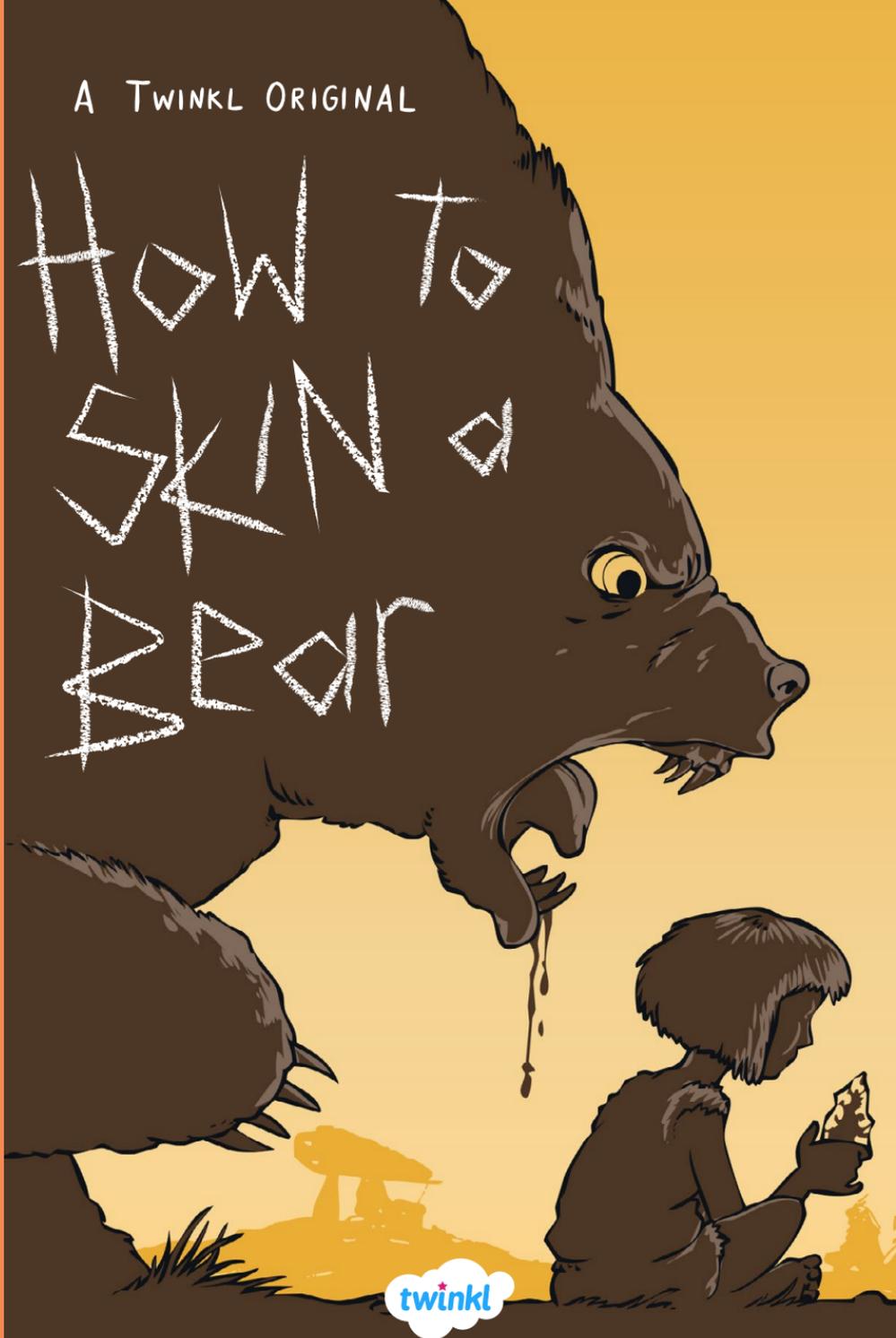


A TWINKL ORIGINAL

HOW TO SKIN A BEAR







First published 2018 by Twinkl Ltd.
197 Ecclesall Road, Sheffield S11 8HW

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How To SKIN A BEAR



Twinkl Educational Publishing

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T

The Dance of the Drippity Drops

“I *hate* feathers,” I say, as Dad throws the limp, dead duck at me. It flip-flops through the air, until – *snap!* My dog, Dog, leaps up and snatches it in his pointy teeth. I grab the duck’s scaly feet and yank firmly, but Dog won’t let go.

“I *especially* hate feathers covered in dog slime,” I snarl through gritted teeth.

“Well, plucking feathers is your job, Bee,” says Dad,

chuckling. "As you get older, you will learn new skills, but for now, get plucking!"

My dad is the sort of dad whose goatskin tunic doesn't go all the way round his belly. He is also one of the tribe elders. That means that he gets to do fun jobs like hunting. It's so unfair. I could be a mighty hunter too, if only I had the chance.

After the elders come back from their hunt, Dad makes new bows from the animal guts and furry clothes from their skins.

"Rargh," I say, finally jerking the duck from Dog's slavering jaws. Dog huffs and shakes his tufty head, trying to spit the feathers from his teeth. I got a feather stuck in my teeth once. It was fluffy and sharp at the same time.

Ignoring my groaning, Dad sings as he mixes up the deer brains. He massages the brain goo into the deerskin that he's tanning.

"Rubbing in the gloopy brain,

Gloopy brain, gloopy brain,

Rub the leather soft again,

Rubbing in the brain!”

Glumly, I pull out hunk after hunk of feathers and throw them onto the ground. I'm tired and I'm grumpy. The tribe has been on the move for at least five suns now, trekking and tramping to our summer hunting ground at the Rock of the Long Sun. Travelling is boring. We walk all day, carrying everything we own on our backs, then we set up camp, and soon enough, we pack everything up and set off again. My feet are sore and my back is full of aches. Travelling is especially boring when you're the youngest in the tribe and your job is plucking duck feathers.

“I. Hate. Feathers,” I growl, for probably the fifth time. “I hate ducks, too.” Dog jumps up and down. Dog is my dog. I trained him from a puppy. He gets excited whenever I shout. He's still got feathers wedged between his teeth.

“Well, I don't hate ducks, Bee,” says Dad, glancing towards me. “Duck skin makes lovely, soft leather. Your underpants are made of duck skin. *Rubbing in the brain...*” he continues to sing happily.

Fuming, I glare around at the tribe as they go about their fun, featherless tasks.

Knotted Mane is my dad's sister. Her job is to gather berries. She sneakily eats them as she's going along, so her lips are always juice-purple. I could learn to gather berries...

Breath of the Vulture is my dad's sister's man. He gets to make the drums and flutes for the ceremonies. I could learn to make an instrument...

Tumbling Pebble is Vulture's brother. He weaves the sticks and furs to make our shelter. I could learn to construct a shelter...

Bent Tree is the tribe's chief. She starts the fire with a stick and a clump of moss. Then, she sits by it all day long with her eyes closed. I could learn to build the fire...

Even Snore of the Rat is learning how to navigate, and he's only π summers older than me. I could learn to navigate, and I could do it a lot better than Rat!

Rat is pacing nearby. He's yammering to Bent Tree in that voice of his that sounds like a strangled goose. "I

believe that it is a trek $\pi\pi$ suns long from the Wolf Claw Mountain until we reach Moaning Woman Tree,” he says, “then the land will lead us to the Pig Lick River.” He nearly steps on me so I whack him with the plucked duck.

“Oh, sorry, Bee, I didn’t see you there. Still plucking feathers?” Rat smirks. “What a useless thing to do.” Bent Tree ought to hit him with her walking staff, but instead she just lets him get away with it. I hate being the youngest in the tribe.

Moments later, Breath of the Vulture runs over. Vulture is a big man. Not big like my dad, but bulging with muscles. He’s got a bent nose and bristling eyebrows and chest hair as thick as fur. His weathered face is stretched wide and panicky. He looks scared. I’ve never seen him scared before.

“Achoo, have you seen the sun?” he pants. Achoo is my dad. His real name is Sneeze of the Aurochs, but no one calls him that. He’s nearly as big as an aurochs, but he’s not as fierce-looking. He doesn’t have horns, either.

“No, I haven’t, Vulture,” says Dad. “You shouldn’t look at the sun, you know. It’ll make your eyes hurt.”

“But this is different. Come quickly!” says Vulture, running back towards a thick cluster of trees.

I drop the lifeless duck and run after him. Dog pants at my heels. Dad lopes behind, making the muddy ground thud with every heavy step. We run through the thick trees and ferns to a sloping clearing. Nearly the whole tribe has gathered. Some point and stare, some cover their eyes, some wail and moan. Bent Tree sits with her eyes closed, bathed in fiery light.

The sun is glowing red – really red. Red like a big pimple or those winter berries that gave Knotted Mane a stomach ache. Red like fresh blood.

“It’s an omen!” cries Tumbling Pebble.

“The sun is sick!” shouts Snore of the Rat.

