

The Thickening Plot

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DEDICATION

To NaNoWriMo, for the forum and excuse. To the brave
souls at NIAC who pointed the way.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I acknowledge that the most important step is showing up.

1 PLOT DRIVEN

I am telling this story in the form of NaNoWriMo, national novel writing month. The situation is certainly novel. At least for me. Others may tell me later it is derivative, that it happened to their neighbor's aunt, or that I simply stole the plot.

I didn't steal the plot. Not technically. I did buy it for one dollar at foreclosure. So it felt like stealing.

I wasn't sure why it was going so cheaply. Neither did my parents, Bob and Janet, or my boyfriend, Stephan. "Maybe it's haunted," Stephan said. But then again, he had a strange view of northern Maine. The only place in the East where you could get lost, physically and mentally. The only place with large unbroken areas of wilderness. And the wilderness in the people too. "If not haunted, then at least otherworldly." I thought he was just being Californian. Before I bought the land, that's what I thought.

It was a lovely spot, a long drive from what passes as the Big City hereabouts. That is, head out of town vaguely

North-East, on the two-lane state highway, for about half-an-hour. In the middle, more-or-less, of some town that has more name than buildings, turn left on the road that bears the name of some other by-name-only town. After this shaded road winds around one hill and then seven more, finally head out to where the dirt road heads off to the left again. That's Maine for you—you can keep turning left, and never cross your old path.

Driving down the dirt road, you wonder if you're heading toward anything. Or are you just meandering, perhaps in a pleasant way, perhaps just one wrong turn after another. Not a bad start to writing about Nanowrimo itself, or at least how I am telling this story.

Finally, there it is. An open meadow. A small stream running along and beside it. A gentle hill beyond. The smell of pine and sweet fern and moisture. My plot. The beginning of the story. We will see, together, if it is also the end.

And so this will be a plot-driven story.

The nature of Nanowrimo, where you load your story to a word counting machine, takes some of the fussiness out of playing for hours with what font to use. So shall I say this will not be a character-driven story?

Since I have not yet even introduced myself, that seems fair enough. Call me Friv. I may tell you more or other or truer names later. But Friv catches my ear for now, and so Friv is what you can call me.

I am an artist. Or at least a craftsman. Craftsgirl? When I lived the next state over, in Nashua, in bustling vibrant crowded relentless Nashua New Hampshire, I belonged to the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen. Not like the

BOOK TITLE

Justice League, not like the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. Not in league with the devil, although I had my doubts sometimes.

I was using my powers for evil.

Rather than lifting the hearts of all I touched, rather than exploring my heart like a spelunker crawling through a tight aorta, I was soaking tourists for whatever I could. I churned out rich and tasteless multi-media scenes of moose and squirrel. And they ate them up. I felt empty.

So from the streets of Nashua to the woods of Maine I came. First this plot, driving to this plot, and finding my direction.

So here I sit, in my car and my tent, at the end of the spring by the side of the stream. I wonder. Well, I wonder a lot. I wonder about the lot, and I wander about the lot.

The first steps take me to the blueberry bushes where it seems a fire had run through three years ago. This is a fine place to sit as I think about the first steps in settling myself here, a modern-day settler. How to become both settled and unsettled at the same time. I moved here because I felt too settled in Nashua. My California Boyfriend thinks I am making life complicated. My New England neighbors accepted my art if it had a purpose, and soaking tourists is a perfectly acceptable purpose. This restlessness confuses everyone as much as the dirt-cheap price of the rare piece of earth.

And rare earth it might be. This place is not too far from one of the areas with rare earth elements. Euxenite, to be precise, was found near here, in Topsham, Maine. Euxenite, from the Greek meaning "hospitable or friendly to strangers." This New England rock might just seem

downright welcoming, compared to the New Englanders themselves.. So why stay here? Why not ditch these bitches and the ditch-digging britches and make the switch all the way to sunny Stephan and California?

Good question.

Maybe it's the same reason I dropped production of shadow boxes. Trading boxing at shadows for tilting at windmills. Ah, but Don Q. himself knew what he was doing. Say what you will, the Knight of the Woeful Countenance had a strong sense of self.

2 THE INEVITABLE CAT

Of course there is a cat. I am a thirty-five-year-old woman, living alone, and an artist to boot. If there had not been a cat, I would have had to invent one.

If I had invented my cat, it would be a sleek black thing with green almond eyes and a superior attitude. I didn't invent my cat. I didn't even choose my cat. This cat appeared one cold New Hampshire week. It seemed to like me and it seemed just like me—not quite a kitten anymore, curious, guardedly affectionate. I find him useful to watch and to talk to. He finds me useful to give him food, give him scratches behind the ear, and give him papers and boxes to sit on and in.

I had trouble picking a name, of course. I had trouble picking my own artist's name. The was around the house for a week before I found his name. Well, you know, the naming of cats is a difficult matter. And I wasn't even on holiday.

I let the beast in, and it was everywhere. On my pillow at night. In the bathroom door in the morning. On my

chair at lunch. In the studio door during my work. On my drafting table every chance it could take. In the bathroom door again—oof—in the middle of the night.

And so the beast was named after the Irish hero who found the doorway to the Otherworld.

My parents say they wish there was someone to watch over me. I told them I found someone, a solid ginger-haired athlete named Bran. It wasn't until they came over for a visit that they learned the awful truth.

I observe. I am an artist, and that's what I do. I watch the changes in sunlight through the clouds, and its effect on Bran's fur. I watch him watch things, and I think he watches me watch things as well. I can tell when the dawn chorus starts by his stirrings on the bed before I hear the birds. I can tell the change in the seasons by its affect on how both of us step.

I am going on about Bran not because I am a batty old lonely woman, or at least not just because I am a batty lonely woman. Bran figures in the mystery of the cabin I am building on my meadow plot. His alertness, and his penchant for doorways, both. If not for these, I would have made a terrible mistake.

3 SHADOWS AND BOXES

I am thinking about the layout of the cabin. I make shadowboxes for a living, and I am good at it. I can find a collection of unrelated items and bring them together into a harmonious yet intriguing whole.

It's hard living in a tent with a cat. And my art supplies are stacked in solid 4x3-foot tupperware containers. A far cry from an artist's studio. I want to put something up as soon as possible. I spend this first day looking at how the shadows play across the field. There is one spot where there is a hill to the East, casting long shadows from the sunrise, and a clear view to the est, to see the sunset. Even better, there is a wetlands with a million tiny puddles to the west. As the sun sets, it lights them all up gold and fire. Late mornings and late evenings, and good light most of the day. Sounds right for an artist.

It's time to build.

Some of my shadowboxes are tiny match-box sized vignettes, and some are cabinets sized. Since I'll start with a tiny cabin, a cabinets, I figure I can jump right in with my

cabinet-building skills. The only differences are stability, insulation, durability, and weather tightness, right? So it's off with Bran and my trusty rusty to town, as it is, for lumber and Tyvek and a rough idea on roughing in my solo rough inn.

For starters today I'll set myself up a lean-to. One floor. One wall. Just to have a bit more comfort and to see how this will come together. Maybe this is an odd way to build a house. Maybe other people draw up plans and elevation drawings. I hear stories from distant parts of building permits and such. There, it seems a miracle that anything ever gets built. I expect I'll follow the tall tales of our wild past, where you can build what you want and houses grew upon themselves.

That's how I do my shadow boxes, anyhow. I start with what materials I have at hand. They give me a glimmer of an idea. I build a frame to fit the idea. The frame calls for other materials to fill it. This gives another idea. When the work tells me it is done, I stop. As my last touch, I always add a door, to invite the viewer to imagine that the shadow box is larger than it really is. Since most of my works take their inspiration from the nature of the New England woods, the door is the most intriguing part of the work, and what keeps the customers to stop for a second or third look. The door may be a space between two trees, or it may be a sugaring-off house, or it may be some surreal ornate gate, standing out of place and Just So at the same time.

So even though my ur-shelter has only an eight-by-seven-foot wall to define it, I add a door frame to the eastern brace.

4 DOOR FRAMES

A good day. In one day, if you're not picky, and I am not, you can throw down a floor and throw up a wall. I had just made the door frame, and had not yet hung the door. I fired up the butane stove, heated water for tea and warmed up my stew, pulled out the bread from the one bakery in town, and after dinner I settled in for a smoke. I had knocked up a bench, leaning up against the lean-to wall. Of course I had made the bench big enough for two. Even big enough for two people, but for now it only had to be big enough for me and Bran.

Where was Bran? Normally after dinner, he settles into my lap if he must, usually opting for being almost but not quite in my lap. Typical cat. Wanting to be two places at once. And here was the perfect almost-but-not-quite spot. Easy to jump to, with an inviting fleece jacket to sit on and furify.

Ah, there he is, in another typical cat almost-but-not-quite spot, sitting on the door threshold, watching me and watching the outside. If outside you can call it. I watch him. I watch him watch me. I watch him watch the

outside.

I notice the orange light of the setting sun making the world look warm and cozy, and think about lighting a real fire.

And I watch Bran.

I watch the light cast long shadows on from my lean-to side braces, and the darkening cast on the grasses around me.

And I watch Bran.

I watch the light cast shadows from Bran's ears over the front of his face. Why is the light hitting his head from above? Maybe I left a cross-brace over the door on the other side, and it reflects light downward? But the shadows are too distinct for that. Maybe I left my big flashlight on a piece of scaffolding? I pulled it out to check an awkward joinery. If I leave it on all night, then it'll be dead if I need it in the morning, and I didn't want to take the long drive into town just to replace batteries.

5 THRESHOLD

I get up from the bench, stretch, and head over to Bran and the doorway. Bran looks up at me and blinks. I have only ever taught him one trick, the only trick anyone has ever taught a cat.

