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AKUZMO AND THE GOLDEN COINS

By Marilyn J. Malone

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CHAPTER 1

Akuzmo was so thirsty and hungry that he felt he was going to collapse. For almost two days, he had walked many miles over the parched land from his village. The dusty road was extremely hot, and the leafless trees did not protect him from the merciless sun. Sweat poured from his thin body, but he walked on, for he had no other choice. He had to reach the crossroads before sunset. The entire village of Inlandia relied on him to keep his promise.

Inlandia, his village, and its way of life were dying. The drought that began one year ago had caused great hardship for his tribe. Although Inlandia had received small amounts of rain over the past nine months, the rain had not been enough to provide adequate water for the villagers and their farms.

And the famine that started two months ago was causing much difficulty in his village. The riverbeds were almost dry, and the water in the wells was low. Many of their farm animals were sickly, and some of the animals had died.

There was not enough food, as the fruits and vegetables that the villagers harvested were too small, and the villagers had to eat smaller and fewer meals. Sadly, some of his people became sick because they did not have enough food to eat. And others had left Inlandia to find a better way of life in nearby cities.

Fearful that no one in the village would survive the famine, the three elders of Inlandia had spoken with his parents, Sedmond and Niara. And they had asked his parents to allow him to go on this journey to find food and supplies that would last until the rains returned.

Elders Greta, the healer, and Adam, the army leader, had said that although Akuzmo was only fourteen years old, he had

grown into a responsible young man. They had also mentioned that he took special care of the farm animals and healed many of the sick animals. Menuke, the wise man and a farmer, was the last elder to speak with his parents. Menuke had said that although the tribe only had about three weeks of food left, he was confident that Akuzmo would find help for Inlandia.

Then Menuke had said, “I understand your concerns, but Akuzmo will be able to survive this journey and return safely home. He is a healthy, wise, honest, and patient young man.”

While his parents had been afraid to let him go on the journey, they knew that their village needed help. And they had also been comforted by Menuke’s promise that Akuzmo would return home safely.

Thus, with his parents’ permission, Akuzmo embarked on this quest to save his people.

CHAPTER 3

He was getting anxious. The sun would set soon, but he had not reached the crossroads. He hoped to find shelter before sunset, so he walked as quickly as possible and stayed on the main road. But as far as he could see, the road seemed to be an endless straight path without any crossroads.

Akuzmo became discouraged, as he believed that he would not reach the crossroads before sunset. He put his bag on the ground and began to look for a nearby shelter close to the road when he felt a warm touch on his back and a gentle nudge from a sudden breeze. Nervously, he looked around to see the person who touched him, but no one was there. Since there was no one next to him, he thought he had imagined that someone had touched him, as he was quite exhausted.

“I might be imagining things that are not there,” he said to himself. “Maybe this is a sign that I need to keep walking, so I will continue on my journey instead of stopping here.”

He was getting quite fatigued and decided to slow down as he walked around a winding curve in the road when he suddenly noticed a crossroads in the distance. As he got closer to the intersection, he saw a few shrubs and patches of grass on the roadsides and quickly increased his stride so that he could reach the crossroads before sunset.

The sun was almost setting when Akuzmo finally arrived at the crossroads. Although Akuzmo was relieved that he had reached his destination, he knew that he had to find a safe place close to the road to set up a shelter. After he had walked a short distance from the road, he came upon a shaded area with many berry trees. He looked around and decided that the trees were close enough to the crossroads and would provide

adequate shelter. Gratefully, he spread out his bedding, and dropped to the ground and took a brief rest.

His next task was to find nourishment, as the few dried fruits and the two jugs of water were just enough for the next two days. And he was quite relieved when he saw that some of the berry trees were full of red, ripe berries. As he walked a little further, he saw a large tamarind tree with ripe tamarinds. He tasted the tamarinds and was surprised that they were sweet. Next to the tamarind tree was a dried passionfruit vine that clung to a nearby tree. He picked up the nine yellow passion fruits off the ground and placed them into his sack. Then he added some tamarinds and berries to his bag and quickly returned to his shelter.

Akuzmo ate his meal of berries, dried fruits, and one passion fruit, drank a small amount of water, then got ready to go to bed. He hoped that he would find some answers to his problems when he woke up.

Exhausted, he fell asleep as soon as he lay down, but his sleep was full of horrifying dreams. His first dream revealed that strangers had burned his village to the ground and killed all the animals. Then the dream changed, and his village was full of trees, fruits, happy and healthy people, and healthy animals. However, another dream showed him that he had failed his people. He had returned home to find that another tribe had captured his people and sold them into slavery. Finally, he dreamt that someone had tied him up in chains and had thrown him into a pit of dirty water.

While in the pit, he heard someone whisper to him, “Akuzmo, you must remember. Take your time to decide. Do not forget your family, your people, or your honor. Sometimes, things are not as they seem.”

He struggled to escape his nightmares, but he felt that someone had him pinned to the ground. Suddenly, the loud and terrifying screams of someone woke him up. He was frightened,

and he looked around to see who was screaming. Then he realized that the screams came from him.

