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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ JUVENILE FICTION

The Missing Bullet

Liliane Thomas
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Thirteen-year-old Jason must save his mother after he finds her with a gun in her hand and his dad lying in bed covered with blood. When he hears her screams and rushes to his parents' bedroom, she is still clicking the empty gun.

Jason calls 911 and reports, "My mom shot my dad." When the police arrive and he's answered their questions, Jason and his eighteen-month-old sister, Megan, are shuffled out the door to stay with their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Parker. The Parkers are the grandparents of his best friend, Chrissy. Although Jason really likes the Parkers, they always make him miss his own grandparents.

It's only a few days before Christmas, and Jason only wants one thing: to spend Christmas at home with his parents and Megan. However, the police have declared the house off-limits while they investigate the shooting. Jason gets to know the police—the mean one, the nice one and the others.

Slowly he begins to remember things. He had found his baseball bat on the floor. He found a pipe and remembered the smell of tobacco, a smell that reminded him of the pipe his Grandpa smoked before he died.

Evidence piles up against his mother. There's only one missing clue: his mom fired six shots, but only five bullets were found. When he visits the hospital, his dad tells him to find a hidden envelope and tell no one.

Jason finds himself caught up in mystery, danger and fear. He involves his friends, Chrissy and Barry. The three of them eat pizza for lunch every Friday and call themselves the "Pizza PI's."

Author Liliane Thomas keeps the suspense high as more clues are discovered and the young investigators realize that people aren't what they seem. All of the characters are well-developed, and readers will not only get to know Jason, his family, and his friends, they will also come to like them. As the mystery deepens, the relationships between Jason and his parents, the Parkers, and his best friends are strengthened.

Unfortunately, there are typos throughout the book, and the cover is lackluster. Nevertheless, Thomas has turned out an engaging mystery where surprises abound. There are enough twists and turns to keep readers wondering what will happen next.

PAT AVERY (September 4, 2010)

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