

DogBoy's Long Night Moon

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The morning mist still hovered heavily over the encampment when DogBoy entered SunMoonMan's dimly lit lodge. The cold winter air entered with him and he felt a shiver of anticipation. The Shaman would ask one question, and Juan Ramón de Tirni, Count of Ensanada and former dog, would never be called "DogBoy" again.



It took a while for his eyes to accustom to the darkness of the inner lodge. Crepusculent light filtered through the eastern wall where the mud had given way to wind. He could see SunMoonMan sitting in front of a fireless hearth. Near the ancient Wiseman, in the shadows, was another figure.

SunMoonMan said nothing; the figure in the shadows was silent. DogBoy stood before the cold hearth and he too was silent, hearing only the drumming of his heart and the throbbing in his head. His excitement was obvious; at last he stood before the great teacher SunMoonMan. No one knew how old he was, and looking at him, DogBoy imagined him to be very, very old indeed.

He thought about the now somewhat foggy events that had brought him in four short years from an elegant hacienda in Madrid to this chilly Shaman's lodge in the forests of the New World: the voyage from Spain, the storm at sea, the death of his parents the Count and Countess of Ensanada in the cold waters of the Atlantic; and then, the time of no memory that followed.

He thought too of Morning Star, who had found him nearly dead on a deserted beach and had nursed him back to health and life. She had persuaded her family to let the strange boy live among The People, if only with the dogs. And then, when her own husband and son perished, she had taken in the dog boy and let him live as her son, among The People but not yet one of The People.

That was three years ago, and since then, as would a clever and friendly dog, DogBoy had endeared himself to all who knew him and of him. It was that endearment that had brought him to this special place now, on the verge of becoming a man, a man of The People.

This was what he knew he wanted and bore no regrets for the life in Spain, nor did he miss the power-hungry father who was always absent even when present; or the Mother whose beauty and social graces were her only interests. If anyone was to be missed it was Fray Diago, the Countess's confessor and his tutor. The old priest had taught him well and by his tenth birthday the young Count could say all his prayers in Latin and retell the lives of Saints and Martyrs; he could dine with nobility and use the newly invented fork his mother had brought from France; he could play the six string arch-guitar and read the adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha, the recently published novel by Miguel DiCervantes.

Fray Diago had taught Juan Ramón these and many other things, but the Fray had died, quite suddenly, just before the fateful trip. There was nothing in Spain that seemed more important to him now than being here and becoming a man. SunMoonMan would teach him, and this was why he was here now, silent and waiting.

Time passed; too much time, time to worry. But still, SunMoonMan did not speak and the silent anticipation was almost more than DogBoy could bear. He knew how important this time with the Great Teacher would be. In five days the Long Night Moon would begin; that night in which Grandmother Moon takes the longest time to journey across the early winter sky. In five days DogBoy would be taken to a sacred place deep in the forest. There he would be left to seek his vision, his sacred path, and there, if he were deserving, he would dream his true name. He would have to be ready, but he did not know what that meant. What would he need to know? What would he need to do throughout that Long Night Moon just five sunsets hence? Now, waiting in the thundering silence, he hoped that SunMoonMan, like Fray Diago, would teach him well!

At last, the Great Teacher spoke. He asked the two-part question that had been asked to countless boys who would be men. “What is your name and why are you here?”

DogBoy was ready with his answer. He had rehearsed it over and over in his mind; he had spoken it aloud in the presence of none but the dogs of the village, his former companions and dinner mates. He now spoke to SunMoonMan himself, “My name is DogBoy and I have come to be taught the ways of The People.”

SunMoonMan was silent; a frown, almost imperceptible, made his face seem now even older. What had gone wrong? How could this perfectly rehearsed answer not be acceptable? Perhaps it was. Perhaps it was not a frown at all on the face of the ancient Shaman. But then he spoke again and DogBoy’s heart stopped beating, or so it seemed to him. “You are not ready yet. Perhaps you will be ready tomorrow.”

