

# StoneSoup



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# StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting  
creative kids around the world*  
Editor

Emma Wood

Director  
William Rubel

Operations  
Jane Levi

Education & Production  
Sarah Ainsworth

Design  
Joe Ewart

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## Editor's Note

Imagine if animals could talk: what we would learn, and how we might be different, and how much chatter we'd hear every time we entered a forest! In the fantastical stories in this issue, there is a talking, magical butterfly and a shape-shifting goddess of the forest. There are gods at war with humans over leaves. And there is a lovingly reared pig, who must be sold at auction. In the poems, there is nature in its real—and ever-strange and unknowable—state. In the art, fantasy and reality meet. I hope you will enjoy the magical, the animal, and the natural in this issue!

Best,  
Emma

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Wood'.

**Submissions:** our guidelines for submission are on the Submit page at [stonesoup.com](https://stonesoup.com), where you will also find a link to our Submittable online submissions portal.

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On the cover:  
'Mighty Exquisite  
Parrot'

by Nicole Qian, 13  
Auckland, New  
Zealand

# StoneSoup

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# The Legend of the Leaves

*The gods gave people the greatest gift of all—leaves—but the humans kept demanding more and more*

Long, long ago, in the days when dinosaurs roamed, and the Earth was filled with lush, green grass, the first people were born.

The gods shaped them from the mud of the Earth, dropping them on the soft ground and giving them shelter from harsh weather.

In the time before humans, the gods were lonely. They would eat and sleep and occasionally play bingo at the top of a volcano. But they never experienced joy or happiness like we do today.

So they created humans.

The gods would make houses and villages for the people to live in. They would give food to the people when they were in need.

The gods were so generous they gave the people the most valuable resource of all.

Leaves.

Now, when you first think about it, doesn't it sound a little silly?

But, back then, they didn't have the same animals as we do today. They wouldn't be able to make clothes or blankets without the soft animal skins we have now.

The gods saw the humans in distress. They were cold at night and made clothes out of tough alligator hides. So they took action. The gods thought up something that would

solve the problem. Something common, that could be found everywhere.

And so they created leaves.

Lots and lots of leaves.

The people used the leaves right away. They made soft clothing to wear that was a million times better than the scaly lizard skin. They stuffed pillows with them. They even used sticky tree sap to glue them together and make roofs.

The gods gave them everything.

But, the problem was, the humans were still not satisfied. They demanded more from the gods. Better food. Nicer homes. More recipes for Italian beef stew.

The gods were astounded.

"They must be put under control. They want more, and they are greedy. If we give them more, the people will only want more. What can we do?" said Civerous, the most powerful of the gods.

"We must take away their things," replied Nethran, Civerous's son. "Maybe then they will realize that to survive they must do things for themselves."

Meanwhile, the people were gazing at the palace of the gods, perched at the top of the tallest volcano.

The palace shone with gold and bronze statues, depicting the gods themselves.

"We must have that palace to our-



by Marcus R. Bosley, 10  
Amery, WI

selves,” said the human leader, Sarah. “We will drive the gods out of the palace and live in it. We shall climb the volcano. Assemble the Warriors!”

People rushed off to gather the Warriors, the strongest men and women in the colony.

Sarah and the Warriors climbed the steep volcano to the gods’ palace.

Sheggera, the eldest god, spotted them coming before they were even halfway up the volcano.

She shouted to the other gods: “The humans are coming to attack us!” The gods rushed into the room.

“You are right, Sheggera. They have come to attack us. My son was right. We must take away what we have given them,” Civerous spoke up. “If they attack us, we will fight back.”

And the humans did attack.

And the gods did fight back.

A great war began, gods on one side, humans on the other.

It waged on for many years until the gods came to a decision.

“We shall use the last of our strength to drive them down the volcano. At whatever costs,” Allegro, the wisest of the gods, said in a set tone.

“Aye!” said all the gods in unity.

“It is decided then,” said Sheggera. “We will drive them down the volcano!”

And so the gods used the last of their strength. They piled it together and strained and sweat.

The volcano shuddered with power as hot lava started to come together into a big glob.

The human army stopped and stared at the lava spilling over the side of the volcano, heading straight for them. They screamed, dropped their weapons, and bolted down the volcano.

Civerous yelled after them: “Because of your ignorance, we shall take away what we have given to you. Once a year, we will take away your greatest resource—leaves! And in that time, you will be without clothes, without shelter! This was caused by you!”

The humans retreated down the volcano and never set foot there again.

The gods, however, died at the top of the volcano that day, having used up all of their remaining strength.

And so it is that every year, in the coldest days, trees lose their leaves. And so it is that the gods are no more.

# Night and Day

by Hannah Parker, 12  
Burlington, VT



Night is dark and mysterious.  
Every soul is asleep.  
Even the tiny baby birds don't make a sound  
for we know the moon is quite big,  
its falling, glowing gaze from up above.

