

My Australia

by Leo Valeriano

Translated by Elvira Ricci

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Associazione culturale



Aurora Mediterranea

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Preface

These few pages certainly do not want to be a travel guide or a treaty on the nation continent that is Australia. They are just little news flash that, in any case, can help you understand the strange country. Because, believe me, Australia is completely different from how we can normally imagine and consider it in Europe. Maybe it is more than that. Maybe it is less. However, it is another thing.

Rather than present just a story, I want to offer a large watercolour that could create impressions, moods and feelings. It might be a way to understand Australia and, in a sense, also certain ways of acting and mannerisms of Australians. Like walking barefoot in the big cities, not minding the rain falls (in the summer or in warm regions), accepting whatever happens with regardless, a mild form of philosophy tinged with humour and lots of other similar small features.

This book narrates the stories and experiences of a country that is as big as the whole of Europe and a culture that, somehow, we still have the opportunity to discover; but keep in mind that just by going there you realize so many things. This, especially for younger people is not something impossible. There are discounts for travel and, once they are in Australia, they can get a job to earn the money they need to pay for their stay.

Finding a job in Australia is easier than in Europe, you have a green traffic light. Delivering letters, serving in a cafe or helping in a store. Of course it all depends on who you claim to be and what you expect. If you think that everything is given, wrong. Life is easy, everything is well organized, but in that country you must always follow the rules. Much more than here.

I – The big house

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In Australia there are no wild beasts or wild animals. The only one is the Dingo, which would be a wild dog. Sure, there are crocodiles, sharks, jellyfish (those found in the north are called stingers and their touch is almost always fatal), but if you are in the water and bathe in the patrolled and protected areas, the danger is less. On land, there are spiders and poisonous snakes. And, of course, these are found mainly in the Australian bush and outback and you can avoid them most of the time.

To start, always remember that there is no single Australia. There is Aboriginal Australia, which all looks the same but in fact is made up of different "nations". Then we have an Australia made up of "whites" that is different depending on the place of origin of the people that comprise it. There is that of the Orientals, and even then you can only imagine the diversity coming from China, India, Indonesia etc... You also have one comprising of tourists and businessmen.

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So much for the human beings. Now we really must consider the major cities of Australia, all very busy like the entire metropolis in the world. The plantations in the north where there are still people living in homes built on stilts because there are times when the floods in the summer form large lakes and in order to move around people need motor boats rather than motor cars; Australia of the rain forests, where you can even find beautiful corners of Europe: small workshops that look very like chalets and where German and Scandinavian immigrants work precious and unique porcelain and pottery or carve wood or stones with age-old Viking runes. It is really strange to find these examples of Scandinavian civilization in these remote places, believe me!

And more, there is eastern Australia, north of Sydney, where over the Clarence fly huge bats as big as eagles, that go in search of tasty mangoes grown in the area forcing the farmers, therefore, to cover them with wire mesh. There is the Australia of mines and mining areas where FI-FO workers (fly in - fly out) earn exorbitant amounts of money and do four days of work and three days of rest flying back and forth from their town of residence. And then there is, of course, the Aborigines of Australia where the sage Gondawara, in exchange for a few dollars, tells you the tale of the dreamtime when the dingo also flew over the dry land of Uluru and it was the breath of the desert wind that brought him up high in the air, and the men themselves were also flying with the dingo. And as they flew inside the dark faces etched in white, the eyes saw clouds of opal where, with fanciful arabesques, warm currents were drawn that lifted them and made them climb up toward the sun and then swept them away. Below them, in the great sea that was all around, squalls arose, followed by calm intervals and currents, while in the deep and magical outback the desert ground parched and thirsty for water, jealously hid the wildest dreams of the snake, that always dreamed of flying.

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History tells us that in the beginning the whites employed some time to understand the Aboriginal people and to make themselves understood by them. This was further complicated because there are a very large number of Aboriginal languages. The first white people, as everyone knows, were English and did not understand anything of the Aborigines. And I speak not only about the language, but their way of thinking. Not understanding anything, proved useful when deciding to exterminate them. But the British did so regularly, I think. Consider that the names of two of the most famous animals of that nation continent derive precisely from a misunderstanding. The first

Europeans who arrived saw a strange animal with long legs that, instead of walking, leapt when moving. They asked the Aborigines, indicating a kangaroo (animal that whites had never seen): What is its name? - The aborigine, who had been asked the question and who did not understand the meaning, replied: Kan Gha roo. Which means: *I do not know, I do not understand*. - And since then the Kangaroos took this name. The same goes for the koala. Koala means does not drink. And in fact this is just one of the characteristics of the cute bear with the funny ears. In fact, the Koala quench their thirst especially through the eucalyptus leaves which is their only food.

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You should know that, in 1788, and according to English law, there were only three ways to colonize a country: through conquest, through a voluntary transfer of land from the natives, or through the declaration of no man's land. This condition occurred in the absence of inhabitants who lived on the conquered lands. The first two methods provide for fair compensation and reward the indigenous people for all the occupied lands, the third did not because the British believed that it was their birthright to settle in uninhabited lands. And, it is not easy to understand very well what might have been the reason why, according to the British, the Aborigines were "no man" and, therefore, that Australia was uninhabited. The excuse was that, being nomadic Aborigines (and wild) were not bound permanently to the territories they passed through. Following this line of British thinking adds weight to the obvious lie that colonization took place without bloodshed. Instead, on the contrary, the Aboriginal people were linked to the territory by strong ties which are critically important to their culture. However, to all effects for the British conquerors, at least at the beginning, Australia was just a huge penal colony to send all those that were unwanted at home.

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To the land and to the territories are connected all the stories related to the Dream Time, memories and tales associated with particular places, which would enable Aboriginal people to come in contact with the experiences of past generations. Disruption of these places, then, for the indigenous peoples represented a real desecration because it would have prevented the transfer of the entire culture of a clan or nation. The British did not understand that the defence of the land by Aboriginal, derived not only from the knowledge of the sensitivity of the ecosystem in which those people had lived in harmony for at least 40,000 years (the oldest population of the entire planet), but also on the sense of obligation that the elders of these people have to enforce the laws of their own country.

These laws not only regulate the internal relations of the group, but also those with other tribes. For example, crossing a territory inhabited by another people, it was customary to announce this by lighting fires to signal their presence. Even today, once the tribes come into contact with each other, they sit and talk, sometimes for days or weeks, of the reasons why one party needs to cross that particular area. After the meeting, the visiting population may be authorized to transit and also to hunt, to fish, or even to perform dances and rituals on the ground of the host population. To do this, there was no need of treaties, signatures or documents. Obviously, the rules of which I speak were never respected by the British colonizers who ignored them completely. As a result, aboriginal lands were expropriated without any regard for the laws and customs of the peoples who lived here for thousands of years. A century after the invasion, which took place just over two hundred years ago, the Aboriginal survivors began to get a certain freedom of movement on their lands, but it was only in 1992 that they saw the recognition of their fundamental rights. All this became possible because many of the

aborigines, who had studied and perhaps had become lawyers, appealed to the very laws imposed by the conquerors.

But why did the British, virtually, exterminate the Aborigines? First of all, let's not forget that at that time slavery was still in force in many places and, therefore, blacks were regarded as little more than animals. Then we have to consider that Aboriginal people did not have the sense of "ownership." So when they needed meat for the tribe they hunted until they got what they needed. When the "whites" arrived with their sheep, for the aborigines it was almost a blessing: the sheep did not run away and it was easy to kill them. They did not understand that these animals were "owned" by whites, and thus for a long time, the natives were surprised when the settlers fired at them when an aboriginal person killed a sheep and took it away. As I said, they did not have the sense of ownership and then sheep were simply sheep, just like the kangaroos were simply kangaroos. What mattered to the aborigines was that taking a sheep was much easier than taking a kangaroo.

But land and animals, was not the only reason for conflict between blacks and whites. There was also a profound lack of understanding on a spiritual level. For the British it was important to spread Christianity, which they professed. For the Aborigines, the story of this God who would become man (and, moreover, white) only to be killed, was incomprehensible. Even today, the problem remains linked to children. Initially, they were taken and put in the protestant missions, with different excuses, to make them grow in the European manner. This no longer happens, but aboriginal children continue to be uprooted from their natural environment through the work of social services, who often find them in conditions of unbelievable poverty and neglect.

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This too was a direct result of the invasion of "whites". Direct testimony from Alice Springs in the Northern Territory tells us that hundreds of children sniff petrol out of plastic containers hanging from their necks. Furthermore, with regard to health, an Aborigine has four times the chance of dying from diseases such as diabetes, tuberculosis, and cancer compared to a white person. Social exclusion is also reflected in the situation of prisons, where an Aborigine ends up, according to official data, with an average of at least fifteen times greater than a white Australian. And if that were not enough, the deaths of Aborigines while in custody, occur so frequently that the government decided to set up inquiry commissions for decades that are dedicated to this sad issue. For an aboriginal, being locked up between four walls is tantamount to a death sentence.

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Here, I wanted to report these data so there would be no confusion and you do not think that everything is always quiet and easy in Australia. Today, to the Aboriginal people are acknowledged the same rights as are acknowledged to whites, and let me add, even a few more. In the past the exaggeration was at the negative end of the scale, today it is at the other end of the scale. In fact, in the so-called reserves which are as large as the whole of Italy, Aboriginal people receive funding that gives those who want it, without doing anything, the opportunity to survive. One way to try to wash the conscience of those who destroyed their civilization. But even this is not positive because it takes away any incentive for them to improve. As we shall see, it is not always the case and some of them look for alternative ways to regain at least part of their culture and preserve it. Today, the natives have a television channel, some publishing houses and produce objects of art. This is, however, a minority and the road to a form of total

emancipation is long and difficult to pursue.

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Whenever we talk about Australia, what immediately comes to mind is their ancient and little-known world of the Aborigines. They currently refuse to be called Aborigines and prefer to be called Native or Indigenous. They are not one people but a number of peoples with similar characteristics and languages □□ that are completely different. There were 250-300 languages □□ with 600 dialects. Today there are only 200 remaining. Usually, a people, occupied an area no bigger than Belgium and had sporadic contact with neighbouring peoples. Each population was composed of a few thousand people and divided into tribes of fifty individuals on average. They generally roamed, more or less, within the same territory, and thus met only with neighbouring groups that bordered with their territory. On these occasions you had unions, transfers, exchanges and large gatherings met that fostered exchanges of all kinds, including cultural.

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One of the most important concerns of the Aboriginal beliefs was the dream, the Dreamtime. In the Age of the dream everything that exists and whatever we can see around us was created: humans, animals, plants, rocks, rivers, seas and so on. This mythical era of the dream, however, would not be entirely extinguished, but survives, even today, in the soul of Indigenous Australians that express the vitality through their ceremonies, their mystical dances and their mysterious and haunting songs that are accompanied by the sound of the didgeridoo. According to the Aboriginal people, it all started only 40,000 years ago and since then the ancestors of humans began to populate the planet. One of the gifts that remain of the ancestral heritage of the ancients is the ability of their descendants to know how to be in harmony with every element of nature, as does every aboriginal.

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Another capacity (at least theoretically) would be the transformation. According to the Aboriginal people, human beings are turned into kangaroos and crocodiles, and these in plants and trees, and the latter again in human beings, in a ceaseless exchange of forms and possibilities because everything that exists was created by the same matter in the era of the dream.

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The curious thing is that there are also other religions of peoples geographically distant from Australia that teach something very similar to this. Let's talk about forms of reincarnation or transmigration. In these, after death, the soul would be transferred from one body to another, until the complete liberation from matter. Originating from ancient India where it is known by the term *samsara* and attested already in the Upanishads (which is connected to the theory of karma), in the East this doctrine was accepted in part and perfected by Buddhism. In the West, this theological philosophy, called metempsychosis, was absorbed in the mystical religion of the Orphic and then in Greek philosophy.

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In Australia there are about 500 different Aboriginal peoples, each with its own linguistic and territorial identity, and generally organized into separate clans, but for easier

identification, these people today are divided into some regional strains:

Koori (o Koorie) in New South Wales and Victoria (Victorian Aborigines);

Ngunnawal in Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales;

Murri in Queensland and north of New South Wales;

Murrdi in Southwest and centre of Queensland;

Nyungar in south Western Australia;

Yamatji in centre Western Australia;

Wangai in Golfield of Western Australia;

Nunga in southern South Australia;

Anangu in north South Australia, in Western Australia and Northern Territory;

Yapa in west and centre Northern Territory;

Yolngu in east Arnhem Land (Northern Territory);

Bininj in west Arnhem Land;

Tiwi in Tiwi Islands northern Arnhem Land.

Anindilyakwa in Groote Eylandt (Carpentaria Gulf Islands);

Palawah (or Pallawah) in Tasmania.

And then there are also the people of the Torres Strait Islanders who, having had frequent contact with the Polynesians and Papua could not be considered truly aboriginal. In fact, many aspects of their culture are clearly Polynesian origin. This is evident from certain buildings in palm leaf and woven by particular objects in wood. However, nowadays these people are treated, even in regard to their rights, as aboriginals.

Each of the groups mentioned above, of course, is divided into different fractions that form the veritable tribe and have other names.

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II – Gondawara

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Surrounded by Kakadu National Park, the Arafura Sea and the Gulf of Carpentaria, Arnhem Land is a vast, pristine wilderness, rich in Aboriginal culture.

The Yolngu people are considered the owners of Arnhem Land and have occupied the region for tens of thousands of years. It is said that the didgeridoo, the famous Australian musical instrument, was first made here. And it is in this area that I met a curious type: Gondawara.

Gondawara is an Aboriginal already assimilated in European culture but who does not forget his origins. When I met him for the first time, he was an individual whose skin was like dark leather. He had not an ounce of fat, was able to walk for a week day and night,

and had a noble bearing, with bundles of muscles strong and snappy as springs, which could be seen darting under the black leather. He never stayed more than a few days in the same place.

In Australia this pilgrimage is called *Walk About* or do not know where to walk and, of course, is the very part of Aboriginal culture. Gondawara claimed not to be afraid of anything or anyone.

It was said, but I have never been able to verify it, he was well respected in his tribe because he did not hesitate to risk his own life. He did not have the same sense of money that we have, but for a while he had begun to search for gold, and so had gained and lost huge sums. Quick with his tongue as well as his knife, he was able to kill a snake and cut off its head with a bite to the neck and wore a necklace of croc teeth, the terrible crocodiles of the Australian seas, which he had killed. It was a symbol of Australia that probably no longer exists. This man, in some respects exceptional, definitely out of the ordinary, had only one Achilles heel. He was terrified of the clouds. It is true.

He was convinced that they could fall from the sky and crush him. All scientific explanations they gave him, like the fact that the clouds were distant at least ten thousand feet, which were composed only of water vapour and therefore practically inconsistent, did nothing to convince him.

I believe that these are things that can happen when an individual is deprived of his spiritual background, as had happened when the whites to force civilization on Aborigines. This strange terror of the clouds that my aboriginal friend had probably revealed a desire for absolute freedom, a freedom that he rediscovered only in open, serene skies.

As for the clouds, he was sure that those giant mounds that were floating in the blue, followed him everywhere because they were intent on crushing him. For this reason, and not just to follow that ancient Aboriginal tradition which I have mentioned, he continued to move continuously from one part of Australia to another, as a sleepless wanderer. Always looking for a rest that he would hardly find and always looking for absolutely serene skies.

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Gondawara could not forget his roots. - *When I was born* - he told me one day - *you whites were already here a long time. I should have accustomed myself to you. Yet still I cannot understand how you think.* - And as he spoke he looked at me with his strange eyes, bright as black opals. - *What do you not understand?* - I asked him - *I cannot understand why you put so much rage into owning land. We have lived here for thousands of years and for millennia have never had the need to distort this earth on which we walk. We picked fruit, herbs, hunted animals, but we do not hurt the earth. You, on the other hand, want to actually own it. And you do not realize that you cannot do that. You die, the earth remains. It is not you who owns the land but it owns you.* -

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Now Gondawara is very old. Almost ancient. Every time I come back to Australia I go to visit him, and every time I remember that only if we respect the earth, will it respect us. - *I would like to imagine that even you whites can manage to become humble enough to understand that we can teach you something too! You know what? Before you came to make us civilized men we did not have any kind of prison. Perhaps it was for this*

reason that we did not even one criminal! We had neither locks nor keys and therefore among us there were no thieves. In the tribes, vital things, such as food, were common. When someone was so poor and had nothing, he received something as a gift from others. The fact is that, perhaps, we were too uncivilized to give great importance to private property. We did not know any kind of money and, consequently, were unaware that the value of a human being was measured according to his riches. We had no written laws filed, we had no lawyers and no politicians, and therefore, we could not cheat each other. – Then he continued, with a touch of humour - Oh yes, dear chap, we were really badly placed, before the arrival of the whites, and I do not know how to explain how we could get by without those basic things that, as you often say, are so necessary for a civilized society. Anyway, as I said, we have retained a wild conviction of property and we think that we humans are not owners of the earth. It is the land which is our host. The earth is our mother. The earth is the source of everything. - He bowed down, he picked up a handful of earth and went on: - This is my home and I come back to it. The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and our identity. We have no boundaries or fences as farmers do, we have only spiritual connections between ourselves and the earth. Also because we are part of the earth as she is part of us. And even many of those things that you whites identify as negative, are just things that belong to the earth and, therefore, to life. -

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Gondawara always says: *You whites are convinced to be more civilized than us, but your so-called civilization leads you, above all, to destroy. At best, you change things, but you do not always get better. Do you not realize this? Look at what you are doing to these territories? Here everything was green before, now there is only desert. -* And this is true. In Australia, first, there were no animals with hooves like horses. These were brought by white man. That land was not used to being trodden on by hooves, as do certain animals, and had a great many plants with roots very close to the surface. The horses and cattle destroyed them, and where there were huge prairies now there is only desert. That is how we relate to nature. Very often we change the habits of the animals. We did this with the rabbits that have increased dramatically, with camels and horses. We did this to the seagulls that are now urbanized, like pigeons. There are eagles, but even those are dying out because there are those who consider them a threat to sheep and kill them by shooting. But, after all, in this world of soft bellies, that is just what we deserve: no more eagles ... just sheep!

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Gondawara told me that among the people of the Anangu who live near Uluru, the magic mountain which we will discuss later; there lived Woombatara, a great wise man of the tribe. He, one day, asked the young people who had gathered to listen to him, as they often did: *You know why people shout when they are angry?* - Everyone looked at each other than one, who became courageous said: *They shout because they lose their temper.* - Woombatara smiled. Then he asked: *That's okay, but why shouts if the person is right in front of you?* - *Well, we shout because we want the other person to listen well to what we have to say.* - So Woombatara asked again: *You're right, but wouldn't it be easier to make him understand by talking in a low, firm voice?* - The girl, at that point, was silent and confused. Then Woombatara said - *I'll tell you why you shout at another person when you are angry. The fact is that when two people are angry their hearts are far away and it is to cover this distance that you have to shout to hear each other. The more two people are angry with each other, the stronger they must shout to hear each other. Instead, notice what happens when two people are in*

love? They do not shout, but speak almost in a whisper. Gently. And why not? Because their hearts are very close. The distance between them is very small. Sometimes their hearts are so close that they do not need to speak aloud, just whisper. And when love is even more intense, then you need not even whisper, just look. The two look at each other and their hearts are one. This is what happens when two people, who love each other, are close. – The whole tribe became very attentive to Woombatara and so he concluded by saying: Therefore I tell you: when you argue with someone, always try not to let your heart turn away, because there may come a day when the distance between you could be so great that you may never find a way back to meet again.-

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Gondawara says: *Long ago there lived a famous hunter named Ataturi. One day, while he was returning from the hunt carrying birds that he had hunted, Ataturi saw a small snake of bright and vibrant colours that appeared quite friendly. The hunter stopped and watched it for a moment. He thought that it could be hungry and so he threw it one of his birds. A few weeks later, going through the same place with some wombats, he saw the snake again. It was wonderful and still had an even more friendly attitude, but it had grown just a little. So he threw it a wombat while he continued on his way. Sometime later, as he frequently followed that same trail, he saw the snake again. It had become quite big, but still had a friendly attitude and it seemed that it was hungry. The hunter was carrying an iguana that he had killed for his people, so he stopped and gave a bite to the serpent. The next time, the beautiful coloured snake had become very big, it seemed so hungry that the hunter felt pity for it and threw it a whole wallaby to eat. That same night, his tribe was celebrating a party and there were many people around the fire that danced and sang. When, suddenly, along came the snake and it too began to dance. The snake had become so big and long that it surrounded the dancers. But it must be said that the snake always maintained its friendly attitude and it was quite nice to see with all its dazzling colours, but it also seemed particularly hungry that the people were beginning to feel afraid. When the snake wrapped itself in a coil around a man, the warriors tried to drive the snake away, but the furious tail began to beat wildly and killed so many people of the tribe of Ataturi. This story is well known among the sages of our northern tribes and they say that the snake had behaved just like the white man who seems friendly but, in the end, manages to give heed only to his stomach.*

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The Yolngu tribe, as I said, is one of those most related to the ancient traditions of the Dreamtime. The singers of this tribe travel through the endless expanses of Australia to spread news and old music and to keep the tradition alive.

