Hard Sun
Prologue

Brodie’s mum and dad had always believed that everyone had a special connection, a spiritual connection with the Land, with Australia. They had always wanted to explore this connection, to be an even closer part of all of what made this land great, powerful; what made it thrive. Many a night when it was hard to sleep, they had told stories of the Dreamtime.

Brodie had always smiled, grinning at the thought of all people being part of the animals, the plants, each other. It was beautiful.

When her parents had finally decided to throw away the city-life, to be truly one with the land, she and her siblings, Kyle and Jamie, had thrown themselves into the idea just as enthusiastically. It brought the family even closer. Every night they slept close together, being able to hear each other’s breaths, and her father’s hideous snoring. Brodie loved it.

They made friends with other children, all living the Dreamtime with their families too, being homeschooled and together. Together was what mattered.
Brodie’s parents often made supply runs for the other people, when they stayed together in a big nomadic village. They would journey to far away towns and bought food, water, medical supplies, everything that they and others would need.

It was perfect; no worries, no sadness, just them together.

They often had to fill the trips with stories, to keep the boredom from eating away at them. Sometimes, they were Dreamtime stories. Others were made up on the spot or old stories like “Hansel and Gretel”. Brodie was telling the story of how the Earth and sky were created this time.

“And that was how the sky was made.” Brodie’s parents grinned at her through the mirror, as she finished the next part of the story. She grinned back

“Hey Mum, Dad, could we get some fruit next time too?” Kyle mumbled as he ate his apple.

“Depends, but we’ll see, mate.” Their dad turned his head back to look at them.

“Eyes on the road, dear. We all know you need to watch harder than anyone else.” Brodie’s mum shook her head, raising her eyes up from the book she was reading.
Brodie’s dad gasped in mock indignation. “You wound my heart, dear lady! I am not the fool you-“ he yelled in surprise as a kangaroo bounded out of nowhere, narrowly missing the large animal as he swerved to the right.

The car made a whining crunching noise and began to dive. Everyone screamed, Kyle and Jamie hugging each other for dear life as their parents tried desperately to unbuckle their seat belts, to get out of their seats and protect their children. The rocks on the bottom of the ravine suddenly became closer than ever before.

The car flipped as it hit the bottom of the ravine, caravan swinging over and crushing the front of the car like one would a bug. Brodie didn’t have enough time to scream again before the car continued to crush inwards. The metal of the car’s chasse groaned and the towbar snapped from the caravan, sending the car onto its roof meters beside the decimated caravan.

The pain eventually became too much. The unconsciousness brought sweet relief.
Chapter One

A Gruesome Reality

Darkness; darkness and smoke. I opened my eyes to the horror that surrounded me. I was lying on the car seat; Kyle’s leg had landed on top of my face and I could hear Jamie moaning quietly next to me. I blinked a couple of times, trying to force myself to focus, but it was like my brain wasn’t functioning at all. I could barely hear myself think, it was like all of my instincts had switched into overdrive and my mind was struggling to keep up. It was like the entire universe had been turned on its head, my sense of direction had been thrown entirely out of balance.

A shade of red blurred the edges of my vision, making everything around me seem disoriented and unreal. I moved my head, looking around me, and suddenly experienced an unbearable pain. It was a pain different to anything that I’d ever felt in my entire life; everything hurt and it was like my entire body was on fire.

I screamed out, trying my hardest not to pass out. I shut my eyes, ignoring the little black spots that danced around in front of me, making it impossible for me to see.
What is going on? I thought to myself.

“Brodie?” a timid voice asked in the darkness, “What’s going on?”

“Jamie?” I called back, “Are you okay?”

“Mum? Dad?” Kyle called out into the darkness.

I looked around, ignoring the pain. My mind still hadn’t put all the pieces together, and I could feel my brain churning, trying desperately to grasp for an answer. That’s when I smelt it again. The smell of burning that I’d smelt when I first opened my eyes.

“Everyone out!” I yelled at the top of my lungs.

“What? Why?” asked Kyle. It then dawned on me that he hadn’t realised the desperation of the situation.

I reached over and started fumbling with Jamie’s seat belt. “Get out of the car! We need to leave now!”

As I jumped out of the car, almost tripping over my feet, I could smell burning rubber and I could see smoke starting to rise from the front of the car. I raced around to the passenger seat and reached out to open the door, but the heat had become too intense. The light wisps of smoke that had originally been rising out of the carnage had somehow transformed into massive flames.
I could hear the sounds of my brother and sister tumbling out of the back seat and I breathed a sigh of relief; at least I knew that half of my family were safe.

“Stay there.” I called out to them over my shoulder. The last thing I needed was for them to come over and see what was happening.

I knew that I was running on pure adrenaline, I also knew that if my family started to fall apart there was no way possible that I’d be able to hold myself together. I resisted the urge to try and open the door of the car. I knew that my parents were gone and there was no way of bringing them back. I now had to focus on keeping the rest of my family alive.

I walked back over to Jamie and Kyle. They were sitting in the sand, staring bewilderedly at the scene in front of them.

“Come on.” I told them. “We have to keep moving.”

“Are we going on an adventure?” Kyle asked me. “This is exactly like that game that I was playing on my DS.”

