

A young Irish housemaid from Boston travels half way across the country in the 1870s to try to establish a Brahman life style at a wild west Army fort.

## **The Irish Brahmin**

By Robert G. Wilson

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The  
**Irish  
Brahmin**



**Robert G.  
Wilson**

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# Chapter 1

## Margaret

She could expertly make beds, wash laundry, clean kitchens, polish furniture, and shine windows with the best of them. Proficiency in these abilities were saleable in Boston in the 1870's. But she was Irish. In Boston in the 1860s that meant she could make a living wage handling such jobs in some of the best homes in town, but not much more.

Margaret Gildea came from a poor, tough section of Everett near the shipyards in a family where her mother took in wash, her brother played politics, and her father took in mostly whiskey, But, she wanted to improve herself.

So, when Margaret answered the ad in the *Boston Courier* she took care to be controlled and prepared. She wrote out a list of expected questions and her planned answers. This household probably would be damn fussy about who they hired. I'll be damn-well be ready for anyone that shows up.

A manicured pathway led to the Endicott mansion on High Street. Its third story windows looked over all the area, and the "Widow's Walk" above that added more height, and an appropriate administrative touch.

Margaret's heart felt ready to burst. In her "Sunday best", anxious and nervous, she arrived early.

Waiting, Margaret gawked at the shiny antique furniture, upholstery, and draperies that surrounded her. The

Endicott family crest, framed in gold, hung over the mantel. How could she not be envious and tense? This is how Margaret dreamed of living.

Then, Mrs. Endicott slowly descended the curved staircase holding her hand lightly on the polished handrail.. Margaret was to be interviewed by the venerable Mrs. Steven Endicott herself.

Margaret rose politely from the chair as the portly, grey haired woman of about 50 entered the sitting room where Margaret waited. Mrs. Endicott looked Margaret over quickly, then asked her name.

“Good morning, Mrs. Endicott.” she said. “My name is Margaret Gildea.”

She hoped Mrs. Endicott didn't notice that tension had tightened her hands into fists.

“Good morning, Margaret. Please sit down. Tell me a little about yourself. Where do you work now? What do you do there?”

Sitting on very edge of her chair, she smoothed her hands over the front of her dress, and said, “I work now for Mr. and Mrs. Bleiler over on Arsenal Street. I do the housekeeping and help tutoring their son, Frederick. I've been there two years.”

“Are you not happy there? Why are you thinking of moving?”

She blushed, lowered her eyes, and said, “Oh yes, ma'am. I am. They treat me just fine. But I saw your ad and thought this might be a chance to advance myself.

I'm sure Mrs. Bleiler will give me a good recommendation."

"That's very laudable, my dear. Tell me Margaret, are you Irish? You don't seem to have much accent."

"Yes Ma'am. My family is Irish, but I was born nearby in Everett." She suppressed a flash of anger at the question but continued looking steadily at her.

"We moved to Watertown some years ago, to get away from the shipyards. I went to the Watertown schools."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that, my dear. But you have no objection to doing housework for us, will you?"

"No Ma'am. I'm a hard worker. I'll take good care of your things."

She glanced at Margaret's hands and asked, "You're not married, are you?"

"Oh, no Ma'am. The men have all been away at the war. Besides, I like my independence."

So, after a few more questions, Mrs. Endicott showed Margaret around the first floor, then asked if she could come back at the end of the week.

"Then I'll give you an answer and we will discuss wages and so forth." She added, "That will give me time to speak to Mrs. Bleiler."

As a maid showed her to the door Margaret started to run her hand over a highly polished table but stopped. She dreaded that Mrs. Endicott might still be watching.

She was also nervous about getting a job in such elegant surroundings. Would they hire her?

\* \* \* \* \*

Margaret did get the job, not only at a little higher salary, but the Endicott's also provided her with a room on one of the upper floors of the mansion. That meant her mother wouldn't need to hold space for her in her own small house.

The Endicott house was large. It provided quarters for only Mr. and Mrs. Endicott and their daughter, Sally. But it provided income to six people including Margaret. Her position was housemaid, meaning she had to clean the house, maintain the linens and laundry. She also helped Mrs. Endicott with her personal clothes. Such chores didn't stir Margaret's dreams, but since the war with the Confederacy this was the best fulltime employment to be found. Around Boston "Help Wanted" signs still carried the NINA slogan, warning applicants that No Irish Need Apply. In 1875, much of Boston still disdained the Irish as the "servant class."

When she was hired at Endicott House she came without the heavy baggage carried by so many others. Unlike most of the Irish women looking for work, Margaret was not really an immigrant. Her parents had flown from Erin's shores earlier than most, so she had the good sense to be born in nearby Everett. So, to have gotten the job, Margaret felt very fortunate that she hadn't been grouped with all the other "Micks" and "Paddy's" like her father. But unlike most of the Irish women looking for work, she had been viewed as a native.



But sometimes at night, as she lay in the small loft room provided, she stewed about the attitudes that her Irish countrymen and women suffered. Even in this household, where the Master sometimes referred to Mary, the cook, with the derisive “Bridget”, she had difficulty holding her tongue. Yes, she needed the work, but resented having to do it. She dreamt of the day when she too might enjoy a life away from the scowls and oppression, a life more like theirs. She knew damn well she was as good as any, but why she not have all the privileges and big homes? She dreamed of living in a place like the Endicott’s, and having luncheons at private clubs on Beacon Street.

