

PRAISE FOR CARNEGIE'S MAID

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"In *Carnegie's Maid*, Marie Benedict skillfully introduces us to Clara, a young woman who immigrates to America in the 1860s and unexpectedly becomes the maid to Andrew Carnegie's mother. Clara becomes close to Andrew Carnegie and helps to make him America's first philanthropist. *Downton Abbey* fans should flock to this charming tale of fateful turns and unexpected romance, and the often unsung role of women in history."

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"The stuff of good storytelling."

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"Marie Benedict has penned a sensational novel that turns the conventional Cinderella story into an all-American triumph. Young Clara Kelley steps off the boat from Ireland into Andrew Carnegie's affluent world, where invention can transform men and women into whatever they dare to dream."

—Sarah McCoy, *New York Times* and international bestselling author of *The Mapmaker's Children* and *The Baker's Daughter*

ALSO BY MARIE BENEDICT

The Other Einstein

CARNEGIE'S MAID

a novel

MARIE BENEDICT

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PROLOGUE

December 23, 1868
New York, New York

THE GENTLE MELODY OF A CHRISTMAS SONG LIFTED INTO THE air of his study from the street below. The music did nothing to change his mood or his actions. Ensnared behind the black walnut desk in his luxuriously appointed St. Nicholas Hotel suite, fountain pen in hand, Andrew Carnegie wrote like a madman.

He paused, searching for the correct word. Glancing around the study lit by the very latest in gaslights, he saw it as if anew. The walls were hung with a heavy, yellow brocade wallpaper, and dark-green velvet curtains framed the windows, tied back by heavy, gold cords, affording him a fine view of Broadway. He knew this suite was superior to any found in America or even Europe. Yet this fact, which had so pleased him during his earlier visits to New York, now repulsed him. The curtain's gold cords seemed like binding ropes, and he felt trapped inside a rarified prison.

He had argued with his mother that they should stay elsewhere, somewhere less ostentatious. He longed to reside somewhere that was not haunted by memories of Clara, although he did not say that aloud. It no longer seemed right to stay at the St. Nicholas, not without her. He had spent the better part of a year searching for her, with no success. Not even the detectives, his top security men, or bounty hunters—the best in the business—could locate a hint of her trail.

But his mother would have none of it. *Andra*, she called him in her inimitable brogue, *the trappings of wealth are the Carnegies' right and due, and by God, we will secure our place*. He acquiesced, depleted of the energy to argue. But on their arrival at the St. Nicholas Hotel earlier that day, Andrew had taken the extraordinary step of banishing his mother to her adjoining suite of rooms and ignoring her pleas that they attend a holiday dinner at the Vanderbilts, an invitation to the near-highest echelon of New York City society that had been hard-won. He needed to be alone with his thoughts of Clara.

Clara. He whispered her name, letting it roll over his tongue like a fine cordial. In the privacy of his study, he let his very first memory of her wash over him. Clara had trailed behind his mother into the parlor of Fairfield, their Pittsburgh home, with a step so light that he barely noticed the tap of her shoes or the swish of her skirts as she crossed the room. Her demure manner and averted gaze did nothing to draw his attention until his mother had barked out some order in Clara's direction. Only then, when Clara lifted her eyes and met his square on, did her presence register. In that fleeting moment, before she quickly lowered her eyes again, he witnessed the sharp intelligence that lay beneath the placid demeanor required for a lady's maid.

Other, more intimate memories of Clara began to take hold, along with a longing so intense, it caused him physical pain. But then a roar of laughter and the clink of crystal glasses from the Grand Dining Room below his study interrupted his reverie. He wondered who might be celebrating in that gilded room. Could it be one of his business colleagues visiting from out of town, or perhaps one of the elusive "upper ten" families deigning to leave their cosseted, insular world of brownstone dinners to peer into the latest in sumptuous New York City dining establishments? Should he go downstairs to see?

Stop, he chastised himself. *This is precisely the sort of status-seeking, greedy thinking that Clara would have loathed*. He had vowed to her that he would carve out a different path from those materialistic

industrialists and society folk, and he would keep that vow, even though she was gone. He returned to his mission of honoring her, one he'd attempted countless times as he drafted and redrafted this document. Pressing the tip of the fountain pen so hard that the ink bled through the fragile paper, he wrote:

Thirty-three and an income of \$50,000 per annum! By this time two years I can so arrange all my business as to secure at least \$50,000 per annum. Beyond this never earn—make no effort to increase fortune, but spend the surplus each year for benevolent purposes. Cast aside business forever, except for others.

Settle in Oxford and get a thorough education, making the acquaintance of literary men—this will take three years' active work—pay especial attention to speaking in public. Settle then in London and purchase a controlling interest in some newspaper or live review and give the general management of it attention, taking a part in public matters, especially those connected with education and improvement of the poorer classes.

Man must have an idol—the amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry—no idol more debasing than the worship of money. Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately; therefore should I be careful to choose that life which will be the most elevating in its character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery. I will resign business at thirty-five, but during the ensuing two years I wish to spend the afternoons in receiving instruction and in reading systematically.

