

Running With The Caribou: Twelve Traditional Tales From The Natural World (The Family That Reads Together Series)

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Running With The Caribou

Twelve Traditional Tales From The Natural World

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Introduction

Here are twelve traditional stories of young men and women who found courage, cunning and compassion in the natural world.

The great American Writer Henry David Thoreau said, "In Wilderness is the preservation of the world." In these wild tales, we enter two landscapes at once: the landscape of the imagination and the landscape of the natural world. From the African grasslands to the Arctic tundra to the lakes and forests of the North American wilderness, each of these tales invites us to open ourselves to

the gifts that the wild world can bring. In listening to these stories, we are preserving both worlds at once.

These stories are designed to be read aloud. The human voice carries a strange magic. We all love a good story and there is nothing more comforting than to sit together as a family after a long day and become immersed in a really compelling tale.

Why stories?

Let's listen to the words of Nalungiaq, an old Eskimo Storyteller:

In the very earliest times when both people and animals lived on the earth a person could become an animal if they wanted to be and an animal could become a human being. Sometimes they were people and sometimes animals and there was no difference. All spoke the same language. That was a time when words were like magic and the human mind had mysterious powers. Sometimes a word spoken by chance would have strange consequences. It would suddenly become alive And what people wanted to happen, would happen— All you had to do was say it. No one could explain this: That's just the way it was.

I hope you will take some time from your busy lives to become immersed in the landscape of your own imagination and enjoy these tales of courage, cunning and compassion.

--Robin Moore

The Man Who Became A Caribou

Long ago, way up north, among the Inuit Eskimo people, a man lived with his family in a tent made of caribou skin.

This is how it was for them:

The man was good hunter and was able to provide all of the game the family required to live in this harsh land. His wife took what her husband brought home and fashioned it into the things they needed to live: warm parkas, mittens and boots, tent covers and bedding to keep them warm and fed through the fierce cold of the arctic winter. The meat and fat from the animals of the land made them happy and strong. They were never ill or exhausted. All of these things were good, but their greatest joy was raising their two young sons. At night, after the hunter had returned, they would sit up by the fire and tell stories and laugh far into the night.

There was one problem: One year, in the depth of winter, the woman's father was killed in a hunting accident. This was how her mother came to live with them. And that was how their troubles began. The old woman was bitter and had a sharp tongue. She was never satisfied with anything the man did. She was always comparing him to her own husband, who had been an excellent hunter and provider. She started to say that the man was not a good hunter. Even though the man knew this was not true and even though his own wife assured him that he provided everything they needed to live a good life, the old woman's words found their way into the young father. And they lodged there.

Nothing happened at first. But in time, the old woman's words had strange consequences. The man began to have less and less luck in the hunt. In the past, the man had always been able to find

rabbits or birds or caribou and draw them to him so that he could take them with bow or spear or net or snare. But now the animals avoided him. Even when he knelt on the ice and soothed them with songs and prayers, even when he promised them that he would remember him in his dreams and never waste their meat or skin or sinew, even after he had told them, with tears in his eyes, that his children would starve without their help, even after all of that, he came home empty-handed, day after day.

Weeks went by. The family was reduced to depending upon the charity of their relatives up the river, who brought them fish to eat and scraps of caribou hide to repair their clothing. The wife and her small sons made traps in the thicket and caught mice. This was how they survived.

And still, the old woman sat by the fire, filling the smoky tent with her bitter words and anger.

As for the man, he wandered all day, hoping that he would find his luck again out on the vast, lonely stretches of the tundra. But nothing changed. After a while, he left his hunting weapons behind, as they were useless to him. He himself felt useless.

Then one day, when he was climbing a hill overlooking the river, he looked into the valley beyond and saw a huge herd of caribou deer. He watched them from a distance as they kicked at the snow and ate the green moss underneath. The man thought that the caribou looked happy and contented. He imagined that their lives were so much easier than his. They did not build shelters or hunt or skin game. They did not need to set traps or fish in the cold water. The tundra provided all that they needed to live, buried in the snow beneath their hooves.

