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Rakunydhirri Wangalkal (Deadly Tempest)

The sun is blotted out of the sky - look there - a lethal mist spreads across the earth.

THIS STORY DOES NOT BEGIN AT BURRALKU. It is the story of our time, not of time's beginning. It is a story of the latest invasion. Despite calamity after calamity, there might still be hope... I tell you this story from the uncreated conscience of the soul. I tell you to escape nationality, language and religion. I tell you so that you can escape from the prison and the stilted mind. I tell you so that you too can learn to feel and start again. I speak gently and humbly to those who have been visited by the sweeping cycle of death and destruction. I ask for forgiveness so that we might restore some magic and light back into this dark world.

Who am I? Ha! My name is unimportant, for I have many names. I am one of the *daoine sidhe* - little people of the hills. I come from Éire. Of me, nothing is material. I am the guardian of the hearth and home. A light was kept for me constantly burning by devoted nuns for a thousand years until a time came when men knew better and homes became houses and land became nothing more than soil. I am a spirit being. You can see and feel me. I am with you always. I am a stag of seven tines, a flood across a plain, a wind on a deep lake, a tear the sun lets fall, a thorn beneath the nail, a wizard that sets the cool head aflame with smoke, a spear that rears for blood, a salmon in a pool, a lure from paradise, a hill where poets walk, a boar ruthless and red, a breaker threatening doom, a tide that drags to death, an infant that peeps down from the unhewn dolmen arch, a womb of every holt, a blaze on every hill, the queen of every hive, the shield for every head and the grave of every hope! I was conceived as a thought from the mind of the world. I live with owls and snakes. I play in olive trees.

I counsel generals. I am your divine intelligence. I guide the hand of painters and weavers. I am the muse that whispers in

your ear. I am the dream of a child who struggles to tell. I am older than the piper's stones.

We 'little people' are greatly feared by those who came to invade our ancient lands. For thousands of years we repelled fierce warriors with our magic and song. This was a time before the written word and the civilised mind. There were many lands and disconnected kingdoms and cultures. But even we magical beings of Éire had no inkling of the myriad spirits, lives and civilisations far beyond our shores. We were but youngsters compared to them but yes, we were all too familiar with invasions and death.

There is more to who we are. The ringing bells for the 7am mass call us to prayer. They ring loud and long to attract strangers, sinners and vagrants who have lost their way.

Time and space are nothing to us. Our ancient lands and kingdoms are under mountains, lakes and even under the sea. We appear and disappear in your world. When we are at play, very sensitive boys and girls and old men and women can sometimes feel our presence. We may appear as a breeze in trees and leaves. I think you know that we can fly! When we fly, time and space shifts. We can take our friends with us, but our greatest power is to *place thoughts in minds* even through the words on this page. You are flying with me now. You see us all the time but rarely do you recognise what you are seeing.

Birds and animals know better. When you hear dogs barking at night, seemingly at nothing, there is usually some faery flitting about. It is natural for us to change and shift and transmogrify. We just turn our minds and we are they and they are us. We feel and experience nature in the same way as the creatures we become. If you look very closely you will see us. Perhaps an animal will be noticeably larger... or perhaps it will have a little shimmer of light around it. These are the clues. Like birds and animals, we can sense when great changes are occurring.

You know that animals can sense a storm or an earthquake or a great wave hitting the shore before it happens? We faeries had these feelings of trepidation in that year without a summer when the sun did not shine and plants did not grow. Dry fog

hung over the land. Potatoes rotted, wheat and oats shrivelled. There were strange murmurings across Éire. The people were soon starving. Old men and women looked to the heavens, crossed themselves and asked themselves what was awry. Something far beyond our world had changed. Something deep within our world had also changed. Men were altering the flow of waters in the countryside, smoke and steam were creating new powers. Burning coal vomited smoke and absorbed the hands and bodies of small children. It was one of those times where it is hard to understand what was going on. We were travelling far and wide, alert to new vibrations, trying to understand why the life-giving power of the sun had left us. A lone machine travelled across the maze, a hare ran out alarmed, shocked and fearful. It was a new age, a time of crowds when people fell by the wayside.

THE FOG THAT ENGULFED THE WORLD was something different from that friendly old man who hugged rivers and fell and rose in valleys and the crevices of mountains. This was a fog of despair, death, depression and desolation. This was a time of horrors and chills when the dead walked the earth. We prayed each day for the ancient winds to blow away the gloom. We prayed to the hero of the deep wood, dim seas and dishevelled stars.

I was drawn upwards to the sky seeking clear air. I wanted to be with the wind and to direct it downwards. In the gloom, I lost track of myself. I lost track of time. Was I flying for days or weeks? I was calm, serene, lost in my thoughts, and quite literally lost. I was searching, searching... but for what?

The grey winds, the cold winds are blowing

Where I go.

I hear the voice of many waters,

Far below.

All day, all night, I hear them flowing

To and fro.²

I had this instinct to fly higher. I wanted to get above the fog that covered the land day-in and day-out. Something drove me

on. Higher and higher I flew. I was too delicate and I called on all my energy. In my mind, I became *jiir*, I felt the power of the wings take over my being. Now I could fly as high and as far as I wanted.

As day turned into night and night into day, I flew ever higher. But there was no clarity in the air. How I longed for the rays of the sun! How I longed to see the stars in the sky but there was nothing except grey. It was like flying in a great soup. I had no concept of north or south or east or west or even up or down.

