The Magpie and the Sun

(Ngarrindjeri and other South Australian Nations – collected by W. Ramsay Smith, 1930)

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A long time ago, in the Dreaming, the world was dark. Night covered the land like a heavy blanket. The trees stood in silence. The rivers flowed quietly, but no one could see their waters. The animals moved carefully, for they could only feel and hear, never see. “Why is there no light?” asked Kangaroo.

“Why must we live in darkness?” whispered Possum.

The elders shook their heads. “The sky is too low. It presses down upon us, keeping the sun hidden away.”
The animals sighed. “If only we could raise the sky.”

The magpies’ idea

Among the gathering was Magpie. His feathers were dark as night, but his eyes shone with determination.

“We are small,” Magpie said, “but we are many. If we work together, we can lift the sky.”

The other animals murmured in doubt. “Lift the sky? It is heavy. It cannot be done.”

But Magpie spread his wings. “If we never try, we will never see the sun.”

The magpies flocked together. With sharp beaks, they pecked at the edge of the sky. With strong wings, they pushed and pulled. They sang as they worked, their voices rising like a song of hope.



Lifting the sky

At first, the sky did not move. It pressed down heavily, grey and stubborn. The magpies strained. They flapped harder. They pecked again. “Push!” cried one

“Lift!” cried another.
The sky trembled. Slowly, slowly, it began to rise. A faint glow spread through the cracks. The animals gasped.

“Look! Light!” shouted Emu.
“Keep going!” called Kangaroo.

The magpies pressed their wings to the sky one last time. With a great heave, they lifted it high above the earth.

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The first dawn

At that moment, the sun burst forth. Golden light spilled across the plains. The rivers sparkled. The gum trees glowed green. The animals saw their world for the first time — wide, bright, and beautiful.

They cheered. “The magpies have brought the day!”

Magpie flapped his wings proudly. “We only did what was needed. We worked together.”

The animals looked around in wonder. Colours danced before their eyes. They saw one another clearly — the feathers of birds, the fur of possums, the strong legs of kangaroos. All was bright and alive.



Why magpies sing

From that day forward, the sun rose each morning, lighting the land. And each morning, as the first rays touched the earth, the magpies sang. Their voices rang out, a chorus of joy and remembrance.

“Kwarra-kwarra!” they called.

They sang to remind the world of the time they had lifted the sky, the time they had brought the first dawn.