

Uneven Quality in Picture Books

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The Girl Who Could See Around Corners, A.P. Campbell. Illus. Nell Sonneman. Borealis Press, 1978. 30 pp. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-919594-84-0.

A True Story: Albert the Talking Rooster, A.P. Campbell. Illus. Andrea Campbell. Borealis Press, 1974. Unpaged. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-919594-174.

The Story of Farmer Means, Ellen McIntosh. Black Moss Press, 1978. Unpaged. \$3.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-050-8.

Canadian publishing for children has increased in volume, especially within the last decade. Quality, however, seems rather uneven. Three little books examined recently show this uneasy style.

In *The Girl Who Could See Around Corners*, A.P. Campbell derives his theme from the innate curiosity of most children. Lucy Anne, a good little girl, obsessed with the desire to know what is happening everywhere, especially at night, meets a mysterious little man, who transforms her world by enabling her to see around corners. The conversations she hears and the sights she sees engross her completely, and bring sheer delight as she peers through and beyond all barriers.

Of course, there are inconveniences. It is impossible to see straight ahead, and Lucy Anne begins to fall over things. Medical advice is not sought for clumsy Lucy Anne, but rather, her father finds a place for her with the circus. Though an amusing idea for a story, it is not very well developed.

Didactic and overlong, the story falls into several inconsistencies. For instance, Lucy Anne is a young child who keeps her secret well, yet her father knows enough of her unusual gift to realize that it should not be wasted. Lucy's gift allows her to arrange affairs for her family, but her inability to see straight ahead forces her to reject temporarily the suitor of her choice.

The unattractive illustrations, in unsuitable colours, add little to the descriptions in the text.

For *Albert The Talking Rooster*, a second book by A.P. Campbell, eight-year-old Andrea Campbell created the illustrations. For this reason the

book may have visual appeal for children although the red on pink colour combination strikes an adult as a strange choice of colours.

Albert the talking rooster has a habit of warning the family against threatening disasters or giving constant reminders of duties neglected. This brings him into disfavour with the entire family. All become spiteful over Albert's meddling, promptly forgetting how frequently he has been helpful, and decide he should be used for food as had been intended originally. The story lacks vitality, but the ending is a pleasant surprise. Too many details, including references to matters such as insurance, money orders and the stock market (which are almost certain to confuse children) combine in a long story with little action.

Another story which is also rather long drawn-out is *The Story of Farmer Means* by Ellen McIntosh. This is an otherwise well-written tale of magic, of a quest, and of faith in growing things.

Farmer Means discovers a gourd tree in his backyard, decides to share the fruit with his friends, and goes off to market with a huge cart filled high with his exceptionally fine produce. Each successive crop is better and more unusual, and Farmer Means flourishes. Misfortune replaces success when these special gourds trick their owners and run away. The mayor and the people drag Farmer Means off to jail. But before long the gourds rescue him and send him on an enchanted journey through expanses of rare and magnificent growing things of the widest variety. On the successful completing of his test, Farmer Means finds himself at home in his own field but there is no longer a gourd tree in his backyard.

Young readers may find the ending unsatisfactory and some of the detail superfluous. The story is pleasing, however, and the simple clear illustrations do complement equally well the happy and frightening episodes in the text. The physical format is good, with sturdy paper and bold clear print.

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