

## Falling Like Ember

**Christina L. Schmidt**

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*Falling Like Ember is solid and complex, a story of troubled love that comes complete with a dash of the paranormal.*

A study in contrasts, Christina L. Schmidt's *Falling Like Ember* is the gritty yet whimsical romance of two young teens with old souls.

Fourteen-year-old Lux has always been unique and offbeat. A talented painter and quirky dresser, she is unappreciated and misunderstood by her glamorous, perfect sister and parents. Enter her neighbor Ember, the wildly popular member of a local band destined for fame.

Lux and Ember fall hard and fast for each other, but insecurity, miscommunication, and tragedy get in the way of their happily-ever-after. If they want a future together, they must deal with obstacles, both past and present.

*Falling Like Ember* shows atypical skill with addressing real difficulties faced by teens, including struggles with self-esteem and acceptance. And while Lux and Ember experience some insta-love when they meet officially on the first day of school, their romance is definitely not easygoing. With the emotional intensity characteristic of new adult titles, their story spans years and requires the involvement of friends, teachers, therapists, parents, and siblings to even have a chance.

When tragedy strikes, Lux finds herself at an ominous crossroads, and the ensuing fantastical narrative alternates with Ember's more grounded reality. Lux's Boreloque is a wild and colorful land where water fairies have underwater tea parties and where the mysteriously evil Venia collects jars of hearts as she plots in a dark cave. It reads like a mash-up of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Odyssey*, complete with multiple rabbit holes.

As the narrative becomes cryptic and heavy on symbolism, it is not always clear what is actually happening in Lux's new world or with the seemingly dozens of new characters who may or may not be manifestations of others in Lux's home life.

Because characters believe that "music fills the infinite between two souls," music takes on a role of its own, becoming almost another character in the story. From Taylor Swift to Marilyn Manson and everything in between, music is paramount, as the cast says frequently. Chapters all begin with an album and track; barring familiarity with the artists, some sleuthing may be required to fully appreciate this method.

Characters also habitually share—along with good-natured ribbing—the first and last songs they listen to every day, lists that include titles both popular and obscure. In these ways, the novel may serve as a good starting ground for anyone interested in expanding their listening libraries or musical repertoires.

Haunting and dreamlike in places, yet inclusive of high school note-passing and assemblies, *Falling Like Ember* is solid and complex, a story of troubled love that comes complete with a dash of the paranormal. Just be sure to grab headphones and an MP3 player before falling in love with this novel.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (August 6, 2016)

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