



MY NOONGAR FRIENDS

Sketches of the South Eastern Noongars of Western Australia.

Some of their legends and customs

by

Ethel Hassell.

Edited by Roz Butterworth from the on-line manuscript at
<http://indigenous.sl.nsw.gov.au/collection-items/my-dusky-friends-sketches-south-eastern-natives-western-australia-1861-1910>

The events in this book took place circa 1881
Presented to Mitchell Library about 1910

INDEX

Introduction

Chapter One

My home

Marriage

Journey to Jerramungup

The Stirling Range

The Night Well

Meeting the Noongars

Animals

Dialect

Chapter Two

Noongar dress and weapons

Marriage ritual

Chapter Three

Noongar foods, medicine and games

Chapter Four

Twertup

Chapter Five

Juganna's song

Noongar song and dances

Chapter Six

Tupin

Chudic, *Waitch* and *Coomal* (quoll, emu and ring-tailed possum)

Chapter Seven

Gimbuck's *coot*

The passing of Winmar

Burial rites

Legend of the eclipse of the sun.

Yump stick

Chapter Eight

Jannocks (spirits)

Chapter Nine

Waitch and Gindie (Emu and Stars);

Yardie.

Pointing Gumbar

Chapter Ten

Werriben

Legend of the Southern Cross

Chapter Eleven

Spinning
Honey
Lost sheep

Chapter Twelve

Birthing rites
Yuillen and her baby
Buckerup
Mulgar Booliah

Chapter Thirteen

Cowran and Werriben
Yoump
Battle at Kamballup
Genealogy

Chapter 14

Orion's belt and the Pleiades.
Mancarl dance.

Chapter 15

The *Weelows* (curlews) and the Noongars

Chapter 16

The gully
Little bit *tdage*
Yilgar's first sight of white people
Balyet. (The echo)

Chapter 17

Coomalnintup
Noongar place names
The *gnow* (mallee fowl)
Legend of Waitch and Coomal (emu and possum)

Chapter 18

Celebratory corroboree

Chapter 19

Jannock carl (the legend of the spirit fire)
Noongar community
Insults

Chapter Twenty

Wild teal

Ter ter society
Ter Ter and Cootup.
Legend of Waalegh and Chillian.
Waitch and Coorley.
Dalyar and Gudgilan.

Chapter Twenty one
Camping at Beulah Meal
The Legend of Carcup

Chapter Twenty two
Waitch and Corley

Chapter Twenty three
Doubtful Island Bay
The Nautiluses
The storn
Noongar counting
How the parrots for their colours

Chapter Twenty four
The legend of Waalegh and Wording

Chapter Twenty five
The legend of Norn and Cubine
The legend of the flood
A trip to Esperance Bay in 1861

Chapter Twenty six
The Woolgrum

Chapter Twenty seven
Chudic, Waitch and Coomal

Chapter Twenty eight
Chitter Chitter and Pinny Pinch

Chapter Twenty nine
Omer and Maak
Maak and Yonger

Chapter Thirty
Currah and Woolah.

Postscript

Appendix A: Wheelman Noongar bird names recorded by Ethel Hassell

Appendix B: Notes on the Night Well

Appendix C: Mysterious mounds.

Appendix D: The Pardooks

Appendix E: Jerramungup Vocabulary

Appendix F: photos of the homestead

Copyright information

'My Noongar Friends' was transcribed and edited from an on-line presentation of Ethel Hassell's original typewritten notes. It is shared on the basis that it will not be published for profit. The book *My Dusky Friends* published by in 1975 by Cleve W. Hassell is still subject to copyright and this edition is not intended to breach that copyright in any way. Copies of the original *My Dusky Friends* can be purchased from Cleve Hassell. 39 Birdwood Parade, Dalkieth, 6009.

Introduction

I acknowledge the Wiilman, Koreng, Wudjari, Njungar, Njakinjaki, Pibelman and Warndandi Noongar elders, past, present and future, and their enduring connection to the land. I acknowledge the descendants of the people named in this story; amongst others the McGlade and Winmar families.

Always was, always will be.

Ethel Hassell

Ethel Hassell, nee Clifton was born in London on 31 October 1857. Whilst a young child, she moved with her family to Mauritius, and when eight years old, to Albany Western Australia. In 1878, aged 20, she married Albert Young Hassell, aged 36, at St John's Church in Albany. She and her husband moved from Jerramungup to Albany in 1895, and she died in Albany in 1933. Albert died in 1919. This manuscript was written in the years prior to 1910, and published as *My Dusky Friends* by Mrs Hassell's grandson Cleve in 1975.

I have changed the order of some of the observations recorded in the original book to make (I hope) it flow more easily. I have also removed or reworded some out-moded expressions and opinions (there were thankfully few to begin with) to make the Noongar cultural information, and not white opinion, the predominant feature of the manuscript.

I changed 'native' and 'dusky' to 'Noongar', 'my husband; to Albert, 'my brother' to Gervase.

Cover photo: Jerramungup Pasture from Monkey Rock Road; April 2017 (thanks to Rex Parsons for driving me to the spot.

**In memory of
Yilgar, Gimluck, Buckerup, Winmar, Tupin
and the Jerramungup Noongar people.**

Chapter One

I married Albert Young Hassell in Albany, early one lovely spring morning in September 1878, a few weeks before my 21st birthday. After the wedding and a hurried breakfast we started off on a four-day, 240 kilometre drive from Albany to my new home. My parents did not like the idea of my going to Jerramungup, four days' journey from Albany, but I had known Albert for many years and now that my brother Gervase¹ was farming with him I had a sturdy advocate who had reassured my parents it was quite safe on Albert's station. The Noongars were peaceful, the climate was excellent and I would have plenty to amuse myself, Gervase said. Albert thoroughly understood the conditions of life and was well able to take care of me.

Every kilometre of our journey to Jerramungup was of intense interest to me. About 24 kilometres out of Albany we stayed at a large lake² for dinner and to rest the horses. The lake presented a beautiful sight in the midday sun – it was of irregular shape with tall, slender, vivid green rushes growing all through it. The head of each rush was crowned with pale pink and white star blossoms emitting a faint sweet perfume. Some of the rushes were adorned with patches of water-creeper with soft violet heart-shaped flowers about the size of a half-crown, hanging like miniature flags along the rush blossoms. Here and there were taller rushes with black heads and pale yellow flowers.

On the edge of the lake was a broad band of azure blue Australian forget-me-not; a small rush flower quite unlike its English namesake and of a far deeper blue. Mixed amongst the blue forget-me-nots were two varieties of white swamp flowers, both small and the same height as the forget-me-nots; one shining in the sun as though it had just been frosted over with powdered glass, the other smooth and shiny with a nut-brown centre. In the middle of the lake the water gleamed with pink and violet reflections from the flowers. With a bright blue sky and fleecy clouds above it looked like an upside-down sunset. A background of large well-shaped red gum trees completed a scene which I have never forgotten.

¹The oldest of Ethel Hassell's brothers was Gervase Clifton (1863 – 1932). He would have been 15 at the time Ethel and Albert married. The next youngest male sibling was 13 so I am assuming it was Gervase who helped A.Y. Hassell on the farm. To make the narrative a little more personal, I have substituted all Mrs Hassell's future uses of 'my brother' with his name, Gervase.

² The journey was probably taken on the Chester Pass Road. There are a number of small lakes along the way but none are named on the map.

About 90 metres from the lake stood the inn; a long low building with a thatched roof, a verandah back and front and a single row of rooms, every room opening to the verandah. I thought it a delightfully quaint looking place, but I certainly did not think so much of it when I left. The inn was changing hands; the wife of the outgoing tenant had left and the incoming lady had not arrived; consequently there were only two men there to run the place. In the confusion of transferring ownership they had forgotten all about the dinner for which Albert and I had given such particular orders.

After a while I was called from my enchanted lake to a meal. I entered a long low room and saw a table running nearly the whole length with wooden settles or forms on each side. At the head of the table, spread on a piece of newspaper was my wedding lunch. It comprised half a loaf of rather stale bread and a tin of very rank-smelling sardines (I think they were the remains of mine hosts' supper the night before). For tableware, management had provided two tin mugs, two tin plates and black horn-handled knives and forks. In a large tin basin was the brownest of brown sugar and by the basin the biggest tea pot I had ever seen. It is my firm belief that the wash-hand basin and the garden watering can had been pressed into use for those two items. Albert's annoyance was great. He went to the trap and got out some china cups and plates but could do nothing with regard to the food. I nibbled at the bread and was thankful it was good. The sardines we could not touch, as the smell was rancid. We satisfied our hunger on bread and got away as soon as we could.

At dusk we arrived at the Porongurups: a range of hills which are now the happy hunting grounds of geologists for they are composed of the oldest known rocks in the world. They are not as high as the Stirlings through which we were to travel the next day, but there appeared to be no way through them – in the Porongurups everyone goes round the different hills whereas in the Stirlings there are three good passes. The Porongurups are flat-topped hills; very fertile soil is found right on the summit of many of them and gigantic karri trees grow in the gorges. There have been several land slips on the sides of the range which have revealed great treasures to the geologists but so far nothing of any commercial value.

Our wedding night was spent at the home of a settler living at the foot of the Porongurups with his wife, two children and mother-in-law. They gave a kindly welcome to this worn out and hungry bride. Their home was a sweet little cottage built of sunburnt bricks. It had a deep verandah and a high-pitched thatched roof that

fascinated me; quantities of small pink and white roses grew over it, the pink roses in bloom and the whites just budding. A huge honeysuckle bush climbed at one corner of the verandah and a small orchard, bursting into bloom, stretched up the sides of the hill behind the house. Inside I found a bright fire burning and supper ready. The settler's wife showed me to a bedroom I was to share with her mother (Albert would sleep on the sofa in the sitting room). A small child followed us and gave me a bunch of wild flowers. The wife told me the children were very excited at my arrival for few women passed that way and the children were very fond of Albert who always brought them sweets from town. She seemed to think I was very brave to go so far away from town and said she did not think she could have remained at the Porongurups if it had not been for having the support of her mother.

The living room had whitewashed walls and looked homely and comfortable. Supper was a plentiful meal to which we did full justice: roast wild duck, fried home-cured bacon and home-made bread and butter. Soon after supper the old dame said in a motherly way, 'Come, my dear, you've had a tiring and exciting day and will have to be up bright and early tomorrow, so don't you think you had better go to rest now?' I agreed with her. I had never spent a whole day in the open like this – my head and back ached and I was glad to go to bed. Though my surroundings were strange, I was very soon asleep.

The following morning I was awakened by a light flashing across my eyes and a gentle shake. 'Come my dear, you must get up, for you have a long way to go.' I saw the old dame fully dressed standing beside my bed with a lighted candle in her hand. When I entered the living room; the fire was burning, breakfast was in preparation and Albert and the kind old dame were busily packing the hamper which had to last us until we arrived at our home.

We stopped in the Stirling Range for lunch. The Stirlings are highest range of mountains in West Australia and for wild and rugged grandeur it is hard to beat. Great rocky mountains with sharp peaks towered into the sky. Tall trees grew on the sides of some while others were nothing but masses of stone and great patches covered with wild box³, blooming in brilliant red. We travelled through those wonderful hills all day and camped on the other side that night. It was my first experience of camping out; all so novel. When we went to the waterhole we startled

³ Possibly a variety of *Darwina*

a great flock of white-tailed black cockatoos. They are a very deep black but the underneath of the tail feathers have a broad band of creamy white which can only be seen when they are flying. They resented our intrusion and showed it by circling around making the air shrill with their weird cries. The as we sat at supper by the camp fire some little ground rats⁴ came out with their plaintive cry, 'hump, hump,' and hopped close to us to get little bits of bread which we put down for them.

The next morning I saw the sun rising over the mountains for the first time; a beautiful sight I have loved ever since. The mountains have all manner of rugged peaks. The Noongar name for the range is Toolbrunup. Colonists changed the name to Stirling Range and named one peak in it Toolbrunup. For a long time, Toolbrunup was thought to be the highest mountain in the range at 1,018 metres above sea level. It is frequently covered in mist. Very few people have ascended this mountain; I have been told by one who has that the ascent is particularly difficult near the top. The way is impeded by an overhanging outcrop of stone resembling a man's billycock hat. When the brim of the hat has been passed it is only a very short distance, but a very sharp climb to the summit. On the flat tip there is a small spring of clear fresh water barely trickling over the rim of the hat, which judging from the vegetation around it must run all the year. At the summit there is a splendid echo that repeats nine times.

Another group [of mountains] in the Stirlings is the 'Abbey'. It's a portion of the Ranges that appears to have many stairs like an ancient cathedral. Ellen's Peak is a sharp point and the highest in the range. As far as I know it has never been ascended but its height has been calculated to be 1,042 metres. It seems to be covered with rugged reddish-brown stones and when touched by the rays of the rising or setting sun the mist at the peak turns a soft pink. When snow falls on the tips of these peaks as it occasionally does, the resulting layers of colour is indescribably beautiful; from the deep blue of a frosty sky to the reds, pinks, violets and mauves of dawn or dusk to the white patches of snow atop the reddish stones.

In the distance was Bluff Knoll, the very highest peak in the range at 1,099 metres. I couldn't see his head as it was shrouded in grey mist but I made his acquaintance later.

⁴ *Bettongia lesueur*: the short-nosed rat-kangaroo; a small marsupial, now critically endangered.

We left the ranges and drove all day over sand plains and low hills. The whole way the road was covered with wonderful wildflowers in masses of pink, yellow, white and blue. The wild bush was flinging out her welcome, bedecked with floral wreaths and rapidly weaving her spells over me which remain unbroken.

Our evening camping place was the Night Well⁵, one of nature's wonders. Imagine it as I saw it that early spring afternoon; a large jumble of rocks near the bed of a branch of the Salt River⁶ flowing in from the east; a pool of salt water below a cleft in two large sloping rocks. When the river was in flood it flowed over these rocks and for a short time the water in the cleft was brackish; though drinkable and not as salty as the water in the river or the pool below. When the river ceased to flow from the cleft the water became quite fresh. In the winter the water often came right up to the edge of the cleft but as soon as the hot weather set in, the water went away in the daytime and returned again in the night. When I got there at four o' clock in the afternoon there was not a gleam of water to be seen. 'Wait till sunset,' Albert said.

Half an hour after sun set, a rim of water appeared at the bottom of the crack like a moonbeam. We let a billy down and got sufficient fresh water for our evening meal. By the time our meal was finished the water had risen so high that we were able to dip a bucket in and get sufficient for the horses to drink. By 9.00pm it was up to the top of the cleft and I could have put my head down to drink if I so wished. We drew water for our breakfast and for the horses' morning drink.

I was so fascinated with this phenomenon that twice in the night I got up and looked at it, but it had not overflowed. About half an hour after sunrise the water had begun to fall and when I looked at it just before leaving it had fallen 30 centimetres. I have visited this delightful spring many times since; in summer it was always the same: no water in the day but plenty during the night.

Alas the Night Well is no more. Some years ago a party of surveyors was sent by the West Australian government to survey and map the surrounding countryside. After camping there about three months, during which time their horses and camp had been supplied from the spring, orders were given to build a dam or catchment in

⁵ A mineral spring near Borden, W.A. As there is a considerable amount of information in old newspapers (the National Library of Australia's Trove website) about the Night Well which is relevant and interesting, I've included it in an appendix (Appendix B).

⁶ The Salt River is the Pallinup river (known to local Noongars as the Mara) and the branch on which the well was situated is Peenybup Brook (see Appendix B)

the vicinity. The surveyor-in-charge decided to blast out the rocks in spite of the remonstrance of the settlers and carters who had used the spring for many years. The water disappeared and nothing but dry rocks remained. It had been the only recognised permanent fresh water on that road; an incredible natural phenomenon.

We left the Night Well, and in the afternoon arrived at Albert's station. I received an ardent hug from my brother Gervase and we all chatted that night. What a lot I had to tell him, and how important I felt the next day when I was guided around the homestead. Our home⁷ was a quaint grey granite cottage. It stood on the side of the hill on a cleared piece of ground overlooking the river and the surrounding fields. It had a high peaked thatched roof, with exposed round rafters beneath, a wide verandah in front and a sloping sort of lean-to at the back. The rooms had deep windows with strong jarrah shutters fastened on the inside. Access to the house was by two strong jarrah doors which could be securely bolted at night.

Built as a fort in still earlier days it was comfortable and well-protected in case of a siege. There was a small room where the guns and powder and stores were kept, two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. The kitchen was a large comfortable room with a colonial oven; delightful in winter but very hot to cook with in summer. The fireplace in the living room was almost a small room in itself and I found a good fire in this room warmed the whole house. The furniture had been made on the station with local woods. It was solid but comfortable. I felt that by the time my belongings arrived in a fortnight's time, I could make a very cosy home.

Just below our house was a stone cottage for the farmhands, stone stables and a well. Each building was capable of resisting a siege, but such necessity never arose. In front of the house was a wide, shallow river.⁸ A little distance up it tumbled through a conglomeration of immense granite boulders extending nearly 800 metres. The river was saltier than the sea and in summer the shallow parts of the rocks were covered in layers of salt. We collected and purified it with boiling and evaporation but I never liked it for it had a peculiar dry taste and meat preserved with it soon got very tough. But it was all I could get, so in time I got accustomed to it.

Next afternoon, Albert and Gervase took me down to the Noongar camp, situated in a hollow near the edge of the forest, close to a small, shallow freshwater pool a little

⁷ On what is now Woolshed Road, just off South West Highway, built circa 1861.

⁸ Now Gairdner River

distance from the river. I was the first white woman to visit that part of the country, and I think they gazed on me with as much curiosity as I did them. They began to make remarks about me in their own tongue, some of which I could see annoyed Albert, but caused Gervase to laugh heartily. When I asked what the joke was, Gervase *chuckled*, 'Your dress is not respectable or modest and your waistline is absolutely indecent!' and went into fresh fits of laughter at my look of indignation. He recovered himself a little and called out, 'Yilgar!'⁹ A stern-looking older woman who had been very free in her remarks rose from her spot by the fire. She wore a cloak of skins with the leather side out, and had a bag made of furry skins on her back. The cloak dangled round her knees and she had the thinnest legs and ankles I had ever seen.

Gervase asked me to be careful so as not to embarrass or annoy my new friends' saying, 'Now that you are at the other end of nowhere you will have to fall back on them for most of your amusement.' He spoke truly. I have been on that station for nine months at a time and rarely seen a European face; yet I found plenty to keep me busy and interested and my days were rarely dull. I read everything I could get hold of; studied natural history and botany, and though we had to travel 96 kilometres to get the post, which only came at irregular intervals, mail days seemed to come around fast.

The dialect of my Noongar friends differed from those of groups west of the Stirling Range. Their words very rarely had more than two syllables; for instance *cool* (bug) is called *coolu* west of the Range. *Twonk* (hear) is *Twonka*. On talking to a Noongar near Port Augusta¹⁰ I found he understood my dialect if I added a syllable. *Yok* (woman) he called *yoka*. The second syllable was very soft and had a curious clipped sound. I believe further towards Perth a third syllable was added.

My Noongar friends were fine-looking people with beautifully shaped feet and hands, exquisite filbert-shaped nails with the half-moons well showing. Their numerous customs were an unfailing source of interest to me for their home life was spread before my view daily as was the ingenuity with which they supplied their wants. I endeavoured to find out the reasons behind many of the customs but generally failed

⁹ According to the Yilgarn shire, 'Yilgarn' means white stone or quartz. This may be a Gubrun (southern Goldfields region) language word – I haven't found it in Noongar dictionaries.

¹⁰ Present day Augusta, south west WA

to get a satisfactory reply. 'We have always done this' was usually the only answer I got. I could see each custom had a sound and logical plan at its base.

We lived about 96 kilometres from the sea but my Noongar friends kept up a friendly communication with the fairly numerous coastal Noongars who frequently visited them and hosted them when they made occasional trips to the seaside. There was never much social contact with the hill groups so I know very little about them; besides which very few Noongars lived in the Porongurup and Stirling Ranges.

The Noongars did not worship any deity but believed in the supernatural. Generally any stone markedly different in appearance to those around it was concluded to have magical or healing properties. They had a few simple herbal remedies; disease seemed rare amongst them, though when the boys reached puberty some seemed to contract a kind of consumption which caused their demise. The girls married very young. They did not have large families and there were long intervals between each child.

I made many friends amongst the Noongar people. I gained their confidence and went amongst them without fear. If I wanted to explore any distant part of the station I could always ask some of the women to come with me, my greatest difficulty being to put a limit on the number. I became a great walker – the horses were few and all were wanted for station use. Rarely could I get a horse to ride (a drive with horse and cart was a real treat for me). My Noongar friends could walk great distances and never seemed to get tired.

I often think back to the fascinating walks and talks I had during the early years of my married life on the station; learning so much from the Noongars' observances and skills. I was taught to track various creatures; while I was learning the woman derived great amusement at my failure to take notice of small things - the true art of tracking. We might sit down under a tree to talk and one of the girls would wish she had brought her stone hammer so she could use it to climb the tree to get the possum¹¹, or *coomal* as they called it. They'd show me where its claws had stuck in the bark as it scampered up the tree. I felt so proud the first time I discovered a set of claw marks unaided and triumphantly announced to the girls that there must be a *coomal* up the tree. When I showed the marks to the girls they let out a shriek of

¹¹ Western ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) or common brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecular*)

laughter: the *coomal* had come down the tree, not gone up! They showed me that the marks did not go down to the root but left off about 1.2 metres from the bottom where the *coomal* had jumped to the ground. The girls taught me that parrots often nested in tree hollows, but unlike me, they could tell from the outside whether there was a parrot in residence. If there was, the hollow would have beak marks around the edge where the hole had been enlarged.

I learned bush craft and found it more interesting than books. I developed the sixth sense of a Noongar and never got lost, always instinctively turning homeward. I learned much about the habits of the birds and animals, even though (with the exception of dogs) the Noongars never tried to tame them. Everything was for food.

Sometimes during our walks the women caught a young *coomal* or *boodie*. I'd carry it home in my arms and by evening it would follow me all over the place. After two days a young *yonger* would stick so close that it could not be driven from my side. I had a pet *yonger* for years. It sometimes went away for a month but always come back. I got Albert to earmark it like a sheep so no Noongar would touch Missus' pet. The *yonger* had several young ones but all except one went away after a time. The remaining joey grew to be very big and fought with everything: alas when he was about five years he old got badly hurt in a battle with some dogs belonging to a drover and had to be put down. I think all the station mourned his death, for he was a great source of amusement and a pet to everyone.

After two years on the station I decided to make notes (for the benefit of my young sisters) to record the Noongar customs and legends I saw and heard. I trust the public will find some interest in the manners, legends and customs, of great antiquity and obscure origin, of my Noongar friends. I believe many of these legends are common to the whole southern portion of West Australia. They were told to me before the whites had much religious influence; indeed I doubt if any of the Noongars had ever heard anything of our religion, for their early acquaintance with white man was not the missionary but the whaler and sealer, who treated them with extreme cruelty.

Chapter Two

The gum of the grass-tree, botanical name *xanthorrhoea pressii*, figures largely in all Noongar domestic works, including the making of weapons. The grass-tree has a large round trunk which grows in rings or layers something like a palm trunk. It attains a height of 3 to 4.26 metres and has a crown of long dark green rushes, which drop down as they die, so the crown is always dry underneath. From the middle of the rushes a long dark shiny green stick grows, anything from 30 centimetres to 2 metres long. Halfway up, this stick is covered with soft green curly foliage. As the season advances it becomes a beautiful shiny brown and the green mossy foliage bursts into a mass of sweet-scented white flowers to be followed by hard, shiny long brown seeds. One variety has several branches springing from the head of the parent trunk and each branch has its separated crown of stick and flowers. The whole trunk is full of dark red resinous gum which is beaten, softened with fire and kneaded till it is the consistency of putty. Then it can be moulded into any shape required and when cold is as hard as stone.

Early one morning Wynne and Waymen came to bid me farewell. They had been married the night before and well I knew it for the noise of the corroboree had kept me awake nearly all night. Now they were off for their bushwalk and had their best clothes on. I think they wanted me to see how fine they looked and I admired them greatly. Wynne was a fine looking young fellow aged about 25, standing about 177 centimetres tall. His body had been rubbed and greased and was sleek and shiny.

His clothing consisted of a new *noolman* (belt) made of spun possum fur; a small flap made from the skin of a kangaroo tail about 10 by 10 centimetres hung in front. His chest was painted with stripes about 2.5 centimetres wide and 2.5 centimetres apart; of alternate yellow earth and *wilgie*. *Wilgie* is yellow clay burnt to a deep rust-red colour which is powdered and mixed with fat. Clay for making *wilgie* can only be obtained in certain places and the Noongars trade it with other groups for flints¹² and spear¹³ sticks, sometimes over hundreds of kilometres. When it is burnt it powders up very finely, looks and feels like dull red flour and is very hard to rub off. I rubbed

¹² Noongar people used quartz (*borryl* or *yligar*) to make spearheads from about 12,000 years ago onwards after the main chert deposit (off the south-west coast) disappeared under water at the end of the last ice age.

¹³ In the south-west, spears were often made from the large wetland sedge plant *Reedia spathacea* (*reedia*) also known as spear wood (see <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-02-18/rare-flora-fauna-found-in-south-west/299856>). It is now a critically endangered species.

some between my fingers once and it was days before I got it off my hands. It seemed to filter through the cambric of my handkerchief.

On Wynne's head was a *barlkee*, a fillet¹⁴ made of a band of spun wool, but this was a kind of yellowish-red having been dusted with mixed burnt and unburned *wilgie*. The top of his head was plastered with *wilgie* and at the front of his head was his *twert-tyre*. This is a head-adornment made from wild dog skins fastened together with grass-tree gum. In the middle of the *twert-tyre* is a full, sable-coloured tail, held onto the head with pieces of skin taken from the inside of the hind leg of the dog tied under the chin. On each side of Wynne's *twert-tyre* there were sprigs of pretty everlasting flowers, closely bound with dried grass. They had grey feathery stalks and deep pink, shiny round flowers. At the back of his head Wynne had some of the pale grey wind feathers of the blue crane, his totem, and the black wing feathers of the wild duck, Waymen's totem.

Bound around his upper arm, Wynne wore his *barllee*; a band made of three to four strands of possum wool. Across the front of his body he had placed his weapons and tools in his *noolman*, easy to get to at a moment's notice. They including two *hoitch* (stone hammers), one made with a sharp piece of stone firmly embedded in a lump of grass-tree gum on the end of a stick. The other *hoitch* was double-headed. The handle was split down the middle with two pieces of stone placed back-to-back in the split. Grass-tree gum was moulded over half of each stone near the handle to keep them firm. The other end of the handle was sharply pointed. Wynne's *tap* or knife was a round stick about 18 centimetres long made out of very hard wood, one end sharpened and the other blunt. The blunt end was slightly flattened out for about 8 centimetres. At this end, sharp, thinly flaked pieces of quartz were firmly inserted into grass-tree gum. Each of the quartz pieces was made as straight and as tightly-fitted to its neighbours as possible. The blade was almost transparent with a very pale green tint; much like common glass.

The sharp pointed end of the *tap* was used for climbing trees. A hole for the big toe was made in the bark with a *hoitch*, and the *tap* was stuck in the bark to make a handhold. The climber would go from one *hoitch* hole and *tap* hole to the next, both ascending and descending. By this method the Noongars had the ability to go rapidly up and down very tall trees.

¹⁴ Headband

Wynne also had his *kyle*. This is a flat, almost half-moon-shaped piece of wood, bent in a sharp curve; not rounded like a crescent. This was more of a plaything but could be nasty weapon if thrown – I have seen a *kyle* rip open a kangaroo's thigh. This weapon is frequently called a boomerang – which might be its name in the Eastern States but not in this part of Western Australia.

Wynne's next weapon was his *doark*, a round heavy stick about 90 centimetres long and 5 centimetres round, sharpened at both ends and used for killing small game. Across Wynne's shoulder covering his back was his *quaark*, a cloak made of kangaroo skin looking much like a woman's *boork* only not quite as wide or so long. It was fastened round his neck with a small tag of wool and passed under his left arm leaving the arm free and uncovered. In his right hand he held his *meera* or throwing stick. This is a flat piece of very hard wood about 60 centimetres long, 15 centimetres wide and about 1.2 centimetres thick, of a long oval shape not unlike a eucalyptus leaf. It has a little wooden pin about 1.2 centimetres long fastened to it at one end with grass-tree gum and kangaroo's tail sinew. This pin is inserted into a specially-made hole at the end of a spear before the spear is thrown. At the other end of the *meera* a front tooth from the lower jaw of a kangaroo is embedded in grass tree gum. This tooth is used to sharpen the points of the various sticks. To throw a spear, a man takes the *meera* in his right hand places the end of the spear over the wooden pin. He holds the spear in place with his fingers and lightly throws it. A lot of grass tree gum is smeared over the *meera* where it is gripped to prevent it slipping out of the hand.

In his left hand Wynne had a perfect bunch of *geize* (spears). This word has no plural and may mean one or a quantity of spears. There are two kinds of fighting spears: one is made very like the knife with a head about 20 centimetres long; the other has a barb about 7 centimetres long and 1.3 centimetres thick. I have occasionally heard the fighting spear called the *geize tap*. Its point is very sharp and is fastened to the end of the spear with kangaroo-tail sinews and grass-tree gum. The hunting spear is simply a long piece of wood sharpened at the end. All the spears are from 1.82 to 2.43 metres long and non- ornamental. They are generally made of *mungut*,¹⁵ a slender tree which grows in swamps, the wood of which is very strong and tough. Sometimes they are made with long straight pieces of *mallee*; also

¹⁵ *Acacia acuminata* Benth

a rather heavy tough wood, while the *meera* is made of jarrah or raspberry jam wood. All the woods used in weapons are seasoned by baking in hot wood ashes and then well-greased with fat and regreased at frequent intervals. The Noongars were very careful in picking their wood for their spears and indeed all their weapons, but the spears were especially well-looked-after.

Waymen, was about fifteen years old, 165 centimetres tall, and slender. She pointed proudly to Wynne's *barlee* for in this he wore strands of her hair to signify their marriage. The marriage ceremony is a simple one – the bridegroom plucks a few hairs from the bride's head, she binds them through his *barlee* and he wears them until they fall out. After the plucking and binding, which is done in front of several members of the group, the bride accompanies the bridegroom to his *mia*, and in a day or two the newlyweds go away together.

Waymen wore a new *boork* made of young female kangaroo skins. To make a *boork* the kangaroo is opened down the stomach and skinned. The skin is pegged out onto a flat piece of ground to dry, then carefully scraped using a woman's *tap*, which is different to a man's, and is rubbed every few days with a rough stone. Five skins or more are sometimes used; it depends on the size of the skins and the wearer. The seams are sewn from the kangaroo's neck-skin downwards. Five of these skins form a wide, round cloak which entirely covers the whole body and extends down to the knees. The bottoms of the hind legs of the kangaroos are not shaped but dangle around the legs of the wearer. The *boork* is fastened around the neck by a hole cut into the skin and a tag from the skin from the other side drawn through it. Into this tag a small piece of wood is put to keep it secure. A second fastening is made a few centimetres further down. It's a comfortable garment leaving all the limbs free yet warm.

Waymen's shoulder bag or *coot* was constructed from a young male kangaroo's skin doubled up at the hind legs which formed the band around her neck. The head part formed the flap to cover the mouth of the *coot* and the sides were securely sewn together with kangaroo-tail sinew. In the *coot* were all Waymen and Wynne's household goods.

The *boork* was worn with the fur inside, while the *coot* had the fur outside. Under Waymen's *boork* I could see the smoke curling out from her *carla* or fire-bark composed of three pieces of smouldering bark. When the fires were made up, the

carla would be put into dry leaves and blown-on, then carefully put out and relighted when it was time to travel. The process of making fire by rubbing two sticks together is a very tedious one and almost impossible in damp weather; therefore the Noongars prefer to carry *carlas*. I have known a Noongar to travel about 80 kilometres in wet weather to get a *carla* from another camp when by rain or carelessness all his family's fires have gone out.

Waymen also carried a *wanna* in her right hand – a stick slightly thicker than a spear and not quite so long. It is sharply pointed at one end and used for digging roots. It's also used to make the holes for the *mia*'s supporting posts.

There stood Waymen and Wynne that bright summer morning; perfectly equipped for their journey. I felt I must give them something to farewell them but what to give? They so evidently had all they wanted; so much and yet so little. I remembered I had some johnny cakes and hurriedly brought them out. Food, after all, was the only thing they could need. I offered the plate to Wynne and with quite a lordly air he offered it to Waymen. She placed the cakes in her *coot*, perhaps her first act of wifely submission. Now she had a man to protect her from enemies and hunt for her, and she in turn would make his *mia*, oil and massage him when he was tired from hunting, spin his *noolman* and help to make his spears and various implements of the chase. He was her particular *noongar*, or man, and she was his *york*, or wife. They looked so happy and contented that I thought they could well have a happier existence than me; no cares beyond sufficiency of food and water which they could generally get. They walked down the hill, he a few steps ahead, ready to defend her from all the dangers in their path, she following behind in full confidence of his ability to do so. I wondered when I would see them again, for though they had told me they would be back before the snakes went to sleep¹⁶, I knew when a Noongar starts on a wander it is often two or three years before they return, for they take no count of time.

¹⁶ Autumn/winter

Chapter Three

The Noongar women became friendlier with me as they got to know me better. They introduced me to every visitor to their camp; and I learned many fascinating things from the women and their friends. No knowledge was passed to me all at once, but little by little I obtained pieces of information enabling me to record various legends, customs and knowledge.

During the summer months and early days of Autumn I often went walking with the women and learned about their methods of collecting food. A woman did not have regular meals but ate what she needed when she found it and took the rest to camp, where at sunset it was shared for supper.

There were many lovely black wattle trees¹⁷ in the vicinity, and during the spring the slopes were clothed with their pale golden blossoms called *wuanga*. After blossoming, these trees seeded profusely; the ripe seeds were collected by the women and ground into meal. Also at seeding-time, the wattle trees exude quantities of sweet gum, called *keen* by the Noongar women; a great source of food. When it is fresh out of a young tree it is like pure white sugar candy, soft and sticky. On exposure it becomes a beautiful clear honey-colour and is delicious – crisp outside and sticky inside. On the older trees the gum is dark brown, very hard and not nearly as sweet. The lumps vary in size from that of a large pea to as big as a door handle. It has excellent adhesive purposes: we never needed to use glue at home - instead we kept a big bottle of black-wattle gum handy.

When the women gathered the *keen*, they pressed the lumps together and made large round balls about as big as a child's head to keep for future use. When needed, pieces were chipped off and sucked, or warmed by the fire until soft, and chewed.

Wuanga flowers were followed by the *mungert* or raspberry jam flowers. The *mungert* is a species of acacia¹⁸; a beautiful tree in shape and colour, with a profusion of deep, soft-orange-coloured flowers like those of the wattle but longer in shape. The trees were given the name 'raspberry jam' because of the scent of the wood. The odour is very strong when the wood is freshly cut and becomes fainter on

¹⁷ Probably *Acacia mearnsii*, native to south-eastern Australia but a rapid spreader.

¹⁸ *Acacia acuminata*

exposure to air. By briskly rubbing older wood the scent can always be brought back. *Mungert* is a beautiful timber; very hard and heavy. It takes a lovely polish and has two distinctive colours – a pale yellow and dark brown. It was greatly valued on the station for use in fencing because it did not rot in the ground and the white ants never attacked it. The Noongars valued it because the flowers were the favourite food of possums and they could always rely on getting plenty of nice fat *coomal* when the *mungert* was in bloom.

The method of seed collection was very simple: the women would fill their *coots* with the pods of the *mungert* and black wattle and bring them into camp. They laid their *boorks* in the sun and emptied heaps of pods onto them. The heat of the sun opened the pods and the husk blew away leaving quantities of small, hard and shiny brown and black seeds. The collected seeds were placed into communal *coots* and hung up on the forks of *mia* poles. Each woman would take the amount she wanted. Grinding was slow and arduous and the women never ground a large quantity at a time. They did not store the meal but ground the seeds as needed. At the end of each season the unused seeds were discarded.

To make a grinding implement, a large flat stone was heated by fire. When the stone was hot the centre was slightly hollowed by repeated chipping with a stone hammer. Then another heavy stone was rolled across it to smooth it. The flat stone was laid on a large piece of bark, which the meal would fall onto as it was ground. The grindstone was a spherical piece of stone held in the right hand. A small quantity of seeds was put onto the flat stone at a time, kept in their place by the slight hollow, and with the round stone broken and rolled until sufficiently ground into a coarse meal. I have in my possession a grinding stone of diorite¹⁹ with finger indentations worn into it from constant use.

The grinding was generally a great source of merriment for the seeds were so hard and shiny that it required some skill to prevent them hopping about all over the place. Wattle seeds contain a lot of oil and the meal was more or less sticky, resembling a dark, coarse linseed meal and called *quonert*. It was combined with *wuanga* and mixed with water or fat or finely ground *keen*, made into small flat tough-looking cakes and baked in the hot wood ashes. Sometimes, to make them extra tasty the

¹⁹ Similar to granite but darker in colour

women would mix them with the sap of the yate²⁰ tree, a species of eucalyptus. They obtained the sap by stripping pieces of bark from the trunk of the tree and scraping the thick, purplish, very sweet syrup from the trunk. They carried the sap back to camp in baskets made of yate-tree bark, curled at the sides and bent up at each end. They often ate this syrup like honey and told me it was very nourishing. I ate it too and thought it tasted like a mixture of treacle and honey.

Often on our walks the women and I would gather *wolgo*²¹ nuts. (In the Eastern States *wolgo*s are called quandongs and the name has gradually spread over here.) These trees grew plentifully everywhere and could be seen from a long distance, for they are tall and look not unlike a cherry tree with pale, almost yellow leaves shaped like a narrow pear leaves. They produce red berries resembling large deep-red cherries. The skin is thick and there is not much flesh over the stone. The fruit has a slightly tart flavour and the kernels taste like brazil nuts.

I experimented and made some delicious damson-like jam from the fruit. After that success I started collecting the *wolgo* nuts. The stones are crinkled and a pretty pale brown colour. They vary in size from that of a small marble to as big as my two thumbs, and I made some beautiful necklaces with them. In the winter I gave the *wolgo* nuts to my Noongar friends and the children cracked and ate the nuts by the wood-heap while their mothers did small jobs for me.

I was so successful with the *wolgo* jam that I decided to make jam from another fruit, the *chuck*²². The result was like clear red currant jelly in flavour and appearance. The *chuck* tree is a very graceful tree of weeping willow habit with narrow pale green leaves. It looks very beautiful in full fruit. The fruit grows all along the stems between the leaves and is like a small red currant. It has green seeds about the size of a grape seed growing outside on the end of the fruit. Biting a *chuck* seed is just like biting a grape seed – it has a sharp, bitter flavour. The fruit is sub-acid – very like a currant. The women collected lots of this fruit for the trees bear very freely. The women's collection method was to spread their *boorks* under the tree and shake the tree well. They gathered around, ate what they wanted and took the rest back to camp.

²⁰ *Eucalyptus cornuta*

²¹ *Santalum acuminatum*

²² *Exocarpus sparteus* R. Br. Native Cherry, also *tijuk*, *jeeuk*

My experiments with bush foods were a great source of amusement for Albert and Gervase, but I argued that what was good for the Noongars was good for us. They disagreed, and asked me not to put any bush condiments into my cooking. However, on one occasion I did, and it was a disaster. There is a plant that grows like a flag, with a broad green leaf and a root very like a leek. It grows about 15 to 20 centimetres below ground and has a deep salmon-pink colour. The women told me it was called *quirting*²³ and persuaded me to taste it. On chewing a morsel I found it tasted not unlike a chilli and was just as hot. We collected a lot of these roots and took them home. I watched the women mash them up into a slimy-looking mass, knead them into flat cakes and put them into the wood ashes to bake. They told me the fire took most of the heat out of them and said they also ate a little of it raw after a meal as a digestive. On returning to the house I put some *quirting* into a stew I had made for supper, to season it. Baking in wood ashes may have taken the heat out but stewing certainly did not. It coloured the meat a very peculiar tint and it tasted as though I had mixed in curry powder and cayenne pepper with a liberal hand. My stew was inedible!

During the summer, vegetables were impossible to get and we had to eat pickles to keep us healthy. I got very tired of bread and meat for every meal and was delighted to see Gervase ride up to the door one afternoon and empty what looked like a lot of new potatoes out of his saddle bag. Upon closer inspection I could see they were not conventional potatoes. He told me they were *youcka*²⁴ and I should bake some in the wood ashes for supper. He said I would find they were better than *quirting*! Some were as about as large as my thumb; some weighed at least three quarters of a pound and were a dull red colour. I carefully baked them and found them delicious. They were sweet and watery, more like a yam than a potato, and had a very thick skin which easily rubbed off. I tried boiling them but it was not a success for they became soft and bland. I was eager to see them growing, so one Sunday Albert took me out to an area of reddish sandy soil where there were plenty. The plants were bushes about 60 centimetres high with a small sage-green leaf and grew just like potatoes. The roots spread out some distance and have to be followed up like sorrel roots to find the tubers at the end. Had Albert not pointed them out I would have passed them by without having had any idea of the edible roots underneath. The

²³ *Geranium solanderi*: native carrot: *kwardiny*. Rose Whitehurst's dictionary states [the flower] is purple in colour; [the tuber] red when ripe, and very hot when raw. It should be cooked on coals or in hot ashes.

²⁴ *Platysace deflexa*; also known as 'Ravensthorpe Radish'.

colour of the roots varies according to the colour of the soil in which they grow; from red to pink to yellowish white. They are greatly prized by the Noongars who will camp where *youcka* is plentiful and stay until the supply is exhausted. The women dig long trenches with their *wannas* to trace the roots and afterwards the place ground looks well-dug and furrowed.

I was so delighted with the *youcka* that I generally brought home the roots of any flowers that I found to find out whether they were edible. I thought I had made a great discovery once when on the banks of a deep creek I discovered a pretty heliotrope geranium. On pulling it up I found it had a long, thickish root and smelt very like a parsnip. I brought this home in triumph, and stopped to ask some of the Noongar women if it was good to eat. Yilgar hobbled up and became concerned when she saw the plant, asking who was sick. She told me this was a medicinal plant called *wardie*²⁵ which had to be eaten very sparingly. I had brought home nearly enough medicine for the whole Noongar camp!

There were many other edible roots growing on Noongar land but I have described the principal ones that grew where I lived. They were all sweet and watery no matter how dry the ground in which they grew.

Native liquorice²⁶ was traded far into the interior. The women soaked the dry twigs in water for eight to ten hours and drank the decoction. It was good for colds and coughs, causing profuse perspiration and after a deep sleep the patient woke up feeling much better. We frequently used it ourselves in small quantities and found it very beneficial. I tried boiling and straining it and obtained a beautiful non-fading canary-coloured dye. This plant grows in great quantities near the coast. It creeps along the ground and has very fine deep green leaves with small soft white flowers.

²⁵ The identity of this plant is confusing. The name Hassell ascribes, *wardie*, is similar to '*kwardiny*' which is the name for the native carrot (see previous page), but the root sounds very different. The root of *kulyu* (*Ipomoea* sp.) looks similar to a parsnip: the flower is a purple colour but it belongs to the Morning Glory family. This was eaten by Noongar people. *Ipomoea pes-caprae* (goat's-foot morning glory) grows all over Australia. In other parts of Australia it was used by Aboriginal people for relief from stingray and stonefish stings. However for the time being I am not absolutely certain which plant this is, although I think it is probably a morning glory species. Southern Western Australia contains over 150 species of plants that form root tubers or related storage organs. See http://www.aff.org.au/Woodall_Native_Potato-like_Foods%20Brochures.pdf

²⁶ *Glycyrrhiza acanthocarpa*: Noongar name unknown. The flowers are a pale blue-lilac. See <https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/3943>

The leaves and roots are sticky and when soaked in water produce a taste not unlike liquorice.

In cases of diarrhoea the Noongars ate the seeds of the red gum²⁷, a species of eucalyptus. When the seeds were not procurable they used the gum which comes from these trees. The gum is a dark red colour; very fluid and never gets really hard. It drops in great quantities under the trees and makes the ground look as though it has been splashed with blood. It will not dissolve in water but can be melted and spread thinly on paper making the paper waterproof.

The *quinnin* or macrozamia palm²⁸ was a food our Noongar friends obtained through trade as none of those beautiful plants grew anywhere near us. It was years before I saw them growing though I was familiar with the fruit. When the fruit first emerges at the base of the fronds it is surrounded with a soft brown wool resembling kapok. This was used by settlers to stuff mattresses and pillows. The fruit grows to a length of about 30 centimetres and resembles a very large pineapple 10 to 15 centimetres in diameter. As it ripens the pods open and shiny orange-red seeds fall out. They are about 5 centimetres long, 1.3 centimetres wide and oblong in shape. When they first fall out they are poisonous and cause violent diarrhoea and vomiting if eaten. The Noongars gather them and bury them in great heaps about 90 to 120 centimetres deep. They remain buried through summer and autumn until the early part of the winter; about eight or nine months. By the time they are dug up the fruit has become soft, resembles a date and tastes like an olive. Before trading, the Noongars take the stones out of the fruit – these are never eaten as they retain their poison. The Noongars string the processed flesh of the fruit on rushes. It retains its shine and colour and keeps for quite a long time.

Though burying *quinnin* eventually removes the poison, if it is eaten before it has been buried long enough it will cause violent illness as one of our farmhands discovered to his cost. He found one of the Noongars' buried heaps and dug it up. As the fruit was soft he thought it was safe to eat and ate a lot. He had not ridden many kilometres when he was taken so ill that he had to get off his horse and lie down. If he had not been discovered by some passers-by I believe he would have died. It was many weeks before he had entirely recovered from the ill effects.

²⁷ I assume this is the Marri: *Corymbia calophylla*

²⁸ *Macrozamia riedlei*

There were lots of sandalwood²⁹ trees about and I loved to burn small pieces of bark on summer nights, not only on account of the fragrance but because the smoke kept the mosquitoes away. The tree has fleshy leaves about the size and colour of sage and looks pretty when covered with red berries which are round and red with a thin, tough skin that tastes like alum³⁰. The nut is smooth and brown, about the size of a large marble. The kernels are very oily and have a bitter flavour, and though they are occasionally eaten the women preferred to grind them up and rub their men with sandalwood oil. The smell of the oil is not unpleasant but becomes rank when worn on the skin, and when the nuts were in season a pungent odour emanated from those who had been oiled.

Just after Christmas, Albert took us to meet our nearest neighbours who lived 80 kilometres away. We left the station at daybreak and arrived at our destination in the evening. Whilst travelling across the plains, I saw in the distance a clump of tall, beautiful trees covered with very deep-orange-coloured blossoms, so bright that they caught our attention from about eight kilometres away. As we drove past the trees we saw six or seven Noongars busily digging up the suckers which grew very profusely around the base of the trunk. We stopped to speak to them and they gave me one of the roots to taste, telling me it was called *nungah*³¹. The outer skin was pale yellow and was easily stripped off leaving a moist little centre tasting very like sugar candy. Very few of these trees grew near us and none was within walking distance, but in later years the women occasionally brought me pieces to chew.

The principal event of that journey was my first experience of seeing dogs hunting in the wild. We were driving along a low range of hills; the valley below was clear and grassy, shaded with a few tall trees. We caught sight of two *twerts* chasing a large brown *yonger*. The poor *yonger* hopped one way and then another while the two *twerts* – a beautiful golden sable colour – seemed to be acting on a settled plan. They kept heading off the *yonger* till it could hop no longer and stood with its back to a big tree trying to fight them off with its feet. They were wary and stayed out of reach. One *twert* would lie down some distance away while the other worried and snapped at the *yonger*. When that *twert* was tired, the other one took its place. We reigned in the horses and sat to watch this unequal combat. Eventually a *twert* caught the *yonger* off its guard and made a spring at its neck. In a second the other

²⁹ *Santalum spicatum*

³⁰ Used in baking powder and as a vegetable 'firmer'. Was used to whiten bread in England before 1875.

