

SHE is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers around her are sighing;
But coldly she turns from their gaze and weeps,
For her heart in his grave is lying!

She sings the wild song of her dear native plains,
Every note which he loved awaking
Ah! little they think, who delight in her strains,
How the heart of the minstrel is breaking!

He had lived for his love, for his country he died,
They were all that to life had entwined him,
Nor soon shall the tears of his country be dried,
Nor long will his love stay behind him.

Oh! make her a grave where the sunbeams rest,
When they promise a glorious to-morrow;
They'll shine o'er her sleep like a smile from the West
From her own loved Island of Sorrow.

She Is Far From The Land - Thomas Moore

ONE

We fought with unbridled ferocity, granting no quarter, as only sisters can. For the slightest acknowledgement from our father we launched attack after attack, yet Gertrude held the field with an ease that further infuriated me. She mocked my efforts to improve my mind as a way to gain Father's attention, snatching *Paradise Lost* from my hands when I wanted to pass the afternoon in reading instead of following her orders. I would have landed a harder blow if I had thrown the book at her head instead of using the knowledge inside as a weapon. I would not have lost the war so thoroughly.

Down the stairs she flew with the leather-bound treasure that I intended to memorize so that I could be part of the intellectual circle that flocked to The Priory, our home on the Rathfarnham Road. I lobbed verbal missiles at her back, irking her to no end and pushing her to run that much faster. "In mercy and justice both," I said, "through Heaven and Earth, so shall my glory excel."

“One day I shall be married and you will remain here, a spinster, your mind ruined by education,” Gertrude said, She flew out of the door into the back garden where dead leaves skittered across the gravel path.

“But mercy first and last shall brightest shine,” I continued.

“And Father shall have to maintain you,” she said.

“After he has married you off to a tinker because no other would have such a sour old witch,” I said.

“Even the tinkers would not take you.”

Her comment stung all the more because I valued her opinion. We were inseparable, Gertrude and I, and the thought of being torn apart by husbands was impossible to imagine. No matter how angry I was with her, however, the fact remained that she had stolen an expensive book that had to be shelved in the library before Mr. Curran returned and discovered that it had been taken without his express permission. As if to reinforce the danger I faced, Gertrude held the book aloft as she circled around the rose bed and charged through the garden gate to the carriage walk.

"Richard's friends are drinking tea with us on Sunday," she said as she raced around the house. Our older brother was a student at Trinity College and often brought friends to our home, to listen to one of Mr. Curran's discourses on the state of Ireland. We thought some of the gentlemen were rather handsome. "Do not expect them to take any notice of your sour face. Stick your nose in a book, little bookworm. You would not be missed."

She slowed just enough to let me get close, a trick that gave me false hope of catching her before she sped up and dashed through the front door. Up the stairs I flew, hot on her heels, but not quick enough to reach her before she had thrown open the bedroom window and dangled Milton over the sill. I leapt for it but she pulled it back. "They will not pay you any heed, either," I said. "Father tells everyone that he has no money and we bring nothing to a marriage. You less so than the rest of us."

Eighteen months older, and with an advantage of height, she held me at arm's length while waving the book around like a battle flag, taunting me with renewed threats to let the tome fall to the ground.

“Admit defeat. Abandon this foolish quest and come for a walk with me,” Gertrude said.

We faced off across the bed, Gertrude feinting a move to the right that put some distance between us when I fell for her ruse. I used the bedpost to propel my turn around the footboard, but she had the

advantage of me yet again. She jumped across the mattress, only to tangle her feet in the coverlet. The book fell to the floor with a thud.

Screaming filled my ears, so many voices screaming that I was not sure if one of them was mine. Gertrude's black shoe sat under the window in a puddle of white linen, a still life from a nightmare. How long did I stand in place, unable to move, staring at her shoe? I looked around to find her, telling myself that she had thrown it at me, but at the same time I knew she had not. How did I make my way downstairs? The memory was never formed, the shock too great. Mercy, first and last. If only our father had read *Paradise Lost* and absorbed its philosophy.

