

D'harawal

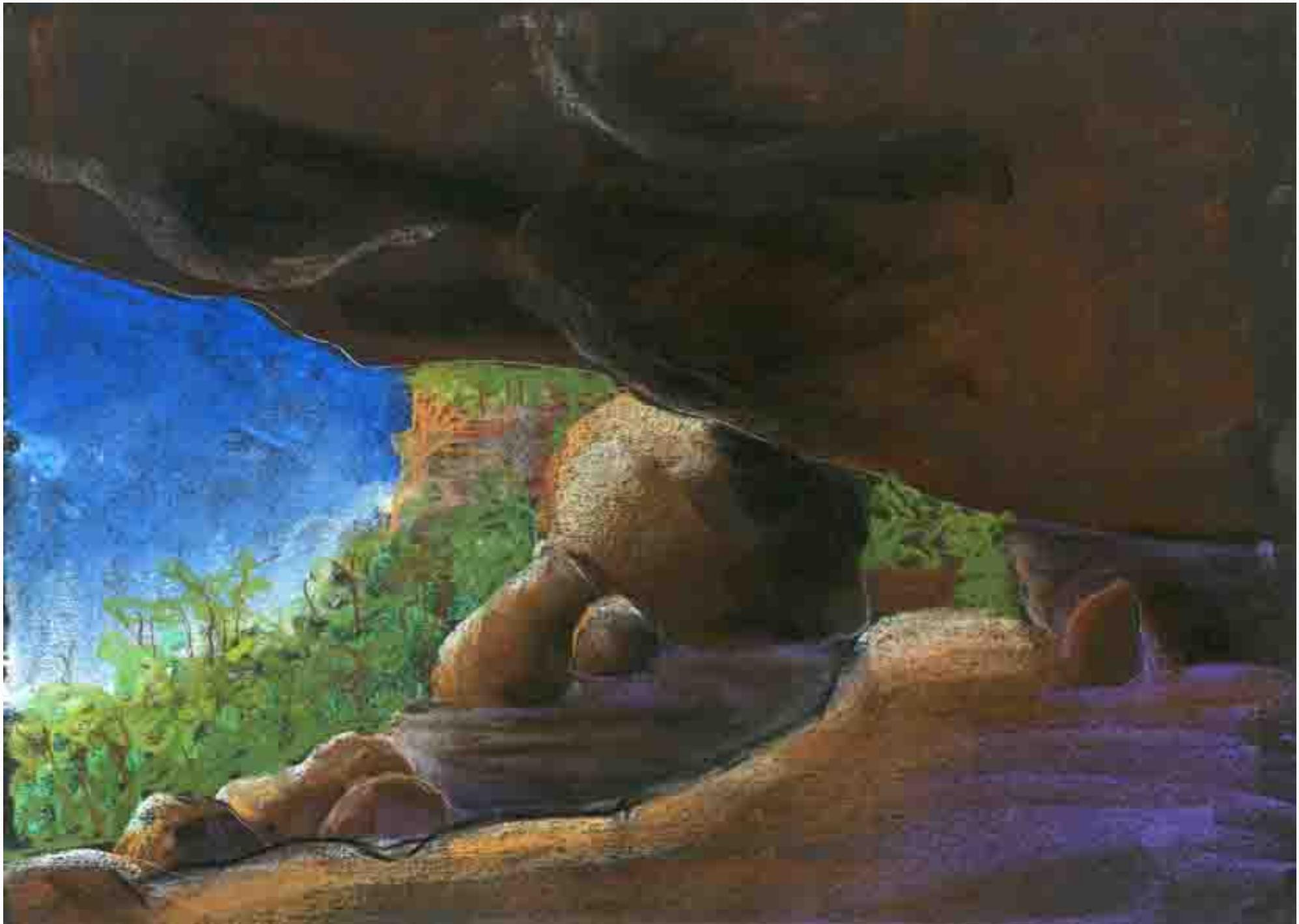
DREAMING STORIES

Frances Bodkin

Gawaian Bodkin Andrews

Illustrated by Lorraine Robertson

How Kannabi became wise

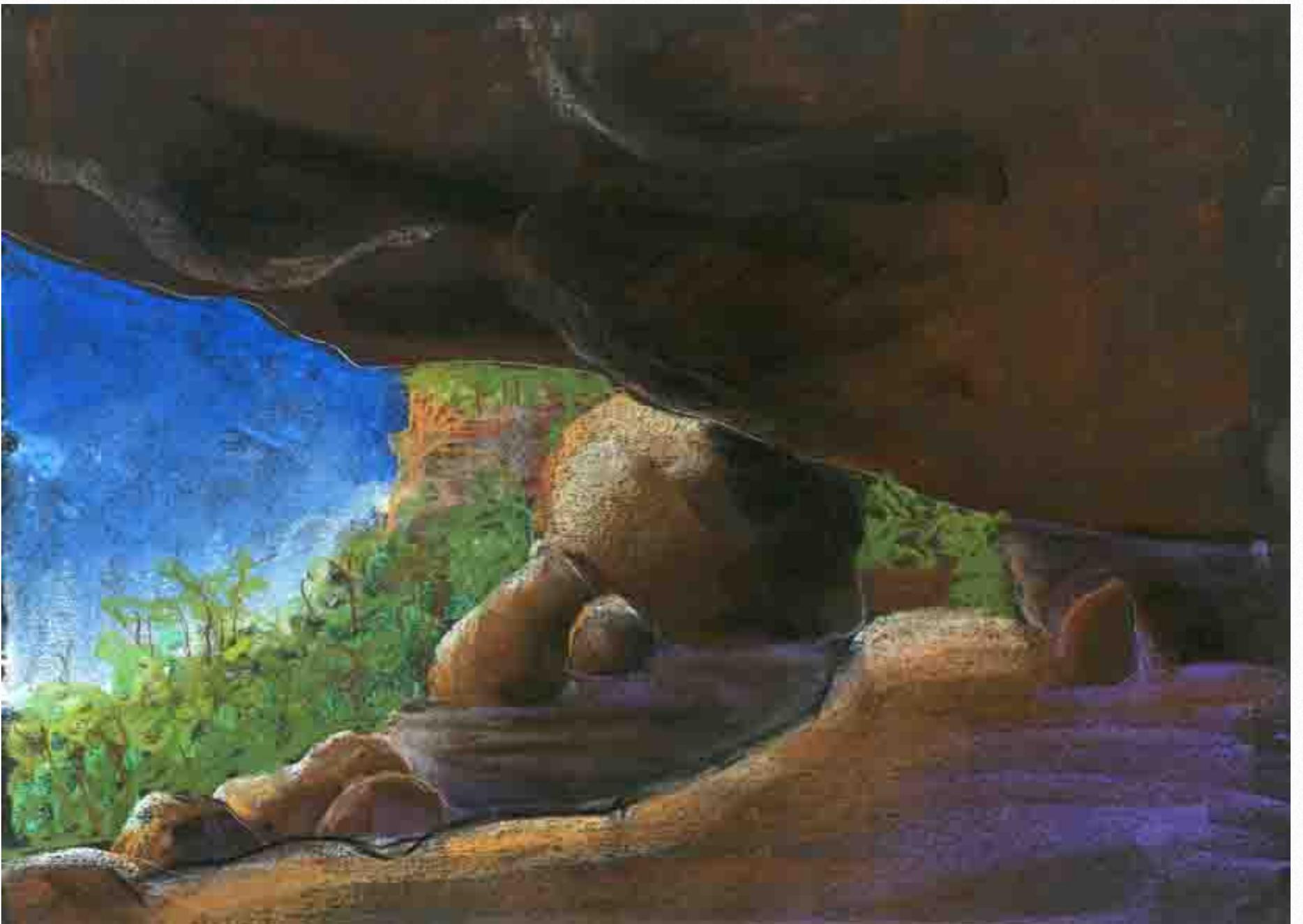


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Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Frances Bodkin

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A very long time ago there lived a brave and fearsome warrior named Kannabi. Now Kannabi had fought many, many battles and had won every one of them through his cunning and his strength. Warriors came from everywhere to sit at Kannabi's feet and to listen to his exploits as he told of them around his campfires.

