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Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Mackie and the Strawberry Butterfly
Gina Rossi
Quinton Barber Press
978-0-9855147-0-9
Four Stars (out of Five)

Schools often bring together children of vastly different experiences and home environments, and it's easy for those children to become focused on what they don't have in comparison to their fellow students. Gina Rossi's picture book *Mackie and the Strawberry Butterfly* addresses those differences, and the feelings they generate, in the context of a larger story about putting others' needs before one's own.

Charged by their teacher, Mrs. Bray, to share something beautiful from their yards, the students wonder what Mackie will bring. Mackie, living in an apartment with his mother, has no yard, just a balcony. The strawberry plant growing on the balcony would be wonderful for show-and-tell, but a butterfly vigilantly guards the plant, preventing Mackie from using it. Eventually, Mackie discovers the reason for the butterfly's efforts, that one good turn is often rewarded with another, and that he can enjoy nature—even without a yard.

Gina Rossi's writing is excellent, as are the text layouts, which cleverly use spacing to indicate pauses and the passage of time. In Rossi's hands, Mackie is a sympathetic character, and the boy's mom strikes just the right notes of parental guidance. There are several funny, nicely handled scenes in which Mrs. Bray corrects the class bully's grammatically incorrect slang.

The level of enjoyment in reading this book will be partially determined by one's opinion of the illustrations: they are pure CGI (computer-generated imagery). As a result, backgrounds can feature photo-quality details; the classroom scenes are particularly impressive in this respect.

But the details that make the illustrations so realistic in some settings can seem static and distracting in others. For example, in a key scene, Rossi depicts a dropped flower pot in midair rather than on the ground. Although this would seem to be a more exciting way to relate the

action, when combined with the CGI depictions, it makes the page feel like a freeze-framed image rather than part of a fluid story. Facial expressions bear the trademark exaggerations of computer-assisted illustration. The technical and artistic achievements of Rossi and Mark Bridges, her layout and illustrations partner, are impressive, but there's something about this type of illustration that makes a story about a butterfly and nature feel somewhat artificial.

Even so, *Mackie and the Strawberry Butterfly* is a sweet and meticulously crafted tale, one that might especially strike a chord in children who, like Mackie, don't live in a house with a yard enclosed by a white picket fence.

Peter Dabbene