



**QUENTIN  
AND THE  
CAVE BOY**

**SUSAN  
GABRIEL**

# Quentin and the Cave Boy

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*To the Dream Maker*

## The Dream

“Quentin, are you up yet?”

*The Voice* yelling up the stairs is my mom’s. I’ve heard it for the last twelve years of my life, and I’ve got to tell you, I’m getting tired of it. It’s there when I wake up. It’s there when I go to bed. Sometimes I even hear it in my sleep, like a recording of everything she’s ever said to me has soaked into my brain cells or something. To think that same voice used to sing me lullabies! And like most babies who drool in a crib all day, I probably loved it.

I wish Dad still lived here. Dad’s voice doesn’t bother me at all. He used to wake me up on school days, but not at the crack of dawn like Mom. Six months ago, Dad moved to Oregon—three thousand miles and three time zones away—with the waitress at the diner who used to serve us blueberry pancakes every Saturday morning. That leaves me, my mom, and my sister, Katie, who is four years and three months older than me. As the only guy in our family, I’m outnumbered two to one.

I can tell you’re still in bed, Quentin,” *The Voice* yells. Not only can her vocal chords penetrate steel, but she has X-ray vision, too. The clatter of bowls and silverware in the kitchen adds exclamation points to her words. My dog, Coltrane—

named after my dad's favorite jazz sax player, John Coltrane—licks my face, like he's trying to warn me. I crawl deeper under the covers and drift off to sleep for one last dream:

A Stone Age kid sleeps on the floor of his cave and pulls a bear hide around his shoulders. His mom grunts from overhead, "Boy, get up." The cave woman is missing teeth and looks like a dirty, primitive version of my mom. The voice sounds familiar, too.

The boy rolls over and looks like a dirty, primitive edition of me. He grunts and goes back to sleep.

The cave mom yells a prehistoric version of "Get up!" She throws a pile of animal bones in his direction. They clatter to the floor inches away from his head.

"Quentin, get up!" *The Voice* yells at exactly the same time.

Startled awake, I sit up straight in bed. In the next instant it's like the dream and real life collide, because somehow—don't ask me how—the cave boy crosses from his world into mine and is now sitting on the end of my bed. Coltrane begins a low growl behind his teeth and starts sniffing like crazy in the direction of my dream.

"Hey, what's happening?" I say. I rub my eyes to wipe away the mirage in front of me. Surprise, it doesn't go away.

Cave boy grunts. He rubs his eyes, too.

"I'm dreaming," I say to myself.

We stare at each other. In a way it's like looking in a mirror, but a really old one, where one of my ancient ancestors is glaring right back at me. And a mirror where I'm having the worst hair day of my life and bugs are living in the tangles.

The boy in my dream has dirt covering his face, wears a necklace made of animal teeth, and is naked except for an animal hide around his waist. I wonder if he's collected the teeth right off the animal because he has scars on his chest like he had to fight an enormous cat to get them. He's looking at me like I'm strange, too: a modern version of himself in boxer shorts.

Whatever is happening, I'm convinced it isn't real. Since when do dreams come and hang out in your room?

I laugh to myself. What will Dex say about this one? He thinks my imagination is in overdrive as it is. Dex is my best friend. We used to hang out in diapers together. We have photographs to prove it, which we've hidden and hope nobody ever finds.

I wait for the dream to fade. I hum to myself while I wait. To prove the dream isn't real, I reach out to touch the cave boy, expecting him to vanish. But what I touch is a real shoulder. In fact, it's hard as a rock. This kid has serious muscles. He shows his very real teeth and growls at me.

"Whoa!" I say. Then add a few words that could get me grounded for a year.

I jump out of bed and land on my feet. At the same time the cave boy jumps up toward the window.

“This isn’t a dream at all,” I say to myself.

Coltrane barks like he does when the UPS delivers a package to the door. But this is the strangest package I’ve ever received, delivered priority mail from a dream into my *real* world.

“What’s going on?” I ask. I don’t know whether to be excited or terrified. I make Coltrane stop barking because the cave boy is starting to bark back.

