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HELLO, DEAR READER! HAVE YOU EVER SEEN
ANYTHING AS OLD AND AS BEAUTIFUL AS I AM?

WHAT? YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I AM?




HAIRPINS



TALE

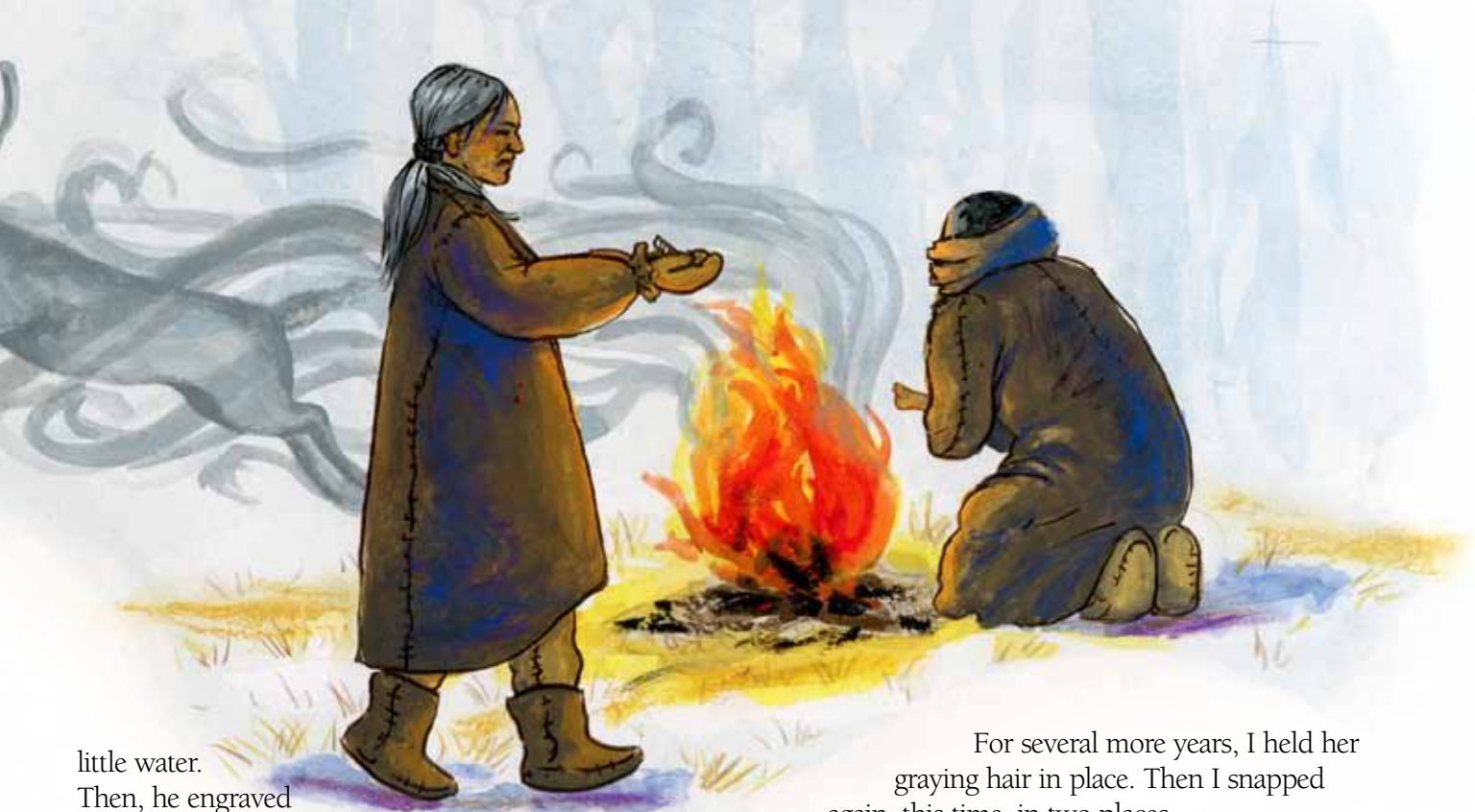
BY A. GWYNN HENDERSON
ILLUSTRATED BY KATRINA DAMKOEHLER



I am an engraved bone hairpin from the Falls of the Ohio River region. Nearly 6,000 years ago, I held my owner's long black hair in place, simply and elegantly.

While I might not look at all like the right front leg of a deer, that's exactly what was used to make me. Split lengthwise twice, that straight dense bone can produce four pin blanks. My maker selected the straightest piece, scored it with a sharp chert flake, then snapped it to remove the remains of the joint. He expertly formed my crutch-shaped top, and worked my shaft smooth with a sandstone abradant and a





little water.
Then, he engraved
my beautiful geometric
design with another sharp flake.

If you could hold me in your hands right now, you would feel how round and smooth I am. You would also see how the oils of my owner's hands and hair polished my top and sides.

In my prime, I was long and slender, with just enough give in my shaft to bend a little when I held her hair. Everywhere she went, I went. From my place at the back of her head, I eavesdropped on conversations. I held tight when she danced. I had another job to do as well. The shape of my top and the style of my design were like a warm welcome to strangers. Once they saw me, they knew who my owner was and who her family was.

One cold winter morning, as she pushed me through her hair, I snapped, neatly and completely. Perhaps it was too cold, or maybe I was too old. She took me to her friend—my maker—and, with very little effort, since just a small part (the lower section of my shaft and my tip) had broken off, he re-shaped me. I was two inches shorter, but I could still do my job!

For several more years, I held her graying hair in place. Then I snapped again, this time, in two places.

Now, I was too small to be a hairpin.

She replaced me with another, but for a while, kept my parts. Eventually, though, they became separated. Her people were hunter-gatherers and they moved often. I have no idea where my other sections ended up, but I landed in a trash pit. And there I stayed for thousands of years.

People came and went. History moved forward. A city grew up around me. Then, an archaeologist found me. She knew what I was and what I had been. By studying me, she learned my story.

And, now, you know it, too!

A. Gwynn Henderson, staff archaeologist and education coordinator at the Kentucky Archaeological Survey, consulted Dick Jefferies, Anne Bader, and Chris Turnbow, archaeologists who have studied Ohio River Valley bone pins or made them.

Check out all those contemporary bone hairpins in that neat title for the article about me! They are from a site in southern Illinois, and they show the many possible kinds of bone pin head shapes and engraved designs.

