

"Delightful. Warm. Whimsy. A very accomplished piece of writing"



2016
Tim Winton Award for Young Writers

FIRST PLACE
UPPER PRIMARY CATEGORY

© **Isabella Crean**

Ten years old
Sacred Heart School Mundaring

THE LONG WAY HOME

Upper primary category

Isabella Crean

When the spring wildflowers bloom it's like nature's disco ball demanding attention. The refractive vibrant colours touch everything. Park Bench was found surrounded by the wildflowers, outside Green Gables Café, at the Mundaring bus stop.

Every Monday to Friday at 6.45 am, a sharp shiny businessman was enthroned on Park Bench. The waterfall of wildflowers, like Park Bench's chipped paint, went unnoticed while he scanned his emails. By mid morning, a young mother plopped onto Park Bench with an exhausted sigh. She didn't see Park Bench's missing plank because she was grateful for a sturdy place to rest the baby carrier. Later, a tear stained school girl wiped away the days bullying. She chipped away rust from Park Bench's arm until her Dad rescued her from her day. After the busses stopped, a weary old man unrolled a bundle of blankets under the night sky. The muttering man liked the hospitable length of the old style Park Bench.

Park Bench didn't know any of this. All Park Bench knew was constraint. The old bolts pinning Park Bench to the ground were tethered to the earth's core. Park Bench's deepest constant wish was to leave the Perth Hills and live a life of never-ending global escapades. Park Bench was so restless that Park Bench's paint chips were shaken free and escaped in the wind. As if parts of Park

Bench were starting a journey that Park Bench could never take.

Trapped by the bolts, the seasons happened to Park Bench on constant repeat. Park Bench baked during the long hot summer days and was suffocated by thick bushfire smoke. While autumn bought some relief, the smoke continued as the hills were control burned. Crunchy leaves danced around Park Bench before the torment of their departure. Unpredictable darkness and wetness accompanied winter and Park Bench was lonely as people fled to cozy fires. The first sign of spring was always the pop of colour of the wildflowers and the happy bird song. The relentless change of seasons could not be avoided by imprisoned Park Bench.

It was a dewy autumn morning when Park Bench was shocked by the belly growl of the old Shire truck. Muddy boots and gloved hands were kicking and knocking Park Bench's legs. *"Put the drill away Gus, these old bolts are rusted through. We'll have to grind this one free."* Inside Park Bench was elated. *"Careful, now, they don't make them like this anymore"*.

Cut free, Park Bench was petrified. Moments later Park Bench was shoved on to the Shire truck. Park Bench's terror faded with the realisation that Park Bench was going somewhere, anywhere. Park Bench jiggled as the

truck moved, and took a last look at the blurry bus stop as it got smaller and smaller.

Park Bench was liberated and a life of adventure and constant motion was ahead. With a thud the first destination presented itself. A noisy roller door clattered open to a huge warehouse. With dizzy excitement, Park Bench wondered if all airports looked like this. *“Where to with this one Gus?”* Park Bench was thinking Paris would be nice. *“Put it against the wall like all the others.”* Park Bench wondered about the ‘others’. *“Shame such an antique one will be left here to rot.”* The roller door smashed down and Park Bench was devastated.

“Hey dude, what wave did you surf in on? I don’t see any gnarley Cottesloe sand on you, and I can’t smell that rad sea spray” said a relaxed yellow bench. A prim and proper park bench pronounced *“Don’t be silly Cottesloe. This antique elder obviously has a refined cultural origin. Look at that iron lacework. It’s just like His Majesty’s. I used to sit there for years soaking up Opera all day and night.”* The formal bench was interrupted by an earthy green recycled bench. *“Oh be quiet both of you. Greetings and salutations my new friend and welcome to the park bench cemetery. Wherever you hail from, I can assume it’s not the spectacular vista of Kings Park, where I gave rest to people from all over the world.”*

Park Bench felt like everyone was starring. Park Bench was wondering how they could talk and how Park Bench

could hear them, but most of all Park Bench wondered when the adventure would begin. Park Bench fell asleep listening to the three benches reminisce about where they were from. Surely they had travel plans as well thought Park Bench.

