

Nadine  
Dorries

*Shadows in  
Heaven*



## Chapter I

1940

*Tarabeg village, on the west coast of Ireland*

**I**don't want to be here. Seamus made me come.' Nola Malone had sat as still as she could while having her Sunday-best frock repaired by Ellen Carey in the tailor's shop. But she kept glancing over her shoulder and out of the window, tea slopping from cup into saucer, waiting to catch sight of her husband and son as they rode down from the farm up on Tarabeg Hill in the horse and cart. She'd fixed her eyes on Ellen's foot, expertly depressing the pedal on the Singer sewing machine, until it became almost too much for her to bear and she had to speak out.

'Oh, don't I know that,' Ellen replied as she grabbed the wheel of the machine, stopped the needle, took it back half a turn, flicked up the foot and removed the fabric. She snapped the thread with her teeth. 'I've put a new hem on this frock. You can farm and cook, Nola, and you make the best butter in all Mayo, but you cannot sew, and that's for sure.'

She placed her hands in her lap and sighed. 'Look, I know

you don't want to be here – when was the last time a busy woman like you sat with me while I worked? Seamus has told me why, Nola. It has to be done. The lovebirds cannot meet anywhere else. That girl's father would take a gun to him, and her too, if he knew they were together.'

Nola blinked back the tears of self-pity that had sprung to her eyes. All thoughts appeared to be for young Sarah McGuffey from the fishermen's cottages, the girl Michael had fallen in love with. The daughter of Kevin McGuffey, a man who had already done well from the war, using his boat to smuggle goods around the coast to the North more often than he used it for fishing. A man famed for his bad temper, his love of money and drink, and someone most people avoided where possible. 'But what about me? His mother.' Her voice faltered.

Both women were fully aware that this could be the last time Nola ever saw her youngest son. She would have loved nothing more than to spend this, the last hour Michael had in Tarabeg before he left to fight in the war, in the farmhouse together. Checking his bag, counting his socks, feeding his belly. Fussing. It was what she did best. But her husband, Seamus, had persuaded her otherwise not two hours since.

She had been keeping herself busy enough. Making oatcakes for Michael's journey to stop from thinking how empty the house would be once he left, how hollow her heart would feel. She'd been in the middle of stoking up the fire to warm Michael's coat as he took his final wash down in the scullery when Seamus had unexpectedly walked into her kitchen and laid down the law.

'Leave the lad alone,' he said firmly. 'He wants this time for himself, with Sarah. I'll be bringing him down the hill to the village on the cart, say your goodbyes then. I'll stay out

*Shadows in Heaven*

in the field until the time comes, so they can have the place to themselves.’

Nola bristled. ‘Say goodbye to my son in the middle of the village? Along with everyone else? Does a mother have no privacy to shed her tears? Am I to cry them in front of the likes of the O’Donnells and every gossip we know? My boy is not away to America to send home the dollars. He’s going to war, Seamus. He might die.’ She hissed these last words, even though Michael could not have heard her with all the noise he was making in the scullery – a large man going about his ablutions in a small space.

Seamus had removed his cap and was studying the brim as though he had never seen it before. ‘Nola, there will be no send-off in the village. You know how it is. Ireland is neutral, for a good reason. The people don’t want us to be fighting for the British.’

Nola waved the poker in her hand in the air. ‘No one to see him off? My son is putting his life at risk, and not an ounce of gratitude in any one of them.’ She threw the poker back into the fireplace with force and it clattered against the blackened stone chimney.

Seamus was relieved. He had regretted speaking the moment she’d turned from the fire to face him, the tip of the poker burning as red as her round apple cheeks. He looked about him awkwardly and inclined his head towards the open farmhouse door to check if Pete Shevlin, the farmhand, was waiting for him.

Sarah would be there soon. He had seen the first of the fishing boats leaving as he rode down from the top field, dragging the prickly yellow whin in bundles behind the horse to hedge off the bull with a stubborn taste for freedom. Sarah

would be there in minutes. It was time for Seamus to take charge. To separate his wife from the last of her brood.

She didn't yet know it, but she was going to need her husband to support her when the moment of truth hit her, to comfort her and absorb her tears. Even though they had six other children who'd already left for foreign shores, and even though tears had been shed at their leaving, this parting would be the worst.

Michael might never return to Tarabeg. This might have been his last night in his own bed. The last breakfast she would serve him. She might never again complain about the water on the floor after he'd finished his wash. Michael wouldn't be sending home happy letters stuffed with dollars like the others, or a hat at Christmas from Macy's like the six in New York had bought and sent home together, in a huge hat box that half of the village had gathered in the post office to watch her open. A hat Nola would never wear. She had no notion yet how Michael's leaving would rip her heart in two, but Seamus did, and this, this sudden removal of Nola from the house, was a part of his plan to save her, if only from a fraction of the pain of parting.

'Come on, the horse is ready and Ellen Carey's expecting you. I saw there was a rip in your dress at Mass on Sunday and Ellen has it. I took it down yesterday.'

Nola spluttered in disbelief. 'You did what?'

Seamus continued undeterred. Nola would not have her way, not today. For her own sake. 'Pete isn't due to collect Daedio from Paddy's bar until four. Let's go.' He had removed all her avenues of protest and he was doing something he was simply not used to doing. He was crossing a line, taking charge inside his own house.

*Shadows in Heaven*

As they made their way down the hill, the horse harnessed to the cart, and Nola stoic, resentful and silent, they came upon Sarah, her eyes alight, her skirt bunched up in her hands so as not to trip her, and her golden-red hair flying in the breeze behind her. Seamus lifted his hat in greeting. ‘I’ll be back for him in an hour, Sarah. You don’t have long.’ His heart pained for her. Just sixteen and already she’d experienced far more heartache than any girl of her age should.

‘I’ve left food on the table,’ said Nola. ‘Make sure he eats, would you, Sarah? There’s oatcakes and buttermilk on the side of the fire on the griddle, keeping warm.’ She grabbed her husband’s arm. ‘Seamus, stop! Stop the horse, would ye.’

But Seamus hadn’t stopped the horse. He hadn’t even slowed it. He kept the cart moving and by the time Nola had finished her sentence, Sarah was behind them, waving down to them, disappearing into the distance. He cracked the reins and the horse trotted smartly down the hill.

Nola turned abruptly to face him. ‘What did you do that for, you fat maggot.’ She slapped him on his back with her bag, but not too hard. ‘I had things to tell her, instructions... God in heaven, you will be sending that lad away starving hungry.’

Seamus didn’t reply. He whistled to the horse and flicked the reins and they trotted on to Ellen Carey’s and the dress that didn’t need mending.

‘Promise me you’ll wait for me until it’s all over and I’m back,’ Michael begged Sarah as he held her in his arms in the final minutes before he left.

The stars had aligned, the weather was fair, the tide was in, the fishermen out. It had all come together to give them this

precious hour alone. But it was a risk, as Sarah's mother was painfully aware. 'God be with you, Sarah. And be careful, will you,' she'd admonished. 'They are only loading the nets yet. If he catches sight of you from the shore...'

They rarely referred to Sarah's father by name; it was always 'he' or 'him'. But Angela McGuffey's words had fallen on deaf ears and she'd been left standing at the door, watching her daughter scramble up the escarpment from the beach to the road, the blaze of her golden-red hair seeming to hang in the air behind her long after she'd gone.

Now, all passion spent, Sarah lay on her back, her head in the crook of Michael's arm. She turned onto her side to face him. 'After what you've just done to me, I have to wait all this time for you to come back home! I can't believe you are actually going, Michael Malone.'

It would forever be her secret that this seduction had been her plan all along. She thought that if she let him make love to her, tempted him into her arms, he would be unable to leave her. Surely that would make him change his mind. He would want more than just the once; he would stay in Tarabeg.

'Will this not make you so sad to leave me, you cannot possibly go?' she said theatrically but also with real feeling, her eyes shining with emotion.

The past hour had gone exactly as she'd hoped. He had kissed her in the way he had during all of their clandestine meetings, but this time she'd pulled him closer in, for more. She had held his face in her hands and looked deep into his eyes as her own sent him a thousand messages of seduction. She felt no fear and, apart from the tremble in her hands which threatened to betray her, none of the nervousness that she had worried would be her undoing when the time came. With the boldness

*Shadows in Heaven*

and skill of a woman ten years her senior, she had guided his hands over her virginal body. They had sought out her breasts together and, pulling them free, she had arched her body as her hair tumbled down her back, guiding his mouth as she eased his unresisting head down. She'd been in charge right up until a moan had escaped her lips and taken her unawares, not in her plan, and the control passed from her lips to the tips of his fingers. The sensation that flowed through her made her weak at the knees and she was truly lost, her plan abandoned. He had kissed her until her head spun and she felt faint. She was beyond reason and oblivious to danger. Once he had undone the final buttons on her blouse, her hands tore at his own shirt, all shyness forgotten, all sermons from the pulpit unheard, all thoughts of tomorrow vanquished.

‘Sarah, I have to go, I’m signed up and it’s a war.’

Her face fell. She had failed. ‘You don’t have to, Michael, that’s just it. Ireland is neutral. You don’t have to be doing nothing.’

Michael groaned and placed the flat of his palm on his forehead. ‘God in heaven, Sarah, I do. For one thing, I know I will see some of the world and learn about something other than picking potatoes and stacking turf ricks. There are other places to live and I want to make a fortune one day. I can’t learn how to do that, here on a farm. If I stay here, we will both have to work to save to travel to America or Liverpool. This way, I get the money quicker and sure, how long can the war last?’

Michael had propped himself up on his elbow and was stroking her breast. His finger, encircling her nipple, strayed to the bruise on her shoulder. He pulled back in horror. ‘What in God’s name is that?’ he asked, then gently placed his hand over the large yellowing patch of skin.



She raised herself onto her knees and hurriedly yanked her blouse back up over her shoulder and began to fasten the buttons. ‘Tis nothing. I fell on the rocks on the shore. I’m always doing it, so I am.’

