

Mice, Parrots, Hippos, And Children, Too

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"Children are entitled to their otherness, as anyone is," wrote Alastair Reid in "Places, Poems, Preoccupations" (1963), "and when we reach them, as we sometimes do, it is generally on a point of sheer delight, to us so astonishing, but to them so natural." With the idea of furthering such contact, here are 10 delightful children's picture books that one hopes will seem both astonishing and natural. They are described in roughly ascending order of sophistication.

MOUSE AROUND, by Pat Schories (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$11.95). A water leak develops in a dark brown cellar, attracting from its nest a baby mouse who, in the act of trying to catch a droplet, falls into the pocket of the plumber fixing the leak. In wordless pictures, you follow the mouse's progress around a bustling town, back to the house and into its cozy nest again. If you can't find the mouse in the big pictures, close-ups in the border zoom you in.

HARRY AT THE AIRPORT, by Derek Radford (Aladdin Books/Macmillan, \$10.95). In a world of hippopotamuses, Harry and his family pack for a vacation, drive to the airport, stroll on the moving walkway, board their flight, buckle their seat belts, learn how to work the seat-arm controls and feel their plane lift off the runway. Lots of brightly colored details for the curious child, including the logos of 20 airlines from the world over.

THAT BOTHERED KATE, by Sally Noll (Greenwillow Books/William Morrow, \$13.95). Kate's little sister, Tory, was a copycat. And that bothered Kate. Until Tory started making her own friends and didn't seem to need Kate anymore. And that bothered Kate, too. Kate and Tory look like a pair of iridescent rag mops, but they charmingly convey this lesson in the ambivalence of sibling love.

THE LAST TIME I SAW HARRIS, by Frank Remkiewicz (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, \$13.95). Harris, you must understand, is a parrot who is the best friend of a wealthy boy named Edmund. Harris need learn only the color purple to gain command of the whole color wheel, but a fierce windstorm sucks him out the parlor window, and Edmund takes to his bed, grief-stricken. The color spectrum will, of course, play a role in Harris and Edmund's eventual reunion, but what is inspiring here is the exuberant nonsense of the exercise.

SANTA COWS, by Cooper Edens. Illustrated by Daniel Lane (Green Tiger Press/Simon & Schuster, \$14). "Twas the night before Christmas, and in our duplex/The children were plugged into special effects,/While pizza with sausage and peppers they downed/With soda, plus popcorn and chips by the pound." Anyway, instead of reindeer showing up, the mooring of Santa Cows comes to their ears. "So we ran to the windows and opened the shutters./We threw up the blinds to a sky full of udders." Well, I guess you have to see illustrations, especially the expressions on the faces of the family, to appreciate fully the comic zaniness of this surreal parody of Clement Moore's poem.

IRENE AND THE BIG, FINE NICKEL, by Irene Smalls-Hector. Illustrated by Tyrone Geter (Little, Brown, \$14.95). In which Irene wakes up, stretches her "sturdy caramel frame," takes off her stocking cap and gets a good day going, at the climax of which she and her friends find a whole nickel in the gutter. The expressive pictures and text capture the author's vision of a happy past when "Harlem was a place where nobody locked the door, and you never questioned being black because there were a million people who looked just like you."

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Houghton Mifflin
A detail of an illustration from
"The Wretched Stone."

KNOCK! KNOCK! by Jacqui Hawkins. Illustrated by Colin Hawkins. (Aladdin Books/Macmillan, \$14.95). The mansion herein is haunted by ghosts and monsters asking knock-knock jokes, the punch lines of which the reader has to lift a hinged flap to discover. "Knock! Knock! Who's there? Gorilla. Gorilla who? Gorilla me a cheese sandwich, please." And so on through to: "Knock! Knock! Who's there? Dishes? Dishes who? Dishes the very last knock-knock joke in this book."

BEARHEAD, adapted by Eric A. Kimmel, with illustrations by Charles Mikolaycak (Holiday House, \$15.95). Although the hero of this variation of an old Russian folk tale has the head of a bear and the body of a strong man, he puts the apparent denseness of his brain to good use, outwitting a witch and a troll, and bringing home riches to the couple who adopted him as a cub-child. The illustrations are an appealing blend of the contemporary and the traditional.

THE WRETCHED STONE, by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton Mifflin, \$17.95). In this comeback book, the author's best since "The Polar Express," Capt. Randall Ethan Hope records in the log of his ship, the Rita Anne, the near catastrophe her voyage became when her crew brought on board a strange rock from a disturbingly mysterious island. Mr. Van Allsburg achieves his usual ominous monumentality by depicting his scenes from a ground-level point of view. And then he undercuts their solemnity with a subtle humor so that the whole effect is not quite funny and not quite horrible, but entirely and uniquely Van Allsburg.

MORNING MILKING, by Linda Lowe Morris. Illustrated by David DeRan (Picture Book Studio, \$16.95). A young girl's memories of the ritual of morning milking with her father, who tells her stories of growing up on the farm. "I have heard these stories so often that they are almost like my own memories. And sometimes it seems as if there is no time here, as if I could go around a corner of the barn and find my grandfather hitching up his horse to the wagon, or walk into the house and find my great-grandmother peeling apples in the kitchen." Mr. DeRan's beautiful muted watercolors — of barns and cows and kittens and snowy fields — make the experience seem as timeless as the author's memories.