

SUNSHINE COUNTRY

By Kristina Roy



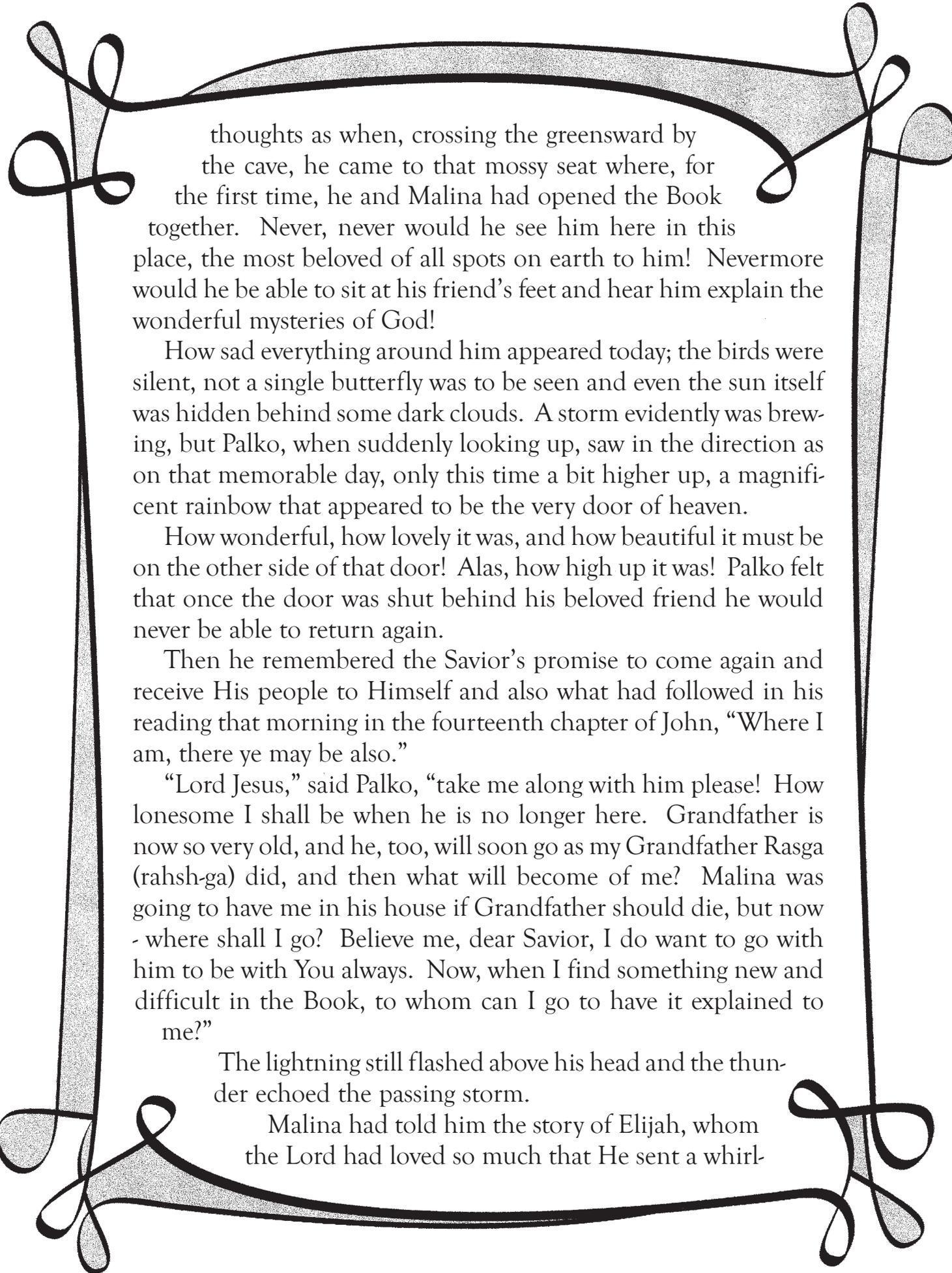
Chapter 18 Palko Finds His Father

It was the second Saturday after Palko had come to take care of his beloved friend. The chapel house was sheltering many guests in addition to Palko and all the regular members of the household. There was the priest's sister who had come; then there was the young priest who had come to take Malina's (mal-in-ah) place in the church for the time being.

"Palko, as I am not so lonely as I was, it is but right that you should go and get a little mountain air into your lungs and also bring happiness to your loved ones in your grandfather's house," said the priest. "Come back to me on Monday and give my love to all the dear friends both at the forest guard's house and at your own home.

