The Stone Soup

One day, two soldiers were returning from war talking with each other: "How I would like a good dinner tonight," said the first soldier. "And a soft bed to sleep in," added the second soldier. The two men continued walking in silence when they noticed some lights ahead of them. They were hoping to find something to eat and a bed to sleep in for the night. When they arrived in the little village, they began to ask about food and a place where they could stay. "We have no food for ourselves! In fact, there's not a bite to eat in the whole village" lied the villagers. "You'd better keep on moving."

The first soldier said out aloud, "Good people! We are hungry soldiers; we've asked you for food and you have none. I suppose we will have to make stone soup." The villagers were shocked. The soldier added mysteriously, "Our king gave me a very special gift when I saved his life in the war." He then asked for a big pot and water to fill it. When the villagers brought the cauldron, the two soldiers placed it in the middle of the square and built a huge fire underneath. Then the first soldier took out a bag from a secret pocket of his jacket, removed three very ordinary-looking stones from the bag and dropped them into the water.

A crowd started gathering in the square to see what all the commotion was about.

"A good soup needs salt and pepper. If only I had some salt and pepper!" the first soldier said, so one of the villagers sent his children to fetch some salt and pepper.

As the soldiers sniffed the soup and licked their lips in anticipation, hunger began to overcome the villagers. "Oh!" the soldier said to himself rather loudly, "I do love stone soup. Of course, stone soup with carrots...that's hard to beat. If only I had some carrots!"

Hearing this, one of villagers sent his son home to fetch some carrots hidden in the house. Soon the son returned and they added the carrots to the pot. "Magnificent!" exclaimed the soldier. "You know, I once had stone soup with carrots and some beef as well, and it was fit for the king!" The village butcher managed to find some beef. And so it went, until soon there were onions, potatoes, barley, cabbage, and milk added to the boiling pot.

"It's soup," yelled the soldiers, "but first we must prepare the place for a party!" Tables, chairs, torches, and banners were arranged and the soldiers and villagers sat down together to eat. One of the villagers said, "A great soup would be better with bread and some apple juice," so he brought out these last two items. The villagers had never before tasted anything so good that were made of stones, and soon they began singing, dancing, and making merry well into the night.

The soldiers were weary from their travels, so they inquired again to see if there was a hayloft or spare floor corner somewhere where they could rest for the night. "Oh, no, a hayloft or a corner won't do for men such as you!" cried the mayor. "You two must have the best beds in the village!" One soldier spent the night in the mayor's house, while the other was offered lodging in the baker's house.

The next morning the villagers gathered to say goodbye to the soldiers and offered them a great sum of money for the "magic" stones. The soldiers said the stones were not for sale, politely refused the offer, and then traveled on.