

OPRAH'S Book Club.

# MAEVE BINCHY

TARA POGGIO

THE HEARTWARMING  
NEW YORK TIMES  
BESTSELLER



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T A R A  
R O A D



*Maeve Binchy*

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A D e l l B o o k

**TARA ROAD**  
A Dell Book

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## PRAISE FOR TARA ROAD

“*TARA ROAD* . . . CERTAINLY DELIVERS. Moreover, the assured, confiding voice perfected by Binchy for helping us achieve instantaneous entry into the heart of each of her communities is as smooth as ever.”

—*The Washington Post Book World*

“In *Tara Road* the extraordinary Maeve Binchy spins an irresistible tale of modern life, creating a world so packed with telling details and emotional perspicacity that you feel instantly connected to the heartbroken Ria Lynch and Marilyn Vine . . . and the funny, conniving, tear-jerking cast of characters who orbit them.”

—*Elle*

“ENGAGING . . . The pleasures Binchy offers readers are her lively depiction of social connections, feuds and friendships; secrets, lies, alliances, in short, the thicket of Irish everyday life.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“ENGROSSING . . . It is very hard to put down.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Good storytelling . . . [Binchy’s] books reach into the hearts of millions.”

—*Irish Herald*

“Maeve Binchy fans will be delighted to know that in her latest novel, *Tara Road*, the Irish writer has created yet another unsinkable heroine.”

—*New York Daily News*

“*Tara Road* works magic . . . a marvelously involving story.”

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

*Please turn the page for more extraordinary acclaim. . . .*

“Vivid characters and relationships . . . are at the heart of Binchy’s success. The story unfolds in short scenes and moves in such a relaxed, unhurried fashion that it’s almost a shock to realize, by the end, how much has happened and how utterly involved Binchy has made us feel.”

—*People*

“IN NO TIME YOU’RE SIMPLY UNABLE TO PUT THIS STORY DOWN.”

—*The Des Moines Register*

“Fans of beloved Irish writer Binchy will be transported to reader’s heaven by her latest. With words, she paints sensitive portraits of a variety of women connected by a Dublin address: Tara Road.”

—*Library Journal*

“An intricate, tightly integrated story . . . the sum and substance of this engaging novel becomes what each woman learns about the other and, more importantly, what they learn about themselves.”

—*Booklist*

“Binchy’s forte is telling stories of ordinary people captured in their most extraordinary moments.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

“Difficult to put down, a story of finding strength in the kindness of friends and strangers . . . Binchy again demonstrates her gift for bringing the reader fully into the story . . . painting clear pictures of life in urban Dublin and in the American countryside.”

—*The Denver Post*

“A GOOD OLD-FASHIONED PAGE-TURNER brightened by Binchy’s deft hand with dialogue and appealing, believable characters.”  
—*Dayton Daily News*

“In the tradition of a true Irish storyteller, she weaves a spell that lingers long after the tale has ended. Binchy fans will be delighted and those who have yet to fall under this accomplished writer’s spell will be won over. Drawing her characters with affection and sympathy, Binchy brilliantly evokes the travails of a childhood splintered by divorce.”  
—*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

“TRIUMPHANT . . . Maeve Binchy has proven to be a master, an artist of the heart who takes the mundane and weaves it into an irresistible spell.”  
—*Florida Times-Union*

“Such rich, romantic writing doesn’t occur often in these spare, modern literary times, but the prolific Irish author who divides her time profitably between engrossing novels and entertaining short stories tells all her tales with heart and humor. . . . Binchy takes her time telling her ambitious tale. A smart reader will do the same absorbing it.”  
—*The Star-Ledger* (Newark, N.J.)

