ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

The Waterfall's Gift
Joanne Ryder
Richard Jesse Watson, illustrator
Gibbs Smith Publisher
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“The old north woods hides treasure in its deepest places.”
Endless treasures of nature and human nature are unveiled by the author and the illustrator in this memorable book about life’s cycles and promises. The young female narrator, her Grandma, Mama, and Papa escape the heat of the summer and find refuge at Grandpa’s cabin. Remembering Grandpa, they revel in the tiniest details around them, such as watching a baby mouse run from circles of fear to safety.

While the others prepare the house, the child runs to answer the unspoken call of the woods. Illustrator Watson captures her in motion in a stunning double-page spread amid the forest creatures and peeling birch trees. Children will delight in identifying the animals and birds (including a baby bear, raccoon, fox, pheasant, squirrel, and deer) almost camouflaged in the picture. The narrator reflects and dips her toes in the icy water at Mama’s sitting rock. In the inviting berry patch, she pauses to feast on the lushness of the flora and fauna. She gives in to temptation and eats a “pawful” of berries as “the black bear inside roars: More. Give me more.”

In a climactic scene, the girl finds a secret place. Watson effectively places her in the right foreground of a lengthwise double-page painting of a waterfall cascading into glimmering, clear waters, illuminated by a rainbow. Her “waterfall says what it always says: ‘NOW, NOW, NOW, NOW, NOW’” The sun kisses her face, an otter connects with her in a spiritual moment, and she returns to the house, where she express her luck to Grandma.

Ryder’s imagery is magical and lyrical. The child is both ingenuous and perceptive in her recognition that her grandfather lives on in the special world they shared. This fine book, comparable to T. A. Barron’s poignant *Where Is Grandpa?*, explores loss and renewal with words and illustrations to be treasured.