“Of all things on the earth, the worst is to be a human being,” the man thought. “If only I had been born a caribou, maybe then I would have been truly happy.”

He felt a sudden urge to walk down among the caribou. But as he waded through the deep snow and headed down into the valley, his movements caught the eye of the deer. The whole herd turned, as one animal, and ran away. The man stood in the deep snow and watched them disappear. He had never felt so alone. He could not become a caribou. And he could not return to his human family. His shame was too much.

The man did not know what to do. But he was still a hunter. So he did what all hunters must do: he followed the tracks on the animals he admired. The man walked all that day, moving in the direction the herd, moving further and further from his home by the river. As the sun was dipping down, in the strange change of light that comes between sundown and darkness, the man noticed that the tracks of the caribou were intermingled with the footprints of human beings. The man thought this was strange. Had other men followed the herd, walking before him?

But the man noticed that more and more of the caribou tracks changed into the footprints of humans. At last, the darkness came along suddenly and he was in a dark cold world, windswept, with no fire or warm food or loving family to shelter him.

Just then, up ahead through the trees, the man saw a campfire. He thought that he had stumbled on a band of hunters. But when he came up into the firelight, the people turned their faces to him and a man who seemed to be the leader called out:

“Why have you been following us all day, without spear or bow? We have never seen a man do that.”

Then the man realized that these were not human beings. These were the caribou, in human form. By some strange magic, they must have been able to change into the form of humans so they

could sit up by the fire at night and sing and laugh and tell stories.

“I do not wish to hunt you,” the man said, “I only want to become one of you.”

“Why would you want to become one of us,” the leader asked, “when you are already a man?”

The man told the caribou people his story and they took pity on him. That night, the leader gave him a caribou skin and told him to lie down beside the fire and go to sleep.

In the morning, when the man woke, the fire and the caribou people were gone. Instead, all around him was a huge herd of caribou deer, kicking at the snow and eating the green moss underneath.

The man rolled to his feet and stood. He sniffed the air. He felt the weight on a huge antlered rack on his head and when he looked down he saw that his feet had turned to hooves.

Then he realized—He had become a caribou, too.

It took a while for his caribou nature to take over. But soon he was walking and then running with the herd. They ran all that day, stopping and feeding when they could. At night, they changed themselves into the shape of people and made a fire in a stand of trees, preparing to spend the night.

In the days ahead, the man learned what it was to be a member of the herd. He was happy and contented to travel with the herd during the day. And at night, when they turned into people, he was happy with that as well. It was the leader’s custom at night to talk with the man about what it meant to live as a caribou. He would often tell him about the country they would be traveling through the next day. He would also explain any dangers that they might encounter. This way the man would not be afraid and would know what to do.

One night, the leader said, “Sometimes, we are chased by wolves. When you hear the others running around you, you must keep up. Anyone who falls behind will be taken by the wolf pack.”

The next day, the herd was chased by a fast-moving pack of wolves. The man tried to keep up but he had never seen the others run so fast. Soon, he was left behind. He cast a glance behind him and saw that the wolves were moving rapidly, in twos and threes, closing the distance behind him.

Then he saw someone running near him. At first, he thought it might be a wolf. But when he turned his head, he saw that the leader had dropped back to run beside him.

“What is slowing you down so?” the leader demanded.

“It’s my feet—” the man gasped, looking down-- “I urge them on but they won’t go any faster.”

“Never mind your feet,” the leader returned. “When a caribou runs, he holds his head up and looks only at the horizon.”

After that, the man held his head up and he was able to keep up with the fastest caribou.

