



Shelter

Frances Greenlade

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A gorgeous, poetic literary debut from award-winning author Frances Greenslade, *Shelter* is a brilliant coming-of-age story of two strong, brave sisters searching for their mother.

For sisters Maggie and Jenny growing up in the Pacific mountains in the early 1970s, life felt nearly perfect. Seasons in their tiny rustic home were peppered with wilderness hikes, building shelters from pine boughs and telling stories by the fire with their doting father and beautiful, adventurous mother. But at night, Maggie—a born worrier—would count the freckles on her father’s weathered arms, listening for the peal of her mother’s laughter in the kitchen, and never stop praying to keep them all safe from harm. Then her worst fears come true: Not long after Maggie’s tenth birthday, their father is killed in a logging accident, and a few months later, their mother abruptly drops the girls at a neighbor’s house, promising to return. She never does.

With deep compassion and sparkling prose, Frances Greenslade’s mesmerizing debut takes us inside the extraordinary strength of these two girls as they are propelled from the quiet, natural freedom in which they were raised to a world they can’t begin to fathom. Even as the sisters struggle to understand how their mother could abandon them, they keep alive the hope that she is fighting her way back to the daughters who adore her and who need her so desperately.

Heartwarming and lushly imagined, *Shelter* celebrates the love between two sisters and the complicated bonds of family. It is an exquisitely written ode to sisters, mothers, daughters, and to a woman’s responsibility to herself and those she loves.

Shelter Details

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From Reader Review Shelter for online ebook

Mimi Sakarett says

2 sisters lead an interesting, slightly dysfunctional family life with a lumberjack father and a feminist mother in hippie days, out in the middle of nowhere. the daughter and the dad are huge worrywarts. the dad dies in an accident and soon after that, the mom leaves the family. the two girls are like... what the fuck mom?!?!? and one becomes more and more dysfunctional, leading to a knocked up kid and interesting stories about a nunnery where teen girls give birth to babies. the younger one tries to find the mom really hard. finally she tracks down the story, involving a paranoid schizophrenic ex boyfriend. the boyfriend got the mom preg again after the dad died and the mom ran away to give birth. the story ends with the youngest daughter learning the story of how her mom bled to death while giving birth.

this book ended in a HUGE what the fucking fuck. i really liked the girlhood story, meeting a nice guy, the wilderness and the native people, the psychoses, and the rebellion. but then you see a bloody dead mother and baby and the book ends. not good.

Sarah says

Maggie and Jenny live a mostly carefree life in the Canadian wilderness with their spirited and adoring parents. But then their father is killed in an accident. Not long after, their mother loads them up and drops them off with family friends. They never see her again. When another trying time strikes the sisters, Maggie realizes she must search for the truth of what happened to their mother.

I'm kind of on the fence about this one. I picked it up at Midwinter on a whim, because it sounded like the kind of adult novel I'd enjoy (yes, it is marketed for adults, though I think it has definite crossover appeal). It's gorgeously yet simply written, and the characters are beautifully drawn - I understood the publisher's note in the front about falling in love with Maggie. She's an excellent narrator. But something about this novel felt a bit uneven for me. It moves at a very leisurely pace, but it never plods - I was engaged the whole time. The result is that the plot develops slowly over a number of pages. Because of this, I felt a little disappointed in the ending - we find out what happened to Irene (the girls' mother) over a very small fraction of pages. This makes the story feel lopsided and is kind of a let-down after the sprawling way it was told in the beginning. However, I think the book is great. Like I said, the writing is beautiful, the characters are wonderful, and the story itself is very engaging. I definitely recommend this. I think I'm just sad it ended a bit abruptly.

Julie says

I forced myself to get half way through this book and still hated it and still had no real clue what was going on so I quit reading. There were too many characters and the main characters were way underdeveloped. There was nothing about this story that drew me in or made me want to keep reading. The story was really detailed on inconsequential things and then large time periods would pass without hardly a mention to time.

