

Ivy Lodge: A Memoir of Translation and Discovery

Linda Murphy Marshall

She Writes Press (Jul 12, 2022)

Softcover \$16.95 (280pp)

978-1-64742-367-4

Ivy Lodge is a resonant memoir that looks beyond the “opulent facade” of a mid-century family’s stately home.

Built in the 1800s, Linda Murphy Marshall’s childhood home bore the distinguished name “Ivy Lodge.” In 1960, Marshall’s father purchased this suburban St. Louis Tudor home for a “bargain” price: wealthier white residents were leaving the neighborhood to avoid racial integration. Though the home provided ample space for Marshall and her siblings, it was also somewhat drafty and dysfunctional, leading to a “somber spirit.” Family displays of affection were infrequent; happier moments were undermined by Marshall’s father’s angry outbursts and her mother’s passive-aggressive tendencies.

The book exhibits empathy for Marshall’s parents, noting that her father grew up during the Great Depression and had little opportunity to enjoy his own childhood. Marshall’s mother fulfilled conventional expectations as a busy, resourceful housewife, yet she also seemed to harbor secret resentments about the demands and limitations of her role. And because she was exuberant by nature, Marshall herself was often rebuked for being too needy. Her mother mocked and criticized her for gaining weight; both parents belittled Marshall’s later accomplishments.

Going through each room of Ivy Lodge following her parents’ deaths, the book represents a singular process of healing. Then married and with her own family, Marshall chose to “rescue” less valuable items from the house that held personal significance. Using her skills as a multilingual translator, she found new meaning in these quirky objects—“stand-ins” for the emotions her parents “didn’t—or couldn’t—express.”

Many of Marshall’s memories still carry a certain pain, even with the passing of time. However, in her collective portrait of Ivy Lodge and those who lived within it, she creates a compassionate whole, narrated in the acquired language of forgiveness.

MEG NOLA (July / August 2022)

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