



VALLEY OF THE MISTY MOUNTAIN



Christine Buzzi

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DEDICATION

For my grandsons, Liam and Kayle Buzzi

LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS

- GARDON A 'superhuman' being who has lived many lives before, like all of us have – but with a difference – he can remember every one of them.
- KODIAK (KODI) Gardon's grandson, a young lad of about eight years old.
- JALU An old wise friend of Gardon who lives in the Valley of the Misty Mountain with his grandson Kalu.
- KALU Grandson of Jalu who lives with him in a cave in the Valley of the Misty Mountain. He is about Kodi's age.

ENEMY CAMP in the VALLEY OF THE MISTY MOUNTAIN

- TAREK A friend within the enemy encampment.
- ALCOCK Dreaded Chieftan of the Misty Mountain Marauders.
- DALOCK Son of Alcock, about Kodi's age.
- MARDOX Deceased favorite son of Alcock.
- DARGON Cousin of Dalock.
- BARTOK Alcock's second in command.
- ANTAS Young warrior: cautious, serious, quiet – very good tracker.
- CANTUT Young warrior: agile, short, slim, happy – good hunter with a spear.
- BALDUK Young warrior: tall, heavy set, uncouth, disagreeable.

FRIENDLY CAMP of the MEADOWLANDERS

SAMTU	Admired Chieftan of the Meadowlanders
SALANA	Wife of Samtu, the Shaman.
MARLO	Son of Samtu and Salana, about 20 years of age.
MARTA	Pregnant elder daughter of Samtu, married to Chalu.
ARLA	Daughter of Samtu and Salana, about 16 years of age, beautiful, flirtatious
DARLA & CALA	9-year-old twin daughters of Samtu and Salana, known as ‘the terrible twins’ – mischevious and always getting into trouble.
CHALU	Husband of Marta.
SANTO	Young archer about 15 years old, has crush on Arla.
DALU	Young archer also the same age.
JARU	Another young archer and sentry.

The First Four Lessons On The Journey For Kodi's Enlightenment

Lesson No. 1
Patience

Lesson No. 2
Always Be Cautious When Traveling
In Strange Places

Lesson No. 3
Have Faith

Lesson No. 4
Be Prepared And
Always Expect The Unexpected

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The Beginning

The sun was quite high in the sky. In another hour or so it would be mid-day with not a cloud in sight. Clutching the hand of the old man the young boy struggled to keep up with the ‘ancient one’; stumbling along the well-worn trail of dry earth, uneven and with many small pebbles, as they climbed higher and higher. It was a hot day in August; rain had not fallen for some time. The pebbles beneath Kodi’s feet made it difficult to keep his balance, like he was walking on marbles.

Sensing the difficulty the child was experiencing the ancient one stopped, sat down on a rocky outcrop and invited the little one to join him.

“Where are we going, Grandfather?”

“You will see,” the old man replied smiling as he looked down at the child. “You will see.”

“How much further?” the child continued.

“Have patience, my child, patience is a virtue which few of us possess; but have patience.”

They lapsed into silence as they looked back over the way they had come. Soon it would be cooler as they would be heading into the forest, but right now there was an almost unbearable heat they had to deal with as they continued their journey. The old man reached into the large worn sack he was carrying and produced a deerskin container of water which he handed to the boy.

“Here, Kodi, it’s time to drink,” he said, handing the small boy the

deerskin vessel which had been filled with water from the creek earlier that morning.

The child eagerly took the water, drinking a few sips, handing it back to his grandfather as he studied the surroundings. Looking back down the mountain he could see the village in the valley they left this morning. It looked very small as they had climbed steadily since leaving the hamlet and would look even smaller when they reached their first destination, if indeed they could still see it then. Scanning the horizon the ocean could be seen plainly in the distance. It was too far away to see how high the waves were but as there was no wind on this hot August day the waves were probably not very high; in fact, with the sun glinting on the water, it looked almost like a shimmering silver glass.

“Look, Grandfather,” said the child, pointing at the horizon where the river met the ocean. “I can see the end of the river, over there,” he said excitedly.

The old man smiled at the child – everything was so exiting at his age, and everything was new, fresh and uncontaminated by years of living with other humans. He envied the child’s innocence, hoping that much of it would always remain, but was saddened to realize that it probably would not.

The ancient one put the deerskin back into his sack and got to his feet with the aid of the staff he was carrying. The staff had been cut from a tree many years ago by his grandfather and one day the staff would be passed onto his grandson, the boy now journeying with him to the summit. The boy scrambled to his feet and reached for the hand of the ancient one.

Clutching his grandfather’s hand, the small child gazed in wonderment as everything below got smaller and smaller. The oppressive mid-day heat was tiring him out, and he looked forward to reaching the forest ahead. His grandfather, although old, did not seem to tire as Kodi did but kept up a steady pace as they climbed onward.

“What will we see when we reach the top?” asked the young boy excitedly, anxious to reach the summit.

“Have patience, child; all in good time,” said the old man, smiling as

he looked down at the boy holding his hand, remembering a time many years ago when he had taken the same journey with his grandfather. "All in good time."

For another hour they toiled, the boy becoming visibly tired but complaining little. This was the trip he had looked forward to for a long time. He was eight years old and now it was the moment. It was time to go to the mountain with his grandfather, like his father had done and his father too, and so on as far as anyone remembered. He wondered would they encounter bears or cougars?

Across the straits they could see the far off land and the snow-capped mountains beyond. What a beautiful sight it was, craggy mountains with cool, cool snow covering just the very tips. Oh how he wished he could play in some of that snow now! A sea mist was now developing and hanging close to the distant water so far below them. He loved the summer mists as there was something so welcoming and calming about them and, yes, mysterious too. To walk along the sea shore with the summer mist swirling around and the sun breaking through intermittently....



Just ahead lay the entrance to the forest where the path would be less arduous and the air cool. First they passed small scraggy pine trees which quickly gave way to denser vegetation with fir, cedar and other great trees towering high above the boy. Kodi felt so small now as he looked skyward at the magnificent trees. Oh, how he loved trees, they were his friends. He was visibly upset if anyone cut one down in his presence. He was truly a lover of the earth, the animals and his beloved trees. They weren't really *his* trees as, after all, they belonged to everyone but he loved to think of them as *his* and wanted to protect them. Yes, he was a special child indeed.

Kodi felt a renewed energy entering him; a mix of the cooler air and an eager anticipation of what lay beyond made him want to accelerate his pace. This was an adventure, an adventure for which he was more than ready, although he had no idea what was to come. He knew he would be forever changed by the time they came down from the mountain. The

two walked in silence for about ten minutes, the boy looking around the forest wondering again if he would see a deer, a bear or even a cougar. He was not afraid; the animals were his friends and he was theirs, of this he was sure although he had never come in close contact with either a bear or a cougar. He just knew they were his friends and was not afraid, yet did not want to come across a cougar or bear suddenly in any case. His father had taught him to be wary when walking through the forest and now he remembered that wise advice.

“Come on, Grandfather. Now I am ahead of you! Come on,” he said excitedly as he was now able to move swiftly and sure footedly with the grassy track under his feet.