“What about Mum and Dad?” Jamie asked me, staring up at me with her big, blue eyes. When I looked
at her I could still see all the innocence within her and
couldn’t bring myself to destroy that part of her.

I crouched down next to them. “You’re right
Kyle.” I said, trying to sound excited, lying through my
teeth. “We are going on an adventure. This is exactly
like your game. We are going to get through this dessert
and find other people. You think you can do that?”

“Yes.” Jamie and Kyle sung out in unison.

“Cool.” I replied. “The only catch is that we only
have one life. We have to get through this desert with
only one life. If we lose that life it’s game over.”

Slowly rising to my feet, I got up and started to
walk towards the caravan. The fire in the car had already
burnt itself out but I couldn’t bring myself to open the
door; I didn’t really want to see what had become of my
parents.

The caravan was a mess and it took all of my
willpower not to give up and just leave. The entire
structure had fallen in on itself and I had to crawl
through the wreckage. It took only a few minutes for me
to find what I was looking for, but it felt like hours. Time
was running out; I had to get my brother and sister out of
this ravine before they caught onto what was really
going on.

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I grabbed the emergency kit and started to scramble out of the wreckage. The emergency kit was small and only contained a few basic supplies but they were invaluable for our survival.

“Come on.” I said to Kyle and Jamie, beckoning for them to come over to me. “Let the game begin.”

Chapter Two

Coming to Terms

We needed to do something, we couldn’t stay in that ravine. We needed to find food, water and shelter. I was looking frantically for ways of climbing out and back to the road or to some sort of civilization. I decided that we needed to move along the ravine if we wanted to get out so we picked up the backpack and started to move along. For a while it was just steep and rocky hills but I noticed that after a few hundred meters it started to even out.

“Look a way out!” yelled Kyle and he ran over to a ledge and started climbing up.
“Be careful Kyle!” I yelled as I ran over to help him up. Once Kyle was up I helped Jamie up then got up myself.

“Finally out, now we need to look for a place we can get help, look around guys, keep your eyes open and if you see anything shout, okay?”

“Okay!” they both yelled at once.

“Great, now let’s get moving before it gets dark.”

We started walking, we sang songs and played eye spy to keep our spirits up but after an hour or two that lost its touch, so we just walked in silence.

“Look, Look!” yelled Kyle suddenly, I was in a daze so the sudden noise scared me and I tripped and fell in the dirt.

“What is it, did you find something?!?”

“It’s a kangaroo! Look over there, see it?” He yelled. I looked up and in the distance I saw a kangaroo.

“Look over there Jamie” and I pointed to the kangaroo. That definitely put a bit of a smile on her face. It hopped away and we all started to move again. Despite being covered in dirt I was picked up by seeing the kangaroo.
It was starting to get dark and I knew that we needed to find someplace to sleep. We searched for another hour or so until we found a small cave. It didn’t seem safe at first but when we went further in we realised it didn’t go very far. We set up for the night as best we could. The kids went to bed quickly and I soon followed. As I lay there drifting into sleep I couldn’t help but remembering the events of the day. The horror of seeing the car on fire, Mum and Dad inside it, the excitement on the kids’ faces seeing the kangaroo. It was all too much. I fell asleep.

I woke up to a scream of sheer terror. I jolted awake only to see a large doglike figure at the entrance of the cave. I didn’t know what it was but my first instinct was to protect the kids.

“GET BACK!!” I yelled at the kids and the animal in general. It growled fiercely and didn’t budge. All of the sudden I heard Kyle’s voice fill the cave

“Fire the Cannons!” and a barrage of rocks started to pummel the dog. It yelped in pain as it was hit in its eyes and head. It turned and ran off into the night. I turned to face Kyle.

“Did you see that Brodie? I got him good didn’t I?” I was amazed and shocked. I guess all those games

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ended up being a good thing. If Kyle didn’t do what he had we could have all possibly been killed there and then.

“That was amazing Kyle! I think that you deserve a reward.” I pulled a chocolate egg out of the bag and gave it to him. He devoured it in seconds.

“Okay kids back to sleep, we have more walking to do tomorrow.” This time I made the kids sleep closer to me in case of another animal attack. They were as usual asleep in seconds but my mind was still racing at a billion miles an hour. I tried to calm down, I was cold and scared but I needed to protect the kids. I eventually dozed off.

I dreamt that night, I can’t remember exactly what about but it was before the crash, perhaps from school, I don’t know.

I was shaken awake by Jamie. It was morning, probably seven-thirty.

“Come on lets go, I want to see more kangaroos” She said as I sat up, rubbing my eyes. It was dark when we found the cave and I hadn’t had a good look around but I now saw that we were in a desert with assorted trees across the landscape and small shrubs. I looked in
all directions and saw where we had come from where the shrubs were more common and greener. I decided that we had to keep moving.

“Okay kids let’s go, we can’t stay here or the monsters might come back.”

