

Bismark and Us

Min Pin Tootsie

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This is the sweet and simple story of one dog's family life.

Bismark and Us: A True Story by Min Pin Tootsie is the sweet story, told by a canine narrator, of four dogs and their human family.

Min Pin Tootsie, a dog belonging to Ken and Dezi, begins the family narrative with its first dog: Bismark, Min Pin's father. Ken and Dezi get Bismark while living in Nigeria, and the rest of the dogs join the family in Botswana; finally, the whole family moves to England.

There are bits of each culture throughout the tale, but they're limited given the canine perspective; most cross-cultural insights are related to the cross-species nature of human and animal relationships.

Min Pin shares stories about Bismark's early life with Ken and Dezi based on what the pup heard from Bismark himself. Then Min Pin traces the growth of the family from one to four dachshunds and relates how the dogs interacted with each other and their human counterparts.

The relationships among the dogs, particularly Bismark and Min Pin, and between the dogs and the humans, give the book heart and offer some structure and a modest arc to the day-to-day recollections. Throughout the story, each character grows and changes, and as a result the family unit and its relationships shift.

This idea of change over time is very relatable, even coming from a nonhuman narrator. As with many stories focused on pets, the tale ends with heartbreak, but it contains touching and humorous moments along the way.

Min Pin Tootsie's perspective is the defining quality of the book. The dog's-eye view will appeal to dog lovers and other pet enthusiasts, but it leads to a story that's rather simplistic.

The basic chronological narrative doesn't offer much beyond the recounting of events. As a dog, Min Pin doesn't have much say in what goes on in the family and puzzles through human ways rather than discerning deeper motivations.

Min Pin recounts human and dog dialogue and offers childlike observations. The use of emotions feels accurate to a dog's point of view, but it becomes repetitive, especially when emotions are shown through dialogue or action and then reiterated in exposition. The slow pace and daily details also feel appropriate; some of the reminiscences are quaint, but others feel mundane.

Straightforward sentences and moments of colorful diction (like "ramshacklety") fit the tone and voice of the book, but the grammar and punctuation occasionally hinder the flow of the narrative. The uncomplicated sentences open this volume to a younger audience.

This book would appeal most to people who love dogs and sweet, unassuming animal stories, including middle

schoolers and young teens, parents reading along with their elementary-aged children, and adult pet owners who want an easy, unpretentious narrative about—and by—dogs.

Bismark and Us is a touching and simple story of a dog's happy life.

MELISSA WUSKE (December 29, 2016)

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