

# TROLLEY DAYS

by Robert T. McMaster



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U.S.A.

**Trolley Days**

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**Cover design by Benjamin Christopher Martins**

*Dedicated to*

*Robert W. McMaster,*

*my father,*

*who inspired me with his memories of*

*the days of trolleys*



## CHAPTER 1

### **Two Storms**

*November 1916*

Jack Bernard had lived in Westfield most of his life and he felt he knew his town as well as anyone. Every neighborhood, every street, nearly every building brought back memories of his childhood: the imposing brick edifice of St. Agnes Church where his family attended Mass each Sunday; Aucoin's Market on Main Street with its green and white awnings where he and his mother shopped for groceries; and LeClaire's Newsstand where he browsed the latest issues of *Boys' Life* and *St. Nicholas Magazine*.

Almost as familiar were the fields and woods north and west of town: the Dunham Farm on Russell Road where Jack worked on the tobacco harvest one summer; the angular ledges of Mount Tekoa he climbed to watch the Boston and Albany train descending from the Berkshires, its shrill whistle echoing off the rock faces; and the bend in the river where he and Tom Wellington swam on a sweltering August day, the late afternoon sun turning the water to shimmering gold, back when he and Tom were best friends.

But on this ashen November afternoon, those days were only distant, shining memories. A chill wind was blowing out of the northwest, snow was just beginning to fall, and the streets of Westfield were already nearly empty as families withdrew to the comfort of their fireplaces, coal stoves, and down comforters.

Jack once loved days like this, nestled at home with his parents and sisters by the light and warmth of the fire. Their house was small, but it was well-protected from the frigid

winds of winter, tucked against a dense row of hemlocks on the north side of town. Behind the house stood a barn and several sheds; beyond was the vegetable garden, its narrow rows of black earth nearly converging in the distance. In early mornings he often paused to gaze across those fields, listening for the sounds of a new day: the raucous cawing of crows, the resonant clip-clop of the muscular draft horses pulling the ice wagon up Southampton Road.

The Bernard farmhouse had white clapboards on the front, weathered cedar shingles on the sides and rear. To the left of the front door was a small parlor with a fieldstone fireplace; to the right a dining room barely large enough for a table and six chairs. At the rear was a kitchen with a soapstone sink, hand pump, and cast iron cooking stove with shining chrome trim that burned wood or coal. A wooden ice box stood against the rear wall next to a Hoosier cabinet where his mother prepared bread for baking. Bathing was done in the kitchen in a large tin set tub filled with boiling water from the stove, adjusted for comfort with cold well water. The small toilet attached to the rear of the house was a recent and very welcome addition.

A narrow hallway connected the kitchen with a bedroom shared by Jack's sisters. Off the hallway was a tiny windowless alcove with a gate-legged mahogany table and cushioned kneeling stool. A white lace runner covered the table; it was tatted by Jack's *mémère* in Québec almost half a century earlier. Neatly arranged on the runner were two votive candles in red crystal bowls, a family bible, and six strings of rosary beads laid neatly side-by-side. Centered on the wall above the table was a crucifix framed by hand-colored portraits of St. John and the Blessed Virgin. This was the Bernard family shrine.

A steep flight of stairs rose from the parlor to the second floor and two tiny bedrooms with slanted ceilings and small windows. Jack's bedroom, on the left, had a single window that looked out on the back lawn and gardens. On the

opposite side was his parents' bedroom with two windows, one facing the rear, one overlooking the row of hemlocks.

On wintry days like these when they were very young, Jack's sisters, Marie, Thérèse, and Claire, would sit on their mother's lap, listening enraptured as their father read to them. Jack sometimes listened, but often he would be reading with the aid of an oil lamp, or just gazing into the flames, lost in his thoughts. From time to time the children coaxed their father into telling them about life in Québec, before he met their mother, before Jack was born. It was a hard life, Charles Bernard would say; winters were long and cold, but families, friends, and neighbors helped each other to make it through until spring. "Family, friends, faith, those were the pillars of life in Québec," he repeated again and again.

Jack wanted nothing more than to be home in the embrace of his family on this cold November day. Of course, it wasn't the same anymore. Marie and Claire were now fifteen and twelve; their dear sister Thérèse was gone, lost to diphtheria at the tender age of four. Their mother had died of influenza just a year-and-a-half ago, when Jack was sixteen. Even today bitter tears stung his eyes at the memory of that March day when Evelynne Bernard breathed her last and gave up her spirit to God.

The happy, innocent days of Jack's youth were gone and in his heart he knew that was so. But knowing that didn't prevent him from wishing otherwise. Still today he loved to be with his family. When his father wasn't feeling well, which was often, Jack felt like the head of the household, and it gave him strength and a sense of purpose that he needed right now. Even at his young age, he had lost too many who were dear to him, and his heart ached to the very core at the thought of them.

As Jack made his way along Elm Street, the broad intersection known as the Trolley Centre at Park Square came dimly into view. But the approaching blizzard was not the only storm he was struggling with that day. Another battle

raged within. On one side was his family, at home, by the fire, calling him back. On the other was a sense of duty and friendship that propelled him forward, and duty and friendship were things that Jack Bernard took very seriously.

The trolley stop was empty and Jack stood alone for several minutes until a figure approached out of the swirling snow. It was Mr. Bowen, an old friend of his father and dispatcher for the Springfield Street Railway Company. He was shorter than Jack with a round face, ruddy complexion, and ready smile.

"Jack? Jack Bernard? Is that you? What in heaven's name are you doing out in this weather? There's a blizzard comin', my boy, you should be home with your dad and sisters, shouldn't you?"

"I have to go to Boston, Mr. Bowen, on an errand," replied Jack haltingly.

"Boston? Are you mad, son? It'll take you forever. Can't it wait a few days?" he asked, a smile of both affection and concern spreading across his face.

"No, it can't," replied Jack emphatically. "Are the cars still running?" he asked, referring to the trolley line that ran along Western Avenue from Huntington to Westfield and all the way into Springfield.

"There's one more car coming from the mill in Russell...that's it for today...and probably for several days until the snow ends and they can get the tracks plowed. Better go home, son, and wait out the storm, don't ya think?"

"But I have to get to Boston," repeated Jack, "It's about a...a friend."

Mr. Bowen looked intently into Jack's face, as if trying to discern a possible motivation for the young man's ill-conceived venture. He took Jack's arm, leaned in and spoke softly, his words barely audible above the wind: "That must be a real good friend, my boy, a real good friend. Godspeed to you, son." He turned and walked away, the swirling snow quickly engulfing him.

The wait for the last trolley was long and cold, but at last a single headlamp appeared through the driving snow, sparks flew from the wires overhead, and a clanging bell announced the car's arrival as it shuddered to a stop. The battered wooden door squealed as it slid open and half a dozen riders disembarked, probably workers from the paper mill in Russell who had finished their shift and were headed home.

Jack boarded the car, dropped a nickel into the coin box, and chose a seat at the rear as the trolley lurched forward. He would have been more comfortable sitting up front next to the electric heater, but he was the only passenger and he did not wish to be drawn into conversation with the motorman; he had too much on his mind right now.

The ride to Springfield, normally only forty-five minutes, took well over an hour. By now the snow was accumulating rapidly. At every switch the motorman halted the car and climbed down to inspect the rails to be sure it could pass safely. Finally, it pulled up to the curb on Main Street in Springfield.

"All off, this is the end of the line," announced the motorman loudly to his solitary passenger. "Next stop's the car barn." As the rickety door opened before him, Jack climbed down the two stairs and stepped onto the street.

Springfield looked as deserted as Westfield as he ascended the wide stone stairway to the railroad station two flights above. The station was an imposing stone structure, dark and cavernous within. Jack's steps echoed off the walls and ceiling as he strode resolutely to the ticket window. "One ticket for Boston, please," he said to the clerk at the window.

"The trains are running behind due to the weather, son. It could be hours before the next train for Boston arrives," responded the clerk.

