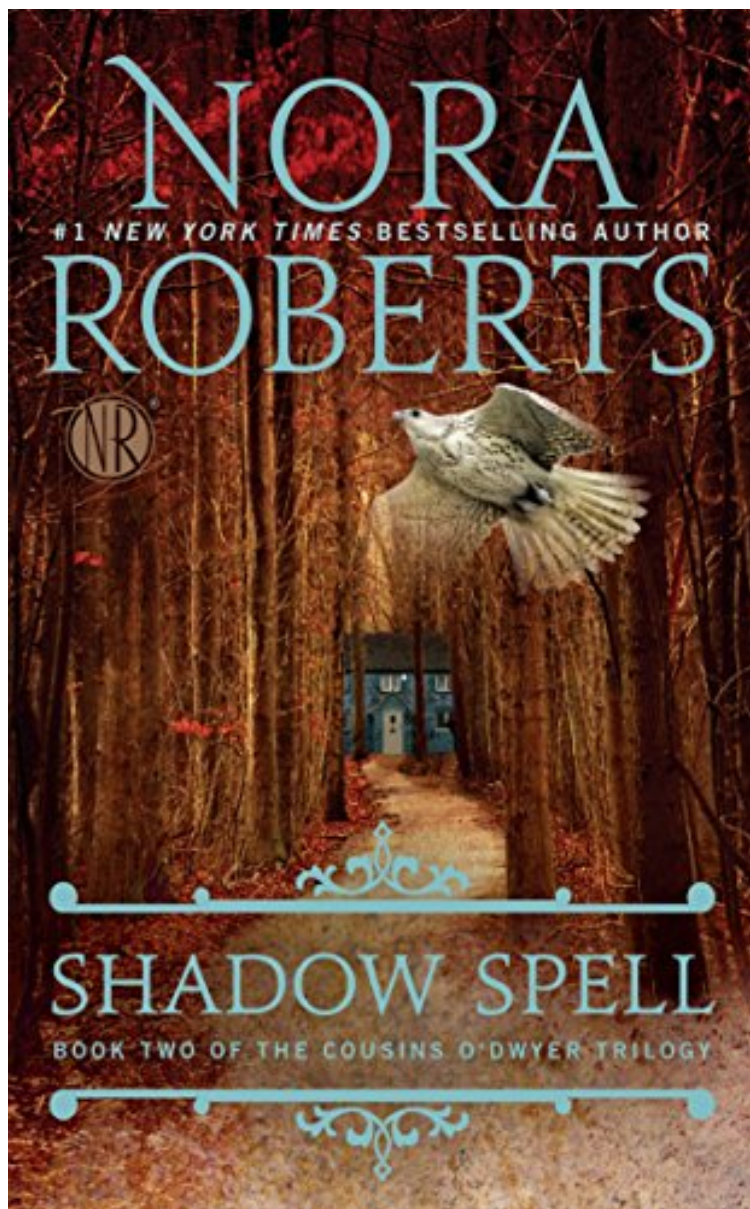


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Shadow Spell (The Cousins O'Dwyer Trilogy, Book 2)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom #1 New York Times bestselling author Nora Roberts comes the second novel in a trilogy about the land were drawn to, the family we learn to cherish, and the people we long to loveBook Two of The Cousins ODwyer TrilogyShadow Spell With the legends and lore of Ireland running through his blood, falconer Connor ODwyer is proud to call County Mayo home. Its where his sister, Branna, lives and works, where his cousin, Iona, has found true love, and where his childhood friends form a circle that cant be

broken A circle that is about to be stretched out of shape by a long-awaited kiss. Meara Quinn is Brannas best friend, a sister in all but blood. Her and Connors paths cross almost daily, as Connor takes tourists on hawk walks and Meara guides them on horseback across the lush countryside. She has the eyes of a gypsy and the body of a goddess things Connor has always taken for granted until his brush with death propels them into a quick, hot tangle. Plenty of women have found their way to Connors bed, but none to his heart until now. Frustratingly, Meara is okay with just the heat, afraid to lose herself and their friendship to something more. But soon, Connor will see the full force and fury of what runs in his blood. And he will need his family and friends around him when his past rolls in like the fog, threatening an end to all he loves. Don't miss the other books in the Cousins O'Dwyer Trilogy: *Dark Witch*, *Blood Magick*. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Excerpt***This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof.***Copyright 2014 by Nora Roberts

Chapter Four Connor slipped through the employees gate for the falconry school. As always, he felt a little flutter a bit like beating wings in his heart, along his skin. It had always been the hawk for him. That connection, like his power, came down through the blood. He'd have preferred having some time to walk around the enclosures and aviary, greet the hawks, the big owl they called Brutus, just to see and hear how they all fared. But the way he'd started his day meant he was a few minutes behind already. He saw one of his staff, Brian, skinny as a flagpole and barely eighteen, checking the feed and water. So he only glanced around to be sure all was well as he crossed over to the offices, past the fenced-in area where his assistant, Kyra, kept her pretty spaniel most days. And how is it going for you today, Romeo? In answer, the dog wagged his whole body, clamped a gnawed blue ball in his mouth, and brought it hopefully to the fence. It'll have to be later for that. He stepped into the office, found Kyra, her hair a short wedge of sapphire blue, busy at the keyboard. You're late. Though she just hit five foot two, Kyra had a voice like a foghorn. Happy I'm the boss then, isn't it? Fine, the boss. Happy I had breakfast with him so he knows what's what. He knocked his fist lightly on the top of her head as he moved by to a desk covered with forms, clipboards, papers, brochures, a spare glove, a tether, a bowl of tumbled stones, and other debris. We've had another booking come in already this morning. A double. Father and son and the boys just sixteen. I've put you on that, as you do better with the teenagers than Brian or Pauline. They're for ten this morning. Yanks. She paused, sent Connor a disapproving look from her round, wildly freckled face. Sixteen, and why isn't he in school, I want to know. You're such a taskmaster, Kyra. It's an education, isn't it, to travel to another country, to learn of hawks? That won't teach you to add two and two. Sean's not coming in till noon, if you're forgetting. He's taking his wife in for her check with the doctor. He looked up at that because he had forgotten. All's well there, right, with her and the baby? Well and fine, she just wants him there as they may find if it's a girl or boy today. That puts Brian on the nine with the lady from Donegal, you at the ten, and Pauline's at half-ten with a pair of honeymooners from Dublin. She clicked and clacked at the keyboard as she laid out the morning's schedule. Though she tended toward the bossy and brisk, Kyra was a wizard at doing a dozen things at once. And the fly in Connor's ointment expected everyone else to do the same. I've set