# Bootoolgah the crane and Goonur the kangaroo rat, the fire makers

In the days when Bootoolgah, the crane, married Goonur, the kangaroo rat, there was no fire in their country. They had to eat their food raw or just dry it in the sun. One day when Bootoolgah was rubbing two pieces of wood together, he saw a faint spark sent forth and then a slight smoke. "Look," he said to Goonur, "see what comes when I rub these pieces of wood together—smoke! Would it not be good if we could make fire for ourselves with which to cook our food, so as not to have to wait for the sun to dry it?"Goonur looked, and, seeing the smoke, she said: "Great indeed would be the day when we could make fire. Split your stick, Bootoolgah, and place in the opening bark and grass that even one spark may kindle a light." And hearing wisdom in her words, even as she said Bootoolgah did. And lo! after much rubbing, from the opening came a small flame. For as Goonur had said it would, the spark lit the grass, the bark smouldered and smoked, and so Bootoolgah the crane, and Goonur the kangaroo rat, discovered the art of fire making."This we will keep secret," they said, "from all the tribes. When we make a fire to cook our fish we will go into a Bingahwingul scrub. There we will make a fire and cook our food in secret. We will hide our firesticks in the openmouthed seeds of the Bingahwinguls; one firestick we will carry always hidden in our comebee."Bootoolgah and Goonur cooked the next fish they caught, and found it very good. When they went back to the camp they took some of their cooked fish with them. The blacks noticed it looked quite different from the usual sun-dried fish, so they asked: "What did you to that fish?""Let it lie in the sun," said they."Not so," said the others.But that the fish was sun-dried Bootoolgah and Goonur persisted. Day by day passed, and after catching their fish, these two always disappeared, returning with their food looking quite different from that of the others. At last, being unable to extract any information from them, it was determined by the tribe to watch them. Boolooral, the night owl, and Quarrian, the parrot, were appointed to follow the two when they disappeared, to watch where they went, and find out what they did. Accordingly, after the next fish were caught, when Bootoolgah and Goonur gathered up their share and started for the bush, Boolooral and Quarrian followed on their tracks. They saw them disappear into a Bingahwingul scrub, where they lost sight of them. Seeing a high tree on the edge of the scrub, they climbed up it, and from there they saw all that was to be seen. They saw Bootoolgah and Goonur throw down their load of fish, open their comebee and take from it a stick, which stick, when they had blown upon it, they laid in the midst of a heap of leaves and twigs, and at once from this heap they saw a flame leap, which flame the fire makers fed with bigger sticks. Then, as the flame died down, they saw the two place their fish in the ashes that remained from the burnt sticks. Then back to the camp of their tribes went Boolooral and Quarrian, back with the news of their discovery. Great was the talk amongst the blacks, and many the queries as to how to get possession of the comebee with the fire stick in it, when next Bootoolgah and Goonur came into the camp. It was at length decided to hold a corrobboree, and it was to be one on a scale not often seen, probably never before by the young of the tribes. The grey beards proposed to so astonish Bootoolgah and Goonur as to make them forget to guard their precious comebee. As soon as they were intent on the corrobboree and off guard, some one was to seize the comebee, steal the firestick and start fires for the good of all. Most of them had tasted the cooked fish brought into the camp by the fire makers and, having found it good, hungered for it. Beeargah, the hawk, was told to feign sickness, to tie up his head, and to lie down near wherever the two sat to watch the corrobboree. Lying near them, he was to watch them all the time, and when they were laughing and unthinking of anything but the spectacle before them, he was to steal the comebee. Having arranged their plan of action, they all prepared for a big corrobboree. They sent word to all the surrounding tribes, asking them to attend, especially they begged the Bralgahs to come, as they were celebrated for their wonderful dancing, which was so wonderful as to be most likely to absorb the attention of the firemakers.All the tribes agreed to come, and soon all were engaged in great preparations. Each determined to outdo the other in the quaintness and brightness of their painting for the corrobboree. Each tribe as they arrived gained great applause; never before had the young people seen so much diversity in colouring and design. Beeleer, the Black Cockatoo tribe, came with bright splashes of orange-red on their black skins. The Pelicans came as a contrast, almost pure white, only a touch here and there of their black skin showing where the white paint had rubbed off. The Black Divers came in their black skins, but these polished to shine like satin. Then came the Millears, the beauties of the Kangaroo Rat family, who had their home on the morillas. After them came the Buckandeer or Native Cat tribe, painted in dull colours, but in all sorts of patterns. Mairas or Paddymelons came too in haste to take part in the great corrobboree. After them, walking slowly, came the Bralgahs, looking tall and dignified as they held up their red heads, painted so in contrast to their French-grey bodies, which they deemed too dull a colour, unbrightened, for such a gay occasion. Amongst the many tribes there, too numerous to mention, were the rose and grey painted Galabs, the green and crimson painted Billai; most brilliant were they with their bodies grass green and their sides bright crimson, so afterwards gaining them the name of crimson wings. The bright little Gidgereegahs came too.Great was the gathering that Bootoolgah, the crane, and Goonur, the kangaroo rat, found assembled as they hurried on to the scene. Bootoolgah had warned Goonur that they must only be spectators, and take no active part in the corrobboree, as they had to guard their combee. Obedient to his advice, Goonur seated herself beside him and slung the comebee over her arm. Bootoolgah warned her to be careful and not forget she had it. But as the corrobboree went on, so absorbed did she become that she forgot the comebee, which slipped from her arm. Happily, Bootoolgah saw it do so, replaced it, and bade her take heed, so baulking Beeargah, who had been about to seize it, for his vigilance was unceasing, and, deeming him sick almost unto death, the two whom lie was watching took no heed of him. Back he crouched, moaning as he turned, but keeping ever an eye on Goonur. And soon was he rewarded. Now came the turn of the Bralgahs to dance, and every eye but that of the watchful one was fixed on them as slowly they came into the ring. First they advanced, bowed and retired, then they repeated what they had done before, and again, each time getting faster and faster in their movements, changing their bows into pirouettes, craning their long necks and making such antics as they went through the figures of their dance, and replacing their dignity with such grotesqueness, as to make their large audience shake with laughter, they themselves keeping throughout all their grotesque measures a solemn air, which only seemed to heighten the effect of their antics.And now came the chance of Beeargah the hawk. In the excitement of the moment Goonur forgot the comebee, as did Bootoolgah. They joined in the mirthful applause of the crowd, and Goonur threw herself back helpless with laughter. As she did so the comebee slipped from her arm. Then up jumped the sick man from behind her, seized the comebee with his combo, cut it open, snatched forth the firestick, set fire to the heap of grass ready near where he had lain, and all before the two realised their loss. When they discovered the precious comebee was gone, up jumped Bootoolgah and Goonur. After Beeargah ran Bootoolgah, but Beeargah had a start and was fleeter of foot, so distanced his pursuer quickly. As he ran he fired the grass with the stick he still held. Bootoolgah, finding he could not catch Beeargah, and seeing fires everywhere, retired from the pursuit, feeling it was useless now to try and guard their secret, for it had now become the common property of all the tribes there assembled.

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