

StoneSoup

The background of the cover is a vibrant, abstract collage. On the left, a large, grey, textured figure with a long, flowing mane or hair-like structure dominates the space. It has a small, dark eye and appears to be holding or interacting with a blue, curved shape. To the right, a large, bright pink flower with many petals grows from a green stem. Below the flower, a small, grey, lantern-like structure is visible. The background is composed of various colored areas: a bright green top left, a deep blue top center, a purple middle right, and a bright orange bottom right. There are also some green and yellow shapes at the bottom left. The overall style is painterly and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a mix of textures.

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StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting
creative kids around the world*

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Editor's Note

This issue is a bit different than usual for two reasons.

First, we have started to serialize Hannah Nami Gajcowksi's fantastical novella, *Elana*, which placed third in our 2019 book contest. *Elana* follows the extraordinary adventures of a "furow" girl who lives on Neptune and has an important destiny to fulfill. We will be publishing *Elana* in three installments in our April, May, and June issues—we are sure you will be waiting impatiently for the next installments each month!

Second, it is National Poetry Month again! For this reason, we have chosen to showcase the work of two young poets. We hope you will enjoy reading this larger selection of work by a single poet (as well as an additional short story), and that you will take the time to read and reread these pieces. Poems may take less time to read than stories, but they are meant to be read many times.

Until next time!

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

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On the cover:
Eyes on You,
Watercolor

by Rebecca Wu, 9
Medina, WA

StoneSoup

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The Leafy Thing, *Canon PowerShot G15*



by Oskar Cross, 10
Oakland, CA

A Birthday Surprise

by Bo-Violet Vig, 13
Los Angeles, CA



Every year, Emily's birthday morning is the same—except this year...

I wake up to silence.

No usual sounds of Dad clattering around in the kitchen, or Lucas hammering on the piano, or Maggie screaming at Mom because she doesn't want to take Pickles out for a walk.

I swipe at my eyes, roll over to check the neon-pink digital clock that sits on my bedside table. Blinking lights form the numbers—it's 7:04 a.m. *That's a little weird.* Usually everyone is awake by now, but I guess they're all extra tired today. I mean, Mom did force us all to stay up watching classic musicals until 11:30 last night, which I guess is late for Lucas, but on a day like this he'd surely be awake by 6:00 at the latest, scampering around and snickering at Maggie whenever she hisses at him to pipe down. Our family gets pretty excited about birthdays.

I sink back against my pillow, letting my eyes close. In my mind, I can see the usual pink and blue streamers—my favorite colors—and Maggie, teetering on a chair, stringing them across the mantle; Dad in the kitchen, arranging lemon-glazed donuts on a platter in the shape of a star; Mom tying a flawless bow on each of my perfectly wrapped gifts behind a locked

laundry-room door; Lucas attempting to set the table with bright-yellow paper plates while playing a raucous game of tug-of-war with Pickles...

The next thing I know, light is trickling through the blinds, and I can hear a crow in the backyard pine making a racket. *I must have fallen asleep!* My eyes jerk towards the clock—9:28! Have they eaten all the donuts without me, or what?

At least the sounds streaming in from downstairs are steady—water running in the sink, Pickles yapping, the strains of morning cartoons playing on the living room TV...

Wait a second. I've lived 13 years in this house and know for sure that these sounds come *after* breakfast, not before, and definitely NOT on a birthday. Especially MY birthday—I'm positive that Lucas knows how much I despise his favorite TV programs. He should be queueing up something I love since it's my birthday...

Unless he's forgotten it's my birthday.

Gasping, I cast my blanket aside, shove my feet into a pair of slippers, and skitter out into the hallway. *It couldn't be possible! My family never forgets a birthday!* Darting back inside for

my phone, I check the calendar—it is July 5, the day I turn 13. I've circled the day with my favorite fat, pink Sharpie, doodled stars and hearts, and even written *EMILY'S BIRTHDAY!* in impeccable cursive. I'm not mistaken, so I guess my family is. I dash back into the hallway and march down the stairs.

The sounds are louder now—Mom is calling out to Maggie, asking what time she's going to see a movie this afternoon. Lucas has switched channels and is now cheering on some baseball team or another. I grit my teeth. *I can't stand baseball.*

Lucas looks up at me once I reach the living room. "Morning, Emily. Come watch last night's Dodgers game with me!" He pats the space next to him on the couch.

I'm gazing around at the barren room—no pile of sparkling presents on the chair, no hot-pink streamers fluttering in the breeze flowing through the open window. No donut crumbs on the floor, I notice, feeling small and forlorn.

"No thanks, Lucas." I shuffle into the kitchen. Mom's at the table reading a thick paperback, and Maggie's leaning against the counter by the sink, eyes glued to the screen of her phone.

"Oh, good! You're awake!" Mom looks up at me, then sets down her book. "Emily, it's 9:30! Are you feeling alright?" She touches a hand against my forehead.

"Yeah. Fine. What's for breakfast?" I lower into a chair.

"Dad made bacon and French toast, but it's all gone. Sorry, sweetie. Want to grab some Cheerios?"

The only Cheerios on the counter

are Lucas's disgusting Honey Nut ones, and besides that, there's only cornflakes and some awful organic stuff of Mom's.

"I'll just get something later," I groan. *Of course my favorite cereal had to be forgotten too.*

Maggie straightens up. "Mom, Lily's dad is picking me up at 12 for lunch and a movie. We're not going to the theater, just seeing *A Star is Born* at her house."

"Can I come?" The question flies out of my mouth before I can stop it. Mom and Maggie's heads swivel around to stare at me.

"Why would you want to?" Maggie waggles her eyebrows. "You hate Lady Gaga, and besides, you're only 12."

Only 12? Tears spring to my eyes, and suddenly I'm sobbing, my head against the table.

"Emily? What's wrong?" Mom rushes over, her hand running over my back.

"I'm 13!"

Mom cocks her head. "What?"

"I'm 13!" I cry, my voice breaking as I lift my head off the table.

Mom gives me a funny look. "No, sweetie, your birthday is . . . is . . ."

She trails off as I point at the whiteboard calendar. There, written in firm purple Dry-Erase marker under the FRIDAY tab, is *Emily's 13th Birthday*.

Mom's jaw drops open.

"Oh my god, Sweetie!" Mom springs out of her chair. "BILL! Get inside right now!"

