

Maggie's kiss that breaks this "potent spell" is the earliest example we have of Crawford's recurrent theme of the power of love to conquer darkness (the manuscript is signed "I V C/18/North Douro") and in the structure of the story itself is the necessary event that precedes this stunning description of the lily as a kind of sacred lotus:

In a second, a great and wonderful light shone round them, and a burst of harmony made the very air tremble. The petals of the lily slowly opened, and a creature no larger than a moth, but of the most exquisite beauty, unfolded her large, rose-colored wings and rose from a golden couch in the centre of the flower.

Some readers may find the stories rather too delicate and too little supplied with robust sex and violence: evil forces – the waterbeetle who abducts the fairy and the shark who wants to gobble up Wava – never seem a serious threat and are speedily defeated. The \$9.95 price tag may well deter buyers. Nevertheless the *Fairy Tales of Isabella Valancy Crawford* cannot fail to engage serious attention as the contribution of the young Crawford to the genre of the art fairy tale, a genre but rarely cultivated in nineteenth century Canada.

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Fantasy, An Extension of Reality

JO CHURCHER

The House Mouse, Dorothy Joan Harris. Illus. by Barbara Cooney. New York: Frederick Warne & Co., 1973. 48pp. \$3.95 hard cover.

The School Mouse, Dorothy Joan Harris. Illus. by Chris Conover. New York: Frederick Warne & Co., 1977. 30pp. \$7.95 hard cover.

These little books are designed for children from four to eight years old. Because they are the first two of a series, it is unfortunate that they appear

in different formats: *The House Mouse*, 5" x 6 3/4" — a convenient size to be held in a small hand, but the more readily lost on library shelves — is presented on glossy paper, while *The School Mouse*, 8 1/4" x 8 3/4", is on thick, grained paper with unnumbered pages. Mrs. Harris's third book, *The School Mouse and the Hamster*, will be on the market before Christmas 1979; its format will be similar to that of *The School Mouse*, and, regrettably, it will give the series yet another illustrator.

The style is charming, the characters are well-drawn and interesting, and the blend of fantasy with family and school life is handled with a practical sensitivity that makes a "willing suspension of disbelief" pleasurable as well as possible.

The House Mouse has a loosely structured plot. It tells of solitary, four-year-old Jonathan, who borrows his big sister's elegant but unused doll's house for the winter to keep his rubber duck in, and finds it unexpectedly tenanted every night by a mouse, whose family live their secret lives in the attic where they will not be disturbed by people. Jonathan has afternoon naps and goes to bed early so that he will have more hours to spend in conversation with his mouse. He brings it cookies (which it prefers to cheese) and decorates the doll's house at Christmas with a tree and cookies tied up with gold ribbon (which the mouse fails to appreciate). In the spring, as Jonathan is attracted to football and the world out-of-doors, the mouse leaves the doll's house for its summer home in the fields.

In *The House Mouse* the fantasy world of the mouse's nightly visits to the doll's house is the hidden part of Jonathan's life, just as the attic with its dust and cobwebs exists within the real house where Jonathan's mother cleans and dusts and polishes. The worlds complement each other, with their correspondences as well as their differences. For a season, at least, Jonathan and the mouse both choose to be solitary from their kind, as well as individualistic beings:

"Why, Elizabeth!" said Mother, "you've been playing with your doll's house."

"No," said Elizabeth, looking surprised.

"Well, someone was playing with it," said Mother.

"I was," said Jonathan, who was only four. "I was pretending my little rubber duck lived there."

"Ducks don't live in doll's houses," said Elizabeth.

"Mine does," said Jonathan.

"And boys don't play with doll's houses," said Elizabeth.

"I do," said Jonathan. (*The House Mouse*, pp. 8-9.)

The child is declaring his individuality as firmly as the mouse asserts his preference for cookies instead of the usual, expected mouse fare. Jonathan and the mouse are astonished to learn that they share similiar family problems — that small mice, as well as small children, are often scolded by their mothers.

The differences between them give the advantage of superiority to Jonathan — that advantage which is always so precious, yet is always denied, to the youngest member of a family. In this case, the mouse has appalling manners, and Jonathan can tell it severely that it should wash its feet because it is leaving footprints.

As spring approaches, Jonathan's night life, which through the winter has been more real and exciting than his daily existence, is superseded by his new outdoor activities. Mrs. Harris handles the shadowy withdrawal of the fantasy world with skill, as Jonathan, tired out at the end of the day and too hungry to leave any of his cookies, first sleeps through the mouse's nightly visit, then, only half awake, is not sure whether there is someone in the doll's house or not, and finally discovers that the mouse has really gone away to the fields.

The School Mouse has a more tightly constructed plot. Jonathan is now six and is in his first year of school. From being solitary — a condition chosen for oneself — he has become lonely — a state thrust upon one by forces outside one's control. Jonathan has so many anxieties about school that he dreads each new day. His only comfort is his new jeep, which lives in a shoe-box garage in his bedroom. Then his mouse returns and discovers the joy of riding in the wound-up jeep. It is in an attempt to satisfy its craving for longer, faster, more exciting rides that Jonathan solves his own dilemma and makes a new friend at school.

The School Mouse displays a development of character beyond that of the earlier book. In *The House Mouse* Jonathan is largely passive, and the change which takes place is predictable and chiefly due to the evolving seasons; in *The School Mouse*, Jonathan must make decisions, and he takes definite steps to bring about change in his own and the mouse's situation. He is learning to control the forces outside himself which are causing his loneliness and anxiety. It is through fantasy, the extension of the real world, that he gains a new self-confidence and contentment.

It will be interesting to see what developments Mrs. Harris's new book has in store for us, and we can look forward with pleasant anticipation to *The School Mouse and the Hamster* this fall.

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