you on at two for another, she added. Yanks again, a couple over from Boston. They've just come in from a stay at Dromoland in Clare, and they're having three days at Ashford before moving on. Three weeks holiday for their twenty-fifth anniversary. Ten and two then. They've been married long as I've been alive. That's something to think on. Listening with half an ear, he sat to poke through the paperwork he couldn't palm off on her. Your parents have been married longer yet, considering you're the youngest. Parents are different, she said decisively though he couldn't see how. Oh, and Brian's claiming there was an earthquake this morning, near to shook him out of bed. Connor glanced up, face calm. An earthquake, is it? She smirked, still clattering on the keyboard with nails painted with pink glitter. Swears the whole house shook around him. She rolled her eyes, hit Print, swiveled around for a clipboard. And he's decided it's some conspiracy as there's not a word of it on the telly. A few mentions, so he claims, on the Internet. He's gone from earthquake to nuclear testing by some foreign power in a finger's snap. He'll be all over you about it, as he's been me. And your bed didn't shake? She flashed a grin. Not from an earthquake. He laughed, went back to the paperwork. And how is Liam? Very well indeed. I'm thinking I might marry him. Is that the way of it? It might be, as you have to start on racking up those anniversaries sometime. I'll let him know when I've made up my mind. When the phone jangled, he left her to answer, went back to clearing off a section of his desk. So some felt it, some didn't, he thought. Some were more open than others. And some closed tight as any drum. He'd known Kyra most of his life, he mused, and she knew what he was had to know. But she never spoke of it. She was, despite her blue hair and little hoop in her left eyebrow, a drum. He worked steady enough until Brian came in, and as predicted was full of earthquakes that were likely nuclear testing by some secret government

agency, or perhaps a sign of the apocalypse. He left Brian and Kyra battling it all around, went out to choose the hawk for the first walk. As no one was watching, he did it the quick and simple way. He simply opened the aviary, looked into the eyes of his choice, held up his gloved arm. The hawk swooped through, landed, coming in as obedient as a well-trained hound. There you are, Thor. Ready to work, are you? You do well for Brian this morning, and I'll take you out later, if I can, for a real hunt. How's that for you? After tethering the hawk, he walked back to the offices, transferred him to the waiting perch, tethered him there. Patient, Thor closed his wings, sat watchful. We may get some wet, he told Brian, but not a drench I'm thinking. Global warmings causing strange weather around the world. It may have been an earthquake. An earthquake isn't weather, Kyra stated. It's all connected, Brian said darkly. I think you won't see more than a shower this morning. If there's an earthquake or volcanic eruption, be sure you get Thor back home again. Connor gave Brian a slap on the shoulder. There's your clients now, at the gate. Go on, let them in, give them the show around. I'll take Roibeard and William for the ten, he told Kyra when Brian hurried to answer the gate. That leaves Moose for Pauline. I'll set it up. We'll have Rex for Sean. He respects Sean, and doesn't yet have the same respect for Brian. Best not send him out with Bri yet, on their own. I'll take Merlin for the two as he hasn't been on a walk in a few days. Fins hawk isn't here. He's around, Connor said simply. And Pauline can take Thor out again this afternoon. Brian or Sean, whoever you have for the last so far, can take Rex. What of Nester? He's not feeling it today. He's got the day off. She only lifted her bearded eyebrow at Connor's assessment of the hawk. If you say. And I do. Her round face lost its smirk in concern. Does he need to be looked at? No, he's not sick, just out of sorts. I'll take him out later, let him fly off the mood. He was right about the shower, but it came and went as they often did. A short patter of rain, a thin beam of sun through a pocket of clouds. By the time his double arrived, the shower had moved on, leaving the air damp and just misty enough. Truth be told, he thought as he took the father and son around, it added to the atmosphere for the Yanks. How do you know which one is which? The