

**Thesis for the Master of Arts Degree**

**The Seeds of Desperation and the Flowers of Hope:  
Short Prose on the Irish Potato Famine**

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## Preface

History and literature are partners and reflect each other. Literature can stand as a primary resource to historians providing insight to a philosophy, an era, or a movement occurring in the time it is written. This goes for historical fiction and poetry as well. Historical fiction offers commentary on both the era its author lives in and the era of its setting. Often writers choose time eras with some similarity to their own time. Setting the narrative or poem in that time era allows the writer to juxtapose their current time frame with the past. Numerous reasons exist for writing about the past: the love and gilded view of a bygone era; the curiosity and search for truth; the historical propensity to repeat the past; and the connection of the past, present and future. The short stories contained in this collection follow in the tradition of historical fiction, but are not intended to romanticize the hardships of The Great Irish Potato Famine. Instead these stories attempt to explore the plight of the people who experienced the famine as sufferers, witnesses, and officials. In this manner the following pieces will explore the plight of the Irish and the effect of British Colonialism. The Potato Famine bears a resemblance to many other human disasters that have occurred throughout history such as the forced removal of Native Americans and the European Holocaust. The Potato Famine also juxtaposes our current views of poverty and prejudice with those of the past.

The work included in the following pages complies with the definition Bryony D. Stocker supplies; “The Historical Novel Society defines historical fiction as a novel ‘written at least fifty years after the events described, or having been written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events...’” (311). Samantha Young describes two types of historical fiction: “...the first places its events within a historical backdrop or period; the second employs historical ‘fact’ to tell its story” (2). Based on this explanation my work falls under the first category. The characters are fictional, but the information and descriptions of the setting are researched, as well

as the conflicts and ordeals the characters face. I made the decision to use fictional characters to allow me to explore a broader range of experiences that focus on historical figures may limit with definite plot.

History often neglects to record the experience of individuals who do not call attention to themselves through politics, movements, or by simply raising their voice above the rest. In his article "Six Propositions about Literature and History" Fred Chappell states, "I suspect that there are great segments of history, real events which actually took place, which are operable as history in the world about me, and which just never had the fortune to be documented..." (513). These people, overlooked by most recorded history, provide fascinating story opportunities. None of the stories contained here are representations of people who actually lived. They represent a possible experience of the famine, and because the characters descend from the masses they offer characters that many readers may be able to relate to. In "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser" Richard L. Stein suggests, "History in Scott is human history. Great events involve real actors, not just romantic heroes but ordinary people with whose feelings and situations we can identify, or at least sympathize, as readily as we can with those of characters in more familiar sorts of novels" (219). Like other forms of fiction, historical fiction provides a human understanding of the event documented.

When looking at history, a contemporary audience inflicts their modern values upon the time they research. An authentic understanding is not possible, and all that can be offered is a reflection. In hindsight it is easy find fault with actions taken in the past and questions arise of a person's reasoning or motive. As previously stated, I do not pretend that historical fiction can persuade a reader, nor do I even attempt to defend the decisions made by the characters, just to simply offer an explanation for their choices. I imagined characters from varying life

experiences, and then thought of the possible actions. Many of these efforts took research and guidance from authors of historical fiction.

The historical fiction genre is unique in that it allows writers of both fiction and non-fiction to inspire each other, and I find that I draw inspiration from both areas. William Henry and Harper Lee provide the strongest inspiration and influence for the short stories contained here. The book *Coffin Ship: The Wreck of the Brig St. John* by William Henry is a non-fiction piece, but he weaves a compelling story in the representation of fact. Henry's book served as the spark that caused my interest in The Great Irish Famine. I purchased the book on my first trip to Ireland, and found the narratives and facts that compelled me to write "Steerage" and begin my research of the famine. Henry includes facts from the famine in Ireland as well as information on other ships carrying Irish passengers to new destinations. He then relates the story of *The Brig St. John*. I challenged myself to match the accuracy and research Henry used to compile his historical account. I also used many of the facts he gathered to shape the details of the ship and passenger experience in "Steerage." Unlike Henry, I center on one family and one sailor where Henry focuses on the general experiences of crew and passengers alike. Henry set out to tell the true story of *The Brig St. John*. He provides a study of the famine ship as a whole. I chose to emphasize one family and one sailor to help create a strong connection between the reader and the characters. Narrowing the point-of-view gives insight in the everyday experience of the travelers.

Possibly the greatest influence for this project is Harper Lee and her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel was published in 1960 and set during the depression. There are several aspects of this novel that helped guide my project. The characters in the novel are not historical figures but are woven into historical events and a historical era. These characters are also based

on happenings of the time (the Scottsboro Trial). Instead of writing directly about the trial, Lee relates her reflections on the events through fictional characters. This allows her to include the family of her narrator. Through Lee's narrator, she strings autobiographical details creating personable characters. While I do not intentionally include aspects of my life into these stories, I do attempt to create characters that can open the narrative world to the readers as Lee is able to do with her novel. *To Kill a Mockingbird* also provided the urge for me to present the famine from numerous points of view. Atticus Finch, the novel's hero, intones, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (Lee 30). Even when discussing the novel's villains, Lee reminds us to consider perspective in order to understand their devious actions. "...see if you can stand In Bob Ewell's shoes a minute. I destroyed his last shred of credibility at that trial...The man had to have some kind of comeback" (Lee 218). Even though Lee is not excusing Bob Ewell's actions, she does give the reader enough perspective to understand his choices. In my characters, I try to offer their perspective and reasoning for the decisions they make. Multiple perspectives allow the exploration of the individual experience and the reasoning for decisions made during historical events.

Lee also inspired me by creating a strong connection between the era she wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird* in and the setting of the novel. Through Tom Robinson's trial, she presents a subject that parallels the civil rights movements in the 1960's. Still, the novel set in the 1930's found significance in the 1960's and still resonates today. The politics of the famine still slip into the political debates of today in questions of taxes, welfare, and immigration. Many of the stories composed for this collection contain references to such issues during the time of the Great Irish Famine (1845-1852).

Dorothy Parker's poem "Penelope" though not of a historical genre, helped shape my prose pieces as well. In her poem, Parker presents Penelope's struggles at home while her husband, Odysseus, goes to war and remains lost at sea.

In the pathway of the sun,  
 In the footsteps of the breeze,  
 Where the world and sky are one,  
 He shall ride the silver seas,  
 He shall cut the glittering wave.  
 I shall sit at home, and rock;  
 Rise, to heed a neighbor's knock;  
 Brew my tea, and snip my thread;  
 Bleach the linen for my bed.  
 They will call him brave.

Western cultures often champion those who leave. The heroes go to war or venture to new lands, but in "Penelope" Parker suggests the heroics of the people who remain behind. In the short stories that follow I try to give those who stayed the same consideration as Parker. In "The Physician" and "The Last Time I Saw You" I offer the experience of those who managed to remain in Ireland, or those who came to Ireland to provide aid for the suffering. I tell Sinead's story rather than her husband's, and through the Doctor's eyes I tell the story of relief efforts as well as the people he witnessed who remained in Ireland.

The characters in these short stories present varying views of the famine and don't seek to present an absolute truth, but a perspective truth by voicing the concerns and experiences of everyday people that were affected in one way or another by the tragedy. I also attempt to

provide an understanding of the Victorian English view of the famine as presented by the “Doctor’s Tale” and “Land Lords.” In “Based on a True Story: Contemporary Historical Fiction and Historiographical Theory” Samantha Young claims, “New-Historicism scrutinized overreaching issues of capital-H History, rather than focusing on a specific period or topic, recognizing that there is no single version of history and that any representation must reflect multiple truths or pasts...” (13). These stories are not meant to offer an excuse or assign blame for the beliefs and actions for any of the characters or events that I chose to cover but an explanation. It is a rare person who is cruel just for the sake of cruelty. These people generally feel they are justified in their actions, and whether or not a twenty-first century audience agrees with these character’s reasoning at least the readers may be able to understand it.

In the story “Land Lords,” I represent three of the views held by English landlords James S. Donnelly Jr. covers in his essay “Mass Eviction and the Great Famine.” The Baron represents those who viewed evictions as economic gain so they cleared their lands at the slightest provocation. He saw an opportunity to update the farming on his lands in Ireland by evicting the tenants, dismantling their farms, and running cattle or sheep on the emptied lands. The Duke represents those land lords that felt eviction necessary to protect their own finances and their holdings. Both the Duke and the Baron pay their tenants to avoid forced evacuations, and though this is for their own gain, there is a sense, that at least in the Duke’s case, he feels he is truly helping the people he is depriving of their home by paying them. The Earl embodies the few landlords that attempted to help their tenants by not evicting even when those tenants fell behind in rent. He also is indicative of those unfortunate enough to fall behind in taxes and debt, enough so his tenants fell victim to court ordered evictions. According to Donnelly these evictions

displaced more families than evictions ordered by land lords. Incidents such as these fueled the arguments of the views held by the Duke and Baron.

Henry, in “The Doctor’s Tale,” characterizes the English view in the beginning of his story. He blames the Irish for the famine believing they are lazy and ignorant. As he becomes acquainted with the sufferers of the famine, he soon begins to sympathize and desires to help them. Henry and the Earl represent the argument asserted by Donnelly that the land lords and English living in Ireland during the “Great Hunger” were generally more sympathetic than those removed from the situation. James, the sailor, shows yet another side of the travesties of the famine. William Henry in *Coffin Ship* recounts remorseless sailors throwing the bodies of their passengers that did not survive the trip over board. Through James I offer a sailor who feels for the human cargo they transport, but James also provides an explanation for the other sailors’ callousness. James feels the human loss so deeply that to remain in his employment would drive him insane.

The remaining stories in the collection detail events in lives of the sufferers: the evicted who immigrated, the evicted who stayed, and the tenants who fought and struggled to keep what they had. They represent the common people, whose names are often anonymous to history. These characters do what they deem necessary for their and their family’s survival. In “The Last Time I Saw You,” Sinead exemplifies several historical aspects of the famine acknowledged in Donnelly’s essay. Curran, her husband, travels to the United States, but like many unfortunate immigrants the vessel transporting him to his new home succumbs to the Atlantic. Sinead experiences the eviction many Irish faced when they returned from the work house or other occupations to find their home a heap of ashes. Since her home was destroyed, Sinead must survive without that security. This eventually causes Sinead to arrive at the work house that

cannot take on more inhabitants. Like many desperate parents, Sinead leaves her daughter at the work house knowing they will take children no matter how crowded they are. “Steerage” illustrates the horrors faced by families making the trip across the Atlantic, and “Desperation” depicts a family’s frantic attempt to maintain their livelihood.

The mass immigration from Ireland during the famine lends itself to Edward Said’s discussion on Exile. In Said’s “Reflections on Exile,” he states, “...anyone prevented from returning home is an exile...” (143). Said goes on to create distinction between the people who fall under that description of an exile.

Exiles originated in the age-old practice of banishment...The word ‘refugee’ has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas exile carries with it a touch of solitude and spirituality...Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons...Émigré is an ambiguous status. Technically, an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country (Said 144).

The Irish Immigrants fall under the description of Émigré. They immigrated to a new country not necessarily because they wanted to. Many of the people who left Ireland did so because they were evicted from their homes, they feared eviction, or they felt they should leave while they still could. Not all of the Irish immigrants had a choice. Their options were to move to an overpopulated workhouse or to accept the money from the landlords that evicted them if it was offered. In any case the home that the Irish immigrants knew no longer existed for them, and return was impossible suggesting that many of the immigrants could be considered exiles.

To further explore exile in relation to the potato famine I turned to Robyn E. Bates. In her book *The Cultural Colonization of Ireland*, Bates applies Said’s discussion of the Exile to

William Shakespeare's deposed *Richard II*. She argues that Richard II's loss of the throne sends the character into exile though he remains in his own land. Bates then claims Richard II represents Irish characteristics despised by the English. She claims that "[the] frustration at the English failure to appreciate Richard's poetic superiority is something very like an Irish frustration at the English failure to appreciate the poetic nature of the Celt" (80). Bates's argument that a person could be exiled in their own land lends itself to the situation in Ireland during the famine. Bates argues that exile can also be the loss of self-identity, so in her argument for Richard II, she states he is an exile since he is no longer King of England he must reimagine himself as the way he thought himself no longer exists. His relationship to the world had changed. According to Bates "...a culture which has been invaded and subjected to a dominant empire works culturally against the constructions it finds itself in the dominant literature, it must reappropriate the image that had been constructed or write against that image" (1). Like Richard II, the Irish evicted from their homes and often their way of life also must reimagine themselves. I combine the work of Said and Bates to develop the characters in the narratives that follow.

