



Nose Down, Eyes Up

Merrill Markoe

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At forty-seven, Gil is the world's oldest twenty-two-year-old man, living in relative contentment with his four dogs, including the alpha, Jimmy. When he stumbles upon Jimmy delivering lectures on canine manipulative techniques to the rest of the dogs in the neighborhood, Gil's not particularly surprised, and his eyes light up with dollar signs. But their money-making venture has barely begun when chatty canine Jimmy realizes the shocking truth: He's adopted. And not only is Gil not his real father, they're not even the same species. In the identity crisis that ensues, Gil hears the last thing he wants his favorite dog to say: Jimmy wants to be reunited with his birth mother, a bitch owned by Gil's sexy ex-wife, now remarried and living in Malibu. Could things get worse? Apparently, yes.

Nose Down, Eyes Up Details

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Nowlin says

Nose Down, Eyes Up follows the rather hilarious episodes of Gil and his four loyal dogs Cheney, Dink, Fruity, and the alpha, Jimmy. At first, life is pretty good, but when Gil stumbles across Jimmy lecturing other dogs in the neighborhood on ways to manipulate their humans, things take a turn for the worse. Gil tries to exploit Jimmy and his advice in order to fill his selfish needs; he ruins his relationship with his current girlfriend; and somewhere along the way, Jimmy finds out that not only are he and Gil not actually related, but they aren't even the same species. In the following identity crisis, Jimmy wants nothing more than to reconnect with his birthmother, a dog owned by Gil's glamorous, scheming, and incredibly sexy ex-wife--and things only continue to fall downhill from there...

When I first picked up this book, just reading the summary on the back cover gave me the giggles: I mean c'mon, a dog who can talk and finds out that his "Dad" isn't even the same species? This has to be a humorous book, and for the most part, it is. Even when Gil was at his lowest, Markoe always found a way to lighten the mood. Usually that involved a very clueless and awfully cute comment from one of the dogs. But anyway, it was funny.

One thing that kind of bothered me though, was the fact that Gil's little escapades were often incredibly over-exaggerated. I know it was probably meant to be funny, or maybe it just really was meant to be incredibly over-exaggerated--I don't know. But it made the characters seem a little less realistic, a little less relatable, and thus, incredibly more annoying. I especially found that it was mainly the women who were highly exaggerated and overbearing, which I didn't find appealing at all...

Also, it really surprised me how much sex was in the book. I just wasn't expecting so much of it. Luckily, it wasn't excruciatingly detailed, but it was a lot more than I anticipated (I hadn't anticipated any sex at all, actually). Granted, I'm not the kind that is absolutely disgusted by it (it's only human nature) I was just surprised is all. But don't let that stop you from reading it; honestly, it wasn't that bad, it was more suggestive than anything. So, you should be fine.

Otherwise, it was a fun read. There was never a dull moment, and Gil's dogs always kept me laughing (especially Dink, who always confuses peeing outside with peeing inside!) I would recommend it as an easy read, just something to lighten the day a little. But I must say, this is isn't a book I'm looking forward to reading again...

Oscar Maquito says

*5/5

Sunny says

Too much crude language

Jenny says

This book had higher reviews on amazon than it should have! It started off extremely amusing when Jimmy began talking to the neighborhood dogs. There was so much potential for canine chaos. But instead, this book became much more about Gil, when it gives the impression that it's going to be just about dogs. Also, the "voices" of the dogs weren't very creative. While I agree that little dogs like Dink probably DO say "I love you I love you I love you," it made her, Fruity and Cheney extremely one-dimensional in their own little ways. Jimmy was at least an interesting alpha dog, and while I enjoyed the tense plot near the end of the book involving Jimmy and his family, I was pretty disappointed in the rest of the book's characters. They all seem very one-dimensional and the dialogue isn't distinct or even remotely interesting. This seemed reminiscent, though not quite as clever/witty as Duck Duck Wally. My apologies to the author...better luck next time?

Paula says

Ms. Markoe firmly and successfully places a dog's behavior and attitudes within the context of a hugely funny story. Family and relationship dynamics play well. We pity Gil at times, but I think most of all, we identify. Conversations with canines come off as some of the best.
"Beer-thirty," indeed.

Jane Carlson says

The only interesting dialogue were the talking dogs

Lori Whitwam says

If you can suspend your disbelief and accept that Gil can hear dogs talking, you'll enjoy this book.

One day, he hears his dog, Jimmy, giving a class to his three other dogs and dogs from the neighborhood about how to get their people to do what they want, including a session on "edible or inedible."

Jimmy soon discovers, to his horror, that he's not Gil's biological son, and asks to be introduced to his birth mother and siblings, who unfortunately live with Gil's ex-wife and her new husband. (And she's got some ideas regarding getting her paws on Gil again)

Temporarily displaced from his work/home, Gil ends up staying in her guest house, supposedly to remodel it.

His girlfriend, Sara, is an animal communicator, and the dogs laugh at her because she gets it totally wrong every time.

Funny, enjoyable read.

Janice Workman says

I didn't identify with any of the characters - not even the dogs! I loved "Turning in Circles", so thought this would be great - but grew tired of the repetitive language, plot and such.

Laura says

Fun ideas about what dogs may really be thinking. A fast read probably best saved for vacation.

Jennifer says**Fun summer read!**

Light and fluffy for most of it, and excellent tension building. The characters are wonderful! Perfect for people who love dogs.

Erik Tanouye says

Bought this new at the Madison Square Garden Borders when they were going out of business.

Patricia Ponder says

Markoe's female characters, from girlfriends to ex-wives to mothers -- are self-absorbed, annoying, and awful. There are no exceptions, beyond the possible love interest alluded to for the next book. I would be surprised if that one didn't start out with the male protagonist already enumerating her flaws. Since I don't plan to read more of Markoe's books, I will mercifully never know.

