

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

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illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

Pokulbi

How the Dianella 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.

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Pokulbi

How the Dianella Came to Be

Many, many grandmothers ago, there lived a beautiful woman called Pokulbi. She had eyes that were the colour of the deepest blue of the Bundelook's wings, and hair that was so thick and black and long that everybody marvelled at it. Because of her hair and her eyes, she was most sought after by many of the young men of the surrounding clans. But, as a young child she had been promised to a warrior, a tall, handsome and honourable man, Kulara, who was known as a great hunter.

Pokulbi's uncle and Kulara were the best of friends and many times hunted together until Pokulbi's uncle was killed when he fell from a cliff. Pokulbi's mother and sisters were left without a hunter to provide fresh meat and they would have gone hungry on many occasions had it not been for the kindness of Kulara who brought them many gifts of fresh meat.

One day, whilst Pokulbi was still a child, and playing with her sisters, Pokulbi's mother spoke to Kulara. "Your hunting skills and your kindnesses have meant much to us since my brother fell from the cliff." She said. "I owe you a great kin debt, and I ask you is there any way that I can repay your kindnesses."

Kulara looked at the children playing near the water and he smiled. "When Pokulbi is of age," he said, "I would like to take her as my wife."

Pokulbi's mother agreed readily. Kulara was a brave warrior, and she was honoured that he wanted Pokulbi to be his future wife. Such a marriage would ensure that Pokulbi, and her family, would be well looked after, and that an important kin debt would be repaid. Shortly after the betrothal, the warrior received a plea for help from a distant clan, and he went to where Pokulbi was helping her mother grind seed. "I must leave now, but I will return." He said, then left the encampment.

For many years, whilst Pokulbi was growing up, neither she, nor her mother saw the warrior, but they did hear of his brave exploits. However, stories began to come back to them of how he had been sorely wounded in a great battle, and whilst he was weak from his wounds an

evil spirit captured him. After he recovered from the illness, he had become renowned for his cruelty to those he hunted, be they enemy or animal. And he rejoiced in causing pain to his victims.

Pokulbi's mother worried about her daughter's betrothal to this man, but she had accepted his gifts, and therefore could not take back the promise she had made to him.

As Pokulbi approached marriageable age, and they still had not heard from Kulara, her mother encouraged young men to visit, in the hope that the cruel warrior had forgotten the betrothal promise.

But her hopes were dashed when one day Kulara arrived in the camp, and without a word of greeting or allowing Pokulbi to farewell her mother and aunts and cousins, took her arm and led her away.

Tears dimmed Pokulbi's blue eyes, and her thick, long hair flowed behind her as she ran to keep up with Kulara's long strides. For days they travelled like this, resting only when it grew too dark to travel, and starting again before the sun rose.

Finally they reached a small gully where a mean shelter had been constructed. He pointed to the shelter indicating that it was to be her home, and Pokulbi was expected to gather and prepare his food for him. Pokulbi was very unhappy at first, sadly missing the company of her mother and her sisters and cousins, but, as she searched the gully for fruit and berries, she noticed tiny birds hiding fearfully amongst the prickly shrubs. She left some small berries and seeds for the tiny birds, and returned to the camp.

Time went by and the tiny birds no longer hid from her but came out of the prickly bushes to greet her, flying around her beautiful hair, and twittering happily.

Pokulbi no longer wept bitterly every night, although she still missed her mother, her sisters and her aunts and cousins desperately. But Pokulbi's husband was concerned. He liked to see his wife miserable and upset. He liked to see her weeping, he did not like to see her smiling and happy.

One day he gathered up his spears and boomerangs as if he were about to go hunting, and left the camp. However, instead of leaving the gully he hid behind a rock and watched her. Kulara watched as Pokulbi gathered wood for the fire, selecting only those fallen branches that did not provide a home for animals or insects.

He followed her as she gathered up her coolamoon, and happily set off to gather food and seed and roots for their meal. Then he saw the tiny birds flying out to greet her, and heard her laugh with pleasure at their antics as they flew around her.

Kulara grew angrier and angrier, and finally he could stay hidden no longer. He crept up behind Pokulbi and grabbed at some of the birds, pulling their heads off and throwing their tiny bodies to the ground at Pokulbi's feet. Then he grabbed her by her hair and dragged her back to the camp. "You will never go back there again," he said angrily. "If you do, I will follow you, and I will kill every single one of them, then I will kill your mother as punishment for your disobedience".

For many days the warrior stayed in the camp, beating Pokulbi every day, watching with enjoyment as she wept with pain and loneliness, but finally his hunger for fresh meat grew too great and he gathered up his spears and left the camp. When they were sure that he had left the gully, the tiny birds came down to the camp and greeted Pokulbi. She was delighted to see her little friends again, and once again she felt happiness.

For many years the tiny birds visited Pokulbi every day after Kulara has left to hunt, bringing her great happiness, and for many years Pokulbi pretended to weep with loneliness at night when Kulara returned to the camp.

As the years passed the warrior's beard turned grey, but Pokulbi became more beautiful than ever, and Kulara grew suspicious. "If she was so unhappy, why had she remained so beautiful?" he asked himself.