"Steerage" represents a family in exile. They choose to leave their country, and according to Said they qualify as *Émigré* rather than exiles. It is true that the family in this story chose to leave Ireland, but that decision came after they were evicted from their home, after Seamus sold his boat and fishing nets in order to feed his family. Not only did Seamus, his wife, and children lose their home, but Seamus lost his means of providing for them. The loss of a home and Seamus's work caused this family to lose a portion of their identity and dignity, and finally they are forced to leave their country for the sake of survival, so according to Bates this family can be considered in a state of Exile. The family in "Desperation" truly fits the definition of the exile. They managed to keep their home, but through the Landlord's demand for rent and rising taxes

reach desperation extreme enough to commit murder. Once the crime is committed, their only option is to leave or face execution.

In “Missing Pieces” and “A Pocket Full of Memory” I try to add hope to the collection. With all of the tragedy and struggles the Irish faced due to The Great Famine, some did survive and thrived in Ireland and in new lands. Even though the stories carry a note of hope, exile still plays a part. The exiled person is not given a choice, and actually reaches an idealized or exalted state, “...exile carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality” (Said 144). The solitude appears in both stories. “Missing Pieces” continues the story of “Steerage” by featuring Abby and James. Abby desires to return to Ireland, but does not have the funds to return, the means to support herself once there, and no ties with her family still living in Ireland. She feels alone due to the loss of her family and turns to James for help. Rory in “Pocketful of Memory,” leaves his children in Ireland in order to supply them with enough money for survival. Rory is disconnected from his family, home, and country. These characters provide hope by improving their situation. Even though they do not get what they want, they do improve their situation. Abby is able to help support her adoptive family and assists with James’s recovery. Rory sends the money needed home to his children and even dreams they will receive educations. Both Rory and Abby work to reimagine themselves by creating new identities in their new home.

Through Bates it is possible to depict characters that remained in Ireland as exiles. “The Last Time I Saw You,” represents Sinead as an exile. Her home is destroyed. Her shelter and safety are irreversibly lost. Trying to sustain herself and her daughter, she is forced to take whatever work she can find, live with another family, and eventually abandon her daughter. The loss of home, family, and livelihood leave her in exile.

The included prose featuring English protagonists also present arguments supporting the Irish as Exiles in their own land. “Landlords” shows the desire some landlords held for their tenants to leave their lands so they could move on to a more modern system of farming. The Baron explains that he is willing to even pay his tenants to leave their homes, and if they refuse the money he offers them, he will find any excuse to evict. I would argue that people living under landlords like the Baron were forced into exile even though it didn’t occur by a legal course of action. These families were purposefully forced away from their home and many times their country with little chance of returning, just to accommodate the greed of their landlord. In the “Physician,” Henry blames the Irish for the famine citing their life style as the major contributor, never considering the hardships put on the Irish by the English. This goes along with Bates’s suggestion that the Irish felt the English did not appreciate or understand their culture.

The consciousness of theory and the attention to it in my writing increased in my time in the program. I learned to understand the direction theory could take my writing, creative applications of theory, and eventually what my writing could do with theory. Early in the program I found Edward Said’s work fascinating and enjoyed applying it to the literature I read, and my creative pieces. Robyn Bates’s book *The Cultural Colonization of Ireland* showed me ways to bend and apply theory in new ways. The graduate workshops I participated in during my time in the program encouraged me to confine my writing to moments occurring in characters’ lives while including the necessary details to create compelling events and characters.

During my time in the program I began to challenge myself to try new techniques such as dual narrators. I realized I needed to expand the events in my writing to highlight themes, draw attention to symbols, images, and various forms of figurative language. Through my work in the program I learned to slow my writing down. I noticed I always seemed to hurry through the story

so excited to reveal the plot that I forgot to give it strength by stopping time and revealing the moment in slow motion, building suspense, exploring foreshadowing, and bringing the setting to life.

Good writing tells the audience something about themselves. It allows the readers to identify in some measure with the hero and the villain. This collection offers the experiences of real characters in realistic situations. Even though these characters are fiction a reader may be able to identify them as someone they know in their current time. Plots that keep the narrative moving, and keep the reader turning pages well into the night, but maintain relevant themes and do not neglect important details prove essential to successful writing. My plots tend to move quickly even when they only cover a short period of time in an attempt to build suspense. Timeless themes and current concerns are imperative to generating texts the readers can relate to. Many of the themes and issues in the stories that follow examine topics still debated to some extent today like social classes, poverty, government aid, immigration etc.

Samantha Young states, "...a focus on the past was an attempt to find historical paradigms for contemporary situations" (6). Poverty remains an issue in society. Often attempts to create solutions for those in need lead to aggravation and resentment. These can often resemble the view the English held of the Irish. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon provide an example of this in their article "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State." In the article, Fraser and Gordon track the changing connotation of terms for the poverty stricken receiving some form of financial assistance. Fraser and Gordon assert, "The first icon of industrial dependency was 'the pauper,' who lived not on wages but on poor relief" (316). The Irish living in the work houses were members of the pauper class. Later Fraser and Gordon argue that "...reformers in the 1890s introduced the word dependent into relief discourse as a substitute

for *pauper* precisely in order to destigmatize the receipt of help” (320). According to Fraser and Gordon the term dependency has gone on to represent the same criticism as that of the term pauper. Those in poverty receiving assistance are seemingly regarded with the same stigma today.

Empathy works as a theme for this collection as it relates different views of the famine. Main characters include poor evicted farmers and fishermen, a farmer barely holding on to his land, an English doctor, a displaced widow, and landlords. I do not intend to excuse the landlords from their role in this atrocity, for many times these large land owners felt compelled to drive the Irish from their holdings. “Landlords” represents the importance of empathy and the danger of the lack of it. The landlords living in Ireland tended to be more sympathetic to the suffering Irish because the atrocities showed themselves in the landlord’s world. The Earl lives in Ireland and did not evict tenants behind in rent because he knew what they faced once removed from their homes. Though Henry, the English doctor, blames the Irish for the famine and views their ways as irresponsible and fanciful in the beginning, he changes his opinions after being exposed to the devastation of the famine. Once Henry sees the impact he can no longer harden himself against their plight.

The theme of forgiveness arrives through responsible parties. The Earl in “Landlords” seeks forgiveness from the tenants who are displaced because he fell in arrears on his own debts. Parents seek the forgiveness of their children for the way they cared or couldn’t care for them during the “Great Hunger”. Sinead hopes her daughter will forgive her for leaving her at the work house, Seamus hopes Abby can forgive him for leaving her to face a new country on her own, and Fergus needs forgiveness for altering the lives of his children in an act of desperation. On the other hand, Rory feels he needs the forgiveness of his father because his father remained

in Ireland through the worst of the famine while keeping his family in good health, but Rory knows he must leave as he cannot provide for his children in Ireland when conditions are improving.

My writing tends to follow the realism movement. I did not intend to romanticize the past and gloss over its glaring catastrophes and faults. I acknowledge that these stories should not be taken as factual accounts of a family's ordeal in a famine ship. As Chappell states, "Fiction may of course offer us a vision of wholeness, of historical and universal order. But it will not be the same vision history offers for the vision of fiction is perforce mystical" (516). Historical fiction cannot be viewed in the same manner as history. Historical fiction attempts to focus on an event in minute detail by focusing on the actions of a central figure real or fictional. Since the experience is not that of the author. The details included are largely conjectural and contain a note of the fantastical. Everything about my characters is fictitious their thoughts, feelings and actions. Still the stories include facts such as what happens to human waste aboard a ship where passengers travel in the cargo hold without access to the deck to dump it over board hoisting buckets is the main method. Many of my characters suffer from illnesses or starvation. I researched the diseases in Laurence M. Geary's "Famine, Fever and the Bloody Flux," so I could present the symptoms of the illness realistically. I also employ some aspects of the naturalist movement. Nature is a force that destroys potato crops, creates a raging sea claiming many ships carrying immigrants away from Ireland, and to some extent the force behind the diseases that afflict thousands.

Narration drives many of the pieces that I include in this project. Third and first person point of view are the only narration I use in the following stories. The narration in each story allows me to continue to provide the perspective of different participants in The Great Famine. Stepping

into varying personas and describing their views on the issues of the famine allows me to display the early harsh opinion of Henry in “The Doctor’s Tale,” and his change to compassion by the resolution. Experimenting with narration allowed me to challenge myself to write with dual narrators in “Steerage” providing the view of a sailor and a man traveling in the overcrowded conditions of the cargo hold. The final story that employs first person narration, “The Last Time I Saw You,” uses the persona to capture the regret and apologetic tone of Sinead as she recounts the events that led her to leave her daughter at a workhouse.

The third person narration seems more objective than first person narration. Third person narration can help shift focus from one character to multiple characters if necessary. In “Landlords” each character verbally expresses his philosophy of handling his tenants. This enables the presentation of three common views held by landlords dealing with the situation in Ireland. In the story “Missing Pieces,” I use third person limited omniscience. I use it mainly through Abby. This allows me to avoid becoming bogged down with details of all of the characters in the story, but still gives me the freedom to apply James’s perspective as needed.

The numerous settings affected by the Great Famine included in the following prose are the product of research and travel. I visited a remade famine ship, saw abandoned famine houses, the relief projects dotting the countryside, the jails, and monuments honoring the sufferers. The information I gathered from research and travel helped shape the description of ships, landscapes, and cities.

Developing dialogue for characters from the past presents a challenge. The language must seem to be a product of the era of the story’s setting. Bryony D. Stocker’s article “Bygone’s—Is this Really the Authentic Language of Historical Fiction?” provided me with guidance in undertaking this task. Stocker provides two methods for giving the reader the historical speech

they expect, immersion and hybridization. Since Stocker stipulates that immersion works best if recordings of speech exist, I realized my stories would benefit from hybridization (311). Stocker states "...whilst authenticity is desirable, it cannot be the primary factor taken into consideration" (313). Stocker suggests authors must achieve a balance that creates a past dialect while maintaining reader understanding. Since spoken language was not recorded from the time era I am writing in, and the written language is different than spoken language. To create a language that could be a product of the setting I try to use terms and phrases that were used during the time era but are still in use or recognized today. In this manner, the language becomes a hybrid of the past and present.

The narrative events in these prose pieces developed from questions I asked myself after visiting Ireland. I wanted to know how the landlords felt about the situation there, what it was like to live in the small dark cargo compartment of a famine ship, what happened to children when their parents couldn't survive the voyage, how could parents save the lives of their children when they could no longer feed them, what is the cost of food when there is none, and how can someone continue after such an experience. These questions relate to humanity throughout the ages. These questions echo today. Many can relate to these questions as they are the questions one would ask if faced with such odds.

I included subtle nuances and images. One motif is the images of light and dark. The light and dark motif works well with this project because it merges with the Celtic Irish culture. Before Christianization, the Irish worshipped the sun. I use light to represent good things and dark to represent struggle. Light arrives when the characters have hope, and remain as long as they believe they have hope. Light also serves as a guide leading characters in necessary and often helpful directions. The dark is oppressive, and keeps the characters from rising out of their

situation. Many times it claims them with illness or hopelessness. Those on board the famine ship suffer in the dark and long for the few hours they were allowed on deck, in the light. When Rory is in the river and disoriented, the light shows him the way to the surface and the safest path to avoid the logs. Sinead finds her burnt home in the dark, but receives renewed hope after arriving in the village in the morning. Fergus commits murder in the dark but watches his children make it aboard a ship bound for Canada in the morning light.

The historical fiction genre opens many avenues for narrative writing. It allows writers to choose a historical event of their interest and explore it by creating people to view the event through. As stated by both Chappell and Stein, historical fiction allows the authors to explore history through individuals that may not be documented in history texts. Themes present another avenue. Writers can work with themes that stretch across the ages and deal with them as they occur in varying eras. Forgiveness and empathy remain part of the human condition today, and in some cases act as connections to the past. This genre allows me to combine three of my passions: history, literature, and writing. I hope to continue from this project and develop stories that involve more Irish history, or to look at varying human disasters and draw connections between them.

### **Desperation**

Fergus always kept a pig, but never expected to use it for anything but rent. When the blight inflicted itself upon Ireland, Fergus refused to consider the pig for his family's use even when they were at their hungriest. The pig never really belonged to them; they merely kept it for the land lord he reasoned. This meant in addition to his wife, daughter, and two sons, Fergus had to figure out how to feed this pig as well. Somehow, he managed. His method for survival was to quietly keep what he had. He never joined any of the marches or protests much to the consternation of his oldest child, Lochlain. Lochlain wanted to fight and shout about the injustices, but he respected his father and followed his wishes.

