

Wild with All Regrets

E. L. Deards

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As much a tragic romance as it is a war drama, the historical novel Wild with All Regrets delves into sensitive topics with grace and tact.

In E. L. Deards's historical novel *Wild with All Regrets*, an Irish World War I veteran is haunted by the death of the man he loved.

Lucas survived a traumatic youth colored by extreme poverty, an emotionally and physically abusive father, a sexually abusive priest, and shame over his attraction to other boys. He was kicked out of the house at eight and was found freezing on the street by Jamie, a ten-year-old from a wealthy family. This chance encounter led to a complicated but powerful relationship. The boys became friends, roommates, and then soldiers who fought side by side.

Now, in 1928 in Dublin, Lucas is a veteran grieving the tenth anniversary of Jamie's death, which he saw up close in the trenches. That loss upended his life—a testament to the depth of his love for his friend, though it was romantically unrequited. Still, Lucas's love for Jamie is palpable and aching, and his guilt and shame are pervasive. As the novel jumps back and forth between four time periods, the gaps in the men's relationship are filled in, and certain secrets are teased out. Indeed, Lucas guards a guilty secret, and it comes to a head when Jamie shows up in his apartment as a ghost.

The book's details are brilliant and sensory, whether they're used to describe the sounds and smells of Lucas's decrepit childhood home or the bloody devastation of the war. Still, the book's most compelling scenes are those without Jamie, set during the aftermath of the war. Lucas has conversations with his siblings about the state of their family and with his best friend, Angie, who urges him to move on with his life. Jamie himself is a hazier presence: he says he wouldn't survive without Lucas, but the details of this dependence are unclear, which muddles the intensity of Lucas's life-derailing grief. All of this gets murkier when Jamie returns as a ghost and the men try to figure out what unresolved business needs to be settled so that Jamie can get to heaven. As a result, the stakes of the climax are too dim to command full attention.

Wild with All Regrets is a powerful novel in which a grieving man endures the shame of a lost love in a time and place when homophobia reigned.

ARIANNA REBOLINI (January 5, 2023)

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