ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

ROMANCE

My Last Summer With You: No Fanfare for a Withered Rose
Fidelis O Mkparu
Dog Ear Publisher
978-1-4575-1258-2
Two Stars (out of Five)

When a seventeen-year-old moves six thousand miles from his home to attend college in North Carolina, he excels at his studies, but as an international student, he struggles to fit in culturally.

In this sweet romance, Fidelis O. Mkparu tells the story of Joseph, who arrives on campus and quickly establishes a friendship with Wendy, a fellow student. She is instantly attracted to him and pushes for a deeper romantic relationship, but he is reluctant and tries to keep her at arm's length. Joseph is fond of Wendy, but wants to focus on his schoolwork; he is also concerned that he does not have enough money to date. Their friendship is further complicated by Wendy's father and other students on campus who object to their cross-cultural relationship. Their close friendship eventually dissolves, but they remain acquaintances, and there are hints that Joseph still has strong feelings for Wendy even after he establishes a similarly challenged romantic relationship with another student, Francesca.

The reasons the women are so enamored with Joseph are evident. He has many admirable qualities, including a strong work ethic and a willingness to help his friends in need. But even though the story is told in first person from Joseph's perspective, his true feelings about the women he is involved with are never clear and little is discussed about his innermost struggles, especially regarding the prejudice he faces. The dialogue is overly formal and stilted, both among the characters and in Joseph's mind. As a result, the relationships with Wendy and Francesca ultimately do not ring true.

A disjointed narrative structure further distances the reader. The story is framed by an opening flashback that establishes a misleading premise. It begins in 2010, when Joseph receives a phone call from Francesca, whom he hasn't heard from in thirty years. She tells him she owns a multi-million-dollar real estate investment company with Wendy, but Wendy has just resigned and wants to turn over a portion of her financial interest in the company to Joseph. In this exchange, Francesca is presented as the key relationship in his life, but when the story is actually told, he appears to have a stronger emotional connection with Wendy. There is never a

return to 2010 to complete the story arc, and the significance of this reconnection with Francesca, as well as Joseph's reaction to Wendy's gesture, is never revealed.

Furthermore, throughout the story events are offered either in summary rather than vivid description, or in bits and pieces. Such moments—a family visit, a meal shared between friends—are reminiscent of diary accounts. Key details are also vague. Joseph refers to "my country" several times but the specific location is never identified. References to some characters are confusing, particularly Gina, who is mentioned as Joseph's sister but also as someone he fears Francesca will view as a potential love interest for him.

Mkparu presents likable characters, particularly in Joseph, but the unique aspects of their personalities are not captured. Similarly, he touches upon many important personal and social issues, but the details are too sketchy to fully engage readers.

Maria Siano