

Wurrunnah's Trip to the Sea

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Intermediate

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When the two Meamei were translated to the sky from Wurrunnah's camp, failing to recover them, he journeyed on alone. He was now a long way from the spot he had started from, which was near Nerangledool. He had passed Yaraänbah, Narine, and had reached Nindeegoolee, where the little sand-ridges are, to where the Earmoonän have gone from Noondoo.

He was camping by some water when he saw a strange creature coming towards him, having the body and head of a dog, feet of a woman, and a short tail. It bounded four or five feet in the air as it came along, making a whirring, whizzing noise with its lips.

"What is this coming to water?" said Wurrunnah to himself. When the creature was close, he said: "It must be Earmoonän, one of the pups of the dog Byamee left at Noondoo that I have heard of."

He called out to it, "Where is your old master?" for he thought he would find out if the strange creature knew where Byamee was. For answer the Earmoonän made the spluttering, whizzing noise with his lips Wurrunnah had already heard.

Wurrunnah said: "Has he gone right away from you?" Again came only the spluttering, whizzing noise, a sort of pursing of the lips together, and blowing out a sound like "Phur-r, phur-r."

“Is it true that he has gone for ever?”

“Phur-r, phur-r,” came again the answer.

Wurrannah stood up and motioned Earmoonän back, saying: “You go away now. That will do. I want you there no more. You tell me nothing of Byamee.”

At the sound of the name “Byamee,” Earmoonän jumped away, saying as he went: “Phur-r, phur-r.”

He quickly disappeared, going back to the sand-ridges under which Wurrannah had heard he and the rest of the strange litter lived, in huge caves, where- they imprisoned any travellers they could round up into them. Nothing frightened them but mention of the name of Byamee.

Wurrannah did not mean to risk another encounter, so he hurried on to Dungerh. On, on he travelled for many days, until at last he reached Doogoonberh, which is on the sea. Seeing a wide expanse of water before him and feeling thirsty, he took his little binguie down to dip some out and drink.

“Kuh!” he said as he swallowed a mouthful before he realised the strange taste. “Kuh! Budta! Budta! Salt! Salt!” said he, as he spat out what he could.

He thought it must be the white froth that was salt, so he cleared this off with his hand, dipped the binguie in again, and again tasted. “Kuh! Kuh! Budta! Budta! I am thirsty. I must go back to the water-holes I passed and get a drink there.”

Before going, he looked as far as his eye could reach across the sea. He said: “What sort of flood water is this that has a tree in it nowhere, not even a mirrieh-bush, and is salt, salt to taste? It does not look like flood water at all. It looks like Goonagulla, the sky, with white clouds on it. Yet when the clouds move the sky is still; all this moves and is water, though surely man never tasted such before.”

Wonderingly, back he went to the water-holes and quenched his thirst. Then he killed two opossums, and skinned them to make water-bags, or gulleemeah.

That night as he camped out of sight of, and some distance away from, the sea he heard its booming noise, for the wind had risen. What the noise was he did not know.

The next morning he went to see the strange water again, thinking he might now make out a bank on the far

side. Seeing a high tree a few hundred yards from the beach, he climbed up it and looked again seawards, scanning the distant horizon for trees or land. He saw only water, a dark troubled-looking water that day.

“There is a thunderstorm in it. This must be the camp of Dooloomai the Thunder, and the roaring winds,” he said as he listened to the angry booming, “That is what I heard last night.” Then, as he saw the tide rising and the waves chasing each other on to the beach, where they dashed with an angry roar, going back only to come rushing in again higher next time, he said: “There must be Wundah—devils—in it, and they are trying to get me. I will go up that high mountain; there shall I see better.” But in vain he climbed the mountain; he saw only the strange water, as far as he could see, water, only water.

Down the mountain he went again, back to the waterholes, where were hanging the opossum skins to dry. These he quickly made into water-bags. He waited until he saw the strange water still as when he first saw it, then he went to it and filled the bags with it. He then picked up a few shells to take away with him. He meant to go straight back to his tribe and tell them what he had seen, taking with him the bags of water that they might taste it and know his story was true.

On his return journey he met a very old Daen. Wurrannah thought he might know something of this strange water, and its booming voices. The old wirreenun listened to all Wurrannah told him. He tasted the water, spat it out again, sat silent for some time, then he said: “Surely have then my father’s fathers spoken truly when they told their children, that there was beyond the mountains more water than the eye of man could stretch across, water covering a bigger plain than the eye of man has ever seen, water which is full of dangers for man, whom it pursues to its very banks, where it rages when it cannot catch him for the many monsters which live in it, and are bigger, they said, and deadlier than Kurreahs. Saw you any such?”

“Nothing,” said Wurrannah, “did I see but water, budta water everywhere. But the voices of these monsters was the noise I heard, bidding the water draw me to them, and howling in rage when I got free away. I shall go swiftly to my tribe, and tell them what I have seen and heard.”

Before going he gave the old wirreenun some of the salt water that his tribe might taste it. He also gave him a shell, one of those he had picked up on the beach.

These shells were afterwards the cause of many fights, one tribe trying to get them from the other. The oldest wirreenun of the tribe always wore one of them at the great corroborees. After many generations had passed away, one wirreenun, in whose possession it was, put it for safety in his Minggah, or spirit tree. And to this day

there are fights about it, for he died leaving it there. Some tribes try to steal it, but others fight to protect it.

Every now and then on his road home Wurrannah had to stay and make fresh bags to carry the salt water in, as the old ones started to leak, but at length he reached Nerangledool again, with enough for the elders of his tribe to taste.

None of them knew where he had been, nor could they imagine what this water was which stretched farther than all their hunting grounds. Any stranger that came to the camp was brought to Wurrannah that he might hear from him what had turned him back on his journey. But Wurrannah did not live long to tell his story; what he had seen became a tradition in his tribe.

He had broken the law of Byamee by leaving his own hunting ground, so was not allowed to live long after his return.

But yet so famous was he from his far journeyings that when he died, followed by a terrific crash, a huge meteor shot across the sky, thereby telling the tribes for miles round that a great spirit had passed from the earth. From generation to generation was told the story of Wurrannah's journey and the strange water he had seen, and at the big corroborees were seen the shells he had brought.

At length the Wundah or white devils came to live in the country, and the truth of the old tradition was proved by some black boys who went down from Gundablouie with cattle to Mulubinba.

There they saw the widely stretching water, with the white clouds on it. There they heard its booming roar. They were terrified, but one boy, more venturesome than the others, said:

"Let us taste it. If it is salt, then in truth this is like the water the old men tell us Wurrannah saw." They tasted it. It was salt.

"It is true," they said, "that which they told us. We will tell them that we too have seen it, and have tasted it. And we will take back some of these wa-ah to wear at the corroborees." So back to the tribes they took the shells to prove their story.

One of those boys, the first who tasted the salt water, is an old man now. He it is who told me the story of Wurrannah's trip to the sea.

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