

Whispering Tree of the Forest

Dorae Shae

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In the touching historical romance Whispering Tree of the Forest, a woman faces her demons in a new land and finds true love.

In Dorae Shae's moving historical novel *Whispering Tree of the Forest*, two immigrants learn about justice, forgiveness, and courage while they're on the run.

Upon boarding a cargo ship that'll take him from Ireland to America, Clancy finds himself drawn to Rowan, a beautiful yet distant young woman. Unlike Clancy, Rowan isn't leaving in hopes of prosperity: she's been banished from her village after revealing that its priest raped and impregnated her, and is expected to marry a missionary, Isiah, to save her soul.

When Rowan has a miscarriage, it seems that fate has granted her a reprieve: she no longer has to marry a stranger. But Isiah refuses to take no for an answer. With Clancy beside her, Rowan escapes, though Isiah pursues them across America. Their only hope of survival, and of holding onto the love that has grown between them, is to collaborate with the authorities to put both Isiah and the priest from Rowan's village behind bars.

Rowan and Clancy's world is ethereal, almost otherworldly; both their sea voyage and Clancy's inherited land in the forests of West Virginia are described in terms that draw on Irish folklore, making them seem timeless. This confuses the period somewhat. The book is set a few years after World War II, and involves era technology, but early on it has an eighteenth-century sensibility. This changes when Luc, a detective, appears: the subsequent race to apprehend and convict Isiah pushes the novel into the twentieth century.

Among the secondary characters, Luc stands out because of his intelligence, wit, and charisma; he's compelling as he leads the investigation into Rowan's tormentors, sometimes outshining even the leads. Still, Rowan and Clancy's love story is engaging. Their loneliness dissipates as they find comfort in each other. Theirs is a happy partnership despite all that they face, with little internal conflict. Their attraction and compatibility are detailed in tangible terms.

Rowan's own story is interesting and satisfying, and her pursuit of justice, despite the fear and trauma she's endured, leads to triumph, if her belief in forgiveness is equal parts admirable and troubling. Clancy fades into the background beside her, though he's a kind and clever man. His suggestion that Rowan won't be "whole" again until she forgives her family is troubling, though.

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CAROLINA CIUCCI (November 28, 2020)

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