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An Irishwoman in Gilded Age New York

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1.

"Your beauty will be your curse."

Róisín Campbell was eighteen. She could take no credit for how she looked. Yet she did not deserve to be punished for it. Now, though, she was being dismissed because of her "beauty."

The woman who said this to Róisín, the woman who was dismissing her, was Abigail Geherty. She was the mistress in the house where Róisín was a maid. Róisín did nothing to warrant dismissal. She was conscientious. She obeyed orders. She did it all well.

"You are a clever girl and I know you work hard. But I am afraid that Mrs. Collins"—Mrs. Collins was the dour housekeeper—"says you are at times a bit forward with my sons and their friends."

"Ma'am. I admit to being friendly, but I have never—"

"It may not have been intentional, Róisín, but the effect is the same. Men are enough trouble at any time but with…someone as pretty as you, it is too far. I am sorry."

It was not her sons and their friends that concerned Mrs. Geherty, although her eldest daughter, Mary, was vocal in her dislike for the servant. No. It was her husband, Charles. He seemed to have taken a particular liking to this young farmgirl who had been in America for just under twelve months, the last ten in the employ of the Geherty House. She did nothing improper and it is doubtful that she exchanged more than a few dozen words with Charles Geherty. Still, his wife was well within her rights in doing what she was doing.

Róisín expected she would be dismissed when she was told by Mrs. Collins before the family was up that "Mistress wants to see you in her study." She had just finished her breakfast and wore her uniform of a black frock and white apron with a cap pinned across her rusty-red hair, which she kept in a bun. The other staff watched her follow Mrs. Collins out. They liked her well enough, but this was not their battle.

Róisín and Mrs. Collins climbed the servants' stairs to the second floor and walked down a broad hallway. Mrs. Collins knocked on the third door on the left and opened it when Mrs. Geherty bade them enter.

The study was painted in a pastel blue with complementing yellow wainscoting, and a vase graced a table in one corner, brimming with flowers (shortly to be replaced by freshly-cut ones) whose fragrance colored the room. Mrs. Geherty's desk was in the Louis XIV style, and with the room facing the rear, the sound through the open windows was that of morning birds going about their business in and above the rear gardens of the Gehertys and of their neighbors. There were flowers in the room's fireplace instead of wood and screens in the windows, it being early summer in 1871.

The pair stood before the desk where Mrs. Geherty sat in a wrapper dress. She asked Róisín to take a seat and asked Mrs. Collins to leave.

The maid sat as her mistress toyed with a piece of paper on the otherwise empty desk before looking up. Róisín's back was stiff, in the manner drilled into her, though she'd never sat before Mrs. Geherty. She recalled being in this room with her only once before, on the day she was retained.

Today, though, Mrs. Geherty displayed none of the light-heartedness of that other morning. After remarking on Róisín's beauty, she said, "I am truly sorry, Róisín. You are a good girl. But you must find another position. I will provide you with a testimonial, and you will surely find something."

The girl nodded and then returned her eyes to the hands clenching and unclenching in her lap. Had she been told the day before that this would happen she would not have believed it. While Mrs. Collins's command in the kitchen helped to prepare her, Mrs. Geherty's words felt like a slap, however gently she delivered them.

Róisín's mistress lifted the paper. "Here are families that you shall not approach." She handed it to Róisín, who reached across the desk for it. On it were the names of Irish-American

families with whom the Gehertys socialized, all with mistresses about the age of Mrs. Geherty and masters about the age—in their late forties—of Mr. Geherty.

"I understand, Ma'am. Thank you."

"You may leave," Mrs. Geherty said as she sat back in her chair. Róisín again nodded and rose before heading to the door. She held the list tightly in her left hand. When she reached the door, the girl turned and with her head lowered, she curtsied. Mrs. Geherty stood and approached. "I think and I pray that you will do well." Róisín shook the hand that was unexpectedly extended to her. She gave a slight bow and another awkward curtsey.

"Thank you, Mrs. Geherty. I hope so."

