Rescue?

Smoke billowed out from the small aircraft. Both wings had come off in the crash and bits of fuselage and other debris littered the mountainside.

The four children crawled out of the broken machine. They were shocked and frightened. The cold hit them quickly, making their teeth chatter. Thank heaven they had survived, and though the pilot seemed to be unconscious, she was still breathing.

'What do we do now?' whispered Niang, her face white with shock. Goron stared at the aircraft in bewilderment. It had all happened so quickly. One minute they were flying, the next they were hurtling downwards in a sickening dive, out of control. Somehow the pilot had managed to turn the aircraft into the trees and they had missed smashing face first into the mountain. Goron could still feel the hideous bumping and lurching as the plane plunged through the dense forest, cracking and snapping the branches until at last it had come to a stop.

They looked about them. It seemed as if the entire contents of the little aircraft had spilled out over the mountain: their luggage, blankets, seats … . Around them the giant fir trees were bowed down with snow. The silence was enormous. Goron stared at the others. Minna was sitting on a rucksack crying quietly, Niang was comforting her, and Chandra was staring at the debris strewn on the ground. They were all shivering badly from shock and from cold.

'I think we should get away from the plane,' said Goron. 'We should get down the mountain as fast as we can. It's not safe here.'



Niang stared at him. 'Go where?' she asked. 'Where could we go, Goron?' Goron swallowed hard. He had no idea. The forest they were in was so dense they would have difficulty finding a way through.

'I don't know,' he replied awkwardly. Niang stood and faced him. At eighteen, Goron might be the oldest, but he was talking rubbish!

'We're not going anywhere.' Niang said firmly. 'We must shelter here. If we start walking through the woods we'll get lost. The pilot sent a mayday signal before we went down, and someone must have heard it. They'll send a rescue party. If we move, the rescue party won't find us.' Goron stared at Niang. Her words made sense.

'We have to keep warm and dry,' Niang continued. 'We can sit on seats from the plane and find something to make a shelter over us. First let's see what's in the plane.' Gradually the shock and fright began to fade, and the four children started thinking about survival. Niang and Minna found a large plastic sheet which they hung between

This page may be photocopied for use by the purchasing institution only.

© Charlotte Makhlouf and Brilliant Publications

two trees to make a rough tent. Goron and Chandra scattered fir tree branches over the ground beneath the tent to keep the heat in and brought in the broken seats from the plane. In the torn rucksacks they found extra clothing to put on and there were emergency blankets from the aircraft which would help keep them warm. They carefully carried the still unconscious pilot into their shelter, and covered her with blankets.

Somehow Niang managed to get a fire burning using old magazines, and wood from some old packing cases which had been in the hold. They raided the remains of the plane's tiny kitchen and Niang rigged up a small pot over the fire in which she put some snow. Soon they were sipping hot water from polystyrene cups and eating food scavenged from the plane.

Niang shivered and stared fearfully out at the darkening forest. With any luck the fire would keep unwelcome animals away while acting as a beacon to any rescue party. She wondered if there were some flares in the aircraft to signal their position to any aircraft around. 'We just need to get through the night,' she thought fearfully. 'If we can get through the night we'll stand a chance.'

'Do you think there might be bears?' asked Minna. 'Or wolves?' She trembled as she spoke. 'I wish we'd stayed at home,' she continued, with a sob in her voice. 'I never wanted to go up to the Mountain Retreat anyway. I hate the cold. I want to go home. I want Mum and Dad!' She burst into frightened tears. Niang quickly put her arms around the crying girl.

'It's alright Minna, someone will find us. We should have arrived hours ago. The Retreat people will wonder where we are. Anyway the pilot sent a mayday signal, so we'll be rescued soon.' She spoke more confidently than she felt. It could be days before they were rescued and there was very little food. The plane hadn't carried many supplies for such a short journey and so few passengers.

They all slept fitfully that night. It grew colder and colder, forcing them to huddle together for warmth. With the dawn came snow. At first it only drifted down lightly. But gradually the snow grew thicker and thicker until they couldn't see the trees ahead of them. Finally, Goron's temper snapped.

'We can't just sit here doing nothing,' he said angrily. 'We've got to do something! I vote two of us make our way down the mountain and find help, while the others stay here.'

'And I vote we stay here,' replied Niang angrily. 'We've got no map and no idea of where we're going. We'd be mad to leave now, with no shelter or food at all.'

'Right, like there's tons of food and drink here.' said Goron sarcastically.

'There's more than in the forest.' Niang stood up abruptly. 'What's that?' she whispered. Everyone tensed and listened.

'Voices!' replied Chandra. 'There are voices … . Over here,' he shouted loudly, 'We're over here!'

Out of the whirling snow came figures with lights and sledges. The children hugged one another in relief. They had been saved.

This page may be photocopied for use by the purchasing institution only.

© Charlotte Makhlouf and Brilliant Publications