

D'harawal

DREAMING STORIES

Mararan and Marareen

How the Spiders Came to Be

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Illustrated by Lorraine Robertson



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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.
e 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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Now the time of which we speak, a very long time ago, only good things lived in This Land, and all The Peoples and the birds and animals lived together happily. There was plenty to eat, and one did not have to travel far to get all the food needed.

However, some of The People of the Spider clan grew fat and lazy, eating only the sweet bulbs and tubers.

And some grew bored. Very bored.

In those days the Spider Clan was a very large clan, so large that it had two leaders, Mararan and Marareen, twin brother and sister. But, although they were twins they were very unlike.

Mararan was large and fat, with arms and legs that made the Giant Wombat look thin. His skin was as black as a moonless night, and his two canine teeth were long and sharp, so that when he smiled he looked like the Devil Dog snarling.

His sister, Marareen was slender, and long limbed, her hair was as golden as the blooms of the Boo'kerrikin, and her skin was the colour of smoke.

Marareen was always busy weaving string for dilly bags, or mats upon which to rest. But she was the best weaver of fishing nets in the lands of all Peoples.

One day, Mararan passed, unseen, by the circle of women who were busily weaving dilly bags when he heard his name being mentioned. He stopped and listened as the women gossiped. Some were making very disparaging remarks about his appearance.

Then his own mother spoke. "Sometimes, when I look at my son I am ashamed." She said. "Marareen has more sense than he. At least she does not lay about all day expecting people to gather food for her."

"A leader should lead The People according to the laws of This Land." Said one of his aunts. "Mararan does not even teach the laws, he is so lazy that he leaves that to Marareen."

"The old ones were not wise when they selected him to lead us." said another.

"But they showed great wisdom when they selected Marareen also." Another woman said.

"Not enough wisdom." His mother said. "They should have selected Marareen only. And I shall tell them so at the next meeting."

Mararan moved silently away from the women's circle, seething with rage. How dare the women question his leadership. They were well fed, their bellies were always full, they did not have to go far to gather food, or to find water. That was all that was needed in life, and why teach the laws when he was the law.

Mararan scuttled back to his cave where he sat himself down upon the soft ferns that his mother had gathered and placed there that morning, and glared at Marareen's gunyah with its neatly woven mats and grass thatching to keep it cool.

He remembered as a child how his mother had always favoured Marareen, how she had stayed with his sister during her initiation, but how she had given him over to his uncles, and allowed him to suffer the trauma of initiation. When he had gone to her for comfort after it was over, she had turned him away saying that he was now a man and was no longer allowed in her gunyah.

And he searched his memory for other times when his mother and his aunts had favoured Marareen over himself. He remembered how his aunts had fussed over Marareen after he had pushed her over the rocks. He would not have pushed her if she had not insulted him by saying he was fat.

After a while he looked up and saw the men gathered outside the entrance of the cave, seeking an invitation to enter. At first Mararan felt like telling them to go away, but he signalled them permission to enter.

The small cave was very crowded by the time the men, all large and fat, had squeezed themselves in. "You do not look happy." Mararan said as the men settled in as comfortably as they could on the hard rocky floor. The men glanced at the soft ferns under Mararan's fat bottom, but he did not offer to share.

"The women are insisting that we find our own food." Said one of the men.

“They cannot do that. It is the law that they gather the food for us.” Mararan replied. “I have said so.”

“Marareen has told them that it is our duty to hunt.” Said another of the men.

“The women are refusing to gather our food. They have told us that if we do not hunt, then we can go hungry.”

Mararan stared out of the cave at Marareen’s gunyah. He must do something about his sister, it was she who was stirring up the women, causing trouble for him. He was convinced that she was doing this deliberately so that at the next meeting of the old ones they would make her sole leader.

Now up in the mountains there lived a shrivelled old woman. Everyone was afraid of this old woman, she was ugly, and had a terrible temper, and worst of all, she wore the finger bones of the long dead as decoration in her hair. But this woman had knowledge of the yesterdays long passed, and of all of the tomorrows to come, and, some said, could work spells that could alter tomorrow.

Now Mararan did not like the idea of having to walk that far just to see this old woman, but he knew that he would not be able to do what he wanted to do without her help.

He crawled out of the cave, and signalled the others to follow him. “I am going to seek the advice of the Old Woman.” He said. “Those of you who want to can come with me.

Those who do not, I seek your promise that you will say nothing at all to the others. If you do, I will return and tear your throat out with my own teeth.”

Each of the men looked around, and each knew fear as Mararan grinned evilly. “We will come with you.” They all said. “But when you meet with the Old Woman we will stay away.”

