

# StoneSoup

A watercolor illustration of a landscape. The sky is a vibrant yellow with a large, pale, circular sun or moon in the upper center. Below the sky, there are rolling green hills. A prominent feature is a small, square tower with a blue, conical roof and a small brown door, situated on a hill to the right. A brown path or stream winds through the green hills from the foreground towards the tower. The overall style is soft and painterly.

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# StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting  
creative kids around the world*

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## Editor's Note

This issue explores the extremes in nature—from the terrifying peaks of the mountains and the towering peaks of ocean waves to storms capable of wiping out an entire group of soldiers. The stories, poems, and art here all remind us of the awe-inspiring power latent within the earth, water, plants, and rocks that surround us. The Earth has seen it all. As Zeke Braman writes in his poem "Mountain":

The footprints that have faded leave their story,  
The birds have an article that they will share,  
The trees have old legends  
Of kings and queens and knights,  
The ground has an account

The Earth holds and remembers our stories—in the form of fossils and artifacts, of course, but also in the landscape itself, which we have so drastically changed. We have transported plants and animals from their natural habitats to new ones. We have dug lakes and built mountains and created snow. And now, through climate change, we are causing fires to rage, oceans to rise, and storms to flood our cities. What "account" will the ground have of us in the next decade, the next century?

This month, I encourage you to explore the landscape around you—however ordinary it might seem—and to find the extreme, and also the beauty, within it.

Till next time,

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*On the cover:  
Your Day to Shine,  
Watercolor*

by Story Kummer, 12  
St. Louis, MO

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by Caitlin Goh, 12  
Dallas, TX

# The Asteroid Attack

by Julia Hershon, 11  
Potomac, MD



*A sudden rain of asteroids turns a normal school day into a terrifying experience*

Light glimmered on the vast plains of France and on the sparkly stones that lay around like lazy cats. The stones rose angrily above the ground, glistening in the sun's radiant light. Endless fields danced in the glorious, full light emanating from the brilliant ball of fire above the crystal blue sky that stretched as far as the eye could see. Blurry rivers sang around gleaming, round stones, creating elegant rippling sounds that filtered through the immense plain. Grasses tingled in the clear morning air; the wind flowed like rain through the long expanse to field after field after field. In the far blue distance, mountains arose like clouds soaring across an endless sky. Sheer white snow sparkled, sending thousands of points of diamond light across the plentiful land. Erect stones and points jutted from the mountains; the steep hills looked ominous even from such a long distance. Splashes of brilliant green sparkled in the crooks of mountains far away—dew glistening and opulent green hills soaring through the landscape. A few scraggly caves jutted through the fertile soil; the dark, dreary, dim center hidden from view by craggy and rugged cave walls

that whispered in the wind. The landscape blended together into one big mush of land; the colors blurred, but the regions themselves were very different. Thus, a single farmer could get lost in unknown territory; the spaces were so vastly different, whether plain, river, mountain, or valley.

As dawn seeped across the sky like milk pouring into a bowl, a young girl carefully climbed out of her microscopic bed. She tried, ever so carefully, to prevent the dusty wood floors from creaking. Her name was Evangeline; her hair was as pure as dark chocolate and her eyes as green as the plentiful valleys that surrounded her home on her parents' farm. Her hair swept across her shoulders like waves rolling onto the beach in the far distance, every single strand falling into place as if her hair moved not as many single strands, but as one whole. Her skin was the color of the grainy sand that spilled around the cliffs and the fields, a dark tan color. Her skin was as soft as a feather and warm and silky to the touch. Her eyes gleamed emerald fire as the sun shone brilliant, warming rays down through the dusty windows onto her face. She was elegant,

although her body was rugged and powerful after many long, hard days of tending to the farm in the warm summertime.

Evangeline crept across the old wood floor like a quiet mouse. Dust spilled in the air as she placed her feet carefully down; it billowed around her like a storm. She slipped across the tiny house and onto a chair in the cold, damp kitchen. There were no windows in the creepy room, no warm light that spilled and danced through the glass.

She walked over to the dusty wooden cabinet that contained her breakfast for the whole week. Inside, there were vegetables and fruits of any color and size imaginable. A rainbow of color filled the whole room like a mist; the fresh produce gave light to the suffocating darkness of the room.

She grabbed six strawberries, two oranges, and one carrot for her measly breakfast.

*Oh, she thought, I wish I could have pancakes like all of the other kids at school.*

She danced back into the spiraling light, dismissing the thoughts from her head.

*I should be grateful for all I have.*

The door creaked and seemed to twist as it was opened by her sand-colored hand. Evangeline knew that the door would not hold for much longer as she quietly clicked it shut. She flew out through the meadow, running at a tremendous speed. She had always been excellent at running; if running were a class at school, she would have already aced it.

The grass under her pounding feet swished; it tingled and glimmered with

dew. The dew that once resided on the grass was flung into the air; rainbows spread across the grass as the sun shone its blinding, gleaming light through the tiny pearls of water.

Evangeline looked back at her parents' farm—one day to be *her* farm. The crops placed in neat rows were shriveled in the sun; the green sprouts were not visible from the spot where Evangeline stood.

