

taps at his foot. He grunts in pain and bends to rub his foot where the hammer had hit.

With Ar-gah' calmed, Ah'-oom turns to the strangers. She puts both hands in the air, palms out, and bows her head to the ground in an act of submission. She kneels, still with her hands in the air, her head bowed. She can hear the bowed hide stretch, and she hopes that this will show the strangers that they mean no harm. She grabs Ar-gah''s leg and rubs downward to indicate that he must follow her lead. Ar-gah' understands the need to show submission, but he only bows his head and opens his palms toward the strangers. He suppresses his anger enough to put one of his hands on Ah'-oom's shoulder to show solidarity.

The oldest of the strangers is white-haired. He motions for his men to put down their bows and arrows. He approaches the hunters and invites Ah'-oom and Ar-gah' to rise. They do so and look into the eyes of the old man. He puts his hands on both their upper arms in turn, with Ah'-oom the first to receive his ministrations.

The old stranger motions to one of the women in his party carrying food. He picks some succulents out of her basket and offers them to Ar-gah' and Ah'-oom. The two hunters accept them and eat them hungrily.

The old man then bids them all to sit and share their meager store of food. Ah'-oom tries, by pointing, to convey the existence of Bo-nah' and Bo-nee', and her need to rejoin them. Eventually, together, she and the old man agree that Ar-gah' will rejoin the other hunters, tell them what is going on, then help them get on the way back to the sleeping place. Ah'-oom will stay with the travelers. As a sign of mutual respect two of the men with the travelers' party will go with Ar-gah'. They all know that they must then try to get to the sleeping place where there will be shelter and fire against the coming storm.

With gestures Ah'-oom urges the strangers to prepare for fast travel toward the hills to the south. She will lead them to the sleeping place. Once she has picked up her own tack, she picks up one of the bundles of hide that the others have brought to fend off the cold. Then, as at the beginning of her journey, she moves at the fastest pace that each of the strangers can match to return to her family at the sleeping place.

As the darkening clouds in the south grow more threatening, Ah'-oom hears the call of raven. The bird flies low over the group, appears to glance in her direction, then continues south.

They are on their way.

In the sleeping place, beyond the windbreak, Boa pulls the hide tighter around his body. A chilly wind has been building up ahead of the storm. He had been looking north and hoped he would not miss the returning hunters as soon as they came within his vision.

Yah'-nay joins Boa. She puts another hide around his shoulders and gestures to the new, partially buried shelter that she and Pe'-dah have built.

Despite his pleasure Boa is growing more concerned as time passes and daylight fades. He fears that the hunters will spend yet another night away from their camp. He indicates to Yah'-nay that the fire needs to be started. He hopes there will be enough wood and kindling to last through the night if that becomes necessary.

As they sit quietly together Yah'-nay's raven with a single white feather on its right wing comes to them and lands a few paces away. The raven hops sideways toward Yah'-nay then vocalize various sounds that she recognizes as sounds of comfort. She smiles to herself and chants softly in a way that gives assurance to Boa that all preparations are as good as they can be.

The fire is lit while there is still an evening glow from the setting sun. Boa can no longer see very far

in the direction of the hunters' return. He hopes they can see the fire.

The nature of his worry soon shifts. Shortly after, Ar-gah' appears followed by the other two hunters and two travelers bearing the palette with their weapons, and the animal they had killed the day before. Though he is glad to see three of his hunters return, Boa growls at the newcomers.

Ar-gah' does his best to cheer and bark in confident tones that all is well.

As soon as the hunters and travelers come in sight, the women begin to sing a barking ululation to indicate their great pleasure at their return.

The younger ones run down the hill to greet them. Boa, Yah, and Yah'-nay descend more carefully, being mindful of the hazards on the darkened path. Boa is immediately concerned that Ah'-oom is not with them. When Ar-gah' realizes that she is not among the greeters, he, too, becomes concerned. He and Bo-nah' turn back to the trail to search for the missing girl. Boa puts his hands on both hunters to caution them against going back into the dark, stormy night. He indicates that a better plan would be to pile more wood on the fire to give the missing party a bigger target in the dark.

Ar-gah' looks at the gathering storm and feels the rushing wind. He agrees with the wisdom of Boa. The possibility of the two groups missing each other, and becoming more lost, is very great. The group moves back up the hill to gather more wood for the fire. The women move into the shelter and begin a soft chant to give guidance to the travelers.

