

Gus

Author:

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Reader:

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Gus (Gus)

Gus is one of several dachshund dogs owned by a hunter. Unlike his companions, however, he hates hunting and prefers playing and cuddling with the hunter's son. He also lacks the killer instinct, preferring to use his long and flexible body to help other people, for instance by acting as a bridge over rivers or gullies, transporting small animals' long distances or simply being a big cushion for the small boy. But his owner is not happy and is always shouting at Gus and berating him for his inability to hunt. Gus is oblivious to this, even as his master shouts at him and tries to get him to kill rabbits. One day, ignoring his master's cries he walks off into the forest. Seeing some scared rabbits surrounded by the other dogs, he walks in front of them, acting as a visual barrier and walking them to safety. As his master cries "Nobody wants you", we see Gus and his human and animal friends enjoying themselves in the forest, safe and sound and happy.

This is a charming and brief story, with wonderful illustrations. The text is simple and spare, the words showing rather than telling, and the pictures speak for themselves.

The illustrations are wonderful, mostly watercolours with some hard pencil lines, giving the mostly rural scenes a wonderful, lush vividness which is given definition by the sharp lines. The palette is very rich with lots of greens and browns and warm colours as well as some brighter blues and yellows. The characterization, especially of Gus's furious owner and the other hunting dogs, who look terrifying compared to the placid and chubby Gus, is spot on.

The book also has a lovely message. Gus refuses to engage in violence, even when he is coerced or pressured into it by his master and peers. He always chooses to help others whenever he can, using the physical advantages he was born with to help smaller and less bendy animals. The last part is almost like a fairytale as Gus and his friends leave the other dogs and the hunter behind and make their way into the centre of the forest, which is portrayed as an enchanted place of peace and contentment. It also shows the importance of ignoring other people when they say cruel and critical things about you. Gus knows what he is doing is good and that his master is wrong.

Visually, Alba's illustrations put him up there with great illustrators like Helen Oxenbury, John Burningham and Michael Foreman, as well as more modern creators like Jon Klassen and Oliver Jeffers

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