

Brumby Dancing

Then sun was setting once again and Alicia wanted to pin it back high in the sky to stop the days ticking past. Days she was quickly running out of.

Her sickness was getting worse. She didn't know what her illness was called but she knew her parents did. Every time they asked they said she wouldn't understand. Alicia suspected they didn't want to tell her because they didn't want to make it seem all too real.

But the reality was, Alicia wasn't getting any better. Her bones were showing through her thin pale skin making her appear like a walking ghost. Her strength was nearly completely gone; it took all her effort just to come down to the creek every day. What she really longed for though was a simple juicy red apple. Her teeth were so fragile they began to ache if she bit into anything harder than a sandwich.

Alicia sighed and turned her gaze to the swirling waters of the creek she so loved to sit and watch. She was fascinated with how it lived forever; pulsing along its course like a heart beat before emptying itself into the lake and beginning its journey all over again. The willow trees swayed in a sudden breeze and Alicia shivered. Her body couldn't retain heat the way it used to anymore. The smell of the wattle and the gum tree leaves surrounded her and flooded her nose with its peculiar scent.

In this spot, with the fading light and the swaying trees, Alicia imagined this place was magical. A small part of her wanted to believe that if she stayed here long enough she could get better.

But that was a child's fantasy and it had no place in her all too serious world.

'A few more minutes, then I'll go' thought Alicia drowsily.

The stillness of the bush and melodic sway and rustle of the trees soon lulled into Alicia into sleep. She lay down and tried to remember what she was meant to do but the soft bush music pushed all conscious thought from her mind and rocked her to sleep.

Alicia jolted awake and looked around in confusion. Everything was dark and unfamiliar, she knew this wasn't her room and she struggled to remember where she was.

The thump of kangaroo feet made her jump then she relaxed as she realised where she was. She had fallen asleep by the creek. She wondered how late it was and where her parents were.

'They must be very worried' she thought.

She got to her feet awkwardly and looked around. She saw nothing but darkness at first then she saw a light bobbing about in the distance.

'It must be a torch' thought Alicia and began stumbling toward it. The darkness completely cloaked her and she had no idea where she was going but she kept following the light which she found never got any closer.

"Over here!" she yelled at the light, hoping whoever was holding it turned around and found her.

But whoever held the torch neither slowed nor turned around. Alicia paused and wondered vaguely if she should continue to follow the strange light. After all it could belong to anyone.

But then she pushed her fears aside and stumbled after the light again. She didn't know how she knew it but she knew the light was a good thing.

After stumbling and tripping for what seemed like hours Alicia finally realised the orb was getting closer.

'No' she thought, "I'm finally getting closer to it".

She began to stumble toward it faster and finally she reached it. But it wasn't a torch, it was a bouncing orb of pale blue light which seemed to pulse and hum.

She reached out to touch it but her attention was diverted to the bush around her. Or rather the clearing where the full moon shone down on it like a spotlight on a stage.

Alicia's jaw dropped as she stared at what was emerging from the trees. She had never seen so many before in one place.

They were brumbies, of all colours, blacks, bays, chestnuts, greys, palominos, paints, there were dozens of them. All of them stepped into the clearing as silent as the gentle breeze Alicia could feel tickling her cheeks. Their coats shone with moonlight and their warm breath in the cool air caused fog to come out their nostrils as they snorted and pawed the ground.

'They're waiting for something' thought Alicia and she blinked at herself in surprise. She had no idea where all these ideas were coming from, to fall asleep by the seemingly magical river, to follow the bobbing orb and now about the brumbies waiting for someone or something.

Suddenly they all stopped and looked up at the moon. Alicia found herself following their gaze and she watched the moon as if under a spell. The moon seemed to be pulsating like the orb that had led Alicia here.

Alicia broke her gaze from the moon and looked around for that particular orb but found nothing but thin air where it had been.

Shuffles and snorts brought her attention back to the clearing and Alicia gasped as she saw that the brumbies were prancing gracefully.

Amazed and mesmerised by the sight Alicia found herself swaying to the same beat which thrummed through her veins and made her blood sing. The bush music and the rhythmic thuds of hoof-beats drummed the rhythm that the brumbies and Alicia danced too.

'What am I doing? Why am I doing this?' she thought briefly but those useless thoughts were pushed away as she danced alongside the brumbies.

They accepted her in their circle as if they had expected her and Alicia laughed softly at that thought which she knew should be silly but right now found it incredibly true.

Alicia had no idea how long she danced but she finally found herself staggering on weak, wobbly legs toward a tree to rest.

The brumbies were still prancing and Alicia felt awed at how long they could dance without even appearing tired.

