



***The Rain Train* - Elena de Roo**

Published by Walker Books, RRP \$29.99.

There's a dream-like quality to this book. A boy in pyjamas watches from his bedroom window as rain pitter-pats against the glass. He hears the sound of a train in the distance.

Then doors open along the row of houses in his street and light streaks out into the rainy night. People leave their homes shielded by brightly-coloured umbrellas. The boy and his mother join them. A train rolls into the nearby station and passengers enter the softly-lit carriages. It seems like an ordinary scene, until a closer look reveals that many people are dressed for bed. Even the guard is wearing striped pyjamas under his uniform jacket. "All aboard the Rain Train!" he calls.

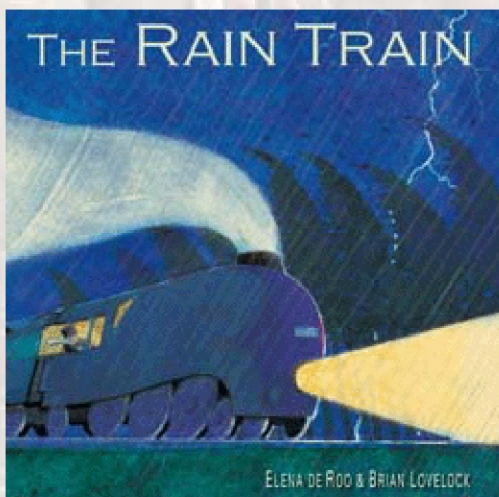
Roll-off-the-tongue rhyme keeps the story moving with the steady pace of the train, "Gathering speed, a ratter-tat-tat. Into the black, a clatter-clat-clat."

The illustrations by Brian Lovelock are spread across double pages to give the sense of a train snaking through the night. Watercolours in muted blues and greens convey the dusky atmosphere. Golden light in the carriages is cosy and reassuring.

The end papers are a clever part of the story. Inside the front hard-back covers the train winds through a night-time landscape. While the closing scene inside the back cover shows exactly the same view at sunrise.

Subtle clues lead readers to wonder: Was the boy's ride on the sleeper train a dream? A beautiful bedtime story.

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett.



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