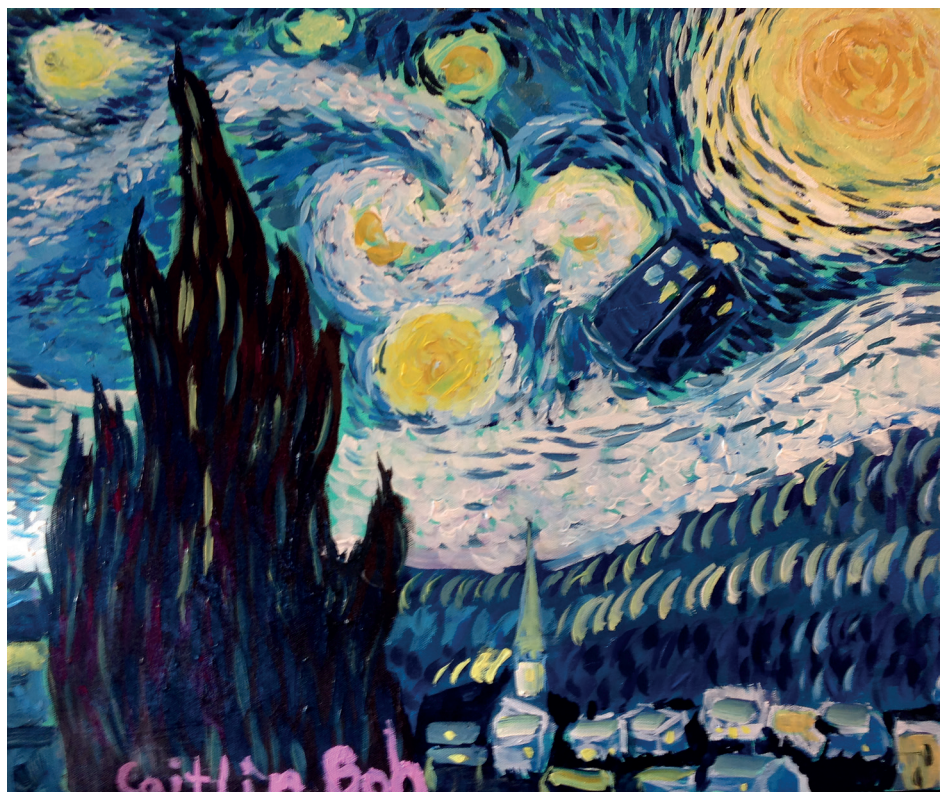
The stars are bright.  
The fairies dance under the twinkling lights.  
In the moonlight, God casts a spell on the glowing Earth  
to make the sun peek out from behind the clouds  
again and again.

After the darkness has gone,  
a big yellow ball of fire emerges from the sky.  
Everybody is awake except the owls  
who sleep and don't make a hoot.

Birds fly everywhere and tweet their melodies.  
Butterflies flutter with excitement and dance along.  
The sky is painted blue  
like a canvas.  
The sidewalks are warm under my feet.  
It is time to shout and play!

As evening approaches,  
God casts a spell to make the starry night appear  
again and again.





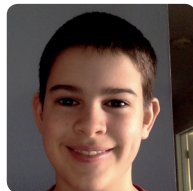
Space Travel: Goh to Van Gogh, acrylic on canvas



