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NESQUENS, Daniel

My Tattooed Dad

Illustrated by Magicomora. Translated by Elisa Amado. Groundwood Books, 2011. 48p. Illus. Gr. 4-6. 978-1-55498-109-0. Hdbk. \$18.95

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This lavishly illustrated book contains a series of stories told by an often absent father to his young son. Each tattoo on the father's body marks the memory of a strange and magical tale from the father's life, a life comprised of tigers, serpents, spiders, elephants and mysterious birds.

The complex relationship between the boy and his father is highlighted in the first lines of the book: "Dad goes and comes. Like the day, like the night." The father's appearances are often unexpected and are accompanied by a new story, such as his encounter with the fantastic two-tailed Pim tiger, the events leading up to meeting the boy's mother, or the times the boy almost died but was saved by his father. Moments of fatherly sentiment, such as when he congratulates his son because "You are almost a man," are contrasted with the boy's confusion about his father's stories. As the boy says, "There are many nights when I lie in bed, sorting out Dad's stories. But they get all tangled up, like a ball of wool that someone has dropped."

The book lacks a strong narrative coherence. Each story begins in the boy's everyday world, but he is soon transported by his father's fantastic retellings. The first person perspective shifts frequently between the boy and his father and is sometimes difficult to follow. Although there are attempts to use the typography to signal the shift, it is not always clear who is speaking.

Each story, in some ways, can stand alone, complemented by Magicomora's pop surrealist illustrations. The Spanish artist's style is colourful and visually striking, employing common tattoo motifs. The surreal nature of the stories is highlighted by the illustrations. The Spanish edition of the book was named "best children's book" by the Association of Illustrators of Catalonia.

Thematic Links: Fathers; Fantastic; Surrealism

Kristine Moruzi