

ABHI

BABY DRAGON

FLYING TIGER



BALBEER BAHU

ABHI
Baby Dragon
Flying Tiger

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ABHI: Baby Dragon, Flying Tiger

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First published 2026

by The Storytelling Machine.com

2nd Prototype test-print of 6

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ISBN: 978-XXXXXXXXXX

Cover designed by ZB & BB

Dedicated to:

Mum & Dad,
Zanardi & Nirin
(the original Seba & Abhi),
& Luna & Azaelea.

Chapter One

Seba Discovers Abhi

High in the northern mountains, by a sparse grove of evergreen juniper trees that towered higher than most clouds dared.

At the edge of a serene lake, fed by a waterfall that never ceased to flow.

Between the silent reeds...

Seba, a three-month-old sabre-tooth tiger cub, her thick fur as white and soft as the snow that covered all, delicately lapped ice-cold water.

A vibrant Blue Frog with a wide-mouthed grin hopped out of the lake, and landed on a pebble.

He noticed Seba's moss-green eyes peering down at him, and her protruding, emerging eyeteeth.

"Oh-oh," the Blue Frog croaked, and lost his wide-mouthed grin. "Carnivore!"

And sprang away, stamping tiny frog-prints in the snow.

Seba pounced after the nimble Blue Frog, which launched itself into a wide, deep pawprint already indented in the snow.

“Oh my,” Seba muttered to herself, lost interest in the elusive Blue Frog, and compared her paw with the larger, mysterious pawprint.

With the damp tuft of her nose, she sampled the pawprint’s scent...

And *sneezed!*

Seba froze.

While her sneeze’s echo slowly faded across the lake, she scanned the grove of juniper trees with her moss-green eyes.

Only the ever-flowing waterfall stirred.

Seba sought out the mysterious pawprint’s next step in the snow, then the next, and next...

Crunching pawprints of her own, Seba scampered after the pawprints, into the cold wind of the snowy plain.

Higher up the mountain she ran, towards the panorama of snow-capped mountain peaks.

The grinning vibrant Blue Frog that-got-away, peeked out from the first mysterious pawprint.

In a burst of sparkling blue magic, the Blue Frog transformed into Krsnā, the mythical, blue-skinned child-god – yet barely a teen – with the same wide-mouthed grin.

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Pleased with Seba's progress up the snowy plain, Krsnā twinkled out of sight.

Seba padded after the enigmatic pawprints, across a snow-blanketed plateau.

Her fur momentarily glistened silver in a blast of sunlight.

The pawprints led her past the cold shadows of obtruding rocks.

To a vast, barely discernible cave mouth in the mountain, impossible to see from below.

The young sabre-tooth hesitated, and looked back.

Summoning her courage, whiskers twitching with anticipation, Seba stepped into the gaping maw of the unknown cave.

Seba crept at a measured pace over the dusty floor of a monumental, sprawling, musky cave.

She wove around boulders.

Under sharp stalactites.

Past tunnels that slithered deeper into the heart of the mountain.

Her ears twitched.

Seba froze, poised to run.

Above the beating of her heart, the echoes of gentle snores rumbled through the floor.

Seba slunk forward.

The gentle snores came from a twitching shadow, asleep on a large concave boulder that served as a bed.

Over the boulder's edge dangled a taloned foot that matched the pawprints Seba had followed.

And a long, pointy, silver, almost translucent tail.

Both tail and foot were encrusted with petite, pearly scales, the size of sprouting leaves, infused with tiny red and gold freckles.

Wow, Seba mouthed.

Barely daring to breathe, Seba inched closer.

She stretched up against the porous boulder, peppered with quartz and hornblende, to get a better look...

Her face lit up in wonder.

Abhi, a three-day-old baby dragon, under newly formed wings spread over himself like a blanket, sucked his thumb and slept fitfully.

Seba gaped at the glossy membrane of his wings, streaked in the hues of a fiery sunset.

Shoulder to haunches, he was no heftier than Seba, but with his slender neck and long pointy tail, he was thrice longer.

