**A Little Girl With Red Hair**

Written by: Boolidt Boolidtba

BILL and Gordon sat on a bench in the shade of the trees and listened to the magpies whisper-carol to each other as they wove between the feet of afternoon shoppers in Bairnsdale. Nothing was spoken between the men: they simply sat and absorbed the magpie-atmosphere - each interpreting the song in his own way.

The men had come into Bairnsdale in the hope of finding Gordon's Uncle who, they had been told, was helping his wife with the shopping. The men hadn't seen him yet - but there was no rush. The magpie was singing, that's all that mattered at this moment; that, and the tiny, little girl with the red hair who was sitting with her dad - both enraptured by the whisperings of the birds.

"She's a Koorie," Gordon said to Bill.

"Ow'd you know that?"

"You can see it." Gordon scratched his ankle. "Anyway, that's her father and you can tell he is."

"Ow you know 'e's 'er father?" Bill asked as he adjusted his battered old hat.

"She just said 'Daddy'." "You got better ears th'n me." Bill smiled, and continued: "She's pretty." Bill nodded acknowledgement to the father of the child. "Uncle," he muttered, respectfully.

Gordon stood, hitched up his trousers and retied the twine that did for a belt: "Gotta get a belt today," and then walked over to the window of the supermarket. When he returned he stood in front of Bill and spoke: "Don't think he's in there. Got a feeling his truck broke down comin' in this morning."

Bill swung suddenly to his left side, then back: playing peek-a-boo with the little red haired girl. "What do you want to do?" he asked.

"Do ya mind giving it a bit longer?"

"The magpies are singin' sacred songs to this little girl - and she knows it." Bill replied, scratching the stubble on his cheek.

Gordon sat beside Bill and listened to the magpies and watched the little girl.

Neither man spoke for quite some time. The little girl had curled up into her father's side, on the bench opposite the men; she looked tired - her eyes occasionally closing. Her father seemed asleep. Bill knew he'd seen him back in the old days of 'Land Rights' politics, but couldn't find the name. It didn't really matter - the magpies were standing in front of the little girl and whispering to her between a scrap of dropped food from some passer-by, or an inattentive insect.

"She's beautiful, 'ay." Bill's statement needed no answer; but was replied with an emphatic nod. "Red 'air and a face like that mob over in the desert."

"Pitjantjatjarra. Western mob." (PRON: pi-juhn-JAH-ruh)

"Yeh, that mob. But this one's got a white mum, I'll bet. One with red 'air." Bill smiled and swung to look at Gordon. "Pretty, 'ay."

"Yep!" Gordon seemed to have drifted into a different space.

The men remained silent - Bill entranced by the little girl, Gordon throwing the occasional unconcerned glance either way along the footpath. The magpies finished their lullaby to the, now sleeping, little girl and had moved away to a dropped half-croissant in front of the hot bread shop. And somewhere in the dream of autumn sun and reverie, the little girl's mother had gathered up her husband and child to the side of her laden shopping trolley and disappeared in the maze of cars in the car-park. The mother, Bill vaguely remembered, shone like the sun at sunset: a lithe and beautiful woman with skin like milk. The little girl had her mother's colouring - and her father's features.

"What you fellas doin' down 'ere?" The voice was like gravel and sand. Bill looked up into dappled and sparkling sun to seen Gordon hurriedly standing and shaking his Uncle's hand.

"Uncle!" Gordon beamed. "Watching a little girl, listening to the magpies and waiting for you."

"She was a Koorie with the most beautiful red 'air.' Some fella gunna be a lucky man in eighteen years." Bill smiled. "Till then, we're the lucky fellas, 'ay."