



THE LEGEND OF MORWAKA

By Sharon Plumb

Tondoor held his wings in tight as he raced the other hatchlings toward the Story Place. He might be small, but he wasn't slow! If he lowered his head he could flit between their tails. Fire on the left, Sky on the right, gap between two Leafs straight ahead.

With his head down, he didn't see the minder's signal to stop. He plunged out of the group and tripped over a large set of toe-claws. Guffaws erupted behind him as he sprawled on his belly on the grass.

In front of him was the shiniest Gold dragon he had ever seen. She was an apprentice, only a couple of years bigger than he was. Even as he felt his eyes cool to embarrassed yellow, hers went wide with laughing blue surprise.

Minder Daroop wiggled her toe-claws out from under his body. She snapped her green jaws around his neck and lifted him to his feet with her teeth. "Get into your place," she growled.

The other hatchlings had already sorted themselves into colors: Leafs, Fires, Bloods, Skies, Bones, and the small group of Golds, none of whom were remotely as shiny as the apprentice dragon standing behind him. He stole another look at her over his shoulder.

"Go!" Minder Daroop barked.

He took a step, then stopped. "Where?"

"With your...oh," said Minder Daroop.

He didn't have a group. He was the only Snow. He hadn't noticed so much when his nest mates were scattered every which way, but now it was glaringly obvious. The hatchlings looked around and tittered.

The Gold apprentice nudged him with her wing. "There's your spot, next to the Golds." She sounded kind, not irritated like the minders.

Tondoor settled himself on the grass beside his Gold nest mate and watched Minder Daroop survey the hatchlings with slitted eyes until the only sound was the wind.

"Kalooka is our storytelling apprentice," she said. "She has learned one of the stories of our people and has come to tell it to you."

The young Gold dragon folded her hands and bowed her head in the posture of greeting while the hatchlings clapped their tails together like the minders had taught them. Tondoor whacked the tail beside him as energetically as he could, but the Gold it belonged to pulled his aside so it didn't connect.

Tondoor made himself small and looked back at Kalooka. He repeated her name under his breath. Maybe she would be his friend.

"I am going to tell you the first part of the Legend of Morwaka," Kalooka said. Her eyes turned a faraway blue.

Everything about her was beautiful. He would stay still for a whole afternoon to watch her and listen to that lilting voice.

Kalooka lifted her head and began.

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Morwaka, the Great Star Dragon, came from the heavens and formed the dragon-people from the clouds of the sky and the rocks of the hills. He fanned spirits into their bodies with the beating of his wings. He burned speech onto their tongues with the fire of his breath. Then he devised a quest, that he might know what manner of creature he had made.

Morwaka looked upon the six dragons, and said to them, "Fly out across this world that I have given you, and bring back to me, each one of you, the greatest treasure you find." And the dragons went forth.

Sky flew over the plains and saw multitudes of beasts grazing the grasslands. She was hungry, so she seized a shaggy beast in her claws.

Fire flew into the hills and felt rich veins of yellow metal pulsing through the rocks. It was shiny, so she scratched some out with her sharp claws.

Leaf flew over the forests and sniffed the dampness of wood and moss. The forest was full of treasures, so she wove a basket to carry them.

Gold flew along the coast and saw the sand changing shape beneath the pounding waves. She shaped some sand into a pile, and carried it off in a curly seashell.

Blood flew over the sea until her wings gave out, and would have drowned if she hadn't seen the island. After she was rested, she picked up a solid rock in her claws.

Bone flew over water and land but in all the world, she saw no treasure great enough.

Now Morwaka was tired from the work of creating the dragons, so he lay down to rest in the Bountiful Land at the southern end of the world. While he was sleeping, Bone came across him. When she saw the colors glittering in every star of his body, desire burned in her heart and the quest vanished from her mind. She thought only of how she must have one of those stars for herself. Quickly, she plucked the smallest star from the Great Dragon's littlest toe-claw. Then she flew away.