Meanwhile, outside Green Gables Café, things had changed. Early in the morning the stressed business man paced along the bus stop. He couldn’t do his work without a seat. Just before lunch, people in the café watched the desperate mother trying to soothe her crying baby. She really needed to sit down and breastfeed. After school, the young girl could be seen running with tears as the bullies chased her. She longed for the public safety of Park Bench. Later at night, No one saw the old man because there was nowhere to sleep.

The next morning, Park Bench had the courage to squeak, *“Ah excuse me when do they come back and take us out of here? When does the travel begin?”* Everyone laughed. Park Bench sagged as the laughter confirmed the fear. *“Hey dude, it’s the last wave, you’re not going anywhere”* the yellow bench crooned. Park Bench didn’t want to be indoors. Park Bench didn’t want to be trapped again. There was no point being able to talk and hear the other benches if Park Bench was staying put. Park Bench had wanted to leave the Perth Hills for so long and now the thought of the hills was Park Bench’s only escape from the gloomy warehouse.

Months passed and the chill left the warehouse. Park Bench knew the wildflowers would have started to pop up in the Hills. Park Bench had found a voice amongst the other benches and began to entertain with talk of bushfires. *“First came the smell and then the trucks. Next the people hurried about and then it would get very still. No one was coming or going, no animals, no children, just the smell of fire all around while I was bolted to the ground. The smoke would thicken and sometimes it would even feel hotter...”* *“Were you terrified?”* whispered the opera bench. *“No. They all know what they’re doing. They always get the fire under control”* said Park Bench proudly. In the quieter moments, Park Bench longed for the vast bush, for the colossal starry night sky and for the people who came to sit and wait.

As time passed, more benches were dropped off and Park Bench was no longer new. The warehouse was a home of sorts and routines emerged. Park Bench helped the new arrivals settle in. Park Bench listened to their stories of Fremantle and Fairbridge, and to his older friends’ tales of surf, theatre and Kings Park. Park Bench realised there were adventures to be found everyday in the warehouse. Park Bench traveled all over Perth and beyond in the memories of the other park benches.

One day the roller door clattered open. The light broke in and shattered the peace. The boots had returned and

were dropping off another park bench. Park Bench wondered where the new bench would take them that night.

“It’s so annoying that we have to lug this old heavy one back up to the Hills”. Park Bench felt a shove and a lift. *“I mean who writes to the council about a park bench”*. Park Bench was stunned. No one had ever left the warehouse. From the atop the Shire truck, Park Bench looked out to the old warehouse, and all the other benches. Park Bench said a silent goodbye to that land of journeys before the roller door rattled down.

As Park Bench was bolted to the ground outside Green Gables Café, Park Bench knew the Perth Hills was the best place to be. That night, under a million stars, the old man rolled out his blankets. Park Bench pushed gratitude around him, thankful that they had both found their way home. *“Okay old friend, let me tell you where I’ve been...”* muttered the old man as he took Park Bench on another journey.



O V E R

T H E

W A L L

AIMEE TELFORD

UPPER PRIMARY CATEGORY

2016
Tim Winton Award for Young Writers

SECOND PLACE
UPPER PRIMARY CATEGORY

© **Aimee Telford**

Eleven years old
Georgiana Molloy Anglican School

Mira didn't speak, he didn't shout, he didn't sing. Every day for Mira was a silent timetable. He didn't go to school or play outside with the other children because he was needed to do work at home. Mira continued every day, never once complaining or even shedding a tear. People thought that Mira was happy, but they were wrong. Nobody knew how broken he was inside. The only thing that was keeping Mira from slipping into depression and despair was the wall that surrounded his tiny village, like a mother holding her newborn child, warm and safe. He visited the wall every day at dusk. He would run his hand over the weather-beaten rock and all the happy memories that he had made there would come back to him. He would touch the name engraved on the bottom corner and smile. Even if it was just for a few moments, Mira felt happy near the wall. But walls can't stop the sound of gunshots echoing through the still air.

Mira had stopped talking when he was ten years old. A month before, his father had been sent out beyond the wall to fight the approaching darkness. He had hugged his father and said goodbye. Mira felt sure his father would come back, he had to. But one day an officer knocked on the door of their hut. He began saying something like "enemy base", "multiple wounds on the abdomen" and "very sorry". But Mira knew as soon as his mother opened the door that he would never see his father again. All that was left of him was a blood-stained

military shirt and his cap. Mira's mother, older sister and infant brother held a funeral for him. Mira wasn't there, he spent the day at the wall, tears running silently down his cheeks. His heart was shattered.

