

## Frightened twisted trees

*"Mum, I'm going to Nicks, I'll be back later."*

Nick lived just down the road, at the end of the street. He had an even better view of the massive factory and its chimneys, which dominated the entire area. Smoke was pouring from the huge chimney stacks. It felt as though I could touch those toxic plumes as they were taken overhead by the wind, above the treetops, out to sea.

"Frightened twisted trees" were lined up alongside the footpath, one adjacent to every house. They angled sharply West towards the nearby ocean of dreams, which had become an ocean of tears for mum.

Passing one particular tree, I touched and briefly caressed its gnarled dark grey bark. It wasn't much older than me, planted when this estate was built. That tree had brought joy in the carefree days of childhood. Michael and I would use it as a cubby house.

Michael was gone now; that accident when he was eight had killed him nine years later. A twisted tree had hidden his run onto the road that fateful day.

It was dusk when I arrived back home.

I blurted out, *"Hi mum."*

I knew she would be sitting under that twisted tree in our backyard.

The bottles clinked as she put them to the side, trying to conceal them from me.

She started crying again.

A tear rolled down her cheek, dripping to the ground, watering our frightened, twisted tree.

*"It'll be alright, mum."*