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Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Friends in the Garden
Karin Ursula Gopinath
Tommy Sutanto, illustrator
978-1-4343-5706-9
Four Stars (out of Five)

Ruby the ladybug is happy in her quiet garden home where she lives with fireflies grasshoppers ants and even a cricket. The older creatures take younger ones under wing and teach them things about the world around them like how to be safe and where to rest so that they are out of the sun. When a large gray cloud appears in their calm sky the creatures all become very nervous about the impending storm. Ruby is so frightened that she closes her eyes when the fierce rains finally appear and waits for the storm to disappear. When she finally opens her eyes again she is in another garden like her own but unfamiliar. All of Ruby's friends are gone.

Author Gopinath should be proud of her first book for children. The story presents friendship in a meaningful way to young children but also helps them to see that new places can be exciting and welcoming. Author Gopinath is a grandmother who lives in California. She escaped her birthplace of Brandenburg Germany to discover a nursing career in West Germany before moving to the United States in 1967. Her own experiences leaving a familiar place and adapting to a new country have played well into this story. The illustrations by Sutanto add a sense of playfulness and lightness to the story. The facial expressions of the small creatures will make young readers want to laugh with delight. This author/illustrator team should be proud of their first attempt into the world of children's literature. This is a great read-aloud story and will provide a fertile ground for discussing friendship with young readers.

Joyce Rice