Coltrane cowers. For part-bulldog but mostly mutt, he acts tough, but isn’t.

The cave boy grunts. He stands on my bed like he’s about to pounce on me and wrestle me to the ground. I flash back to Brad Blankenship pushing me off the swing in second grade because he thought I stole his bubble gum. I was so scared I peed a little in my pants. I cross my legs so history won’t repeat itself.

The stranger across from me growls and shows his teeth again. Coltrane hides under the bed like he does when Mom wants to give him a bath.

“Hey, calm down. Nobody’s going to hurt you,” I say to the cave boy, though my first instinct is to run like mad. But this kid could outrun me in a heartbeat. Besides, I’m not the type of guy that wins fights, especially against some kind of prehistoric enemy.

The cave boy growls again. I back up further against my wall, which isn’t that easy to do with your legs crossed.

"I'm harmless. I swear," I say. I wonder if he's always this grouchy when he wakes up in the morning.

He grunts again.

I figure out that the grunts are like words, and I'm supposed to know what they mean.

"How'd you get here?" I ask. I talk slow and loud like those bad movies where earth people try to talk to aliens. "Do. You. Know. Where. You. Are? Where. Did. You. Come. From?"

He snarls at me like *The Voice* does when I ask too many questions.

Where's Dad when I need him? I remember how far it is from Atlanta to Oregon and snarl, too. I've been deserted at the worst possible time.

"Okay, okay. We can figure out how you got here later," I say. I take a deep breath to relax so maybe my brain will unfreeze, and I'll know what to do. No such luck.

"This is not a dream," I repeat to myself.

The cave boy scratches his head. Several prehistoric insects fall from his hair and onto my bed before scurrying away under my sheets. Coltrane snaps at one of them on the floor, but it gets away.

"And Mom thinks *my* hair's a mess," I say and manage a smile.

"Mess," he repeats back to me.

My mouth drops open. Did this guy just speak to me? Coltrane sniffs in the direction of our guest. “You can talk?” I ask the cave boy.

“Talk,” he grunts back.

I guess they speak English where he’s from. Or maybe dream people who become real always speak your language. If some guy in Africa had the same thing happen, the cave boy might be talking in Swahili. But either way, my English teacher wouldn’t be too thrilled with his grammar.

“This is unbelievable,” I say.

“Unbelievable,” he repeats, stumbling over the syllables.

The cave boy and I keep staring at each other, like our brains have short-circuited, and we need time to get used to the idea. But I’m starting to think there’s something about this kid I like.

“How’d you get here?” I ask him.

He shrugs—the universal kid gesture for ‘I don’t know.’

“Do you know how to get back?” I ask.

“Get back?” He shrugs again.

He’s a lot smarter than I imagined a cave boy would be. I love reading about history. My room is full of history books. But having a genuine cave boy in my room is way better than reading a book.

“This kind of thing is not supposed to happen,” I say.

“Never.”

“Never,” he repeats.

My brain is working way more than usual to figure this out. Maybe the cave boy was dreaming about me at the same time I was dreaming about him and it created an opening, like a black hole or something. Except it's a dream hole, where dreams travel back and forth in time and visit real life. It could happen, right?

I've always had really vivid dreams, anyway. My Grandma Betty says it's because we have Hungarian gypsy blood in our ancestry from seven generations back. Once I dreamed a shark was chasing me and when I woke up I was totally wet and I found a shark tooth in my Batman slipper. Another time I dreamed I was pitching for the World Series and I woke up with a ball glove on my hand. Granted, a cave boy isn't the same as a ball glove, but still.

"Quentin, are you up yet?" *The Voice* yells.

The cave boy jumps like he's heard a ghost. Our eyes reflect panic. Coltrane whines.

"Quentin, if I have to tell you one more time, I'm coming up there!" *The Voice* sounds serious.

At that moment it's like I know his thoughts and he knows mine. A mom showing up—present or prehistoric—is the last thing we need.

"What are we going to do?" I ask the cave boy.

