



Kassy O'Rourke, Cub Reporter

Kelly Oliver

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Kelly Oliver's middle grade mystery *Kassy O'Rourke, Cub Reporter* is filled with adventures, riddles, and a missing lion cub.

Kassy and her brother live with their mother, a veterinarian who runs a petting zoo. It's been a rough year, including because Kassy's father left, but the animals are helping the family to cope.

As a young journalist, Kassy is also looking for the next big scoop, and she's hoping to win the coveted Thompson Award by following the motto that detectives, spies, and reporters don't cry. When the family's rescued lion cub, Apollo, goes missing, it's up to Kassy to find him before the mean-spirited animal control worker, Mr. Killjoy, does; he's looking for an excuse to shut down the petting zoo.

Kassy narrates, her perspective consistent and fun, though it also conveys her authentic struggles with losing her dad. Her sense of humor comes through in her unique turns-of-phrase, including "holy halitosis!" and "deviled eggs" (used for those she doesn't like). She is an adventurous and stubborn lead who's willing to get in trouble and who always follows through with her plans.

Kassy also proves reluctant to ask for help, though. Assistance from friends—including Butler, whose first impression is less than genial, and Kassy's future stepsister, Veronica, who reminds Kassy that her father has a new family—is necessary if she wants to save Apollo and the petting zoo.

All characters and events are filtered through Kassy's detailed perspective. Secondary characters are lively, and their rich backstories are conveyed without detracting from Kassy's mission. Kassy comes to understand why her brother talks to animals to see him in a whole new light, and she learns to accept Butler as a friend and to recognize Veronica's good qualities.

Kassy's inner monologue shows her bouncing back and forth between different opinions. This is consistent with someone her age, but when she talks about discovering who took Apollo and then mentions that he could have escaped, the investigation becomes harder to follow. Other details—such as Kassy's mother not calling animal control right away, and the ultimate culprit's exaggerated abilities—are confusing.

The book moves quickly, with challenges arising one after the other. All are handled in turn. Kassy's wits and keen eye help her to get out of tough situations, all while wrapping the mystery up well.

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REBECCA MONTERUSSO (July 4, 2019)

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