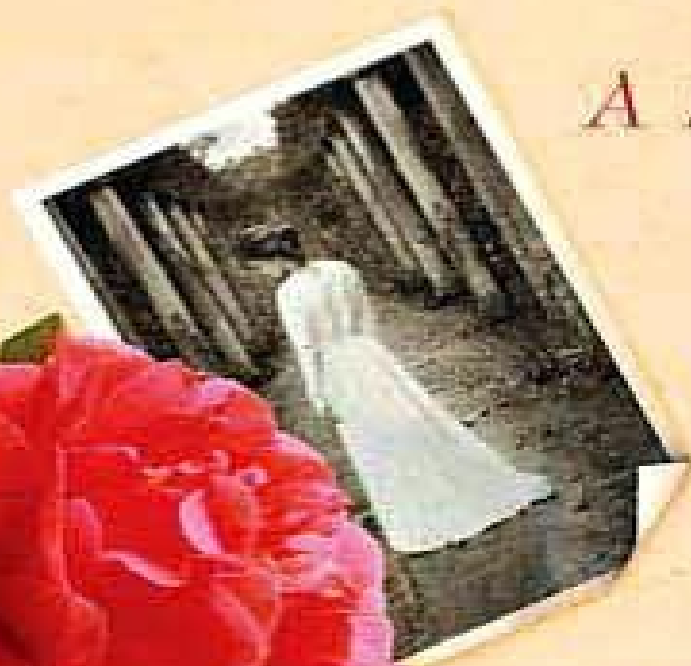


In Dublin's Fair City

*A Molly Murphy
Mystery*



Rhys Bowen

In Dublin's Fair City

The Molly Murphy Mysteries

Oh Danny Boy

In Like Flynn

For the Love of Mike

Death of Riley

Murphy's Law

The Constable Evans Mysteries

Evanly Bodies

Evan Blessed

Evan's Gate

Evan Only Knows

Evans to Betsy

Evan Can Wait

Evan and Elle

Evan Help Us

Evans Above

Evanly Choirs



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Rhys Bowen



St. Martin's Minotaur  New York

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This book is dedicated to the memory of two wonderful women, almost Molly's contemporaries, who died within a week of each other. Marie McCormack and Alice Stinchcomb were smart, feisty, enthusiastic, like Molly. They were both university graduates at a time when it was unfashionable for young women to pursue education. They devoured books—especially mine. Their minds remained sharp and witty until the end. I will miss them terribly.

Be careful what you wish for.”

That was another of my mother's favorite sayings—one of the few in her wealth of warnings that didn't predict a bad end, hell fire, and eternal damnation. It was brought out any time I expressed my childhood ambitions to see Dublin one day, to dance at a ball like a real lady, to own a horse and carriage, or just to free myself from our dreary life in Ballykillin. The end of the sentence was rarely said, but always implied—”or you may get it.”

Now it had finally come back to haunt me. My mother would undoubtedly be chuckling her head off in heaven, or wherever she was spending the hereafter. Ever since I'd arrived in New York and met Captain Daniel Sullivan, I suppose I had secretly nourished a hope that we could be together some day. Although I told myself that this would never happen, also that he was unreliable, two-faced, and all around bad news, I had never quite managed to put him out of my thoughts or my heart. And now it seemed I was being offered as much of Daniel Sullivan's company as I ever wanted. More, in fact.

Three weeks had gone by since his release from The Tombs on bail, and he was still charged with taking bribes from a gang member, being in the pay of a gang, and setting up an illegal prize fight. Since then he'd received no news on his future or his fate, although we now knew who had so carefully plotted his downfall. It was a horrible way to be living, to be sure—like walking on eggs—and Daniel wasn't taking it well. He was used to being cock o' the walk, a powerful man who commanded the respect of his colleagues among the New York police and who had connections to the Four Hundred—the highest-born families in town. Those weeks in The Tombs had taxed him physically and mentally, so that he was now alternately moping or prowling around like a caged tiger.

And much of his prowling was being done at my house, which is why I was pacing the floor myself one muggy September afternoon. Daniel had finally managed to engage the services of a reputable attorney, who was working on his behalf, and had arranged a meeting today with the police commissioner, Mr. John Partridge. And I was left to pace the floor at home, wondering if he'd return a free man, reinstated at his job. Please let him be freed from this terrible burden, I found myself praying, even though I was not much one for chats with the Almighty. And please let him get his job back and leave me in peace. I was appalled at myself immediately. Wasn't I supposed to be in love with Daniel Sullivan? Hadn't I seriously considered the prospect of marrying him some day? And yet here I was, dreading the thought of his presence. What about for better or worse, richer, poorer, in sickness or health? This marriage question would require some serious rethinking, provided Daniel was ever in a position to ask for my hand, of course.

While I waited I cleaned the house feverishly, polishing my few pieces of furniture till I could see my face in them and still no Daniel. Surely the interview must be over by now. Surely the commissioner would have no alternative but to declare him a free man. I paced the house, exactly as Daniel had done so often these past days. I pulled back the net curtain, looked down Patchin Place, then let it fall again. Suddenly I could stand it no longer. I needed company, and I needed it now. Pleasant company, amusing company. And I knew exactly where that could be found.

I crossed the street and knocked on the door of the house on the other side of the alleyway. It was

opened by an alarming vision with a deathly white face and two green circles where eyes should have been. I gasped as the vision removed one of the green circles.

“Sorry about that,” she said. “Cucumber. We’re trying out skin remedies. Sid just read an article *Ladies’ Home Journal* on the subject of natural health and beauty from the larder.”

The white-faced ghost now revealed itself as my dear friend and neighbor, Augusta Mary Walcott of the Boston Walcotts, but more usually known by her nickname, Gus.

“*Ladies’ Home Journal*?” I had to chuckle. “You two are the last creatures on earth I would have suspected of reading ladies’ magazines.”

