

Part II, Chapter 5. Bridget and the Upper Classes



THE FIVE POINTS IN 1859
(Crossing of Baxter [late Grand] Park [late Cross] & Worth [late Anthony] Sts.)
By J. B. Thompson, artist.

After that night of terror on Mulberry Street, Bridget had had enough of Five Points. She complained to Thomas about the violence and roughness in the area. What a difference from back in Galway.

“People live on top of each other here. And the fights! Here they act tough and bully others, even though they have to go to jail for it. They have to assert their

importance, because they haven’t anything else.” Now that Thomas and Michael were working steadily, it was time to move out, she said. Bridget, Thomas knew, still had lingering memories from her girls’ school days, where they were taught fine manners to work in the homes of the rich. “I’ll not be another Irish cleaning lady.”

The time had come for her to speak to Mrs. Malloy about concluding their arrangement. Hadn’t they been here two months already? Hadn’t Bridget earned enough in the two months they’d been there to redeem her tablecloth with the dog rose embroidery?

She told Mrs. Malloy, as kindly as she could, that she could not continue to work for her. She intended to move on. Mrs. Malloy would understand that she needed to get a better job. Her husband was now working, as Mrs. Malloy knew, and she herself hoped to find employment. She could earn a dollar and a half a week, she’d been told, and had seen an ad in the Irish newspaper, *The Truth Teller*, for a “seamstress, No. 3 Washington Square North.” Could she please take time off to visit the address? Mrs. Malloy said that Bridget must have delusions of grandeur and be uppity to expect to be hired by someone on Washington Square. Irish seamstresses were a dime a dozen. Of course, she wished her well.

Bridget Strolls up Broadway

It was a long way up to Washington Square—about 14 blocks north. The thought that Thomas had to walk further to work and back each day prevented her from spending the 12-1/2¢ for carfare on the train. She decided to wait for that until some Sunday when she and Thomas could take their first ride in a rail car together. Instead she would breathe the fresh air she knew must be outside Five Points, and see the nicer side of New York .

She walked up Mulberry, the street she hoped to escape for good, only as far as Canal, then took Canal to Broadway. There she joined other people, people who did not live in a sordid neighborhood, strolling on the sidewalk. She looked up



and admired the many fine homes and churches that lined Broadway. She stopped a woman dressed like herself, whom she took to be a servant, and asked her who lived in these homes—“Oh, mostly merchants and rich people, but some are accepting tenants, if that’s what you’re wondering.”



Bridget hadn’t thought of the possibility of living in a brick or brownstone house, renting a room, but why not? After Thomas made some money and after she had found a position, she decided that she would aim at finding a place like this. Just living in a place like New York gave you ideas.

(from <http://www.talkinbroadway.com/oldnewyork/>)

No. 3 Washington Square North

Bridget was impressed by the scale of the rowhouses on Washington Square North, with their tall colonnaded doorways. “I’ve



come to inquire about the position,” she explained to the servant who answered the door, and who looked askance at her dress. She was directed to apply at the servants’ entrance, and entered a basement, where she waited to be seen by the butler. After introducing herself to Mr. Ruggles and inquiring about the position advertised, she added, “I have been educated,

you know, by the Presentation Sisters in Galway.” Mr. Ruggles was not impressed. No matter who had educated her, she was probably no better than Molly, whom Mrs. Daly had just let go for “poor personal hygiene and theft.”

“If you please, Mr. Ruggles, would you show Mrs. Daly this table cover which I embroidered, as a sample of my work.” She unwrapped the precious cloth for

him to see. He took it without saying a word and left the room, and returning asked her to follow him upstairs.

Mrs. Daly was sitting in the back parlor. “Come here, Bridget,” she ordered. She couldn’t have more than a couple of years older than Bridget—yet she expected to be obeyed. “Did you do this work? Where did you learn to do this?” She seemed to suspect that Bridget was lying and was challenging her to prove that she had not stolen it.

