Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

Wildfire!
Trisha Davis
iUniverse
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Five Stars (out of Five)

An appealing young adult novel, *Wildfire!* follows thirteen-year-old Buddy as he spends a memorable summer with the grandfather he barely knows. Past hurts, misconceptions, and even a dangerous forest fire are a few of the obstacles that Buddy must overcome as he learns to look at life a bit differently.

Buddy has lived most of his life in Alaska with his father and older brother. His mother, a member of the Kootenai Indian tribe, died in a car accident after having an argument with Buddy's grandfather, Sebastian; during the argument, Sebastian said regrettable things about Buddy, his brother, and their father, creating a seemingly unbridgeable rift between Sebastian and his deceased daughter's family. When Buddy's father tells him that his grandfather has changed and wants to get to know him, Buddy reluctantly agrees to visit.

Buddy's time with Sebastian on the Kootenai-Salish Indian Reservation in Montana is depicted with a realism that brings the story to life. Author Trisha Davis describes the land and its people with just enough detail, offering an introduction to daily life on the reservation. Sebastian is compassionately portrayed as a man with deep regrets and a strong desire to mend the rift between himself and his grandchildren. His patience with Buddy and his understanding of the boy's resentment is conveyed realistically, as is his wish to teach his grandson about his heritage.

At heart, *Wildfire!* is a journey of self-discovery. Buddy begins with a stubborn sense of conviction about what he thinks he knows, and little by little he opens his mind and heart to other possibilities. He learns to forgive and to trust, and the pace and progression of his realizations is handled credibly. The depiction of the grandfather-grandson relationship is often poignant, and readers will feel Sebastian's guilt and Buddy's fear of trust. Eventually, Buddy discovers that, "Sebastian was interesting and knew a lot about a lot of things. That made it hard

to hate him."

Davis shines most brightly in her ability to capture Buddy's narrative voice. Buddy is genuine and engaging, and readers will be drawn into his story as he begins to open himself up to a connection with his grandfather. The target audience of nine- to thirteen-year-olds will identify with Buddy as he struggles with peer pressure and navigates his interest in a girl. His thoughts are conveyed with a realistic tone: "Weird. I'd never hung out with a girl before. Emerry was more than just a girl. She was cool, she wasn't afraid of bugs, she didn't giggle and she never talked about movies."

Wildfire! is competently edited, with virtually no typographical or grammatical errors. The well-structured book progresses at a comfortable and consistently compelling pace toward a satisfying conclusion.

Davis has crafted an appealing and highly enjoyable novel. The author packs a lot of action and emotion into Buddy's pivotal summer, and readers will be invested in the cast of characters from start to finish. *Wildfire!* is a worthwhile and affecting novel, and Davis is an author to watch.

Jeannine Chartier Hanscom