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Mystery

Collusion: A Jack Lennon Investigation Set in Northern Ireland
Stuart Neville
Soho Press
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> *'The truth is a slippery thing,' Gordon said. 'Watch your back, son. That's all I'm saying,'*

In *Collusion*, Stuart Neville weaves a sparkling web of suspense with heart-captivating depth. Few hard-boiled detective novels take aim at readers' real-life issues like this one. One doesn't usually expect a mystery to explore the pain of broken relationships, the desire to atone for past errors, and the struggle to transform our darker selves. Yet all these things flow naturally through a gritty story that enthralls readers.

For Detective Inspector Jack Lennon, the stakes couldn't be higher. When a murderer starts killing everyone involved in a previous murder case, Lennon realizes his former lover, Marie, and their daughter, Ellen, are next. Protecting them won't be easy. Marie disappeared with Ellen and wants nothing to do with him. To complicate matters, everyone on the force warns Lennon away from investigating the murders further. "No matter what you think, no matter what I think, it was an accident. End of story," says his boss.

With fellow officers unwilling to help, Lennon turns to a series of shady characters. He may even be forced to rely on the very assassin who prompted the murders in the first place. "He's a monster," Marie says. "He's insane. And he'd do anything to protect us." As events unfold, readers find Lennon would too.

Neville's previous book, *The Ghosts of Belfast*, earned him the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and was chosen as Best Crime fiction of 2009 in the *New York Times Book Review*. His vibrant writing in this latest offering shows why. Lennon remains a flawed but relatable and sympathetic character. And readers will take twisted delight in rooting for an assassin to become a hero. Meanwhile the compelling plot sends the reader on a thrill ride with climactic peaks and unexpected turns.

A couple of minor issues merit noting. The Belfast setting brings a distinctive, often welcome, flavor to the traditional detective story. However, readers in the United States may struggle at first with navigating the Irish subculture central to the book. In addition, the experiences and traits of two characters occasionally suggest the supernatural. This seems slightly amiss in a book grounded in the gritty life of the detective.

Nevertheless, this book will appeal to any mystery lover. It begs one to open the pages on a rainy afternoon. And it offers unexpected depth in a rough-and-tumble genre, while perfectly satisfying lovers of down-and-dirty suspense.

Diane Gardner