

Mattie, Milo, and Me: A Memoir

Anne Abel

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Raw, vulnerable, and introspective, the memoir Mattie, Milo, and Me covers a woman's transformative relationships with two dogs.

Anne Abel's loving memoir *Mattie, Milo, and Me* covers her care for an aggressive dog, which influenced her own approach to her clinical depression.

When a delivery truck ran over Abel's joyful terrier, Mattie, Abel reacted with grief that terrified her; she curled up under a table. The following day, she and her family ended up at a dog rescue. There, she met Milo, a big dog pitched to her family as a perfect fit. He was in fact an aggressive and dangerous dog. Milo's threatening behavior created conflicts that intertwined with the conflicts of Abel's depression, with the situation escalating in just a few days—to a bloody extent.

Moving at a rapid but deliberate pace, the book jumps from Mattie's death to coverage of Abel's mental state. It includes an early revelation about Abel's own origins in her family: Abel, obsessed with being a good mother, permitted the addition of a dog. Related questions are rushed by in the process, though, including regarding the roots of Abel's parenting preoccupations, her own childhood, and her decision to keep a violent dog. But such questions are answered in a gradual way as the book progresses, with bits of information dropped in like treats.

Though it is raw, vulnerable, and introspective, the book moves with speed. Its language is concise and action oriented. Descriptions of Milo's power, strength, and beauty are embedded in scenes that center on his behavior. In moments when trying to mimic his actual speed would create a word-blur, Milo's behaviors are treated in a slowed-down, step-by-step, rhythmic way.

Still, the story is told at somewhat of a distance: Abel is most often seen from the outside rather than through her internal monologues. Other people's assessments of her in conversations, combined with her own actions, shape the book's nonetheless complex portrait of her values and motivations. What emerges is a sense of a woman who was made vulnerable by experience and who protected others, including Milo, when they were vulnerable too. Her relationships with others, including her husband and her sons, are fleshed out through conversations as well, and without editorial interjections or the baggage of judgments. Indeed, even the difficult relationship between Abel and her mother is presented through bare exchanges alone.

Mattie, Milo and Me is a warm memoir about a woman's connection to—and transformation because of—her dog.

MICHELE SHARPE (December 1, 2023)

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