

# **Chip's Adventure**

## **A Rabbit's Story**

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## Chapter One

The day breaks clear on this spring morning. The sound of song birds greet the new born day, as rays from the sun pierce the darkness of the forest floor. A young rabbit yawns and runs his fingers through his hair scratching a itch. He sits up, looking about. Chip checks to see if he left anything. He says to himself. "It's nice to hear the sounds of spring once more."

The sound of his tummy rumbling reminds him of how long it's been since he had anything to eat. He had walked quite a distance the night before and is not familiar with the forest he finds himself in.

After eating the last bit of bread he saved from the previous day, he stands to survey what he can of the forest and gathers his few belongings into his backpack. He decides to push on thinking. "I must find food and work soon."

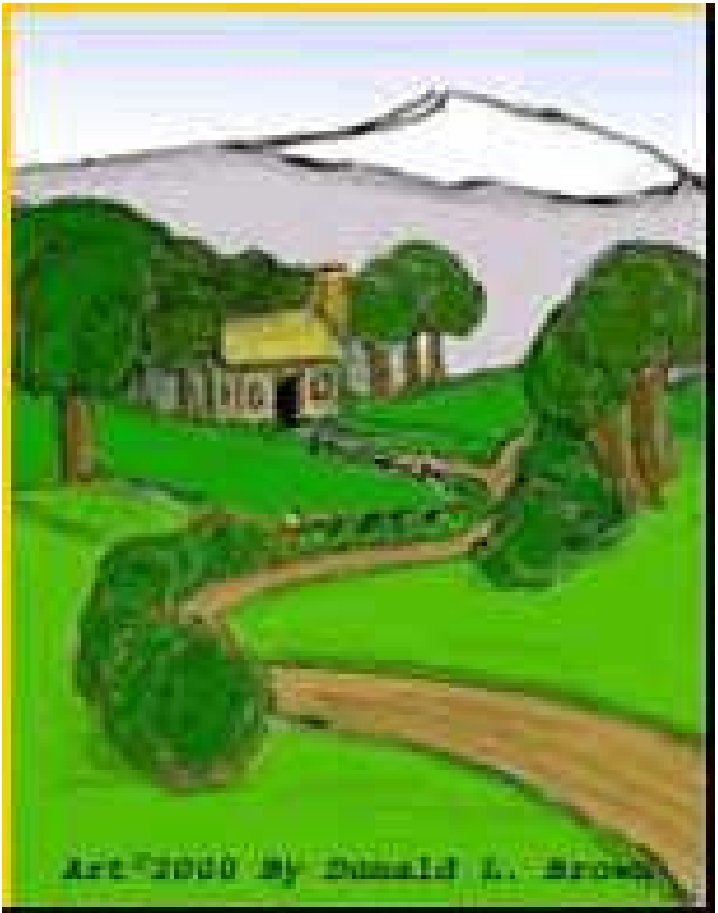
Though a young rabbit, Chip is thin, with ragged clothes. An orphan from shortly after

birth, he has struggled just to stay alive nearly all his short life. He travels the countryside doing odd jobs for food and shelter, desiring one day to find someplace he can call home.

While following the trail through the forest. He thinks about the two foxes that tried to steal his backpack a few days earlier. He stops upon hearing a noise and looks all around, then moves quickly along.. He says to himself. "I hope I don't meet any robbers."

After what seems like hours. The trail breaks out into the open and there before Chip, stretches a beautiful valley with grassy fields and a small stream flowing through it. Chip smiles and says."Sure is peaceful here." He follows the trail wishing he could find some berries along the way. In the distance he can see a small house set near a grove of trees and thinks. "Maybe I can find work there."

He continues along the trail towards the house. The sound of someone chopping wood grows louder as he does. He looks for the



sourceas he walks and shouts. "Hello!!" Then just as he passes some bushes, he hears a shout,

then a loud crash behind him.

Turning quickly with a hop. He blinks to see the top of a tree laying across the path. A skunk runs up and asks. "You ok, young fellow?"

Chip scratches a ear just a bit and says. "I think so, but that tree nearly got me."



The skunk holds out a paw and says.” Sorry.. But that tree went quicker than I planned.”

Chip nods and says. “I understand. It’s happened to me also.” He takes the skunk’s paw with his and says, “My name is Chip Sty.”

The skunk smiles as he shakes Chips paw. Then says. “Glad to meet you Chip. Fures around here just call me Mac.”

Chip nods. “Nice to meet you, Mac. Would you be needing any help. I am in need of food and shelter.”

The skunk thinks a moment. Then says. “Well since I nearly fell a tree on you, it’s the least I can do to offer you some food and shelter for the night and I could use a little help cutting this tree into firewood.”

Chip smiles and says. “Thanks a lot and I would be glad to help.”

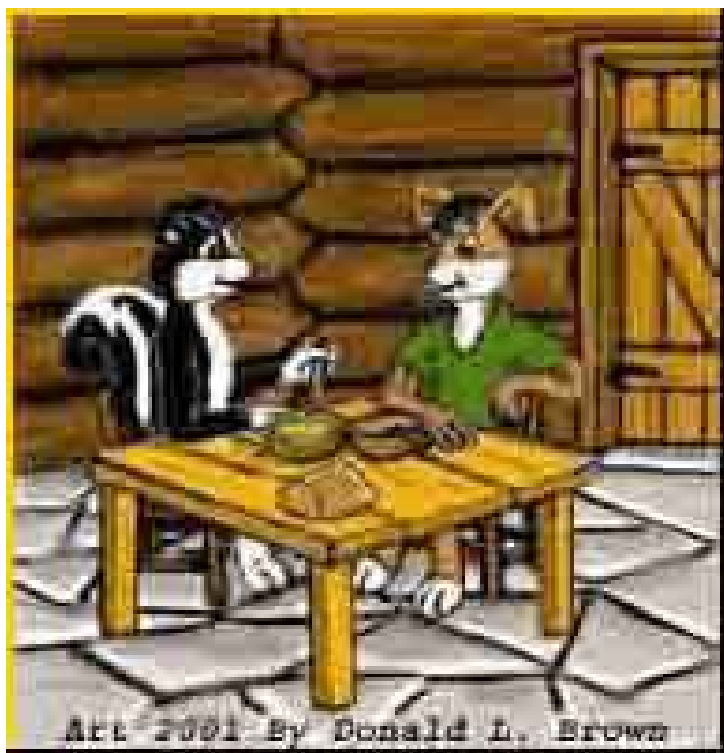
Mac grins and says. “It’s close to lunchtime, we can have a bite to eat first and I’ll show you where you can bed down as well.” Chip nods and walks with the skunk up the path to the little house.

Chip follows him through the door into a small room that has a single table, two chairs, small bed and a large rock fireplace. In the fireplace a pot of vegetable soup simmers over a small fire. Chip sniffs the air as the skunk grabs two bowls and spoons from a large wooden



cabinet that stands in the far corner.

Mac smiles as he notices the rabbit sniffing the soup. He walks over placing one of the bowls on the table. He then asks, "You like vegetable soup, young fellow?" Chip looks at the skunk and says, "Oh yes and it smells very good." The



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skunk fills one bowl, then puts it on the table and says. "Sit yourself down and have some."

Chip smiles and says. "Thank you. I will." He then removes his backpack and bedroll before sitting at the table. He dips his spoon into the tasty soup and smiles after tasting it...Chip and Mac sit talking.He remarks as the skunk sits another bowlful on the table. "Oh, that tastes great."

Mac grins and says. "You must be real hungry to like my cooking." He then takes out a loaf of bread, breaks a large piece off and hands it to the rabbit, saying, "Here have a little bread to go with your soup."

Chip smiles and takes the bread, crumbling some into his soup saying. "This is the best meal I've had in days." The skunk smiles as he starts to eat as well.

A few minutes later Chip finishes his soup and bread.. Mac looks over and says, "If you're still hungry young fellow, get some more." Chip smiles as he leans back, then says. "If I eat any more, I couldn't do any work." Just then there is

a loud knock at the door.

Mac nods, as he gets up and says. "Now I wonder who that could be."

A voice shouts. "You home Mac?"

Mac shouts back. "Hold on there. I'm coming." He opens the door and there in the doorway stands a rather stocky raccoon.

Mac smiles and says. "Hi Tim,. Come on in."

The raccoon nods and follows Mac inside and says . "I fear the Dragon has returned to the valley."

Mac blinks and says. "Tim, Are you sure?"

Tim nods and responds in a worried voice . "I'm sure I saw him soaring over the northern part of the valley this morning."

Mac shakes his head and says. "We must be sure. The folks of the valley will be in a panic, if it's true."

Chip gets up from the table and says. "I had heard tales about a Dragon, but I didn't think they were true..."

Tim blinks and says. "Who may you be, stranger?"

Chip responds. "Chip Sty is the name." He holds out his paw to the raccoon who shakes the rabbit's paw.

Then he turns to the skunk saying. "He a friend of yours Mac?"

