

Tara Maguire struggles to reunite with her parents, who have lost their farm during the potato famine in 1847. She is indentured, and falsely accused of stealing. A mysterious Emerald Bottle and a family of Irish Tinkers help her escape, and make her way to North America..

The Emerald Bottle

by Linda Shields Allison

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BOOK 1

The Emerald Bottle



Linda Shields Allison

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The Journey of the Bottle Trilogy
by Linda Shields Allison

The Emerald Bottle

The Bronze Bottle

The Amethyst Bottle



Preface

Throughout most of its history, many countries invaded a small island, west of England and north of Spain, called Ireland. The most recent trespassers have been the English. From 1695 until 1829, the British imposed harsh Penal Laws upon the Irish people. No Irish could practice the Roman Catholic religion. They were forced off their land and barred from purchasing land, until barely five percent remained in Catholic ownership. Irish Catholics could not vote, hold political office, practice law, carry a gun or a sword, or own a horse worth more than seven dollars. Their children were banned from going to school. Those who wanted to learn to read met, in secret, at outdoor Hedge Schools taught by priests. The system left the Irish paupers in their own land. The British finally repealed the legislation in 1829—sixteen years before a devastating period which came to be known as the *Potato Famine*.

Between the years 1846 to 1851, terrible troubles swept across Ireland causing the worst disaster in Irish history. During this time, half of all Irish lived on small farms, or were tenant farmers on large British-owned estates. The Irish raised cattle and grew grain to pay their rents and other expenses. This left them with only their potato crops to use for food. When a mysterious blight destroyed their potato crops, nearly one million men, women, and children died of starvation and disease. So many people perished, they were buried in mass graves. Countless desperate victims became so hungry they ate grass and became known as the *green mouths*. During these years, hundreds of thousands of Irish citizens left their beloved

Emerald Isle. Forced off their land, they left behind the country they cherished because they had no other choice. The immigrants survived horrible conditions to come by ships in steerage to North America. My ancestors were among the many Irish who came to North America looking for a dream—hoping for a better life.

Prologue ~ July 1845

At County Cavan, Ireland a modest village named Cootehill lay nestled within soft green hills about thirty miles from Dundalk Bay by the Irish Sea. Twenty-four hundred people inhabited the village, which contained a Catholic Chapel and a Protestant Church. Most of the villagers were farmers. A few owned small farms, but most worked as tenant farmers for large estates called plantations. Life was hard for many people, but the village of Cootehill proudly boasted one brewery, two banks, and three pubs. The people collectively ran one of the finest markets in the county. Flax, linen, vegetables, and cattle were among the items briskly traded and sold on market day. In the village there lived a budding lass of ten, named Tara Kathleen Maguire. This story belongs to her.

“Bailey, stop diggin’ up the cabbage! ‘Tis a dog you are, laddy, not a mole,” called Tara. The small black and white dog trotted out of the girl’s garden. Bailey squatted on his haunches to stare at the girl pulling weeds near a row of carrots. The little male dog was similar in size to a small fox, and weighed a stone, or the equivalent of fourteen pounds. He had fluffy thick fur, and a small round face. Bailey’s black pug nose and large brown eyes gave the dog an impish look. A wispy patch of fur, which fell irreverently from the forehead, sometimes hid the eyes. The dog was not a pedigree but he was smart, and Tara loved him with all her heart.

“Look Bailey, I found a shamrock nestled amongst the weeds. You know, legend has it, that Saint Patrick, our patron saint of Ireland, once explained the Trinity to the people by

comparing the three leaves of the shamrock to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” remarked Tara. “Saint Patrick was a very clever man.” Bailey cocked his head, as if he understood every word the girl had uttered. At that moment a rabbit poked its head out of a bush, and Bailey darted off in chase. “Hey, I’m not done with my preaching, laddy.” Tara sat back on her heels and laughed. “I hope St. Patrick had better luck with his flock.”

Humming to herself, Tara smiled and looked lovingly at her father tending his crops in the distance. Michael Maguire labored long hours each day to produce the barley, oats, flax, and potatoes on his five acres of land. Tara loved to watch her Da toil in his fields.

Tara knew how proud Michael was that *his* family owned the land they worked. He often told Tara how sorry he felt for the many villagers who worked as tenant farmers on the bigger estates. “The husbands, wives, and children who work these rented plots of land are hollow-eyed and hungry. As hard as they work, these families never seem to get ahead. They live hand to mouth.” Tara shared his despair. When they took their grain to market, they saw hoards of raggedly clothed children playing barefoot by the road.

“The land, ‘tis everything,” Michael said time and time again. “Robbie, Joseph, Tara, are you listening to me?. A man without land is a man with no future. To own your land is the key to owning your own life.”

“Yes, Da, we know, Da, ‘tis the truth, Da,” the children always intoned. They had heard the gospel of the land many times before.

Tara had a wild spirit, and was happiest when she could hike and explore the woodlands and meadows. She had a scientific mind and knew the names of all the plants and herbs in the area. She kept meticulous diaries on the local vegetation, and the healing properties of various herbs. The garden she so

skillfully tended produced essential food for the table. Tara strived to increase the bounty of her harvest using new farming methods from a book on gardening, which was a gift from her parents for her tenth birthday.

Tara knew she was strong. She could carry a twenty-pound sack of oats to market without effort. She knew a lot about her strength of body and character, but what Tara *didn't* know, was that she was blooming into a rare Irish beauty. Tara was as lovely as a crisp spring morning. From her father, she had inherited a crop of thick curly hair as black and shiny as a raven's feather, and blue eyes that sparkled like the waters of the Irish Sea. Tara's skin was soft and fair, with just a spray of freckles dotting her cheeks and nose. Tara loved her freckles.

Grandma Cassie often said, "Ah, Tara, those with true Celtic blood running in their veins have freckles somewhere on their person. Be proud of your freckles, lass. 'Tis your Irish heritage. 'Tis who you are."

