



# Smilestones

Squarehead had spent the day at the beach collecting things. Shells of all shapes and sizes. Seaweed with bubbles in it. Cuttlefish skeletons. A dried-out starfish. And some flattish, round stones, which he felt might be useful for something, but he wasn't sure what.

When he got home he arranged all his seaside treasures on the shelf in his room. He looked at the round stones and wondered why he'd brought them. True they were nice and round and smooth from being tossed around in the sea. But now he'd got them home, they looked a bit and grey and dull – not very exciting compared to his other treasures.

“Oh well,” he thought.

“I'll just leave them in a little pile here by the back door.”

When his mum saw them, she wasn't pleased. “What are these old stones here for? They make the place look untidy.”

“Sorry.” Said Squarehead. “I promise I'll move them tomorrow.” And he ran off to play, forgetting all about his promise – as kids do!

Later that week, Squarehead was playing “it” in the park with SquareNess. (I’m sure you know the game, where you have to chase the other person and when you touch them – they are “it”.) SquareNess suddenly stopped and stared. Squarehead looked where she was looking. A little square old man was walking slowly along the pavement outside – he was so bent over with age that all he could see was the ground.

**“He is the saddest man in Squaretown.”** Said SquareNess.  
**“My dad told me.”**

Squarehead watched the man as he moved slowly down the street at about the same pace as an elderly tortoise. He looked incredibly sad and morose (which means gloomy). His sadness moved slowly down the street with him. The people he passed suddenly lost their smiles for a few seconds and stared into the distance, as if remembering a miserable time from long ago.

**“Why’s he so sad?”** Asked Squarehead in a very quiet voice.

**“I don’t know.”** Said SquareNess in a whisper.

Without quite understanding why, Squarehead said: **“Let’s follow him.”**

They hurried out of the park and, keeping a safe distance from the old man, they followed him. It was quite difficult because he moved so slowly they kept tripping over each other and giggling with nerves in case he turned around and saw them.

And eventually, that’s exactly what happened!

**“What do you two want?”** Said the sad old man, stopping suddenly outside his house.

Squarehead and SquareNess stared at him wide-eyed. They couldn’t think what to say.

**“What are your names?”** Said the old man.

**“Errrrr...”** said Ness looking anxious.

**“Ummm...”** Said Squarehead looking even more anxious.

**“Um and Er? That’s a funny pair of names!”** Said the old man, glaring down at them with his fierce, miserable face.

Then he did the last thing they expected him to do.

He grinned. Then he chuckled. Then he opened his mouth and roared with laughter.

**“Oh my days! Um and Er! What a pair of nincompoops!”**

He opened his front gate, still chuckling to himself.

**“Um and Er!”** And disappeared through his front door.

Squarehead and SquareNess went back to Squarehead’s house for tea. They couldn’t stop thinking about the strange, sad old man. They were halfway through jam sandwiches when

Squarehead's mother said: **"Forgot about your promise did you?"**

**"What promise?"** Said Squarehead.

**"Those awful stones!"** Said his mother, pointing to the pile beside the back door. Squarehead brightened.

**"I've just had an idea!"** He said excitedly to Ness.

Later that week, when the sad square man was walking home, slow as an old tortoise, with his head facing the ground, he stopped and stared at something that had been left at the foot of a tree. It was a smooth, round stone that had been beautifully painted with the words:

KEEP SMILING

**"Strange "** he thought.

A little further on, when he was close to his house, he was surprised to see another beautifully decorated stone which said:

BE HAPPY

**"Very strange "** he thought

The beginnings of a smile were pulling at the edges of his mouth. When he reached his front gate, there by the side of his path was another brightly painted stone with the words:

U HAVE THE BEST LAUGH!

**"Who could have left them?"** Thought the old man and peered round to see if anyone was there. He couldn't be sure, but he thought he recognised a couple of faces that ducked down behind a wall across the street.

I bet you can guess who it was...

**"Um and ER!"** said the old man shaking his head and smiling. Then he laughed and laughed and laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

Happy tears of course!

