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But the Stones Remembered

The wind blew over the lake, rippling the water and distorting the sun's bright reflection. Small waves lapped up upon the shore, and a few birds circled about in the air. The beach did not stretch far inland and soon became a collection of large stones that in turn became a cliff-face rising about a hundred feet into the air. From the beach, the shoreline was visible for a long ways in either direction, stretching out and slowly curving away. Other hills and cliffs arose around the lake. Most were barren although shrubs and a few trees dotted the landscape. The shoreline eventually disappeared out of sight, and the hills across the lake only appeared as a faint, grey shadow. The cliff-face slowly petered out several hundred feet to the left to become a gradual embankment down to the beach from the inland area.

A young girl, wearing only an animal skin tied about her body by a rope, was running down this embankment. In her hand was a wadded, empty pouch made of similar material, and two women, similarly clad and also holding pouches, were following her, carrying on a conversation and more carefully placing their bare feet to avoid sharp stones. The girl ran into the water and kicked it to splash it onto her body. When the women arrived at the water, they bent down and began searching through the sand and stones for shells. They carefully examined each one and discarded those that were chipped or badly colored. After awhile, the girl came up to them and showed them some shells she had found in the water.

“What about these?” she asked, holding out a fistful of shells.

“Let me see, Kialla” said one woman, and she took the shells. Fingering through each one, the woman dropped about half back into the lake and then showed the remaining ones to the

girl. “Kialla, look for more like these. See, they are whole and have the light blue color on them. Don’t bother with the grey ones.”

“Why just the blue?”

“The gods like the blue. That is there color. The gods of the sky and the water have made their homes blue. They want us to decorate the shrines the same way.”

This answer made sense to the girl, and she ran back out into the water. The women smiled at each other and returned to their work. Suddenly, one of them lurched back and fell to her knees in the water. The other looked over and saw the shaft of an arrow protruding from her collapsed friend’s back. The woman started screaming in pain, and the other began calling out a list of gods’ names in panicked supplication. Looking around to see who their attacker was, she saw some men crouching in bushes on the top of the cliff-face. Moments later, two more arrows shot through the air, one sticking into the ground and the other penetrating into the wounded woman’s torso. The other woman grabbed her hand to help her get up but then released her own grip as she felt a sharp pain in her own leg. She looked back and saw another group of men beginning to run down the embankment. Franticly, she left her friend and, calling out to Kialla, began limping down the beach. Kialla ran towards her and grabbed her hand.

“Get them before they escape,” shouted one of the men as they bore down on Kialla and the woman. The two never got far. The first man to get to them grabbed the woman from behind and ran her through with his sword. As she collapsed to the ground, another man ran up and grabbed Kialla putting his hand over her mouth with crushing force to prevent her from screaming. The man hurried her over to the stones below the cliff-face and, grabbing her by the leg, picked her up and swung her like a club against one of the larger stones. Her head smashed on the rock, and her limp body fell to the ground, leaving a bright stain of blood upon the stone.

Meanwhile, all the men were congregating on the shore. Many more were arriving on the top of the cliff, and new groups were coming down the embankment. After many minutes, a man came quickly walking down to the beach alone, and a murmur rose up in the gathering crowd: “Look, it’s Ehelco.” Ehelco was a thick shouldered man with large muscles and a thick beard. A large scar ran down one of his cheeks, and one of his eye sockets was badly damaged. Another man came up to him, and they conferred briefly.

“Have we secured this place?” Ehelco asked.

“Yes. We’ve checked all throughout the area. We only found a few people, and we killed them quickly. Down here we can’t be seen or heard by any of the villages.”

“Do we know where the rest of our men are?”

“They probably had to attack that village along the shore that we went inland to avoid.”

“True. Did any of our scouts see any boats? It would be helpful to get control of some.”

“Just one or two, I think. It looks like we’ll have no choice but to continue advancing around the lake’s perimeter by foot.”

Ehelco nodded and then confidently leapt up onto one of the larger rocks near to where Kialla body’s lay. The crowd grew quiet.

“Brothers,” he shouted, “our time has come. Soon we will have purged the land of the enemies of God and established it for ourselves as a place where we may live in peace.” The men raised their weapons and cheered. “Remember our homeland, how it is desolate and how it was bringing us to starvation. Contrast that with what you have seen in these last few days. This is a land that God has provided for us, that his ungrateful enemies have wrong seized. Are we not his servants? Haven’t we faithfully followed him while others have gone to worship idols of stone and wood? Will he not stand with us today? Tonight, we will take back for him what is his and

what he has reserved for his servants. Our women and our children will soon be clothed, and sheltered, and well fed by this land.” The men erupted into even more shouting, and Ehelco jumped back down off the stone.