³¹ *Nutsia floribunda* (Christmas tree)

twert rushed up and attacked the other side. The poor beast was pulled struggling to the ground and in a few moments was dead. I think the combat must have lasted half an hour.

The Noongars frequently held dances or corroborees but did not seem to play many competitive games. One game they were very fond of greatly resembled hockey. They played it with a short natural stick with a root at the end.³² This stick and root was burned and hardened in the fire and the root chipped until almost round. The ball was another small root plastered around with clay and hardened in the fire. They played the game with two sides of no particular number. When a player got tired he or she drifted away, and anyone who wanted to join in could take that player's place. There seemed no time limit – they just went on until all the players were tired. It would go on all day for a week and all the Noongars around would come to play. During the matches no station work could be got out of the Noongars; they played, ate and slept.³³

The men and boys were very fond of playing a catching game with their spears. They'd cut a tough, porous grass-tree centre about three quarters of a metre long and 12 centimetres wide and stand in two opposing lines. One player would throw the grass-tree towards the centre of the two lines and the others tried to catch it on their spears. It went backwards and forwards until it crumbled to pieces.

In another game of spearing-skill, the boys cut a circle of white gum bark about 4 centimetres thick and trundled it along the ground trying to spear it as it rolled along. In another they would throw spears at a small bough on a fairly high tree aiming to hit the bark. For all these games they used short, pointed spears about 1.2 metres long.

There were games with the *kyle* in which it was thrown along the ground to try to make it hop or thrown in the air to come back to the thrower. A slightly different shaped *kyle* was used for each kind of game.

With the exception of hockey, all the games described were played by boys and men. In the only exclusively female game, the women engaged in combat with their

³² A.J. 'Jack' Bussell stated the name of this game in Bunbury was *Pandy* (see *Bunbury Herald* 14 November 1917 – article written under the name 'Tim O'Thy')

³³ In other places a marri nut was used as a ball – from this came the expression *hockey nut*, which by the time I was a child had become *honky nut*.

wannas in a kind of single-stick sword play, trying to strike each other, dodging and fending each other away.

Chapter Four

Twertup

It was a glorious September morning. We'd had a very dreary winter with high winds, hailstorms, low temperatures and driving rain, during which I did not often venture out, for when I did I was either blown to bits or nearly frozen. The ground was generally so sodden that I could sink ankle deep into the mud if I went off the beaten path, a rough and uninteresting walk. Occasionally I went to visit the Noongar camp and was always given a hearty welcome. The *mias* were built in the warmest and driest spot available, made to sleep in, not to be lived. In winter the Noongars often had bad colds and their fires were small and smoky.

This September day I really felt winter was over and spring was in the air. Wheat sprouted in the weak sunshine and the fields were a tender green. The headlands were a mass of pale golden yellow where the cape dandelion,³⁴ a large pale yellow daisy with a deep black centre, bloomed in it in all its splendour. All over the sheep paddocks were great patches of yellow and on the slopes opposite the house, showers of pale bluebells nodded their heads on slender stalks at every passing breath of soft wind. Great bunches of deep pink flowers covered the bushes that grew on the banks of the wide shallow river, which in a couple of months would be a dry, white sandy bed.

I hurried through my household duties and went outside to breathe the fresh air and bask in the bright sunshine. It was far too nice to sit inside on such a day! I glanced at the wood heap – a large pile of variously-sized branches near the kitchen door. Great fallen boughs were placed one on top of the other, such that it took skill to pull out an easy log to chop without bringing down half the pile. I decided to walk to the Noongar camp and ask two of the boys to come up and chop wood. Having found some boys to help me and personally superintended the grinding of the axes at the blacksmith's shop, I found a nice warm corner free from the wind and watched the boys chop. Every now and then I would remark that 'Quarran is a better worker than Beenup' or vice versa. Like most children, Noongar *cooning* (children) were competitive and by judicious flattery I could encourage them to do a lot of chopping. I'd also get natural history lessons from the boys, for they were very observant little fellows and would bring me all sorts of treasures from the bush.

³⁴ An invasive South African weed

On one particular morning I had not gone far on my walk when I met my two favourite boys going out on a hunting expedition. I tried and failed to persuade them to chop some wood for me, so proceeded to the camp to find alternative helpers. With a promise to reward them with toffee when the work was finished I persuaded two boys to help me and was accompanied home by the boys and most of the camp. It meant making lots of toffee and being given various degrees of advice on how to make it, but it was too fine a day to worry and it was no use trying to limit numbers for when a Noongar intends to do something he or she does it, regardless.

Off we went to the house, the two boys about 11 and 12 carrying the axes, four older women; two younger ones with their babies, three girls aged from 11 to 15 and various small children aged from about ten months to eight years. On arriving at the house I hauled out my box-seat, the women made a small fire (for you can't talk without 'tittly bit fire') and we discussed affairs in general. Tupin had seen a snake; Gratin had found a lark's nest with one egg. Beenup had seen two blue cranes³⁵ down at the river so summer must be coming. Gnablich³⁶ and Taigon were going for a bush walk (meaning to get married). I solemnly said I thought Gnablich was too young, whereupon Gnablich smiled, showed her white teeth and said, 'We promise a long time'. Old Gimbuck said Taigon had known Gnablich since she was a baby and now he claimed her.

We were discussing these subjects when Gervase rode up and asked me to organise some food for him as he and one of the farmhands were going out to Twertup to lay poison for wild dogs. He would stay the night there and return the next day. The women set up a chorus of 'Don't stop at Twertup at night time, Mister. Missus don't let him. Twertup very bad place. Noongar never stop at Twertup, not even little bit and night time worst of all!'

I left them excitedly discussing the matter while I prepared some food for Gervase. He mounted his horse and I handed him his billy. Old Gimbuck cried out, 'Mister, if you do stop at Twertup don't camp near water and mind you make up fires.' He

³⁵ Presumed to be the white-faced heron (*Egretta novaehollandiae*) also known incorrectly as the blue crane, a common bird throughout most of Australasia. E.A.Hassell (one of Ethel's sons) later stated the Noongar name for the white-faced heron is *bullong*, which is similar to some names in other regions.

³⁶ A Noongar woman called Ngalbaitch helped compile a Jerramungup vocabulary in the early 1900s – see <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/81192> (Appendix E). Knowing Mrs Hassell's unique way of recording Noongar words and names, I wonder if Gnablich was actually Ngalbaitch.

laughed, told her he would and cantered off waving his hand. The old women silently watched him go and went back to the fire, shaking their heads. The silence was broken by Tupin, one of the younger women. 'Young mister white man, he'll be all right,' she said, intending to comfort and reassure me.

'But Tupin,' I exclaimed, 'I don't know what it's all about. Why is Twertup such a bad place? I know it's a good distance away, but what's the matter with it?'

Tupin glanced at her grandmother, old Yilgar, who said a few words in *Noongar* to Gimbuck. Yilgar and Gimbuck were great friends and probably the oldest Noongars on the station but they never revealed Noongar lore without consulting each other. Many a bit of information I gleaned from them during the wood chopping, and on this occasion they shared the story of why Twertup was a bad place. Yilgar began the story by explaining Gervase should make two fires to protect him from the *jannocks*³⁷; evil spirits he would meet at Twertup.

Long long ago, there was a Noongar called Noity³⁸, Yilgar told me, a *Nunnich*³⁹ and a fine, strong man. He had been betrothed to a *Wording*⁴⁰ girl from babyhood. When she was a child this girl fell into a fire and the sinews of her legs shrank. From that time she had a permanent limp and she was always behind when the group went out in search of food. Noity did not want to marry her - he wanted to marry Gillan, a *Nunnich*.

'Oh Yilgar,' I exclaimed in horror-struck tones, 'That's *nuech*⁴¹ (wrong woman). Yilgar shook her head sadly. 'Yes, Missus, it's *nuech*, but Noity was a very strong man. He took Gillan away and she was happy to go with him. We followed their tracks three days. I was only a little girl then. They went into rocky dry country and we could not catch them. Sometime afterwards we heard that they had been seen at Twertup. It was called Jacup then⁴². Gillan's totem was a *bullong* (blue crane) and Noity's totem was a *twert*.'

³⁷ More widely spelt as *djanak*.

³⁸ Similar or the same as '*Noitch*', the word for 'death' or the ruler of the spirits.

³⁹ White cockatoo moiety

⁴⁰ Crow moiety

⁴¹ *Nunnich* could only marry *Wording* and vice versa. *Neuch* is similar to the word *winnaitch* which means 'taboo' in the Whadjuk dialect; also similar to *Noitch* – death.

⁴² Jacup is marked as a place 34 kms east north east of Jerramungup on the South West Highway near the Fitzgerald River. It may once have been called Twertup – Twertup is now the name of a creek and road in the Fitzgerald Range.

'Oh, worse and worse!' I exclaimed, for there is a hierarchy of totems. Those that fly are on the highest level, followed by things that climb, those that run and jump, flying insects, creeping insects, lizards and goannas, snakes, trees and lastly grasses. Noity had committed two crimes. Firstly, he taken a girl of his own moiety and secondly he had taken one with a totem ranked higher than his.

Gimbuck took up the tale. 'Noity was a very bad man. He took the little *twerts* from their mothers and made them hunt for him. Sometimes when he was hungry he ate them.' A Noongar must never eat or destroy his totem; to the Noongars, eating your totem was almost as bad as eating your children.

'Yes' said Yilgar, 'He climbed the trees and got the *bullong's* eggs and the little ones and made Gillan eat them so she would become as bad as him.'

Gimbuck went on; 'The river flooded and Noity and Gillan lived on an island in the middle of it. We went down there and camped opposite and the men threw spears at Noity who just laughed at them. He told Gillan to pick the spears up and bring them to him but and never bothered to throw a spear back. We camped there for quite a long time but the river didn't go down and there was not much food, so we had to leave.

'Afterwards we heard Noity and Gillan had gone to the coast and we sent a message to the Noongars down there to tell them who Noity and Gillan were and what they had done. By then Noity had taken another girl for a wife; she was a *Wording* and a *chuck*. The girl was the right family and totem for Noity but her totem was so much below Gillan's that the marriage was an insult to Gillan, even though Gillan could never be Noity's wife by *barlee*.'

'And did Gillan stay with him after that?' I asked. Tupin, in a tone that said 'silly question' replied, 'Yes, if she did not want to die.'

I realised it had been a foolish thing to ask. If Gillan left Noity's protection what was to become of her? She was a thing accursed. Every Noongar's duty, man or woman was to kill her, and if she succeeded in getting away once she would still be pursued. She could not throw spears like the men; certainly she could snare *coomal* and dig up *youcka* but where *coomal* and *youcka* are plentiful there are sure to be bands of wandering Noongars. Clearly Gillan had to stay with Noity or die.

'What became of them?' I asked.

'They lived about the country for quite a long time,' said Gimbuck. 'Noity had a lot of *twerts* and he trained them well. They camped around his *mia* and no Noongar could get near him. He taught them to howl a warning when they saw the Noongars, and he made them attack the Noongars. Oh he was a very bad man.

'The *twerts* hunted *yonger* and Noity and his *yorks* got quite fat. Every winter he took his *twerts* and *yorks* to the river island at Jacup and lived there. The ducks made their nests on the island and Noity lived very well on them and their eggs. When the *twerts* had too many puppies he'd eat some of them too. Neither he nor his wives respected any of their totems.

'This went on for several years; then Noity's second wife was bitten by a snake and died. The following winter when Gillan was digging for *gilgies*⁴³ on the riverbank, she fell into the river, was swept along in the torrent, caught in the boughs of a submerged tree and broke her arm. It did not set properly and she caught a bad cold and died soon afterwards.

'After she died, Noity was very lonely and wanted to make friends with the other Noongars and return to his home camp, but the Noongars would have nothing to do with him. What if he'd taught the young boys to eat their totems!' Yilgar looked horrified at the thought of the example he might have set. She continued, 'Noity wandered around for a year or two after Gillan's death, lonely and shunned by the Noongars. In winter he retired as usual to his camp on the island. The flood had come down harder than it usually did and the island was smaller and ducks were scarce. The *twerts* got hungry and so did Noity. He ate lots of *twerts*, but they would not eat each other. Some swam across the river and camped on the other side. Noity got angry and tried to swim across the river so he could beat them, but he got caught in the current and was carried along until he jammed against a submerged rock and broke his leg. He returned to the island with difficulty and had nothing to eat.

⁴³ *Cherax quinquecarinatus* freshwater crustacean endemic to south-west Australia

'One *twert* that stayed on the island had puppies and Noity killed them one by one. When he killed the last one the mother got angry and called to the other *twerts* across the river. As the waters were getting low they came back to the island. Noity told them to get him a *yonger* and they went ashore and killed one. When Noity saw the dead *yonger* he made the *twerts* swim on each side of him to take him to the riverbank. He made himself a feast of *yonger*, but he was so hungry that he did not leave any for the *twerts* and hung the leftovers in a tree so they could not reach.

'The *twerts* were very angry, because a Noongar, no matter how small his kill, always shares it with his family and friends. They said, 'He has killed and eaten our young and now we have killed a *yonger* for him and he won't give us any.' They attacked Noity, and as his leg had not set he could not run away from them. He tried to beat them off but there were too many for him. In the end they killed him; and as he had broken his totem rules and eaten their young, they ate him, which made them go mad and form themselves into a dangerous mob. Now they eat any Noongars that camp near the water at that place. They never go far from the river and their numbers have increased so much that the Noongars changed the name of Jacup to Twertup and it is a very bad place.'

Old Gimbuck concluded by saying, 'Don't like young mister stopping there but if he makes two fires perhaps he will come back all right. What about the toffees, Missus?' I brought out the ingredients: dark brown sugar, a little dripping, and vinegar. I put the saucepan on the fire, the wood-chopping was finished and the next half hour was devoted to toffee making.

In the evening I asked Albert about the story I had been told; he remarked that he had heard a similar tale to account for the large number of wild dogs in Twertup. He theorised that the abundance of grass on the river banks brought *yonger* there and the *twerts* came to hunt *yonger*. However I prefer to think that Yilgar and Gimbuck's tale was the true one.

Chapter Five

One afternoon I was in my bedroom when I heard a noise in the kitchen. I found Yilgar, Gimbuck and a strange woman examining my saucepans and plates. Yilgar explained that they had been waiting for me at the wood heap wanting to introduce me to Juganna, a visitor from a neighbouring group. I picked up my box-seat and proceeded to the wood heap ready for a *wongi* (talk). Juganna was a good-looking woman about 150 centimetres tall. Though her face was wrinkled it was kind. She was decorated to show she was in mourning. On her head she had a thick plaster of white clay which looked almost like a skull cap. Across her forehead she had three lines of white clay and a thicker line of clay from the corner of each eye nearest the nose, curving around the bottom of the cheek bone and coming to the tip of the ear.

Conversation was difficult: she could not speak English and my knowledge of the Noongar language was limited. Gimbuck explained that Tooting, a member of the same visiting group as Juganna had brought a very good new song and dance to the camp that everyone was learning. Juganna knew the song and could sing it very well.

I was eager to hear the song and tried to show Juganna by smiling and gesturing that I would love her to sing. She was shy and needed a lot of encouragement. After a lengthy discussion she consented and commenced to sing, beginning in a low key and gradually getting higher, then dropping again. With my limited knowledge of the Noongar language I could not fully understand the song. I heard *yonger*, *cart* (head), *mint* (tail) and *maar* (hand) but what the *yonger* was doing with its head, tail and hands I could not tell.

I noticed Yilgar pulling small pieces of stick away from the fire and making a centre of the hot ashes. It dawned on me that I should make some toffee to thank Juganna for her song, and that Yilgar and Gimbuck might have been showing her the kitchen utensils to explain toffee-making. Toffee was made, cooled and enjoyed by the visitors. I wrapped up the fragments in a piece of paper and gave them to Juganna, for Tooting. The three old dames cordially invited me to come and see the new song performed that night at camp and trotted off down the hill back to camp.

That evening Albert and I walked over to the camp. It stood on the edge of the forest, about 400 metres from the house near a bend in the river. It was a lovely,

clear, moonlit night, perfectly still with just the slight suspicion of frost. When we arrived at the camp we found many visiting Noongars. It was evidently an important occasion as the men were wearing magnificent headdresses. Their chests and shoulders were painted with straight lines, wavy lines and curved lines of *wilgie* and yellow clay. Some were decorated with alternate stripes, some with three stripes of one colour then one stripe of another, some with two stripes of one colour and two stripes of another and some with one stripe of one colour and two stripes of another. Some wore *twert tyres* across the top of their heads with strips of fur down each cheek and tied under their chin. Some had *waitch* feathers on their heads and faces and others were adorned with *chudic* tails. Some had headdresses made from tail and wing feathers of many different wild birds. The women wore no ornaments of any kind but sat in a semi-circle a little distance away and tended the fires.

My friends saw me and introduced me to the visiting Noongars. A few of them had not previously encountered a white woman and seemed fascinated by my clothes, especially my high-leather buttoned boots and the blue veil I wore over my hat.

Tooting wore a wonderful headdress consisting of three *twert* tails, a *chudic* tail, a bunch of *waitch* feathers adorning his cheeks and the tail feathers of a male red-tailed black cockatoo (*currah*) attached between the dog tails. *Currah* feathers are very beautiful. They are about 20 centimetres long; and a deep black. In the middle of the male's feather is a bar of deep scarlet which one only sees on the bird when he spreads his tail in flight. The female has alternate bands of black, scarlet and orange on her tail feathers.

Judging from the admiring glances cast at him, Tooting could have taken a wife from any of the girls there. He already had two wives and they were present. One was an elderly woman and the other a pretty young girl. I think two wives must be the limit for I have never met a Noongar with more than two. A husband has to hunt and provide food for two wives and their families, and occasionally his family group is increased by the family of his deceased brother or near relative. In accordance with one of the oldest Noongar customs, a man is bound to provide for his late brother's widows and children and accord to them exactly the same privileges as his own family. He may try to find a suitable husband for his brother's widow.

Albert and I sat on a log watching Tooting's dance. The men had seated themselves in a circle which Tooting ran into carrying a tree branch. He suddenly sat down with the branch over his head, picked off some leaves, jumped about and

shook himself, sat down again and tried to cover his back with the bough. The other Noongars seemed delighted and one after another followed his example while the women kept up the chant that Juganna had sung to me in the afternoon.

On the way home from the dance Albert explained it thus: it represented a large male kangaroo feeding on the plains that was overtaken by a violent rain storm. The kangaroo got under a small tree not big enough to shelter his whole body; therefore his tail got wet, and when he sheltered his tail his head and feet got wet. He picked leaves from the trees and tried to cover his head and feet but became wet all over. He shook his body and ran about to dry himself. This is the song:

Yonger baal bucal are barn baree tannie
Ripe are channie bucal are waree
Yonger bucal nint ripe are chanie bucal nee tannie
Cart maar ripe bucal are barn barree tannie.

Freely translated, this is:

Large kangaroo with his back to a tree
Water running down his back
Large kangaroo his tail by a tree water running down it
Head and hands water running down them.

This was repeated over and over; the first lines twice, the next two twice, all four lines at ones by one woman, then taken up again by all the women.

The visitors stayed at the camp nearly a fortnight and during that time the women did not come to see me. I wandered past the camp one day and found the Noongars were all dozing around their fires, which are kept burning day and night, just with a few bits of stick together – never much of a blaze. I was not surprised to see them sleeping for they seemed to be having a corroboree every night and kept it up until the moon went down.

Chapter Six

It had been a hot, tiring day and I had been up since daylight. The men breakfasted at five a.m. and went off to put a crop in the far paddock. After I'd tidied I found to my annoyance that we had only a little bread left and there wouldn't be enough for the men's dinner the following day. This meant making scones and johnny cakes and baking a batch of bread in the evening. I still had to do the washing, and baking and washing on the same day is exhausting! Making a quantity of scones is nearly as bad. However it was not much use grumbling - it had to be done. Instead of creeping back to bed for another hour's snooze I lit up the copper and set to work with the washing, melting over the kitchen fire.

In the afternoon when Albert and Gervase came in hot and hungry, they remarked how cool the house felt. I thought if the house felt cool it must be sweltering in the fields outside. The house was built in a windy spot on a hilltop and in the summer we certainly got any breeze there was, though in the winter we braved the full fury of gales.

After tea Albert and Gervase went straight off to bed. I washed up, got the fire ready for the morning, laid the table then suddenly remembered I had a batch of bread to make. It was too hot to light the fire again so I took the billy outside and made a small fire on a flat rock near the house. I was lying down waiting for the billy to boil, gazing at the stars that fairly powered the deep blue sky overhead when I felt a movement. Tupin was standing beside me. She had come up so silently that until she sighed I had no idea any one was there. Such is the way of the Noongars.

She crouched down by the fire evidently ready for a chat. I liked Tupin; she was quite young, between 18 and 19 and a really pretty girl. She had glorious eyes and carried herself in a stately way though barely 120 centimetres tall. She had beautiful little feet and small slender hands and lovely filbert-shaped nails which were my constant wonder and envy. She always had quite a shy way about her and was kept in subjugation by her grandmother Yilgar and her husband Winmar, the Noongar *mulgar* (doctor), who was old enough to be her grandfather. She had a baby boy about six months old.

The baby rested his sleepy black-haired head on his mother's shoulder supported by her *coot* hung over her back. The way the Noongars carry their children is unique.

The baby is not put in the bag but is placed between the *boork* and the bare body of the mother, the arms out over the *boork*, the stomach on the mother's back and head resting on the shoulder. When the baby requires nourishment the breast is lifted up to the shoulder. The child rests its head over the shoulder and sucks as the mother travels along. The *boork* goes over the mother's head and neck leaving her arms free while the *coot* is put over the *boork* with the strap and helps to support the child. The *coot* contains all the household goods and food though Noongars carry very little in the way of food trusting luck to provide a meal.

I was surprised at Tupin's visit for the Noongars rarely go about at night. I asked her what the matter was.

'Nothing Missus; I see a little bit fire so I walk up see what Noongars are here.'

We were silent for a while; I felt too tired to talk, but after a time the loveliness and the peacefulness of the night soothed and revived me. Presently we heard a possum cough, then came the cry of a quoll; the first time I had ever heard the latter sound.

'What animal is that?' I asked.

Tupin laughed. 'That's *Chudic*⁴⁴ Missus.' I was interested as so far I had not seen one of those spotted animals.

'Tupin, do you think you could catch one?' I asked.

'Don't know, Missus, *Chudic* very cross, very cunning.'

Again there was silence, suddenly broken by Tupin exclaiming, 'Missus, see black spot in sky – that's *Waitch*.'

I looked intently straight up into the Milky Way. There is a dark patch something like the outlines of an emu. I confess I had never noticed its likeness before.

This is the tale Tupin told me that still, hot summer night under the starlit heavens. It felt as if she and I were the only human beings awake for kilometres around.

Long ago a *chudic* met a nice young *waitch*. After a short courtship they decided to bushwalk together (marry). They walked for a long long way until they came to the edge of the forest where there was a little soak of water, which in this waterless country is of the greatest importance when choosing a camping place. Being on the edge of a forest, the place was ideal for the pair. *Chudic* could go into the woods to hunt and *Waitch* could feed on the grass of the plains. All went well for a time and

⁴⁴ from *djooditj*: the western quoll (*Dasyurus geoffroi*)

they were very happy. Eventually, food became scarce for Chudic, though there was still plenty for Waitch. Chudic often had to go hunting a long way from camp leaving Waitch alone, though women should never be left alone at night because that is when the *jannocks* are about. Waitch grumbled but Chudic was hungry and didn't care.

One night as Waitch was sitting alone by the fire she heard Coomal cough and saw him peering down at her from the branch of a big tree. *Coomals* have a reputation for being flirtatious and Waitch knew she should ignore him, so she went back to her *mia* and stayed there. The next night after Chudic had gone hunting Coomal coughed again. Still Waitch did not respond.

Night after night this routine continued, until finally one night, Waitch boldly looked up at Coomal. In an instant he swung himself down from the tree and sat down next to her beside the fire. She was so frightened by his audacity that she did not attempt to speak.

Each of the following nights Coomal came to the fire. He did not attempt to speak to Waitch but just sat and looked at her, leaving when the fire began to die down. After a while, Waitch looked forward to seeing Coomal and enjoyed the silent companionship. One night Coomal appeared, took his seat by the fire and began to talk about nothing in particular. Waitch had become so accustomed to his presence that she felt comfortable chatting with him. Besides, she had no one else to talk to: in the day time Chudic slept and in the night he hunted.

Chudic was apparently quite contented with this life but Waitch was getting tired of it. She had wanted companionship and now she'd found it with Coomal. He brought her news from the forests and the plains and she loved listening to his gossip. She and Coomal both knew they should have stayed well away from each other, but they enjoyed each other's company.

After a while Coomal began to put doubts into Waitch's mind, hinting that perhaps Chudic had found another companion. Was he really hunting all this time? There were plenty of other *chudics* in the forest and his absences were very long. Was food really so scarce? After all, there were plenty of little birds and *waige* (brown

rats⁴⁵) about. Just as Coomal wanted, Waitch became jealous and concerned about what Chudic was up to.

One night Coomal appeared with *wilgie* on his chest. *Wilgie* is yellow clay which is burned till it is red and mixed with fat. When a Noongar puts it on his chest and head it is a sign that he is courting. Waitch knew quite well that Coomal wanted her to run away with him but she was frightened of Chudic who was very fierce and pulled her feathers out when he was angry.

That night when Chudic came home he could smell the *wilgie*. It has a rank, earthy smell which lingers a long time. Chudic questioned Waitch but she stated she knew nothing and had seen no one. Chudic was not satisfied and the next day decided to move camp, for although Waitch might be telling the truth there could also be an amorous bachelor about. He felt he could not take the risk of leaving Waitch alone at that camp for such long periods so they moved away. But *Waitch* was cunning. On the track every now and then she dropped a feather so *Coomal* would know where she had gone.

After walking a long way they camped near a *yamma*. *Yammas* are round waterholes in rocks. Curiously, the top is smaller in diameter than the bottom for they widen as they go down. The rain water that collects in these *yammas* is conserved all summer. Some *yammas* hold only a few hundred litres and others hold a few thousand. They are greatly prized by the Noongars, birds and animals (and now settlers) for kilometres around them.

For several nights Chudic stayed at home and Coomal did not appear. Chudic decided it was safe to leave Waitch and went hunting again. He had not been gone very long when Waitch heard Coomal cough. He swung himself down from a nearby tree and sat next to her. She told him Chudic had smelt the *wilgie*, questioned her and decided to move camp. Coomal urged her to run away with him. He told her as they both ate the same foods he wouldn't need to go hunting and they could always be together.

⁴⁵ Australia does have its own species of rat: possibly bush rat (*Rattus fuscipes*) but I could not find it recorded by this name elsewhere. Rose Whitehurst records the long-tailed marsupial rat as *bankot*.

The following night he appeared covered with *wilgie* and boldly embraced Waitch, rubbing *wilgie* onto her feathers. When a man smears *wilgie* on the skin of a woman, he is making a sign of betrothal, and the woman leaves it on her skin to indicate she is engaged. When Coomal left, Waitch tried to wipe the *wilgie* off her feathers but it wouldn't budge. In desperation she kicked the campfire to pieces and covered herself with ashes. When Chudic came home she told him a Waitch covered with *wilgie* had come to her and tried to abduct her but she had fought him off.

Chudic was very troubled at this story and stayed at home every night for a long time, telling Waitch food was plentiful and there was no need for him to go away to hunt. But eventually he got tired of staying at home and went away hunting again. Just as before, he began to stay away for longer and longer intervals. Coomal, who had been watching from the treetops came back to the fire and renewed his romancing. Waitch warned him not to wear *wilgie* but he followed his customs so closely that wore it anyway, and once more rubbed *wilgie* onto Waitch as he embraced her.

Waitch thought she had succeeded in removing all traces of *wilgie*, as this time when he came home, Chudic didn't say anything. But a *chudic's* sense of smell is acute and Chudic smelt both Coomal *and* the *wilgie*. He was so suspicious he decided to come home from hunting early and watch from the bushes, and of course, he soon caught Waitch and Coomal sitting by the campfire. He emerged from his hiding place and confronted the guilty pair. Coomal scampered up the nearest tree and Waitch stood by the fire. Chudic told Waitch to collect a lot of *mungert* wood, which makes a fierce fire and burns with a lot of smoke. It is a favoured wood for baking.

Frightened, Waitch obeyed without question and collected more and more wood until there was a huge heap. Then Chudic made her take her *carla* (fire stick) from under her *boork* and light the leaves.

As she bent over to light the fire her feathers caught fire and the smoke ascended to the tree from where Coomal was watching. He choked on the smoke and fell into the fire with Waitch. The wind blew Waitch into the sky with the smoke and Coomal was burnt in the hot ashes. Chudic watched Waitch ascend then went into the forest and never came back. The dark patch in the Milky Way is where Waitch settled in the sky.

Chapter Seven

Late one afternoon I was surprised by a visit from Gimbuck, who was evidently in a very bad temper. All the visitors had departed accompanied by several of my Noongar friends including Yilgar, Tupin and Winmar. Gimbuck had been left behind because she had no man to provide her with food (my friends knew I would not let her go hungry). Lately she had tried to claim she was related to a wife of one of the men in her group but he had slipped off to the visitors' camp without her. By rights she should have gone away with Waymen and Wynne at the beginning of spring but she had wanted to enjoy the company of the visitors and had remained behind. Now she was lonely and feeling the effects of all the fun she had been having. I gave her a piece of bread and jam which cheered her up. To pass the time I asked her to show me the contents of her kangaroo-skin bag (*coot*) – I had been dying to see what was in it. After demurring a little she took it off and emptied it out onto the grass. As far as I can remember it contained the following:

1. Two needles – these were made from the shin bone of a *yonger* which is a solid piece of bone, very hard with no marrow. The needles were about 18 to 20 centimetres long and 2 centimetres wide. One side of the needle was flat, the other was rounded. The rounded end was sharpened on a flat piece of stone and the other end was squared. The needle had no eye.
2. A bundle of dried sinews from kangaroos' tails. These were rolled into a ring with an end drawn through to keep them in place just as we roll up a piece of thick twine.
3. Her *tap* or knife. This was longer than a man's *tap*. It was a round piece of hard, well-seasoned wood with a lump of gum at the end into which was firmly embedded the front tooth from the lower jaw of the *yonger*. The tooth, a beautiful ivory, was placed sideways so as to get the greatest width and rubbed between two stones to make a very sharp edge. It was used for skinning, scraping and cutting any sinews. I have seen women skin a *yonger* with one of these knives as rapidly as a man with could do it with a steel knife.
4. Her *cobal*⁴⁶ half-full of fur and her *werpul* or spinning sticks.
5. Evidently a wonderful treasure, a flattish, water-worn stone about the shape of a broad-bean and about twice as big – a meteorite, I fancy. I turned this over a few times and asked what it was. She explained it was a rain stone she had found the day before near the bed of the river and should have handed it over to Winmar immediately as he was the tribal doctor or *mulgar*, but she was cross with him for

⁴⁶ Pouch made from the stomach skin of a *coomal*

refusing to take her to the visitors' camp; therefore she kept the stone. She knew it was useless in her hands, but when I asked her what would happen if rain didn't come, she obstinately said she didn't care. She could get plenty of *tdage* (meat) at the station and it would do the others good to go hungry.

Noongars burn large patches of ground, not to destroy the game but to make the ground sweet for the young grass, and rain is crucial in the process. The new grass springs up directly after the first rain and the *waitch* and *yonger* come to the burned patches to feed and grow fat making them more easily to catch. Every group has its rain-maker and rain stones are greatly prized. The more stones a rain-maker has, the more successful his efforts are likely to be.

Gimbuck was part way through making another *coot* and I asked her to do a little sewing for me to show me how it was done. Her method was most interesting. First, she doubled the skin. Holding the two sides together she forced a hole through them both with her needle then with her fingers threaded the dry sinew through the hole. The stitches were about half a centimetre apart but the seams were later oversewn and were very strong. When finished the bag would be dampened and left to dry to set it firmly in shape. Gimbuck was quick with her work and I heartily admired her skill. I gave her a bright glass marble and told her it could be a woman's *booliah* (magic stone), if she promised to give Winmar the rain stone as soon as he returned. At the sight of the marble she readily agreed and went off quite satisfied.

Winmar, Yilgar and Tupin returned from their visit at the beginning of winter. The day after their arrival, Yilgar came to see me. She had been away just over three months and I gathered the visit had not been an entire success. Tupin (Winmar's wife) had struck up a great friendship with Tooting's young wife and the two girls were always together. Tooting devoted himself to the young people and neglected his older wife, who became jealous and beat and scratched Tupin, whereupon Winmar threatened to put *mulgar* (magic) on the whole group if they interfered with his young *york*. The women did not dare tell Winmar that they wanted Tupin to leave; instead, Yilgar was politely told to go with the presumption that if she left, Tupin and Winmar would follow her.

Apparently, Tupin had been enjoying herself. She had a position of importance and received plenty of attention because she was the wife of a *mulgar* and quite a beauty. Winmar was enjoying his comfortable quarters and was not anxious to leave either.

Yilgar could no longer endure the host's rudeness and decided that if the other two would not go home, she would go alone, or accompany two young boys who had been sent out for their education and were now old enough to return to her group.

The idea of a woman setting off on her own was unheard of, and was discussed for some days. It was considered improper for women and boys to make a long journey unless accompanied by an old man like Winmar, and brazen of Yilgar to suggest such an idea. However, it seems she got her way, and through coaxing and threats succeeded in persuading the boys to accompany her with no other chaperon. They left the camp very early one morning hoping to reach the station in three or four days. On the third day, Yilgar and the boys were overtaken by Winmar and Tupin who had been reproached by the other Noongars for allowing Yilgar and the boys to leave without supervision. They had made a forced march to catch Yilgar up so all three could re-enter their camp together.

The night before they got back to camp it had been raining almost all day and was bitterly cold. In the evening there had been a slight fall of snow. Winmar was an old man and had become overtired in the hurried journey; consequently he arrived home with a very bad cold. Yilgar seemed anxious about him. She said he 'barked all night like a *twert*'. In the morning he did not take an interest in anything; not even the beautiful new rain-stone which Gimbuck had found and given to him. Gimbuck also had the marble I had given her, round like a sheep's eye and full of colours. She thought it must be great *mulgar* and put it in Winmar's mouth to make him better, but it didn't help. She put it on his stomach under his cloak, but still he coughed. She asked me if she could use some of Missus's *mulgar*.

I had a recipe for cough mixture which I often made for the Noongars and they had great faith in it. The principal trouble was sending it in doses that would not do them harm, so I mixed it to make it safe and put it into a jam tin with strict instructions to bring the tin back, otherwise I would have run out of tins (the Noongars were beginning to use tins to carry water).

I walked down to the camp with Yilgar and found Winmar very ill; so ill that I went over the fields to tell Albert then hurried back to make some broth and cough mixture, which some of the women collected. The following day, Winmar was no better. I went to the camp taking more cough mixture and broth and found two men sitting on his chest back to back while a third man blew wood ashes over his face to drive the

twerts away, saying he must have encountered evil *twert* spirits. I suggested we try my *mulgar* and gave Winmar a little of the cough mixture from a spoon. I left the spoon with Yilgar, advising her to try to give Winmar more broth.

That evening Albert said he feared the old fellow was dying and advised me to keep away from my friends, so they could follow their customs in private. I made broth for Winmar every day which the women came up to collect, but that was about all I could do for him.

The poor fellow lingered on for about a week, until one bitterly cold and frosty night I heard a terrible wailing and keening coming from the ridge of the hill above the house in the direction of the camp. It lasted far into the night. Albert remarked the old fellow must be near death and his wives and daughters were calling on the *jannocks* to spare him.

The following morning at daylight more wailing was heard; a most weird and mournful noise made by all the women. Many of the group went to the burial ground to dig the deceased's grave, leaving only the oldest men and women to guard the body. They returned to the camp at about midday to collect the body and I went down to the burial ground, about one and a half kilometres from the camp, and watched from a hidden place so I would not intrude.

A person who knows a little about Noongar practices of burying the dead can tell at a glance whether the deceased belonged to a hill group or a plains group. The hill groups dig the grave north-south and the body is placed on its right side with the head to the south and the face towards the rising sun. The earth is formed into a half-moon shape on the western side of the grave. The plains groups dig the grave east-west and lay the body on its back; the head to the east and the face turned on one side so it looks towards the setting sun, or the midday sun. The earth is thrown in two heaps; one at the head and the other at the foot. There is a slight hollow in the earth where the body lies and the half-moon shape is preserved. The hill groups call the burial service *Gotyl*.

The deceased's body had been taken from his *mia* on a stretcher made of boughs and twisted leaves and carried, surrounded by the men, to the burial ground situated amongst some big trees. The women and children followed wailing. A large circular patch had been cleared in the undergrowth. A *mia* had been built, and in the loose

sandy soil in front of the *mia* a shallow crescent-shaped grave was dug and lined with a few bushes. I noticed quite a number of old graves. I could tell where women had been buried by the *boorks* and *coots* at the foot of the graves and the unbroken *wannas* at the graves' heads. There were an odd number of notches on the trees near the women's graves and even numbers of notches on the trees near the men's graves. Female children's graves were marked with small *boorks* and *coots*, and male children's graves were marked with a *kyle* or two. Babies' graves had little *mias* by them. Near every grave were the remains of two fires and some bark.

The deceased's body was laid near the waiting grave and a man with a *doark* (stick), whose name was Pungin, broke the body's arm, leg and thigh bones. The knees were drawn up to the chin and the body placed on its right side. The stretcher was placed in the grave so the deceased faced the rising sun. Leaves were placed on the body followed by a layer of earth which covered it completely. The earth was covered with a layer of leaves resembling a bed.

The women had been keeping up a continuous wailing throughout the burial. Now they brought their *carlas* out from under their *boorks* and lit two fires that had already been prepared; one near the grave and the other some yards away. They placed a small bark container full of water and a piece of meat near each fire. Pungin took the deceased's spears, broke them over his knee and placed them at the foot of the grave with the deceased's *meero*, *hoitch* and *tap*. The *kyle* was placed at the head of the grave. A forked stick stood at each end of the grave; on one hung the deceased's *noolman* and head ornaments. On the other hung a small *coot* containing the deceased's magic stones.

At the conclusion of proceedings, the women ran from the burial ground wailing and the men walked away slowly. Pungin came out of the *mia*, took his own *hoitch* and made several notches on the bark of the two trees near the grave.

On my return from the funeral I passed the camp. I was astonished to see the women carrying everything away as quickly as they could and hurriedly constructing a new camp a few hundred yards up the hill. Just as the sun set they put their *carlas* to the old camp and burned it down to the ground. Every afternoon for four weeks they walked to the grave wailing, filled the bark containers with water, put some meat down and made two fresh fires a little further away from the first. They timed themselves so as to be back at the camp by sunset.

During the mourning period Yilgar and Tupin dwelt alone in a small *mia* a couple of yards below the camp. Tupin and most of the women were ornamented with white clay like Juganna had been. Tupin, her mother and the deceased's sister had clay mixed with blood on their heads and the other women wore plain clay. At the end of the month, Tupin was taken as wife by Pungin, her late husband's next of kin. He was a quiet man aged about 30 whose first wife had died. Tupin had now lost all her prestige (which didn't seem to worry her at all) and the camp was without a *mulgar*.

Poor Yilgar seemed to be grieving deeply for Winmar. They had been life-long friends and were nearly the same age. She visited me at all times of the day, sometimes accompanied by Gimluck, but usually alone. The weather was bitterly cold so I invited her to come into the kitchen and she squatted by the fire. We had many quiet talks in the kitchen during which she told me the reasons for the various ceremonies I had seen at Winmar's funeral. She told me the women put down food and water and built two fires further from the grave each day so that when the man (for a Noongar will never mention the name of a recently deceased relative), awoke from his sleep fully recovered from his illness he would find all his possessions by the grave. He would get up, reach out for his spears and find them broken. He would drink the water, roast his meat, sit by the fire and warm himself, before going to a far country to find some new spears.

The reason for the second fire was thus: when a person died there was always an evil spirit waiting to steal his fire and food⁴⁷. The second fire and the additional food was left as a decoy for the evil spirit so the deceased had a chance to escape its clutches. The bones were broken to drive out the evil spirit which had caused sickness and death and to ensure the deceased had a good rest while his bones mended. The old camp was abandoned immediately after a death because evil spirits were hovering about. These spirits had caused one death and might cause another if the group stayed.

Should any Noongar spear a *mulgar* he would be cursed forever and many of his family may die, for vengeance would not be satisfied until the killer's whole group had accompanied the *Mulgar* to the Far-Off Land. The killer's spirit would be given over to Noitch.

When I found out how firmly Yilgar believed in the resurrection of the dead I tried to comfort her by telling her that when she died (and jumped up to take her journey) she

⁴⁷ Noitch: see Chapter 5

would meet Winmar again. She shook her head sadly and said, 'It is a very far country Missus and a very big country – most likely I lose him.'

One cold morning she arrived as soon as Albert had left the house and sat by the fire drinking a steaming hot cup of sugar and water. She seemed extra forlorn; her misery perhaps worsened by the weather. Great gusts of wind played around the house whilst fierce storms of hail and sleet rattled against the window panes.

As soon as I had finished my household duties I got my low chair and sat down by the fire with my needlework. Yilgar, who had been dozing, began to talk and tell me of her childhood days before the white man came. While we talked a violent storm came on and the sky was quite darkened. Yilgar shivered and hid her face in her *boork* saying, 'The sun hides its face, Noongar look down.'

"Oh the sun will come out again," I said cheerfully, and when in about an hour's time the storm had cleared and a fitful gleam of sunshine did come out, I coaxed the following story out of Yilgar.⁴⁸

Long, long ago when my mother's mother was a *cooning* (child) under her mother's *coot*, the *yhi* (sun) shone all day and all night the *maak* (moon) was bright. The grass was always green and young and sweet and there was plenty of water and *yonger*. The Noongars were happy then and did not throw *geize* or fight each other. They had corroborees every night. The men hunted in the daytime and the women spun *noolman* and made their *boorks* and *coots*. Food was so plentiful that they never needed to move camp. There were plenty of *cooning* and plenty of Noongars.

One day many of the men refused to hunt and went to sleep so the women began to scold them. Their complaints made such an awful noise that and the *maak* came down and split the earth in half. The two halves went to opposite sides of the sun; one below and one above. The half below the sun was populated by the lazy men and complaining women. On this half there was little water and grass and only a few *yonger*. The half above the sun was populated by the men who had hunted and ensured their *yorks* and families were happy. There it was always green, warm and beautiful with plenty of water and *yonger*. The *yhi* shone all day and the *maak* shone all night.

Now when a Noongar dies, he (or she) travels a very long way till he comes to the country below the sun, where there is little grass and water. It is peaceful there now,

⁴⁸ I have changed this story slightly as in its original form it was confusing and contradictory.

because the men have stopped sleeping all day and the women have stopped complaining. The other Noongars welcome him and show him around and he tells them all the news of the home.

Every now and then the Noongars who live above the sun want to know what is happening below. The men, women and children all crowd together and they push the sun over so they can see past it. There are such a lot of them that they cover the sun and take all the warmth for themselves, making it dark and very cold on the earth below. They don't block the sun for long; just long enough so they can look down and feel glad they are in such a beautiful warm green country.

A day or two before the month of mourning had concluded, I went to the camp and found Gimbuck and Yilgar talking earnestly to two strangers. On the ground near the fire was a stick so curious that I picked it up for a closer look. It was about 15 centimetres long and 1.7 centimetres across. Half way down was a succession of straight rings, wavy rings, small squares, and straight lines measuring 5 centimetres. Approximately 2.5 centimetres from each rounded end the stick was smeared with blood and wrapped in a long human hair.

'Whatever is this?' I asked Gimbuck, examining it carefully.

'That *yump*⁴⁹ letter stick same as paper talk,' said Gimbuck. ('Paper talk' is what the Noongars called the little notes they used to bring me from Albert.)

I could see Yilgar and the two men were uncomfortable with me handling the *yump* but Gimbuck appeared not to mind and kept talking. Suddenly Yilgar gave a sort of howl and I dropped the stick in fright. Both the women burst out laughing. When I recovered myself and looked down for the stick, it had gone. I realised the howl had been part of a plot to retrieve the *yump*, and was surprised it had been effected so cleverly.

The following afternoon I passed the camp and found everyone very busy. The men were burning *wilgie*; the women were chipping quartz and kneading gum. Endless spear sticks were in evidence; some being hardened in the fire and others being greased by the boys. The women seemed uneasy and the men made it clear that my presence was unwanted so I pretended I had just stopped to enquire whether

⁴⁹ According to information in The Aboriginal languages of south-west Australia (Douglas, 1976), the *yump* 'may be a ball of human hair held together by gum or clay. It is sent by the avenger to the victim through many hands with instructions that it must reach the person named.' When it reaches the victim, he becomes ill and dies.

they knew where Gervase was working. The Noongars told me where Gervase would be and I briskly walked away.

At tea time, Albert told me a *yump* was an 'evil-stick'. It meant there was vengeance in the air and the group may be set to move away for the rest of the winter. I remembered hearing that when a Noongar dies, someone must be killed to accompany him or her on the journey to the faraway land; a man for a woman and a woman for a man; someone belonging to another group. Indeed these murders are the principal causes of inter-group warfare. The *yump* may have contained information as to where there was an unprotected band of Noongars out hunting who had not heard of Winmar's death so that perhaps one of their women would be easy prey.

Albert was right about the Noongars' departure, for a day or two later I noticed there was no smoke rising from the camp. I walked down and found all the fires out and the camp deserted. The Noongars must have left at sunrise that morning without wishing to announce their departure as none of the women had been to bid me farewell.

The Noongars returned one afternoon in spring. They didn't go back to the site of their old camp but built their *mias* on a spot north of the house near the river bend where there was a long pool of fresh water.

It was some days till they had all returned and settled in. I decided I would not go to them but wait until they came to see me. In about a week I had my first visit from Yilgar and Gimbuck and over the next few days all the women and children called in. I asked them why they had gone so suddenly without bidding me farewell but they would not tell me and I couldn't find out where they'd been or what they'd been doing. 'Just nothing,' they said, or 'Just hunting *yonger*' or 'Just walk far away.'

If a Noongar does not want you to know something there is no point asking questions. His confidence is hard to gain and easy to lose – once lost it is never regained. Though the Noongars were guarded about the information they gave me, they were eager to hear all station gossip and I was questioned about everything that had happened during their absence.

Chapter Eight

I had been for a long walk with three of the Noongar girls. We were resting under a big tree in the forest which overlooked the road to the homestead. Instead of following the road we intended to walk home across the ridge and reach the house by a shorter route. I was lying on my back idly watching shafts of sunlight filtering through leaves that quivered in the weak breeze. I was roused from my reverie by a startled exclamation from Greton. I looked around expecting to see a snake close by but saw only the girls, terrified expressions on their faces. I looked in the direction they were pointing, but saw nothing. Then I saw a little puff of wind swirl the dust and leaves, blow along the road and subside. Another puff of wind spun the leaves near us and raced away towards the road. The girls screamed in absolute terror, and when three or four more little puffs came twirling towards us they seized me by the arms and we went running back the way we had come. When I had had time to recover myself I anxiously asked them what the matter was. '*Jannocks*,' they whispered.