Tara's beauty shined from within. When she wasn't helping the family carve out a living on the farm, she helped all others who came within her radiant circle. Folks often knew Tara was near long before they saw her. They warmed to the familiar sweet tones of a voice raised in song almost every waking moment of the day. Tara sang the same lilting songs that every Irish man, woman, and child knows by heart. She sang the Irish ballads that told the stories of their past.

Ten-year-old Tara Kathleen Maguire lived with her family on a small farm northeast of the village of Cootehill, near Dellamort Forest. Her family's land rested in the shadow of a large tenant estate owned by Squire Chase Dellamort. The squire was the richest man in County Cavan, and Dellamort Manor was the biggest estate in the area. Besides owning most of the land in the county, Dellamort possessed a large brewery, one bank, and one small linen factory. For all that the squire

owned, he was not a contented man. He hated riding his horse to the edge of Dellamort Wood only to see Michael Maguire tending his crops on five acres of prime land. The squire coveted Maguire's land.

Tara shared a small thatched cottage with Grandma Cassie, her parents Elsie and Michael, the seven-year-old twins, Robert and Joseph, and her new baby sister, Diane, who was almost two months old. Two other little angels, born in between the twins and Diane, had died in infancy. The Maguire cottage, though small and simple, was polished to a shine every day. The home celebrated the love and pride of a family who labored long hours each day to nourish the land they cherished so dearly.

The kitchen was the heart of the home, and it contained an oak table. Michael had felled the ancient oak tree from his land. With painstaking patience, he dried, sawed, and crafted the oak into a spiritual center, which would bring his family together and share the blessings from the earth. A huge fireplace warmed the kitchen in winter and served as both oven and stove. Cassie and Elsie were wonderful cooks. Grandma Cassie's Irish soda bread was the best in Cootehill, and she had seven blue ribbons from the village fair to prove that it was so. Elsie could serve potatoes in thirty different ways - each as tasty as the next.

When Elsie's father, Papa Frank, had died four winters ago, Grandma Cassie came to live with the family. She and Tara shared a meager room at the back of the cottage where they slept in Cassie's feather bed. Wooden pegs attached to the wall held their few items of clothing. A lovely cream-colored pitcher and bowl, resting on a small table in the corner, were the prettiest things in the room. The delicate porcelain was a present from Papa Frank and Cassie cherished the gift with all her heart.

“Granny, tell me about your beautiful china again?” begged Tara. “No wait, I think I remember. Papa Frank’s brother worked in the bleak factory, and he made it special for Papa Frank to give you as your bride’s gift when you got married.”

“No, child, Papa Frank’s brother made it at the *Belleek* factory. But you’re right ‘twas made especially for our wedding day. ‘Tis one of a kind, Tara. There’s no other exactly like it,” boasted Cassie proudly. “Papa Frank cherished it then, as much as I do today.”

“I love to look at it when you wash it in the kitchen,” said Tara. “When the sunlight shines on the bowl, I can see the shadow of your hands through the other side. ‘Tis like a pair of angel wings shimmering in the glow of a halo.”

“Sure, and ‘tis a miracle that it hasn’t been broken or cracked. Imagine something so fine and fragile lastin’ all these many years.” Cassie sighed wistfully.

Elsie, Michael, and baby Diane shared the other bedroom located on the east end of the cottage. It was the only room with a large window. Elsie said she never tired of looking outside to see productive fields, Tara’s vegetable garden, and a small creek that meandered through their property. She said the window was a living portrait of the seasons of her life. Robbie and Joseph slept in a small loft built above the kitchen. There was no parlor, but Michael had plans to expand when he could set aside some extra cash from the harvests. What the small cottage lacked in grandeur, it made up in warmth. The Maguire home radiated love.

Like the cottage, the farm possessed a sturdy little barn with walls of sod two feet thick. The sod kept the barn warm in the winter and cool in the summer. A ladder led to a small loft filled with hay. The thatched-roof barn smelled of moist earth and hay mingled with the various scents of the animals that dwelled within. It was home to one milking cow named Mrs.

Mooney, two lazy hogs called Buddy and Bonnie, one rooster, and six hens.

Life on the farm was hard, but Tara knew that her family was luckier than most of their neighbors. Each night, as Tara said her prayers, she appealed her patron saint. "Saint Catherine, thank you for watching over our family. Keep us safe and protected. Help the people of our village to grow in the love of our Father. Amen."

Tara looked with pride at her garden as she gathered her gardening tools into her basket. "Bailey, called Tara, 'tis time to help Granny Cassie make the soda bread for the bake sale at Saint Michael's. Bailey, where are you?" After a few minutes, Tara picked up her basket and walked up the path to the cottage. She knew that Bailey would show up in his own sweet time. The dog seemed to possess the nature of his mistress. He was trusting and inquisitive and possessed a love of nature.



A few miles to the west of the Maguire cottage, Squire Chase Dellamort sat in his morning room, which faced the southern portion of his estate. Although the pale twenty-nine-year-old was slightly stooped and had rapidly thinning hair the color of dull wet hay, he was still considered the catch of the county by the ladies. The most astonishing feature, about the squire, was his eyes. His left eye was a pasty shade of blue, while the right one was hazel spotted with tiny flecks of mustard-yellow. It was often whispered behind his back, that the flecks in his right eye seemed to change into odd shades of yellow when he became agitated. At that moment, the squire

was in a particularly foul temper after losing at a late night poker game.

He barked at his new kitchen servant, Shauna Curran, for spilling a drop of raspberry jam on the lacy white Irish linen napkin that covered his beautiful silver tray. “Who are you? Where’s Mary? Get out of my sight you idiot peasant!” The petrified kitchen maid backed out of the room apologizing profusely. Shauna could not believe her careless mistake. She needed this job, and could ill-afford to anger his lordship.

