



SERIES 1 · BOOK 3

Sticks and Stones

By JC

Ages 4+

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The leaves turning golden,

a chill in the air,

Pip shivered a little.

The others don't care.

"I'm cold," said Pip simply.

"Cold?" said the rabbit.

"The summer's still here!

There's warmth in the meadow,

there's gold far and near.

Not cold - little softy,

the warm's all around!"

The rabbit ran off

with the sun on the ground.

Fox drifted by gently,
warm voice, gentle eyes.

"Still cold, little Pip?

Well, I can't say why

you feel it more keenly -

it's just how you are.

Don't worry," said Fox.

"The sun's never far."

Pip didn't run.

Pip sat in the sun.

I'm cold. I know it.

I'm cold in the sun.

Pip said it at last.

Out loud, to the wood:

"Your words felt unkind.

I'm not sure they should."

"Unkind?" laughed the rabbit.

"We've said nothing wrong!

It's only the truth, Pip.

Now just run along -

Sticks and stones

may break your bones,

but words can never hurt you.

Words can't hurt - we just told you so!

So what's all the fuss?"

Pip felt something settle

like stones in the dust.

Pip tried again later,
with the squirrel and hare.

"It feels like your words..."

Sticks and stones.

Pip walked on alone.

Once more, as the evening grew still,

Pip tried one last time.

Sticks and stones.

Pip felt the chill.

The wood had gone dark.

The light had grown thin.

Just Pip, and the quiet,

and the cold settling in.

They called me a softy.

And it hurt more than the cold.

Pip sat where the grass
met the last of the light.

The cold came from outside
and cold Pip could take.

But the words went inside,
and that was the ache.

Through the long amber evening,
the first leaves let go,
Pip walked past the treeline
through the last of the glow,
to the oak at the edge
where the forest grows thin,
to Owl at the hollow
and the warm settling in.

Owl saw Pip arriving.
Said nothing at first.
Then, soft: "There you are, Pip.
Tell me which part hurt the worst."

So Pip told it all -
every bit, every part:
the cold in the fur
and the words in the heart,
the saying *it's cold* -
and the answer: *not so*.
The saying *that hurt* -
and the answer: *let go*.
"The feeling," said Pip,
"of knowing a thing
and being told no -
that's the cold with the sting."

Owl was quiet a moment.

The sky going gold.

"You were cold. That was real.

Your cold was your cold.

And the words, yes - they're real.

No one should ask you

to unfeel what you felt,

or unknow what you knew."

"But sticks and stones..." Pip said.

Owl nodded slow.

"Yes. That's what they say.

It's always been so.

They mean it kindly.

But they're wrong, even so.

Words can hurt, little Pip.

You already know."

Pip held that a while.

The sky going gold.

Something went still

in the middle of Pip.

Something said: oh.

Words can hurt.

My feelings are real.

No more pretending.

I feel what I feel.

The leaves turning golden,

a chill in the air.

Pip shivered a little.

The cold really was there.

END

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WITH AN AI WRITING TOOL.*