Watertown boasted some of the best public schools in the Boston area, but schooling or not, Margaret remained a part of the underclass, and knew it.

The cattle yards and factories of Watertown attracted many Irish immigrants. Among them, the Gildeas. The Irish were the backbone of Watertown’s prosperity. The railroad that ran through the village center carried much of what Boston bought and sold, including the leather hammered by the Irish cobblers and factory workers in Massachusetts’s burgeoning shoe industry. One of those factories is how old Archibald Endicott had made his fortune.

The meager wage Margaret’s father earned working for the railroad – as paltry as it was – did allow her to attend the Watertown schools, some of the best in the Boston area. This gave her a distinct advantage. Young women from Irish families who were ‘native-born’ and better educated, were desirable domestics and hired to work in

the better homes of the town. Thus, Mrs. Steven Endicott, and the wealthy like her, skimmed the cream from Watertown's schools.

\* \* \* \* \*

Over the next few months, she discovered that Mrs. Endicott often "felt frail" and decided to stay confined to her room. Where Margaret grew up, if someone felt "frail" in the morning it was assumed that she was hung over. Margaret wondered, but said nothing. At such times, Mary was asked to bring her "Ladyship" the meals. Thus, Margaret had to hurry through her other household chores.

Margaret was also expected to deal with daughter Sally when she returned from school. The additional jobs Mrs. Endicott asked of her, clearly added an extra burden to Margaret's regular workload of cleaning, washing, and ironing,. But what choice did she have?

"Yes, ma'am", she said with a smile. "I will be happy to."

It soon became clear that one of Margaret's most important tasks was the care and companionship of Sally Endicott. She was a bright enough girl of twelve or thirteen. She needed all the help and encouragement on education that could be provided. Other activities attracted Sally much more than schoolwork.

Though Margaret sometimes resented these extra chores, Margaret envied Sally more than she let on. She attended an exclusive private school that Margaret could never hope to attend. Boys filled most of the public schools in town. That left few openings for girls, especially of Irish immigrant families. So, to be exposed, even

remotely, to the education Sally received at The Sedgwick School for Girls opened rare vistas of opportunity for Margaret.

Listening to Sally's lessons and helping her with her homework, enabled Margaret to peek, however mistily, into the world she so longed to be a part of. Oh, how it gladdened her heart to dream that she might one day follow in Sally's footsteps.

As the end of May neared, Sally had become more excited about her approaching birthday. The Endicott's had agreed that Sally could invite her school girl friends for a festive party. Therefore, each afternoon, when she returned from school, Sally was more interested in planning for the party than in studying.

"What games should we play? What kind of cakes shall we ask Mary to make? Can we have music? How many girls shall we invite?"

These became the pressing matters that had to be thoroughly explored and decided. Then Margaret was implored to gain the necessary permissions from her parents. Who was running this party anyway?

\* \* \* \* \*

Margaret's dear friend, Bill Smyth, Union Army veteran, friend of the cavalry officer under whom he served, still favored his bad leg, gift of a Confederate mini ball. But Bill stood army proud and tall as Major Thompson entered the pub on Watertown Square.

"Glad you found my note, sir. I left it with the duty officer at the Arsenal yesterday, said Bill Smyth. "I was afraid you were off on maneuvers again."

"No, damn it" muttered Major Thompson, "I was just a little late coming in that day. We're sure not busy these days. I wish we were out in the field again."

Major Frank Thompson, about 30, wore the blue uniform of the Massachusetts 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry proudly, a broad-shouldered fighting man, he longed to get back into action, that's where further promotions might lay. Thompson was a West Point graduate and a regular Army officer rather than a volunteer. After the war ended, he had been assigned to the Watertown Arsenal since it was close to his home in Lexington.

The two sat in a quiet corner of the pub just off Watertown Square. Bill Smyth, former sergeant, had chosen that spot carefully. Bill had served under Major Thompson in the Massachusetts 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry during the War. Bill was still fond of him. He had stayed in touch after he mustered out. But Bill showed his nervousness being seen with an officer in uniform.

Bill took a slug of his beer and said, "Damn it's good to see you again, sir. You look pert. They must be treating you well at the Arsenal."

"Yes Sergeant, I got a cushy job over there as munitions inspector, but I miss being doing what I was trained to do. I often think about the old days in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav. I'm envious of the men where the action is. But it grates a little under the tedium of military paperwork."

Bill lowered his voice and moved closer to the table in a show of confidentiality and said, "Well sir, that's one of the reasons I wanted to speak with you. I figured you might be getting a little stir crazy over there. Always one ready for action, weren't you?"

"You may know, sir, that I have a friend named Michael, who is connected with an organization that's been putting together a troop of men. They need experienced officers to lead them. I right off thought of you, sir."

"Yes, I do remember you talking about that group. It's an Irish group, angry at the British, wasn't that it?"

"Yes sir, they're called the Fenian Brotherhood, sir. If anything, the Fenians hate the Limeys worse than the Union Navy did. Now the Fenians have armed a body of men to get their revenge. I believe in their cause, sir, but my gimpy leg keeps me from doing much more than cheering them on. But they have some exciting plans. That's why I thought of you, sir. You are just the kind of experienced man they need, a fighter and a leader, sir."

"Tell me, Sergeant, what are they thinking about? What plans do they have? What do they want a man like me to do?"

