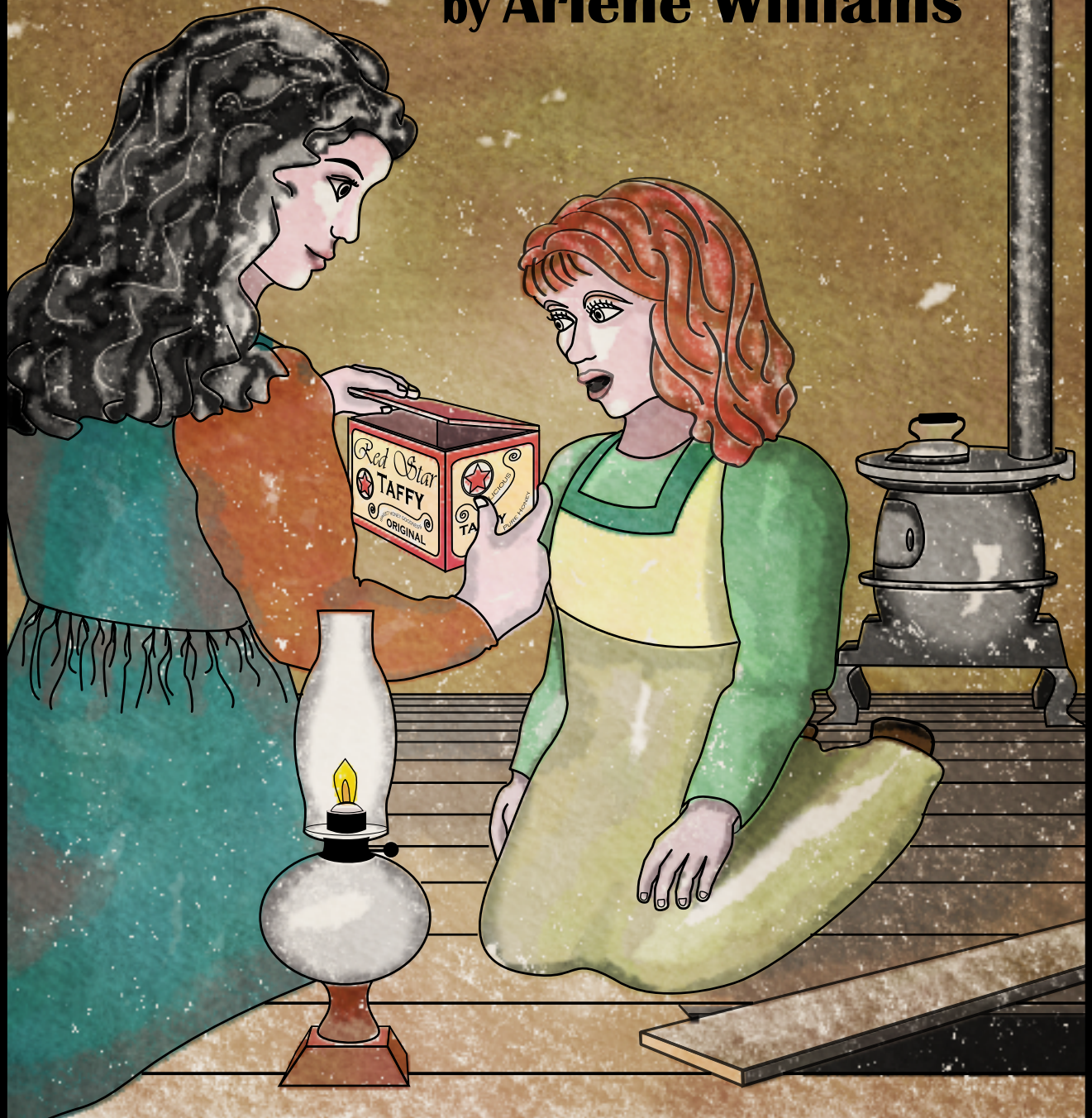




# *Simmie...* *with secrets*

by **Arlene Williams**



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# *Table of Contents*

## **Dedication**

## **Part 1: The Alley**

Meet Rosie and Clare

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

## **Part 2: Scary People**

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

## **Part 3: Old Secrets**

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

## **Part 4: In Disguise**

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

## **Part 5: In The Loop**

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

## **Part 6: Simmie's Secret**

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

## **Historical Notes**

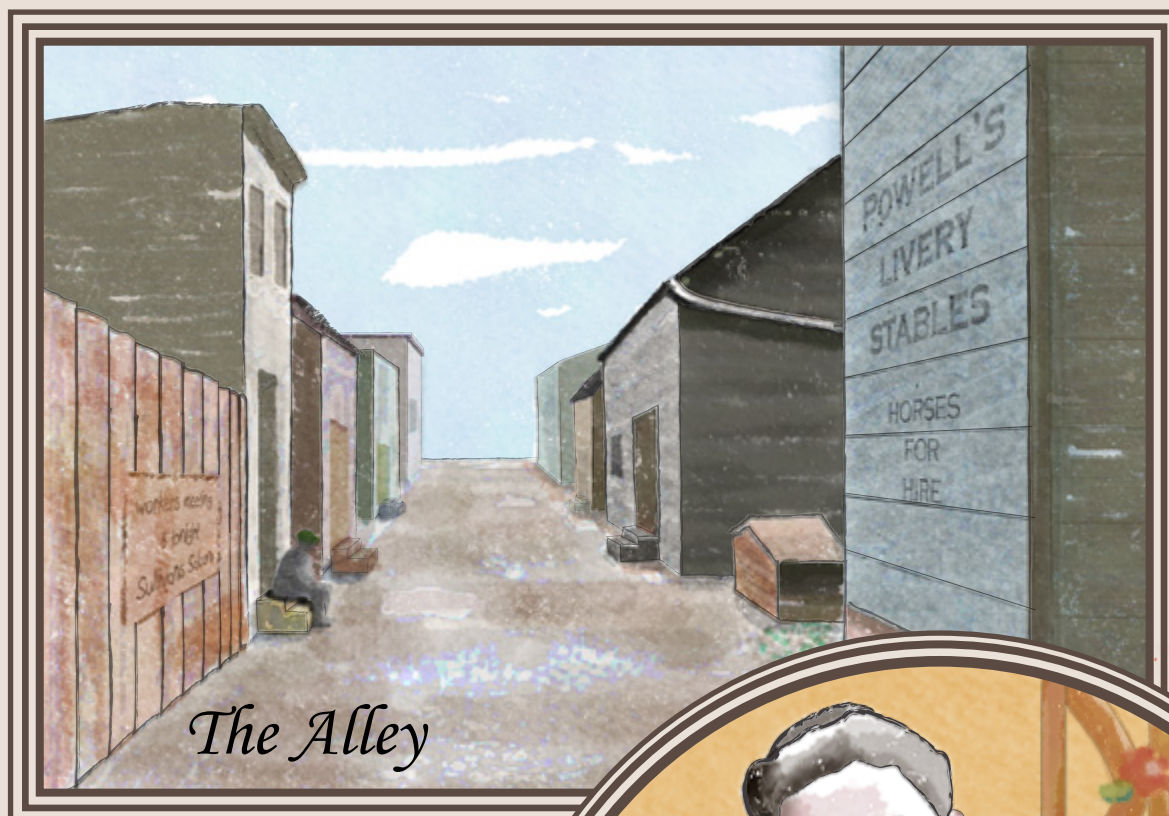
## **Acknowledgements**

## **Author's Note: Why this Ebook is Free**

# *Dedication*

*This book is dedicated to the memory of Sherrie Kaye Schulke who lost her battle with cancer after surviving the childhood onset of Hodgkins Lymphoma for nearly 30 years. At the time of her death, Sherrie was working with young survivors of childhood cancer to understand their psychological and social adaptations to their disease. She also left unfinished a dissertation on the spirituality of Jane Addams and the contributions of Addams' Hull House experiment to the profession of social work.*

*I was deeply moved when Sherrie's family offered me all of Sherrie's Hull House research in hopes that I could write a book to complete this part of Sherrie's work. And though I could not finish her scholarly effort, I have endeavored to synthesize Sherrie's deep love of children and her insights into Jane Addams, here, in this book for children. Sherrie found Jane's social work to be rooted in the practice of mutual respect, empowerment, and equality. Sherrie valued these principles herself. I hope that I have been able to give form to some of Sherrie's thinking so that her work may inspire others, especially the children.*



*The Alley*



*Jane*



# *Part 1: The Alley*

## Meet Rosie and Clare

In 1894, many people had hard lives in the United States. People flooded bigger cities like Chicago, looking for work in the countless factories that were there. They came from rural areas of America as well as from overseas—countries like Italy and Ireland. Some families were so poor they had to send their children to work instead of school. This made life difficult for everyone except those who owned the factories. Let Rosie tell you why...



### Meet Rosie:

*Hi, I'm Rosie O'Shea. I live in an alley shack in Chicago. My Ma died in a [sweatshop](#) fire and my Da works in a reaper factory for low pay. My brother Tim is 11. He works at the caramel factory with the other alley children and sells newspapers on Sunday to help with the rent.*

*Things are bad for everyone except the rich folk. They get richer and richer because they keep cutting wages and hiring children instead of men. People are hungry, but Da says things might get better. Men are joining together to go on strike.*

*Meanwhile, I stay alone all day, me and Mr. Nibbly, the mouse beneath the floorboards, who visits with me for a few crumbs of bread.*

Children like Rosie, who were [too young to work](#), were sometimes left alone at home during the day. Everyone else had to work to feed the family, and there was no money to pay for care for the younger ones. Rosie's neighbor Clare has been left alone as well, but for a different reason.



**Meet Clare:**

*Hi, I'm Clare... Clare D'Arcy. I'm eleven and I'm frightened being alone. My mother is away, so it's just me and Simmie, my china doll, in our little alley shack. I've got work to do to keep me busy, sewing buttons and hems on the dresses my mother made.*

*That's how we earn our money... [sweatwork](#). It's hard on my eyes and my fingers get stiff as I take stitch after stitch after stitch.*

*I'm hungry, too, but I've only a few pennies left to buy day old bread until Mr. Jones, the sweat boss, comes to pay me. He gets us to sew for him, and he's a mean, mean man who always tries to cheat us.*

*But my biggest worry is my mother. I don't know where she's gone or how to find her. And with every stitch I take, I can't help but think: What will I do if she never comes back?*

Clare doesn't know it, but she's about to stumble upon a mystery that could change her life forever. And it all starts with her [china doll](#) and a taffy tin filled with secrets.





## Chapter 1

Clare peered through the open door of a grand mansion, searching for a glimpse of the beautiful, bisque doll. The house bustled with people. Some were talking. Some were reading. Some were scurrying down the hall or up the wide mahogany staircase. Many were poor, like Clare, dressed in coarse work clothes, but a few were not, wearing tailored silk dresses or fine tweed trousers. Clare admired the fancy stitching on a fine lady's collar. It looked similar to collars she herself had stitched a few weeks ago.

Glancing through the drawing room door, Clare spotted the young woman from Halsted Street. Dressed in a long gabardine skirt and stylish balloon-sleeved jacket, she still carried the doll Clare had spotted in the crowded street outside. Clare took a step forward. She really wanted to see that doll's face up close. It looked so much like her own [doll](#), Simmie.

"Excuse me." A lady in a feathered hat slipped past.

Clare ducked her head, feeling awkward. She stepped back from the doorway, fearing someone would scold her for being there. Just as she was about to turn back to the busy wagon-filled street, a large group of grimy children clambered up the steps and jostled into the entryway. Clare marveled at how they felt so welcome in such an elegant place. On impulse, she joined them. Following them into the big drawing room, Clare gasped in wonder. She turned in a circle, dazed by the sight of the high gold-trimmed ceiling, dark Turkish carpets, ornate gas lamps, and stylish furnishings. It was like coming home at long last.

At least that was the feeling the great house gave her as she strolled through the room, her mouth wide with amazement. She felt she belonged among the glazed book cabinets, oak tables, sofas, and chairs. The [gas lamp](#) on the wall beside the window dazzled her. Its brass bracket, shaped like a winged griffin, held up a delicate frosted glass chimney. She had seen one just like that somewhere before. As she moved past a green,

claw-foot sofa, the velvet of its cushion, brushing against her fingertips, stirred a whisper in her of some past secret she had forgotten. She was Clare D’Arcy, a poor girl from the [19th Ward](#)—one of Chicago’s grimmest—but she stared at the classical pictures on the wall as if they were hers.

Gazing toward a painting of a little ballet dancer, Clare felt a shiver race up her spine. She remembered a little ballerina like that, and for a moment it seemed that ballerina had been her. She flashed on the memory of a room, rich with tapestry hangings. The room held fancy sofas as well as bookshelves filled with leather volumes. In the middle of that room, she remembered a piano, gleaming black, and saw her younger self plunking the ivory keys as a pair of white satin ballet slippers dangled half-on, half-off her tiny feet. They were much too large for her.

A woman’s voice pulled her back to the present. “Are you here for the drama presentation? It’s in the gymnasium building on Polk Street.”

Clare turned to see a woman with large, kind eyes that blended wisps of sadness into their flecks of blue and grey. Her long bell skirt was finely tailored, but her puff-sleeved blouse had a comfortably worn look. The woman gazed at her with friendly interest.

Clare blinked, puzzled by the question.

The woman smiled. “Maybe the music class... or the art class, perhaps?”

Clare shook her head. Her black curls swung softly against her shoulders. “No, Miss. I’m not able to attend. I manage without school. My mother teaches me as we stitch.”

The woman sighed. The sadness of her eyes deepened. “Yes, piecework. It is hard to make time for school with all that sewing to be done. But she’s taught you well. Your words are very proper.”

Clare blanched and bit her lip. She had forgotten to speak with a bit of accent the way Auntie Dearie had taught her, blending Irish and American English like the alley boys did. It was too late now. All she could do was mumble her words slightly so they did not sound so crisp. “I’ve been taught to be polite with strangers.”

The woman winked. “Then let me introduce myself so we won’t be strangers

anymore. I am Jane... [Jane Addams](#). I am a resident here at Hull House.”

Clare bobbed her head shyly. “I’m Clare.”

“Do you read, Clare?”

“Yes, Miss Addams. My mother makes me read the Bible every evening when we’re done stitching.”

“We could lend you a book or two, something perfect for a girl your age. We have poetry, fairy stories, novels... whatever you desire.”

Clare’s pale brown eyes widened for a moment till she stepped back and bowed her head, remembering she shouldn’t be there. Her mother had given her strict instructions before she left: finish all the sewing, don’t go out except to shop or bring the piecework to Mr. Jones, and use the money that he paid her for only bread and potatoes, no sweets. Still, Clare was tempted to take a book home to make the lonely days and nights go more quickly. She had no one to keep her company until her mother returned. If she didn’t have to pay for the books, would her mother really be so angry? Clare decided, yes, her mother would because Clare had spoken to a stranger to get them. Clare was not allowed to talk to strangers while her mother was gone. No one was supposed to know their secret—that her mother was away and Clare was left home all by herself.

Clare shook her head. “Oh, no. My mother would be anxious if I borrowed something so important as a book.”

“You can read here, then, if you like. We have a reading room that is open most evenings.”

Clare melted. Miss Addams made her feel so welcome that she longed to stay in the warm comfort of the room. She imagined herself curled up in a chair, reading book after book all evening. There would be no scary shadows or troubling noises like those she had heard the last few nights beyond the walls of her shabby house. She wished she could stay here in the big, friendly house until her mother got home. The thought of staying another night alone, without her mother or her Auntie Dearie, made her tremble.

A young girl entered through the main door, asking for the art class. She was Clare’s

age, and the white pinafore the girl wore was just as plain as her own. Jane waved and stepped out into the hall to speak to her. Clare followed awkwardly.

“Hello, Gretchen. Glad to see you here. Go back down the veranda and to the left through the doors to the next building. Upstairs you will find the room.”

More children bounced up the porch steps and trotted the same way Gretchen had gone, needing no direction. Clare watched in amazement. They all wore ragged dresses or dusty knee pants, some washed, some not. Was this really a school? Who was the school for? How could all of them—surely as poor as herself—afford art lessons?

And then a boy, about twelve, rushed in, flushed with pride. His shirt sleeve was torn and the knees of his baggy trousers were patched. He carried a violin case. “I learned the Corelli, Miss Addams. I practiced night by night. *La Folia*. It is good... so good music” he sputtered with a heavy accent.

Jane was delighted. “I knew you would master it, Luigi. I will come listen in a moment. Wait for me.” Then she pointed to Clare. “Luigi, this is Clare. Perhaps someday she will come hear you play.”

Luigi smiled hopefully. Then, impulsively, he grabbed her hand and kissed it. “I feel happy in my heart if you do.”

Clare blushed. She was only eleven. No boy had ever treated her like anything but a child, let alone kissed her hand. Suddenly, she imagined herself a princess.

Luigi bowed to Clare and Jane in an old-fashioned way. “Now, I go,” he announced and marched triumphantly down the hall past the stairway.

Still feeling the tingle of the kiss, Clare couldn’t help but be drawn into the sudden wonder of this house. It seemed as if a fairy castle had magically risen from the dirty squalor of the ward. How had she found such a remarkable place? Then she remembered she had been looking for that woman who had carried a doll. Where had she gone?

It was the doll that had diverted her toward the mansion as she was swept along, completely lost, with the surge of people, wagons, pushcarts, and horse cars swarming up Halsted Street. The woman had stepped out of a horse-drawn hack, which had stopped just



in front of Clare, and turned toward this large brick house with its grand, white-columned porch. Catching sight of the doll, Clare had turned, too, and followed the woman, along with several other folks, through the wide-open door. That doll had seemed familiar just like the furnishings of this room.

Clare peered back into the drawing room, hoping to find the doll on a table or a chair. The doll had been dressed in a sun bonnet and a dress of blue gauze. She had softly blushed cheeks, perfect golden ringlets, a little porcelain nose—so delicate and white—and large glass eyes as blue as a summer sky. Those eyes made Clare think of Simmie, her own doll, even though Simmie's eyes were brown, her long black curls tangled, and her clothes plain. She desperately wanted to see the fancy doll again to find out why it had given her such a feeling, but the woman had disappeared, and the doll was nowhere to be seen.

At the moment, there were only a few older men left in the room, sitting together in quiet conversation or reading alone from newspapers. She studied the men's faces like Auntie Dearie had told her, searching for a sign of bad men. Clare never quite understood what Auntie Dearie had meant by bad men, but Auntie had assured her that she'd know because the bad men would be watching her, and she'd feel a little jolt inside, a warning to run away. None of the men in the room, however, were paying any attention to a little girl in a smudged pinafore. The only one intent on her was the woman called Jane.

"Tomorrow we have a cooking class in the kitchen, and there is a doll party."

"A doll party?" Clare felt breathless.

"Yes." Jane smiled, knowing Clare was tempted. "Come at three. We will have tea with cakes and fresh apple cider."

The thought of cake made Clare's knees go weak. Feeling a raw gnawing in her stomach, she remembered what had coaxed her out of her house. "Sorry, Miss Addams. I must go. I just stopped in for a look. I have errands. Could you tell me the way to the street... Blue Island?"

Jane pointed out the route then touched her shoulder gently. "Clare, I hope to see you

tomorrow.”

Clare nodded and stepped out into the autumn chill, wishing she hadn't. The people in the street seemed so hurried and tense after the warm charm of Miss Addams. She felt for the coin in her pocket and headed for the bakery to buy a day old loaf of bread. There was nothing left in the house to eat and this was one of her last pennies till she was paid for the sweatwork. Sometime tomorrow, she hoped, her mother would be back. It probably would be late at night, she guessed—her mother always returned from these trips in the darkness—but before she did, Clare and Simmie would be headed to Hull House for tea.

## Chapter 2

Clare sat on her little work bench with Simmie in her lap. She stared at the fading light peeking in around the edges of the front door. She didn't dare light the [kerosene lamp](#) or the coal stove while her mother was gone for fear that someone would knock on the door. Always before, Auntie Dearie had been there to watch over her, but Auntie had died last spring of pneumonia. Now there was no one but Simmie to share the darkness with her.

Clare's mother, Colleen, had waited as long as she could before packing up the worn travel bag and heading out for the train station. Auntie's sickness had delayed her, and then there had been the big Pullman strike that had shut down the railroads last summer. With all the violence of the strike, Clare's mother had been reluctant to travel. That was why there was not enough money left to buy fresh-baked bread even with all the sweatwork they did—her mother machine stitching the seams by pumping the [heavy foot treadle](#), and Clare sewing hems and buttons. Without Auntie Dearie to help sew, they earned less than they [needed to live](#) so their money disappeared fast.

Their biggest expense was, of course, rent—six dollars a week. Rent cost more for them than for other families in the alley's rear houses because their half of the subdivided cottage had a tiny kitchen and an indoor bath as well as a bedroom off the small front room. Their house had actually been built right here on the spot, perhaps one of the first in this area before it had become a crowded slum. The other houses in the unpaved [alley](#)—wood-frame shanties weathered to a rough, unpainted gray—had been moved from someplace else and squeezed into the empty alley spaces. All of them were divided into separate apartments, with crude privies out back and an outdoor spigot for water. Whole families lived in a single, crowded room. That one room served as bedroom, kitchen—everything.

Clare wasn't sure where her mother had gone or why she always had extra money

when she got back. Auntie Dearie had known, but never would say except to explain that it was dangerous. She and Auntie had always said double the prayers while her mother was away, and Clare murmured some now, thinking of the bad men that might be watching and waiting to grab her mother off some dark street. Auntie Dearie had often told stories of the men, chasing her mother till she hopped on a train or a carriage to get away. Once, Auntie had said, her mother had to hop on a train and hop right off again in order to sneak away from the men. Because of missing the train, she hadn't been able to get back for another whole day. Clare had often asked her mother about these stories, but her mother would only wink and say that Auntie had been spinning yarns again.

Before the house grew completely dark, Clare went to the kitchen to cut herself another chunk of bread. It was then that she heard the crying. There was a soft whimper seeping through the wallboards by the sink. She had heard that sob before—a little girl named Rosie O'Shea was left alone during daytime hours in the apartment next door. Rosie's father or older brother would usually come home from their factory job before supper, but it seemed today they were late. Clare wished she could call through the wall to assure Rosie they would be home soon, but because she was also alone, she didn't dare.

Instead, she took the bread and sat on the bench with Simmie, teaching her manners for the tea party. "Don't sip loudly," Clare explained. "Don't gossip too much. Be polite and patient."

Simmie stared back, her face white in the gloom.

"I know," Clare told Simmie. "We shouldn't talk to strangers. But we have to go to the party. We were invited by the nice lady. It wouldn't be polite to refuse."

Simmie seemed unconvinced.

"Yes, we have to go. And perhaps you'll make a friend tomorrow," Clare urged, thinking of the fancy doll. "Someone that reminds me of you."

Clare thought again about the doll she had seen that afternoon outside the big house on Halsted Street. As she stared at Simmie now, it seemed their faces were indeed similar with those big glass eyes—almond-shaped with fine painted lashes—and a delicate



porcelain nose. Of course, Simmie's cheeks were scratched and her white face smudged from falling in the coal ashes the other day.

Clare had no doubt that Simmie had once been a beautiful doll. Her mother said Clare had inherited Simmie from the little rich girl at the big house in Boston where her mother and Auntie Dearie had worked as servants. Clare knew *inherited* really meant *hand-me-down*, and she supposed Simmie had been given to Clare when the little girl of the house had grown tired of her. That is why Clare called her doll Simmie the Second, because Simmie was a second-hand doll—at least that is what she believed. Clare didn't remember getting her doll, or naming her doll, so very long ago.

What she did remember were little bits of scattered memory like playing the big piano in the book-filled room. She also remembered eating breakfast in a nursery filled with toys after waking up in a soft, four-poster bed. Her mother always assured her that they lived in the servants quarters at the back of the house, not in the fancy rooms like the nursery. However, there were times, her mother said, when the family went away, and Clare was allowed to wander through the big rooms to play. Clare always thought it odd, though, that she never remembered playing with the rich girl. Perhaps the girl's parents didn't approve of such a thing.

Clare finished her bread and went to lay in the darkness on her mother's narrow bed, wrapping herself in a scratchy wool blanket. She clutched Simmie tight and said another prayer, picturing her mother's large, brown eyes that sparkled like the starlight when she laughed. Her mother was not only beautiful, but gentle, though she could be firm when it was needed—such as in dealing with their boss, Mr. Jones, the [sweater](#). Her mother could always get their full pay, even when he tried to cheat them out of it, but her voice would never rise against him in anger. Perhaps that was why she had felt so comfortable with Jane Addams. Miss Addams had a gentle way, too—one that was also calm and solid—and Clare could barely wait to see her again. She thought of the tea party tomorrow, imagining the fancy doll and the rich lady, along with girls her age, dressed in their Sunday Best. The only one who was dressed plain, in her mind, was her.

Clare jumped up and closed the bedroom door. It was a windowless room, and so she felt safe to light the little candle that her mother kept on a table between the beds. She picked up its wooden holder and carried the candle to a small trunk in the corner of the room. Peering in, she searched through the scattered dresses and pinafores that belonged to her. The best ones were too small, and the only one that might do for the tea party was torn. Clare would have to mend it in the morning before she finished all the hems and the buttons on the sweatwork left to be done.

As she pulled out the dress, she noticed a letter tucked into the corner of the trunk. It was addressed to her, in her mother's hand. A note by the wax seal read:

*Clare, open this only if I do not return by September  
12th.*

Clare stared at the letter, her heart pounding. Her mother had not mentioned leaving it when she said goodbye, but clearly, her mother had been worried that she might not come back. Suddenly, all of Auntie Dearie's stories of the bad men flooded her. She imagined her mother captured by them, screaming loudly, struggling to get free as she was carried into a dark room, locked there perhaps forever. Clare shivered. She dropped the letter and rushed back to the bed, hiding under the covers, her teeth chattering with fright.

It was only when she remembered she shouldn't let the candle burn all night that she peeked out. The letter lay beside it, golden in the flicker of the flame. She stared at it, desperately wanting to open the envelope but frightened of what it might say.

Jumping from the bed, she rushed to the trunk, threw the letter inside and slammed the lid tight. Blowing out the candle, she slipped back beneath the covers and shut her eyes once again. It was September 8th. Tomorrow would be the 9th. Clare counted out the 10th, the 11th, the 12th on her fingers. Her mother had left four days ago. That meant the 12th would make more than a week. Her mother had never been gone longer than a week, at least not that she could remember.

Clare felt a tear slip from her eye. For years, she had wanted to know where her mother went every five or six months on her mysterious trips. She knew the letter might

reveal the secret, but now she hoped she would never have reason to open it. She wanted her mother home much more than she wanted to know where it was that her mother had gone.

Still, as Clare tried to go to sleep, the secret hidden in the letter haunted her, reminding her of the secrets in the rest of her life. She thought of the way she was always reminded not to speak so precisely—to be more plain-spoken—so she would fit in. She thought back to a place they had lived after Boston. It was a small town in Ohio called Meadowfield that was so much quieter than this city of Chicago with its noisy, cluttered, filthy streets. Her mother had had an office job back in Meadowfield, and Auntie Dearie had taken up caring for a sickly lady. There had been no sweatwork then. They had lived in a boarding house, plain but friendly, and Clare had gone to school. She missed school so much with its lessons to study as well as friends, real friends, to play with. Three years ago, they had left in a hurry. Clare was never told why. They moved constantly, staying here and there in dreary hotels and tiny cottages in isolated villages. Just over a year ago they had settled here, in this muddy, stinking alley, and taken up the sweatwork. Auntie Dearie always blamed it all on the bad men—at least when her mother was away.

Outside the house, there was a whistle in the alley. “Clancy, Clancy,” someone called. “Hurry it up.”

Clare listened as a door slammed and someone clomped down a set of alley steps. “Hold on, Rodney. Ma’s got her praties on the cooker. I can’t miss ‘em. They’re grand.”

“We’ll be late,” Rodney urged. “O’Toole will warm our ears if we’re late.”

Passing by Clare’s bedroom, the boys lowered their voice as they talked, but Clare could still hear them through the thin, wood-frame wall.

“Dad says O’Toole is shady. How can we trust him?”

“So don’t, if you like. Go back to Grady’s stable for another whiff of sweet manure. There’s a nice profession, ain’t it?” Rodney grumbled. “Mind you, it’s only two hours work and the pay’s fine enough.”