Dad comes jogging in, trailed by a confused Lucas. "What's going on?"

Mom points at the whiteboard. "Emily! You're 13!" Dad wraps his arms

around me.

I shove him away and swipe at my eyes. "You forgot about me."

Lucas starts snickering. Pickles bounds in, barking.

Mom plants a kiss on my forehead. "Sweetheart . . . this must be terrible for you. I'm sure you hate us right now, and I totally get it. But listen to me. If we started your birthday over again, as if this morning had never happened, would you feel a tiny bit better?"

"Like a do-over? I guess." I tilt my head to look at her.

"A do-over." Mom points upstairs. "Emily, we're starting again. So get ready for your birthday breakfast!"

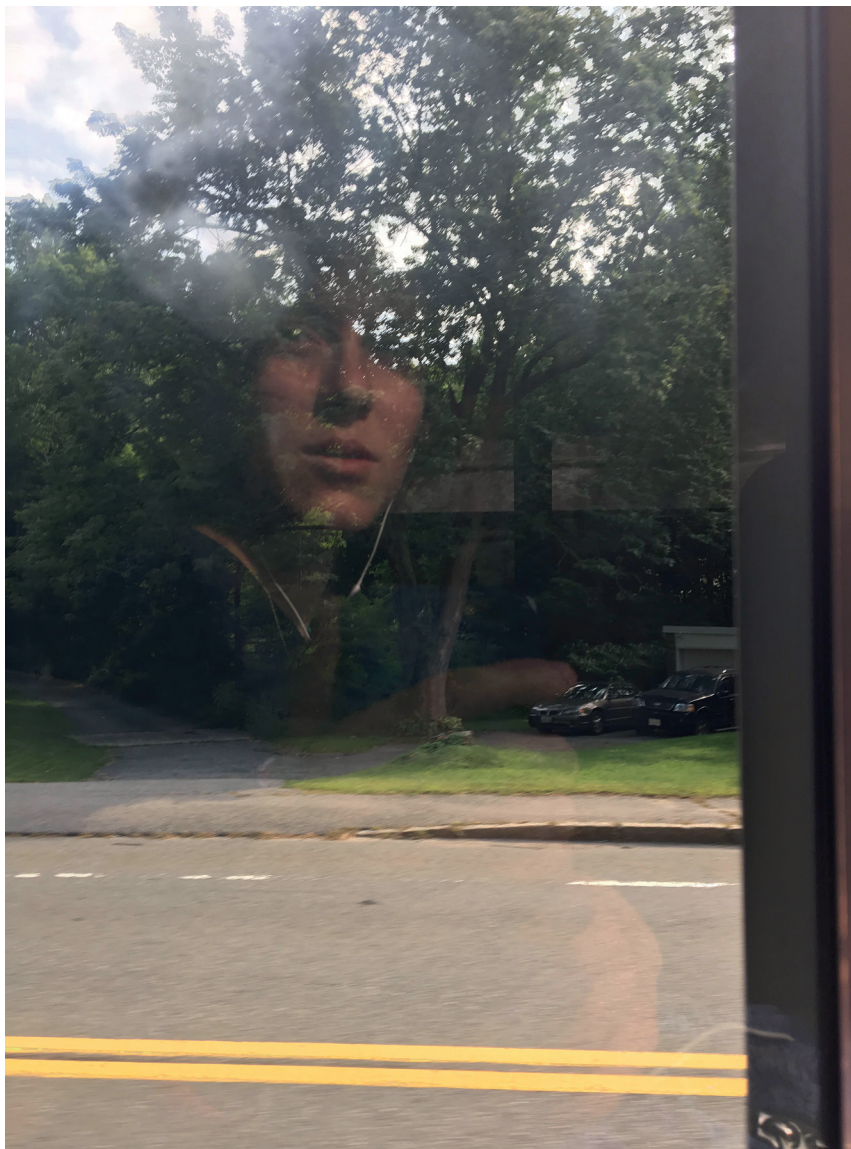
I can't help but smile. Dad whoops. Maggie frowns. "Does that mean I can't go to Lily's?"

"That's exactly what this means." Mom turns to me, softening her tone. "Emily, sweetheart, I am so, so sorry. All of us are. I don't know how this happened, but trust me, it will never, ever happen again. And it's okay if you're mad, but please try to have some fun. It's all we want for you today." She kisses my forehead, then nudges me toward the staircase. "Now. Get upstairs, and don't come down until I wake you up!"

Dad heads for the front door, sliding on his clogs. "Off to get the donuts!"

Giggling, I race upstairs and slide under the covers. The clock glows 10:04. Now, I can truly see—and hear—the usual birthday goings-on: Maggie on the chair, the streamers, Dad driving off to get the donuts, Mom and her gift-wrapping, and Lucas, playing with Pickles. I smile.

I can't wait for the new start to my birthday morning.



Self-Portrait, iPhone 6s



by Anya Geist, 13
Worcester, MA

Three Poems

by Sabrina Guo, 13
Oyster Bay, NY



Portraits of Thirteen

I.

I used to confuse coffee grounds
with the dirt in flower pots,

the earthy scent overtaking
the musky flowers.

A bird nest lies on a shelf in our garage.
I do not have the heart

to close our garage door at night,
to move the nest:

the blue eggs unhatched,
cushioned in the leaves—

unable to escape
their home.

II.

More pressure, my teacher says.
I tilt my index finger,

clasping the bow
skimming the strings of my violin.

The amount
the bow hair should bounce
ingrained in muscle memory.

Increase the bow speed.

I find
the fine line

between a gritty sound
and the tip of my bow flying
off the strings.

The rosin puffing gold dust
onto my music sheets,

onto the black lines, the swirls
of the clefs and key signatures,

the stickiness
finding homes in crevices

made by the screws
in my music stand.

III.

I trace the patterns
of rock on my shower wall

I once believed
told my life's story.

I saw my cat, grey stripes
curled in a ball,

pressed
into the tiled wall.

Arbitrary like a raffle,
fate carves into the rock

with the right set
of sharp tools.

IV.

When I was six,
I dreamt of a crimson path.

Barefoot, I walked on eggs—
red, runny yolks.

The eggshells poking my feet,
the path has no end.



Experiments in Reduction, Acrylics



by Caitlin Goh, 13
Dallas, TX

Self-Portrait: Breath of Ghosts

We never used our fireplace
until Hurricane Sandy
snapped the power lines.