Kalooka folded her wings and bowed in the posture of completion. Tondoor let out the breath he was holding. Kalooka's scales sparkled like a thousand suns.

Minder Daroop nodded at Kalooka. "Thank you. That was well told." She fluttered her Leaf wings at the grassy field behind the hatchlings. The collection of colored scales on her necklace clinked. "Storytime is over. Run along and play."

Tondoor stretched up his arm. "Can't we have more story now?"

Hoodon was already up. He swatted Tondoor with his blue Sky tail. "We've been sitting too long already."

Kalooka's mentor, a large Gold with a crooked horn, peered down. "Kalooka is still learning to tell the story. She will invite you back when she knows the next part."

Tondoor followed the other hatchlings to the field. Images from the story swirled in his mind. He saw great, starry Morwaka forming the dragon-people from clouds and rocks, molding them like mud in his talons. He imagined six colored dragons, just like the ones he lived with, fly out in search of treasures he could only imagine—except for the shaggy beasts on the Plains. There were lots of those here, and they were delicious. He shivered at the very idea of Bone stealing a star from the Great Dragon himself! He would never be that bold. What would the great Morwaka do to her when he found out?

But a question simmered beneath all the images, and when it finally bubbled through, it cast a pale shadow over all the rest. When the Great Dragon Morwaka created the first dragons—Sky, Fire, Leaf, Gold, Blood and Bone—why had he not created a Snow?

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Bone fled from the Great Dragon, clutching the smallest star from his littlest toe-claw. She was filled with fear lest he see the star in her hand and fly into a rage and strike her dead. I will hide the star, she thought, and find another treasure. I will fetch the star again when the Great Dragon has returned to the sky.

But the other dragons saw the star's light bobbing where Bone flew, and each went closer to find out what it meant. When they reached Bone, they saw the star she carried. They were filled with jealousy, for they perceived that next to the beauty of the star, their own treasures were like mud. When Bone told them where she got the star, they too were filled with fear. Yet desire for the star burned in their hearts, and crowded out the fear of Morwaka. As they settled in the wide treetops of the Bountiful Land to determine what to do, each schemed to have the star for herself.

"I will hide the star for you in the mountains," offered Fire. "There are many crevices in the rocks, and the Great Dragon will not be able to find it."

Immediately the star flashed the orange of deceit. The dragons realized the star was warning them that Fire planned to bury it in a place only she would know. Fire quickly added that Bone should come with her to see where she hid the star. But the star flashed yellow and betrayed that she spoke only out of shame, and would not allow Bone to see.

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"Oh, I understand," Tondoor whispered. The star's colors were the same as the colors in the dragons' eyes. Hoodon had snarled at him with angry red eyes just this morning when Tondoor tried to move in front of the Skies in the line-up. Since he was the only Snow, what difference would it make if he was in the middle instead of the back? He might have stood up to Hoodon, except that Minder Daroop warned him not to with her yellow-eyed squint.

Now Hoodon was holding his blue wings above his shoulders on purpose, just so Tondoor wouldn't be able to see Kalooka. He shuffled to the side. Minder Daroop turned her head at the noise, but he sat like a rock until she looked away again.

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When the dragons saw the star changing color at Fire's words, they realized it had the power to see into their hearts, so whoever held it would rule over them all.

Sky said, "We should take turns with the star, and share its power equally. I will take it for six days. Then Leaf shall have it for six days, then Bone, and so on." But the stone flashed orange once again, and they all knew that once Sky had the star, she would never give it up.

Leaf said, "Let us ask the Great Dragon to make sure that each of us passes on the star when our time is done." This time the star flashed violet with triumph, and they knew that it longed to return to Morwaka, and if they gave it back, they would never hold it again.

Gold said, "This star is pitting us one against the other, and will destroy us if we do not get rid of it." The star flashed green with compassion, for Gold spoke wisely, even though in her heart she desired the star as much as the others.

