

Five

The return trip from the sage's dwelling looked set to be even worse than the journey up. Yash felt like running ahead and leaving Goldlaw behind, hoping that he'd get lost or fall or just turn so red that he popped. The only thing that stopped him was the feeling that all his energy had been sucked away. He just wanted to get home to his parents.

On his way back down the rugged path, Yash thought about all the treks that he had made up the Jagurdwa mountain. He marvelled, perhaps for the last time, at layer upon layer of jagged rock; here and there, streaks of colour leaked across its surface, compressed like dough under a rolling pin. Yash took in all the colours and shades of the layers, bearing all that history. When he didn't point out one overhanging ledge, Goldlaw walked straight into it.

Rubbing his head at the point of impact, he grunted, "Who put that there? I don't remember it being that low before."

"I think you'll find that it's been there for millions of years," Yash replied wearily.

Goldlaw wheeled round to face him. His expression, in which confidence was usually set like concrete, was one of surprise. He rested a hand on the dusty surface. "Surely not."

Yash shook his head a little at Goldlaw's ignorance, given that he was now the owner of the land. "Just look at the layers – the different colours and rock types. The layers on top have built on those underneath, and that takes a long time."

Yash ran a long finger along a thread of siltstone at eye level, and Goldlaw's gaze followed it. For the briefest moment, Yash thought that he could sense a shift in the way in which the man looked at what was all around him.

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Just as quickly, the spell was broken. “Come on,” Goldlaw grunted. “We’ve been held up long enough.”

They walked on, returning to silence. Below, the peaceful beauty of the mid-hills gave way to the lower regions: the rushing streams which provided a home for unusual fish and water for other animals; the bamboo forest with its sheltered canopy, which hosted rare varieties of plants; the fields of crops which brought the whole community food, money and life.

When Yash reached the familiar makeshift bridge, he took a left turn off the well-trodden path, into a wooded patch of scrubland in the other direction.

Goldlaw stopped and frowned at him as he stepped lithely away. “Wait. Why aren’t we taking this route back?” He pointed at the planks that made up the path across the stream.

Yash scowled. “We are. I just have to do something first.”

“I don’t have time for detours – I’ve a detonation planned!”

Breathing deeply, Yash counted to five in his head. “You don’t have to come with me. If you think that you can get yourself back through the bamboo forest without following the wrong path, off you go. It’s *your mountain*.”

Yash continued to tramp away through the undergrowth, not caring whether or not Goldlaw followed him. As far as he knew, no one but himself and the sage had ever walked this way on the mountain and, until now, they had worked hard to keep it that way. Now, though, Yash’s rage was causing him to throw caution to the wind; Goldlaw owned all of this, after all, so it was only a matter of time before their secret was either discovered or destroyed.

Away from the path, the pair weaved between thickly growing birch trees. Moving neither up nor down but across the mountainside, Yash navigated the sloped ground as easily as a duck would navigate water; Goldlaw stepped uncertainly over mossy tree roots and stumbled over limestone steps.

After a few minutes, the slope of the mountain face began to level out and the trees thinned. They emerged onto a small outcrop, halfway up an enormous crease in the mountainside where the Jagurdwa folded back on itself. It was perfectly sheltered from the wind and other elements, and overlooked the farmland and river below. There was a long, sheer drop on one side, and up ahead was a dead end.

“What on earth are we doing here?” grumbled Goldlaw. He glanced at his watch. “You had better get me down this mountain in time.”

Yash ignored him. Instead, he crouched so low that he was almost kneeling on the dusty ground, pulling from his pocket the tightly wrapped bundle that the sage had given to him. With his other hand stretched out in front of him, he began to make a soft clicking noise with his tongue.

Goldlaw stared at him, utterly perplexed. “What in the name of –”

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Yash shot him a furious warning look and Goldlaw was silenced. Yash clicked a few more times and then gave a long, low whistle.

For a few moments, nothing happened. Then, as Goldlaw watched in amazement, a small creature appeared from a shadowy fissure in the rock face up ahead.

It was about the size of a large rabbit, and obviously very young. Grey, speckled fur grew soft and downy all over the creature, from its pointed, wet nose to its short, stubby tail. Thin, bandy legs tucked themselves timidly under its body and enormous ears stood to attention. Two huge, glistening eyes stared around as the tiny fawn picked its way slowly towards Yash.