“The cover promised interesting tips for decorating the home in the Japanese style, which we were thinking of doing anyway, so we bought the magazine and there was this delicious article on health and beauty, so of course we had to try it for ourselves. Come on in, you’re just in time to try our complexion paste.” She ushered me in and set off ahead of me down the hall and into their kitchen. “It’s egg whites boiled in rose water with alum and oil of sweet almonds, and a dash of honey, all whipped together into a paste, and then left to dry,” she called over her shoulder. “I must say, it feels very strange as it hardens, but you can actually sense all the impurities being drawn from the body.”

Sid and Gus had added a conservatory onto the back of their kitchen and the doors between the two were open, as were the doors to the little garden beyond, giving the place a delightfully rural feel. As we approached I could see another white-faced specter lying under a white sheet on a garden chair, looking horribly like a corpse until she started fanning herself furiously.

“These damn flies,” she muttered. “I suppose they are attracted to egg white, but they won’t leave me alone.”

“We have company, Sid darling,” Gus called. “Molly has come to share in our experiment.”

Elena Goldfarb, usually known as Sid, sat up and peeled the cucumber slices from her eyes. “I wanted to send Gus to fetch you, but she said you wouldn’t be able to desert Daniel the Deceiver.”

“He’s not around at the moment, saints be praised,” I said.

“That doesn’t sound like the voice of a woman in love.” Sid attempted to frown, but her mask would not let her.

“I know. It’s terrible of me. I should be delighted that he is gracing me with his constant presence, but frankly I’m not. His gloomy, moody behavior is driving me insane. I’ve come to the conclusion that I won’t make a very good wife.”

“I’m sure every person on this earth drives his or her partner insane from time to time,” Sid said. “I know we do. Now tie back your hair and let me slather some of this mixture onto your face. Madame Vestris is said to have preserved her beauty with this very concoction until late in life.”

I had no idea who Madame Vestris was. “Oh, I really don’t think—” I began.

“Don’t be a spoil sport, Molly.” Gus was already gathering back my unruly mop of hair. “Besides, it’s supposed to draw out impurities so you may be more saintly and forgiving the next time Daniel comes to call.”

I resigned myself to my fate, and was soon laughing with Sid and Gus as they turned me into a meringue. The laughter felt strange. How long since I had laughed and allowed myself to be silly with my friends? The whole summer had been one of tension and heartbreak, to say nothing of the constant worry about money. Now I was recovered from my recent ordeal, both physically and mentally, but there were no new cases on the books for my small detective agency.

“So where is the dreadful Daniel this afternoon?” Sid asked. “Sit still, or the cucumber slices will fall off.”

“His new attorney has set up a meeting with the police commissioner and is asking to have all the charges against him dropped.”

“Well, that's finally good news, isn't it?” Gus said.

“I do hope so,” I said. “Daniel's reputation means so much to him. His fellow officers still think I betrayed them, and I know how deeply that has affected him.”

“All's well that ends well,” Sid said. “Daniel will be exonerated and go back to work, Molly can go on with her life, and peace will reign in Patchin Place.”

She was just finishing the sentence when there came a thunderous knocking on their front door. Gus hurried to open it. We heard an explosive, “What the deuce?”

“Beauty treatments.” We heard Gus's calm voice. “And if you're looking for Molly, she's with us.”

I hastily removed the cucumber slices from my eyes in time to see Daniel striding down the hallway toward me.

“I went to your house and you weren't there,” Daniel said petulantly.

“So being a great detective, you deduced she might be over here with us,” Sid said calmly. “Would you like a glass of ice tea, Captain Sullivan, or something stronger?”

“I'm not in the mood for socializing, I'm afraid,” Daniel said. “I've just had an infuriating meeting with the police commissioner.”

“He wouldn't agree to drop all the charges?” I asked.

“No, he damned well wouldn't.” He checked himself. “I apologize for the language, ladies, but my patience has been stretched to its limit this afternoon. Molly, would you please remove that ridiculous concoction from your face and let's go home.”

I put my hand up to my cheek. “I think it needs to harden first or it will be impossible to remove,” I said. “But what was Mr. Partridge's reason for not declaring you innocent on the spot?”

“Because that snake Quigley refuses to confess to anything. So until he is brought to trial and found guilty, I am still officially charged and will still have to stand trial myself.”

“But that's ridiculous,” I said, rising from my garden chair with difficulty. “We have the proof that Quigley is guilty.”

“Of his part in the murders, yes, but there is nothing to prove that he orchestrated my meeting with the gang member, - and I have, of course, admitted to my part in setting up the prize fight.”

“But they can't punish you for that. Half the New York Police Department was present at that fight. I saw them with my own eyes.”

Daniel sighed. “I know none of it makes sense, but I have the feeling that Partridge wants to make an example of me. The only way that he'll let me off is if I can get the gang member in question Monk Eastman himself to come forward and categorically deny that I was working with them.”

“Then that's what you should do,” I said.

Daniel gave a bitter chuckle. “Ask Monk Eastman to speak in my defense? I don't think you understand the adversary, my dear. He would like nothing more than my downfall. He'll not say a good word on my behalf nor let any of his gangsters.”

“He might, if I asked him for you,” I said.

“Under no circumstances, Molly. And that is an order.”

“You can't order me around,” I said. “I'm not married to you - and even if I were, I'd not take your commands like some dog.”

He laughed again. “I don't doubt it for a second,” he said. “But I'd rather suffer the indignities of

trial than send you to plead with Monk Eastman on my behalf.”

“Then send Gentleman Jack to plead for you,” I said. “He must be in favor with Monk at the moment. I’m sure he made Monk a good deal of money by winning that prize fight.”

“I’m sure he did, but you’ve met him, Molly. The man is so ad-dlepatated that he’d forget his own name if people didn’t keep addressing him by it. What good could he do?”

“At least give him a try, Daniel,” I said. “Write a letter to Monk and send Jack in a hansom cab to deliver it in person. He could then add his appeal to the letter.”

“Molly, I can’t go on discussing this in these circumstances,” Daniel snapped. “Would you please do as I ask. Remove that ridiculous stuff—it makes you look like an iced cake—and let us continue this conversation in private. I hardly think it appropriate to discuss my current situation in front of those who aren’t concerned with it.”

