

and crazy details. Through quieter tones, the artist captures some of the open beauty of New Brunswick, a lingering part of Rosette's world.

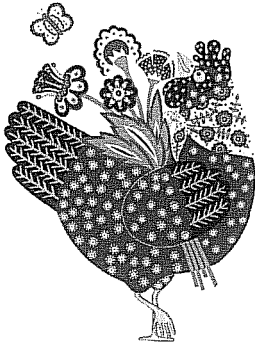
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EXQUISITE EGGS

Nina's treasures. Stefan Czernecki and Timothy Rhodes. Illus. Stefan Czernecki. Sterling/Hyperion, 1990. 56 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920534-65-1.

NINA'S TREASURES

Story by Stefan Czernecki and Timothy Rhodes



Illustrations by Stefan Czernecki

An appealing tale inspired by the Ukrainian folk art of *pisanka* or egg painting, *Nina's treasures* derives much of its emotional depth from the profound connection between food, self-sacrifice and love. Katerina, "a little grandmother," lives in a cottage surrounded by her beloved flowers. The poppies are especially important for she uses their seeds "to decorate her festive breads and cakes."

More a surrogate child than a farm animal, Katerina's hen, Nina of the insatiable appetite, regularly lays eggs. Like a child who raids the cupboard, Nina hurries into the garden every morning before Katerina awakes "to eat her fill of the precious black seeds."

Like the loving mother figure she is, Katerina forgives despite the inconvenience. Katerina is also known in the village for her cakes and braided breads which she sells or gives to her poor neighbours who endure poverty and a superabundance of children.

A particularly severe winter strikes. Katerina "had little food for herself and none for Nina" who stops laying eggs during this season of deprivation. To keep the chicken alive, Katerina sacrifices her flower seeds. When spring finally arrives, there are no seeds to plant in the garden, no money, no flour, and no food.

One of the attractive features of Czernecki's and Rhodes' story is the convincingly portrayed bond between the two main characters. Nina wonders what she can do to help. Here, the authors ask us to forgive a lapse in narrative control. When "it was time to celebrate the Spring Festival" to which Katerina cannot go "for she had nothing to take," Nina miraculously begins to lay eggs once again.

The shift from sterility and hardship to fecundity and plenty is abrupt, re-

lying upon the appearance of sudden magic. But this is a minor flaw in an otherwise nicely-paced story.

The eggs in Nina's nest look "like a miniature flower garden laid out in the most gorgeous patterns of colors and borders." They are the first "pisanka" eggs which Katerina gathers and takes to the Spring Festival where their beauty amazes everyone. She trades them for the supplies she needs and Nina is rewarded with "a sack of cornmeal." Once introduced into the village culture, the eggs become part of the spring and Easter rites of renewal and resurrection, painted by grandmothers.

This solid tale works well with Czernecki's colourful, detailed illustrations. The intricate, finely drawn pictures of Katerina, her flowers, Nina and the cupboard are based upon the patterns and motifs of egg painting itself. Given Nina's diet of flower seeds, it's not surprising to see a brilliant array of floral patterns on her eggs. Czernecki's illustrations for *Nina's treasures* are a delight to the eye, endowed as they are with warm and happy feelings.

Kenneth Radu, a co-editor of *Matrix magazine*, is also a teacher and writer whose collection of poetry, *Treading water*, will be published by Oberon in the spring of 1992.

A CHRISTIAN'S CAPTIVITY

A boy's war. David Michell. Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1988. 175 pp., \$8.50 paper. ISBN 9971-972-71-9.

A boy's war tells of Michell's childhood experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese in Weihsien Concentration Camp near Tsingtao, Shantung province, North China during World War II. He recounts his adventures with the reminiscent tone of an adult, but also through the eyes of his childhood self. This latter perspective presents a different side of captivity, one which includes an awareness of humour that adults might fail to notice.

The cover blurb is rather misleading. It says *A boy's war* "is an account more about children and their adventures than the atrocities of a deathcamp." Yes, it does describe the children's escapades, but the description of Weihsien as a deathcamp seems to be an exaggeration; it is clearly an internment camp. The occupants do not live in great fear of execution. The hardship of having little food and clothing, few amenities, and no freedom cannot be understated. The internees are, however, able to smuggle food into the camp with the help of villagers. Reprisals for disobedience often take the form of a harangue by the Japanese camp commander. Even when punishment is more severe, it sometimes has a comical side. For example, a missionary priest sits by the wall and has eggs handed through to him which he hides under his long robe. Ironically,