

The Stone King

by Claire Dean

This story begins behind the Aston Memorial in Williamson Park. Can you find the rose made from stones in the mosaic? Once you have, it's time for the story to begin...

Chapter 1: The Stone Beast and the Rose

59, 60, 61.... Rose didn't want to seek. Hiding was more fun. She was standing in the middle of the stone mosaic, eyes shut. 68, 69, 70.... She could feel the Memorial looming over her. When she tipped her head up slightly and peeked, she could see its green dome, bright against the blue sky. 76, 77, 78.... Her brother thought he was clever, but she could hear him breathing; he was behind her. When she opened her eyes and turned, Ben would try to shadow her movements, so she couldn't catch him.

84, 85, 86.... She hated counting. Especially all the way to 100. 89, 90, 91.... Mum said they shouldn't go too far from the café while she had her cup of tea. When it was Rose's turn, she'd hide inside the Memorial. Ben wouldn't look in there. 96, 97, 98. There was a great rumbling beneath her feet. Rose opened her eyes and spun around. Ben wasn't there.

'You've done it now,' said a man who was standing outside the Butterfly House. He was wearing a green jacket, like one of the park workers, but when he approached, Rose saw it was made of leaves. 'You've woken the Beast,' he said. 'And he's taken your friend.'

'No, my brother is hiding. We're playing hide and seek.'

'He was behind you a moment ago. You woke the Beast and now he's gone. Taken.'

'But I didn't do anything.'

The man walked over the mosaic and pointed down at the stones. Where there had been a picture of a big black creature, with sharp teeth and claws, all the stones were missing.

'I don't understand – '

'We don't have time to talk about the whats and the whys.' The man held out two upturned fists. 'If you want to save your brother you need to choose now, left or right.'

Not knowing what else to do, Rose said, 'Right.'

'You chose well.' The man opened up both his hands. On his left palm there was a grey-winged butterfly that looked like it was made of stone. It wasn't moving. On his right palm there was a butterfly with beautiful green wings that had markings on them like the paths on a map. The butterfly soared into the air. 'If you want to find your brother, you'd better follow it,' the man said. 'Run.'

To follow the path that Rose took, face the Butterfly House and take the path that goes to the right. When the path forks, go to the left and follow the winding path through the trees. You then need to take the second right down towards the lake. The path is steep, so take good care. Pause the story now and begin it again once you reach the bridge.

Chapter 2: Fishing for Light

On the bridge there was a boy with a fishing rod. He held the rod between the stone balusters with the line dipped into the blue side of the lake. The butterfly landed on his shoulder.

The boy glared up at Rose. 'Shhh,' he said. 'No trip-trapping girls on my bridge.'

The boy was concentrating on reeling something in. Rose saw the rod bend and the boy strain, but on the end of the line there was nothing. The boy didn't look

disappointed, but pleased. He unhooked the nothing and placed it carefully in the net bag by her feet.

‘I’m trying to find my brother. Have you seen him?’ Rose asked.

‘You can’t see this, can you?’ The boy let the line fall back into the lake. ‘It’s a beauty. Look harder and cross your eyes a bit. If the sun goes behind a cloud, you’ll see it. In fact, hold this.’ He placed the rod in her hands, grabbed the net bag and ran to the trees on the other side of the bridge. In the shadows beneath the branches, a shimmering, shifting ball without proper edges appeared in the bag.

‘It’s a lakelight, a lantern made of sunlight and water.’ The boy came back and snatched the rod. ‘You could look a bit more impressed,’ he said. ‘You’ve got a face like a frog.’

‘My brother’s been taken,’ she said. ‘I have to find him. Can you help me?’

‘Taken? Taken by the Stone Beast?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not a chance! I mean, I’m busy. I’ve got to catch these lake lanterns. Sunny days are rare up here.’ He tossed her the bag. ‘You can take this if you want, though. You might need it in the darkest part of the wood.’

Rose glanced at the shadowy trees on the other side of the lake. ‘But I don’t want to go to the darkest part of the wood.’

The boy went back to his fishing. ‘Is that your butterfly?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well hadn’t you better follow it?’

To follow the path of the butterfly, cross the bridge and take the path to the left. Pause the story now and begin it again once you reach the shelter.

Chapter 3: Spinning Moss

The butterfly landed on the slate roof of a shelter. There were lumps of mossy stone scattered all over the ground nearby. Rose couldn't see any sign of her brother. 'Ben,' she called, but the only replies were birdsong and the whisper of leaves. The inside of the shelter was gloomy, but as Rose stepped onto its red tiled floor her lakelight began to shine. It showed patterns of hills and seas in the stone of the walls.