The now-dismissed servant walked through the door and climbed to her room to gather her belongings. It was a small room on the top floor, beneath the sloped roof. There was a tiny window with a small, yellowed lace curtain providing slight shade. The room's size was a blessing; Róisín had it to herself. The bed was old and lumpy, but it was flat, and she was provided with enough blankets when it was cold. It was not cold now, though, and the summer air was finding its way through the city. She was in part relieved not to have to suffer in the heat of August in a small room with a small window on the top floor.

Róisín owned only a few things—three frocks and two pairs of shoes, three bonnets, plus an assortment of undergarments and stockings. There were the photos of her parents and siblings. A Claddagh ring. Letters from home, chiefly from her mother. The necklace given to her by the family on St. Stephen's Day. Her books, some, including the Gaelic Bible, she'd carried from Ireland and others she bought since her arrival. She had neither the money nor the inclination to buy things since coming to New York, except for her books. She sent some of what she made home and kept the rest inside a sock. It was not much, but it would keep her going till she found

another position and another place to live. She lay these few things in the satchel she carried from Ireland.

She sat on the bed and ran a hand across the rough blanket. After a minute or two of looking around, she rose. Her door was open, but Róisín heard a knock. Mrs. Collins was making sure she was gathering what was hers so she would be gone before lunch. And not gathering what was not hers.

"Come on, now. We don't have the whole day."

"May I take—?"

"You take what's yours. And leave the rest. Now let's get you out of here. The mistress wants you gone."

There was an embroidered seat cushion she fancied, but as it was not hers it would remain. After a final look around, she put the satchel over her right shoulder. Mrs. Collins stepped aside to let her pass and stayed close behind her in the hallway.

"And don't think of going through the front door," she said as they went down the servants' stairs.

As Róisín reached the basement floor, her escort took something from the table. An envelope.

"Here's the testimonial—probably better than you deserve if you ask me—and two weeks' pay—which is better than you deserve, as we all know. Now go on."

Biddy, the chambermaid with whom she was closest, was tending to something, and she looked out to watch Róisín leave by the side entrance, giving a slight wave, which Róisín returned with a nod. No one else came to see her go or did anything, and an hour later she sat in a dark tavern named The Thistle near where she'd spent her first night in America.

2.

It was just about a year earlier and Róisín Campbell's final day in Hospital, the farming town on the eastern edge of County Limerick where she was born. She did not know what time it was when she shot up from what had been a deep sleep. All was quiet except for the rhythmic breathing of her sleeping sister, Sophie. It was dark, too dark to see anything, and thus her hearing seemed heightened. And she understood that she would never again hear what she heard at that moment. Her sister would never be dreaming beside her. The slight Limerick wind she would wake to in the night would never whistle through her room.

It was that realization, the concept of *never again*, that finally chilled her. She long knew the day would come. It was a Wednesday in June of 1870. Her eyes were open, but it made no difference in the pitch black. Still, it gave her the illusion that she was seeing something, and the something she *imagined* she was seeing was burning into her memory. From the ceiling to the bedroom to the farmhouse itself. Moving from room to room, imagining she was running her fingers along the walls and the windowsills and the tops of the old, dark furniture she took for granted. The kitchen with its pots dangling. The outhouse discreetly in the rear corner of the yard, sometimes too far and sometimes not far enough from the back door.

Soon—she could not know how soon—her daddy and her brothers Liam and Aidan would be heading into the fields with the dog to drive the cows to the barn for milking. Her mamma would start making a small breakfast while she and Sophie tried to stay in bed as long as they could. Róisín had three older sisters and another older brother, but the oldest sister, Ciara, was married with a baby girl on the Owens farm about a mile to the north and the other two sisters were off in Liverpool, working as maids. John, the second son, was in Liverpool too, working on the docks. The night

before, her mamma gave Róisín the letters the three in England wrote to her, and each told of how there was a good, or good enough, life away from the farm. That she should not be afraid though she was going far, far away.