DogBoy knew better than to question an elder, especially one as revered as SunMoonMan. So it was in deep disappointment that he turned to leave, only to hear a voice from a darkened cranny. “DogBoy! Do not be disrespectful! SunMoonMan has not given leave.”

Turning back toward the Shaman, he saw an old woman emerge from the shadows. SunMoonMan spoke, “DogBoy, I am quite cold, and I see Grandfather Sun peaking through the many cracks in the eastern wall of my poor lodge.” He gestured to the woman standing next to him, “This is my daughter, GreenCornWoman. Today you will help her fill the cracks with fresh mud.”

DogBoy’s disappointment quickly gave way to humiliation. What had he said to deserve this dishonor? He had expected to emerge from the Shaman’s lodge nearly a man, and now he was to be nothing more than an old woman, digging in the mud where the pigs dug for tubers. Would they call him “PigBoy?”

Throughout the day he was sullen and silent, resenting his task, resenting the old woman who talked very little, except to criticize, but sang the same repetitive song all day long:

Hey now Black Bear, give me courage;

Ho now Eagle, give me strength;

Hey now Hoot Owl, give me wisdom;

Ho now Turtle, give me patience.

DogBoy listened in silence, enduring GreenCornWoman's gentle chastisement when the mud he chose was either too wet or too dry, or when he would try to fill a patch while ignoring the need for new branches or bark to replace a decaying piece of the wall.

Grandfather Sun was directly overhead by the time enough branches and appropriately moist mud had been collected, and DogBoy had helped GreenCornWoman patch the walls in SunMoonMan's lodge. This meant that the remainder of the afternoon was still to come and DogBoy was sure that then he would be taught the ways of The People. His disappointment was doubled when GreenCornWoman said, "DogBoy, you have done well. Our cousin Standing Hawk's lodge is also full of holes and the winter wind comes through. Please go to Standing Hawk's lodge and show her how well you can patch the holes in her walls."

DogBoy was beside himself, but what could he do? And so, he went to Standing Hawk's lodge and patched the holes. And, no sooner did he finish than Standing Hawk said, "DogBoy, you have done well. Our uncle WiseWildWolf's lodge is also full of holes and the winter wind comes through. Please go to his lodge and show him how well you can patch the holes in his walls."

This scenario repeated itself five times. DogBoy passed the remainder of the day and late into the night collecting just the right branches, digging up just the right mud (not too wet, not too dry), applying the just the right amounts in the proper places and, as intended, stopping the winter wind from coming through and chilling the bones of SunMoonMan, his daughter, GreenCornWoman, her cousin, StandingHawk, her uncle WiseWildWolf as well as four additional family members whose specific relationships with SunMoonMan were seeming very distant to DogBoy.

His body ached, but he was comforted by the thought that on the morrow he would answer differently and this time he would get it right.

DogBoy was awake long before Morning Star arose to rekindle the waning embers in the center hearth, and long before Grandfather Sun filled the Eastern Sky and chased away the spirits of the night. The evening before he had not spoken to Morning Star of his first day with SunMoonMan and he was glad that she did not ask that morning. She cooked a full breakfast for him, as was her custom, and sent him off as though he were going no place special at all.

He was, however, going someplace very special indeed. And so, for the second day, he entered the ancient lodge to find SunMoonMan once again sitting in front of a fireless hearth. As on the morning before, he saw GreenCornWoman sitting silently in the shadows, darker now that the holes in the eastern wall had been filled and the morning sun could not filter in.

Again there was a period of silence until, at last, SunMoonMan asked, “What is your name and why are you here?” DogBoy spoke with confidence, “My name is DogBoy and I have come to be taught the ways of The People that I may become a man and that I may dream my true name.”

DogBoy searched the old man’s face, harder to see now in the greater darkness. SunMoonMan gave no hint of what he was about to say. He simply said, once again, “You are not ready yet. Perhaps you will be ready tomorrow.”