boy named Taylor, gangling with big ears and knobby knuckles, put on an air of mild boredom. They look alike, the Harris hawk, but they each have their own personality, their own way. You see, there's Moose, he's a big one, so he has the name. And Rex, beside him? Has a kind of regal air. Why don't they just fly away when you take them out? Why would they be doing that? They've a good life here, a posh life come to that. And good, respectable work as well. Some were born here, and this is home for them. You train them here? the father asked. We do, yes, from the time they're hatchlings. They're born to fly and hunt, aren't they? With proper training, reward, kindness, affection, they can be trained to do what they're born to do and return to the glove. Why the Harris hawk for the walks? They're social, they are. And more, their maneuverability makes them a fine choice for a walk in these parts. The Peregrine, you see here? He walked them over to a large gray bird with black and yellow markings. They're magnificent to be sure, and there's no faster animal on the planet when they're in the stoop. That would be flying up to a great height, then diving for its prey. I thought a cheetah was the fastest, Taylor said. Apollo here? At the name, at Connor's subtle link, the falcon spread its great wings. Had the boy impressed enough to gasp a little before he shrugged. He can beat the cat, reaching speeds to three hundred twenty kilometers an hour. That's two hundred miles an hour in American, Connor added with a grin. But for all its speed and beauty, the Peregrine needs open space, and the Harris can dance through the trees. You see these here? He walked them along. I watched these hatch myself only last spring, and we've trained them here at the school until they were ready for free flights. One of their brothers is William, and he'll be with you today, Mr. Leary. So young? That's what, only five or six months old. Born to fly, Connor repeated. He sensed he'd lose the boy unless he moved things along. If you'll come inside now, we've your hawks waiting. It's an experience, Taylor. The father, an easy six-four, laid a hand on his son's shoulder. Whatever. It'll probably rain again. Oh, I think it'll hold off till near to sunset. So, Mr. Leary, have you family around Mayo then? Tom. Ancestors, I'm told, but no family I know of. Just you and your boy then? No, my wife and daughter went into Cong to shop. He gave a grinning roll of his eyes. Could be trouble. My sister has a shop in Cong. The Dark Witch. Maybe they'll stop in. If it's there and it sells something, they'll stop in. We were thinking of trying a horseback ride tomorrow. Oh, you couldn't do better. It's a fine ride around. You just tell them Connor said to give you a good time with it. Stepping inside, he turned to the holding perches. And here we have Roibeard and William. Roibeard's my own, and he's for you today, Taylor. I've had him since he was a hatchling. Tom, would you sign the forms that Kyra has ready for you, and I'll make Taylor acquainted with Roibeard. What kind of name is that? Taylor demanded. Thinks he doesn't want to be here, Connor mused. Thinks he'd rather be at home with his mates and his video games. Why it's his name, and an old one. He comes from hawks that hunted these very woods for hundreds of years. Here's your glove. Without it, as

smart and skilled as he is, his talons would pierce your skin. You're to hold your arm up like this, see? Connor demonstrated, holding his left arm up at a right angle. And keep it still as we walk. You've only to lift it to signal him to fly. I'll tether him at first, until we get out and about. He felt the boy quiver with nerves, excitement he tried to hide as Connor signaled Roibeard to step onto the gloved arm. The Harris is agile and quick as I said, and a fierce hunter, though since we'll be taking these chicken parts along he patted his baiting pouch; they'll both leave off any thought of going for birds or rabbit. And here for you, Tom, is young William. He's a handsome one, and well behaved. He loves little more than a chance to wing through the woods, and have some chicken as a reward for the work. He's beautiful. They're beautiful. Tom laughed a little. I'm nervous. Let's have ourselves an adventure. How's your stay at the castle? Connor began as he led them out. Amazing. Annie and I thought this was our once in a lifetime, but were already talking about coming back. Sure