As Squire Dellamort absently nibbled on his toast and drank his Earl Gray tea, he questioned why his butler, Nevil, had hired such a stupid girl in the first place. “Why is proper help so difficult to come by?” he bellowed to the empty room. At that moment his butler, Nevil Hawkins, entered the room with Squire Dellamort’s newspaper. At the squire’s insistence, the newspaper was ironed daily. He felt that its pages were infected with the same putrid dampness that seemed to settle on everything in this dreadful island. Squire Dellamort was glad that he had just spent three months in the south of France. *To escape is the only way any sane person can endure this abominable climate*, he reflected as he watched his butler walk toward him.

“Good morning, sir,” greeted Nevil. I trust that you had a pleasant night’s sleep?” Nevil placed the newspaper on the table next to the silver tray with small delicate hands, which looked more like a girl’s than any man who had ever done a decent day’s work in a field. The butler was a small wiry man with graying hair and steel gray eyes that darted everywhere. Nothing escaped Nevil’s vision. The large sharp nose protruding from his face gave him the appearance of a hawk in search of a good meal. Like the hawk, Nevil was a predator. He never missed an opportunity to advance his immediate self-interest.

“No, I didn’t have a pleasant night’s sleep,” mocked the squire in childish tones. He added angrily, “I don’t like losing at cards to that fat toad, Lord Higgins! And where did you find that useless serving girl?”

“I will fire her at once, sir, if that is your desire,” said Nevil, “but it is my hope that you might see fit to give the girl another chance. She is the daughter of your deceased tenant worker, Dennis Curran. The family is pathetically needy. I believe that the villagers would take it as a noble gesture to help the family by gracing the girl with employment.”

“I could give a fiddler’s hoot what the village people think of me,” shouted the squire. “However,” he relented, “I suppose you’re right, and I like the fact that she’s needy. *Needy* makes an employee bend more easily to the will of the master,” he smirked.

“I couldn’t agree with you more, sir,” said Nevil. “Now, if there is no further need of me, sir, I will leave you to your tea and newspaper.” Nevil closed the doors to the morning room softly, smiling that he had steered the conversation as he wanted.

Chase Dellamort picked up the newspaper, but couldn’t concentrate enough to read. Absently, he looked around the room. The morning room was one of his favorite rooms in the mansion. It favored five large windows framed in oak, which overlooked one of the three lakes that lay scattered across his estate. The land was rich with meadows and rolling hills. Resting at the highest point of his land stood his beautiful brick mansion. It had been called one of the finest examples of Palladian architecture in all of Europe and had been in his family for nearly one hundred years. It was a shining archetype of the grace that symbolized a man of wealth and stature. To the east of his property stood Dellamort Wood, one of the most beautiful forests in all of Ireland. He loved to ride his black

stallion, Rogue, through its dark shady interior. He reveled in the fact that he could ride for hours and never reach the end of his vast estate. That is, until he came to that pitiable little excuse for a farm owned by Michael Maguire and his ample family. The squire scowled just thinking of it, and anyone who might have walked into the room at that moment would have seen the speckles in his right eye spark a menacing shade of amber.

For years, Dellamort had tried to press the Maguire family into selling their land to him. *But, no matter how many offers I've made, or how many secret schemes I've conspired, the wretched family has avoided all my plots to transmit their pathetic pimple of earth into my keeping,* the squire bitterly mused. It annoyed Chase deeply, that although his family had been successful in gathering land from most of the people in the area, he could not add the Maguire's paltry bit of acreage to his holdings. "I will not fail! So far the man has been lucky," voiced the squire out loud. *But if I'm patient, the changing tide of fortune will favor me. Patience is a virtue that can easily be practiced by a rich man. One slip and that trivial parcel of land will be mine.*

Squire Dellamort settled more comfortably into his favorite Chippendale chair and eyed his breakfast with a bit more enthusiasm. *After all, if I'm riding later in the day, I shall need to be well-fortified with food.*

Shauna Curran nervously polished a silver candlestick as Nevil entered the kitchen. "You careless dolt," shouted the butler. "If not for me, the squire would have sent you packing."

The cruel butler grabbed Shauna by the arm and pulled her close to his face. Squeezing her flesh with a steady pressure he growled, "You will do as I tell you, or you will be unemployed. Do you understand what I am saying?"

Shauna had never known such terror in her life. She wanted to run out of the mansion and home to her mother, but she knew that would be folly. She needed this job to help support her family and had to make it work. In a voice that shook with terror she uttered, "I promise. 'Twill not happen again, sir. Please, Mr. Hawkins, you're hurting my arm."

Slowly, Nevil released the pressure on Shauna's arm. He then took his hand and brushed a few strands of hair that had fallen across the girl's face. "Good, Shauna. I'm glad we understand each other. You may continue with the polishing."

It was only after Nevil had left the kitchen that Shauna's knees gave way and the petrified girl slumped to the floor. Quickly, she gathered the strength to resume her polishing, but Shauna could barely steady the silver candlestick gripped in her left hand.

Chapter 1 ~ August 1846 - Maguire Cottage

Tara stretched quietly as she slipped her into her skirt, blouse, and shawl. *'Tis Saturday morning*, she thought, *my favorite day of the week*. She crept out of the bedroom hoping Grandma Cassie wouldn't hear her and would sleep awhile longer. As the oldest child in the Maguire clan, Tara learned early in life the meaning of hard work. She was a big help to her family. She was usually, the first to rise, stoking the fire with peat so the house would be warm when the others awoke. This was a particular blessing to her grandmother who, at sixty-five, suffered from aching joints. After a trip to the outside lavatory and a quick wash-up at the sink, Tara put the water to boil and began the daily ritual of making porridge and tea. As she headed to the barn to milk the cow, Mrs. Mooney, she could hear the muffled sounds of Ma talking to Diane and the twins in her parents' bedroom.