Heavy rain and wind
whipped around
our dark house

as the night grew colder.
Our flashlights,
the steamy breath of ghosts

in the dead of winter.
My father's match
struck a stack

of miniature ebony logs
and turned them alight
like the bright orange

wings of a monarch butterfly,
the dark body of the room
made thicker.

Over the flame, we boiled water
and cooled it just long enough to
soak our feet—

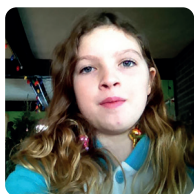
calm ripples and soft circling
soothing us
as the night wind raged.

The house stayed
black, but I memorized
how many steps

the stairway held,
the exact height of each step.



Strawberry, iPad



by Lulu DeMallie, 11
Naples, NY

Aubade: Roslyn

Bluebells
bring upon faith—
happy teardrops
waiting to be
unfurled, tendrils
on their stem
still waiting to grow,
eager for the beauty
that a bell withholds.

All other flowers blur
behind these bells of wisdom,
like back in the old house
in Roslyn, where we had
a mini garden
with orange tulips
gleaming
in the fading moonlight
of fertile brown soil,
earthy and sweet,
and I would fold
in my fertilizer beads:
green pearls
were what I called them
as a child—

each pearl giving rise
to its most perfect
plant: beingness
folded inside,
all as one,
soul in body.



The Lady, iPhone 8



by Margaret Fulop, 11
Lexington, MA

Elana (Part One)

A Novella

by Hannah Nami Gajcowski, 9
Bellevue, WA



This novella, which placed third in our 2019 Book Contest, will be appearing in three parts across the April, May, and June 2020 issues of Stone Soup.

CHARACTERS — *In order of appearance*

ELANA (Uh-LAY-nuh) *A young furow girl who is the Chosen One*

MS. SMIT *Elana's science teacher, who later reveals a secret identity*

HENRY *A tiny, green-haired fairy who guides Elana*

CASEY FLUMPTON *An evil rock star and Elana's mortal enemy*

ASTREA, DANIEL, HERA, ALLEN, and SOPHIA *Henry's friends*

TWEETLE and TWOOTLE *Casey's messengers*

TOONA *A Neptune devil*

MRS. RICHARD *Elana's writing teacher*

MOM, DAD, MARY, DAISY, JOHN, FIONA, and EDGAR *Elana's family*

KĀLEKA CAKE (Kay-LEE-kah), TAFFY CRUSTULUM, MEL LIMBUM, SUGAR SWEET, CHOCOLAT TREAT, COCO SCALERISQUE, and VANILLE GLAÇAGE *Gingerbread workers in the Palace of Honey*

GALETTA *A snappy owner at a bakery in Sugar Top*

BUBBLES, GUMMER, LICORE, and CHOCO *Workers at the Background Theater*

SPOTS *Coco's pet dog*

PRANKSTER *Vanille's pet cat*

HALLOWEEN and EASTER *A dragon and a chick in Casey's palace*

FILLINUS *The ambassador of light*

HAU'OLI *A girl who befriends Elana in Casey's palace*

PHILADELPHIA *Hau'oli's pet rat*

CAPTAIN HAWKINS *The police chief*

MR. REMY and MR. SAGARD *Two police officers*

Prologue

The main creatures that live on Neptune are furows, intelligent beings that look exactly like humans. They also act a lot like humans and like having human names. However, they aren't exactly the same. They can survive both on solid planets like Earth and gas planets like Neptune.

Furows share the beautiful planet of Neptune with other creatures, such as living gingerbread and various animals. These animals resemble Earthen animals such as cats, dogs, and crocodiles. We use Earthen animal names in this book to help our Earthen readers follow the plot.

Elana, the heroine of this tale, is an ordinary furow girl who uses her determination, daring, and faith in magic to save the planet.

I: The Chosen One

Once upon a time, on the planet of Neptune, in the bustling city of Thener and country of Thou, there was a tall, redheaded, 10-year-old girl named Elana Garfield. One afternoon in science class at Jonesberg Elementary, Ms. Smit, the teacher, announced that they were going to change from their current subject, animals, and start discussing electricity.

"To start with, class, I have a question for all of you," Ms. Smit declared. "What are the two different types of electrical circuits?" Elana raised her hand at almost the exact moment Ms. Smit finished her question.

"Yes, Elana," Ms. Smit said with a smile.

"Series circuit and parallel circuit," Elana answered immediately in the most confident voice she could muster up.

"Very good," Ms. Smit congratulated her. "Do you want to tell us more?"

Elana, though very shy, never wanted to lose a chance for attention, especially because she had six other siblings. "In a series circuit, if you break it, then all the light bulbs will turn off," Elana said. "In parallel circuits, if you break a light bulb, the rest of the light bulbs will stay on."

Ms. Smit looked impressed. But she did not want to give Elana too much attention or then her other students might think she liked Elana best.

"Very good," Ms. Smit said again, and then began teaching the class how to make a parallel circuit.

Elana was bored. She liked being the center of attention but rarely was because she had six brothers and sisters.

"Elana, are you listening?" Ms. Smit asked sharply.

"Uh, yes," lied Elana.

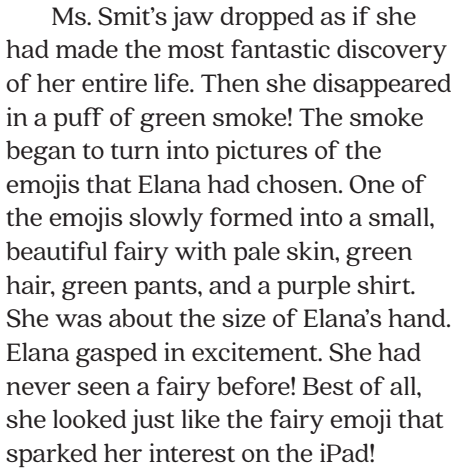
Ms. Smit gave her a skeptical look, then continued her lesson.

Elana began to fidget with her paper on her desk; she did that when she was bored. Just then, the bell rang. Elana's class ran out the door to a different class. But Elana herself couldn't budge. Something deep inside her felt different. She felt that she was about to change at any moment.

"Elana," said a familiar voice behind her. Elana thought everyone had left and turned around, surprised. Behind her was Ms. Smit.

