

All Over Him: The Continuing Journals of Will Barrett

Ronald L. Donaghe

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Will Barnett's family has sold their farm in rural New Mexico and moved to Austin, Texas. Will, in his freshman year at the University of Texas, is sharing an apartment with his Uncle Sean (who was Will's mentor in coming out of the closet at fourteen), while his mother and siblings have a home outside of Austin. Will's lover, Lance Surfett, has moved to San Francisco for two years to study art.

Can Will's and Lance's relationship stand the temptations facing two young gay men living more than half a country apart? "What am I really afraid of?" Will wonders. "If our commitment is strong and our 'marriage' is a good one, it will survive the separation of time, temptation and distance. If it doesn't, what I would really have to realize and accept is that our love for each other wasn't that strong to begin with."

In this novel, the third in the author's "Uncle Sean" series, Donaghe's writing skill is again expressed through Will's written journals, in a voice appropriate to the character's age. Now that Will is a college student, the journal entries are more descriptive and searching, the prose more complex and introspective than in the two preceding books.

Set in the early 1970s, All Over Him depicts an era when the modern gay rights movement was blossoming, after the famous Stonewall revolt in June of 1969. Will participates in Austin's first gay pride march: "We looked like a small knot of people on that large, long, wide street, though we were the most colorful event in the area and we drew attention to ourselves, and some of the guys positively shimmered in their costumes." Donaghe captures the mood of gay college life in the '70s, complete with rock concerts, drugs, fashion, sexual exploration, and the burgeoning social consciousness of the day.

Throughout the novel, the pain caused by the lovers' separation grows. Both are tempted by sexual opportunity with others. Will questions their decision to study in schools so far apart. "I should never have let Lance go even for a moment," he thinks, "even if Lance went along with me."

This book provides hope for young readers who have recently come to terms with their homosexuality. Will and Lance serve as role models for young gays by showing integrity, responsibility, and strength as they face the impact that their separation has on their love for each other and the future of their relationship.

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