The cool morning air washed over Tara with a fine mist. Its dew settled on the wee budding wildflowers that held the promise of a beautiful day. Tara lingered on the mossy path to the barn. She watched two small badgers forage in the bushes hunting for food. "You're quite busy this morning, brave badgers. Perhaps your babies are hungry and cry for some breakfast." It seemed to Tara, that the badgers reflected the struggles of the Irish. Her father's words echoed in her head. *Everyone must work the land to stay alive. The future of Ireland lies with the land.*

"Top of the mornin' to you, Mrs. Mooney," greeted Tara. "'Tis a fine and misty summer morn'." The passive brown cow looked at Tara through lazy wet eyes. A muffled sound in the

corner of the barn startled Tara to attention. A small black and white dog, flecked with bits of straw, trotted up to Tara. “Bailey, you old rascal, where have you been?” The dog looked at his mistress with tail wagging. “I called you for half an hour last night to give you the scraps from our supper, but you were nowhere to be found. Out on the town again were you, laddy? Well, your loss was the pigs’ fortune, because Buddy and Bonnie dined on your dinner.” Bailey cocked his head and barked as if he understood every word. Tara smiled and added, “I imagine you found something to keep you happy.” The dog settled at Tara’s feet as the girl pulled the milking stool next to Mrs. Mooney and began filling the pail with the warm liquid. She had performed the milking so many times, the task came as easy to her as breathing, and she sang as her hands worked in rhythm to an ancient hymn.

*I hear the songs of Ireland calling,
Under the brave and tender skies.
'Tis for you my tears are falling.
I see you smile through misty eyes.*

*The winds of change are blowing gusty,
Throughout the storms of a thousand years.
Our shiny staff has grown so rusty,
Under the flow of our sweet tears.*

As Tara finished, a cool breeze whispered across her face. She conceived the notion that something out of the ordinary would intrude the safety of her life. Tara shuddered and shook the thought out of her head. “Enough of this fairy-dreaming, Mrs. Mooney. The hungry ones will be wanting the milk for their porridge.”

When Tara entered the kitchen, she found Granny Cassie, Ma, and the little ones seated around the oak table discussing plans for the day. "There's a chill in the air, but I believe 'twill give way to a lovely fine day," Tara said. "I thought that later in the mornin' I would check in on Mrs. Curran and the children. Since the death of her husband, she has grown to despair how the family will survive. I'll be takin' her some vegetables from my garden."

"'Tis a cryin' shame her Dennis was killed movin' the logs off Squire Dellamort's wagons, sighed Cassie "Father Scanlon told me that, although Shauna will continue to work at the manor, the squire has given the rest of the family a fortnight to move off his land."

"Tenant farming can be so very cruel when the working family can no longer produce," Elsie uttered as she shook her head.

"Take a loaf of soda bread to the family," Cassie added. "I'll bake it up fresh this mornin'."

The twins implored, "Can we come with you, Tara? We want to play with Mary and Billy while you visit with their ma." Before Tara could answer, her mother spoke.

"Finish your chores and we'll see about that, boys," said Elsie. Robbie and Joseph nodded as they ate their porridge. At that moment, Michael Maguire thrust open the door to the cottage and stood staring at his family.

"Saints preserve us, Michael, what's wrong?" asked Elsie, "You look as though a ghost has walked across your very own grave."

Michael slumped into his chair at the head of the table. "We're ruined, Elsie. God help us, we're surely ruined," he croaked. "I was diggin' up some potatoes to see if they were ready for the harvest..." Michael stopped to catch his breath. His face was as pale as the whitewash paint on the cottage

walls. “The potatoes are black with poison. Every potato, black mush. I took them to the hogs. Buddy and Bonnie wouldn’t even look at ‘em.” Absently, he made the sign of the cross. “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph...we’re ruined.”

Chapter 2 ~ June 1847 - Dellamort Wood

Grandma Cassie sat outside the empty cottage using her small trunk as a stool. She bent over as she prayed the Rosary and stared at the moist soil beneath her shoes. A large black shawl draped her head, and she looked like a very old woman in mourning. The nine-year old twins Robbie and Joseph fiddled with sticks in the dirt. Michael slowly gathered their meager belongings into the handcart they had borrowed from Harry Powers who owned Powers Pub in the village. Elsie carried two-year-old Diane on her hip. The child was tired and fussy.

“Please, Ma, let me carry my baby sister,” implored Tara. “’Tis precious little time I have left to hold her before you go.” Silent tears streaked down Elsie’s face as she blindly handed her daughter to Tara.

"Gather 'round," instructed Michael to his family. "Heavenly Father, bless this land which provided for our needs these many years. Protect this family as we journey to a new country. Watch and guard our cherished Tara until we are united once more. Bless our neighbors whom we leave behind that they may not know another night of hunger. Help us understand and grow from the tragic circumstances that have forced us from our dear Ireland. In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, and all the saints in heaven. Amen."

“Amen,” the family whispered in somber echo.

Tara looked at her family. It was hard to hide the fear in her eyes. A fear, which had terrorized her for months.



When the potato crop had failed the previous summer, the family had lost their main source of food. The money from Michael's crops of barley, oats, and flax was needed to pay the mortgage on the farm. The family frantically struggled to keep ahead of their creditors. When Michael fell behind on the mortgage to Dellamort Bank, the squire quickly foreclosed and the family lost their farm.

It had all happened so fast that Tara was still numb with the reality that everything she loved was gone. Dear Mrs. Mooney, sold to buy food for winter. The hogs and chickens, long eaten. Every scrap from her garden used to feed the little ones. Even Grandma Cassie's lovely Belleek, Da's sturdy oak table, along with every other pot and scrap of furniture sold to Mr. Fox at the second-hand shop to help pay for the passage in steerage to cross the Atlantic. Tara had cried to see Grandma Cassie sell her lovely Belleek pitcher and bowl to Mr. Fox for half its worth.

Tara remembered her parents talking around the table into the wee hours of the night looking to find the best solution to the terrible troubles that plagued them and countless other families in the area.

"I cannot stay in Ireland and become a tenant farmer like so many of our friends," Michael had whispered to Elsie and Cassie in soft angry tones. "I've seen that kind of life, and I'll have none of it. 'Tis best we sell off what we have and try our luck as immigrants in the Americas. Your brother Pat was good to invite us to come and make a go of it on his farm in Prince Edward Island, Canada. He says the land is fertile and cheap,

and any man with a strong back and a desire to work can make a decent living.”

