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# WILD

PART I  
THE FISHING TRIP

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“And then, it came. Tall as the mountains, black as night, glowing eyes red, as blood.”

“The beast of death?”

“The beast of death,” he answered his seven-year-old son, whose eyes were wide open as he paid absolute attention. “So massive was this beast, that its steps shook the very foundations of the earth. So scary was it, that it sent fear, into the souls of men. Warriors threw down their weapons, women screamed, children cried and ran, all of them escaped, all of them, but one. ”

“The boy?”

“The young boy, he stood alone, blunt sword in hand! Courage in heart! Facing the monster *charging*, towards him!” he paused, as the boy’s pupils enlarged a little more as he stared at him across the fire, his face filled with both great expectation and fear.

“What happened?” he very curiously asked, as his serious-faced father slowly looked down at the fire.

“That will wait until the next time?” he replied after some silence, “go to bed now.”

The fire at the center lit the one-roomed, fairly spacious house, whose well finished mud walls were fitted with uneven, rugged, but proper wooden shelves. The shelves were stacked full with food supplies: roasted fish, roasted beef, and reed baskets half filled with both ‘leafy’ and ‘rooty’ vegetables among other foodstuffs.

On the dung-plastered floor under the shelves, were two ‘beds’ on opposite sides of the fire. Low, flat, wooden frames stacked with layers of softened, furry hides. Along the rest of the walls, were different tools and weapons, which included two, very furry, back quivers containing several long arrows, two sharp daggers, two, wooden frame, recurved composite bows, baskets, folded fishing nets, and utensils.

With his strong, hard, callused left hand, the serious-faced man gently pushed a piece of firewood further into the fire, feeding it as his son slowly fell asleep. While holding his arms around his knees, he watched the wood crack up into the warming flames.

Covering his very strong, athletic, hard body, was a sleeveless, brown, pure leather coat, which warmed his torso—across which were several healed scars. Such scars were also present across his face, arms, and legs. While silently contemplating, he observed as orange-glowing ash rose above the fire towards the roof.

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Dew was all over the healthy leaves and thick tree trunks, with a slight mist present in the chilly air; through which the orange sunrays lit the waking jungle filled with mixed sounds of all kinds of birds, monkeys and insects. Thick-barked, well-spaced trees constituted most of the forest, with all kinds of thick leaved, coiling plants attached as they crawled and climbed. The crawlers extended all over the “carpet” of orange, red, and purple *shed leaves* that covered the entire forest floor.

On his back, the boy was carrying a big, square shaped basket on thick, furry, leather straps over his shoulders. He walked through the trees with his father. Between the many red and yellow flower bushes, they stepped, walking over dead logs grown by ferns and colorful fungi.

“Over there,” his father said as he pointed at a small bush comprised of small, upright plants. He walked towards them and the boy followed, squatting next to him while facing the bush.

“A-a-a-a, watch it,” he stopped the boy from uprooting a plant.

“But its vegetable?” the boy wondered.

“It looks like-” he paused as he uprooted it himself, “-vegetable, but if you eat this dear boy, you lose your mind, you become like the monkeys. It is a poisonous weed,” he explained while throwing it away.

“They look exactly the same?”

“They sure do, you tell the difference by these,” he said while pointing out the very tiny fruits under the actual vegetable leaves, “see? It is what you look for, these weeds do not have them,” he showed him while uprooting a few. The boy observed and followed as he uprooted more.

After gathering enough, they moved on, walking through some bushes that were enclosing a small depression. Inside the depression, were several huge, decaying logs grown all over with all kinds of mosses, ferns, and very vibrant troops of fungi; healthy plants that thrived alongside bright flowers, dark green thick grass, and armies of colonizing, crawling plants.

“Mushrooms!” the boy remarked as he followed his father through the bushes, “Lots of them!” he added as he excitedly looked around.

“You need to know which ones are for eating, come here?” his father called. The boy rushed over towards him, squatting at a log and checking out the healthy fungi.

“How do we pick them?” he asked as he took off the quarter-filled basket from his back.

“Everything with spots on it is bad-” he started to explain, showing the excited child who quickly learned. To the basket, with hands full of mushrooms, he made several trips, returning and keeping up with his father who moved about the place and pointed out what was edible for him to pick.

Straight into the basket, the boy threw down big ripe guavas from the big guava tree. The basket was a few steps behind his father, who with his hands, was digging into the ground (covered with dense, dark green undergrowth) and unearthing different types of roots. Upon uprooting two handfuls, he turned around and walked towards the tree. He placed the roots inside the basket and looked up the tree.

“I think it is time to go!” he said to the boy, who was swinging about like a monkey up on the tree.

“Now?” the boy asked with a beaming face and wide-open eyes.

“Now!” stated the man, “We need to catch them before they get fully awake! Unless you do not want to-”

“No father! I’m coming!” he assured as he rushed down the tree.

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While breathing quickly in a controlled fashion, the boy’s legs sprinted on the forest floor. He quickly and carefully jumped over rotting logs densely covered with green coiling plants, rapidly dodging the trees left and right, as he maintained his dangerously fast pace. On his arms and body, thick wet leaves slapped as he dashed between the bushes—which constituted the dark green, dead silent side of the forest.

Abruptly, he made a well-calculated stop; rushing his sight around the bushes here and there, as his ears caught the noise of his target rushing through the thick bushes up ahead. He focused his sight on the sound and ‘followed it with his eyes’ as it moved rightwards. From the brown, furry quiver on his back, he quickly drew an arrow from the set of three. He placed it against the long bow and pulled its white feather fletching against the tight string.

Stretching it fast against the bow’s grooves, he perfectly aligned his eyesight along its shaft. Very keenly, he *turned his aim* to follow the noise. His eyes locked-on, and he released the perfectly straight arrow. The arrow flew fast through the air between the leaves and bushes, right towards the neck of the sprinting antelope. The animal suddenly hopped over a log as the arrow fiercely flew under its belly, piercing a tree trunk as it bolted.

Towards the tree trunk, the boy ran. He quickly pulled out the arrow and continued pursuit. Further into the forest, he chased the antelope, ‘snaking’ through trees side to side and dodging thorny bushes and wet stems. Upon stepping into a part of the forest that had better tree spacing, he stopped. He scanned around fast and re-traced the antelope, which was getting away up ahead.

After it, he ran and closed in as it slowed down while trying to force itself through a thick bush crossed with a web of thick-leaved, climbing plants. Taking advantage, he took position; placed the arrow’s fletching against the bow’s string ones again and stretched it back, as the antelope forced itself out of the ‘trap’ and hoping on. He lowered the bow, removing the arrow with some anger and resuming pursuit.

Into a woody section of the green forest, he chased it; running for several meters before stopping again and taking position. He fit the arrow again, and raised the fully stretched bow to strike before the animal made it across the open area. And just as he pulled back the string—SWOOSH!—his eye quickly caught the straight flying arrow speeding from the right. Without

touching a stem, it flew swiftly and *met with the antelope*—piercing right through its heart and *pinning* its entire body against a tree.

In amazement, he lowered his bow and arrow while looking to his right, from where his calm father, carrying his bow, came walking fast through the few bushes and trees.

“You make the animal run into your arrow!” he reminded the boy as he walked towards the kill.

“I was going to kill it!” the boy defended himself while still amazed, walking to meet up with him at the dead antelope.

“It was going to get away, if it went through those bushes, it would have made the task twice as hard,” his father continued to explain, as he got closer.

“Wow!” the boy remarked as he got to the kill his father was now staring at—the arrow ‘pinning’ its upper body against the tree, perfectly through its heart.

“How do you do that?” he asked as he wondered in admiration.

“Just as I have told you, you take position,”

“I did?”

“You shoot the arrow so that your target runs into it?”

“But I—”

“Shot after the animal,” he informed the boy while looking into his eyes, “I saw it,” he added, “your arrow strikes behind your target.”

The boy remained silent. Seeing this, he placed his left hand on his shoulder, making him feel okay before turning back to the antelope.

“Let us get it off the tree, I will tell you more on the way home,” he said as he stood up and moved to pull out the arrow.

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On his back, the boy carried the basket- full of the groceries they had gathered earlier that morning, following his father who carried the kill on his back by holding its front legs over his shoulders. Up ahead, on a very small hill covered entirely with short, light green grass, was their home: a well-built mud house at the crest of the hill. The house had four walls, which leaned outwards as they moved upwards, intersecting with the thick layer of damp grass and reeds that thatched the pointed roof on both sides.

Just next to the house, was a soft-wood rack on which a piece of white, furry hide was drying; close to which was another rack, on which pots, calabashes, cooking sticks, and other utensils were also drying.

“Are you going fishing tomorrow?” the boy asked as he kept up his pace.

“Yes? Why do you ask?” His father questioned.

“I want to come with you?”

“Son, I have told you before? It is not a journey for children?”

“But I am big now? Do you not see? I can run?”

“It is too dangerous,”

“And I am strong father, I can fight,”

He sighed as the boy insisted.

“Please? Just let me come with you, I *have* to learn to catch fish too? Please father? I-”

“Okay. Alright,”

“*Yes!*” he celebrated.

“You asked for it yourself,”

“Yes!”

“First light tomorrow,”

“*Yes!* I-I will help you carry the nets! And the baskets! I will even-” he continued to promise as he increased his pace in an attempt to walk by his father’s side.