“Yeah, a bit too fine. Dad says we need the extra money, but to just take care with

what I do.”

As Clancy and Rodney continued to argue quietly, their voices disappeared, mixing with the din of wagon wheels and horseshoe clatter from the main road. They were the oldest boys in the alley, almost fourteen. Both of them worked all day in a box factory and were best friends. Last summer they had worked in the stable around the corner, shoveling manure, but had hated it. Clare had once heard them complain that their boots smelled so bad their mothers made them take them off and hide them beneath the steps so the flies wouldn't follow them in. Now that they had a factory job, they reeked less, but had grown more unruly. Clare sometimes watched them through the window playing stickball after work. She noticed they had both taken up swearing and smoking.

Clare thought of her long-ago friends, Sally and Mary, from Ohio. They had played games after school, ones like tag and tiddlywinks. Here in Chicago, Clare was not allowed to make real friends, not with anyone in the alley. Auntie Dearie claimed the boys of the alley, like Clancy and Rodney, weren't the type to get to know. The way Auntie said it, Clare imagined they might grow up someday to become bad men too. The only girls in the alley wrapped sweets in the caramel factory on Harrison Street several long blocks away, except for little Rosie, of course, who stayed home alone. Rosie's mother had been killed in a garment factory fire last May. Since then, Rosie's brother, Tim, had taken up work in the caramel factory, too. Clare imagined in a few years Rosie would be there with her brother, packing box after box of little caramels all day.

One day, last February, Clare had announced she wanted to go to the factory and work like the other girls. She had grown weary of staying in the house all day. Auntie Dearie had been horrified, but her mother just smiled gently and reminded her that Simmie would be lonely if she was left alone all day. Besides, they earned more money by working together her mother had explained. They needed Clare for the hand work, since Auntie's sight was fading. Auntie could only do the hand work for half the day until her eyes grew too tired for such precise stitching. Then Auntie would do the laundry, the cooking, and the shopping, or whatever errands were left such as carrying the heavy



bundle of finished work back to the sweater's shop. Sometimes Clare went with her to learn the way, but Clare had hardly been anywhere else in the city. That is why, now left all alone, Clare was terrified to leave the house. She barely knew her way to the bakery, and she hoped tomorrow she could find her way back to Hull House for the party.

Clare closed her eyes and tried to imagine the route: a left turn from the alley and a right down on Taylor, just like she was heading to the bakery, but then, after a right onto Halsted, she would head straight for several blocks instead of turning off the big street toward the bakery on Blue Island Avenue. It didn't seem far, but Clare just wasn't used to the city and its crowds. On Halsted, all the shops, run-down saloons, and grim alleys looked the same. If she got so lost that she could not find her way, there was only the police to ask for help. Auntie Dearie had always cautioned her about talking to the police. They might ask too many questions, she had warned, and then they would have to move away.

Just as Clare was imagining the route to Hull House for the tenth time, another door slammed in the alley. Soon she heard the most forlorn wail coming from the O'Shea's room next door. She knew something terrible had happened. She raced to the kitchen to listen at the wall boards, fearing someone had come home and found Rosie dead, but Rosie was crying loudly along with her brother, Tim. Clare was relieved for a moment, until she realized there was no sound from Rosie's father. He was not there with them in their little room. That's when Clare understood that they were crying for him.

## Chapter 3

Clare froze at the sound of a knock on the door.

She had just settled back into bed after listening to a blurry conversation beyond the kitchen wall. Something had happened to Rosie's father—she didn't know what. And now, as the knock came again, much louder, Clare didn't dare breathe. All she could think of was the possibility that whatever bad thing had happened to the man next door might have happened to her mother as well.

There was a long silence. Then Tim's voice pleaded, "Mrs. D'Arcy, are you there?"

Clare sprang out of bed and raced to the front door. She opened the door just a crack. "My mother is asleep. This is Clare."

Tim's long face was tense. "My Da's been hurt at the reaper factory."

Clare opened the door wide. "What happened?"

"A machine toppled... big one. His leg is crushed." Tim paused awkwardly. "I must go to County Hospital. Can you watch Rosie? I mustn't leave her in the dark."

Clare hesitated. What would her mother say? No one was suppose to learn the secret—that her mother was away. Still, Clare felt it wouldn't be right to refuse him, so she thought up a good story to explain where her mother was. "My mother is asleep. She has to rise early, but I'm sure she wouldn't mind. Just tell Rosie we'll have to whisper so as not to wake her."

As Tim disappeared to retrieve his sister, Clare rushed around, lighting the kerosene lamp and shutting the bedroom door. In a moment, Tim and Rosie were standing in the room, gazing at the piles of unfinished sweatwork on the table. It was the first time they had been there. Clare's mother rarely allowed guests.

"Many thanks," Tim murmured, with a hint of Irish in his voice. His red hair caught the gleam of the lamp. He was tall for his age, just eleven like Clare, but he acted so much older.

Clare pointed to a stiff chair in the corner. “Would you sit for a minute?”

Tim shook his head. “I must go see to him.”

“I hope he’ll be all right.” Clare glanced at little, red-headed Rosie, looking pale and forlorn. She seemed the size of a pixie. “If you’ll be late, you can let your sister sleep here.”

It wasn’t till Tim had left that Rosie spoke to her. Unlike Tim, she had almost no accent. Clare guessed Rosie had been born here and had never set foot in Ireland. “I brought Brigit. She didn’t want to stay alone.”

Clare looked at her puzzled. “Who is Brigit?”

Rosie brought out a small bundle from her pocket. Clare stared at the dirty twist of rag. It was a tiny knot of cloth dangling from a very small, somewhat grotesque, wax doll head.

“She used to be a real dolly, but then Clancy’s dog chewed her up one night when I forgot her on the alley step. Da said he’ll fix her up right as a rainbow someday.”

Clare smiled at Rosie. “I have a doll. Her name is Simmie.” Before she could think, Clare added, “We are going to a tea party. Perhaps you can come too.”

Rosie was so excited about the thought of a tea party that she forgot all about her father. Her eyes lit up. “Brigit loves a party. We party every day.”

Clare bubbled with excitement. “But, Rosie, this party will have cider and cake.”

Rosie’s eyes grew wide. She sputtered, “Can we go now? I’m hungry.”

Clare’s smile faded. “No we’ll have to wait. It is not until tomorrow afternoon.”

Rosie’s eyes swelled with tears. “Tomorrow?”

Clare nodded, then she brightened. “But we can have a practice party with some bread instead of cake.”

Rosie’s tears stopped. “Brigit loves bread.”

First Clare started a fire in the coal stove because the room had grown quite chilly. Then she moved all the piecework off the sewing table and cut up tiny slices of bread while Rosie carried cups of water from the sink. They pulled up four chairs and sat around

the table with Simmie and Brigit plunked in separate seats. Rosie frowned at Brigit's chair, which seemed empty because there was hardly any height to the pitiful doll.

"Brigit cannot see. She's too short. Can she sit on the table?"

"That's not proper," Clare said sternly. Then she giggled. "But I won't tell."

Rosie brought the little head up from the seat of the chair and sat it on the table next to the plate. The grimy strip of cloth that had once been part of Brigit's dress dangled over the edge. Rosie gobbled her bread, then picked up Brigit's. "Brigit says she's not hungry. She usually isn't. She says I can eat it."

Clare smiled. "Brigit's very tiny. She reminds me of the wee folk. Auntie Dearie always spoke of them."

"Wee folk? What did she say about them?"

"She said they are full of mischief. They do naughty things. They hide treasure under rocks and dance at midnight under the moon and do magic. Every time Auntie lost her needle, she blamed them."

Rosie looked around. "They live here?"

"I don't know." Clare shrugged. "I have never seen them."

"There's no wee folk at my house," Rosie said sadly. Then she brightened. "There is Mr. Nibbly."

"Mr. Nibbly?"

Rosie grinned. "He's a mouse, and he comes when I call to see if I left nibbles for him."

"Really? When you call?" Clare was impressed.

Rosie nodded proudly. "Him and Brigit... they keep me company." She picked off a crumb of bread. "I wonder if he can hear me even here?"

Rosie dropped down to her knees and began calling, "Mr. Nibbly. Come and eat." She waited patiently, but no little mouse came to her across the floor. Rosie shook her head. "There's no way for him to get in. At my house, there's a door."

"A door?"

Rosie nodded. "It's in the floor. There's a loose board, and I lift it for him."

Rosie began crawling across the floor, searching for a board that would lift. Clare dropped to her knees to help. She was excited at the thought of a little mouse that would come when you call. Perhaps Rosie would share him with her. He could be a little pet. In Ohio, there had been a cat at the boarding house. Clare had loved to play with him. And her friend, Sally, had owned Buster, a dog, who would come when you called his name.

They crawled over the rough boards, trying each one. Finally, Clare felt one jiggle.

"Lift it," Rosie said breathlessly.

Clare pried it up as Rosie called, "Here, Mr. Nibbly. Come and eat."

They sat and waited patiently, but no little mouse came. Rosie leaned over and peered into the dark hole. "Goodness," she sputtered. "There's treasure in there." She looked at Clare. "It's the wee folk."

Clare grabbed the lamp and brought it close. Sure enough, there was a metal tin beneath the floor boards. She reached in and pulled it out. It was an old taffy tin. She rattled it. Something was inside.

Rosie's eyes were wide. "Maybe it's gold. Or maybe it's taffy. Open it!"

Clare struggled to open the tin. It was rusted. "If it's taffy, it must be very old. It would be hard as a brick."

Rosie reached for the lid, wanting to help pry it. "I'd still eat it, even if you wouldn't."

Clare knew she would be tempted as well. It had been so long since she'd had a sweet. She rushed to the kitchen to get a knife. Very slowly, she pried the lid up, but there was no stale taffy inside. Instead there were envelopes and a silver locket. Rosie whimpered with disappointment, but Clare stared blankly at the envelopes. The first one was a yellowed letter addressed to a Deirdre Sullivan in Virginia. She didn't know anyone by that name.

Rosie pointed to the letter. "What's that say?"

"It's just a name and address of someone I don't know."

“Aren’t you going to open it?”

“That wouldn’t be polite.”

Rosie frowned. She picked through the pile of envelopes, all letters to the same woman. At the bottom of the pile, though, were envelopes with no address. “What about these?” Rosie asked. “They’re stiff... like tintypes. Can’t we look at them?”

These were indeed envelopes that were too heavy to be letters. Clare picked one up. It was an old tintype—a photo on a thin sheet of metal—of a girl in her teens. She stood beside a river near a small stone cottage. There were other old tintypes of the very same girl, years older and at different times and places: one next to a vegetable stand in a busy city market, one standing with a soldier near a church, one holding a toddler in her arms by a garden. The last envelope was too light to contain tintypes, and also much larger. It held a paper photographic print of a big house on a city street. On the back it read: *140 Meeker Street, Boston*. Clare stared at the house, knowing she had once lived in Boston. Was there any connection? The large envelope also held a much smaller picture, a wedding portrait. Clare scrutinized the bride, veiled in fancy lace. It was then she realized that all these letters, that house, this wedding photo truly had something to do with her. She gasped, pointing to the bride. “It’s my mother.”

“Let’s see.” Rosie pulled the photo toward her. She nodded. “Yes. Mrs. D’Arcy. She’s mighty fancy. And that must be your Da. You’ve got his funny smile.” She pointed to the man beside Clare’s mother. “He’s got a nice look.”

Clare stared at the photo. The man was a stranger. Could he be her father? Her mother had never said much about him, and Clare had never seen his picture. Clare nodded. It must be him. She did have his slightly lopsided grin as well as a lone dimple in the left cheek. That funny smile made him look happy. Like Rosie said, he looked nice.

“I didn’t know him. He died when I was young,” Clare said sadly.

That’s when she heard Rosie sob. “My Da can’t die. He can’t.”

Clare dropped the photo. She put her arms around Rosie and pulled her close. “Shh! It will be alright. You’ll see.”

But Clare wasn't so certain it would really be alright. She imagined the tiny, fragile girl without a mother or a father. It made her heart pain. No, he couldn't die and leave Rosie and Tim alone. She said a silent prayer that he wouldn't. Still, she knew, even if Rosie's father was just confined to the hospital for a while, it was serious. Clare stroked Rosie's hair, wondering, without their father's wages to pay the rent, what would Rosie and Tim do?



## Chapter 4

Rosie cried herself to sleep on Clare's old cot, the one she had slept in before she inherited Auntie Dearie's bed. Clare had pulled it from the bedroom, and made it up with blankets. She hummed Rosie an Irish lullaby, one that Auntie Dearie had always sung, until the little girl fell silent. Then Clare curled up in the corner beside the raised floor board and the tin of letters, staring at the wedding portrait. Why had she never seen it? Why had it been hidden? Her mother looked so beautiful dressed in fancy lace instead of the plain-spun bodice and skirt that she normally wore. In fact, in the photo her mother's dress looked so fancy that Clare could barely believe they now took in piecework. In the photo her mother looked like an elegant lady.

She pulled out the photo of the house on Meeker Street. It was a brick home with three stories as well as a front porch with white posts similar to the columns on Hull House. Clare realized that might have accounted for the familiar feeling Hull House gave her—at least if this was indeed the house in Boston where her mother and Auntie Dearie had been servants. Clare tried to imagine herself running up the steps and skipping through the front door. In her mind, she pictured a long hall and a wide, curving staircase rising before her as she stood on a marble floor. And then the strangest thing happened. Clare began to sing in a language that was foreign:

*Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques,  
Dormez vous? Dormez vous?  
Sonnez les matines, Sonnez les matines,  
Din, din, don! Din, din, don!*

Clare stopped, wondering what she had just done. She had never sung that song or spoken foreign words before. It startled her. She knew it wasn't an old Irish tune either. Only once had she heard Auntie Dearie speak Gaelic, when she was reciting a poem, and there were only a few Irish songs that Auntie Dearie had sung, but this didn't sound

anything like them. Where had she learned this song? Did it have something to do with that big house on Meeker Street? Who was the rich little girl that lived there? Could she have learned the song from her?

Clare looked down at the batch of letters. Who was Deirdre Sullivan? Why was she so important that her aunt, or perhaps her mother, had kept this woman's letters? Why had they been hidden in the tin? Clare studied the tintype of the young woman with the soldier, noticing that behind him was a flag with a big *X* filled with stars. Clare had learned of this flag in school. It was the Southern Cross, the flag of the South. This man had been a Confederate soldier in the Civil War. Clare looked at the address on the top letter—Virginia. The state of Virginia had been with the South in the war. At any rate, the Civil War was a long time ago, decades in fact. That would make the woman in the picture very old by now, if she were still living.

Clare stared at the letters, wanting to read them, but she couldn't get up the nerve to even peek. She shuffled through the envelopes restlessly, looking at their addresses, trying to talk herself into opening one. Though most were very old letters addressed to the same Virginia address, one was rather new. This newer one had an Ohio address in the very same town, Meadowfield, where they had lived. Clare couldn't help it. She opened the envelope and pulled out a newspaper story, along with a short note. It said:

*Read this!*

*I thought I should warn you. He'll be doubling his effort to find you. He is desperate. I never should have trusted him. I should have believed you. Let me help you, now, like I should have helped you then. Please forgive me. Please trust me.*

*Josiah*

*PS: Don't panic. Stay put. McDonald found you by accident through an old friend.*

Clare stared at the letter. The date was three years ago. She opened the article. It was

from a newspaper in Boston and the headline read:

*Donald Killeen Loses Control of Shipping Business*

The article was long, and Clare could not understand what it said. She knew this man, Killeen, had lost a lot of money, but it all seemed a very complicated, grown-up problem about a company. Clare stared at the photo printed in the paper. The man was handsome, but there was something mean about his face—eyes that were sinister, a deep frown, and a scar across his cheek.

Just then a soft knock came on the door. “Clare,” Tim whispered.

Clare stuffed the letters back into the tin and pulled some unfinished knee pants over the raised board to hide it. She opened the door and let him in.

“How is he?” Clare asked in a nervous hush.

Tim stepped inside, glancing at Rosie on the cot. “He will mend. But it may take weeks till he’ll be free of the crutches.”

Clare relaxed, nodding at Rosie. “She’s been so worried.”

“He’ll be coming home day after tomorrow. Do you think your Ma would be willing to....” He looked again at Rosie.

Clare nodded. “We can keep her tomorrow.”

Tim held out his hand. There was a nickel in it. “Here, buy some fixings for her dinner.”

Clare shook her head. “We have plenty. Keep it for a party when your father gets back.”

Tim smiled. “You’ll be invited for sure.”

Rosie turned on the cot, sighing in her sleep. Tim stepped in her direction.

Clare reached out to stop him. “No, leave her be for the night.”

Tim turned and nodded. He suddenly looked weary. “I must be up before dawn... at half past two. I’ve asked for extra work selling papers, morning and evening.”

Clare nodded. She understood that Tim would try to make up for his father’s lost wages. “Don’t worry about Rosie. We will have fun.”

After Tim left and Clare had bolted the door, she felt tired. She banked the coals in the stove and wrote a note for her mother, explaining about Rosie in case she came home late in the night. Before heading to bed, she remembered the loose board and the tin. Her mother might not like her prying into secrets that weren't hers. Clare placed the envelopes into the taffy tin and picked up the heart-shaped locket. Opening it, she saw a miniature tintype of a little girl, about two, in a fancy summer shift. The inscription on the cover read: *To Simone, my dearest.*

Clare stared at the picture a long time. Was this the baby in the picture of the garden? Or was it the rich, little girl? Auntie Dearie had never mentioned the little girl's name, but the sound of Simone seemed strangely familiar to her. Supposing it must be the rich girl in Boston, she closed the locket, closed the tin, and slipped it back into the dark hole beneath the boards. Then as she lowered the board back into place, she heard a rustle in the dirt beneath it. She lifted the board again and stared into the hole. Something was sitting on the tin—a small creature with whiskers.

Clare smiled. She went to the table to pick up a leftover crust of bread. When she returned, the creature was gone, but she set the crust on the tin.

“Good night, Mr. Nibbly,” she whispered as she lowered the board.



*The Caramel Factory*



## *Part 2: Scary People*

## Chapter 5

Clare woke to the sensation of being shaken. She stared up at Rosie's little face.

"Where's your Ma?"

Clare blinked and looked around her. It was just getting light. "I think she had to leave early."

"Is it time for the tea party?" Rosie crawled up on her bed. "I'm hungry."

Clare sat up. "We have to wait for the party, but we can have some bread right now."

Rosie frowned. "Just bread?"

Clare nodded. She heard her stomach grumble. She wished she had taken Tim's nickel so they could buy something else for breakfast today.

The bread was very stale, but Clare found a little sausage grease in a cup in the cupboard and spread it over the bread slices. Then she started a coal fire and set the slices on the stove to soften them. They took their bread to the table and were about to sit down and eat when the whinny of a horse stopped them.

Outside, in the alley, a woman called, "Stop here."

Clare and Rosie rushed to the window, wondering who it might be. They saw a woman standing by a buggy, inspecting an overflowing [garbage box](#). She was writing something in a log book. When the woman looked up, Clare recognized her as Jane Addams. She was so astonished that she ran to open the door.

Jane smiled, seeing Clare on the steps. "Hello, Clare. How are you this morning?"

"Fine, Miss Addams." Clare bobbed her head. Rosie stepped out onto the steps beside her.

"Is this your little sister?"

"No, Miss Addams. This is Rosie. She lives next door. We are minding her today."

Jane nodded warmly. "Nice to meet you, Rosie. Clare is coming to our doll party this afternoon. Why don't you come, too?"

Rosie slipped inside and rushed out with Brigit. “Can my dolly come?”

There was a momentary flicker of sadness in Jane’s eyes at the sight of the mangled doll. “Of, course. We’d love to have her for some cake and cider.”

Rosie hugged Brigit, delighted. Then she looked at the buggy and the driver. “Do we get to ride with you?”

Jane smiled. “I’m sorry. I’m working right this minute. I’m assessing the quality of garbage collection in the Ward.” She looked straight at Clare. “How often are your garbage boxes cleared?”

Clare stared at the grimy wooden box spilling over with coal ashes, rotten potato peelings, and other moldy vegetable bits. It had been like that for quite a while. Clare shrugged, “I’ve had to haul the garbage over to the main street boxes for several weeks.”

Jane shook her head. “This is dreadful.” She made a note in the book. “Thank you, Clare. I have to go, but you’ve been very helpful.” She climbed into the buggy. “Don’t forget the party is at three.”

As the buggy moved off down the alley, Rosie grinned. “She’s a nice lady, she is. It’ll be a grand party.”

Clare nodded. “I have to get to work on finishing up the stitching, so let’s eat.”

As Rosie munched her bread, Clare told her of her father’s condition and, also, where Tim had gone. “Your Da will be home in a few days. He might be home for a while till his leg is better.”

Rosie hugged Brigit happily and finished her bread.

“Guess what else? Mr. Nibbly came while you were asleep.”

“Through the door?” Rosie beamed.

Clare nodded. “I gave him a crust of bread.”

“Oh, he’ll be back, for sure. You feed him and he’s your friend.”

After they gobbled their bread, Clare cleared the table so she could start sewing the buttons that were waiting to be done. She piled the unfinished shirtwaists on the table and brought out the needle and thread. As she began to stitch, Rosie watched with fascination.



“Can I help?”

“Do you sew?”

Rosie looked down at her lap. “Only a bit.”

“I can teach you, then.”

Clare gave Rosie a scrap and a button. She showed her how to thread the needle and then take stitch after stitch. It wasn’t long before Rosie asked for another button, and another, till she had a whole row of practice buttons done.

Clare examined her work. “Very good. You’re quite clever at this.”

“Could I do a real button?”

Clare nodded. “Let’s try one.”

Clare showed her where to put the button so it would line up with the buttonhole.

“You try that, and I’ll start the hems. If we work hard, we will soon be done.”

“Then what?”

Clare blinked thoughtfully. “We’ll get ready for the party.”

By noon the sweatwork was all finished. Clare piled the shirtwaists and knee pants over the sewing machine and swept up all the stray threads.

“Is it time to go?” Rosie asked hopefully.

“No, but we can get ourselves all pretty. You stay here. I have a surprise for you.”

Inside the little trunk, Clare pulled out her torn dress and a smaller one for Rosie, carefully avoiding a glance at her mother’s letter. After she mended her own dress, she had Rosie try the other on. It was a size too big, so Clare took some tucks in it to help it fit. Next, they worked on Simmie and Brigit, braiding their dolls’ hair and washing them a bit. Clare succeeded in smoothing some of the chew marks from Clancy’s dog that were embedded in Brigit’s waxen face. In the end though, they still looked like dolls that belonged to poor girls.

It was then that Clare remembered a scrap of red wool left over from a sweatwork project. Clare dug it out of a box on the floor and set to work with her shears.

“What are you making?” Rosie asked breathlessly.

“Something new for them to wear.”

In a minute they were stitching up capes for each of their dolls. Rosie’s hem was a little crooked, but Brigit looked so much better with a hood tied tight around her head. The cape flowed out below it as if she really had a body. Simmie looked good in her cape, too, for its hood covered her frazzled braids and her worn dress.

“They’re a wonder,” Rosie said proudly. “Can we go?”

Clare frowned. “We’ll be early.” Then she brightened. “But they have a library. We can look at the books!”

Hull House seem closer than Clare had remembered it. She found it easily. The mansion could hardly be missed even though it was set back from the street. As they stepped through the door, Rosie’s eyes widened, just as Clare’s had the day before.

“Isn’t it nice?” Clare whispered.

Rosie nodded. “Where’s the pretty lady?”

“Miss Addams? I don’t know. But I think we’ll see her at the party.”

There was a different woman at the door, greeting the guests, but the house was just as busy as the day before. Some people went down the hall, some up the stairs. Some went down the veranda to the other building. That’s where Clare and Rosie headed. The greeter had told them the doll party would be held upstairs in building next door, and the reading room was below it.

Clare’s heart skipped with excitement when they entered the big room filled with books. A woman at the desk pointed them toward the children’s shelf. Clare sat happily by a shelf, looking through the line of books.

“Read to me... please?” Rosie asked hopefully.

Clare nodded. “But we have to be quiet.”

Rosie picked up a magazine from a box on the floor. “Read this, then.”

Clare leafed through the pages and stopped at a story. “Let’s read this story. It’s about dolls.”

The story was a funny one about dolls who have a party all by themselves in the

middle of the night and almost burn down their doll house when they try to light the wax chandelier with a real match. Rosie laughed loudly, but Clare whispered to her to hush.

Rosie lowered her voice. “Another one... another story.”

Clare flicked through the rest of the magazine and set it down, picking up another one called *St. Nicholas*. “Here’s one about dolls too,” she whispered and started to read, “*How Some Dolls Broke the Law* by Sarah Winter Kellogg.” The story began in London as three people sat in an attic tearing dolls apart.

“Oh, that’s awful,” said Rosie in alarm.

“Should I stop?” Clare asked.

“Oh, no!” Rosie insisted. “We must finish it.”

“First, the lovely dears were beheaded,” Clare continued. “Then they were ripped open about where the clavicles would have been if the doll-makers hadn’t left the clavicles out of the darlings. When they were all ripped, and gaping in a ghastly way from shoulder to shoulder, they were emptied of what would have been their vital organs if it hadn’t been sawdust. Then the heads and bodies were stuffed like Thanksgiving turkey, not, however, with oysters on curry force-meat, but with costly laces—laces fit to adorn a duchess.”

“Laces?” Rosie looked at the words on the page even though she could not read. “What for?”

“It seems they were smuggling,” Clare said as she skimmed the next paragraph.

Rosie nodded. “Laces... in their tummies.”

“And their heads!” Clare added.

“Who would think to look there?” Rosie grinned.

“Exactly.” Clare continued to read the story which ended with a little girl discovering the lace in one of the dolls and the smugglers getting caught. The girl had given the doll a bath, but its head was made of papier mâché and the doll had fallen apart, revealing its secret.

“Oh, I liked that story,” Rosie smiled. “Dolls with secrets.” She peered inside the cape and poked at Brigit’s head. “Nothing there.” She looked at Simmie. “Maybe your

doll has a secret?”

Clare shook her head. “I don’t think so. Anyway, it is time to go.”

They headed up the stairs to a large room with a long table. Clare stepped inside, her eyes beaming. There on a chair beside that table, covered with cups and plates, was the beautiful doll she had been wanting to see. Now she was dressed for winter with a dark fur hat and a fur-trimmed golden cape. Clare looked at Simmie in her own red cape. Yes, though their eyes and hair were different colors, the two dolls had the very same face.

## Chapter 6

There were seven other little girls in the room when they arrived and more came in soon after. Eventually at least twenty girls swarmed the table, clasping their dolls tightly while hungrily eyeing the cake in the middle. All the girls were younger than Clare so she felt a bit embarrassed. Rosie chatted happily with them, while Clare stood back, taking the scene in. She guessed most of the girls her age were either working, in school, or interested in other things.

The wealthy woman with the doll strolled up to Clare and introduced herself. “I’m Helen,” she said. “And this is my doll, Charlotte.”

Clare eyed Charlotte with admiration. “She’s exquisite.”

Helen stared at Clare curiously. “Exquisite? Yes. I guess she is. And who is this?”

Clare felt nervous under the woman’s gaze. She knew she had used the wrong word. *Exquisite* was a bit too rich. Vowing to sound more common, she looked down at Simmie. “Her name’s Simmie. She’s not so fancy, but her eyes are still a pretty sight.”

Helen stared at Clare’s doll. “Yes, they are beautiful eyes. Can I see her for a minute?” Helen turned Simmie over and peered under the dress at her leather body. She noted Simmie’s ragged wig, and peered beneath the hair. “Simmie is quite a doll. I believe, just like Charlotte, she is a French doll, a Bru Béb  .”

Clare was puzzled. “French?”

“Dolls like her have a special mark on their heads. They are quite expensive.”

There was an uncomfortable silence between them. “Ah, yes... she’s a hand-me-down, Miss. She came from a rich girl in Boston.”

“Boston?” Helen look startled. “What a coincidence. I’m from Boston. And that name... Simmie.” She looked straight at Clare. “It sounds short for something. Do you think Simmie might be short for Simone?”

Clare blinked, looking troubled. Inside she was feeling quite anxious. “I don’t know.

I never heard that name before.”

The woman stared at her with such intensity that it scared Clare. “Years ago, I knew a little girl named Simone in Boston. How long did you live there?”

Clare’s stomach was churning. “I don’t know. I don’t remember much. My mother was a servant there.”

