

Chapter Five

The Young Man could tell that wherever the Old Man was going, he wanted to go there alone. The Young Man thought that the Old Man was going to mend something for someone. He was curious as to how the Old Man provided for himself. Young Man thought that if the Old Man was, indeed, good at mending, that he would hire him for his own mending needs. So the Young Man set off to follow the Old Man.

Following the Old Man would not be difficult. If the Old Man could not hear the Young Man approaching when he was washing his clothes, certainly he would not hear him now. If the Old Man did hear him, he would be so slow to turn around that the Young Man could easily hide behind a bush.

After going some distance, the Old Man turned down a narrow path through the forest. Here it would be difficult for the Young Man to follow. But he did not have to follow long. Soon there was a clearing up ahead. The Old Man sat down on a fallen tree and seemed to close his eyes. Young Man hid behind some bushes where he could sit more comfortably to await what would happen.

“What could the Old Man mend here?” the Young Man thought. “Curious that he doesn’t have any mending instruments with him.”

Young Man, waiting for a long time, started to become impatient. The Old Man seemed to have fallen asleep.

Then he heard the voice of a little girl. Soon he could hear people rustling through the path towards the clearing. Young Man swung around to another bush where he would not be visible to the Old Man or anyone coming down the path. On the path, a man passed by carrying a little girl, followed by a woman. Young Man assumed that they were the little girl’s parents. As they entered the clearing, Young Man could see that the little girl had the twisting disease in her legs. This is a common disease that crippled one’s legs so that the person could not walk.

The Old Man slowly lifted his head. He arose, took the child out of the father’s arms, and sat her on the fallen tree. The Old Man took the mother and father by the arms and led them to the edge of the clearing. There he spoke a few words to them. He then went over by the little girl. Young Man did not notice earlier, but the woman was wiping her eyes as if she was crying. The man put his arms around the woman, embracing her, to comfort her.

The Old Man came up to the little girl and squatted down before her. Young Man could see that the Old Man had that same compassionate smile on his face. Old Man shifted his one knee to the ground to better balance himself, and took the little girl’s hand in his. Then he closed his eyes as he did when he was sitting on the fallen tree.

For many moments all was completely quiet. There was no sound of rustling leaves, no animals chirping; all the Young Man could hear was the pounding of his heart and the blood rushing through his temples.

Then, in what seemed like an immeasurable amount of time, almost, it seemed to Young Man, as if time had stopped, the Old Man rose up pulling the little girl to her feet and then letting go of her hands.

“Mama!” the Little Girl shrieked. The man and woman both turned towards the Little Girl, their faces frozen in amazement. The Little Girl took two shaky steps towards her mother and father.

“Little Girl,” cried the mother. The mother ran up to the Little Girl, threw her arms around her and started sobbing. The father, by now also crying, threw his arms around the both of them. The three held on to each other and cried. The Old Man seemed to be wiping tears from his eyes. Young Man noticed that his own chin trembled slightly.

After a few moments, the father got up and extended his hand to the Old Man. The Old Man gave the father a hug. The mother came up to the Old Man and clutched her hands in front of her, sobbing so much that she could not talk. The Old Man gave her a hug. Then the Old Man turned to the Little Girl who took a few steps towards him. Old Man bent over and picked her up high in the air before giving her a hug.