Clarion Review

Picture Books

The Legend of Chris Moose: The (ugliest) Most Beautiful Moose in the World

Allen Northcutt
Christie Morris, illustrator
Old Stone Press
978-1-938462-01-6
Five Stars (out of Five)

In *The Legend of Chris Moose,* Allen Northcutt creates a delightful, beautifully illustrated moose tale that gives parents and children an opportunity to discuss the issue of social exclusion and the hurtfulness of name-calling.

Chris Moose is a loving animal who starts out in Northcutt's tale with the name "Ugly." It is Christmastime in the forest, and the animals have been invited to the Bears' house for a party. Since the landscape is snowed under, Ugly the moose offers to give everyone a ride on his antlers. That includes Chatter the squirrel, Stinky the skunk, Nosey the rabbit, Bandit the raccoon, Squeaky the mouse, Pokey the turtle, Smarty the fox, Honker the goose, Slim the snake, and Hooty the owl. Each character is beautifully illustrated by Christie Morris.

When they reach the Bears' house, all of the animals except Ugly go inside. Ugly cannot fit because of his girth, so he remains outside, alone. When the Bears realize they have forgotten a Christmas tree, Ugly offers to extend his head through the window and allow them to decorate his antlers. "I brought no gift to put on the shelf, but open that window—I'll give of myself," he declares. Once he's decorated with tinsel and trinkets, Ugly looks beautiful, which leads the forest friends to reconsider his name and realize it is inappropriate. They rename him Chris Moose, and he becomes known as the "most beautiful moose in the world."

Northcutt, who penned the first draft of this charming tale in 1982, aspired to address hurtful names like “Ugly” in the context of this rhyming children’s story, and to show how unkind it is to exclude someone from a group because they are different from the rest. The author is a decorated US Marine Corps fighter pilot, Vietnam War veteran, and retired investment banker. Having raised a child who is learning disabled, he has dealt personally with the issues around which he wrote *The Legend of Chris Moose*.

The book is easy to read, both for early readers and adults reading to smaller children, with four rhyming lines per page. Best of all, using the context of forest animals, it gives parents and kids an example of socializing in a kinder, gentler way that’s inclusive and respectful.

Lauren Kramer