'Can I help you?'

The voice was coming from one of the window openings, but Rose couldn't see anyone there. As she moved closer, she could just make out a long green thread being blown by the breeze.

'I'm here, dearie,' the voice said.

When Rose looked hard and let her eyes cross a bit, she could see a tiny woman, no bigger than the butterfly and all dressed in moss, clinging to the thread.

'Hang on.' The woman jumped down and scurried along the bench towards the back of the shelter. 'Can you hear me better now?' Her voice echoed off the walls.

'Yes.'

'The others don't like coming down here. We spend all day spinning and braiding moss up above. But down here's the only place your kind can hear us. Now, is it some rope you're needing?'

'No, I'm trying to find my brother. He's been taken by the Stone Beast.'

'Taken? Well then, it's definitely rope you need. The only way to tether stone is with good strong moss rope. The problem is in this place you never know whether a stone is just a stone. It could be. But it could be the Stone Beast, or something else. That's why we try to keep 'em all tied down.'

'What else could a stone be? And how can moss tie them down? And why does the Stone Beast take people?'

'Oh dear, dearie, you don't know anything, do you? The Stone Beast catches people for his master, the Stone King. And the Stone King tries to transform them to stone, but no matter what he does, they always manage to keep their hearts soft, and so he traps them in the hill.'

‘So my brother could be in the hill?’

‘Well, I hope so, dearie. Now I must get back to my spinning, especially if the Stone Beast walks. How on earth did you set him free?’

‘I don’t know. We were just playing hide and seek. I was counting outside the Memorial, and Ben was hiding right behind me and I got to nine— ’

‘No! Don’t say it! You got to a number that’s two shy of ten times ten, didn’t you? That number enrages the Stone King, that’ll be why he set the Beast after you. You must never, ever say that number in the park. The Memorial has two shy of ten times ten steps. Not a perfect hundred, you see. The Stone King thinks the Lino King cheated him out of the last two steps, along with everything else. Now, I really must get on.’ The tiny woman hurried off along the bench.

‘But who’s the Lino King?’ Rose asked.

‘I’ll throw a skein of my best rope down to you. Take care in the darkest part of the wood.’

‘But I really don’t want to go to the darkest part of the wood.’ Rose couldn’t stop her eyes filling with tears.

The woman was already clambering back up the thread to the roof. ‘Your butterfly’s flitting off, dearie,’ she called down.

Rose caught the moss rope, tucked it into her pocket and wiped her eyes with her sleeve. She had to find her brother. She strode after the butterfly, over the main pathway near the gates and followed as it fluttered up a steep, winding path into the wood.

To follow Rose’s path, head slightly to your left as you cross the main path, then take the narrow path up into the woods. Pause the story until you reach a point where you’re surrounded by trees.

Chapter 4: The Darkest Part of the Wood

Everything was getting darker. Rose was glad of the lakelight shining in its bag. In the middle of the path ahead, she spotted a small black stone. She picked it up. Mum always said Rose's pockets rattled with stones and shells. Rose thought they brought her luck. And she needed luck if she was going to tie up the Stone Beast with moss and rescue Ben from the Stone King.

Rose peered up into the tangle of branches above her and knew she must be heading for the darkest part of the wood. Somewhere up here were the ruins of a haunted observatory, but she'd never found it.

The trees were still, the birds had quietened. Rose tiptoed along the path. Every few steps she stopped. She was sure she could hear someone behind her, but whenever she turned to look, there was no one there. The leaves whispered around her. Then there was a long, low growl.

Rose bolted, taking a right and then a left, not sure where she was going, only sure she was getting lost. She couldn't make out the green-winged butterfly amongst the trees. Rose held the lakelight high above her head. The growling grew louder. Shadows swallowed the path. She jolted as the lakelight's net bag snagged on a low branch. As she tugged at it, the branch tightened its grip. The butterfly landed on the back of Rose's hand and then darted off ahead. 'There you are!' shouted Rose. She had to leave the light swinging from the branch.

Rose ran and ran. And as she ran she felt a rumbling shiver right through her. Coming not from the ground, but rattling through her. The Stone Beast was coming. The Stone Beast was near.

Wherever you are in the woods, you need to follow a path down to where log seats line both sides of a steep cutting. Pause the story until you get there and watch out for the beast.

Chapter 5: A Parliament of Leaves

'Old leaves, old voices, no one listens, no one hears. Old leaves, old voices, no one listens, no one hears. There's a beast in your pocket, dear Rose, dear Rose. There's a beast in your pocket, dear Rose there is.'

