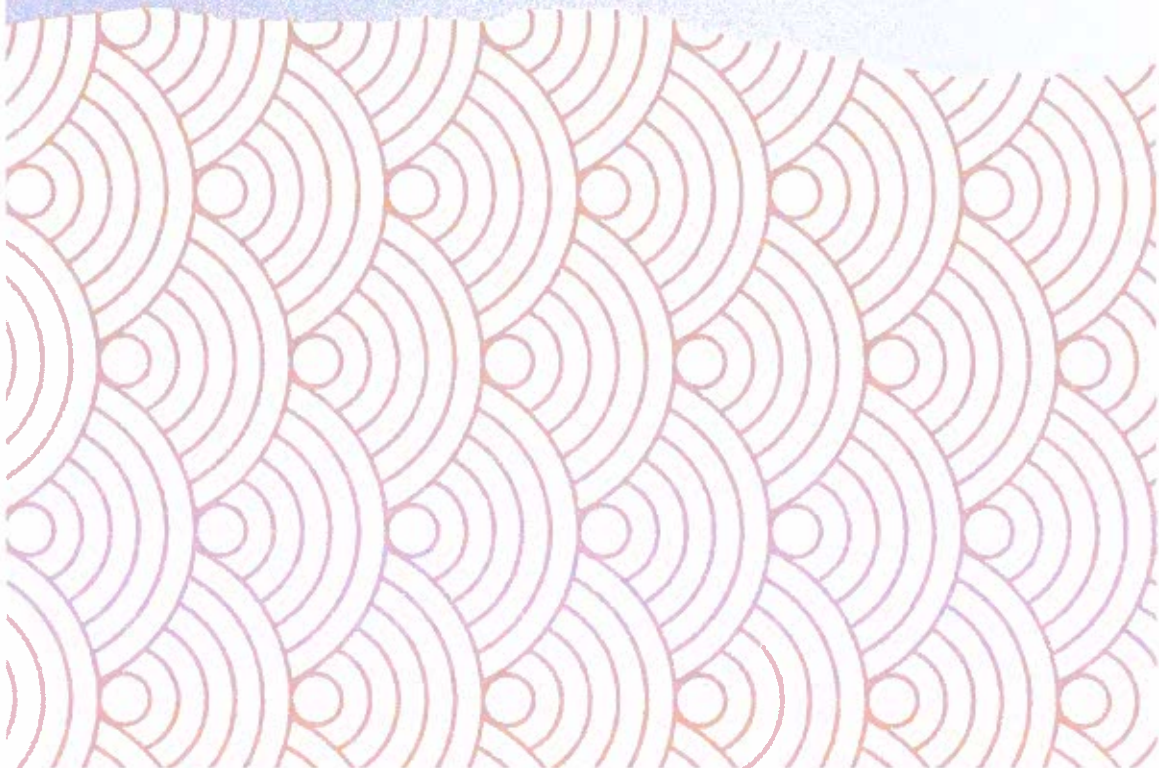




*Bedtime Story
for Campers*



Bedtime Story for Campers

For an hour or so the crackling campfire accompanied some frightening storytelling. These were eye-dilating tales to make campers want someone close to them in the night. Since one of the campers was my nine-year-old, we retired to our tent among the tall pines . . .

There you go now, sport. Get into your sleeping bag.

What?

Yes, they were kind of scary.

Sure, it's okay to be afraid. The one about the bears who kept coming out of the woods was the one that spooked me the most, too.

No. I didn't believe your cousin Joe's story of the flying saucers, either.

Well, sleep tight, champ. I'll be right down the way at the . . .

No. I don't have to. Would you like me to stay awhile?

Another story. Are you sure?

Okay. Let's get you snuggled in here and let me rub your back a bit to get you settled.

Yes. I will. I'm thinking. Give me a minute.

Okay. Here's a bedtime story for my little camper.

Close your eyes. Imagine a little that . . .

Yes, I am really. I am telling the story, honey. I'm just getting you ready to hear it. Relax now. Roll over and . . .

Of course, I'll stay after you're asleep.

Okay. Ready now? Good. Imagine a prehistoric man and woman who had to relocate . . .

Who? Yes, I've heard of them.

Well, if that's what was said, then I'd guess these two prehistoric persons lived a little after Adam and Eve.

So, imagine that this man and woman, like Adam and Eve, had to suddenly reloca . . . had to move . . . away from everything that was familiar to them.

