



The IRISH
Matchmaker

A NOVEL

JENNIFER DEIBEL

Praise for *The Maid of Ballymacool*

“Deibel’s update on the Cinderella story features sympathetic, three-dimensional characters who are easy to root for as they find their way to one another in this page-turning plot.”

Publishers Weekly

“Deibel once again inventively draws on Ireland’s fascinating history as inspiration for a compassionate and compelling, sweet romance with a Celtic Cinderella-like flavor.”

Booklist

“Jennifer Deibel has done it again with *The Maid of Ballymacool*, a hopeful historical romance novel about unrelenting faith and new beginnings with just a pinch of mystery.”

BookPage

“*The Maid of Ballymacool* by Jennifer Deibel is an emotion-driven novel that will keep you reading until the last page. The story was brilliant and moving.”

Interviews & Reviews

Praise for *The Lady of Galway Manor*

“Deibel beautifully recreates Galway’s sights and sounds.”

BookPage starred review

“Deibel has found her rhythm, delivering a classic boy-meets-girl story that packs a powerful punch and avoids preachiness. The historical tale will ring true to readers looking to examine their own biases.”

Library Journal starred review

“An inspirational romance, this superb novel is also an exciting historical journey. Both romance and Irish history fans will love this book.”

Historical Novel Society

Praise for *A Dance in Donegal*

“Deibel’s descriptions of Ireland’s landscape, enticing cuisine, sonorous language, and vibrant culture converge to form a spectacular background for the story.”

BookPage starred review

“Deibel’s exemplarily executed debut is a touching tale of love and forgiveness that also beautifully captures the warmth and magic of 1920s Ireland.”

Booklist

“Heartbreaking, tragic, and full of surprises, this novel was the most engaging one I have read.”

Urban Lit Magazine

Books by Jennifer Deibel

A Dance in Donegal
The Lady of Galway Manor
The Maid of Ballymacool
The Irish Matchmaker

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For Jehovah Jireh, my Provider—
thank You for all You've done in my life.
May this offering bring You glory and honor.

To Matt and Brittany Verlei—
may God's abundant provision cover
your hearts, minds, and homes.

Glossary of Terms

- abair liom*—[AH-burr LUHM]—tell me
Agus tú fein—[AH-gus TOO HAYN]—And yourself?
amadán—[AH-muh-dahn]—idiot
an aimsir—[AHN AM-shurr]—the weather
an-bhlasta—[AHN VLAH-stuh]—very delicious/tasty
anocht—[uh-NOCKT]—tonight
anois—[uh-NISH]—now
anseo—[ihn-SHAW]—here
ar m'fhocal—[AIR muh-OH-kuhl]—on my word; I swear
babai—[BAH-bee]—baby; young one
bábóg—[BAH-bohg]—doll/dolly
bándearg—[BAHN-dair-ohg]—pink
bean an tí—[BAN uhn TEE]—woman of the house
Bíobla—[BEEB-luh]—Bible
bó—[BOE]—cow
bodhrán—[BOW-rah]—a traditional Irish drum
braces—the Irish terminology for suspenders

- buartha faoi*—[BOOR-huh FWEE]—worried about
“*Caillaich an Airgid*”—[KAH-lyahk uhn EHD-ih-guhd]—a traditional Irish folk song. The title literally translates to “The Hag with the Money.”
- cinnnte*—[KINN-chuh]—certainly/indeed/of course
- comhghairdeas*—[kuh-GARR-juh-huss]—congratulations
- conas atá tú*—[KOH-nuhs ah-TAH TOO]—How are you (in the Munster dialect)
- craic*—[CRACK]—fun; good times; fellowship
- craiceáilte*—[CRACK-ahl-chuh]—crazy
- culchie*—[KUHL-chee]—slang for one who lives in a rural setting; country bumpkin
- cupán tae*—[KUP-ahn TAY]—cup of tea
- Daideo* —[DAH-jo]—Grandfather
- Daidí*—[DAH-dee]—Daddy/Dad
- Dáiríre*—[dah-REE-ruh]—really?/seriously?
- Dia duit* [JEE-uh DITCH]—a traditional greeting; literally “God to you/be with you”
- Dia duit, a mhac*—[JEE-uh DITCH uh WAHK]—God to you/be with you, son
- Dia is Muire Dhuit*—[JEE-uh iss MUH-ruh GWIT]—response to “Dia duit”; literally “God and Mary to you”
- Donal Óg*—[DO-null OWG]—Young Donal/Donal Junior
- Éirinn*—[AY-rinn]—Ireland
- féile*—[FAY-luh]—festival
- feis*—[FEHSH]—festival
- go maith*—[guh MAH]—good; I’m well
- Go n-éirí an bóthar leat*—[GUH NYE-dee UHN BOH-hurr]