Mararan and his band of followers began their long trek across the three rivers to the mountains where the Old Woman lived in a cave guarded by a huge Tamnun.

Now the women of the clan noted that Mararan and his followers had taken their spears and boomerangs, and smiled to themselves. These men had not hunted for years, and their weapons were old. “Can you see them running after the Burra?” Said one of the women, and she pretended to run across the hot sand as a fat, soft man would.

The other women laughed loudly until tears ran down their cheeks. But Marareen was saddened.

She remembered as a child the respect that the warriors were given by the women and children. Respect that had been earned by their brave deeds and caring ways.

Respect that did not disappear as soon as the warriors left the camp. And she was ashamed that the one they laughed most at was her own brother.

“Come, now that the men have gone, I want to show you something that I have done.” She took the women and children and showed them a fine net that she had woven and strung between the trees.

Tangled in the net was an emu. “You see, we do not have to hunt to have meat.”

The women were delighted, and demanded to know how to weave the nets.

Willingly Marareen showed them, and pretty soon, all the women were making the fine string, which they soaked in the gum of the Boo’angi, then wove into nets which they strung between the trees to trap birds and small animals.

Now the women were happy. They did not need the men, they could hunt and gather food on their own.

After many days of walking the men reached the cave of the Old Woman, but stayed outside as Mararan entered and told the Old Woman what he wanted to do. The Old Woman listened, then smiled, chillingly. “I will give you what you want.” She said. “But I want something in return.”

“Whatever you want.” Mararan promised.

“Good. Because, if I do not get what I want, then I shall seek revenge.” She smiled again, and Mararan felt the hairs on his arms stand up. “And it shall not be pleasant.”

Mararan took the small bag containing what he wanted and left the cave. He was glad to be outside in the fresh air, and took a deep breath.

Then he smiled. It didn't matter, really, what he promised the old woman, he had no intention of carrying it out.

After all, what could an old woman do to him, she was old and frail, she could not make the long trek to his home country to extract her revenge. It had been bad enough for him and his followers.

"I have what I need." He said. "The women will no longer trouble us."

But also watching was the Spirit Woman who had become concerned at the indolence of The People, and she appeared in Marareen's dream the night before Mararan's return. "You will soon have need of this knowledge." She told her, then into Marareen's mind, she gave the instructions how to use it. "Use it carefully, and tell no other."

She pointed her finger at the ground which began to swell up into a small mound. Then she disappeared and Marareen awakened.

Marareen was cold with fear for her people. The Spirit Woman would not have done this had there not been a need. With great haste she called them all together, and told them of her fears. "What we must do is remove all our Gunyahs, and hide all our tracks so that when the men return they will think that we have gone."

"But where will we go?" Cried one of the women. "We have no where to go."

Marareen looked upwards at the tall trees. “There.” she pointed to the treetops. “There we will make our homes. We have our nets to catch our meat, and the treetops are where the best berries grow and we will be able to move from tree to tree with our nets. The men will never find us.”

The women gathered up their mats and bags, and dismantled their gunyahs, then, with their children on their backs they climbed the trees and made their homes high up in the branches. By the time the men arrived back there was no sign of the women ever having been there.

Mararan looked around, it was as if he had returned to a strange place, except that his cave was there, and the soft ferns had dried to a prickly, crackling bed. There were no ripe berries, or sweet bulbs in his coolamon. He went into his cave, but could no longer see Marareen’s gunyah nearby.

When he came out the men began to blame him for the loss of their women and children. They began to beat him with their clubs and boomerangs until he cried out in pain. Then they left him laying there, bleeding and sore while they searched for the women.

Mararan stared at the poison bag, hatred filling every corner of his being.

With his sharp teeth he tore at the bag and spilled the poison into the waterhole, swallowing some of the poison as he did so. But he had ceased caring whether he lived or died, because what was the use of being a leader if he had no people to lead.

The Old Woman had known that he had no intention of keeping his promise, and she had extracted her revenge.

As he crawled into his cave, the men returned and drank from the waterhole. Their screams of anger and of pain alarmed the women in the trees, but Marareen held them, calming their fears as in horror they saw their men turning into fat, hairy spiders.

And from Mararan's cave came the largest, ugliest spider of all, a spider that reared up on its back legs and bared its teeth dripping with poison. And as the shiny globules of poison fell to the ground, Marareen then understood the words of the Spirit Woman.

