Stone Soup

The Borough of Bold Expressions

VOLUME THREE

IMAGE HERE

A large copper pot with steam rising, three smooth stones visible at the bottom, surrounded by root vegetables and fresh herbs. A mysterious traveler approaches a civic borough with a clock tower and cobblestone streets.

Stone Soup

A Classic Tale Reimagined

The Borough of Bold Expressions

VOLUME THREE

IMAGE HERE

Decorative title page illustration: an ornate border featuring bay leaves, thyme, and rosemary, a steaming pot, and hands clasped in fellowship around a table.

Mr. Ostensible *(ah-STEN-sih-bul)*

Stated or appearing to be true, but not necessarily so; seeming.

"His ostensible reason for visiting was business, but he really just wanted to see his old friend."

Little Partisan *(PAR-tih-zan)*

A strong supporter of a party, cause, or person; showing strong support.

"She was a passionate partisan of the local library, organizing fundraisers every month."

Mother Clemency *(KLEM-un-see)*

Mercy; lenience; mildness of weather.

"The governor showed clemency and reduced the sentence of the reformed prisoner."

The Reticent Hermit *(RET-ih-sunt)*

Not revealing one's thoughts or feelings readily; reserved.

"Though reticent by nature, he shared his entire story when he finally found someone he trusted."

Mrs. Languid *(LANG-gwid)*

Lacking energy or vitality; weak or faint; moving slowly and relaxed.

"The languid summer afternoon stretched on, inviting everyone to rest in the shade."

Mr. Dexterous *(DEK-stuh-rus)*

Showing or having skill, especially with the hands; mentally adroit and skillful.

"The dexterous surgeon completed the delicate operation with remarkable precision."

Young Lassitude *(LAS-ih-tood)*

A state of physical or mental weariness; lack of energy.

"After weeks of overtime, a deep lassitude settled over him that sleep couldn't cure."

Dame Perspicacious *(pur-spih-KAY-shus)*

Having a ready insight into and understanding of things; discerning.

"Her perspicacious analysis of the situation revealed what everyone else had missed."

STORY

An Old Classic Folktale, Retold for Today

DEDICATION

For all who have forgotten that the feast was never in the stone, but in the gathering.

And to all our children and grandchildren who have enjoyed this story, dad's stones, and the soup we've shared together.

C.S. Lewis, in his essays and broadcasts, championed clarity in language while never shying from precise, meaningful words. He believed that when we lose specific words, we lose the concepts they represent. This volume honors words that illuminate character and inspire noble action.

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IMAGE HERE

A hilltop borough with brick buildings, a stopped clock tower, empty cobblestone streets.

Once upon a time, in a land not far from here, there was a borough built upon a hill. Its cobblestone streets wound past brick buildings and iron lampposts, and at its center stood a clock tower that had once chimed the hours for all to hear.

But the clock had stopped years ago, and no one had bothered to fix it. The people of the borough had grown careful... too careful. They weighed every word, measured every risk, and in doing so, had forgotten how to simply live together.

Words to Remember

The Characters & Their Meanings

Lady Prudence *(PROO-dunce)*

The quality of being prudent; careful good judgment that allows one to avoid danger or risk.

"Her prudence in saving money during good times helped the family through the difficult year."

Mr. Probity *(PROH-bih-tee)*

The quality of having strong moral principles; honesty and decency.

"The judge was known for her probity and never accepted any favor that might influence her decisions."

Grandmother Profundity *(proh-FUN-dih-tee)*

Great depth of insight or meaning; intellectual depth.

"The profundity of his grandmother's simple advice only became clear to him years later."

Miss Auspicious *(aw-SPISH-us)*

Conducive to success; favorable; giving a sign of future success.

"The rainbow after the storm seemed an auspicious sign for their new beginning."

Instructions

1. Place three clean stones in a large pot as a reminder of what brings us together.
2. Heat the pot over medium heat and add the olive oil.
3. Brown the lamb cubes on all sides, working in batches if needed. Remove and set aside.
4. In the same pot, sauté the onions until translucent, about 5 minutes.
5. Add the celery and garlic, cooking until fragrant, about 2 minutes.
6. Season with salt and pepper, then add the potatoes, turnips, and carrots.
7. Pour in the water or broth, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom.
8. Add the bay leaves and thyme. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 45 minutes.
9. Return the lamb to the pot and continue simmering for 30 minutes until vegetables are tender.
10. Add the peas in the final 5 minutes of cooking.
11. Remove the bay leaves and thyme sprigs. Garnish generously with fresh parsley.
12. Serve in deep bowls with crusty bread, surrounded by good company.
13. Remember to remove the stones before serving... they've done their work of bringing everyone together.

