

Chapter 2

Maighread O'Leary of Ireland

Hathaway, contrary to Horace Greeley's advice, was a young man who decided to go east. The West was not the place to be. Things happened in east coast cities – centers of business, government, culture, fashion and society. He wanted to open a private detective agency and he believed the need for his talents and abilities would be greatest somewhere in the East. In addition, despite leaving college and distancing himself from the family business, he retained his passion for the game his father had taken so much time to perfect in him. Even while working 60 hour weeks on the toughest cases in Lincoln he escaped his work by watching ball games: Lincoln's class A professional team, college, high school, even little league. He could lose himself at a ball game. By moving east he would be able to enjoy major league baseball when he needed a fix from the game his father taught him to love.

The process of elimination involving a new home city lacked scientific analysis or deep study. New York and Philadelphia seemed too big; he wanted a city he could get to know in a hurry. Washington housed too many bureaucrats and politicians; he had had enough of them in Lincoln. Boston, Providence and the rest of the northeastern cities were located too far north; he could tolerate winter, but not the kind that might stick around for five months. Atlanta, Miami and the other southern cities sat too far south; he did not want to endure extreme heat and humidity either. As he looked at the map, his eyes kept coming back to one city, a community he knew absolutely nothing about, but also one about which he held no undue bias. And it's central location would allow him to reach several major league cities quickly and easily when he wanted to take in a baseball weekend. Baltimore.

In his opinion the city on Chesapeake Bay could use a good detective as much as any other, and from there he could travel to Washington to see the Senators play, or to Philadelphia to watch the Athletics and the Phillies. For an extended weekend, he would ride the train to New York to see the Yankees, Giants or Dodgers, or maybe even to Pittsburgh to see the Pirates, or to Boston to take in the Braves and Red Sox.

Yeah, he thought to himself, Baltimore is the place.

Hathaway left these decisions until after the holidays, which allowed him to concentrate on celebrating Christmas and the New Year with his mother, sisters and friends. His heightened holiday spirit invigorated everyone, was contagious to Kathleen and Annie, and was a welcome tonic for his mother. Her son's new found enthusiasm and relaxed nature did much to lift the veil of sorrow she had been living under since Harold's death. She would never return to the happiness she knew with her husband, and would drop in and out of melancholia for the rest

of her life, but for now she took pleasure in a heightened holiday spirit and savored it long afterward. Hathaway's improved mood also confirmed to her that support of his judgment had been the right decision on her part. As an added gift to his mother he helped out with the candy and tobacco business for a couple of days each week until his spring departure. His confidence was at a level he had not known before and his optimism for the future unbounded. His trust in his skills and instincts soared as well and allowed no doubt to intrude on his contentment. Nineteen years old when he joined the Police Department, he was now just shy of his 27th birthday and ready to move on.

Marie Hathaway stood with her son on the platform of Union Station in Lincoln. It was just after noon on March 27th. She stared into his eyes lovingly, gave him a kiss and a long, strong hug and then pushed him onto the step that led up into the Pullman car. Tears rolled from his sisters' eyes, but Marie just smiled a soft smile and waved as the train began to rock down the tracks from the station.

The start of the trip presented nothing out of the ordinary, no unexpected delays due to aged equipment or stormy late winter weather, but two people he met along the way did prove extraordinary. The first was Marnie Bailey, a short, broad faced musician with sleepy eyes and an even drowsier pattern of speech. Bailey, like Hathaway, had decided the East offered a land of opportunity, and headed that way after being fired the week before. His disagreements about playing style with the leader of a big band he drummed for on the West Coast had cost him his job while the group performed a club gig in San Francisco. Far from blue about the situation, Marnie was exhilarated about finding work in New York where "the real music, the real jazz, is being played."

They met the evening the train left Lincoln. After chatting in the club car for more than an hour, the drummer invited Hathaway out onto the rear platform for a smoke. He lit one cigarette, took two deep drags, held the smoke in for several seconds, and passed it across to Hathaway. While thinking the man must possess a unique musical technique if it matched his smoking style, Hathaway placed the cigarette on his lips and inhaled, followed immediately by a fit of choking and coughing initiated by the irritating smoke.

"What the hell kind of cigarette is this?" he wheezed through the blue cloud of smoke that briefly engulfed his head before being swept away by the wind that swirled around the swaying platform. The answer revealed itself to him in an instant. The breeze from the rushing train may have kept the scent from his nostrils, but Hathaway identified the tobacco from its bitter taste.

"It's a special blend," was the answer from his companion.

"Special? It practically killed me. Christ."

Taking the cigarette back, Marnie brought it to his mouth before pausing to advise Hathaway on the proper procedure for enjoying it.

"Don't inhale it straight in. Just kind of suck it in little drags at first. Like this."

Marnie followed his own instruction, holding the smoke deep in his lungs before passing the cigarette back. Hathaway stared at it for three or four seconds before the drummer motioned for him to try again. He had never inhaled marijuana before, but had encountered its scent a few times during his police work. His companion's eyes closed as he let the cannabis swirl around his lungs and up into his system. Hathaway continued the change in his life by making the decision to experiment. He followed the instructions he had been given, but again the result was a coughing convulsion begun only a second after the smoke entered his lungs. A quick but only slightly more successful third try caused renewed hacking. As the attack subsided he gulped a mouthful of the fresh, chilly night air before frowning at his companion and flicking the cigarette from between his fingers and off the rushing train into the dark night. With a look of disbelief, the musician lunged over the platform rail after the vanishing joint.

"That stuff'll kill you if you keep smoking it. Go back to something milder," was Hathaway's response to Bailey's actions.

"What?! Are you crazy? That cost me a lot o' dough."

"You wasted your money then," said Hathaway. "I've never smoked marijuana before, or anything else that harsh in my life. I'm heading back into the car for a drink."

Hathaway walked back inside and headed to the bar in search of something to soothe his raspy throat. Five steps into the smoky club car he tipped right, overcorrected to the left and then stabilized himself by thrusting his legs apart so that he looked like a weary construction worker trying to control an angry jackhammer. Light-headedness followed as the car took on a slow spinning motion in addition to its natural to and fro. He shook his head and tried to continue despite the vague perception that everything had just shifted to a lower gear. A warm feeling of security washed over him as he reached the bar and leaned heavily against it.

"Whiskey and water...er...no...water...water."

After finishing the three most refreshing glasses of water of his life, his throat felt better, but his head did not, so he pointed himself in the direction of his Pullman berth. Finding his way back to the sleeping car turned into the longest journey of the trip. He longed for the chance to collapse into the bunk, to embrace the warmth of the blankets and the softness of the pillow, but no matter how much he concentrated he could not find the berth. The search continued for what his brain calculated to be eternity and still the misplaced compartment failed to materialize. He gave up and started back toward where he believed the club car to be. After a few deliberate steps he turned and looked the other way, wheeled back around again and then finally gave in to the fact he was lost.

That's when his savior came through the door at the far end of the Pullman. Hathaway lunged, ticket thrust out loosely in his fist, and pleaded, "Help?"

The porter took the ticket without pause, checked it and moved past him. "Sir."

Hathaway was baffled. *Where was this strange voice coming from*, he thought.

“Sir. This one’s yours,” said the voice.

Hathaway stared down the narrow passageway between the compartments, looking for someone, anyone. “What?” was all the response he could make.

After being alone for more of the eternity he felt a tap on his shoulder and heard the voice anew. “Your compartment is this one here, sir.”

