

Prologue

There has always been the wind.

Since our planet began to turn, there has been the wind. This ball of dirt and fire and water started to spin. The air stirred. And Earth's time began.

But the beginnings of the wind are lost in the mists of time. The wind blew before the Appian Way wended through Rome. It blew before the Parthenon crowned Athens. Before pyramids sprang up in Egypt.

Before the Mayans. Before the Incas.

Before Man.

Chapter 1

On current evidence, the Neanderthals lived between about 230,000 and 30,000 years ago--a huge span of time by any reckoning.

In Search of the Neanderthals Christopher Stringer and Clive Gamble, p. 7

The wind picked up speed over the surface of the ice. It blasted downward off the edge of the frozen field, past tangled masses of spruce and pine uprooted by the relentless, inevitable, insatiable progress of the ice mass. It soared over moraines deposited by the glaciers of the last Time of Great Ice.

A new Ice Age was coming. The wind blew change across the land, howled across a smooth plain criss-crossed by small streams, tore through the forest. It gathered strength, came to an open place, and whipped around a small band of about twenty-five hominids. They gathered around their community fire, singing and telling their history, as they did most nights in order that the young ones might learn it and the elders might not forget.

The song of the tribe lifted to Dakadaga, the Spirit of Mother Sky. The Spirit's many eyes shone down on the tribe, some of her eyes twinkling, perhaps because they were about to fall across the sky in fast, bright streaks.

The wind swept past Enga Dancing Flower. A gust riffled her long, coppery-colored hair and made her glad of the bearskin cape covering her back and shoulders. A

low rumble came from her gut, the sound joining the whine of the wind. She had not gotten enough to eat for several days.

The fire, burning in the shelter of the huts, defended Enga and her tribe from the worst of the wind's assault. But the seasons were turning, as she knew they always did, and the cold, dark one approached, no matter how well tended and warm the fire.

The song had been sung, the Saga had been told. Hama, the Most High Female and leader of the Hamapa tribe, stirred and all eyes turned toward her. Hama's long, thick braid, gray with age, caught glints from the firelight and swung across her back as she stood.

"Hoody! Vav Hama." Hama spoke aloud, entreating the Spirits so they would hear and heed her as she made a rare Official Pronouncement.

The tribe heard the sounds that meant, "Listen! The Most High Female Speaks."

She continued: "The Hamapa tribe cannot stay here. We must leave our home, our beautiful village. The great beasts are no longer here in great numbers. In the Seed Season we will move."

Enga felt the stirrings of the brothers and sisters next to her. Such matters were usually discussed before they were announced. The idea of moving the tribe was something new. It had never happened in the memory of anyone living. The Hamapa had lived in this village for generations. Enga caught a vibrant wave of panic from Nanno Green Eyes and the muscles of her own stomach clenched.

Hama looked around for immediate dissent. When no one offered opposition, she finished. "Mother Spirit of the Sky, Dakadaga, bless the Hamapa." The leader then crouched on the stone between the other two Elders, facing the rest of them.

What would it be like to move a village? It was impossible to visualize. But it was true, little game had been killed recently and they were all hungry. Enga shook off her shock, realizing nothing had been said about the immediate future, about the next day. Enga jumped up and thought-spoke to all. *What about the hunt? Will we hold the hunt?*

Hama thought-spoke to answer her. *Yes, we will hunt at new sun as planned. And may all the Spirits bless the hunt so we will have enough food for the coming Dark Season. We will not move our village yet. The tribe will remain here now. When Dark Season is over, when warm weather returns, we will find another place to live.*

A thought came from the Storyteller, an old, bald male named Panan One Eye. *Our Sagas tell of the tribe relocating long, long ago. But we have dwelt here for many ages. Our village, built by the Ancient Ones, is a fine one. Could we build another village such as this?*

Yes, agreed Hama, the Ancient Ones built well. She ran her hand over one of the flat stones that had been fitted together so carefully to make the Paved Place, tiny gravel filling the spaces between the stones. *We can build another village. But first we have to survive the Dark Season. The times of sun are getting shorter and shorter. That season is almost here. And we need more meat. Much more meat.*

And if we have enough meat, there will be no need to move the village.

Hama skewered him with her look. *Panan One Eye, there will not be more game in the coming seasons than there has been in the recent ones. We will move.*

Hama rose again, rattled her hollow gourd, and called for the dance to begin.