By eating nettles, and scraping by on Indian corn, Fergus and his family were able to keep a pig for the landlord, three sheep, and a small batch of seed potatoes from the plants that survived. To make money, Fergus and Lochlain would travel wherever public projects offered by relief committees were advertised sometimes his daughter Ciara would go with them. His wife, Aileen, and youngest son, Jamie, always remained to work the farm. At times they had to walk out of the mountains and eat at one of the soup kitchens in Dublin. They also grew small crops of oats, and cut peat to bring in any money they could. These efforts, along with the seasonal yield of lambs helped them to replace the pig paid to the land lord, buy the corn from America, and pay the taxes imposed on them, but as taxes grew, and the price of food raced even higher, Fergus struggled to keep up.

It was when they came to collect taxes that Fergus first realized he couldn't pay. The rate had soared since the last collection and the money Fergus had in possession wouldn't cover the fees. "The pig will do," the official said.

"Oh, no sir please, that pig is to pay our lease. I have oats here and some sheep up the hill. You are welcome to them, or you could come again next week, and I will have the money

you need, but the middleman will be about soon, and I must keep the pig for him,” Fergus begged.

“We have many families on our collection route we simply haven’t the time to come back with no guarantee that you will have the funds when we return, or to wait for you to collect the sheep,” they said leering at Fergus over their ledgers.

Lochlain clenched his fists when they entered the house to take the pig, but one look from Fergus insured he would do nothing, and the five of them watched the tax collectors take the pig away. Jamie cried. He was afraid, but Ciara watched her mother. She knew that Aileen would confront Fergus right away if there were reason to panic, but if there were hope Aileen would speak to him when she thought the children were asleep. For all the years Ciara could remember, she could hear her parents whisper through any troubles they faced, and somehow in the quiet of the night they always came to a solution.

Fergus, Lochlain, and Ciara spent the rest of the day harvesting the oats. Fergus already began to plan how to pay the land lord, and the oats would have to be part of the payment. With the oats bundled, and the sun setting, the family of five took supper. Over their soup of nettles, Fergus explained how they would pay their rent. “We’ll give them the oats and offer two of the sheep. We will give them the old ram and the youngest ewe. Hopefully the lambs from the older ewe will help us replace the pig, and maybe with any amount of luck our potato crop will actually produce enough, so we won’t have to purchase as much corn.”

“We’re putting a lot on hope,” Lochlain said.

“Well, it’s the best we can do at the time,” Fergus replied.

“We’ll take care of what comes along,” Aileen chimed in.

Just after supper, the middleman knocked at the door. "I know it is late, but we were so close by, it really is saving us a trip, and since you are always prepared for us we thought we would go ahead and collect the pig tonight," the middleman said as he entered the small one room house followed by the two men who helped him.

"Well, that is a problem. The tax collectors beat you to the pig, but I have other valuables that should be acceptable. The oats we harvested this evening are for you, and I have a ram and ewe up the hill, Lochlain and I will be happy to collect for you in the morning" Fergus explained.

"Terribly sorry, but we need the rent tonight. I am not making the trip back out here just for your rent. Besides you know I give you extra time because you provide a fine pig. I need your payment presently."

"Lochlain and I will go fetch sheep strait away," Fergus stammered.

"We really must be on our way. What about those in the corner there?" the middleman said pointing to the basket of potatoes awaiting planting in the week ahead.

"No. We need those for sowing, and I doubt we would be able to find replacements. Let us bring down the sheep. It won't take long," Fergus begged.

"I'm sorry Fergus," the middleman pushed past him and took up the basket.

"You can't have them," Fergus shouted, lunging for the basket. The middleman side stepped him and shoved him to the ground with the weighty basket and kept walking. Something came over Fergus. He knew he couldn't let that man walk out of their house with their potatoes. The iron they used to stoke the fire lay on the floor near where he landed. Before he could think, Fergus rose from the floor and struck the middleman across the back of the head with the fire iron. He hit the dirt floor unimpeded. He didn't move. The two men who accompanied the middleman flew into action and moved to apprehend Fergus. Fergus dropped the fire iron and

retreated to the wall furthest from the men. Somehow, Lochlain found the shovel he set inside the door earlier in his hand. He struck the man closest to his father between the shoulder blades. In one swift motion, Lochlain stepped sideways and struck the other man just as he was turning around. The shovel caught its unsuspecting victim in the ear. The man hit the floor, ear bleeding and shaking his head. Ciara relieved each man of his pistol before they regained their senses, and Lochlain bound and gagged them.

Fergus fell into a state repeating to no one that he didn't mean to; he just couldn't let him take the seed ration. Aileen and Jamie moved next to Fergus and tried to comfort him. It wasn't until Lochlain shook him by his collar that he snapped into motion. "We can't stay here," Fergus said surveying the restrained men and the dead middleman. "If they find us here when they discover this crime, we will pay sorely for it," Fergus said.

"Take the potatoes, blankets, any food that you can find, and anything of value or use," Aileen leaped into action.

"They probably have quite a bit of money," Lochlain said leaning over the middleman.

"We will not take that money. That is our neighbor's rent, and I don't want them in trouble because we stole the rent they paid," Fergus said.

In a whirlwind they were ready to go. Fergus carried the basket of potatoes; Lochlain carried blankets and bore Jamie on his back. Ciara hauled Indian corn, bread, dried seaweed, oats and more blankets. Aileen pulled the three sheep along. Once they came to the bottom of the grassy hill that lead north toward Dublin, they stopped at a cottage of a farmer Fergus knew. They left the sheep with him, and asked him to rescue the two men tied-up in their house after they had time to get away.

They slipped swiftly down the mountains. Chilled by the winter that remained in the air, and guided by the soft reflected light of the crescent moon they climbed over dry stone fences, through tangled tall grass, and down steep valleys and back up the other side. They were exhausted from the day's work, the horror of what happened, and the feverish escape, but no one complained or asked to stop. Sometimes they pulled each other along, but they never even paused. Lochlain carried Jamie the entire route down the mountains and into Dublin.

When they arrived in Dublin, Fergus and Lochlain sold the potatoes, oats, and corn. With the money they earned, they purchased tickets to Quebec, but they could only afford three. Ciara, Jamie, and Aileen took sustenance at a Quaker soup kitchen while they waited. The ship didn't leave until noon giving Lochlain and Fergus time to eat, but also allowing the news of last night's events to reach Dublin. As they finished their soup Fergus shared the news about the tickets, and without discussion he and Aileen agreed the tickets would go to the children.

As they exited the soup kitchen, a constable passed through the street searching for a family of five. Fergus shoved the tickets into Lochlain's hand. "Go south around the buildings. Your mother and I will meet you at the docks. We will figure something out there," Fergus instructed and pushed the children in the direction he wanted them to go. Fergus and Aileen moved after the constable.

When Lochlain, Ciara, and Jamie arrived at the health inspection, they didn't see their parents. Aileen and Fergus arrived at the docks just in time to fall into the path of the constable. It took a second look, but the constable seemed to recognize them, but they prevented him from continuing his search of the passengers boarding the ship. Lochlain looked up just in time to see the constable accost his parents. He stepped to get out of line and go to them, but a quick gesture

from his father told him to stay. "I think we are on our own," Lochlain said to Ciara. He pointed and she glanced in the direction he indicated.

"What will we do?" she asked.

"Nothing, they want us to go. We can't help them now. Do you want Jamie to end up on a penal ship?" Lochlain said.

They moved through the line passed the medical inspection, and found their place on the ship. They didn't tell Jamie about Fergus and Aileen until they were in the hull, so his tears and spectacle wouldn't attract attention. Fergus and Aileen watched their children board the ship as they were pulled to the gaol.

"They will be fine," Fergus said.

## Steerage

Seamus:

My wife is sick again. For weeks now, she has been sick one week and better the next only to fall ill again the next. I croon to her like I have heard her do with our children, “You will be alright. We’ll get there soon,” I tell her. I cradle her in my arms and rock her back and forth to the rhythm of the ship. I can’t tell in the dim light, but I think her skin may be yellow. I am afraid to breathe the name, but it looks like relapsing fever. The wooden belly moans and gurgles like an over filled barrel in the constant dark. I stroke Mary’s blonde hair darkened to brown from her fever sweats, and she nuzzles into my chest blathering in her sleep. Abby, our daughter cries and clings to her mother’s hair and Shane, our son, sleeps. He is sick for the second time in two weeks. I thought I would be used to the smell, but emaciated flesh, vomit and feces still hang faintly about my nostrils. I am not sure what is worse, the stench of the blight that rotted the potato crops, or the pathetic contents of this wooden hull. I try to encourage Mary, and I force what I know is coming to my stomach where it can stew in nothingness. She won’t go tonight though, her grip is strong. “Lay there next to your brother. Try to sleep,” I tell Abby. She lies next to Shane, and I lay next to her with Mary; each of us trying to keep the ill warm.

At first, I hoped we would be fine. I was no farmer. I looked to the sea to provide for our family. My hopes only thrived a few short weeks before the sea became barren. The seasons changed, and cooling waters drove the fish away from shore. I thought nothing of it at first, this happens every year. Then the price of grains reached higher than my pockets could touch, and the money I managed to save vanished. I couldn’t row far enough out to find the fish that had abandoned the shore lines. I sat on the beach looking helplessly at the sea. It betrayed me. Mary had to send Abby to fetch me home. “Mam and Shane are waiting for you,” she said.

“I have nothing to bring home for us,” I replied.

“We want you to come home,” Abby said simply.

I walked five miles one way every day for work, but never made enough to keep up with the ever growing price of food. One night I became so desperate that I threw what little money I made into the white sands of a strand near Galway. A poor move on my part, but the coins seemed useless whether in the sand or in my pocket. That night, while I slept, Mary returned to the beach and searched by moonlight until she found every coin. We scavenged rocky beaches for carrageen moss, dulse, and limpets. The four of us would pick our way slowly through the rocks as we moved cautiously through throngs of people. We passed twisted bodies with grass stained fingers and chins on the roadside verges.

Finally, we became so desperate that Mary and I decided to sell the boat and fishing nets. It was our livelihood, so we had to make a change with the money we earned. Mary and I decided to travel to Dublin and purchase passage on a ship bound for the United States. As we made our way to Dublin, Mary and I tried to keep our family away from the great number of ill people, but occasionally the weather forced us to share refuge with people who looked as if they poisoned the air with every breath. Four tickets to Boston, the ferry across the Irish sea, and a week's lodging in in Liverpool took all the money we had left. Crammed in our small room at Liverpool Mary began to ache all over, get headaches, nose bleeds and the occasional bouts of dry heaves. I wondered if we should risk the tip. After a week of illness, Mary's condition improved so we departed.

When we wake up, I take the children to the buckets and hold a blanket for them so they can have some privacy. I scratch the stubble on my chin and give myself a mental reminder that I need a shave lest the pests get into my beard. We all have lice, and I wonder if the smell of vomit

will ever come off of our skin. We dwell on the bottom bunk because I wasn't strong enough to win us a top one. Really, I never had a chance carrying Shane in my arms because Mary was already too weak to hold him. The family that shared the bunk with us is all gone except for the youngest, a girl of four named Caitlin; I take care of her too. They let us out on deck, early in the morning before the first class passengers are awake. Abby helps Shane and Caitlin climb up on deck, and I carry Marry. She seems to feel better in the sun. "Forgive me Seamus," she whispers as I tend to the blood coursing out of her nose. I beg her to not give up, but nearly four hours after we are below deck, she sweats her life out. She grips my pant leg, pushes against the floor with her feet, her face twists, her fist grinds into my thigh and then she relaxes. I stroke her sunken cheeks remembering the joy that once filled them. Her dull eyes show none of the happiness. Shane and Abby weep and hug her, and I lean back with her head still on my chest, a dreadful feeling in my stomach.

James:

I hate it at sea. I dreamed of how free I would be in the vast openness of the ocean. I didn't think that the ship would be so confining, or that I would actually miss Boston. When we dock, I want to disembark and never board another vessel. Besides the ship, there's the cargo. The trip to Ireland seemed promising. We carried lumber. Now, that's what I signed on for. I never wanted to work on a passenger ship, and this is worse. Since nothing is really being exported from Ireland, we haul passengers, but they are treated like freight. I have heard that they are exporting sheep and wool but they go to Australia and the continent, so we are hauling people. The rest of the crew doesn't even seem bothered by their death. I struggle every morning to hide my tears. I force the emotion down so hard that my chest feels as if it will burst, and I

can't breathe or talk. The corpses are so thin I can see their ribs through their shirts. After I help throw the bodies over board, I must run and find some place away from the other crew members and take in shattered, shaking breaths until I can control it. "You'll go mad if you remain this sensitive," Jack tells me. Jack's an old sailor who had taken me under his wing for my first voyage.

