

# writenow! competition 2009

Year 9 – Winner

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## Welcome to Moon Street

*That summer, we drove up to the cabin in the hills. My parents liked to 'get away from it all'. What they meant by 'all' was stuff my brother couldn't do without, like broadband and TV and pizza delivery.*

*On the fourth day we went 'exploring'. It wasn't exactly a Burke and Wills type project, seeing as how we had four-wheel drive, satnav, a map, mobile phones and an Esky the size of a coffin. Plus a whingey twelve year-old with his head wired to an iPod.*

*After an hour or so Dad said "Let's give this a whirl," and turned off the road on to a downward-winding dirt track. Eventually it levelled out and we found ourselves in a valley. It was hotter down there. Mum cranked the air-con up. The track ran alongside a dry creek; off among the scrub I glimpsed sag-roofed buildings and the ribs of old fences.*

*“What is this place?”*

*“Dunno,” Mum said. “There’s nothing on the map.”*

*And then we came to a stretch of crooked, bleached-white fence, and standing behind it was a horse with a boy on its back. They were completely motionless, even though flies clouded the horse’s head. The boy had hair like black snakes, and wore only a frayed pair of cut-offs. We were past them in a second. I looked back, but they were lost in our dust. No one said anything, which I thought was kind of weird.*

*I dozed off, I don’t know for how long. I woke up when the Toyota lurched and the first thing I saw was the same rickety fence and the boy on the horse. His dark eyes met mine as we passed.*

*“Are we lost?” I said. “We’re going round in circles.”*

*“No we’re not,” Mum said.*

*“Yes we are,” I said. “We passed that kid on the horse a while ago.”*

*Dad squinted at me in the mirror. "What kid?"*

*Mum turned and looked at me. "What horse?" she said.*

"Didn't you see him?" I asked, pulling around to look out the back window.

There was dust. Red dust, for what seemed like miles and miles more. It caked over the glass. It collected in the depths of the abandoned valley and sat there. But beyond that... nothing.

No boy, no horse.

Mum gawked over my shoulder. "Nope darl," she said, scanning the ruined rooftops and broken fences. "There's no one out there. You've probably just nodded off."

She turned back in her seat as I flopped down in mine.

"How could you not have seen him?" I cried over the hum of the air-con.

"He was behind that white fence. He was all messy looking!"

Dad laughed, tiny creases pinching the corners of his eyes. Eyes that flashed at me like teeth in the rear view mirror.

“You know, me and your uncle used to have a word for that,” he grinned smugly, slipping into another of his boring old stories. He paused for effect: “You were probably just visiting Moon Street.”

“What.”

Mum nodded in agreement, “Oh yeah, I’ve heard that too – we used it when we were kids. Huh, when anything seemed possible...”

“Means daydreaming.” Dad said. “When we travelled long distances, we used to stare out the Valiant’s windows and see some pretty crazy stuff. Probably just the effects of dehydration and tiredness.”

“Dad,” I said slowly, as the Toyota ricocheted over a series of bumps. “I feel fine. But there was a kid. Out there, on a horse.”

The valley outside had thickened. It was dense, with matted bushes and bony gum trees sticking out like stripped carcasses. Most of the old fences running alongside us had melted away. The track before us had narrowed

into two red ribbons of dust.

“Why don't we stop awhile and have lunch, and then we'll go back.”

Mum was saying. “The boys must be hungry – ”

But there was something else out there; amongst the trees and shrub. I didn't really see it, nor did I have to. It was out there, alright. All I needed was the single sound of a horse hoof. One glimpse of those cold black eyes...

“Are we stopping!?” my brother exclaimed. “Finally! I'm starving.”

The Toyota stopped abruptly as Dad jerked back the clutch. The car relaxed into the dust.

“What are you staring at?” my brother demanded, yanking the earphones out of his ears. I peered at him blankly, his voice lost in the trembling whites of my eyes.

We did lunch on a collection of fallen branches, huddled around the Esky as if it were a god. Dad told my brother about Moon Street. While grinding his teeth on chips, my brother replied snidely: “Moon Street? That sounds

like a drug thing.”

The steady drone of crickets marked the late afternoon. We piled back into the Toyota and swerved around for the journey home. The sky blushed red with exhaustion.

“You haven’t said anything since lunch. You alright?” Mum asked me.

I nodded.

Eventually, we found the hill we’d clambered down earlier that day. It seemed steeper, more challenging to try and escape. But soon enough we left behind the barren valley, with its crippled fences and lonely houses. A short way from the main road and I could breathe again.

But then, as we were about to leave the dusty dirt track for good and forever, my brother turned around and said: “Hey, did anyone else see that kid on the horse?”

Mum and Dad exchanged a puzzled glance. My hand dropped from under my chin. The Toyota had stumbled back onto the main road and started to drive smoothly. I twisted backwards in my seat.

There was a boy, with a horse; both standing at the mouth of the track.  
Flies flickered around them but they didn't move away. The boy ran a  
stick through the fine red dust.

And I shouldn't have seen it, but I know I did.

It said: "Welcome to Moon Street."