

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

Frances Bodkin

Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews

Illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

Migadan

The Legend of the Bargo River



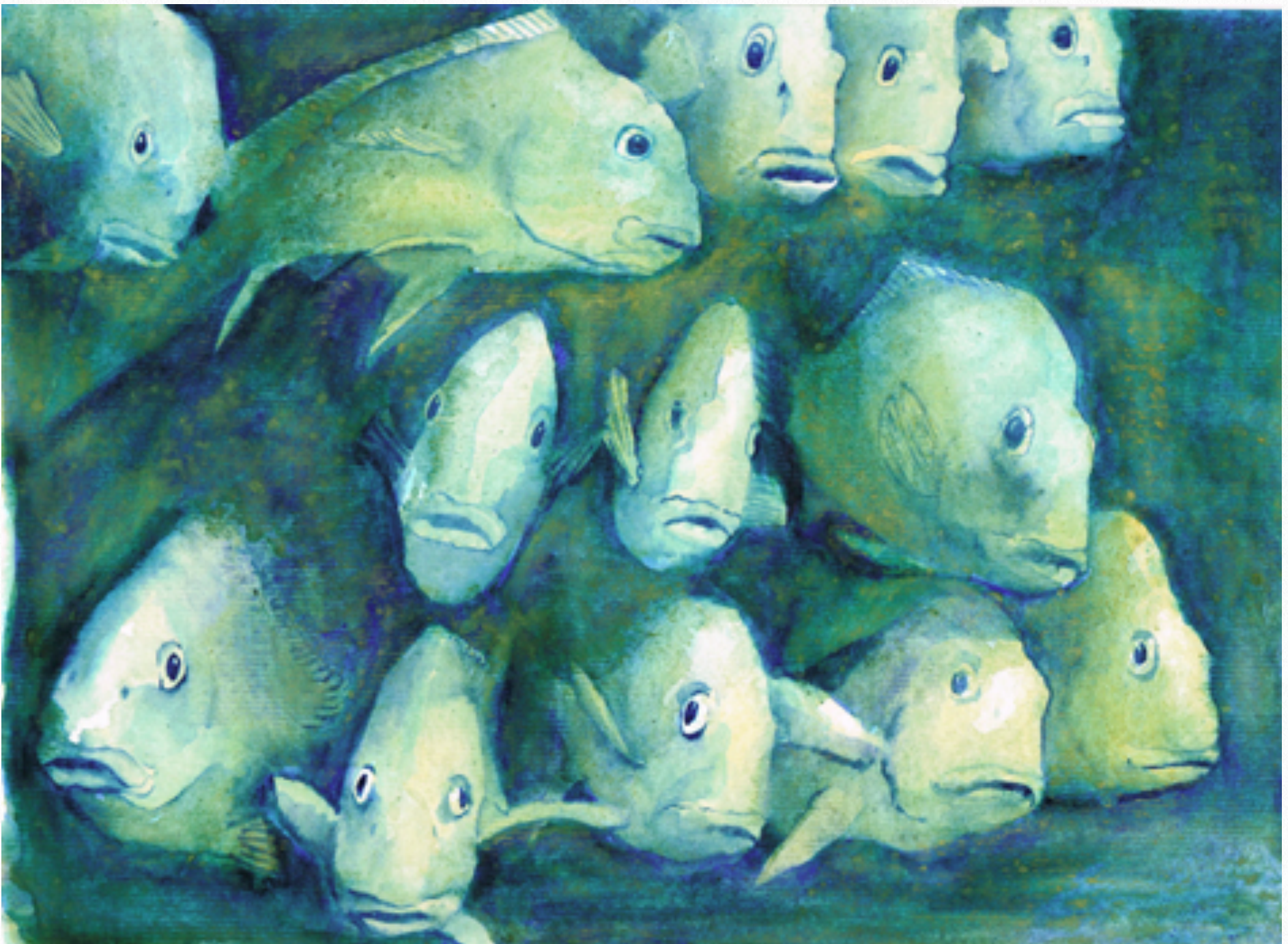
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Foreword

Throughout the past two hundred years, society has come to regard the Koori Dreaming stories as something akin to the fairy stories they were told as children.

However, for thousands upon thousands of years, the stories in this book were used as a teaching tool to impart to the youngest members of the clans the laws which governed the cultural behaviour of clan members. The successive attempts to destroy the Koori culture and assimilate The People into the Euro-centric population were unsuccessful, and the Dreaming Stories were able to continue in their disguise as charming legends where animals became the heroes and the heroines.

Historians and anthropologists have studied the Koori culture since they first arrived on this continent, and have come to the conclusion that the D'harawal culture is dead. Of, course, this has been done without reference to the descendants of that culture, and without even asking the proper questions. The D'harawal culture is not dead, it is a strong, living, vital culture of the Sydney and South Coast regions that just had to go underground for a while to be able to survive. Now that the right questions have been asked, we have the key to unlock a vast wealth of knowledge of this part of the country in which we live.