“No, little one, the sun is still high in the sky and it is time to take some refreshments, energize ourselves. The journey before us is long and we will not reach our destination before night-fall, or for many night-falls. We will have to sleep this night under the pines, or in a cave,” said the wise old man.

The path opened out into a forest glade. The clearing was strewn with decaying fallen trees, each half-rotted trunk acting as a nursery for one or two protruding saplings. The travelers welcomed the sun filtering through the tree tops now as it brought warmth to them. The walk in the forest had begun to chill them.

Selecting a sturdy log, the ancient one sat down. The boy, now beginning to feel weary, yawned and lay down on a grassy knoll under a pine tree that began swaying slightly as a breeze was coming in from the ocean. Upon seeing the boy shiver, his grandfather took a small blanket from the sack and covered the now-sleeping boy. *Yes, a short rest before we carry on*, thought the wise one. He too was beginning to feel weary as although he was fit for his age, his age, nevertheless, was four score and three. He should not be undertaking such a journey, especially taking the young boy. *What if something would happen to me, what would happen to the boy?* But... this was a journey they had to take and they had to take together. At eight years of age the boy should be able to understand the magnitude of what was about to be revealed, as he was not an ordinary boy. He was a very special boy; this the grandfather knew. He knew that

his grandson one day would grow up to be a man like no other. Gardon, for that was the old one's name, had made up his mind that all his knowledge, accumulated during his four score and three years and an infinite time before this incarnation, he would bestow upon this child when the right moment came. And now it would soon be time.



The wise old one, feeling a tiredness reaching into his bones, lay back on the grass, closed his eyes and drifted off into a deep sleep. He did not want to sleep as he knew they had to travel far to reach their intended destination – a journey that could last quite a while – but sleep overcame him and now he slept.

He had lived all this life in the village at the bottom of the mountain in a valley close to the river and near the ocean. It had been a peaceful life and for this he was thankful because in his previous lives, and there had been many, he had usually been a warrior. But now he had evolved from a young soul to an old soul and in this lifetime he had chosen an experience of peace and tranquility and teaching. He was a teacher, a teacher of life and of the universe and of nature. He was very popular with all the children of the village as they often came to him to hear stories of the mighty bear, the stealthy cougar, raccoon, deer, crow and the raven, but his favorite stories were always about the eagles. He loved the eagles. The proud, the magnificent, eagles were his favorite of all the creatures in the wild kingdom.

Gardon had many previous lives on the planet earth. This he knew was true because he could remember them all. He also knew that when other beings return to earth they have no memory of past life existences as it is part of the grand plan, to have no memory when starting a new incarnation. Luckily he had remained sane since, armed with this information, other beings would probably not be able to handle such a heavy load. Bringing into this lifetime memories of previous lives' transgressions was dangerous, but there were also memories of kindnesses given and received and these were good thoughts to nurture. The memories of past life transgressions should act as a deterrent in this life time. Gardon tried

to erase any thoughts of war, hatred and malice against all others and not dwell upon such thoughts of the past or to effect retribution in any way in this lifetime, thus breaking the cycle and Law of Karma. This was the first path on the quest for enlightenment. Gardon knew of many things past and had managed to balance the past and the present equitably.

In too many lives he was the warrior fighting fierce battles; at times a great hero known throughout this land and other lands, far, far away. In later lives he had chosen the path of learning, of compassion and of peacefulness as he slowly evolved from a young soul to an old one. Now he was prepared to be the teacher in this life. He taught through association as he could not help but weave compassion, caring and love into his stories when the children gathered around to hear some of the many wondrous tales he told of the animals, of nature, of happiness, peace and serenity. He would never tell tales of the great battles he recalled as that was not his mission in this incarnation. The stories deep inside him, were remembered, learned from, and then filed in the recesses of his mind to be used more as deterrent for all things of hatred, because now, in this incarnation his mission was one of love and teaching and not one of fighting and hatred. Kodiak, for that was his grandson's full name, was lucky to have Gardon as his grandfather and listened to every word his grandfather spoke; soaking the words up like a giant sea sponge soaks up the water. The wise old man thought himself to be the lucky one having such a grandson as Kodiak because the boy was every teacher's dream pupil with such a thirst for knowledge. Gardon knew that Kodi was wise beyond his years in some respects but still the playful child most of the time.

The fluttering of many wings and cackling of the crows that had gathered woke the sleeping boy. Rubbing his eyes he looked around the clearing. The trees now were casting longer shadows as the sun sunk lower in the sky. The old wise one, now the old tired one, was still sleeping deeply. Kodi thought it was a shame to wake his grandfather as he looked so peaceful sleeping there but he was concerned they had both slept far too long. He slowly got to his feet, looking cautiously around him, wondering what had woken him up so suddenly, then realizing it had been

the crows, now sitting on branches of the pine tree, looking down expectantly, waiting for a crumb or two. The crows did not realize that they were too early as the weary travelers had not eaten even a morsel of food. Kodi and the old man had been too tired to even think of eating and had fallen asleep almost immediately their heads touched the mossy ground.

The boy slowly stretched, gradually moving his body from side to side as he lifted and lowered his arms. Now yawning, he realized that they had indeed slept quite long, not an ordinary mid-afternoon cat-nap. Although it was not yet evening, there was a definite coolness in the air, a lot cooler than when they first entered the forest, and now the shadows were closing in. Shivering, he walked over to his grandfather and gently began shaking the old man's shoulder.

"Grandfather, Grandfather, wake up, wake up," said the boy with a sense of urgency.

Gardon woke up with a startled look on his face. "What's the matter?" he asked the boy.

"Grandfather, we have slept too long."

"Yes, we have, but it is not a negative thing, my boy, for you see our earthly bodies needed rest and food. We have had the rest and now we must replenish our beings with food. Come here, let's see what we can have to eat," said the old man as he undid the large sack he had been carrying.

"We have bread which was baked freshly this morning, some cheese from the goats in the meadow, and here is lettuce and tomatoes freshly picked before we left this morning. There, that will keep us sustained for a while longer, won't it?"

Gardon spread the food out on top of the sack, using it as a table cloth. He then reached into the sack and brought out the deerskin of water; he was sure the boy was feeling somewhat parched as he was himself from the hot journey of the morning. Quickly he broke the bread up into pieces. The cheese was already in small pieces so he did not have to worry about dividing them any smaller. The tomatoes were bite-sized, so once again he did not need to divide them into portions. The lettuce leaves they tore off the main head as needed.

“Grandfather, will we have enough time to reach the top of the mountain and get back home safely tonight?” asked the boy; the concern in his voice was obvious.

“Don’t worry, we will be on the mountain for as long as it takes,” said the old wise one, for had he not taken this journey a hundred times or more – *or did it just feel like it?* A day for Gardon would seem much longer to Kodi because, at times, Gardon was not thinking in earthly time.

“The people in the village know of this mountain; they know of me, and they will expect us to return when they see us, that is all.”

“Oh, so we are going to sleep here? Here in this clearing? Or are we going to travel further until the purple shadows merge together and become as one; one of blackness?”

“Eat up, and don’t worry about such a thing as how ‘it will be’; it always is,” said Gardon in a soft voice which temporarily calmed the anxious boy.

