



There is this mountain. It looms high and forbidding to those who gaze upon it from the tiny village below. It is rumored to have Lemarians living inside, a race of beings from another dimension or world.



Some have visions in their sleep of climbing to the top of this mountain. It is as if It whispers "*climb me and find the secret of mountain high*". There are a few brave souls who obey the Dream Whisperer and attempt to follow the trail known as Sweat, Fear and Endurance. To get to the summit of this mountain, Shasta, they have to climb over 7,000 ft. in less than 7 miles. The way is through treacherous ice fields, with rocks and boulders plummeting toward visitors without warning. One wrong step and a man or woman could fall into a crevasse and become entombed in ice for eternity, a human Popsicle.



Those who have previously been visited by the Dream Whisperer and accepted its challenge with success, know that patience and planning are the secret weapons of a Mountaineer. Those called to Shasta often camp at a place called Helen Lake to prepare for the unknown. The view from there, up Avalanche Gulch where many a Mountaineer has met injury or death, reveals the Red Banks on the horizon. This is a 2,000 foot wall of sheer ice and rock that when even the bravest-of-the-brave look down from atop it, they feel fear and trepidation as the awareness sinks in that they are in the Belly of Danger. This is a place where going higher looks safer than retreating back down, and this is a sight not lost upon the viewer as they realize they must face the hazardous downward descent through the Gulch if they are to ever see their loved ones again. The realization that one mistake will cripple or kill them takes over their private thoughts.



Of the few who follow the Dream Whisperer's call to Shasta and make it to the Red Banks, even fewer make it up Misery Hill. This is where the air is thin and the lungs become starved for the fuel that makes it possible to reach the summit – oxygen. Should one be stout enough to conquer Misery they are treated to the rejuvenating view of the Pinnacle Peak which is where the top of Shasta lies, where the secret can be found.



But to get to the secret one must brave the snowfield between Misery and the Summit to make the final vertical climb to the box which contains it high atop Pinnacle Peak. If the noon sun is upon a Mountaineer it is too late to open the bronze treasure chest as Shasta, the free-spirited lady that she is, has a rule most must abide by – *“If you do not leave early to challenge the gauntlet to the top, and if you are not near my summit by mid-morning, the wise will turn back or face the constant danger of slipping, sliding, falling, and even dying”*.



But some brave souls do find the secret of the bronze box high atop Shasta. It is a secret only known to them. It is a secret that words cannot reveal as it is something that can only be felt. It is indescribable. It is a life-renewing elixir concocted of mental determination, physical pain, and emotional fear. Blend it together and drink it standing upon Earth at 14,000 ft. or higher, closer to Heaven than most mere mortals ever get, up high with Angels, and you become addicted.

It is an addiction that can kill but few ever take the cure.