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## ***Spunky Tells All* (review)**

Deborah Stevenson

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

**Reviewed by:**

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*Deborah Stevenson*

Cameron, Ann. *Spunky Tells All*; illus. by Lauren Castillo. Farrar, 2011. [128p].  
ISBN 978-0-374-38000-7 \$15.99 Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 2-4.

We've heard from both Julian and Huey (*The Stories Julian Tells*, BCCB 1/82; *The Stories Huey Tells*, BCCB 12/95) in the Bates family, as well as their friend Gloria (*Gloria's Way*, BCCB 2/00), but we haven't heard from the Bates family pets—until now. Spunky is Huey's beloved pooch, mostly happy with his domestic lot despite his humans' tragic inability to speak Dog. It's that language barrier that leads to a terrible misunderstanding: believing that Spunky needs animal company, the family acquires a cat. Spunky, however, is incensed by vain, ditzy Fiona (who "smells of Foolish") and wishes the house were rid of her—or does he? This is more an animal story than a genuine continuation of the adventures of Julian et al., but it's no less solid for that. While there's plenty of humor based on crossed dog-human understanding, this is really a character and relationship story, following Spunky as he gets used to what is basically an annoying new sister and as he demonstrates his importance to Huey in an ultimately deeply touching tribute to the dog-kid bond. The characterization of Fiona is masterful yet economic, neatly capturing the svelte, smug cluelessness that is par for the feline course while also making it understandable that Spunky (or "Dog," as she airily calls him) eventually comes to love her. **[End Page 137]** Chapters are neatly self-contained for reading aloud or alone, and the solid-lined monochromatic spot art, focused firmly on the critters and not the people, has the friendly openness of Spunky himself. Dog fans looking for something a little deeper than Nolan's *Down Girl and Sit* (*Smarter than Squirrels*, BCCB 11/04) will delight in Spunky's tail-wagging tale-telling, which could introduce a new generation of kids to the Bates family chronicles.

**BUZZEO, TONI** *Lighthouse Christmas*; illus. by Nancy Carpenter. Dial, 2011 [32p]  
 ISBN 978-0-8037-3053-3 \$16.99  
 Reviewed from galley R 4-7 yrs

Find a picture book with a lighthouse setting and chances are you'll also find a plucky little girl who keeps the light burning and saves the storm-tossed sailors. Buzzeo's Christmas offering puts a bit of holiday tinsel on the tried-and-true tale. It's the first Christmas for Frances and her brother, Peter, since their mother died and their father took a transfer from his mainland lighthouse to one on an island in Penobscot Bay. A run of bad weather has prevented the supply ship from reaching Ledge Light, and as their household supplies dwindle, Peter is so desperate for a real celebration with all the customary rituals that Papa agrees the children should go to their aunt on the mainland while he stays and tends to business. The weather worsens, though, and on Christmas Eve Papa must rely on Frances to tend the light while he puts out in his dory to rescue a fisherman. As the children try to make the best of their ruined holiday to cheer Papa and their guest, a small plane flies low over Ledge Light and drops a bundle of supplies with a note reading "Seasons Greetings from The Flying Santa." An appended note apprises readers that the Flying Santa Service is a real organization, founded by a lone floatplane pilot in 1929 and expanded over the years to serve Coast Guard families through the present day. The telling is smooth and engaging, and Carpenter's mixed-media pictures set the appropriate mood—warm and hospitable inside the lighthouse, dark and tempestuous outside—so even children who are yet unfamiliar with the lighthouse-keeper's-daughter trope will cheer the heroics right on cue. The brief appearance of the Flying Santa upstages the rescue somewhat, since listeners will wish they could follow the pilot as he makes his holiday rounds, but the appeal of a surprising yet old-fashioned Christmas on an isolated island will be enough to satisfy many holiday buffs. EB

**CAMERON, ANN** *Spunky Tells All*; illus. by Lauren Castillo. Farrar, 2011 [128p]  
 ISBN 978-0-374-38000-7 \$15.99  
 Reviewed from galley R Gr. 2-4

We've heard from both Julian and Huey (*The Stories Julian Tells*, BCCB 1/82; *The Stories Huey Tells*, BCCB 12/95) in the Bates family, as well as their friend Gloria (*Gloria's Way*, BCCB 2/00), but we haven't heard from the Bates family pets—until now. Spunky is Huey's beloved pooch, mostly happy with his domestic lot despite his humans' tragic inability to speak Dog. It's that language barrier that leads to a terrible misunderstanding: believing that Spunky needs animal company, the family acquires a cat. Spunky, however, is incensed by vain, ditzy Fiona (who "smells of Foolish") and wishes the house were rid of her—or does he? This is more an animal story than a genuine continuation of the adventures of Julian et al., but it's no less solid for that. While there's plenty of humor based on crossed dog-human understanding, this is really a character and relationship story, following Spunky as he gets used to what is basically an annoying new sister and as he demonstrates his importance to Huey in an ultimately deeply touching tribute to the dog-kid bond. The characterization of Fiona is masterful yet economic, neatly capturing the svelte, smug cluelessness that is par for the feline course while also making it understandable that Spunky (or "Dog," as she airily calls him) eventually comes to love her.



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2715 North Charles Street  
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[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)  
[muse@press.jhu.edu](mailto:muse@press.jhu.edu)



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