

Australia



Strong Magic - A story from Australia

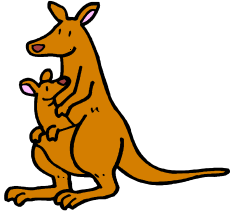
Long, long ago there was a boy who had no mother or father. He lived with his tribe, and was often very naughty. "That boy," they would mutter angrily. "He's a lazy, good-for-nothing who never does as he's told. He won't work and he's up to all sorts of trick."

When the dry season came there was no water in the streams, rivers and ponds, and the people had to walk a long way to the boreholes for drinking water. The boy didn't like walking. He stayed in the camp and, when the water-carriers came back, he would beg them for a drink. They always gave him one, but soon the time came when they were really angry with the lazy boy. "Go and get your own water," they shouted and they hid their water bowls.

One morning, when the men went off hunting and the women and children went to dig for roots to eat, the boy was left alone in the camp. He played around for a while, but began to feel really thirsty. He looked in the usual places for the water bowls, but they weren't there. Eventually, he found them hidden under a bush and had a good, long drink.

Then he thought of a naughty trick. "I'll hide the water bowls where those mean people won't be able to find them. Then I can have a drink whenever I like," he said to himself.

One by one he carried the full bowls of water to a small gum tree. Quickly, he climbed up the tree and hid the bowls among



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the leaves. He was just putting the last one on a branch when, by some strong, strange magic, the tree started to grow up and up. The boy clung to a branch as the tree grew taller and taller until it was huge. When it stopped growing, the boy was right at the very top with all of the water bowls.

In the evening, when everyone came back to the camp, they all wanted a drink, but when they looked under the bush they found only a few empty water bowls.

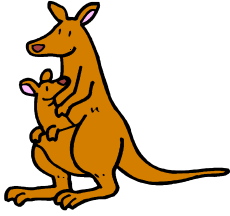
"It's that boy. He's been up to his tricks again. Where is he?" they grumbled. They looked around and saw the huge gum tree that, only that morning, had been a little tree. At the top, they saw the boy with their full water bowls.

"Bring down our water at once," they shouted. "If you want your water, you'll have to come and get it," the boy shouted back.

Two young men began to climb the tree. When they had almost reached the boy, he wailed and moaned with fright. One of the men stretched up to grab him but, as the boy tried to get away, he slipped and fell down the tree...

...bump, bump, bump, right down to the ground.

There he lay for a moment, bruised and aching. Then he scrambled up the gum tree again to escape the angry tribe. Some people began to climb up after him but, by some strong, strange magic, they saw him start to change.



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Thick fur covered his body. His eyes became like black buttons and his nose black and shiny. He looked just like a bear. He had turned into the very first koala.

From that time on, all koalas have lived in gum trees. If they are thirsty, they eat a few leaves instead of going down to look for water, and if anyone tries to climb their trees, they moan and wail, just like that naughty boy.