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Seba almost laughed at his soft, unformed stubby horns, covered in the same freckled scales.

She gazed at his twitching ears.

His long, beautiful face tapered to a glistening nose...

Seba *sneezed!*

Abhi's eyes snapped open...

On Seba.

The baby dragon squealed.

Seba yelped.

They both bolted.

Terrified, they screeched and stumbled over each other, scrambling for the cave's exit.

Their cries snapped back off the walls, rattling them all the more.

Seba sprang out of the cave first, and ran off into the snowy plateau.

Abhi scampered out, took three strides... and tumbled face-first in a flurry of white powder.

Straightening up, Abhi briskly shook off the snow crystals, and darted back into the cave.

Seba circled back, slowly.

Her eyes on Abhi, huddled within the cave's mouth, squinting warily back at her, Seba settled at a safe distance in the frigid snow.

"I'm sorry," she apologised, "I musta surprised ya."

Abhi sat quietly, his nervous violet eyes never leaving Seba's.

“It's only snow,” Seba tried.

Abhi shivered.

“It's freezing, right?” Seba laughed, her breath misting in the icy air. “Tell me about it!”

Abhi's belly *rumbled*.

Seba tensed, ready to flee. “Are you going to eat me?”

Abhi winced at the thought.

“You hungry? Whaddaya eat?” Seba studied Abhi, and stepped closer. “You can't talk yet, can ya! Cos... you're a baby! Ain't ya!”

Abhi twitched, ready to race back into the cave.

Seba stopped, kept a distance, and asked, “Where's your ma?”

Abhi's belly again *rumbled*.

“You like fish?” Seba asked. “My pa says everyone likes fish!”

Seba stepped across the plateau.

“I know a place near here for real fresh fish. Come on.”

Abhi hesitated at the mouth of the cave.

“Come on,” Seba encouraged. “You can do it. Don't make me bring the fish to ya. Come on!”

Abhi looked around, then trailed Seba by several paces across the plateau, raising a wing to shield his eyes from the Sun's dazzling reflections.

“I wish I had wings.”

Seba stood on her haunches and flapped her arms.

“You tried them yet?”

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Abhi extended his wings, revealing an awesome wingspan, almost as wide as he was long.

He flapped vigorously, but didn't take off.

The gusts from his wings did however blast a mound of snow over Seba, who near disappeared.

“Well... maybe not yet.” She shook off the snow. “My name's Seba, what's yours?”

Abhi *bleated*, and followed Seba at a safe distance, stepping and jumping and hopping in her pawprints.

Seba led Abhi across the snowy plain, back towards the lake by the sparse juniper grove.

“My pa says it's the best spot in the world.”

Abhi stopped, puzzled by Seba's comment.

“My pa. My dad. Ain't ya got one?”

Abhi shook his head.

“Well... not everyone does.”

Seba took them to the lake's edge, to her familiar patch between the reeds.

She sat, and recommended, “Better get comfortable, this takes patience.”

Seba raised a paw, and *snapped* out her claws.

Startled, Abhi jumped back.

Pleased at the response, Seba asked, “You got yourself some of these?”

Abhi raised a foot, and *snapped* out his impressive talons.

Seba remained blasé. “My pa says, it ain't what ya got...”

She raised her claws, squinted one eye, focused with the other, and fixating on the water, poised...

She swiped...

Splish-Splash!

A small fish flipped out of the water onto the bank.

Abhi pounced, grabbed the stunned fish with his jaws, raised it, and with a gulp, swallowed it whole. He trembled from the strange, yet satisfying sensation.

“You musta been starving!” Seba commented. “That one was small, want another?”

Abhi pushed past Seba to the lake's edge, and peered at several vividly striped blue and yellow fish, nibbling at the reed stems.

Abhi sat, squinted, focused, *snapped* out his talons...

“After watching once?” Seba was surprised. “It isn't easy!”

Abhi raised his foot, ever so slowly...

The fish spotted Abhi.

He swiped.

The fish darted away.

Abhi lost his balance... yelped, and ploughed into the lake.

