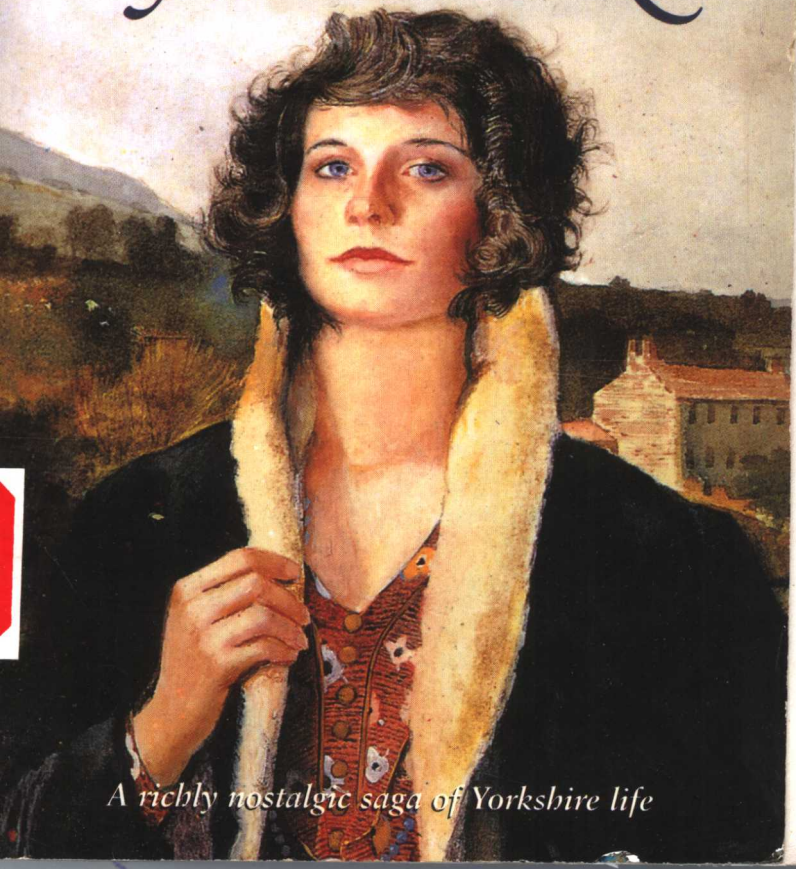
# NICOLA THORNE

# *Swift Flows the River*



*A richly nostalgic saga of Yorkshire life*

# Swift Flows the River

In the heart of the Yorkshire Dales lies the bustling market town of Garthorpe. As the horrors of the Great War recede, the lives of two local families become irrevocably intertwined.

With the sudden death of her father, Kay Mangham takes on at sixteen the double burden of running Mangham's General Store and caring for her brothers and sisters. When Martin Laycock offers marriage, security if not excitement beckons.

Returning from war in India, James Lofthouse finds himself bound to Kay by financial ties and by a shocking secret she has confided to no other. Drawn to her beauty and courage, loses his heart . . . But Kay is ed, and his mother has already chosen James' bride: the cool, upper-class Sarah . . .



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KATHERINE YORKE

# SWIFT FLOWS THE RIVER

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*All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*



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# *Author's foreword*

I first went to the Yorkshire Dales when I was a small girl and lived for a year with my mother in my Uncle John's tiny cottage in Kettlewell. Such childhood experiences remain with one forever, and I have been associated with the Dales and that area round the town, which most people will quite easily be able to identify, called 'Garthorpe' in this book. However it is still a town of my imagination and so is the story; so too are the characters around which it is woven and which have no relation to anyone living or dead.

*Swift Flows The River* had its genesis one summer weekend when I was staying with Alec and Elisabeth Knowles-Fitton at their home overlooking the beautiful valley of the Wharfe. Also there was another friend from my childhood, Joan Satterthwaite, and we sat for many hours reminiscing about the past, about my parents, about friends and relations, many of whom are now dead. I decided to set the novel based on all these memories, moments of nostalgia about the past, around a store because for many years of her life Joan and her family owned a business not dissimilar to the one in this book, which now no longer exists. Although my book is not based on that store or any like it, or on Joan and her family, it triggered my imagination and the result is a work of pure fiction as those who know the circumstances will realize.

I am most grateful to Joan for the help she gave me both in inspiring me and in reading the subsequent manuscript. Without her or that summer weekend at Knowles Lodge it would not have existed.

K.Y. June 1988

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# Part I

# THE TELEGRAM

1916-30

# *Chapter 1*

Alan said, 'Ma there's a telegram!' and they all knew at once what it meant.

Alan had propped it on the mantelpiece and seemed quite excited by the arrival of a missive almost unique to the house where the Manghams lived, half-way up a sloping street on the far side of Garthorpe. But Alan was only seven, the baby of the family, and in any case the Garthorpe 'Pals' had just begun to be mown down on the other side of the Channel in the Battle of the Somme.

