

MILES AND THE MOON  
A Ride the Light Book

For what seemed a very long time Miles had been certain of only two things, the sore spots on his legs where they had crashed down against the steering bar of the sled, and the roaring of air as it flew by him after he had bounced up again. He stopped in the middle of a stand of three tall birch trees growing so closely side by side his shoulders brushed their trunks. The birches swept the wet stiff crusts of snow from his jeans and his elbows sending tiny showers of sugary snow crystals down.

‘What is this? I was just sledding; now this is summer and this river is orange.’

There was light at the tip of the sky, very like a setting sun, reaching orange light strands down to the little grove where he sat, reaching right down to his feet. In the strands, from the strands, around the strands everything glowed orange. Thick coarse grass ran gently down a small hill bank and steeply up again on the other side. To his left, a pile of boulders blocked the view; not too far away on his right, stands of oak and yew trees, and some kinds that Miles did not know, reached so far into the sky this little clearing seemed walled away from everything. The orange river curved gently down the center. And Miles looked about and saw that all was very much like home – trees, rocks, grass, wildflowers, streams, everything growing lush and tall in the orange light, all of them shades of orange.

But at home, it was snowing; and even then the hedgerows were green and brown and the dirt places black with wet and the sky was stitched with winter blue and the trees wore many brown and gray coats under the patches of snow. Miles stood up, stood quite still and looked

slowly, slowly, left to right. A breeze lifted the front of his hair.

He walked upstream to the water that fell heavily, steadily over the stack of boulders that rose so high over him, and knelt at the bank. The water stank of all things old and ran thick with dirt, sticks, leaves and lumps of rotting things. Here and there, flicked lighter shapes that may have been fish and long streaks of maybe eels; nearly round lumps like turtles sliced the thick muck.

“Nothing could live in this river of rot,” said Miles. Just then, the filthy water broke in two ahead of a huge gray green log. It struck the edge of the falls and stuck there, at war with the slimy shadowy water that pushed at its tail. The gray green length shivered and rose a little then flung itself down and was lost in the murky bottom. Yet above it on the dark surface a shadow like a stain flicked grey to green and was gone.

Miles ran back down the hill, his eyes on the creek. His eyes grew a little larger for the water here was only muddy brown and smelled less. He ran further and again gazed in. Yes, the water was more clear and orange and there were fish gliding, turtles rolling side to side beneath the surface and eels snapping through the clear orange water flashing with the orange light and the wet.

‘Strange.’ His eyebrows drew together with thought. His gaze drifted back upstream and he saw that the plants too were black and gray and brown at the falls. But at his feet they lay limp and almost alive. He ran down to the next sharp bend; ran hard and fast until he was gasping and

hot. Just around the stream corner he found the creek sparkling between short grasses that bowed

to each other down both banks.

“What can it mean?”

As soon as he spoke, the surface of the water began to ripple. Some of the ripples drew close together and some much further apart. The ripples became quivering letters and flowed into one another and their words said – To make new –.

“I know a lot of interesting creeks at home from hiking but this is –I don’t know. Where am I?”

The ripples rolled back and forth and the new words came - At the start - .

“Where are my friends?”

- At the end - , the ripples said.

Miles squatted down close, elbows on knees. ‘What do I do?’ he asked softly.

The ripples floated easily, slowly. - Watch the moon - .

Miles sank all the way down, looking slowly across the sky from the fuzzy orange place at the end of the land all across the new jeans blueness that arched so far above him. The blue reflected in his eyes, filled his eyes, but the sky was clear.

“Well, Mum always says if its one thing I am, it’s patient, so I’ll wait.”

He rested his chin in his hands and watched the ripples break clear and fall back orange.

The afternoon grew warmer; the ripples moved slower and slower and took so long to curve and

break; that watching them pulled Miles breath slower, steadier and slower still. Orange

dragonflies hopped and skated across the glassy surface unafraid of fish, frog or tortoise

wriggling beneath them. Little by little, the dragonflies began to hum a sing-song of up and down

notes- one up, one down; Miles eyes dropped and opened and dropped and he began to doze – the songs and water noise drifting into his dream.