In the story the girls' mother disappears. I really didn't care what happened to her.

Cheyenne Blue says

This slow-moving elegant tale is a lovely exploration of family and friendship and motherhood and love. It's also about abandonment and loneliness.

In the 1970s, Maggie and Jenny grow up in the backwoods of British Columbia with their hippie mother and Irish father. When their father is killed, Irene, their mother leaves them with an acquaintance, Bea, and goes off to be a camp cook in a logging camp. Bea treats the girls with an offhand affection, but it's the happy-go-lucky Jenny who is her favourite. The more introspective Maggie is left to her own devices—working at a garage and hanging out with her friend, Vern.

But Irene doesn't return, Jenny falls pregnant and is shipped off to the nuns in Vancouver to have the baby and give it up for adoption. Maggie, the younger sister, is the more practical of the two, and she decides she has to find out what happened to Irene.

This is a beautifully written story, simply told with grace and elegance. The relationships are complicated, but fully developed. The strongest is between the sisters, Maggie and Jenny, but those between Irene and her daughters, Irene and her friend Ruth, Maggie and Vern, Maggie and Cinnamon the cat, and the people living in the rural town are part of this story.

Greenslade has a beautiful eye for detail, both in her characters and the backwoods where much of the story is set. There's love in the depictions of the Canadian landscape, and this, as much as anything, made this book such a joy.

The ending has a rushed feel to it, with a lot of information and telling packed into the final pages. It's a fitting ending, drawn together like a mesh bag, but I would have preferred for the ending to unfold at a slower pace, in keeping with the rest of the book. Despite the tumult of the ending, I still loved this book enough to give it 5 stars.

Brianne Jaure says

In *Shelter*, a fiction novel, Frances Greenslade describes the setting of living in the wilderness of British Columbia so thoroughly that the reader feels as though they are actually there. The storyline is very interesting throughout, and makes the reader never want it to end. *Shelter* is one of the three books published by Frances Greenslade. Growing up in Ontario, Canada, and then moving to British Columbia herself, Frances Greenslade is able to relate to the characters by using very accurate description.

Living in the Pacific Mountains of British Columbia in the early 1970's, life for Maggie and her older sister, Jenny seemed as though it couldn't get much better. However, everything they had ever known went downhill when their father died in a logging accident. After moving around several times from camping to staying at neighbors' houses, Maggie and Jenny were not prepared to lose another parent. But when Maggie's mom, Irene drops her and Jenny off at friend's and gradually stops sending letters and money altogether, she

realizes that Irene had abandoned them. As the years go by, Maggie and Jenny both face many obstacles, and at one point become separated, leading Maggie to deciding to go out and look for their mother.

This book was very insightful to me because it showed how quickly something good that's taken granted for can go wrong. The imagery and storyline was always interesting and suspenseful, and it was never boring. My favorite character was Maggie because I could relate to her the most. *Shelter* was a book I didn't want to end, and I would recommend to anyone. An important theme in this story to never take things for granted, because you may never know what you have until it's gone.

Paige says

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

"Shelter" is an amazing novel in that it is so powerfully realistic that it's agonizing at times. Maggie's narration is honest and straightforward, and through her story you glimpse the struggles of a girl to whom life has been unfairly harsh.

The character development in this novel is phenomenal. Maggie's quirks, worries, and flaws come together to make this unique character, but at the same time readers may well recognize aspects of themselves in her.

The plot moves well, though the third quarter of the book seemed a bit drawn-out and was borderline sluggish. At the same time, though, this may have been emotional exhaustion on my part - I found it difficult to keep returning to Maggie's world, mainly because it was not a place that I really wanted to spend any time. This novel tells a harsh story, and while I'm not typically oversensitive to heavy stories and plots, this novel truly drained me. It's still definitely worth the read and is a great book, but be prepared - it's a hard story to take.