"That's okay," replied Jack, and he produced two dollars and fifty cents, practically his life savings at that moment. He grasped the ticket tightly in his fingers and sat on a worn oak

bench next to a coal stove in one corner of the waiting room. Half a dozen other would-be travelers were seated in silence around the same stove. He dug into his rucksack and drew out a book.

Jack sat awkwardly on the hard, narrow bench, trying to read. He was almost six feet tall, remarkable considering his parents were both quite short. His nose and chin were angular, but the blue-gray of his eyes softened his face. His brown hair still showed some lighter streaks that appeared after working all summer long in the family's vegetable gardens. His smile could be infectious, lighting up the hearts of all around him, but he was in no mood to smile right now.

An hour went by with no sign of the train from Albany. Several of the other parties in the waiting room had drifted off, deciding to return home and postpone their travel plans to another day. Jack shifted his position on the hard bench, staring vacantly toward the vaulted ceiling. His reveries were suddenly interrupted by a loud voice from the ticket window. The train for Boston had just left Albany. With luck it might arrive in Springfield in two hours. He looked at his watch; it was almost midnight. He turned the watch over in his hand, his eyes glistening as he read the inscription on the back. He slumped against the armrest of the wooden bench and fell into a restless sleep.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when at last a loud voice announced the arrival of the train from Albany. Jack and the few other remaining travelers rose from their seats, hoisted their bags, and exited through large swinging doors onto the platform. There was plenty of room on the train and Jack fell into the first empty seat and slumped against the window, half awake and half asleep, his head filled with memories of him and Tom in happier times.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Lessons Learned**

*1904 - 1911*

Jack was six years old and about to enter grade one at St. Agnes School in Westfield. Sister Marie greeted him and his mother brightly that first morning. She did her best to console Jack as his mother kissed him and departed. He whimpered a little, as he recalled, but quickly became distracted by his classmates and soon was happily occupied with crayons, a big sheet of drawing paper, and a story read by his teacher.

Most of the nuns of St. Agnes were warm and motherly. Sister Suzanne, his grade two teacher, was French-Canadian, and that made Jack feel especially at home. Some of his classmates were also from Québec; several had arrived in Westfield only lately and spoke little English. Others were Irish or Italian, and there were even a few from Lithuania, their faces and mannerisms reflections of another world. Mother Superior, from Montréal, was a stern matriarchal figure and the children avoided her whenever possible for fear she would find some fault in their character and exact a harsh punishment.

Father Lévesque, the pastor of St. Agnes Church, was a frequent visitor to Jack's classes. He was nearly sixty and the lines and wrinkles in his face bore witness to a long career spent ministering to his flock, sharing their joys, bearing their sorrows. He walked with a slight stoop as if carrying the accumulated burdens of his parishioners, his hands clasped behind his back. He had a shock of steel gray hair that was often too long; the sisters in the rectory had to speak to him

from time to time to remind him when he was overdue for a trip to the barber.

Whenever Father Lévesque entered the classroom, a hush fell over even the most boisterous students. He would walk down the narrow aisles between the desks, looking at the students' work, complimenting often, reprimanding only occasionally and gently. Before departing he would lead the class in prayer or deliver a short lesson. A frequent topic was sin, a matter he believed was important to children of all ages, and Jack recalled especially Father's words about venial sins and mortal sins. Venial sins were small infractions of God's laws that did little harm and only temporarily damaged our relationship with Him - "little white lies," for example. Mortal sins such as stealing or killing, these were quite another matter, explained Father, his voice dropping, for they separated us from God and his love.

Jack also recalled Father's explanation of "bearing false witness." The words meant little to him as a ten-year-old, but they took on new meaning today as he thought about the past year and the walls that come between friends. At the same time he remembered Father's recitation of a line from the Book of Ephesians: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you."

Once in grade four Father Lévesque made a special visit to Jack's class. The father of a classmate had died suddenly while working in the paper mill. The pastor discussed death frankly with the children, answering their questions about the body, the soul, purgatory, and heaven.

"Father, where is heaven...is it up there?" asked one boy, pointing skyward.

Smiling, Father Lévesque reached out, lightly touching the boy's head. "No, my child, heaven is not up there, it is right here among us. When someone we love passes on, we do not really lose him, he remains with us in spirit. We may not see him or hear him, but he is nearby. That is why we must

talk to the departed and pray for them daily. Remember that, my child."

St. Agnes School was small and Jack thought of the other students and the nuns as nearly family. His sisters would eventually enter first grade following him and his mother would become an assistant teacher in afternoon Christian Doctrine classes. So school felt very much like an extension of home for Jack. But even in the comfortable confines of St. Agnes School, Jack felt the sting of prejudice. Some of the older children called him "Jacques," his Christian name which he hated, and they taunted him with strains of *Frère Jacques* when no adult was within earshot. "Canuck" was also used derisively behind his back. While he was a mild-mannered boy, Jack feared the day when that epithet would cause him to lose control and do something he might regret.

Jack attended St. Agnes School for seven years. But during the summer before he would have entered grade eight, he began to suspect that his parents had other plans for their only son. He noticed how their whispered conversations stopped abruptly as he entered the room, or the way they avoided his questions about who would be his grade eight teacher at St. Agnes School. Late one August afternoon they returned from what he had been told was a doctor's appointment. Conversation around the supper table was stilted and he suspected that his parents had something on their minds. After supper Marie and Claire were asked to do the dishes.

"Jack," said his mother gently, "Please come into the parlor. Your father and I want to talk with you." Evelyne Bernard was slight with reddish-brown hair worn in a bun at the back of her head. Her hazel eyes were soft, her nose and lips delicate. Her warm smile and gentle manner won her friends wherever she went. Despite her mild disposition, Evelyne was possessed of a steely determination that her children not suffer the pain and hardship of her own childhood.

“You know how proud we are of you and how we want only the best for our boy,” she began. Jack had a sinking feeling; this sounded like an ominous opening for a conversation he didn’t want to have. “St. Agnes is a wonderful school, and you have done very well. But you are growing up and we want you to have something more than what the nuns of St. Agnes can provide,” she continued in what sounded like a rehearsed speech.

“Son, we’ve enrolled you in grade eight at the Forestdale Grammar School in Holyoke,” explained his father. “It’s a fine school with excellent teachers. And the principal, Mr. Lataille, is a good man. You’ll like him and we know you’ll be happy at Forestdale.”

That was it, “the die is cast,” as his father often said of things that were over, done, and must be accepted. Suddenly Jack’s comfortable world had been turned upside down. “But how will I get to Holyoke? That’s miles away,” Jack protested.

“We’ll take you in the carriage the first day. Then you can ride the trolley. It takes only twenty minutes and you can get off the car right in front of your school,” his father explained.

“You’ll like it, Son, I know you will,” added his mother with her infectious good spirit and optimism. And somehow Jack believed her. He loved riding the trolleys, electric cars that ran on tracks along the main streets of nearly every town. The longer “interurban” routes ran across country from town to town and were used mainly by workers going to the mills along the river in Hadley Falls, Holyoke, Chicopee, and Springfield. Jack’s father had been riding the trolley to and from the mill in Holyoke every day since they bought the farm and moved to Westfield. The idea of traveling to school by trolley with the grownups appealed to Jack and took much of the pain out of leaving behind his friends at St. Agnes.

Forestdale Grammar School presented many new challenges to young Jack that he could not possibly have anticipated. He found himself in a class of forty eighth

graders, many from Holyoke families very different from his own. These were city children with experiences and attitudes that were new to him; that was sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes stimulating, and sometimes unsettling.

One thing that Jack looked forward to at Forestdale was leaving his French-Canadian heritage behind. He would be called Jack; his parents had made a special request about that to Mr. Lataille who was himself French-Canadian. And his teachers respected his wishes. His last name, Bernard, was just ambiguous enough that his classmates might not guess at his true ancestry.

