

Dumpling knows he is Gary's dog. The arrangement would never work. Instead, Carl offers Gary the dubious favour of helping to train Dumpling. With gentle sensitivity, Gauthier relates Carl's slow, difficult adjustment to his devastating loss. Judy helps her son to appreciate the love and joy he shared with Mooch, explaining that nothing can take that away from him. She suggests that through the creative process of writing Mooch's story, Carl will enable Mooch to live forever.

In this group of early chapter books, those that are less successful include elements that do not appear to flow naturally from the circumstances established by the author. On the other hand, those narratives in which events evolve smoothly offer engaging and rewarding reading experiences.

All five volumes are enriched by the illustrations that accompany the text. Pierre-André Derome's images of *Mooch Forever* are particularly creative and evocative.

This reviewer was disappointed to find proofing errors in both *Video Rivals* and *Mooch Forever*. Because these volumes have been written and published with young readers in mind, better care should be taken in their preparation.

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Ordinary Magic

Roses for Gita. Rachna Gilmore. Illus. Alice Priestley. Second Story, 1996. Unpag. \$5.95 paper, \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-929005-86-4. *The Harvest Queen.* Joanne Robertson. Illus. Karen Rezuch. Red Deer College P, 1996. 32 pp. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-134-9. *River My Friend.* William Bell. Illus. Ken Campbell. Orca, 1996. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55143-084-3.

Each of these recent picture books offers young readers a hint of something extraordinary. Relationships — between generations and between humans and the natural world — are pivotal in all three stories, and shifts in these relationships mark turning points in the characters' lives. Although supernatural magic is hinted at in one of the books, it is the more ordinary magic of everyday life that proves most potent.

Roses for Gita, a sequel to *Lights for Gita*, involves a young immigrant girl's quest to feel at home in her new country. She misses her grandmother Naniji terribly, and wants to plant a garden just like the one Naniji grows in India. Mr. Flinch, the old man next door, seems at first a fierce enemy until Gita hears him playing the violin in his garden and suddenly understands that his bluster hides a more sensitive nature. Gita's gift of wind chimes seals their friendship, and Mr. Flinch promises to help her plant the First Rose in their new



garden. Although this is a simple story, it highlights the magical way in which a simple gesture can transform a hostile neighbour into a friend. There is also a clear sense of the connections Gita discerns between her beloved Naniji and Mr. Flinch, who both share a deep love of gardens. Flowers form a bridge of understanding between Mr. Flinch and Gita, whose grandmother believes that flowers grow better when they are shared with others.

The Harvest Queen incorporates Celtic fairy magic into a story that highlights the closeness between Brigit and her grandmother. The last pumpkin of autumn has been saved for a special purpose: it is to become the head of Carlin, the Harvest Queen. Together Brigit and Grandma build Carlin from sunflower stalks, corn leaves, and other riches of the harvest. They weave her a necklace of red beets for protection. When Grandma tells Brigit of how the fairies come to dance with Carlin, invisible to all but the one wearing a four-leaf clover, Brigit determines to find the magical leaf. As darkness falls, she sees the fairies dancing with Carlin and is almost caught in their circle. But she pulls Carlin's skirt around her and claims the Queen's beet necklace as protection, and the fairies leave her alone. Brigit's experience may be a dream, but her reactions suggest that it marks a new maturity, and perhaps a new sense of identification with the female power that Carlin so clearly represents. The tacit approval of her grandmother, and a hinted-at connection with her mother (who has a four-leaf-clover pendant) seals the pact of understanding between the generations. Carlin's wild dance with the fairies and its revitalizing effect on the garden suggest fertility and abundance and the positive value of being female.

In *River My Friend*, an extraordinary encounter has negative rather than positive effects. Gang-gang, the son of poor fisherfolk, has taken his life on the river for granted until he overhears his parents worrying about money. One day when he accompanies his mother to the market to sell fish, a wealthy woman stops and buys all of their catch; her servant tosses them a silver coin — far more

than the fish are worth. Gang-gang becomes obsessed with finding silver coins to end his family's poverty. He calls on the river for help, and one moonlit night sees the water covered with thousands of silver coins. (One does wonder how a boy who has spent all his life near the river could be so easily fooled by light glittering on water.) Frantically Gang-gang casts his net and draws it in, only to find it empty. His desperate plunge into the water to scoop up the coins in his hands almost leads to tragedy when he is swept downriver. Only as he recovers does Gang-gang realize he must begin to cast his net for fish, not for elusive silver coins. He is then able to appreciate his true relationship with the river, and to take his place as one of the wage-earners of the family. The story's point that hard work is of greater value than luck is made rather baldly, yet the final solution is satisfying because it comes from Gang-gang himself.

All three illustrators bring a realistic style to stories that hint at the invisible magic of life. Alice Priestley's colourful illustrations in *Roses for Gita* focus on Gita and the bright flowers she loves. Priestley's plants surge with life, breaking through the boundaries of the pictures' frames just as Gita's friendship breaks through the boundaries that divide her and Mr. Flinch. Karen Rezuch's illustrations similarly focus on the abundance of nature, and her fairies — beautiful, glowing children of many ages and races — are realistic enough to be believable. Ken Campbell's paintings play with a number of intriguing perspectives to suggest much about the connections between Gang-gang and his parents and the river.

All three of these stories hint at the special nature of the relationship between humans and the natural world. Nature can be a friend, and can even draw humans closer to each other; but it can also be an implacable foe. *River My Friend* is the most overt and moralistic in this regard, and is less successful than the others in making its point gracefully.

These picture books all suggest that even ordinary lives can be touched by the extraordinary. Beneath the everyday layer of existence lies a kind of magic waiting to reveal new ways of seeing the world.

Joanne Findon is the author of The Dream of Aengus and Auld Lang Syne, both illustrated by Tolkien artist Ted Nasmith, as well as several short stories for young adults.

Mini-Reviews

Recipes for Magic

Pizza for Breakfast. Maryann Kovalski. Kids Can, 1990. 32 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-152-7.

Pizza for Breakfast proves that a children's book can successfully employ adult protagonists. Frank and Zelda, the proprietors of a pizza restaurant, are