Rose stopped to catch her breath. The path was lined on either side by tiers of old tree trunks. She could still feel the rumbling and she could hear it now, too. The leaves in the trees above shook wildly. She could only just hear the sound they made over the rumbling, but she was sure she could make out the words: 'beast...pocket...Rose... beast'

Rose reached into her pocket and took out the small black stone she'd picked up for luck; it trembled in her palm and growled. She threw it as far as she could and as it hit the ground, a monstrous, craggy creature blasted from the stone.

The Stone Beast roared and the sound shook the park. Birds flew from the trees to hide in the sky. Rose could hear children crying in the distance. The Beast arched its back and sliced at the air with the shards of its claws. Its granite mane glistened with dark crystals. It roared again, then held still whilst the air continued to vibrate. It stared into Rose with its blank stone eyes.

Rose wanted to run, but she knew she had to stop the Stone Beast to find her brother. She clutched the skein of moss rope in her pocket and walked steadily up to the creature. It watched her.

Rose could feel icy breath coming from between its sharp stone teeth. 'I want you to take me to my brother,' she said, and she was surprised by how brave her voice sounded.

As the Beast opened its mouth to bite, Rose threw the rope around its neck and the moss knotted itself into a noose. She pulled it tight. The creature roared and shook and lashed out, but Rose ran round and round and round and the moss crept across the Beast's stone flanks and under its belly, tangling its legs together.

'Take me to my brother!' she yelled.

The Beast bared its teeth and leapt into the air. Rose yanked on the rope and brought the creature crashing to the ground. Its mouth snapped shut and from between its lips protruded a small green wing. 'No!' Rose shouted.

But the Stone Beast crunched and swallowed the butterfly. It smiled before it curled into itself, shrinking until it was just a lump of rock on the ground covered with moss.

'What do I do now?' Rose shouted at the trees.

The leaves muttered in the breeze.

'Come on, you helped me before! Tell me, what do I do now? How do I find my brother?'

The answer was hushed at first. Rose had to wait until her breath was less ragged and her heart had stopped thumping to make out the words.

'There's always a place, there's always a place, to open the hill, to open the hill. Search for the circle, search for the circle. Where there was song, where there was song, now there is sun, now there is sun.'

Rose knew where she had to go. As she raced along the path, she heard the leaves whisper: 'Old man stone, every bit of him stone, his shadow weighs more than a mountain, he is old man stone.'

Do you know where the park's sundial is? Retrace your steps, follow the path to the right and join the main path by the playground. Turn to your left and then take the first right to reach the sundial. Pause the story and begin it again once you're there.

Chapter 6: The Clock Key

The sundial had to hold the answer. Standing in the centre, Rose could see all of Lancaster stretched out below her and the fine silver line of the sea in the distance. She could see the course of the River Lune and the prongs of the Millennium Bridge. The Castle was directly in front of her, the tops of its blackened stone walls like rows of rotten teeth. She turned clockwise, away from the city until she could see the playground. She could hear children laughing and shouting to be pushed higher and

higher on the swings. The Memorial dominated the sky behind, a grand palace of stone. She wondered if Mum had started looking for them yet. She wondered what would happen if she couldn't get Ben back.

Rose walked around the sundial's edge. She tried jumping on each hour plaque. They all had different pictures on them and she wondered if any might contain a clue. She tried spinning on the sun in the middle. Then she read the instructions: To tell the time, stand upright with your head above the date on the scale. Estimate the time of your shadow from the hour plaques.

Rose couldn't see her shadow. Clouds were covering the sun. She waited and waited and waited and just as she was about to give up, a ray of sunlight broke through. Her shadow was short and didn't stretch to the edge, but she followed the direction it pointed in. Number three. She checked her watch and it was three o'clock. The plaque for three showed the castle, an anchor and a rose. As she stepped onto it, Rose felt a shudder beneath her feet. For a moment, she was terrified the Stone Beast might have broken free, that it was coming to get her. But the shudder became a splintering and a shattering on the other side of the fence. Rose clambered down from the sundial and ran towards the Dell.

To follow Rose, once you've left the sundial, join the main path going right and then take the narrow path on your right that leads down to the Dell. Go quickly now, before the Stone King catches up with you. Pause the story until you reach the rows of benches.

