

HENRY
ERMANN

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BEGINNENGS

A Novel By

HENRY HERMANN

BEGEHNINGS

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CHAPTER ONE

Mark Blum couldn't believe it. The feeling coursing through him as he stared at his career unfolding before him was nothing short of orgasmic. To have a real, live, primitive human to converse with was an experience beyond his wildest expectations. Not just a primitive human, mind you—this was an individual that represented one of the earliest humans on record. He had all he could do to hold back screaming for joy.

Damn, he said to himself. *It's been a long time coming.*

How long had it been? He went up the mountain from the dig site how long ago? Oh, what painful, negative

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thoughts gnawed at him then? What worries? What enemies conspired to stop this moment right here and now, just as they had attempted to do throughout the years that got him here? He couldn't fathom the thought of where he'd be if things hadn't turned around.

To think that he had been groping for *anything* to lift his spirits. He had been depressed beyond reason and uncertain of his future—a direct and radical conflict with his present exuberance. At times, his mind refused to replay the past, but, somehow, he knew he had to let the negativity go. In an attempt to rid himself of the bad remnants of the last few years, he was forced to face the period head-on and rehash the events that brought him here, his thoughts taking him back, far back, to those earlier times.

Even at those times, with his young age and vague interpretations of life and how it should be, he was well aware that his chosen field represented scores of challenges and obstacles. And, yet, he always knew that one good day could change his life forever.

Through the succeeding years, he learned that life was a series of ups and downs, some of the downs sending his mind into stalls that spiraled him into despair. This was one of those times.



When he stood at the beginnings of the dig site in Africa, his mind raced for an answer to his dilemma. As on so many occasions before, he gazed hypnotically at the open savanna and the clouds of light brown dust billowing up from his crew's work station. Its appearance brought mixed feelings to his confused mind.

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In certain ways, there was a kind of beauty in what he saw. As the dust rose above the excavation, warm currents of wind rhythmically caught hold of it and set its motion into spiraling ballerina-like swirls over the ground, the ghost-like mass subsequently meandering and mixing with other clouds that whispered up from several areas of the site.

He continued to stare for a period of time at the magic of it all and suddenly began to have flashbacks about wanting to come to Africa to make his mark on life. His thoughts of the big picture, with fame and fortune, abruptly ended, bringing him back to his senses. Feeling annoyed at losing a moment of bliss, he slowly but carefully changed his focus.

Looking around once more at the details of the open savanna, he suddenly conjured up a more negative image. He threw down the weathered volcanic rock he was holding, hopped into his dilapidated Land Rover, and drove until he was far away from the excavation site and at the interface of savanna and tall, woody vegetation.

As he skidded to a stop, a troop of baboons turned and looked at him, and two or three warthogs raised their tails, snorted, and scattered as his vehicle appeared in the cloud of dust. Assorted monkeys watched from the branches of trees. As he slithered out of his seat and slammed the door, the sharp sound climaxed the decision for any local inhabitants to leave him alone.

While contemplating his situation, he admitted to himself that his life seemed to be at an impasse, and he felt a strong and recurring desire to take time off to sort out his mishmash of thoughts. He was thirty-six and had no one to share life with, and the remoteness of his chosen profession was getting to him.

He didn't even have someone to talk to except for his pa-

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leontological peers, and they very seldom offered any real help at solving his personal problems. On occasion, this made him feel very alone. It was true that he had chosen this life for himself, but that didn't mean he had to like it every minute of his existence.

As he once again stared into nothing, thoughts of his childhood days popped into his head, and he could hear his mother saying, "Mark, you shouldn't be alone all the time. Get out and meet people. Meet a nice girl. Get married, and have children."

"But, Mom," he'd say, "I like being alone. It helps me think."

"It's not good to think all the time," she'd say. "How're you going to meet people?" Then she threw her favorite saying at him, "All work and no play make Jack a dull boy."

He didn't understand the importance of this statement as a boy, but the wisdom in his mother's message finally hit him as he matured, and he admitted it made a lot of sense. He just didn't know what to do about it.

Of all the areas he had frequented in the vicinity of the dig, visiting this particular spot was almost becoming a therapeutic necessity for him. Coming here seemed not only to calm him, it cleared his thinking and allowed him to remember just why he was attracted to this God-forsaken country in the first place.

Transform, he said to himself, as if he was in control of a wizard's charm and could change the environment back to the way it was 200,000 years ago. If he could only do that, he would be a happy man. But it wasn't that easy. It was difficult to imagine what it was like back then, even with the voluminous amounts of literature provided by geologists that synthesized a picture of the climate and vegetation at that

time.

He stood there, gazing at the poorly-defined, scrubby forest edge, knowing that this was not really what it was like at the very beginning, when primates, the two-leggeds, as the indigenous people called them, were about to take their first truly bipedal steps, or even later when they were probably fluctuating from an existence between savanna and forest. From where he was standing, the view would have been looking into beautiful, lush jungle vegetation.

That was this area's true time of beauty, he thought, a time when Mother Nature gifted the earth with her most magnificent natural artwork. What he envisioned at this very moment represented the outcome of the rape of its natural beauty and its replacement with second-rate vegetation. The time of its ultimate magnificence had long passed, and conditions for whatever happened to plants and animals of the time had now disappeared.

He remembered early in his career when someone had asked him, "Of all the places you've been, which do you like the best?"

His answer, as always, was "the tropical rain forest."

While this was quasi-tropical, it wasn't rain forest, but it had been at one time, and, in spite of its drawbacks, it presently had its own likeable qualities. There were a lot of animals, and it still held many mysteries that were attractive to scientists—mysteries that dealt with questions about the origin of the human race.

He closed his eyes and took a long, deep breath, as he often did when he came here, and tried to imagine what it was truly like in the days when humans were about to embark on their rise to dominance. Yes, there were extensive savannas back then, as well, but they bordered upon what he imagined

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was an amazing tropical paradise, a place he willfully conjured in his thoughts whenever he had the chance. And when he began to picture the area, it sent chills up his spine.

Tall, stately trees entered his mind, ones so prolific in their growth that they formed a distinct canopy over a shadowy understory and supported numerous exotic plants and animals, composing a secret arboreal world that was unknown to terrestrial organisms. As he stood there, his mind flashed through every detail of what he suspected the jungle was like at the dawn of early man. He even pictured the new humans as they walked through what he imagined was a primeval wonderland.

Under his breath, he said, “They didn’t realize what a magnificent world they had.”

As he had repeatedly said in the classroom, “Many things back then had to be happening simultaneously to push them on: changing habitats, changing anatomy, and a changing brain. In turn, their behavior and interactions with their environment and each other were forming the basis for an everlasting progression to higher forms.

“When the climate in the part of Africa where humans existed was becoming warmer and drier, leading to their first dispersals out of the area and into Europe, it was the change in the early human brain that probably was most important. To be more specific, it was how the human element reasoned that made the difference.”