“A servant... I see.” Helen seemed to question that. “I’ll have to come visit with your mother before I leave Chicago. Where do you live?”

Clare knew better than to answer her. She searched for a way to change the subject. “Oh, look. Here comes Miss Addams. She’s such a good lady.” Jane entered, just then, along with several other women. As Jane began to speak, Clare slipped away to a corner of the room behind a clump of girls. If Rosie hadn’t been there with her, she would have fled.

It was a much different party than Clare had imagined. The cake and cider were passed around the big table, but no one was polite about their eating. As soon as they received their plate, each girl would begin eating greedily without even waiting for the next girl to be served. Clare sat as far from Helen as she could. Every single nerve in her body felt on edge, and she ate her cake fretfully. After dreaming so long of its sweetness, she could barely even taste it. And when Jane left the room, Clare slipped out behind her, clutching Simmie tightly. She had something very important to ask.

Clare followed Jane down the stairs into the library and out along the veranda. Jane walked so briskly it was hard for Clare to keep up. The woman turned into the main house and climbed the wide mahogany stairs to the upper floor of Hull House. She headed down the hall where a young woman intercepted her just as Clare was about to call out. Clare stepped back against a door, hoping the woman would leave. Just then though, there was a tug on Clare’s sleeve. It was Rosie, rather breathless.

“Where are you going? A lady’s wondering about you.”

Clare peered down the staircase with alarm. She could see Helen heading into the Hull House hallway below them. Jane and the other woman were slowly walking away,

their backs to them. Clare twisted the handle of the door behind her. It turned. She opened the door, pulling Rosie inside with her. Wildly, she looked around for a place to hide.

They were in a large room furnished not only with a bed and bureau, but also a table and chairs, a desk, a settee, a bookcase, and a couple of rocking chairs. Clare tugged Rosie behind the settee.

“What are we hiding for?” Rosie wondered.

“Someone frightens me,” Clare explained.

“It’s that fancy lady, isn’t it? She was asking prying questions.”

“What did you tell her?”

“Not what she wanted. Da always said not to talk to ones so nosy as her.”

Clare sighed with relief. “What did she ask about?”

“She wanted to know where you lived.”

“What did you say?”

Rosie grinned. “I told her Cracker Alley.”

Clare smiled. “Cracker Alley?”

“That’s what my Da always tells someone when it’s none of their business. Who is she?”

“I don’t know, but she makes me nervous.”

Rosie and Clare heard footsteps right outside the door. The girls stiffened. They gripped their dolls tight. Someone jiggled the handle and then stopped.

“Jane,” a voice called. It was Helen. “Can I have a word with you?”

“Can you wait? I am in the middle of a conversation.”

“I just want to ask, have you seen a girl with a doll come this way?”

“There was one here a moment ago,” another voice said. It was the young woman who had been talking to Jane. “She must have left.”

“Why do you ask?” Jane added.

“I need to...” Helen paused. “Do you know where she lives? I’d like to visit with her.”



“What on earth for?” Jane sounded puzzled.

Helen hesitated. “She’s forgotten something.”

“Do you know her name?”

“No, but her doll wore a red-hooded cape.”

“I’m not sure which girl you mean,” Jane responded cautiously. “If you don’t find her, meet me in the parlor after the party and we’ll discuss this.”

The door opened. Clare’s heart pounded. Rosie’s eyes grew wide. Clare put her finger to her lips and crouched low. Rosie nodded and ducked her head. The footsteps grew louder as two people came into the room. Clare sucked in a breath, fearing one was Helen.

Instead, it was Jane and the other woman from the hallway. They moved across the room and sat on the very settee that Clare and Rosie were hiding behind.

“Katherine, I had no idea you were so upset.” Jane’s voice was calm and soothing.

Katherine sounded exasperated. “I feel it’s impossible. They have so many needs.”

“Yes,” Jane said slowly. “We can’t solve all the problems here in the Ward. We can only help as best we can. Most problems that can be solved, the people themselves will solve on their own. As Florence Kelley says, they have the yeast within them to rise—we only provide the favorable atmosphere.”

“But what can I do? They don’t listen to me. They don’t accept my advice. Some days I feel so exhausted.”

“They need support. They need us working beside them, believing in them. Please stay, Katherine. I’m sure you will find your own way to help.”

“It’s just overwhelming.” Katherine’s voice tensed. “The filth. The disease. The ignorance. And the children... in the factories, not the schools. How can their parents send them to work?”

“It is hard not to grow discouraged by the conditions that keep these people so poor,” Jane agreed. “We must keep trying to change what we can—especially by changing the minds of those responsible, the ruthless bosses and greedy politicians who exploit the

poor. We must persevere with them, convince them. Eventually things will change... at least a little... perhaps enough.” Jane paused. Clare heard the other woman let out a long breath. “So Katherine, won’t you stay on and help me with this impossible task? I need you.”

There was silence and then Katherine stood up. “Of course. I mustn’t get discouraged.”

Jane walked her to the door. There was a smile in her voice. “Oh, one can’t help but get discouraged, morning, noon, and night. What we must do is talk ourselves out of our disappointments... daily. I would have given up long ago if I didn’t believe, like my father taught me, that there is good in everyone, even the greediest, waiting to come out if only given the opportunity.”

The door opened and then shut. Footsteps walked away. Rosie peeked around the couch. “Are they gone?” she whispered.

But Jane hadn’t left. “Hello?” she said.

And the next moment, when Clare looked up, she saw those gentle, blue-grey eyes looking down at her.

## Chapter 7

“I am so sorry, Miss. I didn’t mean to...” Clare stopped. Her lip quivered.

“So you are hiding, I see,” Jane said calmly. “Come out and tell me why.”

Before Clare could fashion an explanation, Rosie blurted out. “We was hiding from the lady, Ma’am.”

“You mean Katherine?”

“No, Ma’am. I mean the lady with no business looking for Clare.”

Jane smiled. “I see.” She patted the settee. “Clare, come and tell me.”

Clare’s lip trembled. She stood up and moved to the front of the settee, standing awkwardly beside it. She wanted to tell Jane everything. How her mother was gone. How the letter in the trunk frightened her. How the secrets in the taffy tin bothered her, too, especially the picture of the scar-faced man. Instead she slumped on the settee and let the tears spill down her cheeks. “Auntie Dearie always said to watch out for the bad men,” she sobbed. “That lady Helen is not a bad man, but she scares me. Please, Miss Addams, I need to ask you... don’t tell her where I live.”

Jane looked at her with concern. “She seems a pleasant lady, though I don’t know her at all. She’s just visiting... another very wealthy tourist wandering in and wandering out as if we were some kind of curiosity show.” Jane sighed and smiled faintly. “It happens all the time. What about her scares you?”

“I don’t mean to say she’s bad, I really don’t. I heard all that you said about the good in everyone. I don’t mean to be accusing her of anything. But Auntie Dearie said if a bad man was watching you, you would feel it in your stomach and want to run away.” Clare looked Jane in the eye. “She makes me want to run away from her.”

Jane nodded as Clare collapsed against the settee in limp confusion.

Rosie spoke up loudly. “I don’t like that lady either. She’s what my Da would call a Lady Muck and a nosy-no-good, too.”

Jane looked from Rosie to Clare. “She said you forgot something. Did you?”

“No, Miss Addams. All we came with were our dolls.”

“I see. Well, I will speak to her about this, but I won’t give away any secrets, I promise.” Jane patted Clare’s hand to comfort her. “Now did you girls enjoy the party?”

“Oh, yes.” Rosie said. “Cake’s so much better than crusts of bread.” She raised up her doll. “Brigit was fierce hungry, but...” Rosie stopped. “She wishes there was a second piece.”

Jane blinked. She studied Rosie thoughtfully. “I tell you what. Let’s sneak down to the kitchen and pack a box of extra cake and a little bit of supper. Doesn’t that sound good?”

She led them to the door, opened it quietly and stared down the hall, then stepped out and waved the girls over to follow her. They slipped down the stair and through the lower hall into a large kitchen that bustled with activity. There were a dozen young girls—poor ones just like Clare—gathered around a work table, stirring mixes. A pretty young woman was giving them directions, as if it were a lesson, while an older woman hustled past her, paying little attention to anything but the hunk of cold roast she carried. Clare’s mouth watered as she smelled it. She hadn’t had meat in over three weeks.

“Mary,” Jane called. “Could you slice me some of that roast, please?” Jane hurried to the pantry and cut a large slab of cake from a whole one on the shelf. She wrapped it in a linen napkin and packed it into a little basket, along with two hunks of cheese and the roast beef wrapped in a second napkin. “There, that should make a nice supper for you.” Jane nodded, grabbing four eggs and slipping them in beside the cheese. “And take these for tomorrow’s breakfast.”

Rosie grinned. “My Da is coming home tomorrow.”

“Has he been working away somewhere?”

Rosie shook her head. “He’s in hospital with a busted leg.”

Jane looked at Clare in alarm.

Clare explained, “A machine toppled at the reaper factory.”

“Oh, dear.” Jane frowned at Rosie. “Is he getting any damages?”

Rosie shrugged, not sure what she meant.

Jane patted her shoulder. “Perhaps I’ll stop by to check on him.”

Rosie beamed, proud to have the promise of a visit.

“Will your mother be back tonight, or is she staying at the hospital with your father?”

“No, Ma’am,” Rosie said sadly. “She’s not staying anywheres.”

Jane looked to Clare for an explanation.

“Her mother died in the factory fire last May. She just has her brother, Tim, looking out for her, but he is working day and night, now, for the rent.” Clare gave Jane an urgent look. “Tim is eleven, Miss Addams.”

Jane nodded and knelt down by Rosie. “Don’t worry. I’ll come by soon. I may be able to help.”

Rosie gave her a big grin. “You’re grand, you are. You’re the nicest lady I ever met.”

Jane hugged Rosie gently and guided them to the back door. “If you cut across the yard and head around the back of those buildings you should be able to slip away without notice.”

Clare bobbed her head gratefully toward the food basket. “Thank you, Miss Addams. Thank you so much.” Calmly, she stepped out the door, buoyed by the kindness in Jane’s eyes.

Beyond the comfort of the busy kitchen, however, Clare’s anxiety returned. She began to run. Rosie rushed to keep up.

“Mercy. I don’t see the lady. Stop your running,” Rosie pleaded.

Finally, Clare did stop at the corner of a brick saloon. She peered around it down the street, scanning the crowd for a sign of Helen or anyone else that disturbed her. No one looked particularly threatening, so Clare took Rosie’s hand and walked briskly up several long blocks. She turned right, crossed a street, and headed up an alley. It wasn’t theirs.

“Where we going?” Rosie frowned. The alley smelled of the dingy stable in the

middle of it.

“I have to see the sweater. I’ve got to let him know we’ve finished the work so he will pay.” She stopped in front of a tall, brick tenement with a grimy door. Handing Rosie both the basket and Simmie, she motioned for her to hide behind the rancid garbage box. “I’ll be right out. Don’t be scared.”

But Clare, herself, was scared as she stepped through the tenement door and headed down the rickety basement stairs. She had never been to the sweater’s shop alone. She approached the door with caution and listened to loud voices arguing beyond it.

“Just give me the list, Jones,” a gruff man demanded. “Or I will close you down.” Clare guessed it was the [state inspector](#). She had seen him arguing with the sweater once before.

“You’ve got the list,” the sweater argued.

“I know it changes by the week. Who’s been added?”

“There’s only a few.” Jones paused. “There’s Maria Roselli and Rosa Mancinni and Nora McCarthy... oh, and Ruth Rontowsky.”

“I need addresses,” the inspector huffed. “Write them down. Any minors?”

“No. Never.”

“I’ll be checking them all... this very night... for a sniff of disease.”

Clare shivered. Was her mother’s name on that list? Would the inspector be knocking on her door? Clare vowed not to answer it.

Just then, the door burst open, and the inspector barged out. He stopped and stared at Clare. “Who are you?”

The sweater rushed from inside. He was a little man with a red beard and a limp. “Oh, she’s my niece. How are you little Nancy? I’ve got the ointment for your mother. Is she feeling better?”

Clare looked up at Mr. Jones. She could not stand the thought of being his niece. He was always so cross to everyone. “Yes. Much better,” she mumbled.

“Niece, huh?” the inspector grumbled and marched up the stairs.

Jones frowned and stepped back into his sweatshop, which consisted of one dim room with a large table piled with clothes, two treadle sewing machines, and a filthy mattress. “You’re late,” he snapped. “I needed your work yesterday.”

“My mother’s been ill,” Clare murmured. “I can’t carry it all myself. I need some help.”

The sweater glared at Clare. “I’ll come by tomorrow. I haven’t time today. Tell your mother, I’ll pay two-fifty, nothing more.”

“For all that?” Clare cried. “But you said three-fifty!”

“The rates are going down.” Mr. Jones wiped his nose with his dirty sleeve. “And like I said, I needed it yesterday.”

Clare knew he was lying. If he needed the work yesterday, why was he waiting till tomorrow to pick it up? Still, there was little she could do until her mother came back. She turned and slipped out the door, then rushed up the stairs to find Rosie shivering in the shadows. It was beginning to get late. Clare took Simmie and the basket. “Let’s hurry and have some supper.”

Clare led Rosie down the alley in the opposite direction from where they had come, but as she stepped onto the main street, she caught sight of a shadow from the corner of her eye. Panicked, she turned and headed in the wrong direction.

Rosie planted her feet. “Where are we going?”

Clare came close. “Shh! Someone’s following us. Walk calm and whisper.”

It didn’t take long to figure out who was following them. It was the state inspector from the sweater’s shop. Clare wasn’t quite sure what to do. She was relieved that it wasn’t Helen, from the doll party, but she was also worried that she might get into trouble with the inspector for helping with the stitching. Though children often worked on piecework, the inspector had made it sound like it was against the law. She didn’t want the inspector to know where she lived.

Clare and Rosie wandered around the blocks till the sun set. They crossed a bridge and later some railroad tracks, passing shops, factories, stables, and saloons. One of



the factories smelled of caramel. Rosie looked at it with excitement. “That’s Tim’s sweetworks, don’t you think?”

Clare nodded. She looked up at the factory. It was many stories high. The windows were covered in grit. She shuddered. She was glad she wasn’t working on the candy line after all. It looked a dreary place.

Finally, a block down the street, she saw a small frame cottage whose windows were dark. She started up its steps, hoping to pretend it was hers.

The inspector’s voice boomed behind them, “Stop. I need a word with you.”

Clare froze. Rosie looked scared. The man marched up behind them.

“How old are you?”

Clare turned. “Eleven.”

“Do you sew for Jones? Don’t lie. I overheard you talking to him.”

“My mother does. She’s just ill today.”

The inspector brought out his book.

“You live here?”

Clare nodded. The man wrote as he mumbled an address.

“What’s your mother’s name?”

Clare squirmed. She knew she should not give a real name, but when she tried to make up one, she went blank. She couldn’t think of anything. All at once, she thought of the letters from the taffy tin. She blurted out, “Deirdre Sullivan.”

The man nodded. He wrote it down. Then he pointed toward the door of the cottage. “I need to do an inspection. Can’t have no infection spreading through the clothing. What is ailing your mother. Is it smallpox?”

Clare stammered. “Ah... no. Just a cough. But you can’t come in. She’s not well today.”

“It won’t take but a minute.”

Clare whimpered. “Please, sir. She’s not good at all. Please.”

“Open the door,” the inspector demanded.

Clare reached for the knob. It wouldn't turn. She wilted as the inspector stepped up to knock loudly. Luckily, no one answered.

"What's going on here, Missie?" The inspector stared at her suspiciously.

It was then that Tim's voice called out. "Neila. You're Ma's been taken to County Hospital."

The inspector swirled around to find Tim on the steps behind him. Rosie rushed up to hug him, but Clare, thinking fast, gasped in horror. "No! Billy, when?" she cried.

Tim took her hand. "Just a mere hour ago. Neila, hurry! I am here to take you to her. She could be dying." He led them down the steps toward the street corner. "Don't look back," he whispered urgently.

Clare nodded. She wouldn't dare. "What are you doing here?"

"The factory is just aways back. I was off work early and saw you down the block, followed by the likes of him. I was worried."

"I was, too. He's the state inspector. I didn't want him to know where I lived."

"He won't follow." Tim assured her. "But he'll be back by morning. When he finds you not there...." Tim shrugged. "Perhaps he'll forget it, perhaps not."

Clare's stomach quaked as they turned the corner, leaving the inspector glaring after them. Tim was right. He had called her Neila, but that wasn't the name Mr. Jones had used. He had called her Nancy. When the inspector realized her name had changed, he would be back for sure.

## Chapter 8

They passed a man struggling to fix a broken street lamp in the dusk as they headed down a gas-lit, half-rotten, [cedar-block road](#) filled with wagons and buggies and people walking along its [plank sidewalk](#). Tim turned up a narrow street, deep with dirt and filled with dingy saloons. Clare felt completely lost in this part of the ward, which she had not been in before. She was grateful that Tim was there to help guide them back home. Rosie prattled on about the doll party and meeting Miss Addams. Clare explained about the basket of food and offered Tim some slices of beef and a hunk of cheese for his supper, wrapping it in one of the linen napkins.

Eventually, Tim stopped and turned to Clare. They were past all the saloons. Clare actually thought she recognized some shops up ahead.

“Just turn right, then you’ll know where you’re at. I must hurry,” he explained, after he pointed out the street they needed to take. “I’ve been lucky to nab a busy corner for selling papers, right across from the post office, but I mustn’t be late or someone will pinch it.”

Tim turned to leave, then stopped. He looked back at Clare, remembering something. “That name you gave to the inspector... Deirdre Sullivan. Do you know of her?”

Clare shook her head. “Why?”

“It’s fierce odd, it is. A man, this morning, stopped to buy a paper. He was asking everyone around if they knew of her.”

“Deirdre Sullivan?” Clare was puzzled too. “Did he ask you?”

Tim nodded. “Said I never heard of her. T’was true till you blurted out that name.”

“I wonder why he’s looking for her?”

“Can’t imagine.” Tim shrugged. “Anyway, I wouldn’t tell the likes of him. He was a cop, for sure.”

Clare stared at Tim. “How could you know? Was he in uniform?”

“No, but they’ve all got that look, they do, peering at you as if you did something you shouldn’t. And in this city, you don’t want the cops noticing anything.” Tim gave Rosie a light squeeze on the shoulder. “Be good. I’ll be home by ten. Thanks for supper.” He nodded to Clare and turned away.

Tim had barely disappeared around the corner before his story of the cop began to bother Clare. Someone was looking for Deirdre Sullivan. She realized her mother or her aunt had known a Deirdre Sullivan. Was there any connection? Could they be the same? Perhaps Deirdre Sullivan was a criminal. Perhaps she had done something wicked. Perhaps the police would track her through the inspector. Clare wished she had not used that name when the inspector asked for one. She imagined Tim’s mysterious cop pounding on her door, asking for Deirdre and instead finding her all alone. He would begin to ask questions. Why was she by herself? Where was her mother? Clare gripped Rosie’s hand and looked back through the shadows. She could only hope that the inspector would not be able to find out where she lived.

They walked briskly, but Rosie was shivering in the evening chill. To pass the time, Clare began to tell her a story, one Auntie Dearie had often told about a Deirdre from long, long ago.

“There once was a lady named Deirdre...”

“Deirdre Sullivan?” Rosie asked.

Clare smiled. “Perhaps... She was the most beautiful woman in ancient Ireland.”

“Really, Ireland?”

“Yes, and she was betrothed to the High King, but she loved the king’s nephew instead. So they ran away together to Scotland...”

“Where’s Scotland?”

“Across the sea from Ireland. And they lived there for many years, very happy and in love. But the king was angry, and tricked them into coming back by saying he had forgiven them when he hadn’t. Instead, he killed his nephew, and Deirdre was so sad that she threw herself from the king’s chariot and died.”

“What’s a chariot?”

“It’s like a buggy.”

“And then what happened?”

“They were buried right there, close to each other, and two yew trees grew up on the spot, their branches intertwined forever.”

“What’s a yew tree?”

“Auntie Dearie said it was a tree in Ireland. She used to live there when she was just a girl.”

“Beneath the yew trees?”

“No, but she said one day, when she was walking in the hills, she found two yew trees right together near a mound like a grave. And she swore that she had found Deirdre, and she felt so sad that she vowed to leave Ireland and never go back. And so she did.”

“And she never went back?”

“No, she never went back. She always said it never did the beautiful lady Deirdre any good to go back, so why should she? She believed Deirdre should have stayed away and stayed happy. She said...” Clare stopped. She pictured Auntie Dearie telling the story. She heard again her Auntie Dearie say: *Why should anyone go back? Look what happened to her, to Deirdre... It’s that name. It’s a curse, it is. The name’s a curse.*

A funny chill crept up Clare’s spine. Something about that name Deirdre wasn’t right. Something about hiding letters in a tin box wasn’t right either. Clare had a terrible feeling that she shouldn’t have opened that box. Now that she had, she felt cursed.

Rosie tugged on Clare’s hand. “There’s the alley.”

Clare looked up. It was indeed their alley. She looked around nervously, watching the faces of people in windows, in doorways, and sitting on steps. No one seemed to be watching her, so she rushed up the street and turned into the alley. It was empty except for Clancy who was sitting on his steps, looking forlorn.

“Where’s Tim?” he called out to Rosie.

“Working.”

“Where?”

“Selling papers.”

“I thought he was at the sweetworks?”

“He is. He’s doing both.”

“Both?”

Clare interceded. “Mr. O’Shea is in the hospital with a crushed leg.”

“Bedad. That’s rough.”

“But he’ll be home tomorrow,” Rosie said brightly.

Clancy looked at Clare. “Been rough all around. Rodney’s in the clink.”

Rosie’s mouth dropped open. “Mercy goodness. In jail?”

“I told him not to do it. Eejit. He tried to talk me into it, too. He took a shady job from a crook, pawning stolen loot. Dad’s trying to get him sprung, talking to the Ward Boss this minute.” Clancy looked worried. “Dad says [Powers](#) will spring anyone, but then you owe him in the next election. Dad hates Powers, but Rodney’s Ma is hysterical. Dad promised her he’d do it.”

“Where’s Rodney’s father?” Clare asked. “Shouldn’t he do it?”

Clancy snorted. “Bleedin’ disappeared again.”

“You’re Dad’s a good man,” Clare offered to cheer him. “He didn’t have to help, but he did.”

Clancy smiled at her. Then he nodded toward her door. “A man was knocking there just a minute ago.”

Clare felt suddenly faint. “What’d he say?” she asked, her voice quavering.

“Said he’d stop back in a bit.”

Clare panicked. She looked behind her wildly, imagining it was the inspector or the cop.

“A little guy with a limp,” Clancy added.

“A limp?” Clare relaxed. “And a red beard?”

“Yeah, mean little man.”

“That’s the sweater. He came for his goods.”

“He was toting a new bundle for you.”

“Really?” Clare frowned, remembering how little he was paying. She didn’t think her mother would want to do any more work for him at such a poor rate.

“Hey, is your Ma sick? Never see her.”

Clare winced. She was glad it was dark in the alley so he couldn’t see her lie. “She’s been working... a temporary at an office way downtown. She gets home late.”

Clancy nodded and got up to go inside. “Well, if you need a hand, just knock.”

Clare smiled to herself as she watched him disappear into his house. Even though she was alone, and worried about her mother, there seemed to be lots of people that would help her if she needed. Miss Addams, of course, was a real angel filled with kindness, but the people in the alley were kind too. Rosie and Tim were the best, and Clancy seemed very nice, despite what Auntie Dearie had said. Rodney had proved to be a ruffian, but maybe Clancy could steer him straight. And if the bad men did come, she wouldn’t hesitate to crawl out the back window and head straight to Clancy’s father. She had no doubt he would protect her if she needed him to. Why had her mother been so strict about not mixing with the alley families? They were good people who worked hard and cared about each other.

Stepping inside her little house, Clare felt more comfortable than she ever had. She had Rosie light the lamp as she bundled up the sweatwork for Mr. Jones. Then they sat down for a grand supper of beef and cheese and cake. They gobbled the cheese and the beef, but just as they were about to enjoy the cake, there was a knock at the door.



## *Part 3: Old Secrets*



## Chapter 9

“It’s Jones. Open up. I’m in a hurry.”

Clare rushed to the window to check. It was the little man carrying a large bundle. More important, he was alone. Clare opened the door. Mr. Jones pushed in.

“I’ve got a rush job for you. Where’s your mother?”

Clare pursed her lips, studying the bundle. It looked like cotton dresses made of a brown and gold plaid.

“It’s just buttons and hems. Finish work, but I need them first thing in the morning.”

“My mother’s not interested,” Clare said coldly. “She’s not happy with the lower rate. She’s taken other work.”

Mr. Jones frowned. “What lower rate?”

“You said two-fifty instead of three-fifty.” Clare’s cheeks felt hot. “My mother never agreed to two-fifty. She doesn’t like to work for someone who doesn’t keep his word.”

“Two-fifty? I must have been mistaken. Did I say two-fifty?” He dropped the bundle on the chair and stuck his hand in his pocket. Pulling out a coin purse, he counted out three dollars and fifty cents and set it on the table. “I’m a man of my word. Here... three-fifty. Now can you have this done by the crack of dawn?”

“My mother’s not home yet.”

Jones looked down at her. “It’s just buttons and hems... little girl dresses at that. I’m sure she can find someone to help her, now can’t she?”

Clare planted her feet firmly. “How much?”

Jones eyed the bundle. “Fifty cents. It’s only twenty pieces.”

“It’s a rush job, Mr. Jones. One dollar.”

Jones frowned. “Seventy-five.”

“Eighty cents.” Clare stood firm.

Jones nodded grudgingly.

“Your word?”

Mr. Jones picked up the finished bundles. “My word.” As he marched out, though, he slammed the door.

“Goodness.” Rosie said. “You’re tough.”

But Clare could only collapse in the chair. “Why’d I do that? I’ll be up all night sewing.”

“I’ll help,” Rosie assured her.

Clare nodded happily. “Yes, we’ll split the work and split the pay.” She went to the table and picked up a quarter. She handed it to Rosie. “And here’s your share from this morning, for the buttons.”

Rosie stared at the quarter. “Really? For me?” She danced around the room happily, tossing the quarter up with a little twirl and then catching it again. “Brigit, Brigit. We’re rich!”

They finished the cake and cleared the table. Clare sorted the work, while Rosie threaded her needle. “Can I do hems this time?”

Clare smiled. “Next time, Rosie. Tonight will be a rush. Do you mind the buttons?”

Rosie smiled. “Buttons are fine, but I was thinking, if I learn hems as well, then I can help with the rent.”

“That’s a great idea. Tim will be pleased.” Clare held a dress up, eyeing the sloppy stitching on the seams. “This really is a rush job. They are a mess.” She shrugged. “That’s the sweater’s problem, not ours.”

It was almost eleven when Rosie finished all the buttons on the twenty plaid dresses. Clare still had three to hem when Tim knocked on the door. Rosie rushed to open it. She planted her quarter in Tim’s palm.

Rosie beamed. “I’m a working girl. ‘Tis true.”

Tim looked at Clare.

“She’s mastered the button,” Clare explained. “We worked all morning, and now most of the night. There will be more for her tomorrow when the sweater comes to call.”

“It’s a rush job,” Rosie explained. “That means a good rate.”

Clare nodded at Tim. “She’s got it all figured, you see. Pretty soon she’ll be setting up her own shop.”

Tim smiled. Clare could see he was weary.

“Let her sleep here again till your father gets back.” She reached into the basket and handed him the last bit of cake. “For breakfast,” she said.

As Clare finished the hems, Rosie curled up on the little cot and fell asleep. Clare listened to the girl’s soft breathing, feeling sleepy too. She forced her eyes to stay open as she took stitch after stitch, but her mind wanted to drift. She thought of her mother, wondering where she was. Would it be yet another day without her? She thought of Miss Addams and her kindness, and then remembered the conversation she had overheard. What Miss Addams had said to Katherine—there was good in everyone—was that true? There was good in Clancy’s father but was there any good in Mr. Jones? He was dirty and mean and tried to cheat people. Could you really find some good in him? Miss Addams believed you could, but Clare wasn’t sure a little girl like herself was the one to do it. At least she had stood up to Mr. Jones and gotten her pay.