Chapter 7: The Ship in the Hill

The rockface in the Dell was fracturing. Loose stones tumbled from behind the curtain of roots and ivy. Rose kept well back, behind the rows of benches, and watched as strange shapes began to appear in the stone. A man's head pushed out into the air and as it did his grey stone face was transformed to skin. He smiled and jumped free of the rock. He ran about, stretched his limbs, did a somersault and then

gave a bow. He looked up expectantly at the silent benches and Rose thought she'd better clap. Behind him, she saw more people emerging from the stone. There were men and boys in ragged clothing and women with bonnets and battered-looking parasols. She ran down towards them, sure that she'd find Ben in the growing crowd.

'Are you looking for someone?' The somersaulting man bounced up and down beside her.

'My brother,' Rose said.

'Well, what does he look like, my dear? Perhaps I've seen him.'

'He's taller than me, but he has the same colour hair. He had jeans on and a—'

'No, I haven't seen him.' The man jumped up onto a bench and pulled Rose up beside him. 'But we should be able to spot him from up here. Unless the Stone King has managed to...' The smile vanished from the man's face.

'The Stone King has managed to, what?'

'Don't you worry, I'm sure he hasn't. Your brother will come bounding out of the stone any minute. There are all sorts of people living inside that hill. I'm a flying monkey.' The man rubbed his head. He looked confused. 'Or I was, in *The Wizard of Oz*, it was a play here a long time ago.'

As more and more people emerged from the rock, rubbing their eyes and stretching their arms up to the sky, the actor pointed out quarry workers who'd dug the stone out of the hill that had been used to build half of Lancaster. He waved to some millworkers and told Rose how they'd been employed to turn the quarry into a park when there was no work for them in the mills. There were visitors to the park from all through the years dressed in shorts and woolly hats, sportswear and school uniforms. But there was no sign of Ben.

'What has the Stone King done with Ben?' Rose asked.

The actor crouched down and spoke quietly, 'The Stone King tries to transform people to stone. It never seems to work entirely, but that doesn't stop him trying.'

'Why?'

'He thinks that once he's transformed someone to stone completely, they'll have to take his place and he'll walk free. After all, he's a prisoner, too.'

'He's a prisoner?'

'Yes, of course he is. The Lino King trapped him.'

'But who is the Lino King?' Rose's question was drowned out by an explosion like a canon going off, and everyone rushing to get away from the rockface.

What looked like the prow of a ship was pushing through the stone.

The actor sprung into the air. 'Here comes the ship!' he shouted.

There were cheers and shouts of 'Hurray!' from the dazed escapees who were gathering at the actor's feet. 'Tell us the story of the ship,' shouted one. 'Yeah, tell us how the ship got in the hill!' yelled another.

The actor cleared his throat and began, 'Back in the days when Lancaster was a bustling port and stately ships sailed the River Lune, there was a greedy merchant in the town. He was rich from the slave trade and he wanted to turn his ill-gotten gains into the grandest building on the Quay. The merchant gave orders for stone to be quarried from this hill, but this was the Stone King's realm and the Stone King demanded something in return. He'd watched the majestic ships down on the river and he wanted one of his own. The merchant agreed, but he hatched a plan to cheat the Stone King and send the very smallest of his ships as payment.

'The Stone King heard whispers of the merchant's plan and he turned the ship to stone before it could be carried up the hill. The merchant had to pay every man in Lancaster five shillings to move the stone ship through the town and up the hill on great wooden rollers. The greedy merchant was ruined by the Stone King's revenge.'

As the audience applauded, the ship seemed to give up its fight to launch into the sea of dirt and dead leaves and sank back into the rock.

'Now, I hope you'll excuse me, my dear,' the actor said to Rose, 'but I need to see what's happened to the world!' He leaped from bench to bench.

'Don't go!' Rose shouted after him. 'The Lino King, you haven't told me who he is, or how he trapped the Stone King. Can he help me save Ben?'

'No, no, he died long ago. The Lino King built the Memorial. The people of this city call it a folly, a folly! What they don't know is it's the most splendid prison ever built. He trapped the Stone King in its walls!'

From the last bench, the actor called back: 'I hope you can save your brother!'

Rose willed Ben to come out of the hill, but the rockface had stilled and the Dell was silent. Everyone had wandered away. Rose ran to the place where the ship had tried to break through. She smacked her palms against the rock. 'My brother! Give me back my brother.' She smacked it again and again and again until her hands stung and a kaleidoscope of tiny butterflies flew out of the stone, their wings

vivid green in the sunlight. Rose sped after them as they soared through the branches towards the Memorial.

Follow Rose's path to the foot of the memorial. See if you can find where the Stone King lives. Be brave and pause the story until you're standing before him.