I was told that one of the tenants carried Gertrude into the house and placed her on the dining table, a scene I was said to have witnessed in a state of absolute hysteria. A great wailing erupted as soon as Dr. Emmet declared my sister dead, a cacophony of tears and prayers offered up by the women who filled the room. The maids keened in a way that terrified me, a sound from the depths of hell. By the time Mr. Curran arrived from Dublin, I had been drugged into a numb haze, kept from Gertrude's side by our sister Amelia. It must have been her, rather than our mother, who slapped me when I kept insisting that Dr. Emmet was mistaken and Gertrude was in a deep sleep.

My head was swimming when my father took me by the arm and wrenched me from Amelia's crushing embrace. "How did this happen?" Mr. Curran asked.

"She fell," I said.

For the first time in my life I saw my father cry and his sorrow shocked me. He threw himself across Gertrude's inert form, cradling her broken body with care. He sobbed and cursed God, then cursed my mother for failing to protect his precious little girl, his angel. It was an accident, Amelia said, and Mr. Curran turned on her with his brilliant rhetoric and cursed her for caring about nothing but her own pleasures.

Black eyes spit fire, as if Mr. Curran could burn me alive with his rage. "How could you allow this to happen? How could you stand by and let her die?"

He shook me but there was no shaking out a reply to a question that had no answer. If I had not chased after her, if I had put the book away when she asked me to go walking on such a splendid day. If I was a little faster and had reached her, grasped her skirt before she fell. I might have saved her. Gertrude

would still be alive. I replayed the scene, over and over in my head, changing the outcome in my imagination and wishing I had done even one of the things I pictured too late.

"It should have been you," Mr. Curran said when I failed to answer. He had wanted a second son, and then I arrived, a fourth daughter. I was always a disappointment. "Almighty God, why did you take my Gertrude? Why Gertrude?"

Once released, I ran to the darkest corner of the drawing room so that I could obey his command that I get out of his sight. I prayed that I might switch places with Gertrude, but all my entreaties went unheard, the ears of the Lord closed to me. I was still hiding when Rev. Mr. Sandys strode into the room, his severe appearance heralding a new round of weeping. For the briefest of moments, I felt Gertrude next to me, but when I tried to take her hand there was nothing there.

"What sort of mother fails to supervise her children?" Mr. Curran ranted, turning his ire on the woman who could not seek shelter from his verbal storm. From my fortress behind a chair I listened to the tirade. Both Dr. Emmet and Rev. Sandys beseeched my father to accept Gertrude's death as a tragic accident that none could have prevented. God's will be done, the minister said, while the doctor spoke in platitudes that did little to calm the madman who stalked the drawing room.

There was talk of calling the undertaker and making the necessary arrangements. A fierce argument erupted, all reason and sense taking leave of Mr. Curran in the moment of his deepest grief. I trembled as people came and went, the pounding of shoe heels reverberating in my belly. Guilt weighed me down, kept me from crawling out and running off to seek sanctuary with anyone who would forgive me for killing my sister. The barrage of hot words grew hotter, the skills of an acclaimed orator put to use in arguing against a normal burial. How Dr. Emmet's son discovered me I could not say, but he joined me on the floor and formed a strong wall against the assault.

"It was an accident," I said to him.

"Of course it was. A very sad, very tragic accident." Robert Emmet was one of Richard's closest friends, a young man I held in some esteem because he was so intelligent and yet humble. Unlike my brother, he was consistently kind to me.

"For the love of God, Jack. You cannot bury that child in unconsecrated ground," Rev. Sandys bellowed.

Robert patted my hand. "Your father is a prominent man, and his enemies may imply that Gertrude killed herself if Mr. Curran is allowed to proceed with his plan," he said. "You must be strong and close your ears to those who seek political gain through invective."

"He will not listen," Richard said. My oldest brother had come from school after hearing of Gertrude's death. What a dreadful, horrible journey he must have shared with Mr. Curran on the road from Dublin. He fell into the chair, reinforcement for my barricade.

"The fault is not yours, Miss Sarah," Robert said. "Mr. Curran is beside himself."

"Lost his senses," Richard said. "How can he even think to bury Gertrude in the garden, like some favorite dog?"

Mrs. Curran had grown increasingly hysterical since Gertrude was nestled into a lead box, sealed up, to never be seen again. The discussion over internment only added to heightened emotions and Dr. Emmet demanded that we retire and try to rest. Robert helped me up and escorted me to the door, but I did not climb the stairs with my siblings. Instead I drifted to the library, where *Paradise Lost* rested in its proper spot, likely returned by the housemaid. Or perhaps it had always been there and I was imagining some horror. My forehead felt warm. Surely I was delirious with fever and ought to go to bed. I made my way to the bedroom and saw Amelia standing at the window.