"Now sir, I'm not privy to all their battle plans, but I think they want to take some ground in Canada to put pressure on the Brits holding Ireland. That's sure gonna take some kind of fighting and I know it's that kind of leadership they need. You sure know that trade better'n anyone. You proved it in the Shenandoah Campaign, sir."

“Yeah, we had our share of fun there, didn’t we? I miss being where the action is. But Bill, don’t forget, I still work for the US Army. They might not like it for me to go off fighting for someone against Canada. I’m certain Canada is still a US ally. I’d probably have to resign my commission. “

“Besides, I’ve put in for a transfer. If it comes through, it will get me back to the fighting again. Only this time against Redskins not the Rebs. It will get me out of this damned desk job and back into a cavalry unit again. I’ve applied for a transfer to the Western Command. I’ve got to get back into action again.”

“Shucks sir, I thought you’d say something along those lines, but I had to give it a try. I’d sure never want you to give up your commission, but wondered how much longer you’d be staying in the army. Going West’d sure beat hell out of being cooped up here in Watertown, that’s for sure. I’ve often thought about the West myself.”

“Yes, that’s the truth. Talking to those California boys from Company “A” and “B” made it sound like the West holds some big opportunities. That’s why I asked for the transfer. I’d like to be a part of them.”

“I sure buy that Major. But I know because of my leg, I won’t be fighting with my brothers in the Fenians, so if you ever need a hand going West, get in touch. I’d be proud to serve with you again, sir.”

“Sergeant Smyth, you became one of my most valuable troopers, and your skills as a farrier makes you doubly useful. If this transfer comes through, I’ll be in touch.”

## *The Irish Brahmin*

They each finished their beers and went their separate ways. In some sense, Bill was disappointed at not being able to recruit Major Thompson to the Fenian cause. That would not please Margaret Gildea's brother, at all. But Bill began to have ideas of a more personal nature, for his own future. Will Bill ever hear from his old commander again?

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day Bill met with Margaret at a bench at the little park on Orchard Street in Watertown. It was a beautiful early spring day. Bill knew that she felt more comfortable there, than trying to talk privately in the garden at Endicott House.

Bill was disappointed that Major Thompson would not join the Fenian cause and help her brother. But he thought she would be very interested in how the major had encouraged him about going west.

"Margaret, my dear. I met with Mayor Thompson, my old cavalry commander. Remember, I've talked about him. Yesterday I asked him about the Fenians for your brother as you wanted. Michael will be bent out of shape, but he said it wasn't for him. Major Thompson can't join the Fenian cause. I told Michael it was a long shot. I told him that it wasn't likely that Thompson'd give up his West Point commission to go fight with the Fenians.

"I warned him. But you know how Michael is about the Fenians. Sometimes I'm worried 'bout Mike. I can't guess what he'll do next.

"I'm going to see him tomorrow. I'll try to calm him down. I hear that Michael and his friends have some crazy plans."

"Crazy plans . . . that sounds like Michael."

"But that's not all the major said. He has some exciting news I want to talk with you about. He has applied for a transfer from Watertown to go back into a cavalry unit. He wants to get into the Western Command in the Montana and Dakota Territory. He said that if he gets his transfer, he would be in touch with me."

"Oh, Bill, you're not thinking of going back into the army, are you?"

"No Peg, I'm done with all that. With this gimpy leg, they'd never take me anyway. But I wouldn't mind striking out for the West, especially if Major Thompson is around. Lots of those California boys I served with talked about the opportunities opening up there. I wouldn't mind us trying our luck there."

"God love us, Bill! Do you think there's really a chance? How would you get there? What kind of work could we do? How could we make it happen?"

"Now hold your horses, Peg. Nothing like this may ever happen. But it's something to dream about, ain't it? You might even find some Indians you could badger there! But first, I'd better get to your brother to give him the bad news."

\* \* \* \* \*

That night, as she lay in her room at Endicott House, Margaret continued to dream about the West, those



strange new lands, the opportunities that she might find. Since the end of the war, everyone had been talking about looking for jobs in the new West. That's the kind of adventure she longed for! Going there would certainly get her out of this crummy job as housemaid and nursemaid to a lush. What about this Major Thompson? He was a West Pointer. Was he married? Margaret wondered what he was like? She vowed to have Bill take her to meet him right away. Questions and crazy thoughts swirled in her head until she finally drifted off to sleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

A few days later, Bill caught up with Michael Gildea at an Irish pub in Somerville. Lighting in the room was dim, adding to an air of conspiracy; most of the tables, taken by men who spoke in hushed conversation. The booths clutched small, stained tables with heavy ash trays and cardboard coasters promoting beer.

Michael sat alone in a booth in a back corner of the room. He wore brown felt cap with a green hat-band. He munched on a sandwich while waiting for Bill. He had a beer in front of him.

Bill carried a mug of beer as he limped over to the table and sat down. He plunged right in. "Michael," he said. "Now don't get excited, but I've got some grim news. Major Thompson is not interested in your proposition. He can't get involved. He can't give up his commission."

Snorting, "That don't surprise me none," spat out Michael. "I never thought you Ulstermen would be with us when we needed you. I'll bet he's just afraid."

“Not a bit of it”, said Bill, his own blood pressure rising. “He’s as brave as they come, and that’s the truth. He’s spoiling for a fight, too. In fact, one of the reasons he can’t help you is that he’s applied for a transfer. He wants to go out West where there’s still plenty of action. He wants to join a cavalry unit in the Dakota Territory to drive out the Redskins.”

