

the
LADY *of*
GALWAY
MANOR



Jennifer
Deibel

“A gem of a novel set in the Emerald Isle, *The Lady of Galway Manor* immerses you in a world of differing loyalties, histories, and expectations in 1920s Ireland. With a dash of danger and a soul-satisfying romance, Jennifer Deibel shines through the characters of Annabeth and Stephen, drawing them together through a faith forged and tested amid a backdrop of war. Well done!”

Laura Frantz, Christy Award–winning author
of *A Heart Adrift*

“An immersive read that left me feeling as though I had actually traveled to Ireland. Deibel is proving herself a master at taking readers from all over the world and throwing them into the culture and time of her stories. Pick up this book and be transported to 1920s Ireland, where folklore abounds, conflict is brimming, and love is in the air.”

Rachel Fordham, author of *A Lady in Attendance*

“What a superb visit to Ireland! Authentic, lively characters are spun to life in this tale based on the captivating legend of the Claddagh ring. Set during the Irish War of Independence, *The Lady of Galway Manor* showcases a fascinating piece of Irish history alongside the raw, internal struggles of two characters who are destined to be enemies—and a remarkable source of healing for each other. Deibel brings the tension to a heady climax like a seasoned pro, weaving in and out of danger and high stakes until the very end. Anyone wishing to visit Ireland needs to experience a book by this author. I could almost taste the sea air, and I didn’t want to leave!”

Joanna Davidson Politano, award-winning author
of *A Midnight Dance*

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a division of Baker Publishing Group
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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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For the Ultimate Author of Life:

MAY YOU BE HONORED

AND GLORIFIED

THROUGH THESE WORDS

For Hannah, Cailyn, and Isaac:

MAY YOU EACH KNOW, EXPERIENCE,

AND OFFER TRUE LOVE, LOYALTY,

AND FRIENDSHIP



CHAPTER 1

◆ Galway City, Ireland ◆
April 16, 1920

No one ever tells the truth about love. The stories and fables paint a glowing portrait of valiant acts and enduring romance. Love, it is said, is the most powerful force in the world.

Stephen Jennings knew better.

He watched the pair from behind the polished-glass case as they huddled together, giggling and fawning over one another. Stifling a groan, Stephen slid his hands into his pockets and leaned on the stool behind him. His fingers curled around the worn paper in his right pocket, its presence both a comfort and an annoyance.

“This one here, lad.” The gangly man gestured to the top shelf of the glass case. “We’ll take it.”

The rusty-haired lass swooned. “Oh, Charlie, do ya mean it? In earnest? Oh!” She squealed and threw her arms around her beau’s neck.

“Very good, sir.” Stephen removed the silver ring from the case and buffed it carefully with a polishing cloth. He started

with the hands that encircled a heart, then moved to the crown that topped it. How many times had he recounted the tale of the Claddagh? More than he cared to tally. With any luck, the lovebirds wouldn't ask him to regale them with the legend today. When the ring was sufficiently shined, he handed it to the gentleman.

Fingers trembling, the man took the ring. A foolish school-boy grin spread across his face. His lass clapped incessantly, still giggling. The man glanced at Stephen out of the corner of his eye, the all-too-familiar twinkle of delight mixed with mischief gleaming in it.

Oh no. No. Not here.

The man sank to one knee. "Maggie, you know I love you."

Maggie erupted into hysterics. Stephen gritted his teeth, jaw aching from the movement, and pasted on his best smile—though he feared it came across more as a grimace.

"You know I love you," Charlie repeated. "And I couldn't wait another second before askin' ye . . . will you marry me?"

Unintelligible sounds gurgled from Maggie's lips as she yanked him off the floor and kissed him hard, then held out a trembling hand.

"Is that . . . is that a yes?" The man's puppy dog expression rivaled that of any canine begging in the alleys.

Good heavens, man, are ye daft? Stephen fought the urge to roll his eyes, while ignoring his own painful memory that surfaced unbidden. *Not now.*

"Oh, aye, Charles! Yes! Yes! A thousand times, yes!"

"I love you!" they declared in unison.

Stephen had seen what "love" could do. Not even a mother's love—which is said to be the most powerful—could protect his own beloved mammy from leaving this world while bringing Stephen into it. And the glassy-eyed, giddy type of love the couple before him now displayed had certainly not served any

grander purpose than deluded self-fulfillment. How could they be so blind?

