

The Moonstoners

Barbara J. Dzikowski

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Barbara J. Dzikowski's *The Moonstoners* explores love in unsettled, complicated times.

The Trudeau, Ziemny, and Chavis families first collide when Noel Trudeau meets Ricky Ziemny after art class. While Theckla and Freddie Chavis care for Noel's baby son, Ricky falls for Noel. But then Ricky's brother, Leon, meets her and relationships turn messy. Tormented by her past, Noel struggles to love and be loved. Meanwhile, the country is torn apart by Vietnam and race riots.

The characters' respective woes pump out a steady stream of juicy episodes set against an equally dramatic backdrop of world-changing events. Tangled love affairs unfold in chronological order, and free-flowing dialogue and captivating backstories make the narrative easy to follow.

Personal threads are colored by period musical references and steeped in national news stories. Bobby Kennedy makes a live appearance shortly before his death, infusing the novel with real-life pathos. Polish church traditions add metaphysical depth.

Noel Trudeau dominates the book—the attractive linchpin around whom other characters turn while Leon functions as her foil. Other characters are secondary to the ideas they personify. The Chavises present opportunities for others to change their views, and *chiaroscuro*—an art term for the light/dark juxtaposition that Ricky and Noel discuss—becomes a theme in character interactions. Pascal's notion that "When one does not love too much, one does not love enough" is used to judge characters' actions, though Noel ends up being the only character who transforms because of her love. With refreshing independence, she becomes a heroine and a champion of a new kind of love.

A romantic drama set in the 1960s, *The Moonstoners* forwards an ideal of love in complex circumstances.

MARI CARLSON (July/August 2019)

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