Mac shakes his head. "No.. But he seems like a nice young fellow."



Tim looks at the rabbit and say's. " My name is Tim Pal. I don't know what stories you heard. But according to the elders, a terrible Dragon lived in this valley about a hundred years ago. He was supposed to be dead. A least I thought so 'til this morning."

Mac nods and says, "I heard he was buried in his lair with the last eruption of Scar Mountain."

Tim turns to the skunk and says, "That's the story...but the volcano has been rumbling lately. So could be he's escaped."

Mac looks back and says. "We should go there to see if the dragon really has returned. Maybe we can make a deal with him..."

Tim interrupts.. "We can't deal with him. He won't stop 'til we're all killed or chased out of his valley."

Mac places his paw on the raccoons shoulder and says. "Settle down, Tim. The elders say the dragon can be appeased if we give him food."

Tim just shakes his head saying, "I don't know."

Chip walks over and asks, "Why appease the

demon. Can't you destroy, or capture him?"

Tim shudders at Chip's words. Then looks the rabbit straight in the eye. "The dragon is bigger than this house. We have no weapons to fight him."

Mac looks at Chip and says. "This isn't your problem young fellow. Besides if we make the dragon mad, he'll destroy us all."

Chip says, "Oh" and steps over to the fireplace. Then he says. "I still wish to help."

Mac smiles. "You're a fine fellow, Chip. But this will be dangerous and inexperience could be fatal."

Chip responds. "But is there anyone with experience after a hundred years?"

Tim shakes his head and says, "Mac, let the young rabbit go. If he wishes to risk his tail for us. So be it."

Mac nods and looks at the rabbit. "It's quite a hike to Scar Mountain and we could use someone to help carry the supplies." Chip smiles and holds his paw out, saying. "You can count on me."

Mac shakes the rabbits paw, thanking him.



Tim walks over and says. “We can stop by my farm for any supplies we need.”

Mac nods. “I have some of what we need out in my barn.”

They both leave as Chip puts his backpack on. He then follows them to the barn, filled with

excitement at the possibility of seeing a real dragon.

Chip steps through the open barn door as Mac and Tim are gathering some rope and other supplies. Mac hands him a coil of rope, and says, "You can carry this."

Chip nods and places it over his head and shoulder.

Tim looks at Mac and Chip and says, "Let's go to my farm. I have some food we can take." They both nod and follow Tim out of the barn and down the trail.

After walking for about an hour, they turn down the path to Tim's farm. In the distance a large rock farmhouse and barn sits on a small hill. Chip thinks to himself that he would like to have a place like that. He then says, "You have a fine place here."

Tim looks at Chip and nods saying, "Thank you. I have spent much time and effort building it. I just hope I don't have to give it up."

Mac pats Tim on the back, saying, "I'm sure all will be well."

Tim looks at Mac with a bit of a smile. He then invites Chip and Mac into the house and leads them to the kitchen. He opens the door to the cellar and says, “The food is down here.” Tim then lights a lamp and walks down the stairs with Mac and Chip close behind.

Tim hands Chip a bag of food. Tim hands the



lamp to Mac and gives Chip a bag of supplies. He also picks up another bag saying. "I have some dried fish in the smoke house as well."

Mac smiles and says. "That sounds fine Tim." He follows Tim and Chip back up the stairs.

After returning from the smoke house, they make ready for the journey ahead. Each wishing to carry as much as he can. Tim looks at the other two and says. "I think we have enough to last about a week. I wish to stop by Lacy's place to tell my wife where I'll be."

Mac looks at Tim and says. "You think we should say anything about the Dragon 'til we're sure?"

Tim slips his pack on and says, "Charlotte won't say anything."

Mac nods, "But Lacy might."

Tim nods, "I'll take care not to speak around her."

Mac throws a bag over his shoulder and says, "Ok Tim, then let's be on our way."

"Chip smiles and says. "I'm ready."

Tim nods, as the three leave his house.

A short distance later they arrive at Lacy's home: a small house with a stone fence surrounding it. Mac says, "We'll wait here while you speak to Charlotte."

Tim nods, opens the gate and walks down the path leading to the front door. There he knocks. A moment later a large rather round female badger answers the door.

She smiles and says. "Hello Tim. What brings you here?"

Tim responds, "Lacy, I need to speak to my wife."

Lacy nods and says, "Well come in." Tim then follows Lacy inside. He returns after a few minutes. He stops to give his wife a hug and says. "We should be home in a few days."

She looks at Tim and says, "Please be careful, Tim." He nods and says. "I will."

Mac waves to Charlotte and Lacy as Tim walks out the gate. Lacy shouts, "Come visit when you get a chance, Mac."

He smiles and says."I will" then joins the other two along the path that leads to the north.

Charlotte waves, as she and Lacy watch Tim and the others leave.

As Chip, Mac and Tim all head north, Charlotte and Lacy watch 'til they're out of sight.

Lacy says. "I wonder where they're going?" Charlotte looks toward Scar Mountain and says, "They're going there." She points toward the smoking volcano.

Lacy shudders and says, "Did your husband say why?"

Showing a bit of worry in her eyes, she says, "To investigate the volcano I think."



Lacy gives Charlotte a hug and says, “Tim’s a smart raccoon. I’m sure he’ll be home soon. Come, let’s finish our tea.”

Charlotte smiles a bit and nods as they both re-enter the house.

Chip looks toward the volcano as they walk and says. "Is it far?"

Mac nods. "But we should be there by dusk tomorrow. That's if the gorge bridge is still useable."

Chip's eyes grow wide as Tim responds. "It was still in pretty good shape last summer."

Chip asks. "Is it a long bridge?"

Mac nods, as he answers Chip, "Yes. About 20 meters. It swings as you walk on it, too."

Chip stops and says. "I don't suppose there's another way."

Mac nods. "There is. But it would take two extra days to go around the gorge. Is there a problem?"

Chip shakes his head saying. "Just a little fear of heights."

Mac grins, "Well, just keep your eyes closed then."

Tim just shakes his head as Chip responds, "I'll try."

The path winds it's way along the edge of the valley as it continues North. Tim smiles and says,

“There’s Sidney Fox up ahead.”

Mac nods as Sidney waves at the three. Chip smiles as he looks at the fox in a straw hat



leaning against a tree with a piece of straw in his mouth.

The fox smiles and asks the raccoon what brings them up his way. Tim shakes the foxes paw and says. "We're going to Scar Mountain. It's becoming active. I also think I saw a dragon flying near the mountain this morning."

Sidney responds with a worried look. "So you saw it too? I hoped it was my imagination or a trick of the morning sunlight on a cloud."

Mac and Chip stare at Sidney as he tells what he's seen. Tim gives Sidney a pat on the shoulder and says. "We must be sure that the dragon of old has returned. Come with us."

Charlie thinks for a bit, then says, "You and Mac are good friends, so count me in."

Mac smiles. "Glad to have you along."

Sidney looks at Chip and says. "I don't think we've met."

Chip shakes the foxes' paw and responds, "name is Chip Sty. I'm new to the valley. Just along for the adventure and to help."

Sidney shakes the rabbit's paw in return and says. "Glad to meet you Chip Sty. Have you any experience with dragons?"

Chips shakes his head as he says, "No, only what I've heard about them, which isn't very much."

Mac interrupts saying, "He will do...but if we're going to reach the gorge before dark, we should be on our way."

The fox nods as he says, "Looks like we have about three hours before dusk and the gorge bridge is about a two hour walk from here. I need to grab a couple things from my house. I'll meet you at the gorge."

Tim says. "Ok Sid. We'll look for you there."

The fox nods as he trots up the path to his home.

The raccoon, skunk and rabbit, then continue north toward Scar Mountain: who's peak shows greater signs of activity with occasional clouds of steam." Chip comments. "I hope the volcano doesn't erupt while we're there."

Tim stops for a moment, then turns to Chip to say, "Historically speaking Scar Mountain normally doesn't erupt with much violence. Mostly just a lot of steam and a bit of lava flowing from it's large crater."

Mac nods patting Chip on the shoulder. Then he points to the right side of the volcano and says. "The dragon's old lair is near that outcrop of rock. There's a cave entrance under it."

Chip looks and says. "I can't tell. But I do see the place you're talking about." Tim turns and says. "It's still some distance away. So we should keep walking." Chip and Mac agree and they continue north along the trail.

It's late afternoon as the little trio near the hills below Scar Mountain. Tim remarks. "We've made good time. The gorge is just past those trees."

Mac nods, then says, "It'll be good to make camp. I'm not used to all this walking."

Mac agrees as Chip looks a little worried knowing they must cross the gorge soon.

Then almost before Chip realizes it, the vast gorge opens out before them. He freezes in his tracks as he spots the rope bridge. He says, "That's the bridge?" He gulps as it moves in the wind. His eyes follow the steep walls down to a small stream some 150 meters below.