His eyes case the room for an escape.

Mom only comes into my room when she has to; she says the mess in here is toxic to human beings. I hate to think what she'd do if she found a dirt-covered cave boy with bugs in his

hair stinking up my already stinky room. Not to mention that I get in trouble if I don't ask her before friends come over, and I'm guessing that means friends from another time period, too.

Footsteps ascend the stairs of our small, two-story house in the suburbs outside Atlanta. The cave boy and I look at each other like a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* is stalking us for lunch. Coltrane dives under the bed.

"Hide!" My whisper has urgency in it.

We leap in different directions at the same time. The door to my room opens. The cave boy jumps behind it. He's standing inches away from my mom, but out of sight. If he breathes too heavy, grunts, or growls he'll be discovered. And there's no telling how Mom will react. But I'm pretty sure it will involve screaming, calling 911, and dialing an exterminator for the bugs.

"Hi, Mom," I say. Ever since I had a growth spurt over the summer, we stand eye to eye. She's all of 5 feet, 2 inches tall, but her voice is 6'4. I wave my hands like I'm steering small airplanes into their hangars in order to distract her. She looks at me like she's not sure whether to call the pediatrician or Homeland Security. "I told you I was up," I add. I smile and turn on the charm she says the Moss men are famous for.

She sniffs and wrinkles her nose. "It smells like something died in here," *The Voice* says. She turns over a shirt on the floor with the toe of her shoe.

“Dirty clothes,” I confess. A visible pile of filthy clothes, about waist high, fills the closet. But what she’s really getting a whiff of is prehistoric boy.

“No television until those get done,” *The Voice* says. “Come on, Dog,” she motions to Coltrane. “Time for your breakfast.”

Coltrane whimpers, crawls out from under the bed, and follows her. Mom and Coltrane haven’t gotten along since he ate kitty poop from Mrs. Zimmer’s flower beds and then jumped into Mom’s lap and licked her in the mouth. *The Voice* takes poop personally.

“See you later,” I say to Coltrane. I know how he feels. Mom’s never forgiven me for the time I discovered that if you shellac dust bunnies with hair spray and run over them with roller blades, they can ignite.

One last time, *The Voice* surveys my room before telling me to get dressed and come to breakfast. Then *The Voice* leaves the room.

As soon as she’s gone, the cave boy staggers into the center of the room and we both exhale, like we’ve been holding our breath for the underwater world record.

“That was close,” I say.

“Close,” he says back to me. He breathes heavy, as if he’s escaped the jaws of a saber-toothed tiger.

“What are we going to do with you?” I ask.

He scratches his head and looks as bewildered as I feel.

Getting him back to where he came from is like trying to get toothpaste back into the tube. Not that he's ever used toothpaste a day in his life from the looks of his mouth. I guess they didn't have dentists back in prehistoric days.

"You can't stay here. We've got to get you home," I say.

"Home," he repeats, like he's already a little homesick.

I look at the clock. I don't have time to figure it out now, or I'll be late to school.

"Mom works at home so you can't stay here," I say to him.

"And I'm pretty sure she snoops in my room when I'm gone."

"Snoops," he repeats. He looks at the door.

"I guess you'll have to come to school with me," I say.

"School," he says with confidence, but I can tell he doesn't have a clue what *school* is. If he did, he'd be running as fast as he could back to the Stone Age.

"I guess it can't be worse than what you're used to," I say.

I notice the scars on his chest again and think how middle school can leave scars, too, except ones you can't see. Your parents getting divorced can leave them, too. That's when *The Voice* was born. Plus, your dad leaving home is like getting socked in the gut hard enough that you never want to eat a blueberry pancake again.

I glance over at my new prehistoric friend. If you want to survive, the first rule of middle school is to fit in, and this dude doesn't even begin to.

"First things first," I say. "You need a shower!"

The cave boy grunts and shakes his head no, as if taking a shower is the last thing he wants to do. As we look each other in the eyes, I understand his resistance completely.

