

How Mungghee, or Mussels, were Brought to the Creeks

K. Langloh Parker

Australian

Intermediate

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One day in the far past a Mungghee wurraywurraymul, or sea-gull, was flying over the Western plains carrying a mussel. Wahn the crow saw her, and wondering what she carried, pursued her. In her fear at being overtaken she dropped the mussel.

Seeing it drop, Wahn stopped his pursuit and swooped down to see what this strange thing was. Standing beside it, with his head on one side, he peered at it. Then he gave it a peck. He rather liked the taste of it; he pecked again and again, until the fish in one side of the shell was finished. He never noticed that there was a fish in the other side too, so he took up the empty shell, as he thought, and threw it into the creek. There this Mungghee throve and multiplied, all that followed her being as she was, one fish enclosed between two shells, not as the one Mungghee wurraywurraymul had brought, which had two fish, one on each side shell.

Not knowing that he had thrown a Mungghee mother into the creek, Wahn determined to pursue Mungghee wurraywurraymul and get more, or find out whence she had brought the one he had thought so good, that he might get some. Away he flew in the direction she had gone. He overtook her some miles up the creek beside a big waterhole. Before she saw him coming he had swooped down upon her, crying, "Give me some more of

that fish in two shells you brought.”

“I have no more. Let me go.”

“Tell me, then, where you got it, that I may get more for myself.”

“They do not belong to your country. They live in one far away which I passed in my flight from the big salt water here. Let me go.” And she struggled to free herself, crying piteously the strange, sad cry of her tribe.

But Wahn, the crow, held her tightly. “If you promise to go straight back to that country and bring some more I will release you. That you must promise, and also that when I have finished those you shall bring more, that I may never be without them again. If you do not promise I will kill you now.”

“Let me go, and I will do as you ask. I promise my tribe shall help me to bring Mungghee to your creeks.”

“Go, then,” said Wahn, “swiftly back, and bring to me here on the banks of the creek the fish that hides itself between two shells.” And he let her go, turning her head towards the south.

Away she flew. Days passed, and months, and yet Mungghee wurraywurraymul did not return, and Wahn was angry with himself for not having killed her rather than let her so deceive him.

He went one day to the creek for a drink, and stooping, he saw before him a shell such as he had thrown into the water. Thinking it was the same he took no notice, but going on along the creek he saw another and yet another. He cracked one by holding it in his beak and knocking it against the root of a tree on the bank. Then he ate the fish, and looking round for more he found the mud along the margin of the creek was thick with them. Then not knowing that the mussel shell he had thrown away held a fish, he thought Mungghee wurraywurraymul must have returned unseen by him, disappearing secretly lest he should hurt her.

Later he found that was not so, for one day he saw a flock of her tribe flying over where he was. They alighted a little higher up, where he saw some of them stick the Mungghee they were carrying in the mud just under the water. Having done so, on they flew a little farther to stick others, and so on up the creek. Having finished their work they turned and flew back towards the sea-coast. Wahn noticed that the Mungghee came out of the water, and opening their shells, stretched out between them, and uttered a low, piteous, muffled, mew-like sound. Making their way along the mud, they cried as they went for the Mungghee wurraywurraymul to take

them back to their own country. But their cries were unheeded, for far away were the sea-gulls.

At last they reached the Mungghee which had been born in the creek. These being stronger and more numerous than the newcomers, soon altered their habits of life, teaching them to live as they did, only one fish in the two joined-together shells; and so have all mussels been ever since. For though from time to time, on the rare visits of the sea-gulls to the Back Creeks, fresh Mungghee are brought, yet these too soon do as the others.

The Daens cook mussels in the hot ashes of their fires, and eat them with relish, saying, "If it had not been for Wahn we should not have had this good food, for he it was who caused it to be given to us by Mungghee wurraywurraymul, the mussel-bringer."

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