

Chapter One

JOHN LEARY STOOD AT THE CROSSROADS, WAITING FOR THE COACH. There was still time to back out of this venture.

His mother was watching him from the farm; he felt certain of that. He wanted to stay in Ireland, but his father insisted that the opportunities in New South Wales were massive for a twenty-year old journeyman carpenter with ambitions to become a builder—one day he might even have his own building company.

His mother had wanted him to stay, wanted him to train as an architect and set up his shingle in Dublin, joining his twenty-two-year-old brother Mervin as a professional man. Two of John's other brothers, Kieran twenty-four and Vincent, born a year before John, were farmers on the family's land, while Alf, twenty-three was a priest. Their only sister, twenty-five year old Maureen, the eldest sibling, lived in Dublin, where John would see her soon, if only to say goodbye.

If he were to travel, his mother would have preferred him to travel as a paid passenger with money and comfort. But that was expensive and some of the family farm would have needed to be sold to pay for it, and that wouldn't happen. What it came down

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to was that he wanted to stay, his mother wanted him to stay, but his father wanted him to seek out opportunities elsewhere, opportunities that Ireland didn't offer.

The Bianconi coach rolled up to him, its dust making him turn his face away. It was decision time. He could defy his father and stay here and work, or he could get on board. It wasn't worth labouring the matter. There really was little choice.

He loaded his trunk, climbed aboard, nodded to the passengers and closed the door. As the coach moved off he looked out onto the Leary farm, perhaps for the last time. In the June sunlight, his father's land was an oasis in Kildare. Its grass shone bottle green and lush on the one hundred acres, its cattle were fat and content. And it was owned, not rented—a rarity. In the distance, on lots bare as a beggar's pocket, neighbours struggled to survive. Those farmers had had but one crop: potatoes. Blight was killing the potatoes and, over the last four years, the failure of the crop had led to starvation and deaths. All over the country there were stories of deaths in their hundreds of thousands, numbers that sounded impossible to be true. John Leary felt for his country. His mother had nursed many local families. She had prayed over their children, while John had fixed their chairs and mended their stables. But their efforts were a single grain in a full mill of pain and suffering.

The coach gathered speed, climbed and cleared another hill, providing John with an opportunity to admire his handiwork. Three hundred feet of top and bottom timber rails running along the edge of a drainage ditch were squared and finished with pride, and his labour paid for in cash by the county. This in a time when coin was rare and food was the main currency, because only jobs away from the farms 'paid' anything. The rocking coach bumped against his shoulder as he looked out at the mill on the hilltop. Its sails had seen fifty summers, but its wheel would be idle now with no wheat to grind.

As his view of the family farm receded, John became more aware of the cramped conditions in the carriage—he felt like he was in

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a vice, his six-foot-three-inch frame squeezed between the other passengers. The thought of sitting so long like this added to his discomfort as did his jacket and trousers of broadcloth. He longed to swap them for working clothes. He was at ease when building. All his actions had purpose and logic. When he scanned drawings, swung a hammer or shifted timbers, his movements were confident and lithe. Outside of his job, he felt different and was conscious of his size. Now that awkwardness made him irritable and he kicked himself for not opting for the cheaper seats outside the coach.

The people around him were talking.

‘It *is* high, I tell you,’ the passenger beside him said. ‘Even an eagle couldn’t land on it.’

The man opposite had hair as red as a terracotta mortar mix. He laughed. ‘So you said before, Declan.’

‘No, it can’t be that high!’ A woman flashed a bold look at John that lingered for a second over his left eyebrow. John was conscious of his prominent scar, caused two years ago by a flying nail spun from an errant hammer. She said, ‘What do you think, young sir? Is Dublin’s Customs House taller than St Paul’s? St Paul’s in London I mean.’

‘Don’t know, ma’am. I’ve never been to London.’

The woman sniffed. ‘Neither have we. But nothing could be taller than the Customs, nothing.’ She turned to the red-haired man and continued chatting.

John looked at the man’s hair, so different from his own untidy gold locks, and thought about his uncertain future. New South Wales. What he’d read about the place made him pause—heat, flies, snakes. But there was money to be made there; carpenters were well paid and work was plentiful. Sydney was a growing town. New people meant more houses and carpenters were needed to help build those houses. Melbourne was another place he could work. It was— no, it couldn’t be six hundred miles from Sydney, no, that had to be wrong. Pulling out papers from his jacket pocket, he read the lists of wages he’d be likely to earn and tried to work

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out what he'd need to live on. The wages for a stonemason caught his eye. He noticed they compared well with carpenters' pay.

