

Intellectual Cave Couple.

The writer turned his monitor off and pushed his chair away from the desk. He was writing what he remembered from last night's dream, a dream set in time of over ten thousand years ago.

He realized his singular goal now was to remember as much as he could, hoping to see or hear another memory of some nugget or nuggets of the dream. He had done well remembering what he had, as the dream had been receding as he was writing, so now his only recollection of the dream was what he had written. Now, he was going through his memory again, hoping for more. Once that was completed, he knew there was nothing more.

Rolling his chair back to the table, he decided he was going to reread the story as he had written it, so he turned the monitor on and began reading:

Ehng felt the morning sun warming the long hairs on the back of his head and down the back of his hairy body. It felt to him that as his body hair warmed, they trapped that heat as if he was wearing the skin of another animal. This morning was too warm to wear the skin of a deer, but he was happy to be warming up more than he had been.

Ehng was fishing in a turn of the river where the water ran the slowest, and the fish seemed to congregate. He had a long branch he had found some time ago, and after repeatedly rubbing the end against a rock, the end had become sharp. He used this pointed branch to spearfish.

Ehng looked into the river for fish and saw his reflection, complete with the raised arm holding his spear. He smiled as he remembered the first time he had seen himself in the river, and, fearing his shadow was a predator, he had run, screaming for his life. His parents were there then, and they had laughed while consoling him. They walked him back into the water, where they introduced him to all three of their reflections, and finally, Ehng laughed, too. Soon, Ehng

was pointing to other reflections, like those from the trees growing along the river's edge and the clouds overhead, and his understanding of the dimensions of his surroundings grew.

Engh has been walking down from the high mountains, where he has spent the past several months. Engh loved to stay amongst the trees as they sheltered him from the sometimes strong, cold, harsh winds that blew down from the snow-covered mountains that towered over where he lived. His father had taught him that using the branches from the trees whose leaves didn't lose their color, and sometimes by doubling them, would give him great shelter.

Engh had built several shelters and had gotten very good at making them. After he was gone for many darkneses and returned, he learned that he needed to be careful as sometimes the shelter had become the shelter for another animal. Engh would approach slowly and quietly, and he would throw rocks at the now-dry branches, startling and scaring anything inside to run out. He had scared mountain lions and even a bear and her cub from one of his shelters, and a bear had also scared him from one of his shelters. Engh got cut and scratched quite badly, escaping from that shelter as he needed to tear through the now-dry branches, which tore his skin. After that encounter, Engh always made an escape hole for each of his shelters, one on either end, and they only required a minimum of force to move.

But for now, Engh was enjoying easy living and peaceful days and darkneses. The darkneses were getting colder, but this darkness Engh spent outside. He watched above, which had been blue only a short time before, but it was now filled with objects so plentiful, and the beauty of the objects above was so captivating that he just lay there watching. Sometimes, there appeared to be rivers and creeks like the ones he crossed and fished in, but these were up there amongst the twinkling lights that were so close yet far away. Their color often changed from pastel

purples to green to mixtures of those colors and more. It was a fascinating light show, and Engh often fell asleep while watching.

Engh woke as the light of a new day fell onto his face. As was his custom, he woke quietly and without any quick movements. He slowly surveyed his immediate surroundings, and as he felt safer, he would rise and survey further away. Once he was sure he was alone, he would smile and stretch, and then he would be on his way. Today, Engh was headed to a river he knew was nearby, and grabbing his thin spear, he set off. Engh walked in such a manner that when he felt a small branch under a foot, he would roll that foot so as not to break the branch and startle any of the animals that may be near. Startling a lion or a bear with her cub could cause a footrace, which had happened many times to Engh. But Engh was fast and nearly perfect with his ability to throw rocks at objects even while running as fast as he could. Engh had practiced running and throwing for as long as he could remember.

