

## The Great Rope

*By Marilyn Reeves*

The People had come to The Place of Tall Grasses near the edge of a gorge in the early summer. Already the tall, green stalks of grass had grown as high as a man's waist, and the women busied themselves preparing a Great Rope, for the People needed a way to cross the chasm before the snows of winter trapped them too far north. So they labored throughout the warm months of summer, hoping to have it ready in time.

First they rubbed handfuls of grass between their palms until they created a thin strand. Then they twisted the strands together to create a slender rope, adding to its length until it was several feet long. But it would take hundreds of these thin ropes, braided together to create a Great Rope, strong enough to bear a man's weight, and long enough to reach the bottom of the gorge and across the river, in order for it to be tied to the tall tree on the other side.

Finally the day arrived when the sun and moon shared the sky in equal measure and the leaves of the quaking aspen began to turn to gold, and it was decided that the Great Rope was finally ready to accomplish the task for which it had been created. The men secured one end of it around a stout tree and tied the other end around the waist of Noco, who was the strongest and most agile of the boys verging on manhood, and lowered him over the edge, feeding out lengths of the rope a little at a time.

Noco felt his way down the side of the cliff, his hands and feet probing for rocks and roots to give him purchase. The People lined the edge of the chasm, whistling and shouting words of encouragement as he worked his way down. Finally, his feet touched the shore of the narrow river down below, and he turned and waved at the People and the People waved at him.

Fortunately, the river flowed slow and shallow this late in the season, so he was able to work his way across by jumping from stone to stone until he reached the other side. Again Noco waved at the People and the People waved at him.

Then he began the long climb up the opposite cliff face, once again feeling his way, using rocks and tree roots as handholds and footholds until he reached the top, dragging the Great Rope along with him.

Once he reached the tree that stood opposite its sister on the other side of the gorge, Noco pulled and pulled on the rope until it was as taut across the chasm as he could get it and tied it around the trunk. Then he tied it again around a sturdy branch a little farther up.

Now Noco grasped the taut portion of the rope with his hands and legs and, hanging suspended above the chasm, inched his way forward. The heavy loop of the loose end dangling from his waist caused the section he was straddling to sway, threatening to dislodge him from his precarious perch. But he held on tight and slowly, steadily, he worked his way across. And the People greeted him with cheers of joy as he collapsed into their welcoming arms.

The men untied the end of the Great Rope from around Noco's waist and tied it to the tree above the first section to act as a handhold when the People crossed over the new bridge that spanned the gorge.