John's Uncle Gerry had been a stonemason, but he knew nothing about him because the family had never heard from him after he'd been transported to New South Wales in 1828, for murder. His mother had always maintained his innocence. Might this uncle have been released, in Sydney or Melbourne? Or, after twenty-two years, was he still in jail for his crime? The rocking motion of the coach made it hard for John to think. He extracted a book from another pocket and started to read, the action prompting a flash of home and how his mother had read to him as a boy. He would miss her.

An hour later, the coach stopped. He looked away from his book to watch the change of horses in the late-afternoon light. Getting out, he stretched his arms and legs and looked down the valley to the distant spires of Dublin and the Anna Liffey. By that ribbon of water he would meet his sister again—and then sail to the other side of the world. Kicking the dust in excitement, he leapt back onto the coach and willed it to go faster.



William Baxterhouse rubbed the watermark on the creditor's letter and placed it back down on his desk.

'Damned sniffing hounds. *Anomalies, inconsistencies*, all fancy words for lack of cash.' He grinned. 'Well, I don't have cash for them!'

His business in imported goods had kept him solvent, but lately his debts had risen to exceed what he earned. One creditor had done a check and found *anomalies*. In ten days there would be an audit of William's books. That he couldn't have. If he owned up to not being able to pay his debts, he would be bankrupted, with nothing but beggary and thievery to follow. However, if he migrated, he could escape debts and disgrace. It would mean being separated from his brother, James but maybe James could follow him, at some point.

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It was just the two of them, born to a wealthy Belfast family. Different they were as granite was to talc. James, slight of frame and fair of face, loved music and the theatre. William smiled. He himself favoured the rough and tumble of life and limb. And yet, they loved each other. Their early lives had been comfortable in 1830s Belfast, which was a dirty city with overcrowded houses. The family's company interests had comprised shipbuilding but primarily cotton and linen-making. After training as an accountant at Queen's College, William had entered the shipbuilding firm at age twenty-three. James joined the cloth company four years later. His brother's talents were well-suited for selecting fabrics that sold well and he was now propping up their father's faltering Belfast business, Elite Fabrics. The family's cotton division suffered from a general turndown in 1848 and their income, status and influence had mirrored the same unhappy downward slope as the change in demand. Bitter and angry at his misfortune, William suffered a massive blow that same year when their dear mother had died from cholera. Inconsolable at the dual calamities, his father George had suffered a breakdown and a stroke and had retired from both businesses.

The shipbuilding industry was booming in Belfast. However, as it had only been a small proportion of the Baxterhouse's businesses, the other shipbuilders had closed ranks and thwarted their growth. As senior manager William had been sent to Dublin to use his skills and had initially achieved a modest success, winning the odd tender for naval vessels. To supplement their income he'd opened an office for importing furnishings from England for ocean-going vessels. Over the past year and again squeezed by local competitors, William had had no choice but to cut costs and prices. The company's finances struggled and he was forced to live in the warehouse they owned near the Dublin docks.

Their biggest customer was the East India Company and William had been steadily overcharging them, in small amounts that now added up to a considerable sum that was lodged in the

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safe at his feet. He thanked his luck and congratulated himself that they'd never discovered his scheming. But this damned creditor was a worry. An audit would be his undoing. He had to act, now.

There were two folders on his desk. Opening the thick one, he picked up the top document, a letter of credit from Barclay's Bank of London for £2,000. Part of that amount was based on the value of his Dublin house (£500) and the other on the Mayor Street warehouse, in which he now sat (£1,500). Neither property, nor the smaller Belfast business, Elite Fabrics, had been mortgaged to the Dublin business so his creditors couldn't touch them.

So, to set himself up overseas, in addition to the cash in his safe he had Barclay's note. Not bad. At nearly thirty-five, he could still become rich, even if that meant leaving his country and his brother behind.

Was he running away? He'd never yet baulked at taking on an opponent! He glanced at an 1841 Dublin newspaper mounted on the wall and smiled at the article displayed. He'd been new to the capital then—a twenty-six-year-old trained accountant. He'd also been a boxer, and in twenty rounds, with a half-closed eye and a broken rib, he'd won the bare-knuckle final to become Queen's College Lightweight Boxing Champion, knocking out the star opponent, a protégé of Dublin's top trainer. Yes, he could fight. But fighting for his business was a different battle, perhaps better fought elsewhere. No, he was not running away—he was taking on a greater challenge.

