

# KIRKUS

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# REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### MOOSE LAKE

Hemstock, Monica Coral

BalboaPress (76 pp.)

\$8.99 paperback, \$3.99 e-book

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## BOOK REVIEW

With the aid of a best friend, a magical light and a mysterious boy, a little girl runs away to avoid a confrontation with a bully.

In the first entry in the Moose Lake Chronicles, readers meet fourth-grader Angela in her small northern Canadian mining town of Moose Lake. Neighbors there know each other, families eat together, children play outside and the lack of cellphones and computers suggests mid-20th century America—although the school principal, who has “a way of rat-tat-tatting when he talked that made some people get sleepy and other people get scared,” drives a Lexus. After mean new kid George knocks Angela down, she’s helped by the school monitor, who speaks in a “clipped voice,” uses the royal “we,” and wears orange lipstick that leaks “into the lines above her lips.” (Colorfully observed characters deepen and enliven the story throughout.) Afraid of repercussions when Mom and Dad insist on reporting the bully, Angela runs away from home and into the snowy woods with her best friend, Carrie. When the two get lost, a “yellow dancing light” guides them to a strange boy named Roland, with “jet-black hair” and “ivory-colored skin” that “made his green eyes stand out catlike.” Roland leads them to shelter in an abandoned cabin, and after he departs, the light helps rescuers find the runaways. Angela learns that “bullies are people who are afraid,” the mysterious light makes another appearance, and the stage is set for upcoming stories about a rumored haunted house, the mystery of Roland and the town itself, and the source of the helpful “dancing light.” The author, an Ontario-based writer of wellness publications and the owner of a healing arts center, is an “angel therapy practitioner,” though the story’s inclusion of an angelic light seems intended as a supernatural means of reassurance and comfort rather than religious icon. In her treatment of the bullying that sparks Angela’s adventure, the author tends toward a lesson-based narrative—“bullies are people who are afraid,” “bullies are very scared....love can help bullies to be unafraid,” etc.—but her colorfully observed characters deepen and invigorate the story.

An engaging mix of the everyday and the mysterious, enlivened by a well-observed cast and intriguing hints of adventures to come.