Many years ago the water rat was an old man who was very lazy. He would not hunt for his food but depended on what others brought home. When they came back he would expect to have the best and fattest of the catch because he loved eating fat.

Soon, the rest of the tribe got tired of the old man and threw him out to hunt for himself. But the old man’s nephew felt sorry for his Uncle and went along with him. But his Uncle did not improve. In fact, he got worse and expected his young nephew to go out and get food for them both, while he did nothing but sleep all day. Although the young man dearly loved his Uncle, he began to get tired of hunting for him and started to think of a way to stop his old Uncle from being so lazy.

And so it happened one day that the young fellow was luckier than usual in his hunting for he had not gone far from their camp when he came across a flock of emus. With his keen hunting skills he got very close to them and speared the bird of his choice, a nice young fat bird. He rushed back to the camp to get the old man to help him to carry it home. Because emu was the old man’s favourite meat he was very pleased and, although it was hard for him, he went and helped the boy to carry it to the camp. When they got home the boy said to the old man, “Uncle, if you go up to Algabohnyah and get some mussel shells I will give you all the fat off this bird, because we can’t open it until we get some shells.”

So the old man, thinking of all of the fat he was going to get, set off on his six mile journey to get mussel shells. In the meantime the boy, knowing where there were mussel shells much closer, got some and had the bird cleaned and on to cool. It took the old man a long time to come home and the boy was worried about him, so he climbed up on to a high tree stump to see if he could see him coming.

After a while he saw the old man walking back in the distance. Then suddenly he thought of an idea. As the bird was about cooked, he climbed down and cut off all the fat and some of the flesh and climbed back on to the tree stump with it. He then came down again and got some of the red hot stones which had been used to cook the bird, and climbed the tree stump once more to await the old man, who he could see coming not very far away.

When the old man finally arrived and saw the boy was missing he called out for him, “Boy!” “Hey boy!” The boy sat quiet for a bit but finally called out to the old man “Up here, Uncle!” The old man was relieved and hungry and straight away asked where the emu fat was. The boy said, “I have it up here, Uncle. Come, climb up.”

Desperately and after many tries the old man tried to get up the tree stump but when he couldn’t he called to the boy to drop him down the emu fat. “But it will fall in the dirt and be wasted”, said the boy, “But I’ll tell you what. If you stand with your mouth open as wide as you can, I will drop the fat into it”. The old man, being so greedy to get the precious fat, said, “Alright my son”. So the boy took the fat and also one of the red hot stones he had carried up and rolled the fat around it. He then dropped it into the old man’s mouth, and the fat and hot stones ran down into his throat.

Straight away the fat started to burn the old man’s throat and he ran to the river and dived headfirst into it taking a huge mouthful of water as he did. At this moment, the old man turned into a water rat. And so as the story goes, the water rat can blow out lots of heat, because of the hot fat and stones in his throat and that is why he is able to open the shell of a mussel without difficulty. And so for being greedy the old man was turned into a water rat.