He wondered, as he often did, if the early people that roamed this area were mostly forest dwellers, or did they spend a majority of their time in the open savanna, walking through dangerous areas where predatory animals hid so well in the tall grasses? These were questions that scientists had been asking ever since Darwin wrote his *Origin of Species*.

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If they always roamed the savanna, he and his crew should have been finding more evidence of this. It was more likely that they spent most of their time along the forest edge to maintain their bearings, like early naval explorers during historical times often hugged the shores in unknown waters of the New World.

Another flashback took him to when he was a young boy, playing rubber-gun games with his playmates. As long as he was behind cover, he was safe; when he stepped out into the open, he was invariably shot by several of his opponents. Just as these primitive people no doubt had done, he learned during his simple games to hide when danger surrounded him.

Multiple questions raced through his mind, just as they had done every time he came to this spot to think. *What were these people really like? How did they communicate or even have the sense to protect themselves from every-day trials and tribulations? What was it really like to live here in a style so primitive that it now remains a mystery to even the most primitive of modern men? What were their fears? What changes have come about since their time?*

He definitely had many more questions than answers, and this haunted him. Everybody had hypotheses about these issues. It was one of the favorite subjects among scientists at meetings.

Whenever he presented a paper, someone invariably would ask, "Dr. Blum, what were these people you speak about really like?" He always attempted to synthesize an answer that would appease them, but it always unimpressively ended with something like, "Many of these questions can't be answered at this time. All we can do is guess."

Mark and his team had long been searching for these and other answers to the beginning of his species, but based on the specimens they were finding, there seemed to be little chance

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of making earth-shaking discoveries. They hadn't even come close.

Finding something new was possible. Over the last few years, other investigators had made many new discoveries, and it appeared as though several groups of scientists from around the world were closing in on some of the well-hidden secrets of human origin.

Recently-found remains of several human species were providing data that supported the consideration that they were the most important *Homo sapiens* predecessors. "Why can't it happen for me?" he begged under his breath.

He had devoted his life to paleontology and was one of the most knowledgeable researchers in the field, especially for his young age, and, yet, the truly significant finds appeared to escape him. What seemed to hurt most was that even his most ill-informed contemporaries were coming up with something once in a while, although he thought that a few of them were often prone to making illogical judgments about their finds.

Painfully, Alex Stanford immediately came to mind. Deep within his essence, Mark bore extreme enmity for Alex and his antagonistic view of everyone's research but his own. Yet, he periodically materialized in Mark's thinking like a nightmare that kept repeating.

If life was fair, Alex and Mark could have been friends, or at least respectful colleagues. They both had the same interests in primitive humans and, by rights, should collaborate on some of their projects. However, Alex was constantly at Mark's throat, choking the life out of him. Mark couldn't understand why Alex continued to hold a grudge for such a long time. It had started as such an innocent situation.

As Mark approached Rhonda Prescott at a meeting in Washington, D.C., all those years ago, he couldn't help notic-

ing she sobbed alone. “Is there anything I can do to help you?”

Would he have offered her his handkerchief if he'd known she was dating Alex Stanford? Would he have even offered her a sympathetic ear? He didn't realize the “loser” she described as being mentally abusive was his colleague, and when Mark's next few days of attention resulted in Rhonda's termination of her relationship with Alex, the spurned boyfriend went berserk. Alex never forgave Mark for the slight.

Once he and Alex had gotten their doctorates and taken on new positions at their respective institutions, Alex did whatever he could to discredit the discoveries Mark made. Whenever Mark submitted a paper for publication, Alex somehow got on the editorial committee and influenced the other committee members to consider its rejection. Mark wondered how he ever got so much clout.

Upset with thoughts of Alex, his mind automatically brought him back to the field and his tropical rainforest fantasies. Actually, he had to repeat these thoughts because the center of early human development was supposed to be right here where his team was working to uncover precisely the fossil remains that were constantly on his mind, but it wasn't happening, and he didn't know why. Even Alex had his *graveyard*.

What Mark was really looking for was a link between pre-humans and those known to have more human characteristics, with a strong edge toward the human side. He often attempted to picture them in his mind as living, breathing creatures rather than simply as an assemblage of anatomical parts. While he had a scientific approach to all his studies, he sometimes felt that coming here alone and concentrating on what it must have been like back then, he felt he may acquire

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some insight about where to look and understand what may have truly happened in those times.

“Transform!” he shouted, out loud and into the trees.

He was certain that his early humans were here, somewhere. *Where would I go if I lived back then? Where would I live? Where would primitive human remains most likely be found?* These were difficult questions to answer under the circumstances.

His former professor and mentor had attempted to pound certain ideas into his head, forcing him to take a holistic approach to his investigations. He would say, “The environment was totally different back then, Mark; the climate was a little cooler and wetter, and the pristine forests that existed at those times have all vanished. Also, the rock formations and caves that at one time protected primeval beings from danger have now shifted, and vegetation has overtaken them to a point of hiding their secrets.” This had sunken in, and he now repeated it to himself.

Although he hated the thought, he reluctantly said to himself, “Maybe Alex is right. Maybe they buried their dead in certain places.” *If they did have graveyards, as Alex insisted they did, it would make it a whole lot easier to study them, because once some clues were found as to their whereabouts, a person could concentrate on just that particular area.* Without such concentrations, investigators were generally forced to locate scattered remains, because when they died without a burial, animals readily fed upon them and scattered the parts over a larger area.

This made whole specimens almost impossible to find, and even the parts were sometimes small and more difficult to locate because they were the remains of larger ones that were chewed upon by predators and scavengers. However, many samples of these various pieces were found by scientists over

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time, and a reasonable picture of their anatomy had developed as the pieces were assembled, patched, and described.

While Mark was looking for even more anatomical parts to increase the knowledge about primitive man, he wished he could somehow find evidence of things that would explain a more active part of their daily lives. As it was, most behavioral information was only in the form of hypotheses.

He harped on this thought in class when he was on campus. “What we have accomplished in the last 50 years has been astounding,” he would say, “but we still know very little about primitive human behavior.”

One of his students asked, “But how are you going to ever learn about behavior when you can’t see it?”

“That’s the rub. I don’t know the answer to that, but if we ever could, it would make our understanding of them a lot better. It’s true that we can learn a certain amount about behavior from the artifacts that we find, but many of our current theories that have stemmed from artifact-related circumstances are simply educated guesses.

“Even though various human fossil remains have been found in different locations, almost nothing is known about their daily habits or degree of intelligence and cooperativeness.” It appeared to Mark that we may never know about these things, but he nevertheless promised himself that he would strive through the most negative of days on the dig in an attempt to fill in some of the pieces to the early human puzzle.

Mark, himself, had barely acquired enough grant support to launch a study in what was at one time considered to be one of the prime locations known to support numerous fossil animals and the humans that lived among them. One of the reasons for this was because paleontological evidence indicated

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that this area had been exhaustively investigated and picked over until there was very little left to find. Mark knew this when he wrote his proposal, but he also knew that finding paleontological pieces to the human puzzle was spotty, and it may be that the right spot, “the Mother Load,” as he called it, was yet to be found.