DogBoy was stunned. Not ready? He could not remember wanting anything as much as this; how could he not be ready?

“DogBoy,” SunMoonMan continued, “I thank you for helping my daughter GreenCornWoman fill the cracks in my poor lodge. The wind does not blow through and chill these old bones of mine. But still, I am cold and now my lodge is dark.”

The old Sage gestured and the figure in the shadows stirred. DogBoy saw that it was not GreenCornWoman at all, but another old man, looking almost as old as the Shaman himself. “This is my son, Red Elk. Today you will help him gather wood for the hearth and rushes for torches.”

DogBoy could not hold back a muttered protest, only to be silenced by nothing more than a gesture from Red Elk. And so it was that on the second day of his preparation for the Long Night Moon, DogBoy gathered wood and rushes and listened to Red Elk’s constant chatter. Unlike his sister GreenCornWoman who sang and sang, RedElk talked and talked, not to DogBoy but to the trees! “Ah yes, old oak tree, give us your branches, they will burn long and hot and will warm my Father’s old bones.” And then, when DogBoy threw some pine boughs on the growing wood pile, RedElk said nothing to him but again spoke directly to the braches as he tossed them back to the forest floor, “No, no, Pine tree, your green dress is beautiful and keeps the cold away, but you shall not fill my Father’s lodge with your black and sooty smoke.”

And even after sufficient wood and rushes had been gathered and DogBoy helped RedElk build a fire, he explained the fire building process to the kindling, “Ah, yes, little branches do not despair, you will begin a most glorious blaze that your larger brothers will ache to join! You straw rushes, you are not strong in your singularity, but see your power grow as I bind you so tightly together with this leather thong. You will fill my Father’s lodge with light as the fire fills it with warmth.”

And this was how it went through half the day, RedElk carrying on conversations with wood and straw: DogBoy seething in the growing frustration for the time he was wasting.

By the time that the fire was burning brightly and rush torches filled the Great Teacher’s lodge with light, Grandfather Sun had only half completed his journey. DogBoy thought, “Surely today my lessons will begin. Today SunMoonMan will teach me what I need to know,” his Long Night Moon now just three sunsets hence.

But DogBoy did not see SunMoonMan again that day, for no sooner did he have the thought than he heard RedElk say, “DogBoy, you have done well. Our aunt Leaping Deer’s lodge is also cold and dark. Please go and show her how well you can build a fire and make rush torches.”

And so, once again DogBoy worked late into the night and not just for Leaping Deer, for she sent him to her brother WeepingOwl, and he to his niece, SingsWithFrogs; and finally she to her cousin (or was it her uncle?), MountainWind. By the end of the day DogBoy had collected the right kindling and long burning logs, and had wrapped straw rushes just tightly enough to ensure long and smokeless burning. And, as far as he could tell, all of SunMoonMan’s relatives were warm and as well lit as SunMoonMan himself.

DogBoy was tired, disappointed, and confused. He did not understand why SunMoonMan was not teaching him anything. (He was, after all, the “Great Teacher”.) But, Dogboy was quite sure of one thing, he would not go to sleep that night until he had thought long and hard about what he would say to SunMoonMan the next morning.

And so, throughout the night, as he listened to Morning Star’s gentle breathing in the darkness, he tried out many possible answers to SunMoonMan’s two-part question.



When DogBoy entered the lodge the next morning it was warm and brightly lit. A fire blazed in the hearth and rush torches illuminated even the darkest nooks and crannies. Once again SunMoonMan was not alone, but DogBoy was relieved not to see the elderly children of the Shaman, but a woman who DogBoy judged to be about Morning Star's age, the age of most tribal Mothers whose sons think themselves ready to be a man and carry a man's name.

While he was a bit suspicious at this woman's presence, (what mundane duties will she need help with?), he was sure he would not be spending the day wallowing like the pigs in the mud, or carrying on conversations with fuel. No, today DogBoy would have the right answer for SunMoonMan's eternal question and it came, once again after a period of silence, "What is your name and why are you here?"

