
The Broiga Dance
(Ngarrindjeri Nation – South Australia)

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A long time ago, in the Dreaming, there lived a young girl who loved to dance. From the moment the sun rose until it dipped low on the horizon, she moved across the open plains. Her feet tapped softly on the earth, her arms stretched like branches in the wind, and her body spun and twirled in graceful circles.

When the people worked, the girl danced. When the children played, she danced. Even when the Elders called her to sit and listen, her toes still shifted and her hands still waved in rhythm.

“Look at her,” the people whispered. “She moves like the reeds swaying by the water. She is as light as the breeze across the grass.”

Dancing without pause

As the days passed, the girl danced more and more. She began to forget the words of her Elders. She forgot to join in the work of gathering food and fetching water. She forgot to rest when the sun burned hot.

“I must dance,” she said. “It is what I do best. Why should I stop?”

Her mother sighed. “Child, your gift is beautiful, but remember: even beauty must be balanced with care and respect. Do not let pride carry you away.”

But the girl only laughed lightly and spun faster across the plain.

The spirits watch

High above, the ancestral spirits watched. They saw the joy of her dancing, but they also saw her pride. They murmured among themselves.

“This child has been given a gift,” they said. “But she forgets that gifts are for sharing, not for pride alone. Let us remind her of balance.”

And so the spirits decided to act.



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The transformation

One evening, as the sun dipped low and painted the sky with gold and crimson, the girl stepped onto the wide plain to dance once more. The people gathered to watch, their faces glowing in the fading light.

She twirled and spun, her arms rising and falling. She leapt high, her shadow stretching across the ground. She laughed as she moved, caught in the music only she could hear.

Then a wind rose — gentle at first, then stronger. It swirled around her, lifting the dust in circles. The girl felt her arms lengthen, her body grow taller, her voice turn into a strange, ringing cry. Feathers sprouted where skin had been, long legs stretched beneath her, and her feet struck the ground in a new rhythm.

Before the people's eyes, she had become a tall, elegant bird — the brolga.

The brolga's dance

The people gasped. "She is gone! She has become the bird!"

But the brolga lifted her long wings and began to dance. She leapt and twirled across the plain, bowing and stretching, her feathers catching the last light of the sun.

The people watched in awe. Though she no longer had the body of a girl, her spirit still moved in every step.

From that day on, the brolga bird danced on the open lands, her cry echoing across the sky. When the people saw her, they remembered the girl who loved to dance too much, and the spirits who turned her gift into a lesson.

