

KIRKUS

REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

A BIT OF SUGAR

Debbie Wilson

Dog Ear

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BOOK REVIEW

In this engaging children's novella, a fourth-grader thinks she's found the perfect pony until circumstances show her that perfection can come in a surprising package.

Laura Maynor, a little girl in Maryland, wants a pony more than anything in the world, and she can't understand why her mother, who had her own beloved pony growing up, says no. (Mom's reluctance is rooted in loss, something the author makes understandable with age-appropriate clarity.) In one of the book's many realistic depictions of Laura's close-knit family, Mom is finally persuaded by her own mother, who says, "The difference is that you won't let Laura have the good thing, because you are trying to protect from a possible bad thing." But just when it looks like Laura is going to get her dream pony, her parents must instead use the money to pay for repairs essential to her Dad's livelihood as a tow-truck driver. Laura is crushed, until she and her supportive grandfather Pop-Pop stop at a horse auction where a sad, neglected, possibly ailing little mare captures her heart. While offering plenty of details for horse lovers about what it's like to care for, train, and ride a pony, debut author Wilson brings readers into Laura's world with simple but colorful word pictures: one character's "hair was as white as snow, and her sundress seemed to be dancing in the breeze....She was barely as tall as the fence post she was standing beside"; at another point, "The trees seemed like they touched the clouds....There were lush green pastures, as far as you could see, with ponies scattered throughout the fields." In the book's strong conclusion, after the pony is brought home to Pop-Pop's barn, Laura proves her commitment and strength of character by helping the little mare come through a time of crisis, until a surprise ending. Overall, this book is sure to resonate with young horse fans.

A well-crafted, engaging book about a girl and horse that weaves a suspenseful story with messages of family, faith, and character.