That definitely got their attention, so we all picked up what stuff we had and left. As the cave grew smaller in the distance and the sun rose higher in the sky I knew we needed to find more water, and fast.
Chapter Three
Gnawing Thoughts

As we wandered aimlessly in the desert as far away from the crash as possible, our water supply was getting low, I don’t know how far we could make it with the resources we grabbed from the crash but we had to try. A water source is hard to come by in the desert already, especially with Kyle and Jamie being as young as they were, I felt like the world was on my shoulders, multiple thoughts racing through my head: what would we do for food? Where will we sleep? How will we defend ourselves? I had a knife in my backpack, but will it be enough to protect us all? These were just a few of the thoughts gnawing away at my sanity, how long before the need of survival wasn’t enough? I had to ration the water so carefully, until we found freshwater, which could be hours or days from now. I hope to make it, but reality attacked my every thought: we were only kids. Mum and Dad would know what to do, they’d have a more secure goal, information, but Kyle and Jamie only have me. I’ll never be as strong as Dad, or as wise as Mum, how can they put so much faith in my abilities without hesitation? Kyle turned to me every so often, as happy as ever, calling our problem a game, those green eyes staring back at me, reminding me that the lie I
created was the only thing keeping him smiling, unaware that we will never see our parents again, well, ignorance is bliss, if only we could all be in such high spirits.

We continued to walk as Kyle happily ran ahead, yet still in view. Kyle began talking about the bad guys and the superheroes of the games he used to play along with the books he would read, he said to Jamie at one point that I’m the hero of this story, which made me feel sick to my stomach. Jamie has been so quiet since we left the ravine, but Kyle’s happy attitude had kept her cheerful enough, although every so often she would ask for Mum, I never knew what to tell her except to give the same story as I had to Kyle, that this is all a game, and that we would find our parents at the end, then everything would go back to normal. I couldn’t tell the truth to them, the guilt was unbearable, I had to hold my emotions back, if they knew how I was truly feeling, then I would have doomed us all right there, but no matter how strong you are, everyone cracks in the end, my turn had come, under this burning sun.

Kyle slowed down and turned to me “Brodie? Can I have some water?” I knew that he was really desperate just like the rest of us.

“Alright, but don’t take too much, okay?” He nodded in response, only to get three gulps in before
Jamie started to pull the bottle away from him; water began to spill from the bottle into the dry red dirt.

I had worked so hard to keep us from dying of thirst, only to have our most necessary supply slip out of our hands. All my fears had erupted from this loss of water, there was nothing left, no way to continue the way we had. This could end us all, death would take us easily from such a thing, I had failed my parents, I failed Kyle and Jamie, our game would end, because of me. I fell to the ground, tears streaming down my face. Kyle and Jamie stared at me unsure of what to do as I broke down in grief and shame. If only Mum and Dad had been here to lead, to guide, to comfort. Jamie tried to approach me, but I pushed her away, they should not have seen me like that. I was the leader in this “game”. I was meant to be the superhero my brother had idolised, but like any child in such a situation, my mind had been shattered by a single moment of weakness. It had broken in ruins as my siblings watched waiting for their hero to pick herself up and lead once again.
Chapter Four
Blood On My Hands

After what seemed like forever, I forced myself to my feet, wiping the tears from my cheeks and eyes and straightened my back. I looked over my shoulders at Jamie and Kyle, Jamie with her beautiful wide smile, and Kyle, his eyes on the clouds.

I walked over to them and squeezed them both tightly, I felt Jamie’s tears, warm tears, seep through my shirt; I crouched low and looked into her blue eyes.

“Everything is going to be alright, but when we are safe, then we will be better” I whispered to Jamie.

“When we find the fairies, we will be safe.” Jamie said with bright teary eyes.

I squeezed Jamie’s hand and grasped Kyle’s, Kyle’s face then turned to mine, his smile widened, “Is level two next Brodie?”

“Level two” I repeated.

We walked for what seemed like hours, watching kangaroo after kangaroo skip by in the distance, I then
stopped, Jamie immediately stopped beside me, but Kyle walked a few more paces before stopping and glancing up at the sky once again.

I opened the pack and shuffled the blanket to the side, pulling the machete knife out and shoving it into my pocket; I then counted the bars in the bottom of the pack. “One, two, seven…no that’s wrong, one, two, three, twelve…no. one, two, three, four, five, six, seven.”

It was then I realised, tomorrow we would have nothing, and starvation would begin. Jamie could not survive without food for long, neither Kyle, but me, I would live with this for longer, how I failed my family, how I lead them to death.

I then felt Jamie’s soft hand squeeze mine, I looked up from the pack into the wild of the desert, the powerful winds, the scraping sand and searing heat, how long could we survive for? I knew the answer.

I then heard Kyle yell, “Bad guy!”

My head then shot in the direction Kyle was, I then saw what he saw, a lone dingo, overgrown, clearly some sort of alpha, but missing one ear and with scars running down its entire body and face. It prowled closer to Kyle as he stood there staring into its powerful black eyes with his soft green.
My instincts carried my actions as I ran at full speed lunging at the overgrown beast, its legs buckled under my weight. Its legs flayed at me as I pulled the giant knife from my pocket and with all the power I could muster driving the powerful blade into its throat.

I then stood up, however so did the dingo, its epic power depleting by the second, it howled softly at the sky. I ran at it grasping the hilt of the knife in its throat and ripping it from the dingo, it spewing litres of blood by the millisecond, eventually falling onto its side, its dead black eyes seeing death itself.

Kyle jumped for joy yelling, “My sister is a superhero, she kills the bad guys, we will win this game.”

Jamie stood there; I saw the tears build in her eyes as she stared down at the magnificent beast that was slain. I slowly walked towards her and held out my hand, it was then I realised she wasn’t staring at the dingo on the ground but at my hand, soaked in blood from knife tip to elbow.