For the remainder of the meal they ate in silence, both lost in their own thoughts. Gardon was remembering the time he first made the trip with his own grandfather, many many moons ago. He was then about the same age as Kodi and he had asked his grandfather the same questions. He smiled, thinking of that day long ago. The journey was the same, and the track through the forest was the same too, worn down by transiting animals; the elk, the deer, and others. It was still a busy highway, this beaten track deep in the forest. Everything even looked the same since little had changed. The trees were taller, some had fallen, and the brush too was the same, nibbled close to the ground by the deer. Some years there was more vegetation which told him there were less deer. If there were less deer there would soon be less cougars, or maybe at least fewer hunting in the area. He knew the mountain like the back of his hand, all the rocks, the caves, the hidden valleys and the animals that grazed and hunted in the forest during the summer and sheltered in the caves when the snow came to envelop the mountain like a pure holy mantle. There was something so nice, so pure, when the first flakes of snow fell softly in the forest, soon covering the grasses and small shrubs, leaving only the dark tree trunks, standing like sentinels, starkly contrasting the

pure white snow. The weight of the fresh snow lying on the branches of pines, cedars and fir trees bent downwards, creating archways out of the lower bent branches. Gardon shivered: *why all this thought of winter?* Winter was a long way off and there were more important things to think about now.

Kodi had been lost in thought too. He felt this was the journey he had waited all his life to take. He knew this trip would be very significant and his life would be changed for ever more by the time they came down from the mountain. He was quite nervous and anxious at the same time but knew little of what he was about to experience. Finishing his meal, he threw the last remaining crust across the clearing and immediately there was a fluttering of wings as the beady-eyed crows dive-bombed down and began fighting for the solitary crust of bread. Kodi was fascinated by the crows – they were his favorite of all the birds in the kingdom. His grandfather liked the eagles and Kodi liked eagles too but he liked the cunningness of the crows as they were very smart, often outsmarting even the elders in the village.

The noise of the dueling crows brought the old one back to the present reality – making him realize they still had time, if they hurried, before sundown to reach the area of caves where they could rest in a safe haven for the night.

“I think we will travel for a while yet before we put down for the night,” said Gardon. “Soon the path leaves the forest and we will climb steadily for a short while. We will have more light to travel by as the sun does not sink below the horizon for quite a while at this time of year,” rationalized Gardon. “If we stayed in the forest, the darkness would surround us very quickly because the branches of the trees block the last rays of sunlight and there would be no light until the moon is high in the sky.”

Placing the now-empty deerskin water container into his sack, the old man got to his feet. Throwing the sack over his shoulder he picked up his staff and reached his hand out to the boy. He could see that the boy, although enthusiastic, was beginning to tire. Now the boy was standing, Gardon let go of the boy’s hand and began walking slowly upward along

the shadowy forest trail. Soon sunlight was lighting their way as the trees gave way to grassy slopes with outcrops of rock and low shrubs.

Sitting down to rest on a nearby boulder, Gardon held his hand to shield the sun from his eyes and looked towards the horizon. How calm the sea looked now. This is a good sign, he thought, as there would be no rain tonight. The sun was hanging low in the sky behind the clouds colored red, orange and blue. *What a beautiful sunset*, he thought. Just then his thoughts were interrupted by the child.

“Grandfather, Grandfather, just look at the sky; look at those beautiful colors. How wonderful to see the sunset from way up high on the mountain. Oh, and look across the straits in that other land and at those mountains the snowy peaks, they look pink now.”

The old wise one smiled at the child’s simplicity and purity. Yes, he was still a child of eight years of age who appeared sometimes much wiser than his years, but right now he was enjoying just being a child. Just like a puppy put down on the grass for the first time; everything so new and so wondrous to be explored. The boy’s wonderment of the nature all around him, as if seeing it all for the first time, made Gardon’s heart beat proudly and happily.

“Yes, it certainly is a sight to behold,” he agreed. “Come on, we can’t tarry any longer, we must away to find sanctuary for the night.”

Gardon picked up his sack. Now on his feet, staff in hand, he started plodding up the mountain track, Kodi falling in behind him like that new puppy ‘in training’ obeying but who’d rather be exploring. For about twenty minutes, more or less, they trekked onwards, glancing from time to time at the ever changing sunset. Now the colors were deeper and merging into one as the night was swiftly approaching. As they walked onwards and upwards Gardon bent down and picked up a few branches and twigs, and moss here and there and placed them in his sack. Soon his sack was beginning to bulge with the cargo he was carrying.

“Are we nearly there?” Kodi asked.



“Are we nearly there?” the boy asked his grandfather again.

“Yes, just behind that large boulder there is a cave and we can rest there safely. I will go in first just to make sure that our haven has no prior occupants still residing there. Depending on the occupants we will either share the accommodation with them or I will shoo them away so we can rest our weary bones for the night,” the old wise one said.

As they approached the boulder Kodi could see the opening of the cave. It looked dark and not very inviting so he kept well behind his grandfather. Just as they reached the entrance of the cave there was a whooshing of wings and about six bats swooped out of the cave and almost collided with them. They both ducked down and the bats glided closely over their heads.

“Are you sure we should share the cave with the bats, Grandfather?” said Kodi with a very worried look in his eyes. He had seen a lot of creatures but so far had not seen many bats. Bats are creatures of the night and Kodi usually went to sleep at sundown and rose early in the morning, sometimes even before the sunrise and even before the birds had woken up.

“Don’t worry, little one, I will shoo any remaining bats out of the cave,” replied the ancient one, calming his weary companion.

“What if they don’t want to go, Grandfather?”

“Did you see me picking up sticks on the way up here?”

“Yes, I did, are you going to light a fire?”

“Yes, little one, I am going to light a fire in the entrance of the cave. Firstly, it will warm our weary bones and help us feel sleepy. Secondly, it will deter any wild animal who is presently outside from joining us inside the cave. Thirdly, any remaining bats will probably wish to leave the cave until the morning,” said Gardon.

“Oh, Grandfather, you are so wise. How could I have been so scared?”

“You must learn to trust me, Kodiak,” said the wise old man now feeling extra protective of his small charge.

“I do, Grandfather, I do. It is just that I am not very comfortable with bats around. I heard that if they fly at your head their little hands can

hold on tightly to your hair and then you have to cut your hair to release them,” said Kodi, still looking worried.

It was almost dark but light enough to see the entrance of the cave and the surrounding area. Gardon walked into the cave cautiously waving his big staff in front of him and from side to side. Now he was waving it in a circle above his head, at times hitting the wall with it. A few more bats flew out but after a while there did not seem to be any more activity in the cave.

“Is it safe for me to come in now?” asked Kodi.

“Yes, come here, boy, take the sticks out of the bag and place them here, in front of the cave entrance, just a little way inside to keep the wind from blowing out the fire should a wind suddenly arise,” instructed Gardon.

“You are going to make a fire, Grandfather?” asked Kodi. “How?”

“You will see,” said Gardon smiling.

Kodi did what he was told and arranged the sticks in a pile.

