

A Season of Happiness



the wonderful world
of Story-Telling

MOONBERRY PIE



MP84

www.aseasonofhappiness.com

Suzie and The Sliders

There was something wrong. It could have been the weather, or maybe not. Whatever the problem, it hadn't affected anyone else in the valley except for Farmer Fred. In previous years everything had been fine, but recently many of his plants were quite droopy and sad-looking. His neighbours who were also farmers didn't mind this at all because they too grew flowers; and the way Fred's were at the moment, shops wouldn't want them, which meant they would be able to sell more of their own. They did, however, feel a bit sorry for him and offered him advice. Some thought it might be due to the fact that his land was close to the sea shore – salty air, they said.

Fred, however, wasn't convinced. Neither was his wife, Lily. "It's never happened before," she said, "But I *have* noticed there don't seem to be many bees around this year."

"Don't imagine that's the cause," said Fred doubtfully, "If it was, the other farms would be affected, but they aren't. No, I reckon it's something else. Maybe pests are to blame," and he pointed, "Just like that mob of snails heading towards the carnations." Fred stomped off to get a shovel and a bucket. "Right, you lot," he growled, returning to the group of snails. "You're not having my flowers." Scooping up the snails with the shovel, he put them in the bucket.

"What are you going to do?" Lily asked. "Please don't hurt them."

"You're too soft, Lil," said Fred as he marched off. "But, no, I won't hurt them, even though they are only snails." A short walk and he was at the back of the beach. Swinging the bucket, he heaved the snails onto the sand. "Chew on that," he sneered, "And don't bother coming back to my place."

The snails didn't like it at all on the sand. "It's hard to slither," Patsy commented.

"And my foot's all gritty," Elvo added. "It's much better on the grass."

"Then we should go back there," suggested Bon, "But we'll have to stay clear of Farmer Fred or he'll chuck us back on the beach."

"Or he might do something worse," said Suzie, ominously.

"Like what?" Cilla asked.

"You don't want to know," murmured Dolly.

While the snails had been discussing their predicament, something else was happening further down the beach at the edge of the sea. Waves were crashing on the shore, and as they did they tossed a number of little creatures onto the wet sand; three of them to be precise. Scuttling higher up the beach away from the water, they stopped for a rest. "We took a bit of a battering there," said Ray unnecessarily. "I reckon what we need now is something to cheer us up."

"How about a song?" suggested Mimi.

“Good idea,” said Solo. “After three – one, two... one, two, three,” and the little creatures burst into song: “We’re riding along on the crest of a wave...”

Higher up the beach the little snails heard the strange sounds and were puzzled. “What’s that noise?” queried Bon.

“We might find out in a minute,” said Dolly. “It’s coming closer.”

The singing petered out when the sea creatures noticed they weren’t alone on the beach. “Hello,” said Ray, “You’re snails, aren’t you? You should be in the sea.”

“Don’t know sea,” said Patsy.

“No,” added Elvo, “And what are *you* anyway? You look like snails but you’ve got more than one foot.”

“We’re hermit crabs,” replied Solo, “And these aren’t really our shells – we just found them empty in the sea and borrowed them to live in.”

“Whatever,” droned Cilla. “By the way, what was that noise you were making?”

“Oh, the singing, you mean?” said Mimi. “We do it a lot. We actually have a name – The Shingle Singers; and when we sing, the coral and the seaweed seem to like it.”

“Don’t know sea *or* coral,” crooned Suzie, “But we do know weeds. A few of them are quite tasty.”

“Maybe you could show us some: weeds, that is,” said Ray. “I’m feeling a bit peckish.”

“Wouldn’t mind that at all,” chirped in Elvo. “Then we can get off this gritty sand. Come on,” he beckoned, and began slithering up to the back of the beach.

Because snails only move very slowly, it took them while to get anywhere. On the way, Dolly asked the hermit crabs about singing. “I thought it sounded nice,” she commented. “Do you think we could do it? Maybe you could teach us to sing.”

So, Ray, Mimi and Solo first sang part of a song, then encouraged the snails to try repeating it. Although they had never done it before, singing came easily to them, and before long the snails and hermit crabs were all singing together. “I reckon we sound pretty good,” said Cilla. “You’ve got a name; maybe we should give ourselves one. Suzie’s voice is probably the best, and seeing as she’s our lead singer, how about Suzie and The Sliders?” Everyone agreed it was a great name, so that was what the snail singers decided to call themselves.

They carried on singing as the snails slithered and the crabs scuttled, and eventually they were off the sand and into the grass at the edge of Fred’s farm. Looking around, the hermit crabs couldn’t see anything that looked like food; at least not the sort that they always ate. They were even more mystified when Bon slid up the stem of a nearby weed and took a bite of its leaf. “Yummo,” he declared. “I have to admit, though, they used to taste better when they were nice and fresh. They’ve been a bit limp this year for some reason. Still, why don’t you give it a go anyway?”

The hermit crabs pondered for a bit, then decided this kind of food wasn’t for them. “I reckon we go back to the sea,” suggested Mimi, and began scuttling towards the beach.

One of the snails, at least, was disappointed. “Shame,” said Dolly. “Do you think you might come and visit again sometime?”

“Don’t see why not,” said Ray. “But next time,” he added, “We’ll bring a packed lunch.” So off the hermit crabs went, singing happily as they scuttled along: “It’s a lovely day today...”

The snails had already learned the words and the tune of that one, and they broke into song; only pausing occasionally to take a bite of a leaf. Continuing to move slowly as they do, they slithered further into the farm. “Best not go too far in

case Farmer Fred sees us,” warned Patsy. “Pity, though, because these weeds don’t taste as good as the ones we left behind.”

