

Singing Lessons for the Stylish Canary

Laura Stanfill

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A town of craftspeople encounters maybe-miracles in Laura Stanfill's fantastical historical novel *Singing Lessons for the Stylish Canary*.

Mireville, in rural France, is known for two products: its lace and its serinettes. The Blanchard family has a corner on the latter trade—not only because its eldest son, Georges, is credited with having called forth the sun after years of ceaseless rain. The idea that Georges could have such powers results in a certain amount of esteem—favor that passes on to Henri, who, for all the people of Mireville know, is Georges's firstborn son. But Georges maintains a secret from New York, where he once traveled to deliver a serinette to a bold woman who trains prized canaries. That secret keeps him from investing in Henri fully.

Henri grows up in the shadow of his father's reputation, longing for gifts of his own. He's sensitive and empathetic, which secures the forever allegiance his unlikely best friend, Aimee. But then fortune—or disaster—strikes: Henri comes to believe that he may be able to raise the dead. When Aimee's malicious brother decides to test his abilities, the Blanchard family privilege wavers.

Stanfill's novel is thick with the merged language of folklores and music. Evocative details capture the nineteenth century French countryside, where a sense of the miraculous persists, even as the rest of France modernizes. From the smells, sounds, and heat of a New York aviary, to the cold chill of a French jail cell, each setting is enrapturing. And though the novel's ending somewhat abandons the magic that preceded it, Henri's tale remains captivating throughout. *Singing Lessons for the Stylish Canary* is a moving debut about the worlds that open when a parent dares to love their child without reserve.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2022)

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