In ancient Aboriginal culture it is believed that music can invoke supernatural powers left in the ground by the sacred ancestral peoples. Gondawara is part of this tribe and told me many stories that concern him directly. When I met him, Gondawara collaborated in one of those facilities that go by the name of Sanctuary. From the word, you might think of a church or something, whereas in Australia, sanctuaries are the places where nature is preserved. A kind of zoological and botanical garden where the animals roam free. Of course, there have to be experts to follow and monitor the visitors so that they do not harm animals or commit indiscretions. And vice versa. You know, there is always some idiot who wants to feed the crocodiles!

Even today, it is easy to meet Gondawara holding the leash while walking his two dingoes. Dingoes are wild animals in Australia. They are sort of reddish-haired dogs. They cannot bark, only howl. Sometimes, as in the case of Gondawara, there are those

who manage to tame some of these dogs, but it takes a lot of patience and, above all, we must never forget that they are wild animals.

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Gondawara told me that once, when he was a child, he had gone with his father in the forest. At one point, they were in a narrow valley, he hurt himself in the foot, under which the land was open for about a foot, penetrating into the lair of I do not know what animal. The sharp pain made him cry: *Damn!* - With his utmost surprise, he heard a voice come back from the mountain: *Damn!* -Hearing that voice, he looked at his father. But his father stared back at him immobile. Then he shouted again: *Who are you?* - But the only answer he received was the same phrase that he had shouted: *Who are you?* - This fact angered him. So he began to shout even louder: *I dare you to show yourself!* - And the voice said: *I dare you to show yourself!* - Feeling teased he became more and more upset until the small Gondawara asked his father what was going on and why that rude person not only did not show himself but continued to tease him. And the father said to him: *Now listen to this son!* - And then he shouted with his powerful voice: *I love you!* -And the voice answered immediately: *I love you!* - Then his father shouted again: *You're a very nice person!* - And the voice replied: *You're a very nice person!* - Gondawara was surprised, but still could not understand what was happening. And then his father told him: *White people call this effect "echo", but in truth it is a great lesson for life itself. Life always gives you back what you give, it is a mirror for your own actions. Do you want love? Then give love! Do you want more kindness? Give kindness. Do you want honesty? Be honest. Do you want understanding and respect? Offer these yourself. Remember, my son, this law of nature applies to every aspect of our lives.* - So Gondawara asked him: *Father, you speak of life. But what is the meaning of life?* - Then the father took out a small leather pouch in which he always carried a small fragment of a round mirror, no bigger than a coin. Then he said: *When I was a child, one day, near a village of whites, I saw a mirror shattered. I took the larger fragment and kept it. I began to play with it and let myself be enchanted by the possibility of directing the reflected light in the dark corners where the sun never shone: deep holes, crevices, closets. On becoming a man I understood that that piece of mirror could help me understand what I could do in life. I am also the fragment of a mirror that does not comprehend its entirety. I know, however, that in spite of my limitations, I can reflect light, truth, understanding, knowledge, goodness, serenity, tenderness in all those dark places that lie in the hearts of men and change something in someone. We do not always succeed, but that is part of the possibilities of life. There will be other people who may see it and, maybe, they will do the same. Here, in this lies the meaning of life for me.* -

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Many of those who carry out their work in these areas are Aboriginal. Due to their knowledge of the territory many are used by the army to counter the illegal landings and their importation of drugs. They are camouflaged so well that it is impossible to see them. Besides, they alone manage to survive in such inaccessible areas for weeks and succeed to find food to eat on site. Patrols that protect Australia, along the coast, always employ at least a couple aborigines.

These aborigines are well integrated in society, however, in a sense they regret the loss of what they call the Age of the dream, when Europeans had not yet arrived and they did not know so many things that the new invaders brought with them. Such as the colourless liquid that whites extracted from the sugar cane (*This refers to rum*) and that many of them, of course the most vulnerable, have learned to drink to numb their

senses, so as not to accept the reality. - *These are the gifts that you gave us when you decided to acquire our land. – Gondawara told me - gifts that have destroyed most of our population. Even the other things that you have brought us, we would have done without. But you say that this is civilization. -*

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Gondawara reminds us that the wise Aborigines have handed down the idea that everything in the universe is made, also by man; it is as if he were in a circle. This would happen because the Power of the Universe acts in accordance with circular shapes and everything tends to be round. The sky is round for the aborigines and they have also learned that the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The wind at the height of its fury always forms circular vortex. The birds build their nests by making a circle because they know the design of the Gods. The sun rises and sets by drawing a circle. The moon does the same and both are round. Even the seasons, in their alternation, form a large circle and always come back to the starting point. The whole life of man is a circle, and this is the same for everything.

That is why in Aboriginal painting, there is always a circle. This is one of the many things that the white man does not understand right away.

Moreover - Gondawara told me - you do not even understand our respect for the earth and creation. When we sang our songs to the sun, moon, or the wind, we did it because those are all forms of the creator. We have always seen the work of the creator in his entire opera: the sun, the moon, the trees, the mountains and the wind. And we gave each one a name and each tells a story. And we sing. We sing the trails, mountains, rivers, sacred places. Today you have civilized us, almost nobody sings anymore. The savages you call aborigines have always been intimately united to nature much more than the white savages. You have taken our children and have brought them to your schools just because you did not understand the fact that in our tribes, for example, children were taught to sit motionless and feel the presence of the Creator in its various forms. They were taught to develop the sense of smell, to look at where, apparently, there was nothing to see, and to listen carefully to what all seemed calm. A child who cannot sit still without moving, for us, is a half-developed child. You considered yourselves civil and polite according to your affected ways but we, long before you came, refused all exaggerated and exhibitionist behaviour because we considered this false. In our meetings, a speech was not to be quickly started nor continued hastily. Nobody asked a question recklessly even if it could be very important. No-one was forced to give an answer, even though he could. Our polite way to start a conversation is to dedicate a moment of silence to reflect together. Even during the speeches we respect every pause, during which the other person may reflect. For us, silence is eloquent. It is a way to communicate. You never stop. For us it is important to respect. We know that the lack of deep respect for all living beings and everything that grows, quickly leads to a lack of respect for men. For this reason we think that contact with nature makes young people to develop deep feelings and it is an important part of their training. But you have not figured it out. You are always considered yourselves superior, and in many practical things maybe you are, but you do not know the world and nature as we know it. And you do not even know what we feel and how we think.

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III – The Dreamtime

Let us examine the ancient aboriginal thought more deeply. Before everything was created, there was the *Altierjinga*, or the Dreamtime, as I mentioned before. It would be a mysterious place that still exists physically on earth, but no one, except the Australian aborigines, is able to see. According to the rich mythology of the indigenous, in a remote epoch the *Kundingas*, the strange beings, half-men and half-animals, and in particular the *Pitjantjarjara* (men-hare) and *Yankuntjtjara* (snail-men) had dreamed and sang the whole of the Australian Territory in search of resources, rocks, trails that would prove useful to their descendants, and that they generated by the thousands. At this point, it is necessary to clarify the term *dream*. This verb does not have the meaning we attach to it is a cross between create, imagine, process ... by singing. As they walked across the country, Kundingas left behind them a trail of words and musical notes. Then they fell asleep in trees and rocks, leaving behind them the memory of the dream in the minds of their children, the Aborigines. It was at this point that the world of the dream materialized. The dream took the form of natural objects and abstract concepts. There is thus the *dream of water*, a rock that expresses the essence of water, the *dream of air* and the *dream of the sky*, but also the *dream of strength*, the *dream of justice*, and so on. The Aborigines, who have passed a particular magical ritual called *Kadajingera*, are able to see this world. That is, for example, to distinguish a simple rock from a rock that is completely identical which is, instead, the dream of water, and so on. All Aboriginal people, and even some whites, whom they call *Cumbo*, are able to dream, and are all linked by particular bonds of kinship. These are completely different from those which we conceive: they are natural and acquired at the same time. An Aborigine (and therefore also a *Cumbo*) may, in fact, have many fathers and many mothers.

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The mythology of the Aboriginal people is so eradicated in their nature that no anthropologist has ever been able to understand it fully. And maybe it also explains the unnecessary war that the white British engaged in against those people, decimating them. Today, however, in an attempt to make up for this, somehow their culture and the survivors enjoy some consideration. But even this was done very poorly. Where in the past the whites had taken from them, what the natives thought indispensable; today they provide them with too many unnecessary things. But then don't we also do this for ourselves and for our own children?

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Another interesting thing is that Aboriginal people have an impressive knowledge of the night sky but have never used for orientation. Like many primitive cultures, the Aborigines see the emergence of a bright star or a constellation, an indication of a seasonal event. For example, the appearance of Arturo at dawn to the Aborigines of Arnhem Land suggests that it is time to start collecting the rush for the construction of fish traps and baskets. In the Mallee region of Victoria in the West, the rise of Arturo was identified, however, with the arrival of *Marpeankurrk*, a hero who had taught him how to find the pupae of termites, that the Aborigines use as an important source of food during August and September. Venus as the morning star, known to the aborigines as *Barnumbir*, is still an important sign and is identified with *Bralgu*, the island of the dead that hosts the spirit of those who die.

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The Milky Way is seen as a river in the Sky World. By certain aboriginal tribes it is associated with *Priepriggie*, a kind of antipodean Orpheus, known as a singer, dancer

and hunter, who was cast into the sky by flying foxes. Hoping to call him back, those of his tribe attempted to sing his songs but they could not. Then they heard a song come from the sky, it was just Priepriggie singing and as the rhythm became louder and clearer, the stars began to dance settling in a wide band across the sky: the Milky Way. This is why our galaxy remembers that their hero has to be celebrated with traditional songs and dances so that the order continues to prevail. In central Australia, however, the Milky Way was considered by the neighbouring Luritja and Aranda tribes also as a kind of celestial arbitration. This, very broadly, would mark the division in the sky by placing Aranda in the east, and the sky field of Luritja to the west, and, in addition, it contains the spirits of the dead of both tribes.

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One legend has it that during the Dreamtime, North Queensland was a dark and desolate expanse. Inside this, curled around itself, slept *Goorialla*, the Rainbow Serpent, that was dreaming of so many beings who sang and danced. The Rainbow Serpent awoke suddenly, and decided to go and look for them. It pierced the earth's crust and re-emerged, but it found itself wrapped up in the cold and dark. When it saw that no one was there, it felt alone. To look at the earth from above it formed clouds with its breath, then climbed onto these. It noticed that there was no water, so there could be no life. Then it pierced the clouds with his flaming tongue, gurgling with his voice of thunder, and the rain fell from the clouds. Hence, the Rainbow Serpent thundered once again pleased with its work, and then showed itself as a rainbow in the hope that those it had dreamed about would notice and come to meet it. But he still did not see anybody. It came down from the clouds and began marching to go and look for them. Along the way its heavy body gleamed across the ground, forming the bed of the rivers, and the land piled along the sides forming mountains and valleys. Where he stopped to sleep the bed of the lakes were formed, and the rain began to slide downhill into the rivers filling them. Suddenly, the Rainbow Serpent heard a song. He walked over and saw that there were creatures who sang and danced, trying to imitate it. It slid over to them and taught them how to wear the colourful feathers to resemble it even more, and dance and sing in a more appropriate manner. At that point, it felt tired and yawned to fall asleep soon after. But while yawning, two rather curious boys looked into its mouth. They slipped and were swallowed up. The people of the tribe then opened the belly of the rainbow serpent to get them out, but instead of the two young men came out two beautiful parrots of many colours. The rainbow snake became furious. Those who had opened the belly were terrorised and turned into other beings called totem. Then the rainbow serpent disappeared, leaving, however, his knowledge behind. However, not to all. Since it is one of the ancestor creators, it chose among the human beings only the most worthy. Until today, the Rainbow Serpent remains the guardian of the magical powers of all shamans.

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Some other legends refer to the Rainbow Serpent as the Great Mother. It is said in Arnhem Land and in Western Australia that the Great Rainbow Serpent Mother kept in its womb the Ancestor Creators. Then it gave birth to two rainbow serpents, one male (which went to forge a territory with its mother) and the other female that used to take care of their home.

A curious peculiarity lies in the fact that, in effect, the Rainbow Serpent really does exist! However, not in Australia, in Asia. This snake is not poisonous and rarely attacks humans. It feeds on other snakes and small rodents. Its name, Rainbow Serpent, comes from the bright colours (blue, red and emerald green) of its own livery. In the

sun-light it reflects rays, just like those of the rainbow. It has very primitive characteristics, such as the fact that a lung is double the size of the other, which was only observed in ancient extinct snakes. Just as the legend tells us, rainbow snakes sleep beneath the earth or take refuge among the vegetation and in the channels. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see this specimen as it rarely comes out, except at night following rainfalls.

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One of the astronomical myths of Northern Australia describes how the sun-woman *Wuriupranili* and man-moon *Bahloo*, her husband, travel at different times across the sky. Each of the two travelling on a flaming chariot and each of them carries a torch made of bark, but when they reach the western horizon, they turn off the flame and use the ashes of the burning end of the torch to light their way back to the east through the darkness of the underworld. Every morning, the sun-woman rekindles her torch for another day. The clouds that you can sometimes see on the horizon during the sunrise are caused by the ochre dust that she uses to decorate her body. This occurs when the soft, melodious song of the *Tukumbini* the Honey Eater draws men to the duties of a new day. At sunset *Wuriupranili* arrives at the horizon to the west, but before returning to set out on its underground passage to the east, he decorates his body again with bright ochre red colours and it is this that causes the bright colours that are seen at sunset when *Wuriupranili*, begins a long underground journey to reach his field again in the east. During this trip underground the heat of the torch causes the plants to grow.

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Wuriupranili works many spells. You should know that, in a moment of his existence, a shell tired of being ridiculed by the other shells in his colony, decided to leave. It was sad that he had to make this decision, but he knew that was the only thing to do. He wandered through the vast expanses of the seabed until exhausted, he stopped on a sand dune. His sleep did not last long, when it was interrupted by a soft thump. He opened the slot of the valves just a little to see what it was. He was surrounded by beautiful shells, he had never before seen so diverse and special, one approached him in a threatening manner. - *What are you doing here? You are not a member of our colony, with your ugliness you spoil our habitat.* - He snapped shut immediately and without even responding or trying to apologize, he resumed his journey and arrived at other depths. However, the story was always the same: they shunned him away only because they considered him different from them, too ugly. He continued to get carried away by the currents until a gentle wave laid him on the sand. It was on the shore, but he did not know. He felt suffocated, the heat that was beating on the shell was drying him out. Then he heard a voice. -*Hey, creature of the deep sea, what are you doing here on the shore? - I ran away because no one accepts me as I am, I'm an ugly, ungainly shape, different from all the other shells, there is no place for me in the sea.* - The heat she felt was *Wuriupranili* the goddess of the sun and it was she who was talking to her now. - *In the sea there is room for everyone, instead, and then you're not ugly, you're special. And it is also true that the majority never accept different beings, but only out of ignorance, because they do not understand. However, running away is never a solution ... every creature has a purpose and so have you.* - The shell smiled in that way that is typical of the shells: they were the first kind words he had ever heard anyone say to him. - *You have a beautiful smile, you know? You should smile more often - and for that reason I smile more often? - Being there, for example, to search for your task, that of being a unique creature.* - These words had a strange effect. He felt something inside of him that was changing, something that he was being born and gave

him a wonderful feeling he had never felt before; but the unbearable heat made him feel bad, feel the outside of its shell dry, away from him. - *Hey look, my heat is removing the scab that you have on the shell. It is revealing beautiful colours. You are magnificent!* - The shell is closed from the emotion, and shed tears of joy. Then, he opened up because he had something inside him that he could not hold back any longer: it was a perfect sphere of white evanescent colour with bluish shades. - *Please, accept this as my gift.* - He said – *It is not a lot, but it is the only thing I can do and I did it with all my heart for you, because you were the only one who had words of comfort for me. - Instead, it is the most beautiful and true gift that I have ever received, and to show my appreciation, I will bring it up here in the sky with me, indeed, and I will lay it among the stars at night, so everyone can see its brightness every night.* - Then, Wuriupranili helped him get back into the sea. In fact, Wuriupranili knew that the shell was a creature of the sea, not of the land, and that the lack of water would make him die. Before resuming navigation, however, the shell lingered a little longer because he wanted to see the light of stars that Wuriupranili had spoken of to him. And at some point the stars lit up, as they only light up near the equator. They were really beautiful, charming, and gorgeous. Then a strange light began to darken the splendour and the shell saw his pearl appear from behind a cloud, which became bigger and bigger and began to shine brightly in the sky. It was dazzling white and perfectly round. It was the gift that the shell had given to Wuriupranili and that the Sun Goddess wanted to return to the world. And so the moon was born. And, of course, the moon was followed by the birth of the Moon God: *Bahloo* who, as we know, married Wuriupranili.

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Now let us talk about *Baiame*. He (or Baayami, Baayama) would have been the primordial Creator, according to several linguistic groups of the south-east of Australia. The myth of Baiame tells how he would have descended from heaven to earth to create everything. Even the Gods. And, therefore, he created the laws of life, traditions, songs, and culture for the people of the land.

We know that in the past, it was forbidden to mention or even discuss the name Baiame publicly. Women were not allowed to see the designs of Baiame or come close to the sites dedicated to his worship, which are often the sites of male initiation (the famous Boras). In the cave paintings, Baiame is often depicted as a human figure with a big hat or a rich headdress.

Depending on the traditions and regions, however, the primal creative principle is also called Altjira, Alchera (Arrernte language), Alcheringa, Mura-mura (Dieri language), or Tjukurrpa (Pitjantjatjara language).

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Under the influence of Baiame, creation took shape. Wherever on Earth, there were green fields and blossoming flowers. Bees and butterflies took their nectar and the trees gave fruit and shade. The animals were running in the grasslands and forests, and beautiful streams and waterfalls slid into the sea. In short, everything was ready for the arrival of man. But all this did not please *Marmoo*, the evil one who decided to act in his own way. Hidden and in great secret Marmoo, locked in a deep cave where no one could see him, he created a whole host of insects and worms harmful to plants. They were horrible to look at but even more horrible were their actions. Taking advantage of a lunar eclipse, Marmoo freed his deadly army and scattered them on the ground. In a short time the hordes of Marmoo attacked all around them with their venom and with their ferocious jaws. They destroyed the green fields, made plants die out, attacked

trees that became sick, and even the animals were attacked by fleas and ticks. The Great Spirit, Baiame, did not notice it right away because he was giving birth to *Nungeena*, the Goddess of rivers and waterfalls. When she noticed, however, he was terribly distressed. - *Now what will you do?* - Asked Nungeena. - *I'll have to start all over again* - Baiame answered. - *Wait. It may not be necessary.* - She consoled him. And then, with its water flooded fields and drowned most of the harmful insects. Many of these, however, were equipped with wings and flew away. Then Nungeena created a multitude of birds of all colours that went up in the sky chasing insects and exterminating them. But part were saved. And even today, in Australia, the eternal struggle continues between the pests of Marmoo and wonderful birds Nungeena. It is easier to destroy than to build. But even destruction can generate new life.

