

Chapter III

LEGENDS OF OOLDEA WATER

In Weejlara or Dhoogoerr times, the long-ago dream times, the country where Ooldil-nga water now "sits down" was as desolate as the great wini (plain) which edges it, and as waterless. There were no trees at Ooldil-nga, only murnda-murnda (earth, soil) everywhere. All the animals and birds were nunga (men) in those far off days.

Ginniga (the native cat) and Beera (the moon) had been sulky with each other for a long time and had been fighting and running away, fighting and running away, but always coming back again to fight on the earth. One day Beera hit Giniga with a wij-wij (heavy club-like boomerang) and made his nose bleed. Ginniga ran a long way and made a blood-red karu (creek) all the way. He sat down at the end of the karu and all the ground over which he ran was red with his blood and now it is murdarba (red ochre) which the Ginniga men can sell to their friends. Ginniga speared Beera and Beera ran to Dhoorinya and sat down there and you can see a big mardargi (circle) where Beera sat down until his wounds were healed.

By and by, when Ginniga had rested, he got up again and went after Beera, and standing in front of him, stamped his foot, challenging Beera to fight again. They fought and fought until Beera was killed. He turned into stone and all his eelpa (dogs) ran away.

Now Ginniga stood for law and order in Dhoogoerr times and when Wilba (species of wallaby) would not stop in their own ground but went round in big mobs spoiling the ngalda gabbi (water root mallee) and letting the water run to waste, Ginniga was wala (sulky). One day a big mob of Wilba came to Ginniga and challenged him. "All right," said Ginniga, "I'll fight you, but I will give you my koorda manthu (entrails) to eat, for you must be hungry." Ginniga was Manu (sorcerer), so he took out his koorda manthu and gave some to each Wilba and as they ate they died, for it was nobburn keega (magic meat). Three of them, Dhadel,

Malaguli and Manu ran away leaving their kajji (spears) behind. Ginniga took all the spears of the dead Wilba, all made of different wood and the bungala wood ones he threw south, and bungala spears and karli (boomerangs) and miro (spearthrowers) are now made by bungala nunga. He threw bilbagooroo wood ones west and bilbagooroo kajji now come from there. Oojan and kalliwarra wood he sent north and yaggala, koerrgu, jindu and ngabbarli wood ones east. All the spears turned into trees and the plain was covered with them, and that is why some trees have mai (vegetable foods) and some have gabbi (water), because all the spears were different.

Ginniga kept three spears and went after Dhadol, Malaguli and Manu, and he chased them and chased them a long, long way. They tried to make nests and threw up the earth quickly, but Ginniga caught them up before they could hide in the nests and he speared them and killed them. The earth they threw up is now called Wilba (Ooldea Range); a little rockhole called Kara marks the spot where they died, and the hills near it are called Wilbamurdu.

When Ginniga had killed all the Wilba he heard his brother's spirit talking, and he said, "My brother wants me." He walked a long way and saw a lame man's jinna (track, footprint). "My brother's foot is minga (sick)," he said. He "sat down" by a rockhole one afternoon, then went further and came to another waterhole. He slept there and early next morning he saw smoke. He tracked his brother's footprints and at last he found his lame brother whom Beera had speared. Ginniga was goonbu (glad) he had killed Beera and went back to his kaanga (fire).

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One day Karrbiji (species of marsupial) started from a long way west with a kangaroo skin bag full of water. He was travelling south, but Ngabbula the spike-backed lizard followed him up, and so he turned a little bit north, and then east, with his bag still full. He went along, long way east and then turned south again and sat down on a little sand mound, and scratched and scratched until he had made a nice hollow to put the water in.

He poured some of the water out and said, "Ooldil," ("Here I shall stay") and sat down beside it. The water was on the surface so that everyone could see it. Presently he heard a whistling and he cried out, "Who is that?" and covered up the water quickly with sand. Ngabbula came along whistling and frightened Karrbiji so much that he said to himself, "Ooldil binna," ("Staying here is no good,") and he picked up his bag and ran west.

