



The Canal Bridge: A Novel of Ireland, Love, and the First World War

Tom Phelan

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In 1913, before there is a rumor of war in Europe, two lifelong friends from Ballyrannel in the Irish midlands, Matthias “Matt” Wrenn and Con Hatchel, decide to see the world at the expense of the king of England and join the British army. A year later, while en route to India, their troop ship is recalled and they find themselves in the slaughterhouse that was World War I. As stretcher bearers, the two men witness the horrors of the battlefield and the waste of human life at the Somme, Ypres, and Passchendaele. Meanwhile, back home in Ireland, Con’s sister and Matt’s lover, Kitty Hatchel, yearns for their safe return and reminds them of their carefree childhood on the banks of the local canal, as well as their hopes for the future.

Brilliantly and movingly narrated as a chorus of voices from the community—Matt, Con, Kitty, and others—*The Canal Bridge* tells the story of how the young men take Ballyrannel to war with them, and the many ways they bring the war’s devastation home. At war’s end, the Ireland the friends left in 1913 no longer exists, for the Rising against the British in 1916 has changed everything. In a land now riven with sectarian tensions and mounting bloodshed unfolds the love story of Matt and Kitty.

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