Niki says

I loved this book overall. The story was set in the 70's, which is when I was a teenager myself so I could relate to some extent to the time-frame. However, the novel is set in a remote logging area of British Columbia and this made the story novel, exotic, fresh and thrilling for me. The author wonderfully described the natural setting in the story, really brought the environment to life and made the novel beautiful in a visual way, so much so that I am thinking about exploring that area! The characters were well developed, believable and likeable, or in a few cases, not likeable but still very believable, as well as seemed uniquely and authentically Canadian to me. The story line was engaging, even gripping until Maggie goes to find her mother. However, at that point, I felt that the story started heading down a line that did not really fit to the earlier story, although there were hints of Emil's existence early on. It seemed like the story up until that point in the story is one story, and then a separate story about Emil and his young lover got patched in but did not feel seamless, believable or even that sympathetic to me. I basically ignored that whole portion of the book and was still able to come out liking this book very much. The resolution of the sisters' story was satisfying and felt right.

Kirsty says

Shelter takes place in Duchess Creek in British Columbia, Canada's most westerly province. It begins during the 1960s and spans a period of several years. *Shelter* is told from the first person perspective of Margaret Dillon, known throughout as Maggie. The narrative is retrospective and the more sinister events of the novel are foreshadowed as it progresses.

The novel opens with Maggie stating that it was her older sister Jenny who urged her to document their story. The heartbreak of both sisters with regard to their abandonment by their mother, Irene, is clear from the start. Maggie tells us 'we did not try to look for our mother. She was gone, like a cat who goes out the back door one night and doesn't return... We let time pass, we waited, trusting her...'. She goes on to say that as her mother 'was the constant in our lives, the certainty and the comfort', neither she nor Jenny felt any reason to worry.

The girls' father, Patrick, works at a local sawmill. His nickname is 'Mr Safety', and he is called it not just by his family but by his friends, who are 'irritated by his careful checking and rechecking'. Patrick's character is unsettled at times. He is plagued by what the Dillon family term 'terrors... seizures of fear which took possession of his whole body when he was on the edge of sleep'. Seeing her almost as a 'son', Patrick teaches Maggie about survival in the wilderness. He teaches her how to construct a lean-to shelter whilst telling her 'If you ever get lost, this is what you do first. You build yourself a little shelter'.

To the surprise and shock of the Dillons, Patrick is killed whilst at work and the family is forced to cope without him. Following his death, a chasm opens within the family. Maggie begins to see her mother as a distant figure: 'she was not really my mother, but some beautiful woman with flushed skin going to have a nap in my mother's bedroom'. Irene's previously spirited character begins to unravel in consequence. She leaves the girls with the Edwards family in Williams Lake whilst she begins a job relatively far away. Unlike her popular sister, Maggie feels as though she never really fits with the Edwards, despite the warmth of wheelchair-bound Ted. When payments for the girls' billet suddenly stop, nobody is able to discover where Irene has vanished to. Undeterred, Maggie sets out to find her and unravel the mystery of her sudden disappearance.

Shelter is rather an uncomfortable read at times. The entire novel is filled with dark incidents. These include shooting accidents, widespread alcoholism, the widespread isolation during the harsh Canadian winters, disability, coping with grief and loss and the wider concept of abandonment.

Greenslade's descriptions are rich and are balanced well with the unfolding story. Jenny is described as a 'powder blue beacon' whose grief at the loss of their mother is 'majestic and furious'. The natural environment which has prominence in the life of Maggie particularly, has been written about with true care on part of the author. Almost fairytale-esque elements are woven throughout the novel, particularly with regard to Maggie's daydreams. Maggie's narrative voice is consistently strong and she is a vivid character from the outset.

Greenslade has a real way with words and *Shelter* is certainly an accomplished novel. The abandonment of their girls and their gradual realisation of their mother's whereabouts are realised sensitively and touchingly, and every single loose thread which appears in the novel is tied up well at the story's end.