by Caitlin Goh, 8  
Dallas, TX

# The Teacher

by Charlie McDermott, 13  
Vienna, VA



The wind teaches  
the bare trees  
how to dance

The trees try but  
they are not agile and thrash  
like a beached fish

I wonder why  
the wind does not  
just give up

Its next lesson may  
be more fruitful

The green leaves  
flutter in the wind  
against the bare tree

I wish that the  
wind would teach  
me how to dance

I wonder if  
I would ever be  
the wind's great pupil

# Violet Break

by Georgia Marshall, 9  
Marblehead, MA

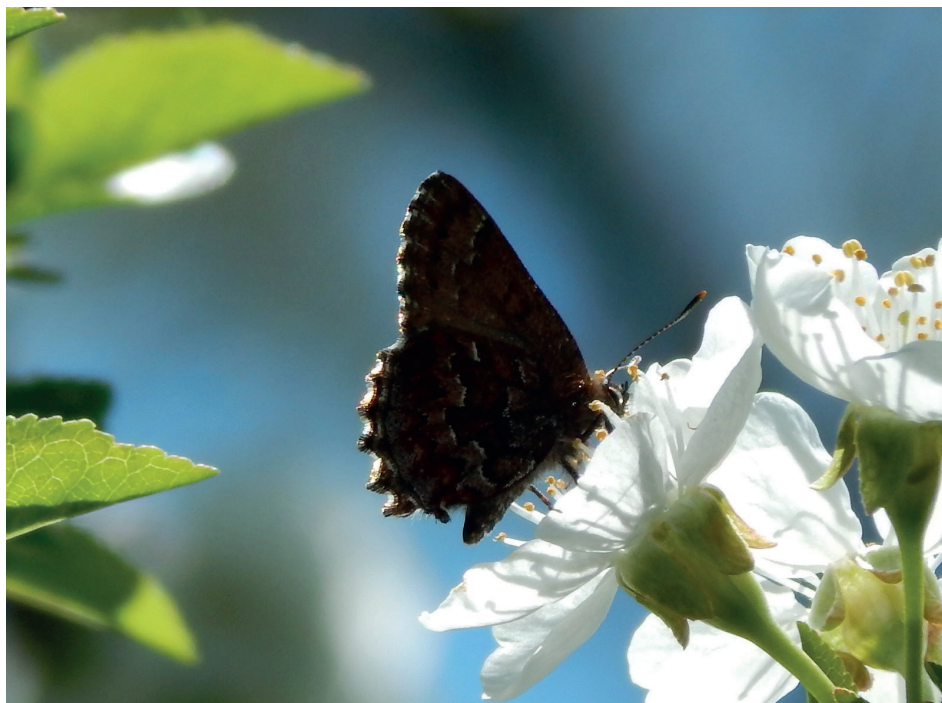


Up, out of the Spree!  
(of the city) he said  
We should get out of town!  
(in the meadow)

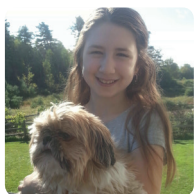
Do you know how breakneck it is?  
to be alone (on a dusty bridge)  
when you have a violet break?

Dancing in the sunshine  
(bare feet) you see!  
He was right all along

(Maybe I should propose)  
in a violet break!  
(and I did!)



Cherry Blossom Visitor, *Nikon Coolpix L830*



by Hannah Parker, 12  
Burlington, VT

# The Magic Female Butterfly

by Seven Guo, 6  
London, UK



Long, long ago, in a scorching, wet rainforest, where the leaves of trees were covered in sweat, lived a poor family. They had: a sister called Vigo, a boy called Cancy, and a mother, but the father was killed by a crocodile.

One day, when Vigo was exploring the jungle, a vivid spark fluttered past. It was a butterfly but not an ordinary one because it was speaking. It sang: "Hi, girl, I'm The Magic Butterfly and poor people can make a wish!"

"Are you joking?!"

"No," the butterfly said while gliding. Vigo waddled towards the insect.

Then, as expected, the girl said: "I wish my family were the richest in the world!"

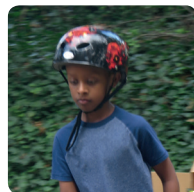
When Vigo got home, she found her house was loaded with gold as heavy as an elephant.

Then, ruthlessly, they started spending their wealth and bought a fabulous house. Soon the money ran out!

The End

# George's Dream

by Yanni Yohannes, 9  
Alpharetta, GA



*A brilliant scientist invents a potion that allows people to live forever*

My name is George. I'm a six-year-old boy. I have a nose-picking brother who annoys me constantly. I want to be a scientist. Specifically, I want to make a drink that will make people live forever. My mom and dad tell me that I have a good imagination. I tell my parents that I have 100 in science, and in every other subject, my grade is an 80. Also, I have won four science fair projects.

Like my parents, my teacher also says that I have a good imagination. My teacher says that I could be in the fifth grade science class, but my parents say that I am good where I am. It is not fair, but people in fifth grade may pick on me, so I agree with my parents.

I'm in college now; I skipped middle school and high school. I attend Harvard University, and I still want to be a scientist. I told Mr. Johnson that I want to make a potion product that will make people live forever. He almost expelled me because he said it was impossible. I decided to quit Harvard and begin working.

I use very complex math and science. After many years of challenging work, I knew that I did not have one material. For two decades, I have been looking for the right material. I have

tried everything—sticks, rubber, liquid, fruits, rocks, and more. The weather reporter stated, "There will be a meteor crash on the border of Georgia and Florida." I live 25 miles from the border of Georgia and Florida.

The following week, the meteor crashed in the morning, and I went outside to see. I picked up a bluish red rock. When I returned to my house, I tripped, and the rock fell into the drink that I almost finished. When I looked at the drink, it looked and smelled like it was supposed to when finished.

I took a sip, and it tasted as it was supposed to according to my calculations. I knew that this was the last ingredient. I gathered all the bluish red rock I could.

A year later, I went on television and showed my product. Ten minutes later, companies gave me billions of dollars for my product. My parents called and asked if they could have some of my product. I refused because they hadn't believed in me.

Within an hour, I received trillions of dollars from Bill Gates and Warren Buffett because they asked for some product. One person said they would trade their baby for my product. I am very rich.



