



Joshua: A Brooklyn Tale

Andrew Kane

Abbott Press (December 2011)

Softcover \$28.99 (467pp)

978-1-4582-0074-7

In this gripping, multi-layered narrative of racial tensions in Brooklyn spanning four decades, from the late 1950s up until the Crown Heights riots in 1991, the triumphs and challenges of three main characters are traced from age nine through their early forties.

Joshua is a young black man who had moved from Bedford Stuyvesant to Crown Heights at age nine with his single mother; Rachel is the daughter of a Hasidic Rabbi; and Paul lives on Long Island in an affluent suburb with his non-Orthodox Jewish parents. Seemingly from different backgrounds, they share similar struggles. As they negotiate personal relationships, including romantic feelings for each other, readers are drawn into their lives as they grapple with a series of conflicts over a long period of time, aware of all of their thoughts and desires, creating a strong sense of emotional engagement.

Parental expectations weigh heavily on the decisions of each character and is a consistent theme, further drawing readers in. When Rachel and Joshua are attracted to each other as teens, they must deal with the fact that Rachel's parents won't approve because of their racial and religious differences. Paul must break away from his immediate family when he chooses to study Hasidic religious principles. Rachel tries to balance her desire to become a doctor with her parents' expectation that she will solely devote herself to being a wife and mother, as is customary for women in the Orthodox culture. While Joshua does not have a close relationship with his own father, a professor eventually serves a similar role and places expectations on him. Each is faced with either living up to these expectations or disappointing an authority figure.

As adults, the characters' lives continue to intersect, in both tragic circumstances and courageous moments. Eventually they must confront prejudices not only among their various communities but within their own communities as well. Their decisions ultimately require them to choose to either perpetuate or combat the prejudices that have confined them throughout their lives. As Joshua, Rachel, and Paul make those life-changing decisions, and they experience the heartbreak of unfulfilled romantic desires, unrealized professional dreams, and devastating illness, readers, who now understand the totality of their life experiences from age nine on, will be rooting for them to persevere and overcome the obstacles.

Using lively dialogue and vivid detail, the author traces the lives of three specific characters and transports readers back to a particular time and place in contemporary American history, but the themes explored are universal and will be relatable to many.

MARIA SIANO (February 29, 2012)

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