

A Prize-Winning Quartet

G. JOAN MORRIE

My Friend Pichou, Ginette Anfousse. Translated by Mayer Romaner. Illus. by the author. NC Press, 1978. 22 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919601-08-0

Hide-and-Seek, Ginette Anfousse. Translated by Mayer Romaner. Illus. by the author. NC Press, 1978. 22 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919691-10-3

Chicken Pox, Ginette Anfousse. Translated by Mayer Romaner. Illus. by the author. NC Press, 1978. 22 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919601-28-6

The Fight, Ginette Anfousse. Translated by Mayer Romaner. Illus. by the author. NC Press, 1978. 22 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919601-30-8

Four delightfully illustrated English translations from the French Canadian author and illustrator Ginette Anfousse make a welcome addition to the Canadian book scene. Anfousse was awarded the French Language Canada Council prize for children's literature in 1978 for *Chicken Pox* and *The Fight*. All four books have enormous child-appeal and yet are very simple in style and vocabulary.

In *My Friend Pichou*, Jojo introduces herself and her exotic pet-toy Pichou, "my-honest-to-goodness-baby-aardvark-who-really-eats-ants." We are instantly drawn into the story since Jojo talks to us on a one-to-one level as if to a close friend. She worries about Pichou not having any ants to eat; in fact, he is made to seem so real that we worry too, until — our relief! — we are told towards the end of the story, "Sshhh, of course we know that Pichou is only a toy . . ." This statement is accompanied by a charming picture of the two of them hugging each other, with love-hearts sprinkled all about them. Any little child who loves his "Ted" will identify right away with Jojo and Pichou. (see Figure 1)

Hide-and-Seek emphasizes reader involvement again. Jojo is lonely again because Pichou doesn't know how to play Hide-and-Seek, Jojo enlists the reader to join in the game. We get a tour through Jojo's house as we go from room to room looking for her. Finally, Pichou's tail which is sticking out of a closet gives Jojo's hiding place away.



Figure 1.

In *Chicken Pox*, Jojo is separated from her pet-toy because, as she explains, chicken pox is contagious. She is terribly lonely until she conceives of an idea which will allow them to be together again. As soon as the reader sees the box of paints, it is obvious what is about to happen. But no ordinary red pox for Pichou; he is painted every colour of the rainbow and when he is covered with multi-coloured pox, he can happily rejoin his Jojo.

Phyllis McGinley, in *Sixpence in my Shoe*, makes some important observations: "Now it is the artist not the writer who has become important out of all proportion. This would be splendid if the desired end of reading were for the formation of a taste for good art. But these books are not meant to whet the child's appetite for good literature. Text must measure up to illustration." It certainly does so in *The Fight*. We are shown Jojo's black eye and her opponent, the terrible Cloclo Tremblay. At this point Ginette Anfousse adds immediacy and realism to her tale by saying "Don't go away, I'll tell you about it." The fight is over something inconsequential (as most fights are), but the battle itself is fierce. Intrepid Jojo plunges into the fray, no holds barred; she pulls hair, bites ears and wins her point over

Cloco (who also ends up with a black eye). I liked the ending which shows them friends again, even after such violence; the moral is clear that fighting is not nice. But what a wonderful change from prissy little children of former days who ate strawberries and cream and sewed a fine seam!

The illustrations show talent and careful work and they are truly captivating. Children will enjoy the bright colours and the special child-like quality of the loosely-drawn pictures. Jojo's bedroom with its bed running up the wall, huge blocks that only the strongest child could lift, pictures with wavy frames, is depicted as a room any eight-year-old would like. Therein lies the charm rendered by Ginette Anfousse: everything she writes and draws relates entirely to a child's-eye view of the world. One of my favourite illustrations is in *The Fight*. Jojo and Cloco are walking down the street with the birds following. But what birds! They are every colour of the rainbow; they whirl through the sky like brilliantly coloured leaves. Two pages later, another splendid picture appears of Cloco in his Montreal Canadian sweater and cap, looking fearsome and brandishing his sword.

The texts are in large dark print and therefore easy to read. Each book is staple bound with an attractive shiny cover. One wishes these books could be in hard cover. *My Friend Pichou* and *Hide-and-Seek* would be enjoyed by the three to five-year-olds; the other two would be more suitable for the five to ten set.

I note from the back cover of *Canadian Children's Literature* number 13, that some of Ginette Anfousse's work was displayed at the National Library of Canada exhibition last summer. One might note also that Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council assisted in the production expense of these English versions. Children everywhere will be looking for more stories about Jojo and Pichou. Let's hope they are forthcoming.

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