## Nature Calls

From my bedroom door I look to see if the coast is clear. Then I sneak the cave boy down the hallway and into the bathroom. As soon as I close the door and turn on the light, he freaks and jumps up onto the toilet seat shielding his eyes as if four tiny suns have just appeared in his orbit. I've never seen anybody jump that high and that fast. But I guess you have to be quick if you live in a cave and wild animals want to eat you for lunch.

"It's only a light," I say. "See?" I flip it on and off a few times to show him how it works.

He cowers as if Thomas Edison had invented a total eclipse of the sun instead of a light bulb.

"It's like fire, except better," I say.

He reaches up and touches the decorative bulbs over the mirror. He jumps, then blows on his fingers. "Fire," he says. He snarls at me like I should have warned him.

I realize I'm in for a long day if I have to explain everything invented between the Stone Age and now.

I open the shower curtain and motion for the cave boy to get into the bathtub. He looks at me like I've invited him to step into the arms of a Velociraptor.

"I know the feeling," I say. "But it's only water." After I turn on the water, I splash a handful in his direction. He

scrambles behind the toilet and covers his head like I've thrown a hand grenade.

"Relax," I say. "It's only a shower."

His eyes narrow.

"You can trust me," I say. I hold my hand out to him and talk soft like a fireman trying to coax a kitten from a tree. "I hate showers, too," I continue, "but it's something you have to do once you hit middle school or the other kids will make fun of you." I wonder if peer pressure was around in prehistoric times.

The cave boy edges his way closer to the shower. He sniffs the shower curtain, then the handrail and the faucets. I wonder if he's sniffing for danger or mildew. He steps inside the tub, not bothering to take off his animal skin underwear. He's examining the shower nozzle like it's a telescope and he can see the entire solar system from there. When I turn it on he screams. Not a regular scream like girls do if you throw a spider on them, but a primordial one, like something wild is after him and threatening his life. I cover his mouth and he bites me.

"Ouch!" I yelp.

"Quentin, are you all right?" *The Voice* calls from outside the bathroom door. The woman has ears that can pick up the splitting of subatomic particles. She knocks. I lunge for the door, pushing in the lock with my throbbing finger right as she turns the knob. The cave boy's eyes widen. My mom is probably as wild as anything he's ever met in the jungle.

“I’m fine, Mom,” I say, trying to sound normal. “The water was really cold.”

“You’d think you’d know how to work the shower by now, Quentin,” *The Voice* says.

“I know, I know,” I say.

“Why did you lock the door?” *The Voice* asks. “I’ve seen you naked, you know. I used to change your diapers.”

“Oh, God, don’t remind me,” I moan. *The Voice* recites humiliating stories at every opportunity. Her favorites involve diapers, potty seats, and embarrassing body sounds.

“I’m fine, Mom,” I say again.

“Hurry up, you need to eat breakfast,” *The Voice* says before she walks away. She calls for my sister with a different voice than she uses for me. My sister, Katie, is the princess in our family. I’m the toad. Just ask *The Voice*.

“That was close,” I say to my new prehistoric friend.

“Close,” he says.

I examine the teeth imprints on my bitten finger. After a few seconds the throbbing starts to go away. At least he didn’t break the skin. I’d have a hard time explaining human bite marks in the emergency room.

In the shower, the cave boy takes a bite out of a bar of soap. He spits it out and makes a face like he just ate Brussels sprouts for the first time. I’m not sure but I think one of his teeth came out with it because something hard clangs against the tub.

“No, you use it to clean with,” I say. I grab the soap away from him and show him how it works by pretending to wash myself.

“To clean with,” he echoes, and sputters out more pieces of soap.

The amount of dirt pouring down the drain could fill a dump truck. In the meantime, I’m envious that he hasn’t had to take a shower in his whole life until now. Mom makes me take one every day. If I don’t, she threatens to turn the garden hose on me.

I’m showing the cave boy how to use the shampoo when there’s a knock at the door. “Hey shrimp, get out of there,” Katie calls.

My new friend peeks out from behind the shower curtain. His hair is full of suds. I signal for him to be quiet.