Then Blood realized she must act quickly or lose her chance to own the star. She said to Bone, "The star agrees with Gold. Come with me, and I will show you where to cast it into the deepest part of the sea, while the others wait here for Morwaka." But the star flashed orange once again, for Blood sought to drown Bone in the sea and take the star for herself.

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Tondoor cried out with the other hatchlings. Kill her own sister? Still, he wondered what he would do. If he had Morwaka's star, everyone would invite him to play, and crowd around him at night when the minders pointed out the star creatures, and offer him bits of their food instead of stealing his. He gulped. And steal the star when he wasn't looking, and hide it from him, and "forget" to give it back, and maybe kill him for it. Poor Bone, he thought. What will she do?

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Bone saw that the other dragons would not rest until they had stolen her treasure. "I will go alone," she said, "and return the star to Morwaka." And she leapt into the sky.

But the other dragons saw the star flashing orange through her hand-claws. They dropped their treasures and flew at Bone. The star became like shed blood, and blazed so brightly that the sky turned red in all six corners of the world. The battle was fierce and terrible, in tooth and claw and flame, and the hot breath of the dragons scorched the Bountiful Land beneath them. The beasts of the ground and the birds of the air fled in great droves, and nothing lives in that wasteland to this day.

The dragons pursued Bone over all six corners of the world. She fought valiantly, but her injuries were numerous and deep. Wherever her blood dripped onto the ground, there sprang up the plant that has the red fire root, which the dragons know to this day.

Finally, Bone's spirit left her and she fell into the dark waters of the Bog. The star became as black as night, and dropped from her hand.

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Kalooka assumed the posture of completion, and her Gold mentor murmured approvingly. The hatchlings stirred, images of the battle in the sky still spinning before their eyes.

"Let's go play battle!" shouted Vroon, bouncing on his wide Blood feet.

"I want to be Fire!" shouted Gornfla, flapping her stubby orange wings.

The rest of the Blood and Fire hatchlings cried out to join the game, then the other colors as well.

Tondoor watched them uncertainly. To him, the battle had been horrifying: panicking beasts and raging fires, and the killing of the dragons' own sister! Still, the excitement of the other hatchlings was contagious, and he did want to play. Besides, their hatchling teeth weren't strong enough to pierce scales, and their claws were still short. "I'll be Gold," he shouted, abandoning himself to the excitement of the group.

Hoodon snapped at Tondoor's white snout with his blue one. "You can't be in the battle," he scoffed. "You aren't even in the story."

Before Tondoor could retort with, "I'll be Morwaka then," he felt hand-claws on his shoulder. In front of him, Hoodon's jaw dropped. The claws belonged to Kalooka.

"Look over there, Tondoor," she said, waving her wing toward the vast grassland that spread to the southeast. "Do you know that if you flew to the end of the Plains, you would come to the Wasteland of the story?"

Tondoor shook his head. He didn't know if he could trust his voice to make proper words in her presence. He dared to glance up at her. She was gazing into the distance as if she could see the Wasteland beyond the flat, green horizon.

Hoodon's mouth was still hanging open. Tondoor felt a smug violet creep into his own eyes.

Vroon tugged on Hoodon's arm. "Come play," he whispered. Hoodon let Vroon lead him away, still looking back over his shoulder.

Tondoor turned his attention back to Kalooka. "What is the wasteland like?" he managed to squeak.

"Vast. Hot.. Full of sand and rocks and wind. The few beasts that live there stay under the rocks so they don't get roasted by the sun." She cocked her head. "That's probably how they survived the battle for the star."

Tondoor felt the sun warming, but not roasting, his scales. Kalooka turned around, and he skittered around beside her. Now he could see the familiar grass and trees of The Nest, where they all lived, the lake sparkling beyond, and the rocky hills on the other side.

"Beyond those hills," Kalooka said, "lie the mountains, also called the Rocks. Beyond them lie the Bog, where Bone died, then the Coast, and last, beyond the sea, the Rainy Island." Once again, her eyes misted over as if she could see them as she spoke.

