and the pattern of greeting, hushing, and pouncing repeats with equally slapstick results. Big, blocky shapes and intense hues make the action simple to follow, and Haughton’s (Oh No, George!) text is similarly telegraphic. Eventually, the birds fly toward the littlest hunter after being offered a bit of bread, a flock of phantasmagorically colored birds gather, and the hunters get their comeuppance. The delicious stupidity of the hunting trio, the purity of heart of their small companion, and the sweet-tempered drama of each page turn make this a classic exercise in picture-book making. Ages 3–7. (Sept.)

★ Fox’s Garden

An act of tender compassion is given (and repaid) in secret during an icy winter night in this memorable addition to the Stories Without Words series, the U.S. debut for this French artist, born Camille Garoche. The story concerns a sleek, rust-colored fox seen darting through a gnarled forest of pale lavender trees beneath swirling snowy skies. Drawn to the orange glow of a building in the distance, the fox is shoed away by the man and woman who live there, before taking shelter in their greenhouse. A small boy, whose red sweater perhaps serves as an off-kilter hint that he’s an ally to the ruddy fox, sneaks outside to deliver a basket of food. As he sets it down, the full scope of his kindhearted action is revealed: the fox has four tiny kits snuggled under its bushy tail. Camcam creates her images by then lit and photographed. The resulting images possess a subtle dimensionality while the story exudes a haunting winter magic and a strong sense of the way a small kindness can make an enormous difference. Ages 3–8.

Madame Martine

Who needs to go to the top of the Eiffel Tower when you live in its shadow? That’s the logic adopted by set-in-her-ways Madame Martine, the dour, elderly star of this sweet-natured story about the joys to be found in trying something new. Madame Martine is content to follow her familiar routines through the streets of Paris: “Every morning Madame Martine went to Rue Cler and bought chicken on Monday, scallops on Tuesday, mushrooms on Wednesday, beef on Thursday, and fish on Friday. On Saturdays she fed the birds. On Sundays she stayed home.” But after a friendly stray dog catches her eye during her stroll, all bets may be off. The new pet, now named Max, inserts himself into Madame’s rigid routine and helps her gain a new perspective on her surroundings. Brannen (Uncle Bobby’s Wedding) illustrates her tale of an expanded viewpoint with gently drafted watercolor scenes of vibrant Paris streetscapes that gradually brighten, right along with Madame Martine’s wardrobe—and attitude. Ages 4–7. Agent: Jennifer Starkman, Transatlantic Literary Agency. (Sept.)

★ What There Is Before There Is Anything Else: A Scary Story

In an about-face from The Big Wet Balloon, his sweet-tempered English-language debut, accomplished Argentinean cartoonist Liniers presents an unsettling look at nighttime fears. A boy lies in bed at bedtime, staring at the ceiling. Shadowy, oppressive cross-hatching hints at what’s to come. Wished a cheery good night by his parents, the boy waits alone in the dark. “Where there was a ceiling, now there is nothing,” hand-lettered text explains passionately. “He knows that they are coming. They come every night when the ceiling disappears.” First to arrive at the foot of his bed is a tiny being with a nose like a stinger and a black umbrella. More creatures follow—half-comic, half-frightful, masked, and grasping—followed by a giant, writhing mass of blackness with rootlike tentacles. “I am what there is before there is anything there,” it says, reaching with all its arms for the boy, who bolts to his parents’ bedroom. “Not again” says his father. “It’s just your imagination,” says his mother. But even his parents’ bed isn’t safe. Fear is the new fun, and Jon Klassen and Lemony Snicket’s The Dark has an impressive rival. Ages 4–7.

—Publishers Weekly
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Beetle Boy
Margaret Willey. Carolrhoda Lab, $17.95 (208p) ISBN 978-1-4677-2639-9

Willey (Four Secrets) returns with a riveting story about being robbed of one’s childhood. When Charlie Porter is seven years old, his mother abandons him, his father, and his younger brother, Liam. To comfort his father, Charlie recites his mother’s bedtime stories about a beetle. Sensing an opportunity, Charlie’s short-tempered, womanizing father shoos him into the role of the “world’s youngest published author,” pressuring him to write and promote the books they cobbled together, wear a bug costume, visit schools, and attend conferences. It’s at these author gatherings that Charlie gets to know acerbic veteran author Mrs. M., with whom he forges an unlikely but crucial friendship. Now 18, Charlie is estranged from his family and living with his girlfriend Clara, who is growing increasingly frustrated with Charlie’s unwillingness to discuss his past. Willey expertly peels away Charlie’s backstory in flashbacks that alternate with present-day scenes that have Charlie wracked by horrific beetle-themed night terrors and consumed by guilt over abandoning Liam when life with their father became too much to bear. A potent story about the power that the past exerts on the present. Ages 13–18. (Sept.)