Charles slipped the ring on Maggie's finger and presented her hand to Stephen. "Is it on properly?"

Stephen cleared his throat. "Aye, that's right. The tip of the heart points in, toward her own heart, if she's spoken for." He looked between the two, who only had eyes for one another. "And it seems she is most certainly spoken for." Though he tried to avoid it, his voice sounded flatter than it should have. After all, the store needed this sale. He pasted another smile on his face. "*Comhghairdeas.*"

Charles looked at him now. "*Go raibh míle maith agat.* A million thanks." He handed the payment to Stephen and guided his bride-to-be out of the shop.

Stephen watched them leave, resisting the urge to rush and slam the door behind them. Bolt it. *Fools.*

"I can't do this anymore." He dropped his head. His knuckles were white, and the edges of the case dug into the heels of his hands. He slapped his palm onto the wood beam acting as the side of the case, anchoring it to the wall.

It was bad enough he was the only one who seemed to understand the truth of this ruse the world called love. But his family made their living peddling the idea and legend of it. It was salt in an ever-open wound. How could no one else see? Love was a myth. A crutch. And he couldn't be part of flogging the lie any longer. He rubbed his hand over his head, down his face, then pulled the worn piece of paper from his trouser pocket, unfolding it.

He read the words he already knew by heart.

Dear Mr. Jennings,

We are delighted to accept you as an apprentice at Sánchez Iron and Masonry Works. Your family's skill with design and

craftsmanship is well known. We look forward to adding your expertise to our repertoire. Once you have acquired the necessary funds to relocate, please let us know and we will make your lodgings ready.

*Sincerely,
Roman Sánchez*

Eyeing the door to the shop, Stephen could no longer deny the inevitable. *It's time.* His father would be devastated. But the thought of staying here, hocking jewelry, and reliving his family's legacy day in and day out was enough to bolster his courage to tell his father of his plans to leave. Any shards of regret that remained melted away like the wax in their jewelry molds, leaving only white-hot frustration to solidify in his heart.

Replacing the letter in his pocket, he turned to search for Seamus Jennings. But before he could take a step, his father entered from the back door of the showroom, the faint scent of lavender wafting in his wake. And he wasn't alone.

"Ah, Stephen, there's a good lad. I've someone I want you to meet." Seamus's eyes carried more spark than usual, and there was a bounce in his step Stephen hadn't seen in ages.

Stephen turned his attention to his father's guest. Standing arm in arm with his father was a strikingly beautiful woman. Her golden hair twisted on top of her head in an intricate weave of braids and coils before falling around her shoulders in soft curls. Blue eyes pinned Stephen where he stood, and soft dimples accented her rosy cheeks as she smiled at him. She was beautiful, aye, but something about her seemed . . . amiss. Her dress, too fine. Her posture, too straight. He'd been around long enough to know a beautiful face and beguiling smile meant nothing. The most striking face can hide the blackest heart. What was this lass's secret? Still, Stephen's heart thudded unnaturally against

his chest. He told himself it was due to the uncertainty of her presence in the shop and not her allure.

“Stephen, my boy, this is Lady Annabeth De Lacy.” Seamus beamed.

Stephen shook himself from his thoughts and turned his eyes sharply to his father. “Lady? De Lacy?” Stephen’s voice rose an octave. “As in—”

“How do you do?” Annabeth interrupted him and extended her left hand, fingers daintily dangling down.

Stephen looked from Annabeth to his father and back. “De Lacy?” He practically spat the name out.

“That’s right,” she continued, hand still extended, and lifted her chin. “My father, Lord De Lacy, is the new landlord for this parish.” She cleared her throat and gave her hand a slight twitch, her unblinking eyes boring into Stephen’s with expectation. Nae, demand.

Seamus continued to beam. When Stephen failed to respond, Seamus frowned and jerked his head slightly in the direction of the woman. “Where’re your manners, lad?”

Making no attempt to mask his irritation at his father bringing a British courtier into the shop, Stephen stepped forward, grasped her fingertips, and waggled her hand briefly before dropping his arm back to his side. “Miss.” He nodded curtly. “Father? A word?”