Splashing in the water with his wings, Abhi overcame his surprise, and took to the water immediately.

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“Melted snow,” Seba cautioned from the lake’s bank.
“My mum says never go in it.”

Abhi floated naturally, like a duck.

He stuck his head underwater, and paddled out towards the centre of the lake.

“I hope you’re holding your breath!” Seba fretted.

Abhi raised his head, took a breath, and with a thrust of his tail, dived into the water completely.

“Hey! Baby dragon!” Seba stepped into the lake.
“Hey!”

Under the shimmering surface, Abhi swam with the agility of a winged otter, darting and weaving through a gaudy shoal of panic-stricken fish.

“Hey! Where are ya?” Seba nervously swam further out. “Baby dragon!”

Underwater, Abhi chased the shoal of fish this way and that, snapping at them.

The startled, wily fish led Abhi into the turbulence under the waterfall.

The sudden rush of water caught Abhi by surprise, tumbling him deeper into the lake.

His lungs strained against his remaining breath.

“Baby dragon! Come up!” Seba called, swimming as far as she dared into the lake. “Baby dragon!”

Snarling ferociously, Sola, an adult mountain sabretooth tiger, ran from the grove of evergreens.

“Seba! I told you never go swimming without me!”

Without breaking stride, he leapt into the lake and swam to Seba.

“What’s this about a dragon?”

“I’m all right, Dad! But down there! A baby dragon. He can’t swim, Dad! He’s only a baby! A baby!”

Sola noted his daughter was safe, took a breath, and dived.

Underwater, Sola spotted the gyrating Abhi, pummelled by the waterfall’s turbulence.

Sola checked Seba’s legs treading water above him, shook his head, and swam to Abhi.

Sola looped his tail around Abhi’s foreleg, and hauled Abhi upwards, to the lake’s surface.

“Dad!” Seba cried out in joy and swam to intercept them.

With her tail, she tried to hold Abhi’s nostrils out of the water.

Together, Sola and Seba tugged Abhi back to shore, and dragged him onto the bank.

“I found him, Dad. He was all on his own!”

“Where’d you find him, Seba?”

“I’ll tell ya later, Dad,” Seba avoided. “Is he breathing?”

Sola placed his ear to Abhi’s chest.

“He’s breathing.”

Sola stepped back, and sized up the *‘baby’* dragon, already big enough to take a hefty chunk out of a full-grown tiger.

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“Absolutely right, Seba, a baby dragon. Poor thing.”

“He'll be okay, Dad, won't he?” Seba checked her father. “Won't he?”

Abhi spluttered, coughed up some water, and sat up. A fish wriggled between his lips.

Abhi *schlooped* the fish back into his mouth, and swallowed.

“He's fine, for now,” Sola looked around. “But on his own, for how long?”

“He's got us, Dad.”

“We can't help him,” Sola answered solemnly. “Not without our clan's approval.”

Chapter Two

Meet the Family

After Abhi recovered enough to walk, Sola and Seba led him through the sparse grove of towering junipers, beyond the serene lake in the northern mountains.

Nearing their clan, their approach was scrutinised from above by several discreet adult sabre-tooths, watching from the trees.

Abhi was quickly enveloped by a creche of wide-eyed, sabre-tooth tiger cubs of different ages, some who had canines longer than Seba's.

"Hey!" "Who's this!" they gawked and enquired. "Who're you?"

"Wait here," Sola instructed Seba and Abhi, and strode away.

"You Seba's friend?"

The sabre-tooth tiger cubs crowded Abhi, crushing him with their soft bristling fur.

"What are ya?" "He's a dragon!" "Wooo!" "Where ya from?"

Equally amazed, Abhi flopped back on his haunches, and gaped at the assortment of cubs.

Seba peered around a wide-trunked tree, and eavesdropped...

Her father Sola stood on the banks of their glimmering pond, and awaited the convocation of senior sabre-teeth, convening in the branches of their colossal Banyan tree.

Sola noted the clan's Eldest sabre-tooth, bathed purple like twilight leaves, take her seat highest in the tree.

Sola winked at Seba, and addressed them.

