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23,600 words

SEEKERS

by
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Chapter One

For Reviewers

PLEASE READ THIS PAGE

NOTES FOR REVIEWERS

You are looking at a review copy of a fictional work based on some sketchy family history. This is not a memoir, biography, nor a chronicle of events. All of the dialog and a considerable amount of the characters and the events are fictional.

The story is a first draft. I intend to make changes. Exactly what I change depends partly on you.

I would appreciate any feedback from you:

- Tell me what you liked
- Tell me what you didn't like
- Do the speaking parts sound like the real people?
- I am not happy with the ending. Are you?
- Anything else you feel that I should know.

You can send me your comments by email or leave comments on

my website www.NEW-TALES.com

Thanks again,

Patrick Kelly

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Chapter Two

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

In the middle ages, Ireland was ruled by many kings. They employed knights, called the Feanna, to wage war between their kingdoms. Somehow, peace broke out, and the kings declared an end to war, at least, among themselves. (Could King Arthur have been Irish?) They surely had the Vikings and Danes and a few other enemies to contend with who would raid the coastal areas,

but the inner lands were free of internecine war. Unfortunately for the Feanna, the peace diminished their employment prospects. Most of them roamed the countryside, doing good deeds for a fee, to eke out a living. In American terms, think of the movie "Magnificent 7" or in Japan, Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai". The Feanna are examples of the cast-aside soldiers who continue to live by their code of honor, even if their community has forgotten them. The legend of the Feanna inspired the Fenian Irish Independence groups of the late 19th century.

This fiction story is based on events that occurred in 1881 in the lives of John Aaron Kelly and Margaret Joseph Marrey of Drogheda. At this time, there had been nearly two hundred years of intermittent rebellion by the Irish against the British domination. The last rebellion was fourteen years before in 1867. John and Margaret may have had childhood memories of it. Certainly their parents remembered it.

Historically, our story falls into a "quiet" period, 1867-1898. This does not imply that everything was cozy between the Irish and Brits. Ireland in 1881 was a police state by comparison to the today's USA or even compared to mainland China today. It must have been a frustrating, intrusive and offensive place for the Irish. By 1881, Fenians was a name applied to any group that was advocating revival of Irish heritage and/or home rule, and was willing to at least talk about fighting for it.

Apparently, with the memory of the 1867 still fresh, most Irish wished for a peaceful path to home rule.

Margaret was a member of the Galicians League, a Fenian group. John was an active Fenian, possibly in the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). The IRB morphed into the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the 20th century, and led Ireland to independence.

This was also a time of technological change. Cottage industries had been Withd by factories in many industries, but the few standard management practices were still heavily influenced by the theories of economists. Electricity and steam had nearly Withd water power. Advances in metallurgy made it possible to build a wider variety of ever-more-specialized machines. The machines were conceived by new techniques for analyzing work into the most efficient steps. In 1881 transatlantic travel took a week, on a ship powered by sails, and steam. Electricity was a new thing. Compare this to the period 1970 to 2010 when the internet, fiber optics, cell phones and PCs changed communications globally. The Irish were sharing in that period's vision of a better life through technology.

I hope this thumbnail summary of modern Irish history helps give you a context for the following story of John and Margaret, and what brought them to their decision to leave Ireland and go to America.

#

Chapter Three

Easter 1881, Drogheda, County Louth, Ireland

The morning fog had burnt away. The April sun is bright, a good day for the Easter fair. Everyone is dressed in their Easter finery of wool and lace. His siblings crowd around their parents at the bottom step. The air is warming. John Aaron Kelly stands apart, at the top of the church steps where a tall elm tree cast a bit of cool shadow. John, being over twenty-one years old, is certainly not a child, he now lives on his own, nearer to his work. Neither is he fully a man, at least in the eyes of his parents. It does not bother him, as long as they let him find his own way. He will be patient to wait for full acknowledgment of his manhood. He shall continue to come to the church of his childhood out of respect and to keep in touch with the family.

The approach to the church is filled with sun and parishioners. His father, John Kelly Sr., and his mother, Susan, embrace their friends Dennis and Anne Marrey. This is clearly a reunion. John heard them mention Balbriggan, a fuzzy memory for him. They're in the linen trade, he recalls, distant neighbors from the same parish. He remembers a few summer Sundays, when the whole family of Kellys would take a long walk to visit the Marreys, at the seashore. He remembers only that the seashore

with the Marrey children was a good time.

That must have been ten years ago.

The Kelly children and the Marrey children were both restless to dispense with these strangers and get on to the Easter fair and fun. The parents insisted, they first line up by age and properly introduce themselves to their counterparts. Mrs. Kelly apologized for the absence of her two oldest boys who were off on seafaring jobs. His father motioned to John to step out of the shade and, being the oldest present, to head up the line. His father had a fondness for military style. He was proud of his ancestors who had fought in the British Army during the Crimean War. He still had the medals.

John Aaron had done this line-up before. It seems incongruous to him to form up a military line on church grounds. It was all about his parents taking every chance to show off their children. He found himself opposite, Margaret. He tipped his hat, "Good day, miss. I am John Kelly." He knew they had met before.

"Good day, John. I am Margaret. You may call me Margie. I remember you, from Balbriggan." She gave him an informal curtsy.

He wasn't expecting a full-grown woman. Her voice was familiar, then he placed her. She was the skinny girl who wasn't afraid to catch crabs in the tide pools and throw them in the bucket.

"I remember you. Didn't we go crabbing together at the

seashore, once? That was about ten years ago."

"Aye, we did go crabbing." She leaned over to him and whispered, "You took off all your clothes and went swimming in the ocean! I feared you'd get swept away."

John blushes, and smirks, "We didn't get to the seashore much. I found it irresistible."

Their eyes linger on each other as that distant day washes up in their memory, like a delicate foam on the waves.

He realizes the implications of this recollection. He feels he has a high reputation and this could only tarnish it.

I've been caught in a childish transgression by a playmate who is now grown. This is not fair.

"Don't worry. I won't tell," she whispers.

"Thank you," he answers, "You know, there are some things our mothers' should never know."

"Agreed," she giggles.

Somehow, he has absolute confidence that she will keep his secret.

The conversation drifts back to the more mundane. He listens to himself speaking. That is an unfamiliar experience. He knows he has the sea of the past and the woman of the present intertwined in his thoughts -- yet another unfamiliar experience.

Margaret confirms that the Marreys are newcomers to St. Peter's parish in Drogheda. They live in Yellowbatter, less than

a mile away. The Kellys live on Greenlanes, within sight of the church. They are closer to the town center, overlooking the river. John mentions that he lives beyond Greenlanes, nearer the factories that cluster around the riverbank. Sunday mass is his weekly visit with the family.

The conversation has stirred questions he had not thought of in a long time:

Why did my father move from the coast? The smell of the sea, the fog and good times playing along the seaside are all good. Did they move from Drogheda to the coast, then back again? Where was I born? Why? Does it matter? Not in any practical way. I just want to know.

He resolves to ask his father about these things. That won't be easy. John and his father are busy men, when they're not thinking of the present, then they're planning the future. There's no room for the past. Thinking about the past is also unmanly. It can quickly slide into reminiscing. That's something the old, nearly dead people do. It is not what strong men do. He'll have to find the right moment and be firm.

His reverie is interrupted as the crowd moves. Parents began herding the children towards the lane. The mothers kept the smaller ones close. The Marreys and the Kellys joined the stream of parishioners, and other townsfolk, headed down the hill to the fairgrounds by the River Boyne.

John and Margaret, being the oldest headed up the procession. The little ones would follow with the parents sweeping the rear, coaxing stragglers, and picking up the littlest who could not keep up. This arrangement kept the younger ones in view of the parents, and gave the parents full view of the two oldest ones, to see what might be happening.

John and Margaret walked together at a leisurely pace, and exchanged the standard pleasantries. He liked the way the springtime sun picked up the streaks of red in her brown hair. Her blue eyes were bright even in the shadow of her bonnet. Some of his relatives had coal black hair, like his.

After a time, the conversation lagged, he found he didn't know what to say, and apparently, neither did she. They continued walking, both wondering what's next. They were from working families. Conversation was taken for granted. He was introduced to her, after a fashion, as a "big brother for the day". Brotherly protective feelings were automatically engaged. Alongside them was something much more attracting. His mind was now filled with so many questions about her.

He chose to ask her a question about her old home. It seemed a safe topic.

"Did you go to Easter Fairs, back home?" he asked.

"Of course, there's Easter Fairs everywhere in Ireland. Aren't there?" she said.

"I haven't traveled much. I presume it's so. There must have been Spring Fairs, even before Christian times. I suppose even the ancient Druids and Irish kings celebrated spring in some way, and enjoyed the company of their friends."

"You sound like a man who has been doing some reading, John. Tell me what do you read?"

She put her arm in his. He found it surprisingly relaxing.

"Well, I read all the books that I can borrow from my boss at the factory. Mostly about mathematics and mechanical devices," he steals a glance at her. She looks directly back, wondering if he exaggerates, then realizing that he is not, she turns back. The boy who went swimming in the sea is now fearlessly tackling things with his mind. She has never met such a person.

Thinking that he may have lost her interest, he rambles on in another direction, "For enjoyment, I like to read stories about the adventures of the Fianna. Those are about the times when Ireland was its own country."

Her face brightens, "Oh, I know those, well. I find the ancient tales inspire us to be better."

A common interest was enough to launch a more relaxed conversation. They discovered the reading had led them both to be members in the Irish heritage groups. Ostensibly, these groups do not pursue Irish independence, the membership increases with every report of injustice at the hands of the

Brits.

Margaret describes her enthusiasm for the Gaelicians, whose goal is the revival of the Gaelic language.

"When we drink a toast of whiskey, what do we say?" she asks.

"We might toast most anything. If nothing in particular, then we might merely say 'Water of Life'. We'd be toasting life in general and perhaps, whiskey in particular." John thought his answer was well-stated. He wondered if he made an impression.

"Well done!" said Margaret, "Now, do you know that 'Water of Life' is simply the English translation of the Gaelic words, 'uisge beatha'. That phrase is hundreds of years old."

"That is interesting," John says, "I will try it next time and see what effect it has on others. Tell me, is Gaelic a practical language? It's an old language, that lacks many words."

"The language has been suppressed by the Brits for the past two hundred years, so it does need updating. I believe its revival and use is an important part of re-establishing our Irish heritage."

John remains unconvinced.

"Margie, I am sympathetic to the Gaelicians sentiments. I fear such a project is bound to be lengthy. My inclination is towards what might show results sooner. I am considering joining the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). The leaders want to move

us towards home rule in our lifetime, by peaceful means. They want to avoid another 1867 disaster. Restoring our heritage is one of IRB's priorities, too."

"Be careful, John, leadership in those groups can change with the weather. The IRB is a Fenian group. There's violent roots there."

"Oh, for sure. It is partly why I am still pondering membership. There are some hotheads in the local chapter that I don't want to be associated with. They'll be nothing but trouble to everyone."

The weightier topics of Irish Independence intruded upon all conversations in those days.

Arriving at the fair. They keep to the crowded midway to survey the sights. The little ones try to run off. John and Margaret help gather them in. Margaret's mother says to Margaret, "Go with John, we can manage. You two, go enjoy yourselves."

She thanks her mum and takes John's arm again. With a gentle nudge she steers him away into the crowd.

They walk for a while, trying to maintain their conversation. The noise of the midway crowd is too much. They turn into a huge cool tent. It's a shooting arcade. John tries a game. Margie takes her turn with unladylike determination to win. He likes her spirit. It doesn't matter that the games are

rigged to be almost impossible to win. They both know that, and play with intensity anyway.

John's watching her shoot and trying to sort out how they got here._

We are so much alike. It seems a miracle. Or, did our mothers talk? How did our families find their way together today? No matter. One does not question gifts from heaven.

As she lines up a rifle shot, he has an excuse to stare at her. He wraps his arms around her to help adjust the stock, so it recoils properly. She relishes his comfortable embrace. She knows his attention to the recoil is exaggerated. He loves the smell of her hair and the crinkle of her starched lace collar.

They both miss the targets by wide margins, as expected. He congratulates her on her cool-headed handling of a firearm.

"Just call me a modern Fianna," she says with a fist lifted high.

That afternoon, they discover more similarities in their backgrounds. She fills in some gaps in John's knowledge of his own family's history. Both came from the same corner of Ireland - near the coast, north of Dublin. The Marreys are masters at the linen trade. Several generations hale from Balbriggan which has been known for linen-making for a century. Now, with steam-power, electricity, and Drogheda being closer to the sea, the area promises to become a new factory hub. The Marreys see themselves as seekers, not refugees. Margaret Marrey is truly

one of them, unwilling to grab crumbs that life might toss on her path. She is proud, and Irish.

John is smitten with her. He knows it, and he is surrendering to it. He half-forms a question like he has never had before, "does she feel anything for him?" He has no idea how to ask this question. He can only feel it.

He buys her some ice cream, and they find a picnic-style table under a large parasol. There was an older couple and their two small children on one side. They welcomed the young couple to fill the empty bench.