Over the next two years, I got married, and we had two children. The children are twins. They once switched their classes, and no one knew until I saw their handwriting. My children have millions of dollars, and they spend their money on candy and mansions.

Two-thirds of the Earth's population has purchased my product. I have everything I need: a hot pool, a house as big as Minnesota, limousines, a puppy, and even a McDonald's in my house. The problem is that I have too much paperwork. I also have complaints that my product doesn't work for cancer.

I wish I could just discontinue my product and create something else. I asked the president to discontinue my product, so I can have my normal life back again. However, I did not receive an answer. The next morning, my family was robbed. I lost billions of dollars. I asked the president to close my product again, and the answer was finally "yes."

I'm now a normal man with trillions of dollars who will live forever because I drank my own product.



*Meeting of the Minds, pencil and copic marker*



by Avery Multer, 11  
Chicago, IL

# The Emperor and the Animals

by Natalie McGee, 13  
Pittsburgh, PA



*The animals in the forest rebel when the emperor attempts to destroy their land with a new palace*

Ra-ra-ra. Raurau-ra. . . An extraordinary barking cry shattered the frosty air. A huge black eagle settled itself on an icy birch limb. Ruffling his feathers against the chill, he stretched his enormous wings one last time before settling them comfortably on his back. Respectfully, he cocked his head to meet the calm stare of the small copper animal before him, her sleek hide spotted like earth dappled with sunlight.

Dea had taken the form of a rare Amur leopard and was reclining in the peeling branches of a birch nearby. The Protectress's draping tail swayed hypnotically as the sea eagle began his narration of the day's events. Through a series of harsh barks and calls, he told Dea of an emperor from the neighboring land who had come to build a palace in the birch forest. He explained that all of the creatures would be forced to move into the barren tundra surrounding the tiny woods and would have to live like reindeer, serving humans forever. The entire time, Dea sat with her tail twitching, showing no emotion on her severe face. When the sea eagle was finished,

the goddess sat up.

"I will take care of it," she stated peacefully. "It will all work out in the end."

The eagle cocked his head, preparing a question, but, when he blinked, the leopard was gone.

---

The emperor posed with his advisors on the barren hill outside the birch forest, surveying the wintry land which would soon be his.

"Your Highness?" a melodious voice echoed from behind the troop. The men turned slowly. Before them stood a petite young woman swallowed in a spotted fur parka. "I heard you have plans to build a palace in these woods, am I wrong?"

Surprised by the girl's audacity, the emperor responded affirmatively.

"And who might you be?" he asked.

"I am called Dea," the girl responded. "I have something to ask of you. Before you build in these woods, you must solve one riddle to prove your worth. As soon as you bring me the

creature it is describing, you shall be free to do as you wish. . .”

The emperor glanced at his advisors, speechless.

“If you fail to do this, your palace shall never stand. Would you like to hear the riddle?” The trio of men started to speak, but were swiftly interrupted.

“All right! ‘Legs and nose both long and red, night-sky hands and snowy head.’ Would you like to hear it again?”

When no one answered, she repeated the riddle: “Legs and nose both long and red, night-sky hands and snowy head.” And, with that, Dea skipped down the glittering hill, the end of her spotted sash fluttering like a tail.

Still bewildered by the girl’s speech, the emperor watched the retreating figure curiously until she disappeared among the frozen birches.

Suddenly, both of his advisors burst out into cacophonous laughter, rolling in the frost-laced grass, and doubling over, slapping their knees. The emperor whipped around, his heavy furs slashing the bitter wind. He barked at his men to stop and ordered them to fetch him a plane back to the village, as it was too cold to walk. Though the rest of his fellow travelers laughed off the incident lightheartedly, the emperor remained in a sour mood, unable to push Dea’s riddle out of his mind.

The next morning dawned blinding white, a thin layer of fresh snow blanketing the birches.

*Bang... bang... bang...*

The emperor shouted for the visitor to enter. The heavy oak door

creaked open, revealing three of the royal architects, panting and rudely-cheeked from the cold. The emperor scowled, extremely annoyed at being interrupted.

“Well, what is it?” he barked. “This had better be important!”

The man in front stepped inside, backed by his shivering comrades.

“Well, sire. . . you see. . .”

“GET ON WITH IT!”

“It’s the palace! Your Highness, we have been working with our entire team for a day and a night, but not a stick or a stone will remain where we have placed it. It’s as if the land is enchanted or—”

“ENCHANTED?” the emperor yelled, ignoring the voice in his head reminding him of Dea’s warning. “Of course it’s not enchanted! The forest is as plain as you are, you lazy, cheating fools! Off with you! Away! I have no more need for you. . . GENERAL? GENERAL! Come and take these filthy malingerers out of my sight, and hire me some new architects while you’re at it!”

