Clarion Review

General

Marvin's Mysteries
Richard Mulligan
Lulu
978-0-557-06550-9
Three Stars (out of Five)

Some animals survive in nonnative habitats adapting well when climate and food sources prove favorable. The preteen novel *Marvin's Mysteries* tells the story of an exotic animal bred for domestication but lost in a foreign environment.

Marvin lived with Lisa his human owner and her family until they relocated to a country whose laws prohibit his remaining with them. Shortly after their arrival Lisa's father over her objections decides to turn Marvin in to the authorities. On the way Marvin falls from the car. He awakens beside an unfamiliar road pet carrier open and food bowl upended beside him. His head hurts and aside from his name he remembers nothing including what kind of animal he is. (This secret is also kept from readers until the book's end.) Shunned by animals who don't recognize his kind Marvin is finally befriended by an orphaned rabbit named Orville. He invites Marvin on a quest to solve the mystery of his own family's violent demise. Lucy a raccoon with attitude teams up with them.

Lucy leads them to a campground to beg for food but Orville resists the idea of going near humans. Lucy explains "If you pick the right humans they respond to the begging and there's no danger."

On their journey the trio encounters two foxes Rennie and Sly and Lupe a wolf and Marvin teaches them the meaning of brotherly love. They resurface again later when Lucy mistakenly begs from campers who send their coon dog after her. Marvin joins Rennie Sly and Lupe to save Lucy. "Their combined attack was too much for the dog who fled yelping back toward the campsite" Mulligan writes.

Eventually the mysterious threat to Orville's family is eliminated and Marvin's memory is restored. He finds his way home to Lisa. Knowing she can't let him stay she says "You're free now…Please come to see me often."

The informative plot is well developed but lengthy expository dialogue slows the pace. With the exception of Marvin Lucy and Venom the snake the animal characters could have been better defined by specific speech and behavior traits.

This book helps young readers learn about animals and how they coexist in the wild. Adult readers concerned about keeping habitat free of nonnative species might question Lisa's compromise that allows Marvin to find food and shelter with her while running free in a country foreign to his natural habitat.

Margaret Cullison