“Well, good luck to him.” said Michael with biting sarcasm, “But we don’t need him anyway. I just got word from W. R. Roberts that he has signed up Colonel John O’Neill, a good cavalryman and a good Irishman to boot, to lead the fight.”

“I don’t suppose you’ll be joining us either?” smirked Michael.

“Now, you know I’ve a hankering to join you, but me with my gimpy leg wouldn’t do you much good.”

Waving dismissively Michael sneered, “Sure, and I know all about your leg. But what’s really clear is that lily-livered sister of mine has got you tied to her apron strings. You’ve lost your backbone. So, go on with you. Maybe you can find some penny fights with that Major of yours in the Dakotas.”

Bill’s blood rose, ready to start a row. But it struck him as a good time to leave. He left his unfinished beer on the table, and with a wave of his hand, wished Michael good luck. Then he stalked angrily out of the pub into the crowded streets of Somerville. It was March of 1876.

\* \* \* \* \*

A week or so later, a knock on Margaret's door at Endicott House woke her up. The windows of her third-floor loft still glowed a deep, morning blue. Before she could swing her legs out from under the covers, a hushed voice called, "Margaret, it's Mary. You'd best get up."

Mary the cook, was always the first one up in the Endicott household. Margaret gargled a response, "What is it, Mary?" as she reached for her robe and stumbled for the door.

Mary's eyes darting back and forth as she whispered, "Peg, it's the Missus, again. She needs your help."

Margaret opened the door just enough to trade sounds with the breathless cook. "She's had a bad night again. She'll want to get cleaned up before Himself comes out'a his room and down for breakfast."

"Fine, Mary. I'll get some duds on and be down in a wink. You try to stall breakfast a bit, will you?"

Margaret knew the problem only too well. Wine with the dinner guests last night had started it off, followed by the "nightcaps" she kept hidden in her bedroom. With that, her 'Ladyship' was off the deep end again. It would be lucky if the bedroom only smelled of gin.

Margaret splashed some water on her face from the pitcher on the nightstand and hurried into her clothes.

In less than five minutes she tiptoed into Mrs. Endicott's room on the second floor and eyed the woman sprawled across her bed. The drawn shades kept the room dim. Margaret turned up the wick on the oil lamp and quickly searched around for the telltale gin bottle, anxious to

dispose of it promptly. She then shook the groggy woman toward consciousness and tried to sit her upright on the edge of the bed. Her patient groaned and appeared ready to retch, so Margaret quickly drew the chamber pot from its stand. She helped Mrs. Endicott confront it. In a few minutes she had a damp cloth pressed to the sick woman's brow. A quiet knock on the door interrupted her as Mary entered with a steaming cup of coffee and then scurried away.

Within half an hour, Margaret had performed a near miracle. She had changed the near corpse into a presentably dressed and heavily made-up woman who could safely navigate on her own. Her hair had been brushed and mostly concealed under a colorful scarf. She certainly did not look glamorous or healthy. But at least she looked like she would live through the day.

A very contrite Mrs. Endicott said, "Margaret, my dear, please look in on Sally and see that she gets ready for school. I'm afraid I'm going to need to rest today, after Mr. Endicott gets off to work."

At the breakfast table, Steve Endicott did not seem terribly surprised that his wife had breakfast in her room. He was only slightly put out that she merely called down to him from the head of the stair when he was ready to leave.

He commented to Margaret as he asked for his hat, "Perhaps we shouldn't have opened that second bottle of wine last evening."

Sally seemed even less concerned that her mother was “not feeling well” again. She hurried out the door soon after her father.

\* \* \* \* \*

Around noon, Margaret went upstairs and tapped on Mrs. Endicott's door. The room was quite dim, and though the bed wasn't made, the room was somewhat less messy. Mrs. Endicott slouched on a chair gazing out the window.

Shaking her head and muttering, Margaret intoned, “Mrs. Endicott, it's time we talked. I don't know 'bout you, but I can't go on like this.

With her chin bent, eyes cast down, Mrs. Endicott moaned, “Oh Margaret, I understand. I've been very unfair to you. You have helped me so much, and covered up for me so often. I don't know what I will do without you. With tears in her eyes, she whimpered, “But I feel so much stronger now. I'm sure I can do better.”

With a heavy sigh Margaret said, “Yes ma'am. I'm sure you can too, but my covering up for you, the way we did this morning, is not the way. That doesn't fix a thing.” Shaking her head Margaret spit out, “You've got to get help. The place to start is with yourself and with your family – including Sally – she worries about you. You really need to talk with your husband.”

Margaret paced back and forth in an angry circle, remembering the family tension in her own early days. Running her hands through her hair in frustration, she said, “My father was a drinker too. He didn't change until he leveled with my mother. Together they worked on the

problem. To start with, you need to tell him how much you've been sneaking out of the household money every week."

Then she spat out the words, "He needs to know now. He really needs to get it clear the money ain't slipping to Mary and me."

"Oh Margaret, I couldn't do that, but I certainly won't implicate you with my problems. Steven is so very strict, but I love him so. I don't want to hurt him. I'm afraid he'll leave me if I told him."

In disgust, Margaret threw up her hands and said, "Mrs. Endicott, don't you think he realizes now? Or at least suspects? I'm damn sure I don't want him suspecting it's me and Mary dipping into the household money!

