

The Mountain That Hiccupped



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Mount Mumble stood tall and proud above the village of Nook. Every morning, its rocky peak glowed pink in the sunrise. The villagers grew carrots in its shadow and hung their washing on lines that stretched between the houses. Life was quiet and cheerful. Felix, a small boy with messy chestnut-brown hair, often sat on the fence and stared up at the mountain, wondering what secrets it kept.



One day, Mount Mumble gave a gigantic HIC! The ground shook. Windows rattled. A cow mooed in surprise. Then everything went still. But a few minutes later—HIC!—it happened again. Felix grabbed the fence post to steady himself. His hazel-green eyes sparkled with curiosity. 'What was that?' he whispered. His red boots trembled on the dusty path.



The villagers rushed into the square. Mayor Hettie, tall in her plum-coloured coat, banged her walking stick on the cobblestones. 'That mountain has the hiccups!' she declared. 'And every hiccup shakes our homes. We must leave before the roofs fall down!' The villagers gasped and began packing their bags. Felix frowned. 'But why does it have hiccups?' he asked. Nobody listened.



Felix packed his canvas satchel with bread, cheese, and a small notebook. 'I'm going to find out what's wrong,' he told his mother. She kissed his freckled nose and waved goodbye. Felix marched up the dusty trail, his scuffed red boots crunching on loose stones. The mountain hiccupped again, and he wobbled. But he kept climbing, higher and higher, toward the rocky peak.



Halfway up, the ground rumbled. HIC! Felix lost his footing and slid down a slope. He landed with a thump on a hidden ledge. Behind a curtain of moss, he spotted a dark opening. Warm air puffed out, smelling of soup and fresh bread. 'Hello?' he called. No answer. But he heard a bubbling sound and a cheerful voice humming. Felix took a deep breath and stepped inside.



The tunnel led to a huge kitchen carved from solid rock. Pots the size of bathtubs bubbled on a stone stove. Steam swirled in the warm air. A tall stone creature, twice as tall as a man, stirred a cauldron with a giant ladle. Moss grew on his shoulders, and he wore a copper pot as a hat. 'Oh dear, oh dear,' he muttered as the mountain shook with another HIC!



'Hello,' said Felix. The stone creature jumped, and his ladle clattered. 'A boy! In my kitchen!' he boomed. 'I am Grandfather Granite. And you are just in time for the hiccups!' A small, round pebble child skipped over. 'I'm Pebble!' she chirped. 'Our cooking makes the mountain hiccup!' Felix blinked. 'Your cooking?' he asked. 'How?' Pebble pointed to the bubbling pots.



Grandfather Granite sighed. 'We are preparing a feast for the Stone Gathering,' he explained. 'But our pots are too small, and the steam has nowhere to go. It builds up inside the mountain and—HIC!—out it comes!' Felix looked around. The kitchen was cramped, with pots crammed together. Steam hissed from every corner. 'We need more space for the steam,' Felix said, tapping his chin.



Felix opened his notebook and drew a quick plan. 'What if we move the big pots near the chimney and open the vents?' he suggested. Pebble clapped her stubby hands. 'Oh, yes! And we can put a fan on the wall!' Grandfather Granite scratched his mossy beard. 'A fan? Made of what?' Felix smiled. 'Leaves! Woven leaves that spin in the steam!' They set to work right away.



Pebble fetched armfuls of broad leaves while Felix wove them into a big fan. Grandfather Granite hauled the heaviest pots to the chimney. The mountain hiccupped again—HIC!—but this time, Felix wobbled and laughed. 'We're fixing it!' he cried. Pebble giggled and stirred a pot of soup. The warm air began to flow up the chimney instead of building up inside the mountain. The kitchen felt bigger and calmer already.



Grandfather Granite lifted the last pot into place. The fan spun gently in the steam. The kitchen filled with a soft, steady warmth. Everyone held their breath. One minute passed. Two minutes. No hiccup! Pebble squealed with joy. 'You did it!' she cheered, hugging Felix's leg. Grandfather Granite beamed, his amber eyes twinkling. 'You understood our problem, young Felix,' he said. 'Thank you.'



Felix hurried back down the mountain, his satchel bouncing. The village came into view, and he saw the villagers gathered with their bags. Mayor Hettie was just raising her walking stick to give the order to leave. 'Wait!' Felix shouted. 'The mountain won't hiccup anymore!' Everyone froze. 'I found stone creatures cooking a feast,' he explained. 'Their steam was trapped. We fixed their kitchen.' The villagers stared in wonder.



Just then, the mountain rumbled. The villagers gasped. But instead of a HIC!, a gentle puff of warm air floated down. It smelled of soup and bread. Mayor Hettie lowered her walking stick. 'No hiccup!' she said. 'The boy was right.' She looked at Felix with sharp dark eyes. 'You went up there alone?' Felix nodded. Mayor Hettie's frown softened. 'Then you have saved our village,' she declared.



The villagers cheered and unpacked their bags. That evening, they climbed the mountain path to meet the stone creatures. Grandfather Granite and Pebble welcomed them with bowls of hot soup. The village kitchen was soon full of laughter. Mayor Hettie raised her bowl. 'To Felix,' she said, 'who taught us to ask questions instead of running away.' Everyone clinked their bowls and cheered.



From that day on, the villagers and the stone creatures shared many meals. Felix often visited the mountain kitchen, where Pebble showed him new recipes. Grandfather Granite gave him a tiny stone spoon as a thank-you gift. The mountain never hiccupped again. And whenever a problem rumbled through the village, someone would say, 'Let's ask Felix. He knows how to find out.'



Felix sat on the fence at sunset, the tiny stone spoon in his pocket. He looked up at Mount Mumble, peaceful and still. He had learned something important: when something scary happens, it's better to climb up and understand it than to run away. And sometimes, the biggest problems are just a kitchen that needs a little fixing. He smiled, and his chipped tooth showed. The mountain smiled back.