He tapped the thinner file. Most of these documents described investment opportunities in Canada, America and New South Wales. He scanned them again and nodded. He'd decided on New South Wales, because of the growth potential there for boatbuilding, in which he would have few competitors. Sydney would be his destination. The last sheet in the file was an offer to buy his existing Dublin warehouse stock for £200—less than its value, but in this crisis William needed the money. Taking a pen, he wrote a letter to James in Belfast, telling him of his plans and instructing him to sell the stock after he'd gone.

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Standing up, he walked from his desk to the window and looked down at the Anna Liffey, his escape route, shimmering in the afternoon heat. The capital was cleaner than his native Belfast and not so overcrowded, but it still crawled with beggars and starving people. A breeze wafted from the water, redolent of salt, waste and assorted smells from the endless coming and going of ships. William felt a surge of hope. A voyage to a new land, a new beginning. It was time for a drink.

Grabbing his hat, he walked from his warehouse to the nearby tavern. It was seldom quiet and now was no exception. As usual, sailors and dock workers rubbed shoulders with better-dressed patrons. Ordering a whiskey he sat down and observed the customers, noticing a nearby woman whose breasts nearly burst out of her blouse when she laughed. Her face had a tell-tale blush; she'd be carrying more disease than a plague-ridden city.

Tonight he'd come back here and play cards. Afterwards, he'd pick out a woman—but not like this one. He would take her back to his lodgings at the warehouse and enjoy her. A rousing goodbye to Dublin life, before he adopted a new one in Australia. *Have your fun here, man; soon you need to get married again.* Mary. He often thought about her. A slight figure, a gentle spouse and of good temperament. It had been eight years since her death and her passing had been senseless. A trip on a misplaced doorstopper and a fall down the stairs. In anger he'd sacked the servant who'd caused the hazard. Bitter that a life could be taken so, he'd been cautious in seeking a new partner and was satisfied up till now with short term dalliances. In Sydney though, once he'd planted feet, turned timber and sown money in a new land, he hoped to find a respectable woman, similar to his late wife. She would attend church every Sunday, raise his children and maintain his social standing.

His thoughts turned to Maureen Murphy. She was definitely worth getting to know better. He ordered another drink and allowed his thoughts to dwell on the delightful school teacher.

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It was late in the afternoon and two young women, Jane Forde and Maureen Murphy, were walking homeward together through the Dublin streets.

Jane was talking about her brother. 'Liam knows where you can get that novel you were after. I've forgotten its name.'

'David Copperfield.'

'That's the one. Do you still want it?'

Maureen liked Jane Forde and she liked her brother Liam even more. She'd only met him twice but there had been a mutual attraction. 'Yes, I'd like to talk to him about it.'

'I'll tell him.' They turned a corner and Jane looked back. 'Your place is a fair walk from Portland Street. Do you still like teaching at the school?'

'I do, Jane, but I've only been a teacher for six months and it's all come at a cost.'

'Is your family still angry with you for staying in Dublin?'

'My parents are. My brothers understand, I think. Except for Mervin.' When she was widowed, Maureen had won a scholarship to train as a primary teacher, at The Kildare Place Training Institution run by The Church of Ireland. Her parents had disapproved, even more so when she chose to teach in Dublin instead of in the country. 'I don't regret it so far. The teaching standard's high, and Dublin's a far cry from Kildare.' Maureen stopped at her front gate. 'I'd invite you in but—'

'That's all right. You're expecting your brother. He's coming tonight, isn't he?'

'At about eight. I must run out and pay my rent beforehand. I've just got time to wash and eat, then I'll dash out.'

'Doesn't your landlord come round for your rent?'

'I don't want him to do that any more. I feel a bit uncomfortable with Mr Baxterhouse. He might come again, so I'm going to pay him now at his office first before he does.'

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‘He’s a good-looking man,’ Jane said, ‘and he knows it. Those piercing eyes and that smile.’

Jane didn’t seem to mind Baxterhouse flirting with her, but Maureen was wary of him. She said quietly, ‘I don’t like his behaviour as much as you do. Isn’t he married?’