Pounding her fist into her hand she erupted, "Mrs. Endicott, ma'am, I don't like to say this, but if you don't tell him, I will! It's my guess that he knows already, just like my Ma knew right from the beginning."

Hiding her eyes, with her hair hanging over her face, Mrs. Endicott murmured, "I'm sure you are right. I will talk with him . . . but not just now. He has that big meeting at the church this weekend. I don't want to spoil that for him. When that's over with, then he and I will have a talk."

Margaret crossed her arms and with lips tightened she said, "Mrs. Endicott, if you don't tell him, I'm going to have to leave. I can't have this suspicion hanging over my head about the household money. It's now or never! You got to speak with your husband tonight."

\* \* \* \* \*

Much to Margaret's surprise, within a half hour Mr. Endicott came back. This time he circled around and entered by the garden entrance. He saw Margaret at work in the laundry room sorting linens. He motioned for her to follow him through the garden and into the carriage shed at the rear.

Soon they were both in the shed.

Endicott said, "Margaret, thank you for taking care of Alexandra this morning. She has become quite a handful lately, has she?"

Margaret jutted her chin into the air angrily and said, "Yes, that she has, sir. And that's the truth. It's not the sort of work I expected to do here. It happens too often for my tastes."

Endicott sputtered, "These have been difficult times for us all, haven't they?"

Margaret's face whitened as she spat, "And difficult times especially for me, sir. I agreed to be a housemaid, but not a nursemaid. 'Cleaning up after her gets harder and harder. Everyone in the household is upset about her drinking, even Sally."

"I know that Margaret, and it bothers me greatly. I suspect I'm partially to blame for her problems. I've talked with her about it several times, but it doesn't seem to do any good. Each time she swears she will reform, but never does."

"Aye, I understand all that, sir. We need to be a death to her words and all eyes for her actions. She keeps going

back to her friend, the bottle. That's what makes her feel better."

"I suppose that's true, but I want to be that friend and to help her."

"I am sure you do, sir. That's proper. But without trying to, you are one of the ones helping her to keep on drinking, aren't you?"

"Me? how so?"

"Well, some of the money you give her each week for our household expenses gets set aside for the gin man that comes to the back door, doesn't it? And if that isn't enough, she can always come 'borrowing' from Mary and me! She is a sly one that. She always has someone to mooch from."

"Good God! I didn't realize it had got to that point."

"Aye, and that's a fact."

"Look, Margaret. You probably know more about these things than I do. I respect your experience. I realize we have already put extra burdens on you because of it. You ought to be compensated for your care. I can't have word of this spread all over town. So, I am going to raise your salary by \$5 a week. If this never appears in the papers, I'll see that you get a substantial bonus."

"Mr. Endicott, I appreciate the extra pay, but I don't think that's apt to solve your problems. Mrs. Endicott needs help. You need to talk with a doctor."

\* \* \* \* \*



A few days later Bill met Major Thompson at the pub in Watertown Square. This time Thompson had contacted him, so Bill waited at a table by a window. He spotted the major when he strode through the door in his uniform. The major stepped through the door glowing with a broad smile.

He stopped at the bar and bought two beers.

Then he enthused, "Bill I have some great news. My transfer came through. I have been assigned to the brand-new 7th Cavalry regiment in Montana. I have to report there by July 1<sup>st</sup>. I'll get back into the action again."

Bill lifted his mug of beer in salute and whooped, "Good Christ sir. That's almighty fine. I knew you make it. Congratulations!"

Taking a big slug, the Major clinked Bills glass and said, "Thanks Bill. I'll be happy to leave this damn desk job and get out into the field again. Riding a desk is no way to advance in this man's army. You have to be in the field commanding troops to get ahead."

"That's grand major. When do you leave?"

"The new regiment is being formed this month, headquartered at Fort Riley Kansas. The 7th has forts all over the west to protect the settlers from bands of redskins. I'll be commanding one of the Montana posts. So, I have to get cracking. That's why I contacted you. I need somebody to help me get ready. There's a ton of things to do.

"You know I'll pitch in any way I can, sir. What needs doing? God, it's going to be like old times ain't it? Where do we start?"

"Well, my orders only tell me where and when to report. They don't say much about how to get there, or what to do about my family. The army doesn't seem to care that I now have a wife and son these days."

"Good God sir. I hope they don't expect you to ride horseback all the way, do they?"

"No, not that," he chuckled. "I do get travel vouchers but I have to make all the arrangements myself. That's where I need your help. I have another question for you."

"You have a gal that's a housemaid, don't you? I think we talked about her. Are you two married yet?"

"No sir, we ain't married yet, but she's my dear heart these many years. Yes, she's a housemaid for some wealthy folks in town here."

"Reason I ask, I've heard you talk about going west. Are you thinking of taking her with you?"

"Aye, sir I have." Bill nodded with a faraway smile. "We've spoken about it. I might be able to talk her into it, if there's something she could do, sir, she'll do it. She's a proud and strong Lassie, that one."

"Well, I got thinking. It's a long trip to the Montana territory, where I'll be stationed. I'm sure my wife would welcome help with our son, and appreciate some woman company for herself along the way."

"If your gal, what's her name?" "Margaret", Bill interrupted. . . "yes Margaret. . . If Margaret is interested, I be happy to help with the expenses. Do you want to talk with her about it? Perhaps the two women could meet to see how well they'd get along?"

