ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

The Vengeance Trap
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"She had an unfinished commitment to keep, like a soldier who must leave his loved ones, pick up his rifle, and return to the battlefield where his buddies died," Hansen writes.

Kathleen O'Toole of Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army is a petite mother of two boys. She believes in the nationalist cause deeply enough to become its ace procurer of armaments, from Kalashnikov assault rifles to fighter jets. She cannot make peace with the fire-bombing murders of her brother and parents. Walking away from the struggle for Northern Ireland isn't possible, yet her man and children demand exactly that. Black market weapons dealing is hazardous work, and pursuit by British law enforcement is a constant worry, but the true divide is a conflict inside Kathleen.

The heroine meets the menacing, deep-voiced Omar Jabri in a botched Irish seacoast gun-buy, running from the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Love blossoms quickly, at first aided by the urge to avenge—all of Omar's relatives suffered political deaths at the hands of the Shah of Iran. They establish a family, but do not marry. He is a shipping magnate with enterprises on both sides of the law, reluctant to let drop the high seas piracy which built his first fortune. The urbane, affable Omar has key politicians in his pocket, although Kathleen refuses to enlist his help for IRA missions. While she prefers the partial protection of emotional distance, Omar is a surprisingly gentle father. He counsels his sons against violent solutions, while profiting by the millions from a network of brutality. When Kathleen is sexually assaulted by a rogue policeman, Omar's extreme retribution involves surgical scissors and heavy duty tattoo needles.

The couple's boys, one of predominately Persian appearance, the other with Gaelic features, experience lessons in comparative prejudice. Schoolmates encourage the whiter boy beat on his brother. The couple maintains residences in three countries. Northern Ireland is portrayed as intolerantly hostile compared to the immigrant hub of live-and-let-live London or the Mediterranean unconcern evident in Florenza, Spain. Brief historical lessons cover far-flung

places connected by arms trade and privateering. The rightly condemned abuses of the Catholic church-run Magdalene Laundries against girls and women receive another healthy dose of sunlight.

Hansen holds master's degrees in teaching and business administration. He is the author of four novels and several short stories. This leadoff to *The Vengeance* trilogy reveals character, establishes setting, and produces the seeds of larger conflict. Billed as romance-adventure, the structure includes genre hallmarks—boy meets girl, and a definite obstacle. Rather than wallowing in love-match angst to the verge of melodrama, the book is a fresh examination of the effects undeclared wars can have on families. The heroine's occupation makes full sympathy difficult; however, it affords an intimate view of an under-investigated group. The strength of blood and romantic ties versus commitment to a cause—the outcome is anything but certain.