"My daughter found a baby dragon..."

"Which you elected to bring here?" one of the gathered Elders interrupted.

Another asked, "Where are its mother and father?"

"I don't know. He's too young to talk." Sola was straight. "He can catch fish, barely, but alone he cannot meet his needs..."

"What if its parents return for it, right now?" asked another Elder. "While it's in our camp?"

"We can ask why they abandoned him," Sola insisted, "and give them their baby back. Problem solved."

"Talk to a dragon!" There was a breakout of scepticism. "Like father, like daughter." "Ridiculous!"

"Left alone, he will not survive," Sola persisted.

"It is a curse to be a dragon!" stated an Elder from a higher branch.

"If it stays, we'll all be cursed too," affirmed another.

“*It?*” I didn't bring *‘him’* here to be insulted, or educated in base superstition! My daughter rescued him for a reason. Without her intervention, he would surely perish!”

Sola's rebuke echoed through and past the tree, startling even Abhi and the mingling cubs.

“Sola,” the clan's Eldest sabre-tooth inquired from her highest seat, “you say it can catch its own food?”

“It's not fear of hunger. It's Man.”

Sola leapt lithely into the tree, and from branch to branch, made his way to the elders in the upper levels.

Out of Seba's earshot, he whispered, “A rumour whispers from our cousin-tribes to the west. Man killed a dragon in their mountain last week. It must have been his mother...”

“That's its problem!” The Eldest sabre-tooth stood, and declared, “Our collective needs will be compromised if it stays!”

“Have pity!” Sola skipped down the branches, jumped back to the ground, and pleaded with them all. “At least until he learns to fly, ‘til his scales toughen...”

“Sola, I want no part of this.” The Eldest sabre-tooth turned her back, and flicked her tail with finality.

“Nor I!” “Nor I!”

More and more sabre-tooths stood, turned their backs and waved their tails.

“Nor I!” “Hear, hear!”

The clan's decisive agreement reverberated past Seba to the dejected Abhi, sat with the sabre-tooth cubs.

Upset that the negative cacophony made Abhi look so morose, in three bounds Seba was at her father's side.

“What are you all afraid of?” Seba demanded. “You're always telling us cubs to look out for each other, to do *'sewa'*, help one another. He's only a kid too. A baby! Mum, tell them! He's only a baby!”

“You don't know dragons, Seba,” her mother replied, lounging in the tree. “They'll snap up a sabre-tooth like you or me for breakfast.”

“No way! He'd never eat me! Tell her, Dad! Tell Mum he'd never eat me!”

“Seba!” “Seba!” the sabre-tooth cubs called. “He's going!” “Seba!” “He's going!” “He's going!” “Seba!” “He's gone!” “He's gone!”

“It's okay, I have an idea where he'll go,” Sola reassured Seba.

A parting glance at his pragmatic tribe perched higher: “You should be ashamed of yourselves.”

Sola stalked off.

Seba started to follow...

“Seba!” her mother slunk down the tree. “You can't go chasing dragons!”

Seba hesitated, but ran off to catch up with her father, past the playful creche of sabre-tooth cubs, some of whom were tempted to follow.

“The rest of you wait there!” Seba's mother strode up to the cubs. “Nobody move!”

The younger cubs sat on their haunches, and held up their paws.

Sola and Seba caught up with Abhi, and tramped with him back past the lake, up the snowy plain towards his cave.

“You need to know about Man,” Sola tried.

“Smelly-two-legs,” Seba elaborated. “Carries sharp sticks.”

Increasingly agitated, Abhi snapped at them. They may have been baby dragon teeth, but they were still intimidating.

Sola paused in front of Seba.

A shadow in the sky caught Abhi's eye. He *bleated* and flapped his wings excitedly.

“Shhh... Calm down,” Sola advised. “It's just Sky-Snow. I wonder where your ma went? It must have been important.”

Close to tears, Abhi snarled, and trudged and flapped across the plateau to his cave.

“Dad?” Seba asked, “What if his ma don't come back?”