Bill said, "I'll speak to her about it right away, major, I have a hunch she will jump at the idea. She's pretty adventurous."

They had another beer and talked for another half hour about transportation, routes, and schedules. But Bill's mind was distracted by thoughts of Margaret, how she would react to the idea, and what this meant for their future.

\* \* \* \* \*

The very next day, Bill made arrangements to meet Margaret in the Endicott's Garden during an afternoon break. He couldn't sit, he was so excited. His face beaming, he spouted, "Margaret, our lives are about to change! I saw Major Thompson yesterday. He got his transfer to Montana. He wants us, both of us, both you and me, to go with him!"

"Whoa! Hold on there. Both of us?" She gasped, "To do what? What are you up to? Going back in the Army? And what am I to do?"

"Hold your horses, Peg. I'm not going back in the army. But he gets paid for travel expenses. He gets vouchers for the trip. So, he wants me to help with the transportation details. He's willing to pay part of the cost for us to go with him to start a new life in Montana. Ain't that the beatingest?"

"That may be fine for you," she snapped, "but where do I fit in?"

"That's why it's so grand! His wife has a young boy. He wants you to travel with her to help care for the child and to give her company too. His wife's name is Rebecca he wants you to meet her."

"Well, that's sweet for when you, but I'd I have to quit my job, leave my Ma, and everything here. That's a mighty big change. You're asking a lot of me. How do you know I'd like her? I didn't even know he's married. What if I don't like it when we get there? Where is he heading? And what will you be doing?"

"It's a town on the Missouri River, Fort Benton, I think. I could set up a blacksmith shop like I always wanted. With all the horses out there, it will be good work."

"I don't know. I got to think about all this, she muttered."

"Of course, you do. I don't mean to rush you. But you and me, we've been talking about all this stuff for a long time. Here's a chance to start fresh, and he wants to help us get started.

"It's no secret that I've always wanted to marry you Peg. Here's a chance for that too. What do you say? You will think about it, won't you?"

"Of course, I will. But Bill, it's sure if we do this, there is no turning back. I don't want us to go off halfcocked! I want to talk to my Ma.

"If what I just heard is a marriage proposal, I got to think about that too, don't I?"

## *The Irish Brahmin*

\* \* \* \* \*

As usual, Margaret seemed to do the best thinking in bed in her little loft room.

She said to herself, Well, old girl, if you have ever wanted to prove yourself strong enough to stand on your own, here's your chance. If you want to impress folks with how tough and smart you are, now's the time. The West is a whole new world of opportunity out there. You have sometimes said Bill doesn't plan enough for the future. Here is the opportunity to show how to do it. If you do marry him, at least you know that he's kind and dependable, unlike that scoundrel Ma married.

She chuckled, what are you doing, thinking about marrying an Orangeman?

But if that Rebecca woman wants me to help taking care of her child all the way across the country, she'll probably still need me when we get there. That's something I can do, that'd be a start anyway.

God knows I won't be sorry to leave the Endicott's. That lush is getting to be more than I can bear. If I'm careful, I may be able to work "Himself" there, for a good-bye bonus.

I do wonder what Montana will be like anyway. Margaret, old girl, I say we take the chance. Smiling, she fell asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next several, days passed in a blizzard of activity. Bill arranged for Margaret to visit Rebecca Thompson's home one evening after work. As she walked up the path

to their modest house on Cypress Street, Mrs. Thompson greeted her at the door with a warm smile and a strong handshake. Margaret liked her new friend cautiously. She was a tall blonde woman nearing 30, with an easy-going, friendly manner. Her high cheekbones and strong jaw line conferred a beauty and grace Margaret that saw as a touch of royalty.

As they settled into the first-floor sitting room, Rebecca apologized that her husband, the major, was not at home yet, then served tea for both of them. As she moved about the room, Margaret observed that her host stood a bit taller. She dressed in a plaid skirt just above her ankles topped with a light woolen sweater. This lady was obviously in tune with the latest fashions.

Jeffery, her son, a smaller edition of his mother, was well mannered for a child of six or so.

His mother introduced Margaret by saying, "Jeffery this Margaret. She is a good friend of mine. Say hello to her."

The young boy put out his hand and with a shy smile said, "Hello Margaret."

The two women chatted easily as they shared tea, then jointly helped Jeffery get ready for bed in his pleasant room on the second floor.

Later Rebecca inquired about Margaret's job. She seemed not surprised to learn that Margaret was a housemaid for the Endicotts.

"My mother and father know the Endicotts, so you must have made a good impression. Did you grow up nearby?"

“Yes”, replied Margaret with a secret smile, “I was born in Everett, but went to school here in town when we moved to Watertown some years ago. Do you know the Bleilers on Arsenal Street? I used to work for them as well.”

Having established friendly connections, they talked for an hour or more, about the forthcoming trip, how long it would take, and what to pack. Before long, as it began to get dark, the front door opened and Major Thompson returned. That was a comfortable time for Margaret to thank them both, promise to see them again soon, take her coat to depart. Margaret felt that they met had as strangers, but parted with a good foundation. It gave her an increased sense of confidence about the weeks that lay ahead.

\* \* \* \* \*

During that day, and the several days after, Bill explored the transportation options heading to Montana for Major Thompson. Bill’s first thought was of the railroad running west from Boston to Worcester.

