



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION  
Queensland Branch

---

PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING & HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ENGLISH

---

THE ESU ROLY SUSSEX SHORT STORY COMPETITION  
2020

Highly Commended in the Secondary School Division

**William Curr**

*Dundee*

© Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



2021

## William Curr

### *Dundee*

The darkness was all-consuming. A cloud of black ash lingered above the van, letting in only glimmers of deep red sunlight, like starlight poking holes through the night sky. In the distance, savage beasts burned on and on and on. It was as if they appeared from thin air, blackening everything they touched. As the road curved towards the flames, their devil-like limbs became visible, climbing higher and higher onto the un-suspecting trees, eventually strangling them to a horrible death. The fires didn't leave much, but the magnificent aroma of burning eucalypts was very welcome in this dry, dead land.

The darkness, however, didn't just exist on the outside. It slowly invaded my mind, eventually enveloping the precious pink flesh of my brain. It seemed to be all I knew. When she died, all my hope seemed to die with her. Without a sense of purpose, my mindless body just kept driving West, to the red, rocky desert where the flames had nothing to burn. But only God knew if I would get there before the darkness of my mind took control and killed me.

As the road took me over a small hill, I was met with an horrific sight. A blue gum stood tall; the bonnet of a car crushed against its enormous trunk. The ash was waiting for me as I opened the door. I pulled up my bandana, but it did little to stop the burning sensation in my throat. As I came up alongside the Commodore and peered through the window, the slow rise and fall of a man's chest came into view. Though blood dripped from the gashes spread across his head and body, his lungs still managed the burden of life. I raced back to my van, immediately reaching for the gauze and half-empty rum bottle in the glovebox. With everything I had, I pulled him out of the car and lay him carefully on the cracked bitumen. As I did so, a faint sound emerged from his mouth. I leaned in closer, but it was gone by the time I got there. My whole body seized up when I noticed the dark-green clothing that the man was wearing. He was a prisoner.

Escaped or set free, this man was probably dangerous. No-one would know if I just left him here to die, nor would anyone care. I kicked myself immediately for

thinking that. Leaving him to die would be more criminal than anything he ever did. He was still a human, now one of the rarest creatures left roaming this land. Whatever he did was forgiven by the burning that tore apart our world. We needed to remain together. So I began to work my unpractised first-aid skills. The rum on the wounds would clean them, but it wasn't ideal. With each drop on the poor man's skin, I winced as if I was the one dying. I pray to God he couldn't feel it; the alcohol would've been like acid on his bloody gashes. With the limited bandage I had, I managed to cover each of his red-raw wounds. As I lay him down on the reclined passenger seat, the faint whisper emerged from his mouth again. This time, however, it was far more audible than the last.

"Dundee," he breathed croakily.

"What on Earth is Dundee?" I thought to myself.

Then a lightbulb flickered above. My grandparents died when I was very young, but that didn't stop me from remembering where they lived and died. I reached under my seat and pulled out a dusty copy of the NSW street directory. I flicked to the index, and after a bit of searching, I found it. As directed, I flicked to page 239, and there it was. In the smallest print on the page was Dundee, and it was not far away at all.

With a destination in mind, some of the darkness had cleared from my head. The monster still wreaked havoc in the distance. Its wild limbs still lapped up the fuel from the trees. The land was still bone dry, but the slightest glimmer of hope still managed to shine through. But it didn't last long.

There it was, lit up by the faint glow given off by the flames that burned in the distance, a small, aluminium sign; behind it a scene of devastation.

"Dundee," the sign read.

Smoke still rose from the piles of timber and ash that lay alongside the road. Embers still lay peacefully burning on the front yard of what was once somebody's home. The beast had been through, and there was nothing they could've done to stop it. Leaving footprints in the ruins of a community made the darkness of my mind worsen to extreme anger. I picked up a stone, and with a mighty scream, hurled it against a brick fireplace. It still stood tall. The slam of a car door caused my head to whip around.

The man limped down the street, his focus set straight ahead of him. He then turned to his left and stopped, staring at the ashes that lay before him. After a few moments, he collapsed to the ground with his head in his hands. I began to walk

slowly towards him, ready to call out, when a voice from behind me stole that thought.

“Jimmy?” it called hopefully.

I turned and locked eyes with a woman; her wild eyes were unsettling. Frizzy, greying hair sprouted from the ashen roots of her scalp. She looked more frightened than anyone I’d ever seen, but then again she probably thought the same about me. With a shaking hand, I pointed to the body across the road. As the woman followed my finger, the man raised his head, and his mouth turned to a wide grin. She ran to him, and collapsed alongside him, crying with absolute joy. They both turned to look at me, tears still filled their eyes. They nodded their heads, and I nodded back.

The darkness retreated.