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Brooklyn



Synopsis

Colm Tóibín's New York Times bestselling novel "now an acclaimed film starring Saoirse Ronan and Jim Broadbent nominated for four Academy Awards including Best Picture" is a moving, deeply satisfying read • (Entertainment Weekly) about a young Irish immigrant in Brooklyn in the early 1950s. "One of the most unforgettable characters in contemporary literature" • (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette), Eilis Lacey has come of age in small-town Ireland in the hard years following World War Two. When an Irish priest from Brooklyn offers to sponsor Eilis in America, she decides she must go, leaving her fragile mother and her charismatic sister behind. Eilis finds work in a department store on Fulton Street, and when she least expects it, finds love. Tony, who loves the Dodgers and his big Italian family, slowly wins her over with patient charm. But just as Eilis begins to fall in love, devastating news from Ireland threatens the promise of her future. Author "Colm Tóibín is his generation's most gifted writer of love's complicated, contradictory power" • (Los Angeles Times). "Written with mesmerizing power and skill" • (The Boston Globe), Brooklyn is a triumph | One of those magically quiet novels that sneak up on readers and capture their imaginations • (USA TODAY).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reading Brooklyn was an unusual experience. Why? Because I had to read the whole book to appreciate it and be gripped by it. The book was like an embryo--rudimentary, unborn. But when I read the last paragraph, I actually got a spine chill. And, later, after shelving it, my thoughts wandered back to the story with a deeper pleasure. For the first 100 (or more) pages, nothing much

happens. Young provincial Irish girl Eilis Lacey travels to America (circa 1950), leaving her sister and mother in the Irish bog. She improves her education, her appearance, and refines her tastes. With the help of a family friend (a priest), Eilis finds a place to live in a rooming house and a tedious job in a clothing shop. She encounters new friends, (all rather shallow), meets a man, has a courtship. It is all very mundane. When she lies in bed after receiving a letter from home, she actually thinks about her mother or sister taking out the envelope, what kind of envelope, how many envelopes. I was exasperated at that point. Yet I kept reading. Toibin is a competent writer, and I was at least partially engaged, although I remained skeptical of any interesting story emerging. You know how some authors fail to maintain control over their story and characters? Well, Toibin has perhaps too MUCH control. That is how it seemed as I was reading. It plodded along, but rather lightly. I did like Eilis and cared what happened to her, but I wanted something imaginative or inventive to occur. At least one splashy thing. But when something dramatic happened in the last 100 pages, it didn't really affect me too much. It seemed more of a vehicle for other action to take place, for Eilis to enter into decisive conflict and change.

Brief summary, no spoilers: There are no explosions in this book. There are no murders, car chases, scenes with international espionage, or anything that would require its movie rendition to have special effects. Instead, this beautifully written story is about a young girl named Eilis Lacey, who lives with her mother and with her attractive, vivacious sister Rose in a small town in Ireland. The time period is the 1950s. Eilis is smart and good with numbers but there is not much employment opportunity where she lives, so a priest with connections in both Ireland and New York gets her both boarding and a job in Brooklyn. Needless to say, Eilis has to learn to live in a new culture and away from the only home she's ever known. Everything is so strange and new, but soon she meets a sweet young man named Tony and suddenly she begins to adjust and flourish. This is the story of a young, immigrant girl learning to deal with change and adversity and how this makes her grow both intellectually and emotionally. It's also about dealing with disparate cultures, and having your heart and soul divided. Just what is "home?" That this novel is written by a man is truly stunning - because Eilis comes alive from these pages and her thoughts and reactions generally rang true. I also want to add that I could not stop reading towards the end because I just had to find out how this was all going to be resolved. And let's just say that this would make a very good novel for book clubs - there are going to be lots of different opinions on the denouement. My only quibbles? I had trouble with the male characters, especially Tony. In many ways he didn't seem real to me, and if anything, too idealized.

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