“I know, Michael,” Elsie had sobbed. “Katie and Patrick say the island is a trove, and ‘tis much like our beloved Ireland, but to leave our home, forever. I’m wracked with worry about the trip. They say ‘tis a hard voyage and many have lost their lives in the sailing. What’ll the voyage do to poor Cassie and the wee children?”

“I don’t know, Elsie. We’re in God’s hands now. In truth, I’m more worried about Tara and leavin’ her to pay off the rest of the money we owe to Dellamort,” declared Michael. “Indentured to that devil for a year is almost more than I can bear. I’ve half a mind to flee in the night and take her with us.”

“We’d never make it to the next town, Michael. You know the squire owns half the village and has the arm of the law in his favor. He’d have the constable hunt us down before we could get to the next county. He’s hated us these many years, and that fearsome snake would love a reason to torment us further. ‘Twas a clever blessing that you made the squire put pen to paper stating he would be bound by contract to give Tara passage on a sailing vessel after one year of labor. Our family *will* be united again,” lamented Elsie. “I’d have stayed myself, but with the baby and all. Cassie wanted to stay but she isn’t up to the work, and you must go to get us started in the new land.”

Michael patted Elsie’s arm, “Don’t torture yourself, love. We both know ‘tis the only way. The squire allowed her to keep her puppy as long as she feeds him from her daily allotment of food. At least she’ll have Bailey to comfort her at night. The little dog is the joy of her life, and he’ll give her the strength to endure.”



Tara sighed as she pushed away the unhappy incidents, which had brought her family to this day. She struggled to stay cheerful so that her family would not worry about her. *I must be brave so they will not sense the terror that grips my heart*

Tara walked to the village with her family. A steady drizzle began to fall, which made the handcart difficult to pull. No one spoke. Every step, every movement of the little procession was like a funeral-march. The slow pace mirrored the sadness that had settled in the canyon of their souls.

They stood in front of Powers Pub beside the rented wagon that would carry them to Dundalk Bay. When it finally became clear that they could no longer halt the current of time, Tara embraced and said goodbye to Grandma Cassie. She thanked her for the hours of stories she'd told her in bed before they went to sleep each night. She kissed the twins, and they cried when she did not get on the wagon with them to go sailing on the big ocean. She handed sweet Diane, who had fallen asleep on the walk to the village, and kissed her softly on the forehead. "Be a good little lass for Ma," Tara whispered as she buried her face in her mother's waist.

Michael guided Tara a few steps away from the family. "Tara," Michael croaked, "remember to say your prayers each night, use you gardening skills to tend to your daily work with pride, and come home to us soon, lass. If you need anything, Father Scanlon said he'd look after you. Your Ma will write when we arrive at Uncle Pat and Aunt Katie's farm." He gathered Tara into his arms, thinking how small she felt. He squeezed his daughter as he squeezed his eyes shut to hold back the tears.

“I’ll make you proud, Da,” cried Tara into his chest—forgetting her promise to be brave. And then it was done. The wagon wheels creaked as it pulled away. Tara waved and watched her entire family leave. She watched until there was nothing left of them but the muddy tracks in the road. A sudden chill gripped her heart with an icy truth. She was twelve and alone in Ireland. The village clock chimed twice as Tara and Bailey began the walk to Dellamort Estate.



Her paltry belongings had already been brought to the tiny room that would shelter her for the next year. It was a small converted tool shed situated at the back of the finest stable Tara had ever seen. The ceiling had been hand carved in intricate designs. The high vaulted roof looked like pictures she had seen of cathedrals in books. Beautiful arched windows allowed ample light to spill into the stable. Tara could not believe that something so grand was made for the pleasure of horses that could not appreciate the beauty of it all. The walls of the stable were made of thick stone, and would keep Tara from freezing during winter.

On the walls of her cramped little shed, hung a variety of garden tools. The hoes, rakes, and shovels were for Tara’s use tending the squire’s garden. A wooden crate served as a table, and her mattress was nothing more than a bed of straw on a wooden box-frame. Michael had nailed it together so she would be up off the cold floor. He had also fitted a slide lock so the door could be bolted from the inside, and that gave Tara an added measure of comfort. Elsie and Granny Cassie worked

nights to fill her rag quilt with extra feathers so she would stay warm.

But the best thing in the shed was the calendar that Cassie had given her. Michael had nailed it to the door with a pencil attached by a length of string. The calendar would mark the days until next July when the squire's debt would be paid, and she could sail home to her family. A narrow rectangular window, which had been cut into the wall above the door, let in a sliver of light from the stable. Tara's day would begin at five o'clock in the morning, and her alarm was the crowing of a fat rooster that lived in a nearby barn. Sunday was the Sabbath and her only day off. It was a day to go to Mass in the morning, wash her clothes and hair, and prepare for work again on Monday.

A butler, named Nevil Hawkins, had already interviewed Tara. She had also briefly met Mrs. Larkin, the cook who managed the kitchen staff. Tara thought the butler was a frightening little man. She did not like the way he glared at her with hungry eyes like she might make a savory snack. His instructions had made her shiver. "You'll work from sunrise until dark overtakes the day, and sometimes into the night if the squire's having a party. You will weed and tend the garden to the rear of the kitchen. The tools are in your shed. Lose them and you'll pay for them. You will help with the laundry, and do any other manner of things in which the servants might need assistance with. The kitchen staff will provide two meals per day, and if the dog becomes a problem," the butler paused, "I will personally drown the mutt in the wash basin near the back porch. We'll have no slackers on this estate, or you will be put out with the rubbish in the morning. Do I make myself clear?" Tara had nodded, knowing that the butler meant every threatening word.



Tara wondered if she should stick to the main road, but decided she could make faster time if she cut through Dellamort Wood. Although it was heavily guarded with keepers, many of the village people used the woods to poach pheasant from the forest, or trout from one of the squire's lakes. For the most part, Tara had always stayed out of the forest because she did not like Squire Dellamort. Tara knew that he had been after her family's farm for many years, and she made it a practice to stay away from his land. She had never spoken to him personally and doubted if he even knew what she looked like. Although she had never told anyone her feelings, Tara thought the squire was a vile, mean man.