A feeling of dread crept into her stomach on tiny paws, seeping, pouring into every bone in her body.

*How can we survive any longer if our crops keep dying?* Evangeline wondered fearfully. There was not enough money in her family to keep their farm and their house; they would have to move far away into the distance that seemed untouchable.

The ominous mountains rose threateningly like mouths full of sharp teeth waiting to bite her at any second. Evangeline did not want to move away from her home, or all of the landmarks so familiar and friendly. Except for the mountains. The mountains always posed such a threat to Evangeline; whenever she looked at them, their terrifying looming over the land and the way they seemed to whisper ominous things had always made her feel as if there was no hope, that the world would soon come to an end. To cross them, as many did, would be the ultimate horror.

The other people in Evangeline's school seemed to love the mountains. The rock formations seemed so fragile but fierce. Interesting minerals poking out of rough stones to peek at the glorious world around them. Sloping hills

## *Light danced through the warm windows and spread through the classroom like a tsunami of glitter.*

that wound up the sides gently crafted by a mysterious water source long ago. Minute, trickling streams that wound through the mountains like pieces of thread. Exotic mountain plants growing through cracks in the rocks.

To Evangeline, they were dangerous, deadly, full of monstrous cliffs at every corner and sharp stones that could draw blood from her smooth skin. She had never been to a mountain, though. She had only seen them in books. Books with soft leather covers and ridged, yellow pages that contained intricate drawings of mountains all over the world. The pictures made them look spectacular, but the immense amount of detail provided her with all of the fears of cliffs and rocks.

Evangeline wanted to forget mountains and rush upon the grass like a roadrunner. The unmaintained, winding, white-stained road drew a streak across the vast plain; its color came from being bleached from the sun. Evangeline followed it through the grassy plain to her school near Lascaux.

Lascaux is a place that hosts a beautiful cave full of wondrous paintings created by people thousands of years ago. The amazing place could not be visited by tourists, though, because people and cameras could damage the colorant the paintings were made of. As a result, scientists were working on creating a replica so people could see

its glories.

Evangeline rounded the last bend on the road to an old brick school. Light danced through the warm windows and spread through the classroom like a tsunami of warm glitter.

Evangeline carefully placed her foot down on the slowly rotting wood worn by hundreds of children pounding it with their feet. The room felt radiant and warm with the gleaming light. The aged, dusty wood that lined the room was illuminated to a bright amber; the whole complex looked like a vivid autumn forest.

The seats and desks were lined up in perfect order; the books were stacked on the shelves, strangely unlike how they were usually splayed all over the place. Everything seemed neat and organized as if someone extremely important was about to come through the doorway this very moment.

*How strange*, Evangeline thought.

In fact, it was not strange at all.

A minute after Evangeline plopped down on the wooden chair that rested near her creaky, wooden desk, an unfamiliar person stepped through the doorway and into the classroom.

Her hair was as black as coal and her skin as dark as chocolate. Her eyes gleamed from brown to amber in the glorious light emanating from the sun; they were filled with knowledge beyond comprehension and a deep understanding of the world. She ap-



peared to be wise and brave; every motion she made seemed to be planned out so carefully that she seemed like a machine. Her hair swept back in a breeze-like motion, its shining blackness lighting on fire in the golden light. Her skin was soft but tough, ready to withstand anything. This girl seemed to be a wonderful person, but it was yet to be found out if that was true.

She started to walk over to Evangeline with exact steps, the floorboards creaking under her precise footsteps. She neatly walked over to the old desk next to Evangeline and slid into it in a formal fashion.

"Hello, I am Clara." She spoke kindly, her eyes radiating brightly in the warm morning sun.

"I'm Evangeline," Evangeline responded timidly.

"It is quite lovely to meet you, Evangeline."

"Okay, class. Calm down. I would like to remind you that we have a new student here, and I would like it if you stopped acting like pigs," the teacher announced in a hoarse voice.

The students giggled at the pig comment but were silenced by a warning glare from the teacher.

"Anyway," the teacher continued, "we have a new student in the class. Her name is Clara. She just moved here from America with her parents, who are scientists. As you all know, we reside near the wonderful cave paintings of Lascaux. People cannot visit the caves, though, and so scientists are working on creating a replica for people to see. We learned about this already, so you are all quite familiar with this. Anyway, Clara's parents are

two of the scientists who are working hard to try to replicate it."

"That is amazing!" some child exclaimed.

"Can I come to your house?" another asked.

All of the children gathered around Clara like a swarm of bees, buzzing about while asking ridiculous questions.

"Now, children, settle down," the teacher declared kindly, but with an undertone of ferocity. The children heard this and immediately slid into their crooked seats.

"Okay, then. Today we're learning about—" the teacher was cut off in the middle of his sentence.

"Ahhhh!" someone screamed.

More and more people screamed, staring wide-eyed at the crumbling glass window. The room quickly turned from calm as a lake to chaotic before a volcano that was about to erupt. Books flew everywhere, their pages tearing and crumpled as everyone scrambled to escape the room. Wails and a thundering banging sound could be heard from outside the door. The main door to the exit of the school was soon crushed by hundreds of feet hurtling out of the building at once.