Within a few days one of Jack's classmates, Jeffrey O'Malley, spotted his full name, Jacques Honoré Bernard, on the teacher's attendance list and the whispering began. In the schoolyard during recess, Jeffrey and three of his friends approached Jack. Jeffrey was short, had a round, chubby face, and wore an annoying grin whenever he caught Jack's eye. Jack was bigger but the bully was emboldened by his two friends, Michael Shaughnessy and Dennis Donovan. Michael was tall and skinny with red-brown hair and freckles; his face bore a permanent, malevolent sneer. Dennis was short and stocky with black hair and a vacant expression in his eyes. Michael and Jeffrey, Jack had observed, were troublemakers, always on the lookout for mischief; Dennis was quiet and slow, clearly a follower.

"Look at the frog, *Jacques*, who tries to pretend his name is Jack. We know what you really are, *Jacques*, Frenchy, frog...Canuck," Jeffrey taunted.

Jack's blood was boiling as he approached his accuser and glared balefully at him. "Shut up, O'Malley, or else," said Jack forcefully.

"Yeh? Who's gonna make me?" replied Jeffrey. Just then another classmate who had been watching from a distance approached the boys. He was slightly taller than Jack with dark, wavy hair, and an air of confident self-assurance about him.

"What's going on, Jeffrey?" asked the tall boy. "Something wrong?"

"No, no," said Jeffrey, suddenly smiling. "We were just welcoming Jack here to Forestdale." Turning to Jack, he added, "You're gonna like it here, Jack...one big happy family we are." Jeffrey and his sidekicks quickly turned and disappeared among the children on the playground.

"Don't worry about those guys," the tall boy said to Jack. "They're not worth it."

"Thanks," replied Jack, "I wasn't worried." There was a momentary pause. Then Jack extended his hand. "I'm Jack Bernard."

"Tom Wellington. Glad to know you, Jack," offered Tom, shaking his hand vigorously and smiling.

From that day on, Jack Bernard and Tom Wellington were inseparable. They played catch on the playground every morning before the clanging bell that signaled the start of the school day. They chattered endlessly about baseball and football during recess and lunchtime. Some days after dismissal they walked together down Sargeant Street to High Street.

Holyoke was a thriving commercial and industrial city that teemed with life. Dozens of factories large and small - paper, textile, and specialty mills - stretched along three broad canals close to the river. The roar and clatter of the mills could be heard from miles away. Long freight trains rumbled through the city day and night bringing wood pulp, wool, and other raw materials to the mills, then departing loaded with paper, fabric, and other finished goods.

High Street was the center of Holyoke's shopping district and it was lined with businesses: grocers, butchers, bakers, tailors, clothiers, haberdashers, milliners, hairdressers, druggists, shoeshine shops, department stores, banks, restaurants, bars, theatres, and much more. Trolleys, motorcars, omnibuses, and horse-drawn carriages raced up

and down the streets, bells clanging, horns trumpeting, operators shouting greetings, warnings, and curses at one another. There were no traffic lights and few crosswalks, so pedestrians ventured across the wide thoroughfare at their hazard.

The two friends spent much of their time downtown peering into store windows, browsing newspapers and magazines on the newsstands, or slurping colas at Liggett's Drug Store on Maple Street.

One afternoon the boys stood on the banks of the Connecticut River at Riverside Park. A week of heavy rain had swelled the river well above its normal level. Watching the waters roil and writhe, they pitched stones and pebbles into the swirling eddies.

"You wanna go fishing on Saturday?" Jack asked. "I know a great place at Hampton Ponds that's right on the trolley line. We could meet there."

"I don't know how to fish," admitted Tom. "And I don't have a pole or anything."

"Don't worry, I'll borrow my father's rod. And I'll dig us some worms for bait," added Jack.

They fished at Hampton Ponds that Saturday morning as planned, and thus began a weekly ritual. Jack boarded the trolley in Westfield, Tom boarded a car on the same line in Holyoke, and the two met beside the tracks at pond's edge. Since theirs was not a regular stop, each boy had to remember to ask the motorman to stop at Hampton Ponds. Should one of them forget to do so, he had to leap from the moving trolley, though that was strictly against the rules.

Often the boys caught small perch by the dozens, a few pickerel, and an occasional bass which Jack brought home for his mother to cook in the frying pan for supper. For Jack the best part of those fishing excursions was the endless banter between two good friends on all matters of interest to thirteen-year-old boys. Jack would recount stories he had read in *Boys' Life* or describe shocking photographs of naked African

tribesmen he had seen in *National Geographic Magazine*. He often went on in great detail about the projects he and his father were working on together in the workshop behind the barn: building a chicken coop, repairing an old grandfather clock, installing a pump for the well. The family had a cow, a Guernsey named Angélique, and Tom listened wide-eyed as Jack described the birth of a calf.

Another favorite topic of conversation was sisters. Jack could prattle on and on about Marie and Claire, their silliness, and why girls were like that. But he ended each monologue with "...but they're okay, I guess. They look up to me, you know, 'cause I'm the oldest."

Tom had a sister, too, named Anne. She was a year younger than Tom and in grade seven at Forestdale, so Jack had seen her. Her hair was reddish, cut short in a boyish bob, her cheeks were rosy, her eyes bright green. She shared her brother's poise, cheery disposition, and air of self-possession. Sisters, Tom agreed, were hard to understand. But Jack saw how Tom watched out for Anne in the schoolyard at recess and he could see the genuine affection between the two. Other than that, Tom had little to say about his family life, at least until a Saturday in early October while the two boys were fishing.

"What does your dad do?" asked Jack.

"He works in a mill."

"So does mine, which mill?"

"Wellington Textiles...on Canal Street," replied Tom.

"Holy cow, that's where my dad works," said Jack.

"Maybe your dad knows mine."

"I don't know, maybe," said Tom vaguely.

Suddenly Jack made the connection: "Wait a minute, your name's Wellington. Your dad...is he the owner of Wellington Textiles?"

"Well, he's one of the owners," replied Tom, trying to play down this revelation, "with my Uncle Richard and my grandfather. They run it together."

“Your family must be rich, I’ll bet.” Jack was remembering his father’s uncomplimentary descriptions of the wealthy mill owners.

“Not really,” replied Tom modestly. “It’s not that big a company and business hasn’t been too good the last few years.”

This unexpected development occupied much of Jack’s thoughts for days after their conversation. He liked Tom and admired him. But it surprised him that the son of the owner of Wellington Textiles wanted to be his friend. After all, Jack’s family was of modest means and his father was just one of hundreds of men and women who labored at that very mill. For the first time Jack felt a little embarrassed about his family and his home when he was with Tom. So the subject was not discussed again for several months.

A few weeks later, Tom and Jack walked slowly down Sargeant Street after school carrying book bags. Both boys wore white, loose-fitting cotton shirts and brown woolen knickerbockers tucked into woolen stockings just below the knee and supported by suspenders, Jack’s brown, Tom’s bright red.

Several steps behind the boys walked Anne and her friend, Carolyn Ford, each wearing a colorful gingham pinafore over a white dress. Anne and Carolyn had been classmates at Forestdale Grammar School since grade one. Carolyn was tall with dark skin, black, lustrous hair, and large brown eyes. Her temperament was decidedly saturnine, and one would have thought the two girls an unlikely pair, but Anne’s outlook seemed to bring out the lighter, gayer side of Carolyn. They shared many interests: needlepoint, for one thing, and reading, and music. Both took piano lessons with Miss Sheldon on Maple Street. When the four reached the trolley stop, Jack stopped and turned to Tom. “Well, I guess I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Why don’t you come with us, Jack? Anne and Carolyn are going to piano lessons and I have to wait around and walk them home afterwards. We can go to Whitman’s while we’re waiting.”

Jack promptly agreed and he and Tom set out again, side-by-side, engrossed in talk of fishing, while the girls followed along quietly. In front of Miss Sheldon’s house Anne spoke to her brother. “We’ll be finished in an hour, Tommy. You be back here on time!” She turned and looked pleadingly at Jack: “Remind him, Jack...please?” Then a slight smile crossed her face, she wrinkled her nose, and whispered conspiratorially to Jack: “Sometimes he forgets.”

Jack nodded. “Okay.”

“We’ll be here, Anne, don’t worry about it,” said Tom, abashed and a little irritated.

