



THE AUSTRALIAN FILE

by
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PROLOGUE

William (Bill) Janaujg Niedjedly and Walarloo Banajuderdy were Australian Aborigine, so they went to the corroboree. It was important to them, for it was the first gathering in over two hundred years in which all of the three thousand remaining members of the Binin, the Aborigine People, were expected to attend.

This grand festival was held on the Nuwalangja Plain in the Northern Territory, southeast of Darwin, between the Great Ubirri Rock and the Burrunguy Rock Mountains. The site was a sacred common ground for the Binin; for all the Gundjietmi speaking Warramal, Gagjudju, and Badmardi clans. For most of them the festival was a time of joy, and for renewal of their spirit. For others, it would be a time of tragedy.

While sitting around the campfires, some of the men would play their monotone didgeridos, and the women would color the haunting tones with their rhythmic singing. Others, men and women together, would stoke the fires and discuss the future of the Binin.

The Binin sat in groups, and smoked their Aborigine tobacco under the white chalky skeleton-like paintings of Narmargon, the Lightning Man, and his wife, Barginj. These two most revered paintings were placed high on the face of Ubirri Rock as many as a thousand years earlier. They were put there by the Binin's ancestors to remind them of their origins, and were among a myriad of other rock drawings depicting the Binin's world.

Each day the Binin would perform their ancient rituals of renewing these rock paintings, using dyes of brown from the clay, white from the nearby chalk mounds, and red from the berries that grew in the flood plains. These were the colors used by untold thousands of Aborigine for thousands of generations.

The festival was also a time to bring together the Great Men, the leaders of the clans. They came for the important meetings from which they advised their clans for the coming periods. Such was the way before the influx of European civilization. Such was the way ever since the Dream Time, when the Binin were first created by God.

In this gathering there would be the Great Men old and wise, schooled in the ways of the ancestors, who knew how to cope with the white Europeans. There would also be those who were less than wise, who were schooled in European ways, in European psychologies and sociologies.

They were the men who exhibited the impatience, the greed, and the ambition that would lead to the destruction of the Binin.

The first meeting of these Great Men in this corroboree was called on the afternoon of the third day. It was at a time when the smoke from the campfires hung heavy, when the air was filled with the scent of burning Blue Gum wood to ward off the hordes of mosquitoes swarming from the nearby Angangang Billabong.

In this first meeting, the Great Men sat on rocks or squatted beneath the Scrub Eucalyptus trees. They were nearly naked in keeping with tradition. Their glistening black skins were adorned with the vivid white painted patterns of their ancients. In this first meeting, the less than wise demanded the Binin regain their dignity lost at the hands of the Europeans. They demanded to take steps to once again become owners of their destiny. "We will regain our dignity," they argued, "by forming a revolution against the white government."

The truly wise men, though, knew rebellion would be ridiculous. "We are weak," they argued. "The Binin are scattered. We have grown old. Most of us have gone out of this life. It's too late for rebellion."

But the greedy were persistent. They claimed their rebellion would be successful, because they would soon have their hands on the Binin's most sacred icon, the Eye of God, the ancient stone that shone with the fire of the heavens. "The Eye of God has been lost from us for over two hundred years," they said. "And that is why we have been lost, why we haven't been able to see our way as true Binin. We have been lost since the whites first came to our country and took the Eye of God. Now we have a chance to reclaim the Sacred Stone. When it is again in our hands it will bring all the Binin together and show them the way. We can use The Eye of God to show the Binin how to throw the white government out of our sacred lands." They wielded their psychology well.

"Do you have the Eye of God?" the wisest of the Great Men asked.

"We do not, yet," the most impatient of the younger men responded. "But we will, soon. And when we do, we will overcome our white oppressors with unity and rebellion."

"No," the wisest of the Great Men countered. "The only way we can overcome the whites is to be patient. To join in your unity, yes, but to deal with them in their way, not yours. We must deal with them in their way until they see that we deserve a rightful place as their equals. Our place is among them, not against them." The strength of their wisdom was unyielding.

