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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Lives of Lyman Liri

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At times both lyrical and graphic, the author's innovative storytelling in *The Lives of Lyman Liri* sets the book apart from other works of intellectual fiction.

Hidden within clouds of philosophical mist that shroud the narrative, Lyman Liri emerges in a series of brief sketches told from the viewpoints of those who knew him. In one instance, a piano teacher and undercover KGB agent says of Liri: "I never believed in voices that spoke to us from the inside. But I knew that, with Lyman, anything was possible. There was something so heartrending about a boy who could turn his own tragedy into a learned lesson. It transformed me. And for the first time in my life, I felt…*compassion*."

The author offers a parable that asks what would happen if key decisions could be reversed. She suggests that when one is faced with two inner voices that the mind draws and repels simultaneously, a tug-of-war ensues that may lead to regret regardless of which path is taken. Though some believe that fate and destiny play a part in determining one's happiness, this foggy perception can lead to a lack of action—no goal, rather than a potentially wrong goal—or, in Liri's case, a life determined by a dictatorial father obsessed with baseball.

In another portrait of the protagonist, his mother reflects on her son's domestic entrapment: "He could have been anything he wanted to be—an artist, a musician, a teacher… anything. He even excelled in science. And needless to say, he was a pretty fair athlete. I've always wondered, however, regardless of his success, whether he was truly happy."

The Lives of Lyman Liri shines a spotlight on human nature, exposing raw behavior and cruel intentions as well as sterling morals and simple kindnesses. The book's primary flaw lies in the vague message at its core, a meaning that is not stated in a straightforward manner. But boiling the central theme down to a phrase could be difficult, if not impossible. Thanks to both the high quality of the writing and the editing, readers will encounter thought-provoking description that elicits genuine emotion.

This well-intended contemplation of the human spirit and the difficult decisions that everyone must make on the journey through life demonstrate that anyone can be a hero or a villain.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (January 25, 2012)

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