Then, the time came when there were no more battles to fight. All those who needed to be conquered had been conquered, and alliances had been made so that there was peace all over This Land.

No warrior challenged Kannabi's strength and cunning in battle, and all obeyed him. But, although Kannabi was a just and fair leader, he was arrogant and impatient with those who were not as quick witted as he.

But Kannabi started to get bored, there was nothing for him to do, he grew tired of hunting, there was no joy in tracking and killing animals. Then, one day he watched as one of the knowledgeholders was sitting down telling children some stories, teaching them the laws.

He saw the faces of the children filled with wonder, and the women, sitting forward eager to listen, though they must have heard those stories hundreds of times.

And he saw his warriors, seemingly uninterested in the children's stories, but moving closer to the circle to enable them to hear better.

And he decided that he wanted the women and children to look at him the way they looked at the knowledgeholder. Kannabi went into the centre of the circle and stood over the knowledgeholder. "I want to know the stories." He said.

The knowledgeholder did not even look up at him, but continued on with the story, until she had finished the lesson for the children. Only then, did she look up at him. "If you wish to learn the stories, you must ask the storyteller." She said.

"Then tell me who the storyteller is and I will ask." He replied.

The knowledgeholder packed up her little dilly bag with the treasured gifts that the children had made and given to her, then stood up. “The story teller lives on the edge of the Wirrimbirra, near the Great River, on the highest hill so that she may see all that is happening in This Land.”

Kannabi did not even bother to thank the knowledgeholder, but strode off, pausing only to collect his spear and boomerang, as he made his way to the highest hill.

And it was there that he found the storyteller, a little old woman living in a small gunya under a large Tamnun. She was busy grinding some seeds as he approached.

“Are you the storyteller?” He asked.

The old woman continued grinding the seeds until they were done to her satisfaction, then, as she got to her feet, Kannabi asked her again.

“Are you the story teller?” He asked again.

She reached over to a pile of paperbark beside the gunya and carefully wrapped the seed paste in a small piece of paperbark.

“I do not have enough paperbark to last the cold times,” she said., “nor do I have enough firewood to last even another night.”

Kannabi grew impatient. “Are you the storyteller?” He asked more loudly. “I want to know the stories.”

The old woman looked up at him and studied him for a few moments.” Surely you already know the stories, Great Warrior.” She said. “Did not your mother and aunts teach you the stories?”

He frowned. “I do not remember.” He replied. “I want to know the stories.”

The old woman nodded, but did not speak, instead she set about lighting a small fire. “I have very little firewood left.” She finally said.

“There is plenty around.” He replied. “Down in the gully below there is more than you could use in the time of two bloomings of the Boo’kerrikin.”

The old woman stared at him. “I am only the story teller.” She said. “I do not have permission to give these stories to just anyone. You must first pass a most difficult test.”

The Warrior straightened himself. “There is no test that is too difficult for me. Tell me what it is.”

“Below here, beside the Great River where it joins another, there is a flat rock. In this rock there is a hole. You must find that rock, then return here and tell me what is in that hole.”

Kannabi smiled to himself. This was too easy! He thought. Then, without thanking the storyteller, he went down to the Great River and found the flat rock. He was puzzled when he looked in the hole and found that it was empty. He climbed back up the steep hill, and returned to where the story teller was enjoying a tjoni made from ground seed. “I have found the flat rock, and the hole contains nothing.”

The old woman nodded. “That is good.” She said. “Now you must fill that hole on the flat rock with water.”

Kannabi was annoyed. “Why could you not have told me to fill the hole with water before I went down there the first time?”

The old woman smiled. “I did not know if you would find the right hole.” She replied.

Once again, Kannabi strode off without saying anything, and as the old woman watched him go, there was a small glint in her eye, before she set about gathering up some kindling for her fire.