Michelle says

Sort of quiet, depressing book about two girls who grew up in a makeshift sort of way and whose mother abandons them. Shelter is an apt title as the main character, little sister Maggie, is certainly looking for protection physically and emotionally. It took me a bit of time to get into the storyline. The writing is solid but not necessarily grabby and the beginning is almost too quaint. However, the author does a good job evoking sympathy for the characters, including the unsympathetic one. A few of the secondary players are the most interesting and dynamic of the book. Vern is terrific and I like how his uncle is actually a good guy. When you encounter ancillary fictional uncles it usually does not end well for the kids he hangs out with. Loved that this didn't go there. I'm not entirely sure how I feel about the big sister's storyline but it does touch on some interesting things.

Squibart says

I am unsure how to feel about this book because it seemed to me to begin as one story and end as another. Yes, the writing was vivid and almost mythical, but it also frustrated me at times when I wasn't sure which person's story was unfolding. I am still not connecting some of the "mystical" occurrences. I liked the letters the sisters wrote back and forth. Dad, Uncle Leslie and Vern were the characters that provided comfort which I find interesting since in this story of women, it is ultimately the men who seem to treat the main characters with kindness while other women just selfishly claim independence and push each other away. The stories being told at the end to explain Irene's life became tedious and the explanations too literary for me to believe they were offered by real people rather than book characters. Perhaps the biggest issue I had in reading this book is the negative momentum of the story. I didn't expect a story about abandonment to be sunny, but I just felt depressed as each "third thing" piled on. I just wanted it to be over and when it was I could only sigh. I do believe this book is very discussion worthy and that there is likely much that other readers took away from this story that I didn't. That is why I chose 4 stars, not 3.(less)

6 minutes ago ·

Vikki VanSickle says

I very much enjoyed the story of Maggie Dillon, a quiet, woodsy girl abandoned mysteriously by her mother in the early 1970s in rural British Columbia. Maggie and her sister Jenny (sweet, sunny, popular) make due with temperamental and mean-spirited Bea, waiting for their mother to return. But when Jenny finds herself pregnant and shipped off to an unwed mothers' home in Vancouver, Maggie decides to stop waiting for things to happen and take charge of her life.

Frances Greenslade knows how to write about nature. Her descriptions of the BC woods are breathtaking and vibrant. On the woodsy scale I'm about a 7 out of 10, but this book made me feel like a 10. I'm disappointed this book did not make it on this year's Canada Reads list, as it is both beautiful and super regional.

This qualifies as a poignant coming of age story (my favourite kind!) and a teenager could definitely read and enjoy this. Maggie is likable and it is heartbreaking when her cat is taken away and when she discovers what happens to her mother (somewhat farfetched and sensational, but affecting nonetheless). But Maggie is made of stronger stuff and has made a good friend in Vern, a kind-hearted boy from her adopted village who

turns into something more.

Fans of *The God of Animals*, *The Patron Saint of Liars*, and *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* will enjoy this rich, moving story. I look forward to Greenslade's next book.

Debbie says

:I would say that the title *Shelter* appropriately sums up what this book is about. It's the search for physical shelter, monetary shelter, emotional shelter. Maggie, Jennie, their mother, and many of the other characters are all searching for it in different ways. Will they find it? You have to read the book to find out.

This book was beautiful in many ways but I found myself having a hard time with the narrative coming from a preteen girl. It just never rang quite true to me. The story itself never became a completely cohesive work for me. I still think that the book has interesting things to say. I especially liked the peek into the life of a logger and the interactions we see with the Indian community in the area. The beautiful friendship between Maggie and Vern is a heart melting coming of age tale.

I'm left with the feeling that I missed something in my reading of this story. A link, an event, a remark that tied it all together. I didn't find it but the book, was still worth the read. Many of the sub-stories made for good stories. I would love to hear others' thought after they've read it.