“The land will turn to ice!” warns Dad.

“The world is ending!” wails Breath of the Vulture.

I don’t say anything. I think the sun looks as angry as a girl who has to pluck duck feathers *again*. But no one cares what I think.

Bent Tree doesn't cry or shout or wail. Slowly, she opens her crinkly eyes.

"The Sky Spirits are testing us," she says. Bent Tree is so old that her voice crackles. "In the stories, ill omens warned of the Long Frost. Our ancestors ignored the omens, and lived through a winter without end. We will not make the same mistakes that our ancestors made." She bangs her staff on the ground so hard that the tribe trembles. "We must perform the Ritual!"

Quickly, the elders put on their best furs and their deer skull masks. Dog runs around, yapping excitedly. Bent Tree's mask is the skull of a snarling cave lion. The lion's teeth hang over her eyes and scrunch up the skin on her face. I can't help but giggle.

"Dad," I tug Dad's goatskin until he pays attention to me. "It looks like Bent Tree's mask is eating her face." Dad doesn't think that it's funny.

"That mask has been passed down in our tribe since the Long Frost," he says, pulling his special deerskin over his shoulders. "In those days, cave lions still roamed this land. They were bigger than bears and fiercer than wolves. Few people were brave enough to fight them, and even fewer survived."

I roll my eyes. “I was only joking.”

“That skull belonged to one of the last lions,” Dad goes on, as though I’m not even there. “It was killed by Glinting Fang. She was fierce. She was strong. With one swipe of her axe, she brought the beast down and saved her tribe. We still remember her in song:

“Glinting Fang was fierce and bold,

With strength you could rely on.

Her axe was sharp, and with one stroke,

She bravely killed the lion!”

“Good for her,” I mutter under my breath. Dog licks my hand consolingly.

“Bent Tree wears that mask to remember Glinting Fang, and to honour her courage,” says Dad, still lost in his story.

“Hey!” I stumble as someone pushes me from behind. It’s Snore of the Rat. He’s almost swamped in his best horse pelt and his mask comes down over his eyes. I don’t even have any best furs or a skull mask. I’m too

young to join the Ritual.

Rat sneers. “Maybe when you save the tribe from a fierce lion, we’ll write a song about you, Bee. Oh no, wait, all of the lions died in the Long Frost. That’s too bad!” He minces past me and joins the elders at the fire. “Keep out of the way, Bee. This is too important to be ruined by your buzzing.”

All dressed up, the elders gather around the fire. Vulture plays his bird-bone flute and Dad bangs the drums. I slink off into the shadows with Dog.

“The Dance of the Drippity Drops!” cries Bent Tree, and all of the elders raise their fingers and rain them down, their feet tap-tapping.

Off in the shadows, Dog and I dance the Dance of the Stick-Fetching Dog. Dog catches it really quickly, because he’s an excellent hunter.

“The Song of the Swishing Stream!” cries Bent Tree, and all of the elders stomp round in a circle, yodelling.

In the shadows, Dog and I sing the Song of the Howling Dog. Dog is better at it than I am.

“The Procession of Shimmering Sunbeams!” cries Bent Tree, and all of the elders snap their fingers and leap up and down. Vulture pipes and Dad bangs.

In the background, Dog and I do the Procession of the Dog Chasing his Tail. We both run round and round in circles as Dog’s tail swishes back and forth.

“And *bang, bang, bang*, and *twirl, twirl, twirl*,” says Dad, as the elders prance and swirl, “and *jump*, and *spring*, and *HUERGH!*”

The elders freeze. Their mouths hang open and their arms are spread as they stare at the sky like fearsome monsters. I stare at the sky too, with my tongue hanging out. Without warning, Dog bounces up and nearly knocks me over, so I have to scratch his chin to calm him down.

We wait. No one says anything. Dark clouds gather over the red sun. Then a fat drop of rain lands on my tongue.



Goat Guts and Ox Intestines

There are  people in our tribe and we all share a tent made of sticks and furs. All of these people are crammed into a small space, all snoring and breaking wind in their sleep. It is loud. It is smelly.

“Can Dog sleep in the tent with us tonight, Dad?” I ask, grabbing Dog around the belly so that he can’t run off after a frenzied squirrel.

“We can’t have that, Bee,” Dad says. “The tent is

for humans. Dog wants to sleep outside, where the air is fresh.”

Dog isn't the only dog in the tribe, but he is the best. “If any dog deserves to sleep inside, it's him,” I say. “Plus, it's raining. Hard.”

“Dog loves the rain,” says Dad. “*Gloopy brain, gloopy brain...*” he sings. Dad is always singing to himself. He's that sort of dad.

“No, Dog hates the rain,” I say defiantly, as Dog breaks free and trots off cheerfully through the hammering drops into the underbrush.

“He's having the time of his life,” says Dad. “Now, get inside before you're soaked. I'll lead Dog over to the others.”

My furs are soggy and my tangled hair is full of drips. I leave Dad to chase after Dog, and I clamber into the tent.

Inside, it's already crowded. I stumble over hairy legs, trip on an arm, and nearly land face-first on Vulture's bent nose.

“The end of days!” he cries as I fly towards him, but I throw my arms out and stop myself just in time.

“Sorry, Vulture.”

Vulture just grunts. He really is spooked by the red sun. Could it *really* mean another Long Frost? I shiver just thinking about it. Luckily, when you sleep in a tent with  other big, sweaty people, it is never cold.

I curl up next to Knotted Mane. The ground is a bit lumpy, but I wrap my deer pelt around me. When Dad comes back, soaked to the bone, I tuck my toes under his goatskin. He doesn't mind sharing. He's that sort of dad. I listen to the rain drumming on the tent and to the shuffles and grunts of the tribe as they try to get comfy.

“Dad,” I whisper, “why did you call me ‘Bee’? Why not something scary, like... ‘Glistening Claw’?”

“Because when you were born, you were so small and fuzzy,” says Dad, holding his hands up to show me just how small I was.

“But I'm not small and fuzzy *now*.”

“That’s true,” says Dad, shuffling to get comfy, “but you still bring sweetness to my life.”

I lie still and think about this.

“But, Dad...”

“Yes, Bee?”

“What if I grow up into a fierce fighter? What if I kill a wolf or a... a bear? Could I change my name to *Glistening Claw then?*”

“You could. But it is not our names that make us who we are, Bee. It is our actions.”

“Oh.”

“Goodnight, my little Bee,” yawns Dad.

“Night, Dad,” I mumble.

“*Gloopy brain,*” he sings sleepily.

When I close my eyes, I dream.

I dream that it's the Long Frost and I am Glinting

Fang. I face a cave lion across the ice. The lions snarls. I raise my axe but just as I'm about to bring it down, I look up. A red sun glares in the middle of a hazy, yellow sky...

I wake to darkness and snores and pattering rain.

Tumbling Pebble said that the sun was an omen, and even Bent Tree was worried. But the elders have done the Ritual, now: a dance, a song *and* a procession! If that doesn't keep the Sky Spirits happy, nothing will. In my mind, I squeeze the picture of the red sun between my fingers until it bursts like a pimple. Soon, I'm drifting off to sleep again...

I'm woken by a blast of cold air. I sit bolt upright. That's not right. The tent is never cold. I mean, *never*, not even in the depths of winter with snow piled up knee-deep outside.

The rain drums so hard on the roof, it's like the Sky Spirits are pelting us with stones. The tent creaks and shudders. Outside, I can hear the wind crashing through the treetops. I imagine the red sun, bigger and redder and more evil than ever before. A shivery wind shoots past me. I hear a *flap, snap* sound, then one of the furs covering the tent flies off. Stone-hard rain

tumbles onto me, Dad and Knotted Mane.

Oh, goat guts.

“Aargh!” shouts Dad.

Knotted Mane squeals and within moments, the whole tribe is awake. It’s pandemonium.

“Pack up the tent!”

“Keep the food dry!”

“Stick together!”

“Bring the masks!”

“Grab the instruments!”

“Get everyone inside!”

“Get everyone outside!”

“It’s wet outside!”

“It’s wet inside!”

“Look out, it’s going to collapse!”

The tent posts groan and creak. Arms, legs and furs crash into me on all sides. I frantically scramble through the tent door just as the whole structure collapses in on itself.

Outside, the rain hammers down. Storm clouds scurry past the moon, lighting the sodden forest in flashes of white. The muddy ground slimes between my toes. I can’t see where I’m treading.

“Ouch! Ah!” I cry, as I step on splintering sticks and sharp stones. The air is full of sound.

“Fetch the dogs,” someone shouts.

“Leave the dogs,” shouts someone else.

No way am I going to leave Dog in all of this! I skid over the slushy ground towards the howling pack. “Dog!” I bellow.

“Bee?” calls a worried voice. It’s Dad. “Honey Bee?”

“Dad!” I call. “I have to find Dog.”

“He will find us, Bee. Come this way. There is a warm, safe cave. It’s not far.”