Her eyes left his, the air left the room, and for a brief moment Michael had no idea how to respond. He had heard the rumours of how moody Sarah’s father was. Kevin McGuffey’s temper was legendary in a village where no home held secrets. But this? He lifted her chin with his finger and forced her to look at him. ‘As soon as I’m back, things are going to change. Do you understand that, Sarah?’

Sarah was on the verge of tears, her mind racing. What could she do now to keep him? What else was there left that she could use to persuade him? She had given him herself, her all. She had nothing else. ‘Michael, don’t go. Do you not love me now, after what we just did together? Has it not changed anything at all? Won’t you stay now?’ Her eyes were wide and pleading, her lips trembling.

Michael pulled her towards him and groaned. He was weakening. There was nothing he wanted more than to stay with Sarah, to marry her tomorrow. To take her away from the home that was more often than not the talk of the village. ‘I will be back before ye know I’m gone, Sarah, I promise. I swear, as God is true, I’ll be straight home to you as soon as it’s all over and I will drag you to that church if I have to. It can’t be another year at the very most.’

Sarah half laughed at the prospect of being dragged to the church and collapsed on top of him. ‘It could be even less. It might be only weeks. God, I will pray so every day. Are ye proposing to me now after this, or what?’ She was teasing, half teasing. Wanting to believe his words but seeking

his confirmation that he meant them. She was stunned by his response.

He sat up on the mattress, the look on his face earnest and intent, his black curls falling over his eyes as he brushed them back and lifted her up by her shoulders. ‘Yes, Sarah, I am. Just wait until this is all over and I am back. Promise you will wait for me? Be my wife, please, will you? Wait for me?’

Sarah nodded furiously, unable to answer, her throat thick with emotion as the tears ran down her face and she struggled to speak. ‘I... I do love you, Michael. I wouldn’t have let you do that if I didn’t. I’ve never done it before...’

‘Shush, I know that.’ He grabbed her to him and smothered her face as he kissed away her tears. He moved his lips to her eyes, her nose, her cheeks, and as his passion rekindled, and with it the knowledge that there was now very little time left to them, that she was not his wife and he had no right, his own tears began to mingle with hers. Their breathing quickened as they stroked each other’s faces, hands, hair and held each other so tightly, committing each second to memory – the taste, the feel, the smell, each kiss.

They both heard the wheels of the cart outside the house.

‘I have to go,’ Michael said softly.

Sarah pushed down the skirt she’d hurriedly pulled up during their lovemaking, having had neither the courage nor the time to remove it, and wiped her eyes. ‘I can’t bear it,’ she whispered as she tucked in her blouse. ‘I’m not as strong as I thought I was. I can’t do it.’ She was trembling, her complexion white, her eyes full of fear.

‘Don’t you worry, my love,’ he whispered back, placing his arms around her and hugging her into his chest, her tears soaking through his vest. ‘I’ll be home before the year is out.’

And I promise you this too: you will be the next Mrs Malone, because I love you. I'm going to dress you in fine clothes and shoes and no one is ever going to lay a finger on you again. Do you understand? You will be safe with me.'

They both jumped at the sound of Pete's polite and gentle knock on the door. Sarah began to shake uncontrollably. She bit her lip, fighting every instinct to cling to him, to lose all self-respect. *Hold on. Hold on.* The words raced through her mind as she closed her eyes, holding on for dear life. 'I cannot do this, I cannot,' she whimpered.

Michael knew this was his only chance. He had to run now, he had to run and do something, grab at any opportunity, to make a better life for them both. Another moment of hesitation and he would falter, and that would be it. They would live their entire life there on the farm, scraping by, hand to mouth.

'Wait for me, Sarah. Just one year at the very, very most. Count the days. As soon as I am back, 'twill all be different. God in heaven, I promise. Don't go marrying anyone else when I'm gone, do you hear me? If you need to get away from home for any reason, come here, to my mammy and daddy. They will help you.'

Sarah couldn't speak. She couldn't see. Her nose ran with her tears and she wiped her face with the back of her hands, too afraid to say anything. And then, turning from her abruptly, he was gone.

As the cart pulled into the village, Nola, listening for the familiar sound of the horse's hooves, raced out of Ellen Carey's shop to hug her son goodbye.

Just at that moment, Sarah, having ran in the opposite

*Shadows in Heaven*

direction, to the shore, reached her own cottage. She stopped outside to catch her breath, then almost fell through the door, tears still pouring down her face, as she called to Angela. ‘Mammy, I’m back.’

She froze to the spot at the sight of her father standing before her, his belt in his hand. His gun, glinting in the light from the door, lay menacingly on the table, and her mother was sitting on the floor in the corner, her back against the wall. Instantly, Sarah understood. She knew that position. It was where they both shuffled to with their feet to edge away from his lashings, instinctively knowing that the wall would save half of their body from the blows raining down on them.

Angela was rocking, holding her shawl to her head, blood seeping through it.

How had he known? That was the first thought to flash through Sarah’s mind. No one knew about her and Michael. No one. She’d made sure she wasn’t seen as she crossed the boreens rather than take the main road from the shore to the bottom of the boreen that ran up Tarabeg Hill to the farm. No one had seen her apart from the tinkers, the Maughans, who were camped on the side of the hill, away from the Malones’ land but close enough to help themselves to their crops and orchards. No one spoke to the Maughans, so it couldn’t have been them.

‘Where the feck have you been?’ McGuffey snarled.

Sarah paled and felt faint with fear. The brass of his belt buckle caught the light from the fire and winked at her. She felt her bladder weakening and her head spinning, and then she heard the whip of the belt as it cut through the air. Before it made contact with her face, the familiar wave of darkness saved her as she hit the floor.

## Chapter 2

Five years later: 1945

Rosie O'Hara's shoes, still wet from the walk to school that morning, squelched as she finished damping down the fire and made her way across the scrubbed wooden floor to the classroom windows. She reached across to fold the bottle-green shutters. Peering down the street, she caught sight of young Theady O'Donnell heading home, dragging his feet as he went. He was walking alone, so he must have been the only child in detention in the boys' room. Rosie pulled the ribbon that held her long, shiny auburn hair tighter and tucked the strands that had escaped during the day behind her ears. It was late June and the freckles that dappled her nose and cheeks looked almost painted on against her pale skin. Her grey eyes reflected the grey sky and as her insides churned with hunger, she sighed.

She had remained late to wipe clean the slates and polish the girls' desks; she'd worked quietly as she went, to avoid attracting the attention of Mr O'Dowd, the school principal. A loud and cheerful man with a thick thatch of badly cut dark

*Shadows in Heaven*

hair, he was also the teacher in the boys' room. He was wont to pop into her classroom at the slightest excuse, to see what she was doing, and had a habit of talking to her about things she knew nothing of – football and fishing. If he paid less attention to both, she thought, he might have found the time to marry. He spent most of the day sitting in the chair behind his desk, smoking his pipe, and when school was finished, he headed straight over the road to Paddy Devlin's bar.

Mr O'Dowd also ran the local football team, which played out on the flattest field in the village every Saturday morning. Rosie, often cold and suffering from painful chilblains in her toes, could never understand the attraction. She shivered in sympathy for the poor muddy boys, made to wash in the freezing Taramore river before they returned home.

It was rare for Rosie to keep any of her girls in detention and she often felt sorry for the boys Mr O'Dowd kept behind, especially those who had to walk back home to the hill farms. 'Tis different altogether with the boys,' Mr O'Dowd would say to her. 'Someone has to stay on detention at least once a week, whether they need it or not. 'Tis a warning to the others. Best form of discipline, in my book. I hardly ever need the stick, and don't I have the best-behaved class in all of Ireland to show for it.'

Rosie never answered Mr O'Dowd back. Shy by nature, she felt diminished by his overly gregarious nature. He was liked and respected by every single parent, and for timid, withdrawn Rosie, being in his presence highlighted everything she was not. She strove for respect but mostly what she earned was pity.

Theady was the child who lived closest to the school. He was also one of the few who possessed a pair of sturdy shoes, being

the only O'Donnell child left at home who had not emigrated to America. Rosie had noticed a difference in him of late. Once the most pleasant boy in Tarabeg, he had in a matter of months become one of the most sullen. She had commented to her only real friend in the village, Teresa Gallagher, that a great change had come over him.

'His mother, Philomena, is the scold of the village, with a tongue sharper than any knife,' Teresa had said. 'He's been the same since the last brother ran from her house on the day he had the fare saved to take him to Cobh for the boat to New York. It must be awful for him, being the only child left with that woman, and him being too young to escape. His da spends most of his day anywhere but in the house. She missed Mass twice last week, can you imagine?' As Father Jerry's housekeeper at the presbytery, Teresa seemed to find this far more significant than Theady's unhappiness.

'He is a sensitive boy, his heart must be breaking for his brothers,' said Rosie, almost to herself. She knew Theady loved to please. It was easy enough with her, but seemingly a near impossibility at home with his mother. He was always the first to arrive at the school in the morning, long before Mr O'Dowd appeared, and he would always ask Rosie, 'Shall I take the basket to fetch the kindling, Miss O'Hara, to get the fire going for you?'

'You do that, Theady,' she would say, and straightaway he would head off up the hill to collect bits of wood and anything else that would catch for long enough to sustain a flame and start the fire in the schoolroom. He was never quite so keen to leave Rosie once they had got the fire going and it was time to line up in the cinder yard when she rang the bell.

The school comprised just two classrooms, one for girls,

*Shadows in Heaven*

the other for boys. Mr O'Dowd, originally from Dublin, had taught there for many years. He did not divide up the grant that they were paid from fairly or in the manner that he was supposed to, but kept the lion's share for himself, which meant that Rosie, who had arrived six years ago from Connemara, received a pittance. Without the kindness of Teresa Gallagher she would have struggled to survive.

Mr O'Dowd was also profligate with the kindling Theady brought back, and Rosie struggled to keep enough back to ensure they never had a truly cold day in the girls' room. He used more of the turf that the families were required to provide for the benefit of the school, too, leaving her with less for the girls.