Gardon reached further into his sack and brought out some dry moss he had also picked up along the way. This, he knew, would be ideal for kindling. He also brought with him the fire sticks the elders in his village had traded with the white strangers, for skins of the animals the men of the village had killed for food. They had traded often with the invaders, the white-skinned strangers who kept on coming. In the beginning they, the people of the village, were suspicious of the strangers and approached with caution but gradually both sides began to feel comfortable. Some metal items – knives, axes and cooking pans – were also acquired by means of trades for animal skins. This was an equitable arrangement, or so he thought, but past life experiences had taught him to beware as nothing in life was ever as it appears to be.

Gardon carefully brushed away the loose pebbles in front of the cave and now removed some dry earth, making a depression. He filled the depression with the dried moss and placed the twigs over the top. Reaching once more into the sack he brought out a package of fire sticks and now brushed one of them against the abrasive cave wall rock. It burst into flame. He hurriedly touched the moss with the flaming stick and in no

time the fire sprang to life, first the moss and now the dry twigs caught the flame and began to crackle. Standing up tall, for he was well over six feet in height, Gardon stretched and walked outside the cave, then he brought some logs in for the fire. He had noticed the logs on the way in, probably left there by other weary travelers who had stopped for the night before traveling onwards. He was thankful for the logs; they would provide warmth as the night air was beginning to chill the very core of his being. The boy must be cold, hungry and tired too, he thought. Soon there would be a nice fire and the damp cave would begin to be more hospitable for the guests inhabiting it tonight.

He was a very resourceful man and his eyes were always darting around, making mental notes of everything, as he did not know when he would have to remember these things again; things that would be very useful either now or at a later date. Many lifetimes of remembering had indeed made him a resourceful man, filing away useful bits of information for future reference. Gardon was respected near and far as 'The Supreme Wise One,' as indeed that is exactly what he was.

Any human who could remember back across the time barrier to previous existences when walking on planet earth in a present incarnation would undoubtedly be a very unique individual. Besides remembering all his previous existences Gardon also time traveled, but this was by far the life he chose to be in now for he was indeed a great teacher and he was dedicated to teach his grandson. Certainly he would not teach him all he knew of past lives, but enough for Kodi to carry on the work that must be done. Gardon had told no one of his previous existences or of things in the future; he just seemed always to have the right solution to any problem and knew of many, many things that no other man knew. The children thought he was 'magic' and sat with him around the campfire on many a night, their eyes wide, and their voices still, listening as he told them of things past. Of course, the children thought they were just stories having been passed down through generations, never knowing they really were hearing Gardon's own previous lives' experiences. This he could not tell them, so he let them believe they were just stories. In each tale there was a lesson to be learned and the children learned well.

Gardon prodded the fire with a blackened stick which looked like a previous occupant had used it for the same purpose. Now the fire was well on its way to warming up their night's lodgings.

"Are you hungry, my child?" Gardon asked the boy.

"Yes, Grandfather; and I am thirsty too," he said looking up into the craggy, well-worn face of his grandfather, the 'Wise One'.

"Good, then we shall eat," Gardon said smiling, as he patted the head of his grandchild.

"Stay here and watch the fire, I am just going to get some water. There is a stream close by, I won't be long," said the old man. "In the meantime you can get the two blankets out of the sack and prepare our beds; there is fresh moss in the sack which will do as a pillow as it will be nice and soft for our heads."

The next second he was gone. It was just as if he had simply disappeared and not walked out of the cave.

"Grandfather! Grandfather!" called the now-frightened boy. "Where are you?" he said as he quickly looked around the cave for any sign of his grandfather.

A sudden calming came over him and he immediately knew all would be well and not to worry. He now proceeded to do what his grandfather had bid him to do, preparing the sleeping arrangements for the night.

Moments later his grandfather was back, carrying the deerskin vessel now filled with water.

"Here, child, refresh yourself with this water, it is nice and cold," said the ancient one, smiling at this very special child.

"I can see you made up our beds for the night," he continued. "Thank you."

"Yes, Grandfather, although I was a little afraid at first as you just seemed to disappear into the night. One minute I was looking at you in the entrance of the cave and without taking my eyes off you... well, you just vanished. It was very upsetting."

"I am here now and that is all that matters. Now let's see what we have to eat in the sack. Did you see anything when you took the blankets out?" Gardon said.

“No, there was just the two blankets, and the moss to be used for our pillows,” said the boy, wondering where the food was. He was now very hungry, tired and although the bedmaking chore had warmed him somewhat, he was still a little cold.

Gardon smiled, sat down cross-legged beside the fire, and reached over to where the sack was lying on the ground. It looked, to a casual observer, an empty sack. By this time Kodi was beginning to think that this trip was not exactly the trip he had envisaged when they set off for this ‘journey of a lifetime’ earlier in the day.

Puzzled, his eyes never leaving the sack, he waited and wondered if his grandfather was indeed magical as the children in the village had often referred to him.

The ‘ancient one’ reached into the sack. Slowly his hand found what it was seeking, then placed before the wide-eyed child a huge chunk of bread. He reached further into the sack and retrieved one apple, and then another one and now some cheese and more bread.

“Oh, Grandfather, are you are a great wizard from times of old? I am sure there was not another thing in the sack when I took out the blankets and the moss. I must be so tired that my eyes are playing tricks on me. It won’t be long before I am asleep but it will be good to eat something. The climb made me so hungry. I’m glad you brought food. Are you hungry too?”

Gardon was glad Kodi had found his own explanation for what had happened as he was not ready to divulge everything to his grandson; well, not yet anyway.

They ate in silence, each deep in thought, oblivious to what the other was thinking. The child was happy now and his belly was full. The cave was warm, and he was very tired; he was going to sleep soon and he would sleep well and be refreshed once more when morning came.

The ‘wise old man,’ the teacher, was concerned as soon they would reach the snow line where there could be danger to travelers. Yet he must not think of negative things now, for he must also sleep, refresh himself. He needed to be strong for the second day of their long journey into future enlightenment.



Climbing to the ridge

By the time the last ember changed from red to white and died in the fire pit, dawn was breaking. It was the second day of their journey. Kodi woke, thinking he was first, but Gardon was already awake and sitting in the cave mouth, watching the sun coming up over a distant mountain. It was not the same western mountain where they watched the sun go down but another mountain, in the east. Gardon had chosen this cave, with the east-facing entrance, as it would be sheltered from the winds that swept the mountain almost daily from the west. Looking at that far distant mountain Gardon now closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath. He sat cross-legged, with his arms outstretched, palms facing upwards. This was his hour for his daily meditation. Kodi knew he would have to amuse himself while his grandfather meditated. It could be some time before his grandfather had finished meditation and Kodi did not feel like trying to meditate or sit quietly. As he was always on the go, and couldn't sit still for five minutes at a time, Kodi figured this was why he could not meditate well. Maybe one day he would but right now there were places to explore and things to do.

Standing up, Kodi stretched as he drew in a deep breath. He walked outside the cave and let his breath out slowly. He was surprised it was as cold as it was outside the cave because he could see his breath when he releasing it through his mouth. Although it was still August and hot in the daytime, it was, after all, late August and nights had been getting cooler for a while and would be colder as they were at a higher altitude than back home in the village. He shivered and quickly went back inside the cave which still held some warmth from the previous night's fire. He

lay back down on the blanket and decided to wait until the sun was much higher in the sky. Closing his eyes he drifted into a deep sleep.