The two boys headed off. Finding their way to Whitman’s Hardware at the corner of High and Suffolk, they snaked through a maze of narrow aisles to the fishing and hunting supplies. Tom was hoping to get his own fishing gear and Jack wanted to help him choose the very best. They browsed the rods and reels, from simple jig lines to the fanciest fly-fishing gear, trying out each, making feigned casts, reeling in imaginary fish, half shopping and half fantasizing about the next season’s adventures. They pulled on waders and hip boots, laughing at themselves in the floor-length mirrors. They studied with fascination the selection of handmade fishing flies that beautifully mimicked the insects fish were attracted to.

“Tommy, we’d better go, it’s getting late; Anne and Carolyn will be waiting for us,” said Jack with urgency in his voice.

“Okay, okay, just one more minute,” replied Tom vaguely as he examined a display of fancy reels.

Jack went off to find a clock, then returned. “It’s already nearly quarter to five, Tommy, we should go.”

It was almost dark and the boys ran the five blocks to Miss Sheldon's house and knocked on the front door. Miss Sheldon appeared; the girls had already left. They hurried up Hampshire Street, the route the girls would be most likely to follow toward the Wellingtons' home. Just then they heard screams from an alley across the street. They ran as fast as they could in the direction of the voices. As they entered the alley two younger boys came running out into the street; each was carrying something concealed under his jacket. Behind them emerged Anne and Carolyn, both very agitated. Carolyn was crying.

"They stole Carolyn's purse and my bookbag," cried Anne.

"Stay with the girls," Jack ordered Tom, and he sped off after the young ruffians, his legs little more than a blur under the gas streetlamp.

"Jack, be careful," called Anne as he turned into another alley where the two boys had just disappeared. Several minutes went by. Then Jack reappeared carrying Anne's book bag and Carolyn's purse.

"Wow, Jack, you got 'em," shouted Tom with admiration.

"It didn't take much," replied Jack. "As soon as I caught up with 'em they dropped the things and took off. I could've chased after them and given them the thrashin' they deserved, but I figured I'd better bring the girls their things."

Anne and Carolyn were shaken and they huddled together, consoling each other. "Did they hurt you?" inquired Jack.

"No, we're all right," responded Anne.

Jack and Tom carried the girls' book bags as well as their own several blocks up Hampshire Street. At the corner of Hampshire and Cabot they stopped at an iron gate that appeared to be the entrance to the driveway, although large trees blocked the view of the house. "I better be going," said Jack.

"Thanks," replied Tom, looking a little sheepish.

“Thank you, Jack,” added Anne. By now she had calmed down. “As usual Tommy let me down...but you saved the day!”

“It was my fault, too,” replied Jack. “We were both thinking about fishing and just lost track of the time. I don’t have a watch. Well, I gotta get going.”

“See you in school, Jack,” replied Tom.



## CHAPTER 3

### **The Gift**

*December 1911*

The fishing season had ended and winter was approaching. Shorter days meant it was no longer possible for Jack and Tom to spend time together after school or go fishing on weekends. Weeks went by when their only contact outside of class was at recess or during lunch.

One December day amidst the clamor of the Forestdale Grammar School lunchroom, Jack and Tom talked about Christmas and how they hoped to spend their vacation time. Suddenly Tom had an idea: "Hey, Jack, why don't you come and stay at our house for a few days after Christmas? We could go skating and sledding...it would be so much fun. What do you say, Jack?"

Jack was uneasy about the prospect of being away from his family, but he enjoyed Tom's company and pleaded with his parents to permit him a two-day visit in Holyoke after Christmas. Tom's mother wrote a letter of invitation to Jack's mother, who quickly consented. "But you'll have to discuss this with your father," she added.

Jack's father by now knew all about Tom Wellington and the thought of his son spending time with the mill owner's family made him a little uncomfortable. But he also knew how much Jack liked his new friend and how important he had been in Jack's adjustment to his new school, so he agreed.

Christmas at the Bernard home was especially merry that year. For weeks the three children had been busying themselves making gifts for one another and their parents.

Marie secretly worked on knitting projects in her room, hand warmers for her mother, a woolen scarf for her father, a sweater for Claire, mittens for Jack. She helped Claire get started on potholders and an apron for her mother. Meanwhile Jack worked in his father's shop, building a bookshelf for Marie and a dollhouse for Claire. For his parents he had repaired an antique mantle clock and was painting it to match the furnishings in the parlor.

Evelyne and Charles saved all year long so that they could surprise each child with a store-bought gift, an easel for Claire, a dresser with mirror for Marie, steel ice skates for Jack. During the summer, Charles bought and refinished a handsome slant-topped writing table for Evelyne which he had secreted away under a blanket in the hay loft. For her husband Evelyne had purchased a new dress shirt and matching tie at Marshall's Clothiers in Westfield.

Christmas Day for the Bernards began with Mass at St. Agnes followed by the exchange of gifts at home, a feast at mid-day, and a long, leisurely afternoon of singing, games, and story-reading by the fire. But Jack's excitement at his impending visit with Tom was apparent and the family was happy for him.

The next day a horse-drawn carriage pulled up in front of the Bernards' farmhouse at precisely one o'clock and Jack was whisked away with a hearty wave to his family as they stood in the front doorway. A half-hour later the carriage turned from Cabot Street in Holyoke into an open iron gate. As Jack's eye followed the long curve of the driveway, he could not believe what he saw ahead. An imposing white mansion three floors tall loomed above a sweeping, snow-covered lawn. Huge copper beech trees stood at each corner of the house, their graceful, leafless silhouettes contrasting with the formal, rectilinear lines of what was surely one of the largest, finest homes in Holyoke.

As the carriage drew beneath the stately portico at one end of the house, a tall door opened and there stood Tom,

smiling and waving. A maid took Jack's rucksack and Tom led him inside, chattering all the while. Down a broad hallway they walked, Jack's boots clicking on the marble floors that looked like a great checkerboard. Passing through a pair of heavy wooden doors decorated with elaborate carvings, they entered a long parlor with a grand fireplace.

Tom's mother was seated by the fire in an ornate chair with green velvet cushions. She rose to greet him: "Jack Bernard, hello and welcome. I am so happy to meet you," she said warmly, her eyes twinkling. She was a short, stocky woman with chestnut brown hair wrapped in a tight bun atop her head.

Jack found Mrs. Wellington's face and manner warm and reassuring, and he attempted a polite reply: "Thank you, Missus...Ma'am..." As he spoke he looked into her eyes. They seemed puffy, as though she had been crying but was trying very hard to conceal it.

At that moment Anne appeared and smiled demurely. "So good to see you, Jack," she offered, tipping her head coyly to one side. "Did you have a pleasant journey?"

"Eh, yeh, I guess so," Jack mumbled awkwardly in reply. The three children sat before the crackling fire sipping hot cocoa and sugar cookies served on an oval tray by the parlor maid, Margarita, who was dressed in a starched black and white uniform.

"Anne made those cookies especially for your visit, Jack," explained Mrs. Wellington.

"They're delicious," remarked Jack as he reached for a second. Tom and Jack exchanged stories from school and their fall fishing adventures. Mrs. Wellington listened with obvious pleasure, but Jack could see her eyes glistening in the fire's light.

As they talked, Jack looked around the large, elegantly furnished room. His gaze fell on the three Christmas stockings hung from the mantle above the fireplace. Each was hand-stitched and beautifully decorated with a different letter, "A,"

"T," and "M." This struck him as curious; there were, after all, only the two Wellington children, Tom and Anne, so far as he knew. When he realized that Tom had seen the perplexed look on his face, he quickly averted his eyes and changed the subject. "So, d'you think we could go skating?" asked Jack. "I brought my new skates that I got for Christmas."

"Let's go after supper this very night," Tom replied quickly. "Anne, Mother, you and me, we can all go to the pond at Highland Park. We'll bring oil lamps and blankets. May we, Mother, please?"