I’m not listening.

“Dog,” I bellow. “Where are you?”

I trip and land in the mud. I don’t know which way I’m facing. Treetops bend and wave as if they’re beckoning me.

“Bee, you have to stay with the tribe,” calls Dad. His voice seems further away. I hear a howl echoing in the distance.

Moonlight floods the forest in front of me. Less than five paces away, I can see the dogs, crowded together under a tree. I scan the heaving, furry bodies.

“Dog?” I call.

There he is! His grey coat shines silver with rainwater and he’s fighting through the crowd of frantic mutts desperately looking for a way to escape the chaos.

“Bee?” Dad’s voice is so faint now, I can hardly hear him.

“I’m coming!” I yell. “Come on, Dog. Good boy.”

I run towards him but he doesn’t hear me over the noise and commotion of the other dogs. I race towards the terrified pack but I am too late. Dog bolts.

“Dog!” I shout. Dog yelps and disappears into the darkness.

“Bee!” yells Dad.

I have to go back, but I can’t leave Dog. What do I do?

Lightning zigzags through the sky so close that I can feel the air tingle. With a mighty *CRA-A-ACK*, it strikes a tree. Suddenly, the whole thing is burning. It burns with a bright yellow grin, like a vengeful Sky Spirit, come down to earth. Oh, goat guts and ox intestines!

In my head, pictures run round and round like a herd of deer: Dog lost in the rain; Dog falling over a cliff in the darkness; Dog getting struck by lightning. I have to find him. Without another thought, I sprint into the darkness.



I Have Done a Few Things Wrong

I'm lost.

Really lost.

Really, *really* lost.

Aaaaooooo.

I hear it faintly through the trees. Is that Dog?

It's nearly daylight. I've been chasing him all night – at least, I've been chasing the howling sound all night. I hope it's Dog. I stop and whistle, like I've seen the elders do on hunts, but Dog doesn't come. Wind and rain strike me from every side. I might as well not be wearing furs. I'm so wet that I'll probably never be dry again. I haven't seen or heard the tribe in an age. But who cares about them? They wanted me to leave Dog behind.

I stumble into a clearing. Although I frantically scan the area around me, I don't recognise anything. Snore of the Rat would be able to tell where he was just by seeing a knot in a tree trunk or a funny-shaped rock. I wish that I had been taught to navigate. That twisted branch might mean that I should walk south for seven days. Those tangled roots could be telling me to go east until I reach a river, then south until π bats fly overhead. That grumpy-looking bush might be suggesting that I spin π times on the spot, whistle for a ride, jump on the back of the next aurochs that comes along and trot off into the sunset. But how would I know? No one bothered to teach me how to navigate. "Your job is plucking feathers, Bee. Just stick with the tribe and you'll be alright."

Aaaaaooo!

There it is again: Dog's howl. Where is it coming from? My brain feels tangled. I shake my head hard from side to side. Sometimes when I do that, clever thoughts fall out. This time, my thoughts are not helpful, but come thick and fast.

ㄤ: Why am I following the howling sound? It might not even be Dog. It might just be the wind in the trees.

ㄤ: Or a wild animal that wants to eat me for dinner.

ㄤ: Uh-oh.

ㄤ: I'd better move, quick.

I start to run. I am totally, utterly, absolutely lost. My lungs burn like fire and the soles of my feet are full of cuts and grazes from accidentally standing on things in the dark.

Aaaaooo!

ㄤ: Maybe that noise is just the Sky Spirits messing with me. After all, they must be very angry to send a red sun *and* a stonking storm all in one day.

ㄤ: What's scarier – wild hungry animals or angry

Sky Spirits?

: I'd better keep running.

I've got no food, no water, no tent and no idea where my tribe is. I haven't even found Dog! Oh, pig's bladder. If I don't find somewhere warmish and dryish soon, I'll become a human swamp.

The wind rushes through the clearing and the trees wag their fingers at me. I shiver and my skin goes all bumpy, like duck skin. I look up at the sky and wonder if the Sky Spirits are watching me. But why would they? It's not like I've ever done anything wrong.

Except for when I complained about plucking the duck. And when I ran after Dog even though Dad said to stay with the tribe. And there was also that time that I borrowed the flint spearhead that Dad had been shaping and chopped off all of my hair without asking. And that other time, when I carved a picture of a dog into the side of Dad's drum, only he said it didn't look like a dog at all, more like a pig with belly ache.

Ok, so I have done a few things wrong. I still need to find Dog, though. I start tramping uphill, but I'm tired. Really tired. Totally, properly, really tired, from

being awake all night. My heavy eyelids begin to droop; I can't help it. Desperately, I try to open my eyes wide and stare – I even hold my eyelids open with my fingers. When I realise that this simply won't work, I pick up some short sticks from the forest floor and attempt to prop my eyelids open with them, but I just poke myself in the eyeballs. Eventually, despite all of my efforts, I'm walking with my eyes closed.

That's how I fall into the hole. My foot slides and I tumble, face first, banging my head on something hard. There is a white flash, and then darkness.



I open my eyes. It feels like only a moment has passed, but the rain has stopped. Strange...

I'm cold, covered in mud and my head is splitting. Not to mention that I'm in a hole in the ground with no way out.

The hole is like a long, thin passage in the rock. The walls on either side are at least  times my height and covered in moss and ferns. I run my hands over

them, looking for handholds, but all I feel is slime.

My head throbs. Water drips. I try to walk all quiet and sneaky, but it's impossible when every footstep makes an enormous squelching sound. After five more strides, I stop. I can hear something. A splashing, snuffling something.

I freeze. It could be a wolf or a boar or a bear. If I don't move quickly, I'm going to be something's dinner.

I run. My head nearly explodes from the intense pain, but I don't care. My feet sink into the mud, but I heave them out and keep on running. Even the elders are scared of things like bears. No one has faced anything that big alone and survived since Glinting Fang killed a cave lion. I run and run, dash round a corner and then I see it.

A tree trunk as big as an aurochs blocks the passage. There's no way around it. The sound is becoming louder. There is no other way. I'll have to climb!

The tree is covered in slimy, green moss. Desperately, I throw my arms up and dig my fingernails into the moist bark. My hands slip, my feet slide and I fall back into the mud. My head pounds like a banging drum.

I'm not going to die because of a bit of slime.

I jump up at the trunk once again. My belly skids against the moss-covered trunk and before I know it, I'm tumbling over the other side. Frantically, I try to grab the thick trunk, but it's much too slippery. Losing control, I slide right over the top and roll in the cold, thick mud.

"Ouch!" I cry, rubbing my sore head. The light blacks out for a moment. I can't tell if it's the Sky Spirits messing again, or just because my head is all funny.

Something scrabbles and whines nearby. I have to move. Right ahead of me is a little nook in the rock, just high enough and deep enough to hide a Bee-sized person. Peeling myself out of the sludge, I crawl inside. Just then, the snuffling, whining creature leaps over the tree trunk. My head is full of pain and strange lights. I can't see. I can't move. I curl into a tiny ball.

Seconds later, something wet and furry is sniffing and licking my face. I groan. I can't believe that I'm going to die like this.

I squint one eye open. The thing licking me isn't a wild beast at all... it's Dog!



A Scrumptious, Crunchy Feast

Dog is wet and muddy and he smells worse than our tent after the tribe ate rotten horse meat. But he's here! He sticks out his big, pink tongue and licks my mouth and nose and hair and the sore bit on the back of my head where I fell. Then he flips onto his back for a belly rub. I ruffle his fur up and down until I'm too tired to move. I rest my head on his grey, furry tummy and, even though I'm lying in the dank, sloppy mud, far from my tribe, I feel cosier than a bee in a hive. I'm so cosy that my eyes slip shut and I slide into a dream.

I dream that I'm chasing after a great beast in the dark. I've got spiky hair and a mud-smeared face, just like the elders when they go hunting. I'm running, running, running with a spear in my hand, and I can see the beast up ahead with pointed teeth and a mouth like a sinkhole –

I wake up cold, shivery and lonely. I need to find my tribe.

Dog stands outside the little cave. In the bright daylight, he looks wolf-like and muscular; his giant pointy ears swivel, and his wet nose twitches. Dog is the best hunter in the pack, which is another reason Dad should never have told me to leave him behind! If anyone can lead me back to the tribe, it's Dog.

Dog stares along the stone passageway. I wonder what doggy thoughts he's thinking... *Weird smell, tasty smell, fishy smell, yucky smell.*

Dog yips and my belly rumbles. I'm so hungry that I could eat my own leg.

"Come on, Dog. Let's find breakfast."

"Yip," says Dog, which might mean 'yes', or it might

mean that he's still smelling peculiar things in the cave. I scramble from the cave and Dog sets off.

As we tramp through the passage in the rock, I think of feasting with the tribe. Fresh horse liver and roasted nuts, steaming fish with the skin on and sharp berries. It makes me miss my people even more. Well, except Rat, obviously.