Ever since his father died, Mira grew to hate the shadows lurking behind the wall. All he wanted was revenge. His mother and older sister tried to understand, but Mira knew nobody would ever understand the way he was feeling. One day, about two months after his father's death, Mira scratched his father's name on the wall. The wall was like his gravestone and his father's name deserved to be scratched upon it. His sister would always find him at the wall and try and play games with him. After a while, Mira realised that his family just wanted to see him smile, but he could not do that. He tried and tried, but he was missing a piece of his heart and he didn't know how to fix it.

Then one cool autumn night, Mira awoke to shouting, screaming and the low drone of aircraft. He thought there was at least twenty planes coming towards them. "Take the baby and go!" his mother shouted, thrusting his baby brother into his arms. "GO!" She screamed again, shoving him out of the doorway. Mira fell into a soft pile of grass and was suddenly hit by a blast of hot air. He gazed in horror at the beautiful, yet deadly, fire that had engulfed his home. Soon the

agonised screams of his mother and sister faded and were gone.

Mira lifted his infant brother into his arms and the baby sobbed; somehow he knew deep down that he would never cry into his mother's arms again. Mira hid in a ditch until the bombing was over. He did not know what to do. He trudged through fields and valleys, staying in empty, damaged houses and stealing food from the homes that were abandoned. They walked for over six months and Mira cared for his young brother, but he did not have any love to give him, so his baby brother grew sad and lonely. Mira's face was hollow and full of grief; he was hungry and scared.

One day, he and his little brother stumbled into a refugee camp many miles from his village. Mira was given food and fresh water and eventually started to look like a child again. His wounds started to get better, but the sadness in his heart never healed. His baby brother was given to a young woman with a newborn baby, so that she could care for him. Mira went to visit his brother often but after a while his brother stopped squealing with joy when he saw him. He did not know who Mira was anymore, no-one did. Unlike all the other children in the camp, Mira did not make any friends. He did not have enough joy or innocence left for friendship. People from different countries came and delivered parcels of fresh food and medicine to the camp. One of

them gave Mira some candy and smiled at him, but Mira didn't smile back. Many of them tried to get Mira to speak but their efforts were in vain, because Mira had given up a long time ago. He just walked around staring at the barren landscape that had become his new prison.

One day Mira decided that there was nothing left for him at the camp anymore. Mira boarded a tiny boat with barely any food or water. He didn't take anything with him. As they travelled, many people threw themselves off the tiny craft into the churning seas, driven mad by the hunger and loneliness that seemed to haunt the ship. Mira did not go mad, he relished in the sadness that had become his new best friend. When they finally saw land in the distance and came upon the shore of a brand new country where, they could start a brand new life, they were pushed away, back to where they had come from. The rich, the comfortable, the happy people of that land didn't want them, so they were returned to where they had come from.

Mira stayed in the camp for another five years. And over time his need for revenge grew stronger. People would always tell him that revenge wasn't the answer but they had no idea. When he turned eighteen, Mira enlisted to fight the evil that had taken everything he had ever loved away from him. His father, his mother and his older sister were all dead. His younger brother saw him as a stranger and he no longer had a home anymore.

Mira was taken to a training base and there he learned how to become the perfect soldier. This disgusted him. He was learning how to fire a gun, and a gun had killed his father. But Mira could not hate himself any more than he already did.

After many months, he was given a uniform and climbed into a small green and brown truck. They drove for days; the other soldiers made conversation and said how nervous they were. Mira wasn't nervous, he wasn't scared, Mira didn't feel anything anymore...

They arrived at Mira's home town, which by then was completely abandoned. As he walked through the crumbling streets, Mira wondered what his life could have been like if he lived somewhere else. As he walked past the burnt-out house that was once his home, Mira wondered if the bones of his mother and sister were still there. He wished that he could have given them a proper funeral.

As he neared the edge of town Mira saw something in the distance that he recognised. His wall looked back at him and seemed to smile. Mira didn't smile back; his heart was too heavy. He walked up to it and for the first time in his life, Mira climbed over the wall. The wall that would always protect him, the wall that kept him safe,

the wall that never wavered. But as soon as his feet touched the ground, gunshots started going off.

