



How the Farmer Deceived the Demon

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Very many years ago, in a far-away land where the trees never changed their green leaves and where the birds always sang, there lived on an island a farmer with a large family. Though all alone on the island and knowing nothing of people in the outer world, they were always happy,—as happy as the laughing rills that rippled past their home. They had no great wealth, depending from year to year on the crops which the father raised. They needed no money, for they lacked nothing; and they never sold their produce, for no people were near to buy.

One day in the middle of the year, after the crops were well started, a loud, unusual roar was heard. Suddenly a stiff gale blew up from the southwest, and with it came clouds which quickly hid the entire sky. The day turned to night. The birds ceased to sing and went to their nests. The wild beasts ran to their caves. The family sought shelter in the house from a heavy downpour of rain which continued for many days and nights. So long did it last that they became very anxious about the condition of things around them.

On the eighth day the birds again began to sing, and the sun was, as usual, bright. The farmer arose early and went out to look at his fields, but, lo! his crop was all destroyed. He went back to the house and told the family that the water-god was angry and had washed away all that he had hoped to have for the coming year.

What were they to do? The supply in the house was getting low and it was too late to raise another crop. The father worried night and day, for he did not know how he could keep his children from starvation.

One day he made a long journey and came into a place that was strange to him. He had never before seen the like of it. But in the midst of a broad meadow he saw a tree with spreading branches like an elm, and as his legs and back were stiff from walking, he went over and sat down under it. Presently, looking up, he discovered that on the tree were large red fruits. He climbed up and brought some down, and after satisfying his hunger he fell asleep.

He had not slept long when he was awakened by a loud noise. The owner of the place was coming. He was fearful to look upon. His body was like that of a person, but he was of enormous size; and he had a long tail, and two horns growing out of his head. The farmer was frightened and did not know what to do. He stood motionless till the master came up and began to talk to him. Then he explained that he had come there in search of food to keep his family alive. The monster was delighted to hear this, for he saw that he had the man and the man's family in his power. He told the traveller that in return for a certain promise he would help him out of his troubles.

The demon, as he was called by some travellers to that land, showed the farmer a smooth, round stone, which, he said, gave its possessor the power of a magician. He offered to lend this to the farmer for five years, if at the expiration of that time the farmer and family would become his slaves. The farmer consented.

Then the demon was glad. He said to the farmer, "You must squeeze the stone when you wish to become invisible; and must put it in your mouth when you wish to return to human form."

The man tried the power of the magic stone. He squeezed it, and instantly became invisible to the demon; but he bade him farewell, and promised to meet him in the same place at the appointed time.

In this invisible form the man crossed the water that washed the shore of the island on which he lived. There he

found a people who lived in communities. He wanted something to eat, so he went into the shops; but he found that a restaurant owned by a Chinaman was the one to which most people of the city went. He put the stone in his mouth, thus appearing in visible form, and, entering the restaurant, ordered the best food he could find. He finished his meal quickly and went out. The waiter, perceiving that he did not pay, followed him. The man had no money; so he squeezed the stone and shot up into the air without being seen. The Chinaman, alarmed by the cry of the waiter, came out and ran in all directions, trying to find and catch the man. No one could find him; and the people thought he must indeed be a fast runner to escape so quickly, for they did not know of the gift of the demon.

Not far from that place he saw groups of men and women going in and out of a large building. It was a bank. The farmer went in to see what he could find. There he saw bags of money, gold and silver. He chuckled with joy at this opportunity. In order to use his hands freely, he put the stone in his mouth; but before he could fill all his pockets with money, he was discovered by the two guards, who began to pound him on the head. He struggled to save his life, and finally took the stone out of his mouth and squeezed it. Instantly he vanished from their sight; but he was vexed at the beating he had received, so he carried off all the gold they had in the bank. The people inside as well as outside the building became crazy. They ran about in all directions, not knowing why. Some called the firemen, thinking the bank was on fire; but nothing had happened, except that the farmer was gone and the two guards were "half dead frightened." They danced up and down the streets in great excitement, but could not utter a word.

Straight home went the farmer, not stopping by the way. His wife and children were awaiting him. He gave them the money, and told them all about the fortune which he had gotten from the man on their own island,—told all his secrets. Prosperous they became, and with the money which he had brought they purchased all they needed from the city just opposite them.

The time passed so pleasantly that the man was surprised to discover that his promise would be due in two more days. He made preparations to go back to the land of his master. Arrived there, he met the same monster under the same tree. The demon was displeased to see the old man alone, without the family which also had been promised. He told the man that he would shut him in a cave and then would go and capture those left at home.

But the farmer would not go to the cave. The demon tried to pull him into a deep hole. Both struggled; and at last the farmer squeezed the magic stone and disappeared. He took a green branch of the tree and beat the demon. The demon surrendered. He begged for mercy.

The farmer went home, and from that day thought no more of the demon. He knew that while he held the stone the monster would never come to trouble him. And the family lived on in peace and happiness, as they had done before the water-god became angry with them.

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