DogBoy knew what he would say, but waited a bit, wanting to appear thoughtful, wanting the Shaman to think him wise. But he could not wait long, the answer soon burst out, “Honored Elder, my name is DogBoy for I am a boy who has lived as a dog. But now I seek to be a man and to carry the name of a man. I come to you now in deepest humility to ask you to teach me the ways of The People.” Once again SunMoonMan responded, “You are not ready yet. Perhaps you will be ready tomorrow.”

DogBoy could not hold back the tears, but suffered them in silence as SunMoonMan spoke again, “DogBoy, I thank you for helping my son, Red Elk, gather wood and rushes and build a proper fire. As you can see, the hearth fire now warms us all but does not fill the lodge with smoke; the torches burn brightly and a hundred little flames illuminate my old and wrinkled face. Can you see on my face that I am very hungry?”

With this surprising question, for DogBoy did not think hunger could be seen, the woman rose and came forth. SunMoonMan held her hand as he spoke, “This is my granddaughter, OneVoice. Today you will help her gather roots, mushrooms, and tubers for the cooking pot.”

OneVoice did not hesitate. She walked past DogBoy and spoke only one word, “Come.” DogBoy felt more the dog than the boy, his embarrassment and humiliation growing stronger. Mercifully, OneVoice spoke very little as DogBoy followed her through the woodland, stopping by an old maple tree and finding stores of squirreled away acorns and chestnuts; digging in a mossy patch beneath the snow for succulent mushrooms; following the trail of the forest pigs and finding many starchy tubers missed by the inefficient swine.

She was truly a woman of few words, but even those few grated on DogBoy's patience. She would point to a patch of mushrooms and say, "Those!" But when DogBoy would reach for some that looked quite the same as the first, she'd say, "Not those...poison." By midday her basket was full but the work not done. Dogboy watched and when told what to do, participated in the preparation of the food. Again, there was little conversation. "Wash these...dirty! Cut that part off...bitter! Cook roots all night...tender tomorrow!"

And then, although the food was cooked and the day not yet half over, DogBoy was not so surprised to hear One Voice say, "DogBoy, you have done well. Our elder brother-in-law, TwoDogsBarking, has hurt his foot and has no woman to prepare his food. Please go to his lodge and show him how well you can select and cook the tastiest mushrooms that will not cause the fire spirits to dance in his belly."

And it was no surprise to DogBoy either that, by the end of the day, he had met many more of SunMoonMan's relatives and that all of them had feasted on succulent mushrooms. And thusly, DogBoy spent the third day of his preparation for the Long Night Moon in servitude. His annoyance growing moment by moment as was his determination to return in the morning with a convincing answer to the old man's query.



On the morning of the fourth day, DogBoy entered the warm, well lit lodge to find SunMoonMan chewing on a root they had left buried under the coals the night before. Sitting with him was someone DogBoy recognized and admired. Screaming Eagle, SunMoonMan's grandson was the greatest hunter in the tribe. When the men returned from the hunt, Screaming Eagle would always be the one with the largest buck or great black bear, whose coat would warm him, whose flesh would feed him, and whose Spirit would give him courage to face whatever the future would bring. In the presence of such a Great hunter, DogBoy could not embarrass himself again; he would have to give the right answer to SunMoonMan's question or, he thought, shrivel up like the now tender roots that still remained uneaten.

The inevitable question came, as DogBoy knew it would, “What is your name and why are you here?” DogBoy did not hesitate, “My name is DogBoy, Great Shaman and I have come to beg you to teach me just a small portion of your great knowledge for I must become a man and carry a man’s name or I will die nothing more than a dog boy. Master, the Long Night Moon is tomorrow, please teach me today.”

SunMoonMan studied DogBoy’s face, looking into his eyes and feeling a tinge of regret for what he was about to say. DogBoy did not know of the Teacher’s hesitation, he only knew what the Teacher (who does not teach) said, “You are not ready yet. Perhaps you will be ready tomorrow.”