I knew *jannocks* were evil spirits. Greton explained the little puffs of dust and leaves were the shapes they had taken. The girls were too terrified to listen to a scientific explanation for the little whirlwinds. The *jannocks* were out playing and woe betide anyone who watched them or crossed their path!

Here was a predicament. A stronger breeze was springing up and I foresaw we would see many little eddies on our way home. I suggested we should talk and make a loud noise and frighten them away, but no matter what distractions I tried the talk always wandered back to *jannocks*. Thus I learned a great deal about their evil ways.

There was *Noitch*⁵⁰, the supreme evil-one, who lived in deep gullies in the highest mountains. Genderless and shapeless, it haunted tribal burial grounds on the lookout for the Noongar spirits who had risen up from their burial sleep and started their long journey. It lived in the mountain ranges amongst the cold mists but loved the heat from a fire. This explained the practice of lighting two fires at a burial: one large and one small. The larger fire was for *Noitch* and the other for the deceased Noongar's spirit. *Noitch* would go to the big fire to get warm and so give the Noongar spirit time to escape and get so far away that *Noitch* would give up the chase.

⁵⁰ Also means dead or deceased (Nortj/Gnoytj)
<http://www.noongarculture.org.au/glossary/noongar-word-list/>

Noitch seemed chiefly to concern itself with departed spirits but *jannocks* concerned themselves with the living. There were some who were the servants of Noitch, and if Noitch was in a bad temper it might send a *jannock* to go out and kill an unfortunate Noongar, whose spirit it could pursue for entertainment.

Other *jannocks* were mischievous and evil like the little wind eddies we had seen. They could make the dust go into our eyes and cause us great pain or perhaps blind us, or they would go down our throats causing us to cough and choke. Sometimes a lot of *jannocks* joined together, made a cloud of dust, and billowed along the road sweeping everything before them. Then they'd choke up the shallow water holes and cause great thirst and suffering to the Noongars.

Some *jannocks* come in the night and worry the Noongars so they cannot sleep; some make the children cry. Sometimes they steal the warmth from the fires and devour any food that might be lying about or get into smouldering ashes and scatter them about, often setting fire to *mias*. When a Noongar makes a fire it is just as well to make a second one further off and place some food near it so when the *jannocks* approach the camp they will sit down by the outlying fire and eat the food. Satisfied and warm they will go to sleep without worrying the Noongars.

The *jannocks* very rarely make a noise but you can always feel them when they are about. Apart from being seen in the dust and leaves, sometimes they can be heard screaming in the winds of a big storm. That is when they are fighting. Then it is wise to stay very quiet, for when they are angry and screaming they are likely to get into very evil mischief.

'Marghet'⁵¹ is an inland water spirit, invisible to human eyes. He is very long and round with short feet, an immense head, enormous mouth and lots of teeth. He lives in the deep lakes and pools and travels by night, often heard but rarely seen. If a Noongar goes into a pool where Marghet is lurking, Marghet softly seizes the Noongar's legs and pulls him under the water, never to be seen again. Sometimes on some of the large lakes the water in the centre boils and bubbles and big rings appear just as though a large animal was on the point of rising up, but after a time

⁵¹ Matjit is the name of a water-snake spirit (Douglas, 1976), present in the Night Well. In this context it would seem 'Marghet' should be pronounced 'Marjet'. Interestingly, 'Matjit' is identical to the word Noongars closer to Perth adopted for the supernatural after invasion, due no doubt to wetjellas using the word 'magic' to try understand Noongar spiritual beliefs.

the boiling and bubbling subsides and all is still. That is Marghet. I have several times seen this strange phenomenon and am unable to account for it.⁵²

Marghet also makes strange noises in the night; sometimes like a large animal wallowing and grunting in the water, sometimes a deep booming sound, and sometimes like the cracking of a lot of whips. I have heard all these strange noises at various times, but the greatest fright Marghet ever gave me happened one night when Albert and I were camping near a paperbark swamp, on a trek to take some horses to the men constructing the overland telegraph line. Gervase and two Noongars were leading the horses while I rode in the trap with Albert, the tents, provisions and food for the horses. We arrived at our camping place on the banks of a paperbark swamp early in the afternoon. The centre of this particular swamp was full of rushes and we knew snakes were about.

Paperbark swamps contain fresh water. The crooked limbs of the paperbarks which fringe the swamp's outer edges appear as though swathed in white blotting paper. The bark peels off in unexpected places showing pink blotting paper underneath. Sombre dark green leaves impervious to light make the water appear dark and sullen. Numerous dead paperbarks with decayed black and sodden trunks extend far beyond the outer range of live trees.

Paperbark can be cut off in large, thick sheets. It becomes tough and light to carry when dry and does not burn easily. It is therefore a favourite bark for the rooves of *mias*. However Noongars are not fond of paperbark swamps and avoid them if possible. When moving camp, I have often seen the women strip the bark off their old *mias* and carry great bundles of it away on their backs rather than go to the swamps to procure more.

Albert and I got everything ready for the horses, made our fires and pitched our tents. The sun set – still Gervase did not arrive. We decided to wait for supper no longer and put the billies on to boil. Suddenly we were startled by the sound of heavy rifle fire, apparently coming from the other side of the swamp. Then came a perfect fusillade of rifle shots. We had no idea what to do, for other than a shot-gun for hunting ducks, we had no firearms. We wondered whether some of the telegraph men had been trading their rifles to Noongars, who might be attacking Gervase. We hastily put out our fire and Albert seized his loaded shotgun and hurried towards the sound. I remained with the horses who were snorting with fright. The firing started

⁵² Possibly methane created by rotting vegetation on the lake bed or coal-seam gas (?)

again. I felt nearly frantic with terror, thinking we were being surrounded. To my relief Gervase rode up shouting, 'Whatever is the matter? Are you there, sis?' Good god! Are you alone?' I hurriedly explained that we thought he might have been ambushed and that Albert had gone to his assistance.

While we were speaking the firing seemed to come closer to us. Then the noise ceased and there was dead silence, broken only by croaking frogs. As we were anxiously discussing what we should do, the Noongars and horses arrived, but Albert wasn't with them. Gervase and one of the Noongars went to look for him while I waited with the other young Noongar in a state of anxiety I cannot describe.

I experienced an unutterable feeling of relief when they all appeared safe and sound, Gervase and Albert declaring they had seen nothing to indicate the source of the noise. The Noongars maintained the noises emanated from Marghet and told us tales of the fabulous sounds Marghet could make when wishing to drive intruders away. They begged us to move camp, but we were too afraid to go anywhere. Thus we passed a most uncomfortable night.

Though the swamp was far too big to ride all around without losing more time than we could afford to, at daybreak Albert rode the camp to where we suspected the noise had been made. On the boggy ground along the shores of paperbark swamps, tracks are usually easily spotted, but nothing was in evidence on this occasion. I am inclined to believe the sounds must have been made by night birds⁵³, although I had previously only heard them once.

According to my Noongar friends, sometimes when Marghet is travelling during a drought, or when he gets too far from waterways, he sinks into the ground and water comes out of him making strange mounds of mud⁵⁴. I have seen some of these curious mounds in rocky country, about one and a half kilometres from a river bed. The mounds sat in groups of three or four; a few metres between each group. They stand about 1.2 metres high, about 90 centimetres to 1.2 metres in diameter and 1.8 to 2.1 metres around. They are made of a soft dark mud and a tiny spring seems to bubble out of their cone-shaped tops. The most curious thing is the ground around the mounds is perfectly dry, though the springs are wet even in the driest of

⁵³ Possibly the rufous night heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*); Noongar *ngalganing*. I have listened to the sounds of all three birds with the word 'night' in their names; the other two being the Australian owlet-nightjar and spotted-nightjar, both found in the south-west. The heron is the only one whose call, in your wildest imagination you might mistake for a gun. It sounds more like a low *squawk cluck cluck* (sounds available on YouTube).

⁵⁴ See Appendix C

summers. Some of them bubble and eject lumps of type of coarse gravel varying from the size of a coconut to larger than a man's head. Curiously, the lumps are dry inside. Some of the mounds can throw stones up to 40 metres. When dry these stones reveal a lovely pattern of bright orange and dull grey earth. The mound-spring water is delightfully soft and feels effervescent on the skin. I don't know how deep the springs are; but when once I inserted a 1.8 metre-long spear in a mound to search for the bottom the spear was simply sucked down. Once, I widened the top of a mound with a cup and collected some muddy water. Though I left it to stand for nearly an hour the mud did not settle and the water was undrinkable.

Marghet was said to revisit various places occasionally to keep them damp. He did not seem to do any particular harm beyond drowning Noongars if they went too far into the lakes or frightening them out of their wits by making strange and unaccountable noises when they intruded on his privacy.

Goombar Jannock, is the Big Spirit. Long, long ago when the Noongars were very tall, large men and women, it once rained so much that they had to go to the mountain top to get away from the rising water. Many of them drowned and all the children died. When they came down from the mountain top food was scarce. Most of the animals had perished and the edible roots had rotted in the ground. The few children born were very small and few survived. The people gradually became smaller and thinner.

One Noongar had lost both his *yorks*; drowned in the rising waters. There were no *gnanes* (marriageable girls) for him to marry and though several *cooning* (babies) had been born and betrothed to him they all died in infancy.

He left the group and went deep into the forest where the *geize*⁵⁵ stick plants grow into tall trees and there he lives alone. He is tall, wide and heavy. He has long white hair on his head and all over his face: only his nose and eyes are visible. (I must mention that long-haired, heavily-bearded Noongars are rare.) He has no *york*. He carries an immense *doark* (throwing stick) and very long *geize*. On his back he carries a huge *coot* and he wanders about all day and night, never sleeping. Should he meet an unwary Noongar out collecting sticks to make *geize*, he seizes him and

⁵⁵ Spears were also made from rushes and hard woods. In the Mallee area of WA, spears were made from the green wood of *Acacia acuminata*, the raspberry jam tree, *Acacia burkittii* (sand hill wattle) and or gum trees. The plant known as spearwood is *Kunzea ericifolia*, a coastal plant. The species growing in the Jerramungup area is *Kunzea ericifolia* subsp. *Subulata*.

puts him into his *coot* and the Noongar is never heard of again. Some Noongars say he eats his victims; others say he is just lonely and wants a *york*, but as the *yorks* never go to get sticks for making *geize* he can only catch men. This sends him into a rage and he kills the men and throws their bodies into thick bush where no one will ever find them.

He does not seem to do any particular harm outside his own provinces which are the thick, deep forests in the Mallee country. But his existence is most firmly believed in. Should a Noongar disappear and his body not be found, it is believed *Goombar Jannock* has got him. As the Noongar's death was not caused by human hands it is not avenged in the traditional manner. As there is no body to bury there are no burial fires, making it easy for Noitch to catch the lost Noongar's spirit. It is a terrible thing for a man or his spirit to fall into *Goombar Jannock's* hands.

The spirit Gnolum takes the form of a very tall, very thin man and has a long wispy beard. He wears no *quaark* but has his totem is *cubine* (the mopoke) and he has *cubine* feathers stuck all over his head. He has very big round eyes that can see everywhere and he carries a long thin wand about three times as tall as himself. He holds it straight up in front of him and twists his arms and hands round it to keep it in position. As he moves he kicks it and makes a strange track which is occasionally seen in parts of the forest. He uses the wand to knock the tops off the sheoak trees whilst looking for *bardi* grubs.

He is so tall that on sunny days and on very bright moonlit nights the Noongars can see his eyes peering through the tops of the trees (the rest of him is invisible). No one knows where he lives or goes when it's dark. He likes stealing Noongar boys. He comes to them when they are away from camp and tries to coax them to go away with him by offering them the sweet shoots of *mungar* trees. You can often see where he has been digging them up. Should any boy be foolish enough to eat the *mungar* roots or *bardi* grubs given to him by Gnolum, he will be coaxed away and never heard of again. Gnolum's eyes will search him out and compel him to follow. If he manages to resist, his only chance of escape is to hide when Gnolum's eyes are turned away from him and run home.

Though the other Noongars see Gnolum he never offers them food or in any way attempts to coax them to follow him. He has no power over women and girls or grown men.

On the coast there are other *jannocks*. Some live in the sea and are occasionally seen in the form of waterspouts. They are viewed with the greatest terror, for the meeting of sea and the sky, except at the edge of the earth, is an unholy union and a waterspout can bring nothing but misfortune to those unlucky enough to see it. Therefore if a Noongar should happen to see the sea rising up and the clouds lowering to meet it, he should inform his group. They will destroy their camp and move as far inland as their boundaries will allow them and will let a long time lapse before they revisit that place.

Once we were driving around the coast came across a bare cliff covered with rocks and numerous shrubs. The 200 metre-high cliffs sheered down to the sea and waves crashed against them with great force. As we drove on we heard a curious noise like a humming top. We turned in the direction of the humming and traced it to its source: a cleft between two large buried rocks about 800 metres from the sea. As we examined these rocks there was suddenly a rush of wind from the cleft and we realised we had stumbled on one of the wonderful blow holes we had heard the Noongars discussing. We picked up boughs from trees and placed them on the edge of the cleft. Every now and then we would hear a rush of water, a loud humming and then the bough would be blown about six metres in the air. We dropped stones down the cleft and could not hear them touch the bottom.

We drove towards the sea and found it running into a large fissure in the land.⁵⁶ The indentation was more than 800 metres long and I fancy must have been still longer underground for it sounded hollow. As we walked we could see earth falling into the void in certain spots and realised we were crossing a dangerous place. But the wild and solitary grandeur of sea and rock was truly wonderful. Every now and then with a mighty roar the sea poured into the fissure and foamed out in a whirl of white. As it drew back it seemed to make the peculiar humming sound we had heard at the blowholes and when it rushed back in it made a sound like a terrible blast of air escaping through a natural chimney.

Back at the camp I was enthusiastically describing this place to Gervase. The Noongar sitting near us became uneasy and told us never to go to there again. Sometimes, he said, the Noongars who hunted there got carried away when chasing the *quaka* (wallaby), and didn't notice how close they were to the edge of the fissure until it was too late. Some were killed when the earth crumbled under their feet and

⁵⁶ Possibly the 'Gap' near Albany

they disappeared into the waves. He told us a *jannock* lived at this place and the noises we had heard were made by him as he was getting ready to go out and about. This *jannock* did not always make a noise; sometimes he would lie quietly for a long time. When he was noisy, something was going to happen. He could not tell us what was to happen but urged us to leave the area as soon as we could. Indeed, he said, it was a miracle that we had escaped with our lives.

As our work was finished we took his advice and started inland that afternoon. It was a good thing we did for that night there was a terrific thunderstorm. Thankfully we were camped in a sheltered spot; if we had been on the open, bare cliff near the fissure we would have been exposed to the full fury of the storm. The Noongars rejoiced that we had seen the wisdom of their advice and tried to extract a promise from us all never to go near the spot again.

Chapter Nine

It had been humid and thundery for the previous two days and my head ached. I saw Tupin and Waymen with their babies on their backs wending their way to the wood heap and knew if I did not greet them they would sit there patiently all afternoon until I appeared. I went out shortly after they arrived. The heat was intense. Along the southern horizon was a heavy bank of black clouds from which lightning occasionally flashed. It was so distant that I feared the storm would not come close enough to clear the air.

I was with the girls for some time feeling too languid to talk and vaguely listening to their conversation when we heard a long mutter of thunder and I fervently hoped the storm was coming our way. Again the thunder growled and rumbled. 'Waitch tired, very tired,' said Tupin.

Waymen nodded. 'Long time to settle down; very heavy load today.' My interest was roused.

'What are you talking about?' I asked, 'There are no *waitch* around – no green grass!'

'Oh Missus,' laughed Tupin, 'Waitch not here, Waitch far away. There, she move again!' as the thunder rumbled again.

'Can you tell me the story, Tupin?' I asked, 'I am tired today. Is it anything like the *Chudic* story?'

Waymen grinned. 'Tupin tells stories well. Tell Missus, Tupin!'

Tupin was a good story teller with a significant knowledge of Noongar lore, passed to her by her mother old Yilgar and her husband old Winmar.

'Well Missis, you *male* (remember) Waitch in the sky among the *gindies* (stars).'

'Yes Tupin,' I replied, 'I look at her every night.'

'Long time ago Waitch was blown up into the sky in smoke from a big big fire by a big big wind but when she got there she found no place to stop so she went to the moon and tried to rest between the moon's horns. By and by the moon got fat and round and squeezed Waitch out. Waitch went to the sun but the Noongars in the sun said they did not want her there – she talked too much. She went to the *gindies* and asked them to give her a place to camp in. The *gindies* talked together and they

said, 'Our job is to keep the Earth in place and we have to stay close together. We can't go out and hunt and play for if we did the Earth might drop, but we are tired of being close together.' They told Waitch if she wanted to camp with them she must help share their load. Waitch agreed to this and the *gindies* spread out and let Waitch settle down in between them.

After a while the *gindies* became cunning. Little by little they moved away from Waitch and gave her more room. As they did so they put more and more of the weight of the Earth onto Waitch's back until she was holding up the Earth completely on her own. Now Waitch was afraid to grumble too much because she had no other place to go. By and by she had to spread her wings to keep the load in place. It was terribly heavy but Waitch dared not fold her wings for the *gindies* told her if she let a little bit of the Earth drop she would be blown away again.

Sometimes she can't help letting little bit of Earth drop and then it looks like a *gindie* is falling from the sky. She is afraid to do it too often. When she gets very very tired she groans and moves her burden from one wing to the other and while she is doing that the weather is very hot and you can hear her groaning. Sometimes when she moves her head she does it with a jerk and then the whole earth trembles. That frightens her too. She grumbles and groans all the time with the effort of trying to move gently. If she makes too much noise the Noongars in the sun get angry and make it dark and send out flashes of light to frighten Waitch and make her quiet. When it rains very hard it means Waitch is crying because her burden is so heavy.

After a while she quietens again and rests. Sometimes the *gindies* cluster together and help her out a little bit and keep her quiet. They don't do it often for they are afraid if they get too close together Waitch might suddenly shove the whole Earth back onto their backs again.

'But Tupin,' I asked, 'Is the earth round like a big ball (I held up a ball of crochet cotton) or square like the box I am sitting on?'

'Round like a ball,' both the girls promptly replied.

'How do you know?' I asked.

'Oh Missus – just look all around you – see the sky touching the earth all around. Wherever you stand and look it is all around. Put baby down to walk and he soon run around. Not always straight like along a fence. See ship get lost they run round.'

Yonger run straight very little then run around and Missus white man know it!' cried Waymen excitedly. "When that white man got lost in the Mallee and Wynne tracked him he go round and round.'

'Yes Missus,' chimed in Tupin, 'All trees are round, all bushes grow round. Missus, why do you ask us?'

Here the problem of the form of the Earth was solved with simple logic. The answer to my question and the reasoning it contained were unexpected. The girls were so sure of their facts that I didn't know what to say. I felt relieved to see the storm was rapidly approaching. 'Well girls,' I said, 'You had better get back to camp as quick as you can; I think Waitch is about to cry very hard.'

The girls jumped up, glanced at the sky and in a moment were racing each other back to camp. In spite of the babies they bore on their backs I think a horse would have had difficulty keeping up with them.

Shortly afterwards the storm broke and the rain poured down in sheets. The next day the country was in flood. The river came down in with a roar and joined the brook. Trees and bushes were torn from the riverbanks as the waters foamed over the huge rocks and boiled and churned up the pools below, widening the river by a few metres. Where I had walked with dry feet 24 hours earlier would now not be safe for a horse to cross. This storm signalled the end of summer. Though we had many lovely days afterwards, thunderstorms were frequent and the days shortened.

In early spring the old women came up to bid me goodbye. My friends and the neighbouring Noongar groups, mostly friends and relatives, had decided that the time was right to hold a big *yardie*. They would come together for ceremonies, discussions and trade. The girls were all very excited; a number of the boys were *gnarnooka*; that is they had grown hair on their faces and were of a marriageable age. They had been sending *cort* sticks to the girls.

Cort sticks are Noongar love letters; from 10 to 15 centimetres long with squares and circles carved on them. The ends are rounded and smeared with *wilgie*. The decorative carving is done with a sharp piece of flint or the front tooth of a kangaroo. Each stick varies as to the number and size of the squares, oblongs or circles according to the taste of the carver. The length of the *wilgie* smear on each end indicates the depth of the sender's affection.

It was the custom for a number of young lads to be taken from one group and sent to the next. The second group in its turn sent a number of boys to a third group and so on down the line for between eight and ten groups. Each group in its turn sent a number of boys back down the line, so in each group there were certain boys who were 'exchange members'. Sometimes the boys were returned to their parent group under the care of one or two elderly men, and coinciding with the *yardie*, several of the boys who had been living with different groups would return to their homes.

There are two important ceremonies in which the boys take part before, and at the conclusion of their exchange visits. These are the *Noilyet*⁵⁷ and the *Poining Gumbar*⁵⁸. The *noilyet* takes place before the boys leave the parent group. They are all collected one evening and stand before the camp fire. A thin, hard, solid kangaroo leg bone is broken into two pieces about 6 centimetres long, each of which is ground to a fairly sharp point. This bone is very fine ivory; flat on one side and slightly rounded on the other and about a third of a centimetre wide. As the boy stands facing the fire, his father or male next-of-kin firmly holds his head with both hands while the *mulgar*, with a sharp, pointed, fire-hardened stick pierces the boy's septum and thrusts the piece of bone through the hole. As long as a boy remains away from his group the *noilyet* must stay in place. On his return the *mulgar* withdraws the bone in the presence of the whole group. The boy is then considered a man and is privy to men's rights and knowledge.

When the men go to war and leave the women behind, their *noilyets* are placed in their noses and remain there until peace is made. Usually it is worn square across the face. Should a Noongar be sent on a peace errand alone, the *mulgar* places the bone in his nose so that its curve turns upwards. The wearer is then recognised as a peace-maker and is respected as such by all the Noongars that he meets including the enemy group. He can safely enter the enemy's camp but must go straight to the *mulgars* before he speaks to any other member of the group.

Poining gumbar is one of the Noongars' most important ceremonies and unites boys as blood brothers. It can take place at any age but happens for the first time before a boy leaves his exchange group to return to his home. He selects the best male friend he has made in his exchange group to be his blood brother.

⁵⁷ In Rose Whitehurst's dictionary a nose-bone is *moolyambidi* (nose path).

⁵⁸ 'Big cutting' – in Rose Whitehurst's dictionary the two words are written as *borniny* and *koomba*.

Most important ceremonies take place in the evenings because that is usually the only time when all the members of the group are gathered together. In the presence of everyone the two boys stand by the fire, side by side facing the group. The *mulgar* makes some small incisions each about 1.3 centimetres long on each boy's right or left breast or arm or back depending on the tribal custom. The blood taken from each boy is mixed together on a flat stone, rubbed into each boy's wound and allowed to dry. The skin rises in a weal and the boys are forever marked as blood brothers or *poining* and are bound to help each other whatever the circumstances. If someone sees his *poining* in difficulties he must assist him even if it means opposing his own kin.

Some boys are away on exchange visits for two or three years and may take a year to get home. If they stay with a second group they may contract a second *poining* on their backs or chests according to group custom. *Poining gumbar* is a great safeguard against tribal warfare and generally it is the *poining gumbar* who are sent on peace errands. Thus the more *poining gumbar* there are in a group the greater its chance of being at peace with its neighbours.

Yardies did not happen at set times, although I think the dates may have been governed by some rules. The Noongars chose an area on the plains where food and water were plentiful and the people gathered at the chosen place just before the full moon. We drove out to the *yardie* one afternoon and found six groups encamped, each in its own quarter, leaving a means of escape so if a fight should occur.

A large number of small *mias* were built near the open plain where the young *gnarnocks* camped, supervised by some of the old men. The *gnanes* or marriageable girls were camped in another area guarded by all the old women. Between these two camps was another camp with larger *mias* to which the *gnarnocks* would take the *gnanes* when it was settled on who was marrying whom.

Geize sticks, flints, *wilgie*, *doarks* and various foods were traded while the old men and women held lengthy discussions on the matter of the impending marriages, though it seemed that the *gnarnocks* and *gnanes* did have some say in who they married. Of course kinships had to be carefully matched first, and if those betrothed as the infants had reached a marriageable age their unions had to be ratified, though a boy could get out of fulfilling his marital contract if his next of kin was willing to take it on in his stead. Some of the boys were allocated as husbands to quite elderly women and afterwards took a younger wife.

Marriages that had taken place between the previous and current *yardies* were ratified and if couples were not happy with each other they had a chance to separate. However, couples who took advantage of the *yardie* to do so seemed to be regarded with a certain disdain.

The wedding ceremony involved the boy pulling a few strands of hair from the girl's head which she then bound through his *barllee* (arm band). The couple stayed in one of the marriage *mias* for two or three days and when they rejoined their group, another couple took their place in the *mia*. This continued until all the marriage ceremonies had been performed.

Arrangements were made as to which boys would leave their groups for exchange visits and where they would go. There was much hunting and feasting and corroborees were held every night. Many old differences were settled and there were frequent fights which seemed to clear the air. No feuds were carried on from one *yardie* to the next.

When the game became scarce the groups separated and return to their homelands accompanied by the exchange boys and newly married couples. They left the *yardie* one group after another. The last people to leave burned all the *mias* and many kilometres of the surrounding area. Within a week, beyond the blackened trunks of larger trees no trace of the *yardie* remained.

When my Noongar friends returned to camp I was surprised to see the new faces. Several boys I thought had belonged to their group had returned home to other groups and taken some of the young girls with them, as was customary. The girls were accompanied by men belonging to their group and returned within year having made new friends and sometimes marriage contracts.

There was much cheerful talk after the group returned for old friendships had been renewed. The women seemed to be in better spirits, but try as I might I could get very little information about the ceremonies which had taken place, many of which, as I gathered from a few hints which the old women dropped, were of a spiritual nature. Even the young girls had no information for me, or perhaps they had been bound to silence. When I began to ask questions the subject was changed or I was politely told not to be inquisitive. Noongars are very adept at diverting the conversation when questioned about any subject they do not wish to discuss.

Various rites were much more strictly observed after a *yardie*, as were food laws. There are certain animals such as the eagle hawk and the wild dog that the young folk are not allowed to eat. Should they catch these creatures they must always bring them home and hand them over to the old people. Other food laws state that certain meats may only be eaten by men, or people who are married.

Several of the boys had been hunting and found a wild dogs' nest in the hollow of a tree with five very young thin puppies in it. The boys were hungry and agreed they would eat the puppies, but they were too frightened to eat them all. They decided to eat two and bring the other three back to the camp, for often wild dogs only have three puppies in a litter and two would not be missed. Accordingly a fire was made; two puppies were roasted and devoured and the bones were carefully burnt so no one would discover the crime. The boys had also eaten a quantity of *chucks* (or wild cherries).

Soon after they arrived back at camp the boys were violently sick and suffered severe internal pain. They were very ill all night, fright adding to their discomfort. The following day they confessed to what they had done. As punishment it was decreed that for a certain time they must bring all the game they caught back to the group before eating it. The old *mulgar* explained that transgressing the rules had caused all the pain and sickness. Little *twerts* were reserved for elders. The boys would suffer in a similar way should they ever break the rules again.

On another occasion, two more frightened little boys learned a lesson about eating forbidden meats. There is a species of white ant or termite whose nests are pointed mounds of clay about 1.2 metres high. The outer crusts are very solid. We'd break the empty ones up with a pick, crush them, mix the crushed nests with water and use the mixture for flooring, smoothed down and levelled with a heavy wooden roller. The substance was almost like cement when dry and floor of the kitchen and the threshing room were made of this natural cement.

The outer crusts of the nests are about 30 centimetres thick and the centre of the nest is composed of dry, powdery sand and numerous brown cells, very like the cells in the comb of a honey bee attached to the hard inner crust.

Each stage in the life cycle of the white ant has a different name in the Noongar language. The eggs are called *cool*. Just before they hatch they are called *took-el-yuck*. When the cells get harder and assume the colour of dark wool the young ants

in them are called *car-hil* and at the last stage when the ants are winged and can fly they are *gnorlap*. The nests themselves are called *weet*. The women dig around them with their *wannas* and pick out the eggs. They put the soft earth and ants' eggs into sieves made of woven rushes bound with dried grass at each end, like a sort of cradle and gently sway it to and fro until all the earth has gone, leaving the eggs. The eggs are combined with wattle-seed flour and baked into cakes or roasted in heaps on a flat stone surrounded by a ring of burning sticks.

I have heard that in Queensland, a species of kingfisher scoops out holes in the base of these nests and makes small burrows in which to lay its eggs. The white ants fill up any holes which open into the centre of their mound but don't interfere with the birds' nests or their young. There is a species of iguana called *carta* by the Noongars, about 1.2 to 1.8 metres in length from head to tail (scientific name Gould's Monitor⁵⁹), which does a similar thing. She scrapes a small hole around 8 centimetres across through the hard outer crust of the ants' nest, makes a nest in the central soft earth and lays her eggs. The ants build up the cells and cover the hole with crust but leave the *carta* eggs intact. For two or three weeks the eggs are left to incubate in the heat the nest generates.

At the end of that interval, the parent *carta* comes back to reopen the hole and check on her eggs. The ant eggs are hatching out at about the same time and the ants need to maintain the heat in the nest. By midday the *carta* has scratched open the hole and by the evening ants have covered it up again. This goes on for five or six days until all the young *cartas* are hatched out.

We could always tell when there were *carta* eggs in a white ant nest because of the small round patch of different-coloured, softer clay in the outer crust. *Carta* eggs are about the size of a pigeon's egg with a very tough outer skin, rather than shell. When roasted in wood ashes they are delicious, resembling very rich custard in taste and appearance, for the yolk and albumen seem to be mixed together. The difficulty is in telling which eggs have just been deposited from those about to hatch, for the *cartas* seem to be laying and hatching all summer.

One morning young Minden and Perriup, boys of about seven and eight discovered a soft patch on a nest and with their little *wannas* set to work to break in and get the *carta* eggs. It was not a freshly made nest; but one into which the parent *carta* had been breaking regularly to check her eggs. The boys had no right to eat the eggs

⁵⁹ *Varanus gouldii* – racehorse goanna

because they were considered food for old men and women, but they ate them anyway; even the ones in a half-hatched state.

The parent *carta* came along to perform her morning task of checking her eggs and seeing the plunder taking place, rushed up onto Minden's back as he was stooping down and fastened her powerful claws to his head. With a howl of terror Minden jumped up and tried to free himself, whilst Perriup scampered up the nearest tree.

With some difficulty Minden managed to repel his attacker. However when a *carta* is frightened it will run over or up any obstacles in its escape-path. Thus as soon as the *carta* had been repulsed by Minden she ran up the tree in which Perriup was taking refuge. Perriup sat motionless, terrified of attracting her attention, and Minden, scratched and bleeding, stood below the tree afraid to move in case the *carta* came down and attacked him. Gervase found them amongst eaten eggs and baby *cartas*, baled up by an enraged mother *carta* clinging to the side of the tree!

Chapter Ten

One afternoon in the New Year, I received a visit from some of the Noongar girls, bringing with them a stranger, who appeared to physically different to my friends. Her name was Werriben. She was a *Karkar*⁶⁰, quite a different group to my friends'. She was of a smaller build with a rounder, plumper face and very large, round, dark eyes with big pupils. The Noongar girls had finally persuaded her to visit me and she seemed terrified by her unfamiliar surroundings. The girls explained that Dongup, a young man of the group had been away droving cattle around Esperance Bay. While droving he had met and married Werriben and lived with the Karkars. Before he and Werriben returned to Jerramungup, Dongup was made *poining gumbar*; then he and Werriben set out for home passing from group to group, through Bremer Bay, arriving home a day or two ago.

Werriben had learned a little English. The girls seemed to regard her as a sort of showpiece and said many of her customs were different to theirs. I wondered how she would get on with them all, and invited her to come up to see me as often as she liked. I noticed that her *boork* was fastened with a piece of mutton-fish shell⁶¹, the inside of which is beautiful mother-of-pearl. This had been roughly ground and measured about 6 centimetres long and 5 centimetres wide with a slightly curved shape showing the pearly inside. It was the only time I ever observed an Aboriginal woman wearing a decorative item.

Werriben's complexion was more of a chocolate black than the complexion of my friends, and one of her front teeth had been knocked out; a marriage custom practiced by the Esperance Bay Noongars. She seemed so very young; away from her friends and a stranger in a strange country and I felt sorry for her. I wondered whether she would attempt to run away after a while, as sometimes happens and contract an alliance with another man. Despite the frequency of wives leaving and making new alliances, the husband always has prior claim and can make her return to him whenever he chooses. General opinion is always on his side and fierce battles are sometimes the consequence. Once a woman is received into a group she belongs to that group and members resent her attempting to leave.

⁶⁰ In the language database <http://www.ausanthrop.net/>, Karkar and Caskar are shown as alternative names for the Wudjeri Noongar people of Bremer Bay. According to anthropologist Norman Tindale, *Karkar* means 'east' and is the name applied to the Wudjari people by the Willman people.

⁶¹ Abalone shell

Werriben was so far from home, and there were so many groups between my friends' group and hers that she had little chance of getting home. She and I became friends, for she was undoubtedly lonely. She would slip away from camp and sit in the corner of the verandah watching me at work, a curious wistful look in her large round eyes, which never seemed to lose their timid expression. She very quickly picked up more English and we talked about her country. She drew me pictures in the sand of places around her home and Albert, who had been to Esperance Bay, recognised many of the spots she drew. Her perspective was fairly good; she drew animals in their various attitudes with wonderful accuracy and seemed to capture the spirit of the pose. She was also skilful at drawing scenery, but human faces and figures she could not portray. I have often regretted that I did not give her paper to draw on, but paper and pencils were scarce and valuable commodities in those days.

My Noongar friends were delighted with her talent and we had some amusing drawing competitions. My friends drew trees, rocks and animals, but never managed to depict the house. Werriben could tell when the girls' pictures were inaccurate but did not seem to be able to show the girls where they had gone wrong, though she would often rub out part of a picture and put it right herself.

One lovely starlit night, when Albert and Dongup were away overnight droving some sheep, Werriben slipped away from the camp and appeared at my doorway. I asked her if she was lonely. She gave me a wistful smile and said, 'You and me alike, far away from our own country.' I heartily agreed with her and sat down on the doorstep to chat. We discussed the sea, but her powers of description in English were limited. Then we began to talk of the sun, the moon and the stars. After some conversation, I gleaned the following legend of the Southern Cross.

A long long time ago there was no *gindie* cross in the sky. The *gindies* were all clustered together in the Milky Way and there were wide open spaces between the clusters. Sometimes one cluster of *gindies* visited one another. *Gindies* still travel, but now and then they get lost and we can see them falling down to earth. Sometimes they travel to and from their own country and if we watch the heavens carefully we can see them moving. But the Southern Cross is different to all other clusters: its *gindies* never travel because they are women.

These women lived close to the sea where the earth and water touch the sky. Once, their group travelled a long distance and at dusk stopped at a camping place where

the forest and the waterhole were separated by a treeless plain. They built their *mias* close to the forest and ate supper. Several of the girls were given big pieces of bark and asked bring water back to the camp for the children who were tired after the journey.

Instead of coming straight back to camp, these girls began to play and to waste the water, scooping it up with the bark containers and splashing themselves until after sunset. The men became anxious when they did not return and went to look for them. When they found the girls playing they were so angry that they took out their hunting spears and prodded the girls in the calves of their legs. The girls put the bark containers over their legs to protect them and ran as fast as they could; the men in pursuit, throwing their spears. As the girls ran a big wind sprang up and blew them into the sky where they became stars of the Southern Cross. They scattered out so much that they are not clustered like other *gindies*. They stay up in the sky because they are afraid that if they came home, the men will still be so angry that they'll kill them. They are now a lesson to other girls not to play on the way to and from collecting water. They are so far apart from each other they can never find a man and never be married.

I pointed out several other bright stars to Werriben and asked whether she could tell me anything about them but she shook her head. Apparently this was the only tale about the sky that she knew.

The Noongars very rarely carry water for they have nothing in which to carry it. Occasionally they will strip broad sheets of bark and fold the ends together: the sides naturally curl so the container resembles a canoe. In this they carry a little water a short distance to the camp to mix their cakes. But after a meal they always go to the shallow waterholes and scoop the fluid up with their hands. They drink very sparingly – I do not think they need much water as nearly all their foods have a high water-content.

Chapter Eleven

On the previous morning the women were sent to collect some sheep about five kilometres away and shepherd them back across the river. On their way home they'd found a honey tree; a big tree in which wild bees had made their hive. What were sheep in comparison to a find like this?

The sheep were left to their fate while the women set to work to burn the tree down so it would fall in the right direction and they could smoke the bees out with green bushes. Now that takes time so the sheep wandered off where their own sweet wills dictated.

Meanwhile at the homestead Albert was becoming impatient and worried at the non-arrival of the sheep. Sometime after the anticipated hour of arrival had come and gone, a Noongar was dispatched on horseback to see what had happened to the women. He found them just as the honey tree was about to fall and decided to help them collect the honey. Bark had to be found, stripped from trees and bent into shape to make containers for the honeycomb.

It was getting near to sunset and no one had returned. We became more and more agitated and concluded something serious must have happened to the women and our tracker. Gervase mounted his horse and rode off to look for them. He found them about 1.6 kilometres from the homestead laden with honey in bark baskets but unaccompanied by sheep. Where were the sheep?

'The sheep? Oh we lose them.' was the chorus, 'But look mister what lovely honey! Taste some – it is very good!' Gervase could not help laughing despite his annoyance. It was far too late to try to find the sheep so he rode back to the homestead and told us what had happened. By and by the women and children straggled in, sticky from head to foot, carrying bark baskets of honey in new and old comb. They were perfectly delighted with their find, anxious to share it and surprised that we had been worried about them. Albert was angry and stated we would not be providing any more suppers till the sheep were found, though privately it was decided that if the Noongars came up to the house we would give them food for the children. We were quite sure they would put in an appearance as soon as they were certain Gervase and Albert were out of the way so I saved some food for them.

The following day the search for the sheep started before daylight, and by evening the search party had still not returned. In the afternoon I received a deputation from the younger women; they brought me a basket of beautiful honeycomb and two birds' nests. Would I coax Mister to give them some food, they asked - the children were hungry and Gillan's husband had beaten her. This really was terrible, for a Noongar very rarely lifts a hand to his wives or children. The women explained that the men had been on hunting expedition to provide supper but hadn't caught enough *coomals* and *boodies*. Gillan's husband might beat her again and other husbands might follow his example. It was too dreadful to think of. They would never do such a thing again, they said; indeed if a tree laden with honey fell right across their path they would walk away from it.

Yilgar and Gimbuck hadn't been involved in the honey gathering so they did not join the search for the missing sheep, however they had been asked to go down to the river to assist at the sheep's crossing the previous day and had not moved from the camp. Consequently they too had missed out on last night's supper and came to see me later in the afternoon. It was their practice never to tell me plainly what they wanted but to beat around the bush and hint until their meaning was clear to me. Nothing annoyed them more than when I failed to get the hint! Gimbuck opened the discussion by informing me that on the way up to the house she had found a ground lark⁶²'s nest with five eggs in it. She wanted to bring the eggs to me but said they had broken and that she was so hungry she had eaten them, shells and all. I said that it was unfortunate but remarked that there were plenty of ground larks about and that possibly she would find more nests with eggs. Yilgar said she had found a *bardi* grub⁶³ (a large white larva found in the roots and the bark of many trees). *Bardi* grubs are greatly prized by the Noongars and eaten raw or roasted. I have eaten them roasted and their flavour resembles pound almonds and cream. Yilgar said she was going to bring the grub to me but she too was hungry and had eaten it. I said I was sorry but trusted that later on in the season more would be found.

There was dead silence for a time. A large ant came out of the wood heap. Yilgar pounced on it then dropped it saying, 'Cannot eat it – *couburne*⁶⁴ (totem).'

⁶² An alternate name for the Australasian Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*). The Jerramungup Noongar name may have been *Piek Piek*.

⁶³ The larva of *Trictena atripalpis*; a moth of the Hepialidae family.

⁶⁴ This word means 'friend' as well as 'totem'. In the Whadjuk region the words for friend are *koobong* or *babbin* (as recorded by Daisy Bates speaking to Jubaitch of Guildford).

'Rubbish, Yilgar,' I said, 'Your totem is *towran*.' (*Towran* is a beautiful green parrot with a black and blue head and a deep yellow ring around its neck.)⁶⁵

Gimbuck gazed on the ant. 'I am so hungry, I must eat it,' she said, 'I don't think it will matter,' knowing perfectly well that neither she nor Yilgar had the least intention of eating the ant.

'Tupin and I had to unwind Pungin's *noolman* and make it tighter this morning,' announced Yilgar. There was another silence during which the ant wandered out of sight. If a man has to tighten his *noolman*, or belt, it means food is very scarce. The women will be hungry too for a man must keep up his strength to hunt and feed the women. Yilgar had no husband and Pungin, married to her grand-daughter⁶⁶ was bound to feed her.

This was too much. I burst out laughing. 'You precious pair of humbugs⁶⁷! I suppose you want some food!' Yilgar looked a little abashed. I went to the kitchen and got them the plate of food I'd saved.

When Gimbuck had finished eating she produced her spinning paraphernalia from her *coot*. The *coba*⁶⁸ contains the fur to be spun and the wool already spun. It is made from the paunch of a possum turned inside out and scraped. I did not mention it to the women, but the paunch looked remarkably fresh and I strongly suspected the *Coomal* had been caught the previous evening. If I had asked them why they were so hungry when there was meat at camp, they may have put the spinning away or wandered off, so I held my tongue and delightedly watched the fascinating process of spinning.

It is wonderful how quickly the Noongars can make *Coomal* wool; both the men and women make it, sitting around the camp fire on fine winter evenings. They prefer the *Coomal*'s winter coat to its summer coat because in winter the fur is more dense and firmer.

⁶⁵ Australian ringneck (*Barnardius zonarius*) or 'twenty eight parrot' as it is commonly known in Western Australia.

⁶⁶ Earlier the author indicated Yilgar was Tupin's mother, but Tupin was married to Pungin and is more likely to have been Yilgar's granddaughter.

⁶⁷ Pretenders or deceivers

⁶⁸ *Koool* - stomach

There are two kinds of spinning sticks or *waupull*. One set is made of two round pointed sticks; one about 20 centimetres long and the other about 10 centimetres long and as thick as a little finger. A hole is made about eight centimetres from the end of the longer stick and the small stick is passed through it thus making the form of a cross.

The other kind comprises a thicker stick about 20 centimetres long and two sticks about 10 centimetres long and as thick as my finger. Two holes are made in the long stick eight centimetres from one end and smaller piece of stick passes through each hole. These are held in place by a piece of wool.

The fur of the large grey possum is pulled off by hand when the animal is freshly killed and still warm. It is tightly packed into the paunch of the animal. The stick is inserted into the paunch through the gutting hole and fur is drawn out with the left hand. The fur is formed into worsted⁶⁹ by rolling the fibres on the left thigh with the right hand. The spun wool is kept on the cross stick until it is full, then wound into a ball about 180 metres in length. The wool is about the thickness of four-ply and feels strong and delightfully soft.

It is worn by the men in three ways: the *barlkee* – a few strands wound around their heads when they dress for a corroboree, the *barlee*: about half a dozen strands around the top of their right arms, and the longest item; the belt or *noolman*. If a man is very hungry and loses girth, the *noolman* is unwound and rewound as tight as he can bear; the narrow strands placed close together then one on top of the other. The belts vary in width from 8 to 12 centimetres, are about 5 centimetres thick. I didn't think Yilgar would have had time to wind and unwind Pungin's belt as it can be a morning's work, and her story did not impress me as much as she hoped.

I had been watching old Gimbuck spinning, seated on a log with her *boork* pulled across so that her left arm was bare. I was perfectly fascinated with the rapidity with which she was filling her sticks when I heard a satisfied grunt from Yilgar, and 'York got sheep.' Sure enough I could faintly hear the baaing of sheep in the distance.

'That's not *york*, that's Mister,' I said.

'Oh Missus,' responded Yilgar with contempt, 'Mister come that way.' She pointed to the south-west. '*York* come that way.' She pointed to the south.

⁶⁹ **Worsted** is a type of wool yarn, the fabric made from this yarn, and a yarn weight category. The name derives from Worstead, a village in the English county of Norfolk.

I could see dust rising from the sheep being driven by Albert but no trace of anything in the direction in which Yilgar pointed.

Soon I discerned a band of women and children triumphantly driving a small mob of sheep homewards. The two mobs met close to the homestead gate and Albert was so joyful at their appearance that the women were forgiven for losing them and a hearty supper was served. I could not help saying sardonically to Yilgar as she walked off with a big piece of meat in her hand, 'It will be a long time before *you* get to eat as you and Tupin will now have to unwind Pungin's *noolman*!'

Chapter Twelve

One sunny afternoon as I walked past the native camp my curiosity was aroused by the sight of a new *mia* built some distance away from the other *mias*. There had been no deaths recently, so I went to investigate. The new *mia* was a larger construction than usual with a smaller *mia* built on to it. It was well sheltered; beneath a tree with a break-wind behind it.

In front of the *mia*, three or four women sat laughing and chattering. They had a large fire going (though it was not a cold day) and were busily sifting fine white wood ashes between their fingers, making a heap as soft and as fine as flour which they placed in the smaller *mia*.

On enquiring as to the purpose of the ash, I was told that Yiullen's little one was due to be born and they were making preparations. Yiullen, her mother and grandmother had taken up residence in this new *mia*. A beautiful thick bed of leaves had been made for Yiullen. Everything was ready.

I learned that it was customary for the mother-to-be to move to a temporary *mia* about a week before the expected arrival. Though visited by her lady friends, she was not permitted to go to the main camp. Yiullen's little boy, a child aged about three, was being taken care of by friends at the camp and was not allowed to go to his mother's *mia mia* (in this country *mia mia* is the confinement hut and *mia* is the home in the camp).

A day or two later, one of the women came up and told me a *gnane* (girl) had been born. I immediately went down to see the small stranger. The birth had taken place on the bed of leaves outside the *mia mia* at the foot of a tree. The baby had been taken into the smaller *mia* and well powdered all over with the fine wood ashes. Yiullen had been assisted into the small *mia* and the bed on which the baby was born had been immediately burned. When I arrived, mother and child were lying comfortably on a fresh bed of leaves by the fire.

Due to the ashes I could not see the baby's colour but I noticed that her palms and the soles of her feet were almost white. I don't think I have ever felt anything as soft as her small shoulders. I thought she looked quite small, but having no knowledge of Noongar babies could not express any opinion. Yiullen seemed happy and content and she and the other women were already discussing finding a husband for the newborn. It was the custom to betroth all infant girls to a man or a youth who was

expected to provide a certain amount of food for the child should the parents die or the mother be captured by another group. He would support her and she would be taken care of by his female relatives until she was old enough to be his wife. He was not expected to remain single all that time; he was entitled to take a wife when he was old enough and should he wish it his first wife would take charge of and bring up the wife-to-be.

I have seen several cases where this has occurred and the two wives have been the greatest of friends. The younger one has helped with the children and cared for the older wife in sickness while the older has always been with the younger during the birth of her children. The arrangement seemed to work well and was apparently designed to provide protection for women both young and old.

On the baby's second day of life, Yiullen walked to my house to see me. The baby seemed to hang on and support herself on her mother's skin though I think Yiullen's *coot* must have been adding to the baby's support. Though Yiullen was able to visit me she was not able to go to the camp and none of the men went to her *mia mia*. She and her mother and grandmother remained in their little camp for four weeks. During that time no water was allowed to touch the infant, but she was well-dusted over with wood ashes three times a day. When it was time to return to the main camp the old grandmother set fire to the *mia mia* that had sheltered them and it was burned to the ground.

Many babies were born at the camp during my life on the station and the same practises were observed. A baby was always born under a big tree and a woman never gave birth under the same tree more than once in three years. I never managed to find out why this was. I often asked but was told it was the custom, and nothing more.

