ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

HISTORICAL

End of a Silence: Full Moon over Fox Prairie
Willard D. Gray
1stBooksLibrary
978-0-7596-1044-6
Four Stars (out of Five)

End of a Silence: Full Moon over Fox Prairie, by Willard D. Gray, is an absorbing historical tale set in a small Illinois town shortly after the Civil War. The citizens struggle against the forces of nature, corruption, and greed as they carve out a life for themselves in the fields and forests of the Midwest.

Gray's rich characterizations draw the reader into the tale and make each of his many characters come alive. There's John Peter Wachtel, a hardworking, good-hearted farmer, father, and husband; Alexander Byers, the town's most successful businessman; and Grandma Riggs, the sage whose memory stretches back farther than the hills. They help one another even as corrupt and violent people such as rapist and criminal Jeff White endanger the peaceful lives of the rural community.

The imagery and style are reminiscent of slow Southern storytelling, as Gray connects the people in his story to the landscape they inhabit. Of Grandma Riggs, Gray writes, "Her eyes scanned across the field beyond where that old thresher sat, wood parts rotting and metal rusting away just like her." And it is through Grandma Riggs that Gray begins and ends the story. A description of the old lady on her porch provides a tight frame within which the plot moves.

Gray provides effective transitions through the characters' dialogue. At the beginning of a new scene, two young women run up to Grandma Riggs and ask her, "You haven't heard yet?" Their question moves the plot forward into the next section. Similarly, occasional shifts into the present tense allow readers to settle comfortably into a scene: "Constant, malleable, the earth beneath one's feet offers a palpable certainty—here a path, there a plowed furrow. To a farmer, the sea is a field in chaos, the momentary cut of the prow is lost immediately in the swirl behind."

Gray was born in rural Illinois and based many of his characters on his ancestors. An epilogue detailing the historical paths of the main characters lends credibility and depth to the novel. *End of a Silence* will provide lovers of historical fiction with a fascinating and rewarding

read.

Emily Adams