“Just a minute,” I say to my sister, like I’m the sweetest little brother on earth.

She pauses. “Hey, why are you being so nice?” she says through the door. I can almost hear her eyes narrow.

“No reason,” I say. Niceness is always suspect between us.

“Come on, Q-Tip, let me in.” Katie calls me Q-Tip whenever she’s trying to get what she wants. Since my hair is blond and kind-of curly she likes to rub the top of my head when she says it.

“I don’t look anything like a Q-Tip, you swab.”

Katie thumps the door with her claws. “I’m going to tell Mom,” she says, which she knows will get a reaction out of

me. She inhales, ready to blast the neighborhood with her latest complaint.

“Wait, wait!” I insist. “I’ll be right out. Just go to your room or something.”

“Why, Q-Tip boy, are you in your birthday suit?”

“Yeah, that’s it, Katie,” I say. “Now get out of the hall so I can go to my room.”

“Quentin’s in his birthday suit . . . .,” she begins. But at least the taunting is coming from her room.

“We’ve got to make a run for it,” I say to the cave boy.

He’s drying off on the first towel he’s ever used in his life. He rubs it against his face and sniffs it like he’s in a commercial for fabric softener. He refuses to put it down. Even clean, his hair looks wild. I try to brush it before we leave, and he growls at me. I hand him the brush and show him how to do it himself. For several seconds we get nowhere. He has a decade’s worth of knots in his hair. With each attempt his growl gets louder.

“Maybe you should pull it back,” I say. I hand him one of my sister’s hair bands that are always all over the bathroom. “Lots of guys do that these days. Here, I’ll show you.”

I bunch his hair up into the rubber band.

He makes a face at me like: *you’ve got to be kidding me.*

“It’s the only way,” I say. “If we’re lucky, people will think you’ve got dreadlocks.”

“Dreadlocks?” he stutters.

“Never mind,” I say. Some things are too hard to explain.

He's not too thrilled with the hair thing, but goes along with it.

Opening the door, I check again to make sure the Sister and *The Voice* aren't around. Then I pull the visiting cave boy down the hallway. Once we're inside I latch my bedroom door and throw him some clean clothes from my dresser drawer.

"Here, put these on," I say.

He looks at them, one eyebrow raised.

"Okay, I'll help," I say.

After pulling the T-shirt over his head, I make him change out of his animal skin into a clean pair of my boxer shorts. Then I conceal his smelly hide in the bottom of the clothes hamper. Even covered with clothes, the hamper smells like a combination of wet dog and dead skunk.

"You can't wear the necklace," I say. I point to the collection of teeth hanging around his neck. "It'll draw too much attention. People will think you're in a gang or something." But even in Atlanta I haven't heard of gangs this rough. Some of the teeth look human.

He takes off the necklace made of vine and wrapped carnivore teeth and puts it on the bed. Then I show him how to put the blue jeans on and zip them up. His feet miss the legs several times. But then he secures them around his waist. He studies the zipper, like it's the greatest invention made by mankind, and then slides it up and down about a hundred times.

“Hey, you’d better not do that in public,” I say. “The police will come after you.”

“Police?” he asks.

“Grownups that carry clubs,” I say. “They make everybody follow the rules.”

“Clubs,” he says. He grunts like he understands and then lets the zipper go. Then he tugs on the seat of his jeans, looking stiff and miserable like I do when I have to wear a suit.

“It’ll get better,” I say.

His look says: *Yeah, right.*

“Hey, do you have a name?” I ask.

He shrugs, tugs at the seat of his pants a few more times, and then gives the zipper several swift zips.

I decide to show him how greetings in this country are done. I extend my hand. “My name’s Quentin. Quentin Moss.”

He looks at my hand like there may be a weapon attached. “Moss,” he echoes.

I try to explain to him that my name isn’t Moss, but Quentin.

“Moss,” he repeats.

“Oh, do you like the name Moss?” I ask, figuring I have to call him something.

“Moss,” he repeats, as if he’s trying it on and it fits fine.

