



Prelude to Terror

Helen MacInnes

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The scene is Vienna, where an American art expert, Colin Grant, has been dispatched by a Texas millionaire to buy a painting by the Dutch master Ruysdael. He is instructed to get the painting "at any cost" but to keep his employer's name a secret. This seemingly simple assignment turns into a nightmare for Grant as he finds himself in the center of a conspiracy to unleash bloody international terrorism

The art world meets cloak-and-dagger intrigue in this Cold War thriller. A triumph of pacing from a veteran of the genre.

Prelude to Terror Details

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Author : Helen MacInnes

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From Reader Review Prelude to Terror for online ebook

Liz Lund says

This book is set in Europe in the World War II era. Mrs. McInnes writes real thrillers. Spy methods are ancient, but she brings people and events into your heart. I really enjoy her books. I can read them several times and still enjoy them.

Gena Lott says

The title is a little bit misleading, but like MacInnes's other books that I have read, it is full of suspense and thrills. I really liked the plot and the story-line is interesting as it deals with the art world and espionage.

Leslie says

This is a spy novel-y spy novel. The kind where the unsuspecting guy gets recruited for a seemingly above-board and noble business/art venture, and ends up caught between the KGB and CIA. Colin Grant is a freelance art writer and adviser in acquisitions to a prestigious New York fine art gallery. The staff of a billionaire on whose private collection Colin had advised contacts him about traveling Vienna to bid at auction on a piece that the billionaire wanted to acquire quietly. The piece belonged to a friend who was using it to fund his escape from Hungary.

Of course Colin accepts. Immediately on his arrival in Vienna, a team of Mossad and CIA agents intercept him, and it quickly becomes clear that the mission is quite dangerous. There's a background love story, but really it's about a KGB ring that is intercepting rare works of art that are coming onto market, killing the original owners, selling the art at auction, depositing the selling price on the stolen art in a Swiss bank account to fund KGB programs, and substituting a fake for the original art so that they acquire it, too. So Colin's job is to break the cycle by figuring out which Swiss bank the money is in so they can trace it, retaining the original piece of art, and escaping alive. He's smart and handsome, so it must turn out all right in the end...right?

Edward Creter says

Boring in spots, but even the boring parts have some fascination in them. Colin Grant, an art dealer wrapped up in espionage, is a very human character with a very big temper. You never know when he'll explode or when he keeps cool. I kinda like this book.

Stacey says

Chose this for my book club's birthday challenge. Followed the 100-page rule but just couldn't get into it.

Elia Giordano says

Il libro in sé mi è piaciuto molto, il racconto abbastanza originale ed interessante. Non mi è piaciuto molto lo stile narrativo, che personalmente mi ha spesso e volentieri spiazzato e/o lasciato in stato confusionale costringendomi a tornare indietro di qualche riga (o addirittura paragrafo) per dare una seconda lettura che mi permetesse di capire ciò che mi ero perso, ovvero legami tra botta e risposta o commistioni tra dialoghi diretti, pensieri dei personaggi e sezioni descrittive "esterne" a questi ultimi. Ho poi trovato nella traduzione italiana delle vere "falle" sintattiche e grammaticali, talvolta dei sintagmi che in lingua italiana semplicemente non esistono oppure dei costrutti privi di coerenza grammaticale. Non so se siano solo meri "errori" di traduzione oppure proprio strascichi del testo in lingua originale.

Detto ciò, come detto inizialmente, il racconto mi è piaciuto, la trama alquanto intricata e ricca di interessanti aspetti, dallo spionaggio ai sentimenti e le emozioni dei vari personaggi; non mancano i colpi di scena né i momenti di suspense.

Nel complesso la narrazione procede senza mai annoiare con capitoli o sezioni troppo descrittivi.

Le 4 stelle, oltre ai motivi sopra esposti riguardo al ritmo di narrazione, sono dovute anche al titolo che invero, fin da prima che iniziassi a leggere il romanzo, ho immaginato fosse del tutto inappropriato e, azzardo, fuori luogo. Ovviamente non posso esternarne le motivazioni per non svelare contenuti della trama. Chi lo leggerà (o l'avrà già letto) penso converrà con me su questo particolare.