"Are there dragons in all of those places?" asked Tondoor. His voice was working properly now.

"They do," said Kalooka. "Once in a very long while, some of them come here, or our dragons go there."

"I wish I could go."

Kalooka looked down at him. Her eyes were a soft, kind blue, and he felt his turn blue in response. "The world is a big place, Tondoor, much bigger than the Nest. Who knows what you will do, and see, when you grow up?"

"Kalooka! Time to go." Her mentor flicked her tail impatiently.

"Coming, Dorla," Kalooka called. She patted Tondoor's horns, then flew away.

Tondoor watched the two Golds soar above the trees. His horns tingled where Kalooka had touched them. Behind him, the other hatchlings shrieked in their battle game, but somehow he didn't mind any more that he wasn't playing. He had never thought about what he would do when he grew up. He knew that Leaf's looked after hatchlings, and Golds told stories, and when he tore his wing, it was a Bone that put something on it to help it heal. He wished he'd asked Kalooka if she knew what Snows were supposed to do. Maybe they went exploring. He fixed his eyes on the hills and imagined he could see beyond them like Kalooka.

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The other dragons dove into the Bog after Bone and the star. They made much splashing, but could not find the place where the star sank. As Blood rose from the depths, she found her sister Bone's body sinking into the water, and bore it on her back to the surface. The dragons stood on an island in the Bog, gazing at the dead body of their sister Bone.

Suddenly the Great Dragon Morwaka appeared in a cascade of colored lights. "Bring me your treasures," he boomed.

Trembling, the dragons did as Morwaka commanded. Sky found the broken body of her shaggy beast, Fire her muddy flakes of copper, Leaf her torn basket, and Gold her cracked seashell. Blood left his rock on the ground, and instead laid Bone's dead body at Morwaka's feet.

Morwaka studied the treasures they placed before him. "Where is Bone's treasure?"

The dragons were too afraid to answer.

Morwaka roared, and the ground shook. "Did not Bone steal the smallest star from my littlest toe-claw?" he thundered. "Did you not fight her for it, and kill her? Is my star not now lost in the depths of the bog?"

The dragons saw that they could not hide their deeds from the Great Dragon. Their scales rattled with fear, and they waited for Morwaka to strike them dead.

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But Morwaka couldn't have killed the dragons, Tondoor thought, or he and all the others wouldn't be here. He strained forward eagerly. Maybe now Morwaka would create a Snow dragon, to replace the dead Bone.

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Morwaka did not strike them, but when he spoke again, black storm clouds filled the sky. "I gave you a quest that I might determine what manner of creature I created. The quest has fulfilled its purpose, for I see clearly now what you are." Morwaka looked again at the treasures the dragons had brought him. His eyes lingered long on Bone's lifeless body, and the storm clouds rumbled and flashed.

Morwaka spoke again, and bolts of lightning rocked the ground around them. "Since you have so desired the smallest star from my littlest toe-claw, I make it yours. Henceforth the colors of my star shall live in the eyes of every dragon. But so that you do not think yourself glorious, know that the colors of your eyes shall reflect the colors of your hearts, and none shall be able to hide her intentions."

The dragons' eyes turned yellow with fear, and they saw that it was so.

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The hatchlings turned to look into each other's eyes. Tondoor tried to turn his yellow. Now he understood why it was so hard to change his eye color on purpose—because first he had to change his feelings. He turned his eyes, which felt an eager blue, back to Kalooka.

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Morwaka looked around at the six corners of the world. He spoke again, and the leaves of the trees flamed orange like the sun, and dropped to the ground. "Since you have used your fiery breath to destroy the Bountiful Land where beasts and birds once flourished, I quench the fire within you. It shall flare up again only when you eat the plants with the red fire roots, which sprang up wherever you spilled the blood of your sister Bone. But so that you do not use them overmuch and destroy more of the world I have given you, the taste of those plants shall be like ashes in your throat and cinders in your bellies."