“Stop!” his father suddenly cautioned, holding him back at his side with his strong left hand.

“What?” the boy asked as he tried to look up ahead.

“Over here,” his father pointed as he quickly pulled him aside behind a bush, from where he peeked out behind his shoulder while staying very close.

“Wow,” he remarked in a low tone, as he laid eyes upon the fat, adult, white rhino, which was *patrolling* the back of their house while sniffing everything around the place.

Cautiously, the man and the boy raised their heads further above the leaves, getting a better look at the animal, which stamped around their utensils.

“I’ve never seen one this close before?” the boy said in a low tone, “Is it dangerous?” he whispered as they watched.

“Very, very dangerous,” his father answered. Suddenly, the rhino lifted its head and looked right at them. Behind the bush, they quickly ducked as it maintained its gaze, it’s very fat belly moving in and out as it ‘groaned’ angrily. Lightly, it puffed and waited for any signs of movement, standing ready to attack. The boy and his father remained still.

Getting bored with the silence, the rhino turned back to sniffing as it moved on around the house, groaning as it puffed away.

“Come on,” the man told the boy, who followed him out of cover.

“What did it want?” the boy asked as he hurried through the bushes, keeping up with his father’s pace,

“I do not know for sure.”

“I think it wanted our food! It smelled the pots! Did you see?” he asked as he followed.

“Of course I saw, hurry up now, there is something I’ve been planning to show you.”

“Show me? What is it?”

“I cannot tell you, you need to see for yourself, you said you are a big boy right?”

“I am!” he agreed, “Is it something scary?”

“Not a chance son, I am not saying a word until you’ve seen it,” he intrigued him as they climbed up the green-grass gentle slope towards the house.

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The side of the high cliff was extremely steep, with hanging plants and roots almost coloring it green and purple. With one hand after another, the boy climbed along the small rocks all over the dangerously steep side. As he climbed, his heart raced as he grabbed a rock that fell out and

dropped far down below, leaving him hanging by the other hand, which was holding onto another rock that also started to loosen.

“I’m afraid!” he complained to his father, who was climbing just below him.

“It is okay son, I am right below you! Just keep climbing!” he reassured him.

The nervous boy moved his hanging hand and grabbed the next rock, climbing before stepping onto another loose rock that fell off and left his leg hanging. Quickly moving the leg in panic, he stepped on another firmer rock, after which he turned his head and looked.

“Do not look down son!” his father warned him. His heart pounded at the sight of the great distance between himself and the tree top bottom. It did not seem that high from the ground.

“Keep moving up! Keep climbing son! Keep climbing!” his father motivated him. Turning his head back up, he kept climbing. He missed a step here and there, grabbed a loose rock this way and that way. Under his father’s motivation and assurance, he proceeded, slowly approaching the top of the cliff.

A wide, fairly flat, uneven soft rock covered almost the entire top of the cliff, extending over the other end—opposite of which the boy climbed. He pulled himself upon the platform, crawling on all fours as he let out his fear by breathing hard. After him, his father climbed, rushing to check his condition as he also caught a breath.

“Are you okay?” he asked as they took a moment to rest. The boy nodded, and they relaxed for a short while.

“Come on, I would not want you to miss the sight,” his father told him while getting up, walking towards the extended side of the rock.

“Wow!” the boy remarked in amazement, extremely impressed by the view as he followed his father. He stared at the sight, as his father sat on the very edge of the rock.

“Come, sit here,” his father asked him, and he walked closer and sat on the rock at his right side. Their legs hung in midair as they enjoyed the view under the setting sun, whose orange light softly shone over the green, partly wet, endless grassland.

“Look! *Elephants!*” the very impressed boy shouted while pointing very far down below—at a parade of sixty elephants slowly moving through a big pool of clear water, which was partially ‘bathing’ the grass.

“Rhinos! They are so many!” he added, referring to a crash of very fat, white rhinos, grazing next to a herd of hundreds of antelopes.

“Look at all the animals father!”

“Yes?”

“Look at those birds! *Look!*” he insisted, referring to the million pink flamingoes that jammed around the lake in the distant background.

“I’ve never seen it like this before!”

“And it goes as *far* as your eyes can see,”

“All that far!”

“*All* that far,”

“Wow!” he commented as his body relaxed in admiration.

“There is nothing quite like it,” his father commented.

“It is so beautiful,”

“I know son, I know,”

“Wow,” he appreciated. All around, he looked, not sure which sight to stick with. He switched from the distant crash of tens of lazy looking hippos in a wide puddle, to the zeal of hundreds of zebras, sieges of noisy cranes, troops of stubborn monkeys, clans of cheeky hyenas, among many, many other animals.

“Well, we better get going?” his father suggested after a while.

“But we just got here!” the boy protested.

“I thought you were scared!”

“Not anymore? Can we stay a while please?” he begged, as his father looked at him for a moment.

“Okay, but just a little longer, I would not want us to stay up here until dark,” he advised as they continued to watch.

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Early next morning, the two were prepared to leave. Both of them were dressed in brown, sleeveless, very furry, soft leather coats, which extended just below their knees. Equally furry boots covered their feet and half their legs. On a ‘stick back pack’, the boy carried a huge, strapped load of fishing baskets, with a gourd of drinking water and other tools strapped on his waist. He was standing excitedly while holding a straight walking stick his height, facing his father, who had strapped fishing nets and many other supplies on his ‘stick back pack’.

His father was also standing with his walking stick in hand, with two, very sharp spears strapped while pointing upwards on his back behind both of his shoulders. Strapped along the right side of his right leg, was a furry sheath enclosing a long dagger.

“Are you ready?” he asked the boy, who nodded in acceptance, “Let us get moving then,” he said with a light smile as he turned and walked out the door, the excited boy following his lead.

Through the thick, early morning mist, the boy followed the steps of his father, walking along the narrow footpath on which visibility was impossible beyond several strides. As they walked, the mist gradually began to disappear, the air becoming clearer as they moved.

“Wow!” the boy exclaimed in both fear and amazement, as he walked-on while looking down to his right side at the wide lake several miles away. It was very far down below—a thing that made him realize they had been walking on top of an extremely high ridge. He kept looking down to the side, the trees that were barely recognizable.

“Do not stare down too long,” his father cautioned him without looking back, “you might miss a step,”

The boy rushed to catch up with him.

“Where did all that water come from?” he asked, as he got closer,

“I really do not know,”

“Are we fishing there?”



“No?”

“Can we go down and see?”

“Not today,”

“But it’s not far? Look?”

“It appears close because it’s a lot of water, believe me son, it is quite far from here, hurry up a little, we need to get there before midday.”

The boy stepped up as they walked towards a small path that led leftwards and downwards off the ridge.

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The sun was now fully risen, with the father and his son making their way across a vast rocky plain; a wide piece of land that was bordered by distant escarpments.

“Are you tired?” he asked the boy.

“No I’m not?”

“Hungry?”

“Just a little,”

“Want to turn back and-”

“No!” the boy immediately protested.

They approached a path that cut through a raised section of the plain, and the boy followed closely as his father walked up and stopped at its crest. It overlooked a lower, flat area down below.

“*Hooow!*” the boy remarked as he got up the crest and stood beside his father.

“Seen anything like this before?”

“No! It is, scary!” he replied, both scared and surprised. His father smiled a little, and walked on down the path, leaving him frozen for a few seconds to process the scenery. He was looking at a vast, flat area covered by tens of ‘wells’ of different sizes; wells that were gushing clean, steaming water up into the air, some as high as the tallest trees. The water splashed and bathed most of the area, scattering and flowing into a clean lake above which hundreds of thousands of white flamingoes flocked.

“Are you coming?” his father asked as he walked on. The boy, *snapping out of his surprise*, followed his tracks down the path. At the springs and geysers, he stared as he approached his father, who was tracing a path through the springs on the flat, red-orange landscape.

“Where is it coming from!” he asked as he kept walking while staring—raising his voice to be heard through the gushing and splashing.

“Under the earth!” his father replied.

“Is it hot?”

“Very hot!” replied his father, after which the boy rushed his little steps and grabbed his belt; staying very close as they walked through, without him keeping his eyes off the water.

“This is amazing! Why does it pour out?”

“I really do not know! You like it!”

“It is, scary!”

“Relax! We are getting close to the fishing grounds! Keep up the good pace!” he encouraged as they walked through.

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Close to midday, the two were walking down a gentle slope grown with thick vegetation. They followed a green, carpet-grass path, through the thin, straight trees, as they walked towards a very sandy, clear area down below. A pool of water was next to it.

“Look at this place!” the boy marveled as he followed his father out the trees; walking onto the warm, light brown sand. He turned and looked around, marveling at the sight of the very high, medium size waterfall, which poured cool, clear water into the wide pool that flew on slowly and calmly.

All around the area were hundreds of noisy monkeys, which chattered and escaped from the man and his son; madly dispersing and jumping further into the tall trees surrounding the fall. The man walked closer to the pool, and he ‘unburdened’ himself beside a lone tree. Just close to the fall’s plunge pool, was a fairly flat piece of rock—several meters wide and across—toward which the boy walked under his father’s instruction.

“Will they harm us?” he asked about the monkeys while ‘unloading’ at the rock.

