Clarion Review

General

Michael
Ann O'Farrell
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Most siblings share many things—their parents their home their heritage their community their history their vision of what life can be. Family should give one a sense of belonging and self-esteem. The few unlucky siblings who are separated in childhood lose more than a brother or sister—they lose themselves.

Michael Kelly was the youngest child of Norah and Brendan Kelly. When he was two years old his mother died. His father immersed in issues associated with his second marriage placed him and his older sister Sheelagh with relatives in England. After one night the Porter family decided that Michael might be a little slow. The toddler was given to an aging spinster who saw the boy as an investment in the future—someone who would take care of her in her golden years. This novel begins the day that Michael meets his new guardian and ends with his wedding in 1943.

Michael's childhood coincides with the beginning of a war and his personal tribulations reflect the global ones going on around him. The author skillfully uses dialogue to forward the action of her plot and develop her characters. For example when Michael asks his uncle if he fought in the big war Jim Porter answers "'No no. Too old boy. Would have had to though if it had gone on much longer. Running out of good men they were.' Wyn sniffed. 'I'll thank you not to fill his head with notions like that Jim. I didn't rear him all these years for him to be killed or maimed just when he's started to earn his keep.'" In a few short lines the reader understands some of the reality of war how Jim Porter feels about war and what it is to be a man and Wyn's continuing perspective that Michael is her blanket against the coldness of old age.

Author Ann O'Farrell gives extra attention to details and her plot works from beginning to end. While not particularly dramatic in total the story does have its moments. For example when Michael's town is bombed several characters important to the boy are killed. "We were all

coming out of the factory to have our sandwiches in the fresh air" a witness explains. "Tom and George were ahead of me. We heard the sirens but the aircraft seemed to appear at the same time. Came out of nowhere they did flying low so we could not see them until the last minute. They were faster than me so I turned back into the hangar."

Michael like O'Farrell's first novel *Norah's Children* is an entertaining look into the sociological aspects of what makes a person unique. This subject is not particularly unique but it's one that continues to intrigue young people generation after generation. While the book is not classified as a young adult story that audience would be a solid one for this novel.

Joyce Faulkner