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Spiritual

The Outsider
Ann H. Gabhart
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The ambition of the historical fiction novel is not only to expound upon the events within a previous time and place, but to peel back the layers of fact and reveal the nuances of the lives beneath. *The Outsider* by Ann H. Gabhart has completed this mission admirably.

For many, retreating to a life in the Shaker village in Kentucky at the turn of the nineteenth century was an escape from life's cruelties and hardships. Within it, Gabrielle and her mother find an accepting family and begin to repair the damage caused by the death of a child and the loss of a father.

For some, however, the simple, disciplined life is more like a prison than a haven. Gabrielle's friend, Brice Scott is a doctor, brought to the village for his healing skills. While he considers the rituals and traditions of the Shaker faith confining, he has made his own kind of prison, one whose bars are composed of grief and heartache.

Using these characters as her vehicle, the author reveals the life of the Shakers through the striated vision of a Believer and the critical, sometimes harsh perception of an outsider. Gabhart shows Gabrielle's evolution from pathos to contemplation and consideration in delicate detail. She writes, "She knew Sister Helen was still talking to her, but she shut her voice away until it was only an annoying noise, something like the buzz of an insistent mosquito. Inside her a wind was blowing, changing her until she felt like a tree bent out of shape by the force of a storm."

Gabhart, author of *The Scent of Lilies* (one of *Booklist*'s Top Ten Christian Novels of 2006), *Orchard of Hope*, and *Summer of Joy*, has created a marvelous depiction of the convergence of lives. *The Outsider* is a multi-layered story of love and war. But it is also touchingly sweet and as innocent in content as the people and the setting in which they exist.

Donna Russo Morin