The birth of Yiullen's baby was impressed on my mind because through it I learned a Noongar belief, not only concerning the resurrection of the dead but of the spirit world. The Noongars have no god spirits; their spirits are mostly evil with a modicum of good.

When Yiullen's baby was about four months old, Yiullen was bitten by a small red spider⁷⁰. She was gathering dry sticks and leaves for the fire and picked up small piece of wood. The underpart was decayed and the spider had made its nest within.

⁷⁰ The physical description of the spider sounds very much like *nicodamus peregrinus* but these are not known to be lethal.

The species is about the size of a small pea. The legs are a most brilliant *scarlet* and the body a deep velvety blue. The spider is venomous and its bites seem to burn the skin. I have known some to recover from their bite, but Yiullen's wound was soon infected. Though it was lanced, burned with fire sticks and rubbed with red-hot wood ashes (all remedies that were freely used for both spider and snake bites before the advent of the whites), she died in great agony the following night and a great wailing and keening went up from the women. She was buried at daybreak and by midday the camp had been moved and the old one burned. Yiullen's little boy was taken into the care of his father's other wife. The baby was cared for by her paternal grandmother and was carried about by Woyeinong, one of her young half-sisters who was devoted to her.

As far as I knew, Yiullen's death was not avenged like old Winmar's (probably) was, unless it was done very quietly by someone well beyond Yiullen's immediate family. No one knew or said much about it and the Noongars did not break up camp and go away as they had after Winmar's death.

I often saw the baby and my heart ached for her. She was small and seemed to be pining away for want of proper nourishment. I had no milk and this was all before the days of tinned or condensed milk. I tried to feed the baby on boiled bread, sugar and water, and told Woyeinong to bring her up to the house two or three times a day for sustenance but it was no use. The old women said Yiullen's spirit was calling for her baby and it could not travel to the Far-Off Land without her. The baby heard her mother's voice and was fretting to go to her, they said.

The weather was frosty and Yiullen's grave fires burned brightly at night. The women said this was another sign that Yiullen would not start on her journey without her child and it was wrong of me to try to keep the infant in this world.

Woyeinong had become very fond of the baby and certainly tried her best to keep her alive. She even took the child with her when it was time to walk down to Yiullen's grave to replenish the grave fires so Yiullen's spirit would know her child was satisfied and being cared for.

One afternoon Woyeinong came to me weeping and told me Yiullen's spirit had taken the baby. Woyeinong had laid her under the big tree where she was born and had gone to the camp; when she returned the *boork* which she had rolled the baby up in

was there, but the baby had gone. She and the other children had searched far and wide to no avail.

The baby was never found and no one ever heard or said anything more about it. I questioned both Yilgar and Gimluck very closely but they maintained that the spirit mother had taken her baby. She had haunted the place where the child was born and Woyeinong had given her the opportunity to take the baby by laying her down in that spot.

After the baby's disappearance the frost broke up and we had some misty weather. Yiullen's grave fires did not burn as brightly, which assured the Noongars that Yiullen had claimed her baby and had started on her journey to the Far-Off land. The grave fires were kept burning for two weeks after the baby had vanished.

Of course there was a great deal of talk at the station about the baby's disappearance but though it was strongly suspected that one of the old women knew exactly what had happened, to us it remained a mystery. The Noongars themselves had no questions. The baby was under a year old and had been dependent upon her mother for her nourishment. What was more natural than for a mother to want her baby and for a baby to pine for its mother? It was good, they said, that Woyeinong had laid the baby down to sleep under her birth tree; it made it easier for Yiullen to take her. Yiullen's spirit would have undoubtedly haunted the group until she had claimed her child, they told me – it often happened with babies and the sooner they were taken off by their mothers, the better for the group.

I once asked whether the fathers ever wanted to take their children with them on their journey to the Far-Off Land but was told that children were not the same to men as they were to women. Perhaps this was related to the Noongars' matrilineal kinship system.

Some months after Yiullen's death, Wynne and Waymen returned from their bushwalk after over 18 months. It was then that I learned there was a reason why a man stalked on in front of his wife carrying only his weapons, while his patient spouse followed him loaded with household goods.

It was late summer. I had been for a long walk in the forest and was feeling rather tired. I sat down under one of the big trees and saw Waymen and Wynne in the distance, walking slowly in my direction. Waymen was pregnant and seemed overloaded with the couple's possessions though Wynne carried only his *geize* and

meera. When they reached me, I said to Wynne, 'And I suppose if there was a baby she would have to carry that as well!'

'Oh yes Missus,' Wynne replied, 'Suppose I carry *coot* and *cooning* and Waymen carry *geize* and *meera* and and you were a Pardook.⁷¹ By the time I drop *cooning* and *coot* and get *geize* and *meera* from Waymen the Pardook's *geize* would be through me and Waymen. No Missus, I walk in front and throw *geize* first when Waymen go behind me so if I'm killed she can run away and hide and get back to the group before Pardook catch her.'

The morning after Wynne and Waymen's arrival I noticed the women were busily erecting a *mia* like the one they had made for Yiullen. I went to investigate in the afternoon and found the women all hard at work sifting ashes. They told me they were in a hurry: Wynne and Waymen had delayed their return until it was almost too late. Each group has its well-defined internal boundaries and families may occupy their own separate area within the group's region, but a woman should give birth close to her female relatives on her original home ground. It transpired that Wynne and Waymen had been camped on their country close to the edge of its boundary

A Noongar's home land or that of his (or her) ancestors was a vital part of his life. Noongars who were very ill were often carried considerable distances so they could die near their family and ancestral burial grounds. I knew of one occasion on which, the Noongars carried a deceased relative back to his home ground over many kilometres. Fires were lit about every 1.6 kilometres and half the country was on fire by the time they arrived. We all thought the smoke indicated another group of Noongars was nearby, but when the funeral party appeared they were only ten in number. They bypassed the camp and went straight to the burial ground where the body was hastily buried. The keening started at sunset, just as though the deceased had died in the camp, but the camp was not moved because the death had occurred elsewhere. The transportation of the deceased to his home ground was exceptional: Noongars have an aversion to handling dead bodies.

Waymen's baby was born the next day; a fine strong boy, welcomed with a corroboree that night. Waymen came to see me the following day but did not stay long, saying she she was a bit tired. Old Gimbuck accompanied her, bursting with the important news that a new *mulgar* was coming, and he was somehow related to her. She said Wynne had discovered him and that he was a wonderful *mulgar* with

⁷¹ Pardook – see Chapter 19

some extremely good *booliah* (wizard stones). She said the *booliah* I had found and given her was only a women's *booliah*. Here she whispered, 'Missus, don't tell you found it, I pick it up in the gulley near the river.'

It was undoubtedly a good *booliah* as Waymen had held it in her hand and wished hard for a *nop cullum* (baby boy). Two other women had wished for the same while holding the stone and each time a *nop cullum* had arrived. It had also cured Woyeinong who had burnt her hand with her *carla*. It must be a woman's *booliah* as it had been no use in curing 'the Last *Mulgar*', as she referred to Winmar. (A Noongar will never mention a deceased person by name.)

Buckerup, the new *mulgar* arrived a few days later. He belonged to another branch of the group, and was a particularly stern-looking old man. He had lots of long grey hair and his face was covered with short curly hairs. His eyes were red and watery and his beard and whiskers were slightly powdered with *wilgie* which gave his face a peculiar red tint. To Noongars eyes his appearance was absolutely correct; in fact they considered him a high-class *mulgar* and their pride was restored. Most *mulgars* were old men. Occasionally I met a middle-aged *mulgar*, but I think he had succeeded an old man and taken the contents of his *coot* when he died.

Buckerup had a wonderful collection of *booliah*, and as a great favour to me, mainly through Gimluck's influence, he allowed me to see them. I felt rather smug when I found that Gervase and Albert were not allowed the same privilege. They were very anxious to get a peep particularly when I told them there were some very interesting mineral specimens in Buckerup's collection. He had some pieces of copper ore, and some iron-stones I am certain were meteorites. One of the *booliah* was the size and shape of a goose egg but of a dark green colour⁷² and extremely heavy and smooth. Indeed when I first saw it I thought it was a small emu egg. Buckerup also had two pieces of iron ore, square and exactly like black dice without the spots,⁷³ and pieces of black stones rather like large shot. Other curious stones were grey with jet-black stones speckled throughout.⁷⁴

All the stones had differing degrees of magic; some were for rain, some for sickness and some for wickedness and curses. The greenish copper stones were to make

⁷² Possibly chrysoprase

⁷³ Possibly 'Devils Dice' from the Mt Magnet region of WA or thereabouts.

⁷⁴ Probably breccia, from roughly the same locality as the Devils Dice.

the grass grow, the blue copper stone was to make the sun shine and the emu egg stone was for something extra special: making game more plentiful.

Being a *mulgar*, Buckerup carried a *coot*, but unlike a woman's *coot* it was made with the furry side in and the leather side out. Otherwise he wore the usual outfit of an ordinary Noongar. Only his *coot* proclaimed him to be a *mulgar*. He was a shrewd old fellow and often came up to the house for a quiet chat but he would never tell me where he found his copper specimens. When I began to question him he would divert the conversation by telling me a piece of camp gossip totally irrelevant to the subject of stones.

Rain-making generally started when there was a likelihood of rain. Buckerup would select his meteorite rain-making *booliah* and stand out in the sun at midday for about fifteen minutes showing the sun the *booliah* and making a humming noise like the buzzing of a very loud bee. He'd run behind some low bushes, buzzing, and fifteen minutes later re-emerge buzzing still. These proceedings could go on at intervals all day until sunset, when he retired to his *mia* and had his supper. During the night he would stand over his camp fire, make it blaze up, hum and buzz for a while, then all would be quiet. Each day this was his routine until rain, or perhaps a very heavy dew came; then he would rest. After he discovered I could tell him rain was coming by tapping on my barometer he would come to me in the mornings and say, 'Missus make talk rain come.' The rain-making process was a hard one, and I think he probably wanted a hint to set a limit to his labours.

Making the sun shine was a far simpler matter. The green or grass stones, blue or sky stones and some reddish stones would be set in a row out in front of his *mia* and left there till it stopped raining.

The cubic and black stones had something to do with sickness. I could not find out which was the curse stone; indeed Buckerup had several stones he would not tell me about – they were men's *booliah* and nothing to do with women. Women were not to know what magic these *booliah* had. A small irregular piece of white quartz with two tiny specks of gold inside it had the power to make women bear children. It was carefully wrapped in bark tied in kangaroo sinew and carried from full moon to full moon by the woman trying to conceive. When Buckerup pronounced some magic words over the woman his wonderful magic did its work, so my friends told me.

Before Buckerup had been six months in the camp, Gimbuck's self-importance was almost unbearable, because it was Wynne, her grandson by marriage, who had found this wonderful *mulgar*. She seemed to be setting herself up as something of a lady *mulgar* and I often felt tempted to tell some of the women that I had given her the glass marble she was making such a fuss about, but I couldn't betray her. Her trust in me was complete; besides I truly think she had persuaded herself that she had found the marble. It was as well she had proved, by being unable to cure Winmar that the marble was a woman's *booliah* – old Buckerup often looked at it with envious eyes. He had never seen or heard of its like before and I am certain he would have demanded it from Gimbuck had the matter not been conclusively settled before his arrival in the group.

Rain-stones are most peculiar. I have seen about half a dozen of these stones. They are greatly prized by the Noongars but I could not find out from where they came or of what they are composed.⁷⁵ I have one in my possession which belonged to old Winmar. It looks almost like a spinning top; about 5 centimetres across. It is sharply bevelled in the middle but not pointed as a top is and both sides are alike. Such stones are usually a reddish-brown in colour (although I have seen black ones), and rough in texture; something like an uncut garnet. It is not a stone: Gervase put it on the anvil and tried to break it. A very small flake came off which looked like common glass of a greenish hue.

NOTE: When the trans-continental railway was surveyed some of these curious stones were found on the Nullarbor Plain between 480 and 643 kilometres from our station. This shows how the Aboriginal people traded amongst themselves. No one seems to know what they are. It has been suggested they are a kind of cosmic glass and have fallen as meteorites. As the plains on which we lived are comprised of limestone and non-volcanic rock, these stones have been greatly discussed by scientists.

⁷⁵ These are 'splash-form tectites' or 'Australites'. The most widely-accepted theory of how they formed is that they are the result of a meteorite impact on earth. The impact throws tonnes of small rocks with a high silica content out of the atmosphere. On re-entry these rocks become molten and gain an aerodynamic form. Most Australian tectites are found in South Australia. It is thought they are the result of a meteorite impact in Indochina 800,000 years ago. (source: Museum of Victoria)

Chapter Thirteen

One day after Werriben had been at the camp a little over a year, I mentioned to Albert that one of the Quaalup⁷⁶ Noongars had been constantly about the camp lately. He was named Cowran; a bright, merry-looking man aged about 22. I knew he was not there just to visit because he would not have come alone if that was the case. He would have been accompanied by several other men and their wives.

I thought perhaps he had been hired to work on the station. When Noongars from other groups did come for work they often arrived before they were due to start and lived within our Noongars' camp. We rarely employed anyone other than our Noongar friends, but now and then our men would bring someone from a distant group or another branch of our local group to assist them.

Albert told me he feared the young man's presence meant trouble was brewing over Werriben, the 'Esperance Bay woman' and assumed Cowran wanted to take her away with him. I knew Werriben had not been contented for a while. She was disappointed that she was still childless. Tupin, who now had two children mocked her. Waymen was kinder but it was evident that Werriben was at a social disadvantage because of her childless state. Dongup, her husband, was becoming indifferent to her though was still very jealous if she talked to other men. Several times she had expressed a longing to see the sea again and said she felt lonely in the camp. The Quaalup Noongars' boundary joined that of the Bremer Bay group and if she ran away with him she would be close to the sea again.

Cowran remained at the camp nearly a month. He had a good many rows with my friends and narrowly escaped a spearing several times. Eventually Dongup put a spear through the calves of Werriben's legs – the Noongar method of preventing a woman from running away. The spear used inflicts a clean wound, which, if the victim stays calm and quiet, soon heals. Dongup's actions showed that his suspicions were thoroughly roused.

Though Albert very seldom interfered with Noongar quarrels, he decided to intervene. He told Cowran he must leave the station and stay away. Werriben seemed unaffected by his departure and there was again peace in the camp. Werriben's leg healed and she began to move about freely again.

⁷⁶ 59 kilometres from Jerramungup on Devil Creek

At about this time, Dongup took another wife; a girl that had been promised to him from her birth and was now of a marriageable age. She and Werriben had been on good terms and Werriben seemed quite satisfied with the new state of affairs.

A fortnight after Dongup's marriage, all the female members of the camp visited me in a great state of excitement. Some time in the night, or *kittiupcowra* which is just before daylight when all the birds began to move and twitter in their nests, it was discovered that Werriben had left the camp. They were all quite sure she had gone with Cowran though no one had seen her go. The only thing in dispute was whether she had left at moonrise or *kittiupcowra*.

The group held long discussions, and decided they had been deeply insulted by Werriben's actions. She had come to them a perfect stranger and was now proclaiming her unhappiness far and wide. She was, in effect stating that they had failed to make her happy and that Dongup was an inferior hunter.

I pointed out that no one could say this of Dongup because Werriben had always had smart *boorks* and *coots* and plenty of spinning fur, but my friends were not satisfied. They were insulted and nothing could lessen their annoyance. Day after day, the matter of what action should be taken was hotly discussed. Eventually it was decided a *yoump* (battle-token) should be sent to Cowran's group. A *yoump* was made of a piece of tree branch from 15 to 18 centimetres long and five to eight centimetres thick with both ends sharply pointed. Long lines to represent spears were carved down the length of the yomp and two oval lines, something like *meera* were carved at each end. (The only carving I ever saw the Noongars do was to make their three message sticks; the *cort* (love stick), the *yump* (evil stick) and the *yoump* (battle stick)). One end of the *yoump* had been split and a piece of sharp flint inserted. This was bound together with hair and smeared with blood. The other end was also smeared with blood and had women's hair wound around it.

The *yoump* was given to a messenger who went forth showing it to all he met. When he arrived near the Quaalup group's camp he hid until it was dark, hurled the *yoump* with his left hand and his fighting *geize* with his right, aiming for one of the campfires, then ran for his life. He would have been speared if caught.

Had the messenger only thrown the *yoump* it would mean only those directly involved in the matter should engage in battle. Throwing the fighting spear said the messenger's whole group wanted war and it would be a fight to the death.

The Quaalup Noongars had been expecting a *yoump* but they were not quite prepared for the *geize*. They readied themselves for battle, as did our men, painting themselves with *wilgie* in a variety of colours till they looked fierce and frightening. *Geize* were tested and greased; the men inserted their *noilyets*. Their *mulgar* must have been busy preparing about fifty men for battle.

A week after the *yoump* had been thrown, the men went out to fight. Gervase and Albert followed on horseback to view the proceedings. On their return they gave me a graphic description of the battle.

The two groups met some kilometres from the homestead at a place called Kamballup⁷⁷ on the edge of the plain. Our men came through the forest and met the Quaalups with a tremendous shout and a hail of *geize*. Each woman stood by her man deflecting spears with her *wanna* and assisting him in every way she could. The older children picked up fallen spears and handed them to their fathers. The men threw off their *quaarks* (cloaks) and had spare *geize* thrust through their *noolmans* at their backs so they could easily reach them. When a man had no *geize* left he threw his *doarks* at his opponents' legs and his *kyles* at their thighs. Many wounds were sustained and the noise was horrendous. The women kept up a continuous shrill sort of squeal and the men gave a frequent deep howl. The children did their best to help but many of them were crying with fright.

The women were wonderfully adept at deflecting the spears, even those encumbered with babies hanging on to their *coots*. There were over 150 Noongars in the fray – men, women and children. The fight lasted over an hour, until one man fell, speared through the thigh. That seemed to end the battle and both parties drew back. Several men's thighs had been ripped with *kyles* and badly smashed with *doarks*. One small child was killed and two or three of the women were hurt – one very badly. It was a very battered set of Noongars that marched back to camp with their honour restored. Despite the battle, Werriben did not come back to her husband and both groups of Noongars still wore their *noilyets*. I was afraid to go any distance away from the house while the camp was like a hive of angry bees, small groups roaming

⁷⁷According to postcode information this is an unmarked spot approximately 34.067338S, 118.124263E on the Pallinup River. It is 74 kilometres from Jerramungup and 104 kilometres from Quaalup. It seems to have been the name of a homestead founded by Andrew Moir – a grazier contemporary of A.Y.Hassell (who died in the same year). Mr Moir's obituary from the *Gnowangerup Star and Tambellup Ongerup Gazette* of 23 August 1919 reads in part: 'For the past half-century [Mr Moir] has been identified with the area adjoining the Pallinup, successively founding Campbellup[sic], Glengarry and Woolagenup –'

around. Dongup asked Albert to try to get Werriben back, but he refused to interfere. He asked me to stay away from the camp and said it could be dangerous to take sides or interfere. Those were anxious days and I bolted the door every night. The women came up each day with various tales as to what was going on but I did not encourage them.

In time, peace reigned in the group again and the men's wounds healed. A strong undercurrent of resentment remained and eight months later, preparations were being made for another battle. One day a man arrived at the camp on his own wearing a *noilyet* with its points turned slightly upwards and went straight to Buckerup's *mia*. A week later Gervase announced another row was brewing and single-combat battle was to be the final settlement of the dispute. The man I had seen in the camp had been there to propose the terms. Gervase said he would be a witness at the battle but faithfully promised Albert that he would not interfere even if asked to, on the grounds that he did not understand the relevant customs or rites.

'Champions' were chosen by the protagonists Cowran and Dongup. Cowran chose a Noongar from Bremer Bay and Dongup chose a Noongar from Mongup⁷⁸, the home of a neighbouring inland group. A Noongar from the Cucerup⁷⁹ group (which had friendly relationships with all the tribes involved) was chosen to superintend the battle. The parties met at a place called Mordecup⁸⁰ about halfway between the boundaries of the opposing sides. Our group and the Quaalup group were there in full strength but the groups of the two champions and the superintendent were not present.

Dongup's new wife assisted the Mongup man and Werriben assisted the Bremer man. Each man had a boy aged about twelve to help pick up the spears.

The combat was a repetition of the big battle. Fires were started. Hunting spears were used. The two women scurried around deflecting spears with great vigour while the men kept up a continuous howl. *Kyles* and *doarks* were thrown. The Quaalup man succeeded in getting a spear well into the thigh of the Mongup man, and at that point the Cucerup man stepped forward, pulled the spear right through the Mongup man's leg and called for wood ashes. Two women from each group brought a handful, and the Cucerup man rubbed ash on each side of the wound staunching the blood flow. Cowran's champion was the victor.

⁷⁸ A spot north-east of the Stirlings; 34.182109832S and 118.311203002E

⁷⁹ possibly Corackerup to the east of Mongup

⁸⁰ The closest name match to this place is Martacup Soak on Martacup creek, which is exactly the same spot as Cambellup (see previous page). Not on most maps.

Werriben now belonged to Cowran by right of conquest, and Dongup relinquished his claim to her. Cowran promptly staked his claim by spearing her through the calf of her left leg. The *mulgar* set to work removing the men's noilyets. Both groups then hunted and feasted together and returned to their respective homes within two or three days.

I lost contact with Werriben after the combat but heard years later that she had left Cowran and returned to Esperance Bay. Her position as Cowran's wife by right of conquest was different to that of the ordinary wife. The children of such a relationship belong to their father and his group and take their descent from him. Should the mother be exchanged, bartered or ransomed or leave of her own accord (if she manages to) she cannot take the children with her. If the matter is settled when she is pregnant, she remains with the man until the child is born, then leaves the child and goes where she must. If she manages to rejoin her group, she cannot be reclaimed. If a man wins a wife by conquest and later marries her by *barllee*, she is taken into her husband's group and belongs to it.

With regard to descent, Yilgar used to say, 'Waymen child of Greton. Greton child of Tupin, Tupin child of Yilgar, Yilgar child of Beenup, Beenup child of Gillen. From this I would know that Yilgar's mother was a wife by conquest because Beenup is a man's name and all the others are women's names. There was no slur on the children of mothers who were conquest-wives.

Had Werriben's group been in the vicinity at the conclusion of the battle, she may have been taken away from both combatants and given to the man she properly belonged to; that is the man she was betrothed to at birth, or his next of kin. She would have been speared through both legs and been placed under the supervision of her husband's other wife and her husband's mother until she behaved herself. I have known a woman to be speared four or five times in each leg when she tried to leave a husband she didn't like to marry a man in a different branch of her group. In this case shame was on the jilted man, not on the women who jilted him. When a woman went to a completely different group, the shame was on the whole group she had left.

After the single combat, all the excitement died down and I rarely heard Werriben's name mentioned. Our group was just as friendly as ever with the Mongup group and I saw Cowran several times with his first wife, but Werriben never came near us and Cowran didn't stay for more than a day at the camp. Several years after Werriben

had left him, Cowran married a young girl from our group whose betrothed had died. The man's next of kin had arranged the match as soon as the girl reached a marriageable age, being already burdened with his own two wives and his deceased brother's two wives.

The battle was fought in 1870⁸¹ and was the last big battle in this part of the country.

⁸¹ Ethel Hassell was only 13 in 1870, and living with her parents in Albany. As she speaks of this battle occurring after she had married Albert, I think she meant to write 1880.

Chapter Fourteen

It seemed my Noongar friends did not have many legends about the heavens. They didn't often venture away from the light of their campfires after dark; not that they went to bed early – I had known them to stay up all night during a corroboree, and when food was plentiful, to sleep all day.

The Noongars on the coast seemed to have more sky-legends. I frequently asked them what they thought about the planets. They recognised the planets were different to the other stars: they called them the *mulgars* of the constellations and said they went visiting other groups. They had the power to look through clouds, no matter how thick the clouds were or dark the night might be. The moon was different, for he died and came back to life, getting very fat and thinning before he died. The sun is the Far-Off Land where Noongars go to live after they die. No evil spirit can get there and it is wonderful fertile country. When I observed that the sun was very hot, I was told no, it wasn't. The heat came from the sky which was below the sun and the sun had nothing to do with it. The sun was above everything; the stars, moon and heavens, and independent of them all. It was the abode of the departed.

One lovely clear night, when there was no moon but the heavens were powdered with stars, Albert and I decided to go for a walk. I do not think there is a lovelier time for a walk in the bush than in the cool of a starlit night after a hot day. The sky is a deep blue and the gum trees throw out their pungent scent. Even the grass smells sweet and fresh.

The night birds and animals played around fearlessly. Every now and then an owl would suddenly flit soundlessly between the shadows of tall gum trees, frightened by some sudden movement. The possums scampered through the trees with the aid of their tails, peering down from the topmost boughs, only their heads, sharp ears and bright beady eyes visible through the leaves. Their little ones clung to their mothers' backs and watched the world from their vantage points of safety with their heads on one side. Occasionally we heard the distant melancholy howl of a dingo or the sad call of the mopoke – it was hard to tell those two calls apart.

On the way back from our walk we passed the Noongars camp and as it was still early, stopped for a short chat. I wanted to ask some of the women if they would help me with some tasks the following day.

We found there were several visitors from Bremer Bay at the camp, and we sat down to talk about the stars. Werriben's story about the Southern Cross was discussed and various stars were pointed out. My friends told me the names of several groups of stars which I regret to say I have forgotten. During our gossip, one of the women told me a legend about Orion's belt and the Pleiades.

A wife and her daughters are the brightest stars in the group. The dimmer stars are the children – dim because they are covered with a *boork*. Orion is a man with a son on either side of him; the three stars of the belt are the Karkars⁸².

But before telling the story I had better describe the *mungite*⁸³ tree. This is a species of *Banksia* which grows near deep creeks and on the coast. It has peculiar seed pods, two kinds growing on the one bush; one is about 15 centimetres long and five centimetres round with a hard grey surface. On being sharply rubbed, the hard grey outside covering comes off leaving a beautiful dark-brown velvety stuff, beneath which is a hard stick about 1.3 centimetres thick. The early settlers used this velvety stuff for stuffing mattresses and pillows when they couldn't get palm wool. It is soft and warm to sleep on but makes for very heavy pillows. It was excellent for filling the cushions on the verandah.

The other seed pod which grows on the *mungite* is about 25 centimetres long and 10 centimetres round, tapering at each end. This is dotted all over with follicles about the size and appearance of a thumb running to a sharp point. The grey covering sits in between the follicles which are embedded on the hard centre stick. As the seeds ripen the follicle pushes the soft covering to one side and opens to disclose two gauzy black seeds which float away on the breeze.

The follicles are harder than any wood, of a beautiful grey colour outside and a pale brown inside which is shiny as though it has been glazed. The seed pods are frequently used for fires. A few placed together will smoulder on the hearth all night giving off a pleasant heat.

When the *mungites* are in flower, the trees appear to have been decorated with beautiful round golden brushes. The flowers are about ten centimetres long and composed of a quantity of slender, thread-like petals. The seeds without follicles have the longest-lasting blossoms. At the base of the flowers on both types of seed

⁸² See also Chapter Ten

⁸³ Bull *Banksia* (*Banksia grandis*)

pod there is a quantity of sweet nectar; the best nectar is on the seeds without the follicles, which are the easiest to suck.

The nectar, which keeps for about a week, is traded from coastal to inland groups. The birds and ants are fond of this honey plant and when the *mungite* is in bloom there are plenty of parrots around the rivers and swamps.

Long, long ago a man called Degindie lived with his wife, children and a girl named Wardah who was betrothed to his eldest son. Degindie had cared for Wardah since she was a baby. One day, Degindie and his two eldest sons went hunting, leaving his wife, Wardah and younger children at the camp. On their journey they met some people of the Karkar group who joined them in the hunt. They caught so much game that Degindie asked the Karkars to help him carry the food back to his camp.

The Karkars stayed at the camp with Degindie and his family till game became scarce. When it was time to leave, they decided to go towards the coast where the *mungites* were in bloom. Now Degindie had never seen *mungite* and was keen to know what it was like. So with his wife, children and Wardah he journeyed to the coast with the Karkars. They travelled slowly for many days. The moon was full and kangaroos became plentiful as they neared the coast. They camped by a big dry creek where there were plenty of *mungites* laden with flowers, and ate mungite nectar to their hearts' content. In the evening Degindie went hunting *coomal*; for where there are *mungite* flowers there are always plenty of *coomal*. He felt he had arrived in a land of plenty.

One of the Karkars said Wardah was a pretty girl who was old enough to be married and he wished to marry her and take her away. Degindie's boys were still too young for her, he said. At this, Degindie was furious. Had he not hunted with the Karkars and let them live in his camp? Now one of them wanted to take away his son's wife-to-be! He told the Karkars to leave the camp and never come near him again. He realised he and his family could be in danger and decided to return to his former camp. They all collected as many *mungite* cones as they could carry, and set off for home.

They had not gone far when they were attacked by the Karkars. Degindie, his boys and Wardah fought hard: Wardah deflected spears and the younger children picked

them up and gave them to their father. But in the end Degindie was beaten to the ground and both his eldest sons were speared.

Wardah eluded her would-be captors by escaping into the undergrowth. She climbed a *mungite* tree and hid herself amongst its thick foliage, listening to the sounds of the Karkars frantically trying to find her. A strong wind blew up and it was all she could do to hang on to the *mungite* tree. Degindie, his boys and the Karkars were blown up into the sky and there they stand to this day; Degindie with a boy on each side and the Karkars trying to reach him. They serve as a warning to Noongars not to entertain strangers in their camps.

While the fight was going on, Degindie's wife ran away and hid with her children. They were hidden at the bottom in a dry creek when the big wind came. They travelled up and down the creek trying to find Degindie and his sons for a long time. The wife managed to feed her other two children on *coomal* and *mungite* for some time; then decided to try to get back to her home camp and find Wardah. She and the children travelled on for some days and finally saw Wardah's tracks. It looked like she had been trying to find her way home too. Degindie's wife asked her children to cry at night time so Wardah would hear them and know it was safe to come to them. Wardah heard them, and when she found them she told them that the Karkars had killed Degindie and his boys. The two women filled their *coot* bags with mungite and travelled as fast as they could towards their group, stopping on a wide plain for the night. They looked up and saw the new stars which they guessed were Degindie and his sons.

Degindie's wife gave her children all the *mungite* she had left and they cried because they were still hungry, which made her cry too. Wardah hunted all the next day but there was no food to be found on the plain. The women walked on together and the children followed them crying. When night came they sat down together, too tired, hungry and thirsty even to make a small *mia* for themselves. They spread their *boorks* over the children to keep them warm and lay looking up at the stars all night occasionally calling for help.

Just before dawn a wind arose and roared over the plains. The women knew the children could not walk in such a gale so told them to sleep and tried to keep them quiet. The next night the wind sprang up again and blew more strongly than ever. In spite of the women's efforts, a large gust caught a corner of their *boorks* and blew the

little group up into the sky to become the stars of the Pleiades, where they remain to this day.

One morning towards the end of the summer, the girls came to me and told me they were all going for a bush walk to start the *man carls*; the bushfires. The Noongars burned large tracts of land every year to ensure the grass and herbage would come up green and sweet at the first rain, and to drive the game out for hunting purposes. At that time of year all the chicks of the ground-nesting birds were hatched and able to fly, and all the young *boodies* were running about. The Noongars had all been preparing for the first *man carl* corroboree to be held that night. Gervase and I decided to go and watch, and the girls were pleased for I rarely went to the camp after dark.

When Gervase and I arrived at the camp we found preparations were still being made. A little distance from the dry river bed, four large circles had been made on the ground. Each was beaten flat and cleared of all grass and leaves. In the centre of each circle were bushes and boughs built into bonfires.

I sat down on a log while Gervase went off to talk to the men. The girls soon joined me and we chatted away. As soon as the men appeared the girls jumped up, lit the bonfires, then retired to a small rise on the side of the ridge and sat with the old women.

The men were not as elaborately decorated as they usually were. Many of them wore a band of spun possum wool around their heads into which they had tucked the feathers of their totem birds and pieces of stick about 15 centimetres long. These sticks had been shaved against the grain and the shavings curled so that the sticks looked like brown and white feathers. Each man carried a spear in his right hand and a stick about 18 to 20 centimetres long, shaved and curled the whole length in his left hand

As the men reached the bonfires, the women began to chant. The men separated into four groups and danced around the fires with their arms outstretched. They formed into one long line and snaked around the all the fires at a steady pace, tramping in time with the women's chanting. When all parties had been round all fires they stopped suddenly and gave a tremendous shout of 'Hooh Haah'. The sudden silence after the continuous noise seemed strange.

The men gathered together and the women came down from the ridge dragging more wood to fuel the fires. The men placed a group of spears, barbs upwards at each corner of the group of circles, and the women sat down at by the spears and began another, quicker chant. The men in each end circle danced sideways towards the fires in a north-south direction while the men in the centre circles, each holding a spear in his hands danced sideways in an east-west direction. After revolving several times in this routine, three men broke away from each centre and again the chain was formed and snaked around the fires more quickly than before. Now the men with spears were in the end circles and the men without spears were in the centre circles. A terrific 'Hooh haah!' proclaimed the routine ended and the men sat down.

The women instantly jumped up and dragged the burning boughs out of the circles. They swept away the hot ashes with green boughs and made up numerous little fires around the edge of each circle. In about thirty minutes all was ready for the next routine.

The men reformed and this time danced in circles within each ring. For the first routine they put the spears at the northern edge of each circle. For the second they were armed with hunting spears. After dancing in each circle they came to another sudden stop, threw their spears onto the ground, grabbed their *kyles* and made a mad rush out of the circles, driving each other backwards, very much as they do when driving game. Their dance was as perfect as any ballroom choreography. Each man knew where to revolve, how to move, and how to go from one circle to another. A mistake would have caused chaos, but the routine was faultless. Every now and again a man would drop out and lie down near one of the heaps of spears. They all seemed tired which wasn't surprising; by that time they had been dancing continuously for almost three hours.

Waymen pointed out with pride that Wynne was leading the chain between the circles. I asked her what would happen if there was a mistake. She told me indignantly that no man could dance until he knew he would not make a mistake. The boys had to watch until they knew every routine, then they were put into places in the circles where a mistake would not matter, to learn further. Later they danced amongst themselves and only when the old men and women were satisfied they would not make mistakes were they allowed to perform with the men.

The dance was performed each night for several nights, then the women came to bid me farewell for they were off to make *man carls* all over the country and would not be back for some time. In a few days the whole country was on fire and the smoke blew down over the station making life difficult. Albert and Gervase had taken the precautionary measures of clearing large patches of ground around us but we had to be alert as we never knew exactly when the wind would change and blow the fire onto vulnerable buildings. The fires went on until extinguished by the early rains.

I frequently tried to find out whether the fires and dances had any religious significance but was told only the usual answer – they had always had these corroborees towards the end of summer before the *man carls*. No, they did not dance all through summer; it was too hot. And it was no good performing the *man carl* dances in winter; besides they had dances more suitable for the winter weather.

Chapter Fifteen

There are many birds that fly about by night and their strange notes give rise to some uncanny tales told around the campfire in the evenings or on rainy days. The Noongars have vivid imaginations and frequently embellish the legends to suit themselves, but a story's foundation is always the same.

We had mopokes⁸⁴ or night hawks in our area, which are really a species of owl. Their flight was so silent that they would almost brush up against me as they flew past, giving me a terrible fright. Their call was like the howling of a wild dog. I would often see them in the tall trees blinking into the setting sun. They were so well camouflaged and sat so still that sometimes they seemed to be absorbed by the trees.

I do not think I could ever get used to the curlew's⁸⁵ frightening call. It begins with a long, low, wailing whistle and ends with fiendish shrieks. They sound like lost souls, which is the name I gave them. During the hot dry months of summer they haunt the damp places on the river bed hunting for worms but I rarely saw them, though their cries disturbed our nights. The Noongars said they were calling for rain but they kept up their wailing even after the rains began.

Curlews are a strange looking bird. They have long legs and very big round eyes which seem out of proportion with the rest of their bodies. I once chanced on a nest – a bare hole unlined with grass or leaves near tree roots in a dry stony spot – with a bird in it; its grey and brown feathers just the colour of the sand and leaves. I think had it remained quietly I should never have noticed it. It jumped up and ran away on its stilted legs. The nest contained two greenish eggs blotched with black. I left the nest intending to get the eggs but when I returned they had gone. Several times the Noongars brought me curlew chicks: I found they were fairly easy to tame, but in the end they all returned to the bush.

Albert and Gervase often amused themselves when the curlews started their cries by whistling like them. This seemed to throw the birds into a perfect frenzy and their shrieks were overpowering. One warm night as soon as the birds had quietened

⁸⁴ The author may mean the tawny frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) rather than mopoke. Mopokes sound more like a cuckoo.

⁸⁵ Bush stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*)

down, Albert or Gervase would whistle and start them up again. Eventually, several of the Noongar women came up to remonstrate. Mister Hassell was driving the birds mad and they might come to the camp fires and bring misfortune with them.

Next day at our woodheap chat the women told me the *weelows* were crying, not to signal the onset of rain (it was too early) but because they were upset by the copious bushfires which added to the heat. Buckerup was busy using rain stone to try to quench the fires with a good downpour.

I asked the women what misfortune the birds would bring. They explained that a curlew running past a fire meant general bad luck for the group. If the curlew ran right into the firelight it portended a death in the families of those who saw it. Due to Albert and Gervase's whistling the night before the birds had been running in every direction and frightened the Noongars greatly.

According to the legend connected with *weelows* and fire, a long time ago during been a very hot dry summer, all the Noongar wells dried up. The few *yammas* (waterholes) left were almost dry and the birds were dying for want of water. There had been big *carls* burning in every direction ignited by ashes dropping from the Noongars' *carlas* onto dry grass. All the gum in the trees was melting, only making the trees more flammable. The river bed was dry and the *weelows* had great difficulty keeping themselves alive. There were no insects for them to eat.

A very big *carl* came along and swarms of insects were flying in front of it to escape the smoke. The *weelows* caught them as they flew and got quite a nice meal but the Noongars were coming as well, hunting the animals that were fleeing the fire. The fire travelled all day and all night. The moon looked down on the terrible scene. She was full, but reddened with fire and smoke. There was no rest for bird, beast or insect. Even the Noongars began to get frightened by the terrible *carl* spreading rapidly in every direction.

The *weelows* saw a long dry salt-river bed ahead and flew into it followed by the Noongars. There was no vegetation growing in the coarse sand making the river bed a refuge from the flames. The fire had driven the fear of man from the animals, so there in the river bed they all camped; birds, snakes, animals and Noongars. The *carl* raged along the sides of the river for days and the Noongars feasted on various

animals who were afraid to leave the river bed. But they left the *weelows* alone because they had led them to shelter from the *carl*.

When the *carl* had gone past them, the Noongars emerged into a blackened landscape devoid of water. Again the *Weelows* proved to be their friends and led them to a *yamma*. However the water was so low that the *weelows* could not reach it. The Noongars made pieces of bark into baskets, tied the baskets to their *noolmans* and dipped them into *yamma*. Everyone drank and was satisfied and the Noongars were so grateful to the *weelows* that they kept water aside in their bark baskets for the *weelows* to drink. The Noongars and *weelows* camped at the *yamma* for a long time, both going out hunting by day, returning at night for water.

Food around the camp began to get scarce for the Noongars. They were afraid to go far away from the camp for fear of a lack of water. They got so hungry that they forgot how the *weelows* had helped them to escape from the *carl* and had shown them where they could get water. They began they kill the *Weelows* for food. At first the *weelows* did not understand why their numbers were reducing and thought their missing flock members had gone away to look for more food and water.

One night the flock returned to the camp and smelled burning feathers. As there were no other birds about (having all flown away when the *carl* first began), the *weelows* wondered which other birds had arrived in the camp. They went to the Noongars' fires but did not discover anything amiss. The next night the *weelows* noticed the same smell and again found nothing. This went on for some time and their numbers continued to dwindle. Then one of the *weelows* found some feathers near the Noongars' *carl* and recognised them as belonging to her own group. The *weelows* resolved to watch the Noongars.

The *weelow* hunting party came home early the following night and saw Noongars killing *weelows* with their *doarks*. The Noongars plucked the dead *weelows* and threw the feathers onto the fire, then roasted and ate the birds. At the sight of this treachery the *weelows* began to wail and shriek and flew away vowing misfortune on the Noongars.

Not long after the *weelows* had left, the Noongars, who were again without anything to eat, travelled to another camping place. The *weelows* discovered the new camp and flew there in a big flock. They circled the Noongars' fires round and around

again and caused a big wind to blow sparks onto the Noongars' *mias* and create an enormous fire. Not even a spear was saved from the inferno, leaving the Noongars defenceless against their enemies. As they went looking for more spear wood, the *Weelows* followed, shrieking and wailing. Some enemy hunters heard the din and found the unarmed Noongars. With no spears to defend themselves, many Noongar men were killed and many women were taken away. After such a disaster, the Noongars tried to make friends with the *weelows* but the *weelows* wanted nothing to do with them.

Now the *weelows* always run about and scream and shriek in the night. If they can get to the Noongars' fires they bring misfortune: sometimes fire and sometimes death, but always trouble. They scream in the dry weather when the fires come and the water holes dry up leaving them without worms to eat. At the end of summer they scream for rain. But they never go far from the Noongars' camps for they are always intent on revenge.

Chapter Sixteen

The homestead had been built on an undulating terrain. None of the hills were of any height; they were more a succession of low ridges. Some fairly deep gullies had been cut by various streams: they were dry in the summer but became small torrents during the heavy rains and dwindled to little streams for the greater part of the winter. I frequently wandered up these interesting gullies, never quite knowing what plants and birdlife I might encounter.

One day I went for an extra-long walk by myself and followed a dry stream in a gully, almost to its source, which seemed to be under some immense granite rocks where the stream bed narrowed to only a couple of metres. As I was scrambling up the rocks determined to ascend to the summit, I discovered there was an echo and amused myself for some time by calling. The four-fold echo was clear and deep but had a limited range. I wasted so much time experimenting with it that I had no time to complete my climb to the top of the rocks and reluctantly returned to the homestead.

Some days later, when Albert had gone out for the day I went to the camp and suggested to the women that we take a 'little bit *tdage*' (meat or food), go for a walk and make a day of it. The air was pure; the sky overhead was of the deepest blue with small fleecy scudding clouds. There was just enough wind to make walking pleasant. There had been a sharp frost the night before so everything felt fresh.

My suggestion was received with delight by three of the girls and to my astonishment old Yilgar decided to come too. She certainly could walk as well as any of us but on previous occasions, constantly wanted to sit down and make a 'little bit fire'. She would grumble at the direction we wanted to go and usually had an excellent reason for wanting to go exactly the opposite way. Yet when we asked her to choose the route she would say 'Missus choose,' only to raise objections when I did. On this occasion I made up my mind to explore the echoing gully and overruled all Yilgar's objections. We steadily made our way in the gorge's direction. Yilgar followed us, grumbling. I suggested she make fire for our picnic and wait for us till we returned, adding rather maliciously, 'If we are not back by sunset we will have taken another road home.'

The girls did not dare speak to Yilgar as plainly as I did and I too was half afraid of her for she seemed to know everything that went on everywhere. Gervase used to call her 'Yilgar the Spy' for when Albert came home she was always there to open the gate and walk to the homestead beside his horse telling him everything that had gone on during his absence. Albert said he should make her his farm overseer – she could tell him how the sheep were looking at the outstations and where the horses were running, thus saving him many a weary and fruitless ride in search of them. We were at a loss to know how she knew these things as she rarely stirred away from the camp. Yet her information was invariably correct. She was probably the oldest woman in the group – well versed in the tribal lore and traditions and a great stickler for preserving them.

None of the Noongars on this part of the coast used any form of boat. They walked to the heads or bends of rivers where they were fairly narrow and crossed them with the help of fallen logs, using them as rafts to support them as they swam, or they waded across with the help of long sticks. To my knowledge they never swam in the river or sea for pleasure but I often saw them wading waist deep, spearing fish along ocean and estuary shores.

Yilgar told me she was quite a young girl when she saw the first white man and the first boat. She was visiting Bremer Bay when a ship appeared and anchored in the bay. Some men got into a boat and rowed ashore and the Noongars ran and hid in the bushes, staying out of view, silently watching. During the two days the white men remained on shore the Noongars made their fires very small and a long way off. I asked Yilgar why the Noongars didn't go and talk to the white men, telling her there was nothing to be frightened of. She retorted, 'What would Missus do if she saw a red man come down from the sky?'

After the ship sailed away the Noongars went down to the white men's camp to see what had been left behind and found some sweet brown stuff in a sort of *coot*, which Yilgar now knew was sugar. The Noongars ate it and liked it very much. They took the *coot* to the *mulgar* who kept it for a long time, till eventually it fell to pieces in the rain. Yilgar said she had often seen these *coots* in the store; Missus's husband called them 'bags', but they were not as good as the Noongars' *coots*.

As the girls, Yilgar and I continued our walk towards the gully with the echo, Yilgar's temper seemed to improve. She began to tell the girls of the good hunting trips the Noongars made to this area when she was a young woman and related many amusing little incidents. She was so absorbed in her reminiscences that she did not notice that we were heading down the gully. As it narrowed she stopped to take a breath. She sat down and told us not to go any further. She knew the place. A very bad *jannock* lived further up. She insisted we retreat.

I was obstinate as she was and by dint of coaxing and bribery I persuaded Greton to come to the end of the gully with me for company. I asked Yilgar to make two fires to attract the *jannock*, and Greton and I continued on.

With some difficulty, we climbed to the top of the rocks. We were well rewarded for our trouble. A magnificent panorama spread out before our eyes; hills and dales and creeks running through clear glassy plains fringed with tall yate trees whose shiny rounded tops glistened in the sunshine. We could see the clear patch where the homestead stood and beyond it some huge rocks which stood out like gigantic forts. On the trees near us a couple of black cockatoos screamed and chattered; now and then rising up, wheeling around over our heads and settling on the trees again – Greton said it was a sign there was water nearby. We sat down and rested, gazing for nearly an hour at the lovely view spread at our feet.

Greton saw two thin spirals of white smoke, and further on two more. She pointed them out to me and said Yilgar was signalling to us that she was getting anxious. We had better get back or she would think the *jannocks* had got us.

We headed back down the gully - when we came to the bend with the echo I could not resist doing a Noongar call. Nowadays, 'Cooee' is supposed to be the universal call of Aboriginal people, but I knew it as the call of the coastal Noongars: an imitation of the *codeyah*, a very long-legged frog⁸⁶ which buries itself in the white sand all along the coast and does not live very far inland.

86 Possibly *Heleioporus albopunctatus*, the Western Spotted Frog. Males dig burrows in low-lying areas that become inundated after autumn and winter rains. It is found through most of the wheatbelt extending north to the lower Murchison River, south to Tambellup and east to Jerramungup. The call is a 'coo' sound repeated about once per second.

All the Noongars' calls begin in a low key; almost every letter is drawled separately and it ends in a high-pitched shriek. The Noongars who live away from the coast call 'Youaal!' which carries a very long way.

I should not have *cooeed*, for as the sound reverberated around the rocks, Greton screamed in terror and plunged headlong down the gully scattering the pebbles and larger stones in her haste to get away, making even more echoes. It was no use my calling her for that only made matters worse. I let her go and cautiously picked my way down.

I came to the first fire but found no signs of the women and I feared they had headed back to camp. I only hoped that they had left my sandwiches at the second fire. I found old Yilgar alone at the second fire. She scolded me as I thoroughly as I have ever been scolded in my life. Her fright and her anxiety quite overcame her. She had sent the girls home, she said, because the gully was no fit place for them. She was an old woman so no harm could come to her but I ought to know better than to disregard her advice and take young girls to such evil places. In fact I was not fit to be trusted with them. There was no knowing what harm might result from my folly.

