



# *Narahdarn the Bat*

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Australian

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*Intermediate*

*6 min read*

Narahdarn, the bat, wanted honey. He watched until he saw a Wurrannunnah, or bee, alight. He caught it, stuck a white feather between its hind legs, let it go and followed it. He knew he could see the white feather, and so follow the bee to its nest. He ordered his two wives, of the Bilber tribe, to follow him with wirrees to carry home the honey in. Night came on and Wurrannunnah the bee had not reached home. Narahdarn caught him, imprisoned him under bark, and kept him safely there until next morning. When it was light enough to see, Narahdarn let the bee go again, and followed him to his nest, in a gunnyanny tree. Marking the tree with his comebo that he might know it again, he returned to hurry on his wives who were some way behind. He wanted them to come on, climb the tree, and chop out the honey. When they reached the marked tree one of the women climbed up. She called out to Narahdarn that the honey was in a split in the tree. He called back to her to put her hand in and get it out. She put her arm in, but found she could not get it out again. Narahdarn climbed up to help her, but found when he reached her that the only way to free her was to cut off her arm. This he did before she had time to realise what he was going to do, and protest. So great was the shock to her that she died instantly. Narahdarn carried down her lifeless body and commanded her sister, his other wife, to go up, chop out the arm, and get the honey. She protested, declaring the bees would have taken the honey away by now.

“Not so,” he said; “go at once.”

Every excuse she could think of, to save herself, she made. But her excuses were in vain, and Narahdarn only became furious with her for making them, and, brandishing his boondi, drove her up the tree. She managed to get her arm in beside her sister's, but there it stuck and she could not move it. Narahdarn, who was watching her, saw what had happened and followed her up the tree. Finding he could not pull her arm out, in spite of her cries, he chopped it off, as he had done her sister's. After one shriek, as he drove his comebo through her arm, she was silent. He said, “Come down, and I will chop out the bees' nest.” But she did not answer him, and he saw that she too was dead. Then he was frightened, and climbed quickly down the gunnyanny tree; taking her body to the ground with him, he laid it beside her sister's, and quickly he hurried from the spot, taking no further thought of the honey. As he neared his camp, two little sisters of his wives ran out to meet him, thinking their sisters would be with him, and that they would give them a taste of the honey they knew they had gone out to get. But to their surprise Narahdarn came alone, and as he drew near to them they saw his arms were covered with blood. And his face had a fierce look on it, which frightened them from even asking where their sisters were. They ran and told their mother that Narahdarn had returned alone, that he looked fierce and angry, also his arms were covered with blood. Out went the mother of the Bilbers, and she said, “Where are my daughters, Narahdarn? Forth went they this morning to bring home the honey you found. You come back alone. You bring no honey. Your look is fierce, as of one who fights, and your arms are covered with blood. Tell me, I say, where are my daughters?”

“Ask me not, Bilber. Ask Wurrenunnah the bee, he may know. Narahdarn the bat knows nothing.” And he wrapped himself in a silence which no questioning could pierce. Leaving him there, before his camp, the mother of the Bilbers returned to her dardurr and told her tribe that her daughters were gone, and Narahdarn, their husband, would tell her nothing of them. But she felt sure he knew their fate, and certain she was that he had some tale to tell, for his arms were covered with blood.

The chief of her tribe listened to her. When she had finished and begun to wail for her daughters, whom she thought she would see no more, he said, “Mother of the Bilbers, your daughters shall be avenged if aught has happened to them at the hands of Narahdarn. Fresh are his tracks, and the young men of your tribe shall follow whence they have come, and finding what Narahdarn has done, swiftly shall they return. Then shall we hold a

corrobboree, and if your daughters fell at his hand Narahdarn shall be punished.”

The mother of the Bilbers said: “Well have you spoken, oh my relation. Now speed ye the young men lest the rain fall or the dust blow and the tracks be lost.” Then forth went the fleetest footed and the keenest eyed of the young men of the tribe. Ere long, back they came to the camp with the news of the fate of the Bilbers.

That night was the corrobboree held. The women sat round in a half-circle, and chanted a monotonous chant, keeping time by hitting, some of them, two boomerangs together, and others beating their rolled up opossum rugs.

Big fires were lit on the edge of the scrub, throwing light on the dancers as they came dancing out from their camps, painted in all manner of designs, waywahs round their waists, tufts of feathers in their hair, and carrying in their hands painted wands. Heading the procession as the men filed out from the scrub into a cleared space in front of the women, came Narahdarn. The light of the fires lit up the tree tops, the dark balahs showed out in fantastic shapes, and weird indeed was the scene as slowly the men danced round; louder clicked the boomerangs and louder grew the chanting of the women; higher were the fires piled, until the flames shot their coloured tongues round the trunks of the trees and high into the air. One fire was bigger than all, and towards it the dancers edged Narahdarn; then the voice of the mother of the Bilbers shrieked in the chanting, high above that of the other women. As Narahdarn turned from the fire to dance back he found a wall of men confronting him. These quickly seized him and hurled him into the madly-leaping fire before him, where he perished in the flames. And so were the Bilbers avenged.

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