ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Sun Moon Stars Rain
Jan Cheripko
Front Street
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This book's title is taken from E.E. Cummings's poem, "anyone lived in a pretty how town," but it also signifies the poetic language this author uses to describe the wonders of nature. As the book opens, personification helps describe what the seventeen-year-old protagonist Danny Murtaugh sees as he photographs Frederick P. Garrick's land without permission. "Trees bent to the ground, defeated, bowed, humbled by a god of white war … reaching branches encased, immobilized, still, silhouetted, stretched out in homage to the conquering king."

The reference to the Cummings poem also introduces the mood and tone of the book. Danny has recently withdrawn from a music school he once hoped would train him to be a celebrated pianist. A breakup with his first love serves as the final draw, sending him home, where in time he learns the true source of his unhappiness. Each short chapter—often filled with dialogue—brings Danny closer to discovering himself and realizing telling details surrounding his father's death.

The author has been an English teacher at The Family Foundation School in Hancock, New York, a school for at-risk teens, for nearly fifteen years. He has worked as an editor and writer at newspapers in New York, and he has also served as an assistant to the editor at Boyds Mills Press, working closely with writers and illustrators. The author of several books, most recently *Brother Bartholomew and the Apple Grove* and *Caesar Rodney's Ride: The Story of an American Patriot*, Cheripko has won a number of awards, including the International Reading Association's Children's Choice and Young Adult's Choice awards. His tapestry of experiences as a teacher, editor, and writer certainly has informed the writing of this novel.

Cheripko strategically offers one small clue after another to help unravel several mysterious overlapping subplots that enhance the story. How did Danny's father die, and did Danny have something to do with it? Will Mr. Garrick surrender and sell his land to the state? Some mysteries are never fully revealed: Did an employee of the state park commission *really* kill Benji Samuels, the town drunk? Will Stephanie, the former prostitute and young mother, continue to move in a positive direction? Will Danny and Stephanie begin dating again? Is Mr.

Garrick Danny's uncle?

Sun Moon Stars Rain is perfect for reluctant young adult readers. It is a "problem novel" in every aspect, as Danny has to confront the past, himself, and others before he can move forward. The mature topics alone (alcoholism and drug abuse among them) might keep the book off shelves and in the hands of readers.