“Oh, we are most concerned,” Gus said. “It affects us too. If you are unhappy, then Molly is unhappy, and if Molly is unhappy, then we cannot truly enjoy life ourselves. And since it is our aim and pledge to enjoy every moment, the sooner the situation is rectified, the better.”

“Hmmp,” was all that Daniel could say to that.

“Captain Sullivan, let us pour you a glass of brandy,” Gus said in her soothing voice. “I’m sure you have had the most vexing afternoon, and poor Molly was quite distressed when she came to visit. It is not easy for her either, you know.”

“I’m sure it’s not,” Daniel said. He sighed again. “Very well. I accept your kind offer, simply because I refuse to walk across the street until Molly has removed that stuff from her face.”

“Replace the cucumber slices, Molly, or your eyes won’t feel the true benefit,” Gus directed as she disappeared into the drawing room to find the decanter. Feeling stupidly self-conscious with Daniel’s eyes on me, I replaced them, then thought better of it.

“I think you should stay for dinner over here, don’t you, Sid?” Gus said, returning with a generous full brandy snifter. “We could try something Japanese. I’ve been dying to do things with raw fish.”

“I really don’t think . . .” Daniel began when there was yet another knock at the front door.

“My, but we are popular this afternoon,” Sid said, attempting to rise.

“Perhaps I should answer it,” Daniel said. “You ladies present a most alarming appearance.”

Almost instantly we heard a man’s voice saying in theatrical tones, “What a disappointment. I was expecting to see two lovely ladies. Don’t tell me they’ve hired a butler?”

“The lovely ladies you refer to are unable to receive visitors at this moment,” Daniel said. “And I am not the butler.”

“Unable? Don’t tell me they have succumbed to the horrible grippe that is felling everyone. O God, tell me it’s not bad news. You’re not the doctor, are you?”

“No, I’m not, and may I ask who you are so that I can convey a message?”

“Moi? I thought everyone knew me. Tell them that Ryan is pining for them and has to see them immediately. You wouldn’t happen to know where the divine Miss Molly is, would you? She’s the one I am especially seeking tonight.”

“Miss Molly is with the other ladies at the back of the house, but they are in no condition—”

Before he could utter another word there was the sound of some kind of scuffle or commotion, a yell from Daniel, and wicked Irish playwright Ryan O’Hare came flying down the hallway toward us. He was wearing a white peasant shirt, a royal blue cape, and I must say he made a most dramatic entrance.

He stopped short when he saw us then gave a delighted gasp. "It's the complexion paste from *Ladies' Home Journal*. What fun. I'm dying to try it."

"We used up the last on Molly," Sid said.

"Molly, my angel, is that you under there? Yes, it is. I'd know that delicate white hand anywhere. Let me give it a kiss."

"I'm sorry about this, ladies," Daniel said in a tight voice. "I presume you know this gentleman?"

"Oh dear. You two gentlemen obviously haven't been introduced. Ryan O'Hare, playwright extraordinaire. Captain Daniel Sullivan of the New York police."

"Not Daniel the Deceiver?" Ryan exclaimed. "We meet at last. I have heard much about you. We're all so proud that our dear Molly managed to rescue you from prison."

"Well, actually I'm only out on bail," Daniel said dryly. "Of course I'm grateful for what Molly tried to do."

Then it hit me. He didn't know the truth. I had never managed to speak of that night on Condemned Island, so he didn't know what I'd been through. And would never know, I decided. That chapter of my life was firmly sealed.

"I think the paste has hardened enough," Sid said, and began to peel it off. We followed suit. Ryan danced between us, stroking our cheeks. "Wonderful," he exclaimed, "deliciously soft, like a baby's bottom."

"Really, Ryan, you'll go too far one day," Gus scolded. "You know you only do it to shock."

"One just wants to have one's little fun," Ryan said, pouting.

"Molly, can we please leave now?" Daniel came over to me and took my arm.

"You haven't drunk your brandy," Sid pointed out.

"Thank you, but in the circumstances—" Daniel said.

"You can't possibly take Molly away. I forbid it," Ryan said. "It was to seek her out that I trudge all this way through the heat and the flies and the dust." Ryan took hold of my other arm. "I'm whisking you away, Molly dearest. I've been instructed to escort you to a party tonight. Someone is dying to meet you."

I glanced at Daniel. His face was like granite.

"I'm afraid that I can't go to a party tonight, Ryan," I said, then my curiosity got the better of me. "Who is dying to meet me?" "None other than Tommy Burke." "I'm afraid I don't know Tommy Burke," I said.

"Never heard of Tommy Burke?" Ryan sounded shocked. "My dear girl, he is only the leading theatrical impresario in the city. If Tommy Burke puts on a play, it is always a sensation. Did you not see his version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Not a dry eye in the house. But that's beside the point. Tommy Burke is hosting a fabulous party tonight at the roof cabaret at Madison Square. Now tell me you cannot resist that, can you?"

"My, that does sound glamorous," Sid said. "But you're only inviting Molly so we understand. Gus and I are mortally wounded that we're not to be included."

"Of course you two are included. Our bold police captain too, if he so wishes," Ryan said. "It just happened that Tommy Burke expressed a desire to meet Molly."

"Why?" I asked. "How could he have heard of me?"

"I can't exactly say. Something to do with your detective work, I understand. Anyway, all will be made clear tonight at the roof garden cabaret of Madison Square Garden, while sipping the mo

delightful champagne. I'll return to escort you at eight. Wear something devastating." He glanced the clock on the kitchen wall. "~~Horrors. Is that the time? I'm late for my fitting. Must fly.~~"

And he was gone.

Daniel and I crossed the cobbled alleyway in stony silence.

“You can’t seriously be contemplating going to a party with that dreadful creature?” Daniel said, and I closed the front door behind us.

“He’s not a dreadful creature. He’s actually quite delightful and very talented.”

“He’s a freak, Molly,” Daniel said, “an outcast from civilized society.”

“As for that,” I said, “you are also an outcast from civilized society at the moment, are you not? Jailbird, only out on bail? Dear me, what must Miss Van Woekem and her set be saying about you now?”