Soon he ordered them to march back up the embankment, and they disappeared out of sight. That night, the stones at the base of the cliff-face were lightly illuminated by the glow of several large fires from inland areas along both directions of the shoreline. Smoke was billowing up in several places, and a haze hung over the beach. After this had happened, the seasons came and went, but the stones remembered these events.

Many years later, two men descended the embankment and walked out onto the beach, each carrying a large chunk of bread. Sitting on one of the flat stones below the cliff-face, they looked out at the lake and began to eat. “It’s nice to come out here once in awhile,” said one. “The water is so beautiful.”

“Yes – and peaceful. I feel God’s presence differently out here. I think he made the lake so that we would come to it from time to time and remember him.”

“Perhaps. At very least, he has used this particular lake in a special way.”

“You mean in the legends?”

“Certainly.”

“Yes. It must have been an amazing time to be alive when God told Ehelco to bring our ancestors here and drive out the pagans. In those days, God actually spoke to his people directly. Do you ever think about that?”

“Sometimes.”

“It’s unbelievable – so unlike today.”

They sat in silence for awhile, and then the other said, “The elders have asked you to write Ehelco’s story down, haven’t they?”

“Yes – just a few days ago. They said it was time that we had an account that we could pass on to our children’s children. I haven’t started on it yet, though. I thought it would be best just to think for awhile before I actually tried to write anything down.”

“Yeah. Well, you’re the right person for the task. I like you’re writing better than any other scribe around here.”

The scribe smiled and laughed. “I just hope I figure out what to write. Isn’t it funny how different our various stories of Ehelco are? Every morning since the elders commissioned me to this task, I’ve reread the account from the village to the West. Much of it is about how before they crossed the lake, God gave them those golden boats. Have you heard about that?”

“I’ve talked to them about it a couple times when I’ve visited their village. Yeah, no one really talks about that part of the story over here. As far as I know, we’ve simply said that when they crossed over, the enemy assembled on the shore to attack them, and God struck them with confusion. They ended up killing themselves as much as we killed them.”

“That’s in their text too, but the account also talks in all this detail about the boats. It even gives their measurements – height, length, width – and the number of passengers per boat.”

“That’s strange. Do you think it’s true?”

“I don’t know,” the scribe replied. “I don’t really think so. I don’t know why they would have that knowledge and we wouldn’t, considering that we’re all just branches of the same ancestry.”

“Will you put it in your account?”

“I’m thinking I may just transcribe their text into mine. Having it there will certainly emphasize how much God has been with us, for I think that when people hear all those details about the boats, they’ll be reminded of how closely God pays attention to our needs.”

The other man nodded in agreement. Their conversation moved on to other matters, and when they had finished their bread, they arose and walked back up the embankment. After this had happened, the seasons came and went, but the stones remembered these events.

Over the years, some of the descendents of Ehelco’s people came and built a village near the top of the cliff, and they made the beach into a little harbor for their fishing boats. People began coming up and down the embankment everyday, and on most nights, either the fishermen who had stayed to mend their boats or some of the villagers who wished to take a break from their work would sit around bonfires and look out at the lake. The smell of fried fish was often in the air. One day, two men came walking down the beach. Sweat was heavy on their brows, and their skin was red from the sun.

“The fishing has been pretty good these last few weeks, Yaplino,” one was saying as they came to sit among the stones at the base of the cliff-face. “We’ve been lucky.”

“That’s excellent. I wish I could say the same about the crops. I mean, I think we’ll pull through, but there just has not been enough rain to get a full, healthy harvest.”

They sat in silence for a moment, watching a fisherman untangle a large net. “Helcop, where did you say you saw him?” Yaplino asked.

“Telmron? Down the beach. He had a small crowd around him. Doesn’t he like to teach down here when he’s in town.”

“Yeah, I think so – although I wouldn’t be the one to ask. I haven’t really been paying much attention to him. What do we know about him?”

“Some of my friends down here among the boats know him, and some of my family. I’ve met him a couple times. His older sister is married to the blacksmith.”

“Oh, is that his older sister? I didn’t know that.”

“Yep.”

“Did you hear that they’re saying he healed someone in the next town?”

“I’ve heard people talk about it – don’t know what to make of it, though.”

“Yeah, I don’t really know either. He clearly has some following, so he must be doing something that’s getting him attention.”

“That’s true. Certainly stranger things have happened.”

“Exactly.”

“Don’t the scriptures say that when Ehelco crossed the lake in the Golden Boats, he landed right around here?”

“I think so, and what Ehelco did definitely is more amazing than a single healing. For God to give them the Golden Boats and then strike the enemy with confusion so that they would start killing each other is pretty incredible. You know, I wonder where those boats went. I guess they probably just got buried by the sand overtime and are right around here beneath us.”