Crossing his legs slowly, Yash seated himself on the ground and unwrapped the sage's parcel. Goldlaw peered over Yash's shoulder from his great height.



From inside the small package, Yash pulled a handful of lush, green leaves and yet another, even smaller, parcel. Quietly, he held out the bundle of leaves and the little fawn stepped instantly towards it. It sniffed Yash's hand momentarily before folding its legs under itself and settling down beside him, blinking up at Goldlaw as it chewed.

Goldlaw stared, transfixed, at the tiny creature. His mouth hung open slightly as he stood on what felt like the edge of the world, gazing down at the scene unfolding in front of him. After a few minutes, he swallowed, blinking, then cleared his throat quietly. "What –"

Before he could ask, the soft clicking sound broke through the quiet once more. Cradling the remaining leafy parcel in his free hand, Yash continued to make soft noises with his mouth, and they waited. Goldlaw stared at the gap in the rocky wall expectantly until, eventually, they saw movement.

An adult deer, perhaps half a metre in height, with huge ears, small tusks on its snout and thick, brown hair all over its body, moved into the light. Large, dark eyes gazed dolefully towards them and its ears twitched this way and that as Yash continued to click. It was remarkably thin; the shape of its features was clearly visible under the skin and its limbs trembled slightly. It limped towards Yash awkwardly, keeping one hooved foot raised off the ground as it came. As it neared the group, the deep wound that it carried on one leg became visible.

"What is it?" Goldlaw asked, his voice a soft rumble.

Yash waited until the adult deer had settled itself beside its fawn before he responded. "It's a musk deer," he explained gently, keeping his voice low so as not to startle the animals. "The fawn is probably about six weeks old." With his free hand, Yash opened the small package onto his lap, revealing a thick, brown paste.

"And that?"

"Lotion," Yash replied, "made with neem roots." He was struggling

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to hold the clump of long leaves in one hand and the paste in the other. "Here, hold this." He held out the leaves to Goldlaw, who hesitated before stepping forwards, his large boots crunching on the rocky ground.

Goldlaw crouched beside Yash, his smart suit now noticeably dusty. Looking disconcerted and utterly out of place, he took the foliage and held it out for both creatures to graze on. "What's wrong with it?" he asked, looking at the injured mother.

Yash dipped two fingers into the paste and, very gently, applied it to the wound on the adult's leg. His kind hands worked expertly and the deer hardly moved, such was the carefully built trust between them.

Yash sighed. "Musk deer are poached for their scent. The males have a gland in their abdomen that creates a perfume and hunters kill them for it. You can tell that this one's female," he said, gesturing at the deer's muzzle, "because the tusks are only small." He wiped his hand on a tuft of grass and folded up the wrappings from the lotion. "This one was hit by accident. She's no use to hunters but she can't take care of her young while she's hurt."

"I've never heard of them," Goldlaw said bluntly.

"They're very rare," Yash continued. "They're almost completely nocturnal, usually. They stay as far from humans as they can" – he shot Goldlaw a disgusted glance – "but the more we take, the less choice they have."

There was a few minutes' pause, punctuated by the sound of Goldlaw's heavy breathing. When Yash turned to look at him, he saw what looked like a furious battle taking place behind the man's eyes. Sensing an opportunity, he continued. "They live on the mountain because humans don't build their homes and cities up here. The mountain gives them water to drink, shelter from the wind and rain, and food to eat. Even the tree root in this medicine was grown on the mountain."

Goldlaw gazed down at the fawn's beautiful head as it chewed calmly through the pile of leaves, and then at the mother, whose flank Yash was stroking gently. "Will it survive?" he asked gruffly.

Yash gritted his teeth. "Perhaps. If she isn't *disturbed*," he replied shortly.

Before Goldlaw could retort, a distant sound from far below them disturbed the quiet. A muffled rumbling, like thunder, seemed to roll towards them through the mountain and was followed by the rustling of hundreds of wings as flocks of birds fled the local woodland, soaring upwards.

The deer panicked. The fawn scrambled upwards and cowered behind its mother, who kicked out in an attempt to stand before Yash reacted and held her still.