Her mamma also handed her the letter from her sister's son Jimmy, who worked on the New York docks. In it, Jimmy said he would see to Róisín when she arrived and that he hoped he could help her get placed at the home of an admirable Irish-American family once she received training.

Hours after reading those letters, she was looking at the dark ceiling and trying to memorize every part of the house that was her home since she was born there just over eighteen years before, and she could not control her sobs. She refused to cry before about this. She knew that she would have to leave. She was strong till that moment. The farm, because of where it was, was prosperous with its dairy products, especially its butter, finding its way to England's booming industrial north. It did not suffer as the small parcels in the west and northwest did during the Famine, but even so, it could only support one boy. The rest had to leave. So Liam would stay and he would marry the eldest daughter of a nearby farm—much as Ciara married Gerry Owens—and Aidan and Sophie would follow her or their other siblings to England or America when they, too, turned eighteen.

Róisín fell back asleep, and it took several shakes from Sophie to awaken her.

"Get up, you fool. Today's no day to sleep in." Sophie was a troubling sort and far too unsettled in Róisín's mind, even for a fifteen-year-old. Still, Róisín would miss her.

Things were somber when she reached the kitchen, and her mamma insisted that Róisín do nothing but be waited upon. She told her mamma when she saw the men finished with their milking, and Mrs. Campbell got the tea ready. Everyone was quiet as they had their eggs and toast and tea, and they were somber as they went about doing chores. For

those in the house, the ticking of the clock above the mantel in the front room seemed to get louder with each minute, approaching the moment when Róisín would have to leave to be in Knocklong to catch a train that would begin her journey to New York.

Liam carried Róisín's satchel to the parlor. She'd packed it the night before with her mamma, and it contained the clothes they bought two weeks earlier in Limerick City supplemented by family mementos, her siblings' and Cousin Jimmy's letters, and three of her beloved books. Her daddy made a point of buying one for her when he went to the city. She was a good, bright student, and she read alone when she could in quiet times and appreciated that her parents did all they could to encourage it, hoping it would give her an advantage in her new life.

Finally, Róisín's mamma went to her room and she sat on the bed with her child, holding her hands, and Róisín put her head on her mamma's shoulder as the others had done before her, and her mamma said everything would be grand. Not long after that, Liam rushed in.

"Daddy says…you must get going," and he hurried down the stairs, followed a long minute later by the two women, who went to the drive at the front of the house as Liam put Róisín's satchel in the back of the single-horse trap her pa had brought around. Mamma handed her a large package containing food to have until she reached Queenstown, where she would board a boat to New York. Aidan and Sophie were joined by Ciara, holding her baby and beside her husband, as well as some of Róisín's friends. One by one they hugged and kissed her—except for little Meghan Owens, who received Róisín's lips on her forehead—until she reached her mamma, and that dear woman clutched her tightly and made her daughter promise to be a source of the family's pride.

Finally, Róisín joined her daddy in the trap for the six-mile journey south to Knocklong. There she would catch a

train that would ultimately take her through Cork City and to the port of Queenstown where she would spend the night in a hotel. It was a pleasant day, and Róisín sought to imprint it on her memory as she looked back one final time just as the trap started a turn that would forever leave the farm behind. With a wave, it was gone.

Her father was his usual taciturn self for the early portion of the ride, and Róisín's head leaned against his shoulder. Neighbors on farms along the way stood at their stone walls to wave their own goodbyes and shout their own encouragements as had become a ritual, and they stopped at the church, where the teacher, Mr. Sullivan, reached up to her to hug her goodbye and the parish priest, Father Crowe, handed her the book, a Bible in Gaelic, he gave each who left. After the Campbells received his blessing, they continued south, and Róisín took her last look at the town and could just see the church's steeple until it, too, was all gone.

As they neared Knocklong, her daddy spoke in a way he never had before.

"Your mamma and I will miss you, that's for sure. You understand why it must be?"

"Yes, daddy."

"From Jimmy, we hear good things about New York. And some bad things, too. You are a good girl. I know you will do good."

