

# Three

When the Council of Elders called an urgent meeting the following week, Yash paid little attention as he was far too busy with the goats, which wandered over his grandfather's land near a little stream, and the chauries on his mother's land. Of the two herds, he preferred the goats. Chauries and yaks were a bit moody sometimes, probably because of all that boring, dry land they grazed on lower down, where the slope became a little flatter. At least the yaks had their long fur to make them look friendlier. The chauries were all stretched skin on lumpy-looking bone, droopy mouths and heavy eyelids.

When the villagers talked of being present for a second meeting not long afterwards, however, Yash grew more suspicious. As he crept to the ramshackle village meeting hall and heard the shouts from the small crowd that spilled out of the doors, his mouth dropped open.

"You can't sell the land! It's *our* mountain. It's sacred. Our ancestors have lived here and farmed on this land for generations!" he yelled over the top of the raucous noise.

"Yash, what are you doing here?" asked his uncle Ranj, shocked.

"That man's an idiot! You mustn't allow it to be sold. He will ruin it, whatever he does. The farmland is all around the slopes and foothills and the mountainside. We could lose it all."

"Yash," interrupted his uncle. "The elders have met. They have consulted the sage. Mr Goldlaw is offering a lot of money to buy the land which we all own. No one wants this, but it's too much money to be able to refuse. Maybe Mr Goldlaw's plans will attract more tourists and we can focus on leading treks rather than farming. It could be good for us all."

Yash stamped his foot. Why wouldn't anyone listen to him? There was something not right about that man and he hated the thought of him owning the land on which all of the community lived. What was he up to?

Yash pushed his way into the building, under the arms and between the knees of the crowd. At the front of the room, the meeting was becoming rowdy. There were moans and grunts from many people who disagreed with the elders' vote. Yash spotted his mother and father stood close to the elders' table. His mother shot him a trademark glare as he emerged at the front of the crowd. Bhubakta, who sat at the table with other members of the council, held out a hand as if welcoming a good friend.

"Mr Goldlaw, please join us."

Until this point, Yash had not spotted the sweaty, beetroot-faced man lurking at the side of the room. Theodore Goldlaw sidled over to the table.

"With some understandable regret, a narrow majority decision has been arrived upon," Bhubakta said to him solemnly. "The Council of Elders has agreed that your offer will be accepted. We hope that it will be a profitable and constructive relationship for everyone..."

Grinning, Mr Goldaw held out a large hand. His cufflinks glinted briefly as he extended his arm towards Bhubakta.

"...however, there is one condition."

Goldlaw hesitated. Bhubakta continued, "We are all guided eternally by the wise sage who lives on the mountainside. He wishes to meet with you before the deal is concluded. Other than that, we have an agreement."

Bhubakta stood up and held out his hand to meet Goldlaw's. The portly man paused briefly, then grinned even more broadly. He gripped Bhubakta's hand and shook it with obvious force. Without letting go, he turned towards the disgruntled crowd as a piece of paper was passed along the table and signed in turn by each of the elders.

"This is a great decision for your community and a sign of progress in our modern world. Thank you all for your patience," Goldlaw announced.





## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

The paper was passed finally to him and he took his own gold pen from his inside pocket and leant on the table to sign with a flourish. Immediately, he turned back to the crowd to finish his speech.

“Now that the deal is agreed and the land is mine, I am delighted to announce that I intend to move the Jagurdwa mountain from its current position to a new, more accessible, tourist location.”

Gasps rose from the crowd. People turned to look at one another in confusion.

“Unfortunately,” Goldlaw continued, “this will cause some inevitable disruption and those of you living on the slopes of the mountain or the foothills will need to relocate.” A cruel grin spread across his plump face.

No one in the crowd seemed to know what to say for a moment. A few people laughed, uncertain if what they were hearing was serious.

“Move the mountain? You can’t be serious! You can’t *move* a mountain!” shouted Yash.

Bhubakta held up a hand. “Yash, please. Mr Goldlaw, there must be some misunderstanding. Could you explain what you mean?”