By this fourth day, DogBoy had no doubts about what was going to happen next. And, not surprisingly, SunMoonMan quickly confirmed, “Dogboy, I thank you for helping my granddaughter OneVoice gather food in the forest. The mushrooms were sweet and succulent and did not cause the fire spirits to dance in my belly. But, I must tell you that I am still quite hungry and I fear that only meat will satisfy my great need.” With that statement, ScreamingEagle stood and left the lodge. DogBoy expected to be sent to help him hunt but no such instruction had been given. But then, looking into the Shaman’s eyes and the eyebrows that arched above them, DogBoy realized that he had been sent and that he’d better get going.

This was not so bad. At least he would not be wallowing in mud, or gathering firewood, or cooking meals, he would be hunting with the mightiest hunter of all The People.

Screaming Eagle did not wait, nor did he speak to DogBoy when he caught up with him at his lodge. DogBoy in his excitement could not keep from blurting out, “Screaming Eagle, I am honored to hunt with you this day! Shall we kill a big black bear to feed your hungry Grandfather?” Screaming Eagle looked askance at DogBoy then entered his lodge in silence. DogBoy was surprised when the hunter emerged, not with bow and arrow to slow and stop a fleeing black bear, nor with a long sturdy spear that would penetrate the heart of the raging beast, but with only a handful of long, thin pieces of rawhide. Screaming Eagle said nothing but handed half the strings to DogBoy and set off into the wood at a heart pounding pace. DogBoy thought him angry at having to bring along this dog when he hunts the ferocious great black bear. Dogboy was ashamed, yet he could not conceal his excitement to be part of such a hunt.

With such anticipation, the disappointment was only greater when Screaming Eagle did not seek out a great black bear, or a many horned deer, or a bull moose as it wades in the near frozen lakes. He walked until he came to a clearing deep in the wood. He stopped and looked around, at the ground, at the sky, at the many pine trees that surrounded the glen.

Then, without a word, he set to work. Quickly gathering pine boughs, Screaming Eagle set up a small structure, branches on all sides, level upon level until it appeared to be nothing more than one of many randomly fallen piles of pine. He formed one of his strings into a loop, laying it over a hole in the snow that DogBoy had not noticed before, and extending the other end into his pile of branches. Screaming Eagle then disappeared into the pile himself, again without uttering a sound, and left DogBoy standing there, in the middle of the clearing, in the company of a pile of pine braches.

DogBoy did not know what to do! Should he leave; should he wait? And so he was relieved to see Screaming Eagle begin to emerge from his hiding place. He did not come out all the way, but only far enough to be seen. DogBoy read his eyes, followed them to the forest floor, criss-crossed with the footprints of the small rabbits that were brown in the summer and white in the winter. Screaming Eagle disappeared once again into the pine bough cover to await, as DogBoy only now realized, not the appearance of a great black bear, or a many-horned deer, or a bull moose, but of a silly little rabbit that, this early in the winter, is neither brown nor white but confused as to how to dress for the season.

And so, DogBoy waited and waited, feeling more embarrassed for Screaming Eagle than for himself. Screaming Eagle, the great hunter who could not even trap a small rabbit, for his quarry had not emerged from its warren hole to be snared.

It was only after many minutes that DogBoy began to wonder if his standing there in the middle of the small clearing, just yards from the rabbit hole, might have anything to do with Screaming Eagle's lack of success. More from boredom than anything else, DogBoy began to gather pine boughs as he had seen Screaming Eagle do, and fashioned a structure much like the one that sheltered the other hunter. Looking around the glen, he spotted another hole and soon it was adorned by his own leather loop made from the string Screaming Eagle had given him. Soon, that string extended into a pile of pines wherein sat another not so mighty hunter.