The wonder was never in the stones... it was in the bold hearts that dared to share.

One bright morning in early spring, when the last snow had melted and the first flowers were pushing through the damp earth, a stranger appeared at the bottom of the hill.

He was a man of middle years, with weathered hands and eyes that held the quiet patience of someone who had seen many roads. On his back he carried something unusual: a great copper cooking pot, its surface burnished by years of use, catching the pale spring light.

The few shopkeepers who noticed him from their windows quickly found reasons to step away. Strangers were uncommon in the borough, and uncommon things required careful consideration.



The traveler climbing the cobblestone hill, copper pot catching the morning light, early spring flowers sprouting through damp earth.

The traveler walked steadily up the winding streets, past closed shop doors and curtained windows, past the silent clock tower, until he reached the old market square.

The square had once been the heart of the borough, where merchants had called out their wares and neighbors had gathered to share news. Now the market stalls stood empty, their awnings faded and torn. The fountain at the center had long since run dry.

Here, beneath the shadow of the clock tower, the traveler set down his pot.

IMAGE HERE

An abandoned market square with empty stalls, a dry fountain, the traveler setting down his pot.

Stone Soup

A Recipe for Bold Spirits

This recipe, like the story it comes from, works best when shared. Each ingredient represents a contribution from a caring neighbor, and the wonder lies not in any single addition, but in the coming together of many gifts.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	SERVINGS
25 minutes	2 hours	Enough for a borough (8-12 people)

Ingredients

- 3 clean, smooth stones (for tradition)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 lb lamb stew meat, cubed (from The Reticent Hermit)
- 2 large onions, diced (from Lady Prudence)
- 3 stalks celery, chopped (from Mrs. Languid)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced (from Mr. Dexterous)
- 4 large potatoes, cubed (from Mr. Ostensible)
- 3 turnips, cubed (from Mr. Probity)
- 4 carrots, sliced (from Miss Auspicious)
- 1 cup peas (from Young Lassitude)
- 3 bay leaves (from Grandmother Profundity)
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme (from Dame Perspicacious)
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley, chopped (from Mother Clemency)
- Fresh bread for serving (from Little Partisan)
- 8 cups water or broth

THE WONDER WAS NEVER IN THE STONES.
THE SECRET IS REMEMBERING OUR UNIQUENESS AND INDIVIDUAL PURPOSE, CREATED TO BE WOVEN TOGETHER IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

IMAGE HERE

A simple image: three smooth stones resting in an open palm, surrounded by many hands reaching toward one another in fellowship, with the silhouette of a clock tower in the background.

IMAGE HERE

Close-up of three smooth stones being placed into the copper pot, olive oil glistening.

From inside the copper pot, he produced a small camp stove, a large wooden spoon, and a small bottle of olive oil. He set them aside on the cobblestones.

Then he placed the empty pot upon the stove and lit the flame low.

Reaching into a leather pouch at his side, he drew out three smooth, round stones. He held them up to the morning light, examining each one as though it were precious... turning them over, rubbing them gently.

With reverence, he placed them into the warming pot.

He stirred them slowly with the wooden spoon.

Clunk. Clunk. Clunk.

He poured olive oil over the stones until they glistened. Then, from his pocket, he drew a worn wooden box marked "S" and "P." He poured a bit of salt into his palm and tossed it over the stones, then added a few pinches of ground black pepper. The oil began to shimmer and release its fragrance.

Lady Prudence (PROO-dunce) had been watching from her parlor window, considering whether to investigate. She was a woman who thought before she acted, who weighed consequences with the care of a jeweler weighing gold.

"It would be unwise," she murmured to herself, "to approach a stranger without first understanding his purpose."

But she was also a woman who recognized when caution had become cowardice. She drew her shawl around her shoulders and stepped outside.

"Good morning, traveler," Lady Prudence (PROO-dunce) said, approaching slowly. "Wisdom suggests I should ask... what are you doing in our square?"





"These," he whispered to himself, tucking them carefully into his leather pouch, "are very special stones from a very special place."

And with a small smile, the traveler walked on.

Somewhere ahead, another borough was waiting.

Another community had forgotten itself.

Another pot of soup waited to be made.

Behind him, high on the hill, the clock tower suddenly chimed. Someone had finally fixed it.

The End.

The traveler walked down the winding cobblestone streets, past the clock tower, toward the bottom of the hill. At the edge of the borough, where the cobblestones gave way to dirt road and the lantern light no longer reached, he paused.