My father was a sailor. I don't know much about him or what happened to him except that he is buried at sea like the many men and women that I have committed to the deep waters. I cried, but my mother told me not to. "You can't be weak," she said. I never understood the connection between weakness and tears, but I assumed that my mother understood see something I can't. I felt that my mother was angry with my father and that anger soon afflicted me. "With your father gone we have more worries," she would complain, or she would moan, "How could he leave us?" He told me he would come home that is the only memory I have of him. I guess that's not true because I remember rushing from our tenant building overjoyed at his return. Still, he didn't come back, and I felt abandoned.

The first class passengers don't have ideal conditions. They have cramped quarters with only one set of bunk beds, but they have more room, and freedom than they do in steerage. Their clothing has been maintained; they give the appearance of cleanliness, and they eat at the captain's table every night. It is rumored that it was at one of these dinners that one of the first class passengers requested that the steerage passengers' time on deck be limited to early morning and late evening. She didn't want her time on deck to be hampered by the "miserable wretches," whose smell she couldn't stand.

I have noticed one family when the steerage passengers come up on deck. I imagine that the father is much like my father would have been. His wife is sick, she was sick when they

boarded, and he cares for her and the children with a quiet tenderness. I think he truly believes that his entire family will survive the trip to Boston, but the rest of the crew believes she and the boy won't make it. Jack tells me that the woman's skin tone being yellow means she won't last long. The girl is strong like her father. She strokes her mother's hair when they are sitting in the sun, and her father cradles the little boy in his arms. I want to talk to them, but I fear they don't want to hear from one of the men who lock them below deck as if they are prisoners.

All of the crew members must share a bunk with at least one other man. The man who sleeps in my bunk before me smells like smoke and mildew, but that is not why I can't sleep. She watches me while I am below deck. She will scan the room with lazy movements, but her wide open dark eyes always focus on me. She says nothing while chewing her cud. I have decided I hate cows. When I wake up, she is still staring but no longer chewing. I milk her, and that sweet nourishment is for the Captain and first class passengers. The crew may get some on occasion, but the people in steerage get none. Even though I feed her at this point, I think the cow hates me even more. She is an Irish cow. I wonder if she is angry because her milk is not used for the people from her country who truly need it.

I start my shift and learn that the woman is dead. It is only then that I hear her name was Mary. The children weep. Her husband shows no emotion. He just comforts the children, but I suspect he waits to avoid a public spectacle like I do.

Seamus:

The sea is rough and bile pours through the slats of the bunk above us. The people above us try to leave their section when they become ill, but at times it seizes them too quickly. To make matters worse, the storm that has enraged the sea has inhibited our time on deck. I feel I

will suffocate; the walls spin and suddenly I am on my knees rejecting my small breakfast. Shane gets sick too. I rub his back and use my handkerchief to wipe his face. He apologizes and I hug him. I use my jacket to clean the children and myself. I tell myself I won't need it, but hours later I find myself trembling, so I brush the dried crud from the jacket and pull its reeking warmth around my shoulders. Shane sleeps all day. His skin is sallow and sweat beads well up on his face. He's slipping away. It will be too much to take.

I take Abby to the buckets, but the line is too long and she doesn't make it. She cries from embarrassment and complains about her wet undergarments and stockings. We don't have any spare clothing; we left nearly all we struggled to carry on the docks. I should have kept Mary's, but they wouldn't fit Abby anyway. I did keep Mary's jacket. I pull the lining out and use a needle and thread that I found in the pocket to make crude stockings, and Mrs. Daily gives us a pair of boy's undergarments they managed to bring along. Abby is grateful to have them even though she hesitated at first.

Shane tosses and moans. His nose bleeds, so I stop it with my handkerchief. I can only keep him quiet by cradling his tiny body next to mine. "I am sleepy, Da" he says in his slight voice.

"You should sleep then," I tell him. "Sleep and we shall arrive in our new home by the time you wake."

"Are we almost there?" he asks with his eyes closed.

"Yes," I whisper, and watch as his chest takes on the shallow breathing of sleep. Soon, his breathing slows and while I am stroking his feverish cheek he stops. This is much harder than I can convey. Everything is blank. I can't breathe, and my head feels as though an invisible hand is trying to force my brain through the top of my skull. Hooks gouge into my stomach, attach

themselves to my spine and attempt to rip it out. I gasp but the pain won't go away and the tears won't come. My jaw trembles. I am surprisingly angry, but I don't know at who or what. I want to do something, bring him back, but there is nothing that can be done. I hold him all night fiercely tight trying to defend myself against the hooks.

The next morning, his fledgling body is petrified with the rigor of the dead. I bring Shane and the girls up on deck. I hold Shane until they take him from me. The gruff old man indicates for the young sailor to take Shane, but the awkward young man stands mouth gaping and rooted to the deck. With clear disdain for the young sailor, the gruff man takes Shane from me and drops him overboard. I rush to the side and watch his blonde hair disappear into the water. I fall on my knees and am rocked by sobs so hard I must hold my sides to keep from breaking. Abby looks terrified, but I can't stop. I feel a hand on my shoulder, and it is the young sailor. He wears a look of pity, fear, and concern in his eyes. It doesn't take long for him to grow uncomfortable. Pulling his hand away as though he touched fire, he moves to Abby and Caitlin and takes them around the ship explaining the equipment, leaving me to myself, and I am grateful.

James:

The boy is dead. I let myself believe he would make it. His father would somehow find a way to save him, but there he stands holding his dead son. I don't want to be the one to submit the boy to the sea, but Jack tells me to take the child. I am molded to the deck and stand dumbfounded. Jack takes the child in disgust and does what I cannot. The boy's father rushes to the railing and for a moment I fear he will try to retrieve his son, but he merely collapses and explodes into tears. I have never experienced melancholy so strong it caused me to neglect all composure. Before I knew what I was doing, I put a hand on his shoulder but removed it swiftly

and took the girls about the ship. We looked at the netting and the crow's nest. By the time they were forced to return to the great wooden belly of the ship, the father had returned to the man I observed day after day.

“Thank you,” he says offering his hand. “My name is Seamus.”

“I am James.” I say offering mine.

He nods his thanks again and ushers the girls down stairs. I go back below where I milk the cow. She gets angry with me and kicks me with her hind feet. When I try to dodge the sharp hooves, I spill the milk. I call her a hag and rave about wasting milk when we are surrounded by the undernourished. She glares back at me and seems to say, *It won't help those who need it anyway*. I finish milking, keeping a wary eye on her hind quarter. Once I have delivered the milk to the cook I lay in my bunk smelling of milk and feeling the cow's eyes focused directly on me. When Jack comes in, he ignores her, and she ignores him. Somehow she knows she has a power over me.

Seamus:

The trip has taken its toll. I used to believe that all I had to do to stay alive was just keep breathing. I am often sick and I vomit even when there is nothing left but clear, sticky, nothing. I never considered the possibility that I would simply be too weak to live. We are so close now and I know I won't disembark with Abby and Caitlin at the quay. I will find a home at the bottom of the ocean with Mary and Shane. I don't know what's worse, losing Mary and Shane to the sea, or leaving Abby alone in a strange land with an adopted sister to tend. Abby has taken over my duties with Caitlin, and she's done well. Mrs. Daily, who occupies the bunk above ours, keeps an eye on them too. I haven't been on deck since yesterday morning. I wish I could see the

sun and feel the grass just one more time. I can't even remember them. "The sun is so warm Da," Abby says. "The grass is cool but comfortable, and you can feel it all at once." She reads my mind, or was I talking out loud?

"Well done. You'll be a poet yet," I tell her. She smiles. I am lying with my head on Abby's lap and she cradles my head. I am so tired. I feel that I am being drawn inside myself. I close my eyes for just a tick.

James:

I like the morning shifts because they are quiet, and I can stew in my silent enthusiasm of the prospect of disembarking and never boarding this ship or any other again. I worry about Seamus though; over the last few days he has grown thin and dark circles started under his eyes, but we will arrive soon, and I am certain he will make it. We have caught a good wind and are being borne along swiftly enough that we could land in Boston Harbor in two or three days. I haven't seen him since yesterday, but I am hopeful that the extra rest will help him. We open the hatch and the steerage passengers climb out. I help empty the buckets and am so distracted with the excitement of being nearly to our destination that I don't realize something is wrong with Abby and Caitlin. I begin to help with the bodies. At first I carry the corpses. I take hold of one corpse then another. When I grab the next one, I see Seamus and try to convince myself it wasn't him.

When I return, I can no longer deny that Seamus is in the pile of the dead. I never thought Seamus would leave Abby and Caitlin alone like my father left me. Then I realize he couldn't help it; he had no say in the matter. Neither did my father. I am numb and without thinking I take him up under the arms and shuffle to the railing. I feel the tears tumble down my cheeks. Some

glide into the corners of my mouth, and I swallow the salty water and the rest patter like rain against my sweater. My partner won't look at me. We try to lift him over the rail, but my strength fails and I knock him into the side. I am sobbing, loud choking sobs. I have never even seen a child sob as hard as I am. The strain on my throat was such that only hard dry coughs could relieve it. Tears pour in greater numbers, and thick warm liquid flows from my nose, and like the tears I don't even try to stop it.

I fall on my knees and Seamus's head falls against my shoulder. My partner struggles with the feet still on the rail, and the captain barks an order from somewhere behind me. Without fully knowing the command or thinking about what I am doing, I push Seamus's body up the side and over the rail. His body thumps against the ship's great wooden belly. His arms and legs fold over as he splashes into the water. I watch him sink into the sea. Then I heave the contents of my stomach over the side. My mouth is dry; I wipe the snot and tears with my shirt sleeve.

The rest of the crew continue sending the bodies to their graves while I sit next to the railing and bury my red, tear muddied face in my hands. Caitlin and Abby stand next to Mrs. Daily who drapes an arm around both of them. Caitlin weeps nearly as openly as I do, but Abby wipes vengefully at the tears she cannot control.

In the last days on the boat, I watch over the two girls along with Mrs. Daily. The cow closes her eyes now, while rolling around her partially digested mastication in her mouth. I still think she hates me. The captain has suggested that when we dock I consider disembarking and finding work on land. I agree. When we dock Mrs. Daily pulls me along with her family. Another lost lamb for her flock, but I can repay her kindness in a small way. I buy them food, clothing and blankets with my pay despite their objections. We sleep in the Boston commons on our first night there. In the week that follows, Mr. and Mrs. Daily already concern themselves

with citizenship. I learn that immigrants can achieve this if a member of their family is willing to join the U.S. military. The following week, after I convince the Dailys, they teach me an Irish accent. They continue to complain about my lack of lilt. I never get it right, but when I volunteer so my parents, their young son and adopted daughters can have citizenship. My faulty accent is never questioned, and our story is never checked.

“We are always glad to see even our newest citizen taking interest in our country’s defense,” the recruiter says as we work through the papers. I am afraid, and want to admit I am only sixteen so he will turn me away. Then I remember the pride on the Daily’s faces as they were promised citizenship. “What was your livelihood before this?” the recruiter asks.

“I worked on a sailing vessel...” my mind trails as I explain my previous work. I can’t stop my mouth despite knowing what will come of this.

“You have sailing experience?” the recruiter asks with a smile.

“Um...” There is no way out of this. They will send me back to sea. “Yes,” I answer.

“Good, we need men for our Navy,” the recruiter says reaching for another form.

**The Physician: The Journal of Doctor Henry Walters**

13 September 1847

I never chose Ireland. I completed school fully intending to join my father's practice and take it over when he retired. We could take on more patients with two doctors, but my father insisted I needed to prove myself. He made his reputation in the army. Since I had not joined the military, he suggested I find a cause to donate my services to. Find people in need who could not afford my services otherwise. I did not want to, so I took my time choosing. So long, that my father chose for me. He chose Ireland.

I will not lie. I have no love for the Irish. I find them lazy, and ignorant. All of the trouble they currently find themselves in is self-wrought. Their stubborn dependence on the potato, their silly belief in a superstitious faith, their idle comfort in living in run down houses brought them to the severe starvation they currently face. I will not go so far as to say that God is punishing them. I doubt God wastes much time concerning himself with the Irish. It is their lifestyle. Who can go about life feeling rich by the mere possession of potatoes and milk? Who really believe they can rely on the same staple year after year? They had sufficient warnings. These are not the first potato crops to fail. Granted, it was never on this scale, but those hard times should have served as admonitions. What about 45? That first crop failure wasn't nearly as detrimental as those of the last two years. They should have supplemented their crops with other vegetation in preparation. I presented all of these arguments to my father, but he simply wouldn't hear them. He insists that my duty is not to judge these people, but to ease their suffering and heal them where I can.