"Bran, are you coming in or aren't you?"

As usual, he did or he didn't. Today, he didn't. Bran got up from the threshold, stretched, and leapt down and out, landing with a crunch.

Crunch?

I step through after him, and also crunch. While my left foot just leaves the lean-to floor, my right foot lands on gravel and small stones.

The light is bright and direct. The air is dry and a little spicy. The stream is silent, replaced with the sound of sheep and a man saying "And where did you come from, little one?"

I start and look around. I am in a jumble of large

stones, with no-one in sight. I hear Bran mew, and realize the man is talking to the cat.

Enough of this. I step forward three long steps, get a glimpse of a tall man in a long coat, scoop up my cat. I take a deep breath, turn around, and look back at the stones from which I came.

My heart rate slows just a hair when I see an orange glow of twilight faintly illuminating two of the taller stones. I step briskly between them and back into the lean-to.

Wow.

First thing, I toss Bran into the truck cab. Complain all you like, I am not going to accidentally time travel or cross into the land of fairy chasing some damn cat. Then I ponder.

The sunset is as I left it. The tea is still warm. No loss of twenty years of my life.

And now what about that door? I would be no kind of artist if I wasn't delighted and amazed. But I need some sort of control. If nothing else, to keep Bran from hopping through again.

Do I block it off or do I dismantle the door frame? It seems to me that the one might preserve the ... magic? ... and the other would not. One keeps my options open, keeps the door open, and the other puts me back in my same old world.

What the hell. I moved from Nashua to Maine to shake myself up. As they say, ask the universe, and it delivers. Want a shake up? Here you go, ma'am. Care for an

existential crisis for dessert?

No need to hang a door tonight. It is getting late, and I just need it to be enough to keep Bran from getting us both into trouble. A sheet of plywood, a couple of nails, and that should do the job.

OK. I head to the lumber pile I'd made, haul off a sheet of plywood, grab a couple of nails, and tromp back to the door frame. I set the foot of the sheet against the bottom edge of the frame, pull a nail out, and raise the hammer.

6 BANANA, BANANA

Knock, knock.

"Who's there?" I can't help but think about knock-knock jokes. Argo, interrupting cow, banana.

"My name is Brandon. I met your cat. I'd like to meet you."

"Are you alone?" Foolish question. Trust him or not. If he were hostile, what would I do? What could I ask to reassure myself?

"Often. And presently."

For the second time in ten minutes, I take a deep breath and hope my next actions will not lead to disaster. Fine. Not so strange. My usual plan of attack. As I say, "Look before you leap, and then leap."

I put the nail in my pocket, pull aside the sheetrock,

land lower the hammer.

"Hello Brandon. Call be Friv. Do you drink tea?"

He steps forward. I say "Do you mind? I want to keep the cat safe." He furrows his brow for a moment and says "Ah, this isn't some witchy trick to trap me in the other world, then?" I look at him, and say "You walked through to me. If it will make you feel better, I'll use just the one nail, and leave the hammer by the door."

I let the cat out of the cab, relight the stove, pour another two cups of tea, and gesture for us both to sit on the bench. I say "It'll be very confusing, your name being Brandon, as my cat's name is Bran."

"I expect that is not the most confusing thing we will find tonight."

"I expect you're right."

We watch the sun set over the wetlands. Strange, so much is strange, but especially strange to find someone who knows when it is time to be quiet.

After enough of a pause, long enough to finish our tea, Brandon says, "Your cat's name is Bran, as in the old tales. So, are you an alchemist?"

"No," I say, "I am an artist."

"Do you paint?"

"Some."

"Do you draw?"

"Some."

"Do you sculpt?"

"Some."

"Ah. And is this is why you have some of a house?"

I laugh. I suppose it is.

I look over at this tall man with shoulder-length hair pulled back in a simple ponytail, long greenish jacket, and leather pants. "And you," I say, "are you a fairy?" I immediately bite my tongue. Does he blush, just a tiny bit? "No," he replies, "a farmer. And a frayed one at that." He gestures at his worn coat sleeves.

"Alright," I said. "You picked the first question. My turn. You also know the old tales. Are you Irish?"

"Certainly," he says. "As are you, judging from your nose and chin."

"Oh, my grandparents were, but I'm American."

At this, Brandon's brown eyes widened. "Ah, the colonies. But they are not old enough for grandchildren. Unless, for my question. What year is this?"

"Ah, excellent question. 2015. And your year?"

"Remarkable. 1597."

"My turn again. Where were you when we met?"

"I should just answer 'East of the Sun and West of the Moon.' In truth, it was close by my farm, in County Cork.

And where are we now?"

"East Bottomfield, Maine, near nothing in particular."

"I can see that. But then again, I expect the colonies might be a bit provincial."

That got my dander up. "You think so, do you? Big words from a frayed farmer. Here, give me that coat." Brandon shrugs off his coat, and hands it over with a curious expression. I take it over to the fabric box, and pull out a strip of brown damask, some pins, and the small battery-powered sewing machine. I take this all over to the truck cab to get some more light. Five minutes later, I hand him back his coat, looking dapper. He nods his head. "Many thanks. This is fine work."

I head over to the fabric crate to put away my pins and stitcher. In the crate is one of my boxes, only half finished. This one has a lot of little cloth bits left to add. I pull it out to make room for the stitcher. I hand it to Brandon to hold, and he looks it over. It has a cabin in the background, light woods in the midground. In the foreground is a too-precious girl in a gingham dress, bent over at the waist, nose-to-nose with a baby bear. Below their six tootsies are the words, in blue and blush, "Be Fearless."

Brandon raises an eyebrow. I say "Hey, it's a living."

"How is that? Do you have an agreement with the undertaker?"

"No sir. People will buy something that shows them as how they want to see themselves." Brandon nods and looks thoughtful.

I look up at the darkening sky. "I need to set up camp tonight, and you probably can't leave your farm alone too long."

Brandon nods again. "But tomorrow is market day, and I am free of the farm for a spell. Lady Fearless Draws-some, come with me to market tomorrow."

I grin. "It was noon when I stepped out, right? So Maine runs about 6 hours ahead of Cork. If you come by the door at daybreak your time, it should be midday mine."

"Unless time runs differently. In the old tales, an evening in Other World was twenty years back home."

"But neither of our homes are fairy," I say, "and my tea was warm after I fetched Bran. Still, as I say, 'look before you leap and then leap.' Let's check the flow of time."

We agree Brandon will step through the door, he will knock, I will knock back, and then we'll each count to a minute and knock again.

"How will I time a minute," Brandon asks.

"Just count to sixty. One banana, two banana, three banana."

"That should work. Funny word, that. 'Banana.'"

That's when I really got chills.

7 'TO MARKET'

I woke up early. Lots to do before Brandon shows back up. Look first, then leap. And so - up at sunrise to get to the lumber yard when it first opens at seven.

"Morning, Ted."

"Morning, Friv. Those salvaged two by eights work out for you?"

"Yup. They worked fine. I just need a quick door and hinges today."

"We're expecting some used doors tomorrow."

"Thanks, Ted, but I'll buy a new door."

"Alright. Aisle 12 inside. Hinges, handles and locks are on the end display."

"OK then." I head over, with Bran in my cat-friendly sack. I had stitched this up when I first started taking Bran with me to gallery spaces. It's basically a sling with a felted lining, arranged so Bran can snuggle against me on one

side and look out on the world on the other. Typical cat, trying to be two places at once. At least it keeps him close and quiet.

I had over an hour to think through the question of a lock during the drive into town. I wanted a door because the plywood was going to be a pain, but I still needed a way to keep the cat from wandering through. And a lock would keep other people from wandering through too. But what would a lock do from the other side? I didn't see my modern doorframe when I passed back through with Bran. Certainly I wasn't looking hard, but I would have seen that.

For that matter, what would happen if I close the door behind me? Brandon knocked on the plywood, and I heard that. Sound is a physical vibration of material, right? So the side of the whatever he saw was connected somehow to the side I saw. But if there were a closed door, would there be a knob?

Right. Mount the door with a latch only, no lock, for when I am at home. And get some hardware to keep the door open when I am away. At least until Brandon and I can experiment with trips in an out.

In fact, now that I'm here, maybe it's not a good idea to mount the door this morning. Some times it's fine to experiment, like trying copper wire as a way to draw faces. Some times it's not, like risking being trapped forever an ocean and four centuries from home.

I wouldn't enjoy market day half as much if I were terrified.

So for now, I just pick up hooks, $3/4$ spaced from the wall, on which to hang the $1/2$ -inch plywood.

Sigh. Probably a wasted trip, and certainly a waste of good money on an honest-to-god new door. As well as ruining my reputation as a thrifty yankee.

The next stop is the library when it opens at 9:30, where Mary helms the desk. She is the town's librarian, and the county clerk.

"Morning, Mary."

"Morning, Friv. Are you in to ask about your well, or your septic?"

"Neither one. I'm in a bit of a hurry. Where can I find out about Ireland about 1600?"

"Irish history will be, let's see, 941.5. Are you starting a new project?"

"Sometimes a project starts me. But I don't know much."

"1600. That's Elizabethan England: Shakespeare and Drake and all that. Ireland's under Queen Elizabeth too, but not so easily."

I head over to history shelves, and lay my hands on the 650-page tome, "The Oxford Companion to Irish History." Not much else likely-looking on the shelves. I hesitate just a hair, wondering where I can keep this dry. Oh, in the truck cab I guess.

Gee, maybe both my vital errands were not so useful. I take my doorstopper over to the desk.

"Alright, Friv," Mary says, "that'll be due in 2 weeks. Good luck. And I thought you might find these useful

too." She hands me over some photocopied pages, apparently from some book called "Timetables of History."

"Mary, you're a lifesaver," I say, hoping I don't believe it.