It is difficult to explain to a society based on commerce fuelled by the profit motive, that D'harawal culture is not based on the ownership of tangible things like land and dwellings and possessions, but it does have a very strong sense of ownership of information. That information, particularly in story form, was not traded, but could be given, and given freely, but its ownership was respected, those stories were not told or passed on by those to whom they had been given, but the knowledge in them was used by the receiver whilst ever they walked in the Land of the D'harawals, This Land.

It is hoped that our present society is now mature enough to be able to accept the Koori Dreaming stories as they were, as they are, and as they were always destined to be; tools to teach the Children of The People about living with Earth, the Mother, in peace and harmony.

Each story contains several layers of knowledge, the first of which are the secrets. Which can only be passed on or discussed with persons of the same level of knowledge or higher than the story teller. These secrets are never told within a legend, but are remembered separately from the legend itself. These are very important components of any legend, and it is the knowledge of the secrets which determines the level of the person's worthiness to ownership of that story.

The next layer of knowledge within the stories was the law, or laws, to be obeyed. The laws of the stories were told and often repeated after the telling of each story, after which the laws were discussed and their application in life demonstrated in a variety of ways.

The third layer of knowledge contained in each story was the lessons which could be learned from the story and the lessons were taught to all members of the group as well as visitors. These lessons introduced Peoples to the means to live in harmony with each other, and the land and its resources.

In this series of D'harawal Law Legends, there are many lessons to be learned. The D'harawals believed that children learned better and more quickly when they were encouraged to work through a problem, rather than be told the answer. By sharing the stories of our ancestors with you, it is hoped that not only will you recognise and learn the lessons and laws of the Peoples of This Land, but you will also come to understand and respect the culture of The People and our feelings and relationship with the land.

The stories do not in themselves act as an instruction manual - rather they point the way and encourage The People to think, to learn and to live. It is hoped that by sharing our stories, you too may be able to think, to learn and to live in This Land.

With understanding and respect for each other we can learn to more easily share This Land and live together in peace and harmony.

Frances Bodkin

Migadan

The Legend of the Bargo River

As you know, all rivers have a spirit living in them, sometimes this spirit is a good spirit, and sometimes she is a bad spirit, but whether she is good, or whether she is bad, the river spirits, which are all known as the Migadan, are the mothers of all the fish which live in their respective rivers.

Now, the Migdan is half fish, half woman, and nowadays you would call her a mermaid.

She lives in a home underneath the river, and travels up and down the river, checking to see that all is well, and that no monsters or other beasts threaten her children.

A very long time ago, the Migadan who lived in the river now known as the Bargo River, was a very cunning mermaid, but one who loved her many children, and would do anything to protect them.

She had noticed that the water level in the river had been falling, and she travelled up the river to investigate why there was less water coming down the river to sustain her children.

She left her children playing in a series of ponds near the home of the Keeper of the Fire, and thinking they would be safe, made her way up the river, checking all the small creeks and waterways that entered the river.

On the banks of the river near where her children were playing there was a group of young warriors of the Barrago clan, lazing around in the fine, warm weather. As the sun rose, the weather grew warmer, and one of the men, decided to cool off in the water.

He entered one of the pools, and as he cooled off, noticed the fish playing in the water. He slapped the surface of the water, and watched delightedly as the fish fled. He did this repeatedly, then tried to catch them, but with no luck.

Some of his companions on the bank of the river watched him lazily, then decided to join in the game. Soon, they were all splashing around in the water, chasing the fish, and laughing merrily.

Then, one of the young men climbed out of the pool and broke off the slender branch of a nearby tree. He re-entered the water and began to slap the surface with the branch. His friends then each broke off a branch, and soon the water was splashing almost as high as the trees themselves.

But, the young warriors soon grew tired of this game, too, and another of the young men climbed out on to the bank and began to sharpen the end of his stick. The others watched him with curiosity as he rubbed the stick on the rock. Finally, he stood up, and with a yell, held the sharpened stick above his head.

He then bound into the water and chased after the fish, jabbing at the water surface with his pointed stick. Then, with a triumphant cry, he held the stick up with a flapping fish on the end of it. He threw the fish on to the bank of the river and began trying to catch another.

His companions rushed out of the river and began to sharpen their own sticks, and as soon as they had a sharp enough point, they rushed back into the river, stabbing at the fish. Soon, there were no more fish to chase, but the banks of the river were littered with their bodies.

One of the young men, having worked up an appetite with this pleasurable past-time, wandered out of the river towards a tree laden with native cherries. As he made his way across the hot sand littered with dead and dying fish, he slipped, and fell on one. As he picked himself up, he looked at his hand with pieces of fish smeared on it. Without thinking he put his fingers in his mouth, and tasted the delicious juices which covered them.

