

Water Master

[by Carol Emshwiller](#)

If the Water Master says, yes, then your apple trees will grow. If he says, yes, you'll take a bath, have a drink, and you might even have a little patch of grass.

He checks the irrigation ditches and gates all day long. Leans over to pinch the sand between his fingers. Never looks up to see the birds or the mountains. Never notices the sky except as it's reflected in his water. He has to watch for secret ditches or for open gates that are supposed to be closed.

When I say, Hello, and he answers the same, he doesn't look up. I don't know what color his eyes are. Blue, I would imagine. I would hope. He always wears a wide brimmed black hat pulled down low. I don't know what his face looks like except that it's lean and lined. I don't suppose he cares who I am. Besides, I only grow prickly pears, squaw tea, tepary beans, and mesquite pods. I don't need the Water Master's water. At least not much of it.

Water is what's on his mind and rightly so. I can understand that. Nothing is better, how it bubbles up and sparkles, silvery in the sun, frothing, foaming as it rushes, roaring down from way up there to here. How it leaps so high over rocks. How it trembles in backwater pools. How it tastes. Cool.... Cold.... How dangerous it can be.

Those who steal water are the worst, therefore the Water Master wears a bullet proof book of "The Hundred Best Loved Poems" over his heart (given to him by the town. We need to keep him healthy) and pistols at his sides. Shoot first, think afterwards, that's what a Water Master does. *Has* to do. Those who open gates in the middle of the night after the Water Master has closed them ... those people are in trouble even if they think they're doing all right so far.

He lives way up by his dam, in a big house or so they say. All the things to build it but the stones came up on mules. Furnishings, too: Bathtubs, beds, mirrors so large you wouldn't think they could get around the switchbacks. I've heard tell there's an orchard and grapes and artichokes and rose bushes. There's plenty of water up there, that's where it comes from.

Even so, I'm sorry for him, looking at the ground all day long, seeing not much more than lizards. Lizards down here that is, goodness knows what crawls around up there. It's a hard, long climb to where he lives but he goes up and down almost every day, checking our raging river as he goes.

His name is Amos Acularious, but nobody calls him anything but Water Master. I think his grandparents and parents were shepherds. I wonder how one gets from shepherd to Water Master? It doesn't seem right. They say it's the river, chooses its own master. I don't believe it. And even if true, why would it choose a shepherd?

Even though all those Acularius's were nothing but shepherds, and even though Amos Acularius is so thin there's nothing much to him, and even though he wears a fringed jacket which makes him look even thinner, every girl would like to marry the Water Master and live in that big house. They've heard how shiny the floors are, how the roof gleams with copper, how water runs, icy cold, from half the faucets and even, though hard to believe, hot from the other half.

I, on the other hand, have long since decided never to marry. In fact that's been my policy from the start. It was because of diapers. (I changed my first diaper at the age of seven.) Because of dishes, too. (As

the oldest child in my family, I had plenty of both those.) Besides, by now I'm too old for marriage, anyway. Except so is Amos Acularius.

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There hasn't been much snow on the mountains this year. They say our Lake of the Mountain is low. Many of the ditch gates are shut in order for the lake to fill. Even so it isn't filling. Onions and rutabagas and apple trees are dying. Perhaps my tepary beans will save us all.

Nobody is supposed to go up there. That was decided a long time ago when the first Water Master was appointed. (I say appointed, but everybody else says chosen by the river.) That's his private place where he can work water wonders in seclusion. Bring a wife up and live his own life. Have his little Water Master children. Little skinny mountain goat kind of children, I suppose, brought up on the cliffs.

But something is wrong. Nobody has seen Amos Acularius for several days. They've formed a group to go up. A sort of posse. They're angry. They think maybe it's a lie that the lake is low. Maybe there's plenty of water but Amos Acularius has been persuaded to let our water fall over to the other side of the mountain into some neighboring town or other we don't know anything about. There's talk of bringing up a bomb.

Even if he is skinny and ugly (though I've hardly seen more of his face than his unshaven bony jaw with deep lines at the sides) I wouldn't want him hurt. I'm going up by myself. Secretly. And before that posse goes. They're still getting themselves together. Arguing. Even though they're angry, nobody wants to go up this time of year. It's not only harvest time, but this is the season for mountain storms. I wonder if any of them will actually get around to going up? But I'm going. I'll hide and watch what happens. I'll be there before any of them even starts. All I need is lunch and a sweater. It's a perfect day for a climb.