"What's happening?!" Evangeline screeched.

"Asteroids are pouring down on us like rain." Clara spoke as if nothing was wrong; she spoke as calmly as if this were a normal school day. They both knew in their hearts, though, that this day was unlike any other.

"Asteroids? I don't see any asteroids!" Evangeline tried to yell above the thunder of people screaming and

crying.

“They’re going to kill us all!” one child wailed, tears pouring out of his eyes and dripping onto the ground.

Clara ran up to him through the mob of children and teachers.

“They won’t kill us if we run as far away as possible.” She spoke softly. “Now, let’s run through the doorway and escape this madness.” She pointed toward the doorway that was almost invisible through the hoard of people.

“Evangeline, come on,” Clara lifted her gaze toward Evangeline. “We have to get this young child to safety.”

“You’re right,” Evangeline spoke surely. “People need help, and we seem to be the only ones who are willing to give it to them.”

Evangeline grasped the hand of the boy, and they ran through the crowd, dodging people and jumping over upturned chairs and spilled school supplies. They flew out the door and collapsed onto the worn grass below.

Evangeline gazed up at the sky to see what the children were so terrified of. What she saw struck her like lightning.

Huge lumps of rock hurtled through the air sending streaks of fire through the sky. The asteroids looked like giant balls of terror—the surfaces dull and unreflective, the muted dark gray color made it look as if there were chunks of onyx flying through a diamond sky. The craters looked like black holes. Gleaming streaks of red and orange, flowing, dangling from the asteroids, trailed them like cars on a road. Scarlet flame poured into the air, overtaking the sun’s brightness and catapulting the world into a deep

redness.

Evangeline was frozen in fear. No matter how hard she tried to flee, her limbs would not budge; they locked in place like a door closing tight shut.

Clara came flinging up to them from the crowd.

“We must leave this place,” she declared urgently. Evangeline stood still on the rough grass, her eyes glazed with terror.

“We must leave!” Clara repeated, even more urgently. “We must get this child to safety.”

Clara was right. The poor child was crying and wailing, saying that he was going to die. Even though it was such a dire situation, Evangeline could still not bring herself to move.

Clara had no choice but to yank her hand and the child’s hand. Clara raced across the grassland, the other children stumbling behind her like a pack of sick dogs. The wind stung Clara like bees, and the asteroids closed in on them, almost as if they were pouncing on them like prey.

Evangeline could hardly feel the soil pounding underneath her; she could only feel the terror that coursed through her veins and the fear of the others as it bounced through the air like waves. The mountains were rising in the distance, but Evangeline hardly noticed them or the fear that she received from them.

A looming asteroid spilled across the sky and appeared to fill the whole horizon. They did not have much time to escape the fate that loomed ever closer; they ran faster and sped across the endless field toward the mountains, the grass swishing around their

legs.

Alas, even though they had tried as hard as they could to escape the fate of being torn to shreds, an enormous crashing noise could be heard. The noise seemed to fill the planet, the air, the earth, the water. It was as loud as thunder, as airplanes landing on smooth tarmac, as trees falling and waterfalls gurgling off of a cliff. The sound was as loud as all of these combined. An asteroid had landed.

More thunderous noises filled the air as more asteroids fell like rain on the soft earth.

“Run!!!!” Evangeline screeched. They tensed their muscles to run faster, harder, farther. Their strength was withering, and they could only run for a few minutes longer. Their muscles burned and their chests heaved as they gasped for air while asteroids flooded around them.

“We . . . must . . . keep . . . running!” Clara gasped.

Suddenly, a sound louder than anything the group had heard before sounded. They were flung into the air, curving in a high arc the wind winding through their hair and clothes, the breath taken from them as they hung in the air.

The group was first catapulted to the ground and then hurtled through the air. They landed with a thud so sharp that none could breathe. Pain coursed through Evangeline’s body for an instant, and then the world faded to black.

Evangeline lifted her head to a blinding, brilliant light that dazzled her eyes. Birds chirped as they flew about, landing on the rough stones of the mountains and perching on mountain bushes.

Wait—*mountains?! Evangeline thought fearfully. How did I get here?*

Evangeline shifted on the ground to reposition herself so that she could see further. Clara and the young boy were lying a few feet away; their bodies were motionless.

Fear struck Evangeline like lightning. *What if they are dead?*

Evangeline rose to her feet and ran on her still-aching muscles to Clara and the boy. She saw the rise and fall of their chests and knew that they were alive, but she did not know if they were well.

As a result, she shook them violently to see if they were healthy.

Clara peeked open her eyes.

“Wah?” she stammered.

“We’re fine now. All of that asteroid business is over. We’re in the mountains, and I’m not entirely sure how we got here. Do you have any idea?” Evangeline asked.

Clara moaned as she slowly sat up.

“Are you okay?” Evangeline demanded, worried.

“Yes, I’m fine. You say we are in the mountains?” Clara glanced around. “I think we ended up here by being blown into the air by an asteroid. Remember?”

“Oh, right. Hey, is the little boy

*What if they died? She thought, the panic rising in her chest like a hot soup.*

okay?" Evangeline asked.