“But sir—”

“SILENCE! I will deal with you when you return!”

The four men stumbled out of the house, the heavy door slamming behind them. Inside, the emperor paced the frigid floorboards anxiously. After this report, he had no doubts about the strange girl’s message. If all was as it seemed, the only way to break the curse was to solve the riddle. . .

That night, after the generals in the neighboring cottages were asleep, the emperor himself emerged onto the moonlit snow, pockmarked by the

smudged footprints of the morning's scuffle. Enveloped in layers of heavy fur, he made his way into the shadows among the birch trees.

Each crack of the ice-laced snow caused him to jump and glance around the shadowed forest. Every hoot from an owl or scuttle of a small animal sent a shiver down his spine. Over and over these noises haunted him, until he began to grow exhausted from the stress. The woods seemed innocent enough, and nothing bigger than a dormouse had scurried across his path. The emperor decided to sit against a tree and wait for his answers to arrive. After all, he couldn't see much in the dark...

*Click... Clickclick...*

The emperor woke with a start. The dawn was just breaking in the frosty forest, and a strange humming sound was resonating very close to his head. Slowly, he sat up and looked around, his back and neck creaking from a night on the ground.

*Clickclickclickclick...*

"AHH!" the emperor whipped around and came face-to-face with a huge swarm of beetles. They were crawling from beneath the birch bark, swarming all over his parka, his trousers, his pouch of food! More and more of them, forming a shimmering wave with thousands of long, clicking, jointed legs.

Unable to move, he let out a quiet whimper. How could he, the king of all

he knew, be so disgraced by insects? Meanwhile, the beetles continued swarming from the tree. His fine fur coat was crawling with them. The emperor closed his eyes, swallowed hard, and did something he had never done before—he called for help.

"Someone, over here! I'm being attacked!"

*Mmrraaaa... MrrraaAAAH...*

A strange, whining bleat resonated from behind the tree. The beetles all froze, then began scuttling away as fast as they could.

A large, furry animal lumbered out from the leaves and started snapping up insects with a short, tapered muzzle. Within seconds, the bugs were gone, and the emperor leapt up to leave.

As soon as he snatched his food sack, however, he stopped and turned slowly. Before him stood a medium-sized animal with long, gray fur and little, rounded ears. It looked a bit like a cross between a bear and a raccoon. The emperor cleared his throat.

"Well... um, I suppose I should... uh... thank you for that. It was very... very kind of you to... assist me. I shall forever be indebted to you and—"

"Oh, well, that's fabulous! You know, that is exactly what I need right now!"

The emperor stared at the creature in shock, his mouth hanging open.

"What?" the animal asked. "Oh,

*Unable to move, he let out a quiet whimper. How could he, the king of all he knew, be so disgraced by insects?*



of course! I am so sorry. . . I forgot to introduce myself! I am Raccoon Dog, and I need help. Since you are forever indebted to me, you can solve my problem! After all, no one ever helps Raccoon Dog. I was trying to fish in the river, but I can never catch any good fish. I heard your kind is good at this sort of thing, so. . . will you help me?"

The emperor had really no other choice than to assent.

On the way to the river, the pair passed many exotic animals. They all spoke very politely to the emperor and Raccoon Dog, like friendly passersby on a street. The emperor wondered how it was that he was all of a sudden able to understand them.

Suddenly, before them was a great stretch of frozen land, split by an icy-blue swath which was the river. Raccoon Dog and the emperor sat on a large pile of sticks by the river to fish.

*Clack, clack. . . Clakclakclak. . . Clack...*

A loud clattering sound came from nearby. A large white bird with gangly red legs and inky-tipped wings was clacking its beak impatiently. Apparently, it seemed to consider the pile of sticks its nest. Just as Raccoon Dog was suggesting they both move over, the emperor recalled Dea's riddle.

"Legs and nose both long and red, night-sky hands and snowy head."

*Of course! This bird had to be the answer to the riddle!* It boasted long, red legs and a long, red beak, as well as wingtips black like the night sky and a strikingly white head. The emperor leaped up and, much to the shock of the stork, lifted it off the ground and danced along the river.

"Aha! Aha! I have found the an-

swer to my riddle! I can now build my palace here and all will be well. . ." He stopped. All of the other animals along the river had abandoned their jobs and were now backing away slowly, murmuring amongst themselves in strange barks, hisses, and growls.

"What is it? What's wrong?" The emperor looked around and finally located Raccoon Dog. "What are they saying, Raccoon Dog? What's wrong with them?"

His new friend only let out a cautious bleat and bolted into the forest. The others followed him in a cloud of foliage, leaving only the emperor and the stork.

The emperor stood shocked for a second, then his eyes widened. Instantly, his kingly brain put together his recent past like a jigsaw puzzle. If he built his palace among the birches, he would lose the bond he felt with its resident animals. After all, he would be kicking them out of their home. He set down the bird. "I'm sorry, Stork. Will you forgive me? I promise no one will ever hurt another animal as long as I live." The stork looked at him sadly, then darted away into the forest.