His face flushed with anger. “It’s not the same thing at all and you damned well know it,” he said. “You let him paw you all over. Is that the way you behave when I’m not around?”

“Paw me all over? Daniel, he took hold of my arm. He patted my cheek, if I remember correctly. That hardly constitutes pawing. And for another thing, Ryan sees me as a sister, nothing more. His interests lie elsewhere.”

“Another Oscar Wilde, you mean? I suspected as much. Molly, I utterly forbid you to go to that party tonight or to go on mixing with people like that.”

Like many of my fellow countrymen, I’ve never been known to back down from a good fight or a challenge.

“You utterly forbid me?” I demanded. “And who are you to be laying down the law, I’d like to know? Until a couple of weeks ago you were promised to another woman, and I don’t recall you getting down on one knee and proposing to me since then. And if you had, then this kind of talk would cause me to rip the ring right off my finger.”

“Then maybe it is lucky that we have made no such promises,” Daniel said stiffly.

“How right you are. Nobody owns me, Daniel Sullivan. I am my own person, and I mix with whom I choose. If you can’t trust me enough to have good judgment in my friends and my actions, then I see no future for us together.”

Daniel picked up his straw boater. “In that case there is little point in my remaining here any longer. Good day to you, Miss Murphy.”

He gave a polite little bow and left. I stood there staring at that front door. I was so tempted to run after him and make everything all right again, but I forced myself to stay where I was. For the first time in my life I’d had a glimpse of what being married might mean: having a man dictate to me how I should think, with whom I should associate, surrendering my own identity and my freedom. Why do so many women opt for this so readily? Love, I supposed. Did I love Daniel Sullivan enough to marry him and subordinate my will to his for the rest of my life? In the first flush of romance with Daniel I would have willingly said yes to any proposal. And then there’s security, of course. How many women can provide for themselves? Even professional women find it hard to overcome the prejudices of society. Those with private incomes like Gus and Sid do just fine, but I wasn’t making too good a job of keeping J. P. Riley and Associates afloat.

Which brought me back to the invitation for this evening. Something to do with your detective work, Ryan had said. Did that mean that Tommy Burke, impresario, was interested in hiring me for an assignment? Wild horses would not keep me away from the party tonight.

I half expected that Daniel might come back to apologize for getting upset over nothing, but he didn't, leaving me feeling uneasy and hollow inside. Maybe I felt a little guilty too, because I did realize that Daniel was on edge at the moment and it was not a good time to confront him. But it didn't bode well for any hope of a future relationship if we both flew off the handle so easily and had such different views of what we wanted from life.

By eight o'clock I was dressed in my finest attire, a sea green taffeta dinner dress, cast-off from Gus's days as a society debutante. The leg-o'-mutton sleeves were now old-fashioned, but the color contrasted well with my red hair. Besides, it was either that or a muslin. After much struggling I managed to tame my hair and hold it in place with tortoise-shell combs. The complexion paste had certainly made my face feel smooth, but it was glowing like a setting sun and I had to calm it down with some corn starch. Still, the final result, as I glanced in the mirror, was not too terrible, - and I felt a wave of excitement surge through me. Fancy parties at a roof cabaret with a famous theater impresario were not something that happened often in my life.

Sid and Gus emerged at the same moment as I, looking stunning in emerald green and peacock blue. Sid's short dark hair was styled in a sleek, smooth cap, and I noticed that under her emerald green theater cape, she was wearing trousers. Normally such attire would cause a stir, but I suspected that at a theatrical party, she would feel right at home. I supposed that Daniel did have a point when he saw that such friends would be frowned upon in polite society. But then we didn't live in polite society.

Ryan was waiting for us at the entrance to Patchin Place, having already secured a cab, and we piled in. He was still wearing the royal blue cape over a frilled lace shirt tonight and looked ridiculously like Hamlet.

"No Daniel, I notice," Ryan said. "Not his cup of tea, does one surmise?"

"Daniel walked out in a huff after forbidding me to attend this party," I said.

"And you didn't allow yourself to be browbeaten. Splendid. Well done," Sid said.

"Have you ever known me to be browbeaten?" I asked.

"No, but women have been known to act quite ridiculously when it comes to pleasing a man."

"For your information," I said, "I don't ever intend to take orders from a man, not even Daniel Sullivan. If he doesn't trust me to choose my own friends, then he'd make a poor sort of husband."

"Ah, so we were to blame for the upset," Sid said. "Daniel doesn't approve of your mixing with people like us."

"Then I pity Daniel and his lack of judgment," I said. "And we will talk no more about him."

We were making our way up Sixth Avenue and I stared out at the pageant of New York life unfolding on the sidewalks, as it did every warm evening: mothers sitting on stoops with babies on their laps, small boys playing kick the can, small girls jumping rope. As always I was conscious that I was in a great city, teeming with life, full of exuberance and promise, and I tried to put aside my dark mood.

"Tell me, Ryan," Gus said, steering the conversation onto a new topic, "what has happened to the good Dr. Birnbaum these days?"

"We've parted company, alas," Ryan said. "I think, like Daniel, he found my company detrimental to his professional standing in the community. Even though I tried so hard to be moderate in all things"

and actually wore an ordinary dinner jacket in the evenings, I fear my reputation had preceded me. We parted amicably.”

“I’m sorry,” Sid said.

“Don’t be,” Ryan said. “The world is full of wonderful new opportunities, I always find.”

I looked at him with affection. These were my friends who sailed through life determined to wring every ounce of pleasure and excitement from it. Nothing about them was ordinary or plain or boring.

The cab came to a halt outside an imposing brick building. I’d glanced up at it from the outside before, admiring the Moorish colonnades and the tower that seemed to go up into the sky, but I’d never been inside. Never dreamed I’d have the chance to go inside.