No wonder the crops would not grow. No wonder feelings of gloom took over the people's spirits. My mind turned to the earth where it had rained incessantly for over 100 days. People left the countryside for the cities tramping over muddy roads. They were looking for work, looking for food, looking for a dry place to sleep.

What was causing this chaos? Had the sun left the sky? Was the earth twisting on some new orbit moving out into an unknown galaxy? Who had upset the forces of nature?

As time went on I had this feeling that something over the far horizon was clogging up the sun. It gave me an instinct to fly even higher. I needed to see. I felt the air thinning. My feathers and down allowed me to endure the cold and I flew ever upward. There were tiny sheaths of ice forming around my breast but I had to go farther.

I don't know how long it was but suddenly the atmosphere became clearer. I was miles above the earth gliding through air currents that came from space. A silver trail of dust particles followed me. I saw the heaventree of stars with humid night-blue fruit and found here the wandering island of winds.

It was in this refined air above the world that images that had entranced the world came to me. I was a ball of confusion. Some things were familiar and others were strange. I saw the young Daedalus reading the covers of books at Wetherby Road. He was devouring knowledge in the great house with Corinthian columns, that grand house with its sweeping orchards, there for an instant then demolished for flats and subdivided into little boxes for crazy ants. His vibrations

moved forwards and backwards. He was the scholarship boy seemingly from nowhere and yet, through him, ancestors began to sing and a great and true dynasty was to begin. The cousins were there. Baby tookoo jumping from the train at Carwarp. Easter, the incense of the Red Cliffs church and the glorious cousins Jill and Ginny riding horses; Jo dreaming and being chased by boys; Melanie, even then, pondering the Middle East; Matt studying Red Fin and knowing early that these questions of earth were beyond the farm and that other futures would emerge. The great man Uncle Bill loading bags of grain and marking sheep in the Mallee heat. Past and future which was which? I was so high I could feel the ancient gods. I could sense another journey of ancestors and spirits beginning. I could sense Djanda on the sands. I saw the lost warrior, master of exploits and pain. I remember how I guided him home. His spirit revived me. I heard his words... "brothers in hardship, we can't tell east from west, the dawn from the dusk, not where the sun that lights our lives goes under the earth and where it rises. We must think of a plan at once, some cunning stroke."³ I had found my way before. What a blessed relief to see the morning star over the horizon shining down to earth. I sensed other travellers millennia before me.

In this thin air, high in the atmosphere, a new consciousness came into my being. It astonished my Celtic mind for it was older and wiser than my known world. Older than any monolith, older than even the entrancing stories of the ancient warrior. It was far older than the great healer of Nazareth. It was a wisdom of earth never known to my kind. It was a spirit that came from even before the beginning of our human time. I could feel a place beyond my imagination pulling me. It was drawing me to it but at this moment I had only thoughts for the hardship of Éire and the tribulations that men and spirits faced. I just wanted to understand what was happening at home. I just wanted the sun to shine on the land.

THROUGH CRACKS AND HOLES the universe unfolds. A myriad flow from the far past and future: patterns, paintings, machines, beliefs, journeys, relics, telephone numbers, texts,

poems, conversations, dreamings... Clues or follies? Your eyes or mine? Or just the musings of some stranger? Seaweed rolling in and out with the tide, no identity, no family, just nothing. There will be great tribulations ahead. Death is not the end. The pathway to the top of the hill begins. The man, the dog and the gypsy eating the apples freely. Oh, the tourists invading the churches and the manikay on their vacations and work experience philanthropic tours! Ignorance is the enemy - if it takes hold all is lost. Let us paint to inform and illuminate, like so many have done in your cathedrals and churches. They are old, but we are much older. "Do not be afraid. That is one of our friends from Baralku, Bañumbirr. She is telling us that all is well at home - Djankawu told his sisters. The rising rays of Waḷirr, spread and light up the shore at Yalanbara." ⁴ The morning star greets us every day. It guides us. It tells us all is well. Its light shines towards the promised magic land of gentle people. It is an old friend and confidante. It makes us comfortable when danger is near. It consoles the tears that bring up the sun. It shows the direction of life. It rises up on the string during the late-night sky and is pulled downwards in the day. It is a flag from the paradise. It shows us where we have come from and where we are going to. We have adopted you church man. Are you wise enough to understand what all this means? Your holy man was condemned and so we have been. Let us comfort and understand one another.

HIGH ABOVE THE WORLD I prayed and consulted my guides and masters. Was the world to be lost in fog? Was there to be no redemption? Would the world of men lose their magic, their loved ones and their lands? With these thoughts came determination. New strength and renewed energy surged through me.

The ancient gods favoured my efforts. *'Accept this gift nymph immortal, beauty, bride of Noman, you of the windy wilds of Connemara. Heed you well lessons of the sailor of old, the bureaucracies of churches and men, the silly, lost ponderings of Eccles St and the pain of worlds that are disconnected from spirits, planets and the unseen guides of life.'* ⁵ On their way to

Ithaca with a house load of suitcases and boxes from Lae. There on the streets of New York City catching taxis and a bus. The little boy was ashamed of his adventurous parents. Why were they so naïve? Could we be murdered and all our possessions stolen? And yet here was a destiny forged from the books read late at night by candlelight. The great man, the dreamer, the teacher pulling his family to higher heights so they could see. And she too full of life and willingness so determined that it would be good for children to have these adventures and so it was.