Much to DogBoy's surprise, it was through his loop that a rabbit first popped an inquisitive head. He was even more surprised when the rabbit casually hopped right on through the loop and went on his way. Did Screaming Eagle know that he had not the wits about him to pull the string when the rabbit was in the trap? DogBoy hoped for another rabbit and after a long wait one appeared.

This time he was ready and the rabbit was snared. DogBoy, for the first time felt pleased with himself. He had caught a rabbit while the greatest hunter in the tribe still sat silently in his pile of wood.

DogBoy crawled out into the clearing and called to his reluctant companion, “Screaming Eagle! Come out, for I have snared a rabbit. Do not fear; your Reverenced Grandfather will not go hungry!” Screaming Eagle did not come out for he was not in. DogBoy realized that Screaming Eagle had been behind him only when the great hunter turned to leave. DogBoy watched him walk away with a dozen small rabbits hanging from his belt.

DogBoy followed, carrying his lone rabbit and feeling not so pleased with himself. When he and Screaming Eagle had reached home and he had helped him skin, clean and cook the rabbit, it was once again mid-day.

DogBoy wondered which of SunMoonMan's relatives were hungry for meat and he did not have to hear Screaming Eagle say, "DogBoy, you have done well. Our brother or our sister or our nephew or our cousin is very hungry and needs to eat meat. Please go to his lodge or to her lodge and show him or her what a mighty hunter you are. Let them feast on roasted rabbit such as SunMoonMan has eaten today."

And thus ended the fourth day of DogBoy's preparation for the Long Night Moon. Tomorrow, when the moon rose, he would have to go, ready or not. How would he know what to do? He could only hope that on the next morning SunMoonMan, the Great Teacher would at last deem him worthy of his teaching.

When DogBoy awoke on the fifth and final day of his preparation, he was surprised to find that Morning Star was already up and gone. He hurried, not breaking his night's fast. Morning Star had not prepared his breakfast of corn meal and sweet milk as she had nearly every morning since his unexpected arrival. Even when he lived as a dog, Morning Star would make sure his food was even better than that of the undisputed alpha male among the village canine community. But this morning, on the day of DogBoy's Long Night Moon, there was no breakfast; instead Morning Star had left her dead husband's finest buckskin garment.

Dogboy smiled, quickly dressed in the warrior's clothing and, too excited to eat anyway, hurried off to his meeting with SunMoonMan, the Teacher.

Entering the lodge, DogBoy was greeted in silence not only by SunMoonMan, but also by his daughter, GreenCornWoman and her son, Screaming Eagle and SunMoonMan's son, RedElk and his daughter, One Voice. And, as on the very first day, there was a mysterious figure in the shadows. There were many shadows that morning, for there was no fire in the hearth and the torches burned only dimly.

As on each of the previous days, there was a long period of silence. SunMoonMan sat in the center, before the hearth. Behind him sat his family. However, unlike on the previous days, the silence was broken not by SunMoonMan's question, but by giggles! It was GreenCornWoman and she was laughing very quietly. "My Daughter," SunMoonMan said, "Why are you laughing?" "Forgive me Father," trying to suppress her amusement, "I was just remembering a foolish child who did not know wet mud from dry mud!" GreenCornWoman began to laugh again and soon all except DogBoy were chuckling out loud.

SunMoonMan, who DogBoy thought should be the most serious, laughed the loudest. Soon the laughter subsided and there was silence again...for a moment. It was RedElk who was laughing this time. When asked by his ancient father why, he responded, “Forgive me Father. I was just remembering a foolish boy who did not know that pine burns with sooty smoke!” And, as before, all present thought that foolish boy to be very laughable.

The next period of silence was even shorter and when asked the reason for her laughter, One Voice said, “Forgive me Grandfather. I was just remembering a silly child who did not know poison mushrooms from succulent!” The laughter was this time not interrupted by silence, for Screaming Eagle, now screaming in laughter and gasping for air said, “Forgive me too, Grandfather. For I was remembering a very, very stupid boy who did not know that bears sleep all winter!”

