

Glass Halo

Colleen Smith

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When a man becomes a Catholic priest he relinquishes the chance for marriage, family, or sexual intimacy. He gains a life of spiritual devotion and many find this a fair exchange. Sometimes, however, as in the case of Father Vin DiMarco, the handsome priest in Colleen Smith's debut novel, *Glass Halo*, the temptations of earthly love prove too strong to resist.

The object of Vin's desire, Nora Kelley, has demons of her own to fight. Since her husband's death—the result of a tragic accident that left Nora with both physical and emotional scars—she has struggled to find meaning in life. Living alone in a rented cottage has been an escape from the demands of reality, but her money is running out. Then, a sudden afternoon storm brings destruction to Vin's church but also salvation; Vin hires Nora, a talented glass artist, to repair the stained glass windows, saving her from both financial difficulty and the stagnant malaise in which she's been mired.

As they meet occasionally to sort out the logistics of the windows, the two grow closer, until Nora finds that her feelings for Vin have grown to an inappropriate strength. To make matters worse, Vin seems to return not only her affection, but also her lust. Tensions build and anxieties mount. Nora turns to the glass while Vin relies on too many beers to make it through fraught days and nights. Nora knows her obsession is hopeless and malignant, but knowing that makes it no easier to cure.

Smith writes with an ever-present sense of poetry; some lines are lovely enough to be read a few times over. Nora's anxiety, her panic, and her helplessness in the onslaught of physical desire are palpable and authentic; they enliven and renew a plot that has been used before.

Other paragraphs in which Smith shines are the ones detailing the process and history behind stained glass. Nora delights in her work, when she allows herself, and tends to be a natural teacher during her own private musings on her craft. "Church art, any glazier would tell you, poses extra hindrance. The best windows exploit light and bend the waves into joy, sorrow, mystery. Whatever one's belief system, there is the terror of spirituality...It's a risky, risky business, accessorizing blind faith with pigment."

Lovely images, tangible passions, and lessons in stained glass combine for a delightful read in *Glass Halo*.

ANDI DIEHN (September / October 2010)

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