



The Gwineeboos the Redbreasts

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*Intermediate
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Gwineeboo and Goomai, the water rat, were down at the creek one day, getting mussels for food, when, to their astonishment, a kangaroo hopped right into the water beside them. Well they knew that he must be escaping from hunters, who were probably pressing him close. So Gwineeboo quickly seized her yam stick, and knocked the kangaroo on the head; he was caught fast in the weeds in the creek, so could not escape. When the two old women had killed the kangaroo they hid its body under the weeds in the creek, fearing to take it out and cook it straight away, lest the hunters should come up and claim it. The little son of Gwineeboo watched them from the bank. After having hidden the kangaroo, the women picked up their mussels and started for their camp, when up came the hunters, Quarrian and Gidgereegah, who had tracked the kangaroo right to the creek.

Seeing the women they said: "Did you see a kangaroo?"

The women answered: "No. We saw no kangaroo."

“That is strange, for we have tracked it right up to here.”

“We have seen no kangaroo. See, we have been digging out mussels for food. Come to our camp, and we will give you some when they are cooked.”

The young men, puzzled in their minds, followed the women to their camp, and when the mussels were cooked the hunters joined the old women at their dinner. The little boy would not eat the mussels; he kept crying to his mother, “Gwineeboo, Gwineeboo. I want kangaroo. I want kangaroo. Gwineeboo. Gwineeboo.”

“There,” said Quarrian. “Your little boy has seen the kangaroo, and wants some; it must be here somewhere.”

“Oh, no. He cries for anything he thinks of, some days for kangaroo; he is only a little boy, and does not know what he wants,” said old Gwineeboo. But still the child kept saying, “Gwineeboo. Gwineeboo. I want kangaroo. I want kangaroo.” Goomai was so angry with little Gwineeboo for keeping on asking for kangaroo, and thereby making the young men suspicious, that she hit him so hard on the mouth to keep him quiet, that the blood came, and trickled down his breast, staining it red. When she saw this, old Gwineeboo grew angry in her turn, and hit old Goomai, who returned the blow, and so a fight began, more words than blows, so the noise was great, the women fighting, little Gwineeboo crying, not quite knowing whether he was crying because Goomai had hit him, because his mother was fighting, or because he still wanted kangaroo.

Quarrian said to Gidgereegah. “They have the kangaroo somewhere hidden; let us slip away now in the confusion. We will only hide, then come back in a little while, and surprise them.”

They went quietly away, and as soon as the two women noticed they had gone, they ceased fighting, and determined to cook the kangaroo. They watched the two young men out of sight, and waited some time so as to be sure that they were safe. Then down they hurried to get the kangaroo. They dragged it out, and were just making a big fire on which to cook it, when up came Quarrian and Gidgereegah, saying:

“Ah! we thought so. You had our kangaroo all the time; little Gwineeboo was right.”

“But we killed it,” said the women.

“But we hunted it here,” said the men, and so saying caught hold of the kangaroo and dragged it away to some

distance, where they made a fire and cooked it. Goomai, Gwineeboo, and her little boy went over to Quarrian and Gidgereegah, and begged for some of the meat, but the young men would give them none, though little Gwineeboo cried piteously for some. But no; they said they would rather throw what they did not want to the hawks than give it to the women or child. At last, seeing that there was no hope of their getting any, the women went away. They built a big dardurr for themselves, shutting themselves and the little boy up in it. Then they began singing a song which was to invoke a storm to destroy their enemies, for so now they considered Quarrian and Gidgereegah. For some time they chanted:

“Moogaray, Moogaray, May, May,
Eehu, Eehu, Doongarah.”

First they would begin very slowly and softly, gradually getting quicker and louder, until at length they almost shrieked it out. The words they said meant, “Come hailstones; come wind; come rain; come lightning.”

While they were chanting, little Gwineeboo kept crying, and would not be comforted. Soon came a few big drops of rain, then a big wind, and as that lulled, more rain. Then came thunder and lightning, the air grew bitterly cold, and there came a pitiless hailstorm, hailstones bigger than a duck’s egg fell, cutting the leaves from the trees and bruising their bark. Gidgereegah and Quarrian came running over to the dardurr and begged the women to let them in.

“No,” shrieked Gwineeboo above the storm, “there was no kangaroo meat for us: there is no dardurr shelter for you. Ask shelter of the hawks whom ye fed.” The men begged to be let in, said they would hunt again and get kangaroo for the women, not one but many. “No,” again shrieked the women. “You would not even listen to the crying of a little child; it is better such as you should perish.” And fiercer raged the storm and louder sang the women:

“Moogaray, Moogaray, May, May,
Eehu, Eehu, Doongarah.”

So long and so fierce was the storm that the young men must have perished had they not been changed into birds. First they were changed into birds and afterwards into stars in the sky, where they now are, Gidgereegah and Quarrian with the kangaroo between them, still bearing the names that they bore on the earth.

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