

## Chapter Five/Hominid

### *Movement*

The landscape was changing.

Nature had shifted, and the animals had changed.

The hills in the distance remained, but hills that had been hidden by foliage were now revealed. It was easy to walk from one place to another, no longer battling undergrowth.

But the creatures that lived in the undergrowth were gone, and the creatures that fed on the creatures in the undergrowth were gone.

And it was time to move.

The patterns of life had changed along with Nature, and Life would change, too.

### *Sound*

It was subtle, the gentlest hint of something *other*.

The sound of walking, *pat pat shuffle drag pat pat shuffle drag*, a background, no longer noticed.

The sound of breathing, *puff sigh puff sigh gasp puff sigh*, no more than distant harmony.

The sound was new. It followed the warm breeze up the slight hill and down onto the broad expanse beyond.

In its wake the grasses susurrated and fell silent.

*tap tap tip tap tap tip tip tip tap tip tap tap tap*

The sound of wood on stone, or stone on metal, far away.

It was a sound that did not belong to the hot, still, air. It did not belong to the long, wide spaces, devoid of movement or color. It did not belong to this landscape of emptiness.

It belonged to Time. It was a green and silver and blue sound. A sound of growth and belonging.

And it came from the distant hills, the ones that had not changed even when the animals left.

The hills that had not changed even when the trees burned in their own dryness.

The hills had not changed even when the river that pointed in their direction slowed, muddied, and disappeared into the cracked mud of its channel.

The hills were still blue, violet in the evening light, silver in the moonlight. The sound came from the hills.

Life was in the hills.

### *Journey*

Life was in the hills and Life would return to the hills.

In the early morning, before the sky turned blue, they woke and walked.

A male, a female, offspring too young to fend for themselves, too old to nurse. An elder, weakened but determined, able to remember and communicate old patterns, but not these patterns.

It was a small group, remnant of a larger clan from the lowland forest that was no more.

With no recognizable landmarks, they walked, always toward the blue hills. When the heat of the day hit, they stopped, sheltering in any shade that could be found.

When the wavering air began to silver, they set out again, faces to the blue hills, feet following faces.

There was little food, less water. The elder recognized a stalk of something on occasion, and they dug down to find a still-moist tuber, sharing it carefully.

Still, the youngest died before the long blue line began to separate into individual hills.

By the time the elder died, the female had learned to find the tubers, and the hills were green in places, as well as blue.

The soil began to be cooler underfoot, and the grasses held some green where they met the land.

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Day and night, *tap tap tip tap tap tip tip tip tap tip tap tap tap*, led them forward, now beginning to climb through small shrubs on which the offspring found small berries.

They ate them, not knowing if they were food, and survived.

The male found small animals each day now, and in silence they ate, listening to the song from the hills.

Occasionally they looked back at the land they came from, brown and empty, remembering a time when it was green and full.

But the changing pattern drove them to the hills, and they learned new patterns.

This plant grew tall when water was near. That plant always grew near the tastiest berries. The animals hid under that kind of outcrop, and came out just before the light was full.

The hills grew closer, but the need to eat and to recover from deprivation slowed them now.

But at night, the sound continued.

*tap tap tip tap tap tip tip tip tap tip tap tap tap*

At noon, as they rested, the sound swelled, resonating between the hills and building.

*tap tap tip tap tap tip tip tip tap tip tap tap tap*

And so they moved forward, slowly, learning the new patterns until the movement was automatic, following the sound unconsciously even as it grew louder.

And the hills grew even as the plants returned and grew.

Now and again a rumbling shook the land, and then a brook would appear at the bottom of a gully for a while, before disappearing again.

Every so often birds would fly over and drop fruit, or nuts.

Trees were defined, barely visible above the tops of the nearest hills. Different in shape, but still, trees.

Beyond, the hills now stretched up and up, hiding the sun until the sky was past blue and returning to purple. It was colder in this place, but still the hot breezes would

race up the valleys and rustle the leaves. A reminder of the changes, impetus to keep moving.

And at night, it continued:

*tap tap tip tap tap tip tip tip tap tip tap tap tap*

The family kept moving, higher into the hills, and then into the mountains, following the sound.

*tap tap tip tap tap tip tip tip tap tip tap tap tap*

Bone on wood, wood on stone, stone on metal?

It was cold at night and cool in the day. There was no warmth, small animals were all that were left to eat.

The patterns made sense now, which places would be warmer, which places would provide water, which places food.

The family kept moving.

The female began to piece together bits of skins from the animals they ate, held together with plaited grasses. They wrapped the skins around them when it got cold, when they stopped to rest.

The male caught larger animals, with more skill, and the family ate until they were satisfied more nights than not.

A baby was born, and the family kept moving.

The mountains, the sound of the mountains, beckoned. They followed.

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