He looked down at the ground beside the path. There, among the damp earth and spring shoots, lay dozens of ordinary stones... field stones, road stones, garden stones.

He knelt and picked up three.

They were smooth. They were round. They were perfectly ordinary.

He held them up to the moonlight, turning each one over in his hand, rubbing them softly as though they were precious.

IMAGE HERE

The traveler crouched by the roadside, moonlight illuminating three new stones in his palm.

"I am making stone soup," the traveler replied with a gentle smile.

"Stone soup?" Lady Prudence raised an eyebrow. "How extraordinary... soup from stones?" She paused to consider. "Let us examine this carefully. Stones are not typically... edible. And yet, here you are."

"These stones," the traveler said, stirring them gently, "come from a very special place. They make the most wonderful soup. Though I confess... it would be even better with a bit of onion."

Lady Prudence considered this. The request was small, the risk minimal. And the aroma rising from the pot was unexpectedly pleasant.

"I have onions," she said at last. "It would seem... sensible to contribute."

IMAGE HERE

Lady Prudence looking thoughtfully at the pot, steam rising, morning light on the square.

IMAGE HERE

Lady Prudence dicing onions carefully, Mrs. Languid watching lazily from her doorstep.

She returned shortly with two medium-sized onions and a small cutting board. With deliberate, careful strokes, she diced them into neat pieces, her movements precise and unhurried.

"For the soup," she said, adding them to the pot. They sizzled immediately in the warming oil, releasing their sweet, sharp fragrance into the air.

Rattle, sizzle, rattle.

Mrs. Languid (LANG-gwid) had been watching from her doorstep across the square, where she had been sitting for most of the morning. She was a woman who moved at her own pace... which is to say, very slowly indeed.

"Something is happening," she murmured drowsily. "Perhaps I should... in time... go and see."

Grandmother Profundity nodded slowly. "The soup," she said, "created fellowship. That is its deepest meaning."

"And remembering," the traveler added. "Remembering how to live... not beside each other, but with each other, and with Him who made us."

He placed the camp stove, the water jug, and the oil bottle back inside the empty pot. Then he fastened it to his back. It was lighter now, as though the weight it carried had been transferred to the hearts of those who remained.

The borough gathered to see him off. Mother Clemency pressed a wrapped piece of bread into his hands for the journey. Little Partisan waved with both hands. And The Reticent Hermit... the hermit nodded once, which from him meant more than most people's longest speeches.

IMAGE HERE

The traveler fastening his pot, the townspeople gathered to say farewell.

IMAGE HERE

The traveler speaking to the gathered townspeople, their faces illuminated by lantern light.

Dame Perspicacious stepped forward. "I perceive what you are truly saying. The wonder was never in the stones."

"No," the traveler replied softly. "The stones are ordinary. But each of you... each of you was formed with something particular, something your own. Like colors on a painter's palette... alone, each is merely pigment. But when brushed together on the canvas, each finding its place, a masterpiece emerges."

He paused, looking at each face in turn... Lady Prudence, Mr. Probity, Grandmother Profundity, Miss Auspicious, Mr. Dexterous, Mrs. Languid, Young Lassitude, Dame Perspicacious, Mr. Ostensible, Little Partisan, Mother Clemency, and even The Reticent Hermit.

"Whether you name it design or blessing... this is what God intended. What was scattered becomes whole; what was separate becomes art."

Mrs. Languid (LANG-gwid) rose slowly, stretched luxuriously, and drifted across the square as if carried by a gentle breeze.

"There's no rush," she said dreamily, arriving at last beside the pot. "What seems to be... happening here?"

"Stone soup," said Lady Prudence. "The traveler is making stone soup."

"Stone soup?" Mrs. Languid yawned softly. "How... strangely wonderful." She watched the steam rise with half-closed eyes. "The smell is rather... lovely. In time, I suppose I could contribute something."

"Celery would be wonderful," the traveler suggested.

"Celery," Mrs. Languid repeated slowly. "Yes... I have celery. I shall return... eventually."

IMAGE HERE

Mrs. Languid, a relaxed woman with dreamy eyes, approaching the pot with unhurried grace.