So, the Great Men of the Council weren't able to reach an agreement. They couldn't unify their divergent philosophies. The meeting was finally adjourned, and the leaders rejoined their clans for the evening meal.

While the moonlight glimmered through silvery clouds, the Great Men performed their rituals of leadership. They caucused for their arguments. The impatient and greedy knew the power of greed, and they played on that power, promising everything to their followers. The wise men waited patiently.

The evening passed. At dawn, a secret meeting was held between the two Great Men leading those for rebellion, and the three Great Men wisely against rebellion.

"With the Eye of God once again in our hands, we can be one people and reclaim what is ours," the greedy repeated their argument.

"Eye of God or not," argued the wise. "Your way will only get us prison."

"We must unite and rebel to become a power to be reckoned with," the ambitious persisted.

"Not while we are Great Men," the patient ones replied, their voices rising in unison. They stood as a group to leave.

"Then you will no longer be Great Men!" The leader of the greedy shouted in anger. He waved his hand in the air.

A Great Jabaru stork screeched in the dark. Disturbed by the shouting, it spread its black and white wings to take flight. It soared low over the Eucalyptus, silhouetted against the huge yellow moon. It was an evil omen for the wisest of the Great Men.

A lone gunman stepped from behind the largest Blue Gum tree. He raised his automatic pistol. With the confidence of experience, he fired three times, quickly, deadly.

Flames spewed from the gun's silencer. The flashes danced among the grass and branches, forming shadowy devils with leering faces to mock the three wisest Great Men as they fell, each with blood flowing from a single wound in their forehead.

CHAPTER ONE

The winter's clouds of August blocked the morning's sun in Sydney. A dull and gloomy light filtered through the bedroom windows where the old Australian opal collector looked down on the form of the nubile young woman still asleep in his bed.

"Ah, my little Wombat," the collector sighed as he sat on the side of the bed and kissed the woman's sleepy smile. A strand of his gray hair fell across his eyes. He brushed it aside, then felt his beard. He wished he had shaved and combed his hair before awakening the girl. To greet someone in the morning before completing his toilet wasn't his manner. "How lucky it was for me to have been home when you had car trouble," he added contemplating her form.

The woman moaned her wakening objection, and turned on her side. She pulled the gray blanket up over her full, bare breasts, for the morning's air in the plush Boxwood paneled bedroom suite was chilly.

"You must get up now," the man continued while stroking her short red hair affectionately. He rose from the bed, and his black silk robe fell off one shoulder. He quickly pushed it back in place. It was important to maintain propriety, even though the woman was in his bed. "You must get up because it's nearly nine, and I have appointments to keep."

"Appointments?" she asked, her sleepy eyes watching him over the crook of her arm, nestled against the fluffy, Eider down pillow.

"Yes. And I'm afraid you will have to go."

The woman turned on her back, then sat up. She let the thick comforter slip down as she stretched her arms over her head and smiled seductively. She pulled on his robe, to bring him down to her. She brushed his unshaven face with the back of her hand and wrapped her arms about his neck. "Did you have fun last night?" she asked, coyly.

"Of course," the collector replied. He pushed back the graying hair that again fell over one eye, and struggled to maintain his balance. "In all my, ah, sixty some odd years, I, ah, I don't think I've had quite such a good time."

She knew he was lying about his age, for she'd done her homework well. He was much closer to mid seventy than the sixty he claimed, and he certainly should have a good time, for she had worked much harder than she had expected to make sure he would.

"Are you really an opal dealer?" she asked, wanting to avoid the talk about her leaving so soon.

"You don't believe me?" he said, raising one bushy eyebrow on his wrinkled kindly face.

"Well," she replied hesitantly, suggestively, as her fingers played with his ear.

"Then, perhaps I should prove it to you," he said as he freed himself and discretely pulled his robe into place.

"Would you?" she gushed. "I'd really like that."

"Get dressed, and we'll see," he said.