'Speaking of tired...,' Alicia thought dryly as she felt fatigue begin tugging her down into sleep.

'Just for a minute' she thought to herself and forgot she had thought a similar thing when she had fallen asleep by the river and woken up to chase a floating orb to a herd of dancing brumbies.

She had strange dreams during her time asleep against the tree. The beat of hooves and the bush music in Alicia's blood made her dream a girl came through the darkness. A girl with hazel eyes and dark hair that cascaded down her back like a waterfall. The girl had a

look about her that Alicia imagined was wild. The bush had touched this girl and left its mark on her.

“I am Snow River and I am of the Hill People” the girl said in a soft musical voice that reminded Alicia of the bush music.

“I’m Alicia Jenkins” said Alicia softly.

“I know who you are, the brumby’s have been whispering about you for months now” said Snow in her lyrical voice.

Alicia frowned at Snow’s comment about the brumby’s whispering about her but didn’t say that was impossible. She had seen the dancing and witnessed the magic, nothing would surprise her now.

“You have witnessed the Brumby Dancing, the most spiritual and healing dance the bush creatures have ever revealed to humans” Snow continued “Before only the Hill People have witnessed it which makes you a very special person”

Alicia nodded her understanding, feeling drowsy again. Her eyelids flickered and she felt sleep begin to drag her away again. Which confused her because wasn’t she already asleep?

“Sleep now Alicia” Snow’s voice was fading and it was the last thing Alicia heard before sleep claimed her.

She jolted fully awake and found herself leaning against a tree but it wasn’t the one she had fallen asleep against. It was the one beside the river where she had originally fallen asleep.

She shifted her legs and found they weren’t hurting. She no longer felt the continuous aches and twinges that had plagued her for months, since her diagnosis.

“Alicia, where are you?” the voice was loud and close by. Alicia looked up and saw two lights but this time they looked like torch lights. They weren’t bobbing orbs of pale light; they were yellow streams of torchlight that searched her out.

“I’m over here” she managed to croak out, surprised that her throat was so dry. For a moment she feared they hadn’t heard her but suddenly the lights turned around and shone on her.

“Alicia” her mother called and Alicia smiled back weakly, squinting at the harsh torch light.

“I found her Ted” Alicia’s mother called out and when her husband arrived she helped him lift Alicia up and take her to the car.

“Where are we going?” Alicia asked as she was strapped in like a little child.

“To the hospital, you’ve been out too long in the cold” said her father as he got behind the wheel of the car and started the long drive to the hospital.

Alicia sighed and let her father drive her to the hospital, she was too busy staring at the moon and wondering why it was no longer full. It was a half moon tonight and its glow was weak, unlike the bathing light the full moon had given off in the clearing.

When they finally pulled up at the hospital Alicia had decided she must have dreamed it all. Perhaps it was another side effect of her illness.

But when she saw her doctor a few minutes later he took a few blood samples and x-rays then hurried off only to appear an hour later with a bewildered look on his face.

He ushered Alicia’s parents outside and though they closed the door Alicia found she could hear them perfectly.

“She’s cured, there’s nothing wrong with her anymore” the doctor said, sounding baffled.

“Are you sure?” her mother’s voice was quivering.

“Yes, quite sure, I can show you the x-rays and blood tests to prove it” the doctor insisted.

The conversation went on for another five minutes but Alicia tuned out after that remark and her mind whirred with the fact that she was all better.

They drove home in silence and went to bed without saying a word about her illness.

Alicia realised that her parents didn’t want to get her hopes up in case the doctor was wrong.

As she drifted off she dreamt of the brumbies again. They danced through her dreams with their bush music and moonlit coats, their foggy breath and thundering hooves.

But this time as Alicia dreamed she was on the back of one of the brumbies and she swayed with the rhythm of its strides.

Snow River was there, and people just like her. People that had been touched by the bush and been marked by it.

Alicia slept and dreamed through the whole night and late the next morning, the brumbies and the Hill People kept her in her dancing dream world for longer than she had thought possible but when she woke up she found she couldn’t fall back asleep.

She leapt out of bed, suddenly feeling like she was alive with energy.

She bolted down the stairs and into her mother’s arms. They cried and hugged then her father appeared and they hugged some more.

Finally her parents were ready to accept she was better and they jokingly asked about what she had done out there by the river.

Alicia just grinned and bit into a juicy red apple. She sighed dreamily and closed her eyes to enjoy the taste.

She would never tell about the Brumby Dancing, she would also never tell about Snow River or the other Hill People. They were her secret and she would hold it close to her soul for as long as she lived. And thanks to the brumbies and Snow River, that would be a very long time.