



Molly's Miracle: A Chosen Dog, Not a Broken Dog

W. B. Murph

Luca Mendieta, Illustrator

WonderBeagMurph Press

(30pp)

979-898824620-6

All living creatures should be treated with love—and with respect for their differences—according to the inspirational picture book Molly's Miracle.

A beagle escapes from an abusive household, seeking a loving owner, in W. B. Murph's picture book *Molly's Miracle*.

Molly is neglected and abused by her humans. When they are distracted, she escapes, badly injuring her leg and becoming an unprotected stray. Eventually, she is taken in by a rescue shelter to await her forever home.

In covering Molly's escape and rescue from her perspective, the book inspires empathetic identification with her struggles. Molly's fear and confusion are palpable at the beginning of the story when she asks what she has done wrong to deserve her abuse. And the harsh realities of Molly's continued hardships on the streets after her escape are detailed as well: she nearly starves, is chased away when she begs for food, and hides from other, vicious dogs. Still, the story evades despair, holding out hope that Molly will find a loving home.

The book's bright, simple illustrations, outlined in thin black ink, feature the characters' exaggerated expressions and Molly's large, innocent puppy eyes. They are expressive when it comes to emotions including fear, sadness, happiness, and joy. That Molly deserves kindness is made clear. But the illustrations of the humans Molly encounters are less polished and less multifaceted, including those of the cartoonish, brutish villains who treat Molly with cruelty. Nonetheless, their large, angry sneers, bulging eyes, and towering size emphasize Molly's powerlessness and inspire sympathy for her as a literal underdog.

The book closes with discussion questions that encourage active participation. They drive home the book's ultimate message well: that people are responsible for caring for and loving their pets, who are sentient and feel pain and love too. These questions are direct, though their arrangement on a single, unadorned page renders their message tedious and even visually discomfiting to read. The text next to the illustrations throughout the story faces similar problems: the small font size, combined with the large blocks of text, proves cumbersome. In addition, the bold and enlarged fonts of certain words seems random, rather than creating dramatic emphasis at moments of high tension.

Through its story of a hopeful dog, the picture book *Molly's Miracle* advocates for the humane treatment of pets.

ISABELLA ZHOU (October 9, 2023)

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