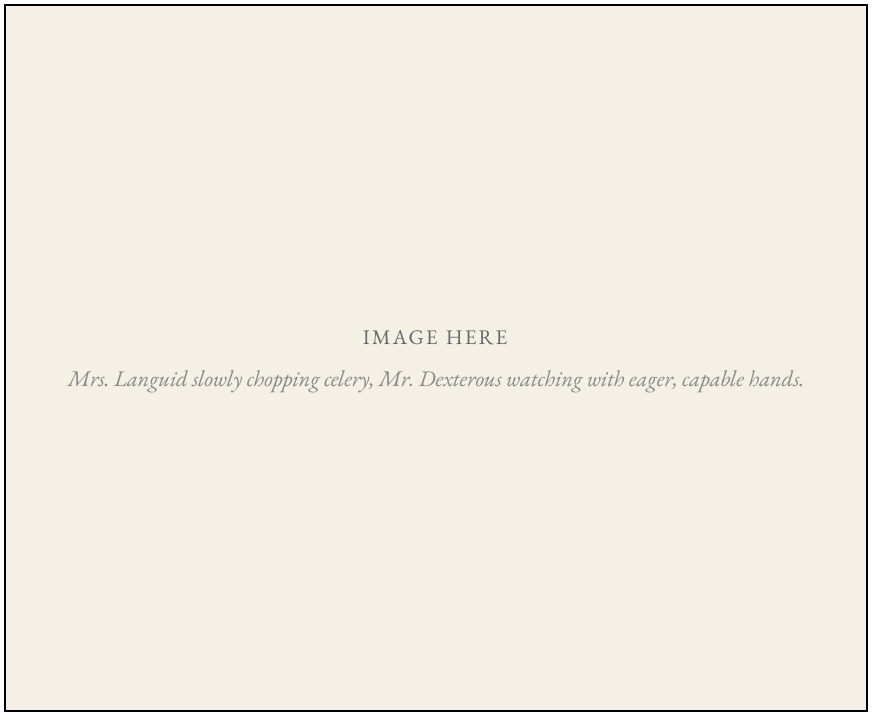
True to her word, Mrs. Languid returned... eventually. She carried several stalks of celery and moved toward the pot with the pace of honey dripping from a spoon.

"I brought... a knife," she said, producing one from her apron pocket. With slow, dreamy motions, she held each stalk over the pot and sliced it into pieces, letting them fall gently into the warming oil.

"There," she said at last. "No need to... hurry."

The celery joined the onions, filling the air with a deeper, earthier aroma.

Mr. Dexterous (DEK-stuh-rus) had been watching from the kitchen attached to his workshop, his skilled hands already itching to help.



Mrs. Languid slowly chopping celery, Mr. Dexterous watching with eager, capable hands.

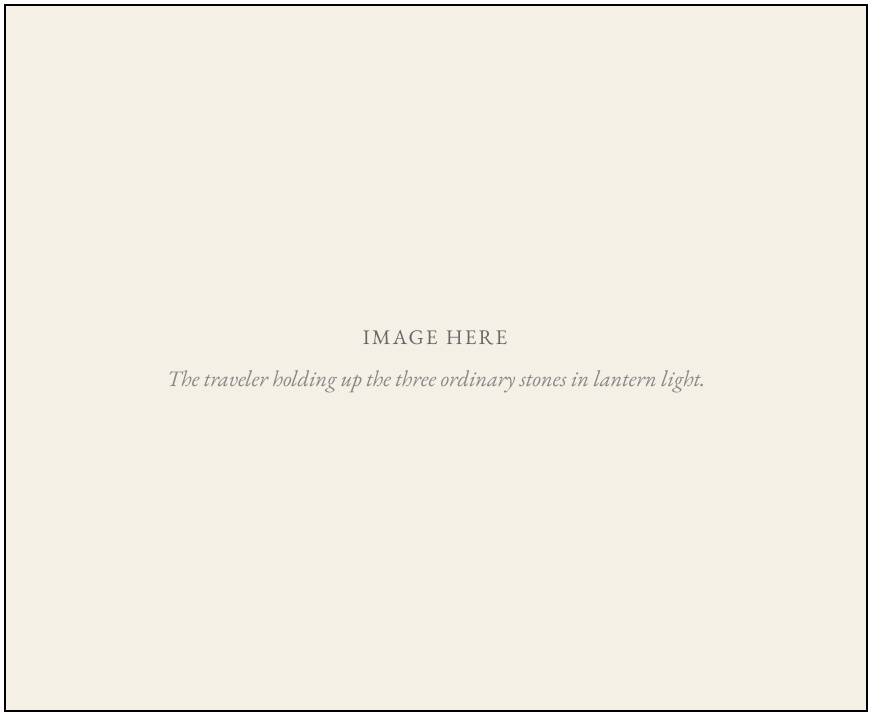
The traveler listened to their plans with quiet satisfaction. Then, as the lanterns burned lower and the last of the soup was scraped from the pot, he began to gather his things.