For all that, Rosie knew that he was such a great man of the community, such a well-regarded figure and a friend of all, that no one would believe her, a girl from Connemara, if she complained about him, an educated man from Dublin. And she was doubtful if they would see anything wrong in a spinster teacher being paid such a pitiful salary. Shamed, she would be sent away from Tarabeg. And for reasons that were very close to her heart, that was the last thing Rosie wanted to happen. For now that the war was over, she was sure that Michael Malone must be coming home, and Rosie wanted to be there and waiting when that day arrived. She was older now, more of a woman than a girl. This time, she would not allow her shyness to repel him. Even if it killed her, she would win his affection back.

Rosie wriggled her toes, cold and still damp in her cheaply made shoes. Her heart sank as she took in the heavy mist on the hills and the rain bouncing off the cinder playground. She would be wet for the second time today when she left



for home. The rain had been relentless. ‘Even in summer,’ she whispered.

Her breath had misted up the pane of glass and she rubbed it with her sleeve as from the corner of her eye she caught sight of Teresa Gallagher. She was pulling up the reins of her horse with force.

‘Whoa! Whoa!’ Teresa shouted. With the agility of a woman half her age, she got down from the trap before the wheels had fully stopped, turned in through the gate and hurried up the path towards Rosie. She had news to tell, that much was obvious.

Teresa was a purveyor of news. As housekeeper at the presbytery, she got to hear everything – it all came to her door. This news, however, was so important that all pleasantries were dispensed with as she marched into the empty classroom. Her silver hair was always fixed in a small tight bun at the nape of her neck and she wore the same style of dress as she had for the past forty years: long and black, with a change of collar, always made by Ellen Carey. Narrow, wire-framed spectacles perched on the end of her nose and she never set foot outdoors unless she was wearing a hat. Today was no exception and her oilskin bonnet was tied tightly under her chin.

‘Well, you will never believe it, Michael Malone is on his way home,’ she said as she shook out her oilskin cape. It cracked as she did so and the raindrops covered Rosie’s feet in a light shower. But Rosie hadn’t noticed; her heart had stopped beating right there and then. ‘He’s sent a telegram and Mrs Doyle has to take it from the post office to Seamus as soon as they all stop drinking the tea. Keeva is in a right flap, she thought it was another death in the village, she was all for running up to tell Father Jerry if I hadn’t been there

and heard it all myself. Mrs Doyle was put out indeed. “Your job is as my assistant, miss. You don’t run the post office,” she said to Keeva. Anyway, I thought I would stop to tell you before I’m off to see my sister, thought you might like to know the news.’

Rosie felt her heart restart. It beat in her chest with the force of a trapped bird. Her mouth dried, the palms of her hands moistened and she struggled to reply. An awkward silence filled the space between them as Teresa, a stranger to self-doubt, wondered if she had made the right call. Rosie had never discussed Michael Malone, or taken the bait that Teresa had thrown down for her a million times, so it was all guesswork on Teresa’s part. However, she was sure that Rosie was sweet on Michael and had been since almost the day she’d arrived in Tarabeg. ‘Even a blind man can see that,’ she had once said to Father Jerry. ‘Sure, wasn’t he once sweet on her too? I cannot get a word out of her, no matter how hard I try. I’m never wrong though.’ Now, in the confines of the schoolroom, she studied Rosie’s face for any indication of her affection for Michael. She was disappointed.

As calmly as if she were discussing the weather, Rosie replied in a voice she barely recognised. ‘That’s good news. His family, they will be relieved that he wasn’t one of the soldiers who never came back then.’

‘Oh, they’ll be thankful he’s alive all right, praise be to God for that. But they will know the way people are feeling about those who fought with the British, they will have heard all about that. He will be back off away out of here the minute he turns up and he finds out what’s what. Nola won’t let him jump from a frying pan into a fire, so she won’t.’ Teresa tutted and shook her head in irritation. ‘They’re even talking about

passing a law, so I hear, to stop soldiers like Michael from getting proper work and benefits when they come home. They are going to be calling it the starvation law, can you imagine? Call them deserters, so they do, because they fought with the English army. He'll not be forgiven in a hurry. Doesn't Father Jerry know all about it. He spends his life, so he does, trying to get them not to listen to Kevin McGuffey and his wicked words of hate towards the English. There are enough lads from the villages round here who haven't made it back, who died in a field to keep the Germans out. He's a bog maggot that man McGuffey is.'

Rosie picked up the white duster and began wiping the blackboard in earnest, keeping her back to Teresa and her hands busy. Her face was inscrutable, but she took no chances as Teresa continued.

'Will they listen to Father Jerry though? No, not a word. They would rather follow the gospel according to McGuffey, one filled with hate, and walk along a path that leads straight to Galway jail. My sister, and as you know we were both very well educated, she says that the people around here have no idea, no idea at all what it would have been like had Hitler marched over the hill and into Tarabeg.'

Teresa stopped talking and studied Rosie's swaying back. She was disappointed. Rosie was composed, she was giving nothing away. 'Anyhow, I'm off to my sister's. Will Father Jerry and I be seeing you later for your tea?'

Rosie turned, slowly laid the chalky rag down on her desk, and nodded. She wanted to decline, to hide away and secretly digest this news. But there would be more, she was sure, in the hours between now and teatime and, despite herself, she wanted to know, to know it all.



Mr O'Dowd had already departed, as was his routine, leaving Rosie to lock up while he headed to the tobacconist for his daily craic and supply for his pipe before making his way to Paddy's bar. As Rosie turned the key in the huge green-painted wooden door, ready to begin her walk home, she saw the post-mistress, Mrs Doyle, coming out of the post office. She was clutching the telegram in one hand and the heavy gold crucifix that hung from her neck in the other. Her breasts, free from the restraint of a folded pair of arms, ricocheted about like rocks in socks.

Mrs Doyle had barely suppressed a yelp of delight when the telex machine had erupted into life of its own accord and began tapping away behind the counter. 'Keeva, would ye look at that, we have a telex coming through. Put the kettle on, would ye.'

Keeva Power had only just finished clearing away the mugs from the last round of tea. Tea was always required when two or more women appeared in the post office at once, and most definitely when one of them was Teresa Gallagher, the only woman to know more than Mrs Doyle. 'What, again?' she muttered. 'It's barely cold from the last flamin' lot.' She grudgingly loaded up used cups onto the wooden tray and hurried over to the range next to the fire to slide the kettle across.

She was keen herself to see who it was who was trying to make contact with them. Her mother would be all ears too, for she was convinced that with a little ingenuity the telex could be used to bring messages from the dead. Keeva would be sure to fill her in when she got home that evening. The two of them lived together on a farm two miles outside the village.

Her father had died and her sisters and brothers were all scattered across America, so Keeva and her mother survived on the dollars sent and on Keeva's wage from the post office. The dollars were intermittent, but the wage was weekly and therefore essential.

Keeva's shoulder length hair was wild and red and her eyes were as green as the first spring shoots of the wild angelica that grew along the banks of Tarabeg's Taramore river. She was thin from spending the entire day on her feet, walking an hour to work and another hour back in the evening, and never resting until she hit her straw mattress at night, but she loved her job. The post office was the hub of the village, the place where all news arrived, and being a part of it relieved the repetitive routine of her life.

The telex had caused quite a stir the day it was installed and had not ceased to amaze since. The women of the village still sometimes gathered round it, gazing, waiting, bending their ears to the background hum as they stared in wonder at the occasional involuntary half jump of a key as it threatened to beat out a message.

Finding Seamus Malone on this wet afternoon was not a difficult task for Mrs Doyle, who knew he would be up at the farm on Tarabeg Hill if he wasn't in the village. Along with the post office, the main street comprised only the tailor's shop owned by the Careys, the tobacconist's, a hardware shop, the new baker's, the public house, the schoolhouse, Paddy and Josie Devlin's butcher's shop, with its own second bar at the back, and, finally, the old barracks and Garda post, the church and the school.

'Where are you off to with that?' Ellen Carey shouted to her from the door of the tailor's shop. Mere seconds before, she'd

*Shadows in Heaven*

been sitting by the large-paned window, pedalling away at her Singer sewing machine as her eyes scanned the village. It was a draughty spot, and furthest from the fire, but it afforded Ellen the best view, and that she would never relinquish. She had spotted the mustard-coloured envelope in Mrs Doyle's hand before she was ten paces from the post-office door.

Without breaking her stride, Mrs Doyle gasped, 'Oh, I can't stop, Ellen, I've left Keeva looking after the post office and if I'm too long, she'll have given all the money away in wrong change. 'Tis for Seamus. I have to see is he in Paddy's. Oh look, would you, his horse is there! I've caught him, praise be to God.'

Her still-black hair was drawn into a loose chignon on the nape of her neck, in the local style, and bobbed up and down to the rhythm of her breasts. Her long black skirt and white blouse had been dry when she left the post office only moments earlier, but the rain hit the black serge of her outer skirt with the force of the wind behind it, penetrating the linen slip beneath and seeping through to her stick-thin thighs. Her shawl, draped across her shoulders, was in danger of slipping off as she lowered her head and ran, trying to keep her face dry.

'If it's for Seamus, it must be news of Michael,' said Ellen. 'Wait for me.' She stepped back into the tailor's, grabbed her own shawl from the back of the chair, turned the 'Open' sign to 'Closed' and, slamming the door to the sound of the jangling bell, threw the shawl over her head and shoulders and headed off down the street after Mrs Doyle.

'How are ye, Miss O'Hara?' she shouted to Rosie, not stopping to wait for a reply. 'Mrs Doyle has a telegram, so she does. For Seamus,' she called over her shoulder by way of an explanation for her bad manners.

As Rosie watched Ellen's back disappear around the corner, the thunder of the fast-running peaty river resounded in her ears. It came crashing down from the mountains over flinty boulders and smooth, centuries-worn pebbles, drowning out the intrusive rhythm of her own pulse, which had been beating a tattoo ever since Teresa had imparted her news. The rain poured, the river roared and the scattered cottages of the village were thatch-soaked and wretched and looked as miserable as a jilted lover. She had never wanted to be anywhere as much as she wanted to follow Ellen Carey and run into the Devlins' bar and know the exact contents of the telegram, dictated by Michael. Her mouth dried and she swallowed hard as her hands scrunched up the fabric of her thin coat. A telegram from Michael!

