

A JOURNEY IN TIME

~A NOVEL~

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*To my husband, Ron, for his
love, constant support, patience
and painstaking honesty*

A Note Before You Begin the Journey

Have you ever wondered how writers of historical fiction choose their subjects or why they were inspired by a particular project? My father died in 1998 and on his deathbed, he asked me to find his long-lost brother. I found him, but unfortunately, he had died one year prior. My father and his brother grew up in an orphanage in Detroit, Michigan in the early 1900's. We grew up knowing virtually nothing about his side of the family and he rarely shared his memories. His past was one vast expanse of nothingness.

Once I found his brother, I became compelled to find the others. It took fifteen years of searching, making calls, writing letters and doing continual research, but one by one they seemed to come forward just as if they wanted their memories preserved and their voices heard.

In 2012, just before a research trip to Kingston, Ontario, Canada, I received an email from Kevin Hoeg through Ancestry.com sharing that he believed we were cousins. Since I had plans to visit Canada, he graciously volunteered to meet me in Kingston from his hometown of Toronto. As it turned out, Kevin's grandmother, Mary Ellen Garrett Cavanaugh was the niece of my great grandmother, Catherine Garrett Doyle. Kevin had known my great aunt, Annie Doyle, prior to her death in 1975. He

gave to me photos, family stories, the family bible, and other mementos from the Garrett and Doyle families. He also introduced me to another cousin, Margaret Thompson who was a distant relative to the Doyle side and who shared with me many valuable documents including the land lease and baptismal certificates of the Doyle family in Ireland. I am deeply indebted to both for their thoughtfulness and willingness to share what they knew. I would also like to thank Colum O'Rourke of County Wicklow, Ireland for his time and interest in reviewing the accuracy of my Irish history and Bernie Schein, my writing coach and author in his own right for his encouragement, patience and grand sense of humor.

I continued to travel back in time through research and found that my great great grandfather, Thomas Doyle had leased land from Samuel Astleford in 1829. After Thomas' death, the potato famine ensued. Thanks to Jim Rees for his book *Surplus People*, I researched the Fitzwilliam Clearances and found out that millions of Irish had fled Ireland from 1847 through 1856. As Jim writes, "The Irish potato famine of the second half of the 1840s was a catastrophe of immense proportions. It has been described as the worst social disaster of nineteenth-century Europe." There is a saying that describes the horrific time period: "One million dead, two million fled." I discovered that John Doyle, my great grandfather did in fact leave Ireland during this period at the age of

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twenty-six. I found his courage and determination to be extraordinary. Inspired by my newly discovered ancestors, I believe I have given a voice to their indwelling spirits to tell their story since my father never could.

With a few exceptions, most of the characters in this novel are fictional and their actions are based on events that may or may not have happened. However, the major narrative arc is based in fact and historical truth. My hope as the novelist is to be your guide through the time period, the challenges and the joys and extreme heartache that was common to people of that time. I can take you safely through the death and destruction during the potato famine, the danger and extreme risk of traveling in steerage to an unknown destination, past the early death of so many from lack of medicine, basic knowledge or epidemics. We can tiptoe together into the bedchambers to experience the warmth and safety between two lovers – opening and illuminating a vanished world so that for a few hours at least, you can experience the successes and failures of a great man. I hope this story of John Doyle will inspire and delight you.

MAUREEN FRANCIS DOYLE

May 1848

Dear Mamai,

Charlotte has agreed to write this letter for me. I hope it goes without saying that the hardest thing I have ever had to do was leave my family at the Shillelagh Workhouse.

I pray everyday that you all are doing well. Please be reassured that I'm going to do everything in my power to get to America and will send back for you as quickly as possible. I must admit I was heartsick to leave our home even though I know we had no other choice except to stay and perish. Samuel and Charlotte offered to give me a ride to New Ross to catch the ship instead of me doing the journey on foot. Mamai, you would not have believed all of the people that we passed. I only recognized a small handful from Coolkenno and Shillelagh. I felt so grateful that I had a ride. It will take them many days to travel on foot to New Ross. I saw so many old people and children trying to keep up carrying everything that they owned. There were even a few that had died on this journey from starvation or sickness and their bodies were left on the side of the road. People stopped to cover up the dead but had no choice but to leave them. Samuel and Charlotte have been able to tell me stories along the way of buildings that they recognized or shops where they have bought things. We stopped in Fern and I thought of you and Dadai. We passed the cathedral that I believe you were married in. How I wish you were traveling with me. I know it's been many years since you were in County Wexford. I must go for now. I will write to you when I reach the ship before my voyage. Love to you and the rest of my family.

John

Part I

Chapter One
Wicklow, Ireland

1835

*Courage does not always roar.
Sometimes, it is the quiet voice
At the end of the day saying,
I will try again tomorrow.
Author Unknown*

*T*here is nothing colder than an Irish winter. John stood in the frigid air pulling his thin coat around him feeling the cold seep through the cloth. He choked back the tears that were determined to spill onto his red cheeks. The smell of burning turf from his neighbor's roof circled around him making it difficult to breathe. The whinny of a horse and a lonely sheep bleating in the distance could be heard as if in a desperate plea for help. He ran around the burning embers searching for life inside what was left of his neighbor's home. Besides the distant sounds of barn animals, he heard nothing but the crackle of burning turf and fire.