LAHT]—good luck; directly translates, “may the road rise to meet you,” meaning may your journey/work be easy.
Go riabh míle maith agat—[GO ROW MEE-luh MAH uh-GUT]—Thanks a million
iontach—[EEN-tahk]—excellent; wonderful
Íosa Críost—[EE-suh KREEST]—Jesus Christ
Maidín mhaith, a stóir—[MAH-jeen WAH uh SHTOR]—
Good morning, love
maith an cailín—[MAH uhn KAH-leen]—good girl/good woman
mar dhea—[MAR YAH]—yeah, right
m’dhada—[muh YAH-juh]—my dad
midgie—[MIJ-ee]—a small gnat-like insect with a painful bite
mo grá geal—[muh GRAH GEEYAL]—love of my life/my
bright love
Moladh Dé—[MUHLL-oo JAY]—Praise be to God
muise—[MIH-shuh]—oh my; dear, dear
na ba—[NUH BAH]—the cows
nach bhfuil—[NAHK WILL]—doesn’t it?
ná dean é sin—[NAH JANN SHINN]—don’t do that
níl ann ach amaidí—[NEEL AHN ACK AH-muh-jee]—it’s
simply ridiculous
oíche mhaith, gach duine—[EE-huh WAH GACK DINN-uh]—
Good night, everyone
o mo léan—[OH muh-LAN]—oh, dear me
peata—[PA-tuh]—pet; a term of endearment
pionta uisce, le do thoil—[PIHN-tuh ISH-kuh, LEH duh
hull]—pint of water, please.
Sasana—[SAH-suh-nah]—England
seafóid—[SHAH-foyj]—nonsense

seisún—[SEH-shyoon]—an informal gathering involving traditional Irish music

sióg—[SHEE-ohg]—fairy

slán—[SLAHN]—goodbye to you/health to you

slán abhaile—[SLAHN uh-WAH-leh]—safe home/get home safely

slán leat—[SLAHN LAHT]—a traditional parting; “health and safety be with you”

stone—a unit of weight equal to fourteen pounds

uilleann pipes—[UHL-uhn PIPES]— the Irish form of bagpipes, played by pumping a bag using one’s elbow rather than blowing into a mouthpiece

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Lisdoonvarna, County Clare, Ireland
August 25, 1905

The warning came far too late, and before Donal Bunratty could register what his daughter was saying, he was slammed into with the force of a locomotive. Arms akimbo, he craned his neck to anchor himself in space while his feet flew up and over his head. The rustic odor of wet hide assaulted his senses, and Donal groaned and rolled onto his back. Wiping the muck from his eyes, he looked up to find *Bó* standing over him, huffing.

Donal grunted. “Hallo, auld man.”

Bó sniffed Donal’s hair and forehead and then, as if deciding his master was alright, he snorted heavily and trotted off away from the barn, the deep timbre of his hearty *moo* trailing after him.

Donal rested on his elbow and turned to see where the bull was headed. A chorus of lowing filled the bog. The whole herd of cattle now roamed as free as jaybirds. Flopping back down, Donal studied the heavy slate clouds mixing ominously overhead as he seemed to sink deeper into the spongy turf. The

rain had passed—for the moment. But it wouldn't be long in returning.

“*Daidi!*” Sara splish-splashed toward him in her wellies. “Sorry 'bout that, Da. I couldn't latch the gate. It's rusted again.”

Suppressing a sigh, Donal sat and squinted up at his daughter. Her sleek brown hair clung in wet strands to her cheeks, which held the rosy glow of childhood. She looked off in the distance—toward the herd, no doubt—and in the waning evening light, and from that angle, she looked just like her mother. He swallowed hard and lowered his gaze. Nearly six years later and he still missed his wife, though the grief was more of a distant foggy ache than the harsh knife to his heart it had once been.

