

SILENT SKY

By Pemulwuy Weeatunga

The dark-skinned semi-naked boy struggled against his bindings as he stumbled along on lands he knew he didn't have any right to be on. He had no choice but to put foot after foot and take the slaps and prods rained on him persistently since he'd been taken from his Clan lands. Forced to keep up with the noisy throng behind by grown merciless men that laughed mockingly and hit him when he stumbled in his forced gait, the boy looked dazedly across to a young girl who walked beside him. She was likewise bound, forced along and sobbing as she walked, her head and tear-streaked face looking only at the ground in front of her.

Flicking a glance behind and knowing he was likely to get a hard slap for that slight disobedience, he saw another two couples - also bound - and tied again to other youth that had been caught up in this monstrous bizarre affair. Getting away with it once, young Wana-yabuh risked another and saw that the line of people following the captives stretched for some distance behind. The hit to the back of his head came hard, fast and unexpectedly, driving him forward awkwardly: however the brave young boy had seen enough to know there was nothing ordinary about this group of man-hunters...

Strangers!

When the men had first jumped him and bound his hands, forcing him to go with them, he had glimpsed only a few people with them. But since then, as the hunters brought other captives

together and begun walking toward the coast, he saw now that there were at least two full Clans following: *and not one of his own mob in sight!* he thought angrily. Glancing to the hard-faced warrior beside him, the boy risked trying to get some kind of answer one more time.

“Where are we going? Why have you broken the Law to take me from my Dreaming lands, warrior?” he asked the man closest and received another hard slap to the head with the hard stick the man was carrying for speaking again. Wanayabuh stumbled intentionally and as he regained his balance, he glanced surreptitiously to the girl walking beside him. She was still weeping and stumbling occasionally as she was driven forward. He *stumbled* again, moving closer to her.

“Wah! You speak Kabi? Waka? Gureng? Woman?” he spat softly at her - not recognising her from his lands - and sick of her sobbing and whining; even though she was obviously younger than him and also very scared. The girl surprised him. She didn’t look his way or give any notice that he’d spoken at all, before she threw an answer back in his general direction.

“Kabi - yah!” she spat, at least stopping her crying for a moment to answer.

Wanayabuh grinned through split lips as he staggered closer to whisper again.

“Good! Now! Name and Clan eh?” he mumbled, before being pulled roughly away from her by the worst of the men around him. Yet another jolt landed between his shoulder blades from the hated silent figure behind that pushed him stumbling forward again. But then he was

pleasantly surprised again: the crying girl discerned his ruse quickly - and suddenly stumbling too - she fell toward him as they walked to whisper her response.

“Panrtira-pache - Badtjala mob, eh?” she told him before she too was dragged unceremoniously back into line. *Oh! That Island mob eh!* Wanayabuh knew, wondering where and how these weird strangers had caught her on the mainland, away from her island home? Wanayabuh knew that they wouldn’t damage him too much - or they’d have to carry him to wherever they were taking them - and he wanted to let the girl know that he knew of her name and her people. He swayed crazily toward her again and bravely took the punch from the same silent warrior as he spoke.

“Ah! Panrtira: *a friend* - and pache - that island *flower* mob, eh?” he said as his head almost crashed into hers from the force of a punch into the back of his head that caused stars to appear behind his eyes. Nevertheless, as he took up his own position again, the boy was rewarded with a quick smile from the girl and, even better, she had stopped her constant sobbing as well. He fell toward her again reaching to where he’d been hit and pretending to swoon from the recent punch.

“Our Clans-people will come and kill these fools soon - don’t worry; friendly flower girl,” he told her, before another vicious slap knocked him forward and away from her once more...

Watchers

At that moment, as he straightened, Wanayabuh's fine young hunter's eye caught a slight glimpse of movement, just off the track they were following: a little further ahead and higher up, on the big set of coastal sand-dunes they would soon pass by. The young boy willfully pushed his eyes back down, not wanting to warn his captors about the surreptitious movement ahead. Using just his eyebrows and face to 'chin-lip', he pointed his young captive companion toward the movement; wanting to let her know that they were not alone, that there were others - not part of this mob - and obviously watching this large crowd cross *their* lands.

The girl, Panrtira-pache he saw - surreptitiously watching her as they were forced along - was smart for her age. At first he thought she had missed his signal. She cast her eyes downward and only after taking several more forced faltering steps did she sneakily raise them slowly back up toward where he'd indicated. Wanayabuh saw another tiny smile cross her lips as she dropped her head ground-ward again quickly, and without giving the slightest hint that she'd spotted anything.

Wanayabuh knew for certain that nothing this big could ever happen anywhere around his tribal or clan grounds, without some of his people hearing about it quickly - and whoever was up ahead there certainly wasn't letting this mob know they were there. *Thus*, as his dad would say: "dem-fla against our enemy - bin our friend till bin prove otherwise; eh boy?" he'd told Wanayabuh frequently. Now, hope that this awful mistake would all soon be over quickly, rose up sharply in his scared young heart and mind...

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Bio

Pemulwuy Weeatunga is the pen name of John M Wenitong, chosen for the FfC series.

John is a 61-year-old indigenous Australian man of Kabi Kabi Aboriginal and South-Sea Island origin. His Australian indigenous mob is caretakers of the mainland area from approximately – the Fraser to Moreton Islands area of the SE-Qld coastline. John was born in Gladstone, Qld Australia. He plays guitar, photographs nature, writes poetry and songs and tries to sing occasionally. John has four children from 16 – 38 and 6 wonderful grandchildren. John’s mother – Aunty Lorna Wenitong – started the first Aboriginal Health Program out of Mt Isa in the late 1960’s and his younger Brother Mark, was one of the first indigenous Doctors in Qld and credited with being the mind behind AIDA in Australia.