“I’ll bet with a few short changes in the Berkshires to the Western Division of the Hudson and Berkshire line, we could reach Albany, New York by railroad. From that point we could get good comfortable transport via the Erie Canal system all the way to Buffalo and beyond. But that’s a pretty slow route to reach the western rivers and on to St. Louis. That may be the most comfortable and safe way to reach St. Louis, But it will probably take 30 to 40 days at least. It will never get the Major to his new post at Fort Benton by July 1<sup>st</sup>.”

But the more he investigated the more both Bill and the Major became convinced that railroads offered a better

alternative. Bill learned that efforts by railroad builders since the end of the war had pushed many trunk lines westward from Philadelphia. The new routes had been developed to speed freight traffic to and from the West. So, it was now becoming possible for passengers to travel to St. Louis in about a week via Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Cincinnati. Since Major Thompson was due to report to Montana in early July, this alternative looked like the most attractive route.

Also, since the federal government in Washington had encouraged and supported the railroad construction, it became clear that the Major's travel vouchers would probably be honored.

Meanwhile, Major Thompson got in touch with some of his army friends along the route. He hoped to arrange a rest stop for his family to break the arduous trip.

Since time was short, he experimented with the telegraph system gradually taking root across the country. He began by sending electronic messages to the headquarters of the newly formed 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas. He reported his travel plans and estimated time of arrival.

Then he sent off a message to Fort Mitchell near Cincinnati. A Civil War friend of his had spoken of it. Cincinnati lay on one of the train routes to St. Louis, so he thought it would make a convenient stopping place.

Soon he received a reply, not from Fort Mitchell, but from Newport Barracks in Covington, Kentucky, across the river from Cincinnati. Old Fort Mitchell had been converted into an army hospital in Newport. His friend, now a military



doctor in residence, graciously offered to give the whole party lodging when they passed that way.

Bill still had important chores ahead: He had to arrange for freight shipping of the Thompson household goods. He still must obtain rail tickets for the first leg of the trip, to Philadelphia. Departure was set for April 19. With good luck, that should get the party to St. Louis by late April. He discovered that was the date the when steamboat captains expected the Missouri River to be navigable up its entire 2500 miles. He also learned that Fort Benton held the record as the world's most inland port.

Departing on April first gave everyone little more than a week to pack their bags and say their fare-wells'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Margaret's mother lived in a three-flat tenement on Wells Street at the far edge of Watertown, near the Mount Auburn Cemetery. Her brother Michael lived with her but was seldom home. Margaret climbed the stairs to the second-floor apartment with the purpose of saying "good bye" before starting west with Bill, but she expected to face a fight.

"My mother will probably think I'm crazy for leaving. I'm also certain that she won't like the idea of marrying Bill Smyth either."

Holding her breath, she tapped on the door, and strode into the warm apartment.

Margaret's mother, Sarah, supported herself and the family by taking in wash. The big room in front of Margaret was filled almost entirely with clothes-lines hung

with sheets and towels. In addition, the second-floor porch to the east was also crowded with laundry. Sarah stood at an ironing board at the left as Margaret entered. The room smelled, not unpleasantly, of warm cotton and soap. Margaret put her arm around her mother's damp shoulder, gave her a big hug, then slumped into the only chair in the room and sighed, "Hi Ma, we need to talk."

Sarah, visibly brightened at the sight of her daughter. She jumped at the chance for a break, so set down the iron, brushed a lock of sweaty hair from her forehead, and chuckled as she replied, "Always glad to see you dearie, at least you're not Michael looking for beer money! Or are you?"

"No, you know that's never been me, Ma. I'm looking for more than beer money. I'm looking for your blessing. I've come to tell you 'goodbye'."

"That don't surprise me none. I always figured you had itchy feet. Where ya' going today?"

"Not just today, Ma. I'm going West, to the Montana Territory!"

"Montana! God love us! Where's that, and how'd that come about?"

"Bill and me's got a chance to go West to start fresh, where there aren't so many angry Paddies and Micks, like here. We hear rumors they're finding gold out there. Bill's got an army officer friend that'll help pay the way for both him and me."

"Both of you, is it? Didn't know you two'd been hitched! Peg, you'll not run off with that Orangeman without the blessings of the Church, now will you? Has he at least been honest enough to ask you yet?"

"Well, sort of, and I'm still thinking about it. I'm not certain what I'd say when he does. I like him, true enough, but whether he's the one for me, I haven't made up my mind. Meanwhile we got to start traveling."

"God help you, dearie, don't say 'yes' 'till he really does ask you. Then rush him to the altar real quick, before he can change his mind. These boys'll all make sweet noises to get you into the sack. Then they tend to forget the formalities. I wouldn't journey half a block with any Orangeman, especially one that hasn't made a stop at the altar. So, if you're hell bent that he's your man, tie him down before you go an inch with him."

"I will, Ma, but it may be some time before we get time to find a priest. In the meantime, we've got to get moving. His major's got to report to Montana in early July. Besides, his wife has a young one. That's why he's paying for me to go along. I'm to help care for the boy, and to keep her company along the way. So, I'll be rooming with her, not Bill. Old Bill will have to bunk by himself on this trip."

"Well, that sounds better, but it won't make losing you any easier." She turned away, pretending to check some towels on the nearest line, but when she turned back, she had an odd catch in her voice as she coughed, "I'd always dreamt of seeing you in a wedding dress, dearie, so now I suppose that'll happen in Montana."

Then she paused to gather herself. "What about those rich folks you've been working for? Do they know you're takin' off? You're not leaving them in the lurch, are you?"

