



Albie's Struggle

R. S. Steinberg

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Albie's Struggle, R. S. Steinberg's psychological novel about a ten-year-old at Camp Bear Lake, explores alienation and the fallout of casual cruelties.

In the book's enigmatic opening, Albie hides from his counselors. Hints at dark incidents swirl before the story backtracks to examine how Albie arrived at his lakeside standoff. The book's early, slow-burning chapters depict Albie's childhood in Golden Era New York. As he learns to read, dines in Chinatown, imagines escapes, and goes to school, Albie is revealed as a sensitive child. Intricate descriptions of his circumscribed world set him up for sudden shocks once his parents send him to the New Hampshire summer camp, where being an observer is no longer enough to survive.

Deft in its mining of the ill fit between bookish Albie and the bullying environs of Camp Bear Lake, this character-driven tale gathers force through Albie's humiliations. His lack of athleticism and retiring demeanor make him an easy target. Raw talent at riflery further sets him apart from his peers, whom he longs to join, even while harboring misgivings about them. Suspense about Albie's ability to endure boyhood rituals, and about what happened to make him flee, results in a foreboding atmosphere.

Albie's keen intelligence strains under real and perceived expectations. He makes use of dense imagery, forensic impressions about people's words and actions, and continual self-examination. When he finds reprieve through friendship with a fellow outsider, the allure of rebelling bristles with danger. All of this crescendos in a tragic confluence of fate and remorseless righteousness involving another camper, after which Albie is left in an ambiguous state.

Through its careful buildup of emotional disturbances, *Albie's Struggle* is a haunting portrait of boyhood.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2021)

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