Skating at night was thrilling despite the cold air, and the three young people and Mrs. Wellington skated for over an hour. One of the servants waited on the shore with blankets should anyone get chilled. Eventually Mrs. Wellington tired, removed her skates, and stood watching, a blanket draped over her shoulders. The children played "crack the whip" with several other youngsters from the neighborhood to the amusement of all.

By the time they got home, the three children were exhausted and ready for bed. Tom and Jack shared a huge four-poster bed in a guest room on the second floor with a veritable mountain of quilts and comforters to keep them warm. One of the maids had placed a shiny brass bed warmer under the covers so the sheets were warm and inviting. A small fire crackled in the fireplace.

The two boys lay in bed staring up at the high ceiling, their cheeks still burning from the chill night air. "I'm sorry Father was not able to join us for supper or skating, he had to work late," explained Tom. "Perhaps he will have breakfast with us." There was a long pause.

"Tom," said Jack hesitantly. "I noticed the Christmas stockings over the fireplace, one for you and one for Anne. Who was the third one for? Who is 'M'?"

For the first time since he had known Tom, Jack sensed a crack in his friend's composure. The boy who was always so well-spoken and sure of himself was speechless and there was

another very long pause. Finally Tom spoke: "'M' is for Matthew, my older brother." He hesitated again. "He...he died the summer before last. He and some friends were swimming in the quarry up on West Mountain and...he...had an accident."

Jack turned and looked at Tom's face, barely visible in the light of the fire. His eyes were wet and Jack thought he saw a single tear roll down his cheek. "I'm sorry," said Jack, "I shouldn't have asked. It's none of my business."

"No, Jack, don't apologize. I should have told you before. I didn't know how to say it," admitted Tom.

"Do you miss him?" asked Jack softly.

Tom nodded, his lower lip quivered, but no words came out. Soon both boys were fast asleep.

The next day was sunny and not too cold for December. The boys spent the morning sledding on a steep hillside at Lincoln Street Park. No more was said about their discussion of the previous evening. Anne and Carolyn rode a small toboggan down a much gentler slope nearby, shrieking with glee as they descended. They finally coaxed the boys to climb aboard, but the load was unstable and the ride ended abruptly as the toboggan tipped and one by one they fell into the snow, laughing hysterically despite their tumbles.

After lunch the carriage pulled up to the portico and Jack prepared to leave. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Wellington. I had a wonderful time," said Jack with words he had carefully prepared in advance.

"We enjoyed your visit so much, you'll never know," she replied. "Please come again."

Just then Anne appeared with a small package wrapped in silver paper and tied with a bright red bow. "Happy New Year, Jack," she said brightly with a sparkle in her eye that he could not miss.

"Eh, happy New Year, too...I mean...to you, too," said Jack.

"This is for you," said Anne. She paused, then added, "from all of us," as she handed him the gift. Jack stared at the beautiful bundle in his hand.

"Go ahead," said Tom, "open it. But read the card first."

Jack opened the crisp, beige envelope and removed a folded card with a gilded border. Anne had written in beautiful, studied script: "To our dear friend, Jack, with warmest regards, The Wellingtons".

Jack smiled, not knowing what to expect next. He pulled the ribbons apart and carefully removed the paper to reveal a small, felt-covered box with a hinged lid. He lifted the lid and gazed in disbelief at his gift. It was a silver watch with a glistening glass crystal. Beneath the glass were two small, elegantly curved black hands. The hours were inscribed in Roman numerals on the watch face. Attached to the watch was a handsome leather band, a fob, that allowed the watch to hang from a belt loop as was the fashion for well-dressed men. Jack was speechless.

"Look at the back," said Anne cheerily. On the reverse was a delicately engraved inscription. Jack read it aloud: "Jack Bernard, Christmas, 1911".

This was a gift beyond Jack's wildest dreams and he stood, staring at it, genuinely at a loss for words. He had never owned a watch. Even his father had only the watch his *pépère* had given him when he turned sixteen.

Finally Jack spoke. "Thank you, thank you very much...this is a handsome watch. I'll take good care of it, I promise." Still struggling to make sense of the gift, Jack said his final thank-yous and goodbyes.

"Please come again," said Anne sweetly.

Tom accompanied Jack on the carriage ride back to Westfield. Their conversation was about sledding and skating and ice fishing. When they drew up before the Bernards' farmhouse, Jack climbed out, thanked Tom briefly, and said he'd see him in school in a few days. He ran toward his front door as the carriage pulled away.

## CHAPTER 4

### Clara

*January 1912*

**H**elen Cooke was the eldest of four children. Her father was an accountant whose clients included the owners and executives of many of the largest mills in South Hadley Falls and Holyoke; her mother taught kindergarten before marrying and raising a family. They lived in a small home on a quiet side street in South Hadley, just across the river from Holyoke.

The birth of the Cookes' last child was difficult and Helen's mother's health was severely compromised. By age twelve Helen was managing much of the work of raising her three younger siblings including cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry. She left school for several years, only returning when the youngest of the family was of school age. Helen had an aptitude for the domestic arts and, rather than begrudge her lot, she embraced the opportunity to be of assistance to her family. Eventually she returned to school, received her high school diploma, and attended Worcester Normal School for two years, hoping to follow in her mother's footsteps and pursue a career as a teacher. Her career plans were never realized, however.

Helen met Thomas Wellington and married him in 1895. The Wellington family's mill was already well established and successful, and shortly after their marriage the couple moved into the imposing home on Cabot Street in Holyoke where they would raise their children, Matthew, Thomas the Third, and Anne. Helen's life changed dramatically as she was swept up in the social circle of Holyoke's most prominent families,

but she never forgot her roots. She was determined not to become too intoxicated by the world of wealth and status in which she found herself.

Perhaps it was Helen's experience caring for her younger siblings that made her a particularly good mother. She never allowed the luxury of the family's life to come between her and her children. She exuded warmth and genuinely enjoyed the company of her three little ones. Her husband was also very fond of his children, but with the constant pressures of a large and successful business on his shoulders he seldom found much time to devote to them.

Just managing the Wellington household staff was a full-time job. Fortunately Helen had Hanna O'Toole, her head housekeeper, who oversaw the smooth operation of the house. Hanna had held that position for most of the Wellingtons' married life and so was regarded as a permanent fixture by the rest of the staff, all of whom deferred to her more or less willingly. She supervised the entire female staff including maids, waitresses, and laundresses. Mildred, the cook, supposedly reported directly to Mrs. Wellington, but Hanna did not hesitate to exercise her seniority over her from time to time, much to Mildred's dismay. As to the male staff, there was Mr. Bromley, the chauffeur, and Patrick O'Toole, Hanna's husband, the head gardener. Bromley worked for Mr. Wellington; officially Patrick reported to Mrs. Wellington, but Hanna managed to keep very close tabs on his comings and goings, and felt free to redirect his efforts whenever necessary.

One of the effects of the rapid growth of Holyoke was the influx of women from around the region and from Canada seeking employment in the mills. Some found success and happiness in the city, but others did not fare as well. Substandard housing, poor nutrition, inadequate health services, and few recreational opportunities made their lives very difficult, particularly for those of limited means. Recognizing these problems, a group of Holyoke's most prominent women, including Helen Wellington, opened a

social center for young women on Maple Street in Holyoke in 1898. The Holyoke Women's Home provided temporary accommodations for women, meals, assistance in finding permanent lodging and work, as well as a variety of health and recreational services.

This project was a considerable challenge for the center's founders, and raising the funds for such an ambitious undertaking was not the greatest of those challenges. Some members of their social circle questioned whether the Women's Home was a necessary or appropriate endeavor for the city's most prominent women. Some felt these social problems were being exaggerated in a way that reflected poorly on Holyoke; others had doubts that these young women truly needed or deserved help. The project quickly gained momentum, however, thanks in part to the generosity of the founding members and their spouses, but also in large measure to the sheer determination of the founders.

Although Anne grew up in a home with a large staff to tend to her every need, she nevertheless developed many of the skills her mother had learned at a young age. She was a talented knitter and quilter, and she took considerable pleasure in cooking and baking, skills that she honed with the able instruction of Mildred, the Wellingtons' cook of many years.