“You think all those boats could have been buried by sand?”

“Sure. Don’t the scriptures say how deep they were?”

“I think so. Is it four spans long, two wide, one deep? I forget. It’s something like that.”

“Yeah, something like that. So with those dimensions, I think the sand could definitely cover them up. Just look at the waves now. They’re not that big, but occasionally one could kick

some sand and water into boats that are only one span high. After awhile, they would start to sink into the wet sand, and after enough years the lake would just cover them entirely.”

“Good point.”

They continued talking for awhile, and then a group of about twenty people came walking down the beach. A short man was leading them and carrying on a conversation with those closest to him as the others walked along behind. The group approached the stones where Helcop and Yaplino sat.

“I think this is a good place to stop,” said the leader, and he gestured for them to sit on the stones. The man situated himself to speak to the group and then noticed Helcop. The two made eye contact, and the man smiled in recognition and began walking over.

“Good to see you again. Is it Helcop?”

“Yes, Telmron. Glad to see that you’re back in the area.”

“Yes, it is. I’ve been wanting to come back and see my sister.”

They exchanged a few more words, and then Telmron turned to the group and began to speak. He talked about God and the history of Ehelco’s people, and he spoke of how much God had used Ehelco to bring his people across the lake in the Golden Boats. He then said that God was with them just as much as he had been with the people during Ehelco’s time, and he then began a discussion in the group about personal conduct and how one was to live out one’s life as a servant of God. Helcop and Yaplino stayed and watched, and at one point Helcop made a comment in the discussion.

After awhile, the meeting ended, and the crowd dispersed, some back down the beach and others up the embankment. Telmron stayed and talked with a few people afterwards. Helcop and Yaplino were the last to leave, and before they did so, Helcop introduced Telmron and

Yaplino to each other. The three spoke for a little while about various things, and then Telmron took his leave back down the beach. The sun was beginning to get low in the sky, so Helcop and Yaplino walked up the embankment and back towards their town. After this had happened, the seasons came and went, but the stones remembered these events.

Only a couple of years later, in the morning when all was quiet, Yaplino came down the embankment and walked to the edge of the water. He looked out at the faint outline of the hills on the lake's other side, and then slowly walked back and sat on one of the stones at the base of the cliff. A short while later, Helcop came running down the embankment. Calling out Yaplino's name, he hurried across the sand. Yaplino rose and went to greet him, but Helcop almost collapsed into Yaplino's arms.

Helcop was breathing heavily and his eyes were wide open. "Thank God I found you," he said.

"What's happened?" Yaplino responded, helping Helcop over to sit on a rock.

"I've seen him."

"Who?"

"Telmron."

"Telmron? What do you mean?"

"I don't know. I saw him. He was there."

"Where?"

"In my house. I woke up, walked outside, can back in, and he was there." Helcop was now sitting on the stone. Shaking and breathing unevenly, he spread his knees apart and put his face in his hands.

“Was it his ghost?” Yaplino asked.

“I don’t know. I walked back in and something came over me. I felt his presence. I turned around, and there was something there.”

“What did he say?”

“I don’t know. They weren’t really words. It was more that he was there and he knew that I could feel he was there. I thought...”

Helcop suddenly collapsed to the group, and Yaplino quickly grabbed his arms. “We need to get you back home. You’re ill.” It took several minutes for Yaplino to get Helcop to his feet, and when he did, they only made minimal progress towards the embankment before Helcop collapsed again and started vomiting. After a few more minutes, Yaplino got him up again, and this time they made it up the embankment. After this had happened, the seasons came and went, but the stones remembered these events.

Many years later, two young adult men came walking down the embankment. The fishing industry along that part of the lake had died down some over the years, but a few fishing boats either rested on the shore or were being manned out in the water. Other than a small group of men building a boat a little ways down the beach, the area was mostly deserted. Although it was afternoon, the day was not very hot, and a few clouds hovered in the sky. The two men came and sat among the stones at the base of the cliff.

“Gee, it’s good to get out of town once in awhile. Thanks for coming down here with me.”

“Oh, you’re welcome. Yeah, I like coming down here, especially when it’s quiet and there aren’t a lot of people around.”

“Exactly.”

They sat in silence for a while, looking at the lake and kicking the sand with their feet.

Finally, one spoke: “It’s sad that the potter has died.”

“Yeah, he’s stood in that shop and worked each day since we were babies. It will be strange having him gone.”

“Yes. Well, at least we know that he was a godly man. I’m sure that Lord Telmron has taken his soul before God.”

“Absolutely. There could not have been a man who loved Lord Telmron and preached him more wholeheartedly than the potter.”