“They are afraid of us. Put the baskets over there,” he instructed the boy, as he grabbed one of his two spears.

Kneeling on the rock platform and sitting on his calfs, the boy watched his father (on his front-left side) scan for fish inside the clear water. As he watched, his naked upper-body warmed in the sun. His palms rested on the rock, on which in front of him, were three fat, orange-gray tilapia, and one brown mudfish. Each of the tilapia was as long as his leg, from the knee downwards, and the mudfish was as long as the distance from his waist to his feet.

The area around the pool was cool: a result of the mist from the splashing water neutralizing the heat from the overhead sun. Enjoying the coolness on his skin, the boy relaxed and observed his father, who stood in the middle of the flowing water facing the direction of *the water flow*, which gently curved into the forest where trees bordered its banks all along its course.

With his feet anchored in the water (that reached close to his waist), the man observed the big, healthy fish swimming around his legs. Selecting a fat tilapia, he held his spear in readiness. And just as he raised it for a strike...

“Why do we have to fish here?” the boy innocently interrupted his concentration, causing him to hesitate and scare the fish. Sighing to himself, the man stepped very smoothly through the water to change his position.

“The water here is fresh, so the fish is healthy, it is all I know,” he answered as he took position, the boy watching as he gripped his spear. He selected a slow fish from the oblivious school swimming around, and he stilled himself. Controlling his breath, he raised the spear a strike, as...

“Why is the water here fresh?” the boy interrupted his concentration again,

“You are making me scare the fish!” he complained. The boy looked away slowly. He moved slowly to change his position, and again picked a new spot. The boy looked back at him and kept watching.

As his father was focused on the fish, the boy noticed something different; small water waves were moving outwards and backwards as they approached his father from the quiet side of the river. By straightening his back, he rose to his knees to have a better look.

“I think something is moving in the water,” he said to his father, who got distracted again.

“I cannot catch more fish if you keep talking? What do I have to tell you?”

“But it’s-”

“There is nothing in the water,” he ‘assured’ the boy, who slowly sat back on his calfs. He went back to fishing while slowly shaking his head. To avoid distracting him, the boy tried to look straight down at the water, but the side of his left eye unintentionally caught the ‘movement’ again, forcing him to pay attention. He looked as the small waves kept approaching his father, getting uncomfortably close.

He looked at his father, and back at the moving waves, and he almost said something but stopped himself. He weighed the consequence of distracting him against the possibility of something dangerous harming him inside the water.

“Something is in the water father,” he fearfully said aloud.

“How many times-”

“Look!” he pointed out the fast moving, small wave to him. His father suddenly turned his head and looked. His face turned serious and his eyes widened, as he realized what it was. Quickly, he turned around and started towards the rock, on which the boy stood up in fear and watched as he rushed his steps against the flowing water.

“What is it?” the boy asked loudly with fear.

“Stay back!” his father cautioned.

“It’s getting closer!” the boy observed with both fear and curiosity, as his father rushed against the current, his steps speeding up as he approached the shore. Just as he raised his foot and stepped on a rock inside the water, a massive, scaled tail lashed out behind him. It swept his foot off the rock and caused him to fall backwards into the water, losing grip of his spear as he plunged in with a massive splash.

“*Father!*” the boy cried as he stood confused, watching as the water around the splash whirled and mixed with great intensity. His eyes opened wide as he saw his father suddenly get hurled out into the air by the massive, stone-hard crocodile back.

The reptile’s back was close to his father’s back, as he turned with it in midair. Its massive jaws moved in a biting stance towards his right arm, which he removed to his right leg, and drew his sharp dagger. They plunged back into the water.

“Father!” he cried, watching helplessly as blood started to color the ‘turning water’.

“*Father!*” he cried again, rushing to the edge of the rock, from where he saw the massive crocodile charge out again—now with his father’s left arm tightly restraining the underside of its neck, his legs locking across its belly, holding on at its back as he repeatedly continued to stab its

throat. Vigorously, the monstrous reptile turned and splashed back in an attempt to get him off its back, the water turning redder as it continued to mix up.

The boy felt a slight skip in his heartbeat as his father's head suddenly surfaced. "Father!" he called as his father caught a breath, after which he immediately started rushing towards the tree on which he had set his tools. The boy ran off the rock in the same direction.

"Get me that spear!" his father said as he rushed his legs through the coloring water, whirling around him.

"Hurry!" he insisted as the boy ran towards the tree, "hurry!" The boy got to the tree and grabbed the spear, which he threw so that it spun and turned as it flew toward him. Raising his hand as he stepped on the rock ones again, the man grabbed the spear right at the middle of its shaft, as the crocodile charged out the water behind him.

Against the rock, he sprung himself as he turned, his hand charging with strength as he thrust the razor sharp tip right into the crocodile's throat through its huge, open mouth. With the other end of the spear, he pushed it backwards into the water, and he quickly turned and splashed towards the shore, where his son was anxiously waiting for him.

"Father!" he called as he rushed out the water. He moved to help him as he collapsed on all his fours, coughed as he caught a breath.

"Are you hurt father?" he very caringly asked.

"No I'm (coughing) I'm fine, are you okay!"

"Yes father." "Are you okay!" he insisted while holding his right shoulder and checking his condition.

"I'm fine father," the boy assured, "your hand!" he noticed a profusely bleeding fresh wound on his father's left arm—a deep 'hole' made by one of the crocodile's dirty canines.

"Get me my pouch, hurry," he sent the boy rushing to the tree, as he capped the wound tightly with his right hand, blood flowing out between his fingers. The boy rushed back with the soft skin pouch, and he turned slowly and sat on the ground, getting ready to nurse the wound.

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"...it was *twisting* and *turning*! And you grabbed it with your arm and killed it!" the very excited boy demonstrated with a lot of energy as he followed his father through the clear, leaf carpeted paths of the forest, carrying the same loads he had when he left that morning, "that was great father! You *killed* a crocodile! I *cannot* believe it!"

"Not the fishing exercise you hopped for, was it?"

"No father! It was more than I imagined! It was *amazing*! I want to come with you next time!" he suggested as the house came into view against the orange, setting sun.

"But you saw how dangerous it was?"

"No! I want to come again! I want to walk on the *very high* ridge! I want to see water *exploding* out of the ground! And learn how to kill crocodiles!" he said with his father laughing lightly as they approached the raised part of the forest.

"I'm serious father! I want to learn that too! I want to be strong too?"

"But you said you were strong already? Remember?"

"I am? But I want to be stronger?" he said as he hurried his steps to catch up with his father's left arm, which was entirely bandaged with a soft piece of skin that held the herbs which prevented infection and restrained bleeding.

"Stronger?" his father asked.

"Way stronger!"

He insisted, his father laughed while walking on towards the house.

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"And then what happened father? What happened?" the boy, who sat on his bed, asked while staring at his father, seated on a stool on the opposite side of the fire as he paused and looked down at the flames.

"Death happened. Death," he replied. The boy sighed with some sorrow while still staring at him.

"Time for bed now, get in before *the monster* comes to get you too," he said to him.

"Monster?" the boy returned, "I would take a sword and *strike it*, like that boy?" he illustrated while getting into bed, covering himself to the neck with the warming, fur blanket.

"Does it hurt?" he asked his father with some sympathy.

"Not that much," he replied, covering up the fact that it was excruciatingly painful.

"Father?"

"Yes boy?"

"The forest is dangerous, is it not?"

"It is?"

"Yet we live here every day? Why?" he asked as his father paused for a while before responding.

"Is it not beautiful? And rich?"

"It is?"

"And fun?"

"Of course it is, but it's dangerous? You could have died today?" he said. His father sighed ones again.

"It is our home now son," he told him, "and we accept it for what it is, you see, that way, we can prepare for whatever it brings, we cannot go back, can we?" he asked while looking into his eyes. The boy slightly moved his head side to side in refusal.

"Sleep son, I will see you tomorrow."

"I will see you tomorrow as well father," the boy said and he laid back on the bed, the man smiling and watching as he turned and faced the other side, closing his eyes.

Back to the fire, the man turned his attention. He gently pushed-in a piece of firewood, and then carefully crossed his hands over his knees. Soundlessly, he watched the flames as he contemplated.

THE END

WILD  
PART II  
THE GRASS LEOPARDS

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“Have you caught it!” the man asked as he stepped through the light green, wide and circular leaves, which were suspended on straight stalks to form an almost level bed that was as high as his knees. As he stepped through, tens of wild, fat chicken, big pigeons, enormous geese, and many other hundreds of wild birds dispersed. They took off, others flying up towards the branches of the well spaced, straight-stem trees.

“I’ve caught it!” the boy shouted while still out of sight, as the man, his father, with his spear in hand, walked on towards a section of the round leaves from under which the panting boy arose. Close to his chest, the boy was clutching a huge, grey-brown duck with both of his hands. Squeezing it tightly as it quacked loudly and jerked its muscles in an attempt to get free.

“I’ve caught it!” the boy repeated excitedly, as sweat continued to wet his face. He looked at his excited father who stepped faster towards him.

“It’s a fat one!” the boy said aloud.

“Very impressive!” said his father as he approached,

“It’s a big one! Look!”

“Great job son,” he said genuinely said as he got to the boy, who looked down at the face of the duck that quacked more slowly.