“*TARA ROAD* IS CLASSIC MAEVE BINCHY. The characters are so real they could be your next-door neighbors. In *Tara Road* Binchy holds a mirror up to her readers, and each will find something different.”  
—*The Tampa Tribune & Times*

“*Tara Road* is just the ticket for cozy-comfy reading.”  
—*The Orlando Sentinel*

***Books by Maeve Binchy***

TARA ROAD

THE RETURN JOURNEY

EVENING CLASS

THIS YEAR IT WILL BE DIFFERENT

THE GLASS LAKE

THE COPPER BEECH

THE LILAC BUS

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

SILVER WEDDING

FIREFLY SUMMER

ECHOES

LIGHT A PENNY CANDLE

LONDON TRANSPORTS

*To dearest Gordon  
with all my love*



## C H A P T E R

## O N E

RIA'S MOTHER HAD ALWAYS BEEN very fond of film stars. It was a matter of sadness to her that Clark Gable had died on the day Ria was born. Tyrone Power had died on the day Hilary had been born just two years earlier. But somehow that wasn't as bad. Hilary hadn't seen off the great king of cinema as Ria had. Ria could never see *Gone With the Wind* without feeling somehow guilty.

She told this to Ken Murray, the first boy who kissed her. She told him in the cinema. Just as he was kissing her, in fact.

"You're very boring," he said, trying to open her blouse.

"I'm not boring," Ria cried with some spirit. "Clark Gable is there on the screen and I've told you something interesting. A coincidence. It's not boring."

Ken Murray was embarrassed, as so much attention had been called to them. People were shushing them and others were laughing. Ken moved away and huddled down in his seat as if he didn't want to be seen with her.

Ria could have kicked herself. She was almost sixteen. Everyone at school liked kissing, or said they did. Now she was starting to do it and she had made such a mess of it. She reached out her hand for him.

"I thought you wanted to look at the film," he muttered.

"I thought *you* wanted to put your arm around me," Ria said hopefully.

He took out a bag of toffees and ate one. Without even passing her the bag. The romantic bit was over.

Sometimes you could talk to Hilary, Ria had noticed. This wasn't one of those nights.

"Should you not talk when people kiss you?" she asked her sister.

"Jesus, Mary, and Holy St. Joseph," said Hilary, who was getting dressed to go out.

"I just asked," Ria said. "You'd know, with all your experience with fellows."

Hilary looked around nervously in case anyone had heard. "Will you *shut up* about my experience with fellows," she hissed. "Mam will hear you and that will be the end of either of us going anywhere ever again."

Their mother had warned them many times that she was not going to stand for any cheap behavior in the family. A widow woman left with two daughters had enough to worry her without thinking that her girls were tramps and would never get a husband. She would die happy if Hilary and Ria had nice respectable men and homes of their own. Nice homes, in a classier part of Dublin, places with a garden even. Nora Johnson had great hopes that they would all be able to move a little upward. Somewhere nicer than the big, sprawling housing estate where they lived now. And the way to find a good man was not by flaunting yourself at every man that came along.

"Sorry, Hilary." Ria looked contrite. "But anyway she didn't hear, she's watching TV."

Their mother did little else during an evening. She was tired, she said, when she got back from the dry cleaners where she worked at the counter. All day on your feet, it was nice to sit down and get transported to another world.

Mam wouldn't have heard anything untoward from upstairs about experience with fellows.

Hilary forgave her—after all she needed Ria to help her tonight. Mam had a system that as soon as Hilary got in she was to leave her handbag on the landing floor. That way when Mam got up to go to the bathroom in the night she'd know Hilary was home and would go to sleep happily. Sometimes it was Ria's job to leave the handbag out there at midnight, allowing Hilary to creep in at any hour, having taken only her keys and lipstick in her pocket.

“Who'll do it for me when the time comes?” Ria wondered.

“You won't need it if you're going to be blabbing and yattering on to fellows when they try to kiss you,” Hilary said. “You'll not want to stay out late because you'll have nowhere to go.”

“I bet I will,” Ria said, but she didn't feel as confident as she sounded. There was a stinging behind her eyes.

She was sure she didn't look *too* bad. Her friends at school said she was very lucky to have all that dark curly hair and blue eyes. She wasn't fat or anything and her spots weren't out of control. But people didn't pick her out; she didn't have any kind of sparkle like other girls in the class did.

Hilary saw her despondent face. “Listen, you're fine, you've got naturally curly hair, that's a plus for a start. And you're small, fellows like that. It will get better. Sixteen is the worst age, no matter what they tell you.” Sometimes Hilary could be very nice indeed. Usually on the nights she wanted her handbag left on the landing.