Lady Prudence noticed first. "You're leaving," she said. "Wisdom suggests... we wish you would stay."

"There are other boroughs," the traveler replied gently. "Other places where people have forgotten what you remembered tonight."

He reached into the pot and lifted out the three smooth stones. In the lantern light, they looked utterly ordinary... just simple, river-worn stones.

"These stones," he said, "I leave with you. Keep them. Remember what they taught you."



The traveler holding up the three ordinary stones in lantern light.

As the evening deepened and lanterns were lit around the square, the people began to make plans.

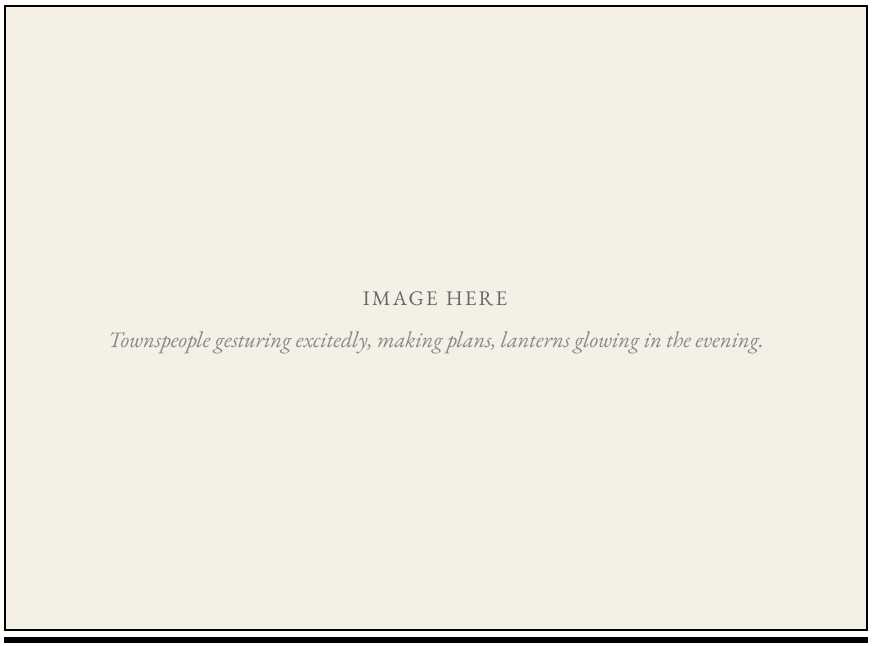
"The fountain," said Miss Auspicious hopefully, "could be restored. What a favorable sign that would be!"

"Allow me to manage the repairs," offered Mr. Dexterous. "I can easily handle the mechanical work."

"And the clock tower," added Mr. Probity. "It is only right that we fix it. A borough should know what time it is."

"In time," said Mrs. Languid, surprising everyone, "I would like to help. There's no rush... but I want to be part of this."

Grandmother Profundity smiled. "Consider the deeper meaning: you are already part of it. You always were."





"Allow me," said Mr. Dexterous (DEK-stuh-rus), striding forward with confidence. He was a man whose hands were never still, always fixing, building, or crafting something with remarkable skill.

"The soup needs garlic," the traveler observed. "It would add warmth and complexity."

"Garlic? I can manage that easily." Mr. Dexterous disappeared into his workshop and returned with a bulb of garlic and a small hand press. With quick, nimble movements, he separated the cloves, peeled them with a flick of his thumb, and crushed each one through the press.

Squeeze. Scrape. Squeeze. Scrape.

The garlic fell into the pot in perfect ribbons, releasing its pungent fragrance.

"There," Mr. Dexterous said with satisfaction. "Precisely done."

The aromatics sizzled together now... onion, celery, and garlic filling the square with an irresistible fragrance. Windows began to open. Doors began to creak.

"Now," the traveler said, producing a large jug from his pack, "the time has come for water."

He poured it slowly into the pot, and the liquid hissed as it met the warmed oil and vegetables. Steam rose in fragrant clouds, curling upward past the stopped clock tower.

Mr. Ostensible (ah-STEN-sih-bul) had emerged from the borough hall, where he served as the chief clerk. He was a man who questioned everything, always looking beneath the surface of things.

IMAGE HERE

Steam rising past the clock tower, more townspeople appearing at windows and doors.

IMAGE HERE

Townspeople eating together, faces glowing with happiness and connection.

