

## **On finding Charlotte in the Anthropological Record**

We meet on the surface of a photograph, as a fish and bird might meet in a lake, at a point of sky and the water's plane. Charlotte, in a book called *The Aborigines of Northern Victoria*, sits jade-black on earth, wind disarranging her hair. Trees obscured by falls of campfire ash. Her nudity is covered by a blanket. I don't know if her breasts are hanging, if her thighs bear designs or marks. A needlework of scars crosses her chest, repeated dots, like patterns on a goanna's back, like rain spat by goannas into dirt. Soon constellations will appear over branches, on this night of ninety years ago, this never-again night— and she asks me: “Where did you go girl, with your made-up history, your ever whiter babies?” This is what remains, a record of relatedness— scars to hold the memory of someone precious after they've died. We begin by cutting skin— rub wounds with gum and ash, black ants to cauterise the flesh. I remember them telling me: don't worry, this blackness fades with each generation. Charlotte is a map of a Country stained by massacres: Skull Creek, Poison Well, Black Gin's Leap. A geography of skin and land— maps for the returning, for those who speak only a murderers' tongue, whose songlines are erased, who consulted departments of births, deaths and marriages, who stood beside rented Toyotas, clutching photographs, in a hundred remote communities, asking strangers “Do you know my family? Can you tell me who I am?” This moment, an old light is crossing the boundaries of emulsion, and I say to her— Charlotte, Grandmother of my Grandfather, I am Judith, and these are my scars.