Lifting the pen from the paper, Andrew read. The words were rough and imperfectly formed, but he was satisfied. Although God had willed that he could not have Clara, he would brandish her beliefs like a sword. He would worship the idols of status and money—for their own sake—no longer. Instead, he would amass and utilize reputation and money for one higher purpose only: the betterment of others, particularly the creation of ladders for the immigrants of his adopted land to climb. Through the heavy fog of his despair, Andrew permitted himself the smallest of smiles, the tiniest of appeasements. The letter would have pleased his Clara.

CHAPTER ONE

November 4, 1863
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I SHOULDN'T BE HERE. CECELIA OR ELIZA COULD HAVE BEEN SWAYING on this stinking vessel instead of me. It was their right—Eliza's duty anyway, as the eldest daughter—to make the voyage and take the chance on a new land. But Mum and Dad offered a litany of excuses for my sisters—the twenty-one-year-old Eliza was on the brink of a marriage that would allow the family to keep our farm tenancy intact, a status that had eluded me due to my overcleverness, Dad said, and Cecelia was too young for the voyage at fifteen and too weak-spirited in any event—and so, knowing my parents were right, I boarded the *Envoy* in their place. Forty-two days later, I regretted the preening and arrogance to which I subjected my sisters when I'd learned of my parents' decision. I knew now that being considered my parents' *siofra*—their changeling capable of transmuting into whatever America required—was no prize. And I desperately missed my sisters.

Light snuck through the hatch into the steerage cabin, blinding me for a moment. My eyes closed spontaneously. Even as the light faded a bit, I chose to keep my eyes shut, surrendering to the remnants of the sun's heat. I wanted the fading rays to burn me clean. I wanted them to burn away the sour smell of the long Atlantic passage and the recurrent tears of leave-taking.

The steward clanged the ship's bell to signal our disembarking. I opened my eyes and reluctantly glanced around the cabin. Mothers with listless infants in their arms pushed themselves to standing, while their older, hollow-eyed children clung to their skirts, scared by the relentless ringing of the bell. Fathers and old men struggled to smooth their filthy, rumpled suits into some sad approximation of dignity. Only the few young men, the *fir òga*, were strong enough—and eager enough—to readily form a queue.

The journey had been rough, taking its toll on even the *fir òga*. Nearly three weeks prior, after an already tumultuous crossing, a storm hit the *Envoy*, tumbling those of us in steerage out of our beds into a hold with two feet of water. As the crew and my fellow passengers began working the pump in the pitch-dark of the moonless night, the ship began rolling from side to side like the heavy log it was, causing one Dublin girl of about sixteen, traveling alone like myself, to crash into one of the wooden posts keeping the ceiling firm above our heads. Moaning as she fell with a splash onto the still-flooded floor, she never regained consciousness. When she died the next morning, the captain sent the first mate and a sailor to steerage to sew her up in a sheet, with some rocks at her feet to weigh her down, and throw her overboard without a single word or prayer. This loss and her treatment bore heavily upon me, upon all of us really, as it seemed a portent of the treatment we might expect in the new land.

Footsteps clapped on the wooden deck above our heads, followed by the thud and drag of trunks. My cabinmates rushed to assemble their meager belongings: rucksacks, wicker baskets, tools, treasured pictures, and Bibles, even the odd battered trunk. But I knew we needn't hurry. We would bide our time until all the other classes had left the ship. Steerage always waited: for the dry biscuits, putrid water, and rancid oatmeal that serve as sustenance; for sleep uninterrupted by hacking coughs and crying babies; for air uncontaminated with the stink of vomit and full chamber pots; for storms to break and the hatch to be

unlocked to grant us a few blissful moments above deck; for privacy that never came.

I was tired of waiting, but we had no choice but to stand in the queue, immobile but for the rocking of the ship in the harbor. I glanced at the young mother beside me, her tattered brown dress stained with the evidence of her baby's constant seasickness. At seventeen or so, she was a couple of years younger than my nineteen years, but her eyes looked older. There, lines had given way to furrows. All alone throughout this terrible voyage, she bore the weight not only of her own worries and suffering, but also those of her child. I felt ashamed at wallowing in my own discomfort and longing for home.

"*Ádh mór,*" I said, having nothing to offer her and her baby but luck. No worries here that we'd receive tallies on our *bata scóir* for speaking Irish instead of English and then receive the corresponding punishment, as teachers at the hedge schools for the Irish were instructed to do. Not that this poor mother had ever been beaten for speaking Irish in school, as it wasn't likely that she'd attended school of any sort.

She looked surprised at my words. I'd maintained my distance from fellow passengers, at Mum's request, and this young mother and I had never spoken. This separation kept me healthy if unpopular among my gregarious countrymen, who resented my standoffishness. Too weary to speak, she nodded her thanks.

The hatch flew open, and crisp, salty air filled the cabin. I inhaled deeply, and for a long minute, the fresh breeze was enough. The air smelled of home, and I gulped it down hungrily.

"Line up, people!" The steward yelled at us. His pinched, sallow face had terrorized steerage for forty-two days, withholding food, water, and deck time if he deemed us not compliant enough. If he didn't hold the power to deny us admission to our new land, I would have shared with him my thoughts on his cruelty. I'd refuse to still my tongue as Mum and Dad often chided me to do.