"What!?" screeched Elana, feeling

“Calm down,” soothed Ms. Smit. “I just want to know which emojis spark your interest.” Ms. Smit then handed Elana an iPad. Elana was quite surprised by the odd question, but she typed in her favorite emojis in response:



“You are the Chosen One,” announced the fairy grandly. “And you will go on an adventure to help me, Astrea, Daniel, Hera, Allen, and Sophia.”

“What are you talking about?” Elana asked loudly.

"What is the Story?" Elana inquired.

“Long ago, Neptune was very dark because we are so far away from the sun. Back then, there was only one light on the entire planet of Neptune, and that came from one bright, dazzling light bulb. A couple of years later, another light was created. It was a single, brilliant candle. These two lights illuminated two different towns in Neptune that were particularly lacking in sunlight.

“By the way,” Elana interrupted, fascinated by the tale, “when were the light bulb and the candle made? Who made them? Where did they come from?”

¹ e.m. means a.m. in Neptune.

the light bulb. It was either made here or on Earth—nobody quite knows.

“By the way,” the fairy said, her mind wandering, “I think it was January 27, 1880, in Earth time when Thomas Edison put up a bunch of light bulbs to light up a park or something . . . I could be incorrect.

“But as I was saying, the devils, who lived on the sun, were raging with anger at Casey’s theft. You could see the fury in their eyes as they walked around the sun, looking at Neptune in the distance. They wanted all the light back from Casey, and they also wanted revenge on her.

“Casey soon realized the threat from the sun devils when her two messengers, Tweetle and Tootle, found a message from the sun devils to a Neptune devil named Toona. The message explained that the sun devils wanted to have Toona start an attack on Casey. They wanted Toona to ‘get rid of her’ and take back all the stolen light.

“Casey wasn’t too worried about the message because she thought she could beat the devils easily in a fight. But she was wrong. Soon, fire exploded all around her. Some came from the sun; some came from Toona’s house. One of the sparks landed on Casey, and in a minute, she was dead. The world seemed to pause. Nothing moved. No bird twittered. Everything stood still, even the clocks and time itself.

“The sun happily sucked up all the stolen light from Casey and decided to give Neptune its fair share after all the planet had been through, leaving our planet as bright as all the other

planets in the Milky Way. That was when I was born, along with a mermaid named Astrea and twin scientists named Daniel and Hera. Astrea married Daniel and had two children named Allen and Sophia.

“Eight decades later, Hera and Astrea died. A year later, Daniel died, and finally, two years later, I died. A year ago, my spirit came back when the sun shone down on me for five winter days in a row. But Casey’s spirit came back too. Now, she’s trying to steal *all* the light from the world.

“Thankfully, the sun shines so brightly on us that I didn’t think she could do much harm, but I was wrong. Thousands of pounds of light have been taken from our planet each year—”

“Pounds of light?” Elana inquired curiously.

“That’s how I measure light,” the fairy answered. “Anyway, my friends and I were on the lookout for the Chosen One. We decided that the Chosen One would have a name that means *light*. At first, we couldn’t find any popular names to choose from—”

“Why popular names?” Elana interrupted.

“Well, because—” the fairy paused thoughtfully, “if we came up with an uncommon name for the Chosen One, we’d never find him or her. Even after they meet the name requirement, there are other requirements they have to meet. They have to be good, and they have to be able to control the power we give them. But we *finally* found someone who met all our requirements. After five years looking all over the planet for the Chosen One . . .” she

paused dramatically, holding her hands up for effect, “I found you.”

“Wait! Do you mean . . . I’m the Chosen One!?” Elana gasped in surprise. She had somehow missed it when the fairy said it the first time.

“Yes,” the fairy said calmly. Elana looked at the fairy. *What if she had made up the whole story?*

Without thinking, Elana said, “I’m too old for made-up baby stories.” The fairy looked shocked, and Elana stomped out of the room, narrowly missing a bookshelf that was right next to the door and almost bonking her head.



“Elana, you’re late for class,” admonished Mrs. Richard, her writing teacher.

“Uh, had to go to the bathroom,” Elana lied.

Mrs. Richard continued on with the class while Elana thought about what the fairy told her.

“Elana,” Mrs. Richard said, “how do you spell ‘there/their/they’re’ in this sentence? For example: ‘I wonder why they’re telling on us.’”

Elana, who was daydreaming, didn’t answer. “ELANA!” Mrs. Richard shouted. Elana snapped right out of her trance.

“What?” Elana sputtered loudly in surprise.

“Elana,” Mrs. Richard said sharply, “don’t be rude. Go to the principal’s offi—”

Just then, the school bell rang. Elana ran right out of the building before Mrs. Richard could say another word.

When Elana got home, she burst into tears. Today seemed like a day that everything was going wrong.

III: Sugar Top

“Honey,” Elana’s mom said. “Eat your dinner.” But Elana just picked at her food. “Honey, eat your food!” Elana’s mom insisted.

Elana didn’t respond. She just dusted the crumbs off her dress, picked up her plate, and left the room.

Her mom looked shocked. Elana usually devoured her spaghetti and meatballs. Why had she just picked at it tonight? It had taken her a long time to make the pasta, and she couldn’t just let this much food go into the compost!

“Elana, come back here!” Dad called.

“Mom, what’s wrong with Elana?” Mary, one of Elana’s triplet sisters, asked.

“I have no idea,” Elana’s mom replied.

“Did you ask her how her day was?” asked Elana’s other triplet, Daisy.

“No,” answered Elana’s mom. “Good point, though. Oh, it’s 8 p.m.! We must get all of you into bed!” In addition to the triplets, Elana had a 2-year-old brother, John, and older siblings named Fiona and Edgar.

Elana’s dad picked up John while Mary and Daisy went up to the bathroom they shared with Elana to brush their teeth. The older siblings stayed in the dining room to clear the table.



Meanwhile, Elana was in her room crying.

"Why are you crying?" said a voice behind her. Elana spun around. It was the fairy.

"I-I d-don't know," Elana stuttered. "What should I call you?"

"Fairy, please," the fairy said politely.

"So, Fairy, why are you here?" Elana asked.

"To escort you to your mission!" Fairy replied grandly.

"But I can't go!" Elana gasped. "Who knows how long it could take? What if I never see my family again?"

"Don't be silly!" Fairy cried. "You go on this mission, I'll make sure that everyone in your family will forget you cried, and Mrs. Richard's class will forget that you almost got detention!" That did it. To Elana, getting in trouble was one of the worst things that could happen to her.