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As I go I keep looking back to see if anybody has started up behind me yet. Nobody has. I like looking back at our little town, nestled in close along the river bank, even though that river is dangerous. Folks have drowned. Folks have been swept away—God knows where. I won't be able to see it much longer. A fog is rolling in—up here, of course not down there. It's all blue sky down there. I've seen these clouds before, hanging around the mountains. Pretty soon the tops will be hidden from everybody down there and I'm about to be swallowed up in it. I won't get lost. It's easy to see when I'm on the path, and all along I've been listening to our waterfall. I could follow by the noise alone.

When I'm most of the way up (I *hope* most of the way, I've climbed for three hours) the fog begins to seem a little wispiest, I see ... I *think* I see Amos A. in the smoky distance.

I feel my heart lurch—in fact my whole body lurches, just from thinking it *might* be him.

I follow, well behind. Luckily the fog is still fairly thick. I climb right on through it, up and out the other side. Suddenly the air is clear and the sky—such a dark blue. Below me, everything is all fogged in. I can't see our town at all.

I look ahead. I'm at the edge of a lake. I gasp. I can't help it. This is it, *the* lake. *Our* lake. Here's where everything comes from. Without this lake and the torrent rushing from its dam, there'd be no town. There'd be no us. Here it is, all shiny in the sun. Little lapping waves. And here the dam itself. The dam of life, the water roaring out.

I fall on my knees (I don't mean to do it, but I do) I fall and look and keep looking, and keep thinking: This is it. *It!* It's *it!*

The lake is nestled in a bowl. A golden bowl because, on each side, aspen are in their most golden phase. I'm not exactly on the shore. I'm up above the dam. The lake is longer than I had imagined, I can't see where it ends, in the distance there's a row of snowy mountains.

I finally come to myself and look away. Now where is that big house? All I see is a hut partly built into the granite. Even my own little place is bigger than this.

And where's that orchard and all those roses? Nothing here but stunted lupine and pennyroyal. (I don't see the pennyroyal, but I can smell it.)

I knew it, I knew it. There has always seemed to me to be something wrong with Amos Acularius being our Water Master. He doesn't look right. He looks more like a half starving, beaten down servant than lord of the water. Here he is living like a sheep herder. At the mercy of his dam and his lake and his torrent.

And here comes the Water Master, himself, come to lift me to my feet. I see up under his hat for the first time—those blue, blue, *blue* eyes. I knew they'd be like that. I get all shaky again. I feel a rush of heat. It's the eyes—that must be the reason he's Water Master.

And the scars. He has scars all over him, face, hands and all. Perhaps that's why he always keeps his head down and his hat pulled low and always wears long sleeves down there in town. Scars and blue eyes. He's wearing a torn T shirt and I can count all his bones.

I'm so trembly I can't get up even with him pulling at me. His hands are rough and callused, but his voice is clear as water. "Come. Come, get up." If we were any closer to the dam and he, not leaning so close to me, I'd not hear him at all.

I can guess the reason for the scars and scrapes. I'll bet he went down in his raging torrent. That's what the scars look like anyway. He couldn't have come down from here, right under the dam. Nobody could live in this torrent. It must have been farther down, much nearer the town.

(If he came part way down in his raging river, he'd have ended up by my house. You'd think he'd have come to me for help. Did he walk away after? Right past me? I wish I'd known to look out the window. I could have been harvesting my tepary beans and he could have walked by me all bloody and bruised, head ducked down as usual—though probably hatless for once in his life.)

When I can't get up, he says, "It's always that way when you first see it." But that's not the reason (anymore) that I can't get up. It's that I'm looking straight up into eyes that exactly match the sky behind him. His face is a combination starving shepherd and yet Water Master, too. He needs a shave, and his cheeks are deeply lined, his eyes have crow's feet at the sides, but his nose is a Water Master kind of nose, sharp, regal, and with a bump in the middle. Clearly he's as old as I am. We're weathered about the same.

He never came for one of us girls. He must have known how we all wanted to come up here but he never came for any of us. When I was younger (and he was younger, too,) even I had wishes. I didn't admit it

to myself. I always said the opposite.

Perhaps he went down the other side and took a wife from somewhere over there. But if this hut's his only home, all the girls would have been unhappy. And what's up here to be friends with except jays and marmots. I couldn't live here. I wouldn't, even if he asks me to.

