

'Tashi tiptoed to the library in the main house where the moonlight poured through the windows, lighting up the shelves of beakers in its cold, eerie beam. Working silently, Tashi found the ingredients on his list, one by one, and put them into a large mixing bowl. He was almost finished when he heard something move behind him.

'He stood, terrified, his insides churning. The sound came again, slithering towards him across the ground. The hairs on the back of his neck prickled. He looked down and saw something glittering in the moonlight, beside his heel. The tip of the monster's tail!

'Tashi tried to slow his breath, to make his hands still. Maybe the creature would think he was a statue, or a piece of wood. But the tail was sliding over his foot! He dug his toes into his boots. He imagined he was a tree, rooted to the ground. The serpent tail was heavy, like the weight of two men.

'Tashi was melting with fright. But the tail came to rest over his feet. Oh *please*, thought Tashi, *please stay asleep!* He counted to one hundred, and still the tail didn't move. Then slowly, smooth as honey dripping from a spoon, Tashi slid one foot then the other from under the tail.

'When he was free, Tashi bolted back to the hideaway. Wise-as-an-Owl told him they'd have to wait until it was light before mixing the potion. They all tried to get some rest but twigs and stones stuck into their backs and Ah Chu's stomach was grumbling like thunder. When the sun finally came up Ah Chu said it looked like a great fried egg and that made everyone even hungrier.

'But it was time to get to work. Wise-as-an-Owl checked every item, asking Tashi to tick each ingredient as he added it to the bowl. Much-to-Learn sniffed, offended by his father's choice of helper. "I could have done that, better than young Tashi," he said, "only my arm—"