Once again he pretended to go off hunting, but instead travelled up to the place of the prickly bushes to find the birds and kill them all. But he could not find one single bird. Not even a feather.

He made his way back to the camp, hoping to find the birds there with Pokulbi so that he could punish her. But when he got there, Pokulbi was grinding up some seeds, and there was not a bird to be seen.

Kulara had been looking forward to killing the birds and punishing Pokulbi by making her watch her little friends die, now he was angry and disappointed. Pokulbi looked up at him and smiled.

And he struck her so hard that she fell to the ground striking her head. The tiny birds that had been hiding in her wondrous hair flew high into the trees, out of his reach. Angrily Kulara repeatedly kicked at the fallen Pokulbi, killing her. The tiny birds, seeing this terrible man kill

their friend, flew down pecking him with their tiny beaks, until he too, fell to the ground beside Pokulbi, his eyes had been destroyed, and he was bleeding from thousands of tiny wounds.

He did not have the strength to get up and just laid there, his blood seeping into the ground.

And as his blood ran from him, the evil spirit that had captured him so many years ago fled. His bloodied hand sought the hand of the woman he had loved for so long, but because of the evil spirit that had captured him, he had never been able to tell her.

“We are together, now.” He whispered.

The tiny birds, seeing the evil spirit flee from the body of the man, and hearing the words that Kulara had spoken, gathered leaves from the trees and buried them as they lay, side by side.

But Kulara’s beard remained visible amongst the fallen leaves. Then, as the tiny birds watched with amazement, from out of the ground there grew a plant with beautiful blue flowers which formed, as they watched, sweet blue berries as brilliant as Pokulbi’s eyes. The tiny birds took the berries and smeared the brilliant colour over their heads and bodies, and today they are known as Murrudoo’win the Blue Wrens.

And they still live in prickly bushes, and bring joy and happiness to those who are sad, or who have been cruelly treated. But they never appear when there is an angry person around.

The plant with the blue flowers is today known as the Dianella, and the grass that looks like an old man’s beard always grows next to it, so that The People will remember the story of Kulara and Pokulbi.

Glossary:

Murrudoo'win

Superb Fairy-wren

Malurus cyaneus

Adult male Superb Fairy-wrens are among the most brightly coloured of the species, especially during the breeding season. They have rich blue and black plumage above and on the throat. The belly is grey-white and the bill is black. Females and young birds are mostly brown above with a dull red-orange area around the eye and a brown bill. Females have a pale greenish gloss, absent in young birds, on the otherwise brown tail. The legs are brown in both sexes. Males from further inland and in the south-west of the range have more blue on the back and underparts. Several other species of fairy-wren are found in Australia. The males of each species are quite distinct, but the females and young birds are often difficult to separate

Superb Fairy-wrens are found south of the Tropic of Capricorn through eastern Australia and Tasmania to the south-eastern corner of South Australia.

Seen in most habitat types where suitable dense cover and low shrubs occur. They are common in urban parks and gardens, and can be seen in small social groups. These groups normally consist of one dominant male and several females and young birds.

Superb Fairy-wrens feed on insects and other small arthropods. These are caught mostly on the ground, but may also be taken from low bushes. Feeding takes place in small social groups.

The nest is a dome-shaped structure of grasses and other fine material. It is usually placed in a low bush and is constructed by the female. The female incubates the eggs alone, but both sexes feed the young. Other members of the group will also help with the feeding of the young.

Pokulbi

Blueberry Lily, Blue Flax-lily

Dianella revoluta R.Br.

Dianella revoluta, commonly known as blueberry lily, blue flax-lily, black anther flax-lily or spreading flax-lily is widely distributed within Australia and grows in extremely variable conditions, predominantly in sclerophyll, woodland and mallee forests.

Sometimes a dominant understorey species, it can form large spreading colonies. *D. revoluta* is an erect, hairless, perennial herb with a lifespan of many years, forming clumps and growing from rhizomes underground. *D. revoluta* grows to about 1m in height and has a diameter of up to 1.5m. The leaves are leathery, long and linear, varying in length from 1.5 – 8.5 cm and width from 4 – 15mm. This species flowers from spring to summer and has deep blue to purple inflorescences. The flowers stalks rise on wiry stems from the foliage, branching several times into open sprays with one flower a day opening. This prolongs the flowering time for long periods. Flowers have six petals, filaments are long thick and yellow and anthers are brown to black in colour. The fruit are blue to purple and persist for many months after the flowers. Usually round in shape they measure from 4-10mm in diameter and contain 3-4 seeds.

Once it is established this plant is very hardy and is drought and frost resistant, is generally trouble-free and is grown for its distinctive strappy foliage as well as for its flowers and fruits. Propagation can be either from the ripe seed collected by hand and sown in spring or by the division of rhizomes which can be struck in moist shady conditions in light soil during cooler months in later winter.

Name Meaning: *Dianella revoluta*

Dianella – from ‘Diana’ Roman Goddess of the hunt, often associated with woodlands, and the suffix ‘ella’ meaning small. The first specimen was collected from the island of Mauritius and was simply labeled ‘Diana’ by French botanist-explorer Philibert Commerson.

revoluta – derived from ‘revolute’, referring to the leaves in-rolled margins