“Just that!” Goldlaw declared, as though he were suggesting nothing more unusual than pouring a cup of tea. “I shall bring all the modern technology that the city has to offer, and the mountain will be moved to its new home.”

“Relocate?” came a shout from a farmer who lived near Yash’s family. “You mean, you expect us to *move*? We can’t just move! We’ve nowhere to go!”

“We won’t need to go anywhere, because you *can’t move a mountain!*” said Yash, almost laughing at the ridiculous nature of the situation in which he found himself. Several villagers nodded and some raised their voices to agree with him, but Goldlaw puffed out his chest as Yash had seen him do before.



## The Man Who Bought a Mountain

“I assure you, *young man*, that I can and I will. You will all need to be prepared to make way for my machines and, yes, those of you who live on the higher slopes will be required to move.”

As realisation dawned on the villagers, fury and frustration grew. Most found Goldlaw’s suggestion laughable, but all were concerned about the destruction that he would bring to their beloved mountain in his attempts to lift it off the ground.

“See? I told you not to sell it to him!” Yash fumed, casting his eyes around at the stunned crowd.

He pushed his way out of the tiny building, head bowed, and sat down on a rock. Plucking at the long dry strands of grass growing loosely around its edge, he swallowed a lump which was forming in his throat. How could this be happening?

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It was only a few days later that great hordes of heavy construction equipment gradually began to arrive on the outskirts of the bamboo forest, where the flat valley ground began its long slope upwards. Mechanical monsters rumbled in, assembling like an automated army. It was the kind of equipment never before seen at the Jagurdwa: enormous excavators, winches with reinforced steel cables and huge hydraulic cranes with extending boom sections. Truck after truck rolled into the region – none of which looked remotely large enough to climb the Jagurdwa, let alone lift it.

Rumours about Goldlaw’s plans spread like wildfire.

“They’re going to try digging out the base of the mountain.”

“They’re blowing up bits of the mountain to loosen it.”

Just as quickly, worries and fears grew over the damage that would be caused.

“How are the diggers going to get through the forest? Will they cut down the trees?”

“What if the blast scares away the animals?”

“What if it blocks up the river with debris?”

Most villagers had refused to move off the mountain, none believing that Goldlaw would succeed in uprooting it from the earth. Uncle Ranj, however, was concerned. “If he’s going to ruin the landscape with his awful trucks and dynamite,” he said one morning, “who’s going to want to climb the mountain, then? I’ll have no business, especially with Goldlaw taking a percentage of my profits. It’s his land, after all.”

Yash stomped around in a bad mood.

“This plan is crazy! We can’t let it happen. This is our mountain – our home,” he pleaded with anyone who would listen. “Bhubakta, what about everything you taught us? The spirit of the mountain? The connection to the gods? The life-giving land?”

Bhubakta looked forlornly back at Yash.

“The spirit of the mountain will always be strong. There is nothing we can do – the deal was signed.”

Yash did not understand Bhubakta. He definitely didn’t understand Theodore J. Goldlaw when he arrived to join the growing team of workers and vehicles. He wore a navy blue suit with a long, grey coat buttoned over the top. His wide boots were the only attire remotely suited to the environment – those, and the plastic white hard hat on his head. His bright blue tie was pinned to his white shirt with a sparkling silver clip. Yash couldn’t recall ever seeing anyone in person wearing a tie before.

A large space had already been flattened at the mouth of the bamboo forest where Goldlaw’s men now stood, some hanging out of the cabs of their enormous vehicles. A small crowd of villagers had gathered.

## The Man Who Bought a Mountain

Mutters were passed around and anxious looks exchanged. Yash was among them, fuming more with every new machine's arrival.

"Let's get this show on the road," Goldlaw declared, ignoring the crowd. The other men and women who had been with him in the trekking group filed along behind him, clinging to their screens and muttering into their earpieces. Yash couldn't help noticing that they looked a little nervous. Furtive glances were thrown between them every few seconds, and the group weren't the only ones acting strangely. Some of the men who were climbing into vehicles seemed to be smirking slightly, and Yash even caught two of them rolling their eyes in Goldlaw's direction.