We tidied the queue and waited again. Some silent signal finally

reached the steward, and he motioned for us to climb the stairs and mount the deck. Single file, we left the stinking pit of steerage for the last time and walked into the muted light of the Philadelphia harbor.

The gangway leading to shore felt unsteady underfoot, as did the rocky ground once I reached land. It felt almost as if the earth was rocking rather than the ship. My legs seemed to have grown more accustomed to the swaying of sea than the constancy of land.

Black-uniformed officials guided us into a building labeled *Lazaretto*. In the long, dark nights, my shipmates had spoken with fear of Lazaretto, a quarantine station. From relatives' earlier crossings, they had learned that any sign of illness in the ship's passengers could mean weeks or months at Lazaretto, a place where people often entered well and left sick. Or worse.

I didn't worry that I harbored some disease. Mum's instructions kept me safe. Even so, I'd heard too much coughing to think the rest of the passengers were brimming with health, and our fates rose and fell with one another. If the inspector found one contagion in one steerage passenger, it was in his discretion to hold all of us at Lazaretto until every last person in steerage recovered.

One by one, we moved up in line toward the health inspectors. I winced as the officials inspected my cabinmates like they were Dad's farm animals, lifting up their gums and eyelids for signs of disease, sifting through their hair for evidence of lice or other vermin, examining their skin and fingernails for yellow fever or cholera, and pawing through their belongings. Any infraction could be enough to condemn us all to Lazaretto, and I said a silent Hail Mary that the toddler prone to coughing all night managed to keep quiet.

The line shifted forward, and it was my turn. I took off my crumpled bonnet and heather-gray outer coat, extended my arms, and submitted my body for examination.

"You look well enough," a heavily bearded inspector said in my ear as he unpinned my heavy, dark-red hair. The gesture and the whisper

felt strangely intimate and wholly inappropriate. But I couldn't object. It could ruin everything for which Mum and Dad sent me here. It could render useless all the sacrifices made to pay for my ticket.

I nodded in acknowledgment, as if his remark were perfectly fine. Just a simple statement on my health. But my hands shook as I repinned my hair, and he continued his review of my skin. Only when he turned his attention to my rucksack did my shallow, fast breathing slow.

With the shadow of a smile, he waved me forward. It seemed I'd passed the test, but what of my shipmates?

With the rest of steerage, I was herded into a large, dingy waiting room that reeked of unwashed bodies and urine. Once again, we waited. I promised myself that, if I ever made it through Lazaretto and onto American soil, I would not wait anymore.

After another long hour, during which passengers trickled in and anxiety mounted, a bell rang. Old men and tired mothers and young children looked at one another quizzically. Should we know what it meant?

Finally, a door slammed open, and a thick shaft of light entered the room. "Welcome to America," a bespectacled official announced.

Even though no one spoke, the relief in the room was audible, like a collective exhalation. We assembled into the last line we would ever form together and walked outside into the American daylight.

I breathed in hope.

All around me, I heard cries of reunion as my fellow passengers fell into the arms of their waiting relatives. But I walked on. No one was waiting for me.

CHAPTER TWO

November 4, 1863

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I WALKED WITH PURPOSE. I HADN'T A CLUE WHERE I WAS HEADED, but I couldn't afford any hesitation that marked me as weak. Even in our small Galway village outside of Tuam, we heard rumors of immigrants who, upon landing in America, had been victimized by sharpers, unscrupulous men engaged in all manner of trials, plots, and chicanery. I'd talked a brash game to my family and friends when Mum and Dad decided I'd be the one to emigrate, but now, I wondered how I would fare in this strange land.

Except for the cry of seagulls and the clop of horses, this harbor didn't sound anything like the harbors in Galway. The fishmongers called out their wares in a language I knew was English but sounded like gibberish, and news peddlers cried out the day's news with the same inflection. Except for the salty air and scent of horse droppings and fish, the smell was unlike home as well. Arriving passengers stumbled around me as they regained their land legs, and the air was thick with the stench of their bodies. Unwashed for weeks in turbulent seas, even the sea air couldn't freshen them. Even the beggars recoiled from the stink of my fellow passengers.

For the first time, in this mass of humanity, I really understood how alone I was in the vast land.

A voice drifted through the din. "Clara Kelley?"

The name was unmistakable. It was my own.

I listened hard, but I didn't hear it again. I wondered if, in my loneliness, I had imagined it. I decided that I must have. No one expected me here.

"Clara Kelley? I'm looking for a Miss Clara Kelley from Galway," the voice bellowed louder.

I followed the voice. It belonged to a tall, clean-shaven man wearing a bowler hat and a houndstooth topcoat finer than I'd seen in some time. Before I got too close, before I identified myself, I stopped and watched him. Was he one of those runners we had heard about from our farming neighbors, the O'Donnells? A fellow Irishman had approached their nephew Anthony at the New York City docks, promising him a pleasant room at a reasonable rate, only to settle him in a rat-infested tenement room in the Lower East Side of the city that was already inhabited by nine other immigrants, at a rate many times more than what he had been told. When Anthony couldn't meet the exorbitant payment, the runner tossed Anthony out onto the street, keeping his stored trunk—his only belonging in the New World—as final payment. The O'Donnells and Anthony's poor parents had not heard from him since his last letter describing the machinations of this evil runner. This terrible fate wasn't the worst an immigrant could expect. I overheard the O'Donnells whispering to my parents about a girl from a neighboring village traveling alone to Boston who encountered a runner who exacted a far worse penance from her than the confiscation of her luggage.