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An aboriginal legend relates to the secret tribe, also known as the *lost tribe* or the *secret brothers*. A tribe that was formed at the beginning of time, in the era of the Altierjinga and that would be the progenitor of all the other tribes of the Australian continent. This tribe has been hiding, since the arrival of the settlers in Australia, in an underground city of the Antarctic continent in order to preserve the ancient secrets of the Australian Aboriginal people and ensure their cultural renaissance. According to the aboriginal traditions, this ancestral tribe consists of aborigines and descendants of a population of reptiles endowed with gaudy coloured plumage. The two different species are said to have lived together in peace and mutual exchange of experiences. The members of the *lost tribe* would speak a secret language to prevent their existence and their secrets from being discovered by the invading settlers, and would practice rituals related to the myth of the *Rainbow Serpent*. The entrances to reach the subantarctic city were kept secret and guarded by a few aboriginal initiates.

It is quite curious that even in the ancient Druidic traditions, stories are told even today of how, living below the glaciers of the south pole are the survivors of the environmental catastrophe that destroyed ancient Eden and forced the ancestors of mankind to disperse on the planet, leaving behind them on the ancestral Earth, a small community of the two species, human and sauroids, who had lived in the primordial world of Eden. It often happens, in fact, that certain legends are found in places distant from each other and in different cultures.

It should be noted how a particular custom of the aborigines is to achieve in the places inhabited forever by them, and for no apparent reason, circles formed of rocks of medium or small size, in the centre of which is placed a tilted pole. Its inclination is always toward the extreme south, toward what the aboriginal shamans call the "land of the Ancestors" from whence one day they came to inhabit the Australian continent and which, in their rituals and in their hearts, they have never forgotten. And to the south, as we know, there is Antarctica. At night you can very clearly see how the pole is bent in the direction of the "Southern Cross", toward the ancestral land from which, according to ancient legends, originated the aboriginal peoples.

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One of the symbols of Australia is Ayers Rock, which the Aborigines call Uluru. Uluru is the home of the Dreamtime *Pitjantjatjara*, the people of Kangaroo hare who lived to the north, and *Yankuntjatjara*, the people of the diamond Snake which had established itself on its southern side. We have already talked about these things. Well, near Uluru two great battles took place, that still live in the songs and ceremonies of the modern aborigines. It happened when from the southern regions of the Dreamtime came a

fierce tribe belonging to the people of Venomous snake, determined to slay the peoples of the diamond Snake. But *Bulari*, the mother goddess of the earth worshiped by the latter, met the onslaught thus defeating the invaders. It is said that the bodies of some of them are still enclosed in the rock formations of Uluru.

About Bulari, in some of the aboriginal tribes, it is said that when the Dreamtime was just beginning, the universe was like a huge dark tank in which the earth hid its desolation. Its surface did not yet reveal the etching of the harmonious geometry of valleys, or even the lively serpentine rivers or streams. Not a peak, not even a hill rose from the ground, and no-one could have imagined that, later, there would be towering mountains that would have stretched their peaks beyond the clouds. In that remote time, no living being hovered between the desolation of the terrestrial landscape and even the sound of the wind dared not break the chilling silence. Tired of that darkness and oppressed by the silence, Bulari decided to give a new face to the Earth. He wanted, in fact, to make the planet a more seductive universe, so that the People of Heaven would be conquered from the first light, one day, would have ventured onto our planet. So the Gods would never divert their benevolent eye from our planet and its many inhabitants. Bulari shook off the suffocating embrace of the bowels of the Earth and slowly ascended to the surface of the planet. All was still. Not a reflected light, not even a flash of lightning lit up the appearance of Bulari. Of course, the story of the Rainbow Serpent had not yet occurred and certain tribes confuse the legend of Bulari with that of the rainbow serpent itself. When the smoke and dust thinned and settled, back on Earth returned the all heavy silence. Then, from the crater that had been formed gradually emerged a thin but bright figure of a woman. Bulari advanced in the darkness, with slow but continuous steps shaping the land, creating mountains and cliffs. All this gradually turned into overhanging rocks, the mountain peaks, beaches and inlets of the coast of Australia. And, while Bulari continued to form the shape of Australia, he felt a slight gurgling sound of soft subdued music: it was the rhythmic sound of the surf, the first, seductive voice of the Earth. The waters, since then, would have reflected the trees of the woods, the petals of the flowers, the leaves of the bushes, the tops of the mountains and the clouds that had already ventured into the territories of the People of Heaven. And while Bulari worked in this enormous undertaking, in the immensity of the sea water, poured his sweat and, since then, the seas have become salty.

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During the time of the Dreamtime, *Birrahgnooloo*, the wife of Baiame had the task of bringing life to the land with its multiplicity of gifts. Birrahgnooloo for many Aboriginal peoples represented the Mother Earth. She had a lovely daughter, a carefree and cheerful girl, who liked to play with her □□ friends in the green meadows at the edge of the rainforest: *Birranula* (*).

(*) *For other Aboriginal peoples Birra-nula is the second wife of Baiame.*

At that time all the Gods gathered to witness the celebration of nature created by Birrahgnooloo and participated with joy at the wonders that this Goddess continually invented. One day Birranula was busy gathering the flowers of the meadow, when inadvertently she moved away. And then, suddenly in front of her opened the earth and emerged from the deep, *Nuthma* the God of the underworld. He grabbed the girl, and heedless of her cries, carried her in his chariot, and then disappeared again into the bowels of the earth. It had been a rapture of love, as Nuthma was madly in love with the daughter of Birrahgnooloo, and abducted her to make her his wife. It was rapture of love but also of death. Because, more precisely, Nuthma was actually the ruler of the

kingdom of shadows. The girl, in this manner, had been torn from the world of light and all this had taken place in the face of the indifference of all the other Gods. Birrahgnooloo just noticed the disappearance of her daughter began to look for her. She searched everywhere, but in vain. She ran headlong all over the earth, looking in every corner, in every cave, at the bottom of the lakes, even at the bottom of the sea, but no one knew (or wanted) to give her news of her daughter. And so she continued, poking everywhere, without taking rest from sunrise to sunset. When night fell, she lit two twigs of eucalyptus over Uluru as a torch to look around. And so she repeated this for nine days and nine nights, without a moment's rest. But she could not find anything: although Birrahgnooloo had searched every corner of the Earth she could not find the truth. The traces of Birranula had disappeared. The truth was revealed to her by Wuriupranili, which lights up the earth, and every day with its sunlight illuminates all the darkest spots. At this point, dejected, Birrahgnooloo, grief-stricken, decided to close herself in a dark cloud and did not want to see any more. She felt betrayed by all the gods that, in this whole affair, had not moved to help her. Naturally, she was angry with Nuthma, whom she had asked, even begged to have her daughter returned but to no avail. And so it happened that without the care of Mother Earth the fields ceased to produce. Everything began to dry up and terrible times also came to the men and animals in the form of famine and death. At that point, Baiame, who was in charge of all the gods, seeing the hunger exterminate entire populations, tried to appease the outraged Birrahgnooloo. However, her grief being so great she could not be comforted and said that she would return to the care of the earth only after she had regained her daughter and wanted her as she was when she was taken by Nuthma. The Great Spirit then summoned Nuthma. But unfortunately even Nuthma could no longer do anything about it. The girl had lost her virginity, and had become in effect his bride. In short, Birranula could not go back to being a virgin. Evidently, there was a limit to the power of the deity. Therefore, the Gods gathered in a big assembly, and they came to realize that, in a sense, it was precisely their indifference that caused all the damage and grief, so they took a wise decision: the daughter of Birrahgnooloo would still come back every year to remain on the earth to keep her mother company until late autumn. On the whole, that would be nearly two-thirds of the year. For the rest of the time she would have been with her husband. And from that moment the daughter of Birrahgnooloo rise to the surface of the earth in the early spring and her mother, happy to be able to embrace, grants an abundance of flowers and covering large green meadows and breathes the breath of creation all around. Then, upon the appearance of the first cold days of winter, she disappears into the bowels of the earth, only to be reborn again, along with the new vegetation in the following spring.

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The Sea, when it was created by Baiame, was calm, placid and cheerful. *He* felt serene. He sang and caressed the lands which were lapped by the waters. Cradled the fish and the animals that had chosen to live in his many waters. Created fantastic sculptures, worked by the waves. But, even with all this to be done, he was lonely. He needed company that was not fleeting as that of those who, from time to time, appeared on the beaches or lived in the waters. Then he turned to Baiame so that among all the spirits who ruled, he found that he could marry a female. In short, a Goddess who would become queen of the seas. When this was revealed, there was a great commotion everywhere. Marrying the Sea was a great honour and there were many gods that made it know that they would accept the marriage. At that point, it became necessary to make a choice and the choice of a bride had to be made precisely by the Sea. So a big party was organized on an enchanted beach, where the goddesses could dance around bonfires to allow the sea to choose one among them. Among them was *Rage*, an awful

goddess. She was the daughter of Marmoo and always angry. In order to eliminate rivals she dug up the earth and brought a huge quantity of sulphur to the surface that she hid under the huge piles of firewood that was to be used for bonfires. Evening came and the Goddesses came from all over. They came from the skies, forests, lakes, rivers, from large meadows, from mountains and each of them was dressed with the best she had been able to find. They all came to the beach that had been selected and stood around the piles of firewood. But when they were lit, the sulphur blazed bursting and emitting a terrible stench. At that point, the Goddesses became frightened and ran away. Rage was the only one to be left alone on the beach. When the Sea looked out, he saw only her. Let's face it, Rage did not look so terrifying when you looked at her. In fact, she had a certain something shimmering in her eyes, at least initially, she was rather pleasing. So when the Sea saw her, he was initially pleased. Moreover, as we have said, he liked the idea of □□ having a companion to help him keep the discipline in the waves and among the fish and that, in the hours of rest, could tell him some pretty strange stories. But he realized very early on that Rage was an unpleasant being. She began to claim that everyone, from the jellyfish to the salmon, should succumb to all her crazy whims. She began to hurl vulgar words at her husband, she kicked and shoved the small waves, played terrible jokes on the whales, tied the ends of the octopus tentacles, snipped the tips of the marlins and screamed for the whole expanse of ocean. The sea, which had a sweet and generous spirit, endured this for a while with patience. But he also had his pride. And then, he liked the quiet and tranquillity. He tried to talk to Rage, to reason with her, but there was nothing he could do. And then, seeing that Rage did not abate with sweetness, he changed approach and adopted a more energetic system to bend to bring her to obedience, which led to terrible scenes. Just try to imagine the scene: the wife was screaming, the husband was screaming, and the waves, mad with terror, tried unsuccessfully, to flee, asking the Wind and Rain for help, clambering over one another, skimming and taking frightful leaps. They unleashed the first terrible storms and all the oceans were shocked. Then, little by little, the will of the Sea was able to triumph over the silly petulance of his wife, and at least for a little while calmness was restored to the great expanse of ocean. The waves with their graceful lace crests set in motion once again, kind and gay, sliding gracefully. The Sea returned to caress the shores and cliffs gently, singing some friendly song, and the fish resumed their games, flashing, pleased, from the gardens of algae to the coral forests. But apparently it was not to last. After a while Rage started once more and the furious arguments commenced again and the entire oceanic expanse returned to fidget in large storms. In short, the great peace, that perfect peace of his joyous youth, the Sea, could no longer enjoy because of his nagging wife. And from that time on, in the oceans, there are alternating periods of dead calm and wild storms. And, even today, those who undertake sea voyages learn about the character of the terrible-tempered and bitchy wife of the Sea.

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It is said that many years ago when the earth was not yet fully formed, *Wullungori*, one of the most powerful spirits of the times, lived in a house made of light placed above a beautiful carpet of clouds. One day he decided to take a wife and he informed all the Gods of his decision. The word spread and four Goddesses showed up in front of Wullungori. At that point he asked each - *What would you do for me if I married you?* - The first declared - *I would clean the sky and look after your home.* - And the second - *I would invent the best dreams for you.* - And the third - *I would make mountains of clouds and take care of the fall of the rains.* - And the fourth - *I'd give you a child of gold!* - After having well thought everything over, Wullungori chose the last. A year later, while Wullungori was away, his wife gave birth to twins, one with skin of gold and

the other of silver. At that point, one of the other rejected goddesses, envious of the twins, kidnapped the children, locked them in a basket and left them in the hollow of a tree replacing them with two frogs in the baby cot. When Wullungori came back and saw the two horrible frogs, he became furious and banished the Queen. Meanwhile, a hunter discovered the basket with the twins and decided to take them home, caring for them with love and while he brought them up. A few years went by, when Wullungori by chance, passed in front of the farm of the hunter and seeing the children of gold and silver he realized that they could not be anything other than his kidnapped twins. He rewarded the hunter by filling him with riches and called his wife back from exile. All lived happily ever after except the traitor who had stolen the two small babies and that was deservedly turned into a snake. And it happens that, even today, when the two sons of Wullungori go for a swim in the large river cascading on earth, a little bit of gold dust and silver that falls off their skin comes up to us and those of us who find it become very rich. That's how the Aborigines of Australia explain the fact that, in certain rivers, there are nuggets of gold and silver.

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When all the land was still submerged by the sea, a seed found itself flying swept by the wind. The winds swept it from one place to another, and it travelled for a long time. It felt tired and wanted to rest on safe ground. So it turned to the wind and said: *Wind God, I'm tired. It has been such a long time since I've been travelling, supported by your strength. Please give me a little ground where I can rest.* The spirit of the wind answered: *I cannot do that, as I am the lord of the air, ask the sea.* - All should know that before this seed took the form it has now, it was a spirit of time. Having listened to the God of the wind patiently and without losing hope, the seed turned to the God of the Sea: *Sea God, hear my voice.* - There was a roar. - *Who is calling me?* - Replied the spirit of the sea with his commanding voice. - *I am a seed and I must ask one thing of you. Let me have a little bit of the earth that you keep buried under your water so that I may rest!* - The sea god agreed and brought out a piece of barren and parched land. The seed felt powerless upon seeing that lifeless land; but the sea added: *This is the land which I give you, but you shall be lord of this land only if you overcome some trials: the first thing you will need to do is convert the gray earth in a green meadow.* -The seed, as the spirit of time, also had some power. For example, to stop time. So the years passed, perhaps even centuries, and when the earth discovered it was clothed in soft grass, the seed turned back to the sea, for which in truth, only a moment had passed by. The spirit of the sea, he marvelled in the face of such beauty. - *Well, you have passed the first test. This is the second: in one night and one day your land will need to be filled with fresh water. Your job is to create rivers, springs and lakes.* - The spirit of the seed stopped time once again and asked Nungeena and the Goddess of rain, for help. The rain poured down for years and years, perhaps for centuries, and slowly trees grew, rivers, springs and lakes were formed. When all was ready, the God of the sea, for which only a moment had passed, as had previously happened, said: *You were good, but now, as part of the third trial, you will need to create me a son. A new creature who can call me father!* - Again the seed stopped time, and created a Man, in whom the spirit of the seed had put all of its being and soul. The sea was even more surprised this time, in fact, it felt speechless with wonder and determined that this only son should become master of the whole earth. So the sea ordered the seed to build roads, trails, and a method for cultivating the fields. The spirit of the seed, using magic in addition to a lot of will, did everything that was required and the land became ever more beautiful. But the man was sad because he was alone. Hence, the sea set another challenge for the spirit of the seed: *I think that your kingdom needs people who may live together and who will remember me. The last thing left for you to do is to make*

sure that this man does not remain the only one. - It was not an easy thing to fulfil this command: solitude is bad for man, but nobody knew how to alleviate it. Then the god of the sea summoned the God of the moon, the wind and the new spirit of the land that had just been created, and set the problem before them. After pondering this for a while, they decided that together they could solve it. The God of the Earth said: *I will provide the material to model a companion for the mind.* - The moon, Bahloo, added: *I'll give her beauty and grace.* - The God of the wind, then, promised: *I will give her breath and song.* - The happy sea god thanked everyone and all set to work. But it took them a great deal of time. Concerned, a spirit of the air went to see why it was taking so long and found that they were all still very busy. He asked: *What are you doing?* - Bahloo, looked at him a moment, then said, half-heartedly, annoyed at the interruption: *Can't you see?* - The spirit of the air looked puzzled for a moment and then said: *Beautiful. What is it?* - *She's a woman* - replied the God of the earth, greatly annoyed. The spirit of the air did not want to make it clear that he did not know what a woman was so he replied: *And what's this ... woman for?* - Then it was the God of the wind to answer: *First of all "this is a "she". We're making a companion for man.* - *And what does he need her for?* - The spirit of the air asked once again. - *To soothe the loneliness of man. She will be like man but also different. So much so that she will be almost incomprehensible for males. She will have a fickle mood, be easy prey to emotion, she will fall madly in love, but become irritable for a trifle and she will be faithful and unfaithful at the same time.* - *Calm, quiet* - said the spirit of the air - *But it's a complete disaster!* - The sea god looked at him with a strange smile, and then he said - *not really. However, when there are so many of them, the men will love them and they won't be able to do without them.* - The spirit of the air was confused. - *And men will understand and appreciate all this?* - *Well* - Replied the four Gods dark in the face - *This is a problem that we have not solved yet.* - And they turned to confabulate, while the spirit of the air moved away to report back to all the gods what he had learned. But he did not have the chance to tell them in what way the four gods could solve the last dilemma, which, until today, remains unsolved for all of us.

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The wallabies are animals of the family of kangaroos, only they are much smaller. Well, it seems that at the time of the dream gods had created a kind of Olympics in which all the new creatures of the earth could participate: be they men or animals. The race included, among others, the kangaroo, man, the emu (which would be the Australian ostrich), the Tasmanian devil, the flying fox, the wallabies and also the flea. Before starting the race, participants had gathered and had sworn that they would not use tricks or deceptions to win. The opening ceremony included a parade of all the participants. The flea stepped forward first: he put on a good show of manners and always waved right and left, because he was also the head of a great lineage, having noble blood in his veins (in fact, the flea does not care much who he sucks it from) and was used to frequenting mainly humans, which is saying something. Then came the emu. He wore the classic uniform which he had inherited from his ancient family, who, it is said, enjoyed a good reputation. He paraded smartly. With great strides. Then it was the turn of the kangaroo and the flying fox, who tried in every way to exhibit self-importance. The Tasmanian Devil, all black with a wide-open red mouth, managed to get some little cry of astonishment. The wallaby, however, did not speak at all. He paraded with his head down. As I said, before the start of the race, the competitors had gathered and had sworn that they would be absolutely loyal to one another, and that they would not use any kind of cunning to win. Baiame, the supreme God, officially set off the race and the competitors started performing. Man began and took a big jump which, however, he was superseded by that of the kangaroo. It was the flea's turn, who

jumped so high that no one saw him again. Some even said that he had not jumped at all! The emu jumped but collided with the God of fury, who halved the score! So it fell to the Tasmanian devil, as we know, creates so much confusion that he ended up being disqualified. The same thing happened to the flying fox, which had helped the jump by flying. It was now the wallaby's turn. He remained stationary for a long time reflecting: so much so that now all were convinced that he would not jump at all. Then, suddenly, the wallaby gave a little jump and ended up right in the lap of Daramulum, who was sitting next to her parents. Daramulum, you know, is the son of the same Baiame and Birrahgnooloo. He, then, said: *The highest jump is the one that has come to touch my son! It took cunning to get there, and the wallaby has shown to have this. So he deserves the award.* - All the others then began to complain about the fact that the wallaby had not complied with the rules of the race and that he had behaved like a hypocrite, ensuring loyalty and using, instead, cunning to win. But Baiame said: *Wallaby you have really won the race. But as they have all noticed, you've been very hypocritical with the other participants. So you will have the prize but at the same time you will be punished. And since you have always remained silent and hypocritically only to fool your friends, from this time on, you will not talk anymore. Your silence will be eternal.* - And in fact, even today, wallabies do not emit any sounds. So should be punished all hypocrites and liars.