She breathed in and out, slowly. *Keep calm. Keep calm.* It was the hardest thing. Five years had passed, but she could give nothing away. She continued slowly down the main street, heading home. *Keep calm.*

She had reached the butcher's shop, and, looking up, saw Josie Devlin behind the counter, and John O'Donnell, Theady's father, along with Bridget McAndrew. They were all, each one of them, watching her. She smiled nervously, unclenched her hands and pulled her frayed coat across her chest against the wind and the rain. She dropped her gaze to her feet and without waiting to see had anyone smiled back, continued her journey. If she had looked up instead of down, she would have noticed that Josie had indeed smiled kindly, John had touched the rim of his cap out of respect for her role as the teacher of his son, and Bridget McAndrew, who knew the secrets of most hearts in Tarabeg without needing to be told, had sent her a look of deepest pity. Rosie would have been glad to have missed that.

## *Shadows in Heaven*

The Devlins' shop and home was divided into two, with two entrances. The meat counter in the front opened onto the main street, presenting a respectable frontage, whereas the bar at the rear was reached through a side door. A wooden shed in the back yard served as the slaughterhouse and contained a fridge which hid the salmon that were illegally poached from the Taramore river as well as the holy herrings during Lent. The running of the butcher's shop and the bar was also divided up: Josie served customers at the front, while Paddy was either in the slaughterhouse or at the bar. From there he would dispense Guinness and, when the barrel ran out, whiskey and porter; when that ran dry, a mysterious milk churn full of poteen would appear, distilled from Malone potatoes and hidden away in Paddy's yard until it was needed.

Those who wanted to avoid incurring the wrath of the wife or attracting the attention of Teresa Gallagher bypassed the public house and kept their custom for Paddy's bar. Respectable men had no notion to be seen stepping off the main street and in through the doors of the public house in the middle of the afternoon; and so, in a village where gossip was currency, they slipped through the side door of Paddy's instead. Among their number was Father Jerry himself, Brendan O'Kelly, the clerk and magistrate for the area, and Mr O'Dowd. Respectable men supped with the fearful, the hen-pecked and anyone else who chose to partake of the cheapest drinks in town. There were also those who ducked in from the butcher's, through the dividing curtain, to down a quick glass of whiskey, for medicinal reasons, while Josie wrapped up the pig's trotters in the front.

Paddy was in the process of filling a half pot of Guinness from a wooden barrel for Seamus Malone. Father Jerry was



sitting next to him, stuffing a dudeen with tobacco. Teresa did not allow smoking in the presbytery. ‘Tis an unholy act altogether,’ she would protest every time he tried, and so, to keep the peace, he kept his pipe for the back of Paddy’s. Porick McAndrew, Bridget’s husband, was sitting by the fire, well away from his wife. While he nipped around the back for whatever Paddy had on offer, Bridget herself always sat on one of the wooden chairs in the butcher’s shop, drank tea and talked to Josie. Brendan O’Kelly was at the table in the window, reading the *Irish Times*, having patiently waited until three in the afternoon for the mail van to arrive. He studied the crossword and chewed his pencil as he worked his way through half a pint of Guinness. The bar was silent apart from the rain hitting the windows and the slow drip, drip onto the wooden floorboards from the coat stand where Seamus had just hung his oilskin cape. A puddle began to form below it.

‘I’ll join you in a quick one, Seamus,’ said Paddy. ‘Will you be wanting a top-up, Porick?’

Porick looked woefully into his glass. ‘I would like that, Paddy, sure I would, but you know, she would know I had, given that she has the sight. I can keep nothing from her and you would hear her all the way back if I did.’

Paddy smiled. Nothing was missed by Bridget. The village apothecary, she spoke to the spirits and healed people with the potions she made in her cottage up on the hill. ‘You shouldn’t be such a lazy fecker, Porick,’ he said.

Porick’s face took on an expression of deep hurt. ‘Paddy, do you have no sympathy for the cut of my back? Gone, it is, and it won’t ever be coming back – the doctor says that and he knows more about it than the witch I am married to.’ He shook his head self-pityingly. ‘You have no notion of the

pain I am in. Besides, I still cut the turf and do odd jobs on the farm.' He stood up slowly to leave, making a show of his aches and pains.

Paddy made no response, just flicked back the tap and placed Seamus's Guinness to the side to settle. Porick was the laziest man in the village and Bridget the hardest-working woman. Everyone agreed that there had never been such a mismatched couple.

'Has Teresa left already?' Seamus asked as he walked over to the fire to dry off. 'I suppose she must have if you are here yerself, Father.' He half raised his sodden cap to Father Jerry, then shook it onto the flames of the turf fire, which spat back at him in protest. Paddy never opened the bar of an afternoon until Teresa was clear of the village, sent away from the presbytery by Father Jerry on special errands or to visit her sister.

'Aye, she left not minutes since,' said Paddy. 'She's a desperate driver, that one.' He had watched her turning the corner from the main street, both inside wheels leaving the ground as she drove her horse and trap out of Tarabeg, then stopping suddenly at the school. 'There will be no one on the roads this afternoon and that's for sure. She drives every sober man indoors before lunch until they know she's back at home and the coast is clear. I cannot imagine what possessed you, Father, to give her the use of your horse and cart.'

'Really?' said Seamus with a smile and a wink towards Father Jerry. 'Well, the fact that Father is often the first through the door as soon as she's away down the road ought to give you a clue, ought it not?'

Father Jerry pulled hard on his pipe and grinned. 'Tis the horse I feel sorry for,' he said.

Seamus chuckled. 'Tis you, Father, I'll feel sorry for if she

ever finds out you are over here in the afternoon. She'll be down here giving out to you, all right, and Josie won't be up for stopping her. Thick as thieves, the women in this village are.'

They all looked out of the window, across the road to the seven acres of wasteland that spanned the Taramore river. Where the land bordered the main street stood the Church of the Sacred Heart, peering down at them, and the presbytery, where Father Jerry lived, along with his housekeeper, Teresa. Officially, Teresa kept records of the village births, marriages and deaths; unofficially, she also recorded all that mattered in between. She was often to be seen standing in front of the tall dark windows that blinked in the sunlight, missing nothing that occurred in the quiet village.

Just as Paddy carried the two pots of Guinness towards the fire, Seamus opened his eyes wide. 'Feck,' he said.

'What?' Paddy turned his head to follow Seamus's gaze out the window. 'Tis only Guinness.'

But he received his answer soon enough as, with little ceremony, the door was flung wide. The rain hurtled in first, and then came Mrs Doyle, the only woman in the village apart from Josie who could set foot near the bar without being talked about.

'Oh Holy Mother of God, you are here,' she gasped to Seamus.

Ellen Carey shuffled in behind her and slammed the door shut. It was acceptable to enter the bar with Mrs Doyle. If another minute had passed, her cloak of respectability would have disappeared. She pulled her shawl across her chest, folded her arms and pushed her shoulders back; if her short, thin hair hadn't been soaked to the scalp and plastered to her face in wet strands, she would have looked important.

*Shadows in Heaven*

‘Hello, Paddy, Seamus.’ Mrs Doyle directed her pointed chin and beady black eyes straight at the earthenware pot that Paddy was placing in front of Seamus.

Seamus jumped to his feet and pulled out a wooden chair from the bar’s only table. It stood in front of the fire and was covered in a bright green gingham cloth – a homely touch added by Josie. ‘Here, woman, would ye sit down,’ he said. ‘Ellen, here, you too. Paddy, pour a pot for Mrs Doyle, before she takes bad, and Ellen too, would you now.’

Mrs Doyle flopped down into the chair he held out for her.

‘What have ye there?’ he asked. ‘Here, drink this. God in heaven, ye’ll be doing yerself no good, running like that at your age.’

Mrs Doyle’s eyes flashed with indignation – her age was the best-kept secret in Tarabeg – but Seamus failed to notice.

Josie bustled through the curtain. She had seen the tail end of Ellen’s shawl as she flew past the butcher’s shop window. ‘Is it a telegram?’ she asked, looking at the mustard-coloured envelope in Mrs Doyle’s hand. Telegrams no longer inspired the dread they had only weeks earlier. The war had been over more than a month since. Enough young men had died; there would be no more now. ‘Only John O’Donnell is in the shop and he wants me to check, before he’s away home. He doesn’t want to be missing the news now and having to wait until tomorrow like everyone else up the boreens. And besides, if Philomena finds out a telegram arrived when he was here and he can’t tell her what was in it, she’ll be giving out to him something wicked.’

Seamus placed the pot of Guinness in Mrs Doyle’s hand. Her gaze met his and she winked as the draught slipped over her toothless gums as fast as it would those of any man. Her

shawl fell from her dark hair and landed on her shoulders, and her eyes closed in ecstasy.

Mesmerised, Paddy, Josie and Seamus watched her noisily gulp down almost the entire contents of the pot.

‘Jesus, she’ll be needing a second,’ muttered Seamus to Paddy, unheard by Mrs Doyle, who, as she finished, slammed the empty pot down on the table with one hand and proffered the ransom telegram to Seamus.

She sucked the residue of the Guinness from her gums. ‘Tis for you, Seamus,’ she wheezed, as though there had been any doubt, and, turning to Josie added, ‘Tell John he can be on his way now. ’Tis from Michael. He’s coming home.’

For the briefest moment, no one said a word. Seamus, yet to open the telegram, stared at her open-mouthed until Josie broke the silence and bustled back through into the butcher’s shop.

‘Tis from Michael,’ they heard her say.

Seamus flinched as John O’Donnell’s response floated back through the curtain.

‘Sure, is he dead? The fecking bastard should be, fighting with the English. A traitor, he is, after what the English did to us.’