This man didn't look the part. In fact, my little sister, Cecilia, would have called him posh, especially as he was leaning against a highly polished black livery coach with two dappled gray horses attached. And anyway, how would a runner know my name?

The man caught me watching him and asked, "You wouldn't be Miss Clara Kelley, would you?" His American accent was thick and flat, but I made sense of him.

“Yes, sir.”

He stared long and hard at my face, clothes, and rucksack. “A Miss Clara Kelley who was on board the *Envoy*?”

“Yes, sir,” I answered with a half curtsy.

He looked surprised. “You’re not what I expected,” he said with a shake of his head. “But Mrs. Seeley knows her business. It’s not my job to judge.”

I was about to ask him why he was looking for me and who was this Mrs. Seeley when he said, “Come on, miss. Climb into the carriage. We’ve been waiting for you for well over an hour. Long after the rest of second class exited from Lazaretto. God alone knows what sort of dawdling you were up to. Now we’re well behind schedule to Pittsburgh. And Mrs. Seeley does not like us to be late, particularly since she’s paying extra fare to get you to Pittsburgh safely by coach.”

I knew there were confusing assertions imbedded in the man’s words, but all I heard was “Pittsburgh.” Was he truly offering to take me to Pittsburgh? The industrial city over three hundred miles from Philadelphia was my planned destination. Back home, we’d heard the city had work aplenty, and it was the one place in this boundless country where my family had relatives. Not close kin, mind, but a second cousin close enough to reach out to once I found employment in a textile mill or in one of the big homes that needed domestics.

I’d squirreled away the rest of the pounds and pence Mum and Dad had given me to secure the passage to Pittsburgh. I’d assumed I would have to cobble together the cheapest route I could find, some combination of rail and canal rides and wagon, since the train route didn’t extend all the way from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. But now a complete stranger was offering me a continuous horse-drawn carriage ride across the Allegheny Mountains and seemingly not asking for payment. Would I be a fool to decline? Or would I be a fool to accept?

I had a choice. I could tell this man the truth. That I was not the Clara Kelley for whom he was looking. That Clara Kelley was a common

enough name. That the second-class passenger Clara Kelley for whom he was waiting probably never made it off the ship ferrying her here from Ireland if he had not yet come across her. Cholera and typhoid took many of us from all classes of travel. Illness did not discriminate. It was perhaps the one thing that did not.

Or I could become that other Clara Kelley. At least until I got to Pittsburgh.

I stared at the black carriage, trying to decide. On board the *Envoy*, I had promised myself that I wouldn't wait any longer, that I would take my future in my own hands when I could.

The man opened the door to the carriage for me. "Come on, miss."

I glanced up at him and said, "My apologies for the delay, sir. It won't happen again." And then I climbed up the steps into the carriage.

CHAPTER THREE

November 4, 1863

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

THE CARRIAGE WAS NOT EMPTY. ONCE MY EYES ADJUSTED TO THE dim interior, I saw that there were two other girls inside. Both were near my age, with the reddish hair of my people, but there, the similarities stopped. Wearing dresses with crinoline underskirts peeking out at the hem, thick silk sashes, high necklines with lace collars, and wide pagoda sleeves, the girls had clothes finer and more fashionable than anything I'd ever owned. Finer than anything I'd ever seen, in fact, except the two occasions I served as a temporary kitchen maid for a holiday meal at Castle Martyn, the medieval citadel owned by the Martyn family, who served as landlord to all the farmers in our region.

Who in the name of Mary was this Clara Kelley I'd become?

From their gawking, I saw that the girls found me as alien as I found them. But I could not let on, or I risked losing my place in the carriage. How could I best ensure that I stepped into the mysterious shoes that the other Clara left me to fill?

Not by speaking in my usual manner, that was for certain. These girls didn't look as though their accents would match my farmer's daughter's West Ireland lilt, no matter how posh our fellow neighbors found it compared to their own, thanks to Dad's education of us girls. And I guessed the other Clara Kelley spoke like them. Not me.

Mrs. Seeley's man poked his head into the carriage. "Miss Kelley, I need to load your trunk onto the carriage. Where is it?"

How could I answer that the rucksack slung over my shoulder contained the entirety of my worldly possessions? The real Clara Kelley undoubtedly had traveled with trunks large enough to carry the kind of dresses these girls wore, and my bag was so small that it wouldn't hold even a single one of my treasured volumes of history and poetry, only my necessities. No matter my efforts, Dad's battered copy of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which he had used as inspiration for his earlier political involvement with the Fenians and I used as a primer to understand American life before my departure, would not fit. Leaving behind those books, from which Dad had educated all his daughters (much to the outcry of our farming neighbors), was nearly as hard as leaving behind my family.

I answered, "My apologies, sir. I should have told you that my trunk was lost en route." I prayed that these words bore a good approximation of an Anglo-Irish accent, with which I assumed my carriage-mates spoke. My model was the Martyn family.

