

# The Promised Land

GRADE	<u>10</u>
Fiction	<u>X</u>
Poetry	<u>      </u>
Nonfiction	<u>      </u>

"NaKoda, come here so I can tell you a story." her mother had said when she was just a cub. NaKoda had padded over, then flopped down on the freezing ice. They were in a cave to stay safe from the freezing thunderstorm outside. It had been going on for at least three seal-hunts, and NaKoda was hungry.

Her mother must have seen the look on her face at the time, because she gave her the last seal piece, and then started on her story.

"A long time ago, the Great Bear named Kúnan was traveling alone. He had been walking more paw-steps than you can count. However, even though he was exhausted, he kept going on."

"Why?" NaKoda had asked, food falling out of her mouth.

"Because," her mother continued, " he had a goal, and his goal was to reach the land called the Promised Land." She had stopped speaking for a while, and had possibly been thinking about the amazing wonders of the Promised Land.

"Momma!" NaKoda growled impatiently at the time, "Finish the story!"

Her mother had snorted, but continued anyway. "The Promised Land is a place where there are no Furless ones attacking us."

"What's a Furless one?"

"They are evil beasts that walk on two paws. They are destroying our ice and building tall structures."

"I'm gonna destroy one of them!" NaKoda roared back then, jumping up and slashing the air with her two white paws.

"That won't do any good," her mother snorted, "There are too many."

"Then I can find the Promised land!" NaKoda retorted. Her mom just stomped around in a circle and layed down, getting ready to sleep.

\*\*\*

Three years later, NaKoda fights to find a cave in the howling wind. She thinks about that day as she trudges through the weather, step by never-ending pawstep. As she goes on, she becomes slower and slower, and then starts thinking about the Great Bear. She had given up hope long ago about finding the Promised Land, as she now believed it was only a fable.

The longer she trudged on, the weaker she felt. She had not eaten for at least two sun-rises, and she was on the point of exhaustion when she finally saw a cave. She quickly padded over to it. When she got inside, she sniffed, and smelled old male bear. The smell was sweet and friendly, so she went inside. She padded in slow but loud to make sure that the bear heard her. As she came farther in, she saw him. He had broad shoulders and a long claw scar on his side. He looked up as she came in, and bowed his head in respect.

"Hello, she-cub. Have you come to rest and wait out the storm?" he asked.

"Yes, but only if it's okay with you." She panted, bowing her head in response. She then collapsed in a heap on the floor. The male bear stared at her for a while, and then nodded. He padded over to his food stock, then gave her a piece. NaKoda thanked him and started scarfing her food down.

"What's your name?" He asked while she finished her food.

"NaKoda," she said, licking her chops, "and yours?"

"My name is Murali." He sat down, and stared at her with his wise eyes.

"Will you tell me a story, Murali?" NaKoda yawned, stretching out on the ice. Murali settled in, and then began.

"Long ago, there was the Great Bear. His name was Kúnan. He was a traveler, and he was looking for a place without any Furless ones. He traveled for a long time. For more sun-rises than you can count, he traveled. Then, one day, he found the place he had been looking for. The place free of Furless ones. Free of towers. Free of shiny water. The promised land, as he called it. Other bears have found it, y'know. I found it once, I think. It was beautiful. There were seals everywhere." He thought of the beauty of the Promised Land for a while before he realized that his story fell on a snoring bear's ears.

\*\*\*

NaKoda woke up to the smell of fresh seal. She sat up hungrily, and looked around. There was a new seal in the seal pile, and Murali was already eating a piece of older seal. Outside, the storm had stopped, but there was still tons of snowflakes on the ground.

As she noticed these things, she thought about the story from last night. How Murali said that he had found the Promised Land. She hadn't believed in the Promised Land for a long time, but now his story made her wonder.

'No,' she thought, 'he's just a crazy bear trying to get to my head.' However, she still had doubt in her mind. She didn't need to believe that the Promised Land was real. She was already safe in a cave, with lots of food. But that didn't change the fact that she wanted to believe. She padded over to Murali, and asked him if the Promised Land was real.

"Of course it is. I saw it with my own eyes."

She waited for a moment, then asked him, "What was it like?"

He settled in, preparing for a long talk. "It had many other polar bears, first of all. They were everywhere. We lived on the clearest sheet of ice, and you could see the seals coming from whale's away. There were many snow caves, like this one. The biggest thing, though, was that there weren't any

towers, colored water, or Furless ones. It was free of the beasts that crawl the land we live on."

"Could my mother be there?" She asked, her voice filled with hope.

"For sure, she-cub." He huffed as he stood. As he wandered around the cave, she thought over his words. Yes, he may be a crazy bear, but she had hope that the Promised Land was real. She wanted to go there and live free of the Furless ones. She wanted to have enough food to eat each day. She wanted to see her mother.

On a feeling only Kúnan could understand, she asked Murali, "Will you go with me?"

"Where to? I am old, and can't travel far." He groaned.

"The Promised Land." She simply said. He looked up, and stared intently at her. He looked away, then started pacing again.

"It is a long and hard journey, young one. You would need to be brave and strong to get through it," He replied, "but yes, I will go with you. I need to visit my son, anyway."

"You have a son?" NaKoda asked incredulously.

"Yes." He growled, obviously annoyed at the fact that she was surprised. "His name is Oslo. He is about as old as you, she-cub." He tossed her a big seal, and told her to eat up. "We're going to be leaving soon." He sat down next to his own seal and started to eat.

Throughout the whole meal, they were silent. NaKoda knew that the journey was going to be dangerous. They might get lost, hurt, or even lose their lives to the Furless ones. She knew, however, that she couldn't not do this. She needed to go to the Promised Land. NaKoda knew that she could do it with Murali, for he knew the way. He was like her compass, a dear friend leading the way to their destination.