That was when it hit Yash. None of Goldlaw's men and women actually *believed* that they could succeed in lifting the Jagurdwa – how could they? Each one was humouring their foolish employer, who thought himself more powerful than the ancient earth.

Engines echoed like thunder as, one by one, they were started up. The hulking vehicles looked so out of place in the scene overlooked by proud trees and with the crop fields stretching in front of them. The chaury herd two fields over stared at the noisy machinery invading their peace, looking more sullen than ever.

A worker in a fluorescent yellow waistcoat stepped forwards. "Which way for the first crane, boss?"

"Take it towards the northern face," shouted Goldlaw.

"We can't get the trucks up through that forest, boss."

"Don't worry," Goldlaw replied, "the bulldozers will make a path. We need the explosives team in first to loosen the rocks and then the cranes can move in."

The worker who had approached Goldlaw frowned, perplexed. "Right, boss. Of course. It's just that... we don't think that it's going to be possible to..."



## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

Goldlaw bristled. "I'm not paying you to *think*, I am paying you to *do*. I don't care how you do it, just make it happen." His face was wobbling dangerously, and the worker blanched under his glare before lowering his head and hurrying away.

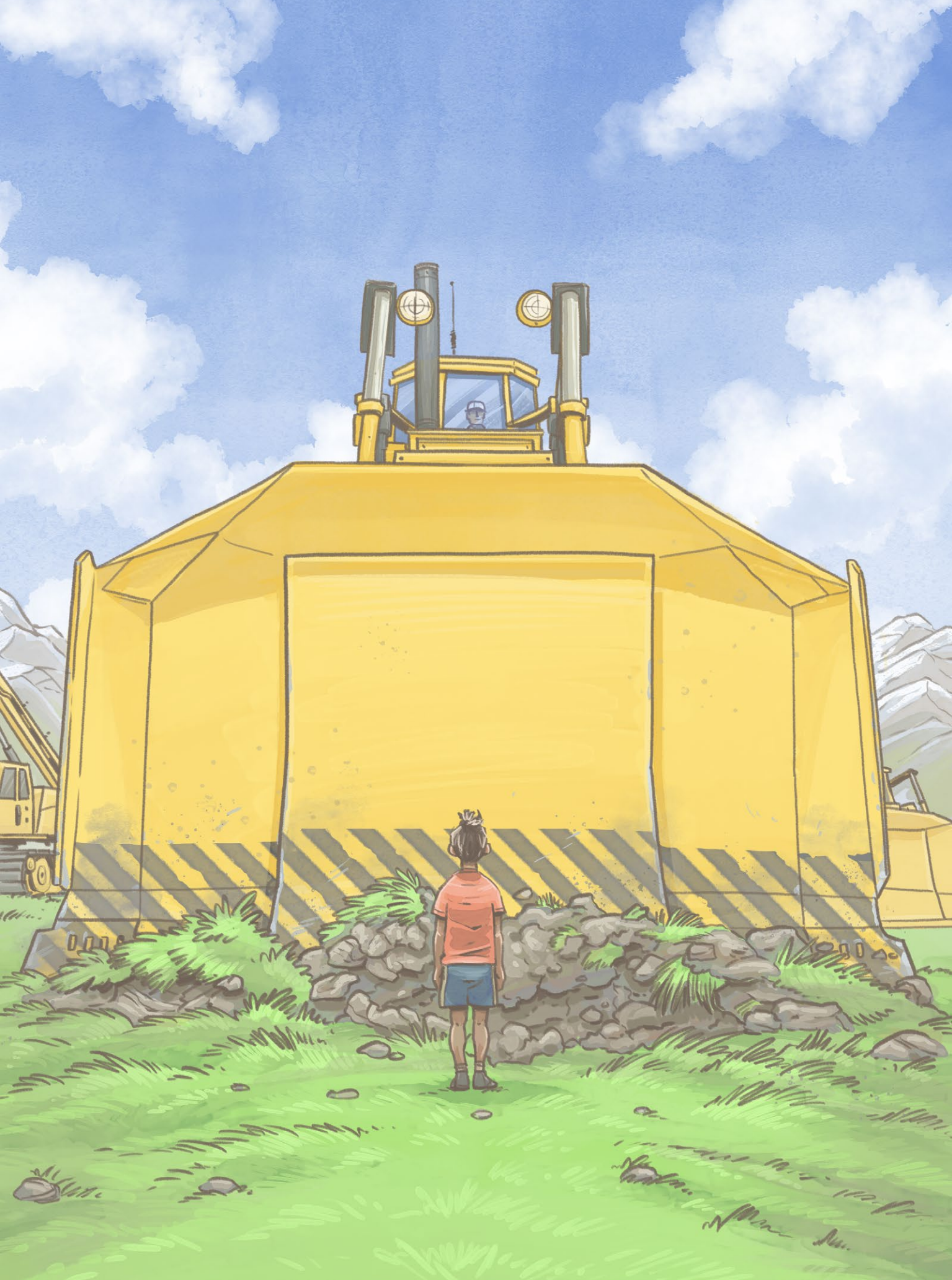
"Ready the bulldozers!" shouted Goldlaw.