The Martyns. It pained me to conjure them up in any form, even as a reference point. Their actions were the cause of my departure. When rumors surfaced again about Dad's years-earlier alignment with the Fenians—an Irish-led movement that maintained Ireland should be its own state, that farmers should have fair rent and fixity of tenure, and that all people should have rights and the ability to better themselves, it had arisen from the near nonexistent assistance offered by English leaders to the sufferers of the Irish famine—the Anglo-Irish Martyns retaliated. Bit by bit, the Martyns took away land from the twenty-acre tenant farm Dad had amassed, a size permitting the crop diversity that allowed our family to survive the famine, unlike so many with the standard one-acre tenancies that could grow one crop only, the decimated potato. Our family needed another source of income to bank against the reduction in the family's earnings, and I was to be that other

source. Lord Marytn, his wife, and their daughter might as well have placed me on the *Envoy* themselves and steered the ship through the rough Atlantic waters to America.

“Lost?” the driver asked.

Did he not understand my feigned accent, or was it skepticism I saw in his eyes? Either way, he was questioning my explanation, and I had to stay firm.

“Yes, sir. Lost in a squall.” As soon as the lie spilled from my lips, I regretted it.

The girls, who had been surreptitiously watching this exchange behind the slow wave of their fans, openly stared. They too were on board the *Envoy*, and while the boat regularly cut through rough chop and suffered through the storm that had flooded steerage, no squall had pummeled the old whaling ship. Would the girls reveal my lie?

He tilted his head in clear disbelief. “A squall? These girls said nothing of it. Nor have I heard any talk of a squall among the sailing folk.”

“Yes, sir.” I nodded emphatically. The girls’ askance expression or no, I had to adhere to my claim and convince this man.

Shaking his head, in disbelief or frustration, I could not tell, the man slammed shut the carriage door. I was left alone with the two girls, who had curiously chosen to keep my secret. For now.

The crack of a whip broke the awkward silence, and the carriage lurched forward. The careening took us off guard, and at first, we were all preoccupied with restoring our belongings and ourselves to order. Once the carriage began rumbling along with only the odd jerk when the wheels hit a rock or rut, the uncomfortable quiet and scrutiny began again.

I stared out the window, pretending to be engrossed in the passing sights. It started as a ruse to avoid the girls’ gaze, but as the minutes passed, my astonishment was genuine. As the carriage left the harbor and progressed into the grid of Philadelphia streets, I saw no gray stone buildings climbing with moss and ivy. None of the verdancy and history

of Galway existed in this new city. Instead, the streets were wide and straight, intersecting at right angles, and abounded with redbrick buildings trimmed with bright-white columns and window sashes as well as freshly painted signs proclaiming the name of the purveyors and their wares. Everything here looked tidy and freshly hewn, though not as elegantly designed as the Dublin and London buildings and squares of which I had seen engravings in Dad's books.

"Miss Kelley?"

I looked away from the window. "Yes, Miss—" I realized that I had not been properly introduced to the girls.

"I am Miss Coyne, and this is Miss Quinn. You told the driver that you were on board the *Envoy*?"

Now I understood. Even though the girls chose to keep my secret from Mrs. Seeley's man for reasons known only to them, they weren't going to let me off so easily in the privacy of the carriage. I would have to maintain my confidence, no matter our shared, unspoken understanding that my story was, at least in part, fabrication. "Yes, I was."

"In the second-class cabin?"

"Yes." I hoped I sound convincing. I needed to tread carefully, or they might reveal my lie to Mrs. Seeley's man and ruin this opportunity.

"Curious. Neither Miss Quinn nor I saw you during the long days of travel."

"Nor I you. Although from my vantage point, I did not see much of anything or anyone during the voyage." My words, spoken slowly and deliberately to maintain the accent, sounded false to my ears.

"Your vantage point?"

"The floor of a laundress's cabin. My seasickness was so profound, no one would bunk with me." I gestured to my dress. "It also explains the dowdiness of my attire. None of my own gowns survived my illness. I was forced to buy clothing from a shipmate."

The girls recoiled in unison at the very word *seasickness*. Although they might have suffered from the same affliction, it was not considered

polite to discuss the reality of the common sailing condition. It shut down the conversation, as I'd hoped.

I returned to my window and tried to keep my attention fixed on the world of curiosities unfolding before me. But the whispering of the girls distracted me, and I used the opportunity to try and glean a few words and phrases from their hushed mutterings. "Seeley," "service," and "Mrs. Carnegie" were only a few that stood out from their murmurs.

"Did I hear the driver say that you were headed to Mrs. Seeley in Pittsburgh?" The other girl, Miss Quinn, spoke this time.

"I am. Are you as well?"

"We are indeed. Do you know to whom you will be posted?"

What did she mean by "posted"? Wracking my mind for a response, I thought on the whispers I had overheard and pieced together an understanding of her question. Perhaps she was asking to whom I would be placed in service. Was that the role Mrs. Seeley played, matching employers with servants? If so, she must be asking what family I would be serving.

After an uncomfortably long pause during which my fear of giving the wrong answer paralyzed me, Miss Quinn asked, "You aren't going to serve Mrs. Carnegie, are you?"

I grasped at her suggestion. "Yes. Yes I am."