Back, back, back to the back of beyond. At this point, I have just an hour or so before I expect Brandon's knock, if all goes well. Do I spend it rehanging the plywood, or reading some homework? I figure the doorframe does what expect now, but a little knowledge could go a long way.

How selfish of me! I could have grabbed a short history of the US for Brandon. Oh, though, to think of the library fines if it got lost in 16th century Ireland. Four centuries at a quarter a day. I have last Sunday's newspaper. That might give him some idea of what he steps into. Provincial colonies, indeed.

I read more-or-less at random. My eye, of course, is caught by items of craftsmanship and industry. The sumptuous laws of 1675! Sounds worse than a homeowners association, legislating who can wear which colors or fabrics. Did I turn Brandon into an outlaw by mending his coat with fancy cloth on the sleeve hem?

As it gets closer to noon, I get restless. Did our little time-flow experiment mean anything? Is Brandon reckless enough to bring me over? Will I get burned as a witch? Is this just a ploy to, I don't know, ransack my plastic crates? Or maybe the plastic crates themselves are a king's ransom?

Bran is really getting concerned at my pacing, when I hear:

Knock, knock.

"Who's there?" See, I can't help it.

"Lady Fearless Drawsme, you know who I am."

I remove my one securing nail, and Brandon steps through. He is in his market-day best: clean linen shirt, jerkin, and stockings to show his fine farmer's legs.

"Don't you look fine," I say.

"Aye, it's market day. You will see a lot of finery. Are you ready?"

"Yes, as ready as I can be."

He hands me a stack of clothes. Ah, Brendon's been thinking and running errands too.

"They were my sister's," he says, "and they should fit you." I walk around to the far side of the lean-to to change. How odd to see the backside of this doorway, looking completely innocuous.

As I change, he says, "What should I call you, again?" That's right, he never actually used my artist's name yesterday. "I go by Friv in my artists's work. But my parents names me Catherine."

"That is perfect, by fearless fiery friend. You will be my cousin, Catherine Dawson."

I step out, and Brandon nods approval at my costume. I mean my outfit.

"Come along then. But maybe bring your charcoals."

"Good idea." I gather some charcoals and a sketchbook, and grab up Bran and the cat sling.

One more deep breath, and we step through.

8 DRAWING A BREATH

It is, indeed, early morning on the Other Side. We step around the large stones and up the trackless field toward the hilltop. At the top, I stop and look around me to get my bearings. Could I find this spot again, if I lost Brandon? I think so.

From the hilltop, I can easily see into the small village, and the town square about a mile and a half away. Already it was starting to fill up. "It's strange," I say, "but I'm closer to a market by coming through the door than I am in Maine." Brandon did not look like it was strange. Maybe he is still thinking of the provincial Americas.

"Come on," he says. "You'll enjoy this."

We take an easy half-hour to walk into town. During that time, I want to pry and yet I also don't. I want to gather my information by watching and listening, to see what people do, not what they say. It's gotten me safely through life so far, and I don't see why four centuries should make that much difference. If we started trying to tell each other our stories, we'd never stop.

"How fun can a market day be," I ask, "if I don't have any money."

"Well, Lady Drawsome, I talked to a friend of mine about that. Would you mind sketching some of the other people in the market for a while?"

And so we enter the market. I see the carts with breads and chickens and just a few with fruits. Brandon chats easily with the merchants, although he clearly was not buying. I noticed that further in to the square, the carts and tables became filled less with food and more with drygoods. All the words flitting through my head from old songs or people's last names. Tinker. Chandler. What do you call a barrel-maker again?

Brandon raises his hand in greeting at a white-haired stooped man and his two blond assistants, standing behind an array of linen and woolen cloths. "Hello, George," Brandon calls out. "This is my talented cousin I was telling you about."

"Right. The one whose name you were oddly unwilling to tell me."

"Well, George O'Reilly, meet my cousin, Catherine Dawson. Catherine, meet George, his son 'Young George,' and his other son, Henry."

I am uncertain, and do a half-bob. "Most pleased to meet you."

"Catherine," George says, "Brandon tells me you draw."

"Yes"

"He says you have a theory, that people want to buy drawings that show themselves how they want to look."

"Yes, I told him that."

"He and I think that you might be able to sell drawings to people as they try on shawls, for as much as a quarter-penny."

I have no idea what the market will bear, so I say "A quarter-penny! As much as that?"

"Ah, well, you won't know until you try."

It isn't too long before we get to put this to the test. Two neatly dressed women come by. George says his good mornings, introduces me as Brandon's cousin, and then says, "I have just the new shawls for you. May I?" as he drapes them over their shoulders and arranges the gathers near the neck just so. "It is from this spring's lambs. Isn't it soft? And warm?" The women allow as they are. "Almost as good," says George, "is how the soft wool makes you look like young lambs yourself. Wouldn't you say so, Brandon?" Brandon says that yes, he would have taken them for their own daughters. I see my cue.

"Pardon me, but I have been practicing my drawing. Those look so lovely on you. Would you mind terribly if I draw the two of you?" I pose the two of them.

This is easy work, pleasant work. Drawing fabrics is always a fun challenge, as it has been forever. Well, since the renaissance, I guess. In moments have a passible likeness.

"Why, Master O'Reilly, I do believe you have described

the wares accurately," says the older of the two women. They purchase the wool shawls with a smile. George looks at me. "And should we ask Mistress Dawson if she will part with her drawings?" They do ask. I hesitate, with some sincerity. These are the first 16th-century portraits I've drawn. Maybe my hesitation makes the work seem more valuable. I easily get the quarter-penny from the pair.

The next hour or so continues like this. More often than not, I sell the sketch. Those I do not sell, one of the sons tacks up on a long staff besides the table. The sketches themselves seem to catch people's eyes. I gather that street artists are a novelty in County Cork. By lunch, I have four and a half pennies.

"Come," says Brandon, "this has been thirsty work for you." For just a penny and a half, I get a tankard of ale and a chicken.

9 EVEN KEELED

Brandon and I settle in to lunch. Normally at lunch I would be drinking coffee, but that doesn't seem to be an option here. Maybe not anywhere? Maybe only in London or Vienna? Everyone seems to drink ale at lunch. In fact, they have been drinking ale all day long. It might be safer than the water.

Nobody is near our trestle table, and so I feel free to speak what is on my mind.

"Brandon, is it this fine ale, why you are taking all of this in stride?"

"Dear Catherine, I think I take your meaning. As a farmer, I learn to be measured in my reactions. And as an Irishman, I learn that life is full of mysteries, every day. You are not half as strange as the tales my grandma tells, and she is an upright woman who would never lie to me. But how about you?"

"Oh, Brandon, I think the most unlikely thing is that two such similar souls met over the span of four centuries. Compared to that, doors are just a mechanism, a passageway. I also grew up reading stories of fantasy or time travel, but they were never sold as anything but

fiction. They make you think, though. I think my reaction is a combination of New England practicality and having an artist's eye. One says 'don't get too excited,' and the other says 'watch, learn, and don't be surprised by anything.'

I take another sip. "Growing up, parents always told their kids 'don't talk to strangers.' It took me a long time to unlearn that."

"We see so few strangers here, we do not get that warning. Just like my pa neve told me not to step through magic doorways."

"Magic? I don't know yet."

"What else could it be?"

"I have no idea. But if it's natural or constructed, it has to follow some rules, and we can figure out what they are. Like how time runs at the same speed on both sides. If it's magic, then that's just silly."

"How can a woman who chooses to have others call her 'Friv' complain about something being silly?"

"Oh, its one thing to be frivolous, to have the world touch you only lightly, and to touch the world only lightly. There is a great relief in not being responsible for anyone. But to have something like the door act in an unpredictable and arbitrary way, that's something else again."

"People are unpredictable and arbitrary, so why should the door be different?"

"Maybe that's why I moved out of the city. Or rather,

am moving out of the city. With just one wall and no well, I'm not really moved in."

"You are planning on a new well?"

"Sure. I live too far from town for the water lines. Oh, but you mean am I getting my own well? Yes, and a well pump. When that is in, I can turn on a tap and get running water inside."

"That would be something to see."

"Oh, you'll see it soon enough. I've got to get the house buttoned up before winter, and it is already June in 2015."

"That is a tall order. You have just the one wall. And how many men do you have working on it?"

"No-one. It is just mine, and whatever advice I can get from Bran. And I'll hire out some of the work with heavy machinery, like the well."

We sat quietly again for a while. I looked at the houses around us and thought about how much easier even building "by hand" is now, with the great industry making nails and two by fours and preformed concrete blocks.

"It must be getting on sunset back at your home, if we are right," Brandon said. "But I hope you will stay through the evening."

"I want to also. Maybe it would be safer to return at sunrise, or about midnight here. If some one sees us arrive, my house will be seized by the government and we will be taken away for study. If someone sees us leave..."

"They will assume witchcraft, of course. You say 'we.'"

Are you offering me another cup of tea?"

"It'll be long night, I know. But I am itching to do some tests, to see how the door works. Aren't you? I bought a door with a lock for the doorframe, but I was too uncertain to use it this morning."

The afternoon went much as the morning, with even more brisk business. Word of my drawing brought some people in, and even the rejected drawings caught the eye of others and slowed them down at least long enough for George to reel them in the rest of the way. Clearly he was an experienced salesman, and his patter kept the same personal and encouraging tone through the whole day. He was downplaying my role, but between customers, we would look at me and give me a wink. For my part, I was happy as a clam. I was able to make full-up sketches of a few dozen new and unusual faces, and small character sketches of a few dozen more. I'd been spending so much time with the delicate fussiness of assembling the shadow boxes, I'd missed the free flowing feeling of simple charcoal on paper.

