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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ JUVENILE FICTION

Sad Sam, Glad Sam

L.E. Rainey
Bill Megenhardt, illustrator
Shoetree Publishers (December 2006)
Hardcover $16.95 (32pp)
978-0-9785521-0-7

Bold bright colors are the hallmark of this tale about a little girl whose grumpy morning is transformed by her mother's intervention. Samantha called Sam because "it was the right size name for a not very big girl" is usually cheery and loves to play with the family cat Larry. One morning however she doesn't feel cheery and things go from bad to worse as her mother's brushing pulls her curly hair and her cat takes off with her favorite toy which then gets ripped when she tries to retrieve it.

The text is simple and clearly written presented within boxes of intense color that contrast with the colors of the illustration with which it is paired. On several pages the colors are severely contrasted—vivid green or purple against orange butterscotch against blue—and the text is sometimes difficult to read in white against these colors. The illustrations too juxtapose colors in ways that often are rather hard on the eyes.

The story is short and charming as Sam's mother instead of scolding her child for being in a bad mood allows her to express her feelings and further uses a puppet to help Sam express those feelings so that she can return to her normal sunny disposition. It may be a bit simplistic in returning Sam so quickly to a cheery mood when her favorite toy is damaged but it is an optimistic story—something that's nice to see.

The notes on the dust jacket discuss the usefulness of "play therapy"—the use of the puppet by Sam's mother—as a tool to be used in parenting instead of simply within the confines of counseling. This point is valid but is perhaps made a bit too strongly for the average reader who may find it off-putting. However the strategy certainly is both valid and valuable.

The illustrations are two-page spreads that advance the action right along with the text and go all the way to the edges of the pages. The cover beneath the dust jacket bears the same color illustration. The book is a large format and should be easy for young ones to hold as they page through the pictures—but this is probably a book best read by parent and child together to enhance the closeness that's evident between Sam and her mother as sad Sam is coaxed back into glad Sam.
(August 21, 2009)

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