While Tim walks across, Mac turns to Chip and says. "Don't worry young fellow. Just keep your eyes on the far side. You'll be across before you know it." The three start across the shaky bridge.

Chip nods, not wishing to cause problems for the others. He puts one foot on the bridge and tries not to look down. Mac walks up behind him and says. "I'll be right behind you, young fellow."

Chip looks back to say, "Alright, but I will be ok."

Mac smiles.

As the young rabbit starts to walk slowly. Tim shouts. "Hurry, you two. I wish to make camp before dark."



Mac shouts back. “Ok Tim. We’re coming.”

Chip walks slowly, keeping a tight grip on the ropes as Mac stays close behind, encouraging him as they go. Just then a strong gust of wind shakes the bridge violently. In trying to make sure Chip is ok, Mac loses his footing and near-ly

falls. He cries out with a loud “Help” as he hangs from his paws..

Tim turns as he hears Mac’s cries for help and shouts to Chip. “Help him rabbit!!”

Chip, still frightened by the violent motion of the bridge hangs on for dear life as Tim continues to shout for him to help his friend.

Mac again cries out as his grip starts to slip a little. “Please help me!”

Something in the tone of Mac’s voice brings back an old memory from Chip’s past. He then seems to forget about the danger of the shaky rope bridge as he turns to help his friend.

Mac breaths a sigh of relief as Chip pulls him up onto the floor of the bridge. Chip asks if he is ok. Then they both walk carefully to the far side where Tim helps them both to a rock. Mac sits as Chip says he’s sorry for hesitating.

Mac shakes his head and says, “Don’t worry, young fellow. It took a lot of courage to rescue me out there.”

Chip covers his face with his paws as he lightly sobs.



Mac, looks at Chip and pats his shoulder saying. “It’s ok young fellow.”

Chip looks up with tears in his eyes and says. “It’s not that. When I was small...I lost a close friend because I couldn’t help him. Your cries for help reminded me.”

They both sit with Chip as Tim remarks. “I think your friend would have been proud of you today, young fellow.”

Mac nods and says, “Tim’s right and it’s time we made camp. The sun will be down soon.”

Chip dries his eyes and says, “You’re right and I am ready for a bite to eat as well.”

Mac, nods as Tim points towards some trees and says. “That should make a good place to set up camp.” The others agree, as they all gather their gear and walk quickly toward the trees.

Just then, Sidney shouts from the other side of the bridge, “Hey I finally made it.”

Tim turns and shouts back. “We’re making camp by those trees next to the trail.” The fox shouts, “Ok,” and with no hesitation crosses the bridge.

Sidney walks quickly and catches up just as the others reach the spot Tim pointed out.

Mac says.”Glad you made it before dark.”

The fox nods. “It took me a little longer than I planned.”

Tim and Chip start to set up camp. Tim smiles

at the skunk and fox then says.”We need some firewood guys.”

Sidney says, “You bet.”

Chip helps the raccoon with setting up the campsite as the fox and skunk find wood for the fire.

A short time later they return, each with a armload of firewood. Chip places a small metal grill so it rests on three large rocks as Tim lights a small fire underneath it. He then puts a pan on the grill to cook some beans, along with a pot for coffee. The little group sit down to rest, talk and enjoy a meal. Not sure of what the next day will bring.

## Chapter Two

The late evening sky is filled with the stars of spring as Chip watches the glow from the volcano. A shower of glowing rocks can be seen near the top. A short time later the sound of a low rumble reaches his ears.



Mac walks up and says, "It's rather scary isn't it?"

Chip is startled and jumps a bit and says, "Yes, it's making me a little edgy. But it's my nature I guess." Chip and Mac watch the distant volcano.

Mac pats Chip on the back and says, "Don't let it bother you, young fellow. Any fur in his or her right mind would feel the same near an active volcano. Come, it's been a long day. We should get some sleep."

Chip nods saying. "You're right." They both walk back to camp and shortly after are fast asleep.

Chip wakes feeling Tim's paw shaking him. As he sits up, he can see the first light of dawn as it stretches across the valley to the south. Tim remarks. "Time to get up, rabbit." He yawns as he nods to Tim. Then as he rubs the sleep from his eyes. His nose catches the smell of coffee brewing.

Mac offers to pour Chip a cup of coffee as he sits near the fire.

Chip says, “Yes, thank you.”

Sid looks over at the rabbit and says, “Mac told me how you saved him. I want to say that you’re welcome to stay in our valley.” Tim and Mac both agree.

Chip smiles, as Mac hands him a cup of coffee and says, “I was glad I could do it.

Sid then remarks.”Well we need furs like you in our valley, young fellow.”

Tim speaks up. “That is if we still have a valley to live in.” The sound of the volcano rumbling is heard as Tim reminds them that they still may have a dragon to deal with.

Sid notes: “You’re right and we better finish our breakfast and be on our way.”

Mac looks toward the volcano and says, “I hope Scar settles down. With all this activity we could get caught in a rockslide.” The others nod in agreement as they finish their meal and begin to break camp, each helping the other with their packs.

A short time later the little group walks single file along the narrow trail. The smoke from the volcano's crater can be seen through the trees as the trail climbs ever higher. To the south the valley floor stretches to the southern pass. There, a large lake formed by a natural dam flows out of the valley.

Chip stops to look at the vista and remarks, "The valley sure is beautiful from here."

Sidney nods, "It sure is, young fellow."

Tim comments: "Hope we can keep it this way."

Mac points and says, "Yes and isn't that the outcrop where the dragons cave is?"

Tim looks where Mac is pointing and nods. "That's it, I'm sure. But it's still too far away to see if the cave is open or not."

"We should be able to tell in a couple of hours," Mac says.

Tim nods in agreement as a small earthquake shakes the ground. A moment later a loud rumble is heard from the crater above.

Chip looks up as he exclaims, “Is it erupting?”

Sidney shakes his head no. “Ol’ Scar is just letting off a little steam, rabbit. It’s been doing that for the last few days.”

Chip swallows with a gulp. “It’s making me jumpy.” Tim grins at the rabbit as another much stronger quake hits causing the raccoon to grab a small tree to keep his balance.

The four look at each other as a low rumble grows louder from above. Mac cries out loudly, “It’s a rock slide! Run for your lives.”

Sidney runs up the trail shouting, “There’s a rock ledge just around the next bend.”

The others chase after him just as the first large rock crashes past, barely missing the raccoon’s tail. Chip turns to look as Mac grabs the rabbit’s arm, pulling him out of the path of a falling tree struck by a huge boulder. Two more large rocks bounce past them just as they dive under the rock ledge.

Moments later Tim dives in after them just as a massive number of stones and boulders crash

past them. The four cling to each other as the slide continues with huge boulders crashing against and off of the protective ledge, creating a great deal of noise and dust as well.

Some minutes later, after what seemed like forever, the raccoon and fox poke their heads out followed by the skunk. Sidney brushes the dust from his clothes and fur as he looks around.

Tim also dusts his fur and clothes saying, "We were very lucky"

Sidney nods as he climbs over the large rocks.

Mac sneezes from the dust as he cleans his own self and agrees.

Mac then notices that Chip hasn't come out yet. He turns and calls to the rabbit. "You gonna stay under there all day?"

Chip doesn't seem to hear as he continues to sit with his paws over his head. The skunk crawls back under the ledge and says, "Come on out young fellow. It's ok, The slide is over."

Shaking with fright, Chip slowly uncovers his head. Eyes blinking from the dust, he turns to the



skunk and says, "I...I'm sorry. I was so afraid I couldn't move."

Mac smiles. "It's ok young fellow. I think we all were feeling the same way there for a while." As Mac helps him get out from under the ledge they find Tim and Sidney looking at the sky.

As Chip stands to brush the dust from his clothes. The sun is blocked for a moment by large flying object. He looks up trying to see the object, but it's blocked by the trees. Then he asks, "What was that?"

Tim looks at the other three and with a shaky voice he says, "I think it was the dragon."

Mac blinks. "Do you really think so?"

Tim nods. "I'm afraid so. 'Or a very large bird."

Sidney rubs his nose a little and nods. "I didn't get a good look either, but I feel it was the dragon also. I haven't seen any birds that large in the valley."

Chip continues to search the sky while listening to the others. He climbs up on a large rock hoping to see better.

Mac shouts, "See anything, young fellow?"

The rabbit shakes his head no and climbs back down.

As he does, Tim remarks, "We best continue. With luck we should reach the cave by late afternoon."

Sid agrees and the four work their way over the rock strewn trail. After only a short distance the trail is clear and it's easy going again. Chip and the others keep a eye to the sky as they continue along the trail. The outcrop on Scar mountain growing larger each time it comes into view.

Finally, as the trail breaks out into a large clearing, Tim points saying. "There! You can see the cave. It appears to be open don't you think?"

Mac responds. "Yes I think so. It looks like it's open for sure."

Sidney shakes his head. "It's still hard to...to..." The fox seems to loose his voice as he stutters. "It...It...It's..." Just then a huge winged dragon flies low past them making a terrible roar.