She threw back the comforter and got out of bed. She crossed the room without feeling embarrassed by her nudity, slipped into her tight fitting blue jeans, and pulled on a long sleeve Disneyland sweatshirt with the black face of Mickey Mouse prominently printed across the front. She enjoyed this sweatshirt, because the mouse's big, black ears were displayed across the front in a manner that accented her bra-less movements.

"Okay?" she asked, smiling at the man. She wasn't asking for approval so much as she was hinting that she was ready for him to show her his opal collection. She knew he was willing to do almost anything she wanted, and what she wanted most at the moment was to see that collection.

"Ummm," he said with a nod. He tightened his robe around him, and led her to the next room, a room lacking the usual neatness of the mansion. It was crammed with antique tables, tapestries and oriental rugs.

"You understand, my little Wombat," he began, but then paused in the middle of his statement while pushing aside a wall tapestry, revealing a safe. He spun the combination lock with the deftness of years of experience with the same numbers. The last number clicked into place as the dial stopped, and he pulled open the safe door.

He continued his sentence as he reached inside the safe to get a tray with a velvet cover. "That the only reason you will have to leave is because I'm about to sell some of my collection, and the buyer is a very sensitive person. It would not do to have witnesses to the sale. However, I think we will have time to see some of my collection before the buyer arrives." He uncovered the tray in front of her.

But the gem collection on that tray wasn't what she wanted to see. She hadn't faked car trouble practically right in front of his house, and forced herself on him to spend the night, just to see a handful of small stones. She wanted to see the special stone that she knew he had, and she wasn't going to leave without seeing it.

"These are nice," she mused, barely glancing at the stones on the tray, and then smiling at him. "You know what? Ill bet, that if I can't watch the sale, you must be selling something very special." She wondered about her directness, then discarded her concern. "And, I imagine you are a very special opal collector," she said in a seductive tone. "Aren't you?" It was a strong challenge.

"Special?" he responded. "I suppose you could say I'm a very special collector. Here, let me show you just how special." He returned the first tray to the safe, and retrieved another one. He uncovered the second tray to reveal a stone the size of an owl's egg. "How about this? he asked with pride.

She gave an admiring gasp.

The collector was pleased. He smiled. "I knew you would be impressed," he gloated. "This is a very special stone. See how the dark green center is surrounded by the brightest fiery blue and then white? It looks like an eye, like some mythical eye."

"Oooh," she cooed. "It's so, so... beautiful."

"Yes," he agreed. "It's the legendary Aqualene."

"And so brilliant," she added with excitement as she reached out to delicately stroke the smooth surface of the opal. She wanted to caress it. "Legendary?" She nearly whispered in awe of the stone's beauty.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean it has quite a legend," he smiled, watching her.

"Oh, do tell me about it," she pleaded. She already knew the legend, but she needed time to think of a way to get her hands on that stone. That was her goal, her purpose for the charade. She listened intently as he related the stone's unusual story.

"In the Dream Time, as the Aborigine people call their prehistoric beginnings, their Great God visited them. According to the story, he was so pleased with them that he left one of his eyes to enable them to see their way through their future."

He turned the stone over in his hands, stroking it, caressing it as he spoke. "The aborigine had lived their own way since their beginning, right up until the white man came. Their legend says they lost control of their destiny when they showed the Eye of God, as they call the stone, to a white man, who promptly stole it. That was probably around the late seventeen hundreds." He paused to gaze silently at the stone for several seconds.

"Since then," he continued, "the aboriginal races have become more and more subjugated, more degraded. They believe that as long as the Eye of God is gone from the clans, they cannot see their way, and must accept being guided by the whites. When it is returned to them, as their legends say it will be one day, they will once again see their own way, be the owners of their destiny." He again paused, this time to wait for a response from the woman.

She smiled softly, with an awed expression. "That was more than two hundred years ago, wasn't it?" she asked, still stalling for time. "Where has it been all these years? And how is it that you have it now?"

A secretive smile broke across the man's wrinkled face. "How I happen to have it is my secret. However, the opal has developed another legend since it was stolen. Supposedly, every white man who has had possession of it since the first theft has died an unexpected death. Of course, I don't believe that part."

The doorbell rang.