The boy responded by sitting up on the coarse grass and blinking wildly at them.

"Do you remember anything?"

Clara asked the boy.

"Yes," the boy squeaked. "I remember being chased by an asteroid and being catapulted all the way over here."

"Hah, he remembers more than you do," Clara joked.

Evangeline was not excited nor joyful about the joking. She and Clara were not full-fledged friends yet, and she could save the joking for when they were.

Clara frowned.

"Anyway," Clara said, "we should figure out how to get back to our homes. Also, little boy, could you please tell us your name? My name is Clara, and hers is Evangeline." Clara pointed at Evangeline when she said this.

"Well, my name is Pierre," the boy answered. "I want to go back to my family."

"Family!" Evangeline gasped. "My family's farm would have been hit by the asteroids!" A fear like sharp needles poked into Evangeline, stirring her every organ and bone.

*What if they died?* she thought, the panic rising in her chest like a hot soup.

"Yes, I guess we should try to find them," Clara reasoned.

"We *must* find our families!" Evangeline almost yelled. "My parents could be dead! We *have* to find them, or at least I have to."

"I'll help," Clara declared. "My house is very far from here and would not have been hit by the asteroids.

What about you?" She motioned to Pierre.

"I live far away too—out of the range of the asteroids."

"Very well. Then finding Evangeline's family is of utmost importance," Clara decided.

"You would really do that for me?" Evangeline asked, in awe.

"Of course." It was Pierre who answered. "You saved my life."

Evangeline smiled thankfully, but worry still stabbed her like thorns. She did not know if her family was alive.

"Where shall we look for my family?" Evangeline asked.

"I thought that we should start up there." Clara pointed up the mountain where smoke was billowing out like waves. "It looks like someone is camping up there."

"Good idea," Evangeline replied.

Even though it was a good idea to look up the mountain, Evangeline still felt worry about her parents clinging to her like a pelt. She was so worried she even forgot to be terrified of the mountain they were about to climb.

The group walked up to the mountain and started their first steps toward a new journey. Pebbles shifted and crunched on the ground as they walked, and sharp stones jutted out from every direction. It was just as the book that Evangeline had read had described, but worse. There were tangly roots that seemed to appear from nowhere and pesky pebbles strewn all over the place. Evangeline remembered to be terrified of the towering mountain, but Clara was enjoying every step that she took.

The sun shone down like fingers

onto the small, twisted trees, their branches arching overhead to form a passageway; the stones were so round and shiny; sharp rocks jutted out from the cliff walls and created marvelous shadows; the little mountain wildlife was green and majestic; the roots and vines filled the whole space with a natural vibe.

As the group was reaching the peak of the mountain, the ground became steeper and harsher. The lush plants disappeared and were replaced by a bleak landscape. The ground became unsteady too. It felt as if it were shaking beneath them.

Suddenly, an immense hole opened in the ground, and a yelp split the air as Evangeline plummeted into it. She grabbed hold of the edge just as she was about to plunge into the endless depths below.

"Did I mention that I hate mountains!" she screamed as she dangled precariously over the rim of the hole.

Her heart pounded with fear; her breath came in gasps as she struggled to hold on; her life dangled on the brink. Sweat poured down her face, and she could feel her hands becoming slimy and wet. She was starting to lose grip.

Her new friends grunted and pulled with all of their might, trying to lift the poor, doomed Evangeline out of the hole. Evangeline felt all hope give way. She was going to die. She let herself drop.

Abruptly, two adults streaked across the bleak mountain and rushed to Evangeline's side. They thrust their hands into the hole and bent down to catch Evangeline. Evangeline landed

in their arms, and they heaved her out of the hole with many grunts of effort. She fell onto the hard soil and gasped in relief.

"I'm alive!" she exclaimed. Her heart opened, and she could breathe again. She had not realized that she had been holding her breath. She felt such gratitude to these strangers that she felt almost bursting with excitement. The two people were not strangers, though.

"My parents?!" Evangeline cried out in joy and embraced them in a warm hug, "I'm so happy that I found you!"

"Oh, we missed you!" Evangeline's mother cried.

"How did you ever find us?" Evangeline's father asked, compassionately.

"Well, it's a long story, but it's all thanks to my newfound friends," Evangeline smiled brightly and gazed at her wonderful friends.

The group, including Evangeline's parents after they had extinguished the fire, joyfully walked down the mountain together. Birds sang in the trees, and flowers blossomed in the watery grass. Rocks and pebbles clacked as they stepped over them. Evangeline had forgotten her fear of mountains. They were not terrifying, except ones that contained horrible sinkholes in them. Evangeline now believed the mountains to be a beautiful place, full of sunlight, exquisite wildlife, and delight.



Mountains with Trees, oil pastels



by Enoch Farnham, 12  
Edmond, OK

# Mountain

by Zeke Braman, 9  
Acton, MA



Pine needles cover the ground,  
Life chirps and peeps from cracks in the Earth.  
These mountains rise high,  
Scraping space.  
Lizards and bugs infest the leaning trees,  
The elder branches of the oak,  
Fir,  
And birch  
Wave their spidery fingers at the sky  
As if waiting for an answer to a prayer.  
Paths twirl and unfold like ribbons,  
Tracing the past generations' steps to the peak.  
Clouds encircle the summit as if dancing.  
Markers are set to tell you that many people  
Have been here to rise above.  
Trees make a thin blanket against the buffeting winds  
That scour everything  
And withdraw suddenly.