"Not a bit of it. I gave my notice. I can't say I'm sorry. They treated me fair enough, but handling the woman is more than I bargained for. I could tell you a thing or two."

"You don't need to give me all the gory details. From what little you've already said, I can guess the rest. I sure know about that stuff, don't I – and that's the truth."

"Peg, my darlin'. I can't say I'm happy to see you go off, so young and all, especially since Michael seems to be marching with those Fenians again. But I guess, go you must, so God be with you."

"You've always been my favorite, maybe that's because you're most like me. You're tough, independent, and smart. You'll get along, the way I've had to get along. You'll do just fine. I'm too old to try what you're doing, but if a mite younger." She hesitated,.... "I'd prob'ly be right up there beside you. God bless you darlie, and good luck."

They hugged one another again for a long time, then parted, with tears streaming.

\* \* \* \* \*

The group left Boston on April 19<sup>th</sup>. The trip to Philadelphia was arduous and troublesome. Getting through New York to change trains was especially annoying. By the time they dragged into the inn on Walnut Street everyone showed their weary, gritty, and grouchy side. Margaret

sized up the situation immediately. She resolved it by suggesting that the major, Rebecca, and Bill find a nearby restaurant, have some dinner, and let her take care of Jeffery.

She dipped into her reserves of energy saying, "I'll take care of my friend here, give him a bath, and get him to bed. What do you say, Jeffery?"

This idea appealed to everyone including the tired boy. Then, she clasped Margaret's arm warmly.

Rebecca murmured, "Oh, Margaret, that's a wonderful thing to do. I'm so tired and so grateful to you. You're very thoughtful. We'll bring you something to eat when we come back."

Margaret found the public bathroom just down the hall, and soon had Jeffery splashing happily in a tub of warm water. That cheered the boy noticeably. He hummed as Margaret scrubbed away train grit and grime with a soapy cloth. Soon she picked up on his hummed melody and sang to him a happy rhyme:

"Half a pound of tuppenny rice  
Half a pound of treacle  
That's the way the money goes,  
Pop goes the weasel.

“Up and down the city road  
In and out of the Eagle  
That’s the way the money goes,  
Pop goes the weasel.”

Whether by intent or by instinct, as she sang her words drifted more into the sweet Irish brogue of her youth. The boy picked up her rhythm and her sing-song lyrics.

He said “Oh Aunt Margie, that’s a wonderful song. Will you teach it to me?”

Rather than repeat the first verses Margaret went on:

“Every night when I go out  
The monkey’s on the table  
Take a stick and knock it off,  
Pop goes the weasel.

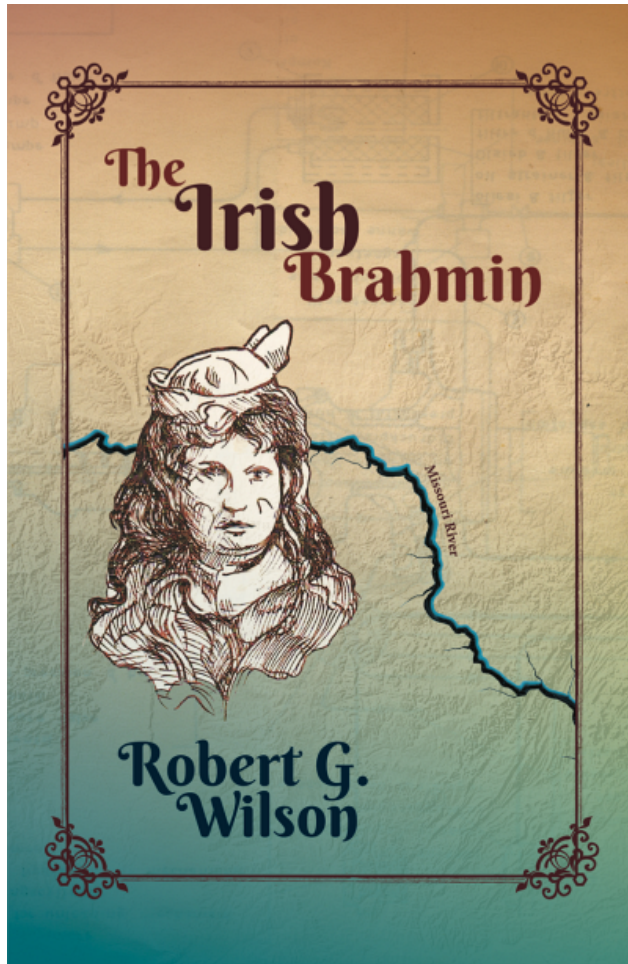
A penny for a ball of thread  
Another for a needle  
That’s the way the money goes,  
Pop goes the weasel.”

*The Irish Brahmin*

As the last verse ended, they both rocked with laughter and she wrapped him with a warm towel. They hurried down the hall. In a few minutes she sat on the edge of the child's bed as he said his prayers that closed with, "And God bless Aunt Margie." Before many minutes he fell asleep and she soon dozed in a soft chair by his side.

When Rebecca returned, she chose not to interrupt Margaret's sleep with thoughts of food, and merely helped "Aunt Margie" into the other twin bed as she slipped in alongside her son.

The first long day of their voyage ended on a decidedly high note despite the frustrations of the road.



A young Irish housemaid from Boston travels half way across the country in the 1870s to try to establish a Brahman life style at a wild west Army fort.

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