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Soldier Boy

Lucy Williams

His taut brown skin glistens as light catches his tears.
Heavily breathing, gasping for air,
The morning's crisp fog draws a shiver from his body.
Death's whispers can be heard, as the boy's amber eyes
close.

They had come at dusk.
A woman's scream pierced the stillness of the village.
The town's gates splintered under their weight.
Their dark eye; cold and unfeeling.

He watched as those gargantuan soldiers torched his
home.
The searing heat blinding him,
As tongues of fire licked at the timber,
The flame swallowed the small hut, reducing it to an ash
heap.

An electric energy ran through the village, dangerously
destructive,
Carrying the haunting tune of children's cries,
Birdsong and roaring fire.
The chaos of fear.

He found his father and mother, searching for an elderly
neighbour.

They called desperately into the night
Rummaging through broken homes, burning huts,
Frayed carpets peppered with spices.

Until finally they found him.
Hidden in a garden of succulents,
Concealed by hanging vines,
As this nightmare unfolded.

The look of dread in the neighbour's stare,
Two milky white, orbs of eyes,
Transfixed, as if in a trance
Was shocking.

An insurmountable mountain faced them,
Such wickedness poisoned these soldiers.
The heavy numbness of fear trapped the boy.
His heart drumming, a resonant, ominous sound.

The boy watched as they stole his father from his grasp.
Watched as those two white eyes became lifeless
And lost his son's amber gaze.
Mirroring the moon; captivating, arcane, far away.

Concentrated venom,
Sickly sweet and dangerous,
Polluted his blood.
Hatred.

Bare feet ran across dirt and rock.
Bleeding, the skin's raw-red stain deepened.
Adrenalin and fear intoxicated his body,
His mind confused, he simply ran.

A child's heart tainted by terror and grief,
On a labyrinthine search for a safe place.
Tears streamed from the young boy's eyes,
And he ran on.

The night rings with the echoes of warfare;
Of horse hooves like thunder as they approach,
A clamorous eruption,
A call of mercy.

The sword is raised, glinting with loathing.
As it falls through the air, the son clings to his mother.
Metal slices flesh, a body falls,
A mother's cry stills the night.

She drops to the ground
Wrapping warm arms around her child
Protecting her son.

This ephemeral peace ends,
As thick, hairy arms grab at her limbs,
Murderous hands muffling her devastating scream.

As those he saved run,
His body collapsed, tears blurring his vision,
Clutching his bloody wound.

And the soldiers galloped on.
Leaving the small body, broken and bruised.

The navy blanket of night became faint,
The cosmos more distant,
And gave way to the brilliance
Of dawn's morning.

The cruel sun mocked his injury.
Maimed, he lay as it shone down.
Beads of salty perspiration stung his lips.
The blood of his wound agglutinates and becomes black.

The last fragments of soul escape,
From those deepest, most profound crevices
Of his heart,
Leaving in their wake, a child's corpse.

Nearby, a tall and lonesome tree trunk,
Its dark wood painted with flowering lichen,
Stands amongst a sea of golden red and saffron;
Fragile carcasses of once green leaves.

Specks of dust dance through the air,
Glowing under the sun's gaze.
Time stops,
And the dust is held a moment.

Delicately placed, as if in deep slumber,
On a dusty carpet,
His amber eyes closed.
Alone in this expanse of earth
Save for the tree and the shrubs, sparsely scattered across
this brown canvas

The wind's roar ceases,
The land embraces the body.
It will not forget him, as we will.
His youth is given permanence, not often afforded life's
most infantile of moments.

Held closely by the land,
Of infinitesimal importance to the universe,
After the fleeting instant,
In which he lived.

The tree stands as a mother, wilted in mourning.
The call of a single golden oriole plays in the distance,
Its black and yellow plumage striking against the powdery
blue sky
Golden wings sparkling under the sun.

The harmony of the birds,
The drone of airborne cicadas,
The memory of children's laughter,
Nature's orchestra.

Roads of tears trace their journey across the boy's brown
skin,
His shirt now crimson, saturated with blood,
His amber eyes asleep,
Little hands aching for their mother's touch.

Far away, a woman wails,
In a small, dark room,
Her fate uncertain.
The last surviving remnant of a broken family.

The golden oriole sings its last note,
As the cicadas drift off with the wind,
But the tree stays.
Watching over this small child,
As his eyes close,
And his lips part.

Like an ocean's wave,
That rises to meet the sun,
Before crashing down into the sand
Engulfed by its mothers opalescent depths,
He is embraced by that, which made him,
Returning home.

Noon's sky watched as his being seeped into
non-existence.

In this tragically beautiful place,
Lies a soldier boy.
He could be sleeping, but we know he isn't,
An eternal child.



Lucy Williams wrote this in 2011 when she was in Year 11 at Girton Grammar School in Victoria.