Torches glowed at the edge of the garden, in the grove that Gertrude and I had claimed as our own playground. Shovels and picks cut into the sod under our favorite tree as a gang of men worked in the cool autumn air. "He means to put her right there," Amelia said.

"Not in the family vault in Cork?" I asked.

"Cork is too far away. He wants to keep her here, nearby, forever and ever."

Flames and shadows danced in a macabre gavotte. "Will Gertrude not go to Heaven?" I asked. Convicts and suicides were buried in such places, hidden away, their sins making them unfit to lie with good Christians in consecrated ground. My poor sister was only twelve years old. How could one so young have been so evil as to deserve the same fate?

"Of course she will," Amelia said. "She is an angel now. Poor innocent child."

Not a feverish dream, then, but unbelievable reality. Put to bed, I stretched out my arm to find Gertrude next to me, as she had always been. Empty space filled my hand. I tossed her pillow to the foot of the bed but she did not chase after it or swing it at my head. There was nothing but nothingness, and a

silence that rang in my ears like the buzzing of bees. I shivered despite the suffocating blanket that my sister Eliza tucked around me, shook with the chill that descended on The Priory.

“Mercy first and last shall brightest shine,” I whispered. Darkness descended on The Priory, an unremitting black darkness.

TWO

For hours, I stood at the nursery window and watched the grove, always hoping that Gertrude would appear, even though Eliza and Amelia both scolded me. As the months passed, however, I noticed that the pain diminished to a dull and steady ache, while the emptiness remained raw in my heart. The vacant chair at the dining table was a constant reminder, and one that Mr. Curran masked with a barrage of his storied sarcasm. Meals were the most unpleasant part of the day, when we were all made to gather at five o'clock precisely and endure an attempt at normalcy that ended with Mrs. Curran fleeing the room in tears while Amelia sat like an obelisk to be an example to the rest of us. We had to endure, her rigid posture said, and tolerate what could not be avoided. John, my younger brother, would hold my hand under the table, as if he was afraid that I would disappear like our sister. I envied the babies, James and Will, and the peaceful sanctuary of the nursery.

Within weeks of Gertrude's death, Mr. Curran returned to his former habits and our dining room was again the center of political discussion. Usually his guests were fellow barristers or members of Ireland's Parliament who came to continue some debate begun in the afternoon. I much preferred the Sunday sessions attended by Richard's schoolmates, who looked up to our father as a bold spokesman for Catholic emancipation. One of the most devoted acolytes was Tommy Moore, a close friend of Richard who earned a small stipend as my music master. He was one of the first Catholics admitted to Trinity, and he gave all the credit to my father for championing the rights of an oppressed majority. He showed his appreciation by acting as the voice of reason when a drawing room debate grew heated, often calling on me to perform as a way to calm the mood. "An Irish air, Miss Sarah," he said on such an occasion. "In the native tongue, Mr. Curran, and the pronunciation is flawless, I believe."

Tommy sat at the pianoforte and Richard joined us to turn the music. We were a small island of calm that quickly attracted Amelia and Eliza, who added their voices to our impromptu concert.

"Our Gertrude had the loveliest voice," Mr. Curran said. Gloom emanated from the tips of his fingers and painted the walls. "Silenced forever. How can you sing so merrily, children, when your sister lies cold and alone?"

Richard snapped the sheet from right to left. "A tragedy compounded," he said under his breath. I lost my place and forgot the lyric, stumbling over the Irish words that I knew so well but five minutes earlier.

"Her fluency in the language was remarkable," Mr. Curran said. "Our tenants took such delight in conversing with her, as it showed our unity with them. Many of my colleagues are endlessly devising some method to erase the language, to eradicate Irish culture at the point of a sword. They fear plots being concocted under their very noses, but rather than learn the language, they prefer to cause more unrest by demanding that everyone be as ignorant as them."

"English is the language of authority, and its use is intended to keep the Irish subservient," Dr. Emmet said. "Particularly among the poor, who are denied education."