The others turn as they hear the dragons roar. Chip and Mac stare as the large creature circles back. Tim pulls a white flag from his backpack and waves it as the dragon flies past them once more, then turns back, landing near Tim.

The dragon folds his huge wings and rumbles. "What brings the four of you to my mountain?"



Mac and Chip stand frozen as Tim responds. “Great Dragon, sir. The volcano has awakened after a 100 years of silence. We came to find you and ask for peace between you and the people of our valley.”

Sid stands behind the raccoon as the dragon

looks at the little group. His eyes flash as he rears up on his hind legs. He then looks out across the vast valley below. After a few minutes of thought he drops to all fours, then places the point of one claw against the raccoon's chest and says, "Then hear this. I will grant this peace under three conditions. One: stay off of this mountain. Two: erect a large monument to me in the valley center. Three: I wish a large wagon load of coal each week placed near it."

Tim gulps as he feels the point of the claw. He looks up to say. "I'm sure the first two conditions can be met, sir. But Coal? What for?"

The dragon then pokes Tim a little harder as he almost roars. "To fuel my flame." He then blows a little smoke ring which circles the raccoon as it settles to the ground.

With this Chip falls to the ground in a faint as the others gasp in disbelief upon hearing that the dragon breathes fire.

Tim winces in pain as the point of the dragon's claw pierces his tunic. He steps back a little saying, "Please sir, that hurts."

The dragon then looks at the raccoon and the others. He responds, "If my conditions are not followed. The pain caused by my claw will be very minor indeed."

Sidney speaks up "But we will need time to let those in the valley know your terms, sir." Mac nods as he tries to revive the rabbit.

Tim rubs his chest a little as he says, "Yes, we'll need time to do what you wish."

The dragon looks at the sky and says, "I will give you 'til the moon waxes full again. Then I will expect the conditions to be met." Tim looks up to say. "Thank you sir. We'll do our best to do so. Is there any special kind of monument you wish?"

Chip starts to stir as the dragon responds. "I saw a large rock near the center of the valley. I wish a statue of myself carved from it."

Tim shakes his head a little, then responds slowly, "But Dragon, sir, it will take much time to carve. I fear more time than one moon's passing."

The dragon turns to the raccoon and rumbles.

“Then you better find a way...or I may just destroy your valley.”

The huge creature seems to laugh as he again takes to the air. His huge wings creating a cloud of dust as he rumbles loudly “I will arrive at the central rock with the next full moon.” The great dragon then quickly rises, flying toward the summit of Scar mountain.

As the dragon sails out of sight. Chip sits up scratching his head. He looks up at Mac and says, “What happened?”

Mac responds. “You fainted young fellow.”

Sidney offers a paw to help the Chip up and says, “Yea rabbit, you passed out cold.”

Tim walks over, still rubbing his chest a little as he asks, “You ok, rabbit?” Chip takes the foxes paw as he is helped to his feet by the others as well.



Chip looks at the ground feeling foolish that he fainted. He looks at the raccoon and says, “Yes, I think so.” He then adjusts his pack.

Mac pats the rabbit on the shoulder and says, “Don’t feel bad young fellow. That dragon was very scary.”

Tim nods, “Sharp claws too.”

Sidney chimes in. “Don’t worry about it, Chip. I felt a little weak in the knees myself.” Chip smiles a bit, feeling a little better with the support from his friends.

Tim looks toward the volcanos peak as he continues, “We must return to the valley without delay. We’ve little time to meet the dragons demands.” Mac and Sidney agree as they begin to retrace their steps along the trail.

Chip asks.”How much time is there?”

The raccoon looks back at the rabbit to say, “A bit more than a moon’s passing.”

Chip responds. “That should be time enough.”

Tim shakes his head. “Not unless you know how to turn a large rock into a statue of a dragon in that time.”

Chip says, “Oh, what if we don’t?”

Tim sighs. “The dragon wasn’t specific,. But I fear it won’t be good.”

Chip nods as the four furry friends continue down the trail. They notice the dragon now and

then. The fox comments that he thinks it's watching them.

A few hours later they make camp for the night. The sounds of the volcano are still heard as the four bed down for the night. They talk about what the dragon might do if the statue is not ready, but soon they all fall fast asleep.

The next morning dawns grey with the threat of rain. A cool breeze blows under Chips blanket as he pulls it up tight, feeling a bit cold.

Tim sits up yawning a bit as he rubs the sleep from his eyes. He then stirs the coals of the campfire 'til a new blaze begins. Then he starts some coffee brewing as he wakes the others.

Chip shivers a little as he sits up saying. "It sure has cooled off."

Mac walks over to the fire and nods. "That it has young fellow."

Tim nods as Sidney sits near the fire to warm his paws. Tim pours himself some coffee and says, "I hope the weather clears. I don't like to be in the mountains while we're getting rain.

Sidney nods as he pours a cup for his own

self. Chip, not being used to hiking in the mountains, asks, “Why?”

Tim responds. “The flash floods. That’s why, rabbit.”

Chip sips a bit of coffee and says, “Oh. I didn’t know.”

Sidney nods. “They can be bad news alright. We should go.” Tim nods as a few drops of rain start to fall.

Chip and the other hurry to break camp as the few drops become a steady drizzle. Sidney makes sure the fire is out as the little group gets ready to continue down the mountain. Mac shouts to Chip.”Hey young fellow. You forgot your knife.” Chip turns as Mac hands the knife to him and says, “Thanks Mac. I would hate to loose that.” Mac nods as they hurry to catch up with the raccoon and fox.

After a time the trail begins to become muddy as the rain continues. Tim points to a small stream they crossed before, now much larger. The four stop to decide if it’s safe to cross. The sound of thunder rolls down the mountain as

Chip and the others stand near the edge of the fast flowing stream.

Sidney looks at the raccoon and says, "We might have better luck higher up." Tim looks upstream and agrees. The stream cuts through a narrow gap about 250 meters up the mountain. The rain stops as the fox takes the lead with the others close behind.

Chip shakes the rain from his ears a bit as he looks at the sky. He turns to Mac and says, "I hope the rain doesn't start again."

Mac nods. "I do also. But I fear it's gonna rain most of the day."

Chip sighs, as he tries to keep up. "I just wish I had some good protection from the rain."

The sound of a waterfall grows louder as they near the narrow gap. Tim points and says, "There. We have to climb up to that out crop."

Sidney nods. "I hope the rocks aren't too slick."

Tim starts to climb as he agrees. "But it's our only way to cross." Sidney and the others follow up the steep path.

Slipping and sliding they finally make it to the outcrop. Tim looks at the short span they have to cross. He looks back to say. "Well here goes nothing." He then makes a running jump across to the other side where he neatly lands on his feet.

Sid shouts to the raccoon. "Good leap."

Tim shouts back. "Thanks. Here fox, tie this to that rock." He then tosses a rope to Sidney, who then ties it tight.

Sidney turns to the others and smiles. "Come on rabbit, it's your turn."

Chip says, "Oh, let Mac go first."

Mac pokes the rabbit and smiles. "Nope. It's your turn young fellow."

Chip gulps as he walks up to the edge. Sidney smiles. "Don't worry rabbit. Just use the rope to get across."

Chip looks down at the fast moving water as he steps close. He grabs the rope just as his feet slip on the wet surface. Swinging out over the rushing water, he hangs on for dear life, afraid to move.

Tim and Sidney both grab the rope as they both encourage the rabbit to keep moving, but he just hangs on tight with his eyes closed whimpering for help.

Mac shouts. "You must try to move young fellow. We'll help you." Chip still holds tight, not responding as the others try to figure out a way to help the rabbit across.

Tim shouts over to the others. "Loosen the end of the rope so I can pull him over to this side."

Sidney nods. "Ok Tim. I think we can do that." Mac holds the rope tight as the fox begins to untie the end.

Tim shouts. "Be careful now."

With Chip's weight, the rope slips a little even with their best efforts to hold it tight. Chip squeals as the slack lets him drop a bit. As the skunk and fox continue to let out rope, Tim pulls the rabbit to his side of the gap. There the rabbit just lays on the rock ledge trembling with fear. His eyes tightly close as he still holds the rope tight.

Tim shakes his head as he looks down at Chip. “Rabbit. You must try to contain yourself. We have to be on our way. Let me have the rope so the others can cross.” Upon hearing the raccoon’s stern voice, he slowly opens his eyes and lets go of the rope. Then he sits with his head



down, feeling ashamed of himself.

Mac and Sidney both cross over quickly. Mac pats the rabbit on the shoulder and says, "Come along young fellow. Don't feel bad. Some of us are more easily frightened than others."

Chip takes the skunk's paw with his and stands, then says, "I'm sorry everyone. But when I slipped. I froze. All I could think of was falling into that cold water. I nearly drowned as a child. I guess that fear's still with me."

Tim and Sidney gather the long rope as Mac, helps the rabbit with his pack, then helps the others as well. Tim turns to the rabbit and says, "Just try to be more careful. Ok?"