‘No, he’s not! So he’s ripe for the catching if you want him, though you’d better hurry—I’ve seen him with Frances Ferguson at church. You should get married again, Maureen. I’m surprised you don’t have many suitors, with that curly red hair and all your curves. You’re so attractive.’

‘I’d like to get married again, but not yet and certainly not to Mr Baxterhouse.’

Maureen turned away to open her gate, stepped through and shut it, thinking of her husband. She still missed him terribly. Colin Murphy had been killed in Mexico in 1846, fighting for General López de Santa Anna. Under the green banner of the Irish republicans, he had fought for Mexico’s independence, and been cited for bravery. She was lonely on her own. A child by her beloved husband would have been a gift to Maureen, but God hadn’t blessed her.

In the silence, Jane gave Maureen a quizzical look.

Maureen managed a smile. ‘If I’m to see to our *friend* Baxterhouse at his office before it closes I’d better not dally. I’ll see you tomorrow.’

Jane laughed and walked off, waving goodbye.

Upstairs in her room Maureen half undressed, washed her upper body and checked her reflection in the mirror. Was Jane right? As a twenty-five-year-old widow, was she attractive? Her face was bright, with fair skin and clear eyes. Maybe.

The knocker on the front door thudded. Startled, she pulled up her gown, quickly doing it up. Hurrying down the stairs she wondered who it could be. Jane, perhaps? It was too early for John. The other tenant of the house was away and wouldn’t be back until the next day. She opened the door a fraction.

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‘Good afternoon, Mrs Murphy.’

Maureen felt awkward and flustered. ‘Mr Baxterhouse. I wasn’t expecting you.’

Baxterhouse smiled. He *was* a good-looking man, suave and urbane. ‘I was passing your way and decided to take my luck.’ He leaned closer, and Maureen smelled whiskey on his breath. ‘I hope I’m not imposing.’

She hesitated. She didn’t want him in the house. Perhaps she could get his visit over quickly. ‘Please come in. If you’ll wait in the parlour, I’ll get the rent.’

She stepped back and he entered and shut the door behind him. ‘Thank you.’

Maureen hurried upstairs to her room and took the envelope from her chest of drawers.

A squeak on the floorboards outside her door made her turn.

Baxterhouse stood in the open doorway, smiling at her. ‘I thought I’d save you the trouble of coming downstairs.’ Maureen stepped towards him, expecting him to make way for her. But he stayed where he was. ‘You’re a handsome woman, Mrs Murphy. Has anyone told you that?’

Maureen held out the envelope. ‘Here’s your rent, Mr Baxterhouse.’

‘Please call me William. I asked you to call me that, last time. Don’t be shy.’

Maureen tensed, not liking his manner or the now hard look in his eyes. ‘I’d be grateful if you could go.’

He reached out, took the hand that held the envelope and squeezed. ‘A handsome woman, make no mistake.’

She disengaged her hand. ‘There’s your money. Now please leave.’

He put the envelope in a pocket, his confident figure still barring the doorway. ‘And spirited, too. That’s good. That shows you’ve missed a man, missed his attentions. Come, I’ll be gentle.’

She backed away.

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'Maureen. Come on, we've been flirting these past weeks. I know you want it as much as I do. Be good to me and I'll give you back the money.' He smiled. 'A week's rent, back in your hand for a quick frolic with me.'

'I asked you to leave!' He grinned again. 'I've power in Dublin. I'm on very good terms with the trustees of the Church of Ireland. Make a fuss and you'll be on the street, begging. Your choice. I could revoke your licence to teach, faster than a pickpocket can snatch a purse.'

'You wouldn't dare!'

He moved closer. The danger galvanised Maureen. She screamed, 'Get out of here!'

He gripped her throat with one hand, pushing her further into the room and onto the bed. Filled with terror, Maureen grabbed his strangling hand and tried to jab her knee into his groin. But he twisted away, still holding her with one hand. With the other he yanked her gown up to her waist and drove his hand between her thighs.

Breathless and blind with panic, Maureen fought him as hard as she could, but she was no match for her boxer landlord.