Fashionably dressed theater crowds were milling around on the sidewalk. Beggars and hawkers hovered in the gutters, swarming up to each carriage or cab as it came to a halt. Flowers were thrust at us. Hands reached up imploringly, but Ryan whisked us successfully in through an archway and up a flight of steps. As we entered the rooftop cabaret I was definitely overawed and hung back as Ryan forged his way into the room. The room was decorated with statues in archways, tall palm trees around the walls, and Moorish style chandeliers. The floor space was packed with an absolute throng of people, through which waiters with trays of food and champagne dodged and darted, trays held high above their heads. On the stage at the far end a Negro band was playing some kind of modern, syncopated music to which several brave couples were attempting to dance with strange, jerky movements. The noise level in the crowd almost drowned out the band. Jewels glittered and sparkled in the gleam of the electric lightbulbs that festooned the chandeliers. Handsome men in tails and glamorous women, sporting ostrich plumes in their coiffures, mingled with theater folk outrageously dressed as Ryan.

Ryan swept ahead of us into the fray, arms open wide, greeting, embracing, beaming. He seemed to know everybody. Gus and Sid also seemed to have their share of acquaintances, and I felt like Cinderella. I stood there while the crowd pressed around me, feeling dowdy and out of place and wishing I hadn’t come. A tray of champagne appeared. I accepted a glass when offered, reminding myself an affair like this had been beyond my wildest dreams just two years ago. I was here in the liveliest city in the world, mingling with its most fashionable residents. Not bad for a girl from a peasant cottage in Ballykillin. I resolved to have a good time no matter what and drained my glass.

“Oh, there you are, Molly. Your champagne glass is empty. Let me get you another,” Ryan said, returning to my side.

“The champagne certainly seems to be flowing tonight, doesn’t it?” I commented.

“Literally,” he answered. “Have you seen the fountain yet?” He dragged me across the room. And there in one corner was a fountain, flowing, if my eyes didn’t deceive me, with champagne. “Holy mother, what will they think of next?” I muttered and Ryan laughed. “Tommy Burke has a reputation to live up to,” he said. “If his parties are not the talk of the town, then he feels he has failed. Come on, let’s try to find him.”

We fought our way through the crowd. It was a warm, muggy night to start with. In that confined space it was stiflingly hot, and the smells of competing perfumes, cigars, and perspiring bodies made me feel as if I might faint. I was relieved when Ryan came to a halt next to a large man in tails. He was middle aged with a good head of wiry gray hair, big boned, beefy, round faced, red cheeked, like an Irish peasant. He had a glass in one hand and a cigar in the other, and he was talking with animation to a gorgeous auburn-haired woman in a stunning white silk gown with a train that she carried over one white-gloved wrist.

For once even Ryan appeared to be overawed. He waited for a lull in the conversation before I

tapped the man on the arm. "Here she is, Tommy. Miss Molly Murphy. I promised I'd produce her and I have."

The man turned and his shrewd little black boot-button eyes looked me up and down appraisingly.

"Miss Molly Murphy, eh?" he said, and stuck out a beefy hand. "I'm delighted to meet you, your woman."

"Delighted to meet you too, sir," I said, "but I'm intrigued as to why you wanted to meet me, Mr. Burke. You're not thinking of offering me a part in your next play, are you?"

At this he threw back his head and laughed. "Offer you the lead instead of Oona here? Now there's a thought." And I realized that I had seen pictures of the woman in white gracing posters and newsstands. Oona Sheehan, one of the darlings of the Broadway stage.

"We know you are notoriously ickle, Tommy dear," Oona said in a deep, melodious voice. "If you found someone sufficiently younger and prettier, you'd drop me in a second. I know my days are numbered." She turned to look at me and winked.

"Never," Tommy exclaimed. "You'll still be the darling of the public when you're sixty, just like the divine Madame Sarah."

"And one hopes I'll keep my looks longer than she has," Oona said. "We live in the same building you know. We each keep a suite of rooms in Hoffman House, and I nod to her from time to time. I fear she has become quite plain and ordinary looking."

"But she can still act," Tommy said. "By God, she can still act."

"Are you a fellow Thespian, Molly?" Oona asked. "I don't recall seeing you—"

"Indeed no, Miss Sheehan. I've no aspirations to go on the stage." "You might do well for yourself," Tommy said. "I'll wager a good pair of legs extends up from those trim little ankles."

"Tommy, you are incorrigible. Now you've made her blush," Oona said.

"Surely not. Don't lady detectives have to be as tough as nails?" "She's a lady detective?" Oona asked.

"So Ryan tells me. Although I never expected a lady detective to look so young and winsome. So are you really and truly a lady detective, my dear?"

"I am."

"And Irish too, by the sound of it?" Tommy asked. "I am that too."

"A perfect combination for my needs. I think you might do very well."

"Do what?"

Tommy Burke leaned closer to me. "I've a little job for you, my dear," he muttered into my ear. "We won't speak of it in public. Come to the Casino Theater tomorrow, where I'm rehearsing a new play. It's on the corner of Broadway and West Thirty-ninth." Tell them to bring you straight to me, and we'll have a little talk. Any time you like. I'll be in the theater all day."

"Hiring a detective, how exciting," Oona said. "He can't want you to shadow his wife to start divorce proceedings because he isn't married any longer. I'm bursting with curiosity, Tommy darling."

"Then you'll just have to burst, Oona, because I'm not saying another thing," Tommy Burke said with a grin in my direction. "You just enjoy yourself tonight, Miss Molly Murphy, and we'll continue our conversation in private tomorrow."

❁ Three ❁

I'm a self-made man, Miss Murphy," Tommy Burke said, turning to me. We were sitting side by side in the darkness of an empty theater. On the dimly lit stage actors were reading through lines, but here at the back of the stalls, we were in a private world, and I was conscious of the intimacy of his bare shoulder touching mine, of his warm, slightly beery breath on my cheek.

"I've done very well for a boy who came to America with nothing, and who was close to starving several times in his childhood."

He looked at me and I nodded approval. "We came over during the famine, you know," he went on. "Driven out of our homes like so many families. The landowner's thugs actually knocked down the cottage as my parents struggled to save our few possessions. I was only about four years old at the time, but I can still remember it clearly. They broke my mother's one good pudding basin, and she would have killed them if my father hadn't held her back. Then we had the chance to come to America on a famine ship. You've heard about the famine ships, have you? Back and forth across the Atlantic crammed full of poor wretched souls like ourselves."

