

THE REALLY USEFUL ROCK

Written by Chris Sig



Peter Sam and Sir Handel were taking workmen to the old stone quarry. As they chuffed along, they saw a huge boulder standing by a small hill.

“Is that the boulder Rusty told us about?” Peter Sam asked.

“Looks like it,” said Sir Handel grimly. “He was right. It *does* look scary.”

Boulder had once stood on the mountain high in the hills. But when workmen came to build a quarry below, it had been shaken loose and chased the engines down the line.

Boulder had caused so much damage that the quarry had to close. Workmen were sent to take up the rails leading to it.

“At least it can’t do any more harm on that hill,” puffed Sir Handel.

“Mind you,” said Peter Sam, “it looks rather sad, doesn’t it?”

“Don’t be silly! How could a *rock* look sad?”

“I don’t know; but somehow, this one does...”

That night, Sir Handel and Duncan laughed at Peter Sam. “Fancy feeling sorry for a rock! You’re going soft in the boiler!”

“You shouldn’t laugh,” said Rusty sternly. “I told you there was something strange about that boulder.”

“Rusty is right,” agreed Duke. “There’s a legend that it was protecting that mountain from where it used to stand – all alone for years and years. I know what that feels like...”

“The safest thing to do is to leave Boulder alone again,” decided Rusty. “We don’t want any more trouble.”

All the engines agreed. Except Peter Sam.

‘Poor Boulder! It misses the mountain. No wonder it looks sad,’ he thought.

Each morning, Peter Sam brought workmen up to the old quarry. Then he brought down the rails and sleepers to be used again. Whenever he passed Boulder, he would give a cheerful whistle:

“*Peep! Peep!* Hello, Boulder!”

After a while, Boulder didn’t seem quite so scary.

Then one day, Sir Handel had to help Peter Sam again. As he set off with his empty trucks, he glared at Boulder.

“Stupid rock,” he muttered.

A little later, Peter Sam followed on with the men.

“*Peep! Peep!* Good morning, Boulder!” he whistled.

Suddenly, a slab of rock slid down the hill and onto the rails. Peter Sam had to stop.

“Bother!” said the Driver. “This is going to make us late!”

Then they heard a new sound. Peter Sam could see a line of trucks rattling towards him.

“Look out! They’re going to hit us!”

Instead, the runaway trucks hit the fallen rock and were derailed. Peter Sam *was* surprised!

Just then, Sir Handel arrived. “Sorry, Peter Sam! I lost my trucks on the hill. I bet it was that boulder, playing more tricks!”

“Wait a moment,” said Peter Sam. “That slab of rock fell before your trucks ran into us. I think Boulder just saved me!”

“What – because you’ve been *nice* to it!?”

“I know it’s hard to believe,” said the Driver, “but Peter Sam could be right...”

When the Fat Controller heard what happened, it gave him an idea. “Maybe we’ve been wrong about that boulder. I think we should give it the respect it deserves.”

And so the old quarry became a national park. Trees and flowers were allowed to grow with strict orders *not* to cut them down.

A path was also laid near the hill where Boulder stood. Visitors come to take photographs, and to learn about ‘*The Really Useful Rock of the Mountain*’.

The engines aren’t afraid of Boulder anymore. Now they *all* remember to whistle as they pass by for good luck.

“Boulder won’t feel so lonely now,” smiled Peter Sam. “I think it looks much happier.”

And – somehow – it did.

AUTHOR’S NOTES:

This story takes place after the events of ‘Rusty and the Boulder’.