

The Young Sailor: Memoir of Love and Adventure

Al Cadondon

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A young man works through the excitement of courtships and travel in this appealing coming-of-age story.

The Young Sailor by Al Cadondon is a novelization of a man's life that looks back over mostly fond and romantic memories.

Albert, a Filipino American sailor, leaves his California home to join the navy during the Vietnam War. His story includes romance, flings, crushes, and heartache; such themes are the focus of the book. It is narrated from a third-person point of view and in the present tense. This coming-of-age tale leaves many of its more interesting aspects underexplored.

At the start of his adventures, Albert is fairly green, and his naïveté in different scenes and interactions is charming. As he meets an increasing number of women, his romantic desires become more conflicted. The girls in his life change depending on where the young sailor is stationed—a true take on the joking idea that sailors have “a girl in every port.” Often, Albert's dates become a vehicle for sightseeing, adding a fun travelogue element, though Albert focuses on his companions' bodies and their chemistry together as much as he does the scenery.

The excitement of new opportunities is clear, and so are the thrills and pangs of romantic courtships and career possibilities opening up for hardworking Albert. Real, sensuous pleasure is evident in descriptions of good meals eaten throughout his travels in the United States and Europe, as well as through the sights he sees and his love of dancing, which leads him to explore the nightlife in port cities.

Women are introduced in a redundant way; first eye contact is followed by descriptions of their hair color, height, and the attraction felt, which comes to feel mechanical. It is difficult to differentiate the relative importance of different relationships in Albert's life. Situating details, such as the songs played when Albert is out dancing, also become repetitive.

Albert's actual military experience is glossed over to focus more on his social life. There is not much of a dramatic arc to the story; rather, it reads like a journal of Albert's dating life. Racial tensions add some drama to the plot, as Albert is subject to prejudice and has to meet higher standards in his career and face a girlfriend's judgmental father. Some such incidents are resolved, but not satisfactorily.

The Young Sailor is a story about growing up through many dates and an adventurous period in the navy, with sensual and historical details that heighten its appeal.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (January 29, 2018)

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