“Are we going to eat it?” he asked while looking at the duck, which was giving up its struggle.

“Of course we are?” replied his father.

“I feel sorry for it,” the boy said.

“Believe me son, you will not feel sorry when you’ll be chewing down its roasted meat,” he assured him, “come on.”

The boy followed his lead as he cuddled the slowly quacking, enormous duck—a duck that was much bigger than the size of his entire chest. The circular leaves, through which he followed

his father, 'buried' his legs to his waist. They walked down towards a wide, shallow depression that was covered entirely by the circular leaves and surrounded by trees.

"Can you carry it all the way?" his father asked as he led the way down the very gentle slope.

"I think I can, but my hands are starting to hurt," the boy replied. The weight of the fat duck was stressing his young muscles, causing his elbow to ache. He did his best to hold the bird from sliding down and getting away.

Down the gentle slope, he followed his father as they approached the centre of the very shallow depression.

"Stop," the father said, the boy who was very close behind him, stopped.

"What is it?" he asked nervously, as his father looked down at the bed of leaves before him. He had noticed 'a curving disruption' that extended from up on the very gentle slope ahead, and stopped a few steps in front of them. Towards that place where the disruption stopped, he walked, with the boy following close behind.

"What are you looking at father?" the boy asked, as the man used the sharp tip of his spear to cautiously move the concealing leaves to the side—revealing a puppy that was lying on its side while panting with its eyes closed. He slowly went down on one knee to have a closer look, as the wild puppy started to whine in fear. Dark brown in color, with white spots, and pointy ears, the wild puppy was about three months old.

To his father's side, the boy moved to have a look as well. Down on the rotting leaf carpet, it remained coiled while hissing motionlessly.

"A small dog!" remarked the surprised boy, who had never seen a puppy that close before. "You said they never come out this far?" he asked while raising the heavy duck under his tired right arm.

"They never do," his surprised father, answered. He gently placed the spear down beside it. While staying immobile, the puppy increased its whine as he reached for it. Its belly went up and down rapidly as it breathed. Gently, he held its legs and slowly turned it over as it whined. Laying it over on its right side, he saw that its left, hind leg was bloody. He also noticed the marks of three, big claws from which the drying blood had been oozing.

"What happened to it?" the boy asked sympathetically, as he gently laid it back to its initial position. He looked around keenly, his face turning more serious, as he noticed something else: all along the disruption were several, big paw prints that were hardly visible.

"Something bad was here," he said as he stood up with his spear while still observing the disruption.

"What is it?" the boy asked.

"I cannot tell for sure," he said, looking around at the surrounding trees, "something chased it down here, something very, very dangerous," he added and then sighed, "we need to keep moving," he said while stepping aside.

As he walked on, the boy remained standing, looking down at the whining puppy. Sensing that the boy was not following, he stopped and looked back. He was still sympathizing with the puppy.

“Can we take it with us?” he asked.

“We need to get home, come on?” he called him. The boy remained silent and hesitant, not sure whether to follow his father or remain with the puppy.

“We cannot just leave it like this?” he said.

“Son, we have no time, you need to come with me now, night is approaching,” his father insisted. The boy continued to hesitate.

“But father-”

“But what son? We need to get home. It is probably almost dead—you have seen its wounds? Come on,”

The boy still did not move. After a sigh, the man turned around and walked back to him.

“Look, this puppy might not make it all the way home,” he said.

“It can father?”

“Even if it did, it might end up causing trouble,”

“Trouble?” the boy questioned, “But you said they could be kept? Didn’t you?”

“Look, this dog, is going *to die*,” he stressed, “look at it, it is *dying*, and we need to get home,”

“But we cannot just leave it here like this,” the boy continued.

“What is wrong with you? We have to go!” There was a moment.

“But I want it,” the boy said finally. The man sighed, after which the boy looked up at him with a miserable face. They gazed eye to eye for a moment, and he noticed that the boy was not going to give up.

“Okay,” he said, “but something is not right with this, give me the duck,” the boy handed him the duck, which quacked louder and jerked its muscles vigorously to escape. He grabbed the duck and locked it under his strong right arm, his spear held in his left hand.

“Pick it up,” he told the boy while looking around at the surrounding trees, walking on away. The boy gently carried the whining puppy and carefully supported it on his arms across his chest. He followed his father while cuddling it with sympathy. Eastwards, opposite the direction of the orange, setting sun, they walked through the bed of circular leaves, heading down another very gentle slope that led the way out of the well-spaced trees.

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Lighting the entire hut, was the fire on top of which was placed the simple grilling apparatus. Well above the warming flames, was the headless, leg-less, golden brown duck, dripping fat through the grill into the fire, which expanded at intervals because of burning it. All around the hut spread the aroma of roasting duck, as the man and his son—seated on the warm and dry, dung plastered floor on opposite sides of the fire—feasted on its soft meat. Just next to the fire, was the puppy, coiled in a small depression of ash. It had a skin strap pressing a bunch of ground, mixed herbs against its wounds.



With his knife in his right hand, the boy reached again for the roasting duck. He pinched a big piece and cut it off. He sat back down on the floor and chewed it down. Just before he could bite the last piece, he looked down at the puppy at the side of the fire. He extended the piece towards its mouth. The puppy hurriedly snatched it with its young but sharp teeth.

“Finnish eating before feeding it,” the man, his father, told him while clearing meat from a bone.

The boy cut off another piece, and he looked at his father as he enjoyed it. His father thought for a while as he looked at the cleared bone, which he eased to the puppy that grabbed it with a groan and started grinding it. Into his eyes, the boy looked as they feasted late into the night.

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The orange sunlight shone through the spaces between the pieces of wood that made up the door, causing the puppy to wake up and start barking. It played about and barked until the boy woke up.

“You’re okay!” he exclaimed excitedly as he sat up, watching the puppy as it limped around and barked at the tens of chirping birds just outside the door.

“Take it outside,” his father said while still in bed.

“Why?” the boy asked in defense of the puppy.

“It wants to chase the birds,” replied his father.

Off the bed, the boy jumped towards the door, opening it as the puppy rushed out and caused the hundreds of birds that were around the house to disperse. Beside the house, was an incomplete store, made of mud and reeds. It was halfway in terms of height, and on its sides, were piles of fresh reeds and an almost depleted heap of clay that needed refilling.

As the puppy chased the birds round and round the incomplete store, the man stepped out the door and told the boy to prepare for a trip to the river. There was no need for breakfast since the duck had been big enough to keep them full until lunchtime.

They put on their brown, furry, sleeveless coats that reached close to their knees, and went on to prepare for the trip. With a big, soft leather bag over his shoulder, a furry skin sheath strapping a dagger at the side of his right leg, and a spear in his hand, the man led the way out the door. The boy followed with the puppy close behind him. He ran around with it as they proceeded down the gentle slope leading away from their house.

They trekked westwards into the ‘tall forest’, which had sparsely spaced, perfectly straight trees whose high branches formed a continuous canopy a long distance above. Through the red flower bushes growing close together between those trees, the man led the way. The excited boy followed with most of his attention focused on the trailing puppy. Surrounding the vast spread of red flower bushes, were taller, green bushes, which proceeded ahead.

“Carry it,” said the man as they approached a clear, shallow stream that cut through the flower-colonized grounds. As he stepped in and started to cross, the boy excitedly picked up the barking puppy and followed his lead.

“It barks all the time?” he noted.

“It’s excited,” his father replied.

“Is this the same river were getting mud from?” the boy asked.

“Yes? But further along its course, come on,” he said as he got to the other side, with the boy following. They proceeded into the taller bushes along a green, short grass path. Flowering bushes taller than the man grew in bunches of different sizes, with carpet-grass paths clearly connecting all around them.

“Stop!” the man said suddenly to the boy, who stopped immediately and waited.

“Something is stamping,” the boy said with a low tone, as the stamping got closer. For a moment, it stopped, and the boy started moving.

“Stop!” his father insisted, as abruptly, a buffalo charged out of the bushes straight in front of them. It was so heavy that the ground shook as it stamped towards them while puffing. With their eyes wide opened, the man grabbed his shocked son’s arm as they backed away. Around and away, they turned and fled.

They ran round on the paths around the bushes as the buffalo charged after them. It rushed its body through the leaves, as it closed-in on the boy—who was just behind his father holding onto the puppy. The puppy groaned and barked to scare the buffalo away. Round and round, they tried to lose it, and suddenly, the man grabbed the boy and rushed with him into a bush.

“Shut it up!” he whispered strongly to the boy, who struggled to control his breathing while wrestling to keep the puppy’s mouth closed. The puppy shook its head and groaned in attempt to free its mouth.

Just outside the bush, the buffalo ran, round and round, before finally stopping and sniffing around as it stepped through very slowly. The man cautiously moved a few leaves, and as he peered out at the beast. He noticed bleeding claw marks on its front leg, the same as those on the puppy, only more severe. And as he looked more keenly into the animal’s eyes, he noticed that it was in distress.

Slowly, the buffalo walked around and away between the bushes, and by observing it, the man realized that it had been attacked by the same animal which had attacked the puppy. He thought that it was not chasing them, but instead, it was probably following them for safety.

“What was it doing here?” the boy asked as he followed him out of the bushes, “The plants here can’t be eaten?”