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“You found the stray...” Sola traipsed with Seba to Abhi’s cave. “I should let you babysit him... Alone.”

Sola sniffed the musky air at the cave’s looming entrance, stepped inside, and inspected the cave.

“It’s safe, Dad,” Seba insisted. “There’s no one here but him.”

“You’re certain of that?”

Spotting the perfect boulder to guard from, Sola vaulted up to it.

Seba padded after him, calmly tracing a path along several lesser rocks.

Sola lay down on the boulder for the night.

Seba joined him, and spun on her toes within his embrace, fluffing up his fur.

“Thing is, Seba...” Sola cupped her cheek in his paw. “Nobody should have to be alone. Not you, not me. Not even a baby dragon.”

Seba snuggled up on her father’s belly, and listened to his slowing heartbeat...

But her ears twitched.

Through the silence, from deeper within the cave, she heard Abhi *sobbing*.

Abhi shuffled and turned on his concave boulder-bed, trying to sleep.

His ears perked up. The faint *pattering* of paws.

Abhi raised his head to look.

“I’ll wait with ya.” Seba approached cautiously from the shadows of the cave’s chamber. “If ya want.”

She leaned up against Abhi’s boulder-bed, looked into his lonely eyes, and whispered, “And when your ma comes, I’ll go away. If that’s what ya want.”

Abhi sniffled.

“Come on...” Seba leapt onto Abhi’s boulder-bed. “You don’t... eat tigers, do ya?”

Abhi yawned, displaying his impressive teeth.

“That’s not reassuring!”

Seba giggled, and cuddled up with Abhi.

Quite surprised, Abhi slowly relaxed, but kept his tired eyes on Seba.

“Snuggle up.” Seba wriggled closer, and began to *purr*.

Abhi was startled.

“That...?” Seba looked into Abhi’s drowsy eyes. “Means I’m contented.”

Abhi was still puzzled.

“If I can’t sleep, my pa lullaby’s me. Ya wanna hear?”

Needing no answer, Seba sang soothingly:

“Tween moon and sun

Can't do much so just kick back.

When the stars shine

Time to lie down and relax.

Everything you could do

*Today you have done.
Close your eyes dream away
You can have fun!
Floating on pink seas
In gargantuan flowers.
Hiding behind elephants,
Chasing alligators...*

Abhi smiled.

“I don't know what they are either!” Seba explained.

“I've never seen alligators. Try these...”

Seba sang:

*“Flying with wings
Over purr-urple hills.
Sliding down mountains
On furr-urry fish!
While we are sleeping,
We are still learning,
To sing, dance, and play
Makes the purr-urfect day!”*

Abhi's curly eyelashes closed over his big, beautiful baby eyes.

Seba whispered, “Don't worry, we'll find your ma, tomorrow. Till then...”

*“Tween moon and sun
Can't do much so just kick back.
When the stars shine,
Better to lie down and relax.
Everything you could possibly*

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Do today you have done.

Close your eyes, dream away...”

Noting Abhi had fallen asleep, Seba *purred* contentedly next to him, and closed her eyes.

Chapter Three

They are Found

The next morning, as the Sun straked its way through the tallest mountain peaks.

Sola awoke on his boulder within the entrance of Abhi's cave, and surveyed his less familiar environment. He yawned, sniffed the crisp air, jumped down, and ambled to the cave's maw.

On a distant, elevated mossy outcrop, a herd of Tahr mountain goats grazed, their leonine shaggy manes billowing in the wind.

"Hello breakfast." Sola stretched his sinews.

Sensing all was tranquil within the cave, Sola prowled into the new day.

He stalked his way up the mountain towards the grazing Tahr.

One of the keen-scented Tahr sensed him, bleated loudly three times, and they all stampeded off.

"Perfect way to start the day," Sola muttered, and gave chase. "A morning run."

As Sola disappeared after the Tahr goats, he missed the danger approaching from below – up the snowy plain – following the tracks Abhi, Seba and Sola had left behind last night...

Deeper in the cave, nestled up with Abhi on his boulder-bed, Seba slept soundly. Until her nostrils twitched.

