



## Peaches and the 19 Cobras

**Paula Bailey**

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*Two dogs and their human make the best of life despite pandemic restrictions in the optimistic picture book Peaches and the 19 Cobras.*

Paula Bailey's quirky, photograph-based picture book *Peaches and the 19 Cobras* follows a dog's life during COVID-19.

Peaches and Jake are golden retrievers who live with Mommy, who winters in Florida and spends summers in Maine. In March of 2020, the family quarantines during the pandemic; Peaches mishears the virus's name as "19 Cobras." Thus Peaches, Jake, and Mommy hide from the "cobras" in their home, making the best of being cooped up by reorganizing their bathroom, decorating their house with fourteen Christmas trees during the holiday season, and later taking a recreational vehicle trip to their summer cabin in Maine.

Peaches narrates, her voice lighthearted and optimistic. She speaks in run-on sentences, though, and her tendency toward asides often obscures her main points. Further, the happy tone that she establishes is undermined by heavier exclamations, as with the observation that some people are doomed to die if one of the cobras "gets" them. Still, Peaches and Jake work to cheer up Mommy—dressing in matching outfits, goofing off when she tries to take photographs of them, and trying to be good dogs so she has less to worry about.

Peaches and Jake banter like siblings, and their puns and jests are charming. They also have messages for their audience: They encourage mask-wearing and washing one's hands (or paws). Endearing whimsy plays in when Peaches wonders if their home's bright Christmas lights will scare away the cobras.

The book is structured like a scrapbook, with photographs and titles adorning each page. Some of these photographs pull focus from the dogs, as with those of the fourteen Christmas trees Mommy designed, the masks she decorated for friends and family, and the angel figurines and flower arrangements she gave to first responders, caregivers, and delivery drivers. In other images, photogenic Peaches and Jake are better centered; they are cute whether they are posing or caught in candid moments. But even the stories built around these photographs feel contrived, as when Peaches blows raspberries and makes a "mean face" to say "take that!"

In the end, the book is too incohesive to hold interest. It shifts between topics with speed, covering Jake's protective instincts, Peaches's birthday, and Christmas decorations without sufficient transitions. There are funny and poignant moments, but they are raced through. Some scenes last longer, as with a ten-page photography shoot starring the dogs wearing masks and with the plodding process of making a platform for a Christmas tree, but these slow the pace without need. The setting switch from Florida to Maine halfway through is jarring, too; in Maine, the focus shifts from the dogs to their human family and friends, whose photographs and names are included without enough context. Mentions of drinking beer and wine, a step-by-step account of a bathroom renovation, and a joke about a COVID-19 rapid test "from China" in which a fortune cookie reads "You not have coronavirus" take the book beyond its young audience's scope.

In the scattered picture book *Peaches and the 19 Cobras*, a dog finds joy with her family even in tough times.

AIMEE JODOIN (November 23, 2024)

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