you can't come once to Ireland. He walked them easy, making some small talk, but keeping his mind, his heart with the hawks. Content enough, ready enough. He took them away from the school, down a path, to the hard paved road where there was an opening, with tall trees fringing it. There he released the jesses. If you lift your arms. Just gentle now, sliding them up, they'll fly. And the beauty of it, that lift in the air, that spread of wings, nearly silent. Nearly. A soft gasp from the boy, still trying to cling to his boredom as both hawks perched on a branch, folded their wings, and stared down like golden gods. Will you trust me with your camera, Tom? Oh, sure. I wanted to get some pictures of Taylor with the hawk. With... Roibeard? And I will. You turn, back to them, look over your left shoulder there, Taylor. Though Roibeard would answer without, Connor laid a bit of chicken on the glove. Gross. Not to the bird. Connor angled himself. Just lift your arm, as you did the first time. Hold it steady. Whatever, Taylor mumbled, but obeyed. And the hawk, fierce grace in flight, swooped down, wings spread, eyes brilliant, and landed on the boy's arm. Gobbled the chicken. Stood, stared into Taylor's eyes. Knowing the moment well, Connor captured the stunned wonder, the sheer joy on the boy's face. Wow! Wow! Dad, Dad, did you see that? Yeah. He went... Tom looked at Connor. That beak. Not to worry, I promise you. Just hold there a minute, Taylor. He took another shot, one he imagined would sit on some mantel or desk back in America, of the boy and the hawk staring into each other's eyes. Now, you, Tom. He repeated the process, snapped the picture, listened to his clients talk to each other in amazed tones. You've seen nothing yet, Connor promised. Let's move into the woods a bit. You'll all have a dance. It never got old for him, never became ordinary. The flight of the hawk, the soar and swoop through the trees always, always enchanted him. Today, the absolute thrill of the boy and his father added more. The damp air, fat as a soaked sponge, the flickers of light filtering through the trees, the swirl of the oncoming autumn made it all a fine day, in Connor's opinion, to tromp around the wood following the hawks. Can I come back? Taylor walked back to the gates of the school with Roibeard on his arm. I mean just to see them. They're really cool, especially Roibeard. You can, sure. They'd be pleased with a bit of company. We'll do it again before we leave, his father promised. I'd rather do this than the horseback riding. Oh, you'll enjoy that as well, I wager. Connor led them inside at an unhurried pace. It's pleasant to walk the woods on the back of a good horse a different perspective of things. And they've fine guides at the stables. Do you ride? Tom asked him. I do, yes. Though not as often as I might like. The best, of course, is hawking on horseback. Oh man! Can I do that? That's not in the brochure, Taylor. It's true, Connor said as he gently transferred Roibeard to a perch. It's not on the regular menu, so to speak. I'm just going to settle things up with your da if you want to go out, have another look at the hawks. Yeah, okay. He studied Roibeard another moment with eyes filled with love at first sight. Thanks. Thanks, Connor. That was awesome. You're more than welcome. He transferred William as Taylor ran out. I didn't want to say in front of the boy, but I might be able to arrange for him to have what we'd call a hawk ride. I'd need to check if Meara can lead your family; she's a hawker as well as one of the guides at the stables. And if you'd be interested. I haven't seen Taylor this excited about anything but computer games and music for months. If you can make it happen, that would be great. I'll see what I can do, if you give me a minute or two. He leaned a hip on the desk when Tom stepped out, took out his phone. Ah, Meara, my darling, I've a special request. A fine thing it was to give someone the lingering glow of memories. Connor did his best to do the same with his final client of the day but nothing would quite reach the heights of Taylor and his da from America. Between his bookings, he took the Peregrines Apollo included out beyond the woods, into the open for exercise and hunting. There he could watch the stoop with a kind of wonder that never left him. There he could feel the thrill of that diving speed inside himself. As he was a social creature like the Harris, he enjoyed doing the hawk walks, but those solo times only himself and the birds and the air made up his favorite part of any day. Apollo took a crow in midstoop a perfect strike. They could be fed, Connor thought as he sat on a low stone wall with a bag of