I was too bewildered to reply and let her ramble on as she walked beside me. When she had finished I asked meekly whether we were out of danger now because if we were, I was hungry and we had better eat our *tdage*. She seemed satisfied I'd taken her seriously and gathered some sticks for a fire. We ate our sandwiches and I gave her all the sweet cakes to try to coax her into a good temper. I asked her more about the terrible danger in the gully was but she was not inclined to discuss the matter and we arrived home considerably earlier than I intended. As soon as we got to my door, she left me and hurried off to the camp.

The influence of the whites was beginning to make itself felt in the younger generation of Noongars and Yilgar had a hard job keeping the young people in order. They were inclined to argue and point out that the whites went to places supposed to be haunted and came to no harm. However, after the echo incident I was only visited by the old men and women. I discovered the girls were deliberately being kept away from me and, which upset me greatly. For a while I responded by telling the old folk I was busy when they came up for a *wongi*. When they smelled the baking and came to investigate they would find the door closed. When they scratched (they never knocked) I ignored them.

Beenup and Quarron arrived one morning inquiring whether I wanted any wood cut. When I said yes, they disappeared, and half an hour later returned with nearly all the members of the camp. Peace was restored. Though I was told lots of camp gossip, the unlucky walk was never referred to again. I felt certain there was some legend connected with the gully but decided to let the matter drop for the time being.

There are many echoes; a beautiful one in the Stirling Range, another nearly at the top of Mt Toolbrunup and another halfway up Bluff Knoll. I dare say there are many others unknown to the whites. It took me nearly two years to piece the following legend together: It was shared with me by a number of groups from Albany to Bremer Bay and some distance inland.

A long time ago there was a big, powerful and wise group of Weelow Noongars that lived on the plains at the foot of the mountain ranges. Their *mulgar* was a very clever old man and their group included several wise women possessed of excellent *booliah*. Many neighbouring groups asked this group to take on their young men and teach them tribal law. Girls too were sent to them on long visits. Most of their men were *poining gumbar* with men of other groups and they became numerous in number.

They were mighty hunters and faithful allies. The women had the best *boorks* and *coots* and were always fat and well-nourished while the men's *noolmans* and *barllees* never seemed to wear out for they were constantly renewed. Their *twert-tyres* and *barlkees* were the finest. They were welcomed wherever they went.

The *Weelow* girls were were eagerly sought in marriage, well-fed from birth and always pretty. Their skin was smooth, soft and sleek. They could run fast and were clever at catching small game. Their *coots* were never without *cobals* filled with fur and their *waupulls* were always half-filled with spun wool. They were desirable matches and they knew it; none more so than Balyet.

Young Balyet was by far the prettiest girl in the group but she was very wilful and did not yet want to marry. The boy she had been betrothed to died when she was very young and his next of kin already had two wives, so she became her own mistress and was free to flirt with any boys that came to the group for their education. She

would tell them when that their noilyets were taken out⁸⁷ they should return and she would consider their suitability for marriage. The wise women shook their heads but she was so pretty and had such coaxing ways that they did nothing about her behaviour.

Two boys from separate groups arrived from the other side of the mountains to spend a year with the Weelow people, accompanied by an old man who was very friendly with the Weelow *mulgar*. The boys were each other's *poining gumbar* and *poining gumbar* with a second group whose marks they both bore on the right sides of their chests. They were soon captivated by Balyet's charms and she laughingly accepted their gifts of fine skins and furs. She spun them *barllees* and *noolmans*, and each boy thought he was her favoured suitor.

When it was time for the boys to go home, Balyet gave them her usual answer. They were mere lads... she must marry a man. They should wait until their *noilyets* were removed and they'd been admitted to a man's privileges. The boys were made *poining gumbar* with other boys in the group and left, both vowing they would return for Balyet. She privately bade each boy farewell, telling both when they came back as men she would marry them. They had proved themselves good hunters, she told them both. Look at the *boork* and coot she had made from the skins each boy had given her! Both boys believed her and neither suspected she had promised herself to the other.

The boys went back to their own groups, their noilyets were removed, and their elders discussed who they should marry. When each said he wished marry to Balyet of the *Weelow* people his wish was hailed with delight for Balyet's cleverness and beauty was spoken of far and wide. Accordingly each boy accompanied by the *mulgar* of his group set forth over the mountains to arrange the match and suggest a *yardie* to celebrate.

Such a match with so superior a group had to be approached with a certain amount of tact. Though Balyet herself might be willing, her folk still had to be consulted and the question of kinship gone into; not that there would be any difficulty for *Balyet* was a *Nunich*⁸⁸ and both the boys were *Wordings*; therefore they could wed.

⁸⁷ After initiation

⁸⁸ White cockatoo, known in other dialects as manaitj. Also became the word for 'policeman'.

The boys arrived at the Weelows' camp within a few days of each other. At first they were delighted to meet again and had much to talk about. When they discovered they were rivals for Balyet, a rift grew between them. Balyet would not say which she preferred and taunted them both. The rift turned into fierce jealousy, which Balyet made worse. Secretly she did not want to marry either boy – her affections were fixed on a man of her own group – the only man who had never succumbed to her charms. This man openly showed his disapproval of her and when she spun a *barllee* and offered to bind it on his arm he rudely told her to give it to a *nop cullam*.

Though *poining gumbar*, the visiting boys no longer spoke to each other. Balyet's behaviour was causing a scandal amongst the Weelow people and word was spreading, ruining the high esteem in which they were held amongst the neighbouring groups.

The Weelows' *mulgar* told the boys' *mulgars* that Balyet had decided not to marry either boy. Balyet's next of kin told her he had chosen a husband for her (a man she detested) and they would be married at the next full moon. This was terrible news for Balyet and she wept. Meanwhile, each boy still thought he was her favoured one and mused that if the other was out of the way there would be no further impediment to marriage.

The morning before the boys were to be sent home, Balyet sealed her fate. She arranged to meet one boy at the end of a secluded rocky gully as the moon set and to meet other boy in the same place at *kittiupcowra*, just before sunrise. Her interview with boy number one took longer than she intended and boy number two arrived at the spot before number one had left. With a howl of rage boy number two sprang on his rival and they locked together in a fierce embrace. They seized their *doarks* and attempted to club each other. The *coorbardies*, who love to watch a fight chortled with delight.

But the *malack*⁸⁹ - the black white tailed cockatoos and the *towran*⁹⁰ - the parakeets screeched with horror when they saw that the sacred marks on the boys' chests were the same. *Poining gumbar* were fighting! This was a sinful fight, for *poining gumbar* are closer than siblings, closer even than husband and wife and mother and child.

⁸⁹ Baudin's Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus baudinii*) and or Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*) also called *woolah* later in the narrative.

⁹⁰ *Platycercus zonarius* (Australian Ringneck)

They are brothers not by birth but of their own free will. These two boys were doubly blood-brothers for they had two sets of marks alike.

Balyet was horrified at the fierce passion she had aroused and tried to separate the boys, but her words only seemed to inflame them more. She hurried back to the camp calling on the *mulgars* for assistance. As she called her voice carried up the gully, infuriating the boys even more.

Assistance arrived too late: the boys were found dead, still locked in the embrace of battle. The three *mulgars* gazed in horror at the scene then pointed wordlessly to the stricken Balyet. Her voice trembling, she tried to make excuses. The *mulgars* said nothing and she turned and fled down the gully.

The wise women and the *mulgars* had a long *wongi*. How could they bury these *poining gumbar* who had killed each other? How could a woman who had caused such a sin ever be allowed to live in any group? Her sin was the greatest that can be committed and she was too wicked to even to die. Her spirit could never be allowed in the Far-Off Land in the sun. It was decided she was to be driven into the hills and all the groups in the region were to be warned about her evil ways.

At sunset, wearied by her emotions, Balyet returned to the scene of the combat and was terrified to see the boys' bodies had not been removed. She wandered down to the camp but found her people had gone. The *mias* were burned and no tracks had been left. She went back to her suitors' dead bodies and sat on a rock to review her work. The *weelows* screamed and wailed till the moon rose and she called on them to comfort her, but there no comfort came. Instead, her voice echoed around her, causing her great terror. It was the only human voice she was ever to hear again.

Noitch, the supreme evil spirit took Balyet under its protection, told her she could dwell amongst the hills and gullies but forbade her from ever returning to the plains. No man will ever marry Balyet and she will never have children of her own. She is immortal for even Noitch does not want her spirit in the after-life. She wanders about the gorges and gullies trying to tempt little children to climb the rocks and come to her arms. She can only catch children between the hours of sunset and moonrise for little children are safe in bright daylight and moonlight. Her shadow is like a faint soft grey mist. Darkness comes earlier in the mountains and deep gullies, and when children stray she enfolds them in her arms and presses them to her cold breast with

a soft, motherly, misty embrace. They die so quietly that it is only when they become cold and stiff that she realises they're dead. She drops their bodies and goes wailing and screaming like the wind further into the mountains. The children's mothers find their bodies among the rocks, just as though they had gone quietly to sleep by the campfire. On the rare occasion a child escapes Balyet's embrace, they are usually forever changed.

Chapter Seventeen

We were enjoying our usual gossip at the wood heap, when it occurred to me that I didn't know the name of the hill on which the house stood. I asked Yilgar.

'Coomalnintup,' she promptly replied.

'Coomalnintup,' I repeated thoughtfully. 'What a strange name. *Coomal*, possum, *nint*, tail and *up*⁹¹, camping place. Possum's tail camping place. However did it get that name?'

There is generally some good reason for most place names, such as '*Twertup*' where there are many *twerts* (wild dogs) and '*Tourtup*⁹²', a wide grassy plain where there was a single *tourt*⁹³ tree; the only one known for about 80 kilometres. Carlingup⁹⁴ was a bend in the river with a piece of land sticking out like a tongue; Chillionbungup⁹⁵ is made up of *chillion* (fish hawk or sea eagle); *bung* (a nest in a tree or rock) and 'Gnowangerup' is *gnow* (mallee fowl) and *aner* (a nest on the ground). Indeed every hill, lake, swamp and hollow has a name. The meanings of some were very obvious such as those I have quoted. Some meanings have been forgotten by the Noongars but most have some little distinguishing note.

There was nothing in the shape of the hill or the rocks near the house to give me any clue as to why the hill was called Coomalnintup. Eventually Yilgar and Gimbuck told me the tale as to how it got its name, but before I tell it, I must mention a few details about the *gnow*'s⁹⁶ nests and habits. The *gnow* is a very shy bird and I seldom saw one in the wild though their nests were plentiful not far from the homestead. For five

⁹¹ From *kep* (or similar according to dialect, meaning water)

⁹² Memorialised in Tooartup Creek in the Fitzgerald National Park; 33.59S, 119.24E.

⁹³ *Tuart (Eucalyptus gomphocephala)*: the 'hardest, finest naturally-oiled timber on earth' once covered 120,500 hectares of the south west of Australia. It was cut down to build ships for the British Navy. It is estimated that only 30,300 hectares remain. (Cunningham, 2005, p.12), City of Kwinana. Also known (north of Perth) as *moran* or *morang*

⁹⁴ Carlingup Creek near Ravensthorpe. In the original manuscript the name is shown as Tarlingup (and this probably was the original Noongar name) but there is now no trace of a place called Tarlingup. In some Noongar dialects, tongue is *djaa* or *daa*. There is a bend on the Jerdacuttup River near the end of Carlingup Creek that does look like a tongue. 33.573891S, 120.177978 E

⁹⁵ Chillionbungup is now memorialised at Chillinbong Soak – on Devil Creek 4 kms from the coast: 34.16S, 119.26 E. The creek is cut off from the sea by a sand bar.

⁹⁶ *Leipoa ocellata* – Mallee fowl

months I had a *gnow* chick; I managed to keep it in captivity until it died as the result of an accident.

The bird is delicious eating. It is the size and shape of a pheasant; of a dark brown colour with a small crest of feathers. The eggs have a very thin shell; about the size of a small goose egg and a beautiful salmon pink colour when fresh, getting browner as the chick develops. They are most delicate in flavour. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of my description of these birds but I have seen many of their nests and eaten many of their eggs boiled or poached.

The nest or mounds are made of sand and leaves and are from 1.2 to 1.8 metres high, 3 to 4 metres across and 9 to 12 metres in circumference. They're generally built in dry country in an indented spot on the edge of a watercourse. The soil is swept cleanly around the nest for some distance and the eggs are laid in circular tiers in the centre, each tier covered over loosely with damp sand and leaves. The Noongars say the hen only lays eggs every few days which may account for the fact that I have found eggs at all stages in the nest; some quite fresh and others nearly hatched.

According to the Noongars the parent birds visit their nest daily. They scratch out and opening and the male bird puts the head in to test the temperature. The chicks usually hatch in pairs and are fully fledged and can fly from the moment they hatch.

Curiously the birds alter the shape of the mounds according to the weather and time of day. At midday the tops of the mounds are flattened. In the afternoons and in dull rainy weather they are pointed, while in stormy weather the top is hollow like a basin. They begin to make their nests towards the end of the winter when the leaves are wet. The eggs are laid towards the end of October and all through November. The birds feed on insects and the tender shoots of the mallee gum – a small scrubby kind of eucalyptus.

There is now a thriving village called Gnowangerup but the *gnows* have forsaken their old haunts and I doubt any nests could be found where they were once so numerous. This bird is called by the mallee hen by the whites because it is only found in the country where the mallee grows.

The country round the homestead is low, rolling grassy hills with very little timber. The particular hill on which the house was built had one big yate⁹⁷ tree in the yard. , Except for a belt of tall trees near the river there was no other tree for over a kilometre.

Long long ago a flock of *waitch* fed on the grass where the house now stood. Among them was Chila Waitch: old emu. He had been rather unfortunate with his wives. The first had been killed by snake bite and the second had died as a consequence of breaking her leg. For years he was a widower, then he married a third *york*. She was a foolish young thing but very fond of him. As he had been so unfortunate with his wives, Chila Waitch paid her more attention than usual and took great care to select a good spot for their nest. He chose a place not far from the solitary yate tree on the hill. It was a land mark for kilometres around and much favoured by *waitch* as a nesting place. Very often several of them nested in the same spot.

Several older and more experienced *waitch yorks* offered to share the labour of nest-making and hatching with Chila Waitch but he refused to allow anything of the sort. He was wise and knew that if he did not help his *york*, the older *waitch yorks* would leave his young wife with the all labour of making their nests and the tedium of hatching their eggs as well as hers (it is customary that the older ones impose on the younger ones). Chila Waitch had been married twice before and knew all about the habits of *waitch yorks*, but though he thought himself wise he did not know everything. He helped his *york* to make the nest and did most of the work while all the other *waitch yorks* told her what a fortunate woman she was to have such an attentive Noongar. The nest was a shallow depression, stamped down until it was firm and covered with leaves. Every two days Waitch York laid a dark green egg a little larger than a swan egg. Chila Waitch always stayed near the nest while she laid her egg; such is the custom of all *waitch*. After Waitch York had rested from her labours, instead of re-joining the flock she and Chila Waitch walked away and fed by themselves. This demonstrated a great deal of attentiveness on Chila Waitch's part.

When all the eggs were laid, the tedious process of hatching began. At first Chila Waitch stayed close to his *york* and took her place on the nest when she was tired so she could go for a run and refresh. She was very impatient and did not like sitting quietly for long when it was her turn to sit. But as the time went on all the food near

⁹⁷ *Eucalyptus cornuta*

the nest was eaten and Chila Waitch got tired of sitting. Here, he showed his lack of wisdom in declining the offers of help from the other *waitch yorks* for they would have shared the labours of sitting, though doubtless they would have made the young and inexperienced *york* do more than her fair share. Still they would have talked to her and kept her company.

Gradually, Chila Waitch became cunning. Instead of keeping within call of the nest he re-joined the flock and went further afield to feed. At first he came back to the nest at frequent intervals to see if everything was all right and gave his young *york* time to get off the nest and go for a run. As the flock fed further and further away Chila Waitch began to get tired of his *york* constantly grumbling and calling him to let her have a break. Besides, all the other *waitch* began to laugh at him and call him *cartboie*; old fool. Soon he only came back at set intervals as all the other husbands did and the spoiled young *york* was left alone more and more. She inwardly raged at her solitary confinement.

One evening Chila Waitch was later than usual coming home. The young *waitch york* heard Coomal cough. She was frightened for no male except her husband should go near a sitting female. Her nest is her private *mia mia*. She put her head under her wing and kept it there till she heard Chila Waitch coming. She did not tell him Coomal was near because she was cross with him for being late. She jumped off the nest as soon as he got close and went for a long run. She purposely stayed away a good long time to punish him, knowing he would not leave the eggs. When she returned, Chila Waitch scolded her. She responded angrily and they had a quarrel, which Coomal heard as he sat up in the yate tree.

The next afternoon to punish his *york*, Chila Waitch, did not come home at midday as expected. Waitch York sat on her nest alone feeling decidedly cross. Again she heard Coomal cough and saw him sitting quite close to her. She was so cross with Chila Waitch that she gave a faint whistle in reply to Coomal and they began to talk. They had only said a little when Coomal saw Chila Waitch in distance and scampered up the tree. Young Waitch York hardly spoke to Chila Waitch and almost before he had reached the nest rushed off for her run. She was stiff and hungry and Coomal laughed when he saw her go.

The following afternoon Coomal came down from his tree quite early to talk to Waitch York. Now she knew very well she had no right to listen to Coomal but she was

cross with Chila Waitch and considered herself neglected. If she had only stopped to think she would have realised her husband treated with far more consideration than the other *waitch yorks* were treated by theirs.

For a week *Coomal* gently encouraged her to think she was an ill-treated, neglected *waitch york* and that her Noongar was imposing on her by not taking on his fair share of marital duties. Waitch York was foolish for listening to him for it is well known that *coomals* are the worst possible husbands – unfaithful and careless. They let their *yorks* go about alone with their *cooning* in their *coots* and if danger approaches they run into a hole and leave their *yorks* to climb a tree. In contrast, all *waitch Noongars* guard their *yorks* and chicks well, fighting with their feet, giving their *yorks* a chance to escape.

Coomal flattered Waitch York and told her she didn't deserve to be lonely. One fine morning he suggested she should leave her nest for a little while and go for a run with him. She hesitated, but Coomal said the sun was very hot and if she covered the eggs up it would not hurt them to be left for a short while. So Waitch York covered the eggs and greatly enjoyed her little run.

The following day she went out again with Coomal, and every day after that. He encouraged her to stay away from the nest longer and longer, until one evening she found to her horror that her eggs were nearly cold. She realised she was looking forward to taking her chicks out and about and did not want to risk losing them. She knew Chila Waitch was looking forward to the hatching too. Finding the eggs almost cold made Waitch York realise Coomal was leading her astray and she resolved not to go out with him anymore. She was too frightened to tell Chila Waitch that Coomal was near, for though he had always been very kind to her she was not sure what he would say if she admitted she had been out for many runs with Coomal. She resolved to get rid of Coomal by herself. However, by now, Coomal was not to be got rid of so easily. When, the next morning came, she told him she would not be going out with him again for fear of damaging the eggs. She said that soon they would soon be hatched and she would no longer need his company.

Coomal was enraged. He had been using *her* for company but he did not like the idea that she'd been using *him*. That evening, Chila Waitch arrived home early and talked happily to Waitch York about the chicks that would soon be hatched. He said

he would come home at midday each day from now on and watch the eggs while she went for a run. He was so kind that she almost told him about Coomal.

As promised, the following day Chila Waitch came home at midday and Waitch York went out by herself. Coomal saw her go but could not leave his tree for fear Chila Waitch would see him. He wondered what Waitch York had said to him. The next day he hid in some rocks so he could meet her without being seen. When they met she was very cool to him and talked of nothing but the expected chicks. He suggested a long race but she declined. The chicks would soon be hatched and she must hurry back.

Each day Coomal pestered Waitch York with his attentions whenever she left the nest. She was still too afraid to tell Chila Waitch who grew kinder every day. Chila Waitch saw she was becoming thin and thought that sitting on the nest for so long had made her ill. He secretly reproached himself for his neglect. But Waitch York was hungry, not ill. Finally she got desperate for food and left the nest before Chila Waitch came home. She had to go some distance to feed for all the grass near the nest had been eaten. When she saw Coomal coming towards her she decided enough was enough. She hit out at him and struck him with her legs. Coomal was furious but he could do nothing to defend himself against her. After the beating he stopped pestering her, and sat up in the tree, waiting for an opportunity for revenge.

A few days later, Chila Waitch came home at the usual time and suggested Waitch York might like a dust bath to refresh herself for it was a very hot day. He said it would not hurt to leave the eggs for a short time and he knew a nice place for a dust bath a short distance away.

This was Coomal's opportunity. The *waitch* were no sooner out of sight than he scampered down the tree, rushed to the nest, tore the covering off and broke every egg one by one.

Chila Waitch came back to check on the eggs and saw Coomal up to no good. With a whistle of rage he rushed to the nest. He did not stop to see the havoc Coomal had caused: one glance was sufficient. Coomal raced to the tree and Chila Waitch caught him by the *nint* just as he was almost out of reach. A battle ensued. *Coomal* tried to twist his tail round Chila Waitch's *nanet* (neck) and throttle him but Chila Waitch got free and trampled on Coomal until he was so flat that only his *nint* was

left. Chila Waitch threw the tail onto a rock and went to look at the damaged nest. Alas, not one egg was left whole.

What a scene for Waitch York when she returned refreshed from her dust bath. Chila Waitch, trembling with rage and sorrow met her and showed her their ruined hopes. Waitch York, overcome with grief told him the whole truth and wept over her loss. Coomal's rage reassured Chila Waitch that Waitch York had not been unfaithful to him. He consoled her as well he could and took her back to the flock cautioning her to say nothing about her acquaintance with Coomal. He told the flock only what he had actually seen happening.

In the evening, all the *waitch* went to see the ruined nest and Coomal's *nint*, the only recognisable part left of him. It was resolved that to prevent such a catastrophe happening again, nests would no longer be built near trees. The hill was named Coomalnintup.

Waitch York went back to the flock and saw all the other *yorks* with their chicks following them about. She remembered that her foolishness had deprived her of chicks of her own that year. Chila Waitch was very kind and attentive and tried to console her for her loss. He'd been married twice before and had plenty of children and did not feel the loss as greatly as she did. He considered she had been punished enough and never spoke of Coomal. She had great trust and confidence in him and always told him when there was danger about. She thought him much wiser than any young husband.

Chapter Eighteen

When I returned to the station after my first baby (a son⁹⁸) was born, the Noongars decided to hold an extra grand corroboree to celebrate his arrival. Many of their friends arrived to join in. The men looked magnificent in their head dresses and *wilgie*. They had been making careful preparations and the women had kept me up to date with their progress.

A corroboree is not a dance; it is a party during which the men will perform a variety of dances. They will dance one particular dance till they're tired; then they will rest; have a talk and possibly a little refreshment in the way of roast meat, before starting another dance. Some of the dances were performed by all the men, while in others there were only a few performers. The women never danced. Their role was to sing and to keep the fires tended. Sometimes they were assisted by the very old men in tending the fires but the old men did not sing. This particular corroboree was a celebration and the dance I am about to describe was only danced on special occasions.

It began with the arrival of a large party of men walking in step, followed by the women. The men stood around in a large circle; the women sat down in a half circle a little further off. The men held their hunting *geize* and *meeras*. As the dance commenced the women sang a low plaintive song. The men kept step, stamping first one foot then the other chanting, 'Hoo hoo'. The song and the dance gradually got faster and faster until the men were almost breathless. The women's song abruptly ceased and the dancers stopped. One old man broke away and ran into the circle brandishing a *geize* in his *meera* and chanting verse. He danced round inside the circle pointing his *geize* at every alternate man. When he stopped and stood still all the men shouted, 'Hoo-hoo.'

Another old man did the same thing, pointing his *geize* at the men who had not been pointed at before. When he finished there was another shout of 'Hoo-hoo,' and another fast dance around the circle; the men shouting, 'Hoo hoo' and the women singing their song.

⁹⁸ John born in Albany 2 May 1879

The women stopped. The men cried 'Hoo hoo'. Two more men ran into the circle joining the two that were already there. They ran around the inner circle pointing their *geize*. This was repeated until a complete inner circle was formed. The inner circle revolved one way, and the outer circle revolved the other way and the women sang.

Upon another 'Hoo-hoo', the two circles reformed as one large circle and the men commenced a circular march. Soon they stopped and shook their *geize*, stamping first one foot and then the other, making the ground tremble.

At the appointed moment they cried 'Hoo hoo' and reformed into a large circle. The women's song became wilder and louder and the inner and outer circles were again formed. As soon as women's song stopped, the shouting was taken up by the men, and when they stopped the women took up their song without a pause. When the men and the women joined together the shouting blended with the song as a base and soprano note.

This dance was performed for nearly an hour. The timing of the movements was perfect, the men keeping excellent step to the song. When it was finished, they sat down, quite exhausted. The women made small fires all around the dancing circle, and started their chanting again. One man stood up and danced about in the circle shaking his *geize* and saying what a fine fellow he was. When he sat down another man stood up and did the same thing.

At the conclusion of the ceremony I brought out the baby and introduced him to the Noongars and shared some cakes around. Finally the men marched off singing 'Hoo-hoo' and didn't stop till they got back to camp.

I felt very honoured by the performance of the corroboree for it is only on very special occasions that Noongars visit another camp expressly to dance. I doubt there are many who have ever witnessed such a wonderful sight as I did that night: 200 Noongars dancing in every sort of headdress and adornment that their ingenuity could conceive of and to which the birds and beasts could contribute.

Chapter Nineteen

I have frequently heard non-Aboriginal people speak of Aboriginal groups as having chiefs or kings, but as far as I now this did not apply to the Wheelman⁹⁹ Noongars, the largest group about. In times of conflict, a man was selected to lead the group into battle. It might not be the same man who had led them before, or it may be same man who had led them several times. It depended on the success and the popularity of the man.

It was the *mulgars* and the wise women of each group who had the most influence. To them was entrusted the power to find out and report if any laws had been broken. The whole group inflicted punishment on the guilty ones. Certain crimes brought certain punishments; and all this was well-known to all.

They Noongars lived as a community pure and simple; each man governed his own home and family and was quite independent of any of the other families. Although they lived together it was not unusual for a man to take his family away from the group and to remain away for months. In some unknown way, the main group generally seemed to know how to communicate with him if necessary. People went hunting in small groups and chose who they went with. When game was brought in to camp it was shared by each family in the community. No important enterprise was undertaken until had been thoroughly discussed by members of the community.

The Noongars had no swear or curse-words in their vocabulary. Their only form of verbal abuse was to make critical remarks about each other's personal appearance. They were very careful about how they spoke of the *jannocks*. They preferred not to discuss them at all for fear they may say something that may be construed as an insult, which could bring misfortune to them.

I asked Old Buckerup the *mulgar* to describe Noitch, and how it was different from any other *Jannock*. Buckerup gravely told me that now there were white people about who could easily make fire, perhaps he could talk a little bit about Noitch, but he didn't want to say very much. He was in a rather talkative mood that day and told

⁹⁹ The Tindale boundaries (1974) show the south-eastern boundary of the Wiilman people as being approximately 80km WNW of the North Western boundary of the Wheelman people. He places the Wheelman people just inside the Western Wudjari border along with the Kar Kars. According to Tindale, the Quaalup and Bremer Bay people are on Koreng land.

me a story about what happened when some Noongars forgot the dangers of making remarks about the *jannocks*.

It happened a long, long time ago but it might happen again. The weather had been very wet and cold for some time. Everything was damp and disagreeable and the Noongars had great difficulty in keeping their *carlas* alight. Many of the women grumbled at having to dry the sticks before putting them on the *carl* and declared they would not make the *jannock carls*¹⁰⁰ any more. They did not care if the *jannocks* did come to their *carls*: *jannocks* were only *wamong chilla walech* anyway (very old grey-haired men). The old Noongars were horrified to hear them say such a thing and scolded them, but the women just said even worse things about the *jannocks*. They said the *jannocks* had heads like the *karrak* (black cockatoo), feet like the *waitch*, and legs like *oma*¹⁰¹ (the brush kangaroo) which everyone knows are crooked. The men drove them from the fires saying *they* would keep the *carls* alight.

Men do not know as much as the women about the worry of keeping the *carlas* going in wet weather. They put the *carlas* just inside their *mias*, piled a lot of damp sticks on them and went to sleep. When they awoke in the morning all the *carls* were out and the rain dripping down from the *mias* had put the *carlas* out too. The men spent days rubbing sticks together to try to make a *manCarl* (spark) but were unsuccessful and had to eat their meat raw.

When the hot summer weather returned they tried many times to make fire, but though they selected the driest sticks and laid powdered red gum (which catches fire easily) down on the dry grass on sunny rocks it was no use. *Carl* would not come; not the faintest *manCarl* appeared. The women put meat on stones in the hottest part of the day to try to cook it at least a little but it tasted bad. They ground *quonert* flour and made it into cakes but the sun was not hot enough to bake them.

Winter returned and still the Noongars had to eat their *tdage* raw. They mixed it with the *quonert* and water and tried to chew it but it made them ill. They became desperate. The *cooning* (children) were beginning to forget what a *carl* was like and the women bitterly regretted insulting the *jannocks*. But it was too late for regrets – the mischief had been done.

¹⁰⁰ Fires to distract the *jannocks* - see Chapter 7.

¹⁰¹ Western brush wallaby (*Macropus Irma*)

Two very big Noongar brothers called Worduckor and Coodeera said they would go into the interior and climb the high mountains looking for the *jannocks*. They would attempt to coax them into providing some *carlas* to bring home. They knew they were taking great risks, but it would be worth it to get *carl* back.

They took two big *kyles* with them. It had taken a long time to make the *kyles*; because there was no fire to harden them in they'd had to be hardened in the sun. Each brother took two hunting *geize* but no fighting *geize* so the *jannocks* would know they had come on a peaceful errand. They travelled a long way and could find no traces of any *carl*. The bush was thick and there was little grass because there had been no fires for so long. At length, they arrived at the coast, at Korra Korrenga, the hills around Bremer Bay, and stayed there two days, throwing their *kyles* at daylight, midday and sunset.

The *jannocks* failed to respond and the brothers were beginning to despair, so they went on to the Barren Range¹⁰². At midday they threw their *kyles*; one north and one east. After a longer wait than usual, the *kyles* returned. One smelled faintly of smoke. This gave the brothers hope, and in good spirits they travelled in a north easterly direction till they came to the Woomlanack, the Fitzgerald Ranges, and climbed to the highest point. Again they threw their *kyles*, one north and one east and sat down, tired out but feeling hopeful. The *kyles* came back much more quickly than previously, smelling strongly of smoke. The brothers looked carefully out to the far north east and eventually Coodeera saw a little smoke curling up into the sky. They were so delighted that they lay down and slept feeling quite sure they had either found the *jannocks*' home or a group of Noongars that had fire.

After waking from their nap they travelled all the rest of the day and all night until they came to an enormous hole on a mountain with a fire blazing from a hole in the middle.¹⁰³ There was no one else about so they knew they must have found the *jannocks*' home. They did not dare touch the *carl* for it belonged to the *jannocks*, and touching it without permission would have extinguished it. They talked a long time about what to do. They decided to give the *jannocks* some gifts; so went hunting and

¹⁰² Mt Barren, Fitzgerald National Park

¹⁰³ This sounds like a volcano, though there have been no volcanics in Western Australia for millions of years. However, 4 to 5,000 years ago there were active volcanoes on the South Australian coast: Mt Gambier and Mt Schank, approximately 2,900km to the East. There are some Dreaming legends connected with these.

caught a *yonger*, a *coomal* a *coorley*¹⁰⁴ and some *gilgies*. They put each catch north, south, east and west of the fire, as close as they could get it without burning, went away and hid in some bushes.

The *jannocks* were so pleased with all the food that they sent fire pouring over the mountain and ignited the bushes near the brothers' hiding place. The brothers' *carlas* blazed up brightly as they lit them, showing them the *jannocks* were pleased. The brothers waited until it was dark, then took lots and lots of stones and threw them into the hole in the mountain to keep the *jannocks* in long enough for them to get safely back to their camp.

They made a *carl* at every camp on their way home and burned great quantities of country so the rest of the group would know they were coming. Since then they have always been careful when talking about the *jannocks* and have never been without fire. Despite the white man's ability to make fire whenever he likes, it is just as well to be careful what you say about the *jannocks*.

¹⁰⁴ Australian bustard (*Ardeotis australis*)

Chapter Twenty

The short winter was over and spring was again in the air. Every day was getting warmer though the nights were still cold and frosty. Once again the earth was covered with a green mantle and the birds were chirruping busily and making their nests. Wildflowers bloomed everywhere and the cheerful magpies kept up their joyful song all day long. I had already found several ground larks¹⁰⁵ nests with eggs. Ground larks are dear little grey birds. They run in all directions to attract predators away from their nests which are made in the long grass in the most exposed places. One nest I found was on the roadside just near the farmhands' gate. The mother reared its young seemingly unconcerned about the traffic passing it daily.

Greton and Woienong came up one afternoon and suggested a walk along the river. Beenup had told them there was a mountain duck's¹⁰⁶ nest high up in the fork of a tree. I was rather pleased to hear this as I had never seen a mountain duck. We went some distance along the banks of the river and found the nest, but it was far too high for us to reach unless one of the girls climbed the tree.

We decided it was not worthwhile to climb the tree; besides I have seen mother ducks and ducklings swimming about in the water when the ducklings are just a mass of yellow and black down and could not possibly fly. I was keen to find out how the young ducks got down from the tree before they fledged. The girls told me the ducklings got onto their parents' backs and were flown down. I never saw this happen but it seems to me the only possible way.¹⁰⁷

We found a teal's¹⁰⁸ nest with nine eggs in it. I decided to take them home and hatch them under a hen. The attempt was successful and I brought up several healthy young birds. They were perfectly tame and would feed out of my hand. One showery afternoon at the beginning of winter I was feeding them as a flock of wild teal flew overhead, whistling as they went. In a trice my seven birds flew up to join their wild comrades and that was the last I ever saw of them.

¹⁰⁵ *Anthus novaeseelandiae* (Australasian Pipit)

¹⁰⁶ *Tadorna tadornoides* (Australian Shelduck, also known as the Mountain Duck)

¹⁰⁷ Mountain ducks nest high up in tall trees, in hollows lined with soft, thick down, laying up to 20 eggs ... One day I watched 12 greyish-brown striped babies tumble from at least 15 feet high, hit the ground, look around dazed by the real world before finding their feet and heading unerringly for the soak where their parents sat watching and waiting. (Cunningham, p 119)

¹⁰⁸ *Anas gracilis* (grey teal)

From amongst the bushes by the riverside, out hopped a beautiful blue wren. We all sat as quiet as mice to watch him. One by one he was joined by four of his little brown wives. He was lovely and seemed so pleased with himself. His plumage was nearly every tint of blue from darkest azure to palest sapphire and his little wives were a contrast in their pretty pale brown. By the brightness of his colours we could see he was an old bird and had just put on his summer suit. In the winter his coat is brown and he can only be distinguished from his wives by a few faint blue feathers in his tail.

We hunted for the wrens' nest and found one little wife sitting there. The girls told me the little wives took turns to sit on the eggs. The male accompanies one little wife to the nest when it's her turn to incubate the eggs and takes the other one away. Each wife lays only one egg and there are rarely more than three eggs found in a nest. The male always has three old and two young wives. He is always to be seen first and is later joined by his wives, one at a time. The fifth wife arrives about ten days after the male is first seen.

By and by we saw a sparrowhawk sailing overhead and in a moment all the little birds had disappeared into the bushes. One of the girls laughed and remarked that *ter ter*¹⁰⁹ had got wise. He didn't trust strangers. As we waited for the *ter ters* to come out again, the girls told me the following story.

Long long ago all along the river banks there were lots and lots of *ter ters*. Each one had only two *yorks* which was as it should be. They shared their labours in nest-building, hatching and feeding the young and their husbands took care of them. Each husband knew his boundaries and kept to them.

One *ter ter* was more venturesome than the rest and took to visiting his neighbours, sometimes taking his *yorks* with him, sometimes going alone. This was all very well while he kept to his own group, but he began to make acquaintances with all sorts of birds and the other *ter ters* thought he was somewhat foolish. Not content with taking strange birds to his own *mia* he began to take them to visit the other *ter ter mias*.

¹⁰⁹ *Malurus splendens* (splendid fairy wren)

Some of the visiting birds were friendly and kind to the *ter ters*. But when Ter Ter began to talk to the *woor* (pallid cuckoos)¹¹⁰ who are pushy birds, the *ter ters* did not like it. Once they got acquainted with the *ter ters* the *woor* began to visit at all sorts of unseasonable times particularly at nesting time when visitors were not wanted.

The *woor* refused to leave the *ter ters* alone, and would often lay an egg in the *ter ters*' nests. The *ter ters* resented this. They could not push the *woor* egg out; that was against bird law, but they did not want to raise the chicks of strangers.

Foolishly, Ter Ter made friends with Cootup,¹¹¹ who seemed so nice and friendly and always glad to see him. He showed Ter Ter so many places where he could get insects that Ter Ter took Cootup home and introduced him to the other *ter ters*, who objected strongly. Still, for a while there were no problems between the *ter ters* and Cootup.

Soon there was a terrible outcry. Nearly all the *ter ters* hatched out *woors*. The *woor* chicks kicked the *ter ter* chicks out of the nests as soon as they could and insisted on the bereaved *ter ter* parents feeding them instead.

Cootup offered to help the *ter ters* and his kind offer was reluctantly accepted. First he killed all the young *woor*, for which the *ter ters* were very grateful, but then he began on the male *ter ters* which began to disappear, one by one. Still Cootup flew about amongst the *ter ters* and never hinted he knew how they had disappeared. Indeed, he offered to find out where they had gone!

One little *york* had a long talk with another little *york*. They had both lost their husbands and were suspicious of Cootup. They decided to watch him and eventually found him in the act of eating yet another a little *ter ter*. Just a few blue feathers remained when he had finished his meal. Filled with dismay the *ter ter yorks* flew home and told all the other *ter ter* what they had seen. The next day the *ter ters* all met together and beat and buffeted Cootup until they drove him away.

So many males had been killed that the group contained many unprotected females. Each male had to take five wives to look after: three old and two young. Now *ter ters* are very particular – each one has his own boundary and never intrudes on another's

¹¹⁰ *Cuculus pallidus* (Pallid Cuckoo)

¹¹¹ *Accipiter cirrocephalus* (Collared Sparrowhawk)

land. They can come close to their boundaries to tell each other when strangers are coming but then must leave at once. Though they are able to bunch together to beat *cootups* off they have never really been able to get rid of the *woor* and often a *woor's* egg is found in their nests. Now when you see a little blue bird hopping about by himself it is to tell you strangers are coming and you had better look out. If he has all his little wives with him, it means everything is safe.

This legend highlights some facts about bird life and Noongar customs. If there are no women to be seen at a camp it means the Noongars think danger is about. As soon as they confidant they are safe, the women emerge from their concealment.

The blue wren seems to have certain fixed territories and I have never seen two males together. Year after year I have seen one male and four or five females in one spot, while across the river just a few dozen yards away there will be another male with his family. I have frequently found cuckoo eggs in the *ter ter* nests and have sat and watched the little wives change places on the nests. At changes of shift, the oncoming *ter ter york* is escorted to the nest by her husband and the off-coming *york* is escorted away.

The Noongars coming in from the edges of their boundary brought disquieting stories of strange tracks that they had seen during the winter. We couldn't make out what they could be from their description or sketches drawn in the sand. An expedition was fitted out with the double purpose to find out what the tracks were and to discover whether there was any good country further back.

Gervase, an elderly white man and three Noongars made up the exploration party, expecting to be away at least three weeks. We were very busy for a fortnight before they left. A bullock had been killed in the winter and the skin tanned. This was made into saddlebags by Albert and Gervase while I made countless bullets. We ground flour and put it into strong 11 kilogram bags which I made. Hobbles¹¹² were made from the bullock leather and horse bells were made out of an old cross-cut saw.

We packed supplies of dried beef, mutton, ham and pork salted during the winter but not too much meat. The explorers decided to depend on their guns instead. They took plenty of tea and sugar.

¹¹² A rope or strap used for hobbling a horse or other animal. Hobbling is tying an animal's legs together so it can't stray.

At daylight one lovely morning the five men set forth; each mounted on a packhorse. Life seemed very flat after they'd gone. In the absence of Gervase, Albert had a heavy work load and came in so tired each night that he often went to bed as soon as he'd had his supper. Some days he didn't come home for lunch and I would be alone from six in the morning to six at night. Those days were very long. I often wonder how I would have survived without my Noongar friends. Their unfailing humour and merry laughter always cheered me up, never mind how low-spirited I was feeling. I was always glad to hear the cheerful, 'Missus have wongi (talk) today.' We would adjourn to the woodheap and discuss every subject under the sun.

On one occasion, Pirrup¹¹³, one of the boys had told a deliberate lie and misled Albert about some sheep, causing considerable trouble. On wood-chopping day I got out my bible and read the story of Ananais and Sapphira¹¹⁴ to Pirrup and the boys laying great stress on how both characters were struck dead in consequence of telling a lie. The boys went off duly impressed as I had hoped they would but old Buckerup who had joined the wood-chopping party (for being a *mulgar* he did not have to work or hunt: the group kept him fed in return for his services) lingered behind and remarked with a broad grin, 'That very good story Missus; Pirrup make great bother when he not tell truth. Good thing to frighten him but you and I Missus know better for it is only story good for children.'

I never tried to impart Christianity to the Noongars: their morality is not ours and their laws are not ours but they are admirably adapted for the life they lead and their punishment for any infringement of the laws is far greater than ours. They know what the punishment is for various crimes. No one is ever excused punishment; they may escape it temporarily but sooner or later it will be dealt out to them. There is no evading it.

The expedition rode back through the fields into the stockyard one afternoon, and a few moments later, Greton and Woiyenong came running to me with the news that Albert had sent for me. Gervase had caught some Pardooks¹¹⁵. The girls were absolutely dancing with excitement and could hardly wait for me to put on my hat. I was soon in the middle of a regular hubbub.

¹¹³ May have been the son of Noongar policeman and tracker Bobby Roberts: see *Kayang and Me* by Hazel Brown and Kim Scott, page 49.

¹¹⁴ Bible: Acts 5: 1-11

¹¹⁵ See Appendix D

The male Pardook was elderly, about 155 centimetres tall. He had a low forehead, small eyes, a flat nose with very wide nostrils, and a short an upper lip. His lower jaw was heavy and his shoulders were broad but his body fell away at the hips and his legs were nearly spindles. His arms were long and he was very hairy. He had five fingers and a thumb on each hand. The fingers were all perfectly formed and the hand looked just like mine until I counted the fingers. He also had five very short toes and a long big toe which seemed to spread well away from the others.

The women had similar body shapes, hands and feet. I was amazed any human being could have such thin legs. I was able to span the calf of the younger woman with my middle finger and thumb. Their colour was a reddish-black and their skin was rough. They wore no garments except a string knotted around their waists hanging down in front.

According to Gervase on their outward journey the expedition members had seen the strange tracks leading towards the country's interior but did not follow them. On their way back the explorers were short of water. They saw the elderly male Pardook in the distance and rode after him to ask whether he knew the whereabouts of a *yamma*. At first the man ran as fast as the horse could gallop and it was a good hard run before they caught up with him. He was horribly frightened. Gervase tried to make him understand that he was looking for water but his language was different to that spoken by the Noongar men. Gervase was going to ride away but one of the Noongars noticed the man's footprints were the strange tracks that had been seen about the station in winter. They gave the old man sugar which he ate greedily. He tasted and spat out flour and salted meat but devoured fresh kangaroo meat raw, refusing the cooked meat which the Noongars offered him.

Just before sunset Gervase heard a voice and saw the younger woman beside the man. Where she had come from he could not tell. The man said a few words and a few minutes later the older woman appeared. The man seemed quite satisfied now his women were with him and his fear diminished. Gervase gave him some sugar and more raw meat for the women. He ate all the sugar and gave part of the meat to the women, then dug a hole with his hands, buried the rest of the meat and lay down on top. The women settled down near him. In the morning one of the women dug up the meat and shared it with the man and other women. They signed they wanted sugar, and Gervase made them tea. They ate well but drank sparingly.

Gervase decided to bring the Pardooks to the station to satisfy the Noongars about the strange tracks and to find out see whether anyone knew the Pardook's language (no one did). The man seemed content to trot alongside the horse and the women travelled just behind him. That night the party came upon a vacant campsite which the Pardooks seemed to recognise.

The women collected a quantity of the low scrub, scooped a shallow hole in the sand, put the scrub into the hole and set fire to in it. They piled wood on to the fire for nearly two hours then let the fire die down and covered the ashes with sand. After a time they scooped out the ashes and sand making a fairly large hollow and lead the old man to it. The man lay down in the hole, coiled into a half-circle. The women scattered the hot sand over him and curled up beside him snuggling down in the warmth.

After we had made the acquaintance of the Pardooks, we asked the Noongars to take them half a day's journey away from the station and let them go on their way, but they refused and seemed not to want to have anything to do with them. So the next day after giving the Pardooks a hearty meal and some provisions, one of our men rode out with them for several kilometres and bade them farewell.

The Noongars knew very little about the Pardooks other that they lived in the desert interior where there is very little food and water. Old Buckerup was the only one who seemed to know anything definite: he said they were not numerous and apparently went about in small bands. He thought one of the two women was the old man's wife, the other his daughter. He said most Pardooks had five fingers and a thumb, though some of them had six toes one on one foot and five fingers on one hand.

The gentle Pardooks were the subject of conversation at the station for a long time and formed the basis for many Noongar tales.

Chapter Twenty one

Albert and I were leaving the township¹¹⁶ and had spent the night at an Inn. We still had a 190 kilometre drive in front of us and would have to camp out at least two nights at places with sufficient water.

The maid failed to get up in time to make us a 5.00 am breakfast, despite me privately paying her to do so. I would have set the kitchen fire myself if I'd been able to find the kindling. While we waited, Albert packed the trap so we could get going as soon as we'd finished breakfast.

We hurried through our meal and got away at 7.00 am, an hour later than planned. We had barely gone a kilometre or two when a couple of cows ran across the road and frightened one of the horses. He reared and broke a trace¹¹⁷, and there was another delay before we could get him quiet and repair the damage.

We soon realised we could never get through the long pass in the Stirling Ranges before dark and decided to camp by the side of a large salt-water lake at the foot of Bluff Knoll. Nearby was an almost-dry fresh water swamp fringed by tea trees with gleaming white bark and dark green foliage. In its rush-covered centre was small pool from which we procured a little water.

The mountain reared its lofty head above us, and I felt the loneliness it seems to exude. It sits between great high mountains tumbled against one another, huge jagged peaks towering overhead. The name it is given by the Noongars is *Beulah Meal*; great many-faced hill, and it suits it well for the rocks seemed to form themselves into faces wherever you look. It is the highest peak in the Stirling Range at 1,109 metres. Two sides sheer steeply down from the summit torn by numerous waterfalls and gullies, and one side is a gentle slope. It seems barren and an unlikely place for game to be plentiful.¹¹⁸ The faces in the rocks have given it a reputation amongst the Noongars as a place of evil. They never camp on or hunt near the mountain. It is the headquarters of Noitch, the supreme evil spirit and his attendant spirits the *jannocks* who haunt the deep gullies. When mist curls around the

¹¹⁶ Presumably Albany

¹¹⁷ Traces are the straps which go from a horse's breastcollar to the vehicle being pulled.

