

**Review of “Whisper my Secret” by JB Rowley
(Zeus Publications, 2007)
www.whispermysecret.com**

*“Can you keep a secret? I don’t suppose you can.
You mustn’t laugh; you mustn’t smile,
but do the best you can...”*



Whisper My Secret, the masterful debut by Melbourne author and storyteller JB Rowley, narrates a secret discovered after her mother’s death.

JB’s experience as a wordsmith is evident from the outset: no word is wasted, sentences are crisply crafted, characters feel utterly authentic, and plot springs open as closely coiled secrets do. (After all, this secret *was* literally hidden in a cash-tin!)

Raised in New South Wales on the East coast of Australia during the 1930’s and 40’s, when many women were powerless, Myrtle fell in love, fell pregnant and ultimately fell victim to social prejudice. Trapped in a loveless marriage, despised by a haughty, sanctimonious mother-in-law, yet too naive to see that appearances meant everything, Myrtle soon found herself ensnared by false accusations – resulting in her children being taken from her.

Australians are still confronting our national shame of “The Stolen Generations”, in which Aboriginal children were removed from their parents by missionaries under state sanctioned force, albeit with good intentions. Now for the first time, many of us will learn of a white family torn apart in a similar way: a tragedy that a family – indeed, an entire community - could not come to terms with earlier, ironically because an innocent woman was shamed into secrecy.

With neither sentimentality nor indignation, if occasionally with satisfying reprisal, JB places facts together with perception, thoroughly researched historical detail, infinite tenderness and respect.

I hope that an imaginative film-maker will recognise the potential of this story. Meanwhile, we can look forward to its sequel.

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