crisps and an apple. They could be trained and tended. But they were of the wild, and the wild they needed for their spirit. So he sat, content to wait, to watch, while the birds soared, dived, hunted, and prized the peace of a damp afternoon. No fog or shadows here, he thought. Not yet. Not ever as he and his circle would find the way to preserve the light. And where are you now, Cabhan. Not here, not now, he thought as he scanned the hills, rolling back and away lush and green. Nothing here now but the promise of rain that would come and go and come again. He watched Apollo soar again, for the joy of it now, felt his own heart lift. And knew for that moment alone he would face the dark and beat it back. Rising, he called the birds back to him, one by one. Once all the work was done, he made a final round with the birds and checked on all that needed checking on, then shoved his own glove in his back pocket and locked the gate. Then he wandered, at an easy stroll, toward the stables. He sensed Roibeard first, pulled out the glove and put it on. Even as he lifted his arm, he sensed Meara. The hawk circled once, for the pleasure of it, then swooped down to land on Connors gloved arm. Did you have an adventure then? Sure you gave the boy a day hell not be forgetting. He waited where he was until Meara rounded the bend. Long, sure strides a man had to admire a woman with long legs that moved with such steady confidence. He sent her a grin. And there she is. Howd the boy do? Hes mad in love with Roibeard, and expressed great affection for Spud who gave him a good, steady ride. I had to stop once and give the sister a go at it or there'd have been a brutal sibling battle. She enjoyed it quite a lot, but not like the boy. And we wont be charging them for the few minutes of her go. We wont, no. He took her hand, swung it as they walked, kissed her knuckles lightly before letting it go. Thanks. Youll thank me for more, as the mister gave me a hundred extra. A hundred? Extra? That he did, as he judged me the honest sort and asked if Id give half to you. Naturally, I told him it wasnt necessary, but he insisted. And naturally, I didnt want to be rude and refuse again. Naturally, Connor said with a grin, then wiggled his fingers at her. She pulled euros from her pocket, counted them out. Well now, what should we do with this unexpected windfall? What do you say to a pint? I say on occasion you have a fine idea. Should we round up the rest of us? she wondered. We could. You text Branna, and Ill text Boyle. Well see if we have any takers. Itd do Branna good to get out for an evening. I know it. Why dont you text her? Its easier to say no to a brother than a friend. He met Roibeards eyes, walked in silence a moment. And the hawk lifted off, rose up, winged away. As Connor did, she watched the hawk for the pleasure of it. Wheres he going then? Home. I want him close, so hell fly home and stay tonight. I envy that, Meara said as she took out her phone. The way you talk to the hawks, Iona to the horses, Branna to the hounds and Fin to all three when he wants to. If I had any magic, I think that would be what Id want. You have it. Ive seen you with the horses, the hawks, the hounds. Thats training, and an affinity. But its not what you have. She sent the text, tucked the phone away. But Id just want it with the animals. Id go mad if I could read people, hear their thoughts and feelings as you can. Id forever be fighting to listen, then likely be pissed at what Id heard. Its best to resist the eavesdropping. She gave him an elbow poke and a knowing look out of dark chocolate eyes. I know good and well youve had a listen when youre wondering if a girl might be willing if you bought her a pint and walked her home. That may have been the case before I reached my maturity. She laughed her wonderful laugh. Youve not hooked fingers around your maturity as yet. Im within centimeters now. Ah, and heres Boyle answering already. Ionas at the cottage practicing with Branna. Hell drag Fin with him shortly and see if Iona will do the same with Branna. I like when its all of us together. Its family. He heard the wistfulness, swung an arm over her shoulders. Its family, he