The emperor made his way back through the frigid birches. The sounds of construction resonated from the middle of the trees, and he plowed forward, determined to stop it at once. As soon as he reached the clearing, however, no one even looked up. Abandoned by all of his followers, he was instantaneously filled with aggression.

"STOP!" he bellowed. Very, very slowly, the work ground to a halt, and the emperor's people turned to face him. For the first time, he felt uncom-



fortable standing before them. "You must cease all work immediately." Shocked and angry protests rippled around the crowd, and the emperor could feel his influence quickly slipping away. He tried again. "If any of you threaten to harm another animal or clear any habitat. . . you. . . I shall. . ."

"He's crazy!" called a voice from the crowd.

"Yeah! What's wrong with him?"

RRROOOAARR!!!

All protests ceased as a huge menagerie of forest animals, led by the stork and Raccoon Dog, burst into the clearing and took their place behind the emperor.

"Way to go!" whispered Raccoon Dog.

"If anyone knowingly threatens an endangered animal, they shall be banished from the earth! Now, run, RUN and NEVER RETURN!!!"

Completely startled by this, the people at the scene dropped their tools and dashed across the snowy ground as fast as their legs could carry them, chased by the horde of animals.

Finally alone in the clearing, the emperor looked up. Among the ice-laced branches, he thought he caught a glimpse of a spotted tail disappearing into the foliage.



Blue Leopard, *pastel chalk*



by Quinn Kammer, 13  
Madison, WI

# Alive

by Katie Turk, 11  
Palo Alto, CA



Bright moonlight fills  
the rainy forest.  
Trees' leaves glisten with rain.  
The shadow of a wolf  
slices the white glow.  
His paws softly touch the damp mud.  
He has a place to go.

The moon flickers,  
appears again  
in a crack  
between two treetops,  
{the light shining like fire.}  
The wolf opens his jaws,  
throws his head back,

howls.

The sound echoes through the woods.

He ceases his noise.  
His job is finished.

All around him  
the forest awakens.  
Owls' wings beat.  
Rats scurry, bats squeak,  
foxes growl.

He runs back across the mud,  
paced by the rhythm of his feet against the ground,  
and watches the black shapes of animals travel from tree to tree.  
He has nothing more to do.  
The night has come alive.

# What the End Is

*When Freya signed up for the 4-H hog project she knew she would have to say goodbye—but that didn't stop her from getting attached*

I knew how it would end. I knew from that first spring day when my dad and I took the old green pickup over to Big Sky High School's Future Farmers of America (FFA) building and came back with the 25-pound piglet I called Ash. From that night when I carried an old sleeping bag out to the pen and snuggled up in the straw alongside him. I knew every morning, when I woke up at seven to make sure his feed and water were full. Every day when I let him out in the yard to teach him how to walk for the fair, when he taught me to do what sounds fun in the moment and that happiness is more important than checking items off my to-do list. I knew when I brought letters to local Missoula businesses asking if they would bid on my pig at the Western Montana Fair on August 11, 2017. It couldn't last. It would be smarter not to become attached, but I couldn't help loving him anyway.

I lie in the sawdust of the pen, arms wrapped tightly around Ash. Tears slide down my face and onto his warm side. I feel every breath he takes. Every heartbeat. But it's only days now until that beat grows quiet. He sleeps so contentedly. *Does he know what comes next?*

---

This was my third year in the 4-H hog project, so I had a decent idea of what I was doing, but it was still a challenge to train my pig. I would release him from his pen and out into the yard, and he would immediately run off to eat something. Pigs like to stick their snouts in the ground and dig up the grass, which is not exactly desirable for my family's suburban lawn. I would rub his belly, and he would flop over on his side and stick his legs out like a puppy. If I was upset about something, I would go out and sit in the pen with him, and I would feel better because he reminded me how good my life was. Of how lucky I was to be in 4-H and to get to raise pigs. Sometimes, on hot days, I would turn on the pump in the middle of the yard. No matter where he was, Ash would come running and drink as much as he could, standing directly under the spigot as the stream of water gushed over him. He was so smart that after a while he figured out that if he put his nose under the handle and pushed up, the water would turn on.

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I hold Ash close, whisper his name, over and over, telling him I love him, telling him I'm sorry. I don't say it will

by Freya Jones, 13  
Missoula, MT



be okay. It's hard to imagine that it ever will be. *How many times can I do this? Will there be a day when the pain finally pulls me apart, the pieces left to drift like shadows on the wind?*

Outside, children still roam the fairgrounds, dragging their parents from one ride to the next, screaming at the moment of weightlessness, suspended upside-down at the top of the Kamikaze, then careening in wild circles on the Tilt-A-Whirl. Teenagers laugh as they try to knock over a tower of bottles, spending more money than they can afford on something they never had a chance of winning. The world still spins; somewhere a man wins the lottery while another begs on the sidewalk. So much like me, that day I got my pig, and now as I let him go. People are born, entering reality at the same moment as others leave. I know this, yet it feels like life has been put on pause. The world slows its rotation, people hold their breath to see what comes next.