Enga watched the dancers in the blaze of firelight and waited for a signal from Hama to join in. Chill evening air brushed her bare arms as she shivered and drew her

cape closer.

She kept one eye on Hama, their elected leader, who also watched the dancers whirl around the leaping fire. As the tallest female in the tribe Hama could easily watch over everyone and keep order.

Because of her position, she kept most of her thoughts from the others. The tribe depended so much on her, to lead them with strength and wisdom.

Enga Dancing Flower. The thought-speak came from Tog Flint Shaper. *I am happy that you and Ung Strong Arm and the others will hunt tomorrow. I will enjoy watching you.*

Hamapa scouts had recently spotted a large herd of mammoth at a nearby watering spot. Hama was too old now to wield a spear, but Enga and the other young, sturdy females could bring down the mammoth. They knew they must bring home a large one tomorrow. It had been many suns since their bellies had been full.

Hama shook her gourd toward the tools of the hunt, stone-tipped spears and flint knives, laid out around the fire burning in the center of the Paved Place, to point the weapons out to the Spirits for their blessings.

To the solemn beat of the hollow log, the dancers moved, at first, in a slow circle around the fire. Sannum Straight Hair, the drummer, maintained the rhythm, steady and stately. Soon, Hama bobbed her head at him and he quickened the beat. This dance had to catch the attention of the Spirits.

We are depending on you, Enga Dancing Flower, thought-spoke Hama. *I will put you into the dance soon. Prepare yourself to dance to Dakadaga, the Most High Spirit.*

A sudden disturbance erupted between two adolescent males. Enga and the others

perceived angry thought waves. She turned her gaze to Kung, a strong, strapping youth, who was standing over little Jeek, threat written in his dark glower.

Kung failed to funnel his thought-speak to Jeek and it radiated out to the others. *No female would prefer you, puny Jeek, to me, big Kung. I will show you that Gunda would rather be with me.*

Jeek scowled and shook his small fist in response, but kept his thoughts in check.

Enga thought Kung was developing a swagger that needed to be squelched, but Jeek was not the one to do it.

Kung's birth mother had died as he was being born. He had been nursed and babied by all the females, but had resisted attaching to anyone. Enga had heard he had been a hard baby to cuddle. Very squirmy. It was no wonder his adolescence was proving to be difficult.

Little Jeek, the son of the Healer, was a dreamer. Enga suspected his thoughts often strayed from where they should be. She funneled a private thought to Ung Strong Arm, her sister, *I am not certain Jeek always keeps the good of the tribe in his mind, but I know Kung does not.*

Ung sent back her agreement.

Hama quieted the squabble with a stern look and a cold thought. The tribe, Enga knew, could not afford dissension at most times, but especially not now.

The dance continued into the night. The males stomped their feet on the hard stones and the females twirled, flinging their hair to get the attention of the Spirits. They wore their best ceremonial finery; wolf and bear capes for the males, soft camel or brown bearskin capes for the females, all flaring with their spins. Their tresses, coppery, brown,

blond, and a few gray, adorned with river shells and tiny bird bones, clicked and clanked.

Hama rattled her gourd at the darkness, toward Mother Sky, with her whole body. She raised her arms and her woven hair bracelets fell up to her elbows.

Enga never tired of her tribe's music. Rhythm from the hollow log beaten by Sannum Straight Hair pulsed inside her, excited her. The wooden flute of Panan One Eye and the high, trilling song of Lakala Rippling Water floated the beauty of melody into the night.

But she shivered with something besides the cold. A ripple of distasteful thinking trickled to Enga. She looked around for its source. Her skin crawled as if someone had been watching her, thinking of her in a harmful way. She caught Nanno Green Eyes frowning at her and Nanno quickly looked away, turning face toward the fire. But Nanno's dislike was nothing new. Enga looked on both sides of her, but saw only her fellow tribe members.

Someone crept up behind Enga and put two strong hands over her eyes.

She tensed, then sniffed, then relaxed. *No fear. It is a known person. The smell is right.*

It was Tog.

She laughed at herself for her initial fear, although the Hamapa people were always extra wary at dark time. The wisp of unkind notion floated away. She grabbed Tog's fingers, drew them down to her mouth, and gave a nibble to the thick thumb of the young male who had been so favored by the Spirits at his birth. Tog had come from the body of Hama. The look he gave Enga, and his low laugh, warmed her.

