

# Dreamtime

*by* Jane Flett

The engine rumbled to a stop somewhere in the blank sandpaper dusthouse of the outback—Sam said we'd lost the toss with the Dreamtime, he said he'd slept with scorpions and seen the destiny of snakes.

For a while we sat with our first aid cool box, mixing mother's ruin and pineapple juice, pretending for once the bucket we'd overturned was full of success and confetti. Pretending our holiday had aligned with the grand plan, and this—the sand, the sun, the broken bus—was just a tropical beach side adventure anyone would love to join.

We waited until darkness came and the sky unfurled and somehow it was so full of stars that it seemed like we were just tiny creatures camped out on a chunk of earth and fire that was hurtling through space. Oh yeah. Do you ever wonder about the ups and downs of the universe, and how we can tell? Maybe this bit of rock is just falling, not spinning. Maybe there's a bottom to dash our hopes and split our skulls upon. Or it's a bottomless pit, but then, there's got to be a top where small, frightened farm children lean over the edge of the well and drop pennies.

In this thick velvet desert night we did a whole lot of howling. Arreeoooww! To the songlines and the fictions that are woven into this old, old underfoot. Arreeoooww! To the thunder and the shards of electricity that split the sky like a deck of cards, shuffling, though the air, Vegas. Won't you please show me your poker face? Take your clothes off, layer by layer, until you're scrubbed pink skin and the only difference between you and the night is that I can feel the night in my arms, in my bones, but I turn to you and you have already sprinted across a jut of rock, you're already halfway to the moon.

Pass out in a patch of scrub and try not to think of the beasts that scuttled across these walkways long before you arrived with your cough of petrol and your clumsy heels. Wrap yourself in a feather boa, because they say it gets cold here at night, but there's no whispering that in your ear, you're already gone.

The problem with drinking gin in the desert is that eventually there is no more gin but the desert is still there. After a long night, we were dried husks, threads of pineapple in our teeth. The sun was sharp as an axe and someone was throwing it, some fucker was flinging it repeatedly through the air. I checked my body for bites and breaks, but I was all still intact.

I looked towards this horizon and that; I saw the world go on so far that the curve of the earth swelled like a pregnant belly. Maybe no one would ever drive this way again, and we had a new toss of a destiny—the orange days turning to deep purple nights, again and again, until we scraped out the secrets of this earth. Or maybe it's time to leave this husk and start walking, just for the sake of some direction. Just to see the world's got over there.

