

They could feel it in the air, smell it even. The atmosphere was thicker, more dense. It lay over them like a heavy blanket. They breathed it in. The unfamiliar aroma engulfing their lungs. They breathed it in deeper and more deeply. ~~It~~ ^{The sweet, musty, scent} ~~It~~ tasted warm in their mouths, the spiralling dust turned to mud on their tongues, and they savoured the moisture. The red balloon that one of the boys held twirled violently in his hands as the hot wind picked up speed.

They stood surrounded by red. Red dirt. Red air. Red sun. ~~They were surrounded by red.~~ Red was pain, red was sacrifice. It was hardship, and it was struggle. It was hunger when the crops wouldn't grow, and sadness when a much loved pet was to be sacrificed. It was grief when a farmer lost the game of Russian Roulette, when he said "enough is enough" and threw up his hands. They were so young, but not so innocent, they knew

the colour red.

(Insert 2nd paragraph)

(★ ~~It~~ They were so young, so innocent, Never before had they seen swollen creeks or overflowing dams. Or heard the soothing "tat, tat, tat" ~~of~~ on a tin roof as they lay awake at night. No, they knew nothing of these things, they knew the colour red.)

They stood hand-in-hand as the storm clouds grew, casting vast ominous shadows across the land. They could feel the electricity charging through the air, the hair on their arms standing tall. They could almost hear the red balloon buzzing as it bounced around.

They remembered the story their mother had told them. The day had been sweltering, it had been too hot to go outside. They had been forced to seek shelter in the tin shed they call home. No work would be done that day. All they could do was sit around, bathing in sweat blessing every scarce breeze that found its way through the window

and praying there would be no bushfires. Their mother had sat in the kitchen with a book in her hands and the boys had scrambled towards her, desperate for any form of entertainment. She read ~~aloud~~^{aloud} to them. Telling them the tale of "Jack and the Beanstalk". The boys had listened in wide-eyed wonder as she told them of the giant beanstalk that had sprouted from just a few drops of ~~rain~~^{rain}. She described the precious, life-giving water. The chill as it ran across your cheeks, the pitter-patter and the puddles. A force the boys had never known. A mystery, an enigma, a miracle. Until now.

They stood silently, waiting. The storm grumbled and growled. The balloon jerked violently. And suddenly, the storm broke. It fell softly at first, caressing their faces, rolling lazily off their skin. And then harder and faster, slashing them, washing away the red dirt and dust; they rebelled in the feeling.

Their mother watched from just outside the house. Her two little boys, playing in the rain, a red balloon in tow. She laughed hysterically. The cool, brilliant water filled her mouth and she savoured the flavour. It rolled down her jaw, soaking her hair and dress, chilling her to the bone. ♥

Finally the boys retreated. They ran towards their mother, embracing her. The ^{red} balloon finally broke free. They watched it float into the storm. It was as though a veil was being lifted, a wall broke down. The landscape turned into a swirling mess of red. Of red and green and yellow and blue. Before only red had existed, and now a twirling kalidescope of colours. It was a chance. It was hope. It was life.

(insert into paragraph)

♥ (She felt warm tears rolling down her face. Tears for all she had lost, all she had never had. Tears for the pain, the struggle, the grief. Tears for the burdens too heavy to bear a second

longer. And she felt the rain wash it all away. Felt it cleanse her skin, her mind, her soul. She threw back her knotted and tangled hair, trying to get a better glimpse of her boy running through the sheets of rain, the balloon bouncing, ~~like a beacon~~ bright like a beacon.

(• It floated upwards, jerking, spiralling, tumbling. They watched it ascend into the storm clouds, leaving the ^{red} world below behind.)