

A Season of Happiness



the wonderful world
of Story-Telling

MOONBERRY PIE



MP79

www.aseasonofhappiness.com

ROLLING STONES

The day his parents bought the house, Jason was overjoyed; mainly because it had a swimming pool. Although only six years old, he had learned to swim from an early age and used to go for a dip in the pool every day after school. His favourite game was diving for coloured rings that had been tossed in to sit on the bottom; and this was what he had in mind to do very soon. In the meantime, however, while waiting for some friends to arrive, he was in his cubby playing with his little stones. At first sight they just appeared to be ordinary stones, but for Jason they were quite special. Each had a face painted on them and they all had names. Hearing his mother call out that his school friends were here, he scooped up the little stones and began putting them carefully back in a tin box. "There you go, Bob, and you too Molly," he said; then gave each one a mention until they were all in the box. When the last one was in, and just before he put the lid on the box, he said: "I'll be gone a while, but I'll see you later." Any grown-up watching might have thought this rather strange, a boy talking to a collection of stones; but they would probably be too old to remember that children didn't always need people to talk to.

Leaving the tin box on the little table in the cubby, Jason rushed out to meet his friends who were already by the pool. "Can we dive for the rings again?" asked Pam.

Before Jason could answer, Ryan said: "I reckon we should have a competition to see who can pick up the most rings."

It was agreed that was a great idea, so in went the rings, all ten of them. As the game progressed, the three children were becoming really excited. They had each gathered three rings apiece and there was just one left on the bottom of the pool, which meant that whoever picked up the last one would be the winner. Ryan and Pam were first to dive in together. Jason, though, was a bit behind the others. Over-eager to catch up he was running, slipped on the wet paving, fell and smacked his head on the edge of the pool. Into the water he went.

The others didn't notice to start with. Ryan popped up just before Pam and he had the last ring. "Hey, Jason," he called out jubilantly, waving the ring in the air, "I've got it – I win." When there was no reply he looked around, but there was no sign of his friend. Hearing Pam shout, he turned to see her diving down again.

In a matter of seconds she surfaced and gasped out: "Give me a hand! It's Jason – he'd sunk to the bottom. He was drowning!"

Thanks to Pam's swift action, Jason survived; but his problems weren't over. He had been under water too long and the ambulance officers had to start his breathing again. Even then, Jason wasn't fully recovered and he was still unconscious. Once in hospital, that was how he remained for over a week. His parents visited him every

day and they were talking as they walked along the corridor. "I know it's going to be hard, but I want to sell the house," said Elizabeth, Jason's mother. "And when we buy another, it mustn't have a swimming pool. We can't risk this happening again."

They paused outside Jason's room. Her husband Martin nodded. "You're right, Liz. I'll leave you here and make a start on it straight away. Give my love to Jason."

Elizabeth opened the door and went in. Nothing seemed to have changed and her son was simply lying there with his eyes closed. She began talking to him as she always did, believing what the doctors had said that the unconscious boy could most likely hear and speaking to him would help his recovery. Sitting on a chair next to the bed, she took Jason's hand and gave it a little squeeze, never expecting what happened next. Her son's fingers moved for the first time in a week; then after a few seconds he opened his eyes. It was such a relief. "Oh, thank goodness," said his mother almost breathlessly, "You're back." Jason blinked a few times and gazed around as if in a dream, presumably not knowing where he was. "You're in hospital, darling," she explained. The boy's eyes returned to his mother's face and merely stared; but he said nothing.

Meanwhile, back in the cubby there was also movement, not the people kind, though. It was a tin box sitting on the table that was doing the moving. No-one was making it, but the box was actually bouncing all on its own. Yes, that's right – a seemingly ordinary tin box was shaking and bouncing on the wooden surface. There were sounds, too, tiny voices coming from inside the box: "Keep jumping," ordered Bob. "I think the lid's coming loose." And the little stones renewed their jumping up and down, hitting the lid of the tin box again and again.

"Why are we doing this?" grumbled Donk.

"To get out, silly," Molly reminded him. "Jason hasn't been for ages, and that's not like him. Something must have happened to him, and if we get out of this box we might be able to find out what."

So, the little stones carried on jumping up and down. Perhaps the lid was actually rising a bit at a time; but in moments it didn't matter. The box had bounced its way to the edge of the table and fell off. As it hit the floor, the lid popped off and the little stones spilled out.

"Woah, that hurt!" exclaimed Donk. "Okay, we're out of the box. What now?"

"Go and look for Jason," said Bob.

"And how are we supposed to do that?" sneered Donk. "We haven't got legs."

"No," said Molly, "But we can roll."

And that's what the little stones did; well, after a fashion. Not one of them was truly round and they weren't able to roll in a straight line; but with a bit of practice they managed something close. Once at the doorway of the cubby they had to roll and bounce down a step to reach the garden. Luckily, the grass cushioned their fall, but it presented another problem because it was taller than the little stones and they couldn't see much. Eventually, they made it onto a pathway which led to a much bigger cubby than the one they knew. Old Izzy, though, had seen it before and declared: "That's not a cubby – it's the main house where human people live. Jason took me there a long time ago; long before you lot came along."

Donk moaned. "Stop her before she bores us with her life history - again."

Fortunately, Izzy remained quiet, except for a bit of grumpy grumbling to herself. The little stones continued rolling on along the path, wobbling in an almost-straight line until they reached the house. It seemed deserted. Rolling round to the front of the house they saw a For Sale sign, but the stones didn't know what it said because they couldn't read.

After a while, Molly sighed. "I guess Jason and his family have gone," she said sadly. "What should we do now?"

"Well, we aren't having much fun on our own just rolling around," observed Bob, "We need to find someone like Jason who will play with us. Come on – let's leave here and go looking."