At the end of the day, George, Young George and Henry packed up their stall. Young George took down my drawings, a half-dozen of them. George says, "These are yours, but I would like to keep one to show what you've done here today."

"Certainly, for a price. Not the ha-penny. Instead, I'd like to draw the three of you. A proper drawing, not one of these quick sketches. Maybe after dinner? Would you mind?"

"Mind? Miss Dawson, do know that you doubled my business today? Your cousin thought it might attract some attention, but we were all surprised by how much. In fact,

BOOK TITLE

I insist that you and Brandon both dine with my family tonight. "

10 STILL-LIFE WITH GEORGE

And so we stayed for dinner with the O'Reilly's. I'd met the father, George, and the older sons, Young George and Henry. Around the table that evening were also their two younger sisters, Maude and Sarah, and the baby, Thomas. The mother, Christina, saw them through. Clearly, she was the mistress of the house, in more than name alone.

Christina greeted George. She looked concerned when she heard there were two more for dinner, and had what looked like a long-standing air of wariness as she took the cashbox from her husband. He said nothing, but only grinned when she opened it. Christina hid her reaction, but I could see the pleasure in her eyes. George extolled Brandon's wisdom and my talent. "So we can certainly feed these two tonight" George said. Henry squeaked "In fact, we brought you a treat from market for tonight." From his sack, he pull out a half-gallon sized clay pot. "Eels!"

Oh joy.

I was quiet during dinner. It was half prudence, half

preference. I will probably get a reputation for being an idiot. New Englanders are notoriously quiet, and we get a lot of guff for it in other parts of the country. In contrast, the O'Reillys were merry. Henry delighted his sisters with stories of the people in the market, complete with voices and mannerisms. George and George talked about what new fabrics to weave to complete their inventory, and Catherine was not shy about chipping in. They noticed the trim on Brandon's sleeve. Really, was everything going to come crashing down because of a foot of trim? The O'Reillys were all insistent. What workmanship, what fine stitching.

"Ah, you'd expect that from Miss Dawson's clever hands and keen eye," says Young George.

"But where did you get the fabric," asks Mistress O'Reilly, all business again.

"Miss Dawson is able to aske for scraps from the dressmakers back home," improvised Brandon.

"And where is home? Brandon never said," asked Mistress O'Reilly.

"Penzance" I answered, trying to hide my panic. That was an OK answer, right? Far from here, a seaport so it might get exotic items. Nobody challenged it, and I saw Brandon exhale. Even from Christina, I saw a look of motherly concern.

"Oh, darling Catherine, why-ever did you go so far?"

"I was courted by" I bit my tongue before I could say "Pirate." Brandon stepped up for me. "We was courted by a sea captain, but he did not return from his last voyage. Family is family, and so I called for her to come join us in

Cork."

"Aye, family is family," said George. Looking around the table at the seven O'Reillys, I had to agree. When was the last time I phoned my parents? I could claim no cell service on my lot, but I was just in town this morning. Was it only this morning? This was going to be worse than jet-lag, if we kept it up, Brandon and I. I can't easily go into a pharmacy and ask for something for door-lag.

"Family is family," I say, smiling at Brandon. So quickly, he feels like a familiar familial face. Could it be only because I knew him for a half-hour longer than anyone else. "Family is family, and any drawing of Master O'Reilly is incomplete without all of you. Just stay right there at the table, you couldn't be more perfect." I move my chair to the corner by the fire.

"Surely I should clear the plates off the table" frets Mistress O'Reilly.

"Absolutely not! Don't touch a thing!" I stand and gesture her to sit. They all stare, even little Thomas.

"Well now," says George. "I guess we know what it takes to make your cousin speak for herself. Catherine, since you are so clear in your instructions, we will obey."

I blush. I haven't blushed in years, but this outburst makes me blush. I have this feeling that I should have had before chasing Bran through the doorframe. I have this feeling of anticipation, that I am about to start some new and unmappable adventure.

Every journey starts with a single step, and this drawing is it. I take my time, encouraged by George's words earlier. I pay particular attention to the faces, as I must, and as I

had been doing all day. This time, I also have the luxury of being able to record the details. The rough turning of the table legs. The jug of ale, and the mugs in front of all the family, even the daughters. The plates and knives, but no forks. Were people not using forks yet? Or were they too expensive for this weaver? All those fancy table setting people have to deal with now, with their too-many forks—maybe that starting off by people showing off a new technology? The guttering candles. The clean but unadorned clothes, even for a weaver's family. I think that this would be good worked up as a painting, and make notes to myself in the corner as to colors.

I finish the composition, and show it to Brandon and the O'Reillys. They all agree it is a very good likeness. I think so too, and more besides. The likeness is a workman's job. The arrangement of the people and the still-life that was the meal is more than adequate. The true gem, maybe for the first time in my life, is the subject.

"This is going to make me famous," I say to Brandon as we head back to his farmhouse.

"Really? Don't people eat dinner in America?" he asks.

11 DOOR TRIALS

"It doesn't have to be a good plan, it just has to be a plan." I say.

"Yes, yes. I know. Look, and then leap."

Well, if you're going to leap, and I almost always do, you learn to look. And listen. I heard Bran's "crunch" of paws on small stones before I went through. Hmm. Come to think of it, I didn't look before following Bran. That was foolishness and luck. If you are secure, you can be more open, and have more adventures.

So we came up with a plan that would test this door. A good plan that we could follow even when we were tired. I wrote it out in a list, which amazed Brandon. He said there weren't any women in the village who could read, let alone write. When pressed, he admitted he could only read with difficulty, himself. Good to do this after supper, rather than at midnight. By midnight, I'll have been up for 24 hours straight, and drinking ale for most of that time.

1. Can Friv/Catherine find her way from Brandon's house to the stones in the dark? No, not yet. Brandon had

to point her way three times. Check. Something to work on next time.

2. What does the door look like from the Ireland side? Um. Dark. It's midnight. Lighting a lantern, it looked like a gap between the two tall stones, with the faint glow of dawn just beginning to softly illuminate the sides of the stones.

"Will it glow with sunlight in a few hours" Brandon wonders, "that will make it easy to notice."

"It was midafternoon when I made the door, before Bran jumped through around sunset. What drew you up to these stones, anyhow?" Brandon only shrugged.

3. Can Friv step through, and is she back home (knock once for home OK, three quick knocks for distress). Yes. Friv and Brandon agree that stories with time travel or fairy doors sometimes don't end well.

4. What did the door look like after Friv stepped through, and can Brandon follow? Unchanged, and yes.

And now the tricky ones.

5. Friv gives Brandon a key. Brandon returns to Ireland. Friv mounts the door. Friv opens the door and latches it in the open position. Can Friv step through into Ireland? What does the doorway look like? Can she step back to Maine? Yes. Unchanged. Yes.

6. Friv closes the door. Brandon knocks on the door. Friv opens the door. Did Friv hear the knock? What does the doorway look like? Can Brandon step into Maine? Yes. A door, with a doorknob. Yes.

7. Brandon returns to Ireland. Friv closes the door. What does the door look like? Can Brandon open the door (he'll knock if he can't)? Can Brandon enter Maine? A door, yes, and yes.

8. Brandon practices locking and unlocking the door while it is half-open in Maine. Brandon returns to Ireland. Friv closes the door and locks it. What does the door look like? Can Brandon unlock and open the door? Can Brandon reenter Maine? A door, yes, and yes.

9. Friv returns to Ireland. Brandon closes the door and locks it. What does the door look like? Can Friv unlock and open the door? Can Friv reenter Maine? A door, yes, and yes.

"I hope we don't lose a piece of our soul each time we do this," says Brandon.

"I hope this isn't a limited-use passageway," I agree. "Do you feel different?"

"Just tired. How about some of that tea?"

Tea and ale and a friend you can trust. How quickly Brandon became someone to trust.

We've tested the vital but easy stuff. The things we expected the answers to, but would get us in trouble if they were otherwise. The next steps were more risky, and would take us truly into the unknown.

"It would be prudent," I say, "to get some rest before the next tests."

"I expected you'd say that, my increasingly inaccurately named Friv," said Brandon.

"I don't hear an argument from you, Master O'Reilly."

"So when do we visit again?" He is eager. He raises an eyebrow, and I expect him to sweeten the pot with a promise of some other small-town event. No such luck. "If my cousin disappears, then people will suspect I have locked her up or worse. Tomorrow is Sunday, and surely even a witch like you attends church?"

"Oh Lord," I sigh, "I haven't been to church for years, outside of weddings."

"Then you would rather see me hang than to suffer the pain of a hard pew?"

"I couldn't stand for you to wear such a roughly made collar. Fetch me for church. You can let yourself in. I'm going to bed."

And so we part. I stash the precious drawing of the O'Reilly family in the safest place I have, in a document tube under the seat in the truck cab. The sooner I have a weather-tight house, the easier. Then I clean up a little, and crawl into the tent as the sun rises and the world wakes up.

12 VOICE TRAINING

I get five hours of sleep. If I could sleep on-and-off, like Bran can. At about noon, I hear a car arrive.

Damn!

I get out of the sleeping bag, unzip the tent, and slip on a jacket, more for modesty than warmth on this warm early-summer midday. Who even knows where I live? My parents, two states away in Massachusetts. My boyfriend, even farther. Who in town?

Mary steps out. Of course. The county clerk knows where I live. I filed all my well and septic paperwork with her.

"I hope you don't mind. I came by to see what your Elizabethan project was. I didn't mean to wake you."

BOOK TITLE

I grunt. Was that expressive enough? Does Mary speak artist?

And then another form walks around from the passenger side. A broad-shouldered man with a face like a sausage factory opens his wide mouth for his big speech.

"Morning, Ma'am."

I stare at Mary.