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Long ago, in Australia there lived a young warrior who was very strong and very clever, named Wooruwooru. He was kind to all and the village girls were crazy about him, because he was pretty well built and had two bright eyes that shone like stars. But he did not care, in fact, he was always quite sad because he could not fall in love with any of them. One day, while hunting, he managed to shoot down with his boomerang a Kookaburra, a large bird that is only found in the forests of the continent. As he approached his prey, the Kookaburra pleaded: *Great warrior, do not kill me and I will make sure that your pain can be relieved.* - Wooruwooru stared incredulously at the bird, then asked: *In what way?* - The Kookaburra replied: *Well, I know a girl with whom you cannot help but fall in love. She is the daughter of the God of the moon that is located above the clouds. Her skin is the same colour as the moon and her hair is golden. I'll fly up there and deliver your request to Bahloo to meet his daughter.* - Wooruwooru decided to let the bird fly free and he immediately felt bound and committed to keep his word. With a broad flight he climbed to the top of the trees, and then with a more direct flight he climbed even higher, higher and higher, until he reached the palace of the moon. The God of the moon, which, according to Aboriginal mythology, is male, when he saw the bird, asked him what he was doing so high. The Kookaburra replied that he had come from Earth where Wooruwooru, the great warrior lived, who wanted to meet his beautiful daughter. The God of the moon, Bahloo, was amazed by so much boldness, however, he replied that he would agree to send his daughter to Earth, but only if accompanied the request was accompanied with an important gift. The Kookaburra returned to Earth and told Wooruwooru how things had gone. He immediately prepared a beautiful bag in which he placed a necklace of the most dazzling iridescent opals that could be found in the subsoil of Australia, then handed the bag to the bird to deliver to the God of the moon. He listened to his words and replied he had to think matters over. But the Kookaburra had his own plan that would allow him to bring the daughter of Bahloo to Earth. So during the night he placed two magic eucalyptus leaves on her eyes, that were invisible to everyone, but which prevented her from seeing. Bahloo concerned about the blindness of his daughter called the Kookaburra to ask if he could do anything and the cunning bird said that in order to heal her eyes the girl had to go down to Earth at once. Bahloo gave his consent

and so, gliding along the silver thread woven by the queen of the spiders, the girl got to the point where Wooruwooru waited, hidden in the foliage. The moment Wooruwooru saw the girl he fell in love madly. At that moment the Kookaburra removed the leaves from the eyes of the girl whose sight returned and when he saw Wooruwooru, so strong, beautiful and confident, she immediately lost her heart to him. So it was that Wooruwooru, a man of the earth, was able to marry the daughter of Bahloo, God of the Moon. And that is why there are many Aboriginal people who have lighter skin colour and blond hair.

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Long ago, the Australian parrot did not have the colour which it has now; it was gray and his feathers were short like those of a chicken. It was just one of the many birds created in the era of the dream. But not only he was so. The entire world then was in black and white. For this reason the Gods were always quarrelling among themselves because they could not distinguish well the things that they saw, and what's more, the world was very boring being composed of just two colours. Even then, black dominated the night and white dominated the day, so all that remained was gray to paint the evenings and mornings so they did not collide too often. And so, after much debate, the Gods turned to the supreme spirit, Baiame, pleading to solve this problem. Baiame gathered them all together and at that meeting the Gods came to the agreement to invent colours so everything became more cheerful even the walking and loving between men and women. Yes, but how to create other colours in addition to black and white? While others discussed, the most beautiful and graceful of the Goddesses came down to earth and saw a rosebush. Even that was all gray. She wanted to pick a flower but she pricked her finger and a small drop of blood appeared. It was a different colour from gray. Touching the rose, it took the same colour. So she went by the other Gods and showed them the new colour and the others, all together, called it *red*. After black and white it was the first new colour to be born. It was born from the blood of a Goddess. Another Goddess, that of fertility, wanted to find a colour to paint the hope of the great prairies. It was not easy to find but in the end her imagination invented a new and shining colour. Then she showed it to the assembly of the Gods which they named *green*, and it was the fourth colour born. After a while, one of the other Gods began to scratch strong in the land. - *What are you doing?* - Asked the others. - *Looking for the heart of the earth* - he replied, turning the earth over on all sides. After a while, he found the heart of the earth and showed it to the other Gods. It was a new colour and the Gods called it brown and it became the fifth colour. At that point, another God jumped up. - *I want to look at the colour of the sky* - he said, and began to climb and climb to the top. When he reached the very top, he saw the colour of the sky. It was beautiful, but did not know how to take it with him. So he looked at it until the colour clung to his eyes. He descended the best he could, groping, and went to the assembly of the Gods. - *I carry the colour of the sky in my eyes.* - He told them. The others were enchanted and named the sixth colour *blue*. Almost at the same time, another God was looking for a warmer colour, when he heard a child laughing; he approached the child carefully and saw that the laughter had the colour of the sun. So he got close to the child and borrowed the laughter. He carried the laughter of the child to the world of the Gods and they named the seventh colour *yellow*. In much the same way purple and orange were born. At that point, the Gods who were weary of the lengthy discussions went to rest, leaving all the colours in a basket. But the basket was open and so, the colours, that all in all, were young colours, went out and began to make a noise and play with each other. They mingled. So many other new colours were born. When the Gods came back look at the colours, they realized that the new colours were no longer only seven. So enthused they also wanted to play with the colours. They

climbed to top of the mountain, and from there they began to throw the colours. As the Gods were throwing colours without paying attention to where they ended up, some of them also sprayed the animals and men. And that is why there are people of different colours and different opinions. Then the Gods tried to find a way to remember the colours and avoid losing them, so they also sought a way to preserve them. It was then that the parrot passed that had been partially sprayed too. The Gods then realized that he was predestined. They seized him and attached all the colours to him, but they had to lengthen his feathers so that all the colours would fit. And still today the bird flies across Australia to remind all men and the Gods that there are many colours and opinions, and that the world would be much happier if all the colours and all opinions had their own space.

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Another legend is that of Namarrkun, the flashing man, that comes riding stormy clouds. The lightning is generated by magic rods bound around the body and the sound of thunder from stone axes fixed to his shoulders, on his elbows and knees when banging against the clouds. When people disobey the law, Namarrkun makes the sky thunder and the bad may be struck by the lightning. Namarrkun lives in the sky even though it is not visible during the day and absorbs the sunlight which forms an arc across his body. Generally he appears during the pre-monsoon season (*Gunumeleng* in the language of Arnhem Land) reminding people who invoke his power, which is revealed through the rains brought by the Rainbow Serpent.

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These are just some of the myths of those people who feel an integral part of the natural process, whether terrestrial or celestial. They feel that they, through their Great Ancestors, are the heirs of the creation of the natural world as it exists today.

VI – Aboriginal Stories

The legends of the various aboriginal tribes are often linked to their myths. Wootungong was an aborigine who observed the world of the white people with great interest. It fascinated him. For this reason he hid in a very cool cave not far from the white settlements. The truth is that Wootungong was a very vain Aboriginal. One day, at the mouth of the cave where he had settled, a shadow appeared. He went out and saw that it was an old man, perhaps just passing by. Wootungong looked with astonishment at the stranger. He had never seen a face so wrinkled, dark and lacklustre. He was wearing two tiny faded rags, and his drooping eyelids completely covered his eyes leaving just a narrow slit which revealed a gleam of light. However, it was an unusually bright light, which deeply disturbed Wootungong. The old man asked for hospitality for a few days. Wootungong was quite surprised because he did not expect such a request. The nomadic aborigines usually do not ask for hospitality. They adapt to sleeping anywhere and are content to have something to eat. In fact, Wootungong had thought the man was just an old nomad, perhaps a beggar. It was clearly evident just by looking at his ragged and colourless clothes. He gave the old man something to eat, then motioned for him to leave. After two days another stranger came to the front of his cave. He was a young man of noble bearing, dressed in Western clothes. When Wootungong looked out of the cave, he saw the old man whom he had refused to accommodate still sitting on a rock in front of the cave. However, he did not pay much attention to him. - *What do you want?* - He asked the newcomer politely. - *I was on my way to my farm. It's called Red Mount.* Wootungong became more interested – *Are you the owner of that beautiful farm?* – he asked – *That's right.* - Replied the other – *You must be very rich.* - *I'm not complaining. Listen, my horse died while I was on my way back to the farm. It happened while we were wading across the river. The poor beast lost his balance and fell into the water. And he did not succeed to get up again. It would be pretty stupid, you know, if I tried to walk to my farm. Tomorrow I will buy another colt, and you can accompany me to the market at the nearby village. But I'm not used to sleeping outdoors, could you put me up for tonight?* - Wootungong offered a huge smile. You can understand that he could not have asked fate for a better chance. A rich farmer, a true gentleman in his cave! He had dreamed about this many times but he never believed that it was possible. He bowed reverentially a thousand times, saying how happy he was to put his humble cave at the disposal of such an important person.

He scrambled around the fire preparing a meal of roast rabbit and fresh vegetables. Then he arranged a sort of table to eat at, as he had seen white people do, and, meanwhile, he kept foolishly repeating - *What a joy, what an honour!* - When he sat down with the guest before the food, he sensed a feeling of coldness. His enthusiasm melted away like snow in the sun, and he could not understand why. None the less, he continued repeating the foolish chorus: *What a joy, what an honour!* - He felt a strange ill-feeling attack him, an overbearing sense of unease prevailed. Looking at his face, he suddenly realized, that the fellow had eyes that were like two coals of ember and in his straight, jet black hair, two small horns stood out. At that point the strange ill-feeling and sense of unease turned into pure fear. He had heard about the legends that circulated among the whites that spoke of the lord of evil. The aborigines called him Marmoo. He said the guest - *I'm going out to pick some sweet berries for the night.* - But his voice was shaking. He moved with some effort. When he was on the threshold of the cave, he heard an eerie, diabolic noise. He looked stunned and saw that the objects in the cave were swirling around his guest as if they were leaves in the hold of a cyclonic wind. Feeling ever more terrified, he made a supreme effort to reach the exit. The old man was still there, sitting on the dirt road. Very quiet. Wootungong approached him and whispered, stammering: *I saw Marmoo. The very Devil himself. The evil one the white men always speak about. His eyes are fiery and he even has horns.* - The old man looked at him and said. - *What you and the white man call the devil is none other than the spirit of evil. We call him Marmoo. But he is not the master, he is only slave. And the master can always dominate the slave.* - Then he entered the cave while Wootungong remained terrified to even look from the outside. Suddenly he heard a hoarse scream, and then, almost immediately, he saw the young white man running out of the cave at the speed of a rocket. He ran as if he were chased by a pack of ravenous wolves. He walked away in a cloud of dust and sparks. The old man calmly came out of the cave. He appeared unaffected. At that point, the terror vanished from Wootungong's eyes. - *Who are you, to scare away a being like that?* - He asked, astonished. - *I am Daramulum, son of Baiame. From my father I have received the power and strength to overcome evil spirits.* Wootungong, who knew that Baiame was the spirit of all creation, suddenly realized that what first appeared to him as an old man, was now shining being. He threw himself on his knees begging. - *Forgive me, Daramulum. I was very stupid. Vanity, stupidity. Now I understand and I feel like a different man.* - *I understand everything.* - *Within your soul now burns again the sacred fire of the ancestors. But remember that you will find your true essence among your people and not among the whites.* - So Wootungong said - *It's true and now I fully understand that. But I wish to mend my stupidity. Allow me to serve you as best I can. Humbly.* - *And how are you going to do that?* - asked Daramulum. - *Transform me into a pair of sandals to protect your feet wherever you go.* - *So be it.* - Proclaimed Daramulum. And from that day Daramulum was seen with two wonderful sandals that shone the light of awareness.

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Watambari was a great hunter and a great warrior because he had a generous heart and was open to all. He fought not to plunder other tribes or other people, but only to defend his people. One day, while hunting, he came across a white dingo. Watambari had never seen a white dingo and began to follow him to capture him and bring him back alive to his tribe. He began to follow him crawling in the tall grass, then running and hiding in the bushes and behind the trees, but the distance between him and the dingo, which did not seem at all frightened, did not decrease. So it was that suddenly he found himself in front of a cave. Thinking it was the lair of the dingo, Watambari went in, because as I said, he was a very brave man. He had taken fifty steps inside the cave when, to his great surprise it opened into an even larger cavern, at the centre of which

sat a very old man in front of a fire. The old man fixed the fire with eyes of flame. Watambari slowly walked under his sharp gaze and stood a step away from him, staring at him intently but without saying a word. They stood so still for a long time, staring at each other. Then the old man said: *If you've come this far, you must want something very special* - and his mouth curled into a strange smile. - *Actually, I do not want anything for myself.* - *Oh really? How admirable! And for your people?* - Asked the old man. - *Ah well, I do want something for them. I'd like to know how to fend off the cold, hunger, poverty and death.* - The old man looked at him for a long moment, then said: *Then I will show you where to find the spirits of these ills that plague your people, so that you can fight them.* - So it was that, following the indications of the old man, Watambari found himself in a large clearing. He saw at once a figure that could not be anything but an evil spirit. So Watambari came up to hit him with his spear. He noticed that the spirit trembled and writhed in front of him, but not from fear. His name was *Cold*. Watambari knew that the cold was a great enemy of his people, and that many children had died because of him and so he raised his spear to strike him. But the spirit said: *If you kill me the heat will reign, then water will evaporate and the grain can not grow without water to bathe it.* - At that point Watambari thought he might be right and said to him: *You're right. So I won't kill you.* - Later on, he met a second Watambari spirit. It was called *Hunger*. Watambari knew that famine was a terrible thing and was about to strike it with his spear, when the spirit turned to him and said: *If you kill me there will be plenty of food, but your people will become bored with all the food and they won't do anything to survive in future. So, all engaged in idleness will be killed by snakes and crocodiles.* - After thinking a moment Watambari replied: *That's true, the joy of all feasts would disappear. I won't kill you.* - The third spirit was that of *Poverty*. - *Kill me if you will.* - she said when he came closer - *I am so unhappy! But know that once I am dead things will never wear out and your people will no longer have a taste for new things.* - He replied: *It is true, my people enjoy new things when they succeed to conquer them. I won't kill you.* -The last spirit was that of *Death*. When he saw Watambari and before he could raise his spear, he said: *If you kill me people will no longer die and no more children will be born. The world will be a nation of old people. Let me go so the people can grow, there will be strong young men who will take the place of the tired old people, that I will lead by hand. - So, it is obvious that I cannot kill you either.* - Watambari concluded while he slowly resumed his journey to return to his people. And that's why Death, Poverty, Hunger and Cold, still live among us.

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In the northern regions of Queensland, a long time ago, there lived a family of five brothers and three sisters. Their life went on quietly. They got on very well together, they lived quite well and always helped with each other. One day, the three sisters went to bathe in the lake close to home. After bathing, one of them, Julunggul, realized that a snake had made its way into her clothing when she left it on the bushes. So, she could not get dressed while the snake was inside her clothes. The sisters immediately thought of shaking Julunggul's clothes to frighten away the snake, but the latter began to speak with the voice of a man: *I will not leave Julunggul's clothes unless she accepts to become my wife.* - Thinking it was a joke, the sisters persuaded Julunggul to accept the offer. Once Julunggul had formally accepted the proposal, the reptile abandoned the clothes. While crawling along the path of the rainforest, the snake told her to prepare for the wedding, because after three days he was going to come for her. And, in fact, on the third day, a carriage drawn by four horses and driven by the envoys of the snake arrived in front of their house, asking for Julunggul. The brothers replied that they would never allowed the girl to marry a snake. But the envoys could not accept such a blatant breach of promise. There was a great discussion and, after being threatened with the

destruction of the crop, their supplies and livestock, the brothers cunningly made a white duck climb into the carriage, instead of Julunggul. But a possum warned the envoys of the snake that the creature in the carriage was not Julunggul, so the trick was discovered. Then, the brothers replaced the duck with a white sheep. But again, the possum spied on them. Angrily the envoys become more and more threatening, so Julunggul decided to climb into the coach and follow her sad fate as there was nothing more that could be done. When they arrived at the seaside, Julunggul saw a beautiful man appear from the sea, whose voice she immediately recognized as that of the serpent. He was the God of the waters. The waves of the sea, meanwhile, had brought ashore an amber necklace that he put around her neck. The girl was fascinated by the God and showed herself most happy to marry him, so the two went to live in the sea. There were four children, three boys and a girl and we can say that the woman was really serene. Julunggul, however, after some time had a feeling of nostalgia for her family, so after nine years, she asked the man who was now her husband if she could join her brothers and sisters with their children. The God of the waters granted her desire. Julunggul could stay with her brothers and sisters as long as she wished but when she wanted to return to him she had to call him close to shore using these words: *Daramulum, if you are alive come on a white wave, if you're dead come on a wave the colour of blood.* - She left. Naturally, the brothers were happy to see Julunggul, and arranged □□ a great feast. A few weeks went by and Julunggul thought it was time to get back to her husband, but the brothers who wanted to prevent her from returning to him and who had discovered everything that had happened to their sister, insisted on knowing what was the phrase she had to say to return to her husband. She, however, did not disclose the secret, imagining that the brothers had some bad intentions. So the four brothers tried to find out through their children, but the three boys did not speak, only the small girl, frightened by the threats of an uncle, revealed the phrase. At that point, the brothers made □□ their way to the sea with a scythe. After two days Julunggul, together with her children, took the road back. When she arrived at the sea she saw that it was stormy, the sky was terribly cloudy and a strong wind was blowing. So Julunggul uttered the secret words. But the sea became darker and blood-red wave arrived. Of course, she was frightened and cried uncontrollably. She turned to the children and asked them: *Which of you has betrayed your father?* -No one had the courage to answer. So out of the sea came the voice of the God of the waters: *Our daughter has betrayed us and your brothers, Julunggul, have killed me with a scythe.* - Then an indescribable sadness descended on the face of Julunggul, and after looking at the sea and then at the eldest son, she pronounced the following: *You will become an oak, sturdy and strong, and you will live for a very long time.* – To the other son she said: *You will be a birch and all lovers will gather under you.* - The third she promised: *You will be a eucalyptus. But you, my daughter, will become a mangrove. Your arms will drop down into the water and those who look at you will understand the sadness you've caused. I, however, will join the spirit of waiting for my husband to be reborn.* - And so Julunggul never returned to her brothers again. And even today throughout Australia, mangroves that have their roots in salt water, tell of the pain of Julunggul who lost her husband at the hands of her brothers, who betrayed her.

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In Australia, in the land that is now called Northern Territory, even in the period in which the events occurred that I am about to tell you, there were many different tribes of men and herds of kangaroos. Among the kangaroos there was one who had a rather independent character. His name was *Bohra*. Since he was born, he had always wanted to do his own thing. Imagine that he left his mother's pouch when he was just two months old! At that time, you should know, the night was absolutely pitch black.

Darkness fell suddenly like a black storm enveloping everything in its darkness and the land could not be illuminated by the light of the moon or even by the light of the stars, which were also covered by the darkness of the night. Well, as everyone knows, the Kangaroos are animals that prefer to eat right through the night because the leaves of trees and shrubs are cooler. But with all that darkness it was not easy to find good plants and often kangaroos were banging against each other or even against the trees. However, they were all accustomed to that state of things, and no one complained. No one, except kangaroo Bohra, who, I said before, was quite enterprising. One day, or rather night, Bohra decided to rebel against this state of affairs and decided to put an end to the darkness. So, while all other nocturnal animals rested and the spirit of the night was distracted, he rolled the darkness up like a carpet and put it at the end of the horizon. So it was that the light of the stars and the moon suddenly poured on earth, illuminating the rainforest, grasslands and deserts. Everywhere you heard the murmur of surprise at this unexpected event and a feeling of great satisfaction filled the Bohra's soul. At last, he was able to see what he ate during the night, and where he was going on all four paws. In fact, you should know that, in those days, even the kangaroos walked on all fours like the dingo. One night, Bohra saw before himself numerous fires and heard the song of many voices. Being curious, Bohra approached the sounds and suddenly, out of the darkness emerged a long line of men with strange white marks on their bodies that danced and sang to the spirit of the night, beating their boomerang. They were celebrating the moon and the stars that now shone in the sky. Watching them, Bohra was overcome with a strange desire to dance too. Then, he rose on his hind legs balancing himself with his tail, and jumped into the circle and began to dance behind the last man. In seeing Bohra, the women who were sitting in a circle, stopped singing and clapping and gave out a cry that was heard everywhere in the forest. Bohra froze and remained perfectly still. The men then saw him standing on his hind legs that looked at him with terror mixed with wonder while the women continue to scream and laugh. Bohra, still motionless, he found himself surrounded by the whole tribe. There were those who simply wanted to chase him away, even those who wanted to kill him, and those who wanted to let him dance. Then the eldest immediately called a council meeting to decide what to do. They threw magic stones on the ground in order to discover the will of the spirits and read that it was, thanks to Bohra, if the stars and the moon now shone in the sky, but the spirit of the night demanded a punishment for him for having deceived him. At that point, the men of the tribe decided to let him dance with them. And so the singing and the dancing began again. Behind the long line of men, Bohra was trying to mimic humans, with his movements. The people of the tribe, especially the children thought it was great fun and soon all their agitation turned into joy. And so they laughed for a long time while Bohra continued to dance with a solemn air and shy expression, taking leaps and balancing on his tail. The tribe liked Bohra's style of dancing and decided to imitate him. So the men decided to make long tails out of very coarse grass, which they made up in the form of a braid and hung behind their belts and continued to dance imitating the kangaroo. However, even if the scene was very funny everyone knew that, at the end of the dance, the spirit of the night would have taken its toll. And so it happened. After the dance, Bohra suddenly felt bewitched, the front legs shortened and he continued to walk on his two hind legs, as he had done during the dance, giving rise to that particular way of moving that, from that day on, all kangaroos have imitated. And yet today during sacred ceremonies, the men of the tribe of Bohra put fake tails on and dance the dance of the kangaroo to celebrate the resourcefulness of Bohra, without whom, the night would still be dark and starless.

