



The Monk's Son

W. R. Wilkerson III

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W. R. Wilkerson's emotional novel *The Monk's Son* incorporates several subjects that not so many years ago might have precluded it from publication to a mass audience. The sensitive factual treatment of homosexuality drugs and prostitution underlines how an accomplished writer can turn even the most charged of subjects into a compelling inclusive and readable story.

The central characters in Wilkerson's story are two men growing into middle age and searching for meaning in their lives. They meet as 16-year-olds in a monastery at the outset of WWII. Steven is a callow youth who has spent his entire life as a ward of the abbey—Brother Dominic found him abandoned in a nearby field. The other lad Michael is a rebellious and abused delinquent orphaned in a bombing raid and taken in by the monks when they open a war-time shelter emboldened by the successes they felt they'd experienced in raising Steven.

Steven's naivete and Michael's worldliness set up the classic test between good and evil. Steven experiences Michael's seduction and comes to love him although he refuses to engage in ongoing sexual encounters. Steeped in conflicting emotions Steven dedicates himself to the monastic life following Brother Dominic's mentorship. Michael on the other hand engages in sex mischief and insubordination throwing himself into his painting and drawing turning out work that Dominic wants to destroy to prevent further criticism by the monks but which Steven treasures as artistic masterpieces. Finally Michael heads to art college on a scholarship thanks to a portfolio of his work Steven presented on his friend's behalf.

By skilfully inter-cutting Steven's and Michael's stories Wilkerson sharpens the tension and drama of their lives. While Steven finds relative contentment and resignation with his life and achievements at the abbey Michael suffers miserably in his secular choices. When Steven questions the idea of God he finds solace in prayer peace in the monastery's garden and comfort in the friendship of his brother monks. When Michael's tests beset him—and there are many as he spirals downward—he rails against religion rants at God and turns for comfort to sex and drugs. Eventually Michael's desperation leads him back to the monastery and reconciliation with Steven before a heart wrenching conclusion to their story.

The son of Billy Wilkerson founder of *The Hollywood Reporter* W.R.'s earlier works include *The Man Who Invented Las Vegas All-American Ads of the 40s* Las Vegas Vintage Graphics* and *How Would You Vote If You Were Allowed To?* W.R. Wilkerson's current novel is first-class in style and unique in its portrayal of good versus evil. Although graphically descriptive at times the sex drugs and associated violence are never gratuitous. *The Monk's Son* illuminates with its treatment of human issues and motivations and the tragic illustration of how "from great hell comes paradise."

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