“Peeyoo!” Seba woke with a terrible expression. “You babies do some stinkies!”

Abhi woke, and immediately pulled a wing over his nose in protest.

Their ears turned to the sound of feet *crunch, crunch, crunching* towards them.

Two flickering flames appeared, casting a growing shadow, which split into four:

Cootha, an exuberant, irrepressible, two-year-old, wiry patchwork dog.

Two novice Dragonslayers:

A young woman, Roshan, who expertly held forward her sword.

Chandran, barely a man, who warily held a spear and steel net.

And their teenage Apprentice, loaded with ropes, who held the two burning firebrands.

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“*Smelly-two-legs*,” Seba hissed. “Man! Scram!”

Seba and Abhi sprang from the boulder-bed, and bolted into the cave's interior.

Cootha chased after them, barking shrilly.

The two Dragonslayers, Roshan and Chandran, and their Apprentice, pursued. The firebrands sent overlapping shadows tumbling on the cave's walls.

Seba sprinted through the labyrinthine tunnels of the cave.

Slowing to let Abhi catch up, Seba hurried them down a narrowing tunnel... towards a dead-end. Except... a cracked arch to the right.

Seba sprang off the tunnel's dead-end, through the cracked arch, into a low, wide circular cavern.

His heels scrabbling, Abhi *slammed* to a stop against the tunnel's dead-end with a shoulder, then hurried after Seba under the cracked arch into the cavern.

“We got ya.” Cootha caught them up, slithered to a stop, and yelped, “We got ya now!”

Nowhere to run, Seba stood her ground. “Now you got us, what do ya want?”

“I dunno, I dunno!” Cootha excitedly jumped a somersault.

“You're scaring the baby!” Seba cried out. “Dad! DAD!”

The two Dragonslayers and their Apprentice, puffing from the chase, reached the tunnel's end. They stepped warily through the cracked arch into the cavern. The

Apprentice's firebrands burned soot-stains on the low ceiling.

Trapped on the far side of the cavern, stood nervously before their vacillating shadows, the snow-white Seba flickered silver, the pearlescent Abhi gold.

The Dragonslayers *chattered* briefly between themselves.

Roshan spurred Chandran forward with his spear and net, and held her sword steady.

"Ready yourself!" Seba whispered to Abhi, squinting at the humans. "At three, I bite one, you scratch the other."

Stood between them, Cootha backed to the cavern wall. "I hate being piggy in the middle."

"One... two..." Seba *snicked* out her claws. "Three!"

Seba launched herself at Chandran.

Chandran threw the net...

Surprising Seba...

But caught only his own spear.

The cavern's floor *quivered* beneath them.

Seba and Chandran both retreated.

Cootha laughed at Chandran untangling his spear from his net.

Roshan shook her head at Chandran.

"Why didn't you help?" Seba demanded of Abhi.

Abhi blushed.

"Of course!" Seba decided. "I forgot, you're a baby. I bet you can't count! How many feet you got? One..." she

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raised a paw, and counted off the others: “Two... three... Four!”

Abhi nodded.

“Good. This time, together, after three.”

Abhi squatted, and shuffled, readying to attack the humans.

“One, two...” Seba turned to the aggressors.

Both Seba and Abhi *flicked* out their talons.

“Three...!”

Abhi and Seba charged across the cavern at the humans.

The ground *shook*.

Roshan swung her sword at the leaping Seba...

Abhi sprang at Chandran...

Chandran tossed his net desperately...

The net spun, opened mid-air... And caught Abhi completely unaware.

Abhi *thudded* to the ground, entangled in the chain net, caught like a big fish.

The dusty floor *buckled* angrily, *split* like a wound, and *collapsed*.

Abhi, Seba, the two Dragonslayers, the Apprentice, and Cootha, all were swallowed by the broken floor...

They emerged, plummeting from the ceiling of a vast thousand-foot-tall chamber inside the hollow mountain.

Their *screams, barks, snarls, and shouts*, mingling as they fell until indistinguishable, barely pierced the vastness.

Caught and tangled in the heavy net, Abhi fell like a dead weight.