¹¹⁸ In fact the Stirling Range is a species-rich area recognised internationally as one of the world's top 35 hotspots for biodiversity.

mountain tops and through the gullies, the shapeless and genderless Noitch is showing itself. It cannot hold any form for long. Along with the *jannocks*, it is forever on the lookout for Noongars. When the Noongars camp they always light two fires – one for them and one for the *jannocks*. No matter how hungry a Noongar may be, a small portion of food is always placed near the *jannocks*' fire to divert their attention. However, I have seen the forepaw of the kangaroo placed by the fire with about as much meat on it as the claw of the fowl. It would seem *Jannocks* do not have big appetites.

We followed our usual camping routine. Albert unharnessed the horses and took them to drink while I decide on a suitable place to pitch the tent and made tent pegs from sticks. The horses were tied up with their feeders in position, and we pitched the tent. We collected small twigs of eucalyptus leaves to form our bed, and found wood for the fire. I felt we should have a big fire that night, so darkness was almost upon us before we had gathered enough wood. We boiled the billy and ate supper, partly disrobed and rolled ourselves up in our blankets.

Though very tired I could not sleep. It was so still that not a leaf stirred. At about midnight I woke Albert and asked him to check on the horses. On his way back to the tent he saw that fire was low, stoked it and threw on some fresh logs. As it blazed we heard a most awful shriek, close by. Dead silence followed, then the sound of another shriek, like a woman in death agonies. I fled from the tent and clung to Albert in horror. We could hear the horses' terrified snorting but everything else was oppressively silent. We sat by the fire for some time, no clue to the origin of the shriek but feeling certain a foul murder had been committed. There was no sleep for either of us that night. My blood was cold for days afterwards when I thought of it.

In the morning we searched carefully all around the camp but found no trace of any footsteps. When we reached home we asked the Noongars what the noise could have been, knowing they regarded Beulah Meal as a place of evil. They said Carcup must have been about.

Years afterwards, camping at Bremer Bay I heard the same terrible scream. I have since been told this scream is made by the large brown owl ¹¹⁹when it is frightened.

¹¹⁹ At www.owlpages.com you can listen to the calls of a number of owls that live in south Western Australia. Two in particular emit blood-curdling screams: the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

On the two occasions I heard it I was considerably more frightened than any bird could be.

The legend of Carcup seems to have a wide range as I have heard it in many districts. In order to make it understandable I must explain that Noongars have taboos on marriage taking place between people who are related to each other by certain degrees (though I never discovered what those degrees were). Should such a union take place there is only one punishment. The guilty parties are killed as is the fruit of such union. Should the pair escape and the woman later die the man is sometimes received back into the group but the woman whose husband has died never is. She is *neuch* or wrong woman.

A *Nunich* can only marry a *Wording*. Strangely I have occasionally been told that there are *Nunich* and *Wording* women in the same family, although I have wondered whether I was spun a yarn. A Noongar tells you what he or she thinks is good for you to know and if you probe too deeply you will often be told some wild story to the huge amusement of the other Noongars, who will be delighted by your gullibility. Noongars are very quick to read facial expressions and will often tell you what they think you want to know whether it is true or not. I frequently thought I had discovered a really interesting custom but on questioning another group of Noongars was told with a smile that whoever told me was 'only talking'.

In the story of Carcup, the inland Noongars claim it was the wedge-tailed eagles that discovered the forbidden union while the coastal Noongars claim it was discovered by the sea-eagles. Otherwise the main parts of the story are alike.

There had been a terrible storm; the worst in anyone's memory. Tall trees crashed and broke, riven with lightning and torn from their roots. They tossed and tumbled into deep gullies on the mountainsides. Great ravines appeared and landslips occurred all along the mountain ranges. The Noongars' *mias* blew down and their fires washed out. They cowered shivering under the wet frames of their ruined homes, frightened to even to lift the debris from their bruised and trembling bodies.

A brighter flash of lightning, a loud roll of thunder followed by a mighty crash indicated that an immense tree at the edge of one of the gullies had been struck and

and the Masked Owl (*Tyto novahollandiae*). The Barking Owl (*Ninox connivens*) sounds like a female exclaiming in alarm but it's a cry rather than a scream.

had rolled down the mountain side. Now on the summit of this tree a pair of eagles; *waaleghs*¹²⁰ had for years made their nest and brought up several pairs of young. The tree's height and the inaccessible spot where it grew had made it a safe place for an eyrie. Now in the crash of scattered boughs the nest was destroyed and the parents and one young newly fledged eaglet were killed. The remaining chick, a female was so dazed by the shock that for some hours she remained in a gully recovering in the comparative quiet.

Hunger drove her to make an effort to rise. After a few trials she soared to the mountain tops only to find the wind was still very high. She drifted on the wind, too weak to battle against it and was blown towards the coast. Finally, frightened, cold, exhausted and hungry she crept into a thick bush near some big rocks and fell asleep.

When she awoke the sun was shining and the wind had dropped. She could hear the unfamiliar noise of the sea beating on the reefs and thought it was a terrible wind on the mountain tops. Nearly mad and quite reckless with hunger she rose from her shelter to find there was no wind. She saw for the first time the glittering expanse of the ocean. It was water, she knew, for she had seen rivers in full flood, but it was not water that she sought; it was food.

While she was feebly circling around in the hopes of catching an unwary wallaby she was startled by a hoarse scream and saw a young *chillian*¹²¹ overhead. She recognised him with a feeling of joy for the *waalegh* are kin to the *chillian*. They meet at the heads of estuaries and occasionally have corroborees and *yardies* together. She had heard about *chillian* kin from her parents and had vaguely looked forward to meeting them someday.

Waalegh called on Chillian to help her in her dire distress. Chillian responded to the call and conducted her to the beach where some fish had been cast up and she ate. Indeed she gorged herself, but being unaccustomed to fish and having been through such privation she fell ill.

Chillian looked after her, showed her a safe place to hide and visited her day after day bringing with him various ground-game, as he realised that fish had made her ill.

¹²⁰ *Aquila audax*

¹²¹ *Haliaeetus leucogaster* (white-bellied sea eagle)

She soon recovered under his care and commenced to fly about with him. It was strange the way they had met; Chillian had been blown away from his home by the same storm and as she, and now he had found a companion he had no wish to try to find his home again.

Food was plentiful and Waalegh charmed Chillian with the beauty of her plumage, her swiftness of flight and the rapidity with which she swooped down on her quarry. She did not care for fish and would never go fishing with him though he often urged to do so. She was quite content to sit on a rock and admire his agility as he pounced on small fish.

Time went on and mating season came round. The innocent friendship was disturbed. Chillian suggested they should build a nest and Waalegh rejected the suggestion with horror. Weren't they both *Nunich*? Any union between them would be an abomination. Nothing but misery and death could come from it. She had learned that in her nest, almost before she had feathers. He had been told the same! For two or three days she was so aghast at the mere suggestion of a union that she did not even speak to or go near Chillian. But the place was lonely – she had no one else, and the season was passing. She yielded to his persuasion with many misgivings and they began to build a nest.

They built a strange nest unlike a *waalegh's* nest or a *chillian's* nest either in situation or construction. Wedge-tailed eagles build nests in the forks of high trees and sea eagles prefer to build on tall rocks near the sea. Their nest was built partly on the fork of a tree and partly on a rock against which the tree leaned. Chillian and the Waalegh had hunted long and hard and frequently argued before they settled on their nesting spot; it was a sort of compromise between the instincts of the two birds. The construction was not as sturdy as a *waalegh* or a *chillian* nest. It was built with the stout twigs of the wedge-tailed eagle's nest and lined with the reeds and rushes of the sea eagles nest.

Owing to all the complications the season was nearing its end when the nest was completed and Waalegh laid one egg. This clearly showed the union was unnatural for the wedge-tailed eagles always lay two eggs and sea eagles generally lay three.

When the egg hatched, an enormous chick emerged and grew rapidly. It ate anything and everything. Waalegh brought it ground-game and Chillian brought it

fish. As its plumage developed it showed its evil origin. Some of the feathers were *chillian* and some were *waalegh*.

As the chick grew older, its parents discovered it was neither male nor female but a little of both. It was a wayward, wilful, reckless bird, and told its parents it didn't want their advice on any subject. It ate what it fancied regardless of its totems. Its call was strange and like neither of its parents' calls. It caused grief and terror to its mother and its recklessness annoyed its father for he feared that some of his relations might discover his sin and he knew the inevitable punishment. Death would be dealt to all three birds.

One fine spring day the Carcup, or so its parents called it, flew along the coast and saw a flock of *chillians* feeding on a dead porpoise. It flew down and joined them for they looked just like its father and fed and screamed like him. The *chillians* regarded this stranger with annoyance and in spite of its defiant attitude soon drove it away for there were many of them. It returned to its parents with its pride bitterly hurt and did not tell them about its rebuff from the strangers.

Hitherto it had been monarch of all. Smaller hawks had fled in terror leaving their prey when they saw it approaching. It decided to haunt the sea shores no longer and extended its flights towards the mountains feeding more exclusively on ground-game.

One summer day it met some *waaleghs* feeding on a kangaroo at the foot of a high hill. They looked like its mother and fed like her. Now, the *waalegh* are more cunning than the *chillian* and Carcup aroused their curiosity. They let the strange creature join them for a short time until its overbearing ways feeding habits so disgusted them that they drove it away.

After Carcup had been repelled, the old men and women *waaleghs* had a long *wongi* and decided something was very wrong with the strange creature of unknown origin. It was something like a *waalegh* yet not a *waalegh*. It could talk a little like them and had cobbled together pieces of their language, but also spoke words they didn't understand. What was the language and plumage? They felt they knew and had seen something like it yet could not remember what. Discussions continued for many days, till someone remembered the strange words the bird had spoken were from the *chillian* language. Another suddenly remembered some of the feathers were like *chillians'* feathers. It was decided to hold a big corroboree with the *chillians* at the

head of one of the estuaries where there would be plenty of fish and game and the mystery could be discussed and thoroughly investigated.

Waaleghs and *chillians* came from far far away to attend the corroboree and there were great discussions. The *chillians* related how they too had seen the monster that was neither a *waaleg* nor a *chillian* but a little of both, and all the birds felt sure a sin had been committed. The sinners must be found and dealt with according to their laws. If nothing was done no luck would come to the *waaleghs* or the *chillians*. Indeed, recently game had been scarce and fish had not been plentiful. Undoubtedly *chillians* and *waaleghs* were already suffering in consequence of the sin.

The *waaleghs* and *chillians* set out to hunt for the guilty pair they were sure existed somewhere. The *waaleghs* circled all over the country so not the smallest thing could escape them and the *chillians* went along the beaches. Soon, some *chillians* came upon the strange nest. Feeling certain they had found the place of the sin they flew back to the corroboree ground and told the other birds what they had seen.

Early the next morning before the sun was up, the *chillians* and the *waaleghs* joined together in a huge flock and flew to the strange nest. They surprised and speedily destroyed the guilty parents and pulled the nest to pieces so not a trace of it was left. But Carcup was cunning. It had heard the noise of many wings approaching and hidden in a hole in a rock. Though the *chillians* and *waaleghs* hunted it for days and days they never found it, for it had completely changed its habits. Now it lived in lonely places and went hunting at night to feed on *coomals* and take little birds from their nests.

When the Noongars are camping in the hills or near the beaches and hear a terrible scream like a woman in her last agony, they must sit up for the rest of the night and keep their fires bright. On no account should they go outside the firelight. At daylight the next morning they must move their camp, even if there is plenty of water and good hunting nearby for Carcup is about, hoping to feed on their intestines – its favourite food. If it can get into a *mia* it will sit on the occupants' stomachs and suck their breath out of them. They will be seized with incurable mortal sickness and endless pain. Carcup screams when it is hungry and causes misery and misfortune. It is immortal and its existence, arising as it does from terrible sin, is an everlasting warning to all Noongars against forbidden unions.

Chapter Twenty two

One glorious afternoon I decided that instead of taking my favourite walk along the river to birdwatch, I'd go to a large rock about 800 metres from the house with some of the Noongar girls to try to get some manna gum. It was rather early for the gum but we had been having some very hot days and I thought we'd probably get a little; besides it gave the Noongar girls a reason to walk. They do not believe in walking merely for the chance of seeing something interesting. Waymen and Tupin came with me and enlivened the journey with much interesting gossip about the goings-on in the camp, to which I had not been for some time.

There was very little gum at the rock so we wandered on to higher ground. To my delight, there below us on a small grassy plain we saw a flock of emus with several clutches of chicks. I was anxious to get near them and would have loved to get a chick but Tupin explained that though she knew she could easily run down a chick, it would not live if captured. It was much too young and would have to be kept very warm.

Emu chicks are very pretty and look exactly like domestic turkey chicks only much larger. With their long legs they appear to be mounted on stilts. We sat very still. Every now and then the girls made a shrill whistle and the emus lifted their heads and came closer until they were so close I could easily see the markings on the chicks. Emus are inquisitive birds and like to know everything. On one occasion Albert and I met an emu when out on a drive. We whistled to it occasionally and it followed us for several kilometres running either behind or alongside the trap, till I frightened it by suddenly flicking the whip and it rushed off into the bush.

These birds fed near us uneasily for some time, and we did not dare to speak. Suddenly one of the girls laughed and the emus were off like the wind, their little chicks streaming behind them. We noticed a wild turkey with her two chicks in the distance. Wild turkeys are very shy and as soon as she caught sight of us she fled. A discussion ensued about the habits of the two kinds of birds. The girls said old emus will stand and fight when faced by danger but the chicks will scatter and hide in the bushes, or run much further if they are old enough. As they fight, the old birds draw the attacker away from the direction in which the young ones have gone. The girls were sure the *nunk waitch* (emu mothers) told them where to go and followed them up when the danger was over.

Tupin told me the following legend.

Long ago Nunk Waitch had a large number of chicks of which she was very proud. She boasted that no other bird had as a family large as hers. Therefore she was most annoyed to meet a *coorley*¹²² one day with a larger clutch of chicks. She could not believe it and counted them two or three times, but there was no doubt – Coorley had one more chick than she did. She went back to her camp and wondered what she could do about it. She hated the thought of losing her reputation as the most productive mother, besides, in her view, Coorley was much too stupid to bring up a big family.

Waitch thought the matter over for a long time. She decided that when she was likely to meet Coorley on a particular journey she would leave most of her chicks at the camp and take only one or two with her.

Coorley had no idea that Waitch was jealous and continued to show all her chicks with great pride. Soon she began to pity Waitch for her small family. This was more than Waitch could bear, so one day she took her two finest and fattest chicks out with her, ordering all the others to hide themselves in the bushes. On meeting Coorley she pointed out how fine and fat her *waitch* chicks were, adding that because she had only two she could give them all her attention. She said she felt sorry for poor Coorley who had so many chicks she must be running about all day gathering food for them.

Coorley laughed at Waitch and declared she found great happiness in walking about and feeding her chicks. Waitch was not pleased at this and told Coorley it was time the little chicks ran about a little more and went further for food. Coorley agreed with Waitch and began to take longer and longer walks which made her poor little chicks very tired, just as Waitch wanted. As Coorley wandered further and further each day the chicks got so tired that one by one they died and her family dwindled to just two chicks.

Waitch brought all her chicks out and told Coorley she had been keeping all her other chicks in the camp so they would grow strong and had only taken the fat ones out

¹²² *Ardeotis australis* (Australian Bustard)

with her. Now all her chicks were strong and all had their feathers and were ready to roam with her. She boasted that she had a big, beautiful healthy brood and pitied Coorley for her small family.

Coorley could not rest. She realised she had been tricked and was determined to take revenge on Waitch. She waited for a long time. Eventually Cartar, the long-tailed iguana came along. Now Coorley is not fond of Cartar for he eats her chicks, but she only had two chicks now and Cartar prefers many. She had a *wongi* with Cartar and told him about what a lot of chicks Waitch had and how big and fat they were. Just as she had hoped, Cartar left Coorley's chicks alone and went after Waitch.

When Waitch saw Cartar coming she did not know what to do. It was no use telling her chicks to hide for Cartar would find them and they were too small to run very far. She found pieces of stick, fastened them to her chicks' legs and told them to run as fast as they could to Beellup¹²³ while she stayed to fight Cartar. The chicks found that with the sticks on their legs and their wings out to help they could get a much longer stride. They arrived at Beellup and got into the soft sand (which Cartar cannot run through) and laid down to rest and wait for Nunk Waitch. Meanwhile, Nunk Waitch was in the middle of a terrible fight with Cartar who pulled all the feathers from her breast. She battled on until she defeated him and made her way safely to Beellup.

The chicks told their mother how the sticks on their legs had helped them to get safely to Beellup, so she got some sticks and put them on her own legs. Now she could see over the grasses and rushes and move much more quickly. She decided to share her good idea with the other *waitch* and ever since that day, all *waitch* have walked on stilts.

Waitch was too strong for Cartar and Coorley realised she would not get the revenge she wanted. She flew to Beellup and saw Waitch there with all her chicks. She was glad to see *Waitch's* breast feathers were all torn. To this day *waitch* feathers part down the middle of their breasts leaving a bare strip. Coorley asked Waitch what she had done to herself to become so tall. Waitch told Coorley she had made herself stilts to give herself a longer stride and Coorley tried to do the same but she was a

¹²³ (The author later states this word means 'sea coast')

silly bird. She got thin sticks and didn't fasten them properly, so when she tried to run they bent under her. Now, Coorley can look over the grass, but not from such a height as Waitch. However Coorley can fly and Waitch cannot. That is Waitch's punishment for enticing Coorley to run her chicks to death. Now *coorleys* have only two chicks, as they are not fit to take care of more while *waitch* have large families and are good mothers. A *coorley's* two chicks fly young and can get away from danger quickly but *waitch* chicks can only run.

At the conclusion of Tupin's story, Waymen suggested we should return to the spot where we had first seen the emus; the chicks were so young she was certain the nests must be close. After searching for some time we found a deserted nest. It was a good-sized hollow in the ground, well formed with a quantity of dark green eggs lying just outside it. Broken eggshells showed the young had recently hatched. When I exclaimed at the number of eggs lying about, the girls explained that *waitch* always laid many eggs to ensure a big brood. The male *waitch* also sat on the eggs and as he was larger he could cover more eggs. The eggs that were not good were kicked out to insure all the chicks being incubated would be healthy. From then on the female sat alone, but the male was always around to look after her. Sometimes several *waitch* laid in the same nest and shared the labour of sitting and hatching. When the chicks were hatched they would divide them up. One *nunk waitch* would take the first hatched chicks and another would take a later brood. Although I have doubts about this the Noongars' information is usually accurate for it is their living to observe the habits of the various birds and animals on which they feed.¹²⁴

There are always several emu eggs lying around outside every nest that I have found and on breaking them I have frequently discovered they were in the first stage of hatching. Some were addled and some were perfectly fresh. The girls told me those were the first laid, unfertile eggs.

¹²⁴ In this instance, Tupin wasn't quite right. *Whilst the female dominates the male during pair formation, once incubation begins the male becomes aggressive to other emus including his mate. The female then leaves, after which she shows no more interest in her eggs or partner. She may join a group of non-breeding birds or find another mate and lay again. Meanwhile, the male emu incubates the eggs for a period of 7 - 8 weeks, without drinking, feeding, defecating or leaving the nest for any other reason.* (http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/322194/emu4.pdf)

Chapter Twenty three

We had been camping down at Doubtful Island Bay for some time, staying in a small thatched cottage; really just a sleeping space. Albert was doing some fencing and as he was to be away for some time, he took me and the children with him. I greatly enjoyed the change. It is a beautiful place. A low hill runs out to a long point and forms a small bay of shallow water where the children could splash and bathe to their hearts' content. Yarrabil, an elderly Noongar woman watched them: she kept imploring them to keep out of the water and told them wonderful stories to distract them.

One evening, as a storm approached, I saw a most glorious sunset. I can scarcely describe the beauty and the colours. The wide open bay was a shade of deepest, purest blue, as calm as glass. On one side the Fitzgerald peaks were a soft pale blue contrasting with a sky filled with the loveliest tints of orange, violet and pearly grey. The sea reflected deeper tints of the same shades. Coming in on the calm, still waters was an immense fleet of small purple paper nautilus¹²⁵ with their white balloon shells spread out. The nautiluses were a huge pale purple cloud tipped with white, apparently headed for the shore. I called Yarrabil to look, and asked her what could possibly have caused this to happen. She told me the nautiluses knew bad weather was coming and were seeking shelter. I gazed at this wonderful fleet until it was too dark to see them any longer. Though it was perfectly calm, the sea seemed to be making a low moaning sound. The men were too busy during the making everything secure to weather the coming storm and had no time to admire the sunset and the nautiluses, indeed they kept calling to me to leave the lovely scene and carry in wood for burning as they expected the bad weather to last for two to three days.

At about midnight the storm burst. The wind howled and raged around us and though the cottage was built in thicket of short bushy trees in a very sheltered spot, we could still feel the violence of the wind and hear the waves crashing onto rocks. The next morning the wind and rain were so violent I could not leave the cottage. At about sunset the weather cleared a little and Yarrabil and I went for a short walk along the beach. A 30 centimetre-thick line of the lovely paper nautiluses I had seen

¹²⁵ Presumably *Argonauta nodosa*; the paper nautilus; occasionally involved in mass stranding along the southern Australian coastline. The shell is an egg sac carried by an octopus which grows in length from 10 to 30 centimetres.

sailing in the night before lay along the contour of the waves. The shells were smashed and nautilus octopuses innumerable were strewn between them.

Some lovely little gulls of a type I had never seen before were washed up on a great bank of seaweed. On the small rocky hill piles of seaweed teemed with tiny crabs. An immense flock of beautiful little parrots not much bigger than chicken hatchlings was foraging in the seaweed.¹²⁶ They were grass-green with a darker green edge to each feather giving it the appearance of a shell-shape. They were so busy hunting that I was able to get quite close to them. When they noticed me they would give a shrill little cry, flutter off a short distance and resume their search. The whole hill was covered with them.

Along the beach were numberless birds about the size of snipes; a dark glossy-blue with long bright legs¹²⁷. A little further on I saw several sea eagles feeding on what I thought was a large fish. As I got closer I saw the fish was actually a porpoise that must have been caught in the breakers and thrown over the reef. Further still, too far for me to walk, a huge flock of birds was settled on a great black thing which seemed to cover half the corner of the beach. On my way back to the cottage I met Albert and excited his curiosity so much that he rode off to see what this great black thing could be. When he returned he told me it was a sulphur-bottomed whale¹²⁸, not quite dead, measuring 24 metres in length. The sea eagles, gulls and eaglehawks were already at work on it. He said he wished he could have put it out of its misery; he had never seen fear so plainly shown as in the eyes of the unfortunate creature.

Next day I spoke to Yarrabil about the little parrots; the first of that kind I'd ever seen. She endeavoured to tell me the exact number of feathers each bird had, but the Noongars never count to more than seven, so she couldn't be precise.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Western ground-parrot (*Pezoporus flaviventrus*) now critically endangered. At the time of writing there are less than 140 left in the world.

¹²⁷ Possibly sooty oyster catchers (*Haematopus fuliginosus*)

¹²⁸ *Balaenoptera musculus* or Blue Whale

¹²⁹ It is erroneous to generalise and say that Aboriginal people could not accurately measure anything above seven (or more usually, four). See <https://theconversation.com/why-old-theories-on-indigenous-counting-just-wont-go-away-64173> The author of the article, Professor Ray Norris quotes Dame Mary Gilmore who in her 1934 book, *Old Days Old Ways: A Book of Recollections* stated:

The Aboriginal power to count or compute in his native state was as great as our own [...] I have seen partially trained native stockmen give the exact number of cattle in a

They do not count their thumbs; they count:

Caine: the first finger on the right hand

Coogal: second finger

Mendin: third finger

Moe: fourth finger

Moe-caine: first finger on the left hand

Moe-coogal: second finger

Moe-mendin: third finger

Boolah: the lot (they hold out both hands).

If they wish to express more they say *coombar boolah* which means a great quantity.

The *gudgilan*¹³⁰ is a small hawk which feeds on very small birds. In the middle of a still, hot day when the little birds are sheltering in the bushes, it hovers above them and seems to charm them out. As soon as a little bird appears the hawk pounces on it and flies away. Whether the draught caused by its pointed wings makes the little birds believe a breeze has arrived I do not know. The *dalyar* or ground parrot¹³¹ makes a tremendous screaming when it sees the *gudgilan* fluttering over the bushes; therefore the Noongars call the *dalyar* the small birds' *cubbie* (friend).

Yarrabil told me the following legend.

For many years a big flock of *dalyar* had been settled on some plains and low hills near the coast. They liked to talk to all the little birds that came and went as the seasons passed. The little birds brought and took messages of friendship and invitations to *yardies* from the *dalyars* to the different groups.. It required a great many messages to be carried backwards and forwards before the final meeting places for such events could be settled on.

group up to four or five hundred almost without a moment's hesitation, yet authorities on the blacks continue to tell us that the Aboriginal only counted to ten or thereabouts.

The book is mostly set in the Riverina country of New South Wales.

¹³⁰ *Accipiter fasciatus* (Brown Goshawk)

¹³¹ *Pezoporus flaviventrus* (Western Ground Parrot)

The *dalyars*' annoyance was great when the *janggang* (wattle bird)¹³² began to talk of a strange bird which had lately arrived and seemed to be coaxing away the *ter ter* (blue wren), the *bandin*¹³³ (yellow fly-catcher), the *targilia*¹³⁴ (small kingfisher), the *bildjar*¹³⁵ (the yellow honey-eater), the *pinny pinch*¹³⁶ (the robin) and many other small friends of the *dalyar*. The *dalyar* had a great wongi with the *janggang*, obtained an accurate description of the new birds and resolved to look out for them. The *janggang* said the strangers were only interested in talking to the small birds.

The *dalyar* began to feel a little anxious. They were the smallest of all the parrots, and like all parrots, they were foolish. They knew quite well that if any of them were coaxed away they would come to harm. They asked the little birds many questions about the strangers and the answers they were given made them feel even more uneasy. The little birds said the strangers were called *gudgilan*. They did not like *gudgilan*; in fact they were frightened of them. No bird that had been coaxed out of the bushes had ever come back.

The *dalyar* became more and more frightened. Soon, one *dalyar* reported he had seen what he thought was a *gudgilan* close by. He said as he was resting under a bush a strange bird hovered over the bush singing and fanning the leaves. The *dalyar* was almost enticed out of the bush but remembered the danger just in time. Eventually the *gudgilan* gave up, went to another bush and coaxed out a *bildjar* which it carried away in its claws. The *bildjar* seemed stupefied and did not cry out at all. The *dalyar* concluded that *gudgilan* was a type of *bepumer* (hawk), for it had carried the *bildjar* away in its claws showing it intended to eat it.

The *dalyars* got together and decided the matter was serious enough for a *yardie*. Messages were sent to all the parrot groups that lived on the plains and hills for kilometres around and they gathered at the appointed time and place. It was decided that any parrot spotting *gudgilan* should scream and frighten it away from the little birds.

¹³² *Anthochaera carunculata* (Red Wattlebird)

¹³³ *Eopsaltria australis* (Yellow Robin)

¹³⁴ *Todiramphus sanctus* (Sacred Kingfisher)

¹³⁵ *Lichenostomus plumulus* (Grey-fronted Honeyeater)

¹³⁶ Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodan*)

The plan worked well and the *gudgilan* began to get very hungry for lack of prey. They vowed to get revenge on the *dalyar*. One day, a *dalyar* was feeding near some low bushes when a *gudgilan* swooped down and caught him. But the *dalyar* had not been coaxed out with singing so was not under the *gudgilan's* influence. He managed to twist himself around and peck at the *gudgilan*, who had to let him go, but in the meantime the *dalyar* had lost nearly all his feathers. When he returned to his group the *gnanes* (girls) laughed at him. None of them would marry him and he was cold at night. He shivered by the *mia carl* and was altogether miserable.

He chatted to a *bandin*¹³⁷ one day and said how miserable he was. The *bandin* gave him a couple of feathers. Later, a *pinny pinch* gave him a few more feathers to cover his breast, the *ter yer* gave him some feathers for his wings and the *targilia* gave him some feathers for his tail. All the little birds he met gave him a few feathers each until he was quite covered. He returned to his *mia* the most beautiful variegated parrot that was ever seen. All the *gnanes* fell in love with him and the *dalyar yorks* never tired of praising his beauty.

This was more than any of the other parrots could stand, for though they differed in size according to their groups they were all green; some darker and some lighter but all green. Various male parrots also wanted to make themselves beautiful for their *yorks* and set out to see whether the little birds would give them feathers too. They reminded the little birds they were their *cubbies* too and had protected them from the *gudgilan*.

The first group of parrots met the *pinny pinch* the *ter ter* and the *widu widu* (diamond bird)¹³⁸. They were given some red feathers and a few odds and ends and returned to their group as *rosellas*¹³⁹.

Another group of men were given feathers by the *bibinakes* (flycatchers) and came back as *dammalan* (yellow-banded parrot)¹⁴⁰. Others went to the *bandin* and came back *warraling* (crested parrot). Indeed, so many men went out to bag a few feathers with which to adorn themselves that the small birds were almost stripped bare.

¹³⁷ *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* (New Holland Honeyeater)

¹³⁸ *Pardolatus striatus* (Striated Pardalote)

¹³⁹ *Platycercus icterotis* (Western Rosella)

¹⁴⁰ *Platycercus zonarius* (Australian Ringneck), also Towran (Abbott 2009)

Lastly, the *towran*, the big parrots decided they too would have to follow the fashion. They flew around to see what they get, but the little birds had no more feathers to spare. The *kanginnan*¹⁴¹ (large blue kingfisher) gave a few feathers, as did the *targilia*. The *maning will will*¹⁴² (swallow) protested and said the *gudgilan* had never bothered them. Begrudgingly they gave the *towran* some head feathers saying they would not see them go back to their group in shame.

The *towran* did not want to return with just a few blue feathers in their wings. They gathered for a *wongi* and decided to gather some *nutyal* (large yellow everlasting) which they strung together to make themselves necklaces.

And that is why different varieties of parrots have so many different colours and patterns in their plumage, and why the *towran* has just a few blue feathers in its wings and a lovely yellow band around its neck.

¹⁴¹ Also described as a Sacred Kingfisher in *Abbott* (2009)

¹⁴² *Hirundo nigricans* (Tree Martin)

Chapter Twenty four

The wedge-tailed eagle is Australia's largest and most beautiful eagle. I loved to watch them soaring, just resting on their wings, floating along, scarcely seeming to move; then suddenly dropping to the ground. They are amusing when they walk for they are feathered right down to their toes and look as though their stockings need pulling up. Their eyes and their beaks are cruel-looking and they eat a lot of meat. One eagle could eat a lamb in one meal.

The crows' plumage is a beautiful glossy black, but they are sly-looking birds and their cries are irritating. The Noongars enjoyed eating crows and raised a great outcry when Albert said he would poison them and the eagles to prevent the loss of so many lambs.

One afternoon old Yilgar arrived with the news that the Noongars thought the crows and eagles were going away for they had only seen two crows at the waterhole recently and had not seen an eagle for several days. They told me the following legend.

The *waalegh* and the *wording* are kin, but are not fond of each other. They live near each other and try not to quarrel. The *waaleghs* dislike the fact that *wordings* are not honest predators but scavengers who follow them and feed on their left-overs. If a group of *wordings* sees a tired *waalegh* with its meal they try to drive it away before it's finished eating and a *waalegh* doesn't share unless it's forced to.

The feud started a long time ago. It had been a very hot dry summer and the waterholes were all dried up. All the birds had left that part of the country except one pair of *waaleghs* who decided to stay knowing they could fly long distances and generally get some game. Besides, they had found a *yamma* (waterhole) with a good supply of fresh water.

The *waaleghs* were not too pleased when a pair of *wordings* arrived and inquired as to whether there was any good water about. Under Noongar law, the *waaleghs* had an obligation to share their water with others, but they decided to say nothing about the *yamma* and pretended they got their water from a small hole in the bed of the river. The *waaleghs* hoped that as this water became more and more brackish and eventually dried up the *wordings* would be starved out and leave. But the *wordings*

talked together and said, 'We will stay as long as the *waaleghs*, because we can eat their left-overs and not worry about hunting. When the water dries up the *waaleghs* will leave and we'll follow them.'

Each day the water in the river bed was more salty and there was less of it. The *waaleghs* devised a plan to drink secretly from the *yamma* and keep the *wordings* away from it. They went out early each morning knowing the *wordings* would follow them and separated to hunt as is their custom, as the *wordings* knew they would. Once the *waaleghs* had separated, the *wordings* both followed Nop (male) Waalegh. Meanwhile, Moor (female) Waalegh went to the *yamma* for a drink. When she returned to her mate, he went to the *yamma*, leaving his kill to the *wordings*.

This plan worked for quite a while, though Nop Waalegh grumbled that he had to kill for the lazy *wordings* whose usual method of getting meat was to follow weak, half-starved *waaleghs* and peck at them till they died. Moor Waalegh soothed him by saying the river water was becoming so dreadfully salty that soon the *wordings* would be forced to leave to look for fresher water.

Even when the river water dried up the *wordings* stayed and got a little moisture by burying their beaks in the mud, despite becoming thinner and thinner. It began to dawn on them that the *waaleghs* must have found a spring to drink from, for they looked fat and well-nourished and their plumage was glossy. Moor Wording decided to stay and watch one morning when the *waaleghs* went out for their usual hunt. Nop Wording told the *waaleghs* that Moor Wording was sick and he had been obliged to leave her behind.

This was foolish as it made the *waaleghs* suspicious and prevented them from getting their drink of water. The three birds returned to their home almost crazy with thirst and found Moor Wording looking very ill. Still the *waaleghs* said nothing. They went back out again the following morning followed by Nop Wording.

At about midday, poor Moor Wording heard the flutter of wings and saw Moor Waalegh alight nearby. Now it is the custom of the *wording* to peck dying creatures to death, and Moor Wording thought she was about to be pecked to death by Moor Waalegh. She pretended to be dead; her last hope. Moor Waalegh hopped over and took a look at her, assumed she was dead and flew off in the direction of the *yamma*, a little further up the river. Moor Wording stayed very still, but opened her

eyes a little. She saw Moor Waalegh descend on some rocks near the river and wondered if that was the site of the secret water supply. As she lay still, thinking this over, she heard the flutter of other wings. She squinted until her eyes were almost shut and watched to see who had arrived. This time it was Nop Waalegh. He hopped all around her then flew off in the direction Moor Waalegh had gone.

Moor Wording was now certain the *waaleghs* had found a *yamma* in the rocks. When the *waaleghs* had gone she flew to search where they'd been, and found the *yamma*. She drank long and greedily and returned to camp refreshed and revived. On Nop Wording's return, Moor Wording told him what she had found.

The *waaleghs* arrived back at camp and were surprised to find Moor Wording alive and looking so much better. She declared the cool evening air had revived her so much she could go hunting the next day. In the morning, as soon as the *waaleghs* departed, the *wordings* flew in the direction of the *yamma*. The *waaleghs* hurried after them anxiously, but Moor Wording pretended not to see the *yamma* and flew past, secretly signalling the *yamma*'s location to Nop Wording.

For the next few mornings the two couples went out as usual. The *waaleghs* became puzzled at the increasing health and strength of the *wordings* who still briefly stuck their beaks in the river bed each day. One day, one of the *wordings* accidentally left a feather at the *yamma*. When the *waaleghs* saw it they were furious. The *wordings* had tricked them! How they must be laughing at them! Every day the *wordings* had been pretending to drink from the river bed and instead they'd been drinking at the *yamma*! The tricksters had become the tricked!

The *waaleghs* became determined to drive the *wordings* away; but *wordings* are cunning birds and not so easily expelled. The *waaleghs* stood guard at the *yamma* and told the *wordings* they had no right to the water. The *wordings* told the *waalegh* they had broken Noongar law by refusing to truthfully tell them where they could find good water.

At being reminded they had broken the law, the *waaleghs* became enraged and attacked the *wordings*. Luckily for the *wordings*, they had met other *wordings* a few days previously and told them, in accordance with Noongar law, about the existence of the *yamma*. Soon after the fight began a huge flock of *wordings* arrived and joined

in. The *waaleghs* were badly pecked about the head and retired from the conflict as the losers.

Since that day, the *waaleghs* have had white feathers on their heads to show they broke Noongar law. The *wordings* always travel in flocks to protect each other from the *waalegh*, who attack them if they ever get the chance. They hate being reminded that two members of their group were outsmarted by a flock of *wordings*. The *wordings* still follow them and steal their kills if they can; which is fair. If a Noongar won't share he must be made to do so.

I asked Gimbuck whether she always shared and she gravely told me she always shared some of whatever she had. I suggested she could lend her *booliah* (the marble I had given her) to Yilgar sometimes, which would be sharing. Yilgar liked the idea but Gimbuck became agitated and said the sharing laws only related to food, water and garments. She said things like *booliah* had to be exchanged for other things of value rather than shared, and Yilgar had nothing that would be fair exchange; nor would she know how to use the *booliah*. From then on she treasured the *booliah* no less but talked less about it. Years later when more marbles appeared at the station, her belief that they had magic powers remained. However she said that the whites had spoiled the magic as they'd spoiled almost everything else. Even her rain stone was losing its magic.

Gimbuck once showed me, with great reverence, a long piece of spun wool mixed with human hair. She told me she could use this to orchestrate a storm and make rain fall when and where she wished. The string was about 70 centimetres long and the hair, which she had collected from various women, was wound up in it so thoroughly that one could only distinguish it from possum fur by colour. She kept it coiled up in her coot and occasionally wore it in her hair, but how she used it, I don't know. I asked her many times, but she just looked at me smugly and told me that if she explained, the magic would diminish. No girls or other women would touch this coil. Old Buckerup knew all about it though and sometimes Gimbuck would assist him when he was rain-making.

I suspect Yilgar had one of these coils too, though she wouldn't confirm or deny it and politely told me to mind my own business. Yilgar always considered I was a young girl even though I was Mister Hassell's *york* and she had no hesitation in speaking to me plainly if she thought it was necessary.

Chapter Twenty five

There were two ways of reaching the station: one by sea from Albany to Bremer Bay and then by road 96 kilometres from Bremer Bay to the station. The other the route was through the Stirling Ranges: the route I took when I was first married.

On this occasion, Albert was attending to the overland telegraph that connects Western Australia with the Eastern States and Europe and the children and I had been staying with him in Albany. I decided to return home by sea and arranged passage for myself and three children to Bremer Bay on an 83-tonne boat. Albert was to return to the station by land and we arranged to meet at Bremer Bay.

The wild grandeur of the King George Sound scenery is magnificent. I have heard it likened to the fjords of Norway and the *Kyles* of Bute¹⁴³. Huge rocks resembling prehistoric animals crawl up from the shore and go far inland. There are great crevices where the sea has eaten into the land with unceasing waves leaving nothing but bare cliffs of rock. Every now and again we passed massive granite boulders seemingly dropped at random. I was glad I took the trip though the children were a little seasick but not badly enough to distract me from the savage beauty of the coast. We sailed along close to the shore and the curious rocks and strange shapes they took deeply impressed themselves on my memory.



We landed stores and stayed at a place called Cape Riche.

There is a rather curious reef which runs along the coast for a short distance and not far from it is a large stone, the shape of which looks like a mopoke, complete with two dints making the eyes. (See below¹⁴⁴)

We arrived at Bremer Bay after dark but it was a bright moonlit night and the sea was beautifully calm. The Bay is a wide open place where the huge Southern Ocean waves come thundering in, but there is a little rocky cove in one corner where our small boat landed on the crest of a wave. As the wave receded the children jumped for the shore. We climbed up a steep cliff and

¹⁴³ A narrow sea channel which separates the northern end of the Isle of Bute from the Cowal peninsula, part of the Scottish mainland.

¹⁴⁴ Could this be it? It seems unlikely because it is small (maybe a metre high) and made of limestone, rather than granite. Yet it does resemble a tawny frogmouth. Found on a picture on the internet (attached to Google maps).

picked our way round to the main beach where I found Albert had already pitched a tent.

Whilst at Bremer Bay I met several Noongars from the Cape Riche area. They seemed delighted I had noticed the mopoke or *cubine* rock and the curious reef. My Noongar friends supplied the first part of the following story and the Cape Riche Noongars provided the ending.

Some time ago a lot of birds decided to hold a corroboree. The *towrans* (ring necks), *cowra* (green parakeets), and *coorbardies* (magpies) got together for a *wongi* and agreed to ask the *wordings* (crows) along to join in. Now all these birds fly in big flocks and live in big groups. There are several other birds that fly in small flocks and live in small groups such as the *tite* (black duck)¹⁴⁵ and *kylong* (teal)¹⁴⁶. There are some birds which fly in twos and threes such as *cootup* (sparrow-hawk), and *cubine* (mopoke).

While planning the corroboree, the *towrans* and *coorbardies* agreed that only big birds that flew in large flocks should be invited. But the *cowras*, who are smaller than *towrans* and *coorbardies* pleaded for the inclusion of the *maming will wills* (small swallows which fly in flocks but emigrate during the winter) and the *towrans* and *coorbardies* relented. The *towrans* said that if *cowras* were going to invite their friends the *maming will will*, they should be allowed to invite their friends the *tite* and the *kylong*. The *Coorbardies* objected because the *tites* and *kylongs* were two branches of the same group. The *towrans* pointed out they were very small branches, and would number less combined than than one flock of *wordings*.

After much *wongi* the arrangements was settled and word spread. Soon the *cootups* and *cubines* got to hear of the corroboree and wanted to join in. The bigger birds didn't mind if the *cootups* joined in; they never interfered with them and if they did they were quite big enough to fight them off. As for the *cubines*¹⁴⁷ –they were stupid and half-asleep nearly all the time.

The decision to invite the *cubines* and *cootups* caused a great outcry amongst the *cowras* and *maming will wills*. Being small they were vulnerable to being preyed

¹⁴⁵ Pacific black duck (*Anas superciliosa*)

¹⁴⁶ Australian wood duck (*Chenonetta jubata*)

¹⁴⁷ *Podargus strigoides* (tawny frogmouth)

upon by *cootups* (as they often were) and didn't trust them. They didn't object to *cubines* being there; the *cubines* were so stupid that the *cowras* and *maming will wills* were surprised they wanted to join in.

The *coorbardies* and *wordings* promised to look after the smaller birds and protect them from *Cootup* and *Cubine*. The small birds reluctantly agreed and the venue was set.

The *tites* and *kylongs* were the first to arrive at the corroboree ground. They found Norn¹⁴⁸ the black snake (a savage and venomous snake which grows to a length of 1.2 metres), Toukich (a rather sluggish grey-brown venomous snake which attains a length of 1.8 metres)¹⁴⁹, Mulel¹⁵⁰ (a very active black-headed venomous snake) and Nornt (a venomous grey sand-snake)¹⁵¹ already in possession of the ground.

Now *tites* and *kylongs* hate snakes for they eat their eggs and their young. But they said nothing and waited for the other birds. The *maming will wills*, who also hate snakes were next to arrive. Snakes have a way of coaxing them down from the trees and they fear them greatly. The *maming will wills* had a quick *wongi* with the *tites* and the *kylongs* and they all flew to some trees a short distance from the corroboree ground to await the arrival of the other birds.

The *coorbardies* and the *wordings* who are kin and great friends arrived together. When they heard what the *maming will wills* had to say they flew over to the snakes and asked them to leave, explaining they only needed to use the ground for a small corroboree. They assured the snakes they would have notified them in advance if they were planning a *yardie*, but they were just having a small corroboree so they hadn't reserved the spot.

The snakes refused to budge, saying they were there first and intended to have a corroboree too. The birds were disgusted. During further discussion, Norn suggested they join together and have combined corroboree but the small birds objected fiercely and the *coorbardies* and *wordings* sided with them. Finally it was agreed that the birds and snakes would take turns to use the ground. The snakes would tend the

¹⁴⁸ Probably the Black tiger snake (*Notechis ater*)

¹⁴⁹ Probably the Dugite (*Pseudonaja affinis*)

¹⁵⁰ Possibly the Crowned Snake (*Drysdalia coronata*)

¹⁵¹ The Western Tiger Snake (*Notechis scutatus occidentalis*) is *Nornt* in the Rose Whitehurst Dictionary, whereas the dugite is better described as a grey sand snake.

fires while the birds had their corroboree and the birds would tend the fires when the snakes had theirs. Now they had to decide who went first. The snakes said that if the birds gathered all the sticks for the fires that they could have the first corroboree.

All this discussion had taken so long that by the time everything was settled and the sticks had been collected, it was far too late in the day to begin. The birds and snakes slept; the smaller birds and ducks keeping well out of the way of the snakes.

Early the next morning the *maming will wills* went to the *coorbardies* and told them they were frightened. They did not like Cootup and didn't trust Norn and would much rather just go home. The *coorbardies* are wise birds and they saw the *maming will wills'* point of view. *Coorbardies* could fight Cootup and Norn but they recognised that *maming will wills* could not. They did not try to persuade them to stay.

When the *cowras* saw that the *maming will wills* were going, they too left, without saying anything to anyone. This annoyed the *towrans* for the *cowras* are their kin. The *Coorbardies* pointed out that if there was a fight with the snakes (which they quite expected) it was just as well for the smaller birds not to be there and for Cootup and Cubine to stay.

As the corroboree commenced, the snakes took up their stations to tend the fires. In the evening, Norn and Mulel wanted to know when the birds would be finished so they could start their own corroboree. Cootup told them they would have to wait until the next day. It was now too dark to collect sticks and they would need to gather more in the morning.

Norn and Mulel were very angry at this, but Toukich and Nornt said they must stick to their bargain and wait. Norn sulked for some time, then went to old Toukich and asked him to tend his fire. As soon as Toukich had agreed, to the annoyance of the birds and the other snakes, Norn joined in with the birds' corroboree. Because Norn is very fierce and quarrelsome no one challenged him and he went on dancing and enjoying himself for some time.

Toukich got fed up with tending two fires and called Norn to leave the dancers and come back. But Norn was having a wonderful time and had no intention of stopping. Fed up, Toukich began to make remarks about Norn's personal appearance.

Now there are no swear words in the Noongar language. The only form of abuse Noongars use is to make disparaging remarks about each other's personal appearance. Toukich said Norn had no nose and a tail that was blunt like a *youan's* (bob-tailed goanna's). Norn was most insulted.

Toukich continued with the abuse and the other dancers heard him and joined in. When Norn could no longer bear it he rushed from the corroboree ground and attacked and killed Toukich.

Birds dislike all snakes but they hate *norms* the most and *toukiches* the least, so they decided to avenge Toukich's death. Norn was too quick for them. He glided away into the bushes with Toukich's two wives calling, 'If you want to catch me you must follow me to Beellup (the sea coast) and try to find me when you get there.'

The birds were furious, for Norn had broken faith all round. It was then that the other *toukiches* told the birds that as soon as they heard about the birds' corroboree, they, Norn and Mulel had gone to the corroboree ground purposely to pick a fight. They intended to eat the *maming will wills* and *cowras* and had been very disappointed when they found both those groups had left. They had stayed with the hope of catching the *tites* and *kylongs* when those birds became exhausted from dancing.

Toukiches are stupid, slow-moving snakes and were greatly enraged at Norn's behaviour (especially his kidnapping of Toukich's wives). It did not occur to them realise that in explaining to the birds why they were at the corroboree ground they were admitting their guilt in the plot to kill the birds.

The *coorbardies*, *towrans* and *wordings* had a wongi with Cootup and Cubine; skilful snake-killers and can fly the quickest. Cootup and Cubine agreed to track Norn to Beellup and went down to the coast stopping at every camp to ask whether anyone had seen a *norn* with two *toukich*, but no one had. They arrived at Beellup without finding Norn and flew back to Cubine who was following more slowly and circling carefully.