And of course Hilary was right. It *did* get better. Ria left school and like her elder sister took a secretarial course. There were plenty of fellows, it turned out. Nobody particu-

larly special, but she wasn't in any rush. She would possibly travel the world before she settled down to marry.

"Not too much traveling," her mother warned.

Nora Johnson thought that men might regard travel as fast. Men preferred to marry safer, calmer women. Women who didn't go gallivanting too much. It was only sensible to have advance information about men, Nora Johnson told her daughters. This way you could go armed into the struggle. There was a hint that she may not have been adequately informed herself. The late Mr. Johnson, though he had a bright smile and wore his hat at a rakish angle, was not a good provider. He had not been a believer in life insurance policies. Nora Johnson worked in a dry cleaners and lived in a shabby, run-down housing estate. She did not want the same thing for her daughters when the time came.

"When do you think the time will come?" Ria asked Hilary.

"For what?" Hilary was frowning a lot at her reflection in the mirror. The thing about applying blusher was that you had to get it just right. Too much and you looked consumptive, too little and you looked dirty and as if you hadn't washed your face.

"I mean, when do you think either of us will get married? You know the way Mam's always talking about when the time comes."

"Well I hope it comes to me first, I'm the elder. You're not even to consider doing it ahead of me."

"No, I have nobody in mind. It's just I'd love to be able to look into the future and see where we'll be in two years' time. Wouldn't it be great if we could have a peep?"

"Well, go to a fortune-teller then, if you're that anxious."

"They don't know anything." Ria was scornful.

"It depends. If you get the right one they do. A lot of the



girls at work found this great one. It would make you shiver the way she knows things.”

“You’ve never been to her?” Ria was astounded.

“Yes, I have actually, just for fun. The others were all going, I didn’t want to be the only one disapproving.”

“And?”

“And what?”

“What did she tell you? Don’t be mean, go on.” Ria’s eyes were dancing.

“She said I would marry within two years. . . .”

“Great, can I be the bridesmaid?”

“And that I’d live in a place surrounded by trees and that his name began with an *M*, and that we’d both have good health all our lives.”

“Michael, Matthew, Maurice, Marcello?” Ria rolled them all around to try them out. “How many children?”

“She said no children,” Hilary said.

“You don’t believe her, do you?”

“Of course I do, what’s the point giving up a week’s wages if I don’t believe her.”

“You *never* paid that!”

“She’s good. You know, she has the gift.”

“Come on.”

“No, she does have a gift. All kinds of high-up people consult her. They wouldn’t if she didn’t have the power.”

“And where did she see all this good health and the fellow called *M* and no children? In tea leaves?”

“No, on my hand. Look at the little lines under your little finger around the side of your hand. You’ve got two, I’ve got none.”

“Hilary, don’t be ridiculous. Mam has three lines. . . .”

“And remember there was another baby who died, so that makes three, right.”

"You are serious! You do believe it."

"You asked so I'm telling you."

"And everyone who is going to have children has those little lines and those who aren't haven't?"

"You have to know how to look." Hilary was defensive.

"You have to know how to charge, it seems." Ria was distressed to see the normally levelheaded Hilary so easily taken in.

"It's not that dear when you consider—" Hilary began.

"Ah, Hilary, please. A week's wages to hear that kind of rubbish! Where does she live, in a penthouse?"

"No, a caravan as it happens, on a caravan halting site."

"You're joking me."

"True, she doesn't care about money. It's not a racket or a job, it's a gift."

"Yeah."

"So it looks like I can do what I like without getting pregnant." Hilary sounded very confident.

"It might be dangerous to throw out the Pill," said Ria.

"I wouldn't rely totally on Madam Fifi or whatever she's called."

"Mrs. Connor."

"Mrs. Connor," Ria repeated. "Isn't that amazing? Mam used to consult St. Anne or someone when she was young. We thought that was mad enough, now it's Mrs. Connor in the halting site."

"Wait until you need to know something, you'll be along to her like a flash."

It was very hard to know what a job was going to be like until you were in it and then it was too late.

Hilary had office jobs in a bakery, a laundry, and then settled in a school. There wasn't much chance of meeting a

husband there, she said, but the pay was a bit better and she got her lunch free, which meant she could save a bit more. She was determined to have something to put toward a house when the time came.

