

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

Frances Bodkin
Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews
illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

TALARA'TINGI

How the Flannel Flower Came to Be



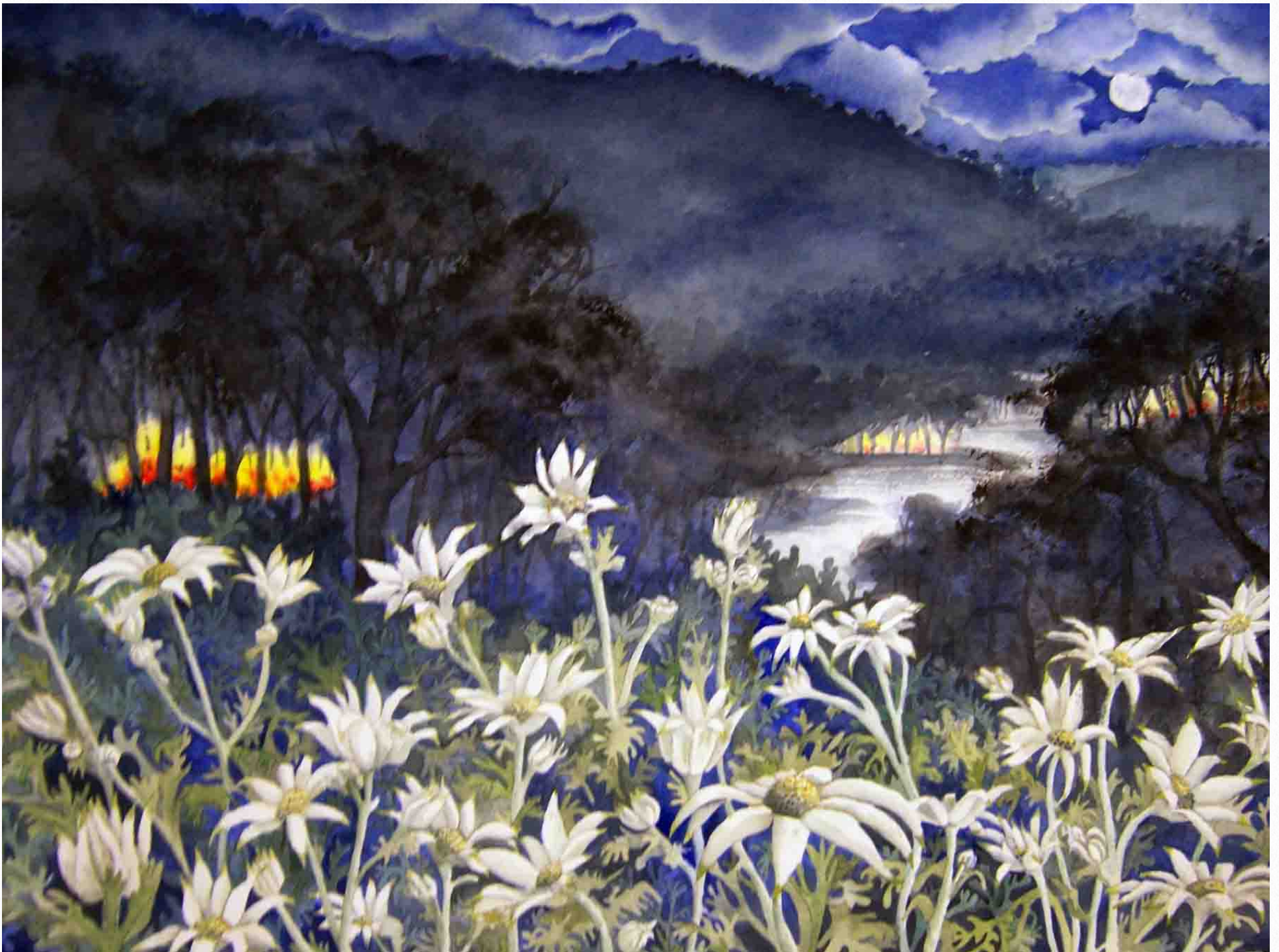
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Foreword

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

Talara'tingi

How the Flannel Flower Came to Be

Once, long ago, during a time of great cold, the ground was white with ice all year round, and grey clouds covered the skies. Children were born to The People, and learned to walk without having seen the sun or the moon and the stars.

During this time the flowers died, and the only colour to be seen in the bushland, was the green of the trees and the grass, and the brown of the rocks. Mothers and aunts told their children of the wonderful colours of the flowers, but the children did not understand. They had never seen the brilliant beauty of the waratah, or the warm gold of the wattles.

The mothers and aunts were very worried.

Without the flowers the plants did not bear fruit for the children to eat, and the mothers and aunts knew that it was unhealthy for the children to eat only the roots of the plants and the flesh of the animals.

But they were also very worried that Baluniri, the Earth Mother, was sick, that she could not make the flowers grow because some evil spirit had taken possession of her.

They called a great meeting of all the mothers of the clans to discuss what could be done to free Baluniri of this evil spirit, and to bring back the flowers.