Kannabi got to the flat rock and realised that he had nothing that he could use to carry the water to the hole, so he cut a coolamon from a nearby tree and used it to transport water to the hole.

It took him a much longer time than he had first thought because the water seemed to disappear once he had placed it in the hole, but, eventually, the hole was full and he sat down to rest. It was not long before he fell asleep.

The next morning he awoke to find the hole empty once again, and impatiently set about filling it. This time it did not take as long to fill, and once it was brimming with water he set about returning to the storyteller.

This time he found her skinning a small possum.. “I have filled the hole with water.” He said rather gruffly.

As before, the woman did not look up until she had finished her task. Only when the skin had been stretched out to dry did she look up at him. “That is good.”

She smiled, but as Kannabi prepared to sit down to hear the stories, she added. “Now that the water hole has been filled, you must go through This Land and gather the dung from all the different creatures that live here. Once you have done that, you must return to the flat rock, and place the dung in a circle around the hole. She then set about preparing the possum for cooking.

Kannabi shook his head in exasperation, then set off to carry out the instructions he had been given.

For weeks he travelled throughout This Land, collecting the dung of all creatures that lived here, and taking it back to the flat rock where he placed it in a circle around the hole. Several times he had to fill the hole once again with water before going out and collecting more dung.

Finally, he completed the circle with the dung of all the creatures of This Land, and he returned to the camp of the storyteller. This time the storyteller was asleep in her gunya.

“Wake up, old woman” he said. “I have completed the circle on the flat rock. What do I have to do next?”

The old woman stretched her arms, then yawned sleepily. “You must now stay within the circle, you must not leave the circle from this moon, until the time this moon appears again.” She said. “You may take enough tubers and fruit to last you through to that time, but you may only drink from the water in the hole. And above all, you must not leave the circle, for any reason.”

Kannabi was not sure that the water in the hole would be enough for his stay within the circle, so he made more coolamons and filled them with water, keeping them within the circle, along with his supply of food.

On his first night within the circle he realised that he had to set aside a part of the circle for his own dung. This he did, using that part of the circle furthest away from where he had chosen to rest.

On his fourth day within the circle it began to rain, and Kannabi regretted not having brought along his cloak, but he was a warrior. In fact, he was the Greatest Warrior, therefore a little rain and cold was nothing more than a discomfort.

On the seventh day, the rain stopped and the sun came out. Kannabi lazed around feeling the warmth of the sun’s rays on his cramped muscles, he longed just to be able to run freely through the forest, or chase the kangaroo, even a wombat.

Those thoughts made him feel hungry, and looked to his pile of tubers and fruit. After only seven days the fruit was starting to wrinkle and dry out, and the tubers did not look very inviting.

Worse still, he did not think he had enough water to last him until the next moon.

On the eleventh day, rain fell heavily, and not only filled the hole, but also his empty coolamons. However, the fruit had all gone, and only the tubers remained for him to eat.

And he was bored. There was nothing for him to do.

Then, on the fourteenth day, he remembered what the old woman had said to him. “Did not your mother and aunts tell you the stories?” she had asked.

Kannabi then thought about his life as a child, with his mother and his aunts, and he remembered them fondly, but he could not remember the stories they had told him.

Try as he might, he could only remember little pieces of some of the stories. So he set about searching his memory for those stories and the lessons to be learned from them.

On the twenty first day it began to rain again, a fine, misty rain at first, then falling heavier and heavier, and on the twenty third day, the rain stopped. And he no longer had any food left, only the water in the hole.

But he still could not remember all the stories his mother and aunts had told him.

When the moon rose on the twenty eighth day, he realised that he was now free to leave the circle.

The hole was empty, there was no longer any water in it - he had drunk every last drop of it. As he got up to leave the circle, he looked around.

He felt surprise.

Then anger.

Then he burst out laughing.

All the dung had gone, even his own dung had been washed into the hole by the rain.

And he had consumed all the water from the hole.

He had thought that he was the strongest, most powerful, and most cunning warrior of all.

But a little old woman proved him wrong.