

Part II Chapter 32 1843 A Departure

Changes were in the air by late fall, 1842. The Croton Aqueduct was finished and the men were looking for other work. Lena was eight and felt even more important at school and home. Will was finally old enough for school so Bridget had to let him go to the public school. The Catholic Schools under the program Bishop Hughes had inaugurated only the year before, were not finished yet. Bridget had decided that **any** school would benefit Will, and that reading the Protestant Bible was a small price to pay for keeping him from running who knows where.

It was easier for Bridget now, with only Dan and the twins at home to care for. And staying in the boarding house now was important to her as Peggy needed her advice with her baby Edward. With three babies between them, they could manage to take turns minding them and free one other to run errands. “Every girl new mother someone to help her. I had Betty and now I can help Peggy,” she told Tom.

Tom and Brian had decided to keep working together—each man taking a horse and cart. Together they waited at one of the cart hiring stations. Tom and Jackson would take the heavier jobs that earned more money, while Brian would take only work that would be easy for an older horse like Dolly. Brian had some money saved and could rent a room for himself at the Newmans’ Boarding House and didn’t need to sleep on the floor.

The problem was Mike.

Mike had been complaining about New York for a long time, about the bad treatment the Irish Catholic workers received, the limits on them. He didn’t want to keep being a laborer, like Tom, he said. “Do you know we’re only allowed one horse and one cart? Others can have a fleet, but we can have only one!” Not that he had even one horse of his own, but still it was the principle that bothered him. He was a man of principle he said. Tom didn’t want to ask where his principles had been when he’d invested in that parlor house. He didn’t want to start anything with his brother in a bad mood.

Bridget had an idea. “New clothes. You need to brighten up your wardrobe, Tom. I’ve set aside a bit for a new suit—to go with that fine hat. And why don’t you take Michael along to help you choose something. Why don’t you go to Mr. Leary and have him suit you both?”

It was decided that even Brian could do with a visit to the tailors. All three of them would give Mr. Leary some business with the money they’d saved from their several years’ work. “Michael must have enough to buy a coat as well,” Bridget added with a wink.

She thought it would be nice to make a day of it the next Saturday. Bridget hadn't had a visit with Betty. Time to catch up, to show off Lena, eight; Will, six; and Dan, four, and the twins, now almost a year and a half and walking.

When they arrived at the tailor shop, they were surprised to see that Betty was at the counter with a customer, while an assistant was measuring another customer beside several racks of ready-made clothes. Betty immediately came to greet them, and the two women exchanged hugs and kisses with all the children. Nell, was 14, and Cathy, six. "Cathy is starting at your school, Lena," Betty told her. Lena was ecstatic. She hugged Cathy as if they were best friends.

The older girls played with the twins. Everyone wanted to hold them, and Lena generously shared them with her friends, showing off all the things they could do. She hoped her mother wouldn't ask her to keep Will and Dan from fighting.

"Lena has been the best helper—I thank God I had a daughter first," Bridget told Betty when they were out of earshot of the others. "She has taken the twins as her special mission. The Blessed Virgin arranged it, she says."

"I know how you feel. I am blessed to have had daughters. I wouldn't know what to do with a son."

"I'm secretly praying myself that this new child will be a daughter." She smiled.

"No! Another child? Bridget! After what you went through with the twins? What were you thinking?"

"It wasn't up to me, was it? Wasn't it God who decided that I should have another? That's what I tell myself. Anyway, I'll not worry about it. It's only the first inkling of a child I have and it'll not be for another month that I'll know for sure. God has blessed me so far, hasn't He? With your help and Lena's?"

"And the Blessed Virgin's," Betty smiled. "Oh, you might want to know that Mrs. Daly is also going to have another child."

Tom told Tim that the men all wanted new suits and that Michael even wanted a new coat. As he was measuring them, Tim told them, "The recession has finally ended. It was hard going, and for a time back there in '37 I thought I might have to fold. I'm a man for a risk, though, and borrowing money to pay off what I owed and start anew up here was what I needed to do. I've got customers right around in the neighborhood." He nodded around in every direction.



“We saw the townhouses going up here,” Mike commented. “How’d you do it, Tim? You beat the system, didn’t you?”

“If I hadn’t had a trade when I came, there was no chance I would learn one here, I’ll agree. This is no place to start over—for an Irish Catholic, I mean,” he added.

Mike was smiling as if he were bursting.

“What is it Mike?”

“I’m going to start over myself, but not here, not in New York. In Chicago!”

This was a complete shock to the others. “Chicago? Where’s that?”

“It’s on the southern shore of one of the great lakes—Michigan. It’s only just getting started, not even ten years old, but it’s all Catholics there. The French started it as a trading post. Frenchie told me all about it. He knows somebody who went there and said it’s wide open and full of opportunities! They need canal diggers.”

“Are you going to work on the canal?” They didn’t know whether he was serious.

“No more labor like a slave for me. No, I’m going to start a saloon, someplace for all those canal diggers to spend their money, just like the sailors spend theirs in Frenchie’s. They’ll be needing saloons. Now that I’ve got my stake and know the business, so to speak, I’ll be the one of the first to open a saloon in Chicago.”

“A town that’s been there ten years doesn’t want for a saloon, Mike. There’s likely dozens there by now. How many people are there?”

“Who knows? They’re pouring in every day.”

“Wait till I tell Bridget,” Tom laughed.

“Aren’t there Indians out there?” Tim asked.

“The army took care of them before the city got going. They’re offering land out there to settlers now.”

“Why not get some land?”

“I’m not a farmer; I’ve seen enough poverty from farming. I like the city; I like New York, but not for us, not now anyway. I like a public house. I’ll have an O’Shaughnessy Pub right next to the canal.”