It was based on this latter premise that he had finally gained some support for the dig, and he was determined to show the scientific community that he was right. Yet, based on what they were coming up with over the last few months, there was a chance that even his meager support could be in jeopardy. Needless to say, this weighed heavily on his mind.

He didn't want to lose hope. Things were changing in the scientific world. It was at a recent meeting that his friend, Bruce Yeager, was expounding on the future of paleontology when he said, “If something of importance is found,” and this was a big if in Mark's case, “there is a chance that it can be investigated from various sophisticated angles, because along with the examination of newly found fossil-rich areas, technology has now progressed to a point whereby almost anything is possible in terms of understanding the intricate details of organisms at every level, from their gross anatomy to their genetic composition. The world of science is changing rapidly because of ever-diversifying approaches.”

Mark asked, “But what does this mean in terms of my dig site? How can I benefit from these new advances?”

Bruce answered, “I can recommend the material you should read. You'll find that new techniques are being used in a number of fields and actually resulting in a directional change for research in those fields. In fact, several fields of science are beginning to merge with paleontological studies.”

“This sounds interesting, but will I be able to use these

techniques to get some insight into the lives of early humans?”

“Well, think of it this way,” Bruce had said. “You’ll never be prepared if you don’t keep up with modern technology. You need to read ahead in case you find that ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ opportunity.”

Mark took Bruce’s recommendations and began to read about things that didn’t exist in his world. It didn’t take long to realize that investigating foreign approaches added to the complications of life.

Within a society where science in the international community was as close as the computer on your desk, living and functioning as a paleontological researcher was sometimes difficult. Computer electronics played a major role in Mark’s procedures to study and interpret his finds, but, at the same time, his scientific world was traveling so fast that it sometimes seemed to almost spin out of control. It was often difficult to even keep abreast of the literature.

Thank God for abstracts at the beginning of scientific papers. Without them, it would be impossible to keep up.

It was a stressful situation. In addition, when one spent all his time reading the literature, even just abstracts, when was there time to make discoveries? The pressure mounted anew, and he was certain that some of the others at the dig site experienced similar anxiety. Something had to give.



One evening, at the supper tent, Mark made an announcement to all of his co-workers. “While it’s up to you how you spend the next few days, I suggest you take some time off, a sort of holiday. We haven’t had any time off since

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we got here, and it's time we take a breather for a few days of relaxation."

He announced that he was organizing a trip up the side of Mt. Kilimanjaro, which was not far from the dig site. "Everyone is welcome to come along."

In addition to those that simply didn't want to leave the dig site, others declined the offer because it appeared that the trek up the mountain would be difficult. Mark ended up with only half a dozen individuals that wanted to take part.

"Mark, isn't that the mountain that Dr. Stanford found a graveyard of humanoids by?" When this was said, Mark's whole demeanor changed, and he felt a chill go up his spine. It was a comment he had to quickly but thoroughly assess before engaging his mouth.

Sissy Spencer, a graduate student at the San Diego University that represented Mark's home base, had happily grabbed up the post that let her work with the professor she respected. Because she was specializing in particular historical events in primitive human societies and had almost gone to work for Dr. Stanford at one time, Mark wasn't sure if Sissy was serious about what she had said or whether she was pulling his leg. He didn't want to alienate someone who knew Alex, but he thought it would be appropriate to make some comment about this *find* that Alex had claimed to make.

While Mark had more extensive training and an extraordinary comprehension of the subject matter in the field of paleontology, Alex seemed to have less trouble getting grant support. That support and apparent current stability in his department probably had more to do with his brown-nosing nature and the bullshit he used to subordinate his peers than with his ability to interpret the lives of primitive people. While Mark never liked the subordinating approach, he un-

derstood that it had its benefits.

Mark responded to Sissy's question, beginning with a slight twist of sarcasm. "Yes, it appears that Dr. Stanford has made a very good find. Actually, the find was made by some African citizens, and Alex somehow inherited the research project through an old alumnus at his university."

He turned to the rest of his crew and said, "In case some of you are not familiar with Dr. Stanford's find, a group of early people was discovered lying in a gorge at the base of Mt. Kilimanjaro, not far from where we will be at one point of our climb. I would hesitate to refer to this find as a graveyard, though, for several reasons. It's true that his group was made up of individuals that were early humanoids. This being the case, graveyards are not known to have been part of their culture."

Sissy broke in, "But this doesn't mean that they didn't bury their dead, does it? I mean, just because more evidence hasn't been found to support your hypothesis, it doesn't mean it won't be found in the future."

Sensing some support among the rest of the crew for Sissy and her thoughts about Alex's hypothesis, Mark said, "They didn't even have a religious base or the intelligence to bury their dead together. As far as we know, they didn't seem to bury them at all.

"Yes, Sissy, you're right, but based on our present knowledge, I don't think Dr. Stanford has found a graveyard. Also, his group was found to have a lot of broken bones. This, in itself, is an unusual circumstance.

"Try to imagine it, everyone, numerous whole bodies found together, all with multiple fractures throughout their skeletal remains. They were not arranged in any particular fashion, and they were all one sex and about the same age. I

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wouldn't be surprised if some catastrophic event occurred to trap the group in that gorge. But whatever that event was, we may never know its true significance, and Alex Stanford has a right to express his views, no matter how wrong they may be.

"No matter what the truth of the matter is, saying that they were ritualistically buried there is pure speculation. Nothing used by Stanford to support his conclusions is factual other than that those humans were found together."

Ever since the discovery was made, Mark knew that Alex would somehow come up with a reason for this group to be in a graveyard, whether he had supporting evidence for it or not. He had talked about graveyards throughout graduate school, never with a shred of evidence to support his theories.

When Mark finished with his comment, Sissy wasn't sure that asking her question had been the right thing to do. She could see that mentioning Alex Stanford's name had brought up some bitter feelings in Mark, and she was willing to let the subject drop.

As if in agreement, Mitch Staner, a graduate student working on primitive jawbone characteristics, switched to the trek ahead of them. "Mark, what do you think we should take with us up the mountain, and how long do you think we'll be? And, how cold do you think it'll get?"

"Even though there are reports of ice melting near Mt. Kilimanjaro's peak," Mark said, pleased with the switch to a new subject, "I think it'll be very cold at some point. I'd take enough food for ten to twelve days, possibly more. We could be up there that long. And I'd take a heavy jacket of some sort, along with a sweater and some long-johns, if you have some.

"When we reach the snow in the permafrost zone, we'll need some extra clothing to stay warm. We'll try not to stay

at the summit any longer than we have to. I'd also take along some note paper in case we get inspired, and some fire-starting materials, like matches and a magnifying glass.

"A sleeping bag, hat, sunglasses, flashlight with some extra batteries, and a few tools, in case we find anything of interest. You'll find a lot of this in the supply tent.