"I will, daddy."

"Lots of people who are not like us, though. Some very poor. They are God's creatures and do not forget that. You will also see people who think themselves superior to you. Like the English do. Remember you are a good, Irish girl."

"I will, daddy."

"And be sure to write to your mamma regular. Some of the ones in Liverpool are not so good. But you are in America. Write when you can."

"Yes, daddy."

They arrived at the station shortly after nine. Róisín's daddy handed her a bag with money. This was for the train and the boat and the hotel in Queenstown plus enough, according to Jimmy, to tide her over until she could cash the modest bank draft her daddy got for her in Limerick City, which was safely stowed in her satchel. He also reserved a cabin for her on the boat so she would not be in steerage. While sailing ships still plied the route to New York and were cheaper, they were also far less predictable or comfortable, and the Campbells could afford passage on the *City of Paris* steamship. It was among the fastest that made the crossing.

Father and daughter found a place for the trap, and after Róisín bought her ticket, they went to the platform. When the train pulled in some ten minutes later, the two hugged. She put her head out the window and waved as she looked upon her father, waving back, for the last time.

As the train neared Cork some hours later, Róisín was amazed at how crowded and congested everything seemed. She was in Limerick City a few times. It was nothing compared to this. But she was in Cork only briefly as she switched to the train to Queenstown. She had the name of a small hotel near the quay. At the desk, she was asked what boat she was on and when it was departing. Róisín shared a room with another girl, from County Sligo. She'd arrived at the hotel the day before, and the two went to the dining room. It was full of girls and boys near Róisín's age and some older men and women and some families with wee ones. All were waiting to go to America, and Róisín was at a table with seven others.

"You think Cork is big, lasses?" It was addressed to the table by an older man. "I hear tell that 'tis tiny compared to New York." He slurped his soup, and his wife said, "And the hurrying. Our son be there, and he says they never stop. But he says it'd be a good life for us." They looked to be from a

farm, and Róisín could not place their accent, and she missed some of their words.

After the meal, Róisín went out with her roommate and several others for the air of their last night. They were mostly quiet, paired arm-in-arm till dusk appeared. Róisín had never seen the water before, though some of the girls from the west had. The group strolled to the quay, where they saw the *City of Paris* on which they would all sail to America, and they watched the darkness cover it and the sea. They returned to the travelers' hotel, going to their rooms to sleep at home one last time.

3.

The *City of Paris* had both cabins and steerage. Róisín could afford a small cabin in second class, though the others she walked with that night in Queenstown were deep belowdecks in steerage. She tried not to become too attached to such girls. They were the ones in desperate straits, and she wanted nothing to do with them.

She would find work as a domestic servant, she hoped, preferably in a mansion of one of the wealthy Irish families she heard about at home. Cousin Jimmy spoke in his letter of a connection to a grand house with a good master and a kind mistress and that he expected that she could maybe work there.

Róisín was not so foolish as to believe a well-bred and handsome gentleman would carry her away, notwithstanding how often it happened in the romances she read and re-read. She knew they were fantasies, and that no man of a good family would marry a farmgirl, no matter how handsome he might think her. To such a family, she would be little better than the poor from the west of Ireland who could barely speak let alone read English. She knew there would be many a man in a good family who would seek to take advantage of her, promising her all manner of things to seduce her and that such a man would be her ruination. There were many such rakes in her books too.

Róisín had her share of attempted liaisons with the idiot boys around her farm and in the village. Older ones especially, making her silly promises, promises even they did not believe.

Still, she feared she would end up in the squalor she read about in other, more serious books set in London and Manchester and prayed that that would not be her fate, and she took comfort in the letters her mamma received from her sisters in Liverpool about their hard but tolerable lives in service. During mass on the fourth day out, she could not

help but feel some sympathy and more pity for the girls and boys, most about her age, from steerage. Yellow and thin, they were.

