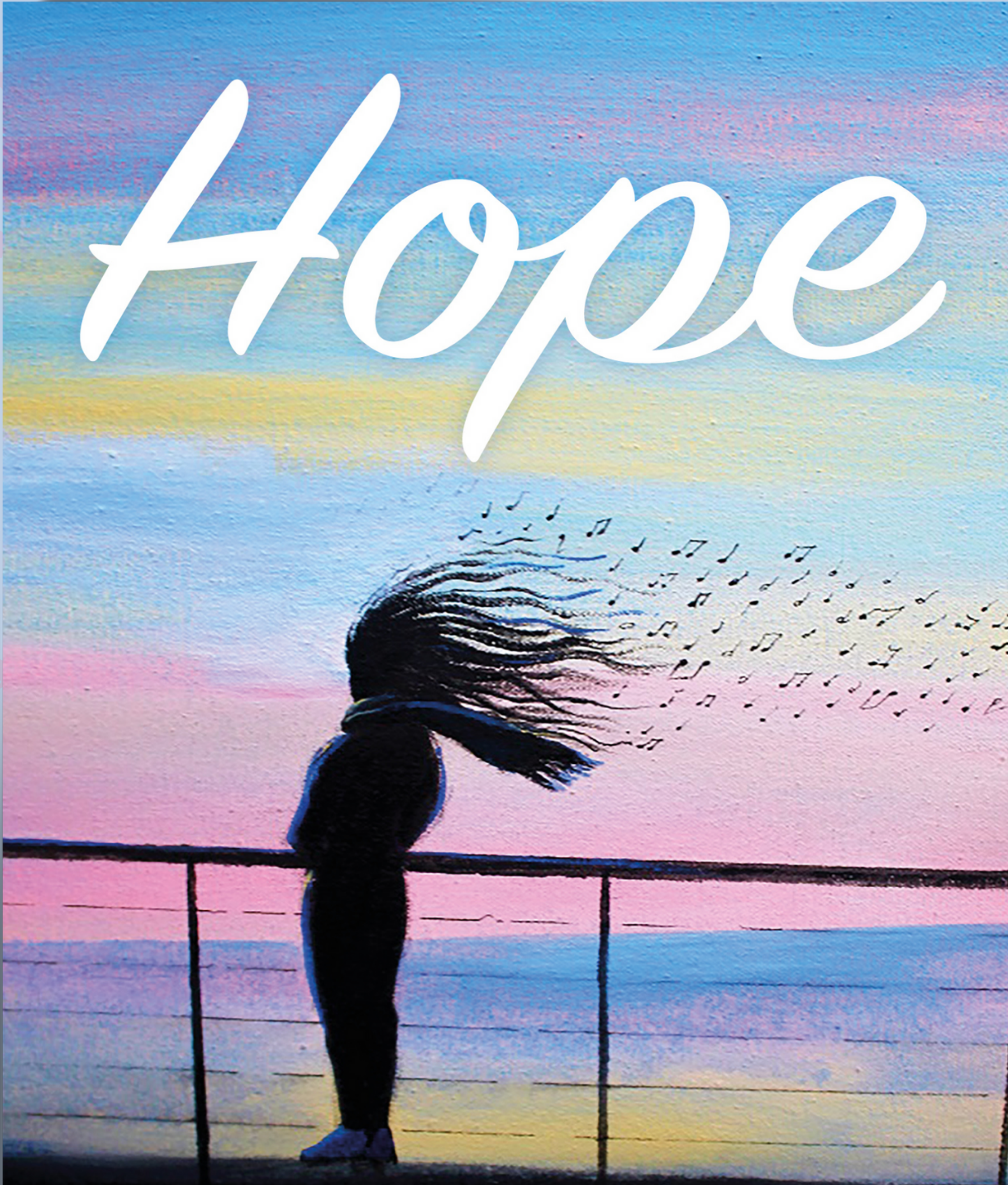


# Hope



Sometimes the end is just the beginning

**RHIAN IVORY**

'A wonderful, believable story' Eve Ainsworth

try the 1st chapter!

*Hope*

This book is for anyone who has ever been in  
hospital and needed a bit of hope.

And to all the teenage girls out there; you're braver  
than you know and stronger than you think.

# Hope

Rhian Ivory



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“Hope” is the thing with feathers—  
That perches in the soul—  
And sings the tune without the words—  
And never stops – at all—

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard—  
And sore must be the storm—  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm—

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land—  
And on the strangest Sea—  
Yet – never – in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb – of me.

*Emily Dickinson*



# May



I climb up and lean over the ferry rail, looking down into the grim, grey sea. *I've ruined everything.*

'Want a smoke?' someone asks behind me – a he someone. I shut my eyes tight and pray he'll walk away. I smell tobacco, strong but sweet, and try not to breathe in. I keep my eyes closed – if I can't see him he can't see me. But he leans against the railing I'm standing on and it shakes.

'I won't say "It can't be that bad" cos clearly it is, right? Life's shite. Not all the time, just sometimes.' His accent is very strong – Irish.

I open my eyes a little. Snot is dripping onto my top lip.

'Want to talk?' he asks. He's heard me. He's been watching me. But I don't know *what* he's seen or heard.

'Just piss off!'

He takes a final drag and grinds his fag into the deck with his boot. As he pushes away from the railing it



shudders violently. My feet slip. He grabs my denim jacket. He holds on so tightly that I can't breathe. When he lets me go, I drop back hard onto the deck. I'm winded.

'Want to tell me what all the shouting and swearing's about?' he says, pulling me up. I try to push him away but I can't stand up straight. I end up leaning against him despite myself; he's warm and smells funny, slightly sweet. Oh, I get it, not quite cigarettes.

'No.' I spit the word out.