I dropped the knife then wiped the blood of the beast on my jeans turning the light blue denim into a morbid purple. I then reached my other hand out; Jamie still stared at the blood-soaked knife poking out of the ground.
I stepped forward quickly and embraced Jamie, I once again felt her tears on my shirt, Kyle then ran up and latched onto my arm holding it tight, probably intending to never let go.

I then felt a single cold tear run down my cheek; I stared up at the sky and pulled Jamie and Kyle closer, holding them tight, I never wanted to let go either.

We left the great beast to bleed into the sand, walking quickly, our mouths dry and our muscles aching, then heard a small thud beside me as I looked over and saw Kyle sleeping on the ground beside me.

I lifted Kyle’s light body into my arms and began carrying him, Jamie at my side constantly; clutching my waist like it was a life preserver.

After at least half a day of walking my legs eventually buckled under the combined weight of both me and Kyle, I rested Kyle down gently on the sand wiping his blonde hair from his face, watching his relaxed and tired face.

I then placed my hand on the ground, the sand felt more structured than earlier, I drove my hands into the ground ripping the sand away forming a small hole, and the sand was cool.

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I then looked around and saw that we were in a wide but smooth riverbed, with the water down. “Water!” I screamed into nothingness, Jamie jumped from her sitting position and started running, I yelled out after her but I had clearly startled her, I hoisted Kyle into my arms once again and ran after Jamie, I then suddenly heard a quick squeal.

“JAMIE!” I screamed, I ran harder and faster than ever before, but when I came over the hill, I saw the last thing I ever wanted to see, I ran down the hill, placed Kyle in the sand once again and ran over to Jamie, her face still with a fearful expression.

I lifted her head from the ground to reveal a rock under her head, I ran my fingers down the back of her head when they suddenly fell inwards, I pulled my hand away and closed Jamie’s eyes and mouth, she now looked peaceful just as life should have been.

I then felt Kyle’s hand on my shoulder as he peered over and saw Jamie. “Did she lose her life?” Kyle asked politely.

“Yes Kyle.” I repeated shakily.

“Don’t worry maybe if we find her a gold star she will come back.” Kyle said quietly.

“Jamie is a gold star now Kyle.”
I then stared at the sky once more and screamed with all of my power for God to spare her.
Chapter Five

No Time To Mourn

I raised my head and looked up at the stars. They shone brightly in the sky and the moon was full; Jamie would’ve loved that sight. I looked over at Kyle and was amazed that he still believed that this whole adventure was just a game. He didn’t know that his sister had just died and that broke my heart more than anything.

Kneeling on the ground, I peered over at the hole that was in front of me. I looked over to Jamie’s body. It was lying in the sand; her face looked peaceful and fragile, like the slightest movement could break her. But it was too late to have that kind of caution; Jamie was already broken, there was no saving her now.

“If we get to the next level Jamie will get another life, won’t she?”

I blinked away the tears in my eyes. I knew that Kyle didn’t understand the situation but I didn’t know why. Was he really that dumb that he just didn’t get it or was this his way of coming to terms with the grief. I could feel myself losing control.

“What do you mean ‘if we get to the next level Jamie will get another life?!’” I screamed at him. “Jamie
isn’t coming back, Kyle! Don’t you get that?! This isn’t a game anymore, this is real. This is real and we’re all going to die!”

“So you mean Jamie will be with Mum and Dad?” Kyle asked, his face full of innocence.

Sighing heavily, I felt all the strength draining out of me. I felt powerless. What was I thinking? I was just a fourteen year old girl and I was travelling around the Australian Outback with a six year old girl and a nine year old boy who hadn’t quite caught onto the fact that we were probably all going to end up dead.

I placed my hand gently on Kyle’s shoulder. “Yes little man.” I replied to him. “Jamie is with Mum and Dad. That’s the best place for her.”

Reaching over to Jamie’s body, I picked her up and lowered her into the hole. I watched as some sand gently fell on top of her, encasing her in its hold. It just looked so right, her lying in the sand. Her long brown hair was spread around her head, like a halo. She looked angelic and peaceful.

I wiped the tears off my face. I had to be strong; I had to hold this together. Jamie believed in me so I now had to believe in myself. I had to get myself and Kyle to safety, he depended on me and I depended on him. He provided me with my strength. With all of his little
innocent comments he fuelled me with the hope that I needed to survive. I would get out of here; I wouldn’t rest until I knew that Kyle was happy and safe. I would not let him suffer, he deserved better than that.

Pushing the sand onto Jamie’s body, I watched as her face was finally covered up. The pit was eventually filled up with sand and the moonlight bounced off the flat surface. I pushed rocks into a pattern that swirled across her grave. The pattern unnaturally resembled all of the Dreamtime artwork that Mum and Dad had taken us to see. Jamie used to love looking at all of the patterns. I knew that she’d love this too.

I took hold of Kyle’s hand and pulled him towards me, into a strong hug. I’d never really hugged him before. I had always been a solitary figure, so this sudden display of affection was completely new to me. I realised only now how much I depended on him my family. As long as we were together everything was okay; the fact that we were together is what mattered most.