John is preparing yet another question about her, when she decides that she wants to hear something more entertaining.

She asks him, "Tell me about yourself."

He was spun 'round. Now she wanted him to think in an entirely different direction, to speak of himself. No one had ever asked him such a question. Such a simple request. Where to start? He drummed his fingers on the picnic table, rolled his eyes upward, twirled his ice cream, searching for the answer.

Surely I cannot start with "I was born..." that would be boring. An intelligent woman like this commands something more lively, interesting, to hold her attention, and lead her to want to hear more. Aha! That's a prescription for a story.

He remembered entertainment at home was always Dad and Mom telling stories. Books were expensive. No one had any musical

talent, so they all learned to tell stories.

She feels sorry for putting him in such an awkward position. He seems unable to speak. Apologetically, she tries to help him, "John, tell me about your work. Your Dad's work, and your work. How's that?"

"I'll tell you a story."

"I'd be delighted," she says with concern that he is still making this harder than necessary.

He starts with an interesting time:

"Dad insisted that I get as much schooling as possible. Dad should know. He did a lot of jobs when we lived near the sea, but nothing lasted for him. Those were hungry times. So, when I was ten, he moved us all up here to Drogheda. A lot of others made the move before us, so it weren't so bad to find our way. I missed the coast, the salt air, the cold wind. Even in the fog, you know the sea is wide and free. I think Dad had to hire out at times to the tobacco smugglers to make ends meet. He's law-abiding. He's not the kind of man to do such work for long.

"The move was good for all of us. Dad could have done shoe-making but he got better work in the shipyard. He worked himself into a shipwright job, since he was the only man who knew how to figure, and use a square. That's why he insisted I stay in school. I didn't mind. I liked school. I liked learning new things. He knew that, too.

"Dad advised me not to work in the shipyards. 'People

always need shoes,' he said. At 16 I was apprenticed to the new shoe factory in Drogheda.

"After working there for a time, I made a small change so we could make soles faster. The boss saw what I could do with machines, and paid me a bonus. Since everyone was on piecework, all the workers made more money, so they were happy, too.

"There's a big demand for quality Irish-made shoes. The boss says our shoes are as good as the English-made. I heard that some of our shoes get stamped "Made in U.K.", and shipped off to America. The boss won't talk about that. Whoever's doing the buying has money. They buy all that we can make. So far, Dad has been right about the shoe business being steady work.

"Last year, the boss put me on half-time salary and half piecework, so I could work on speeding up our methods, and keeping the machines running. He's been talking to the bank about a loan. He wants to buy more machines and hire more workers to double the size of the factory. Then, he'll make me Factory Engineer, and I'll be on full-time salary."

He puts his thumbs in his lapels.

"So, there you have my work story, and my home story follows. Being a successful man of 21, with a steady job at the shoe factory. I have my own house, near the factory to make it easier to work extra hours on the machinery. I'm sharing a cottage with another lad. He also works at the factory. Every Sunday I come back to the old neighborhood where I grew up, to

join my parents and siblings at St. Peters's church. I am still, officially, a member of the Armagh diocese."

He puts his hands in a prayerful position.

"Do I pass muster to be an Easter Fair companion for the lass before me?" he says with feigned fear of rejection.

She in rapt attention. Her mother had briefed her. John did leave out a few things, like the embarrassing story about how he broke his arm on the rocks in Barnageeragh Cove, while he was trying to impress a girl. She can see no benefit to bringing that up.

She gives him a taunting laugh, "I must defer to my father about you 'passing muster', Mr. John Aaron Kelly. As for me, I think you'd best worry that God may hear your prideful talk and send a lightning bolt to knock you down to size."

"Oh, I expect the Brits will do that for Him, eventually. They don't seem to like us Irish doing well at anything. Wait a minute ... I didn't say my middle name. How did you know?"

From a nearby tent comes the toot of horn, pound of a drum, and the screech of a fiddle, all mixed up. A band is tuning up.

"Women have their ways," she says with an impish smile.

She gets up and spins away towards the tent. He freezes, bewildered. What now? She stops and turns back to him, and puts out a hand.

"Well? Aren't you going to ask a girl to dance?"

"Well, of course! M'Lady," he says with a deep mocking bow

and a flourish with his hat.

His lack of hesitation is borne upon the knowledge that his mother showed him the steps the week before. She had insisted that he take the time and learn this manly art, "because you never know".

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Chapter Four

A Petty Incident

Dawn washes away the stars from the early morning sky above Drogheda. The sun still hides under the seaward horizon, stoking a red fire in the sky that pulls the hills over Drogheda out of the darkness. A chaotic texture of thatched roof cottages and brick walls at the ridge-line seems to be ablaze then fades.

The dawn breaks, illuminating the hillside cottages, waking the working folks who reside there. John's family home is among them on a street called Greenlanes. It is part of a web of cobbled old farm roads that lead down to factories, downtown, and the port on the bank of the River Boyne. The industrial age has arrived in Drogheda with its emphasis on scale, mechanical power and promise of continuing progress. In a single generation, the skilled workers of the old cottage industries have moved from their homes into factories. High quality Irish linen, lace and shoes are now produced in greater volumes than ever, and shipped to the world. The Irish have begun to dream of

Ireland again.

Most young men his age, only 21, live with their parents in one of the cottages up the hill. John lives down the hill, in a small cottage on Bachelor Lane with his buddy Murph. They are a short distance from the factory. John has persuaded the boss to let him work on the machinery at night for extra wages. Besides doing repairs, John uses the quiet of the night to disassemble the machines. He is learning the secrets of how they work.

The factory boss insists that John live close by the factory for John's own safety. The port bars cast out drunks and desperate men into the street. Some will wander the night. Drogheda has gas street lights in downtown to keep such men away. The gaslights stop at Shops Street. They don't cover Bachelor Lane or the factory streets to the East. John must walk home by the light of the moon and stars.

Recently, there have been changes. The British Authority put a curfew on all Irish. Officially, the reason is to prevent 'rogue elements from repeating the incident in Cork', a reference to a small riot. Most residents in Drogheda see it as merely punishment of all Irish. They have no control over what happens in Cork. The Brits are just peeved.

John sees the curfew as helpful. The police pick up the drunks and criminals at curfew time. John waits till after curfew to go home. He keeps to the shadows and can outrun any

cop. He is determined to improve his skills and livelihood.

This morning he dreams of Margaret, just a mile away in Yellowbatter. He hopes to see her again on Saturday, and again on Sunday at St. Peter's Catholic Church. His dream of her sweetness and fiery spirit fades as the the sun pours in the cottage windows. The church bell chimes the 6:00 a.m. Angelus. It's time for John and his roommate Murph to rise. They must get the factory started.

As the streets brighten, the first wave of workers emerge from the cottages, tramp down the hill, and turn onto Cord Road. It runs East, parallel to the river. The sunbeams shine down the street like searchlights, blinding the workers who cast long shadows as they head to the port, docks, warehouses, powerhouses, and factories that have claimed the banks of the River Boyne.

The powerhouses sit astride the water and the bank. Their water wheels are lazily dipping into the flow of the river. When engaged to the wooden gears, they provide mechanical power to adjacent factory buildings as they have done for decades. Farther up the riverbank, a different kind of powerhouse houses a steam engine that cranks an electric generator. The chink-chink of shovels feeding coal to a boiler mixes with the sound of seagulls heading out to sea.

The newspapers tell with pride of the new electric street

lamps that have come to the capital city of Dublin, 30 miles to the south. In Drogheda, the lampman is finishing his rounds, quenching the gas streetlights downtown. The factories are growing. Their thirst for electric power to drive machinery takes all the power that can be made. Someday the city will be able to invest in electricity to light the streets in the modern way. For now, the gaslights in downtown must do.

John and Murph, leave their cottage. Their street is still cold and damp. The sky is bright enough for walking at a normal pace. On their way to the factory they can catch glimpses of steam-powered tugboats pushing empty barges upstream to the factories. They both enjoy watching machinery of any sort. There is no comment. It is just a shared pleasure of two friends.

At Cord Street, they turn left, into the full morning sun. It warms them. They are part of the startup crowd. Stopping at the bakery, they get first pick of some still-warm, fruit-stuffed pastry for breakfast. There's some fresh bread to top off their lunch buckets. As they pay a few pennies for the baked goods, they hear a commotion outside.

They cautiously step into the bright sun, and resume their walk. At the corner, they join a crowd observing the action across the street. The brick wall bears three man-high letters. The first two, IR are still clear. The last letter is smeared, unreadable. On the corner, an ordinary bloke sits on the curb,

head in hands, mussed with white paint, in handcuffs. It is not normal for them to see a person in handcuffs in the morning. Criminals are not usually early risers. A uniformed officer with extra brass, clearly a detective, a hunter, has found his prey. He's standing over the handcuffed man, quizzing him and taking notes. A local beat cop is at the wall, shaking his stick at a shopkeeper.

"It's your wall, so it's your responsibility to clean it up!" the copper yells.

The shopkeeper is trying to remove the paint, with a long-handled brush. It is not going well. The first two letters, 'IR', are still readable.

"It's drying fast. I can't get it off," yells the shopkeeper.

The cop is impatient. The scrawled letters must be taken down right away or his chief will hold him to account. The gathering crowd has him concerned. He doesn't want a riot. He'll let the bloke run off before he risks taking a beating from the crowd, like happened to a policeman in Cork last week. He hopes the detective feels the same way.

"Just paint over it then. You can make it neat later. Do I also need to tell you how to hold the brush?" he adds caustically.

The shopkeeper is much annoyed. His shop is closed while he deals with this. It's the busiest time of the day for him. He

gets the paintbrush and fills in the R as fast as he can move.

"That's better. One more to go," says the copper with all the authority he can muster.

The crowd grows larger and braver. Voices within the crowd chant "IRB is for the Irish", and "Home Rule or No Rule." The detective and the beat cop hastily lead away their prisoner. A few of the crowd start to come after them, firing more colorful taunts, like "Bugger the Queen". This gets a laugh from the coppers, who are both Irish. They fire back, "We aren't the Brits." Their voices are lost in the noise of the crowd. Cooler heads in the crowd restrain the taunters and remind them that they need to get to work. No one really wants trouble. No one wants to see an Irishman taken away by the Authority. They will remember this for days. They also know the man's fate. Basic rights will be ignored. The man may be tortured. His life will be ruined by jail time, and his family impoverished. All that, for painting a Fenian group's initials on a building.

John and Murph resume their walk to the factory.

"Looks like the Irish Republican Brotherhood has arrived in Drogheda," says Murph.

"I was expecting more," says John in disgust.

"I heard an IRB leader speak last year when I was in Dublin. He meant business. This is not the real IRB you see here. This is a bunch of fools playing at it. Painting names and slogans isn't going to change anything," says John.

"They need to get the attention of people in Drogheda. That would be a good thing," says Murph.

"They've been scrawling patriotic slogans on buildings for years down in Dublin. Stronger stuff, like 'Erin Go Bragh', and it's all come to nothing. It'd be smarter if the IRB didn't announce their arrival in Drogheda. That'd keep the Brits guessing. I'm ready to join the IRB if they have a program that makes sense."

"Maybe the people in Drogheda, must get stirred first," suggest Murph.

"The Brits will get stirred first, and come down harder on all of us. This will be good for nobody. You'll see."

Murph nods, tolerant of John's point of view which he sees is often rooted in feelings and justified with logic. He heard the news of crowds beating up on coppers down in Cork. That was a very serious business. The newspaper ran a single story about the incident. No more news followed. There was talk of censoring by the Brits. The disruption is painful and no one wants it. John's right, there needs to be a program. The program follows the populace's feelings, not the other way around. He'll talk with John another time, after John learns more about the other good things that the IRB is doing in Drogheda.

"Did you recognize that lad in handcuffs?" Murph asks.

"No, he's new to me. He was dressed like university student."

"Aye, he's not a Drogheda working lad. I wonder if the IRB sent him up from Dublin?" says Murph.

"If he's underage, he might get off lightly. Perhaps the IRB is not so dumb as they seem," John says with a wink.

"You mean, like on the battlefield. The Generals send out their worst soldiers first, to test the opposition? That is very cold-blooded thinking," says Murph.

John looks coolly at Murph, "I believe our city has become a battlefield. Thank God we don't have bullets. It makes us use our heads."

Murph just shrugs. He thinks of his father, in jail, serving a 20 year sentence at the hands of the British Authority. He has a seething hatred that he nurtures behind his usual smile and cheer. Now he sees John coming around. That talk of the "town becoming a battlefield" is new for him. Life's been good to John. Once he gets a taste of how heavy is the hand of British Authority, then he will awaken, too.

They hurry along the street, making up for lost time. Out of breath, they arrive at the factory by 6:45 a.m. They're late. They greet the boss at the door. He nods and initials their work tickets. Later he might ask what held them up; for now, he'll hold his tongue. He needs the factory started up and ready for the workers by 7:00 a.m.

