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The Keeper of Ugly Sounds

Eleanor Walsh Meyer
Vlad Guzner, Illustrator
Winslow Press (October 1998)
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In an original and compelling story set in a small village long ago, a little boy is born, and to his adoring parents' dismay, makes not happy baby noises, but crabby and startling ones. No medical cause can be discerned: "He just wants what he wants when he wants it!" the doctors all say.

We follow the boy through childhood, where his attitude only worsens. Passages such as this one will cause parents of even the most well behaved children to nod in recognition: "He shouted when other people were talking. He howled and howled when he had to go to bed. And no matter what they were having for meals, he fussed about it." Scolding does no good.

In the midst of "muttering a complainy grumble" the boy meets a small man in a green hat and elf-like outfit who silently snatches him into a dark forest and gives him a job—he is to be The Keeper of Ugly Sounds. The boy must sort the cries, sighs and groans into bags, and in the process he realizes just how ugly those sounds can be. Dramatic and lush illustrations meld perfectly with the text and do much to deepen the story.

This is a lesson-based tale, but both the text and illustrations go about their business gently. An engaging and beautiful book highly recommended. A Web site with accompanying activities can be found at www.winslowpress.com.

JODY MILLER (September / October 1998)

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