Once, when she was nine, she had seen him kick a small puppy who was sleeping on the steps of Dellamort Bank. The squire was annoyed because he had to step over the unlucky dog who blocked his entrance to the bank. The poor creature yelped as the squire's boot laid into its haunches. It limped to the side of the bank and dropped in the dirt to lick its wound. Tara ran over and saw that the metal toe of the squire's riding boot had sliced into the hip of the poor creature. The small dog's fur was matted with blood. Tara ran over to the pub and asked Mr. Powers for a wet rag. She cleaned the wound while the scared pup shivered and whined in pain. Tara sang a soothing lullaby until the puppy fell asleep. It was clear that the scrawny dog was a stray. After some time, Tara picked it up and carried it home. She had not yet reached the cottage when she decided to name him Bailey.

Tara slipped through a hedge and found the path that cut through a meadow leading to Dellamort Wood. “’Tis our last day of freedom, Bailey, so we must try to make the best of this very sad day.” She stopped for a moment in the small meadow. In the distance, two red deer grazed on some grass near a small lake. They glanced her way but continued eating. Several beautiful swans floated gracefully across the glassy water. Two black swans mingled among the white. *Look at how happy they are in each other’s company*, thought Tara. *Why can’t people learn the lessons that the Lord’s creatures already seem to know?*

“Bailey, did you know that another name for a black swan is a mucky duck?” asked Tara. “Isn’t that funny? I wonder who thought that up?” Bailey cocked his head in Tara’s direction as if waiting for her to continue. Tara laughed as she spoke, “Well, I must say, laddy, you’re a good student today.” Bailey opened his brown eyes wider and stared at his mistress. “You stay close at hand, young man. I don’t want to be losin’ you in here. I shudder to think what your fate might be. Squire Dellamort’s hounds might eat you for a snack!” The girl pressed on with Bailey at her heels. It was unusual for the dog to stay so close. It was as though he also sensed that they were in unwelcome territory. Gradually the clearing gave way and Tara followed a path into the dense forest.

Tara had to admit that the trees of Dellamort Wood were as lovely as those described in an enchanted fairy tale. Large majestic oaks formed a canopy over the forest sheltering it like an umbrella. An understory of smaller shade loving beeches, hemlocks and maples added texture and a woody incense smell to the natural surroundings. Cardinals and robins nestled in the branches of the trees with squirrels, pheasants, and grouse. Foxes, badgers, mice, and deer were among the many other animals that made the magnificent woodland their home.

The Emerald Bottle

It occurred to Tara that nothing in a forest ever stands still. *Old trees die and make room for new ones. Animals lose their struggle with life and decay into humus. The cycle of life helps the forest to thrive in glory.* The morning's drizzle had given way to a bright sunny day, and rays of sunlight poured through the branches of the trees. Streaks of light cascaded on the leaves and onto the forest floor. To Tara, it felt as though she were in a cathedral more beautiful than any built by man. *There is such a sense of reverence and harmony betwixt the plants and animals. A forest is truly one of God's finest creations.* Tara pressed on. The girl never suspected that this afternoon would be the last moment of peace she would know for sometime.

Chapter 3 ~ June 1847 - Dellamort Estate

Tara awoke early the next morning, long before the rooster crowed. The girl lay huddled in bed with her dog, reluctant to face the day ahead. She pressed her nose to the rag quilt and breathed its scent. It smelled of a peat fire from the kitchen hearth; it reminded her of home. She wondered where her family had spent the night.

Tara had not slept well in the little shed. She remembered her terrible dream about a massive giant sitting on a gigantic pillow. He sat with a crown on his head yelling for food. Many small people were cooking roasts, potatoes, pies, and hams so that they would not have to listen to the giant bellow about how hungry he was. But no matter how much they cooked, the little workers could not quench his hunger or thirst. Tara was tired and hungry just thinking about the dream, and it occurred to her that she had eaten nothing but a hunk of bread at breakfast the previous day. Bailey licked her face and that brought her back to what she needed to do today. Survive. Her family was gone and she was at the mercy of Dellamort Estate. She said a quick prayer to Saint Catherine to give her courage and one to Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travelers, to guard her family on their journey. Quickly, she stood to get dressed.

The morning was cool and damp as Tara made her way to the lavatory near the back of the stable. She had been told that she would share this privy with the kitchen help and the stable boy who took care of the squire's horses. She found a large washing basin filled with water. The icy cold water tingled as she cleaned her face, neck, hands, and arms with a small rag and a bar of soap Cassie had packed for her.

Bailey sniffed the bushes looking for a rabbit to chase. “Here, fella,” Tara whispered softly. She watched him take care of his morning business and then tiptoed back to the shed. The dog followed his mistress to their room. She hung the washrag on a nail and placed the bar of soap on a wooden ledge. “Well, I guess it’s time to face the day.” She walked to the door of the shed. “You stay, laddy, until I come back for you.” Tara closed the door and made her way to the kitchen.

Shauna Curran waved Tara into the warmth of the mansion. “My, but you’re up early!” The girl spoke in rapid whispers. “’Tis so nice to have someone I know come work at the estate,” Shauna said as she looked over her shoulder nervously. “I’ve been so lonely since Da died, and Ma went to live with her sister in Ballybay.” Shauna’s thick red hair was pulled up inside her crisp white mobcap. She had lovely green eyes just the shade of new spring ivy. A warm smile awarded Shauna the largest dimples Tara had ever seen. She was taller than Tara and had a little more meat on her bones. “Three of us work in the kitchen most of the time. Unless the squire is havin’ one of his parties. Then I ‘spect you’ll be called into service. Cook’s name is Mrs. Larkin, and she’s okay. If you work hard and stay on her good side, she’ll treat you fair.” Shauna leaned in and spoke softly, “’Twould be wise to watch out for Mary Tully. She serves most of the meals to the squire and would stab you in the back if ‘twill make her look good in the eyes of the butler. She might act all sweet and smiles but watch that one. I think she spies for him, so be careful what you say and do around her. ‘Tis true, Mr. Hawkins scares the breath out of me. Be careful of him, Tara. I think he’s a mean bully, and I don’t like him.” Shauna continued to speak in faint whispers while looking over her shoulder as if she expected someone to hear her. “I can’t believe the squire let you keep Bailey. The butler watches the food around here like a jackal, but I’ll try to save

him some scraps of meat and the odd bone. ‘Twould be best for us if they didn’t think we know each other. Goodness lass, you look as though you cried most of the night. I’m sorry for your troubles. How long will you be working here?’

