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One Careless Night

By Christina Booth

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Black Dog Books

Sydney

Hardback, 40 pages

Illustrated

RRP \$24.99

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One Careless Night, written and illustrated by Christina Booth, tells of the last thylacine held in captivity. This restrained, ghostly tale recounts the early days of the thylacine with her mother. 'When night devours the sun, they hunt. As wallabies graze in the dying light, they stalk, silently choosing their prey. She shows her how to survive.' But her mother cannot protect her pup from the hunter's trap that sees her 'Caught. Carted away. Sold for a bounty.' Caged in a concrete prison with fading memories of the forest and her long-dead mother, the thylacine eventually dies one cold night when her keeper fails to bring her into her shelter.

Hauntingly evocative, this book is illustrated using mixed media, and is presented from the perspective of the thylacine and her mother. Ferns obscure their view as they stalk and hunt through the forest. The narrative shifts to the spirits of those long-lost animals who are ever-present as 'memories [that] flicker to life in the dark... Glass-eyed tygers stand faded

forever on display,' and 'furs that were trophies hang in shame.'

This theme of shameful, careless waste resonates through this noteworthy book. The final pages contain the glint of hope that 'a flash of stripe on sandy fur' is more than just 'a trick of the moonlight,' and alludes to the occasional report that thylacines may still roam 'forests... where no one has trod and creatures run free in endless rain and deep, dark bush.'

One Careless Night is a plaintive exploration of the disparity between the predatory thylacine struggling for life and the destructive human hunters that bring about the end of her species. The death of the last thylacine in captivity, on September 7, 1936, is now the date of National Threatened Species Day in Australia. There is scope to use this book as an opportunity to observe the day, or within a unit of work to enhance cross-curricular studies of endangered species, and the impact of colonisation and agriculture in Australian History.