



Gooloo the Magpie, and the Wahroogah

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Australian

Intermediate
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Gooloo was a very old woman, and a very wicked old woman too, as this story will tell. During all the past season, when the grass was thick with seed, she had gathered much doonburr, which she crushed into meal as she wanted it for food. She used to crush it on a big flat stone with small flat stones—the big stone was called a dayoorl. Gooloo ground a great deal of the doonburr seed to put away for immediate use, the rest she kept whole, to be ground as required.

Soon after she had finished her first grinding, a neighbouring tribe came along and camped near where she was. One day the men all went out hunting, leaving the women and the children in the camp. After the men had been gone a little while, Gooloo the magpie came to their camp to talk to the women. She said, "Why do you not go hunting too? Many are the nests of the wurrannahs round here, and thick is the honey in them. Many and ripe are the bumbles hanging now on the humble trees; red is the fruit of the grooees, and opening with ripeness the fruit of the guiebets. Yet you sit in the camp and hunger, until your husbands return with the dinewan and bowrah they have gone forth to slay. Go, women, and gather of the plenty that surrounds you. I will take care of your children, the little Wahroogabs."

"Your words are wise," the women said. "It is foolish to sit here and hunger, when near at hand yams are thick in the ground, and many fruits wait but the plucking. We will go and fill quickly our comebees and goolays, but our children we will take with us."

"Not so," said Gooloo, "foolish indeed were you to do that. You would tire the little feet of those that run, and tire yourselves with the burden of those that have to be carried. No, take forth your comebees and goolays empty, that ye may bring back the more. Many are the spoils that wait only the hand of the gatherer. Look ye, I have a durrie made of fresh doonburr seed, cooking just now on that bark between two fires; that shall your children eat, and swiftly shall I make them another. They shall eat and be full ere their mothers are out of sight. See, they come to me now, they hunger for durrie, and well will I feed them. Haste ye then, that ye may return in time to make ready the fires for cooking the meat your husbands will bring. Glad will your husbands be when they see that ye have filled your goolays and comebees with fruits, and your wirrees with honey. Haste ye, I say, and do well."

Having listened to the words of Gooloo, the women decided to do as she said, and, leaving their children with her, they started forth with empty comebees, and armed with combos, with which to chop out the bees' nests and opossums, and with yam sticks to dig up yams.

When the women had gone, Gooloo gathered the children round her and fed them with durrie, hot from the coals. Honey, too, she gave them, and bumbles which she had buried to ripen. When they had eaten, she hurried them off to her real home, built in a hollow tree, a little distance away from where she had been cooking her durrie. Into her house she hurriedly thrust them, followed quickly herself, and made all secure.

Here she fed them again, but the children had already satisfied their hunger, and now they missed their mothers and began to cry. Their crying reached the ears of the women as they were returning to their camp. Quickly they came at the sound which is not good in a mother's ears. As they quickened their steps they thought how soon the spoils that lay heavy in their comebees would comfort their children. And happy they, the mothers, would feel when they fed the Wahroogahs with the dainties they had gathered for them. Soon they reached the camp, but, alas! where were their children? And where was Gooloo the magpie?

"They are playing wahgoo," they said, "and have hidden themselves."

The mothers hunted all round for them, and called aloud the names of their children and Gooloo. But no answer could they hear and no trace could they find. And yet every now and then they heard the sound of children wailing. But seek as they would they found them not. Then loudly wailed the mothers themselves for their lost Wahroogahs, and, wailing, returned to the camp to wait the coming of the black fellows. Heavy were their hearts, and sad were their faces when their husbands returned. They hastened to tell the black fellows when they came, how Gooloo had persuaded them to go hunting, promising if they did so that she would feed the hungry Wahroogahs, and care for them while they were away, but—and here they wailed again for their poor Wahroogahs. They told how they had listened to her words and gone; truth had she told of the plenty round, their comebees and goolays were full of fruits and spoils they had gathered, but, alas! they came home with them laden only to find their children gone and Gooloo gone too. And no trace could they find of either, though at times they heard a sound as of children wailing.

Then wroth were the men, saying: "What mothers are ye to leave your young to a stranger, and that stranger a Gooloo, ever a treacherous race? Did we not go forth to gain food for you and our children? Saw ye ever your husbands return from the chase empty handed? Then why, when ye knew we were gone hunting, must ye too go forth and leave our helpless ones to a stranger? Oh, evil, evil indeed is the time that has come when a mother forgets her child. Stay ye in the camp while we go forth to hunt for our lost Wahroogahs. Heavy will be our hands on the women if we return without them."

The men hunted the bush round for miles, but found no trace of the lost Wahroogahs, though they too heard at times a noise as of children's voices wailing.

But beyond the wailing which echoed in the mothers' ears for ever, no trace was found of the children. For

many days the women sat in the camp mourning for their lost Wahroogahs, and beating their heads because they had listened to the voice of Gooloo.

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