Ria was saving too, but to travel the world. She worked first in the office of a hardware shop, then in a company that made hairdressing supplies. And then settled in a big, busy real estate agency. Ria was on the reception desk and answered the phone. It was a world she knew nothing of when she went in, but it was obviously a business with a huge buzz. Prosperity had come to Ireland in the early eighties and the property market was the first to reflect this. There was huge competition between the various real estate agents and Ria found they worked closely as a team.

On the first day she met Rosemary. Slim, blond, and gorgeous, but as friendly as any of the girls she had ever met at school or secretarial college. Rosemary also lived at home with her mother and sister, so there was an immediate bond. Rosemary was so confident and well up in everything that was happening, Ria assumed that she must be a graduate or someone with huge knowledge of the whole property market. But no, Rosemary had only worked there for six months; it was her second job.

"There's no point in working anywhere unless we know what it's all about," Rosemary said. "It makes it twice as interesting if you know all that's going on."

It also made Rosemary twice as interesting to all the fellows who worked there. They found it very difficult to get to first base with her. In fact, Ria had heard that there was a sweepstake being run secretly on who would be the first to score. Rosemary had heard this too. She and Ria laughed over it.

"It's only a game," Rosemary said. "They don't really want me at all." Ria was not sure that she was right; almost

any man in the office would have been proud to escort Rosemary Ryan. But she was adamant: a career first, fellows later. Ria listened with interest. It was such a different message than the one she got at home, where her mother and Hilary seemed to put a much greater emphasis on the marriage side of things.

Ria's mother said that 1982 was a terrible year for film stars dying. Ingrid Bergman died, and Romy Schneider and Henry Fonda, then there was the terrible accident when Princess Grace was killed. All the people you really wanted to see, they were dying off like flies.

It was also the year that Hilary Johnson got engaged to Martin Moran, a teacher at the school where she worked in the office.

Martin was pale and anxious and originally from the West of Ireland. He always said his father was a small farmer, not just a farmer but a *small* one. Since Martin was six feet one it was hard to imagine this. He was courteous and obviously very fond of Hilary, yet there was something about him that lacked enthusiasm and fire. He looked slightly worried about things and spoke pessimistically when he came to the house for Sunday lunch.

There was a problem connected with everything. The Pope would get assassinated when he visited England, Martin was sure of it. And when he didn't, it was just lucky and his visit hadn't done all the good that people had hoped it would. The war in the Falklands would have repercussions for Ireland, mark his word. And the trouble in the Middle East was going to get worse, and the IRA bombs in London were only the tip of the iceberg. Teachers' salaries were too low; house prices were too high.



Ria looked with wonder at the man her sister was going to marry.

Hilary, who had once been able to throw away a week's salary on a fortune-teller, was now talking about the cost of having shoes repaired and the folly of making a telephone call outside the cheap times.

Eventually a selection was made and a deposit was paid. It was a very small house. It was impossible to imagine what the area might look like in the future. At present it was full of mud, cement mixers, diggers, unfinished roads, and unmade footpaths. And yet it seemed exactly what her elder sister wanted out of life. Never had she seen her so happy.

Hilary was always smiling and holding Martin's hand as they talked, even on very worrying subjects like stamp duty and the real estate agent's fees. She kept turning and examining the very small diamond that had been very carefully chosen and bought from a jeweler where Martin's cousin worked so that a good price had been arranged.

Hilary was excited about the wedding day, which would be on the day before her twenty-fourth birthday. For Hilary the time had come. She celebrated it with manic frugality. She and Martin vied with each other to save money on the whole project.

An autumn wedding was much more sensible. Hilary could wear a cream-colored suit and hat, something that could be worn again and again, and eventually dyed a dark color and worn still further. As a wedding feast they would have a small lunch in a Dublin hotel, just family. Martin's father and brothers, being small farmers, could not afford to be away from the land for any longer than a day. It would be impossible to be anything but pleased for her. It was so obviously what Hilary wanted. But Ria knew that it was nothing at all like what she wanted herself.

Ria wore a bright scarlet-colored coat to the wedding,