An old house at the back of the mountain

Gives you a personal secret

You keep to yourself.

Your ancestors scaled it.  
You want to follow their invisible ghosts up to the top  
And see the valley spread out like a patchwork quilt,  
And a feeling of big/small makes you want  
To become part of the mountain yourself,  
To become one with the wind and trees and birds  
And stories that the locals tell.  
You want them to surround you  
And enclose you.  
The footprints that have faded leave their story,  
The birds have an article that they will share,

The trees have old legends  
Of kings and queens and knights,  
The ground has an account  
Of the gossip passed by the people of the mountain.  
You want to call this home.





The Crow on Top of the Alps, *iPhone 7 Plus*



by Ziqing Peng, 11  
Nanjing, China

# The Crow

by Aiah Morris, 12  
Burien, WA



The crow flies across the sky away from all troubles,  
the wind whipping through her wings.

She basks in the sun as if it were a precious gift.

She doesn't have a voice like a scream piercing through the air.  
Her voice is firm.  
Never complacent.  
Yet  
docile.

Like a vulture, she only takes what no one wants.

Everyone thinks crows are menacing and go to graveyards, but they are kind like  
vultures.

Whenever she comes down to perch, she knows the sky will always claim her  
once again.

# Slaying Monsters

by Liam Hancock, 11  
Danville, CA



## *William Morgan prepares to surf the same enormous waves that killed his father*

The usual morning fog is persistent today. The long jetty near Pillar Point is swallowed by the soupy grey, seemingly disappearing into the abyss. Through the panoramic view of my bedroom window, I see Half Moon Bay coming to life in the early morning. A man is taking a jog down the steep beach with his stumpy bulldog. A couple of early commuters' headlights are slicing through the fog and heading into the overshadowing mountains. The occasional surf shop is lighting up and un-shuttering its windows. The ocean is roaring today, and an excitement bubbles up inside me as I remember that today is Mavericks.

I hear the hissing of bacon hitting the frying pan and the hum of the espresso machine. My mouth waters as I stumble down the stairs. Mom is plating up my breakfast. A pink box is set in the center of the table. *Wait, a pink box?* I settle into my chair.

"Donuts, Mom?" I ask, shocked. I open them up . . . My favorite—maple bars. "C'mon. An athlete doesn't eat donuts on a day like *this*. My stomach will weigh me down more than the waves themselves!"

Mom gives me one of those mom looks. "Now, last time I checked, donuts

don't weigh hundreds of thousands of pounds. And I spent good money on these, so eat. Mom's orders."

I groan, then my wall caves in. If William Morgan has one weakness, it's maple bar donuts. I dig in, cover the donuts with that greasy bacon, and feel that amazing feeling of a future heart attack. I swear, if this is what they eat in Vermont, I'm gonna move there someday.

---

The forecasters on the minivan's raspy weather radio are warning that the Mavericks waves are larger this year than ever before. As I stand on the beach, I can see where they are coming from. Beyond the small ripples lining the shore, I see the world-renowned monsters. I'd seen them many times before, but not at this volume or this dramatic angle. It seems Mother Nature is having a temper tantrum. Do giant, lethal waves scare off William Morgan, a three-time Mavericks champion?

Possibly.

But not today!

I can hear the engine of Mom's ancient minivan kicking up dust in the



Admiring Ocean, *acrylics*



by Nataly Ann Vekker, 12  
Towson, MD

parking lot behind me. It's only a faint noise, drowned out by the sound of water pounding water. I know the usual question is coming: "You sure, Will?"

I understand her concern. She doesn't want to lose me in the giants like she lost Dad. I remember the day she came home holding pieces of Dad's famous orange-and-pink surfboard, but no Dad.

I manage a tiny nod. "Yep," I mutter. "Yep, sure as ever."

But she doesn't leave. She jumps out of the van, embraces me in a tight hug, then gets back in. As she pulls away, she calls, "I expect to see you at home at seven tonight. Promise me I'll see you at seven. Mom's orders."

I look down at my watch. I can't stay down here much longer. Sandy's waiting for me on the jetty.

"You will," I promise. Then she takes off, turning onto the main drag. I watch her go. I watch her go every time, hoping it won't be the last.

---

I meet up with my friend Sandy at the jetty. The iconic foghorn is blaring in our ears. My skull seems to rattle every time it bellows loudly. Everybody calls him Sandy because of his trademark surfer-dude hair and yellow surfboard.

From here, we have a clear view of the waves in all their glory. They are even scarier from this vantage point than from the beach.

"The waves are *wicked* this year,"

Sandy says excitedly. "I'll be tearing it up out there. You just wait and see. Beating my records from last year."

I know those records will be hard to beat. Last year, Sandy scored a ten on his first wave, then doubled his score on the second one. On the third and final wave, he blew it but still got pretty high up on the podium. Top ten well within reach, at least.

