

Folklore from Around the World

Australia

The Galah and Oolah the Lizard

Oolah the lizard was tired of lying in the sun, doing nothing. So he said, "I will go and play." He took his boomerangs out, and began to practise throwing them. While he was doing so a Galah came up, and stood near, watching the boomerangs come flying back, for the kind of boomerangs Oolah was throwing were the bubberahs. They are smaller than others, and more curved, and when they are properly thrown they return to the thrower, which other boomerangs do not.

Oolah was proud of having the gay Galah to watch his skill. In his pride he gave the bubberah an extra twist, and threw it with all his might. Whizz, whizzing through the air, back it came, hitting, as it passed her, the Galah on the top of her head, taking both feathers and skin clean off. The Galah set up a hideous, cawing, croaking shriek, and flew about, stopping every few minutes to knock her head on the ground like a mad bird. Oolah was so frightened when he saw what he had done, and noticed that the blood was flowing from the Galah's head, that he glided away to hide under a bindeah bush. But the Galah saw him. She never stopped the hideous noise she was making for a minute, but, still shrieking, followed Oolah. When she reached the bindeah bush she rushed at Oolah, seized him with her beak, rolled him on the bush until every bindeah had made a hole in his skin. Then she rubbed his skin with her own bleeding head. "Now then," she said, "you Oolah shall carry bindeahs on you always, and the stain of my blood."

"And you," said Oolah, as he hissed with pain from the tingling of the prickles, "shall be a bald-headed bird as long as I am a red prickly lizard."

So to this day, underneath the Galah's crest you can always find the bald patch which the bubberah of Oolah first made. And in the country of the Galahs are lizards coloured reddish brown, and covered with spikes like bindeah prickles.

Mullyangah, the Morning Star

Mullyan, the eagle hawk, built himself a home high in a yaraan tree. There he lived apart from his tribe, with Moodai the opossum, his wife, and Moodai the opossum, his mother-in-law. With them too was Buttergah, a daughter of the Buggoo or flying squirrel tribe. Buttergah was a friend of Moodai, the wife of Mullyan, and a distant cousin to the Moodai tribe.

Mullyan the eagle hawk was a cannibal. That was the reason of his living apart from the other blacks. In order to satisfy his cannibal cravings, he used to sally forth with a big spear, a spear about four times as big as an ordinary spear. If he found a black fellow hunting alone, he would kill him and take his body up to the house in the tree. There the Moodai and Buttergab would cook it, and all of them would eat the flesh; for the women as well as Mullyan were cannibals. This went on for some time, until at last so many black fellows were slain that their friends determined to find out what became of them, and they tracked the last one they missed. They tracked him to where he had evidently been slain; they took up the tracks of his slayer, and followed them right to the foot of the yaraan tree, in which was built the home of Mullyan. They tried to climb the tree, but it was high and straight, and they gave up the attempt after many efforts. In their despair at their failure they thought of the Bibbees, a tribe noted for its climbing powers. They summoned two young Bibbees to their aid. One came, bringing with him his friend Murrawondah of the climbing rat tribe.

Having heard what the blacks wanted them to do, these famous climbers went to the yaraan tree and made a start at once. There was only light enough that first night for them to see to reach a fork in the tree about half-way up. There they camped, watched Mullyan away in the morning, and then climbed on. At last they reached the home of Mullyan. They watched their chance and then sneaked into his humpy.

When they were safely inside, they hastened to secrete a smouldering stick in one end of the humpy, taking care they were not seen by any of the women. Then they went quietly down again, no one the wiser of their coming or going. During the day the women heard sometimes a crackling noise, as of burning, but looking round they saw nothing, and as their own fire was safe, they took no notice, thinking it might have been caused by some grass having fallen into their fire.

After their descent from having hidden the smouldering fire stick, Bibbee and Murrawondah found the blacks and told them what they had done. Hearing that the plan was to burn out Mullyan, and fearing that the tree might fall, they all moved to some little distance, there to watch and wait for the end. Great was their joy at the thought that at last their enemy was circumvented. And proud were Bibbee and Murrawondah as the black fellows praised their prowess.

After dinner-time Mullyan came back. When he reached the entrance to his house he put down his big spear outside. Then he went in and threw himself down to rest, for long had he walked and little had he gained. In a few minutes he heard his big spear fall down. He jumped up and stuck it in its place again. He had no sooner thrown himself down, than

again he heard it fall. Once more he rose and replaced it. As he reached his resting-place again, out burst a flame of fire from the end of his humpy. He called out to the three women, who were cooking, and they rushed to help him extinguish the flames. But in spite of their efforts the fire only blazed the brighter. Mullyan's arm was burnt off. The Moodai had their feet burnt, and Buttergah was badly burnt too. Seeing they were helpless against the fire, they turned to leave the humpy to its fate, and make good their own escape. But they had left it too late. As they turned to descend the tree, the roof of the humpy fell on them. And all that remained when the fire ceased, were the charred bones of the dwellers in the yaraan tree. That was all that the blacks found of their enemies; but their legend says that Mullyan the eagle hawk lives in the sky as Mullyangah the morning star, on one side of which is a little star, which is his one arm; on the other a larger star, which is Moodai the opossum, his wife.

