



Part II Chapter 11 A New Baby

After St. Patrick's Day, Bridget finished the christening clothes—gown, cap, booties, blanket, and was working on further clothing items for the baby. It was April; Mrs. Daly's time of delivery was approaching. She had been in confinement for months, ever since her condition became visible and she was judged not fit for mixed society by her mother. Mrs. Daly--Emily was her given name, Bridget learned from hearing Mr. Daly address her—had enjoyed staying home thinking about the new baby, but as she was still lonely she leaned even more on Bridget for company during their tea time chats, and loved to talk about what Bridget knew of babies. Mrs. Daly's mother, Mrs. Jones visited more and more frequently, to look after her daughter “and supervise,” Mrs. Daly told Bridget.

Bridget herself had more than an ordinary interest in all the baby talk. Several months ago she had found herself feeling nauseous in the mornings. Perhaps she might be pregnant too, she hoped. Watching Mrs. Daly prepare, and making all those lovely clothes for a baby, then talking about how to care for babies had made her long for a baby of her own. And now she was certain she would.

Since they had been living with the Learys, Thomas and Bridget had felt more comfortable and at home. Thomas especially had relaxed and become more like himself—carefree and easy, so by the time Bridget told him the good news, he could enjoy it fully. He would have a son! They would name it for his father, Daniel, of course. When Bridget wrote home, he wanted to write his own note. It was first letter to them. He had left the letter-writing to Bridget, not wanting to admit his disappointment. But now he had good news!

“Dear Mam and Da, Well, the O'Shaughnessys of New York are doing well. Not only have we found a nice new place to live with a friendly Irish family, but Bridget has made me very happy by telling me the news that we are going to have a child—hopefully a son, whom we will name after you, Da. My work situation has improved, you'll be happy to know, as has Michael's—he now works in a saloon in a good neighborhood.” He winked at Bridget as he wrote those words. “Bridget will add a few words about the family she works for, as I know you've heard about her the Dalys.”

Now that she had something in common with Mrs. Daly, Bridget watched with more interest the preparations. She would have liked to have lovely clothes for her own baby. A new room was painted and decorated and prepared for the baby. A pram was purchased.

Mrs. Daly's baby arrived—a boy, smiling red-cheeked little darling with golden curls—the idol of his father and mother and grandparents—named for Mr. Daly's father, William. Mrs. Daly's mother accepted this as it was the tradition, knowing

that the next son would be named Charles, after Mr. Jones, Mrs. Daly's own father.



William's christening gown, booties and bonnet, as well as the blanket were worn, admired and Bridget was duly praised, even by Mrs. Jones.

By the time William was born, Bridget was having to conceal her own condition by modifying her green dress. She didn't want to lose her position if Mrs. Jones knew that she was pregnant.

In the Leary household, life continued as usual—Bridget helped Betty in the kitchen and the two women helped Mr. Leary in the tailor shop when he needed them, they shared meals. Little Nell called them Aunt Bridget and Uncle Thomas.

In the Daly household, however, many things had changed. The arrival of William had meant new servants—a full time nurse and a wet nurse, both of whom lived upstairs in the servants' quarters. Nurse was an older woman. "She comes highly recommended," Mrs. Daly had told Bridget

The wet nurse was also highly recommended, although Mrs. Daly resented her. "I would like to nurse him myself," Mrs. Daly sighed. "But Mother says I'm too delicate. Doctor says I shouldn't even think of such a thing and that my milk has certainly dried up and wouldn't provide enough nourishment for Willie." The burden of keeping Willie alive and well-nourished fell upon Bessie, a shy girl of about 17. Bridget took note of her and listened to her, befriended her and eventually got her to speak up in private and tell her story. She was Irish as well, she said, from Kerry. She had fallen in love with a young man who was one of many sons and had no expectations. As she had no dowry, they had no future in Ireland. They had "married" she said, in secret and had run away together to New York, where he had abandoned her. She turned to working as a part time prostitute, and had gotten pregnant. She had been "reclaimed," she told Bridget, and lodged in a home unwed mothers where she had given birth. Her baby was being cared for in an orphanage while she, in return, was working as a wet nurse, providing milk for nine months to a child in a good home in exchange for a place to live and food to eat.