"This soup," declared Lady Prudence between thoughtful bites, "is... unexpectedly wise. Wisdom suggests we should do this again."

"On the surface," Mr. Ostensible admitted, "it appears to be merely soup. But the deeper reality... it is something more."

"I perceive," said Dame Perspicacious, "that we have all been transformed. What you truly needed, borough, was not a recipe. It was remembering."

Mr. Probity nodded firmly. "That is the honest truth."

Miss Auspicious beamed. "The signs were right! This bodes so well for our future!"

Even Mrs. Languid seemed energized. "I feel... surprisingly... awake," she said, her eyes wide open for perhaps the first time anyone could remember.

Then the feast began.

Bowls appeared from homes. Mr. Dexterous ladled soup with practiced precision. Little Partisan distributed bread to everyone... from every side of the borough... without distinction. Mother Clemency made sure no one was forgotten, especially those who had been slow to join.

And as they ate, wonder filled the square. Children who usually sat alone were chasing each other around the dry fountain. Adults who had not spoken in years were deep in conversation. Laughter... real laughter, born of shared joy... echoed off the brick buildings and climbed past the stopped clock tower.

Young Lassitude, somehow, seemed less tired. There was color in his cheeks, energy in his movements.

IMAGE HERE

The feast in full swing, children playing, adults talking, joy visible on every face.

"It would appear," said Mr. Ostensible (ah-STEN-sih-bul), adjusting his spectacles, "that you are making soup. On the surface, at least."

"I am making stone soup," the traveler agreed.

"Stone soup." Mr. Ostensible peered into the pot with a skeptical eye. "The apparent claim is that stones can produce soup. Yet what I perceive is that you have already added onion, celery, and garlic. The ostensible purpose of the stones seems... questionable."

"And yet," the traveler said calmly, "the soup grows richer with each contribution."

Mr. Ostensible considered this. "Perhaps there is more here than appears. I shall contribute potatoes... and observe what emerges from beneath the surface."

IMAGE HERE

Mr. Ostensible, a bespectacled man with a questioning expression, examining the pot.

IMAGE HERE

Mr. Ostensible cubing potatoes precisely, Mr. Probity approaching with steady confidence.

He returned with an armful of fine potatoes. Setting up a cutting board with analytical precision, he peeled and cubed each one into identical pieces, as if conducting an experiment.

"These potatoes," he announced, adding them to the pot, "will provide substance. We shall see if the reality matches the appearance."

Mr. Probity (PROH-bih-tee) had been watching from across the square. He was a man of unshakeable integrity, known for never speaking a word he did not mean.

"What is happening here," Mr. Probity (PROH-bih-tee) said, walking toward the pot with steady steps, "appears to be exactly what it claims to be. A stranger is making soup, and the borough is... participating."

As the soup finished simmering and the afternoon sun began to slant golden across the square, Grandmother Profundity raised her hand.

"Before we eat," she said, her voice carrying across the gathering, "consider the deeper meaning of what we are about to share. We should give thanks."

The crowd grew quiet. Some shifted uncomfortably... it had been a long time since they had paused to express gratitude.

Grandmother Profundity bowed her head. "Heavenly Father," she said simply, "we thank You for this food, which comes from all our hands. For this gathering, which comes from all our hearts. And for the stranger who reminded us of what we had forgotten. Amen."

"Amen," murmured the crowd, and even The Reticent Hermit's lips moved silently.

IMAGE HERE

The crowd with heads bowed, Grandmother Profundity leading the blessing, evening light on the square.

IMAGE HERE

The square transformed with activity, people working together, the soup bubbling with lamb.

Nothing more. Just those three words. But they were enough.

The traveler accepted the lamb with a deep bow of respect. He added it to the pot, and as the meat began to simmer, releasing its rich, savory fragrance, something shifted in the square.

The people looked at one another... really looked... for the first time in years. If the hermit, who had hidden himself away from everyone, could give so generously, what excuse did any of them have for holding back?

Mr. Dexterous began to tend the fire with his skilled hands. Mrs. Languid, moving faster than anyone had seen, helped arrange benches. Even Mr. Ostensible smiled, seeing something real beneath the surface at last.

"Honor demands," Mr. Probity continued, "that I do my part. I have turnips in my cellar... fine, sturdy turnips. It is only right that I share them."

He returned with three sturdy turnips and a heavy knife. With strong, dependable strokes, he cubed them and added them to the bubbling pot.

"There," he said firmly. "What I have promised, I have delivered."