“Something is wrong,” his father said as he looked around to confirm that the animal had indeed left, “we have to go,”

“Is it gone?” the boy asked as he let down the puppy, which had been struggling to get free.

“Yes,” his father assured, “come on,” he said as the puppy ran off after him, the boy following it.

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By mid-morning, they had reached the section of the clear stream in which clay had formed. Being larger than the rest of the river, it formed a fairly flat pool; from which the stream flew on down a gentle slope out of the jungle and into the grassy, savannah woodland. Beside the pool, the man stopped and took off the leather bag and his furry coat.

The boy picked up the puppy.

“Can we go and play?” he asked his father, who was folding a brim on the bag’s top while squatting beside the pool.

“Where?” his father asked.

“In the grassland,” the boy replied, “can we?” he asked as his father placed the leather beside the water and stood up to face him.

“I want you to listen very carefully,” he started, “do not get anywhere close to that tall grass,” he said to him while pointing at the unusually tall grass, which had grown in bunches and occupied a fairly vast area of the woodland

“Wherever you go, *do not* get anywhere close to that place,” he repeated,

“But why father?”

“It is dangerous,” he replied, “there are things there that will kill you,”

“What makes it-”

“Just promise you will *not* get close to that place?”

“I will not get that close,” the boy assured him,

“Promise again,”

“I will not get close to that tall grass,”

“Stay where I can see you,” his father said to him, after which he ran off into the grassy woodland after his puppy.

Into the water, the man stepped and sank his feet into the river’s floor. He scooped out the first heap of clean clay, and looked at the boy as he placed it into the leather bag. He watched to make sure he played a safe distance away from the parades of elephants, flocks of the notorious white birds, and most importantly, the tall grass. He continued to watch him as he scooped; but as he continued, he began to focus more on the digging, which was becoming harder.

The also started to forget the warning as he kept playing, blindly following the puppy across the field as it barked louder and ran faster towards the tall grass. Into the tall grass, the puppy ran while barking fiercely, and after it, the boy followed. Being too busy with the clay, the man did not notice. Suddenly, the boy screamed so loudly that it echoed across the grassland, the puppy fell silent.

Quickly, the man looked up at the field where the boy had been playing, sweeping his eyes across before settling them at the tall grass.

“No,” he said to himself, “No,” he repeated, as a fear rose in him upon realizing that the boy had screamed from the tall grass. At ones, he jumped out of the water and grabbed his razor sharp spear. Bare-chested, he took off and ran fast into the field. He sped straight across the grassy woodland towards the tall grass.

“Son!” he called aloud as he approached the grass, “*Son!*” he called again as he entered it; and as he rushed in, he spotted several drops of blood that formed a trail on the narrow, natural, dusty paths around the green-brown bunches that were taller than him.

He approached the blood trail as a weakness grew in him. He dropped to his knee before the blood drops; placing his spear down to his side as he started to disagree with the thought of the boy being dead.

“No,” he said to himself, as he extended his hand to touch the blood. And as he fought against the thought, he heard something moving around him through the grass. His hand froze just above the blood, and his entire body followed. With his eyes fixed on the drops, he focused his ears on the movements.

Grass leopards, more than one, his mind figured out, after which the corner of his eye caught one of them rushing past on his side. As tall as a mid-aged buffalo calf, the grass leopards were very muscular. Their bodies were covered in excess, brown, dotted fur that extended to form a white line under their bodies, including under their tails.

For a while, the man remained frozen on his knee, eyes fixed on the blood, as the leopards stopped moving around him. Suddenly he grabbed his spear and leapt forward into the air, and with all the strength in his legs, he charged straight towards a wide bunch of grass—out of which a muscular, full grown, grass leopard flew out with its razor sharp claws out of its paws.

While in mid air, the man drew back his spear to his right, and thrust it with a groan, piercing its tip into the animal’s neck. Down towards the sand, the animal crashed and shook about. With his bare foot, the man stepped on its head side and grabbed his spear, and as he was about to pull it out, the leopard fiercely swiped its very powerful claws as it moved about in an attempt to ride. It raised a cloud of dust, and the man raised his foot and brought it down powerfully on the side of its groaning mouth. He struggled with it, and finally pulled out his spear with both his hands.

Just as he did this, his ears caught the sound of another grass leopard jumping toward him from behind. Turning around half-circle, he raised his spear to attack, as the leopard got him with its claws aimed at his chest. Realizing that he would not have the time to pull back and strike, he raised the spear and held it horizontally—blocking the predator’s paws close to his chest as its weight and force fell him to the dust on his back.

With the spear, the man held back the leopard’s deadly claws, just above his chest, as it roared through its mouth close to his face and tried to bite off his head. Strongly, it moved its hind legs about, shoving back the sand as it wrestled around with him on the soil. It pieced its claws into his left thigh, and he screamed as he let the spear drop to his chest. With his left arm, he pushed its head to his side; and with effort, he reached to the side of his right leg and drew his sharp dagger.

He forcefully pieced its neck. Repeatedly, he stabbed until the beast reduced its aggression as it began to focus on its pain. Taking advantage, he pushed it over and went atop it, from where he continued to stab repeatedly.

Off the dying animal, he stood with his bloody dagger. He hurried for his spear, after which he rushed back to the blood drops and followed them deeper into the grass. He came across a piece of his son’s skin cloth. Up from the dust he picked it, as the fear of him being dead grew a lot more. It broke him down. Nevertheless, he followed the blood drops.

He came upon a dry, open area surrounded by the grass. There were rocks about half his height that formed ‘caves’. Under one of these caves, he spotted the puppy hiding. Down on his knee, he went and tried to reach for it. It hissed in terror and pulled itself further back into the

cave. As he prepared to reach further in and grab it, he heard another leopard moving around fast, and as he turned his head to look, he saw his son's skin bracelet. He would deal with the leopard first.

Promptly, he began to turn around with his spear held steady. The leopard, which was already close to him, dived into the air to swoop down on him. As he turned around to pierce it, he quickly realized that it was already too close. He let his dagger and spear drop, and he grabbed its mouth as down to the ground, he fell with it roaring atop him.

With his bare hands between its canines, he held its jaws, which were very close to his face. Under the rocks, the puppy hissed and barked in terror. Fiercely, the leopard roared as it struggled to close its mouth and bite off his annoying arms; and as it opened its mouth wider for the crashing bite, the man let go of the upper jaw, and with the right hand, he quickly reached to his side and grabbed a rock close to the small cave. He strongly banged the leopard's head side.

Repeatedly, he banged its head. It reduced its aggression and shook its head. Strongly, he pushed it aside and rolled over towards his spear. Recovering quickly, the leopard turned towards him ones again. He grabbed the spear while still on the ground, as it leapt and pounced down towards him. As it came down, he raised the spear so that it crashed its head into its tip.

Just after he rolled over and got up on his knee, another leopard flew out of the grass behind him. At ones, he turned and 'caught' it in midair—his right hand between its hind legs, and his left between its front legs. He carried it over with its momentum and crashed it on its back on the rocks.

He rushed for his dagger on the ground, as yet another leopard charged out after him. He grabbed the dagger and turned around fast while drawing it to his back; while on his knees, he pierced right into the middle of its skull. Sweat continued to wet him as he panted. The animal jerked its claws while dying. He rushed for his son's bracelet.

Convinced that he was dead, he picked it up and began mourning tearlessly. He began harshly blaming himself for letting him out of his sight. However, as he mourned, he suddenly heard the boy's distant cries. Immediately, he stopped mourning and looked up, after which he ran for his spear and pulled it out of the dead leopard. He rushed through the grass towards the cries.

At another open part of the grass, were several rocks forming more caves—the places where the grass leopards slept. Under one of the smallest caves, was the sweating, crying boy, struggling to stay hidden from the leopard that was snarling while moving around the cave. It climbed on top of it, as it tried to get him. It could not fit its huge body through the small entrance.

With its powerful paws, it tried to claw away the rocks, scarring the boy who tried to stay hidden. The claws repeatedly swept near his face and body, and his heart throbbed as he turned this way and that way to keep away from the animal. Desperately, he looked out of that cave and spotted another one directly across the field; and as soon as the leopard jumped behind the cave, he crawled out and started towards the other cave.

The leopard jumped onto, and over the cave, moving towards him. Halfway through his crossing over, he looked back at the leopard, during which he slid and fell on his back. Horrified, he laid immobile on the ground. Sweat poured as his heart pumped out of his chest. The animal came charging towards him with its claws at the ready. He raised his head to see as it came to kill him. It got to him.

Hardly had it touched him when a sharp spear tip came down its neck and stopped dangerously close to his forehead. The boy felt his heart stop for a second, and the back of his brain turn cold, as he watched his sweating father pull up the entire animal and throw it to the side. He watched as he stepped on it and pulled out his spear from its neck, piercing into its head with a roar.

With tears rolling down, the boy looked up apologetically at his panting, sweating, bleeding father, who was also looking down at him with sympathy. He dropped to his knees, spotting the deep, stone cut on his leg, the one that had left the blood trail. While soundlessly shedding tears, the boy rose to his knees and embraced his father, who embraced him as well.

“I am sorry father,” he cried.

“It is okay,” his father replied, realizing that he had almost lost him.