Along the path they sort-of rolled, out past the sign that they couldn't read, and on into the street. Here was another wonder that none of them had seen – lots and lots of houses in rows stretching off into the distance. There were human people too; and when one of them came close, the little stones stopped rolling to wait and hope; but not one took any notice of them and they simply walked on. "This is useless," grumbled Donk, "Nobody wants to play with us. We'll be play-less forever."

Just then, along came three young boys who would have been a bit older than Jason. Spotting the group of little stones, one said: "Someone's lost their marbles."

"They're not marbles, dummy," said another. "They aren't even round."

"No," said the third, "But some of them are kind-a flat. I reckon they'd be good to skip on the pond." Gathering up the stones between them, they headed off.

The park was only a short walk for the boys; but it would have been a long, wobbly roll for the little stones, and Donk in particular was glad they were being carried. As they were placed on the ground, here was something else the little stones had never seen – not just the park itself which was far bigger than Jason's garden, but the pond was also a wonder. None of them had ever seen water before, and they had no idea what it was for; but they were soon to find out.

One of the boys sorted through the stones and picked up Donk. "This should work," he said, turning the stone over in his hand. "It's pretty flat, sort-of." Swinging back his arm, he threw the stone out across the pond just above the surface. The idea was that it was supposed to skip on the water a number of times: but it only made two skips before it sunk. The boy groaned.

His friend picked up Izzy and said: "You were doing it wrong. You're supposed to spin it. Like this..." and he threw the little stone nearly the same as the other boy; except that he gave it a flick with his fingers that sent it spinning. Izzy hit the water with a single splash and disappeared below the surface.

"Forget the skipping," said the third boy. "Why don't we see who can throw a stone the furthest?" One by one the little stones were hurled into the pond. When it was all over, the boys just went on their merry way, not the least concerned about the little stones which were now sitting on mud in the bottom of the pond.

Rolling in the sludge was much harder than on solid ground and it was ages before they were out of the pond. In fact, it took the rest of the day, the following night and a bit of the next morning. By then they were really tired and would have liked to go to sleep, but Bob checked and realised not everyone was there. "Has anyone seen Izzy and Donk?" he asked. Apparently, no-one had. "They must still be in the pond," he said unnecessarily.

Molly suggested: "Maybe we should go and look for them."

"Not yet," said Bob. "Let's wait a bit." So the little stones stayed on the bank beside the pond and kept a lookout for their missing friends.

Further into the park was a path that wound through the grass areas, and as it was still quite early in the day, not many people were about. It just so happened that walking along the path were Elizabeth and Martin with Jason a few paces ahead. His mother was whispering to her husband almost as if she didn't want her son to hear: "I don't understand," she was saying. "The doctors say he's fully recovered and there's nothing wrong with him; so why can't he speak?" Actually, she was

talking loud enough so that Jason *would* hear, hoping that their concern might encourage him to say something, anything.

“He did say one word,” Martin reminded his wife.

“Pets,” Elizabeth said. “We thought he wanted a pet; but when we offered to get him a puppy he didn’t seem at all interested. So what, I wonder, did he mean by Pets?”

Jason *had* heard and it made him even more miserable. Trudging on ahead of his parents he noticed they were coming to the pond. A shiver went down his spine at the mere thought of what had happened to him; and he was about to change direction away from the water when he caught sight of something on the grassy bank. Hesitantly at first, he edged a bit closer, halted, then took another few steps. Jason could hardly believe his eyes. There in a park sitting beside the pond were his little stones. Rushing over to them, he crouched down and said: “What are you guys doing here?”

“We went looking for you,” said Molly. “Where have you been?”

“Hospital,” explained Jason. “I whacked my head and fell in the pool.” Picking up some of the stones he said: “I never thought I’d see you again. I am so happy.”

His parents had been watching from a distance. A bit worried that he was going too close to the pond, they quickened their pace and were almost there. “Am I hearing things?” queried Martin, “Or is he speaking?”

“Yes, he is,” confirmed Elizabeth, “But who to?”

Jason heard them talking and turned, a huge smile on his face. “My pets, of course – my little stones. Come and say hello.” His parents were stumped for words and stood in silence. “Come on,” urged Jason, “They won’t bite.” And he laughed which surprised the grown-ups because he hadn’t done that either for a long time.

Approaching cautiously, the boy’s parents gazed down at the stones. Jason picked one up to show them. The little stone said: “Hello, I’m Bob. Nice to meet you.” When the adults failed to reply, Bob said to Jason: “What’s the matter with them? Are they deaf?”

Jason chuckled. “No, they’re just grown-ups, not kids; so they probably can’t hear you at all. Isn’t that right, Mum, Dad...?”

In truth, the boy was quite right and neither of his parents could hear the little stones speaking. Eventually, Elizabeth frowned, raised her eyebrows and replied: “Maybe they were speaking so quietly that we couldn’t hear. Now, darling, why don’t you pick up your pets and take them home with you?”

Still in the boy’s hand, Bob began joggling around. “We can’t go yet,” he said. “Izzy and Donk are still in the pond. We can’t leave them behind. We have to wait till they roll out.”

Jason explained this to his parents, and it was clear from their expressions that they thought he was making it up. Martin shrugged and spoke aside to his wife: “It won’t hurt to stay a while longer, and whatever he believes is alright with me. At least he’s talking again.” Elizabeth agreed; so they waited.

Not for all that long, though. In just a few minutes there was movement at the edge of the water as two very tired and grumpy little stones rolled out of the pond and up onto the bank to join their friends. Jason and the others were very relieved. Elizabeth and Martin didn’t know what to think. What they had seen was so unbelievable, all they could do was stare wide-eyed at the little stones, and they were both quite speechless.