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I heard the story of two strong brothers and proud hunters, who were highly respected

by all the tribes. The afternoon before each hunt both adorned themselves with emu feathers and kangaroo skins so as to resemble these very animals, then they mingled with the real animals and they were so similar that they could easily kill their prey with spears, boomerangs, woomeras and nulla-nulla, which is a sort of club. It was a real competition between the two brothers and for this reason, they often argued. Regardless of this, the two brothers shared with others what they had hunted so that everyone had an animal to take back to camp where they celebrated in thanksgiving to *Korrndon Marma Man*, one of the most important deities of the tribe. Despite this, the antagonism between the two grew every day. One day, he sent them to call the big old Jubuk, who said: *Last night I visited Korrndon Marma Man in the guise of a beautiful swan, and while it was talking to me it constantly changed colours. It said: Jubuk, will command the two warrior brothers to go on a trip to the sacred river Warrening to give life, both of them together, to a new tribe, which will be called the tribe of the two swans. The names of the brothers will be changed to Moornuwooling which means black and Ngnitteeyung which means white, and should never be at war with each other or my wrath will fall on them.* Then the two different brothers, the black swan and the white swan, got up and went away in the dark to start, each one of them, a new tribe in Western Australia that has since lived in harmony. It is for this reason that in Australia, you will never see a black swan without the presence of a white swan!

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The people of the *Nunga* had learned to live with the strange white men who came from far away and had such terrible weapons. But basically, in their vast land there was room for everyone. Nature was none other than opulent and generous. At nightfall, the flowers exhaled a heavy, gentle perfume that donated the souls a delicious headiness. At dawn, the dew cooled the lush land where the children played happily. The forest abounded with kangaroos, wallabies, iguanas and a multitude of birds, nature was generous and life here progressed quietly and lazily as the great river flowed quickly passed. The Seasons, with unchanging ritual, followed one another endlessly and you knew it was coming after the big hot rainy season. The young Kakadoora loved watching the rain fall. With deep respect, as he had been taught by the old wise men, he looked at the big drops that sank into the parched ground, creeping into cracks caused by long months of hot weather to quench the thirst of the land. He saw the sky fill with water and drink it thirstily. Everything became a fantastic holiday, the whole of nature was nourished, filled with water, it filled itself up with life. And after the rains, with the ground now quenched, it prepared to give birth to new gifts, the head of the elders called the others to a meeting in celebration of the starry sky. The elders, wearing white marks that revealed their condition, painted on their skin, formed a silent circle and contemplated. In doing this, they appealed to all their mental energy to join the cosmic forces. Nothing must disturb the arrival of the spirits. Their presence was manifested with an almost imperceptible breeze, a slight hiss in the air and foliage. In response to this sign from nature, the elders seemed to be reborn. Once, during one of these celebrations, something happened that Kakadoora could not explain. The dry season was coming to an end but the rains were late in arriving. A month passed, then two, then three but not a single drop of water fell. It had happened in the past, the elders knew this, and it was a test that mother earth subjected them to. The elders invoked the spirits but they seemed deaf to their prayers. Faced with this uncertainty, fear invaded the entire tribe. It was dark anxiety that generated violence and hatred. Then the leader of the elders spoke. He said: *Do not get overwhelmed, drive away the bad feelings from your lives. We accept these tests with confidence. Do not awaken the demons, otherwise the darkness will invade us for eternity.* - All listened in silence, thinking that what the old man had said must certainly have an element of truth. But a young warrior

stood up and shouted arrogantly: *These words are just lies. The elders do not dare confess their inability to get us out of this hell. The spirits claim blood, let's kill ten kangaroos caught in the area of Uluru, spill their blood and offer the meat to the spirits of heaven and earth, and in three days and three nights, the sky will bless us and the rains will return. Have confidence in me.* - But Uluru was a sacred mountain where hunting was banned. Naturally, this was pointed out to them by the wise old men of the tribe. To no avail. Indeed, the wise men were driven out by the crowd now enthralled by the seed of violence. That night, the group that advanced up the sacred mountain, was a wild, uncontrollable crowd. The kangaroos were hunted and killed. Then they were shredded and buried. The wise old men pleaded with the Spirits but they knew it was too late. The sacred land had tasted the poison of spilled blood. However, a miracle happened: after a week it started to rain. Alone, sitting in the doorway of the hut, Kakadoora watched the rain fall. But this time, this event did not fill his heart with joy. On the contrary, there was a feeling of strange and painful melancholy that chilled his whole being. But the rest of the tribe cheered. Men, women and children danced in the rain, rolling about in the mud. The elders were ridiculed by those who had honoured them only a few days before. It rained for many months. But after three months it still continued to rain, it was always raining.

One night, men, women and children woke with a start. The water had filled the valley, and men, women and children were carried away by the rushing waters and then bitten by crocodiles who carried them to the bottom. In the fury of nature, the red, full moon made this vision of horror even more dramatic. Suddenly, everything calmed quietly, the river subsided, it returned to its bed. - *Who is to blame for all this?* - The people shouted. Then the young warrior usually followed by a group of young hunters went to the middle of the village, and said: *It is the fault of the white man who came to destroy the land of dream. The land thirsts for the blood of the white man.* - There was a moment of silence as heavy as a rock. Then, suddenly, a demonic voice rang out in the night: the young warriors, armed with spears, faces covered with signs of war, ran to the house of white settlers, mother, father and two children, who lived near the sea. In vain, the wise men who tried to stop them, were beaten and reduced to near death. What happened next, I prefer not to tell you, suffice to know that the four poor inhabitants of the farmhouse ended up like the ten kangaroos. So the young warriors returned to the tribe with the objects and clothes that they had raided. They returned to their tribe and in the morning the young warrior said: *Behold, the rains have ceased. The Spirits have accepted our offers, the Spirits have heard.* - And indeed the sun was shining again. Soon after many white men came riding their strange animals. When they saw the clothes and other items that the warriors had raided from the white settlers, they surrounded them and began to thunder with their weapons. Nearly the whole tribe was killed. Those who managed to escape fled to the interior to less accessible areas. Then time passed. A year or maybe two. There followed a quiet time. In Kakadoora, however, nature seemed less generous, its fruits less tasty. The vegetation around it was thick and dense. The rays of the sun, even in the hottest periods, could not penetrate through the dark foliage and between the intertwined thorn bushes. Slowly and in small groups, the survivors of the tribe returned to their land and they noticed that where their dead were buried a greenish mould had spread that gradually took possession of the clearing. From the polluted land rose foul stinking fumes as if all the sins and all the evils of the earth had been dumped there, in that cursed place. More time passed and the people forgot. But not the spirits: they had all eternity in front of them. And Kakadoora knew. Since then, much time had passed, many years had passed and Kakadoora was over a hundred years old. Sitting on the threshold of his hut he was trying to remember the time spent when the children laughed quietly and in which purity, innocence and love were the lifeblood of the earth itself. And he knew that the spirits

slowly continued to collect their revenge.

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In a forest whose name I do not know, that can be found in that green island which lies south of Australia, Tasmania, there lived a family of foxes. Father, mother and a rowdy brood of little foxes that crawled everywhere. Among them, Yari Tary, a young fox stood out because of two very special characteristics: it was all black and had a form of curiosity that sometimes even bordered on recklessness. Yes, I know, that the little ones are all pretty curious about the things around them, but Yari Tary was in a way that even worried his parents a little. His brothers and sisters were also curious enough, but their curiosity was mainly about discovering new places and getting something to eat.

Whereas, Yari Tary was curious about everything: the fish that swam, the worms that wriggled in and out of the ground, snakes that slithered, the opossums that climbed trees and the birds that flew. To tell the truth, these were the ones that most aroused his curiosity. In fact, he had learned to swim. At least a little. He had learned to dig to go underground and to climb trees, but flying remained a true mystery for him.

After he had observed how birds were made he noticed that instead of the front legs they had two wings, so one day he decided to build himself a pair of wings. He did so by applying to his soft and yielding fur rush mats and bamboo sticks. As soon as he had fixed them to his back he threw himself off a cliff ... and fell to the ground. But he did not give up, indeed, after every trial he would build better wings, risking his life to test them. As time went on, his skin began to stretch adapting to the bamboo sticks fixed to his back creating a kind of parachute. Yari Tary slowly learned to glide, throwing himself from the top of tall trees, to be lulled by the wind and land gently in very distant places. Yari Tary, however, was not selfish and he even began to teach his brothers and sisters how to fly. They also learned this strange flying by jumping from the top of trees. One day, an eagle that was flying over the group of Yari Tary and his students, saw them and said jokingly: *You're beginners! You'll never fly as high and as fast as me! The foxes were born to walk on the ground, not to fly.* - It flew off at great speed. The words of the eagle profoundly discouraged the young foxes, who thought that the bird of prey was right in saying that foxes were born to stand with their feet on the ground. - *Do not be put off* - Yari Tary said - *The true essence of flight is not height, nor speed, but attitude and the joy we feel in achieving this.* - The young foxes also realized that their curious little brother was right and that, in life, you should never ask too much because even curiosity must have its limits. And so the young foxes continued in their funny flight, more enthusiastic than ever about their discovery, transmitting even to the youngest what they had learned. And it is for this reason that in Tasmania, even today, there are foxes, which the locals call the Flying Fox.

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At the dawn of creation there were only two seasons: spring and autumn. That was how the supreme creator Baïame had established things. During the spring, the plants bloomed and grew fruits and reached their maximum development. During the fall, they returned to hibernation waiting for the next spring. You have to understand that with a climate like that everyone was happy: plants, animals and humans. And even the Gods who attended the continuous cycle of nature filling their spirit of all the beauties. But not all the Gods felt this way. There was the spirit of envy who resented the cycle of nature and was plotting for something sinister to subvert it. Thus, once when the great creative spirit was resting, he stretched out his hand over the gray earth and sent down on it a layer of frost. The animals and the men began to shiver and seek shelter. Many plants

died. Out of the sky began to fall an impalpable, cold substance that settled on the land and on things, cooling them. It was the snow that the bitter cold turned into ice. The animals did not find anything to eat and humans also went hungry. You see, until the day before they could find fruit at will anywhere and now there was snow covering everything that had killed many plants.

Humans, who had not had any reason to make provisions, suddenly found themselves with nothing to put in their mouths. The strongest, could still dig with their hands or with improvised tools, in the snow to find something. But for the old, there was nothing to be done. Even when the adults succeeded to find something to eat, they thought first of their children, the old could only hope to receive a few morsels. The old Wooruwooru had always been a sad person. You know one of those old, wise men who are part of certain tribes that always manage to foresee everything. He had always said that mankind should, however, learn how to stock supplies for future use because something could always happen. And in any case, it was good practice to economise. Besides, he had noticed that certain fruits, when dried, they tasted even better. So it was good to keep them. But the women and the men of his tribe had not ever wanted to listen to him. – *Why preserve fruit when you could have the fresh one?* - And so now his tribe went hungry. Meanwhile, the cold became more rigid and continued to claim its victims. Wooruwooru watched and became sadder and sadder.

In the cave, where his tribe had found shelter, the men always kept a fire that mitigated a little the cold outside. But, especially younger children, they began to get sick. Among them there was a little girl with big blue eyes named Nahanalan and when Wooruwooru told his stories, she was always looking at him in amazement, but also very concerned by what he said. He always did this before the arrival of cold weather around the evening campfires in the great prairies as he did it now around the fire in the cave. But Wooruwooru did not have enough tales to feed all those children. Wooruwooru was also hungry and could hardly stand from the pain in his stomach.

In the past he looked sad, now his sadness flowed from his whole being: from his eyes, mouth and movements. It got to the point where the men could no longer find anything at all to eat, and the tribe was in danger of dying. Then the miracle happened. While everyone was complaining around the fire, the small Nahanalan got up, went to the back of the cave and returned with a skin full of strange, wrinkled things. They were dried fruits that she, following the advice of Wooruwooru, had put aside. The child had been the only one to put into practice the teachings of the old Wooruwooru. She came around the fire, took a prune from the skin and offered it to Wooruwooru. At that gesture, the old man who had never smiled, felt moved. His face scarred by a thousand wrinkles of time began to ripple, his eyes became bright and vivid, his bald head rose, and he began to smile. And that was the most beautiful, bright smile that had ever been seen on Earth. In it, there was happiness and the realization that his teachings were not lost. In the small Nahanalan he saw the future of his people but also the future of the world. And his smile became more and more open and warm, so much so that in the end he managed to break the spell of the frost.

The ice melted, the land began to revive and animals, insects and birds filled all creation. And so it happened that the sun, intrigued by all the commotion, looked out of the clouds and started to laugh, realizing what had happened. In his great laugh he began to shine even stronger than before. So it was that Wooruwooru brought back the summer.

The chief of a village had recently remarried a young and beautiful girl in his area. He had a son named Ratunanguru, who was very intelligent and with a great desire to learn. In particular, he had a good attitude towards learning languages. Since his son and his wife did not seem to get along, the father entrusted him to a teacher who would him the languages of all the tribes; at that time there were many in Australia.

After a few years Ratunanguru returned to his father to visit him. One evening while father and son were walking hundreds of birds began to chirp on a tree, producing a deafening sound. - *These damned birds break my eardrums every evening* - the father coving his ears with his hands. And Ratunanguru - *You would not say that if you knew what they are saying!* - The father looked at him in amazement. - *How do you know what the birds are saying? Are you perhaps a soothsayer?* - *No, but the teacher taught me the language of all animals. - But didn't he teach you the tongues of men? Can't you translate all the tribes' languages?* - *No. I know the languages of animals better!* - *Oh, what a disaster! I wanted you to learn the languages of our peoples not those of the beasts!* - The son looked at him a moment, then said - *The tongues of men often do not say what men think. Those of animals, do.* - At that moment they saw a dingo running to meet them. And Ratunanguru - *For example, don't you want me to explain what the dingo is saying?* - *No. Leave me alone! I don't want anything to do with the language of beasts!* - They had come along the moat, and you could hear the frogs. - *That's all we needed now, the frogs!* - The father grumbled. - *Father, I think it would be better if you explained yourself...* - Ratunanguru began. But the father exploded - *Oh, get out, you and the fool who taught you all these idiocies!* - He gave him a shove, knocking him into the ditch. And so Ratunanguru could not explain that, the sparrows, the dingo, and the frogs were warning him against his new wife who not only betrayed him, but also planned to ruin him. The father did not understand anything, but his wife realized that Ratunanguru knew something. Together with her lover, the woman decided to eliminate the boy.

In the morning, Ratunanguru was awakened by a group of men who brought him into the rainforest. Ratunanguru could not even imagine the reason for this trip, but he noticed that the man next to him had sad, swollen eyes. - *Where are we going?* - He asked. - *Why are you so sad?* - But the other was silent. Ratunanguru then began to listen to the sounds of the forest and felt that the kangaroos were whispering among themselves, saying, - *Theirs is a sad journey leading Ratunanguru to death.* - And another answered: - *Yes, it was his stepmother's order.* - *So, you've received the order to kill me?* - Ratunanguru said to those who were escorting him. The men gasped: - *How do you know?* - They asked alarmed. - *I've heard the kangaroos around here speaking about it!* - Ratunanguru said. The men turned white in the face. Ratunanguru was a magician if he could understand animals. He could not be killed. Having figured out what they thought, Ratunanguru told the men. - *Remember that if you kill me, you will never be safe from the wrath of animals!* - At that point, the men said - *No. We will not kill you, but you have to go far away. Otherwise you will create problems for us and for yourself.* - Ratunanguru reassured them and then began to run further and further away from his village.

In the evening he came to the camp of a tribe of the valleys and asked to be admitted. They were all sitting around the fire, when he heard the lyre bird singing. Ratunanguru listened to him, and then said: *Quickly, send all the women and children to bed, you arm yourselves and be on your guard. Tonight men from another tribe will attack you.* - The warriors thought that the young man was crazy. - *But how do you know?* - *Who told you that?* - *I heard it from the lyre bird that is up that tree. If you listen to me, you will be saved.* - The men did not believe him and laughed. But an old man who had

seen many things in his life, said – *It's better to be on guard. You never know.* - So, some of them hid behind hedges and stood guard for the night. In the deep of the night a signal came, then another and another; out of the bushes jumped a group of armed men. But the attacked could not even get close to the huts because they were overwhelmed by the warriors of the valleys.

Ratunanguru received a great feast and all wanted him to stay in their camp, but he took his leave and continued his journey. After a while, he came to an inhabited cave. He was unsure of what to do, when he heard the croaking of frogs in a ditch. They said - *Six years have now gone by since the daughter of this man was taken by the spirits and became sick. To drive them away all they need to do is dip the girl in the ditch-water, but no one does this!* - Ratunanguru looked inside the cave and the two people who were there invited him to dinner. Talking to the man he learned that he, in fact, had a daughter who had been sick for six years, but no sorcerer knew what illness it was, and she was already dying. - *If you want to heal her you must do as I say. Take the girl and dip her in the ditch-water. Then she will be healed* - The farmer was astonished. - *But how do you know these things?* - *I just know, that's all.* - Ratunanguru said. The farmer, though he did not understand, did what was suggested and his daughter was healed. The parents did not know how to compensate for it, but Ratunanguru did not want anything, he took his leave, and went away.

One hot day he found two men who were resting in the shade of a eucalyptus tree. He lay down next to them and asked to keep them company. They began to talk - *Where are you two going?* – *We're going to the great gathering. The Great Leader of all heads has died and a new Great Leader must be elected.* - Meanwhile, some Kookaburras had come to rest on the branches of the eucalyptus trees. - *These birds are also going to the big city.* - Ratunanguru said. - *And how do you know?* - Asked the two men. - *I understand their language.* -Ratunanguru said. He listened, and then continued - *You know they're saying? That one of use three will be elected.* - You should know that, during those times in that area of Australia to elect a leader, a tamed bird was freed and allowed to fly among the gathering of people. The man on whose head the bird rested became the Great Leader. The three arrived to the crowded clearing and slipped among the people. The bird was let loose, flew, and eventually came to rest on the head of Ratunanguru. Amid chants and cheers, he was appointed the Great Leader of all the tribes of that area. At that moment, out of the silence that had overcome the crowd a scream was heard. An old man had fallen to the ground unconscious. The Great Leader ran to help the old man. He recognised his father who had been kicked out of his tribe by his wife and her lover, who had settled in his place. On discovering this, Ratunanguru set off in the direction of his tribe's camp.

The next day, followed by a large pack of dingoes with whom he had spoken at length, they showed up at the clearing where the tribe had stopped. Upon seeing him with all those dingoes, his stepmother and her lover ran away and never came back and Ratunanguru's father was re-instated in his place. And from that day all spoke of Ratunanguru, the leader of leaders that could talk to the animals!

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In the lands of the North, in the Dream Time male twins were born, one was called Love and the other was called Hate. When they were old enough, the boys told the Gods they wanted to go round the world. So two delicious buns were prepared for both of them. One for each of them and after being placed in their bags, they set off. Towards sundown they reached the bank of a stream and there they stopped to rest. The boy called Love was hungry, he pulled out the bun but Hate approached him snatched it

from his hand and devoured it in a flash. To the grievances of Love, Hate said – *Don't worry my brother, when you get hungry, you can eat my bun. Now we have before us two roads, both lead to the hill. I'll go left, you go right: let's see who arrives first.* - And so they did. Love walked his way. Not met his brother but he found himself in a great forest and, try as much as he may, he could not find his way out.

