

A PUBLIC SERVICE

By R. G. CARTER.

You have to be very careful. It can strike at any time. The old lady who lives behind the big kauri, half way down lovers' lane; she told me about her experiences. It wasn't new to me; she described things in so much detail. I had forgotten. The heat; that initial feeling of heat. You're thinking: "Where is that *heat* coming from?"

"Fire risk!"

Ducks think they're safe; or perhaps ignorance is bliss. Just because you spend all day in the water doesn't make you immune. Bob Harvey swum across the heads; he was a lifesaver you know. He still felt it; struggles with it privately; the heat. Not even those rushing waters could cool it down.

"Fire risk!"

Peter's another one. It's not really surprising when you think about it. I mean, they're called *Midnight Oil* right? "*Burning the midnight oil!*" It was only when he got into government that I started to understand the darker side of it. The mine. The uranium. The fire that invisibly burns inside. Nobody sees how it burns until it's too late. Just like Chernobyl.

"Fire risk! You can't see it but it's there!"

Try to cover it all up. That's what they did. It's the same wherever you go. That chimney. It looms over us day and night. They say it's an incinerator. Burns medical waste. Tumours. The sound of frying fat and roasting skin; falling off the bone.

"Stop."

Did I say that out loud? You know sometimes there is a voice that holds you back? In restraint. Restrained. You can't change the nature of a stone by calling it a rose. *You can't!* They built that thing there; that towering monument to the process. Combustion; and offering up to heat and dust; vapours, gasses, fumes, molecules and energy. Half lives and isotopes. Heavy water.

"Fire risk!"

It's all I can do to prevent it happening again. Just like in the 90's. Every ten years it seems. A cycle of life. Except Peter, Bob, Marie, and the others who know something about it; who've seen the results...

I made this speaker from cardboard. It's painted black to absorb the sunlight. I charge it up in the sun as I'm walking around, so it's ready when I need it. Someone told me it's parabolic.

"Hello."

It's the children I worry about. They play; enjoy life without a care. But the heat affects them too. It's all I can do to get the message out there...

"FIRE RISK!"