Although he was not sleeping long before his grandfather gently shook his shoulder, he felt he had slept for a week. He had a dream, and in the dream his grandfather was made of gold, like a golden idol but not an idol or statue as he was moving, and statues never move. His grandfather appeared to have golden skin and garments with a white light all around him. He decided not to tell his grandfather of his dream in case the 'ancient wise one' would think it was his imagination working overtime again. Kodi was always saying things that made people look twice at him and wonder 'where did that come from?' He was self-conscious and did not want to upset his grandfather. Little did he know that this was all part of the grand scheme; he was chosen to learn from his grandfather and be 'the one'. He was the one who would be the voice to the world but he did not know this, he could not know this, but one day it would be so. Even his grandfather did not know the magnitude of such things. Gardon would be instrumental in the boy's teaching, even more than he had been so far in this chosen child's life.

"Wake up, wake up, our journey is long and our destination far," said the ancient one, once again shaking the boy gently. "We must replenish our bodies with food and water before we set off again," said Gardon emphatically.

Kodi lay there staring at the roof of the cave and wondering where the bats had spent the night. As they were nocturnal they probably just flew around all night, he thought. Soon they will be back in the cave if not already here hidden in dark crevices. Now his mind came back to the present situation, sitting up he stretched his arms wide and then got to his feet.

"Tell me where the stream is and I will go and fill the deerskin, Grandfather," he said.

"Good boy, good boy," said Gardon, handing Kodi the water container and pointing in the direction of a very large rock.

"Just go in that direction and you will see the water," he said.

Kodi set off on his errand while Gardon folded the blankets after

first shaking any loose leaves, moss or small twigs that had become stuck to the blankets. He carefully picked up the moss batts they had used for their pillows. With the moss and blankets now safely stowed away in the sack, he sat down and peered out of the cave. The sun was beginning to rise in the clear sky. Gardon knew it would be hot trekking as they would climb through areas where there were no trees to shelter them from the midday sun. Today's journey would be more arduous as the day wore on. Later they would enter the coolness of a forest where they would rest.

The ancient one, as if in a trance, stared at the sack intensely – his black piercing eyes almost boring into the sack like an invisible laser beam. He then reached into the sack and produced the breakfast meal consisting of two apples, some more bread, cheese and two carrots. Although it was not a 'feast of kings' it would tide them over well for a few hours. He now lay the sack down and placed the food on the sack, using the sack as a tablecloth. Next he lit a small fire. He smiled and leaned back, looking at his handiwork. Just then he heard Kodi returning. Once again Gardon resumed his sitting position in front of the sack as he waited for his grandson to join him.

"Grandfather, here is the water. I stopped a while and washed my face in the cold water; it was very refreshing. I didn't think we would find water this high up in the mountain," Kodi said, now fully awake, refreshed and ready to continue on the journey. Looking down at the sack his eyes opened wide, amazed at the food that lay on top of the sack, but decided to say nothing.

"Come, sit down beside me and let's eat," said Gardon.

"What time today will we get to our destination?" Kodi asked his grandfather.

"Ah, my impatient one, it is not a question of what time, it is a question of what day."

"But... I thought we would have been back home by last night!" exclaimed the child, with a worried look in his eyes. This truly was an adventure, he thought, but now he was worried that things might not turn out well after all. He had heard of tales of wanderers who had climbed the mountain and never returned. They seem to have vanished without a

trace and when the elders of the village spoke of these things they spoke in hushed tones.

“They will be expecting us, Grandfather. They will worry if we don’t return.” Kodi was getting visibly upset by now.

“Hush, hush, don’t fret about things you know little about. Have I ever disappointed you before? You must have faith and believe in things that are not always tangible. I know it is hard for you to believe but understanding will come to you soon,” said Gardon, trying to allay Kodi’s fears. “You must first have patience. The first lesson is patience,”

“Well, alright then. You are right; there is a lot I do not understand in this world. I suppose it is because I am young and you are old that you know all about the things that I have not experienced yet. Maybe one day I will understand too, Grandfather.”

“Yes, yes. One day soon you will understand. Now enough talk about all that as there are more important things to think about right now,” said Gardon suddenly getting to his feet, and then moving slowly and cautiously, stooping slightly as he crept to the entrance of the cave; obviously he had heard a sound outside. For a man of his many years he still had very good hearing; in fact better hearing than most other people, more like the hearing of a wild animal, a wolf or even an eagle. Kodi watched as the old wise one stealthily crept to the entrance, holding his hand up to warn Kodi to be quiet and not make a sound. Kodi drew up his knees to his chest as if to appear smaller and blend into the shadows. He did not know what to expect but did as he was bade – he kept silent.

Looking cautiously to the left and then to the right, Gardon now relaxed his large frame, stretched and, standing at his full height, turned and smiled at Kodi.

“It was just the deer outside; no need to be afraid but it does pay to be cautious at all times. Remember that, little one. That is your second lesson of to-day: always be cautious when traveling in strange places,” Gardon said, now turning back to where the sack lay. “Come on, let’s finish our meal, we have to be on our way soon as we have a lot of ground to cover before nightfall.”

“Where are we going to sleep tonight?” asked Kodi.

“I will know when we are nearer to sunset than sunrise. I will tell you then but right now I can not answer that question for I know not the answer.”

They finished their meal in silence, both deep in thought. Gardon’s thoughts were those of reaching the destination and teaching his grandson the ways of the worlds, both the earthly world and the other world. When his grandson was enlightened it would be time to return to the valley and then his work on this earth would be complete and he would shed his body, like a costume, and his spirit would be free again to journey to the other world. There he would rest for a while before possibly again returning to this earth. If that was so, he would again choose the life he would live and the lessons he would learn, but he felt in his bones this was to be his last life on the planet earth.

Kodi’s thoughts were very different for after all he was only eight years old. He was thinking of his home in the valley and his friends who were going fishing today. He always loved fishing and right now the salmon were beginning to run. He had planned to go out in the boat and fish for salmon and help prepare the salmon for drying and, of course, there would be cooked salmon for all to eat. Oh how he wished for some salmon to eat right now.

Gardon, although lost in his own thoughts, could, through mental telepathy, read Kodi’s thoughts and desires. He smiled at the young boy, remembering how it was when he was that age, a very long time ago.

The meal and water finished, Gardon got to his feet and replaced the empty water vessel in the sack making a mental note to fill the bottle from the stream when they left the cave. Picking up his staff and throwing the sack over his shoulder, he extended his hand to Kodi which the young boy grasped, slowly getting to his feet.

“Well, let’s be on our way, young sir,” said Gardon. “But first we have to stop and refill the deerskin bag. We will be thirsty before long with our climbing and the sun will be getting stronger and warmer.”

“Let’s make sure the fire is out before we leave, Grandfather,” said Kodi, prodding the ashes with a stick and stomping on any last remaining embers.

“Very good, I am glad you are acting responsible – we don’t want to start a forest fire. This time of the year the ground can be so dry, the fire would spread so fast and the poor animals would have to run for their lives and we would have to escape too and could easily lose our way in the thick smoke.”

At the entrance of the cave they stopped and looked out. What a beautiful day it was shaping up to be; a day that would surely bring more wonders, Kodi thought. He was beginning to feel more relaxed now, having got used to the idea that he would not be going fishing just yet. There would be plenty of fish and fishing and playing with his friends when he got back, he was sure.