There he sat down near the edge of the wini (plain) and scooped out a big deep hollow in the sand and emptied all the water into it. Again he said, "Ooldil-nga," ("I will stop here,") and he sat down beside the water and saw the wilba and warda (hills and trees) that Ginniga had made and he said, "Ginniga yaddu (good)."

Kallala (emu) were the first to see Karrbiji's water and they ran quickly to get it, and then came Ginniga and Ngannamurra (mallee hen) and Waiurda (opossum) and Burna (long-tailed iguana) and Maalu and Waru (kangaroo) and many more - all came to drink the water that Karrbiji had brought and they sat down beside Karrbiji and were goonbu (glad). Karrbiji, too, was very happy, until one day he again heard the whistling. "Oh," he said frightened, "that is Ngabbula coming," and he again covered the water with sand so that Ngabbula should not see it. Then he took his empty bag and went away north. Ngabbula followed him up, thinking he still had the water, and when Karrbiji had gone a long way he dropped his bag and it turned into a burnda (stone) and is still where it fell. Karrbiji went on still further north and also turned into stone, but he was so far away that Ngabbula never found him.

Kallala, Waiurda and Ginniga were all very angry with Ngabbula for frightening Karrbiji away from his water, and Kallala said, "I will track Ngabbula and kill him when I find him." Kallala tracked a long way and could see the tracks of Karrbiji and Ngabbula, and Karrbiji was always ahead. Ginniga and Waiurda followed behind, for they were not so strong or so quick as Kallala.

By and by Kallaia came up to Ngabbula and challenged him by stamping his feet and lifting them high off the ground. Ngabbula stopped and fought, and Kallaia speared him and all Kallaia's long spears stuck in Ngabbula's back, and killed him.

When Ginniga and Waiurda came up, Ngabbula was dead, with all the spears sticking out, and when he turned into Ngabbula (lizard) again, all the spears still stuck out of his back. Ngabbula is always sulky and goes koojoo (alone) whistling when anyone comes near him.

By and by Kallaia, Waiurda and Ginniga turned into stone, and if a strange spirit goes near the stone, Kallaia and his thoonadha (friends) will stand up and the stranger will very soon die.

When they were all changed into men again, everyone knew where Karrbiji water was, and first the Kallaia men sat down beside it and then the stone and mallee men and ginniga men, and all the others who were friends in Dhoogoorr times continued friendly when they changed into spirits again. Jiwin-wongga, Oolawongga, Ngallee wongga, Jiji wongga, were all Kallaia men, but they called each other by these names. Jiwin, cola, jiji and bilyi all mean "boy", and each little group used its own name and was known by it. There was one word for meat food - kooga - which all the friends used, and no matter what the local group name of each was they all called themselves Koogurda; Ngallee, Ginniga, Ngannamurra, Weerongu, Wongai-i, Jiwin, Cola, Ngangali and Kaiali, all were Koogurda men. All these could come and drink from the Ooldil-nga water, and each could scratch out his own little waterhole in the sand and cover it up when he went away. The water was always minyaru (cold) in ~~the~~baring (hot) time. The Jiwin kallaia men were camped always close by the water and they made a well for themselves in the sand and kept it open as Karrbiji had made it when he first came to Ooldil-nga.

Marda wongga, Rabbuni and Yarunda men came from the east, Yulbari and Walba from the south, and Kaiali, Munjinji, Kalur and Badu from the west, and Ngallee men from the northwest. Sometimes the water made Marda men or Badu sick and then a Jiwin

Mamu (sorcerer) performed un-gariri (rubbing stomach with nulu - magic stone - or jalyir - white magic stone) and they were soon all right again. Men came from far away to Karrbiji water when drought dried up all the surface water, and amongst them were many ngadharri (strange) men who had heard of Coldil-nga. These brought flints, ~~rope~~ string, pearlshell, and many other goods to pay for the water and for their sojourn there, so that Karrbiji water was known far away in every direction. Koogurda all joined together when big mobs came from far away, so that if a fight should occur, all the friends would be in one mob and always ready to defend their water. Many strangers brought their boys for weela and kulu ("initiation") and thus made a claim to be included amongst the friends, and many different wongga (speech, dialects) were brought by them to Coldil-nga water.

