

offer sympathy, kinship, and an extra pair of hands to mollify the offending locks. "I know all about hair," the totally bald man reassures his incredulous granddaughter. "I used to have hair. It was long and curly, just like yours." He produces an old photograph of himself as a young man, sporting a shaggy mane to rival Toby's own crowning glory. Clearly she comes by it honestly. Hirsute or hairless, the young girl and the older man concur: "I love you any way at all." Together, they concoct an orderly headful of auburn plaits, much admired by all at the picnic. After the party, Toby and her mother free her hair from its silken fetters. They stroll happily under the darkening sky, only to find starlight caught amongst those legendary curls.

*Little Toby and the Big Hair* is a feast for the eyes and the ears. Kim Fernandes's beautiful "fimo clay" illustrations are the perfect complement to her mother's witty and well-measured text. Eugenie's prose combines lifelike dialogue with a poetic flair for colourful imagery and musical cadence. There is an enticing rhythm in the rise and fall of each paragraph, which invites reading aloud. Kim's luminous three-dimensional "drawings" vibrate life, with their beautifully proportioned figures, vivid colours, and intricate detail. Each page rewards the reader with an abundance of pattern and texture. The versatility of this medium is amazing: flesh, wood-grain, lacy curtains, flora and fauna, and of course Toby's ravishing red ringlets, are all elegantly rendered. Further exploration produces charming minutiae: a twist of apple peel, a smudgy barbershop window, silver barber's shears, cracks in a sidewalk, a tiny snail. Quirky typescript with a whimsical squiggly rendition of "hair" embellishes each gorgeous two-page tableau.

If the delightful dust-jacket photos of Kim and Eugenie Fernandes are a clue, we can surmise that art in *Little Toby* certainly imitates life. Mother and daughter together have created a play-filled book with a gentle message of unconditional love, for readers of all ages. *Little Toby and the Big Hair* is clearly a labour of love.

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### Hazardous Occupations

*Catching Fire: The Story of Firefighting*. Gena K. Gorrell. Tundra, 1999. 160 pp. \$18.99 paper. ISBN 0-88776-430-4. *Mining*. Jane Drake with Ann Love. Illus. Pat Cupples. Kids Can, 1997. 32 pp. \$14.99 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-337-6.

Gena Gorrell's *Catching Fire* is likely to become a well-thumbed volume to which

the reader returns repeatedly. It is superbly organized, ranging from the earliest human relationship with fire to the most up-to-date firefighting techniques and equipment. Boxed sections encapsulate answers to questions such as “What happens if you breathe smoke?” Every few pages offer startling nuggets of information — for example, that early fire hoses were made from ox intestines. Thoroughly and meticulously researched, the book provides a compendium of information about fire itself and the role of firefighters.

Gorrell reflects that she can imagine “(if I were a little younger and had much better eyesight) being a police officer” or a paramedic: “But I don’t understand how anyone can be a firefighter, and stand face to face with the age-old threat of fire — not just once in a while ... but as an ordinary day’s work.” The directness of this statement sets the tone for the book as a whole — cleanly written and endlessly informative.

The material here is so rich that it seems a pity that, well designed though it is, this edition is limited to black-and-white. I can envision a coffeetable-style book that would engross adult readers as completely as the age ten and up for which this edition of *Catching Fire* is designated.

The publishers describe Jane Drake’s *Mining* as filling “an educational need for information about one of Canada’s vital resources.” The text echoes the blandness of mining industry PR material. “In years past,” we are told, “only strong men had jobs in mines. Women were not allowed. Now machines do most of the work, operated by women, men and computers. For safety, miners work in groups ...” In this never-never land, not only is mining completely safe, but also a paragon of gender-parity.

Pat Cupples’s illustrations are the strongest feature of the book, especially the diagrammatic cross-sections beloved of technically-minded child-readers. Yet Cupples’s illustrations share the text’s relentless blandness; smiling children and parents visit beaming geologists and engineers. Miners blast and excavate wreathed in smiles. Even the picture of passengers on a cross-Canada flight shows cheery smiles on every face. Readers may be made rightly suspicious of the anodyne the book attempts to administer.

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### Shaking on the Dust

*Dust.* Arthur Slade. HarperCollins, 2001. 168 pp. \$14.00 paper. ISBN 0-00-648593-6.

Since I am a prairie dweller and a reader of fiction for young adults, the title *Dust* immediately made me think of two things (well, three, if you count vacuuming). One was the drought that inflicted the Canadian west in the 1930s. The other was