*Oysters! growing on the timber floating far out to sea.*⁶

It was there in the wide ocean I saw them paddling, steadily following the morning star. Guthaka circling excitedly. A bag made of the skin of a Highland cow came floating to me. In it were the bawuthu of the world? There were unfamiliar, tricky, playful, gundawirwiryun winds: bärä', buḍuyurr, bulunu, djalathanj and the faithful lunḅgurrma - a wind to cheer even the heartless and hardened. Time would reveal their meanings and purposes.

Then I saw the whole picture. On the edge of the earth a great fire was burning. Its smoke and haze had shut out the sun. Most of the earth was covered in dust. I could see great clouds billowing north. Dust was blowing out over the oceans and lands. A great mountain had exploded into the sky sending ash and smoke to the very edge of the blue atmosphere of the earth. So that was it! My heart leapt! Surely even this great fire would have to go out!

As I flew above the earth I sprinkled dust from my wings. It seemed a futile gesture. I called on the great spirit of the seas. I called my familiar winds Boreas, Eurus and Aparcias to blow. For many hours, there was nothing but even more confusion. Eventually the smoke haze that covered the earth began to break up. Then, oh joy, Helios appeared and I could see that sunlight began to bathe the earth.

But now something new appeared to me.

As I looked towards the far horizon I could see thousands of little fires burning on great plains. I sensed the gentlest of peoples also waiting for the cataclysm to pass. They were

cooking yams in the morning coals and keeping warm. I longed for home and the warmth of a kitchen hearth. I was so tired. How long had it taken me to get this high? How long would it take me to drift downwards? I knew I had drifted far far from Éire. But I had found a cause to our problems and with renewed spirit I plunged back into the grey, now willing myself downwards.

As I flew I wondered about heaven and earth, about the world, my people and faery magic. My thoughts cheered me and helped me on the long journey downwards. Many things came into my mind. I was excited to understand what had caused the year without a summer. But I also knew in my heart that a new spirit had come to me and that the world itself was changing. Was this terrible fog a warning?

A bearded man came to me. He was dreaming of a paradise in a dingy town of vomiting plumes of burning coal. A dustman was dressed like a king. A revolutionary illusion and the promise of conflicts driven by committees was imagined. I saw how wrong this 'news of nowhere' dream was and yet I too felt his quest to see. I too dreamed of an unlimited world of sacred *djāma* and love. But it would not be so easy to reconcile these worlds.

As I flew downwards I saw great pillars of smoke curling upwards from towns and cities and these great plumes were raining down soot and ashes. A great odyssey was beginning for me and the people of Éire. The tramping over muddy fields would continue beyond Éire. I knew that as the crops had failed in the year without a summer, more and more people were moving away from the countryside. High in the sky I could also feel the fragility of the earth. If an eruption like this could shut out the sun, then what of these great human fires of coal? What was the new destiny that Demodocus had signalled for the earth and the people? What was the future?

All of these questions ran around my consciousness but now I had to find my way home. I was circling around and around for an eternity. It slowly dawned upon me that I had flown to the end of the world and travelled far beyond my land. I just knew that I had to fly away from the direction of the great fire.

I knew somewhere in the north was Éire. I began to look too into my heart and ask for guidance on the journey back to earth, back home.

Ever downwards I went, I had to be careful not to go too fast, I flew in long spirals, watching attentively for any sign of land, of earth and of where I was. At last after what seemed an eternity I sensed that I was getting closer to land. Was I imagining it? Could I smell the scent of the forest and gardens? Could I hear the faint strains of a fiddle? I was thirsty, weary and hungry. Down and down I went.

Gradually the grey haze cleared. Through the clouds I could see the land. It was one of those days in the countryside that faeries love. The sun was shining again and there was something else. There was music!

I am a dance you will learn.⁷

ROLY POLY!! My heart skipped a beat. How I wanted to dance! I could see in my mind's eye the activities below. Summer had returned in all its glory.

Clear, fresh, cool gapu, sparkling with life and light, babbling and gurgling, darted round rocks below me. It made little whirlpools and undulations as it ran into deeper parts of the brook. Wrens and finches jumped from twig to twig chirping sweet messages. Bees were buzzing, taking nectar from the summer flowers.

It was just as the season should be. Faeries were everywhere. If you looked at the edges of the water where the sunlight sparkled, you could see little faery splashes. If you listened very carefully you could hear tiny squeaks of delight.

Oh, of course! It was May Eve! How wonderful – one of the three great faery festivals of the year, everyone was celebrating the warmth of the summer sun. Faeries playfully tossed wisps of grass around. They made great whirly-whirl swirls of leaves in the air.

The small number of people working in the fields looked up, and the older ones knew that the faeries were at play. It was

just what I needed to soothe my troubles. Down I flew to drink sweet water and join the festival.

Faeries are the greatest musicians and singers. *Roly-Poly, Pretty Peg, Pigtown Fling, Hexham Races and the Whistling Postman* could be heard across the meadows as faeries danced and sang to celebrate the coming summer. In the sunlight was the glimmer of gossamer wings, little shafts of gapu flew up as young, cheeky faeries dive bombed each other in the stream.

