Condamine Tree

The firstborn one of five stood pleading,
“Take me back to see,
however briefly, if our home still stands, or helplessly
succumbed to writhing fury of the mighty Condamine,
in flooding overburden, to the west horizon line.”

A hardy outback woman now, this firstborn one of five,
replayed in hope her memories, throughout that anguished drive;
those memories of Mum and Dad, who built security
within the walls of that small home, now hers to oversee.

How Mum when just a wispy girl, with Dad on mill-hand wage,
had learned to bear the outback woman’s burden of that age;
an age when gentle natured Dad was summoned to the war,
and trained to kill - forsaking that soft nature ever more.

And yet, the times when demons slept within his damaged mind,
he’d still buy rose edged cards for Mum,
engraved with words so kind;
his heartfelt words to his one love, to ease her burdened days,
the love he swore he’d cleave to through the torments and the craze.

But Mum expressed her loyalty and love in other ways,
despite the terror of her nights, and tenure of her days.
She’d planted two young trees to mark their bond, close, side by side.
For thirty years they’d stood now, branches touching - unified.

Those ‘Mum and Dad trees’ overlooked a smaller line of five,
that Mum had planted also, for her babies, each to thrive
from her devoted tending, like the roses she adored.
The “Kids’ Trees” she had named them, with their blooming her reward.

Reality returned upon arrival near the scene.
She stepped inside the tiny boat, afloat where roads had been.
She barely had the courage left to elevate her eyes,
but oh thank God! The cottage stood. The

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water on the rise…

…was lapping at the rooftops, but the Kids'
Trees stretched their crowns
above the sea the Condamine had forged
upon the downs
and valleys, to the mountains in the distance,
barely spared,
in furious revolt against monsoonal rage
declared.

The Dad tree wailed in anguish through the
wind's cacophony;
his thrashing limbs imploring Heaven's
merciful decree.
For when she sought the boundary her heart
was turned to stone;
the Mum tree had been washed away…the
Dad tree stood…alone.

She floated…feeling empty…feeling numb.
The minutes froze.
A sad acceptance claimed her as she plucked
a single rose,
defiant on the arbour, and with heart and
soul bereft,
she cast it on the tide beside the Dad tree,
turned, and left.

The Condamine reclaimed its place. The
waters settled back.
The firstborn scoured the riverbanks, she
sought and searched each track.
If only she could keep a twig, or even just one
leaf,
at least she'd have a keepsake to help soothe
her grinding grief.

She sought her memories again to warm her
frozen heart,
and visions came of Mum and Dad, how
they'd been torn apart,
when Dad took ill and lingered in a sterile
ward, Mum gave
no quarter, when they told her, "Any day
now dear, be brave."

For Dad had pledged to stay beside her, even
unto death,
defying all predictions, and defying each
short breath
to leave him. Though he couldn't speak, his
eyes conveyed his drive
to hold this woman to him, and to keep this
bond alive.

The lamplight flickered faintly as Mum sat
beside their bed.
She'd taken Dad back home, and as she
shared the words he'd said

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within the rose edged cards he'd gifted, cards she'd ever keep,
his anguished eyes then mellowed, yielding to eternal sleep.

Relief was but a brief respite. The monsoon raged once more.
The Condamine, again in fury, charged through every door.
When finally the lust was quelled, the townsfolk, stupefied,
trod robot-like through ruination. Even hard men cried.

The firstborn wandered likewise in that eerie atmosphere,
and looked upon the devastation of her home, so dear.
The little house was standing, for her dad had built it well,
but where the treasures of her life were now, she couldn't tell.

She still had treasured memories of kin, and kindred ties,
but then a further horror found her sad, depleted eyes.
Along the muddied boundary she'd cast her eyes upon,
a new void struck the landscape…her most precious Dad tree…gone.

In frenzied faith she followed every course the waters found.
She searched in panic, frantic, and then suddenly…a sound.
Familiar voices whispering, it seemed, said, "Daughter, here."
She slowly followed, musing, "Is that Mum and Dad I hear?"

Beneath the bedroom window where her mum had farewelled Dad,
and lying in the wreckage from the flood, beside a pad
of roses, lay the Dad tree, with his limbs in gentle fold
around the long-lost Mum tree…as Dad's earnest vow foretold.

And to this day, within the Kids' Trees' gently shifting shade,
there sits in fond remembrance, a fine garden seat, hand made
from both the Mum and Dad trees, with two hearts carved there, abreast,
to honour Love's endurance…and one staunch, bush woman's quest.

(Author's note: This is a true story, as told to me by "the Firstborn," featured in the poem.)

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