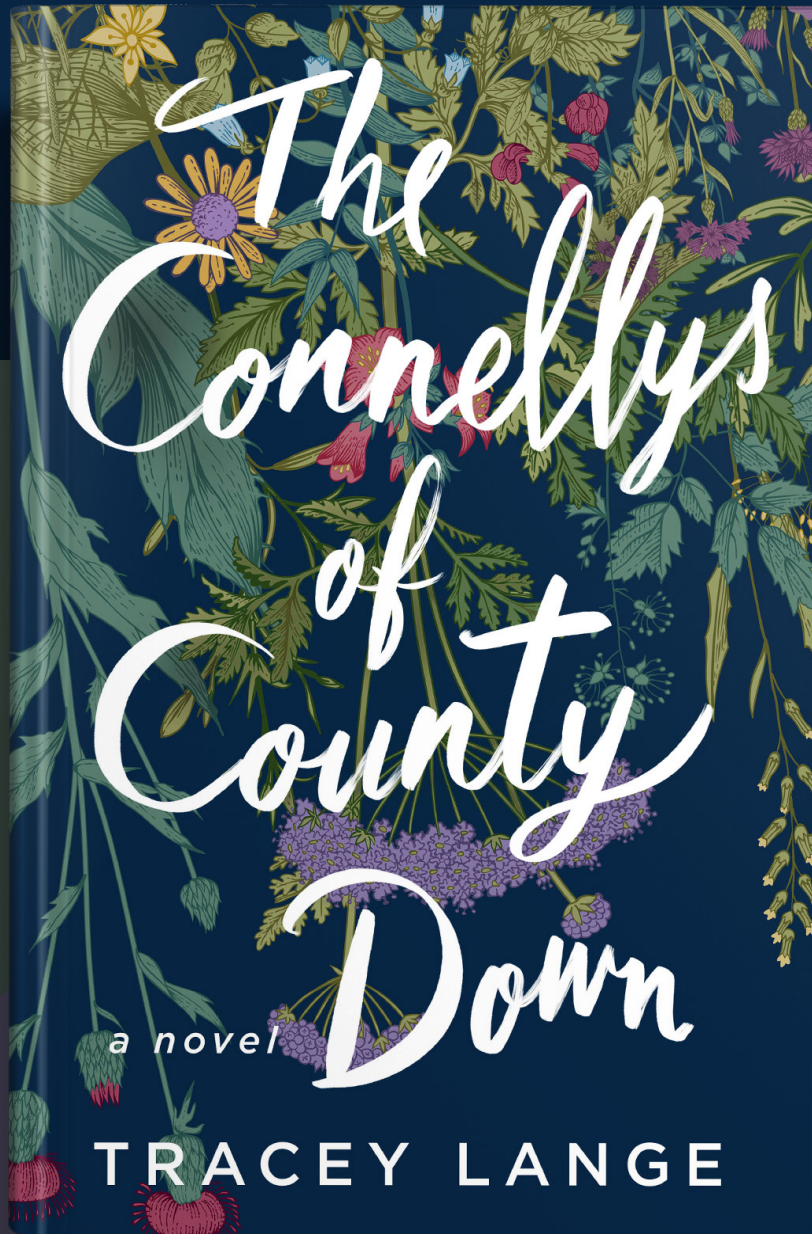


# BOOK CLUB KIT



“An intricate story of family love and horribly damaging family secrets... I recommend this book for book clubs.”

—ROXANNE LANEY, ARTS & LETTERS BOOKSTORE



# AN INTERVIEW

with Tracey Lange

**TRACEY LANGE** was born and raised in New York City. She graduated from the University of New Mexico with a degree in psychology before owning and operating a behavioral healthcare company with her husband for fifteen years. She completed the Stanford University online novel writing program, and is the author of *We Are the Brennans* and *The Connellys of County Down*. She currently lives in Bend, Oregon with her husband, two sons, and beloved German Shepherd.

## What inspired *The Connellys of County Down*?

So much of what I read and write about has to do with the dynamics that take root within families and how they come about. It often occurs to me that the person who appears to be causing the outward turmoil in the family, the one that may look the worst on paper, is sometimes the one with the least to hide. I experienced this myself to a degree growing up, and I saw it frequently in my work in the behavioral- healthcare field — one individual was acting out and creating overt difficulty, while there was less obvious but perhaps deeper dysfunction going on with other family members.

This is in many ways the case with Tara, the main protagonist in the novel. All the Connelly siblings survived a fairly traumatic childhood, but she's the one with a long history of getting into trouble, culminating with a prison sentence for a drug charge. I thought it would be interesting to explore the many obstacles that come with returning home after serving a prison sentence, including reentering society with a criminal record. But I particularly wanted to delve into how family members can either support or sabotage that process, as well as how those family members are impacted by having a loved one serve time in prison and then try to return to the fold.