In small bends of the brook, banquets were being prepared. Honey nectar delivered by hundreds of bees was set out in little acorn goblets. The aroma of asparagus and corn gently roasting carried upwards. The delicious smell of fresh bread and cottage pies carried in the breeze making the field workers hungry for their lunch. Even in ordinary times faeries create special picnics, treats and surprises, but today of all days, to celebrate the summer a great banquet of food and drink was prepared. We faeries believe that a magnificent feast brings luck and good fortune to all.

I was being drawn ever downwards to what was happening below me. I remember feeling the sun as it emerged from behind the clouds. Perhaps it was because I had flown so far, that as I flew downwards I became disoriented and I forgot whether I was bird or spirit.

Down I went. I could hear voices and I knew that once I was on the ground I would know where I was and what to do.

Suddenly all the faeries looked up midst the celebrations. They saw me gliding and wheeling downwards. What was this giant bird of the sea doing so far inland? Why was it heading straight towards the celebrations and why were its feathers so dirty and ruffled? Many faeries flew up towards me and soon I could feel them propping up my tired wings. Together they guided me ever downwards.

Soon I was on the ground with dozens of faery eyes looking at me. I had never seen the costumes or finery that the faeries were wearing.

The little faeries laid me down on a cocoon of grass. I could see that they too were confused.

I was still a sea eagle. I lacked the energy to move back to my faery form. I tried to say who I was but only bird sounds came from my mouth: *gnarly birdy gathering, a Runa little, Doolittle, preallotted, pouralittle, wipealittle, kicksalittle, verytableland of bleakbardfields! ... Our pigeons pair are flown for northcliffs. The three of crows have flapped it southenly, kraaking of de baccle to the kvarters of that sky whence triboos answer; Wail, 'tis well! ...Her would be too moochy afreet. Of Burymeleg and Bindmeollingeyes and all the deed in the woe. Fe fo fom! She jist doeshopes till byes will be byes. Here, and it goes on to appear now, she comes, a peacefugle, a parody's bird,⁸ Awk, Awk, Awk... crows looking for bits of damper, picking up bits of plastic, paper and string... see the crows coming now appearing on the bungul ground.*

"Rest!" a hundred faery eyes told me. For the faeries knew that, despite my incomprehensible babble, something was up. They could see that I was no ordinary bird that I had come a very long way and that it was no accident I had appeared to them.

I was drifting back and forward from bird to faery mind and to different places in time and space. The grass was so soft and the music all around me was so comforting, I closed my eyes just for a minute.

CARRYING THE ENORMOUS DHARPA up the hill, too much for any man, let us take the load and share the burden. Emerging from the sacred fire beneath the sea, creating people, animals and all the ingredients of the world. This was fire hotter than a volcano, holy fire, cleansing, creative and true. Here are the mystery beings, the wajarr, known in such detail and clarity. The learned judge and the wisest and most trained minds could not comprehend the exquisite detailed codes and meanings of the painters. Gawerij, Janggarin, Birrikiidji, Manggarwuy were truly connected to the wise Guwak (koel cuckoo).⁹ The greatest creative minds of the mainstream world looked on with awe and incredulity. Some had an inkling, a tingling at what was before them. They saw the technique and skill unlike any other. But not many had the

patience, wisdom and knowledge to really see. It has taken many lives to get to this point of just beginning and asking the right questions. For who were these beings? Did they come from another planet? Perhaps! Millenia before the mind of modern man, these mystery men came from the sea with foam criss-crossing their chests. They brought culture, law and guardianship to the crude beings that walked the earth. Along with the sisters they taught men and women how to live. They created a paradise of heavens, earth and sea and showed us all how to love this place. It will take another five generations or more for us to become more than just beginners. How wonderful for us of this time and place to have this challenge and, finally, these teachings! Men of god and language can start the journey. They got their toes into the waters. Now it is time for the rest of us. If you want to learn, be ready to strain your brain. Be contemplative and thoughtful like a wise old man sitting on his verandah looking out to the paperbark tree at Mata Mata. Be open. Dream.¹⁰

“And the wise choirs of faery begin (numerous!) to be heard.”¹¹

I HAD WANTED SO BADLY TO DANCE but I was exhausted and my bed of grass was so soft. I fell into the deepest sleep. As I slept, midst all the festivities, I began to dream. Oh, I must tell you, a faery dream is something special! When faeries dream, things happen!

Our dreams are like yours but they light up the earth. Bystanders come with us into these dreams as we move to other places and times. Our innermost thoughts and desires light up the sky. Have you heard of the Northern Lights? In this great night-swirl of colours and shapes are faery dreams. Sometimes it is as if the whole world changes from a faery's dream!

There can be no secrets amongst faeries. Soon everyone had picked up my vibration. At times like this faeries often wake each other up because they don't know what they are in store for. But no-one in the faery throng wanted to wake me. They had seen me turn from a dishevelled sea eagle back to tired

faery form. They knew that the dream would tell them more about my journey and my spectacular entrance. Soon all of the faery host gathered around wondering and watching expectantly at what would unfold.

I, of course, had no power to control my dreams. I had zoomed in on those little fires I had seen when I was high in the atmosphere. Now I was flying high in the sky above a strange new land. A marvellous vibration filled the air, it was a sound like no other. How different it was to the music of May Eve. The musical vibration carried new spirits and life we could barely imagine. It was the yidaki heraldry of a lost paradise!