But what of the lady from Boston? Mr. Jones made her anxious and mad, but Mr. Jones wasn’t powerful, just a scoundrel. It was Helen who really frightened her. Helen was rich, and rich people were powerful. They ran everything, at least in Chicago. They could bribe the police. They could make the laws. Clare knew whatever Helen said she would be believed much more readily than a poor girl in a rear alley house.

Clare blinked her eyes. They were hurting now from straining over the stitches, and the plaid pattern seemed to dance before her. She stopped and pulled the lamp closer, adjusting the wick till it was at its brightest. The kerosene was running low, and she soon would have to fill it, but she hoped she would have enough to last until the hems were done. Filling the lamp would take time, and all she wanted was to hurry to finish so she could close her eyes and sleep. Just thinking of sleep, though, made her eyes feel so heavy. She felt herself nod a moment, then jolted herself awake.

Clare looked down at the cotton dress she was stitching. It was not a rich girl's dress, not with such sloppy seams and roughly woven cotton, but she remembered some materials she had hemmed months ago that were truly fine: thick, soft wool; shimmering silk; and her favorite, a plush velvet. What would it be like, she wondered, not to wear a poor girl's clothes? What would it be like to read books all day and eat caramels and chocolates? What would it be like to not work so hard your eyes hurt? She blinked back tears, wishing with all her heart that she hadn't been born poor. She imagined herself a rich girl in a velvet dress dyed a deep emerald green. She could go to school, shop in fancy stores, and buy her friends a dozen presents. And most of all, her mother could stay home with her and never need to go away for days and days. If she had been rich, living in a fine, warm house far from the coal smoke and the cold, trash-strewn streets of Chicago, Auntie Dearie might still be with them, healthy and happy. Yes, if only she could be rich, life would be better than this.

It was then that Clare dropped her needle as she began to nod again. Suddenly she was skipping down a hallway filled with statues and fancy vases. Then she heard a voice echoing from behind her, "Simone! Simone!" The voice grew fainter and fainter as she skipped. The corridor became darker. It twisted and turned. She skipped around a corner and ran right into a big vase. It rocked wildly one way and then another till it fell over with a loud, shatter of glass.

Clare shuddered awake. She looked around, certain that something had fallen in the room. Nothing was broken. She shrugged, picked up her needle, and began to sew again, but the dream nagged at her—that name, Simone, had been the one engraved in the locket. She thought back to the doll party this afternoon. Helen had known that name, too, and had also known that her doll, Simmie, was French. Had Helen known the rich little girl her mother had been a servant to? Had her mother ever met Helen? Clare thought back to the letter in her trunk that her mother had left for her. It was only the 9th of September, three days before the 12th, but Clare had an urgent feeling she should open it now. She steeled herself to finish the last hem before the kerosene was completely consumed,

stitching briskly, solid in her decision. When she was finally done, she took the lamp and headed to the bedroom. Standing over her trunk, she lifted the lid, reaching for the letter. She had to know the secret. She had to read it.

Breathlessly she broke the wax seal and opened the envelope. Inside was six dollars, but only a quick note:

*Clare,*

*If I am delayed this time, which is likely, please use this money for the rent. I hope the pay from Mr. Jones will cover all the rest of your needs.*

*You are my dearest,*

*Mother*

## Chapter 10

Wrapped in her mother's blankets, Clare huddled in bed, crying quietly in the darkness. It was a deep, uneven sort of crying, without any specific cause to focus upon. Perhaps the tears arose from the frustration of not learning her mother's secrets; perhaps they were weary tears—from the hours of eye-straining labor over the hems; perhaps they flowed up from her fears about Helen, the inspector, and that mysterious cop who was looking for Deirdre Sullivan. Clare only knew she had never felt so forlorn except when Auntie Dearie died.

Clare thought back to those horrible days. She remembered the relentless cough that rose from deep within her Auntie's chest, leaving her so exhausted. She remembered her Auntie's clammy, fevered face and the sleepless nights for her mother. She remembered the wagon that had come that day to collect Auntie's body. The old man driving it was toothless, and the sway-backed horse had a sluggish gait. The man loaded the sheet-draped body onto the rickety wagon bed as if her dear Auntie was merely a lumpy sack. After that terrible day, Clare had cried every night for a month, refusing to sleep in Auntie's bed, but no amount of crying could make the pain of Auntie's absence go away.

Someone outside kicked an empty can down the alley, coughing loudly. A dark, disturbing feeling settled over Clare, and the coolness of the tear-dampened pillow made her tremble. She should have listened to her mother. She should have stayed at home. She should have never gone to the doll party. She thought of the curse that Auntie had spoken of, the one on the name of Deirdre. She had disobeyed her mother and had awoken the curse. She had to fix it, but what could she do? Her only clue was the taffy tin and its letters. Perhaps they held the answer. Clare nodded, realizing that the key to understanding the secrets surrounding her life—the secret of Simone, Helen, and Deirdre Sullivan—was in those letters, but she feared they would only deepen this feeling of being hexed.

Thinking of the letter she had already opened, Clare remembered the picture of the

scar-faced man from the newspaper article. Donald Killeen suddenly loomed large in her mind as the bearer of something dreadful and threatening. He was desperate, the note had said—desperate for money perhaps. But what would Deirdre Sullivan have to do with that money? Is that why the police were looking for her? Had she stolen it?

Clare tossed and turned as she tried to sleep, fitful from all the questions that had no answers. She knew, in the morning, she would have to read the letters because—whether she was cursed by an ancient legend, or just caught up in a strange misunderstanding—there was nothing to do but learn the reason for it. For now, though, she spent the dark hours imagining the crimes of Deirdre Sullivan and the evil plans of the scar-faced man. Eventually, these restless thoughts turned into restless dreams filled with frightening faces and crashing vases and letters whispering from beneath the floor. In one dream, Mr. Nibbly, the mouse, turned into a giant taffy-chewing monster who brought her photo after photo from the little tin, but he had chewed a huge hole through every one of them so it was impossible to see the faces of the people in them. Soon the photos became pages from the letters which had so many words nibbled away that they were impossible to read. And then just as she was about to pick up the little silver locket from the bottom of the tin box, someone in her dream reached out and stopped her hand. “Don’t think of her,” a hushed voice said. “Don’t think of that little girl again.”

Rosie shook her awake. “I woke early, but your Ma was already gone. She’s like a ghost, she is.”

Clare smiled at Rosie. “She has to work long hours, but guess what? We have eggs for breakfast.”

Rosie’s eyes danced. “And guess what? I left a crumb of cake by the loose board for Mr. Nibbly this morning.”

“And it’s gone?”

Rosie nodded and clapped. “I lifted the board just a bit and I waited, calling him ever so softly. It took a donkey’s year for him to come, but then I heard a skitter, skitter over the little tin box and I saw him. In a flash, the crumb was gone.”

Clare washed her face and went to the kitchen to make their breakfast. As she was beating their eggs, Mr. Jones knocked on the door. "I need my dresses."

Rosie opened the door and grinned. "All done. That's eighty cents."

Clare peeked around the corner of the kitchen as Mr. Jones stormed inside. He studied the dresses. "Sixty cents, that's what we agreed."

Rosie glared at the grimy sweater. "You hooligan." She grabbed a few dresses. "Eighty cents or you don't get these."

Mr. Jones put some coins on the table. "There."

Rosie frowned. "That's seventy-five."

Jones tugged on the dresses. "That's plenty."

Rosie stood firm. "I'm telling the inspector."

The sweater stopped tugging. "What inspector?"

"The one that doesn't want you working children young as us."

"Here," Jones grumbled. He tossed the last nickel on the table as Rosie let go. She raced to gather up the change as the man gathered up the dresses.

"Thank you, Mr. Jones," Clare called as the sweater stormed out the door.

Rosie rushed after him and slammed the door shut. She turned to Clare, beaming. "I showed him, didn't I?"

Clare nodded proudly. "Like I told your brother. You're a natural. Someday, you'll be the boss of thousands."

They had a great breakfast of scrambled eggs, and then Clare showed Rosie how to thread the sewing machine and push the treadle with her foot. It was too hard for Rosie to work it alone. She couldn't reach the pedal. Clare could barely manage it herself. It took all her strength and the effort made it difficult to concentrate on the scrap of fabric she was stitching.

"I don't know how my mother does this all day long."

Rosie frowned. "But how can I open my shop if I can't work the machine?"

"Don't worry," Clare assured her. "You will grow. And besides, Auntie Dearie said



they'll have power machines someday, run on steam or electricity. But till then, let me show you how to stitch a good hem."

It was almost noon when Mr. O'Shea came home in the back of a delivery wagon. Two men lifted him off the wagon bed and with the help of crutches he managed to get across the alley to his steps. Rosie was clapping and dancing, jumping up and down so hard all her change from the sweatwork jingled out of her pocket.

Mr. O'Shea sat to rest on the steps. "Rosie," he frowned. "Where those coins be coming from?"

"I'm a working girl, Da. I've been learning to stitch. I'm going to open a shop someday."

Mr. O'Shea looked at Clare sternly.

"She's been staying with us, and I've been teaching her buttons and hems. She's very good. She helped us with a job yesterday, and we split our pay with her."

Mr. O'Shea's expression changed. He looked at Rosie with approval. "Truly?"

Rosie rushed up to hug him. "Truly, Da. I'm good."

Clare smiled. "She's bright as a button, Mr. O'Shea. That sweater didn't have a moment's chance to cheat us. She stood right up to him. You'd been proud of her."

"Well, many thanks for your good care of her." The man shifted his weight forward, trying to stand up. A painful wince flashed across his face. "Come, Rosie. I think I need a bit of a rest."

Rosie helped her father struggle up the steps. She turned and waved at Clare before she closed the door with a happy slam. Clare was surprised at how unsettling it was to see that door shut. All at once, she was alone again.

Inside her house, Clare stared at the cot where Rosie had slept. She hoped her new friend would still come for visits. She picked up the coins on the table and took them to the money drawer in the kitchen, adding her share of the night's work to yesterday's pay and the rent money. Taking a last crust of bread, by now hard as a brick, she went to lift the loose floor board in the corner of the front room. She broke up the crust, setting one

large crumb on the floor by the raised board. “Here, Mr. Nibbly,” she called softly. “Time to eat.”

As she continued to call for the mouse, she made a circle of crumbs on the floor around the board. Then she picked up Simmie and curled up in a chair to wait. Simmie stared at the board with her bright, glass eyes, looking as if she were about to speak.

“Hush, don’t say a word,” Clare told her doll. “We must be patient.”

But they didn’t have to wait long. It was only minutes till the little mouse jumped through the opening in the floor and began to nibble crumb after crumb. Clare watched in fascination as the little creature moved around, his whiskers twitching. Mr. Nibbly didn’t hurry. He took his time with his meal, and once he stopped and looked square up at Clare, raising up on his hind paws to give the air a little sniff.

“Hello, Mr. Nibbly,” Clare whispered.

The mouse sniffed again and then went on with his meal till the circle of crumbs was finished. At last, with one flash of a leap, he disappeared into the hole in the floor.

Clare scrambled down and peered beneath the open floorboard, hoping to catch one last glimpse of him. To her surprise, the mouse was sitting on the taffy tin, calmly cleaning his whiskers. He looked up at Clare in the most expectant way.

“All gone,” Clare whispered sadly.

As if he understood, the mouse scampered away, leaving Clare staring at the taffy tin.

Clare gave a deep sigh. She reached for the tin. It was time to read the letters.

## Chapter 11

Clare decided to read the letters in order, starting with the earliest. The first was from Ireland, in 1854, telling Deirdre of the death of her parents in a terrible flood. The letter was from Deirdre's sister, asking her to come home. The sister also wrote the second letter, in 1855, asking for Deirdre to come back for her wedding. The letter was signed with a postscript: *It's been too long. At least send a letter.* Clare guessed that Deirdre had not gone home after the first letter. Perhaps she didn't return home for the wedding either. Clare thought of Auntie Dearie never going back to Ireland. Was that why her and Deirdre were such good friends—they shared a vow to never go home again? For a moment, Clare wondered if they were related, perhaps cousins. But Auntie's name had been D'Arcy like hers, Derry D'Arcy. That's what everyone called her except Clare. Clare called her Auntie Dearie because, her mother said, when she was young, Derry sounded like Dearie to her toddler ears.

The next letter was from a soldier—she guessed the one in the picture. There were, in fact, several letters from him during the years of 1861 to 1863. He was Deirdre's husband, Jerry Sullivan, who had gone off to fight for the South in the Civil War. The letters were love letters, and Clare blushed to read them. The soldier found a hundred ways to tell his wife how much he missed her and how often he thought of her, reminding her of happy moments in their lives, even recounting fond memories of back in Ireland where they had met. There was so little talk of the war that Clare had begun to believe Jerry was far from the battles, but then she came upon a letter from early 1864 with a medal in it. The letter that accompanied the medal was from a Captain Richard Harper, telling of Jerry's bravery in battle and his heroic death. Clare had to pause right then, setting down the batch of letters. Whoever Deirdre Sullivan was, she knew that this news had been devastating to her.

Clare wiped a tear from her eye and reached for the tin, studying the little locket

inside, the one engraved to Simone. That's when she noticed something funny about the tin. At its bottom was a cardboard liner, one that made the inside of the taffy tin so much shallower than the metal box actually was. Clare shook the tin gently. She heard the delicate rustle of the locket chain but also something else, something larger. Clare pulled out the locket and set it on the table, then shook the tin more forcefully. Something clunked beneath the cardboard. It was heavy and it sounded metallic.

Clare ran to the kitchen to get a knife. Soon she was prying up the cardboard, gently so as not to leave a mark. In a moment, she had the cardboard removed, and there in the bottom of the tin lay a key with a tag attached to it. The tag read: *Box 133, Boulet*. On the back was an address: *200 East Redwood, Baltimore*.

Clare had no idea what the tag could mean. Was the key for a house? No, the tag had given a box number. What kind of boxes were numbered besides postal ones? Clare picked up the letters again, hoping for a clue. She read the rest of the letters urgently, searching for an explanation. None of the letters mentioned the key, or Baltimore, but they did mention the name Boulet.

According to the letters, Deirdre went to work for Captain Harper after her husband's death. She took care of the Harper's youngest child, Caroline, while his wife ran the family grocery and produce business. Caroline's oldest brother, Josiah, had gone off to war, leaving no one to help tend the store. How long Deirdre watched over Caroline as she grew, Clare could not tell, but Deirdre certainly stayed in close contact with the girl for there were letters from an older Caroline—off to boarding school in 1876, and finally, in 1880, an invitation to her wedding. Clare stared at the name of the groom, *Henri Boulet*. She picked up the key again and read the name on its tag. *Boulet*. They matched.

Clare picked up the last letter, opening it expectantly. This letter had to explain things, had to help her make sense of Deirdre and reveal why Auntie Dearie or her mother had kept Deirdre's private treasures. The letter, dated 1885, began:

*My Dearest Nanny Dee,*

*As you helped my mother with me, when she needed*

*you so desperately, I am asking with such fondness and devotion, that you come here to Boston...*

Clare stopped and checked the return address on the envelope: *Caroline Boulet, 140 Meeker Street, Boston, Massachusetts*. Her heart skipped faster as she read on:

*...to help me with my brand new baby girl. The other servants work hard enough, but they just can't replace you. I need you here to help with my daughter, Simone.*

Clare blinked. Finally, this was the connection she had searched for, one between the big Boston house and the rich little girl, Simone. Her mother and Auntie Dearie had probably worked with Deirdre Sullivan in the same house for the same people, Henri and Caroline Boulet. Clare sat back, staring at the key in the taffy tin. It was to a box that belonged to the Boulets. Is that why the police were looking for Deirdre? Had she stolen something from the rich family? After reading Deirdre's letters, though, it was hard to believe. People had cared about Deirdre. She didn't seem the type to be a criminal. Clare guessed her mother and Auntie Dearie had felt the same. That must be why they had kept her most precious things.

Clare began to read the rest of the letter, but a knock on the door interrupted her. Hurriedly, she tossed the letters and photos into the box and as quietly as possible slipped it back below the floor, lowering the board. Before she could tiptoe to the window to see who was outside, a letter slipped under her front door. Clare rushed to pick it up. She saw it was addressed to her and it was from Jane Addams. Guessing she had come to help Rosie's father and had stopped to visit her as well, Clare reached for the doorknob.

"Miss Addams!" Clare cried out as she yanked open the door.

A woman was descending the steps, her back to Clare. She turned, startled. It was Katherine, the young woman from Hull House. "Oh," Katherine said. "It's you." She looked down at the letter in Clare's hand. "I didn't know your name was Clare."

It was an awkward moment for the two of them—Clare studying Katherine; Katherine studying Clare. Clare sensed Katherine was suspicious of her, though she didn't

know why. She couldn't think of what to say.

Finally, Katherine spoke. "Is your mother home?"

"She's at work."

Katherine looked past Clare into the room as if she did not believe her. "Do you stay by yourself all the time?"

Clare shook her head. "My Auntie is out shopping."

Katherine strode back up the steps. She nodded toward the sewing machine. "Does your Auntie do sweatwork?"

"Not lately," Clare replied. She wasn't sure why she was lying so wildly to this woman. She worried it would get back to Miss Addams, and Jane would think less of her. Deciding to change the subject, Clare asked. "Have you been to see Rosie and Mr. O'Shea?"

Katherine nodded. "Yes... a difficult situation, but I think we can help. At least I'll try."

"Miss Addams was supposed to come..." Clare trailed off. Speaking of Jane, was that a mistake?

"She's ill today. Just a stomach problem."

"Oh, I hope she'll mend soon. She's such a wonderful lady."

Katherine nodded absently. She was staring past Clare at Simmie, sitting in a chair beside the table. "Miss Addams sent the note to you when she couldn't come herself." She pointed to the doll. "Can I look at her? I love European dolls."

Clare desperately wanted to get rid of the lady, but she didn't know how. "Yes, I'll get her," she said, intending to bring Simmie outside so the woman could have a look. However, when Clare turned to get Simmie, Katherine followed her inside.

## Chapter 12

Once inside, Katherine seemed more interested in the room than the doll. Clare watched the woman study the sparse furnishings: the rough, unfinished table, the kerosene lamp with a cracked glass chimney, the plain chairs with their stiff wooden backs, the frayed sewing basket on the floor. Hers was a gaze that was not accepting or respectful.

Clare frowned. She reached forward with Simmie. “You wanted a look?”

Katherine took Simmie. It was then that Clare understood what was wrong. Katherine handled the doll coldly, peering at the smudge on her face with a flicker of disgust. Katherine, Clare realized, was rich. The dolls she loved wore fancy clothes and had perfectly arranged hair. Katherine had grown up in huge rooms with fine furnishings, not small, cramped places like Clare’s. It was only when Katherine turned that gaze toward Clare, though, that Clare understood the deeper problem. Katherine’s look made Clare feel small as if she were less of a person just because she was poor. Clare wondered what Katherine was doing at Hull House trying to help people like her. Why had Miss Addams thought Katherine should stay?

Thinking of Jane Addams standing in the very same alley yesterday morning, Clare couldn’t help but compare the two women. Jane had looked at her with concern, but it wasn’t pity. In fact, Jane had found her interesting, while Katherine did not, and Clare decided Jane’s opinion of her was more important. She wouldn’t let Katherine’s disapproving manner affect her. If Miss Addams liked her, that was all that counted.

All at once, Clare relaxed. Katherine’s unpleasant gaze no longer mattered. Clare no longer felt small. It was as if this sudden understanding made them equals, even if Katherine couldn’t fathom it. Clare knew, just as she had handled Mr. Jones, yesterday, she could deal with Katherine. She spoke up with confidence. “Is there something more you needed, Miss?”

Katherine blinked, startled by the change in Clare’s tone. She cleared her throat,

“There is a lady asking about you.”

Clare nodded. “She has me confused with someone else.”

“She asked me to find out where you live. I had no idea I actually would. I didn’t even know your name. She claims your real name is Simone.”

Clare tried to remain as cool as possible. “Do you believe her?”

Katherine was hesitant. “I don’t know.”

“I don’t trust her,” Clare announced. “Whatever this woman, Helen, is thinking, it all seems very strange.”

“She says that you and your mother went missing from Boston years ago. She says that your father is her brother and he has been looking for you everywhere.”

Clare looked Katherine straight in the eye. “Well, that proves she is lying, or at least completely mixed-up. My father is dead. He died when I was very young.”

Katherine suddenly smiled. It was a smile of relief. “Oh, good,” she sighed, then caught herself, wincing with dismay. “I am sorry. It’s not good that your father died, but it is good that Miss Killeen is mistaken.” She turned to go, rattled by embarrassment. “I shouldn’t have bothered you.”

Katherine walked toward the door, which was lucky for Clare because her knees had suddenly gone weak and her face had turned pale. The name of the scar-faced man—the one from that news article in the taffy tin—was Donald Killeen. It was the same last name as Helen’s.

Katherine turned to say goodbye. “I won’t mention anything to Miss Killeen,” she assured Clare. Then she happened to glance down. “Oh, what is this?”

Her hand swept toward the pocket on Clare’s pinafore, capturing something dangling precariously toward the floor. It was the little heart-shaped locket from the taffy tin, its chain half-in, half-out of the pocket as if it had fallen there by accident. Clare realized it must have fallen off the table when she cleared up the letters in a hurry.

“It’s beautiful,” Katherine murmured. “Very precious.”

“‘Tis a family heirloom, passed down from me great-great-grandmother D’Arcy in



Ireland.” Clare was suddenly pouring on the accent, chattering wildly. “It must have fallen from the keepsake box as I was dusting it. Thank you kindly. I might have lost it.”

Clare reached for the locket, but Katherine held tight to it, struggling to open it. Before Clare could maneuver it away, Katherine found success. The little heart opened wide to reveal the tintype and inscription. Katherine read the words and then stared at Clare. “This could be your picture... yes, easily.”

Clare pulled the locket from the woman’s hand, ready with an explanation. “It isn’t me, Miss. But my mother was a servant for this little girl’s family back in Boston a long time ago. That’s the connection. Her name was Simone, but I don’t know why she disappeared, or if she really did. All I know is that Helen’s brother is a desperate man, so please don’t speak to Helen about me without consulting Miss Addams first.” Clare paused for effect, adding, “If you tell Helen where I live, you might be putting me in danger.”

Katherine jolted with alarm. After a moment, she nodded. “Alright. I won’t say anything. But I will have to tell Miss Addams about the locket.”

“Please do,” Clare agreed. “And tell her to come see me as soon as she’s better so I can explain all of this.”

Katherine nodded, but she didn’t smile or say a polite goodbye as she turned towards the alley. Clare watched her walk away, then shut the door grimly. Katherine was not convinced of her story, which meant only one thing—she had to talk to Miss Addams before Katherine did and she had to act quickly.

First, though, Clare opened the note from Miss Addams. It was only a simple apology and explanation of why she couldn’t come, so Clare set it on the table with the locket. Next she went to the money drawer and pulled out enough for the week’s rent. Rushing down the alley and around the corner, she found old Mrs. Harris, smoking a pipe and rocking on her porch. Clare handed her the money.

“We’ll be gone for a day or so, and we wanted to get the rent to you on time,” Clare explained.

The old woman counted it methodically. She nodded at Clare. “Wish all my tenants were so trusty.” Then she closed her eyes and started rocking again.

Clare waited a moment. The old woman did not notice her, but Clare had paid the rent before so she knew the landlady could not be trusted to remember anything.

“I need a receipt.”

The woman grunted. She pulled a receipt book from her pocket and scribbled on it. Tearing out the page, she handed it to Clare silently and went back to her rocking.

“Thank you,” said Clare politely as she studied the receipt to make sure of the date. It was correct so she turned away.

Clare hurried back up the alley, stopping to knock softly on Rosie’s door. Rosie opened it. “Shh. Da’s asleep.”

“Is he okay?”

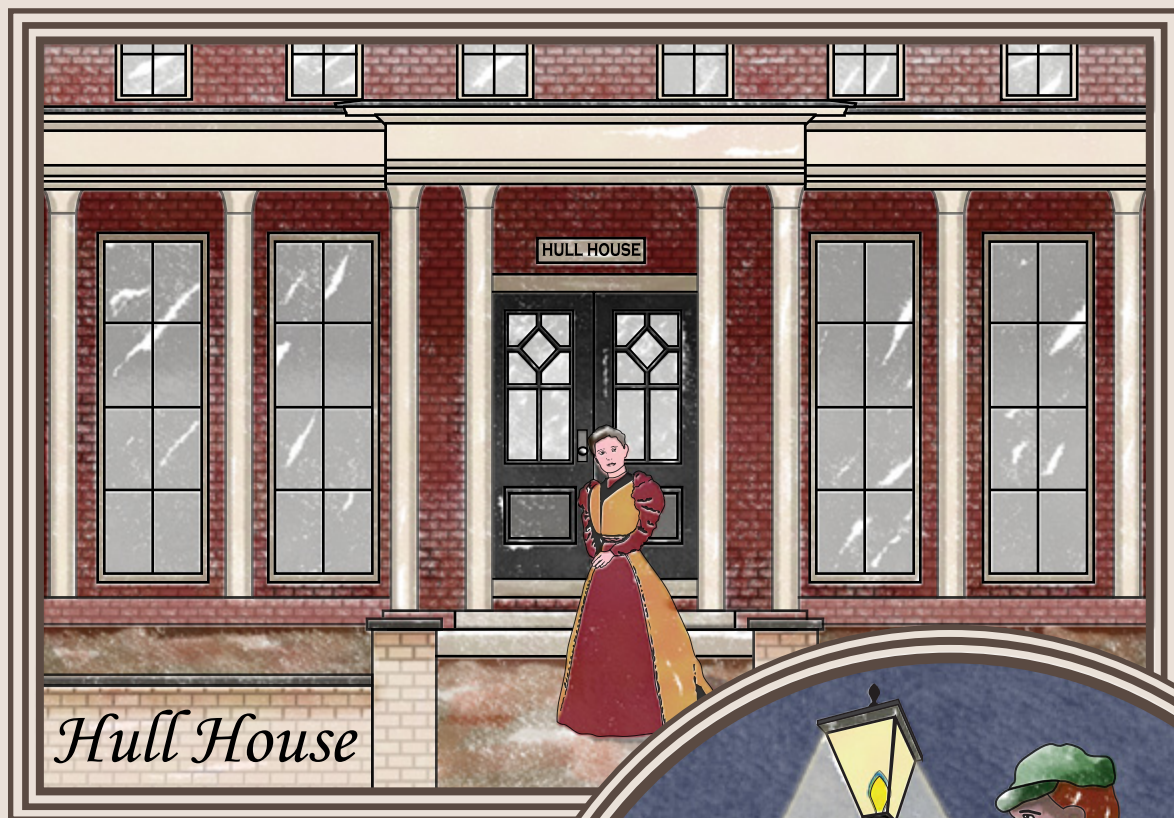
Rosie smiled. “He says so. At least his leg bone’s not busted. He’s fierce determined to be back working next week.”

“Rosie,” Clare whispered. “I have to go see Miss Addams. If my mother comes back, will you tell her where I am?”

Rosie nodded. “I wish it was Miss Addams here today. Da didn’t like that other lady. He showed her the door, he did. Said she was all laudy daw. Please, tell the Miss not to send her again.”

Clare grinned. “I didn’t like her either. I’ll be sure to tell Miss Addams so.”

Back at her house, she took off her shoes and packed them in a little satchel along with a clean pinafore and dress, plus the rest of the money from the kitchen drawer. Then she grabbed the shears and propped up a small mirror on the bedside table. She studied her face. She didn’t look like the girl in the locket. She was sure of that. That girl had been rich, but she was just a poor girl who was lonely for her mother. Now, though, Clare knew she should not even look like herself anymore. With a deep breath she lifted a section of her hair with her fingers and snipped at it.



## *Part 4: In Disguise*

## Chapter 13

Inches of dark hair cascaded to the floor. Again and again, she severed her curls, remembering the night long ago when they left Ohio. Her mother had done the cutting then, pruning down Clare's thick, black hair until she looked like a mop-headed boy. Now she struggled to do the pruning on her own. It didn't go well. She managed a straight, blunt cut across the back, but she could not figure out how to thin the curls to lie close to her head like a boy's, so as she continued to snip, her hair looked more and more uneven. Finally, she gave up, went to her mother's trunk, and opened it.

