

Born in Shame Study Guide

Born in Shame by Nora Roberts

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Plot Summary

Born in Shame by Nora Roberts opens with Amanda confiding in her daughter Shannon. Amanda is deathly ill from cancer, and decides to tell Shannon the secret that she has kept for years—that Shannon's biological father is not Colin Bodine, but Thomas Concannon, a married Irishman with whom she had a passionate affair. Just before she dies of cancer Amanda confesses the secret to Shannon, who is shocked and angry. Shannon's biological sisters in Ireland send her an invitation to stay with them in their bed and breakfast, and after thinking it over Shannon accepts. She immediately butts head with sister Maggie, but finds Brianna kind and appreciates her hospitality. Though Shannon is still reeling from her mother's death and the truth about her parentage, she tries to give Ireland a chance, telling herself to enjoy a vacation at the very least. Murphy, nearest neighbor to Blackthorne Cottage, is struck dumb by recognition the first time he meets Shannon: he knows he has seen her before. Though Shannon is resistant to the idea of being in a relationship with Murphy, she cannot deny her attraction to him, and they both eventually succumb to their shared passion. Meanwhile Shannon must deal with the contentious Maeve Concannon, her responsibilities back in New York, and navigate her new relationships with her sisters and brothers-in-law. Shannon also rediscovers her love of painting, and is offered a contract for her work from Rogan. She is torn between the life she worked so hard to build in New York, and everything being offered to her in Ireland—including her love for Murphy. Finally Shannon decides to sign the contract and is set free from her need to control: she finally admits she loves Murphy, and purchases a hammer dulcimer for him. He is enamored with the gift upon her return and they love each other. The next day the whole family goes to the Worldwide Gallery in Clare to see Shannon's work on display. She offers to purchase one of Maggie's pieces and is shocked when Rogan gives it to her. She asks for it to be shipped to New York, which upsets Murphy because he thinks she has decided to stay in Ireland. He proposes to her in the stone circle and she tries again to explain why she cannot stay, but they part ways very upset. That night Shannon paints furiously from dusk until dawn, and after sleeping all day she asks to see the letters between Amanda and Tom. Her mother's letters open her eyes to everything, and she is awed at what Amanda went through for her unborn child. Shannon takes the painting and meets Murphy in the stone circle, where they share their accounts of the vision and she gives him the painting she made of it the night before. He offers to sell the farm and lands and go to New York with her, but Shannon reveals she has decided to stay in Ireland. She wants to continue to paint, and more than anything to be his wife.



Prologue and Chapter One

Prologue and Chapter One Summary

Born in Shame is the final installment of a trilogy of books set in Ireland that revolve around the Concannon sisters, who each find love with the help of a mysterious, ancient circle of stones on their property. The story focuses on Shannon Bodine, who has been told her biological father is not the man she grew up knowing as her father. This news sets her on a journey to Ireland to find some answers. While staying at her sisters' bed and breakfast Shannon finds new family, new artistic inspiration, and lasting love.

In the prologue, Amanda is dreaming of Ireland and her experiences there long ago with Tommy. She has kept a secret from her daughter for Shannon's entire life, and is wrestling with the eventuality that she must share it before she dies. Shannon worries about her mother and thinks the cancer drugs may be affecting her perception of reality. Amanda is in hospice care at her home, and Shannon has returned to care for her mother during the final days.

In Chapter One, Amanda and Shannon reminisce about Colin, Amanda's husband and the man Shannon always knew as her father. Shannon regrets that she has not brought her new painting to show her mother and Amanda says she is proud of Shannon's career choice to go to New York and become a commercial artist. Amanda recounts her long-ago trip to Ireland, the first taste of freedom she got from her strict Irish Catholic family.

She met and fell in love with Thomas Concannon, a married farmer/poet with two children (Brie and Maggie Mae). By the time she returned to the United States, Amanda learned she was pregnant with Shannon. Amanda's family disowned her and she went to work as a waitress, where she met Colin Bodine. He fell in love with her and offered to care for both her and the baby. Though she refused him multiple times, they were finally married, and unopposed since his parents died in a car crash shortly after.

Shannon is shocked and angry by this information, calling Amanda a liar and refusing Colin as her real father. Soon the pain overtakes Amanda, and as she slips into unconsciousness her last request to Shannon is "don't hate me."

Prologue and Chapter One Analysis

The prologue sets up the conflict right away: Amanda has extremely sensitive and pertinent information that will effect Shannon, and is nervous yet determined to share the information with her. Shannon is concerned about her mother's clearly failing health and has no idea about the bombshell that is shortly to be dropped on her. Shannon comes across to the reader as a pragmatic and strong woman who is trying hard to keep her mother from seeing her fear.



Chaper One is where the bomb is dropped on Shannon: the man she has called father her entire life is not, in fact, her biological father. Amanda struggles with revealing this information to Shannon but feels she deserves to know the truth about her birthright. Amanda's situation was a complicated one: a sheltered girl from a conservative household gets her first taste of freedom and, unfortunately, falls in love with a married man in an impossible circumstance. Amanda knows she is dying and feels she must tell Shannon the truth, no matter the emotional and physical toll it takes. Shannon is shocked at her mother's confession and is quick to judge her. She is angry and resists the urge to physically lash out at Amanda. On one hand Shannon's reaction makes sense—she has had a shock and is being forced to reimagine her life and who she thought she was. However in her moment of passion she forgets the toll this secret must have taken over the years on Amanda, and her mother slips away before they can discuss the matter further.



Chapter Two and Chapter Three

Chapter Two and Chapter Three Summary

Chapter Two begins in Ireland, where Brianna Concannon Than has just given birth to daughter Kayla. She is surrounded by her husband Grayson and her sister and brother-in-law, Maggie Mae and Rogan Sweeney. Brianna and Grayson are overwhelmed with emotions as new parents. Maggie and Rogan have left their son Liam with neighbor and close family friend Murphy, who owns the farm next to their bed and breakfast. The inn is Brianna's livelihood, and Maggie is a glass sculpture artist. Their mother is a difficult and embittered woman. The sisters found Amanda's love letters to their father and have been trying to track Amanda down. Their private detective is on the way to Columbus following a lead. Maggie worries that Brianna will be disappointed, and that she will not be able to handle the baby, the inn, and the investigation.

Chapter Three picks up with Shannon again. She is burying Amanda, who slipped into a coma and died after her confession. Shannon has held herself together all day through the funeral and the reception afterward, but back at the house she is alone with her grief. She is woken from a nap by a Mr. Hobbs at her door, looking for her mother. He is investigating on behalf of Rogan Sweeney, husband of Maggie Concannon, one of Thomas Concannon's surviving children. Rogan Sweeney owns galleries and Maggie is a famous glasswork artist, while Brianna Thane owns a B&B and her husband Grayson Thane is a famous author. Shannon tells Mr. Hobbs she wants nothing to do with her sisters, and he leaves her to focus on selling the house. Later, Shannon reflects on her career while unable to produce at work. She cancels a lunch date with current boyfriend Tod. She later breaks up with him, realizing they were not right for each other. When she arrives home she finds a letter from Brianna, inviting her to stay in Ireland with them for a while.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three Analysis

Chapter Two reveals the other side of the story to the reader—though Shannon will be the main character, the journey with her Irish biological family will be the focus of the story. The girls own and operate an inn and have a difficult relationship with their mother. Brianna's eighteen hour labor to bring Kayla into the world seems to have strengthened the relationships in their group, including the relationship between her and her husband Grayson. Maggie is the more vocal of the two sisters and is not afraid of letting her opinions be known. She worries about tracking down Amanda and wishes that Brianna had never found the letters. Both Maggie and Brianna seem to have strong relationships with their husbands. Besides their mother and Lottie, a neighbor named Murphy is mentioned in Chapter Two as a family friend who is trusted enough to take care of Liam, Maggie and Rogan's young son. At this point he is the only non-familial character in the story.



