

## Goonky Giwiirr (Scary Man)

Word Count: 1,956

With thinas *feet* pounding the ground, we banaga-y *ran* towards the walaay *camp* thuuraay *lights*, my thinas stamping through the damp gum leaves and dry tree branches on the rough bushland, and my galamaay *brother* racing like a thinawan *emu* in flight behind me. The adrenaline surged through our veins as we neared the flickering campfire, its light promising safety and warmth.

As we headed towards the camp, we could hear guni *mother* calling to us in a loud, stern but joking voice, "Where are you lot? Them Goonky Giwiirr, *Scary Men*, be out soon. They will get you!" Those words sent a shiver down our spines and instilled a fear of terror in us. We ran as fast as thinawan in the paddock, past the old gum trees towards camp, the wind blowing our hair back in our faces as if trying to blindfold us. Dare we stop? No! The very thought of the Goonky Giwiirr catching us out at night propelled us forward.

Then, the trees began rustling, and a breeze of stillness filled the air. Gasping for breath, I felt something touch my shoulder. I could not run anymore; my thinas felt like the grass was growing over them, pulling me underground. I looked behind me for my galamaay *brother* and felt a rush of panic roll over my body. Then I saw him.

Two big, bright red mils *eyes* pierced through the darkness, staring right at me. The look on his ngulu *face* made it hard to breathe. I gulped for air, and I felt tears dripping from my eyes onto my icy cheeks. His body was round and hairy, and his arms were like tree branches that went on forever. He had human-like maras *hands* that extended to long yulus *fingernails*, which sparkled in the ngurru thuuraay *night light*. I felt the temperature drop.

I stood frozen to the bone, my teeth chattering and my knees bobbling together. Goonky Giwiirr dropped his jaw, and a long, horrendous scream came from what seemed to be a deep dark hole within his mouth. The ground beneath my thinas quaked, telling me to move, but I couldn't. I feared he might reach out with those long arms, and his sharp claw-like fingernails would dig into my skin and grab me.

He came towards me, dragging his long marras, his thinas *feet* taking up the leaves as he pounded the ground. My trembling murras clutched my binas *ears*, and I felt my skin tighten. I looked around for a place to hide, but a voice inside told me to keep going. "It's not real. Keep going. You know this land. You are strong and brave. Believe in your ancestors' stories. Be brave, be you."

I banaga-y towards the river, so I could hide under the breast of her banks. Oh, I wished I had listened to guni when she told us to be home before ngurru *nightfall*. I could hear the Gali *river* as I banaga-y towards its banks, and I could see the flickering of the ngurru *night* sky through the big old yarrun *gum trees*. A strong wind began to blow up, and the buluuy waagaan *black crow* sang out. The bush birds made a slapping sound as they all made their way home to perch. The crickets sang their ngurru *night* songs, and the wise old owl sat quietly. While all this went on, I could hear the beat of my heart, racing to the rhythm of each breath I took. When I felt that all was lost, I heard a soft voice telling me, "It's not real. Keep going."

With a long deep breath and a strong spirit, I felt my thinas move. Like a malyain *eagle* set free from a cage, I began to banaga-y towards the gali *river*. Oh, I could see the gali, and it shone in the ngurru *night* as if it was showing me the way back to thuraay *camp*. As I ran along its banks, the slippery eels slid alongside the rough rocks as if they were asking me to follow them.

It was dark and cold. My thinas felt like they were no longer part of my body. I lay down beneath a yarrun *gum tree*. I could no longer hear the sound of the bush. I could no longer see the Goonky Giwiirr. My eyes fell closed, and a warmth wrapped itself over my body. I felt as though the earth beneath me was soft and warm like soft Muthay Yulay *possum skin*. I sank into the tree, knowing this place was warm and friendly. I felt safe.

The Muthay Yulay is my totem. My old people taught me to trust in my totem as it links me with creation time and the dreaming. The old people would say, "The Muthay has many adventures. It travels from yarrun *gum tree* to yarrun *gum tree* across the ngurru *night lights* to farming fields and bagay *river* banks."

A lull came over the ngurru *night*. I could see the walaay *camp*. I smelled the walaay wii *campfire*, a familiar scent of lemon gum. I felt guni's murras on my face. "You are safe," a soft, familiar voice said. "You are home." My mils *eyes* were heavy. I tried to open them, but they stayed shut as if glued tight.

I rolled over onto my side, and a soft voice said, "It's time to wake up. Them guya *fish* in that bagaay *river* won't wait all day for you! Come on, get up. Tuckers waiting! You have to get down to the baggay and back home into bed before nightfall, 'cause that's when the Goonky Giwiirr come out."