A huge, hulking machine began to move. Yash's eyes filled with tears.

*Doing what is right is never easy, Yashaswin, but it is within your power.*

Suddenly, Yash thought of the sage. He hadn't met with Goldlaw yet. There was no way that the sage would allow this. Yash's last hope was with Guru Oluko.

"NO!" he screamed, running in front of one of the vehicles as it growled its way across the flat area of land towards the edge of the sloping kaguno crop fields.



# Four

He stood like an insect in front of a lawnmower.

“Get him out of the way,” Goldlaw demanded. His team of men and women in suits began to pick their way towards Yash. Some of the villagers became more animated, shouting their support for Yash. Amid shouts and waves and billowing smoke, the enormous wheels of the truck continued to roll towards him. Yash dug his feet into the dirt and clenched his jaw.

“What on earth do you think you are doing, Yash?” called his mother as the engine revved menacingly.

Yash didn’t flinch. He continued to stare at the truck’s driver.

His mother forced her way through the gathering crowd. The enormous vehicle continued to crawl towards them: Yash, planted in place, and his mother, tugging desperately at his arm. Any second now, they would collide.

Yash pointed at Goldlaw. “He hasn’t met the sage! You said that he had to meet the sage before everything was agreed!” he shouted.

The entire village seemed to hold its breath. After a few seconds, the rumble of the surrounding machines dropped and the great bulldozer squealed to a halt.

Every pair of eyes was fixed upon Goldlaw.

Goldlaw frowned and pursed his lips as he looked at Yash. He surveyed the scene with his arms crossed and his legs wide apart, peering out from under his hard hat.

Bhubakta approached him calmly and a moment of conversation followed. The pack of tech-wielding cronies had stopped in their tracks and turned to stare, waiting for instructions.



## The Man Who Bought a Mountain

After several more minutes of discussion, Bhubakta marched from Goldlaw over to Yash. He cleared his throat. "You are required to lead Mr Goldlaw up the mountain to meet the sage."

Yash couldn't believe what he was hearing. "No way. I'm not walking with him again." He scowled and turned away, crossing his arms.

"It is your duty, Yash," the village elder replied. "You are correct – the visit is required. Mr Goldlaw has been reminded that he must meet with the sage before the deal is completed, and he has requested someone who can direct him to Guru Oluko quickly."

Yash poked the toe of one worn boot into the ground, chewing over the thought.

"I have assured him that you are the fastest and most experienced guide that he could wish for," Bhubakta continued.

Yash looked back over his shoulder, kicking at the stony ground, and caught Goldlaw's gaze. Every part of his big, red face looked just as annoyed as Yash felt.

"Fine." He exhaled loudly and tramped across to where Goldlaw was standing.

"We meet again, boy."

"Not through my choice," Yash mumbled.