Inside were the knee pants, knee socks, shirt, boy's boots, and suspenders she had worn when they left Ohio. To her dismay, all except the suspenders and the stockings were much too small for her. She found the tweed cap with a stiff front bill to cover her mangled hair. At least it still fit. Deeper in the trunk, she found another pair of knee pants made of brown corduroy, along with a shirt and some larger boots. These had been the clothes that her mother had worn when they fled from Meadowfield. Being such a small woman, her mother had looked just like a teenage boy, which had been the intended effect. Clare tried the clothes on. With a little tuck here and there, especially around the waist, they might do. In a place like the 19th Ward, such clothes would blend in with all the other hand-me-downs that needed growing into. Most children wore clothes that didn't quite fit.

Clare threaded her needle and set to work. She started first on the side seams of the knee pants, taking an extra inch at the waist and the hips. She hemmed them a bit, too, so they would look like they almost fit, but when she tried on the shirt, she decided not to bother altering it. It hung off her shoulders limply, but she could tuck in all its extra length and width beneath the suspenders. The boots were very big, but Clare stuffed the toes with fabric scraps and decided she could manage walking in them as long as she didn't have to go too fast.

Finally, she went back to the little mirror by the bed, holding it far in front of her,

trying to catch a glimpse of herself to see how convincing she looked. The result was even more believable than she had hoped. As she stared at herself, so unrecognizable, she felt a tiny lump of fear sticking in her throat. If she could pass as a boy with just a haircut and some knee pants, how easy would it be for a rich girl to pass as poor? It would be very easy, she decided, especially when she could not remember being anything but poor. Clare felt her stomach pinch. The hand that held the mirror trembled. For the first time since meeting Helen, she realized she doubted who she was.

Still, as Clare clumped awkwardly in her boots toward the front room, she realized she might never pass as a boy if she had to speak. She raised the loose board and called to Mr. Nibbly. Not finding a sign of him, she tried again with a lower voice. “Mr. Nibbly, do you know who I am?” Lower and lower she went with her voice, trying to find the right pitch. She didn’t need to sound like a man, just a boy like Tim. Finally, she settled on a reasonable compromise, somewhere in the middle, and tried one last time. “Mr. Nibbly, do you know who I am?”

It was then that the little creature scuttled up on the tin. Mr. Nibbly twitched his whiskers wildly, smelling for food.

“Oh, dear.” Clare sighed. “I didn’t fool you for a minute.” She dropped some cake crumbs from the bottom of the food basket into the hole and watched the mouse eat. “I hope people aren’t as smart as you, little fellow.”

Finally, the mouse scampered off. Clare reached for the tin and settled the board back into place. Sitting in a chair by the table, she opened the metal box. The loose pages of the letters were all crumpled, the result of her frantically stuffing them back into the tin when Katherine knocked on the door. Sorting through them, she smoothed them one by one and folded them back into their correct envelopes as best she could manage. The Boulet’s key had slipped between the envelopes to the bottom of the pile. Clare picked it up, along with the last envelope, catching sight of the cardboard liner beneath it. In her earlier hurry to put the box away, she had stuffed the liner in upside-down, and now she saw, glued to its exposed underside, a linen pocket.

Clare picked up the liner, peering into the pocket. It was filled with small white envelopes. She pulled one out. It was empty, but it was labeled: *key*. Obviously, the heavy key to Box 133 had slipped out of it, perhaps from all the jostling as the tin was slipped down below the floor again and again. The next envelope only held a slip of paper. Written in careful script was: *Postal Box 9* and the letters *S-A-M-B*. Clare remembered the month before Auntie Dearie had taken ill, they had gone together to check a postal box up on Halsted Street. Auntie had said to keep the box a secret from her mother for a little while, and Clare had forgotten all about it. Was this the combination to open the box? Was there mail there that had been left waiting for months since Auntie's death? Clare decided she should check the box as soon as she was able.

The other envelopes were even more exciting. There were five of these in all, and each one was marked by a word that made Clare's heart race. One said *ruby*, another *emerald*, and the rest were labelled *diamond*, *sapphire*, *pearl*. Clare shook one of the envelopes, the one marked *emerald*. She heard the soft chatter of a metal chain sliding inside the paper. Opening the flap, she poured its contents into her hand—a gorgeous green pendant on a delicate golden chain.

Clare trembled with excitement as she checked the other envelopes. All held jewelry: a diamond ring, a sapphire bracelet, a ruby brooch, and the smallest rope of pearls, with matching ear drops, that Clare could imagine. Clare stared at them scattered across the table beside the stack of letters. Why was her mother hiding such jewels as these? Were they real? Were they valuable? Did her mother even know about them or were they secrets known only to Deirdre Sullivan? Clare looked around at the drab contents of the room. What other secrets were lurking, hidden somewhere? She picked up the locket and opened it, studying the face of the little girl, trying to make sense of everything. Then she picked up Simmie and spoke to her.

“You're a doll with secrets, aren't you? You understand? You've seen it all. You've heard everything. You've been awake and alert all these years. While I've been sleeping, you've listened to late night whispers between Auntie and mother. You know why we've

been on the run, where my mother is off to now, and you know where these jewels come from.” She paused for a moment, staring into those glassy brown eyes. “Simmie... you know who I am.”

All at once, Clare glanced at Simmie’s ears. There were small holes there, as if for earrings. She looked back to the table at the set of pearls. The strand was small, just long enough to fit a doll’s neck. She untied the red wool cape and reached for the ear drops, fitting them to the holes in Simmie’s bisque lobes, and then she fastened the rope of pearls around Simmie’s neck. They fit perfectly.

“These are your pearls, aren’t they?” She stared at Simmie. “If they are real, they would never have been given to a servant’s girl.”

It was then, driven by a desperate confusion about her past, that Clare did something unthinkable. She picked up her shears and lifted Simmie’s dress. “What other secrets are you keeping?”

With tiny precise cuts she began to rip apart the leather seam on Simmie’s back. When the opening was large enough, she pulled out the sawdust stuffing, searching it for anything small, anything that had been hidden, like the smuggled lace in the story she had read to Rosie yesterday. However, she found nothing—no lace, no jewels, no coins—not even by prodding deep into Simmie’s hollow head. Finally, she gave up. She looked down at her dismantled doll with dismay. Why had she done that? She didn’t understand anything—herself, her mother, the fearful feelings conjured by the thought of Helen and Donald Killeen. Clare suddenly felt so weary. It was too much to face all alone. Why didn’t her mother tell her of all this? Why would her mother keep such secrets? She felt cursed, cursed by Deirdre Sullivan. It was that name—that name was a curse like Auntie said.

Clare laid her cheek against her ruined doll and cried.

## Chapter 14

Clare had just finished repairing her doll, replacing all the stuffing as best she could and closing up the opened seam, when a loud knock came at the door.

“Open up, Mrs. D’Arcy.”

Clare blanched. She recognized the voice of the inspector. He must have gone back to the sweater and gotten her real address. What would he do if he found her? Would he arrest her? She didn’t want to go to jail.

“Jones gave me your address. I’ve crossed paths with your daughter. She shouldn’t be working for Jones.”

Quietly, Clare gathered the letters and photos from the table and put them into the taffy tin, along with Jane’s letter and the locket. She closed the lid tightly and stuffed the tin and Simmie into the satchel, then crept slowly into the kitchen. There was one window above the little sink. It faced away from the alley. Clare opened it and climbed into the sink basin. It was then that she heard the door knob rattle and turn. In her rush back from the landlady’s, she must have forgotten to bolt the door behind her. Frantic, she threw the satchel out the window and squeezed through the open frame, dropping down to the soft mud that seemed to be always present in the gloomy shadows behind her cottage.

Clare heard the inspector, calling out into the empty house, “Open up, girl. I know you’re there.” It wouldn’t be long till he found the open window.

Slipping past Rosie’s, she moved through the trashy, muddy corridor between all of the rear alley houses and the row houses that faced the main street. Eventually she found herself forced back toward the alley by a fence that blocked her way. Peering around a shanty, the one where Rodney lived, Clare watched for the inspector. He must have given up, or else he was still inside the house, because he was nowhere to be seen.

“Eh, what you lurking here for?”

Clare jumped. She looked up. It was Rodney, frowning as best he could, his face



swollen and bruised. She almost answered him by name then realized, dressed as she was, he didn't recognize her. She lowered her voice as she had practiced. "A copper's chasing me."

Rodney winced. "Now, don't let him catch you. Look at me face."

"He may be following my footprints. Don't tell which way I went."

Rodney nodded. "Wouldn't think of it."

Clare tipped her hat. "Thanks."

Just as Clare stepped out into the alley, though, the inspector came around the back of the shanty, following Clare's footprints. He looked directly at Clare. "Have you seen a little girl come by here?"

Clare shook her head. The inspector looked up at Rodney.

"A little girl? Yeah, she went by way of Taylor Street." Rodney pointed toward the other end of the alley.

The inspector grunted and rushed back up toward Clare's house. Rodney studied Clare. "I thought he was after you?"

"I must've been mistaken." She waved to him and slipped out into the alley toward the street.

Walking as swiftly as she could, she headed toward Hull House, clomping down the wooden sidewalk, checking often behind her for the inspector. Gradually her stride slowed. She didn't have to worry now. Even Rodney didn't know her. She made a point to relax and breathe. And as she caught her breath, she began to think. She couldn't go back home now, not with the inspector waiting at her door—at least not until her mother came back.

Clare stopped, panic rising in her throat. If she couldn't go back home, where would she sleep? She had so little money. She needed more. Clare looked around her, getting her bearings. She was on Polk Street, heading toward Halsted. If she turned around, and headed the other direction, she might be able to find Mr. Smith's.

It had been a wrenching day last April when Clare had accompanied her mother to

the pawnbroker. Mr. Smith had the best reputation in the ward, and so her mother had taken her most prized possession to him in an attempt to get Auntie Dearie the best doctor she could afford. When Clare's mother had taken off her wedding band and set it on the pawnshop counter as a pledge for a loan, she had trembled, choking back tears. Mr. Smith had been kind and given her a fair amount for it. Still the doctor had not been able to help Auntie Dearie, and all the money went for her burial. They had never earned enough to redeem the ring after that.

All the way up Polk Street, Clare could only think of the bruises around Rodney's eyes. Rodney had been jailed for pawning stolen loot. Clare had no way to know which shopkeeper had called the cops on him, but it made her nervous to think it might have been Mr. Smith. She stopped for a moment and stared into her satchel at the rope of pearls around Simmie's neck. What if Mr. Smith didn't believe they were hers. After all, she was dressed as a boy. A boy with a doll would be suspicious.

Clare was relieved that there were no customers in the shop when she entered. Mr. Smith had his back to her, cleaning a small gold watch. Clare removed the pearls from Simmie's neck and clutched them in her sweaty hand. She cleared her throat, trying to deepen it, but her voice cracked. "Excuse me, Mr. Smith, I need a loan. It's urgent."

Mr. Smith turned to stare at her. "I don't do business with children."

Clare's voice shook. "It's not for me. It's for my mother. She's been here before. Colleen D'Arcy. She came last spring with her wedding band."

"Wedding band?"

"Yes, with little diamonds all around it, embedded in clusters of golden roses."

Mr. Smith suddenly brightened. "Oh, yes. I was hoping she would come back," he smiled at himself. "Perhaps I'm getting soft in my old age. I couldn't bring myself to sell it."

"You still have it?" Clare's eyes grew large. "Oh, we thought it was gone."

"Well, I can't keep a ring like that forever."

"We'll get the money soon," Clare assured him. "But first..." Clare searched for her

words. “We have a little emergency. Can we get a loan on these?”

Clare put the strand of pearls on the counter. She held her breath as Mr. Smith studied them under his jeweler’s loupe. He looked up at her. “Where did you get these?”

Clare gulped. She searched for a story to tell him, but failed to conjure one. Finally, she sighed. It didn’t seem right to lie to him after he’d kept her mother’s ring. “Mr. Smith, it’s from my doll. I’m Colleen’s daughter, Clare.”

“I know.” Mr. Smith smiled. “You put on a good enough act, but I never heard a ring described so breathlessly by a young boy before.”

Clare looked at her boots. “I wasn’t trying to deceive you... just the inspector. I’m dressed like this because I’m hiding from the state inspector. He doesn’t think I should be doing piecework.” She pointed to the pearls. “I don’t know if they are worth much, but my doll came as a hand-me-down from a rich family in Boston.” Clare brought Simmie out of her satchel. “She’s not so fine anymore, but she’s French.”

Mr. Smith nodded. “She does look French. Tell you what. I’ll give you fifty for the string of pearls and the doll. I could fix her up nice.”

Clare winced. “She’s all I have, Mr. Smith.”

“Thirty for just the pearl necklace then, but on one condition. When you get some money, you redeem the wedding ring first.”

“Oh, thank you,” Clare sputtered. “Oh, so many thanks.”

Mr. Smith wrote out the ticket for the strand of pearls and handed her the money. He winked at her. “Tell your mother not to be spreading tales, now, about my good kind heart. I don’t want anyone knowing the favor I’m doing her.”

“We won’t say anything.”

“Now, get going, before someone comes in. I wouldn’t want someone to think that children are welcome.”

Beaming, Clare put Simmie back into the satchel and rushed to the door. She turned to wave goodbye, but Mr. Smith had his back to her again, working on the watch. She was glad she hadn’t lied to him. She was tired of doing that. Then she sighed and looked

at her clothes. Just walking down the street like this was a complete deception. Still, as she headed back down Polk Street, she felt relieved. With more money in her pocket than she had ever had before, she felt so calm and confident that she couldn't help smiling at everyone she passed. And to her surprise, soon people were smiling back at her in return.

## Chapter 15

It wasn't till she reached Hull House that her jitters started to grow again. She passed into the big house and up the stairs without any notice, but the fear of running into Helen was still immense. She retraced her steps down the hall, looking for the door to Jane's room. She stopped at one, hoping she had picked correctly. What would she say if she opened it and found someone else?

Listening at the door, she heard someone inside humming softly. It was a pleasant voice and that gave her hope that it was Jane. She knocked softly. She heard Jane call out, "Who's there?"

Clare looked right and left, making sure no one was nearby. "It's me, Miss Addams. Clare. I need your help."

In a moment, Jane opened the door. She stared blankly. "Clare? Is that you?"

"Yes, it's me," Clare whispered. "I don't know what to do. Can you help me?"

"My goodness, yes. Come in." Jane stepped back. "What's become of you?"

"I am so sorry. I know that you are sick, but I'm desperate." All the way to Hull House, Clare had rehearsed her story. She had figured she would explain first about Katherine and why she had come to talk to her. As she stepped into the room, however, Clare's story tumbled out in a mixed-up jumble. "My mother's gone," she began, her heart pounding. "Donald Killeen is a villain, and I'm not sure who I am."

Slowly, as they sat and talked on the settee, Jane sorted the story out with the help of many patient questions. When it came to the part Deirdre Sullivan played, Clare pulled out the taffy tin. Jane read every single letter, including the note and article about Donald Killeen.

"My goodness," Jane gasped. "I can see why you are concerned about Helen's brother." She looked at Clare. "I never had a chance to talk to her. I am always interrupted by one crisis or another. Sometimes it's a blessing to get a little bit ill and be down for a

day... it's worth the peace and quiet I get."

"I'm sorry, Miss Addams, that I disturbed you, but Katherine is suspicious of me. She's been talking to Helen. Helen wants to learn where I live, and now Katherine has found that out. I made her promise not to tell Helen until she talks to you... that's why I had to come here right away and explain all this." Clare dropped her head, staring at her hands nervously. "Trouble is, I don't quite know whether what Helen says is false or true." Clare showed Jane the picture of her mother and father from their wedding. "Rosie says I look like him. I've got his dimple and his smile."

"You do," Jane nodded.

"But I don't remember him. He died when I was young. Thing is, look at my mother, how elegant she is. She's not a poor girl's mother, Miss Addams. What does it mean?"

"I am not sure," Jane said slowly. "Perhaps, when your father died, there was some grave misfortune that your family suffered."

Clare nodded. She pointed to the taffy tin. It was empty, except for the locket. "There's more. Look inside the little heart. It opens."

Jane stared at the tiny picture just as Katherine had done.

"Is it me, Miss?"

"It could be, Clare. There is a hint of your smile and something about those eyes are very similar to yours." Jane smiled. "Of course, it's a bit hard to tell for sure... right now, at least, seeing you dressed like this." Jane winced. "Your hair, Clare. What have you done?"

There was a twinkle in Jane's eye that made Clare giggle. She suddenly melted back against the settee. It felt so good to find someone to trust with all these secrets. "Oh, Miss Addams. I am so relieved to finally tell someone."

Jane grew serious. "Now, you won't be going home by yourself till we sort this out. I'll make up a bed here on the settee and call down for your supper." She paused thoughtfully. "We'll give you a name... let's see... Benjamin. You'll be my distant cousin's son from..."

“Ohio,” Clare declared. “Meadowfield, Ohio. I know that place if anybody questions me.”

“Good idea.” Jane nodded with approval. “Clare, you are such a bright girl. Look at how you’ve managed on your own... through all of this.”

That little bit of praise undid Clare. She began to shiver. Jane jumped up to get a blanket. Tears slipped from Clare’s eyes as Jane covered her gently. Jane brought her an untouched tray of soup and bread from her desk. “Have some of this. I had no appetite at all for it, and it is still somewhat warm.”

Clare sipped the soup gratefully. It was so nice to have someone care about her. “Sometimes I get angry at my mother when she leaves like this. She is such a good mother when she’s home, but then she goes away.”

“How often does she leave?”

“Maybe twice a year... when we’re really short of money. Up until now, Auntie Dearie has been home to watch me, but after Auntie died... well, she waited as long as she could, and then she left just like that.”

“And are you short of money when she comes back?”

“No, that’s when she get’s me a new dress and the little things we need. And we always get meat and milk and even fruit for a few months before the money gets low again.” Clare looked at Jane. “She goes to get money, I know. But where does it come from? Why can’t I go with her?”

Jane shook her head. “I don’t understand it, but I am sure she would not have left you if it hadn’t been necessary. There are so many parents in this city whose situation is desperate. They are forced to leave their children, or forced to make their children work. It shouldn’t be like that, but it is.”

Clare looked at Jane, thoughtfully. “You care about people. You want to help, like Katherine, but you’re not like her.”

Jane peered at Clare, curious. “Tell me about Katherine. Why am I not like her?”

Clare frowned. What was the difference? What should she say? Katherine was a rich

girl who might mean well, but she considered the people she wanted to help below her. Miss Addams was completely different. Clare thought back to the conversation Jane had with Katherine on this very settee. Miss Addams had said: *They have the yeast within them to rise... they just need us working beside them, believing in them.* Yes, that made the difference. With Miss Addams, Clare didn't feel inferior. When Jane looked at people, she believed they were every bit as important as herself no matter what clothes they wore, what work they did, or how they might speak.

Clare nodded, finally sure of her answer. "Katherine wants to do good, but she can't help looking down on poor folk as if they were small and she were big. Rosie's father sent her away and doesn't want her back." Clare smiled at Jane. "But you... you feel sad for the way things are, yet it is different. Where Katherine sees all the ways we're less than her, you see all the ways we are the same."

Jane sat back, breathless. "How does such a young girl know so much?"

Clare looked at her hands in her lap. "Just because we don't go to school, doesn't mean we're not smart. Rosie, well, she's as bright as a button. And her brother, Tim, is real smart too."

"I know. Reading and arithmetic are not the only important lessons." Jane nodded in agreement. "Even though we give classes here at Hull House, even though everything we do is important, perhaps the most important lessons may be for the rich ones who come to volunteer. People like Katherine are here to teach, to help those less fortunate." Jane winked. "But secretly I hope they learn something too."

"Is that why you asked Katherine to stay? So she would learn she's not better than anyone else?"

"Yes," Jane said quietly. "She has so much promise. I believe she will turn out fine when she finally sees the truth of things. That is why Hull House is so important to me. To help the working poor, I need to change the minds of the people running things... the ones with power. This is a place where the two worlds can meet, where both sides can learn from each other." Jane smiled ruefully. "At the very least, I have learned a lot... about



myself... about other people.”

“I can’t imagine you needing to.”

Jane laughed. “Oh, I’ve made mistakes. Our first Christmas, we wanted to have a party for the children, and the caramel factory wanted to donate candy for it. We were so excited, thinking the factory was being so generous, but many of the children at the party worked at that factory, packing that candy hour after hour for just pennies every day. They couldn’t stand the sight of caramels. I was never so embarrassed.” Jane shrugged. “Sometimes you have to learn the hard way.”

Clare nodded. “Sometimes I’m like Katherine. I think I’m better than others, too. People like Mr. Jones, the sweater. He lies and cheats. I think he’s a scoundrel and that I’m better than him. But... then I’ve been lying, too... making up stories about where my mother is. When they’ve asked where she was, I’ve told everyone she was working in an office. Does that make me just as bad as the sweater?”

Jane sighed. “It’s complicated. Lying isn’t good, but then you didn’t feel safe telling those people about your mother going away. That would not have been wise.”

“Even Rosie. I didn’t even tell Rosie the truth.” Clare began to cry again.

“Don’t worry. Someday, you’ll be able to explain to her and make it right again. When I was young, I remember I would tell lies, too, and then feel so bad about it I couldn’t sleep at night. I would sneak down in the darkness to tell my father. It was a terrifying journey down the dark stairs and past the front door that he always left unlocked. That door petrified me. I imagined it opening to the night, all on its own, letting in some terrible thing, so I scurried past it... quick as a wink. Finally, at my father’s bedside, I would whisper out my sin, and then he would always say that if he had to have a little girl who did tell lies, he was very glad that she felt so bad about it that she could not go to sleep afterward.” Jane squeezed Clare’s hand. “I don’t think you would have told lies if you hadn’t felt threatened, and the fact that you feel bad about it is a sign that lying isn’t something you’d get used to doing.”

“Do you think the sweater sleeps good at night?” Clare asked.

“There’s no way to know. Perhaps he thinks he needs to lie in order to survive.” Jane pointed to the desk where her purse was settled. “One night a man came into this room while I was sleeping. I woke to find him searching through my purse.”

Clare’s eyes widened. “What did you do? Scream?”

“No.” Jane smiled. “I wasn’t scared. I just asked him what he needed the money for. When he said for food, I told him to take the money and come back in the morning so I could help him find work.”

“And he did? He came back?”

“Yes, he did.” Jane paused. “You see, if people are trying to survive, they just need help, not condemnation.”

Clare looked at Jane thoughtfully. “What about Helen? She’s rich so she is not trying to just survive. She told Katherine that her brother was my father and he was looking everywhere for me, but my father died. She lied. Why?”

“I don’t know the answer to that either.” Jane sat back thoughtfully. “I think it’s time that I have a word with her, don’t you?”

Clare nodded. Jane looked through an appointment book on her desk. “Let’s see. She’s staying at the Maxfield Hotel downtown. Perhaps I should meet with her.” Jane picked up a pen to write the address, but before she could find a piece of paper, someone knocked on her door.

“Miss Addams,” a woman called. “There is a young man here to speak with you.”

“Come in,” Jane answered.

The woman opened the door, and there standing behind her, peering meekly into the room, was Luigi with his violin.

## Chapter 16

“Miss Addams, you not feel good?” Luigi said sadly.

Jane smiled. “I feel much better. And yes, I do remember your recital this evening. I’ll be there.”

Luigi beamed brightly. “Oh, thank you. I am happy now.”

“Now you go practice. I still have some things to do.” Jane smiled at him. “You’ll do wonderfully, Luigi. I know you will.”

Luigi gave a little bow and the woman closed the door. Jane turned to Clare. “Tonight we’re having a party and you can come, but first, Benjamin, let’s see if we can even out your hair and find you some better shoes.”

Jane took out some scissors and snipped at Clare’s ragged cuts till they were more even. Then she led the way down to the end of the wide upper hall where several trunks nestled against the wall. She opened one. It was filled with clothes, hats, and wigs. She rummaged through it and pulled out a boy’s jacket. “These are for the drama club... costumes for plays. Try this on. Your shirt is too thin for this autumn weather.”

Clare tried the jacket. It was almost a perfect fit.

Jane rummaged through a second trunk. “Here, perhaps these will work as well.” She handed Clare some boots, much smaller than the clumsy ones she wore. They were still a little big, but she could walk without fearing she would trip.

Jane smiled at Clare. “Now, I’ll leave you to search for a shirt that doesn’t look like a sack. I have some things to attend to for the recital.”

Jane left, and Clare sifted through the trunks till she found a suitable shirt. She took it back to Jane’s room to change. After checking her reflection in the mirror, she sat patiently on the settee, staring out the window at the gathering gloom and waiting for Jane. A knock startled her.

“Benjamin,” someone called. “It is almost time. Come.”

Clare jumped up and opened the door. Luigi stood before her. “Miss Addams said you must tell of your country... it is Ohio? You must tell me because... because....” He paused, struggling to explain. “My sonata... perfetto.” He closed his eyes for a moment and made an invisible sweep of a bow across unseen strings, his movements delicate and flowing. He opened his eyes and frowned. “But my mind too, too...” Luigi stopped, not knowing the word. He made a little circling motion with his hand. Clare guessed he meant he was nervous.

She cleared her throat, lowering her voice to sound like a Benjamin. “Ohio is a state to the east. The people are very nice. Many are farmers.”

“They play stickball?”

Clare nodded. “Where are you from?”

“Napoli.” Luigi smiled. “I live by the bay. Fish. Many fish to eat.”

Clare and Luigi talked as they sat at the top of the stairs, looking out over the people who entered through the front door. Most of them turned right, filling up the drawing room. Luigi pointed out his family as they came through the door and told about their long voyage over the ocean just a few years back. His father was a great cook and had come with grand plans to open his own restaurant, but someone stole most of their money in a real estate swindle so he had to work in another man’s restaurant instead. Luigi’s father wanted him to learn to cook as well, but Luigi loved the violin. That was why he was so nervous. He wanted to impress his father so he could continue to study it.

Luigi asked again of Ohio, and Clare talked about it as if she still lived there. She spoke of people she had known, but she was very careful not to mention her family. She didn’t want to lie to him. It was bad enough pretending to be a boy. She thought back to the day he had been so gallant and kissed her hand. She wished she could just be herself, Clare D’Arcy, and talk to him about her mother and Auntie Dearie. She wished they could become friends.

Finally, Jane came to find Luigi. She reached out with his violin case, but he didn’t make a move to take it. Instead, he put his head in his hands. His fingers were shaking.

Jane leaned close. “You are so good, Luigi. I believe in you. You are a great musician, and you can play *La Folia*. Just love the music with all your heart and begin.”

Luigi looked up. Jane’s eyes crinkled, bright with encouragement. Clare watched as that gleam in Jane’s eyes spread to his. He nodded and stood. He took his case proudly and descended the staircase, with Jane and Clare following. Inside the drawing room, Luigi walked calmly to the front, standing beside the piano. He opened the case and took a deep bow. Then the pianist struck a chord, and Luigi began to play. Clare sighed. From his very first note, his music was beautiful.

When he was done, the whole room erupted in loud applause. Clare looked at Jane. Tears flowed down her cheeks. She dabbed them quickly with a handkerchief and then plowed into the crowd, shaking hands and nodding happily. It was clear she enjoyed these people as she chatted back and forth with them, talking a strange language, which Clare realized was Italian. Clare couldn’t understand it, but she listened carefully, wondering if this was the same language as in the song she had sung two days before. However, none of the words seemed quite the same.

Jane made a point to speak to everyone—the Italian mothers hugging their babies with their husbands by their side, grinning widely, as well as the few wealthy folks who had come to listen to Luigi. Clare realized there was a reason the rich people were there. As she followed Jane around, she saw her take several silk-gowned ladies and a smartly dressed man over to Luigi’s family to introduce them. Jane was hoping to get Luigi into a special school if his father would allow it. One of the rich ladies wanted to pay his tuition. Luigi’s father looked concerned, but Luigi’s mother beamed proudly. Clare had the feeling Luigi’s mother would have her way.

All at once, a different conversation caught her attention. A big, blue-eyed woman spoke earnestly with an older man. “But it *will* work,” the woman said. “The children must go to school, not stitch their lives away. It cripples them, bent over the machines like that.”

The man shook his head. “Florence, what will they do without the whole family working? They’ll starve to death.”

Florence shook her finger at him. “As soon as the children stop working—they will have to pay the parents a decent wage.”

“But the new age restrictions don’t work. Haven’t you heard? Every child now is automatically fourteen. They simply lie about their age.”

“It will stop! It must stop, or my name’s not [Florence Kelley](#)! I will keep my inspectors enforcing state law!” Florence’s face was tense. “With a few successful prosecutions of the factory owners, you will see. It will end. It has to.”