The laughter now was almost uncontrolled and even the mysterious figure in the shadows chuckled, familiar yet unrecognizable amid all the other laughter. DogBoy's embarrassment and chagrin was overwhelming. He could not imagine why this was happening.

SunMoonMan was the first to regain his composure. "DogBoy! Please forgive our laughter at these remembrances. I do thank you for helping my Grandson ScreamingEagle capture and cook my roast rabbit dinner, it was most delicious and gratifying. And I thank you again for helping GreenCornWoman, RedElk and One Voice in their tasks. Because of you, many of The People are warmer in the light of their fires and torches and their bellies are full with mushrooms and roasted rabbit. Indeed, we all thank you and wish you well on your Long Night Moon."

DogBoy was incredulous? Wish me well? What about the teaching? The Shaman continued to speak as he rose and placed a soft doeskin blindfold over the boy's moist eyes, "Late this afternoon shall GrandMother Moon begin her longest journey. And so, you too shall begin your longest journey from boy to man, if you can."

DogBoy could not speak and it was well, for there was no need on the part of the assembled adults to hear him speak. He listened and SunMoonMan continued, "Today you will sit here and you will reflect. When it is time, you will be taken to a sacred space known to The People since before any of The People can remember. There you will find comfort, warmth, light, and food. There you may seek to know your true name." And with that, SunMoonMan and his progeny departed, leaving the blindfolded DogBoy to wait for Grandmother Moon to begin her long night."

It was only after sitting there in the darkness for many hours, stewing deep in his thoughts and disappointments, that DogBoy noticed the breathing so much in tune with his own that it sounded like an immediate echo.

He remembered the figure in the shadows and almost in anger blurted out,

“What is your name and why are you here?”

Morning Star smiled, “You know my name.”

“Mother! Why are *you* here?” She did not respond.

DogBoy felt deeply ashamed.

“Mother, you laughed along with the others?”

Morning Star laughed again, loudly,

“Of course, how can one not laugh at such things?”

DogBoy did not want to give in to his anger, especially with Morning Star who had been more of a mother to him in the previous four years than the Countess of Ensanada had been in the ten before that. But, he could not control himself, “You have all made the fool of me, the dog boy! You sent me to be taught the ways of our people, but you used me to do your work. Then you all laughed at me, the foolish boy child who did not know dry mud from wet, oak from pine, good mushroom from bad, or that the great black bear sleeps all winter. Why did you all laugh at me so cruelly?” Morning Star smiled, not wanting to laugh out loud again. “My son, they were not laughing at *you*; it was *themselves* at your age that they were remembering.”

DogBoy was taken aback, but then remembered the real source of his anger, “Then why did SunMoonMan misuse me so when I asked only to be taught the ways of The People? For four days I have come to him and for four days he did not teach me anything!”

Morning Star did not answer except with an audible sigh. She placed a hand softly on his shoulder as she rose to leave. He could feel her breath on his cheek as she whispered slowly and deliberately,

“It’s not about the teaching.”



DogBoy had little time to reflect on the meaning behind his foster Mother's words, for immediately after she left he heard a new voice summon him to come out. Feeling his way through the door, he emerged into the late afternoon air. "Who calls me?"

"It is I, Silver Fox, your guide. Now, DogBoy, place your hand on my shoulder and follow." And so he did, and they walked for many miles, one following the other, until they came to "the place of comfort, warmth, light, and food" as SunMoonMan had promised. And there, DogBoy's guide said simply, "Dream well, DogBoy."

When DogBoy hesitantly took the doeskin from his eyes, his guide was gone. DogBoy was alone in a small forest clearing and looking around him was horrified to realize that Silver Fox had brought him to the wrong place! In the fading light he could see that he was in the very same place he'd been the day before, where he and Screaming Eagle had snared the rabbits, and... *there was nothing here!*

His horror turned to anger when he began to think that this was yet another trick, another reason to laugh at him. And soon after that, the horror turned anger turned to fear, and despair, and loneliness...and the boy dog who would be a man sat down in total bewilderment.