Since he had nothing to eat he looked around and fed on a few hazelnuts, raspberries and blackberries. But his hunger grew. All of a sudden he came close to an anthill; he was determined to eat it, so great was his hunger. But the queen ant, who had guessed his thoughts said: *Don't eat us! Have a little more patience, you've already been so patient. You'll see, you won't regret it.* - Love took pity and continued to move forward.

Yet he was so hungry that he began to feel ill. As he walked he saw a nest of bees in the hollow tree and approached it with the intention of eating it. But the queen guessed his thoughts and said: *Don't it, please. If you eat it won't satisfy your hunger. Be patient a little longer, since you've already been so patient. You'll see, you won't regret it.* - Love let the honeycomb be and went on feeling the hunger pangs more and more intensely. Walking on he saw two storks that were hunting frogs. – *I simply must eat one of these!* - Love said to himself and looked for a piece of wood to kill a stork and then roast it. But the storks must have guessed his thoughts because they shouted from afar: *Spare us and you won't regret it! You have been patient for so long, a little longer won't hurt! Go along this trail and you will come to a beautiful meadow; there you will find a farm where you can have anything you want.* – Love also spared the storks, although he did not believe that anyone could have built a farm right out there, and proceeded along the road that they had indicated to him. Amazingly, after a while he found himself in a prairie. *And what was the first thing he saw?* Hate, his brother, who was tending the flock of sheep of the owner of the farm. When he saw him, he ran toward him shouting: *Thank goodness I've found you, brother! Give me something to eat, for I am dying of hunger!* - Hate rather than give him something to eat, ran away. Grief-stricken, with legs that staggered with weakness, Love crept up to the farm and asked the owner to give him a job so that he could earn enough to buy food.

The master ordered that he be brought food but said that all services had already been assigned; the only remaining job, if he wanted it, was the keeper of geese. Love gladly accepted and, finally, ate and then went to bed. The next morning he took up the position of geese keeper.

The next day Love went with the geese, while his brother Hate grazed sheep. When it was evening, Hate entered the farm and said to his master: *I heard the keeper of geese boast that in a day and a night he was capable of separating all the wheat from the chaff, thread by thread.* - The master sent for the keeper of geese and said: *Boy, you have to do what you claimed, otherwise it will be worse for you.* - *But what am I to do, sir?* - Asked Love - *Whatever did I boast about?* - *You know very well. You said that you could separate all the wheat from the chaff in one night and one day. Now I want to see this done, otherwise woe to you!* -The boy felt desperate, he locked himself in his hut near the fence of the geese and wept until around midnight. It was then that he heard a voice. - *Who is it?* - Asked the boy. - *I am the queen of the ants.* - Once inside, the queen of the ants said: *My boy, I am aware of your misfortune. Go lie down and go to sleep without fear by tomorrow morning all the wheat will have been separated from the chaff.* - Then the queen ant went into the barn where he had gathered all the ants. They were so numerous that for every grain of wheat there were three or four ants. Within hours, the wheat was chosen.

In the morning the master got up, went to look in the barn and saw the miracle. I am

honestly amazed, he praised the boy, though he could not understand how a poor keeper of geese could do things that even he was unable to do. The next night, Hate told the master that the keeper of geese had boasted of being able to transform the farm into a palace covered with wax. Then the master sent for the boy and said: *By morning you must transform the farm into a palace covered with wax!* – You understand for yourselves how the poor boy must have felt. He could not sleep. But around midnight the queen of the bees came to him. She told him not to be sad because she would help him. She ordered all the bees to gather wax and then to coat the walls of the farm. The master, when he saw the wonder, was again very pleased as well as surprised and praised the boy.

A few days later, after thinking up one devilry after the another, Hate showed up again with one more of his lies. He knew that the master had no children but only one daughter, who was now a young girl. Then he told him that Love boasted of being able to go to the spirits and bring forth a child with golden hair, all in one night. The master believed him because he so wanted to have a grandson and had ascertained how many miracles Love had already achieved.

So He called him and said: *By tomorrow I want to find a child in my daughter's bed, next to her. Go get the fairies, do as you wish, as long as it gives me a baby grandson!* – This order left Love somewhat stunned and he did not know what to say. He returned to his hut crying. But around midnight there was a knock on the door and the Emperor stork said: *Weep no more, because the order has been fulfilled. His daughter has a baby on the breast with golden hair: we've just picked him up from the spirits.* - When the master saw the new miracle he allowed Love to marry his daughter and gave him half of his lands and goods, saying that Love had to sit on top of them all. Hate did not take kindly to this because he could not bear to see Love seated in a higher position than him. So he built a high tower of straw, on which he sat. But on the day of the wedding ceremony there was blazing, hot sun and the wax on the house almost all melted finishing right on the tower of straw.

Then, the sun got so hot that it lit the straw and immediately the whole tower was in flames. Hate burned and nothing was found of him not even the ashes which had been blown away by the wind in all directions. Unfortunately, where the ashes fell, they took root. Then they rose again and moved elsewhere. And everywhere they set down they left their mark of Hate. That is why, even today, if you look around you see there is more hatred than love.

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Bunyip would be a strange and mythical animal that, according to the aborigines, lived in Australian rivers. This creature has special properties that enables it to change shape. It could reach the size of a cow, and it would be a species of giant water marsupial. The Aborigines consider him an evil spirit that inhabits the rivers and marshes but also the rainforests where his terrible screams can be heard.

In the Aboriginal folklore of the Bunyip, also known as one of the "*Ancients*", he usually appears as a creature the size of a calf or a small hippopotamus, often with fins instead of legs and a snout that, at times, appears canine. It is sometimes described as being covered with a thick fur or feathers, and in most cases there is the presence of a horse or saurus tail. Sometimes it has also been described as a huge, fluffy, aquatic snake.

His appearances are often different depending on the various testimonies that describe him. In particular, he is identifiable by the length of the neck, which in some cases, is

extraordinarily long and serpentine, and in others it is short and stocky. One of his features is that he appears only at night, uttering a very loud, sharp cry, capable of terrorising and paralysing animals and humans, but generally in our time, this creature would limit himself to only defending his territory.

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This legend is about a brave little bird and his great willpower. In the rain forest of Kakadu, which as you all know, is full of trees and vegetation, there lived a family of colourful birds, as they are often the birds of the tropics. In their brood of children, there was also a small bird. It was the smallest of all and was so little that it was not yet able to fly well. Despite this, the little bird was quite brave. He also had a strong willpower.

One day, the little bird decided to delve into the darkest part of the forest. In the forest, unfortunately, there were also Bunyips, which we have just spoken about. These Bunyips do not let even the light of the sun or the moon penetrate through the trees.

They let the bird enter, but once he was inside their area, they did not allow him to get out any more. The bird knew he was lost. He was afraid of the dark, like all young ones, and of that sense of bleakness that is typical of the woods. In fact, the centre of the forest was dark.

After unsuccessfully trying to find his way out, the bird, exhausted by the fatigue alighted on a branch to rest and fell asleep. When he awoke it was still dark, but he heard a voice telling him that he had to have courage and that if he wanted he could manage to drive away evil spirits. Looking around carefully, he saw an owl poised a little away from him. He, too, had been imprisoned by the spirits. The owl gave him courage and told him that if he used all his willpower he could chase the evil spirits away, in the name of the other animals of the forest.

But how to succeed in this endeavour, since he still did not know how to fly well, and all things considered, the darkness frightened him quite a lot. He was just a poor little bird. But the owl urged him to fly, with all his strength. But the evil spirits were proving increasingly strong for him. Then the bird opened his mind to imagination. He felt a sense of burning inside, a great feeling of security and suddenly the bird spread its wings and flew. It was his willpower to push him forward. The bird began to fly in circles ever wider and more imaginative. At that point, the spirits were forbidden to watch. Then, with one last great dive, the bird came toward them like a lightning bolt, so that the Bunyip became frightened and ran away pursued by the little bird, even beyond the centre of the forest. So it was that the little bird was able to open the doors of light to the dark zone. That brought life and serenity again to the entire forest. With his gesture, the bird was able to give courage to other animals as they took their cue from him. Now that part of the rainforest and its inhabitants had rediscovered serenity and happiness and the evil Bunyip spirits could no longer enter. Courage, willpower and also friendship between the animals, made them stronger than any evil.

Even today, alongside the wind in the forest, there is always a small bird that spreads its wings to fly: occasionally it drops abruptly to perch on a branch, sometimes it falls to the ground but then gets up. If you look at him with eyes of children, you will not see the bird, but inside his little chest you will detect the great courage to fly high in the sky.

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In the mythology of the Gunwingu people, the first man and the first woman who appeared on Earth were called *Wurugag* and *Wara-murungun-gundi*. It was the

woman who created all the languages spoken by the Australian aborigines. The ancestors had created the human race, but also ants, emus, eagles, kangaroos and lizards, snakes and all edible plants. Then, tired from all these efforts, they went back into the earth, from whence they sprang up, and they went back to sleep. In some cases, their spirits became rocks or trees or something else.

These natural elements have become sacred places which can be visited only by initiated men. There are places that have special meanings to all the tribes and every site needs to be *sung* so that it remains alive forever. It is the art of cave paintings that are witness of these *songs* in the history of the Creation and the stories of the People of the Dream that for more than 40,000 years have been walking on Earth through the breath of their *Ancestors*. The aboriginal picks up a handful of earth and says: *The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and our identity. We have no boundaries or fences, we only have spiritual connections between ourselves and the earth because we are the earth as she is part of us.* The earth, therefore, has many different meanings: for a farmer, the land is his gain and his way of life, for a mediator the earth is something to sell for profit, for Aborigines it is part of their cultural heritage. That is why they think that you cannot be owners of the land because it has a strictly spiritual value.

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For Aboriginal people the concept of music is different from ours. Music is the sound of the wind in the branches of the eucalyptus. Music is the sound made by the streams when they flow into the valley and meet the rocks that divide them into many different streams. Music is the song of the lyre bird that can imitate all animals. In short, nature is music. The music of the sea stops on its shore or in the human heart that listens? For Aboriginal people, sound has a very special relationship to physical reality, it penetrates it, in a sense it creates it. For this reason, with sound at the back of our mind, we can also move to astral worlds.

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For an Aboriginal woman, the place where she becomes aware of being pregnant, has great importance because her baby will be a reincarnation of the spirit that animated the point of the earth. The mountains, rivers, stars, water, fire, wind, plants, animals, and everything that exists comprise the original plot generated by their ancestors. The beginning still animates the present. The Time of the dream continues in the spiritual life of men. The creative power of the ancestors is infused in art, in which, it is manifested. The rites retrieve the themes of creation. Every form of art draws from the ancestral order of things. Music and dance are a generative force. Numerous ways have been developed, over time, to recover the meanings of existence. Body painting, personal adornment, bark painting, sculpture and engraving of the rock. All of these things trace the meaning of the earth, men and the relationship with the ancestors. Transmitting artistic heritage, music, songs and ritual dances means to transmit all this, because sounds and music, have the power to bring together people of today with their ancestors and with the forces of nature.

The songs during the ceremonies of the *Corroboree* are constantly accompanied by the hypnotic sound of the didgeridoo and the rhythmic beat of the music sticks. It is a great responsibility which every generation must accept so as not to interrupt the flow of the Dreamtime and of life on earth. Music and dancing bring the events of creation and the power of dreams to the present. This gives men the strength to support existence and prolong life into the future. Some Aboriginal people living in the interior of Australia

still carry on the classical traditions related to the Dreamtime. Others living in the interior of Australia only carry on a summary of the rites, trying to convey to tourists a few fragments of the ancient culture of the Dreamtime. Still others living in the city, continue to play and sing in the streets, even if their sounds are not understood by the hurrying passers-by. But maybe, this nomadic singing, may slowly and finally be understood by everyone, like a seed that is spread.

Water is considered a precious commodity among Australian Aborigines. There are many stories in which the forces of good, bearers of rain, are opposed to those of Evil, the architects of the drought. It is said that in the past, the Arunta tribe, Ilpirra, Kaitish and Unmatjira, who lived in the arid regions to the north and south of Alice Springs, everywhere they stayed they would build the largest hut in the village for the Wizard of Rain.

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Those we call Aborigines prefer to simply be called Indigenous Australians. As I said, this is not a people but a real race that consists of many different people who have different customs and speak languages that are not at all alike. One thing they do have in common is their religious beliefs and spirituality. Although there are several differences between the tribes, the one element that is common to all is: Aborigines believe that everything is born from the earth. Even the sun and the stars were born from the earth. Not as a physical fact, but as a projection of ancestry.

I have given you a brief idea of the spirituality of these people who live in our antipodes, just on the other side of the planet. Today, among the sons of the original British settlers, the other whites of European descent, Asian immigrants and Aboriginal people, there seems to be peace and acceptance. Although it was not always so. I hope that the time of acceptance will soon become the time of understanding. For now I only say: *Atneme Atnyematye*.

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Aussie curiosities

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Aussie is the nickname that is given to Australian things. Just as things that are associated to New Zealand, go by the nickname of Kiwi. Well, I want to tell you about some Aussie curiosities.

Let's start by saying that the interest a country like Australia succeeds to arouse is different depending on the people who go there. What has been dubbed with the name of the new continent, is in fact, a country that, precisely because of its complex national history, it has in itself and in its own multi-ethnic society, a series of contradictions which are not always easy to overcome.

Australia has a history that can refer back a long way; a history which, as I have already told you, connects the people of the Australian aborigines, who inhabited these lands for more than 40,000 years. According to the Aboriginal culture, as we now know, all things were created during that time of mythology that goes by the name of the Dreamtime. At that time, the ancestors gave life to things with their song and would have left traces of their passage on earth through what were called the *trail of the dream*: always the same paths, along which numerous aboriginal tribes moved incessantly on a journey that lasted throughout life.

Perhaps it is to those trails of the dream, that is, to the mystery connected to the concept of a nomadic lifestyle, that reconnects the interest displayed by the western world toward Australia.

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Aborigines have always chosen an alternative life style connected to nature and respect for all life. The journey, or nomadism, whatever term you choose to use, was always for the Aborigines also a time of searching, in the course of their existence. From this point of view, it takes on a symbolic value that is not limited to religious significance or searching for certain truths that are not traceable in sedentary society: it becomes a moment of inner growth, experience and maturity.

Therefore, a spiritual journey, a journey of faith, but above all also a training journey. Today, the negative qualities that have since the past always been associated with travelling societies, have been idealized and re-evaluated by many young Australians, who have transformed them into positive values. And hence, poverty becomes a symbol of nomadic simplicity of customs; not having ties with the homeland is almost a form of asceticism, being always on the road leads to a purification that is achieved by renouncing to the accumulation of material goods, typical of sedentary societies.

The Australian world becomes, in this way, a kind of blank slate on which every truth is still to be written. But I must add that extrapolating only partially the truth of nomadic Aboriginal culture, without also providing an adequate explanation of the mythology, or of the concept of Dreamtime, it is impossible to understand.

And, so, let's talk again about Uluru , the sacred mountain. Entering *Uluru and Kata Tjuta National Park*, where the huge and impressive red monoliths seem to loom large on expanses of sand, means entering a world of mystery and legend. Here are two of the most amazing natural beauties of Australia. Uluru, the immense, mysterious monolith of which we have already spoken, and Kata Tjuta, a complex of 36 sandstone formations grouped together, just 32 miles away. This land is also the home of the Anangu Aboriginal people. Uluru has always enchanted visitors from all over the world and rises up to 348 meters above the ground. It seems incredible, but this is only a third of its entire surface, the rest lies underground. Uluru is the crossroads for the Aboriginal Dreamtime, called in the local Aboriginal language Tjukurpa (Alterjiinga or, according to another of the 200 remaining native languages □□ of Australia). The Dreamtime was the primeval time, in which there was no man but a set of high spiritual Entities, totemic, that lived in the dimensional space now occupied by our planet. They were created by Baiame. Uluru remains a challenge for all lovers of mystery and adventure. The Anangu Aboriginal people, who respect this rock as a mother, say they know many of the answers. You simply need to know how to understand them. It is not easy. However, the Anangu are very courteous. If you want, they will take you on a tour of the immense base of the rock, they will tell you about the myths that concern it, share with you stories of their ancestral culture and show you the animals and wild plants related to their legends.

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A half hour away from Uluru you can find Kata Tjuta, a word that means many heads. It is a series of red rock pinnacles that are dome-shaped, covering an area of □□ 3,500 hectares. Some of them are taller than Uluru by 250 meters, while the highest of all, Mount Olga, even reaches 546 meters. Both Uluru and Kata Tjuta react specifically to the various variations of light at different times of the day, producing magical effects,

amazing, absolutely amazing. They are surrounded only by desert. That red earth that dazzles the eyes and gives the impression of being on Mars.

The outback is so: it is fascinating, but more for what is not there than for what is there. In the outback, of course, there are no ancient ruins. The Aboriginal civilization has not produced any. They never needed these. Its monuments are the natural ones that pop up suddenly in the middle of nowhere, his works of art are those engraved on stone.

Instead, you can admire a landscape that is extraordinarily powerful, made of red earth and rock, with sparse vegetation, Spinifex carpets, silhouettes of eucalyptus and oak trees of the desert; an area inhabited by unique animals and bizarre, flat, arid, unprotected human constructions, sometimes surreal in its monotony, where you can free your gaze to no apparent end, where you can appreciate the distance between yourself and any crowd or traffic, the absence of all pollution and noise.

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As I mentioned, and if you're interested, in the outback you have the chance to get closer to the way of life of some communities, gain a better understanding of the complex system of local beliefs and meet people. The best way to learn about this environment, is in the company of Aborigines. Some communities are opening to carefully selected and motivated tourism, with few people.

Currently, there is a growing number of Aboriginal organizations offering cultural tours in native lands, to introduce those who desire to the aboriginal life-style and traditional belief system, starting with medicine, diet based on the use of seeds, roots, fruits, berries, bulbs, larvae and insects. Of course, only for those who feel they can gain from such an experience.

I believe that few people have been as simple as the Aborigines of Australia. Yet when the British arrived, they were unable to recognize that simplicity. For them, a simple person, for example, was one who went to the church service every Sunday, who did not have much culture, who did not wear too many marks on his body, who ate and drank moderately, and so on. All this has very little or nothing to do with the simplicity of the Aborigines, who did not even know what it meant to go to the Sunday service, drink fermented juices and wear makeup to appear more pleasing. For them, the marks on the body had a spiritual function not decorative. So, as you see, for two different peoples, the word simplicity can have different meanings.

Even today, many Aboriginal people refuse to integrate and live in their reserves that are not like those of the Native Americans but have greater extensions than Switzerland. The sense of vastness, in Australia, can give a sense of emptiness to those of us accustomed to our European cities, when we suddenly find ourselves under those cobalt coloured skies that hurt our eyes. Some time ago, I was in a jeep on my way to Alice Springs. I set off from Adelaide and had no problems with fuel, but I wanted something hot to eat. For more than a couple of hours I had not come across a village and it was with some surprise that, at a certain point, I spotted a guy who went quietly walk along the edge of the road. I asked him where I could find a place to eat. He replied that there was one right at the next intersection. As I could not see anything ahead of me that even looked like the shadow of a house, I asked him if the place was far away. - *No, it's very close* - he answered - *not even twenty miles!* -

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A white man sees an Aboriginal sleeping under a tree. He approaches, shakes him and

asks: *Hey Jack, which way do I go to find a billabong?* (puddle of water) - And the aboriginal - *And how do you know that my name is Jack?* - *Well, I took a guess ...* - The Aboriginal stares at him a moment and then - *Well, and then continue guessing your way to the billabong!* - And goes back to sleep. This too is Australia.

You should know that in Australia, north of Alice Springs, in the heart of the country, there is a community called Utopia. It covers an area of about 2000 square kilometres and is home to about a thousand people who speak the Alyawarre and Anmatyerre languages, who, since 1979, have been granted custody of this area. Many of the residents of Utopia, in fact, come from other areas and, in spite of the distance, continue to be portrayed by the many artists who live in this community. It is a community of artists, like Judy Greenie Ngwarai and Rosie Ngwarai, but also fine craftsmen. These people are dedicated to a strange form of handicrafts: Batik. What is it? I do not know if you have ever seen that Indonesian fabrics with beautiful bright colours, depicting flowers, fish, and other things. Batik is a painting made with a technique that consists of dipping the cloth in successive baths of colour and each time a mask of liquid wax is applied on the areas that you do not want to die. This method of dyeing can be applied on fabric or paper. For paper, the batik techniques create particular colours. The batik paper, for example, is created from a sheet of paper that must be folded in a certain way, and then is dipped in a jar of colour.

