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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ RELIGION

A Love Story: How God Pursued Me And Found Me

Samantha Ryan Chandler
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Samantha Ryan Chandler is no stranger to life's difficulties. In her book, A Love Story: How God Pursued Me and Found Me, she imparts her story of divine support and revelation throughout many years of turmoil, abuse, heartache, and disappointment from childhood through motherhood. A co-founder of Childspring International, a nonprofit organization that arranges treatment in the United States for international children with deformities and diseases, she is a testament to the good that can emerge through a relationship with God.

A Love Story is full of wonderful truths about the way God meets people in their darkest hour, often miraculously. While the book sometimes reads in a stream-of-consciousness style with an unfortunate number of grammatical errors, the author has a strikingly unique and strong voice throughout, and her southern small-town spunk shines through in sentences like, "I have often had picnics in cemeteries…Having done this all my life, a picnic among graves never appeared to be unseemly to me. In fact, it seemed normal." Later, she notes the initials on a tombstone, placed by a tombstone maker, and declares, "I have yet to see this degree of advertising in any other arena." This sense of humor in the midst of tragedy also succeeds in winning the compassion of readers. It's easy to cheer for Chandler in this volume.

The author is unapologetic in her faith and the hope for an improved future, despite finding herself often unloved, and in need of learning to lean on God. Some chapters would benefit from more specific explanations of Chandler's circumstances (what was the true nature of the abuse she endured as a child?), and others seem too heavy on the rant while lacking true self-reflection (she refers to her ex-husband as Darth Vader and herself as Polyanna). Despite this, the book is generally one that inspires hope, offering insight into the daily adventure of living a life of faith. Anyone having endured trauma in their life will instantly appreciate Chandler's struggles and rejoice in the clearly portrayed moments of divine revelation.

This book is small, but it has big things to say. Readers will surely join with Chandler in acknowledging that this story, like the human story, is not defined by the dark times. Instead, it is about the love that endures through hardship, because "When we love, we are most like God, for He is love."

GABRIELA WORREL (July 29, 2011)

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