He stretched his hand out to his daughter. “Help an auld man up, will ya?”

She giggled and clasped his forearm with both her hands, then tugged with all her might, her feet slipping on the puddled grass. But at last, she managed to help him up. “C'mon, Da, they're gettin' away!” Off she took like a flash toward the errant cattle.

Donal followed suit, though with much slower, heavier steps than his daughter. The next hour played out like a comedy of errors. The pair managed to wrangle the cows into a group fairly easily, but getting them back to the barn was another thing entirely. If father and daughter both walked behind the animals, some at the front would wander off to investigate an inviting shrub or thistle. But if they both walked in front, the group would break up, and the rounding up would start all over again. The fleeting thought that perhaps he should've gotten a dog after all skittered through Donal's mind, but he shook it free. They could barely feed themselves and keep up with the livestock, as it was. At last, Donal and Sara fell into a sort of

rotating dance, circling around the mob of stock—that kept the animals in their places. Confused, but in their places.

As they approached the barn, the skies broke open, and rain lashed down even heavier than before. Tugging his flatcap lower over his eyes, Donal squinted through the deluge.

“Go open the door!” he called.

Sara, her hands shielding her forehead like a shelf, hurried to do as she’d been told.

The wind picked up and whipped Donal’s coattails and yanked Sara’s hair in every direction. He shouted to the girl again, gesturing wildly in case the storm distorted his words. “Now, stand there! No, no, in the open space. Yes, that’s it!”

It took another feat of engineering, and a large dram of luck, to get the excited cattle back where they belonged. Once they wrangled the door closed, Donal and Sara efforted to get the latch to catch.

“We need a new one,” Sara shouted over the maelstrom.

Donal nodded, water sluicing down the brim of his hat like Ennistymon Cascades. “This’ll have to do for tonight.” The hasp was secured, but Sara looked at him, her eyes questioning, doubting. “’Twill hold for the night, at least.”

It has to. The uninvited thought invaded Donal’s mind despite his efforts to stave it off. He refused to entertain any idea of what would happen should they lose the livelihood of their stock.

Back in the cottage, Sara changed quickly and saw to stoking the fire. Donal lumbered into his bedroom, closed the door, and crossed to the window. Pressing his palms to the sill, he rested his forehead against the cold glass as the storm raged on outside. Still breathless from their pursuits, he watched as the panes fogged and cleared, fogged and cleared. He’d always presumed the farming tasks would get easier as Sara grew and her abilities to help

grew with her. Yet, for some reason, it seemed the difficulty was only increasing—compounding exponentially alongside Sara’s growth . . . and the Irish pound’s ever-shrinking reach.

The thud of iron against iron drew his attention back to the kitchen. By the sounds of it, Sara was starting on their tea. Not yet nine years old and already the woman of the house. It shouldn’t be this way. And yet it was all they’d known—it certainly felt that way, at least. The three short years they’d shared as a family of three seemed nothing more than a daydream these days. This farm, this land, this life was all Donal had ever wanted as a lad. And now, if something didn’t change, he would have to give it all up. The thought churned his stomach.



Catriona Daly leaned closer to the looking glass. Touching her fingertip to the corners of her eyes, she traced the fine lines making their home there. The frown that slid onto her face only deepened the creases, and she scoffed. Flapping her hand at her reflection, she straightened and then smoothed her hair. Neither blond nor brown, it reminded her of the color of water rushing from the bog after a heavy rain.

The haunting whine of a single fiddle note seeped up through the floorboards of the flat she shared with her father on the second floor of the Imperial Hotel. It was followed by the hollow groan of the *uilleann pipes* and the shrill call of a tin whistle. The *seisún* would be starting soon and Father would be looking for her.

Tightening her apron around her slightly-too-thick waist, she gave herself one more look in the mirror. Too old to be young, too young to be old, and having inherited her mother’s “big bones,” ’twas no wonder she remained single. She grimaced. Lisdoonvarna’s unmatched matchmaker. That ought to draw confidence from her customers this year.

Her eyes slid closed, and she steadied herself with a breath before bounding down the steps.

She burst around the corner into the Imperial Pub, which was nestled on the ground floor of the hotel, then tossed her arms with a flourish and let out a laugh that failed to reach her heart. “What’s the *craic* now, lads?”

“Caty!” the musicians called over the din of their warm-up.