"If you have a camera, bring that along. Other than that, use your own judgment. I'll take along a few other items that may help us in one way or another. We'll leave in the morning. Let's meet here at five a.m. and have a good breakfast before we head out."

Before retiring for the evening, Mark chose another graduate student, Josh Haldman, to be in charge of the camp. Josh had been with Mark for several years, getting his Master's degree and now working on a Ph.D., and he was most familiar with how Mark ran the site.

"Mark, I understand how you feel. This life kind of gets to you after a while, no matter how much you love it. Honestly, I don't know why you don't take more breaks. When you get back, I'd like to take a few days off, too. Would that be okay?"

"You bet. I appreciate having you here at this dig, Josh. It makes me feel better, knowing you'll handle everything properly while we're gone. I'll make it up to you when we get back, I promise."

Nicholas Lazinsky, a perpetual student who recently had changed his major from business to psychology and just happened to luck out at getting a job with them when they were in need of an extra hand or two, wasn't as thrilled about Mark's new adventure. He took every opportunity to criticize Mark whenever he could, and he didn't think Mark should leave the dig site at all. He felt it was Mark's responsibility to stay at the site and do what he was paid to do.

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Nicholas had been a handful ever since he arrived. Actually, he had been a problem for almost every teacher since arriving at the university because of his negative attitude about every subject he had taken. He was here at the dig site because he needed a job, and Mark felt he could use some support and direction. Mark quickly found out that he didn't appreciate the help.

Every day, he had new complaints, disagreements about how Mark ran things, and misgivings about ever joining this group of what he referred to as *pseudo-scientists*. He often offered some indignant remarks to others at the dig site, like, "So, here he is, Dr. Wonder, getting ready for an excursion away from what he's supposed to do and getting paid for it, as well. What kind of scientist is this anyway?"

Nicholas's negative comments weren't based on anything in particular, as far as Mark could see, and he wasn't as knowledgeable about paleontology or any other subject that would give him the right to criticize anyone. He, as the other students at the dig site had repeated many times, was "just a sorry individual." They concluded that he must have had a bad childhood.

Mark told Josh, "If Nicholas gives you any trouble, just tell him to pack his bags, pick up his ticket back to the states, and get out of here. He has been no help to us, and he's a constant source of grief to everyone. If I didn't know any better, I'd swear Alex sent him to spy on us.

"You have full authority to take control of any situation, okay?" Mark was experiencing serious regrets that he ever accepted Nicholas to be part of his team.

Josh shook his head up and down slowly, acknowledging Mark's comments. He had the urge to immediately run to Nicholas and relieve him of his duties, but he thought he'd

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best wait and see how he did in Mark's absence.

Before he left, Mark said, "By the way, good luck while we're gone. I hope you find something of significance. We could use something spectacular just about now. We'll look around on our trip up the mountain."

CHAPTER TWO

Early the next morning, Mark and the others gathered at the breakfast tent and had their last meal at the dig site.

“Good morning, everyone.” He was surprised at the cheerful nature of his greeting. It almost sounded out of place, considering the foul mood he was in just the day before.

Everybody returned a jovial “Good morning!”

“Are you ready for a change and some excitement?”

With unexpected vigor, everyone in the group yelled a synchronous, “Yes!” Mark stared at the group and hesitated to continue for a moment, giving himself time to digest their

enthusiasm.

Something had happened to the group since the somber meeting he had with them the day before. As he listened during his brief moment of personal quiet, they now seemed to be in high spirits, talking about the climb, whether they would see any unusual animals, and a number of other subjects that preceded a trip of this nature.

This reinforced his thinking that they definitely needed this break as much as he did. Surprisingly, Mark already felt better himself, anticipating that this break was precisely what he needed to organize his mind and move ahead with research.

When they had finished eating, Mark gave the signal, "Let's clean up and shove off." After clearing the tables, they loaded their gear into the truck and drove through a somewhat erratic and very bumpy terrain until the *road* ended, putting them close to the location Mark often visited to get his head clear.

He was sure that their butts were sore by this time, but they didn't complain. They unloaded their gear, strapped most of it to their backs, and began walking.

Conversation was light and non-directed. Behind him, Mark heard someone say, "I think Sissy touched on a nerve about Stanford."

The student he was talking with said, "You may be right. It sure sparked a fire in Mark. It's easy to see he doesn't think much of Stanford's research." When Mark heard the comments, he didn't look around to see who made them, and he held back any reply. What would he say anyway? Their comments were true. He thought very little of Alex's research.

Their first hairy experience was crossing a hippo- and crocodile-infested river on a rickety, make-shift, suspended bridge that was tied together with some sort of rope-like ma-

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terial, all made of vegetation by some locals. Once back on land, adrenaline production subsided, and they covered a considerable distance on flat, grass-covered ground before they got to the rolling slopes of the mountain's foothills. This took them until the afternoon of the first day, at which time they stopped, ate a snack, and were on their way again, this time moving at a slight incline.

They saw a few animals during their afternoon trek. There was a moment of excitement when the group spotted an eight-foot cobra slithering away from the poorly defined path that they were following. This, of course, made them take additional care about where they stepped.

Sissy asked, "Where are all the large carnivores? We haven't seen any."

Mark answered, "What you see out here depends on the time of year. At other times, when the herbivores migrate this way, there would be many more animals in this area. It's during their migrations that the crocs get their fill of herbivores, and when the herbivores venture this way, terrestrial carnivores come, as well. Most of the cats and hyenas are in other parts of the savanna right now. You must have noticed that the variety and abundance of animals are also down near our dig site. Actually, the lack of carnivores makes this time of year the best time for a trip like this."

A second point of excitement raised its head when Daniel Conahan, a new graduate student in Mark's department, came upon a viper early in the climb. Other than scaring the living shit out of him, no harm had come to him when it was over. As he attempted to calm his jangled nerves, he reminisced about Mark telling them to watch their step in the grasses, and he called in what sounded like a weakened voice to let the others know what had happened.

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By the day's end, they had gained a couple thousand feet in elevation, and the temperature was decidedly cooler. They were accustomed to mild days and cool nights, since the dig site was located on a plateau with enough elevation that they didn't have to suffer the typical hot weather that characterized lower elevations on and near the equator.

They dropped their gear in a rocky flat, added a sweater or similar garment to their clothing, built a fire, and ate supper. Conversation led back to the dig and how some of the hikers already were missing their daily finds.

Daniel said, "I wonder what the others are finding at the dig site. It would be our luck that they find a whole skeleton of *Homo erectus*, and we're out here, stepping on vipers. If that happened, I'd really be pissed off."

It wasn't hard for Mark to see that some of his hikers were a little disappointed with the climb. This feeling was strengthened by the fact that they had casually looked for fossil evidence along the way and had found absolutely nothing.

"Don't worry about it," Mark said. "You'll be back at the dig site soon enough, and your routine will continue as before. Take advantage of the time off, and think about something else. We're getting some good exercise for a change, and we need this break." Mark said this, and he truly believed it, but his mind often skipped back to the fossils they found at the dig site, as well.