"Will I live to see the day when a Catholic will be equal to a Protestant?" Dr. Emmet's son Thomas asked. Like my father, he was in law, and traveled a circuit that kept him from home for weeks at a time. Unlike Mr. Curran, however, he espoused armed rebellion as the only sure means to achieve their shared goals. "How can we be expected to govern a people if the populace is divided into two disparate classes? What say you, Robert? You are uncommonly quiet this evening."

"Mr. Curran was speaking earlier of the French and the bloody turn their revolution has taken," Robert said. "It seems to me that their society is divided into multiple classes, and it was the lowest that brought down the monarchy. Do we not face the same risks? Can we learn from the mistakes of our neighbors before violence becomes the last best hope, or is rebellion the only means to free the Catholics?"

Seditious talk was the centerpiece of my education. Mr. Curran was exceedingly radical, a man who agitated against inequality. His position put him at odds with the conservative government that was still smarting over the loss of the American colonies, the Crown doubly determined not to lose another corner of the Empire. Showing a lack of vision, our rulers in London thought that a shared religion was the dangerous link between the French enemy and the Irish Catholics. In fact, it was their attempt to snuff out Catholicism with punitive laws that fueled a smoldering rebellion. As my father so wisely understood, the

short-sighted government all but pushed us closer to France when it should have embraced the Irish as equals.

The United Irishmen were the most vocal in demanding greater freedom, and with Mr. Curran's well-known sympathies it was natural that they would turn to him when the government clamped down. Like my father, they believed in equality and so the group was composed of Catholics and Protestants alike, but so soon after the French king lost his head, the authorities were overly sensitive. It was in January of 1794, after the society had been suppressed, that my father stood at the bar of the King's Bench in Dublin and delivered an impassioned speech that would prove prophetic. He spoke to men whose minds were shut up tight against reason and logic, and so the defendants were all found guilty. What the authorities thought was an end to the unrest was, in reality, merely the beginning.

The war with France was in its early stages, and fear of a French alliance with the Irish Catholics was the root cause of the guilty verdict. Those who supported the ideals of the United Irishmen understood that France stood to gain a decided advantage if it mounted a successful invasion of Ireland. The native Irish whose rights were denied would naturally fight for the French in exchange for religious liberty, and the French Army would gain a ready supply of reinforcements. Coordinated attacks across the Irish Sea and the Channel would overwhelm British forces, and it would be the heads of Britain's peers rolling in the gutters of London.

"The bigotry of the English is undermining Irish loyalty," Richard said. "Go back in recent history, to my father's defense of a Catholic priest against a peer of the realm. Who thought that the truth could prevail?"

"Precisely," Mr. Curran said. "His Lordship presumed that his title alone granted him privileges that included coercing a clergyman to violate his oath to God, and he further presumed that his title granted him the power to beat that priest for disobedience."

"But can we wait, Jack, until the King is put aside and a liberal government comes in under the Prince Regent?" Leonard McNally asked. He was a dreadful toady, currying favor with my father at every opportunity, even though they worked together. Mr. McNally was, without question, Mr. Curran's dearest friend, and my least favorite.

The ladies left the men to their wine and words, retreating to Mrs. Curran's sitting room. She found these evenings to be restorative, she said, because her girls had grown beyond the need for a mother's

constant attention and such pleasant moments were approaching an end. Her spirits did seem to lift when we sat with our needlework while Amelia read the newspapers aloud, discussing weightier topics than the local gossip that filled her day. My mother had grown restless since Gertrude's death, and steered our conversations towards travel to the places mentioned in the news reports. Rathfarnham was too small a town to contain her and the place had shrunk considerably since the previous October.

"Eliza, fetch my Bible," Mrs. Curran said. "You girls must spend more time in studying God's word. The Psalms, for example. You should commit them all to memory. The Reverend Mr. Sandys believes that a young lady of good breeding must know more than the *Book of Common Prayer* if she is to be a good mother."

"What Psalm counsels a lady to be less argumentative?" Eliza asked, tweaking Amelia with a nasty reminder of last winter's social season and the cause of a broken courtship. Our oldest sister was strong-willed and strong-minded, two qualities not in demand in a wife. She wished to be married to her art, to become a painter, but independence was firmly denied.

"And what commandment tells us to love one another," Mrs. Curran said. "To do unto others as they would do unto us."