“I am sorry,” the boy cried,

“It is okay,” he consoled him; “it is fine, we have to get out of this place, come.”

That night, the man sat on the mud-plastered floor facing the fire, as he silently watched the boy sleep quietly under the furry blanket. He looked at the puppy, which was coiled in the depression next to the fire, also silently asleep. He looked up at the fire, as he continued to contemplate.

THE END

# EVIL SUN

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His extremely tired eyes opened to the sight of the many leafless branches of the gigantic, baobab tree, which 'stood alone' in the dry vastness filled with extremely hot dust flowing about in the hot, dry winds. It had been more than three agonizing hours, resting under that partial shadow; lying flat on his back next to his old, very dusty, fairly straight walking stick—which he struggled and turned his head to look at.

Turning away and looking around, he wallowed in the frustrating thought of having to get up, breathing hard as he closed his eyes. He pushed his will and strained his muscles, in the struggle to sit up. A sudden, excruciating ache tortured his head, pounding his brain, as he very slowly pushed himself to rise. He struggled and turned to all his fours, and extended his very thin, hardened right hand to grab his walking stick. Holding onto the stick, he strained to rise.

He stood on his very dusty, very weak legs, getting up on his densely bruised feet, on which he had heavily worn out, barely wearable leather sandals. Straight and weak along the stick, he stood. His very dizzy eyes looked forward into the endless, dry emptiness, tired as he sighed and slowly looked back down at the dust.

"East... you have to... go east..." he reminded himself as he held onto the stick, struggling to take the first, hopeless step, pushing himself to take the next, and the next. Out of the partial shade, he stepped, walking slowly into the unforgiving heat, as 'the fire' from the sun instantly resumed stressing his dark skin.

Looking down, he tried to shield his face—which had been 'eaten inwards' by the draining of flesh his body had consumed throughout his past, eighty-day trek. The dusty, maroon-red cloth over his head did little to protect his face, his heavily stained, extremely dusty, maroon-red dress not helping to insulate his body.

As he walked, his skin started to pour sweat, losing precious water, as his feet stepped on top of the very dusty, densely cracked earth. About two meters in height, was the sea of heat waves, bathing the endless, empty vastness, in which he was the only live creature. He struggled, one step after another, dragging himself along through the bake-oven heat.

From above, the hot sun continued to 'burn' him out, sucking every drop of water from his constantly hardening flesh.

"East..." he kept pushing himself, dragging his feet through the hot sand that clogged and covered his bruises, his numb toes not feeling the heat as they shoved through.

Eastwards, he pushed on, heading in a direction opposite to that of the slowly moving, merciless sun, which shone down through the dead-empty skies with all its might, vanishing every trace of life from the ground.

Gradually, his very tired eyes became too dizzy to enable him see clearly. He slowly looked downwards as his feet started to run out of strength ones again, demanding a break, right there where there was nothing but heat and dust. To push on, he tried his best, closing his eyes as he unwillingly continued to slow down. He almost cried as his will to proceed kept pushing his legs, which ached excruciatingly.

Unconsciously, he slowed down and stopped for a moment, after which he attempted to push forward again, dragging his right foot a few inches before stopping completely. Slowly moving his head side to side in extreme frustration, he held the walking stick upright in front of him, his eyes closing tight as he dropped to his knees and tried in vain to send strength into his legs.

He let the stick fall beside him, as he dropped on all his fours, straining to cry as he started to crawl. One hand and knee after another, he very slowly moved with his 'folded' dry eyes shut. The heat burnt his back, as the headache returned. His lungs labored as he sucked in and exhaled the very hot, dusty air that heated up his ears.

Very slowly, he opened his eyes, which felt burning as he slowly raised his weak head to look up front. There was a rock standing just a few centimeters ahead, on which the sight of a human skeleton with clothes become clearer. They were remains of a man who appeared to have died while sitting against the rock. With all his little strength, he moved his left hand to the side and grabbed the stick again, crawling with it on all fours towards the rock.

Getting to it, he turned and sat on the ground so that his back rested on the rock, with the skeleton on the other side to his left, seated with the same posture. He reached his hand to the left side of his waist, from which he unstrapped his small, brown, very dusty, leather food bag from his belt. Quickly, he opened its 'laces' and desperately checked its inside for any traces of food. He dipped-in his hand, and out it came with barely touchable crumbs stuck on his sweaty fingers. He stared for a moment at the crumbs while panting, after which he reached back to his waist and pulled out his water gourd.

Very quickly, he opened its cap and raised it to his mouth. Closing his eyes in overwhelming frustration, he lowered the dry gourd to his side, gassing the hot air in and out of his lungs. He hated his suffering, and with a passion, he wished to die quickly, right there and right then. His dusty throat was bone dry. His 'tight stomach' empty as the sand itself. Everything was aching, his bones, his muscles, his eyes and ears. He sat there helplessly.

He had lost more than his aching head could process: his wife, his children, everyone from the village. All who had starved and burned to death on the unforgiving trek towards the east-



where they had hoped to find some food and water, a safe haven away from the drought, a place that appeared clearly unreachable.

Hope that was the moment the sun would finally claim him, he sat there in the heat, thinking it would finally incinerate the life out of him, spare him the agony, a thing that still, did not happen. He was forced instead to change his posture, by the heat, which had become too great for his chest, and entire front side to bear.

Subconsciously, his 'partly alive conscience' pushed him to move, crawling back on all his fours, and in great helplessness, he strained to grab the stick just a few centimeters to his side. His heart throbbed as he struggled and grabbed the stick, eyes remaining dry as his body attempted to cry-out his suffering. His soul 'broke down' in extreme sadness, as he forced himself to rise. By supporting his other arm on the rock, he finally rose, with a strained amount of tears rolling down his eyes.

Supporting himself on the stick, he very slowly pulled his 'boiling body' along, absent hope and absent reason, struggling hopelessly without any assurance of ever finding relief. On and on, he dragged himself, suffering and straining under the killing sun, barely feeling his legs as they stepped on. And as he stumbled against the dry, gently blowing dry winds, his consciousness started to fade out of extreme exhaustion. His eyes faded as well, as he felt life slowly start to evaporate from him.

"Mirage... It's..." he was telling himself as the strength in his voice faded, agreeing with his mind to ignore the 'wide lake' several meters ahead—which waved and sent him the message that the desert was on for several more miles.

With the fading of his sight, shortened the length of his vision—prompting him to look down to the sand as he continued to slow down. Being almost sure that it was about 'time', his entire body began to give in to the heat. He got number with each step, as his mind prepared. Eventually, he effortlessly let himself fall to the ground, his stick falling off his hand as he dropped to his knees without any pain.

Absent intention, his drowsy eyes looked around, as his neck turned his head. His eyes passed by *the sight* as if they had seen nothing; and they passed by it again as his head turned in the opposite direction. His eyes were about to pass it again when his dying brain focused his eye balls, and spent its last energy reserves to clear the picture: it was that of a very old, very small well, down inside a dust covered, shallow depression just a few meters ahead.

Out of nowhere, he felt a small surge of breath into his lungs, pumping a small dose of energy into his tired brain and numb body. A surge that must have come from his innate will to survive, a surge that was small but just enough to push him up, and on towards the well. Desperately, he rushed down the depression, feeling as his entire body continued to exhaust its last cells. He collapsed on its knees at the side of the small well.

Directing all the energy left into his throbbing right hand, he reached for the small winch; turning it as his flesh trembled due to lack of energy. He panted as his shaky hand felt a splash, with the bucket finally rising up to the brim of the well. On his face, the helpless look stuck as he gazed inside the bucket.

With his eyes not moving, he 'observed' the black oil that filled the small bucket quarter-way. For a long, hot while, he stared, before finally letting the bucket roll back in. He slowly laid on his side, just next to the well, the sun above him and the hot earth beneath him. He closed his eyes, and he surrendered.

THE END

## THE WILDMAN AND THE TROLLS

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“Next time I will cut off somebody’s big toe!” the very hairy Wildman threatened the four trolls. Which were about twice his height. They were huge, big mouthed, wide lipped, hairy beings, who had a facial appearance that placed them somewhere between a gorilla and a human.

“We were just trying to-”

“Get out of my way!” the Wildman shouted down one of the trolls called Cob, who was trying to explain while cautiously mixing a pot of *gorilla-leg stew*.

“We just thought you’d like it like that?” Cob replied while salivating at his stew, his eyes dulling in wet appetite.

“*Really!*” the angry Wildman stopped and questioned, “Since when did a whole pot of water make soup out of *one rabbit!*” he shouted at him, “You dumb beasts!” he said while turning away into the bushes.

“Aaah!” Cob appreciated the ‘aroma’, together with two of his fellows surrounding the pot, Bob and Gob, equally dizzy with appetite. Their taste buds and saliva dusts had triggered at the site of the cooking meal, preparing their sensitive tongues and wanting bellies. They smiled unintentionally.

“Get the bowls,” Cob advised, almost ordering, as all the trolls stepped quickly towards one side of the clearing, where several very dirty, very greasy pots, greasy big spoons and bowls were heaped. Grabbing one big bowl each, they rushed back to the pot. Around the pot, they enjoyed *gorilla stew*, staying close just in case they needed a top up.