"How did you come to be employed by Mrs. Jones?" Bridget asked, unwilling to believe that Mrs. Jones would have hired her had she known her story.

"The woman who saved me is a woman of noble character who looks after poor Irish girls like me. She has many friends. One of them must have recommended me to Mrs. Jones. Thank heavens for that kind lady who saved me. Who would hire me with a baby?"

“Do you ever see your baby?”

“Well, I trust he’s well. It breaks my heart not to see him. But they’re looking after him for me. William needs me day and night. I moved here straight after my son was born and I haven’t had a chance to see him since then. . . They are looking after my baby for me. ”

Bridget didn’t know what to do. She felt sorry for Bessie, who had trusted her heart to a man, then had trusted the woman who saved her and took her child and found this opportunity for her—a child born almost at the same time as her own child. Now Bessie was trusting Bridget with her story, and certainly would trust the other servants as she became friendly with them. Bridget knew how horrified Mrs. Jones would be if she heard this story. She reminded Bridget of Peggy, who might herself get into a situation like this and need to be “reclaimed.”

“Don’t mention this to anyone in the house, and be sure that you bathe frequently, Bessie,” Bridget advised her, feeling disloyal to Mrs. Daly who had been very good to her. She rationalized that the woman who had all the friends among the upper classes must have placed other girls before Bessie with unsuspecting families, none of whom would like to know the story of their wet-nurse’s past. Employers fortunately didn’t make it a habit to show interest in their employees’ pasts. Perhaps if Thomas hadn’t been so eager to impart to Mr. Daly the fact of his education for the priesthood, he might have gotten a good job himself.

On her side, Mrs. Daly found no fault with Bessie other than that she got to spend more time with William than his own mother did. She was only allowed to see him after he had been bathed by “Nurse,” the woman of whom Mrs. Daly was truly jealous. She was able to be with Willie all the time. She bathed him, clothed him, supervised his feedings with Bessie, put him to bed, rocked him, took him for strolls in his pram. The only time Mrs. Daly was allowed to visit him in his nursery was after he had been fed, bathed, clothed by Nurse and was ready for visitors, who usually included not only his mother but her mother and even her mother’s friends, for Mrs. Jones wanted to show off her fine grandson to all her envious friends.

During the afternoon tea, which Mrs. Daly continued to take in private, as Willie would be out walking with Nurse in his pram around Washington Square, Mrs. Daly had the tea table moved near her bedroom window which overlooked the street and she could follow the pram as it circulated around the Square. She lamented her deprivation to Bridget.

“She won’t let me spend time with Willie.” Mrs. Daly was on the verge of tears. “She appears to assume that I expect to spend little time with my children; she expects me to resume my social life. I want to be with my baby.”

Bridget's heart went out to Mrs. Daly "I want to be with my baby." She thought of her own approaching "confinement." She knew that down in the Sixth Ward, and the Second Ward where they now lived, there was no such expectation that a woman would be too delicate to continue with all her work and would stay home and rest. She would be expected to do all her own work and look after the child—no nurses would attend her child, thank God, or prevent her from being with her child. But how could she take him to work with her?

By June, Bridget could hide her condition no longer, even with binding, and the long walk to Washington Square was very difficult. She decided to take Mrs. Daly into her confidence.

"Mrs. Daly, you may have noticed that I have gained weight," she said hopefully.

Mrs. Daly hadn't noticed. "I've noticed that you're looking very well. You were really too thin when you began working here—now you're filling out. That's good for you. You look very healthy."