"Surprise attack!" one of his fellow soldiers yelled. Mira ran for a crumbling building, breathing heavily. As he sat there, he noticed something poking out from under a brick. It was a child's doll, exactly the same as one his sister had had when they were little. He remembered her trying to get him to play with that doll; he remembered her trying to make him smile.

Mira cried, tears streaming down his face, thinking about all that he had lost and how little he had found. He placed the doll in his pocket and stood up, somehow he knew what he had to do. He stepped out from behind the building and started firing. Then suddenly, Mira felt a searing pain in his chest. A small, perfectly-shaped lump of lead was buried inside. He collapsed against his wall, smiling. His smile was as bright as the sun. Just as Mira was slipping away, he turned and put one blood-stained hand on the wall, the wall that was always there for him, the wall that was his saviour, And Mira spoke for the first time in eight years...

"Goodbye".

Upper primary category



Spots

(n) a small round or roundish mark

Bots

(n) a machine which functions like a human

&

Baby cots

(n) a small bed for a child

a short story by

Isabella Tjandra

"Clever, funny and quirky"

2016

Tim Winton Award for Young Writers

THIRD PLACE
UPPER PRIMARY CATEGORY

© Isabella Tjandra

Ten years old
Winthrop Primary School

It is a very chilly morning, and I'm curled up under the covers-pretending to sleep. It's actually very early in the morning, and even mum and dad aren't awake yet. The thing is though, I feel itchy. I feel as if a whole swarm of mosquitoes has attacked me, and lumps are covering my body. Mosquito bites. I might as well check-to make sure anyway. I tiptoe, not making the slightest sound and stand in front of the mirror. I gasp at what I see-I am covered in spots.

Mum examines me peering in every direction and finally opens her mouth. "Its chicken pox" She announces. I groan. My friend's little sister had it last year. She couldn't go to school, and that meant I wouldn't either. Mum's big belly is squashing me. Mum doesn't eat much. She says she has a baby in her tummy. She has had it for months. She is putting the cream on and reminding me to prevent myself from scratching the itches. I have to look prevent up in the dictionary. I am not that good with words, but I am good with science and building things. Actually, I am entering the Science Fair this year. I have decided to make a robot. A very clever one that will help me remember tricky words. When I told mum at lunch that I wanted to be an inventor when I grew up, she stifled a giggle. I don't know what stifled means either, but I hear it a lot in chapter books. She says "Yeah, and I want to be an astronaut" She says it very sarcastically. Sarcastically was in the spelling test once. I screw up my face as if I had sucked a lemon. Mum

doesn't notice. She is patting her belly. I say " Was I once in your tummy too?" She nods and grins. I questioned her again

" Will the baby be good at remembering words and their meanings?" She stroked my hair. " I don't know" She finally answers. "Is it a boy or a girl?" I asked, determined that she would know the answer of this enquiry. But she has left to the kitchen and was making herself a cup of coffee. I scrunch up my nose. I hate the smell of coffee. Even when I am grown up, I won't try it. I storm into my room and flop onto my cosy bed, sulking.

"Tada!" I say grinning. My dad barely glances at my artwork. He raises his eyebrows. "A robot" I say quite impatiently. "I see." Dad says in a low tone. He focuses on his work again. " It is made of stuff from my room." I add hoping to draw his attention once more. " I used some paint I found in the shed-silver" I say. Dad immediately turns around. His face is red. It means he is mad. I think I know what I did. I had used his paint. He is trying to calm himself down. I murmur a 'sorry' under my breath. I don't think he heard it. I glance left and right, flee and fling my arms around mum. I don't think dad would like the mess I made either. I ruined his favourite tee-shirt. It's all silver now. If he wears it, I guarantee, he would look like a silver rosette. Mum looks surprised. She almost drops the coffee cup. I am panting like a german shepherd. I am quite out of

breath. Mum offers me some coffee. I say that she always says I'm not allowed. I think I have reminded her. She seems very mixed up now-days. Gran told me its because of the baby. She says its very hard work. I asked her if I was hard work. She chuckles and says I am very amusing. I am very muddled. I remind myself to ask mum what 'amusing' means. I also need to ask mum what the reward is if I don't scratch my spots. They are very itchy and frustrating.