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Chapter Five

The Factory

With the sun now nearly full, all the factories are in the midst of their morning startup routine. At the powerhouse next to the shoe factory, the water-wheels are turning the gears. John runs up to the second floor and engages the power take-off to the leather conditioner. This machine makes the softest leather that lines ladies shoes. He loads some hides in the feeder. The staccato cadence of the trip hammers tells him all the hammers are operating properly. John heads back downstairs. Meanwhile, Murph has readied the sole stations. He has opened up a gallon tin of glue. He refills the pots at each work station. The fumes are strong, so they open the roof vents, for more air

and light.

In a building nearby the steam engines are at full hiss and wheeze, spinning electrical generators, and belching smoke that drifts over the river. John goes to the electrical motor that drives the stitchers. He closes a switch. The electrical motor bearings whine as the single motor the size of a barrel comes up to speed. John sets the clutch so the overhead shafts and belts spin at idling speed. Their factory is now alive with whirring machines, ready to do a day's work at the hand of the workers.

The church bell sounds seven o'clock. In they come, they're a cheery bunch. They've all been to Catholic school. They've learned that entering a building means getting to the business at hand. They stash their belongings where they can, and take their places.

For the most part, these workers count themselves fortunate. Their alternative is to find work on the farmlands surrounding Drogheda. The factories don't require shoveling manure, or lifting large loads in the hot sun. The factories make what people cannot make themselves, so the factories need skill and workmanship. They pay better wages. It's good work, if you can get it. Some, like John Kelly, have learned a family trade. Additionally, he finds machinery a challenge to his mind as well as hands. Like Silicon Valley, a hundred years later,

the workers ignore some obvious shortcomings of their environment, in their eagerness to prosper, develop their talents, and make new things, and make old things in new ways. A factory is intoxicating to those who enjoy making things.

As the workers file in, the boss logs them by name. They will be paid a flat daily wage plus enough to pay for lunch. Not all factories pay this. The boss at this factory knows he is competing for the best workers. He also knows that these people will skip meals if they need extra money. He knows a hungry worker will always do a bit less than their best.

The rest of their wages are earned on a piecework rate, per English standard practice. The more they work, the more they make, and the faster they work, the more they make. That's the theory, anyway, as formally written by British economists earlier in the century when cottage industries reigned, and factories were new. By 1881, these theories have become dogma and any other compensation method would have been suspect of being unjust or subversive, by everyone, even the workers.

They each take up their tools or engage their machines. The thump and clickety-clack noise increases. Within minutes one has to shout to be heard.

John looks down the first line, and sees a worker waving urgently to him. He nods and goes to the boss, "Station 14 is

not engaging. Do you want me to fix it?"

"Yes, go ahead," says the boss. He is confident that John will have the worker back in production in minutes. The worker is relieved to see John heading his way. The worker is not concerned about making enough money; he knows he can make a decent wage, five shillings per week, by just making his quota. What one quickly learns about factory work is teamwork. The piece-rate system is deceptive to those who think it's what runs the factory. This worker has learned that he must work steadily, too. He needs to earn his quota every day. He can't let the machine problem go on for hours, then with a burst of energy catch up. That doesn't work on a line. If one stops work, the next worker's queue is soon empty. If one works too fast, one finds his own queue empty, because there's no work until the next basket of materials arrives. Having too much to do makes one look slow, and having nothing to do makes the up-line mate look slow.

The best workers never fall behind for long, or speed up more than the downstream blokes can handle. In spite of this inherent discipline of the line, the pace is frequently thrown off by a broken machine or batch of bad leather, then a line must be stopped. When the boss isn't doing paperwork, he is usually re-assigning workers to keep the work moving at other stations.

The push-pull nature of the line, the breakdowns and slow-

downs, this is where reality of the factory deviates from the simple linearity of economic incentives theory. Without teamwork, they all lose. Yet the economic theory dictates they be paid in the same manner as the old cottage industries.

The boss's work ticket system keeps track of what each person completes every day. Each task has a different rate, depending on the time and skill level required. He calculates each person's earnings every day. Everyone accepts the simple justice of the piece-rate system. There are no debates about its fairness. Though the amount of the rate is a perpetual source of griping by workers or management. The rate is always too high or too low, depending on one's perspective. Even when all would agree that the rate is fair, it is considered proper form to complain lightly.

Everyone knows that the most valuable workers are the ones who learn all the jobs. These are the workers who can team with others to help get caught up and clear backlogs. There's no name for these people in 1881. Factory management concepts are still anchored in a one-dimensional model of human behavior called the economic man theory. In a hundred years, teamwork will be more appreciated. First, as a soft skill, and later as a statistically measurable behavior. For now, man's inherent common sense overrides the economists' theory at Christmas bonus time. That's when the boss rewards teamwork and maintenance people, and the blindness of the piecework system is balanced. A

sense of fairness is restored for another year.

The worker waiting for John knows all this, intuitively. He is confident that John can solve this mechanical problem that keeps him idle and earning nothing. He knows that John does not play favorites. John works the problems in the order they have been called out. But the worker also knows that it is John's choice whose machine he will fix first. For those times when John gets backed up, it is good to be on John's good side. So the worker waits patiently, and gives John the respect he is due.

The church bell strikes the time, 11:00 a.m. Everyone stops for lunch. The entire area slows down to a halt. The noise declines and one can hear the birds that roost in the eaves. Stopping for lunch is mandatory, in part, for safety reasons, and, in part, because that's the way English factories are run. The Irish must follow English practice. It's not actually a law, but the guidelines are followed because the British are in charge. Everyone gets up to leave the factory, except for John, who begins scampering from workstation to workstation oiling and greasing the equipment. The boss insists, rightly so, that every machine be kept well-lubricated. It is the best way to prevent breakdowns, and lost production. John knows every machine intimately, so he can lube each one quickly. By 11:25 a.m. John is nearly finished.

The silhouettes of two men darken the factory doorway.

#

Chapter Six

Coppers At The Door

Two uniformed policemen stepped boldly through the open door of the factory.

"We need to speak to the boss. Where is he?"

John doesn't want to speak to them. They represent the heavy hand of the British Authority, but he is the only one in the factory. Being rude to a policeman would gain him nothing, so he responds.

"The boss is at lunch. He could be in the pub, or the restaurant, or maybe he went home." He hopes that they will just move on.

"Who are you?"

He doesn't want to give his name.

"I'm doing maintenance on the machines. Lubrication and whatever adjustments are needed."

"Why aren't you taking lunch, like all the other workers?"

"I take my lunch at 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., so I can do this lube work without disrupting the line. It's more efficient that way."

"It is customary to be doing lunch now, not doing work."

The copper writes a note in a little book.

The copper sniffs the air. It is heavy with the smell of

glue, and leather. Normal for a shoe factory, the smells seems to disappoint him.

"We are going to wait outside for the boss." They pull up some old stumps by the main door, light up their pipes and relax.

John doesn't like them hanging around, but he has no authority to run them off. He has already crossed the line by being evasive.

I need to alert the boss.

He leaves his oil can at the last workstation, stuffs the oily rag in his pants pocket and grabs his lunch bucket. He looks out at the church clock to make sure he goes out the door at precisely 11:30 a.m. He tips his hat to the coppers to ensure that they see him as he goes out the door. The workers sitting in the little park across the street have been watching the entire scene. They are getting uneasy with law enforcement hanging around the factory. Some had seen the incident in the street that morning. Others had not. They exchange information, and the story, naturally, grows.

John crosses the street, and they hit him with questions.

"Why are the coppers here? What do they want?"

John gives them all the same answer, "There's nothing to worry about. I'm going to get the boss."

He walks past them into the shade and out the far side of the park. Today is Wednesday, the boss will be home at lunch

today.

Following a curving street, he is out of sight of the factory, and heads directly to the boss's house. His knock brings out the housemaid who recognizes him. She hears the urgency in his voice.

"Wait here," she whispers loudly, and scurries back into the house.

The boss arrives at a trot. John tells him of the morning's incident and the coppers who are waiting. Together they head back. On the way, John drops off at the park. He finds a spot near the factory, in the shade of a bush, where he can't be clearly seen. He doesn't want to have to explain to the coppers how he found the boss so quickly when he wasn't sure where the boss went for lunch.

The boss greets the officers with respect, and invites them into his office. It isn't a fancy office. He has chairs for them. There's a roll-top desk, with a lamp, neat and tidy, with drawers for every type of paperwork. The officers can see that this is a carefully-run operation, unlike so many others.

John gets up, and sneaks across the street to the factory. He crouches under the office window, so he can hear their conversation.

"...We're searching for the perpetrator who put the traitorous scrawling on the wall down the street. The deed was done just before dawn this morning. One was caught in the act,

and he says that the other one works in a factory. We might get more out of him later. For now, that's what we know. We intend to check the hands of every worker for white paint. If you will just tell them to cooperate, that will speed up our business here."

"I see," says the boss. He stands up, goes over to the window, glances down at John, and tugs the lower sash shut. John sneaks away as the boss turns back to the officers.

"Best we talk privately about these matters."

The coppers shrug.

John was puzzled. Why did the boss close the window? Could it be that he didn't want to be heard cooperating with the coppers? But what else could the boss do? The cops could shut the factory down if they wished. It must be something else.

Does the boss want to keep me out of trouble? Maybe.

I think he wants me to understand that I have heard enough. The coppers are going to check our hands. He wants me to make sure we don't have the fugitive among us!

John goes back to the park and wanders about the workers eating lunch, deflecting more questions and looking at hands. He finds Murph and someone unfamiliar sitting next to him.

"You're the new lad?" asks John.

"Paddy Branagh's the name," extending his hand in friendship.

John sees white pigment around his nails. He sits down next to them, ignoring the offer of friendship, which momentarily offends Paddy.

Turning to both of them, he speaks quickly, "Listen to me, and listen close. Someone painted an IRB slogan on a wall down the street this morning. I ain't say it was either of you, but I see white hands. The cops have been tipped. They are going to check everyone's hands when we go back."

John stopped talking, to let those thoughts sink into Paddy's brain.

John turns back around, facing the factory. He can see cigar smoke drifting out the window of the office.

The boss is stalling them till the end of lunchtime. I have a few more minutes. His mind is racing. He knows he needs to do something with his hands. It helps him focus. He opens his lunch pail and starts eating.

Paddy is stricken. He compares his hands to Murph's. The white pigment outlines his nails quite clearly. He looks to John who now seems to be more interested in lunch. He rubs his hands. The paint has dried and it won't come off. He doesn't want to run. They will just get his name and hunt him. Better to be hunted than caught for sure. He sees no way out of his situation. In a panic, Paddy whispers "What should I do?"

John's been thinking.

"There's a rag in my hip pocket. Pull it out. Sit behind me

and rub your hands with it. The lube oil will take the paint off. Be quick about it."

Paddy grabs the rag and rubs furiously. The brown rag is now streaked with white pigment. Then for good measure, Paddy pushes his fingers into the grass, and smears dirt into the crevices. Now his hands look like a ditch diggers, not a factory worker who makes fine shoes. It's the best he can do. If he's asked he'll say he is the "new lad", so he gets the dirty jobs.

"John, it worked. I'm done. Thanks," Paddy hands the rag back to John.

"I don't want that thing. That's evidence. Toss it."

The Church bell rings the twelve o'clock Angelus. They all bow their heads and say their noontime prayer, then everyone heads back to the factory.

They file past the boss. He has an extra piece of paper that lists all their names. He is checking them off as they come in. He directs each of them to show their hands to the coppers. His firm and confident manner has the desired calming effect, particularly among those who had prior contact with law enforcement. The coppers are thorough. One checks palms up and the other one palms down.

John walks in with the others. No one notices that he is returning early. The coppers aren't looking at faces, just hands.

As the workers start up their workstations, the noise level

crescendoes back to the normal din. John hangs around the boss's office, looking busy.

The lead copper approaches the boss to get the list of names. He yells above the din, "We didn't find anything. You seem to have a clean crew here. I must point out that you have one worker not taking his lunch on the customary schedule. That's unusual, and might be against labor regulations. You've been helpful today, so I'm not going to report it. However, it is something you need to look into."

The boss smiles with feigned appreciation, "Thank you officer. I will look into it," he says. The officers leave.

The boss stops at where John is pretending to work. "Did you get an earful?"

"Aye, I did. Damn coppers, just Irish flunkies for the Brits."

"Watch what you say. I don't want any trouble here. Take that talk home, and leave it there. Thank you for coming to get me. That gave me a chance to put them at ease."

"I saw the cigar smoke," John smirked.

The boss smiled, "A cigar and a dram of whiskey put them in a good mood. It's not the part of business I prefer. It is a requirement of the times that a man does business this way. Maybe there will be better times coming," he says with a wink. "I won't ask what you did, but it worked, so it was good. Now, let's get back to work."

The boss wants to keep politics out of the workplace. So be it. He didn't mention Paddy, but he knows they were after one of ours, and he appreciated my help. The boss for sure is sympathetic to the cause, but seems uncommitted to action. A lot of people think that way. They hope something will happen to bring better times. I think life is what you make of it. Do nothing, you get nothing.