Róisín's fate would be different. *She* would find a position in a fine home—her cousin practically promised which one in his letter—and she would be clean and presentable and fed. She would have a kindly mistress who would speak to her and treat her properly and recognize her grace and intelligence. Perhaps she'd be allowed to read some of the books that cluttered the grand library she was certain the master would keep.

She was relieved that she was not one of those she pitied. These thoughts hardened on board, when she had much time to think of what lay ahead. She encountered the occasional first-class passenger-of-means aiming to establish himself in America. Indeed, on the evening of the third day, a young dandy who wore a diamond pin in his cravat approached her as he strolled after dinner. He called himself Michael Henry from Cork City and assured her that he would soon make his fortune in American railroads or trade. He was a handsome man, though not tall, with a well-trimmed beard and an easy smile. He could not be more than five or six years older than her. He presented her with his card and urged her to contact him at his New York banker's office. He would, he said, be happy to spend some time with her as they both became accustomed to the new world. Perhaps a dinner?

He was, in fact, a creature of such absurdity, an absurdity of which he was well aware, that he must have learned how to behave from one of Róisín's novels. But Róisín was pleasant. From then, each evening (save the sixth when an Atlantic storm kept everyone from the decks) the pair strolled together often, and Róisín found it the highlight of her day.

On the morning of the ninth day, she crowded the deck railing with the other passengers as the steamer headed into

New York harbor. The crowd was too large for her to find Mr. Henry. She was amazed by the buildings in Cork, but this was miles different, the towers lining the waterfront as far as she could see. The water itself was chock-a-block with ships and boats and ferries going hither and yon, again and again avoiding collisions that to Róisín's farmgirl eyes seemed inevitable.

The *City of Paris* arrived on schedule. As she docked, doctors came on board to examine the passengers. Róisín was permitted to disembark ahead of those in steerage. She was herded through New York's processing center on the southern tip of Manhattan, and when that was done, she was in America. She wondered, but only for a moment, whether she would ever again encounter the girls she walked with in Queenstown the night before they left Ireland.

When through with the processing, she was pleased that Mr. Henry had not forsaken her. He stood on the sidewalk, reminding her that he looked forward to meeting her again, reminding her of his banker's name and New York address. He offered to have a cab take her where she was going, but after asking for directions found that she had but a few blocks to walk. He doffed his hat to her and kissed her hand before signaling a cab to collect him. She waited until he and his trunk were in the cab and watched him give a final wave as he headed north.

Róisín again pulled out Jimmy's letter with its direction for how to find him. It was, as she said, not far. She carried her satchel north and to the right, or east, side of Manhattan. Even this small corner of the City was a mass of rushing. Of strangers seamlessly navigating their way through the crowds, pushing and jostling with no ill-intent in their hurry to get somewhere other than where they were. The streets and sidewalks were paved, though not in gold, and the former had a patina of manure as well as civil servants with shovels and cans who did what they could to make them passable and tolerable to those walking or riding by.

Soon she caught sight of a large structure along the docks. As she neared it, she saw crowds of men congregated. She fought her way through, though news of her presence quickly spread, and a path opened before her. She entered the building. It was a large hall with a dais on one end, on which a cluster of men in suits and ties sat. It was to them that she was directed. When she reached the dais, a portly man in an ill-fitted suit looked down on her.

"Might I help you, lass?" It was a strong brogue, distinct from what Róisín was used to.

It was evident that she was just arrived, carrying as she was her satchel and wearing clothes that showed the effects of her journey.

"Aye. I am looking for Jimmy Regan. He is my cousin."

The man looked to the side.

"Anyone know this Jimmy Regan?"

A short man came to the front.

"I do." He pulled out a book and after scanning several pages pronounced that Jimmy Regan was working on Pier Six, with the *Ajax*.

The portly gentlemen looked down.

"I'll send someone to fetch him. He be expecting you, yeah?"

"I do hope so," Róisín said.

"While he's being got, have a seat," and he directed the men watching to make room and had someone hand a chair down from the dais. Someone else ran to get a glass of water and handed it to her when she sat, her satchel to the side, and the water was quickly drunk.

