

When night fell Lila lay down on the stony ground beside a rock and wrapped herself in her one blanket. The full moon shone right in her face and kept her awake, and she couldn't get comfortable because of the stones on the ground. Finally she sat up in annoyance.

But there was no-one to share her annoyance with. She'd never felt so lonely.

'I wonder...' she began to say, but shook her head. She hadn't come on this journey in order to wonder how things were at home. It was the way things were at home that had made her come on this journey after all.

'Well, if I can't sleep, I might as well keep walking,' she said to herself. She folded away her blanket and retied her sarong and tightened her sandals, and set off again.

The ground soon became steeper and steeper. Soon she could no longer see the top of Mount Merapi so she knew she must be climbing the sides of it. There were no plants at all here, not even shrubs or grass: just bare rock and loose stones. And the ground was warm.

'I'm close,' she said to herself. 'It can't be far now-'

But just as she said that, she set her foot on a stone and it rolled under her weight and she fell, and a dozen other rocks rolled down with her.

All the breath was knocked out of her, and she had none left to cry out with as the rocks pummeled and battered her. The rocks bounded on down the mountain until finally they came to a rest a long way below. Lila sat up gingerly.

'Ow,' she said. 'That was silly. I wasn't looking where I was putting my feet. I must be more careful.' She got up and found that one of her sandals had come off, and had tumbled down the mountain with the stones. It was nowhere to be seen. Very delicately she put her naked foot down, and found the ground hot beneath it.



Well, there was nothing she could do about that; hadn't she come seeking fire? And hadn't she burned herself time and time again as an apprentice? And what did she need delicate feet for anyway?

On she climbed higher and higher. Before long she came to a part of the slope where all the stones were loose, and where she slid back two steps for every three she too upwards. Her feet and legs were bruised and battered and then she lost her other sandal; and she nearly cried out in despair, because

there was no sign of the Grotto - just an endless slope of hot rough stones that tumbled and rolled underfoot.

And her throat was parched and her lungs were panting in the hot thin air, and she fell to her knees and clung with trembling fingers as the stones began to rill under her again. She let go of her little bag of food and her blankets, those didn't matter anymore; the only thing that mattered was climbing on. She dragged herself on bleeding knees up and up, until every muscle hurt and she had no breath left in her lungs, until she thought she was going to die and still she went on.

Then one stone bigger than the rest began to shift above her as the little stones beneath it tumbled down. It slid and rolled towards her and she had no strength to move; but at the last second it bounded over her and rolled on down the mountainside in a cloud of dust and pebbles.

Where it had been, there was a great hole as tall as a house. The moonlight shone into it a little way, but the hole went deeper still, right into the heart of the mountain. A gust of Sulphur-laden smoke came billowing out, and Lila knew she had found her goal: it was the Grotto of the Fire Fiend.