



My Last Days as Roy Rogers

By Pat Cunningham Devoto

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In an Alabama town in the early 1950s during the last polio summer before the Salk vaccine, ten-year-old Tabitha "Tab" Rutland is about to have the time of her life. Although movie theaters and pools have been closed to stem the epidemic, Tab, a tomboy with a passion for Roy Rogers, still seeks adventure with her best friend Maudie May, "the lightest brown colored person" she knows. Now as they meddle with the local bootlegger, Mr. Jake, row out on the Tennessee River to land the biggest catfish ever, and snoop into the town's darkest secrets, Tab sets out to be a hero...and comes of age in an unforgettable confrontation with human frailty, racial injustice, and the healing power of love.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The setting for this nostalgic coming-of-age first novel is the last "polio summer" of 1954, just before the Salk vaccine ended the annual poliomyelitis epidemics. With the Bainbridge, Ala., swimming pools and movie theater closed, and fear and germs in the air, eight-year-old narrator Tabitha "Tab" Goodloe Rutland, her 13-year-old friend Maudie May, and Maudie's two young brothers—who can speak but don't or won't build a hideout and christen it Fort Polio, the scariest name they can think of. Near a creek and hidden by kudzu (the official flower of Southern literature), the fort affords the perfect vantage point from which to watch the local bootlegger and his seemingly respectable customers. Here they plot to free the neighbor boy whose mother makes him stay inside the house all summer, and ponder the truths they read in Silver Screen. Meanwhile, Tab's mother, considered a northerner because she was born in Tennessee, seeks acceptance in the exclusive Ladies Help League. Devoto's story has its charming moments, but Tab's voice is often cloying, the ending is contrived and much of the narrative has a by-the-numbers quality. Roy Rogers makes a brief appearance at the beginning, then vanishes with his white hat and reassuring promise that justice triumphs, just as Tab begins to realize that it doesn't.

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From Library Journal

YA-Life is easy and innocent for 10-year-old Tabitha Rutland, narrator of this novel about one "typical" 1950s summer in Bainbridge, AL. Tab and Maudie build a fort in the kudzu, and watch Mr. Jake sell his bootleg liquor to a range of customers including the mayor. But life in this Southern town is not as easy as it seems. Mama is rejected from the Ladies Help League because she expresses progressive opinions and is a Northerner (from Knoxville, TN). Tab's friend John spends the summer in his basement, being protected (so his mother hopes) from the local polio epidemic. Then there is the unspoken issue of racism. Tab and Maudie play together in their "Fort Polio," and window-shop together for Roy Rogers lunch boxes. But at the movies, Tab sits downstairs, and Maudie joins the other "Colored" folks in the balcony. Time seems to be passing Bainbridge by this summer, but then something happens that will change life in this bastion of traditional Southern culture forever. Like the narrators in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Olive Burns's *Cold Sassy Tree*, Tab is both childlike and wise; the story is both humorous and poignant. Devoto provides a highly readable and entertaining novel packed full of rich and delightful dialogue, funny situations and vignettes, and all-to-human insights and drama.

Becky Ferrall, Stonewall Jackson High School, Manassas, VA

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From Kirkus Reviews

A first novel that affectingly details the bittersweet last summer of childhood, often treating the grimmer events—polio, race, and death—with a cursory, even jaunty vigor. "Tab" (Tabitha) Rutland, the narrator, lives in a small Alabama town. Its 1954, school is over, and summer stretches ahead. Though this is Tab's favorite season, it's also polio time, and, as a precaution, swimming pools and the movie house are closed. Tab, a sixth grader, is enjoying an era when boys are still only fellow football players, not potential dates, and when fun is imagining you're Roy Rogers, building forts. With her new friend Maudie, the daughter of a neighbor's African-American maid, Tab builds "Fort Polio" in a kudzu vine thicket where the two observe the transactions of the local moonshine maker; Tab takes a dangerous fishing trip to make money so Maudie can buy school supplies; and she gets caught up in the less benevolent side of town life. Meanwhile, Tab's intellectual mother doesn't get on with her mother-in-law or the locals. In fact, Tab looks on as Mrs. Poovey, head of the prestigious Ladies Help League that collects money for polio victims, humiliatingly rejects her

mothers application for membership. A neighbor dies suddenly and John, her clever young son, a friend of Tab's, must move in with relatives who don't appreciate his brilliance. And it is Tab who discovers, when Mrs. Poovey suddenly leaves town, the scandalous reason for her departure. But only when school starts, and Maudie comes down with polio and is sent away, never to be seen again, does Tab realize her childhood has ended. Despite some unevenness, a coming-of-age story that deftly evokes a time of blissfully ordinary comforts. -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sonja Johnson:

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