"There is no prayer to grant any of us a dowry that would erase any and all shortcomings in our temperaments," Amelia said.

We were a large family, it was true, and so we were costly to keep. Mr. Curran made no secret of the fact that his daughters would come to their grooms with very little, unlike his own experience. The money that Mrs. Curran brought was enough to start him in his legal career and by all appearances he had thrived. He could have gone higher, he liked to say, if not for his enemy Lord Clare ensuring that John Philpot Curran would not be made Master in Chancery. Thirty thousand was lost, we were told, the same thirty thousand pounds that could have been our marriage portions. Even a girl as plain-featured as Amelia could snag a prominent gentleman with that kind of bait on her hook.

"In time a liberal government will come in," Mrs. Curran said. "All that is past due will be received. A peerage at the least, when Mr. Fox replaces Mr. Pitt. We must be patient, girls, and while we wait, Amelia, you must control your habit of expressing your opinions."

"Hope for reward? Is that why our father continues to support the opposition, even though they never win an argument?" I asked. How often did he decry the blindness of his colleagues who refused to

see what was obvious to any man of sense? During his frequent spells of melancholy he would cry out for a single victory, just one, to show he was in the right.

“For thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me,” Eliza read aloud from Psalm Thirty, the passage our mother selected to demonstrate the comfort of holy words at a time when faith might waver. I imagined Mr. Curran silently repeating those very words as he faced another stinging rebuke from a judge or a conservative MP. With England again entering into war with France, his reasoned points sounded more like treason than good governance, and it must have taken great faith in the Almighty to endure all that while waiting for the Whigs to ascend. Waiting for his fortune to turn, and ours with it.

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning,” Mrs. Curran repeated after Eliza’s reading. “Our joy will come this summer, as it always has. No matter the strident voices in Dublin, we shall make our regular journey to Newmarket and find happiness among our relations.”

Our parents were the offspring of County Cork gentry, and they had risen above their provincial origins. After he was called to the bar, Mr. Curran began his legal practice in Newmarket and gained sufficient notoriety to be awarded a seat in Parliament. He never forgot what it was like to be mocked for his stutter as an impoverished student dependent on a scholarship. He stood on the side of the oppressed, and like so many other well-read gentlemen of that enlightened age, he believed strongly in equality among men no matter what their religion. He set himself a near-impossible task in trying to sway those who saw a demand for equality as a cry for armed insurrection. Little good it did him when he was later proved correct.

“Mr. Sandys has said he will be in Cork as well and plans to call on us,” Mrs. Curran said. “I expect three girls will be alert and attentive to his sermons.”

The Reverend Mr. Sandys was another of Mr. Curran's worshippers, a friend for many years and a fellow believer in the liberal cause. He was a frequent visitor before Gertrude's death, but he had become almost a fixture in our household after that terrible day. Being in the minority politically forced him to find company with others like him, and the center of that small universe was The Priory. All our guests were part of that coterie, until I knew no other way of looking at the world than that espoused by my father's friends and associates. At the age of twelve, I was becoming as radical as Mr. Curran.

“He drones on so,” Eliza said. “My arms will be covered in bruises from Amelia pinching me to stay awake.”

“Memorize some brief passage and then repeat it back to him,” I said. Gertrude had suggested that to me the year before, and I choked on the words. I was excused to take a drink of water, and dawdled long enough to avoid my mother’s displeasure at such a sign of disrespect for a man of God.

Our sleeping arrangements had changed after Gertrude’s passing, but we pretended that Eliza started sleeping with me because Amelia was a grown woman of eighteen, out in society, and had earned the privilege of a bed to herself. My sisters continued their habit of whispering to each other in the dark, as if a matter of great importance could not wait until the following morning. They were discussing the potential for fun in Newmarket, wondering who might give a ball or a card party. I grew bored with their chatter until the topic shifted to Amelia’s plans for her future.

“If you do not marry, what will you do?” Eliza asked.

The sound of our father’s mournful violin penetrated the floorboards. He was working on a speech, or puzzling out a response to a detractor. Playing music helped him focus his thoughts, but he was known to play at all hours of the night when everyone else was trying to sleep.

“Better a spinster than a wife fallen into misery,” Amelia said. “Are there any guarantees that I will not share our mother’s fate?”