The fire boiling the pot lit up the clearing, which was medium in size. It was carpeted entirely with red, orange, and yellow leaves that the trolls had gathered themselves.

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Back into the clearing, the barefoot Wildman walked with a stack of wood. He stopped and stared at Gob, who was sleeping on his back with his eyes opened halfway on top of a layer of two, well made, furry hides.

“The hell is wrong with him!” he asked Cob, who was finishing the stew from the filthy pot.

“He likes your bed,” Cob mumbled.

“Like he liked my other two beds? Which I struggled to make for him to stain with his smell of mud and *dung!*” he responded. Quickly, he walked past Bob, who slept while sitting upright, wearing a silly smile with hands crossed above his knees. Flies and mosquitoes danced around his lips.

“You have a lot of anger,” Ob—another troll—observed as he remained laid back on his heap of pressed leaves.

“And whose fault is that!” the Wildman asked him confrontationally, after which he threw down the stack of wood beside another heap of soft, colored leaves, which he flattened and climbed on.

“It will kill you,” Cob added, about the anger.

“Eating too much will kill you! Empty headed drum.”

Ignoring the comment, Cob continued to swallow the few remaining portions of stew.

“I’m getting sick and tired of all of you!” the Wildman complained as he positioned himself on the ‘mattress’.

“You--say that a lot,” Ob responded as he yawned, wetting his drowsy eyes in the process.

“Do not talk back at me!” the Wildman ordered, after which Gob’s dirty, giant belly rumbled in satisfaction.

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The next morning, birds were singing. Making noises together with the waking animals as the Wildman walked back into the clearing. On his back, was a bunch of partly ripe bananas strapped with a piece of skin, a bunch that he supported with his left hand, his right hand carrying a skin bad full of water.

Down on the leaf carpet, he placed the loads and headed for the stack of firewood he had gathered the previous night. He used them to prepare a fire next to the bigger, dying one that had been going the whole night.

All around him, snores of the four trolls echoed loudly, spreading through the misty air with a tremor. Holding their big dirty arms together between their thighs, the snoring trolls tried in vain to keep warm from the morning cold, shivering at intervals as they laid on their sides.

Krrrrrrr! The Wildman spun the stick between his palms against the hole, around which he had placed dry grass. The dry grass caught fire as a result of the friction. Quickly and carefully, he picked the burning grass and turned towards the set pieces of firewood, under which he inserted the grass through a space under them.

Above the rising fire, he placed the pot stand—a very dirty, heavily stained, three-legged metallic frame with a circular top, after which he headed to the side of the clearing at which the dirty cooking utensils were heaped. He grabbed one of the pots and returned with it to the fire, placing it on top of the stand and pouring in the water from his leather bag. As the fire picked, he un-plucked and prepared his bananas, dusting off the cobwebs and dry leaves. He set the peeled bananas aside on a piece of dry skin as the water started to boil. Upon completion, he folded the skin and carried the bananas to the fire, on top of which he poured all of them into the pot. Minutes later, they were boiling.

All around the clearing, the smell spread quickly. Bob turned around from his side and laid on his back, his large nostrils trembled as they sucked in the traces of banana smell. Unintentionally, his partly open eyes moved slightly, as his wide, smiley lips twitched in an attempt to ignore the smell. He gave in and opened his tired eyes, staring straight up at the sky that was lighting up as the morning progressed.

“Only wake up when you’re hungry, right Bob?” the Wildman asked him, both seriously and sarcastically, while gently turning the bananas with the very old, very big spoon.

“Pathetic,” he said to himself as he re-focused on his cooking.

On his bed, Bob sat up, as the other trolls kept turning in attempt to hang on to the escaping sleep.

“Get up ‘fellas’! Its morning!” the Wildman interrupted their efforts while cooking. They turned uncomfortably.

“You wa--a--” Gob tried to say before sinking back into the partial slumber,

“That’s right Gob! That is it! Time to get your belly up!” the Wildman insisted, interrupting their sleep completely, “Get up, get up.”

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Close to the trees, were Ob and Bob squatting as they checked out the pots for leftovers. Swiping with their fingers, they licked the pasty stew from the previous day. Gob walked past in front of the Wildman turning his cooking bananas. On his shoulder, was a big stack of dry firewood, which he threw down next to the Wildman’s stack and stood dull.

“What the hell are they up to?” the Wildman asked while cooking, referring to Ob and Bob licking pots over on the other side.

“They are hungry,” Cob replied. He went on to arrange the wood on the same site the older fire was.

“So they lick pots when they are--Hey! Ob! Do you know we use those pots for cooking!” he asked them. They ignored and continued licking.

“You probably have tons of *worms* inside those *rotting tummies*! You can’t even wait for proper breakfast!” he shouted. They ignored and continued, seriously cleaning the pot. Back into the clearing from the bush, Cob walked with the remainder of the dead gorilla, the same one whose limbs they had feasted on the previous night.

In total silence, Gob, Ob and Bod observed the big pot ones again, standing in a curve on the opposite side of Cob. They enjoyed the ‘aroma’ of *gorilla stew*, as Cob prepared it on the fire next to which the silently disgusted Wildman prepared his bananas. With a stupid smile, Bob’s nostrils vibrated, his lips trembled slightly as he quickly raised his left hand and scratched his right shoulder in true joy and pleasure—a natural act that got the Wildman angrier.

On the ground next to the dying fire, was the Wildman’s pot; from which he served his hot bananas on a fairly clean bowl. Just next to his fire, were Bob and Gob, very carefully holding their large, dirty bowls. They waited around their pot as Ob received his share of hot breakfast

from Cob. With his full bowl of stew, Ob stepped aside from, not feeling a thing as his large, crusty feet stepped on the hot wood the Wildman had used for cooking.

Minutes later, the Wildman was facing the trolls as they enjoyed their stew, eating his bananas while watching Ob and Bob sit like monks ready to meditate. He observed with ‘hate’ as Bob carefully raised his bowl, his smiley lips protruding and vibrating, as they opened slightly to receive the dirty, greasy brim. His toes twitched as he took a long, loud sip.

Done for breakfast, the Wildman was ready to go. He was however angrily waiting for the trolls to finish consuming the filthy stew. He knew that they ate slowly in the mornings, and he would have to wait until the big pot empty.

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The sun had fully risen, and out of the clearing, they proceeded. They were loaded and ready for hunting. On their waists, the Trolls carried huge mullets whose heavily folded heads were stained with blood, together with big, blunt, heavy swords and daggers. They walked alongside the complaining Wildman armed with a proper sword and dagger.

“...Like he took my bed?” the Wildman was responding to Cob, who had a thick, dirty rope coiled across his shoulder.

“I was just trying it out?” Gob defended himself with a deep, silly voice.

“Trying it out my left buttock! You have been trying out my last three beds! Staining them with smells of black mud and filth!” he shouted at him without looking back. The others laughed lightly as they walked out the thick vegetation onto a highly raised ridgeline—high above the green covering all around.

“It’s not like I mean to?”

“Oh really? Explain to me Gob, you want to honestly say that you just, *find* yourself, sleeping on *my hides!*”

“Yeah.”

“*Gob!*” he threatened,

“What? I’m just talking?” Gob defended himself,

“What if you teach him to make hides?” Cob intervened,

“What are you? Insane! Look who I’m asking,” he mocked him; “you want me to teach *this* Gob?”

“Yeah, I mean, instead of cutting his head off?” he suggested,

“You are all foolish and crazy!” the Wildman concluded. They descended the ridge towards the other side, which was covered with short, well-spaced trees.

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The other three trolls were still hunting inside the trees, and Gob, who was carrying his kill, whose head had been crashed by his mallet, was walking into a small clearing where the Wildman was waiting. In front of a rock inside the clearing, he stopped and stood, staring at the Wildman.

“Don’t just stand there and look at me?” the Wildman said,

“What do I do?” Gob asked without a care of the Wildman’s tone,

“Sit your stinking behind down on that rock!” he quickly ordered,

“You want me to sit down you just say so,” Gob said as he set down his kill, “you don’t need to shout and all,” he said as he sat on the rock, with the Wildman walking up to the deer while drawing his dagger.

“Watch carefully, I’m only doing this ones, so pay, attention,” he instructed Gob. Into the deer’s skin, he cut.

“Alright,” Gob responded after some silence. It annoyed the Wildman, who paused and looked up at his face.

“What?” Gob asked,

“Whatever,” the Wildman responded and proceeded to cut into the skin.

While ‘rubbing’ his big fingertips over his chest, Gob watched the Wildman, scratching as he wondered when it would be all over so they could cook the animal.

“Alright Gob, take out your knife,” the Wildman instructed after he finished opening the deer’s skin, all the way to its tail. He watched as Gob drew his thick, old, blunt dagger. It enraged him, the blunt, metallic whatever that Gob removed was hardly going to do the job. He kept it together.

“You’re going to put the tip right in here,” he started to explain as Gob followed, “you’re going to *ease* it into the inside, not in the flesh, not the flesh Gob, I want you to get that very clearly, between the flesh, and the skin, you got it?”

“I got it,” Gob assured,

“Alright,” the Wildman agreed as he turned the deer so that the cut side faced Gob.

“Start,” he flagged him off.