Goldlaw's eyes widened and he looked down at his watch. "My detonation!" he cried, jumping to his feet.

"Idiot!" Yash hissed, but Goldlaw wasn't listening. He was stabbing the screen of his mobile phone with his large fingers but, when he raised it to his ear, nothing happened.

"No signal, Mr Goldlaw?" asked Yash, bitterly.

Goldlaw scowled and thrust the phone back into his pocket. "We have to leave," he said sharply, and turned to walk back towards the mountain path.

He had taken only a few steps towards the treeline when he stopped.

A new sound had broken the silence. A faint pitter-patter became gradually audible, and a small cloud of dust and dirt rained down the steep slope beside them, landing very close to Goldlaw's feet. He and Yash looked up towards the mountain's summit...

...and horror froze them both to the spot.



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Rocks the size of small cars were rolling down the bumpy hillside in all directions. They picked up speed and bounced higher with every strike of the ground, thudding and smashing into trees and bringing earth and rocks of all sizes pouring down after them.

Shaking himself out of his momentary stupor, Yash jumped to his feet and scooped up the fawn. Shoving it into Goldlaw's arms, he yelled, "Take this!" Goldlaw was backing away from the edge of the platform, flattening himself against the wall created by the fold in the side of the Jagurdwa, and held the terrified animal tight to his chest.

The injured musk deer was on her feet. Yash grasped her around the middle and staggered towards Goldlaw, seconds before the first enormous boulder, almost the size of the sage's house, ploughed through the ground above them and slammed into the spot where the deer had lain. Unhindered, the rock rolled over the edge of the outcrop and continued to gouge a path down the mountainside.

Yash only had a moment to wonder if the rock would land near the village before a wave of debris cascaded over them. He and Goldlaw cowered like mice as dirt, stones and tree trunks alike tumbled down, bouncing over the ledge above their heads and crashing to the ground at their feet. They clamped their eyes and mouths shut against a barrage of dust and shards of stone.

Sound ripped through the air as more and more enormous stones came barrelling down the side of the Jagurdwa. They were heading down towards the valley, each one becoming a marauding monster of rocks, trees, soil, mud, dust and anything else that could be swallowed up in its path. The noise increased; clouds of dust billowed into the air above the moving mass. Below them, Yash could hear trees in their path being knocked over like skittles. Fear coursed through him like ice; a single hit from one boulder would be enough to crush them all. There was nothing to do but hold on tight and wait.

Gradually, the ground beneath their feet stopped shaking, and the thudding and rumbling from further down the mountain became more distant. When the sound of the rockfall had died away enough to hear

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Goldlaw's coughing and spluttering by his side, Yash dared to open his eyes and squint around through the dust.

The small, rocky platform in front of them had all but been destroyed. Piles of ground-up rock, splintered wood and soil had landed inches away from the group and were still pouring like sand over the edge, which had cracked under the impact at some point in the last few minutes and had fallen away, leaving a sheer drop mere yards from their feet. Yash glanced over the brink of the ledge, and what he saw made his blood run cold.

The area below was devastated.

The slope of the Jagurdwa had been deformed. At least ten different paths had been scored down the side of the mountain's face, cutting through forest, stream and farmland like a hot knife through butter. In all directions, remnants of trees and hillside were still falling down into the valley, picking up more debris all the time. The question was, how much of Yash's village had been lucky enough to escape?

Just as hot, panicked tears began to well in the corner of Yash's eyes, a soft, wispy voice floated through the collecting dust towards him.

"Come along, Yashaswin."

Six

Ten minutes later, Yash sprinted down the mountain path towards the village, having left the fawn and its mother with the sage, whose ramshackle home had, fortunately, been higher up the mountain than the rockfall and had therefore remained untouched. Goldlaw huffed and panted along behind him, but Yash couldn't bring himself to speak to him.

He raced down the final slope and ran headlong into his father, who was making his way at great speed up the track. When he saw Yash, he stopped, his face a picture of pure relief, and embraced him.

"You had us so worried," he breathed.

"Is everyone OK?" Yash demanded.

Yash's father led them down into the village, where most villagers had fled into the nearest buildings for safety, followed by the yellow waistcoat army. While many buildings further along the mountain had fallen prey to the rockfall and following landslide, some within running distance had provided refuge.

