



# REVIEWS OF *Sweet Sally Ann*

A Novel by Roger Ladd Memmott

"Heart-breaking and magical...a boy encounters love and death in a town that sits on a metaphorical fault-line between reality and our unconscious desires."  
—*BookSurge Editors' Choice\**

**REVIEW of *Sweet Sally Ann***  
***BookSurge* – Editors' Choice**  
**Jeff Schwaner**

*Sweet Sally Ann* is a wonderworks combination of tall tale, murder mystery, dysfunctional families and magic beasts lumbering just at the edge of our vision. The story and the language is a joy. The book has, in the beginning, a quality of stepping into the unknown from a place that is already not quite familiar, similar to reading King's Talisman books; yet the language is obviously of a higher order (as if King had been reading Rushdie and maybe even some George Saunders); and the careful way that information is distributed throughout the plot, like breadcrumbs, lets the reader experience first the surprise of the unknown—why are the school windows rattling yet nobody seems worried?—then bit by bit receive the information that helps them understand.

Stylistically, the novel is a wonderful affair, and the quality of the writing is inclusive even when the reflection it casts now and again seems oblique or more of a refraction. That's part of the magic of the thing. Certain insistent repetitions of phrase make the reader more aware of language and the power of language.

The characters are very well drawn out, realistic and archetypal at the same time, and although on occasion the children speak like characters in a Greek tragedy, the effect contributes to the overall tone and adds a touch of the fairy tale to the whole thing. Just when you think you have the plot nailed, a new element slips in but doesn't detract from the overall motion of the story. Fleeting glimpses of Cody's Monster—not the beast at the bridge, but the monster of meaning—float in almost inconsequentially. The pills Cody is taking, how they echo the colors of those in the ribbons of Sally Ann's hair, help impress upon the reader the same disorientation that Cody feels when meaning seems to be making itself known, "if meaning there is."

This is a strange story, the kind that, after you finish it, you still carry the book around for another

week or so, as if a new chapter might pop up if you just give it the chance, and you can start reading again. It's one of those books where if you shake it a certain way the ending might change, or some additional insight might clatter out of its pages, like a toy from a Cracker Jack's box.

All in all, *Sweet Sally Ann* is a very satisfactory reading experience, outdoing the blurbs on its book jacket for insight and amazement.

# # #

**REVIEW of *Sweet Sally Ann***  
***POD Book Exchange***  
**Melissa Rasmussen**

Here is an absorbing, inventive tale that takes place as much in the heart as in the head. On the one hand, *Sweet Sally Ann* is an allegorical read about our unreasonable fears and the crusade to put them to rest. On the other hand, young Cody Bryant, the protagonist, is "the product of a generation at odds with itself," who, together with his childhood love, races through a surreal landscape overseen by a restless volcano that keeps their world at bay. One wrong move and the magma may blow. And if that isn't enough to motivate our protagonist's fear, consider whatever it is that lurks in the woods, something largely indescribable and unseen but nevertheless there—at least *there* in the mind. This, together with the mysterious death of his schoolmate, sweet Sally Ann, and the ongoing plague of who he might be, drives Cody to pull down an oath on his head, promising himself "to get to the bottom of whatever [he can]."

When he discovers Sally Ann's bones on the lowermost slopes of the mountain, the world about him begins to shudder with change. Such change is complicated by an assortment of seemingly docile but baggage-laden family and friends. And each of their bags, like a magician's trunk, holds a surprise. Open this one and see the rabbit leap out; open that one and

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saw the girl in half. *Abracadabra*. What next? Cody opens each trunk to find what he can—from rabbits to unicorns to lightning-struck flesh to whatever it is that lurks in the woods. Each metaphor is grounded in the electrical charge of discoveries anew, and the final discovery is that Cody's world is damned—at least until a true Savior appears, something more than “a piece of wood on a wall” (the horrible crucifix on Sally Ann's mother's drawing room wall), something unknown except deep in the heart, “something deep in the soul,” something promised by way of the “sweet and discernible light” that resides within each.

Told in lyrical, rhapsodic prose, *Sweet Sally Ann* is a strange and witty tale about fear, death, and the quandary of a restless volcano ultimately slaked by the magma of love. It is a story of quest and revelation, of becoming and ultimate being, and although deeply metaphorical at times, with a touch of magical realism, it is always concrete in the events that unfold. To allow the reader's own revelations to play their intended role, this is a story that, by review, must be talked “around” rather than “at.” It is enough for the prospective reader to know that young Cody Bryant and his childhood sweet are raised from their garden of fear and childish longing to something metaphysically quintessential, a kind of sublime triumph over worldly dread, a thing effected by faultless desire and appropriate choice. It's in the details of the story that we find answers to the question of how.

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**REVIEW of *Sweet Sally Ann***  
*Scribes Reviews Today*  
**Don Adams**

Quirky and original, *Sweet Sally Ann* takes the reader on a passionate quest, offering unforgettable insight at every turn. When Miss Dibble poses a seemingly innocuous question to her sixth grade class, the world of Cody Bryant begins to take shape. “Is our world more or less real,” she asks, “than one in which giants roam the land and fair maids are lost to monsters in the woods?” Such a question, together with the ongoing threat of a volcanic eruption and something stalking the community's dreams, sets the stage for a world in which anything might happen. And, in a sense, anything does. It is as though Cody and supporting cast are yanked from some earlier innocence toward a frightening maw.

*Sweet Sally Ann* incorporates the absurd and the fantastic, and in the process makes it all real. While everything in the story is virtually symbolic or metaphorical, including the sometimes-curious sexual motif, the literal level of the story is nevertheless

compelling and sustained. When Cody's classmate Sally Ann disappears and a year later when he discovers her bones, a series of subplots begin to support and resolve the coming-of-age theme. What happened to Sally Ann? What's the “three-fingered mystery” of who Cody is? How can he and his childhood love become who they should be? Everything—from Cody's infatuation with the school nurse to a pair of missionaries who herald good news, from the incompetent FBI agents to Cody stealing Sally Ann's bones, from parents considering divorce to the unsettling likeness of Cody's eyes sewn on a doll—addresses the struggles of a god-fearing boy who wants to do good in a world of ill. But can he be saved?

Throughout, the story is skillfully rendered, and we go where it leads because the writing is so stylish and sure.

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**FROM THE DUST JACKET**  
*Sweet Sally Ann*

Miss Dibble turned her back to the class, put the chalk to the board, and made a single indistinguishable mark. “Is our world more or less real,” she asked, “than one in which giants roam the land and fair maids are lost to monsters in the woods?”

BY TURNS QUIRKY AND INVENTIVE, humorous and adept, *Sweet Sally Ann* challenges the depths of childhood fear, from the suspicion of parents on the verge of divorce to the prospect of something that lurks in the woods.

When young Cody Bryant becomes obsessed with the disappearance of his classmate, everything that was right seems suddenly wrong. A year later, when he discovers her bones, it's time to rethink the world at large and all that emerges from it—the intimately personal, the fantastic, the shockingly real.

In resolving the dramatic and tightly contained mystery of what happened to Sally Ann, Cody discovers one truth after another about himself and his childhood loves—and the unimaginable hope promised through the choices he makes.

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