I am recovering at the docks in Dublin. I hate boat travel. It always makes me sick. As strange as it sounds, the sea air always makes me feel better. It takes longer this time because of

the rancor of the Irish Sea. When my confidence is restored in my stomach, I make my way to Kingsbridge Station where I am to meet the journalist I will be riding with to County Clare. We will not be taking the train, as stations have yet to reach that far. I watch people moving about. I see an ill-clad family moving down the street the father gripping four large pieces of paper. Since they are walking to the docks, I assume they are tickets. A mob gathers outside of a soup kitchen offering dinner at the lowest prices I have ever seen. So there are relief efforts. I can see these people suffer. I am not blind. What I can't see is how this is worse than the times before. I am glad our government recognized the Irish over exaggeration and relayed it to the world before we were all embarrassed. Well at least this will not be as terrible as I suspected.

John Taylor, the journalist I am traveling with, proves to be a passible companion. He tells me of the evictions; the mass exodus; the various horrors of the work houses; the mass graves; the lack of discrimination among the living, the dying, and the dead; and bodies in varying states of life and death littering the road sides. It doesn't surprise me, this news. I have read the papers after all, but I also know the press works to sell papers and garner pity for these people. He tells me I shall not want for patients as Clare is wanting of medical services.

15 September 1847

The last couple of days consisted of rather rough carriage travel, cold lodgings, and undercooked meals. At least Mr. Taylor's conversation was pleasant and helped pass the time. I will admit the sights along the road grew increasingly dreadful the further west we traveled. Mr. Taylor proved correct; corpses littered the road side and wretched figures staggered passed the dying and dead, most of them so disheartened, they didn't even look up at the carriage. This

morning I saw a woman prying fist sized chunks of bread from a man's pale corpse while her children huddle together on the roadside.

Just before we arrived in Doolin a group of men flagged us down. They were traveling to find work with a relief project, and after a day's travel found themselves too weak to construct a fire. We gathered the fuel and lit the fire. As they warmed themselves, I checked each emaciated creature over. Their gums bled and showed signs of inflammation and each man had lost several teeth. They surely will lose more. I gave them the last of the goose berries I brought with me, and we continued our progression toward Doolin.

Stopping for those men made our arrival to Doolin an hour and a half late. When we arrived I was exhausted, and hungry. We stepped out of the carriage, and Mr. Taylor pointed out the walk to the Cliffs of Moher. He claims it is a wonderful view. He also pointed out the harbor and directions to several farms and homes. I will be lodging in the same building he stays in when he visits Doolin.

As I gathered my luggage from the carriage, a woman trudged out of the night and insisted I give attention to her infant. I ignored her at first, but her desperation put her always in my way. Mr. Taylor seemed to think I should take a look. I set my bags down and held my hands out for the child impatiently beckoning with my fingers. She guided the baby into my arms. It felt as though it were aged two to three months. I pulled the cover from the boy's face, and his features suggested he was more likely twice what his weight indicated, and they told me something else. He was already gone.

I never told anyone about the loss of a loved one before. At first she shook her head as if she didn't believe me. She stumbled back two paces and cleared the blanket from his face. She stared at me, and I saw reality break upon her like the Atlantic against the distant cliffs. A low

moan emanated from her gaping mouth and she crumbled to the dirt. John and I sat with her. When she gathered herself, John guided us to the mass grave, and I waited with her while he fetched the priest. She couldn't afford a coffin and funerals are considered unnecessary risks. I wanted to examine her, but she refused. I try not to, but I begin to wonder if I could have done something if I got here sooner.

I didn't know what to say. If in all of my education they told us how to help others deal with grief, I missed that lesson. I said nothing as she rocked herself and mumbled in Irish. To my relief, John returned with Father Donovan. The priest knew just what to say. He knelt next to the grieving mother and held her face in his hands. I couldn't hear what he said, but eventually she surrendered the child to him and in a weak funeral procession we all followed the priest to the opening of the grave. After Father Donovan provided the necessary rituals, he entreated me to toss the boy in the trench. Father Donovan guided the woman with him, his arm around her shoulder. John and I returned to our lodging. No longer hungry I went straight to bed. I didn't realize I had fallen asleep until I woke to a baby's cries. I sprang up in bed, but all was silent. My quarters remained cast in shadow. I couldn't sleep so I turned my attention to documentation. I hate it here.

16 September 1847

This morning I planned to visit some of the shacks and various shelters people have taken to after my sleepless night, but I was swarmed in the street. These people didn't really gather to see me. A shipment of Indian corn arrived from America, and they wanted to purchase what their pennies would buy them before the supply disappeared. I checked them over while they stood in

line. I witnessed the same symptoms of scurvy I saw on the men the night before. I told them they need to eat more fresh foods. They all replied that there was none to be had.

Three children clung to their mother's tattered skirt. Their bellies were swollen with hunger. She draped her hands over their shoulders as I checked their teeth. When I looked up at her, I saw dark circles under her eyes. I noticed several people leaning against each other who complained of bloody noses, head and body aches. These are signs of relapse fever. I also noticed the, somewhat more terrifying, rash that accompanies typhus or, as they refer to it, "the black fever."

Several men rushed past the line with their sack of corn. When they reached a distance safe enough from the line, they opened the sack and shoved handfuls of uncooked corn into their mouths. I pushed through the line and made my way to the men. I tried to warn them against eating the corn in that manner, but they wouldn't hear me.

Father Donovan caught me in my consternation and offered to take me to cottages where people maybe more willing to take my advice. As we moved through the grassy hills, we came upon stick furniture and bedding lying outside an abandoned cabin with two women picking through the blankets. Father Donovan explained that they planned to use it for protection from the elements. With no way to know what those blankets had been exposed to, I forced the women away from it as gently as I could. Father Donovan helped, and we invoked the women's ire when I burned the bedding. Once we put the fire out, we worked our way towards the top of the cliffs. We arrived at a stone cottage situated at a level spot in the slope surrounded by failed potato furrows.

We called on a woman named Margret. The first time I saw her she laid on a mattress in the corner. Due to the loosely shuttered windows the cottage proved colder than the outside so I

kept my coat and scarf on. I learned that the shutters remained unrepaired because she couldn't afford the rent increase bought about by the improvements. Luckily, I carry candles in my medical bag, so I had enough light to examine Margret. She seemed surprised at my youth as she continually called me a lad. I cannot tell what the color of her hair used to be as white dominates her scalp. When she smiles she looks like a rotting turnip jack-o-lantern with her toothless grin and craggy face. She doesn't remember her age. I would guess eighty, but I know it is unlikely. Her husband passed in the spring.

From what I could hear, listening to her heart and lungs with my single ear flexible stethoscope, I know she suffers from Pneumonia. Her condition is deteriorated because no other Doctor would visit her. I helped her to a sitting position to ease the fluid on her lungs. I pulled up the blanket laid across the bottom of her bed and placed it across her shoulders. Her fingers were ice cold. Her eyes are blue like my grandmother's. I can't imagine someone leaving her in this hovel to die. I wrapped my scarf around her neck, and she called me a good lad. When Margret drifted to sleep, I moved to Father Donovan by the fire place. He heated the only pot over the flames. Some potatoes danced on the top, and tiny chunks of meat I assumed were lamb. It made me think of the wagon full of oats, escorted by armed guards, that passed us on the way to Doolin. Mr. Taylor told me it would go to the Dublin docks for exportation to the content. Without even knowing it Margret defeated every point I held against the Irish.

17 September 1847

Father Donovan and I remained with Margret through the night. I decided to fetch more peat moss for her in the morning. Before I could leave on the errand, the constable and a crowbar brigade arrived. They demanded Margret pay her rent. She didn't have the funds to cover what

she owed. I offered the money I had on my person, but it wouldn't cover Margret's back payments. Father Donovan offered his money as well, but it wasn't enough. I offered to fetch more money from my lodgings, but the crowbar brigade wouldn't wait. They carried Margret outside on her mattress. I gathered everything I brought with me, and anything I thought would keep Margret warm. In exchange for demolishing the cottage, the constable allowed me to take the thatching from Margret's roof. Father Donovan helped me. When we finished, we moved Margret down the hill where we constructed a crude tent out of half of the thatching. We used the rest as fire fuel.

In the dark I could hear Margret's lungs rattle without a stethoscope. Father Donovan and I huddled close to Margret to keep her warm. At 11:17 Margret passed. I begin to feel I cannot do any good here, but father Donovan believes I will begin to reach these people in time.

7 November 1848

I had the dream again last night. It begins with a smell, the smell of cottages where the dead have lain for days. Corpses stagger out of the mass pits of cadavers and beg me to help them. As I stand there dumbly fumbling in my bag, they give up on me and open bags of Indian corn and shove uncooked handfuls into their mouths. I scream at them, but they never stop. A woman drops a blanket into my arms, and suddenly I am alone. I open the blanket, and there stiff and cold is the baby from my first day. Then I wake.

I must cling to the good that works its way into this dismal affair. I am thankful for my father's generosity. He sends supplies as quickly as I can ask for them. I catch a note of pride in his letters, but I can tell he is worried. He thinks I take dangerous risks. I have gone into sick

houses that even Father Donovan declined to enter. John suggests I take some time in London with my family, get some rest, and return refreshed. I do plan to return to London when the situation is not as dire in Ireland, but I will remain for now.

Another bright spot, yesterday I saw the young couple and their son who I helped deliver. They work on one of the relief projects, and somehow they have managed to avoid illness. They are skinny and the boy is small for his age, but I truly believe their chances are good.

I have recently been called to an abandoned cottage where a pauper took shelter when he suffered a severe bout of “the disorder” as he so politely called it. According to my patient, he suffered severe abdominal cramping followed by a watery bowel evacuation. Generally, he would feel better at that point, but this time the cramps and the watery stool persisted. When I arrived, his condition had deteriorated so he could no longer rise to relieve himself. He lay in his own excrement which to my horror had turned to blood. John accompanied me, and I sent him to fetch Father Donovan as these cases generally have an unfortunate outcome. The smell is offensive. It took all of my discipline to keep from vomiting. I made him a bed and fixed it in hopes of decreasing the mess. I encourage him to drink or to take some soup that I warmed on the fire I built to warm the place. I learned to carry fire fuel, soup and clean water with me.

When John and Father Donovan arrived, I was cleaning the man’s face whose name is Ryan. He moaned and grabbed my hand. I squeezed back equaling his force to help him fight the pain. He defecated. He was ashamed and sorry, but it was not his fault. I assured him of that.

He was young, younger than me, maybe twenty, but his sunken haggard look made him seem older. All of us knew, even Ryan, he was going to die. Father Donovan administered the last rights, but Ryan never released my hand. As calmly as going to sleep, Ryan succumbed.

John and I burned the bedding. When we finish at the cottage, we will wrap Ryan's body in a makeshift shroud and submit him to a mass grave.

8 November 1848

As John and I returned to the lodging house in the dark hours of the morning a woman, who I have seen working on a road project, rushed up to the stoop. She frantically called out to me. Despite my exhaustion I rushed to her. I could barely understand as she told of her husband's illness. She said he suffered from extreme pain, a high fever, and a rash. I knew before I arrived that her husband most likely suffered from Typhus. They sheltered in a barn with several others. I immediately realized that a number of the people lying on the floor already died. I combed the bodies and discovered six of the ten had expired. Of the four remaining, I held out hope for only one. It was not the woman's husband.

The rash characteristically spread across his body except his palms and the bottoms of his feet. His skin was ashen where he had bled under his skin and his fingers and toes were gangrenous. I made them as comfortable as I could, then I set to work removing the dead. By the time I finished with the original six, the woman's husband joined them. The woman who fetched me fell victim to the illness as well. I noticed the symptoms when I returned from burning her husband's clothing.

14 November 1848

One of the men I didn't expect to make it rallied as well as the young man I thought was on the mend, but unfortunately I was correct about the other. He died the morning following the woman's husband. I spent six days with the woman, who eventually succumbed to her illness.

After the woman's death, my recovering patients regained their strength and despite my pleas for them to take more rest, they returned to work on the relief project.

John is still in Doolin. When I returned to my lodgings, he was returning to his room as well. He spoke to me long enough to tell me I looked terrible. That is honestly how I feel. I hope some rest will remedy that.

15 November 1848

I overslept this morning, in fact I may have slept all day if John hadn't knocked at my door. I rose to stiff joints, stiffer than I can remember they have ever been, and pain rippling from the center of my brain and thrusting itself against my skull. I attribute this to my nights of hard work and little sleep. John waits for me on the stoop, and he reminded me that I still look terrible. I already knew. My shaving mirror rarely lies. He gave me a piece of bread. I didn't really feel like eating, but wasting food under these conditions seems like a crime.