Shocked, Clare stepped back to the doorway of the drawing room. The woman had been talking of inspectors like the one Clare had been running from. She stared now at the woman, transfixed, watching her strong hands move emphatically to make a point. Clare remembered Miss Addams had mentioned a Florence Kelley to Katherine. It was a name Jane had said with great respect. Clare guessed this was the same Florence, and she was Jane’s friend, which gave Clare reason to believe what the woman said. Clare wondered if she had been wrong. Perhaps the inspector was not a mean old man. Perhaps he was not someone who deserved to be tricked, but instead, someone who was working for the good of poor people, trying to help them get a better wage. Clare pictured the inspector, seeing him a bit less gruff, less threatening than before. Had she been foolish to run from him? Had she thought the worst of him because she didn’t understand?

Clare watched the woman, still arguing passionately with the man. Then she saw Luigi across the room, talking with his friends. She had an impulse to go up and hug him, but luckily remembered she was a boy. Instead, she just hung back next to the door, waiting to catch his eye. Finally, he looked over at her, and she gave him an affirming nod. He sent back a little grin, then spoke again to his friends, pointing in her direction. Clare smiled to herself and turned, ready to head out of the drawing room. It was then she got a shock. Standing behind her was a boy.

“Tim!” she said with a start.

Tim looked at her puzzled. “Clare?”

Clare looked around her wildly, hoping no one heard, then pulled his arm and led

him out of the room. They moved across the hall to the parlor. As Clare checked it to make sure the room was empty, Tim burst out, “Clare, what are you doing, now, dressed as a lad?”

“Shh! I’m supposed to be Miss Addams’ distant relation, Benjamin.”

“But why?”

“I’m hiding from someone.”

“That inspector?”

“It’s a long story.” Clare looked at him, puzzled by his presence. “Why are you here?”

“Rosie told me where to find you. I saw that man again outside the post office... the corner where I sell papers. He asked me about Deirdre Sullivan again, so this time I asked him why he cared to know. I hinted that I was more than just a bit curious.”

“What did he say?”

“He said a woman was gone missing and he was searching out her little girl.”

“Was the woman Deirdre Sullivan?”

“No, Deirdre Sullivan is meant to know where the daughter is, but he showed me an old tin-type of the girl’s missing mother, and well... Clare, where’s your Ma?”

Clare looked down at her feet. What could she say to Tim? She couldn’t lie to him. She knew she had to tell him the truth. Still, she delayed with a question. “Do you know this man’s name? Is it Killeen?”

Tim shook his head. “No, he’s calls himself McDonald. Says he’s been hired by a Josiah Harper to look for his niece, Simone. Harper’s sister, Caroline, up and disappeared on her way to Baltimore.”

Clare froze. “Baltimore?”

“Yes, on a train from Boston a few days ago.”

Clare felt weak. She reached out to grip Tim’s hand. Just then Katherine walked in, catching Clare as she toppled toward the floor.

## Chapter 17

When she opened her eyes again, they were all standing around her—Tim, Katherine, and Jane.

She looked up at Jane. “My mother. Tim, tell her.”

“I already know,” Jane assured her. She helped Clare sit up. That’s when Clare realized she was back in Jane’s room on the settee.

“What happened?”

“You fainted, Clare, from fear for your mother. Do you think it is her? Do you think your mother may have gone to Baltimore?”

Clare shook her head. “I don’t know. I found a key with a tag on it. It had an address in Baltimore. I thought it was for a house, but there was a box number, too.”

Katherine chimed in. “A post office box?”

Clare looked up at Katherine with alarm. “Don’t tell her! Don’t tell Helen anything!”

“I’ve had a talk with Katherine,” Jane assured her. “She will not tell Helen. In fact, she is going to stay with you while I go meet this man. We have to find out if this has anything to do with you.” Jane turned to Tim. “What else did this McDonald say? Anything?”

Tim fidgeted with his cap. “The man said it was a train from Boston to Baltimore.”

“Not Chicago?” Jane asked.

“Boston.” Tim nodded and continued. “He also says he was waiting outside the post office, hoping for Deirdre Sullivan to come and fetch her letter. Mr. Harper sent one explaining.”

“But how did he know his sister Caroline was missing?” Katherine asked.

“She wrote him a letter and pressed another passenger to post it for her. Then she disappeared, like a faerie in the wind, leaving her bag beneath her seat.”

Clare felt weak again. “It’s him,” she whispered. “It’s Donald Killeen.”



Jane patted her hand and stared into her eyes. “Now, Clare. We don’t know for sure. Tim will take me to meet McDonald. Is there anything else you can tell me?”

Clare looked up at Tim. “Which post office is it? The one with the letter for Deirdre Sullivan?”

“Straight up Halsted some blocks.”

Clare turned to Jane. “Auntie Dearie had a box there, number 9.”

Jane nodded. “Katherine, don’t leave her, understand?”

And then, as Jane and Tim turned to go, Tim turned back. He pulled Clare’s house key from his pocket. “The key was on the table and the door swinging wide. I pulled it over and locked it tight, I did.”

He reached out to hand her the key. Clare shook her head. “No, let Rosie keep it for me. Tell her she can practice her sewing anytime with our needles and thread.”

Tim nodded and left with Miss Addams. An uncomfortable silence filled the room. Clare looked up at Katherine. Katherine was staring out the window, fussing with a button on the cuff of her sleeve. Finally, Katherine spoke.

“I’ve been thinking about what Helen told me... about your father. She had said something odd. She said your father had been made your legal guardian.” Katherine looked down at her. “That would have only been necessary if he wasn’t your real father. Perhaps he was your stepfather.”

“I never had a stepfather,” Clare insisted.

Katherine sat down beside her. “Helen told me also about a large glass Tiffany vase. Do you remember breaking it?”

“Maybe.” Clare sighed. “I remember something of a broken vase.”

“Helen said that it was hers, and you broke it and have always been afraid of her since. Perhaps her brother isn’t so dangerous as you imagine. Perhaps there is another explanation.”

Clare fell silent, brooding over what Katherine had said.

“I have a stepfather,” Katherine offered. “When I was young, I despised him, but as

I grew older I came to accept him. Perhaps you are afraid of your stepfather because you don't like anyone taking the place of your father."

Clare glared at Katherine. "My mother would not have married a man like that!"

Katherine fell silent again. She stared at the floral carpet covering the floor. Clare felt her anger rising. Katherine didn't seem to understand the hurtful things she did and said.

"You're rich aren't you? Why are you here trying to help people like me?" Clare snapped.

Katherine looked at her with surprise. "How do you know I am rich?"

Clare wrinkled up her nose. "Because you feel sorry for poor people, and you look disgusted at the way we live."

Katherine drew back. Her lip trembled a bit. "I don't, do I?"

Clare's anger drained. Now she was the one who had been hurtful. She bit her lip and answered meekly, "Sometimes you do. I've seen it on your face."

Her forehead wrinkled with concern. "Oh, dear. I only want to help."

Clare reached out and touched her arm gently. "You talk to poor people as if they are very small, less important, less able to do things for themselves, maybe even less good."

"I don't mean to do that, really."

Clare sat back. "Maybe rich people can't help it. They feel they have to make people feel small so they themselves can feel big." She was quiet for a moment. "Perhaps, if I was raised rich, I would be bossy and arrogant too." Clare shook her head. "No, there are bossy and arrogant people everywhere. And rich people can be nice. Miss Addams is rich isn't she?"

Katherine nodded. "To some degree. She has some property her father left her."

"Miss Addams sees us all as equals, none better than another," Clare said. "I want to be like her, if I can."

Katherine smiled. "I do too. That's why I came here, but I think I'm failing miserably." Katherine paused. "The first time I saw her I felt so inspired. She was speaking in New York, and I knew I had to come and help her, but I feel like I am no help

at all, really.”

Katherine hung her head. Clare felt awkward. She didn’t know what to say. She thought of Miss Addams, the way she had talked to Luigi—that look in her eye. She gazed at Katherine. “You are very smart. I think you can figure out how to change.” Katherine looked up at her, hopefully. Clare beamed at her and added, “I believe you can.”

“Thank you,” Katherine said quietly. “And I believe you can find your mother.”

Clare nodded. A tear trickled down her cheek. “You think I’m Simone don’t you?”

“Yes, I do. Don’t you?”

Clare didn’t answer. Instead she asked. “Do you think Helen knows where my mother is?”

“Perhaps.” Katherine paused thoughtfully. “I think she knows where her brother is, at least.”

That’s when a sudden idea stirred deep inside Clare. She saw her mother in her mind, like a daydream, reaching out to her. Clare knew she had to find her mother, and she thought she knew the way. She was quiet for a long while, dreaming up a plan. Finally, she patted her stomach. “I’m so hungry. I forgot to eat anything at the recital.”

Katherine smiled and stood up. “Well, at least I can help you with that problem. I will be right back.”

As soon as Katherine left, Clare jumped up, grabbed her satchel and slipped out the door, heading down the hall to the costume trunks. Opening one, she searched for a wig and a hat she had seen, as well as a fancy cloak about her size. Then spying an emerald velvet dress that might fit as well, she stuffed them all into her satchel and headed back to Miss Addams’ room. As she waited for Katherine to come back, she studied the map of Chicago on the wall beside the desk.

When Katherine returned, she carried a tray with two bowls of stew and some thick slices of bread. She set it on the table by the settee, and they both ate hungrily.

“I forgot to eat at the recital, too.” Katherine said. “I’m famished.”

“I didn’t see you at the recital,” Clare said with surprise.

“I was penned in the far corner with a fussy Hull House benefactor. She always needs so much attention.” Katherine sighed. “And you believe I’m the arrogant one.... Goodness, I was so desperate to escape from her.”

“Is that why you came into the parlor?”

“I had made an excuse that I had forgotten to put something away.”

“Had you?”

“Not really.”

“Isn’t that lying?”

Katherine nodded. “I suppose it is, though some call it being polite.”

“Sometimes I wonder, if I am Simone... doesn’t that mean that my mother has been lying to me.”

Katherine touched her cloth napkin to her lips. “If she was, she must have had a good reason. Perhaps she felt you were too young to understand. Perhaps she worried that you could not keep the secret. She must have thought it was the best way to protect you.”

“From the bad men?”

“Bad men?” Katherine looked puzzled.

“My Auntie Dearie always warned me of the bad men. I think she meant Donald Killeen.”

“I suppose.”

Clare set down her slice of bread. She looked straight at Katherine. “Do you really think I can find my mother?”

Katherine nodded. “I do.”

Clare nodded too. “Yes,” she told herself, “I can.”



## *Part 5: In The Loop*

## Chapter 18

Clare slipped into a shadowy spot in the empty alley behind the Maxfield Hotel. There was a large bin filled with rotting garbage next to a stack of crates piled twice as high as herself. She crept behind these and opened her satchel, pulling out the velvet dress, the wig, the hat, and the cloak. It was late, ten o'clock, but she hoped the hotel lobby would still be crowded so she wouldn't look so conspicuous if the clothes did not quite fit.

Clare was reluctant to step out of her knee pants, not just because she felt modest—even though in the darkness no one would see—but because it had been so much easier to travel the nighttime streets as a boy. There had been lots of boys about, many selling papers like Tim, so no one paid attention to her. A girl of eleven on the streets, however, would have drawn long stares or worse.

She shivered as she changed, the cold wind whipping through the darkness. She was near the lake—there was a freshness in the air. This was another world, downtown, near the shores of Lake Michigan. Clare had heard it called the Loop. It was an odd name for such a grand place. Its streets were wide as rivers, and its buildings, some as big as a city block, were as tall as a mountain, perhaps ten stories high or even more. The windows of these buildings glowed orange-gold from the great [arc lamps](#) that lined the streets.

Everywhere, there were buggies filled with women in wide-brimmed, feathered hats and men in bowlers, heading out for a late meal. Clare had been bewitched by the delicious smells—meat and fish, rosemary and garlic—seeping out from restaurants so fancy that they boasted expensive electric chandeliers instead of gas lamps. Here, there were no grimy saloons, pawn shops, tenements, or factories. White linen cloths covered the restaurant tables. Delicate strings of light trimmed the shop windows. Clare had stared through such a window into one of the giant department stores as she waited for a cable car, marveling at the sea of shelves, counters, and cases spreading across the great length

of the sales floor. How could one place hold so much?

Clare felt clumsy and out of place as she pulled off her shirt and her boots. Certainly, her confidence was disintegrating amidst the spectacle of the great city. Back at Hull House, her plan had seemed so certain. Now she felt terrified of what she hoped to do. It was strange that it had been Katherine who had been so encouraging. Perhaps Katherine had learned more from Miss Addams than she had imagined. Now, though, there was no Jane Addams or Katherine to help renew her convictions. Clare would have to do that herself.

Still, everything was going smoothly. It had been easy to distract Katherine with another request, this time for cake, so she could slip away. She had caught a horse car up Halsted Street to the post office and opened the box numbered 9 easily, using the letter combination from the taffy tin—a right turn to *S*, a left to *A*, and then back to the *M* and finally the *B*. She had grabbed several envelopes nestled inside and glanced at the return addresses before slipping them into her jacket pocket. They were all from Josiah Harper in Virginia and addressed to Deirdre Sullivan, but she didn't have time to read them. Instead, she caught a cable car heading east across the river.

At State Street, she made a transfer to another car—one that delivered her to the white marble steps of the [Maxfield Hotel](#). It was a grand palace of a place, with feather-capped doormen, glass canopies, and strands of electric lights splashing glamour everywhere. Clare had frowned as soon as she laid eyes on it, knowing this was the place she needed to enter, but dressed as a girl, not a boy.

A lump of dismay formed in her throat as she pulled her cloak around her in the darkness of the alley. It was too long, dragging the ground as she walked. The velvet costume dress from the trunk had not fit well either. It had been too tight and too short, the hem hitting near her knees. Clare had been so disappointed—she had always wanted a dress like that. She also had wanted to look fancy enough to go into the hotel. Reluctantly, Clare had tossed the dress aside and put on her old dress and worn pinafore. There was nothing she could do about it except keep the cloak closed tight.

She pulled the hair of the wig back and tied it with a ribbon from the discarded dress. Picking up the satchel, she rounded the building and headed for the main entrance. Doing her best not to trip on the cloak, she joined a throng of people flowing up the steps, hoping to avoid the gaze of the doormen. Like a frantic school of fish, the crowd swirled around her, swept her through the thick glass doors—rimmed in gleaming brass—and then dispersed, setting her free. She found herself in a massive lobby that was two stories high with a brilliant painted ceiling. She stared upward like the poor girl that she was, her mouth agape. Above her, angels flew across a heaven of silvery clouds toward a city in the sky. Clare had never seen such a beautiful sight.

All at once, she felt someone watching her. It was a man at the long, marble hotel desk. She knew she looked out-of-place, even with the gold trim on her cloak, and so understood his suspicions. Deciding to act quickly, she marched straight up to him. “I’m looking for Helen Killeen.”

The man’s eyes narrowed. He looked down at his registration book and cleared his throat. “She may be at dinner. I will see if I can find her,” he said stiffly. “Can I give her a name?”

“Simone,” Clare said, with a pinch in her throat. “Simone Boulet.”

The man pointed toward the lobby. “Have a seat, Miss Boulet.”

Clare sat on a marble bench beside a lovely fountain near the desk. She watched the stream of people swirling around the lobby, thinking of that name—Boulet. She wondered how she knew to pronounce it *Boo-lay*, with a silent *T*, and not *Boo-let*. She must have heard the name pronounced before, she decided, and then she realized, if she really was Simone, she had been raised with that name until the day they ran away.

Nearby, an elevator door opened. A little girl, dressed in a wool coat with white fur cuffs, stepped out of it, followed by her mother and father. As her parents passed Clare, heading for the registration desk, the girl stopped to peer into the fountain, trailing her fingers through the water of its catch basin. Clare smiled over at the girl, and said hello, but the girl just stared blankly, looking bored. When her father called to her, the girl



passed Clare by as if she wasn't there. Clare knew, looking so bedraggled, there was no reason for this girl to acknowledge her. They were from different worlds, the rich and the poor.

Clare continued to watch the girl as she rejoined her family. The girl tugged on her mother's cloak, whining loudly for a peppermint from a bowl on the counter till her mother gave in. Clare realized that, as Simone, she might have taken similar trips with her family. They might have even come to Chicago on such a trip and stayed at this very hotel. Perhaps she had even whined for a peppermint just like this spoiled young girl. What would she have been like, Clare wondered, if she had been raised knowing that the world would give her everything? Would a girl like that ever come to know someone like Rosie or Luigi? Clare could see—probably not.

It was a very uncertain moment for Clare. She had the odd feeling that she was about to cross an invisible border from a past that had been poor but certain—as far as knowing who she was—into a future that promised less hardship but was frightening and unsure. Who would she be? Who would she know? Would she be rich? Would her friends be mean and spoiled? How happy could a rich future be knowing there had been a time when the world gave her nothing—nothing, at least, except for good-hearted people like Rosie, Luigi, and Jane? Clare decided she could manage the shock of it, of anything, as long as she had her mother.

Clare jumped up and returned to the man at the desk. "Have you found Helen Killeen?"

The man looked down at her with irritation. "Unfortunately, she doesn't seem to be in the dining hall. I'll send a message up to her room. Perhaps she is there."

"I'll go myself if you tell me the room," Clare announced boldly.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," the man said with a huff. "Please have a seat."

"Thank you, Sir," Clare said firmly. "But I prefer to wait here."

Clare knew the man had forgotten to look for Helen at all. In fact, he probably hoped she would get frustrated and leave. Clare stood patiently, watching his every move until he

finally called a young messenger boy over and handed him a note, pointing to Clare. Clare relaxed and turned to watch the lobby again. That is when she saw a woman cross the room briskly, heading toward the elevator. Clare rushed across the marble floor, lifting the cloak so she wouldn't trip.

“Wait!” she called out to Helen as she stepped into the elevator. “It's me! Simone Boulet!”

## Chapter 19

“Oh, I’m so glad you came to me for help,” Helen said over and over again. “Donald will be thrilled.”

Clare nodded quietly. Her stomach was still settling from the elevator ride, her first. She had wanted to scream with its sudden lurch and whirl, but the elevator operator in the corner had been staring at her as if she were a thief. Now that she could sit still in this solid chair in Helen’s lavish suite, she was feeling better, but she avoided a look out the window. They were ten stories high, and if she looked down over the lights of the city, Clare feared she might faint.

Helen rattled on. “Donald has been anxious for me to find you ever since I wired him days ago. He would have come right away, to find you himself, but he was... detained on business.” Helen shifted uneasily. Clare suspected there was something Helen wasn’t mentioning. “He’s your guardian, you know, and he has been so worried for you all these years...” She shuddered. “Goodness, his daughter... living like that.”

Clare frowned. She was not his daughter. “My name is Boulet, not Killeen.”

Helen looked at her. “Of course! Your real father was Boulet, but Donald thought of you as his daughter the moment he married your mother, and then before he could blink you were gone. He was crushed.”

Clare felt her face flush and her pulse race. She could not believe her mother would marry a man like him and felt as upset as when Katherine had suggested it. Doing her best, though, to control her temper, Clare formulated a careful question. She softened her voice, trying to sound younger, more trusting, “I suppose my father left me with some money, didn’t he?”

Helen nodded. “All of it. Donald couldn’t believe it. According to the will, because your mother remarried, all the money went to you. She never told him that would happen. It was such a shock to Donald.” Helen looked at Clare. “Don’t you see? You are a very

wealthy girl. There is no reason for you to live like this. There is no reason at all.”

Clare sat back. The weight of those words hit her hard. Clare stared at the doll, Charlotte, sitting on a sofa across the room dressed in a blue silk dressing gown with matching slippers. Charlotte had so many fancy things while Simmie was stuffed into a satchel in a ragged, torn, dirty dress. It wasn't fair. Still her mother surely had a good reason for leaving all that money behind, and Clare sensed that Helen was too eager to talk poorly of her mother, so she decided to shift the conversation to Donald Killeen instead. “What does a guardian do?”

Helen stared at her thoughtfully. Then she smiled. “You are obviously quite smart, but I am sure you know very little about what to do with such a large sum... how to manage it. Donald will help you... guide you... make sure the accounts are properly maintained till you are an adult.”

Clare nodded again, searching Helen's face for a clue to the sincerity of her words. Clare knew Donald Killeen could not be trusted, and if he had control of her inheritance, however big or small it was, there would soon be nothing left of it. Helen, though, seemed to believe everything she was saying. Was it possible that Donald Killeen had two sides—one that was ruthless and one that could make a lonely widow marry him or a younger sister believe his every word?

Clare tried to conjure up a picture of him in her mind, but could only manage the one from the newspaper. “I don't remember him, except... perhaps I remember his voice. Does he have an accent?”

“Yes, Irish.”

“But you don't sound Irish.”

“I'm not. I am his half-sister. We share an Irish father. My father came over from Ireland after Donald's mother died. He left Donald in the care of an Aunt. Donald only came to Boston after Father passed away.”

Clare looked around the suite. “This is such a fancy room. It's so beautiful. It must cost a fortune.”

Helen lifted her head proudly. “My father left me the means to live an independent life.” She opened a locket pulled from her purse and showed Clare his picture. “I adored my father. He was so kind. He would always bring me the best presents when he went away.”

Clare looked at the picture. Helen’s father didn’t look at all kind. He had that same severe expression as his son. She wondered, for rich people, if kindness was measured in presents. “So you never knew Donald until you were older?”

“I was sixteen.” She leaned close. “I didn’t even know I had a half-brother. But he was so much like Father... it was a blessing.”

“Is your brother rich, like you?”

Helen shifted uneasily. “He’s had a bit of a setback. Business. But he’ll get on his feet again soon.”

Clare decided it was time to ask the question. Helen wasn’t trying to hide anything. She might tell her what she knew. “Helen, do you know where my mother is?”

Helen looked down at her hands. “Simone, your mother is not well. I don’t think she ever got over losing your father. It has... it has affected her... perhaps it’s the reason she took you away to begin with. Donald is trying to get her help, but it may be a while till you can see her.”

Clare tried not to speak. She knew if she did, she would lash out and ruin everything. Calming herself, she managed to ask, “Is she in the hospital?”

“Perhaps,” Helen said vaguely. “I am not sure.”

Clare frowned. “But my mother is alright, isn’t she?”

“Oh, certainly,” Helen assured her. “My brother will see that she gets the best of care.”

Clare paused. She decided to try another question. “Where does my stepfather live? On Meeker Street?”

“Meeker Street?” Helen shook her head. “Oh, no. Donald closed up Meeker Street when you left. He’s been staying with me at the family estate.”

“In Boston?”

Helen nodded. “Don’t you remember it?”

“No,” Clare murmured wistfully, “but it must be beautiful.”

“Oh, it is,” Helen said brightly. She brought out a photograph and rattled on about her home. Clare nodded politely and tried to pretend some interest, but her mind was whirring. She had gotten some of what she came for, but unless the woman was lying, Helen didn’t know much more. Clare decided it was time for the next step. She leaned forward eagerly. “Can you send my stepfather a telegram for me? Can you tell him I’m glad to be coming back?”

Helen brightened. “Certainly, I’ll do that this instant. And I’ll see about tickets. Maybe we still have time for the late train. Perhaps we can make that.”

Clare’s eyes widened. She let her voice get breathless. “Is it a long trip to Boston?”

“A bit more than a day.”

“Which depot do we leave from? There are so many.”

“The La Salle Station. But don’t worry about the details. I’ll take care of it.” Helen rose and headed toward the door. She stopped and looked at Clare. “No, the afternoon train would be best. We should shop for you. Donald shouldn’t see you like this.” Clare winced as Helen motioned toward her tattered pinafore. “I’ll just send the telegram and be right back.”

As soon as Helen left, Clare raced to the door to open it a crack, making sure the hall was empty. Seeing no one there, she shut the door and sped over to her satchel, pulling out her jacket and then her cap. In a flash, Clare was out of her cloak, her wig, her dress and back in her knee pants. She packed up her dress and cloak, then closing the satchel, she stepped over to the writing desk by the suite window, took a sheet of paper from a drawer and penned a note:

*Dear Auntie Helen,*

*There is something I have to do before I go. Don’t leave  
without me.*

She signed it with a flourish—*Simone*—and set it on the bed.

As she went to close the desk drawer, Clare noticed a telegram folded in two. Curious, she opened it. It was from Donald Killeen and it read:

*Find Simone and lose the nanny if she's there. I'll get a lawyer to draw up the papers. This time, Caroline is in no state to refuse. Hurry.*

Clare blinked. Suddenly, she saw Helen in a very different light. It seemed Helen had been pretending just as much as she herself had. Clare wondered which part of her story was true and which was false. Clare decided Helen must know where her mother was, and that there was no doctor's care to be sought. Clare read the telegram again. The last line filled her with alarm. What condition was her mother in? Where were they hiding her? She thought back to her conversation with Helen. All at once, Clare knew exactly where her mother was.

She pulled on her jacket and cap, and even dared to peer out the window at the city below. It was a marvelous sight, street lights shimmering off into the distance. She didn't linger over the view, however. Tucking a stray bit of cloak back into her satchel, she slipped out the door, relieved by the freedom of being in disguise once again. The elevator ride down was even more unsettling than the ride up. Clare wondered that the operator could stop it so effortlessly when it seemed to be falling so fast. She feared she would faint, but then the doors finally opened, and she strode out, looking neither right nor left, not wanting to catch Helen's eye if she were there. Outside, in the chill of the night, she found a friendly doorman to point the way to the station, and in a few short blocks, she was there.

The ticket for the early morning train to Boston was expensive, almost twenty dollars. However, the train's departure had been delayed for several hours till five in the morning. She felt suddenly exhausted, knowing there was nowhere to sleep and there was nothing she could do about it. Tucking the ticket safely into the inner pocket of her jacket, along with the rest of her cash, she sat on a bench to wait out the night.

The clock on the station wall moved slower and slower, at least to her weary mind. Fighting off a yawn, she pulled out the letters to Deirdre Sullivan from Postal Box 9 and stared at them vaguely. Why weren't they addressed to Derry D'Arcy? Had Auntie Dearie rented a box in Deirdre Sullivan's name? She yawned again, then blinked, a sudden thought occurring to her—if she were Simone, not Clare; if her mother was Caroline, not Colleen; then Auntie Dearie had never been her aunt at all. Auntie Dearie was her mother's old nanny, the one who had cared for her when she was young. After days of wondering who the mysterious Deirdre was, Clare had to conclude that, yes, Auntie Dearie had a different name too. She wasn't Derry D'Arcy. Auntie Dearie was Deirdre Sullivan.



## Chapter 20

Staying awake for the first hour was the hardest. It was past midnight and the station was virtually empty except for the lone policeman who kept a careful eye on her after checking she had a ticket. Clare could not tell whether he was being protective or suspicious. As she tried to ignore him, she busied herself by mentally composing a telegram to Miss Addams. She didn't want Jane to worry, but could not think of what to say that would quiet her fears. Explaining she was off to Boston to save her mother from Donald Killeen would raise the alarm, not lessen it. Finally she settled on:

*I am fine. I know where my mother is. I am contacting  
my uncle directly. Maybe McDonald can't be trusted.  
Don't tell Helen. Thank you so for all your help.  
Clare.*

Clare jumped up and went to the telegraph window, coughing softly to wake the dozing clerk. She filled out the form and paid for the quickest delivery. On another form she wrote Josiah Harper's Virginia address and a short message:

*Dear Uncle. Meet me at Meeker Street. Boston. Hurry.  
Clare.*

She studied it with a frown, knowing something was not right. And then it hit her. She sighed, crossed out her name, and wrote *Simone*.

Clare sat down again and fought to stay awake. Like the telegraph clerk, she found herself nodding off for minutes at a time. Needing a diversion, she took out the letters from her uncle to Auntie Dearie and opened the latest one, expecting to already know what it said. It was a short letter, written in a script that seemed familiar. She opened her satchel and took out the taffy tin, searching through it for the envelope that held the article about Donald Killeen. The note that came with the clipping, the one from Josiah warning about Killeen, was indeed written by the same hand.