"Also, please give my best regards to the beautiful mountains, which my eyes shall never see again, and if you do get a chance to go up to the Sunshine Valley, just look again for that door to heaven, which we once saw, and remember that I shall soon pass through its gates to where, beyond the clouds, lies our true Sunshine Country."

Before going to either house, Palko climbed to the Sunshine Valley. Many, indeed, were his



thoughts as when, crossing the greensward by the cave, he came to that mossy seat where, for the first time, he and Malina had opened the Book together. Never, never would he see him here in this place, the most beloved of all spots on earth to him! Nevermore would he be able to sit at his friend's feet and hear him explain the wonderful mysteries of God!

How sad everything around him appeared today; the birds were silent, not a single butterfly was to be seen and even the sun itself was hidden behind some dark clouds. A storm evidently was brewing, but Palko, when suddenly looking up, saw in the direction as on that memorable day, only this time a bit higher up, a magnificent rainbow that appeared to be the very door of heaven.

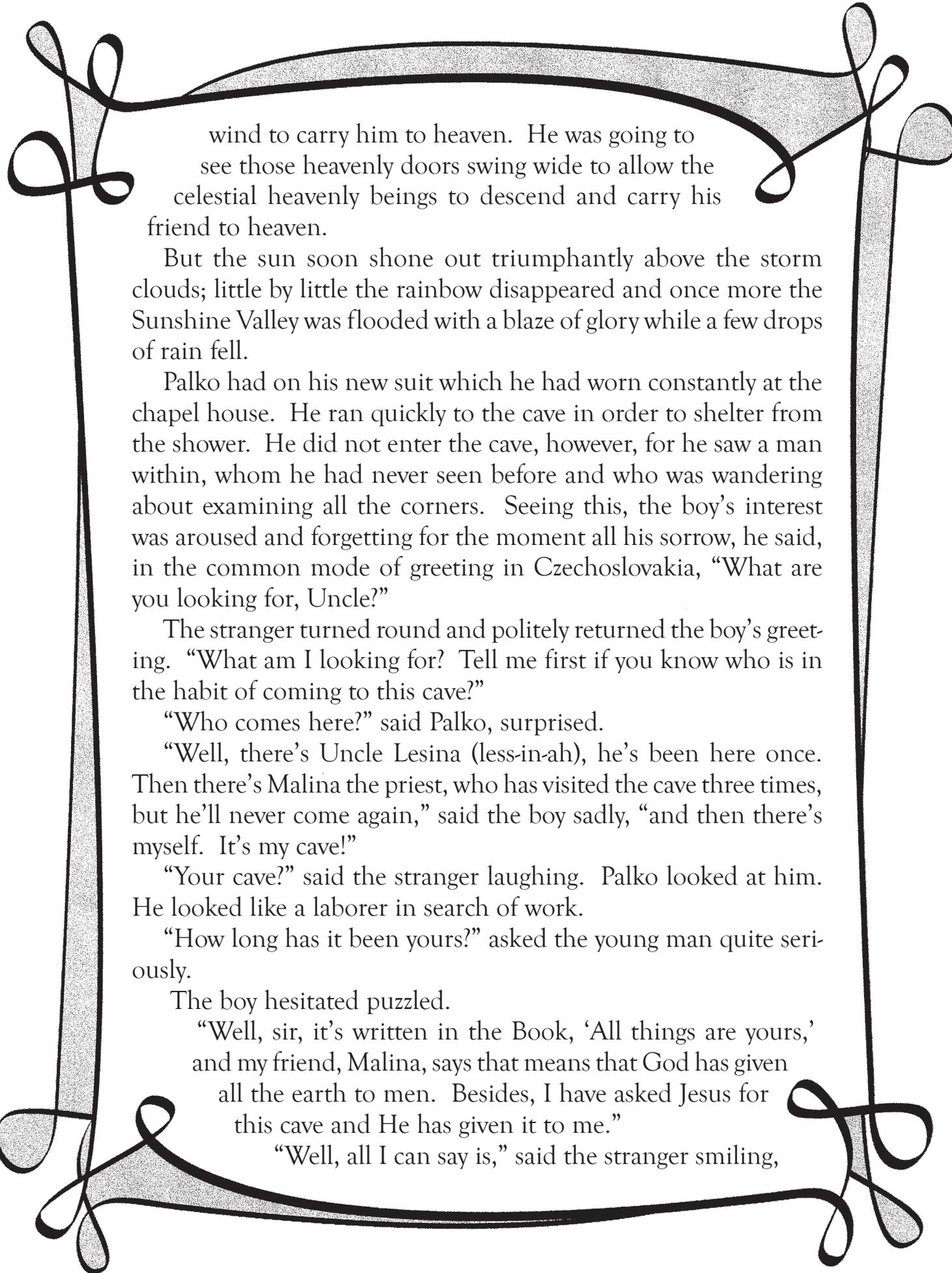
How wonderful, how lovely it was, and how beautiful it must be on the other side of that door! Alas, how high up it was! Palko felt that once the door was shut behind his beloved friend he would never be able to return again.