South America - Brazil

The Jaguar and the Little Skunk

Once there was a gentleman jaguar and a lady skunk. Mrs. Skunk had a son, who was baptized by Mr. Jaguar, so Mrs. Skunk became his comadre (godmother). And as Mr. Jaguar had baptized the little skunk, he was Mrs. Skunk's compadre (godfather).

Mr. Jaguar decided to go looking for food and came to Mrs. Skunk's house.

"Well, compadre, what are you looking for? What have you come here for?" the skunk asked the jaguar.

"Comadre, what I have come to do is to look for some food," said Mr. Jaguar.

"Oh," said Mrs. Skunk.

"I want my godson to come with me so that he can learn to hunt," said Mr. Jaguar.

"I don't think your godson ought to go; he's still very small and something could happen to him. He better not go, compadre," said Mrs. Skunk. But the little skunk protested:

"No, mother, I had better go. What my godfather says is true. I need to get some practice, if I'm going to learn to hunt," said the little skunk.

"But if you go, you'll be so far away," said Mrs. Skunk.

"I'm going, I'm going. Come on, let's go." So they set off on a long walk.

"We're going to where there's a river. That's where we're going," Mr. Jaguar explained to the little skunk, his godson.

"When are we going to get there?" asked the little skunk.

"We're getting close. Follow me so you won't get lost," said Mr. Jaguar.

"All right," answered the little skunk. They finally came to the river.

"This is where we're going to eat," said Mr. Jaguar to the little skunk.

"All right," said the little skunk.

"Come on over here. I'm going to sharpen my knife," said Mr. Jaguar.

"All right," said the little skunk, looking at his godfather.

Mr. Jaguar sharpened his claws, which he called his "knife."

"I sharpened my knife. Now you're going to be on guard, because I am going to sleep. When you see them come, wake me up," said Mr. Jaguar.

"All right," said the little skunk, "all right, godfather."

Then Mr. Jaguar told him: "Don't shout. Just scratch my belly when they come. Scratch my belly, so I won't alarm them. But don't wake me up if just any little old animals without antlers come along, only when the one with big antlers gets here. That's when you'll wake me up."

"All right," said the little skunk. Then the one with the big antlers came, and the skunk awakened Mr. Jaguar. He scratched his belly, and pointed out the deer to Mr. Jaguar, who attacked the animal with big antlers. He went after him and seized him.

"All right, my godson, let's eat. We're going to eat meat," said the jaguar.

"All right," said the little skunk. And so they ate and ate.

"Now we're going to take whatever leftovers there are to your mother," said the jaguar.

"Since we are full, we can take something to your mother. Your mother will have meat to eat, just as we did. We will take some to your mother," said the jaguar. When they came back to the mother's house, he told the lady:

"Look at the food here. Look, we've brought you some food, the food that we hunted. Eat your fill of the meat, comadre," the jaguar said to Mrs. Skunk.

"All right," said the skunk, and ate the meat.

"I'm full," she said.

"It's good that you're satisfied. I've seen that you are, so I'll be leaving now," said Mr. Jaguar to Mrs. Skunk. And so he left.

After the jaguar left, the little skunk stayed with his mother.

When they ran out of meat, Mrs. Skunk said to her son: Dear, our meat is all gone."

"Yes, the meat is all gone. I better go and get us some more food," said the little skunk.

"How can you, son? Do you think you're big enough? You're very small. Don't you think you'll be killed?" asked Mrs. Skunk.

"No, mother, I already know how to hunt, my godfather taught me how," replied the little skunk.

"I'm leaving now." He left, and Mrs. Skunk was very worried.

Her son came once more to the river, the place to which he had come with his godfather to get the meat.

"This is how my godfather did it. Why shouldn't I be able to do the same thing?" said the little skunk.

"This is how you sharpen a knife," said the little skunk. He sharpened his "knife."

"This is the way my godfather did it. I'm not going to hunt the little animals, I'm just going to hunt the one with the great big antlers. I'm going to hunt one for myself just like the one I ate with my godfather. I have my knife here and I'm going to sleep for a little while." The little skunk lay down to sleep, but then he awakened. He was waiting for the one with the big antlers, and when he came, he attacked him, thinking he was as strong as his godfather. But he just hung from the neck of the one with big antlers. His claws had dug into his skin. He was hanging from his neck and was carried far away and fell on his back. He was left with his mouth wide open.