The girls shot a glance at one another. I interpreted nothing of its meaning. "You are to be the new lady's maid to Mrs. Margaret Carnegie? We were considered for that role, but then Mrs. Seeley realized that our educations qualified us for the more important positions of tutors." This time, their meaning was unmistakable. Clearly, they deemed me unsuitable for the role. Most mistresses would agree. I looked like a farmer's daughter—which I was—and such girls were rarely permitted above the station of scullery maid, if they were ever permitted into service at all.

"Yes," I answered, steeling my voice. If the girls wished to challenge this role I was playing, then better the battle commence here than in

front of Mrs. Seeley. Whoever she was. At least then I would already be in Pittsburgh.

Miss Quinn was cowed by the steadiness of my stare, and her eyes shifted to the floor. But Miss Coyne held my gaze and finally spoke the thoughts that had been brewing. "Well, you certainly don't look the part. A servant's appearance conveys not only her standing but the standing of her mistress, as a lady's maid should well know. As tutors to the daughters of the Oliver and Standish families, I can assure you we would be rejected out of hand if we were to appear for our positions dressed like you, Miss Kelley. Seasickness or not." She crinkled her tiny nose as if the very thought of nausea conjured up its smell. "But then you will be serving the Carnegie family, and I understand that they are new in their rise. Perhaps they don't yet know the difference in servants." The girls giggled at Miss Coyne's boldness.

If Miss Coyne hoped to discourage me by her words, she was wrong. In fact, her words had the opposite effect. They only wedded me to this new role I played, firing the stubborn determination Mum and Dad often accused me of having in droves. It was that determination they hoped would serve me well in America and perhaps pave the rest of the family's way here, if the Martyns exacted the worst upon the family.

Reminding myself of my parents' *síofra* label, I thought about how this new Clara Kelley would respond. I smiled sweetly and folded my hands in my lap. "Doesn't Proverbs say that 'strength and honor are her clothing'? I think I'll let my character—character of which Mrs. Seeley is undoubtedly aware—speak for me in lieu of my clothes."

CHAPTER FOUR

November 11, 1863
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

MRS. SEELEY STARED AT ME AS THOUGH SHE COULD SEE beneath the tattered dress I wore, straight through the story I'd started to tell, and deep into the identity of the Clara Kelley I truly was. My false confidence started to slip away. Fear began to replace it, and I knew that if I didn't right myself and stare straight into Mrs. Seeley's eyes as the Clara Kelley I pretended to be, this opportunity would be lost. The prize that Mrs. Seeley held, a coveted job, so recently unimaginable but now in my sights, would be gone forever.

Did I dare continue to spin my confection for Mrs. Seeley like a feast-day treat from the market? But what other offering did I have? I could not lose this chance.

I breathed deeply and said, "My deepest apologies, Mrs. Seeley, for arriving at your door in such a deplorable state. I know that I've already explained the arduousness of my voyage and its impact on my wardrobe, but I know that is no excuse for my condition. Here of all places." I gestured around Mrs. Seeley's sitting room, a place surprisingly immaculate given the blackness of the city in which it lodged.

In the short walk from the carriage to Mrs. Seeley's establishment, I saw filth the likes of which I'd never imagined. Black clouds billowing in plumes from tall stacks. Buildings turned ashen from sooty air, outlines

of posters in white, like ghosts on their walls. Why didn't anyone tell me that industrialization would look like biblical hell?

I quickly lowered my eyes in an approximation of modesty and shame and awaited her verdict.

Mrs. Seeley didn't respond, and I daren't look up. Was she judging the state of my dress—already filthy, blackened further by airborne soot in the few short hours I'd been in Pittsburgh—against the relative poshness of my speech? Was she weighing her reputation as an upscale servants' registry against the toll she might suffer from taking a gamble on me? From snippets and wisps of overheard—nay, stolen—conversation between Misses Quinn and Coyne during our eight days of travel, I'd learned that my guess was correct. Mrs. Seeley owned the preeminent servants' registry in town, the place where society ladies wanting specially trained servants—not your run-of-the-mill laundress, mind—would find them for a fee. Mrs. Seeley prided herself on the impeccable written references, called “characters,” and work of her servants. The other Clara Kelley must have had a first-class character, one challenged mightily now by my attire.

Patience was a virtue hard-won for me, but this opportunity rested on my ability to become the person Mrs. Seeley sought. Without breaking my penitent stance or silence, I watched as her gaze traveled from the dirty folds of my dress to my face. We locked eyes. I could see that she doubted me. Doubted my story, my accent, my modesty. But she wanted to believe me. Maybe she needed to.

So she took a chance too.

“Well, we will have to clean you up. To make your appearance match your character. Mrs. Carnegie knows precisely the qualities she seeks in a lady's maid, and even if you have them in droves, she will never be able to see them beneath that filthy dress. Or your stench.”

My stench? I'd spent so long in these clothes, inhabiting this smell, that I couldn't sense it anymore. Mrs. Seeley was gambling with my stink as well as my clothes.

“Of course, Mrs. Seeley,” I answered with a grateful curtsy.

“I have a reputation to uphold if I’m to continue placing servants in the finest homes.” She paused, scanning me up and down once again and shaking her head, as if she couldn’t believe that she was actually going to let me walk through a client’s door. “Not to mention that I’ve already invested in you and need to recoup my money. The ride from Philadelphia cost nearly two months of your wages.”

