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Review



LOVE AND SUMMER

William Trevor

Viking Adult

Fiction

ISBN: 9780670021239

As fans of the 81-year-old author's 13 other novels (including the Man Booker-shortlisted THE STORY OF LUCY GAULT) and 12 collections of short stories can attest, William Trevor has made a long-standing career out of exploring the quiet, melancholic lives of ordinary, repressed people with past shame to hide and present secrets to keep. But he does it in such a way that seems new (albeit slightly short of revelatory) each time.

His latest novel, LOVE AND SUMMER, takes place half a century ago in the small Irish town of Rathmoye. The residents are simple folk, many of them farmers, who lead fairly basic lives. Everyone knows everyone else (and everyone else's business), and they rarely venture out beyond the town's boundaries, let alone to the nearest city. This type of pristine yet somewhat hermetic setting is ripe for an interloper, and Trevor's Florian Kilderry is not only as unassumingly assuming as they come, he's also the perfect shoe-in for a catalyst.

Dressed in a tweed coat, riding into town on a bicycle, Florian appears on the scene --- the funeral of one of the town's revered elders, Mrs. Connulty --- without much fanfare, or so he thinks. Intending to quickly photograph an old dilapidated cinema in the town before departing, he minds his business and asks directions when needed, hoping to blend into the background. But as anyone from a small town knows, strangers don't just blend in --- especially ones with a camera around their neck.

The minute Ellie Dillahan, the wife of a widowed farmer who accidentally ran over his first wife and child with a tractor years earlier, sets her gaze on Florian, her life is unalterably different. "She wondered if she would be the same herself; if she was no longer --- and would not be again --- the person she was when she had gone to Mrs. Connulty's funeral and for all the time before that." In true Trevor fashion, this chance encounter splinters Ellie's once solid (if complacent) life into a "before" and an "after," two bipolar modes of consciousness that, for her, are now irrevocably irreconcilable.

For the remainder of the slim book, Trevor unwinds the sad story of the affair between Ellie and Florian, using spare and restrained language. Most of the action happens off the page, and whatever action there is, is contained. Unfortunately for the reader, this makes for somewhat snoozy reading. What *is* interesting, however, is what happens after the summer (and, thus, the affair) is over.

LOVE AND SUMMER (what a strangely deceptive title) is peppered with characters who each have their own burden to shoulder. Ellie's too-kind husband borders on the pitiful in his relentless, guilt-ridden suffering. Miss Connulty, the daughter of the deceased Mrs. Connulty, comes off as unnecessarily bitter and cold --- but she has her skeleton in the closet, too. And Orpen Wren, the nattering old man who is half off his rocker with a head stuck in the past, seems downright creepy.

Is LOVE AND SUMMER a joy to read? Not by a long shot. It's not that engrossing, either. But there's something quietly moving and slightly unsettling about what little Trevor's characters are left with at the end of the story --- and that situation, a possibility for all of us, is what sticks with you.

--- Reviewed by Alexis Burling

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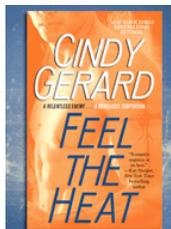
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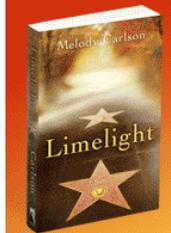


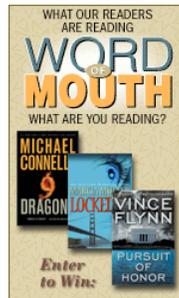
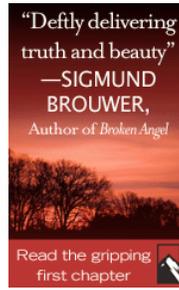
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