There are different techniques of folding, but the main ones are: a triangle to form designs converging at a point (circles, ovals, spirals) and rectangle: to form parallel lines or geometric designs. For fabric, this decorative textile technique makes use of wax, as it is practiced especially in Indonesia, in Java, in southern India, Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia. In common usage, the same term is used to indicate a cut of cloth which is drawn in batik design. In the primitive processing, wax was dripped from a pierced bamboo stick. Well, you should know that, since the end of the seventies, among the Aborigines living in Utopia, the batik technique was encouraged which, though alien to the indigenous tradition, succeeded to foster a commercial outlet.

Essentially, it was the women of the community to engage in this activity, who were inspired for their work by the traditional models of body paintings and the paintings composed of sand and by the rock paintings. Seeing that they had some success, the women of the group were also encouraged to practice painting, which then became part of life in the community thanks to their particular contribution. The women were not professional, but became involved for the first time in the activity of painting, creating paintings of various sizes painted with acrylic colours. While some women simply transferred the established style in batik on to canvas, others immediately realized the possibilities offered by this system, which hitherto had been unknown to them. It made things pretty interesting. One of these women, Emily Kame, was responsible largely for the success and divulgation of the community. In addition to being the most talented artist, Emily was also the oldest of the group and the merits that have been recognized to her agreed well with the social status of elder, and hence more experienced in the facts and mysteries of life. When asked about the meaning of her paintings, Emily replied that they are the *totality of her entirety*, because they offer continuous references to their land, the ancestral mythical creatures that created it, the ceremonies that recall their endeavours and the Dreams that animate it. In short, she succeeded to bring to the original values of her people, the work that she had learned to achieve using the batik system. Soon, the other women in the community reproduced her motives. In brief, what started out as a utopia, as suggested by the name of the community, became a fact that still exists. And, although it has nothing to do with real utopias, it seems to me a very beautiful thing.

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A good part of that nation continent, is horizontally divided in two by the *Dog Fence*, a 5291 km long network which aims to separate the sheep from dingoes in the north to the south. The Dog Fence or Barrier Fence, as it is called, depending on the state it passes through, is the longest man-made barrier. It is 1600 km longer than the Great Wall of China! To preserve its effectiveness, there are men called *Dog Fence Men*, each of which is responsible for about 400 km of barbed wire. When they leave to go to work, their family members know that they will not see each other for at least a week. Men who spend the whole day working in the sun and the night alone under the stars in a sleeping bag near the fire. Something very similar to the cowboys in the Wild West, but also very different. Their work is to primarily check that there are no holes in the barrier, and if there are, to repair them.

The big problem really is not the dingo, but the wombat. And the ants. The wombats are marsupials, as big as a cat or a dog, that dig huge holes under the fence which are then used by the dingoes to pass. Instead, the ants eat the wood stakes, bringing down the fence. The solution that has been adopted against ants is the use of a particular local wood. A timber that must have a very bad taste, given that the ants do not eat it. To deter wombats, on the other hand, men have had to resort to electricity. Still under completion, the electrification of the fence has given great results: in the electrified areas, the number of holes under the fence have gone from 175 to 1 or 2 a week! The fact is that wombats do not seem very intelligent and take a while to understand that it is better to stay away. After an initial shock, you can indeed see them sit and wait for, no one knows what, and perhaps reflect and then they start to dig again a couple of times before leaving. For the dingo, instead, just one shock is sufficient. They are more intelligent. The electricity used comes from the sun through solar panels. Every 20 km there is a station, often contained in an old kerosene fridge, which sends impulses to the fence at intervals of one second.

The *Dog Fence Men*, of which I have spoken, in addition to doing the work that I mentioned, have a great deal to do to keep away the kangaroos, emus and other animals that may damage the fence. In the collective Australian imagination, the fence is something unthinkable, and for many, even useless. But for those who work there, and who often see the dingo that want to pass, they believe in the principle that says: *No fence, no sheep*.

In that far-off country where the majority of the population today is so similar to us from many points of view, since it comes from Europe, you can enjoy a freedom that is hard to imagine anywhere else. Everything is easier. You do not form long queues at the counters, for example, because you can get almost anything by a simple phone call, or on the Internet. Social assistance, just to give you an idea, is much higher than ours. Disabled people can go by taxi at a hugely reduced fee. Single mothers have significant contributions, and even a home for free, on many occasions, and so on. The fact is that Australia is a country rich in raw materials. There is everything: iron, coal, gold, silver, manganese, uranium, oil. Everything. And the mines are often very open: you do not need to go underground. To collect the coal, bulldozers are sufficient. And maybe, as they dig coal, accidentally they also find some important natural gas field!

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As a final curiosity, I would like to speak about: a short distance from Australia but still in the continent of Oceania, there is a part of Europe where the currency is the euro. It is New Caledonia, a part of France (not so small) connected daily with Paris. It is not a

colony or a dominion: it is France!

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VI – From northeast to southwest, more or less along the coast

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So far, I have described the country primarily through impressions borrowed from the culture of Aborigines. I found it useful because young Australians, are especially affected by that cultural environment. It does not matter whether this is a conscious or unconscious consequence. It is what is happening.

After looking at this land from the view of the short story that I have given based on the knowledge and myths of the natives, I wish to offer a summary of a trip I undertook in a camper, from northern Queensland to southern Victoria, along the southern coast of Australia, ending up in Perth. Half of the circumnavigation of the great continent. And this time, I'll do this through disenchanted eyes, which, at least in my view, is just as useful in understanding Australia: the eyes of a Roman Empire that carry with them the history and experience of its ancient land, to understand this new -old continent. Compared to Europe, in Australia, the landscape is totally different. For example, it is not easy to find rock formations on the sea. The people, for example, have a form of kindness that I have rarely found in other places. I also noticed a lot of respect for nature, in the new generations. And then strange things happen that we would make Europeans laugh. If you take a bus in a small town in the north, like Cairns, do not be surprised if, when you come to the end of the run, the driver gets off with a broom and sweeps the bus, before picking up new passengers. Cairns is a town in the north of Queensland, one of the wealthiest states, also for its agricultural production. Being largely in the tropical zone, there are large-scale productions of coffee and sugar cane, from which is extracted a bad rum that tastes like medicine.

The local markets are very special. There are not many, because now, the malls and shopping centres have also invaded Australia, and especially to the north by the tropical sun, people prefer to hang out in a cool, closed in area rather than in the outdoor heat. But in the malls or shopping centres you do not meet those strange characters who have a stall with no more than ten tropical fruits, from which a white man, with a spiritual look on his face, wishes to sell. An absolutely incredible experience.

The arrival at the airport in Cairns was met with hot, humid and suffocating weather. In any case, I managed to pick up a provident camper. The first disappointment: the *thing* was a bit old-fashioned. However, considering the fact that it was about to rain, I headed to the campsite we had chosen. There was hardly anyone there. I soon realized the reason for this, immediately after the rains began. Water in buckets! Unfortunately, in the evening when shutting the camper, I realized that a piece of the camper door had been repaired with a piece of adhesive paper tape. The kind used by spray painters to mask areas. The soul of Australian precision! I called the toll-free: nothing. Ah yes, tomorrow is Saturday and we must wait until Monday. I had a few days to discover Cairns. Since two decades ago, the town had changed a lot. The half-savage aspects had almost disappeared. The waterfront had been transformed into a long wooden walkway that ended in a *lagoon*: a shallow pool (public) full of people. Many are Aboriginal. Everywhere, there were people walking, bathing, cooking something on the grill, free of charge. I found this to be a great novelty: Australia-wide, everywhere I went, I found gas BBQ, free of charge, consisting of a large steel plate with a central hole to drain off the fat. I have always made great use of these facilities. People cook what they

want and then eat on the tables provided. I find this very practical and very civil. And the Aboriginal people adapt. Sitting in a cafe' by the sea, I stared at the water that fell from the sky, while children and adults were bathing. Meanwhile, seated in front of a nice glass of iced cider pulled up my morale. The next day, I got on the longest cable car in the world for a breathtaking view of the Tablelands and surrounding landscape. They had just opened this facility and I noticed that it was very popular indeed.

To get to the Tablelands, however, there is also an old, wonderful train that climbs the mountains, between huge sharp cliffs and amazing waterfalls. And while fascinated you look at the wonder of nature, you are served a glass of champagne! Back down in the city, I went to **Green Island** on a catamaran, a small island on the reef where I got a strange *cappachino* (cappuccino). The place is nice and you can eat prawns that are the size of lobsters. There is a really interesting museum with live crocodiles that wag their tails in large puddles. The next day, taking advantage of the discrete weather, by catamaran again, the Ocean Spirit, I sailed out to the middle of the reef, to **Michaelmas Cay**. I seemed to be dreaming: immersing myself with goggles over my eyes, I found I was suspended in a huge tropical aquarium. Fishes of every colour, huge bivalve with a Red Heart, a most impressive flora, just a few feet from me, a nice two-meter cod quietly grazing on algae. They tell me that, no matter what the weather, the sandy lagoon is protected from the wind and the coral is immediately adjacent to the beach. Here the sea turtles are extremely common and you can also see giant trevally, small black tip reef sharks, batfish, and hundreds of varieties of colourful reef fish. Obviously all the tourists are always watched by expert groups from the shore and from the bridge of boats which are used for transportation to those areas, the staff observe everything, always ready to help if necessary. Michaelmas Cay is also very important as a breeding site for many species of birds. The site has been identified as an *Important Bird Area*, as can be seen from the large amount of sooty terns and common noddies nesting here. The surrounding coral reefs have a rich marine fauna, including giant clams. The outer Barrier Reef is littered with many small islands formed of the same coral formations that emerge and slowly, with the wind coming from the mainland, are filled with earth. The bird droppings are sufficient to transform them into fertile flower beds in the middle of the ocean.

Having to get to Melbourne, for me, I every day is important, therefore, fairly angry, on Monday at dawn I took the camper to the Campervan (the name of the company). While they repaired the camper, I asked the manager if that ... was an aboriginal way to repair the car! He did not smile. I then said: *I hope you don't repair the engine using silicon* and I got a dirty look. With the camper repaired (so to speak) I set off again towards the south. In the meantime, I filled the tank with fuel and the camper with beer, wine and various edible things.

Near **Innisfail** is a strange campsite. Jack and Charline live there. Jack is an old man who speaks an incomprehensible English, at least for me, with sing-song sound to accompany it. On one hand he has three fingers and on the other, he has only two. The other missing fingers were eaten by Charline. Charline is a female crocodile, that is almost three meters long which Jack eventually managed to capture in the river that borders his property and holds in a cage to show to those who came to see him. As Jack says, the females will take everything, even your fingers. His farm is very characteristic: full of wallabies that roam freely all over chased by a couple of puppies that want to play with them and controlled by different yawning, sly cats that barely deign to give them a look. There were also Koalas, Jack picks up the wounded from the streets around the campsite and looks after them, so they live in a section of the campsite, full of all kinds of eucalyptus trees. But the animal that made the greatest

impression on me, was a peacock that, when the sun began to set, flew to the top of a tall pole that served as the terminal of the electrical and phone wires: spread its wheel and stayed there, to be admired until the sun had completely set in the glory of that strange red, purple and orange sky.

We started off again and got to **Townsville**. We stopped at the first caravan park we met. The day after we caught the ferry to **Magnetic Island**. A beautiful tropical island. As protection against the square headed jellyfish (the famous stingers) there are thick net barriers, to allow you to swim. The island is what you would imagine: full of young people of all types and all races. A lasting striking impression was the billions of tattoos flaunted by the young people (but not only) visiting the island.

Even Townsville city has changed a great deal since twenty years ago. The presence of thousands of buildings in the suburbs make you understand that this is a place where you seriously work. Again, there is a lagoon (a big pool - salt water lake to ward off sharks, crocodiles and jellyfish). Had great mackerel with potatoes.

We changed caravan park, still in Townsville, but we only two days left, and then it's off to **Mackay**. I had a good nose in the choosing the place: the **Buchasia** caravan park (I had booked for five days via internet) it is small but right on the sea front. On the beach there are a series of bottles of vinegar, if one is stung by a box head jellyfish, the first thing to do is sprinkle the burn with vinegar.

Like many other caravan parks, this also has a small swimming pool to cool off. The strange thing is that those who frequent the caravan park returning from work, jump into the pool fully clothed! Maybe with a beer in their hands. In fact, because of the type of work and the shortage in housing, many workers are not permanent, they settle in these campsites, to live for several months.

On this trip, I made another remarkable discovery: English is not a language but an opinion. It is written in a way that you cannot possibly know how it is read. There are no apparent rules that can possibly apply to everyone, and everyone talks as he wants. Too many words here are different. Not to mention the pronunciation! I give up! But this leads me to make a remark to the point of absurdity: perhaps this is the reason why there are so many wars!! In international politics English is used. Maybe someone says one thing but that other understands something completely different! It is clear that wars can break out under these circumstance. Perhaps things are not quite as I imagine them to be!

Today it is quite warm and the water is 29 degrees. But I like it. It would seem a paradise. Only instead of angels, here, there are mosquitoes! Tiny and deadly: *Sand flies* and they bring on huge bubbles with every sting!

Mackay city also has a public swimming pool that is on three levels: truly exceptional. Of course, it is very popular. These days, however, I am enjoying the wilderness of Buchasia for a couple of days. We are surrounded by birds: ducks, parrots of all colours, never seen birds and possums at night that come to ask for something to eat. They are amazing: big as cats but very fast and silent. I bought them a bag of peanuts that I put in a cardboard box. They liked them. At least it seems. I made new friends: the possums, in fact. If I sit motionless in the darkness at night, someone or something comes tapping with its little paw-nails on my leg ... asking for more peanuts!

Following Buchasia, after miles of nothing, you arrive in the area of **Rockhampton**, a city full of life. The centre is still full of buildings in the *art deco* style. This is particular thru in the centre because Rockhampton is many cities in one. The centres are different and each has its own life. In fact, we stayed in **Yappoon**. I did not even know that there was such a place and instead is a beautiful town, on the sea and the surroundings are very attractive: the caves, the Aboriginal show, the fabulous village of **Byfield** (250 inhabitants), the Koala Sanctuary is rich in natural fauna that beg to get something to eat, several pubs with live music (great fillet steaks!) and even a hairdresser and barber studio (cut for men \$5), where a beautiful girl massaged my head for ten minutes while shampooing!

There is a beautiful bay, but there is always the threat of the infamous jellyfish. Its long coastline is jaw-dropping! On the waterfront the kids run around with an instrument that is no longer used by us: skate board. There are hundreds of them.

And so the camper has another problem: we discover that one of the rear tyres needs to be inflated every day because it loses about 20 psi every 24 hours.

The curious thing is that, here in Queensland, virtually all of them have off-road (4 wheel drive). Undoubtedly, petrol costs half that in Italy (diesel costs more than petrol), but the reason is different. The automobile here is truly a work tool. Many cars are pick-ups with two rows of seats in front and an open rear section, made for carrying things.

After 5 days we leave again. The road never ends. We drive hundreds of miles meeting only sugar cane plantations. Finally, we find a place that seems suitable for a snack.

They have nothing, so I asked for two fried eggs. They bring them to me: they are perfectly circular. I discover that are cooked in small metal rings that make them look like this. Maybe they will be full of flies, but the appearance has been saved!

Later I stopped to stretch my legs again. A police patrol beckons me to move off the roadway. I do not know for what reason but I move. There is no justification for such agitation. The road is clear and there are only a few houses around. Then I realize that one of the houses is approaching. It passes me on a kind of huge chariot. It is a whole house! A villa! They tell me that they do this here: When you are tired of a place, you do not change house, you change the environment. Change the location ... take the house with you!

We leave for **Biloela**. It is towards the centre. The caravan park here, is also full of workers who stay in cabins originally built for tourists. The next morning, at 4:30 they have breakfast because they have to start work at 5.30 because of the heat. Everything has been leased to companies in the coal mining and gas industries. Almost all jobs are in mining. Seeing these mountains of coal is impressive: they are in the open-air and produce hundreds of tons of coal per day. All around are pipelines for gas. I was explained that while digging for coal, natural methane gas was found in great quantity. Now they are putting down a gas pipeline that will lead to the sea where they are building huge compressors (Eni, the Italian company is also present). In short, the extracted gas will be transported by this pipeline, under construction, to an island in front of Gladstone, where it will be compressed and liquefied. Early buyers are: China, Japan and Korea. There is talk of trillions! Hence, the numerous workers. Also because of the higher wages. A truck driver gets \$ 3000 a week, just for driving a tank full of water!

Even in this caravan park there is a nice pool, the bathrooms are separate (one en-suite per camper), there is a place to hang out with a great overhead shelter and a restaurant in the evening, dinner is \$ 20. The exchange rate for one euro, is \$ 1.30. You can take what you want. Steaks, fillets, chicken, vegetables, desserts, soft drinks, ice cream, fruit. But there are no spirits. I always carry my beer with me, which I buy in big boxes.

As I have already noticed, almost all caravan parks in these areas are predominantly occupied by families of workers who come from all over Australia. If there are no cabins (bungalows) available, they rent caravans or campers. Keep in mind that it is never cold here. Many retirees choose this kind of life. It is easier and you do not pay taxes for housing.

Unfortunately, rain is forecast for the next four days. And here more troubles arrive: even in the camper it begins to rain. In short, the door problem, the tyre which loses pressure and now the rain. With a sheet of plastic and duct tape I managed to fix the problem, at least for the moment. The purchase of plastic ponchos for \$ 5 solves other problems as it continues to rain for days. All the roads around here are closed to traffic. We cannot move. The water rises and the only living beings that are happy are the frogs. The poor white parrots are sheltering the best they can. Even under the canopy. It is an indescribable spectacle. The red clay does not absorb enough water and it spills everywhere. The rivers overflow, the valleys are filled, the dams are overflowing.

To console myself, I made a *pasta carbonara* that would blow your mind. A good bottle of Cabernet was used to consecrate it.

Now it has been raining for four days and the streets around are still closed. Someone tries to pass, but if you try with a 4-wheel drive, it is one thing; if you have an old crock

like ours, it is something else. We sent, by email, a note of protest to Campervan Australia. Apologies, they said. In Brisbane we will try to fix it.

After driving round like gypsies (we were sent back on the Bruce Hwy because of flooding) I found a place in a caravan park full of mosquitoes the size of helicopters, **Tannum Sand**. The place here, too, is full of working families with children running around barefoot. In the morning, a van comes to take them to school. We are practically in **Gladstone** harbor ... full of riches. I counted about thirty ships in line waiting to load the large piles of material that are on the wharf. The effect is awesome! You can eat great grilled barramundi (the fish are local), the famous mud crabs (large freshwater crabs), a whole range of exotic tropical fruits such as Jackfruit and you can try the Billy tea with the Damper, which is unleavened bread. Finally, after eight days, we get back on the road to Brisbane.

As is logical, I went to complain to the local office of the Campervan. They changed the tyre and put on another one (I find out later) which loses pressure like the first one did. For the water leaks, a bit of silicone and then ... well, do the best you can! The spare parts are not available. Again, this is Australia!

As for parking in the city centre, in Brisbane, you need to take out a bank loan, so we decided to stay a few miles out and commute by train. The caravan park on the *Peninsula* is essential but we are advantaged. It is located in **Clontarf**, just in front of the sea. Our site is very close to the bathrooms and the kitchen. With electric cookers and all necessary equipment. Very convenient. For a few days the meals were decent. People arrived from all over the world: the French are about to go to New Caledonia, Spanish, Portuguese, German. I chat with everybody showing off my little knowledge of their languages. There is a constant wind that comes from the sea and wipes out the mosquitoes. The place is beautiful, no doubt about it. And it costs even little. In **Southcliffe**, however, people swim in the sea! No fear of the terrible box jellyfish. The train station is not far away but it takes almost an hour to get to **Brisbane**. The capital of Queensland is a spectacle. Describing it is too complicated. The skyscrapers that rise into the clouds, have another eight floors underground. All usable and full of shops and life. Restaurants, monuments, boutiques. Queen street, the heart of the city, is full of everything: ultra tattooed men with goatees, Chicks with micro skirts that provide a glimpse of her panties, operetta characters with hats, T-shirts and hiking boots, and pageantry. Here you can touch the wealth. On the river, you find multi-billion dollar houses, flaunting their own jetties with million dollar yachts.

