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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Nicoli Conspiracy

W.D. Dodge
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This story of action and adventure packs an enormous amount of material into relatively few pages—unfortunately too much material. W.D. Dodge's Ukrainian-born heroine engages in a great deal of sex and travels extensively both internationally and throughout the United States in order to gain custody of her son Nicoli. Many coincidences lead to their reunion.

Born and raised in a small Ukrainian village Masha grows up with her mother brother and stepfather Andre who sexually abuses her for several years. To escape this situation she marries a young man Yuri and moves with him to Israel. After she discovers that Yuri is involved with terrorists Masha attempts to flee to the US with their son. But Yuri kidnaps Nicoli forcing Masha to continue on her way to America without him. She travels from New York to Florida to California searching for her brother whom she hopes will help her find Nicoli.

The story might have been more credible if Dodge had included fewer coincidences monumental events and major personages in the story. Not only does Masha battle terrorists and experience New York's 9/11 catastrophe firsthand she also becomes involved with CIA operatives and meets up with the president. Remarkably her international lawyer Ben is even aboard the plane that crashes in Pennsylvania. "I like to believe that he was one of the men who helped foil the terrorists' attempt. That was the type of person he was" Masha says. Readers in the meantime know virtually nothing about the type of person Ben was.

Although the author writes in a friendly and accessible manner some images could have been omitted since they contribute nothing to the setting or plot: In the opening chapter the narrator observes "It's comical the way the waiters come and go so quickly. One could believe they have become eunuchs with all of their senses." Moreover "What a country" becomes a catch-all phrase for Masha's feelings. Instead of using this phrase so often the author might have further developed Masha's thoughts and reactions as well as those of other characters.

Masha's discovery that her husband of many years is a terrorist is explained with only one sentence: "I had learned about his activities one night by accidentally over-hearing him talk to one of his fellow conspirators" she says. Suspense and excitement could have been built by expanding on what Yuri said exploring Masha's feelings and elaborating on what Yuri and his co-conspirators were planning.

Although the narrator describes Masha as one of the most intelligent women he has met there is nothing in the story to support this statement. Masha's only useful attribute evident in the story is her sexual resourcefulness. Readers simply follow along as she engages in sex throughout the story to finance her quest to find Nicoli.

Action and adventure are great subjects for a novel and the author's writing style is often quite pleasant. Further character development and a scaling-down some of the unbelievable coincidences would improve readers' experiences.

BETH HEMKE SHAPIRO (May 5, 2009)

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