



Meamei the Seven Sisters

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Intermediate

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Wurrannah had had a long day's hunting, and he came back to the camp tired and hungry. He asked his old mother for durrie, but she said there was none left. Then he asked some of the other blacks to give him some doonburr seeds that he might make durrie for himself, But no one would give him anything. He flew into a rage and he said, "I will go to a far country and live with strangers; my own people would starve me." And while he was yet hot and angry, he went. Gathering up his weapons, he strode forth to find a new people in a new country. After he had gone some distance, he saw, a long way off, an old man chopping out bees' nests. The old man turned his face towards Wurrannah, and watched him coming, but when Wurrannah came close to him he saw that the old man had no eyes, though he had seemed to be watching him long before he could have heard him. It frightened Wurrannah to see a stranger having no eyes, yet turning his face towards him as if seeing him all the time. But he determined not to show his fear, but go straight on towards him, which he did. When he came up to him, the stranger told him that his name was Mooroonumildah, and that his tribe were so-called because they had no eyes, but saw through their noses. Wurrannah thought it very strange and still felt rather frightened, though Mooroonumildah seemed hospitable and kind, for, he gave Wurrannah, whom he said looked hungry, a bark wirree filled with honey, told him where his camp was, and gave him leave to go there and stay with him. Wurrannah took the honey and turned as if to go to the camp, but when he got out of sight he thought it wiser to turn in another direction. He journeyed on for some time, until he came to a large

lagoon, where he decided to camp. He took a long drink of water, and then lay down to sleep. When he woke in the morning, he looked towards the lagoon, but saw only a big plain. He thought he must be dreaming; he rubbed his eyes and looked again.

“This is a strange country,” he said. “First I meet a man who has no eyes and yet can see. Then at night I see a large lagoon full of water, I wake in the morning and see none. The water was surely there, for I drank some, and yet now there is no water.” As he was wondering how the water could have disappeared so quickly, he saw a big storm coming up; he hurried to get into the thick bush for shelter. When he had gone a little way into the bush, he saw a quantity of cut bark lying on the ground.

“Now I am right,” he said. “I shall get some poles and with them and this bark make a dardurr in which to shelter myself from the storm I see coming.”

He quickly cut the poles he wanted, stuck them up as a framework for his dardurr. Then he went to lift up the bark. As he lifted up a sheet of it he saw a strange-looking object of no tribe that he had ever seen before.

This strange object cried out: “I am Bulgahnunoo,” in such a terrifying tone that Wurrannah dropped the bark, picked up his weapons and ran away as hard as he could, quite forgetting the storm. His one idea was to get as far as he could from Bulgahnunoo.

On he ran until he came to a big river, which hemmed him in on three sides. The river was too big to cross, so he had to turn back, yet he did not retrace his steps but turned in another direction. As he turned to leave the river he saw a flock of emus coming to water. The first half of the flock were covered with feathers, but the last half had the form of emus, but no feathers.

Wurrannah decided to spear one for food. For that purpose he climbed up a tree, so that they should not see him; he got his spear ready to kill one of the featherless birds. As they passed by, he picked out the one he meant to have, threw his spear and killed it, then climbed down to go and get it.

As he was running up to the dead emu, he saw that they were not emus at all but black fellows of a strange tribe. They were all standing round their dead friend making savage signs, as to what they would do by way of vengeance. Wurrannah saw that little would avail him the excuse that he had killed the black fellow in mistake for an emu; his only hope lay in flight. Once more he took to his heels, hardly daring to look round for fear he

would see an enemy behind him. On he sped, until at last he reached a camp, which he was almost into before he saw it; he had only been thinking of danger behind him, unheeding what was before him.

However, he had nothing to fear in the camp he reached so suddenly, for in it were only seven young girls. They did not look very terrifying, in fact, seemed more startled than he was. They were quite friendly towards him when they found that he was alone and hungry. They gave him food and allowed him to camp there that night. He asked them where the rest of their tribe were, and what their name was. They answered that their name was Meamei, and that their tribe were in a far country. They had only come to this country to see what it was like; they would stay for a while and thence return whence they had come.

