

Corky Tails: Tales of Tailless Dog Named Sagebrush: Sagebrush and the Smoke Jumper

Joni Franks

Raquel Rodriguez, Illustrator

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Encouraging stewardship as well as kindness, this picture book includes a worthy, timeless call to remember that nature and humanity are inextricably bound.

Sagebrush and the Smoke Jumper is a lively account of a forest fire caused by debris in machinery. An environmental, antideforestation message mixes with optimism and heartwarming kinship. Joni Franks brings a ranch at the edge of the woodlands to life with animals, miniature people, Young Miss, and a spirited family of corgis.

The tale builds tension without excessive fright, allowing its forest fire to serve as an inciting event that drives Young Miss, her herd, and her dogs Sagebrush, Ginger, and Maverick away from potential harm.

At the same time, orphaned Juniper Berry—one of the Shun, a people who resemble sprites—flees from the fire and encounters a smoke jumper. He leads Juniper Berry to Young Miss, who helps her find a new home with fellow Shun. It's an appealing account of strangers meeting under strained circumstances and helping others.

Writing often slips into familiarity with clichéd phrases like “Meanwhile, back at the ranch” and “loud as thunder.” A darker story is superimposed on the narrative but is less developed. Though Juniper recalls the “tree-cutting machines” that have driven many Shun out of their tree hollow homes, and how the event has left her alone, the situation is imparted without gravitas.

The book's moral lessons are spelled out at the conclusion rather than left for children to glean from the story itself. Young Miss is an efficient lead, though, and the dogs' personalities are well developed through their speech and distinctive gestures. The presence of a smoke jumper adds fascinating intrigue for young fans of firefighters who may be less familiar with specialized wildland crews.

Illustrations by Raquel Rodriguez are straightforward depictions of the text. From gradient skies to simplified shadows—which appear as ovals rather than the complex forms of the animals and people they correspond to—they portray scenes and characters without the nuance necessary to underscore the rich Rocky Mountain landscape that is devastated in the tale.

Part of the Corky Tails series, *Sagebrush and the Smoke Jumper* is laced with western flair. It encourages stewardship as well as kindness and includes a worthy, timeless call to remember that nature and humanity are inextricably bound.

KAREN RIGBY (February 15, 2018)

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