

The Heart's Invisible Furies by John Boyne

5 stars

An outstanding book on all levels.

Catherine Goggin is called to the front of the (Roman Catholic) church in Goleen and the priest, James Monroe, takes pleasure in telling the congregation that she is with child and therefore not fit to put a foot in the church. He literally throws her out of the church and to add to her shame, she is shunned by her parents and as a result, armed with a tiny suitcase, makes her way to Dublin, where she shares a flat with Seán MacIntyre (a young man she met on the bus) and Jack Smoot. She doesn't realise until the day that Seán's father arrives and beats his son to death and almost kills Jack, that they were a couple – having never been aware of homosexuality before. The shock of this horrific rage brings on the baby, a boy, who is taken away almost immediately by a hunchback Redemptorist nun and is adopted by Charles and Maude Avery. They register him as Cyril Avery.

Cyril's place in the home of Maude, a prolific writer, and Charles, known for withholding his taxes, (he is convicted several times for these transgressions) is certainly different from most children's home life. He is all but ignored by both of his adopted parents and told at a very early age that he is adopted and never refers to them as either his mother or father, only ever as his adopted mother and father.

The book follows Cyril's life from his unconventional birth, boarding school years, friendships, infatuations, sordid sex life as a homosexual in Dublin, and after a very traumatic incident; fleeing Ireland for Holland where he meets someone who he finally finds love with, Bastiaan. It is thanks to Bastiaan that Cyril finally feels safe and truly loved and their lives are complete when they adopt Ignac.

Bastiaan's work as a specialist doctor in sexually transmitted diseases takes them to New York where the AIDS epidemic is at its most rampant. Bastiaan is killed in a brutal attack which leaves Cyril devastated and it's not just this tragedy but also Ignac's desire to study art and literature at the University of Dublin that leads Cyril to move back to Ireland.

This book has certainly opened my eyes to the harsh realities that homosexuals faced before governments around the world changed their laws. Cyril's early life takes place in Ireland where the laws were particularly harsh and where the (Roman Catholic) church – or, more truthfully, their clergy ruled the government and imposed their versions of their beliefs.

John Boyne has created a masterpiece through these pages as we follow Cyril's life. There were times when I wept and others when I laughed with delight at Cyril's eccentricities. Thanks to this novel, we are able to share his loves, tragedies, the fulfilment of a steady and loving relationship. Being a father. Living through the terrible years when AIDS was at its peak and finally being in Ireland on the day that the government legitimised homosexuality.

This is truly one of the most perfect books I've ever read and the ending is one of the most special ever written. I wish I could encourage those with homophobic ideas to read this, because it will help them understand what being "different" means and hopefully, by reading the book, they will understand that regardless of how humans are created, there are differences and these differences have to be respected and accepted regardless of the bigoted ideas we perceive thanks to our religious DNA.

Treebeard

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.