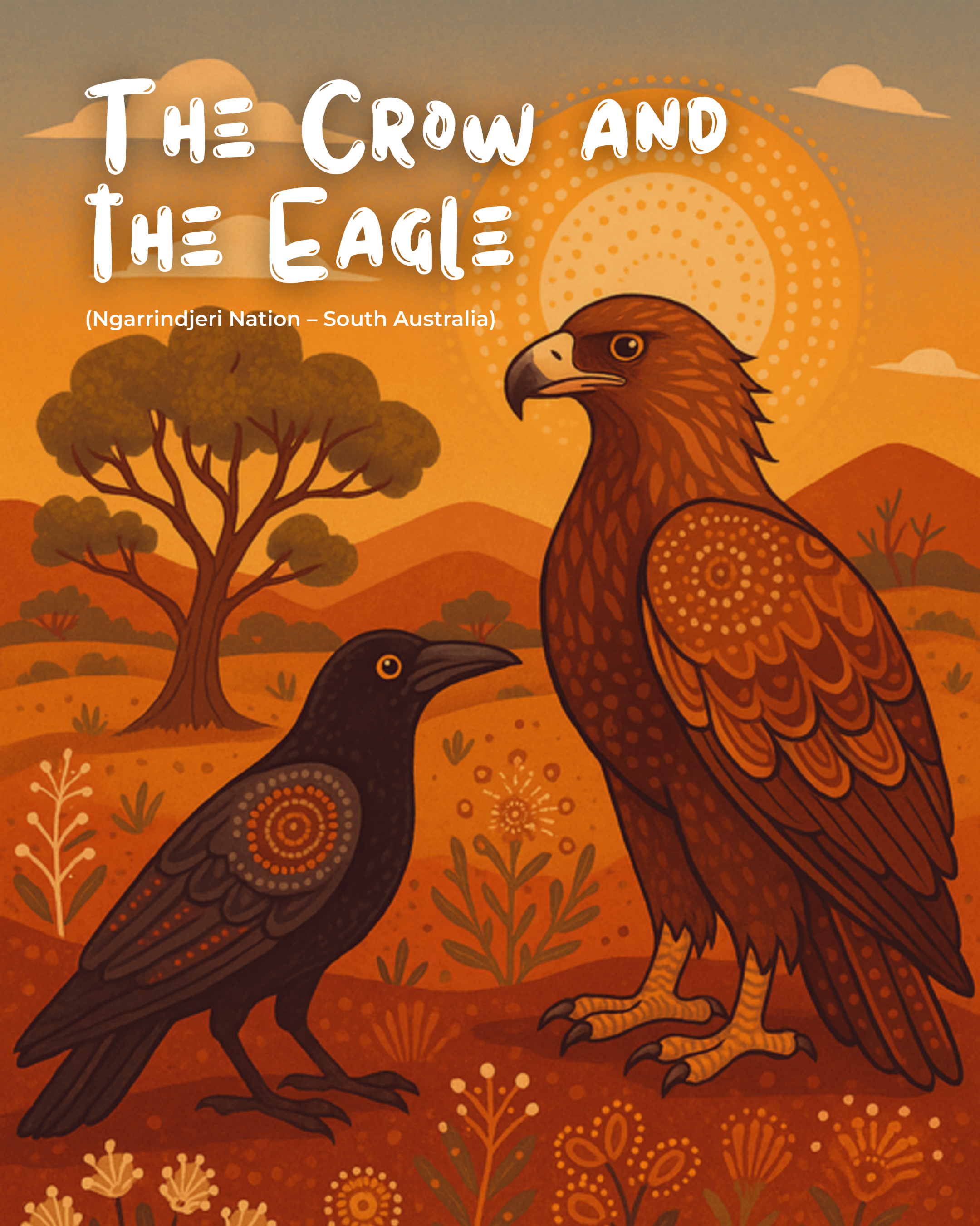
The Crow and the Eagle

(Ngarrindjeri Nation – South Australia)



The Crow and the Eagle

(Ngarrindjeri Nation – South Australia)

A long time ago, in the Dreaming, Crow and Eagle were close. They lived as brothers-in-law, hunting together across the wide plains and sharing food with their families. Eagle was strong and noble, with great wings that carried him high into the sky. Crow was clever and watchful, always ready with a trick or a joke.

For a while, they worked well together. But slowly, Crow began to feel jealous.
“Everyone praises Eagle,” he muttered to himself. “They say he is strong, they admire his hunting. What of me? I am clever too. Why should he have all the glory?”

Crow’s heart grew restless.



The trick

One day, while Eagle was away hunting, Crow went to Eagle’s camp. There he found Eagle’s children playing near the water. Their laughter echoed across the reeds.

Crow tilted his head. “Come with me,” he called. “I will show you something wonderful. Your father will be proud when he hears of it.”

The children, trusting him, followed. But Crow led them away from safety, far from the camp. He left them where the water ran deep and dangerous, then flew off, chuckling to himself.

Eagle’s sorrow

When Eagle returned and found his children gone, he searched desperately. His cries rang out across the plains.

“Where are you? Where have you gone?”

The people whispered, “Crow was here. He took the children.”

Eagle’s eyes blazed with sorrow and anger. He spread his mighty wings and soared into the sky, calling for his little ones. Though he searched far and wide, he could not find them again.

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The punishment

The spirits had watched it all. They saw Eagle's grief and Crow's jealousy. They called Crow before them.

"You have caused sorrow," they said. "You let envy guide your heart. From now on, your feathers will be as black as your deed, so that all may know your nature."

At once, Crow's bright feathers turned dark, gleaming black in the sun. No matter how he preened, the colour would not come off. From that day on, Crow wore his dark coat as a reminder of his envy and trickery.

Eagle keeps the sky

Eagle, though filled with sadness, was given strength. The spirits said to him, "You shall keep the wide sky as your domain. You will soar above all, strong and watchful, a guardian of the high places."

And so Eagle remained noble and proud, king of the skies.



The lesson of Crow and Eagle

From that day forward, Crow and Eagle were no longer friends. They became enemies, and even now, when a crow calls harshly and an eagle circles high above, it is said they still quarrel.

The Ngarrindjeri people tell this story to remind children of the dangers of jealousy. Envy can turn brother against brother, and trickery brings sorrow.

But they also remind children of the balance: Crow is clever, and Eagle is strong. Each has a place in the world, yet it is kindness and respect that hold families together.

And when you see a crow's black feathers shining in the sun, you can remember this tale — that once they were bright, until jealousy darkened them forever.