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Clarion Review ★★★★½ GENERAL FICTION

The Connemara Connection

Nancy Bradley
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“How would you like it, my luv, if we should kidnap the Queen?”

With this question, *The Connemara Connection* takes off in classic thriller fashion, setting a small squad of Irish Republican Army rebels against the Crown and the CIA.

Based in the picturesque western region of Connemara in the early 1990s, Nancy Bradley paints an enticing picture of Ireland. She has a rag-tag team of Irish rebels launch a plan to liberate their country through possession of a small but powerful weapon, in addition to kidnapping the Queen. This list of characters is capably developed and includes: angry Sean, courageous Wolfe, reckless Kevin, and romantic Sheila, each of them sure to evoke a favorable response from the reader.

In 1975 Charley Gibson and his mother spent two weeks in Connemara on a pony trek through the mountains led by Jamey Leary and his charming daughter Megan. The sweet story of young teen attraction, along with foolhardy shenanigans, sets the stage for Charley and Megan to meet again fifteen years later. They embark on yet another pony ride but Charley is no longer a teen infatuated with a comely Irish lass. He’s a CIA agent sent to investigate IRA activities along the coast. But his feelings for Megan, and hers for Charley, are quickly reignited. And this attraction is almost their undoing as they retrace, not deliberately but as a result of mistaken identity, the path of their earlier adventure. As before, it very nearly gets them killed. The author skillfully weaves together the stories of the two groups into a climax at Ussher House, the country retreat where the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh are enjoying a rustic holiday.

Like most thrillers, there are a few implausible factors that take away from the story. Certainly, the Queen of England would be surrounded by a security force, especially on holiday in the troubled country of Ireland. That outsiders could spend a few nights in an adjourning building without notice by her security team is difficult to believe. Also, would the CIA send an inexperienced agent on a mission to intercept an unknown weapon being smuggled in by a force as competent as the IRA, simply on the basis that this agent spent two weeks in the territory fifteen years ago? Seems unlikely. Charley also appears to ignore his CIA responsibilities as he searches for a missing Megan but, like any good thriller, this twist results in a successful conclusion.

Bradley deftly captures the charm of rural Ireland along with the agony of those desiring its liberation. Throw in the expertise of the CIA along with a little bit of romance and readers now have a thriller worth reading.

MARY CARY CRAWFORD (June 2, 2011)

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