Hathaway turned and gazed stupidly at the man behind him. He had never seen him before.

“The upper, sir.”

He allowed his eyeballs to follow in the direction of the finger on the hand hovering in front of his face. Unfortunately, something would not allow him to move in the direction it pointed. The porter knew a passenger who needed help when he saw one, and so he gently took the passenger’s elbow and led him to his rest. After helping Hathaway tumble into the upper sleeping compartment the porter started back down the aisle toward his original destination.

“Thanks. You’re an angel,” Hathaway said as he forced his head halfway out of the berth before collapsing back inside.

“Quite all right, sir,” was the last sentence he heard.

“Angel,” he said to himself as a laugh began to tickle his lips. “That’s good. Angel. My name’s Halo and I’m calling him, Angel. I’ve gotta remember that one. They’ll love it.”

For the first time in his life, Hathaway giggled himself to sleep.

He awoke the next morning wondering out loud what had happened the previous night. A sore throat, a headache and knowledge that he had not drunk that much only increased his confusion. It all seemed like some bizarre, surrealistic dream. He pulled himself up and swung out of the berth, but with more effort than it should have required. In the lavatory he repeated the motion over and over of splashing cold water on his head and letting it find its way down his face and over his chin into the basin. The repetition of the action eased his aching head and helped him feel somewhat ready for the day. He exaggerated the time it took to shave and comb his hair, not only because of the need for additional recovery time, but because his day was open and there was no need to rush any of his routines. Rushing his grooming pattern was not going to quicken the trip to Washington where he would change trains for Baltimore. He wanted to enjoy everything that was involved with his change of life and after finishing in the washroom he took a moment to look at himself in the mirror. Sadly, he saw no change in his appearance. The release from the stress of his job, the first truly joyous Christmas in years, and the adventure of pursuing a new career, had not altered his physical appearance. “Why?” After all, he had read numerous novels and stories that emphasized a physical change in characters to symbolize major life changes. His spirits lagged for a moment as he contemplated the thought that perhaps his life change was not as substantial as he had expected.

Hathaway did not let the feeling linger and by the time he reached the dining car his spirits were revived. He ordered a big breakfast, eating everything except the scrambled eggs, which did not come near in flavor to the light fluffy ones prepared by his mother. He sipped coffee and watched the eastern Illinois farmland roll by. He had believed there could not be more corn land anywhere than he had known around Lincoln, but since entering Iowa all he had witnessed passing by the windows of the train were continuous miles of corn seedlings beginning their annual stretch to the sky and running as far away as the eye could see.

“Right here. The waiter will be with you in a moment.”

Hathaway heard the maitre d’ addressing someone with a tone of admiration and wonder.

A soft “thank ye” forced Hathaway’s attention back inside the car. He glanced up to see beauty and long auburn hair being seated across the table from him. He tried not to stare, but there was an intriguing air to the woman settling into the chair across from him in addition to her beauty. He said good morning; she smiled and nodded in response, but said nothing, turning her attention instead to the menu that had been placed before her.

Hathaway surveyed her for several seconds before realizing that he was in fact staring. He glanced around the car, looking for nothing in particular in an effort to appear casual and unaffected by her presence, a presence that he soon noticed had drawn the gazes of every man in the dining car. He thought about finding his musical friend from the night before to get an explanation of what had happened. He looked back out the window, but could concentrate on the passing cornfields only momentarily before being drawn back. His eyes fell on her hands as she put the menu down and wrote her morning preference out on the order sheet.

“Would you like your coffee now, ma’am?” the waiter asked as she handed him the order.

“Aye, that would be grand. Thank ye, and could ye bring the juice right away, please?”

“Yes, ma’am. Right away.”

She thanked the waiter a second time by offering him a pleasing smile, one he accepted eagerly while coming to almost military attention and beaming back his delight at serving her. The conversation with the waiter provided Hathaway the excuse he had been searching for to bring his attention back to her. The voice was as beautiful as the face and the hair and he wanted to hear it again.

“You’re Irish,” he said without thinking.

“Aye.”

What an ass! he thought to himself. *Of course she’s Irish. Christ, how could you make such a stupid statement?*

“Ye must be...American,” she said and with just a hint of the smile that had sent the waiter into an accelerated service mode.

“That’s right.”

“Oh.”

My God! I did it again. She must think I'm a moron, was just one of the self-chastising thoughts racing through his head as his eyes darted back outside to the suddenly dry brown countryside that only hinted at the beginning of spring. The baseball cork that had lain unabused in his jacket pocket most of the trip began to get a workout. *No, don't look outside. That's too obvious.* He glanced back to her. For a split second he wondered if she was playing games with him, then realized that of course she was.

“I'm sorry. I don't mean to make ye uncomfortable.”

He was spellbound. He kept thinking of how beautiful she was and how he could listen to her talk for the rest of the morning.

“It's okay. I deserved it. There's no need to apologize,” he said as he turned his own smile up.

She smiled with him as the waiter brought her coffee and juice to the table.

“Here you are, ma'am. The rest of your breakfast will be along in a minute. Can I get you some more coffee, sir?”

“Yes, thanks.”

“Would you like me to take these now?”

Hathaway nodded his approval without looking at the waiter.

“Be right back with that coffee, sir,” he said as he cleared the dishes.

As the waiter hurried away Hathaway's confidence revived.

“My name's Hathaway. I'm an American from Lincoln, Nebraska.”

She noticed the adjustment.

“I've been there...briefly. I'm Maighread O'Leary, and yes, I'm from Ireland.”

“Where are you headed?”

“Washington.”

There was a pause she navigated by glancing at the newspaper she had carried to the table. The feeling of awkwardness returned as Hathaway stared at his unexpected but intriguing companion. He noticed a new smile grow on her lips and his understanding and excitement grew. He had known no woman in Lincoln who possessed the style and confidence to lead a man on without losing her composure five seconds into the game. Enjoy the moment he thought to himself and stop trying to impress her. The encounter might end with the last bite of her breakfast, but if he was lucky he might get to enjoy her company again during the trip to Washington.

“Briefly?”

She looked up from her paper for the first time with a manner other than that of total self-assurance.

“Pardon me?”

“Is your visit to Washington going to be a brief one, like the one in Lincoln.”

“Perhaps that's where I live.”

“No. I don’t think so.”

Hathaway was feeling better about his end of the conversation, but the cork continued to tumble through the fingers of his right hand.

Maighread pushed the paper to the side of the table near the window, leaned forward on her arms and asked him directly, but pleasantly, “And why do ye think that?”

Hathaway straightened in his chair before answering. “Your brogue is still heavy which means you haven’t been in this country very long. You aren’t wearing any wedding or engagement rings – and you’re traveling alone, so you probably aren’t going to meet anyone as permanent as a husband or fiancé who might already live there. Your clothes and your hair are too stylish to be going there to look for work, and...”

“All right. All right. Lovely. What are ye, a detective or something?”

“Yes. Not the something.”

A second clattering conversation erupted between the wheels of the dining car and the rails underneath as the train rumbled over a series of crossings. It created the first comfortable pause in their exchange. She looked into his eyes searching for an explanation to the young man who had just become more confident and more fascinating.

“Really,” she said. He widened his smile in response; the game they were playing had become more enjoyable than she had expected. “Actually, yes. Brief.”

“What’s the occasion?”

“Me Da’s stationed there. He’s with the Irish Embassy. What kind of detective?”

“Private, now...but late of the Lincoln, Nebraska Police Department,” he said as he reflected her look. He promised himself not to be the one to break eye contact.