I couldn’t bring myself to cry. All I could feel was emptiness and urgent desperation. I needed to keep what was left of my family together. Kyle and I were all that mattered and nothing in the world was ever going to tear us apart.
Chapter Six

Search For Safety

I laid there on the ground for a very long time after I had buried Jamie. I just couldn’t take it; I had to bury my own six year old sister. I was ashamed of myself that I couldn’t do anything about it. This was all my fault, if I had been paying attention then she wouldn’t have run off and she wouldn’t have fallen over. But we had to keep moving, I had to stay strong otherwise Kyle might get the hint that it’s all real and that it’s not a game. The truth that Dad, Mum and Jamie were all dead. If he learned the truth then it would all be over, he would lose all hope and we would both die in this desert along with the others.

“Okay Kyle, let’s keep moving” I said to him in a voice of encouragement.

“Okay, let’s try to find a star along the way to help Jaime” He said in a voice of excitement.
“Yeah, let’s go” So we filled up on water, drank our fill and started to head off across the desert. We were okay at first but then it started to get hot.

For about thirty minutes it was bearable but it soon started to get even hotter than it had ever been so far. There were no clouds or trees or rocks or anything to protect us from the scorching heat. To make it worse we were running out of food and there was nothing in sight that could have any possibility of having anything remotely like food.

“Brodie I’m hungry” said Kyle in a whiney voice.

“Yeah I am too Kyle” I said in a tone that made him shush without being too offensive.

We were getting desperate and I was half tempted to eat any plants that we came across but then we saw it. In the distance we saw a kangaroo; I shook my head. I wouldn’t eat meat; I could never eat another living creature! My first thought was to ignore it, but then I knew I had no other choice. I told Kyle to stay put and I started to slowly make my way over, being as quite as I possibly could. As I got closer I noticed something, the animal was hurt and it wasn’t moving. I kept trying to sneak up on it in case it could still run. Then I stepped on a branch which made a loud SNAP! That definitely got the kangaroos attention and it got up to run but then
fell over in pain. This was my chance, I knew it couldn’t run; so as quickly as I could I ran up and stabbed it as hard as I possibly could. Thankfully I hit right on target and it went limp all over.

We ate the best we had in days. We made a small fire and cooked the kangaroo as best we could. We did what we could to store some of the meat in some plastic containers we had in our bag but I knew they wouldn’t last long. I packed up what stuff we got out and waited for Kyle to finish eating and then we left and continued searching for somewhere permanent to stay.

A few hours after we left we were tired and dazed but still moving. I had carried Kyle a fair way but now he had gotten some energy back and could walk again. Then in the distance we were greeted by a blessing from heaven. I could see a large hole and the tops of trees poking out of the top. As we got closer we noticed it was a basin like structure full of trees and with a lake at the bottom. All our hunger and thirst and fatigue suddenly disappeared and we bolted down the hill, dropped our stuff and ran to the water. We were splashing and swimming and having fun in the water, we couldn’t believe what we had found.

For a brief moment we had completely forgotten all the troubles of the past days, our problems had just been washed away by the water. Eventually we calmed
down and we filled up our water bottles, found a place to
stay which was sheltered and made camp. That night we
cooked the kangaroo meat we had stored which was
good because it would have gone rotten soon. Kyle went
to sleep rather easily but I stayed up for a while looking
at the sky. I eventually went to sleep and I dreamt,
dreamt of the past, before the crash when everything was
normal.
Chapter Seven

The Thoughts In The Dark.

The cold desert air attacked my face as I whipped my head up from the ground. “Cold desert air…” I chuckled at the irony. A lot of people don’t seem to realise the desert gets cold at night. Freezing. A cruel contrast to the sweltering heat of the day.

What was I dreaming about? I thought to myself. I didn’t have to think for long. I was dreaming of Jamie. Her brown hair. Her blue eyes.

“No.” I said quietly to myself. I knew that if I started to think about her, I’d have to wipe the tears away from my eyes. Turning my head, I looked at Kyle. His blonde hair was so vivid in the light of the moon. He was so different from the rest of us, no wonder his hair was different too.

Did he even know what’s going on? He couldn’t know. At least, I didn’t want him to. *Just let him think it’s a game,* I thought, smiling to myself. He’ll eventually realise. Maybe when we’re out of this, and safe…

My eyes widened, and a sudden fear gripped me. Would we ever be safe? What if we weren’t?! Jamie was
already dead, how long until Kyle was too? How long until I was?! Then would Kyle survive? Of course he wouldn’t.

I pushed the terrible thought out of my mind before I could even think about it. I couldn’t lie under this blanket anymore. Standing up, I shook all the sand out of my clothes. I was getting so sick of the sand. It just… gets everywhere.

It seemed like I wouldn’t be able to get through the night without getting angry. I decided to not even stop myself. The sand sank through my feet as I walked away from our blanket on the floor. I wished I could just keep walking. But I couldn’t. I thought about how life used to be before we decided to ‘move’ to the outback. I thought about how my parents retired, about how they decided to live the ‘hippy’ lifestyle. What was wrong with the city lifestyle?! What was wrong about not moving every day, about living in a house, in a familiar place?! I missed getting up every morning, having my own room, having a school to go to! I missed school! I never would have imagined me saying that, but I did. I missed seeing my friends every day. I missed having friends! I missed having classes, I missed excursions, I missed the way I’d feel when school was finished, I missed having structure and routine to my life!!!
I collapse to the ground, the tears falling down my face. I was crying hysterically now. Not small, petite little sobs; massive, gasping breaths, my mouth open with no sound coming out.