Akuzmo was confused, as he did not remember that he was on a quest. Drowsily, he thought that he did not return home in time, and everyone in his village had starved to death. Alarmed, he quickly jumped up from his blanket and became fully awake. After he realized that he was dreaming, he felt a little better. Once again, he returned to his blanket and prepared to go to sleep, but he was terrified and wondered if the dreams would come to pass.

He thought about his village as he shivered from his nightmares and the coldness of the night. And as he pulled his blanket tighter around him, he thought that he felt the warm presence of someone next to him. Then he relaxed and fell into a deep sleep.

However, he did not hear the voice that urgently whispered, “Akuzmo, Akuzmo, trouble is on the way! Remember, Akuzmo. You must remember!”

CHAPTER 4

He was awoken before sunrise by the twittering of birds in the berry trees. Although he had decided that the shelter of the trees was a suitable place for his camp, he felt nervous. However, he did not know the reason for his nervousness, and he wondered if he had forgotten something important.

As he looked around his camp, he remembered that Menuke had said that he would find help at the crossroads. And Akuzmo decided to forget about his nervousness and began his daily routine. He felt refreshed after he wiped his face with a small amount of water and cleaned his mouth and teeth with some leaves from one of the berry trees. Then he ate some berries, one passion fruit, a small piece of dried fruit and took a few sips of water.

The sun had just begun to rise when Akuzmo started to explore the area next to his camp, as he wanted to see if anyone lived nearby who could help him. After he had walked for about a mile, he came upon a wooded area with many fruit trees and was surprised to see papaya and mango trees full of ripe fruits. The mango trees were laden with different types of ripe, plump fruits that were ruby red, yellow, or orange. He was delighted, as mangoes were one of his favorite fruits. Then to his surprise, he saw a stream next to the trees.

He smiled and said to himself, “This is a wonderful place! I will pick a few fruits and drink some water from this lovely stream, then return later with my water jugs and my sack to get water and fruits to take back to my camp.”

Akuzmo decided to pick some of the mangoes that hung over the path. However, as he reached up to grab some yellow mangoes that were just over his head, the branch seemed to have mysteriously moved above his fingertips. He shook his

head and tried again to reach the fruits. This time he stood on his toes, but to his surprise, the branch moved further out of his reach. Puzzled, he looked around for a small, flat rock and brought the rock directly under the fruits, then hopped up on the rock and reached for the fruits. But just as before, he was unable to get the mangoes.

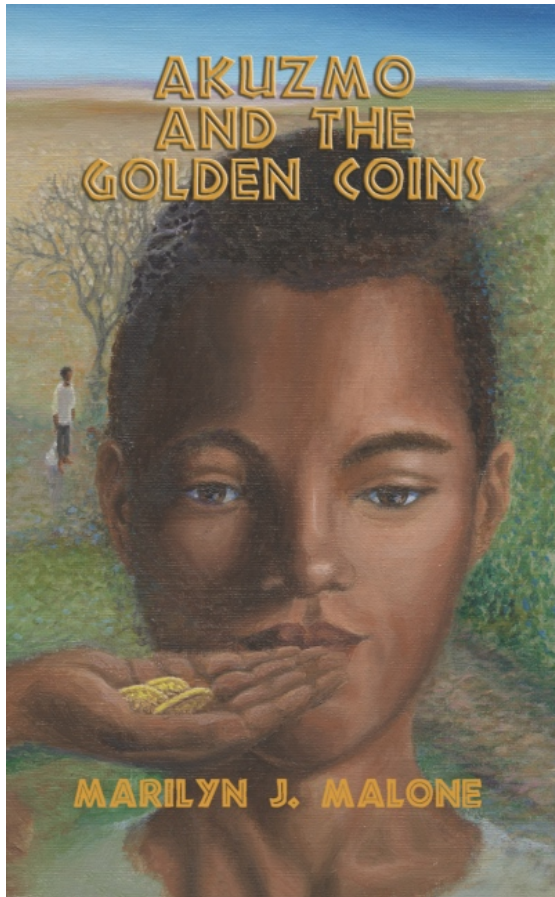
Frustrated that he could not pick the mangoes, he decided to drink some water from the stream. As he bent over the stream to drink the water, he thought that he saw the reflection in the water of an old woman looking back at him. But the woman, who wore a black dress, had dirty, tangled hair. Terrified, he stopped and looked around. However, there was no one behind him. He shook his head to clear his confusion and again tried to drink some water from the stream. Once more, he saw the reflection of the old woman in the water. Suddenly, he was terrified, and his nervousness returned.

Something was not right. Someone was approaching through the bushes. Akuzmo became terrified and quickly jumped back from the stream, then fell over a tree trunk. And as he fell, he hit his head on a large rock. Darkness suddenly surrounded him, and Akuzmo slumped to the ground and fell into a deep sleep.

About the Author

Ms. Malone, a Caribbean Islander, has been an avid reader since she was a child. She is a registered nurse who also has a background in business administration.

Some of her favorite activities are reading, gardening, and swimming.



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