

Fiction

23-4-96

THE FOURTH FRIEND: Manoj Das; Chandamama Publications, 188, N.S.K. Salai, Vadapalani, Madras-600026. Rs. 30.

Three young friends find themselves being washed away in a raging flood that had caught the village unawares. They succeeded in clinging to the branches of a fallen tree which also moves with the flowing water. The boys discover to their dismay that there is another object stuck to the tree. The drifting tree comes to a stop when obstructed by large boulders. Taking a closer look the three friends are shocked to know that the fourth friend happens to be a tiger.

All the four realise that for sheer survival they have to "live and let live." As they wait for the flood to recede, they see an empty boat floating by. The boys stop the boat and also help the animal into it. A strange friendship is struck in the midst of danger. They reach the shore and take shelter in a temple under ruins. When the tiger goes out in search of food it is mistaken for a man-eater and the forest officers are about to destroy the animal. The boys plead for their friend's life. The circus owner arrives in time to claim the tiger and thus saves the situation.

Manoj Dasa relates the story to keep the reader amused all through the book.

D. Venkatesan

LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN VALLEY: Manoj Das; Illustrated by Sisir Datta. Published by Chandamama Publications, 188, N.S.K. Salai, Vadapalani, Madras-600026. Rs. 40.

The story is about a land filled with fantasy and strange things happening all the time. The author perhaps harbours a hope for the salvation of mankind from all the ills by taking the reader through a land of make-believe while the purpose appears to point to the real quest.

The kingdom which nestled in a valley got its name from the belief that heaps of pure gold lay buried under the surface. Though the people of the land had a benevolent prince as ruler, what really ruled over them was their own goodness. Yet as nothing lasts for ever, there was a turmoil and a tyrant usurped the kingdom. The people became unhappy, but not for long.

According to legend the prince had carved out of gold a beautiful statue depicting a princess. A young man who roams the forest comes across the statue and a voice directs him to discover the secret of blowing life into the statue. His travels to strange lands helps him to learn the secret of life itself.

D.V.