John ran back to his home in search of his father.

Dusk was settling in making it difficult to see but he had traveled this road so many times, the light of day did not hinder his efforts. He saw no one on the short journey but a few lonely farm animals that hadn't made their way back to their barn.

"John, what is it? Why are you so out of breath? Asked his mother, Winfred wiping her hands on her apron.

"I need Dadai, Mamai! The MacGrath's house has been burned down."

"He knows, John. There's nothing we can do. No one died in the fire. Just leave it alone."

"But Mamai!!"

"Don't 'but me,' John...enough!"

He couldn't leave it alone and couldn't understand the injustice. He stood there and looked at his mother incredulously. *How could you just leave something like that alone?* Kicking the chair in the kitchen, he stormed out of the room. He climbed the ladder up to the loft and lay there thinking most of the night.

"John, come down for supper," his mother yelled from the bottom of the ladder.

"I'm not hungry," he mumbled to himself, barely audible from below.

Winfred looked at her husband, Thomas and her children at the table and said shaking her head, "That boy's temper will get the best of him."

The tears stung his eyes as he wept into his blanket.

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He knew that someday he would live as a free man and that his family would not fear the Loyalists or anyone else. Over and over in his mind he envisioned the remains of the house smoldering angrily in the dirt and when sleep finally set in, he dreamt he heard the cries of his friend, Willie MacGrath, coming from the house.

Before the first light of the day, John could hear his parents stirring below the loft. "John," Winfred yelled up to the loft. "Its Good Friday and Mass starts in an hour. Wake your sisters and Thomas Jr. and get ready for church."

St. Mary's Catholic Church was only two miles from their home, not a bad distance to walk when the air was warmer. Even though it was March, the wind howled, blowing gusts of ice and snow. John was the last one outside. The air was glacier perfection to someone that was dressed warmly, but with each step John's legs became block-like and he could no longer feel his feet. He worried that if he took off his thin-soled leather boots, his toes might remain in the boot. Way ahead of the rest of the family, his three sisters had already turned the corner and could no longer be seen. John's mother, Winfred, carried baby Joseph in her arms, his weight slowing her walk. His younger brother, Thomas walked a few steps behind him. Unlike John, he had a head of dark wavy hair that accentuated his deep-set eyes. He was an inquisitive little boy and completely idolized his older brother. John

glanced back to Thomas Jr. and smiled. If he squinted his eyes from the blinding reflection of the sun on the snow, he could see the distant ruins of St. Finian's Monastery. The tall steeples, though crumbled with age, rose above the hills harboring the secrets of history. Since medieval times, the majestic monastery had fallen into ruin abandon. John liked to stand on the summit of Aghowle Hill and catch a glimpse of the Irish Sea and the looming Wicklow mountains.

Thomas Sr., John's father said, "Boys, I hear the church bells and we can't be late, so pick up your pace."

John tried imagining that it was spring to get his mind off of the pain in his legs and the visions that he carried from the day before. He loved the springtime in Ireland, the land that boasts forty shades of green. Under a blanket of dew, those shades of green would shimmer like emeralds.

The family entered the church and made their way into the family pew going around the cluster of people also running late for Mass. John sat down on the hard bench and a patch of sun filtered through the stained glass window warming his face, but his frostbitten feet still ached. He started to itch from his wool clothing and now thawing body when his mother poked him and gave an expression of disapproval. Father Byrne, meanwhile, walked up the isle led by servers in starched white soutanes carrying two large white candles that flickered

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when they walked throwing shadows on the ceiling. Lightly showering the congregation with holy water, the priest waved the thurible of holy incense giving off thin, gray wisps of fragrant smoke. John sat quietly on the pew and watched as the priest announced the Stations of the Cross though he was more interested in watching the shadows that appeared on the stonewalls than he was in hearing Father Byrne read from scripture. His stomach began to grumble, his body itched and his feet still felt numb. The incense filled his nose and he started to sneeze. He was physically uncomfortable and mentally preoccupied. When John thought he could no longer sit still, the small church opened its doors marking the end of the Mass and the congregation slowly began to file out.

“Good morning, John.” Walking a few paces behind him wrapped in a thin black cloak was Aideen Murphy. Her once soft features and youthful look now looked drawn and pinched.

“Good morning, Mrs. Murphy.” John didn’t know what to say to her. She was another victim of a house burning a few months back and the depth of her anguish clung to her. Aideen’s husband, James and young son, Quinn had been trapped in the house, burning them alive. James had been accused of assisting the Irish rebels. Now homeless and alone, she was forced to move in with her in-laws and her future looked dim. John missed

Quinn. He was a regular when they played cricket at The Hurling Bank.