And that is how the spiders became two Peoples. One kind, who are big, and fat, live in the ground and dark places and have poison bags that will kill you. The other Spider People who live in the branches of bushes and trees, and who weave nets across pathways, will not poison you when they bite, but they know the secret of how to cure the bite of the big, venomous spiders.

And it is also the reason the female spiders who live in the air kill their males so that they will never leave them to visit the Old Woman in the cave in the mountains.

The Law of the Story of Mararan and Marareen:

When a promise is made it must be kept.

Lessons of the Story;

The spiders who hide in dark places, and who are big and hairy, are dangerous.

The spiders who live in the trees, and build webs across pathways are not dangerous.

The dangerous spiders have fangs that point downwards, the non-venomous spiders have fangs that look like pincers, and point inwards.

Some Information About Spiders

Mararan - The Primitive Spiders:

There are more than 200 species of primitive spiders living in Australia. They are large and hairy and like to live in burrows or dark, moist places during the day, and are mostly active at night. Apart from their hairiness they can be recognised by their large fangs which point downwards.

Some of the more well-known Primitive Spiders are;

1. **Trapdoor spiders;** There are several different kinds of trapdoor spiders, but they all live in burrows in the ground, some of which have a lid which fits exactly over the entrance to the burrow - like a little trapdoor.

The body of the trapdoor spider is about 3cm long, it is brownish, with darker or paler markings. They are usually quite shy, and would rather run away than stand and fight. They are most active at night when they open the trapdoor a little and wait for some unsuspecting insect or small animal to wander by. It then leaps out onto its victim and drags it back into the burrow. Their bite is generally not venomous to humans, but can be painful.

2. **Mouse Spiders;** These spiders look like trapdoor spiders except for their enormous fangs. The females body is about 2cm long, and is black and shiny, whilst the male's body is about 1.5cm long and has a deep blue abdomen and bright red head. Mouse spiders live in a burrow in the ground which can sometimes reach to a depth of 1m or more, and although the females generally stay underground the males will sometimes be able to be seen wandering around after rain. The bite of the mouse spider is venomous.

3. **Funnel Web Spider;** although other spiders may build funnel like webs, most construct their webs so that the silk finishes at the entrance to the burrow. If the silk funnel extends beyond the entrance then it is highly likely that the burrow belongs to a funnel web spider. They are glossy blue black with the abdomen covered in fine, velvety hairs, they have very large fangs, hairy legs and two spinarets on the tip of the abdomen.

There is a tree funnel web, which does not build its funnel in the ground, but rather high in the trunks of trees, nevertheless, it is just as venomous as its brother.

The Sydney Funnel Web Spider is one of the deadliest of all spiders to humans, and it likes to live in the sandstone areas, but will also reside in Sydney gardens, where it may wander into houses, in search of a mate, or after long periods of heavy rain, where it will hide in shoes, or clothing, or dark places in cupboards.

What to do if a Funnel Web Spider bites.

1. Keep the victim calm, warm, and comfortable, lying them down as quickly as possible in a place that is safe from spiders.
2. Do not give the victim anything to drink.
3. Do not do anything to the bite, or elevate the bitten area.
4. If a limb has been bitten, apply a pressure bandage to the entire limb, starting from the area of the bite, then immobilise the limb with a splint.
5. As soon as this is done, seek medical help.

Marareen - The Weaving Spiders:

The weaving spiders begin construction of their webs by paying out a length of silk until it is caught by the breeze and carried across a gap in the bushes or trees to catch on a branch of a neighbouring bush. When this line is established, the spider travels along it, spinning a stronger line as it goes.

A square framework is then established, suspended from this first cable, and anchored on the twigs of the bushes. Then a loose, horizontal third line is spun across the top, the spider then travels back to the centre of this line, causing it to sag, and where it attaches a new thread and drops down and anchors this thread to the base line. The three arms of this Y-shaped web are the foundation of the spokes of the web.

Once the spokes, sometimes numbering up to 60, have been established, the spider then lays a continuous line of silk in a spiral from the centre to the outside edge of the web. When the web has been built to the spider's satisfaction, the spider then returns down the spiral, working inwards, laying a line of sticky thread which is used to trap insects.

The spider then takes up position at the centre of the web and waits for her dinner to arrive.

1. **Golden Orb Weavers;** These spiders build a large web of golden silk suspended between two trees usually several metres apart. The female Golden Orb Weavers can be up to 4cm long, with patterned creamy grey bodies, and long, slender, banded black and yellow legs.
2. **St. Andrews Cross Spiders;** These spiders can be recognised by the woven silk X-shaped cross at the centre of their webs. The spider's abdomen is marked with bands of black, yellow and, sometimes, red.