

Feed the Flame

“Oh my God,” the man said, reverting to panic mode, watching the burning on both sides of his vehicle. The heat was on the brink of becoming unbearable. Heavy, thick, murky smoke clouded the sky, destroying the open blue.

Only yesterday, the forest fire had started west of the town. For months, the area had been stuck in a merciless heatwave and drought, moisture sucked clean out of the earth.

The news reported that the fire had been ignited by a campfire that hadn’t fully been extinguished. Winds had picked up, and embers had flown into the surrounding trees, which became fuel for the spark.

It didn’t take long for the fire to have a life of its own, a living and breathing entity with a savage hunger for consumption. With the aid of the wind, the fire raged ahead, refusing to stop as it pushed towards the town.

A notice of evacuation came through, and the man didn’t hesitate to pack a bag and leave. He’d seen wild fires where towns were burned to the ground from nature’s unforgiving wrath.

He made his way through a smoky haze, watching others around him do the same. Soon the fire would touch the edge of town and keep burning. He turned off the car’s air conditioning, so he didn’t suck the smoke into his lungs, burning them.

His ‘Oh my God’ moment came when he hit the highway, seeing the trees on both sides of the road being butchered by the flames. Driving, the man was starting to feel like he was stuck in a mobile oven on four wheels. He looked up. *The sky*, he thought. *Where’s the sky?*

He reached a gravel side road and saw a charred truck on the edge of the road, the wheels melted into a warped mess around the rims.

He passed the gravel road and faced forward. Suddenly, he saw movement. A tree, once solid and sturdy but now chewed by the fire, broke free near the ground. The burning timber came crashing down and slammed onto the car, right over top of the driver’s seat, smashing the roof in and pushing the metal onto the man’s head, knocking him nearly unconscious. The car’s engine gave out and fell silent.

Weak and groggy, the man watched the flames start to feed on the car, igniting and consuming it. It didn't take long for him to realize he was stuck in the middle of an inferno, his own personal hell.

The car's inner temperature shot up. *The heat. Dear God, the heat.* Smoke filled the car, slipping in through all the air vents. The man's lungs started to scorch.

His last thought was simply, *Mother Nature scores again.*

The burning refused to cease.

At the Abavilla Centre, in the city of Greenwich, Paulix Kane stood in a conference room, speaking to a room full of eager listeners: fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and more. He had their full attention. It was exactly what he craved.

The wall of water that had crashed into the shoreline, ripping it apart and destroying everything in its path, stealing the lives of numerous people, couldn't have come at a more convenient time. Happening only a couple days ago, it was still fresh in people's minds.

He would use Mother Nature's devastation as ammunition.

Beside Paulix, the video projector pumped out images, filling the large viewing screen with footage of the tsunami's devastation and then of a wild fire that had burned a town to the ground, along with the surrounding area, just a few days earlier.

Paulix went to work.

"These images shouldn't surprise you," he started. "Over the years, we have all seen the wrath Mother Nature can bring with no end in sight. The destruction. Human lives stolen. Family and friends. The ones we love."

Paulix took a brief pause. He watched a few audience members nod their heads in agreement.

Seeing their reaction, Paulix thought, *Yes, come to me.*

He marched on. "Our country's political leaders are giving serious thought to having towns and cities, those as great as ours, fend completely for themselves, leaving them alone with no real political support. You've seen and read what our supposedly great nation's leader is seriously considering."

“Political bastards!” an older man shouted from the crowd. “Good for nothing lazy bastards! Leaving us out to hang!”

“No!” Paulix reacted with the same intensity. “I say let them run! Let them run like the cowards they are! They want to give up on you! On us!” He took another pause, letting his words sink in nice and deep. “Mother Nature will never hold back. We know this to be true. We’ve seen it for years. The parched land, the floods, water levels that refuse to lower, tornadoes that only seem to gain power. The planet is falling into disarray.” More heads were nodding in agreement now. “Let the nation’s political leaders run! Let them run far away! This is *our* city! Together, we can grow and rise above whatever nature chooses to throw at us! We will not fear rising sea levels, rising temperatures, or unpredictable weather patterns. We’ll rise above the destabilization of global food systems. We will be our own protector!”

A middle aged woman in the front row said: “Better believe it.”

“Let *me* give you a home where you can raise your family in relative peace. Let *me* give you a sanctuary away from Mother Nature’s brutality and what it *will* bring you. Our future doesn’t have to become a wasteland. You can be *safe*, right here, in the protective confines of Greenwich.”

More and more heads were now nodding.

The corners of Paulix’s lips turned up.

It would be his city.

The people were *his* to mold.