Chip nods. "I will." Then with the sound of thunder in the distance, the raccoon leads the group down the mountain to the trail. There they continue as the rain begins once more.

## Chapter Three

Chip sighs as the rain soaks his fur and clothing. Still feeling bad that he has caused so much trouble for the others, he stops to wipe the tears from his eyes: not that anyone could tell, being so wet from the rain.

Watching the others disappear around a bend in the trail, he begins to feel they might be better off without him. He starts walking again. The rain blurs his vision, causing him to take the wrong path. After a several minutes the rain again stops as he wonders why he hasn't caught up to the others. He looks around, not being able to see very far with all the trees. He decides to continue on. A few minutes later he begins to think the others maybe wanted to get rid of him. He starts to get scared and calls out. "Can anyone hear me? Help me please."

Chip continues shouting for help. He decides to continue along the path which by now is getting rough and very steep. Even though he tries to be very careful he loses his footing and



slides off the path down a short, but steep slope.

After a rough fall he opens his eyes and looks up towards the path, then looks at himself. "At least I didn't break anything." Slipping and sliding he makes it back up to the path where he decides to sit on a rock for a while.

Upon hearing a noise below him he looks trying to see what it might be. He calls out.”Any one there?” He listens, hoping to hear a response. Chip decides he better continue on not knowing what might be causing the noise.

Walking further along the path, the sun breaks through spreading sunlight across the mountain-side. Chip smiles as the warm sunshine strikes him and says, “This is much better.” Then he hears someone singing in the distance: almost enchanting in it’s quality. Chip scans the forest for it’s source, hoping to see who it might be.

Being distracted he steps on a loose rock, causing him to slip and fall through a bush that was hiding the edge of a high cliff. Crying out loudly for help, he desperately claws at the bush and cliff edge. The cruel rocks far below wait to seal his fate if his grip fails.

The sound of the rabbits cries for help reach the ears of the individual that Chip heard singing. She looks all around and spots the rabbit hanging from the edge of the cliff, just a little above her. She shouts, “Hold on. I’m coming.” as she

quickly runs up the path.

Chips cries become frantic as his fingers grow tired. His short life seems to flash passed him as he tightly closes his eyes, not wishing to see the end coming. Then, just as he felt he could hold on no more, he feels a strong hand tightly grasp one of his wrists.

His rescuer crouches close as she pulls hard, speaking in a soft but firm voice. "I have you. Now try to climb up.". Though small in form. this furre is strong from the hard mountain life. With her help, Chip scrambles up and is soon laying on the path, his eyes still closed and shaking all over from fright.

She smiles as she looks at the young rabbit. Thinking to herself. "I wonder if he is lost". Just then in the distance she hears Sidney coming down the path. Not sure of the fox's intentions she disappears into the woods. Moments later Chip opens his eyes and sits up. He looks around wondering where his rescuer went.

Meanwhile the others stop to rest and notice

that the rabbit isn't with them. Tim shakes his head and says, "Now where is that rabbit?"

Sidney turns to Tim and says, "Last I knew he was following Mac."

Mac wrings the water from his tail and nods. "I hope he didn't get lost. With the rain he might have gotten off the trail."

Sidney nods. "You're right. There is a old path that splits off the main trail about a half a kilometer back. If he took that, he could be in danger. That path is very rough and steep in places."

Tim sighs and nods. "I think that old path comes back into this trail in a couple kilometers or so." Sidney nods. "Yes, you're right... I'll go back ,and see if I can find him on the old path. You guys go on and try to work your way back from the other end. We can meet along the path."

Tim nods. "Sounds good to me, Sidney." Tim and Mac wave to the fox as he hurries back along the trail...

Tim and Mac watch for the place that the path rejoins the trail. Mac comments."I hope Sidney

has found Chip.” Tim nods. “Me too. That path is nearly vertical in some places and cliff edges with drops of nearly 400 meters. We might never find him if he falls, or leaves the path for any reason.” Mac nods and points. “There it is...” Tim agrees as they both take the steep path.

Sidney finds the rabbit still sitting on the path and smiles. “Hey rabbit, are you lost?” He then notices where the bush was nearly torn from its roots at the edge of the cliff. He then adds. “You ok? Looks like you or someone nearly fell.”

Still a bit shaky, Chip struggles to stand as Sidney takes his paw. “Hold on Chip. Let me help you.” He then walks the rabbit to a safer spot on the path.

Chip sits down on a large rock and relates what had happened to the fox. “I don't know the name of the furre who rescued me. I wish she'd stayed. I really wanted to thank her for saving my life...”

Sidney smiles. “There are a few groups of fures living in these mountains. Most don't trust

outsiders... But they usually will help others when needed. You won't find her unless she wishes it."

Chip sighs as he listens to the fox... He then stands up and shouts... "Please, whoever saved me, thank you. I owe you my life and if there's anything I can do for you, just ask."

The fox smiles. "There's a good chance she heard you. We should go. The others are back tracking this path and we should meet them soon."

Chip nods. "Ok... Let's go. I'm sorry I caused you all so much trouble."

Sidney smiles. "Hey, don't worry about it. The mountains are tough even for experienced fures... Next time just stay put if you get lost." Chip nods as he and the fox work their way along the path.

Nearby in the woods, she girl smiles as she hears the rabbits words and thinks she'll follow these strangers for a while.

Soon they meet up with the raccoon and skunk. Mac smiles. "It's good to see you, young



fellow. We were worried about you.”

Tim nods. “We were hoping Sidney would find you safe.” The fox nods. “Seems our friend here nearly fell from a cliff. But was rescued by a mountain furre.”

Tim says, “Oh? Anyone we know?”

Sidney shakes his head. “Don’t know. But Chip said it was a female.”

Tim nods. “Well, rabbit. You’re a lucky fellow. The mountain folk are few and don’t often help a stranger.”

Mac grins. “The rabbit probably caught the gals eye.”

Tim laughs, “Could be. But we need to go. We have lost too much time now...”

Chip turns away a little as he feels a bit of embarrassment. Then says, “I’m sorry I got lost.” Mac pats the rabbit on the shoulder and smiles.” It’s ok. We all make mistakes.”

The raccoon just shakes his head and says, “Let’s go. “ The others agree as they carefully walk back toward the trail.

Staying just out of sight. The girl follows along, not knowing why they’re in such a hurry. But she hopes she’ll get a chance to see the rabbit alone once more.

A short time later the small group makes it to the main trail. Since the weather has improved, they’re able to make good time while the girl

continues to follow along. Her knowledge of the mountain allows her to keep up easily. With all the delays of weather, and Chip's being lost, it's late afternoon before they reach the footbridge.

The raccoon looks at the sky and says, "We better camp here. It's gonna be dark soon and even though Sidneys farm is only a couple hours from here. I don't want to walk the trail at night." Sidney nods. "You guys stay here. I'll run on back to my farm. I walk the trail near my place at night quite often..." Tim and the others nod and wish him well as the fox heads quickly across the footbridge and on for home.

Chip scans the area, wondering if he'll ever see the girl that saved him. Mac walks up and smiles. "Looking for someone young fellow?" Chip sighs. "I'm not sure. I guess kinda hoping I would see that girl again." Mac pats the rabbits shoulder and says, "It's hard to say. Most mountain folk stay close to home. But I have seen a few come down to the village in the past. So it's possible." Chip nods as they both help Tim set up camp. Then says, "I really hope she

does.”

A short distance away the girl watches the fox cross the bridge. Then while watching the others make camp. She decides she will sleep in a small cave nearby. So after making a soft bed of pine branches and leaves, it is nearly dark. This allows her to get very close, as she hopes to find out why they are here.

The raccoon pours himself another cup of coffee and says to Mac, “We should be at Lacy’s house by noon.”

Mac nods. “Lacy will help us spread the word.”

Tim sips a bit of coffee as he watches the rabbit walk over to view the volcano. He turns to the skunk and nods. “Yes, that gal knows nearly every furre in the valley. “

The skunk nods as makes himself a cheese sandwich with crackers then lays out his bed roll. He sits to eat and drink some coffee, then smiles at Tim. “If things work out, I probably should visit Lacy. She does make a tasty apple pie.”

Tim grins. "I think you and Lacy would make a fine couple. I know Charlotte would love to see the two of you together."

Mac shakes his head and says, "I must admit It would be nice to have someone to share my life with..."

The raccoon nods as he lays out his bedroll also.

Mac finishes the cheese and cracker sandwich. Then sips some coffee to wash it down, then stands to walk over to visit with the rabbit a bit before he calls it a night.

Tim calls out to the both of them saying he was going to bed.

Mac nods. "Goodnight. Tim."

In the bushes nearby the young lady watches as the raccoon and a few minutes later the skunk go to bed. She quietly works her way around 'til she is near the rabbit. She slips up behind him just as he turns. They meet nose to nose. She covers his mouth as he starts to cry out. "Quiet please brother rabbit. Is Chip your name?"