"Mrs. Daly, I must confess that I am pregnant. I don't know what to do. I wonder if your mother will approve of my coming here when I'm pregnant. And what will I do with my child when he is born. I certainly won't be allowed to come with a child." She was near tears herself at this point. Mrs. Daly had become a sort of surrogate family member to her. She could not imagine not coming here every day.

Mrs. Daly was shocked. "Bridget! Why didn't you tell me? How long have you known? When is your child due?"

"In late August—I've known for months now, but I've tried to conceal it, lest your mother see me."

Bridget could see that Mrs. Daly was very sympathetic, siding with Bridget on this one. "Well, Mother need not know. Bring your work with you and remain seated with it on your lap, and if she comes in while you're here, she'll not notice."

Bridget thought Mrs. Jones was probably more observant than her daughter. .

"But," Bridget continued, "there's the distance, now that I'm pregnant, it's hard walking this far." She didn't want to complain. Employees could never complain about the conditions of their employment unless they were in a group—she had learned that from Tim and Michael's discussions before the strike.

"Well, Bridget, why don't you take the omnibus?"

Bridget could see that Mrs. Daly had no idea of the cost of transportation. She didn't want to seem too poor to pay the shilling, so she didn't reply. The whole matter seemed hopeless.

“I’ll speak to Mr. Daly.” Mrs. Daly had great confidence in her ability to influence her husband in the matter of the help, although Bridget knew he had already taken their hiring out of her hands after the week with Peggy. She might be able to persuade him to make an exception for her. Who knew? Bridget was looking forward to the birth of her child and didn’t want the loss of employment to disappoint her when she had so much to look forward to,

Mrs. Daly did speak to her husband on Bridget’s behalf and the result was that Mrs. Riley notified Bridget that she would be given two weeks wages and her services would no longer be needed, now that Mrs. Daly had had her baby and the main purpose for hiring her was gone.

Mrs. Riley then asked Bridget to go to Mrs. Daly’s bedroom where the mistress wanted to see her.

Bridget found Mrs. Daly in tears. “I feel like a prisoner, Bridget. My husband won’t hear of your working here ‘in your condition.’ I’m losing my son. My mother won’t let me be with my child and has asked Nurse to keep an eye on me and see that I don’t ‘do too much.’ Willie hardly knows I’m his mother. Oh, Bridget, you’re the only one I can confide in and now I’m going to lose you as well.” She wept into her lace handkerchief.

Bridget was embarrassed by this display from her employer. It wasn’t her place she knew, but she reached out and took Mrs. Daly’s hand and squeezed it. “You



haven’t lost Willie, Mrs. Daly. Why not ask Nurse to bring him for an outing in your carriage some afternoon? Do you know City Hall Park at Broadway at Park Row? I often sit there and catch my breath when I’m walking home. Now that I won’t be working, and it’s so hot inside, I might walk there more often—it’s nearby—in the afternoon. If you see me, you might bring Willie over.”

Unknown, Park Row in 1830

Mrs. Daly in turn had a suggestion. “You make your own clothes, I’m sure, Bridget. I’ve admired the outfit you wear to work. Perhaps I might see a design for a dress and ask you to make it for me-- in your home. I could come for a fitting to Mr. Leary’s tailor shop.” All the servants knew that the O’Shaughnessys were boarding with Mr. Daly’s tailor. “The coachman knows where it is.”

Women find it hard to break ties, Bridget told Thomas and the Learys that evening at supper, so she was glad that it had been arranged for the women to meet occasionally. Since Bridget had no other work opportunities although she certainly could go out "in her condition," she planned to help Mrs. Leary in the tailor shop until her baby was born. She would enjoy an afternoon stroll the few blocks to City Hall Park. If Mrs. Daly brought her a design and she could find the material, she could do the work at home. They could keep up their connection, and she could remain employed. . She was pleased that it had turned out well. Now she could turn her thoughts toward preparing for her own new baby.

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