“What about Mama?” I asked. Of all the girls, Amelia was the closest to our mother. They spent a great deal of time together, with Amelia engaged in the rituals of courtship.

“Go to sleep, Sarah,” Amelia said. “This does not concern you.”

“It does. If you become a spinster, then I will too,” I said.

“She confessed all this to you?” Eliza asked, confirming a secret not shared with me.

“As a warning. There have been others, kept in Dublin. A man can live as he pleases, Eliza, and never face censure while we are left to deal with gossip.”

“What are we to do, marry clergymen?” Eliza asked. “Find a man who cannot escape the watchful eye of his flock?”

“And dress like a modest little mouse for the rest of my life? No, thank you. Better a spinster than the minister’s wife.”

"A fine curate's wife you would make," I said. How I resented being kept out of their circle when I had lost my confidante. Loneliness tightened like a band around my middle, squeezing the very breath out of me. I gasped for air and clutched at my nightdress, in a panic that I was going to suffocate. Eliza slapped me soundly between my shoulder blades and I burst into tears.

THREE

The summer of 1794 began as every other summer of my life had begun. The house fell into turmoil with packing and loading and Mrs. Curran fluttering through the rooms in a frenzy of instructions and orders to the staff. She had not wanted to leave Newmarket when Mr. Curran sought advancement, she let slip once. Her manic eagerness to return was evidence of an unremitting heartache that grew from the pain of leaving behind everyone she loved. The Priory had been enlarged over the years to fit her growing family, but a spacious house with fine furnishings was not the cure for her ailment.

Trials for the United Irishmen filled the court's docket and Mr. Curran was unable to travel with us until all the cases had been heard. Events in France had hardened the government against the society, and their leaders were put on trial to silence all dissent. If British support for the Bourbon royalists in France had been effective the United Irishmen would have been seen as harmless, but the military success of the revolutionary army only stoked fear of invasion. The Crown was determined to crush any and all Irishmen who dared to speak their minds, calling it treason. My father was the defense counsel in highest demand, even if his clients were routinely found guilty. His soaring rhetoric served a greater purpose, with his verbal skewering of the prosecutor's logic intended to sway minds and influence public opinion. In a way, he was fighting a series of battles meant to wear down the opposition, so that the war might eventually be won. He never saw the reinforcements forming up on his flank.

We spent our days in long walks to take the air, joined by Rev. Sandys. His presence helped to calm Mrs. Curran, who was forever in a state that I blamed on her unquenchable grief. When she grew agitated, we would pause in our perambulation while the minister offered clerical wisdom and axioms of fortitude in the face of adversity until Mrs. Curran was sufficiently recovered. After one such spell, she called her daughters to her side to walk with her while the men raced ahead.

"Soon to leave your old mother behind," Mrs. Curran said. Her eyes were red from crying. "Making your own homes while I wonder how you came to be old enough to marry."

"While I would be happy to relieve Papa of the burden of my maintenance, I have no immediate plans to wed," Amelia said. She had spoiled breakfast with an unpleasant dissection of the gentlemen she had met at Newmarket, a most unsuitable gaggle of geese who tried her patience.

"The day will come. A mother must let go of her children. So hard to accept, but it is the way of the world," Mrs. Curran said.

Tears rolled down her cheeks and I wished that she would stop turning to Mr. Sandys for advice. His words were soothing as they fell from his lips but she did not derive any lasting comfort from them. Indeed, she tended to spout nonsense. Let go of her children? William was only five years of age, far too young to be turned loose on the world. "I would not accept a man who would not accept my family," I said.

"How ridiculous," Amelia said. "Once you are married, you are at a husband's command. A man will tell you what he must to win your heart, but when he has snared you he may prove false with the knowledge that there is nothing you can do about it."

"You have become so old, Amelia," Mrs. Curran said.

"A woman must take great care," Amelia said. "There is no reason to act in haste. That is all that I meant. Prudence and careful consideration rather than misplaced exuberance."

"Wise girls, all of you," Mrs. Curran said. She embraced us in an awkward tangle of colliding bonnets. "I need not worry about any of you, as the Reverend has told me so often. Truly, you are on your own paths towards womanhood and I am superfluous."

