

SCAR SKIN

Yakoa – Campaspe river (Yorta Yorta), Wakirr – Crow (Yorta Yorta), Biyala – Red gum tree (Yorta Yorta), Murnong – Yam Daisy

Amidst the song of morning birds, on the banks of Yakoa in a tall Biyala tree, Wakirr the crow watched. A woman walked slowly along a track, unaware of the yellow Murnong flowers cheerful by her feet. Her eyes forlorn and filled with sleep, she shuffled.

Constantly feeling unwell made her hours heavy, a weight she carried everywhere. Looking up the woman notices a man approaching. His strides were long and his smile broad, perhaps too confident. Stepping in her way, gesturing to the river near he asked with cheer, 'How are you today, in this beautiful Country?' Barely lifting her eyes, a sob escapes, and in an unexpected tumbling of words her heart spoke. She worked hard, carried people but her body ached, kept her awake, she had to hide bits that didn't work. Dropping ashamed eyes to the loose clay dirt of the track, regret for speaking swept through her.

Hands on his hips, laughing, the man declares he will make her happy. Dancing this way, then that, he throws his hands in the air and spins around to reveal a woman standing behind him. Her eyes are closed, but her sudden appearance and beauty shocks the woman awake. The man smirks with satisfaction. 'This is your new body,' he chuckles. 'Just close your eyes and step inside.' Wakirr begins to caw loudly. Fists clenched, barely breathing from hope and the darkness around her, she quickly steps forward.

The day's heat has crept in, and the bush along the track is now quieter. The woman tries to focus on her new smooth hands. The man grabs her arm roughly to steer her forward, proudly declaring 'You are so happy now. Come let's walk, you can try out your new legs.' A tingle of surprise ripples through the woman's body as she takes her first steps to keep up with the man.

Glancing to the side, she suddenly sees her old body, fallen, crumpled in the dirt. Tasting instant fear and smelling deceit from the man's closeness, the woman jerks away urgently asking, 'What do I do with my old body?'

A hot breeze circles the man, as he flings a theatrical arm in the air shouting, 'It is nothing, leave it in the dirt, let it rot, soon it will be gone.' He is taller now and the lines of his face fall into natural crevices of disdain. Trembling, feeling the awkwardness of her new mouth, the woman hesitantly rebuts, 'But surely, we could carry it somewhere, look after it?' Levelling his stare at her new pretty face, he takes measured breaths as if he is counting. Holding his wrath, he spits at her 'You are silly, emotional, walk away now!'

The sky overcasts, swirls of dust dance towards the man and woman standing on the track. Flocks of galahs and cockatoos take to the air, screeching. Sickened, reeling with remorse, the woman drops to her knees crying. Focussed only on her old body now in a distorted, sunken pile. She sees her loyal feet, weird toes and high arches that helped her run. Her working hands that held children, tools, lovers, plants and animals. Her crazy hair that knotted and split, and her old scars like a map on her skin. Then her oldest friend, her face. The woman sees her body like a child, it was hers to defend, to hold. Crawling through the dirt the woman scoops up her old body, whispering in her own ear 'I'm sorry, so sorry.' The man kneels beside her. A long moment passes. The woman is rocking, clutching her skin, scared to look sideways. The man leans in, sinking his weight against the woman. She can feel his heat, the clicking saliva sound of his dry mouth as he prepares to speak. Whispering into her new ear, jabbing his own old finger into her scar skin, the man pleads, 'If you love this body, then be in love. hold it, as a precious jewel'. Hugging her old body tightly, the woman begins to nod repeatedly. She closes her eyes.

The woman wakes up, face down on the track, dirt stuck to her face from crying. The man and the other body are gone. The woman jumps to her old feet, dancing, she has herself, her own song, her friend. She sees how the river has changed, now choppy and dark as if leaping with her. A chorus of kookaburra's begin, and she whistles with them. Tall and beautiful in her scar skin, the woman walks home. Wakirr circles above her, then swiftly flies down to lower branches to join the daily crow meeting.

Written by

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