As we stare down the giants in front of us, I feel impending doom. The sun, which had been just a half-circle when I first arrived, is now high in the sky and frying us alive. All the fog I saw this morning has vanished. It doesn't usually top 60 degrees in Half Moon Bay, but today it feels well above 80. My phone buzzes in my board shorts—an email from the guy I met yesterday, a Mavericks Competition commentator:

get your butts down here quick. all these tourists are coming in by the tons.

I take a nervous breath and tell Sandy, "Game time."

---

The waves are even louder than the foghorn. Sandy and I push our way through the crowds until we find the restricted area by the public restrooms. We duck under the caution tape and find the guy, Mitch, leaning against a rather large rock. He totally fits the

*The pressure underwater makes me feel like I'm about to be crushed.*

part of commentator at a surfing competition—he’s been in 20 model magazines, 60 issues of surfing magazines, and is a three-time Mavericks champion. So, yeah. Definitely a good dude in the public eye. But in real life, he’s a piece of work. His finger pushes down on something—a stopwatch—and he grins mischievously.

“Only two minutes from the edge of that jetty to the beachfront,” he tells us. “Not bad for some punk teens, huh?”

“Punk teens that also happen to be Mavericks champions,” Sandy points out. “Not too shabby for some punk teens . . . huh?”

We suit up in the bathroom, but we can’t have our own stalls because there are so many competitors. I end up right out in the open, next to a dude from . . . *Minnesota*? Last time I checked, the only waves in Minnesota are in a lake. He’ll get pummeled by the waves, for sure.

A taller dude from South Africa is up first. He swims out on a surfboard so giant it would be a longboard to anybody else. Only a couple of others trail behind him at first—after all, you don’t want to be the first to go down. We watch in uncomfortable silence as the monster surges forward, pushing him with it. He manages to get up into a standing position. The drop is perfect, but when the wave crashes, it takes him with it.

Everybody holds their breath as we count the seconds ticking by . . . 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 . . . 20 . . . 30 . . .

We all cheer as he bursts out of the water. He climbs onto the jet ski, awaiting his score. It’s time for the sec-

ond heat to go in. I take one last look at Mitch. He smirks . . . and I rocket down the sand, into the hungry waters . . .

---

Cold seeps through my thermal wetsuit. My exposed hands and feet instantly freeze on contact. I forgot just how difficult it is to reach the deemed “death zone,” where the real monsters live. I would’ve taken the boat out, but as per tradition, Sandy and I paddle out together. It’s what my dad always did with Sandy.

“God, this water’s freezing,” he acknowledges. Before I can respond, a wave comes our way and I need to duck. When I come back up, Sandy’s hawking up a boatload of salt water. “Don’t know why I got in with my mouth open.”

Then the water goes still. It’s not choppy, or even moving for that matter. Both of us know it’s coming. The first wave. I grip the edge of my surfboard as I wait in suspense for that giant swell, dwarfing us in its shadow. I can feel those maple bars coming back up.

“Crud,” Sandy mutters. We watch as the water builds up in front of us, wanting to wait until the last minute to duck. You don’t want to hold your breath any longer than you need to. I can see the wave right in front of my face and hesitantly duck. The weight of the wave shoves me down further and further and further. The pressure underwater makes me feel like I’m about to be crushed.

I open my eyes and try to ignore the sting of the salt water. I look for

Sandy, but it's almost pitch black, and I can't see a foot in front of my face. The only reason I burst back through the surface is that I know the clock is counting down. I need another wave like that.

Sandy is about a yard ahead of me, and I know he'll most likely get the next wave before I do. I can't go in too late, but in his position, he can't go in too early. "Hey!" I call. "How're you feeling?"

He doesn't respond, which means he's probably in game mode. I paddle out just a little farther, hoping to get into the best position possible. The water begins to build up. I scramble to my feet and drop down a breathless 20 feet. As always, my life flashes before my eyes. I remember my dad and his kind smile, my mom and her hugs, and the maple bars covered with bacon.

I see the water below—a choppy vortex of pitch black. The sun can barely make a dent in it. I feel the spray of water hitting my back like freezing cold needles. It's about to break. I take into account all the balancing and breath-holding practices I've had over the years. If I go down, chances are I'd be down there for up to a minute. Maybe more if a lot of waves followed in its wake.

It breaks.

I hear Sandy's yell as he's taken down. But I don't have time to worry about him. His antique surfboard flies over my head and is swallowed up by the monster. His mom is gonna kill him if they don't retrieve it.

Then the break is gone. Once again, the water is calm.

I made the wave! I clamber onto

the boat, anxiously awaiting my score. I can hear the roar of the crowd, and I offer a friendly wave, which makes them roar even louder than before.

Then I remember Sandy.

*Where is he?*

He should be up by now.

I can tell that the crowd is realizing the same thing because their roar stops. Mitch's booming voice isn't to be heard. We wait. And wait.

And wait even more.

But then the horrifying reality covers us like a blanket . . . he's not coming up.

---

"No," I mutter. Another wave comes, crashes then disappears. But I don't hear it, and I don't feel the harsh spray of salt water against my face. "No! No! No!"