“Are ye going to Washington to work then?”

“No. What I really am is an unemployed private detective on his way to Baltimore.”

“I haven’t been to Baltimore. Is it nice?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been there either.”

“Taking a chance, are ye?”

“No more than a woman running around unescorted in a strange, big country.”

“Who says I’m traveling alone?”

“People traveling together on a train almost always have their meals together.”

“Maybe me mam isn’t feeling well this morning and stayed in the sleeping car.”

“Excuse me?”

Americanizing her accent, she clarified by saying, “my mother.”

“Oh. Well, I’m betting against it.”

“That’s right, the detective. What deductive reasoning brought ye to that conclusion?”

“None. It’s just a gut feeling that I’m hoping is right.”

Maighread leaned back to study him for a moment before inviting the small smile back to her face. “Ye’re right. If American moving pictures are any indication, I guess sometimes a detective has to play his hunches.”

The smile broadened. Hathaway broke his commitment to himself by looking out the window, a bigger smile coming over his face.

“Excuse me, ma’am. Here’s your breakfast,” said the waiter as he placed a plate in front of her. “Hope you enjoy it.”

As Hathaway turned back to her, she looked into his eyes before answering the waiter, “I’m sure I will. It looks grand. Thank ye.”

“Can I get you anything else, sir?” the waiter asked as he straightened and began refilling Hathaway’s coffee cup.

“No, I’m fine. That’ll be all.”

“Yes, sir,” and he turned reluctantly to the table across the aisle.

Maighread directed her interest to the food before her: spreading a napkin on her lap, testing her juice, taking a bite of the bacon and savoring the rest of her breakfast.

The spell was broken for Hathaway. He felt awkward again, shifting uncomfortably in his chair and agitated with himself for allowing her to unnerve him.

“Ye had your breakfast, didn’t ye?”

His delayed response of “yes” reiterated his discomfort.

“Good,” she said. “I want to be able to keep up with ye on this bonnie new day.”

Hathaway slumped ever so slightly in his chair. Beads of perspiration found their way from his armpits and rolled down each side of his chest. She smiled her confidence at him and then turned her appetite back to the food.

God, he thought, she even eats beautifully.

Maighread’s ease and self-assurance allowed Hathaway to regain his composure. Any doubt that may have lingered in his mind about the decision to change his life now disappeared as quickly as the wind that had swept away Marnie Bailey’s joint the night before. The future, at least the immediate part of it, seemed brighter than ever.

Hathaway and Maighread passed the lunch hour together and then a second one as the club car rattled into the Eastern Time zone, all the while talking and laughing, studying and learning about each other. It all took place with comfort and assurance. The churning Union Pacific Challenger engine had guided them into a light cloud cover that softened the rays finding their way into the rocking car. Although it reduced the glow the direct sunlight had brought out in Maighread’s long thick auburn hair it allowed the natural glow of her Irish features to sparkle, especially highlighting her smooth skin and strong yet delicate

features. Hathaway noticed perfections he had never noticed in a woman before: the beauty of her jaw line and the full luster of the soft lips that parted and closed so sexily and seemed to possess a personality all their own as they issued the words that followed her thoughts into expression. Neither of them noticed the fields, streams, rivers, roads and towns that raced by outside the window. When she excused herself for a few minutes, he wondered what state the Challenger was chugging through. It was a casual curiosity, incidental to what interested him at that moment and the thought vanished.

It was well into the afternoon when they returned to the dining car for a light lunch, after which they returned to the rear of the train to reclaim their table in the club car as well as a fresh drink. Hathaway guided Maighread's elbow with the lightest of touches as if pressure would mar her perfection. They laughed as they steadied themselves through the half dozen rocking cars they needed to navigate en route. She pointed out her compartment as they passed it, but made no offer to show it to him, and he never thought of asking to see it. Once in the club car they ordered drinks that sat unfinished throughout most of the afternoon. They drank more water than liquor and continued their discovery of each other into dusk.

She told him her plan was to return to Ireland in two-and-a-half weeks before setting out for Paris where she was scheduled to begin teaching English to the children of wealthy Parisians in a private Catholic school. Like so many others from her country she had developed a desire to come to America, but unlike the majority of those before her, not in search of a "promised land" in which to build a new life, but only to witness the beauty of America's vastness and to learn more about "you" Americans. Maighread loved her native land and harbored no need or desire to leave. The job in Paris would allow her to experience another culture and still be able to hop a steamer home from the port of Calais for holidays and vacations in Ireland. She planned to stay in her Paris teaching position for two to three years before returning to Ireland and then deciding on the rest of her life.

Her way in the United States had been made easier when her father received an appointment to the Irish embassy in Washington five months earlier. She had now been traveling the U.S. for six weeks and intended to spend the final days of her trip visiting Washington and New York. Hathaway listened to all she had to say with full attention and fascination. His breakfast table infatuation had turned into enchantment by the time the sun slipped past the Ohio horizon.

"Thank ye for a lovely afternoon, but I must ask your pardon and return to my compartment," she announced in a casual and matter-of-fact tone.

His response was surprised silence. After rising from her chair in the most feminine fashion Hathaway had ever witnessed she pulled him back up again by adding as she smiled and brushed the hair away from her forehead, "Why don't we meet in the dining car in an hour-and-a-half?"

He mumbled an affirmative answer of some kind, which he could not recall a minute after she left.

He sat staring at his partially filled highball glass and wondering if the day had all been some sort of fantastic dream. Perhaps the marijuana experience with Marnie the previous night was inducing some unexpected and unknown, yet delightful, side effect. Was this woman real or had he been enjoying a marijuana-induced hallucination?

More than an hour-and-a-half later she was late and he was nervous. The cork skimmed through his fingers at a record pace. He had always enjoyed the company of women, but had generally taken them for granted. This was something different. Never before had he been nervous about an approaching evening, and the anticipation produced an interesting change: butterflies in the stomach complicated by an inability to keep the perspiration from starting its trek once again down the sides of his torso even though the night emerged as cool and comfortable.

When the waiter inquired if he would like a drink, he answered, "yes," then quickly blurted out, "no, no," as the waiter turned to leave. It would be impolite he thought to already have a drink in hand.

"Damn, how I'd like one right now, though," he muttered to himself.

He got up and asked where he could find a newspaper. When the steward offered to bring one to his table, Hathaway thanked him, and then started for the men's room at the end of the car. Just as he reached for the restroom handle, the voice was there to greet him.

"Good evening," she said cheerily as she came through the entryway from the next car. "How are ye this lovely evening?"

"Fine," he answered, his hand still clutching the handle.

They had spent the day together, but he felt as awkward as he had when they first met at the breakfast table.

"And you?"

"Grand. I feel wonderful. Do ye want me to meet ye at the table?"

"What?"

"Ye're on your way into the W.C., aren't you?"

"The what?"

"Americans," she said feigning frustration. "The water closet. The restroom."

"Oh, yes, but I can wait. I mean, I don't need to..."

"Nonsense. I think I'm old enough to find my way to the dinner table alone."

With that she brushed past into the dining room. After a couple of steps she eased a look over her shoulder and added, "Besides, I don't like to keep a man from important business."

Hathaway stood with his hand still gripping the men's room door handle, and flushed from the brief bewildering moment and the example, again, of how this beautiful Irish woman could overwhelm him. One more stolen look as she asked the maitre d' which table was theirs. He smiled, the nervous tension that had built up while he had waited replaced by a warm satisfaction. He was the

lucky man who would be spending the evening with the charming and enchanting Maighread O'Leary of Ireland.