The dragons felt their fires grow cold, and knew that it was so.

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Tondoor knew about fire root. He'd heard whispered rumors that they would get to eat it at the end of their third year, when they graduated and became adults. He wondered if Kalooka would have to eat fire root when she finished learning her story, and if the ashes and cinders would coarsen her musical voice. If he had to choose a treasure, he thought, he would choose stories.

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Morwaka spoke again, and hailstones pounded out of the grey sky. "You have been foolish, for you have destroyed your treasures in striving after that which was not yours."

The dragons hung their heads, for they knew that Morwaka spoke the truth.

"But you have also shown a sort of wisdom," continued Morwaka, "for you have found many treasures on this world I have given you, not least your sister Bone."

The dragons looked at Morwaka through the hail and dared to hope.

Morwaka spoke more softly, and the hail turned to rain. "Since you have been so quick to battle against your sister Bone, it may come to pass that you will wage war until dragons disappear from the world. So, as your sister fell into the depths of the bog and as you pulled her out again, I give you the power to drop into the water any beast or bird, and pull out a living dragon in its place. But so that you do not forget that life comes from me, and not from you, the dragons you pull from the water shall be the color of ash."

The dragons looked at their reflections in the puddles, and hoped that it was so.

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Kalooka assumed the posture of completion. Her mentor hopped to her side, and they flew away together without stopping to talk. While the other hatchlings went to play, Tondoor watched the Golds circle the Nest, their bodies glittering against the deep blue sky. They angled down and disappeared behind the bank that led down to the lake.

An Ash dragon trudged out of the trees toward them. She was carrying her basket, which Tondoor had recently discovered held the hatchlings' morning turds. It had never occurred to him to wonder why the Teaching Place always clean when they returned there for their story. It had also never occurred to him to wonder why there were Ashes at all, those almost invisible dragons that did the jobs no one else wanted to do. Now he knew: the other dragons had pulled them out of a puddle to do that work for them.

He caught his breath. What if a Snow was just a young Ash? What if that was why he was so small? What if his vague memory of emerging from his egg was really a memory of being pulled from the water? He rubbed a patch of dirt off his flank. What a horrible thought! If he was really an Ash, it would explain why the others treated him as if he were invisible. Except for Kalooka. She made it sound like he might do something important. Would she say those things, if he was an Ash?

He watched the Ash fly over the lake with her basket and dump out its contents. Next time I see her, he told himself, I will thank her for cleaning up our turds.

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The Great Dragon flapped his wings. The clouds vanished, and the sun sent down its warm orange rays and dried up the water. Then Morwaka spoke to each of the dragons.

To Sky he said, "I give you long wings for soaring, and keen eyes for herding beasts. But so that you shall not roam ceaselessly like the wind, I give you the heart of a whirlwind, which circles about its home."

To Fire he said, "I give you short wings for darting among the jutting mountain crags, and hot breath for forging metals. But so that you shall not bury yourself in baubles and settle yourself like a boulder, I give you blood that thrums to the treasure beyond the next peak."

To Leaf he said, "I give you dexterous claws for creating, and clever eyes for seeing forms where none exist. But so that you shall not forget the duties of the day, I give you ears tuned to the cries of your hatchlings."

To Gold he said, "I give you wide eyes for watching, and speech made of hues and riddles. But so that you shall not think yourself brighter than the sun, I give you a deep heart for truth."

To Blood he said, "I give you strength of body and length of claw. But so that you shall not use your might for tyranny, I give you twin loves of duty and solitude."

To lifeless Bone he said, "To those who will come in your likeness, I give keen ears to hear cries of distress, and flared nostrils to smell the poisons that harm and heal the flesh. But

so that they will not drown in compassion, I give them sturdy hearts to inflict the saving wounds.”

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The hatchlings jumped up and examined each other to see if they had the gifts Morwaka had bestowed. Tondoor sat silent in his lonely whiteness while the minders made the youngsters sit back down and listen to the rest of the story.