“I want to go home.” I sputtered. Where was my home? Was it the house back in Darwin? Was it our little caravan? How could I have called that caravan ‘home’? It was a big metal box!

A big metal box that was now sitting at the bottom of a ravine. Along with my car that contained my dead parents. What did they look like now? Were they a pile of ash, or just grossly disfigured? A yelp leaped from my mouth. Which one was worse? Did it even matter? Why would it have? They were dead!

My hand brushed a boulder. It took everything I had not to smash my head down onto it.

I almost screamed at the thought. I couldn’t do that! I had to be the strong one. I had to look after Kyle. I’d already lost Jamie. She was gone. I couldn’t allow another of my family to die. I had to save Kyle. I had to.

But how? How could I do it? We were stranded in the middle of the Nullabor desert, and out of some crazy stroke of luck we had found this little oasis. Just

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about the only luck we’d had recently! I mean, I was forced to eat meat!

I suddenly stopped crying. Out of all the bad things that had happened to us, I’m most stressed about being forced to eat a little meat. It seemed so… stupid! My mind cleared. I knew I had to think clearly to save Kyle. And I wouldn’t be able to save him by staying in this hole forever. I knew that I would need to get out of this stupid place. No one was going to save us. I had to go and save us.

Wiping the tears from my eyes, I walked back over to our little ‘bed’. I slip under the blankets, careful not to disturb Kyle as he slept so peacefully. I looked at the skies and searched the stars. They gave me no answers.

I sighed as a plane flew overhead.

‘At least we have water’ I thought, before my mind drifted off to sleep.
Chapter Eight

Escaping Sanctuary

Despite my mindless rant the previous day and all the troubles I had come across and overcome I was in a good mood. Kyle was trying to catch fish or frogs or something in the lake and I was doing other small things like cleaning clothes or foraging for other food. We needed more wood for the fire so I decided to go looking.

I was collecting firewood when I heard a deep rumbling noise. It went on for a few seconds then stopped. I thought nothing of it so I continued collecting wood. Then I heard it again. It was a lot louder this time and the ground shook. I started to make my way back to camp when I heard an earth splitting crack and a tremendous tumbling sound. I dropped the wood and started running back to camp. I got back and I couldn’t find Kyle.

“KYLE!!” I screamed looking around frantically for him, the ground trembling beneath my feet.

“Brodie!” I heard in the distance. I followed the sound and saw him standing next to the lake, his face pale white with fear.
“Quickly we have to move!” As I said this a large amount of boulders tumbled down the wall of the lakes basin and crashed into the water.

“Landslide!” Screeched Kyle and I grabbed his hand and the backpack on the ground next to him. We sprinted as fast as we could as the entire basin collapsed in on itself. We were scrambling for anything to hold onto as the ground crumbled under us. I grabbed a tree root at the last moment and pulled Kyle up and onto a solid ledge. Then I lost grip on the root. I started to slide down the hill into the tumbling chaos below. As I was about to fall off the ledge of a newly created cavern I managed to grab onto an outcrop of stone and held on for dear life. I dragged myself on top of the outcrop and clutched to it as hard as I possibly could. Then just as I thought I was safe:

“Brodie, HELP ME!!” I heard a scream from further up the hill and to my horror I saw Kyle tumbling down the hill towards the cliff. In a burst of adrenaline I ran across the tumbling debris and raced towards Kyle, picked him up, flung him over my shoulder and made a dash up the hill, managing to land on solid ground almost every step I took. Then I looked up and to my dismay a large boulder was rolling towards us at breakneck speed. I turned sharply and jumped to the side with inches to spare as it tumbled past.
We were almost at the top and with everything I had in me I jumped onto a solid ledge and clung on with all the strength I had left. I didn’t budge and Kyle stayed stuck to my back the entire time. Only did he start moving when the rumbling stopped.

I was reluctant to move at first, but I had to eventually move, so I carefully let go of the rock I was clung to and slowly stood up holding Kyle’s hand in case he slipped. We turned around and looked back on what was once a beautiful basin oasis and was now completely unrecognizable. Amongst the huge cloud of dust we could make out that where there had previously been a lake was now a huge crater full of boulders and debris. It was utterly destroyed.

“Now we need to find another base” said Kyle with a frustrated tone in his voice.

“At least we’re ok” I said in a false cheery voice, “and we still have our backpack so we have some water and food that we can use until we find another place to stay.

So we started the long journey to find shelter once more. We walked for hours and hours. We found a dead kangaroo which had been half devoured but it didn’t faze us. We had already seen so much death, way ~ 36 ~
more than kids of our age should ever have to experience. We slept that night under a rock in the middle of a large clump of bushes.

In the morning we woke to find a small family of mice sleeping under the rock with us. I made a gesture to Kyle not to move or make a sound, just to look. They didn’t seem to notice either until Kyle sneezed and they all ran away into a bush.

“We should start to get going, there’s no point staying here” I said,

“Okay let’s go start the next level” he said with a hint of excitement in his voice.