Doriana Bisegna says

One of life's greatest pleasures is when you nonchalantly pick up a book and the story totally blindsides you! This is that kind of experience! I totally cared about these characters (and yes, I know they're not real) but they are to me!!! This has undertones of *She's Come Undone*, *The Book of Ruth* and *Icy Sparks*. I couldn't help thinking about how this mother could have done what she did to her two daughters. I think that the story was brilliantly put together, the characters are rich, funny and multi faceted. The pages turn themselves and the characters speak to your heart. I am constantly amazed by the level of talent that Canada has in it's literary world...how a simple tale can just grab you, shake and rattle you and in the end you don't mind the trip that you unexpectedly took without anyone asking if you'd like to go there. I would like to dedicate this review to one of the best Mom's out there...Ms Linda Price...I will save this baby for you!! You will have some words to share with Ms Irene (the mother in the novel)!! Linda, maybe you can adopt these two girls since you did such a good job with your 2 wonderful daughters...LOL!

Book Him Danno says

Another tear jerk-er for sure. The story started out with a bit of foreshadowing and I knew it wasn't going to be a happy go lucky type of book. The picture the author paints is of a family that has problems, but for the most part works them out and continues to enjoy their relationships. Of course the point of view is that of one of the children so memories surface from time to time of other then happy moments. Other moments that leads the reader to believe that everything wasn't as it seemed.

The pacing was great until the second half where it slowed a bit with letters that pushed the story ahead. The

letters I felt slowed the story down, but it did give the reader vital information they would have missed without them. Love and loss are part of life. It just seems that some people get the short end of the straw more often than others. No indoor plumbing in the late 1960's WOW, I wouldn't like living in the bush. But that wasn't their biggest problem by far.

I enjoyed this book and the ending was bitter sweet. I cried and I laughed and I thought about my relationship with my sisters. Would we have been able to depend on each other in this same situation? That is a tough one having never faced such challenges as the two girls in this book do. If you enjoy beautifully written tales of growing up, love, loss and depending on those closest to you, you will love this book.

Jane says

Forty years ago, two sisters were growing up, in a small town, set in the wild countryside of British Columbia. Maggie and Jenny Dillon lived in an unfinished cabin home with their quiet reliable father, Patrick, and their imaginative, free-spirited mother, Irene. A happy family.

Maggie tells their story. And she tells it beautifully. Her voice rang true and she made me see her world, her sister, her father, her mother. I understood how the family relationships worked, I understood what was important to them. And I saw enough to understand one or two things that Maggie didn't

She was a tomboy, always at her father's side. He took her out into the country and he taught her how to build shelters, how to make fires, how to live off the land. Everything that she might need to know to survive in the world.

But he didn't tell her how to survive without him, and when he died in a logging accident his family was stricken.

And then Irene told her daughters that she needed to go away, to take seasonal work to earn the money that they needed to survive. She left them in the care of a childless couple, a couple that Maggie and Jenny had never met. Old friends, good people, she told them.

Maggie and Jenny struggle. Their new home is different from everything that have known before. And when Irene stops writing, when she stops sending money, things become even more difficult.

It was fascinating to watch the characters and their evolving relationships. The girls' guardians were good people, but they were left in a very difficult position, coping with teenage girls who had started their lives in a very different home with very different values.

The world doesn't stand still; things changed, and Maggie and Jenny needed their mother to guide them. But she didn't come back.

In the end, when things became too much, Maggie realised that it was time to use the skills that her father had taught her. She set off to find her mother.

She headed back to her childhood home. She visited old friends and neighbours. And she learned more about her mother, and about what had become of her.

Shelter tells a wonderful story.

It moved slowly, but that was all to the good. It gave the characters and the relationships, all so perfectly drawn, room to shine. It made me think about so many different ways that the relationships between mothers, daughters, sisters can work. And it made me fall in love with an environment that was so vividly described.

I understood. I cared. And I was pulled into a world and a story that was quite perfectly realised.

Every scene played out exactly as it should.

And the ending was exactly right. The only possible ending. And it made me realise that I was completely emotionally engaged with Maggie and her world.

It was definitely love: for the storyteller and the story she told.
