



Jennifer Murdley's Toad (Magic Shop Book Book 3)

By Bruce Coville

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Jennifer Murdley, a homely fifth-grader who would give anything to be beautiful, accidentally stumbles into a magic shop and purchases a very ugly toad. The toad, it turns out, can talk and ends up getting Jennifer into the worst trouble of her life. This madcap, head-spinning adventure is also a thought-provoking story about the nature of true beauty.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This fanciful story questions the value of beauty yet spins out of control after a promising start. Jennifer, a fifth-grader, agonizes over her appearance--"I'm just a kid in the plain brown wrapper"--and her schoolmates' taunts are doubly painful. After purchasing a toad from a mysterious shopkeeper Jennifer is amazed to discover that not only can Bufo talk, he can mimic voices unerringly. At school the canny amphibian inflicts vengeance on Sharra, a nasty classmate. When a gorgeous witch kidnaps Jennifer's youngest sibling, her evil intentions are thwarted by teamwork--and by Jennifer's sacrifices that reveal qualities surpassing mere beauty. Coville's (Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher) comical classroom scenes lapse into a convoluted web involving Bufo's long-lost sweetheart and the belabored idea that pulchritude denotes cruelty; unattractiveness, humanity. The book's laudable message, however, is clearly delineated, and as kind, loyal Jennifer endures a poor self-image, one hopes readers will see the light. Ages 8-12.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 3-6--As is this series' pattern, a child who is having a problem runs away and finds herself in the magic shop with Mr. Elives. Jennifer believes she is ugly and has trouble making friends. Wanting a pet, she buys Bufo, a toad hatched years before from the mouth of a witch who spewed out frogs, snakes, and other nasty items. He has spent his recent life looking for his lost love, another toad. Naturally, he helps Jennifer see her in her self. In the process, she, her brother, and a school enemy are all turned into toads. Meanwhile, the witch is out to find Bufo. It all gets somewhat confusing, but as in earlier books, an adult steps in, and all turns out for the best. Very similar in plot to Coville's Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher (HBJ, 1991), the story moves well, with realistic characterizations. Fans of Coville's earlier books will probably like this as well, especially when the children-cum-toads discover their appetite for bugs. The black-and-white illustrations go well with the text, featuring an expressive toad and an unattractive Jennifer and witch. The theme of inner beauty is particularly well handled for this age group.

-Margaret C. Howell, West Springfield Elementary School, VA

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From Kirkus Reviews

Snagged immediately with "If Jennifer Murdley hadn't been forced to wear her brother's underpants to school, the whole thing might never have happened," readers will find this latest escapade featuring Mr. S. H. Elives and his quirky magic-shop endlessly funny. Painfully aware that she's plain, fourth-grade Jennifer endures underwear taunts all day before bolting from pretty, obnoxious Sharra Moncrieffe and friends into Elives's odd little store. The creature she buys there turns out to be a no-nonsense talking toad (Bufo) who does Bogie imitations and puts Sharra in her place. Chaos ensues. How Jennifer has the chance to become even prettier than Sharra and how a series of shape-changing spells are broken adds up to a roller-coaster ride of a story, full of humor and even wisdom. Coville's motley siblings, rivals, friends, and braggadocio Bufo all come alive in delicious banter and turns of phrase (a few gross ones, too). The author weaves in Jennifer's yearning to be beautiful from the first, ensuring that readers will identify with her anguished decision when she finally comes face to face with what she longs to be. An unusually felicitous blend of lighthearted wit and imaginative plotting. Illustrations not seen. (Fiction. 8-12) -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gena Colgan:

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Lea Wheeler:

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Robert Holt:

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