*“Lovers gather and give each other shade,
relief from the direct sun.*

Stay close by that community.

Be shade with them, until yourself

are full of light like the moon, then like the sun.”¹²

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, LALLA Bakitju Gunda,¹³ was showing children white flowers. She was speaking a language that was barely comprehensible to me. “When you see these flowers *Djinpu* the oysters are plump, juicy and ready to harvest. Manyak!” and with that she nodded her head.

“Our seasons have returned to normal, all is well with the world again,” she said to her sisters and fellow hunters. But in her mind were the strange sunrises and sunsets that had appeared one after another for the past year. The women had continuously sung and cried at sunrise each day. Eventually, they thought to themselves, things had been put right again. Everyone was relieved but Lalla was still a little on edge and apprehensive. Something was not quite right even now.

Up and down the coast family groups were gathering. On the rocky shores women and children with keen eyes were gathering maypal with razor sharp axes and knives. It was a happy scene. The people were celebrating and a great bounty was at hand. The smell of burning eucalyptus leaves wafted through the air. Oysters with wild herbs from the mangroves were roasted.

What were these aromas and these sounds? Nothing was familiar. Cedar trees towered in ancient forests and we watched with wonder as warriors ran unimpeded for miles. There were spirits of the land that the faeries had never seen before.

Shells were thrown into great piles. For many generations, since the dawn of time, ancestors had also feasted at this same place. Lirrwi – the charcoals of past campfires strewn around the beach were a great comfort and guide. Life carried on. The coals symbolized past fires, adventures, great hunters and bountiful seasons. In the evening twilight, the people and the spirits congregated to celebrate the day. Clouds, winds, sand dunes and colours of the land - all were imbued with meanings that grandparents would explain slowly and patiently to young children: ‘This is the place in which the ancients also ate maypal. It is your home. It is our home. It will always be our home. You must nurture this memory.’

There was dance, music and rhythms that we faeries could barely comprehend. Songs of lightning, dolphins, turtles, clouds, rain, lizards and snakes all followed in a progression that was never changed. Each family had its place within the universe and land and sea to rejoice, nurture and celebrate. The dancers would flick the sand from their heels and make shapes and forms like clouds in the air. As old men would sing of whales the great beings came close to shore splashing their great tails, breaching the surface and diving in appreciation.

How was it possible for people to have the same ability as we spirit beings to summon and communicate with nature and animals?

In the night, tucked snug into beds made from grass and woven mats, children slept as the dance and song went on into the early hours.

How different were the countless specks of light and bright stars in the sky? These too carried new meanings and stories. Bukitja Gunda and the old people talked to young children pointing upwards explaining constellations and stars. “See the dark emu? The sisters paddling their canoes.”

A new day began with a bright star low on the horizon. Voices rang out across the camp. Great hunters boasted of their plans for the day and the food they would provide for their families. In this early morning time, people began to think ahead. Women spoke of the size and quality of oysters, mussels and yams. Parents carefully showed young ones the plantations and orchards of fruit. There was a oneness of the people with the land. Life itself was gentle poetry.

There were clever and mischievous spirits (mokuy) lurking. These spirits would play games and tricks. People would get lost. Children making too much noise were teased until they were rebuked by their mothers. In thick parts of the forests and gullies ghost beings and galka (sorcerers) walked the land. In deep caves beings that were part human and part animal lived with their wives and children.

Lalla and her people knew of these spirits and beings and their special majesty. The land was alive with meanings. Children were wild and free. They learned to be safe by experimenting freely and trying new things without paternal or maternal interference. They listened to their relatives and family and respected the places they visited and the unknown mysteries of the world. The stories of spirits and strange creatures helped children to grow up with reverence for tricky and dangerous places. Just like leprechauns, elves and goblins, the strange spirit beings had their place in the world. Without them the world would lose its magic.

Old men and women would gently sing of spirit places and things. In freshwater ponds and wells in the sea Lalla could look beyond normal life to the past and the future. These experiences were very much the visions of life that spirit beings would see.

How could ordinary people see the same things as faeries? The glimmers of sunlight and the shimmers of the ocean all had meanings, you only had to look in a special way to see them.

Suddenly gasps and cries went up from the faeries.

There were old men and women looking into a well of fresh water in the sand and they were looking at the faeries

themselves. Lalla and her friends could see the May Fest activities. They too were shocked at the sight of the faeries.

Mokuy? They asked themselves.

Spirits from another land and place! How could this be?

Yol dhuwala? Who is here? Who is this? They asked each other.

A slither of electricity ran through all of us. A lightning bolt of energy was welding our fates together. As we confronted each other through the miraculous dream we faeries realized the people of the South Land were celebrating the same things, the produce of the land, its magic and its power.

Most of all, like us, the people of the South were recovering from a very strange year in which summer had not appeared at all and smoke and ash had rained from the sky. The faeries had blamed themselves and thrown everything into their May Fest celebrations, the new people had thrown themselves into ceremony, song and dance. Not just human life but all life was challenged by the failure of the sun to nurture the earth.