Kay Mangham, standing behind her mother, instinctively put her arm round her shoulders. For a while both of them stared at the official buff envelope on the mantelpiece until Kay said, 'It may not be what we think.'

'Open it then.' Edna Mangham wearily began to unfasten her coat. She knew what it meant. She had been expecting it ever since Percy had gone off to the war; and now she would know what many other thousands of wives, mothers, children and sweethearts all over the country were learning too, as the terrible, remorseless bloodletting continued, day by day, month by month, year, now, by year.

Percy Mangham, husband, father of five, was dead.

'I deeply regret to inform you . . . ' Edna said, and she had a peculiar smile on her face. 'How's that for a laugh?'

But no one actually laughed and Alan, little Alan who had announced the news with such an air of suppressed excitement, was the first one to burst into tears which gave the rest of them something to do: Jessica and Anne and Frank, who had been sitting at the table doing their homework waiting for their mother and Kay to come back from the shop.

Tea time. Six o'clock. Anne had laid the table and cut the

bread. Anxiously they had been looking at the clock; they were all hungry. It was only Frank who had any idea what the telegram might really mean and he had said nothing.

It was very difficult to believe that their father was dead. It was cruel and it was wrong. Unlike the War Office none of them could think of Percy Mangham merely as a statistic.

Later, after the children had gone to bed, Edna and Kay sat on either side of the fire in the kitchen grate. None of them would sleep much that night; but that didn't matter. They had been brought up by Edna in a disciplined way and now this was where upbringing showed; training, the ability to conceal emotion, to get on with one's work whatever the cost.

All the Manghams were like that except, perhaps, Jessica, who resembled her father, the most undisciplined Mangham of all. But then Edna had not brought him up. She had borne him five children and suffered three miscarriages; but she had not brought him up, and when she got to him it was too late to instil the virtues of thrift, stoicism, and hard work to undo all the harm of his upbringing.

Edna had been crying a little; but they were, Kay thought, tears of anger rather than grief. Her mother was angry that her father had gone to the war and, now that he was dead, her anger was justified. A life needlessly lost. For what? Edna had never been one much influenced by propaganda; deaf to Lord Kitchener's appeals, she had not shared the enthusiasm of so many about the war.

'He should never have gone,' Edna said at last. 'It was selfish of him. But that was your father. Selfish.'

Kay didn't know what to say. She was sixteen, and since the war had started she had been helping her mother in the shop. She remembered the day when the war began. Everyone had been very excited and there had been an air of festivity in Garthorpe that no one had seemed to find incongruous. The Hun would be taught a lesson and it would all be over by Christmas.

Now, two years later, they knew a lot better.

Kay had been the only one who hadn't wept. The rage that had boiled up inside her mother had influenced her; she too had known what her father was like, and the sense of fun, of child-

like mischief that had carried him quite gaily into the war as it had carried him through life.

And now the most difficult thing of all was to imagine, or try to imagine, that gay, carefree, laughing face in death.

Maybe it was just as well they would never see him. No weeping over the bier in the parlour; no closing of the coffin, or solemn procession to church.

'Selfish,' Edna repeated, screwing up her handkerchief in her hand. 'What are we to do now?'

'Carry on, Mother,' Kay said. 'Would you like a cup of tea?'

Edna nodded and Kay went to the hearth and stuck the kettle on the hob, poking it into position over the glowing coals. There was always plenty of water in the kettle in the Mangham household; a lot of water and many cups of tea.

Kay put three spoonfuls of tea into the brown teapot and put it on the hearth to warm. Then she got out the teacups that Anne had stowed away after tea, each of them mechanically carrying out their duties as though nothing had happened, except that none of them had eaten much and only Alan wanted any supper before bed.

Edna sat in her chair by the fire watching Kay – so like her father that she could picture him now: black hair, blue eyes, a cheeky cheerful smile. The smile that had begun all the trouble; the smile that had led to the birth of Kay, a hurried wedding shortly before she was born.

If only Kay wasn't so like Percy; but only in looks . . .

'Thank you, love,' she said with a little smile as Kay passed her her cup. 'I was thinking about your father as I looked at you.'

'You can't just put him out of your mind, Mother,' Kay said, stirring her tea as she sat opposite her.

'Of course I can't. Can't and I don't want to. For all his faults, and he had many, he was the father of my children. But he should never have gone to the war. There was no need. But for those "pals" of his, those drinking cronies, he'd be here now and everything would be as it always has been. There was no need for change.'

'At least we're better off than the Rowbothams,' Kay said. 'Five children under ten and no means of livelihood. Nothing's going to change in that way, Mother. We've got the shop.'

Edna put her empty cup on the table beside her and sat back. It was August but it was chilly and she rubbed her bare arms, pulled the cardigan that she'd put over her shoulders closer to her, wrapping herself up like a parcel.

'I don't want to keep on that shop without your father, Kay. You might as well know it. I've thought about what might happen,' she paused, 'his going, and what I would do if he did.'