It wasn't so much what they were finding at the dig as what he'd like to find. You never knew from one minute to the next what might turn up. That was part of the mystery and fun of it all.

Mark, like any scientist about to embark on an investigation, had thoroughly searched the geological literature prior to commencing work in this area, and he was familiar with

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the changes that had taken place in the various areas surrounding the excavation site over time. In addition, he had rehashed the events of the past so many times, it was second nature to him to consider them in his every thought.

Since they were away from the dig and had the time, he thought this would be a good chance to regurgitate some of the information to his students. This was one of the advantages to having some time off, anyway—to talk about things normally not discussed on campus or at the work place.

He stopped, turned to face the others, and said, “Could I have your attention for just a few minutes? I think we’re going to camp here tonight. It’s a good, level spot, and I think most of us need the rest. But before you turn in, I want to say a few words about some things that have been going through my mind. Take a seat on the ground for a few minutes.”

After a few moments of waiting for them to situate themselves, he continued. “While we relax here and while we’re walking along this trail, I want you to think about where our dig site is and compare it with the areas that we’ve covered on our first day toward the mountain. A quarter-of-a-million or more years ago, our dig site was similar, in a way, to what it is today, a grassland or grassland border, but the dry areas that we’ve covered on our first day up the mountain were once part of a very lush tropical rain forest.

“I think it’s important to think about things like this when attempting to understand what it must have been like during early times. The humans that lived here probably weren’t totally forest dwellers, but they weren’t in the savanna all the time either.”

“What makes you believe this, Mark?” John Etchin, a curious undergraduate student who had just switched his major

to biology, was constantly asking probing questions on the meaning behind their fossil finds.

Mark thought for a moment and said, “Well, while tools were used by very primitive humans and even sub-human animals, they were tools actually made by nature. Most people feel that hand-made tools didn’t exist or weren’t very well developed in early human societies, but to survive the dangers of living in the savanna, some form of defensive tools had to be available. Of course, anything made of wood, like spears, is long gone by now.

“They didn’t have the strength to overcome the more powerful predators without tools or some special form of defense. It took a considerable amount of thought and the acquisition of some type of a defensive strategy to understand how to live here. They probably spent most of their time in groups when they were away from their homes. Their actual homes were probably mostly in the jungle or at the jungle edge, close to the areas in which they collected their food. Some investigators may not agree with this, but this is what I believe.

“Populations are presumed to have been relatively small, and living in a jungle-like environment would sustain small family groups without the need of moving, especially into the more dangerous savanna, for a period of time. But I sincerely believe these early humanoids were forced to sometimes move their homes, in spite of their security, and as populations became larger, moving was even more essential.

“To move, they sometimes had to go into the savanna, and defense against all sorts of dangers became more and more important. To complement their changing needs toward environmental stresses, the humanoid mind was changing to allow them to cope with these stresses. Just how intelligent these early humanoids were is speculation at this time, but we know

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many of them survived or we wouldn't be standing here today."

After a few moments of silence, John Blistock, a new graduate student, commented, "You just mentioned the term societies. What do you mean by that?" John knew what the term meant to him, but he'd read about so many different definitions in the literature and heard them at the meetings he attended, he wanted to hear how Mark defined it.

Mark said, "There are many ways to define societies, depending on the group with which a researcher is working. I speak of societies in somewhat loose terms, as compared with the way it's described by some of our contemporary writers.

"Very few behaviorists have spoken about societies in a holistic way. They refer to societies of invertebrates or societies of vertebrates, but it's sometimes been difficult to refer to societies in such a way that both of these groups are satisfied.

"I like to keep it simple. I define society as a group of individuals that live and function together. So, a society is a separate unit of individuals that may have a connection to or be totally isolated from another society, all within a population of the same species."

John asked, "But, Mark, what does being isolated or being in contact with other societies have to do with it?"

"I'm glad you asked that question, John. I believe that these primitive humans were forced to live in societies of various sizes, mostly as family groups. In certain ways, the arrangement of these societies resulted in some forms of isolation so that breeding among individuals of different societies was restricted to some degree, and there wasn't always the gene flow through the entire population that you'd find if the individuals of these different societies were allowed to breed freely. This is not a concept just for humans. It's the same

with any animal population.”

Mitch asked, “What would happen if gene flow is restricted?”

“Whenever the freedom of breeding throughout a population is restricted, mutations of all sorts crop up that often remain within a society until it somehow causes these differences to surface. While such mutations may be of no consequence in large societies because there is a stronger gene flow that keeps the mutations more-or-less hidden, such mutations could cause deleterious changes in individuals within a society of small size, and it could result in some serious complications, maybe even in their extinction. This is especially true if there is repeated breeding between closely related individuals.

“Many genetically-related diseases of today surface due to inbreeding and the expression of recessive genes. On the other hand, societies with inbred members could also develop favorable mutations that would result in one society being better in some way than another society.”

Mitch piped up again and asked, “How would the beneficial mutations help a family unit?”

“If the mutation involves intelligence,” Mark said, “it could result in one individual or even an entire family group being smarter or more advanced in some way than another individual or society. This would result in varying degrees of survival benefits from one society to another. Variation, as you probably know, is the key to species survival on this planet of ours.

“I would like for all of you to think in depth about this concept of societies. It is the concept that has brought humans to where they are today. There are many advantages to living in societies, and one of the most important rewards centers

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around defense.

“As you think about primitive humans or any other social animal, and as you write future papers about their lives, always keep this concept in mind. With no defensive strategy in a hostile world, an individual or society, no matter how simple or complex its form, will have difficulty in surviving, and that’s as true today as it was back then.”

After the discussion between individuals of the group continued and eventually died down, it was obvious that many of the comments that were made stimulated the group to think about these primitive souls who initiated the lineage that led to modern populations. After they prepared their sleeping areas and lay there, contemplating the distant past, they looked into the sky and became momentarily hypnotized.

They had no lights or clouds whatsoever to hinder their vision. Back at the dig site, even the meager night lights sometimes hindered their vision of the sky, and the constant drone of the gasoline generators at the dig site caused them to forget just how nice a quiet environment was. They saw numerous stars that they had never seen before, with occasional shooting ones. The sky was a fantasyland of sparkling light, unlike anything they had ever seen, and it was very, very quiet.

They conceded to themselves that each star was a potential sun for other planets, many of which could harbor some forms of life, and they wondered if there were some up there like the one they were on, with life like they were experiencing. Chances are, there were.

This fetched new thoughts from their minds, at science’s beginnings, when philosophy was experiencing its heyday, when everyone thought of earth as the center of the universe, and how thinking had changed, making us realize that we are

just a small part of a vast and sometimes mystical system. *What a difference just a few generations made to our understanding of our surroundings.*

Eventually, everyone had drifted from deep thought into a peaceful sleep that took them to a less scientific realm, and they enjoyed a night under the stars, the very same ones that shone down upon the primitive societies about which they pondered.