Even in Southcliffe, the houses have a garden on one side and, on the other, an arm of the sea that comes into the mainland (there are many) where everyone has their own personal pier with billion dollar boats! And the same on **Bribie Island**, which is not far away.

This is something which is not uncommon in Australia. Up here, as well as in Adelaide, many houses are built on canals entering the mainland from the sea. And in these channels, the residents moor their boats, in the home garden. We are not talking of little boats: they range from 11 meters to those that are real ships!

Southbank, instead, the lower part of the City, is yet another showpiece. Swimming pools with sand, open to anyone, with toilet facilities, showers, relaxation rooms ... all free. It is like science fiction to me. It does not seem real. And the Brisbane River (has the same name as the city) catamarans shuttle back and forward between different points on the two banks carrying people. A little like Venice.

After six days we left the capital of Queensland and headed to **Iluka - Yamba**. We stayed only a few days. The caravan park in **Woombah** is located in the forest and there were few people. Only permanent residents. Here there are people who, instead of owning their house, they have a cottage in the caravan park. I do not know exactly what they are charged: about \$ 150 per week, plus electricity. This is also a choice. But it is a choice that many make. They buy a bungalow (called cabin) that are put on the assigned site. They add a caravan. And that becomes home. This is a lifestyle that you can adopt only in this climate. Naturally, it signifies a type of mentality which is very different from ours. Children play barefoot on the grass or dive into the pool, quietly. We're practically on the **Clarence**, an immense river. Indescribable. The last flood caused many problems.

Concerning the rivers and water shortage in Australia, there is one thing to say. During the trip, I have so far seen at least a dozen rivers as large as (or maybe more), than our Po. I have never seen so much fresh water in my life! All these rivers are navigable by sailboat. One feels truly stunned!

A short distance away, we came to the town of **McClean** that is truly unique. Inhabited by descendants of Scots, on every light pole that leads into the town, there is the tartan of a clan drawn on a section with its family name. The country has quite a European feel about it and looks like a movie set. The language, however, is as usual incomprehensible: *Ay - Aia*. They are not cries of pain but the greeting between two people who meet. *Ay* I do not know, but *Aia* I do know. It means: *How are you?* – Abbreviated form: *Aia*.

We continue our way south until the **Hat Head National Park**. Little to say. Much to see. But if you happen to have a sandwich with mud crab inside, you will feel in paradise!

The town revolves around the park and the caravan park, which is very essential and lies between the river and the sea. Here kangaroos are not afraid to be seen. Even a few meters away, they do not seem to be afraid! The water is clear and inviting for a refreshing swim. Unfortunately, given the location in the park, there is no Internet signal. Two days of exploring nearby towns and then we have to move.

You get to **Nelson Bay**, near Newcastle. It is a huge bay full of fjords that creep into the mainland. It is rich in beaches and places where you can have a swim. The caravan park is a five star. It has a beautiful swimming pool surrounded by palm trees, a large kitchen with stoves, ovens, refrigerators. And with lounge chairs and tables with chairs in front of a mega-television screen. Here one can cook properly and so I do not waste the opportunity. All around, there are woods that are suitable for long walks. Last night a Koala delighted us by climbing up a eucalyptus tree.

Port Stephens is a delightful town. You sit in a bar in the harbor and listen to the music that some rock group is performing on the promenade and dine with a beer and a generous portion of fish and chips. What more do you want from life? We go out for a trip in the bay, with magnificent sun shine, dolphins that delight us with their dances right up to the boat. The hostess of the boat shows us a place where we can buy fresh fish. Finally a nice dinner of snapper, prawns and squid. Of course, all cooked by me! Exceptionally tender.

On returning to the caravan park we had a curious surprise: a group of about twenty campers and caravans full of elderly people. They all travelled together! They invaded the kitchen, the living room. All over. This event, of old retirees organized with the

campers and homes-on-wheels, is a unique experience: some sell their homes and everything, they buy a caravan (there are some that are bigger than a house and are driven by a semi-trailer) and drive about. Well, why not - when they are too old to continue the nomadic lifestyle, the state will take care of them. Very controversial, but true.

The following day, after another beautiful evening in Port Stephens we continue to drive south. We arrive in **Penrith**, west of Sydney. Rather pretty town with a river and lake. There are international rowing regattas held here regularly. The kitchen of the caravan park looks like a UNO set up: Korean, Chinese, Japanese ... and us with our seafood spaghetti. The other guests smell the sauce and fresh seafood and they come closer to ask information. I dispense tips and recipes. Tomorrow we are moving on to **Katoumba** in the Blue **Mountains**, 1,050 meters in height. Truly remarkable: it is a little chilly but there are breathtaking views. They look like the Dolomites. We are practically on a plateau that ends abruptly revealing the green valley below and the rock walls of the other surrounding plateaus. The effect is stunning. I take this opportunity to visit the neighbouring villages. All very clean and civil. It looks like an Australian Switzerland. While we were on the move, we decided to take a leap, so to speak, to **Lightning Ridge**. There is a nice Caravan Park, very basic. This area is part of the county of Finch, in Walgett Shire and it is known to be the major mining centre of the world for the extraction of opals (black opals in particular), as well as the fossil record that abounds. It is also known for the properties of its mineral and thermal waters that flow spontaneously from artesian wells. But here, everything revolves around the search and sale of opals. However, they do not give them away!

Sydney is the largest city known all over the Australian continent; the bay of Port Jackson was the landing place for the first Europeans who arrived in 1770 under the command of Captain Cook. A cosmopolitan city that combines the charm of a seaside town to the pulsating, worldly life of technologically advanced metropolis. You can move to all parts of the city with peace of mind. The elevated Metro is modern and amusing; but I prefer the waterways along the **Paramatta**. An evening out at **Darling Harbour** will not be easily forgotten.

We start off again and get to **Canberra**. The capital is made up of many sub-cities that represent the real life of the population. Major roads, however, are dominated by government buildings of all kinds. The museums are interesting, especially what concerns the life of the aborigines before the European invasion, but not much else apart from a nice old man who aboard his boat (electric engine) escorts us go around the lake. Again, this is a unique experience that you can only have in Australia!

In this great country the speed limit on motorways is 90 mph. At one point, on a long straight run, a little because I was distracted, a little because I was fed up with being in a car, a little out of habit, I reached 120 mph. Not even five minutes, and I heard a siren behind me. In the mirror I saw a police car approaching rapidly. The policeman motioned me to pull over and stop. When I got out, I tried to apologize but as I did so, the officer had already put the fine in my hands. Courteous but unyielding: \$ 500 fine. - *Italian? Ah I have many Italian friends. Do You know Joseph Town? It is near here: they are almost all Italian. I love Italy and Italians. You are nice people.* - Then I tried to take advantage: *Well then, since I'm Italian and we are nice, I do not mean any offense, but at least could a little reduction?* - *Already done. According to the laws you would have to pay \$ 1,000 and there would have been the withdrawal of the license. Goodbye and have a good trip.* - At the next town we met I paid the fine. If I had not done so, campervan Australia would have had to pay, and they would have charged it over to us

ending up with at least twice the amount. Now, when I am in Australia, I respect the speed limits, I wear a safety belt and I do not drink. Otherwise, I go by plane, bus or train! It may be a dramatic system, but it avoids many accidents and many deaths. Well then, some might say, why do you not do it in Italy? In part, I do: I never drive through red lights, I slow down at pedestrian crossings, I never exceed the speed limit on state roads. But, just to give you an example, how do you go below the limit of 50 in a city like Milan, Rome or Naples, if all go over 70? Let's face it: if the law is equal for everyone, and if it is always so, then it is easier to respect it. Or am I wrong?

Batemans Bay is a nice place down the road from Wollongong. There are beautiful inland lakes with many pairs of black swans. It is all still pretty natural. And this is another Australia!

And finally, we arrive at the last stop before Melbourne Yarrowonga on Lake Mulwala. The lake is formed by a dam that stops the water of the River Murray and is littered with logs and dead trees, which help to create a ghostly impression. We stopped at a caravan park in the city. The town was full of campers that blocked the beautiful and useful kitchen - dining room. They were always there doing nothing. Luckily we discovered the twin city, Mulwala, and the restaurant *La Porchetta* that, at very affordable prices, provided our meals for two days. The next day's market: very good extra virgin olive oil and exceptional wine. We shopped and set off for Melbourne.

Here was the last surprise of the Camperman Company. The depot for the consignment of the camper is a long way out of the city and, on arrival, there is was no-one to physically collect the camper. The depot was closed and barred. A worker of a company nearby told us that it was quite normal to leave the camper in front of the shop and throw the keys inside the building through the bars of an open window. After checking by phone, we did just that, but we were left without proof of delivery and no reimbursement of expenses incurred.

Anyhow, I do not think they cared much: along the way I saw a sales sign of the same type of campervan for 4000 dollars. Less than we paid for the rent!

Melbourne is a city that is constantly changing. With the construction of **Federation Square**, the city centre (the City) has been joined to **Southgate**, the botanical gardens and the renovated district of **St. Kilda**. There are many things to see but I definitely recommend the Aquarium. It is possible to tour around the centre free of charge on board the **Circle Tram**! And this is another Australia. Having left the camper, we picked up a rented car.

We chose to go along the **Great Ocean Road** to get to **Adelaide**. The scenic south-west coast of Victoria has an amazing variety of natural beauty: the towering waves of **Bells Beach**; the golden beaches of **Lorne**; the intimacy of **Apollo Bay**; the picturesque fishing village of **Port Fairy**; the tranquillity of **Anglesea** and the windswept beaches of the **Shipwreck Coast**. Along the way we saw the famous **12 Apostles**. Pinnacles that rise out of the sea. Now one of them has almost disappeared - eroded away by the deadly Antarctic wind. The apostles are now 11!

The Great Ocean Road, however, is a kind of immense scenic point from which you can also admire the local fauna. At **Warrnambool**, you can see the southern whales during their annual migration; see kangaroos, emus and water birds living in the wild at the **Tower Hill State Game Reserve**; observe koalas in the wild at **Kennett River** and the **Great Otway National Park** and admire the beautiful light show of fireflies at Melba Gully in the **Great Otway** National Park. For a different emotion, take a trip in a canoe

at dawn on **Lake Elizabeth** to see the platypus.

Adelaide is a charming city that offers remarkable insights. I slept in a Victorian hotel equipped with a bathroom of the same era. In every sense. But the beautiful houses on the canals of the interior, with boats moored in front of the houses, quite fascinated me! Similar to Brisbane.

The surroundings of Adelaide deserve a special visit. I would like to indicate a few places worth visiting. One is **Coober Pedy**, which is half way between Adelaide and Alice Springs. Why is special about Coober Pedy? Australia produces 95% of the opals in the world and 99% of all black opals. Well, Coober Pedy in South Australia is known as the white opal capital in the world. Its population is made up of more than 40 different nationalities and, because of the climate, more than 50% of the population lives underground. It is an interesting experience to stay in a hotel of this incredible underground city in Australia, unique in the world. There, you can buy (or even find) the most beautiful opals in the world. The aborigines call it the stone of the rainbow. Opal is one of the most incredible works of nature and is ranked among the five most valuable gemstones in the world. The value of the stone depends on the purity and brilliance of colour. If *Lightning Ridge*, New South Wales is the capital of the beautiful black opal, Coober Pedy, as I said, is leader in mining the wonderful white opal.

Another place to visit, for different reasons, is Kangaroo Island. Here the flora and fauna thrive undisturbed and on your walks on the beach, you will come across sleepy seals and adorable penguins. And, of course, kangaroos. Otherwise, why would the island be called so?

We left Adelaide, which was covered with gray clouds and threatening rain, and we started to climb the Flerieu peninsula before heading west. We went through the Barossa Valley, praised as the area in which the best wines of Australia are produced. I can guarantee that this is so. But they are terribly expensive!

After several miles, we came to Whyalla, a town on the Gulf of Spencer. There are many industries and the whole area is intended for military training! We decide to stop here and after a nice, but frugal, dinner we went to sleep. Suddenly, we were woken by large explosions: they were not fireworks, they were military exercises with guns! This continued late into the night.

Streaky Bay is a small seaside town, nice for its calm and tranquillity. Four X beer, restores my spirit. In the evening we finally arrived in **Ceduna**: last town before Western Australia. This area is called the *Nullarbor*. The term derives from the Latin "no tree" although the Australians insist on pronouncing it "*nalabo*." Obviously, I do not have to explain why it is called so, right? We stop to sleep in a strange place with houses made of rough tree trunks. The bed is a little more than a mattress, but everything is very clean. Too bad, waking at night as I often do, I realized that on the floor bugs and "roaches" of all kinds roamed around undisturbed, not very reassuring. In the morning they were gone! Luckily the light of dawn did not take long to illuminate the sky. When I came out of the house, at dawn, I was greeted by an amazing sight: a magical mist framed hundreds of herons that were perched quietly on one leg waiting, like me, for the sunrise.

We crossed the longest straight stretch of Australia: 146.6 km without even a curve. They tell me that in this straight stretch they carry out testing of special types of motor vehicles and engines. And here we finally arrived at the border, the cute Border Village, with a sculpture of a giant kangaroo with a can in its paw. This is where Western

Australia begins. The first town you come to is **Eucla**: the guide does not really praise it much however, it is definitely worth a visit, especially the small national park near the town and its beautiful white sand dunes. In the evening, **Ceduna** welcomes us with a deafening chatter of mysterious birds that can be seen just on the bushes surrounding the B & B. I am too tired and fall into a deep sleep visited by the mysterious creatures of the Dream time. I think I'm becoming a "Combo" too!

From **Ceduna** there are 1500 km of nothing, but in the early morning freshness travelling is easier. After a while, we decided to stop at **Head of Bight**, a small bay where the whales come to breed from June to October. The show is unbelievable. We proceeded along the *Twilight Beach Road* through *West Beach*, *Chapman's Point*, *Blue Haven Beach*, *Salmon Beach*, *Fourth Beach* and *Twilight Beach*. Velvety white beaches, granite cliffs and the ocean that changes colour from aquamarine along the shore to the deep blue of the water surrounding the islands of the *Recherche*. The sand dunes, blown by the wind known as the "*Esperance Doctor*", reaching more than 50 meters high. **Esperance** is also the gateway to *Cape Le Grand National Park*, the *Stokes National Park* and *Cape Arid National Park*. From here you can easily reach *Middle Island*. Its characteristic is to own a "pink" lake. To tell you the truth, Western Australia is home to many "pink lakes." This one in Middle Island is *Lake Hillier* and, if seen from above, looks like a big pink bubble gum. The lake is 600 meters long and is surrounded by dense vegetation. A thin strip of sand covered with vegetation separates the pink lake from the deep blue of the Southern Ocean. No one is able to explain why the waters of the lake have such a particular colour. Scientists believe that the colour is due to the bacteria present in the salt crust of the lake. The memory of the pink lake of Middle Island dates back to the journals of the explorer Matthew Flinders written in 1802. Flinder climbed to the highest peak of the island, now known as "*Flinders Peak*", to admire the surrounding waters of Middle Island when he saw this lovely lake. To get to see the islands and the rich wildlife of the archipelago Recherche just take one of the cruises departing from **Esperance**. The *Pink Lake*, located seven kilometres from the town of Esperance, is just one of the pink lakes nestled in one of the most beautiful coastal scenery in Australia.

The following night we stopped in **Albany**: typical gray sky. The place is nice. Beautiful Gulf and the King George Sound. Great welcome and you can even cook. Tonight penne with salmon!

In the morning, after the classic coffee, we're back on the road. We drove along the scenic road that goes follows the coast, meeting hills and forests. Near **Denmark**, on the Wilson Inlet with Mount Shadforth in the distance, we stopped to eat a sumptuous steak with classic steamed cooked vegetables and a beautiful basket of fries. I realize that after eating so many potato chips (french fries) you can grow into the shape of a ball. But the rest of the vegetables, here, are rather disgusting! The centre of the picturesque town is very quiet and no traffic lights, but artistically open. Here also the telegraph poles are rich in creativity!

We continued to rise towards **Bunbury**. And then **Mandurah**. For a few dollars you can make a binge of Fish and chips on board one of the boats that will take you to see dolphins, with a short but scenic cruise. The journey continues through beautiful places like **Greens Pools** and **Entrecasteaux National Park** where you will find a beautiful beach, where, approximately every 10 years due to erosion of the sand, you can see the wreck of a Norwegian ship. Not having the possibility to wait that long, I took the road to get to **Fremantle**.

The town capture you with its landscape and its architecture. This area is adjacent to

Beelair, which is the Aboriginal region of *Whadjuk*, a place of ancestral ceremonies of the ancient people. It is said that the mouth of the *Swan River* is the place where *Wagyl* fought the spirit crocodile, defeated him and used his tail (the crocodile) to divide fresh water from salt water. Stopping in the historic port of Fremantle is almost equivalent to taking part in a fantastic party. In this city you can eat along ancient streets, of historic and cultural heritage populated by street artists, or along winding streets that are home to art galleries. The restaurants and cafes along Fishing Boat Harbour are ideal places to sample the famous seafood of Fremantle. But there are even restaurants that include pizza and pasta on the menu and that testify to the strong presence of the Italian community in the city. To enjoy fresh produce, do not miss the weekend markets, where street artists perform alongside vendors and stalls of colourful fruit and vegetables.

Fremantle is the port city dating back to the nineteenth century which is best preserved in the world. Its streets tell stories of prisoners, heroes of the sea, murdering mutineers and pioneers. It is nice to discover the city life before the European settlement along the Manjaree Heritage Trail. You can discover the ancient oral traditions while you go from Cantonment Hill, where the spirit of the dingo still dwells, passing other important places for the Nyoongar people.

And finally we get to **Perth**, the capital of the immense state of Western Australia.

It is an incredibly rich city that overlooks the ocean. The ninth city on the list of the most lovable cities in the world, the capital of Western Australia is literally exploding. Its inhabitants, in fact, have the highest standard of living of all the five major cities of Australia. As if that were not enough, in contrast with the rest of the country, the city is experiencing a new era of great prosperity.

If you have a little time, it is also good to visit **Rottneest Island**, a short ferry ride from Perth and light years away from city life. Known by the local Aboriginal people as *Wadjemup*, the island has an important spiritual significance for Aboriginal communities. The Australian desert between Western Australia and the Northern Territory (there are several deserts in Australia), consists of a vast plain of more than ten thousand miles without mountains, no hills, no higher plain. The only projection of land for miles and miles is the famous Ayers Rock, or Uluru, of which we have spoken.

I conclude by making a brief tourist reference to the **Tiwi Islands**. This is an archipelago, located in the northern part of Australia, between the Arafura Sea to the north, the Sea of Timor and the Coburg Peninsula in the west. It consists of two main islands, **Melville Island** and **Bathurst Island**, plus many others. Homeland of the Tiwi Aboriginal ethnic group, Tiwi Islands can only be accessed through organized tours with an Aboriginal guide and you need to obtain a permit. The inhabitants of these islands are one of the few people in the world to have never exercised agriculture and stockbreeding. But above all, who do not know any form of land tenure, because conceptually, the Tiwi people, as all the ancient aborigines, do not conceive of the concept of "land ownership". The islands enjoy lush tropical vegetation, exotic birds, crocodiles, koalas, kangaroos and brumby horses that live in the wild. And more: bush orchids, the vast rainforests and billabongs where pink and blue water lilies are reflected in the water. Unfortunately, the Tiwi Islands offer few tourist facilities. There is no car rental available and there are few places to stay, with the exception of a few remote fishermen's houses. The Tiwi Islands are famous for excellent fishing, so you can stay in one of the houses of fishermen or join a deep sea fishing expedition.

Here our ideal trip ends. It has been three months since we left Cairns but it feels like

we have stayed for a millennium. We met people of all races and in all conditions and we have travelled 8000 km. On a map, you can see the road we travelled, and considering that Australia is larger than Europe, you can get a good idea of its size.