He looked down at the dead fish, and picked one up, picking off some of the flesh, and putting it into his mouth. He smiled, gleefully, and called to his friends. Soon, they were all tasting the new and delicious food scattered all over the bank of the river. After a while, the young men had eaten their fill, and went to sleep on the sandy bank.

Now, the Mermaid had completed her patrol of the river, checking out that the lowering of the water level of the river was due to a group of fallen trees causing the water to be held back. As she made her way down the river she called to her children, but there was no reply.

Worried, she swam speedily to the waterholes where she had left them playing, and as she looked up she saw on the banks of the river the young men sleeping soundly amongst the bodies of her children. Now this Migadan was very, very angry.

But she was also very cunning. She thought of quickly travelling up the river to where the trees had dammed the flow of water, and releasing it so that it would come down river in a great rush and drown the sleeping men.

But, she thought, the men might awaken and escape her revenge.

She spoke softly, awakening one of the young men. “You are very handsome.” She smiled, “I have been looking for someone like you.”

The young man smiled in surprise. “Who are you, what is your name” he asked.

“I am the River Spirit.” She said. “Migadan is what they call me. I am very lonely.”

“Where do you live?” Asked the young man.

She indicated a deep hole in the river. “I live down there. I have a beautiful home, which is cool, and pleasant, and there is plenty of food. Would you like to see it?”

The young man jumped into the water and allowed the Mermaid to take his hand.

That was the last anyone ever saw of the young man.

Shortly afterwards another of the young men awakened, and saw the beautiful river spirit swimming around in the river. “I have been waiting for you to awaken,” she said. “Your friend has decided to pay me a visit, and he wishes you to join him.”

She held up her hand, and he took it.

And that was the last anyone ever saw of that young man.

One by one, as the young warriors awakened, the Migadan invited them to join their friends in her home, and one by one, they took her hand.

All except for one young man. Young Barrago had a leg which had been broken when he was a child, and it had grown crookedly. He was self-conscious about his leg, and the fact that he could not run or participate in the activities of his companions.

When the young warriors had been in the river killing the children of the Migadan, Barrago had hidden himself, watching them enviously.

He had watched as the Mermaid took the hands of each of the young men, and lead them slowly down into the river. He waited patiently for the return of the young men, but they did not appear.

As the sun began to set, and the shadows in the river darkened, he grew afraid, and made his way back to the camp. There, he told the women of what had taken place.

The women became alarmed as he finished his story, and followed him down to the river where the dead fish still lay on the banks, rotting. Several of the women began calling their sons, and slapping the surface of the water to awaken the Migadan. As the moon rose, the river spirit rose to the surface. "You disturb my sleep. Go away."

"We want our sons back." Said the oldest of the women. "We will not go until you return our sons."

"Then you will be here a long time." Was the reply. "I have eaten their bodies, the way they ate my children, and I have consumed their spirits so that they never enjoy life again."

The women looked at each other in horror.

The fact that their sons were dead, eaten by the Migadan, was bad enough, but the river spirit had also eaten their spirits.

Thus they would never be able to enter the spirit world, to travel on to the next part of their being.

The women prepared themselves to go to the place of the beginning where they would tell the Miwa Gawaian of what had occurred. They painted their faces white with ash and covered their heads with the mourning caps, then began the long trek to where the sacred white flower bloomed.

The Spirit Woman heard their pleas, and came to the river where the Migadan was sunning herself in the shallow waters.

"The women have told me what happened." The Spirit Woman said. "They have told me that their sons did an evil thing by killing and eating your children, for which they are extremely sorry, and offer you many gifts if you will but return the spirits of their sons."

The River Spirit, smiled cruelly. “I have no intention of ever returning the spirits of those who slew my children, of those who ate my children, and who left those which they could not eat to rot upon the banks of this river.”

“What they did was wrong, but what you have done is even worse. At least your children’s spirits still exist.”

“You will not change my mind. I wanted revenge for the death of my children, and I sought that revenge in the death of those who killed my children. I wanted revenge for those who did not give my children honour in their deaths. I sought that by devouring the spirits of those who dishonoured my children.” Migadan replied.

The Spirit Woman realised that there would be nothing she could do to persuade the Mermaid to return the spirits of the young warriors. She called down the lightning which created a great hole in the river.

Then she caused a great storm which washed the Migadan into the hole, from which she could never escape.

Migadan cursed and struggled, but could not get free from the hole. And she is still there to this day, waiting for some foolish man to come to the hole, to cool himself in hot weather, or to search for fish. Then, if his spirit looks palatable, if he has ever wasted a living creature or dishonoured the dead, she will devour him.

And his bones will be found, washed down the river
after the next storm.