They walked past fields through which debris had been scattered and where small outbuildings had been destroyed. A boulder as big as an armchair had smashed into the side of one of Goldlaw's trucks, and the driver was now being attended to by the local medic, along with Bhubakta.

Worse was to follow. A blanket of rock and mud had reigned down over much of the village. A large crane from Goldlaw's fleet had been toppled and the long boom arm had landed, like a felled tree, onto one of the farmers' houses; many shaken locals were trying to recover what they could. Children were crying and land owners were staring, their hands on their heads, at the devastation. In some places, it was impossible to see what damage had been caused further down the valley, as choking clouds of dust



filled the air in the distance.

As more people emerged and gathered in the centre of the village, so did a fresh silence. One by one, the men in yellow waistcoats reappeared from where they had scattered. Villagers who had reached nearby surviving buildings peered out, knowing that these homes were the lucky ones.

Yash found his mother and Uncle Ranj tending to the injuries of a family whose roof had fallen in. Once he had convinced his mother that he was unharmed, he allowed himself to sit down and take a few deep, shuddering breaths. Then, he spotted Goldlaw standing in front of the village meeting hall, looking uneasy.

“This is all your fault,” Yash seethed.

Everyone turned to look at him.

“Yash, this is not the time for blame,” said Bhubakta, softly.

“Well, it’s true!” He shot daggers at Goldlaw. “We could have all been killed.”

No one spoke.

“The boy is right,” came Goldlaw’s rasping voice.

This was not the reaction that Yash had been expecting. He stared at Goldlaw, rage giving way to surprise.

“I thought that we were going to be buried under piles of rock, and it would have been my fault,” Goldlaw continued, his voice shaking. “I... I may have underestimated the force of this mountain.”

Yash had not witnessed this side of Theodore J. Goldlaw before. His face had changed. The normally beetroot cheeks were now ashen; his eyes were usually bright and beaming with plans but now, they were weighed upon heavily by his furrowed brow. His whole body hung limply. He

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looked every bit like a man who had just been scared for his life.

“I should have realised sooner,” he whispered, before rounding on some members of his team. “Why did nobody tell me?”

When it became clear that Goldlaw expected a response, one of the workers edged forwards nervously. “You told us that we weren’t paid to think, sir.”

Goldlaw blinked, stunned. No one spoke for a moment.

“We need to check that everyone is OK,” said Bhubakta, finally. Yash and his father moved to join him and other villagers gathered around, side by side.

“Let me help,” said Goldlaw.

“Help?” Yash responded curtly, raising his eyebrows. “Huh. That’s the first time you’ve used that word.”

Goldlaw looked around, addressing everyone. His eyes met those of the desperate villagers, then the trembling faces of his own workers. “I see what I’ve done. You were all right about the beauty and the importance of this mountain where it is, and now, it has given me a reminder of its true power. A mountain can’t be moved with force. It was wrong of me to try to move it at all...”

Goldlaw screwed up his face and the muscles in his jaw shifted uncomfortably, as though he was trying to force his lips to form words that they had never said before.

“...I’m sorry,” he finished.

Yash blinked and then stared.

“What if it’s too late?”

“I will make it right. Whatever the damage, we’ll recover it. I will help

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to rebuild it.” He looked around the crowd and then directly at Yash again. “We’ll do it – one pebble at a time.”

One pebble at a time.

The sage’s voice echoed through Yash’s head.

“Apology accepted, then,” he said, looking to his father and Bhubakta, who nodded back in agreement. “Bhubakta is right – let’s go and see if anyone needs help.”

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Many weeks passed and, high up the mountain, outside his home, the sage opened his eyes and uncrossed his legs. He looked out across the valley which had seen so much change over the last few months.

