

# BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

## *KELEGEEN*

- The Irish do not use the term “potato famine” for what happened in Ireland in the 1840s. Instead they call it *An Gorta Mór* (The Great Hunger) because it wasn’t a true famine. Only the potato crops failed. There was plenty of food in Ireland at the time, but most Irish didn’t have access to it. Why were the Irish unable to feed themselves? What role did the British government play in prolonging the starvation of the Irish and why?
- At the beginning of the story, Father O’Malley is less than fond of his bishop. By the end of the story, he sees the bishop differently. What accounts for this change? What role, if any, does The Great Hunger play in Father O’Malley’s paradigm shift? Is it Father O’Malley or Bishop Kneeland who has changed?
- How has Father O’Malley’s relationship with Siobhan shaped him as a priest?
- Several times in the story Meg defies her parents. Was she justified in doing so? Was she at least partly responsible for her father’s death?
- Do you think Meg and Rory were right to put off their marriage? Why or why not?
- The O’Connor family is devastated by Brendan’s sentence of deportation. Was it really a blessing in disguise? Why or why not?
- How did you feel about the magical realism elements in the story? (Deirdre’s premonitions, Father O’Malley’s connection with Siobhan) Did you see Meg’s comb as a magical element? Do they resemble real life occurrences that seem to defy explanation?
- Why do you think the baker, Mr. Breckett, kept his assistance to the Irish a secret? How did you feel about him?
- When Father O’Malley first meets Doctor Parker he feels somewhat antagonistic towards him. What accounts for this? What do you think of the way Doctor Parker cajoles Father O’Malley into working with him?
- Kevin Dooley needs a father-figure. Father O’Malley first fills that role for him, then later it is Dacey Kilpatrick. Do you think stepping into that role changed Dacey?