

Stone soup

Once there was a traveller who travelled from village to village with his son, living off his wits. One day they came to a new village. "I'm hungry," said his son. "Don't worry, son," the father said. "We'll get something to eat and a place to stay." "But how?" said the son. "We haven't got any money."

The father looked to his son and smiled. "You have to learn in life how to make something from nothing. Learn that and you will do well."

He picked up a stone about the size of a duck's egg from the road. "With this stone, I will get us food and a place to stay for the night. Watch and you will learn."

He put the stone into his pocket and they made their way to a cottage with window boxes filled with red and yellow roses. He knocked on the door. A little old woman answered. "Can I help you?" she said. "No," said the traveller. "We can help you. We come from a country called Estonia and in Estonia we make a very special dish called Stone Soup. We make it with very special stones like this." He took the stone from his pocket and showed it to her. "Can we make some for you and give it to you as a present?" The old woman was very interested and invited them in and soon the stone was boiling in a pot of water.

After a while the traveller tasted it. "Mmm, the stone soup is almost ready," he said, "It just needs an onion."

"I have an onion," cried the old woman excitedly. She chopped it up and threw it into the pot.

After a while longer the traveller tasted it. "Mmm, the stone soup is almost ready," he said, "It just needs a couple of carrots."

"I have some carrots," cried the old woman. She diced them up and threw them into the pot.

And so it went on, with the traveller tasting the soup saying it was almost ready while adding potatoes and meat and all kinds of delicious relishes. When it was done, the little old woman served the stone soup up in three bowls and they all ate heartily. Then the traveller put the stone into his pocket and made ready to leave.

"Wait," said the old lady. "I want to cook stone soup again and I can't without a special stone such as the one that you have. I'll buy it off you for a gold sovereign." The traveller didn't look keen.

"Two gold sovereigns," said the old woman. Again the traveller looked unimpressed. "Three!" she begged.

And so it came to pass that the traveller and his son, checked into the finest hotel in town, slept in big, comfortable beds and in the morning had a fine, big breakfast.

The son learned his lesson. And that was that.

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