

# One With The Cats

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Generations ago, in the foothills of Colorado, there was a small forest. There were wind-battered, hardy trees so old that only the mountains remembered them as saplings. A clear stream ran from the top of the mountains to the land between the mesas. On a warm summer day, a Native American girl lay in the forest by the stream.

Her name was Namid, a brave girl much like a wild animal in her carefree ways. Namid lived in a village close to the forest, and she came here often to play in the dappled sunlight coming through the leaves of the trees. Sometimes she hopped across rocks in the stream, or laid in the shade, dozing. Namid often hiked up into the mountains to see all about, then would race down, chasing rabbits.

However, today Namid had more serious things on her mind. A large mountain lion was prowling her village, sometimes taking animals, usually sheep or goats. The cat seemed as if it had lived for a long time, according to village hunters who had seen glimpses of it. It seemed to have experience with snatching animals, and taking them into the mountains to feast.

The elders in the village discussed a growing rumor. Could the intruder be the King of the Mountains? The King of the Mountains was a large male mountain lion who created the mountains and all that surrounded them, according to legend in her village. *When he screams, it echoes through his kingdom of Colorado. When he's angry, storms rage over his land.* Namid was worried that the lion would soon take a young child, because the attacks had been on increasingly bigger animals so far.

“Why is he doing this?” Namid thought aloud. “The King of the Mountains must have a reason for taking so many creatures.” As she lay on the ground, she thought hard. Suddenly, it came to her. She didn’t know how. It was as if a spirit had given her the answer.

“There is a reason. The King of the Mountains knows that the mountain lions of the forest are being hunted. He wants payback.” She had to get back to the village to tell the elders. Fast as a whip, she leaped over the stream and dashed through the forest without a sound. The soles of her bare feet flashed in the setting sun as she jumped logs and ducked branches. She was nearing the village when she heard a squeal. She stopped in surprise.

Namid tiptoed to a tree trunk and peered around it. A marmot was being carried into the underbrush by a mountain lion. And could the lion possibly be... no. This lion did not seem as if it were the King of the Mountains. Being a friend of small creatures, Namid decided to follow the lion and see if she could rescue the marmot. It caught a glimpse of Namid following them and screeched for her help.

The mountain lion dug his teeth into the marmot’s scruff to quiet him. It pleaded with large eyes. Namid knew she had to save the marmot. Bending over, she picked up a stone. With butterflies flitting in her stomach, she hurled it at the mountain lion. Hitting its target, the lion dropped the marmot in surprise. The little marmot darted off into the trees. Growling, the mountain lion saw Namid. The lion advanced upon Namid, going in for the kill. The fight-or-flight instinct in her flooded her body with adrenaline. Catlike, Namid scrambled up the nearest tree. The mountain lion began climbing the tree too, angry it had been cheated out of its meal.

*The mountain lion can climb too. It's a cat!* Namid thought frantically. Breaking another branch to use as protection, she kept climbing. The lion caught up with her near the top. They both found a limb to stand on. As the lion prepared to pounce, Namid's heart beat rapidly. She swung her branch, which caught the lion in the side. With a shocked expression on its brutish face, it fell a long way through the branches to the hard ground. Then there was a *CRACK*. Namid couldn't breathe.

She crept down the tree slowly, checking to see if he was dead. The mountain lion's limp body lay sprawled on the ground. Even though she knew she had done it to protect herself, tears began to drip off of her chin. As if moving through water, Namid shuffled towards the lion. She stood over him with her head bowed in remorse.

A deep voice echoed around the trees coming from behind her.

"You showed remorse to my son."

Namid spun around. Behind her stood the most regal mountain lion she had ever seen.

"The King of the Mountains! Please spare me!" the girl sobbed.

He shook his huge head.

"You showed remorse for what you have done. You are unlike any other human. You killed my son, yet you are sorry."

"Thank you, sir! But what do you mean?" Namid wondered, wiping away a tear.

"All of your kind hunts mine without a hint of remorse. You simply did it in protection of yourself and a minor creature."

"The marmot?"

"For showing remorse, I shall let you live, though you killed my son."

“Would it be too much to ask to spare my village too?”

“A tall order. However, you have proved yourself worthy of my trust. I know you will keep your villagers from hunting my own, and I will no longer hunt their livestock.”

The king and his son then dissolved into the air. Full of wonder, Namid looked up at the now inky black Colorado sky. She thought she could see the face of the King of the Mountains etched in the stars, watching over his kingdom. She ran through the trees back to her village. She knew she could keep the King’s promise.