As Engh walked along the river's edge, the sun caused an object to shine brightly, yet the shine was opaque; the object seemed to take the sun into itself and then give in back by glowing within. The black, shiny object captured Engh's curiosity, so he reached down to pick it up. As he touched the object, he sprang back in pain and fear, and looking at his hand, he saw he was bleeding. Engh was confused by what had just happened. He put his cut finger into his mouth and pressed his tongue against the cut to stop the bleeding. Using his fishing spear, he tried to dislodge the thing that had just bitten him, but it was too big, and prying at the object bent his thin spear, which would certainly break if he continued. Engh carefully removed the bigger rocks from around the object until the blunt end of his spear could move it out where he could see it better. Now that the object was in plain sight, Engh could see it was not alive and was just a rock. Taking his cut finger from his mouth, he again reached for the object but again sprang

back in pain, as a second finger was now cut and bleeding. Engh now placed both cut fingers into his mouth to stop the bleeding, and he sat down next to the object and watched it. As the sunlight rose higher, he could see the rock better, and he saw that one side was thin, the side that had cut him, while the opposite side was thicker. Slowly picking the rock up by the thicker edge worked, and he was not cut by the stone. Engh held the stone tightly, and sliding the sharp end down his spear, he cut a large piece off. Engh sat looking at his now useless spear, but he again tried cutting another piece, which worked easily and quickly. Engh then searched for a straight, thin, yet stout branch to make a replacement fishing spear. Finding one, he used the cutting stone to lop it from the tree. Using the cutting stone, he sharpened the thinner end to a fine point, which he would use to spear his fish. For Engh, the many uses of the cutting stone soon became an intuitive part of his life.

Engh left the cutting stone and his other small valuables in a rabbit skin pouch he had made, and carrying his new spear, he headed to the river. This river was full of fish, so he had a trout quickly. The large trout wriggled and squirmed on his spear until he whacked the fish's head with a larger branch to kill it; he then carried the fish back to his camp. Reaching camp, he stopped and became still, and he stood there as still as he could, listening to the forest and the mountains around him. All Engh could hear was quiet, so he built a fire in the small pit he had lined with rocks. Grabbing the cutting stone, he slit the fish's belly open and threw its guts onto the fire, except for the liver and heart, which he ate raw. Sticking the sharpened branch through the fish above its tail and then through its gills, he placed the fish over the crackling fire to cook. Sitting now, the small fire warmed him, and he occasionally turned the stick to cook the fish evenly. Once the fish was cooked, he removed it from the fire, and as soon as it cooled enough

to touch it, he peeled the body from its skeleton and ate it all. Only the fish skeleton remained when Engh was done, which he threw on the fire's hot coals.

Occasionally, Engh would spot small birds, and using rocks, he had become adept at throwing and hitting them. He missed more often than hitting his mark, but the occasional bird was delicious.

Ehng was not a boy now, nor was he old. He had moved away from his parents several winters ago, and while he had met females and fathered several children, their mothers decided to stay with their small tribe of relatives when he moved on. Ehng liked his solitary existence, and he enjoyed being with a mate, but he didn't like being a member of a tribe. The other tribe members wanted his attention too often and for nothing important, so eventually, Engh decided to leave. During Ehng's travels, he built two camps, which he visited depending on how warm or cold it was. The camp highest in the mountains, where he loved to roam, was only inhabitable for a short time because of the early freezes and, later, the deep snow. Engh spent the coldest mountain times in the valley far below the snow line, where even the coldest nights were rarely cold enough for frost.

Ehng built another one of his camps in that valley. He had found a place where the rocks below a large slab of solid rock had given way, creating a wide and deep overhang. As he sat under the now exposed overhang, he noticed that the loose rock that had collapsed had been sitting on another solid yet smooth slab. A lot of the collapsed rock and debris were piled up on that bottom slab. As he began throwing the rocks and dirt off the edge of the slab, he stopped because a thought occurred to him: he could use these rocks and boulders to build the wall. This slab of rock provided no shelter from the wind or the elements of rain and sun, and he would need that. He decided to build the wall and began using the rocks and boulders that had fallen

when the overhang was created. He started by removing rocks until the edge of the bottom slab was debris-free, and he had a long, smooth floor wide enough to be his living space. He then began stacking rocks on top of each other, trying to reach the overhang above, but he couldn't get the rocks to stay balanced as the wall got higher. The wall collapsed repeatedly, and Ehng, frustrated, walked away.