"Friv, this is Al, with Bottomsfield Well and Septic. He's here to inspect your lot."

I stare at Al.

"Did we talk? Did I schedule this visit? Because if so, I have to talk to my doctor about these blackouts."

Al says, "Mary said she was coming out here. I grabbed a ride. You could hire my brother, Erwin, from East Bottomsfield Well and Septic, but he lives another 50 miles away."

I realize that Bottomsfield is a one-septic-installer kinda town. How to hurry them up without seeming even more odd? Oh, what the heck. I'm an artist. They'll think I'm odd anyway. If I can get them away before Brandon comes in, that's worth my pride.

"OK, Al. Look around. I hope you're not easily distracted though."

"Not usually. Why?"

"Well, I just got up, and I have to do my morning voice training."

I give him five minutes to maybe satisfy himself as to the placement of a septic and well — I do need those soon after all, so I am torn. I make myself appear busy getting dressed and feeding the cat. And then I start the a farce of voice lessons I took ten years ago. I start with lip buzzes just to get their attention. To make it more effective as a deterrent, I gesture a "V" with the index of ring finger of each hand, turn my palms to the front, place my fingers on my cheeks, and stick my elbows out. For good measure, I bug my eyes out on the exhale.

Sure enough, Al stops walking the area between my lean-to and the river, and looks at me.

I follow up with four siren songs. Siren as in fire alarm. I run my voice from my very highest to my very lowest notes at the highest volume I can.

Al freezes.

I do the breathing exercises, the heavy exhalations, just as I was taught. What wasn't taught was the haka-style squat, stomp and step.

Al nods to Mary. They head back toward the car. Al starts to open his mouth to speak, then closes it again when I change the exhale from "hoo" to "hee."

For appearances, I keep up the haka/exhalations as they drive away. I am still doing it when Brandon steps through.

"Is this the secret to your witchy powers?" he asks?

I see the car make the final turn. "No, I just bluffed a pair of unexpected visitors."

13 CHURCH

As we did before market day the day before, Brandon brought a change of clothes. Was it only the day before?

We cross together into Ireland without incident, and lock the door behind us. As we walk down the hill toward town, I'm grateful that I hardly talked at market yesterday. If I am the dumb cousin, that will make passing so much easier. Much surer to just sit and watch than to ask Brandon too many questions and forget the answers to most of them.

Brandon brings us around an extra quarter mile, so that we hit a small lane between two tall hedgerows, and use that to join with the main lane toward the church. "People do not normally walk to church across the open fields," Brandon says.

The church itself was the first stone building I'd seen in Brandon's Ireland. It was a small building, with just one door a one large room, but the workmanship was extremely fine. The stones were dressed, not rough, and the graceful arches over the door let me know I was entering a sacred space. Inside were the wooden pews that

Brandon spoke of, ten rows of them on either side of the aisle. The ceiling was vaulted. The walls were adorned with smallish paintings of scenes from the bible, I guess. It had been a very, very long time since I'd set foot in a church.

There were no hymnals, no bibles by the pews. I guess that makes sense, if most of the people were illiterate.

Brandon lead me over to about the seventh pew back, where the O'Reillys were sitting with another large family. Introductions were made. The other family were the O'Malloys, headed by Christina's brother, Sam.

Fortunately, I did not have to pretend to know the songs or the order of service. The service was entirely in Latin. All I had to do was stay awake. Not the easiest thing after the short night.

The priest looked at the assembly, and took a deep breath, and began his sermon. The villagers shifted on their pews, and all sat up a little straighter. It seemed that I was in for a oral performance.

"Sloth!"

A pause.

"Sloth! One of the seven deadly sins. Why do we guard our hearts only against wrath, and envy, and pride? Why do we restrain our bodies only against lust and gluttony and greed? Why do we lower the gates against these obvious dangers, only to let sloth creep in through the side door?"

"It takes vigilance to train the heart and mind. It takes practice to see the untruths we tell ourselves. It takes discipline to hold fast in the face of dangers and

temptation."

"Sloth is the quietest of the seven sins. At the time, it feels merely pleasant. Beware! It is the root of all the other six. Sloth is pleasant at the time but painful. A weak, unpracticed heart will not recognize the evils of wrath, and envy, and pride. A weak, unpracticed heart will tell us lies, will tell us that we are being just or honest. An unrestrained body will yield to lust and gluttony and greed. An unrestrained body will not understand that these are passing pleasures, being nothing next to our future rewards. Sloth allows all these sins and more."

"A man toils his whole life. A woman never rests either. Do not curse God for this state! Rather rejoice! Rejoice! Each day that you arise and make your daily bread is another day to practice discipline! Make your work an offering to the Lord. Make your work a chance to strengthen your heart and your faith."

"And let us say Amen."

The wind is knocked out of me. I'd heard some of this before, as this strangely had the same message as the Buddhist "chop wood, carry water." This time, I felt like he was talking straight to me. I'd put up the lean-to, and then spent two entire days indulging myself in sixteenth-century Ireland. I emit a small cry and slump my shoulders. Brandon looks over at me with concern.

"What is wrong, Catherine?"

"Brandon, thank you for this diversion, but I've not touched my house for two days." I think of the library book and the drawing in the cab of the truck. "If nothing else, I need to go back set up a dry storage room."

"Go back right now? When it is the end of your day? And I can hardly picture you going without a plan. Come back to the house, tell me your plan for your storage room, and I will help you in the morning."

I can't tell if Brandon was the devil, offering me paving stones of good intentions, or if he knows me this well after only two days. I fall back on my motto: "Look first, and then leap." His suggestion and his offer both make sense.

"Thank you, Brandon. I believe I will."

I worry a little about the cat. I couldn't see taking Bran with me to church. I thought "Let it go. He's a cat. There's a field. I know he's a mouser. He can manage." Am I more worried that Bran needs me, or that he doesn't?

14 PLAN VIEW

I head back to Brandon's farm. The clothes feel awkward, and the shoes doubly so. No wonder people never went more than five miles from the place they were born!

Brandon lets me in. I'd been in his farm before, last night, after the long evening at the O'Reilly's. He pours me, of course, a draught of ale, and sits at the table.

"Let's see what you are planning for that house," he says. "I don't have the fancy paper you brought. But I did think you'd want something to draw on. I asked the school master for some slate and chalk. It's the only time I've talked to him this year, Catherine. I had to tell him how you drew people at market, and promise you would draw him, before he would let this slate do."

He hands me the slate. I quickly draw three rectangles, one larger and wider, and two more-or-less square, about $2/3$ the size of the first.

"OK. This larger one is the main house, twelve by twenty-four with a 6-foot porch. It'll have heat and plumbing. The door is here," I sketch the door in the

middle of the long edge. "with windows flanking the door and over on the other wall, too. The stove, sink, counter, and fridge are here," I make quick motions with the chalk on the right-hand end of the main house. "I'll put the bathroom on the opposite side, as soon as I get a well and septic" sketching in a toilet, sink, and shower on the left hand side. "Until then, I'll fake it with a bucket and sawdust if it doesn't smell too much. Putting it at the other end will mean separating the plumbing, but it's only 24 feet, so that's not too bad. I figure it's easier to build a loft than a full second story or a larger foundation, so that's going over the left-hand side. I haven't decided yet whether to add a wood stove. Probably — I have so much wood on my land. So I'm not sure yet if the layout works with that, or if I need to make it a little larger."

"The other two buildings are the studio on the right. That'll be mostly salvaged windows for a lot of light. The studio be heated, but no plumbing. And then the building on the left is the storage. No heating and no plumbing. I'll orient the three buildings to form a little courtyard feeling."

I point at the porch. "This side is facing South, toward the river. Maine's pretty far North, so I'll make the porch short enough to let the sun in midwinter."

Brandon shakes his head. "I can't picture any of this. Am I up in the trees looking down on your house? I'm feeling dizzy just trying to think about this."

Right. He's never seen a blueprint.

I'll work from a plan view when I build. For now, I can switch to a perspective view. I've thought about this house ever since the plot came up for sale. Even before, when I first started thinking about moving out of Nashua.

I wipe the slate clean and start over.

I draw the cluster of three buildings. Each building is really very simple. It had better be. I can fake it as a woodworker if I need to, but I can't claim to be a real carpenter. Each building is, by itself, a simple box. It's the arrangement of the three relative to each other that pulls it together into a whole. Again, I draw the storage shed, the studio, and the main house.

"That is a very small house," Brandon says. "Even for one person. What if your beau finally asks you to marry? Could you fit a second person in there? And how about having a friend or two over?"

"I don't need room. I don't need people over. I moved away from Nashua exactly because I don't need people over."

As I say the words, I know they are not true. I moved away from Nashua because I didn't like the repetitious and meaningless art I was making. I envied George his large family, or at least his merry table. Damn!

Brandon doesn't let up. "It's your house, but where are you going to entertain all your new admirers, when you become famous? How are you going to have eager students come to stay and learn from you? Don't tell me that will be in your next house. You're going to be famous before you finish the house."

"In any case, the first order of business is the storage shed. I need a place to keep things dry. And it'll be a good practice before the main event."

I wipe off the slate again. "OK, here's my plan for the shed. I'll put in concrete footers, then build the floor joists

off of that. The next step is to frame the corners. It'll be a shed roof, so just make the front posts slightly longer. Truss the roof. Assemble the four walls on the flat, then raise them up. Put up the roof and shingle it. House-wrap and siding, and I'm done."

"If it weren't for the footers, I could get this done in a week or less. The footers might be a problem. They're a lot of work, and I haven't worked much with stone or concrete before."

Branson says "But you know someone who has, and that's almost as good."

"Who?"

"You met him this morning, Sam, Christina's brother. Their Grandpa built that find church, and both Sam and his father are stoneworkers. From what you describe, Sam's skill and hard back can speed your labors. And we would learn something new for him."