The next day Wurrannah made a fresh start, and left the camp of the Meamei, as if he were leaving for good. But he determined to hide near and watch what they did, and if he could get a chance he would steal a wife from amongst them. He was tired of travelling alone. He saw the seven sisters all start out with their yam sticks in hand. He followed at a distance, taking care not to be seen. He saw them stop by the nests of some flying ants. With their yam sticks they dug all round these ant holes. When they had successfully unearthed the ants they sat down, throwing their yam sticks on one side, to enjoy a feast, for these ants were esteemed by them a great delicacy.

While the sisters were busy at their feast, Wurrannah sneaked up to their yam sticks and stole two of them; then, taking the sticks with him, sneaked back to his hiding-place. When at length the Meamei had satisfied their appetites, they picked up their sticks and turned towards their camp again. But only five could find their sticks; so those five started off, leaving the other two to find theirs, supposing they must be somewhere near, and, finding them, they would soon catch them up. The two girls hunted all round the ants' nests, but could find no sticks. At last, when their backs were turned towards him, Wurrannah crept out and stuck the lost yam sticks near together in the ground; then he slipt back into his hiding-place. When the two girls turned round, there in front of them they saw their sticks. With a cry of joyful surprise they ran to them and caught hold of them to pull them out of the ground, in which they were firmly stuck. As they were doing so, out from his hiding-place jumped Wurrannah. He seized both girls round their waists, holding them tightly. They struggled and screamed, but to no purpose. There were none near to hear them, and the more they struggled the tighter Wurrannah held them. Finding their screams and struggles in vain they quietened at length, and then Wurrannah told them not to be afraid, he would take care of them. He was lonely, he said, and wanted

two wives. They must come quietly with him, and he would be good to them. But they must do as he told them. If they were not quiet, he would swiftly quieten them with his moorillah. But if they would come quietly with him he would be good to them. Seeing that resistance was useless, the two young girls complied with his wish, and travelled quietly on with him. They told him that some day their tribe would come and steal them back again; to avoid which he travelled quickly on and on still further, hoping to elude all pursuit. Some weeks passed, and, outwardly, the two Meamei seemed settled down to their new life, and quite content in it, though when they were alone together they often talked of their sisters, and wondered what they had done when they realised their loss. They wondered if the five were still hunting for them, or whether they had gone back to their tribe to get assistance. That they might be in time forgotten and left with Wurrunnali for ever, they never once for a moment thought. One day when they were camped Wurrunnah said: "This fire will not burn well. Go you two and get some bark from those two pine trees over there."

"No," they said, "we must not cut pine bark. If we did, you would never more see us."

"Go! I tell you, cut pine bark. I want it. See you not the fire burns but slowly?"

"If we go, Wurrunnah, we shall never return. You will see us no more in this country. We know it."

"Go, women, stay not to talk. Did ye ever see talk make a fire burn? Then why stand ye there talking? Go; do as I bid you. Talk not so foolishly; if you ran away soon should I catch you, and, catching you, would beat you hard. Go I talk no more."

The Meamei went, taking with them their combos with which to cut the bark. They went each to a different tree, and each, with a strong hit, drove her combo into the bark. As she did so, each felt the tree that her combo had struck rising higher out of the ground and bearing her upward with it. Higher and higher grew the pine trees, and still on them, higher and higher from the earth, went the two girls. Hearing no chopping after the first hits, Wurrunnah came towards the pines to see what was keeping the girls so long. As he came near them he saw that the pine trees were growing taller even as he looked at them, and clinging to the trunks of the trees high in the air he saw his two wives. He called to them to come down, but they made no answer. Time after time he called to them as higher and higher they went, but still they made no answer. Steadily taller grew the two pines, until at last their tops touched the sky. As they did so, from the sky the five Meamei looked out, called to their two sisters on the pine trees, bidding them not to be afraid but to come to them. Quickly the two

girls climbed up when they heard the voices of their sisters. When they reached the tops of the pines the five sisters in the sky stretched forth their hands, and drew them in to live with them there in the sky for ever.

And there, if you look, you may see the seven sisters together. You perhaps know them as the Pleiades, but the black fellows call them the Meamei.

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