His dream was of home and himself when much younger. He sat in his chair in the corner of his room and watched things come through the door, toothpastes and bottles of milk, toys and shoes and sleds. At the door the tubes were full and the bottles topped up, frosty white,

the toys sometimes shiny, sometimes soft, the shoes stiff; and they all marched across the room

and jumped into the trash bin flat and oozing, clinking and empty, dull and worn and rusty.

He woke a little then whispering, “Everything gets used up or worn out or so old, its no good anymore. I’ve known that for years and years.”

Then the buzz of the dragonflies and rush of the water led him down again and he fell deeply asleep, dreamless. His breath came slow through his crimson lips; his sandy hair fell in locks and caught here and there among his lashes.

Miles slept as the day wore away. The fish and eels and turtles each found their own small place in the now still water and floated, timeless. The dragonflies sighed away then joined the little boy in his deep dark sleep.

Above them all at last, in the last of the evening, rose a sliver of moon; lit like a bright orange smile over the sleeping ones.

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Miles awoke at the dawn of a bright clear day; came up softly, up and up to a world as

silent and as frozen as a photograph.

He lay against a boulder; his back held so perfectly against its curves that no movement seemed worth the trouble. So he neither moved nor blinked and when he breathed, he kept each puff of air as soft and shallow as he could. Miles wanted nothing to change this magic stillness that was beyond all quiet at the furthest edge of peace.

'I am a stranger here and I see nobody. And if I did they wouldn't even know my name,' he thought. 'It's hard to tell, but this must be a new day because I slept and slept.'

"They must miss me at home," he whispered, "By now, they must be searching. I know no one knows this place – not even me."

His mind buzzed on and he didn't listen to it at all; the way the buzz of a far away lawnmower is there and not worth noticing. 'I'll rest as much as I can and stay up to find the moon tonight. So still, and cool and nice.'

His eyes moved slowly about. There at his feet sat the stream - no current – no ripples breaking over the pebbles or tugging the grass of the banks. Just sitting. He dared not move his head in search of the water creatures, but he saw their reflections against the surface, perfect, beautiful, still as a painting.

'I wonder how long it stays. If I sit up, will it all go?'

Miles blinked hard, and then raised his head. Nothing moved in his sight, but a sound like

a splash whispered on the still air ever so soft. He sat up, then stayed still; his foot scraped a rock

and it tumbled down the stream bank noiseless in the grass. A dragonfly bounced along the

water and settled again. Gently he sank against the rock again.

'It's me. I must make it go. Its crazy, but nothing else changed. I wish Xeth was here; he knows how to figure things out.

'Where is he? What if they're all still sledding and don't even know I'm gone?'

The pretty place grew blurry; Miles eyes sparkled with wet.

'And Mum. She's always saying I'm all she has. She doesn't have me now. Always saying it. I have to get home; I have to. If Xeth was here what would he say to do?'

Miles thought and thought; his pretty place frozen around him. He sat and thought and rubbed his hands slowly together, over and over

'Xeth always says start at the start. So. I'm here today, and last night, I slept and slept. Before that I got here and before that we were sledding and crashed into that hedge. Is the hole in the hedge somewhere? There are no hedges I can see. Wait! We were all on the same sled and crashed together, maybe they're here.'

He called and called for Xeth and the other five; his voice crashing into the quiet. And the only answer was more silence.

"This is stupid; I have to explore. Maybe the moon isn't the only way home."

Miles scrambled up and followed the stream bank down. Here there were few smooth places; the water played hide and seek among the low spots and the rises; hid under fallen logs where earth and grass smashed up against the back side. At last, it became such a tiny trickle he had to part the thick tall grass to see it at all.