William Baxterhouse was at his lodgings in the warehouse. Maureen Murphy had been in his sights for some time and the deed was done but he was a little ashamed that he'd used such force to have his way. It surprised him that he had. It hadn't been his intention. He'd planned to woo her which he sort of had been doing these past weeks. Perhaps, it'd been the drink or maybe it was his anger at having to leave Ireland that had driven him. Now, he wasn't sorry to be leaving. He'd not be facing any possible repercussions, not that he thought there would be. He was too powerful for that. She'd wanted it, he convinced himself, even though she'd fought him. He'd done her a favour; she probably hadn't had a man for years.

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Relaxing, he reached into his trouser pocket and took out the gold watch, admiring its craftsmanship. He'd seen it on Maureen's bureau on his way out and taken it.

'A fine piece,' he thought then laughed. He'd always wanted one and now he had one. Its connection with Maureen was easily erased from his mind.



The coach stopped in Talbot Street. John leaned forward and gazed out the window. The Dublin streets were busy in the evening, as people hurried by, but there was misery, too, in the starving, huddled groups with nowhere to go.

'At last,' the red-haired passenger said. 'The weather has been kind and I've enjoyed our talk on the poets. We could continue it? Over a pint?'

John grinned. It had been grand talking to another about the poetry he loved. Kieran had fostered his interest, his eldest brother delighting in the classics. 'I would down the first, sir, and steadily drink the next four—but I can't. I promised to go straight off and see my sister, the moment I arrived. I haven't seen her for six months.'

'You'll get a fond welcome, Mr Leary?'

'Indeed.'

The man nodded. 'All power to you and your future, then. Goodbye.'

'Farewell to you,' John said as he jumped out.

It took little time to retrieve his trunk and sign it into the depot for safekeeping. When he set out for Maureen's place on Temple Street, it felt good to walk again, to stretch his muscles. Along Sackville Street, folk made way for him and a few women glanced his way.

It was disorienting, too. Here he was in the city of Dublin, and this time tomorrow he'd be on a ship. He might have planned to have more time between his arrival and embarkation, but hanging

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around in Dublin would only make him miss Ireland all the more when he left. As long as he could stay one night with Maureen, he was content. He had no intention of seeing his brother, Mervin—Mervin took his parents' side against Maureen and believed she should never have become a teacher and chosen to live on her own.

When John saw the house where she lodged, he hastened his step. He knocked on the front door and waited. He knocked again and tried the handle, but it was locked.

'Maureen!'

He called again, louder, and waited. Nothing.

He went around to the back of the house and found a gate that yielded to him. A path led to the back door, which she sometimes left unlocked when she was in. It was open today and he went in.

'Maureen?' He listened but there was nothing. He looked around downstairs, then ran up and found her room. It was untidy, which surprised him.

He went downstairs and decided to wait for her. Ten minutes passed and he was beginning to get worried when he heard the key in the front door. He went to greet his sister—but found another woman on the doorstep.

'You're Mr John Leary?'

'I am. Who are you?'

The woman sighed. 'I'm your sister's friend, Jane Forde. I'm sorry, something terrible has happened to Maureen.'

John's concern returned. 'My God! Is she hurt? Is she—?'

'She's had an accident. I'll tell you on the way.'



The vestibule of the Rutland Street Hospital was busy.

The doctor standing before the desk said, 'You're John Leary, Mrs Murphy's brother?'

'I am.'

'Your sister's in a fair condition. The facial cuts and bruises will heal.'

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‘Are there any other injuries?’

‘You may speak to her yourself.’

‘That I will! Where is she?’

The doctor pointed down the corridor. ‘In Ward Three.’

They found her alone in a four-bed ward. Her eyes were closed, her neck was swollen and discoloured. John leant over, close to her face. ‘Maureen, it’s me. Can you hear me?’

‘Johnny . . . Johnny . . . is that you?’ She opened her eyes and tried to turn her head. Her eyes closed and her forehead creased as the effort overcame her.

‘What happened to you? Miss Forde tells me you *fell down the stairs!* Did you?’

Maureen managed to look at her friend, then back at him. ‘I was so silly. It was my fault entirely.’

‘Maureen!’ Jane said, her voice stern.

‘I fell, Jane. That’s what happened.’ Maureen closed her eyes. ‘Please, let me just sleep.’

‘But Maureen—’

‘Please, Johnny. Come back when I’m rested. Jane has my key. Stay at my place. We’ll talk tomorrow.’

John stroked his sister’s forehead, then left. In the corridor he stopped and confronted Miss Forde, who saw his expression and said at once, ‘I’m glad you’ve seen her. Now I can tell you, your sister didn’t fall down the stairs.’

