

Part II Chapter 16 Winter

Now that Bridget was a mother, she seemed like a different person. She had always seemed content and self-sufficient, but now, as she nursed her baby, she had withdrawn to an isle apart, drawing Helena with her. They were wrapped up in each other, enveloped in peace and contentment. He felt unnecessary, except in his supporting role, so he spent more time looking after Dolly and the foal, fixing up the place with Tim, and talking politics.



Tim had become a citizen, his five year period required for naturalization having passed. “I’m a Whig,” he announced. He had put up a cartoon of Jackson as King Andrew I—complaining that he was “usurping our liberties.” Tom was used to Tim’s complaining. Jackson was Tom’s hero. Hadn’t he named the foal in his honor? “You aren’t rich enough to be a Whig, Tim. You’d better stick with the Democrats”

Tim wasn’t rich, and he had found something to really complain about, he said. Something bad was happening in the tailor trade. “Ready-made. That’s what they all want—something ready made. Especially the ones that are just getting enough to afford a new suit of clothes. They don’t want to take the time for custom tailoring—they want to come in and buy a suit right off the rack.”

“Doesn’t your union have anything to say?”

“As long as the tailoring is done by union members, as long as it has the union label, they don’t care,. Yes, the tailors are union members, but they’re not doing the work themselves anymore. It’s the cutters who do the cutting. They’re more like ‘piece-masters,’ for they contract out the stitching to piece-workers. The tailors just check the final work after it’s assembled and then put in their label and call it ‘tailor-made’. The piece-workers don’t earn a fair living—the contractors, really “sweaters,” shave off a shilling here and there, claiming pieces aren’t well-made. Piece-workers need their own unions. Other tailors I know have had to contract out piece-work or go to work as cutters for these larger firms. I may have to resort to doing ready-mades myself, if I lose any more customers to these “clothiers.” A well-made waist-coat. . . . Maybe Betty and Bridget and even little Nell would like to do piecework.” He laughed, but Tom detected a note of desperation in his laugh. The women already helped him but not with his tailoring, but with special projects like the parade banners for the unions and parishes and other organizations. Tim needed an extra hand, but Tom knew Bridget wanted to return to work for Mrs. Daly, who paid her well.

Tom had his own work to worry about. With Dolly and Jackson—“Jack” as Tim called him, he had worked out a route avoided Broadway and the Bowery and other wider and more- crowded streets used by the stages and omnibuses. Each

morning as soon Tom could get Dolly into harness with the cart attached they headed over to Pearl Street where most of the warehouses were—just four blocks east. Tom tried to get there as the doors were opening, to look for some warehouse door that was just opening—that was the advantage of being early—the first doors to open were the ones who needed the most carts. Many of the carts were licensed to carry goods for specific warehouses, so Tom went to ones that hadn't contracted with a specific cartman.

Tom had paid the \$2 licensing fee and wore the white jacket of the cartman. He didn't want to get into any trouble, as Michael had, and end up in jail. He knew how easy it was for the Irish to find trouble-- or trouble to find the Irish, as Michael would say.

Fees had been established, so merchants knew the charges. For any distance not exceeding half a mile, for all ordinary loads, 25 cents; for hides, cut stone, coal, hollow-ware, oysters, etc., 30 cents per load; for pipes, and hogsheads, 100 gallons and over, and heavy loads, 37 cents ; for household furniture, and housing, 50 cents per load ; for cables, an extra charge, according to the dimensions. Tom usually carried ordinary loads, and delivered them to customers' houses.



Tom would load Dolly's cart with whatever ordinary load he could get—sacks of tea or coffee or beans or rice were nice because they were stable and didn't shift as the cart rolled over uneven streets. Bulky objects like furniture had to be tied down carefully to keep from shifting and startling Jackson, who still persisted in following Dolly. By now three months old, he could hold his footing

better, but was still shy and stayed close without a tether.

Most destinations were within a half a mile, so walking slowly enough for Dolly-- who was still thin-- and the foal, Tom could take about six loads on a good day, and earn \$1.50. He talked to reassure Dolly and Jackson as he walked, telling them his story, how he and Bridget had come from Ireland, and rehearsing what he knew about the streets as they walked them—“This is Wall Street, Dolly—this is where the banks and insurance companies are.” Even with all the strange sights in the streets of New York, a cart man talking to his horse with a foal



following along listening must have presented a strange sight to New Yorkers, Tom thought. When they arrived to make the delivery, he told her, “Rich people live here, Dolly. Though they may be rich, I bet they don't have a horse like Dolly or a colt like Jackson. . . . Or a daughter like Helena,” he added to himself.

He felt that he had progressed somehow. He was better off than many. He watched cartmen without horses

struggle with their loads. He saw street sweepers, the poorest of the poor--the rag pickers with their carts piled high, hucksters, even children-- collecting wood chips or pieces of coal.

So the days passed for the cartman and his mare and her foal, until it was deep into winter, and the streets were covered with snow, and turned into mud by the tracks of wheels and horses and people. The mare struggled to pull the cart and the foal could barely keep his footing. Yet the cartman felt blessed in contrast to those others he had seen. He would be happy to get home, put the mare and her colt into the shed, rub them down, water and feed them, and then find his wife and kiss her and tell her how happy he was. He looked for her at the kitchen table, expecting to see her sitting talking to Betty, holding Helena on her lap, while working on some new linen sent over from Mrs. Daly.



Workmen sweeping a newly-paved town street

But this evening, she was not there. “Helena’s taken sick, Tom,” she called from their bedroom. “She’s feverish and chilled. Look at her.”

Tom saw a green mucous oozing from her nose; the baby seemed to be having trouble breathing, wheezing, with a crouping cough. “What can you do for her?”

Betty suctioned the mucous from her nose, and Bridget put droplets up the baby’s nose. “What’s that you’re using?” he asked his wife.

“Salt water drops. That’s what my mother used to do with us whenever we had fevers and colds.”

The women stoked up the fire and put the baby’s cradle near it to keep her warm, as she seemed to be shivering. “Should I look for a doctor?” He didn’t even know the name of a doctor, and might not be able to pay for treatment, but he didn’t know what else to say.

“This child is not going to die,” Bridget said to him. “She was meant to live and so she will!” Bridget pulled Betty to sit with her and began the rosary. “Hail Mary, full of grace . . .” Tom felt there was nothing he could do, so he left the room and went out to see if Dolly needed anything.

The fever was still there when Tom left the next morning. He rushed Dolly through their six deliveries, collected his dollar and a half, then hurried home.

“She’s better now—the fever broke this afternoon.” Relieved, Bridget laughed, “Betty and I must have said a dozen rosaries.” Tom couldn’t face the fierce look in her eyes; she looked old, older even than he was, yet she was only 20.

