



THE RUST RED LAND

Robyn Bishop

'You ask too many questions, Matilda. It's not becoming in a girl.'

But Matilda is full of questions. It's the late 1800s in rural New South Wales and Matilda, as the oldest daughter, is expected to cook, clean and help Mama with her brothers and sisters. But her inquiring mind will not be stilled nor her rebellious spirit tamed. When frustration overcomes her, she finds escape in the land she loves and in her imagination, nourished by books.

In the rust red landscape, both striking and harsh, and against the backdrop of World Wars and a changing Australia, Matilda is torn by her desire for freedom and allegiance to her growing family. With their never-ending demands, and crises of poverty, drought and illness, what Matilda really wants seems further from her reach. Will she ever see the sea? Have a vocation and earn her own money? Have the time to read?

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This sweeping novel brings to life the injustices faced by women in the 1800s and 1900s. Punctuated with betrayal and loyalty, hope and despair, love and loss, Matilda and her family come alive showing how the grip of patriarchy tried to strangle the ambitions of women, but there were women who refused to give up.

Powerfully evoking time and place, a compelling portrait of an extraordinary woman in an ordinary man's world.

—Noni Hazlehurst



Robyn Bishop is a Melbourne-based author and playwright. Her love for theatre led her to study Drama at Rusden State College. On completion of her teaching degree, she was employed as a member of the Bouverie St theatre-in-education team before working as a drama teacher at Strathmore Secondary College for more than two decades. During this time, she devised countless performances with students and also wrote three of her own plays, inspired by women's stories, that were performed at The Carlton Courthouse under the umbrella of La Mama. *Only the End* was published by Currency Press in 2005 and *The Show Must Go On* was published by the Australian Script Centre in 2020. Her short story, 'The Lonely Road', appeared in the Spinifex Press anthology of feminist fiction and poetry, *It's All Connected*, in 2022. Her novel *The Girl in the Bath*, inspired by a painting Robyn saw while attending the Melbourne Writers Festival, was published in 2014. This, her second novel, is based on the life of her grandmother.

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