I close my eyes and lean my head against Ash's side. I think of the day I got him, so full of joy. My dad and I piled into the 1994 Chevy pickup, old stickers saying things like *flammable*, *do not play on or around* plastered onto the driver's side door. We pulled into the parking lot of the FFA building. The second I was out of the truck, I ran

across the pavement and went to look for my 4-H friends and the piglets the FFA students would soon be auctioning.

This room, usually as bare and colorless as a black-and-white photo in an old magazine, had transformed into a bustling action movie. Full of sound and motion, adrenaline pulsing, an invisible electricity running through us all. The cold, concrete floor was mostly covered by makeshift pens and illuminated by metal heat lamps. We crowded around the pigs, commenting on which ones had the best muscle tone and build.

After half an hour, we moved into an adjacent room, and the auction began. The top 15 pigs would be sold to the highest bidder, at a minimum price of \$250. A tall boy stepped out into the ring with a small, white pig, speckled with black spots. The auctioneer called out numbers, and I saw an arm raise. Suddenly my dad lifted his bidding card, and a quick scan of the audience showed that no one else was going to pay for the first animal. Just like that, I had a pig.

Though I didn't admit it then, I felt a pang of anger. This was supposed to be my decision. The price was amazing, only \$25 dollars over what the non-auction pigs cost, so I didn't complain, but it took me longer to love

him than it had ever taken me to love a pig before. The fact that he had not been my choice led me to believe that he was not the right one. Now, clinging to Ash like it was *my* life ending, not his, I can't imagine how I could have pushed him away. We only had four months together, much too short a time to waste on anything but unconditional love.

Ash stretches his legs and snorts, a small motion, but it's all it takes to push through my thoughts, bringing with it the realization that this really is the end. My tears slow, and I hang on tighter. He weighs almost 300 pounds now, but, unlike most people, I still see him as cute. I love the way his curly-cue tail wags when he trots around the yard. The way he always looks like he's smiling. He's only six months old, a baby really. I feel Ash's warmth, send my love. This is the last time I will get to hold him, I want to remember every perfect second.

"Time to go," my mom gently prompts.

I give Ash one last hug and whisper, "I love you." Slowly, I climb over the gate of his pen and walk away. I made a commitment when I signed up for this project and now I have to follow through. The air feels heavy, suffocating, like the force of the entire universe is pressing down on me, but I take another step.

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I wake in the morning to a slow throbbing, deep in my chest. I can't even try to heal; every time I smile, I feel guilty, as if I'm betraying Ash by not completely breaking. I collapse in bed at night where sobs shake my body—rational thinking abandoned. Mechanics have taken down the Kamikaze at our fairgrounds, but I'm still spinning along on this wild ride.

Somehow, I manage to go back-to-school shopping and run to get ready for the cross-country season. My family squeezes in one last trip, and I meet my new eighth grade teachers. I wear a locket with Ash's picture in it, but, gradually, I need it less and less.

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Mid-September, I climb off the bus and walk down my street. I look up and notice that the maple trees have changed color. Crimson and gold frame the sky. Leaves decorate the yards and crunch merrily under my feet. I know fall is the time when plants die, decomposing back into the ground, but to me it feels like a fresh start. I think of Ash and close my eyes. It hurts so much, but I am making money to support my future, and in doing so I'm also supporting the future of farming. There

*Now, clinging to Ash like it was my life ending, not his, I can't imagine how I could have pushed him away.*



are so many feedlots that treat animals cruelly, but with 4-H they have good lives. I gave Ash healthy food, my companionship, belly rubs, and his own water spigot.

The pain that comes with remembering is sharp, but this time there is something else, too. A spark of warmth, because, in less than a year, there will be a new creature digging up my yard. I'll take care of it, and then I'll sell it. I will never forget Ash, but that doesn't mean I can't move on. I take a deep breath, close my eyes, and let my pig go.



Dozing in the Sun, iPhone 5

by Estella E. J. Howard, 11  
Alberta, Canada



# Camping with Bears

by Rose Zimmerman, 7  
Oakland, CA



The trees are like people running a marathon. The noise that's coming from them I imagine to be the sound of the crowd cheering.

I was in the car. My older sister Chanah and younger sister Sarah are fighting.

"We're here," my father shouts over the noise. Here at the campsite.

"How many more camping stops until Oregon?" I ask.