“Well, they didn’t at first,” Bon corrected Patsy. “But have you noticed something? When we first slithered into this clump of weeds they were all sad and droopy; but as soon as we started singing they perked up and looked really fresh like they used to.”

“And the flowers on them seem brighter now,” observed Suzie. “There’s something else – have you seen how they’re all waving around as if they’re dancing?”

It was true, and the little snails discovered as they moved to a different place, the weeds there also brightened up and began dancing to the tune Suzie and The Sliders were singing. At one point a bee happened along and saw that the flowers on the weeds had opened up; which was quite odd because this year all of the flowers on Fred’s farm including those on the weeds had been really sad and droopy for some unknown reason. Settling on one, he tried the nectar on the flower and found it much sweeter than any he had tasted for a while. Believing his friends would like it too, he buzzed off to find them. Shortly, the bee returned with a number of other bees, and they followed the snails as they moved to different patch.

Unbeknown to the snails, Lily was approaching. She was on the hunt for weeds she had spotted growing towards the edge of a dahlia bed, and this was just the spot that the snails had moved to. Putting her bucket to one side, Lily crouched down and was about to dig in with her weeder when she thought she heard something. She frowned and paused to listen more closely. “Is that singing?” she asked herself in a whisper. “Yes,” she decided, “I do believe it is; but who is singing?” There was something else that puzzled her; well, more than one thing, actually. “Where did all these bees come from?” she wondered, “And the flowers on the weeds seem to be dancing. They certainly look happier than they have been recently, healthier too; much more so than our flowers.”

Lily continued to puzzle over the strange sight, and as she was watching, there was movement on the ground between the weeds. It was the snails who had decided to slide along to a new spot, singing as they went. At least, that was how it seemed to Lily. The path the snails were taking brought them very close to the dahlia bed where they paused to chew a few leaves of the weeds there. In moments, not only had the weeds perked up and begun dancing, but also some of the nearby flowers. “My word,” said Lily in amazement, “I think I’ve discovered something very peculiar and quite wonderful.” Although it was probably silly, she spoke to the group of little snails: “Is it you doing the singing...?”

“Not me,” said a deep voice behind her. It was Fred who had walked over when he heard Lily chatting away, even though there was no-one else around. “Who are you talking to?”

“These snails,” said his wife.

“Snails!” he snorted. “Are those little pests here again? I’ll go and get my shovel.”

“No, Fred, wait - and *listen* to me,” she implored. “They aren’t eating the flowers, just the weeds; and I realise I must sound crazy, but they are singing.”

“You’re crazy alright,” sneered Fred. “Snails can’t sing.”

“Well, these ones can,” insisted Lily. “The bees can hear them and they seem to follow them wherever they go. Not only that, but look at the flowers and weeds close to them, all waving around dancing.”

“You’re off your rocker, Lil,” said Fred. “It’s not possible. I’m going to chuck these snails back on the beach.”

“Before you do,” said Lily, “Bear with me. I want to try something.” Against his better judgement, Fred stood by and watched as Lily picked up the snails one by one and put them gently in her bucket. Walking to another spot further into the dahlia bed, she took the snails out of the bucket and placed them in a group amongst the flowers. Then she stood back and waited.

Fred scowled. “Well? That was pointless, wasn’t it?” In a moment, however, he had changed his mind: “Is it my imagination, or have the flowers perked up?”

“They have,” confirmed his wife. “That’s because the snails have started singing again. And do you notice how the bees seem to be buzzing in tune?”

Her husband shook his head in disbelief. “It doesn’t seem possible.” Turning on the spot, he looked further on into the flower bed and added: “But I can’t deny that the flowers and weeds closer to the snails appear much happier than the rest. Do you know, Lil, I think you might have found the answer to our problems.”

Just then, a tractor came rumbling down the track. It was Con O’Toole from the next farm. “Brought that fertilizer you were asking about, Fred,” he said. “I’ll drop it off in the shed.” He had begun to drive away when he noticed the patch of flowers that Fred and Lily were looking at. “Those blooms seem pretty healthy,” he commented. “But they aren’t going to stay like that for long; not unless you do something about the snails.”

Fred nodded. “You’re right, Con. I’ll get onto it immediately”

Lily was a bit concerned, especially when her husband walked off, returning minutes later armed with shovel and bucket. “You’re not going to take notice of Con, are you?”

“Too right I am,” stated Fred positively, “But not in the way *he* meant. I’m going to get some more snails, as many as I can find; and I’m going to put them in every bed of flowers. First, though...”

Lily cut him short: “Aren’t you forgetting that ordinary snails can’t sing?”

Fred smiled wryly. “If you’d let me finish... First, I’m going to put them with our special snails. Next comes your job. Talk to them and ask – nicely, of course – ask them to teach the new ones how to sing.”

Lily stared at her husband in amazement. “That’s a bit fanciful, isn’t it? Now who’s the crazy one?”

As it turned out, Fred’s idea wasn’t so crazy after all. Suzie and The Sliders did teach the new snails to sing, and before too long there were singing snails right through the farm. The flowers loved it, as did the bees; and the weeds were left to grow so that the snails had something to eat.

When Con returned some time later, he was surprised to see how Fred’s and Lily’s flowers were much better than his own; and in such a short a space of time. “What’s your secret?” asked Con.

“Could be the salty air,” suggested Fred, “Or the weather. Then again, maybe it’s something to do with the snails.” he added, grinning widely.

Con frowned. Looking around, he saw that there were snails everywhere amongst the flowers. “I don’t understand,” he said. “How do *they* help?”

Lily walked close enough to whisper in Con’s ear: “If we told you, you wouldn’t believe it.” Then both Fred and Lily laughed.

Con rolled his eyes and drove off, muttering to himself: “They’re both crazy.”

And the snails began to sing: “You may be right, we may be crazy...”