John smiled hiding his pain, not knowing what else to do and ran to catch up with the rest of his family.

“John,” his father called out. “I want you a part of this.” Thomas, John’s father stood with a small group of men huddled together talking softly. Since many locals were loyal to the British crown, the Catholic villagers were forced to hold meetings under a veil of secrecy. John stood close to his father listening to the whispers of the men from his village planning a meeting at the Donegal farm to discuss the recent political riots and pillaging affecting everyone in the village.

Thomas Sr. was a respected and trusted member of the community. Even though small in stature, he carried an air of confidence. His hair was as black as the vestment worn by the priest giving Mass and he displayed a large, strong chin, deep set dark eyes and a nose of topographical complexity.

John, the eldest of his six children, seemed much older than his fourteen years. He had a fierce determination and independence that became more evident as he aged. He was the strong quiet type but was quick to temper. He was a complex series of contradictions - strong and insecure at the same time. Broad shoulders, weathered skin from working long hours in the sun and a firm square jaw like his father. His brown wavy hair

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only accentuated his serious eyes and a warm smile that would make any woman's heart melt.

As the family walked home together, Thomas cautioned, "This gathering must be kept secret. We will be discussing local Loyalists and potential uprisings. These issues must not be shared with anyone. You never know whom you can trust anymore." He was honored that his father would want him there.

That night, John slept lightly fearful of falling into a deep sleep and not hearing his name called.

Hours before dawn, Thomas whispered, "Son, it's time to get up." Quickly and dressing quietly, John made his way down the ladder. He followed his father outside into the cold, windy morning air hours before the sun would gently lift itself over the mountains. They ran through the snow-covered ground taking cover behind the trunks of large trees as they made their way to Patrick Donegal's barn. The meeting was already in session when they entered the small outbuilding.

"As long as the British are in power, we'll remain impotent servants to them!" Patrick said passionately. All eyes went to Thomas and John as they entered the cold barn. The only light that glowed in the dark came from one small candle that everyone crouched around. As John took a seat on one of the bales of hay, he looked around and recognized all twenty-five or so men from church to include his friend Bryan, Patrick's son. The hay

felt slightly damp underneath him, increasing his chill and sending a cold shiver through his body. The barn air was thick with the musty smell of animal dung and mold. Shadows flickered on the men's faces from the wick on the candle. A small field mouse scampered across the barn floor in search of a hiding place and warmth from the cold outside. John's wandering attention was interrupted as he heard his father's voice.

"I know I am not the only one to say that I feel they want us to choose between our religion and our freedom and I will not do that!" Thomas said with intensity. "We have every right to our Catholic religion and should be permitted all of the other freedoms that the Protestant and British people have! The British politician's, specifically Robert Challoner, say that our rights are protected from the 1829 Emancipation Act, but we know we still aren't really free. We can own land now but no one can afford to purchase it our wages are so low.

Everyone nodded in agreement and Thomas continued, "As you all know, only a week ago, near our farm, the MacGrath home was burned to the ground. The Loyalists believed that Liam MacGrath was involved with a group of Irish rebels from Dublin! The family barely escaped with their lives. When will this stop? It wasn't but days ago, another suspected Irish rebel's son was found swinging from a tree with a leather strap around his neck. These Loyalists are lynching and burning anything in

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their path. Will we be the next victims of this violence?”

Patrick spoke up, “I think we are all in agreement that we cannot afford another revolution. We lost 30,000 people during that one summer of 1798. I heard in the village that a Catholic Association is being formed in support of Catholic Emancipation. There will be a fee of one pence a month per family for all of us to participate. Surely, we can afford that small sum for the support that we need. But we must get more people involved and spread the word to do this peacefully! It will take all of us fighting for change to make this happen.”

The meeting continued with a heated discussion about the new groups being formed all over Ireland to throw out British rule and the rebel riots conducted by some of the Irish.

John didn't say anything during the meeting but on the way back he asked, “Dadai, we aren't headed for another uprising are we?”

“I don't know. I certainly hope not but we don't really have any of the rights that the British and Protestants have and that needs to change. I do not want to see the death and destruction that we saw during the rebellion though. Too many lost their lives. John, I'm only telling you this because I think you're old enough to hear it but the Loyalists have started something again called pitch capping. It's been outlawed but it's occurring again. Do you know the farmer, O'Reilly from Aghowle?”

“Yes, Dadai, I know of him?”

“His son was captured a few days ago and they shaved his head, put a cone-shaped cap on him and poured tar into the cap. Ripping the cap off, they intentionally removed part of his scalp. He died a tortuous death. It is so horrendous; no one is talking about it. That is how bad the Loyalists are becoming against the Irish, John. Even though we are not rebels, we could be next.”

John couldn't believe what his father was telling him. He felt a fear he had never felt before but at the same time, he felt anger and wanted to retaliate. They walked quietly back to the farm each in their own thoughts, just as the sun began to glow orange and red upon the earth.