#

Outside, the policemen walk across the street to the park, ostensibly to resume their beat in the shade of the noontime sun.

"Well, do you think our man really works there?" asked the first to the second.

"Yes, this is the factory. The man we nabbed was clear."

The first stooped to pick up something in the grass.

"Look, a rag with white pigment. Could be our man was here in the park."

"Scrubbing his hands. Someone must have tipped him that we were looking at hands."

"Yes, that means we are looking for two men."

"Maybe more than two!"

#

Back at his workstation, John finds it hard to focus on his work.

Paddy's a real Fenian. I just aided a Fenian cover up his crime. Worse, he's a member of the IRB, a secret, and outlawed organization, that makes my crime even bigger than his. The police are on to the IRB. They even had a detective set a trap, and nearly caught both of them. I hope Paddy doesn't tell anyone about the help I gave him. Did the boss bribe the coppers? Not quite, but he came close. He certainly kept them busy. I got him from lunch, so I am an accomplice in his crime, too.

What would Margaret say? No doubt, she would heartily approve of every action, but her peaceful, countryside experience is still fresh. She doesn't know how bad things can be in the cities. I must be careful about how I speak of this to her. She needs to be on guard.

This day went my way, but if it had gone another way, I would be in jail. How much of this was luck?

I guess this is what it feels like to be a Fenian criminal, and get away with it! It feels good. It's actually a bit exciting. I like scoring one for Ireland.

These IRB blokes are all going to end up in jail at this rate. There must be something they could do that would move our cause forward. I must find out more about these IRB fools.

What's all this piled on my bench? Oh, my piecework, a full

basket of shiny new shoes, waiting for me to pack them. Life seems to have crept up on me and turned complicated, but some things stay the same.

#

Chapter Seven

More Than Justice

The factory crew is on the green, enjoying their lunch and the slight movement of air off the river. It's a sultry June day. The factory is hot and sticky. John is glad to finish his machine maintenance rounds. He joins the crowd in the open air.

"Where's Murph?" he asks.

"He went with Paddy to meet his sister at the woolen mill."

Must be something up. Murph and his sisters have some way of letting each other know when there is news.

I don't believe in 'sixth sense'. How do they do that?

Sure enough, Murph and Paddy return with an eager-to-talk look about them, "There's news. The lad who was arrested last week for the scrawling, got a year.

"A year! That's a stiff sentence," said John.

"He was booked, found guilty, sentenced and packed off to jail in a week. It was the Grand Jury, no less. It was all secret, except his name, Sean O'Neill, and his sentence, that was posted at the courthouse. All the details are sealed. It's like they don't want anyone to know what happened..."

"...and if you want to know more you have to identify yourself, and justify why you need to know," said Paddy, "I've seen it before."

Without a thought, John speaks from his heart, "Maybe they don't want to get people stirred. To think, a year in jail for such a petty crime. The thought of it makes me want to break him out."

Paddy had another perspective, "Yes, it's a harsh sentence. A signal to anyone with similar intentions. Sealing the records is common when a criminal gives up evidence against his mates. So that is a signal, too, but a false one. Sean didn't give me up, as you can see. I am free. What is not common knowledge is there was a third lad, they never saw. He's free, too. The authorities want you to think that Sean gave up his mates. Secret courts build distrust among us. They're trying to weaken us."

There is a murmur of common sentiment among all in earshot. They all felt the injustice and the manipulation.

Paddy continues, "Sean's long sentence may also be punishment because he didn't give up his mates. They probably beat him a bit, too. I think he's a hero."

The murmurs grew louder.

John senses the crowd's mood. His instinct is to confront a situation with calm analysis, so he reflexively tries to cool them down, "Paddy, you've clearly been down this road before,

when you were down in Dublin. What's next?"

"Nothing's next. We wait. We remember our heroes. We grow stronger in our resolve. We wait for our time. Our IRB leaders will tell us what is next," Paddy said.

It isn't the answer John wants. This talk of shadowy people, distrust, injustice, and most of all, waiting, doesn't fit the categories of his life. He is proud that he deals with people directly, with honesty, and without delay. His problems are the ones he can tackle with concentration and puzzle out. He thrives on results. Waiting is a waste of time, akin to sin. The conversation leaves him withered.

"Paddy, you have the patience of a saint and a soldier. I am afraid that I cannot so easily sit by and wait to be told what to do next. It is not my way. We will never get Home Rule if we have to wait for directions."

Paddy understood John's impatience, "Don't take what I do as all there is. The IRB has a lot of things going that I am not privy to. I am sure that they would be interested in what you or anyone else here might be able to contribute. Let's talk more another time of what you have in mind."

The noon Angelus rings. The workers mumble a prayer, get up and file back to the factory. This afternoon the line moves with some extra speed, and the factory noise wraps them all in a familiar cloud. John casts his eye about, eagerly seeking a machine that needs a tweak or fix to speed it up. Failing to

find any machine problems, he takes up his piecework with new-found energy.

By the end of the day, the entire factory is ten percent over quota. The boss is pleased and grateful. He thinks to ask someone what is going on, then decides to leave well enough alone, to give it a chance to happen again. At the end of the day, they all leave, feeling a bit better about themselves. The dinner table conversations this evening are about the fate of Sean O'Neill, a good Drogheda lad.

#

Chapter Eight

One Bank

The next day, the rising sun is bright red over the sea, and it paints the river waters pink. The heavy air promises only another sultry day.

The boss cheerily bids them good morning. He is dressed in his better suit. He asks John and Murph to log in the other workers. They gave him curious looks, so he answers the questions that politeness held on their tongues, "I have an appointment with the banker at 8:30 a.m. I'll be back by ten. Wish me luck!"

The boss hasn't told them about his new factory layout, where it might be located, and how they could keep producing shoes while setting up new machines. He didn't think they would

understand, and didn't feel he needed their commentary. He had spoken to them about the need to get a loan to pay for the expansion. He sensed they might have experience with loans and paying back. He is counting on their curiosity to pique their interest, encouraging them to pass it on to the rest. It will give the workers something about the business to think about. He understands the need for a bit of theater in managing a factory.

"Good luck, sir," they say, and they mean it.

Out the door the boss goes, carrying a case with his factory plans and ledgers, prepared to answer any question from the banker.

"Is today the day he gets the loan?" asks Murph.

"Aye, appears to be," says John.

They both turn to their own duties, keeping an eye on the time.

They hear the church bell sound ten, then eleven o'clock. The workers leave for lunch. John and Murph look at each other. The boss is overdue. Something is off.

Eleven-fifteen, the boss walks in, a bit mussed, and unsteady. He goes into his office, drops his case with a bang, and slams the door.

John and Murph go to the office door, and hesitate. They hear the pop of a cork and tinkle of a glass. This does not sound good. They tap the door and call to him. He slides his chair over and pulls the door open. "Come in lads, you are

looking good today. What can I do for you?".

He is never this friendly, which put John and Murph on edge. John fishes a sheaf of paper out of his pocket, "Sir, here's the roster of workers. One of the stitchers is home with a sick child."

"I hope it's not serious," the boss says.

John notes the boss's out-of-character concern for his workers' health. Even discussing such things seems like nosing into others' lives. It isn't something that's done. It isn't polite. John feels a need to get this conversation back on familiar ground.

He asks, "How'd it go at the bank, Sir?"

"Oh, that, it was shit. They asked question after question about the business plan. They got more information than they need to know. I answered them, every one. There was no choice, there's only one bank. They have enough to build their own damn factory. Then they tell me that a big loan needed approval from the head office in London. I asked if they were recommending the loan. Then they said the head office would think them derelict in their duties if they ignored incidents like the scrawling last week, and the 'riot' that happened in Cork before that. They said probably no loan now. Give it a rest, and come back in a few months."

John is bewildered. This is more than he is prepared to take in. He understands payday loans, getting approvals, a head

office, the Cork ruckus being called a 'riot', and the First Street scrawling incident. To John these are all separate things. Now they are all connected. He senses their future is in the hands of distant forces. It will take some time for this to sink in. For now, they are concerned about the boss's welfare. This loan has been the key to the boss's dream for months. They see him drained of good spirit. Their sympathy for him is their immediate priority.

Murph, ever the optimist, speaks first, "We are sorry to hear that, sir. You'll think of some way to overcome this problem. You always do." John can only silently nod his agreement.

The boss struggles to regain his composure, but the drink is fighting him. He puts the cork back in the bottle and slides it into the desk drawer. The key goes in the lock, after a couple of misses.

"Thank you, gentlemen, I don't have any trick up my sleeve this time, so we might just be waiting a while longer than we all expected. Maybe a long while. I am going back to the pub, to get the breakfast I couldn't eat this morning. Be good lads now, and collect the tickets at quitting time. Leave them in the office. I'll be back to close up."

"Yes, sir. Will do, sir," is all they could say.

The boss stumbled up the street, towards the pub.

#

John ruminates for days about the boss's difficulty in getting a loan. He has taken it as a challenge. He likes solving problems and he's good at it. He can solve any machine problem that he encounters. To John, solving machine problems requires that one find the source of the power and how that power is transferred. Each clutch and gear must play its role smoothly. Apply the proper turn of the screw or push of a pry bar and a problem can be solved. He considers solving problems his natural element, but this time a simple solution eludes him. It's as if he went to church and found one of the roof pillars had crumbled to dust. The problem is big and complicated. There's no familiar starting point or end point.

If there were just a way to talk to the bankers and address their concerns, then the boss's problem would be solved. I don't know anyone in the bank business. They're all Brits. The only other people are worse, the riverfront loan sharks.

He begins to think in new ways. He thinks again about how to influence people and who might be the right people to influence others. Gears engaging gears. One must know how the gears teeth are cut to see how it engages.

What does it mean to be persuasive? Inspire desire, and press for a decision.

He pushes further.

The banker who approves a loan, he's a wheel in a larger machine. How does one think like a banker?

What skills are needed to run a bank? Bookkeeping, mostly. Arithmetic. Good judgment of people.

What does a bank do? It takes in money, and loans it out. It's a machine -- for processing money.

If a machine does not produce what is desired then it might be modified, but if it is designed incorrectly then it might never produce the desired result. One must then build a new machine. One needs a to understand all the things that the new machine is supposed to do.

Ireland separate bank for the Irish. Given the current circumstances, it must be run secretly.

Somewhere in my thinking, I crossed a line. Now I am thinking like a Fenian.

Chapter Nine

Another Bank

A few days later, it's Saturday. The early winter's evening, finds John, Murph and Paddy at a birthday party. The cottage is hot, so they go outside for some cool air and a smoke.

The IRB has been quiet for weeks. In John's eyes, this means the local chapter is as useless as ever. Paddy has had a few pints and seems in a talkative mood. John decides to tease him a bit.

"What's up with the IRB these days? Doing any scrawling or bombing?" then he realizes his gaffe, "No offense intended," he added quickly. John sees Paddy's slow reaction. Paddy is in no shape to take offense.

"None taken. I am out of that scrawling club, anyway. I don't know what they are doing. I joined another IRB club that helps new Irish businesses."

"You mean the IRB has different clubs for different things?" asked John.

"They do. The Brits would call them 'cells'. We call them 'clubs'. We have lots of different kinds. Each is secret, and separate from the others. If the Brits break up one, they can't trace anything to the others," says Paddy with a laugh. He's got John's interest. He hadn't thought the Drogheda IRB had such cleverness.

"I see. And this business club, what do they do?"

"Mostly I just help Irish folks setup new shops. I do a little woodworking. Sometimes I go to the coast and help collect materials that the English don't want shipped in."

"I think the name for that is 'smuggling'. I won't ask for details." They both laugh.

"We need strength, to match the Brits. We need businesses, skills, industry," Paddy says.

"Can I get some help from the IRB to start a business?" asked John.

"I suppose you could. You planning on starting your own shoe factory, John?"

"No, I want to start a bank," says John, with a big smile.

Paddy looks at him quizzically, "Well that takes iron-work, stone, a vault, a charter, ..."

"...No, no. I don't want to build the building, I want to make loans, to Irish businesses," says John.

"Oh, I think I see what you mean. Kind of like the loan sharks do. Maybe a bit different. These would be your Irish neighbors getting the loans, so you wouldn't break legs if they get behind in their interest payments."

"Yeah, you got the idea," John smirks, "that's my kind of bank. More important, an Irish banker would be more willing to help another Irishman compete with British businesses, too."

"There's a man in town, who might be able to help you."

He'll be leaving soon, so we need to see him very soon. Let's take a walk and I'll introduce you," Paddy gets up and turns to walk, then stops and looks back at John.

"Well, are you coming?"

John's feels his big talk has been called out, and Paddy's thinking is clearer than he expected. He has to see this through, or admit to Paddy and himself that he is just talk. Margaret isn't at the party, and he's not in the mood for flirting. No one will miss them for an hour. There's nothing holding him back.

"Yes, sure. I'm coming."