Enga drank in his body with her eyes--broad and powerful, his limbs thick with

rippling muscle. She herself had carved the bone that skewered his shiny topknot of smooth, dark hair and had presented it to him at the time of her last kill. She gave Tog the smile she knew he liked, the one that showed her dimples.

But, as she always did, Enga kept part of her attention on their leader. Hama now turned her head. Enga loved Hama's eyes, wise and dark and wide-set in her strong, wrinkled face. Those eyes smiled and summoned her at last.

Enga grinned in return and ran to the fireside so she could join the circle.

Tog sent an individual thought after her. *You are beautiful this night, Enga Dancing Flower. Your whole being shines like Sister Sun on high. Your eyes are the color of smoke to go with your hair, the color of fire.*

In recent days her mind pictures were filled more and more with Tog. With his sparkling dark eyes. With his smooth broad back. With his muscular arms. Sometimes Enga imagined loosening his dark brown hair and burying her face in it. She saw him in her mind while she scraped skins clean to use for hunting, and even when she stripped her clothing off and dipped her body into the stream.

Especially then.

But she yanked herself back from her musings of Tog and their future. Tonight she had a duty. She must concentrate on her dancing so it would be strong enough to win favor for the hunt. She knew she was the best dancer in the tribe. Her people needed her skills tonight.

She tried to empty her mind for the dance. But Hama's Pronouncement had alarmed her. She could not imagine moving the whole village. Her Hamapa brothers and sisters, she suspected, were all uneasy at the idea. But no one would openly contradict

Hama after she had announced an official decision, of course. Enga swallowed with a gulp and tamped down her fears. Their wise Hama would lead them well. She always had.

Enga entered the circle and began to undulate to the rhythm. Tog joined in next to her after she beckoned him. Sannum Straight Hair, squatting at his hollow log, gave Enga a broad smile when she neared him, then hastened his tempo a bit.

Tog wore his ceremonial cape of dire wolf skin. The bushy tails that hung from it tickled her bare arms when he danced near her. She twirled, her own cape of brown bearskin flaring. She shook her long, fiery-colored hair toward Tog, clanking the shells woven into it. She dipped, then rose. Tog kept his deep brown eyes on her. When her breathing became rapid, she didn't know if it was because of the dancing or because of the nearness of Tog.

Enga dreamt of awakening one day soon and going to the wipiti of Hama at first sun, to ask for Tog Flint Shaper in the formal way. A Hamapa First Coupling must be approved by Hama. Enga had not yet coupled with anyone, wanting Tog to be her first. She desired to do what some Hamapa couples did, and stay together all their lives.

These notions had been coming to her for many days. She did not shield her thoughts and knew Tog could see them. Tonight, though, his concepts were not coming to her. Enga suppressed from Tog her desire to see his thinking. He would send them when he wanted to, she knew. His private thoughts, when tunneled straight to her and wrapped in muted, darkened soft shades of night colors to hide them from others, made her feel warm inside, even when a chill breeze blew.

Her glance swung back to Tog, then she frowned. He was gazing upon pretty Vala

Golden Hair. Enga did a double twirl before him and his eyes returned to her. Then she tried to clear her mind of all but the hunt.

The dancing lasted long into the dark time. Enga parted with Tog reluctantly as the meeting dispersed. When she received permission, she and Tog would couple in the Holy Cave, then would be together inside their own wipiti for many days. Vala with her bright yellow hair would not be near. When Enga thought of their coupling, the pounding in her chest matched her panting.

Enga Dancing Flower, worn out from the lively dancing, made her way homeward with slow steps. A gust flung a lock of her long, copper-red hair across her face. Enga inhaled the dusky smell of smoke that lingered in her hair before she flung it back with a snap of her head. Ung Strong Arm, her twin sister, had left the meeting early, needing to rest for tomorrow. Enga's twin was the best spear thrower in the Hamapa tribe. Enga sometimes wished she could aim as true and throw as hard as her sister, but, no matter how much she practiced, she could not.

Lost in these reflections, she bumped into someone blocking her path, startling her. She had noticed him at the gathering tonight, standing at the edge of the light cast by the fire, staring at Hama, as he usually did. When Hama had given him a look filled with unmistakable loathing, he had limped away from the gathering, his thin shoulders weighted with rejection.

The Hamapa called him the New One, since they did not know his name. He had been a lone sojourner when they took him in, no doubt cast out by his own tribe.

