



Clarion Review

General

Not Fade Away

Ronald C. Gordon

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Four Stars (out of Five)

“Love is love and not fade away.” —Buddy Holly “Not Fade Away” (1957)

Fifteen-year-old Andy Lerner greets the summer of 1959 with typical teenage complacency unaware that the close of the season will find his life drastically altered. It seems fitting that this coming-of-age story begins and ends with a subtle allusion to Buddy Holly a voice of innocence in an era preceding a time of great change and disillusionment.

The death of Andy’s grandmother Celia marks an end to the contented lifestyle he shares with his mother older brother Marty and maid Hattie Mae. The loss brings changes to their financial circumstances and opens the door to unsettling family secrets. Soon Andy has given up his bedroom to his displaced great-grandfather a stroke victim and spends afternoons searching his grandmother’s belongings to learn more about the father who died before he was born—who his mother never talks about.

When not investigating family secrets Andy attends summer school classes and tries to avoid school bullies who harass him about his weight. Humiliated once too often he finds the motivation he needs to reinvent himself physically gradually building self-confidence and discovering that both he and those around him are more complicated than he ever realized.

Relationships in the novel are well-realized—particularly Andy’s intense infatuation with his brother’s girlfriend. Perhaps more significant is the connection he shares with Grandpa Simon. Initially intimidated by the silent old man they soon forge a bond built on communication through an old Erase-a-Slate. Shocked that no one in the family ever told him it is Andy who informs Grandpa Simon that his daughter Celia has died. “He was crying inside wracked by dry inaudible sobs. He might have been a wellspring of perpetual undemonstrative grief the moisture that regularly trickled from his eyes the temperate overflow of an illimitable self-contained sorrow. No one knew him now or everything he’d lived through.” Such

sensitively rendered moments give insight into the compassionate young man Andy is becoming as he tentatively navigates changes both feared and anticipated.

Like those lazy days of summer during which it takes place the novel begins slowly eventually picking up momentum. Some readers may find themselves impatiently waiting for something exciting to happen but those who persevere will be rewarded with a rich and thoughtful tale of self-discovery both poignant and witty told by a charming narrative voice. Dialogue is engaging and skillfully crafted enriching characterization while capturing the essence of the time period.

Not Fade Away is author Ronald C. Gordon's first novel and part one of a planned trilogy. It serves as a satisfying introduction to Andy's story and revelations near the end hint at his continuing quest to delve into newly discovered family secrets and get to the bottom of "the lie that dwells at the heart of things."

Rather like Buddy Holly likable Andy Lerner proves that the most unassuming of exteriors can conceal a soul of remarkable depth and potential. A promising debut.