"Going to see a man about something," he calls to Murph who is a ways away sitting on a bench with a lass. Murph waves silently to John. The noise of the party is too much. Murph turns back and pulls a lass closer to continue their conversation. John leaves them be.

John follows Paddy, wondering where they are going, and decides not to bother asking. Paddy's in the IRB, and won't tell him anything. They walk for a mile to the east side of Drogheda. John recognizes the area. It is Yellowbatter, where Margaret lives. He lets on that he is not familiar with the area. A man on the corner is smoking. Paddy asks him for light.

"A lot of stars out tonight. Know where the star Vega might be?" says Paddy.

"You can see Vega tonight, over there," says the other man

pointing to the south.

An owl hoots from a sycamore tree.

Paddy walks up to a cottage, knocks on the door. John maintains his distance. A man in a black leather jacket, opens the door a crack. Paddy greets him, "Good evening, I am Paddy from the Business Club, here to see Vega. Is he in?"

The man says nothing. He opens the door halfway. Paddy turns sideways to come in.

Paddy says, "That's John. He is a friend."

The man nods and holds the door ajar for John, then closes the door, grabs John, and gently pushes him against the door. John flinches. This man is strong.

"Easy now," the man in black says with a Scottish brogue, "I just need to check you."

The man pats him down. "He's clean," he says to no one in particular.

A tarp hangs across a rope, from one side of the cottage to the other, creating a space with no windows. Behind the tarp, a voice calls out, "Paddy, back here. Come in. Lift the tarp. Come in and have a seat."

Paddy lifts the tarp and nods to John to duck under it and come in. The space is harshly lit by a single oil lamp. John shields his eyes as he goes in. Then he sees a another man seated at a rough table. He also has a black jacket. A uniform? This man has bright red hair, partially bald. His hands look

soft, definitely not a tradesman. There's a jar of whiskey, and some small glasses next to the lamp. The glitter of the lamp through the glass shows they are not high quality class.

They take seats. The door man comes in and stands in the corner. Paddy introduces the man at the table as Red Hare. They chuckle, like boys with a secret.

"Just call me, Red," he says to John, revealing a toothy grin.

John recognizes him. He heard the man speak when he "accidentally" attended an IRB meeting with a cousin. The man's name is not Red. He is a higher up in the IRB. This must be serious business.

"Pleased to me you, Red," says John.

"That there is Scotty," Paddy says, pointing towards the man in the corner. Scotty nods respectfully to John.

Paddy and the red-haired man exchange some pleasantries. Glasses are filled. Paddy lays out what John is interested in.

"Why would you want to open an Irish bank?" asks Red to John.

"My boss needs a loan to expand his business. If he expands, I move up. He can't get a loan from the British bank, because of the IRB's mischief on First Street and the ruckus last month in Cork," says John.

Red's eyes flare, he expected a plea from a supplicant, not an accuser pointing the finger.

"My friend John is plain-spoken," interjects Paddy, concerned that Red has been offended.

Red has no ego involved. He senses that this meeting may be worthwhile. He needs to show John the positive side of the IRB.

"I am sorry that we may have had something to do with your employer's banking difficulties. Keep in mind that sometimes the words of the Brits have two meanings. Perhaps they also mean to say, 'Tell your Irish friends to stop their pushing for freedoms, and then you'll get the loan that you need.' I am speculating. No one knows for sure what the bankers say to the businessmen."

John was not expecting an apology from the IRB, not even the half-apology that Red just delivered. Red's words indicated that the IRB did care about how their political acts affected the community. He was concerned they might be little more than thugs hiding behind a good cause.

"There might be another time to discuss the efficacy of IRB's more visible activities. For now, my boss has a problem getting funds to expand the factory and this is my problem, too, since it stands in the way of my advancement. Starting an Irish bank seems like a direct way to solve the problem. That's what Paddy and I discussed and what brought us here tonight. Can the IRB help?"

"Tell me, how much does your employer need to expand?" Red asks.

"Five thousand pounds, sir," says John.

"You want to start a bank so you can help your boss?", Red asks.

"I figure that there are lots of other Irish businesses with the same problem, right here in Drogheda. That's an opportunity. Strong, growing businesses will make Ireland stronger," says John. He hoped the 'make Ireland stronger' phrase might catch Red's interest.

"Well put. Thought up this bank idea on your own, did you?" Red laughs.

"My inspiration came from a book about Irish communities of the past. A village could do their own financing of local businesses. It helped keep the Irish united, even when under the thumb of the Normans and Vikings. Today, it takes a lot of money to build a factory, so banks gather the money from a wider swath. I have no experience running a bank, and don't know anyone in the business. So there may be complexities that I am unaware of. It is clear to me that there is an unmet need for more banks. There are lots of businesses want to grow, and that takes lots of money. I am told it's illegal to start a bank, well, I believe that is unjust to us Irish. Drogheda needs a bank that puts Irish interests first. Getting this town what it needs, may require some courage. Is the IRB up to the challenge?"

Red is not taking John's bait. He is impressed how far John

has gone in thinking this through on his own. Now he can show John that the IRB knows what it is doing.

"One of the pillars of the IRB movement is to re-build that financial strength that used to be in the Irish community. You are correct, banks are an important part of that. Samuel, step out here," Red says as he gives John and Paddy a re-assuring wink.

"Tell me, Samuel, you've heard all this? Tell us what do you think."

A short clean-shaven well-dressed man, steps out of the shadows, and introduces himself as Samuel a Vice-President from an investment bank based in New York. His accent pegs him clearly as an American. He is instantly credible.

"I am glad to meet gentlemen of the Brotherhood who are interested in ways to build up your community's businesses. From what I heard, I believe my firm can help you achieve your goals."

He looks across the faces of the four men. Red and Scotty have heard the pitch before, so they are bored. John and Paddy are attentive. The term "investment bank" puzzles them.

Samuel goes into his spiel, "Let me explain, what an investment bank does. It is designed for situations like yours and is better suited than a regular bank can ever be. It is a new type of bank, founded by some wealthy American railroad industrialists. To my knowledge there are no investment banks in

Ireland right now, so this kind of bank may be unfamiliar. Our investment bank makes loans, usually of several thousand pounds to businesses only, never to individuals. At the same time we will invest additional money in our clients' businesses for a small percentage of ownership. Any questions, so far?"

This man, Samuel, was talking big money. He now had everyone's attention.

"The key to the success of the bank is to only loan money to successful, growing businesses. Successful, growing businesses are hard to find when they are small. We employ brokers to identify qualified businesses and bring them to us. That is where we need the help of the Brotherhood. You folks know your local businesses. You know the people. If my bank makes a loan or an investment, then the broker makes a nice commission. From what I heard a few moments ago, I think Mr. John here, would qualify as a broker. What do you say to that, John?"

"Well, I already have an occupation, sir. I don't see how I could..."

"No need to quit what you are doing. Let's take this one step at a time. The most important thing you can do is to set up a meeting with your boss, say, on Tuesday, around four-thirty P.M. Can you do that, John?"

"That's sounds easy enough, sir!" John laughs loudly, "He would be eager to talk to you. He just got turned down for a

loan by the British Bank."

Red interrupts, in a loud whisper, "Quieter please! We don't want to wake the neighbors. The police may be listening."

John looks at him, eyes wide. He feels he's been tricked into agreeing to do something illegal. He imagines the police eavesdropping under the window, bursting in, arresting them all for 'conspiracy to do illegal banking.'

"Is this illegal?" he asks.

Samuel notices of John's concerned look, "Young man, your concern about banking being illegal is unfounded. Our lawyers looked into the legal status. Retail banks, it is true, must be chartered by the Crown. There are no laws prohibiting private investment banks. In fact, we have an office and several clients in London."

John turns to Red, "Wouldn't it be simpler to get a charter from the Crown and set up an Irish bank? Why should the IRB send Drogheda businesses all the way to America to get loans?"

Red smiles knowingly, "The Brits won't allow any more banks to be chartered in Ireland. It's the absentee British landowners, they don't want any more industry in Ireland. They see industry luring people off their farms with higher wages. Driving up wage costs makes their farms less profitable." This is an angle that John and Paddy never thought of before. Their minds are trying to process how it could be true that there are such connections. John wonders how the IRB even knows such

things.

Red continues, "The IRB has been down this road. There are those, in Britain, who sympathize with our cause, so we know what we are fighting."

Samuel sees the conversation wandering into politics, which is not what he wanted. He steers it back to his proposal.

"John, I am sure we can solve that loan problem. We need to have a discussion with your boss. Can you help me? Can you be my loan broker? My company will make it worth your while."

"Do you need me to be at your meeting?" asks John.

Samuel seems relieved by the question, "No, it's better to have just the business owner and myself at the initial meeting."

John sees little risk in setting up a meeting for what is claimed to be a legal bit of business. He is already attending a meeting with the IRB, which is technically illegal. He has already crossed a line. It's time to act. He can see that being a Fenian won't get any safer than this.

"I am your man. I will set it up." John reaches across the table to Samuel, and they shake hands. John looks around once more, half-expecting the police to break down the door. Nothing happens.

Samuel wants to close this meeting off. He has other business tonight.

"I can draft up a formal agent agreement for signatures, but it seems we have Paddy and Red here as witnesses to our

agreement. I will deal with the paperwork when I return to New York."

"Agreed," says John. He likes this American's style. Samuel accepts a man's word and he does not hesitate to act. What a contrast to the British bankers! The boss will hit it off with Samuel.

Red says, "Thank you, Samuel. We have one more item of business for this meeting of the Irish Republican Brotherhood Business Club of Drogheda. We have a recommendation from Paddy to nominate John as a member of the IRB, is that acceptable to you, John? "

"I didn't know I was attending a meeting," says John.

"Sorry, we misplaced our book of Robert's Rules of Order, so we have drifted a bit towards the informal. Even if you don't want to be a member, I must insist that you swear to keep everything that took place tonight a secret," says Red, smiling, but deadly serious.

"Don't be concerned about me, I will tell my boss only enough to pique his interest. As for membership, I would be pleased to be a member of an organization that is helping make our community stronger."

Red pours a double-dram for each.

"To a stronger Ireland!" intones Red, and the group answers together "Aye!".

Red turns down the lamp. Scotty pulls back the tarp and

opens the door for Paddy and John.

Outside, under the starlit sky, they can hardly see each other's face. Paddy keeps his voice low.

"Follow me. We go back by a different route." He makes a turn, jogs down to the next corner, makes another turn, and returns to a moderate pace, going through a different neighborhood.

"If anything comes up, I can get word back to Samuel and Red," says Paddy.

"Thank you for guiding me here tonight. I should not have been so worried about coppers tailing us. Your lookouts are at every other intersection, and they are all big men."

"John, you surprise me. You are developing an eye for detail."

"The IRB is just like a machine. A small gear engages another gear. You just work back to the flywheel, and there's the power."

"Aye, it's true."

#

Chapter Ten

A Need Is Met

This Friday morning, the week is ending with a cool, gray cover over Drogheda. The September clouds have broken through the heat of summer.

Headed to the factory, John and Murph walk down First Street with a sliver of sun in their eyes. They catch a glance into the bakery window. Today, they resist the sweet creations. They are watching their pennies, saving for new cravats to wear to the Harvest Dance. Their lasses will be dressed up, so they must look good, too.

#

A few minutes later, Paddy passes the same bakery, as he does every day. A red plate full of cream puffs sits in the

bakery window. Paddy enters and asks for "a puff with sprinkles". The counterman pulls one from behind the counter, douses it with green and yellow sprinkles, and pushes it to Paddy. Paddy checks the colors. They are the correct colors, patriotic green and yellow. The puff has no cream. He doesn't care. It goes into his lunch bucket. No one else is around to see, so there's no charge.

Paddy leaves the shop and looks for a quiet place to sit. He finds a bench. He pulls out the pastry, extracts a small sheet of paper, and takes a bite of the pastry. He unrolls the paper and sees that one side has two large letters, LM. In his head, he counts backwards through the alphabet. The L becomes a K then a J. Likewise the M becomes an L then a K. LM becomes JK. The message is addressed to JK. There's only one member with those initials, that's John Kelly. John won't know how to decode messages, so, he reads it: "Sun, 10:00 P.M., #3." It's easy enough to do a similar shift in his head. He reads the message as "Friday, 8 P.M., at the meeting place #1". Red or someone else higher up in the IRB wants to meet with John, tonight at 8:00 P.M.

Tonight! I need to move along and tell John, straight away.

#

At the factory, John has the ceiling shutters wide to the

sky. The cloud-filtered light fills the space. A breeze carries the stale air of the factory up towards the mottled clouds. They threaten an early fall shower. Once the rains start, there will be no fresh air for weeks.

Paddy walks in and drops his kit by his workstation. He greets Murph who is filling the glue pots. The sweet smell of hide glue swirls with the smell of the river coming through the windows.

Paddy walks up to John with a look of urgency. They share a few whispered words. Paddy returns to his workstation.

The boss, walks in beaming. "Top O'the morning to you!" he greets them. Paddy fingers the paper in his pocket, thinking about how to best be rid of it.

