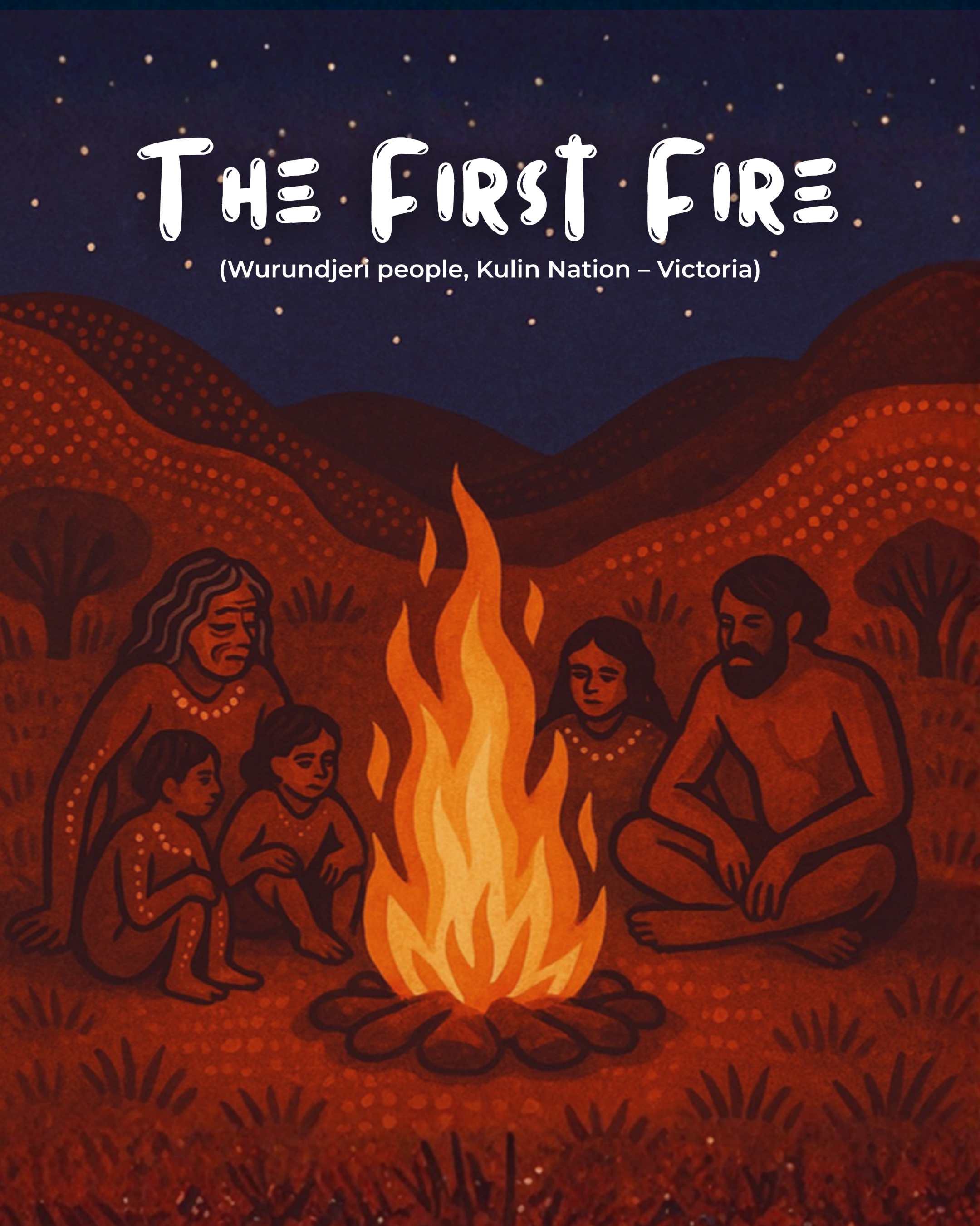
The First Fire

(Wurundjeri people, Kulin Nation – Victoria)



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Long ago, in the Dreaming, the world was colder than it is now. At night the air turned icy, and during the day food was eaten raw, for no one knew the secret of cooking. Families huddled together, shivering, and children asked their parents, “Why can’t we be warm?”

Far away, in the hills, lived the Fire People. They guarded the flames carefully, keeping them in their camp and never sharing. At night their fires burned bright, and the glow could be seen across the plains. But if anyone else crept close, the Fire People drove them away.

The other animals and people gathered one day beside a river. They whispered about the cold, about the food that made their bellies ache. “We cannot live like this,” said Possum, wrapping her tail around herself. “We need fire.”

“But how can we get it?” asked Wallaby. “The Fire People guard it so closely.”

“Perhaps we can beg them,” said Echidna softly. “Surely they will listen if we tell them our children suffer.”

Old Crow tilted his head and let out a harsh laugh. “Begging will do nothing. They are greedy and will never share. If we want fire, we must be clever.”

The animals thought carefully. “Then let us plan,” said Koala. “If we work together, maybe we can bring the gift of fire to everyone.”

So it was agreed.



That night, as the Fire People sat around their flames, the animals began their plan. First, Kangaroo bounded near the camp, making great leaps to distract them. The Fire People watched suspiciously, but they did not leave their circle.
Next, Snake slid silently closer, hoping to snatch a burning stick. But the Fire People saw her scales gleam in the light and chased her away with spears.

Then, Possum tried. She scampered up a nearby tree and dropped leaves to make them laugh. But the Fire People scowled and tossed stones until she fled.

Each attempt failed.

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At last, Crow stepped forward. His feathers gleamed black against the night. “I told you they were too greedy to give it up. But I am cunning. Leave it to me.”

He crept close to the camp, silent as the shadows. The Fire People dozed, their spears lying beside them, the flames crackling warmly. With a sudden dart, Crow snatched a burning branch in his beak and took off into the sky.

The Fire People awoke with shouts of anger. “The thief! Catch him!” they cried. But Crow’s wings beat strong, and he rose high above their reach.
Through the dark sky he flew, carrying the flaming branch. Sparks rained down as he soared, and wherever a spark touched the earth, it lit a fire. Dry grass blazed, logs caught alight, and soon fire spread across the land.

The animals on the plains looked up and cheered. “He has done it! He brings us fire!”
Crow’s beak grew hot as he clutched the branch. The flames singed his feathers, turning them black forever. But still he carried on, determined that no one would ever go cold again.

Finally, Crow dropped the branch onto a pile of dry wood in the centre of the animals’ camp. The flames leapt high, golden and fierce. For the first time, the people and animals felt the warmth of fire.
They cooked roots and meat, and the smoke rose sweet into the night. Children laughed and danced around the flames, their faces glowing.

When the Fire People came rushing over the hills, ready to take back their treasure, they saw fire burning everywhere — in the plains, in the trees, in the camps of the animals. They could not chase it all. The gift of fire had spread too far.

Defeated, they returned to their hills, keeping only their own small fires. From that day on, fire belonged to everyone.

As the flames crackled, Old Crow perched on a branch, his feathers blackened but his eyes shining.
“Remember,” he said, “fire is powerful. It warms us, it cooks our food, it lights the night. But it can also burn and destroy if treated carelessly. Respect it, and it will care for you. Abuse it, and it will harm you.”

The animals and people nodded, understanding. They promised to guard the flames, to pass on the knowledge, and to teach their children to use fire wisely.

And so the world changed. Families no longer shivered in the cold. Food was cooked and shared. The night was lit with dancing sparks. And every time you see a crow, dark-feathered and clever, you can remember how he risked his feathers to bring fire to the people.