I looked around. Everything seemed familiar. My brother was in bed next to me, making a frightful snoring noise that guni said would almost wake the dead. I was in the wallay *camp*, in my safe, soft bed, wrapped in my warm Muthay Yulay.

I could see the morning yaraay *sun* as it peeked through the canopy of trees, casting dappled shadows on the ground. My galamaay and I stretched our limbs and prepared for the day ahead. Today was a special day, for we were going on a journey to the bagaay, a place filled with stories and secrets passed down through generations.

We packed our small satchels with essentials - a few pieces of damper, some dried meat, and a small flask of water. Guni reminded us to be careful and to return before ngurru. "Remember the Goonky Giwiirr," she warned with a playful yet serious tone.

The path to the bagaay was long and winding, filled with the sights and sounds of the bush. Birds chirped beautifully, and the rustling leaves whispered ancient tales. We walked in silence, taking in the beauty around us, each step bringing us closer to our destination.

As we reached a clearing, we saw a magnificent yarran *gum tree* standing tall and proud. Its branches stretched out like welcoming arms, and we decided to take a short break beneath its shade. We shared our food and talked about the stories we had heard about the baggay and the spirits that dwelled within its *gali waters*.

The bagaay was not just any baggay; it was a sacred place where the spirits of our ancestors lived. It was said that the baggay had the power to heal and to guide those who respected its sacredness. As we approached the baggay bank, we could feel a sense of awe and reverence wash over us.

The *Gali water* sparkled under the yaraay, and the sound of the flowing baggay was like a soothing song. We dipped our thinas into the cool *gali* and felt an instant connection to the land and our heritage. It was as if the baggay was speaking to us, telling us to respect and protect it.

Suddenly, a ripple appeared on the surface of the *gali*, and we saw a figure emerging from the depths. It was a spirit, a protector of the baggay, it had a shimmering body and *mils eyes* that held the wisdom of ages. We stood in amazement, unable to move or speak.

The spirit then spoke with a voice that echoed with the power of the baggay, "You have come to the *gali* with clear *giis hearts* and respect for the land, remember the stories of your ancestors and pass them on to future generations, always protect the baggay and all it nurtures."

We nodded in understanding, but a feeling of unknown rushed over us. Our *giis* filled with a sense of warmth. The spirit smiled and slowly faded back into the *gali*, leaving us with a deep sense of connection to our culture and heritage.

As the day turned to dusk, we knew it was time to head back to walaay. The journey homeward was filled with a newfound appreciation for the land and the stories that shaped our identity. The memory of the spirit's words stayed with us, a reminder of our responsibility to protect and honor the land and our heritage.

Back at walaay, we gathered around the walaay wii *campfire* with our family. Guni noticed the change in us and asked about our journey today. We shared the story of the spirit and the message we received, and the entire walaay *camp* listened in rapt attention.

The night was filled with storytelling, laughter, and a deep sense of togetherness. We understood that our culture was not just a collection of stories, but a living, breathing part of who we were. The Goonky Giwiirr, once a figure of fear, had become more than just a tale—it was evidence to our resilience and our growth as Aboriginal people.

The next morning, we woke up with a renewed sense of purpose. The baggay had taught us valuable lessons, and we were eager to continue our journey of discovery and connection. We knew that every step we took, every story we told, and every action we made would contribute to the protection of our culture and the preservation of our land.

We spent the day exploring the bush, learning about the plants and animals that called it home. Guni taught us about the medicinal properties of various plants and how to read the signs of nature. We practiced our hunting skills and learned how to track animals, always mindful of the balance between taking and giving back to the land.

As the yarray began to set, we returned to walaay with a sense of fulfillment and gratitude. The stories of our ancestors were alive in us, guiding our actions and shaping our future. We understood that we were part of a larger narrative, one that connected us to the past, the present, and the future.

*The Goonky Giwiirr, the baggay, and the spirit of the land were not just tales to entertain around the walaay. They were powerful symbols of our heritage, our responsibilities, and the strength we possessed as a community. The stories we told and the lessons we learned were the threads that wove the fabric of our culture, binding us together and connecting us to the land and our song lines.*

*We knew that it was our duty to keep these stories alive, to pass them on to future generations, and to ensure that our culture thrived. As we sat around the walaay that night, we made a promise to each other and to our ancestors. We vowed to protect the land, to honor our heritage, and to keep the stories alive.*

I watched the flames of the walaay wii, as it danced and flickered, and I felt a deep sense of peace within myself.