'But the shop has been in the family for nearly a century, Mother.'

'Yes, his family but not mine. I'm not a Mangham. I only married one.'

'But who could take over the shop?'

'We'll sell it,' Edna said. 'The site in the centre of the town alone is worth a bit of money. They've always wanted to widen the road there, so happen the Council will buy it.'

'And pull it down?' Kay looked aghast.

'Who cares what they do with it?'

'I do,' Kay said firmly, placing her cup on the table with exaggerated care. 'It's our livelihood, Mother, and I don't intend to let it go, not for a while.'

'But it's nothing to do with you, love.' Her mother looked a little surprised. 'You're not yet twenty-one for another five years. I don't think you have any say in the matter.'

There were times when Kay hated her mother. She knew her father had not been an easy man; but her mother had really driven him away. He had wanted to join up to get away from her; the endless nagging and accusations. But for that Percy would probably be here now.

Kay got up and emptied the teapot, washing the cups and saucers and stacking them in the rack. She looked at the clock and saw that it was nearly midnight.

'I'm going to bed Mother,' she said, stooping to kiss her. 'We'll talk about it tomorrow.'

'I've made up my mind.' Edna offered her a cold cheek. 'There's not much more to say.'

'I'm sorry about your father,' Mr Wetherby said, taking his purchases from the counter and stowing them carefully into a

leather bag. 'They say John Scarthrope is dead as well. Same day. Terrible thing, the Somme.'

Kay turned to the woman standing behind him.

'How's your mother taking it?' Mrs Pybus's expression was full of neighbourly concern.

'As well as can be expected,' Kay said. 'Three packets of faggots, Mrs Pybus?'

'Three,' Mrs Pybus nodded as Kay put the bundles of firewood on the counter. Kay knew that there were more people than usual in today because they wanted to chat about her father. They meant well, but they were ghouls. She'd already had twice as many people in in the morning as usual, and in the afternoon she had deliveries to take to the Dales, a task she usually enjoyed, especially on a summer's day. But today she would have to stay in the shop because her mother was at home and she had no help. She wondered after their conversation the night before, and this morning again at breakfast, whether her mother would ever come into the shop again.

'Wish your mother better,' Mrs Pybus said, stowing her purchases in her bag and glancing at Mr Wetherby. 'Good day to you, Mr Wetherby. Good day to you, Kay.'

'Good day, Mrs Pybus.' Kay looked at the old man who seemed inclined to linger. 'Is there something else I can get you, Mr Wetherby?'

'I don't want to be a nuisance,' Ted Wetherby said, 'but I wondered if there was anything I could do. Five children . . . '

'We've got the shop,' Kay said. 'My father hasn't worked here for over a year. We'll cope.'

'Ah, but will you?' Ted Wetherby said darkly. 'They all say that.'

'We will that,' Kay replied. 'If you'll excuse me, Mr Wetherby, I've got things to do.'

Temporarily there was a lull in the shop and Kay went into the back storeroom, to encourage Ted Wetherby to leave as much as anything else.

The store was full of neat drawers ranged against the wall and sacks on the floor; implements for farming and gardening could be glimpsed through a door that led into the back shed. Percy Mangham and Son (est 1828) was a hardware store whose

profitability over the years varied. In her grandfather's day the business was a prosperous one. The Mangham house was bought and paid for. There was no mortgage and no debts.

But after her grandfather had died debts began to accrue. She knew that people said her father was no businessman and, in her heart, she knew it was true. Grandpa had a way with figures, but her father hadn't. He was a socializer; he loved to chat and gossip over the counter or at the door of the store, standing there in his green overall, a cigarette in his hand. And after work it was always the pub and then the pub again after tea.

Her mother said that her father drank all the profits as the children grew up. Kay, always forced by circumstances to be older than her years, had not found it hard to believe her.

When there is no body, no burial after death, it is hard to mourn. It seems as though the life of the departed has not properly ended. Instead of a period of mourning there is an abyss, and into this abyss for the weeks following the War Office telegram the Mangham family floundered.

The children returned to school when term began in September 1916, but Edna continued to stay at home and Kay was beginning to think the task of running the shop on her own was hopeless when, just as she was shutting up one day, the doorway momentarily darkened with a well-known but unfamiliar figure who doffed his hat with a smile.

'Good afternoon, Kay. I was sorry to hear about your father.'

'Thank you, Mr Lofthouse.'

'A terrible thing.' Sam Lofthouse looked around at the neat sacks of provisions, cattle food, dog biscuits, hen feed; at the wire baskets, the rabbit hutches and bird cages, the dog leads and dog collars, fishing rods and fishing tackle, and at the long wooden counter stacked with packets. 'This war is a terrible thing. Is your mother about, Kay?'

'My mother's at home, Mr Lofthouse.'

'Ah it's true then.' Sam Lofthouse sat down, unasked, on a stool by the side of the counter. 'I heard your mother was taking it bad.'

'Very bad.'

'I'm sorry.'