‘Then what on earth happened?’

Miss Forde looked around in case anyone else was in earshot. ‘She was assaulted. At home, in her room. Afterwards she just had the strength to go out in the street and get a man with a dray to bring her here.’

‘She’s been beaten half to death! Who did this to her?’

‘Not only beaten but attacked as . . . as a woman can be. Do you understand?’

‘God Almighty!’ Shock and anger filled him. ‘Who? *Who?*’

‘She told me not to say. She won’t tell you and she won’t go

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to the police. He's a man with influence. She'd lose her job at the school. She'd be thrown out of the house.'

'She can tell me and I'll deal with him!'

'She doesn't want you to know and she definitely doesn't want your family to know. They're against her teaching and living away from home. She doesn't want to bring shame on them as well.'

Maureen had rebelled against her father. To him, she'd turned her back on her faith. God, what a mess. 'Did she know her attacker?' Jane began to walk away from him but he caught her up. 'She won't tell me, but you will! Who is he?'

Jane took one look at him and he sensed her weakening. 'William Baxterhouse, her landlord.'

John's anger mounted and he pressed his hands to his head. 'Where does he live? I'll kill him.'

Miss Forde gripped his arm; he was surprised at her strength. 'I'd like to kill him, too. I'd like to skewer the mongrel. But we've no proof against him. It's Maureen's word against his.'

John's anger turned to bitter frustration. He groaned and leaned against the wall.

'Mr Leary,' Jane pleaded, 'please do nothing stupid. You'll only hurt your sister if you try to do battle for her. She'll get over it, with my help. I've written a note on her behalf, explaining her absence from school for the next few days. Let her recover.' She pressed his arm again. 'Do nothing, Mr Leary, nothing. Let me help her. That's all she needs.'

After a restless night cramped on his sister's sofa, John made his way to the Emigration Depot. He had to ensure that all his papers were in order before he could think about hunting down the man who had raped Maureen.

But the name hit his eye the moment he entered the vestibule, on a faded advertisement tacked to a notice board. *Baxterhouse Company, Superior Ships' Chandlery, 16 Mayor Street.* Now he knew the address!

Pushing open a set of doors, he found a room filled with aspiring emigrants. There were three queues and John got on the shortest.

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A rumble of dialects rose and fell. For the first time that day, excitement replaced his anger. In his pocket, his hands closed around his Approval Circular from the Commissioners—his permission to emigrate. When his turn came, a doctor looked at his documents, gave him an examination and pointed him towards the counter where a clerk waited.

‘Your papers, manifest and proof of identity.’

‘Did my trunk come from the coach depot?’

‘Give me your name and I will check it. Come on, come on, there are people behind you.’

With his documents approved and his trunk’s arrival confirmed, John set out to find Baxterhouse. He’d make him pay.

The port was busy. Amongst its bustle, sights and smells he found the warehouse and walked through the front doors. The place was packed with crates and stock. He approached a worn counter where a man was adding up a list of figures. ‘Is Mr Baxterhouse here?’

The man looked up. ‘He’s at the tavern just down the road.’



William Baxterhouse was having a drink and using his charm on the lieutenant of a Royal Navy vessel that was about to sail from Ireland with two pinnaces on board—pinnaces built, in fact, by the Baxterhouses. His best and most discreet way out of Dublin was as a civilian passenger aboard this ship, but the lieutenant was lukewarm about the prospect.

Eyeballing the officer, William put his glass down. ‘Look, Mr Johnson, it’s easy. You take me to New South Wales. I’m an experienced boatbuilder who wants to report on how my pinnaces perform on the voyage.’ William rapped his fingers on the table. ‘It’s to the Navy’s advantage and ours if we understand how they can be improved under real conditions at sea.’

‘Against regulations, sir. We can’t take on another civilian.’

‘Come, I’m not just any passenger, my friend. I have links with

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the Navy. And you have a vacancy on board the *Defiant*. You gave a berth to a man going to New South Wales, and now he's fallen ill.'

'He's forfeited the fare for his passage.'

'So he has, Mr Johnson, and now you can tell your captain that I'm taking his berth at the last minute, therefore at a discount. And I'll pay the remainder to you on the quiet.' William smiled. 'You'll be richer and the Navy none the wiser.'