“Da took Ma, Granny Cassie, the twins, and baby Diane to the Americas yesterday. Da owed the squire money, so I have been indentured to work for him for a year. After Da’s debt is paid, the squire’s promised to book passage for me on a ship so I can join my family next July. ‘Twas the only way. I don’t mind, but I sure do miss my kin.” Tara looked around the kitchen. It was spotlessly clean. Large shiny white shelves along the walls held all sort of pans, pots, pitchers and bowls. Everything was polished to a shine and stacked in neat orderly rows. A huge pantry at one end of the kitchen held sacks of flour and sugar, jars of preserved fruit, molasses, eggs, onions and smoked hams. The last time Tara had seen so much food was in Mr. Eagan’s produce shop in the village. A gleaming white table inhabited the middle of the room and appeared to serve as a work-table for preparing meals and a place for the servants to eat. The size of the kitchen baffled Tara. It was bigger than her entire cottage. An enormous iron stove completely covered one wall near a sink. Tara had never seen anything like it before in her life.

“My, but you’re brave!” praised Shauna. “’Tis thirteen years I am now, and I still miss Ma, Billy, and Mary so much. I haven’t seen them since they moved to Ballybay after Da died last year. How old would you be now, Tara?”

“I turned twelve in April.”

“You’ve grown these past months and look at your shiny black hair all lovely,” admired Shauna. “’Tis so thick and curly. I wish’ mine wasn’t so flamin’ red....”

At that moment Mrs. Larkin, the cook, burst in through a side door that lead down stairs into the basement of the

mansion. She was a large plump woman with grayish hair, which she had tied into a bun. "What have we here? Work and talk, girls, we must always work while we talk. An idle hand is the devil's playground. Ah, you're the new girl. What's your name again, love?"

"My name's Tara Maguire, Mrs. Larkin."

"Well, I like that you're an early riser. Early bird catches the worm, I always say. Not many 'round here make it to the kitchen before meself. You may call me Cook or Mrs. Larkin. Where's Mary, Shauna? That one will try anythin' to get out of sight when work's to be done. She had better get here before Mr. Hawkins makes his way to the kitchen."

Mrs. Larkin was very efficient and busied herself putting water in a big copper kettle to boil. The enormous stove had already been stoked with wood, and Cook began frying large rashers of bacon in a huge cast iron pan. Tara thought she would faint with hunger at the smell of the savory salted pork. "Well now Tara, you'll work in the garden until nine o'clock tending to the weeds and such. Squire Dellamort will not tolerate a single weed in his garden. Remember, dear, a stitch in time saves nine, so keep after the weeds," she advised in parental tones. "The squire usually takes his breakfast at eight o'clock unless he's had a late night. The staff eats when he and any guests are finished. Wash up and come for a bit o' breakfast at nine," Mrs. Larkin said pointing to a clock on the wall. "I'll ring a bell so you'll know the time. Now, come to my kitchen clean or don't come at all. I'll not tolerate slovenly deportment. A clean body is a clean mind, I always say."

"Yes, Mrs. Larkin," whispered Tara.

"Good Lord, child, you're as thin as a post. When did you last eat?" quizzed Cook.

"I had a bit of bread and a spot of tea with my family yesterday morning, ma'am."

“Dreadful, just dreadful.” Mrs. Larkin cut a thick slice of bread from a large loaf resting on the sideboard. She dipped it in the bacon drippings from the pan. “The state of affairs in this poor country is absolutely disgraceful,” Cook mumbled, as if talking to herself. “Take this bread and hurry on your way. Don’t think this is going to become a habit, but I can’t have you faintin’ in the garden.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Larkin.” As Tara scurried out the back door to fetch the garden tools from her room, she bumped headlong into a pretty young woman coming up the steps.

“Watch where you’re going, you dolt!” snarled the young maid clothed in a long black dress and white apron. It was the same uniform worn by Shauna and Mrs. Larkin.

“I’m very sorry,” pleaded Tara. “You must be Mary Tully. ‘Tis pleased I am to meet you.” Before she could say anything further, the unhappy girl cut Tara off with a look and pushed passed her as though she were nothing more than an annoying leaf that had blown into her face.

Tara watched her sweep into the kitchen with the air of someone who appeared to be very confident and very bored at the same time. Mary had chestnut brown hair and hazel-colored eyes. She was rather short with a thin waist and full hips and thighs. At that moment, it was difficult to tell that Mary was pretty because the scowl on her face gave her a sour look. Tara stumbled wide-eyed to the path that led to the stable.

“Look Bailey, I brought us breakfast.” Tara broke the bread in half and fed it to the dog. “You can come with me when I work in the garden, but I’m locking you in here when I can’t keep an eye on you. I don’t want you to get into any mischief when I’m not around. ‘Tis for your own good, boy.” Tara devoured every crumb of the bread, but her stomach rumbled for more. She removed some gardening tools from the wall and proceeded to the garden with Bailey.

Tara pushed open the heavy garden door. A magnificent garden enclosed in ivy-covered brick walls, lay before her. The walls were taller than any Tara had ever seen. Long rows of vegetables grew in neat precision between cobblestone paths. Each variety was thoughtfully labeled with a small wooden sign, which had been carefully nailed on a stick and driven into the earth. Neatly pruned fruit trees grew along the west wall. Tall vines twisted carelessly on wooden frames and Tara recognized several varieties of beans and peas. A beautiful glass greenhouse rested on the southwest corner of the garden to take full advantage of the sun. Tara was enchanted. *Whoever tended this garden did so with love.* The garden looked as though it had been only recently neglected. Tara set to work, tilling the soil with a hoe. After a thorough search of the area, Bailey settled on the path next to her to watch her work.

