

Stone Soup

An ill-clad tramp knocked at the farmhouse door one wintry noonday. “I cannot allow you to enter, for my husband is not home,” explained the woman of the house. “And I haven’t a morsel to offer you,” she quickly added. Her voice betrayed her unmasked derision toward the tramp.

“Then you could certainly use my soup stone,” interjected the tramp, pulling from his pocket what appeared to be an ordinary stone. Interested, the woman asked how it worked. He replied that if only he had a potful of water and a fire, he could show her. Furthermore, he claimed that the wondrous stone, when added to plain boiling water, could make the most remarkable soup imaginable.

After the tramp advised that undoubtedly her husband would thank her for the marvelous supper, the woman succumbed to her desire for an easy meal, and she bade him come in. Soon the water was boiling. After plunking the stone into the pot, he tasted the liquid. Commenting that it needed seasonings and a bit of barley, he sent her to the pantry and called for some butter if she could spare it. No sooner had she returned, than he tasted it again, observing that clearly a good soup required potatoes and vegetables. These she also obtained. A third time the tramp—evidently a connoisseur of fine soup—tasted it and stated, “The stone has worked its magic; chunks of chicken and some broth will perfect this soup.”

When the full aroma informed them that the soup was complete, the woman served the tramp and herself. They ate well and managed to save a bowlful for her husband, who was coming up the road, it seemed. Hastily, the tramp thanked the woman for the use of her pot and fire. Then he stuck his hand down into the pot, pulled out the stone, licked it clean, and dropped it back into his pocket. The woman of the house enthusiastically invited him to return next time his travels brought him into the vicinity. “I would be delighted,” answered the tramp courteously. Smiling, he left.