In Chapter Three, Shannon is feeling selfish because she wishes her mother had died before telling her the truth. Shannon is a very strong woman but has been thrown for a loop, and feels betrayed that her entire family life has been based on a lie. Mr. Hobbs shows up at an inopportune time, forcing her to confront her new knowledge on behalf of the Concannon sisters in Ireland. After returning to work she finds that she cannot concentrate. Her new perspective on her family is clouding everything she has worked to accomplish, including her relationship with boyfriend Tod. She is forced to recognize that she and Tod are not really in love, and she breaks off the relationship. She returns home to find the letter from Brianna, a sincere note offering friendship and the chance to discover her long-lost family. Shannon is hesitant to accept Brianna's offer of coming to Ireland but does not rule it out. She has been through an emotional ringer and is willing to consider anything that could give her clarity.



Chapter Four and Chapter Five

Chapter Four and Chapter Five Summary

In Chapter Four, Brianna prepares for Shannon's arrival while Maggie tries to prepare her for disappointment. During the conversation Maggie reveals that she is pregnant, but asks Brianna not to tell anyone yet. Brianna nurses new baby Kayla and she and Grayson marvel at being parents. Shortly after, Shannon arrives and is shocked by the recognition she feels when meeting her sisters. She and Maggie immediately butt heads—Maggie disdains Shannon's career and does not consider her an artist. As they approach Blackthorne Cottage Shannon is awed by the beauty of the landscape. When they arrive at the cottage Liam runs out to greet Maggie. Grayson has had a difficult time running the B&B while babysitting the two children. Shannon is impressed with her room and learns she has a view of Murphy Muldoon's farm from her window.

In Chapter Five, Murphy Muldoon has come to the cottage. According to Brianna's assessment he is a handsome, hard-working man. He asks about their mother, apparently a difficult woman, who has no idea about Shannon's visit. When he meets Shannon he is struck dumb by her beauty. Everyone sits down for tea and Grayson and Shannon discuss work. Shannon points out that Murphy has been staring at her and he hastily retreats back to his farm. After dinner Shannon decides to take a walk in the garden and falls asleep in a wooden chair. She dreams of a man on a white horse, a warrior, and comments that he has come back. She awakens in the garden to Murphy staring at her. He apologizes for staring at her during dinner and compliments her "fairy eyes." Shannon concludes that he is an odd man but she may have misjudged him.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five Analysis

In Chapter Four, Brianna and Maggie have opposite ways of anticipating Shannon's arrival. Brianna tends to be a positive thinker who is determined to look on the bright side, while Maggie tends to anticipate the worst. They obviously care very much for each other and are very close. Maggie's pregnancy confession is surprising, but she clearly trusts Brianna with the information. Both women have very specific, loving relationships with their respective spouses. Brianna and Grayson are deep in the thrall of their new baby Kayla, and are amazed that they have a family. The baby has strengthened their relationship, and it is clear they have a strong sexual connection as well. Shannon is overwhelmed by Ireland and by her new relations. Though she and Maggie butt heads, it is because they are so similar to each other. Shannon is clearly searching for something—answers, acceptance, or perhaps a new purpose to her life. Her relationship with Murphy is foreshadowed by the fact that she can see his farm from her window.

In Chapter Five Shannon overhears Brianna and Murphy talking about Mrs. Concannon, a complication of which she had been unaware up to this point. Murphy Muldoon is



almost a part of the family, having known Maggie and Brianna and been their neighbor for years. Murphy is stunned by Shannon's beauty and cannot even finish his dinner, which Maggie and Brianna notice is unusual for him. Shannon finally calls him out for blatantly staring at her. Shannon's dream in the garden is strange—she has never had this dream before and it is very realistic. The man on the horse could parallel Murphy, since earlier in the chapter it was specifically mentioned that he breeds horses. When she awakens to find him staring at her again he must make a better impression: he shows her this time that he is actually an articulate man. She still finds him very odd, but is not overly concerned. The reader learns that Murphy thinks Shannon is the woman he has been waiting for—this foreshadows their relationship, and gives Murphy an air of mystery. Shannon's dream and Murphy Muldoon are very possibly connected.



Chapter Six and Chapter Seven

Chapter Six and Chapter Seven Summary

In Chapter Six, Shannon is experiencing very vivid dreams like she never has in her life. She specifically dreams of storms, men on horses, and a circle of white stones. Up at dawn, Shannon and Brianna meet in the kitchen. Brianna suggests Shannon go for a walk after Shannon asks if there is a gym nearby. Seeing the sun rise, Shannon has gotten the urge to paint for the first time in a long while. She admires the garden and thinks about the difference between Ireland and New York. She climbs over a stone wall and nearly lowers herself onto a cow. She marvels at the animal but almost falls off the wall when Murphy speaks from behind her. She and Murphy take a walk, and Shannon learns that Murphy's land spits the Concannon land. She finds him unexpectedly charming. When they pass the stone circle Shannon senses that it is special and wants to paint it. She hears a girl crying and Murphy admits he has heard it too, along with Maggie and Brianna. There is a legend that a girl lost her lover and died in the spot. Shannon's feelings change toward Murphy when she realizes he is flirting with her.

In Chapter Seven, Shannon watches Kayla for Brianna while she takes care of business at the B&B. She and Grayson talk about his novel, Kayla, and Shannon's desire to paint. Shannon admits to Grayson that she does not know who she is, and that is part of the reason for her visit. They joke about finding her a man and she reveals she has just broken up with someone. They head to the pub, Kayla in tow, and Shannon absorbs the atmosphere while sipping her Guinness. Murphy is there as well playing his concertina, and Shannon meets Rogan. They all talk and Murphy tries to explain being Irish to Shannon. Maggie notices Murphy's interest in Shannon and warns him to leave her alone. Later in her room Shannon decides to stay a few more weeks, despite Maggie's antagonism and Murphy's advances. She dreams again of the man on the horse, kissing him and begging him to stay, yet somehow knowing that he will not.

Chapter Six and Chapter Seven Analysis

In Chapter Six, it is clear that Shannon's dreams are going to play a vivid role in her experience at Blackthorne Cottage. She finds them unsettling and does not understand what they mean, but they will be part of Shannon's journey and growth as a character. Her urge to paint is significant as well, since she has not felt inspired by her hobby in quite some time. She reflects on how very different the Irish countryside is than the life she is used to in New York. For the first time, she lets her guard down and allows herself to follow her own curiosity. The stone circle clearly has something to do with Shannon and her strange dreams, although it is unclear how much Murphy knows. Shannon is surprised at how she reacts to his flirting, and for the first time sees him as an intelligent, strong, attractive man.