I do manage to get up though my knees are wobbly. I have to hang on to him. What a bundle of strings his arms are. The sound of the water roars all around us, more so as we get nearer the dam. I can't even think with that going on. I'm beginning to believe everything they say about the river. It can overpower anything, even your thoughts.

He leads me (his hand holds my upper arm in an iron grip) towards his hovel.

Inside it's dark and damp. Smells damp, too. Not like any of our places down there in the desert. We smell of sand and sage.

It was so shiny outside, sun on the water, little silvery waves ... I can't see a thing in here. Now where is that wife of his, come over from the other side? I want to see if she's as ugly as he is, though I couldn't see her if she was right in front of me. But pretty soon I *can* see. Nobody's here. I feel another sort of lurch.

Surely there's no wife—or if there is, she's a messy one. But there's all different kinds of messes. This one is odd. It's mud. All over the floor (actually, after a few minutes I can see that that mud *is* the floor). There's muddy clothes lumped under his little table, muddy boots by the door—two pairs, equally muddy. How could any wife live with this mud floor and all these muddy clothes?

I can think better in here with the door shut against the sound of the torrent.

"Sit down," he says. "I'll get tea. Are you all right? You were red, but now you're so pale."

I *thought* I was blushing but I hoped he hadn't noticed.

It's cool in here. I hug myself, not for warmth, but to hold myself together. My legs feel as if they'll give out any minute. I sit. The chair wobbles. Either the floor is uneven or I'm sinking in. I start to lean back, but the chair has lost its back. I stop myself just in time. I lean forward instead and put my head on my hands to try to hide how nervous I am. Even his scars make me nervous. Even his ugliness. If I had a hat like his I'd pull it low right now to hide how I feel.

Even here, in the dim light of a dirty window, his eyes look like two little bits of sky left over from out in the sun. All the bluer with his skin so brown around them.

He goes to a hook behind the door and gets a cleanish shirt that he puts on over his torn T-shirt. A yellow slicker with hood is hanging there along with his pistols on a cartridge belt.

He looks shy and pleased as he hands me the tea. (You'd not think such a weathered man nor a man his age would be shy anymore, but I suppose he's not used to people.) The cup is ... hard to believe here with all this mud, but the cup is fine china, translucent and gold rimmed. Just the sort of cup all of us thought would be up here in the big fancy house.

He does look as if he has a secret. A happy secret. There's an odd smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. As if there *is* a fancy house somewhere up here, complete with orchard and mirrors, and I just haven't been able to find it. It's not just his look, but his elegance. Mud along the bottoms of his pants but he sits, and on the edge of his table, as if in some fancy living room and holds his cup (tea for goodness sake! Who would be drinking tea up here?) holds his cup as if it was the finest china. Mine is, but his is

coarse stoneware, thick and chipped.

Down there we always say nobody ever hears him laugh or even sees him smile, but right now he's smiling a little V shaped grin and looks as if he really means it. Why has he kept this smile of his secret all this time?

I should warn him a posse is coming up, and people are angry. But I don't want to spoil his smile. I don't want to say how angry people are. Instead I say, "I suppose there's nothing you can do." Of course he stops grinning, anyway. I might as well tell him. It isn't fair not to. "They're angry. A posse's coming up. I think they have a bomb. I came to warn you."

Of course I didn't. I just wanted to see what would happen up here when they came, and to see for myself if all the water was going down the other side.

"Nobody has seen you for a week, and the water is less and less."

"What is there to do? Did you see how low the lake is?"

He grabs his fringed jacket and tells me to put on my sweater. "I have a look-out spot up on that ridge."

He doesn't take his pistols. Should I remind him?

"Is your poetry book with the metal cover in the pocket over your heart? It should be."

"What poetry book? I haven't time for poetry. Except maybe to look out at it everyday. There's a lot to do even when the gates are shut. Now that the water is low, I've been clearing out the dam."

Is nothing they told us down there true, neither poetry book nor big house? Not even one single thing? It seems that what we believed was true isn't and what we believed isn't might well be.

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We go out into the shine and sparkle of the lake and the gold of the aspen. Everything numinous. He's right about looking out at poetry, though I'd call it ... I don't know, looking at religion maybe. I almost drop to my knees again, though why should a good view be any more religious than a bad one?

