

The Truth and Legend of Lily Martindale: An Adirondack Novel

Mary Sanders Shartle

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The Adirondack is conveyed in poetic terms, with a tragedy set against several years in the snowy, rugged locale.

Mary Sanders Shartle paints a strong portrait of New York's rugged Adirondack region in her debut novel, *The Truth and Legend of Lily Martindale*. It's an atmospheric tale about a great tragedy that devastates two little girls. One refashions her life, finding love, faith, and a rewarding career, while the other struggles for many years to forge herself anew.

The titular Lily is the only child of Robert and his World War II bride, Mariette, who are both friends to and servants of wealthy power couple Charles and Emily Winslow. The Winslows also have only one child, Eleanor, who is Lily's best friend. The Winslows and Martindales form the nucleus of a happy band of friends and employees who revel in the tranquility and camaraderie at the Winslow's Adirondack camp, The Hill, until an accident shatters the idyll.

This pivotal incident is presaged skillfully and slowly, transitioning from one of the most inviting holiday scenes since Dickens's Fezziwig Christmas ball. The book is well paced, slowly revealing details of this overwhelming tragedy as it shifts from scenes of the girls' cozy childhood to their middle-aged lives in 1980s New York City, and Lily's long self-exile as a hermit caretaker of the now mostly vacant camp.

Shartle's evocative prose perfectly captures the beautiful, dangerous winter—"the snow aches and squeals"—and March's maddening alternation between freezes and thaws—"sodden, iced-over, unprofitable, stuck between despair and hope." The author is equally adept at encapsulating characters. Robert describes a pair of wealthy but dissolute neighbors to young Eleanor as "money without conscience; a bunch of hammock-snogging wastrels and good-for-nothings."

Lily is the central character in the book, though she is not very sympathetic. She feels things acutely and writes sharply sensitive passages in her journal, yet she acts glacially erratic toward those closest to her. Other characters are much more engaging and multifaceted, like Eleanor's husband, Colin, a gourmet home cook who endures Lily's draining episodes with his nonstop provisioning of the home and camp larders; or Jim, whose garrulousness and optimism belie an arsenal of wilderness skills.

Shartle's memorable novel will find a ready audience with readers who are already fond of the Adirondacks, but it is so studded with rich detail and scenery that others will want to transport themselves to this wild, dangerous, yet achingly lovely place.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (Summer 2014)

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