In Chapter Seven Shannon begins to relax around her new acquaintances for the first time. She recognizes each of them for the qualities they possess—Brianna is kind and strong, Maggie fierce and loyal, and each of their husbands suits them to a tee. Shannon is surprised at how much she enjoys handling Kayla, and is happy to have apparently found a friend in Grayson as well. Her admission to Grayson that she does not know who she is is significant—she recognizes that she is searching for a sense of self, and that includes deciding where she fits with her newly discovered relatives. The lifestyle in Ireland is so different from what she is used to in New York, and though she finds it odd, she seems to enjoy it more and more. Murphy has made his interest clear to her—so clear that others notice it as well. Maggie vehemently disapproves, mostly because she thinks Murphy is setting himself up for a broken heart. Maggie is fiercely loyal to her loved ones, though she comes across to Shannon as prickly and moody. Shannon dreams again of the man on the horse, indicating that perhaps there is something unusual about her situation—perhaps even magical.



Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine

Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine Summary

In Chapter Eight, Shannon borrows the car and goes sightseeing. She contemplates her identity and is given sage encouragement by an old woman she encounters at Moria's Stand, an overlook where a woman had drowned herself years before after her husband and children died. Shannon turns to offer the woman a ride, but she is gone. When Shannon returns to the house she encounters Brianna, who admits their mother knows nothing about Shannon or Amanda. Brianna feels honor-bound to inform her mother of the situation, even though her parents' marriage was apparently loveless and cold. Shannon does not understand why they stayed together if they were not happy, and Brianna points out that relationships are very different in Ireland than in the USA. Brianna warns Shannon that their mother will try to hurt her. Shannon decides to go for a walk as Mrs. Concannon arrives and runs into Murphy, who accompanies her inside to confront Maeve. She is angry and leaves in a huff, claiming that her daughters have chosen Shannon over her. After she leaves, Maggie announces that she is pregnant and everyone celebrates with whiskey.

Chapter Nine begins with Murphy in the fields. He enjoys working his lands but takes special pleasure in his horses. He thinks that he and Shannon are meant to be together. He sees her painting in the field and stops to talk, wondering why she went into a career of commercial artistry. He invites her to dinner and she accepts. Before he leaves he kisses her and they both feel the effects deeply. He seems to be remembering her from somewhere else, but when he mentions it to her she does not understand. Upon arriving that evening she discovers that Murphy is well-read and a good cook. He takes her on a tour of his farm and shares stories of his upbringing. At dinner Murphy again mentions that he has been waiting for her, and outright states that he is courting her.

Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine Analysis

Mystery deepens in Chapter Eight when the old woman with whom Shannon is speaking seemingly disappears into thin air. Shannon is still struggling with her identity, unsure of who she is without her career and her bloodlines. She is on a deeply personal journey and, apparently to figure out who she is, she must form relationships with her sisters. Brianna must explain to her the cultural differences between the USA and Ireland—divorce is not usually an option, and pregnancy constitutes getting married. It is a different view of the world, and Brianna is trying to explain it in regard to her unhappy mother, Maeve. The complicated and deeply unhappy relationship between Maeve and Thomas Concannon spurred many events in all the girls' lives, including Maggie's fiery attitude and possibly Shannon's creation. Maeve immediately condemns Shannon as the child of adultery and claims her children are siding against her. She is a woman of strong religious conviction who feels she has been cheated by life, and blames Thomas Concannon for everything. Maggie's announcement that she is



pregnant is meant to ease the tension in the room. Shannon's relationship with Murphy grows deeper as he makes her question herself.

In Chapter Nine Shannon and Murphy's relationship deepens. They learn more about each other and Murphy gets bolder in his advances by asking her to dinner. Their physical connection is undeniable, and Murphy's frequent claims that he has been waiting for her foreshadow that something deeper is going on—perhaps even something magical. Shannon is bemused by Murphy but unnerved as well. She does not quite know what to do with him. Her attraction and her common sense are in conflict over Murphy, added on top of her quest to find herself and her relationships with her new sisters.



Chapter Ten and Chapter Eleven

Chapter Ten and Chapter Eleven Summary

In Chapter Ten Shannon tries to convince Murphy that she does not want to be courted. They discuss the status of women in their respective societies, Murphy stating that he believes women should have every right that a man has. Shannon points out that she just ended a relationship and does not want to get into another one, and Murphy declares his love for her. Shannon thinks he is being ridiculous and he becomes angry when she looks down on his lifestyle. They calm down and he quotes Shakespeare, and they get caught up in a passionate embrace. Murphy feels familiar to Shannon but she breaks off the kiss, determined to approach their attraction in a practical manner. Murphy claims again that he loves her and will eventually marry her. Shannon drives herself home in a huff, determined to give him no more encouragement. She complains about Murphy to Brianna and Grayson, then tells them about her recurring dream. They say it sounds like the legend of the witch and the warrior.

In Chapter Eleven Shannon dreams again of the man in the circle of stones, a man she feels strongly is tied to Murphy. In the dream she knows it is the last time she will ever see him. Shannon encounters Maggie in the kitchen and they argue, Maggie warning her not to lead Murphy on and to be sensitive about Brianna's feelings. Maggie insults her mother as well and accuses Shannon of being selfish. In the midst of the argument Maggie gets lightheaded and has to sit down, which she blames on being pregnant. She asks Shannon to keep the episode between the two of them and in return Shannon asks to see Maggie's studio. This is a very personal request, but Maggie agrees. On the way she fills Shannon in on some of the history between the Concannons and the Muldoons. Inside Maggie's studio, Shannon is mesmerized by all the glasswork and asks if she can make something. Maggie helps her make a paperweight and in return Shannon draws her a picture of Liam. They go inside for tea and to discuss Thomas Concannon. Brianna joins them and the three discuss their father, his relationship with their mother, the effect on the girls' childhood, and their father's death. Shannon shares her own mother's death and bonds with the other sisters.

Chapter Ten and Chapter Eleven Analysis

In Chapter Ten Murphy finally reveals his true intentions toward Shannon: he wants to court her. This throws Shannon for a loop since she is only planning on being in Ireland temporarily. She is unsettled by Murphy's declaration of love and cannot see herself as the wife of a farmer. She states this as a defense mechanism—the last thing she can imagine is permanently leaving the life she's known for so long and she makes it clear to Murphy that she is not interested in that life. He is offended at her lack of respect for his lifestyle and she is offended at Ireland's cultural views of women. They are very different people with very different backgrounds—though Shannon attempts to reason with Murphy, he is convinced he will marry her. Brianna and Grayson's reaction to



Shannon's dream is significant: this is the first time other characters besides Murphy and Shannon have indicated that there may be something mystical about their situation. Shannon is trying very hard to deny what she does not understand.

In Chapter Eleven the walls between Shannon and Maggie are finally broken down. Up to this point their relationship has been very contentious—they are each strong-willed artistic women and feel competitive about their careers. Maggie resents that Shannon sees her as vulnerable, but ultimately each of them shares deeply personal life events with the other. They parallel each other in many ways, especially in their choice of careers. They bond over mutual grief and regret for their deceased parents, and the love that Thomas and Amanda were never able to explore. This is a turning point for all the girls: they are conscious of a decision that must be made now. They need to decide whether or not they are able to be a family.



Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen Summary

In Chapter Twelve, Shannon finally accepts that she has sisters. She is also feeling inspiration again as a painter, completing a watercolor of Brianna and her painting of the stone circle. She resolves to stay in Ireland another couple of weeks and take a sabbatical from her job. She returns Murphy's jacket to him and finds him working on his car, frustrated. Murphy asks if she has dreamed about him and remarks on her newfound relationship with Maggie, as well as the peace she seems to be finding in Ireland. Rogan and Liam arrive and sit down for tea with Shannon and Murphy. Rogan recounts the history of his and Maggie's relationship and offers to buy Shannon's paintings. He wants to represent Shannon and her work in his gallery. After he leaves, Shannon discusses her artistry with Murphy and he invites her to the pub to celebrate. She kisses him on the cheek and he asks her to paint something for him. He forces her to look for the difference between ambition and happiness.

