ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

The Hollyhock Wall
Martin Waddell
Candlewick Press
978-1-56402-902-7
(Jun 2, 1999)

An old cooking pot, a few seeds, some dirt and an imaginative young girl combine in a picture book that mixes elements of reality and fantasy. When Mary, who lives with her mother on the upper floor of a tall house, expresses a desire for a garden in which to play, her mother hands her the items necessary to create such a place in an old cooking pot. As the seeds grow into grass, flowers and little trees, Mary embellishes the scene with a blue ribbon stream and a match stick bridge. Around the outside of the pot she paints a hollyhock wall; then she molds a clay boy and wheelbarrow to bring life to the garden. Finally, she makes paper fish for the stream and a fishing rod for Tom, as she names the clay boy.

With her fabric relief illustrations, Mavor sets the stage for the flight of fancy Waddell introduces when Mary, somehow, finds herself in the little garden with Tom. In the morning, when Mary awakens, she's sure the events she remembers clearly must be from a dream, but a dream does not explain the clay girl, looking suspiciously like Mary, who has appeared in the garden. Waddell twists the tale again when he sends Mary to visit Granny in her new home, bordered by a hollyhock wall. Mary peers over the wall and meets a boy, named Tom, pushing a wheelbarrow near a stream. Behind this hollyhock wall, Mary seems to have finally found a garden in which to play.

An author well known for his many books, including those about a fearful Little Bear, Waddell fashions a more complex picture book tale with this title. Although Waddell's text is a simple description of events, Mavor's pictures, created from cloth, wire, wood and other objects sewn to a fabric background and then photographed, supply the illusion and the sense of wonder that bring the story to life. While the book's size is large enough for a group storytime, the intricate detail of the full-color photographs of the carefully created diminutive scenes will have readers wanting to linger over each page as they imagine themselves in the garden, playing with Mary and Tom.

Janis Ansell