They used to live in a valley surrounded by rows of hills and mountains. At the end of every time-of-the-light, the great light that moved across the sky would go behind the mountains on the far side of the valley. It would become dark. Soon after, the whole sky would become filled with smaller lights. The smells became different in this time-of-the-dark. The animals acted very differently during this time-of-the-dark. It was a time of scary things.

But the man and the woman were accustomed to—were used to—seeing the great light come back again. After each time they had slept, it returned from behind the hills across on the other side of the valley. Over time they grew comfortable with the rhythm of this movement of the great light in the sky.

It became something they counted on, depended on. They grew to expect it would happen, over and over again.

That's right. You call it day and night. But the two people in this story didn't have those names for them yet.

What? Their names?

I don't know. I don't think their names are a part of this story.

Yes. That's a good idea. Then it could be everyone's story. You're right.

But, remember now, this man and woman were no longer in their valley and . . .

. . . it was getting near the end of the first time-of-the-light on their journey to find a new home. So, they began to look for a tree to stay in, or a cave, where they could spend the time-of-the-dark. A place to be safe from the animals of the time-of-the-dark. A place they could sleep. The woman and the man decided to walk over just one more hill before stopping. As the two came up the hill, they heard a noise they had never heard before. They climbed to the crest of the hill. They saw stretched out before them a big sea in the middle of the land. The winds swept over it, lifting waves that crashed onto the sandy shore. It was this crashing sound that was new, something they were unsure about. The sound of the waves crashing suggested there was a power here.

They looked out over the sea, looked out over this power. As they did, they became aware of another new thing. There were no mountains for the great light of the sky to go behind. No hills the great light could return from after they slept. They stared as the perfectly round light approached the line where the sky lay atop the sea. The same way the man and the woman lay atop the ground when they slept.

Soon the great light began to move low enough to be near that sea-and-sky line. They realized they could not see under that line. Little by little, a strange and terrifying thing took place right before their horrified eyes. The circle of light broke. It began to stretch, to grow tall and long. It was no longer itself. It reminded them of the bird's young, dripping out of its mother's egg; never to return to grow and fly with the other chicks. The light seemed to be melting as it hit the water. And then, suddenly, it was swallowed up by the sea. It was gone.

The stunned man and woman each remembered when the rain put out the lightning's fire in the trees of their valley. Now they were scared, for they did not know if the great light of the sky was just extinguished—put out—by the sea. They did not know if the light would ever come back again.

And so, they sat, long into the time-of-the-dark, until the sand grew cool. They kept looking at the exact spot where the great light had gone away. And they knew fear. They had scary thoughts:

*What if it did not come back?
What if this new place did not have the light?
What animals would come in the time-of-the-dark?
And what would they do to protect themselves,
with not a rock nor a stick in sight?*

What did my little sleepyhead say?

Yes, baby, I have a flashlight here.

Okay, I'll keep going.

I love you, too. Here's a goodnight hug.

So, the man and the woman sat. As far as they could sense, there was only sand and water. And all they could hear were the sounds of the power crashing on the shore. They sat and felt their fear make them take short breaths. They did not know what to do.

They each reached out and placed an arm over the other's shoulders. It was only in that moment, in that hug, that the fear started to lessen. They turned, in what little light remained, and looked into each other's eyes. And they began to feel a new emotion. What people of a later time would come to call *hope*. This new feeling began to rise from within their hearts. It pounded back, with each heartbeat, at the fear that shook their bodies.

After many hours, the power of that crushing fear made them tired and they fell asleep. In one another's arms they cradled the only thing they had left—their hope in each other.

Deep within their dreaming minds, the crashing power took on a new sound. They awoke with a start.

They saw strange beasts out in the sea jumping up and splashing down on the surface. Jumping up and splashing down. Jumping up and splashing down. A new noise. A new place.

But wait. They could *see* the beasts. Everything was not in the time-of-the-dark anymore. They looked to the spot where the great light had gone away. They could see only the faint twinkling of the many smaller lights. In the same moment, they automatically turned and stared across the sea, toward the other side of the sky.

There. On the surface of the water, there was no more dark. There was brown, and a light blue, and a pink. All of a sudden, rising out of the sea—round and shiny—the orange disk and its light returned.

The woman and the man faced each other. And the fear fell from their backs as the dark sky seemed to drop into the sea. And the hope flooded back into their hearts as the light of a new time spread itself brilliantly, as far and as wide as they could see.

And as they turned to it, they saw it face-to-face. They felt its warmth. They felt it bake their fear away.