"I'll go!" Elana responded immediately. "What can I do?"

"You must follow me," Fairy instructed.

"Hey! Let me pack some clothes!" Elana yelled as she grabbed a small bag and put in three T-shirts, four pairs of pants, one dress, a pair of socks, and four pairs of underwear.

Elana followed the fairy out the open window in her room. Outside was the garden. There were stepping stones from the back of the garden to the front. Fairy led Elana through the dark as they walked on the stepping stones.

"Where are you going?" Elana asked.

"Shhhhhhh," Fairy warned.

"They'll find us!"

"Who?" Elena screeched.

"Shh!" Fairy hushed loudly.

Elana didn't want to be too loud, because whatever Fairy was talking about, it didn't seem good. Then, she heard the lyrics of her favorite song in the distance.

"Shhhh," Fairy snapped, looking toward where the song was coming from.

"I didn't do anything!" Elana snapped back, glaring. Just then, she heard a high-pitched cackle. Elana *knew* that it was Casey.

"Now you've done it!" grumbled Fairy. She tried to snap her fingers three times to teleport her and Elana away, but then—suddenly—a cold hand grabbed Fairy's wrist, sending shivers down her spine.

"You're not going anywhere!" cackled Casey. Fairy spun around to stand face to face with Casey. Elena looked at her new friend and foe. She knew she had to get out of there before Casey could attack them. She ran behind Casey and pulled her faded, baggy jeans as hard as she could. Casey screamed a bone-shivering, high-pitched scream and turned around, realizing that Elana was trying to distract her.

Casey quickly turned around to face Fairy, but it was too late. Fairy had grabbed Elana's hand, and she was now snapping her fingers to get them both away.



Suddenly, the world seemed to spin around and around. Elena saw

that she was flying! She could see the surface of her beautiful, blue, gassy planet. She was in a trance, staring down at Neptune's rings; how beautiful they were! She was about to gasp "Wow!" in awe, but then she plummeted back down to Neptune, to a place far from home. Elana's surroundings were transformed. Elana and Fairy were in a land that seemed to have magic in the air. It was daytime, and Elana absorbed her surroundings. The air was crisp with a sweet smell. "We are in Sugar Top," Fairy announced. Then everything seemed to make sense.

The trees were made out of lollipops of every color, the ground was made out of green Laffy Taffy, the bushes were made out of cinnamon rolls, the houses were made out of ice cream, the cottages were made out of cupcakes, and the wheels were made out of doughnuts. Elana couldn't wait to explore and eat it all!

As if Fairy were reading her mind, she explained, "You can explore, but you can't eat this town. It is against the law. But if you help the town, you can eat the criminals and the dumpster."

Elana scowled. "What are *they* made out of?" was all she could say.

"The dumpster is filled with the best sweets in the world!" Fairy exclaimed. "And the criminals are gingerbread men. Oh! There are also the cigarettes. They're made out of broccoli, but they taste like licorice and dark chocolate. I'm the only one who eats them, though."

"Are they good?" Elana asked.

"Very," Fairy replied with a nod. "But let's get going. We have tons of

work to do."

"What's the work?" Elana questioned.

"You shall see," Fairy replied cautiously.

"Tell me!" Elana shrieked.

"Later," Fairy replied firmly. Then she said, "Follow me!"

IV: The Palace of Honey

Elana followed Fairy through a sweet, beautiful cinnamon-roll bush. As they walked through a dense undergrowth of trees, Fairy stopped at the tallest tree in the forest.

"Do what I do, Elana!" Fairy chanted. "Where honey is made, from the glade, there shall I wade!" Fairy flew gracefully around the tree. Elana had no idea what a "glade" was, but she followed Fairy around, chanting the same thing. Elana began to think that if anyone saw her, they would think she was a weirdo.

Suddenly, there was a blinding flicker of light, and Elana's surroundings collapsed like a crumbling wall, falling down to reveal the outside world. The forest she was in was replaced by a slender, honey-filled moat leading up to a castle with tall tower turrets.

Fairy flew over the moat and dipped down, creating a tiny splash of honey, and went up to the castle. Elana, who was puzzled, stepped onto the drawbridge leading across the moat. To her surprise, it was hard and sturdy.

"Welcome to the Palace of Honey!" Fairy announced, waving her hands around wildly as she zoomed to the other side of the bridge Elana was standing on. Elana slowly inched forward, then made her way across the bridge.

"Uh, Fairy?" Elana inquired, "Why is the honey . . . *hard*?"

"It's called 'hard honey,'" Fairy explained, tapping the bridge with her foot and then tapping the castle made out of honey. "It can only be found here, so you may say it's rare, but as you can see there's a lot of it. Don't try to eat it for two reasons: One, it's against the law because you can't find it anywhere else and the gingerbread here want to save some. Two, it may break your teeth. So if you want honey, just don't get har—"

Just then, Fairy turned her head as a tall gingerbread woman with peppermint eyes, licorice hair, a dress made out of blue Laffy Taffy, and a colorful candy necklace walked out of the Palace of Honey's door. When she saw Fairy, she squealed, "Henry! So glad to see you!"

Fairy shushed her. But it was too late. Elana had heard Fairy's name.

"Is your name . . . Henry?" Elana inquired.

Fairy glared at the gingerbread woman, then sighed. "Okay, okay. My name is Henerita—except I don't like it, so I've changed my name to Henry. But everyone just laughs."

Elana felt sorry for Fairy. But instead of saying, "I'm sorry about that," she asked, "Can I call you Henry?"

"Yes," Henry replied. Elana turned to the gingerbread woman and asked,

"And what's your name?"

"Kāleka," answered the gingerbread woman. "It means 'chocolate' in Hawaiian." Then she added, "By the way, you should see the Palace of Honey. It's magnificent!"

Hearing this, Elana bounded up to the giant palace door and rapped on it three times, excited.

"Don't disturb the workers!" Kāleka urged. "You don't want to make them mess up the piggy banks."

"Piggy banks? What do you mean?" Elana asked.

"They're making piggy banks out of honey," Kāleka explained. "They make a different item every day, and today is piggy banks. At night, they sell them to stores so people can buy them."

Elena was anxious to get inside. She couldn't wait to see honey being transformed into piggy banks. "Can we please go inside?" Elena pleaded.

