Lily, the central character in One Whole and Perfect Day, believes that her family is a bunch of freaks whose behaviors are often a source of embarrassment to her, and she wishes for and dreams of one whole and perfect day where they all act the way she thinks normal people should. As you meet the members of her family, I don’t think you will find them freakish, but you may find them unusual. Perhaps because of that fact, it has fallen to Lily to be the sensible one, a role she has grown to dislike. Why can’t the rest of the family be sensible, too?

The particular day that Lily wishes will be perfect is the day when her grandmother is planning a birthday party for Lily’s grandfather, an irascible old gentleman, Stan, whose bark is far worse than his bite. However, he has “barked” very loudly and in no uncertain terms that he never wants to see his grandson, Lily’s older brother, Lonnie, again. Lonnie is equally angry at his grandfather and is only too happy to oblige by packing up and leaving. Lily is also contending with her mother, a wonderfully compassionate woman who works with the elderly and is given to bringing people in her care into her home. Lily’s grandmother has an imaginary companion that she talks with frequently. How is Lily going to help all of the people in her family come together for one, just one, whole and perfect day?

There were many things that I enjoyed about this book. There are well-drawn characters, all with the usual human frailties, but at heart, good people. Even the
secondary characters (and there are several) seem to come to life in the story. Clarke manages to make the intersections of their lives plausible even when, in one instance, two of the characters who are strangers strike up a conversation while waiting for a train only to later find themselves at the grandmother’s party.

The story is well-written, and unlike many recent young adult novels, things do come to happy conclusion. The target audience for the book is teenagers, but like many other books for teens that I have read recently, this is a story that I think many adults will enjoy as well. (Front Street, $16.95)