*No*, I don't want to tell this strange boy I've failed my drama college audition. I definitely don't want to tell him why this latest failure is worse than the others. Because of Dad.

When I was twelve, Dad borrowed an old camper van from someone else in the music department and took Mum and me on holiday to Dublin to show me his old haunts – the flat above the newsagents, Grafton Street where he busked, and Abbey Theatre, where he and Mum first met. Dad kept saying we'd go back again, showing me photos of Mum and me playing on St Stephen's Green and one of Mum and Dad in Temple Bar looking worse for wear. Dad was so happy when I told him I was thinking of applying to Dublin. He said they'd buy a camper van and come to see me every school holiday. Mum just rolled her eyes. Maybe she thought the idea of me going to Dublin to study Drama at sixteen was even more delusional than Dad's crazy camper van idea. I was too embarrassed to ask.

No one else in our group had thought of Ireland until I told them all about the course there. Even Mr Davis didn't know about it. Dublin's not far from us, just across the water really. When they heard the words 'Young RADA' almost everyone applied, even those who'd already got conditional offers elsewhere, which felt a bit excessive. Maybe I should have kept it to myself. I remember the day I got the letter through with the dates for the second auditions. I was so proud. Mr Davis told us that being recalled for second auditions meant they were taking you seriously. And I believed him, especially about the singing audition. 'No one else will stand a chance when they hear you, Hope,' he said and I trusted him. *Fool.*

'I'll guess then?'

The boy pulls me into an alcove tucked out of the way of the rain. He wraps his leather jacket round my shoulders. It stinks of smoke. I shrug it off. He puts it back. I give up.

'I'm only after keeping you dry and warm. The state of you, you're shaking.'

He lights up another not-cigarette and takes a long drag, flickering it to life. He offers it to me. I take it – I've no idea why – and hold it, letting the heat sear into my skin. I consider throwing it into the sea but don't have the energy. I give it back to him.

'Alright then, let me guess... You've split up with your fella?'

A noise comes out of me, like a snort and a laugh – a snarf. I hope it conveys what an arse I think he is. This has nothing to do with boys. There's no point trying to tell him what it is about because even *I* don't understand.

'Ah, hang on, you've not run away from home, have you? Seriously? *Shite!*' He leans forward, looking properly worried, taking in my damp clothes and messy hair. He looks around as if expecting to see the police or something. 'C'mon now, out with it, are you after running away?'

I shake my head but he won't stop staring at me with that look, concern for the crazy girl, and I don't want to see it anymore. I try to glance inside through the steamy windows, but my glasses are messed up. I pull my t-shirt out from under my other layers and wipe them clean. With them back on, I can just make out the shapes of the navy-blue headrests. My friends are in there with my teacher, laughing, drinking and celebrating. I should be in there, with Callie and my friends, instead of out here with this random boy.

'Ah, here, sorry. I didn't mean to be a dick. I was just trying to distract you, to cheer you up like.' He finishes his joint and flicks it away from us. The wind sends it rolling over the deck and into the sea. 'Lookit, I'm Riley. Riley Santiago. I wasn't stalking you, I'm scarlet you'd think that. I only came out here for a cheeky smoke but then I heard you wailing and whining and I could hardly walk away?'

He turns me round slowly, gently. I take him in, this

*Riley Santiago.* His eyes are brown and hooded under heavy lids. His lips are thick and bouncy looking, like a ripe peach. His skin is dark, rich with beauty spots and moles chucked across his nose and cheeks, as if someone has decorated him with paint but he's been too busy to clean it off. He looks like the kind of boy who should come with a warning, just to give you a fighting chance.

'I'm fine,' I lie, as I shrug off his jacket.

'Is there someone I can get for you? Who are you on the ferry with?' He looks around, past me into the restaurant.

'No! No! I don't need anyone!'

The last thing I need is him finding Mr Davis or Callie. I don't want them to see me like this.

'Alright, well, if you won't let me get someone then I want your phone number.'

He holds out his hand.

I ignore him.

He walks to the door with a threatening look on his face.

I reach into my jacket pocket and pull out my phone. He comes back over to me and takes it.

'I'm going to put my number in your phone and I want you to call me, or text, whatever. That's the deal. I can't just let you go, the state you're in.'

Even though he's sort of making a joke there's something serious there, and it's nice. He means well, I think, but what would I know? I wonder if I can grab my phone back and bolt.

He stays far too close to me, taking his sweet time typing in numbers and letters. He smiles as he puts my phone back in my top pocket, before pulling me back into him by the edges of my jacket. I don't move away. He's deciding what to do next. I'm trying to second-guess what he'll do. I wait for the words.

'I won't go in there and find your parents or whatever – you nearly died when I suggested that – but I want a text from you later to say *I'm alive* or I can't let you go, and we'll be stuck together forever like this. Is that what you want?'

He locks both his arms tightly around my back and smiles at me again and, for a stupid second, I think he's going to kiss me. It makes me feel nervous.

'Okay! Whatever it takes to get rid of you. I was fine until you came along!' I push him away.

He laughs as if this is funny. But he does let go of me.

He zips the neck of his jacket up and pats me on the shoulder in a matey way and the tension is broken, the almost-moment evaporates. He takes a melodramatic comedy step away from me and then starts talking again.

'Now, I won't lie and promise it's all going to be fine. But I have a feeling about you, a wee feeling but a good one, *nameless girl*.' He opens the door, lifting his feet carefully so he doesn't trip.

'Hope!' I shout, just before the door closes. 'My name's Hope,' I add, in case he thinks I'm just shouting words at him.

He raises his hand, to say goodbye – or *I heard*, or *Whatever* – and walks into the steamy restaurant. The ferry sounds its loud horn as it approaches the docks. Home.