After dinner, of which neither of them ate more than a minimal number of bites, Hathaway and Maighread moved for a third time to the club car to continue a relationship that now felt easy and comfortable, as if they had been companions for years as opposed to only hours. She continued teasing him, but it no longer tilted him off balance, but acted instead like a cable binding them together. He fumbled occasionally with moments of awkwardness, but they came less often and when they did arrive Maighread found them more and more appealing.

By ten o'clock the club car was packed, each seat taken with a dozen people standing around the bar and at the various tables. They had been alone for their first hour following supper, but then another couple sat at the small table next to theirs and a short time later those two were joined by three lusty men who proceeded to make Hathaway's and Maighread's intimate corner of the car not only crowded, but loud. After a few minutes of watching and enduring the boisterous intruders their eyes met and studied each other. Hathaway reached for Maighread's hand and led her toward Marnie Bailey's back platform.

Despite the crowded condition of the club car, no one had sought the train's rear deck for escape. Hathaway relaxed in their newfound privacy, the only competition for Maighread's attention the clattering noise and the gentle swaying of the train rolling over track at forty-five miles per hour. Without thinking he moved close to her, put his hand lightly under her chin and kissed her long on the lips, a step that came so naturally it seemed they might have enjoyed such a moment a thousand times before. She moved her hands to the lapels of his jacket and then slid her arm around to the back of his neck. It was the kind of kiss that surges into and through you, forcing you to realize you have never before been kissed with so much intimacy and feeling. No woman had generated this kind of explosion. No woman had captivated and captured him the way Maighread O'Leary had over the past twelve hours.

The delight and the passion of the kiss ended when the train jolted sharply while going over a crossing and the headlights of a waiting automobile engulfed them in a lightning flash of light. She brought her fingers from around his neck and into his hand, started to speak, then stopped, her mouth more inviting than ever. Hathaway moved the few inches back to her and their lips came together once more. Neither of them wanted to end the kiss. Hathaway wanted the moment to last forever, but something made him cut it off after only seconds.

"You're wonderful," was all he could say while looking into her eyes.

She looked down at their intertwined fingers, slipped her hand free, turned to lean on the railing and gazed up at the clear night sky.

"I'm sorry."

There was a pause as he noticed a satisfied smile come over her lips and he recognized he had nothing to be sorry about.

“Look, Hathaway, I wanted to see this grand country of yeers before starting my work in Paris.” She admired the moonless, star-filled canvas above them before continuing. “I didn’t come here looking for an adventure...or a love affair.”

“I never believed you did.”

“Nevertheless, ye must understand that fact because I could very easily fall in love with ye if I let myself.” The stars twinkled back at her. “I know I don’t have to tell ye all this, but I don’t believe in letting anyone not know where they stand, especially a man I could care for.”

Hathaway studied her face studying the stars. “You don’t have to explain anything. I don’t have any illusions about a starry night on the back platform of a train. It’s all very exciting and romantic, but I know it is also probably too good to be true.”

“Don’t say that. Nothing in life is too good to be true. People only use that as an excuse when things don’t work out the way they want them to.”

She turned and took his hand again.

“I’m not saying I don’t want to fall in love with ye. On the contrary, I think it’d be a grand adventure.”

Maighread looked at his hand resting comfortably and loosely in hers. He was at ease and the beads of perspiration had given up their journeys. She liked the feel of his hand and reached down to take the other one. Using only her fingertips she massaged the tops of his hands.

“I have a lot of things I want to do in life before I give up everything for a man. Even if ye would turn out to be that man, I won’t give up those things for ye...not yet anyway. It just isn’t time for that.”

He repeated himself. “You’re wonderful,” and added, “and one hell of a woman.”

“Ye really think so, or is that just one of the – what do American men call them – ‘pick up lines’ ye used on the girls in Lincoln, Nebraska?”

He laughed at the thought of the girls he had dated. “Well, actually, I have used the wonderful part...without meaning it,” he admitted. “But I have never run into any woman before who deserved the second part.”

“I’m flattered.”

“You deserve to be.” It was his turn to look to the sky. “You know, people talk about romantic, moonlit nights. I’ve always preferred moonless ones. There’s something calming and beautiful about a dark night awash with stars that makes me wonder at it all.”

Maighread studied him as he took in the stars overhead. “Aye.”

She took his hand between both of hers and they leaned side-by-side on the railing of the club car, fixing their awareness on the silver dotted sky and contemplating the what ifs. They let themselves be lost for that moment, content to be next to each other on the back platform of a rattling train hurtling them into the future, looking skyward, absorbing the moment and imbedding it in their hearts and minds to live for...

After miles of stargazing and infrequent comments about the beauty of the night, the door to the club car abruptly slid open and a drunken patron stumbled out. The figure wobbled to the railing next to them and the spell was broken. Hathaway swore to himself as he looked at Maighread and then glanced over his shoulder to challenge whomever had interrupted their serenity. But after the man cleared the harsh backlight of the car and leaned over the rail Hathaway recognized his rear deck partner from the night before. And when Marnie recognized Hathaway he smiled and raised his almost empty cocktail glass before saying good evening.

“Hi,” said Hathaway. “You look slightly the worse for wear tonight, Marnie.”

“Yeah. It’s this damn alcohol. I never could handle it. I’m much better with other spirits as you probably guessed.”

“Well, I handle it better than what you were smoking last night.”

The drummer laughed and said, “quite an experience, huh?”

“Yeah, quite,” Hathaway answered and shared a momentary laugh with him. “Listen, Marnie, I don’t mean to be rude, but if you wouldn’t mind, we’d like...”

“Hey, don’t worry about being civil with me. I didn’t know who was gonna be out here, but I can see that I’m the proverbial crowd maker here.” Marnie pushed himself away from the rail. “I just needed a breath of fresh air. Next time I’ll find a platform between cars, so I don’t interrupt anything important.” A pleased and approving smile came over his lips as he got his first clear look at Maighread. He raised his glass to Hathaway’s taste and luck. “Pleasure to meet you,” and then with a large sloppy grin on his face, turned to go back inside.

Maighread nodded and said, “Thank ye.”

“Don’t think anything of it,” Marnie replied as he closed the door behind him.

As he pulled the door tight another couple approached in an effort to enjoy the cool night air. Marnie stood up straight, waved his finger in front of his face as if he was shooing flies away and told them with a wink that the platform was taken. The couple looked at him as if to challenge his authority to keep them from their destination before resigning to his drunken state and heading for the opposite end of the car.

“Looks like we’ve found a protector,” Maighread said with a smile. “Apparently he’s a friend of yeer’s.”

“An acquaintance. I met him last night...out here.”

“Oh. I didn’t realize this was yeer nightly rendezvous spot.”

Before he could kiss her again she neatly pulled away and leaned back against the platform rail across from him. He backed up a half step and did the same, placing his hands behind him on the iron guard and wondering what was next.

Maighread's smile remained sweet and confident. "I only have a little more than two weeks left in this country. It's only a wee bit of time, but what if we take a chance and I come to Baltimore with ye? We'll see what happens."

He wasted no time with the answer, "I'd like that... a lot."

"I only want ye to realize that after two weeks, I'm going home to Ireland. And then on to Paris. I meant what I said earlier about not changing my plans for a man, no matter what I feel for him."

"I understand."