So we picked up all our stuff and continued to walk. As we walked through the seemingly endless desert we came across something extraordinary, a giant rock formation in the shape a bird. It was a sight to behold. It was majestic and overwhelming at the same time. We were standing there staring at it for what seemed like minutes but was really hours because when we decided to start moving the sun had moved a very large distance across the sky and it was now starting to become afternoon. We took a few more minutes to have something to eat and drink and then we stood up and started moving again in the hopes of finding another place that we could use as a sanctuary.

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Chapter Nine

Shadows In The Sand

It was getting late, the sun had begun to set, and both Kyle and I were exhausted. We needed rest, if we kept going there would have been a strong chance we wouldn’t make it by morning. My mind still travels back to how happy Jamie, Kyle and I had been before all this happened, and now it had all been left down to just the two of us, Jamie’s death had added to the ever growing fear of our surroundings. Everything had become our enemy, if only we had realised sooner, then maybe things could have been better, then maybe Jamie would still be with us, all these thoughts had plagued my judgement, past and present. I may have learnt my lesson but at what cost?

Kyle and I found a place to rest as the area around them became darker in front of our eyes, I waited for Kyle to fall asleep, soon after becoming drowsy myself. I laid onto the hard ground facing Kyle as he slept peacefully, even after all the death, after all the pain
and the suffering out in this death trap of Australian outback, he still has the courage to smile, he still considers it all a game, even after we saw her lifeless body amongst the rocks, even after I held her in my arms, knowing she could never come back, sometimes I wish that the game Kyle has been believing all this time was real, and that finding a ‘star’ would be all it takes to get back the ones we have lost since this adventure had begun. I brushed the Kyle’s blond hair away from his face, as a sign of reassurance that we could make it through this, at least for his sake, my mind has been on a rollercoaster since this all began but Kyle has stayed the same, eventually I welcome the darkness, and it consumes me, ready for me to attack tomorrow with a new mission: to get Kyle out of this god forsaken desert if it’s the last thing I ever do.

In the morning we started to move north from where we slept, hoping we were even close to some form of aid. From the outside world of society, there must be someone out there in such a desolate place as this. Kyle seemed as cheerful as before, he still called me his superhero, after all this time, after all that’s happened, I’m still allowing him to keep the fantasy of this world being just a game, that we are the heroes, that we cannot die, but you’d think after all the death that the thought of heroes and surviving would diminish with each day passing by, I don’t know how long we had been out here,
but I know as long as I can see Kyle’s smiling face and
those green eyes staring back at me that we will not give
up easily to this world.

Well, that is what I thought, until pain and
sorrow had struck me for a third time over.

Kyle had started to run further ahead, each day he would
go a little bit more than the day before, and he never
knew that the animals were just as deadly as any bad
guy.

We had been walking for hours the sun had started to
repeat its cycle, it was setting once again, I turned in
every direction looking around for Kyle, only to hear a
cry from afar, just realising that Kyle was gone, this
time he had gone too far ahead, I had to find him, and
fast.

By the time I found Kyle he was sitting on the ground
crying, whatever his attacker may have been it was long
gone by now. Kyle turned to me, there was blood on his
hand, and I panicked. Something had attacked him, this
was bad, and it could have been anything out here. I
asked Kyle to describe what had attacked him, of course
it had been a snake, and it became obvious with the
puncture in his foot, we were running out of time, we
needed help and fast, we have to go on with him on my
back, for Kyle’s sake.

~ 40 ~
Chapter Ten

The Game

As I walked attempting to keep Kyle as stable as possible, trying to prevent the venom spreading, I promised him we would win this game, and I’ll be damned if he doesn’t, we walked for ages upon ages, I could feel Kyle getting hotter by the hour his sweat dampening his own clothes as well as mine.

I moved slowly me feet dragging against the hard sand and rock, covering my feet in blisters the size of hands, Kyle shivering and shaking in my hands.

Eventually I had to stop for a break I sat Kyle down against a large rock, and it was then that I saw how bad his condition was, blue veins had become visible in
his face, his colouring pale and his hair damp and lifeless.

He opened his mouth slightly and I tried to force some water down his throat but he ended up vomiting it back up, I then realised, he could not hold anything down, if the venom spared him, he would eventually dehydrate or starve, he would die soon, if I couldn’t get him help soon, but even then I wasn’t sure, I hated myself for not saving Jamie, I wouldn’t let Kyle die too, that sweet little boy he didn’t deserve any of this.

This blasted game would not take him as well, my sweet little brother, this harsh land took my mother, my father and my sister, I will not let it win, it will not take Kyle, and I wouldn’t let it take me, I would defend him like the hero he thought I was.

We continued to walk, Kyle in my arms shivering violently, I attempted to restrain however his powerful shakes overpowered me easily, I held him loosely so I could hold him while he shivered without dropping him.

Eventually night overcame us, the full moon shone down illuminating my path, I then heard a powerful howl off in the distance, it was then I decided to stop, I placed Kyle once again on the ground piling rocks behind him so he could sit up straight, his green

~ 42 ~
eyes staring at the moon like it was the finish line for his
game, but I think he knows, the won’t win this game.

I stood up and pulled the bottle of water from the
pack and swallowed what seemed like the whole bottle,
but really was only two sips; I haven’t had that much
water in over a week.

