

## Lost in a Dust Storm

To see you, first I have to find you; you tiny little thing. Are you hidden or hiding?

Somewhere amidst the chaos and disorder, fragments of family life scattered, outside and in. Shards of sparkling glass, drained and tossed, an old TV, a lamp no longer able to stand alone, and a lounge suite, stained and beyond care.

A caravan, an old car wheel and crisp dry leaves caught in bundles together in corners... And dust. Dogs pulling tight on chains, eyes desperate, barking.

A single lonely horse nibbling at the dirt in the paddock next door doesn't look up.

A mountain of pilly clothes and stiff old towels sit across the couch, a dinosaur bowl with soggy remnants of breakfast long ago ... And dust.

I can't find you. There are strangers where your cradle was last week.

Your big brother is working hard to entertain them.

Who are they baby and where are you?

Mummy forgot today. And she still forgets when I'm here – it's so busy, and then she remembers, and we find you by sliding an old wooden door into a wall, and there you are.

In your white wicker on castors, in the dimness of the hallway, in transit.

You are sleeping baby, that's where you are as the washing machine rumbles and the drier tumbles around and around in circles and frantically thumps with its heavy load. Just keeping up.

Mummy tries to wheel you, but Jack quickly blocks our escape with his little green chair, then nimble and practiced, climbs up, shaking you like popcorn in a bag. I can't see you now. Jack is bigger and louder and angrier than you, and Mummy looks uncertain and afraid, so we stay. And still you sleep. Your

pencil line lids flicker open as if you might wake, and with them your lips just as quickly tremble so sad, then a quivering smile so brief - a hint of having fun, but you do not wake.

It's always chaos, says mummy.

Jack screams and grabs mummy's phone from the dusty TV cabinet as she drags him from you. Mummy laughs, but her eyes do not as she tells me about the message written there in dust. Daddy works long days in the truck, and he wonders what I do all day she ventures. She hopes I'll understand.

"Dust me now!!!" is gone in an instant as she swipes her hand through it and creates a storm of little motes that look like they will never land again.

I haven't forgotten where you are, as I sit with mummy. The visitors are gone and now it's just daddy's other children, Jax and Anise who come back

with daddy.

They are sisters and brothers and sons and daughters every second week.

They eat and sleep and fight and go to football and stay for a few days and then they are gone.

You cry out, we hear you and Jack rushes through the door climbing and weighing you down and you roll to the side as mummy yells at Jack. Your eyes pop, alert and watching. Mummy lifts you and tells you that Jack is very naughty since you came.

Daddy looks at you as Mummy brings you out and sits on the couch. He doesn't say hello baby. He's got to go and see a mate about the truck.

Mummy looks at you and then her phone, head to the side, lips pursed for just a moment. She thinks you're probably hungry. Jax wants to play with his new remote-control car daddy gave him. Mummy is wearing a dress today and you

are fossicking for your feed as mummy contorts her body to lift her breast out over the neckline. Jax wants mummy to help him and only mummy. Mummy is holding a manual. You grunt and grab at the manual, restless, forgotten.

You scratch and poke with your tiny soft fingernails along mummy's arm.

I'm watching you. Suddenly you pull away coughing and choking, and

Mummy's busy. Your face is so red, and still your little body works

to save you, arms flailing. A quick glance from Mummy. I want her to help you

but she's still helping Jax.

Your face is bright red and alarmed – you work very hard to recover and

you do, all alone, little one. I watch you as you return to the breast and you fall

asleep.

Is it always chaos? No, baby. Remember last week? Oils burned and

I could smell it wafting through the door and you were there, right there in the

middle of the room and it was just Mummy and you.

Music played and Mummy looked at you with sparkling eyes.

You played on your colourful mat surrounded with toys and she

laughed with laughing eyes and told me what a nice change this was.

I watched you as mummy washed up and talked. You talked too, with your

little noises. You performed experiments with your acrobatic tongue. Mummy

came to you and looked at you and smiled a big smile and told us both how

peaceful your cuddles make her feel. She doesn't want to take it all from you.

And I saw you take a breath, almost trembling with joy, and open your

eyes so wide drinking in all that you could.

She measures so carefully.

It was just Mummy and you and the folding was gone.

So was Jack and Jax and Anise and everyone, and so was the dust.