“Moss, it is,” I say. “And if anybody asks, you can be my cousin from out of town.”

He grunts.

It dawns on me—in a painful way—that while I was so busy hiding Moss I forgot to go to the bathroom. “Wait here,” I say.

“Here,” he repeats and sits on the bed. He gives his shirt collar a tug. I’m grateful it doesn’t have zippers.

From the corner of the bathroom mirror, Katie sees me coming and narrows her eyes. I halfway expect fire to flare out of her nostrils igniting the ton of make-up she’s putting on.

“Mom told you not to wear that stuff,” I say.

“Get out of here,” she says.

“I’ve got to go to the bathroom, Spazz,” I say back at her. Spazz is another one of my pet names for her. I hold the front of my boxer shorts to show how serious I am.

“Why didn’t you go while you were in here? And don’t call me Spazz, Creep.”

“Don’t call me Creep, Spazz,” I answer back. I imitate her whiny voice, which now that I think about it, sounds a little like Mom’s.

“Make this Neanderthal get out of the bathroom!” Katie yells to Mom.

“You have no idea,” I say under my breath.

“Quentin, leave your sister alone,” *The Voice* says behind me.

I jump like somebody shot me in the behind with a sling shot.

“You’re jumpy today, Quentin. Are you okay?” *The Voice* almost sounds nice.

“You keep sneaking up on me,” I say. It’s a lame comment but maybe she’ll believe it. I’m also hoping that she doesn’t decide to go into my room where she will find a cave boy named Moss who is a few thousand years old and wearing my clothes. I’ll be grounded into the next century.

“Mom, I’ve got to go,” I say. I plant a pained expression on my face, which is only a slight exaggeration of how I feel.

Emergency bodily functions get first priority when three people share a bathroom—especially if one of them is a guy. All I have to do is threaten to go outside in the backyard to relieve myself and it freaks her out. When I was three-years old some older kid told me that peeing on the shrubs was how you watered the lawn. It wasn’t until our elderly neighbor complained that I found out that’s what garden hoses are for.

I look in the direction of the backyard as a warning.

“Don’t you dare!” *The Voice* says. “Katie, your brother needs the bathroom.”

“Mom ...” Katie moans.

Mom gives Katie *The Look*, almost always reserved for me, that says *don’t mess with me*. After you live with people a long time you can skip the words. All Mom has to do is look at us and we know what she means. *The Voice* and *The Look* are like Siamese twins. Recognizing her text message of looks is crucial, since I don’t have dad to decipher her moods. It’s pure survival, at this point.

With reluctance, Katie steps aside so I can get in the bathroom. As she walks away, I hold up my arms in victory while

she snarls in my direction. A minor battle won in the Quentin/Katie wars. A war I have been drafted into simply by being born.

“You should see what a mess he left in the bathroom, Mom. There’s dirt everywhere.”

She turns around to gloat. I give my sister a look that needs no translation and throw a wet wash rag at her that misses. Tattling is unforgivable. Any peace treaty we might have been working on is now ripped into bits.

“Quentin, I’ve told you a thousand times to clean up your messes,” *The Voice* says, in tandem with *The Look*. “You don’t live in a cave, you know.”

I smile. No, I don’t live in a cave. But I know someone who does. I realize that with Moss in the picture, I’m no longer out-numbered, and it makes up a little for dad being gone.

Mom goes back downstairs. I go into the bathroom and since I know Katie is waiting, I close the door, determined to take the longest, slowest pee in Quentin Moss history. I write out my entire name with urine and even dot the “I.” To further waste time, I also take a long, glacial look in the mirror to search for whiskers that might be breaking through the skin any day now. Facial hair is the first step to freedom from *The Voice* and *The Look*. Once I start to shave, I know my days at home are numbered. I open the cabinet and dash on a handful of Dad’s leftover aftershave. It smells potent, and for a second

I feel like I might tear up, and not just from the smell, but from missing my dad.

“Mom, he’s taking too long,” my sister yells from her bedroom.

“You think this is long, just wait,” I say under my breath. I glance at my primitive self in the mirror and grunt.