At length, Tara heard the sound of Cook ringing the breakfast bell. She gathered her tools and walked to the shed with Bailey close behind. “You stay here, boy, and I’ll bring you some breakfast.” Tara took her washrag from its nail and made her way through the stable.

A tall lanky lad with sandy blonde hair led a beautiful black stallion through the stable doors. “Top of the mornin’ to you, miss,” greeted the stable-boy. He tipped his cap politely to Tara and continued on his way. She gave him a shy smile and made her way to the washbasin.

Tara entered the kitchen. Mrs. Larkin, Shauna and Mary were seated around the large white table, which had been set with bowls of porridge, bread and butter, and a steaming pot of tea. Shauna motioned for Tara to come sit next to her.

“Mr. Hawkins wants to see you in his office as soon as you’ve had your meal,” instructed Mrs. Larkin. “Shauna will show you the way. Now, help yourself to some bread and tea. There’s milk in the pitcher.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Larkin,” said Tara. “I was wondering ma’am. ‘Tis a beautiful garden, and plain to see that ‘twas tended with love. What happened to the previous gardener?”

“Not that ‘tis any of your business,” smirked Mary Tully, “but the old goat was consumed with the black lung, and the blood he spit up killed him a fortnight ago. For the life of me, I can’t imagine why the squire would want a runt like you tendin’ his garden. Looks as though you’d blow over in a stiff wind.”

“I know a wee bit about plants. I expect my Da told the squire I had some knowledge about growing things,” said Tara shyly.

“Really, is that so?” Mary mocked. “Well, too bad your *expert* knowledge about plants couldn’t save your family’s farm,” she sniggered.

“That’ll be quite enough, Mary,” said Mrs. Larkin. “Looks to me like someone got up on the wrong side of the bed this mornin’.” Cook turned to Tara. “Best eat up, child. The butler does not like to be kept waiting.”

Nevil Hawkins sat writing in his ledger at a small desk, with delicately curved legs. Tara entered his small orderly office and nervously waited for him to look up. As he worked, he sipped tea from a delicate china and saucer. Tara couldn’t help but notice that he held the handle of the cup with dainty petite fingers. She stood frozen, nervously waiting for the butler to take notice of her. She had the feeling that Mr. Hawkins was toying with her. At length, the small wiry butler stood and slowly made his way around the desk to address Tara with small penetrating gray eyes.

“You and your family,” he began, “have been a thorn in the side of this estate for too many years to count.” As the butler spoke, he circled Tara like a vulture searching for something to

eat. "But all that has come to an end. Has it not, my dear?" he snarled.

"It has, sir."

"You'll take your orders from me now. Do I make myself clear?"

"You do, sir."

"Good. It's important that you understand what I'm saying," he voiced in cunning tones. "You will begin work when the sun rises, and you'll work until the day is dark. I'll be watching you, and I had better never see you resting on the job," said the butler through clenched teeth. "The squire will be compensated for the aggravation he has endured from the likes of you and your family. If you break something, extra time will be added to your debt. Have I made myself clear?"

"You have, sir."

"Are these rags the best clothes you own?"

"'Tis, sir." Tara looked down at her best skirt, blouse and shawl.

"I will instruct Cook to have a uniform made so that when you work in the kitchen you do not embarrass the squire and his guests. When you work outside you can wear these rags. You're dismissed." He waved her away and continued his work in the ledger.

As Tara turned to leave, she noticed a bowl and pitcher on a small table in the corner of the office that looked strangely familiar. Her mouth fell open and she let out a gasp. Nevil Hawkins looked up from his work. "What are you carrying on about now, you foolish child?" he yelled.

"'Tis nothing, sir," Tara managed to say, "I was just admiring the lovely porcelain pitcher and bowl on the table."

"Yes, well it's clear you have an eye for nice things," he boasted. "I bought the set last month at Fox's second-hand shop in the village for a song. It's Belleek, but I guess you

wouldn't know about something as fine as Belleek. It's amazing what one can pick up these days. I have acquired several nice pieces over the past year. One person's loss is another man's gain," he said laughing.

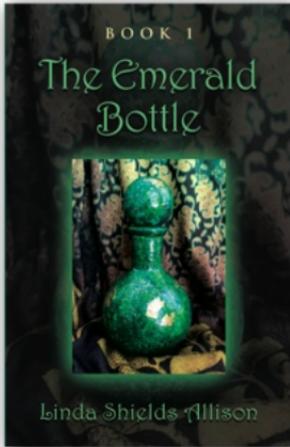
"I'm sure 'tis true. I'll be going now, sir," she mumbled.

As Tara exited the butler's office to make her way to the kitchen Mary appeared at the door. From the agitated look on Mary's face, Tara had the feeling that the girl had been standing there for some time.

She ignored Tara, curtsied to the butler, and said sweetly, "I'll take your tea tray away if you are finished, Mr. Hawkins."

"Yes, you may clear the tray away," the butler ordered. "You know, Mary, that little maiden is going to be a real beauty when she rounds out a bit. There's something about her that I find very alluring," the butler proclaimed. Nevil knew that the comment would annoy Mary, and he loved pitting the servants against each other.

Mary knew better than to say what she really felt, but had the butler looked up he would have seen that the expression on her face was not pretty. Up until now, Mary had been able to entice the butler to get the easiest chores, and she decided then and there that she did not want competition from that little worm. In angry silence, Mary made her way to the kitchen.



Tara Maguire struggles to reunite with her parents, who have lost their farm during the potato famine in 1847. She is indentured, and falsely accused of stealing. A mysterious Emerald Bottle and a family of Irish Tinkers help her escape, and make her way to North America..

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