Miss Auspicious (aw-SPISH-us) came hurrying across the square, her eyes bright with excitement. She was a young woman who saw good omens everywhere, who believed that favorable signs were always just around the corner.

"Stone soup!" she exclaimed. "What a marvelous omen! A stranger, a copper pot, a gathering in the square... the signs are all favorable! What may I do?"

IMAGE HERE

Mr. Probity adding turnips with an honest expression, Miss Auspicious arriving with bright eyes.

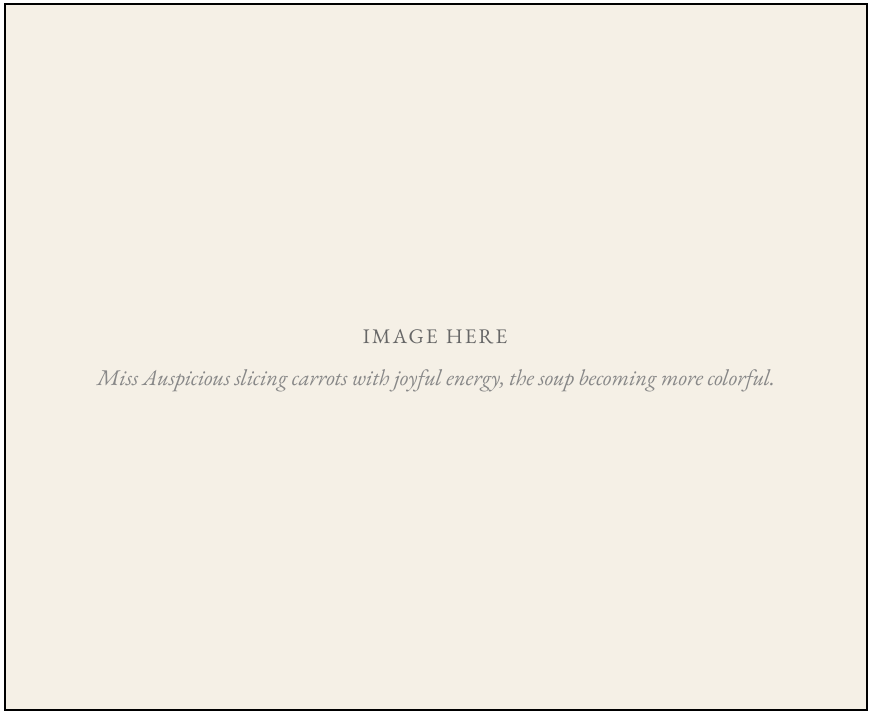
"The soup would benefit from carrots," the traveler suggested.

"Carrots!" Miss Auspicious (aw-SPISH-us) clasped her hands together. "Of course! Orange for hope, for warmth, for good fortune! I have carrots at home... this is surely a promising sign!"

She practically skipped away and returned with a bundle of bright orange carrots, their green tops still attached.

"These carrots," she announced, slicing them with cheerful energy, "were grown in the sunniest corner of my garden. Adding them to the soup can only mean good things are coming."

She tossed them in with a flourish, and the soup grew more colorful still.



Everyone stared. The Reticent Hermit (RET-ih-sunt) had not been seen in the square for years. He rarely spoke, and when he did, it was only when something truly mattered.

Slowly, he walked toward the pot, carrying something wrapped in cloth. The crowd parted before him in astonishment.

He stopped beside the traveler and, without a word, unwrapped the cloth to reveal a generous portion of fine lamb, already cubed and ready for the pot.

The silence was absolute.

Then, in a voice rough from disuse, The Reticent Hermit spoke:

"...For the soup."



The soup was beautiful now... a rainbow of vegetables in a golden broth, fragrant with herbs, warming the cool spring air. Surely nothing more was needed.

But the traveler stirred thoughtfully. "The soup is wonderful," he said. "Truly wonderful. But if someone happened to have a bit of meat..."

A silence fell over the crowd. Meat was precious in the borough. No one spoke.

Then, from the edge of the square, came the sound of shuffling footsteps.

The Reticent Hermit (RET-ih-sunt) emerged from the shadows of an alleyway. He was an old man who lived alone at the far edge of the borough, known for speaking to no one and needing nothing from anyone.

IMAGE HERE

The crowd silent, the Reticent Hermit emerging from shadow, carrying something wrapped in cloth.

IMAGE HERE

Young Lassitude sitting wearily on the fountain edge, the crowd growing around the pot.

The square was filling now with curious townsfolk. The aroma had spread through the borough like an invitation, drawing people from their homes and shops.