Róisín, the object of attention from the entire hall, sat amazed at what was happening to her. Her ship was crowded, with far more people than she imagined ever seeing. Then suddenly she slowly disembarked and went through an immigration station with papers checked and stamped by a uniformed man who did so with a flourish and

a “Welcome to America, miss” before being set out into the vastness of New York.

It was warm, and she was sweating, fearing her odor would be detected by the men around her. But the varying smells of the hall, the sweat most of all, had long since disappeared into the atmosphere of the place. Instead, as Róisín slowly began to cool down, staring at the door where she expected her cousin to appear, she was viewed as an object of curiosity by most of the men, who gradually lost interest and drifted away.

She had not seen Jimmy in years and did not know if she would recognize him. Each time the door opened, she looked, hoping for a flash of recognition, always disappointed. Till, finally, a man came rushing in, his hat in hand, dodging the men loitering. He was a tall, thin man with curly brown hair. When he saw her, he waved and grinned.

“Cousin Róisín Campbell, as I live and breathe.”

She stood before he reached her, and he banged into her, harder than either expected. Now the attentions of the others returned, but the two were unaware of it.

Jimmy looked up at the boss.

“Tommy. This here is my cousin Róisín. She is from County Limerick. A real farmgirl. Do you think we can teach her to live in the big city?”

Tommy, the boss, looked down.

“Lass. Just donna listen to what he or anyone of us says and you’ll do just grand.”

With that, Róisín handed her empty glass up and shook Tommy’s hand, thanking him for his kindness, and a moment later she was back on the streets of the metropolis, her cousin carrying her satchel over his shoulder and leading her to where things would begin.

As they walked, Jimmy was speaking his mile a minute, but little of it was reaching Róisín’s brain. All she saw were the buildings and the people and the wagons and carriages with their horses and all she heard were the sounds of what

she saw echoing against the buildings and all she smelled were the odors of a grand metropolis in action.

Róisín began to make sense of the apparent chaos in the streets. There were avenues and there were streets. Some went uptown and some went across and some were cut at strange angles to others. She picked up that Jimmy was taking her to a boarding house run by a Mrs. Flanagan. On the boat, Róisín heard of all the tenements that flooded with people desperate to flee Ireland and find food and work. Things were not as bad as they were during the Famine years, but they were still harsh for those with little schooling and less hope at home.

As she walked with Jimmy, she saw poverty she had not imagined. The sounds and sights and smells were nothing but chaos, particularly with the rising heat and the blaring sun. But after several minutes they were clear of it, and the streets resumed a more orderly shape.

"You need to keep out of this part as much as you can," Jimmy said. "They say they was once quite grand but now, now these people got less than nothing, and if you have anything going in, you won't have it going out. So just keep away."

Róisín could only nod as she tightened her grip on his arm.

Once clear of that neighborhood, the sun and the smells were no longer stifling. About halfway down one of the blocks, Jimmy said, "Here is Mrs. Flanagan's. I told her all about you, so much as I know. It is a very respectable place. The rent ain't high, and you can stay here till you go to the nuns and then you be living in-house, like the one I talked about in me letter."

Mrs. Flanagan's looked much like the other houses on the block. It was brick with three windows on the front of each floor. There was no gap with the buildings to the left and right of it. A stoop of some twelve steps rose from the

sidewalk to the left side of the building, and there were two large windows to the right. It had four stories.

The door itself was large and black. A brass "145" was above a large, plain knocker. Jimmy, though, simply opened the door, calling out for Mrs. Flanagan as they crossed in. From the rear of the first floor, Róisín heard a sing-songy, "Coming, coming," and a woman, Mrs. Flanagan it was, appeared. She was a wide woman and a little short. Her gray hair was in a bun, and she wiped her hands on an apron as she approached the pair.

"Mrs. Flanagan. 'Tis my cousin, Róisín Campbell." Turning to Róisín, he said, "Your landlady, Mrs. Flanagan."

Róisín extended her hand, but Mrs. Flanagan was too quick, and her arms were around the girl's waist.