He searched the stream all the way to the falls that fell up and stretched wide as far as he

could see. And the falls too were frozen; rippling up to the sky smooth as an orange mirror. The

orange spray rose ever so high against the sky, every droplet quivered with light while staying absolutely still. He could not see beyond the wet orange glistening wall.

'Well, I made the stream go; so I can do this too. If the spray is gone, I can see a way down, if there is one.' "Hey!" yelled Miles as loudly as he could.

Nothing changed.

"Hey!"

"Hey! Hey! Hey!"

The spray stayed painted on the sky. Miles ran closer, yelled louder, softer, jumped up and down, asked nicely and begged. The waterfall did not move. Nothing moved. He let out one last short yell, different from the others, and sank down on his knees, worn out and anxious from exploring.

"And why is everything still so quiet? I've been running and sliding and moving and moving."

He fell forward into the grass and breathed in the softly spicy smell. A sudden gurgle of water startled him and there below the creek rippled - watch for the moon -.

As tired and scared and lonely as he was, Miles did watch for the moon. All that day whenever he felt tired or sleepy, he would jump or walk in circles or flap his arms to wake a little, but the moon never crossed the sky.

Day gave way at last and lightened into orange dusk, and Miles fell asleep once more. This time when morning came, he slept on and the hushed, still world slept with him. The

stream was flat and shiny, the falls mirrored the orange of the passing day.

Miles woke with a start when he felt the evening light change on his face. He lay still a moment in the quiet; then jumped up. He knew he had slept the day, so he could be up all night, all the moon time, to watch and wait.

He spent the twilight time walking about this glen, looking for all the places that had the best view of the sky. He walked slowly; there was no need to hurry. His snow boots made no noise against the grass. In all his small world the only sound was his breath from walking. He settled at last on the high rocks at the upper waterfall where, with the smallest turn of his head, he could see every bit of sky.

“Just what Xeth would have done”, he said quite loudly. Smiling, he sat down to wait. In the last of the daylight the stream gurgled away again far below his dangling feet, but the ripples were only ripples. There were no messages for him.

He sighed. ‘I wonder why?’

Again the night crept in; the stream darkened and Miles sat once more alone in the silence. His rock bed rose below him, his parka pillow still rolled, lying in its hollowed - out place. In the gloom the bed looked something more than empty. Miles sat beside by the frozen down falls, holding his legs while he rocked back and forth, his brittle blue eyes searching the sky for one light place.

The night stole closer.

Now that he thought he knew he was not the one who made things go, he felt free to talk

things out. Talk and talk, because that was the only way he knew how to think. He was sure it was stupid – everyone said so – but he simply knew no other way.

“I don’t even know if I’m talking or thinking. I haven’t said anything to anyone for days now. What was the last thing I said? At the top of the hill and the others were laughing and they all piled on the sled and Xeth said ‘No room for you.’ And he laughed. And -that was it – I said, ‘You know I don’t have a sled. Take me.’ And he did; and put me on the front and we went so fast.”

“And then I was thinking that I wish Xeth wasn’t there because when you’re poor they all laugh. Even when they say they care. Got my wish; he’s gone. Everybody’s gone.

“Night is all the way here now. Look at all those stars dancing like sugar you throw in the air, and no one to see it but me. Just me. Just....

Then Miles slept and dreamed about the sugar stars.

He half woke in the broad day but kept his eyes closed while the light tickled the end of his nose. The tickling made him sneeze, giggle and smile, once, twice. On his third sneeze, his light blue and gold eyes popped wide open then crossed, for there, on the tip of his nose, sat a bright orange dragonfly. It danced and hopped from one foot to the other on its pointed perch until it was quite sure Miles’ eyes were open; then rose straight up, looped wide and flew far down the stream.

Miles watched and watched its bouncing flight and happiness rose and rose in him.

‘This is such a pretty place except for this part of the river up here. I hear it too, so it must be flowing now. I wonder what makes it stop. I wonder what makes it make

words.'

