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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

Old Rye

Jeanne Farewell
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Oscar Wilde once claimed that life has only two tragedies: “One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.” It’s a quote that seems to resonate throughout Jeanne Farewell’s novel, *Old Rye*.

Old Rye is the wealthy, oceanside Connecticut town where Phoebe Bennington has lived all her life. As a child she was in love with Wentworth Lockhead, the handsome son of Old Rye’s wealthiest family. Now, Phoebe watches as Wentworth prepares to marry Nell, an outsider with a shady past. With the encouragement of Mrs. Lockhead, Wentworth’s mother, Phoebe tries to convince Wentworth that he’s making a mistake. Little does Phoebe know that her decision to convince Wentworth not to marry Nell will have such an impact on the residents of Old Rye.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking that *Old Rye* is a love story. While Phoebe may struggle to find ways to make Wentworth love her, Farewell is really writing about control—how someone may influence and direct another for the well-being of all and how the same person may willingly (or unknowingly) sacrifice their own independence for the good of others. Throughout the novel, Farewell’s characters are put in situations where they must take a stance and truly be happy with that choice, whether the issue is restoring a historic building or marrying a partner everyone they love knows is unsuitable. If they waiver, they forfeit control over their own lives.

While some later sections of the book beg for more detail, *Old Rye* is a compulsive read that is a near perfect mix of complexity and thrills. Farewell writes with a clear, concise voice that brings the world of the wealthy resort town and its inhabitants to life. “Mrs. Lockhead was ensconced on a Regency sofa with a glass of sherry in hand,” Farewell writes in one section; “Nell was truculent and unresponsive throughout the meal,” she writes in another. When words fail, Farewell makes up her own; she describes Phoebe at a buffet as “tonging” up pieces of fruit.

Ultimately, *Old Rye* is a perfect summer read—the ideal mix of thriller and romance to get lost in over a long, hot afternoon. It’s also a book that is sure to leave readers debating whether it’s better to get what you want or not.
KATERIE PRIOR (July 8, 2009)

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