

Book Review: Theo of Golden
By Allen Levi

I'll start this review pointing out that I *absolutely hated* a point in the story, about 45 pages from the finish line, that I'll call the penultimate ending.

Disappointed, and emotionally frustrated, doesn't come close to how I felt.

But of course, I kept reading. You don't absorb the first 340 pages of a novel and then abruptly curtail the reading no matter how disenchanting you are.

Thankfully, the author redeemed himself over the last 45 pages. Sort of. At least enough for me to recommend "Theo of Golden" as a well-written, emotional and thought-provoking novel about love, friendship, and kindness.

It's Spring when 86-year-old Theo (the only name he goes by) arrives in the small southern town of Golden, Georgia. Who is he? Where is he from? What is he doing in Golden?

Theo dispenses little information about himself, instead focusing on what he can learn about the town and the people he encounters. On his first morning in Golden he meets Shep, the barista and proprietor of The Chalice coffee shop, and is immediately drawn to the framed portraits – 92 of them, to be exact – of Golden residents that hang along the coffee shop walls. All drawn by the same local artist, Asher Glissen.

Theo begins purchasing these portraits and arranges to meet with and bequeath the portraits to the individual depicted therein. His rationale is that the portraits belong in the hands of the "rightful owners." Each meeting results in an exchange of stories and the birth of a friendship. Soon, the mysterious Theo is the talk of the town for his warmth, generosity, and genuine interest in each person he meets.

Early on we learn that the bestowing of these portraits is part of a plan, but little is revealed as the narrative moves forward. That's just a bit disappointing as the story focuses on

Theo's activities and the relationships he fosters. There is periodic backstory to inform just enough about Theo to pique the reader's curiosity. And the stories shared by the portrait recipients are vivid and make them easy to connect with.

As mentioned, I was initially distraught with a turn of events about 45 pages from the end, but the final chapters and Epilogue left me with an overall good feeling for the book, and a positive feeling about the potential goodness of humanity.

Four stars for "Theo of Golden" which is Levi's inaugural novel. I hope to see more from him down the road.