‘Stop, would ye,’ they heard Josie reply. ‘Surely to God, the war is over, the fighting is over, the worry, ’tis all over, and if you carry on like that in my shop, John, as sure as God is true, ’twill be over for you too.’

They all heard a loud slap. Seamus hoped it was contact between John’s face and the flat of Josie’s hand, though Paddy knew it would have been the rashers John came in for every Thursday afternoon hitting the counter.

Josie warmed to her theme. ‘The Germans lost, we can all

*Shadows in Heaven*

have a bit of peace at last, Jesus, Holy Father, can we? At last, please, would you, John? Just shut the feck up and keep all yer bellyaching for Philomena. Don't be bringing it in here into my shop, to me.'

They heard the crash of the wooden till drawer and the sound of change hitting the counter.

In the bar, Seamus said nothing, just raised his eyebrows at Paddy.

Paddy, embarrassed, adjusted his cap and then thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his coarse brown butcher's apron. 'Go on then,' he said to Seamus, inclining his head towards the telegram, even though it seemed a little pointless now that Mrs Doyle had announced the news it contained. He brought out a small boning knife and handed it to him.

A muscle in Seamus's cheek flickered as he eased the knife into the edges of the envelope. He was well aware that his every action would be described and amplified within every home in the village inside of the hour.

To Paddy, it felt like he was taking an age. He picked up a cloth and began to wipe the tap on the Guinness barrel to fill the time. The door opened and they all turned to see who it was had arrived at such an important moment.

'Ah, what have we here?' boomed the voice of Mr O'Dowd as he shut the door behind him.

'A telegram,' said Paddy, and they all turned their attention back to Seamus, who had laid the telegram on the table and with the flat of his hands was smoothing out the paper as though gluing it to the gingham fabric.

Impatient, Paddy threw his dirty dish cloth into the sink. 'Well, what has he to say?' he asked.

Father Jerry rose from his chair and moved to stand beside

Seamus. Mr O'Dowd, so tall and broad that his head almost reached the ceiling, walked over and stood at Seamus's other side. They read the telegram over his shoulders. Brendan pushed his pencil behind his ear and turned his chair away from the window to face the room and observe the moment.

'He's away home,' Seamus said. 'He was finally demobbed along with the lads from Galway and Cork, the ones in his regiment. They will be back home before the week is out, he says. They've been in Liverpool and will be catching the boat to Dublin and then the train to Galway. He doesn't say what day or time exactly, but then that would be our Michael, would it not. He'll surprise the life out of us all and turn up when we least expect him.'

'Thanks be to God.' Father Jerry blessed himself, and the others followed suit.

Seamus smiled broadly. 'He's alive. I don't care when the hell he comes home. He can do whatever he wants.'

Josie walked back into the bar. She entered the room like a small tornado, the force of her personality taking up more space than her physical form required, and being the well-fed wife of the butcher, that in itself was considerable. Her face was damp around the hairline and still flushed from the heated exchange. 'John O'Donnell has gone off with my voice ringing in his ears,' she told them, even though they had all heard her shouting. In a silent act of defiance, the rashers safely in his coat pocket, he'd slammed the door and set the bell ringing out in painful objection. 'Sure 'twas a bad reaction, that was, and 'twill be all over the village soon enough. You know what people are like, Seamus. Some will have an opinion we won't care for.'

'Aye, so it is,' said Ellen, who had remained silent until then.

*Shadows in Heaven*

‘As soon as he gets home, he’ll tell his shrew of a wife, and then there’ll be no stopping it. The news will have reached Newport by dark. Philomena is as quick to spread the gossip as she is the slurry.’ She turned to Seamus. ‘Do you think Michael will be having any notion at all of how bad it is here? He’ll be finding it hard to get work if he comes home, will he not? There’s to be a law, they say, to punish those who fought with the British.’

Paddy spat on the sawdust-covered floor. ‘Tis disgusting itself how many around here wanted the Germans to win. Some say that even if the Germans were filling the roads on the way to Mayo, they would still rather that than support the British.’

Josie, a woman who never usually sat down, pulled out a chair next to Mrs Doyle and sank into it. ‘Well, welcome news it is. I had given up on him altogether, the war has been over for that long. Wait until our Tig hears. He’ll be that pleased his best friend is coming back, sick with worry the lad had been. I’ll have to stop him running up the hill to the farm to wait for him.’

No one, from a place of kindness, corrected her by pointing out that Tig, who had one leg markedly shorter than the other, a pigeon chest and poor lungs, never ran anywhere. Even in Tarabeg, a mother could dream.

Paddy smiled at his wife. Her bark was very much worse than her bite. As round as Mrs Doyle was thin, she had bright, twinkling, blue eyes and, despite her grumbling, was of a kindly nature. He watched as she took a handkerchief from her pocket, dabbed at her forehead, then wiped the moisture from her eyes and John O’Donnell from her mind.

Josie Devlin rarely drank, but that afternoon she took two pots. No one could remember the last time she’d done that,



but she was making a point, one that Mrs Doyle would carry back to the post office, Ellen to the tailor's and both of them to Mass. Michael Malone was alive and well and his return home was to be greeted with much cheer. And besides, he was a good lad. He'd been a true friend to Tig, standing up for him when he was bullied, always sure to include him when there was a dance or a social. Tig had missed him rotten these last five years, Josie was well aware of that. The boys had been friends since they were born, as were Josie and Paddy with Seamus and Nola. Now was the time for her to help her friends in the best way she could. As stalwarts of the village community and purveyors of the most essential provisions – rashers, trotters, sausages and Guinness – the Devlins' opinion carried some weight. Seamus knew exactly what Josie was doing and was grateful.

'Well, sure, Michael hasn't been the only one to fight for the British,' said Ellen. 'There's been plenty more.'

'Yes, but Michael was the first and he is the only one from around here to return home alive,' said Mrs Doyle, who had delivered telegrams which held the worst news any parent could receive.

'Who will be telling Michael about Sarah, Seamus?' asked Josie, whose voice had dropped an octave. 'Kevin McGuffey has sworn that if Michael goes anywhere near the cottage, he will shoot him. You will have to warn him. Surely to God, the boy will have survived the Germans only to come home and be put in the ground by a monster like McGuffey.'

'Now then, we won't be having talk like that.' Father Jerry frowned. Keeping a check on the violent nature of Sarah's father was a challenge he struggled to meet.

'Well, if he does even harbour such a notion, 'twill be

McGuffey that suffers,' said Seamus. 'He has not a friend from one side of the country to the other, and what the feck is he talking about – the man is never sober enough to take a straight aim. Michael and Sarah, they were sweethearts, after all. Pledged to each other, they were. The only person who didn't know that was McGuffey, and doesn't that tell you all you need to know.'

'And Rosie O'Hara,' said Mrs Doyle, boldly, but no one heard, as was often the case when Rosie's name was mentioned.

Ellen Carey pulled herself up to her full five feet three inches and spoke. 'Seamus, Sarah McGuffey, she is to be married to Jay Maughan, and soon.' Her eyes darted about the room and rested upon Father Jerry. 'There, I've told him.'

She hoped no one would ask her how she knew. Jay Maughan had dropped a bolt of fabric around the back of the shop and asked her to make her two dresses for Shona, his grandmother. She'd made the last one for her over five years ago. Ellen told no one. Business was bad enough without a curse from Shona to make it worse. She had never spoken to Shona, none of the villagers had. It was Jay who did the talking and he'd been very keen to talk to Ellen, when, after dark, he had called around the back to collect the dresses.

Seamus had heard nothing of this. He was speechless with the shock of it and could only look aghast at Father Jerry, seeking confirmation.

Father Jerry removed his dudeen and laid it against his chest in a clenched fist. The air felt heavy, the fire spat. 'Twill not be happening in my church. The tinkers, they have their own priest. 'Tis a sin McGuffey is committing, marrying her off to a man she can't abide. And a cruelty, too, I would say, when the man is a tinker like Jay Maughan. Not to speak of

his sinful grandmother, Shona, cursing and calling on the Devil as she does.' He looked down apologetically at the sawdust floor. 'I'm afraid 'tis true, Seamus. She will be married, I would think, even before Michael is home.'

'Is... is there nothing you can do, Father?' Seamus stammered the words. His son was coming home, but if he returned to find his Sarah married, it would be worse to him than the pain of any wound inflicted by the Germans. His gut tightened at the horror of it. The girl Michael had written about in every single letter home for the past five years was to be married, and to Jay Maughan of all people. Right under their very noses.

'I cannot come between a man and his own wishes for his family,' Father Jerry replied.

All present knew this to be the truth. Kevin McGuffey was a madman and Father Jerry was as scared of him as everyone else in the village.

Paddy voiced what they were all thinking. 'He's a wicked one, that McGuffey. He's spent too much time in his own company out at sea, fishing. He has a temper on him worse than any bull in any field, so he does.'

Brendan was standing by the fire, warming his backside and pulling on his pipe. 'Paddy, is Bee working tonight?'

They all turned to look at him. This was usual: when Brendan spoke, everyone listened. Bee Cosgrove was Sarah's aunt and worked evenings at the bar to relieve Josie.

'She is.'

'Well, I'll have a word with her then. Such news will be best coming from family, do you not agree, Seamus? Angela and Sarah should know what the rumours are, what McGuffey and Maughan have been putting about, in case there is any

alternative action to be taken.’ Brendan looked over to Father Jerry. ‘Now I’m not sure it isn’t all talk from the big man, but Sarah has a right to know, and I can’t imagine she does, wouldn’t you be saying, Father?’

Father Jerry frowned, met Brendan’s eye, put his pipe back in his mouth and said nothing.

Brendan was well aware that the father would never condone any mortal being undermining the way a man ran his family business, regardless of his personal opinion. The fact that the father had remained silent in the face of his question told him all he needed to know. ‘Right, well, leave it to me then,’ he said. ‘I’ll have a quiet word in Bee’s ear and see what can be done.’

Seamus banged his pot on the table and retrieved his cape. ‘I have to leave you good people now. I’m away home to tell Nola, Pete and Daedio the news.’