Then he remembered the Savior's promise to come again and receive His people to Himself and also what had followed in his reading that morning in the fourteenth chapter of John, "Where I am, there ye may be also."

"Lord Jesus," said Palko, "take me along with him please! How lonesome I shall be when he is no longer here. Grandfather is now so very old, and he, too, will soon go as my Grandfather Rasga (rahsh-ga) did, and then what will become of me? Malina was going to have me in his house if Grandfather should die, but now - where shall I go? Believe me, dear Savior, I do want to go with him to be with You always. Now, when I find something new and difficult in the Book, to whom can I go to have it explained to me?"

The lightning still flashed above his head and the thunder echoed the passing storm.

Malina had told him the story of Elijah, whom the Lord had loved so much that He sent a whirl-



wind to carry him to heaven. He was going to see those heavenly doors swing wide to allow the celestial heavenly beings to descend and carry his friend to heaven.

But the sun soon shone out triumphantly above the storm clouds; little by little the rainbow disappeared and once more the Sunshine Valley was flooded with a blaze of glory while a few drops of rain fell.

Palko had on his new suit which he had worn constantly at the chapel house. He ran quickly to the cave in order to shelter from the shower. He did not enter the cave, however, for he saw a man within, whom he had never seen before and who was wandering about examining all the corners. Seeing this, the boy's interest was aroused and forgetting for the moment all his sorrow, he said, in the common mode of greeting in Czechoslovakia, "What are you looking for, Uncle?"

The stranger turned round and politely returned the boy's greeting. "What am I looking for? Tell me first if you know who is in the habit of coming to this cave?"

"Who comes here?" said Palko, surprised.

"Well, there's Uncle Lesina (less-in-ah), he's been here once. Then there's Malina the priest, who has visited the cave three times, but he'll never come again," said the boy sadly, "and then there's myself. It's my cave!"

"Your cave?" said the stranger laughing. Palko looked at him. He looked like a laborer in search of work.

"How long has it been yours?" asked the young man quite seriously.

The boy hesitated puzzled.

"Well, sir, it's written in the Book, 'All things are yours,' and my friend, Malina, says that means that God has given all the earth to men. Besides, I have asked Jesus for this cave and He has given it to me."

"Well, all I can say is," said the stranger smiling,

“that my master and I lived in this cave for four years, but I don’t remember whether we asked God for it or not.”

“You have lived here?” and Palko took a step toward him.

“Well,” continued the young man, “my master was sick and the doctors had recommended him to live on the mountain. He also wished to be alone with God, but he took me with him to look after him. We had a bed of moss and some blankets and in this way we lived quite comfortably.

My master recovered his strength and, if it had not become necessary to return to the city, I believe he might be living here still. But he, poor man, is now resting in his grave in lower Hungary.

I am only a wandering mechanic and it just occurred to me, in passing this place, to come up to see if a certain book still remained, which we left here, but I find that it has disappeared. It must have been found by someone who has taken it away.”

“Here it is!” exclaimed Palko taking it from his pocket.

“Have you read it line after line as my master recommended on the first page?” said the stranger.

“Yes, indeed, we have,” said Palko with his earnest eyes fixed on the stranger’s face. “We have read it line after line; we have put our confidence in the Lord Jesus and we have found the road that leads to the true Sunshine Country. Your master, then, had found it, too?”

“Well, you’d have difficulty finding a person who knew the way better than he did,” and the young man sighed deeply.

“He died and when he left you, did he go up to heaven in a whirlwind? Has he already seen the Lord Jesus and the beautiful country? I shall ask Malina, when he dies and they meet each other there, to thank your master for his kindness in leaving us the Book and for showing us the way to read it. And you, too. I suppose you

have found the way to the Sunshine Country?"

"Me? No, I'm afraid not! I was on the track of it once, but I've wandered far away since then. He gave me a copy of the Book, too, but I no longer read it. May God forgive me," and there were signs of distress in the young fellow's voice.

"How did you come to stop your reading? But you seem to be sorry, are you not?" and Palko's tone was comforting. "You can begin once more to find the way. Just think! What would have become of your master, or of my friend, Malina, who right now is at the point of death, if they had not known the way that leads to the Lord Jesus?"

