

Tommy O'Tom in a Tub O'Trouble

JTK Belle

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Tommy O'Tom uses classic elements, from humanized zoo animals to mostly absent grownups, to make an everyday event anything but ordinary.

JTK Belle and Mike Motz turn bath-time rituals into a whimsical fantasy in *Tommy O'Tom in a Tub O'Trouble*. Preschoolers and early readers will relish the improbable, wild scenarios and charming rhymes.

The story begins when Tommy's bath is interrupted by a hippo and giraffe who walk in and join him. A flamingo, zebra, and elephant follow, engaging in hijinks that include writing on the mirror with soap and watering the wallpaper.

The animals vanish just as Tommy's mother walks in to witness the mess. In the final scene, the muddy trail and feathers left by Tommy's companions serve as evidence. Their absence, however, leaves open the possibility that Tommy might have imagined everything.

It's a delightful comedy, except for Tommy's reactions. The story seldom mentions him, leaving him as a silent witness. The illustrations reveal facial expressions that range from surprise to dismay to shock. He seems reluctant to have a part in the misadventures. Rather than seeming amused, he appears to be in an uncomfortable position—perhaps concerned with the trouble he may find himself in—which darkens the otherwise lighthearted tone.

A bright cartoon style adds panache through humorous touches, from towel-wrapped heads to an elephant examining a plunger. The increasingly chaotic scene is vividly captured, though an additional chance for humor is lost because there's no sense that there are problems of scale, as all of the animals manage to fit into the household-sized tub. In one scene, Tommy's mother is reflected in a mirror even though she is standing farther away in the doorway.

At times the text highlights specific words in color. Sometimes the words are nouns, which may emphasize vocabulary, but at other times, entire lines of dialogue are given prominence; the cause for such emphasis is unclear. Despite their inconsistent use, these colorful bits of text energize the design.

With its blend of familiarity and fantasy, *Tub O'Trouble* uses classic elements, from humanized zoo animals to mostly absent grownups, to make an everyday event anything but ordinary. The hippo emerges as the star of the show, with an assertive exuberance that loudly invites and instigates. This is a winsome romp full of suds.

KAREN RIGBY (March 15, 2018)

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