FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Picture Books

Doctor Me Di Cin
Roberto Piumini
Front Street
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This book doses out a delightful message to children: Go outside and enjoy the natural world. As modern youngsters become hooked on computers and television at increasingly early ages, they are missing out on fresh air and the creatures of the world. The author is a literary translator who has published novels and stories for adults.

His disarmingly simple story, with its elegant Chinese-style illustrations, tells of the sickly son of the emperor. Prince Ma La Di refuses to go outside the palace. Engrossed in his activities, the boy lives in a self-imposed prison much like that of the forlorn caged bird over his bed. When the good and wise doctor tells him he needs to go outside, Ma La Di insists that he can't-that he needs to stay inside and paint. The boy paints what he sees around him-people's faces.

So Doctor Me Di Cin begins his campaign to entice the boy to get fresh air. Each day the doctor leaves the palace and returns to describe what he has seen: "a laughing plant, a weeping plant, and a plant that waved at me."

Curious, Ma La Di wants to know more so he can paint them. Me Di Cin says he is a doctor, not a painter, and will keep searching for a cure. Each time he returns with more stories of wonderful plants: jumping nettles and singing roses, lying mint and timid thyme.

Young Ma La Di wants more information, but the doctor wisely keeps secrets. He says that plants change all the time; they are different every day. The boy, whose art has shifted from painting people to flowers and herbs, finally can't stand it any longer. Together they joyously explore the extraordinary, ordinary world. Ma La Di is cured in a day and for a lifetime.

Grobler, an award-winning children's book illustrator, has created delicate illustrations lush with details of Chinese art. Rice paper, embroidery, bold red lacquer, and a porcelain vase from the Ming Dynasty add to the book's enchantment. Plants dance across the pages. The stylized birds in flight, like those on the vase, color the sky like fireworks, in stark contrast to

the boy’s sad caged bird. Happily, however, even the little palace bird is set free to test his wings outside.

Doctor Me Di Cin is wise indeed.

Linda Salisbury