The two boys sat on a bench under a big old oak tree. There was a lawn in front of them and, in front of that, the huge iron gates of the school. The two boys often came and sat here after lessons. Tom was tall with fair hair and blue eyes. His friend, Mahir, had black hair and dark brown eyes.

Tom was excited and Mahir was smiling. “Are you sure you want me to come?” asked Tom.

“Yes, of course. I’ve told you so much about my kingdom. Now I want you to see it for yourself,” replied Mahir.

“Fantastic,” said Tom. “I’d love to come. I’ll have to ask my mum and dad, of course. But I’m sure they’ll be fine about it.”

“Tom,” said Mahir. His voice was serious now. “You’ve been a really good friend. You stood up for me when the others picked on me. They made fun of my accent and appearance. But you didn’t. I hated this school at the beginning and I hated this country and all the people in it. But your friendship changed everything. And I’ll always appreciate that. Thanks.”

“There’s no need to thank me, Mahir. I was on my own too. And you were fun, and interesting.”

“Thanks, anyway. I’m really happy here now.”

“Good,” said Tom. “Now, let’s talk about more important things.”

“Such as …?”

“My visit to the coolest country in the world,” said Tom. “Do I need a visa to go there?”

“Yes, you do. All foreigners need a visa. Only 5,000 tourists are allowed to come every year. My father, the King doesn’t want our country

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**Glossary**

- **huge**: very big
- **lawn**: area of grass
- **picked on**: were nasty to
- **stood up for**: defended
to lose its culture. He is afraid that tourists will change the country,” said Mahir.
“So it’s no Coca-Cola and no McDonalds for a month, then,” said Tom. “Correct,” said Mahir and he laughed. “Do you think you can live without them?”
“I think I can – but can you?” laughed Tom.
Suddenly Tom saw a tiny flash of light. “Hey, what was that?”
“It looked like a camera flash,” said Mahir.
“I think there’s someone down there by the gate!” said Tom and he stood up quickly. There was another flash. Mahir and Tom ran towards the gate. Tom was sure it was a camera. “Who are you?” he shouted. “What are the photographs for?” The man didn’t answer. He turned and ran away. He was tall and thin. He was bald and had brown eyes. His face was not very memorable except for the long scar that ran from the corner of his left eye down to the corner of his mouth.
“Why do you think he was taking photographs of you?” asked Tom. “I don’t know,” said Mahir.
“What if he’s dangerous? I think we should tell one of the teachers about him,” said Tom.
“No, I don’t want to do that,” said Mahir quickly.
“Well, I think you should tell your father then,” said Tom, concerned. “No, he’ll only worry about me and then he’ll send me more bodyguards. I don’t want that,” said Mahir.
“But aren’t you scared? That man might be a murderer! He might try to kill you,” said Tom.
“Oh yeah! I think you’ve seen too many thrillers,” said Mahir.

Glossary

• concerned: worried
• tiny: very small
• scar: mark on the skin after you have been hurt
“I can look after myself. You know that, Tom.” Then Mahir took Tom’s arm and with one quick move, he threw him over his back to the ground. “Okay, okay, I know,” said Tom. “You can look after yourself. That throw was perfect. It didn’t hurt at all.” “You should never hurt your opponent. You should only block him,” said Mahir. “Those are the rules of combat in my country. Now, stand up.” “You know, I can’t,” said Tom. He couldn’t move his arms or legs. They felt very heavy. He couldn’t even move a finger. It was amazing! Mahir walked slowly over to Tom. He laid his hand on his shoulder and pressed with his thumb. “Now, get up,” he said calmly. And Tom got up. “How do you do it?” asked Tom. “I practise,” said Mahir. “Remember, ‘practice makes perfect’. Now you try.”

STRENGTH

Have you ever done a martial art?
What do you know about the following martial arts?

a) Judo  
b) Karate  
c) Aikido  
e) Tai Chi  
f) Kick Boxing  
g) Kung Fu

What skills do they develop?

- combat: fighting
Tom took Mahir’s arm and pressed with his fingers. Then he threw him over his back onto the ground. Mahir stood up immediately. “The throw was good,” he said. “But you need to work on your powers of concentration.” “I’ll never be able to do it,” said Tom. “You will,” said Mahir calmly. “You’re definitely improving. If you believe you can do it, you will do it. And now I think it’s time for dinner. Let’s go!”

