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General

Restoration: An Aging Italian-American's Return to his Boyhood Village in a Quest to Rebuild his Spirit

Joe Costanzo
Charles River Press
978-1-936185-31-3
(January 31, 2012)

Murder and kidnapping aren't what most readers expect in a coming-home-again narrative. Cross-cultural immigrant stories that are tinged with reminiscence, nostalgia, and a bit of angst are more the norm. But Joe Costanzo breaths new life into the genre with this heartfelt, but violent and vengeful novel of remembrance and identity.

The story opens with Carlo: a young Italian whose parents are dead and whose brother, sister-in-law, and nephew are about to immigrate to America. Carlo is harassing the stonemasons who are repairing the church in town. His venomous words show readers more than even Carlo knows—his hatred stretches beyond the stonemasons themselves to God, the church, and the loneliness he feels. The scene ends when he knocks down the scaffolding leaving the stonemasons to cling for their lives. It's clear there's more conflict to come and within a few short pages a murder occurs.

This event sets the stage for the main action of the story, which takes place some fifty years later when Carlo's nephew, Stefano's, midlife crisis brings him back to Italy to rekindle his lost memories. Readers may find the shift in focus from Carlo to Stefano a bit jarring, but the action of the story soon smoothes over any hesitation.

Restoration of the church hasn't progressed since Carlo's time, but it soon restarts in tandem with Stefano's quest to restore his own youth. Stefano is weary of the American dream and is compelled to see what his life would've been like if his parents never left Italy. Meanwhile, his wife is impatient for him to rejoin her in the life they created together abroad.

Costanzo (author of *Graphic Times*) enriches the story with his own travels and studies, giving the novel a journalistic quality. In the fictional town of Roccamonti, the author captures the quaint beauty of Italy alongside the rugged violence of Calabria, showcasing compelling action alongside nuances of character.

Readers are caught up in Stefano's hope of renewal and share his disappointment as he finds that history simply can't be rewritten. The story delves in to the meanings of belief, piety, and commitment to home and self. As Stefano tries to forge through the deep-set powers of vengeance and justice, the actions of Carlo and other characters show the futility of his optimism. The result is an engaging read for Italophiles as well of fans of literary and suspense fiction.

Melissa Anne Wuske