

Wayambeh the Turtle and Woggoon the Turkey

Brothers Grimm

Australian

Easy
7 min read

Wayambeh the turtle was the wife of Gougourgahgah, the laughing jackass. They had a quarrel when the time came for Wayambeh to lay her eggs. She was going as her tribe did to the sand beside the creek, there to make a hole and deposit them; but Gougourgahgah said that was a mad thing to do, a flood might come and wash them away. She should lay the eggs in a hollow tree.

Wayambeh said: "How shall I get into a hollow tree? And even if I did get there how should I get sand up to cover the eggs? And how would the sun shine on the sand to heat it and hatch them out?"

"How was I born, and my mother before me?" asked Gougourgahgah, answering her question with another, going on, "My wife can do surely as our mothers did?"

"I am a Wayambeh, and it is right only for me to do as the Wayambehs do. Does a child not take its name from its mother? My children will be Wayambeh even as I am. I shall go to my own tribe."

Straight went Wayambeh to the creek where her tribe lived. Into the water she went after them.

Gougourgahgah followed her to the edge. Then he turned back and sent his servant Wonga the pigeon, and Dumerh the wife of Wonga, after Wayambeh.

Wonga sent Dumerh on to tell Wayambeh to come back.

But Wayambeh said: "No, I will not go back. Let him come himself if he wants me."

Wonga and Dumerh went back and told this to Gougourgahgah, who went as his wife had asked for him. But on the bank of the creek he saw the mother of Wayambeh, so he turned back, for the law of the tribes did not let him speak to his mother-in-law. He sent Wonga to consult her.

"Tell him," said Wayambeh the mother, "my daughter will not go back. He would have her break the laws of her tribe. She shall not leave her people."

Wonga went back to tell Gougourgahgah. Just as he was beginning to do so, out from the grass crept behind him Ouyouboolooy the black snake, an old lover of Wayambeh, who was so enraged at this messenger wanting to bring his old love back to the husband she had left that he meant to kill him. He was in the act of making a spring on to Wonga to throttle him, when Gougourgahgah saw him.

Gougourgahgah made one dart and was on the back of Ouyouboolooy. Clutching hold of him, he flew high in the air, up, up, as far as his flight let him go, then he loosened his hold of Ouyouboolooy and let him drop swiftly, thud to the earth, his back broken. Down after him flew Gougourgahgah. There in his camp he saw his enemy lying dead.

"Twice have you tried to injure me, and twice have you failed," he said; "once when you wanted to marry Wayambeh, who was promised to me, and now when you wanted to kill my faithful servant, sneaking as you did like a coward behind him. But instead of him, you yourself lie dead, powerless for ever to harm me. So shall I kill ever your treacherous tribe, against whom my people shall have a dullaymullaylunnah, or vengeful hatred, for ever. Ah! But it is good to see you my enemy lying there."

And Gougourgahgah laughed long and loud peals of laughter, until the whole creek-side echoed with his startling "Gou—gour—gah—gah. Gou—gour—gah—gah."

Startling indeed was the sound to Wayambeh, for her husband had always looked too solemn to laugh, except

when he had to herald the sunrise. She hurried out of the water, and went away along the opposite bank as fast as she could. She thought, as peal after peal of his strange loud laughter reached her, that her husband had gone mad, and if he caught her would kill her. So near the laughter sounded that she fancied he was pursuing her. She did not dare to look round but sped swiftly on. But instead of following her, Gougourgahgah was eating his enemy, and vowing again that so long as his tribe lived so long should they wage war against the tribe of Ouyoubooloey, killing and eating them.

While this feast off her old lover was going on, Wayambah was putting an immense distance between herself and her old camp. At length she was too tired to go farther. Where she rested was a nice sandy place beside the creek. Here she decided to camp. She made a hole and laid her eggs in it in due course. When the last was laid, and she was carefully covering them up ready for the hatching, she heard a sound on the bank above her. Looking up she saw there a dark-feathered bird, with a red head and neck, peering down at her, who, on seeing her look up, said: "Why do you cover your eggs up?"

"That the sand and sun may hatch them."

"But won't you sit on them yourself?"

"No indeed! Why should I do that? They will be warm where they are, and come out even as I came out, in the right time. If I sat on them I might break them. And who would get me food? I should die and they too."

The red-headed bird, which was Woggoon the brush turkey, went back to where her mate was feeding and told him what she had seen. She said she would like to try that plan, it seemed much easier than having to sit on the eggs week after week.

Her mate told her not to be in a hurry to change her ways; each tribe had its own custom. Then the Wayambah might be only fooling her. They would wait and see if the eggs came out all right. But even so he would not have her make a nest near the creek where a sudden rise might wash it away. They must stick to their scrub.

At length time proved that what Wayambah had said was true. The little Wayambah all came out, and were strong and well. Then the Woggoons decided they would try and hatch their eggs without sitting on them. They could not dig a hole to lay them in, but they scratched up a heap of mixed debris, earth, sand, leaves and sticks. Then the mother Woggoon every second day laid an egg until in the mound were fifteen, all apart from each other, with the thin end downwards. Over these they put some more decayed leaves and rubbish, and

outside all a heaped-up covering of more leaves and twigs. When all this was done the parents waited anxiously for the result.

As time went on the mother bird grew restless. What if she had killed all her young just to save herself? She fussed round the big mound which stood some feet high. She put her head in to feel if it were warm; drew it out quickly, delighted to find the nest was absolutely hot. Then, she began to fear it would be too hot. Full of anxiety she scratched away the earth and leaves, thinking the covering was too much. She stopped suddenly and listened. Was that a baby-bird note? She listened again. It was. She called to her mate. He came, and when she told him what she had heard, he scratched away until to their joy out came the finest chicks they had ever seen, quite independent and strong, with feet and wings more advanced than any seen on their chicks before.

Proud of the success of her plan, and anxious to spread the good news, the mother Woggoon ran away from her family to tell all her tribe about them.

The next season the other Woggoons added to the size of the mound, and many of the mothers laid their eggs in one nest, until at last the whole tribe adopted the same plan, thus earning for themselves the name of Mound Builders.

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