

Part II-Chapter 4 Gang Brawl



Michael enjoyed teasing Bridget about the Five Points area, knowing how she hated it.

“Nice place you’ve brought me to, Bridget. Thank you for finding such fine accommodations.”

“I’ll be out of here as soon as I can get my table cloth back from Mrs. Malloy, and you know it.”

“More interesting things happen here than in Galway, you’ll have to admit,” he continued.

“If you think prostitution and vice are interesting,” she said.

“The young people liven up the place.”

“If you mean the Bowery Boys, the Dead Rabbits, the Plug Uglies, the Short Tails, or the Slaughter Houses, or the Swamp Angels always fighting each other—they’re a bit too lively for me.”

“They devote nights and weekends to promoting our Irish candidates.”

“Threatening is more like it.”

“And destroying businesses run by Englishmen,” Thomas added approvingly, to further tease Bridget.

“Well, they’re going a bit too far when they start attacking abolitionists and freed slaves,” said Bridget.

One night, an exhausted Thomas was awakened by the sound of gunfire, breaking glass, screams, and shouts of “Fire!” Bridget was already up at the window, looking out to see what was happening, pointing down the street. “The Five Points gangs are at it again,” she said, “but this time, instead of fighting each other, they’re after the freed slaves, who live in a house on the next block.”

Thomas joined her and could see that the gangs had dragged the men into the street and set their house on fire. The fire had spread to an adjoining house.

The local volunteer fire brigade in Five Points, although not the best in New York, was alerted, and the next day only four houses had burned. Luckily Mrs. Malloy's house was not one of them.

After that night Bridget resolved to move.