He was still looking at me as if he wanted me to say something, but I couldn't think of anything to say. "It was a terrible time," I said at last. "My own family almost died out in the famine."

"What part of Ireland are you from, my dear?"

"County Mayo."

"Ah, the wild, wild west. Never been there myself, but I understand it's very beautiful, all mountains and lakes and rugged seacoast."

"That it is," I said. "Beautiful and remote. You feel like you're at the end of the earth. I couldn't wait to escape from it myself."

"We came from the south ourselves. Near Cork. I don't remember anything of it, but I do remember that ship. No steam in those days, you know. Twelve days under sail, and most of us sicker than dogs. Packed in like sardines, we were. People were already weak from the famine, you know, and they were dying like flies all around us."

"Why are you telling me this, Mr. Burke?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that." He put a beefy hand over mine, making me wonder for a moment whether he had invited me here with baser motives. I'd certainly heard about old men like him preying on young women. But he cleared his throat. "Like I said, I started with nothing, and I've done pretty well for myself, wouldn't you say? Only problem is that I'm not getting any younger, and I've nobody to leave it to."

"No children?" I asked.

"No children," he said sadly. "I was married once, but she couldn't take my sort of life. You're either married to a woman or to the theater. You can't have both. I chose the theater, and she found someone who could devote the time and attention to her that she deserved. I decided not to make the same mistake twice." He gave me a brief, wicked glance and patted my hand, "Oh, don't get n

wrong. There have been women since, but nobody I cared about enough to make it permanent. And now it's only me. My sister and brother are both gone. My parents too. I've one nephew and I've done enough for him already—put him through Harvard, paid off his debts, not to mention paying off the young woman he got into trouble. No, I'm averse to leaving my fortune to him, Miss Murphy. This is where you come in."

Now, for one wild moment I wondered if he was hinting that he'd like to adopt me and make me his heir. I always did have wild, improbable fantasies, as my mother would tell you. I looked up at him. "I want you to try and find my sister," he said.

"Your sister? But I thought you said she was already dead?"

He nodded. "That was my older sister, Bridget, I was talking about. My nephew Harvey's mother."

"You had more than one sister, then?"

"That's the strange thing, Miss Murphy." He stared out into the darkness. Someone on stage was crying. I couldn't tell if it was part of the play or if they were genuinely upset. It sounded real enough. "My ma died a few months ago," he said. "God, I worshipped that woman. What a tower of strength she was. I was with her a lot during her final weeks. She wasted away to a skeleton, you know. Like a stick figure, she was. Pitiful to see. And in the last weeks, when they started giving her morphine for the pain, she started rambling. One day she said she hoped God would forgive her for what she had done, leaving her baby behind in Ireland. I was shocked, I can tell you, but I didn't know if it was fantasy or reality. They say morphine gives you dreams and delusions. So I prodded her about it. She wasn't quite lucid anymore, - but from what I could gather, I had a baby sister called Mary Ann. When we were about to sail for America she fell sick with a bad fever and was not expected to live. My parents didn't want to give up the chance for the rest of us to sail to a new life. Who knows if they have secured passage on another ship? And God knows enough babies die in Ireland all the time. So they left her behind."

"Holy Mother of God. Abandoned her, you mean?" I asked, horrified. "Just left her to die?"

"No, it wasn't like that. I gather they left her with a local parish priest, who promised to find someone to take care of her. But apparently it had been preying on my mother's mind all these years although she never said a word about it to me."

"And you think your sister might be still alive?" I asked. "Do you have any reason to believe this?"

"None at all. It's just that I won't rest until I know, one way or the other. I'm a busy man, Miss Murphy. As you can see, I've a new play opening at the Casino here in two months. I'm also planning a grand production of *Babes in Toyland* for the new year—lots of good songs and a cast of thousands. It's going to make me a fortune. So I'm tied to New York myself. That's why I'm hiring you. I want you to go over to Ireland and see if you can trace my little sister."

"To Ireland?" I can't tell you what mixed emotions coursed through me at that word. The chance to go home again! There had been times during this tumultuous summer when I had been consumed with homesickness. But no sooner had I thought of going home, than I remembered the reason I had fled in the first place. The man I thought I had killed was still alive, it was true, but he was vindictive and would delight in finding me delivered to his doorstep, like a lamb to the slaughter.

"That's right," Tommy Burke said. "To Ireland."

"Wouldn't it be simpler just to place an advertisement in the *Irish Times* and see what comes of it?"

"What, and have every confidence trickster in Ireland coming out of the woodwork for a handout? I'm known on both sides of the Atlantic to be a rich man, Miss Murphy. That's why I'm hiring you. An Irishwoman like yourself can be discreet. Portray yourself as a cousin, coming home from America."

and wanting to look up family members, if you like. You don't even need to say you were sent from me."

"You'd pay my expenses?" I asked, weakening.

"All your expenses and a hundred-dollar retainer—and a healthy bonus if you actually find him alive. What do you say, Miss Murphy? Will you take the case?"

I had no other assignments on the books. Funds were dwindling fast, and New York was not the happiest of places for me at the moment. I nodded and held out my hand. "Very well, Mr. Burke. I'll take the case."

The minute I came out of the theater into the bright sunlight of a crisp September morning I realized what I had done. Going back to Ireland? Was I quite mad? For all I knew there was still a warrant out for my arrest in that country. I should go right back into that theater and tell Mr. Burke to find someone else. Then I thought of the nice fat fee, of the chance to travel home to Ireland in a cabin on a luxury liner, to stay at good hotels, to see Dublin at last. And I reasoned that Justin Hartley, the man who would love to see me arrested, was not even in Ireland at the moment, but touring the western states of America. Besides, Molly Murphy is a common enough name. I should be quite safe.