(I wonder what it would be like to live here and see this every day? Maybe it's worth the mud.)

We have to cross the dam first. There's just a narrow walkway with a railing only on the side where the water comes down. You wouldn't last long if you went over the dam here, even with the water this low. There's a lot of spray, too. I'm shaky and I grip the railing so hard I can hardly make myself let go when I take another step. Amos A. strides along as if it was a perfectly ordinary path and doesn't look back until he's on the other side and here I am, only half way. It's not even that long a dam. All the water is funneled through this narrow gap. It's hardly as far as our little bridge in town, but here the water leaps towards me as though to pull me down into it. Globes fly up as though it had hands.

He smiles. (I never would have thought, all these years, that he'd smile a smile so like a child.) He comes back for me. Holds my hand the last few steps.

At the far end we start up the cliff above the lake. I watch him ahead of me. Nobody should wear such

tight pants when their legs are as skinny as his are.

It's *much* steeper than the climb I climbed to get up here. I'm breathless, not only from that, but from Amos Acularius right here in front of me. He's a nimble man. He'd be at the top by now if not for me and he's not even breathing hard. He reaches back now and then to help me. When he does, I look up under his hat again. Even if I had something to say, his eyes wash the words right out of me. All I want to say is, "Your eyes are blue."

We follow where a little foot wide waterfall used to be but now it's dry. He points at it with his thumb and says, "I can't help this."

At the top we turn around and there's the whole lake below us. The view is even more spectacular than when I first came upon it. Mainly because we can see more snow capped mountains in the distance. The white sets off the gold. There's still fog lower down where the trail from town comes up. It feels as if we're on an island in the sky, and there's no outside world at all. I wish it were true.

Here at the lookout point, there's a gnarled limber pine. Reminds me of him. We sit under it. He's not even out of breath.

Sit and look. Except I'm more conscious of his knobby knees and his muddy worn out pants right next to me than I am of the view. I wonder how long this silence should go on. I wonder if I should say something but I can't think what.

Sit and look. Then he says, "They always blame the Water Master."

They. That's us—us townspeople. Probably even me though I never needed much water. Is that why he's hardly ever looked at us or talked to us? He knows already how we blame everything on him. Especially anything bad. Maybe he knew that one of these days we'd hate him.

"Just because I control the dam, they think I can control the clouds."

I want to answer that *I* don't think that, and maybe I don't now, but I did. Even though I didn't think about it, I blamed him—even before there was anything to blame him for.

We sit quietly again. There are so many things I want to ask, as: Did you notice how I didn't need your water? Did you notice how I didn't need a ditch? And: What about all those scars? But what I *really* want to ask is if he's married, so instead I say, "Where are the children? Are they safe?"

"What children?"

Well, that's a relief. Though he could still have a wife somewhere. Maybe she didn't want to bring children into such a muddy world, and where they might fall into the raging river just as her husband had. Or did she jump in and he jumped in to rescue her but couldn't save her?

"Is your wife going to be safe?"

"There's no wife."

But of course not. Who would marry such a countrified, sheep-herder kind of man who lives in a shack with a mud floor and has stunted lupine for flowers.

"Do you actually live in that little hut?"

"Where else?"

"Isn't this a bad place to bring up children? I mean in case you have some sometime. Your wife would go crazy what with the mud and the danger and nobody to talk to—though of course there's you."

"Then I guess it's a good thing I have no wife."

And a good thing his hat is low again (though at a rakish angle this time).

Then here comes the posse, out from the fog—well, one of them, anyway, carrying a rifle and with pistols at his sides. Goodness knows what's in his backpack.

"This has happened before," Amos Acularius says.

"They'd prefer finding you dead—guarding your dam to the death."

He looks over at me. Smiles. I'm all right this time because I'm looking at his lips. I'm already thinking (I can't help it) how I'm too old to have any little Water Master babies that would have eyes like that or V shaped smiles. Then I'm thinking: Will he mind . . . about not having any children? And then I'm thinking: *I'd mind.*

He says, "I would."

He's talking about dying for his dam though it takes me a minute to realize it.

"I don't want you to." I'm blushing again.

He actually puts his sweaty bony arm across my shoulders. I suppose it's a kindness for the blushing. Thank goodness we mostly keep looking down at the dam.

"I may have to," he says. "It depends."