Chip nods as the girl takes his paw and leads



him a short distance into the woods. She then tells him to sit with her on an old log. Chip tries to express his gratitude for her saving his life. She just smiles as he does, then asks. “Do you have a mate?”

Chip stutters. “I...I...I’m afraid I’m alone.

Could I ask your name?"

The young bunny girl's eyes brighten with this and says, "I'm called Tasha. Do you like it?"

Chip smiles. "Yes, It is a pretty name."

Tasha then smiles. "Thank you, Chip. You have a pretty name too. What brings you and your friends to our mountains?"

Still feeling a little bashful. Chip tells Tasha about the dragon and what it has demanded of the valley fures.

Eyes flashing Tasha jumps up and nearly shouts, "That dragon has no right!!"

Startled, Chip falls backward off of the log. "Oh!" she says, then reaches out to help him up. "You alright Chip?"

Chip, feeling embarrassed, nods his head. "Yes, I'm ok. You surprised me." He then takes her paw to get up.

As they sit back down he comments. "I also don't feel the dragon has the right to make those demands. But I'm afraid he has the might and power to enforce them..."

The girl shakes her head, then turns to face

the volcano.”The dragon can be defeated. It’s written in our people’s history that a fire demon will again arise from the burning mountain. It’s also written how to defeat and seal it back in it’s fiery lair.”.

Chips eyes grow wide as he listens. Then he exclaims. “But how could such a huge creature be defeated?”

Tasha turns back to look at Chip and smiles. “It’s written that a furre pure of heart can use some magic arrows to defeat the fire demon.”

Chip shudders. “We can’t just kill him!” Tasha shakes her head. “The arrows can’t kill him. But they are tipped with a potion that tames the creature. Then we can just command it to return to it’s lair. There the dragon will sleep for another century or more.”

The image of the dragon lingers in Chip’s mind as he says, “Do you know of such a furre that can shoot the dragon?”

The bunny girl smiles as she pulls a small red root from a cloth pouch. “Here eat this.”

Chip takes the root and smells it. “Uh... What

is it?"

She responds with a firm voice. "Just eat it. Please."

Chip nods wishing to be helpful, takes a bite. Then finishes it. "That was good, Thank you."

Tasha watches the young rabbit eat and smiles. "I'm glad you liked it. I must confess I'm testing you."

Chip gulps. "What will it do to me?"

The young girl giggles. "Don't worry. It's a magic root. It tests to see if you're pure of heart. It would have turned your eyes red for a few minutes if you weren't."

Chip blinks his eyes, "Did they turn red?"

Tasha smiles. "No, but I best take a closer look. Hold still now." She scoots up close 'til her nose is nearly touching his. "They still look brown to me."

Chip feeling a little bashful moves back a little saying... "I'm glad. But I think we should tell the others. I'm sure they know of a good archer."

She shakes her head. "No, I already know of



the one that will use the magic arrows”

Chip stands looking back at her. “Great. But we should tell my friends of your plan.” Tasha stands. “Yes they should know. We can go now.” He nods as they both walk toward the campsite.

As they walk, he asks. “Why did you ask me

if I had a mate?"

Tasha looks up. "I find I'm attracted to you and didn't wish to become close if you did."

Chip reaches out, taking her paw, then says, "You really like me?"

Tasha nods as she looks fondly at the young rabbit. Chip continues, "I've been alone since I was a small bunny. It's my dream to find someone like you."

She smiles. "Then I hope you like me too."

Chip smiles. . "I...I really feel I do."

She reaches out to him and they both hug tightly.

Tasha kisses his nose and smiles. "It's late and you should get some sleep. We'll talk with the others in the morning."

He smiles at the kiss and nods."You're right. It's late."

She smiles. "I'll see you in the morning."

Chip responds."See you then." He watches as she disappears into the darkness.

He then returns to the campsite. Mac comments. "You ok young fellow?"

Chip nods with a smile.”Better than I have been in a long time.” He then wishes Mac goodnight and slips under his blanket.

Mac responds, “goodnight,” wondering what the rabbit meant. But he decides he’s too tired to ask and soon falls asleep.

Tasha watches them from a distance. After returning to the cave to sleep, she thinks about the dragon and knows there’ll be danger if they fail. She cries a little fearing for Chip’s life. Then falls asleep as well.

The day breaks bright and clear the next morning. Tim yawns and stretches as he sits up. Mac stirs as he hears the raccoon making the coffee. He sits up scratching his head fur and says, “Morning Tim”

The raccoon nods. “Morning Mac, Did you sleep well?” The skunk looks over at the rabbit and nods... “But I don’t know about the young fellow here. He didn’t get to bed ‘til late and said something about feeling good.”

Tim shakes his head. “Well that’s better than feeling bad.”

With this Chip also stirs. His whiskers twitch as he smells the coffee brewing. He sits up rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Then looks all around the campsite...

Mac smiles. "Morning young fellow. Did you loose something?"

Chip nods morning, then gets up and shakes his head, "No, but the girl that saved me said she would be here this morning."

The raccoon blinks."I haven't seen anyone. Sure you didn't just dream she would be here."

Chip shakes his head. "It wasn't a dream. I just know it wasn't."

Mac pats the rabbit on the back. "Don't worry, it's still early. She may show up yet."

Chip walks towards the spot he last saw her the night before and shouts. "Tasha!!!"

The young rabbit walks out into the clearing and says, "Please. You don't need to shout."

Tim smiles as he and the skunk walk up. Chip points to the raccoon and skunk. "Tasha, these are my friends. Tim Pal and ..."

The skunk holds out his paw. "Folks just call

me Mac.”

Tim also holds out his paw in greeting. “Come join us for a bit of coffee.”

She shakes their paws and they all walk over by the fire. Chip smiles. “We only have black coffee. I hope that is alright.”

Tasha smiles. “That will be fine.”

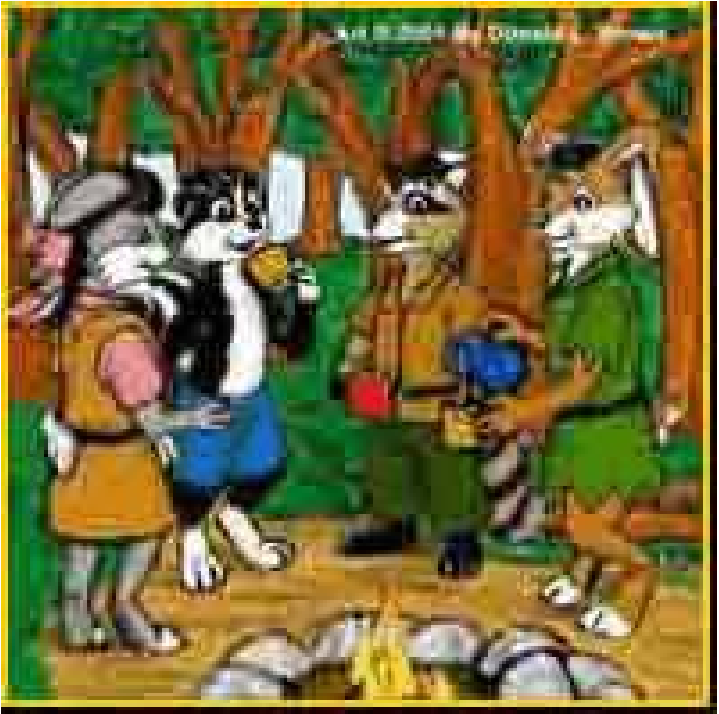
Chip smiles. “Here I have a extra cup. “ He hands it to her after filling it.

She smiles as she sits near him. Mac and Tim refill their cups before sitting down as well.

Tim asks. “Have you seen the dragon.” Tasha nods. “Yes I have and Chip told me about the demands the demon has made of the valley folk... This is wrong.”

Tim nods. “But until we can find a defense. I fear we must try to meet them...Or loose our farms and be run from the valley.” Mac nods with agreement.

She sips a bit of her coffee as she listens, then responds, “Our people’s history speaks of the fire demon and how to defeat him. “ She smiles at Chip. “I told my friend Chip this.”



Tim's eyes grow wide with Tasha's words and he says, "How can this be done?"

She responds. "With arrows"

Tim shakes his head. "No arrow I know of would break the skin of that beast."

She nods, "No normal arrow. But one dipped

into a special magic potion will and it'll tame the demon, so we can control it."

The raccoon looks at the girl. "I'm sorry miss, but I can't turn this over to your magic. We must tell the valley folk. It must be their choice."

## Chapter Four

Chip jumps up to say, "I think we should listen to her."

The raccoon turns to the rabbit, and says, "Look! I put up with you out of friendship with Mac, and since you do not live here... Just mind your own business. "

Chip sits, looking a bit sheepish, then says, "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I'll be quiet."