As he walked, he studied the rocks and mountains around him until he noticed there were no single rocks stacked up high. Ehng realized he needed to lean rocks together so they wouldn't fall over. Walking back to the overhang, he began building the wall again, only this time, he made the wall two rocks wide, leaving a space in the middle. He then started filling the space in the middle with small rocks and dirt from the fallen section of the mountain until it was full. Carefully and methodically, he made one row of the wall two rocks wide, then added a second row, often stopping to check that the wall he was building was straight and plumb, things his father had taught him. However, his father had never built a rock wall this high because he didn't know how, or perhaps he believed it couldn't be done. The work was slow and laborious, mainly because Ehng used an animal skin to hold the smaller debris, which he carried and poured into the space between the rocks. He had about half the wall built when the sun was low in the direction opposite from where it had risen. Ehng also had an idea to have a small fire pit inside the overhang. He built a small fire in his outdoor pit and got a thick branch from the tree that always stayed green. By placing that branch at different places above the fire, he found he could direct the smoke, so he built a small firepit next to the wall, and several feet above that, he left a hole in the wall for the smoke to escape. By the time the sun had risen and set two more times, the wall was touching the overhanging slab. Ehng got several more branches from the

same tree and placed them near the top of the wall, hanging down and out over the firepit, to direct the smoke into the hole he had left in the wall.

Ehng began looking at the one still-open end, and, as his father had shown him, he could close that end by interlacing branches from trees that stayed green all year, thus stopping most of the wind. Finally, this campsite was finished and would last him many changes from warm to cold. Tired from his work, Ehng placed a deer hide on the floor, laid down, and fell fast asleep.

He awoke to birds singing, though it was still dark outside. Ehng also noticed that these birds were different from the ones he had listened to several large moons ago, and as he added up the changes, he knew cold, shorter days would soon arrive.

His new campsite was in the valley where he would stay for the cold, shorter days, and he hoped to kill another deer for its meat and hide. Killing an animal was a dangerous time for Ehng, as the smell of a dead animal attracted predators who also saw him as prey. Ehng had been through this several times, and he knew if he kept the dead animal away from his campsite, kept himself as clean as possible, and stayed alert, he would be okay.

Ehng began looking for recently used deer trails, which he soon located. He then went to the river and cleaned himself as best he could. One trick his mother taught him was to use the fine sand on the river's edge to remove anything sticky or knotting his hair. Ehng then spent time in the warm afternoon sun as his body hair dried. While he waited, he made two more spears, but these were from stouter branches that could pierce a deer's hide. As the sun dropped down further, Ehng found a place to sit where he could watch the deer trail without being seen, and several deer walked by without seeing or smelling him.

As the night was warm, Ehng felt no need for shelter and made himself comfortable. Soon, the sun was gone, and the sky was filled with shiny objects that were beautiful to look at. His

parents had taught him about certain groups of these objects; depending on where they were located, he could tell where he was. Ehng laid back to watch the darkness. Far away, lights would suddenly fall, leaving a trail of light until that faded too, and sometimes, there would be long trails of different colored lights, trails that were long and wide like the rivers around him. But these rivers would rise and fall and move slowly and beautifully in all directions, mixing their colors occasionally in a show that was difficult not to watch. As Ehng watched, he also listened. He could hear sounds coming from where the lights and the rivers of light were. Ehng didn't know what he was seeing or hearing, but he accepted everything as part of where he lived. Sometimes above him was light, and at other times, it was dark, yet in the dark but far away were tiny lights that disappeared as the darkness did. Sometimes, when it was dark, a large round object would rise and light up where he lived. Ehng loved and accepted all the mysterious beauty around him.

He could hear when everything went quiet, and he could also hear when there was no quiet. Ehng didn't prefer one thing over another and accepted life as it presented itself.