As he made for the door, Paddy walked with him. ‘Don’t be worrying about any wedding, Seamus. I haven’t seen sight nor sound of the Maughans in weeks. No, ’tis all gossip and don’t you be worrying about any of it. Not at all, do you hear me?’

Seamus raised his cap in farewell, fastened his oilskin cape at the throat and went out to untie his horse from the post. A group of farmhands were coming around the corner on their way to Paddy’s, and Keeva was ahead of them, already running up the path to the bar. Grabbing hold of the door jamb, afraid of going inside the bar, she shouted from the door, ‘Mrs Doyle, the post office is full of people wanting to know what was in the telex. Am I to tell them?’

Seamus couldn’t hear Mrs Doyle’s reply. The farmhands, all of whom he’d known all of his life, raised their caps to

him and shouted their greetings. He shouted back, ‘Tis a bad afternoon, you’ll be needing a stiff whiskey to get your blood running again,’ but as he did so he couldn’t help wondering if it had been one of them who’d told Kevin McGuffey about Sarah being with Michael on his last day. Had one of them seen her from the fields where they were working? Had they known about Michael and Sarah? It was that which had started the trouble. He felt a weight in his heart when he thought of it, recalling what Bridget had told him, how Sarah and her mother had suffered at the hands of McGuffey.

He began hitching the horse to the cart. He could hear the murmur of the farmhands’ voices as they entered the bar and it seemed the news of Michael’s homecoming had reached them already. They must have passed John O’Donnell on the way – he was almost as big a gossip as his wife. Seamus stopped to listen a moment.

‘There won’t be any trouble, Paddy, keep your hair on.’

‘There’s no need to be worrying about Michael. He won’t be here for long enough, so he won’t.’

‘Sarah’s father will shoot him dead before he takes his boots off, you know the temper on McGuffey.’

‘If Jay Maughan doesn’t get there first! He and Sarah will be married as soon as McGuffey gets back from his smuggling trip to the North. The deal has been done, sure. Anyway, Michael will have forgotten her name already.’

So it was true, Seamus thought. McGuffey had promised Sarah to Jay Maughan. It seemed that everyone knew – everyone except those who needed to know. He heard Josie firing back her angry response, giving the farmhands as fierce a tongue-lashing as she had John O’Donnell. He sighed as he heaved himself into the cart. Josie would have her work cut

*Shadows in Heaven*

out for her if that was how everyone was to carry on when they heard the news of Michael's return.

He pulled the oilskin tight over his knees and shoulders, flicked the reins and directed the horse towards the breen that would take him up Tarabeg Hill and home. As he turned onto the track, he glanced along the coast road. There was no distant glimpse of the ocean today, thanks to the rain, but he did catch sight of Bee Cosgrove, Sarah's aunt, further along the road. She was making her way towards the village, ready for her shift at Paddy's. He decided not to wait for her; she would find out soon enough, and he was keen to take the news to Nola.

As the wheels of the cart trundled from one deep rut and puddle to the next, he kept his eyes focused on the pricked-up ears of the horse in front of him. With a heavy heart he prayed that Michael would come home to Tarabeg Hill first, home to the farm and not to the McGuffeys'. He might have dodged German bullets in a field, but when McGuffy returned, there might be only one bullet heading towards him, at close range. Nola's heart might be broken after all.

## Chapter 3

Shona Maughan lived in a caravan with her grandson Jay and, from time to time, a stolen child. They roamed the backroads and villages of Mayo and beyond, camping where they could, rarely welcome to stay very long. With her wild long white hair, no one knew how old she was and even the storyteller, at the Tarabeg harvests, fairs and dances, could not recall a time or even a story that Shona had not been a part of. She was the force of darkness in Tarabeg and every villager was terrified of being crossed by her. Every villager except Bridget McAndrew, Tarabeg's seer, a woman who lived by her visions of the future and her conversations with the dead, and Michael's grandfather, Daedio.

Daedio had crossed Shona many years since and had safely made old bones, but he knew the scheming witch had something in store for him. He'd half expected she would take her revenge when his favourite grandson went off to war, and for five long years he'd feared that Michael might not return. Shona would use her powers to wound where it had the most impact – this Daedio was certain of. And hurting the family he loved would hurt him more. The worry had taken the use

of his legs away from him shortly after Michael had left for the war. But he had Annie, his dead wife and former closest friend of Bridget McAndrew, to keep them safe.

‘Something is occurring, Daedio,’ Bridget confided in him when she called up to the farm for butter.

Nola, Daedio’s daughter-in-law, was the best butter-maker in the village. No one called round just to buy butter. Everyone stopped, took tea and sat on Daedio’s truckle bed in front of the fire to bring him up to date with the village gossip.

‘I have plenty, Bridget,’ Nola said as she took the dish to fill from Bridget.

‘I have not the time to be making butter as well as potions,’ said Bridget. ‘I’m happy to pay for it, Nola.’ She made herself comfortable on the end of Daedio’s bed, which creaked in objection to the extra weight.

‘You will do no such thing,’ Nola replied as she headed out to the dairy, ‘but if you have a bottle for the rheumatism for me and one to keep Daedio’s appetite up, that would be grand.’ She paused at the door. ‘Now, don’t mind me, I’ve to be getting on with the chores before Seamus gets home from the village. Did you see him at all Bridget? It’s that wet out today, I’m behind with everything.’ Nola hadn’t waited for an answer and for that, Bridget was grateful. The door banged behind her as she headed for the dairy.

‘Tis on the wind, Daedio. I can feel it,’ Bridget whispered to Daedio. She laid a herb-stained hand on top of his, which were bent and disfigured from years of tilling the land. ‘Shona, she is up to something.’

Daedio’s eyes lit up. He had news of his own. ‘Bridget, my dreams are strong, so they are. I wake up troubled and not knowing why.’ He shuffled himself further up his bed as



Bridget nursed the cup of tea Nola had placed in her hands. He was glad she'd called; she was the only one who understood.

'That's not dreams, Daedio, 'tis Annie.' She stared into the flames of the fire. 'Coming back to let you know she's there for when you need her. 'Tis my guessing that she's trying to make you see her more often, to tell you something, but you either don't want to see it, or you can't. They have their own way to let you know, gently like, often in a dream. She is only in the next room, but the walls of that room, well, sometimes she can see through them and you can see her back. She will pass across and draw a little closer to ye if she can, and knowing Annie Malone, she will, because never was there a more determined woman. She will protect her family in death, as she did in life. She is still here, Daedio. I can see her – she's just here, now, stood by the fire. I've been looking at her, trying to make out what she's saying to me.'

A tear sprang into Daedio's eye. 'I can't see her.' His throat was thick and his voice croaked.

'I know. 'Tis harder for men, but you can feel her, can't you?'

Daedio could, he could feel her so strong. Despite the heat of the fire, the air had cooled between them. 'I can, and I feel she is trying to warn me of something because sometimes I feel uneasy, like when Nola and Seamus have had a fight and have gone to their room to blast it out and I'm left sat here – it's that feeling.' He propped himself up against the pillow. 'As for Shona Maughan, Bridget – she has no trouble getting into my dreams. She's been so often now, and she scares me. She's never forgotten, you know.'

'She's a woman who lives for revenge, Daedio. She's never going to forgive you for driving her out of the village and

*Shadows in Heaven*

off the seven acres, sure she is not. She cursed you that day, and we both know it. But you have me and Annie to protect you, so stop your worrying. I can take on any mischief Shona Maughan or anyone else sends our way.'

Daedio smiled with relief as Bridget gulped down her tea.

What Bridget didn't say was that she'd called into the farm today because Annie had paid a visit to her own dreams and had pulled her to Daedio.

With her apothecary skills and gift of the sight, Bridget had worked hard up to now to keep Shona's misdeeds at bay, but of the two of them, Shona, a tinker seer, was the stronger. Bridget's greatest test was yet to come, of that she was sure, and she knew in her heart that at the root of it was the banishing of the Maughans from the land Daedio had bought, which had rendered them homeless. It had happened years ago, back even before Seamus was born, but the Maughans had long memories.

For reasons Bridget wasn't party to, Daedio had bought the land in secret, telling no one but her and Annie. The Maughans had parked their caravan there for generations, on the patch of land between the Church of the Sacred Heart and the Taramore river, in the middle of Tarabeg. The village was a peaceful place, as close to heaven as anyone could want, but the Maughans were a blight, and everyone thought so. They snatched and traded in children, just as their forbears had done since the time of the famine, and the people of Tarabeg despised them for it. So, when the village awoke one morning to find the Maughan clan evicted from their camp near the river, there was nothing but relief.

As they sat in front of the fire with Annie's presence between them, Bridget and Daedio were both thinking back to that

time, remembering. The flames roared up the chimney like the chained dogs out in the old house when a fox slipped past.

‘When are you going to tell Seamus about the land?’ Bridget asked. ‘Sure it’s a sinful waste, all those acres in the middle of the village sitting there doing nothing and no one but you knowing anything about it. Are you going to die and shock the life out of the lot of them too? Seamus could do something with that land, make something of it. Times are hard enough as it is.’

Daedio’s eyes twinkled in the firelight. ‘Annie left me clear instructions, Bridget. ’Twill be soon. She said she will let me know when the time is right, and I think that’s what she’s trying to do now.’

‘Aye, well, she was a wise one, Annie, there’s no denying.’ Bridget looked into the flames again, a rueful smile on her face. ‘And I’m here for you, Daedio, should you need me.’

‘You know what Annie told me, Bridget,’ Daedio said, his gaze now fixed on the fire too. ‘She said that St Patrick banished the snakes from all of Ireland, but that when we bought that land, we banished the Maughans from Tarabeg.’

He and Bridget clinked their mugs and smiled.

