

Part II Chapter 6 Mrs. Daly Wants to Talk

Each day on her way to Washington Square, Bridget looked for signs of rooms to rent, discreet signs placed in the window. She varied her walks so as to see all the different possibilities. She and Thomas both had so far to walk to work each morning, she was desperate to leave Five Points and Mulberry Street behind—

One afternoon, as she was finishing for the day, Mr. Ruggles informed her that she was to go to Mrs. Daly's bedroom on the second floor. This was the first time that Bridget had been above the first floor. Mrs. Daly had interviewed her in the back parlor, but Bridget does her work on the ground floor, where the servants work and eat, and where the kitchen is located.

Mrs. Daly was sitting having her afternoon tea. "I wanted to speak to you Bridget. Oh, your work is fine—I want to speak to you about things that I want to have ready when the baby comes." Bridget gradually saw that what Mrs. Daly really wanted to talk about was her own inexperience in motherhood. She went on to say that she had never been a mother before. She wanted to be more of a mother than her own mother had been. She had been an only child, raised by nurses and governesses, and her own mother had been distant. "Of course, my child will have a nurse, and a governess in turn. But maybe I could take part more in my child's life than my mother did." This was a side of Mrs. Daly that Bridget hadn't seen before. She could be imperious, but she also felt fear that her child might feel as she did about her mother. Bridget tried to allay her fear, saying that her own mother had had 6 children and found time to give them all love and attention.

Bridget sat on the edge of her chair as Mrs. Daly went on with her tea and continued to talk about her mother, who, it turned out, lived only a few blocks west, and whom she saw on Sundays at the Presbyterian Church and then she and Mr. Daly joined her parents for dinner at their home.

When the chambermaid came in to take the tea tray, Mrs. Daly realized that she had kept Bridget until 5, past her time. "If you can come at this hour, after your regular work, Bridget, and stay until 5, I'll tell Mrs. Riley to raise your wages."

When she conveyed this news to Mrs. Riley, she said that she would confer with Mr. Ruggles, who would check with Mr. Daly.

So Bridget's salary was raised to \$1.50 a week, after Mr. Daly conferred with his wife, who told him that yes, Bridget deserved more. Her embroidery was excellent; she wouldn't want to lose her.

Bridget found herself drawn into Mrs. Daly's daily intimacies, during her 4-5 p.m. tea—which Bridget didn't actually partake of, only observed. She realized that Mrs. Daly had no one to talk to. She gathered that she used to talk to her governess, but now that she was married, she no longer had a governess. Bridget had been from a house full of talkers. That was one of the things she liked about Thomas—he liked to listen to her talk, and with him she felt that she had things to say that were important.

From Mrs. Daly she learned that a lady in New York society must be very lonely. Loneliness had never been part of Bridget's own life—she had always been surrounded by people. The life of an only child, she couldn't imagine. Mrs. Daly's life was entirely centered on running the house, but what had she really to do? Mrs. Riley ran the house, under Mr. Ruggles, with Ellen the chambermaid, and Mary the cook as the other servants. Yet Mrs. Daly felt herself to be very busy, and said she needed more servants.

She had so many social engagements, she needed a secretary to handle them all. New York society had such a busy social calendar, and she herself had to entertain occasionally. Everything took so much planning—her wardrobe for one thing, gave her considerable pains. Going out so often, to the opera and to the theater and to so many dinner parties meant that she needed many new clothes. Her mother criticized her if she saw her wear the same dress twice. She ought to go shopping more, but found the street traffic distressing. She owed many so people, and planning a dinner party took weeks; moreover people expected to be invited weeks in advance; there were so many other things going on at the same time. People wouldn't come unless you invited them weeks ahead, so that they could plan—really you had to get your invitations to them first. Oh, a dinner party was a great bother. And getting about took so much time—people lived so far you couldn't get anywhere without a carriage, and the streets were so crowded now.

Bridget remembered how that no one ever bothered to plan a party or perhaps even to invite people. They just dropped by or showed up and there was a party. No one expected much, certainly not food, perhaps some lager or whiskey (more likely potcheen), and some music to dance to. Mainly it was about the dancing. Hadn't that been where she'd met Thomas? She couldn't imagine not dancing, yet Mrs. Daly never mentioned it. She did think to ask her once, but all Mrs. Daly said, was "Oh, yes, the balls. Tiresome."

Mrs. Daly returned again and again to her approaching "confinement," as if she welcomed it as it would give her an excuse not to have to go out so often.