Jimmy told Róisín as they walked that the landlady was a widow. Her husband died in an accident on the docks, and she somehow managed to have enough to acquire the boarding house. Jimmy said how that happened was something of a mystery, but that all agreed it was best left as one.

Mrs. Flanagan directed her into the sitting-room. The room had two windows looking out onto the street and since they faced south and the sun was high, the room was very warm, even with the windows open. It had a high ceiling and a fireplace and was populated by several mismatched armchairs and a threadbare couch and small tables dispersed about.

Before they sat, Róisín asked Mrs. Flanagan where she might relieve herself and was surprised—pleasantly—when she was led to a small room in a back corner of the ground floor. There was a toilet, and Mrs. Flanagan explained how it worked. After Róisín was done, she joined Mrs. Flanagan in the kitchens as a kettle was set to boil. Her host said that many parts of New York, though not yet the tenements Róisín walked through with Jimmy, had central plumbing. She carried the teapot, and Róisín carried a small

tray with two cups and saucers and the women sat in the front sitting-room.

"Your cousin had to get back to work, but he brought your bag to your room. We'll lead you there shortly, but we thought you should have tea first so we can learn something about you."

Róisín nodded, and sat on the couch, as Mrs. Flanagan indicated. Her host sat on the other end, balancing the cup and saucer in her lap. It was a brief conversation, what with Róisín being very tired from the voyage and from all she heard and saw since arriving.

Mrs. Flanagan led Róisín up three flights of stairs. On the top floor, there were two doors, each leading to a bedroom. Both doors were open, and Mrs. Flanagan led Róisín to the one that was to the rear of the house. It was very neat, with two large beds and two dressers and a single closet. The beds were to the right, their headboards against the wall. Each had two pillows, and Róisín would be sharing one.

"As the newest girl, you have this side," Mrs. Flanagan said as she put her hand on the right side of the bed away from the window. "You will not get quite the breeze that the girls closer to the window will. But this is how things are."

"Does it get very warm?"

"Good God, child. At this time of year, it can be sweltering. And the bugs. We shan't mention the bugs."

This was of scant comfort to Róisín, and her landlady left her alone for a nap. She did not know how long she slept. It was still light outside when she was awakened by a woman who was about her size.

"Mrs. Flanagan told me you be here. I be Mary Bette Flynn from County Mayo and I work as a seamstress," and she extended her hand, and Róisín shook it.

She saw that Mary Bette Flynn from County Mayo was a peasant. Mayo was one of the places hardest hit by the Famine, and its children were still coming to America, hoping to send money home so a relative could follow. Her

skin was a little yellower than was Róisín's, suggesting she was still recovering from her Irish diet.

But Mary Bette was a sweet girl.

"Do you know what the time is?" asked Róisín.

"It must be going on eight," was the answer. "Mrs. Flanagan said she kept some supper for you, but you had better come down for it."

With that, Mary Bette was gone, and Róisín heard her bounding down the flights of steps. Mrs. Flanagan did have some supper ready, and Róisín did not realize how hungry she was until it was placed in front of her on the large, dark dining table, where Mary Bette extracted her history while she ate.

For the next three nights, Róisín shared Mary Bette's bed as two girls shared the other. It was brutally warm, well beyond anything Róisín knew, and they slept naked and with the window open, thankful for the window screens that Mrs. Flanagan had installed several months before. On the second night, after Róisín spent much of the day wandering the streets, she woke and found Mary Bette's arm around her. She relished the touch and soon drifted back asleep. It was repeated on Róisín's third and final night at Mrs. Flanagan's, though this time promptly after they were in the bed and when they were both awake, though pretending not to be, each aware of the other's heat, sweat, and smell. To Róisín it was a too-brief pleasure as she was quickly asleep and awoke on the opposite side of the bed from Mary Bette.

On her fourth day, though, it was time for Róisín to leave Mrs. Flanagan and Mary Bette so she could begin to train to become a domestic servant in America.