They set off together in the direction of the large black rock. Close to the rock was the small stream that trickled down the mountain, like an eternal spring. Gardon reached into his sack and handed Kodi the deerskin to be filled with the fresh ice cold water. After filling the container the boy scooped up some ice cold water with his hands, splashed the refreshing water on his face and then scooped up more water and began to drink.

“That is a good idea as the journey is long and we will be thirsty if we are not well hydrated,” said Gardon now bending down, also splashing his face with water and finally drinking the ice cold water.



Grandfather and grandson resumed their journey, climbing up to the narrow track. Out in the open now, traveling on the westerly side of the mountain once more, there was a light breeze which was refreshing, making their journey very pleasant. They had rested well in the cave, had eaten a meal and now they were ready for whatever the day brought forth. Soon they would enter another part of the forest; it would be cooler there but for the time being they enjoyed the sun warming their bodies and the crisp air.

Looking down to the valley below, the river and the ocean beyond, it was hard to discern through a summer haze any details of what had been so familiar to them. They had certainly climbed quite high but to Kodi

it was as if the mountain journey would never end and the mountain top would never be within their reach. Gardon climbed at a good pace for a human of four score years and three, but was he really human? Others had wondered about Gardon as he was so very, very wise, and such a good man that some found it difficult to believe he was indeed human because, after all, aren't all humans supposed to be fraught with imperfections? If Gardon had any imperfections at all – they were well hidden.

As they climbed Kodi noted the occasional trees were not as tall, or the vegetation as lush as it had been on the lower slopes. The breeze was now getting a little stronger and when the sun disappeared behind a cloud for a moment it sent a shiver down the young boy's back. Even if it was as hot as it was yesterday in the valley, it would not feel as hot to the two travelers because of the elevation. Kodi began to think that before long they would both be feeling very cold as they had not brought anything to keep them warm, except the blankets which Gardon was carrying in the sack.

Gardon, reading Kodi's mind, stopped and sat on a nearby rock. The sack was now in front of him and he reached into the sack and handed Kodi a blanket.

"Here, little one, put this around your shoulders. The blanket will keep you warm for it is made of the wool and hair of the animals from the valley," said Gardon.

"Oh, thank you, Grandfather. I was beginning to feel cold as the sun was hiding behind a cloud just now," said Kodi, surprised that his grandfather seemed to know what he needed right then.

"I think we should have something to eat and drink, don't you?" said Gardon.

"I am alright for the moment now I have the blanket to keep me warm. Don't you think we should wait until we reach the shelter of the trees before we stop, Grandfather?"

"Oh, what a wise one you are. That would be preferable, of course, but I thought you were feeling tired as well as cold. But if you feel you can wait until we reach the forest then I think we should keep going."

Gardon said, smiling to himself. He was pleased with the progress his protégé was making.



For about another hour they climbed effortlessly, their energy levels were still quite high, Kodi's especially, both wishing to reach their intended destination by nightfall.

"In another ten minutes we should enter the forest," Gardon announced.

Sure enough in about ten minutes, more or less, they entered the second forest. The alpine environment was somewhat dwarfed: the trees were spaced further apart, were shorter, and the trunks were very small compared to the other trees which they had walked beside yesterday.

An outcrop of rocks came into view and Gardon strode over, confidently making his way through to a flat area surrounded by rocks. There was one huge boulder in the middle which now acted like a table as Gardon placed his sack in the middle of it.

"Come, sit beside me and let's see what we can have to eat," Gardon instructed.

"But, Grandfather, there is no more food in the sack. There is only your blanket and the moss for the pillows and, of course, the water pouch made from the skin of the deer from the valley."

"Faith!" said Gardon "That is the third lesson – Faith. Have you not been provided for up until now?"

"Yes, everything has gone smoothly. When I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you found water and when I was cold you provided shelter and warmth. You are right, Grandfather, I should have more faith," said Kodi feeling somewhat guilty for doubting the powers of Gardon.

Once again Gardon stared at his sack intently for about a minute then reached inside and withdrew some cheese, bread, apples and also nuts, along with the water contained in the deerskin. By now the sun was higher in the sky and the travelers felt a lot warmer than when first starting out in the early morning. Today was not as hot as it had been yesterday and, for now, this was appreciated as traveling was not so tire-

some. It was time to take refreshments and to rest a while before carrying on to their second night's lodgings.

"Mmm, Grandfather," said Kodi as he reached for a piece of bread and cheese. "I was beginning to feel hungry and now I know I am hungry! This is good, not as good as having a salmon dinner, but good anyway."

Once again a party of crows, not the same ones as yesterday but hungry crows nevertheless, gathered around knowingly, expecting the crumbs when the meal was finished. They sat low on the branches and began their cackling. Kodi and Gardon soon finished their meal and drank the water pouch dry.

"We must fill the bottle at the first opportunity," said Gardon. "I always like to have a full bottle with me at all times. That is the fourth lesson, little one: to be prepared, and always expect the unexpected."

"That is a good lesson, Grandfather," said Kodi. "I will always remember it."

"Enough chatter, my boy, we must away as we have several more hours to go before we reach the end of this forest and reach the Valley of the Misty Mountain."

"The Valley of the Misty Mountain?" enquired the boy nervously.

"Yes, we will rest the night in a cave with my old friend Jalu and his grandson Kalu. Kalu is about the same age as you. I have known Jalu for a very long time. You will like him and his grandson Kalu, but we must not dally, be prepared and always expect the unexpected, especially now we will soon be entering the Valley of the Misty Mountain," said Gardon.

"You have never mentioned Jalu or Kalu before, Grandfather?" enquired Kodi.

Gardon did not reply.

"Why did you not mention we were going to stay with them?" continued Kodi.

"All in good time, as it is useless to present you with an itinerary of the journey before us when it could change at any time, depending on the circumstances."

"Oh," was all Kodi could say.

Kodi was beginning to look nervous again as he brushed the crumbs

off the rock. The waiting crows swooped down and devoured the last of the crumbs and bread. Sensing his grandson's nervousness, Gardon said, "Lesson number three, my child; have faith. Have faith."

Now on their feet the duo continued on their journey, Kodi crunching into the apple Gardon produced as part of their meal. His thoughts were not of the apple or the meal just eaten, but of the destination that seemed as far away as ever; if not further. This was not what he had in mind at all when they left. Would this journey ever end?

They walked in silence for a long while, Kodi remembering the lessons he had so far, and vowing to himself that he must practice them now. The first one was patience. That was a hard one for him but he would try and be more patient as, after all, Gardon was the learned one and 'he knew'. Kodi knew he must be cautious when traveling in strange places. He vowed to have faith in life and in Gardon, and now he must be prepared and always expect the unexpected. He kept going over these lessons in his head; over and over so they became deeply ingrained into his mind. These were the lessons that could mean his survival at some later time, he thought. This is why Grandfather is giving me these lesson for survival, for we are not in the safety of the village any more but getting further and further away with each passing hour.



By late afternoon Kodi and Gardon had left the small forest and were, once again, glad to be on the side of the mountain facing the setting sun. Now in the sunshine they felt better as the forest, even though less dense, was still cool.

