

# *Goonur the Woman-Doctor*

K. Langloh Parker

Australian

---

*Intermediate*

*9 min read*

Goonur was a clever old woman-doctor, who lived with her son, Goonur, and his two wives. The wives were Guddah the red lizard, and Beereun the small, prickly lizard. One day the two wives had done something to anger Goonur, their husband, and he gave them both a great beating. After their beating they went away by themselves. They said to each other that they could stand their present life no longer, and yet there was no escape unless they killed their husband. They decided they would do that. But how? That was the question. It must be by cunning.

At last they decided on a plan. They dug a big hole in the sand near the creek, filled it with water, and covered the hole over with boughs, leaves, and grass.

“Now we will go,” they said, “and tell our husband that we have found a big bandicoot’s nest.”

Back they went to the camp, and told Goonur that they had seen a big nest of bandicoots near the creek; that if he sneaked up he would be able to surprise them and get the lot.

Off went Goonur in great haste. He sneaked up to within a couple of feet of the nest, then gave a spring on to the top of it. And only when he felt the bough top give in with him, and he sank down into water, did he realise that he had been tricked. Too late then to save himself, for he was drowning and could not escape. His wives

had watched the success of their stratagem from a distance. When they were certain that they had effectually disposed of their hated husband, they went back to the camp. Goonur, the mother, soon missed her son, made inquiries of his wives, but gained no information from them. Two or three days passed, and yet Goonur, the son, returned not. Seriously alarmed at his long absence without having given her notice of his intention, the mother determined to follow his track. She took up his trail where she had last seen him leave the camp. This she followed until she reached the so-called bandicoot's nest. Here his tracks disappeared, and nowhere could she find a sign of his having returned from this place. She felt in the hole with her yarn stick, and soon felt that there was something large there in the water. She cut a forked stick and tried to raise the body and get it out, for she felt sure it must be her son. But she could not raise it; stick after stick broke in the effort. At last she cut a midjee stick and tried with that, and then she was successful. When she brought out the body she found it was indeed her son. She dragged the body to an ant bed, and watched intently to see if the stings of the ants brought any sign of returning life. Soon her hope was realised, and after a violent twitching of the muscles her son regained consciousness. As soon as he was able to do so, he told her of the trick his wives had played on him.

Goonur, the mother, was furious. "No more shall they have you as husband. You shall live hidden in my dardurr. When we get near the camp you can get into this long, big comebee, and I will take you in. When you want to go hunting I will take you from the camp in this comebee, and when we are out of sight you can get out and hunt as of old."

And thus they managed for some time to keep his return a secret; and little the wives knew that their husband was alive and in his mother's camp. But as day after day Goonur, the mother, returned from hunting loaded with spoils, they began to think she must have help from some one; for surely, they said, no old woman could be so successful in hunting. There was a mystery they were sure, and they were determined to find it out.

"See," they said, "she goes out alone. She is old, and yet she brings home more than we two do together, and we are young. To-day she brought opossums, piggiebillahs, honey yams, quatha, and many things. We got little, yet we went far. We will watch her."

The next time old Goonur went out, carrying her big comebee, the wives watched her.

"Look," they said, "how slowly she goes. She could not climb trees for opossums—she is too old and weak; look

how she staggers.”

They went cautiously after her, and saw when she was some distance from the camp that she put down her comebee. And out of it, to their amazement, stepped Goonur, their husband.

“Ah,” they said, “this is her secret. She must have found him, and, as she is a great doctor, she was able to bring him to life again. We must wait until she leaves him, and then go to him, and beg to know where he has been, and pretend joy that he is back, or else surely now he is alive again he will sometime kill us.”

Accordingly, when Goonur was alone the two wives ran to him, and said:

“Why, Goonur, our husband, did you leave us? Where have you been all the time that we, your wives, have mourned for you? Long has the time been without you, and we, your wives, have been sad that you came no more to our dardurr.”

Goonur, the husband, affected to believe their sorrow was genuine, and that they did not know when they directed him to the bandicoot’s nest that it was a trap. Which trap, but for his mother, might have been his grave.

They all went hunting together, and when they had killed enough for food they returned to the camp. As they came near to the camp, Goonur, the mother, saw them coming, and cried out:

“Would you again be tricked by your wives? Did I save you from death only that you might again be killed? I spared them, but I would I had slain them, if again they are to have a chance of killing you, my son. Many are the wiles of women, and another time I might not be able to save you. Let them live if you will it so, my son, but not with you. They tried to lure you to death; you are no longer theirs, mine only now, for did I not bring you back from the dead?”

But Goonur the husband said, “In truth did you save me, my mother, and these my wives rejoice that you did. They too, as I was, were deceived by the bandicoot’s nest, the work of an enemy yet to be found. See, my mother, do not the looks of love in their eyes, and words of love on their lips vouch for their truth? We will be as we have been, my mother, and live again in peace.”

And thus craftily did Goonur the husband deceive his wives and make them believe he trusted them wholly,

while in reality his mind was even then plotting vengeance. In a few days he had his plans ready. Having cut and pointed sharply two stakes, he stuck them firmly in the creek, then he placed two logs on the bank, in front of the sticks, which were underneath the water, and invisible. Having made his preparations, he invited his wives to come for a bathe. He said when they reached the creek:

“See those two logs on the bank, you jump in each from one and see which can dive the furthest. I will go first to see you as you come up.” And in he jumped, carefully avoiding the pointed stakes. “Right,” he called. “All is clear here, jump in.”

Then the two wives ran down the bank each to a log and jumped from it. Well had Goonur calculated the distance, for both jumped right on to the stakes placed in the water to catch them, and which stuck firmly into them, holding them under the water.

“Well am I avenged,” said Goonur. “No more will my wives lay traps to catch me.” And he walked off to the camp.

His mother asked him where his wives were. “They left me,” he said, “to get bees’ nests.”

But as day by day passed and the wives returned not, the old woman began to suspect that her son knew more than he said. She asked him no more, but quietly watched her opportunity, when her son was away hunting, and then followed the tracks of the wives. She tracked them to the creek, and as she saw no tracks of their return, she went into the creek, felt about, and there found the two bodies fast on the stakes. She managed to get them off and out of the creek, then she determined to try and restore them to life, for she was angry that her son had not told her what he had done, but had deceived her as well as his wives. She rubbed the women with some of her medicines, dressed the wounds made by the stakes, and then dragged them both on to ants’ nests and watched their bodies as the ants crawled over them, biting them. She had not long to wait; soon they began to move and come to life again.

As soon as they were restored Goonur took them back to the camp and said to Goonur her son, “Now once did I use my knowledge to restore life to you, and again have I used it to restore life to your wives. You are all mine now, and I desire that you live in peace and never more deceive me, or never again shall I use my skill for you.”

And they lived for a long while together, and when the Mother Doctor died there was a beautiful, dazzlingly

bright falling star, followed by a sound as of a sharp clap of thunder, and all the tribes round when they saw and heard this said, "A great doctor must have died, for that is the sign." And when the wives died, they were taken up to the sky, where they are now known as Gwaibillah, the red star, so called from its bright red colour, owing, the legend says, to the red marks left by the stakes on the bodies of the two women, and which nothing could efface.

**Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)**