We watch the man go into the hut. When he comes out, he has the pistols from the back of the door. He holds them by their cartridge belt and looks all around as if to hand them to the Water Master—as if he doesn't want to shoot an unarmed man.

Why is the Water Master up here at his look-out spot and without his pistols? You can't guard a dam from here. Though so far there's only one man to guard it from. Except does he have a bomb?

We wait. No more men come up out of the fog. They must be far behind or maybe this man is the only one. I wonder why they've sent him up here all by himself?

I know that man. I recognize him by his hat—brown leather and with a shorter brim than most. I'm not surprised they'd pick him to come up first. He's always the angriest about everything. I don't think I've ever seen him not. The look in his eyes is what I used to think was in the Water Master's, and that that was why the Water Master wouldn't look at anybody. Now I think the Water Master didn't look at people because he thought he was ugly (which is true) and because of all those scars.

The man puts down the pistols and unhooks his rifle. Then he takes off his back pack, rummages inside it and pulls out a package. He walks a little ways along the dam and sits on the edge with his legs hanging over (just seeing him do that scares me) and eats his lunch.

Amos A. and I look at each other. He's so close this time and his sweaty arm still across my shoulders. . . . I look away fast.

We're still in the shadow of the tree though the shadow has moved.

Amos Acularious takes his arm away and moves closer to the edge of the bluff we climbed. Out from under the shadow of the tree he'll be visible from the dam, though I don't suppose the man will think to look up here.

I study Amos A's back. How he has such a longish neck. There's something delicate about him, (translucent like his tea cup) though I've felt his strength as he helped me climb.

The man has finished his lunch and is taking longish, tied together, red things out of his pack.

Amos Acularius says, "You sit tight."

Before I can think to answer—to shout, *Don't!* he's sliding down the slope in front of us as if it was a long, long child's slide.

It took us twenty minutes to climb up here, but he's at the bottom in less than half a minute. I can't see him because he's made a land slide. And he makes a racket—a swooshing, gravelly sound, and a great cloud of dust.

I'm scared to jump off the edge and slide, but I'm not going to sit up here all by myself waiting and watching—maybe watching bad things happening to Amos Acularius. Rocks are still coming down behind him. I jump, anyway, shut my eyes and jump, into his landslide and make my own. I'm all the way down before I have time to think about it.

It keeps on trickling down after our plunge. I can't see a thing. Then I finally make out Amos A. at the edge of his dam, a grayish figure, his black clothes covered with dust.

I see the man look across at Amos. Amos A's arms are out at each side. The fringe hanging down all along them makes him look, not only like a Water Master but master of all the gray granite. He's so dusty he's like a part of the cliff we slid down.

The man stands still as though startled and maybe frightened—surely impressed. Amos Acularius even impresses me and I can only see his back. Except he always has impressed me, even when he toured his gates down there in town.

But maybe his arms are out like that for a different reason. I move up next to him. He's shouting. Maybe he's swearing. Even this close, I can't hear because of the rushing water. Except he doesn't look angry. Maybe it's a prayer—for or to the rushing, roaring torrents. Could that be? Could he be talking to the water?

The man comes to himself after a minute and he starts shouting, too. *He* looks like he's swearing though of course we can't hear. Knowing him, he probably is. Then the man sets his dynamite, carefully, in the middle of the dam. Lights the fuse. Amos Acularius does *nothing!* Keeps talking to himself. Just stands there and lets them be set and lit.

I want to shout: You can't depend on prayer or spells with dynamite. I pull on his fringe. "Amos!" (I dare to call him Amos.) "Do something! Hurry!" But it's as if I'm nothing but a fly—hardly even a bother.

The man moves off the dam as we move on to it. Amos A. grabs my hand and trots me across. He'd go faster if he wasn't pulling me. He's still mouthing things, but I can't hear. I'm too scared about the dynamite to be scared of the water rushing down so near, and with hardly any railing. We cross right by where the fuse is fizzing and Amos doesn't try to stop it. I keep yelling, Amos, Amos, as if he could hear me. I try to hold him back but he pulls me on. I try to pull away so I can put it out myself, but he won't let go.

At the other side, he throws me, face down, and himself on top of me, his arms wrapped around my head, not his own. I've always done the protecting (all those brothers and sisters). I've never, in my whole life, been protected by anybody—not that I remember, though I suppose as a baby I must have been.