He dragged the horrified Chandran with him, unable to release the net, tied to his wrist by a cord.

“Baaay-beee...!” Seba called, twisting in the sundered air... “Draaa-gaaan...!”

“Wheeeee...!” Cootha relished it. The humans yelled at each other!

They fell, fell, fell...

And plunged...

Splash-Splash!

Splash! Splash!

Splash!

Into a frigid river that ran remorselessly through the mountain.

Cootha bobbed upwards first, and looked up at the distant ceiling they fell from. “Can't get extremer than that!”

Swept away by the flow, Cootha paddled against the current. “Hey! Yey! Yey! You not coming?”

Seba resurfaced. “Baby dragon!” She was also shoved along by the current. “Baby... dragon...!”

Roshan bobbed to the surface with the struggling Apprentice – who couldn't swim – trying to keep his chin

above water. Roshan *yelled* at the tumultuous waters that carried them away.

Clawing fiercely at the ensnaring net, Abhi was pulled to the bottom of the river.

He towed the thrashing Chandran, who struggled to release the cord attached to his wrist.

They were bounced along the boulder strewn riverbed by a fast-flowing undercurrent.

Abhi tore a hole in the steel net with his foreclaws, poked his head and forelegs through, and swam himself desperately to the surface.

The torn net caught on Abhi's shoulders and wings; Chandran was dragged with Abhi to the surface.

Together they gulped deep breaths and bobbed along the thriving river, carried by the flood towards sunlight, spilling through a thunderous gash in the mountain.

Seba was hurled past Cootha by the torrent.

"Hey!" Cootha paddled against the current. "Which way you guys going?"

"Do we have a choice!" Seba bobbed in the churning waters.

In the increasingly agitated water, Roshan snatched a rope from the Apprentice's shoulder, gave him one end, and hollering at Chandran, Roshan swam for Abhi. She took a breath, and dived underwater.

Chandran saw her, and drawing breath, following her example, also dove.

Together underwater, Roshan and Chandran wrestled the rope around Abhi's flailing tail, and knotted it.

Abhi wriggled and stretched out his wings, shoving off the remains of the net.

The ripped steel net slunk to the riverbed, dragging Chandran with it.

Roshan dived after him. She unsheathed a knife from her hip... reached it to Chandran's free hand, and swam up.

Chandran hacked at the cord tied to his wrist with the knife, releasing the net, and also swam up.

Seba was thrown out first by the relentless river, through the laceration in the mountain.

Down the mightiest waterfall she hurtled.

Abhi came next, wings spread wide, ready to fly...

Momentarily he floated above the waterfall's edge.

Roshan, Chandran and the Apprentice were also spat out by the river, all three clutching the rope tied to Abhi's tail.

Unable to sustain their combined weight, one of Abhi's wings collapsed...

He was pulled spiralling down like a sycamore leaf, into the waterfall's thunder.

Lastly Cootha, a grin on his face, embraced the rush of being kicked out of the mountain, over the waterfall into freefall.

Seba tumbled through the water's spray, twisted, turned, and landed feet first in the roiling waters at the bottom.

Losing his grip on the rope, the Apprentice, a jumbled scream of coarse clothes and ropes, fell next into the turbulent froth.

Spinning on one wing, Abhi was dragged down by Roshan and Chandran, clinging to the rope tied to his tail.

“Ex-treeee-mer...!” Cootha overtook them, and was consumed by the frothing at the waterfall's base.

Unperturbed by all who came before it, the bubbling white water finally devoured the reluctant Chandran, Roshan, and the dizzy Abhi.

About the Author

Balbeer Bahi is a London-Slough-Punjabi novelist, scriptwriter, filmmaker and director.

Working in theatre many decades, Balbeer formed *The Storytelling Machine*, which specialised in entertaining school children, (with the secret agenda of encouraging their natural delight in reading and writing stories of their own).

Balbeer's passion can be summed up as
'Fantastically Tall Tales.'

You can find out all about him,
as well as forthcoming novels, at
www.thestorytellingmachine.com

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