

*This is a story I did for a contest and then decided to add to. I don't know where it will go. Who knows it may have more parts added to it over time. Having lived in the mountains for a good part of my childhood, I became aware of the fact that mountain people see things differently than city people. I wanted to explore that difference in a unique way. I hope you enjoy it.*

Myles had gotten up early and finished his chores. Something was odd about the mountain today. It was like something was missing, something that belonged here, but wasn't. The whisper in his heart was different, as though the mountain was trying to tell him something, something about being brave. He went into the cabin surprised there was no aroma of breakfast. It wasn't like his grandmother to sleep late. It wasn't unusual for him to head out to do his chores before she was out of her room, but when he came back, she was always working on breakfast.

"Gram, you okay?" he asked, standing outside her door; there was no answer. "Gram?" he knocked this time. Still no answer. It wasn't like her at all and it wasn't like him to go into her room. "Gram, I'm coming in," he called out. Taking a deep breath to steady himself, he opened the door. He took one step into the small room and froze.

It was her color that freaked him out. She was all grey and wasn't moving. He turned and ran out the door, out the cabin and up the path to the hermit's cave. He knew what the mountain had been trying to tell him. His grandmother was gone. He hadn't gone far when he met the hermit coming down the path. The strange man had a sad look on his face. He looked once at Myles and in that look conveyed that he knew. Myles led him back to the cabin and waited outside as the old hermit entered.

"She's gone," he told the boy. "We need to take care of things. You go down to Sara's and bring her back."

Tears ran down Myles face as he stared at the hermit, not hearing what he was being told to do.

"Scoot boy and bring Sara back here, now," the old man repeated. Myles turned and ran down the moss lined path to the cabin near the bottom of the mountain. The tone of the whisper in his mind changed as the mountain comforted him. The trees seemed to droop, the flowers weren't as bright, the whole mountain mourned with him.

"Well, Mabel had a good long life," Sara said. "I'm sorry Myles, but she's gone. There is nothing I can do for her." Sara looked down at the small boy. His black hair reached his shoulders. His dark eyes seemed to look into you. She couldn't look long in them. Turning she looked around the cabin. It was a small two story structure planted right against a low cliff. Herbs hung drying in the kitchen. "We're going to have to find a home for you," she added.

"Why can't I live here?" Myles asked. "I don't want to go anywhere."

"Myles, you are too young to live on your own," Sara answered. "Your grandma had a relative living in the town in the valley. I'll contact him, I'm sure he will want to be here for the burial too."

"I've always lived here," Myles said. "I can take care of everything, gram taught me."

"I'm sure you can, but it wouldn't be good for you to be here alone. I'll take care of your grandmother, you go stay with the hermit for now. He said it would be okay for a day or so."

Myles didn't like the turn of events. He had always lived on the mountain.

The hermit's house was nothing more than a cave with a door on the front. He had asked the mountain to send veins of crystal down to bring him light. He was one of the few who could

communicate easily with the mountain. For the rest it was more of a whisper in the back of their minds. The hermit worked with the mountain to keep things secure.

The next day Myles followed the old hermit to his grandmother's cabin. A few people from around the mountain were already there, more were coming on the paths. A strange looking man came up one path with Sara; Myles figured it must be the relative. The man was very plain looking and stayed in the background.

It was the hermit who took charge over the burial. Myles didn't remember much about the morning. Some things had been said and they put the body in the ground and filled the hole. The hermit bent down and touched the ground at the head and a small tree broke through the surface. He whispered something as he moved his hands over the dirt, small flowers began to vine and bloom.

"There, that will remind you of where she is," the hermit said. He turned and started back up the mountain to his cabin.

The relative came over and set his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Myles, I am Bill, Your grandmother was my aunt. I know this must be hard. Why don't you go in and gather a few thing to bring with you," he said. The man was small and dressed in funny cloths. The whisper from the mountain seemed to trust Bill, so Myles knew it would be okay.

Myles went through the cabin and grabbed a few thing and his clothes, putting them in a cloth sack.

"Who'll feed the animals?" he asked coming out of the cabin.

"The hermit will tend them," Sara said, reaching down and giving him a hug.

"Will I ever be able to come back?" he asked, tears running down his checks.

"This cabin is your, you will need to come and take care of it from time to time," Bill answered.

"But, what if someone gets into it?" Myles asked concerned.

"No one will come here," one of the other mountain men said. "I have protected it. Most people won't even see it." The people of the mountain had the power of the mountain in them. They took care of the mountain and the mountain took care of them.

The walk to the bottom of the mountain was silent. Myles tried to take everything in, burn the images into his mind. The man had a car at Sara's. Myles had never been in a car before. He found the experience wild. The house they came to was bigger than any house he had been in. Bill showed him around the house and then to his room on the second floor.

"This will be yours as long as you are here," Bill said. "The bathroom is down the hall." He stood there thinking about it. "Follow me," he said. Bill led the boy to the bathroom. "This is what we have instead of the outhouse you are used to. This is what you do your business in and when you are done, push this handle and it will all go away. I don't have any streams for you to bathe in so you are going to have to use this," he added pointing to the shower. "It has hot water and cold water."

