Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Bernie Leaves the City
Jim Case
Lynn Stocker, illustrator
Friesen Press
978-1-77097-080-9
Four Stars (out of Five)

A city-dwelling squirrel finds himself caught up in an unexpected rural adventure in *Bernie Leaves the City*, a charming tale by Jim Case.

Bernie's life in the city is grounded in routine. Each morning, he eats a thoughtful meal provided by Mrs. Murphy, a kind woman who enjoys the company of the birds and other animals who visit her yard. At her home, Bernie happily feasts on delicious treats such as avocado, lettuce, pumpkin seeds, and pecans. Life for the little squirrel is predictable and comfortable.

One day, Bernie's regimen is disrupted when he spots an interesting truck that has pictures of walnuts, almonds, and pine nuts painted on its side. His natural curiosity leads him to investigate a little too closely. Before he knows what's happening, he is transported to a strange place far from home. "All he could see was farmland and a few houses here and there. He was in sort of a valley and the hillsides were totally covered with trees, strange looking green trees." As he explores his new surroundings, Bernie makes new friends and learns about life in the country.

Young readers will likely be charmed by Bernie and his new acquaintances, including an expectant raccoon, a helpful horse, and a rather grumpy beaver, among others. The author shares a few facts about each animal, such as the raccoon's preference for early morning worms and the beaver's ability to build a dam to protect his family. Bernie's personality is skillfully captured, and anyone who has observed the antics of squirrels will recognize the quick, agile movements and habits Case describes. Lynn Stocker's watercolor illustrations of Bernie and his surroundings accurately represent the scenes described in the book.

Case doesn't attempt to impart any grand wisdom or heavy moral with his story, but young readers will certainly close the book with a deeper knowledge of some familiar animals.

Bernie himself displays acceptance and resiliency in terms of his change in circumstances, and he is nearly fearless in his explorations. His adventure may inspire parents and children to discuss how human beings affect the lives of animals, sometimes inadvertently, and the ways in which the animals have learned to adapt as a result.

Case's story does need further proofreading to fill in missing commas and correct some minor formatting issues. However, *Bernie Leaves the City* is an engaging tale that's sure to leave young readers both better informed and well entertained.

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