Tasha's eyes flash as she responds to the raccoon. "It's everyone's business Mr. Pal. This demon will not stop with these demands. It'll eventually take all you have. Even your lives if you stay." She takes Chips paw, and says, "This kind gentle rabbit is our salvation. Within his pure heart lies the power to make the magic work, and shoot the arrows into the dragon."

Chips mouth drops open as he hears Tasha's words. He gulps as he shakes his head. 'M...m...m...me? I...I couldn't. I...I...don't know how.'

Tasha looks into his eyes, and smiles. “Yes you can. Just relax now...”

Tim shakes his head. “Now I know we must do as the dragon told us. This rabbit is afraid of his shadow. He could never get close enough without fainting.”

Tasha’s gaze seems to give the young rabbit courage as he looks back at her. Mac walks over, and pats Chip on the shoulder. “Do what you feel is right young fellow. But I agree with Tim. We must try to follow the dragons demands.”

Tasha sighs, “You all do as you must. Don't worry about Chip. He must decide if he wishes to do this. I can't make him.”

Chip looks up at the skunk and smiles. “Thank you, Mac. Thank you both. But I want to stay with Tasha for now. You both should return to spread the word.”

Mac smiles, “You’re welcome to visit anytime.”

Chip smiles, “You’re a good friend Mac, and Tim too... Tell Sidney I hope to see you all again soon.”

Tim and Mac wish Chip good luck as they make ready to leave. He bids them a safe journey as he and Tasha watch them cross the bridge and disappear past the rocks.

Tasha turns to the young rabbit and smiles. "It's time to decide my young friend." Chip looks toward the volcano and says, "You really think I can face the dragon with only a bow and arrow?" She reaches out to turn him toward her. "Chip. I must tell you this will be very dangerous." A tear rolls down her cheek as she continues. "The demon will try to kill you if you fail. But you have the courage inside you. I can see it in your eyes."

Chip wipes the tear from Tasha's cheek. "You saved my life. If you feel I should do this. I'll try. I'll depend on you to teach me how." Tasha hugs him tight. And with her voice breaking. "I...I'll teach you well my young friend. I wish you to live and be my mate."

The young rabbit's own eyes tear up as he looks at her. "When we have defeated the dragon. I'll have you as my mate, Tasha."

She smiles. "Then come with me."

After gathering his pack and bedroll Chip and Tasha walk quickly into the deep woods following a trail that only the young mountain girl knows. She keeps close watch that he stays close as the trail drops steeply ...the trail, at times, only a narrow ledge as they make their way slowly down the mountainside

Suddenly the trail seems to end at a cliff edge. He looks at Tasha. "Where do we go from here?"

She just smiles, grabs a vine and swings across a 3 meter gap to another ledge. Chip nearly freezes as he watches a small rock bounce down out of sight. Tasha throws the vine back and says, "Come on. Swing across. I'll catch you."

Chip remembers how he felt crossing the rushing stream the day before and thinks. He must not fail her. He pulls the vine tight and swings across. Landing nearly perfect, Tasha only needs to steady him a bit.

She smiles. "You did that very well." Chip nods breathing a sigh of relief as they continue



along the trail.

Meanwhile as Mac and Tim walk down the path into the valley. Sidney shouts. “Wait for me guys.” They stop and wait for the fox. He smiles. “Hey, where's the rabbit?”

Continuing along the path, they tell him about the rabbit girl's story and that Chip decided to stay. Sidney shakes his head. "There are many strange tales about the mountain folk and the things they can do."

Tim sighs. "It'd be great if what she said were true. But I feel the valley folk should decide if they wish to do as the dragon demands...or take a chance on magic."

Sidney nods."I understand. But I wouldn't give up on the idea of magic. That dragon couldn't breath fire without some kind of magic I 'd think."

Mac nods. "Sounds reasonable..."

Tim shakes his head."I guess you're right."

The three continue down into the valley. Mac comments. "Sure is a nice day."

The fox nods. "Sure good to see spring after the winter we had."

Tim nods. "It was a cold one with a lot of ice and snow."

Mac points. "There's Lacy's farm."

Tim smiles."It'll be good to see Charlotte

again.”

Sidney smiles. “You sure was lucky to find that sweet girl.”

Tim grins. “Don't I know it?” They all laugh as they head for the farm house...

From inside Lacy's home Charlotte spots the trio walking toward the house. She shouts, “Lacy! They've returned.”

Lacy smiles as she looks. “Yes, they have.” Then they both rush outside to greet them. Charlotte runs up to Tim and hugs him tight with kisses too. “I worried about you. It's so good to see you.”

Tim smiles. “Yes. I missed you very much.” He returns the hug and kiss.

Lacy smiles, starting to speak to Mac. Then she spots Sidney. “Land sakes is that Sidney fox? I haven't seen you since last fall.” The fox nods. “The harsh winter kept me close to home, But everyone is fine. Mom said to say hello if I saw you.”

The badger smiles as she listens. “Well you

tell you're mother I'll try to visit her next week.”

Sidney nods. “I sure will.”

Mac smiles as he stands nearby. Then the badger walks up and gives Mac a big hug. “It's good to see you Mac. I'm glad you returned safely too.”

Mac smiles hugging back a bit. “It's always good to see you Lacy. I hope you're doing well.”

She nods. “Charlotte and I just fixed some lunch and I have some pie cooling. You all must stay and eat.”

Tim turns to Charlotte, then to the badger. “Sounds good to me. But we must get a message out to the valley folk about what we found.” Mac and Sidney nod.

Lacy says, “Oh, well come on in. You can fill me in while we have lunch.” Tim nods as he and the rest follow Lacy into her home.

Back on the mountain, the rabbit calls out to Tasha. “Please, I need to rest a few minutes.”

She smiles. “It's not far now.”

Chip pants. “You said that a hour ago.”

She giggles. "Alright. But there is a spring just ahead. We can rest and drink some water too." Chip nods. "That sounds good, I'm thirsty."

A few minutes later the sound of rushing water is heard. Then, as they walk between two large rocks they find themselves next to a broad pool of water fed by a large spring flowing from a opening in the rock next to a cave. It cascades another 50 meters down onto the rocks below. Tasha walks around the edge of the pool to the spring, and leans down to drink. She then moves aside so Chip can do the same.

Chip goes, "...mmm..." as he laps eagerly at the refreshing liquid. Afterwards he stands wiping the water from his chin. "That sure hit the spot."

The girl nods."Yes it did." He then sits on a large rock. "I hope it's not far. It must be nearly lunchtime..." He removes his pack and pulls out two apples. "Would you like one?" She nods and takes one. "Thank you."

After taking a couple bites. He says, "mmm,

that is good. Please forgive me if I say or do something wrong. I haven't had much experience being around girls.”

Tasha smiles. “I’ll try to remember.” After finishing her apple. She stands and walks over to the cave and says, “Come this way. We must enter”



As Tasha disappears into the cave Chip walks over and looks inside. He calls out, "It's very dark. How can we see to walk?"

Tasha grabs his paw pulling him in. Then she says, "Just stay close. I know the way by feel." Chip gulps. Hoping it's not far, as a dark cave is very scary.

Walking slowly through the darkness. The sound of water dripping is all that can be heard in the pitch black of the cave. Chip stays close holding Tasha's paw with his, not wishing to get lost. After a what seems like hours, Tasha points to a bit of light in the distance..."We're almost there."

Chip smiles. "I'll be glad to get out of this cave."

She nods. "Yes and it'll be good to see my home too." They both squint and blink shading their eyes as they step out into the sunlight again.

In a few minutes Chips eyes become used to the light. He can see a small valley surrounded by nearly vertical rock walls rising over a 150 meters in height. Not far away there are several

small stone buildings lining a wide path. Tasha points to one of the larger building standing at the center. “The magic arrows are in there...”

Chip looks about. “Is this your home?”

She shakes her head no. “It's the place that holds many secrets of our people. It's here I'll teach you how to shoot the arrows.” Tasha points across the small valley. “My home is at the far end of this valley.” As they follow a path toward the stone structures he remarks. “I would like to meet your family, Tasha.”

She smiles. “I'm sure they will enjoy meeting you too.”

Meanwhile back at Lacy's farm house. The others sit around a large oak table filled with good things to eat: fish, fruits and salad, along with the scent of apple pie cooling nearby. As they begin, Lacy pours each one a cup of mint tea.

Mac wiggles his nose as he sniffs the air. “My that smells good.”

The others agree as they start to eat. Lacy

smiles at the skunk. "I'm glad you're pleased Mac."

He smiles back at the badger as he cuts a bit of fish. "You're the best cook in the valley Lacy."

She smiles brightly. "Why thank you Mac."

Tim smiles at Charlotte as she fills his plate. "And your cooking is great too."

She leans over and kisses Tim's cheek. "Thank you Tim."

Sidney grins as he fills his own plate. "I gotta agree with Mac. This is good eating."

Lacy smiles. "Land sakes. You boys eat all you want...But what did you find on that mountain that's so important. Tim?"

After swallowing a bite of fish. He responds. "A dragon."