One night, the leader said, “I must tell you about the human beings that come to hunt us. There

are two kinds: The first, we call the Shadow Hunter. He casts a dark shadow out across the snow and when you cross his trail, it smells like death. The Shadow Hunter wastes our meat and never stops to give thanks for killing us. We always run from a Shadow Hunter.

“The other hunter is clear like water; we call him The Clear Hunter. He casts no shadow out across the snow and when you cross his trail, it smells sweet. He hunts only to feed his family and he is always grateful for the meat and hide and sinews we give him. When we see a Clear Hunter approaching, we always try to help him.”

The man did not understand that. But, sure enough, the next day, two Shadow Hunters approached the caribou. A buck on the edge of the herd snorted, giving the warning signal, and the whole herd ran away.

Later that day, a Clear Hunter was seen approaching. He was dressed entirely in caribou skins but he was a man, walking on two legs and carrying a bone-tipped spear. He cast no shadow out across the snow.

The man, in his caribou form, watched as the Clear Hunter approached the herd. To his astonishment, the caribou calmly moved away, leaving one buck standing in the deep snow, directly in the path of the approaching hunter.

The man watched from a distance as the Clear Hunter made a long and careful stalk and then, when the time was right, crept up to the caribou who was standing in the deep snow. The hunter plunged the spear into the caribou’s heart and the buck fell where he had been standing a moment before. The man watched as the hunter knelt and drew hunting stone knife, cutting into the caribou’s flesh.

Then the man heard something: a human voice, raised in song. And he knew: it was the voice of the hunter, thanking the caribou for giving up its life. All at once, the man remembered his own life as a hunter.

He remembered the caribou he had killed in much the same way and the strange mixture of sadness and joy he had felt then, knowing that he had taken a life, but also knowing that this act of destruction meant that his children would eat.

That night, the man said to the leader: “That was terrible, what we saw today.”

“No,” the leader said, “you do not understand. The caribou who are killed by a Clear Hunter always come back to us.”

Just then, on the edge of the fire ring, the man heard the sound of laughter as a handsome young man came walking in out of the forest. Then the man understood: This was the caribou that had been killed that day, come back to them in human form.

After that, the man became part of the herd and was happy. During the day, he ran with the herd and at night, he enjoyed sitting by the fire with the Caribou People. Life went on like this, for many seasons, and the man did not count the time.

Then, one night, while he was sitting by the fire, he saw a Caribou Man and Woman embracing each other. He watched as they played with their children. And for the first time in years, he found himself thinking about his own family, back among the human beings. He wondered if his wife had ever re-married. He wondered if his mother-in-law had died. And he wondered if his sons had grown to manhood. For the first time in a very long time, he felt an urge to return to his human

family and see them again. When he explained this to the leader, the old one just shook his head and said, "It would be very difficult to live among the human beings after living so long among the caribou."

"I know," the man said, "but my mind is made up. I want to see them once more before I die."

The Leader nodded and, after staring into the fire for a very long time, he bent his head close to the man's ear and whispered what he must do to become a human being again.

The next day, in his caribou form, the man bid his friends goodbye and set off by himself across the tundra, headed for the old family camp along the river, where his journey had begun so long ago. He traveled all that day and into the night. He slept alone, without the protection of the herd, in a stand of trees, keeping an eye out for wolves. In the morning, he traveled on. Many times, he saw snares and traps set in the forest to entrap the caribou. But, because he had been a hunter, he knew how to recognize them and was easily able to avoid being caught.

The man traveled on his sturdy caribou legs for many miles, at last topping the hill and looking down on the river valley where his family had once camped. He was overjoyed to see a column of a smoke rising from the river bed. Looking more carefully, he could make out the peaked roof of the skin tent of his family.

Forgetting he was in his caribou form, the man plunged into the forest and began running downhill through thick stand of pines. All at once, he felt himself lifted from the ground and something tightening painfully around his neck—a snare! He was caught in a trap. The sturdy rope was noosed around his throat and pulled taut against a bent-over sapling arching above him. The snow underneath his hooves was soft and deep. He needed to stand very tall on his legs to keep from strangling. He knew that to struggle would only mean death.