I left the Sixth Avenue el at Greenwich Avenue Station and hurried toward Patchin Place to tell Sid and Gus my news. It was a lovely fall day, the first hint that the heat and humidity of summer was finally breaking. It had been a long, hot summer this year, a terrible season for all the diseases that heat and overcrowding bring with them. But today was just splendid. The leaves on the trees were showing just a hint of yellow in them. The breeze from the Hudson was fresh. Jefferson Market was in the process of shutting down for the day, but I went inside and, on impulse, bought a big bunch of chrysanthemums and some bright red apples.

Thus armed, I knocked on the door of Number Nine and waited with a smile on my face, but nobody appeared. Absurdly disappointed, I turned away only to find myself staring straight into the face of Daniel Sullivan.

“What a charming picture you make,” he said. “Those flowers almost match the copper color of your hair. If I were a painter I’d whip out a brush and canvas and paint you as you stand there. Venu with the bounty of the harvest.”

“Anyone can tell you are Irish. You’re full of blarney,” I said, eyeing him stonily. “What do you want? Come back to check if I’ve made more undesirable friends since yesterday?”

“No, I came back to apologize,” he said. “You are right. I have no claim on you and no right to judge the company you keep. I am also mindful of the debt that I owe you—you put your own safety at risk to find the truth behind my betrayal and arrest.”

He paused.

“Apology accepted,” I said coldly. “Now, if you will excuse me, I have to put these flowers in water.”

He stepped between me and my front door. “I realize that the very qualities I admire in you make you different from other women, Molly. Aren’t you going to invite me inside?”

“You insulted my dearest friends,” I said. “You have apologized for judging me but not for insulting them.”

His face flushed. “Oh, come now, Molly. You do have to admit that—”

“That what?”

“That O’Hare man is quite outside the pale.”

“On the contrary, he is welcome at the most fashionable salons in the city. That party last night had as many Astors and Vanderbilts in attendance as it did theater folk. And they all seemed to know

Ryan. Oh, I agree he is outlandish in his dress and his behavior, but I find him enchanting and never boring.”

“So you went to the party last night,” Daniel said.

“I did. And I had a marvelous time.”

“I see. And this Mr. Burke who wanted to meet you?”

“A powerful theatrical impresario. You go to the theater. You must have heard of him.”

“I might have.”

“He wanted me to star in his next play—Salome and the Seven Veils.”

I watched Daniel's face, then burst out laughing. “I'm just pulling your leg,” I said. “He wanted to hire my detective services, if you must know.”

“He did? What, a divorce case?”

“You know I'm not allowed to discuss confidential business, Daniel,” I said. “Oh well, I suppose you had better come in, before I drop these apples.”

I let him open the front door for me and preceded him inside. “You can put the kettle on while I find a jar to put these flowers in,” I called over my shoulder.

“So you'll be out working on a case,” he said. “I won't be seeing much of you.”

“You'll be seeing nothing of me for a while. The assignment is in Ireland.”

“Ireland?” He stared at me in horror. “Are you mad? I thought you said you could never go back home again because of what you had done. I thought there was a price on your head.”

“I'm willing to risk it,” I said.

“Molly, this is absurd. How many risks do you think you can take in your life before the odds are against you?” He was yelling now.

“There's really not much of a risk, Daniel, so calm down.” I had found a glass jar on the scullery shelf and now filled it with water, my back to him. “It turns out things weren't as bad as I had feared and besides, I'll be going nowhere near my home, and how many people are called Molly Murphy, for heaven's sake? It must be one of the most common names in Ireland. You really don't have to worry about me.”

This speech was braver than I was actually feeling, but I wasn't having Daniel forbidding me to go to Ireland now.

“What is this Mr. Burke wanting you to do in Ireland, I'd like to know?” he went on.

“I told you I can't discuss a client's business. Let's just say it's a family matter.”

Daniel scowled. “I smell a rat here. A rich impresario can cable Ireland and hire someone on the spot to do the investigating. He doesn't need to send an unproven girl from New York.”

“In the first case, he wants a complete stranger to do the poking around; and in the second, I'm no longer a girl but a woman.”

“So you are,” he said, looking at me frankly. “So you are.”

There was a long pause and then he said, “How long will you be gone?”

“I couldn't say. Until I've finished the job.”

“So you won't be here for my trial?” He tried to sound disinterested, but his face gave him away. He looked like a lost schoolboy. I weakened. “Daniel, I have to take the job. The fee is good and I need the money. It's a wonderful chance for me. If I do well, Mr. Burke is a powerful man. He may well refer me to his friends. Besides,” I added, noting his desolate face, “There's not going to be a trial.”

Now your fellow officers know who was really to blame, they'll be speaking up for you. They'll want you reinstated, won't they? The commissioner will have to let you go free."

"I wish I could believe that," Daniel said. "That certainly wasn't the impression I got when I spoke with him yesterday."

"All he can actually pin on you is the prize fight," I said. "And that would merit a slap on the wrist and a fine, nothing more."

"I admire your optimism," Daniel said. "I have none myself. Those weeks in jail have crushed my fighting spirit, Molly."

"Not enough to stop you trying to lay down the law with me," I said, and couldn't resist a smile. He looked at me and smiled back. Those alarming blue eyes flashed for the first time since I'd seen him in that jail cell. He reached out his hands and took mine. "Don't go, Molly. I need you here."

I could feel myself about to weaken. It was a fault I had when I was around Daniel Sullivan. The electricity sparking between us whenever he touched me hadn't dimmed with time. "I have to go, Daniel," I said, trying to pull away from him. "But I shouldn't be away for long. And you have other people you can turn to now. It's time you told your family the truth. They'd want to know, I'm sure. Don't they have powerful friends and connections who'd put in a good word for you? I seem to remember that they were pals with the governor. Have him step in on your behalf."

"You know my reason for not contacting my family is that I'm concerned for my father's health problems," he said. "I'd still rather he wasn't involved in this."

"Then your other alternative is to stall," I said. "Find excuses to have the trial delayed until the end of the year. Then we'll have a new police commissioner and ten to one he'll be a friend of Tammar Hall."

He squeezed my hands tightly. "I'm sure everything you say makes sense," he said, "but this has always been like a nightmare to me. I never believed I could be arrested in the first place. And when I was arrested I never believed I'd be put in jail. Nothing seems secure anymore, Molly. Only you. Stick with me, won't you? One day maybe we'll be able to look back on this and laugh."