“Isn’t it amazing that with his death, there is now no one in the town who knew the Witnesses?”

“It is. I’ve been thinking about that a lot, actually. It is like we’re living in a great age that has now all but passed.”

“It will be very important for us to pass on that tradition. By the way, I’ve been speaking with the elders about writing a text to preserve the Witnesses’ account for everyone who comes after us.”

“Really? What about the texts we already have?”

“Oh, they’re fine. The text of Lord Telmron’s sayings from the neighboring town and the narrative account that was written on the other side of the lake both tell part of the story, but I don’t think that they fully capture the significance of God’s work. I want to put them together and then tie in the rest of the account.”

“What would you add?”

“Well, in that narrative from across the lake, it says that when Lord Telmron first met the Witness Helcop, Helcop immediately began to follow him but doesn’t really say much more than that. I want the account to go into more detail.”

“What details would you put?”

“I’m not sure. It has to be that when they first met and Helcop became one of Lord Telmron’s followers, Lord Telmron performed a miracle in Helcop’s presence. That is the only way to explain why the Witness Helcop started following immediately, so I would add that to the narrative.”

“What miracle would you put?”

“Well, they say in the other town that Helcop suffered from a limp and that Lord Telmron healed him. Most likely it was that healing that caused Helcop to become a follower.”

“That makes sense. Are you going to keep the account of how Ehelco appeared to Lord Telmron in the bright light as he was carrying out his ministry? I know that some people in town doubt that that happened.”

“Oh, I don’t really see a reason to take that out. God could have sent Ehelco’s spirit to appear publicly before Lord Telmron. There’s no reason to think that it didn’t happen. Besides, if I keep Ehelco’s appearance in the narrative, it can serve as a reminder of how God chose our people when he had Ehelco lead them across the lake in the Golden Boats.”

“True. Will you add anything else?”

“Well, neither of the texts so far discuss his birth, so I really want to add that.”

“What about it?”

“Have you heard the discussion that has been going on among the elders? Several of them are saying that Lord Telmron must have been born of a virgin to have entered into the world in a perfect state.”

“I hadn’t heard that – makes sense, though.”

“Yeah, and if our goal is to preserve a record of Lord Telmron and his presence here among us, his initial entrance into the world should be recorded.”

“So you think that the elders are right that it was through a virgin birth?”

“How else could it have been? God would not have sent his messenger through conventional procreation, for then he would have been living in a fallen state. No, God would have caused the pregnancy directly. It’s the only explanation that makes sense. Besides, Lord Telmron didn’t have any older siblings, so that fact fits right in with what the elders are thinking.”

They continued to speak about other aspects of the narrative, and then their conversation turned to other things. After awhile, they got up and returned back up the embankment towards the village. After this had happened, the seasons came and went, but the stones remembered these events.

Over the years, more and more people came to live around the lake. The village at the top of the cliff changed over time, and war eventually destroyed it. Where only hills and cliffs had been visible before, tall buildings began to rise up around the lake. A large road was built along the top of the cliff that stretched out in both directions around the lake. Soon, the quiet of the beach was constantly disrupted by passing cars and the engines of airplanes landing and taking

off from an airport on the lake's other side. A road was built on the embankment, connecting the highway with a small parking lot next to the beach.

One day, a van turned off from the highway and coming down the embankment, stopped in the parking lot. Several people, including a couple of children, climbed out. The driver, a middle-aged man wearing jeans, a T-shirt, and sunglasses, motioned the group over to the rocks at the base of the cliff. Several sat down on the larger stones, and the driver began pointing various landmarks out to them.

“Folks, God’s Word says that Ehelco’s Golden Boats landed near a town that archeologists have determined to be approximately a half mile farther down the coast, so Ehelco’s landing and God’s act of striking the pagans with confusion probably occurred within eyesight of where we stand now. Years later, the Witness Helcop’s hometown was located right above this cliff, and he probably fished on this very beach. The Witness Yaplino, who also came from this region, records in his gospel that it was right around here that Helcop came to Lord Telmron for the first time to be healed of his limp and upon being healed, immediately began to follow him.”

One of the children raised his hand, and the tour guide acknowledged him. “Did Telmron turn the goats into birds on this beach?”

“Good question. No, God’s Word says that Telmron journeyed north from here before he performed that miracle. Archeologists have uncovered another town in that area, so most likely Telmron was on the beach alongside of it when he turned the goats into doves.”

The boy seemed satisfied with the answer, and the tour guide began to discuss other events that he said had occurred in this area. After awhile, the group piled back into the car and

driving up the embankment, turned onto the highway and sped away. After this had happened, the seasons came and went, but the stones remembered these events.