



Lily Of The Valley

Suzanne Strempek Shea

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With a gift for creating fiction that is "rich with an unusual sweetness" "(USA Today)," and filled with "undeniable offbeat charm" "(Boston Sunday Globe)," Suzanne Strempek Shea captured a special corner of the world -- quirky, colorful, small-town Massachusetts -- in two acclaimed novels. Now, with her comic timing in full flower, Shea returns to the place she knows so well to introduce Lily Wilk, an artist who longs to create a memorable masterpiece -- and who finds the key to her dream is in her own backyard. On her tenth birthday, Lily Wilk reached into a grab bag and pulled out a box -- a box that contained her future. The drawing kit she picked by chance held a pencil, an eraser, a sharpener, a pad of paper, and an instruction sheet. Draw a line. "Draw a circle. Draw a square. Congratulations," the instructions informed her, "now you are an artist." And so she became an artist, whose work is always in demand around her town: she paints barns, houses, and fire hydrants; she fetters diplomas, and "Gulls" and "Buoys" onto restaurant bathroom doors; she depicts a tiny romance story on the ten fake nails of a bride-to-be. Taking stock of her life so far, Lily appreciates that the odd jobs pay the bills. But she also knows that someday she will paint something truly special, a work that will forever change everyone who sees it. Her chance comes when Mary Ziemba, owner of the largest chain of supermarkets in the valley, commissions a family portrait. But instead of a sitting, Mary asks her to work from snapshots taken of her loved ones on the days they were the happiest. Lily takes in Mary's detailed stories of the people she loves most in the world, and as the faces and personalities come to life on her drawing board, Lily reflects on the recent fractures to the structure of her own family. And slowly, with each small and gentle brushstroke, she begins to change her own definition of what it means to be related. When the portrait is complete, it is indeed for the world to see -- but at a time and in a place she never could have imagined. Painting Mary Ziemba's family becomes its own reward, a journey of self-discovery for the artist in search of herself -- and her own sense of family. Lovingly rendered and beautifully imagined, "Lily of the Valley" is a bittersweet, unforgettable work of art.

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