He rose and trotted down to the gentle bank and knelt in a small sandy place and watched the river for its secrets. The glowing of the water shone clear and orange then broke silver- white with ripples.

"Hello," Miles said softly.

Good morning -, they rippled. Did you like your alarm?

"Alarm? Oh, my dragonfly. Very much, thanks. Did you send him?"

You did - .

Miles couldn't think of one thing to say to that, to himself or aloud. At last he whispered,

"Where is the moon?"

You saw her face in the light of a different thing - .

Miles backed slowly away. The answers were questions of their own and he was not smart enough. 'Bye.'

He ran to his sleeping rocks. 'Look how pretty this is!' He turned slowly in a circle to take in the grass that covered all but the rocks, stretched his hand out to trace the outlines of the perfectly shaped trees and breathed deeply in to drink the orange rind scent of the flowers, smiling among the grasses and bursting out of their circle blooms and square stems. His eyes swept along the river that circled them all, hugging them close.

Beautiful and perfect.

And Miles too, all the way up from sleep now, felt beautiful bright and more tingly alive than he had ever been. Inside he was so very calm that his heart had room to grow and grow.

Now he had no thoughts at all, but feelings. Miles was glowing and light.

He lay down and felt how cool, rich and soft the long grass was, brushed his hand over the blades and watched them float back up looking a little surprised.

'How could so many spiky blades be so soft?

He pressed the grasses again with his square fingers and they bounced up in a moment as full and rich as they had always been. Miles caught sight of a tiny wriggling between the blades. He made a slice in the grass with the flats of his hands and there at the bottom a ladybug crawled, stumbling up and over and down the roots and fallen blades that were logs to her. She walked steadily but slowly, for her right wing that should have curved orange and black and rounded in the light, lay flat and at right angles to her side. Miles stared down very closely and saw that the missing feet under her right wing made her walk a bounce; her every step was a small fall.

Ladybug had frozen for a moment, sensing the change in the light, the change of Miles' presence; then struggled up, grabbed a root with her feet and tumbled forward.

Without thought, Miles moved with her; his hands slicing the grass ahead of her. Down the gentle slope she went slowly, steadily, closer and closer to the water bank.

At the edge at last, she moved bit by bit across the dark wet earth between bank and stream and into the water marching, stumbling still across the clear bed while the current rushed on above her.

Miles sank back, squatting, and watched her through a squint as long as he could. In a moment he let his fingers dangle in the stream; the water bumped his fingers against one another and he

waited until a bounce on the other bank caught his eye. He felt more than saw the little red-orange speck she was but the bounces he saw –one, two, three. Then where Ladybug had been was empty as she danced down the riverbank, flying free.

If he had thought of it, Miles might have cried, but he only felt as we all do when someone we love wins something we thought we wanted, and he stared blindly out over the meadow flowers, fluffy soft orange puffballs, balls of pansies and marigolds and wild roses.

Miles stood and walked to the nearest bed of flowers, fluffy soft orange puffballs, balls of pansies and marigolds and wild roses. He buried his face in the blossoms breathing their faint powder scent; each bloom pressed round and perfect against his face.

He touched each one as gently as he could. His fingers traced up the stems of the roses, stems smooth and firm and no thorns at all.

‘If they don’t need protection from anything then I don’t.’

He smiled a small, shy smile and walked away further from the river to the trees glowing like giant carrots in the sun; the bark of their trunks shadowed and ridged like water currents in slanting light.

‘Hey, Mr. Tree. You know what? My favorite tree sure looks like you. If the moon doesn’t come for me by tomorrow, can we play? The shimmer of that tree stopped. Miles stared a moment then laughed. ‘You’re right. Tomorrow’s climbing and running and swinging and playing is for then; now it’s today. Thanks!’ Miles hugged the bright trunk tight.