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Morwaka took the dragons and showed them the five corners of the world that had not been laid waste by their battle. “I give you these places to live: to Sky, the vast Plains where the shaggy beasts roam; to Fire, the Mountains where metals flow through rocks; to Leaf, the tangled Bog where plants breathe water as air; to Gold, the gentle Coast where sand shifts beneath pounding waves; and to Blood, the rainy Island where you can rest your wings.

“The sixth corner of the world, which you have destroyed by your fighting, shall remain a wasteland, to remind you of the time you fought and killed your sister Bone. Those who venture there bring the curse of Bone’s death upon themselves.”

Then Morwaka said to the dragons: “Fly into the places I have given you. My colors shall take shape within you, and each of you shall lay eggs and produce offspring, both female and male, in all the colors of the people. Be wise in your use of my treasures, so that your people will live long in the land.”

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Minder Daroop turned green eyes on the hatchlings. Tondoor knew it meant she cared about them, but he wasn’t used to seeing that color against her green scales. Except for the ring of white around her green irises, her eyes would have disappeared. Still, it was better than the irritated red she usually wore.

“Remember Morwaka’s words, hatchlings,” intoned Minder Daroop in her most serious voice. “Soon you will be grown and will need to exercise wisdom. Now go and play.” Her eyes turned red again. “And I don’t want any injuries this time.”

The hatchlings streamed toward the playing field, full of ideas for games where they could use their newly discovered traits. Kalooka flew off with her mentor. Tondoor stayed where he was and stared at the ground. Nobody noticed him, not even the minders.

All the colors of the people did not include Snow. He was not one of the people. Maybe Kalooka had told him about the cursed wasteland because that was the place for him. He could go there and live under a rock. He felt as if he already did.

When story time came again, he almost didn't go. But a minder found him under a tree and dragged him out by one wing to his place at the end of the line. In the Story Place, he crouched with his head down, staring at the dirt, while Kalooka resumed the story.

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Morwaka spoke one last time, saying, "Since you did not honor me when I flew among you, but stole from me and tried to hide, I will no longer fly among you. But I will watch you with my glowing Eye, and I will send to live among you Snow dragons, with scales the color of my Eye..

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Tondoor jerked up his head.

Kalooka stood beside him. Her eyes shone with triumphant violet. "Stand up, Tondoor," she said.

Tondoor got to his feet, and Kalooka led him to the front of the Story Place. Her gold scales glistened in the orange sunlight, and she took Tondoor's hand-claws in hers, and her eyes rested on him as she spoke.

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"The Snows shall be small in body but large in spirit. I, the Great Dragon Morwaka, shall speak to them in dreams when I choose to speak, and they shall speak to you with my voice. Honor them, and they shall not fail to hear me."

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Kalooka swept her wings open and spread her arms wide. Tondoor, standing in front of her, did the same.

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Then the Great Dragon Morwaka fanned his shining wings and rose into the heavens, where he flies to this day beyond the star-creatures of the sky. The dragons spread across the five living corners of the world, and Snow dragons arose among them. They multiplied in all the colors of the people, as the Great Morwaka had decreed.

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Tondoor saw the other hatchlings staring at him, and he felt a glow spread from his heart out to the whole gathering. At last he knew who he was and why he was here—and he could

scarcely believe that the Great Dragon Morwaka himself might someday speak to him—Tondoor—in a dream!

Even when the other dragons jostled him, and mocked, “Speak to us for the Great Morwaka, oh Great Seer Tondoor,” the glow remained. He felt his own eyes shine violet like Kalooka’s, and he knew, more truly than he had ever known anything, that he would listen with all of his heart and love her until his very last breath.

THE END

Or is it only the beginning? If you haven’t read *Kraamlok*, Tondoor’s (and Kalooka’s) big adventure, you can find it at <http://mybook.to/Kraamlok> (Amazon – print and Kindle formats) or <https://ourlittlebookshop.bigcartel.com> (paperback only).



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