She looked at him intently. Did he really understand? She wondered as she searched his eyes in the dim light for a clue. She dreaded the possibility of a sad scene upon her departure for home and felt a brief moment of confusion pinch her heart. Would he end up like so many of the distressing boys she had known and rejected in Ireland? But she also recognized that her feelings for him were real, and she did so want to learn more about this young man from Nebraska.

"Ye have to promise me one thing."

"What?"

That was good she thought. He did not say, "anything."

"Promise me that ye won't say 'it was too good to be true' after I leave."

He looked to the stars again before smiling and answering, "I promise."

Maighread crossed to his side of the platform and gave him a quick kiss on the chin before stepping back and looking up into his eyes. "This has been the best night of my trip. Maybe America will be a grand adventure after all."

"It's just the stars," Hathaway responded. "I believe they cast a spell over things when the moon isn't around to get in the way."

"It's worked on me," and she touched his lips with her fingers.

He kissed them softly. "They can't take that away from me," he said in a low voice.

"What?" she asked with a curious but satisfied smile on her face.

"Fred Astaire. I haven't been able to keep him out of my mind for the past couple of minutes."

"I remind ye of Fred Astaire?"

"Yes. No. I mean yes, but..." He paused to straighten his explanation. "Last year. 'Shall We Dance'."

Her eyebrows pinched in confusion.

"Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in Shall We Dance. It's been one of my favorite songs since I heard Fred sing it to Ginger last year."

Maighread was not sure what he was talking about. Hathaway glanced to the stars for encouragement and then began to sing – albeit off key – in a voice just above a whisper.

"The way you wear your hat

The way you sip your tea

The mem'ry of all that

Oh, no, they can't take that away from me."

The tempo was slower than Fred had employed in winning Ginger's heart, but an impression was being made nonetheless.

“The way your smile just beams
The way you sing off key
The way you haunt my dreams
No, no, they can't take that away from me.

Who is this grand and crazy American? Maighread thought to herself, unable to refrain from beaming at the honor being bestowed upon her.

After a breath and after thinking that he could not believe he had just sung a love song aloud, Hathaway went on with his explanation. “Anyway, you can't go wrong with the Gershwin brothers. So, not only will I keep the promise, I'll just say, ‘they can't take that away from me.’”

Maighread let her emotions free. She had never felt as warm and wanted, as complimented. She was confident he would let her have her freedom when their two weeks in Baltimore came to an end. For the first time in her life she let herself think this might be a man worth coming back to.

Without remembering how it began they were kissing again, this time not to be disturbed by anyone and unaware that their intimacy was observed by a guardian angel. Marnie watched the kiss for a few moments with a sad, blank look on his face. Then forcing a smile, he raised his now empty glass to them and turned to face the inside of the car. Maighread was right. They had found a protector. And even though inebriated Marnie kept all others from interrupting their evening with the stars.

The train grumbled its way into Union Station in Washington, D.C. late the next afternoon. As it rolled along next to the platform, Maighread leaned out over the sleeper car's gate looking for her father among the hundreds of faces waiting and waving for friends and relatives, faces straining to spot arriving loved ones and casual acquaintances.

“He should be here,” she said without turning to Hathaway. “He's always on time.”

A short bolt of fear wrenched through Hathaway's system as the realization struck that he knew nothing about the man he was about to meet except that he had been working at the Irish embassy for the past five months. What if he did not think much of his daughter taking off for two weeks with a stranger? What if he had “a thing” about Americans? What if he was one of those short-tempered Irishmen overly protective of his children, especially the female ones? Hathaway reached into his pocket and the cork jumped into action. He needed to know something about this man before looking him in the eye for the first time in the next minute or two.

“Maighread, tell me something about your father? Is he...”

The train cut him off as it jerked to its final stop.

“Da!” she shouted over the noise of the train and the crowd in the station. “Da! Here!”

Maighread had unlatched and was through the gate before the porter could put the step down. Hathaway lost sight of her as he stepped out onto the platform. He looked to the right even though she had exited to the left. After scanning the crowd in that direction, he gathered his composure, took a deep breath and followed in the direction she had fled. In less than a breath he caught sight of her hugging a small, apple-faced man – also with red hair, but no other feature that indicated he had fathered such a beautiful woman. *She must get her looks from her mother*, Hathaway thought as he started to walk the thirty feet to where they stood embracing. He stopped short and watched. The comfort of their affection, the strength of their hugs were far different from the quick kiss and hug his mother had offered him in front of the dozens of people on the platform in Lincoln – and that had been as intimate a moment as she had allowed herself to display since the death of her husband. He stood watching as father and daughter remained in a tender embrace while sharing a series of personal exchanges that he could not hear and did not want to interrupt. He liked what he was witnessing, but was also leery of how the man would respond to him when introduced. Then, without leaving her father’s embrace, she turned to Hathaway. The father did not break his smile when he looked up at the unemployed detective from the heartland. As the smile was returned from its recipient O’Leary separated from his daughter and stepped briskly toward Hathaway, hand outstretched. The cork dropped from Hathaway’s fingers as he pulled his hand from his jacket pocket.

The handshake was strong, and in a rich sincere tenor voice the man said, “Hello, Mr. Hathaway. I’m Michael O’Leary. It’s grand to make yeer acquaintance.” The next statement set Hathaway back even if it should have been anticipated from any father. “I expect ye to behave yeerself while ye have me daughter down in Baltimore. I don’t take kindly to young men who might have improper motives toward Maighread.”

“No, sir,” Hathaway stuttered.

What an amazing family this must be he thought and then it flashed through his mind that he may have misunderstood the Irishman’s intention.

“I mean, yes sir...uh, I’ll take excellent care of her.”

O’Leary released Hathaway’s hand, slapped him on the arm and added, “I’d expect no less. But, right now, let’s get something to eat and a good night’s rest before ye board yeer train for Baltimore in the morning.”

“Excellent idea, Da, and thank ye,” Maighread said as she gave him a quick peck on the cheek before turning to find a red cap to care for her bags. “Here. Over here, please,” she shouted to a group of three who were waiting to help.

The tallest of the group, an agile and experienced baggage handler in his 50s, hurried over and asked how he could be of assistance. Maighread directed the red cap to compartment “C” and asked him to hold her bags for the early morning train to Baltimore; they would return a half hour before its departure. The man nodded and said she would find her luggage at the handlers’ station next

to the entrance of the platform. He handed her tags for the baggage and bounded onto the car to find her compartment.

“Excuse me, but my train is scheduled to leave in about three hours, sir,” Hathaway said in a confused tone. “I thought...”

O’Leary cut him off, adding a concerned face to the serious tenor of his voice, “Young man, are ye saying that a father doesn’t have the right to share one evening with his daughter after she’s been gone for six weeks? And when she will be leavin’ him again in a few short weeks to return home?”

“No sir, but my ticket is for the eight o’clock train tonight, and...”

“Don’t worry about it young man. Tickets are easily exchanged and besides, do ye have a place to stay when ye get to Baltimore?”

“No, I thought I’d stay at a hotel near the...”

“Then it would be much wiser to stay with me tonight and take a morning train to Baltimore, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, sir, but...”

“Then don’t argue with me about it. Fetch yeer things and have the porter put them with Maighread’s. We have everything ye’ll need tonight at the house.”

Maighread eased Hathaway’s dilemma by chirping in with, “Da’s right. And not only that,” she said looking to her father, “he isn’t nearly as gruff as he’s pretending to be. Are ye, Da?”

O’Leary laughed as he offered Hathaway another heavy clap on the arm and suggested they find a good restaurant outside the station for their dinner.