Each man ate his own dhoogoorr food (totem) and gave it to his friends. Sometimes a grievance arose because the exchange of food was not considered equal, and now and then a great fight resulted from this cause. Then there were many deaths and those who ate their dead cooked their brothers, etc., and shared the food with their friends. The Badu drank the blood of those they killed, and sucked in their lips and made a great noise while drinking it. There was one very fierce nuntha (bad) mob, the Ka-lur wongga, who came from "this side" (east) of the Badu. Ka-lur were kanyala (kangaroo) men, and though they brought many boys for initiation, they were angry because they had not any water so good as Karrbiji. They spat and mouthed at the Kallala men, and dug holes for themselves without permission in the sand, but they only got salt water, for Karrbiji kept the good water for the friends. Then Ka-lur were very angry, for they had to come to the Kallala men to get the good water. They stole or killed fat men, women and girls, and cooked them in a nuntha (bad) way, by making a deep hole in the sand, and putting the dead person sitting up in the hole. Then when the meat was cooked they took it out of the hole quickly, and made it spin round and round, so fiercely did they handle it. The Kallala men killed girls and cooked them face downwards, their foreheads resting on

the hot sand and they swallowed the flesh without biting it.

Ka-lur and Kaiali killed men, women and children and ate them even when there was plenty of totem meat. They were not like other men who only ate those who had been killed in fight, or when there had been no food for some time and they were meat hungry, or when young boys were sick and wanted "sister" food to make them strong and well.

On the steep sandhills round Karrbiji's water the visiting mobs camped, each in his own place. Always the water was there in abundance and always it was covered up when the tribes left, except the well the Jiwin kept open. Besides the abundant water and meat, there were grubs and vegetable foods in great plenty. Ooldil-nga men had therefore plenty of food and water always, and they could go to Ooldilbinna water, too, for Ooldilbinna and Ooldil-nga gabbi are "all one" - they meet under the ground and only come up in the sands where Karrbiji made the hollows. Though they are far away from each other, it is the same water in both, Karrbiji water, tasting the same, and coming up in the same way. When the Kallala men went hunting a long way they did not have to take weera (scoops) with water, for Ginniga had put water into the trees and Kallala knew where the trees with water were.

Ngadharri (strangers, strange tribes) were always sending magic amongst them. Magic went inside the women who were carrying the little babies, and cut the bidi (sinews) of the baby so that when it was born, its joonda (thighs) never grew and it had to crawl about on its marra (hands) always, or it injured the boy babies so they could not be made initiated men, or it twisted their heads and made them wobbalurn (insane). Ooldil-nga mobs sent back fire magic and blood magic and many other kinds, so that when a stranger succeeded in putting magic inside a Kallala man, magic went back again, and to and fro. It was always working. So much food was always obtainable at Ooldil-nga that babies and others were only killed when the former were "too many" and when the latter had been wounded in fight, or when little babies were stealing the fat off their brothers. The Koogurda were a big mob, for many claimed Ooldil-nga

as their totem water.

And so they lived and thrived, watching daily for the light smokes that told them strangers were coming, or the heavy smokes that prepared them for the ceremonial visit of large tribes, the numerous small signs that warned them of magic coming. There was no world but their own, and there were no other people but those of their own colour, friends or strangers as these might be. They knew every animal and every living thing that moved on, over or under their own country and they heard tales from the north of iguana who were so large and so magic that they could swallow a whole family at a meal. (alligators?) From the great country south of them they heard the roarings and rumblings of the huge snake that lived on the seacoast underneath the rocks, through which it boomed at them or tried to suck them in as it inhaled its corna (stinking) breath in passing. They could see the ground move up and down, up and down, as the snake travelled underneath the earth, roaming about always and frightening them with the big noises it made. Sometimes it put its head out of the blowholes and spat out burnda (stones) and sucked them in again. They could not stop it from travelling over their country, but they feared it too much to try to find its kaanga (camp) on the coast, and so they never saw where it lived.