At length, Cubine found Norn's camp. He landed close to it and hid in the bushes. Norn had just arrived and was telling other snakes about the corroboree and the fight and how lucky he had been to get away without being hurt (the Noongars say a bleeding snake always dies, for the blood attract the ants against which the snake

has no defence). The other snakes weren't impressed by Norn boasting that he had won two women by right of conquest and were indignant when he offered to trade one of the *toukich yorks* for some fighting spears. Norn said the stupid birds hadn't been able to track him and explained he had visited every camp on the way home and told the inhabitants to say 'no' if anyone asked if they'd seen him.

Cubine slipped away unnoticed and reported his findings to their other birds. It was unanimously decided that they must put an end to Norn, even if he killed them in the process. They swooped down onto his camp and drove him out into the open and he raced away to Beellup pursued by Cootup and Cubine. When he came to the ocean he swam across to the small island¹⁵² near the landing place at Cape Riche, but Cootup flew to the island and chased him back towards the mainland. Cubine swooped down and prevented him from coming ashore. They kept him swimming backwards and forwards day and night till he got so cold and tired he couldn't think straight. He forgot the danger and scrambled up onto the mainland. Cubine pecked at him and inflicted some serious injuries, but Cubines are slow, and Norn landed a bite. Cubine knew he was doomed and flew to the side of the hill to wait for death.

Cootup chased Norn back into the sea, and there Norn died. His body washed into the shallows, and gradually he was covered with salt and sand and became the foundation for a reef that is there today.

Cootup flew to Cubine's body and dropped stones around it to keep it upright. After a while, Cubine's body turned to stone, and there he still sits, making sure that Norn never tries to crawl up onto the beach.

On hearing that Norn and Cubine were dead, the birds burned Norn's camp to the ground. To this day, *norms* never camp in large numbers; you'll only ever see them in couples. And a *cootup* will still try to kill a young *norm* whenever it has the chance.

Just like the birds, when the Noongars plan a corroboree there is always much discussion for two or three days beforehand. Often some Noongars will leave early or decide not to attend, and sometimes there is a fight.

¹⁵² Cheyne Island

Chapter Twenty six

The winter was exceptionally wet. All the brooks and rivers were in flood and the country was difficult to traverse. The Noongars kept very close to the station and on fine days came up to the house. We generally sat in a corner of the verandah and chatted. They were very worried about the heaviness of the rain. They liked gentle showers but the constant downpour seemed to have got on their nerves and they were unhappy and hungry. They were depending on *coomal* for food, and though it was plentiful there were lots of mouths to feed. We fed the men and women that worked for us and gave food to the very old women.

One afternoon the rain had cleared off and there were patches of deep blue sky amidst the fleecy white clouds. A nice wind had sprung up and the ground was drying rapidly. Several of the women came up to see me and we discussed the weather. Our conversation led me to ask about a group of rocks at the foot of one of the big hills. I asked the women how they had come to be deposited there for at that particular spot there were no other rocks about. Old Yilgar told me this legend.

Long ago when Yilgar's mother was a baby, meaning a very very long time ago, there had been big rains. It rained for days and days and the moon got fat and round and thin again and fat and round again, and still it rained. All the rivers and brooks broke their banks and inundated the low parts of the country. So much water went down into the sea that all the sand bars at the entrance of rivers opened and the sea came up and flooded the country. The Noongars had to move up to higher and higher land. They were big and strong in those days, and the men and women carried stones up the hills to build their *mias* on. Still the waters kept rising. Often, people were drowned and sometimes they dropped the rocks as they scrambled from the rising water. The men left all their *geize* and *doarks* behind so they could carry rocks.

The animals became tame and followed the Noongars. Many sat on the stones dropped by the Noongars until those stones too were submerged. The sky was grey; there was no sun and no wind. The Noongars were not hungry because they had eaten some of the animals that had followed them to escape the flood waters, but all their *carlas* were wet and no one could make a *carl*. Therefore they had to eat everything raw. The women dug up a few *youckas* from the sodden ground, but every hole they dug immediately became a big pool.

The flood pushed the Noongars to a top of a mountain. By then most of the men had drowned or left their weapons behind so they could carry stones. They placed the few stones they had into a big pile and clambered to the top. The women made a big *mia* out of their *boorks* and they all huddled together, cold, hungry and wet. Nearly all the *cooning* died. Still the skies were grey with mist and rain; there was no sun by day nor moon or stars by night.

The Noongars stayed at the top of the rocks for a long time, until they saw a little piece of land below and a ray of sunshine above. By and by a little more sun came out and a little more land showed. One of the men climbed down to the land but it was soggy and shook when he put his foot on it so he returned to the rocks. Gradually the waters receded and a few stars appeared at night. A big wind blew and the Noongars were nearly frozen for they were thin and wet.

One morning the Noongars woke to find all the emus and kangaroos that had been camping with them had gone leaving the *quaka* (rock wallabies) behind. The Noongars found the ground could bear their weight and followed the tracks of the kangaroos. The sea had made all the rivers salt, and the *youcka* pits that had been dug by the women had turned into lakes. Every rock dropped by the men on the journey up the mountain had become a hill, and the many people who drowned with their rocks had formed a chain of mountains. The *doarks* had turned into short bushes and the *geize* into tall trees.

There were very few Noongars and no *cooning* left. They set to work to build new *mias* and make fresh *carlas* and in time their numbers increased, but they were never as numerous as they'd been before the big rain. At least the earth was sweetened and the grass grew well, but the rivers and ground water remained salty. I tried to reassure my Noongar friends that a drying wind had already set in and they need not be anxious about another flood.

During the wet days I found an old journal of Albert's in which he recorded details of a trip he had made to Esperance Bay in 1861 when he was 19. In the evenings he recounted more memories about the trip.

The travelling party consisted of Albert, a white man named Bob, aged about 40 and two Noongars. They left on 13 August 1861, taking rations of 46 kilograms of flour, 6

kilograms of sugar and 700 grams of tea. They had five horses; one each to ride and one pack-horse. They were all well-armed but encountered no hostile Noongars during the trip.

They started off in a northerly direction towards the interior but found the country dry and barren and met very few Aboriginal people. After 96 kilometres and no signs of good land they decided to head back towards the coast. Mellor, one of the Noongars in the party had travelled close to Esperance Bay before and his descriptions of the country fired Albert's imagination and induced him to head south. That afternoon they met an elderly Noongar who was thin and hungry. He was accompanied by two semi-tame wild dogs, also very thin. The old man did not seem frightened but kept his distance, trotting ahead of the party. Albert wanted to ask him if he knew where they could find water so they closed in on him. Realising he could not evade the party he stood still. He wore no clothes and had two dead carpet snakes around his neck. In his hands were a half-eaten possum and another intact.

He spoke a different dialect to the Noongars travelling with Albert but understood they wanted water and led them to a shallow Noongar well. In return they gave him meat which he surreptitiously smelled and gave to his dogs. The party camped by the well and the elderly gentleman made a fire to roast the snakes. The dogs stole one snake from the fire but the old man still had a snake and a possum to eat. When he had finished his meal he dug a hole, buried the remains of his supper and lay down over the hole with his dogs nearby. Next morning he dug up his food and left.

The party continued travelling towards the coast and came upon some huge flat rocks in which there were natural troughs filled with water. In many of these troughs a quantity of spear-like sticks was soaking. The sticks ranged in length from 4.5 to 6 metres whereas a normal spear is from 1.8 to 2.1 metres in length. The Noongars with Albert had no idea what the sticks were for and Albert never found out¹⁵³.

The party skirted the banks of a large river which was afterwards named the Fitzgerald. They passed through a low range of flat-topped mountains now called the Ravensthorpe Ranges, where there are valuable copper mines, and encountered another river on a clear sandy plain. They met some children who scattered into the bushes like frightened chickens but soon realised the party meant them no harm and

¹⁵³ Maybe for making weirs (fish traps) to go across creeks? The water would have made them pliable and easier to weave.

friendly interaction took place. The children were persuaded to ride on the horses and directed the party to their mothers who were busy digging for *youckas*.

The women seemed very friendly and led the party to meet their men. Here Mellor, found some people he knew and decided to stay with them until the party returned on its homeward journey. Two of the local Noongar lads had been to an Esperance Bay group to be educated. They were persuaded to go on with the party in Mellor's stead, pleased to be journeying to see old friends again.

The party continued south, finding plenty of game. Towards evening they rode over some small hills and below them saw the beautiful bay of Esperance guarded by its wonderful chain of islands. They rode a little distance along the beach and camped at the corner of a fairly high hill which stretched out to a point in the ocean. They caught some delicious fish and decided to remain there a few days.

Next morning after a good swim they climbed a hill to see what the surrounding country was like. There they saw a most glorious panoramic view of this magnificent bay. The bay was shaped like a heart; the headland on which they stood was at the eastern end. A short sandy point running into the sea made the middle of the heart and then the beach stretched to the south east for kilometres with a background of low sandy hills running into a chain of medium-height jagged mountain peaks, terminating in a bold headland rightly named Cape Le Grande.

A chain of about fifty islands almost land-locks the bay. One island runs into a peak of a couple of hundred metres; others gently slope down to the sea. The islands¹⁵⁴ vary in size from 0.2 to 121 hectares.

The party gazed over sea, reef and islands and long pure white beaches until their eyes were tired, then turned and looked inland. Lying at the foot of the hill like two jewels were two exquisite lakes: one a soft cameo pink patterned with small stretches of vivid pink, and the other a translucent opal green. They rode down the hill to view the lakes more closely; the colour of the cameo-pink lake seemed to deepen as they neared it. On one side of the lake the land is flat; on the other side is a low range of sand hills mostly covered with dark green scrub. One of the hills is pure white

¹⁵⁴ Recherche archipelago

sand¹⁵⁵ reaching down almost to the lake shore. The lake is 16 kilometres around, 4.8 kilometres in length, 2.4 kilometres in width and from 1.2 to 1.5 metres deep.

The party discovered another curious phenomenon on the lake's sandy white beach: water trickling through their fingers was as clear as rain water and tasted fresh and good; so they rode their horses in to the lake to drink. The horses refused to touch it and the party discovered the water in the middle of the lake was terribly salty. The fresh water only extended from the lake's edge for about a chain¹⁵⁶ inwards.

The party rode all around the lake finding fresh beauty at every point, then turned their horses towards the green lake; which is about 800 metres from the pink lake. It was a lovely tint of pale green, also salty, with large fish swimming about in its clear waters. This lake is 8 kilometres around, 3.2 kilometres long and 1.6 kilometres across. It is situated in a hollow amidst long hills of deep green vegetation, and is much deeper than the pink lake.

Many years afterwards I visited Esperance Bay and traced out the route Albert had taken. On the headland Albert had ascended there is now a fine Marconi station. I saw the wonderful lakes and drove out to a salt company at the pink lake, which contains ninety eight percent pure salt. I was told that no one knows what causes the colour or its varied shades,¹⁵⁷ for the salt is quite white. Nor has anyone been able to explain the phenomenon of the ring of fresh water around the lake's edge. The green lake, though salt, is not as salty as the pink lake and has not been worked for salt. There are still fish in it but no living thing has been seen in the pink lake.

The party remained in Esperance for a few days enjoying fishing and bathing. They decided to return to the station via a different route to see whether there was better land elsewhere, passing several more salt lakes but none pink.

¹⁵⁵ Internet images indicate this area is now overgrown.

¹⁵⁶ 20.11 metres

¹⁵⁷ Apparently the phenomenon remained unexplained till 1980. The colour is caused by a green alga called *Dunallella salina* and the bacteria *Halobacterium cutirubrum*. *Dunallella* is the most salt-tolerant alga known and can live in salinities as high as 35%. In high temperature, high salinity and high light, the alga accumulates the red carotenoid pigment beta carotene and turns the lake pink. *Halobacterium* is pink and lives in the salty crust on the bottom of the lake. It accounts for variations in the lake's shade of pink. Salt is no longer mined at the lake.

After three days they saw fires and knew Noongars were about. Towards evening they made fires to signal to the Noongars, and received a response. The following day both the party and the Noongars travelled in such a direction that they would meet, making fires as they went. The Noongars numbered around two hundred men, women and children, all tall and well-built with large, round eyes, giving them a wistful look. One family had sons, all 180 centimetres or over in height. There were a number of dingos in the camp, quite tame and in good condition. The Noongars recognised the two Noongar men with Albert's party and embraced them and Albert and Bob by putting their arms around their shoulders and pulling them in close.

Albert's blue eyes and ruddy complexion seemed to puzzle and worry them greatly. Frequently a man would embrace Albert, lift his eyelids to peer into his eyes and go away shaking his head. Bob's eyes were brown and the Noongars did not seem concerned by him; however Bob and Albert were the first white men these Noongars had ever seen, although they had heard of the white men's presence. That evening they gave a corroboree including a peculiar dance which Albert never saw again. He described it as follows.

A circle was made with small fires. The women sat outside the circle and fed the fires, keeping up a low chant. The men stood in a circle behind the women. Three, sometimes five men but always an uneven number would suddenly break away, dash between the women, leap over the fires and stand facing each other in the middle of the circle. After chanting a few words they stood on one leg with their arms crossed over their chests making the muscles of their thighs and calves bulge and quiver. It seemed to be a contest as to who could endure, for they stood until they could stand no longer then sank down and waited till another group of men entered the circle, at which point the first group got up and sat just outside the circle of fires.

The men made no noise, other than a grunt of satisfaction when the last man in each group stood. When all the contests were complete, the losing 'thigh dancers' stood outside the fire circle, behind the women and the winning 'thigh dancers' stood inside the fire circle. After a few moments rest, the outer circle dashed between the women and over the fires and embraced all the inner dancers in turn. They stepped around in circles of three and five keeping time with the women's song. Each circle had one or two of the winning thigh dancers in it. Suddenly the women raised their voices to almost a scream. The men immediately dashed out of the circle kicking the fires to pieces and went off to their *mias*. The women took a small fire stick and followed

their husbands. The dance had lasted three or four hours but Albert did not know the language well enough to be able to ask the meaning behind the dance.

Next day, old Bob told Albert he thought he had better move on, for though there were women and children in the Noongar group they were either very old or very young. He had noticed that all the girls of a marriageable age were hidden. For this reason Bob knew the Noongars did not trust the expedition members, though outwardly they were friendly. Bob cautioned Albert to be careful in his actions and not to fire a gun.

Bob told the Noongar men he would get some kangaroo 'by magic' and went off with a few of them to hunt. While he was gone, Albert, with the aid of one of the boys as interpreter discovered that the group belonged to the Karkar people whose boundary extended to Esperance Bay. One of the group had seen a ship, which he drew in the sand, but apparently the sailors did not come ashore. The Noongars had thrown *kyles* and *doarks* at it.

Albert started a rock-throwing competition in which he and the Noongars threw rocks, trying to hit a mark. Then they had a spear-throwing contest; Albert joined in and did well. In jest, he pointed a spear towards the Noongars' camp. In a few moments the spears had been collected and the men were sauntering back to camp as though they were tired. Albert noticed that each Noongar had a spear between his toes and was dragging it through the grass; but remembering Bob's words of caution he pretended not to notice.

Bob returned from the hunt with only two kangaroos. Although he had seen plenty, he said, the Noongars had driven them so near to him that he had been afraid to fire in case he hit someone. When Albert told him about the spear incident, Bob said they should move on at once. Four of the Noongars agreed to guide the party in the right direction.

About 24 kilometres further on, just as they had camped for the night, the Noongars found a dingo's nest in a hollow tree in which there were six or seven unattended puppies. Instead of remaining with the party the Noongars returned to their camp with the dingo pups. They explained they could be trained to use in hunting kangaroos and other small game, and such a find as this was too good to be missed.

After some days travelling the party again entered the Noongar camp at the *youcka* patch where they had left Mellor on the outward journey. Mellor was reluctant to leave his friends but knew it would be safer for him not to travel alone at a later time so resolved to return with Albert. He did managed to persuade Albert to remain a few days to hunt, saying there was plenty of game about, but old Bob considered that the children's distended stomachs indicated they were living entirely on *youckas*.

The party returned to the station in perfect health a month after leaving. The only good pastoral land they had seen was too far from the station to be of any use.

Chapter Twenty six

This is a strange legend which none of the women would discuss with me. Even now through the mists of long years, the memory comes to me of old Yilgar's horrified expression when I asked her to tell me about the *woolgrum york*. She asked me sharply, 'Where you hear of *woolgrum* that bad thing, Missus?' I explained Albert had told me something about *woolgrum*. Later that day, Yilgar intercepted him as he was coming home for supper and told him I was still too young to know such things and he had no right to speak of them.

During all the years I was with the Noongars I never heard a Noongar woman say or saw her do anything that could offend the most delicate or sensitive non-Noongar woman. They never told me a story with a double meaning or a legend I could twist into anything it didn't mean; therefore I knew that when Yilgar said, 'that bad thing' the matter was closed forever, and I would lose credibility by trying to probe into it.

Albert had managed over the years to get most of the story from the Noongar men he worked with, and when he told me, I was not surprised by Yilgar's attitude as a lot of the story is not fit for publication. I found that this legend with various adaptations is known over a very wide area; from Eucla on the South Australian border to the large rivers in the far North West. In this telling I have omitted all the objectionable parts while endeavouring to preserve the main features of the legend.

The country in which the legend is set must be a long way to the North because none of the big rivers near where I lived were of fresh water or ran into the sea. A large sand bar is often formed at the mouths of the southern rivers and every now and then there are heavy rains which cause the volume of water coming down river to breach the sandbar and open the river to the sea. Then the river runs freely for a time and fish ascend it, but the bar soon forms again and the fish are imprisoned. The breaking of a bar is a wonderful sight: the waters of the river rise until there is only a narrow strip of sand between the river and sea. Quantities of fish wait to be liberated from the river and on the other side of the sandbar schools of sharks and porpoise wait for the fish.

The build-up may continue for a month; then with a mighty rush the river tears its way through the narrow belt and the sea foams to meet it. Fish, uprooted trees, animal carcasses and other debris pour out with the muddy water and for days the water is

dirty and disturbed for two or three kilometres out to sea. There is a great commotion at the mouth: large fish rush out and smaller fish rush in and all sorts of birds gather for a feast.

At these times the Noongars make barriers of bushes across the river at all the little narrows and byways where it is shallow and drive the sea-bound fish into them. When the fish have all been speared the Noongars go on to another narrows. Occasionally they are overtaken by the flood but this rarely happens as the Noongars are quick to notice the weather changes.

Far away in the west, towards the setting sun, there are three big rivers. The waters are fresh right down to the sea. Long ago a *jannock* lived between these rivers – the other *jannocks* had sent him there and ordered him to remain for a while. He had no companions and no *yorks*. He was very lonely so he tamed all the animals and they became his friends. They all sat around his campfire at night; the *chudic* sat with the *coomal* and the *twert* sat with the *yonger* and the animals related gossip to the *jannock* as to what went on in the forest and on the plains.

When the rivers were in flood they covered a great expanse of country. Marshes spread across the land, filled with *gilgies* (fresh water crayfish), fish and frogs. The *jannock* tamed them all, with the exception of the bobtailed lizards (*youan*)¹⁵⁸ and the largest frog, the *plomp*¹⁵⁹. To coax the *plomps*, the *jannock* let them sleep with him in his *quaark*¹⁶⁰. The *youans* befriended the *plomps* which annoyed the *Jannock*; he warned the *plomps* that the *youans* were only interested in eating the *plomps*' young. The *plomps* were grateful for the warning and from then on surrounded him and sang him to sleep every night.

When it was time for the *jannock* to return to the other *jannocks* he breathed on the *plomps* and told them they would become like him. But his magic wasn't powerful enough to complete the transformation. As a result, every now and then the *plomps* bring forth a creature called a *woolgrum*. It is half-woman, half frog, and because it was created by a *jannock* it can make itself invisible.

¹⁵⁸ *Tiliqua rugosa*

¹⁵⁹ Perhaps this is what is known around Perth as the Banjo Frog, whose calls certainly sound like 'plomp'. The Banjo is found over a large area of the south-west from Kalbarri, throughout the wheatbelt and south-west forests and east to Cape Arid.

¹⁶⁰ The *quaark* is the male equivalent of the *boork* (cloak)

Now, if a man has become an outcast from his group because of his misdeeds, no woman will live with him. His only means of getting himself a *york* is to travel towards the setting sun until he comes to the three big freshwater rivers in the west that roll down to the sea through scrub-covered banks and big marshy flats covered with reeds and rushes. On still nights he will hear many frogs croaking and the *woolgrums* calling; but will not see the *woolgrums*, for they are invisible most of the year.

On starry nights in the winter, when there is no moon, the *woolgrums* build *mias* on the riverbanks and warm themselves by their fires. Only then are they visible to men. If a man approaches them they disappear, never to return to the same place. Their camps will be seen elsewhere along the river, but it is no use trying to rush and catch them because their *jannock* blood will enable them to vanish.

The only way for a man to catch a *woolgrum* is to go alone to camp near a marshy flat and eat only fish and gilgies. He must tell no one where or why he has gone and stay until the weather turns cold. Next he must find a female *youan* in the act of giving birth to her young just as the sun sets (and it is almost impossible to find a mother *youan* giving birth in the cold weather). He must cast the newly born *youan* on his fire and watch till it bursts. As it bursts he must turn to the river marshes. There he will see the *woolgrums*. He must seize the remains of the infant *youan* and throw it at the *woolgrums* while running towards the river as fast as he can. If a portion of the *youan* touches a *woolgrum*, her frog features will disappear and the man will see a beautiful naked woman standing in the bush. He must be quick to catch her or she will jump into the river and float down towards the sea. If he fails to catch the *woolgrum* he will have to begin the process all over again. No *woolgrums* will ever return to that place

Should the man succeed in catching a *woolgrum* he must take her back to his camp, roll her up in his *quaark* and warm her by the fire all night. The next day they must marry (a *woolgrum* has no totem, so it does not matter whether the man is a *Nunich* or a *Wording*), then hurry across the marshes, staying close together until the following month when there is no moon. By that time the *woolgrum* will have lost the power to become invisible and consequently will never leave her Noongar, however bad his faults may be. She will bear him many children who will be more clever and stronger than any other children in their group. They will be able to travel fast along river beds and marshlands and have acute hearing. They will know when *jannocks*

are about and *jannocks* will never harm them. But they will not be beautiful like their mother. *Woolgrum* children have big heads and wide mouths, and grow to be bad men and bad women. They cannot have children no matter how many wives or husbands they may have. A man who marries a *woolgrum* knows his lineage will come to an end. No mother wants her son to marry a *woolgrum*. No man likes to be told his mother is a *woolgrum* for it reflects badly on his father and means he will have no children to fight for him in his old age.

A curious point in the legend is that the *youan*, or bobtailed goanna, or sleeping lizard is the only one of the goanna species that gives birth to live young with an interval of a few days between each birth. The Noongars say the eggs stay inside the goanna in a thin, soft shell. When it bursts, the young are born, fat and sluggish. They remain close to their mother and apparently do not eat for around thirty hours after birth. These goannas are about 35 centimetres long and have purple-blue tongues and very thick, short, stumpy tails. Once they grip something in their jaws they never let go. I have frequently carried them for 400 metres hanging on to a piece of stick by their teeth. Though their movements seem sluggish they travel a long distance in a very short time.

Chapter Twenty seven

One afternoon, two Noongar boys brought me a dead quoll (*chudic*) with four live young; the first time I had ever seen one. They are small and lithe with a sharp nose, a thin hairy tail and a very pretty brown coat covered with large white spots. To me they looked more like a weasel than a cat¹⁶¹. They are very savage but as the kittens were so small I decided to try to tame them. They thrive on the raw meat I fed them but never became tame and would bite my fingers whenever I put a saucer of water in their cage. I did not dare let them run about like any other animal I'd tamed. When one bit me severely through my glove Albert decided they must go.

I often discussed them with the Noongar women who were very interested in my efforts to tame them. One of the women who came from further down the river told me this story about the cat, emu and possum and it differs in many particulars from Tupin's story¹⁶² which I am told is current amongst the Aboriginal people of the North West. Indeed I have found that nearly all the legends connected with stars, planets, moon and sun have a very wide range. Though various minor points may differ, the main parts of the story are exactly the same. This legend concerns how the birds and animals got their various colours.

A *chudic* was out hunting one day when he suddenly encountered two *waitch* feeding on burnt grass near a river bank. He sat and watched them for a long time and eventually decided to introduce himself. *Waitch* are very timid birds, but curious too. If they see anything strange they go to have a closer look, and having satisfied their curiosity, run away.

Chudic knew this and for some time puzzled about how to introduce himself. He tried various methods, but each time he approached them the *waitch* ran away before he could speak to them. But when a *chudic* makes up his mind he is not easily daunted. He decided to make a nest in some dry tussocks of grass and sleep there so that the *waitch* would see him every day and get accustomed to his presence.

Whenever a *waitch* came to look at him, Chudic pretended to be asleep. After a while the *waitch* stopped being concerned and passed his nest every day without taking any notice of him.

¹⁶¹ They are actually a marsupial and unrelated to the cat species.

¹⁶² Chapter Six

One day as the *waitch* approached Chudic sat up. He did not look at Moor Waitch (female emu) though she was really the one he wanted to get to know. He knew that when she was with her Noongar he must not appear to notice she was there. So he said to Yungar Waitch (male emu) as he passed, '*Kipe bucal are warie?*' which means 'plenty of water?' Now when a Noongar is asked that question he is obliged to reply. He need not get into a conversation but he must give the information. Yungar Waitch answered '*Bucal kipe tannie,*' which means 'plenty of water by the trees' and Chudic made no reply.

This sort of acquaintance went on for some time, but did not develop. The *waitch* seemed to have no interest to getting to know Chudic. He decided he must do something more. As the *waitch* passed the next morning, he told them he had recently been for a long walk and discovered a big patch of burnt ground with plenty of young green grass growing and a good *yamma* nearby. The *waitch* thanked Chudic kindly for the information and asked for directions on how to find the *yamma*, as the river water was getting very salty and the supply of grass was dwindling. Chudic offered to show the *waitch* the way, and after some hesitation, they accepted. It was decided they would all set out to find the *yamma* the following morning.

Now Chudic had told a lie. He did not know the whereabouts of any *yamma*, but last summer there had been some very big *carls* so there was bound to be new grass growing somewhere and he would trust his luck to find water. At *kittiupcowra* (just before daylight) he set off with the *waitch*; he and Yungar Waitch in front, Moor Waitch behind. They travelled all that day and found plenty of food but no *yamma*. In the evening, a tired Yungar Waitch grumbled about not finding the *yamma* and not being able to make permanent camp. But Chudic spoke softly and coaxed Yungar Waitch back into a good mood.

Now Chudic was very cunning. He did not camp near the *waitch* but went off to some bushes not far away and camped there. As is correct behaviour for a *gnarnock* Noongar (bachelor), he had not spoken at all to Moor Waitch. Yungar Waitch was pleased - no *gnarnock* should ever speak to a *york* unless her husband brings her into the conversation – and Yungar Waitch had decided Chudic was a very discreet young man.

All the next day they travelled. Still they found no *yamma*, but Chudic amused the *waitch* so much that twice Moor Waitch laughed and Yungar Waitch did not scold her. They travelled for a week, over kilometres of country, and came to a big grassy

plain where there were lots of *mungite* and *men*¹⁶³ trees about and large quantities of *chucks*, just ripe.

The seeds of the *mungite* and *men* trees were falling from the trees so Yungar Waitch thought the plain was a good place to make a permanent camp. He told Chudic he had decided not to go on looking for the *yamma* and thanked him for bringing them so far.

This upset Chudic's plans for he had intended to travel with the *waitch* until he had become much closer to Moor Waitch. He lost his temper and began to insult Yungar Waitch saying he was sore-footed and his toes stuck out. Yungar Waitch resented Chudic's remarks and told him his tail was crooked and his nose was too sharp.

At this Chudic sprang at Yungar Waitch and Yungar Waitch kicked him with his powerful feet. The battle went on until Chudic sank his teeth into Yungar Waitch's throat and tore the skin from his neck. Yungar Waitch fell to his knees and bled to death, with Chudic still hanging to his neck. Chudic didn't let go until he was sure Yungar Waitch was dead.

Poor Moor Waitch watched the fight with horror for she knew that if Chudic won the battle she would have to go with him and be his *york*. When she realised Yungar Waitch was dead she ran from the scene as fast as she could. But it was no use; Chudic ran after her, caught her and claimed her as his *york*. Now she had to follow him. As they passed the body of Yungar Waitch she saw the head and neck feathers had turned white where Chudic had bitten him. Since then every *waitch* has had some white head and neck feathers which serve as a warning not to travel with strangers.

Chudic was very kind to Moor Waitch for a long time, but he could not make her happy. She had been well-trained by Yungar Waitch and never raised her eyes to anyone else, so after a time Chudic decided he could trust her and began to leave her alone for short periods, never daring to go too far away.

A happy thought came to Chudic – a way in which he could make sure Moor Waitch did not stray. There were lots of *men* and *mungite* seeds about so each day before he went hunting he ordered Moor Waitch to collect the seeds and grind them. He made sure he stayed close enough to hear the knock-knock of the grinding stone thumping the seeds, but soon he began to grumble. What was the use of Moor

¹⁶³ Manna wattle: *Acacia microbotyra* Benth.

Waitch making so much *quonert*? She could not eat it and although he pretended he liked it, he didn't. Besides, Moor Waitch's feet were getting tired from standing so long in the same position and grasping the grindstone and she already had a big pile of ground *quonert* in the corner of her *mia*.

When Chudic had had enough he told Moor Waitch they would leave camp. They could come back for *quonert* when they needed it. Moor Waitch was glad for a break from the constant grinding. They travelled for some days until they came to a full fresh-water river lined with tall trees, *mungite* trees, and big rocks. After resting for two days, Chudic ordered Moor Waitch back to grinding *quonert* whenever he went hunting.

One day while Moor Waitch was grinding *quonert*, Coomal came along and nibbled at some of the seeds. Moor Waitch was pleased to see him, but having been properly raised she did not speak to him. He started visiting every day when Chudic was out hunting. He found it much easier to eat from Moor Waitch's pile of *mungite* seeds than to go out collecting them himself and became quite fat from eating so much *quonert*.

Moor Waitch was always glad to see Coomal, and began chatting to him. But she never stopped grinding *quonert* while Coomal was visiting, as she knew Chudic would come back if the knock-knock of the grindstone stopped.

When the pile of *quonert* in the corner of the *mia* was very large, Moor Waitch asked Chudic what he intended to do with it. She pointed out that she baked *quonert* cake every evening but Chudic hardly touched it, besides, her *coot* was so full of *quonert* she would have no room to pack anything else when they moved camp.

Chudic contemplated this for some time. He was not sure what to do but he was afraid to leave Moor Waitch alone at camp with nothing to keep her busy. He liked to hear the distant knock-knock of the grinding stone when he was out hunting. He decided to give a big corroboree and told Moor Waitch she could invite the *coorbardies* and *towran* for they were her kin. He would invite the *twerts* and other *chudics* who were his kin. Moor Waitch asked if she could invite other *waitch*, but he got so angry with her for asking that she didn't ask again. Next day she asked him if she could invite the *coomals*, but he refused saying he didn't like *coomals* and they were not his kin. Moor Waitch dared not tell him she already had a *coomal* friend.

Chudic instructed Moor Waitch to bake *quonert* cakes for the next few nights: enough for all her kin attending the corroboree. He would go out and catch some game to feed his kin. Moor Waitch was very glad at the prospect of a big corroboree and a rest from eternal grinding. However Chudic told her that as so many of her kin and even *twerts* liked *quonert* she must go on grinding while he was away.

After he'd gone, Coomal arrived for the usual gossip and feed. Moor Waitch told him about the big corroboree Chudic was planning and said she wanted to invite him but Chudic did not want any *coomals* there. She also mentioned how terribly tired she was of grinding *quonert*; she was certain she had ground much more than would be needed for the corroboree. As she talked she kept grinding; she dare not stop for a minute.

Coomal suggested that when the corroboree was in full swing he and Moor Waitch could run away together. She owed Chudic nothing, Coomal said. She had not been promised to him; he had only won her through right of conquest. If Chudic hadn't twisted her feathers into his *barlee* they were not legally married and he could exchange her for another *york* at any time.

Moor Waitch reflected on the truth of Coomal's words. When Chudic came home, just to see what he would say, she suggested the corroboree would be a good time for him to twist her feathers into his *barlee*. He laughed and said as he'd won her by right of conquest he was not going to bother marrying her properly. Moor Waitch was deeply offended, and when Coomal appeared the following day she told him she agreed to elope with him when the corroboree was at its height.

Corroboree preparations continued. Moor Waitch baked every night and Chudic ordered her to grind more *quonert* every day. On the day of the corroboree, Moor Waitch started grinding as usual and continued grinding while *Chudic* went down to the river to catch some *gilgies*. Along came Coomal with wilgie on his face (which shows a Noongar is courting) and embraced Moor Waitch. Chudic suddenly realised the knock-knock of the grinding stone had stopped. Hastily gathering up the *gilgies* he'd caught he hurried to the camp. In a rage he rushed at Coomal and Moor Waitch. He seized Moor Waitch by the breast feathers and tore them all out. Consequently *waitch* breasts have been devoid of feathers since that day. He grabbed Coomal and rubbed his face in the soil; so hard that it bled. Coomal's blood mixed with his wilgie made reddish brown patches on his facial fur, which *coomals* have worn forever after.

As Coomal and Chudic were fighting the *coorbardies* and *towran* arrived and were furious to find Moor Waitch gravely ill with all her *quonert* and cakes scattered around her *mia*. Chudic had managed to chase Coomal away and now he must defend himself from the *towrans'* attack. He drove their heads into the *quonert* and rubbed their necks with it, leaving yellow rings around their necks where the *quonert* stuck – rings that you can see to this day.

The *coorbardies* stayed out of the quarrel and considered what to do. Moor Waitch revived and called on them as her kin to help her but the *coorbardies* are wise birds and never get involved in a dispute unless they know what has caused it. They flew down to Moor Waitch and asked her what she was doing in Chudic's camp. Moor Waitch told them how Chudic had enticed Yungar Waitch into following him on a long journey, picked a quarrel with him and killed him. This angered the *coorbardies* – their anger grew when Moor Waitch told them she had been forced to grind *quonert* whenever Chudic went away and that he had refused to bind her *churl* (hair) into his *barlee* at the corroboree, laughing at her for suggesting it. Moor Waitch was their kin, the *coorbardies* said, and a much higher totem than *chudics*!

The *coorbardies* flocked to where Chudic was fighting with the *towran*. The *towran* had pulled nearly all the hair off his tail, jabbed their sharp beaks all over his body and left him for dead.

Moor Waitch gathered up all the *quonert* she could and brought the cakes out of her *mia* so the *coorbardies* and *towran* could eat. The birds offered to take Moor Waitch back to her group; the *towran* went first to look for the other *waitch* and the *coorbardies* followed with Moor Waitch. On the second day they met a flock of *waitch*, delivered poor Moor Waitch to them safely and bade her farewell. Then the two groups of birds parted; the *towran* flew one way and the *coorbardies* flew in the opposite direction. This was the right thing to do because if too many Noongars congregate together, disagreements can arise. It is better to part on friendly terms.

Now Chudic was not quite dead. He crawled away into the forest where he stayed until his wounds were healed. Ever since that day, *chudics* have had white spots on their fur and very ragged tails, all because of the Chudic who betrayed Yungar Waitch and treated poor Moor Waitch so badly. Whenever *towran* or *coorbardies* see a *chudic* they make such a noise that all the animals he is hunting know he's about. He can no longer hunt in the day time. He must hunt at night when only *coomals* are about. *Coomals* keep to the trees and chatter with fright whenever they

see a *chudic*, for it reminds them their ancestor ought to have consulted with Moor Waitch's kin before he appeared before her wearing wilgie. Wilgie has lost its meaning for them too, as their faces are forever marked as a result of the carelessness of their ancestor.

Chapter Twenty eight

It had been some years since Esperance bay was settled and stocked by Europeans. Occasionally drovers would bring their stock past the station on their way to market. We were always glad to see anyone, and as the European settlers at Esperance bay were old friends of Albert's they generally stayed with us for a few days to rest their stock. They were always accompanied by several Esperance Bay Noongar drovers who stayed with my friends at their camp; and told me a few of their legends.

At about this time, more Noongars began to wear European clothes. I attributed this to a rise of illness in their camps because European dress was not suited to the traditional Noongar way of life. In wet weather, Noongar *boorks* and *quaarks* (kangaroo-skin capes) would be worn with the furry-side in and rain water would run off the outer untanned skin. In summer they usually turned the furry side to the outside. They rarely took their skins off; indeed there was no need to change them as they stayed dry.¹⁶⁴ When they started wearing European clothes they kept them on even when they were wet. As a result they contracted severe colds which their remedies could not address, and many deaths occurred. They were unaccustomed to European foods too, which caused stomach troubles.¹⁶⁵

The Noongars of Esperance Bay told the story of Chudic, Waitch and Coomal somehow mixed with the story of the Chudic, Waitch, Coomal, *coorbardies* and *towran*; whereas in the lore of my Noongar friends these were two distinct stories. In the Esperance Bay legend, *Chudic* had two *yorks* – a *waitch* and a *coorley*. In both our legends he only had one *york*. In the Esperance Bay legend Chudic goes hunting and leaves his two *yorks* grinding *quonert*. Coomal comes along and while one *york* is grinding the *quonert* he talks to the other. Coomal puts wilgie on his face and courts both *yorks* who feed him *quonert*. One day he eats all the *quonert*, so when Chudic comes home with game and asks for *quonert* the *yorks* look at each other in fear and claim they dropped it and lost it all. Chudic does not believe them: he notices the look that passes between them and sees little spots of wilgie on their faces. He'd seen Coomal on his way home and noticed he had wilgie on his face -

¹⁶⁴ It is a myth that wet clothes cause the contracting of colds and flu. The cause of these illnesses is viruses (<http://health.howstuffworks.com/diseases-conditions/cold-flu/wet-head-cold1.htm>)

¹⁶⁵ It was not the food that caused problems per se, but the change in diet from a rich variety of plant and animal matter to a basic diet of flour, sugar and tinned meat (http://www.nt.gov.au/health/healthdev/health_promotion/bushbook/volume2/chap3/after.html)

he concludes Coomal has been at camp and questions his *yorks* as to what's been going on.

Chudic's *yorks* deny having seen Coomal. Chudic instructs them to build a big fire and to roast his meat. When the fire flares up he pushes his *yorks* into it. The smoke sends them up into the sky; Waitch forms the dark emu-shaped patch in the Milky Way and Coorley forms the Southern Cross.

Meanwhile, Coomal attacks Chudic. In the terrible fight that ensues, Coomal is badly bitten all over his face and underside and Chudic is scratched all over his body. This accounts for the brownish-red patches on Coomal's stomach and the side of his face and the white spots on Chudic's body.

This legend with another variation is also told in the North West – I heard it from a Nyamal¹⁶⁶ man from near Port Hedland. In that legend Chudic¹⁶⁷ and Waitch live together; Waitch gets tired of Chudic and tries to run away. Chudic always outsmarts her and manages to thwart her. In desperation Waitch tries to swim across a river to escape Chudic and becomes entangled in bushes. Chudic drags her back and she turns and pecks at him. As they struggle their camp catches alight. Waitch is incinerated and the smoke goes into the sky forming the dark patch in the Milky Way. Chudic is scorched where Waitch has pecked him and the sores heal to form white spots (a burn can leave a light scar on dark skin).

There are many curious rocks all along the south-east coast which have the most interesting shapes. Some had legends attached to them; in fact they probably all did at one stage or another but many have been forgotten. In Albany the dog's head rock¹⁶⁸ is well known – it is an immense rock resembling a mastiff's head, the nose pointing to the sky. There is another rock, not as well-known which is shaped exactly like a small sea rowing boat¹⁶⁹. Near Cape Riche there is a rock strongly resembling an owl which has given rise to a legend (told in a previous chapter). At Alexander Harbour¹⁷⁰ I am told there are rocks that resemble two women and the basin between

¹⁶⁶ As modern Port Hedland is on the land of the Nyamal people, I have substituted 'native' used by the author with Nyamal. He may of course have been from a number of other groups in the Port Hedland region.

¹⁶⁷ The quoll that exists in the Port Hedland region (now in a diminished range) is the Northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*)

¹⁶⁸ Now known as 'Dog Rock'

¹⁶⁹ As yet I have found no trace of this rock.

¹⁷⁰ Alexander Bay, approximately 85 km east of Esperance.

the rocks forms the appearance of a native camp. These rocks also have their own legend but when it was told to me I found it confusing.

This legend is about a rock further east of Esperance near Thomas River¹⁷¹ that (I am told) resembles a Noongar¹⁷² carrying a man, a kangaroo and a dog. I think it shows traces of white influence for I never heard any of my Noongar friends asking any spirit for assistance; indeed they seemed far too frightened of supernatural beings to make any requests of them. The spirits were to be appeased, not petitioned.

Long long ago there was a large shallow lake not far from the sea, home to a large flock of *chitter chitter*. They loved it there for it was quiet and secluded. The low bushes fringing its shores afforded excellent shelter in which to build nests and there were plentiful insects on which to feed. In summer, the lake was land-locked but in winter the heavy rains caused the lake to breach its banks and a small stream flowed from the lake to the sea. Fish would swim from the sea back into the lake – there was enough water to keep them alive through the drier months, and so many sorts of insects for the fish to eat that they grew fat. There was plenty for all.

The *chitter chitter* and fish lived in harmony for many years. One year there was a terrible storm and the rain poured down in torrents. The wind tore the bushes from their roots and the lake burst its banks. The little stream became a river and rushed down to the sea carrying the fish with it, sweeping them far from shore. Countless *chitter chitter* drowned or were carried inland by the fury of the wind. One poor little bird was blown away from all its companions and fell exhausted in a tea-tree bush many kilometres from its home. While it lay there, glad of the shelter, it heard a faint twittering. It moved towards the noise and found a stranded and exhausted *pinny pinch*, very young and very frightened. Chitter chitter comforted Pinny Pinch and they snuggled close together to keep warm.

The storm raged for days. The two little birds managed to find a few insects amongst the tea-tree foliage – just enough to keep them alive. Each time they tried to venture out of the tea-tree the wind blew them back. When the storm finally blew itself out, two very hungry little birds emerged from the bush. They flew about together for some days as they had become close friends, but they could not find any others of

¹⁷¹ 130 kilometres east of Esperance in Cape Arid National Park. Not marked on Google maps.

¹⁷² The Noongar boundary stretches east to Israelite bay, 295 kilometres along the coast (185 kilometres as the *wording* flies.)

their groups. In vain, Chitter Chitter flew to all the tall rushes calling to his group but there was no response.

Pinny Pinch heard a response to his calls at last and was overjoyed to see one of his group. He introduced Chitter Chitter to his fellow *pinny pinch*. His group was close by, and he invited Chitter Chitter to come back to camp. On arriving at the camp Pinny Pinch told his group how kind Chitter Chitter had been to him. He was made very welcome and invited to stay as long as he liked.

He stayed quite a while at the *pinny pinch* camp but the sight of so many happy *pinny pinches* made him sadder each day, and one day he decided to go in search of his own group. He promised his *cubbie* Pinny Pinch that if he had no success he would return for a visit and learn *pinny pinch* lore.

Chitter Chitter flew for many days. The weather was fine and insects were plentiful but his calls went unanswered. At length he came to the shallow lake where he'd been born, and heard a *chitter chitter* call. His group had made their nests in a spot with good shelter and they flew out to welcome him. Once more Chitter Chitter was happy with his own group, but he did not forget his *cubbie* Pinny Pinch and talked about him frequently, telling the other *chitter chitters* how good the *pinny pinches* had been to him. It was decided to arrange an exchange visit: a group of *chitter chitter*, with an elder, would visit the *pinny pinch carla* and arrange for a group of young *pinny pinch* to come to the *chitter chitter carla*.

The *chitter chitters* were very pleased with this idea: they did not know much about the *pinny pinches* and thought an alliance could be a desirable thing. Accordingly the *chitter chitter* visited the *pinny pinch* and an extended exchange visit was arranged. Some time before the young *pinny pinches* left to join the *chitter chitter*, *noilyets* were put into their noses, and the *chitter chitters* did the same. By the time of the exchange, all noses were healed.

When the *chitter chitters* and *pinny pinches* arrived at the *chitter chitter carla* they were disgusted to find a lot of human Noongars had discovered their quiet, secluded lake and were spearing their friends the fish, destroying their favourite nesting bushes and rendering the place uninhabitable. What could be done to get rid of them?

Someone remembered that Marghet¹⁷³ had made a resting place at the other end of the lake near the sea: perhaps he would help them – but how could they contact him? Sometimes he stays at his resting place a long time and at other times he is nowhere to be found. The *chitter chitters* flew off to where Marghet had last been seen, in their agitation forgetting all about the *pinny pinches*, who being young and confused by their strange surroundings did not understand they should follow, and remained at the *chitter chitter carla*.

A number of *chitter chitter* got a long slender stick and drove it hard into one of the mud springs near the lake, crying ‘*chitter chitter*’ hoping Marghet would hear them and emerge from his resting place, but the stick sank into the mud and disappeared. They tried another, and another, and kept trying until the first stick had been pushed far enough down to reach the sea under the lake. Seawater rushed up and poured into the lake and swamped the Noongars who were in their camp eating their supper. They seized their spears and ran. When they saw the *pinny pinches* at the *chitter chitter carla* they assumed they were to blame for the disaster and threw their spears at the *pinny pinches*, wounding their breasts.

Meanwhile the *chitter chitters* realised they’d left the *pinny pinches* back at their *carla* and flew back as fast as they could. On finding the *pinny pinches* had been speared by the Noongars they were furious! The *pinny pinches* had been entrusted to them and were now wounded. They staunched the *pinny pinch* blood with tea-tree bark and called on Marghet to help them avenge the wrong they had unwittingly done to the *pinny pinches* by leaving them unprotected.

The sea bubbled and roared through the hole in the lake and turned the water salty. Many Noongars were drowned. Still the *chitter chitter* were not satisfied. They wanted the Noongars cleared out altogether. They would not feel safe while there were any left at the lake. But Marghet was tired and could do nothing more.

In time the Noongars got used to the salty lake and found fresh water by digging in shallow holes nearby. Game was plentiful and there were still fish in the lake, but whenever the Noongars saw a *chitter chitter* or a *pinny pinch* they threw their spears. It became very dangerous for the birds and they considered moving camp; but they had been at the lake for such a long long time and wanted to stay. Marghet had helped them once; perhaps he would help them again if they teased him enough.

¹⁷³ Inland water spirit (see Chapter 8)

Marget soon became fed up with being constantly pestered by the *chitter chitters* but still, he was silent. One day, the Noongars held a corroboree that was so noisy it made Marghet furious and finally caused him to react. He made the hole in the lake much bigger and the sea roared in and burst the lake's banks sending the Noongars fleeing in terror.

Amongst those Noongars who had been most troublesome to the birds was a boy called Coomera. He and his *twert* had chased the birds whenever they met them; so now the *chitter chitters* pointed him out to Marghet. Coomera and his *twert* ran until they met Coomera's father who was just coming back to his *mia* with a *yonger* on his shoulder. When the father saw the waters rising he lifted Coomera onto his other shoulder and the *twert* ran beside them. As the waters continued to rise, Coomera begged his father to lift the *twert* up to him, which his father did.

Still the waters rose. Coomera's father climbed into a tree carrying the *yonger*, Coomera and his *twert*, and there they stayed. The birds flew round and round the tree so Marghet would find it, and the waters rose and drowned the boy and his father and the *twert*. Marghet caused the mud and salt of the lake to cover them and at once they turned to stone. They remain in the place they died to this day as a reminder to Noongars to leave small birds alone. It's more trouble than its worth to try to catch them – little birds are too small to eat and the *chitter chitters* never keep still. They are always looking for their *cubbies* the *pinny pinches*, for while they had their revenge on the Noongars once they might not be so fortunate another time. Pinny Pinch always wears his noilyet; you can still see the white bar across his nose, for the fright he got when the Noongars threw their spears at him made him decide to leave it there forever. The feathers on his breast are still red from his wounds and serve as a reminder that he was once forgotten by *chitter chitters*.