The huge station was cluttered with people, thousands of them, some moving rapidly to their next destination, others dozing on the long high-backed brown pews, some waiting wearily or anxiously in lines at ticket windows. Hundreds more simply lounged and watched the side show of humanity going on around them. He wanted to keep up with the conversation, but Hathaway could not help turning into a moving people watcher. Union Station in Omaha was the busiest place he had ever been in, but it was nothing in comparison to the size, the congestion and the activity he witnessed in first Chicago’s Union Station and now here. He dropped back a step to let Maighread and her father continue their reunion while he enjoyed the multi-ring circus going on around him. He thought that after he returned Maighread to Washington for the trip back to Ireland he might stick around for a day just to take in the crush of commotion that defined the station. After the walk through the cavernous main waiting area they arrived at a triple set of huge swinging glass doors that never closed because of the constant flow of people spilling into and out of the station. To Hathaway it seemed as if the people were being poured through a funnel as they came from all angles to the doors.

“I’ll get a cab,” Hathaway said as he moved toward the street.

“That won’t be necessary, son. I have a car and driver waiting right over here,” countered O’Leary.

The Irishman motioned them down the sidewalk. Just around the corner of the station there was an area roped off and monitored by a D.C. policeman who

made sure unwanted motorists did not attempt to enter the diplomatic parking lot. Several stalls down from the street a tall chauffeur who looked more like a bodyguard, and may well have been, waited next to the open door of a sleek black limousine. Small Irish flags attached to the front fenders beat gently in the breeze. The man attending the car smiled as they approached. *Just what is O'Leary's job at the Embassy?* Hathaway wondered.

"Good afternoon, Miss O'Leary. It's grand to have ye back," the broad-shouldered, bald-headed driver said with a light brogue that indicated he had been living in America longer than Maighread or her father.

"Hello, Sean. It's grand to be back."

"To the embassy or the house, sir?" the chauffeur asked O'Leary as he helped Maighread into the car.

"Neither. We're going to have a lovely dinner and then a good night's rest before Maighread gets back on the train again tomorrow morning. Why don't ye take us to one of those excellent little restaurants ye always find for me, Sean?"

The statement about Maighread's imminent departure brought a look of consternation to Sean's face, as if he viewed himself as a protective uncle as well as a bodyguard and driver whose responsibilities included directing Maighread's moral course through life. But knowing it was not his place to question his superior, the look lost its severity and he responded with a simple, "Aye, sir."

Maighread and her father carried on a conversation about her travels across America as they rode through Washington. O'Leary complained in a teasing manner that she had not written enough letters during the previous six weeks, while she countered that he would have been too interested in his work to take the time to read the letters if she had corresponded more often. They were very happy to see each other and again Hathaway was amazed at the ease with which they conversed and with the intimacy they shared during the short ride to the restaurant.

The dinner lasted two-and-a-half hours as they talked, laughed, ate, and toasted practically every topic that came into the discussion. Maighread and her father carried the conversation, but Hathaway did have his moments and within an hour of meeting Michael O'Leary he felt accepted and at ease. If the Irishman harbored concerns or misgivings about his daughter running off with some unknown American for two weeks, he gave no hint of them during the dinner or later as they sat sipping Irish whiskey in the library of his residence. He let pass the moments his daughter and Hathaway allowed their eyes to meet and lock. There was something about the glow in Maighread's face that he recognized and to which he responded. A feeling of *deja vu* grew in the Irishman. He adored his daughter and admired her independence, but he also felt close to her because of the likeness to her mother. During dinner Hathaway learned more about Michael's wife (who had died less than three years earlier) from the perspective of the bereaved husband and the loving daughter. It was his wife's passing which made O'Leary eager to accept the job at the embassy in Washington, allowing him to escape the places, events and objects that reminded him of her. As the

whiskey set in O'Leary spoke freely about his wife and how much Maighread looked and acted like her.

"She must have been a remarkable woman," Hathaway said as he imagined the mother.

"Aye...indeed," was all O'Leary said in response.

As Maighread's view continued to find its way to Hathaway the Irishman recognized her expression as the same one he had witnessed innumerable times on his wife's face when they had gazed into each other's eyes during a private moment. The Irishman trusted his daughter's taste and judgment. He would not interfere with Maighread's decision to spend the next two weeks with this young man. Maighread had informed her father during their welcoming embrace of her plans and that she would be returning to Ireland and then France no matter what happened with Hathaway. He believed that was exactly what she would do even after studying her and Hathaway's affection for each other through the evening.

Hathaway moved quietly but comfortably through the remainder of the night. The short lecture from O'Leary on the station platform about staying the night in Washington had been both practical and an example of the older man's sense of humor. He began to understand from which side of the family Maighread received her talent for teasing and for tilting others off balance. He marveled again at the remarkable family he was being exposed to and of how nice it would have been to meet and know Maighread's mother. He wanted to ask more about the woman, but withheld the questions for a later time. Now, he would sit back and enjoy the company of his host and hostess.

There was no lull in the conversation or break from the joy of life in nine hours with the O'Learys. When Maighread teased her father about the late hour and said that she and Hathaway would have already checked into a hotel if they had gone straight to Baltimore, the father's retort was, "Aye, but would ye have gotten any rest?"

The statement caused Hathaway's cheeks to turn a soft red. No one in or around his family would have made such a comment, and certainly not in front of someone from outside the family.

"See, my dear, I'm only protecting ye from the wiles of travel in strange places," O'Leary continued with a chuckle.

"Da seems to have forgotten that Mam told me about the tricks he employed to beguile her thirty years ago. Maybe he's afraid yeer the same kind of man he was, Hathaway."

"Ye could do much worse," the Irishman said after laughing heartily at his daughter's remark. "But I have a full day tomorrow. If I'm going to see ye to the station, it will have to be very early so I can get back to the embassy. Therefore, I will retire, but I would appreciate one thing, young man."

Hathaway stood up as he answered, "Yes, sir." Here it comes he thought.

"Find a nice, clean hotel for Maighread to sleep in while ye two look for yeer place to live."

“Yes, sir. I won’t put her in any situation that might make you uncomfortable.”

“No, I believe ye wouldn’t, son. Good night.”

O’Leary started up the stairs. As he reached the second floor landing Maighread and Hathaway turned to each other.

“Thank you,” she said softly, Americanizing the pronoun for the first time.

“For what? I was just trying to keep from making an ass of myself.”

“Ye were perfect. He likes ye very much. If he didn’t he would have told ye so.”

Hathaway thought for a moment and said, “Yes, I believe you’re right. Knowing how he feels about you, I’m sure he wouldn’t let you take off with just anyone.”

“Oh, yes he would. That’s why he would have told you how he felt, and would have lectured me about it before I left, and again after it was over.” She moved closer. “Besides, he knows I haven’t made too many mistakes. And he could tell I think you’re grand.”

“Is it my imagination,” Hathaway replied with a look of mock concern on his face, “or are ye losing yeer brogue?”

“Yeers...I mean...yours is better than mine,” she said with a sly smile on her lips. Then after brushing his lips with a kiss, “Actually, I’m trying to be more Midwestern in my speech patterns.”

“Don’t you dare! I heard your voice before I ever saw you. Your brogue is what I first became infatuated with. If you lose it, I might be tempted to look for some other fine Irish lass to fulfill my fantasies.”

“Och! By St. Patrick, I’ll never let meself fall into the trap again. Ye can count on that.”