In a short time, two young men with stone-tipped spears emerged from the woods. They were overjoyed to see that they had caught a caribou in their trap. But as they moved in to finish him off, the man remembered what the Leader had told him beside the fire the night before.

"Take me out!" the man shouted, his voice carrying loud in the piney woods.

The young hunters stopped, their spears held in mid-air. They had never heard a caribou speak before!

"Take me out," the man repeated. "Skin my head and take me out..."

Wide-eyed, one of the hunters handed his spear over to his companion and, drawing his knife, he cautious crept up to the caribou and, closing one hand around the beast's antler, he used his knife to make a slit in the skin at the caribou's throat. He peered through the hole he had made and could make out the form of a man inside the caribou's powerful body! The two hunters worked quickly to cut the skin away. They peeled the caribou hide back from the man's shoulders and head and arms and pulled him free. They rubbed him down with handfuls of snow and lead him down the hill to their camp.

When the boys brought the man into their tent, their mother cried out in joy as she recognized her own husband, missing for all these years. She had never re-married, waiting each day for him to return. As for the two young men, they were the man's sons, grown to manhood. The mother-in-law had died long ago.

So the man lived there, with his human family, in their camp by the river. In time, he forgot all

about his life with the Caribou People.

Except for one thing: Sometimes, at night, lying next to his wife in the warmth of their caribou skin robes, the man would dream and dream and dream of running with the caribou...

Selekana and The River Spirit

From the moment she was born, Selekana had everything a Bantu girl could want: She and her family lived on the edge of the African plains, at the headwaters of a reed-filled river.

The girls played apart from the boys, building small brush huts on the outskirts of the village. There, they sang their secret girlhood songs and wove their reedy carrying baskets and roasted sweet-tasting roots in earthen pits filled with hot coals. But most important of all, in this sheltered place by the river, far from the eyes of boys and parents, this was the place where the girls made their necklaces.

Because the weather was hot, ornamentation was more important than clothing and the girls went to great lengths to decorate themselves. They would plait their hair and paint their arms and shoulders with intricate designs. They would fashion bracelets and anklets from the stems of fragrant herbs. They would weave colorful belts from strips of bark dyed red and green. But for sheer beauty and power, there was nothing that was as essential to a Bantu girl as a good necklace.

Her necklace was fashioned from a row of delicate fish teeth, strung on a strand of twisted sinew. She had found the skeleton of the fish one morning while walking along the river and had made her necklace that very afternoon. It suited her perfectly, resting lightly on her collarbones, gleaming in the sunlight during the day and sparkling when she swam in the shallows of the river on moonlit nights.

The other girls admired her necklace and, as much as they liked their own, they all wanted one like her's. She was not a stingy person. She took her friends to the spot where she found the skeleton of the tiny fish. And they spent many hours wading in the clear water, searching for a treasure like the one she had found. But no one ever found a fish like hers, with bones as small and fine as a cat's whiskers. It seemed that she had the only one.

Sometimes, pretending they were only joking, her friends would try to persuade her to trade her necklace for one of theirs. Sometimes they offered her a handful of necklaces, hung with colored shells and wooden beads and brightly-colored feathers, in exchange for her simple strand of teeth. But she always refused.

There were two girls who were very jealous of her. One day, they thought of a way to trick the girl.

"If she will not let us have her necklace," one of the girls said, "then she will not have it either."

They went to a place by the river where they knew she would be walking. Crouching behind the bushes, the girls took off their necklaces and buried them in the sand. Then, when she saw the young girl coming their way, they emerged from the thicket and began walking toward her.

"Hello, Selekana!" one of the girls shouted. Her voice carried merrily over the rush of the river.

Selekana cocked her head. She looked at the girls' graceful necks. Something was missing.

