

Years 11 & 12  
3rd Place: Elizabeth Poh  
Year 11, Harrisdale Senior High School

### **Rust and Rubber**

A black figure shone in the reflection. Black hair, black eyes, black skin. She swelled in the beauty of the endless night and rich soil of the earth. Summertime gold dappled upon the water tips; a light mist rested upon early morning life. The young girl threw a pebble into the centre of the lake and watched a spirit rise up. Her ancestor's stories came to life as the colours of her world melted into arrays of dispersed light. The rainbow serpent flashed across the vast hues of red and yellow, the kookaburra laughed in sight of the waterhole and the goanna squealed as it walked upon red dust. Her little mind held no ends, not when it bore the past, preserved present and became the future.

The earth shook with the rumble of steel and rubber across the unending red. It hugged the soil, drudgingly edging forward as figures ran back and forth in a spurn of panic and fear. She watched, braiding the ends of her dolls' hair, emotionless as men appeared from the vehicle, grabbing the squirming children and heaving them in the truck. They wasted no time following suit, shoving off the figures who grabbed onto their arms and legs and rattling off into the scorched horizon.

The girl simply watched, emotionless as their songs rang into the sky, into the parched earth and into the streams and lakes that surrounded. The trees swayed gently with newfound winds, the land settling into a doleful silence as the figures called out after the falling sun. Their arms reached out and grazed the stars, the names of the lost would never fade, their tears would never forget, their blood staining the earth a deeper red that would echo their tunes through lifetimes.

The young girl stood holding the doll by the hand, her tattered gown danced tenderly in the wails. But she didn't know to feel, didn't feel the land or the sky, didn't notice the red path left behind or the absence of the incessant rumbling.

She turned and walked away.

They were all clothed in white cotton, herded and led like sheep to the slaughter. She saw them in their nakedness; their faces were hers, but they did not live. They would soon forget their stories and watch their language fade. They would live like them, talk like them, look like them. They would scrub their skin, the thin layer splitting in wake of coarse sponge. They would search for what wasn't there; a swirl of soap and muddy water would only polish the black coat. The men would grope in darkness, deep groans and unheard whimpers. The women would look the other way; they did not care for what was not human.

Yet their whispers could still be heard, a silent song to those who listened. Carried upon a gentle evening wind, bringing new hope to dying souls.

The young girl sat alone beneath the rusting veranda, watching the other kids play amongst each other in a scurry of muddy limbs and uplifted dirt. The sun had begun its inviting descent once again, staining the sky a hue of sepia and rusted gold, leaving a calm breeze in wake of foreign humidity.

The girl closed her eyes and left their world, saw the kookaburra and goanna, remembered the stories of land and sky and the spirited colours. An incessant rhythm of the clap sticks and song drifted and braided throughout her mind. The glow of the firelight brought warmth and smelt of home. A mother and father, a sister and brother, a drumming beat and familiar face. She saw them in the same stars that kept watch over them. The girl let her tears meet theirs in a stream of hope that one day she would see them again.

The city swelled in the morning bustle, amongst congested footpaths and horning intersections. Concrete trees rose above the sky, their metal limbs enclosed upon the blue.

Her features sagged with age, chiselled away by the ebb of time. The woman's skin had grown muted, no longer a lucent brown. Her hair was trimmed neatly, a small delicate purse in the palms of manicured hands. Her tiny frame seemed engulfed in the endless mass, an agglomeration of faces all in one place.

The woman waited expectantly, a siren rang in the distance, bodies surrounded, an air of overripe perfumes and pungent colognes. A well-dressed man stood up; an unnerved silence fell.

“. . . for the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, *we say sorry* . . .

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, *we say sorry* . . .

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, *we say sorry* . . .”

The old woman closed her eyes as the scene came alive again and again, unsettled, mutable, fraught with the abstraction of pain and loss.

Black hair, black eyes, black skin, the rumble of steel and rubber, the thrashing of figures and endless red. Their names were never lost, their tears never forgotten,

their blood still sang their songs throughout the lifetimes. She did not forget their faces, their sacrifices and their sufferings. She was their hope, and they were hers, in that time and in now.