The crack of a dry branch alerted Ehng that he was not alone. He rose to his knees and hands, one hand holding a spear, and waited. Ehng instinctively began listening for the quiet because then he became quiet enough to hear anything that wasn't a part of the quiet. This was another trick his father had taught him. His father told Ehng he had learned how to do that from watching animals do it. Ehng kept alert and listened. Another twig cracked but nearer this time. Ehng turned to face the noise and readied one of his stouter, sharpened spears. A flash of fur and teeth lunged up and out of the grass several feet in front of him. Ehng rose, pushing the spear towards the animal, driving the spear with the palm of his hand as hard as he could into the chest of the lunging animal. Feeling the spear find its mark, he backed away as he grabbed his other

spear, readying himself to fight more if necessary. Ehng's breathing grew calmer, and he scanned the area around him to ensure he was alone. As Ehng's eyes adjusted to see the animal he had just killed better, he could see its skin and long white fangs would be very valuable to him. His parents had taught him never to eat the meat of animals that ate other animals. This was handed down from generation to generation and was learned as a fact of life, never to be questioned.

Ehng remained standing for a long time. His father had taught him it was safer to never get near an animal he had just killed until a long time had passed. As he stood in the silence of his kill, he could hear any sounds close to himself, and he could also hear far out into the vastness that only his eyes could see. Slowly, he let his legs relax and continued relaxing until he sat on the ground. He stayed seated until morning, finally standing and dragging the animal nearer to his camp. Leaving the animal and his spears, he got the cutting stone he used for cutting, and, walking back to the mountain lion, he began skinning it. Skinning the lion took a long time, as he wanted to leave as little meat on the skin as possible. He knocked out the fangs using a short piece of thick branch he found, and then he dragged the carcass far away from his camp. He laid the skin in a sunny place quite far from his camp and used heavy boulders to keep the skin from shrinking. He laid the lion's teeth on a flat rock to dry. He then went to the river and washed, using sand to remove the oily residue on his hands and arms, before resting afterward as he waited to dry.

Ehng grabbed his spear to get breakfast and soon stood in his favorite fishing spot, inside a sharp bend in the river. Here, the water was plenty deep, and it flowed slowly. Ehng could easily see the fish here, and it wasn't long before he had speared a nice trout and had it wriggling on his spear.

Ehng thought this was the perfect time to try out his new shelter and the indoor firepit. He gathered a little dry moss and the driest sticks he could find and took them into his new shelter. He placed a dry stick between his palms and the other end between clumps of moss and, using his palms, rotated the twig back and forth until the moss began smoking. Ehng stopped using the stick and blew gently on the smoke until it burst into flames. He slowly added twigs and, finally, larger pieces of branches until a fire burned in his new pit. Almost all the smoke was going out the hole in the wall as he had planned. He grabbed his cutting stone and slit the fish's belly open, throwing the guts onto the fire, except for the liver and heart, which he ate uncooked. Ehng skewered the fish with his spear, then rested the spear across the fire pit for the fish to cook. After turning the fish several times, he saw and smelled that it was cooked. He gently pulled the meat from its skeleton and ate the delicious warm chunks of fresh trout.

With his belly full, Ehng was feeling tired. But he decided to walk to the river and wash up again before sleeping. Ehng was in the shallow water of the river when he heard a loud crack, and the sound froze Ehng.

He began to squat in the river, and soon, his head was the only part above water. Ehng sniffed the air and turned his head so his ear faced where the sound had come from. "Chi-Eke, Chi-Eke," he heard, and Ehng responded with "Chu-Kay, Chu-Kay." Again came the sounds "Chi-Eke, Chi-Eke," only quicker and louder this time. Ehng responded in the same staccato and pitch, standing up and slowly moving towards the ongoing greeting. The two humans kept their simple dialogue going as the distance between them closed. Ehng could now see the other person was a young female, and he smiled broadly. She could see him and smiled, indicating she was friendly and accepted him as friendly. The two met and began sniffing each other, with Ehng reaching out a hand slowly and carefully so as not to get bitten or frighten her. She was

receptive to his gentle touch, yet she was shy. Ehng could smell that she was in heat, which meant she was receptive to mating. She saw he was already ready to mate, and as he moved around to her back, she let him. The mating didn't take long, and after a short rest and listening for any danger, they mated again.

