Clarion Review

General

Adirondack August
Kay Benedict Sgarlata
Kay Benedict Sgarlata
978-0-615-81761-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

Kay Benedict Sgarlata is in control throughout the narrative in this book about the lines between pain and pleasure, set amid vivid descriptions of the Adirondack landscape.

Kay Benedict Sgarlata's debut fictional work, *Adirondack August*, is a compelling story about how easily the lines between what defines pleasure and pain are blurred. The author's vivid descriptions of the Adirondack landscape take readers on a winding journey that follows protagonist Chris Wright, who struggles to reconcile an indiscretion from her youth with her perception of herself as a spiritual, well-intentioned woman.

The novel begins with a portrait of Wright, who is making her annual pilgrimage to her family's camp, a cabin perched on Seventh Lake in the Adirondack Mountains. When Chris unexpectedly learns her high school boyfriend's father has died, she is forced to wrestle with a secret she has kept for more than twenty years. The rest of the book chronicles Chris's struggle as her memories of summer vacations on the lake are repeatedly juxtaposed with a life-altering experience she had while visiting the camp as a grownup.

Sgarlata offers a poignant and somewhat telling description of how the family camp makes Chris feel: "Each spring, as the world reawakened around her, and as the earth warmed along with its lakes and streams, her whole being desired to be in her imagined Eden—the special place she had grown to love, the one filled with the essence of balsam and pine, sweet odors of the earth, and a lake whose refreshing water soothed every bit of her stress and anxiety." This descriptive language evokes a sense of longing that is addressed later in the book when Chris experiences her own sexual reawakening. For Chris, the sanctuary of her youth takes on a new, more troublesome meaning as she ages and attempts to come to terms with a past she would rather forget than forgive.

At times, the dialogue doesn't feel as casual as common conversation—everyone speaks in complete sentences, so no one interrupts anyone else—but Chris's relationships still come across as genuine. Sgarlata offers a realistic example of the tension between two married characters. Chris's husband, David, asks her, "Are you just about ready?" Chris pushes back, saying, "Give me a few more minutes." This back-and-forth continues throughout the story, which entices the reader to find out what will happen between the couple when their issues come to a head.

Sgarlata is in control throughout the narrative. The plot is easy to follow and strategically unfolds in a way that informs readers just enough to keep them engaged. And though Chris's inner dialogue becomes a bit redundant, Sgarlata's point is loud and clear: when struggling with a life-altering decision, such as the one plaguing Chris, many of us would also hesitate before making a move.

Adirondack August is a difficult book to put down, but it is not a light read. The ideal audience would be interested in contemplating spiritual and emotional questions alongside the narrator, who struggles with all of the complexities related to being human.

Jacquelyn Lazo