"But, cornel, I must go home to my grandfather's hut. I will ask Uncle Liska (leesh-ka) to give you a place in his house - he's alone and there is plenty of room, for I've slept there often. You can tell us all about your dead master for we have all wanted to know who and what kind of person left the Book behind. As it says, there is nothing hid, but it shall be uncovered."

"Or, better still," said the stranger, "as my master was so fond of quoting, I have it still by heart: 'My Word that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.'"

They soon arrived at Liska's cabin, but they were so busy talking that they would have passed it, had not Dunaj (doon-eye) rushed out with joyful yelps to welcome the return of his young master.

"There, there, that will do, Dunaj!" cried Palko. "I know you love me very much and I love you, but you'll spoil my good suit if you don't stop. Be a good dog now and stop it, I say!"

Dunaj's barking brought Lesina, who was visiting Liska, to the door, and then what a joyful welcome Palko got. Soon the stranger was introduced to Liska and Lesina and when his identity was discovered, great was their interest in the story of the good man who had left

the Book in the cave.

“You are welcome to stay here with me, stranger,” said Liska. “With an introduction such as this, you can help me in my work until you find something to do that is more in your line.”

“Now,” said Lesina, “we must be on our way, Palko and I, for the folks at home will be wanting to see him and besides I have a load to carry that he can help me with. So good-by until tomorrow.”

As they started down the path together Palko said, “But Uncle, where is the load we are to carry?”

“I’ll show you presently,” said Lesina taking hold of the boy’s hand.

“Uncle!” said Palko presently for he felt worried at the silence of the man beside him, “What’s the matter? Are you sick or what is it that troubles you?”

“Why, Palko?”

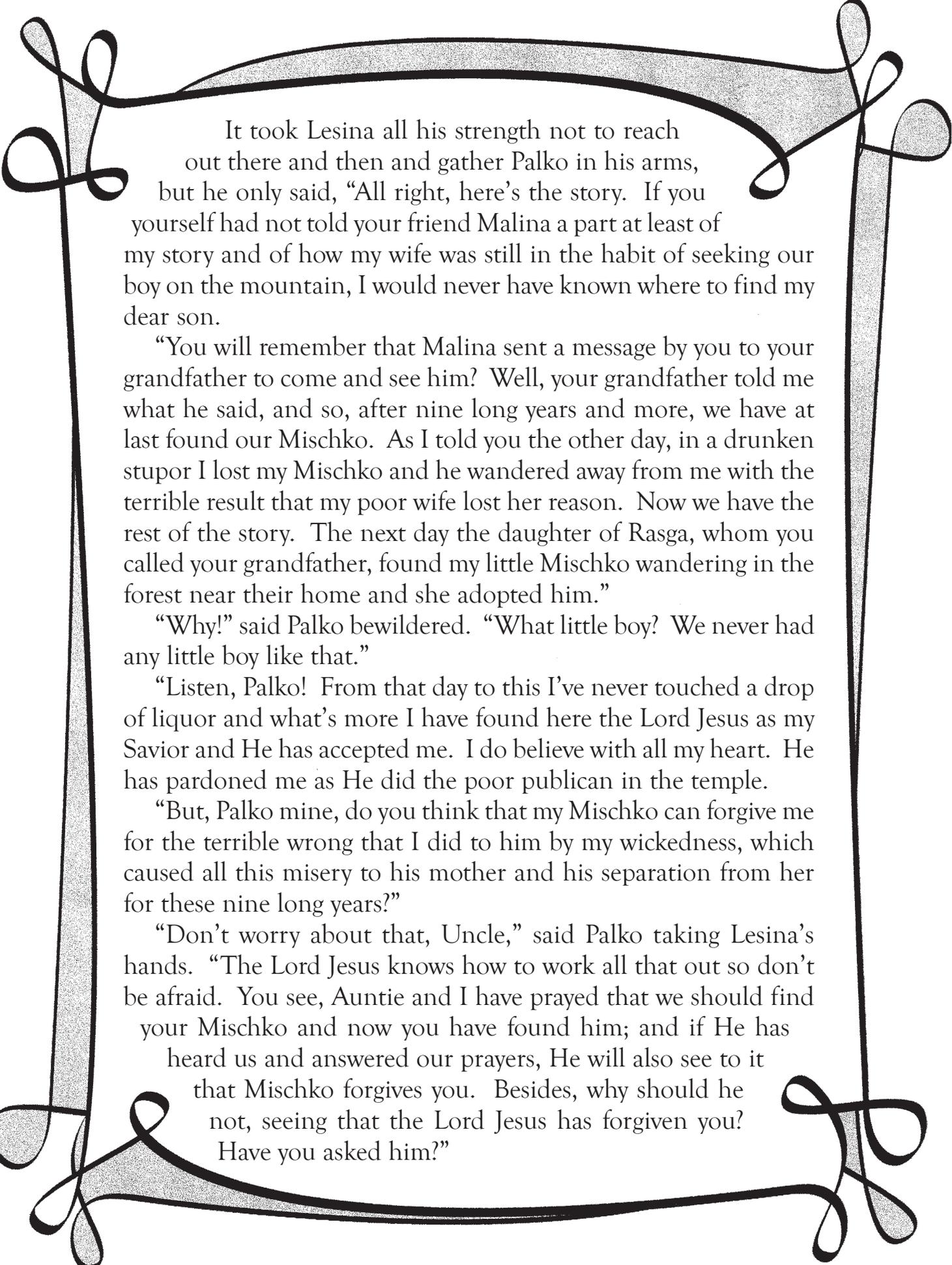
“Because you’re not saying a word. Excuse me for speaking about it, but there’s something strange in your manner and I noticed the same in Liska, too.”