I worked with the relief committee all day. Again I begged for fresh foods, but received the same answer; the committee can't afford to purchase food that will help the most. The pain in my head and joints grew worse throughout the day instead of abating. Even though the chunk of bread is the only thing I ate the entire day, I can't summon the appetite to consume anything else. The walk to my lodging left me shivering and desperate for warmth. Sitting here next to the fire I realize I am perspiring. That is strange considering I am still cold. Sleep should set me right.

16 November 1848

I woke at my usual time this morning, but I struggled to force my stiff joints to do my bidding. The pain in my head increased its intensity with every movement. I had nearly dressed

when John arrived. He was traveling to the north today and no doubt came to make his farewell. I sat at my desk summoning the energy to fasten my waist coat. When I rose to shake his hand, my strength failed. I panicked. I have never been this weak. I knew something was wrong. Apparently John agreed because he put the back of his hand to my forehead and informed me I of my fever

I unbuttoned the top two buttons of my shirt and pulled the fabric aside, and there, what I hadn't seen before; flared a red rash spreading itself across my chest. I tried to keep calm, but John could see the panic in my eyes. He wanted to go for a doctor, but I am the only one in the area. I told him to just get away from me, but He is stubborn. John helped me return to bed. Immediately after I must have fallen asleep because when I opened my eyes Father Donovan stood over me. I tried to relieve the tension by telling Father Donovan I was not Catholic, and I was not dead. They didn't even smile.

He too refuses to make the wise choice and leave me to my fate. I know what I can expect. This is typhus. I tell them to treat me with food, drink, and rest. Apparently they want me to keep with the prescribed treatment as John wants to trade me a bowl of broth for my journal. I will give it a try.

21 November 1848

Dr. and Mrs. Walters,

I hope I do not offend you by taking a page of Henry's journal to write this note. I thought you may want the details of what he experienced. If you don't, please disregard this page. I knew Henry from his first day in Ireland to his last. His courage and compassion saved many lives, and I am proud to know him.

On the second day Father Donovan and I tended to Henry's bedside, his hallucinations began. He talked to both of you. We often had to prevent him from getting out of bed to help a patient who wasn't there. It became more difficult to get him to accept food and drink, but he could still be persuaded. Henry's rash continued to spread, and we could not control his fever. In moments of clarity, Henry advised me to begin burning his clothing and other items that could carry the infection.

On the third day Henry refused food and drink. No pleading could convince him to partake of the broth. No liquids we provided enticed him to drink. He claimed eating and drinking had become painful. He told us his kidneys most likely failed. When we asked him what we should do, Henry told us to change nothing. He also told us he was dying. He never regained full consciousness after that.

Throughout the third night and fourth morning he mumbled incoherently. He couldn't tell Father Donovan and me apart from each other. At about mid-day he grew quiet and still, but he labored for every breath. On the twentieth of November 1848, at 6:33 in the evening, Doctor Henry Walters passed away. As Henry instructed, Father Donovan and I burned all of Henry's belongings that I didn't burn previously. We interred Henry's body in a mass grave as he stressed the importance of a quick burial. Father Donovan saw to his spiritual requirements. Don't worry. Father Donovan has some knowledge of the Anglican Church and complied with Henry's faith. We only kept this journal to return to you.

I am truly sorry for your loss. It is felt here as I know it is at home.

Deepest Regards,

John Taylor

### **The Last Time I Saw You**

The last time I saw Curran, he stood at the crest of the hill leading away from our home. The fog rolled up the hillside and gathered at his knees, the wind tossed his hair and the long thin blades of grass. He looked back at me holding our daughter- born that spring- as I stood waving to him from our field overgrown with weeds. He waved back and with guilt laden shoulders trudged over the hill. Our crops failed for the second year this fall, and we spent nearly all of our money to make up the food shortage. Even worse, we couldn't salvage enough potatoes for seed rations. Since all of our money went for food, we fell behind on our rent. When the landlord came to evict us, Curran refused to leave the house. He knew the laws, so he understood that he could relinquish the land, but keep our house.

Without the land, we needed to seek out another method to support ourselves. Curran searched for work, but he couldn't find a regular job. We tried the soup kitchens that arrived in various areas near our home, but when we refused to become Protestant, they refused to serve us. Curran insisted that our only hope lay beyond Ireland, but at the time of his realization we only had enough money to book passage from Ireland for one person. We decided Curran would go where ever the earliest departure took him. Once he arrived in his new home, he would secure employment and send money to me. When funds allowed, Anna and I would join him.

Five days after Curran left, I received a letter and assumed it came from Curran. I can't read so I carried Anna and the letter to town where Father Donovan read the letter for me. We sat in the back pew with Anna between us.

"It reads, he can't write much as the ship sails soon, but he wants you to know he is bound for Canada. He writes that he loves and hopes to see the two of you swiftly," Father Donovan recited the letter to me.

“So we will live in Canada,” I smiled stroking Anna’s hair.

“It seems so,” Father Donovan said squeezing my hand.

“How long will it take for him to arrive?” I asked.

“About 50 days,” Father Donovan answered.

“Oh,” I tried to hold on to the joy the news of Canada brought, but the terrible realization that I might not be able to hold on long enough for the money to come trumped my relief.

Father Donovan recognized my distress. “A new shipment of corn arrived this morning. Take this and purchase some on your way home,” he said pressing the coins into my hand. When I tried to protest, he insisted that was the purpose of the money.

It took me longer to walk home. The weight of Anna and the corn combined required me to take more breaks than on my journey to town. Mostly I needed to readjust the sling I carried Anna in. I could smell it before I saw it. Dusk made the smoke invisible. My heart tightened and choked my lungs. I realized I made a mistake leaving my home unattended. When I topped the hill where my house sat, a pile of stone that once served as our walls slouched defeated against the dirt encircling a smoldering thatched roof. In the light of the blinking embers white wisps of smoke slid into the night air, carrying my home into the night. My knees buckled. Only the corn prevented me from dropping Anna. I sat on the ground cradling her and looking at our dead house until the chill of the night crept through my clothes. I picked through the belongings the crowbar brigade was kind enough to salvage from the house. I took mostly blankets. I carried Anna, the blankets and the corn as far as I could before my strength gave out. We passed the night under a bridge.

The corn thief woke me the next morning. His boots scraping the rocks near the corn bag pulled me from my restless slumber. He thrust fistfuls of yellow powder into his mouth. My gasp

brought his head around. His cheeks were craters, his eyes sunken, and his thin dry lips were framed in splashes of ground corn. He panicked and before I could get to my feet he dashed away with the entire bag. I wanted to run after him, but I couldn't leave Anna. The heaviest item I had left to carry was despair. Anna coughed the entire way more frequently every hour. Each cough hit me like a hammer between the shoulder blades. At the church, Father Donovan comforted me as I related the events of the night and morning. Anna's cough gradually became worse as Father Donovan and I spoke.

Father Donovan insisted that I let Dr. Walters examine her. I waited with Anna in the church while Father Donovan retrieved the physician. I could tell by his manner, his dress, and accent that he was English, but I couldn't hold it against him. He examined Anna with a gentle hand. He kneeled in front of me so I could see Anna while he examined her. He balanced her on his knee as he listened to her heart and her breathing, and then he looked in her mouth. He spoke softly to her and explained everything he did. "It's just a slight irritation, probably from being exposed to the cold last night. This elixir will help." He said pulling Anna close to him, so she wouldn't lose her balance while he searched in his bag and produced the small brown bottle containing his prescribed medicine, and a spoon. He immediately gave Anna her first dose.

"I can't pay," I said waving the bottle away when he offered it to me.

"I couldn't accept money for this. It is just a small bottle, and one dose is already missing," He said placing the bottle in my hand.

"How old is she," he asked lifting her aloft, judging her weight.

"Just over six months," I answered suddenly feeling my fatigue.

"She should weigh more. What is she eating?" He queried pulling her back to his knee

"I give her everything I have. I take very little for myself," I explained.

“Perhaps you should consider adding goat’s milk to her diet,” he said cradling her and rising to his feet.

“I can’t afford to keep a goat,” I replied dropping my head into my hands.

“Well I happen to keep one that is milking right now,” he answered bouncing Anna and making her laugh.

“I couldn’t accept it. I can’t pay you for it,” I said.

“I would appreciate it if you used it. I don’t have a taste for goat’s milk, but I don’t want it to go to waste.”

I knew what he was doing, but I accepted anyway. The next thing I knew, I woke up and Dr. Walters sat next to me on the pew where I slept. He smiled when I opened my eyes. “My goodness, I am so sorry. I know you must have more important work than tending Anna while I sleep,” I say sitting up.

“You needed the rest, and Father Donovan needed to help disperse the corn. I am actually grateful. I don’t get to sit down very often these days,” he replied handing Anna over to me.

Dr. Walters hired me as laundress, so I could stay near the goat and wait for news from Curran. Father Donovan introduced me to Nancy. Her situation was similar to mine, although more dismal it would seem. Her husband traveled to Liverpool to find work. He sent what sums he could, but with three children to support, the money never satisfied their need. Nancy did any job people would pay her for. The six of us lived in a room meant to house two. Privacy became a memory, comfort a rare occasion, the conditions miserable, but I was grateful.

Still, when two months passed, and I received no news of Curran I became anxious. I feared abandonment or worse. To quiet my concerns Father Donovan and Dr. Walters sounded their friend Mr. Taylor on the subject. As a journalist he had connections that allowed him to

receive information on such things as boat departures and landings. He told me it would take time, but I didn't mind. At least I knew I would have an answer. To tell the truth I was angry with Curran. I am ashamed to admit it. Somehow my mind slipped to the possibility that he abandoned Anna and me. Father Donovan comforted me. He assured me Curran would never do that. He suggested that the ship took longer to cross than usual, or perhaps Curran was still searching for work and didn't want to write me until he could send money.

When Mr. Taylor brought me the news, he asked me to meet him at the church. That and Father Donovan's presence told me it wasn't good. Father Donovan took Anna, and John beckoned me to sit next to him. He took my hand and watched my eyes as he spoke.

"Curran's ship left Liverpool, but never arrived in Canada, or any other sea port in route or near its intended quay. It is feared it is lost at sea," Mr. Taylor spoke quickly as if a quick reveal is less painful. I couldn't breathe. I hiccup coughed. The world spun. I tried to step forward to keep my balance, but I fell into Mr. Taylor's arms. He must have looked to Father Donovan for help because as he guided me onto the pew the priest sat next to me, and I was shifted to his shoulder. Mr. Taylor held Anna. She remained quiet while I wept. Then the tears stopped. I rose, walked to the center aisle and lowered myself to the stone floor, and sat feeling nothing. Relief would never come. Curran was gone and so was hope. Dr. Walters said he would keep me as laundress as long as I wanted to work for him. My living arrangements were not ideal, but if I could get the nutrition Anna needed, I could bear them.

The last time I saw Dr. Walters; he met me at the door, and went against his usual custom by not inviting me in. He told me he didn't have anything for me to wash though I could see the bag we transferred the clothing in full of filthy clothes. He saw Anna in the sling I carry her in and held up his hand as if to block her from his view. He said not to worry, I would still receive

full payment. He looked strange, tired and worried. I assumed he suffered from exhaustion; he tended a rather large group of ill people for nearly a week. Before I could inquire of his wellbeing, he closed the door. When I returned the next day, Mr. Taylor greeted me at the door and informed me of Dr. Walters's illness. Within the week Mr. Taylor and Father Donovan deposited his body in a mass grave.

The money from Nancy's husband could no longer afford to feed the four of them, so she decided to travel to a work house in the north. I couldn't afford the goat, and with Dr. Walters gone, I couldn't make money. The last time I saw Mr. Taylor he tipped his hat to Nancy, me and the children as his coach left heading south. The last time I saw Father Donovan, he gave Nancy and me money for the trip, and he waved to us as we began our journey. Nancy, the children, and I followed the road until we could no longer hear the ocean crash against the shore. We passed decaying corpses, we slept in barns, under bridges, and when there was nothing else under trees growing sideways from the force of the wind or under the stars. We met an old man walking in the opposite direction when we neared the workhouse. "If you are destined to the workhouse, don't bother. They say they are full and won't take any more," without another word, he kept walking.

"You know when the workhouses are full, and they are no longer admitting people; they will take children whose parents are dead or gone," Nancy said after the children were asleep.

"But we are still here," I said.

