



The Disposable Human

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Gunditjmara
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Gather in close.
Sit under the canopy of the ancient eucalypt.
Warm yourself by my fire.
I want to tell you a story.
This is a story about disposable humans.
I know all about this story.
Because I am one.
I am a disposable human.



I am a criminalised blak woman who wears your colonial chain around my ankle every single day and all through the night. You monitor my every move by your sky satellites. The scars of incarceration are carved into my skin, so deep they have changed me on a molecular level.

I am blak.

My pores are clogged with 232 years of colonial violence.

My blood courses with my grandmother's stories, every one of her fears and all of her rage.

My spirit is restless. It is unsettled ... dispossessed ... fragmented. I straddle two, sometimes three worlds, never quite comfortable in any. Never whole. Never complete. Never home.

I am a criminal.

I am a woman who disappeared into your system, and was processed, tumbled and spat out. My head rests uncomfortably on the bottom rung of the two-tiered justice system you call morality.

But I am not alone.

In this place are my brothers and sisters and we are many: my countrymen and women whom you have criminalised from the moment they drew breath. We are all a figment of your imagination: the embodiment of the deviance you constructed of us.



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And now, Mother Earth and all of our man-made misery have delivered unto us a virus that you cannot contain.

I'm watching our Mother steal the breath from our lungs, the same way you have stolen hers. She's burrowing into your body and making her home in the throats of many, squeezing and strangling the life from us, as you have done to her. She's going to flick you off, one by one, like fleas from a mongrel dog's back.

And while our country sighs a big sigh, and the planes are grounded and the city slows and the borders close, you stand alongside the landlords and the bosses and let them continue to line their pockets with our meagre silver.

You keep my brothers and sisters in their teeny-tiny cages with the germs and viruses caught upon winds drifting and circling between them and all around them. We are your disposable humans.

My people cry, "Penny for a bar of soap. Let me wash my hands to stave off infection." And while people on the outside send in soap for those on the inside, you toss it into your bins citing security concerns, as if there are metal files encased in that cake of Palmolive.

They line up side by side to be counted by your officers, because that's what your regimen demands. And while the prime minister of this illegitimate nation tells everyone to stand 1.5 metres apart, you, as the keepers of moral order and safety, make them stand shoulder to shoulder, because that is the rules.

They huddle in overcrowded cells originally built for one but now housing three, and they wonder what social distance actually feels like – because this is certainly not what it looks like.

Meanwhile, their kids cry for their mamas, and you shut the gates and close the visit centres. You let some, but not all, have a video call one day out of seven – but Peter boy has no Internet and down the road, Ruby has no computer, so they miss saying hi to their dad. It's been four weeks since they've felt his embrace.

And Sarah? Well, Sarah's lonely and every night as she sobs into her pillow, she puts her palm to the shadow on her cell wall just for the touch of another human. She thinks of her babies, and tries to remember her son's sweet scent and her baby girl's voice because she hasn't been able to phone home in a week – no money you see.

Hayden lines up each night for more than an hour just to hear his sweetheart's voice over the phone, and just as he gets to the front of the



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line you call 'count', and he's sent back to his cell – another night of no contact.

And through all of this mayhem, and the covid chaos, my people, the people you hold in cages, where you've locked them up and thrown away the key and forgotten them ... you chewed them up and spat them out and discarded their raw carcass and made them every bit as disposable as the rubbish in your trash ... you refused to free them.

You watched other countries remove the padlocks and open their gates and send their people back to safety, but you said no.

You said no.

You sent a message to all of us.

You made us all disposable.

But we are anything but.

Tabitha is a Gunditjmara woman, born and raised on Kurna country. As a First Nations woman, Tabitha is blessed to have her mother's stories and the blood of all the women before her coursing through her veins. It is in their honour, that she centres their unique knowledges, and privilege their voices and stories in all her work. Tabitha is a formerly incarcerated woman, still shackled to the system. It is part of who she is, but not all that she is.