Afterward, Ehng asked her if she was hungry, which she was, and he took her to his fishing place. First, they both cleaned themselves in the river, then he fetched his spear and, quickly, he had speared another fish. As they left for Ehng's camp, their thick, beautiful winter coats dripped water. Arriving at Ehng's campsite, he took her inside and added more pieces of branches to the fire to warm them and cook the trout.

Ehng could see she was impressed by his camp.

Ehng spoke to her, "What is your name?"

The young female looked into his eyes and replied, "Kin-ta'."

The two smiled at each other, and Ehng began rubbing the hair on her back to help dry her; once she turned to face him, Kin-Ta' began returning the favor. Their hands eventually rubbed all of each other's bodies, and again, they mated.

Ehng then went to fetch his cutting stone from the overhang, but when he noticed Kin-Ta' walking after him, he slowed and offered his hand, which she took and held as they looked around the campsite. Ehng told her about finding the cutting stone, and he showed her his still badly scarred fingertips where the cutting stone had cut him; that helped emphasize the danger it posed.

Ehng sliced open the fish's belly, and Kin-Ta' quickly stepped back as she watched how easily the stone cut the fish's belly open. Ehng ate the liver and offered the heart to Kin-Ta', which she ate. Throwing the guts on the fire, Ehng again speared the fish above its tail and out through its gills and placed it by the fire to cook.

Kin-Ta' seemed delighted with Ehng and his campsite, and soon, they returned to the fire and ate the now-cooked trout. As they ate, they talked, with Ehng asking most of the questions and Kin-Ta' offering most of the answers.

Ehng asked her, "How did you come to be alone, and how long have you been by yourself?" Kin-Ta', still very shy, raised her eyes to meet his and answered, "I came into heat several darknesses ago, and my mother ordered me to go. I walked for two darknesses before seeing and watching you since yesterday's darkness passed. I was hiding, but you heard me." Kin-Ta' again stared down at the ground. Ehng slowly lifted her chin with his index finger until their eyes met. He smiled at her, and she smiled at him.

Kin-Ta' then asked, "Why are you alone, Ehng?" Ehng was caught off-guard by the kindness in her voice because he couldn't remember hearing that from anyone other than his mother. He sat looking at her before saying, "You can stay here if you want. We can look after each other if you want." Ehng wondered why Kin-Ta' was suddenly crying, and he moved to her and put his arm around her strong, muscular body. "Why are you crying?" he asked. "I'm crying because I am so happy," she replied, which confused him even more.

And just like that, the two went from being alone to being a couple. Ehng's life changed in ways he had forgotten, and Kin-Ta's life changed in ways she had yet to experience herself.

Ehng now had a shadow who loved him, and Kin-Ta' had a strong male who loved her.

Kin-Ta' shouted to Ehng, "I will race you to the top of that hill," and off she ran. Ehng soon caught up and ran alongside her, letting her reach the top first.

Ehng said, "Shoosh," and he strained to listen. Kin-Ta' listened too, and both knew something was out there, but they didn't know what. Ehng felt around for his spear, but he hadn't grabbed it before running after Kin-Ta'. Kin-Ta' handed him two rocks she had found, and the two waited.

All seemed quiet and safe, but Ehng and Kin-Ta' knew better. Ehng put a finger to his lips and, effortlessly rising from his squatting position, rocks in hand, saw the mountain lion's pointed ears in the tall grass not far from them. Ehng threw the best rock of the two at a spot a little below the ears, and they both heard the rock finding its mark, thud! As the now dazed lion turned to leave, Ehng threw the second rock, and again, the rock found its mark: thud! The mountain lion ran off, leaving the two in peace and safety.

As the two lay in the tall grass, their hands discovered each other's bodies. Their hands seemed eager to learn about the other and learn they did. Soon, Ehng and Kin-Ta' mated again, and afterward, Kin-Ta' told Ehng this was her first experience being with a mate. Ehng smiled and petted her shoulders and breasts until they laid down together; she with her butt in his tummy and him with his arm under her head, and both fell asleep.

