

enough to understand and enjoy Roch Carrier's story may not be attracted to this format. *The hockey sweater* (the original title in French *Une abominable feuille d'érable sur glace* had much more "panache") will be a great favourite with parents who want to tell their children about the times when hockey players asked forgiveness for breaking their sticks. Sweet memories.

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WARS WITH INTERNAL DRAGONS

Lost and found, Jean Little. Illus. Leoung O'Young. Viking Kestrel, Penguin, 1985. 82 pp. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-90835-0; **Different dragons**, Jean Little. Illus. Laura Fernandez. Viking Kestrel, Penguin, 1986. 123 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-80836-9.

"People who live doglessly / Remain a mystery to me," says Jean Little in a self-revealing bit of verse published in *When the pie was opened* (1968). Little's main child (and adult) fans will recognize the confirmation of a motif of several of her books for young readers. The poem continues:

Dogs, several or singular,
Help you discover who you are,
And then dogs, courteous and kind,
Help you to live with what you find.

Lost and found and *Different dragons*, two of Little's most recent children's novels, are aimed at a somewhat younger audience than her usual one. The protagonists are small children whose stories are told with pronounced economy and verbal simplicity. But both are in the Little tradition as demonstrations of their author's abiding faith in the power of a dog to bring out the best in a decent human being, however sad, mad, or momentarily at war with the world.

Lucy Bell of *Lost and found* is sad as her story begins. Having just moved to Riverside (Jean Little's fictitious small-town setting for a number of

books) on the last long week-end before a new school year starts, Lucy feels as alone and disoriented as the little lost dog she finds in the street and takes home with her. The dog answers to “Trouble”, and a poignant trouble he is to poor Lucy, as her parents and later her new acquaintance Nan set out to find his owner, and Lucy has to help them, all the while willing failure with her whole being.

The surface simplicity of this book is deceptive. Strong emotions emanate from short, factual sentences. For example, Lucy’s feeling of estrangement from her kind but firm parents and her resentment of Nan’s detective fervour are clear in and between the lines of passages like this one:

She watched her father and mother smile at Nan. They thought she and Nan were friends already. They were glad she knew someone her own age. Grown-ups often got things like this wrong.

Soon Lucy’s occasionally “very straight” back is eloquent to a sympathetic reader.

Of course, Trouble is ultimately reunited with his master; realism and the requirements of a rounded story demand that. But the ending is satisfying. The needed but unkeepable dog is replaced by a needy one when Lucy has passed her stiff moral test.

In comparison with Lucy, Ben Tucker of *Different dragons* at first seems a cream puff — afraid of spending forty-eight hours alone with an aunt he barely remembers, afraid of thunderstorms, afraid of dogs. In the first chapter he appears a most unpromising hero as he strives for a piteous air to soften his father’s heart about the impending visit to Aunt Rose, a formidable lady who writes books for children but “hates kids,” according to Ben’s older brother. When his father says that “everybody has to fight a dragon sometimes, of one kind or another” and that Ben may slay one or two that weekend, Ben thinks he’s crazy.

But the beginning of the visit is reassuring. Aunt Rose proves to be kindly and outgoing — not at all like a dragon, Ben decides. And her large stone house, the Tuckers’ old family home, is interestingly odd. Lulled by spaghetti, pumpkin pie with whipped cream, and the prospect of a bunk bed with a handy light, Ben is caught off guard by the arrival of his aunt’s surprise for him: a young golden Labrador retriever, Gulliver Gallivant, Gully for short, huge, energetic, and fascinated by Ben, a genuine dragon.

Here Ben’s difficulties begin. So do the book’s, for although Ben doesn’t like Gully, Jean Little likes the dog very much. Little has to stick to Ben’s tremulous, hostile point of view and simultaneously convey the utter loveliness of the Lab. Unhappily, for a time she does better at the second task than she does at the first. Despite all the excuses for Ben neatly planted in the text — his lively imagination, his indoctrination by a dog-fearing teacher, his belief in his brother’s malicious scare stories — the reader

tends to find him considerably less likeable than Gully does. Empathy wanes.

Ben's improvement as a person and rehabilitation as a character start when his terror of a thunderstorm propels him under his bed to find Gully quivering there too. From the moment when the little boy extends a shaky hand to the big dog, the reader's sympathies flow back to him. The process is completed by his exchanges with Hana, the girl from next door, who ridicules his fears but turns out to have dragons of her own with which Ben can help her.

"Reassuring" is a word frequently applied to Jean Little's books. And they are reassuring. Adults, at least the adults with any control over the protagonists, are usually wise, kind, and strong. Handicaps can be lived with, even partially alleviated. Problems are soluble. But life is often emotionally fraught for her child characters all the same. Her youngsters can be realistically angry, frustrated, envious, vengeful, as well as affectionate, hopeful, and capable of great generosity. They experience painful wars with internal dragons. The luckiest ones have potent, patient, uncritical canine allies. As Jean Little portrays dogs, St. George should have had one.

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MINI-REVIEWS

Who hides in the park, Warabé Aska. Illus. author. Tundra Books, 1986. Unpaginated \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-182-8.

Who hides in the park is a beautiful, mysterious book about Vancouver's Stanley Park. The short trilingual text — English, French and Japanese —



tells of the Salish Indian spirits whose secrets live on among the animals and children in the park. The author's full-page paintings convey the same enchanted feeling and are full of hidden creatures, often being transformed into another element of nature.

The variety of scenes and activities is wonderfully caught in this har-