"What happened to your necklaces?" she asked.

"Oh," the first girl said, "Haven't you heard? The elders are telling everyone that the rains are coming, swelling the river. The waters will rise and flood the village if we don't do something to calm the Spirit of the River."

Selekana wrinkled her brow. This was the first she had heard about the elders' warning. She knew that the river, like everything else in the landscape, had a spirit. She also knew that sometimes the old people would speak to the waters, asking for the blessings of good fishing or plentiful rains. But this was the first time she had ever heard of the destructive power of the river.

"What does that have to do with your necklaces?" she asked.

The jealous girls pretended to be sad.

"It was a terrible sacrifice," the second girl said, "but what could we do? We had to obey. We threw our necklaces into the river. The elders say that every girl must do this."

Selekana's hand instinctively went to her throat. She touched the small fish teeth with her fingers.

"Of course," the first girl said, "I don't think it would matter if you kept yours, Selekana. Everyone knows it is the finest necklace in the village. It would be a shame to throw it away."

Selekana felt her eyes clouding with tears. She knew what she had to do. She could not refuse, not when the fate of the village was at stake; not when the other girls had made their sacrifices so willingly.

Maybe someday she would find another Fish, just as delicate and beautiful, she told herself. Maybe the Spirit of the River would smile on her. Then she would make another necklace.

Without another word, Selekana stepped to the edge of the river, untied her necklace and cast it into the water. It landed with a tiny splash and sank out of sight. Suddenly, Selekana heard the girls laughing. She felt empty and sad, but she didn't know why.

Then, as she watched, the two girls ran to the bushes, dug up their necklaces and put them back on. Selekana just stood and watched. They did not even stop to talk with her. They just ran off in the direction of the village, laughing to themselves.

Selekana turned to the river.

"My necklace!" she said. She kept repeating the words over and over to herself as she waded into the shallows, searching the river bottom, holding to the slim chance that the strand of her tiny necklace might have caught on a stick or on the stem of a river reed. She waded further, the water

closing around her legs.

Selekana did not know how deep the water would be. She had often played in the shallows. But the girls were told that they should never swim in the main channel of the river. The current was strong there. And, some said, there were treacherous things in the water, things that could grab a girl-child by the legs and drag her down.

But she wasn't thinking about any of that now. All she wanted was to find her necklace. When the water rose to her waist, she could no longer wade. So she dove and swam, letting the current take her.

She did not float. The water was too fast for that. Instead, she sank, down to place where the water was cool and green. Underwater, beneath the riffing of the rapids, she heard a sound. It was the beautiful singing of a woman's voice. Peering ahead, she was astonished to see an old woman, far below, sitting on the bottom of the river.

With the exception of her face and her hands, the old woman was entirely covered by her hair. It would have taken a dozen lifetimes for a mortal woman to grow hair of that length. But the River Spirit had been there since the dawn of time and had lived in the depths, cool and quiet, while her long strands waved back and forth in the current.

Selekana could tell that the enchanting song was coming from the Spirit's lips. To her amazement, she found that she could breathe underwater and did not have to struggle for breath.

As if she were swimming through a dream, the girl settled down on the river bottom beside the old woman.

"Why have you come?" The Spirit said. Small bubbles rose from her wrinkled mouth.

"I lost my necklace!" Selekana cried. Her voice sounded strange to her, gurgling and far-away.

"If you want your necklace back," the old one said, "then you must help me."

With her thin hands, the old woman swept back the hair from her arms and shoulders and legs. Selekana was horrified to see that the woman's pale skin was covered with open, yellowed sores.

"Lick clean my wounds," she commanded.

Selekana did as she was asked. She was a kind girl and would not refuse the request of an elder, especially one with so many wounds. She swam about the old one, using her tongue to lick each and every sore clean.

When she had finished, the old woman reached into the billows of hair and fished around with her long fingers. A moment later, Selekana could see the old woman's throat. Around her withered neck was a necklace, more magnificent than the one Selekana had lost. It was made from fine points of light, strung on a silvery thread.