"Brandon, you are a schemer. But it won't work. We can't exactly blindfold him and guide him through the doorway."

"My dear Lady Drawsone, have a little trust. I've known John my whole life. You say I am remarkably even-keeled. I say that I am not. I know people like John and many others who have seen enough strange occurrences, how can we be shook?"

"I don't know," I finally say.

Brandon walks over to stand directly in front of me, clasps his hands behind his back, and bends over slightly from the waist to touch me nose-to-nose. He is a clear

BOOK TITLE

parody of the little girl in my shadow box he derided. I
raise an eyebrow, and he speaks.

"Be fearless."

15 MADNESS IN THEIR METHOD ACTING

I start to ask "How well do you really know Sam," but once again, Brandon stops me in my tracks. Instead I ask, "Why would he be willing to come to work for me for free?"

Brandon blinks. "You are an artisan. If you had a chance to learn a wholly new way to do your work, wouldn't you? Besides, I know this town. I know he has no work lined up for the next week. Finally, when you are famous, I trust you will remember your friends."

"OK, OK. New plan."

I take another sip of ale. Somehow, sipping ale in Ireland or tea in Maine, we still end up scheming these plans.

"We talk to Sam. No, you talk to Sam. Today we rest up. Maybe actually nap before midnight. We head into Maine at dawn. I look after my cat, and then we go into town for footing supplies. We'll dig and lay the footings this afternoon. While they dry, we can resume the interrupted door trials we didn't do the other day."

Sam is intrigued by the idea of the footers. When I mention concrete, I would have to tie him down to keep him from coming. "Do you mean that Roman material? The secrets of the ancients?"

"I don't know. I guess so. You don't have concrete? How do you keep your stone walls from collapsing?"

Sam says, "weight, and skill"

Some skill.

And so we three meet at midnight, and step through into the dawn. I whistle for Bran, who sidles up. Bran is a little miffed, and very hungry, but none the worse for his night out. I settle him into my cat sack, and hustle us toward the truck.

Here is where I see how unflappable they really are. Actually, this is maybe a good trial. If they have trouble driving into town with me, then we should rethink all of this. Still, geez, I passed at market and at church. Surely they are as good actors as I am.

Even if they aren't good actors, just thinking of them as actors gives me the idea for their cover story. I'm actually looking forward to introducing them to Ted. Better to hide in plain sight.

I actually hum as we settle in. "Be careful of the book and drawing! I only have them in here because it is the only dry place. Just keep it on your lap."

Brandon holds the large tome of Irish Elizabethan history. "Catherine..."

"Here, call me Friv. Not Catherine, not Lady Drawsome. Friv."

"Friv. Does this book say 'Ireland?'"

"Yes. I thought you could read?"

"Just a little."

Just as well, I thought. What would a clever man like Brandon do after he read a history of Ireland? I immediately answered myself. He would not do bad. His schemes with me, with George, with Sam, even with the villagers with new shawls, they were all for the good. He is a man who sees connections, who changes things.

All the time travel books I've read warned about people who change things.

Be fearless. Besides, you're just trying to build a shed.

If he could read, I think, of better, if he could write, the world would be much richer for it. Who am I to slow him down? Who am I to see a chance to do the right thing, and step away? Taking a breath, about to step into the unknown as much as I did stepping through the door, I say,

"Well, I could help you with reading and writing, if you like."

Sam and Brandon are much more full of questions as we drive into town than I was walking around Cork. That makes sense. I knew something of Ireland, something of the 1600's, something of preindustrial life. They knew nothing of the twenty first century or of Maine. And maybe both Brandon and Sam were natural talkers.

We pull up to Ted's Lumber and Hardware. Brandon says "I know you wear clothes unlike any I have seen before. How are we going to avoid attention?"

I said "There is no way you can pass without notice. I'm going to explain that you are actors, getting used to your roles as sixteenth century villagers."

Brandon shook his head. "Nobody will believe that. That's not how actors work."

I say, "Oh yes, they will. Actors work many different ways. Just agree with what I say."

We step out.

"Morning, Friv."

"Morning, Ted."

"Did that door work out for you?"

"Yes, thank you. Ted, I'd like you to meet Brandon and Sam."

"Morning." "Morning." "Morning."

"Brandon and Sam are working the summer Shakespeare festival in Augusta. This year, they're having the actors stay in costume to give the tourists the full experience."

"Eyup." says Ted. A very Mainer expression of simultaneous agreement and understanding. "Get a lot of Augustan tourists following you to Bottomsfield?"

"Frankly, Ted, they tell me it's more comfortable. But maybe we'll pick up some Carhartts too. They'll be helping me at the house-raising, and I don't want them to get their fancy costumes torn. Take a look, Ted." I gesture Ted so come stand next to me and Sam. "You won't find a single

machine stitch on the whole outfit. Well, except for where they had to fix Brandon's sleeve trim last season. Other than that, it's handsewn, the whole thing."

Ted whistled. "That's a fair bit of work. Not a lot of troops could even know how to do that."

Brandon says, "Aye. And sometimes I swear the tunic still smells of sixteenth century mutton."

We pick up the shovels and the concrete and other fixings. I say to Sam, "I saw so much small stones near the doorway. Are they common" Sam assures me they are. I say, "I've heard the footers work fine with a mix of concrete and stones. Let's try it and see. If it works, you can use that well at home." With the hour drive and the cheap price of stone, I pick up some peastone. If this works, I can try getting stone from my own streambed, but this is faster.

"Bye, Ted."

"Bye, Friv."

OK. Good. One down. Everyone knows Ted, even me. Not that anyone is really a gossip. It's just that questions are usually answered by Ted or by Mary.

So, next stop, the County Clerk's office. As the library is closed today. This may be more crowded. "Are you up to meeting a few more people?"

"Friv," Brandon said. "You met the entire town. Lead us on."

I park by the county building. "Well, here goes. Same story."

Sure, we could have changed clothes between Ted's and Mary's. But this is too good a story to not use twice. Besides, it's just sort of fun.

I walk in to Mary's office. "Just walk as if these are your normal clothes," I say.

"Easy to do" answers Brandon. "as they are."

"Morning, Mary."

"Morning, Friv. Is this your Elizabethan project?"

"It's related. These are my friends down from the Shakespeare festival in Augusta."

"Oh really? And which are they doing?"

Brandon smiles, "His new one, of course."

"Of course."

"Mary," I say. "Did the well and septic man say where he thought would be the right place to dig?"

"Why, yes, Friv. Let me show you the plans." I am reminded of how some innovations have nothing to do with new technology. Plan views, grids, this is something anyone could have done anytime --- could do any time,

"Thanks. Let me make a copy. While I'm there, can I raid your recycle bin? I could use a ream or so."

"Be my guest. Better to reuse than recycle."

Fantastic. Contact established. Materials in hand. And

three strong backs ready to dig.

16 ROCK AND ROLL

Back at the homestead, I unfold the well and septic plot.

"OK, the stream is here. My lean-to is here. It has to stay - it's our way between the worlds. The well will go here, and the septic here."

Sam and Brandon nod. It's not such a hard concept. "Like being in the trees," as Brandon said.

"So I'll put the shed here," I pencil in a box, "and the studio here," penciling in another box.

"That looks wider apart than what I saw yesterday," says Brandon.

"You know why." I said. "You're right, I might need a larger house. I haven't designed it yet, so let's just start with the shed."

The plan for today is simple. Dig eight holes, three feet on a side and deep enough to go below the frost line. Place the cardboard tubes and check their tops are level. Install the rebar. Mix and pour the concrete in six and the concrete-stone mix in two as an experiment. Tamp it down, level it off. Which we do. Sam is amazed. So am I, seeing how easily he takes to this new medium.

We break for a late lunch. And then: step two.

"OK. Brandon. Test this one door more, or build another doorframe and see what happens?"

"Build another. Anything else is just putting it off."
And he strikes the girl-with-the-bear pose.

17 DOOR TO SOMEWHERE

An artist, a farmer, and a mason walk into a bar.

Actually, we duck.

I build the door on the other side of the leanto, facing west. I make it a little smaller, just because the symmetry with the other door didn't look right. Too formal for a lean-to. Sure, I had sketched a balanced main door and flanking windows for my house, but a house is a different scale than the lean-to.

I am putting off the moment. It's too silly to say.

I lay out my plan. I go through first. Look then leap. What if we unleash terrible somethings from another dimension? I go first and then step back through. If I don't, then Sam and Brandon go through the Irish Door and lock it behind them. "Better still," I say, "Drop the concrete off on your side of the door first. If I don't step through in a minute, or if something else steps through, then you can seal your door shut for good."

Sam looks aghast. "What horrors are you picturing?"

I say, "Who knows. Old gods. Bug-eyed monsters. Evil fairy queens intent on mischief. Surely there are nightmares from your Irish tales that should stay as story."

Brandon says to Sam, "She likes having a plan, the way you like having a good hammer. With a plan anything seems possible. Did I tell you about our nine door trials?"

"It is fine with me," says Sam. "I am the apprentice here. How will we tell if it's been a minute?"

Brandon looks at me and then at Sam. "Let me tell you about bananas."

And so I step through. Take one quick look. And quickly step back.

"You will not believe this, but it makes a certain amount of sense."

"Oh?"

"So, I build the first door facing east. I step through, and move east in space and earlier in time. We build the second door facing west. I step through, and move west in space and later in time. It's a smaller door, so I don't go as far in space or time."

Sam says "So what is west of here?"

"Seattle. I saw the space needle. And the space port."

"Did you meet any tall, handsome, inquisitive farmers ready to knock on our door" asks Brandon?

"No, not this time."

Sam looks at the two of us. "You are just itching to go exploring, aren't you?"

