

## Chapter 1: DINNY AND KATIE

**D**inny O'Shaughnessy was the laziest man in all of County Mayo, and the laziest by far in Castlebar, where he lived.

His favourite sport was wrestling the bed linens. His mother always told him, 'Dinny, lad, you've got dropsy and heart trouble!' When he asked, 'What do you mean, Mammy?' she would reply, 'You drop into your bed, and haven't the heart to get out!'

She worried. She fretted. It changed Dinny not a bit. He would simply yawn, sigh and turn over in his bed.



At the ripe old age of eighteen, Dinny roused himself just long enough to ask for the hand of ‘Katie darlin’’, the only daughter of Sheila and Conn Donnahey. Conn, now a widower, lived in a snug, cosy cottage a little way down the glen. Katie was a hard worker. As a schoolgirl, she had won first prize for spelling at the village school.

The villagers were stunned when she agreed to wed him.

‘What is a clever girl like Katie doing wedding a lout like Dinny O’Shaughnessy?’ bellowed Deaf Peter down at the Shamrock Arms, the village pub.

‘It’ll be the end of poor Katie. She’ll be slavin’ her life long,’ screeched Mad Maura Connolly over her backyard fence.

‘Tis a blessed thing that my poor Sheila has gone to her reward, God rest her soul!’

muttered Conn Donnahey, as he tended his sheep on the hills. ‘Tis a sad, sad day we’ve come to that my only daughter marries the likes of Dinny O’Shaughnessy. No good will come of it!’

Dinny’s mum knew otherwise. He had lived with her his whole life long, and she knew that his wit could lighten the darkest of days. Not a single day went by that he didn’t tickle her funny bone with a joke or a riddle that was making the rounds in the pub. She knew, too, that Dinny was a great lover. He loved his family more than life itself. He might not be the most ambitious lad, but he would make a good husband.

Besides, it was love, and there was no stopping it. On a clear summer’s day, all the villagers of Castlebar turned out to wish them well, as Katie darlin’ Donnahey and Dinny

O'Shaughnessy pledged their life and their love to each other in the parish church of Saint Brendan. It may have been a sign of things to come that Dinny was late for the service, that he yawned halfway through the marriage vows, and that he had forgotten to buy a ring for his bride.

They moved into the Donnahey cottage with Katie's father.

Conn Donnahey gave his son-in-law five sheep as a wedding present, and agreed to share grazing rights on his land with the lad. Dinny discovered that he loved tending sheep. He could lay out under the trees all day, chewing on a blade of grass, and doze to his heart's content.

Katie gave birth to five children in their first five years together. Three of them were boys, and Katie named them Michael,

Shamie and Jeremiah (Dinny found that trying to think of names was too much like work, so he left it to his wife). The other two children were girls of course, and Katie named them Rosaleen and Mary Kate. As they grew, the boys took after their father, loving nothing better than to lounge around all day. The girls were images of their mother, keeping the cottage clean and neat, keeping the family's clothes washed and pressed, and tending the garden in season.

Although she loved her family dearly, Katie was tired out. She was weary and looked twenty times her age.

'Kick him out, a stór,' her father would urge her. 'The cottage will be yours when I pass. There's no future with him. He's a do-nothing. Look at the lads. They will grow to be just like him. Is that what you want,

daughter of mine? Your sainted mother, Lord have mercy on her soul, would be turning in her grave if she could see you now.'

'But I love him, Da, and he loves me,' was all Katie would answer, and nobody can argue with love.

Time drifted by slowly. The children grew bigger and hungrier, Katie grew more exhausted and Dinny, if anything, grew ever more lazy. Nothing changed, and it seemed that nothing ever would.