Eventually, the floor slopes upwards and the light gets brighter. We're climbing out of the passage and into a dense, green forest. A forest with trees and leaves and bushes, with nuts and berries and insects. A forest that I don't recognise. "Food first," I say, "then we'll find the tribe." I have to act like an elder, now that it's only me and Dog.

"Yip!" barks Dog. He seems to have a plan. I follow him through the trees.

We walk for an age. Suddenly, Dog stops and yaps. Beside his muddy paws, I spot bright yellow flowers with spiky green leaves.

"Dandelions!" I cry. "A scrumptious, crunchy feast! You are a good dog, Dog." I throw myself onto the soft ground beside him. As I rip up the juicy, green leaves,

my belly roars with hunger. I stuff the dandelions into my mouth. They're crisp and tangy. The creamy sap melts on my tongue and bits of soil add a surprising crunch. Yummy!

After finishing the remainder of the weeds, my belly is still grumbling and something is tickling my hand. I look down. Crawling across my fingers is our main course: "Ants!"

Hurriedly, I lick the insects off my fingers and carefully crunch them between my teeth. They crackle and burst with sour juice that makes my mouth zing.

"Yum! I bet there's more nearby," I say to Dog. On all fours, I run along the ground after the marching ants. I find their nest and grab a sturdy stick. Then, I plunge it into the anthill. When I pull it up, it's crawling with tiny ants.

I'm so hungry, I slurp the ants right off the stick. Dog leaps around me, barking. He's hungry, too. I plunge the stick into the nest again, and this time I let Dog lick it clean. Delicious!

Many sticks later, finally full, I sit and dig spindly ant legs out from between my teeth with my fingernail.

"I'm thirsty, Dog. Do you know where we can find some water?"

"Yip, yip," says Dog, which might mean 'yes,' or it might mean that he's got ants crawling around in his belly. He skips off uphill.

"You're going the wrong way, Dog." I yell after him. "Water flows downhill, not up." But Dog ignores me. He happily bounds away.

"Dog!" I call, but he keeps bounding. "Dog!" He leaps and skips between the trees. "DOG!" I yell, as loud as I can. I can't even hear him anymore. "Fine," I sigh. I don't know how, but Dog is usually right about these things. I take a deep breath and sprint after him until I finally reach the top of the hill.

Up here, there are no trees, just grass and rocks. Dog stands proudly, his fur sticking up in the fierce wind. "Dog, why are we – woah!"

I spin around on the spot. This is incredible.

I'm so high up, I can see to the ends of the world. To the east and south, I see rolling hills and trees. I look north, expecting to see more of the same, but instead,

I see a wide patch of cleared forest. Smoke curls from **TTT** or more fires. Dogs run about herding goats, and people herd the dogs. There must be twice as many people as in my tribe. I've never seen so many people and dogs and goats and fires in one place.

Dog yaps, and curls round my legs until I turn west. Glittering in the light of the sunset, a long eel-shape twists through the trees.

“That’s the Pig Lick River!” I start to jig on the spot. “You did it, Dog. We’re going to find the tribe.”

The river is called the Pig Lick because there are always wild pigs near the banks. We hunt them while they’re busy slurping up the cool water and rolling in the mud. The Pig Lick River is the last landmark on the way to the Rock of the Long Sun.

The Rock of the Long Sun is like a three-legged mammoth with no head. It’s made of giant, heavy stones and it is a really old monument. On Midsummer’s Day, the sun sets between the legs of the stone structure, and when it does, the elders all do a special ritual. I’m not allowed to join in, *obviously*.

My tribe might be sitting on the bank of Pig Lick River

right now, feasting on a sizzling boar. “Come on, Dog, we need to head that way,” I say. I swing my arms and set off down the hill.

Behind me, Dog whines. I stop and turn. Dog yips and disappears.

“Oh, what *now?*” I moan. This is incredibly unfair – when Dog knows the way, I follow him, but now that I know the way, Dog won’t follow me.

I plod uphill much more slowly. When I get to the top, I still can’t see dog. “Dog?”

“Yip, yip!” he says, surprisingly close by. I climb onto a jutting rock and then I see him.

He’s found a cave! Not a piddling little bite out of the rocks full of squelchy mud, like the one that we slept in yesterday, but a proper cave with a high roof and a rock floor. It’s big, dry and out of the wind. It’s the perfect place to stop for the night. Even if it is a bit of a mess...

Dog is busy. He runs about, sniffing scattered objects and dark stains on the cave floor. I follow Dog inside. The middle of the cave is black from the ashes of

many fires, as if a tribe lived here before. Charred logs litter the ground. On the walls are painted shapes, like leaping deer and horses, drawn in red and brown. They're all running in the same direction, like they're being chased. The pictures are flaking and faded, as if they were painted years ago. I take a small step towards the gloom at the back of the cave...

Crunch! My bare foot is met by a hard and cool something that stabs into my sore skin. I reach down to investigate and pull out the splinters. I feel something smooth and round and holey. I pick it up carefully and carry it out of the cave and into the light.

I gulp. It's a human skull.



Solid Tents and Rolling Cows

That night, I decide to make a fire.

In our tribe, it's usually Bent Tree who makes the fire. Although I've never tried it myself, I've watched her many, many times and have carefully studied her movements. As well as this, Dad has told me the legend of Human's First Fire at least  times. On cold nights, Dad would wrap me in his goatskin and we'd stare into the flickering flames together. The story always began:

“The first human to make fire was Snapping Stick. Stick had collected sticks for so long that no one knew what else to call him. In those days, tribes collected fire from lightning-struck trees. Stick gathered sticks to build the fires. That was his one and only job; it was the lowliest job in the tribe.”

At this point in the story, I would always complain to Dad, “At least he didn’t have to pluck feathers, like me.” I think of Dad as I pick up grass and twigs in the gathering dark. A knot inside my stomach tightens as I think about him and my eyes become a little wetter than usual. Quietly, I sing his song. I almost feel like he’s here with me.

“Gather sticks both great and small,

Short and fat or long and tall,

Pile the sticks higher and higher,

That’s the way to make a fire.”

I heap the sticks in the middle of the cave. I take a pointy stick and a flat piece of wood.

“One day, when the tribe opened the fire stone, their

fire had gone out. The tribe despaired. They'd starve! They'd freeze! They'd be dead before the summer! But Stick did not panic. He had carried sticks for a long time, and he knew that they had power.

"Stick tried all sorts of things to draw out the fire. He tried tapping the sticks and spinning them, throwing them and flinging them. Nothing worked. At last, he sat down to think. As he thought, he idly rubbed a stick that was resting atop a flat piece of wood between his hands. His hands became warmer with the movement, so, having been cold and without fire for so long, he began to rub the stick more and more vigorously.

"Before he knew it, the stick that was rubbing against the wood began to smoke. It was only a wisp to begin with – almost invisible. The smoke became thicker and thicker and thicker. Then, he gathered the tiny mound of smoking ash that had formed. With great care he tended the ashes and soon enough, the whole thing came alight!"

I rub my stick into the flat wood. Nothing happens at first and I notice that my hands begin to feel sore. Nevertheless, I continue until it starts to smoke, exactly like Bent Tree does.

*“Twirl the stick between your palms,
Never mind your aching arms,
Till the smoke curls higher and higher,
That’s the way to make a fire.”*

My twirling sort of works. A light wisp of smoke begins to meander from the wood and stick. I carefully gather the ashes into the small, grassy nest. I lightly blow until flames lick the little twigs. I’ve done it!

“Stick was a hero! He had made fire and saved the tribe from hunger and bitter cold. Snapping Stick soon became the tribe’s chief, and from that day on, fire-making was considered the greatest skill in the tribe.”

Surely, now that I’ve made a fire, I could be a chief too. I feel like the chief of my own special tribe, just me and Dog. Dog dries his damp fur in the tiny fire’s heat, and I warm my tingling fingers and toes, singing.

*“Now the fire needs to eat,
Logs and branches bring the heat.”*

Soon the flames lick higher and higher,

That's the way to make a fire."

To keep the fire going, I'm supposed to get a big log and throw it on top! Unfortunately, by the time I find a log, it's too late – the fire is out. I grab more grass, twirl and blow, but I just can't get the fire started again.

"It doesn't matter, though, Dog," I say, forcing a smile. "My arms are warm from all the twirling, anyway. How does Bent Tree makes it look so easy?"

That night, I can hardly sleep. Every wind whistle and leaf crunch makes me jump.

I stare at the painted animals crossing the cave roof. They're running from something, but the paint has flaked off so I can't make out what. All I can tell is that it is a terrible, hungry beast. I think of the discarded bones scattered in the darkness of the cave. Who left them there? What left them there? When I drift off at last, I dream dark, scary dreams.

I'm in a crowd of deer and we're running. No matter how hard I run, I can't keep up. Deer hooves thunder around me. I'm going to be caught. Overhead,

the sun glows evil red.