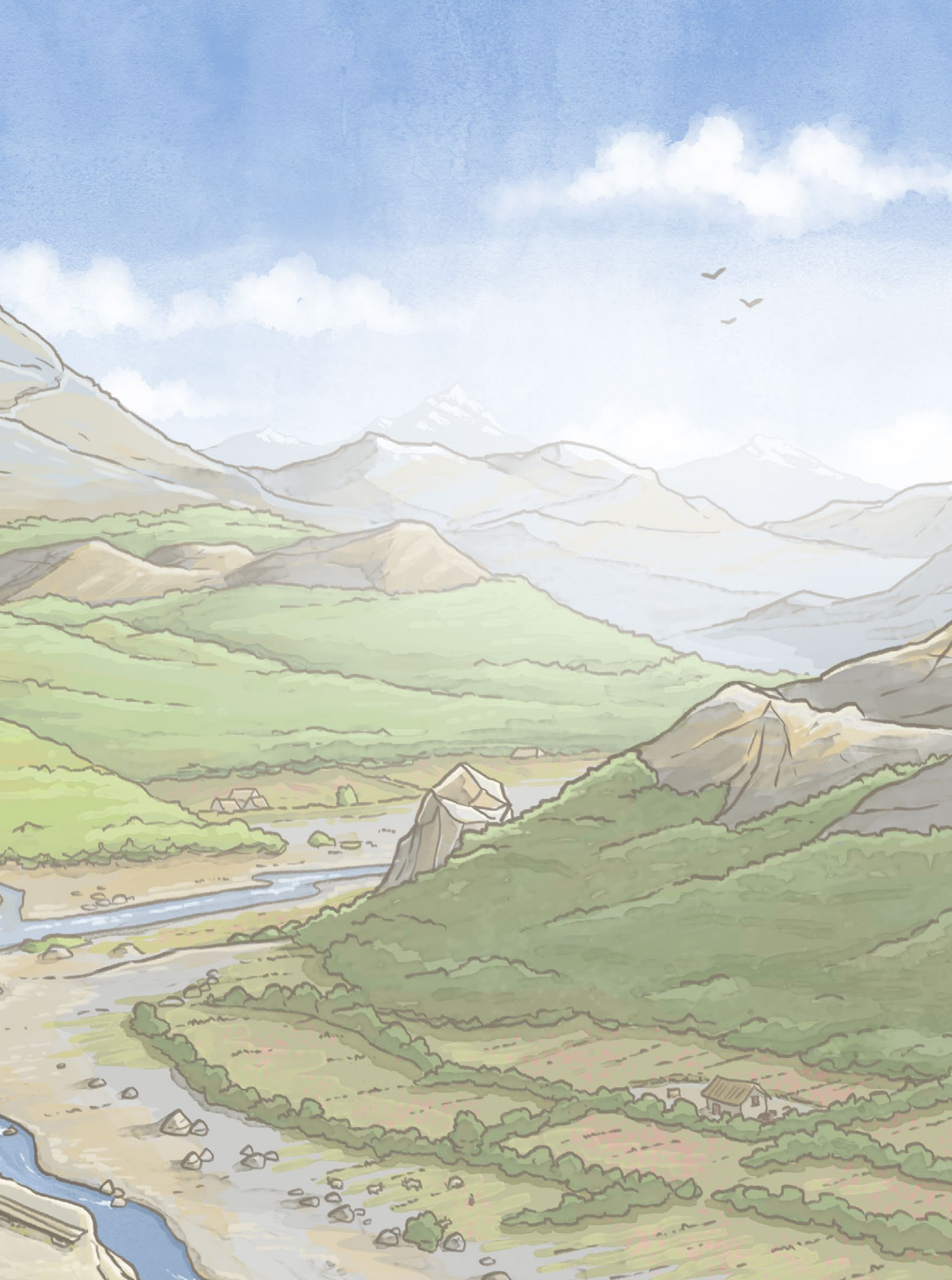
He had been there when Theodore J. Goldlaw had offered the funds to help the farmers to replant their crops. He had been there when Goldlaw’s workers had helped to shift the debris from the river. He had seen the villagers come together to rebuild their homes. Now, he sensed that a new peace had descended upon the mountain.

“Do not concern yourself with moving mountains,” he said aloud, only to the clouds, “for the mountains will move you.”

THE END

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“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.”

The Jagurdwa mountain is home to so much life: birds, fish, deer, wonderful plants and insects, and Yash, a boy whose love for his mountain and his community is unconditional.

One day, however, something arrives which turns his whole world upside down. Now, Yash must fight for his home, his job, the land that he knows so well and the safety of those he loves.

The future of the Jagurdwa hangs in the balance – can Yash save his home in time? Is it really possible to move a mountain?

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