

"I've thought of someone, and I'm very certain  
That SHE will not want to be part of the show.  
She will be happy to sit down. I know." (25)

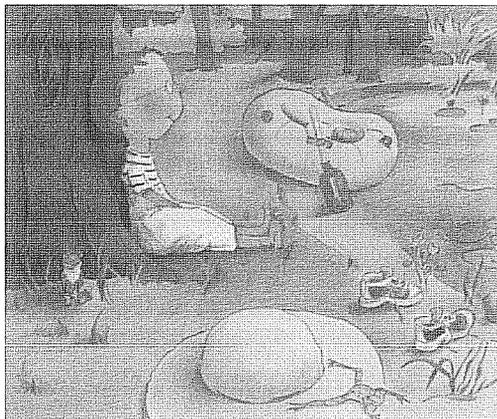
Phoebe Gilman's playful gouache and pencil illustrations provide a colourful, swirling accompaniment to the text's bouncy rhyming couplets in *The Secret Surprise*. An established artist before she became a writer, Gilman's whimsical drawings are replete with expressive faces, snippets from other Gilman stories, and delicate surprises. It's fun to follow the mischievous antics of Jillian's omnipresent kitten — a would-be four-footed thespian. Readers wishing to emulate Jillian's *Secret Surprise* will also discover therein Gilman's engaging original playlet *The Chicken Princess* (complete with text and author's permission for homegrown productions), as well a myriad of creative staging suggestions found at Phoebe's enclosed website address.

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*I Went to the Bay*. Ruth Miller. Illus. Martine Gourbault. Kids Can, 1998. 22 pp. \$12.95. ISBN 1-55074-498-4.

*I Went to the Bay* is a quiet little book of soft pencil colour drawings and simple verse. It tells the story of a bookish-looking boy who goes out on a bay in his dinghy in search of frogs. Frogs escape his notice (though they are everywhere in Gourbault's illustrations) but he does see a number of other creatures, including a blue heron,



loon, snake, and dragonfly. The verse is predominantly iambic ("I sat by the water under a tree. / I stayed as quiet as I could be") rather than the percussive or galloping verse we tend to associate with short children's poems, but it includes plenty of anapests, and thus achieves a lightness that is matched by the illustrations. The strength of this book lies in its gentleness: the boy's moon-shaped face, with its thick glasses and humble smile, suggests a sweet temper and quiet curiosity; the absence of straight lines; the graininess of crayon atop roughly-textured paper and the muted colours (which make it seem as though we are looking at this boy through gauze or a screen door); and the penchant for vertical lines (reeds, trees) that shoot up into the drawing to quickly bend, curl, and tip give the illustrations a curious vitality: the pictures seem to almost jiggle (the way Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman* does). Goubault's use of frames in almost every spread accentuates the gentle calm of the story by keeping activity tidy and controlled. She does have creatures moving out of her frames, but the energy created thereby is playful rather than disturbing. This is an intelligently-designed book whose contemplative tone makes it suitable bedtime reading.

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