



The Monitor



Lullaby of Broadway

Mary Beaty

"for the 59th Street doorman
a bottle of Guinness Stout
to keep him warm on the inside
when there's a blizzard on the out"

--Eloise at Christmas

I heard of Kay Thompson's death when I was scouting apartments in Manhattan. I was chatting up a doorman, exchanging laconic pleasantries only slightly related to influence peddling and key money, when a small child rode a bike with a terrier in the basket out of the elevator. With a quick "hiya", the duo dove under the doorman's liveried arm and wheeled off down the boulevard sidewalk, oblivious of our adult perusal. I immediately recalled Eloise's long-suffering and conspiratorial doorman at the Plaza Hotel.

"Do lots of kids grow up in this building?" I enquired of my new friend.

"Why not?", he answered. "They own the place. And they'll be back, after college. They don't know anything else. They get it in the milk"

Metropolitan kids float above the *Night Kitchen*, deprived of milk cows and turtles and tree houses and fishing holes. They swim in an ocean of adults, sometimes remarkably alone. (Eloise and her spunky urban sister Madeline substituted friendships with avuncular gendarmes, governesses and doormen for the intimate care of absent parents.) I left 74th Street and headed down to the Plaza, and walked up the great staircase to the portrait of Eloise, gazing out under her circumflexed eyebrows over Gucci and tweed nosers in the tearoom. She looked perfectly insouciant, perfectly at home. I smiled, apologised to the portrait for my provincialism, and set off on a literary pilgrimage to look for Manhattan children.

Like all kids, urban children somehow form private lives in the midst of the moil of policemen, tradesmen, traffic and trams. I wandered through Washington Heights, thinking of Eleanor Schick's *City in the Winter*; the "garden" made of carrot tops in a jelly glass, the view from the window of the tenement roof, the cabbage smell from next door and the front door with five deadbolts. Stopping at the George Washington Bridge terminal at 175th, I saw Donald Chen from Pinkwater's *Wingman*, climbing the bridge to read his comic collection. I skirted burned-out blocks, looking for the kids in Holman's *Secret City*, creating their own refuge safe from adult eyes. The sound of a sax from an open window brought Ezra Jack Keats to life and the chalked hopscotch on the pavement invoked Yashima's *Umbrella* (and the lost umbrella of Estes' *Kim Chu*, far below in Chinatown, by the Chatham Square Public Library.) I looked for Yashima's brown wooden water towers, and thought of *Tar Beach*, and all the tiny people far below on the ocean of the streetscape night.

Up by Jumel Mansion, beside the shotgun terrace house where Paul Robeson lived, I thought of all the kids who had made their way downtown -- and the tap-dance kid in Fitzhugh's *Nobody's Family Is Going To Change*. So I rode the express down to 42nd and stopped at a George Selden/Garth Williams newsstand in Times Square, squatting down to share Mario's child's-eye view of commuters' feet. It was warm, gritty, and comfortably noisy on the floor, and I was sure rats and mice and crickets still hunted crumbs dropping from people's fingers. Which reminded me of the lunch counter Samaritan



from *Slake's Limbo* feeding a starving boy living in the subway. Coming up into the daylight I wandered over to Hell's Kitchen, musing on the generational split which greeted Sendak's *We Are All in the Dumps, with Jack and Guy*; adults dismayed by the homeless camps were reassured by kids' prosaic responses: "Oh, good. Now the baby has a home."

Embarrassed about my own apartment trauma, I went down to Orchard Street to the tenement museum. Copies of Merrill's *The Pushcart War* were for sale beside Taylor's *All-of-a-Kind Family*. I imagined the four sisters standing on the front stoop, and recalled a "recycled" Santa Claus mannikin I'd seen in a wine store by the New York Public Library -- itself forever guarded by Daugherty's *Andy and the Lion* -- whose jolly face and white beard had been enveloped in a prayer shawl and who nodded "ho ho ho" amongst the kosher bottles. I remembered Barbara Cohen's *Carp in the Bathtub*, and found just such a fish in the museum's dollhouse diorama. Back on the street, crossing Delancey, I looked across the river and thought of my first "adult" novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and wondered which train *Harriet the Spy* took to the city. And in this year of record-setting home runs, I looked south to Chinatown, sharing my own pig horoscope with Betty Bao Lord's *The Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*.

I went up to Central Park to escape, contemplating other cities' kids on sylvan outings: Mary Poppins in the Park, Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, and Madeline in the Bois (and the Saturdays on their weekly peregrinations). I heard the children around me beg their parents "can't we go visit Alice, now?" and followed the swarm to the Lewis Carroll statues. At the boat pond, I stroked Hans Andersen's shiny toe, remembering Diane Wolkstein telling tales at his feet on Sundays. I looked up at his homely face -- and wandered over to Park Avenue to count gargoyles. (New York is the only place I know of where "good gargoyles" is listed as a category in an apartment's amenities.) Not far from Mrs. Frankenweiler's mystery at the Met, which was also the haunt of *Art Dog* and perhaps *Norman the Doorman*, I stepped into the beginning of the Ramble, searching the trees in vain for signs of a treehouse, a boy --- and the Prince of Central Park.

A dogwalker with a troika of Salukis passed at a trot, springing thoughts of city pets with attitudes: Debra Barracca's *Taxi Dog*, Kalman's Max Stravinsky, the dog poet, Averill's Jenny Linsky, and Hildick's *Manhattan is Missing*, which suddenly evoked Francesca Block's evocative *Missing Angel Juan*; the darker side of urban life. Surrounded by the reality of the city, passing curled-up bodies on park benches, I realized I had subconsciously relocated many New York books to my own landscape in Canada. I thought of Dayal Khalsa's *How Pizza Came to Queens* as somewhere on the Danforth, and somehow repatriated Pascal's *Hangin' Out With Cici* (which was actually filmed in Toronto, confusing the issue). But until now I had not really understood that L'Engle's *The Young Unicorns* took place on the upper west side. Must revisit that, as well as L'Engle's *Camilla*, and a host of others.