“*Lady Annabeth is to be your apprentice,*” Seamus announced, so proud the buttons practically popped off his waistcoat.

“Appren— My what?”

“Just what I said, lad. Lady Annabeth here is to be your apprentice. You’re to teach her the way of things. Ensure she knows the legend of the Claddagh, show her how to make the rings. She’s quite an accomplished artist.” He winked at Annabeth, and she rewarded him with a pearly white grin.

Nodding at Seamus, the woman said, “Please, call me Anna.”

Oh, now she wants to be informal? Not likely. Stephen glanced at her from the corner of his eye but kept his attention fixed on his father.

An apprentice? What was the old man thinking? Sure, it could work to Stephen's advantage if there were someone capable of staying on when he left. But a woman? And a *British* woman no less? Had his father forgotten they were in Galway? Having a woman like this in the shop could only serve to hurt business, not help it. Unless they wished to cater only to the blow-ins and invaders from across the Channel. Despite his own frustrations, Stephen would sooner die than see that happen. He crossed his arms over his chest, cleared his throat, and repeated himself, this time through gritted teeth. "Father. A word!"

"Och!" Seamus waved a dismissive hand then patted Annabeth's arm. "I'll only be a wee minute, lass. Take a look around the shop, so."

She offered him a polite, but tight-lipped smile and took a half step back.

Father and son stepped to the front of the shop, as out of earshot of their new guest as possible. "What's the meaning of this?" Stephen hissed.

"Now, now. It's not as bad as all that." A hint of resignation flickered in the old man's eye.

"Is that so?" Stephen's jaw ached.

Seamus pressed his lips into a thin line and shrugged.

Stephen scoffed. "And what about Tommy, huh? After what they—"

Seamus lifted a silent hand. He stared hard into his son's eyes for a long moment before answering. "No matter what has happened in the past, this is our present right now. You're going to do this." He paused. "I need you to do this."

Stephen's heart hitched at the look in his auld man's eye. But then he glanced back at the woman invading their shop and ire

burned anew in his chest. “A British lady?” He ran his hand down his face. “The landlord’s *daughter*? Father, have you gone mad?”

“Mad? Have you seen the lass?” He chuckled and winked at Stephen.

Oh, no you don't. Stephen wasn't going to let his father use humor to diffuse this situation. Not this time. Not with this. “Be serious, man!”

Seamus's smile faded again, and he closed the small distance between them. Lowering his voice further, he said, “Serious, ye say? How's this for serious? The British government has sent us lowly Irishmen a new landlord.” Seamus glanced over his shoulder then continued, “I don't know if ye'd noticed, but the last one they sent us was a real saint.” Sarcasm laced the old man's voice.

Stephen released a puffed laugh. He couldn't deny the previous landlord had been a tyrant. “True.”

“Well, that shiny new landlord—who we have no idea whether he will be benevolent or worse than the last fella—has requested we apprentice his daughter. It's a mite out of the ordinary, I'll grant you, but I'm not quite in the mood to cross the Brits at this stage.” Footsteps punctuated his point as a unit of soldiers marched past the shop. Whether Irish or British troops was impossible to tell.

Stephen sighed as an unwelcome shiver traversed his spine. He crossed his arms over his chest to stave it. The auld codger had a point, much as he hated to admit it. “Fine, I'll grant you, we need to stay in their good graces, if they even have any. But why me? The pair of ye seem to get on just fine. Why can't ya teach her yerself?”

“In case ya haven't noticed, lad, I'm no spring chicken.” He stretched his arms out to accentuate his point. “I'm gettin' too auld to even be running the shop, let alone teachin' another wee one. I was going to talk to ya about it anyway, but when Lord

De Lacy approached me last week, it was mere confirmation. It's time."

"Time?" Stephen's brow furrowed. "For what?"

Seamus's hand worked the back of his neck, and he stared at the ground for an uncomfortable stretch of minutes. Finally, he cleared his throat and said, "For you to take over. You're a better jewelry smith than I ever was, and you've a smart head for business on yer shoulders. That last bout with the fever I had over the winter is what clinched it. The shop . . . she's yours." Seamus pulled a handkerchief from his waistcoat pocket and swiped at his eyes. "Come now, lad, and properly meet your apprentice."