Since he had not come home to his mother, she wondered: "What could have happened to my son? Why hasn't he come back yet? Something must have happened to him. I better go and look for him."

And so Mrs. Skunk went as far as the bank of the river. She was looking everywhere for her son, but couldn't find him. She began to cry when she found the tracks where the one with the big antlers had come by running.

"They must have come by here," said Mrs. Skunk, and began to follow the tracks.

She came to the place where her son had been left lying on his back. When the mother caught sight of him, she noticed that his teeth were showing and shouted at him: "Son, what are you laughing at? All your teeth are showing," she said to him before she had gotten very close. When she did get close she told him: "Give me your hand. I've come to get you, but you're just laughing in my face." She put her hand on him, thinking that he was still alive, but when she noticed that he was already dead, she began to cry.

The Legend of Saci

One of the most popular Brazilian legend is the Saci-Pererê. It is so present in the local culture, that each year Brazil celebrates Saci-Pererê's National Day on October 31.

Experts agree that the legend of Saci probably originated among the indigenous peoples of southern Brazil during the colonial period (possibly in the late eighteenth century). At this time, Saci was still depicted as a forest dweller Indian boy, with tanned skin and a tail.

However, when the myth migrated to the north, the character received strong African influences. Saci became a young black man with only one leg, because according to the myth he had lost the other one in a capoeira fight. It was around this time that the Saci began to be depicted wearing a magical red cap and smoking a pipe; typical of African culture. Until this day he is represented in this way.

The magical red cap enables him to disappear and reappear wherever he wishes (usually in the middle of a tornado). He loves to play tricks and whistle through the roads during the night. He also likes to braid animals' manes while they are asleep. In addition, he loves to hide children's toys, set animals loose, tease dogs, and curse chicken eggs to prevent them from hatching. Also, when he is in the kitchen, he spills the salt, sours the milk, burns the bean stew, and drops flies in the soup. If a popcorn kernel fails to pop, it is because the Saci cursed it.

In other words, anything that goes wrong inside and outside of the house may be confidently blamed on the Saci. The only way to escape a pursuing Saci is by crossing a water stream. He will not dare cross because he will lose all of his power. Another way to escape is by dropping a rope full of knots because he will then be compelled to stop and undo the knots.

Finally, people can also try to appease him by leaving some cachaça or some tobacco for his pipe. According to legend, every forest tornado is caused by the spin-dance of an invisible Saci. One can capture him by throwing a rosary into the wind swirl. With care, the captured Saci can be coaxed to enter a dark glass bottle. The bottle should then be closed with a cork marked with a cross on it. Finally, depending on the treatment he gets from his master, Saci may become either a trustworthy guardian and friend or a devious and terrible enemy when he regains his freedom. Also according to the legend, whoever can grab his red cap is granted a wish by the Saci, but legend has it that the cap's smell is so bad, you may never rid yourself of it.

Native American - Canadian

The Boy of the Red Twilight Sky

Long ago there dwelt on the shores of the Great Water in the west a young man and his younger wife. They had no children and they lived all by themselves far from other people on an island not far from the coast. The man spent his time in catching the deep-sea fish far out on the ocean, or in spearing salmon in the distant rivers. Often he was gone for many days and his wife was very lonely in his absence. She was not afraid, for she had a stout spirit, but it was very dismal in the evenings to look only at the grey leaden sky and to hear only the sound of the surf as it beat upon the beach. So day after day she said to herself, "I wish we had children. They would be good company for me when I am alone and my husband is far away."

One evening at twilight when she was solitary because of her husband's absence on the ocean catching the deep-sea fish, she sat on the sand beach looking out across the water. The sky in the west was pale grey; it was always dull and grey in that country, and when the sun had gone down there was no soft light. In her loneliness the woman said to herself, "I wish we had children to keep me company." A Kingfisher, with his children, was diving for minnows not far away. And the woman said, "Oh, sea bird with the white collar, I wish we had children like you." And the Kingfisher said, "Look in the sea-shells; look in the sea-shells," and flew away. The next evening the woman sat again upon the beach looking westward at the dull grey sky. Not far away a white Sea-gull was riding on the waves in the midst of her brood of little ones. And the woman said, "Oh, white sea bird, I wish we had children like you to keep us company." And the Sea-gull said, "Look in the sea-shells; look in the sea-shells," and flew away.

