



The Enigmatic Moon's Heroic Rescue



Mystic Moon wandered the Magaliesberg hills for many days and many months. In this time, he had seen no other wolves. He had come across some lions but kept his distance. Now and again they growled at him from a distance as he moved between the age-old brown rocks and the vegetation - bushes, grass, wild flowers. At other times, careful to stay downwind, he came close to the lions, just watching them and getting to

know the other animals in the area. He loved climbing to the crest in the afternoon light.

Up there, he could feel the cooling air, sometimes gusting and sometimes gentle. He could see far into the distance $\frac{3}{4}$ the grasslands

far away and here and there a human dwelling. Sometimes when the wind pushed hard, it caused tears in his eyes. But he was at peace here, finding a stillness in himself.

One day he noticed two young lions playing on the hillside, moving higher and higher up in the folds between the crag. His eyes drifted to some eagles circling a few miles west. He also saw a few grey clouds drifting in and wondered if rain would come. When he turned back to look at the cubs, they were perched on a narrow ledge. Below them, the valley fell away, hundreds of feet. He could see no adult lions nearby.



Before the cubs the small stone walkway continued for a bit; then it ended in a sheer rock-face. Above them, the rocks perched precariously. He watched as one of them tried to walk backwards, but its

paws fumbled on loose stones and the young lion froze. One jump away was a flat rock that again opened up to the bushes on the incline. Mystic Moon bounded down along a path, getting close to the pair. "Hey kids," he said.

The cubs dared not look up. He heard one call out: "Hey, hello where are you, who are you?" .

Then the other's voice trembled: "P..p..please help us!".

The wolf said: "I am Mystic Moon. Don't look up. Just stay calm. I am coming to help."

Just then Mystic Moon heard a loud growl. He looked down. It was the lion he knew as Matseng. A few steps behind him was Cleo, a lioness that the wolf had seen a few times with Matseng and his brother Zukhara. "Keep away from them," Matseng roared again. "Yes you, wolf!" In the silence of the mountain, it was like thunder in the wolf's ears.



Mystic Moon looked at them. Normally he feared lions, especially since they hunted in a pack; but his concern for the cubs made him stand his ground. He walked onto a small rock nearer the edge: "Matseng, I come in peace." he said. "We have had our differences. I know you are fussy about who comes into your hunting grounds. But this is no time for that. Can't you see your little ones are in trouble."

Matseng roared again.



But Cleo intervened, moving to stand in front of Matseng and looking into the big lion's face. Mystic Moon waited patiently. He could feel the wind building up. One of the cubs, the darker brown one with a some black hairs on the ridge of the back, slipped and small pieces of stone went raining down and landed on a small outcrop halfway down. Mystic Moon couldn't hear what Cleo was saying to Matseng. Now and again Matseng let off a soft growl that petered out.

Mystic Moon called out: "You will never reach them in time. Let me help them". One of the cubs whimpered and a blast of wind whistled through the grass and rocks.

"Fine," Matseng said, looking up at Moon and at the cubs. "Just this once. Because you are up there. And we have nothing to lose by letting you help them." Cleo stepped to the side and joined Matseng in looking up at the brown rocks and the three animals up there. Matseng's ears were up and directed slightly forward; his tail pointed up. He leaned forward on his forelegs. It struck Mystic Moon that Matseng was as worried as Cleo, although he tried to hide it.

Mystic Moon jumped down to a spot in front of the cubs. He grabbed one at the scruff of the neck. Then, after measuring the distance with his eyes, leapt across the crevice to a flat rock across. He put the one youngster down and went back for the other one.



When both cubs were on the other side, the wolf led them and said. "Come, follow me. I know an easy way down." He first climbed up higher to pass a spring before making a turn to a path on the other side of the gully and its sticky mud. The cubs followed him. "I am Mystic Moon, a wolf," he said as he

waited along the path for the cubs to catch up. "My mother gave me that name because the moon had a strange reddish colour the night I was born".

"Thank you, we were so scared," said the tawny cub. "I wasn't," said the brown youngster with sprinkles of black hair on the back of his neck. Mystic Moon replied: "If you say so, but it is no shame to feel scared," He noticed the young lion lifting himself higher on his forelegs and raising his tail. "Truly, I wasn't. By the way, my name is Little Warrior," the cub said.

Moon shepherded the cubs down the pathway. Halfway down, Moon stopped and the cubs brushed past him on the path before also coming to a stop. Moon could see Matseng pacing slowly down below. Cleo was resting on her forepaws on a small mound. But she kept her eyes focused on the hillside.

Mystic Moon called out, "Here they are, Matseng and Cleo!" He turned and made his way back up the mountain.

He heard Cleo roar. It sounded like a friendly roar. He heard the light brown cub call out: "Thank you for helping us, mister Wolf".

He turned to glance back briefly, nodding his head. Then he continued to climb. The wind had blown many more clouds over this part of the Magaliesberg mountains; they hung low. It was going to rain for sure. Mystic Moon picked his way from stone to stone and between the bushes, heading towards his cosy den higher up.