She scanned the letter. As expected, it told briefly of her mother's disappearance on the train and Josiah's concerns. Apparently, the letter her mother had tried to post held another copy of the Baltimore key, but nothing more, not even a note. Her mother's travel bag, found on the floor by her seat, held her money and her clothes, so disappearing without the bag suggested something suspicious had happened. Josiah talked of notifying the Baltimore police, and then he suggested it was safe for Deirdre and Clare to leave Chicago and come home to Virginia. His reason for this made Clare sit bolt upright as she read:

*McDonald is just back from Dublin. He has made a great discovery. Killeen was married years ago in Ireland, and he never got a divorce there. His wife is still alive, which makes Caroline's marriage null and void.*

Clare let the letter drop to her lap. The news was electrifying. She stared out the station's rear doors at the trains in the huge iron and glass train shed. They seemed like long, slumbering beasts ready to swallow her and spit her out in a place far away. Clare smiled. Even though she understood very little of the circumstances under which Donald Killeen was a threat to them, she realized that this news would undo the danger. Null and void. That must mean the marriage was not real. He wasn't her stepfather, not legally, so the power he had over her or her mother would be gone. She stared at the clock. It was only half past one in the morning. Five o'clock seemed so far away.

Clare jumped up and began to pace, stuffing the letters back into her jacket pocket. Seeing the policeman watching her, she picked up her satchel and began to walk around the station more leisurely. It was then she saw an old man enter through the station doors. He hobbled past the policeman, his cane clicking on the polished wooden floors, nodding to the officer.

The policeman waved. "Good morning, Ned."

"Had your break, yet?" The old man chuckled. "I'm here. You can go for a beer if

you please. I'll catch those rascals if they threaten anyone."

"Maybe later," the officer called out with a grin.

The old man tipped his hat and hobbled toward the bench where Clare had been sitting. Clare watched him with interest. He settled down and pulled out a paper to read, but stared at the trains instead. Clare walked around the station a few more rounds and then picked another bench near him. She watched him as he watched the trains with a happy smile across his face. Clare could tell he was daydreaming.

Clare began to daydream too. She remembered her mother, baking biscuits in their kitchen just a few weeks before she left. She had a twinkle in her eye and a white dab of flour on her nose as she said, "I'll hide a pebble in the dough. Whoever gets it in their biscuit, gets to choose a treat." Clare remembered that she had found the pebble but had almost choked on it, then got the giggles after she coughed it out. Her mother had panicked at first, slapping her frantically on the back to dislodge the pebble, but then seeing Clare was okay, had joined her in her fit of giggles. They never did go for a treat, content to just sit quietly, playing cards and talking. Clare had felt such a good feeling between them, like good friends. It was hard to imagine her mother keeping so many secrets from her.

"Young fellow, could you spare a moment?" It was the old man, Ned, calling to her through the haze of her daydream.

Clare blinked and looked in his direction. He was motioning to her. "I can't quite read this number in the advertisement. Print's blurry. Could you tell me what it is?"

Clare picked up her satchel and moved beside him, staring at the folded section of paper in his hand. There was an advertisement for a room in a boarding house and a telephone number to call. "It says Main 1461."

"Main 1461," he murmured to himself. "Not quite happy with my current lodgings, you see. Too many stairs. And the owner doesn't like me going out all times of night." He shrugged. "I just can't sleep... too used to night work I suppose." He pointed his cane towards the train. "I want to be back out on the rails."

“You used to work on the railroad?” Clare asked with interest. “What did you do?”

“All kinds of jobs. I started as a call boy at age fifteen. Then I went to brakeman for many, many years till I made conductor... first freight, then passenger... until the wreck.”

“The wreck?”

“Oh, yes. A bad one. Ten cars derailed one night by the Ohio River in a blizzard. Cars piled up like sticks along the river bank. One rolled right into the water. Everyone in that one drowned. Worked all night to save those we could. Then I slipped on the bank in the snow and gashed my knee on a twisted ribbon of metal that had peeled off a sleeper’s roof. Infection set in. That was it. They said I was lucky to keep my leg.”

“My goodness. I guess you were.”

The old man nodded. He stared at her thoughtfully. “Where are you headed?”

“Boston.”

“And who is in Boston?”

“My mother.”

Ned leaned in close. “Well, now, let me give you a hint. If you want to sneak off to Boston dressed as a boy, you had better keep track of your voice. You started off low, but you’re getting pretty high, young lady.”

Clare put her hand to her mouth. She was so sleepy, she hadn’t been paying attention. She was getting confused about who she was pretending to be. She looked toward the policeman. “Don’t tell, please?”

Ned shrugged. “None of my business. I’ve seen them all, I have. On the rails you get all types... angry runaways, sad orphans, devious delinquents.” He looked at Clare. “But you’re not any of those. No, you’ve got a mission.”

Clare’s lip trembled. She was tired. Even though she believed she knew where her mother was, Boston seemed so far away. “I’ve got to find my mother.”

“All by yourself?”

“My mother’s gone missing, but I think I know where she is.”

“Shouldn’t you tell the police?”

“My uncle has, and I have cabled him. He’ll know to meet me.”

Ned seemed satisfied with that. He pulled a piece of taffy from his pocket and offered it to her. She stared at it, thinking of the taffy tin and all its secrets. Suddenly, she felt overwhelmed, and the tears began to flow. The taffy tin made her think of the curse. Auntie Dearie had brought the curse with that name—her name, Deirdre—all the way from Ireland, but when Auntie died, the curse didn’t.

Ned brought out a handkerchief and handed it to her. “Pretend to blow your nose,” he whispered. “Boys usually don’t cry in public.”

Clare blew her nose, wiping down her cheeks and dabbing her eyes at the same time. “I’m just so tired,” she murmured. “And confused. From one minute to the next, I don’t know who I’m supposed to be.”

Ned didn’t say anything. He just waited quietly for Clare to get calm. Finally, Clare looked up at him. “I know I’m a girl, not a boy. But am I a rich girl? A poor girl? I don’t know. Am I Clare or Simone? I don’t know. Everything has turned upside down. And when I get to Boston, everything will change.”

“I hope for the better,” Ned said gently.

“Perhaps.” She looked at him. “What if I turn out to be rich, instead of poor, and don’t like it?”

Ned scratched his head. “People usually worry about it going the other way.”

“I know.” Clare nodded. “But I’ve been raised poor for most of my life, at least most that I can remember. I’m smart. I’m not spoiled, and I can work hard. And there are nice people who are poor. They help you even though they hardly have anything. But rich people are so arrogant. They see others as small so they can feel big. I don’t want to grow up like that.”

Ned tapped his cane a little bit, thinking. “Seems to me that I have met those rich types you mention. But there have been decent folks with money on the trains. And I’ve met poor folks, good ones like you mentioned, as well. I’ve also met those that are poor, and you wouldn’t want to know them. Maybe they’re not arrogant, but they’re mean.” He

paused a moment, collecting his thoughts. “I don’t think it matters what you’ve got on the outside... all the money in the world or none of it. I think it matters what you’ve got on the inside.” He pointed to his chest. “You are not your money or your name even. You are the person you are inside of you. Do you think you are a good person?”

Clare looked at him and nodded.

“Then that’s who you are, Clare-Simone. And that’s all you need.”

## Chapter 21

It was half past three when the old man woke her. “It is time for me to go. I am ready to doze myself, and I wouldn’t want you missing your train.”

Clare looked up at him, rubbing her eyes. “Thank you,” she mumbled. “Thank you so much.”

Ned winked. “Remember your voice... lower, lower, lower.”

Clare grinned and nodded.

“Here, Clare-Simone, have some breakfast.” Ned handed her a dollar.

“Oh, no.” Clare shook her head.

“Yes, you take it, Miss. You never know what’s ahead, and if you do strike it rich, well, come back to Chicago and look up Ned Whistlestone... all the station masters know me. You can pay me back with interest.”

Clare smiled at Ned. He turned and hobbled away, tipping his hat at the policeman.

“See you tomorrow, Ned,” the man replied.

“Maybe. If these legs are willing,” Ned hollered back as he disappeared out the station doors.

It was then that Clare looked down at her satchel on the bench. Beneath it was his paper. She started to jump up and follow him, to give it back, but just then someone entered through the station doors—someone who made Clare turn around abruptly and sit back down. It was Helen.

Clare put her satchel in her lap and picked up the paper, pretending to read it so she could hide both her satchel and her face—the two things Helen might still recognize. Behind her, she heard Helen talking to the policeman, asking about any young girls he had seen waiting for the train to Boston. He hadn’t seen a one, he said, and Helen seemed to believe him. Still, Clare didn’t want to turn around to see if she had left.

From the chatter of voices and scuffle of feet, Clare realized there were more people,

now, in the station. She was glad Ned had offered to keep an eye on her satchel—and her—so she could sleep. She peered over the paper. A few travelers waiting with their baggage looked trustworthy, but some looked pretty rough such as the men leaning against the wall, watching everyone's movements closely. Clare hoped they weren't watching her. She could tell right away that they would fit Auntie Dearie's definition of bad men. They made her want to run.

One shady character suddenly pushed away from the wall and began to walk in her direction. Clare looked back to her paper, hoping he would pass her by, but he stopped right in front of her.

"So, you a friend of Ned's?"

Clare looked up. The man was unshaven and he smelled of alcohol and tobacco smoke. "Perhaps," she said, making her voice so deep it tickled her throat.

"Well, a friend of Ned's is a friend of mine. Name's Reggie." He grinned at her. Several of his front teeth were missing. "Got to admire him. He's quite an angler if you know what I mean."

Clare didn't smile. "No I don't."

"Did he tell you about the wreck?"

Clare nodded slowly.

"Well, there was a wreck, but he weren't anywheres near it. That's what I think." Reggie nodded toward her satchel. "And if I was you, I'd check my belongings. He might have helped himself to something while you slept."

Clare blinked. She was still a bit dazed from her nap, so she could hardly think. She stared at Reggie, trying to understand what he was up to. Did he expect she would believe him when Ned had been so kind? Still, she looked sideways at her satchel, wondering if anything was missing. Then she realized why Reggie might want her to check. Perhaps he was the one who hoped to help himself to something in her satchel once he knew what was in it. She shook her head. "Don't matter. There's nothing there worth stealing."

Reggie shrugged. "Suppose not."



He turned to walk away, but that's when Clare noticed Helen. She was still in the station, lingering by the telegraph window, talking to the clerk. Clare stiffened. What if Helen mentioned the name of Simone? Would the clerk let slip that he'd sent a telegram with that name in it?

"So you don't believe Ned?" she asked matter-of-factly, trying to keep the conversation going. She thought it would be better if Helen saw her with someone else than if she was all alone.

Reggie shrugged again. "Well, he works the crowd... yes, you bet. Someone's always buying him a cup of tea and a bun. That's what I said... an real thimblerrigger."

"So where you heading out for on the train?"

"Nah, nowhere. I'm here waiting for the five-thirty-five from Detroit. Got some business with someone."

Clare looked behind him. She saw a family wander in, loaded with luggage and five sleepy-eyed children. "My friends are here," she said and nodded bye to him. Then thinking of Jane's story of the thief, she took the dollar Ned had given her and handed it to him. "Here, have some tea and a bun, and thank Ned for it. It's his."

He stared at her, bewildered, then slipped the dollar into his pocket with a quick glance around as if he'd stolen it. Clare nodded again and walked past him, hurrying toward the family. She fell in line behind one of the children and walked quietly, hoping to look like part of the little group, but the father turned around and frowned at her. Clare stepped forward, "Sir, I hope you don't mind. That man over there is bothering me. I told him I was with you so he would stop."

The man smiled, handing over one of the smaller suitcases he was juggling. "Here, I wouldn't mind a little help."

Clare took it and grinned gratefully. "Thank you." She followed him over to a rear door where he set the other suitcases down. After giving the children a firm warning to behave, he walked back across the station to the ticket window. The mother stared at Clare suspiciously and picked up the littlest one, a girl of two, who was fussing. Clare smiled

at the mother nervously and, trying to start up a conversation, said, “Did you have a nice vacation?”

The woman frowned. “Don’t ask.”

Clare nodded awkwardly, searching for something else to say, but the woman changed her mind, broke the uncomfortable silence, and launched into a detailed description of everything that had gone wrong: the baby got sick, another child was lost for half a day, and the rest of the children were so cranky it gave her a headache. They had come for a wedding and were very glad to be heading home.

Clare nodded sympathetically. “Where’s home?”

“Ohio.”

Clare beamed. “I used to live in Meadowfield.”

The woman smiled. “We’re from Sparstown, just over the hill.” She looked around the station, “Are you here all alone?”

Clare nodded. “Yes, I’m going to Boston. My mother’s there, but it’s been terrible waiting by myself. That man was bothering me and there is a lady, over there, that’s got me confused with someone else. I swear she’s crazy.” As Clare pointed out Helen back across the station, she saw the clerk pointing out the bench she had just left. Clare turned away, suddenly anxious. “If she comes this way, could you pretend that you know me?”

The woman studied her and then asked firmly, “Tell me the truth, are you in trouble with the law?”

Clare shook her head. “No.”

“But you are in some kind of trouble?”

“Yes.” Clare stepped closer and whispered. “Ma’am, my mother’s missing. I’m going to Boston to meet my uncle and find her. That woman, she’s somehow part of it. Please help me. I’ve got to get away.”

The woman stared at her, uncertain. Clare bit her lip, wondering how to convince her, then she realized the best way. “My name is Clare. Clare D’Arcy,” she said, letting her voice return to normal for a moment. “I wouldn’t be dressed like this, like a boy, if I

wasn't trying to hide from someone, would I?"

The woman nodded slowly.

"Please," Clare said, "Believe me. I'm so worried about my mother. I have to get on that train. I have to find her."

"Yes, I think you do," the woman said with sudden conviction. "So you had better know our names. Mine is Hannah and my husband's is Stanley. My children are Margaret, Tom, Jenny, Jimmy and here..." She handed the little girl to Clare. "This is Rosie. If you can win Rosie over, that woman will be convinced you belong here."

Clare smiled at the girl, who immediately broke out crying. "Shh! Rosie. Shh! I know another girl named Rosie. Let me tell you a story about her and a mouse called Mr. Nibbly who lives beneath the floor."

The girl stopped crying. Clare had caught her attention. The other children gathered around to listen, too. Soon she was spinning such fantastic yarns about Rosie and her mouse that they all were laughing and giggling. Clare had them so enchanted, she seemed she'd been part of the family forever, and when Helen wandered past, the woman didn't even stop to ask her anything.



## *Part 6: Simmie's Secrets*

## Chapter 22

The sun was bright, but it was bitter cold when Clare stepped off the train in Boston. She didn't dally, worried Donald would be watching for her. She slipped outside and lost herself in a crowd of passengers heading down the street, then she stopped in a shop to buy some apples and ask directions.

The long trip had been uneventful. She had slept a bit, but mostly thought about all the people she had met in the past few days, especially the old man, Ned. It seemed Reggie, the shady man at the station, had been partially right. Ned had been into her satchel, but instead of taking from it, he had left her with a puzzling note scribbled on a scrap of paper:

*Clare-Simone,*

*You can see the best in someone or see the worst, and though the worst may be what they are thinking (and certainly take care for that), there's always a bit of magic in seeing the better possibility. Thank you for seeing that in me.*

*Ned*

Clare had puzzled over that note through the long, clickety-clackety night on the rails. Did it mean Reggie was right—Ned was a liar and an angler—but had changed his ways because of her? Or did it mean she had seen Ned for what he was, a good person, instead of distrusting him, like others did, because he was an old, crippled man? In the end, Clare realized that wasn't the point at all. Reggie had seen the worst in Ned, because he saw the worst in everyone, especially himself. He couldn't even accept a dollar without feeling guilty. She, on the other hand, had seen the best in Ned, and he had been kind to her and helped her when she needed it. No, Ned was right—you couldn't be foolish and trust everyone. She hadn't trusted Reggie. Still, Miss Addams certainly got better results

in her dealings with people than Katherine did, and she did it by believing that good results were possible to begin with.

That's why, as she waited in line to buy her apples and ask for directions, she thought of Donald Killeen. Were good results possible with him? On the train, she had not been able to think at all of him, or what she would do when she met him. He certainly was intending the worst, and she had no illusions she could magically change him, but it was time to finally think of him and make a plan. She realized, though, that he frightened her. She didn't want to face him. She hoped she would find her mother at Meeker Street without him being anywhere near. At the least, if she did have to face him, she hoped her Uncle Josiah would be there.

Clare stepped out of the shop, turning north in the direction the clerk had told her to head. As she walked up the narrow cobbled lanes, she thought of her Uncle. On the train, she had read all of the letters that he had sent to Auntie Dearie at the postal box—all written in the months after she had died. Josiah had not known of Deirdre's illness or her death, so in his first letter, dated June 21st, he had apologized for the delay in answering her. He had been away on a trip and was so relieved to hear from her after all those years. He had also sent fifty dollars. Apparently Auntie Dearie had asked him for money, admitting to him that they were getting desperate. The two other letters from him held more money, and he urged Auntie Dearie to convince her mother that it was time to come home. If she couldn't, he said he would still help in any way they needed. Clare sighed. Now he definitely was needed, but she worried that he may not have gotten the telegram. What if he was in Baltimore and not Virginia? He could even be in Boston, looking for her mother, and she wouldn't know he was there.

Clare got lost several times on her way to Meeker Street. Boston was a city with hills, not like flat Chicago. That was not the reason she found herself breathless, however, as she climbed Meeker Street. The old house was at the top, overlooking the city and harbor. Her heart raced as she came into view of it. It sat back from the street on a large lot that was overgrown and unkept. How would she sneak into it? What on earth would

she find? Would he be there?

She stood behind a shrub, watching the huge brick mansion for a sign of anyone. It looked the same as in the old photo except the paint was peeling on the white columns of the porch. She studied the upper windows. One seemed to be broken. The lower windows were boarded up in haphazard fashion as if done in a hurry. It looked just as Helen had said, closed up and empty. She hoped her mother was truly there.

Finally, Clare decided to approach the building from the rear. She walked past the house and then doubled back behind it, looking for a way in. The rear door was locked, but a small, low window on the side showed signs that someone had tried to loosen the boards. After much effort, she pried off two of the boards enough to try the window. To her relief, it moved when she lifted it. She squeezed in, finding herself in an empty parlor that was completely bare. Even the lamp fixture on the wall had been removed, leaving the mark of its outline to show where it had been.

Clare listened for a long time. She heard no sound at all. Donald Killeen wasn't there, but she feared neither was her mother. All she could do was explore and make sure, so she went from room to room, opening closets, checking everywhere in the gloomy, spooky light. Some rooms were so dark she had to feel her way to make certain she wouldn't trip. The whole first floor, however, was as empty as the parlor. Everything that could be removed, even the knobs on doors, had been taken from it.

The kitchen had been stripped of its range and even the sink. She looked in the pantry. Only an empty flour sack and a broken piece of crockery remained on the shelves. Beside the pantry was another door. Clare opened it, knowing it was the basement. She stared down the steps, which descended into heavy, rank blackness. Without a candle to help her navigate the stairs, Clare would have to call out into the darkness to see if her mother was there, but she didn't want to risk the noise until she knew that the upper story was clear.

Retracing her steps to the main hallway, Clare began to climb the wide stairs. It was hard to keep her footsteps quiet. The hallway above seemed brighter than the rooms

below, probably because the upstairs windows were not boarded. She climbed slowly. It was difficult not to tremble. She jumped with every creak the old house made. Then she heard a faint thump above her. Clare froze. Someone was here, after all.

Clare listened, searching for an indication of what the noise was. It didn't come again, and Clare hoped she had imagined it. Still, she feared someone was waiting for her at the top of the stairs. She strained her ears so hard she felt she would hear the faint beating of someone's heart if it were there. For a moment, she heard the sound of rapid breathing, but realized it was hers. Finally, hearing nothing, she continued, step by careful step, willing herself to stop thinking of what she might find after the last one.

It seemed a century till she reached the upper hall. She looked carefully around the corner. No one was there. She listened again. There was the scuttle of a creature, probably a rat in the ceiling above her. Quietly, she began opening doors. Each room was empty—no curtains, no wardrobe, no bed. She tried to imagine where the nursery had been—the room that had been hers—but couldn't seem to tell one from another. Everything looked sad and dusty, with spider webs draped from the ceilings and dirty streaks etched upon the window glass.

She heard another thump. She tiptoed down the hall and opened a door to a room that was small and dark. Clare could smell the scent of fever in the air. As Clare's eyes adjusted to the dimness, she saw in the corner a single brass bed with a thin, bare mattress. Limp, tied to the frame with a rope, was her mother.



## Chapter 23

Clare's mother was so weak she could barely lift her head. Her tongue was parched so she could not speak. Clare worked frantically on the ropes till she had her mother free, then pulled out the taffy tin, spilled the letters out into her satchel, and raced down the hall. She knew there was a bathroom at the end—somehow. Yes, she remembered this place. The door squealed open. Everything inside was gone except a cracked pedestal sink that still had its rusty faucet. She opened the tap, and to her relief, a dribble of water emerged.

Carefully she helped her mother sip from the taffy tin. Then she bit into an apple. Peeling the skin off the chunk as best she could, she slipped it into her mother's mouth. "Just suck on it."

Clare felt her mother's forehead. She was burning up. Panicked, Clare tried to get her mother to stand, but her mother was so weak she just collapsed on the bed. "We have to get you help." Clare pulled her mother's arm. "We have to get you out of here."

Caroline forced herself to sit up. "Clare," she murmured, "How did you get here?"

"I took a train. Uncle Josiah's coming too... soon, I hope."

"I don't want his help. I can't trust him."

"You can. He sent money. He sent letters."

Caroline shook her head.

"But mother, on the train, you sent him the key to the box in Baltimore."

Caroline wrung her hands. "I didn't know what else to do. I felt someone watching me. I feared it was Donald. I couldn't think."

"You have to let Josiah help. It wasn't Uncle's fault. He just fell for his lies, like everybody did."

Caroline's shoulder's slumped. "Yes, everybody... but you really mean me." Her eyes searched the floorboards. "I'm sorry. I don't know why I married him. When your

father died, I felt so lonely.” With a quivering breath, she sank back onto the bed.

Clare felt her forehead again. “You need a doctor. We can’t wait.”

“You go for help.” Caroline motioned for another sip of water.

Clare tipped the tin slowly as her mother sipped. “No. He might come back.”

“Donald hasn’t been here since yesterday.”

Clare bit off another piece of apple. “Here, suck on some of this again. You have to get strong so we can leave.”

Caroline savored the flavor of the apple as it slowly dissolved. “Hide me.” She said. “Then go.”

“There’s no place to hide you. I’ve looked everywhere.”

“There is. In the master bedroom. This is an old house with lots of secret places.”

“A secret room?”

Caroline nodded. “Spies hid here... from the British, I suppose, long, long ago.”

Clare gave her mother a third bite of apple. “You finish this apple and then I will go.”

They struggled to the master bedroom where Caroline directed Clare to open a door in the dark paneling next to the fireplace. The secret room behind it was not much more than a few feet wide. Clare dreaded the thought of leaving her mother shut up in its musty darkness. She spread out the cloak so her mother could lay on the floor, then covered her with the extra shirt, the dress, and the old pinafore in hopes it would keep her warm. She filled another taffy tin of water and set it on the floor. Caroline motioned to her. Clare came close. Her mother squeezed her hand.

“I’m sorry I left you alone. I should have told you everything, but first I wanted to see the lawyer about the divorce... to see what chance I had.”

“Divorce?”

Caroline sighed. “Donald wouldn’t give me a divorce. He said he would ruin my reputation, making up scandalous stories about me and even battle me for custody of you. I didn’t have the courage to fight him, so we ran away. All your father’s money was held

in trust for you by the bank, but I had some money of my own at the Mercantile Trust in Baltimore.”

Clare nodded slowly. “Baltimore.”

“Donald didn’t know about it. That’s where I always went, to Baltimore, just to take out a little bit of cash each time. I should have taken you with me this time, but I was afraid he would find you, Simone.”

Clare winced at the name, Simone. It felt odd for her mother to say it. She still wanted to be Clare. She wanted to live in Chicago with Rosie and Tim. She wanted to talk again with Jane and hear Luigi play his violin. She wanted to never come back to this empty house on Meeker Street. It seemed a house that was cursed. “Mother, why is this house so bare?”

“He must have sold everything. He couldn’t touch the house itself. It was part of your trust. But he must have been desperate to sell what he could.”

“Is Donald Killeen my guardian?”

Her mother shook her head. “No, I would never sign the papers. I would never do that. He would raid your funds... stealing everything.” She rambled on, quite distressed. “He threatened me. He threatened you. He said I had to sign. That’s why I left Boston. I went to my brother’s, but Josiah told him we were there.” Caroline’s hands began to tremble. “He came after me, threatening to petition the court for custody.” Her eyes grew wide. “We had to disappear.”

“Shh! Please. Rest.”

Caroline nodded limply, and Clare turned to go, but suddenly her mother reached out for her again. “I thought I could make the Baltimore money last forever, but it is almost gone. I don’t know how to even pay for the lawyer. I am sorry. I should have been stronger. I should have seen to it long ago.”

“Mother, listen. Don’t worry. I have some money. I found some jewels.” Clare pointed to the tin of water on the floor. “Auntie Dearie had them in this taffy tin beneath the floor.”

Her mother looked at the tin. “Taffy tin? You found the taffy tin? Deirdre had thought she lost it. We couldn’t find it anywhere.”

“Yes, I found the taffy tin. I’ve hidden the jewels. They’re safe. We can sell them for money.”

Caroline smiled faintly. “Yes, the jewels. Except for Simmie’s pearls, they were Deirdre’s jewels... her husband’s, passed down through his family. We saved them for emergencies, but they’re not as valuable as they look.”

Clare frowned in dismay.

“Don’t worry, Clare.” Her mother touched her cheek. “They might be worth enough to pay the lawyer at least.”

Clare brightened at the sound of her old, familiar name. It made her feel like herself again—the Clare who had figured out the mystery, the Clare who had found her mother. Looking at the taffy tin, she remembered the letters in her satchel and the news her mother needed to know. “A letter came from Uncle Josiah. He said Killeen was already married... back in Ireland. Mother, you may not need a divorce.”

With that shocking news, her mother groaned and collapsed, her energy sapped. Clare fussed around her. “Mother, don’t worry. It will be okay. Uncle wants to help. He will straighten all this out.”

“Go,” she whispered. “Go quick. I am.... so dizzy.” She groaned again.

Clare was frantic. She hugged her mother and then slipped out from the tiny room, closing the doorway in the panel. After making sure there was no sign that anything had been disturbed, she grabbed her satchel and raced down the stairs to the parlor. She tossed her satchel out the open window and squeezed through it herself. Looking toward the street, she wondered in which direction she should go for help, but before she could take a single step, a hand came from behind and clasped her mouth.

An arm wrapped around her. “Who is this, now?” said a voice with a thick Irish accent.

Clare froze. She knew that voice was Donald Killeen’s. Panic hit her. She struggled

to get free, biting at his fingers.

“I bet you were disappointed, eh, lad? There’s nothing left for little thieves.”

For one quick moment, Clare relaxed. He didn’t know it was her.

Donald kicked at her satchel. “C’mere, something’s in that bag. What in Mary Mother’s name did you find?” Killeen shoved a small pistol against her forehead. “Pick it up and come inside. We need a bit of a talk about this.”

With a pistol at her head, Clare stumbled towards the back of the house. Her legs were as wobbly as rubber. She wanted to run, but couldn’t chance it. If he shot her, no one would ever find her mother. So she stood limply as he struggled to unlock the kitchen door, knowing as soon as he looked into the satchel he would figure out who she was.

The door swung open. He pushed her inside and she fell against the floor, shaking.

“So what might you be finding in a dark old house?”

“Nothing.”

“You’re lying.”

“I’m not.”

“And what did you see that you shouldn’t?” Donald asked suggestively.

Clare knew he meant her mother. “No. Nothing.”

“You must of.” He shoved the pistol back in her face. “So what should I be doing with you?”

Clare feared she would faint, but thinking of her mother, she forced herself to think instead. She had to do something, and the only thing that came to mind was to confess her true name. “I’m Simone,” she squeaked.

“Simone?” He lowered the pistol.

“I’m your stepdaughter.”

“Away with ya.” Donald stared at her, not believing.

“Look in the satchel. It is filled with letters to Deirdre Sullivan, pictures, my old doll, Simmie, and a locket.”

Donald rummaged inside, checking the contents. He pulled out the locket. Opening

it, he stared at the picture and laughed. “So you did make the Boston train. Helen was right sure you hadn’t. Why didn’t you wait for her, now?”