I wake up shaking. Why am I here, in this cave, alone? Did the Sky Spirits lead me here? Was the red sun an omen for me? A warning? I should never have complained about plucking feathers.

No matter how much I turn and wriggle, I just cannot get back to sleep, so as soon as the first tinge of light leaks in the cave, I'm up. "Come on, Dog. Long way to go." I take one last look at the pile of bones. Then, I shudder all over and scramble outside. As the orange sun climbs up into the sky, Dog and I begin to walk. Before long, the steep hill turns into a shallow slope and Dog pricks up his ears.

"What is it, Dog?" I ask. We creep further into the trees and soon, I hear it, too. It's not just one sound, but lots jumbled together: voices and animals, crackling fires and snapping wood. My mouth hangs open. "Do you think it's our tribe?" Dog grins at me, his eyes shining.

We walk, as soft as a whisper, towards the noise. My chest bubbles with hope as the noise grows louder and louder. Dog stops suddenly. He turns to me and whines pitifully.

“I think you’re right,” I sigh. “Our tribe isn’t big enough to make that much noise. But we should check, just in case.”

The trees begin to thin. Peering from the safety of the bushes, I see tall, wooden posts sticking out from the forest floor. They aren’t trees; they look as if they’ve been put there on purpose.

In the clearing beyond, people sit by fires and outside tents... but these are not like tents that I’ve ever seen before. They don’t look at all easy to move; they’re much too big. They are built in a peculiar, pointed shape. Instead of animal skins, the walls are made from mud and wood. The roofs are different too; these are covered in sticks and twigs. Surely these people cannot move these structures to a new place. There are tracks in the grass as if many feet have walked the same paths between the tents, again and again. They must have been here for a long time...

There are patches of dug earth beside the structures, sprouting with plants. I see women and younger children picking from these plants. One of the women is putting some of the plant back onto the soil. Why are these gatherers able to collect food so close to home? It’s like this tribe decided that instead of looking for

food, they would get all of the food that they needed and put it all in one place.

Near to these strange, dug-up areas of land are patches of grass covered with animals. The animals are blocked into this space with wooden posts. I watch as one girl, not much older than me, chases a group of sheep into an area. She counts them as they run in. Her dog races around the clearing, chasing the last of the sheep inside.

How did this tribe manage to round up so many sheep? I wonder if I could steal one without them noticing. I wouldn't mind some tasty mutton for supper. Just as my stomach grumbles loudly, I see the girl grabbing a handful of grain and giving it to one of the smallest sheep. What is she doing? Why are the animals getting *her* food? I watch on in horror as the sheep happily munches away. Perhaps *this* is why the animals stay so close.

Near the fire,  men push a colossal cow carcass, which is lying on top of  or  thick, straight, stripped branches. It moves easily as the branches roll smoothly underneath it and the men take it in turns to replace the log at the front. Imagine that – a huge cow that you could push around as though it were

lighter than a feather!

I look around at the strange tribe and study their sturdy walls, sheep behind posts and unmoving tents. I wonder whether I'd be allowed to collect sheep. I wonder whether I could build thick walls. I wonder what it would be like to not have to walk everywhere to find food.

I have to find my tribe. "Come on, Dog. We won't find our tribe by sitting here."

Dog yips in agreement, and we sneak away into the forest.



Whack, Hack, Bone Broth

At last, we reach the Pig Lick River. As we get close to the bank, I grab Dog by his neck scruff and we crouch. We mustn't just walk up to the riverbank; it is crucial that we check the area first. At least, that is what I've heard Vulture say when he talks about his hunts. I peer through the bushes, looking for pigs – I would give anything to suck the marrow from a pig bone right now. The river is deserted.

"Still, there are days of the Pig Lick left to walk," I tell Dog. "We're bound to come across a pig eventually,

and when we do: *whack, hack, bone broth!*”

Upon seeing the deserted riverbank, Dog whines and wriggles in my hands. I let him go and follow him as he bounds from the bushes, straight into the water. Spray soaks me all over. I’m dripping from head to toe. Dog paddles in a circle in the middle of the river, then looks back at me encouragingly.

Well, I’m wet and muddy anyway... and I suppose I should try to get the mud and splinters out of my skin... I run, jump, tuck my knees up and – *SPLASH!*

Dog and I play lots of games in the river. First, we play ‘Who can catch a fish first?’. As neither one of us catches even one fish, we move on to play ‘Who looks more like a frog?’. Despite my best efforts, Dog wins easily by making his eyes boggle and his mouth squelch out sideways. After that, we play ‘Who is the scariest bog monster?’. It’s a close thing, because Dog decides to roll in the mud. I give myself green pondweed hair and creepy stone eyes and I roar so loudly that Dog splashes all the way to the bank, so in the end I’m the winner. I throw my pebble eyes into the river and Dog chases after them.

“Hey, Dog, bet you can’t do this,” I say. I pull my

knees up to my chest and flip forwards like a mushroom, holding my breath for as long as I can.

I need to breathe, so I flip my head up. Dog gives me a look as if to say, "So what? Bet you can't do this." He dives down into the water. The last thing I see is his flicking tail.

I wait. And wait. And wait.

Dog bursts out carrying a huge stone in his mouth.

"Clever Dog," I say, taking the stone from his mouth. This looks like the sort that Dad would use to make spearheads and scrapers. That gives me an idea!

We swim to the riverbank and I fling myself down. Since the tribe do not seem to be showing up any time soon, I might as well prepare myself a little more. Dog spits the stone onto the mossy ground and nudges it towards me. "I'm going to make a hand axe." I grab the stone. Dog yips and bounces around. If I'm excited, he's excited.

I pick up a rock, rest the stone retrieved by Dog on my knee, and *WHACK*. A flake chips off. Preparing myself for a long, possibly painful process, I cover

my knees with my pelt. *Whack, whack, whack.* Flakes fly in all directions. This is much more fun than plucking feathers.

No one ever showed me how to make an axe. I learnt just by watching. Time and time again, when I saw my dad crafting tools for the tribe, I would watch over his shoulder and try to mimic what he did. That makes me pretty smart.

Dog chases the flying flakes, then he leaps back into the water. He dives and soon swims back with another stone. By the time I've shaped my axe into a teardrop with a sharp edge all the way round, Dog has collected a whole pile of stones.

"Thanks, Dog," I say, scratching his ears, "but I don't have time to make another axe. We have to get ready to go hunting." I know that a hand axe probably isn't the best choice of hunting tool, but all of the older tribe members have one. If I have a hand axe, I can just about do or make anything that I need. Grabbing my new tool and my dry deerskins, I stand up and scan the horizon.

"Come on. Let's hunt a tasty pig."

I tuck my new, slightly wonky axe into my goatskin leggings and leap back into the river, keeping my head above the water. The sun is lower now, and the water is skin-bumpy cold, but I swim hard to the other side.

The bank is muddy and churned up from passing pigs. I walk around with my nose to the ground, just like Dog, until I spot large trotter prints in the mud. "This way," I whisper. Dog follows me, sniffing and wagging his tail.

I fish out my hand axe and lead Dog stealthily through the bushes and into the darkness of the forest. We trek with silent footsteps, following clues: muddy tracks here, droppings there; tufty, half-eaten plants all over the place... but no pigs. We walk and walk until we realise that we are going round in circles. I yawn and my belly gurgles. I can't decide whether I'm more tired or more hungry.

Suddenly, Dog smells something interesting and scampers off. I follow. Maybe this is it – pig for dinner! When we finally reach the clearing, I see a rat scuttle into a hole beneath a tree, too fast to catch.

"It's not as tasty as pig, but it would have been something," I sigh. The sky has transformed into a

dusky orange – the sun is going to set soon. “Let’s find somewhere to sleep for the night, Dog. We might have to sleep up a tree, like some elders in the tribe do when they go on long hunts.”

Then, we hear it: a snuffling, rustling, scratching sound. It’s coming from the bushes nearby.

“What’s that, Dog?” I whisper. “Tasty pig?” His ears twitch and swivel. Then, he howls.

“No, be quiet, Dog,” I hiss. “You’ll scare it off.” I crouch down and rub Dog’s ears until he’s quiet. “We have to follow the sound.” Just then, I hear a rustle again. “This way.” I creep towards the noise. Dog looks at me worriedly, his tail hanging between his legs.

“What is there to be scared of? You’re the best hunter in the pack, Dog. Now, come on.” I drag him by the scruff of his neck into the shadowy bushes.

Snuffle, snuffle, crack. We tiptoe after the noisy pig. *Snap, snap, crunch.* It’s getting louder and louder. This sounds like a big one. *Snap, snap, crunch.* Closer and closer. *Sniff, crackle, snap, crunch.*

I raise my hand axe. A shiver zig-zags down my spine.

A nervous whine streams from Dog's mouth. Slowly, so as not to disturb the pig, I push aside the ferns in front of us.

That is when I see it. It is not a pig at all – it is a bear!