“Okay, I’m starving. Race you to the canteen!” said Tom. Of course, Mahir won. He always won at sports. He was very fit and strong. Tom thought back to their first week at school together. They were both eleven and they were both very homesick. Life at the expensive boarding school in the south of England was very difficult. One night, they couldn’t sleep. It was a warm night in early September. So they crept out of the dormitory together and went outside into the school grounds. They walked down the long driveway and sat under the oak tree on the wooden bench. This was to be the beginning of a long friendship.

That night, Mahir told Tom a story – a story that Tom will never forget. It was the story of the secret to Mahir’s strength.

“When I was four, my father, the King, took me to a Buddhist monastery high up in the Himalayan Mountains. There were no roads to the monastery. There were only small paths up the mountains. It was snowing very heavily and the ground was icy. The journey was very difficult. My father left me at the monastery with an old monk.
When we first walked into the monastery, I was very frightened. The monks were chanting loudly, the air was thick with smoke from the incense and there was a strange sweet smell. I held my father’s hand tightly and hid my face in his robe. Then the old monk walked down a long red carpet towards me. He was smiling and he had kind eyes. When he reached me, he took my hand and held it. It was a freezing cold day but I felt warm and I didn’t feel frightened any more. And I have never been frightened since that day. I stayed with the monk for seven years. He taught me many things. He taught me to control my mind. He taught me to conquer fear. He taught me to survive without food. He taught me to stay warm in freezing cold temperatures. And he taught me to fight and win but not hurt anybody.”

“Will you teach me?” Tom had asked. Mahir looked at him for a long time. Then he said, “I think we will be friends. And I will teach you.” That was five years ago. Now they were very close friends and Mahir had taught Tom many things.
Finally, it was the last day of term. Tom felt very excited. His mum and dad were coming to collect him and Mahir in an hour. Tom still couldn’t believe that he was really going. He was in the dorm. He was packing his case when Cornelius came and sat on his bed. Tom didn’t like Cornelius. He was clever and witty, but he was also very mean. He used to tease Mahir a lot in their first year at school. Tom and Mahir avoided him as much as possible. “I hear you’re going to spend the Christmas holidays with Mahir in that weird country of his,” said Cornelius. “You must be mad!”

“It’s not a weird country,” said Tom angrily. “And I’m really looking forward to going there with Mahir.”

“Are you sure you want to go to a country that doesn’t have TV or the Internet or a mobile phone network? You’ll get bored,” said Cornelius. “There are more important things in life than TV and the Internet,” said Tom.

“Like what?” asked Cornelius.

“Like travelling and learning about different cultures. Seeing how other people live.”

“Fascinating,” said Cornelius and he yawned. “Well I’m going skiing in Switzerland with my parents this Christmas. We’re going to stay in a luxury hotel equipped with all the latest technology.”

“Well, I hope you enjoy it,” said Tom.

“Yes, I will,” said Cornelius. “Well, I suppose I’ll see you next term but maybe I won’t. Maybe they’ll keep you prisoner in that weird country. Or maybe you’ll be attacked by a yeti and die there.”

“Very funny, Cornelius,” said Tom. “Now I have to finish packing this case.” Cornelius sat around for a while and then left.

**Glossary**

- **equipped with**: that has
- **tease**: make fun of
- **witty**: funny in a clever way
- **yawned**: opened his mouth when he was tired
After Reading
Characters

1 The adjectives describing the characters below are not the correct ones. Replace them with their opposites in the box.

FALSE TRUE
excitable ...................
weak .....................
unadventurous ...................
unkind ....................
unfriendly ....................
cowardly .....................
foolish .....................
unfair .....................

wise brave strong calm fair friendly kind adventurous

2 Which is your favourite character? Fill in a fact file for him/her.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair colour:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Likes:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dislikes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Write the names of the characters beside the sentences.

a) He is English and he goes to a boys' boarding school in the south of England. ....................
b) He stayed in a monastery for seven years and he learnt to be strong and brave. ....................
c) She was the youngest competitor in the archery competition that year. ....................
d) She was wise and brave and she was rescued by a snow leopard. ....................
e) He is an American journalist and he lost his job. ....................
f) They symbolize the peace and happiness of their country ....................

4 Listen and number the pictures.

a) ............................  b) ............................  c) ............................  d) ............................

5 Imagine you are a journalist. What questions would you ask the King? Ask and answer with a partner.