Carla is a girl on a mission. She will somehow make Andy Harris notice her. Resolutely, she marches down to Harris’s hardware store, determined to make a big impression. A chance encounter with two strangers in the hardware store will change her life in ways she cannot even begin to imagine. Rachetville, Ark., has a deservedly tough reputation. This town is no place for anyone “different.” That applies not only to Carla’s mother, the town’s outspoken librarian, but also to the two newcomers Carla meets at Harris’s store. Frank and Stephan are accosted by one of the women in the store who overhears Frank calling Stephan his “love.” Frank stands up to the woman and to the Harris men. Stephan seems ready to bolt and run given the chance. Carla cannot move or speak. It is bad enough her mother has managed to make enemies in town; Carla would just like to get along and be relatively unnoticed. When Andy stops her at school, Carla is dismayed when the conversation quickly turns to Frank and Stephan. It is immediately clear that Andy is prejudiced about homosexuality. Carla is upset by Andy’s reaction, but her attraction to him prevents her from defending Frank and Stephan. In fact, Carla manages to convince her mother to attend the Christmas services at Andy’s church. There, though the preacher delivers a sermon condemning homosexuality, Carla seems not to hear the words. Later that day, Andy shows up at Carla’s house with an unexpected Christmas gift. Soon, the two are an inseparable couple.

Frank and Stephan have opened a small antique shop in a town near Rachetville. One day, Andy and two of his friends, Spider and Ironman, encounter Stephan in his local pizza parlor. They follow him from there and chase him into an alley, where they bully Stephan, burning his face with the steaming pizza. This is not the end of the harassment, as Andy begins a campaign to bully the two men into leaving their store and the community. He makes crank phone calls to Frank and Stephan. Though Carla is aware of these activities, she goes along with Andy and his friends, who see the calls as just simple pranks. Threatening letters soon are added to Andy’s campaign of bullying. Again, Carla decides to do nothing to stop the torment. Her mind is more preoccupied with plans for the upcoming dance.

Frank and Stephan want to end the threats being made by Andy Harris. Determining that going to the police is not a viable option, they decide instead to contact Reverend Wheelright, the pastor of Andy’s church. Wheelright offers no assistance to the two, however, and Andy’s harassment continues. On the night of the prom, the paths of Andy and Carla and Frank and Stephan intersect.
Andy and his friends chase Stephan, ultimately hurling him into a river where he drowns. Andy stands trial for the murder of Stephan Jones; Carla is the key witness against him. Andy claims his act was caused by Stephan’s advances. He and the others involved are given suspended sentences and probation. In the midst of Andy’s celebration, Frank appears. He confronts Andy and shows all those gathered there the “love letters” Andy wrote to Stephan. Andy is discredited in the eyes of all those he knows. Carla and her mother leave Rachetville.

Articles


Challenges

The book was removed from the Barron (Wis.) School District in 1998. The ACLU sued the district and the book will remain available to students. Banned from the Mascenic Regional High School in Ipswich (N.H.) in 1995.

Removed from the curriculum and school library shelves in Boling (Tex.) in 1993.

Internet

Frequently asked questions about the novel, from Bette Greene’s home page
http://www.bettegreene.com/stephanfaqs.htm

Online article from the ALAN Review (winter 1994)
http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/winter94/Greene.html

Online article from the ALAN Review (spring 1998)
http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring98/finnessy.html

Reviews


