

VEGA, ALTAIR AND DELPHINUS

(An Aboriginal Stellar Myth)

Altair in the constellation of the Eagle was a woman in the long ago times. Her name was Irdibilyi, and she and her husband Wommainya (Vega in Lyra) and their two boys (two stars above Vega) lived at Ngai-yenup, beside the Southern sea. Karder the lizard, (Delphinus) was Irdibilyi's brother and he sat down beside Wommainya's camp and was fed by Wommainya and Irdibilyi. Karder was lazy and slow, but being Wommainya's brother-in-law he was very well fed with meat and vegetable food, because brothers-in-law must always feed each other and never quarrel between themselves.

Wommainya was very fond of bardi (large edible grubs) and Irdibilyi always brought home a supply of these from her day's food hunting. The special kind that Wommainya was so fond of were in the roots of the trees and were very difficult to get, and Irdibilyi having so much trouble to obtain them always kept those special kind for Wommainya.

The two boys accompanied their mother, carrying little pointed dowuk (clubs) that their uncle had made for them - they were too young to go hunting with their father - and while their mother gathered roots and fruit and gum and bardi, the boys dug for honey ants and balga (blackboy) bardi and ate everything they found, yet always came home hungry.

One day Irdibilyi had gone a long way to get bardi which she was carrying home in a yorla (bark scoop) when the boys cried out, "Give us some bardi, we are hungry, give us bardi."

"No," said Irdibilyi, "bardi belong to father."

But the boys cried and beat their mother and when they reached their kal (fire, home) they still cried, "Give us bardi," and Irdibilyi said, "No, these are your father's bardi - you find some for yourselves," and the boys went crying from the kal.

By and by Irdibilyi called to the boys but no answer came to her and she called again and again and looked all around but she could not see the boys. "Brother," she said, "go and bring your moyer (nephews) home. They have gone to look for bardi." But

Karder was very lazy - he went only a little way and said, "I can't see them. They will soon come back. I'll go by and by, perhaps they saw their father and are coming back with him," and Karder again lay down by the fire.

Irdibilyi was greatly frightened, for she knew the boys must never be sent away from the camp by themselves, and she had sent them away. Presently Wommainya came along to his fire with his meat on his shoulder.

"Where are the boys?" he said.

Irdibilyi told him they wanted to eat the bardi she had gathered for him and she would not let them have any, telling them to find their own bardi, and she cried aloud in fear and grief. Wommainya was very angry. He looked at the tracks all about and he saw that Karder had only walked a little, but as brothers-in-law must never quarrel with each other, Wommainya did not spear Karder.

He walked a long, long way, tracking and tracking until he came to Ngai-yinup water, and there in the middle of the lake he saw his boys, with only their heads above water. Wommainya stretched out his long beard and said, "Catch hold, catch hold, and I'll pull you out," and the boys caught their father's beard and he pulled and pulled but the water was pulling them down and they could not hold on to their father's beard. Wommainya again called out, "Catch hold, catch hold," but the boys went down under the water and were drowned.

Then Wommainya caught hold of his beard and put it in his mouth and spat it out again in his anger and sorrow. All the way back to his kal he was biting his beard and spitting it out. Irdibilyi saw him coming back alone and she knew her boys were dead and that she would be killed for sending them away by themselves. Wommainya ran up to Irdibilyi and when he was close to her he drove his spear through her heart and she died.

Wommainya could not spear Karder because he was his brother-in-law, but he said to him, "You were too lazy to bring back your moyer and so you may sit by your sister. I do not want a kobong (mate, friend) who won't look out for his moyer. Lazy men must

sit with women and not with men."

Wommainya died of grief for his drowned boys and now they may all be seen in the sky, Wommainya (Vega) standing up holding out his long beard to his two sons (two stars south of Vega in Lyra) and away to the south-east Irdibilyi sits (Altair) with the spear sticking out at each side of her heart.

Because Karder (Delphinus) was lazy and would not hunt for meat or go to search for his lost nephews he has to sit up in the sky near Irdibilyi and he is thin and small and weak and cries and cries because he has to sit beside his sister always. When he looks at Irdibilyi, he sees the anger shining in her eye and he hears afar off the loud and angry crying of Wommainya who is always standing beside the lake where his children were drowned.

At Berung-up, not far from Ngai-yinup, there is a hill with two springs near it which white men call "a pair of spectacles", but which the Bibbulmun believed were the two boys drowned in Ngai-yinup water.