"This is your new necklace," the old one said.

She cried out with joy. The old woman smiled and tied the wonderful necklace around the girl's neck. It settled into place, just where it should be.

Just then, something passed overhead, sending a dark shadow rolling across the river bottom.

Looking up, the girl could see that it was a huge river snake, swimming along the surface, turning its head side to side, looking for food.

"Quickly," the old woman said, "Hide yourself underneath my hair."

Selekana did as she was told.

From the cover of the old one's tresses, she watched until the danger was past.

"Now," the Spirit said, "you may return. Return to your village and live just as you did before."

Selekana swam up through the water and broke through the surface of the river. She waded up into the shallows. When she looked behind her, she couldn't see the old woman. All she saw was the rush of the current and the swaying of the reeds at the river's edge.

Had it really happened? But when she looked down, she could see that the necklace the old woman had given her was still there, looking like a strand of silver against the darkness of her wet skin.

When she got back to the village, the two jealous girls were astonished to see that Selekana was wearing a new necklace. They had both seen the old necklace fall into the river. They had both seen how swiftly the current had closed around her treasure. But now, she had an even better one. But how had this happened?

They asked.

Selekana stood staring at the girls, fixing them with her eyes. She did not trust them and she did not want them to know about the old woman. So she said nothing. She simply turned and walked away, leaving a trail of river water behind her.

But those girls had to know. They could not rest until they discovered Selekana's secret. So, that afternoon, they slipped down to the river.

"We will do what she did!" one of the girls said.

And they did. They slipped off their necklaces and tossed them into the river. In an instant, the girl's necklaces were covered by the waters. They waded and searched. And, at last, they dove. Like the girl who had gone before them, they were astonished that they could swim so easily and so deeply without losing their breath.

Far below, on the river bottom, they saw the old woman and heard her song.

But when the jealous girls swam to her, they did not see their necklaces. Instead, all they saw was the stern face of the River Spirit.

"Why have you come?" the old one asked.

"We came for necklaces, like Selekana's," the girls said in watery voices.

The old woman swept back her hair, revealing the running sores which dotted her arms and legs.

"If you want necklaces," she told them, "then you must lick clean my wounds."

The girls turned to each other in disgust. They didn't even stop to answer the old woman. They just kicked their legs and swam for the surface.

But before they had gone far, they heard a swimming sound in the water above them. The long body of the river snake was there.

One of the girls turned back to the old woman, to call for help. But the woman was gone. In the spot where she had been, all they saw now was a dead tree stump, with dark tresses of clinging moss that swayed in the current.

The river snake crooked its neck and looked down. The girls were there. They were girls who should not have been in the deep channel of the river. They were girls without their necklaces.

The snake dove and devoured the girls there in the frothing water.

They were never heard from again.

From that time forward, many of the village girls told stories about the old woman in the river. But not one of them was brave enough to venture into the watery depths to see the old spirit for themselves. Instead, they delighted in frightening each other by telling the horrible tale of the disappearance of the young girls, over and over. The tales of the monster became so horrible that the girls stopped playing by the river, for fear the old woman would swim up into the shallows, grab the girls by the ankles and drag them down.

Selekana did not listen to the stories. And she did not try to convince the others that their fears were foolish. She did not explain that the old woman was full of wisdom and compassion and that the jealous girls had caused their own deaths by being so shallow and selfish.

As the summer turned hot and dusty, Selekana found herself spending more time apart from the girls who had once been her companions. She wandered alone by the river banks and out into the grasslands, where the sun blazed down at midday, turning everything pale with its flat, hard light. For reasons she herself did not know, something was drawing her to the playing fields of the boys.

The boys her age wanted nothing to do with girls. They were training themselves to be hunters. Hour after hour, they crouched over animals tracks out in the grasslands, trying to decipher what the marks on the ground had to say.