It never ceased to amaze William what debt could do to people. In February, William had tendered for supplying ten pinnaces for the Royal Navy and the young naval officer vetting the bids had been the Jack Johnson with whom he was now bargaining. Back then, Johnson had been short of cash to pay a gambling debt. William had paid what the officer owed, won the contract and supplied the ten eight-oared craft, two of which were now on the *Defiant*.

The lieutenant paused for a moment. 'I can't do it, Mr Baxterhouse.'

The boatbuilder pulled his chair nearer and leaned closer. 'You will do it, my friend, even if I have to reposition your facial features.' He grinned. 'I wouldn't mind doing that. You can take a beating and succumb, as they all do . . . or, keep your face as it is and I write to your flag officers and enclose the receipt I paid for your debt. On any reckoning, after your dishonourable discharge you'll be fighting the waterfront beggars for scraps.' More silence, and Baxterhouse was about to get up.

Johnson said, 'Our ship sails at sunset. Have your trunk at the dock. The wherry will take you out.'

'Good man.'

It was short notice, but William had all he needed and was ready. He stood up. 'I'll see you on board.' He put on his hat and left.



John walked up to the tavern. A barrel-access door stood open on one side and he stepped in, looked around and went up to the bar.

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He had no idea what Baxterhouse looked like, so he'd have to ask questions that might bring him face-to-face with the man—but John was angry and past caring about anything except punishing Baxterhouse.

'I'm looking for a Mr Baxterhouse,' John said to the barman. John eyeballed the man. Baxterhouse could be here and the barman was protecting him or the man just wasn't in the tavern.

'You've just missed him.' The barman turned and served another patron.

John's tension sank for a moment. He hadn't eaten all day, and hunger gnawed at him. He paid for and ate a meal and went to leave. Near the door he passed a lone drinker.

'Hey, big fella, you want to know about Baxterhouse?'

John turned and faced the wiry stranger. 'Do you know him?'

'Depends.' The man looked down at his empty glass and back at John. 'It's a hot day.' John returned with two ales and sat down. His fellow drinker brought his chair close. John had smelled everything on his father's farm but what filled his nostrils now was beyond words. 'He's a regular here. I hate the bastard, true. He sacked my brother for stealing from him but I can't touch him. I tell you, I'll see him hurt, if it kills me.'

John didn't care whether the man was telling the truth or not. 'What does he look like?'

'He's a gentleman, dresses fine, good looking.'

'Hair?'

'Black and straight.'

'Height?'

'About five foot nine and solid. Be careful, friend. He's a fighter.'

'A gentleman fighter? That's odd.'

'He is, bare-knuckle.' The man sipped his beer. 'But you're a giant.' He touched his forehead. 'It looks like you've had a round or two yourself. You'll give him a go.'

John had broken skin in scuffles during his apprenticeship. He would have Baxterhouse all right. John's ship sailed at seven that

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night. He needed to catch up with Baxterhouse beforehand. 'You saw him here?'

'Aye. He was deep in talk with an English naval officer.'

'Did you hear anything?'

'Too noisy, but I know the officer. He's the first lieutenant on the *Defiant*, name's Johnson. She's at dock now. Got the feeling Baxterhouse wanted something out of Johnson.' The man of odours finished his beer. 'Look son, that's it. If I've been a help to ya, then that's one step closer to nailing the bastard.'

John thanked the man and left some change on the table. His time in Ireland was running out.



Maureen was fighting for her life, her arms punching the air. Then she woke to the sounds of a trolley. She lay back, panting.

'Tea, love?' the sister asked.

Maureen nodded, took the cup and drank. It was good. 'Sorry, sister. Another nightmare.'

'Happens often here. The matron says you need watching. I'll help you. I've just started my shift.' She smiled and moved on.

Maureen sank back on the bed. On each side of her head the invisible vice grips were easing. Her head throbbed less, but between her thighs was still painful. Maureen shivered. It all came back to her—in the summer sunset, raped in her bedroom by her landlord. Tears came to her eyes.



John returned to Mayor Street ready to confront Baxterhouse. He would face him, demand that he admit his crime and if not, then John would beat him to a pulp. Then what? How could he prove the man's guilt to the police? He himself might be arrested for assault, and never be able to leave Ireland. What would that do but increase Maureen's pain, and that of the family?

The same clerk faced him. 'Back again, sir? Found the boss?' John just stared at him. 'Did you hear me?'

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John's anger boiled again. 'Is Baxterhouse here?'