In Chapter Thirteen, Shannon decides to paint in the garden. She and Maggie discuss their art and Maggie compliments Shannon's portraits. Rogan is drawing up a contract for Shannon to sign, although she has not made a decision yet. Maggie gives Shannon the paperweight they made together and asks if she can give Shannon's portrait of Murphy and the horses to Murphy's mother. She also informs Shannon of the ceili at Murphy's farm: a party with singing, dancing, and food. Shannon is upset when she realizes Murphy is throwing the ceili so that his family can meet her. She storms off to confront him but encounters Lottie and Maeve in the driveway. Instead of avoiding them Shannon states her case, earning Maeve's grudging respect. When she arrives at Murphy's he is in the middle of selling some sheep. They go inside to argue and she refuses to accept some expensive earrings he has gotten her as a gift, although she allows him to put them on her ears. They kiss passionately, confusing Shannon and strengthening her resolve to leave. Then Murphy pulls a stallion pin out of his pocket, meant as the clasp for a man's riding cloak. He claims he found the pin in the center of the dance when he was a boy, and dreamed of Shannon when he fell asleep with it. She goes, unsure why she is so upset at the thought of leaving him.

Chapter Twelve and Chapter Thirteen Analysis

In Chapter Twelve Shannon finally has the breakthrough realization that she can have sisters if she wants them. The suspicion, anger, and pain of the last year of her life melts away for her and she focuses on only the positive. With this emotional burden lifted she is again inspired to paint and is impressed with her own talent. She is shocked that Rogan is interested enough in her work to offer to represent her. This gives Shannon an entirely new outlook on her future. Coupled with Murphy's hard questions about the difference between ambition and happiness, Shannon is left considering her next step in life, and whether that should be becoming a painter or returning to New



York. Murphy's pointed questions discomfit her—he has an ability to cut her to the quick and make her think about what she really wants. She is still trying to avoid a relationship with him but is no longer in denial of their attraction.

In Chapter Thirteen Maggie and Shannon's antagonism is put to rest by a mutual understanding between the sisters: they are irrevocably intertwined in their personal lives, and they have undeniable respect for each other as artists. Maeve and Shannon's brief argument is a huge turning point for Maeve: while everyone expects her to be embittered and scornful, she instead takes Shannon's point and appears to let go of her anger. However, Shannon is holding on to her anger when she confronts Murphy. He disarms her with the earrings and the story about the clasp: again, Murphy hints at some sort of mystical relationship connecting him and Shannon. Shannon dismisses his claim but is shaken by their physical connection.



Chapter Fourteen and Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fourteen and Chapter Fifteen Summary

In Chapter Fourteen, Murphy tries to quell his emotions by exerting himself physically around the barn. Maggie tries to get Murphy to talk to her, but he successfully waves her off, claiming he needs time alone to think. He continues his work on the farm the next day until Grayson and Rogan arrive with a bottle of Jameson whiskey. Rogan relates to Murphy how Shannon put Maeve in her place, and that Shannon spends more and more time painting. They commiserate together about their respective women and proceed to get drunk, although the next morning Murphy feels no better about Shannon. They speak briefly at Blackthorne about how to interact with one another: Shannon wants him to feel free about coming and going, and he wants her to return to her walks in the fields. Tod calls while they are having strudel, telling Shannon the firm needs her back. She is reminded of all the responsibilities she has let go, and is overwhelmed by the enormity of the changes in her life. She cries in Murphy's arms, then asks if they had known each other during her mother's illness if he would have come with her despite her instructions that she wanted to be alone. He says yes, and she assures him she will be at the ceili.

In Chapter Fifteen, Shannon and her family attend the ceili. It is very crowded with food and music to spare. Shannon is uncomfortable about meeting Murphy's mother. When Maggie arrives, she gives Mrs. Brennan the painting Shannon made of Murphy. Mrs. Brennan loves the painting and Shannon meets Kate, Murphy's sister. Everyone is shocked when Maeve arrives at the party—her first in twenty years. Shannon makes the rounds meeting everyone at the ceili, and much of Murphy's family. She still explains that she and Murphy are just friends. However, when he waltzes with her, she reveals that she cannot stop thinking about him. He says that she must take the next step between them, then sings "Four Green Fields." Shannon is deeply moved by the song, and realizes that she must accept what exists between them, though she still has other responsibilities. They leave the party and go to the stone circle, stopping at the barn for blankets.

Chapter Fourteen and Chapter Fifteen Analysis

In Chapter Fourteen, Murphy is dealing with his conflicted emotions regarding Shannon. While he wants to respect her wishes and give her space, he knows he loves her and wants to be with her badly. He keeps himself busy and accepts Grayson and Rogan's gesture of friendship, but it doesn't really help him. Seeing her and being with her is the only thing that will really help him. Shannon has missed Murphy too, despite all her practicality, and finds herself opening up to him about how lost she feels with her life. It is a very intimate moment when he holds her as she cries—they can be there for each other emotionally, but when combined with the physical it is too much for Shannon. She feels overwhelmed by all her responsibilities in New York, and terrified that despite



getting everything she wanted—the right job, apartment, and more—she isn't really happy.

Chapter Fifteen is the first time Shannon truly accepts the special bond that exists between herself and Murphy. Though she knows she must still return to her old life, she sees him for the wonderful man he is during his song at the ceili. Amid strangers in Ireland, Shannon finds herself deeply moved, despite everything that has happened to her in the past weeks and everything she has discovered. She finally lets loose her feelings, many of which have been bottled up for weeks. This is a big turning point for Shannon: she is finally allowing herself to act on her feelings for Murphy, regardless of the consequences. Murphy takes her to "the dance," the stone circle, where he first saw a vision of Shannon. Foreshadowing that began so long ago is about to be fulfilled.



Chapter Sixteen and Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Sixteen and Chapter Seventeen Summary

In Chapter Sixteen, Murphy lays out blankets at the dance and removes his and Shannon's shoes. She nervously warns him to take their physical relationship for what it is and not read into things too much. She is incredibly physically attuned to him, and he is treating her carefully, wanting to give her his heart and vice versa. They seduce each other slowly and tenderly, and Shannon is surprised at the intensity of their physical connection. They leave just before dawn so Murphy can return to his family, and agree to see each other later. Shannon encounters Brianna in the kitchen and expresses how happy Murphy has made her, but still she worries about her life in New York and doesn't want to hurt him. She thanks Brianna for making her feel like she has a family, and helps with breakfast, claiming she's no longer a guest.

In Chapter Seventeen, Shannon attends Mass with her sisters and Murphy's family. Murphy's sister Kate expresses her surprise that he has apparently settled on Shannon, a Yankee. Shannon returns home with Maggie, Rogan, and Liam for tea after church. Rogan invites Shannon into his office while Maggie puts Liam down for a nap. She is surprised at its modernity, and when Rogan hands her contracts to look over for her paintings. He pushes for a show with Worldwide Galleries in September or October, which shocks Shannon. Leaving with the contracts, Shannon again wonders if her job in New York is what she really wants. She is invited by Alice to sit on Murphy's porch and they discuss Murphy's feelings for Shannon, though she is uncomfortable in the conversation. Alice reveals that she wanted Murphy to settle down with Maggie or Brie, but Murphy had seen Shannon in a dream and waited through the years for her to come. She asks Shannon to be careful with her son's heart and invites her to Sunday dinner with their family.

