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Gravity

A Fable

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Many years passed. Sisyphus wearied of heaving his boulder to the crest of the mountain, only to see it roll back down again.

“Rock, old friend,” he said to himself, one night, at the end of a long day’s work, “I’ve been thinking.”

“Yes?” answered the rock.

“What if we just go part way up the mountain? Just up to the first bend?”

“You know,” said the rock, “We could just not go up at all.”

“Hm,” said Sisyphus, rubbing his chin. “Not go—at all?”

“Just stay down here. Do something else.”

“Hm,” said Sisyphus. He thought about the blisters, the incline, the sweat in his eyes. Thankless, interminable work. “Maybe you’re right. Rock-rolling is obsolete, anyway. Get with the times.”

“Seriously,” agreed the rock. “Who wants to go downhill?”

That night, Sisyphus lay awake thinking of all the things he could do if he didn’t spend all his time pushing a boulder up a slope. He could take it easy, for one thing. Turn over a new leaf. Go back to school. He would find a new project that would engage him completely—something to really put his shoulder to.

At his side, the rock dreamed of gravity and dust.

The next morning, Sisyphus was up before dawn. He looked out over the plain, taking in all the sights of Hades. There was Asphodel Meadows, a sort of subdivision where nothing ever happened, and Tartarus, where gangs of Titans vied for control. He could see the Danaïdes carrying water in their sieves—Tantalus reaching for the fruit over his head—Orpheus turning to look over his shoulder, a prisoner of his own suspicion. It was hell out there, really hell.

“Rock, old friend,” he began, turning back to the mountain, “I’ve been thinking...”

“Oh have you, now?”

And they set off back up the hill.