## Hiding Places

Some people play sports or read, but my hobby is to think up ways to irritate my sister. As a younger brother, I consider it my duty. Most of what I come up with would get me arrested. Since I don't think my dog Coltrane would take to living in a jail cell, I resist acting on those. So far I've come up with 77 ways to get revenge.

It's not that my sister and I dislike each other. We hate each other with a passion. When I was four she talked me into playing bull fights. She was the matador. I was the bull. She used her red sweater as the cape and before I knew it my bull horns, as well as my bull head, hit the living room wall going full speed. I almost passed out from the blunt force trauma. Not to mention that my head hurt for about a year after that. It not only left a dent in the wall, but a dent in my skull about the size of a quarter. Whenever my feelings for my sister start to soften, all I have to do is touch the scar and I see red.

More than once I've wished for an older brother to look out for me. It occurs to me that Moss could take my sister in a fight any day.

"Mom, get this cretin out of the bathroom," my sister yells, which snaps me out of my fantasy. I remember that Moss is still in my room and listen at the door to make sure I don't hear any grunts or anything.

*The Voice* yells up the stairs that I've been in the bathroom long enough.

Before leaving, I take action on revenge idea #77 and put a dollop of mom's hemorrhoid cream on Katie's toothbrush so she'll think it's her whitening toothpaste.

"Mom, he's got on that horrible aftershave again," my sister yells, with her own look of revenge.

"Quentin?" *The Voice* yells from the kitchen. "You'd better get breakfast or you're going to be late."

"I'm coming!" I yell back. Yelling is a standard mode of communication in our house since Dad left. My best friend Dex says his family doesn't yell. In fact, they don't even talk to each other. I guess I'd prefer yelling to nothing at all.

The fight with my sister makes me almost forget about the Stone Age kid in my room. I haven't begun to figure out what to do with him. I whistle, hoping something comes to me on the few steps between the bathroom and my room. Whistling always helps me think. But when I walk into my room, I see my problems have only just begun. My window is wide open and there's no cave boy to be seen. I run to the window and hang halfway out to peer into the backyard. There is no exit. The only way to escape is to jump from the second floor window onto an oak tree limb several feet away from the house. I can't imagine how Moss pulled this off without breaking his neck. Something moves in the bushes. I hear a zipper.

"Moss?" I say, in the loudest whisper I can manage.

He looks up at me and smiles as he relieves himself right in the middle of my mom's prize azaleas. I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to do the exact same thing. But while I'm impressed with Moss' resourcefulness and his aim, I imagine the fireworks this will set off with *The Voice* and *The Look* if my mom walks out the back door at this very minute and finds him.

"Stay there!" I say in a loud whisper. I hold up my arm like I've changed into a school crossing guard. Moss finishes watering the azaleas and then flourishes his zipper with impressive speed.

"Don't move!" I insist. I hold out my hand again.

"Don't move!" he repeats, and holds out his hand, too.

I rush to put on my standard middle school outfit—blue jeans, T-shirt, running shoes, and an Atlanta Braves baseball cap that my dad bought me when we went to a ballgame two summers ago. As I'm putting on my socks, I dream up revenge tactic #78, which involves hiding a pair of ripe gym socks under my sister's bed. The smell will be so intense, she'll think there's a corpse buried under her bed in a shallow grave—like Moss smelled when he first arrived.

Revenge may be hereditary. My dad said he used to bug his older sister, too. Sometimes I wish he was still around to give me some pointers. Heather, the waitress he left us for, wears bright red lipstick and chews bubble gum with her mouth open. One Saturday morning, just over a year ago, right in the middle of our father/son time, Dad announced that he

and Heather were moving to Oregon to open up their own restaurant. We haven't seen him since. *The Voice* tries not to let me hear her cry, but she does sometimes.

I finish getting dressed and run downstairs to deal with the Stone Age boy in the backyard that has relieved himself all over my mom's blooming pink azaleas.

Moss has given up on the zipper, but is now turning the garden hose on and off, giving the plants a shower, as well as himself. I sneak up behind him in the bushes and grab the hose.