Chapter Sixteen and Chapter Seventeen Analysis

Chapter Sixteen is a huge step for Murphy and Shannon. Not only are they physically intimate for the first time, but they are also honest with one another about their feelings. Murphy is in love with Shannon and makes it known to her, and for the first time she accepts it. She still is unsure where Murphy fits in the grand scheme of her life, but she cannot deny herself any longer. Murphy is healing her soul, evident when she finally accepts Brianna as family and offers to help with breakfast. Shannon's newfound happiness is a result of her revelations with Murphy, and letting herself be loved by him no matter the consequences. She feels she has finally found a family and is on the road to being healed.

Shannon's resolve to return to New York is tested in Chapter Seventeen, not only through her attachment to Murphy but also through her burgeoning career as a painter. Though she is skeptical about Rogan's determination to sign her, she finds herself



wondering yet again if her life in New York is really what she wants. She is wary of the dream-come-true aspect of being signed as an artist, though her relationships with her newfound sisters seem to tie her more and more to Ireland. She is considering the option of staying, even if she hasn't admitted it to herself yet. The conversation with Mrs. Brennan cements some of the mysticism surrounding Murphy and his visions of Shannon: according to his own mother, he's been waiting for her for a long time. Mrs. Brennan likes Shannon but asks her to be careful with Murphy's heart, since it's obvious he is completely in love with her. Shannon appreciates her honesty but is terrified of hurting Murphy.



Chapter Eighteen and Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Eighteen and Chapter Nineteen Summary

In Chapter Eighteen, Murphy and Shannon slip away from Murphy's large family to be alone. He assures Shannon that he never had a physical relationship with either of her sisters. They have sex and Murphy has a vision of Shannon, witch-like and speaking Gaelic. She tells him that she is going to Dublin on Tuesday with Rogan, but they are unable to have the discussion about boundaries that she feels is so important. Maggie, Rogan, and Liam go to Dublin with Shannon as well, but Maggie's morning sickness is worsening. When they arrive in Dublin Shannon is impressed with the gorgeous house, and some of Maggie's art pieces. Maggie confronts Shannon, asking why she hasn't yet agreed to Rogan's deal, and Shannon reveals that she is not sure if she wants to continue painting, especially upon her return to New York. Maggie is angry about Shannon's attitude, and they fight.

In Chapter Nineteen, Shannon and Rogan discuss the specifics of her hesitations about signing the contract. She finds Maggie vomiting in the bathroom, her morning sickness back, and gives her some water. They bond over their control issues and Shannon shares stories about her mother and father with Maggie. The fight is over. Maggie accompanies Shannon to the photo shoot that Rogan has set up, and then they go shopping together. Shannon purchases a hammer dulcimer for Murphy, and Maggie knows Shannon is in love with him. Shannon decides to sign Rogan's contract, and a few hours later they are celebrating with champagne. She drunkenly calls Murphy and confesses her love to him.

Chapter Eighteen and Chapter Nineteen Analysis

Murphy's vision of Shannon speaking Gaelic is another clue to the mystical ties that bind them. Though it's very important to Shannon to have a conversation with him about the boundaries of their relationship, their passion overwhelms them and the conversation is delayed. Since Murphy's family is in town, the two have very little alone time. Shannon is surprised that Maggie and Liam are coming on the Dublin trip as well, but is able to see a little further into Rogan and the contrast between the husband and the businessman. The reason Shannon and Maggie fight is because Maggie cannot understand why Shannon is hesitating to sign Rogan's contract. For her, being a professional artist is a dream come true, and she cannot imagine anyone being given such opportunities turning them down. Shannon is still planning to return to New York and her job—she isn't yet ready to completely change her life around.

In Chapter Nineteen, Shannon and Maggie finally bury the hatchet on their contentious relationship. They recognize how similar they are and for the first time they each appreciate the similarities in the other. They are able to connect because they are both vulnerable: Maggie is crippled by her morning sickness, and Shannon is thrown off from



her meeting with Rogan. They finally bond and understand one another, and Maggie supports Shannon throughout the day, factoring in to her decision to sign the contract. Maggie also encourages Shannon's champagne binge, and for once Shannon enjoys feeling free of control. She is finally able to admit her love to Murphy as well—because of the champagne, she has let go of the control she usually clings to, and is able to be completely honest with him.



Chapter Twenty and Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty and Chapter Twenty-One Summary

In Chapter Twenty, Shannon and the others have returned to Blackthorne Cottage. Shannon asks Brianna if she can see the letters that Amanda and Tom Concannon wrote to each other, but before they can begin Maeve and Lottie arrive at the cottage. They offer to take care of Maggie and Rogan's summer home in France for a while, and Maggie is amazed. Murphy comes to get Shannon and as they leave for his house he confesses he missed her every minute. He loves the dulcimer and is awed that Shannon got it for him. They make love upstairs in his bedroom, inside for the first time, and Shannon tells him she loves him again. That night they delight in each other's company, but Shannon knows she must still speak with him about the future. Before falling asleep she dreams of her knight, clad in armor, riding away from her.

In Chapter Twenty-One, Murphy rises to tend the farm after only an hour's sleep. Shannon hears him and makes him breakfast, commenting on the fresh farm food and having trouble visualizing the animals being slaughtered. They begin talking about Tom, and Murphy relates how Tom was a father figure for him. After Murphy's first sexual experience Tom gave him advice about being a man and having responsibilities, and about finding the right woman. Shannon is moved by Murphy's account of Tom's kindness and asks him to drive her to Loop Head, where Amanda and Tom met. Shannon confesses to Murphy that she can't believe Tom was a good man because it makes her feel disloyal to Colin, and that she wishes her mother had never told her. They talk of their visions and Shannon gets upset because she is afraid of them. Later, she speaks with Gray and discovers he had similar visions and feelings while falling in love with Brianna.

Chapter Twenty and Chapter Twenty-One Analysis

In Chapter Twenty, Shannon and Maeve's antagonism is resolved once and for all when Maeve determines to go to France. Being confronted with Shannon has forced Maeve to confront things within herself, and as a result, Maggie and Brianna are shocked to see a new woman in their mother. Murphy is touched by Shannon's gift: the dulcimer is thoughtful and perfect for him. They cannot keep their hands off one another, and Murphy possessively makes her say she loves him over and over. Shannon knows she loves him but also knows the big talk about their relationship needs to happen soon, though upon returning from Dublin she is too distracted by his physical nearness.

In Chapter Twenty-One, Shannon is again confronted with the painful realization that her family will never be the same. She knows she loves Murphy, her sisters, and vice versa, but she cannot help but wish she had never been told of the change in her circumstances. It had been easier for her to think of Tom Concannon as a villain and adulterer: now with the new perspective that he was a tender-hearted, loving surrogate



father for Murphy, it's much harder for her to separate herself from the situation. She is uncomfortable that she looks like him and shares his blood. She and Murphy discuss the visions, which panics Shannon even more. She is afraid of their strangeness and her connection to them. It's important to note that Grayson admits he had visions of Brianna as well, solidifying the theory that the stones are somehow magically helping people find love.