By the time Anne was a young teenager, she too had been drawn into the work of the Women's Home. Anne knew that Carolyn's mother was director of the Women's Home, but beyond that she knew little about Carolyn's family life. She was surprised to learn that Carolyn's last name was different from her mother's. Once when she inquired about the apparent contradiction to her own mother, her question was tactfully fended off.

The Holyoke Women's Home was an austere brick structure on Maple Street in downtown Holyoke. Wide stone steps led up to the main entrance, a pair of heavy wooden

doors that opened into a dark, sparsely furnished foyer. To the left was a small office cluttered with papers, forms, and the like. To the right an arched doorway opened into a large front room that stretched the width of the building and served as a communal living room for the residents. It was furnished with many mismatched upholstered couches and chairs. Shelves on either side of the tall front windows held books, playing cards, and board games like checkers and Parcheesi. Two swinging doors at the rear of the living room led to a large dining room. A narrow stairway off the foyer led to the upper floors where the residents lived. Rooms were small, each with a single bed, bureau, and desk. A few larger rooms were available for women with children. Every floor had two bathrooms, one at each end of the long, central hallway. No accommodations were provided for men.

Meals were prepared in a cramped kitchen at the rear of the first floor. The forty or so women who lived at the Home received breakfast and supper seven days a week prepared by a kitchen staff of five; the residents were required to take turns assisting with meal preparation and dishwashing several times each week.

On Saturday evenings the Home offered a community supper to any Holyoke resident needing a hot meal. These were popular; in winter the turnout sometimes approached two hundred guests. On these occasions additional tables and chairs were set up in the dining room and a dozen or more volunteers were recruited to assist.

Among the enthusiastic volunteers on this January evening were Anne, Carolyn, Tom, and Jack, who had been invited to stay the night at the Wellingtons' home. The four young people had been assigned to set places in the dining room. The boys pushed two wheeled carts of dishes and utensils up and down the rows of tables. At each place Carolyn carefully positioned one dinner plate, a soup bowl, and a small bread dish. Anne would set out the utensils, two spoons and a knife to the right of the plate, a fork to the left.

She would then place a linen napkin precisely in the center of the plate and the four would move along to the next position. It took them nearly an hour, but they completed setting all two hundred places with the same attention to detail. The boys then pushed the carts back into the kitchen where a member of the staff enlisted their assistance in loading additional utensils onto the carts for dessert and coffee.

"Follow me," whispered Carolyn. "I'll show you the upstairs." She led Anne up a flight of steep, narrow stairs at the back of the kitchen that led to the second floor. Stepping through an open door they found themselves at the end of a long, unadorned corridor lit by a single electric bulb that hung from a wire just above their heads. They walked slowly down the hallway, passing a dozen closed doors. Near the end, one door was slightly ajar, a thin shaft of light slicing across the hallway.

A small voice came from the room: "Ellen, is that you?" The girls stood frozen, not knowing what to do or say. "Ellen?" the voice repeated. Through the narrow opening they could just see the face of a girl of perhaps sixteen seated on the edge of a bed. Carolyn pushed the door open and the two peered into the tiny room. The girl's skin was pale, almost white, her features soft, a look of quiet sadness poised in her eyes. Her hair was tied tightly in a bun at the back of her head, making her neck appear very thin and long. She wore a plain muslin jumper that hung from her shoulders nearly to the floor, barely revealing a pair of gray house slippers.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she spoke softly, "I thought you were Ellen. She was gonna bring me some tea."

"No, I'm Carolyn. I just saw Ellen in the kitchen." Then she paused, looking at the thin wisp of a girl seated before her. "But I'll go down and see if I can bring up your tea, okay?" With a glance she hinted to Anne to stay with the girl, then disappeared down the dark hallway.

"Hello, I'm Anne. What's your name?"

"Clara."

"Are you coming downstairs for supper, Clara?" asked Anne brightly. "They are serving New England boiled dinner tonight; I'm sure it will be swell - corned beef, cabbage, carrots, and Indian pudding for dessert."

"I don't think I'd better," replied Clara, her eyes on the floor in front of her. "I ain't feeling too good this evening."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Perhaps we could bring your supper up to your room? Even if you can only eat a little, you'll need to have something."

Clara shook her head and smiled briefly: "My appetite's not too good right now. But thank you jus' the same." There was an awkward pause, then she continued: "I ain't seen you girls before, did you just come to Holyoke?"

"No, we're just helping with supper tonight," explained Anne. "Carolyn's mother is Mrs. Calcagni, the Director. And my mother is on the board."

Clara nodded slowly, her eyes lifting only briefly to examine the pretty face that was beaming at her. Just then Carolyn appeared with a tray holding a cup of tea and a small glass. "I thought you might like some milk in your tea."

"I better not, but thank you anyway," answered Clara. Carolyn placed the tray on the bureau, then handed the cup to the girl. The two watched as Clara slowly sipped the tea.

"Thank you...I can't climb the stairs too good these days."

"Where did you live before you came to Holyoke?" asked Anne.

"North Brookfield. I came to Holyoke last year to work in the silk mill. But I lost my job and my parents won't let me move back with them. So here I am. I guess I'm lucky, though, you know, to have a place to stay."

"Don't worry," offered Anne enthusiastically. "There are plenty of jobs for girls in the mills these days. You'll find something soon."

"I don't think so; I'm gonna be pretty busy." As Clara spoke those words, her eyes dropped and one hand came to rest gently on her mid-section. She turned to place her teacup

on the tray atop the bureau. In the half-light Anne could discern the bulging belly of the thin girl. Clara looked up into Anne's eyes: "I'm gonna have a baby."

Anne paused just a moment, taking in this new information, then spoke gently: "Your husband, does he have a job?"

Clara shook her head once. "I'm all alone," she replied, staring blankly at the wall.

Just then Mrs. Calcagni's voice could be heard from the back stairway. "Carolyn, where are you? You and Anne are needed in the kitchen this minute. Get down here now."

"We'd better go," Carolyn said hurriedly.

"We'll come and visit you again, Clara," added Anne.

Anne, Carolyn, Tom, and Jack were very busy for the next two hours. Guests streamed into the dining room and were quickly seated. Women circulated among them serving the boiled dinner. The girls were responsible for distributing hot beverages and they were on their feet constantly, one with a pot of tea, the other with a carafe of coffee, filling and refilling cups for the diners. The boys carried pitchers of water and milk. After supper all four helped with serving dessert and more beverages. As the guests stood up to leave, they carried their dishes and utensils to the back of the room and deposited them on a long counter. The four young volunteers stacked the dishes and carried them back into the kitchen for washing.

It was nearly nine o'clock before all the dishes were done. Mrs. Wellington spoke to Anne, Tom, and Jack. "We'd better get you home. You must be exhausted."

Anne whispered to Carolyn. "We have to do something for Clara. I'll talk to you in school on Monday."

The normally ebullient Anne was uncharacteristically sober on the short drive home. Her mother concluded that it was due to exhaustion. She entered her daughter's room a few

minutes later to wish her a good night's sleep, but she could see that something was troubling her.

"Mother," began Anne as she lay in bed, "do you know Clara?"

"Clara? At the Home? No, dear, I don't think so. Is she one of the employees?"

"She lives there, Mother, she's a resident. Carolyn and I met her just before supper in her room on the second floor."

"What were you two doing up there, dear?"

"Just looking around, that's all. But she let us into her room and we talked to her for a while."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Wellington, sensing that there was more behind her daughter's question.

"Mother, she's just a girl, only a year or two older than Carolyn and me...maybe sixteen."

"There are some very young girls coming to Holyoke these days to work in the mills. It's not that unusual."

"But Mother..."

"What, Anne, what is it?"

Anne's voice was very soft and her words came slowly, almost as if she was trying to make sense of what she was saying even as she was saying it. "But she's...going to be a mother...and she's all alone."

"Oh, I see. Oh, dear, the poor thing. Well, that's why Holyoke needs a place like the Women's Home, don't you see?"

"But why is she alone, Mother? Shouldn't her husband be taking care of her?"