“Put the tip in here, ease in the knife,” Gob repeated the instructions to himself, as his big dagger froze close to the animal’s skin with the Wildman waiting for him to go ahead. Unable to proceed, Gob looked up at the Wildman, and then back at the skin. He was afraid of blundering.

“Okay! Alright,” the Wildman said while turning the animal back around, “I’ll do it while you watch, but again, I’m only doing it ones.”

“Okay,” Gob responded. He observed as the Wildman continued to skin.

“Just like I said, you ease the knife in-- like this. You pull the skin back as you just peel the skin from the meat. See? It’s easy,” he illustrated as Gob followed keenly—as if he was getting a thing. All he wanted to do was cook the animal, and now he had to sit there and learn skin making and all.

“Hold this,” the Wildman asked him to hold the excess piece of peeled skin, “now, I know you’ve got big arms Gob, I’m going to ask you to pull the skin back, *slowly!* Okay?”

“Alright,”

“Slowly,” he repeated.

Gob slowly started to pull back the skin.

“Hold there!” he said. Gob held just as it got tight enough, allowing the Wildman proceed skinning. Patiently, Gob followed the process—until the neat piece of the main skin was completely separated from the rest of the deer’s carcass.

“And that, was the easy part,” the Wildman said.

“The easy part?” Gob complained.

“Yes Gob, coz the next time I get you on my bed I am going to kill you! *You*, have to remove all this fat, *all of it*. Sock the skin in water, and get ready to make it soft!” he said and threw down the skin close to Gob, who just looked at it.

“Your skin, your job!” he reminded him, and then turned around to walk away.

“Can we cook it now?” Gob looked up and asked, and the Wildman stopped walking. Without turning around, he sighed and shook his head, after which he proceeded.

“You did not say you wanted to know?” the Wildman answered Cob as he led them through the bushes towards their clearing. On his back, Cob was carrying a very huge, dead gorilla—strapped tight with the thick ropes that went around his shoulders and big belly. He walked in front of Gob who carried the skinned deer in his left arm, with its folded skin under his right arm.

“You should have waited for us anyhow?” Cob said.

“You were hunting all day? Okay, look, be with me tomorrow when I show him how to make it soft.”

“But we missed—”

“Are you going to come or what?”

“I’m just saying we should have started from the start?” Ob added to the complains.

“Just come with us tomorrow! The matter with you,” the Wildman ended the discussion.

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Night was falling fast, and all they had done all day was eat, walk, look for food, and walk back. But since it was that time again, what they had done was of little concern to the trolls. It was time to make *gorilla stew*—nothing else in the world mattered. After all, the entire day had been about that one significant moment. All that hunting and ‘struggling’. All of it always led to that one special activity that excited their mouths and filled their bellies to bursting.

Peacefully, the Wildman was finishing off the bananas from earlier that morning, eating as Bob walked past him with a stack of firewood. He was headed towards Cob, who was sharpening a blunt knife next to the dead gorilla. To avoid ‘trouble’, the Wildman tried his best not to look and think about what Cob was about with the dead ape.

As he continued to eat his bananas, Gob walked into the clearing towards him, carrying a cooking pot full of water in which he had socked the skin.

“Like this?” he asked the Wildman.

“*Are you crazy!*” the Wildman exclaimed, with none of the other trolls paying attention.

“I socked it,” Gob said.

“It’s a cooking pot Gob! You know what, never mind, just, put it over there,” he pointed to him. Gob followed his instruction as Cob carried the dead gorilla towards Bob—who was putting the big dirty pot on top of a stand above the fire he had just lit. The Wildman finally looked at them and was sickened.



“Stop right there Cob!” he yelled as he shot up towards them, “I am sick of this nonsense!” he said as he moved and grabbed the gorilla’s foot from Cob’s hand, dragging it away.

“What are you doing?” Ob wondered aloud, almost crying.

“Shut up Ob!” he replied as he dumped the dead primate into the bushes, and walked back into the clearing.

“You know how hard it is to catch that meat!” Cob asked him seriously.

“Do I look like I care?” he asked him as he approached,

“*You!*” Cob said miserably while pointing at him,

“What?” the Wildman replied seriously, dismissing his ‘threat,’ “I am going to teach you clowns how to make real food!” he said as he angrily walked past between them.

“But we like the stew?” Ob said sadly,

“Whatever! We are cooking, *my way!*”

“I cannot believe this?” Ob complained,

“Gorilla stew is nice?” Bob admired,

“Shut up and grab that spoon!” the Wildman instructed while going for the skinned deer. The other trolls watched as he dragged it next to the pot, which they had already put on top of the fire.

“First thing you do is remove the skin!” the Wildman started.

“But it’s got no skin?” Cob asked genuinely,

“We just removed it!” he shouted it at him,

“But you said first thing-”

“After you just captured it---before you cut it up and cook it damn you!” he interrupted him with the answer, before proceeding, “and you do not start by cooking the legs!” he shouted it to Cob.

“It makes the best stew?” Cob replied with open hands,

“Best stew my buttocks! Next thing you do is cut off the head *and the legs!*” he stressed.

“The legs?” Bob wondered,

“We are not throwing em! We are going to roast em, later!” he informed him as he proceeded to separate the head and the legs from the carcass.

“Okay,” he resumed after completion, “now we remove the insides.”

“Ob says they add flavor?” Cob informed him.

“Fuck Ob!” the Wildman replied, after which he proceeded to remove the intestines,

“You’re spoiling the flavor, I’m telling you,” Ob commented as he watched.

“I tried to warn him?” Cob added,

“Shut up and watch,” the Wildman said while cutting out the intestines and throwing them aside, “now, you cut the meat up into pieces,”

“But it has no sweet parts left?” Bob observed,

“Say that after it’s cooked, grab the knives and help me, come on?” he instructed.

“Whatever,” Cob said as he got down and helped him cut it up into big pieces, which they threw into the hot pot as the others watched.

“And now, you add the water,” he said while standing up.

“Can we add the legs back in?” Bob asked,

“No,” the Wildman refused,

“One leg then?”

“Hell, no!”

“Okay, what about the-”

“*No!* Meat is the only thing we are cooking *tonight, real meat!*” he insisted to him.

Minutes later, all the trolls were surrounding the pot as the Wildman cooked for them on the opposite side. They watched without a clue of what he was making.

“I’m going to add something new to you clowns,” he stated as he dipped his hand into his pouch, pulling out a banana-leaf wrapping. He opened the wrapping and scooped out a quantity from the lamp of big crystal, blue-white substance.

“What is that?” Cob asked as all of them wondered.

“It’s called salt, very hard to get in these parts, it adds the flavor.”

“Ooooooh,” all of them nodded after the last bit of the explanation, eyes following his hand as he sprinkled it over the boiling stew. He returned the wrapping into his bag and mixed in the crystals.

“It’s got to touch all the corners right,” he said as he mixed.

“Ooooh!” the trolls followed—as if they had really understood.

“Now, you cover it,” he said and then placed the very dirty lid over the pot.

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The sounds of fire cracking and stew boiling were the only ones in the dark, silent clearing. Above the pot, the lid danced on top of the ‘foam’ that came from the fresh meat. Sitting closest to the pot was The Wildman, who was guarding it from the trolls who sat very silent on the leaves a few steps in front of him, watching and listening impatiently to the boiling.

“Can we taste it now?” Bob asked after some time.

“No,” the Wildman replied,

“Can we check it? The-”

“No!” the Wildman stopped him again, causing him to fall silent like his seriously starving fellows.

After a while, the Wildman got up and turned to the pot, and the trolls got relieved as he opened the lid and checked the steaming stew.

“Get the bowls,” he suggested while mixing.

With their dirty bowls, the trolls gathered around the pot in front of the Wildman, their noses expanding and vibrating in pleasure as they allowed the new aroma to smoothly flow into their air pipes.

“Try this and tell me about it,” the Wildman said as he started serving—bowlfuls of salted stew with properly boiled pieces of meat.

“Taste it?” he insisted to the trolls, who carefully raised the bowls towards their wide lips, which openly received the deliciously smelling, well-cooked stew. As it flowed into their

mouths, their ears began to twitch lightly, a spark of pleasure running all through their bodies as it flowed down their food pipes.

Registering into their old brains was a good feeling like no other, detecting that ‘this salt’ and clean meat was creating just the right amount of ‘taste satisfaction’. In no time, they were gulping down bowl after bowl, sending proper stew down their dirty bellies, which became larger and larger.

“You are not supposed to *gulp* it down! You enjoy the taste!” the Wildman tried to control them. His words were ignored. “This is hopeless,” he said to himself and stepped aside from the pot, which the trolls rushed and ‘competed’ to clear.

A short while later, the stew was finished. And the trolls were licking their bowls. Cob walked towards the Wildman, who was making king his bed, while sucking the last few drops from the big pot.

“You ain’t taking any stew?” he asked,

“No Cob, I’m fine,” the Wildman responded as he continued to make his bed, heaping freshly fallen leaves on top of the ones he had slept on the previous night. He spread his piece of soft furry hide over the top. He turned and walked towards the bush.

“Where are you going?” Bob asked as he walked away.

“Private matters,” the Wildman replied as he disappeared.

Upon returning a few minutes later, he found all the Trolls dead asleep on their beds. He stopped and sighed upon laying eyes on Gob, who was snoring on the new bed he had just prepared.

THE END