"Certainly," Kāleka replied. She grabbed a giant ring from her pocket and inserted a large, golden key into the big lock on the doors of the Palace of Honey.

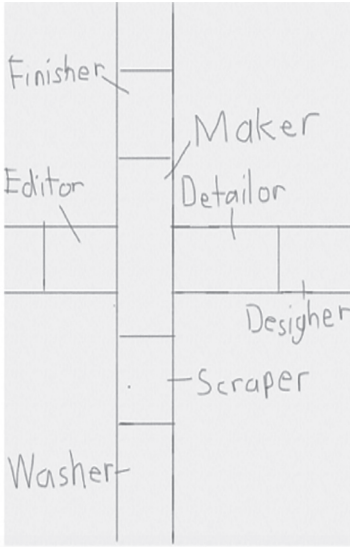
Elana stood still, in complete awe, when she saw the room. The air was cool and crisp and smelled of the delicious, melting honey coming from all over the palace.

V: Helping Hands of Honey

"You can look around," Henry commented in an encouraging voice. Elana smiled to herself. She *loved* exploring

new places.

Elana slowly stepped through the open doorway. There was a table extending from the top of the room all the way to the bottom. A second, shorter table ran under it in the opposite direction, making a crisscross shape. Name tags lined the tables, one for each gingerbread worker. Each gingerbread worker fit the description on his or her name tag.



*Design sketch of the Hall of Honey,
by Dr. Fudge*

She walked around the room slowly, reading each name tag. While she was doing it, the gingerbread workers shuffled away to take a lunch break, unnoticed by Elana. These were the name tags she saw:

- Taffy Crustulum, Whiz Washer
- Mel Libum, Swift Scraper
- Sugar Sweet, Done Detailer
- Kāleka Cake, Do-it Designer

- Chocolat Treat, Magnificent Maker
- Coco Scelerisque, Fast Finisher
- Vanille Glaçage, Epic Editor

Elana thought some of the names were unusual, but they were all fantastic. When she got back, she asked Henry where everybody was. Henry replied, “Oh, they’re just having their lunch: mini cakes with loads of whipped cream, gumballs, and some gummies.”

Elana was jealous of all the treats the gingerbread got to have. But Henry explained, “The things that are healthy for you are unhealthy for the gingerbread, and things that are unhealthy for you are healthy to the gingerbread.” Elana thought this made no sense at all, because then the gingerbread could eat themselves, but she made her best understanding face.

“When will they come back?”

Elana inquired.

“The gingerbread?” Henry asked. “Oh, they’ll return any moment now. Kāleka is with them.” Elana wondered why Henry had brought her to the Palace of Honey, or even Sugar Top. All this stuff wasn’t even closely related to Casey Flumpton.

Suddenly, six gingerbread workers crowded the room. The gingerbread were all bigger than Elana; they were as tall as Kāleka. About 30 seconds later, everyone was in their seats, doing their work like it was a thing they could do all night.

Suddenly, one of the gingerbread jumped up from his seat. It was Sugar Sweet, the Done Detailer.

“Chocolat Treat is gone,” Sugar wailed. A murmur went through the gingerbread workers.

“Chocolat Treat does all of our molding, the final step to complete any of our store items. Without her, it would take a long time before the gingerbread could sell their items again,” Henry explained.

“I’m right here,” said a voice. Everyone turned around. A gingerbread was moping in the corner.

“What’s the matter?” Elana asked.

“N-n-n-nothing,” the gingerbread replied. Then she added, “I was looking at my phone while I was walking through the door, and then I heard some terrible news—my nephew died. Then I tripped and fell.”

Everyone gasped in horror. Elana thought she heard one of the gingerbread mutter, “Then there is a problem.”

“I’m not finished yet,” the gingerbread continued. “I have to go to his funeral in Tocana, a neighboring town, but there’s a very strong storm in between. I’ll be gone a long time because I have to travel all the way around the world and back!”

“Wait a sec,” Elana paused, trying to calm down the gingerbread. “Can’t you just fly around it?”

“No!” The gingerbread replied in an *isn’t-that-so-obvious?* tone of voice. “It’s way too dark over there. There was a plane that crashed into a hail storm, AND MY NEPHEW WAS ON THAT PLANE!” Elana and Henry exchanged worried glances.

“We’re losing Chocolat! We’re doomed!” Sugar whispered to Kāleka.

“Almost doomed,” Kāleka whispered back.

“Now I have to take 161 days off. Have to go book tickets. Bye!” Chocolat shouted as she left the room. Every

gingerbread looked shocked. Elana knew that they couldn’t wait 161 days to see Chocolat again!

“I’ll help,” Elana volunteered quickly. Well, perhaps a bit too quickly, because everyone looked at her with their mouths wide open, like they didn’t believe her.

“I’ll help!” Elana repeated. “Really, I’ll help the best I can. I’ll start my job now!” Vanille Glaçage, the Epic Editor, cocked her head.

“She’s my friend!” Kāleka said, defending Elana. “I met her right before lunch!”

“So you’re believing in someone that you just met!” Vanille mocked annoyingly, then tossed her red licorice hair behind her.

“She’s friends with Henry!” Kāleka protested, as she raised her voice. Vanille paused. She suddenly realized that Elana must be the Chosen One.

“Uh . . .” Vanille paused as she grabbed Elana’s hands. She searched for words as they swarmed through her head, but they kept leaving her like divers swimming away from a humongous group of jellyfish. Finally, she said, “Here’s your seat.” She led Elana to the Maker chair. A pile of papers were stacked high on the desk’s paper holder, and nearby was a bunch of honey that looked like slabs of clay.

“Do what these papers tell you to do with the clay, then give it to the gingerbread on your right,” Vanille instructed. “You’re allowed to talk while you work.” Elana thought that Vanille’s comment was odd, but she didn’t say so.

“Should I start?” Elana questioned. “Yes!” Vanille replied eagerly.

Elana sat down at her seat. As soon as she did, all the gingerbread workers sat down and immediately began to start their work. Elana was having trouble keeping up at first, but then began to get the hang of it. Soon, she began to talk to the gingerbread.

"Hi, I'm Elana," Elana introduced herself to the gingerbread on the left. "What's your name?"

"Scelerisque. Coco Scelerisque," the gingerbread replied. "How are you?"

"Great. You?" Elana replied.