It's all I can say, like it's the only word I know. I stumble forward at first, then I balance myself and run toward the water. The last thing I hear before the water engulfs me completely is the shocked gasp of the crowd.

I hope I can keep mom's promise.

---

I peel my eyes open. The freezing salt water stabs at my skin. All I can see are bubbles from previous waves. I kick and kick and kick down further, finding it much easier now that I'm not holding my surfboard.

A small ray of sunshine punches through. I see his hair waving in the water below for a second, then it's gone. The ocean is enclosed in dark-

## *“So you, like, saved my life?” Sandy says through gritted teeth.*

ness once again. I kick blindly down, my lungs feeling as if they're about to melt.

After a couple of seconds of searching, I find Sandy's vest. I press the button, and he rockets to the surface. I press my own and join him at the top.

This time, the crowd is practically beside themselves. I almost feel like the water is vibrating at my neck. The rescue boat slowly treads over to us. The crew lugs Sandy onto the boat. I collapse onto the deck, panting. My eyes are stinging from all that salt water, and my vision is a little blurry as we head back to shore.

I stagger onto the shore, look up at the board, and think I'm hallucinating when I see the name in first place: William Morgan!

As the heats go by, my name stays at the top. The next days fly by . . . semifinals, finals . . . and by the end of this year's Mavericks competition, my name is still at the top.

---

I climb onto the podium. Mitch raises my hand in the air and offers his best celebrity grin to the crowd. All the pesky teenage girls swoon at the gesture. Sandy places lower than last year because of his major wipeout, but I still drag him up with me and hold his hand up.

In the dense crowd, I spot my

mom near the front. She is practically screaming her head off and doesn't bother wiping her tears away.

“So you, like, saved my life?” Sandy says through gritted teeth.

“Pretty much.”

“Oh,” he says. “Well . . . thanks.”

I make a small eye roll. “A little bit of an understatement, wouldn't you think?”

Sandy laughs, says, “I guess. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, soul, and mind for your brave exploit.”

“Adequate.”

---

A month after I win, it's Dad's birthday. Mom and I visit his grave, and I bury my Heroes of Mavericks trophy next to him.



# In My Liquid Tourmaline

by Lauren Giglia, 11  
Irvine, CA



In this shimmering liquid tourmaline  
A teal and gold-breasted kingfisher whistles in the green pines  
As the lake's cool breath whispers in my ear  
She speaks of laughing trout gliding in her belly  
Humans pouring acid in her veins  
And her tree friends she has lost  
I am wrapped in the scent of salt and sweetness  
As the freezing rush of cold water billows about my hand  
And the smooth trout wriggle across the lake

# Nature

by Penelope Purchase, 11  
Berkeley, CA



Sometimes nature calls to you  
And you long to be outside  
Basking in the full light of the moon  
Or maybe the babbling brook  
Nearby your house  
Holds an importance  
That it has never possessed before  
And even if you don't mean to  
You suddenly find yourself  
Outside turning cartwheels on the grass  
Watching the world spin in dizzying circles



Mushrooms on a Tree, Samsung NOOK



by Sophia Torres, 12  
Chicago, IL

# William's Journal

by Eli Spaulding, 11  
Newark, DE



## *After years of digging for artifacts from World War III, James finds something valuable*

“Still nothing?” asks Peter, his nose pointed down at me like a beak. He has an aura of disdain floating around him. Peter is never happy because he’s having a hard time with cancer, and the doctor said that his days are numbered.

*Leave me alone*, I think to myself. I’ve been digging in this hot, dry dirt since five a.m. And I just want to go home. But I just say, “Yep, still nothing.”

I have a job at a dig site to find clues from a battle in World War III. My father said that it was one of the bloodiest events in history. He served as a ground soldier and when he came back, he was never the same. He started taking drugs and gambling to buy more drugs. He sold our house to buy more, and we went into poverty. My mother ran away with me when he had sold almost everything we had. She got a job and raised me by herself. And now I have a job at a dig site studying the war that drove my dad insane.

It has been a mystery for 18 years now what happened to the soldiers that were here. A storm came through and when it passed, all that was left was mud. The same mud that I am

getting paid to dig through for the museum.

“You can go home now, James,” says Peter, his voice shocking me out of my thoughts. “Better luck next time.”

I walk to my car and drive down the empty streets to my house on the corner of 13th street. *Thirteen*, I think. People always said that 13 was unlucky. And I have not had any luck at the dig site.

“Welcome home, James,” says my wife, Betty.

“Daddy! Daddy!” scream my two children.

“Hello,” I say. “No luck again.”

“I’m sorry,” says Betty. She is pudgy and has a round, kind face.

“Come, let’s eat dinner. I hope you have better luck next time.”

The next day I get up at five a.m. again and drive down to the dig site. The dig site is a grassless stretch of desert. I work for about five hours without finding anything. Until—

For the first time, I strike on something other than dirt and mud. It’s a metal box. I have seen countless numbers of these in museums. It’s probably nothing. But I still feel excited. The box has a lock. It is rusted. With three

## Could this really be from the battle? What if this has the answers to the mystery?

strong hits with my shovel, the lock breaks. Inside is a little book that looks like a journal.