Ehng woke to find he was looking into Kin-Ta's eyes, which were only inches from his. She was sitting on his stomach, and he was flat on his back. Her breasts lightly touched his chest, and she was smiling brightly. This time, their mating was instigated by Kin-Ta', which was something he had not experienced before. Ehng submitted to this new way of mating, and he liked it. Kin-Ta' stayed lying on him long after they were done, and she finally spoke. "Ehng, how come you're not with a mate?"

Ehng replied, "My last mate didn't want to come with me and chose to stay with her tribe."

Kin-Ta' looked at him, staring intensely into his eyes, like she was looking into his soul, and said softly, "I will always stay with you. I have nowhere I would rather be than with you."

Ehng felt that she meant her words. Ehng had felt the same way with his two mates, but they hadn't felt the same towards him. Now, here he was, with a mate who felt as he felt. He smiled.

He asked her if she wanted to find her parents again, and she said no. She said her time was with him now, and they would be happy together. Rising now, they both became quiet while they listened and scanned the area around them. When they were sure it was safe, they walked back down the mountain.

Ehng, after collecting his precious spear, showed her the hide of the mountain lion he had recently killed. Kin-Ta' was excited to see it, and she loved the fangs and teeth he had removed. She said she could make him a spear, using a fang as the tip. She asked him if he had a scraping stone for removing the bits of fat and meat still on the hide, which he did not, but together, they agreed they would start accumulating the things he didn't already have.

Kin-Ta' tried spear fishing in Ehng's spot, and she speared two fish quickly. Kin-Ta' was laughing, as was Ehng, and they held hands as they walked back to the campsite to cook their fish.

During the long nights of the coldest time before the days and nights began warming again, the sky would sometimes be lit by rivers of light that seemed to dance either by themselves or with other lights. The colors often ranged through the entire spectrum, some mixing with others while some remained true to their color. It was always pastels, and the show was so captivating that it was difficult not to watch. The only intermissions were when Ehng and Kin-Ta' listened for the quiet around them, whether together or alone. Listening to the quiet was one of their most essential survival tools.

Kin-Ta's belly now had a pronounced bump to it. Her breasts had grown significantly, and Ehng loved to pet her body. They would spend a lot of time with Kin-Ta' sitting between Ehng's outstretched legs while he stroked her tummy and breasts. Then, one day, Kin-Ta' told Ehng she would soon have their child. She had already made a bed of dry grasses back in the warmest part

of the overhang, and on top of that was the now cured skin of the mountain lion. Kin-Ta' was outside when her water burst, and Ehng helped her up the rocky entrance and into the safety of the overhang. There, she gave birth to a boy, and she bent over and bit through the cord that attached her to the infant. Her mother had taught her how to tie the cord, which she did. Ehng was watching everything, of course, and while he had never done those things, he had seen them done to his other children. The baby started crying; Kin-ta' took him and laid his still-wet body on her chest between her breasts until he wanted to feed. Engh hung a deer hide to stop the last of the drafty winds coming through the thatched entrance. Engh handed her a few small squirrel skins to dry the infant, and he picked up the afterbirth, putting that in the firepit to burn. Taking some dried grass, he wiped the mess off the rock floor and put that in the firepit, too. After that, he lay down and fell fast asleep.

When he awoke to the new addition to their family, Kin-Ta' asked him if he was happy. Ehng said, "Kin-Ta', I am pleased with everything I have, and there is nothing I'm unhappy with." With that, Ehng walked closer, knelt, and kissed the top of Kin-Ta's head. Then he sat on the ground next to her and held her hand.

As the weeks and months passed, Ehng taught Kin-Ta' many things, and he learned much from Kin-Ta'. They used everything around them for their survival. Both had quickly learned from their parents and survived well after leaving them. Survival was pretty easy for them.