"Come, sit here for a while. I will tell you now of the next leg of our journey," said Gardon, patting a rock indicating his grandson should sit beside him.

Kodi sat down, anxious and trying not to be nervous as Gardon described the next stage of the journey.

"Just before the sun goes down we will enter the Valley of the Misty Mountain and we will seek shelter with Jalu and Kalu. They do not live far into the valley, but high up on the edge of the valley. Luckily we do

not have to cross the valley tonight. Let me tell you about those who dwell in the Valley of the Misty Mountain. First I'll tell you about the valley itself. Most of the time the valley is shrouded in mists that come and go, and with the mists come dampness. When the mists clear there comes rain which makes the grass very green and the trees plentiful and tall, although deep in the valley there are no trees, just the settlement of those that dwell in the valley."

"Who lives in such a place?" asked Kodi, now very puzzled as he'd never imagined a verdant valley high up in the mountains. But how could he, for he had never left the confines of the village before except short distances on river, lake and ocean.

"There used to dwell a gentle tribe and now only a few remain. Jalu and Kalu are two of the few remaining who still dwell there. The valley was over-run by a warring tribe that came from afar; from another mountain, a very long way away. One day a party of marauders found the valley when they were lost and took news of its existence back to their tribe after killing six men of the gentle tribe that lived there. Little by little the intruders started coming and taking over the land by force and now hardly anyone is left from the gentle people that once lived in the valley. We have to remember lesson two: always be cautious when traveling in strange places; and also lesson four: be prepared and always expect the unexpected. We have to cross this valley to continue our journey and will need the help of Jalu and Kalu in order to do so."

Kodi's eyes widened – this was more than he had bargained for. This was not a day's journey to the top of a mountain with his grandfather. This was indeed an adventure and one that was getting more precarious as the hours went by. He sat there in silence trying to digest the magnitude of the information he had just received.

"Grandfather, do you mean to say that the people in the valley are not friendly?" asked a now visibly disturbed Kodi.

"Yes, exactly that. They are warriors by nature and wage war even among themselves. They are but one tribe with several groups within that tribe and now they have all but driven the original occupants of the

valley away or killed them – so they now fight among themselves. They will never learn.”

“We must be very careful then?” Kodi said frowning.

“Yes, we must indeed, little one – but have faith,” said Gardon smiling down at his troubled grandson. “You see, my dear Kodiak, this marauding tribe has completely taken over the Valley of the Misty Mountain save for a few remaining hardy occupants who now dwell in caves, hidden from these thieves and murderers.”

“How long will it be before we get to Jalu and Kalu’s cave? Will we get there before nightfall?” asked Kodi nervously.

“Yes, we will but we must not lose any more time. Let us go now as we still have a few hours yet to travel,” said Gardon.

Kodi looked down the mountainside, way down, trying to see the village but could not see anything clearly at all now, as they had indeed climbed steadily higher since yesterday, higher than some thin clouds. Now and then when the mists shifted, he could see the straits and the mountains beyond the straits. He dearly wished to see his own village one last time before they entered the Valley of the Misty Mountain, but the wispy clouds did not part.

Looking ahead up the track, mists swirled in the distance as they approached the Valley of the Misty Mountain. The sun had disappeared from view and Kodi was feeling cold although he did not complain as he was too intent on hurrying and reaching shelter for the night as soon as possible.

“Soon we will reach the ridge and be entering the valley so lesson number four is very important. Do you remember which one that is?” asked Gardon.

“Be prepared and always expect the unexpected,” said Kodi proudly. “Lesson number two is important too, isn’t it?” continued Kodi.

“Yes, little one: always be cautious when traveling in strange places,” smiled Gardon.



Jalu and Kalu

Just then the path veered to the right. They had reached the top of the ridge and were ready to descend into the Valley of the Misty Mountain. Gardon motioned to Kodi to slow down as he looked right and left before settling behind a tree.

“We will have to creep and possibly crouch as we proceed from rock to rock and tree to tree along this narrow path for a while as it is frequently used by the marauders,” said Gardon. “The path goes down to the valley but we will leave the path after a while and then we climb upwards for a very short way and look for the entrance of the cave where Jalu and Kalu live. Let us go now, and watch my every move and if I crouch then you crouch and if I hide behind a tree or rock, you follow suit, understand?”

“Yes,” said Kodi, trying not to show the anxiousness he was beginning to feel.

Slowly they began their descent with Gardon taking the lead, proceeding in a crouching position like a cougar stealthily stalking its prey. Kodi, wanting to be a good student, imitated the old wise one and was beginning to get used to moving like an animal in the wild. He was so intent on imitating Gardon that he momentarily forgot to be vigilant but was quickly reminded when a rock dislodged itself and caused a minor rock slide. Two eagles, disturbed by the cascading rocks, noisily left the branch of a mighty fir tree where they had been resting. On hearing the eagles call, others now joined them as they flew up into the sky and circled, once again, before settling down.

Quickly, and without warning, Gardon crouched behind a rock and

Kodi mimicked his grandfather almost instinctively. They waited, for what seemed a long time to Kodi but was probably less than a minute, to see if the disturbance had attracted any attention, but all was quiet. All the while Gardon was, with eagle eyes and sharp hearing, looking for anything unusual as he did not want them to run into the tribe of mountain marauders. He knew he could handle such a situation if he was alone but, with his precious grandson along for the trip, discovery could be a disaster. The boy had many lessons to learn before Gardon could be sure of a successful outcome should a confrontation arise.

The mists swirled in and out of the valley and the visibility was limited. Gardon thought that this was just as well as it offered better cover for the duo as they crept along the path. Gardon's ears were doing double duty as there was nothing to see with his eyes; he concentrated on his hearing, his apparently 'super-natural' hearing not detecting any troubling sounds.

Happy with the progress they had made, Gardon turned around and smiled at Kodi, with one finger on his lips which told Kodi to be silent. His other hand pointed upwards indicating that they would soon start the small climb to the cave of Jalu and Kalu. Kodi nodded and smiled back. It was a relief to be almost at their destination for the night and he was looking forward to getting out of the mists as he was feeling very cold but had not wanted to complain to Gardon.

They left the mountain path and climbed in a zigzag manner as there was no proper path to the cave. Gardon seemed to know the route like the back of his hand and quickly scaled the side of the mountain. It was not too difficult but care was taken not to dislodge any more rocks. If they disturbed the eagles once more, others might hear and rightly assume that strangers had entered the Valley of the Misty Mountain.

Gardon stopped, put his hand out indicating that Kodi should stop too, and then the old wise one made an animal sound which Kodi did not immediately recognize. A rock, to the right of Gardon, moved slowly exposing a small entrance to a cave. It was hardly big enough to call a cave entrance but that is exactly what it was and it was the dwelling place of Jalu and Kalu. Jalu had a feeling Gardon would be visiting and

was expecting him. Jalu had been keeping watch and sensed Gardon's presence before he spotted him. The wise are often telepathic and Jalu was certainly wise; not as wise as Gardon but very wise nevertheless.



"Greetings old friend, quickly come this way. I see you have brought your grandson with you. This is good as he will be company for Kalu," said Jalu as he moved back from the entrance of the cave.

"Come, Kodi, follow Jalu. I will pull the boulder back in place then I will join you," said Gardon.