The fire spreads warmth throughout the shelter. The men also gather around to discuss the results of the hunt.

Boa notices Bo-nah's wounded arm, and the hide and poultice his daughter has applied to it. He points at the wound with a questioning look. Bo-nah' relates the story by gesture, and by showing Boa the sites of various blows and wounds inflicted on the animal that now lays on the nearby palette. He seeks permission to lay down to rest as he has pushed himself very hard to help bring the animal and their weapons back to the group's sleeping place. He especially praises Ah'-oom's leadership on the hunt.

Ar-gah' shows Boa the leg bone that Bo-nah' had prepared. He picks up a spear from the palette and fits it to the niche. He demonstrates how to hold the two pieces but does not throw the spear. Bo-nee' has sat down, but he is able to express his great pleasure at the skill that Ar-gah' has mastered.

Ar-gah' indicates the two travelers who have remained at the edge of the firelight. He describes the experience he and Ah'-oom had in their meeting with the strangers. He tells them both that Ah'-oom had stayed with them and would be leading them to the sleeping place. Boa looks concerned, but Ar-gah' relays that he and Ah'-oom shared food with them. He believes they are a group of travelers who have their own food and shelter and will cause no harm. He describes their absence of body hair—more like Ah'-oom; less like he, Boa, and other members of their hunting group. He also tries to describe their peculiar way of talking, more like singing than the barks and guttural vocalizations of their own group. When Ar-gah' tries to emulate the singsong voice of the travelers, Boa and Bo-nee' bark in laughter.

Now, Ar-gah' motions the travelers forward. Each lays his spear down, then approaches Boa and extends an open hand in greeting, both touching Boa's upper right arm. Boa responds with a low grunt. He bids the strangers sit with him. He motions toward Yah and Yah'-nay that they be fed.

Rain begins to fall. The roof of the shelter starts to leak, and the men move hides around in the hopes of keeping the inside of the shelter as dry as possible. The fire in front of the shelter is built up strong enough, it is hoped, to persist even through a heavy rain. The women continue their chant in the hopes that Ah'-oom and the travelers will hear their call.

The white-feathered raven flies from his perch on the shelter roof toward the north, in the direction

Savanna

of the returning group. Yah'-nay continues her soft chanting as she watches the bird go.

Ar-gah' motions that he will keep the fires going. After a while most of the members of the group fall into a deep sleep.

Later, while scanning the dark beyond the firelight, Ar-gah' spots Ah'-oom walking alone along a path to the sleeping place. He gets up and moves quickly to her, being careful to avoid the broken ground that could cause serious injury. Ah'-oom indicates that the travelers are coming, but that their burdens had grown heavy. Ar-gah' and Ah'-oom go back to help them. Once they take up the loads, the two hunters and the travelers make their way to the fire and shelter.

Ar-gah' goes to Boa and Bo-nee' to tell them of Ah'-oom's return with the travelers. Ah'-oom wakes Yah, Yah'-nay, Pe'-dee, and Pe'-dah. Once awake, the women once again ululate with joy at the safe return of all the hunters and the blessing of the meat. Boa and Bo-nee' hug the returning hunters and bid them sit down by the fire.

The women who have been chanting grow quiet now. Yah'-nay approaches Boa and gives him the beautiful blue stone, which she has woven onto a colored hide backing. Boa is momentarily surprised. Then, he calls Ar-gah' and Ah'-oom to his side. He looks into their eyes for a few moments, before putting the decoration on Ah'-oom's chest. She is overwhelmed. She bows her head then hugs her father. She turns to look at Ar-gah'. He has no expression in his downcast eyes.

Ah'-oom frowns. She once thought Ar-gah' impulsive, a showoff, a weak spot in their hunting party. Now, she sees him as valuable, as a friend. She steps toward him and puts the honored decoration she has received from her father on Ar-gah''s chest. His expression changes to one of joy and pride. He tries very hard to suppress his emotion.

Bo-nah', who has woken up, looks at Boa and bows his head toward his older brother to indicate his approval of all that had occurred. He looks at the travelers now joining his family around the fire. He knows they are from the north, but he wonders where. He begins to imagine places there, filled with many wonders. He resolves to go there someday, perhaps with the travelers when they return to their homeland.

The black sky along the eastern horizon turns gray with the emerging sun.

END