"Not so well," Coco admitted sheepishly. "I was going to dye my hair back to red, but then I accidentally grabbed purple and used up all my purple, so then I had to rinse out my hair and wasted a lot of water. Then I dyed my hair red, and then I got my floor dirty because I was in such a rush. I had to clean it up and was late to work."

"Why bother to dye your hair when it's so much trouble?" Elana inquired.

"I'm rehearsing for a play tonight, and my character has red hair, so I'll have to dye my hair red," Coco explained. Suddenly, a bell rang.

"What's that?" Elana questioned Coco.

"The 'go home' bell," Coco replied. Elana got up from her chair.

"Wait until they call your job. Then you can go," Coco guided her.

"Got it," Elana replied.

"Finisher," a loudspeaker boomed. Kāleka got up.

"Maker," the voice boomed again.

"Bye!" Elana hollered as she got up from her seat. Vanille put her finger to

her lips. But Elana was already heading toward Henry.

"Henry," Elana whispered.

"Yes," Henry replied.

"I'm here," Elana whispered.

"I know," Henry whispered back.

She motioned Elana to follow her. They walked out the doors and over the moat, and then started walking around the town of Sugar Top. After a few minutes of walking in silence, Elana finally asked, "Why are we here?"

"The gingerbread here are good creatures," Henry replied, looking at a gingerbread woman. "I need to recruit them so we can form an army to attack Casey."

"Where are we going to sleep tonight?" Elana questioned.

"At the hotel I'm leading you to," Henry responded.

"Wait!" Elana yelled. "A bakery!" She paused at a storefront and peered in, spotting all kinds of delicious food. "We can have dinner here! There's breaded chicken!"

"What about something else?" Henry hinted, since she was more in the mood for soup.

"Please," Elana pleaded. Henry sighed.

"Okay, okay," she sighed, "I give in. Let's eat. After all, we may not find anything else."

"Whoohoo!" Elana cheered. "Breaded chicken is my favorite!"



Elana and Henry walked into the shop and saw loaves of bread and breaded chicken. Delicious smells floated through the bakery. A sassy-looking

gingerbread woman was wearing jeans and a blue shirt that barely fit her oversized body. She was standing with her hands folded over a box of mouth-watering cookies, tapping her foot impatiently.

"What do you want?" the woman snapped.

"What's your name?" Elana asked, ignoring the woman's question.

"Galleta, missy. Now tell me what you want," the gingerbread woman screeched.

"Breaded chicken, please," Elana answered politely.

"Now who's your friend right next to you?" Galleta scowled. "And what does she want?"

"You don't have to ask me," Elana pointed out. "After all, she *can* talk for herself."

"So what?" Galleta snorted. "There's no difference who answers. It's not the end of the world. She doesn't have to talk for herself. If she talks too much, she'll be hoarser than a horse!"

"'Horser' isn't a word," Elana argued, not recognizing the word. "And I think you should apologize right now." She paused, but when no apology came, Elana continued, "And she can talk as much as anyone! Besides, can't you tell I'm a furow, not another gingerbread? So don't make me too mad, or I'll eat you." Henry smiled gratefully at Elana.

"Ha," Galleta said carelessly, "I don't ca—"

"Breaded chicken please," Henry interrupted.

"Okay, fine," Galleta sighed as she wrapped up two packs of bread-

ed chicken. Elana went out the door, without saying goodbye, while Henry paid for the food. When Henry got out of the bakery, they both knew what the other was thinking: *She sure is a sassy one.*

"Where's the hotel?" Elana asked.

"Just down the corner," Henry replied cheerfully. When Henry stopped, Elana couldn't believe her eyes. The hotel was made out of gingerbread, and peppermint lined the windows and doors. There were frosting signs and a beautiful soft glow in almost every window. Gingerbread gathered on their porches, watching the sun sink on the horizon.

"It's known as the best hotel in town," Henry commented. Elana thought the inside was even better. There was peppermint almost everywhere, and a chandelier made out of licorice and light-up gummies. To Elana's right was a staircase made of hard honey. Elana waited as Henry checked in. When she was finished, they went up the staircase to see a hall with a beautiful carpet made of fresh, unchewed gum.

When Henry opened the door with a chocolate card, Elana zoomed right in and went to the closest bed she could find. She didn't notice anything else. She was so tired.

VI: The Background Theater

When Elana woke up, sunlight blasted through her window. Elana yawned. She wondered what adventures today

would bring her. She looked around the room. Her blanket was made out of a sugar-coated pancake, the pillows were made out of gummies, and the bed was made out of an enormous pile of chocolate chips. Elana's eyes wandered around the room and landed on a TV made out of milk chocolate. Right next to her bed was a desk made out of gum and a lamp made out of honey. Elana spotted a shelf made out of rich, dark chocolate. Henry had put a sleeping bag on it that wasn't from Sugar Top and was sleeping inside it.

"Henry," Elana whispered so quietly that she could barely hear her own voice. Henry jumped up with a start. She yawned. Elana was confused. How had she woken Henry up?

As if Henry could read her mind, she explained, "I have very sensitive ears, so I can hear almost anything nearby. Oh, I can also read the minds of people I trust, but only if they're nearby." Elana was impressed by all the unusual things Henry could do.

"Can you do any more unique stuff?" Elana inquired.

"I can turn invisible, I can do force fields—and I can fly, of course, since I'm a fairy. I can also fly with someone else holding my hand," Henry explained, trying to sound modest. Elana gasped at what Henry was saying. She could do so much!

"Oh, it's nothing compared to Casey," Henry shrugged. "She's known for making fabulous inventions. Her songs are really popular too. No one can compare to *her*."

"Yeah, 'cause she's so nasty," Elana said with a scowl. "I mean, who does she think she is to steal all the light? I

mean, everyone should see the beauty of light in Neptune."

"You shouldn't gossip," Henry corrected. "She can read all minds up to one mile away. You never know where she is and what she's going to do if she hears you. Also, it's bad grammar to say 'I mean' in a sentence twice. Once is enough."

Elana took the warning seriously. She wasn't going to risk her life for a bunch of gossip. Henry nodded. She knew exactly what Elana was thinking.

"Wherearewegointday?" Elana questioned, brushing her teeth.

"Well, I asked Kāleka to tell the others we're going somewhere else today, and she agreed. We're going to collect some of our army at the Background Theater."

Henry paused, then added, "I also decided on a secret code. 'Casey' is 'CeeCee,' 'army' is 'microphone,' and 'attack' is 'sing.' So that way, if we need to say, 'We need to attack Casey with our army,' we would say, 'We need to sing CeeCee on our microphone.'"