"Are you ready, she-cub?" Murali asked her as she was finishing her food. She nodded, and they set off back into the real, Furless-filled world.

\*\*\*

They had been on their journey for three sun-rises. As they traveled, they talked about many things, one of them being whether or not the Great Bear was real.

"I think that the Great Bear is real." Murali said one day. "Everyday, things happen that cannot be explained, like a seal jumping out of the seal-hole as soon as you get there. What do you think, she-cub?"

"I honestly don't think so," she replied, "because there are things that happen all the time that are horrible to us. Why couldn't we just be saved from the pain?"

"Well, you have to think about it this way, she-cub. You have to go through some pain before you get to the happy and fun life. Happiness comes through the pain at the end."

They came up on a seal-hole, and NaKoda laid down next to it. As she waited for a seal to come up for air, she thought about what the Promised Land looked like. In her head, she imagined it as a huge cave made of ice. On the ground was plenty of ice holes. There were polar bears everywhere, and her mother was in the middle of them all, staring right at her. They walked closer and closer to each other, and suddenly a black thing erupted, breaking the ice in her imagination. As she thought herself back into the real world, she swiped the seal with her snowy white paws, catching it with her claws. NaKoda dragged it onto the ice next to Murali. She padded back over to the seal hole, and waited for another one to pop up.

After a while, Murali spoke. "This tastes funny."

"I'm sure that it will be fine. It probably was just a weird fish it ate." she mumbled. Another seal popped up, and she caught it gracefully. As she dragged it out of the water, she noticed that it had a shiny tint to it.

"What's this shiny stuff?" She asked Murali. He walked over, and after seeing it up close, started to push it back in the water with his snout furiously.

"What are you doing?!" She growled, trying to hold back the seal, but it fell in the water with a splash.

"It had the human's dark water on it," he replied, just as angry as her, "And I ate a seal with the deadly stuff on mine!"

As it dawned on her what was going to happen, the old bear paced up and down on the ice.

"We need to hurry." he barked, and started to run to the north.

They ran for three sun-rises, resting when they needed to. That was when Murali started to feel the pain in his stomach. She could tell, because he started to slow down dramatically. He was also breathing a lot heavier than before.

"Murali?" She asked him as they were taking a break, "Are you okay?"

He sighed, and told her no. He continued to eat his portion of the seal, and continued. "I'm going to die, she-cub. What about that is okay?" They sat in silence for the rest of their meal.

\*\*\*

The next day, Murali was started coughing up blood. He tried to hide it at first, but after awhile there was just too much. NaKoda tried to inconspicuously take more breaks than before. They took longer breaks, and started walking instead of running.

Deep inside, NaKoda blamed herself. She should have noticed the shiny tint before giving it to him. However, there was nothing she could do about it except wait it out.

Later on, while Murali and NaKoda were walking, he collapsed.

"Leave me here, she-cub. There is no point in trying to have me go any further." He said.

"Then I will stay with you until you are... gone." Nakoda then started to bawl her eyes out, nuzzling Murali's fur with her snout.

In his final time, they talked about everything important to them. Right before he passed away, Murali gave her the directions to the Promised Land.

"You must go north, she-cub. Follow the North Star. Then, when you reach the greenlands, go west. Travel safe, NaKoda. My spirit will be with you."

Murali breathed his last breath, and his head fell to the ground. NaKoda roared in agony, then dipped her head in sorrow, whimpering.

The mourning on for two sun-rises. After the third sun-rise, she left his body buried in a pile of snow, heading north. The journey was slow without Murali there.

As she walked, she thought about his son, Oslo. She wondered if he was still at the Promised Land. How would he take the news of his father dead? Would she even be able to tell him?

All this thinking made the journey pass by faster than before, and suddenly, she was in the greenlands. Tall figures stood from the ground with food attached. Small furballs also had berries on them. While in the greenlands, she ate the berries and roots to stay full. They were nothing like seal, but at least she had food in her stomach.

After not even a sun-rise, she was out of the greenlands and back onto the ice, heading west. The rest of the journey took her one and a half sun-rises.

She could tell instantly when she walked into the area of the Promised Land. It was almost as she had imagined it, save for the ice-roof and her mother being in the middle. There were polar bears everywhere, just as Murali had described it. She then called out the only name that she had heard Murali say besides her own.

"Oslo?" She called him name, walking around the area. Finally, a bear's head went up from a crowd of bears when she said his name. He padded over, and she greeted him with the news of, "Your father is dead."

An awkward silence fell upon them. He stared at her for awhile, and then said, "There has been too many losses for one day. I am already grieving for my friend who I lost earlier. Please let me grieve in silence." He walked back over to the crowd of bears, and NaKoda followed him. That's

when she noticed that they were crowded around a dead polar bear. She felt their sorrow and pain, so she sat with them. NaKoda sniffed, and smelt something she had only been dreaming about for years. The smell of fresh seal mixed with lavender. Her mother.

"Mom?" she called out. She continued to sniff for her mother as bears from the crowd started to look at her. The smell was across from her, so she headed in that direction. However, the closer she got to the polar bear's body laying on the ground, the stronger the smell became.

"No no no no no!" she roared, smelling the body on the ground, noticing that it was her mother. "I can't do this, its not fair, please, no..." She crumpled to the ground. Oslo padded up, and nuzzled her shoulder.

"Hey," he said gently, "it's gonna be okay." He laid down beside her, and nuzzled her tear stained cheek. "It'll be alright. I'm here for you. We can get through this together."

That's how they stayed for the rest of the night, next to her mother's body, depending upon each other for strength.

They would depend on each other for the rest of their lives, and then for forever more.