“That’s better. Thank you.”

Hathaway put his arms around her waist and kissed her as she moved her hands up the sleeves of his jacket. It was the first kiss they had shared since before their arrival in Washington. It was so fresh and exciting it seemed as if they were kissing again for the first time. Just touching Maighread’s lips was more exciting and heart-warming than any experience he had known with any woman before. Maighread’s feelings at that moment were similar, but also different. She compared it to nothing, simply enjoying and taking in the experience because it was that moment which she was living. She thought about nothing that had come before or anything that might come after.

Hathaway and Maighread arrived in Baltimore shortly before 9:30 the next morning. He was grinning with excitement as he stepped from the train and took in the station platform of his new hometown. His plan to travel to nearby cities for baseball games meant he would become familiar with this setting. Maighread surveyed him as she followed him off the car, neither of them noticing that he did not assist her down the steep steel steps. She had detected the growing excitement in his voice and manner throughout the ride from Washington and

when he turned to look down the tracks she picked out the satisfied look on his face and pleasant warmth grew in her as well. She walked to him, slipped her arm through his and leaned her head against the front of his shoulder. He paused to look down at her, kissing her gently on the forehead, and then turned for the doors at the far end of the platform. Once inside the Baltimore station he went straight to a ticket window and asked for weekly schedules to New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Pittsburgh and Boston.

“Are ye planning to take a trip already?” Maighread asked as he tucked the schedules into the inside pocket of his suit coat.

“No. I guess I haven’t told you about baseball yet, have I?”

“Baseball?”

“Yes. I wish you could be here during the season,” he said with a touch of regret.

“Ah. American cricket.”

“No! It is not cricket. I’ve seen news reels of cricket a couple of times and believe me, there is absolutely no way that game comes up to baseball. Baseball is more...more pure, more precise.” He made his point, but could not discontinue the lecture about his favorite pastime. “You’re right that it’s American, very much American, but it’s also...also the perfect game. It’s...”

“All right, all right.” She raised her hand in mock surrender, “ye’ve convinced me. I’ll go to a game with ye sometime.”

“Is that a promise, or are you just trying to calm me down and shut me up?”

Maighread stroked his cheek, kissed him on the lips and then led him away. “We’ll go to a game,” she said. “When I come back to visit, we’ll go to as many as ye like.”

The thought of Maighread at a ball game with him brought even more satisfaction to Hathaway.

“And, I’m trying to calm ye down,” she added as they strolled arm in arm out of the station.

He waved down a taxi and asked the driver to take them to a clean and neat, but inexpensive, weekly hotel. As they rode, Hathaway quizzed the cabby about the city – from where the best sections to look for an apartment were to what level of minor league baseball was played. Maighread became the quiet one, pleased and content with the enthusiasm Hathaway demonstrated for his new life and home, and as she watched and listened to him in the cab she contemplated how much more difficult it would now be to leave America. She had not spent a lot of time considering what her ideal man might be like, but Hathaway exhibited many of the qualities she preferred: independent, strong, kind, and a bit awkward at times – all in all, she thought, very appealing.

Hathaway’s financial situation did not allow for both an apartment and an office, at least not until he had established a steady clientele, so he and Maighread began looking for a location that could double as both. He wanted a place close

enough to downtown to be easily available to clients while also distant enough from the city center to offer affordable rent. On the third day, he signed a lease on a fully furnished apartment they had inspected early on the second day. He had liked it from the moment they walked in, but since his only knowledge regarding price and location had been gleaned from the cabby, he wanted to continue the search to insure he was getting the best deal possible.

That evening Hathaway and Maighread collapsed onto the couch that sat in the corner of the new office/apartment. They had been together non-stop for four days, the past three in constant motion searching for a residence. The first night in the hotel they had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion fully clothed in each other's arms. The second evening was the only awkward one: neither of them knew what to do or how to act when they were alone and sleep was nowhere near. On the train and at her father's house, people had surrounded them, but that second night in Baltimore the conversation came less easily and the eye contact less readily. They went to bed early, sleeping together, but not making love for no other reason than they both understood that something was not yet right.

The first evening in the new apartment everything was back to normal. They were in their new surroundings with nothing and no one to bother them. The uneasiness of the night before had disappeared. They took the time to walk to the corner market to buy groceries and then stopped at a nearby liquor store for a bottle of brandy – Maighread telling Hathaway that it was the proper liqueur with which to toast his new home. They remained in each other's eyes and the walk, even with the bags of groceries and the bottle of Napoleon, was made arm-in-arm.

Hathaway was the better cook, although Maighread helped in the kitchen and took great care to set a perfect table for their first meal in the apartment. Michael O'Leary and his wife had raised their children in a non-traditional setting, applying no set roles or rules and encouraging them to discover and pursue any interest or dream they wanted. Many living around them, including the parish priest, thought it a terribly ill-tempting way to raise children, but the O'Leary's ignored their critics. Thus, Maighread had never learned to cook or garden or darn or perform many of the other chores that Irish men expected from their women. Now, as she surveyed the table she nodded approval at the attractive setting she had created. It was intimate and relaxed because of her suggestion to move the kitchen table into the living room where she decorated it with a single tall white candle, its flame taper thin and steady. One floor lamp she had placed in the far corner of the room provided the only additional light. They teased and laughed their way through the meal preparation, but became quieter when they sat down across from each other. They spent most of dinner watching each other eat and speaking only randomly of inconsequential topics. Finally, Hathaway put his fork down and watched Maighread. He took in every movement as she slowly and gracefully brought tiny bites of food from the plate to her mouth.

What a perfect mouth, he thought.

Aware of the attention, she did not look up, but let him lose himself in her splendor. She exuded a personal aphrodisiac that drew him further into her being. And then, following his lead, and with deliberate preciseness, she placed her fork next to her plate, brushed the corner of her mouth with the sheer cloth napkin she had been holding throughout the meal and effortlessly tilted her head up to meet his gaze. The exotic little smile was on her lips. She said nothing. She did nothing. Still she penetrated his soul. It was if they had sat this way for an eternity. Hathaway dropped the napkin from his lap as he rose to his feet. She remained still, keeping her eyes fixed on his as he moved around the table. When he stood over her and started to say something, she shut him off by placing her fingers lightly over his mouth. For that instant, he lost all awareness and entered a world he had never known, a world where only he and Maighread existed. Somehow she brought him back, back to the tactile sensuous world that existed in one room of one apartment in one American city. Putting his hands under her arms he brought her up out of the chair while kissing the fingers that blessed his lips.

Maighread took in his face, his hair, his neck, his ears, his shoulders, his chest as he kissed her fingers. She felt the charging of his nervous system, the racing of his pulse and the quickening of his breath. She moved her hand around his neck, letting her nails tease his skin as they followed her fingers. She waited and then waited longer, staying away from the kiss that would catapult their systems into a passionate eruption she knew would last all night. When she could resist no longer, when the physical pain of being separated was too great to withstand, she parted her lips, brushed his and then covered his mouth with the kiss. An audible sigh emanated from deep inside Hathaway as Maighread filled him with electricity. His left knee trembled and for an instant he sensed he might collapse. He balanced himself by allowing an arm to fall away for an instant to find the tabletop. But from that moment on he became as strong and powerful as he had ever been in his life. With arms around her waist he picked her up off the chair to bring her face up to his. Holding her steady with his right arm he moved his left hand down to where her soft round hip met her strong smooth thigh. It was a progression that made it easier to hold her, but also satisfied a sexual urge that had sidetracked his attention numerous times since first walking behind her and fantasizing about her striking shape. With that caress it was Maighread's turn to sigh. She broke the kiss and tilted her face to the ceiling, but she took in much more. Her body shivered and the grip of her arms around Hathaway's neck tightened to the point of constriction, but still he continued the kisses. His lips moved from her jaw to her neck and across her shoulders.