With the sharp staccato of a sigh, she marched past me to a wardrobe on the far wall, past a list posted next to her desk. Girls’ names scribed larger than was necessary were enumerated there, along with a corresponding offense. I could make out “lazy” and “slovenly” several times. It seemed to serve as a warning for the girls who passed through Mrs. Seeley’s doors. I vowed to *never* be on that list.

Mrs. Seeley pulled a plain, charcoal dress from the wardrobe and walked toward me. The worsted wool gown, adorned with none of the sashes and fanciful sleeves of Misses Quinn’s and Coyne’s frocks, which were perhaps suitable only for the loftier role of tutors, was akin to the serviceable uniform of a servant. She held it next to me, assessing size and fit, and said, as if quoting, “A neat and modest servant should wear nothing too dirty or fine.”

Then, with a quick nod, she pronounced, “It will suffice. I will add its cost to the amount you owe me for the carriage ride and deduct it from your first wages. Assuming the mistress takes you on, of course, which is no sure matter.”

“Yes, Mrs. Seeley.” I curtsied again. Anything to prevent her from rethinking her decision.

“You’ll find water for washing up those stairs to the right. Once you’ve cleaned and changed, bring your awful gown downstairs and put it in the fire.” She picked up a fire iron and stoked the flames dwindling in the fireplace. “Nothing for it now but to burn.”

CHAPTER FIVE

November 11, 1863
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

THE DREARY DAY GAVE WAY TO SUNLIGHT AS THE CARRIAGE LEFT the city. After Mrs. Seeley and I made our way past tall office buildings arched toward the sky and around mills spewing black clouds into the air and black water into the river, I realized that the day wasn't dismal at all but was actually bright and clear. The poison of the city had obscured the sun.

The farther we went, the more bucolic and green the scenery became. I hadn't expected farms and homes and rolling hills—not unlike home—to abut the city. The carriage ride became more unsteady as the cobblestone pavers disappeared, but I clung to my seat with the most ladylike posture I could muster, determined not to raise another eyebrow on Mrs. Seeley's stony face.

The carriage stopped in front of an enclave of miniature castles. Well, not quite miniature, but more human sized. Castles designed not for a medieval siege but for life. A privileged life, that was.

As we stepped out of the carriage in an area that Mrs. Seeley called Homewood, I realized that the corsets to which I was accustomed were loose enough to allow for house chores and farm work. The corsets required of me now were very tight, requiring me to sashay when I

walked. I realized that the distinctive coy flounce with which most upper-class women moved was less artifice than necessity.

I followed Mrs. Seeley's lead toward a gabled mansion with so many turrets I lost count at six. As we approached the ornate oak main door, with the name "Fairfield" scripted on a brass plate, I started toward the steps. Before I could place my foot on a single one, Mrs. Seeley yanked my arm. "What do you think you're doing? You're a servant, not a guest."

Instead, we rounded the house, past a laundry line with flapping sheets that was hidden between a carriage house and the main home. There, we found a simple pine door upon which Mrs. Seeley knocked. The door was opened by a young girl, younger than me, who was wiping her hands on a stained apron.

"Yes?" she asked with a blank face.

"We are here for an appointment with Mrs. Carnegie."

The girl said nothing, but the blank look changed to one of confusion. I gathered that few callers for Mrs. Carnegie arrived at the servants' door.

"Can you please let the butler know that Mrs. Seeley is here for her appointment?" Mrs. Seeley said, less a request than a command.

"Mrs. Seeley, you said?" The girl's eyes went wide. Even servants as low-ranking as this girl knew of Mrs. Seeley, it seemed.

"Yes," Mrs. Seeley answered, her voice irritable. "What is your name?"

"Hilda, ma'am."

"Please fetch your butler, girl."

The girl nodded and moved back to allow our entrance. We stepped into a back hallway onto a diamond-shape-tiled floor of tan and white that peered directly into the scullery. From the state of the scullery, I saw that we had interrupted Hilda at the hard work of peeling a mountain of potatoes. But for the waiting grandeur of the rest of the house, I could have been home. And I could have been the girl.

"Please wait in the kitchen, ma'am. I'll fetch the butler." She gestured for us to walk down a short hallway.

Following her gesture, Mrs. Seeley and I turned left into a vast, white-tiled kitchen. There, next to a black cast-iron stove so large, Mum could have fit an entire cow into it, was an equally enormous man stirring something in a huge copper pot underneath a massive metal hood. The smell emanating from the pot was intoxicating—a savory mix of stewed meat, onions, and herbs, I guessed—and it reminded me that a long time had passed since I'd had a proper meal.

The man looked up at the sound of our footsteps, and I stared into the darkest face and eyes I'd ever seen. He was the first man of color I'd ever encountered. This was who the Americans were fighting their Civil War over.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Seeley." He greeted us with a smile in his voice. "You are back again, I see."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ford. I hope to have more success on this visit."

"Do you think you've finally brought a winner for the mistress?" His voice rumbled low and steady. The tone was almost soothing.

"I do indeed. Although I don't think the blame for my earlier failures lay with the girls I brought over. While I don't like to speak ill of others, your mistress has high standards."