He did not really know how long he sat in the freshly fallen snow, but Grandmother Moon was well on her long night journey when the cold and hunger demanded his attention. He forced himself to rise and gather pine boughs, weaving them together and patching the holes with mud found still moist from the forging of forest pigs. He did not have time to think about his failure and to feel his fear, there was wood to collect for a fire, and tubers left by an inefficient pig, even uncooked, would appease his hunger long enough to trap and roast a hop-less bunny.

Rushes sticking out from the winter snow made a good torch and allowed him to see into an old maple tree where some frugal squirrel had hidden his morning meal. And all the while he worked he sang, quietly at first, but then quite loudly, and GreenCornWoman's song echoed throughout the woodland as he sang,

*Hey now Black Bear, give me courage;
Ho now Eagle, give me strength;
Hey now Hoot Owl, give me wisdom;
Ho now Turtle, give me patience.*

And so in the light of the Long Night Moon, DogBoy worked until he sat before a roaring fire, within a pine-bough lodge, licking his chops of the fat rabbit whose bones now lay beside him. And in his exhaustion, DogBoy lay down to sleep in a place of comfort, warmth, light, and food and there he spent a dreamless night.

DogBoy was awaked in the morning by the voice of his guide. “DogBoy, place the doeskin round your eyes and come forth. SunMoonMan awaits you.”

When he entered the lodge, the fire and torches burned brightly, the light stinging his eyes when the blindfold was removed. DogBoy would not have thought the Shaman’s home would hold so many people, but there they were: GreenCornWoman, RedElk, OneVoice, ScreamingEagle, StandingHawk, WiseWildWolf, WeepingOwl, LeapingDeer, Mountain Wind, SingsWithFrogs, SilverFox and even old TwoDogsBarking, standing on one foot and sporting a toothy grin!

In the center was Morning Star and she too was smiling, as was every person in that room. DogBoy could not describe his shame; there were no words. How could he tell them that he had not dreamt his true name that he had failed? And so, when SunMoonMan at last spoke directly to him, DogBoy could only hang his head in shame.

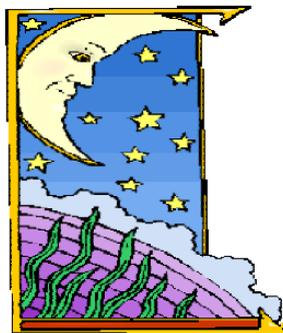
The Shaman's words echoed in his mind, "What is your name and why are you here?" DogBoy felt alone in this crowd of smiling onlookers. But slowly, one word at a time, agonizing to say the name of the boy who lived with the dogs, he said, "My...name...is...Dog...MAN!"

What? What did he say? His own words rang in his head. Yes, that was his name! He was DogMan and with that knowledge he also knew what his Mother had meant the night before when she whispered, "It's not about the teaching!"

And so, Juan Ramón deTirni, Count of Ensanada and former dog, who would never be called "DogBoy" again, raised himself to his full height and said, "My name is DogMan and I am here... *to learn!*"

SunMoonMan showed no surprise whatsoever. He just smiled and said, "Well then, DogMan, what would you like to learn?" DogMan was delighted and with great joy he said, "I wish to learn the ways of The People."

“Ah, but DogMan, you already know the ways of The People. Have you not lived among The People for four winters? Have you not learned to speak the language of The People, to wear the clothing of The People, to sing the songs of The People? And, on your long night moon, did you not demonstrate to all The People that you can find shelter, warmth, food and comfort where the EarthMother provides? And, have you not also shown this past week that you know how to serve your brothers and sisters in our community?” SunMoonMan looked deep in his new protégé’s eyes and said with a hint of pride in his voice, “DogMan, these *are* the ways of The People. It is now time for you to learn the ways of the Spirit.”



*And thus ended DogBoy’s Long Night Moon;
And thus began DogMan’s journey into Spirit.*

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