"Yup." "Aye."

Sam says, "Brandon, I can't let you take this lass into the fearsome wilds of Seattle alone."

"So you're with me, my old friend."

"Yes. This is foolishness and amazement, but I am with you."

I say, "I promise you that you will see stonework and concrete buildings to boggle your mind."

Sam says, "and will I be able to unboggle it when I need to?"

Brandon says, "So what is the plan?"

I say, "I can't think of any. There is no plan. We just step through and see what happens."

We step to the door.

"Oh wait! One plan! Let's be sure to mark landmarks of where we came out."

Brandon says "Aye. Just one little plan. Any others?"

"Since you ask, let's not split the party. Stay together. It's always the safest thing."

"You mean don't send one person off by themselves to face evil fairy queens? Right. Good plan. Any others?"

"No, that's it. Let's go."

18 THREADING THE SPACE NEEDLE

We step through.

"Strange air," says Sam.

"It smells like a city," I say. "You're smelling the lack of trees."

We look around. One by one we turn around, and see what we just stepped out of. On this side, the Seattle Door is a real door, complete with an "Exit" sign. Appropriately enough.

"If this door is for regular use, I wonder why we haven't had anyone from here before." I ask.

"Maybe you have," said Sam.

"Maybe the door went somewhere else before you built your side of things," said Brandon.

"Maybe we should move another ten feet into this brave new world."

Brandon says, "I know that phrase. That's Shakespeare, isn't it? Is he the only person from my time you remember?"

"Hush," I say. "Did you come here to talk or come here to explore?"

I feel like Dorothy with the woodman and scarecrow, and we tiptoe forth. "Bah, we just have to walk in. Let's walk toward the spaceport. But don't lose your bearings?"

Brandon mutters, "Act natural, be careful. What if I'm not naturally careful?" When Sam glares at him, he blushes, at least.

The people are pale and thin. "Like fairy folk," I think. Their clothes are very bright. Did I step into the 1970's or the 2370's? Maybe each century has to have their Decade of Shame. Bell bottoms too? No, they are wearing stockings, both men and women.

"Friv, you were telling the truth, when you told Ted our costumes were more comfortable than these horrible constricting Carhartts. Your children's children agree," says Brandon.

I am amazed that the spaceport could be in the middle of the city. "In my day, you couldn't even build airports in the middle of the city," I say. "What's an airport?" asks Sam. I point out some sort of aircraft far overhead. "A large flying ship, maybe like that."

The good citizens of Seattle were faithful to the vision of the future the way it used to be. The spaceport looked like a scaled-up version of the space needle. The same graceful curves. The same viewing platform at the top. The same elevator running up the middle.

Except that this elevator didn't stop at the viewing platform.

"That explains it!" I exclaim. "It's not a rocket base! It's a space elevator."

Sam says "What?" Brandon says "And what does it elevate?"

I say "Whatever you want to get into space cheaply. A space elevator connects a spot on the Earth with something up there. In orbit, I guess. I don't really know. Some, um, novelist named Clarke thought of it half a century before my time. And I guess now they can really do it."

Brandon says "I guess they didn't figure out your doors, or they'd just use that."

I says "I wonder what's up there?"

Sam says "I'm still wondering what's down here."

Brandon glances down the street from where we came. "Just keeping my bearings, careful Friv. Let's see what we can see at the base of this elevator."

We head over. Despite the fanciful appearance, the structure at the bottom of the elevator was stark. No flashing lights. No spacey music. Simply guarded doors and a marquee displaying the upcoming cargos.

"Here's your answer. Habitat A fuel tanks. Habitat A biolab. Oh! That's interesting. Brandon, next week they're sending up Habitat A, farm module."

"You mean a farm in the sky?"

"A farm inside a large room in the sky. Just like us, they're building a shed. A very large, very very weatherproof shed."

A few people were starting to stare.

"I am feeling like we stand out as different." says Sam.

"Aye." says Brandon.

"Agreed. Not much adventure, but let's head back."

"And watch out about being followed by those tall, handsome bug-eyed monsters," says Brandon.

19 INTRODUCING THE HORSE

Right. "OK," I say. I think Sam and Brandon are getting used to that work. What if "OK" makes it into Elizabethan English three centuries early? I could imagine it making its way into one of Shakespeare's play. Scholars will be arguing still in my time. After all, I think I heard that he invented hundreds of words.

"OK" I say, and Brandon continues my thought. "Let's make a plan before we go back."

"Right. First you look, and then you leap."

"Yeah, Brandon. That's right. First question—we want to go back, right? Wouldn't it be something, to go into space?"

Brandon nods. "Farming in space. How does that work? They must have terribly tiny farms. And you say all the farms are inside one large ship? If we can farm in a, what was the word, skyship, why can't people farm on a real ship?"

Brandon's term "real" ship makes me think this hasn't really sunk in.

"For sure" Brandon continues, "sailors take goats with

them. But food is such an issue."

"Aye," says Sam. "Do you remember Jason's uncle's lad? When he came back from that last long voyage, he was thin as a rail, and he lost so many teeth, he looked as old as his Da."

"Scurvy." I say. "Did he bring limes to keep your teeth healthy?"

"Surely I don't know" says Sam.

"Right. So we are going back. For our curiosity, and to learn about farming in spaceships. Boy, we don't have a local guide. I mean, I could introduce you to Ted and Mary. Brandon, you know every single person in your village."

"Aye, all two hundred souls. And their cousins."

"We don't know anyone in this Seattle." I say.

Brandon says "We don't know anything. I can't ask who the landowner is because you say there is no land, but who do the farmers pay their rents to?"

"Or maybe," I say, "they are hired to grow the food. After all, they have to feed more than just themselves or their families."

"You said the elevator was a way to cheaply move something into space," Brandon says. "It must be that it is still so difficult to move the food that they want to try to grow farms at the top of the elevator. I know it is hard even to load and unload my wagons. Any my poor horse. Sometimes I look at this old nag, and think I should load the thing on the cart as well, and pull it all, horse and

turnips together."

"And speaking of my horse" continues Brandon, looking at the sky, "it is well into late afternoon in Maine, and so late morning in Ireland. I had better get back to tend the horse."

"This is not a problem they teach you in work-life balance classes." I'm too tired to phrase that thought in sixteenth century concepts. "How to keep the day-to-day going while at the same time you are presented with great mysteries."

Sam surprises me by saying, "I don't know. Life is a mystery. My grandfather started with stones and built a house of God. Brandon starts with seed and ends with our nourishment. The wonder of these doors is small compared to the glory of creation around us each day."

The stone-cutter philosopher. Brandon vouched for Sam, so why am I surprised?

"Come back with us," say Brandon. "We can all quickly work through my chores. Then I can feed you dinner, more easily than you can fire up your little stove and clean up your camp. And after, as a special treat, you can make plans."

"And then by tomorrow," Sam says, "if I understand you right, the concrete footings will be cured."

And so we change and step through to mid-morning Ireland. We head down to Brandon's farm without incident. I let loose Bran when we get there. The cat had been at the farm after the market, and was ready to make itself at home.

We head to the stables. There in one corner is the old nag herself. She is a gray horse with a crooked white stripe down the nose. I look around the stables. I see the harness for the cart, but no saddle. Looking at the skinny beast, I can see why. "Does your horse have a name?" I ask, feeling a little foolish.

"I usually choose between calling her 'useless nag' or 'poor thing.'" says Brandon.

Some feeding, currying, mucking, which all goes quickly with three backs bending to it. I think about the truck on these rutted roads. I don't think my trusty rusty would be any faster than "lazy bones," and be more likely to bust an axel. That's even if we could get it here. I think about the two doors. It seems like maybe there are rules. The doors facing different ways move us in different directions in time and space. The size of the door might be related to the distance you move in both.

"Even if we wanted to," I say, "we can't build door big enough to bring 'poor thing' to Maine or my truck to Ireland. Any large door will overshoot and, I don't know, put us back in, let me think" I do a little math. Three times bigger is three times farther? Really, we have no idea. But if a person-sized door sent me back 400 years and four time zones, then a truck or a cart-sized one might send me to where? "um, to China during the Mongol invasion? I'm not sure." If I spent more time studying history and less time learning, for example, how to weld, I might know what was happening in China 1200 years ago. How could I know it would come in handy some day, when I found myself a time-traveller?

Brandon says, "That's if the doors stay sensible. They could still be as a dream. To be sure, so far our bananas are the same in Cork and Maine, but each time I step through,

I expect that I might find all my friends children grown and my friends all ancients."

"I have to act as if they are sensible." I say. "I have to believe that the universe is less arbitrary than, say, our friends."

Sam sighs. "Stay here a while, Catherine. As Friv back home, you may find your friends fly like thistle down. Here in Cork, they stick together like well-dressed stones.

I think more clearly in Cork. Maybe Sam is right. Maybe having some tight companions gives you a strong foundation.

Over dinner, Brandon says "What we need to do is meet someone in Seattle that can be our guide."

Sam says, "How will we do that?"

I say "Any ideas?"

Brandon says "I've had a few. I don't think we can pass as normal people. We have no idea even what church is ascendant." I think it's odd that that's how he divides up the world, but nod my encouragement for him to continue. "We can't pass without notice, so we need to pass with as much notice as possible."

"Like my saying you are Shakespearean actors."

"Exactly right, Catherine."

Sure, it feels natural to answer to Catherine in Cork, and Friv in New England.

"So far, we've had you as an artist, and had us as

Shakespearean actors."

"How about farmers?" I say.

Sam says "What?"

Brandon said "I thought we were looking for something exotic."

"Did either of you see any plants in Seattle at all? It's a dead certainty that farmers are exotic. Besides, this might be a way to find out about the farm module."

I think a little more. "It's June in Maine. What month is it in Cork?"

