

THE BAD BOYS AND THE ELDERS

Wiringi was the naughtiest little jeera (boy) amongst all the Waddiabbuloo boys. Every boy in camp knows that there are certain things he must not do, or some harm will come to him by magic. He must not go into forbidden shady groves that are guarded by a ranji, <sup>(spirit)</sup> or the ranji will put sickness into him and he will die. He must not touch the magic ornaments hanging from the necks of the jalngangooro, <sup>(beads)</sup> or these will hurt him, or pluck the yirgili <sup>evil seed</sup> flowers, for then he will send all the yirgili seed back to jimbin, <sup>unsubstantiated counter</sup> and there will be no yirgili for his people, and there are many other rules that he must remember, but above all, he must not mock talloorgurra (elderly men.) He may mock his mothers or sisters and if his fathers are in a good humour they will laugh at him or they may tell him he must not do that, but whether he heeds the warning or not, he will not be beaten for mocking his mother.

Wiringi, however, saw in old Beedurn an easy person to mock, for Beedurn had caught some evil magic which stiffened his arm, and Wiringi would walk about the camp holding his arm just like Beedurn. His father said to him, "If you do that you will get mirrooroo (magic,)" but Wiringi had been doing so many naughty acts and had not been mirroorooed that he only laughed at his father and mocked Beedurn again and again. All the talloorgurra in the camp warned Wiringi, yet they could not help being amused at the faithfulness of the imitation, all except Beedurn whose anger against the boy grew greater every day. He told jeera to stop, but jeera put his tongue out and went on with his mocking.

At last Beedurn's brother-in-law said to himself, "I must punish jeera for he will not stop mocking Beedurn and we must let the other jeera see that they must not mock talloorgurra." But he did not tell anyone what he was going to do. One morning he went away to a ranji beega (forbidden shady grove) and taking a warrangujji (nose bone) he had brought with him, he marked it with dots for jeera's eyes and lines for jeera's arms

and legs, with a goombara (sharp stone.)

Then when he had finished the markings, he held the warrangujji close to him, and rocking himself to and fro as he sat cross-legged in the ranji beega, he sang the following mirrooroo into it :

Warrangujji biddoor ga-ree-naa,  
Warrangujji biddoor ga-ree,  
Piddoor garee naa.

He sang this over and over again and at last he mentioned the boy's name softly over the warrangujji, and sticking it into the bark of a tree, he came back to the camp. No one but himself knew of the mirrooroo that he had made.

Jeera went on mocking Beedurn for a little while, but by and by he lay down, and then all the talloorgurra knew that he had got mirrooroo, but as they all sent mirrooroo, none of them knew which of the mirrooroo had taken effect.

By and by Beedurn's brother-in-law went again to the ranji beega and looked at the tree where he had stuck the warrangujji. It had broken off "of itself" and the broken part was lying on the ground, and then he knew the jeera would die, so he took the two pieces of warrangujji and put them in the fork of the tree. Very soon Wiringi died and was buried in the fork of a tree. After his death, the other little jeera never again disobeyed the great laws though there were many little rules that they defied, but they were not punished as they were but trivial offences.

Sometimes a little jeera would puff out his stomach and cry out, "Ngai dardal, ngai dardal," ("I am sick, I am sick,") then another little jeera pretends to be jalngangooroo, and comes over to the sick boy bringing a koorabarl or koorabbura (magic stick) with him. When he reaches the sick boy, he turns him over, puts the baaloo (stick) on his back, then on his side, then on the swollen stomach, and the lump quickly goes down. "Jooa maabu?" ("You all right?") the little jalngangooroo asks him. "Ngowai," the patient says, "ngai maabu." ("Yes, I am all right.")

Again the little jeera will have a sham fight with spears made of rushes, and toy shields and boomerangs. After a short fight one little jeera falls down, apparently dead. A young jalngangooroo comes over to him and raises him up, but the boy shows no sign of life. Then the little jalngangooroo puts a finger in each of the dead jeera's ears and shouts to him, "Wan'jalla ngai." ("Look at me.") The dead boy opens his eyes, looks at the jalngangooroo, and is made alive again.

These and other games may be played by the jeera without offending their elders, but as soon as the little boy ceases to be jeera and becomes nimmamu (name given after nose piercing has been performed on them) he is never allowed to play those games, for as soon as he is nimmamu, his childish games and fun are over, and from this time forward he is gradually initiated into full manhood.