Chapter Twenty-Two and Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Twenty-Two and Chapter Twenty-Three Summary

In Chapter Twenty-Two the whole family goes to the Worldwide Gallery in Clare, and Murphy tells her the family designed the property together. Three pieces of Shannon's art are displayed: "The Dance," her portrait of Brianna, and another painting. She is shocked to discover there was already an offer made on "The Dance," and Murphy tells her how hard it was to sell his foal. Shannon sees a piece of Maggie's called "Breath of Fire" and decides she wants to buy it and have it shipped to New York. To everyone's surprise, Rogan makes it her gift. On the way home Shannon can tell Murphy is upset. He leads her to the circle of stones and asks her to marry him. She says she cannot because of her life and career and flees back to Blackthorne, upset. Later Brianna checks on her and finds her painting. Shannon wildly finishes the painting in the night, sleeps through the day, and then asks Brianna to see the letters.

In Chapter Twenty-Three, Shannon reads the letters. She discovers that her mother made sacrifices for her, and never stopped loving Tom Concannon. Reading the letters puts Shannon more at peace, and Brianna states that by truly becoming sisters, they've completed the family. Upon returning to her room Shannon examines the painting, unable to believe it came out of her. She's painted her vision, the man on the white horse. She meets Murphy in the stone circle to give him the painting, and he's come to give her the brooch. He has also decided he will move to New York with her if that is what she wants. However, Shannon has had an epiphany about her life in New York, Murphy, and the visions. She has decided to stay in Ireland as a painter, and to marry him, but it means all the more that he was willing to give up his lands and farm to go with her.

Chapter Twenty-Two and Chapter Twenty-Three Analysis

Despite feeling loved and accepted by her family and Murphy, Shannon cannot let go of the life she built in New York. She is shocked that someone has already offered to buy "The Dance," and empowered. Murphy is upset when Shannon asks for "Breath of Fire" to be shipped to New York, and realizes that she still plans on leaving. Maggie is shocked when Rogan gives the sculpture to Shannon, and is happy to see the humanity shine through in her business-savvy husband. Murphy and Shannon's argument is huge: he cannot understand why she wouldn't stay where she can be loved and do what she loves, and she is frustrated that he cannot see that she would be giving up everything she worked so hard to achieve all her life. He is incredibly hurt and she is



very upset, and channels her emotion into the painting. She also finally decides it is time for her to see the letters—the objects that brought her to Ireland in the first place.

In Chapter Twenty-Three, Shannon finally understands what her mother did for her: gave up her family and the love of her life to make sure her unborn child had a chance. Amanda could have told Tom she was pregnant and run back to Ireland, but she did the honorable thing by staying away from the married man she had fallen for and forging her own life. The letters strike a chord with Shannon, leading her to take the painting to Murphy. She is shocked that he would sell his lands and move to New York for her, and convinced that she wants to stay in Ireland and marry him. The visions come into play yet again through Shannon's painting, and the scene she describes to Murphy between the going off to war man and the pregnant woman. The circle of stones is symbolic of a wedding ring: Murphy first saw Shannon here and knew he would marry her, and now he will. Finally, after all the heartache, Shannon is where she belongs.



Characters

Shannon Bodine

Shannon Bodine is the central character of the story. She is a smart, successful commercial artist living in New York whose world is shattered when she discovers that her family life has been a lie. The man she knew as her father and who raised her, Colin Bodine, is not her biological father. Her real biological father is Thomas Concannon, an Irishman with whom her mother had an affair years ago. This sends Shannon into a tailspin about her family life, and about who she really is. Her questions are compounded by the arrival of John Hobbs, sent by the Concannon family in search of Amanda Bodine after the discovery of her letters. After some consideration and soul-searching, Shannon decides to take Brianna up on her offer to visit her newly discovered sisters at Blackthorne Cottage in Ireland. Though she is deeply suspicious of Brianna's motives, she cannot resist the chance to find out who she really is. Shannon and Maggie clash immediately—they are both temperamental artists—but Shannon is surprised at Brianna's sincerity and kindness. When introduced to family friend Murphy Muldoon, Shannon notices him staring at her and writes him off as a country simpleton, but they are connected somehow. She slowly forms relationships with sisters Maggie and Brianna, letting herself heal from the painful news of her parentage and giving herself the time she deserves to deal with her mother's death. Though she finds Murphy's insistence that he is courting her and wants to marry her infuriating, she cannot deny the physical attraction she feels for him, and the odd dreams and memories she keeps having. Though she is stubborn and resistant to falling in love, Shannon eventually accepts her place in the Concannon family and with Murphy, and is healed by her love.

Murphy Muldoon

Murphy is an intelligent Irishman with a passion for horses and his life on his family farm. Though Shannon initially takes him for a backwoods farmer, Murphy is well-read, educated, and fairly wealthy. He is very close with the Concannon sisters Maggie and Brianna. Their lands neighbor each other and his family and theirs are intertwined. He is very close with the Concannon sisters and their husbands, and is a regular fixture at Blackthorn Cottage. Upon meeting Shannon, Murphy is dumbstruck by her beauty and by the recognition he feels when meeting her. Shannon is put off by his blatant interest in her, but once he regains his footing he surprises her by being well-spoken and charming. Murphy knows immediately he wants Shannon and reveals that he has dreamed of her since he was a boy, when he fell asleep in the Stone Circle. He knows that they are connected but he must convince Shannon they are meant for each other, so he decides that he must court her. Murphy is a strong, assertive, proud man who goes after what he wants in full. Murphy knows he wants to marry Shannon, but also realizes he must let her come to her own conclusions. He is a loyal, stoic individual who is aware of his own charm but does not abuse it. He knows his dreams about Shannon



mean something and is accepting of the Irish mysticism, but is still an incredibly practical man. Shannon is the love of his life, and he will do all in his power to keep her with him and in Ireland.

Brianna Thane

Brianna (Concannon) Thane is sister to Maggie and Shannon, and wife to Grayson. She runs Blackthorne Cottage and is the quintessential hostess. Brianna loves cooking and baking, and at first glance is the meek, quiet counterpart to Maggie's hotheadedness. Through previous circumstances she met and married Grayson Thane, with whom she has new baby Kayla. She has a strong sense of fairness, and wholeheartedly welcomes Shannon into Blackthorne Cottage and her life. Though perceived as the sweeter, nicer one of the sisters, Brianna is fiercely protective of those she loves, especially new daughter Kayla. Brianna had been protected as a child by older sister Maggie, who shielded her from Maeve Concannon's bad temper and misplaced rage at her unhappy marriage and irresponsible husband. She enjoys taking care of people—both her friends and family, and patrons of Blackthorne Cottage. Brianna is an excellent dancer and had circumstances in her childhood been different, she may have turned her talent into a career like Maggie. She is overall happy to have discovered her new sister, and to have come through the adversities of a rough childhood and losing a parent. Her relationship with Grayson fulfills her physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and their daughter Kayla is her joy.

Maggie Sweeney

Maggie (Concannon) Sweeney is the more forceful of the two sisters, known for her fiery temper and stubbornness as much as for her exquisite glasswork. Though she is the temperamental artist to Brianna's serene domesticity, Maggie is a loving, gentle mother to young Liam, her son with husband Rogan Sweeney. Maggie has butted heads with mother Maeve for years, protecting her sensitive sister Brianna by drawing Maeve's focus from her. Maggie's glass art is managed by husband Rogan, a shrewd businessman who can somehow balance her fierce attitude with his calmness. Maggie is skeptical of Shannon from the moment she hears of her existence, and openly hostile to her when she first arrives at Blackthorne Cottage. She is very protective of Murphy and thus doubly antagonistic to Shannon, first because of Amanda's relationship with Tom Concannon and then because of Shannon's relationship with Murphy. However, once Shannon and Maggie identify with each other as fellow artists, Maggie begins to understand her newfound sister on a deeper level. Gradually she accepts Shannon, as an artist, a person, and a sister. Though she is tough and temperamental, once gained as a friend Maggie is loyal and fiercely protective of those she loves.