I Have a Cunning Plan

The bear stares right at us.

He narrows his small, black eyes and grins. I see rows of glinting white teeth, as sharp as arrowheads. We are dead.

I scream. Dog growls. The bear roars. Then, I run.

I speed through the forest, stamping down sticks, snapping off twigs, and scraping on thorns. Dog is behind me, beside me, ahead of me. I force my way

through the thick forest, not daring to look back.

An earth-shattering roar erupts right behind me. The ground trembles. The bear is gaining on me. His hot breath brushes the back of my neck. It stinks of rot and rage. He wants to eat me for dinner.

I look left, then right. Perhaps I can climb up a tree, but if I'm not quick, the bear will pull me down and have me for supper. The blue water gurgles and glitters to one side of me. That's it – the river!

“This way, Dog!” I bellow, and we dart through the bushes. My breath rips in and out of me. My chest thumps harder than ever before. My legs are on fire. My whole body feels like it could explode. The bear's heavy footsteps pound behind us.

Thrusting my hand axe into my furs, I plunge into the freezing river, followed almost immediately by Dog. I fling my arms and churn my legs. Desperately, I try to pull my body through the raging river.

I hear an almighty splash and an enormous wave crashes over me. My whole body is dragged underwater. Hauling myself back towards the surface, I gasp as my head breaks into cold, fresh air. I choke and splutter

out the freezing water. One panicked glance behind me is enough: the bear is in the river.

His mighty limbs carve through the water. His piercing black eyes are transfixed on me. His sharp white teeth continue to glisten dangerously. I'd forgotten that bears can swim.

Dog scrambles out on the other side of the river. My legs pump and my heart thumps as I squelch onto the muddy riverbank. I clamber clumsily to my feet. My exhausted legs tremble. I look back and see that the bear is close behind, gaining on us. I can't outrun him. If I can't escape, I'll have to fight. I dig out my axe and clutch it. The edge bites my skin. I feel almost dizzy. Any second, I'll have to turn and fight.

The river bends up ahead. Dog leans into the bend and I skid after him. The light of the setting sun hits me in the face. I can't see a thing! I hear the river rush and gush. I shade my eyes with my hand, and that's when I see the waterfall.

Just ahead, the Pig Lick River falls over a ledge onto jagged rocks. The edge is lost in clouds of mist. Water glitters on the rocks, like a spell to lure the unwary. If I fall over that, I'm dead for definite.

Dog yaps, and sprints along the ledge-top. I twist in his direction, but the ground is wet and my foot slides out from under me. I land on the mud, hard.

My knees are sore, my hands are blistered and my ankle is throbbing. But I have a bigger problem: a problem with huge, curved claws and blood-stained teeth. I look up. The bear's small eyes shine with malice. He towers over me like a huge cliff. The bear gives a smug shake and his brown fur ripples.

He leaps. His jaws hang open and strings of drool dangle from his teeth. Just as his foul breath hits me, I tuck my knees to my chest and roll. The bear misses me by a hair and lands with a squelch. He slides on the wet ground and I spot the look of confusion on his face, as his back feet threaten to slip over the rocky ledge.

I have a cunning plan. When the elders go hunting, they kill deer by chasing them over cliff edges. Somehow, I have to trick the bear into falling down the waterfall.

“Dog!” I yell, and I do the special hunting whistle.

As Dog runs closer, the bear crouches, ready to spring. I stand on the riverbank, knees bent, axe ready. Ready to do what, I'm not quite sure. My tiny, misshapen

stone can't hurt a bear! Energy races through my body. The bear leaps. I twist to the side and he misses me by a hair. He turns to glare and growls indignantly. I take a few steps back towards edge of the waterfall. Cold mist sprinkles onto my skin. I'm balanced on the edge of a deathly drop. My chest is tight and my head feels so light, it could float away like a cloud.

Then, Dog is there, lean and quick as a darting fish. Dog races round the bear. The bear is distracted and lumbers after him. Dog chases round and round in circles, and the bear follows. Just watching makes me dizzy. Then, Dog runs and leaps over to me, his pink tongue dangling from his panting mouth, and the bear stumbles after him. This is it. I can't mess this up, or it won't be the bear tumbling down into a smushy gloop on the rocks below – it'll be me.

The bear is so close, it could almost grab Dog's tail and swing him in the air. Just as Dog reaches me, he swerves. The bear lunges at me, his deadly teeth bared, powerful claws out.

I dive sideways. My ribs crash onto the rocks and the breath is knocked from me. A shadow flies overhead. I look up –

The bear tumbles over the ledge into the misty waterfall. It feels like an age before anything happens.

I hear a thud. Then, nothing. It's over.

I flop back onto the cool rock. "Woohooooo!" I yell at the sky. Dog joins in howling. "I'm alive! We're both alive! Alive, alive, alive."

I peer over the rocky edge. Through the mist, I can just make out the brown bear lying far below. I just killed a bear. Me. Bee. With only a bit of help from Dog.

No one's going to make me pluck feathers all day after *this*.



It's not easy to reach the bottom of the waterfall. There's a sloping path down, but it's on the other side of the Pig Lick River. I wade across and climb up the opposite bank with my teeth chattering. Dog and I clamber and slide down the uneven rocks to the base of the waterfall. The bear didn't fall into the water, he landed on the rocks – the rocks on the opposite bank. Once again, we have to swim across.

Dog yawns his biggest yawn. I sigh my biggest sigh. "Just one more crossing, Dog," I reassure him.

I lead the way downstream to where the water is rushing less. On the shore, I take a deep breath, then I plunge into the water. My bones feel like ice. Quickly, I push forward, afraid that I'll be frozen solid any moment. When I reach the opposite bank, I clamber out of the river, shaking all over. I don't think that I'll ever be warm again.

The first thing that I'm going to do is make a fire. I collect dry grass and twigs and a few big branches. I whack the branches with my axe. My hands are so sore but I know that I need to get wood if I'm going to be warm tonight. I hack at some of the thinner branches and soon enough, they're all roughly chopped into fire-sized pieces. I carry my freshly cut wood pile near to where the bear lies on the rocks. Fire will scare away any scavengers that come sniffing in the middle of the night, trying to eat my bear.

For the second time in my life, I attempt to start a fire. I twirl a sharp stick on a split branch and begin Dad's song.

*“Twirl the stick between your palms,
Never mind your aching arms,
Till the smoke curls higher and higher,
That’s the way to make a fire.”*

Maybe the Sky Spirits think that I’ve earned a favour, or maybe I’m getting the hang of it, but the fire lights much quicker than before – and it doesn’t disappear! Soon enough, it’s blazing.

The bear is a little bit smushed up from his fall, but there’s plenty of delicious meat on him. It takes a few swipes, but somehow I manage to hack off some strips of meat for myself and Dog. I take the hunks of meat and roast them on hot stones at the edge of the fire.

“Bear meat had better be more delicious than pig meat,” I say impatiently, as Dog tucks into his portion. I wait for mine to brown a little more before I spear the roasting meat with a sharp stick and take a nibble. It. Tastes. Amazing.

Maybe it’s just that I’m utterly tired and hungry, maybe it’s because I nearly died today, but this meat

tastes better than anything I've ever eaten in my entire life. When I'm full, I curl up next to Dog. I've got a full belly, a blazing fire and a swelling sense of pride. I killed a bear today. There's just one problem and I begin to deflate just thinking about it. I miss my tribe, and most of all, I miss my dad.

That night, I dream.

I'm lying beside a fire. Beside me sits the bear, reshaping my axe with a stone. "Lie still, human," he says. "This won't hurt a bit. Well" – he stops to inspect his axe – "it won't hurt me a bit." The bear chortles and I try to wriggle away but I can't. The bear guffaws; I try to scream for help. The bear roars with laughter, showing his huge, curved teeth, and –

I wake up, gasping. Above me, friendly stars twinkle. Dog snores beside me and the fire crackles. On the other side of the fire is a lifeless, lumpy shape. The bear can't get me, because I got it first. Still, I wish Dad were here, just in case. I add another log to the fire, snuggle up to Dog and slip back to sleep. Again, I dream, but this time it's totally different.

I stride towards the Rock of the Long Sun. The midsummer sun is setting between the pillars. The

tribe are waiting for me in their masks and best furs. They stare. They can't stop staring. Snore of the Rat's mouth hangs open, and even Bent Tree's eyes go all goggly. I wonder if I've forgotten to put my clothes on, and look down. I see that I'm dressed in bristling bear fur. Something heavy weighs down on my head. I lift whatever it is off. It's a bear skull.

The whole tribe cheers. The elders do the Dance of the Dizzying Dog, and sing the Song of Bee who Slew the Bear. For once, they let me join in!

I wake up at sunrise with a plan.



Sing a Song to Skin a Bear

Most of the bear's fur is in one piece. The fur is thick and glitters with spray from the waterfall. I clamber onto the rocks and try to find a good angle to skin it from, but it's going to be difficult. It would be better to get the bear onto flat ground.