The next two days were almost eventless, with no animals in particular, save a few hares and rodents—animals that could hide among the stunted vegetation. On the morning of the third day, they ate breakfast just after sunrise, cleaned up the camp site, put their things in order, and started out again.

“Surely by the end of this day we’ll be approaching the summit,” Dale Studerman exclaimed in a depressed kind of way to another student. “I hope the trek today is more interesting than the last four days. The discussion we had at the end of the first day was something I wouldn’t have wanted to miss, but the following days have been kinda dull. Maybe we’ll see something new today.”

The vegetation was becoming dwarfed from what they had seen on previous days, and they were beginning to see patches of ice and snow that apparently had been there for a long time. About midday, just after a lunch snack, the peaceful sounds of camp life were broken when John Etchin let out a sudden scream for help. From the way he had screamed, his fellow hikers weren’t sure if he was in trouble or what his problem was.

“Over here, over here!” he yelled. As they quickly approached the vicinity of the noise, they realized that he had found something protruding from the dirt.

As they got closer and began fingering the specimen,

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Mark shouted, “Hey, hey, hey! Don’t touch. Whatever John found, we don’t want to contaminate it with our own DNA. Just look for now.”

When Mark arrived at the spot, he let out an unexpected, “Holy shit, I can’t believe it.”

He recognized it immediately as a jaw bone of an early humanoid. This was unusual because the temperature here was approaching the colder end of the scale, and he wondered why an ancient humanoid would come up here in the first place. Food was scarce, and he didn’t see anything else that would attract such a primitive being. *Could it be that some form of religion was developing in these creatures, and it was attempting to get closer to his or her God? Or maybe it was running away from something?* Also, there was the possibility that some animal had dragged the remains up to this spot for some reason. To Mark, that was the most logical answer, but whatever the reason, there it was, and a good specimen at that.

Mark stood there, his mouth open, looking at the specimen from every possible angle. He finally let out, “Well, I’ll be damned!”

While Mark looked closer, Mitch Staner was also examining the jaw bone with a high degree of excitement. He said, “This specimen is *Homo erectus* or a close relative, precisely the group I’m interested in most. John, you really should be happy with this find.” While this was a polite remark from Mitch, he was actually a little envious that he had not found it himself.

He said, “I would appreciate having a closer look at it when we get back to camp, John.”

John felt Mitch’s excitement, and he understood his concern. “Sure, Mitch. Let’s talk about it with Mark when we get a chance.” He didn’t quite know how to handle the situation.

He'd have to talk to Mark. He definitely wanted Mitch to benefit from the find, but he wanted to get credit for it, as well.

Mark said, "I want everyone to look closely at the jaw bone as it protrudes from the dirt." When Mark was finished talking about the important characteristics of this particular jaw bone and everyone had seen the specimen at close range, John and Mitch put on latex gloves and stayed with Mark to take notes on the new specimen while the rest of the group went ahead to set up camp a little higher on the mountain.

After convincing themselves that the area was documented in photos, they spent about two hours carefully removing the specimen from its resting place and taking notes. They also dug around the spot a little, looking for accompanying bones and artifacts, but nothing was found.

They photographed the specimen without its matrix, numbered it, covered it in a protective wrapping, and put it into John's back pack. After checking their notes, they added a few final comments and called it quits.

They had told the others that they would catch up to them, so Mark decided not to search any further. Besides, he thought it would be a good idea to mull this over in his mind before carrying out further digging in this area.

Still full of enthusiasm, Mark said, "That was an extremely good find, John. You should be proud. You made the trip well worth it already. In fact, it's one of the best things we've found since we started our dig. After we thoroughly document the jaw bone that you found and establish its age, we'll work it into a publication. It also would be good for you, Mitch, and me to investigate it together because, as he said, that's the focal point in his research. The three of us can collaborate on its publication. Mitch already has all the literature on the sub-

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ject. Whatever we do, you'll still get credit for the find."

Wanting to reinforce the value of the find, John asked, "Do you really think it's a jawbone from a human as primitive as *Homo erectus*?"

Mark and Mitch simultaneously answered, "Yes!" Mark followed with, "There's no doubt about it. When we have it aged, our finding will be more conclusive, but it's old, damned old!

"We'd better get a move on or we'll be camping by ourselves tonight." They took a few rock specimens, briefly described the area, took a GPS reading, and started out at a fast pace to reach the camp before nightfall.

They reached the others just after dark and grabbed a bite to eat before retiring, hugging the small fire that had been started with a meager selection of stunted vegetation before their arrival in an attempt to warm their cold bodies.

John, like the others, couldn't get the jaw bone or its location out of his mind, and it was obvious that he had been thinking about it all day.

"Mark, I couldn't help but notice that the trail we followed up was beginning to narrow just about where we found that jaw bone, and it was located almost at the edge of the trail before the mountainside dropped off. Maybe the individual that the jaw bone came from somehow got trapped up here, or maybe there was a rock slide or some event that caused that individual's death.

"The rest of the body could have later fallen off the edge. But even then, finding a jaw bone in the permafrost region is difficult to understand. Do you think the climate here was different back then, allowing humans to live here?"

"I doubt it, John. While there were many changes in the valleys surrounding this mountain, the climate as you go up

the mountain underwent fewer changes. For instance, the ice caps at the top that exist now are likely to be the same ones that existed thousands of years ago, maybe even much longer. I'm sure that there were minor changes, though, like the rising temperatures this mountain is experiencing today, but it has changed very little since the volcano became inactive.

"So, to answer your question, I doubt that this area was ever a permanent home site for primitive populations. Why live here when it was obviously more of a comfort zone in the foothills, the surrounding forests, and savannas? There also were no animals of size up here to catch or plants of value.

"I think that whoever the jaw bone belonged to got there for another reason. Just what that was is a mystery we may never understand."

Mark actually held back information from John. He wasn't sure if it was significant, but the *graveyard* reported on by Alex Stanford was at the base of the mountain trail that they were traveling along. He couldn't help but wonder if what they had found had anything to do with Alex's group, so he decided to store this in his memory until he had a chance to reevaluate it.

They didn't quite reach the top of the mountain on the next day, but they were close. Noticing that the top of the mountain was completely capped by snow and ice, they were resigned to spending some time in the zone of perpetual permafrost, a frozen condition it had been in since volcanic activity had ceased, in spite of recent reports that its cap was melting due to global warming.

When they reached the top the following morning, everyone huddled together, with a synchronous shivering. As they stood there, their minds concentrated on the view, they were in awe of the beauty.

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“I’ll tell you what, gang,” Mark said, shouting above the noisy, cold breeze, “let’s get started back immediately, and we’ll stop to eat somewhere down the trail. I’m freezing up here, and we’d all be more comfortable eating where the wind isn’t blowing so strongly. Let’s say about an hour below. We’ll make better time going down than coming up, so we should be near the spot where John found that jaw bone.”