Lacy drops the cup she was holding. "Did you say a dragon?" Tim nods and tells the badger what the dragon demanded of the valley folk.

Mac adds what the young rabbit girl said as well.

Charlotte shakes her head hugging Tim as

Lacy grumbles. “The dragon must be stopped. My grandfather told of the demon dragon and how it nearly destroyed the valley 100 years ago.”

Tim shakes his head. “The dragon promised to leave us alone if we do his bidding.”

The badger growls as she responds. “Once before the valley folk did as the dragon demanded...But the demands grew more each time he came to collect from them.”

Mac shudders. “How was the dragon finally stopped?”

Lacy sighs. “My grandfather didn't know. The dragon just quit returning. This girl Tasha may have the answer. I think we should let her try.”

Tim shakes his head. “We should allow all the valley folk decide. I think we should try meeting the dragons demands. For now at least.”

The badger shakes her head. “I think it's a mistake. But I'll help spread the word.”

Tim swallows a bite of fish and nods. “That would be helpful Lacy. Thank you.”

The badger smiles. “ I'm glad to help.”



Charlotte chimes in. "I'll help too."

The raccoon smiles at his wife and finishes his tea. "It's time we left for the village."

Lacy says, "Aw, I was going to offer you all some apple pie."

Mac licks his muzzle. "Um, I think I'll stay to

have a slice.”

Sidney nods. “I will too.”

The raccoon shakes his head. “Lacy, your pie is fine eating. But I just can't hold another bite.”

Lacy smiles as the raccoon gets up. She follows him and Charlotte to the door. “Charlotte. I'll stop by tomorrow for the monthly sewing bee.”

Tim says, “Hey, you all can pass the word there.”

Lacy continues. “Yes, there will be several there that can help spread the word...”

Charlotte nods. “Yes, we normally have a large turnout each month.”

The badger then gives Charlotte a hug as she bids the raccoons a good day. Mac and Sidney shout, “Catch you later Tim.”

He hollers back “Ok”.

Lacy closes the door and smiles at the skunk and fox. Then she carries a large apple pie over to the table...Mac drools as he watches the badger cut a large slice for him and the fox. “There you go, Mac, Sidney. Eat your fill. There

is plenty.”

While Mac and Sidney finish their pie and Tim heads for the village with his wife. Chip and Tasha continue towards the large stone structure. Unknown to both of them, a shadowy figure slips up behind Chip. Moments later the young rabbit finds himself pinned to the ground. He cries out as the figure places the point of a large spear to his chest.

Chip again cries out. “Don't hurt me please!” The unknown attacker ignores the young rabbit's pleas as he leans over him. Tasha screams out. “Don't hurt him...” He looks up just as she hits him with both feet, knocking him into the bushes. She then grabs the spear and breaks it against a rock.

Tasha kneels beside Chip as she asks if he is alright.

Chip sits up still shaking as he responds. “I...I think so.”

She shakes her head. “ I'm sorry. I forgot about the guards protecting our valley.”

Rubbing his chest he nods. "No harm done. But I sure thought he was going to spear me."

She nods and hugs him tight.

Upon hearing a moan from the bushes. She steps over to check on the guard. A short but husky rabbit looks up at Tasha, rubbing a bump on his head and says, "You only needed to shout. I wasn't going to kill him."

She blinks. "Oh Benji it's you. I'm sorry, but when I heard Chip cry out. I just saw red."

Benji slowly stands and nods. "I'll try to keep out of your way next time, Tasha."

After helping Chip up. Tasha smiles. "Chip this is Benji. He is one of our guards,"

Benji nods. "Sorry Chip. You being a stranger, I thought you might be a thief or wishing to harm Tasha."

Chip shakes his paw and nods. "I understand. Tasha is showing me your very nice valley."

Benji nods turning to Tasha he picks up his broken spear. "Keep him out of trouble."

She nods. "I will." He then disappears into the forest.

Tasha takes Chip by the paw and says, "It's not far to the temple. It'll be dark soon and I wish to reach our village before then." He nods as they walk quickly along. As they get closer the path changes to broad white stones. Chip looks at the large grey stone building. Broad steps lead up to a large archway over which twin towers soar



skyward. Tasha smiles. “It’s very old. No one knows for sure how long it’s been here.” She then leads him up the steps and through the archway.

Chip looks all around as he follows the girl into the temple. “It’s so big.”

Tasha nods as she picks up a torch. She lights it from a flame near the entrance. Then they both go down a narrow flight of stairs which leads to a long passageway and ends in a small room. On one wall is a golden plaque. Under which hangs a heavy bow and a quiver of arrows...

She looks at the young rabbit and says, “This is the bow and arrows you’ll use to tame the fire demon.”

Chip gulps as he notices a engraving on the plaque, showing a young rabbit holding a bow drawn back with an arrow ready to fly. The dragon is above him—flames shooting



from its nostrils as it dives downward.

He points. "Um. What does the engraving mean?"

Tasha sighs. "I'm sorry Chip. I didn't tell you the whole story. The engraving was made long ago. Each time the demon appears. A young rabbit pure of heart must be found to defeat the demon. I'm sure that rabbit is you."

She looks into his eyes. A tear rolls down her cheek as she continues. "At first I only thought of our need. But now after knowing you, I fear for your life. I feel I should not wish to live if you were killed." She then turns away softly sobbing.

Chip places a paw on her shoulder. "Please don't cry. You saved my life. If It's lost trying to save the valley and you from the terrible dragon. It'll be worth it."

She shakes her head. "But you mean more to me than this valley, or anything else." Chip wipes her tears away and hugs her tight. "If it's my lot to tame the dragon, then so be it."

She hugs Chip back as she responds... "And now you must learn to use the bow...Your life

depends on how well you do.” She then bites her lip trying to not cry as Chip lifts the bow from its resting place. He brushes the dust from its smooth finish. “It's heavy!!” he exclaims as he examines it.

She nods. “Yes. It's made from a very strong wood...” She lifts the quiver of arrows from a shelf and says, “These are the special made arrows to carry the magic potion. We have more so you can practice shooting at a target.” Chip nods. “I hope I'm strong enough to use it...Um where is the string?”

She says, “Oh, my father will make a new string for it. As it must be very strong and after a few weeks of practice I'm sure your muscles will grow strong enough. Then you will be ready to meet the demon.”

Chip gulps once more as he stares at the engraving, wondering if he has the courage to do the task this very special girl says he must do...

Tasha clears her throat. “We should go now. It'll be dark soon. Bring the bow, but leave the arrows. They will only be used when you're

ready.”

Chip nods as they both quickly leave the small room. He follows along as Tasha carries the torch down the passageway then up the narrow rock stairway. She then extinguishes the torch near the archway .

She looks up at the sky then turns to the young rabbit and says, “We must hurry. We only have a short time before nightfall and my village is across the valley.”

He nods as they make haste for the distant village. The shadows quickly stretch out before them as the sun slowly disappears behind a distant mountain ridge.

Darkness spreads across the valley just as the two young rabbits finally reach the edge of the village. Small bunnies follow along as they walk along a path towards the center of the community...Tasha stops to greet the little ones as Chip stands close by, not sure what to say or do.

They shout. “Did you bring us any treats, Tashie? Please. Please. Please.” Tasha takes



some sweet roots from the cloth pouch she carries and nods. “Here you are. One for each of you.” Chip smiles as he watches the little ones hop for joy as they get their treats. Moments later she and Chip continue along the path.

He turns to her and says, “The little ones are

very fond of you.”

She nods. “Yes, I always try to bring a treat for them when I return. They’re very dear to me.”

Chip smiles. “They are very cute. They remind me of my hopes to have a family someday when this is all over.”

She stops. Then turns to him and says, ”I would be very happy to be your mate after the fire demon is gone.”

He smiles taking her paw with his. Then starts to speak when a loud voice calls out. “Tasha!!! Who is this stranger?”

Chip quickly turns to look as Tasha moves in front of him, then says, “He’s the one who must tame the fire demon.”

Chip's eyes remain fixed on this large older rabbit, His dark brown fur showing signs of greying along his ears and cheeks. In one paw he holds a long staff. A light breeze blows his flowing robes as he says, “This one has a pure heart and agrees to use the bow to tame the fire demon?”

Tasha nods. “Yes father he has, and has

agreed to do his best”

A smile crosses the elder rabbits face. He then holds out a paw. “Welcome to Coelho village. I’m called Dinre. The leader of this village” The young rabbit shakes the elder rabbits paw and says, “Good to meet you, sir. My name is Chip Sty.”

“Then come share supper with us Chip Sty.”

Chip smiles. “Thank you, sir. I’m very hungry after the long walk here.”

Tasha smiles as she and her father take the young rabbit to their home.

Chip follows along, still remembering the drawing. He knows learning to use the bow well is important if he is to tame the dragon. Thoughts of spending the rest of his life with this pretty young bunny give him a new courage. He must protect her and her family from the evil dragon. Even though he may loose his life trying.