"This is the last stop," my mother replies. Yes! I cheer silently. It's not that I don't like camping, it's just going to be nice to sleep in a real bed.

We enter the forest which we are camping in. It's breathtaking. The sun hits the trees like a wave of light. It's magical. We check in at the wooden booth and we also find out there are bears. We all cross our fingers for good luck and head for the actual campsite.

That night, as we're climbing into our sleeping bags, I hear a soft rustle coming from outside the tent. What's that?" I ask my parents.

We all are quiet listening for other sounds. It comes again except this time

it's a little squeak like a baby bear. My mother peeks out of the tent and gasps with surprise. We all peek out and see a family of bears eating our leftovers. It's an amazing sight. The stars are twinkling underneath the midnight sky and over a family of bears. I hear a sudden click of a camera. We all turn around in surprise. It's Chanah. She smiles sheepishly. "Sorry," she says, "it's just too much of an amazing sight not to take a picture," she protests. We all smile and laugh. Chanah smiles. We all crawl back into our sleeping bags and go to sleep.

# Autumn Leaves

by Eva Bandy, 9  
Quarryville, PA



I stand here,  
still in the  
open air,  
paused in  
a lawn of  
crisp, crackly  
leaves. I feel  
sorry they  
had to die.  
I'd feel bad  
to crunch.  
I stand  
still in a  
strangely  
deep  
sorrow.

# Letters to the Editor

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*Here are two letters we received from readers during the summer of 2018.*

Dear Emma Wood, *Stone Soup* Editor,

I really appreciate all of the creativity and talent that is exemplified within the originality of *Stone Soup*. From my personal opinion as a reader, I am truly grateful for all of the work that you publish. Your magazine is the rare link between the youth of this country and literacy, which can inspire them as writers and artists. Because of its reliability and character, *Stone Soup* is definitely an essential resource for students, parents, and teachers alike. I am so grateful for all of the stories that this magazine has shared and which I carry with me. It was such a gift to take in the words other young authors wrote. I am also grateful that this magazine continually produces artwork that continues to inspire and push me to become a more creative and motivated version of myself. You continually show children different perspectives of the world, which is such a difficult thing to do, and your grasp and influence is so far.

Thank you for continuing to promote young creators; it is such a gift.

Sincerely,  
Kendall Vanderwouw, 13  
Nevada City, CA

Dear *Stone Soup*,

Recently, my teacher introduced my class to *Stone Soup*. After reading the book reviews, I submitted one. Sadly, it was not accepted. Now I think I will write a letter to you guys about *Stone Soup*.

I really like your website. I am on it at least five times a week. I love reading book reviews and poems. My classmate's book review on *Moo* caught my eye. After a while, you guys published it. I am almost done with 5th grade. I think you guys should add a section for adults because I love to read adult work, too! I can tell your website is extremely popular because of all the great work on *Stone Soup*. Personally, if I were to choose one of your awesome poems to include on another website, it would be "What's inside my messy head?" by Tommy Swartz. Your website is absolutely amazing, all the work you publish. I hope *Stone Soup* carries on forever!!

Sincerely,  
Vincent Liu, 11  
Manlius, NY



*Do you have something to say about something you've read or seen in *Stone Soup*? If you do, we'd love to hear from you, and we might print your letter on our Letters to the Editor page! You can write us a letter via our Submittable page (choose 'submit' on our website menu and follow the link), or leave a comment on our website. Tell us what you think!*

# Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll. Every month we receive submissions from hundreds of kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

## Fiction

Jacky Xue, 11  
Elizabeth Li, 13  
Anaya Shri, 12  
Ella Thompson, 13  
Elise Dilci, 11  
Kathleen Werth, 9

## Poetry

Alyssa Chow, 13  
Oscar Samelson, 8  
Shiva Swaminathan Strickland, 10  
Zoe Roettger, 13  
Lin Lynn Tao, 13

## Art

Emily Mao, 13  
Joshua Garza, 9  
Enoch Farnham, 11  
Kaitlyn Rose Sheman, 9

## Science Writing

Jahnvi Mundra, 12  
Aaron Du, 10  
Allison Webber, 12

Don't forget to visit [stonesoup.com](http://stonesoup.com) to browse our bonus materials. There you will find:

- 20 years of back issues—around 5,000 stories, poems and reviews
- Blog posts from our Young Bloggers on subjects from sports to sewing—plus ecology, reading, and book reviews
- Video interviews with *Stone Soup* authors
- Music, spoken word, and performances



Visit the *Stone Soup* store at [Stonesoupstore.com](http://Stonesoupstore.com) to buy:

- Magazines—individual issues of *Stone Soup*, past and present
  - Books—the 2017 *Stone Soup Annual*, a bound collection of all the year's issues, as well as themed anthologies
  - Art prints—high quality prints from our collection of children's art
  - Journals and sketchbooks for writing and drawing
- ...and more!





