



*The Night Gardener*

Written and Illustrated by Terry & Eric Fan

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016, 48 pp.

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In 1913, Ina D. Ogden, a public school teacher, wrote "Brighten the Corner Where You Are," a song to encourage people to use their unique skills and talents for the benefit of others. The Fan Brothers' debut picture book, *The Night Gardener*, follows a similar theme. The book opens with a forlorn orphan named William sitting slumped on a log, sketching an owl in the dirt. Unbeknownst to him, he catches the eye of a talented passerby. The next morning, William and his neighbors wake to find an enormous topiary owl in front of the Grimloch Orphanage. This discovery brings a sense of hope to the otherwise bleak community. On subsequent mornings, they gather in anticipation of a new garden creation. Someone—they do not know who—is pruning their trees into an eclectic menagerie. One day there is a perched cat, the next a friendly rabbit, then a pretty parakeet and a playful elephant, and finally, "the most magnificent masterpiece yet!"

Over time, the people of Grimloch Lane are transformed by the sculptures that appear "as if by magic." All kinds of people come together to marvel and celebrate. The mystery surrounding the sculptures continues until the night William spots an unfamiliar older gentleman carrying a ladder and shears into Grimloch Park. He follows and the man invites him to help. The two work together under the light of the moon. When he wakes up the next morning, the man has disappeared, but he has left his tools and a note "from the Night Gardener." The central message of the book is that we share our talents and skills to help others tap into their own ability to experience wonder.

The Fan Brothers both received formal art training at the Ontario College of Art and Design. Their drawing techniques and the colors used to illustrate this book enhance the mystery and magic of the story. A blend of pen, ink, and Photoshop manipulations provide a grainy and textured look, while the use of sepia tones, jade and hunter green gives it a vintage feel—circa 1930s. This decade is often characterized as lost within the larger story of the Great Depression, with massive unemployment and near financial and industrial collapse. The illustrations are consistent with the time period—characters don knickers, caps, fedora hats and muted crepe fabrics. As the mood of the book becomes lighter, splashes of red, yellow and medium blue become more frequent. Near the end, the reader is presented with a two-page spread of rich color that is followed again by a mysterious blue-green that inspires further exploration.

Books that would pair well with *The Night Gardener* include: *Something Beautiful* by Sharon Wyeth (1998), *Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood* by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell (2016), *The Curious Garden* by Peter Brown (2009) and *The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart (2007).

Desiree W. Cueto, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA