

Resurfacing

By Ruby Baird, St Andrews Cathedral School

Tamin decided to take the low road that twisted, snake-like, through the tangle of bush alongside her back fence. Stopping to close the gate, she looked towards her house and almost went back inside, but she didn't. She had come this far.

Tamin zipped her parka up to her neck against the cold, rubbed her gloved hands together and watched her breath form fleeting white clouds in front of her as she walked. Her footsteps seemed louder in the winter stillness; her boots crunching on the gravel at first, and then mulchy undergrowth as the road ended and a dirt path completed the distance to the river. Tamin's thoughts were louder, her heart was louder. Her breathing determined.

There was always something washed up in the river, caught in the bramble of stones and sticks that clumped together where the river narrowed into the slip of water forming Haggarty's Creek. A dead dog, dissected parts of an old refrigerator; leftovers and lost things. The river, and the creek the river turned into, was part of Haggarty's attraction to the wider world. Her waters were deep and dark and mysterious, and rumours and myths about her secrets were passed down from father to son, mother to daughter, neighbour to neighbour. But it was Tommy who shared the secret with Tamin, which had her taking the low road to the river. Tommy who said he'd meet her there.

I've always loved this river. I don't know why, but I've always had a strange fascination with it. As a child I especially loved how anything in here will resurface eventually. I don't know how long it takes- a week, ten years- but it will always come back to you. Unless, of course, you aren't here for it to come back to.

Tamin continued to stumble along the muddy path. It had begun to rain, the icy water transforming the dirt trail into a muddy death trap. She stepped carefully, grabbing hold of

whatever branches or plants she could reach, desperate not to slip and plummet to the bottom of the hill. She hoped it would stop raining soon, else this new piece would be destroyed. That's how she saw them. Each one a little piece of a story.

I used to come and sit here all the time. Whenever it got too hard, or I couldn't go on. I would just sit here and breathe in the cool air, the smell of the river and the bush. I would lie back and not have to think anymore. It was like the river was thinking for me. I needed it. It was my escape route. It will be once more.

By the time she reached the river the bitter downpour had subsided to a light drizzle.

Tommy was waiting for her. He looked up as she came near, his face eager. In his hands was a little black box. They were all different. Some large, others very small; some brightly coloured plastic, others dark wood. This was small and polished black wood. It was grimy and chipped from being stirred around in the river's currents, but it had clearly once been very beautiful. The one thing it had in common with every other of these special boxes that they had found was the thick brown tape it had around its lid, to prevent the river's water from flooding in and destroying its precious content. Tommy jumped up as she approached, his hands trembling.

"I think this is the last one." His voice was hushed and nervous. They hadn't come in order of course, but Tommy and Tamin just knew there was one last box to be found. And now they had found it.

For a while, I was okay. Almost a year went by and I was fine. For three hundred and fourteen days I did not need the river and I could ignore its hypnotic power over me. And then one morning I woke up and my whole world was tumbling down again. My life has always had a kind of domino effect: one thing falls down and knocks everything else down

with it. After that I spent every afternoon here. I would watch the river move, let it come inside me and overcome me. It was part of me. It always will be.

Together, Tommy and Tamin carefully removed the tape from the box. The inside was velvety and deep red. Blood red. Tamin picked up the stiff piece of paper inside. It was folded four times to fit into the tiny box. The letter looked like all the others. The handwriting was the same, just a little shakier, and the date in the top corner was two days after the last. Tamin took a deep breath and began to read aloud.

I think about who will find this. I think about it a lot. Maybe it will be some old farmer, who will discard it as trash. Maybe it will be a bunch of kids who'll read this and think it's a joke. Maybe it will be someone who knew me, and they'll cry as they read it. Maybe it will be someone who will think, why? What makes someone think they have no other options?

Tamin stopped reading. This was too real now. This wasn't just some fun game, a story. This was a girl her age, a girl who thought there was no other way out than to - Tamin's thoughts were interrupted by Tommy grabbing the paper out of Tamin's trembling hands and beginning to read it himself.

In answer to your questions, I know there are other options. There just aren't any I am willing to take. I have tried to ignore this profound ache, a pain so deep it's like a thousand knives lodged in my soul, but it just can't be done. It cannot be ignored, and it won't go away, so now I'm done.

And now I will just let the river take me...