"I know, but we could send the children on without us. They will receive food and shelter. Things we will never be able to give them. We could go to Dublin. Maybe there are more opportunities there," Nancy offered.

I agreed to it. The last time I saw Anna, the wind whipped across the Burren pulling our loose strands of hair straight into the air. Nancy's oldest daughter carried her and led the other girls toward the workhouse. When they disappeared on the rocky horizon, Nancy and I turned for Dublin. I knew Anna would never forgive me, and she had every right to hate me for the rest of her life, but at least she would have that, the rest of her life.

## Landlords

The rain patters against the window splashing across the panes and seeming to dot the gray London sky. The Earl stares out the window miserably sipping his brandy. His brother the Marquis said it would do him good to take a trip to England, but nothing seems to alleviate the weight of the terrible choice he made. He honestly thought giving people more time before collecting their rent would be helpful considering the situation. Behind him, in front of the crackling fire dancing in the marble fireplace, the Marquis and their friend the Baron play cards. “Won’t you join us?” the Baron asks the Earl.

“Oh, don’t bother with him. He is in a mood. Besides, he hasn’t any money to play with,” the Marquis answers for his younger brother as he shifts the cards in his hand.

“I’ll spot you, and we can split the winnings,” The Baron, puffing on his cigar, again addresses the Earl.

“That is kind of you, but I fear I would only spoil the fun,” the Earl replies leaning his head against the chair he occupies.

“I wouldn’t trust him with financial matters anyway. He struggles as it is without gambling,” laughs the Marquis counting his winnings.

“Come now, he thought he was doing the right thing,” The Baron says passing his losing cards to the Marquis.

“I don’t really see how the two of you can afford to be so frivolous. You have debts just as I,” the Earl says switching to a chair that faces the game.

“We take care of our debts on time,” the Marquis answers accepting his new hand as the Baron deals the cards.

“I had hoped that in light of the hard times Ireland currently faces that my creditors would be lenient,” The Earls says taking a gulp of brandy.

“Simply because you were?” the Marquis asks in a mocking tone examining his new hand.

“How can I just throw them out of homes their families have occupied for years? Even if I could, where would they go? Those work houses are overcrowded, and there are hardly any in the areas that suffer the most. What about those laws? If they are out past dark, they are arrested. I am really expected to evict them to such fates?” The Earl argues refilling his brandy.

“Why would your creditors give you more time only to find themselves in court with you?” The Marquis admonishes his brother. “Where did kindness in matters of money get you? In arrears, so the courts evicted two thirds of your tenants to make-up your payments. Letting them stay without collecting rent not only puts you at risk, but your other tenants. I have evicted about half of my tenants, and now seeing how everything has worked out with you I know I did the right thing.”

“Oh, you both worry too much over those tenants. I want my land to make money, and as soon as they give the slightest reason to evict them, I have it done. There is more profit in grazing sheep than in keeping tenants,” the Baron chimes in tossing his bet on the table.

“The two of you can be as ruthless as you like. You don’t live there like I do. You don’t see that they really are good people. You don’t see that anything they work to complete can be taken away at the whim of a man they have never met. You don’t see how wonderful and kind those people are,” the Earl pounds the arm of his chair.

“That is another thing. Do you know how dangerous it is to be a Land Lord living in Ireland right now? A middleman was just recently murdered trying to collect rent. That is how kind your Irish are,” the Marquis says pitching his hand onto the table.

“They are desperate. In order to feed the starving they are taxed, but when they already have nothing, taxes only compound the problem,” the Earl states sitting forward in his chair.

“There are ways to sooth their ill feelings. They can move on. It is best they move on and accept modern farming practices. If they want out of Ireland, I pay their passage to Canada. In fact, when I mention the benefits of going, such as an agent that will meet them when they arrive and help them begin their lives there, they are eager to go” the Baron explains.

“Really, they are in favor of this? Perhaps this is something I should consider. If I could locate as many of those evicted on my properties as possible, I could offer to send them to Canada. It has to be better than the options they have in Ireland,” the Earl states vacating his seat. “I just need funds.”

“Well, I’ll give you a loan so you can play with us. I am tired of losing to your brother. As I said earlier, we can split the winnings. You are due for some good luck, and if you don’t win, I’ll loan you what you need to pay those tenants’ way. You’ll be able to pay me back soon enough; once you put your lands to better use,” the Baron suggests tapping the table with his knuckles.

“Alright,” the Earl agrees joining them at the playing table.

“Great, I can win more of your money,” the Marquis puffs his cigar and passes the cards to the Earl.

They play through the night, through an exhausted stupor of brandy, through a fog of smoke that further darkened the wood clad room. The Earl wins more than he loses. He scoops

winning hand, after winning hand from the mahogany table. When the Marquis finally runs out of money, the Earl's sum after paying the Barron his half is enough to offer any of the families evicted from his lands by the court the money they would need to make Canada if they desired.

"Do I need to contact this agent in Canada to let him know I am sending people his way?" the Earl asks the Baron.

"What agent?" the Baron questions.

"The agent you mentioned earlier. You said he helps the Irish immigrants start a life there," The Earl asks, confusion settling on his brow.

"There is no agent. It's just something I tell evicted tenants to convince them to go," the Baron says leaning back in his chair.

"You lie to them. They are expecting help and nothing awaits them?" the Earl demands jumping out of his seat.

"I thought you knew. I am not the only one who uses the ruse," the Baron says with a chuckle.

Without another word, the Earl crams his winnings into his pockets, jabs his arms into his coat, slams his hat onto his head, and storms toward the door. "What will you do with your new funds now? Send them onto Canada anyway?" the Marquis taunts.

The Earl answers his brother with a glance. He says nothing and leaves their company. When the Earl arrives in Ireland, he keeps enough to cover and avoid future debts. The rest he donates to relief efforts he offers to pay the way of those who wish to leave Ireland. He pays for tickets where ever they wish to go, and he never promises them any help when they arrive.

### **A Pocket Full of Memory**

Exhaustion reaches his bones as Rory slumps down on the blanket he laid out for his bed, and leans against his heavy leather saddle. He hobbled his strawberry roan where he could see the gelding as he rests. Rory looks across the small campfire fed by chunks of dry wood at his longtime traveling partner, Shaver, who practices writing his name on a slate they picked up in Crescent City. Rory marvels at Shaver's concentration as he writes Shaver Cook, over and over again, using the letters he had learned from Rory. The cool air carries a clean sent, and makes the stars above shine brighter than the night before.

Rory breaks his gaze from his pupil and reaches into the watch pocket of his vest, which he called a waist coat, a term he had adopted during his semester at Oxford. He produces a pencil and small hair comb decorated across the top with a series of small metal flowers, and from his saddle bags, he brings forth a letter he needs to finish to his daughter. He started it that morning before work. He finished the one to his son the night before. He fingers the hair comb, the teeth slightly bent and a flower missing. He brings the comb to his nose. It must be his imagination, but he can still smell Molly's hair. He sees her again three years old walking ahead of him as they make their way up the grassy hills leading to the cliffs that overlook the ocean. The cliffs don't level off before they drop into the sea. The discontented Atlantic hurls and breaks itself in waves against their magnitude, sending foam and droplets flying at the summit they will never reach. Instinctively he pulls his hand to his vest pocket and withdraws a piece of cloth no larger than the corner formed by his forefinger and thumb a portion of Sean's baby blanket. He was one when Rory left. He shakes the images from his head. "It has been two years. They are older now," he tells himself. "I probably wouldn't recognize them."

Rory thought telling his parents he had decided to leave would be the most difficult words to ever clear his throat. His mother and father had managed to hold onto everything during the famine, keep Rory and his sister and brother alive. As the oldest Rory was set to inherit all that his parents struggled to keep, but when his younger brother married first and produced a grandchild, Rory declined his inheritance to give his brother a place to raise his family. When Rory married Anna, he rented a cottage from a protestant farmer, and repaired the roof even though it raised his rent. Molly was the product of their first year of marriage. When Molly was two, Sean was born. Anna lived only two hours after the birth of their son.

Rory felt as if his spirit had died and rotted inside of him, but his body was too stupid to realize he too should have died. Nothing could ease the pain caused by the leech like despair that sucked the life from him. Rory felt as he did when his father's injury forced him home from Oxford, abandoning his dreams there. He wanted to give up, but then there was Molly and Sean always looking to him with expectation and hope brimming in their eyes. Rory knew Anna would never forgive him if he wallowed in self-pity, and let their children suffer for it. He resolved to give them a better life than he or Anna had. He would make her proud by creating a wonderful life for their children.

This soon proved difficult the blacksmith Rory sometimes found work with closed shop, forcing Rory to rely solely on the ground that he rented. He soon came up short there as well. He had one hard year, and that ruined him. Rory fell to rationing the little food they had, tucking Molly and Sean into bed with hunger still growing in their stomachs. When the food was spent, even the seed ration, Rory sold the only thing of value he had: A silver pocket watch given to him by his history professor the day he left Oxford. It went for a small price and bought little food. He knew he couldn't sell off everything of value because he was running down the same

road as many people during the Great Hunger. He remembered the stories with horror; the stories his father told him, and wondered how as a child he had not seen it. Rory knew he would have to leave Ireland if he was to provide for his children, and keep them as safe as his parents had kept him.

“Rory?” Shaver breaks his concentration.

“Hmm?” Rory turns to look at Shaver.

“Would you mind writing the alphabet for me, so I could practice it too?” Shaver asks.

“Not at all,” Rory replies taking the slate and printing the letters for his friend.

His mother reacted worse. His father seemed to understand with an unspoken pride in the decision, but his mother railed against the idea. She didn’t want him going so far away, and facing such danger. She accused him of not looking for work in Ireland, but before she could go too far, her husband made her see that Rory’s plan was best for Sean and Molly.

The hardest thing still was leaving the children. Originally Rory planned to take them with him, but his father made him see that without the children. He could work his way across the ocean, and have money when he arrived at the States. Rory would leave his children in the care of his parents, send money as he could, and send for Molly and Sean when he settled.

“Da, please don’t go.” Molly pleaded tears streaking her face the morning Rory was to set out for Dublin.

“I must go darlin’, but don’t worry. I will write you every day.” Rory said brushing her hair out of her face.

“No, what if you don’t come back,” Molly cried frantically hugging his leg.

“Molly you have nothin’ to fear I will send for you as soon as I can, You won’t be long without me,” Rory put his hand on her back, knowing he could be lying.

“You promise?” she asked.

“You know I do, but here,” Rory said removing his scarf, “Your mam made me this scarf, and you know if I thought I weren’t going to see you again, I wouldn’t leave it with you.” Rory said in an attempt to ease her worry.

“And you take my hair comb,” Molly said pulling it from her hair and pushing it into his hand. “Give Sean something too,” she whispered. Rory left Sean his stocking cap and took a corner of his young son’s blanket. With that and a replacement stocking cap from his mother, Rory departed to the sound of Molly’s tears, and Sean calling for him. He nearly had to run from his parent’s home, or he could have never made himself leave. The Buren always seemed a place of beauty to him, but as he passed through the barren rocky ground seemed cold and isolating. The echoes of his foot falls made the rock seem hollow, and that matched the feeling rising inside.

Rory spent two weeks looking for a ship that would hire him at the docks. He found a position on a cargo ship headed to New York, and on to California. It was on this ship that Rory met Shaver, an English sailor. The two constantly swabbed the deck together and drew many other duties for the same time slots causing them to become good friends. The trip to New York paid well, and Rory considered working at sea to raise money to send home and plan a future. When the ship sank off the coast of California, and Rory managed to survive, he decided working on land was best. When Rory set off in California to find work, Shaver went with him. Rory taught him to read and write all the way. They took jobs with a logging company as river pigs, riding logs down river to ensure none became lodged along the bank or disrupted the

general flow. When they made it down river to the mill they would ride their horses back to the top and start over again.

Rory always sent most of his earnings back to Ireland, back to Molly and Sean, always accompanied by three letters, one for each child and one for his parents. When Rory writes the letters, he never tells them of the frightening storms at sea, or how the water swallowed the ship taking them to California, and did its best to take him with it. He doesn't tell them how dangerous his current job is, or that the man he replaced died while on duty. At least he doesn't tell them when the danger is imminent. He tells them about it later when they won't need to worry or when the shock of a shipwreck isn't fresh in his or their minds. He does tell them of the wildlife, the scenery, the friends he's made, and the parts of his work they can enjoy. He only keeps enough money to live on, and a small sum to save. The rest goes home to Molly and Sean.