Across these worlds now things could return to normal... but would they? Could they? Why had we connected? What was the meaning of this dream? Faeries looked at each other in bewilderment. Where was this land? Why had the magic of two worlds come together? Was it an omen? A warning? All these questions ran through our hearts. On the other side of the world Lalla and her sisters asked themselves the same questions. The only clue we had was the warmth we immediately felt for each other. The faeries recognised there was something ancient, magical in the dream, something older than the parables of our forefathers and mothers. Somehow, we also knew that in the future faeries and the people of the South would be friends and allies. We knew these things but we also knew somehow that the year without a summer was the beginning of something that would test us all.

WALTJAN: WITH A JERK and a start I woke up. A light mist of rainbow-coloured rain was falling. What a surprise to find the entire faery band gathered around staring intently at me. I was as bewildered as anybody. We faeries rarely talk as

humans do, we don't need to. We see the images of each other's minds and feel the murmuring of each other's hearts. Faeries harmonise in this way, there is rarely much need for talk or words. The whole faery contingent live in a field of positive vibrations that create energy and life, and in a subtle way, they keep all around them happy, including the birds, animals, flowers and trees. But now there was need for talk. All the faeries stared into my eyes and suddenly all the joy of May Eve evaporated and only the sounds of the babbling water could be heard. I could not make sense of my strange dream. But the faeries could see why I had been flying so high and so far. They had the same troubles that had so worried the magic world of Éire. I stood up to address the assembled faery host. I did not know what I would say. I just let my heart do the talking.

"I am Brigit, princess of Éire, strength beyond strength, protector of home and hearth, friend of owls and eagles, holder of wisdom, weaver of souls, custodian of justice. I am searching for answers. All of the magical beings, the sheoques, merrows, leprechauns, cluricans, ganconaghs, pookies, dullahan, leanham shees, far darig, imps, and far sidhes are asking ourselves the same questions. Why in our land are so many children starving? Why are whole families in rags travelling up and down the highways and byways? The very spirit of the land seems changed.

"The far gorta, faeries who wander the countryside begging for food in times of trouble, have appeared. Banshee wails can be heard each night. The sound of the lonely tin whistle playing *Faeries Lament* is heard in each valley and garden. Mothers' eyes are red, fathers' are bent and haggard, they are worried about their children."

I could see in the eyes of the faeries around me that they deeply understood my feelings. Soon messengers from other faery gatherings arrived. All were eager to understand my startling entrance and my strange dream. All of the faeries wanted to know more and they wanted to know immediately.

Suddenly one of the faery host stepped forward. She wore a green tunic with tiny golden embroidered birds running down her shoulders to her sleeves. Her ebony hair was swept back

under a beautiful silken scarf the colour of moonlight. Her eyes shone. "I know of you, dear Brigit, for a thousand years a lamp was kept perpetually alight in your name, and your famous goodbye to all 'May you stay safe and warm' is revered by all of us. I am Tanaquill, great grand-daughter of the faerie queene. I feel your life. I feel your pain. The same troubles have also come to our lands. This year without a summer has led to great hardship. But there is something more than just this change in our seasons. The whole world seems to be changing. The light in your temple is no longer kept. It is as if people no longer have homes, they have lost their connection to the land. The whole countryside is full of wanderers and lost souls."

My mind and those of all the faeries turned to the strange year in which there was no sunlight. I had heard of Tanaquill. Now I knew where I was. I had landed far from Éire, across the Irish sea, in the great islands to the North. Our faery kingdoms were linked but there was seldom contact. Tanaquill's words reverberated in my heart. "That is why we have celebrated May with such joy this year," Tanaquill continued. "It has taken all our faery magic to bring back the light, the flowers and even the bees. Your dream is an omen to us that beyond the seas we are connected and that our worlds are connected. I could feel the old men and women so far away asking themselves similar questions."

A faery spirit with eyes of oysters and hair of seaweed then ushered me forward and bade me speak more. Faeries are usually reluctant to say too much, but words came gushing out.

"The sun was blotted out from the earth - a lethal mist was spread across the earth just as the ancients had once prophesied. The clouds were filled with soot and when I flew into them I became black. After the mist, we saw women and men who were usually so happy in their gardens, silently weeping as they leant wearily on their pitchforks and rakes.

"Potatoes were withering in the ground.

"Even the best gardeners could not grow a crop.

"A disease of mouth and foot came upon the cattle... so that the beasts simply lay down and could not walk.

“Rumours and wild stories were transmitted across the land. While there was whisky in the jar - men and women sought solace in addled chaos. Others threw themselves on the sorrowful mother. Quis est homo qui non fleret.

“All this heartbreak! I could not bear the gloom and futility. I found a lonely shepherd tending to his herd and watched him weeping. His sorrow moved me. ‘Weep no more, woeful shepherd, weep no more!’ For something must come of this. Éire cannot be weighed down with false beliefs and suspicions. We will find our way!”

Then I remembered how I came to be flying. “I followed a cart laden with grain, corn and barley, it came to a ship. I followed it out to sea. That is how I came to be so far away from my homelands. Why was this precious food being taken away from the place it was needed? Can you tell me?” I asked urgently.

Tanaquill paused to think. As her mind turned to all these things, all of the faery troupe looked deeply into each other’s eyes. They saw in each other’s minds visions of people leaving the countryside, of towns and cities being overrun by people who had nowhere to live. Men were creating factories in which machines powered by steam were served by hundreds of men, women and children. Ominous chimney stacks and whirring, jarring machines were doing the work that master weavers had once done, they were creating fabrics and clothes in far greater quantities than had ever been thought possible... The simple life of the countryside was changing.

