

## Strength in Community

*The Market Wedding*. Cary Fagan. Illus. Regolo Ricci. Tundra, 2000. 32 pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-492-4. *The Kugel Valley Klezmer Band*. Joan Betty Stuchner. Illus. Richard Row. North Winds, 1998. \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-590-03833-8.

Though Cary Fagan's story is set in the city and Joan Betty Stuchner's in the country, these traditionally opposing settings emphasize the same warmth of community. Both books follow the idea that a dream may come to fruition only when nurtured by the community.

In Fagan's adaptation of Abraham Cahan's short story "A Ghetto Wedding," a young 1920s working-class Toronto couple meet, fall in love, and draw up a mistaken plan for improving their finances. The false show that is necessary for the plan to work has no effect on the genuine, down-to-earth people it is supposed to impress, and the couple learn the lesson that true success comes from being oneself and from recognizing the treasures one already possesses. The young couple have to adjust their dreams and learn to accept help from their community, their essential understanding of the world translating into the realization that "home is where the heart is." The lively rhythm of life resonates between the couple as a unit and the community as the greater public world, and it is captured in the simple, concrete language in which the dialogue is written, which should be both attractive and accessible to Fagan's target audience of seven- to ten-year-olds.

The familiar story of the child with a talent who waits for an opportunity to bring her light out from under a bushel is the subject of Joan Betty Stuchner's tale aimed at five- to eight-year-olds. Shira is a ten-year-old fiddler who knows her fate is to be shut out from her talent due to her gender as well as her age but who does not give up hope and is rewarded by the recognition of a talent that allows her to overcome her obstacles. Her independence and new ways of thinking are linked to place: arguing that she ought to be allowed to play an instrument, she tells her father they are in a young country that allows for possibilities not available in the old world. Though her father does not recognize this fundamental difference with the old ways, she continues to dream and to hold on to her belief that her dream will come true, grasping every opportunity to practice and to learn from older musicians. The crisis that gives her the chance to prove herself follows the familiar plot device of a performer falling ill and allowing the neglected "true" star to be revealed. Food is a running motif through the book, which begins by explaining that even the Kugel Valley's famed cooking is secondary to its music. Stuchner effects a neat balance between old and new in placing these newcomers from the old world not only by bringing together different points of view and cultural attitudes but also by weaving dialect into the language which lets the reader hear the many tones of a nation of many cultures. Stuchner's simple, emphatic sentences work particularly well in capturing the crowded but joyous life of that world.

The rural vs. urban settings of the tales allow the illustrators different kinds of scope and focus, but there is some link in the illumination of the drawings, in which light seems to come from very close to the characters — hinting, perhaps, at the idea of a metaphorical light being within humanness and daily life. In Fagan's tale, Toronto's Kensington Market and the wedding banquet allow Ricci to crowd the page with interesting objects that young readers will find most attractive, given that children particularly enjoy enumerating and identifying a mix of objects. The

faces and general appearances of the characters are deliberately familiar or ordinary, pleasant, warm, and often comic. Pictures of a lively community also fill the pages of Stuchner's book. Row's illustrations emphasize motion as well as emotion on the expressive faces and bodies of the characters. Though there are some attractive illustrations of food, the focus is rather on people.

Each tale draws a moral about belief in self and about dreams being made into reality, but the dreams are practical ones, achieved through practical action rather than magic. The lively writing styles of Fagan and Stuchner combined with the closely related illustrations by Ricci and Row contribute to a pair of books that will appeal both to children and their parents.

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### An Emptiness Unearthed

*The Money Pit Mystery.* Eric Walters. HarperCollins, 1999. 250 pp. \$14.00 paper. ISBN 0-00-648151-5.

Eric Walters's *The Money Pit Mystery* raises critical questions: Will young readers inevitably comprehend and embrace the transparently "intended" reading of a text? What are the conceivable consequences of misreading? While these questions are not easily resolvable as they pertain to children's literature in general, they arise with disturbing implications in *The Money Pit Mystery*, which combines the story of a relationship between a young boy and a much-admired grandfather who has Alzheimer's Disease with the story of an old-fashioned quest for buried treasure.

The eleven-year-old narrator, Sam, arrives with his mother and sister on the island where his grandfather has lived for many years, for the first time since a quarrel between the grandfather and Sam's mother resulted in a three-year separation. Grandpa's yard is in shambles, cats roam through the filthy house, and Grandpa is nowhere to be found. For years, Grandpa had entertained his grandchildren with stories of Captain Kidd's treasure, rumoured to be buried on the island. Grandpa possesses an authentic treasure map and, it turns out, has invested his savings in a costly commercial venture to dig up the treasure. Sam, meanwhile, discovers the real secret of the map and the treasure's whereabouts and recruits his sister and a friend to help find it. But the mildly entertaining boy's adventure story (undermined by plot predictability and the stereotyping of its female characters) becomes a morally muddled morass when Grandpa enters the scene, leading the charge to the real site of the treasure.

Although Grandpa's driver's license has been taken away until he agrees to see a doctor, he defies the law by driving the young treasure-seekers at night in his truck to retrieve the gold, deliberately smashing a police cruiser en route, seriously endangering the officer's life. Although Grandpa's antics provoke a few cautionary notes in the children's shock against his behaviour, at the site itself Grandpa recruits Sam to help prevent a police helicopter from landing. Grandpa is captured