He walked back to the river so narrow here and rushing fast and orange and clear and bright. One large rock stood tall, forcing the orange river water around it. Miles leaned

against its back, his head held steady by its top. He let his eyes fill with the sky's vast washed blue, threaded everywhere with cloud streaks, streaks delicate and thin and barely there.

'There's so much sky and so little of me,' he thought.

His happy glow inside just stopped and his chest felt heavy and thick.

'I was so happy a second ago, like everything else was. And all the rest of it is bigger than me too; all I have to do is add the sky. You hear that sky? I'm making you part of me too. OK?'

Just like that his glow was back. He turned slowly around and around so all the sky could see him; he watched the clouds grow longer and further apart like the ripples of the river.

'It's saying something; I know it is. Say it, sky. Please.'

Miles listened closer than he ever had, and far behind him whispered a swooshing, whirring sound. Not much louder than a breeze at first, it swelled up and up and became a powerful thuck-thuck sound. Over the boulder pile at the head of the stream three ducks appeared. Their feathers sparkled like emeralds against the orange river. At the rocks, they turned left toward the play trees, circled back and flew around Miles in a flat, slow circle.

'They're looking at me; I know they are.'

As soon as he spoke, the ducks settled lower and lower still; and one, two, three, slid into

the stream at his feet. The river rushed fast, clear and narrow; the ducks pushed themselves across and back again several times, looking at Miles all the while; then rose and soared straight

downstream, orange water streaming from their feet.

‘The answer! That’s the sky’s answer.’

Miles stepped into the stream. The bank fell away sharply; he pushed with his feet and swam like a frog to the center and was lifted and carried away down his river. In four breaths the

heavy current pulled him to Ladybugs Crossing, that sweet, wide, flat place.

Miles stood and walked easily across while the stream tugged at his ankles licking and pulling like a playing puppy.

The clearing was sinking deep into the days end; the trees were lit at the tops and dark below; the shadows of the flowers stretched dark and low. Only the stream stayed bright and glowing. The downing sun browned the upper river yet lit the lower end to a gentle rippling orange mirror. The sun fell lower in its time, until at last nothing remained bright but the shimmering orange tree traces at the ground that stretched up more and more light to yellow white at their crowns.

His clothes, hair and skin were already nearly dry, but Miles stood frozen. He didn’t want

to move or do anything. Miles didn’t feel like he normally did; no, not like his old self at all.

What he felt was still and calm and wide awake to everything.

He turned downstream, pulled by something. A noise, like a million far drums beating fast pulling at his insides, pulling at his belly.

“Something wants me to walk but I’m not going to. It’s already too dark to see.” His voice was like a breath of air.

Then Miles started down the stream bank to the drumming sound; his feet just went on their own. The drums boomed louder now and under them rolled a great noise like cheering

voices, a great noise rolling up and down.

The dusk deepened to blue-black everywhere. But from the drumming direction an orange glimmer danced on the ground and across the top of the stream. Quite quickly, as he watched the glow, two lighter orange dots appeared on the opposite sides of the stream, perfectly even with one another. The points rose up slowly, stretched wider and wider and at last a curve of the same light rose up to connect them.

“It can’t be, can it?” Miles asked loudly. “Is it? Is it? It’s the moon! It is!”

The orange ball of moon stretched up like a dancer, casting yellow light along the river top. The water flattened and smoothed, even in the light. It became a long ribbon of orange-yellow satin light, and shining there in the ribbon’s reflection up the right bank shone a path, just wide enough for a boy to pass along, that ran flat and smooth down the side of the river.

The pulling in his belly grew stronger and stronger until Miles stepped out along the path.

The drumming pounded louder and louder in the young night as Miles walked to the moon. His steps were light and easy and quick; and joy washed over him again flooding down from the top of his head and all through his body. It felt like going home.

He followed the stream around a corner and the drumming beat yelled in his ears. It was the falls, unfrozen, crashing down, down, so far down and spraying droplets up to its top again and out across the near broad face of the moon.