Using a rolling ball of grass as a target, they practiced with their spears and their bows and arrows, honing their hunting skills until the day when their uncles would take them along in search of the fleet-footed animals of the grassland.

One afternoon, Selekana watched them from behind the waving strands of elephant grass. She watched their shining, lean bodies as they leapt and spun, shouting with joy when they pierced their rolling target.

She wanted to be among them, taking part in their joy. But she knew that it was forbidden. Among her people, there were no women hunters. The world of animal tracks and sharp weapons and the hard, fierce light of the wide grassy plains belonged exclusively to the men. And she knew that nothing she could ever do would allow her to step into that world.

That evening, walking by the river, her thoughts turned to the old woman. It was then that the singing began. At first, it was inseparable from the sound of the river. Then the liquid song rose

and filled Selekana's ears. The girl found herself wading into the river and diving deep. The girl swam with long, graceful strokes, headed for the river's bottom.

Small bubbles rose from the Spirit of the River. There she sat, on the smooth sandy bottom. She did not seem surprised to see Selekana. Her eyes shone in the swirl of the dark water. Her long hair waved about her, covering everything but her face and her hands. Without a word, the old woman swept her hair back, revealing the sores that dotted every inch of her body.

Selekana bent her head and touched her small pink tongue to the old woman's wrinkled flesh, licking each wound clean. The old woman smiled sadly.

When Selekana was finished, the Spirit asked, "Why have you come?"

The girl settled her bare feet on the river bottom, steadying herself in the current. When she spoke, she noticed that her voice had a strange bubbling sound, quiet like distant music.

"I am weary of the girls and their foolish ways. I want to be like the boys, joining in their stalking games and equaling them in their hunting skills," she confessed.

The old woman thought for a moment before speaking.

"You are different from the rest, Selekana," she said. Then, when she saw the girl's startled look, she smiled.

"Yes, I know your name," the old woman said, "I know your name and your thoughts and your aspirations. I know what lies ahead for you. And I can tell you this: You will take your place in the hunter's world, but not in the way you expect.

"You will soon be a woman, Selekana. And you will do what no women of your people have ever done. But you will not do it in the man's way. Many women make this mistake, trying to make themselves into men. They persist in thinking that if their arms grew strong enough to cast a spear or their eyes grew sharp enough to follow a game trail—then they would be powerful. But this, my child, this is all foolishness. If you would take your place in the wild world, you must do it using the powers of the woman, not the man."

Selekana shook her head.

"I don't understand," she said. "I don't understand any more than I did before."

The old woman nodded.

"Of course you don't," she said.

Just then, a dark shadow passed overhead.

"Quickly," she whispered, "under my hair!"

Selekana parted the waving strands and tucked herself away, against the woman's body. She waited there in the watery silence until the old woman closed a hand around her shoulder and drew her out.

"The danger is past," she said quietly, "but you must return to your world now."

"But, please--" the girl began.

The old woman raised a hand and turned her head. Her face disappeared in a waving cloud of dark hair.

With an anxious eye on the waters above, Selekana swam upwards, breaking the surface of the river and swimming to shore with rapid strokes. By the time she reached the land, the sky was completely dark and the stars had begun to appear.

The next morning, while the other girls were still rising and decorating themselves for the day, Selekana crept through the dust on the edge of the grassland, watching the boys in their play.

What did the old woman mean when she spoke of using the power of the feminine to gain a place in the wild world? By definition, the world of women was in the village and in the home. Women did not range out onto the grasslands, far from the village trails and watering holes. But Selekana knew that she must, if she was ever to learn about this strange feeling that drew her toward the world of the boys.

Selekana noticed that the boys very rarely went anywhere alone, they traveled like a pack of wild dogs, gathering strength from their numbers. Maybe, she thought, maybe her power would reveal itself if she entered the grasslands alone. *

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