



Milly: My Life as a Labradoodle ... in Five Short Dog Tales

Robert Belenky

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Those who know and love dogs, particularly Labradoodles, will likely find something here to enjoy.

Milly is the beloved Labradoodle of Mary and Capt'n Bob. *In Milly: My Life as a Labradoodle*, Robert Belenky presents five short stories that offer glimpses into Milly's life, personality, and the relationship that author and dog share.

The first story is about how Milly came to live with her adoptive parents, the second about how she attended law school and defended herself against the accusation of being a tennis ball thief. Story number three concerns Milly's desire to acquire a human pet and is incomplete, with a request for suggestions from the reading audience to end the story. The fourth story discusses Milly's prejudice against squirrels, and the final story is not about Milly at all, instead telling the tale of the death of Milly's grandmother and namesake.

The writing is solid throughout the book. The language is simple and easy to read, and each story is fairly brief. All of this makes for a book most appropriate for young children, but not all of the content seems suited for that age group.

The first story deals in part with a fairly harsh reality as Milly is rejected by her mother when the puppy accidentally bites her while nursing. The fourth story has a perhaps even more adult topic, mirroring current political events. After chasing a squirrel and getting her foot caught in a rabbit hole Milly states: "I shall gather all of the local dogs together, and we will build a wall of stones and boulders all around the forest. No squirrel will be allowed through unless he or she takes the no-tree-climbing oath that I shall compose as soon as I return home. And ... I will make the squirrels *pay* for it!"

There are several unexpected elements in these stories that make them feel disjointed when taken as a whole. The story of Milly being adopted by Mary and Bob, which is told from Milly's perspective, seems very true to life. The story of Milly becoming a lawyer, told from Bob's perspective, is entertaining but clearly a complete work of fiction. This story has a short list of questions to ponder at the end that makes the stories feel even more disparate. Finally, the very brief story of death that ends the book is lovely and gentle but seems odd in a book that claims to be about a different dog entirely.

Ultimately, *Milly: My Life as a Labradoodle* is a confusing book. It is difficult to determine a suitable audience for this book, and the stories, though each concerns a dog named Milly, do not really relate to one another. The author is clearly a good storyteller, and there is charm and humor to be found here. Those who know and love dogs, particularly Labradoodles, will likely find something here to enjoy.

CATHERINE THURESON (April 26, 2017)

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