Taking out my Manhattan map, I started to add dots--east side, west side, all around the town. Lullaby of Broadway: *Goodnight Moon*. Surely it's a Manhattan skyline outside that window? What was that wonderful novel where the girl flew on the gargoyles? And what is the complex fantasy where the statue of Kosciuszko in Central Park is the gateway to another world lying beneath the subway? If it's not by Diane Duane, she still puts the Kraken in the subway in *So You Want to be a Wizard*. She may live in rural Ireland, but she's got the City's heartbeat wired into her book.

No more pity for city kids. Life's an adventure wherever you are. All over New York tonight, children are going to bed, snug in their 700 square foot apartments, listening to the lullaby of taxi horns and traffic and airplanes and sirens and pigeons and elevator whooshing. In my quiet Canadian town, I can hear the crickets outside my window. But I also heard them in the park behind the Natural History museum last night. Goodnight Kay Thompson, good night moon over Manhattan--good night city children, everywhere.

Bibliographic Information

Averill, Esther. *The Cat Club; or, the life and times of Jenny Linsky*. Illus. by the author. [New York]: Harper, 1944. Out of print.

Barracca, Debra and Sal Barracca. *The Adventures of Taxi Dog*. Illus. by Mark Buehner. New York: Dial, 1990. ISBN 0803706715.

Block, Francesca Lia. *Missing Angel Juan*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993. ISBN 0060230045.



- Brown, Margaret Wise. *Goodnight Moon*. Illus. by Clement Hurd. With a 50th anniversary retrospective by Leonard S. Marcus. [New York]: HarperCollins, 1997. ISBN 0060275049.
- Cohen, Barbara. *The Carp in the Bathtub*. Illus. by Joan Halpern. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, [1972]. Out of print.
- Daugherty, James Henry. *Andy and the Lion*. Illus. by the author. New York: Viking, 1938, 1989. ISBN 0140502777.
- Duane, Diane. *So You Want to be a Wizard*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1983. ISBN 0385293054.
- Enright, Elizabeth. *The Saturdays*. New York: Henry Holt, 1941, 1987. ISBN 080500291X.
- Estes, Eleanor. *The Lost Umbrella of Kim Chu*. New York: Atheneum, 1972. Out of print.
- Fitzhugh, Louise. *Harriet the Spy*. Illus. by the author. New York: Harper and Row, [1964]. ISBN 0060219106.
- Fitzhugh, Louise. *Nobody's Family is Going to Change*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [1974]. ISBN 0374355398.
- Freeman, Don. *Norman the Doorman*. Illus. by the author. New York: Viking, 1959. ISBN 0670515159.
- Hildick, E. W. *Manhattan is Missing*. Illus. by Jan Palmer. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, [1969]. Out of print.
- Holman, Felice. *Secret City, U.S.A.* New York: Scribner's, 1990. ISBN 0684191687.
- Hurd, Thacher. *Art Dog*. Illus. by the author. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. ISBN 0060244240.
- Kalman, Maira. *Max Makes a Million*. Illus. by the author. New York: Viking, 1990. ISBN 0670835355.
- Keats, Ezra Jack. *Apt. 3*. Illus. by the author. New York: Aladdin Books, 1971, 1986. ISBN 0689710593.
- Khalsa, Dayal Kaur. *How Pizza Came to Queens*. New York: C.N. Potter/Crown, 1989. ISBN 0517571269. (Canadian edition: *How Pizza Came to Our Town*. Montreal: Tundra, 1989. ISBN 088776231X.)
- Konigsburg, E.L. *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. Illus. by the author. New York: Atheneum, 1967. ISBN 0689205864.
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *Camilla Dickinson*. New York: Laurel-Leaf, 1965, [1982]. (reissue). ISBN 0440911710. (Alternative title: *Camilla*)
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *The Young Unicorns*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968. ISBN 0374387788.
- Lord, Betty Bao. *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. Illus. by Marc Simont. New York: HarperTrophy, 1986. ISBN 0064401758.
- Pascal, Francine. *Hangin' out with Cici*. New York: Viking, 1977. ISBN 0670360457.
- Pinkwater, Daniel Manus. *Wingman*. Illus. by the author. New York: Dodd, Mead, [1975]. ISBN 039607068X.
- Ringgold, Faith. *Tar Beach*. Illus. by the author. New York: Crown, 1991. ISBN 0517580306.
- Schick, Eleanor. *City in the Winter*. Illus. by the author. New York: Collier, 1973. Out of print.
- Selden, George. *The Cricket in Times Square*. Illus. by Garth Williams. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1983. ISBN 0374316503.
- Sendak, Maurice. *In the Night Kitchen*. Illus. by the author. [New York]: Harper and Row, [1970]. ISBN 0060254890.



Sendak, Maurice. *We Are All in the Dumps, with Jack and Guy*. Illus. by the author. New York: Harpercrest, 1993. ISBN 006205015X.

Smith, Betty. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. New York: Harper, [1943]. ISBN 0895773287.

Taylor, Sydney. *All-of-a-Kind Family*. Illus. by Helen John. [New York]: Taylor Productions, 1994. (reprint). ISBN 0929093003.

Thompson, Kay. *Eloise: a book for precocious grown ups*. Illus. by Hilary Knight. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955. (reprint). ISBN 067122350X.

Yashima, Taro. *Umbrella*. New York: Viking, 1958, 1986. ISBN 0670738581.

Mary Beaty