I looked back at Kyle however his eyes weren’t
on the moon, but was on something else but before I
could react a dark shadow lurched from the shadows and
sank its teeth into Kyle’s side. No scream escaped his
mouth but I leaped at the mighty beast smashing into it
with all of my strength.

I drew the great knife once again and drove the
steel blade through the thick skull of the beast before
ripping it out once again. The dingo howled loudly as I
dove once again slashing past the dingo, slicing open its
throat and then watching it drop, the same way the other
one did.

I ran over to Kyle his side now violently spewing
blood, I placed my hand over the wounds in a hope to
hold the blood in, but it began to seep through the small
gaps, I saw tears running down his face, his beautiful
green eyes alive with fear, I then felt cool tears run down
my own face, I knew what was coming.

~ 43 ~
“Kyle, don’t go.” I whispered to him, in some futile attempt to keep him with me, I couldn’t let him go.

“Kyle, eyes on me, don’t you dare leave me here, I need you by my side, and we need to win the game.”

Kyle then whispered softly “This was always a single player.”

I then started crying “No, this is a two player, I still need you… your smile… your liveliness, don’t die.”

I lifted my bloody hand from Kyle’s wound revealing the twelve individual punctures in his side still pumping thick red blood.

Kyle then grabbed my shirt and pulled me in close, “This is my Game Over.”

Kyle’s head then tilted back in my arms, and I pulled him closer, his blood staining my shirt, and then my tears began to dampen the red sand around us.
Chapter Eleven
The Back Of Beyond

My mouth dropped open. I didn’t believe what just happened. The sand moved underneath Kyle’s body as I laid him down next to the rocks. I didn’t know what to do; I couldn’t do anything. My eyes are widened, my mouth open. I started to shake. I started to shake and I didn’t stop. My body was wrought with sobs, which shook my body every time a new one came through. My screams echoed around me, a pained screaming, as if I was the one who was dying. My hair was ragged; twisted and knotted. It whipped around me as I my body convulsed. My screams pierced the air, never ending. Eventually, I collapsed to the ground. My screams of pain turned into small sobs of terror. I lay there, cradling my brother, stroking his hair. The full moon reflected off my tears that had fallen to his face.

I realised that Kyle’s eyes were still open. Even in death, they still glimmered in the moonlight. His eyes were open, but they didn’t see. I cried even more as his death hit me again and again. With every sob, I felt like I was being punched. With every punch, someone screamed at me “Your brother is dead!” “Your sister is dead!” “You killed them!”

~ 45 ~
I truly felt as though I had killed them. If I had done better, then they wouldn’t be dead. All I had to do was stop Jamie from tripping, or stop that snake from biting Kyle. If only I had done a little better.

I knew I had to stop thinking that way. I sat up, and looked over at Kyle. I gently closed his eyes with my fingers. There, I thought to myself. Now he just looks like he’s sleeping. My sobs slowed. I leaned up against the rocks, closed my eyes, and thought.

Some time passed. I almost forget about my brother, and thought solely of myself, and how I was going to survive. Would I survive? Is there anything worth surviving for? But I knew I had to do my best to keep living.

I looked back over to my brother. What was I going to do with his body? I couldn’t take it with me, but could I just leave it there, for the animals to eventually eat it? Could I bear to dig another grave?

I’d have to.

***

A while later, the hole was dug. It was a small grave, just enough room to lay Kyle down. It was a tight fit, but I preferred to think of it as snug. I pushed the sand back onto him. Silent tears rolled down my face as I
watched his face become covered by it. Eventually, the sand was flat, as if nothing ever happened.

I lied down, and went to sleep.

***

Morning. The hard sun beared down on me as the sweat dripped down my back. I’ve already left Kyle’s grave. I couldn’t stand to be there anymore. For the past few hours, I had just walked. I could feel my energy draining; every step was getting harder and harder. There was a hill up ahead.

“I can do this,” I said to myself. I started walking up the hill. Every step feels like a marathon. About halfway up the hill, I dropped to the ground. I had to keep going. I knew that if I stopped now, I wouldn’t survive. I knew I wasn’t even that tired, physically. It was a mental thing. I had to get to the top of this hill.

Three quarters of the way there. I had to keep going. Every crawl was a little bit closer. The sun beared down on me, the sand slipped under my hands. My throat was parched, but I don’t stop to drink. I was hungry, but I had nothing to eat. I knew I was almost there. Just a few more meters…

~ 47 ~
As I reached the top, I collapsed. I lied there for a while, then eventually I lifted my head up.

A road.

I saw a road!

Behind the hill, was a road! The first sign of human civilisation I’d seen for… I didn’t even know how long. I didn’t know what to do. I stood up, and walked over to the road. I didn’t even know what I was doing. I stood there, for… I didn’t know how long. I didn’t know what I was hoping for. I stared out into the difference and watched the sun set.

_Vrooom._

I knew I was hallucinating.

_Vrooom._

The sound was getting louder.

_Vrooom._

I turned my head to the left. There was no mistaking it; I knew I saw the shine of the sun on the bonnet.

Everything went black, and I feel my head hit the sandy ground. The last thing I heard before I lose consciousness is tires screeching, and doors opening.
In the great and open outback,

My family became broken

Me and my siblings learnt to play the great game

One of survival, protection and love

“I will survive…

And I will keep surviving.”