



Seven Tails of Christmas: A Christmas Novella

Rob Edwards

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Strong relationships are the foundation of a joyful life in the parabolic Christmas novella Seven Tails of Christmas.

Rob Edwards's pithy, sensitive novella *Seven Tails of Christmas* is about connections that form after a loss.

Ellis, having lost his wife to cancer, resolves to live his first year of holidays without her alone. He is sad and angry, and he plans to sleep through Christmas so that he doesn't have to think about his loss. His two adult daughters call him to express their concern, but Ellis is resolute.

On Christmas Eve, Ellis is frightened when his cat and dog begin to speak to him, berating him for wanting to be alone when his daughters love him. He is then whisked into the minds of four pets of other mourning people who have also decided to remain alone at Christmas. After he witnesses the fourth person, Kimber, attempt suicide, Ellis races to meet the others. He hopes they can unite to save Kimber's life. Together, this odd bunch learns about the power of connection, finding joy in their lives despite their losses.

Back stories are shared for all five humans, including their reasons for choosing solitude, such as that Kazi fled from his country because he is gay. Their personalities balance each other out: Kazi is humble and empathetic; Julia is vivacious and energetic; Mr. Kobbs is crotchety. These extremes intensify the impact of the parable, in which Ellis comes to realize how lucky he is to have known his wife.

The transition from Ellis's perspective into the animals' minds is an easy one, helped along by details such as that Ellis can't help but eat everything in sight when he's in the mind of Julia's pet goat. And the book's descriptions of its settings are straightforward, brief, and precise, illustrating just enough of the backdrop to form perfect images. Still, there are some awkward sentences that impede the story.

There are also culturally insensitive moments in the otherwise progressive text, which calls Kazi "African-American" though he is Kenyan, is vague about Kimber being of "Asian descent," and makes a joke about a Jewish woman hating being wished a Merry Christmas. These undermine its strong message of connection despite differences. Still, the book handles heavy topics, including depression, suicide, and LGBTQ+ persecution, with tact and empathy.

The book's progression is somewhat formulaic, beginning with Ellis's reluctance to listen to his pets; Ellis's experiences in the minds of the animals, who test his notions about grief, evoke Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, with each person's story building upon the previous to expand Ellis's sense of understanding. Endearing if predictable, the book has the flavor of a fable, and it moves at a swift, structured pace toward its tender conclusion.

Seven Tails of Christmas is a heartwarming Christmas novella about the importance of human connections.

AIMEE JODOIN (December 3, 2021)

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