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Happy Birthday Coco

Oneones
Kane/Miller (September 2006)
Unknown $12.95 (56pp)
978-1-933605-13-5

Dog lovers all over the world feel the same way this Japanese trio of authors and illustrators do about Coco. She is more than a companion; she is a member of the family.

Coco is a charming female wirehair fox terrier. Affectionately told from her owner's perspective, this story delicately illustrates her first year of life. Originally published in Japan, the book presents illustrations with a simple symmetry and lots of white space. The classic terrier brown circles around Coco's eyes contrast with her white-and-gray fur. This adds a needed distinction, especially when she is the only element on a page. The backgrounds are very simple: a bare table with two chairs, a swath of brown ground, or Coco with other dogs, cats, or birds with no ground beneath them. The repetition of a single tree, shown in each season, on an unadorned park-scape, shows the year passing.

The story is written in a subtle voice: Coco wakes and stretches, catches a tennis ball, ignores a much larger dog on her walk, and tries to play with a flock of birds. From her first days as a puppy when she cried at night and chewed the table legs, until her first birthday, Coco's life is seen one day at a time.

One day, Coco's tennis ball rolls to a "very big dog" and he rolls it back. This nameless dog and Coco begin a great friendship. Later, Coco disappears and is finally found outside the vet's office where her friend lies near death, and she waits with him: "It was time to go, but Coco wouldn't. She wouldn't leave her friends. Not until much, much later."

There are sections in the book where it's difficult to tell what is going on. The language, like the paintings, is understated. For young readers, though, that is also the attraction. This simple book is more like a scrapbook than a story. Coco is a loved dog that lives a loved dog's life. It's refreshing not to have a moral or a message.

"Oneones" is the pen name of the book's three Japanese authors and illustrators: Hitomi Sago is a graphic designer who has won awards in Japan and Germany; Tatsuro Kiuchi, an illustrator with medals from the Tokyo Illustrators Society, the Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles, and Kodansha; and Shoko Nagamatsu is a copywriter and author of *The Lotus Seed*. Coco is a real dog. Together, they have created a luscious book.
ANNA STEWART (October 5, 2006)

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