

The rock as big-as-a-house where Scrim sheltered that night sat between him and the city in the north. He faced the other way. He faced south, that meant. He stretched his right arm out to where Fingers and Yellow Leg went. *That's west*. His left arm stretched east.

Sun came up in the east. *Always did*. Back in Hell-city it was like it come up along his left hand when he stood looking south from out from his high-up. *Here the same*.

*There*. The sun rising and glaring, right now. *In the east*. South by east was where he had to go. He peered east into the worst glare of the sun. That glare, and knowing how hot that orb would shine when it got high, had him thinking he forgot something. *Something important. Can't remember*. A road ran east all the way into the path of where the sun came up, it looked like. Rubble as far as he could see to the left of it. *Big stones. Little stones. Rubble*.

But, on the right side of the road cornfields stretched far and far also to the east. As good as all the way to where the sun's hot light first hit the land. *No cornfields where I'm goin*. And but again, the cornfields on their other side were flanked by the high land. Plat-toh, he'd heard it described. Nevermind, *high land* sat easier in his mind. And, not to forget, between the corn and the high land was a river. *And, that niggle again*. Something he *did* forget.

He looked at it all, what lay in front of him. *How I'll win through it all? First thing to choose is the Great Circle or the high lands*.

All the road home back to the delta staying on flat country would be backtracking what Hell-city hunters called the Great Circle. They followed the river at the base of the high land, turned the corner where the high lands stopped and then them hunters followed the braided river that turned into the delta. And at nearly the end of the many delta mouths they'd come to another camel-stair that would lead them back up to the plateau. Only Scrim would've taken a left turn at the bottom of the stair and joined his people in the delta.

Camels couldn't go the high way, diagonal across the top. Like—if this where he stood was a corner—and he pointed across the high land to the diagonal opposite corner in the south-by-east, that was the place where the forsaken hunters forced their beasts back up onto the plateau after they grazed the delta in summer. *Is what Fingers sang at me*.

At that place, he could get down off the high-land and be nearly home. Diagonal across the high land was the shorter way. He marked the place on the side of the high-land he pointed to. Where he pointed was a dark slot-like entry like the entries he might've seen to a street between two tall high-ups back in Hell-city.

He looked along the edge of the high land for more slots that looked like street entries. Saw more. The one he wanted was third from the right. *Easy*.

“Psst.”

*A girl. Out here?* She crouched behind a boulder the size of a hunched-over man. She had big rabbit teeth. Long legs. The north of her was hidden like his north was hidden. The south of them both was free to see.

“Where you goin?” she said. “I seen you pointin. Planning your way.”

*What to say.* “Home,” Scrim said.

“Min says home is where the heart is,” the girl said. “And my heart is here. In me. Where’s yours?”

“Min?” Scrim said. “Kinnie-mah that picks up kids from beside the road where people leave them not to take them into the hell?”

“So you know us?” a boy said. Younger than the girl, he hid behind a nearer boulder.

“I was a kinnie one time,” Scrim said. *How can I warn them?* “Min will sell you back to the hunters when your legs get long.”

The boy scoffed, turned to the girl as if Scrim was helpless. “He a long-leg,” he said about Scrim. “Reckon Min’ll be happy with him for selling?”

“She wouldn’t,” Scrim said. “She sold me already, and I left.” He started walking quite fast into his chosen direction. Back behind him the kinnies argued about following him and pulling him down.

He sped into a jog. Zigzagged from cover to cover, little stands of weeds, then into the corn and among the canes. He wouldn’t get lost, he’d counted the stone street entrances and he needed the third one from the right.

By the time he reached a wide road—what the Martian-class robots had practiced their tricks on, he could see their tracks clearly in the dust—he’d left the kinnies behind. He crossed and walked into a cornfield.

Plants taller than him. All he could see was the sky above him and the plants surrounding. *Hot among them.* How could he see where to go? *Can’t see the sun. Wait. The road I was on went south. The plants in their rows march south. Walk in the gap between two rows. What was that?*

A thing flew overhead. Bigger than any bird he ever saw. Though maybe not *flew*, or with flapping wings. Maybe more like an eagle gliding on an invisible air-current. But bigger. There it was again, like it had a pair of moth-wings but huge.