"One day," I said.

A few days later a packet of instructions arrived for me, along with a second-class ticket on the White Star Liner *Majestic*, sailing out of New York on September Twenty-fourth bound for Queenstown and Liverpool. The irony of this was not lost on me. It was on this very ship that I had fled from Liverpool less than two years ago. Only that time I had been down in the hold, battered down and crammed in with all those poor wretches in steerage. This time I was to have a second-class cabin to myself. I was moving up in the world.

Now that the trip was actually becoming a reality, I couldn't help feeling excited as well as apprehensive. Going home, the words whispered in my head. And not going home a failure, but as a successful businesswoman on an assignment. I'd have dearly liked to travel out to county Mayo to visit my family and let them see that I hadn't come to a bad end after all, but that would have been tempting providence too much.

Sid and Gus came over to help me pack, offering to lend me everything from clothes to reading matter for the journey.

"You two have already given me more than enough," I said. "I'll do just fine with the clothes I already have. Besides—" I added, trying to think of a tactful way of putting things, "I don't want to stand out over there. It's important that I look like one of the locals. And your lovely clothes—"

Sid threw back her head and laughed. "I wasn't suggesting lending you my emerald green smoking jacket, my sweet. Yes, I suppose our clothes would stand out at a provincial Irish market, wouldn't they, Gus dear?"

"What I really meant was that cupboard full of stuff from my former life in Boston society," Gus said. "I'm sure there is a smart, fur-trimmed traveling costume there that would suit you, Molly. And you know I'll never wear it again, I'm sure."

I smiled at them. "Thank you, but I don't think I'll be mingling with the smart set in Ireland. The Burkes were the poorest of peasants when they left. Their child would either have been farmed out to another peasant family or sent to an orphanage. Frankly I think it would be a miracle if she was still alive after all these years, - but I'm being paid to search for her, and search for her I will."

"Then at least take my crocodile-skin train case," Gus insisted. "I found it so handy when I did my European tour with my mother. Now it's just languishing on the top shelf on my wardrobe, and I want you to have something of ours with you to remind you of us."

"And to make sure you come back quickly," Sid added.

"We're worried that you'll decide to stay in Ireland," Gus said.

"And why would I want to do that?" I laughed. "I've told you before, and I'll repeat it now—the life is nothing for me in Ireland. My life is here now."

"Gus was worried that you'd realize what you'd missed if you go back there," Sid said.

"You were worried too!" Gus tapped her hand.

"All right. I was worried too. And what about Captain Sullivan? I'm surprised he's allowing you to go."

“He's not at all happy about it,” I said, “but there's nothing he can do to stop me, is there? And think it will be good for me to get away from him—give me time to think about what I really want for my future. So don't worry about me. I'll be just fine, and I'll have a grand time and be back before you know it with tales to tell.”

“Of course you will.” Sid shot a look at Gus and suddenly I felt a shiver run up and down my spine. They were afraid for me. Was I foolish not to be afraid for myself?

The morning of the twenty-fourth came, bright and breezy, with puffy white clouds racing across the sky. A good day to be sailing, I said to Daniel, Sid, and Gus, who walked beside me to the waiting cab. I had forbidden Daniel to come to the ship to see me off. I didn't think I could handle emotional scenes at the gangplank. And having forbidden Daniel, I could hardly allow Gus and Sid what I had denied him.

“Anyone would think I was journeying to the North Pole or across the Sahara Desert the way you three are looking at me,” I exclaimed, looking from Daniel's face to Gus's and Sid's. “Fashionable people go to Europe all the time. They pop back and forth across the Atlantic as if it were a pond. I should take me no more than a week or two at most, and then I'll be back.”

I hugged my friends, then I went to hug Daniel.

“Good-bye, Daniel. Take care of yourself, won't you?” I put my hands on his shoulders and brushed his cheek with my lips. His arms came fiercely around me, almost crushing the breath out of me.

“You take care of yourself,” he whispered. “No more stupid risks. Remember that I love you.”

I climbed into the cab, my heart beating very fast. I think it was the first time he had actually told me that. I looked out and waved jauntily as the cab set off up Sixth Avenue at a lively pace. The White Star Line pier was at the bottom of West Tenth Street, close enough to walk, really, and I could have saved the expense of a cab if we'd all walked together, with Daniel carrying my valise. But I had no money for expenses, a letter of credit, and my stupid pride. I didn't want to risk shedding a tear at the dockside.

We emerged from West Tenth to the hustle and bustle of West Street. Porters, seamen, and passengers were scurrying around the great ship, picking their way among stacks of cargo like a lot of ants around a picnic basket. The ship's twin funnels sparkled in the morning sunlight. She cast a great black shadow over the scene below. Truly a majestic sight, and this time I was really able to savor it. When I had departed from Liverpool, not only had I been a bundle of nerves at sailing under an assumed name, but I had two terrified children in tow—Kathleen O'Connor's little ones, en route to their father in New York. I had written to Seamus O'Connor telling him that I was going back to Ireland and would try to visit Kathleen's grave, if I had time, but had received no reply. Seamus wasn't the greatest when it came to penmanship. I felt a pang of regret that those children were no longer part of my life. Maybe they'd come back to New York in the winter, I thought. I didn't allow myself a pang of regret for my own child. No good would come from dwelling on that.

I paid the cabby and assigned my humble luggage to a porter who looked at it with distaste, who compared to the piles of steamer trunks that were going aboard and led me to the second-class gangway. I went aboard without looking back, my heart racing a mile a minute, and showed my ticket to the purser at the top of the gangway.

“This way, miss,” I was told pleasantly, and was handed over to a steward who took my train case from me and escorted me along a never-ending corridor to a small cabin. It was hardly big enough to swing a cat, but at least it did have a porthole. The view wasn't the greatest, obscured by a lifeboat hanging out from the deck above, but at least I could see daylight and a glimpse of sky.

“Your bags will be brought up right away, miss,” the steward said. “Have a good trip. We're

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