Once they had squeezed through the entrance, Gardon drew the boulder back to hide the entrance. Now they were safe once more, for the time being anyway.

"Gardon, you have been here many times before but Kodi hasn't, so I will explain the procedure to him. I will lead the way, Kodi will follow and, Gardon, you will be at the back. The passage is narrow and in places we will have to crouch a little. It will be dark as we do not use lights at this end of the passageway in case any light is seen through the spaces around the boulder at the entrance. We have to be very careful indeed not to announce to our enemies that we are here, although they are aware we dwell hereabouts. Put out your hands and feel the rock each side of you, Kodi. This will help steady you as you travel downward, for we are indeed traveling downward to the main part of the cave," said Jalu.

They proceeded downward and for what seemed to be ages to Kodi, but it was probably not that far at all when they arrived at the main part of the cave. A boy about Kodi's age or maybe a little older was preparing a meal on a flat table rock. A large candle was the centre piece of the rock table, illuminating this part of the underground cave. The air was disturbed by the new arrivals making the candle flicker and shadows to dance erratically on the walls of the cave.

"Ah, there you are, Kalu, come and meet Kodi; he is Gardon's grandson and dwells at the foot of the mighty mountain in a village by the seashore," said Jalu.

"Welcome, Kodi, it is nice to finally meet you. Your grandfather has

told me all about you on his previous visits to us. Come, sit at our table,” said Kalu.

“It’s nice to meet you too,” said Kodi relieved to now be in the shelter of the cave, no matter how primitive it appeared to be. It was also nice to meet another boy who was about his age and he was sure they would become good friends.

“I have prepared some food for us. There is dried deer meat, fruit and veggies, and fresh water from the falls,” said Kalu.

“Good, let’s sit and talk. There is much to be said,” said Jalu, now seated. The others followed his lead and sat around the table rock. Gardon placed his sack beside his feet on the floor and sat next to Kodi.

“Let me tell you first about the Valley of the Misty Mountain. This was a peace-loving valley for a long time,” explained Jalu to Kodi. “People had huts in the open and the village was a wonderful place in which to live. One day, a few years ago, came a party of marauders from far, far away. They had plainly lost their way for they had no prior knowledge of our existence here. We had lived peacefully since time began, here in the Valley of the Misty Mountain. But, all that was to change when, by chance, that party of hunters lost their way back to their own valley and happened upon ours that fateful day. Ah yes, it was indeed a fateful day. A day I will always remember for they murdered six of our men for no reason at all and plundered our village. It was a massacre from which the people have never recovered. There is no village left now. Most of our people have been tracked down and killed, although some have descended the mountain and now reside on the coastal plains. The few who remain in our valley have been forced to live in the caves, like our ancestors before us.”

Jalu took a sip of water and continued, “I will say one thing though: when the intruders – for that is what they are – are not on the war path they do let us tend our gardens and animals in peace. It suits them because they are lazy and don’t like to tend crops and care for animals. When our produce is ready, if we don’t pick it immediately, they harvest it for themselves, and also take our animals. It is very annoying but at least we manage to subsist. It is particularly dangerous right now as the

marauders are on the war path because one of their warriors was way-laid and killed by a villager who had had enough of their thieving ways and continual persecution. Right now the villagers are, more or less, confined to their caves, especially after dark when strange things happen,” concluded Jalu.

“I didn’t realize things had got so bad. I was hoping you could get us through the valley up through the alpine meadow to the snow line,” said Gardon.

“Don’t worry about it, my friend. There are many ways to exit this veritable paradise,” said Jalu, showing mild sarcastic wit. No one needed reminding that another ‘exit’ would be to meet up with a group of intruders and be murdered – thus exiting both this valley and this world.

Jalu produced a knife and began slicing up the dried deer meat.

“Here, help yourself to meat and veggies. There’s plenty to go around,” he said.

“Do you have any bread?” asked Kodi.

“No, I am afraid not as we have not dared to use the fire to make either bread or stew these last few days. We do have another chamber in the cave we use as a kitchen and often make a fire to cook and for heat but having smoke leaving the cave through the chimney hole would not be advisable now with so many intruders around this month.”

Gardon looked down at his sack which he had placed at his feet when they sat down. He knew what he must do and do secretly as he did not want to reveal his powers.

He stared at the sack intensely for about a minute. Reaching down into his sack he now produced a whole large loaf of bread. Kodi’s eyes widened, once more, for he was still not used to his grandfather’s powers. Lesson number three, he thought: have faith.

“Here is some bread to complete the meal,” said Gardon smiling.

They ate their meal in silence for they were all hungry. Kodi marveled at the fact that the bread was not stale at all; in fact, it was very fresh. *Grandfather does have supernatural powers! I wonder what else he can do,* thought Kodi. *Could I ever learn to be like him?*

As it was getting late and the travelers were weary, Kalu showed

Kodi where he would sleep for the night. It was in another part of the cave, the floor of which was covered with dry hay which in turn was covered with bear skins and skins of other wild animals.

“You will be comfortable here,” said Kalu. “This is where I sleep most of the time too,” he added.

Lying side-by-side on the skins, the two boys chatted for some time with Kodi telling Kalu of his life down below the mountains in the valley close to the sea-shore. Kalu told Kodi about his life in the Valley of the Misty Mountain. He hardly remembered it when times had been good, only what his grandfather had told him. For him the daily drudgery and tension was always the same – trying to keep out of reach of the invaders and at the same time tending the animals and gardens.

The Valley of the Misty Mountain was either misty or raining most of the time but there was always a good supply of vegetables and plenty of grass for the animals. There were few boys his age to play with and he felt lonely most of the time.

By the time the boys dropped off to sleep they had become firm friends, vowing to always help each other: just like ‘blood brothers,’ although not strictly ‘blood brothers,’ or so they thought.



Tarek will help

The next morning, after a good night's sleep, Kodi and Kalu joined their grandfathers at the table rock and finished the remains of the previous night's supper. This time fresh goat's milk had been added to the menu. By the time they had finished eating, not a morsel was left but they were quite satisfied and not at all hungry.

Jalu presented Gardon and Kodi with capes made of wool from wild mountain sheep. They had been made long ago by Kalu's mother. She had woven many blankets and capes and these were spare ones that had never been used, so in essence they really were like new.

Kodi and Gardon thanked Jalu. Kodi put his on and spun around the cave almost knocking the candle down with the bottom of his cape. Realizing he had better behave, he calmed down and thanked Jalu.

"Kalu, show Kodi the look-out entrance and do a visual check of the valley and see what is going on out there. I hope the mist has cleared and you can, at least, ascertain that there are no intruders nearby because Gardon wants to be on his way as soon as it is safe," said Jalu. "And listen for the birds and squirrels, as they will tell you if anything strange is afoot.

"Alright, Grandfather. Come, Kodi, let's go and check things out," Kalu said getting up from his seat.

Kodi took off his new cloak, folded it neatly and placed it on a ledge. He did not want to risk snagging or tearing it on a rough patch of cave wall in the narrow passageways. Lighting a small candle lantern, he followed Kalu along a passage going upwards to the rock surface, higher up the mountain. Suddenly Kalu came to a complete stop where the way ap-