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Opening extract from
**The Barefoot
Book of Earth Tales**

Written by
Dawn Casey
Illustrated by
Anne Wilson

Published by
Barefoot Books

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Please print off and read at your leisure.

For Al, Heather and Megan, my beloved family — D. C.

For Mia, a beautiful addition to the world — A. W.

Barefoot Books
124 Walnut Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

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 **Barefoot Books**
Celebrating Art and Story



Introduction



Whether we live in the city or in the country, we depend on the Earth in all kinds of ways: we need to use its materials for shelter and for clothes; we must have clean water to drink; and we rely on successful harvests to eat. We may sometimes think of ourselves as separate from nature, but in fact the cycle of our lives is completely interwoven with the cycles of the natural world.

Traditionally, people have lived very close to nature, enjoying the gifts she has to offer and being respectful in turn. The stories from these cultures reflect this: the oldest tales tell of Earth Mothers and World Trees, Ancient Oceans and Heavenly Gardens. They tell of wonderful spirits and talking animals. Many religions and faiths teach that the heavenly reveals itself through nature. All over the world, songs and stories express a deep understanding of the Earth as sacred.

Sadly, this respect for nature is not as strong as it was even a hundred years ago. Recently, many people and institutions have begun to take a more selfish approach to the natural world — as something to use and make money out of, without caring about the damage that their actions may cause.

Now, at a time when we are again becoming aware that we need to live in balance with our planet, these ancient stories offer an important message. I have chosen a selection of tales that both celebrate our connection with nature, and remind us how important it is to look after this Earth, our home. There are myths to renew our understanding of the land, stories that celebrate the glory and beauty of the natural world, and wisdom tales about how to care for the Earth.

Listening to these ancient stories today and acting on their advice helps us to move forward, as the caretakers of tomorrow.

Dawn Casey, Lewes, Britain, 2009



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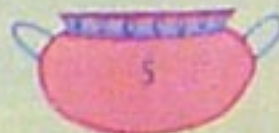
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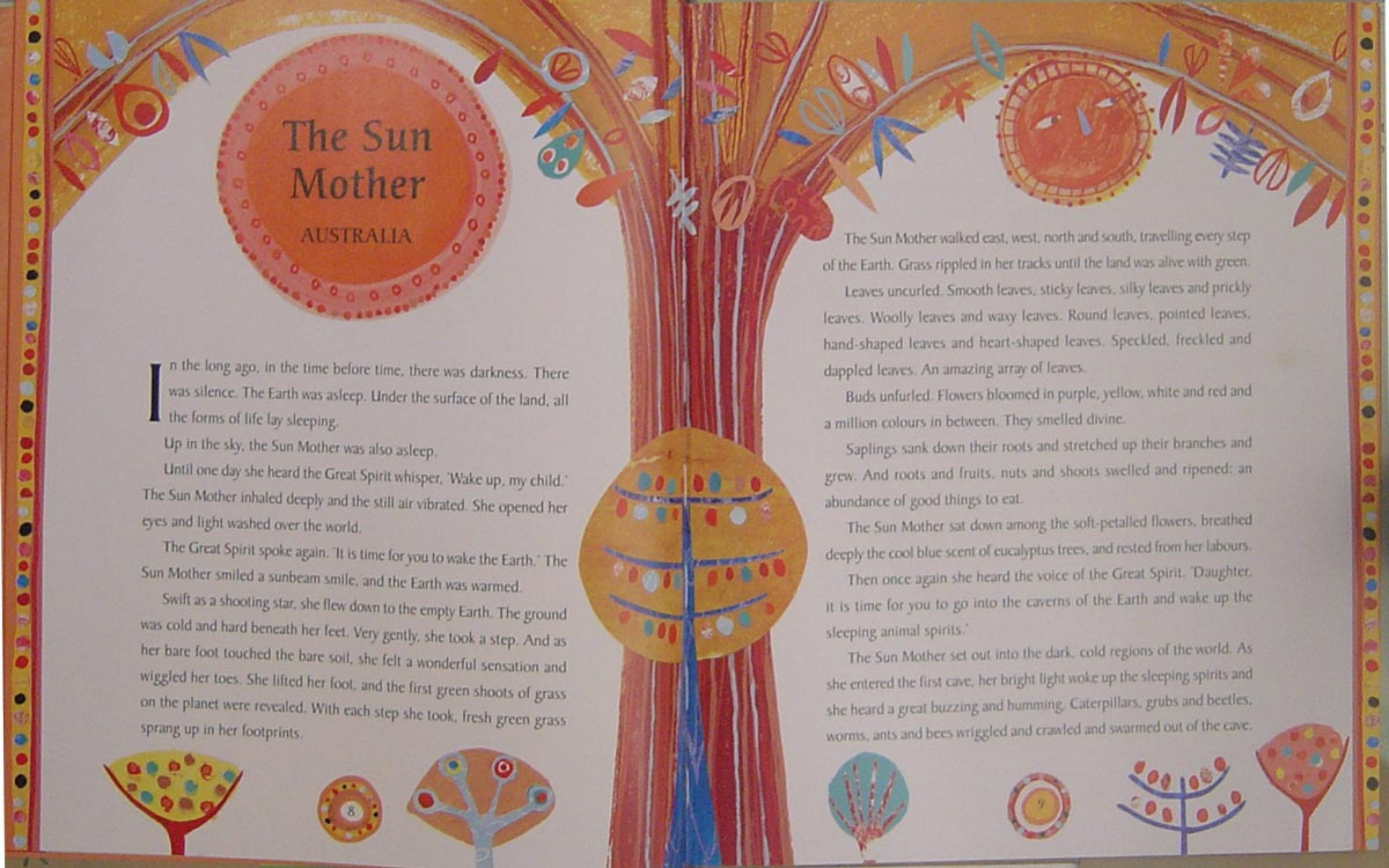
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The Sun Mother