"Nor mine. Let's get this over with so that my men can get their work started."

Before they could leave, a flustered-looking woman carrying a portable computer tottered over to Goldlaw and spluttered, "Sir, our first detonation is planned for 2 p.m. Shall I cancel the order as a precaution?"

Goldlaw scoffed. "Absolutely not. This won't take long. Continue as planned."

## EXTREME EARTH COLLECTION

From there, they marched, separated by several paces and a gulf of frustrated silence. Yash trudged up the winding path through the bamboo forest. Goldlaw huffed and puffed behind, past the mountain goats and along even more narrow ridges than the tourist trail had to offer.

Eventually, Yash could stand the silence no more. “Why are you so determined to ruin our lives as well as our mountain?”

Goldlaw harrumphed but did not reply. They approached a small stream with a makeshift bridge, in the form of two thick planks, laid over it. “You’ll probably fail, anyway,” Yash added as he stepped forwards onto it.

“I don’t fail at anything,” came the provoked response.

“You failed at trekking up this mountain, the last time you were here!”

Goldlaw paused. Yash didn’t know whether to expect a verbal barrage in retaliation or more of his silence. Instead, the reply was measured.

“Listen, son. I’m a businessman. This mountain provides a business opportunity. Clearly, other people get some kind of pleasure from climbing this thing. But out here, it’s so hard for most people to reach. If we move it to somewhere just outside the city, we can attract thousands – millions – more tourists. We can charge admission for people to climb. It just needs to be in a more convenient place.”

Yash stopped in the middle of the stream and laughed. “Convenient? You have no idea why people climb this mountain, and that’s your problem! Does your city have a view like this one?” He threw out his arms to gesture at the peaks and valleys in the distance, followed by the stream under his feet, the hanging foliage and the goats on the slopes below. “Could all these animals and plants live there? Would the streams flow?”

“The world is covered with trees and streams. In the city, we can build a ski resort and hotels. We’ll make our town the one to see!”

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“But this is where we *live*,” Yash pleaded. “Our farmland stretches up the mountainside; our animals are perfectly adapted to live all around it; whichever direction you go from here, you’ll find people from my community living and working – my uncles and aunts, my cousins... There are crops that are in just the right place for them to grow – the climate and soil would be different anywhere else. This mountain brings us food and brings us money from tourists; it brings us... together.”

“All good business decisions require a sacrifice.”

“And what are *you* sacrificing?!” Yash cried. “You can’t move a mountain anyway, you must be stupid – all you’re going to do is destroy our homes and land – and there’s no way that the sage will agree to the deal.”

“Actually, for this job, we have the biggest, most advanced engineering ever produced, young man. Here, we will do what no one else has ever attempted. We will move this mountain. As for your wise old sage, leave him to me. Just take me there, as you were told.”

“Ugh!” Yash turned his back and stamped across the bridge, making it wobble. Goldlaw waited until Yash had reached the other side, then followed cautiously. For the rest of the journey, not one more word was spoken.

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As always, Yash found the sage outside his home, looking out across the valley. Yash marched round the final bend of the steep, twisted path to his door and wheeled round to watch Goldlaw staggering up the last slope. Finally, Goldlaw heaved himself onto the rocky outcrop and paused, bent double, to draw a few deep, shuddering breaths. When he eventually regained his composure, he forced himself upright...

...and his jaw dropped.

In the far distance, snow-capped summits glistened in the sunlight. Birds swooped effortlessly through the cool, clean air. The sky had a









different blue here; you could see – almost touch – the texture of the clouds, like you were actually with them, not beneath them. Huge forests lay far below, divided by great rivers, expansive lakes and miles of lush, green hills. All sound had fallen away below them; the mountain towered over the land and Goldlaw suddenly looked very small, perched upon it.

Yash turned to the sage. “Hey, G. I’ve brought –”

The sage raised one thin hand. “Thank you, Yashaswin.” He spoke in a soothing tone. “Your efforts are appreciated, as always. Welcome, Mr Goldlaw.”

