

Zoe Lucky: and the Green Gables' Mystery

M. Carol Coffey

M. Carol Coffey, Illustrator

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Zoe Lucky chases a burglar with a knife but he runs too fast for her to get a good view of him. “What would I have done if I had caught up?” Zoe asks herself.

Since her mother is working the night shift in the third of thirty-two short chapters thirteen-year-old Zoe is home alone when this first break-in leaves the living room in disarray with two candy bars missing. Six months before her dad a cop was killed in a bank robbery shootout. Zoe and her mom now live in the downstairs apartment of a building that Zoe calls Green Gables due to its repulsive pea-green trim.

Zoe realizes that someone is following her when a man appears in a white van parked near Green Gables and he ducks to avoid being seen. With the help of her boyfriend Toby her bilingual parrot Paki and some intelligent crows Zoe discovers clues about the mysterious break-ins. They are also helped by an undercover cop whose identity is a tremendous but unrealistic surprise.

While the first break-in provides exciting conflict the slower pace of the other early chapters might not securely hold the attention of ten- to thirteen-year-olds. The book’s multicultural aspects provide a good message. Zoe feels safe with detective Tracy whom she describes as “a large black man with a gray speckled beard and movie star smile.” Readers are also introduced to the Swahili language through Paki whose words are footnoted with translations such as *asante* which means “thank you.” A glossary would have solved the problem of occasional missing translations for repeated words.

Author M. Carol Coffey who also illustrated the book received art training from the Carnegie Museum of Oakland and the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. She served as editor and wrote a column for the *Pittsburgh Women’s Magazine*. Her other books are *The Fashion Secrets of the Frugal Fox* *The Frugal Fox Shops for Fashion in the Pittsburgh and the Tri-State Area* and *Archie the Bird Brain*.

A thorough editing would have reduced the number of typographical errors and helped eliminate confusion in several places. Deleting parentheses from quotes would increase clarity.

Readers will enjoy the book’s occasional humor. After escaping from a criminal who was chasing Zoe and her mother in a mirrored room they see an ironic sign at the amusement park exit that reads “Thanks for having a good time at Kennywood.”

Zoe feels all alone the night she chases the intruder with a knife but Paki is with her. Wonderful friends both human and avian make Zoe truly lucky.

NORMA D. KELLAM (May 5, 2009)

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