They all met at the women's place in the Yandel'ora, and talked about what they could do.

One by one, they bemoaned the fact that even the Miwa Gawaian had failed to produce a flower this year, and that they could not ask the Spirit Woman to help them.

But one woman, barely old enough to have entered the women's circle, requested to be allowed to speak. Some of the older women huffed with impatience, but the oldest of them, a wise old woman called Naali, put her hand up to silence the other women.

"We do not have thoughts of what to do." she said. "Why can we not listen to what the younger ones have to say. Speak little Tiana, let us hear what you have to say"

Tiana, whose name means Bright Star, seated herself within the circle and placed the feathered headband which signified her right to sit within the circle, upon her head.

"It has been said that the Spirit Woman told us to tell the Miwa Gawaian when we are troubled." She began timidly. "And always we have gone to the flower and told it our problems. We have never gone to the flower unless there was a great need."

The older women nodded, for they knew that what Tiana was saying was true.

"Whenever we have had a great need, we have gone to the flower and it has been there for us." She was very nervous, and her hands shook as she touched the feathers on the headband. "This time, when we went there was no flower. Perhaps our need is not great enough." And she held up one finger, "or, perhaps, the Spirit Woman is angry with us. We have not cared for the Miwa Gawaian as we should have done."

The women looked at each other guiltily. They had not cared for the Miwa Gawaian as the Spirit Woman had requested.

They had not tended it and kept its stems free of other plants.

As each clan began to blame each other for neglecting their duty, Tiana got to her feet and left the meeting, making her way from the hill, across the icy ground toward the valley where the Miwa Gawaian grew.

She saw the stems of the flower, with its rich green leaves, she saw Naga, the honey bee buzzing around, and Munduwin the ants, climbing the stems, looking in vain for the precious nectar of the flower, Then, as she watched, a tiny Galu'dilinga, the honey eater, desperately seeking nectar from the flower, fell dead at the frosty base of the Miwa Gawaian.

Tiana picked up the tiny body, just feathers and bone, and stared at it sadly. She scraped away some of the frost on the ground beneath the Miwa Gawaian, and laid the body of the tiny bird there.

"Illabuka'merlai'yuri." She said softly. "May your Spirit live forever".

But, even before she could get to her feet, the Munduwin had swarmed over the tiny body. Tears came to her eyes as she realised that it wasn't just The People who were dependent on the flowers, but it was the animals and the insects and the birds, too who needed the flowers and the fruit. She looked around the small valley and saw that there were no young plants growing beneath the mature ones.

The ground, usually so full of life, was dark and cold, only the ants, it seemed, were able to survive in such cold.

The day began to fade, and Tiana shivered.

She gathered some fallen wood, being careful not to take any which provided a home for animal or insect, lighted a fire, pulled her feathered cloak around her, and lay down to sleep. Before she closed her eyes, she noticed that the heat of the fire had melted the ice on the ground around the burning embers.

Whilst she slept she dreamed that the Spirit Woman had come down and lighted a great fire which had warmed Baluniri, and melted the ice that covered the ground.

The next day, Tiana gathered up many fallen branches and lighted many small fires in the valley, keeping them burning all night until she fell asleep with weariness. She dreamed that she had awakened during the night and that Tjillak, the moon was shining above her.

The next morning the clouds still covered the sun, but they did not seem to be as heavy. The day after that the Go'win, the sun could be seen mistily making her way across the skies, and the day after that patches of blue sky appeared.

Then, as Tiana tended the Miwa Gawaian, she saw a tiny plant poking its leaves through the thawed ground.

Tiana touched the tiny plant, its leaves were soft, and covered with fine fur, and were the colour of the frost.

With great joy, the young woman danced around the plant and the Miwa Gawaian. She ran all the way back to her clan and told her grandmother about the tiny plant.

The Grandmother gathered all the women, and together they went to the valley of the Miwa Gawaian to see for themselves.

But, when they reached the valley, there were hundreds of plants growing, and some of them bore white flowers, flowers the colour of the ice on the ground, flowers with petals that were soft and covered with fine fur, to keep them warm.

Flowers that were shaped like a bright star.

That is why the Talara'tingi, the flannel flower, is always the first plant to appear after the ice has melted, and why it wears a coat of fur.

And why the People must always follow their laws and customs,
and why, at times, it is wise to listen to the words of the young.

Some Information about Talara'Tingi:

Flannel Flower

Actinotus helianthii

Distribution: Widespread - Coast and Blue Mountains

Niche: In partially shaded, dry, rocky places, in gravelly soils over sandstone.

Description: An annual and perennial plant which may grow to a height of 1.5m Stem; erect, with spreading, ascending branches, covered with soft, woolly white hairs.

Leaves; Silvery grey, to 10cm long and 7cm wide, divided into three, deeply lobed segments.

Flowers; White, tipped green, woolly, to 8cm across, appearing spring and summer.

Fruit; small, flat, hairy, ribbed carpels.

Uses: Medicinal; This plant has mythological values.

Associations with other plants: Open Forest Heath

Killed by fire, but re-establishes from soil stored seed