"As for this year's dancing lessons," Amelia said. She was upset at being made to attend classes like a child when she expected to have leisure time to pursue her passion for painting. Rather than listen to a repetition of previous conversations, I raced ahead to catch up with Richard. He thought that his position as scholar would spare him from the ordeal of reels and gavottes, and I took great pleasure in telling him he was quite mistaken.

"Miss Sarah, I was just talking about your performance last night," Mr. Sandys said. He offered his arm and I tucked my hand into the crook of his elbow, noticing that I had to reach a bit higher because he was taller than Mr. Curran. "You are blessed with a rare talent and I hope you will make every effort to cultivate your voice."

"Richard is an excellent pianist," I said. "He promised to play a duet with me this evening. Will you come, sir?"

"Then I must play badly so that Sarah might shine," Richard said.

"So you will play as you always do," I retorted.

"A pity she is a female, Mr. Sandys, or she might follow in our father's footsteps. Turning a sarcastic phrase with such ease," Richard said.

"The Curran blood, in that case, but one cannot dispute the source of her pretty face. The Creagh line is evident in her features," Mr. Sandys said. I favored my mother's family. Gertrude had been the very image of Grandmother Curran, whom our father worshipped.

"So fortunate, Sarah," Richard said. "No man wants an argumentative barrister for a wife."

Our route took us to the spot below the town where a stream entered the Dallua, but we did not pause for a rest. Mrs. Curran was eager to get back to Grandfather Creagh's house in case Mr. Curran had been able to leave Dublin a little sooner than he first thought. His arrival would result in our departure from the Creaghs and there was packing to be done so that we could decamp for Grandfather Curran's house. Will and James complained of fatigue, but even that would not keep Mrs. Curran from walking at a rapid pace. I helped Will climb onto Richard's shoulders and took James' hand, while Mr. Sandys and Mrs. Curran took up positions behind us. Before long, I had heard enough of Amelia's complaints about being made to take lessons with infants when she was old enough to be a mother herself. I dashed ahead to walk with Richard, who was educating John about the realities of life at school for a boy whose father was well known and not all that popular with the ruling elite.



My belly was in turmoil that night and I retired early to avoid sitting down to a meal I would not keep down. Alone in the bedroom we all shared, I sprawled on the floor with my head to a crack in the floorboards, to listen to the rumble of voices that drifted up from the library below. I could not make out the words, but I could tell that my mother was speaking to her parents, an argument I guessed. Sobs and something about mercy angered Grandfather, who broke in with a harsh utterance that he punctuated

with a fist striking wood. Indistinct sounds did not hold my interest and I took advantage of the long hours of light to read in private. As darkness crept in through the window my eyes grew heavy. Amelia woke me with a nudge of her foot.

The full moon cast a glow on our muslin nightdresses, transforming us into ethereal beings floating just above the surface of the earth. "Mama is deeply distressed," Amelia said. "We must be extra good to her tomorrow. Absolutely no gainsaying a thing she says, is that clear?"

"Papa is expected," Eliza said. "His presence always distresses her."

"All the more reason for us to be kind," Amelia said. "We don't want her to worry herself into illness. That would be the end of any amusement outside of Grandfather's house. I will not stand by while you two do anything to spoil things for us."

"But she accepted some invitations already," I said. "It would be rude to say no three days later."

"Hush, Sarah," Eliza said. "Go to sleep. You are too young to concern yourself with dances or parties."

Beams of moonlight tickled my eyelids until they lifted. I got out of bed to catch a breath of fresh air, wedged in as I was between my overheated sisters. Very slowly, I lifted the sash without making a sound and then leaned on the sill to admire the ghostly gloom of Grandfather's park. From the road came the distant clatter of hooves and harness, but my view was blocked by a large birch tree. A latch clicked below me, followed by the crunch of gravel under a delicate foot. My mother entered the scene, walking as gingerly as if she were treading upon hot coals. She turned her head towards me but she was gazing at the house, fixing it in memory. I lifted my hand to wave, but something in the shadows of her face held my arm in place. All the tension that dwelled in her neck and shoulders was gone at that instant and she was beautiful, more beautiful than I had ever before seen. Serenity washed over her features, even as the tears poured down her cheeks. At that moment, the moment of her death, my mother's heart shattered. She left nothing behind but a trail of tears that ended just beyond the gate.