

The Whistling in the Wind

She was small and plain. Dull and grey. Unlike the colony of white feathered ducklings that suffocated her. She was a different kind living in the same pond.

The lesser whistling duck; a small bird, pale brown overall with darker in contrast to other ducks. It makes a raspy whistling call when threatened.

She had not a clue as to where she came from but the pond was the only home she had ever known. Suddenly the water began rippling and the thunderous sound of an angry beast's hooves sliced through the water. Chasing her like a terrifying machine, pushing her away from her home as he went. Finally, when the water buffalo had returned to his own home a whistling sound emerged.

The lesser whistling duck; a sociable bird introduced from South-east Asia to Australia. The species is known for sticking together with their clan and the loud distressed whistling upon separation.

It had been a week since her father had kicked her out of the family home. Resentment bubbled to the surface as the words 'I wish you were never born' flickered to the forefront of her mind. As if a pen were etching the words across her bones, a permanent tattoo engraved on her soul. She found herself slouched against a tattered milk carton, in her musty new apartment. The LED lights barely above a sparkle. A blank canvas leant against the wall staring her in the face presenting a future with endless possibilities, next to it a closed chapter. A family once on display so full of light and colour now covered by a dull, lifeless bedsheet.

The process began. This time much darker. She moved her hands from canvas to paint like a robot on autopilot. Splashes of ebony watercolour and grey oils lighting the canvas on fire. Much like the world it depicted inside. She glanced downwards at her hands and realised she could no longer see her calloused apricot skin. "Father, can you bring me a rag?" The silence; an unwelcome friend.

...

Archibald Prize Portraits had labelled her an 'Asian-Australian star fresh on the scene to look out for. Her work is shiveringly magnificent.' She had hungry journalists following her around all week like sharks out for blood. They wanted to catch an interview with the season's newest prospect. She had done it. She was an artist.

Whilst able to survive on their own for a period of time, once lost lesser whistling ducks are always on the hunt for their clan. Their whistling becomes more frantic the longer it takes.

...

It had been six months since she had entered the artistic scene. Her work was marvelled at by many and stood alone as the crown jewel in many museums. She was known as the "Ice Queen." Her father had always called her "Sunshine."

The little duckling was making her way back to her new home when she saw him. The water buffalo. Trudging down the dirt path, the shivering rain seemingly having no effect on the beast.

Staring wide eyed at the small man across from her, the duckling remained hidden. She was a shadow. He was holding a bag of oranges. Her favourite. She began to follow, slowly waddling out of her hiding spot.

...

Swiping a glance at the clock, she rushed out of the door. It was Thursday 5:30pm, the same time as always, when her father would appear out of the local stop and shop with a bag of her favourite treat. He would walk a kilometre with her silently waddling behind. Arriving at a park bench where he would sit and peel the oranges masterfully until there was none left. Then he would leave. All the while she observed with beady eyes from the safety of the darkness. A raspy whistle is all that can be heard across the park.

...

As she sat on her designer, impossibly white couch, she stared around herself in awe. It was blindingly beautiful like the white ducklings' feathers. This was not where she belonged. Where was her makeshift milk carton seat? She was existing in a plane she did not belong to. A fatherless plain. She raced along her shiny marble floors, hauling herself inside her studio. She began to paint.

Upon death of a family member the lesser whistling duck lets out a noise so astronomically loud it can burst an eardrum.

A deep ruby was flying across the room. Trickling into a stream of water colour; aqua, violet, magenta. All awoken by the shimmering gold cast above it. The low hum of the air conditioner barely audible over the noise screaming from the canvas. Holding it up to the light she could see two faces. One with a thousand stories locked up and the other desperately searching for a key. Sitting on a bench, orange in hand, the two figures were engulfed in a utopia of utter light and bliss. Rolling hills passed by and the sunlight rejuvenating their once wrinkled faces. The flowers of Spring bringing back to life the two souls on the bench. The Ice Queen's lake had long since cracked.

It was 5:30pm, Thursday night. Sitting alone on his bench an aged man could be seen, munching slowly on an orange. About 30 metres behind him a young duckling can be spotted, orange in hand staring at the grand water buffalo ahead. A longing whistle barely noticed in the wind. But stuck somewhere between their current reality and the canvas that lies ahead.

The lesser whistling duck whilst intelligent enough to survive on its own will always find its way back to its clan.