Thinking of Helen, Clare felt her anger rising. She decided to use it to her advantage. She sat up boldly. “I’m looking for my mother. Where is she? I thought she would be in this house. But she isn’t. I’ve searched everywhere.”

Donald looked up from the locket. He didn’t say anything for a long while. Then his face softened. His tone completely changed. “Simone. It is you, it is. And I’ve been looking and looking all these years. Many’s the time I’ve been wondering how you were faring. You’re right grown up, to be sure.”

Clare could tell he was trying to charm her the way he must charm everyone at first. He seemed totally different—like day and night, the prince not the monster. “Where is my mother?” Clare repeated.

“Now, your mother isn’t well. She’s in a doctor’s care. Upon my word and honor, you’ll see her soon.”

“What hospital is she in? Take me to see her.”

Donald’s voice was gentle. “She’s not in hospital. She’s home... on the estate. Let me take you to her.”

He reached for her hand. Clare pulled back. This wasn’t going the way she intended. She knew if she left with him, she might never get away to find help for her mother. Wondering what to do, she thought back to the pawn shop and the family at the train station—when she was desperate, she had turned to the truth to help her persuade. Perhaps the truth would work on Donald Killeen.

Clare shook her head again. “I can’t go anywhere with you. I am waiting for my Uncle. He’s coming.”

With that, Donald’s pretense at charm disappeared. He looked out the back door anxiously, fearing Josiah was already there.

“You can’t win on this. He knows,” Clare said boldly.

Donald swung around, glaring. “Knows what?”

“That you were already married in Ireland.”

Donald’s eyes grew wide. “No!” he exploded. He pounded his fist on the wall. He paced the room, thinking. He swore at her a hundred times, every bit the monster, not the prince. Finally he looked at her. “You little gossoon. You’ll pay for this.” He swept her up, slung her over his shoulder and tromped up the stairs.

Soon she was back in the little, dark room tied to the frame of the bed. Clare realized she had made a terrible mistake.

## Chapter 24

Clare shivered with fear as she sat on the bed. She could hear Donald searching the rooms for her mother. “Caroline!” he called. “Where are you? I’m a hold of your daughter, I am! She’s tied on that bit of a bed! Come out or she will suffer! You don’t want that now, do you dear?”

Clare was terrified her mother would hear Donald and surrender to his threat, but his rant continued unanswered. Her mother was probably too weak to move, or perhaps she was asleep and couldn’t even hear him. Clare feared, though, if her mother’s fever had made her delirious and restless, she might call out or groan or even thump against the walls. Clare’s only hope was that he would keep hollering so much he would not notice.

The room seemed to suddenly chill. Clare shivered. Her thoughts turned to the curse. She imagined Donald was the High King and her mother the beautiful Deirdre with her father as the nephew Deirdre loved. For a moment it felt real, as if it had truly happened that way. She even imagined Donald had killed her father because he felt betrayed. The legend gripped her like a nightmare, a paralyzing one. She was trapped in the center of it, that dark and deadly curse. There was no way to break free of it. There was nothing to hope for. That was how it seemed until she heard the scuttle of tiny feet across the floor.

Clare couldn’t see what had made the sound, but she imagined it was a mouse. Thoughts of Mr. Nibbly flooded her. Thoughts of Rosie followed, then thoughts of Tim and Jane and even Katherine. She saw Jane’s gentle eyes and heard Katherine telling her again, like a far-off whisper, “I believe you can find your mother.” It was the memory of those words that broke the spell.

“I’ve found my mother,” Clare told herself. “And I’m going to save her... curse or no curse.” She looked around the room as she worked her wrists behind her back, trying to wriggle free of the rope. There was one window, with a hint of light peeking out from behind some boards. As with the downstairs windows, Donald had boarded this one up,



but at least these boards were on the inside. They were of random lengths and extended beyond the window frame on both sides. Hoping they could be knocked loose, she scooted down the bed as far as the rope would let her and tried to kick at the boards, but she could barely reach. Her kick had no force.

Inching back toward the frame at the head of the bed, Clare did her best to reach the knot Donald had tied around it. The rope on her wrists had loosened so Clare had a little bit of flexibility with her hands. She used it to work on the bed frame knot, feeling her way through its twisted maze. It took total concentration to know which way to coax the rope behind her back, but eventually she felt the knot relax and fall away.

Pulling free of the bed, Clare searched in the dimness for something sharp. She found a jagged edge on one of the window boards and sawed the wrist knot against it until it frayed and broke. Grabbing the edge of the board, she jiggled it loose. With all her might, she pulled harder and harder. The nails squealed. Slowly it gave way as light poured into the room.

She peered out. She was at the back of the house. There was a roof not far below her over the section of house that held the kitchen and the servants quarters. It was too far to jump down to it, but she hoped the rope might bridge the distance. Using the first board as a lever, she pried off another board and a third till she could try the window. It was stubborn but it lifted. Finally, tying the rope to the last board still nailed to the window, she lowered herself toward the ground-floor roof, but the rope wasn't long enough to reach—short by about six feet. So she held her breath and let go, hoping she wouldn't make too big of a thump as she dropped. Scrambling to the edge of the roof, she prepared to drop to the ground until she looked up to see Donald watching her from the shadows beneath a tree.

“Evening, Simone.”

Clare went limp. He must have been searching the house near the kitchen and heard her drop onto the roof. Clare pulled back from the edge. What could she do? She was trapped. There was no way off the roof except past him.

That's when Clare remembered there was something she still had left to bargain with. This time, though, she had to be smart. She had to make Donald believe his best choice was to let her go.

"Off the roof," he demanded.

She peered back over the edge. "You have to let me go."

"I can't do that, now can I?"

Clare stared into those severe eyes, hard like iron. It was impossible for her to see the best in him, like Jane might try to see, but perhaps she could stop herself from seeing the worst. He may be mean. He may be greedy, but that didn't make him murderous.

"What you need is to get away from here. My Uncle is coming. He may bring the police."

Donald snorted. "That's just malarkey."

"No, it's not. I sent a telegram from Chicago. You can check the satchel for a receipt." She paused for a moment, choosing her words carefully. "And besides, what about my mother? Where do you think she is? Maybe my Uncle has already been here, and he'll be coming back."

Donald shifted uneasily. "Then you're coming with me, you are."

"No, they will follow you for sure if they can't find me. Besides, I'll only slow you down. But I do have something you need."

"What?"

"Go inside and get my doll. I want to show you something."

"You get down first."

"It will take just a second. I won't have time to get away."

Donald didn't take his eyes off of her. He glared, but didn't answer. Finally, he stepped into the kitchen and then rushed back out with the doll.

"See those earrings on Simmie, those pearls? I have more jewels like that. I hid them before I came to the house. There's an emerald, a ruby, a sapphire, a diamond ring. They will help you get away... perhaps where no one will find you. They are yours if you let me go."

Donald stared at the ear drops on the doll. “I sold all the jewels.”

“Not all of them. My mother took some with her, and I will lead you to them. But you have to let me go.”

“Right,” Donald snapped. “Get down off of there.”

Clare paused a moment, wondering if she really should. She looked up at the sun, sinking lower in the sky. Too much time had passed already. She needed help for her mother. There was nothing else to try.

She dropped to the ground. Donald rushed up to her, waving the pistol. Clare reached out, “Give me my doll.”

Donald shook his head. “When you give me those pretty jewels, m’dear.”

Clare nodded and led him back around the house and down Meeker Street. Donald gripped her arm firmly when a woman passed holding the hand of a little girl. Clare could hear the girl singing a song, one that was familiar. “Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques. Dormez vous? Dormez vous?”

Clare joined in quietly for a moment, remembering, now, that the language was French and her father had sung that song to her, long, long ago in the big, brick house she had just left. Boulet was a French name, she realized. She was half French, not Irish, and it was because of her father that she had been named Simone.

Clare sighed. The name Clare was just a lie, then, a reminder of all the ways people deceive each other. She was deceiving Donald Killeen right now about where her mother was, about the jewels, and what she was about to do, but she had to for her survival. Clare looked up at Donald. He had been a deceiver, too, in marrying her mother, but in his case it was not a question of survival. Or perhaps it was. Something inside Donald was as desperate for money as if his life depended on it.

Clare thought of what Ned Whistlestone had said: whether rich or poor, if you know who you are inside—a good, decent person—that is all you really need. She realized Donald didn’t understand that but was glad she herself did. Donald was looking for money to make himself feel big and powerful, as if money could make him tower above others.

Clare knew money wasn't the answer, and you could never truly feel big if you needed others to feel small. Instead, you become as small as you treat others.

It was then she looked at Simmie, clutched tightly in his grip. Her hood had slipped down from her head, and her braids had come undone, leaving her hair more tangled than ever. Still, Simmie's eyes glimmered brightly with the autumn light. Clare sensed Simmie knew what was coming and she approved. She had understood Ned's wisdom, too.

They headed down to a busy corner, people passing right and left. A trolley came by. Clare saw a policeman in the distance, two blocks down the road. She stopped and turned to Donald. "Here. It's here."

"Here?" Donald looked around, confused. "Where?"

Clare pointed at Simmie. "She's a doll with secrets," Clare told him as she reached out, grabbing her doll. Without a moment's hesitation, she raised Simmie up and then cracked the doll's head against the stone of the sidewalk, breaking off the back of it. Clare smiled. She pointed to five little envelopes scattered among the broken bisque and the safe deposit key. One of the jewels, the ring, had spilled from its envelope and landed by his boot. Even Simmie's wig had gone flying. "There, Donald Killeen. Grab them. They're yours."

People stopped and stared as he dropped to the ground, frantically collecting the ring and the other envelopes. As he reached for the key, Clare turned and ran. She didn't worry about letting him have it. Her Uncle Josiah had the other one, and she knew, if Donald dared to steal the money from that bank box, at least there wasn't much of it left.

Careening down the hill, Clare ran as fast as she had ever run, clutching Simmie tight and calling out to the policeman. She rushed up to him, panting heavily. "My mother is desperately sick," she said, forgetting to disguise her voice. "Please come and help me."

The policeman puzzled over her clothes. He looked at Simmie's bald broken head, perplexed. "What's your name, my boy?"

"I'm not a boy. My name is Clare," she announced. She took hold of the policeman's arm, glad that she could finally ask a cop for help instead of hiding from him. "Some call

me Clare-Simone. Please come with me. This way.”

They hurried up Meeker Street to where Simmie’s head had shattered on the sidewalk. The doll’s wig lay limp among the shards of bisque. She picked it up and moved on. Donald was long gone. She didn’t bother to look for him. Uncle Josiah would make sure he never came back. As they continued up the hill, she explained scattered bits of her story. Finally, she led the officer to the back of the house and through the open rear door.

The policeman looked around in the dusty gloom. “This is just an empty house.”

Clare shook her head. “No, it isn’t. My mother’s upstairs, hiding. This way.”

As they started up the stairs, they heard a man call out, “Simone, is that you?”

Clare stiffened and stopped, gripping the banister. She saw a silhouette appear at the top of the stairs. Had Donald really returned? She took a deep breath, feeling grateful for the policeman’s presence.

“I’m not afraid of you,” she called defiantly.

“Simone? Is it you, Simone?”

Clare let out a long gush of relief. It wasn’t Donald after all. This voice was softer, gentler, than Donald’s. It had not a hint of Irish in it. “Uncle?” she asked hopefully.

“Yes, Simone, it’s me.”

Clare raced to the top of the stairs and gave him a hug. He was a short man, with salt and pepper black hair. “Uncle, Uncle... I’m so glad you’re here.”

He hugged her back. “Simone. I’ve been so worried. Why did you come here all alone?”

“I’ve found my mother, Uncle. She’s here. Follow me.”

When Clare released the door panel in the wall, her mother didn’t stir. She lay so still, Clare feared she was dead. And then her eyes blinked open. “Donald, I heard him,” she murmured.

Clare grinned. “Yes, but Donald Killeen isn’t a problem anymore.”

“Donald Killeen?” The officer asked as he helped her mother up. “I’ve had a run in with him on more than one occasion. That fellow will charm you like a leprechaun, but if

you cross him, he's as mean as a hornet."

The officer carried her mother downstairs where Clare picked up her satchel and closed the door. They headed down Meeker Street, her mother cradled in the policeman's strong arms as her Uncle raced ahead to hail a Hansom cab to take them to the hospital. Clare knew her mother was barely aware of what was happening. She hoped she would forgive her brother when she realized Josiah was there.

Just before they disappeared over the crest in the hill, Clare stopped to look back at the mansion. She doubted they would ever live there again, and she wasn't sorry. She also knew if there had ever been a curse on it—or on her, or her mother—there was no more. They were free, now, to do as they pleased. She hoped they would stay in Chicago, though they probably would no longer live in the rear alley house next to Rosie and Tim. She would not forget about them, however, or Katherine, or Jane. And no matter what, wherever they lived, she would keep hold of a new feeling, calm and solid inside her. It was good, this feeling, and like Ned Whistlestone said, that was all she needed.

Finally, as she looked at Simmie, she realized after all these years why she had called her doll Simmie the Second. She wasn't a second hand doll, at all, but she was the second Simone in the family. It was as if, just through her name, Simmie had kept alive the memories that she herself had forgotten. Clare hugged Simmie tight. "Thank you, Simmie, for keeping them for me."

As she turned to catch up to her mother and the officer, Clare whispered to Simmie. "Don't worry. We'll fix you up right. We'll put a hat on that head." She giggled. "You and Brigit. What a pair. She's got no body, just a head, and yours has a hole in it." Clare smiled at her wonderful doll, so bedraggled, so broken, but so special. There wasn't a doll like her in the world—a Simmie with secrets.

# *Historical Notes*

## **The 19th Ward**

The 19th Ward was one of Chicago's **poorest** sections. Though it housed many industries, it was a center for the clothing manufacturing trade and attracted a large number of **immigrants** who worked in the **sweatshop system** for extremely low pay. Residents included the Irish, Italians, Germans, Polish, Russian Jews, Bohemians, and French-Canadians. The main streets, such as **Halsted Street**, bustled with butchers, grocers, clothing stores, as well as dingy saloons and foul-smelling stables.

## **Jane Addams**

In 1931, **Jane Addams** became the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her work towards international peace. Earlier in her career, however, Jane's efforts had a more localized focus.

In 1889, along with her friend, Ellen Gates Starr, she founded **Hull House** in the impoverished 19th Ward of Chicago. Hull House was a settlement house—a form of community center pioneered in London at Toynbee Hall. In a settlement community, educated, privileged men and woman became residents in a house that focused on **volunteer work** in the surrounding slums. These volunteers provided not only health and welfare services for the neighborhood, but cultural activities and classes.

Because of Jane's social skills and strong democratic beliefs, she was successful in connecting with her **immigrant neighbors** as well as the **rich elite** of Chicago. She became a bridge between the two worlds, and many of the people who joined the settlement as residents, such as Julia Lathrop and Florence Kelley, were energetic **reformers**. Together they created a much-needed wave of reform in Chicago, getting legislation passed on

child labor and creating the first Juvenile Justice Court in the country.

At the core of all these successes was Jane's unbending belief in people and their **inherent value**. Her calm presence drew others to her, and even some of Chicago's cynical reporters began to refer to her as "Saint Jane."

## **Florence Kelley**

One of the women who became a resident at Hull House was **Florence Kelley**. Florence Kelley was the first woman factory inspector in the United States, appointed in Illinois by Governor John Peter Altgeld in 1893. As the chief factory inspector, she hired a staff of ten **state inspectors** whose job was to enforce the provisions of the Illinois Workshop and Factory Act of 1893. An ardent reformer, she was involved in many issues, but her research and activism directly impacted working children when the state legislature passed the Factory Act, which **prohibited the employment of children under 14** and limited their work hours to 8 hours a day (though **certificates** to work could be obtained by lying about their age).

## **Child Labor**

Until the passage of the Illinois 1893 Workshop and Factories Act (promoted by the residents of Hull House), child labor in Chicago was unregulated. Children often worked as bootblacks (shoe shiners), newsboys, cash-children in retail stores, and did sewing in sweatshops. They also might work in factories such as box, cutlery, metal stamping, and paint factories, or bakeries and binderies. The **conditions were harsh and dangerous**. The children worked long hours, often with only a short lunch break and no supper. Many were sickened or crippled for life. When the 1893 law passed in the state of Illinois, it forbade children under 14 from working in factories or sweatshops, but they could still obtain certificates, **lying about their age**, that allowed them to continue working. Unfortunately, because their pay was so poor, child laborers made it harder for adults to get employment that paid a living wage. Of course, these children were not educated



because they **missed school**, and so were condemned to a lifetime of poverty.

**Child labor did not officially end** in the United States until the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938. Until then some states regulated child labor while other states did not. To see old-time photos of children at work, taken by the famous photographer Lewis Hine, go to [www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor](http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor).

## Sweatshops

One of the worst-paid occupations was **sewing in the garment trades**. The sweatshop system kept its workers desperate. For months, the work would be relentless as deadlines had to be met under the stern demands of the sweat boss, a subcontractor who was referred to as the **sweater**. Then the work would stop, so the workers would slowly starve for several months until the next orders came in. Because the people were hungry, they had to accept less pay per piece than they had the season before. It was a downward cycle that caused the families to need even their children's labor, some as young as four, to help **earn enough to live**. The work was especially hard on the young because the sewing machine was operated by foot power using a pedal called a **treadle**, and long hours on the machine could cause, in growing children, curvature of the spine. Also, tuberculosis and smallpox were prevalent in Chicago at this time, and the sweatshop workers were often sick or the clothes were piled on beds where sick people slept. The filthy conditions in which these clothes were made often spread disease to other workers or to the customers who bought the clothes in the retail stores.

## Dolls

Nineteenth century dolls could be made of wax, papier mâché, composition (wood pulp or sawdust plus glue), or porcelain. The most expensive dolls had heads made of **bisque**, an unglazed porcelain, with jointed composition or leather bodies. They were made in either France or Germany, but the **French dolls were of better quality** and they cost

more. Some of the largest French manufacturers were Jumeau, Bru, and Steiner. These dolls had beautiful **glass eyes** and finely painted lashes and eyebrows as well as **mohair wigs**. Elaborate wardrobes and accessories were available for these dolls.

## **Chicago in the 1890s**

### PRICES

*Here is a sample of what everyday items might cost in Chicago in the 1890s:*

#### **Bread-one pound loaf: 5 cents**

Pound of Sugar: 6 cents

Pound of Chuck Steak: 8 cents

Pound of Butter: 22 cents

Pound of Cheese: 17 cents

Quart of Milk: 6 cents

Basket of Coal: 35 cents

Cable car/Horse car ride: 5 cents

*A sample of prices for food served to the public in the Hull House Lunch Room:*

Bowl of Pea Soup: 5 cents

Mutton Stew: 10 cents

Pork and Beans: 10 cents

Ham and Eggs: 20 cents

Pie and Cheese: 5 cents

Ice Cream: 10 cents

Cake: 5 cents

Cup of Coffee with cream: 5 cents

*Cost for a night's lodging:*

Poverty Hotel: 2 cents for bare floor and 5 cents for filthy mattress per night

Basic Hotel Lodging: 25 to 50 cents a night

**Luxury Hotel Rates: \$3.50 to \$7.00 per day, including meals.**

## ROADS

**Cedar block**, stacked side-by-side, was the most common paving material for streets in Chicago because the steel of wagon wheels and horseshoes was much quieter hitting against the wood blocks than it was on streets paved with brick or asphalt or stone.

**Sidewalks** were also commonly made of wooden planks, like a boardwalk. However, all this wood was prone to rot and the odor of decay was noticeable in some areas. It was preferable, though, to the many **unpaved streets**, mostly small alleys between the streets, which turned to mud whenever it rained.

## LIGHTS

During the 1890s, there were three different possibilities for lighting: kerosene, gas, and electric. **Electric lighting** was a new development and was expensive, so only upscale buildings and wealthy individuals used electricity. **Gas** was very common, but **kerosene** was still used in buildings not fitted for gas and also where portable lighting was needed, such as in desk lamps. On the streets, **gas lights** were the norm, but in downtown Chicago, huge electric **arc lamps** lit the major streets, giving off an orange-gold glow.

## GARBAGE

The garbage of Chicago was dumped by its people in tall **wooden boxes** either anchored to the sidewalks or placed in the dirt alleys. Since many of the city contracts were given to corrupt businessmen, the pickup of the garbage was often neglected, especially in the alleys. The residents of Hull House organized a survey of the garbage services, because they felt the rotting garbage contributed to the spread of disease. In an

effort to force the work to be done, Jane Addams became a **garbage inspector** to report on the job the garbage haulers were doing.

### POLITICS

The politics of Chicago at that time was very corrupt, and this allowed the terrible working conditions of the poor to go unchallenged. Each ward of the city was run by a city alderman who was called the **Ward Boss**. To get elected, they **bought peoples votes** with favors and handed out jobs and contracts to those who supported them. In office, they sold their votes on the City Council, a practice called **boodling**, and took other bribes. Jane Addams tried twice to unseat the boss of the 19th Ward, **Johnny Powers**. Each time though, voter fraud, violence, and the loyalty of Powers' supporters defeated her.

### HOTELS

The hotels of downtown Chicago were some of the most **luxurious** buildings in the city with elegant lobbies, grand ballrooms, and the latest technologies such as telephones and elevators. It was the invention of elevators that allowed hotels and office buildings to grow taller and taller. The first elevators were steam powered, but in 1878 the **hydraulic elevator** made it possible to give a quick, smooth ride to the top of the tallest building that an architect could design. The elevators were not automatic like they are today. An elevator **operator** rode in the car to make it stop at each floor and to open the doors.

# Acknowledgements

Since this is a student project, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the excellent teachers that have helped give me the ability to produce it. It is amazing what talent resides in my local college, Truckee Meadows Community College.

First mention goes to Ron Marston, who by his very nature—calm and thoughtful—taught me how to approach the overwhelming technical maze involved in creating computer art, animation, and this ebook. He was my advisor for this project, and his exceptional critical eye gave me essential feedback on my graphic design work. I also need to thank Wes Lee for helping me see deeper levels of color, shadow, and perspective, as well as Michael Ganschow-Green who helped me make sense of the technical mysteries of html code and cascading style sheets so I could make this ebook happen. I even need to thank Sandra Backus, a truly excellent yoga teacher, who started me on a daily practice of yoga so that I don't seize up after an 8 hour stint at the computer.

Last, but never least, is the incredible Donna Moore, who taught me to draw. She brought the world of art alive for me in a concrete way. Donna's classes were filled with patient guidance and inspiring stories about what art really is and how we can learn to create it by using our amazing eyes to truly see things. I consider her a miracle worker because she took my fervent hope to illustrate my books and turned it into a given even before I picked up the pencil—just by believing in my ability to learn. My very first drawing hangs above my computer. It is a still life of ordinary kitchen gadgets and they look real. Donna told us that we were going to tackle something really big in the first project so we would know what we were capable of. "Everyone can do this," she said. "You just think you can't." Step-by-step, she proved to us that we could. When I am faced with the impossible, I conjure up memories of Donna Moore, a larger than life personality and visionary artist who inhabits a universe that seems not only vast, but never-ending. And then I can begin.

*Disclaimer: Though this was a student project, the viewpoint expressed in this ebook is my own and does not reflect the viewpoint of Truckee Meadows Community College or any employee thereof. Assistance by any teacher in no way implies their approval of the content.*

# *Author's Note: Why this Ebook is Free*

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*I have good reasons for offering my ebook for no charge. Please read why, and share it in the same spirit.*

On January 27, 2012—the day of my first meeting with my faculty advisor for this ebook project—Hull House closed its doors. After 123 years of continuously serving the poor in Chicago, one of the country's oldest and most revered social services organization went bankrupt. As I listened to the news on the car radio, I was shocked.

The announcement was sudden. In less than a week, 300 employees and 60,000 recipients of child care, job training, housing assistance, and other services fell victim to huge government budget cuts that are happening all across this country. Private sources could not be found to make up the difference. In a blink, Chicago and the nation lost an esteemed institution that was founded in 1889 in one of Chicago's poorest wards by the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Jane Addams, and her friend, Ellen Gates Starr.

The timing stunned me. This was the day I had been so eager for—the beginning of my independent study project to get this book out into the world. If my ebook had been ready before this unfortunate disaster struck, I could have sold it for the benefit of Hull House, but the book was not done. It was only a vision in my mind.

The manuscript had been ready since 2006. It had been circulating through publishing houses with no success, despite a stint with an editor at one publisher who took a record 3 years to decide to turn it down. I felt defeated. This was a special book, completely outside the genre I usually write (fantasy). It was special because its story sprung from the efforts of Sherrie Schulke, someone who was no longer here to finish her work. I never had the opportunity to meet Sherrie, but after her death from cancer, her

family offered me her research on Jane Addams in hopes I could use it in some way to finish what Sherrie had to leave undone. I did my best to honor her gentle and compassionate spirit in the only way I could—by writing a children’s book. When I couldn’t get it published, I felt I let down not only Sherrie, but my dear friends, Dale and Marianne. Sadly, I put the project aside.

In August 2009, I made a year-long commitment to national service as an AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service to America). The VISTA program was envisioned by President John F. Kennedy as a national service corps “to help provide urgently needed services in urban and rural poverty areas.” President Lyndon Johnson realized Kennedy’s dream by launching VISTA in 1964 as part of his *War on Poverty*. The VISTA slogan is to “Fight Poverty with Passion,” but though I loved my VISTA year and definitely served with passion, I did not directly fight poverty.

Instead, I became the guardian of a nonprofit website that promoted volunteering in my state. I addressed poverty indirectly by doing my best to inspire others to serve their neighbors who need assistance. I didn’t come to the mission with all the skills required to be successful. My technology and graphic design skills were rudimentary. I had never been on Facebook or set up a blog. I didn’t even know how to text on my cell phone, and my grasp of the Adobe software that could be used to enhance the website and the blog was nonexistent.

So I taught myself what I could and took a few summer week-long intensive classes in Photoshop and Flash that were paid for by my nonprofit. When my service year was over in August 2010, I signed up for more classes using the AmeriCorps VISTA education award given to those who finish their volunteer commitment. I was soon tackling digital graphic projects—from video to computer illustration to animation—that I would have never imagined doing before. And with these newfound skills, the dream of publishing this ebook was born. I hoped it would allow me to finally fulfill my VISTA commitment to alleviate poverty by sharing this story about the poor in America in 1894.

So this is why I can’t charge for this ebook. How could I with my commitment to VISTA and to Sherrie Shulke’s family? And now with the collapse of Hull House, how could I try to profit from it? Instead, I hope that the extraordinary vision of Jane Addams won’t be lost and will carry on partly through this simple story as it is shared digitally.

These are all strong reasons for distributing this book for free, but there is also one more person

to mention. When I was eleven, the same age as Clare (the heroine of the story), I sat on the Arlington Bridge across the Potomac River with my father and my sister, watching President Kennedy's horse-drawn casket roll by. I was fascinated by Black Jack, the riderless horse that followed the casket, and took in the impressive somberness of the motorcade. I paid attention because my Dad felt it was important for me to be there even if I couldn't understand the complete scope of the national situation.

My Dad understood that part of growing up was grappling with experiences like the assassination of a President that might be challenging for a child to comprehend but were important. He believed that children have always been far more up to the task than many adults think. Because of him, I was a child who had an interest in the world around me and had begun to think critically about the complex issues life would bring my way. In my own way, I am trying to pass my father's wisdom on. I believe children need to come into contact with important stories—by sitting on a bridge to watch a funeral procession or reading a book—and that this story is one of the important ones.

I never had to face the extreme poverty that Clare or the other alley children in this book face, but my father did. He grew up fatherless and poor during the Great Depression, and at 12 was out on the streets selling newspapers to help stave off hunger just like the character Tim in this book. Despite such difficult circumstances, my father grew up to be a good man and a great dad, because along the way he learned what Jane Addams knew and passes on to Clare in this book: how to see the best in people.

At the very least, my dad saw the best in me, even when I drove him crazy, which I often did. He could be angry with me without shaming me. With him, I never had to doubt my self-worth. Plenty of others taught me the opposite lesson, and I've spent a lifetime unraveling the tangle, but my father's gift always stayed with me, a solid anchor amidst my confusion. If I can plant that idea in just one child's mind, how to see the best in themselves and others, the effort to create this book will be worth it.

And so this book is pure gift. It has to be. Whatever good this book does in the world, and I think it can do some good, it will happen faster, more completely because it can be easily shared.