



The Many-coloured Land

Christopher Koch

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'To be one third Prussian by descent, another third English, and a final third Irish, is a situation fraught with ambiguities. This has been my fate, and I don't rail against it: having been dealt this hand, I've obviously had to make what I could of it. But it would have been much simpler, I've often thought, to have been able to choose the Irish third alone ...' As a youngster, Christopher Koch was intrinsically aware of his mixed heritage. When Margaret O'Meara, his Tipperary born, rebellious great-great -grandmother, boarded the Tasmania to travel as a convict to the southern hemisphere, there began a new dimension within Christopher's family tree; a secretive past that his mother refused to discuss. Many years later it was in Tasmania that the young Christopher grew up, and here that he began his lifelong quest to better understand his ancestral roots, a quest which rears its head in his travels around Ireland in the 1990's. As Christopher tours modern day Ireland he glimpses signs of tradition amongst the variegated landscape and, with his yearning for meaning, is reminded at every turn of the political and literary figures who have shaped its history. He traces the paths of Yeats and Michael Collins and talks to the IRA's leading biographer. He also links north with south as he recalls his own youth and those figures who influenced him. Over his shoulder always is the young Margaret O'Meara, the rebel whose mysterious adventures placed the first seeds of curiosity in his mind.

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