His unexpected appearance here frightened her at first. She kept her fear dark and

close so he couldn't read it, then she remembered he did not seem to be able to read her thoughts and feelings. She stood only a few steps from the doorway to the wipiti she shared with her sister. She didn't want to wake her; Ung needed her rest for the hunt. Maybe she would try to get around him and avoid a confrontation.

But he looked so eager to communicate with her, she changed her mind and tried to greet him. Her thought-speak did not reach him. He only grunted and made odd sounds, as if he were trying to speak out loud, to Pronounce. He accompanied his noises with broad hand gestures, but Enga, grimacing with the effort to follow them, could not tell what he meant.

He reached into the pouch he wore around his neck and drew out a small carving. He ran his pale fingers over it, then held it out to Enga. She took it without touching his skin. Warm from his hand, it fit inside her palm. She turned it over, then held it up to catch the light from Brother Moon. Her breath caught. The smooth wood carving looked exactly like a very small mammoth. Enga was stunned, first at the artistry--she had never seen anything like it--then at the fact that he had handed it to her.

Maybe he hopes to bring us good fortune on the hunt tomorrow by carving a mammoth. But why has he given this to me? It is too beautiful for anyone to own.

Enga didn't bother to shield her wonderment, knowing he could not comprehend it. She gazed up at the New One in awe. Could he want her to keep it?

Here, away from the gathering, his white hair did not gleam as it did when in the firelight. But it caught enough light from the beams of Brother Moon to faintly glow. His hair, and his skin, too, were the color of Brother Moon at his most pale. She shuddered when she thought of what it must feel like to touch that skin, almost the color of a fish

belly. Then she squelched that notion and narrowed her eyes, trying to read his thoughts.

What must he be feeling on the eve of the hunt? He could neither dance nor hunt. His foot twisted inward at such an awkward angle it made his gait slow and jerky.

Enga guessed what he had felt when Hama looked around the circle and beamed her warm smile on everyone but the New One, showing the gaps in her worn, yellowed teeth. To him she always gave a cold frown. Why did Hama not want the New One in the tribe?

After all, the Hamapa had taken in Enga and Ung. They had been found as infants, not far from the village, and had been eagerly taken into the tribe.

What a shame he was crippled, thought Enga. Because he stood a head taller than anyone in her tribe, he would have made a good runner.

She clutched the carving to her chest and raised her eyebrows in question.

He nodded vigorously.

He does want me to keep this. It is a precious possession. But I must share it with my Hamapa brothers and sisters. Everyone should see this.

She smiled quickly and tucked it into the pouch at her waist. His return smile split the night with whiteness. Enga paused. She was glad she could bring some joy to this poor creature, spurned by many in the tribe. She felt a measure of kinship with him, since they had both been cast out by their own tribes.

But when he tried to follow her into her wipiti her repulsion rose in her throat.

No! You cannot come inside, she thought-spoke.

The New One's grin turned nasty. He pushed past her, then turned, grabbed Enga's arms, pulled her to his body.

In a flash her sister, Ung, awoke and jumped to her feet.

Ung twisted one of the intruder's thin arms behind his back and propelled him out the door. Ung stood at the opening, her thick arms crossed before her, and watched until he disappeared into the cold, windy night.

Why did he follow you in here? Ung thought-asked.

I do not know. I could not ask him. I tried to stop him. Her arms burned where his hot hands had gripped her.

Enga showed her the carving. *He handed me this.*

Ung was speechless. She gently took the piece of wood in her rough hands, turning it to get a better look at it in the glow of their fire, which had burnt down to embers for the night. *The New One has a gift for carving. But you had better be wary when you are around him. It seems he does not yet understand our ways.*

Enga nodded. Ung returned the carving and lowered herself back onto her warm fur.

Enga also readied herself for sleep. After she took off her foot wrappings, she emptied her pouch and lined the contents up between her sleeping fur and the wall, on the dirt floor. Side by side, she set her bone for putting up her hair, her shells and leather thongs she used for hair adornments, her extra spear tips, a smooth rock she had found with an odd shape, and her new carving. As she lay awake, trying to relax enough to fall asleep, she resolved to be on the lookout. This encounter had raised her neck hairs with a whiff of the same distasteful, harmful vibrations she had sensed earlier.

Her mind turned to Tog Flint Shaper, but the New One intruded there, also. Had the New One wanted to couple with her? But she wanted to couple only with Tog. In the

future, she would avoid the New One as much as she could.

She did not want anything to interfere with her First Coupling with Tog.

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