Many tales came to them from the east of a tribe of great eelpa (dogs) whose daily food was men, and from the west and north-west came strong magic, but there also came beautiful karrarr (pearlshell) and sacred kalleegoorroo (bullroarers) which when laid on the boys' wounds quickly healed them and made them grow strong men. New dances came to them through the Badu of Warrdarrgana (Boundary Dam) who were friends of the Wong-gai-i, or perhaps from the Wanmaring men of Jinyila (Eucla) through their Yulbari friends. When the Wong-gai-i mobs visited them there was always friendly meeting and feasting and parting, for Gianniga kept the laws in Dhoogeorr times, and were the dhoogeorr friends of the Kallala men.

And so their lives went on. Their religion was Fear, fear of magic, of thunder, of lightning, fear of the awful Unknown that lived in ceremonial and sacred tokens whose rearing voices were only understood by the Mamu who whirled them round and round to make them talk, and who noticed the smallest wrong doing and sent magic punishment for every breach of native law. Sometimes when the thunder and "lightning god" crashed and burned around them, or when bigger booming sounds than usual came up from the angry snake under the sea cliffs, and it seemed as if he would tear up the ground and come and eat them, some male or female sorcerer, with spear or digging stick, went into the open, and thrusting the weapon above, around and below, remonstrated with the noisy god, telling it they had done no wrong, beseeching it to go elsewhere, and continuing their efforts until the noise abated. Anything unusual in the elements, in tree, plant, animal or bird, brought the Fear God before them, and at times propitiatory offerings were made to appease its wrath. When a star fell, or a meteor, and they found meteorites or obsidian on the spot where the star had fallen, this was taken as a sign of grace, and was endowed with magic power and used in healing or killing, as needed.

And then, long before Flinders and his men were seen by the Yulbari men of Fowler's Bay district, or the wombat men of the West Coast of South Australia, rumours were carried from north and west of still more fearsome monsters, mawgun (white) men - walking like themselves, and having ngarngoor (beards), but "different" and having a fire magic that sent burnda (bullets) inside men or women or anything the magic firestick (gun?) pointed at. How the rumours spread, and gained in the spreading! Horned white men, white men with tails, white men with great eyes (kooroo) that they could draw out of their heads and put back again (spectacles?), awful white men! Camp after camp along the route of the rumours surrounded itself with its greatest magic, fire, which it lighted at all points, as it did not know from which direction the white men would come. Rumour swelled in the spreading, and to the white men's human features and bodies, horrible malformations were added. Aboriginal imagination revelled in the hideous monstrosities it conjured up out of the rumours.

Time after time, the white man became a new and old and new tradition with fresh horrors added to the old ones. Flinders had had time to become a tradition when Eyre and his comrade Baxter passed across their view, bringing strangers of their own colour with them. (No wonder the strangers were killed and eaten afterwards.) By and by the rumours became more than traditional and were relations of fact. Sturt and his nandhu (horses - the first Central Australian name applied to horses) were seen of many, and probably Leichhardt and his horses, and then came a new name for the white men - "wail-bela" (a corruption of whitefellow) and we come down to Giles' journey through the Badu at Boundary Dam, the Wong-gai-i, the Ngallia and other Koogurda groups. Still later came a fresh horror, and monsters that were shouted at as "Windingjiri! mawgun ngalguri!" (Camels! run! the monsters' spirits are going to eat you), made their appearance, and groups scattered to the four winds, dropping infants and food in their desperate fright. In time the origin of that dreadful creature was solved: its mother was most certainly the Kallala (emu) and its father the nandhu (horse)!

