

Not Quite a Bedtime Story

Bedtime Baa-a-a-lk. Rukhsana Khan. Illus. Kristi Frost. Stoddart Kids, 1998. 32 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-30680.

Bedtime Baa-a-a-lk is a delightful take on the familiar bedtime injunction to count sheep jumping over the fence. The story starts with a little girl going up the stairs to bed.

However, it is not quite a bedtime story. It invites the listener's participation with paper and crayon, as the little girl deals with a surly old ram who says there is little reason why they should be jumping onto the dark side over the fence. So the girl conjures a "meadow with clover and buttercups thrown in." And then she is persuaded to colour the dark sky blue, and then she is talked into making the side they are on a little more attractive. Carried away, she draws a merry-go-round and a ferris wheel, and before she knows it, she has a very mutinous flock of sheep indeed. They see no reason at all why they should jump over the fence just so that she can fall asleep counting them. The girl has an answer why. She says she can blot them out of existence and make other sheep who will be more obedient. The ram thinks she is OUT OF HER ... but before he can complete his sentence, pouff, he is gone, the sheep are gone. All gone. A new flock of sheep dutifully jumps over the fence as her eyes close.

Like many modern stories for children, it has its own little sermons — brush your teeth before going to bed and use your imagination. It also has a neat little dig at authoritarian parents (or is it a feminist dig?) when the ram scolds a young ewe for speaking when she is not spoken to, even though he agrees with her.

The illustrations are colourful, especially the scene with ferris wheel and cotton candy man(sheep). On a couple of occasions, however, the page is rather too busy with oversize close-ups that distract rather than add to the use of imagination that could help children "colour in" their own visuals.

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A Sibling Bonding Diptych

The Bye-Bye Pie. Sharon Jennings. Illus. Ruth Ohl. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1999. Unpag. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55041-405-4. *Ballerinas Don't Wear Glasses*. Ainslie Manson. Illus. Dean Griffiths. Orca, 2000. Unpag. \$18.95, \$8.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55143-158-0, 155143-176-9.

The Bye-Bye Pie enchantingly captures very believable, naive antics of two pre-school age boys while *Ballerinas Don't Wear Glasses* exposes the painful realities of older children coerced into responsibility for younger ones, along with bullying and taunting by classmates and childhood self-esteem challenges. Both stories feature realistic yet gentle portrayals of reciprocal sibling bonding. In *The Bye-Bye Pie*,