Ngumundi. Voice of the trees.

The scent of Tallow wood reaches through my sleep-addled senses. I blink as a fly buzzes past. It seems to be on a mission by the look of it, not the slightest bit interested in me as it careens past.

Another smell wafts past: pine resin and gumtree blossom. I draw a long, slow breath and yawn. Deeply. “Well, I can’t put this off any longer”, I run a claw through my stubble.

That last wrangle with Jahrah has left me a little balder than I was yesterday. I look down, way down, and sure enough scattered through the grass below are little pieces of myself. As I watch, a soft feather is lifted away by the breeze, only to be captured mid-air, in the beak of a tiny, brightly coloured bird, its red back vivid against black as it flicks its tail in triumph, disappearing with its prize into the thicker grass at the foot of a rough-barked gum. Its plain, dust-coloured mate, and another of the same hue, dances—bobbing its tail up and down in an excited rhythm, darting in and out of the grass, with a high-pitched chittering. A third dull bird, its white flash above each black brow, giving him a permanent scowl, flits between them with a tiny cricket.

Hunger nudges at me now. The storm just before dark last night, prevented my feast; everything was drenched, and the wind was impossible. I can see the runnels where the water tore the land on its way down into the creek, the current flowing fast, early-morning mist slowly rising off the water like kangaroo breath in the cold.

“Get outta my way.” Shrieks my neighbour and I turn to watch him clamber over a broken branch as he heads upwards towards the light and the small tender leaves. “Watch it bozo, I’m coming through!” He bawls.

It’s hard to take a shine to this strange character; he always seems to be cranky at someone. Noone can say where he came from, but he seems to have knitted himself into the community as if he was always here, grating as he is.

The mist has lifted more in the time that it takes for my neighbour to disappear completely from sight.

I procrastinate a little more before deciding to have a climb above the trees for a look around. As I do so, I hear a saw start its steady huffing, the men working it singing a tune I’ve come to know well. Then comes the call—“Timber!”—echoing through the bush. The creak and

crack of the trunk giving way follows. The leaves hiss like a thousand brown snakes or the mighty roar of water crashing down Wappa Falls in the wet. The screech of the lorikeet mob drowns out the leaf noise for a moment but the loud crack and bang of breaking branches and the trunk hitting the earth drown out their racket soon enough.

I feel the thud through the tree I am branch-hopping. I find I'm a bit stiff. That barny I had with Jahrah last night really did throw me about.

"Morning Harriet," I call, as a yellow crest and white blur flashes past me. "How's your morning shaping up?"

"Ah, and a good morning to you." She wheels around to face me. "You look none the worse for wear after your run-in last night. I could hear you pair of galahs over the storm, you know. A small bald spot, I see."

"I'm sorry we disturbed you, Harriet. I'll check in with the worm sucking old codger, after I've had a look around, he lost a lot more feathers than me. The tree-fellahs are back, I see."

"I did notice that the draught horses they're using are looking a little worse for wear this morning. You might want to pay them a visit later on too."

"I may just do that. Well, I'll be seeing you then." She fades into the clouds as I watch her wheel away.

I hop from branch to branch, emerging from the crown of the tree onto a hard, dead limb. The leaves long since gone. Sturdy enough.

The landscape looks different to yesterday: a pile of cut timber stacked as neatly as fallen branches clogging a waterfall. But I haven't come up here for that. I look beyond the line to the low bush beyond. A flurry of movement catches my eye and I hone in on it. It almost mesmerizes me as I fixate on the grass. I launch off the branch with a victorious cry.

I leap into the air, my flight taking me above the trees and down again at a tremendous speed, the wind catches me in its embrace and I trust my precision, never taking my eye off the thrashing in the grass. I dive closer. A sudden cacophony erupts as the small beast sees me at the last second, too late for flight.

I hold tight, the thrashing body stops moving as I lift it way above the grass and drop it onto the rocks below, following it's decent. I stand above it and pick it up again, rising above the rocks a second time before again dropping it onto the outcropping.

"Get out of it, ya pusillanimous scrounge rat." Comes a voice I am all too familiar with.

"Orrh come on cobber. I won this fair and square. It was injured anyway. That tree falling damaged it good and proper."

"You just don't learn do ya? This is my turf, mate, and you need to scram." He spat.

"Look can't we come to some kind of agreement? You turn a blind eye, and I keep the rodents from scrounging your nest or something."

A golden eye sizes me up and blinks leisurely. Twice.

"I've got a better brainwave, Bruce. Every day, you get me some grub from where those blokes are hacking down our home, and I'll turn a blind eye to your pilferin' on my patch."

A long, black, forked tongue slides out of his mouth. It's always creeped me out. Can't say why—it just makes my skin crawl, same as when I let ants walk all over me to clean out the parasites.

"Deal!" I yell over the crack and crash of another tree falling.

We hear a scream, and a man races out of the scrub, lighting out across the clearing, slapping himself all over, closely followed by another bloke doing the same wild dance. We both chuckle, our own tension easing with our mutual loathing of these interlopers. "Good one fellahs, I'll leave you an extra few bits of flesh on the bone when I'm done." I call through the trees.

"Well Bazza, I'm off." I chuckle again, and launch myself from the branch, my wings spread wide as I lift up above the canopy.

The squirrel glider is clutched in my talons. I circle once, high up, then release my catch, lining it up with the goanna watching me from below.

It lands with a thud on his upturned face and I screech a laugh only the kookaburra's can beat.