



NIKULINSKY UNFOLDED
XANTHORRHOEA

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 FREMANTLE PRESS

INTRODUCTION

FIRE IS NOT DEVASTATION. IT IS A NEW BEGINNING.

Continuing my fascination with regeneration after bushfire, this book unfolds to take you on a walk through the Great Victoria Desert, before and after a fire.

The Great Victoria Desert is what I call red earth country. In mid 2017, my husband Alex and I drove out to see Queen Victoria Spring, about 200 kilometres east of Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. The spring was dry, but in the surrounding area, the grass tree species *Xanthorrhoea thorntonii* was particularly picturesque.

Where the fire hadn't reached, the old leaves of *Xanthorrhoea* skirts draped down to the ground. Pairs of trees grew together with their skirts joined as if dancing — how many years had they lived intertwined in this pose?

Leaving the spring, we travelled through the ashes of the fire-ravaged dunes. This scene was especially dramatic, where chunky black trunks were dotted as far as I could see, topped with bright green swaying arcs of new leaves. Their tall flowering spikes stood like sentinels across the blackened desert landscape. Burnt eucalyptus branches twisted up and out, bending and falling to the sand. The sunlight caught on the orange-red new growth shooting from underground stems.

In the clearing of the land that comes in the aftermath of the fire, each plant is given its moment in time, space and light to regrow. Even tiny plants, usually covered by spinifex in an almost impenetrable spiky barrier, begin to emerge from the sand.

I needed a way to depict this landscape. Not just a single image, but as a story. Back in my studio, I painted on and on until the seven-metre roll of Japanese kozo paper ran out, to show an unfolding of time, with no beginning and no end.

Philippa Nikulinsky.

