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The Stone-Cutter

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Once there was a stone-cutter who went each day to a great rock on the side of a mountain and cut slabs for gravestones and house foundations. He knew exactly which stone was right for which job, and he was careful and honest, so he had plenty of customers. For a long time he was content.

A spirit lived in that mountain, and sometimes it helped people. The stone-cutter had never met it, and when people spoke of it he only shook his head.

Then one day he delivered a gravestone to a rich man's house. He saw silk curtains, golden tassels, and a bed so soft it looked like a cloud, and he walked home with his tools feeling, for the first time, that his work was heavy.

"If only I were rich," he said. "How happy I'd be, with a bed like that."

A voice answered: "Your wish is heard. A rich man you shall be."

He looked around. No one was there. He told himself he'd imagined it. But when he reached home, his wooden hut had become a palace, and in it stood a bed with silk curtains and golden tassels.



For a while he was delighted. But summer came, and one scorching morning the heat was so fierce that he stayed indoors, peeking through the blinds. A prince went by in a carriage, with servants in blue and silver and a golden umbrella held over his head to keep off the sun.

"If only I were a prince," the stone-cutter sighed. "How happy I'd be, with a golden umbrella over me."

"Your wish is heard," said the voice. "A prince you shall be."

So he was a prince, with riders before and behind, and servants in scarlet and gold, and a golden umbrella of his own. But the sun still scorched his gardens, and still browned his face under the umbrella. "The sun is mightier than I am," he said crossly. "If only I were the sun!"

"Your wish is heard. The sun you shall be."

He was proud to be the sun. He blazed across heaven and earth, scorched fields and princes alike, and felt very powerful. But soon he was bored, and then a cloud drifted in front of him and blocked his rays. "The cloud is mightier than I am! If only I were a cloud!"

"Your wish is heard. A cloud you shall be."

As a cloud he stretched between the sun and the earth, and the land turned green. That pleased him for a while. But then he poured rain for days and weeks, until rivers overflowed and villages washed away. Only one thing stood unmoved: the great rock on the mountainside. "The rock is stronger than I am! If only I were the rock!"

"Your wish is heard. The rock you shall be."

As the rock he was proud and still. Neither the sun's heat nor the cloud's rain could shift him. "This is better than anything," he thought.

Then he felt a tiny tremor at his feet. He looked down, and there was a little human, chipping at him with a hammer and chisel. A great slab split off and fell to the ground.

"A mere person is mightier than a rock?" he cried. "If only I were a man again!"

"Your wish is heard," said the voice. "A man once more you shall be."

So he was a stone-cutter again, with a hard bed and plain food, and he toiled all day in the sweat of his brow. But he had learned to be content with it. He never again wished to be greater than anyone else, and he never heard the mountain spirit again.

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