

Story Carrier

By Tais Rose Wae

Here, in this moment,
unfolds an invitation to stand
 or sway
 or sit
 or lay
to land on these lands
 wherever it is you feel comfortable
 in presence
 and in reverence.

To make each gesture, each movement of foot greeting earth,
 an acknowledgment for the sentience of this Tweed Bundjalung Country
 upon which you have found yourself.

Searching for sunlight from behind now-closed eyes,
 noticing the shadows from the shade of the tree
 that may or may not be above you,
making an image of the landscape around you
 in your mind, at first,
 and always through heart-memory,
to draw in your vision a painting
 of the ebbs and flows,
 the rises and falls of the forms of green and ground,
 or the spiralling of a leaf falling to earth,
or the gathering of rocks at the water's edge
 where the currents have danced and pushed upon their boundaries
 small handfuls of pebble and quartz.

This land is held by banks that are held by tree roots,

strong at the outer confines
and soft at the centre
where water travels from just over there
to the sea.

Down near the rapids
that we have come to know like our own journey home,
where the water dances with our limbs,
we move, with it, with the water.

With closed eyes feel
the water turn to salt turn to smoke turn to air,
notice the pearl in the riverbed in the memory
laid out with the tide like an oracle,
where language is made in the loam
of leaves left to mulch at lomandra roots.

With feet on earth,
open yourself to the listening of the language,
and with eyes still closed, come to know
the song
of the storied lands
that surround you.

Listen for the history,
then for what is made by hand or machine
and then listen again
and again
and again
for everything that has been here
since time immemorial.

With eyes still closed, resting your mind in the safety of the surrounding bush
that can hold and heal so much,

come to feel the motion of weaving:
 of that birdsong forming a basket
 with the trickle of water over there
 and the breath of the wind, weaving too,
with the wise roots of trees wrapping up from the earth,
and the sun or lack of it
 and the moss
 and mud.

Your limbs enmesh with the great spiralled weaving,
 one with the fibres of the air and the earth and the bush
 that surrounds you,
this environment, this teacher,
 – an entanglement of the old, old ways –
 meeting the curve and point of building
 and all art, always,
 with you, just as much a part of this weaving
as the trees and soil, themselves.

What shape has this basket taken in your mind?

 If your finger were to trace
the outline of its perimeter,
 how long would it take you
 to bring your hand
 back to the point
 from which it started?

Is it ovular? Circular? Its own thing entirely?

Is there a map for this story of spiral and deep listening?

Has it taken on the shape of a leaf?

Is it flat like a river stone once skimmed across this water?

What has this landscape come to carry
in this woven container?

Will you learn from it
reverence
or curiosity
or love?

What kinds of memories or questions or beliefs
can be carried from here to there?

What ideas would you release
and cast out upon the river and let wash out to the sea?

What does this basket ask of you,
you who are engaging with these lands?

How can you come to view and feel
the landscape
as if it were art,
like any one of the paintings in the gallery upon the hill?

How can you run or ride with reverence,
without leaving any sign that you were here at all?

How can you breathe this air
and give thanks just by doing so?

How can your time here
be a love letter to Country
and to every Elder and First Nations person
who has lived upon and tended to these

lands
and waters
and skies
with love and care and knowing
since time immemorial.

Now, when you leave this place,
the rock embrace, the basket,
carry with you a seed of stillness,

cradle a love, a listening, for the earth beneath your feet
and the woven stories that walk upon the land,

Go gently now,
Go gently like water.