They return the greeting. It's the polite thing to do. They wonder what has put the boss in such a good mood, on such a dreary day.

The boss motions Murph and John to his office. He has a letter laid out on his desk.

"Gentleman, have a seat. I have an announcement and I want you two to hear it first. I got the money that I need to expand the factory! John, thank you for introducing that American. He came through for us."

John glances at the letter lying on the desk. He can read the letterhead, "American Financial Investments LTD a division of ...(unreadable)", and a figure catches his eye, 5,000 pounds.

"Today, I'm going to see the real estate people about getting more space, so we can do more work. Opportunity is within our grasp. I see you, John, being the full-time engineer, and you, Murph will be the Supervisor of Operations. We need to double production. Keep an eye out for new recruits."

"When will all this happen?" asks Murph.

"It all depends on how fast the real estate folks can finish the building, and when the manufacturer can deliver new machinery. The rest of the schedule will be up to us. We need a few weeks to get set up, then we are up and running. About, six months from now. There will be a lot of extra work for us to do between now and then."

Their eyes gleam. This is the most exciting thing that's happened since the visit by the policemen, two months before.

"We should be able to take on more orders for summer shoes, then?" Murph observes.

"Yes, we need to start booking more orders this month for delivery in the spring. Not to worry, the orders will come. Today, I need to be out to meetings. Show me what you can do lads, and keep this factory running. I'll be back before quitting time."

"You can count on us, Sir."

#

John and Paddy are walking together, headed to the IRB meeting. It is nearly 8:00 p.m. and the streets are pitch black. There's pools of light in the streets thrown by the Pubs and Taverns. Friday night revelers are finishing supper and a ordering a second round of ale.

"You are taking a different route," says John.

"Yes, always. Not to worry, I know where we are going, and it's better for you not to know."

That made sense to John. If they were stopped by police, they could just say they were out for a walk and smoke. One could not get caught in a lie if one did not know.

They circle a block, and end up at the door of an unfamiliar cottage. There's the coded exchange of greetings, Scotty lets them in, and Red welcomes them. The steps are now familiar.

"Gentlemen. Thank you for coming on such short notice. Have a seat." Red has skipped the usual offer of a dram of whiskey. The bottle on the table remained corked.

He says that he has something to deliver. It is something that he did not want to delay. He pulls a small bag from his satchel. There's a dull tinkle as he pushes the weighty bag to John. This, is yours. Count it. I have taken out the IRB tax, that's 10%, the rest is your commission from the American for helping him place the loan with your boss.

John counts out the coins. He can't remember how much the

American promised. So many things happened during that one meeting, he's not even sure if the American had quoted a number. Evidently, he had, or Red thought he had. It seems Red was looking out for him, as well as the IRB. There is nearly the equivalent of a month's wages in gold.

John nods to Red, "The amount is correct."

"There's more," says Red, fishing another bag from his satchel. This is also from the American. It seems his investment bank also bought part ownership in the factory. He calls this a 'finder's fee' for services rendered, and it's your due.

John doesn't remember any discussion of a 'finder's fee'. He wonders if he's now indebted to the American? Or worse, to the IRB? Is this "fee" is even legal?

Red senses his concern, "This is all honest money, John. You earned it. You don't have to ask any Brit's permission. Take it and do well with it."

"Thank you! I will put this to very good use, you can be sure."

"Make your lass happy," Red smiles.

John looks at Red, wondering how Red knows he has a lass. Seeing John's expression, Red tries to cover his slippage.

"You are a smart young man, if'n you don't have a lass, save your money and get one! How about we celebrate with a dram?" asks Red, as he pours the whiskey. Red proposes a toast, "To our future and a better future for Ireland."

John decides to let it pass. It is only fair. He checked out Red and the IRB a year ago at the IRB meeting in Dublin. It makes sense that Red would check him out, too.

#

Chapter Eleven

The Proposal

Sunday morning, an autumn shower has left a drizzle in the air, a promise of winter to come.

Murph is slowly waking. He got in late last night.

John is dressed, almost ready to leave for Mass. He has purchased an umbrella, and is regaling Murph about its fine points.

"Look at how it's made ... such fine stitching by machine ... the ribs are the latest steel alloy, very thin and stiff. This is a marvel of our age."

"Most important, it makes the user look dandy," Murph smirks. "How much did that set you back?"

John lifts his nose, "A man should look his best for his lady. One might think that this is an investment in my appearance to secure her good graces, but it's just a sign of consideration and respect. Besides, where there's love, price is no object."

"Oh, you paid that much, eh? She must be a looker. Have I seen her?"

"No, she's finer than the likes of you could even dream

of," he taunts. "You'll meet her at the dance and not a whit before."

"She must be Margie. You've talked of no other for months. She has a grip on your attentions. How serious are you two? Do I need to look for a new place to sleep?"

"Relax, there's nothing planned that will affect your home... yet. Now, I'm off." John opens the door. A whisp of drizzle blows in. He steps out and pops the umbrella. His footsteps are light as he walks up the hill to St. Peter's Church.

#

Arriving at the church, he spots Margaret, with her family. They are in their pew near the back of the church. Being a recent arrival to the parish, they have been assigned to the next pew available. It may be years before they move up to the middle, nearer the Kellys who have a ten-year head start.

Margaret spies him, and responds to his nod, with her own nod and the hint of a smile. It's all she can do in that moment without disturbing the somber decorum of the church. Her mother sees the two of them. She smiles and looks away, not wanting to discourage them. She likes John. He's a fine reflection upon his mother and father, who she counts as their best friends in Drogheda. She'll do everything she can to make this match

successful.

The service ends, and the crowd drifts out of the church. They linger in the courtyard and on the church steps, deploying umbrellas and oilcloths against the drizzle. This is the best time of the week to see all of one's friends and acquaintances, so they will endure the wetness for a short while to get the latest news and gossip.

John has no interest in newsy updates. He bids farewell to his family, promising to catch up at home in time for Sunday dinner. He works through the crowd to join the Marreys. After some pleasantries to Mr. and Mrs. Marrey, Margaret gives him a look and ducks under his umbrella, letting her hand slip over his.

She has something in mind.

"Let's walk through the cemetery next to the church. The rain will chase my family home soon, so we can't stray far."

He loves her directness and just follows her lead. She doesn't give him a choice. Her grip is tight upon his, holding up the umbrella over both of them.

He tries to interrupt her march, "I have news. I'd best tell you straight away."

She continues to walk, "Oh? Do tell me, don't keep me in suspense."

"Oh, maybe, I'll wait. I do like to see your eyes when they're open wide."

With her hand still firmly over his, she turns straight at him. "You are such a flatterer. I'll not move another inch 'til you tell me, John Kelly. What's your news?"

"My boss got the loan money so he's expanding the factory. With the new machines, the business should be twice as large by spring. I shall be promoted to full-time Engineer."

She wraps her other hand around his, "I'm happy for you, John. Your dreams are coming true."

"Even better, I have received a commission from the American banker. I'm, as he says, his 'finder' and 'loan broker in-training'. It's a nice sum, nearly two month's wages at the factory. So, what do you think of that?" John asks with a boasting smile.

"I know you have done your best to help your boss at the factory. You have done a fine deed by him. He knows he's lucky to have you. You are also lucky to be so generously rewarded by the American. You have some good people in your life."

He doesn't reveal to her that he also has talked to other factory owners about loans. He doesn't want to be a braggart. He fears he might say something that will break the spell.

Margaret has said nothing about herself. To think, that one can find another to enjoy life's joys as much as I'm enjoying this moment, without a hint of selfishness. She seems like an angel.

He feels they are on a path. Now they must take it wherever

it may lead.

"And I am lucky to have you, that is, I don't want to be presumptuous, but I do seem to have had your attention, and mine yours, recently, and for that I'm grateful. I'm a lucky man. We are lucky together."

She has learned John's style during their summertime together. His words often don't keep up with his thoughts, and he cannot just think. His thoughts always lead to action.

"You are like a leprechaun sprinkling golden words. What's your thinking behind these words, John?"

"I'm thinking that by the time my new job comes through, I will have saved a substantial sum, and will have more coming in six months from now. I could buy out the cottage that I'm renting now. However, I'm considering that there might be some reason to move, perhaps, to be nearer family."

"I can see no reason a bachelor, like yourself, would need or want to be nearer to family. A family man, might."

"Exactly. Think on it. We have time. No one need know what we are discussing," he says.

"What are we 'discussing'?"

John had his thoughts and words choreographed. Margaret's energy has pushed him along. He hasn't had time to practice his delivery. He just lets the words tumble out.

"Margaret, will you be my wife? Forever?" he answers.

Margaret had her hopes, but not so soon. She smiles

radiantly, frozen in place with delight. She's not sure what to do.

Someone calls her name. They ignore it.

He looks away. He recalls that the proper way to do this is on one knee, but the ground is wet and there is nowhere for Margaret to sit. And this location, a church cemetery, is not customary. What was I thinking? So he just closes his hands around hers, a bit tighter. He opens his mouth to apologize for not doing this in the correct fashion. She turns away.

"I'm coming," she calls to her family.

She turns back to him, eyes wide, and pulls him close, and whispers, "YES!".

Someone calls again.

John tilts the umbrella to block the view of the crowd, reaches around her waist and pulls her close. She yields a kiss that they will remember forever.

Her little brother, black-haired Kevin, runs up, tugs at her dress, "Margie, come on. Time to go!"

John covers the three of them with his umbrella as they walk back to the Marrey family. He returns Margaret to them and turns to Kevin, "Can you do me a favor? Take good care of your sister. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I can do it!" Kevin grabs Margaret's hand and pulls her arm. She blows John a kiss, then allows Kevin to pull her away.

John stands in the rain with his umbrella, waving good-bye to Margaret and the Marreys 'til they are out of sight. His dreams are coming true.

#

Chapter Twelve

On the List

It's been a typical overcast winter's day in Drogheda . The clouds have moved back in. They hang low in the colorless late afternoon sky. The Angelus bell will be ringing 4:00 p.m. soon. The workers will be heading home.

Headed home, Paddy passes the bakery for the second time today. It is still open. Bargain-hunters are stopping in to buy the day-old bread, and half-price pastries. He sees the red plate in the window, so he goes in and asks if there are any Red Plate Puffs left.

"Just one left," says the counterwoman. He pulls a tray from beneath the counter, with one lonely puff, with no cream filling.

"Let me freshen it up with some sprinkles." He douses it with green and yellow grains of colored sugar, and wraps it in

paper, and hands it over to Paddy.

"Don't let it go stale," he warns.

Paddy grasps from the counterman's warning that this pastry contains an urgent message. He quickly stuffs the pastry into his lunch bucket, and walks out at a brisk pace. He is careful to take his usual route home. Upon entering his cottage, without taking off his jacket, he lights a candle, then sits down and retrieves the pastry. In the candlelight and waning light of day, he reads the paper message, and takes a bite of the the pastry. The price was right, it's stale.

He decodes the message in his head. Now he understands the urgency. The church bell is ring 5:00 p.m. He sees that the sun is getting low. He takes another bite, while he burns the message in the candle flame. He leaves the half-eaten stale pastry in his plate, and leaves his cottage, heading east. Seeing that he is not being followed, he circles back and heads west towards John's home, as the sun sets and the darkening streets close in.

Paddy arrives at John's cottage. He hears a conversation and the clunk of spoons and bowls. He raps quietly on the door. There's no answer. He reaches over to the window, and taps on the pane. The conversation stops. He hears a chair scrape along the floor. Murph opens the door.

"Paddy! What brings you out at this hour?"

"Good evening Murph. Sorry to interrupt your supper. Is

John in?"

"Aye, come in, come in. Have you eaten? We have extra."

"No, thank you. I must talk to John. It's a family matter."

"Then I will step outside and have a pipe, while you two talk." Murph steps outside, and sits on a stump. The cobbles of the street were warmed during the day and they take the chill off the cooling evening air.

Paddy steps inside and shuts the door.

"Paddy, you look a fright," says John.

"Aye, I need you to come with me, right now. You are in danger. Red wants to meet with you right away."

"Me, in danger? Hah! How can this be? I am just a lad with callused hands and no weapons. I am a danger to no one, so why would I be in danger?"

John knows he speaks the truth of fools. He's just trying to calm Paddy down, and hold his own concern in check. They both know that John has crossed the line with the British Authorities by being an IRB member. They also know that the IRB now has thousands of members, and Authority has been lax in pursuing them.

"I don't know, John. I am just the messenger. Something new must have happened. If you want to find out, come with me and we meet with Red. If'n you don't, then what happens to ye is your own doing."

Paddy is slipping into his country brogue, that's a sign he

is not saying what he thinks. Paddy is also a fearful man on a good day. He worries about money and gets the jitters easily when things don't go perfect. He lacks confidence in himself.

If this is about me working with the IRB "Business Club" to get loans of American money for the local factories, well, they shall have to show what law has been broken, and then prove that I did it. There's nothing written down with my signature on it. Let them try! I doubt they will throw me in jail while they build their case.