Mark was intrigued by that spot now, having thought about it ever since they removed the jaw bone from its substrate, and he was now thinking that maybe if they looked around a bit more, they might find something else.

After about an hour, they were still well into the permafrost region. They hadn’t reached the spot at which the jaw bone was found, but everyone was hungry and ready for a rest. The narrow pass was just ahead, and they could continue toward it just after their break.

Mark stopped, held up his hand, and said, “Let’s eat our noon-time snack here and look around a bit before going on.” He didn’t know exactly why, but he had a feeling that something was here that needed to be found. It wasn’t a likely spot to find anything. Almost everything was covered in ice and snow, with the exception of a few scattered protruding rock formations. Possibly finding that jaw bone on the other side of the narrow pass influenced his thinking, that maybe something actually did happen up here to cause primitive people to venture this way. What event that was, he still didn’t have a clue.

Mark got their attention again and said, “Since John found that jaw bone near here, let’s take a little time to look around. Once we’ve examined this area a bit, we’ll descend the mountain further, traverse the narrow pass to our former lunch site and spend a little time looking there, as well. May-

be we'll get lucky and find the rest of that individual we discovered on our way up. I don't want to spend a lot of time in either place, but it would be a sin not to look around just a little bit."



After their meal, everyone scattered to take care of personal business and check for any suspicious things in or extending out of the rocks, snow, and ice. The search remained relatively quiet until Daniel Conahan started yelling. "Quick, quick, I've got something!"

As was the case when John was screaming on the way up the mountain, everyone thought Daniel was in some sort of trouble. Yet Daniel was yelling loud and with greater excitement, and they knew it had to be something of importance.

As they all ran to assist him in whatever way necessary, Daniel continued yelling until they arrived and saw what he was yelling about. He had stumbled upon a small depression in which snow and ice had accumulated over long periods of time. How long it had been there, no one could know, but there, sticking out of the ice, were the bony remains of a hand, and the remainder of whatever it was attached to was covered by a mixture of ice and soil. The extent of the fossil wasn't evident because of the frozen substrate's opacity.

Mark arrived, moved closer to the specimen, and stared intently at the hand. "Oh, my God!" Once the words left his mouth, he continued to stare at the specimen, appearing to be in some sort of a trance, and he began to tremble.

At first, it didn't seem to be that old. There was skin and flesh, although wizened and ancient in appearance, still present on the bones, some of it hanging in shreds from the

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exposed joints. But when he began examining the details more closely, he realized that it must be old—very old.

It obviously had been there for a long time, because the exposed portion was completely weathered, and from what they were seeing, it being an extremely early human was not beyond the realm of possibility. Although totally illogical at the time, he rationalized that for some odd reason a primitive human could have become frozen here and remained in ice for many thousands of years. It was that kind of place.

Mark's thoughts were coming more rapidly and uncontrollably. Again, he thought, *just why would a primitive human be up here?* Again, he had no clue. This was another of those illogical things that came up once in a while, but that really didn't matter at this point. What mattered was that they had found this fossil human or pre-human hand, and the specimen to which the hand attached, or parts of it, appeared to be in reasonably good condition. If it was very old, it might be the most important paleontological discovery in ages.

With a pounding heart and difficulty controlling his emotions, Mark held a shaky hand up to get the attention of everyone in his group. He felt a lump in his throat, and he had some difficulty breathing.

"Jesus, I can't stop shaking!" He lowered his head and attempted to gain some control over his emotions. "Even without digging this specimen out of the ice, I know this is a very important find. In fact, it may be much more important than anything we could even hope to find at our dig site. I'm guessing, but I would say that the age of this individual is close to that of the jaw bone we found on the other side of the pass, and they are both very old."

He stopped talking for a moment, took some deep breaths, and said, "While it's important to get back to camp

and decide what we want to do with this creature, it's also important that we investigate it as much as possible before we leave. So, I'd like everyone here to assist in digging at least a portion of this find out of the ice so we can have a better look."

He thought about what he said and decided to clarify his instructions. "I don't want a lot of digging, and I don't want any more tissues exposed to the air. I just want to clear away some of the snow and debris, make some attempt at identifying it, and see how much more of this specimen is here before we leave.

"We can work out the details about its investigation at a later date. After all, it's probably been here for thousands upon thousands of years, and I doubt that things will change before we can get back up here. You should all feel very good about this find. It may be the find of a lifetime for all of us, and you can always say that you were part of this expedition."

A visible sign of excitement rippled through the entire group as they each realized they were part of what was happening, and they were eager to all chip in to find out more about this specimen. While Mark could see that there was excitement among the individuals in his group, he knew that the real significance of the find wouldn't hit them until later. They were all in shock, like when you have an accident but don't feel the pain until your body adjusts to its new condition.

With their digging tools, Mark and the others carefully began scraping away at the ice, compacted snow, and debris to get a closer look at the specimen.

On a couple of occasions, Mark shouted, "Careful, careful! We don't want to harm it."

When he began to see that there was significantly more to

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the specimen and subsequently saw the body and face, even through a foot or so of cloudy ice, his heart began to pound rapidly until he thought it would burst out of his chest, and his trembling reached new heights. He knew that the specimen had to be a very early humanoid.

With some difficulty, he ascertained that it had some type of skin-like wrappings around its body, and it appeared to be quite hairy. He now was absolutely certain that they had found something of extreme value.

What was difficult to understand was that the specimen was wearing some kind of necklace. He couldn't make out its details, but nothing as old as what he thought this specimen was had ever been found with a necklace of any sort, or any other ornamentation. This made him wonder if they should chip away at the ice to get a closer look, but his better judgment made him think twice about the possibility of harming their find. He could wait.

Once they had finished with their preliminary identification, Mark reiterated to the others, "I'm convinced more than ever that this may be the find of a lifetime. I don't know its true value at this point because we don't know the condition of the body, and we won't know until we can study it under laboratory conditions."

Yet, based on his reading about new technology available to paleontologists, Mark was already thinking about how to use the specimen. "Mitch, we have to think hard about what we're going to do with this specimen, but I would imagine that at some point you'll end up with the cranial region to work with. Your jawbone investigation, especially with the surrounding tissues well preserved in the head region, should really be enhanced with a study of this specimen." He knew that Mitch was thinking along the same lines.

“Okay, okay! This is what we’re going to do.” Mark continued to speak with a quavering voice. “We’re going to pinpoint this location and take some notes but leave our specimen here for the time being.”

When he said it, he noticed a sudden expression of worry on the faces of his party members.

“As I said earlier, it’s been here for a long time, and it’s likely that this is the safest spot for it until we can get some help. To have a varied assortment of opinions about the area and our find, I want everyone here to take separate notes. We can combine them at camp. That way, we’re sure to cover every aspect of the find, and it’ll be good experience for you.