"Well, honey, she may not have a husband. You know, some men take advantage of young girls and then make themselves scarce. It's a terrible thing to do, but, honey, it happens all the time."

"But she's just a girl...like Carolyn and me. How could this happen?"

“Anne, dear, there are many reasons that girls get in a family way when they didn’t mean to or want to. We’ve talked about this, remember?”

“Yes, Mother.” Anne hesitated, then continued. “But why should she have to go through this alone? If she doesn’t have a husband, what about her parents? She told us her parents don’t want her back home. Why would her parents say that?”

“People can be heartless sometimes, dear. Her parents may feel Clara has brought shame to their family.”

“It doesn’t seem fair, Mother, that she is all alone. It seems so cruel. Doesn’t it?”

Helen kissed her daughter. “Yes, dear, it does...it certainly does seem cruel. Now get some sleep, you’ve earned it.”

The thought of Clara apparently abandoned and alone preoccupied Anne throughout the following day. When she and Carolyn met on the schoolyard on Monday morning, it was the first thing they discussed. “Somebody should do something for Clara,” Anne asserted. “It’s not right, Carolyn, no girl should face what she’s facing alone.”

Carolyn had obviously been troubled by the encounter as well. “I talked to my mother about her. She says the Women’s Home does a lot for girls like her. They give them a place to stay and they help them to find work. She says Clara is lucky to be there.”

Tom and Jack were nearby, but the girls chose not to discuss the subject with them. That evening Anne told her brother about Clara and he eventually told Jack, but the two boys quickly forgot about it. Anne and Carolyn did not.

For the next few weeks Carolyn and Anne spent every free hour after school, evenings, and on weekends, working on their new project. They knitted booties, bonnets, and a sweater, and with their mothers’ assistance, they made a small coverlet with needlepoint, all gifts for Clara and her new baby. They were planning a party in her honor at the Women’s

Home. They visited Clara once about two weeks after their initial encounter just to say hello, but gave no hint of what was to come.

One morning in the Forestdale schoolyard, Anne and Carolyn cornered Jack and Tom. They wanted to enlist Jack's help, knowing that he had some skills with hammer and nails.

"Oh, Jack," Anne began. "Tommy tells me that you and your dad have a workshop where you make things. We wondered if you could make us a cradle, you know, for a baby?" She didn't feel it was necessary to explain what baby she had in mind and was just as happy not to have to go into details.

"I don't know. I think that would be more than I could handle. I'm not that good at that kind of carpentry. My dad, maybe..." replied Jack. Then he had a thought. "I've got an idea, though. Let me talk to my dad tonight."

That evening as Jack was feeding the animals in the barn, his father came in to get some firewood. "Dad, up in the loft there's an old cradle. Maybe it was Claire's...or Thérèse's?"

"And yours and Marie's, too," added his father, nodding.

"We won't be needing it any more, right?"

"I guess not, Jack," replied his father, a smile creeping across his face.

"Could I fix it up, Dad, and give it to someone who needs it?"

Charles thought about that for a moment, then smiled again. "Something you need to tell us about, Son?"

Jack didn't catch his father's little joke. He explained that it was for a needy young mother-to-be at the Women's Home whom Anne and Carolyn wanted to help.

"It's okay by me, Son. You'd need to do some work on it, though. Maybe repair the rockers and put on a fresh coat of paint. Best ask your mother first. It likely has some sentimental value to her, you know, eh?"

Jack's mother was seated by the fireplace darning socks when Jack proposed his plan for the cradle to her. The thought

of giving up the cradle was a little painful to Evelyne, Jack could tell. But when she heard about Anne and Carolyn's project, she quickly consented.

"Thanks, Mom," said Jack, and he turned to head out to the barn to get started. But there was something else on Evelyne's mind.

"Jackie, dear. Before you rush off, come sit down for a moment...please."

Jack sat, but she could tell he was anxious to be off to the workshop. "Tell me more about this mother-to-be, Jackie. How old is she?"

"Eh, sixteen, I think."

"And she's living at the Women's Home? Where is her husband?"

"I don't know. I don't think she's married. Can I go, Mom?" Jack was getting a little uncomfortable at the direction of the inquiry.

"You're going to be fourteen in a few months, Jackie, aren't you?"

"Yes, Mom."

"And of course you know all a young man needs to know, don't you? I mean, about babies...and things?"

"Yes, Mom. I helped you and Dad deliver Angélique's calf, remember?"

"Yes, I do, that was quite something, wasn't it?" she recalled with a smile and a twinkle in her eye.

Jack grinned, a little embarrassed as he remembered nearly fainting when the calf's head first appeared. But he had recovered just in time to assist by pulling on the rope wrapped around the calf's front hooves.

"But, Jackie, there's more for a young man to know than just where babies come from. Important things, like what it means to be a husband...and a father. And when..."

"Mom, I know all that stuff, really, I do. Can I go now?"

"Okay, Jackie. But I want you to promise me that you'll talk about these things with your father...and soon, eh? He's

not likely to bring it up, so I'm depending on you to ask. Will you promise me that you will do that?"

"Yes, Mom, I promise." At that moment Jack would have said almost anything to get away from his mother.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Two Worlds**

*February 1912*

Fishing was Jack's favorite pastime. He liked baseball and he enjoyed reading, but fishing was more to him than just a sport or a hobby. There was something about fishing that drew him in and held him in its thrall. Standing on the banks of Hampton Ponds, rod in hand, gazing across the still waters, knowing that at any moment his bobber could spring to life and his reel spin wildly, that was thrilling. At the same time, the dark, unseen depths and the mysteries they held provided rich nourishment for his young imagination.

Fishing through ice had its own special allure. Maybe it was the sharp, smooth line between the known world of light, sound, and sentient beings above and the dark, unknowable depths below. Or maybe it was the way thick ice boomed like thunder rolling across a lake. Jack's father assured him this was due to expansion and contraction and nothing to worry about, but the sound nevertheless stirred something deep inside him no matter how many times he heard it.

On a blustery Saturday morning in February, Jack and his father were preparing for a day of ice fishing at Hampton Ponds. They hauled all their gear on a battered old toboggan: tip-ups, bait, tackle, ax, shovel, pails, ladle, strainer, toolbox, blankets, kindling, and lunch. On the pond's edge they built a fire. As they tended the fire they could see Tom making his way across the ice from the eastern shore where the trolley had deposited him. Tom had become a capable fisherman under Jack's tutelage the previous fall, but he would quickly

realize that there was much more to learn about fishing through ice.

After greetings and sips of hot cocoa prepared by Jack's mother and kept warm in an insulated thermos bottle, the trio set out across the ice to cut holes and set their tip-ups. First the boys cleared snow from a small patch of ice. Then Charles, carefully and skillfully wielding the ax, sculpted a neat hole in the ice until greenish water gushed up from below. In each hole the boys placed a tip-up, a reel of heavy line with a baited hook secured to the end of a foot-long vertical strap of wood. Two horizontal wooden supports lay on the ice, attached at right angles to the vertical strap. One end of a long metal spring was secured to the top of the tip-up, the other end to a wire loop below that was connected to the submerged reel. A small square flag of red cloth hung from the loop end of the spring so that a sharp pull on the line released the spring, causing the red flag to pop up when a fish had been hooked.

The three anglers cut a dozen or so holes, some in the deep center of the pond, some in the shallows on the west side where, according to Charles, the biggest fish lurked among submerged tree trunks and rocks. When all their tip-ups were in place, they retreated to the warmth of the fire, standing with eyes trained across the ice. The instant a flag popped up, the two boys were off like jackrabbits across the ice. They would lift up the tip-up, then reel in the line and, with luck, their catch.

Tending their tip-ups kept Jack and Tom busy for the next few hours. Most of their catch was small perch or pickerel. Jack would quickly remove the hook and drop the fish back into the water. But they also landed several larger bass and one foot-long pickerel. After lunch the pace slackened considerably and the two boys began to get restless.

"Come with me, Tom," said Jack at one point when there had been a long lull. And the two headed off across the ice toward the shallow western side of the pond. Jack led his friend into a small cove, then off the ice and into the forest.