Is this really me thinking these things? Defying the authorities? Has the devil got me in his grip? No, there's nothing wrong with a man doing good things for his family, his employer, and his community. Even the parish priest would not let me confess my actions. He called the loan business "a fine deed". So, even the church says I'm doing the right thing, so that's what's got to be, the Brits are wrong, again. I should not be in danger for doing good things. This situation must be confronted, not feared.

He surprises himself with these feelings. They appear to have sprouted and grown of their own accord, nourished by the ferment of recent events.

The other possibility looms: Paddy could be luring me away, so someone can rob the house. I have gold stashed here. They'll ask Murph. He doesn't know where I put it. People have been killed for less.

He turned to Paddy, "I will come. Please wait outside. Tell Murph to come in please. I will be right along."

John then goes to small trunk in the corner, unlocks the latch with a key from round his neck. He pulls out a thin wooden box, unfolds the velvet lining and pulls out a silver dagger. Its silver plating is patchy and black. The blade edge is as sharp as a leather-cutter's knife. He lays the box on the table.

Murph comes in, puffing on his pipe. "What's up? Can I help?"

John hands him the dagger.

Murph looks down at the knife in his hands, "This is a killing knife. Where did you get this? These are illegal."

"Family lore says it belonged to an ancestor who fought in the Battle of the Boyne. Dad gave it to me when I moved here to live on my own. I sharpened it at the factory one night. It will go through flesh like butter. I have never seen Paddy so upset. If he's been put up by someone to rob us, then we are both in danger. I hope you won't have a need for the dagger. I must go with Paddy."

"It's dark. You could be jumped. You take the dagger."

"No, if the Authorities are up to something and they nab me carrying a dagger, then I'm headed to jail for sure. I will be walking with Paddy. When I leave, bolt the door. I shouldn't be long."

Murph is speechless.

John quietly pulls the door shut. He hears the bolt rattle into place, then he follows Paddy's lead into the night.

#

Tuesday, Paddy takes a circuitous route. It tries John's patience. He has attended so many meetings that he now knows all of the meeting points. He just doesn't know which of the three cottages they are going to.

He keeps asking, "How much farther?"

Paddy is accustomed to John's impatience. He gives the usual answer, "Not much."

John appreciates that Paddy is watching for anyone following them.

Is he considering that the more time we spend on the street, the more chance we will pick up a tail?

An owl hoots.

Presently, they arrive at a cottage. A dim glow fills the curtains. Paddy knocks twice then twice more. The Scot opens the door, looks them over and behind them, then lets them in.

"Red is in the rear."

Once again a cloth hangs beyond the door, to block the view of anyone trying to peer in. They lift the cloth and take a seat at a table, lit by the candle. Red appears from the darkness in

the rear.

"Good evening, gentleman. I am glad you have come quickly."

Red takes his seat opposite them. The Scot stands guard at the door, occasionally moving to look out the window.

"There's some concerning news. It appears we have been betrayed."

He goes on to explain that on the Grand Jury's authority, someone has been picked up. They have given the authorities the name of everyone in the "Business Cell" of the IRB.

John's and Paddy's eyes are fixed on every word Red says.

"For you, Paddy, this all means nothing. You are just a suspect. They don't even have your proper name. You've been mentioned because you were at some meetings. They don't really know who you are or what you do for the IRB. We need to keep you out of action till things cool off. As of tonight, the Drogheda Business Club Chapter of the IRB is disbanded. I will be in touch with you by the usual channels in a few months."

Paddy relaxes, Red takes a deep breath.

"For you, John, we have bigger problems. Do not fear, the IRB will help you as much as possible.

Another source, who I shall not name, has information about the Solicitor General's plans. Apparently, when they made the banking laws, they never considered that we would ever go offshore and work with foreign banks. So, the law doesn't strictly prohibit the these loans or the use of American banks

to pay for the machinery. The prosecutor intends to claim that the IRB got a percentage of the loans as their "finder's fee" and they used that money to fund violent actions here in Ireland. That makes the whole loan making business part of a traitorous enterprise."

I wouldn't be surprised if it were true, thinks John. This has always been the part I felt uncomfortable about. Can I be held responsible for something an American is doing?

Red continues, "Legally, it's tenuous. They have a string of witnesses who are all liars. They have some ledger documents that have your name on them. These appear to be from the American's bank offices in New York. Someone in that office has betrayed us. That's the hardest evidence they have. They don't care if they win the case. Their strategy is to put you, I and a few others in jail on suspicion, without bail. Then they drag this through the courts for the next two or three years. They want to strike a blow against the IRB."

John mulls this over. This is all based on the words of two informants. He asks Red, "What's the chance that they won't go forward with this case? A grand jury would have to approve it."

"They have a judge in Dublin, who has indicated he will hear the case. That means this case could go on for six to nine months, at least. The Solicitor General can appeal the result. There is also some talk about picking up the factory owners who got the loans, just to harass them. However, the judiciary in

England is already not happy with what they say is "the judiciary powers being used as a tool of law enforcement." Apparently, even the English judiciary have their limits."

"Don't they have to arrest us?"

"Oh, yes. The Grand Jury must approve the filing of charges, warrants must be issued, and so on. I am not sure of all the steps. I understand we have about a week, maybe ten days, before the police will come to pick you up."

"What should I do?"

"First, recognize that they have won this battle. This is going to stop the IRB "Business Club" activities in Drogheda, for a while. Let it go. The IRB will carry on with its other groups. We will come back, stronger than ever. You have done good work, John. Be proud.

You can stay and fight on their turf, in the courts, but really, the IRB doesn't have the resources to fund your legal expenses. I don't expect you do either.

I recommend running. You could move to Cork, and restart your life under another name. You lay low, don't work for any shoe companies for a few years. Take a dead man's name. We have done this for others.

"That sounds like running for the rest of my life."

What kind of life can I promise Margaret? Will we ever have peace? 'Marry me and live as a fugitive forever.' Will she accept that?

"After a year or two, these cases run cold and they quit looking for you," Red says.

"Is there another choice?" asks John.

"We can help you get to America, Canada or some other country if you prefer. America is probably the best, since they won't send you back."

Red tries to smile to ease John's pain. "There's about two million Irish who moved to America during the famine years. You'll find a lot of welcoming Irish communities there."

John sighs, resigned, "Aye, I have an uncle who lives in Philadelphia."

Will Margaret be willing to go? And if she is, will she be willing to wait till I can send for her?

"John, just so you know, I am also on the list. I plan to go to America, too, for a while. I want to help our American friends find the informant at the bank who has sabotaged us. Then we will find the ones who put him up to it." Red reaches under the table, then he gently places a revolver on the table.

Red winks, "If you see me on the streets in New York, you look the other way. I will be hunting."

Paddy turns to John, "It would be best for you to clear out of your house right away. The police may come around sooner. If they suspect you are going to run, then they will arrest you on some minor offense, while they wait for the Grand Jury warrant."

You are welcome to stay at my house for the next week."

John feels a wave of guilt. Only minutes before, he was concerned that Paddy was out to rob him. Now Paddy is, once again, proving to be a friend. John feels ashamed.

"Thank you. You are a friend," he says to Paddy.

John turns to Red. "There must be another way. This is a nightmare. I cannot do this."

"Yes, it is a nightmare for you and Ireland. It's real. Every day, good people like you are boarding steamships to America. Most are just ordinary blokes who have heard wild stories of easy riches in America. They'll learn that there is no easy life anywhere. Of course, they will be free of meddlin' so they will be happier. The Brits have worked to drive out the best of the Irish. It is sad. No doubt, you will do well in America where good work is rewarded.

Do you have any money in the bank?" asks Red.

John hesitates. He feels invaded. Even his closest friends wouldn't ask such a question.

Is this Red going back on his pledge to help me get out of this jam? I have to trust him. There is no one else. He has been trustworthy so far.

"I have some money in the bank, and my rainy day money, in gold. It's enough to pay for rent and meals for three months."

"Good planning. This is your 'rainy day'. Don't close any bank accounts. That will attract attention. Take most of the

money out. Leave a little. If anyone asks, tell them you are going to pay for medical help for a dying aunt who lives in Balbriggan. It makes you seem more connected to Ireland. If anyone wants to check out your story, they will have to find out your aunt's married name. No one will take the trouble. I will arrange for steamer passage out of Queenstown. You may have to hole up down there until the next ship is available. Paddy will be in touch with you."

It's too much to take in all at once. They sit, in silence. Red pours three drinks. Their toast is a silent prayer.

John leaves Paddy and Red at the cottage in Yellowbatter. He heads home alone. He knows the way now. The night seems much colder. Winter is coming on strong. He tries to focus his mind on important details.

I must pack my warmest clothes. America will be colder. Retrieve my stash of gold. Write a letter to my boss. So many things! Have we overlooked something? Is there another way to deal with Brits?

John arrives at the cottage. Murph hears his knock and waits for John's voice before he will open the door.

"You set me a fright, John Kelly. I was worried about you, and myself, too."

Murph tries to hand him the silver dagger. John waves him off.

"So, what is going on?"

"Thanks Murph. It was as Paddy said. I am sorry I gave you a fright. "

Should I tell Murph what's going on? No. It can only work against him.

"I must take my mother to Balbriggan tomorrow, to be with my aunt. I cannot go to work."

"I see. That's unfortunate. Can I help?"

"Yes, give the boss my regrets. I will wire him from Balbriggan. It's late. I have had enough excitement for one night. I'm turning in."

Murph has never seen John so upset. He's seen John worry about his machines at the factory more than his relatives. This aunt must be someone special. And the robbery scare, he can't figure it. John did not mention the IRB at all.

As always, Murph decides to look at the bright side: John is back in one piece and there's been no robbery. What more could anyone need tonight?

#

Chapter Thirteen

Parting

Wednesday morning, John starts packing his clothes. He waits for Murph to leave without him, then he retrieves his gold from its hiding place under the floor. He lays out his winter coat and sews the coins into the lining to foil robbers. He leaves a note for Murph:

Dear Murph,

The rent is paid through January.

I'm going over to Green Lanes to join my family.

I will try to keep in touch.

John

John runs his errands and heads to Paddy's house. The church bell chimes 11. Nearly time for lunch. His stomach growls. He's used to meals on a schedule. Today his stomach must wait.

I don't want to run into a factory worker. There's too much chance that someone might say something to somebody about me leaving. That would get picked up by the authorities. Being Wednesday, I can catch the boss at home. He deserves a good-bye

and some explanation.

John fumbles around Paddy's door, looking for the extra key Paddy had stashed for him. As he fumbles for the key, John's thinking about where he can buy some lunch where he'll not be noticed. He thoughts are interrupted when Paddy opens the door.

"Good day! I hoped you be early. There's word about your travel." Paddy pulls out a sheet of paper, and an oil cloth packet. "You are to go to Waterford and someone will help you get from there to a steamer out of Queenstown."

"Waterford? That's over a hundred miles from here."

"You had better read the whole message."

John sits down by the window to read:

Tonight you take a ride on a barge boat named 'The Wee One'. Be on the Mead-side dock at 11 p.m. sharp. They leave on the high tide at quarter past midnight. The boat will take you down to Waterford.

"Tonight, that is mighty fast! I had no idea my life could be turned upside down and inside out so quickly."

Paddy shrugs, "Yes, last night Red did say we had a week. It appears he got some more news during the night. I don't know how he does that."

John continues reading the note:

At Waterford you go to Tilsie's Tavern. Buy a shot of whiskey at the bar and ask for Muphrith. He's your contact in Waterford. He'll get you to Cobh. You will take a steamer to Philadelphia. If the weather is good, you will be in America in a week's sailing time. Memorize these instructions and burn the paper. Bring with you a birth certificate or passport, or anything to prove who you are. It will help get you settled when you arrive in America. If you don't have it, don't worry about it. We'll help you manage.

Godspeed

Red

John re-reads the paper, memorizing every detail, and hands it to Paddy, more out of courtesy.

"I don't need to read it," says Paddy as he puts the corner of the paper into the candle flame. Paddy hands him the oilcloth packet. "You have a new name. While you are in Ireland, you are John Hornsby, and here are your papers to prove it. You probably won't be stopped. We appear to be one step ahead of the Brits on this caper. When you get on the high seas, you can become John Kelly again. Or not, if you are so inclined," says Paddy with a wink.

John offers his hand, "Thanks Paddy, you are a true friend. I could never have done this by myself."

Paddy looks at him steely-eyed, not a nervous twitch about him. John wonders about the transformation from normal, tentative Paddy into the strong man standing before him. Was the old Paddy an act? Or does the situation just bring out the courage that lies hidden in some men? John regrets that he will never learn the answer to this question.

Paddy shakes his hand and gives him a brotherly hug, "It's more than just me. The IRB stands by its people. The IRB will contact you when you reach America. Thank us by doing what you can from America."

"You can be sure I will. Since I leave tonight, I must move along. I hope to catch the boss at home, then go over to Greenlanes and stay their tonight. Do you need me to write to you after I arrive in America?"