The woman wondered greatly at the words of the Kingfisher and the Sea-Gull. As she sat there in thought she heard a strange cry coming from the sand dunes behind her. She went closer to the sound and found that the cry came from a large sea-shell lying on the sand. She picked up the shell, and inside of it was a tiny boy, crying as hard as he could. She was well pleased with her discovery, and she carried the baby to her home and cared for him. When her husband came home from the sea, he, too, was very happy to find the baby there, for he knew that they would be lonely no more.

The baby grew very rapidly, and soon he was able to walk and move about where he pleased. One day the woman was wearing a copper bracelet on her arm and the child said to her, "I must have a bow made from the copper on your arm." So to please him she made him a tiny bow from the bracelet, and two tiny arrows. At once he set out to hunt game, and day after day he came home bearing the products of his chase. He brought home geese and ducks and brant and small sea birds, and gave them to his mother for food. As he grew older the man and his wife noticed that his face took on a golden hue brighter than the colour of his copper bow. Wherever he went there was a strange light. When he sat on the beach looking to the west the weather was always calm and there were strange bright gleams upon the water. And his foster-parents wondered greatly at this unusual power. But the boy would not talk about it; when they spoke of it he was always silent.

It happened once that the winds blew hard over the Great Water and the man could not go out to catch fish because of the turbulent sea. For many days he stayed on shore, for the ocean, which was usually at peace, was lashed into a great fury and the waves were dashing high on the beach. Soon the people were in need of fish for food. And the boy said, "I will go out with you, for I can overcome the Storm Spirit." The man did not want to go, but at last he listened to the boy's entreaties and together they set out for the fishing grounds far across the tossing sea. They had not gone far when they met the Spirit of the Storm coming madly from the south-west where the great winds dwelt. He tried hard to upset their boat, but over them he had no power, for the boy guided the frail craft across the water and all around them the sea was calm and still. Then the Storm Spirit called his nephew Black Cloud to help him, and away in the south-east they saw him hurrying to his uncle's aid. But the boy said to the man, "Be not afraid, for I am more than a match for him." So the two met, but when Black Cloud saw the boy he quickly disappeared. Then the Spirit of the Storm called Mist of the Sea to come and cover the water, for he thought the boat would be lost if he hid the land from the man and the boy. When the man saw Mist of the Sea coming like a grey vapour across the water he was very frightened, for of all his enemies on the ocean he

feared this one most. But the boy said, "He cannot harm you when I am with you." And sure enough, when Mist of the Sea saw the boy sitting smiling in the boat he disappeared as quickly as he had come. And the Storm Spirit in great anger hurried away to other parts, and that day there was no more danger on the sea near the fishing grounds.

The boy and the man soon reached the fishing grounds in safety. And the boy taught his foster-father a magic song with which he was able to lure fish to his nets. Before evening came the boat was filled with good fat fish and they set out for their home. The man said, "Tell me the secret of your power." But the boy said, "It is not yet time."

The next day the boy killed many birds. He skinned them all and dried their skins. Then he dressed himself in the skin of a plover and rose into the air and flew above the sea. And the sea under him was grey like his wings. Then he came down and dressed himself in the skin of a blue-jay and soared away again. And the sea over which he was flying was at once changed to blue like the blue of his wings. When he came back to the beach, he put on the skin of a robin with the breast of a golden hue like his face. Then he flew high and at once the waves under him reflected a colour as of fire and bright gleams of light appeared upon the ocean, and the sky in the west was golden red. The boy flew back to the beach and he said to his foster-parents, "Now it is time for me to leave you. I am the offspring of the sun. Yesterday my power was tested and it was not found wanting, so now I must go away and I shall see you no more. But at evening I shall appear to you often in the twilight sky in the west. And when the sky and the sea look at evening like the colour of my face, you will know that there will be no wind nor storm and that on the morrow the weather will be fair. But although I go away, I shall leave you a strange power. And always when you need me, let me know your desires by making white offerings to me, so that I may see them from my home far in the west."

Then he gave to his foster-mother a wonderful robe. He bade his parents good-bye, and soared away to the west, leaving them in sadness. But the woman still keeps a part of the power he gave her, and when she sits on the island in a crevice in the dunes and loosens her wonderful robe, the wind hurries down from the land, and the sea is ruffled with storm; and the more she loosens the garment the greater is the tempest. But in the late autumn when the cold mists come in from the sea, and the evenings are chill, and the sky is dull and grey, she remembers the promise of the boy. And she makes to him an offering of tiny white feathers plucked from the breasts of birds. She throws them into the air, and they appear as flakes of snow and rise thickly into the winds. And they hurry westward to tell the boy that the world is grey and dreary as it yearns for the sight of his golden face. Then he appears to the people of earth. He comes at evening and lingers after the sun has gone, until the twilight sky is red, and the ocean in the west has gleams of golden light. And the people then know that there will be no wind and that on the morrow the weather will be fair, as he promised them long ago.