Occasionally, there was still hunger and cold because those things were out of their control. But they were comfortable now with the different campsites Ehng had built. Kin-Ta' was, of course, a blessing Engh had not imagined. Their separate lives had become one, and everything was done in unison.

At this point, he stopped thinking and looked over at the family he now had. He was an integral part of his family, as was Kin-Ta' and the new one. Kin-Ta's eyes were open and watching Ehng. She said, "What are you thinking so deeply about Ehng?"

Ehng smiled at her and said, "We're good alone and perfect together. You're a strong, intelligent, heart-of-my-heart mate. I'm very confident to go forward with you."

Kin-Ta' playfully pushed Ehng onto the ground and laid on top of him. Her lithe body and silky smooth hair caressed his body as she moved on him. They were both surprised when his body reacted as if it were mating time, yet neither wanted to stop his reaction. Instead, and as she had done before, she slid down onto his mating tool, and they moved together, smiling at how good this felt, then faster and faster until they shouted out loud together. The ending of their mating was joyous and the most profound pleasure they had ever experienced. Afterward, they lay together, feeling these new feelings they now shared. Their son Da'Uhd crawled over and, clutching Kin-Ta's body hairs, climbed onto her back, and they all shared this happy moment. Neither Kin-Ta' nor Ehng had ever mated without the female being in heat, but now they had, and they accepted what just happened as perfectly natural.

Holding Kin-Ta' tight in his arms, Ehng asked, "Have you ever heard the sounds that come from out there? Far out where our eyes can see?"

Kin-Ta', her head on Ehng's chest, said, "Yes. My family, our clan, would listen together, and afterward, no one would say anything. They were the most beautiful sounds I had heard until I met you, and then his sounds when he came along," Kin-Ta' raised her eyebrows to indicate Da'Uhd, still lying on top of her.

"We hear the wind, and we hear twigs crack, and that's because we listen to and listen for both. We hear both near and far, and we hear well. But sometimes, only sometimes, I can hear things

from way out there. I can hear all the way out to the things I can see that are farthest away. And those sounds are unlike any I have heard before,” said Ehng in his most animated voice.

Da’Uhd slid off his mother, and she slid off Ehng. As Ehng sat up, they all listened to the quiet, and all they heard was quiet.

Kin-Ta’ and Ehng had decided to leave this camp for a while. They would walk a route across the valley floor and carry but a few possessions. They would take the cutting stone, a deerskin, the lion skin, their now prized fishing spear expertly fitted with the longest fang from the mountain lion, and also a much stouter spear just in case it was needed. And with those possessions, they set out quietly together. Crossing the river allowed them to clean themselves before starting their journey. Da’Uhd, of course, took the opportunity to splash, dive and play.

Ehng didn’t know how, but he knew he could still talk with his parents. It was as if they were there without being there. When he mentioned this to Kin-Ta’, she immediately affirmed what he was saying. She said, “Oh, I talk with my parents all the time. And sometimes it’s not talking, but I can feel how they are. Sometimes they’re fed and happy, sometimes not, but they always feel okay to me.” Kin-Ta’ laughed before going on, “It’s like us now. I can look at or think about you and know how you are or what you want. Distance doesn’t seem to matter any longer. It’s like we’re tangled together.”

“Exactly,” responded Ehng. “Exactly.”

Ehng was both predator and prey. He had quickly learned how to be a better predator, and, at the same time, he knew, and in minute detail, how to lessen the odds of being prey. Ehng thought it was easy to avoid being prey as long as he stayed alert and listened for the quiet. He and Kin-Ta’ often talked about that, and Da’Uhd would listen intently. Da’Uhd was never allowed to be alone, nor could he be further than an arm’s reach away. Both Ehng and Kin-Ta’ had seen clan

or tribe members of all ages taken by lions and killed. Both Engh and Kin-Ta' had come across the bones of humans who had been killed and eaten by lions or other animals. Ehng and Kin-Ta promised each other they would do their best to avoid such a fate.

A car traveling past the writer's house backfired, startling the writer, who woke and opened his eyes.

The End.

Written and edited by Peter Skeels © 2-25-2024