There are two cots in mum's room. They are made of wood. Mum has bought lots of nappies too. I ask "Why did you buy me a cot?" I ask because there are two cots instead of one. Mum replies and says they are for the new babies. Mum said the babies are due in a week. I tell her she has bad grammar and its meant to me 'baby' not 'babies' but she isn't listening. I grunt. I think an alien has stolen her brain. I'd better get it back. I think I should invent a robot that could fight aliens that have stolen your mums brain.

Later, mum says I have been a very good girl since I haven't scratched my spots. That is not true. I actually have been itching the spots. They are way too itchy for me. I try to keep my mind off spots and babies by making a robot made of stuff that isn't dad's. Dad threw my other one away. I thought it was a clever robot, but I guess not everyone thinks like you do. In the end, I use some old toys and I borrow-asking first of course-dads

tools to screw some stuff together. I don't use paint. Dad had found out I spilt paint on his shirt and has confiscated me from using paint. I didn't know what confiscated meant at first, but I looked it up in the dictionary and it means take someones property or authorities. I search authorities and property up in the dictionary too. I am unsure about what they mean. I am very sure I will win first prize and get a gold medal. I hope I do not get silver. It reminds me of my confiscation with paint.

I have been working very hard all week adding and taking away bits and bobs on the robot. The Science Fair is on next, next week and it is marked on my calendar. Mum is in hospital right now. Gran is taking care of me. I like gran. She is very comical, which is a synonym-I found out of 'amusing' We have take-away pizza for dinner. Dad is visiting mum. I ask why I'm not allowed to visit. Gran says that mum thinks you might get scared with all the hospital stuff. Gran says all little kids are. I am quite indignant and I say I am not a little kid any more. Gran chortles her head bobbing up and down like waves at the beach. I start to chortle too. Grans laugh is very humorous.

Mum is back and my spots are still on my body. She says they will go away in a week or so. I hope they would go away before the Science Fair. I do not want to go up on the stage and receive a gold medal with spots all over

my face. They would not look nice together. The baby is here too. Actually, they are the 'babies' There are two of them. Mum says they are twins. There is one boy and one girl. They are very small. I wondered what size of shoes they would wear. Mum says I'm not allowed to go near the babies as chicken pox is contagious. I know what contagious means. I saw it in the dictionary.

I am very curious about the babies, so I ask mum if they liked to eat chocolate cake. Mum says they aren't quite ready for cake yet. Dad says it's because they can't digest it properly, and they didn't have any teeth yet. I say "But chocolate cake is very soft" It is true. Especially chocolate sponge cake. Mum tells me that when I am older I will learn these things. "But I am already a big girl" I protest. Mum burst into laughter. I don't know what I said that was funny. I am just saying the truth, and mum always says to tell the truth. I leave the table and tell the grown ups I am going to be in my office working on the robot. I strut quite lady like into my bedroom, I heard another howl of laughter as the grown ups exploded into laughter again.

I stare proudly at my creation. The robot! It was finally, officially finished. She is very pretty. I had given her some eyelashes. She has a dictionary taped onto her. It is mine, as dad would not lend one to me. I said he was being very selfish. It is true, he has a whole shelf of dictionaries. He said it was because I took one for the

previous robot without his permission. I grumbled and folded my arms at that, but in the end taped on my own, and only dictionary. The fair is tomorrow. Gran is coming. So is dad. Mum, and of course, the babies. Everyone is going to cheer me on, well that's what they said, but I am not sure that the babies can make any noise yet. Except for crying. But they definitely can't cheer anyhow. I take a deep breath and imagine myself wearing a medal around my neck. I think it will come true. Except for the chicken pox part. I still have spots on me. Mum assured me they would go-probably tomorrow. I hope she is right.

The fair is very full of life. I don't have chicken pox anymore, but I am feeling a bit doubtful. I have to say, mum's predicting skills are very good. I don't have a single spot. Gran says that I am lucky that when I woke up, they were gone, otherwise I wouldn't have been allowed to enter. There are lots of great inventions, and suddenly mine feels small. It is time for my age group's inventions to be judged. I cross my fingers. My throat feels dry. A girl who made a lava lamp won. I didn't win anything. Not even a bronze medal. Gran gives me a cuddle. So does mum. The babies give me a kiss on the cheek. I sigh, but then my eyes light up. I have an idea as I see a model aeroplane with an engine carried by a big kid. I think I am going to be a pilot when I grow up. That would be perfect.