Catriona made her way to the bar where Peadar polished the wood to a high shine. “The usual, Caty?”

“Aye.” She nodded, her eyes scanning the dark, wood-paneled interior. Reflections from hurricane lanterns hung around the room danced on the tabletops, while the soft glow from the turf fire in the hearth pooled in a golden puddle on the floor. Every table was clean and equipped with no fewer than four chairs. “Expectin’ a mob, are ya’?” she asked. “The festival doesn’t start for another week.”

Peadar shrugged as he set a steaming pot of tea in front of her, alongside a pint of water. “Seems some folk are startin’ early.”

Catriona poured the molten liquid into her cup, then added a splash of milk as she watched the door. She rolled around the idea of another matchmaking season in which their sleepy little village overflowed with interesting new people from all over. Hope fluttered in her weary soul at the thought. Maybe this would be the year. When someone would miraculously swoop in, ignore all the other perfectly coiffed merrymakers, and whisk her away to a life she could only ever dream of. One of excitement and city life that would take her far away from cattle and bogs and the never-ending loneliness that permeated every nook and cranny of her life in Lisdoonvarna. She lived in the famed home of romance, where people found love waiting around every corner—often orchestrated by Catriona herself.

For everyone else, this village represented all their hopes and dreams of finding their one true love. For Catriona Daly, it was a reminder of all she failed to be.

Scooping up her tea service and water, she shuffled to the side room—not much bigger than a wee closet—that served as office for her and her father. Catriona scooted to the center of the bench that filled the rounded bay window. As she settled in for the long evening ahead and arranged her things on the table just so, a ruckus erupted at the main door. She didn't even need to raise her head. Jimmy Daly's chaos surrounded him like a thundering cloud, and Catriona would recognize its unique cadence anywhere.

"Ah, there she is." Her father's broad smile appeared around the corner. His graying hair stood out in all directions from the strengthening near-autumn wind. Though, in truth, it mattered not if the wind blew. The man's hair had a mind of its own. "The finest matchmaker woman in the whole of *Éireann*."

Catriona scoffed. "Oh, Da."

He scurried around and plopped onto the bench next to her, his well-worn woolen jumper scratching at her elbow. 'Twas true, her father carried an air of utter disarray about him. To look at the man, you'd think he'd lost his marbles long ago, along with any information or documents of any import. But the truth was, Jimmy Daly had a mind like a steel trap and could recall every detail of every deal he'd ever made—whether land, livestock, or love. Indeed, some deals involved all three! Catriona had no idea how he did it. She had to settle for keeping detailed notes when working with a brand-new client. Though she could hold more in her memory banks if it was someone with whom she was already well acquainted.

"Ya all set for *anocht*?" he asked, his bushy brows lifted.

Catriona nodded. "Aye, though I must duck out around ten."

“Ten?” His voice cracked. “Ye do realize ’tis a Friday night in Lisdoonvarna? There’ll be plenty o’ matchmaking work to be done well into the wee hours.”

“Yes, Da, I know.” For the locals, matchmaking took place all year long. She pulled out the small notebook she carried in her skirt pocket and flipped through it. “But I’ve the plucking of the gander with the O’Malleys and the Duncans.”

He inhaled sharply. “That’s right, that’s right.” He tapped his pointer finger to his temple. “The auld trap’s startin’ to slip a mite.”

“It is not.” Catriona slapped his arm playfully, shaking her head. “Ya just only have enough room in there for yer own deals, that’s all.”

Jimmy’s features softened, and he leaned over and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “Ye’re a good daughter, Caty. The best.” Movement in the main room caught his eye, and he shimmied off the bench. “There’s Black-eyed Jack. He’s after me to make him a match.”

Catriona followed her father’s gaze to Jack. At over six feet tall and nearly sixty years old, Black-eyed Jack had been looking for a wife for ages. None of their matches ever seemed to work for him though. This one was too tall, that one too fat, this one not fat enough. Catriona suspected the real fault lay with Jack and his brusque, heavy-handed ways. But that didn’t stop her father. He was bound and determined that there was a love out there for everyone.

She flapped her hand in Jack’s direction. “Go, go.” As she watched her father approach the giant of a man, her smile faded. Feigning interest in her tea, she couldn’t help thinking that Jack wasn’t the only one who was beginning to doubt her father’s credo of true love waiting for all.