AUSTRALIA

In the long ago, in the time before time, there was darkness. There was silence. The Earth was asleep. Under the surface of the land, all the forms of life lay sleeping.

Up in the sky, the Sun Mother was also asleep.

Until one day she heard the Great Spirit whisper, 'Wake up, my child.' The Sun Mother inhaled deeply and the still air vibrated. She opened her eyes and light washed over the world.

The Great Spirit spoke again. 'It is time for you to wake the Earth.' The Sun Mother smiled a sunbeam smile, and the Earth was warmed.

Swift as a shooting star, she flew down to the empty Earth. The ground was cold and hard beneath her feet. Very gently, she took a step. And as her bare foot touched the bare soil, she felt a wonderful sensation and wiggled her toes. She lifted her foot, and the first green shoots of grass on the planet were revealed. With each step she took, fresh green grass sprang up in her footprints.

The Sun Mother walked east, west, north and south, travelling every step of the Earth. Grass rippled in her tracks until the land was alive with green.

Leaves uncurled. Smooth leaves, sticky leaves, silky leaves and prickly leaves. Woolly leaves and waxy leaves. Round leaves, pointed leaves, hand-shaped leaves and heart-shaped leaves. Speckled, freckled and dappled leaves. An amazing array of leaves.

Buds unfurled. Flowers bloomed in purple, yellow, white and red and a million colours in between. They smelled divine.

Saplings sank down their roots and stretched up their branches and grew. And roots and fruits, nuts and shoots swelled and ripened: an abundance of good things to eat.

The Sun Mother sat down among the soft-petalled flowers, breathed deeply the cool blue scent of eucalyptus trees, and rested from her labours.

Then once again she heard the voice of the Great Spirit. 'Daughter, it is time for you to go into the caverns of the Earth and wake up the sleeping animal spirits.'

The Sun Mother set out into the dark, cold regions of the world. As she entered the first cave, her bright light woke up the sleeping spirits and she heard a great buzzing and humming. Caterpillars, grubs and beetles, worms, ants and bees wriggled and crawled and swarmed out of the cave.



When the Sun Mother walked out into the world again, she was leading a kaleidoscope of butterflies behind her. The insects flitted and fluttered from bush to bush, and the world was a dance of shimmering colour.

Again, the Sun Mother rested. She looked down from the mountaintops at the splendour of the Earth, and beamed with delight.

Refreshed, the Sun Mother walked down, down, down, into the next cave. She stepped down onto solid ice. With the touch of her foot, the ice began to melt and squeeze between her toes. Beneath her feet a stream started to flow, splashing around her ankles. Her warmth woke up lizards, frogs and snakes. A river gurgled out of the cavern, filling up lakes and lagoons, creeks and billabongs, and the deep wide sea.

The Sun Mother walked out into the world once again, trailing her fingertips through the rippling waters. All around her swam seahorses and turtles, and fish of every size and every shade from pearly silver to coral red.

Again the Sun Mother rested, for she was filled to the brim with the wonder of the world.

When the Sun Mother went into the coldest, darkest cave, in the deepest loins of the Earth, she was accompanied by a procession of crawling creatures, some wriggling their way on hundreds of legs and others slithering on no legs at all.



She looked down into the depths of the cavern, and her face shone with love. All along the ledges were the spirit forms of birds and animals. Her presence woke up the feathered tribes and the furry clans. With a flutter and clatter of wings, birds of every call and cry burst out of the cave and into existence.

Parrots whistled, emus waddled and the treetops rang with the laughter of kookaburras. Then out came the animals. An infinite variety; a jubilant hullabaloo.

All the creatures gathered around the Sun Mother, glad to be alive. The Sun Mother spoke softly to the multitude of beings assembled around her. 'Listen, my children. Like seeds in the winter, you slept in the earth. Like seeds in the spring, I have woken you. Now my work is complete, and I shall return to my home in the sky. Now I must leave you.'