Grayson Thane

Grayson is Brianna's husband and father to new baby Kayla. He is a famous, successful mystery writer and instant friend for Shannon.

Rogan Sweeney

Rogan is Maggie's husband and father to young toddler Liam. He is in the art business, and manages his famous wife's glass projects. Rogan offers Shannon a contract with Worldwide for her work.

Amanda Bodine

Amanda is Shannon's mother, wife to Colin Bodine and lover of Tom Concannon. She confesses to Shannon on her deathbed that Tom Concannon is her biological father, not Colin Bodine.

Colin Bodine

Colin Bodine is the man Amanda married upon her return to the USA, while pregnant with Tom Concannon's baby.

Thomas Concannon

Thomas Concannon is father to Maggie, Brianna, and Shannon, husband to Maeve, and lover of Amanda. He was a happy-go-lucky man trapped in a loveless marriage, with no sense for money or business.

Maeve Concannon

Maeve Concannon is Tom Concannon's wife and mother to Maggie and Brianna. Maeve is bitter from long years spent in an unhappy marriage, and she takes out her ill tempers on her children.

Liam

Liam is the young son of Maggie and Rogan. He loves cake.

Kayla

Kayla is the infant daughter of Brianna and Grayson.



Tod

Tod is Shannon's ex-boyfriend in New York. He also works at Ry-Tilghmanton.

John Hobbs

John Hobbs is Rogan's solicitor, sent to locate Amanda Bodine for Maggie and Brianna.

Alice Brennan

Alice Brennan is Murphy's mother.

Lottie

Lottie is Maeve Concannon's companion.

Con

Con is the family dog.



Objects/Places

Blackthorne Cottage

Blackthorne Cottage is a bed-and-breakfast in Clare County, Ireland, run by Brianna Thane. Shannon stays at Blackthorne for the duration of the story.

New York City

New York City is where Shannon has her professional life, perfect job, and ideal apartment.

Columbus

Columbus is where Amanda's home is located. Shannon must go there to settle her mother's estate.

The Stone Circle

The stone circle, or the dance, is a mystical ruin near Blackthorne Cottage that Shannon dreams about. It is also the site where Shannon and Murphy make love for the first time.

Murphy's House

Murphy's house borders the Concannon property and is a functioning farm.

The Broach

A mysterious object that Murphy hands to Shannon, she has seen this broach in her dreams.

Dublin

Shannon, Maggie, Rogan, and Liam go to Dublin so Shannon can look into signing Rogan's contract and visit the gallery.

The Fields

The fields border the Concannon lands and the Muldoon lands. Shannon often walks through them and enjoys watching Murphy work with his horses and on the farm.



Ry-Tilghmanton

Ry-Tilghmanton is the firm where Shannon works in New York as a high-paid commercial artist.

Maggie's Studio

Containing a furnace and various tools and glass, the studio is where Maggie creates her beautiful artistic glassworks.

The Hammer Dulcimer

Shannon purchases a hammer dulcimer for Murphy, just as she is accepting that she loves him.

Loop Head

Tom Concannon and Amanda met years earlier at Loop Head. Murphy drives Shannon to see it after their breakfast.

The Letters

Correspondence between Amanda and Tom, essentially love letters, are found by Maggie and Brianna years later.

Worldwide Gallery

Worldwide Gallery is Rogan's art business, where Maggie's work and Shannon's work are managed.



Themes

Truth/True Identity

Shannon goes into a tailspin after her mother confesses that Colin Bodine was not her biological father. She feels that her entire life has been a lie: through everything she fought so hard for, all the accomplishments she had made, all of professional success, she had been laboring under a misapprehension. These feelings are compounded when Amanda dies directly after her confession, and a few days later Shannon learns she has biological sisters in Ireland who have issued her an open invitation to come visit. Shannon struggles with the decision to go to Ireland: she is a person who likes to be completely in control, and so many changes in her life make her feel completely out of control. This is especially evident in her relationship with Murphy. Shannon quickly realizes she is attracted to Murphy, but refuses to allow herself to cultivate the relationship because of its impracticalities. Throughout her time in Ireland, Shannon begins to realize that she is not who she thought she was: the high-powered job, the perfect apartment, the meticulously planned and successful life haven't made her happy. Ireland, her sisters, and her love for Murphy transform Shannon into the person she is truly meant to be. She comes to realize that her identity as an artist is significant, and she had brushed the artistic side of herself off for many years to ensure that she would be professionally successful. In Ireland, Shannon is able to heal from the shattering news of her true parentage and the shock of losing her mother. She is able to accept her new role as sister to Maggie and Brianna, and accept Murphy's love as the most important thing in her life. Murphy discovers his true identity as well: he's been waiting long years for the women he has seen in his visions, and upon meeting Shannon he knows without a doubt that she is his other half.

Control

Shannon is an extremely organized and controlled person, which is part of the reason why it is so hard for her to accept Murphy's love and decide to stay in Ireland. She has had her life meticulously planned out, sensibly giving up her artistic side in favor of the money and security that comes with being a commercial artist. This all makes sense when she thinks she is Colin Bodine's daughter, but once she discovers that her real biological father is Tom Concannon, Shannon's perfectly organized life shatters. In Ireland, Shannon slowly lets go of the control she previously had to have: first by painting, then by accepting her sisters, then with Murphy. He exercises control with her as well, trying to respect her wishes while battling with his burgeoning love and intense physical attraction. Rogan is adept at controlling his business relationships, railroading Shannon into accepting the artist she truly is. Though Maggie and Shannon butt heads, they finally relate through a shared need for control, both as artists and as women. Maggie cannot stand to be seen in weakness, and Shannon finally understands that she and her half-sister are incredibly alike. The story concludes with Shannon finally letting go of the control she has clung to for so many years, and decides to stay in Ireland with



Murphy and her newfound family. In the end, it is the letting go that makes Shannon happiest.

Love

Love is undeniably the center of this story: lost love, true love, and the transformative powers of both. Shannon dearly loved her mother and the man she thought was her father, but when she is told that her parentage has been a lie, she is thrown into doubt about everything. She feels betrayed by people she loved, that she does not know who she is, and wonders how to include this new information in her life. Murphy on the other hand has plenty of love in his life, but his visions of Shannon have kept him from truly loving a woman in a romantic way. Shannon ends her relationship with Tod because she realizes she does not love him, and does not want to waste his time. Maggie and Brianna are examples of successful love matches: they each have loving, supporting husbands who complement their personality types. Shannon initially does not think Murphy is the man for her, but she cannot deny their strong physical attraction. Then she tries to write off their relationship as purely physical, but finally has to admit that she loves him. This completely complicates her life in very unforeseen ways, but she is happy with him and their connection fulfills her in ways that she did not know she needed. Ultimately, all of Shannon's hurt is healed by love: the love she shares with Murphy, the love she finds for her new sisters, and her rediscovered love of painting.