agreed, right and true. Do you miss your parents since theyve settled down in Kerry? I do sometimes, yes, but theyre so bleeding happy there on the lake, running their B and B, and with Mas sisters all chirping about. And theyre mad about the FaceTime. Whodve thought it? So we see them, and know whats what. He gave her shoulder a rub as they walked the winding road to Cong. And truth be told, Im glad enough theyre tucked away south for now. And here Id be more than glad to have my mother tucked away most anywhere, and not for unselfish reasons such as your own. Youll get through it. Its but another phase. Another phase thats lasted near fifteen years. But youre right. She wiggled her shoulders as if shaking off a small weight. Youre right. I put a bug in her ear today about how she might enjoy a long visit with my sister and the grandchildren. And thats shoving the same bug straight up Maureens arse, which she well deserves. If that doesnt stick, Im planning to bounce her from brother to sister to brother in hopes she lands somewhere that contents her. Im not giving up my flat. Youd go stark raving if you moved back in with your ma, and what good would that do either of you? Donals done well by her, no question of it, but so have you. You give her your time, your ear, help with her marketing. You pay her rent. He only lifted his eyebrows when she jerked away, narrowed her eyes. Be sane, Meara. Fins her landlord, how would I not know? Im saying youre a good daughter, and have nothing to feel selfish

over. Wishing her elsewhere seems selfish, but I can't stop wishing it. And Fin doesn't charge half what that little cottage is worth. Its family, he said, and she sighed. How many times can you be right on one walk to the pub? She shoved her hands in the pockets of her work jacket. And that's enough bitching and carping from me for the same amount of time. I'm spoiling my own good day at work, and the extra fifty in my pocket. They passed the old abbey where tourists still wandered, snapping photos. People always tell you things. Why is that? Maybe I like hearing things. She shook her head. No, it's because you listen, whether you want to hear it or not. I too often just tune it all out. He stuck his hand in her pocket to give hers a squeeze. Together we probably come average on the graph of human nature. No, she thought. No, indeed. Connor ODwyer would never be average on any graph. Then she let the worries and wondering go, walked with him into the warmth and clatter of the pub. It was Connor who was greeted first by those who knew them which was most. A cheery call, a flirtatious smile, a quick salute. He was the sort always welcome, and always at home where his feet were planted. Good, easy qualities, she supposed, and something else she envied. You get us a table, he told her, and I'll stand the first round. She skirted through, found one big enough for six. Settling in, she took out her phone. Connor would be a bit of time due to conversing, she knew. She texted Branna first. Stop fussing with your hair. We're already here. Then she checked her schedule for the next day. A lesson in the ring in the morning, three guideds not to mention the daily mucking, feeding, grooming, and nagging of Boyle to make certain he'd seen to the paperwork. Then there was the marketing she'd neglected for herself and her mother. Laundry she'd put off. She could do a bit of the wash tonight if she didn't loiter overlong in the pub. She checked her calendar, saw her reminder for her older brother's birthday, and added finding a gift to her schedule. And Iona was due for another lesson in swordplay. She was coming along well, Meara thought, but now that Cabhan had put in an appearance, they'd be wise to get back to regular practice. Put that away now and stop working. Connor set their pints on the table. Workdays done. I was checking on tomorrow's workday. That's your burden, Meara darling, always looking forward to the next task. And you, always looking to the next recreation. He lifted his glass, smiled. Life's a recreation if you live it right. He nodded as he spotted Boyle and Iona. Family's coming. Meara glanced around. And put away her phone. *Revue de presse* Roberts has a real flair for seamlessly melding day-to-day domestic details and the supernatural... A satisfying love story. *Booklist* [This] character-driven story, with its picturesque rural Irish setting, will charm romance fans. *Publishers Weekly*