Underneath swung a shape. For a minute he doubted his eyes. *Shape of sleeping man?* Then he remembered long time ago far away. *In the delta we saw these fliers sometimes. They jumped from a high place above and glided down to the green lands.* If he’d been up there on that high place, he would seen the delta already. *Winged there instantly.*

*But I’m still me, still Scrim, and I’m walking south by east. Goin home. Which today is up on to that high-up in the land. Being high is being safe. Never heard of camels walkin up there.*

Corn grew taller than him all around. *Sky above.* He couldn’t see the new-day sun. How

could he see where he wanted to go? *Wait. Back in Hell-city, the sun tracked along my left side when I looked out from my window at daybreak. Here ...? When I'm lookin at the high land, my left side is my east.*

He walked forward until a road crossing his path said stop. *The other side of it has grass and trees.* He crossed the road and walked onto the grass. Came to water moving from east to west. *Get a drink here?* He remembered deep dark fast water and this water had logs swimming in it. Not safe to bend down and get a drink. Crocs bigger than him, longer and wider. *You want to be et, Man-skin? Not safe to swim, neither.*

He shuddered. *Lookit them toothy animals comin over to see me standing and thinking what to do. Get back away from the water. Down stream is where the hunters cross. Upstream is east. I'm walkin east to go south. Ha! I see, I see, I see a thing.*

A span crossed this ... too big-to-be-a-stream ... river. Two bamboo sticks wide with one above to hold onto? Tied to a tree this side either side of the trunk, and tied together a way down the riverbank. *Climb the tree.*

One stick above tied into the branches. *Good rope.* He wished he had some to tie himself to the upper. He'd be shoving the loop along and he'd never fall despite that he couldn't see from this side how the sticks were fixed to the other side.

*Forget it, I don't have a rope.* He was tall enough to hang onto the higher stick. *Move foot by sliding foot. Hand by sliding hand.* In the middle was cobble where he had to set his feet onto where a new length joined the first-too-short-timber. *How do they both stay up?* Crocs watched him from down in the water. *Move yourself, Man-Skin!*

*Made it. The other side.*

*Man, I feel pale enough to puke. What with? Nothing in my gut. Should of taken some cobs from the cornfield when I passed through. And the other thing I forgot. Still don't remember it.*

He had to think now about this slot cutting through this high stony *cliff*—a word from long ago far away—where two walls of stone had the bit of mountain between them worn away. *Chasm* was the word he remembered.

*Is it safe?* The chasm's underfoot was scoured bare with deep grooves like of stones dragged along it. *What dragged them and so many?* The stone sides of the chasm this near to the ground were also bare. No green things hung off their ledges like there were in Hell-City's streets despite pigeons pecking at the greens. High up ... when he looked up there ... there was a plenty of green stuff hanging down. *High, low.* What was different?

He studied the mouth of the chasm. From down on the river-bank he'd climbed up a slope of stones. Big stones little stones a jumble like they were all the stones that once upon a time paved this street and that were carried away by ... ? And dumped ... ?

*Starting to feel very unsafe down here in this chasm, Man-skin. I should maybe clamber somewhere. Find a high-up. Get out of the cold, too. Is the sun still shining up there?*

*Yes to the sun. Lookit no shadows of high-ups down in here, meaning the orb is directly overhead. What Yellow Leg used to say. Just one little shadow of a little Man-skin pointing directly back to the river. Because of walking south.*

Then there was no more south. He saw more stones in front, flakes, rocks, and rubble making another slope of stones, like a stairway, not quite to the top. *How will I?* Then he saw a ledge, and another. That one needing slide-footing without there being a stick above to hold onto except finger-wide ledges. *Needs must*, he thought in Min's snippy tones.

Then, *Watch what you are doing, Man-skin.* His own talk.

*Made it.* He felt so so good. Up here was the whole blue sky, bigger than he ever saw. *I will lay me down on this sun-warm rock. Sleep. Try to forget that I forgot the thing I need.*