“Are you going by yourself?”

“Well, Tom, I was hoping you and Bridget might want to come too.”

Tom stared at him in disbelief, then laughed. “I can’t imagine Bridget thinking that’s a good idea.”

“Why not ask her?”

Bridget and Betty were called over to where the men were talking.

“Bridge, Mike here has some news.”

“I’m going to Chicago, Bridget, and I want you and Tom to come along. It’s the city of the future.”

“Chicago? Never heard of it,” said Bridget then turned to Tom with eyes narrowed. “And I suppose he told you it’d be just fine with me?”

Tom smiled. “I just wanted him to see your reaction.”

“Mike, I’m sure you’ll do well wherever you go. You got us here and you’ve helped Tom and all of us, and we thank you for all you’ve done, but this is one thing that if you do it, we’re not going to follow you. You’re doing well here and made your stake, and we hope you’ll stay with us. We’ve got five children, and another on the way, and you want us to pack up and move out West? To where there are savages and probably no schools even! What are you thinking?” She walked away saying under her breath to Betty, “Men!”

Her outburst had not gone unnoticed by her children, especially Lena and Will. Lena looked distraught at hearing that Uncle Mike was going to leave and they might be too. She could not imagine leaving her school and her teachers and friends like Nell and now Cathy. Will, upon hearing the word “savages,” was delighted, and began giving the Indian war whoop which he had often heard from boys playing soldiers and Indians. Dan picked up the whoop and began running around after his brother.

The men continued with their talk of Chicago, trying to interest Tom in his dream. “The Illinois and Michigan canal—they started it in 1836, just about the time the Aqueduct was getting underway here. Then with the panic of 1837, everything stopped, just like here, and it’s just turning around, same as here. It’s just like New York, he says, only not run by the Prods. They need the canals to bring all the farm produce to the port of Chicago. They’re just waiting for you to come, Tom.”

“Well, they may have to wait awhile. . . . When are you leaving?” Tom couldn’t believe he was asking this of his own brother with whom he had become very close.

“Not until next spring. The only way to get there is by steamship through the canals and lakes.”

“A steamship ride through the canals and lakes. Imagine.” Even Tim was impressed.

Only Brian found a suit off the rack that Tim could adjust to fit him perfectly. The two brothers were taller than average, so needed custom-made suits. Tim gave them the friends and family discounts and by Christmas each of them had a new suit, and Michael had a fine new warm coat to wear on his trip to Chicago in the spring, after the ice melted on the Great Lakes and in the canals. “We look like Broadway B’hoys.”

The Sendoff

Tom and Bridget wanted to have a farewell sendoff for Mike in early April, for he planned to leave as soon as the first steamships left that could take him to Chicago. They couldn’t have it in the Newman’s Boarding House and serve liquor, even among to family. Bridget refused to go to Frenchie’s saloon, which the men had suggested, or any saloon for that matter. She never knew what went on in the back rooms or upstairs of public houses.

“We’ll just have to have it here, without any liquor, and the men will have to go out later for drinks,” she decided. “We’ll have music, though, and they’ll forget the liquor.”

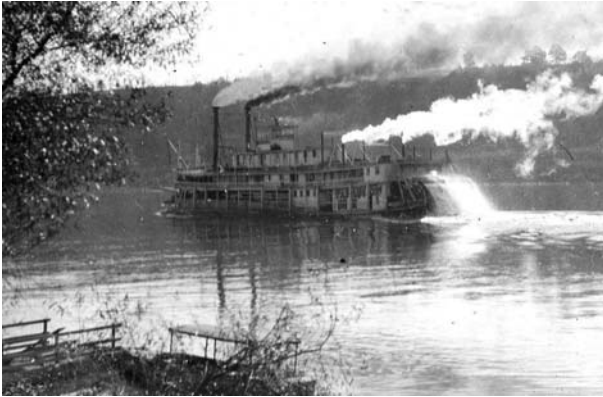
“I doubt it,” Tom said.

In addition to the Learys and the Newmans, they invited several in the house who knew Mike, and Frenchie brought some of Mike’s friends from the saloon, including a fiddler, an accordion player, and a guitar. The children were told that as they were going to see Uncle Michael off, they didn’t need to stay up for the party. Cathy would stay upstairs, and Lena would be a good girl and look after them, wouldn’t she? They’d hear the music upstairs. Nell could stay with the adults. Peggy told Bridget she’d rather help in the kitchen. Bridget knew the two had never forgotten each other. It was good for Michael to leave so he could make a fresh start there too.

The group played reels, jigs, hornpipes, musical fare which was already well-known in New York, from the early Scotch, Irish and English immigrants. Bridget declined dancing as she was “too far gone for that nonsense” so she stayed on the sidelines. Mr. Newman also declined, saying he was too old for dancing but

could clap. The furniture was moved into another room, and the lines formed for the reels. Everyone partnered with anyone, kicking their heels and stepping, clapping and laughing. Peggy was even drawn out, and, in the heat of the moment, Michael kissed her, and said, "I should have married you, Pegeen, but I was a fool."

"Sure, I knew you were a fool the minute I laid eyes on you. I never gave you a thought."



It was an evening everyone would remember, along with the sad farewells at the dock, where Mike boarded the paddle wheel steamship headed north for Buffalo and then west through the Erie Canal to Buffalo, thence through Lake Erie to Lake Huron and then Lake Michigan to Chicago. All told, the trip would take three or four days and had cost him a week's wages. Will cried the

entire time, not because Uncle Mike was leaving, he said, but because he wanted to go with him.

"Maybe someday we'll all go," Tom told him, rather hoping he might be right. .