'It's *Mister* Baxterhouse and no, he's not here. But as you want him bad, leave your name and I'll tell him you came. Is it business?'

If John revealed that it was personal, the man's employees would warn him. 'I'll come back tomorrow.' John turned and left, shaking from head to foot with barely controlled rage.



'She's better, Mr Leary,' the matron said. 'Not a bad night, with the laudanum helping her. You can see her.'

John went into his sister's ward and Maureen welcomed him with a half-smile. He went to her. 'You're looking better. Did you sleep at all?'

'Yes, Johnny, I did. What about yourself? I was going to take the afternoon off school, to see you to the boat. And look at me, bedridden. But never fear, I'll be up tomorrow.'

She was putting on a brave face for him and he loved her for that. 'I wish I wasn't going and leaving you like this. But my ship sails tonight.'

A shadow settled on her face. She sat up and John helped her with the pillow. Maureen drew breath. 'What a voyage it'll be! How did you find the money for the passage?'

'I'm going assisted.'

'Ah, the full fare is so expensive. But you'll gripe sailing steerage.'

'There's no cash to spare. Da would have had to sell land to raise enough for the full fare.'

Maureen looked out the window. 'Does he ever speak about me?'

'No.' He saw her look of pain and burst out, 'It's not right for you to suffer so, Maureen. You *can't* let him get away with it!'

Maureen looked at him. 'Da?'

'No, Baxterhouse! Miss Forde told me what he did to you.'

Her eyes flashed. 'She had no right to tell you and I don't want to talk about it.'

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John didn't understand. Maureen had always been a fighter, like him, and here she was just giving up. 'You must tell the police and make the bastard pay. I'll back you up. They'll have to take your word.'

'I'll do nothing and neither will you.'

'But you have to, Maur. It's—'

'He could get back at me. I need my job.' She lifted her chin. 'Johnny, I mean it. This is to stay with us. And Da must never know.'

'But it's unjust. That man gets to go free.'

Maureen shut her eyes. 'I don't want people knowing what happened to me. I'll deal with that man—my way.'

'How?'

She opened her eyes. 'Just leave it to me. Is that clear?'

He knew he had no time left to change his sister's mind. 'Yes, but I do so, very reluctantly.'

'Now, go back to the house and get my Colin's gold watch. It's no use to me, the big heavy thing. It's on the top of my bedroom bureau. I want you to have it, but don't you dare lose it—'

'Maureen, please.'

'God knows you might. If you do, remember it's inscribed on the back with "C.M.". Lock the house and leave the keys with Jane.' She leaned over and John gently embraced her. 'I'll be all right. Now, off you go, with my blessing.' Her eyes filled and he kissed her on the cheek knowing he'd miss her terribly.

John left the hospital, torn between frustration and sorrow. At Maureen's house he searched for the watch. It wasn't on or in the bureau and he didn't have time to look anywhere else. The hall clock showed five-thirty; he should have been on the dock at five. He left the house and dropped the keys off at Miss Forde's place nearby. Jane told him not to worry; she'll look after Maureen.

At the docks, the Anna Liffey raised his spirits. Its water reflected the outlines of the buildings above as an easterly filled with sea air cooled the crowded docks. Sobs and cries competed with the screeches of the gulls as loved ones said their farewells around him.

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He soon found his ship, the *Spirit of Dublin*. Easing his way through the crowd, John completed the formalities, then sat down on a bench and looked downstream. A warship departing under gentle sail caught his eye.

A merchant seaman joined him, squatting on a mound of rope. ‘Good to see the arse end of that, eh?’

‘Aye, English warship, isn’t she?’

‘You’re a country lad, I’m guessing, and you guessed right! That’s the *Defiant*, on East India convoy duty.’

John’s memory jolted back to the conversation in the tavern. ‘A naval vessel . . . where is she bound?’

‘I’d put money on New South Wales.’

John gazed at the warship. The *Defiant*. Baxterhouse had been talking to a naval lieutenant on that ship. Why, he wondered.

‘All aboard, last call,’ came a voice from a loud hailer.

John walked to his ship, still thinking about Baxterhouse and the *Defiant*? What was their connection? A thought suddenly occurred to him—could Baxterhouse be on board the *Defiant*? Was he fleeing a possible prosecution for his rape of Maureen? Was he not so confident she wouldn’t report his crime?