“See here, Palko,” said Lesina seating himself on a moss-covered rock and drawing the boy to him. “Let’s sit down for a bit. I’ve got something to tell you. It’s about what has happened in your absence,” and Lesina’s voice trembled.

“Something has happened?” said Palko. “That’s what I thought from the way you were acting!”

“Yes, my son,” and somehow Lesina seemed to have a new way of saying ‘my son.’ “What do you think? We have found our Mischko!”

“What?” cried Palko. “Tell me, where was he? Where has he been all this time? Please tell me all about it from the beginning. Where is he now?” and he clung to Lesina as if he might get away before he had heard the whole story.



It took Lesina all his strength not to reach out there and then and gather Palko in his arms, but he only said, “All right, here’s the story. If you yourself had not told your friend Malina a part at least of my story and of how my wife was still in the habit of seeking our boy on the mountain, I would never have known where to find my dear son.

“You will remember that Malina sent a message by you to your grandfather to come and see him? Well, your grandfather told me what he said, and so, after nine long years and more, we have at last found our Mischko. As I told you the other day, in a drunken stupor I lost my Mischko and he wandered away from me with the terrible result that my poor wife lost her reason. Now we have the rest of the story. The next day the daughter of Rasga, whom you called your grandfather, found my little Mischko wandering in the forest near their home and she adopted him.”

“Why!” said Palko bewildered. “What little boy? We never had any little boy like that.”

“Listen, Palko! From that day to this I’ve never touched a drop of liquor and what’s more I have found here the Lord Jesus as my Savior and He has accepted me. I do believe with all my heart. He has pardoned me as He did the poor publican in the temple.

“But, Palko mine, do you think that my Mischko can forgive me for the terrible wrong that I did to him by my wickedness, which caused all this misery to his mother and his separation from her for these nine long years?”

“Don’t worry about that, Uncle,” said Palko taking Lesina’s hands. “The Lord Jesus knows how to work all that out so don’t be afraid. You see, Auntie and I have prayed that we should find your Mischko and now you have found him; and if He has heard us and answered our prayers, He will also see to it that Mischko forgives you. Besides, why should he not, seeing that the Lord Jesus has forgiven you? Have you asked him?”

“No, not yet, Palko, but there is another thing. He might forgive me, but do you think he could love me?”

“Of course! Why not, when you’re his father? He’d be a funny boy if he didn’t love his own father. If I had a father I’d love him, I can tell you! But I never knew either my father or my mother. I think they must have died before I could remember them. Grandfather Rasga never told me much about them. Oh, but I’m so anxious to see Mischko, where is he?”

Lesina could stand it no longer. “He’s here beside me now, my boy,” and he gathered his child in his arms. “Oh, my son, my son!” he cried between his tears, “My beloved son! And you do forgive me, don’t you?”

“And so,” said Palko bewildered indeed, “you mean that I - I -” he faltered - “I am Mischko! Oh, Father, my dear Father! I have a father after all! Long and fast the father and son clung together.

“Now, come, let’s find your mother. She’s waited too long already. And she knows the whole story. You’ll find her different. In these two happy weeks of waiting for her son she has become her old true self again.”

Let us draw the curtain here as that dear, beautiful mother, with shining eyes of love and welcome, comes running from the hut to greet her long-lost son! It is too sacred a scene for our prying eyes to witness for such sights are but a foretaste of the great future day spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, when “everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. I, even I, am He that comforteth you!”

To be continued...

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