Amanda says

When Gil stumbles upon his alpha dachshund Jimmy lecturing the neighborhood dogs on canine manipulation techniques, his life is profoundly changed. That is, if you consider Gil's first instinct to exploit his newfound knowledge by starting a pet blog to kick-off the sale of silk-screened T-shirts a profound revelation. The only redeeming quality about 47-year-old, bitterly divorced, layabout Gil is that he understands his dogs far better than the women in his life. If not for the laugh-out-loud dialogue between Gil and his four dogs, Jimmy, Cheney, Fruity, and Dinky, this book would possess little redeeming value.

As an animal lover and a dog owner, I found the first section of the book containing the interaction between

Gil and his dogs both heartwarming and hilarious. I laughed out loud during several moments. But then, illustrating a dog's personality is going to be humorous no matter how you write it. However, despite the truly enjoyable first part of the book, including such memorable pearls of canine wisdom as "Is it pee inside, poo inside?" and "Everything can be eaten", the story suffers from an unfortunate overload of dislikable, shallow, greedy, and selfish cast of human characters that sour the latter plot, which focuses more heavily on human than canine antics--predictably Gil's trouble with women.

Drama starts when Gil accidentally runs into his sexy ex-wife at a convenient store while collecting a six-pack for beer-thirty--a longtime tradition for the lately-out-of-work, blue-collar handyman who conveniently lives in the empty summerhouse of rich retirees in exchange for household maintenance. Startled by the encounter with the woman who cleaned out his bank account during their divorce five years ago, Gil succumbs to Eden's overly enthusiastic greeting by giving her his phone number.

When Gil's cunning canine manipulator Jimmy discovers the shocking family secret that Gil is not his biological father, his traumatized reaction (sprinkled with a heavy dose of "nose down, eyes up") persuades a reluctant Gil to call his ex-wife and owner of Jimmy's mother Gypsy to facilitate a reunion between mother and son. Meanwhile, his landlords call unexpectedly to announce their return to the summerhouse, which forces Gil to vacate the premises and move in--grudgingly--with his well-intentioned albeit clueless "animal communicator" girlfriend Sara, whose recent desire to deepen their relationship is rubbing commitment-phobic Gil the wrong way.

Predictably, Gil begins an affair with his vain and horny ex-wife Eden under her rich husband's nose after accepting Eden's carpentry job offer to fix-up the guest house. Tack on the undercover P.I. Eden's husband has hired to spy on her who blackmails Gil, and his troubles are only beginning. Meanwhile, friction with his suspicious girlfriend Sara exacerbates Gil's stress over the affair, which he spends the majority of the novel complaining about. In fact, a large extent of Gil's dialogue had a tendency toward crudeness, which grows tiresome to read. Readers who don't enjoy frank discussions of sex or profanity may find themselves horrified by some of the saltier scenes Gil details while en flagrante delicto with Eden or Sara. When Gil moves into the guest house is about the time when the story shifts focus and the dogs take a backseat to Gil's screwed-up love life after Jimmy decides he prefers the company of his canine family to Gil. (No big surprise there.)

It was difficult to get through the second half of the story once the dogs lost the limelight and the humor alternated from doggie frolic to sexual shenanigans, but the ending is, if not the most desirable, at least realistic. Gil's sojourn to visit his mother as a way of avoiding Sara seemed an unnecessary diversion from the main story to illustrate Gil's contemptible personality as he complains about his family, particularly his mother, and picks up a sexy high-school classmate for a one-night-stand. Returning home at the onset of the California wildfires separates Gil from Jimmy when he can't get to the guest house to rescue him.

I hesitate to recommend this book because overall, it really isn't a very good story. Yes, parts of it are funny, but the overly long detour from Gil's interaction with his dogs to Gil's deplorable behavior as he selfishly manipulates the women in his life cannot maintain the same vein of light-hearted humor. Perhaps the author intended to compare human vs. canine manipulation by shifting the focus of the story, but the contrast does not make for very gratifying reading.

That being said, if you're an animal lover and don't mind stories with contemptible characters committing depressing acts of betrayal merely as a literary device for situational humor, then you will probably enjoy this story. It IS funny, at least the first half, though I doubt I will buy another book by this author given the cynical depiction of human interpersonal relationships that is such a big focus in the story.

Bottom line: there are better dog books out there.

Denise says

For everyone who swears their dog knows exactly what they are saying and wishes they could talk to them!

Claire M. says

Wow, what a disappointment from an author I really, really like. With an ingenious idea first introduced in her previous book, I was so ready to love this book. Love this book forever. Yes, it was funny (this woman can't help but write funny), but the protagonist was so morally bankrupt that I couldn't in any way be sympathetic to him. He is a lying skank, who is only honest and loving with his dogs. In fact, the novel is populated with some very, very ugly people, and, unfortunately, I count the protagonist as one of them. Yes, it is extremely difficult to write a character with warts that remains sympathetic, but she pushed this character too far. In an attempt to take some of the dross off of his character, she makes the truly nice people in the novel objects of his scorn. What ends up happening is that the reader doesn't like ANY of these characters, with the exception of the dogs. I kept wincing as this jerk kept piling on the lies. After a certain point, these lies were pointless or so self-serving that his abrupt epiphany at the end of the book seemed out of nowhere. This protagonist was surfing very close to the edge of being a sociopath as far as I was concerned, so the resolution of the novel felt forced. This book (as so many others I've read recently) desperately needed an editor. Markoe's humor often walks the line, and an editor would have kept her ON that line, as opposed to what we have here, which is someone who has tumbled over the line and the humor starts to become mean-spirited and more mockery than anything else.