"Goohidea," Elana said. Then she started rinsing and spitting out toothpaste and water.

"Thanks," Henry replied.

"Are we going to go collect the army today?" Elana questioned.

"Yeah," Henry replied. "We're going to the Background Theater."

"Hey, don't look!" Elana warned as she threw off her pajamas and hastily grabbed a T-shirt and a pair of pants she had packed the night before. She hurriedly put them on as Henry turned away, flying toward the door.

"Wait for me!" Elana shouted.

Henry paused.

"Thanks," Elana added.

"That's okay," Henry responded. "I'm used to it." Then, staring out the window of the big chocolate door, she asked, "Shall we go?"

"Yup!" Elana replied. She couldn't wait to see what adventures were in store for them today.

Elana thought that the view was even better in the day than the night. The sky was bright blue, and gingerbread roamed the streets. The warm air felt fresh on her skin, and the breeze ruffled her long, red hair. Occasionally, a hawk flew by in search of food.

Elana followed Henry in search of the Background Theater. Finally, Henry stopped at a corner store. Well, it wasn't really a corner store; it was just a wrecked gingerbread building with a faint frosting sign that read CORNER STORE. Henry walked in. Elana followed. The room was, well . . . interesting. It was lit with light-up gummies. A stream of hot chocolate flowed through the floor of the room. Elana couldn't stop herself from drooling.

Henry waved her wand in front of Elana's face to snap her out of her trance. It worked. Henry waved her hand toward a door that was marked EMPLOYEES ONLY. Elana made a *we're-not-supposed-to-go-through-that* kind of look. Henry just shrugged. Elana made the same face again, except this time she cocked her head to the left for emphasis.

"It's okay," Henry assured. "Honestly, I know what I'm doing."

Elana sighed. She had no idea what to expect. Reluctantly, she dragged herself to the door. Henry

tried to open it, but she was too small. Elana pushed and forced the door open with a mighty heave . . . and fell down a flight of stairs on the other side. She and Henry screamed, but for different reasons. Elana screamed out of surprise, while Henry screamed because Elana had made a gigantic hole in the door.

Elana hit her mouth on the ground below, but she quickly recovered because it was gingerbread, which is not as hard as concrete. As a bonus, she got to taste a tiny bit of it. Henry, however, was still in shock. Elana got back up and dusted off her pants, then rubbed her sore left leg. Henry, meanwhile, was thinking of a punishment for Elana—like green bubblegum that would taste like unripe green tomatoes.

"Where are we going next?" Elana inquired.

Henry forgot about the punishment and quickly replied, "Follow me. I'll show you." Elana followed Henry through a dark hallway, and a sudden chill fell over her. She shivered. The hallway was very long and very dark. Paintings hung on the walls. They seemed to watch every move she made in the creepy hallway. The hallway made Elana feel uncomfortable. She felt that something bad was going to happen.

... to be continued in the May 2020 issue of Stone Soup.



Web Dweller, *Canon PowerShot G7X*



**by Anya Geist, 13
Worcester, MA**

Three Poems

by Isabel Goodey, 11
Livingston, NJ



Bored

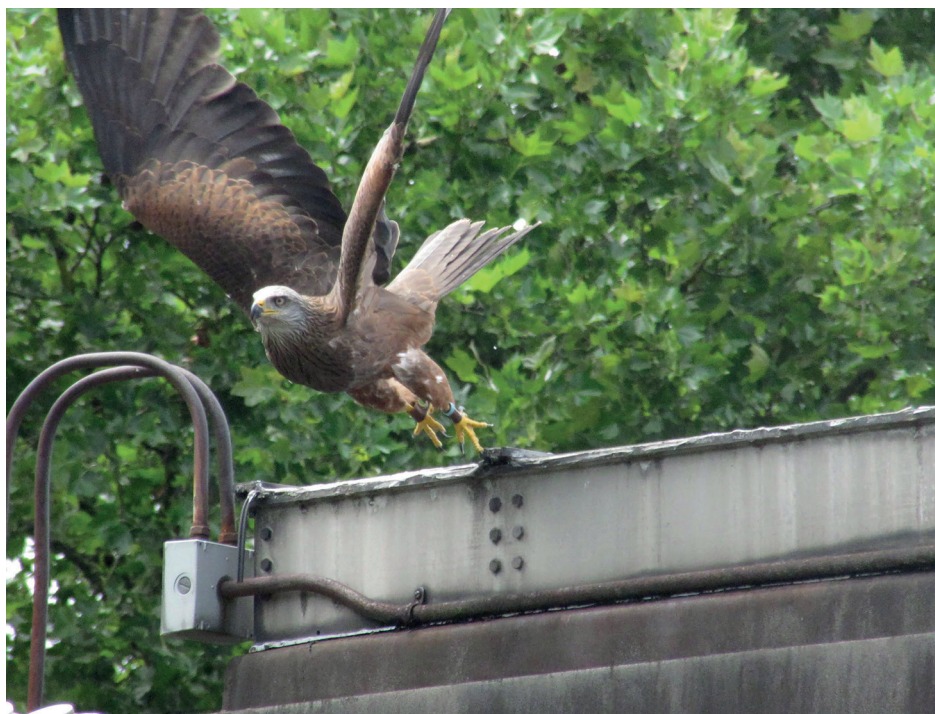
I am bored,
I am bored.
Like a boat
That is moored
In a dreary bay
On the sea,
Rocking gently.
Under the stars, who twinkle merrily.
And the gulls, who squawk terribly.

Coleslaw

The law, the law.
Sometimes I hate the law.
Paying taxes for things like axes?
The law, the law.
Sometimes I love the law.
Especially when you add “coles” in front.
Coleslaw.

Birds

They tweet,
They trill,
And always seem very thrilled.
They soar,
They glide,
And climb the clouds.
Until they come
Right back to me,
Into the birdhouses,
Where they know they're free.



Uplift, *Canon PowerShot SX600*



by Sage Millen, 10
Vancouver, BC

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

Srija Biswas, 11
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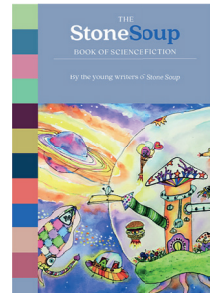
Art

Grace Williams, 12

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