



Lemuel the Fool

Myron Uhlberg

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Lemuel, a fisherman in a small village, dreams of a magical city on the other side of the sea. He builds himself a boat to carry him across the horizon, and ties a red scarf to the bow to lead the way, and a rope at the stern to trail behind, so he knows he'll always be headed in the right direction.

Disoriented by a storm, he lands on an island much like his own. He is surprised at how familiar everything seems and even when confronted by his wife and son cannot accept the obvious. "Confused beyond understanding," he again sets sail. Lemuel gratefully returns home to his family, a fool for sure but finally content.

Based on a Jewish folktale, the pattern of this story is familiar, with three repetitive yet distinct parts. Although the telling of this tale is a bit flat and slightly longwinded, it still contains the requisite benefit of allowing the child reader to be smarter than the adult character. Children will understand immediately that Lemuel never does enter an enchanted city. Further, his antics with the rope and the red scarf supply humor and added evidence of his foolish nature.

The illustrations in this book go a long way in raising the quality of an otherwise ordinary tale. Recalling the work of the picture book artist Diane Goode, Lamut depicts soft, round-faced characters in traditional villagers' garb set against a muted background of stone walls and shingled huts. The linen canvas upon which the paintings are created adds an Old World texture to each page.

This book would be a good supplemental purchase. It would fit easily in a collection of individually illustrated folktales.

MARTHA TOPOL (November / December 2001)

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