

CHAPTER 1

LET'S MEET KADO

ON HIS small mat on the hard mud floor of a rude hut in faraway India, lay a tiny brown baby boy, fast asleep. His mother beside him had just awakened, for the first rays of the morning sun were coming into the open doorway, shining down from over the tall trees of the jungle. His father was out in the yard behind the house, milking the cow. There would be warm, rich milk to go with the rice for breakfast.

Before arising to prepare the rice, the mother turned to look at her sleeping son. He looked so tiny and innocent as he lay on his wee mat. How wonderful it was to have a little son in the home. He was a lovely baby. But, oh! she must not speak her thoughts aloud, for fear the spirits would hear her and take her baby away from her. Very soon his father must take a generous gift to the charm doctor. Only then would they feel that no evil would come to their home. The mother gently touched the little brown bare feet. Then she arose to prepare breakfast of rice for herself and her husband.

Upon three small stones in the corner of the room sat a smoky black kettle of rice. She built a fire between the stones, and soon the breakfast was ready. When the milking was done, the man of the family came in, ready to eat. Seated on the floor, with the bowl of steaming rice between them, they lifted out the rice with their hands, placing it upon large leaves, from which they ate it with their fingers.

“Have you thought of a name for our son?” asked the father, proudly looking at his sleeping baby.

The mother shook her head. “I have not decided,” she said.

“I have thought of many names,” continued the father; “but we must be careful. If we should call him by a nice name, the spirits will think he is of great value, and they will take him from us. Perhaps we should call him ‘Red Onions,’ or ‘Bad Luck,’ or ‘Dirty Water.’”

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“I think we shall call him ‘Kado,’” said mother tenderly. “It is different, and our son, too, will be different. Someday he will be big and strong like his father.”

“And kind and good like his mother,” added the father with a smile.

“I want him to learn many things that will help make him wise and useful. Yes, our little Kado will be different,” said mother.

Day by day his parents could notice that Kado was growing big and strong. He smiled. He made queer sounds in his throat as though he were trying to speak. One day he discovered his own brown toes. How he laughed in glee as they wiggled up and down on his mat.

Soon Kado was creeping all over the room. But mother was always on guard to keep her little son from harm. Kado must learn to stay back from the hot rice kettle upon the three hot smoky stones in the corner. He must not crawl outside the little doorway - not yet. First, he must learn that the outside world is full of dangers: snakes, bears, leopards, tigers, and other wild animals.

When mother went out into the bright sunshine, she took little Kado with her. He learned to ride on her back or hip, fastened securely within the folds of her sari, which was a wrap-around garment, her only necessary piece of clothing. Kado would ride to the spring, where mother filled an earthen jar with water and carried it upon her head or shoulder. They went many times each day to the spring, for mother could carry only one jar at a time.

Sometimes Kado would ride to the forest when mother went for wood. Mother took a little hatchet to chop off small branches. She would carry a large bundle of sticks on her head to be used at home for fuel to cook rice, lentils, curry, and beans. Kado enjoyed these days in the forest with mother. Many of the village women went in a group to gather their supply of wood. They felt more secure in case some wild animal should be lurking near. When Kado became tired, he

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just rested his little brown head against mother. He would sleep while mother went about her task of gathering wood.

When the party returned home, Kado was glad to have his share of rice and curry that mother prepared in the black kettle that sat over the fire between the three stones in the corner.

Kado did not stay little. He grew and grew like any normal baby. Soon he was big enough to run about. He followed his father to the rice fields. He liked to help pick up roots when father plowed the fields. He helped gather stones to build the bund, the little mud-and-stone fence around the rice terrace. The bund kept the water in the field so the rice could grow.

Soon Kado was big enough to go with father to herd the cattle, and to take the big water buffaloes to the pond to be washed. The boy carried a little stick in his hand to help keep the cattle on the trail. The big water buffaloes looked fierce and dangerous with their long sweeping horns; but father was close beside Kado, and the boy knew they would not hurt him.

There were many things to fear - things that could be seen and things one could not see. There were bears, tigers, leopards, and snakes that could be seen; but Kado was also told that there were ghosts and spirits that could not be seen. These were mostly to be feared. You never could know just when they might accidentally stop under a spirit's tree. The spirits would become very angry and would cause harm to come to you. Then you must go to the charm doctor so that he could break the spell. When Kado grew older, he was also taught to fear Christians and missionaries. If you went near them or talked to them, they would cast a spell upon you and you would become a Christian. Then all manner of trouble would come to you and your family, but the charm doctor would be powerless to help you.

Kado was a happy boy. He was made even happier by the arrival of three little brothers, Tari, Lesso, and Con. As each little brown brother was added to the family, father made a special visit to the charm doctor, taking him a gift so that no evil would befall the new baby or the family,

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Kado loved his younger brothers. They played with him by the pool, watching the older boys wash the huge water buffaloes to keep them cool. Often Kado would carry little Con upon his hip when he helped drive the cattle to the pond and back again to the enclosure behind the house for the night.

What fun it was, after a long, hard day of work in the rice paddies, to sit in a circle around the family rice bowl with father, mother, and his three brothers. When supper was over, they spread their garments upon the hard-packed dirt floor and went to sleep.