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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ JUVENILE FICTION

Amberella in the City

Rosemarie Kaupp
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Amberella in the City is the first of what author Rosemarie Kaupp promises will be a series of stories about a delightful pup named Amberella that is geared toward the younger set of chapter-book readers. The initial installment of *The Amberella Tales* provides a lovingly written, light-hearted romp through the early months of a puppy's life.

Amberella is a spirited, Welsh Corgi-Staffordshire bull terrier mix, with "her Mama's corgi face and her Papa's tan and brown brindle coat." The illustrations by Marvin Alonso are simple and sweet, evoking the sketches in Norman Bridwell's original *Clifford the Big Red Dog* series. Unfortunately, the illustrations, while absolutely charming, do not reflect Amberella's heritage.

A puppy of humble farm origin, Amberella must bravely endure life in the big city after her adoption by a well-to-do family. Her new life is dominated by Grand-mère, the family matriarch, and two often ill-behaved French poodles who sport pink-tinted fur. Initially, the poodles' snooty elegance is lost on the family's new addition, who only wants to make friends. "Dogs in the country don't wear clothes," thinks Amberella, when the poodles insist that she needs a sweater, raincoat, and boots. Her old friends, she fears, will make fun of her.

Young readers will delight in the fact that Grand-mère is able to understand dog language. Life is far easier for Amberella with a human nearby who knows what she is saying.

Even more exciting is the fact that the poodles speak French. Kaupp includes a "French Word List" that provides definitions and pronunciations for the words used by the poodles. Some may take exception to a few of the simplified pronunciations, but for the young reader who is not familiar with the language, the "how to say it" guide will do. When Amberella learns, "Très chic is French for 'stylish,'" readers learn it, too.

Amberella in the City succeeds on many levels. With an endearing dog as its primary focus, the story will undoubtedly attract the many pet lovers. Amberella's appealing character will make her beloved by many. The French lessons built into the story add to its charm and educational quality. The various plot lines, from Amberella's stint in obedience school to her first trip to the groomer, ring true and are amusingly engaging in their detail.

What disappoints is the story's ending, when Amberella finds herself in love and engaged to Prince, another puppy from her training class. True, dog years are not the same as "people years," but the development comes too soon. Prince's declaration that "(T)he man should make the home. I think we should live at my house," is both startling and disheartening.

Kaupp undoubtedly has plans for Amberella, but the full potential of the puppy's captivating interaction with Grand-mère and the poodles is thwarted in the last pages of *Amberella in the City*. The ending feels false and contrived, designed merely to make way for the next installment in the series.

CHERYL M. HIBBARD (August 23, 2012)

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