Though they still like the lakes, the *chitter chitters* now go to many other places so they can visit their friends the *pinny pinches*. The *pinny pinches* love the *chitter chitters* and have forgiven them, for though the *chitter chitters* forgot them briefly, they made up for their neglect and took revenge on the Noongars.

Chapter Twenty nine

As time went by my trips away from the station were less frequent. My family was growing and I could not leave the children so Albert travelled alone. But every now and then we'd take a trip to Albany. The children thoroughly enjoyed it – they called it 'a picnic without going home'. A cover was put over one of the wagons and plenty of rugs and pillows placed within. The boxes and chaff for the horses were loaded onto the back, and the children rode along with their pet cat and pet dog and their maid. The eldest boy rode alongside on his pony.

The wagon was driven by Moobill – an elderly Noongar who told the children a wonderful range of stories to keep them amused. Albert and I would drive on ahead in the trap and get everything ready for the wagon's arrival. We'd have lunch and rest for a while then go on ahead again with the trap some way behind us. It took four days and nights to reach Albany. At our overnight camps, some of the children slept in the wagon and some in tents. When the moon was full I'd often go walking into the bush to watch the animals of the night emerge and listen for their various cries. If I sat very still I would see them in their natural state. I often heard a possum cough and looked up to see it peering down at me; its bright beady eyes looking straight into mine. Then its mate would appear and they'd scamper about on the slender boughs. I might see a mother with a baby. When the mother wants to move and the baby doesn't let her, she gives it a nip on the ear. It gives a funny little squeak and climbs onto her back and she hurries to another bough.

When the young possums are too old to be carried in the pouch they climb onto the mother's back and cling to her thick fur till they learn to navigate the branches by themselves. Then there are the kangaroos. There is nothing more amusing than to watch their frolics and see their attitudes and gestures which look almost human. It is interesting to see a small mob; one can almost imagine they are talking to each other as they feed on a small patch of burnt grass.

One of the stories old Moobill told the children which always delighted them was the story of the *yongers* and the Maak (moon).

Once long ago a lot of *yongers* were playing about in the moonshine, seeing which of them could jump the highest and which could hop the fastest. Goombar Yonger, the biggest of the *yongers* always came out on top. In the heat of the day while the other *yongers* were trying to sleep he liked to boast about his successes - about how high

he had jumped and fast he had hopped and how he had found the sweetest patches of grass. When the other *yongers* went to look for grass at night, Goombar Yonger would stay behind and sleep, knowing he could catch up to the others when he was ready.

The other *yongers* were sick of Goombar Yonger telling them he was the highest and the fastest and decided they would not camp or feed with him any longer. They waited until the sun had set then travelled along the banks of a dry creek until they came to water. They swam down the creek then came back up onto the bank, on the same side they'd gone in. They thought Goombar Yonger would see their tracks and think they had gone straight across; thus he would look in the wrong place and they could get away from him and all his foolish talk.

Their plan worked just as they had hoped it would. Goombar Yonger went across the river to look for tracks. When he could find none he hopped down the river banks but still saw no tracks. He quickly fed, having wasted so much time looking for his group he hardly had time to get back to camp before the sun rose.

He was greatly disgusted when he returned to camp to find it was empty. He waited all day, but no one came back. For some time he was alone, but got so tired of his own company that he made friends with Maak. He and Maak talked about many things in the night time, though Goombar Yonger could not break his boasting habit. Some of the things he said were not true, which Maak knew because he could look down and see what Goombar Yonger was doing. He told Goombar Yonger he had never seen him jump as high as he claimed he could. Goombar Yonger said, 'Oh I do most of my jumps in the day time when you are in bed!' This made Maak angry and he began to tell the Goombar Yonger about all the wonderful things *he* had seen in his time. Goombar Yonger said, 'Now *you're* telling lies!'

This annoyed Maak so he challenged Goombar Yonger to a race. Off they went with Maak leading and Goombar Yonger following. They ran all night and all the next day until Goombar Yonger had to stop and admit he was beaten. Maak called down and asked Goombar Yonger, 'How long will you live? What will happen to you when you die? I want nothing more to do with you!'

At first Goombar Yonger was too annoyed to respond, but Maak repeated the questions. Finally Goombar Yonger said, 'I may live a long a long time or I may live a

short time but when I die my bones will go white and crack in the sun. I want nothing to do with you either!’

Maak laughed and said, ‘I never die; I live forever.’

‘That is foolish talk,’ Goombar Yonger replied. He knew better than that! Everything died!

Maak insisted he never died. Goombar Yonger laughed and said now things would change. Maak would die for a short time then come to life again. And that is what has happened ever since. Maak lives, gets thin, dies then lives again. That is his punishment for boasting that he was eternal.

Another story the children were very fond of was the Omer and the Yonger or the Brush Kangaroo and the Kangaroo.

Yonger was Omer’s uncle and very jealous of his nephew, for Omer had a beautiful thick *quaark* which kept him warm and dry all winter. Yonger often asked Omer if he could borrow his *quaark* but Omer was cunning. He knew that if Yonger got hold of the *quaark* he would never give it back. Yonger was stronger and bigger than Omer and would beat Omer if they’d ever fought, so Omer guarded his *quaark* and wrapped it around himself tightly whenever he saw Yonger coming.

One very hot day Omer checked carefully to make sure Yonger was not around. Seeing no sign of him took his *quaark* off, laid it at the foot of a *mungite* tree and climbed into the tree to gather flowers for his supper. Yonger, who was always watching Omer and waiting for a chance to steal the *quaark*, was hiding in some bushes close by. When he saw Omer was a good way up the tree he hopped out of the bushes and seized the *quaark*. Poor Omer saw this happen and cried out, ‘Uncle, uncle do not take my *quaark*! The days are hot the nights are cold!’ But Yonger had waited so long for his chance to take the *quaark* that he wasn’t going to give it up. He threw it over his back and hopped off as fast as he could. Omer, in his hurry to get down the tree to give chase, bent his legs. Yonger went faster and faster in his panic to escape, using his tail to help him make long hops. Omer didn’t stop chasing Yonger until the pain in his legs became so much that he could go no further. *Omers*’ legs have been bent ever since, and their coats are thin with long hairs. *Yongers* have always had shorter thicker coats since then because they have two *quaarks* on their backs. They use their tails to help them hop, as that is the means by which their ancestor managed to steal the *omer’s quaark*.

It is curious, given that there are so many ways in which *yongers* were used in the Noongars' daily lives that there are not more legends about them. Their skins were the only sort used to make *boorks*, *quaarks* and *coots*; the sinews from their tails were used as threads. Their hind leg bones were used to make needles and broken into small pieces to make *noilyets*. The teeth were used as blades for the women's knives, as point-sharpeners in men's *meeras* and for honing and scraping their *geize* and *doarks*. In contrast, the *waitch* is used only for its feathers (by the men for decoration), its meat for food and its fat for rubbing on the body; yet there are many more *waitch* than *yonger* legends.

In the story of Omer and Yonger, sometimes old Moobbil would change the *yonger* to a *waitch*. Stealing Omer's *quaark* would explain why the Waitch had the best feathers of any bird. But the children always objected to that version. I don't know which the correct legend is but I'm inclined to think it is the Yonger and Omer version because that is the first version Moobbil told. He told the *waitch* version if he had seen a *waitch* during the day.

Chapter Thirty

This legend was a great favourite with the women and frequently told during the wood chopping days. It seemed to be about a general quarrel between all the birds, beasts and reptiles and really had no end or beginning. When some fresh creature was brought in to the story the merits of that particular creature and its relationship to the other animals in the quarrel was carefully discussed, the narrative being suspended during the discussion. If the discussion concluded in the animal's favour one of the women would say, 'Oh we lose that one; he all right.' If the majority decided the animal had no right in the story there would be a chorus of, 'She not tell him true, Missus; he down at Carlingup,' which meant the animal was out of range of the country of my Noongar friends.

Large flocks of very handsome black cockatoos¹⁷⁴ frequented the forest. At the end of summer, early in the morning and late at night, these cockatoos would fly over the station screaming their shrill discordant note. It sounded to me like *willah willah*. When their tail feathers were spread they showed a broad creamy white band. Occasionally another kind of black cockatoo would appear¹⁷⁵. The males have broad bands of red under their tail feathers and the females' tails are laced with red and very pale yellow. These cockatoos were rare and had a different note to the *woolah* or white-tailed birds. They flew in much smaller flocks and were far less noisy.

Margt, the swamphen¹⁷⁶, is a beautiful bird. Its colouring is like the eye of a peacock feather with shades of metallic blue, green and bronze. It is about the size of a leghorn fowl but more slender, with long red legs and a red beak. It lives on the edge of swamps and cuts the thick, high reeds into even lengths about 60 centimetres long; I never discovered why. Wherever Margt is, small bundles of evenly cut reeds will be spread about.

I had a partly-tamed *margt* given to me once; it spent most of its time in a nearby swamp, but it loved raw meat and whenever it heard the bell ring for meals it came rushing to the kitchen door. It was fearless and savage. It fought with cats, dogs and chased the children. One day, after almost seven months it failed to appear for

¹⁷⁴ Baudin's Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus baudinii*) and or Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*)

¹⁷⁵ Forest red-tailed black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii naso*)

¹⁷⁶ Australasian purple swamphen, (*Porphyrio melanotus*) There is a subspecies common in the extreme south-west.

dinner. A few days later the friend who had given it to me told me it had returned to the swamp near his house, a distance of 35 kilometres.

The *wee-oo*¹⁷⁷, or banded anteater is a beautifully coloured little marsupial about 40 centimetres long, nose to tail-tip, with a pointed muzzle and a bushy tail. Its colour varies from soft grey to reddish-brown and it has a black stripe on each side of its face and a number of white stripes along its back. It nests in hollow logs and lives almost entirely on termites. I often saw *wee-oo*s hunting in fallen leaves and though I wanted to tame one I never managed to keep one more than a day. They were adept at escaping through very tiny holes.

A *chitter chitter* was sunning himself on a low tree branch, watching for passing insects and thinking of nothing in particular, when the sound of a hiss made him jump. He looked straight down into the eyes of a *nornt* (black snake). Poor Chitter Chitter fluttered his wings in terror, caught in Nornt's stare. He felt the urge to fly down to Nornt, but knew he would be eaten so he fluttered about trying to break away from Nornt's gaze. Try as he might, he could not. Nornt moved his head slowly to and fro, never taking his eyes off Chitter Chitter. Chitter Chitter uttered little cries of distress and felt himself being drawn closer and closer. Meanwhile, Wakal, another snake, very venomous but not as active as Nornt, slithered towards the scene. He had been watching the proceedings and decided he wanted Chitter Chitter for himself, but he was too afraid to challenge Nornt who was well-known for fighting and conquering anything that got in his way.

Wakal saw Twert sitting behind a bush. He suggested to Twert that they take advantage of Nornt's concentration on Chitter Chitter and get the little bird just before Nornt did. Twert was hungry too or he would never have risked a fight with Nornt, but Wakal said it would be easy. As Chitter Chitter fluttered closer and closer, Twert sprang at him, snapped and missed, just as Wakal had expected. Enraged, Nornt reared to strike Twert, who jumped back howling with fright. Just then Nornt noticed Wakal sneaking up on Chitter Chitter and attacked Wakal instead.

Chitter Chitter, out of the gaze of Nornt managed to pull himself together but was still too frightened to fly away. He stood on the branch trembling with terror and watched the snakes fighting below him.

¹⁷⁷ Numbat, or banded anteater (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*)

Chudic came along and decided *he* wanted Chitter Chitter. He told Twert to stop howling, but Twert paid no attention. Fed up with the noise, Chudic attacked Twert. In the scuffle they rolled over Wee-oo who was minding his own business hunting for beetles. He was outraged at being interrupted and bit Chudic. Though Chudic retaliated fiercely, Wee-oo was nimble and gave Chudic more bites than Chudic gave him scratches.

Twert howled harder than ever. A big flock of *woolah* were flying overhead, heard the howling and stopped to investigate. Wakal, who was losing his battle with Nornt shouted to them, 'Twert is trying to save Chitter Chitter from Nornt and Chudic!'

Now the *woolah* knew Wakal was a liar, but they could see Chitter Chitter really was very frightened, and Chudic and Wee-oo were really fighting. They could certainly hear Twert howling, so without asking any further questions they went to Twert's aid. This was not the right thing to do. They should have left the animals to fight and gone to the aid of their kin, Chitter Chitter.

Margt the swamphen was feeding over at the lake on some young *mein*¹⁷⁸ (*Mein* is a tall rush plant with a black stem and bright red roots. It is something like a leek in shape. The Noongars eat these juicy, sweet and hot roots which leave a deep red stain on the mouth.)

Margt had noticed the events unfolding beneath the tree when she saw Twert snap at Chitter Chitter. Having seen Chitter Chitter was safe and Twert was getting what he deserved she went on eating *mein*. When she saw the *woolah* come screaming down to defend Twert she decided it was time to interfere. Hurriedly she pulled up a thick reed to use as a *wanna*. She ran up to the *woolah* and told them Twert had tried to eat Chitter Chitter but the *woolah* refused to listen to her. She got very angry and pecked and flapped at them hit them over their backs with her *wanna*. They spread their tails to defend themselves and she threw lumps of red *mein* at them, hitting their tail feathers and staining them red.

Gurego¹⁷⁹ had been sitting in a yate tree nearby and laughing at the battle. She flew down and told them to listen to Margt: she was telling the truth. The *woolah* realised they had been defending the wrong animal and were so embarrassed that they began to quarrel amongst themselves. They made so much noise that more and

¹⁷⁸ *Haemodorum spicatum* or bloodroot species – a variety of the *quirting* mentioned in Chapter Three,

¹⁷⁹ Australian shelduck (mountain duck) (*Tadorna tadornoides*)

more birds came to see what was happening. When Margt told them the *woolah* had defended Twert, they joined in the fight, hitting the *woolah* with reed *wannas* Margt cut for them and pelting them with *mein*.

Many of the *woolah* became frightened upon seeing their new red feathers and flew away. They were so hoarse from screeching they could only say 'Currah!' from then on. The rest of the *woolah* drove all the other birds back to the nearby lake for a *wongi*. It was agreed that from then on, they would not defend any creature except other birds, no matter how desperately the other animals called for help. They should kill any snake they had the chance to kill, unless it was too big, in which case they were to warn the other birds with their calls and frighten the snakes.

Poor Chitter Chitter had such a fright that day he has never sat still since. No snake can charm him because he is always moving. Twert's tail has a white tip where Chudic bit it, Wee-oo has bands of white fur where Chudic scratched him and Chudic has white spots where Wee-oo bit him.

The *woolah* broke into two groups – the *woolah* with red tails became *currah*, are timid and live in the forest, while the remaining *woolah* go about wherever they like and make as much noise as they please to show they are not afraid. The *margt* are never quite sure when there might be another fight and still cut reeds into *wannas* so as to have a good supply ready just in case.

Circa 1910

How times have changed I first arrived in Jerramungup. Nearly all my Noongar friends have passed on. I revisit the place sometimes but it is no longer my little 'grey home'. The trip can take less than a day by motor car though it used to take nearly four days to get there from Albany by horse and cart. A railway runs within 50 kilometres and there is a thriving village within 80. The old home is turned into men's quarters and a newer more commodious house has been built. More land is cleared and many old landmarks have gone. The Noongar burial ground was burned in a big bushfire and none of it remains. Everything is different; improved I suppose; the reaper and binder rattle over the fields where the men used to go with the scythe, Noongar women following, gleaning the sheaves. The seeder travels along where men used to sow, right hand left foot with a friendly rivalry as to who could scatter the broadest cast. The several-furrowed plough tears up the surface of the ground and the headlands¹⁸⁰ are left. Neat work is not important now. Machines take the place of hand shears and the shearers don't race to see who can shear the most sheep and perform the cleanest closest cut. Saddest of all, the old cordial feeling between Employer and farmhand seems to have gone. Men no longer say with pride, "I belong to so-and-so's station, been there for ten or twenty years or so," or "I have always shorn at such a station, I can't disappoint them." Will the old times ever come back I wonder or have they gone with the Noongars and soon be legends like theirs.

¹⁸⁰ A headland, in agriculture, is the area at each end of a planted field where the machines turn

Postscript

Of Yilgar, Buckerup, Winmar, Gimluck, Gillan and the other Noongar people you have met in these pages (with the exception of Tupin), I know not the destiny. By the time Ethel Hassell wrote her manuscript in the early 1900s, she states most of her Noongar friends had passed: though I think that is a too- convenient version of history.

'Winmar' is a well-known Noongar family name that lives on. Yilgarn (meaning 'quartz' in some Noongar and Wongi dialects) is a geological area. Yilgar, who for me is the star of this book, must have been born circa 1825 or earlier if she was able to remember life before white invasion. She may well have died before Mrs Hassell moved to Albany in 1895.

The *Protector's Report* of 1903 contains notes about Noongars on various stations in WA including Jerramongup. Could Yunga, mentioned below, be Yilgar? The notes state:

The Chief Protector of Aborigines, Perth

JERRAMONGUP – MR A.Y.HASSELL. MANAGED BY MR J, HASSELL¹⁸¹.

There are three (3) natives on relief here as follows:-

(1.) Gnarbein or Yunga, alias Polly, F.70, unable to work:

(2.) Chaea. F., 18, a Chinese half-caste }orphans

(3.) Gratchen,. F., 8 }

A parcel of seven blankets received by Mr Hassell 12 months ago, without any instructions. I opened that package and gave out three for above natives, remainder will be held until required next year. Ms Hassell said he did not recognise the claim of working women having relief blankets. Their men were paid and should be able to find the women in clothes etc. It is quite refreshing to meet a gentleman with these views. In many cases employers of native labour endeavour to obtain all the assistance possible from the department.

Eleven natives from 19 to 50, six women from 20 to 40, two girls (one and two years), six boys, three weeks to 13 years, three half-castes six months to 12 years.

Scale of rations: 10 lbs flour, 2 lbs sugar, 4 ozs tea, 8 lbs meat, per week.

One death two years ago, an old woman. One girl (22) died last year, probably from consumption. Three births in the last two years.

¹⁸¹ Jock Hassell, Albert's brother.

Six other natives employed at intervals now in the bush kangarooing etc; one white man living with half-caste woman, 45, having nine children, four months to 22 years: eldest son (22) lives with a native woman who has a baby two weeks old. Most of the natives constantly employed are signed and receive wages. The men about the place appeared to be good workers and were employed chaff-cutting at the time of my visit. They are well-fed and clothed and appear contented and happy. A native woman signed to Mr Hassell absconded some few weeks ago. She was living with a white man in Mr Hassell's employ and left six to eight weeks after agreement was made. Mr Hassell applied for a warrant, but the R.M. Albany told him the woman could not be prosecuted on this agreement. This seems strange as the woman took a mare and foal, saddle, bridle, hobbles and bell when clearing out, these being recovered through the agency of Corporal Wall at Ravensthorpe If the magistrates will not issue warrants in such cases, the agreement does not appear to be of much use.

I have, etc.,

G.S.OLIVEY

Travelling Inspector

Perth, 6th May, 1902.

I have found a record of who I think could be our Tupin. She is mentioned in a letter from Bremer Bay dated 1 August 1907, addressed to the Chief Protector of Aborigines (see the postscript). It would seem she was treated with appalling callousness by the Hassells when her usefulness as a worker had ended.

Bremer Bay

1st August 1907

Chief Protector Aborigines

Perth

Sir

An old native woman named Tooping and her daughter named Emma have been given good relief today. The former is about 50 years of age and the latter 15 years. She has had no man to keep her as he died some years ago but lately she has been working at Jerramungup up till about a month ago when she got dismissed by her employer not wanting her services any longer so she came here for relief which I gave them as they were destitute.

Frank H. Cornish

Protector

In fact, A.Y.Hassell had a very bad reputation as an employer of Aboriginal people. In the book *The Hassells of Albany* (Cleve Hassell 1972), I found reference to another of his disgruntled Noongar employees, Mindum. In 1898, Mindum escaped from Albany Jail where he had been imprisoned for breaking his contract with Hassell. He was captured dramatically and was sent to Rottneest. He and two Aboriginal men (Weinjoe and Marbyamarra) from the North West escaped by floating to the mainland in a large box (some news reports of the day say the three men stole a rowing boat which they used to get to shore), and another story has it that Mindum swam to the mainland.

Mindum¹⁸² made his way to York and stole a blood stallion, rode back down to Jerramungup and left the horse 'tidily' in the horse yard.

This article deriding the hapless Hassell appeared in the *Sunday Times* of 26 June 1904, and mentions Esperance 'bushranger' Johnny Cudgel, whose story deserves a telling of its own.

ALIENIST HASSELL: MAKING OF BUSHRANGERS

AY Hassell, The late member For Plantagenet, is the jimcrack¹⁸³ boss of Albany. He is the owner of several sheep stations in the Southern district, and runs things with a lofty hand. There are signs however that the people are getting very tired of Hassell. In Parliament he has been a dull, hopeless failure, and down in his own country he is a long-sight too big for his bluchers¹⁸⁴.

In addition, yarns get about remembering his fondness for coloured labour and his treatment of the blacks on his stations, which, whether true or not, do not enhance his reputation. According to an elector of Hassell's constituency, whose name we would publish were it necessary, the bushranger, Johnny Cudgel, whose exploits we detail in another column was driven into outlawry, simply by the bad treatment of the Hassells.

Cudgel hitherto was employed on Hassell's station of Jerramungup, and was a well-behaved, hard-working, and generally-liked black. A mob of sheep was lost from the station, and Hassell's son, who is the manager, asked Cudgel to go and look for

¹⁸² Also spelled Mindam and Mindim

¹⁸³ This could be an alternative spelling of 'jimcrack'; American slang for a curiosity; a piece of bric a brac; a white elephant. More likely it is an intended reference to the segregation laws in America post slavery. See <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Jim+Crow>

¹⁸⁴ Strong leather boots

them, promising him 30 shillings and a bottle-of whisky if he brought them back. Cudgel found the sheep and brought them back, but on asking for his money, and his whisky he was met with a refusal. He thereupon SWORE to get back on the Hassells, and has been occupied ever since in. keeping his word.

Another incident of a somewhat similar character is alleged against the Hassells. Some time ago the elder, of that ilk had Henry Woods and Simon McEvoy (two half-castes) arrested on a charge of killing one of his sheep. The men protested their innocence vehemently and their guiltlessness was generally believed in by the people around the station (Jerramungup).

The father of Woods made inquiries into the case and found that a gin on the station had the sheep in her humpy just about the time the men were alleged to have killed it. He reported this fact to J Hassell, who asserted that the dogs had killed the sheep, and it had been given to Polly. The foreman, however, to whom old Woods repeated his statement, denied that it was true.

Before the case was brought on A.Y. Hassell suggested that the men should plead guilty, undertaking that he would get them off if they did so. The accused were at first inclined to reject the proposition, but being informed that they would be committed for trial and would afterwards be in gaol for months awaiting the criminal sessions, they decided to accept it.

When brought up in the police court they each pleaded guilty. To their surprise and indignation, however, Hassell made no earnest result to get them off, and the result was that they received a month's imprisonment. The present feeling of these men towards the Hassells need not be described. . Our informant reckons that Hassell's chance of beating the Labor candidate for the Albany seat is somewhat remote. Tuesday will show anyway.

He lost his seat!

And what of the property? From The *Western Mail* (Perth) 4 August 1906 comes this article, designed to fill the white settler with hope and joy. Long occupation of 60 years! (They forgot the 000 at the end of the number):

Mr. F. H. Piesse, M.L.A., has contributed an admirable series of articles to the "West Australian," describing his recent trip from the Great Southern to Ravensthorpe, and pointing out how that region can best be opened up to settlement.

Jerramungup

We were glad to take advantage of Mr. Jock Hassell's kind invitation to stay a day. We seemed to be ill-fated as regards weather, having had the south-east rain going down. A north-west gale was blowing, with very cold rain showers, coming back. I had an opportunity of looking over this fine property, and also seeing the copper mine, which has been worked, three miles north, of the homestead. This is a beautiful piece of country, comprising something like 26,000 acres of cultivated land, about 12,000 freehold, 2,000 conditional purchase, and the remainder leasehold. The name Jerramungup, or, properly pronounced *Yarramungup* by the Noongar people means, I am told, grassy hills far away. **It was one of the favourite camping places of the Noongars in the old times, many of whom, from time to time, return to their land.** This distant out-station, over 130 miles from Albany, brings to one's mind the daring intrepidity of the early settlers who located themselves at Albany. Driven by necessity, owing to the unsuitability of the lands near the coast to seek other pastures inland for their flocks, sixty years have passed since the late Mr. John Hassell, father of the present owner. Mr. A. P. Hassell first pastured stock here. To look at some of the surrounding country, one wonders how these patches were discovered so early in the colony's history. We have much to thank these hardy pioneers for. My drive through the property under the guidance of Mr. Jock Hassell was most interesting. Timbered almost exclusively with yate, interspersed with scattered jam and manna. There are rich grassy open clear patches at frequent intervals of from one to three hundred acres ready for the plough, with here and there a tree or stump. The large granite boulders, cropping up from time to time on the hillsides, with the dark-green gentle slopes on either bank towards the river – which was a torrent dashing over its rocky bed, swollen by the recent rains of nearly 3 inches – made the scene an impressive and, charming one. Well-conditioned ewes and lambs scampered away while we drove along. This was no small area as you will realise when I tell you that we were driving for three hours through this delightful scene. Everywhere the sheep looked well, from 10,000 to 11,000 being pastured, according to the season. This is addition to over 100 head of cattle and a large number of horses. The water supply is from river pools and dams and reservoirs. Two hundred and-fifty acres have been under cultivation, over 100 of which will be cropped this year. The soil is a dark heavy loam; nearly 100 miles of netting fence has been erected in the external and subdivision boundaries. It is, indeed, an ideal property, and its **long occupation of 60 years** has enriched the pastures. I would like to see it in the spring, when the grass is at its best. Mr. Hassell has a good market for his mutton at Ravensthorpe, 80 miles distant. The sheep are taken to Doubtful Island Bay, on the coast, 50 miles away, for shearing, thus saving cartage. The rainfall for the last 10 years has been over 14 inches, verified by the daily records kept for the Meteorological Department by Mr. J. Hassell. To the north of the property, outside the station boundaries after the

plain is passed through and extending for several miles, are similar patches of country, but smaller. There are also large areas of black mallee country. When a railway is constructed it would pass through this belt which is about 12 miles north of the station.

The property in 1955: From the *Western Mail* (Perth) 23 December 1955)

Now used as a cook-house and dining-room for farm-workers, a weather-beaten, but still solid stone cottage was once the home of Jerramungup's pioneer. With grey, solid stone walls smoothed and worn by the passing of a century of sun, rain and wind, the old Hassell homestead stands in the heart of Jerramungup's pleasant, rolling acres, a short distance from where the Ravensthorpe road crosses the Gairdner River.

Many changes have taken place during the last five years, where for the previous century change had been a matter of gentle evolution. Near to the old homestead now stands a cluster of small buildings and temporary housing used by the workers on this development project. These buildings are the administrative nucleus of a farming community now being planned. It was in September, 1950, more than a century after Hassell, an English settler, first set eyes on Jerramungup that the property was sold to the Crown for subdivision under the War Service Land Settlement Scheme.

Statistics, often dull and uninformative, tell much of the story of progress which has been made since the sub-division: nearly 60,000 acres of land have been cleared, 9,000 acres of cereals have been harvested, 5,000 acres put down to pasture, 109 miles of boundary rabbit netting and 75 miles of internal fences have been erected, 28 combined shearing and machine sheds have been built, 96 dams (involving a total capacity of 2,034,000 cubic feet) have been excavated. The first eight farms in the project have already been allotted to soldier settlers. The old Hassell lease of 21,222 acres is included in the settlement, and a further 60,000 acres is made up of adjacent pastoral leases and Crown land. Even from a distance there is clear evidence of the new life that is stirring in the valley. It shows itself, perhaps, in a lazy curl of smoke rising from a chimney, in a rustling field of wheat, or in the huge swathes of cleared land in the middle of the bush that mark the passing of the bulldozers. Perhaps the breeze carries across the paddocks the sound of a tractor at work. The Jerramungup project is a comparatively small part of the War Service Land Settlement Scheme, which is opening up huge areas of new land in the State, but from similar beginnings have sprung some of the State's important rural communities.

As a conclusion to this postscript, I include this piece from the (Perth) *Inquirer and Commercial news*, 13 July 1870, to bring Boxer, who was likely known to Yilgar, Winmar and Gimback, out of obscurity.

A native named Boxer came to his death in a strange manner lately. It appears from the statement of a man named Hiscox in the employ of Messrs. Hassell that Boxer had been troublesome and speared sheep; that he had instructions to secure Boxer; that he did so by fastening a chain round his neck, but whilst he was doing so Boxer took the sulks and died. Two police men who examined the body after burial say that there is a deep wound in the forehead, and that the neck is broken. This statement is corroborated by two natives who were present at the capture, and who say that after Boxer was dead Hiscox kicked him in the back. The doctor has gone out to Jerramungup to examine the body.'

Vale Boxer

References

People

The Pardooks

<http://theviewfrommountclarencel.blogspot.com.au/2014/12/interlude-pursued-part-eight.html>

Scott, Kim and Hazel Brown: *Kayang and Me*, Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle, 2014
The Hassells of Albany (written and published by Cleve Hassell, Perth, 1972).

The land

<https://parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/downloads/parks/20150391%20Stirling%20RangeNP%20Bro%20WEB%20layout.pdf>

Birds

Abbott, Ian: Aboriginal names of bird species in south-west Western Australia, with suggestions for their adoption into common usage; in *Conservation Science, West Australia* 7 (2) pp 213-278 (2009)

http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/322194/emu4.pdf

Cunningham, Irene The Land of Flowers – An Australian Environment on the Brink; Oxford Press, Sydney, 2005

Frogs

<http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/frogwatch/search>

<http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/frogwatch/frogs/western-banjo-frog>

Plants

Cunningham, Irene; *The Land of Flowers: An Australian Environment on the Brink*; Oxford Press, Sydney, 2005

<http://www.petercoppin.com/factsheets/edible/nyoongar.pdf>

<https://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/1468>

http://www.aff.org.au/RIRDC_09-161.pdf

<http://www.kippleonline.net/bobhoward/plantsframe.html> ("Aboriginal Names for Plant Species in South-Western Australia" by Dr Ian Abbott (Forest Department of Western Australia Technical Paper No 5, 1983)

The Kwongan Foundation (Hans Lambers)

https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/images/documents/conservation-management/off-road-conservation/gww/3513_CSIRO_Ngadju_Doc_A4_C_med.pdf

Language

Whitehurst, Rose Noongar Dictionary Noongar Language and Cultural Centre 1997
Online at <http://www.noongarculture.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Noongar-Dictionary-Second-Edition.pdf>

Douglas, Wilfrid H. The Aboriginal languages of south-west Australia; Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976.

<http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/products/monograph/noongar-people-noongar-land.pdf>

Thanks to:

Rex Parsons
Philip Commander UWA
Tim Overheu, WA Department of Agriculture
Hans Lambers: Kwongan Foundation
Dr Alex Bevan, WA Museum
Mark Leahy, Department of Parks and Wildlife
Richard Mouritzen
Michelle Leahy
Ciaran Lynch

APPENDIX A

Wheelman Noongar bird names recorded by Ethel Hassell

Australian bustard	<i>Coorley</i>
Australian pipit	<i>Peik peik</i>
Australian ringneck	<i>Dammalan, Towran</i>
Australian shelduck	<i>Gurago</i>
Banded lapwing	<i>Kelkul</i>
Barn-owl	<i>Men-arra</i>
Black-faced cuckoo shrike	<i>Kalokwen</i>
Black-winged stilt	<i>Churga</i>
Brown falcon	<i>Kulkum</i>
Brown goshawk	<i>Gudgilan</i>
Bush stone-curlew	<i>Wheelow</i>
Carnaby's cockatoo	<i>Malack, Woolah</i>
Cockatiel	<i>Warraling</i>
Collared sparrowhawk	<i>Cootup</i>
Common bronzewing	<i>Gnambain</i>
Crow	<i>Wording</i>
Elegant parrot	<i>be-lill-bit</i>
Emu	<i>Waitch</i>
Grey-butcherbird	<i>Yoichiddi</i>
Grey-fronted honeyeater	<i>Bildjar</i>
Grey teal	<i>Kailyung, Kylong</i>
Ground-parrot	<i>Dalyar</i>
Magpie (Australian)	<i>Coorbardie</i>
Magpie lark	<i>Kulyill-bronk</i>
Malleefowl	<i>Gnow</i>
New Holland honeyeater	<i>Bandin</i>
Pacific black duck	<i>Tite</i>
Pacific gull	<i>Yorringup</i>
Pallid cockatoo	<i>Woor</i>
Painted button-quail	<i>Purlup</i>
Pelican	<i>Pilabook</i>
Penguin	<i>Kulija</i>

Purple-crowned lorikeet	<i>Cowra</i>
Purple swamphen	<i>Margt, Mulal</i>
Rainbow bee-eater	<i>Beringo</i>
Red-capped parrot	<i>Tuill-Tuill, Talup</i>
Red-tailed black cockatoo	<i>Currah</i>
Red wattlebird	<i>Janggang</i>
Sacred kingfisher	<i>Kanginnan, Targilia</i>
Scarlet robin	<i>Pinny Pinch, Tennuluk</i>
Silver gull	<i>Gnerija</i>
Splendid fairy-wren	<i>Ter Ter</i>
Striated pardalote	<i>Widu Widu</i>
Tawny frogmouth	<i>Cubine</i>
Tree martin	<i>Maming Will Will, Ma-ning Will Will</i>
Wedge-tailed eagle	<i>Waalegh</i>
Western long-billed corella	<i>Nunnich</i>
White-tailed sea eagle	<i>Chillian</i>
Willy wagtail	<i>Chitter-Chitter</i>
Yellow robin	<i>Bandin</i>

APPENDIX B

Notes on the Night Well

According to Cleve Hassell in *The Hassells of Albany* (1972), the Nyoongar name for the Night Well is *Kiap-wam-wan-buck* (water-nothing-daylight). He says 'It was a V-shaped piece of rock in the bed of the Pallinup River which was dry in the daytime but started to fill about 9 in the evening and by daylight a small bucket could be dipped. By 10 in the morning most of the water had gone and the performance was repeated each night. The well was on the Cowallellup run and it was later dynamited to "open it up" and was of course completely useless afterwards.'

The Trove website (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>) reveals quite a few articles and letters about the Night Well: this is part of an article by F.H.Piesse and was published in the *Western Mail* (Perth) on 4 August 1906.

Leaving Jerramungup on the 10th, I had an opportunity of seeing the rocks in which that mysterious phenomenon known as the Night Well is situated. On each side of the rocks are pools which are salt in summer. From a fissure in the rock about 20 inches wide and a few feet long, the water rises gradually at certain times till it fills a basin with a capacity of about 80 to 100 gallons. It remains in this position for several hours, and as much as 100 gallons has been taken out at one time. The mysterious thing about it is that it disappears altogether, and does not return till times which vary from just before dark till as late as four in the morning. Sometimes it disappears for a few days, but the Noongars say that it has only failed twice in the summer, and that was many years ago. The water is quite fresh, therefore the assumption that it may be fed from the adjoining pools is dispelled, because they are salt in summer.

This one from The *Western Mail*, 2 May 1935 reads in part:

My father, who visited the well about 15 years ago, says at that time the water didn't come into the well until midnight and it remained there until midday. Just recently, my uncle paid a visit to the same well, and found it nearly filled up with stones, probably thrown in by mischievous children. He soon cleaned them out and was gratified to see next morning a nice amount of water coming in. As far as he could ascertain the supply has not diminished since the hole was enlarged by explosives.

Another letter (*Western Mail* 6 June 1935) says in part:

I found it was generally midnight" when the water came in. I also noticed it came in stronger on the nights of the full moon. Once on the night of a full moon the rush of air preceding the water was strong enough to blow out matches which we held down the crack of the well. Torches were rare those days, so we did not have one. A lot of people think the Government tried to enlarge the well. They did. But their reasons were the same as those of little boys who take watches to pieces to see what they are made of. They wanted to see what made the well "go," but they left it none the wiser. The well still makes water, but as a natural wonder it has been spoiled.

This letter from *The Western Mail* 25 July 1935 reads in part:

With reference to "B.S.R.'s" remarks about the name of the Night Well: I was in that part about the year 1884, and the natives in the district called it "*Kipitch-narn-wimbercup*," but I would like to point out that the native dialect varies in different localities. For instance, the Willams River natives call water "gaban," the Albany natives, "cawan," and the Jarramongup natives, "kipetch."

Other names for the Night Well put forward in 1935 by correspondents to the *Western Mail* include *Kiarra Kike Cumwingicup* and *Gaben Kum Wingicup*.

A legend concerning the Night Well is contained in *The Aboriginal languages of the south-west of Australia*; Wilfred Douglas, AIATSIS, 1976.

It is said that old *Yurn*, the mythical blue-tongued lizard cut the hole in the ground with his *kodj*. Into the hole he drove the *madjit* (water snakes) which has been killing many people in the district. From that time the *madjit* were held responsible for the unpredictable disappearance of the water.

Note: *hoitch* is the word used by Hassell for *kodj*.

The photo on the following page is from *The Western Mail* 18 November 1905: it shows A.Y. Hassell standing by the Night Well



I visited the Nightwell on 6 April 2017, subjecting my little Hyundai to 20km of flood-damaged, horrendously corrugated dirt track to get there. I had wanted to visit since first reading about it. It is in a beautiful place, and its natural wonder is no longer evident, though the damage is imperceptible unless you know the history.







APPENDIX C

Mysterious Mounds

Two scientists assisted me with thoughts as to what these mounds could be. Philip Commander from UWA stated:

I've never come across any reference to these mud springs, which is surprising, given the height (1.2 metres) quoted, since that would be quite remarkable. If they occur in rocky country, they could be due to groundwater coming up through cracks in the bedrock, fed from a higher elevation in rocky outcrops. This would be most likely, if they are close to Jerramungup.

It seems less likely they would be associated with the Werrilup Formation (aquifer), which usually underlies flat country (i.e. not rocky country), though the Gairdner and Fitzgerald Rivers do cut through and expose the Tertiary sedimentary rocks closer to the coast.

I would find it hard to believe that rocks are thrown out sixty yards, indeed, that rocks should be 'thrown' out at all. Odd that Mrs Hassell doesn't mention anything growing on the springs, which one might expect with a continuous supply of water.

Mr Commander asked his colleague Tim Overheu who was based in Jerramungup with the Agriculture Department doing soil mapping in the area what the mounds might be. Mr Overheu stated:

My guess is crabholes (or the technical term crabhole gilgai) which can comprise a deepish pit with an adjacent mound created by shrink-swell clays. Soils on the mound are usually alkaline self-mulching clays, often with soft carbonates throughout - and coloured pale grey; and soils in the pit are often non-alkaline heavy dense cracking clays.

The pits during winter or wet seasons are often flooded and their size can range from a small dining table to a large courtyard and they can occur as whole patches of multiple pits and mounds across the landscape! From aerial photographs, these features are very prominent - looking like snaking braids across the landscape. They are very common around the Cascades - Upper Young-Lort River areas, some parts of North Fitzgerald and North Jerramungup, and less common and smaller in the Gairdner area (*continued next page*)

When the landscape in which these features occurred was initially cleared for farmland, many farmers adopted the approach of simply grading them over to form a smooth land surface - but while the surface may have appeared flat, the geomorphology below the surface would remain - and the pits would flood and mounds would regenerate through the shrink-swell action of the clays.

I have never heard of nor seen geothermal mud springs in the Jerramungup area (ever). The only other thought would be the swamp lakes towards the Bremer area that were often deeper and contained more organic material. Gentle morning and and stronger evening breezes would erode the banks and shift small stones.

See aerial views of the landscape in the region of Peak Charles National Park area for examples of crabholes.

APPENDIX D

The Pardooks

Norman Tindale describes the origins of the Pardooks (or Bardoks) (see following link) thus: (<http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/tindaletribes/wudjari.htm>)

[The Wadjari people's territory was from] From near Gairdner River east to Point Malcolm; inland to edge of coastal slope, approximately 30 miles (50 km.); at Kent, Ravensthorpe, Fanny Cove, Esperance, and Cape Arid; western members were moving toward Bremer Bay in earliest historical time; those members of the tribe living east of Fanny Cove and Young River had, within earliest historical time, begun to adopt circumcision and therefore they were called Bardonjunga or Bardok by the rest of the tribesfolk; they were becoming a separate tribe; these eastern hordes preferred the term Njunga; they disputed with the Njadjunmaia over possession of the area between Mount Ragged and Israelite Bay.

It has been suggested that the Pardooks may have had Ellis–van Creveld syndrome (EVC), which can manifest in short arms, legs and extra toes and fingers. Further suggestions have been made that the syndrome is 'prevalent amongst the Dutch' and may have been taken to the Aboriginal people of WA by a lost 17th Century Dutch ship. (Note: Ethel Hassell described the male Pardook as having very long arms, so EVC is doubtful.)

Ellis–van Creveld syndrome occurs when a small group of migrants settles in a new area and does not mingle with the general population. It is often seen, for example, among the Old Order Amish community in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Both parents need to have the gene for it to be present in their offspring. The Amish have German and Swiss origins and I could find no records of the syndrome being prevalent in the Dutch population.

Richard W.B. Ellis of Edinburgh and Simon van Creveld of Amsterdam first described Ellis–van Creveld (EVC) syndrome. They met while traveling to a paediatrics conference in England in the late 1930s and discovered that each had a patient with the syndrome. Thus the name 'van Creveld' is related to a scientist, not to the Dutch. The Pardooks may have been outcast from another group of Aboriginal people and have developed the syndrome in the same way it occurs in other small populations with a limited gene pool but I doubt it has anything to do with Dutch sailors.

APPENDIX E

X11 2B, 50

NATIVE VOCABULARY

Compiled by
John L. Wall

(Obtained from Jerramungup Natives – Mr A.Y.Hassell's Station)

Ngalbaitch's vocabulary covers Jerramungup

MAN, HIS RELATIONSHIPS etc

Aunt	knonk cawat
Baby	nop neeala
Noongar man	mowern nonger
Noongar woman	yorke nonger
Boy	nop nonger
Brother	newont
Brother-in-law	old jerwonie
Child	nop
Daughter	yorke be-ee-ding
Daughter-in-law	yorke moer
Father	ma-um
Father-in-law	yorkmor
Girl	cooming-york
Granddaughter	calm-beruk
Grandfather	dam, juck
Grandmother	juck
Grandson	calm-peruck
Husband, man	nonger
Mother	nunk
Mother-in-law	mum-york
Orphan	mamberup

Sister	teuch
Sister-in-law	jork-newelair
Son	berting
Son-in-law	moir
Uncle	conk
Virgin	mooit
White man	noy-you-er

PARTS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE BODY

Ankle	ta-nt
Arm (left)	jew-er-ug-each
Arm (lower)	Mair-uck
Arm (right)	whe-en-mon-ug
Arm (upper)	wo-rn-ock
Back	bookal
Backbone	bookal quich
Beard	na-rn-uck
Blood	kno-ock
Bone	qui-ech
Bowels	co-ab-le
Breast (left)	jew-er-ung-each
Breast (right)	a-no-nt, new-en-mur-nung
Breasts	a-no-nt
Breath	a-n-ang
Breathe, to	a-n-ang quit-it
Calf of leg	wool-each
Cheek	ka-el-cut
Chest	moluck
Chin	he-at
Cry, to	walling
Drink, to	dew-ery-ing
Ear	dew-uk
Eat, to	naming
Elbow	noy-ung
Eyeball	Me-le-coble
Eyebrow	Meng-an

Eyelash	me-le-gent
Eyelid	me-le-back-ert
Eye	me-le
Face	me-in-each
Fat	je—ung
Finger joint	a-morn-duckler
Finger nail	mair pire
Foot (left)	generani
Foot (right)	generwonemon
Forehead	mengon
Generative organ (female)	yerick
Gums	daylick
Hair	kartumber
Hand	mair
Hand (left)	mair gerugeach
Hand (right)	mair wonnonug
Head	carte
Hearing	kadding
Heart	corte
Heel	morne
Hipbone	quondone
Instep	genebuckal
Jaw (lower)	nonbarur
Jaw (upper)	dongun
Kidney	cheupe
Knee	bonich
Leg (left)	dowle gerugeach
Leg (right)	dowle wonomonong
Legs	dowlebuhl
Lip, lower	mene loredmonong
Lip (upper)	mene yardmonong
Liver	mia
Lung	wallyill
Moustache	mening
Neck	nanurk
Nipple	bipcarte
Nose	murhl

Nostril	murhl yeart
Palm of the hand	maparte
Perspiration	bying
Perspiring	bying
Pregnant	genalong
Puberty (age of)	norbal beeming
Rib	narich
Rump	merin
Seeing	genalin
Semen	cungit
Shin	mart
Shoulder	mornk
Sinew	peart
Skeleton	quate quate
Skin	porach
Skull	cartquage
Smell, to	parmong
Sneeze, to	jungong
Sole of the foot	genare
Speak, to	whanke
Spit, to	tayel
Stink, to	nuit
Stomach	coolle
Taste, to	parkenong
Tears	malleon
Teeth	lorloch
Temple	menong
Thigh	dowle
Tongue	tarling
Look	chenel
Urinate, to	komp
Vein	ompit
Walk, to	partquillen
Windpipe	wangong
Wink, to	mahl pengong
Womb	quiech
Wrinkle	carliar

Wrist mare condalar

ANIMALS

Ant-eater (marsupial)	nombat
Bandicoot	quaint
Bat	barbil
Cat, native	chudich
Dingo, female	towitmela-yanch
Dingo, male	towitemela-mam
Dog, puppy	towit-kuning
Kangaroo (generic)	yonger
Kangaroo (brush)	quore
Kangaroo rat	wohle
Kangaroo, rock	yonger boymenong
Kangaroo, silver-grey	yonger berot
Kangaroo young (in pouch)	woher tuding
Mouse	naror
Opossum, black	komil morne
Opossum, grey	komil barit

APPENDIX F
THE HOMESTEAD

With grateful thanks to Rex Parsons I was able to visit the old homestead in April 2017. My focus was on the spot where the woodpile would have been; where toffee was made over a campfire and stories were told. In the place of the woodpile there is now a water tank overgrown with grape vines. Grass and weeds are thigh-high all around the house and the surrounding area. The house itself, despite having been generously repaired by Cleve Hassell and the Parsons family in previous years is now crumbling. The chimney has slumped to an angle, bird droppings are thick on the floor and there are gaps between the stones and the walls and door frames. Since the Hassells left it has been shearers' quarters and a cookhouse, but since then unused for decades.

I tried to imagine Yilgar crouched by the fire on a winter's day, telling Ethel a story as a storm raged, but I didn't feel what I thought I'd feel. I couldn't supplant my imaginings with the real scene.

Of course, the land on which the house is built, being on the southernmost edges of the Yilgarn Craton is 2.5 billion years old, and where Jerramungup Homestead stands has been home to Aboriginal people for up to 60,000 years. From that point of view the house is an aberration; an anomaly on the landscape, destined to return to dust. But it is a tangible connection to the Old People and their lives, as it marks a place where their culture and that of the settlers met; where they shared their culture with a stranger, who thankfully recorded it in her own flawed ethnocentric way, for future generations to consider.