Young Lassitude (LAS-ih-tood) sat slumped on the edge of the dry fountain, watching with weary eyes. He was a young man who seemed perpetually tired, as though the weight of the world pressed upon his shoulders.

"I suppose," he said with a heavy sigh, "I could... contribute something. If it would help."

"Peas would be perfect," the traveler said gently.

Young Lassitude (LAS-ih-tood) rose slowly, as if even standing required great effort. "If it would help," he repeated. "I have peas. Small things. Like me."

He shuffled home and returned with a bowl of fresh peas, still in their pods. With tired but willing hands, he began to shell them, one by one.

"These are small," he said, letting the peas tumble into the soup. "But I suppose... even small things matter."

"They matter very much," the traveler assured him.

Something shifted in Young Lassitude's eyes... a flicker of energy that had not been there before.

Grandmother Profundity (proh-FUN-dih-tee) had been watching from her window in the building overlooking the square. She was a woman of great age and greater wisdom, known for seeing meaning where others saw only surface.

IMAGE HERE

Young Lassitude shelling peas, a spark of life returning to his eyes.

IMAGE HERE

Mother Clemency with a gentle smile, scattering parsley across the golden soup.

The soup was rich and colorful now, bubbling gently, filling the square with warmth. Nearly the entire borough had gathered.

Mother Clemency (KLEM-un-see) moved through the crowd, her kind face serene. She was a woman who forgave easily, who saw the best in everyone, who believed in second chances.

"Let us be gentle with one another," she said softly. "Everyone deserves forgiveness... even those of us who have been slow to gather."

She produced a generous bunch of fresh parsley from her basket. With quick, merciful snips, she cut it fine.

"Parsley," Mother Clemency (KLEM-un-see) said, "is for freshness. For new beginnings. Let it remind us that we can always start again."

She scattered it across the soup like green confetti.

Little Partisan (PAR-tih-zan) ran home and returned with two fresh loaves, still warm from the oven, held aloft like trophies.

"Bread from my side of the borough!" the child announced proudly. Then, noticing the faces around the pot came from all parts of the borough, added more quietly: "Bread for... everyone."

"You see," Dame Perspicacious observed, "even the most devoted supporter can learn that some things transcend sides."

Little Partisan nodded slowly, understanding dawning. "The soup isn't about sides. It's about... all of us."

"Precisely," said Mr. Probity. "That is the honest truth."

IMAGE HERE

Little Partisan holding up bread, realization softening the child's fierce expression.

She descended to the square slowly, leaning on her cane, her silver hair gleaming in the spring light.

"In the depths of truth," Grandmother Profundity (proh-FUN-dih-tee) said, her voice carrying across the gathering, "there is always more than meets the eye. This soup... consider the deeper meaning. It is not about stones. It is about what the stones reveal."

She drew three dried bay leaves from her pocket.

"Bay leaves," she said, "are for depth. For layers of meaning that unfold slowly. Let them teach this soup... and us... that some truths take time to understand."

She placed them gently on the surface of the broth, where they floated like small boats on a golden sea.

IMAGE HERE

Grandmother Profundity, silver-haired and wise, adding bay leaves with reverent hands.

IMAGE HERE

Dame Perspicacious with knowing eyes, adding thyme to the soup with certainty.

Dame Perspicacious (pur-spih-KAY-shus) had been standing at the edge of the crowd, her keen eyes taking in everything. She was a woman who understood motives instantly, who saw through pretense to the truth beneath.

"I perceive," she said, stepping forward, "exactly what the traveler is doing. And what you truly mean, traveler, is not that the stones make soup... but that they make community."

The traveler smiled. "You see clearly."

"I always do," Dame Perspicacious (pur-spih-KAY-shus) replied. "And I perceive that thyme is needed. The soup requires it... and so do we. Time to come together."

From her basket, she produced several sprigs of fresh thyme and added them to the pot.

Little Partisan (PAR-tih-zan) had been watching from behind Mr. Probity's sturdy frame. The child was known throughout the borough for fierce loyalties... always taking sides, always championing one cause or another.

"Soup from stones?" Little Partisan whispered in wonder. Then, louder: "I believe in the soup!" the child declared, pushing forward. "We must support it!"

"And what will you contribute?" Lady Prudence asked.

Little Partisan hesitated. "I... I don't have vegetables. But my mother bakes bread. I believe her bread is the best, completely!"

"Bread would be perfect," the traveler said. "Every feast needs bread to share."

IMAGE HERE

Little Partisan, a passionate child, declaring support for the soup with fervent eyes.