"I found something!" I yell.

Peter and a few other men come running over. "What is it?" asks Peter.

"I think it's a journal," says one man with a shovel.

"You men go back to work. James and I will look at this journal."

And that is when my job at the dig site started to get interesting.

---

Peter and I walk briskly down the hall. Thoughts run through my head: *Could this really be from the battle? What if this has the answers to the mystery? What if this could be the thing that gives me the money to send my kids to school?* All of this crosses my mind while we walk down three flights of stairs and open a door. Peter flicks on the lights to illuminate a large desk at the end of an otherwise plain room.

"Let's take a look at what you found," says Peter.

He places the small book on the desk, and we both sit down. The suspense is killing me as he slowly, slowly moves his hands toward the book and opens it. Inside are thin yellow pages. At the top of the first page, it says:

**General William's Journal, June 26th.**

Peter and I look at each other in

awe.

"Could this be the thing we have been looking for?" I say to Peter.

"Yes, yes. I think it is."

**June 26**

This is the first time I have recorded. The fighting has been at a standstill. Both my side and the enemy's are not getting anywhere. I am just about to go play cards with Tucker, Bartholomew, and Sam. After that, I am going to send a small scouting party to check on the enemy's position. Tucker is going with the scouting party.

The end of day bell rings. The day went by so fast. I found a journal, and it has some answers.

"Tomorrow we'll continue to look at this journal," says Peter, and we walk out the door.

---

As I walk to my car, I think of the good news I can tell my wife and kids. For months, I had nothing good to tell them. Today, I would finally have something good to say to them as I came through the door.

When I drive into my driveway, I see the faces of my two little children peeking out at me, and I smile. They will go to school.

I walk through the door, and my children run at me.

“Did you find anything?” they ask.

“Yes, my darlings.” I say.

“Well, come on, sit down and tell us,” says Betty, and I do.

The next day, I meet Peter at the dig site. He says we should go look at the journal now so we could find out more. So we go down to the studying room and read some more.

June 27

The scouting party I sent was spotted and killed by the enemy. Tucker is dead. It is time I taught those scumbags a lesson. I am going to send a full attack on the enemy. We have the power—plus I am one of the greatest generals we have. I am sure that I can beat them.

The sadness of Tucker’s death is killing me. He only had two more months in the army.

The fort is in need of supplies. I think they are coming soon. I hope they are coming soon.

Peter taps me on my shoulder. “I think it’s time for lunch.”

---

I feel good with a ham-and-cheese sandwich in my belly, but as soon as I’m finished, it’s back to work.

June 30

The attack I sent failed, and we were massacred. Bartholomew is dead. I did not think I could lose so much so fast. I hope the supplies and new troops come soon. We are going to need them fast.

July 2

I got a message from the government. They said that we were a lost cause and that they were going to send supplies to the good forts. We have no help coming.

July 7

A huge storm has been going on for two days nonstop. The fort is almost buried in mud. Many have died. I don’t know what to do.

I imagine the screams, the wind, the rain. I wonder what it would be like to be in his position. The end-of-day bell jerks me out of my thoughts.

Peter looks up at me. “The museum is giving you a raise for finding the book,” he says, “and lots of money for publishing it.”

He walks out, leaving me with an astonished look on my face.

---

July 16

We are going to lose this. The enemy is not affected by the mud because they are on higher and sturdier ground. They are starving us out. But I am going to go out fighting for the friends I have lost.

July 18

I have rallied the troops and they are ready. I started so high and have been brought so low. But I will go down fighting.

Peter and I stare at each other for a full minute.

“That was beautiful,” I say.

---

And so I published William's journal and got rich, but I will never forget his story. My grandchildren look up at me with their big eyes, and I smile.

"Grandpa, can we go to the battlefield where you found the book?" asks my oldest grandson.

"Yes. How about right now?" I say.

So we get in the car and drive to my old job.

I get out and everything looks exactly the way it did when I worked there. People are still working in the dry dirt. There is still no grass, the land is covered in holes and trenches, and the familiar smell of dust and dirt is comforting. It's not like I miss the job—it was hard—but it reminds me of when I was younger.

I can almost see the general and I think, *That man lost so much and I gained so much. Is it fair? No. I never did anything that brave, but he did. Life rewarded the wrong person. I owe William for everything I have, and I will never be able to repay my debt to him.*

# 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 that comes our way. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

## Fiction

Layne Dawley, 10  
Nora Heiskell, 11  
Quinn Kennedy, 13  
Diya Mukherjee, 13  
Ever Sun, 9  
Soraya Takhari, 7

## Poetry

Max Corthésy, 10  
Riley Killen, 8  
Lucia Murdoch, 12  
Adele Stamenov, 10  
Jungwoo Wi, 10

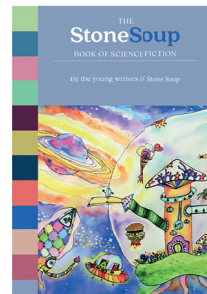
## Art

Elise Ko, 9  
Selina Ni, 12  
Kathleen Werth, 10  
Grace Williams, 12

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