The sticky sun trickled down through the valleys and poured into the tunnel. The flecks of gold that twisted and orbited around beams of light fell lightly, dusting the bleached bellies of the stalks of the knee high grass that sashayed in the early morning breeze. The wind pin wheeled through the trees, gently lifting and tugging the world into morning, dragging behind it the drunkenness of sleep. The daylight cracked through the shell of drowsiness, heard as the birds unfurled their wings and larvae emerged from their sticky translucent cocoons. Each living being collectively sighed and stretched, heard through a cacophony of creaks and groans, of a thousand twigs snapping under the weight of a new dawn.

The morning salute came in the form of a full battalion of cockatoos, followed by the kookaburra armed guard and the fire of all troops of every nationality following their orders. The horizon shifted, trying to get a peek at the new morning, glancing over its shoulder exposing the sun, and turning its back on its pale-faced counterpart. As morning infiltrated the land, pinpointing those darkened corners we all wish would remain hidden in the night, the world was reborn. A second chance.

Slowly, I stretched my legs, each one clicking into place as I winced and blinked last night from my eyes. I blinked and blinked again, my eyelids grating against the lenses, debris of sleep creating thousands of tiny scratches as I dragged them open. My vision was blurry through the ghosts of last night, the morning light chasing them away. My tunnel is filled with light, those persistent beams probing every corner, rousing me and forcing me to pay attention to the new morn. The warmth that came loosened my joints, and grew along with the rising sun. However soon the heat was tattooing the land with its burning kiss, branding every cell as its own, reminding just who was in control. The land seemed to buckle and heave under the stifling heat, kept in check only by the opal blue sky that pinned down the ground at each horizon. The heat sucked every ounce of moisture from my body, and I knew I had to replenish if I had any hope of surviving today.

Time to eat.

One foot in front of another, I clicked down the tunnel and emerged between the dried stems, feeling my way with my antennae. The ground was so hot that it seared my feet, so I hopped from shade to shade with quick, flickety sprints, clicking and buzzing, tasting and testing the air for my prey. I tried to fly, but the heat had cracked my wings and rendered them brittle.

The ironbarks wept, shrinking their skin forcing it to split, the cuts oozing rust as red as the dirt. Its roots dove deep into the red dust, desperately seeking something instinctively, yet questioning; frustrated at the futility of it. The scraggly scrub doubled over upon itself, succumbing to the heat that drew upon their strength, forcing them to collapse from sheer exhaustion. I clicked and buzzed onwards, searching for the strength the ironbarks had too easily surrendered.

I reached an overhanging scrub, and crouched beneath a particularly wide blade of dying grass, gasping for its last breath. A roo and her Joe lounged in the shade of a decaying eucalypt, chewing languidly, only using their energy to swat away the tiny insects that buzzed around them with a flick of their dusty-grey ears.

Lunch.
I found a root at the base of the small shrubs that provided the shade they sought, and began my ascent to the edge of the branch that extended just beside the larger roo's ear. A small gathering of gnats and flies clustered around her face. An annoyance for her, a smorgasbord for me.

I edged out to the tip of the twig, balancing delicately, trying to stop my legs from clicking in excitement. I needed to concentrate. I eyed off the small gathering of hors de 'oeuvres that nattered over the tip of her right ear. I tensed, ready to take one for myself, and a few for the road. The heat had dried up what little strength I had and my legs were shaking from exhaustion. I needed to eat.

That was when I saw her.

One of the tiny flecks of gold that hung suspended in the air had alighted upon the tip of her wing, catching the light and momentarily blinding me, nearly causing me to collapse from my perch. Stunned, I closed my eyes and determinedly stuck all my legs to the twig, gripping it with all the strength that was yet to be taken from me, praying that in my moment of weakness, I did not become prey myself. Carefully, I opened my eyes to a sight that knocked the breath from my lungs, the thought from my mind, and the beat from my heart.

She pirouetted and careened, avoiding the constant threat of the dusty grey flick, a twisted ballet, where the final curtain could be all too real. Her tiny wings fluttered around her dainty black body, as she spiralled through indecision as to hang around the roo or go join the others on the corpse of a calf that had long been taken hostage by the harshness of the light. The bleached bones beckoned, but she stayed her orbit, preferring the hive of activity to the dryness that death left in its wake.

Her eyes glittered and shone reflecting the light through one thousand lenses, my heart beating more intensely with each flutter, as I clung in suspense on my airy perch. My greying bronzed body shuddered as I imagined flying up to her, flying away with her, being with her...Hopelessly falling. I was ensnared by this tiny...magnificent creature...some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

I was unsure if the ache in my legs was the muscles slowly seizing up from fatigue, or my insatiable appetite for her. An appetite I never knew I had. The staccato of my heart matched the pounding in my ears that joined the fluttering in my stomach. The rhythm of her movements, darting around the piercing rays of heat that perpetually speared her from the sky. I was mesmerised. I was drawn to her like a moth to a flame (excuse the pun). I felt as though every cell in my being was inextricably intertwined with hers, just as the life force is with every being in this harsh paradise. I gazed upon her intently, as if I could almost will her to cease her futile efforts and come away with me, to take the leap and break the most fundamental laws that define our beings, to break the chain of existence that binds us all...

I remember the world taking on a wonderful rose coloured tinge, as my heart swelled and my body ached...however I should have recognised it for the violent shade of red that it was.

The kind of red you saw through closed eyelids on a sunny day... that burned straight through to singe your thoughts.

The kind of red that struck fear into the hearts of all, the red of the dust to which we all inevitably returned...
The kind of red that meant danger...that meant run...

I wasn't the only one that was watching her. Another set of beady, glittering eyes glanced maliciously through the sun split ochre tones, fracturing the sphere I had created around the two of us that beat to the rhythm of the blood coursing through my body, encircled by the blessing of this inescapable heat. A skink slithered from the undergrowth, snaking through the parched foliage that draped upon the ground. He looked at me. He smiled and winked. And then, she alighted upon the low russet fur of the jee, resting her wings veined with streaks of gold.

It happened in an instant.

He was fast,

The heat made him desperate.

A snap of the jaw,

The crack of doom.

The destruction of two lives...one to the inevitability of the earth, the other to a broken heart.

She was snatched, her absence shattering the golden tones of the afternoon into a dull, dismal, brown, barren land, suffocating us with its heat. My muscles shook and my frail cricket body swayed, threatening to plunge me from my perch. The air was sucked from my lungs just as she was taken from the earth. My vision grew dimmer and dimmer as the world subtly shifted from browns to greys, fading until it was cemented into black and white.

But as I fell, the blackness overcame.

The course of true love never did run smooth.