I grab the beast's forepaw in one hand and heave. The bear is oddly stiff. It doesn't budge.

"No one told me that bears were this heavy," I complain to Dog, who is busy sniffing at the bear's oozing guts.

I sigh and grab both of the bear's big, furry paws. I brace my feet against the rocks and heave with all my might. The bear shifts a finger-length.

"Dog," I call. "Come and help."

Dog trots over. He takes one paw in his mouth and I take the other in both hands. We pull and pull until I'm dripping with sweat and Dog is panting hard. The bear is hanging over the edge of the rocks but if we pull any more, we might both melt into puddles.

"Raaargh! Just move!" I yell in frustration at the lifeless heap. Exhausted and annoyed, I throw the bear's paw to the floor and kick out at a nearby log. If only I had some of those rolling logs that the other tribe had. When I get back to the tribe, I'm going to tell them all about it. For now, it looks like the bear is staying where it is.

I pick up my hand axe and try to reshape the edge. It's going to need to be really sharp. After this, I test the fresh edge.

"Ow!" I wince as blood leaks from the cut. I suck my thumb clean and get to work on the bearskin.

“Peeling off the tough bearskin,

Tough bearskin, tough bearskin,

Peel it so it’s neat and thin,

Peeling off the skin!”

I sing Dad’s song. It makes me feel safer singing his songs; it feels as though he is with me and Dog, helping us with our mission. Some of the elders could get this skin off in one piece, from neck to tail. But the hide is heavy and much thicker than I thought it would be. Peeling it off is difficult and takes much longer than I thought it would. Without a plan or any kind of experience, all I can manage is a rough sort of square shape. It doesn’t matter, though. I imagine myself strutting into camp wearing my bearskin and spinning on the spot for effect.

Eventually, my arms ache so much that I can hardly bend my fingers. When I look at my palms, they are red and covered in fresh blisters. Even my hand axe looks tired. I decide to stop for food. Dog and I share some more of the juicy bear meat. Once again, I cook some meat for me on the stones beside the dwindling fire, but Dog grabs a full bone and chews the meat off raw.

“You’d like it better cooked,” I tell him, but he growls and drags his dinner into the forest so that I don’t take it from him.

When I’m done eating, I finish peeling and put the misshapen bearskin on the ground, fur-side-down. I grab my axe and begin chipping away at the tool. After several forceful hits, a chip, no longer than my little finger, flicks onto the ground. Picking it up carefully, I begin to scrape. I scrape and scrape until all of the sticky bear goo is gone.

“Scraping off the meaty goo,

Meaty goo, meaty goo,

Scrape it so it’s dry and smooth,

Scraping off the goo!”

I scrape off the fatty bits and the muscly bits. I scrape and scrape and scrape until there’s just the skin left – well, mostly skin left. My arms are covered in slime and my fingernails are all gunked up. I lick my fingers clean, then dip my arms into the cool river. The water soothes my aching hands.

It takes a long time to separate the bear's head from the rest of the body. Dog did his best to help, but I still had to reshape my axe $\pi\pi$ times. The skull makes a handy bowl to mix up the brains in. I add water and churn the brains around and around with a stick until they've turned to mush. Then, I pull out handfuls of brain gloop and rub it all over the bearskin.

"Rubbing in the gloopy brain,

Gloopy brain, gloopy brain,

Rub the leather soft again,

Rubbing in the brain!"

I do every step exactly the way that Dad does it. In fact, I'm probably doing it better than Dad. I'm rubbing so hard that my hands and arms feel tingly. I'm sure that Dad never does that. I drag the skin to the river and weigh it down with stones. Dog trots over with the leg bone that he licked clean, so I throw it for him to chase after, while I wait for the brains to wash off.

Dog is really clever. I've trained him to do loads of tricks, like: if I swish my finger, he spins around in three circles; if I throw a stick really high, he does a

backflip in the air (he never catches the stick though); and if I say, "Achoo!" he stands up on his hind legs and walks about like a man with a big belly. Once, he accidentally did this trick when my Dad was watching. Vulture shouted "Achoo!" from close by and Dog, who's a good dog, rose straight up onto his back feet. I had to grab his paws quickly and pretend that we were dancing together so that Dad didn't notice. Which he didn't. Probably.

At last, the brains have washed off the bearskin and are floating away down the river. I pick up the skin and squeeze out as much water as I can on the riverbank. Next, I wrap the skin around a narrow tree trunk and tie it in a loop. I find a nice, long branch and stick it through the loop. I turn the stick so that the skin twists round and round.

"Twisting up the soggy hide,

Soggy hide, soggy hide,

Twist it long and twist it wide,

Twisting up the hide!"

It's important to work the leather, otherwise it goes stiff, which is only good for water carriers and drums. I don't want a drum. I can picture me in jagged, brown fur, striding towards the Rock of the Long Sun. The tribe elders gasp and fall to their knees. I'm like a god to them!

I pull myself back to the real world. There's one more thing to do before the bearskin is ready.

I let the logs on the fire burn red hot – redder than the sun was on the day the bad omen came. Then, I throw green branches on the fire. They smoke like angry spirits. Dog whines and runs from the billowing cloud, his bare leg bone between his teeth.

The smoke stings my eyes and fills my nose, but I don't care. I stick four strong branches in the ground around the fire and stretch the skin between them, fur-side-up. It's important to smoke the pelt or if it gets wet, it will go stiff. Good thing Dad smoked my clothes. After all that swimming, I'd have rock-hard pants!

“Smoking wood to cure the pelt,

Cure the pelt, cure the pelt,

Smoke it but don't let it melt,

Smoke to cure the pelt!"

While the skin is being smoked, I scrape all the gunk off the bear skull. Then, I wash the skull in the river.

Suddenly, I remember the cave that Dog and I slept in yesterday. I picture the human skull and the paintings running across the walls, fleeing a toothy beast. Were the animals running from a bear? Was it a bear who crunched up the bones and left them there?

Well, no one needs to be afraid of the silly bear any more. Thanks to me.

Dog has stopped sulking about the smoke. He trots over and drops his leg bone beside me. I throw it up high, again and again. Dog does one backflip, then one half-backflip, then one belly flop.

"It's like you're not even trying, Dog!" I say, and he yaps and yaps and yaps. He can't help himself.

Then, we skip round in a circle doing the Procession of the Achey Arms, and singing the Bearskinning Song.

Sing a Song to Skin a Bear

“Sing a song to skin a bear,

Skin a bear, skin a bear,

Make a fluffy coat to wear,

Sing to skin a bear!”



Bee, Slayer of Bears

The Pig Lick River is really long and pointlessly windy. Nevertheless, we have to follow it because it is the only way I know to get to the Rock of the Long Sun and meet up with the tribe.

On the first day, I wear my bearskin and mask all day, like a chief. If there are any more cave bears lurking nearby, they'll run in fear when they see me. I am Bee, Slayer of Bears.

On the second day, the sun is so hot that I almost

melt inside the bear fur. Not to mention that the pelt is starting to smell funny. I take it off, but the strange smell hangs about like a hungry dog.

On the third day, I spot a tree that I recognise. “Now, Dog, see this tree here, with a trunk as wide as Achoo’s belly?” I cross my arms and pull my mouth down at the corners, just like Snore of the Rat. “This tree means that we must follow the river until nightfall, wait for a crow to fly overhead, twirl in a circle, do a handstand, then head west until we see the Rock of the Long Sun,” I say in Rat’s show-off voice.

“Yip,” says Dog, like he understands perfectly.

“Let us proceed,” I say, still mimicking Rat’s voice, and I march along the river, bouncing on my toes and swinging my arms, just like he does.

When night falls and we settle down, I stare upwards, waiting for a crow to fly overhead, but I can’t really see anything because the sky is so dark. Eventually, I fall asleep against a tree. Dog snuggles under my bear fur, so we’re totally toasty warm.

In the morning, I wake to cawing. I look up and catch a bird disappearing over the treetops.

“That was probably a crow,” I say. Dog gives me a questioning look. “Well, it might not have been. I just made the crow bit up, really.” I twirl around in a circle and Dog does too. Then, I do a handstand against the tree and I stay up for ages. With any luck, a good idea will fall right out of my head. It doesn’t. The only reason I fall down is because Dog licks my armpit and it tickles.

“Dog!” I laugh, wiping off the slobber.

We set off west anyway, walking away from the rising sun. We can’t be far from the Rock of the Long Sun. I keep expecting to see Knotted Mane picking berries, or hear Dad singing one of his songs. I smile to myself. What I wouldn’t give to hear Dad singing one of his songs again. I wish that I could watch him and Vulture playing their instruments. I wish that I could listen to Bent Tree’s stories. Astonishingly, I even wish that I could hear Rat’s irritating whine of a voice.

I’m busy imagining, and I don’t notice that I’m walking uphill or that the trees are disappearing. I walk right into the Rock of the Long Sun and smack my nose.

