FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Picture Books

Gem
Emma Kallok
Joel Bower, illustrator
Tricycle Press
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The anticipation and actual arrival of a new baby girl in the family are taken in stride in this pleasantly life-affirming book written by a thirteen-year-old girl. In fact, everything in this story is taken in stride and that is its charm.

The saxophone playing of a neighbor named Bluesy serves as a backdrop throughout. Bluesy is at it day and night to the apparent complete delight of this family. He calls his compositions “gems” and is playing one of them for the baby at the very moment the mother starts having contractions. Thus, the baby is named Gem.

Overwhelmingly pink and peach at first glance, the illustrations seem to work when absorbed while reading along. The intensity and warmth of these colors somehow make it easier to imagine the sound of the saxophone. The angularity of the drawing also blends well with the underlying jazziness of the sax. Bower must have taken a good, long look at the book’s young author when drawing the sister-to-be because the resemblance is unmistakable, and he undoubtedly also noted that she loves the color pink. He did not, however, do quite as well at noting the text in that sometimes the illustrations do not reflect it—as, for example, when the “white room” at the hospital is definitely not.

The family is racially mixed. This is not an issue in the book and is not even mentioned. It is, however, easily observed. The mother, although said to have a “huge prize watermelon belly,” is not obviously pregnant.

Gem is a soft-spoken, joyful appreciation of ordinary, everyday things. It is “cool bursts of music,” “silky moonlight,” and pancakes “with sweet strawberries, and thick, oozy rivers of maple syrup” all intertwined with friendship and family love.

Vickie Leonard Darnell