Now the path ended at a broad wet stone step, the first of many that poured down the side of the falls, each step slick with wet and moss. So many of them no one could count them;

narrow and more narrow, the end of them lost in the far wet dark.

Miles moved slowly, down, down and then a turn and down. He saw that the step path ran between the cliff on one side and the pounding water on the other. He threw his head back and laughed out loud.

‘None of my friends have walked behind a waterfall. Only me!’

He stepped further into the tunnel of wet lit orange by the moon on the falling water. Orange light glowed from the shiny wet cliff. The steps began again. Down, down, turn - down, down, turn. The falls beat the air and echoed against the rock so loudly now that Miles whole body shook, and he wondered if he were halfway down yet.

Down, down, turn; slowly, carefully he planted each foot firmly, evenly. It had become a game, fun and easy to win. And at each turn Miles stopped and laughed a little. Down, down, turn; down, down.

Then a turn was not a turn - but a stone circle in the cliff, a round space cut out of the sheer rock; round, flat, slippery, smooth and shining darkly orange behind the falls. The edges of the round rock were splashed and washed by the drumming water.

Miles stepped back to the wall as far as he could; his tee shirt soaked through now and cold on his back. He felt high and low and all around that he could reach for the step, a toe hole, an opening, anything. Still the water roared between him and the so close moon.

“Oh, no. No. No. No. No!” The falls drowned his shouts. “There’s no choice,” he said softly now. “No choice at all.”

Miles turned to go back. The moon had risen higher and the stairs were lost in the new

dark. Slowly he scrunched down and tried to feel the step up. There was nothing there; his fingers felt nothing.

He stood slowly, shaking, and for long minutes he felt nothing at all, not a thought, not his body.

‘Doesn’t matter. I could never feel my way up all those steps.’ He turned back and stood at the widest middle part of the round rock; the falls so close the spray stung his skin, and his clothes made squishy sounds from the water beating against him. Miles thoughts were music lines; every one reflecting another one above and below it and strung out to an end he could not guess.

“I have to move – before the moon gets washed away by the sun and I get frozen behind the falls for always.”

A clear soft thought floated up in him like a bubble.

‘Xeth said one time courage wasn’t when you could only do one thing. Courage was when you looked at all the things and did the best one.’

Miles wiped the water off his face; his hands flung it from him. He spoke against the water; the way a casual enemy is spoken to.

“You were wrong, Xeth. Least for me. I have just one thing, so hard, and I dunno if it is the best. You said too when we were sledding its best to be brave – so I will.”

And Miles stretched up and stepped out into the falls.

He tumbled and circled, but the water did not beat him in fury as he thought it would. This whirling world of orange white water moved slowly and the water held and turned

him gently, roiled him slowly down across the face of the bright round moon. He reached to touch the glowing face he had waited and waited for and just nearly missed. Somewhere he heard children singing in wild, happy tones. His once small body stretched out long and straight, turned head over heels one last time and slid feet first into a black dark pool.

The pouring water pushed down into itself, shoved against itself and pushed Miles down then quickly, softly towed him up to the light. Bright white moonlight shone gently and full on a huge meadow glowing with red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple and violet flowers – all washed pale in the soft bright white light.

At the edge of the meadow, at the edge of the pool, Miles saw Xeth jumping and shouting and laughing. Miles ran to him, his knees slicing the gurgling waters, and held his friend close and tight.

Xeth leaned back a little and stared.

“You’re so tall!” Xeth said.

Miles grinned. “I’m happier now. How did you know I would be here?”

“Let’s just say I followed my tears. Did you have adventures too? You feel very strong.”

“I think I found out if you think you’re little then you are.”

“I told you.”

“I know,” said Miles. I know now.”

So the boys sat cross-legged, face to face on the grassy bank and told each other of all that had passed, even told of a few of the dark places they had known, and all the while the field flowers waved behind the friends and grew ever brighter, pulling all of their

colors from the dawn light around them.

THE END