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Picture Books

In Every Moon There is a Face
Charles Mathes
Arlene Graston, illustrator
Illumination Arts
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The mind strives to make sense of what it sees and hears. This book says, “Let go. Let the experience guide you.”
The text of this picture book is a single poem, circular in nature, starting and ending with reference to the moon. The illustrations open and close with a picture of a young girl in her room, a full moon outside her window. In between these first and last pages, the combined efforts of the text and art take readers on a journey. The girl and her dog are the thread that visually connects the pages. They are cleverly integrated in each new setting as the poem expands in scope. “In every Moon there is … a Face / In every face there is … a Tree / And every Tree is full …of Lace / And in that Lace you’ll find … a Sea.”

The author’s previous books include coffee-table art and history volumes as well as a series of mystery novels. His text in this book uses well the drama of the turning of the page while the art asks readers to linger. At times the mind resists the connections the poem is making: Above the Sea a cloud of Words? or, In a Kite made of a cloud of Birds there is a Jar? Yet, this is where the intrigue lies. Even the literal-minded or analytical child, who may struggle with this book, will be challenged by the text enough to warrant repeat readings.

Also, the luminous illustrations aid in easing any reluctance the reader might have. Each extension the poem makes is fully realized by the art. The illustrator designed fashion with Nina Ricci and posters for Broadway shows before turning to illustrating children’s books. Her full-color paintings are fanciful, precise, and full of beauty. They are reminiscent of the fantastic painting of Maxfield Parrish. Of interest here is the geometric, grid-like backdrop to every picture, as if each inventive scene is grounded in the concrete. This becomes a subtle nod to the realist.

Overall this book is a stellar collaboration by a husband-and-wife team, in which the

strength of the whole lies in the interaction of the art and text. An eight-year-old dreamer who read this book couldn’t wait to share it with her classmates.

Martha Topol