This was going to be stranger than Myles imagined. Instead of candles all he had to do was flip a thing on the wall and the light came on.

"We are going to need to get you some new clothes," Bill added. "You will want to fit in at school."

The clothes Myles had on had been made by his gram. She took the fibers from the cattail leaf and shredded them. She then made a soft brown fabric from them and then made the clothes from that.

"What's school?" Myles asked.

“That is where you go to learn,” Ben said. “All the kids go there.”

“You aren’t going to show me how to do things?”

“Of course I will, but school is where you will learn other things.”

It had been a long day with long emotions. It had been full of strange first events for Myles. He was in his new bed, staring at the ceiling. He could still hear the mountain, though it seemed fainter. He was having a hard time falling asleep with all the light streaming in through the window and all the strange sounds coming from outside. It was a noisy place to live.

Bill walked with him to the building he called school. Myles had never seen so many kids in one place in his life. They went through a set of double doors, down a hallway and into a room. He sat on a hard chair and waited while his cousin was talking to a woman. When he came out he introduced Myles to someone called a principal. She eyed him up and down, her one eyebrow raised. He figured it was his clothes. Bill had gotten him some new cloths, but he felt better in his old ones. It was going to take some getting used to.

Ms. Bier, the principal took him down a hallway to another room. She opened the door and ushered him in. The large room had a large group of kids in it.

“Ms. Jackson, this is Myles, he will be in your class,” Ms. Bier said.

“Welcome to our class Myles,” the teacher said. “Why don’t you sit over there,” she added pointing to an empty desk near the window.

Myles found it hard to pay attention to what the teacher was saying. The sun was shining outside and he could hear the whisper of the mountain in the back of his mind. The mountain always whispered to him. But here the whisper was hard to here.

A bell rang and Myles watched the other kids get up from their desk and go out the door. He followed, not sure what was going on. They went outside to a fenced in area with swings and strange metal things set in one place and a large grassy area beyond it.

Kids were off in little groups playing, Myles alone stood watching.

It didn’t take long for some of the kids to come up to the new boy and stare.

“So, you are the new boy,” a redhead boy declared. “You look funny.”

Myles looked at the taller boy, trying to figure out if he was being made fun of or not. It was important to not be made fun of. “Yes,” he said, his mountain drawl different from the kids around him.

“Where you from?” a brown haired boy asked.

“I grew up on the mountain,” Myles answered. He had been born on the mountain and lived all eleven years of his life there. Now he was off the mountain.

“You lived on the mountain?!” the brown hair boy asked, stepping back a little. The other kids stepped back too.

“Yes,” Myles said. He couldn’t figure out what was going on. “Why?”

“Only witches live on the mountain,” the brown haired boy answered. “Are you a witch?”

“He’s a boy, stupid, boys can’t be witches,” a girl said. She was a little taller than Myles and had blond hair. “So are you a wizard?”

Myles looked back at her, not sure what she was asking.

“You don’t say much do you,” the red haired boy commented.

Myles shook his head. When you lived up there, you didn’t just talk for the sake of talking. If you did you would miss what was going on around you.

“Well, I’m not afraid of you,” the girl said. “I’m Julie.”

“I’m not afraid of him either,” the brown haired boy stated. “My name is Mark.”

Myles wasn’t sure how to react. He couldn’t figure why anyone would be afraid of him. “My name’s Myles,” he said.

“So, Myles, are you a wizard?” Julie persisted.

“I don’t think so,” he answered. He didn’t know what a wizard was.

“He must be if he lived on the mountain,” Mark said. “Everybody knows the people on the mountain are different.”

“Why?” Myles asked.

“It’s just so,” Mark said stubbornly.

“So why are you down here?” Julie asked.

“My gram died,” Myles said in a quiet voice. “I came to live with a cousin.”

“My grandma died when I was little,” Julie said.

“Can you do magic?” the red head boy, who hadn’t said his name, asked.

“No, I don’t think so,” Myles answered. He was confused about what the boy was asking.

“Well, if he can’t do magic then he can’t be a wizard,” the boy concluded.

Myles wasn’t used to being in a classroom. His grandmother had taught him in the kitchen, outside, down by the stream or on the front porch. Each day had been different. Now he was sitting at a desk in a room with other kids. The day was warm and the windows were open. Myles could hear the birds outside and wanted to be out with them. He was thinking about what they were doing and not paying attention to what the teacher was saying.

A bird flew in through the open window, flew around the room once and landed on Myles desk. It looked up at him expectantly, its head cocked to one side. Myles slowly brought his hand up, one finger extended. The little bird hooped onto his finger and chirped. Myles listened closely, unaware that everyone in the room was now watching. The bird chirped some more and Myles nodded his head. Satisfied, the bird flew out the window.

“I’ve never seen anything like that,” Ms. Jackson said.

“I told you he was a wizard,” Mark declared.