Goldlaw blinked, and turned away from the view. His eyes seemed overly bright and his face paler.

Yash stared. “Welcome? But, he –”

“Please take a seat, Mr Goldlaw. Yashaswin, would you excuse us for a few moments?”

Yash crossed his arms but said nothing. After a moment, he turned and trudged a little further along the path, up past the house and away from the two men.

Then, he waited.

He kicked around in the stones for a while.

He used a stick to drag lines and patterns in the dusty soil.

The two men had been talking for what felt like an age, but Yash could hear nothing. He looked back down the path but could see nothing, either.

Stepping lightly, he crept a little closer. From above the corrugated roof of the sage’s dwelling, he could make out the sound of their muffled conversation inside. On his knees, he edged closer still, holding a tree



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stump to keep his balance.

Goldlaw's voice was getting louder. "Let's stop beating around the bush. You're trying to call my bluff, aren't you, old man? You think that we can't move this mountain."

Yash grinned and waited for the sage to tell him that, of course, the mountain couldn't be moved. There's no way that G would agree to this.

"With respect, you are wrong, Mr Goldlaw..."

*Ha! Here we go*, Yash thought.

"...I believe that it would be perfectly possible to move this mountain to a new location."

"What? No! What are you saying, G?" Yash's eyes widened as he broke cover. Stumbling, he clambered back down from his listening place. "You can't let him, you *can't!*"

Theodore Goldlaw leaned back in a wooden chair, hands clasped behind his head and stubby legs stretched out in front of him. A satisfied grin spread over his face and he crossed his feet at the ankles.

"Maybe you are a 'wise' guy, after all, old man."

The sage held up a pale hand to them both.

"Please, Yashaswin. Mr Goldlaw, if you'll kindly let me finish."

All three of them looked at each other for a moment before the sage spoke again. His voice was as composed as ever.

"The mountain can indeed be moved if you have enough patience."

"That's alright, old man, we've got excavators and cranes..."

“Your tools will not do the job adequately, Mr Goldlaw. You must move the mountain one pebble at a time. You must break down the mountain into small pieces, transport the materials and rebuild the structure elsewhere.”

Guffawing, Goldlaw spluttered, “You’ve got to be kidding! One pebble at a time would take way too long. We don’t have time for that!”

“It is the only way, Mr Goldlaw. The mountain is too great for your machines to lift.”

“Now, see here, old man.” Goldlaw’s smile had faded. “You are looking at the man who stopped the rain in New Kathpur, the man who stemmed the flow of the Narapti river and calmed the wind in Bodhar Bay! I am the man who is going to conquer this mountain. My engineers have drawn up the plans. A series of small explosions will create the necessary cracks, then we can move in with the big beasts. My machines will do the job.”

The sage shook his head. “Beware the power of the mountain. Do not climb it so that the world can see you, but so that you can see the world.”

Goldlaw stared momentarily, then laughed so hard that he nearly fell backwards from his chair. “You’re as nuts as I thought you would be, old man. Living up here, talking about ‘the power of the mountain’? Ha! You can keep your ‘one pebble at a time’ nonsense.”

Goldlaw heaved his large frame out of his chair and edged around the sage to the door of the little house.

“But you can’t!” Yash blurted out. “You needed the sage to agree. He hasn’t agreed.”

He looked back, impatient. “Sorry, lad. I only came up here to *meet* the sage. That’s what the agreement stated. So, now I’ve *met* him, our work shall begin.” Shielding his eyes from the bright sunlight, Goldlaw stepped out of the hut.

## The Man Who Bought a Mountain

“A pleasure to meet you, Mr Goldlaw,” the sage called after him.

As Yash stared, his eyes prickling, at the man who had been his last hope, Guru Oluko smiled and stretched out his arm towards him as he always did. Clutched delicately in his thin hand was the usual parcel of leaves and string. Yash reached out to take it automatically but, this time, the sage grasped his hand with surprising vigour. His wrinkled fingers curled around Yash’s wrist as he whispered, “*For the mountains will move you.*”