So, this was where the precious food from Éire was going. The faeries looked back at me and I understood that ships from many places were bringing food and resources for this new empire of machines. Something filled my heart with despair for I knew this was a gloom and a fog that would not disappear so easily. This was a great shift that would require all our energy over many generations to appease and moderate. It would engulf us all. It would link us all to a common destiny. We would survive or fail together.

As one, the faeries flew in their minds over the earth. They saw a dank, dusty, musty cotton factory where hundreds of

children were working. None had a smile on their faces. Most were dressed in rags, and all were hungry. Giant wheels spun and pistons pushed looms back and forth. In the shadows of the factory women were sweeping up the cotton off-cuts and unthreading giant bales.

We faeries knew of the beautiful weavings that had been completed by the master stocking-makers in which the most brilliant colours of nightingale tails were spun together with intricate shades and types of cloth. I knew of the skills of Irish weavers. Now I saw machines completing yards of fabric over and over again. The faeries' eyes turned to the sight of the despondent stocking-makers with their small looms huddled on the side of roads. I looked into the future and I saw the great weaver of mandelas, created from the dyes of the earth, weaved from pandanus fronds, sewed with fire and rainbows. All was not to be lost but at this time ghost-like whirring of machines hummed and drowned out all that was human.

A small faery came forward. She showed us stocking-makers with clubs and iron trying to break the great power loom which monotonously churned out yard after yard of cloth. The master stocking makers wanted to free the women and children from the factories and send them back home to the countryside. But these machine breakers were soon captured and sent to gaols where they languished in misery. We faeries saw how the world was changing dramatically. In many towns, ghastly scenes unfolded, police came in to break up the protests against the machines, women and children left the countryside and came to work in the industrial centres and towns. The dyes and wastes polluted the water, the rivers and streams became a stinking gravy of toxic sludge.

Worst of all, families lost the capacity to grow their own food in the countryside, many were forced out of their cottages because they could not pay the rent. Thousands slept in the streets. But others grew intoxicated with the power of the machines. They amassed greater fortunes than kings and queens, they grew fat from the wealth created by the drudgery of the new slaves of industry...

As the faeries looked into my eyes they slowly connected our worlds.

They saw that faery magic itself was under threat. People were drifting away from the ancient world of magic and nature to a world of cities, buildings and machines. We could see more and more people living in tiny spaces. Even the fields themselves would be over-run with machines and threshers that would replace the summer harvest work of thousands of men and women. The food and cloth that once all had a hand in producing was to be produced by machines.

Our collective emotions and feelings send a vibration across the countryside across all of the domains and regions of faery land. Even the cranky, hairy, petulant goblins said they were willing to help.

Normally such magic creatures are so focused on themselves that the mortal world of human beings simply does not even register with them. They just carry on their business. Now everyone was tuned into what was happening in the human world.

In the past, we had seen kings and queens and great armies do battle. We had fought invaders and won and lost great contests, but no-one had seen the likes of what was occurring. The health and magic of the world can be measured by faeries and spirit beings. The life of the wild countryside was being transformed. Magic itself was in danger. There would be more of everything, but nothing would be the same. Food would not taste as good. Fabrics would lose their intricate charm. At the May Eve festival, strong feelings were felt across the assembled throng. Like seers in the faraway land, we knew what had to be done. We had to protect the children. We had to protect the future. We also knew that in some way, that we did not yet understand, we were connected with the strange land and people of my dream.

That night across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales thousands of faery lights could be seen across the night sky. One by one the faeries landed on the shoulder of a little child in need and remained with them. In the factories children slept under their machines. In the streets children slept in rags down

dark and cold alleys. On the outskirts of towns children wrapped themselves in whatever materials they could find and slept in ditches. Wherever the children were, faeries found them. Our job was to keep the magic alive within each child. I led the way in Éire, Tanaquill in England. As I made my journey home I watched as thousands flew down to the cities of Manchester and Leeds and London.

I flew back over the Irish Sea and down to the Irish countryside. The Irish faeries had also tuned into the developments and they were also on the move. There were fires ablaze and angry crowds in the towns and countryside. In all these places, we snuggled up to the hearts of those who needed comfort.

We whistled *The Faery Reel* to cheer the hungry and warm the cold hearts of the people. No-one wanted to dance but our vibrations of hope and love were like a little flame burning in the night. Hearing the music gave everyone a message of hope, from the darkest hours better things would come.

New tunes were learned and played. Gradually even in these times the spirits of the people revived. Adversity created new dreams of times when no-one would be hungry. "I will never turn a needy person away from my door." "The land is for those who respect and love it not for those who claim to own it by means of paper and police."

Across Éire, families still had to find food and sustenance. It was a daily task and to survive required the greatest endurance and ingenuity. The children dreamed of potatoes.¹⁴

This time as I was flying a vision began to form in my mind. I could see that we spirits and faeries were linked to the people of my dream. The year without a summer was an omen. In the great reorganisations, people would face the greatest tribulations. Midst all this we faeries had to hold on to the ancient magic.