Paddy looks concerned, "Best you write to your girl friend. Tell her about anything that doesn't go to plan. We need to know."

"Aye, she can keep a secret. She knows Murph and can play him. So you will get a message through him, most likely."

"Erin go Bragh!"

"Erin go Bragh!"

They shake hands one last time. John grabs his bag and leaves.

#

At his boss's townhouse, he is welcomed with concern. It is unusual to have workers visiting the boss's house for any reason, and this is yet another visit from John. The maid seats him in the parlor and offers him a cup of tea while he waits for the boss to finish his lunch. John reluctantly accepts the cup of tea. He wants to reach Margaret and his family, this visit to the boss is a thank you and a courtesy.

After a bit, the boss joins John in the parlor.

"... My father is not up to traveling so much these days. As the oldest, I am nominated to travel with Mother to Balbriggan. I will be back as soon as I can."

The boss got a far off look in his eye, "Balbriggan, you say. That's a long walk, especially now that the rains have started."

"Wait here a moment, I have something that might be useful to you."

He went into his office. John could hear the pen scratching on paper.

He returns and hands John an envelope.

"Here, this may be useful. Open it when you get to Balbriggan. Off with you now, you have a lot of preparations to do, I am sure."

The church bell sounds the noontime Angelus, as he takes an unusual route along the hilltops. He stops to look out over the

green hills, the river, a glimpse of the sea and St.Laurence's Gate. It's painful to think that he will likely never see Drogheda again in daylight. That thought gives rise to doubts. He makes himself think of the years in prison almost certainly before him if he tries to stay and fight. For what? The IRB is not strong enough to spring him out. If he went to prison, he could never ask Margaret to wait for him. What life could he ever hope to offer her? There'd be no factory engineer job waiting for him. The dismal visions of his future in Ireland are a slap in the face. He knows this is the best decision.

No matter how uncertain this course laid out by the IRB might be, it promises better than what awaits me here in Ireland. God, give me the strength to see this through!

With his head clearer, he moves on towards Greenlanes.

What if something happens to me? I don't want her wasting her life, pining for a man who will never return. I must tell Margaret that she is free to find another man.

#

He creates a stir in the Kelly household. A new housekeeper has been hired. She opens the door and John asks for Margaret. Courtiers do not visit during the day. Respectable people are all working. John chuckles at the irony of having to negotiate with the new housekeeper to come into his own home. His calm,

definite manner persuades the housekeeper that she should fetch Margaret and let her handle the situation, while he waits outside with his suitcase on the front step.

Margaret comes to the door, sees John, and sends the housekeeper off to the back of the house.

She greets him, "John, a pleasure to see you. What brings you calling? Shouldn't you be at the factory?"

John grabs his suitcase from the side of the step, where he had dropped it, lest he attract attention.

"Margaret, let me in. I don't want anyone to see this suitcase."

His serious expression is alarming. She opens the door and they go into the parlor. It's nothing like the parlor at the boss's house. For a middle-class family, a separate room for meeting callers is a bit of luxury.

"Margaret it is lovely to see you. This is the best moment I have had all day all week. I have sad news.

We've talked about making a life together. We have even talked of marriage and where we might live. I want you to know that I am still serious about all of that. You know I am."

She's taken aback. She has never seen him so serious about anything except problems that he could not solve. There haven't been many of those.

"Of course John, and I am of the same heart. Why are you concerned?"

"I need to do some traveling. To be blunt, I need to flee. I have done nothing evil and hurt no one. On the contrary, you know how I have helped my boss get a loan to expand his business. I now hear that the Solicitor General for Ireland considers my actions criminal."

"What? You, a criminal? Ha! John there must be some misunderstanding."

"It is no misunderstanding. The IRB has spies watching the secret Grand Jury. Their drafting warrants to arrest me and others, as I speak. I must leave, tonight, and there is a good chance I will never return.

"Oh, John, this is awful. I will go with you!"

"You don't even know where I am going!"

"What difference does it make? We can make our life in a another place. We cannot travel as husband and wife, though. I have no papers. I can dress like a boy, and you can treat me as your brother."

"That's an interesting idea. I wish there was time to pursue it. The IRB has made arrangements, and there's no time to make changes. I have to leave, tonight. That's why I have the suitcase.'

"You must send for me," she says, then wonders if that is possible, perhaps John is saying good-bye forever.

"Don't worry. If you wait for me, I will send for you. I am going to America. It is still a new land. We both have relatives

there. I expect they might welcome us."

"...perhaps, or they might have their own problems and not look kindly on some poor folk from the old country showing up on their doorstep asking for a hand-out."

"I don't plan to be begging from anybody. I know there are many factories in New York. I shall find a job. When I get settled there, then, I promise, I will send for you. The IRB has been loyal and helpful. They have chapters in America, they will help me get you to America."

They held each other tightly in their arms, a bundle of hopes and fears.

#

Chapter Fourteen

Inside the Courthouse

Two Weeks Later in the County Louth Court House

The bailiff announces the call to order of the Grand Jury.

The Prosecuting Solicitor calls Detective Forggus to report, "Detective, can you tell us your progress in fulfilling the warrants for arrest of the eight IRB cell members in Drogheda?"

The Detective has worn his best suit, to look as professional as possible. He wants to leave a good impression. He knows he has little positive to report, so he thinks, 'If one cannot do good, then one should look good.'

"We have had eight warrants open. We have arrested a Mr. Paddy O'Shea, who works at the shoe factory. But we had to let him go. In the lineup, none of the witnesses remembered him. We thought he was a minor participant at most. Six have disappeared without a trace. An informant tells us that John Kelly is visiting a sick relative in Balbriggan, so we plan to pick him up when he returns."

"Thank you, Detective."

That afternoon, the Prosecuting Solicitor returns to Dublin. He is seated before the desk of the Solicitor-General, in a private session.

"The Drogheda police are up to their usual level of incompetence. Here is a copy of their report, Sir. I can summarize it for you."

"Please do," says the Solicitor General.

The Prosecuting Solicitor proceeds from memory, "The Grand Jury in secret session, authorized eight warrants for the arrest of the IRB cell members. Apparently, word of the warrants got out. The police arrested one person who had to be let go for lack of evidence. One of the key members is being sought after in Balbriggan. He may be in hiding. The other five have disappeared."

The Solicitor-General pulls a piece of paper from a stack, and lays it next to the Drogheda police report.

"I have a report from the undercover team in Waterford. They have spotted the five you say "disappeared". They were all spotted on various ferries, bound for Southampton, and Pembroke. What do you think of that?"

"It seems we turned over the nest in Drogheda and the rats ran. I would bet they're all on steamers to other countries by now."

"Good riddance. I call this a success. We have driven five, maybe seven of these IRB characters, out of Ireland. We don't have to waste Her Majesty's money to prosecute these troublemakers, and we don't have to house them in jail. We are rid of them at minor cost to the crown. Good work Mr. Solicitor, go have a drink on me tonight. See me tomorrow, I have another IRB case out in Shannon that needs your special talents.

#

Chapter Fifteen

A Letter from America

It's January, 1882. Drogheda gets a nippy dawn. The cobbles' light beard of frost is melting. The heavy rains have overflowed the outhouses. The streets are foul. There is concern the well water is no good. Families have been advised to boil their drinking water. Boiling and prayer are the only defense from cholera. It's been thirty-three days since John departed

Margaret awakes from a dream about John, as she does every

day. She knows he survived the trip. The newspapers report on all steamers that leave Ireland. All that were headed to Philadelphia arrived without incident. That is all she knows. John could have been intercepted, and is languishing in jail.

"Surely the IRB would let me know", she tells herself.

She has Uncle Frank's address. She could send a cable to him, but then he would feel obligated to respond at unnecessary expense. Perhaps John did not even stop in Philadelphia but went on to New York. The IRB appear to have more connections there.

She puts these speculations aside, to deal with the day. One of John's sisters is not recovering, and Mrs. Kelly needs assistance in caring for her. No one wants to speak of cholera, for fear it would finish her. It's a superstitious way to act, and frowned on by the Church, but ancient habits die hard. There's a sense that life and the grim reaper are struggling in this house and one's faith or lack of it might tip the outcome.

#

Meanwhile, downtown, the postal delivery men in their dark blue uniforms have hefted their leather pouches and dispersed from the Drogheda Postal Station.

One is headed to the northside with a few letters for Green Lanes. It's a middle class neighborhood, so there's never much mail for these folks. The men have left before dawn for work,

and the women are busy inside getting children off to school. Normally, the postman will just shove a letter or two into the apartment mailbox and move along. He rarely meets the residents.

Today, a letter with foreign postage stamp catches his eye, addressed to Miss Margaret Marrey c/o Kelly Family on Green Lanes". He's curious who she is, who would have the attention of someone far away. He finds the Kelly household and knocks on the door.

Margaret answers the door, unsure who this blue-uniformed man is. He looks vaguely military, maybe police? His collar is bright red with embroidered white letters 'GPO' followed by a number. Definitely military style.

The uniformed man tips his hat, "I thought I should hand this one over. It looks like a special letter,"

"Oh, my, thank you, Sir!" she realizes he is their postman. She isn't sure what the proper way is to greet or thank a postman. She gives him a curtsy, as she might a distinguished military man, and thanks him again.

She wastes no time closing the door. She pulls back a curtain to bring light into the sitting area, and opens the letter:

My Dearest Margaret,

I do hope this letter finds you well. Be assured, my travels were long but the voyage went smoothly and I am fine.

God's looking after the Irish, I do believe. Please tell my Family, Murph and Paddy hello for me.

When I left Drogheda, the boatmen asked no questions, and put me in the hold. It wasn't very comfortable, but was better than sleeping out in the weather on the cold deck. We got into Waterford after daybreak. I found my IRB contact in the tavern. He works quite openly. The IRB is much stronger in Waterford. It seems they, not the Brits, run the town. He had a pouch full of tickets. I told him I wanted to go to America, preferably Philadelphia. Quick as can be, he hands me a ferry ticket to Queenstown. They call it by the old name, Cobh. I told him that was fitting. He liked my comment. Then he whips out a ticket to Philadelphia. No trouble at all.

The police were checking names of everyone who boarded the ferries. I used the name Hornsby as I was told to do, and that got me through. It seems quite possible that the police were wired my name, and I was on their list.

The ferry trip to Cobh took several hours. The steamship was due to leave the next day, so I decided to spend the night in a hotel rather than risk being robbed on the street. The hotel patrons were the types I would not want to see ever again, but it was safe enough. No one checked my papers when I got aboard the steamship. They just wanted to see that I had a paid ticket, and they inquired about my health. They asked what country I was from, I said, "Ireland". I could see, the clerk

write, "U.K." They said the Americans would want to see my papers when I landed. I felt like I had been kicked onto the boat by a British boot.

The trip across the sea was breathtaking for the first day or so. We saw an iceberg on the third day. The next four days were boring and cold. Accommodations of all types were shared with groups. I made friends with the ship's engineer. He let me sleep in the engine room one night. It was warm and cozy. The steam engine chugged along, day and night with never a stop. It was fascinating to watch it. On the seventh day, I spotted land. I thought it might be the island where they are building the Statue of Liberty, but they tell me that island is far away in New York harbor, and the statue is still being built in Paris.

Imagine, it's a day's train ride from Philadelphia to New York. This country is huge!

As soon as the steamer docked, they dropped most of us in quarantine. I can't blame them. We had some people from Eastern Europe on the boat. There have been reports of typhus on the continent. That caused a scare, so everybody got quarantined who couldn't prove where they had been for the week before. I could have told them. I had the ticket stub from Waterford to prove it, but I didn't want anyone to know my route. It might raise questions that I didn't want to answer. It seemed best to just sit out the week in quarantine.

While in quarantine, I posted a letter to my Uncle Frank in

Philadelphia, to let him know I was coming. He was very welcoming. He has an apartment for his family on Market Street. It was easy to find. He's putting me up until I find a job.

He told me to apply for a resident's card and citizenship right away. So, this morning, I took the trolley downtown to the Immigration office. A trolley is a wagon, pulled by a horse, of course. The wagon runs on iron tracks. They run everywhere in Philadelphia. There are tracks across the street from Uncle Frank's apartment building. There are plans to electrify the trolleys.

I wanted the papers to show my real name, not my passport name. I expected some difficulties, but when I told the immigration man what I wanted, he just said, "New people, new country, new name, no problem." He wrote up the the papers as I had requested and it was done. These people really understand liberty! It is amazing how easy everything is.

I borrowed some better clothes from Uncle Frank. Tomorrow I start looking for a job here in Philadelphia. Frank thinks there are shoe factories downtown with over a hundred people working in them. Imagine how large that must be! In Drogheda, we never had more than dozen or so.

Not seeing you for these past few weeks, puts an ache in my heart. I feel like I left a part of me in Ireland. I want you back. I will write again soon. We are going to be together. It will be a wonderful thing!

Kelly / JOHN MICHEL KELLY / 104

Give my regards to Dad, Mom and my brothers and sisters.

Sincerely,

Your John

<<<>>