Family

Family is a central theme in the novel: Shannon's entire adventure starts out because of family related events. The tragic death of her mother devastates her, but the shocking news that Colin Bodine is not her father sends Shannon down a dark spiral of doubt. To have something so central to her life change so drastically in such a short amount of time is traumatizing for Shannon—especially since she is such a controlled, organized, practical person. It is just as difficult for Shannon to learn of the existence of Maggie and Brianna as it is for them to discover her. Maggie and Brianna move past their unhappy childhoods and have been able to find loving partners, and with those partners they have begun families on their own terms, with none of the bitterness that plagued their childhood homes.

Murphy's family is very close, despite the large number of close relations. When Shannon is accepted by both his mother and his sister it is a turning point for her: she knows she cares deeply for him, but it soothes her to have the family who loves him so much trust his judgement and accept her. He is surrounded by family, including Maggie and Brianna, and the chance to be part of the family is like a new beginning for Shannon. She has seemingly lost everything, which is why she clings so much to her job and life in New York, but by deciding to stay and make a life with Murphy she regains so much more.

Style

Point of View

The story is written in omniscient third person, meaning the author moves fluidly from character to character and can relate anyone's thoughts to the reader. This style is helpful for this novel because much of the drama takes place internally: the characters' thoughts are how the story is communicated to the reader. Especially with the love story between Shannon and Murphy, it's important that the reader understand and empathize with both characters. This point of view allows readers to form their own opinions about other characters in the novel as well, and not have their opinions colored by a narrow first-person perspective. This point of view also allows the author to share information with the reader that the characters do not necessarily know, and to easily move from exposition or description to dialogue. Especially during the dreamlike flashbacks, which can be confusing, it is helpful for the action to be described omnisciently. The most common characters the author uses to relay the story are Shannon and Murphy, but she does move through Brianna occasionally, and the beginning of the novel is from Amanda's perspective.

Setting

The bulk of the story takes place in Clare County, Ireland, in and around Blackthorne Cottage. Although New York is often mentioned, it is only briefly visited in the book as a location. Shannon resides in the USA at the beginning of the novel, initially visiting her mother in the hospital, then dealing with the estate in Columbus after Amanda's passing. A specific year isn't mentioned, so the reader assumes the story takes place in the present day (except for the flashbacks, which are obviously from a long-ago historical period now steeped in Irish folklore). Shannon, Rogan, Maggie, and Liam also spend a brief time in Dublin. At Blackthorne Cottage, there are a few separate places where the characters spend time, including the kitchen and the garden. The stone circle, or "the dance," is a place of great significance: it is the place where Murphy first had dreams of Shannon as a child, and Shannon begins to dream of it when she arrives in Ireland. It is also the place where Shannon and Murphy are intimate for the first time, changing both their lives and setting off a chain of events that will keep Shannon in Ireland. Much time is spent at Murphy's house as well, including the fields between Murphy's land and the Concannon's, and time spent working on Murphy's farm. The group also spends an evening at the town pub, and Shannon goes sightseeing for a day and has an experience with an old woman at an overlook.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is fairly straight-forward, with some added Irish and Gaelic words and phrases. The Irish characters speak with a certain cadence that reflects their



accents, differentiating themselves from Shannon's Americanisms. The most obvious differences are in their sentence structures and word usages. Shannon must be taught the meaning of various Gaelic words, which is helpful since the reader needs the information as well. The language in the novel is easily read and understood for the most part, except the spattering of Irish words and phrases that are present. Much of the language takes place within a character's mind, where the reader can access it due to the third person point of view. Through this writing style, the reader gets to know the characters' true personalities and intentions more from their own thoughts and less from their dialogue with others. Shannon's Americanisms make it even more significant when she begins to speak Gaelic in the stone circle with Murphy: she does not, under normal circumstances, speak Gaelic, therefore something is different during this interaction.

Structure

The novel is comprised of twenty-two chapters, each between ten and fifteen pages long, with a prologue and epilogue. The chapters tend to begin from one character's perspective, and sometimes the perspective switches back and forth depending on the action in the chapter. There are three distinct locations where the novel takes place: Columbus, New York, and Ireland/Blackthorne Cottage. These are differentiated by descriptive passages explaining the surroundings, and by tonal shifts within the text.

The novel begins with a bang when the main character, Shannon, must deal with the death of her mother and the knowledge of her true parentage all at once. This information set up the character's struggle for the rest of the story, the bulk of which takes place in Ireland. Once Shannon arrives at Blackthorne Cottage the descriptions lengthen, partially to convey the beauty of her surroundings and also to show that Shannon is taking the time to notice the gorgeous scenery. This is significant since she is a hard-hitting professional New Yorker, and ties in nicely with her rediscovered passion for painting.

The various dream sequences are an important part of the novel's structure as well: though at first the story seems to be firmly rooted in reality and circumstance, the reader quickly discovers that there is something mystical about the whole situation. This is especially applicable to Shannon and Murphy's love. Other than that, it is a pretty typical love story, with everything wrapped up neatly by the end and everyone happy, healed by love.



Quotes

"Amanda had been preparing for this moment for years, knowing it would come, wishing it wouldn't." p. 7

"The woman in the bed was a stranger now, just as she was a stranger to herself." p. 21

"No matter how wrong it may be of me, I wish to God she'd never found those letters." p. 31

"And her only wish, as she stood over the graves of the two people she had loved all her life, was that she had never learned the truth." p. 36

"If you could find it in your heart, I would very much like you to come and stay with me and mine a while." p. 48

"You have a face, Shannon, that plants itself right in the front of a man's mind, and blooms there." p. 89

"If she was not Shannon Bodine by birth, and the hot young commercial artist by design, who was she?" p.116

"It was a stunning thing for a man who had gone more than thirty years without feeling more than a passing interest in a woman to see one, once, and know without doubt that she was his fate." p. 132

"She hated that he was seeing in her things she'd refused to admit to herself." p. 149

"We're family, by the blood. It's up to us to decide if we can be family by the heart." p. 180

"She'd never painted that vividly before, or felt such a fierce emotional attachment to any of her work." p.182

"When a woman was an artist down to the bone, she recognized another." p. 200

"There was a quick and stunning thought through the haze of desire, that he was giving her no choice but to love him." p. 210

"Nothing soothed the soul like martyrdom." p. 219

"Every barrier she had built crumbled and fell, soundlessly, under the effortless beauty of the song." p. 240

"I'm not a guest here anymore." p. 256

"The right woman, when you find her, is more than sunlight." p. 323

"If you love with kindness, even when you can't love with permanence, you'll deserve the one who's waiting along that path for you." p. 323



Topics for Discussion

What is the difference between Shannon's job as a commercial artist and the paintings she does in Ireland? Why do you think Rogan is so interested in her work?

Discuss Shannon's life track before she is told about the Concannons. What does Shannon do for work? For fun? What is her plan for the future?

Why is Murphy so struck by Shannon when he first sees her? How does Shannon interpret his reaction?

Discuss the relationship between Shannon and Maggie. How are they similar? How are they different? Why do their personalities initially clash?

Do you think Amanda should have revealed the truth about Colin and Tom to Shannon? Why or why not?

How does Maeve change throughout the novel? Discuss three instances that illustrate her transition.

Why does Shannon struggle with the opportunity to become a professional artist? What issues in her life are holding her back?

Maggie is known as the "fiery" sister. How is her personality different from Brianna's? From Shannon's? From Maeve's?

The bulk of the novel takes place in Ireland. Were there any Irish traditions or words that were new to you? Are there any parallel traditions in your culture?

Discuss the role of fate in the novel. Murphy has known from a young age that he was meant to be with Shannon, but for much of the novel she dismisses his belief as mysticism. Do you believe in fate? Why or why not?