

Small Fred

"Guinevere And The Fire"

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My grandmother was born in 1900
On a farm in New South Wales
She wed a dairyman
Who liked to raise a pint of ale
The first child came when she was twenty
Five more babes in seven years
That first daughter was my mother
They called her Guinevere
Little Gwen would play beneath the willow
"Yes the Queen would love some tea"
Helped with chores that never ended
Tried to mind tried to please
Sometimes she heard the music
Wild and strange in the summer night
"They're dirty people" warned her mother
"Never go near their campfire light"
CHORUS:
"Stay away from the camp of the blackfellas
Little white girls have disappeared
They drink and dance when the moon is red
Better never let 'em see your golden hair"

Came the winter of '27
So cold the milk froze in the pail
Her mum hung the nappies by the hearth
Her dad in town for a round of ale
A spark leapt from the fire that night
Wrapped her mother in a gown of flame
Flailing dancing in a frenzy
Falling down in voiceless pain
Stillness and the stench of burning
Then so soft 'twas like a ghost
"Fetch the Cunninghams" she whispered
"Bring me aid or I am lost"
The Cunningham house was not two miles away
And they the nearest whites
Past the camp of the Aborigines
Past the demons of the night
CHORUS
"I will run to save my mother
I must go now I must fly"
Still she heard her mother's tales
Of the Devil's drums and the evil eye
Her mother's breathing ever fainter
Gwen frozen in her fright
Seven hours till dawn she waited
For the safety of the light

Now she runs till her feet are bleeding
To the house upon the hill
Now comes the doctor's wagon speeding
To her mother cold and still
They laid her down in the Nowra graveyard
From the Bible read a verse
Children sent to aunts and uncles
Some to Melbourne some to Perth
Gwen packed her canvas satchel
Could not hold the salt tears back
Turned to leave her home forever
Faced a woman gnarled and black
"Child our hearts are heavy
Grieving for your loss
We live so close by you
Why did you not come to us?
We hve salves to heal the burning
We hve herbs to stop the pain
We could have helped had we but known
To make your mother whole again"

CHORUS

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