Linda says

Colin Grant, an art expert in New York, is commissioned to travel to Vienna to bid on a painting by Dutch landscape artist Ruysdael on behalf of a millionaire art collector in Texas. As one would expect from MacInnes, the assignment turns out not to be as easy as expected. KGB terrorists are financing their activities by selling paintings from Iron Curtain countries, and Grant gets caught up between the terrorists and a group headed by Robert Renwick, a NATO intelligence officer, who hope to uncover and reveal the terrorists' activities. I've read other MacInnes books I've liked much better, mostly those she wrote earlier in her career.

Anna Richland says

Oh this made me so FURIOUS! It is classic MacInnes in so many ways - excellent writing, tense, spot-on period and place details. And of course having terrorists poison spies in their apartment lobbies with nerve toxins isn't just for the 1960s and 70s anymore, it's still with us. So yes, read this book for a well-written thriller. Using art as a way of moving money clandestinely certainly happens (I researched this for a book of my own).

BUT THE END WILL MAKE YOU FURIOUS. No spoilers, but I knew in my gut that something was coming and I had to keep walking away from the book, getting a drink of water, taking a deep breath, convincing myself that I was overreacting, and then going back to read. So be ready.

Jeri Stofa says

Very enjoyable, well written, and suspense that drew you in to try and solve the mystery

This was a very enjoyable and well written suspenseful mystery. There was never an obvious clue or easy to figure out what would develop next, except for the missing Lois... Some parts were a definitely easy to predict, but the writing of the story was so well done that this was not a deterrent to the story.

Judio says

This is the second time I'm reading this one. When I registered it on Goodreads last year, I gave it a 3, mainly because I had forgotten the story (but knew I'd liked it) which I'd read around 1993. I've just re-read it and am giving it a 4.

This is another brilliant espionage thriller from Helen MacInnes. I've just been reminded once again why I love her books.

Faith Weldon says

This book has been around for a while. The plot includes murder, intrigue, kidnapping and smuggling. It's a page turner and a good read for a trip or the summer.

Janette says

Not as exciting or interesting as other MacInnes' books, probably 3 1/2 stars instead of 4. Nice to read something exciting that doesn't have iPhones or new technology....she never has needed it in her books!

Melissa says

I really like Helen MacInnes (espionage books). This book was not one of my favorites of hers, but still well done.

Kate says

This was the first book by MacInnes that I've read. Wow! It was clever and exciting. After the sale of the artwork, it was hard to believe we were only two-thirds through the story.

Colin Grant finally finds his niche regarding what to do with his life, especially after his bout of depression after the murder of his wife. But it is a long and winding road to that destination.

The author sums up the problem with terrorists (published in 1978!): "They came in all dimensions: groups of political fanatics with blind obedience and perverted social conscience; the trained assassin tracking down their victim in a peaceful Austrian village; a boy on a quiet Washington street killing on vicious impulse. All of them, however different they seemed, bent on destruction. All of them, however motivated, with total contempt for human life." Not much has changed, unfortunately.

I loved discovering the "good guys" from the "bad guys" and watching the novice, Colin, learn the ropes.

Shoshana Hathaway says

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MacInnes, Helen. Reading time 10 hours, 40 minutes.

This is a polished, intelligent thriller, which reminded me more than a little of the work of John Le Carre, my very favorite espionage author. While the writing doesn't quite meet his gold standard, it is extremely good; descriptive when appropriate, creating scenes that have depth, color and texture which provide the perfect staging for her action. The writing can be terse and direct, especially in action scenes, which give just enough information and move the reader along with the story, sometimes at breakneck speed.

The plot is as convoluted as any really good espionage story should be ...with agents, double agents, triple agents and innocents all maneuvering in old Vienna, as fertile ground for spies and spying as any other city in Europe ever was. Everyone is watching and listening to everyone else, and plots abound.

While the characters aren't spectacularly developed, they are well drawn, and I found it easy to identify with the main characters and detest and hope for the complete ruin of others. One of my pet peeves, though, is the non-professional who becomes involved in espionage ...and is better at it than the professionals. This was the case in this book, but the author stayed just short of making this hero entirely unbelievable, giving him *just* enough background and native intelligence and skill to pull it all off fairly well.

The narration was more than competent, even skillful, and the narrator had no problems with the foreign (German, French, and occasionally Italian and Russian) names and phrases. All in all, I found this an enjoyable engaging read, and while not life changing or great literature, will certainly provide several hours of excellent entertainment.

Shoshana