We had to sew our magic into the children and into the new forms of the world. I would dedicate myself to this great quest. When the children were hungry I would sing to them. When a family was cold I would make them laugh. I would teach each child that no matter what happened it is how brave and fearless

you are in your heart that matters. I would teach them that magic can change the world. I would teach them that there is magic in everything and it is only when people forget this that troubles abound. Magic, spirit and the natural cycles and vibrations of the earth had to live on.

CRACK! BANG! BANG! BOOM! WALLOP! WHOOSH! Rain bucketed down. Wind blew the giant eucalypts so they doubled over, lightning struck and limbs came crashing to the ground. Was it the same storm that appeared before young Hicks saw the distant mainland? The water spouts that came and went year after year. The camp was tucked snugly behind a south facing sand dune in their shelters of bark. Some of the men and women had used the time to paint the bark slabs that sheltered them and kept them perfectly dry. Up in the mountains above the shore the people sheltered in hollowed out rocks and caves. Everyone was comfortable, warm and happy. They had, of course, anticipated the storms. The people had roamed the land during the pre-wet season, dancing and rejoicing as new shoots of vegetation sprouted. The great snake started to spit water into the air to form rain clouds. The people continued on their way dancing as they went. The great wititj rested under hills and suddenly stood up to strike creating lightning. The lightning struck trees. The storms were a welcome clean-up of the land. The lightning snake was shooting growth and vitality through the land. The rivers and streams would run strongly and clean up the debris and make it easier to hunt. The grasses and plant life would thrive and so too the animals. After the year of strange seasons, the great storms were welcome. Everyone was content and uplifted by the storm, everyone except the white-haired wise man, *Dilkurrwurru Watangurr*.¹⁵ There was already a kind of telepathic relationship developing between me and the people of the Southern Lands. I could close my eyes and see how *Dilkurrwurru Watangurr* tossed and turned in his sleep. He kept on coming back to the strange vision. When he had looked into the sacred well he had seen me and strange little beings with lights.

He was overcome with a feeling of trepidation. The troubles of many thousands of miles away were coming to his shores.

The people of the South, like us faeries, did not need to use many words. Their words were interconnected with feelings, hand movements and a sense of spirit. I liked these people very much. They were tuned to the land and its meanings. The people of the land still had something that we in Éire were losing. Their lands, seasons, winds, the cycles of life and death and their spirits were so interconnected that magic accompanied them as they moved through the lands.

But Dilkurrwurru could sense that the fate of his people and of the lands across the seas were becoming intertwined. Just as I had flown the length and breadth of Éire, over the Irish Sea to England, searching for answers, now the old men of the great South Land were communicating through dreams and song. It seemed danger and evil were to engulf both worlds. There were stories of marauding vessels and of sticks that spat fire and lead.

Great ceremonies were being held. In music, song and rhythm, messages about the future were forming. Warnings were being issued.

No-one could understand what was happening on the other side of the world. But the vibrations and tremors of meaning were entering into the unconscious thoughts of the wise old men and women. Dreams of signs, squiggles and marks on thin strips of bark made people sit up in their beds. What was this world of strange beings approaching them? Dilkurrwurru knew of the pain of war between people, but over the millennia laws and ceremonies and marriage obligations had been devised to ensure that knowledge and magic survived the battles of foolish and greedy leaders. Flashes of the world of the faeries came to Dilkurrwurru. He saw thousands hungry, starving and dying. Troubles, war and dislocation were coming.

SAVIOUR MEETING NĀNDI ON THE TERRIBLE DAY, heal sacred mother, dhoku' has been cut down. The bees and chips of wood are flying everywhere.

The beautiful honey is in the centre of the tree. The sugar-bag falls and splits all over the country. Honey heals, purifies, restores and nourishes. Walking with the dogs, feeling the wind and watching for bees. Burning the land as we walk. Never losing control. For this is an estate just like the orchard at Buckingham Palace! Eagle eyes spied *nan'tabakarra* forty metres from the speeding troopy. STOP! Out piled the eager harvesters. Do you see now the paradise? The orchard? Not just an endless forest all the same - its fruits are nurtured and appreciated. It is just your eye cannot see it. Vital growth all activated by sacred smoke, even you have discovered this truth in your horticultural laboratories. How clever you are to 'discover' this, like lots of Captain Cooks and not enough continents to find!

The truth is that you cannot hunt for honey. You have to feel it. Ask for it. *Dhuway* at the base of the tree beaming. The river of honey - *limbaraku* - created by the greedy lizard. Bees, creatures of Venus, bringing their love life to the hive. Each one a supporter of the love life of the collective. Thriving, germinating love, through bees the entire cosmos finds its way into human being.¹⁶

Elixir. Healer. The tonic of all good humour, the sparkle in a laugh and the warmth in a smile.¹⁷

DANCING OF THE DHUWA FAMILIES, feathers and string representing the flower that only blooms in the morning, symbolising the great guide and friend who led the ancestors. Grab the feather string and dance, pass it on, others catch and pass on. Families working together, holding the world together, moving forward.¹⁸

When the camp awoke with *banumbirr*, the storm clouds had cleared and the air was crisp and clear. The early risers found *Dilkurrwurru Watanjurr* staring into the wet, charcoal embers of the fire. They knew he had been dreaming. It was unusual for him to be up so early waiting. The women had left dry wood under cover for the morning fires. Soon they would be cooking yams and begin making flour and grinding seeds for cakes on the hot stones.