Seamus had made good progress despite the downpour and the heavy load along the boreen and up Tarabeg Hill. As the horse and cart followed the familiar route to the farmhouse nestled into the little valley just below the rocky heights of the mountain, he stared around him, thinking of his son and the two pieces of momentous news he’d just heard down at Paddy’s bar. If he were Michael, there was no way he could give all this up, he thought, glancing around appreciatively at the

*Shadows in Heaven*

comforting landmarks of his home. The bog holes where the fairies lived, the bridges over the streams he'd helped Daedio build with his bare hands when he was just a boy – they were a part of his history. He tilted his head as the heavy grey clouds began to lift and let his gaze linger on the lush green fields, flung against the mountainside like a bolt of unfurled emerald velvet, setting into relief the old thatched white cottage before him.

The cottage had once been the Malone family home, but they used it as the cowshed now. As he drew nearer, he saw Nola in the evening light, carrying a pail of milk back to the farmhouse. Hearing the horse and cart, she stopped, set the pail on the ground and waved to him. Her hair was wrapped up as always in a headscarf and her long apron hung from a bib, covering her dark blue pincord skirt. 'You took your time,' she shouted. 'I'll see ye back at the house.' She picked up the pail again and carried on along her path to the back door and the dairy.

Seamus made the sign of the cross and blessed himself, as he always did when he returned home and caught sight of the best woman in all of Ireland waiting for him. He was momentarily transported back to his boyhood and the countless times he had sat on the cart next to Daedio and they had waved to his own mother, Annie, carrying a similar pail, treading the same worn steps to their farmhouse, newly built and slate-roofed. Annie would shout to Daedio, scolding him for keeping the young Seamus out too long.

He gathered the reins into one hand and raised the other to wave back to Nola. Seeing a gossamer vision of his late mother waving back at him took his breath away. He knew it for what it was, a warning.

The image was dispelled when the horse got spooked and speeded up. The old nag was heading for home, focused on getting to his stable and his hay manger. ‘Whoa!’ shouted Seamus, but to no avail, and the cart turned the final corner on two wheels, just as it always did.

Through the open doors of the old cottage came the voice of the farmhand, Pete Shevlin, who had made the place his home, preferring to bed down in the hayloft above the cowshed, where once the whole family had slept. ‘He will have you off one day,’ he shouted as the cart finally slowed and the horse made its way in under the arch, into the near darkness of the windowless shed.

‘He’s like Mrs Doyle heading for a Guinness!’ Seamus shouted as he wound in the reins. ‘Only he has a little more grace and his own teeth.’

Both men laughed as Seamus dismounted the cart and removed the rope harness from the horse. Pete had prepared a manger of feed and a deep bed of straw for the old nag, and the old cottage was filled with the smell of sweet hay and cow. Pete carried on with the milking, singing the same comforting tune he sang every night, convinced that his music increased the cows’ output.

Seamus composed his thoughts as he brushed the sweat from the back of the horse with a rough handful of straw, and allowed himself his first smile. Throwing down the straw, he patted the nag on his rump.

‘I’m away into the house, Pete. I have news for Nola.’

He’d felt the telegram burning into his leg through his trouser pocket and once or twice had let his hand lie against it, to reassure himself it was still there. His heart was beating faster. The waiting and worrying were over, and now the one

*Shadows in Heaven*

thing he wanted to see was the relief on his wife's face. He ran out of the barn and up the path, and before Pete could answer him, Seamus was gone.

Pete stared out of the door, open mouthed, the rhythm of the milking broken as he tried to remember the last time he had seen Seamus Malone run.

Nola let the hot, freshly baked, floury loaf drop from her hands onto the wooden breadboard as Seamus barged in through the door. She knew instantly that something was wrong. This was not how Seamus entered the house. Gentle in both movement and speech, he was more likely to creep in without her even knowing than arrive like this, running across the kitchen towards her. She wiped her floury hands on her well-padded sides and mopped the perspiration from her brow with the back of her sleeve. She spent the best part of her day covered in flour and smelling of butter, and always wore her short dark curly hair tucked into one of the frilled white cotton caps Ellen had made her. Her cheeks were as doughy as her bread and criss-crossed with tiny red veins that gave her a permanent rosy glow.

Seamus flicked Daedio's cap from his head as he trotted past the old man, who was dozing on his bed in front of the fire.

'Oi, you feckin' bastard,' Daedio shouted, woken from his slumbers. 'Give it me back. Do you want me to catch my death? Tell him, Nola, would ye.'

It was a nightly routine, the flicking of the cap, which was never removed, even in sleep. The baiting was done in ruthless good humour, to try and encourage the old man to find his legs and pick up the cap – a reason to move.

'I've done it to wake you up, you lazy old git,' said Seamus

as he bent to retrieve the cap from the floor. His flick had been a good one tonight; powered by relief and happiness, the cap had reached all the way to the press behind Nola.

‘Nola, put that knife down, I have news,’ he said as he scooped up the cap and fitted it back into place on Daedio’s head.

Nola dropped the knife onto the breadboard, next to the loaf. ‘What is it?’ she asked as she rubbed her hands down her apron and made her way around the table to the fireside, where Seamus was standing next to Daedio’s bed.

Seamus ran his hand down his hip and ruffled the paper in his pocket. The tension was such that if he didn’t tell Nola soon, the telegram would surely catch alight. Without any further preamble, he removed it and thrust it at Nola.

She looked up at him and frowned. ‘What’s this?’ she said as her blood ran cold.

They had all heard the stories of telegrams arriving in homes across Ireland, informing parents that their sons had died in the war. There was little sympathy for those sons; soldiers who had donned a British uniform. The manner in which the British had behaved during the famine was still talked about as though it had only been yesterday. And the list of reasons why some of the Irish hated the British didn’t stop there: there was the First World War, their devious tactics during the fight for Home Rule, the Easter Rising... The mothers of lost soldiers got few condolences.

‘Is it Michael, is it, God love him? Tell me, is he dead?’ Her eyes filled with tears she could not hold back. She began to tremble and took a step away from the fire, putting her hand behind her to grab at one of the wooden chairs.

‘No, not at all.’ Seamus placed a hand on her shoulder. ‘Stop

now, would ye. Far from it, Nola. Did ye ever really think our Michael wouldn't make it? He's coming home.'

Nola clasped her hand tight across her mouth. 'Home?' she said. 'Here, to the farm? To Tarabeg? Oh God in heaven, I don't know whether to be happy or sad. Is he in Liverpool? Does he not know what it's like? Seamus, tell him to stay in Liverpool, where there's work to be had repairing the bomb damage. That's were all the lads are heading to, you know as well as I do. The McGintys have three boys all upped and left for the building and the labouring. They say there's good money to be had. What in God's name is he coming back here for? There will only be trouble, surely to God.'

She was talking faster than usual, her words tumbling out of her. She looked from Seamus to Daedio, who was grinning from ear to ear, and knew she was making little sense. She slumped onto the chair she'd been holding on to and collapsed, then gently rose again, removed her knitting from under her rear and placed the half-finished Aran jumper for Seamus over her face. Now that she'd stopped talking, she was weeping sudden tears – of joy, fear and relief.

'Typical bloody woman,' muttered Daedio. 'She's been saying every day for five years, "I'm off to Mass to pray for Michael. I can't wait for the day when I lay me eyes on his face, so I can't."' Daedio spoke in a mocking high-pitched voice as he peered at Nola from under the brim of his cap. 'Mary, Mother of God, would ye look at the cut of her now.' He snorted, but he was still unable to remove the grin from his face. Michael was coming home, and regardless of all the problems he would bring with him, it was a moment of joy to savour.

Seamus, ignoring Daedio, sat on the settle next to Nola. 'There's one reason he's coming home and it's for Sarah



McGuffey – you know that, don't you? If it wasn't for Sarah, he probably would stay in Liverpool and earn some money before he came home. Stop the crying now.' He removed the knitting from in front of Nola's face and peered into her weeping eyes. 'Nola, listen, would ye, Michael is coming home to news he won't want to hear. He is too late – Sarah is to be married to Jay Maughan, and soon.'

If anything could make Nola's tears stop, that news was it. For a brief moment the only sound in the room was the crackling of the fire and a peat block slipping down more comfortably onto its bed of hot ash. Nola, almost uncomprehending of what Seamus had just said, blinked in disbelief.

'Feck, I need a drink,' said Daedio.

'We all do,' Seamus replied. 'I'll fetch the jug.'

Nola threw the knitting to one side and, pulling a handkerchief from her apron, wiped her eyes and blew her nose with some force, regaining her composure.

Seamus returned from the scullery with a jug of his own poteen. They made it in a still they kept in the old cottage. Every so often, when the wind blew in the wrong direction, the Garda from the village would sniff the unmistakable whiff of the illegal brew and come marching up the hill. But the dogs and the view always gave them fair warning and Seamus and Pete could have the still out of the old cottage and hidden in a hayrick in the field before the Garda had picked themselves up out of whichever bog hole they'd invariably have fallen into on their way up.

Seamus half filled the mugs and handed one to Nola. 'Tis the best yet, this one, don't you think?'

Nola made no comment, distracted, her thoughts racing ahead.

*Shadows in Heaven*

As Seamus poured, he talked. 'As I see it, he has two choices, now that there will be no Sarah waiting for him. Brendan was in Paddy's when the telegram arrived and he will be telling Bee tonight what the news is and she will be telling Sarah. God alone knows what that will do. The farm will make more this year than last, so if Michael wants to stay, there is money here for him, but we would have to let Pete go.'

Daedio glanced up at Seamus. This was not such good news. Pete had been with them for many years and was as good as part of the family.

'Or he will do what they are all doing and go to Liverpool, or if he has enough money, to America, to seek his fortune. Whichever one it is, it doesn't matter, Nola. You will be seeing him soon and that's all that matters, for now. Take your drink, go on. You've had a shock.' He wrapped Nola's warm, plump fingers around the mug.

Their eyes met and spoke the messages of a couple who understood each other's thoughts.

'Aye, a nice one that he's coming home,' Nola said. 'Despite the disappointment waiting for him, at least we are still here. But, Seamus, his heart will be broken when he finds Sarah already married.' Her eyes filled with fresh tears at the thought of the pain this would cause her son.

'Stop fretting and drink.'

