Clarion Review

General

In Search of Sanctuary
Jamie E. Kirby
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Shamus O'Connor is reflecting on the previous months of his life: "He had learned so much about people, about friendship, about faith, and about letting go. There were some things he knew he would always hold in his heart, but there were some that he was going to have to release."

The tragic and untimely death of his older brother, Joseph—better known as Father Joseph to the working-class Irish citizens he ministered to in and around St. Mark's Church—is the catalyst for eighteen-year-old Shamus to be sent away from the slums of late-nineteenth-century New York City to Europe for an artistic education provided by his employer and mentor, Patrick Sullivan.

The events surrounding Father Joseph's murder also profoundly affect sixteen-year-old Aiden, adoptive daughter of Maggie, the proprietress of Sanctuary, an outdoor café located near St. Mark's Church. Another character intertwined with Shamus and Aiden is Mac, the disturbed and coldhearted leader of a gang of local ruffians. These three main characters are on a collision course with one another as they each wind up traveling in the same social circles in Europe.

This is the author's debut work. A native of North Carolina, Kirby is recently retired from a career in international business.

Kirby's prose is exceptional. On Shamus' initial trip to the United States as a young immigrant, he "would wander to the bow of the boat and paint the sea in his imagination, set the sound of the waves and wind to music in his mind."

By overlapping the main characters' viewpoints with the timeline of their specific experiences, the author creates a unique and compelling structure. For example, part of the story's beginning involves someone pounding on the church door while a shocked Aiden is being consoled in St. Mark's by one of the elderly nuns. In another chapter, readers follow

Shamus as he runs to the church in a panic and loudly knocks on the door.

The novel's cover depicts eye-catching, drawn photographs of Shamus, Aiden, and Mac. The names and a brief description of each of the characters are listed at the front of the book, an added feature many readers will find handy. However, a few errors in wording occasionally detract from the story.

A key element in the plot is how Shamus and Aiden search for peace in their lives through spirituality. They are encouraged on their paths by priests and nuns and a collection of church-going characters who want the couple to succeed in their endeavors.

Readers who enjoy spiritual literature will find this novel to their liking. It is also recommended for readers who enjoy human drama, historical fiction, and adventure.

Robin Farrell Edmunds