

## Happy Birthday

It's the 28th of March 2025. My 14th birthday.

I lie under the rubble, my friend next to me. I don't know how long we've been here, in the rubble of this once-standing mall. We never realised how bad the cyclones were getting. We live in Sydney and hear about them on the news. But here we are. Trapped.

Anya's panicking. I can't comfort her. I'm being crushed. "It'll be...fine. They'll find us".

I remember the calm earlier. We were running around the mall, birthday shopping, for me. Laughing before the sirens went off. We hadn't heard those sirens before so we ignored them. Like we ignored the news because it wasn't clear. There was so much conflicting information: "The world is too warm, we're all going to die and there's nothing we can do". But other people were saying "We are finally starting to cut down on the warming of the globe". We were in Target, and our laughter had long faded. Not paying attention to the clothes, but thinking of the sirens and what they meant.

The lights flickered off. The building started to rumble and shake. Vibrations coursed through the floor, my feet and up my body. It felt like the building was swaying. Anya dragged me away from the glass skylights that had stress fractures in them. The sky looked dark, with menacing clouds throwing lightning that cracked and made my hair stand upright while the rain pelted the glass.

The building groaned, and the glass shattered. Throwing freezing cold water and blowing everyone around with the wind. Anya yelled "Everyone get AWAY from the middle of the roof!" The walls bowed, the building sighing its last hurrah. The roof caved in. I am squished under the rubble and the shifting metals. The water drip, drip, dripping next to me. The rubble shifting, creaking, groaning. Singing a chorus of devastation.

Why didn't they tell us the disasters were so violent? I knew the sea levels were rising and the average temperatures were getting hotter. I knew that the scientists had said that if we pass the 1.5-degree warming average, there was no going back from global warming. I also know that we passed that average.

The scientists were worried about the Tasman Sea, the Bight of Australia and the Coral Sea, and their potential for dangerous cyclones. They were warm as a bath and deeper than they had ever been this summer, because of global warming and Antarctica's melting ice. So many people have died, and it's our fault.

Anya cries out again, I look over and I didn't notice before, but there's a gash cut out of the side of her head, blood staining her warm golden blonde hair red. "Hey! Hey!" I call out to her, seeing her eyelids flicker, I can't comfort or hug her. "Hey! Anya, Anya. Look at me" My voice cracks, she's my best friend. She has been there for me when I am down and hurting, I need to be there for her. She's not going to die. I try to wiggle my fingers to check how much room I have around my hand but brush the left side of my body, feeling something sticky and the pain almost makes me black out. But I continue.

"We are going to get out of here. You will see your mum again, she'll be there when you get home. Your dad will hug you, probably out of his mind with worry. You'll see your annoying brother, he'll probably punch you, but hug you tighter than he ever has and probably break your ribs."

She chokes out a laugh, it's strained and laced with pain as tear tracks run down the side of her face. I look at her again, blood around her head like a messed up halo. "HEY! HEY," I sob, choking on the words. "I'll see them again. But say hello to them while I'm gone. Happy birthday August," she whispers, barely audible as she exhales her last breath. Her eyes fluttered closed, never opening again. I want to scream. Beg her to open her eyes. To hold on.

But death doesn't wait for anyone. Death isn't kind. Death isn't pretty. It takes the young, takes the old. Death doesn't discriminate.

So I lie there, under the rubble with Anya's body next to me, her last words echoing in my ears as the first ray of sunlight hits my face.

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