Nola sipped on the poteen and screwed up her eyes as it slipped down. The first sip was always the worst. She tutted impatiently. 'God help Sarah McGuffey if I ever see her. My words alone will cut her to shreds.'

'Shush,' said Seamus. 'You can't be blaming Sarah, 'twill all be down to her daddy, he will have been the one to be marrying her off. It's Jay Maughan she is marrying. McGuffey will have

earned himself a fine bride price from the Maughans. Buying brides and stealing children, 'tis what the Maughans do best. 'Twill have had nothing to do with Sarah, of that I'm sure.'

Daedio snorted. He was reminded of Bridget's words and felt a cold shiver run down his spine. He opened his eyes a little wider and looked a little harder, trying to locate the ghost of Annie, but she was nowhere to be seen. The temperature remained warm; there was no unexplainable breeze in front of the fire, no stirrings in the air. She wasn't there to hear the news and his heart sank. He almost jumped out of his skin when Nola spoke.

'He should have stuck to Rosie O'Hara. If it hadn't been for Sarah, he would have made something of that and wouldn't that have been a grand thing, a Malone marrying a school-teacher? Instead, he fell for the daughter of a fisherman, and the worst one of the lot at that.'

Seamus squeezed his wife's shoulders as he leant back against the chair. Removing his cap, he ran his hand over his head and across his face and eyes as he let out a deep sigh. He felt weary and after only half a mug, the poteen and the fire were already having an effect. 'Pete will be here in a minute. Let's lift our pots to Michael.'

'To Michael and a safe journey home,' said Daedio.

Seamus and Nola downed their drinks in unison as the back door opened and Pete let a blast of cold air run down the room.

They went about their usual routine: Seamus banked up the fire, Nola placed the supper on the table and Pete washed his hands at the scullery sink. When he came back in to stand at the fire and warm his backside next to Seamus, Daedio and Seamus told him the news. Nola dished out huge ladles of lamb stew from a tureen into their bowls. For Daedio, who had only

two teeth left to speak of, she chopped and mashed up the meat. The flames of the peat fire roared and chased up the chimney and the room was cosy as the night drew down and the rain picked up and beat against the door. On the long, scrubbed table sat a fresh jug of porter. Two candles burnt fiercely in hurricane lamps, one at each end, and as Nola bustled by with the bowls of stew held aloft, both flames dipped a respectful curtsey to the matriarch of the house.

‘Come on, eat, would ye,’ she said as she smiled up at her husband and set the bowls on the table. The imminence of Michael’s return was warming her heart.

‘Shall I be cutting the bread?’ said Pete, noticing the loaf on the board as he moved from the fire, rubbing his hands together, his mouth almost watering at the sight and smell of the food.

While the men began to dip their bread in the gravy and tuck in to the stew, Nola sat on the side of the truckle bed to feed Daedio his mashed-up supper.

‘How much did you pay for the pig feed?’ Daedio asked as he turned his head to Seamus, having swallowed his first mouthful while Nola blew on the second to cool it. ‘Your wife tried to kill me today,’ he added as the lamb rolled over his gums.

‘Oh shush,’ said Nola. ‘He’s talking about the potion that I asked Bridget for. Sure, ’tis the only thing keeping you alive.’

Daedio looked at Seamus and Pete, his rheumy eyes brimming with mirth. ‘Aye, because it won’t be your cooking and that’s a fact.’

And the night passed in much the same way it did most nights in the Malone house, filled with warmth and laughter.

Two hours later, Pete was the first to move, having finished his game of cards with Seamus. ‘I’m away to my bed,’ he said

as he stood and picked up one of the hurricane lamps. 'I'll unpack the feed after I've milked in the morning.'

'Aye, I'll be up to the pigs with ye,' said Seamus as he stood and placed the cards back into the press drawer.

'When do you think Michael will be arriving?' Pete asked, and they all knew why he was asking. He was wondering for how long he had a roof over his head and a wage in his pocket.

Nola was sitting in the rocking chair in front of the fire, knitting. 'Don't you be worrying, Pete,' she said. 'We have no idea what Michael's plans will be. He may not even be staying here, once he knows Sarah is to be married to Jay Maughan. He could be on his way up the hill right now, or in a week, or a month even, if he finds work in Liverpool. Who knows.' She looked up at him as he made his way to the door. 'Goodnight now,' she said.

'Night, Nola. See ye in the morning, God willing. Are ye away to Mass?'

'I'm not. Not tomorrow. If my son comes home, I want to be here for him, so expect Father Jerry to be running up the hill and giving out to me by the afternoon. We all know 'tis the only house he gets a good bite of pie at when he arrives, so any excuse, eh? He may have Teresa, but try as she might, she can't beat my creamy chicken pie, and nor is her pastry made using my butter.'

Pete smiled. 'Lord knows how the man survives with that tea-drinking scold as a housekeeper,' he said as the door closed behind him.

Seamus moved over to sit on the settle near to his wife. At almost fifty-five years of age and having worked on the farm since he was a boy, alongside his own granddaddy, he felt as though for the first time the rain was giving him the rheumatics.

*Shadows in Heaven*

He looked down at Daedio, who was now fast asleep, replete with the best lamb stew he could be served, and he saw his future. The Malone men were renowned for making old bones. ‘One day, that’ll be me,’ he said to Nola.

She laughed and shook her head. ‘You will never have the temper or the cheek of that old maggot, that’s for sure. But one thing’s certain, it won’t be me. My lot are lucky to ever make three-score years. ’Tis not many more years I have before God calls me, and I want to see my youngest son happy and settled before I go.’

‘Don’t be talking like that,’ said Seamus. ‘I won’t be having it. Everyone who stays up here on this hill lives a long life. Why do we need to go to heaven when we have it right here? We live in heaven, sure we do.’

He stood and, straightening his back, placed his hands in his pockets. His father didn’t stir on the mattress. Having been made comfortable, he was out for the night.

‘Look, let’s to bed,’ Seamus said. ‘There’s nothing we can do or decide until the man himself gets here.’

Nola rose and carried the mugs to the sink. “‘Man’!” she snorted. ‘He was just a boy when he left here.’ She turned to examine the table that she had already laid for the breakfast. The flour was in the bowl, ready to be made into bread at first light.

‘Anyway,’ said Seamus, ‘if he is on his way, I reckon we’d best be making the most of the privacy before he does arrive.’

Nola looked up at him and the twinkle in his eye was unmistakable. He winked at her.

‘They should have christened you Shameless Malone, not Seamus,’ she said as she grinned back at him.

She extinguished the candles in the sconces and picked up

the hurricane lamp from the table and set it on the windowsill. 'In case he comes home tonight,' she said. 'Who knows when he sent that telegram. It could have been a week ago. I don't have the same faith in Mrs Doyle's famous telex machine that everyone else has. Keep the jug with the rest of the porter on the table and cut some cheese to leave on the side with the bread, just in case. No lad of mine will arrive home from the war to an empty table.'

When a plate had been laid, covered in a cloth, and a new candle put in the window, Nola turned to her husband. 'Come on then, let's see how much of you is talk and how much is action.'

Seamus slapped her rotund backside, the width of his hand covering the white and floury imprints of her own, and she giggled in exactly the same way she had on their wedding night, many years before.

As the door closed, neither saw the eyes of Daedio Malone open as he turned his head towards the fire and the empty rocking chair. He heard a sigh, a breath, a smile.

'Is that you, Annie?' he whispered to his long-departed wife.

'It is, Daedio. I'm here, I'm with you,' she replied.

'Did you hear that, Annie?' he asked.

'I did that. Isn't it just the best news,' she replied. 'Our Michael is coming home.'

Daedio Malone smiled. A lone tear left the corner of his eye and travelled down his cheek.

'He is, and he's safe and well. Shona didn't curse him and he's coming home. He's been spared, God bless him. I'll wait for him awhile. I'll get him sorted and settled first. There's things to do, you know that, and then I'll be coming to join ye, Annie.'

*Shadows in Heaven*

The chair moved. 'I'll be here, but Michael, he will need you for a while yet. You must wait for Shona to go first, Daedio – you will know when it's time. You will see me then. Don't you worry, I'll come for you myself, I'll bring you across. You won't be alone,' she whispered back to him as he closed his eyes.

And the rocking of her old wooden chair matched the rhythm of his heartbeat as he melted back down through the folds of sleep.



## Glossary of Irish terms

<i>boreen</i>	narrow country lane
<i>boxty</i>	bread made with grated potato and flour
<i>colleen</i>	girl or young woman
<i>curragh</i>	small wickerwork boat or coracle
<i>dudeen</i>	short-stemmed clay tobacco pipe
<i>Garda</i>	the Irish police force
<i>hooker</i>	single-masted boat, larger than a curragh, used by ocean fishermen on the west coast
<i>poteen</i>	illegal home-brewed alcohol, made from potatoes
<i>whin</i>	gorse

# *Shadows in Heaven*

NADINE DORRIES grew up in a working-class family in Liverpool and spent part of her childhood living on a farm with her grandmother, and attended school in a small remote village in the west of Ireland. She trained as a nurse, then followed with a successful career in which she established and then sold her own business. She has been the MP for Mid-Bedfordshire since 2005 and has three daughters.

*Also by Nadine Dorries*

*The Lovely Lane Series*

The Angels of Lovely Lane  
The Children of Lovely Lane  
The Mothers of Lovely Lane  
Christmas Angels

*The Four Streets Trilogy*

The Four Streets  
Hide Her Name  
The Ballymara Road

*Standalone Novels*

Ruby Flynn

*Short Stories*

Run to Him  
A Girl Called Eilinora

First published in the UK in 2018 by Head of Zeus Ltd

Copyright © Nadine Dorries, 2018

The moral right of Nadine Dorries to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

9 7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (HB): 9781786697493  
ISBN (XTPB): 9781786697509  
ISBN (E): 9781786697486

Typeset by Adrian McLaughlin

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

Head of Zeus Ltd  
First Floor East  
5–8 Hardwick Street  
London EC1R 4RG  
[WWW.HEADOFZEUS.COM](http://WWW.HEADOFZEUS.COM)