“Now, Mark there are no such things as wizards,” Ms. Jackson admonished, but her eyes never left Myles.

“What did it say?” Julie asked.

“What did who say?” Myles asked. He was aware he had done something weird, but wasn’t sure what it was.

“The bird stupid,” Julie said.

“He asked if I was going to be outside later,” Myles stated. Hadn’t she heard the bird?

“Now Myles, birds don’t talk,” Ms. Jackson said.

“Sure they do, all the time,” Myles replied.

“I don’t want to hear any more about it,” she said in a stern voice. “Now, let’s get back to our lesson.”

Myles was confused, everyone could heard the birds talk back home. That was why you sat quiet; there was so much conversation going on. Maybe because these people lived in town they just didn’t understand.

“Hey Witch Boy,” Myles heard the yell behind him. “Yeah, Witch Boy I’m talking to you.” Myles turned and saw the red headed boy and a couple of his friends coming towards him.

“What?” he said a little frightened, but he wasn’t sure why.

“We don’t want you in our school!” the red head yelled. “Why don’t you go back to the mountain where you belong?”

“I-I live in town now,” Myles said.

“Well, maybe we need to encourage you to go back!” The three boys ran towards Myles. Myles took one look at the three larger boys coming at him, turned and ran.

He didn’t know the town and it didn’t take long for him to end up at the edge of it. The boys were almost on him. All he knew was he needed to get away. He had to get away. Behind him he heard yelling, confusion. He turned and saw a flock of crows attacking the boys, dive bombing them and pecking them with their beaks.

“Make them stop, make them stop,” one of the boys yelled. He was waving his hands fanatically over his head trying to keep the birds away.

Myles watched as the birds continued their attack, the boys were running trying to get away. His thoughts were to not do anything, but he was afraid the crows would get hurt, he sent a thought to the birds telling them he was okay, not to hurt the boys.

The next day word about the bird attack had spread, the kids seemed to stay back from Myles. He sat by himself at recess. He didn’t want to be in town, he wanted to go back to the mountain where things were normal.

“Did you make the birds attack Ryan and his friends?” Julie asked, walking up to him.

“No, the birds just knew they were going to hurt me,” Myles mumbled. He didn’t know things were this different in town.

“How did they know? Are you a witch?” she asked.

“No and I’m not a wizard either,” Myles cried out.

“It’s okay, Myles,” Julie soothed. The effect on Myles was immediate. “I was just asking,” she said with disappointment. “I was hoping . . . Never mind.”

“No, what?” Myles asked. He could tell something was on her mind, he could almost feel he knew what it was.

“Do you ever hear a whisper in your head?” she asked.

Myles thought for a moment before answering. He studied her face, but he couldn’t see any sign that she was making fun of him. “I hear the mountain,” he answered.

“Does it feel like the soft sound the wind makes in the trees?” she asked.

“I guess I never thought of it like that, but yes. How did you know?”

“I hear it too,” she said in a small voice. “So does Mark.”

“You mean you two are the only ones?” Myles asked. Where he came from everyone heard the mountain.

“Yes, but don’t say anything in front of Ryan or Ms. Jackson, they’ll think you’re nuts. After the bird thing in class yesterday and then the birds attacking Ryan, well, I just wondered, I mean, I, oh, I was hoping you heard the whisper too. What is it?”

“It’s the mountain,” Myles said. “But why can’t Ryan or Ms. Jackson hear it?”

“I think it is because they are not from the mountain. My dad can’t hear it either, but my mom came from the mountain and she can, but she wouldn’t answer any of my questions.”

Myles wondered why Julie’s mom wouldn’t tell her, he even wondered why her mom had left the mountain.

“Wait, does that mean Mark has a parent from the mountain?”

“His dad. What is the mountain trying to say, I can never understand it?”

“He is telling us what is going on all around and that he’s there.” Myles thought for a moment about it. Then it hit him. “If you can hear the mountain, can you do other things?”

“Well, not really, I mean, well, I can make people calm down when they are upset. But that is about all. Mark can find water in the ground and make it come up a little.”

“Wow, a calmer and a waterer, they’re rare,” Myles expressed wide eyed. “People in the mountain would give you gifts for your help.”

“What do you mean?” Julie asked.

“Have you ever made a dog stop barking?” she nodded. “There are animals in the mountain that like to cause a trouble. A calmer can make them behave. And Mark is able to pull enough water up to water things when the weather is dry. He could keep things from getting to dry and catching fire.”

“Wow now there are the three of us,” Julie said. “Maybe if we stick together the others won’t pick on us. One time Ryan was picking on a kid and Mark made water come up and Ryan sank to his kneecaps in the mud. It was funny, but boy was Ryan freaked out.”

Myles stared at the ceiling that night. It had been a good day after all. He now know people from the mountain were different than people in the valley. He also knew he wasn’t alone; maybe things would work out after all. He couldn’t wait to tell Sara what he had learned. Just as sleep was taking him, he wondered if his cousin heard the mountain.