“When we arrive at the dig site, I’ll make arrangements to get a helicopter up here to take our specimen to a laboratory where we’ll conduct our research. Daniel, you and I will write a grant proposal and study this one together, and everyone here, unless you object, will have a hand in its investigation in one way or another. If you don’t yet have a subject for a thesis or dissertation, I’m sure you will be able to get one here.”

Daniel seemed to be happy with these arrangements. After all, he did find the specimen, and he began to realize that even though he hadn’t graduated from college yet, studying and reporting on this specimen, especially under Mark’s direction, could provide the clout he needed to enter graduate school and work on the specimen for at least one of his advanced degrees.

By refraining from overdoing their digging and putting the specimen at risk, their preliminary work was completed within the next couple of hours. Mark took another GPS reading, and he carefully removed the exposed hand and some adjacent tissue from the hand that was protruding from the ice for a determination of the specimen’s age.

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When they had finished with their field notes, Mark took the last of his pictures, pushed some of the ice back in place to hide it from view, wrapped a white university tape around the specimen, and gave the signal to move on. He chose this color so as not to draw attention to the specimen but to let anyone who came upon it know that it belonged to his research team and his university. He and the students also put a yellow plastic ribbon around the area to let any hikers know they shouldn't venture beyond that point.

Following their careful crossing of the narrow pass, they stopped briefly at the spot at which the jaw bone was found, but no one had their heart set on staying there long. After poking around for about an hour without finding additional material, Mark gave the signal to pack things up and prepare to descend the mountain once again.

Mark realized that they hadn't given this site their best shot, and if they hadn't found what they did on the other side of the pass, he would have stayed longer. His excitement after finding the frozen specimen was compelling him to leave and immediately prepare for its safe keeping and subsequent investigation.

The talk all the way back to the dig site was about the fossil remains they had found. "Who was it?" "How old was it?" "Where did it live?" "Why was it there in such a frigid area in the first place?" They all realized that some of these questions may never be answered, but it was fun speculating about them.

Once back, the crew that had remained at the dig site immediately detected excitement in those that had ventured up the mountain, and for a long while, most of the talk among the researchers continued to be about the new finds. Both Daniel and John received hearty hand-shakes and vigor-

ous expressions of congratulations that evening from almost everyone, which reminded them, once again, of the importance of their finds. Some of the other dig-site researchers showed signs of disappointment that they hadn't gone on the trip.

John Etchin and Mitch Staner wasted no time with the jawbone that John had found on the trip. As Mark had suggested, they decided to publish on the find with their names and Mark's on the paper as coauthors. Mitch would be the senior author. It was a break that Mitch was waiting for.

Mitch had a number of additional thoughts in the back of his mind. He was reminiscing about Mark's reference to his studying the musculature that attached to the jawbone of the specimen in ice. That would greatly add to his dissertation. It, in fact, could be the main focus. No one had ever described the musculature and function of the jaw of such a primitive human. Mark, on the other hand, knew that he'd have to wait. The specimen was too valuable to commence dissection at this early stage.

Everyone that went on the trip continued to be extremely pleased with what had happened. They weren't all sure about how this find would affect them, but they were certain that Mark would be fair about how he shared it with them. He was known for his fairness on issues such as that. Some of the individuals that remained at the dig site would certainly end up investigating the new specimen as well, because of the various facets of primitive anatomy that they each had been working on.

On the other hand, Nicholas Lazinsky wasn't impressed. He was still bitter that he was surrounded by morons who were being directed to believe they had found an early human.

His comment was, "And even if they did find a primitive

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human, so what? What of importance could they ever learn from a specimen like that, even if it did turn out to be old? They'll probably request more government money that will be wasted on something that has nothing to do with reality. And this jawbone. It's another insignificant piece of a stupid puzzle, designed as a game to keep pseudo-scientists busy in their jobs."

It was obvious to everyone that Nicholas didn't like Mark, and he didn't think much of the dig, the new specimens that were found, or anything else that was going on in what he considered "a remote hell hole." In addition to whatever happened during his childhood, many of his problems probably originated simply with being in the field, the C-ration-like food, the primitive toilet facilities, and the discomforts associated with field work. He'd rather be back on campus, eating real food, and sleeping in a soft, clean bed.

Mark did a lot of thinking and planning that night about the procedure to follow to get the specimen to a safe place. Sleeping was, at first, out of the question, but as the hours passed, he began to wear down, and dissonant thoughts entered his mind. He began worrying about the safety of the specimen the minute it was found, and now this, along with his normal problems at the dig site, kept him awake most of the night.

Trying to organize his plan, numerous quick but important thoughts ran through his mind. It had to remain frozen until a definite plan was established. With all the technological advances in the last few years, there was no limit to the information that could be gleaned from a project like this. He was now glad that he had done the extra reading that pertained to advances in biological investigation. But first and foremost, he repeated to himself, it must be kept frozen, and

the condition of the external and internal structures must be determined.

In the next couple of days, arrangements were made to move the specimen from its present location directly to a well-established cryonic laboratory in San Diego, at which the specimen would be transferred to liquid nitrogen for storage until further details of a research procedure could be established.

Two days later, Mark met the helicopter at the dig site, and he, Daniel, and a crew of the three other graduate students flew back to the specimen, bringing the tools necessary to free the body and at least a ten-centimeter-thick protective ice covering surrounding it.

It was hard work, but the activity helped them through the cold temperature. Mark reiterated, "We have to be careful to bring the specimen out whole. We also have to wrap it while in its frozen state to protect it from any bumps and jars that it might get en route to the lab."

With assistance from the helicopter, it was lifted out of its grave, wrapped in canvas, strapped from all directions, fitted with a thick padding, wrapped again, re-strapped, put in a thermally controlled box, strapped again, and fastened across the helicopter's landing struts.

Before they left the site, however, they took more notes, describing exactly how the specimen was buried, and they dug around the area to see if anything else was there. They found an animal femur within three feet of the specimen which was unusual because it was unlikely that any large animals would have been at this elevation. However, the humanoid specimen was there, making the association a little confusing.

After examining the bone, Mark said, "I'm not sure, but it looks like a lion femur." He wondered if the humanoid had

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been eating the meat from it when he died. Strangely, much of the condyle on one end of the femur had been removed, and it was unusually smooth, lacking any signs of flesh or ligaments. To Mark's astonishment, it clearly resembled a club.

It was numbered, wrapped and put into Mark's back pack. After a careful look around, a rechecking of their notes, and picking up their tools, they hopped back on the helicopter and flew back to the dig site. The helicopter pilot got further instructions from Mark about where to make his connection in Nairobi so the specimen could be transported to the lab in the United States, and he took off.

While Mark was extremely happy about how the procedure had gone thus far, he couldn't help thinking that something would go wrong during the shipment of the specimen back to the states, even though he took every precaution so that wouldn't happen. He reasoned that sometimes things just go wrong in spite of how much you do to avoid mistakes—Murphy's Law, so to speak. He wondered if he should have made arrangements to go along with it. *What a shame it would be to lose this one.*

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