Bridget was not put off by her superior attitude and told her of her education in Galway and her recent arrival—scarcely two months ago. Now that her husband was employed, she herself could begin to work. She had been trained to be a ladies’ maid— or governess or companion, she added.

Hearing that she had been trained to be a governess seemed to impress Mrs. Daly, but what she wanted was a seamstress. She asked whether Bridget thought she could embroider the Daly family coat of arms on several fine linen napkins. Bridget was sure that she could. Mrs. Daly added that she might be have other work to do, adding that she was expecting a child, and hoped that a seamstress could make a christening dress and other things for the new baby, which would be born next April. Could Bridget do that? She would have to find something nicer to wear to work, though.



When Mrs. Malloy questioned her upon her return, Bridget reported her good fortune. “I will earn a dollar a week, perhaps more, if I am satisfactory, and I need work only from 8 until 4.” Mrs. Malloy tossed her head and walked off.

Bridget told Thomas that night that she had a job, but first she must find some material to make a suitable dress that she could wear to work, to satisfy her new employer. Thomas was saving everything he could, at the rate of 75¢ a day, and didn’t want to spend anything on clothes, so he asked Michael. “Maybe we should go back to Rosa Peer’s place,” he suggested.

Bridget did not know how Thomas got the material but he brought her a bolt of dark green wool serge, and she bought thread and needles and scissors from a street peddler. She made a dress suitable to wear to Mrs. Daly’s, with material left for a jacket, a cape and enough to make a cloak, when the weather turned colder.

Working in the Daly family allowed Bridget to escape each day from Mulberry Street and the filth and noise of Five Points. In Washington Square, the streets were clean, not littered with garbage. Carriages drove around Washington Square, letting well-dressed people out at the curb of their homes, then drove off. People weren’t lounging about on street corners drinking. No mothers holding children peered anxiously out of windows looking both ways to see if their

husbands were coming home from saloons. No peddlers were on the street or stray children. At the Daly's, no one shouted; no one fought; life was serene and orderly, not restless and chaotic as it was where she lived. The other servants—Mrs. Riley, the housekeeper; Mary the cook; Ellen, the chambermaid—were Irish as well, and behaved with propriety under the supervision of Mr. Ruggles.

Now that Bridget was in her home every day, and looked presentable, Mrs. Daly stopped to speak to her occasionally. She herself had been born in New York and her parents came from England, she said. It was interesting that Bridget had been trained to be a governess. She wondered if Bridget knew French and was disappointed that she didn't. She had had governesses who spoke French. She was kind, Bridget discovered, although she knew that she was the mistress and Bridget was a servant.

From Mrs. Riley, she learned the family's history. The head of the household, Patrick Daly was born in New York to poor, immigrant Irish parents. He spent three years "before the mast." After he returned to New York, he worked as an apprentice carpenter by day and studied law by night. He caught the eye of several benefactors who recognized his brilliance and assisted him through law school and found a position for him in a New York law office. He passed the Bar easily and practiced in New York, and by the age of 27 was made a judge, as a member of the Democratic party. He was now in his 40s, Bridget assumed. His success had allowed him to purchase this fine new home in Washington Square, which they were in the process of furnishing to suit Mrs. Daly's wishes. Mr. Daly was involved in many things, including Irish matters. He was on the board of the Shamrock Friendly Association and contributed a column to the Hibernian Chronicle. His travel interests drew him to become active in the American Geographical Society.

When Bridget told Thomas of Mr. Daly's accomplishments, he said, "Perhaps he was the man in the fine carriage who almost ran me down today." He was in no mood to hear the accomplishments of Mr. Daly. "I'm sure he's a fine man, Bridget, and so might I be, if I weren't a Catholic." He informed her that if he ever went looking for a job again, he would leave the O off his name, "for good!"

"Then you might as well stop being a Catholic altogether."