Hathaway was losing contact with what he knew as reality. He was discovering a new meaning about what it meant to share truth with another. He had never sensed the thrill that was driving every physical and emotional ingredient of his being, as if sex was being discovered for the first time. That first night of complete love would remain with them always as an overpowering and total experience: physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual.

Hathaway would never remember that night without thinking of it as the overwhelming event of his life to that point, or without sensing it all again.

Maighread brought her head down and let her hands tear at the buttons that blocked her from Hathaway's chest, while he continued to devour every part of her face and neck with kisses. She ripped his shirt open, buttons flying across the room, and tried to force it off his shoulders. When she could not accomplish that goal, she pulled his arms from around her and yanked the shirt off. The instant it passed his fingers he was around her again, his powerful abrupt movement causing them to lose their balance. They crashed against the table, knocking it over and sending food, dishes and candle to the floor, the latter snuffing itself out when it slammed onto the hard maple. Later, they would remember the candle and laugh about the likelihood of burning down the apartment on that first night. But as it happened neither of them assigned it a glance or a thought. The passion was too overwhelming. They never thought of that first night of physical love as animalistic despite the fact it was filled with actions and sounds that were nothing less than that.

They remained upright, shredding their clothes away from their bodies, but never letting those efforts detain them from keeping their lips in constant motion. They could not stop kissing and rarely separated their lips from some part of the other's body. (Many hours later – neither knew exactly when since time had become irrelevant – they fell asleep wrapped around each other and with their lips touching.) At that moment, however, they felt as if they could remain awake forever, live forever if they could just live in the same state of ecstasy they were now enjoying. They traversed the room, she with arms around his neck and legs wrapped around his waist, their clothes littering the floor.

The center of their hearts had been touched and a sense of compassion as well as passion awakened in them. Their spirits opened. It had begun the morning they met at the breakfast table and grew steadily as they learned more and more about each other, through the awkwardness of the evening before, and culminating in the shared bliss of complete love on this first night in surroundings that provided them comfort and security. Life and experience would never be the same for either of them after swirling through the night in a trans-conscious state of being, a being every person should strive for, but few achieve. After this night they would come to know and understand a new meaning of life: existence with form as well as without and beyond form, beyond time and beyond space, as long as it is all awakened through the person you love.

Somehow Hathaway never left his feet and hers never touched the floor during the ecstasy of their first consummation. During the night they moved throughout the apartment and through numerous sexual positions, but when they fell asleep hours later with their lips barely brushing each other, they would sleep more deeply and peacefully than either had slept before.

Maighread and Hathaway shared every moment of the remainder of her stay as if it was their first together, and their last. They walked and picnicked by

the harbor, enjoyed restaurants and clubs, mapped out a strategy for the successful opening of his office – her favorite suggested motto being, “the best damn detective in Baltimore” – explored museums, walked, talked, laughed and loved each other. And every night they fell asleep in each other’s arms, as early as 9:30 – after one especially tiring day of walking the city – and as late as 4:00 a.m. on a night when they could not and did not want to stop making love. They found it most comfortable to fall asleep with her back snuggled up against his chest, like a pair of matching spoons, his right arm under her neck and with his hand cupping her left breast and with his left arm under her arm with that hand crossing her upper stomach to caress the right breast. If one or the other awoke during the night it signaled the beginning of more lovemaking.

The night before Maighread’s return to Washington they suffered a return to the awkwardness that had plagued Hathaway the first day on the train and which had returned to both of them the second night in the hotel. Short periods of forced laughter and erratic banter were followed by ones of heavy silence and quick glances away from the other’s eyes. As they sat for dinner in Maighread’s makeshift dining room Hathaway searched his brain for a way to ease the strain. When he realized thinking was not the solution, he simply took her hand in his and kissed each finger. The clumsiness ended with the first touch. They smiled at each and let their eyes rescue the rest.

“I love you.”

The words escaped their mouths at the same moment, coming out without thought or planning, a natural extension of the point to which they had evolved, and as if to put a seal on what they had created over the past two weeks. They held each other and whispered and kissed and giggled and remained hushed for more than three hours before making love a last time. Enthralled, they had gently and slowly explored every inch of their bodies, but they had refrained from consummating the love making, almost as if the act itself might signal some symbolic end to the relationship. When he did enter her, they slowed the motion of their bodies until finally there was no movement between them. They let their eyes connect without saying a word, without kissing, both believing that by freezing the moment they could glimpse, examine and experience a piece of the other’s soul and could meld their souls into one.

Without movement the orgasm should never have come. But it did. It exploded over them, consumed them, rushed them to a dimension outside the reality of existence. It could never be duplicated, and impossible for either of them to explain. Without leaving the beauty of each other’s eyes they remained in an ecstasy that was all consuming, beyond physical and entering the realm of existential and spiritual.

Morning crept through the window of the small cubicle-like space they had converted into a bedroom. They were wide awake and smiling, gazing into each other, kissing continually and talking intermittently about anything except the reality of her leaving that morning for Washington. The alarm sounded, Hathaway had set it during one of the awkward moments the evening before. The

loud metallic clanging startled them back to reality, the first reaction of which was to laugh out loud at the unexpected interruption. The only digression from the business of the morning was her suggestion that they take a bath together. After an hour washing and massaging each other in the tub they gave in to the inevitable and made passionate and ferocious love.

On the way to the station they held hands in the back seat of a taxi, but rarely spoke. When they arrived Hathaway checked her bags with a red cap while Maighread bought a ticket to Washington. They sipped coffee and held hands at a booth in the cafeteria, but few words were shared. Twenty minutes later they were standing on the platform in a gentle embrace. When “all aboard” was announced she looked away for a moment, ran her fingers up and down his lapel and stepped back. He let his hands drop from her waist and started to speak, but stopped when she took his breath away with a sad but satisfied glance.

“Da will be very glad to see me.”

“I know,” was all he could say at first, but then continued, “I’m sure he’s missed you tremendously. I feel a little guilty keeping you from him for so long.”

“We can catch up while we’re in New York.”

“When does your ship sail?”

“Thursday at 10:00.”

“Yes, that’s right. I asked you that before, didn’t I?”

“Aye.”

The “all aboard” was sounded a second time and the train whistle screeched the signal for this part of their lives to end. Maighread pulled the strap of her purse up higher on her shoulder, turned toward the train and walked to the boarding steps.

As she put her hand on the side rail, she turned to Hathaway, smiled and asked, “Do ye have the patience to wait? I don’t know when I’ll be back, but...”

“I’ll be here. If you want, I’ll find a way to come over there.”

“Thank ye. Ye are lovely,” she said so softly he could barely hear the words. Then smiling that mischievous little smile, she mouthed, “I love ye,” and with erect composure and a touch of jauntiness swirled around, hopped onto the train step and disappeared. He looked for her through the windows of the car, but she did not want him to see the tears that had started running down her cheeks.

Hathaway sighed, smiled wryly and then started up the platform as the train lurched down the tracks. He did not look back, but as he picked up his pace and placed his hands in his pants pockets, he began to sing, “The mem’ry of all that, Oh, no, they can’t take that away from me...”