There was still fear of the white man, but he had been "touched", tasted and handled by some one and the fear died down. Anger took its place for a time, for whites were killing their totem animals and taking only the gooloo (skin), thus offending the totem kangaroo and emu. Whites were taking their ancestral waters, and when they had drunk of it they let the windingjiri (camels) spoil it, and would not let its owners come near it. Then, little by little, or quickly, according to local circumstances, the whites assumed another, and although they did not know it, a still more dreadful aspect, and became a source of "idle wealth" to the natives who found a familiar labour for their women in ministering to all that was bad in the white who was no longer above their own native level.

Then the whites came to stay. First the Yulberi men became less and less, others followed suit, the Walba, the Wanmaring, Badu, Wong-gai-i, Ngallee, for with the first survey of the East-West Line which cut through the Koogurda

groups and their allies, the extermination began - not from any deliberate cruelty of the white man, but from the impossibility of amalgamating two such extreme types, primitive man and civilised man, and the ready and eager adoption of the white man's vices. They were always familiar with traffic in women, and that the white knew the trade also simplified matters. Diseases from which we have become immune through the centuries, measles, chickenpox, whooping cough, came upon them suddenly and killed them off "like dogs", and so their destruction went on.

As the construction of the East-West Line proceeded, tribes from far and near heard of the abundance of food and the new "fire drink" ("Kala gabbi") that made them koora bamba (eyes blinded, drunk), and if, here and there, the price of food and drink was a wiana or wanyi (woman or girl), why, these had always been saleable. Each group through whose territory the line was passing saw its waters absorbed, its game driven away, its food and water trees cut down, the whole country turned to strange uses, and its own people made intruders on their own ground; but in their eagerness to "make the most of what they yet may spend" they did not realise the tragic significance of the event. The Koogurda allies closed in their ranks as their numbers lessened; they drank their Karrbijl water only by courtesy of the white man, and from their appointed places and the spots where they had erected their kanga (homes) for thousands of generations became closed to them. Having stood aside to let the white man pass, they found they had to stand aside for all time.

When the first half-caste baby was born, they believed that the white man's food was the cause, for they were ignorant of the facts of birth, and they rubbed it frantically with charcoal to bring it to the "clean black colour" again, often killing the poor infant in the process. When they had eaten of the white man's "tree of knowledge", so to speak, they were not altogether pleased, for they had seen piebald horses and dogs of mixed colours, and though they could not coin the

term "mongrel", the idea was there and they felt the degradation, until some one of them with Shavian humour, drew attention to Paddy's nose, or Micky's red hair, in the baby, and Paddy and Micky had in consequence many calls on their wages. I know that the sight of the baby led many a white man to repentance!

The outlying tribes who came amongst them to share in the good things, brought strange magic with them, as well as strange women, and unprofiting by the protection of the white man, the remnants of the old tribes begged, borrowed and stole the women. Caste and law, by which their old life was regulated, consanguineous relationships which forbade marriage, were broken down in a moment, and as the women and girls succumbed, fresh contingents were sought for as far north as Musgrave and Everard Ranges, for it is only from the north and northwest that the new supplies can now come. All joined together in a sort of "armed neutrality" and began roving from Kalgoorlie, Laverton and Leonora (W.A.) to Tarcoola, Port Augusta, Eucla and Fowler's Bay (S.A.), their old life with its songs and ceremonies travestied by the mongrel mobs that eke out their years under the shadow of the white man. They still drink Karrbiji water, but they have to take it from the hot pipes stretching out from Ooldil-nga to the Railway Siding at Coldea. Anyone who can claim the remotest connection with Karrbiji water, with Ngallee, Jiwin, Wirongu or Badu, still feels pride in his ancestral water, and claims it as his, but there are very few to whom the ground is familiar and the old haunts of ngannamurra, burna, ginniga and kallais are unknown to the younger members of the mob who play at hunting nowadays.