The Dark Ones and Hopefully-Ever-After: How Claire Legrand Subverts Mental Illness Stigma in
Some Kind of Happiness

(2019 ChLA Presentation by Caitlin Moser)

Abstract: According to the US National Institute of Mental Health, about 3.1 million people (12.8%) ages 12-17 had at least one major depressive episode in 2016. Fictional depictions of young people with depression can combat or increase stigma, which has the potential to interfere with care-seeking behaviors (Chandra and Minkovitz, Corrigan *et al.*). Some authors seek to portray mental illness in subtle, realistic ways that elicit empathetic responses. Claire Legrand's *Some Kind of Happiness*, a 2017 Edgar Award nominee meriting more scholarly attention, achieves this balance. Eleven-year-old Finley, who personifies her own hidden depression as "the Dark Ones" in stories she creates about the Everwood, must stay the summer with the grandparents she's never met, while her parents finalize their divorce. Playing with her cousins and the neighbor boys, Finley uncovers the dark past connecting a charred ruined house in the wood with her perfect grandmother and aunts. She learns that other people's darkness is not always visible, and "it is okay to ask for help. Otherwise, how will you ever find it?" (Legrand 362). Combining Corrigan *et al.*'s research on effective strategies of combating mental illness stigma with Busselle and Bilandzic's mental models of meaning in narrative processing, I will examine how a fictional story like Finley's can influence readers' thinking about mental illness by 1) offering empathetic, realistic representation of those with mental illness, 2) acknowledging and subverting stigma, and 3) setting up a realistic hopefully-ever-after pattern for readers with depression.

References

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