Rory finishes the letter, seals and addresses it. He slides it into his saddle bag for safe keeping until he rides the logs down the mountain again, and he can mail it. He tucks the hair comb and portion of blanket back into his pocket. The fire slowly dies, and Shaver puffs the small breaths of slumber. Rory shudders to the chill in the air and curls inside his blanket. Before drifting off to sleep, he pats the breast pocket of his coat, and feels the papers crinkle against the lining. They are the letters sent to him, arriving at random times, when the carriers can locate him. Many are scribed by his parents, but recently, he has received some in Molly's hand.

The following morning Rory and Shaver are back on the logs when the log carrying Rory crashes into another that had become lodged along the bank. The collision launches Rory into the air and deep into the water below. Water roars past his ears and echoes with the colliding logs above. The current tumbles him over until he can no longer tell the direction he faces. The logs above blocked the sun's guiding light. He considers giving in and letting the water take him.

His hand falls to the pocket with his children's items, and he fights the swirling current. He forces his eyes open and seeks a way out. By chance he sees a sliver of light appear at his feet showing through the logs above. He kicks for the surface. His lungs ache, but he must wait for a break in the logs. He hears Shaver and the other men on their crew calling his name. A small but human sized opening shines through. He goes for it. Rory breaks the surface gasping for air. Shaver seizes his arm and pulls him to the bank before the logs crash into him.

“Are you alright?” Shaver asks.

“I think I am,” Rory replies gasping for air. “I also think it is time we found different work.”

### Missing Pieces

Abby writes to James twice a month. She started writing him letters when she was nine and learning to write. Mrs. Daily told her it would be nice since James did so much for them. Caitlyn wrote James as well. James always replied to their letters. He answered their questions, and he inquired about the other members of the family and their daily lives.

At first Abby wrote what her limited vocabulary would allow her, penning her simple well-wishing statements in her crude hand. *Hi James, I hope you are having fun.* James always answered. *Abby, thank you for your letter, and we have much work to do aboard the ship, but yes we find time for fun.* As time passed and her ability became stronger, she would send him a list of questions and answers to his queries. *How many people live on the ship with you? Do you get to have your own room? Could I come visit you?* When she felt she mastered the written language enough she resented writing James. She didn't hate him. She just felt she didn't know him. She only knew him for a brief time, and the writing tasks grew tedious. She ran out of questions to ask, so she started writing letters with the smallest possible messages. *Everyone is doing well. Hope you are healthy too.* Caitlyn always bore her writing duty well. She wrote James without complaint and always seemed to have more to say than Abby.

When Mrs. Daily stopped requiring the girls to write to James, much to her surprise Caitlyn stopped writing, and Abby continued. Abby, at the age of twelve suddenly developed a need to hear from James. She waited impatiently for his letters, and replied quicker than Mrs. Daily ever asked her to. Mrs. Daily didn't know that this started the year before. Abby learned that the blight that affected Ireland subsided, and she wanted to go home, but starvation and hard times continued there, besides she had no home to return to. She dreamed of the green hills, the wet freshly ploughed dirt in her neighbor's fields, the high cliffs rising above a roaring ocean everything that made up her home. Abby felt she couldn't breathe in the tenant building.

Families living on top of each other and nothing outside that belonged to them not even by lease. When she spoke of this to Mr. and Mrs. Daily, it seemed to cause them guilt and pain.

Still, the yearning for home didn't subside, and when she felt she would boil over from it, she wrote everything in a letter to James. She penned the keen longing for home, her constant grieving for her family, and her nightly tears spent for her father.

*Every night he surfaces in my memory and rends my soul. Maybe he stays with me because I didn't fully grieve for him on the ship. I know this is silly, but I used to believe that if I could make it back to Ireland, they would all be there: Mum, Da, and Shane. Now I just hope returning will help me find something I lost.*

She sent it knowing she would not have to face his wounded reply for weeks at best. She wept when she read his reply, not because he made her feel guilty or selfish, but because he offered understanding. He resided on a naval ship, a place he didn't want to be, a sacrifice he made so Abby, Caitlyn and the Dailies could get citizenship, and now he offered her comfort. He even told her about the loss of his father, and the struggle he and his mother encountered as a result. *Never feel silly for hope, even if it is for the impossible. My father passed when I reached five years of life. When I wasn't sleeping or working, I waited on the shore for him to return.* James became her confidant. She informed him of her regrets, her fears, her failures, and triumphs. She shared thoughts and memories she shared with no one else. *I am ashamed to admit it, but sometimes I am angry with my family for leaving me.* He never judged, or sent a harsh word. He gave the gift of empathy and connection. He tried to understand and shared his secrets too. *I felt angry with my father as well. He is buried at sea like your father, but I never saw his body. For a long time I thought I was angry with my father, but really I was angry with my sorrow.*

As the angst of adolescence passed Abby wrote James of daily life. Her letters became light for the most part, full of hope and determination. Some letters bore sad tidings or released old feelings of dread, but she sought to supply some normalcy to his militant world. She wrote him of the death of Mr. Daily and the accident at work that ushered him from the world. *The funeral will take place Tuesday. I must find work, but it won't be easy with a heavy heart.* He wrote of his worries of being detained in the navy longer as the North and South dug their heels in for a fight. *Sometimes I wonder if I made a mistake reenlisting.* She splashed the pages with tears as she told him the Daily's son, Ian, was drafted. He promised to send Ian any advice he could. She wrote him three times the month Caitlyn got married. Despite the war, she had a good month. In addition to her general reply Abby wrote him when she found a job as a dairy maid, and when Caitlyn married a dock worker who had traveled from Ireland during the Great Hunger as well.

Since the War Between the States, Abby waits with apprehension for letters from James. The news Abby receives always speaks of severe fighting, and she and Mrs. Daily live in fear that one or both of the men they wait for will not come back. Abby milks the cows and separates the cream. When she can, she takes hours as a seamstress. She sleeps little, and when she finds time for sleep, it's fraught with worry. She can't find peace. Sitting up at night she realizes how dark their small apartment really is; only one dirty window admits daylight. She examines her hand in the flickering candle light. They would never be delicate, thick fingers made strong from milking marked with scars and calluses.

She hates waiting for the letters. They let her know James and Ian are okay. It takes the letters too long to arrive. Her worry never ends. When Abby returns home from work after

another sleepless night, Mrs. Daily presents her with a letter from James. Like Abby, James doesn't hide anything in his letters, and Abby feels sharp pangs of fear as she reads his latest correspondence. James's words indicated real distress. He experienced two nearly disastrous incidents during an encounter with a confederate ship where he narrowly escaped injury from their fire. *The canon blast shattered the rail, stabbing wooden splinters into my forehead and shoulder.* He tells her he is losing hope that this will ever come to an end, and he begins to believe he will not see Boston again.

Abby writes to give him comfort, to give him a reason to believe he would survive. She tells him she can't wait to see him again, and that she will not recognize him. She had not known him long before he left, plus she was only eight and he was sixteen, even though his papers say he is two years older making it possible for him to enter the military. Sixteen years passed since they last saw each other. She told him they owed it to each other and themselves to meet the person they confided in for thirteen years. *James, please don't deny me the chance to put a face with the letters.* She sent the letter, and she prayed the letter would raise his spirits and ease his worries.

Weeks passed and no reply. From the deep caverns of her being the knowledge that too much time has passed and murmurs feeds her anxiety. Still she waits willing James's letter to come. She hopes against the growing dread. He was delayed in writing, he couldn't send it right away, or maybe the mail was delayed in an area the letter had to pass through.

Finally a letter did arrive, but not from James. Holding tightly to Mrs. Daily's hand, Abby steeled herself to receive the worst news. The letter informed them that James Daily received serious injuries in a battle at sea. The patient had recovered enough to be moved to the Naval Hospital in Boston for the remainder of his recovery. Abby couldn't contain it anymore.

Tears cascade down her cheeks. She prepared herself for a casket, but James was pulled back from the grave and will return to Boston.

The day James arrives home to Boston, the farmer Abby milked for let her off work early. When Abby and Mrs. Daily arrive at the medical institution, James's doctor greets them. "He handled the trip up here well, but he isn't talking or eating."

"Is it the nature of his injury?" Mrs. Daily inquires.

"No, the injury is to his arm, but it may be a cause. Mrs. Daily, didn't they inform you that your son's arm was amputated?"

"They never said anything about the wound," Mrs. Daily replies.

"He developed an infection, and they had to remove the arm at the elbow," the doctor states putting a hand on Mrs. Daily's shoulder.

"He will be alright though?" Abby asks.

"His injury is healing, but if he doesn't overcome his melancholy, he may not recover."

"Can we see him?" asks Mrs. Daily.

"For a short time, you can. He is in bed 14."

Mrs. Daily leads the way, and stops at the foot of James's bed. His body had grown thicker with muscle, and he seemed taller. His tan leather skin looks as though it belongs on an older man, and his hair is bleached blond made lighter by the contrast of his darkened skin. The left arm lies at his side and the right which ends where the elbow should be rests on a pillow perpendicular to his body with a clean white bandage. The blankets cover him from toe to chest, and a white night shirt covers his shoulders. James doesn't acknowledge them. He just stares across the other sick beds into the thin light of the windows.

"Hello James," Mrs. Daily says touching his foot.

James says nothing.

“I brought Abby along. I know you want to see the girl on the other end of those letters,” she says moving to James’s shoulder.

James doesn’t even move.

Mrs. Daily brushes the hair from his face. “I am so sorry sweetheart,” she says and kisses his cheek.

She gives Abby a turn at his bed side telling her she will wait for her outside the hospital. “You never wrote. Do you know how long I thought the worst? You couldn’t write and tell me you were injured? No matter, I am so happy to see you,” Abby says laying her hand on his hand.

James does nothing.

“You know, my correspondence with you got me through many dark times.”

Again, James makes no response.

“I know you are tired. I will come back tomorrow. I’ll bring a book in case you don’t feel like talking,” Abby pats his hand and strides out of the ward. James shifts his eyes to watch her reflection in the water pitcher at his bed side as she exits.

Abby visits James every day after work. She brings any reading material she can lay hold of or borrow. A week passes, and he never speaks, but he does begin to move his head to acknowledge her coming and going. Then, one day as she reads from a newspaper he states, “They cut off my right arm.”

“Pardon me,” Abby responds, shock plain in her voice.

“I couldn’t write you because they cut off my right arm. I write with my right hand,” James explains meeting Abby’s eyes.

“Oh, I should have thought of that.”

“It hurt. I screamed for them to stop, but they wouldn’t. They finally had to tie a strap in my mouth to shut me up. Then they threw my arm away. I don’t know if I really saw that or dreamt it, but it was a part of me, and they threw it away,” James says holding Abby’s gaze.

“It was making you sick, James.”

“I know. There was pain, but I felt much better after. Then I realized they wouldn’t keep me in the Navy, and I couldn’t write. I began to wonder, what can I do now? What use am I without my right arm?”

“Well you don’t know what you can do until you try,” Abby says setting the news paper on the bed side table.

“Who would hire me? I will need work. How can I convince them to hire a one armed man and convince them I still have something to offer?” James asked looking at his right bicep for the first time.

“The first person you must convince is yourself, the rest will follow,” Abby suggests.

James does try, and with his renewed efforts he is released from the hospital after one more week’s stay. He works through the skills he already knows, and he struggles to adapt. Pulling on boots proves too difficult, so he switches to lace-up boots. Buttoning his shirt still requires aid from Abby or Mrs. Daily. He tries to keep a positive attitude, and attempts to help with daily chores. He will discover his capabilities and improve them to help in his employment search. Cleaning seems easy, cooking takes trial and error. He learns he can stir the contents of a bowl by holding it with his knees. Carrying wood works well if he keeps the door open, but chopping the wood is a different story. The axe proves difficult to wield with one arm. He strikes far from his original swing, and often misses completely. Finally, he strikes angrily at the defiant log and embeds the axe in the chopping block so deep he could not pull it free. Abby sees him

fall to his knees and bury his head in his left arm. “I am sorry Abby. I can’t do this. If I keep it up I will lose a leg as well.”

“Maybe, you should wait until your arm is stronger to use the axe. I can chop whatever we need until you figure it out.”

“I have lost too much of myself. I can’t do this.”

“You can. It is hard, but you have enough strength and determination. I know you can do anything. You will figure it out.”

“Do you think I will ever stop missing that part of myself?”

“No, you will get used it, but you will never stop missing it,” Abby says sitting next to James.

“How do you know?” James asks.

“I have lost part of myself too. Ireland was my first home, and I will never see it again. Even if I could go back there, I would miss pieces of my life here. No matter where I go now, I will miss the other place. Even though physically I am whole, I am missing part of myself,” Abby says taking James’s hand.

“What can we do from here?” James asks.

“We keep proving to ourselves that we are capable of moving on. That we have something to offer because like I said before once we believe everyone else can too.”

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