“Ow!” I say, and I hold my nose until it stops hurting.

The tribe are nowhere to be seen.

“They must be going the long way,” I tell Dog. He looks unconvinced. “Come on, let’s do the Ritual.”

Even though I’m not allowed to join in with the Midsummer Ritual, I have my own ritual that I always do when we first reach the Rock of the Long Sun. I stand under the heavy roof stone, brace my hands against it, bend my knees and heave.

I push and push. The roof doesn’t move. One day, I’m going to be strong enough to lift it, but not yet. Dad says that it’s impossible – even he can’t do it. But that doesn’t make sense, because if it’s true, how did our ancestors get the stone up there in the first place?

I wish that Dad was here now.

For a while, I keep watch on the hill, but I don’t see the tribe. I fetch water from the river to drink. I start a fire after only one attempt. I roast the last of the bear meat that I could carry and serve it with earwigs and leaves for extra crunch. I have a full belly, a blazing sun, a toasty fire and my warm, smelly Dog at my side. I’m getting used to looking after myself. Maybe I don’t need the tribe, after all.

However, as night falls and I curl up under my fur

with Dog, scary thoughts start to swim around my head. Thoughts like: what if the red sun we saw was an omen that the tribe was in danger? What if danger found them? What if they got swept away by a river, or fell over a cliff, or eaten by bears that they weren't brave or strong or clever enough to fight off, like I was? I should be with them. I could help!

I try to spear the thoughts like fish so that they won't bother me, but they keep slipping away. I lie awake with my thoughts swimming and splashing. After all, it's nearly midsummer. Nothing keeps the tribe from the Rock of the Long Sun on Midsummer Night.

In the morning, I am still tired. I'm so tired that I don't hear the footsteps at first – not until Dog starts to jump and yap. I look where he's looking, and then I see them – my tribe!

Dog's ready to leap out and lick everyone, but something stops me. I grab the scruff of Dog's neck while I try to work out what's wrong. Then it hits me: I can't see Dad.

Snore of the Rat walks at the front. He swings his arms and bounces on his toes. "See?" he says smugly. "Not far from the Frog Face Stone, just like I said."

Quietly, the rest of the tribe follow. Bent Tree hobbles slowly behind him on her gnarled walking staff, her eyes fixed to the floor. Knotted Mane follows with a basket of berries; today, I cannot see juice around her mouth. Tumbling Pebble glumly leads the dogs, who are dragging the tribe's tent. Then, the rest of the elders follow, carrying pots, axes, bows and arrows. My stomach drops. Where is he? Where is my dad?

Breath of the Vulture walks behind the elders. He looks tired – almost as though he hasn't slept or eaten in days. He glances behind him and waits. There he is: my dad! My fingers and toes tingle with relief. His eyes, like Bent Tree's, are fixed to the floor and he is dragging his feet. My dad isn't the sort of dad who acts like a baby. What's he playing at?

As the tribe reach the Rock of the Long Sun, I see my dad lift his head. I thought that Vulture looked tired, but my dad looks exhausted! His eyes are all red and have dark circles under them. "Where is she?" he sighs. "Where is my little Bee?" I think that he's being a bit melodramatic. I can clearly look after myself!

Vulture pats Dad's shoulders gently as he lowers himself onto the ground. "There, there, Achoo. I'm sure we'll find Bee soon."

Rat rolls his eyes and snorts. “Not likely. We’ve searched everywhere.” Bent Tree glares at him, which shuts Rat up pretty quickly.

I’m about to blow their minds. I pull on my bear fur and skull mask and stand up tall. I stride out from the trees towards the tribe.

“Well, not quite everywhere,” I declare.

They see me. Snore of the Rat’s mouth hangs open. Bent Tree’s eyes go goggly. Vulture pokes my dad with his foot. As he turns, he sees me. His whole face seems to lighten and his eyes sparkle.

Dad leaps to his feet, then he howls just like Dog and runs towards me. He picks me up in his giant arms and spins me round so fast that my skull mask flies off and lands in Knotted Mane’s fruit basket. Juice goes everywhere. I’m giggling and I can’t help myself.

“I thought... we all thought that... you were dead,” says Dad.

“Well, I *nearly* got eaten by a bear, but luckily I killed it first,” I explain. “I skinned it, too.”

“You killed and skinned a *bear*?” says Dad. His mouth is so wide, he could nearly swallow a horse liver whole. He places me back down and stares at me. He sees my beautiful bear fur and my majestic skull headdress. His chest swells with pride and his eyes shimmer. Then, he bursts into song.

“Sing a song of fearless Bee,

Fearless Bee, fearless Bee,

She’s as brave as she can be,

Sing a song of Bee!”

Then, everyone in the tribe is dancing and singing and swinging each other in circles. Dog is busy chasing his own tail.

After that, no one can stop asking me questions. I tell them all about how I fell into the passage in the rocks, how I slept in a cave and how I made my own axe.

“And I saw something really strange. It was a tribe, but they had tents that didn’t move, and they’d built walls out of mud, and they had whole herds of animals! Just living, right there with them!” Bent Tree and Dad

share a look. I carry on with my story, though. I am at the most exciting bit: the story of how I slew the bear.

“He was coming right at me with this horrible grin on his face –”

“Bears can’t grin,” Rat interrupts, but everyone shushes him.

“– and at the last minute, I dived to the side and, *whoosh, smack*, he flew over the cliff and hit the rocks below.”

Everyone gasps, except Rat, of course.

“Then, I waited by the Rock of the Long Sun until you all arrived. I thought you were never coming!”

“We were busy looking for you,” says Dad, ruffling my hair. “At least we know what the omen meant, now.”

“We do?”

“The red sun was a warning not to take our little Bee for granted,” explains Bent Tree.

“Hey! I’m not little.”

“Not anymore,” says Vulture. “Before we know it, you’ll be as big and strong as me.” He flexes his arm. It bulges so much, I half expect it to pop.

Bent Tree thumps her staff on the ground. “Your story, Bee, is one that our children will be retelling for years and years. We must learn from it. We almost lost an irreplaceable member of our tribe.” I blush and have to suppress a smirk as Rat scowls. “Moving from place to place has been our way of life for many years, but if we want to survive, it is important that something changes. So, I, along with the other elders, have made a decision. We cannot lose people from our tribe. We must settle.”

“Settle?” I ask.

“Building houses,” grins Tumbling Pebble, “like the tribe that you saw.”

“Growing fruits,” sighs Knotted Mane.

“Keeping animals of our own,” Dad says, stroking his goatskin tunic.

“And staying in one place,” spits Rat. I can’t help but smile at this. Rat’s navigation skills aren’t going to be so useful if we’re going to stay in one place.

“All of the modern, forward-thinking tribes are doing it,” says Vulture.

“And where better than beside the Rock of the Long Sun?” says Dad. “There’s open space, a river nearby, plenty of pigs to eat.”

“We could even make the Rock of the Long Sun bigger!” Vulture cries.

Bent Tree gasps. “The Rock! The Ritual! The sun is setting, and it’s Midsummer Night!”

Suddenly, everyone is busy. Bent Tree begins to start a fire. The elders put on their masks. Dad and Vulture find their instruments. The tribe gathers in a circle around the Rock of the Long Sun. I hang back at the edge of the trees, teaching Dog a new trick.

“Come on, Bee,” says Bent Tree. “Are you joining us?”

I look up the hill. The whole tribe stand there in their best furs and masks. The only person missing is me.

“Yes, join us, Bee,” says Vulture.

“Get up here, and bring that mask of yours,” adds

Knotted Mane.

Soon, everyone is begging me.

“Oh, all right then,” I say, like it’s no big deal. I pull my bear fur tight around my shoulders and balance the bear skull on my head. As I walk up the hill, my insides are buzzing like a beehive. This is it. I’ve proven myself.

Dad says, “I suppose you want to change your name to something scary, now, like Glistening Claw? You did skin a bear single-handed.”

“Dad, it’s not our names that make us who we are,” I say firmly. “It’s our actions.”

Dad nods, smiling. He does a drum roll as he announces, “The Song of Bee, Slayer of Bears!” The tribe cheers.

As the sun sets, we stamp our feet and wave our arms. After the Song of Bee, we do the Dance of Digging the Earth and the Procession of Fencing a Field. We leap and yodel, clap and twirl.

We don’t stop until the sun rises again on Midsummer morning.





“It is not our names that make us who we are, Bee. It is our actions.”

Bee is the youngest in her Stone Age tribe, and she hates it. While the elders get to hunt, skin animals and perform rituals, Bee has to watch from the shadows with only the company of her dog, Dog. One day, an omen appears: a red sun which warns of great danger. That night, a fearsome storm strikes and, in the chaos, Bee and Dog are lost in the wilderness.

Bee must face danger head on, finding food, seeking shelter, and even fighting a bear, if she ever hopes to see her tribe again...

