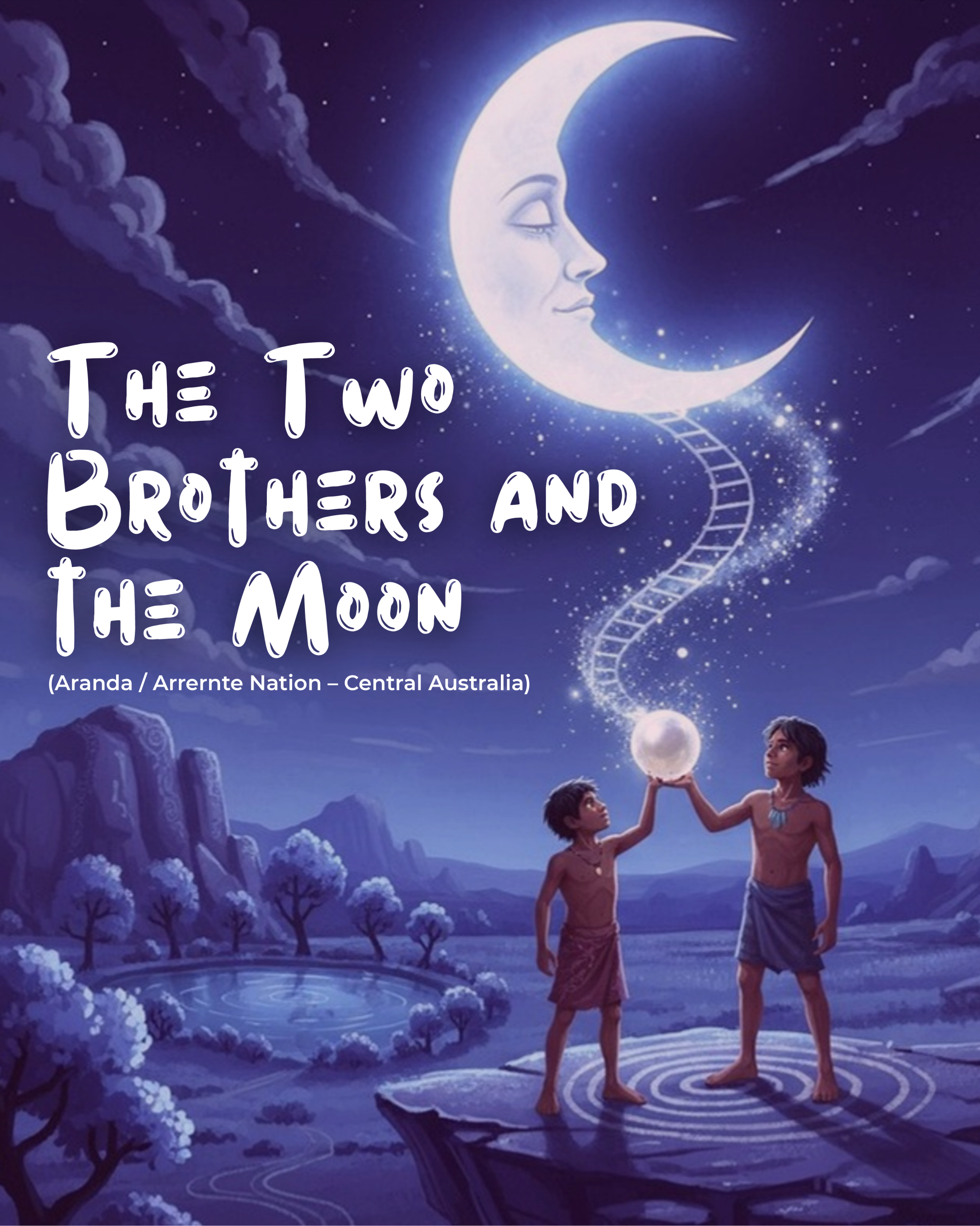
The Two Brothers and the Moon

(Aranda / Arrernte Nation – Central Australia)



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Long ago, in the Dreaming, two brothers lived together on the wide plains. They hunted side by side, shared the same fire at night, and slept beneath the same sky. The younger brother admired his elder, for he was strong and swift with the spear. The elder brother cared for the younger, teaching him how to track kangaroo across the sand and how to find water in the dry country.

For a time, their lives were peaceful. But as often happens, quarrels sometimes grew between them.

The quarrel begins



One day, the brothers set out to hunt. The sun was high, the earth baked hot, and the air shimmered with heat. They tracked a great kangaroo across the plain, following its prints carefully. The younger brother spotted it first.

“Look, there it goes!” he cried, raising his spear.
But the elder pushed him aside. “No. I will strike it. Stand back.”

The younger frowned. “Why should you take all the game? I saw it first.”

“You are too slow,” the elder snapped. “Your aim is weak. The meat will be mine.”

The younger lifted his chin stubbornly. “I am not weak. Today I will take the catch.”

At this, anger flared in the elder’s chest. Without thinking, he struck the younger across the shoulder with his hand. The blow sent the boy stumbling to the ground.

The younger brother flees

The younger brother’s eyes filled with hurt. He did not speak, but rose silently and turned away. His heart pounded with sorrow, not only from the blow but from his brother’s anger.

He walked across the plain, his head bowed. Behind him the elder called, “Wait! Come back. I did not mean it.”
But the younger did not stop. He walked until the red hills rose before him. He climbed higher and higher, his figure small against the glowing sky.

The elder followed, calling, “Brother, forgive me! Do not leave me.”
Still the younger climbed, his steps sure and steady. At last, when he reached the highest ridge, he lifted his face to the heavens.

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The transformation

The spirits were watching. They saw the pain of the younger and the regret of the elder. They took pity, and they lifted the younger up, higher and higher, until his body shone with a soft, silver light.

The elder brother gasped as he saw his sibling rise into the sky. The boy's form glowed brighter, round and shining, until he became the Moon.

From then on, he travelled across the heavens each night, lighting the earth below. His silver glow softened the darkness, guiding the people and the animals through the cool hours.



The elder's sorrow

The elder brother stood on the ridge, his arms stretched upward. "Come back!" he cried. "I am sorry. I should never have struck you. I cannot reach you now."

But the Moon only drifted higher, calm and silent, moving on his endless path.

Night after night, the elder sat by his fire, looking up at the sky. He saw the Moon grow full and bright, then fade and return again. Each time he whispered, "That is my brother, and I must remember never to let anger drive me from love."