I feel his body all along my back—all along where I've just been scraped and bruised, but I like the feel of him, even though I hurt. I hope we never have to get up.

The dynamite goes off but with the sound of the water I can hardly hear it. Mostly I feel the shaking of the ground.

Stones clatter down around us and on top of us, though hardly any on me because Amos is protecting me.

We lie, until it stops. It feels like a long time, but I know it can't be. Then we look up, over and down at what used to be the dam. It sounds out even louder than before and the sound is different. Angrier—though it always sounded angry.

"Well, they've got water down there now. Will in a minute anyway." Amos Acularius, still on top of me, speaks right into my ear or I'd never have heard him. How can he say that so slowly and calmly after what just happened? "For a while, more than they bargained for. Are you all right?"

"But you? You must be bruised all over your back."

He helps me up.

I think he's saying he's all right but I can only guess since he's not that close anymore.

The man is staring at the Water Master. You can see the rage on his face. He's yelling, and for sure it's cursing though we can't hear. He pulls one of the pistols from its holster, cocks it, aims it right at us. Shoots one shot. We hear it ping as it ricochets against the rocks.

Amos Acularius walks right straight to him. Grabs him, gun and all. They tussle. Amos is clearly stronger. It only takes a minute before Amos turns him around and bends his arm up behind him and walks him towards the river bank. The bank is in a different place now. Already the lake is even lower and yet the torrent below, where the dam used to be is much higher and much more vicious. I've never seen anything like the way the water rushes down now.

Amos walks him to the new edge and throws him off. I see a brown hat fly away and I catch a glimpse of feet in boots. Then, in less than half a minute, the man is long gone.

Amos Acularius stands on the broken edge watching the water rush down. I come up beside him. He leans close, his hand on my shoulder. Is he going to kiss me? I'm not sure if I should pull back or lean forward, but he just wants to speak into my ear so I'll hear above the sound of the water. I feel his breath on my cheek.

"He won't die," he says. Shouts.

"How can he not?"

"The river won't let him. The river will save him. Throw him from pool to pool and never pound him into the rocks. He'll end up looking like me that's all."

He takes his hand from my shoulder. He walks up to the weapons, picks up the rifle and throws it in the

river, then throws the man's and his own pistols in, too. He takes off his fringy jacket and throws it in. "This goes with the job," he says. It belongs to the river.

He takes my arm and leads me, just as he did before, into his shack and shuts the door against the roar of water. "I'm free," he says, and begins packing up his things, bunching them in to a muddy duffel, clean and dirty lumped in together.

I plunk myself on the wobbly chair. I look down at the rips and scrapes all over my pants.

"This happens after every major drought. There's a new Water Master every time. Takes about twenty ... thirty years. He'll be it now. That's how you get to be Water Master. I'm free."

Then he notices I have my arms around myself again and I'm shaking more than when he first handed me tea. That seems like a long time ago. He stops packing and gets me tea again. Sits beside me on his table as he did before.

"I don't mind being Water Master, though you can never really master water (you think you can, but you can't) but I don't care that much for the townspeople. They hate you for spoiling their town—like it's being spoiled right now, as we sit here. They'll hate him. They never learn it's not his fault, wasn't mine either. I'm glad to be rid of them."

He reaches as if to touch my shoulder, but doesn't quite. As if he wants to caress but doesn't dare. "But I'm glad you came."

"I know that man. He's cruel. He doesn't care about anybody."

"He'll be different once he knows water. Once the water knows him. Water changes you. And living here alone will change him. Seeing gold, like it is now, and the silver lake. That'll change him, too."

"But you never looked up. I was sorry for you, never looking up."

"I did. I looked out at it every morning and every night. And down there in the village, I looked. I saw you."

He takes the empty cup and saucer and wraps his clothes around them. "It's my grandmother's cup. The only thing she had of any value." Then he unwraps it and hands it to me again. "Would you like to have it?"

"Where are you going?"

"Some place where they never heard of a Water Master nor ever needed one. Where there's no hanging mountain lakes and no dams. Will you come? I noticed you before—how you never needed water."

He's looking straight at me again. Maybe his eyes can hypnotize and I've been hypnotized all this time. But I like it.

"Grandma's tea cup. It's yours if you want it."

I don't expect he'll ever be able to say, I love you. I'm not going to wait around for that.

I hand it back so he can wrap it up again.

"I'll come."

The End