**Readers will find some similarities between the Brennans (from your first book, *We Are the Brennans*) and the Connellys, both tight-knit Irish American families in Westchester, New York, who struggle with the weight of keeping secrets. What would you say are the most important differences between the two families?**

The histories and undercurrents for these two families are so different, particularly their childhood circumstances. While the Brennans enjoyed an intact family with stability, comfort, and financial security, the Connellys lost their parents at young ages and raised themselves to a large degree. They spent years living in fear of losing Eddie to his injury or being split up and placed in foster care. They were forced to band together to survive common enemies — poverty, a criminal father, child protective services. As a result they've developed a deep but at times skewed sense of loyalty to each other.

### **Tell us about your writing routine for *The Connellys of County Down*. How did you get into the mindset to write this book?**

My daily routine varies little overall. I tend to work for several hours in the morning, take a break, and then come back to it in the afternoon. Though when I have good momentum going, I've been known to stick with it all day and well into the evening hours. For this novel I often started writing sessions by reading Irish fairy tales or reading about the history of those fairy tales so I could incorporate some of those themes throughout the book in subtle ways.

### **What are some of your favorite books and authors to read during your free time?**

Fredrik Backman is a favorite — I couldn't wait for his latest to come out, the third in the Beartown series. I'm also making my way through Jonathan Tropper's novels, which always make me laugh out loud and cry, often at the same time. Tana French, John Boyne, and Ann Patchett are go-to authors for me, and a great recent find was Jillian Medoff's *When We Were Bright and Beautiful*.

### **What do you think will surprise readers about *The Connellys of County Down*?**

I think it might be a toss-up between how far someone will go to protect the people they love and how far someone will go to hide their vulnerabilities.

# BRENNAN'S TRIPLE FINN MCCOOL

## Instructions

Combine Irish cream liqueur and rye whiskey in a cocktail shaker or mason jar. Shake.

Strain into a glass over ice.

Add half & half with a pinch of cinnamon.

Optional: Add coffee to create a mythology-inspired Irish coffee.

## Who is Finn McCool?

Finn McCool (or Fionn mac Cumhaill) is a hunter-warrior in Irish folklore who is said to have eaten the Salmon of Knowledge and, as a result, could gain wisdom by putting his thumb in his mouth and reciting an incantation of divination.

McCool carries with him a magic spear, which he used to defend the Irish city Tara against a fire-breathing man who lulled men to sleep with music and burned their cities to the ground.

It is said that to this day, McCool is asleep in a cave and will one day awake to defend Ireland again.

## INGREDIENTS

1 oz Irish cream liqueur

1 oz rye whiskey

1/4 cup half & half

A pinch of cinnamon

Ice

Coffee (optional)





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Discuss the childhood tragedy of the Connellys and how that affected their relationship as siblings. What was surprising or different than you expected?
- 2 Tara keeps secrets to protect her siblings. Do you believe there are situations where keeping secrets from loved ones is a good thing, or will keeping secrets always cause trouble eventually?
- 3 What were your opinions of Geraldine in the beginning of the novel, and how did your perception of her change throughout the story? Did you grow more sympathetic toward her as her character progressed through the story?
- 4 What factors do you think are holding Eddie back from living the life he wants?
- 5 Discuss the unlikely relationship between Tara and Brian. What endeared her to him and him to her? What were you thinking/hoping their relationship would end up becoming?
- 6 Imagination plays an important role in the story. How does Tara use her imagination to her advantage and to help those around her? How does the author use the tale of “The Connellys of County Down” to better explain the Connellys’ situation?
- 7 Tara’s art helped her find her way in prison, and it helped her again when she needed to find a new job. Do you have a creative hobby? How does it help you?
- 8 Were you surprised that the Connellys’ father made an appearance? Were you satisfied with the role he played or with Tara’s interactions with him? Would you have acted the same if you were in her shoes?
- 9 If you’ve read the author’s previous book, *We Are the Brennans*, discuss the similarities and differences between these two Irish-American families living in the Westchester, New York, area. (Did you spot the reference to *We Are the Brennans* in this book?)



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 10 The author leads us to suspect early on that Tara is hiding more than just Roland's whereabouts from the police.
- 11 Did you figure out her secret, or were you surprised when it was revealed?
- 12 Which character did you bond with the most? Why? What do you think will happen next for these characters?
- 13 Who would you cast in the film of *The Connellys of County Down*?



If you decide to adopt *The Connellys of County Down* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at [reader@celadonbooks.com](mailto:reader@celadonbooks.com) or post on social media using the hashtags #CeladonBookClub and #TheConnellysofCountyDown.

