Clarion Review

Picture Books

Little Ray & Shark Patch Things Up
V. R. Duin
CreateSpace
978-1-4751-9042-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

Can a shark and a ray use teamwork to help a group of stranded boaters? In V. R. Duin's delightful rhyming picture book *Little Ray & Shark Patch Things Up*, the answer is a resounding "yes."

Little Ray, the central character, helps boaters in distress by sealing a leak in their vessel with his own flattened body. A bull shark soon approaches and Little Ray prepares for the worst, but luckily (and unexpectedly) the shark decides to help instead, towing the ray-patched boat back to shore.

V. R. Duin is an experienced author of children's books, having written and published four in her Goopy Ghost series, as well as a previous book featuring her Little Ray character, *The Amazing Flight of Little Ray*. As one might expect, Duin's latest work proves that she has many of the techniques of children's literature down to a science: Her rhymes flow nicely and relate the story without ever seeming forced. The illustrations are also well done, vibrantly colored and consistent, aiding the storytelling throughout.

Though well executed, *Little Ray & Shark Patch Things Up* does fail to live up to its potential in one respect. The title presumably refers to Little Ray's temporary repair work, preventing the boat from sinking. However, "Patch Things Up" would also seem to indicate a reconciliation—that Little Ray and Shark are adversaries who have battled each other before, and are now mutually deciding to put their differences aside in order to help the boaters.

Yet, there is no backstory provided, and no explanation as to the shark's sudden change (even as drawn) from threatening to helpful, or why a shark and a ray, who would usually be considered natural enemies, are suddenly able to work together. Duin writes, "Then all at once the shark's menacing glare / Changed to a look of tender care. / It seemed there'd been a change of heart / Within the huge and frightening shark." From the words as written, it is not that Little

Ray misjudges the shark based on appearance or reputation; rather, something causes the shark to change. Unfortunately, Duin does not make clear what that is.

To be fair, this implied reconciliation could be unintended. Duin's main message is summarized in the last verses of the book: "Sometimes when we trip or fumble, / Teamwork may just stop our stumble. / That's why we must always show respect / To help that comes when we least expect."

The final page, with Little Ray saying, "I'll be back," seems to indicate that Duin is considering writing more Little Ray books. If so, they likely would make a welcome addition to any child's bookshelf.

Peter Dabbene