

Central Australia, 1993

## Palm Valley Evening

Palm trees,  
thrust from russet sandstone,  
reflect in dark water  
with river red gums and paper  
melaleuca.  
The sun sets up-canyon.  
Cliffs of senna  
fall into shadow.

The palms, *Livistona mariae*  
live only here, these few,  
only in these valleys,  
only now.  
Among endemic cycads and ferns,  
stranded for over five million years,  
lost tribes,  
time refugees,  
relics.

The palms lift shaggy heads  
on slender, twisted necks,  
into the last radiance of evening.



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## Palm Valley Morning

Red palm seedlings  
sparkle in the morning,  
bathe in ephemeral pools  
between bars and boulders  
dry *Aristida* grass and red-green  
*Rumex*,  
under arching river red gum and  
tumbled sandstone cliffs.

We climb above the pools,  
above cycad and ghost gum  
to higher ledges  
where rock figs cling.  
We seek the ancient nest of  
stick nest rats  
beneath exfoliating overhangs and  
varnished crevices.

We find only black amber rat.  
Congealed on boulder edges  
like hardened tar,  
the petrified urine of  
stick nest rats contains,  
as if in amber,  
the pollen and bones  
of extinct life,  
extinguished  
like the stick nest rat itself.

The palms below,  
rooted in sand  
between drought and deluge  
greet another morning.