Chapter 8: Facing the Stone King

The Stone King was waiting for Rose. His face slid out from the Memorial wall. His neck stretched over the rest of his tall, jagged form as he strained to pull himself free from the hollow arch behind the fountain. His towering greyish-white body was riven with cracks and streaked with granite and grit and crystals that shone like mirrors. In the deep holes of his eyes, Rose could see his fury. Not wanting to anger him further, she curtsied and bowed her head.

The Stone King's voice rasped through unmoving lips, 'You mock me. They all mock me. They took my stone to build a castle for some other king. They took my stone to build themselves a town. And the Lino King, with all his factories and money, came and turned my moor into a playground and built this flimsy palace, this ornamental imposter. He built it around me and trapped me here!'

As the Stone King thundered, Ben crept out from behind the stone pillar to the right. He looked normal, not stony at all. He even stuck his tongue out at Rose, but she could see his eyes were red from crying. Rose needed to distract the Stone King so Ben could escape. She climbed the steps very, very slowly. 'I love the beautiful statues and the great green dome and the lions over the fountains and the weather vane at the top. It's a magnificent palace for a King.'

The Stone King let out a pained wheeze. 'Its bones are steel and concrete, not stone. He thought he could defy me, he –'

'He can only move through stone,' Ben shouted. He can't move from the Memorial. The walls have trapped him here because they're not solid stone!'

The Stone King howled and there was a scraping noise as he battled to move his petrified arms. 'Come here, boy. You will be transformed and take my place in this wall!'

Ben was teetering on the edge of the fountain basin. There was no way for him to get across to the steps, except for through the water. The Memorial quaked as the Stone King contorted and fought to separate from the wall. Rose saw her chance to reach Ben.

'Keep back, Rose!' Ben yelled.

'But the water's only shallow. We used to play in here all the time when it was empty. See –' Rose placed her foot in the water, but where she thought it would reach the bottom, it didn't. She toppled backwards, away from the murky depths of the fountain. 'There must be something that can help us! I've no moss rope left. I had to leave the lakelight in the woods. The words, the whisperings of the leaves... the last thing they told me was: He is old man stone, every bit of him stone, his shadow weighs more than a mountain, he is old man stone.'

'That's it.' Ben put his foot over the edge.

'No, Ben, don't!'

But Ben stepped onto the water. 'Every bit of him stone. If his shadow is made of stone, then his reflection must be too – see.' Ben jumped up and down on the Stone King's solid reflection. The Stone King roared as Ben ran across it like it was a bridge to reach Rose on the other side.

There was an unbearable grating and screeching of slabs as the Stone King was dragged back into the Memorial wall until only his face remained. His eyes watched Rose and Ben as they ran from him.

As they raced down the steps and up the slope to the café to find their mum, leaves all around the park whispered, 'He is old man stone, every bit of him stone, take care the King don't catch you, he is old man stone.'

And that is the end of the story, for today. Keep listening if you'd like to hear a little about the inspirations behind the story.

Inspirations

Before the 18th century, Lancaster Moor was used for grazing animals, gathering firewood and as a place to hang criminals. In the 18th century, Lancaster became a busy port and was the fourth largest slave trader in the country. Stone was quarried from the moor and used to construct many of the grand Georgian buildings you can still see in Lancaster today.

Work on transforming the quarries into a park began during the cotton famine of the 1860s, when the American Civil War led to a shortage of raw cotton. A scheme to landscape the moor provided work for the unemployed cotton workers. In 1877, James Williamson Senior started construction of the park as we know it. Work was completed by his son James Williamson Junior, who also held the title Lord Ashton.

Lord Ashton was known as the Lino King because of his successful linoleum manufacturing business. He had the Memorial built in the early 1900s. To save money, the Memorial wasn't constructed from solid stone, but stone cladding on a framework of steel and concrete. One of the main ingredients in the concrete was fly-ash, a waste product from mill engines that probably came from Ashton's own mills.

The Memorial is a folly. This term is used to describe a building that was designed without an intended function. Today, the Memorial houses art exhibitions and performances and it's a popular venue for weddings.

The Dukes theatre have been performing plays in the park since 1987. Their version of *The Wizard of Oz* did include actors dressed as flying monkeys. The author of *The Stone King* saw this and many other Dukes' plays as a child and she's thought of the park as a magical place ever since.

Acknowledgements

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www.litfest.org

www.lancaster.gov.uk/sites/williamson-park



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Explore the hidden pathways of Williamson Park in this enchanting audio story inspired by the park's landscape and history.

Join Rose as she searches for her brother Ben, meets magical helpers and comes face-to-face with the Stone King.

Cut out and keep!

Follow the trail, pausing to experience each chapter of the story in the location it is set.

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