

The Cry of the Mountain

In a valley at the foot of a towering mountain, there was a small village. The village had long depended on the mountain for its streams, which nourished their crops and filled their wells. But one year, the rains stopped, and the streams that once flowed abundantly from the mountain dried up. Without water, the fields withered, and the villagers began to lose hope.

Among them was a young woman named Dara. She had always tended to her family's land with care, her crops thriving even when others struggled. But now, like everyone else, her plants shriveled under the relentless sun. Each morning, she walked out to her fields, hoping for a sign of rain, and each day she returned home with a heavy heart.

The village elders, wise and stoic, gathered often to discuss the drought. They encouraged patience, reminding the people that hardship was a part of life. "The rains will return when they will," they said. "We must endure."

But Dara could not accept this passive waiting. She remembered stories her grandmother had told her as a child — tales of the mountain's spirit, who listened to the cries of those in need and offered help to the worthy. Her grandmother had always said that the mountain was alive, that it had its own will, and that it could provide or withhold based on the heart of those who called upon it.

One evening, as the village huddled in quiet despair, Dara stood and addressed the crowd. "We cannot wait in silence any longer," she said, her voice trembling but strong. "I believe the mountain will help us if we ask. Tomorrow, I will climb to its summit and call out for its mercy."

The villagers stared at her, some with surprise, others with skepticism. The elders frowned. "Dara," one of them said gently, "the mountain has not spoken to anyone for generations. What you suggest is foolishness. You are better off saving your strength for the harvest that may yet come."

But Dara would not be swayed. "I cannot sit and watch everything wither. I must try."

Her neighbors, while not entirely convinced, could not argue with her determination. So, at dawn, with only a small pack of supplies, Dara began her ascent.

The mountain was steep and rugged, its paths narrow and treacherous. As she climbed, the wind howled, and loose stones slipped beneath her feet. Yet, with each step, Dara whispered a prayer, her heart filled with both fear and hope.

By midday, she had reached the highest point she could climb. From the summit, she could see the vast valley spread below her, dry and brittle. The riverbeds that once shimmered with life now lay barren. Dara's chest tightened at the sight, but she swallowed her fear and stood tall.

She raised her voice and called out to the mountain. "Spirit of the mountain, I ask for your mercy! Our village is dying. We need water, we need life! Please, help us."

Her words echoed in the silence. At first, there was no reply, only the sound of the wind whistling through the rocks. Doubt crept into Dara's heart. Maybe the elders were right. Maybe the mountain was indifferent to their plight, or worse, that it had no spirit at all.

She sank to her knees, tears of frustration and exhaustion streaming down her face. "I don't know if you can hear me," she whispered, her voice cracking, "but I can't just watch everything we've built fade away. If there is any way to help us, please, show me."

For a long time, there was only silence. The wind died down, and the sun hung heavy in the sky. But then, just as Dara was about to turn back, she heard a faint rustling behind her. She turned and saw, standing in the shadow of a boulder, an old woman, her eyes bright and knowing.

"You climb the mountain and speak to it, though others told you it would not answer," the woman said, her voice soft yet clear. "Why?"

Dara wiped her eyes and stood. "Because I couldn't just sit and wait. I had to try."

The old woman nodded slowly. "There is an ancient spring deep within the mountain, long forgotten by your people. It once fed the streams that flowed to your village, but it has been sealed off by the earth's shifting over time. I can show you where it is, but you must bring others to help."

Dara's heart leapt. "I will. Thank you!"

"Remember," the woman added, "it is not enough to ask for help. You must also be willing to work for it."

Dara hurried down the mountain, her mind racing with the old woman's words. When she returned to the village, the people gathered around her, eager to hear what had happened. She told them of the spring and how they could bring water back to the village.

The elders, skeptical at first, saw the fire in Dara's eyes and the hope she brought. "We will help you," they said, and soon the entire village worked together, digging to find the ancient spring. It was not easy, and there were moments when they thought they might fail, but Dara's courage had sparked something in them all.

At last, after days of labor, the water burst forth from the ground, flowing down the mountain and into the village's dried riverbeds. The crops were saved, and the people rejoiced, not just in the water, but in the knowledge that their courage and unity had brought it forth.

Dara had shown them that hope alone was not enough — one had to act, to ask, and to believe that even in the face of despair, there was always something more that could be done.

— *William Zeitler*
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