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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ MYSTERY

The Nose Knows: A Spunky Mystery

Holly Lewitas
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Monkey C. Media, designer
Wheatmark (Mar 15, 2012)
Softcover $14.95 (350pp)
978-1-60494-737-3

The heroine of Holly L. Lewitas' debut novel is intelligent, clever, and intensely loyal. She is also covered with gray and white fur, but the fact that she happens to be a dog doesn't stop Spunky from solving mysteries and protecting those she loves.

In *The Nose Knows: A Spunky Mystery*, Lewitas introduces Spunky, a small, mixed-breed terrier with a big personality. Fiercely protective of her owner, widowed therapist Dr. Hannah Richards, Spunky and her four cat friends devote themselves to ensuring their "mom's" safety and happiness. Considering that Dr. Richards was once held hostage by a patient and is now wary of human interaction, the task is rather complicated. When the doctor finally begins to come out of her shell only to fall under the shadow of threat once more, Spunky enlists the help of her feline housemates as she sets out to solve the mystery and protect Dr. Richards.

Lewitas makes her belief in the healing and comforting power of pets a prominent theme in *The Nose Knows*, utilizing the narrative to present examples of the ways animals can bond with and emotionally support human beings. As Dr. Richards eases her way back into meeting with patients, she soon discovers that the presence of Spunky or one of her cats brings her comfort and often helps her clients to relax and let their guards down as well. For instance, soon after spending time with Spunky, a particularly reticent and angry young woman opens up in therapy with Dr. Richards. As Spunky says, "Mind you, she never progressed to the level of acting more like a dog, but she definitely made progress by human standards."

Besides keeping Dr. Richards safe, Spunky and her cat friends (Fearless, Bobby, Sweetie, and Fancy Pants) ease their human pal back to life in other ways. By conspiring with another dog, Spunky orchestrates several meetings between Dr. Richards and the other dog's owner, Jacob, with the goal of helping both humans to leave their pasts behind. Such instances of the animals' guiding the humans are always entertaining and heartwarming.

Told in Spunky's voice, *The Nose Knows* is narrated in an approachable and uncomplicated style, making it appealing to most age groups. Although there are a few edgy moments, there are no graphically disturbing scenes. The story progresses and tension mounts effectively, while the tone is kept at a predominantly lighthearted level.

Avid mystery readers may find this approach a bit too tame. While pets comforting the elderly or ill may not be a new idea, the prospect of dogs and cats being brought into a police interrogation room to help influence a suspected criminal may seem rather unorthodox for many readers. Yet, in the context of Lewitas' story, it has a certain realism.

The Nose Knows is often witty and charming, and it illustrates just how special the bond between animals and humans can be. Spunky and her cat companions are clever and endearing, and the human characters are largely well developed. Animal lovers are sure to be entertained, and they will look forward to the next book featuring the delightful and spirited Spunky.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (September 7, 2012)

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