"Put that down, Moss," I say. I'm not too thrilled with how much I sound like *The Voice* and before I can stop myself I also give him *The Look* to show my disapproval.

Unfazed, Moss grunts his usual grunt. Then he starts to sniff like a dog following a scent. His sniffing nose follows a trail that ends up about an inch away from my face. Eyeball to eyeball, he crinkles his nose.

"Animal, dead," he says.

"That's not a dead animal," I say, "that's my aftershave."

"Animal, dead," he says again. He waves his hand in front of his nose to dispel the scent. If a smelly cave boy thinks you stink, that's saying something.

"This stuff grows hair on your face," I say in my defense.

He gives me a look like I'm trying to sell him a used cave with a pack of wild hyenas inside.

"Come on," I say. I motion for him to follow me and lead the way to the tree house, where I can hide him until we leave

for school. We sneak from one group of bushes to the next to avoid being seen. The back door opens and we dive into the bushes like Olympic swimmers jumping into the pool at the start of a race. *The Voice* tells Coltrane to go do his business. Coltrane makes a bee-line for us, barking the whole way. *The Voice* yells at him to stop, but then gets distracted and closes the door.

Coltrane joins us under the bush and growls at Moss.

“Stop it, Cole,” I say. He looks at me with his big brown dog eyes like he’s seeing double. Then he raises his leg and pees right where Moss peed on Mom’s azaleas. Dog and cave boy pee glistens on the petals. I roll my eyes. I’m like the only civilized creature here. Considering my own primitive tendencies, that says a lot.

Moss and I crawl from behind the bushes and one of the azalea limbs slaps us hard in the face like it’s paying us back for what Moss did. I rub my stinging face and motion for Moss to follow me. At least he’s good about going along with what I say. Being in my dream doesn’t seem to bother him that much. But my guess is that not all dreams are this easy to deal with. Especially a dream where lions are after you, like the one I had the night before. If a lion had ended up in my bedroom, I might not be here right now. It would have had Quentin pancakes for breakfast.

Once Moss is up the ladder and in the tree house, I relax. Branches almost hide it. “Stay here until I get back,” I instruct him.

“Stay here,” he repeats. He holds up his arm like he’s a school crossing guard again.

“Look at this while I’m gone,” I say. I hand him a *National Geographic* Magazine from the pile that used to be my dad’s. I open it to a full page picture of a Bengal tiger somewhere in Africa. As soon as he sees it, Moss tosses the magazine to the floor and stomps on top of it like the tiger on the page is dangerous.

“Hey, that tiger’s not real,” I say. But his eyes are wide like he doesn’t believe me.

“See?” I show him a waterfall on the next page.

“Shower?” he asks.

“No, that’s not a shower. That’s a waterfall.”

“Tiger in shower?” His grunt goes up at the end like a question.

“Tiger not real,” I say.

“Stay here,” I repeat. My mom is going to come looking for me at any minute, I’m sure of it. “Do you understand, Moss? Stay here.”

“Stay here,” he repeats, not looking up. He flips through the magazine, holding pictures sideways and upside down sniffing and licking the page. He makes a face from the taste. It’s the most I’ve seen anyone ever get out of a *National Geographic*.

Coltrane at my heels, I walk back to the house, passing Mom’s azalea bushes on the way, the sun reflecting off the glistening pee. I have to resist adding more to the mix, and I

think about how civilized humans have become. In Moss' world, he goes to the bathroom outside all the time. The closest I've ever gotten to that was the one time Mom and Dad took us camping and Dad and I peed out in the woods.

Before going inside I turn around and glance at the hidden tree house that I haven't used in years. Little did I know that it might someday be a hiding place for a prehistoric guest. Dad would be proud of how I've put it to good use again.

On the way inside, it occurs to me that there's something about Moss that I like. Even though he's been transported into a different eon, he's making the best of it. Moss grunts in the distance, and I hear papers being ripped. I can't believe how weird my day has been already, and I haven't even had breakfast yet.

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