Heavy rain in the fall had left pools of water in hollows among the trees. Jack fell to his knees and began pushing aside the snow, exposing an oval patch of ice no more than a foot in diameter. The two boys lay on their stomachs in the snow, peering through the thin, dark ice filled with air bubbles of many sizes suspended at different depths. Seen from above, the bubbles looked like stars in the night sky, each reflecting bluish and greenish light to the eye.

"Wow, Jack, I can't believe it, it's like a whole universe down there!" exclaimed Tom.

"Keep watching," added Jack, "there's more." Suddenly, the boys could see movement; a dark, undefined object was writhing in the water below the ice. It disappeared briefly, then reappeared closer to the ice and clearly visible. It was a tadpole or "polliwog" as Jack called it, and it was swimming in gentle arcs in the icy water. It was feeding on small submerged green plants, apparently perfectly content just inches from the bitter cold above.

"It's alive," cried Tom, "how can it be alive in that cold water? It doesn't seem natural. Jack, how did you ever find this?"

The two boys lay on the snow for a long while, peering down through the greenish-black ice. They eventually discerned two more polliwogs and lots of tiny, transparent creatures that were swimming around the polliwogs.

"It's like a secret world down there, Jack," exclaimed Tom over and over, "and only you and I know about it! It's like magic! I wonder if the polliwogs can see us...or hear us."

About then they heard Jack's father calling them. They carefully replaced the snow over the patch of ice, emerged from the woods, and crossed the pond. Snow and sleet had been falling all day. Charles had not seen a trolley pass in several hours and he knew what that meant. The Westfield to Holyoke car line was prone to disruptions during winter storms. Without the trolley Tom would have no way of getting back to Holyoke that day.

"I'm afraid the trolley line is shut down because of the snow, Tom. Why don't you come home with us and spend the night?" offered Charles. "We'll call your parents from the neighbors and tell them you're safe and sound."

That was more than agreeable to Tom and the three began to pack up their gear. Jack, however, was feeling a little uneasy. This would be Tom's first visit to the Bernard home and he was wondering what his friend would think when he stepped into the rustic farmhouse on Southampton Road. On the other hand, he had so many things he wanted to show his friend and talk about.

The two boys trudged through the snow, each with one hand on the toboggan rope. Charles followed a few steps behind the toboggan carrying the day's catch on a string. When he was certain his father was out of earshot, Jack spoke quietly to Tom. "Our house is pretty small, but it is keen in some ways, too. My mother will be very happy to meet you." Then he added as an afterthought, "I'm not sure how my sisters will behave. They can be kind of silly sometimes."

Tom was greeted warmly by Jack's mother. It filled her with pride to see these two fine boys getting along so well... "even if they are from different sides of the tracks," she thought to herself.

"It's very nice of you to allow me to stay tonight," offered Tom immediately.

"Well, you are most welcome, Tom. I understand you've been very kind to our boy."

"He is my best friend!" exclaimed Tom emphatically, snapping to attention and beaming as he wrapped one arm around Jack.

Marie, who was ten, and Claire, just turned seven, hid in the downstairs bedroom, peeking and giggling at Tom through the partially opened door. Eventually Claire emerged and was introduced, and she finally coaxed the more reserved Marie to come out.

Charles and Tom went next door to the Bousquets' to use the telephone. When they returned, Jack's mother was busy preparing supper in the kitchen. She suggested that Jack show Tom his bedroom, then take him out to the barn and tend to the animals. The boys were upstairs for a few minutes as Jack was eager to show off his rock collection that he kept in his bottom bureau drawer, much to his mother's dismay. He showed Tom his most prized possession, a small slab of red sandstone that he and his father had found along the river in Holyoke. Embedded in the rock was the unmistakable footprint of a small, three-toed animal. It looked like it had been made by a bird, but his father insisted it was a dinosaur track.

"There are some great dinosaur tracks along the river up near Smiths Ferry," Jack explained. "We should take the trolley up there sometime and search for them."

When they came downstairs, Jack showed Tom the parlor, the girls' bedroom, and the kitchen. As they passed the alcove Tom paused and looked at the neatly arranged objects on the table and the wall behind it. "This is our little chapel," explained Jack, our '*petit sanctuaire*,' my mother calls it. It's where we say our prayers and the rosary. We're Catholic, you know."

Tom knew this, of course, and took everything in, including the rosary beads laid out so carefully. The boys went to the barn where Jack introduced Tom to the cow, Angélique, the chickens, and, most important of all, his father's workshop. Then they sat on bales of hay watching the animals feed. "The rosary beads," said Tom in a low voice. "Does each of you have your own?"

"Yes, we say the rosary three times a week. It's a Catholic ritual," explained Jack.

"I noticed there were six. One must be for Baby Thérèse, right?" asked Tom. Jack had told him about the death of his sister almost six years earlier.

"Yup, we each take turns saying the rosary for Thérèse. She's still with us, you know, in spirit," explained Jack matter-of-factly.

Tom nodded thoughtfully, his eyes cast downward. Just then Jack's mother called the boys to a supper of fresh pickerel fried in butter with carrots and turnips.

It was tight quarters for the two boys in Jack's bedroom. Jack lay on a spare mattress placed on the floor beside the bed where Tom would sleep. They talked for a long while about the usual topics of interest to thirteen-year-old boys, but eventually it seemed they had run out of things to say. "I'm sorry everything's so cramped," said Jack after a while.

"It's not cramped," answered Tom, "It's cozy...and nice. Sometimes..." he paused, "sometimes our house feels empty...especially since...without Matthew."

A long silence followed. Finally, Jack began hesitantly: "Tom, have you ever tried to talk to Matthew? I mean, tried to tell him about things, about you, your family, school? It sounds crazy, but it might help. Tell him you miss him. He might be able to hear you, you never know." Jack paused again, not certain how his suggestion was being received. Tom showed no reaction, but Jack went on: "Maybe it's like that polliwog under the ice... maybe it's another world right close by if you know where to look for it."

Tom was looking down, apparently considering Jack's words. Then he looked up and into his friend's eyes and nodded: "Maybe you're right, Jack, maybe you're right." Tom paused, then smiled. "Thanks, Jack. Well, goodnight."

"Goodnight, Tom." And they both slept soundly through the night.

The next morning the Holyoke trolleys were running again. After breakfast, the two boys walked along Southampton Road to the nearest trolley stop.

"Here's something for you," said Jack reaching into his pocket. And he produced a string of rosary beads and placed

them in Tom's hand. "You don't have to be Catholic to use it, just hold it and say a little prayer each day for Matthew. It helps you remember..."

Tom looked intently at the crimson beads linked in a silver chain and nodded. "Thanks, I will." Just then the trolley approached, Tom boarded and waved vigorously to Jack as the car clattered off down the tracks toward Holyoke.

A few weeks later, on a Saturday afternoon, Anne, Carolyn and their mothers sat with Clara in the living room of the Women's Home. Several of the Home's residents were also present. By this time Clara's belly bulged very large beneath her smock. She appeared uncomfortable and frequently had to change position on an upholstered couch, but she managed a weak smile as each of her guests presented gifts for the baby. Eventually all the packages had been opened and the young expectant mother blushed and thanked everyone again.

"There's one more gift, Clara," interrupted Carolyn as she nodded toward the front hallway. On that cue Jack and Tom entered carrying the wooden cradle. It had been rejuvenated with several repairs and a fresh coat of white paint and bore a large pink bow. The group broke into applause. Clara was speechless and thanked everyone, including the boys, tears now running down her cheeks.

After the group had broken up, Anne and Carolyn carried Clara's gifts up to her room. One of the other residents helped Clara up the steep stairway to the second floor. The two girls were about to leave when Clara spoke softly: "Thank you, Anne, Carolyn..." She shook her head as if trying to convince herself that this was all for real. "You been so kind."

"We're very happy for you," responded Anne. "We promise to visit more often...and we can't wait to meet the baby. That will be so exciting!" Clara smiled as each girl kissed her on the cheek, then departed.