"I'm all too familiar with those high standards," he said with a chuckle. "Tell me about this girl here."

They began talking about me as if I weren't there. Talking about the other Clara Kelley, in truth, not really me. I listened hard, absorbing the history of the other Clara Kelley. Born in Dublin, but of English heritage, Clara hailed from a family of fallen tradespeople. Well-educated for a girl, particularly in the ways of the home, Clara had been slated for a life as the wife of a prosperous shopkeeper until the family's fortune turned. Without a dowry, a life as a lady's maid became Clara's life instead, and as the positions evaporated in post-famine Ireland, she sailed for fresh opportunities in America.

This was the Clara Kelley I was meant to be. The knowledge made me feel dishonorable in her skin, for as of this moment, I was the only one who knew that the real Clara never finished the journey across the Atlantic.

As their chatter devolved into neighborhood gossip about people I didn't yet know, I stared around the kitchen, with its chest-high, white-tiled walls topped by butter-yellow-painted panels. Newfangled devices hung on the walls and sat on the tables. A contraption that looked like a whisk attached to some form of crank sat on the butcher's block in the room's center, alongside an elaborate miniature scale and several sifters. A device hung on the wall with thirty buttons labeled with names like "parlor" and "blue guest bedroom."

A shrill buzz sounded from the wall device, and a light flashed above the word *parlor*. I jumped and, without thinking, cried out, "What in the name of God is that?"

Mrs. Seeley stared at me. "It is just the enunciator. Surely, you have those in Ireland."

My heart pounding, I gathered my wits, praying to Mary that my accent hadn't slipped in my outburst. "Sorry, ma'am. None of the other homes in which I worked had that sort of device."

Mr. Ford said, "I'm not surprised, miss. The master of the house, the elder son of Mrs. Carnegie, always secures the latest inventions for his home, as you can probably see from all these contraptions. Not every house has an enunciator."

I tried to remember what sort of calling system Castle Martyn used. "Most of the homes I'm familiar with had the more traditional system with bells."

Mrs. Seeley's eyes were still narrowed, but she seemed willing to accept my explanation. For now. "Mr. Ford, our appointment with Mrs. Carnegie was set for two o'clock. It is now ten minutes past that time, and I would hate for her to think that we arrived late. You know how she values punctuality. Do you think we might wait in the front hallway so she knows we are here? Even if she isn't ready to see us?"

"I prepared tea and cakes for Mrs. Carnegie and her guests and had them delivered over an hour ago, so I'm guessing the afternoon calling hour is coming to a close. I don't see the harm in waiting in the front hall, but you should check with Mr. Holyrod. My domain only extends so far as these kitchen walls."

A man with a meticulously groomed beard and gray-streaked hair strode into the kitchen. He was dressed in a black suit with knife-edge pressed pants and looked so officious, I assumed he was the gentleman of the house. I curtsied to him, but he continued walking toward Mrs. Seeley as if he could not see me.

"Ah, Mrs. Seeley. You've arrived. Mrs. Carnegie is still in the parlor. The guests are gone, but she is speaking with her elder son. You and your candidate may wait in the main entryway for her to finish."

From his words, I knew he wasn't the master of the house but the butler, Mr. Holyrod.

Without waiting for our response, he pivoted, leading us from the kitchen through a back hallway with a small sink and wall of hooks into a grand entryway. As the decor grew more elaborate—the molding changing from simple blond pine to intricately carved mahogany and the window glass shifting from clear to stained glass in vivid patterns of cobalt blue, persimmon, and citrine—the air grew colder. It was as if all the warmth of the house abided in the kitchen.

We stood underneath a gleaming crystal chandelier hung from the high ceiling, which was painted with fanciful swirls of gold. Portraits of ladies and gentlemen in gilt frames hung on the red-damask-covered walls. Turkish carpets in carmine and a marble fireplace completed the scene, ensuring that the Carnegies' guests would wait for their hosts in the utmost comfort. I'd never seen anything like this cocoon of luxury, in which everything was so new, I could almost smell the paint on the walls.

Voices rumbled from a room so red in decor that it smoldered like a fire even from my limited vantage point in the entryway. Mrs. Seeley

took note of the noise and moved closer to the room. Loud laughter punctuated the silence in the entryway.

“Ah, Mother,” a man said. His voice had a lilt that I couldn’t quite place. “No one makes me laugh the way you do. The blunt way in which you assess my business colleagues never fails to surprise.”

“Andra, someone must take the frank measure of the men with whom you enter into ventures. After all, it is on behalf of all three Carnegies that you operate. Tom Miller, those Kloman brothers, young Harry Phipps, and that iron business you are thinking of forming together need a proper vetting.” A clock chimed the quarter hour. “Oh dear, look at the time. That overbearing Mrs. Seeley will be here with her latest chattel—another lady’s maid. Let’s hope she doesn’t think she can pass off another lump of coal as a diamond.”

The man laughed again, a good-natured chuckle. “Now, Mother, be kind. It isn’t Mrs. Seeley’s fault that no one can meet your standards.”

She chortled back. “Andra, you think all ducks are swans.”

A bell rang out, and Mr. Holyrod invited us to enter the parlor. As we passed into its ruby opulence, I saw the shadow of a man leaving the room.