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Spirit of the North

Tyler R. Tichelaar
Marquette Fiction (2012)
ISBN 9780979179068

Reviewed by Olivera Baumgartner-Jackson for Reader Views (5/12)

Tyler R. Tichelaar's "Spirit of the North" is a very compelling and well told story. It draws the reader in quickly, and although large portions of the book deal with relatively minor events and observations, the pull of the story persists. I particularly liked the "frame" of the story, namely the explanation of the automatic writing as the means of creating it. Although this was a gentle and somewhat mellow read, it was by no means boring.

Two young and not very worldly ladies, Barbara and Adele Traugott, arrive in Marquette in late October of 1873. They are hoping to stay with their uncle, whom they believe to be living there, since they've lost their father recently and have no other living relatives. Upon arrival they discover that their uncle recently died, but they find themselves heirs to his cabin in the woods. Their funds are severely limited, so Barbara decides that moving into the cabin for the winter is their only choice. Unaware of the reality of the harsh winters, they proceed to do just that, in spite of not having the necessary skills to survive in the isolation and wilderness they find themselves in. On their second night in the cabin, Barbara finds a young man, Ben, nearly frozen in the snow outside. They rescue him and he helps them with several of the basic and very necessary chores for a few days. He returns to the cabin often and it soon becomes clear that Adele has strong feelings for Ben. But Ben has a secret. Will this story end happily? Will Barbara accept the fact that she can not solve everybody's problems? Will Adele finally grow up?

Intertwined with the main story are several little side stories, from a hefty Paul Bunyan story to descriptions of family lives of other people and the Annabella ghost story. I would have enjoyed a few more such stories inserted somewhere - and with those long winter days and nights described in "Spirit of the North," they would not be a far-fetched addition. This was just one of those books where one wishes it would not end quite yet...

"Spirit of the North" reminded me greatly of "Little House on the Prairie"; being partially idyllic, partially very harsh, altogether nostalgic and a great study of human nature at its best and worst. It should be well received by romance lovers as well as those who like good historical fiction, and those who enjoy well written fiction without earth-shattering sensationalism.