"August," says Sam.

"I think we can set up a farmstand. There are plants that do fine with a little space, right, Brandon? I mean, we could sell something that will die without a lot of care, but we may as well do this right. Here's what I picture..."

We lay out a plan (I love a plan) for how to meet people in the Seattle Spaceport.

Brandon says, "It looks like maybe we have a good rhythm for tomorrow too. Work on Catherine's — or Friv's — shed in Maine early morning, go to Seattle after lunch, and then take care of the farm, if you're willing again, and stay here through dinner."

I say "I think we might have to spend as much time in door trials as in shed building. I think we might be able to lay down the floor frame and the floor deck tomorrow. But once we start raising the posts, we're sort of making door frames. I don't want to think we're walking between

two posts, and end up 2000 years away."

Sam asks "Did that happen to you on the lean-to? I mean the solid-wall side?"

"No, but I was working alone. I worked only from the one side, and I didn't walk back-and-forth between the uprights."

Sam says, "We can just be careful, and do the same. But you'll need a shed door, somehow."

Brandon says "What about your truck door?"

"I don't want to tear apart my truck, Brandon."

"Ah, no. You miss my meaning. Nothing unexpected happens when you go in and out of your truck. What is different about the truck door?"

"Lots. It's metal. It was built somewhere else and brought here. It's not part of the lean-to. I mean, it's in a different part of the property."

Sam says "If we can get a metal door built somewhere else we could put it on the shed. If it is a normal door, that's all we need to know to finish your shed. We can test later why it is safe."

I say, "I think Ted's shop sells metal doors." Besides, we need to go into town for Operation Seattle Flowershop.

20 A GOOD START

We three break up after dinner for a rest, and meet again just past midnight. We pass through the door to Maine with pots full of herbs. "Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme?" I ask.

"I think the rosemary and thyme will grow better for new farmers," Brandon says, seriously. "But I know the song. We're bringing the parsley and sage for our small show."

Passage into Maine is uneventful, despite Brandon's misgivings that it could behave otherwise Any Time Now. We settle the pots by the lean-to to protect them from the wind as we head into town. Before we get into the truck, Sam and I inspect the footings. They are all well set and level. The footings that were made with a mixture of concrete and rocks seem as solid as the others. Sam nods his head in thought.

"If I could get one bag of concrete, I could mix it with stones and it would last me for an entire cottage."

Sam asks for me to walk us through the remaining

steps in building the shed.

"As I said, I'm not much of a carpenter, so my plan is to build the shed as simply as possible. I guess one difference in the last four hundred years is that we have some standard measurements for lumber. The easiest way to build takes advantage of that. It has less waste too. The key thing is to size the floor frame to take sheets of plywood. So all of my floors and walls will be close to four feet by eight feet. I'll make this shed eight by twelve. There will be a little cutting on the floor frame supports, because the inside of the frame is only going to be seven-foot-four if the outside is a full eight feet. So I'll pick up a skil saw. How I'm going to run it, I don't know."

"And then I'll lay down the floor, just the plywood. The next step is putting up the walls. Four posts in the corners. I need a sloping roof for the snow. Rather than do a full gable, again I'll keep it simple by making what we call a shed roof. Appropriately enough. It'll mean a bigger difference between back and front, but that's OK."

Sam says "So how steep a roof?" He gestures with his hands.

"With something so small, I think I can get away with a little flatter. If I drop 6 inches out of every 12, then I can add the excess out of a single four by eight. And the front posts will be twelve feet, which I can also get as a standard size. So that works out. After the plywood floor, we can add the framing for the walls. That'll be the risky part. We'll build the walls on the ground and then list them up. We'll have some people inside and some outside, and I don't know if putting the wall framing will make something a door."

Brandon says "That's where we can use the metal door

frame. We can test it out first, and if it is an ordinary frame, we can use it to get people in and out of the shed, before we're ready for more door trials."

"Good idea. Anyway, with the wall framing up, we can once we put on the roof beams, then it's the sheathing, and the felt, and the shingles. Finally, we put on the siding for the walls." I'd done some research on this, but I've never done it myself.

Sam stood at the footers. I could see that he could picture the entire finished shed. "It is so much less solid than the houses I've built. It feels like a kite or a canvas painting stretched over a frame. The walls themselves are feathers."

"It would be easier access," he says, "if the front of the shed could be rolled away. I saw some barn doors in town yesterday that slid sideways."

I think. "It might depend on how the Doors to Somewhere work."

"I haven't forgotten that you're going to be famous once you make a painting of George's family," says Brandon. "You'll need a protected place with lots of light. Until you build the studio, having the rolling doors will let you work in the shed."

Perceptive Brandon.

"So what else do we need from Ted's" asks Sam. "I mean, to finish the shed completely? We have the wood for the floor, right? Can you get all the materials today?"

There's no difference in the cash-flow between getting it all today, or over the course of the week. It'll save us the

round-trip drives to Ted's.

And so we enter Ted's with that plan.

"Morning, Friv."

"Morning, Ted." If we get everything today, then I'll miss even this simple conversation. It's my only connection with the Real World.

"Morning, Brandon. Morning, Sam."

Right on cue. "Morning, Ted."

"I have a big list today, Ted. If I do things right, I can get everything to finish up the shed."

"Ayup."

"I'll need a circular saw. What I'm not sure about is how to set this up on my site right now. Should I go battery powered? If so, how do I recharge?"

"Well, Friv. You'll be building the house after the shed. Get yourself a good saw. And get one with enough power. You'll just be fighting the saw if you go battery powered."

"And your not just trying to sell me a bigger saw?"

Ted looked sincerely hurt. "Friv, I wouldn't have lasted in New England if people around here thought I was flim-flamming them."

"How am I going to power it?"

"You're off grid, right. What's your plan?"

"Solar and batteries, eventually. For now, I've got nothing. I mean, I've got my truck, I suppose."

"Well, you could get an inverter. But you don't want to have to have your truck tied up. Instead, I could lend you a spare generator."

The big-city Nashua girl response kicks in. "Ted, you don't know me. Why would you trust me with your generator?"

"Friv, you've building a house. You're getting a well dug. You've got a contract going with Al. You're not going to skip town."

If I wanted to, I could. I could so skip this century with a generator. That would fit through the door. Well. Wouldn't that play merry hell with any timeline?

"Thank you, Ted. Thank you very much. You let me know if you need any watercolor brushes, OK?"

"OK. Or, from what I hear, maybe some singing lessons."

Oh, that. I think I manage not to blush.

No need to stop at the library or county clerks, so just one more stop. I hadn't stopped at the post office since that first day I got here. How many days ago was that? Day 1: lean-to, meet Brandon. Day 2: market day. Day 3: church. Day 4: footings and Door to Spacey Seattle. Day 5: today. So nearly a week since I've gone to the post office. Nearly a week for any news from the outside world. I've got no cell service at the lot, so I saved some bucks by dropping my service. I for sure don't have cell service in

1597 Ireland!

One letter from Stephan. And one from the Guild of New Hampshire Craftsmen. Good. Now that I'm starting to build, I can use the money.

Feeling flush with the Guild letter in my pocket, we stop in at the cafe for a ... what is this? Late breakfast? Early lunch? Or, as our body thinks, maybe a post-midnight snack? In any case, eating in town will save me from having to wash up well enough to keep bears away from the lot.

Terrific. Fed and supplied, we make short work of the floor frame and the floor joists and the plywood. The generator was, of course, of extreme novelty to Sam and Brandon. The circular saw amazed them both, especially Sam. "It works so well, because your wood is so regular," he speculates. "The wood out of our mills is much more varied. How would it work?"

Brandon says, "I would not want to disturb the villiage with these devices. Maybe we can bring some of your woods here, and we can see how it works."

I think that it would work fine. Better to wait and see what they are building.

Continuing with the plan, we pause after laying the floor, and have a late lunch. Cleaning up, I then say "Right. Time to get ready for Operation Seattle Flowershop."

"No." That was Sam.

"We have a new plan, Lady Drawsome." That was Brandon.

Sam says, "You need a house. We can't talk you into staying in Cork forever, that is clear. We are learning much helping you. And in terms of wages, these fine shirts," and he tugs at his Carhartts, "is many months of wages."

"But what about finding out about Habitat A?"

Brandon says "It's a habitat. It will be up there for a while. Also, they wouldn't call it 'Habitat A' if there were plans for only the one. Finally, next week is just the sending up of the 'farm module.' It won't be a full farm for a while. And the 'farm module farmers left in Seattle may well be bored and willing to talk."

"But we had a plan!"

"No, you had a plan," says Brandon. "Sam and I made a new plan. You need a stable place. You need a place where your goods are safe and dry. You need a place to come back to, to rest and recover. You need a place to do your art. You need a place where your American friends can find you."

I can see how Brandon convinced George to let me sketch, and how he talked Sam into coming to Maine with us. He is perceptive, sympathetic, and clear.

"OK, OK. Wall framing it is. But let's do some door trials with the metal door frame first."

This time, Sam and Brandon would not let me be the first one through. "It is only natural that the men take the risk and protect the women," explains Sam. Brandon looks at me as I struck the now-familiar "Be Fearless" pose.

"Or let us three take turns," he offers instead.

And so the new round of door trials begin.

1. We place the metal door frame near the truck, to the North of the buildings. Can Sam walk through North to South? Yes. Can Sam walk back through South to North? Yes. "Well, that was as expected," says Brandon.

2. We place the metal door frame next to the door to Ireland. Can Brandon start on the lean-to side and walk through West to East? Yes. Can Brandon return, walking East to West? Yes. "Brandon, you sneak," I say. "You picked the rotation so that you took the riskiest test."

Brandon says, "My mother raised me right. I will not apologize."

3. We place the metal door frame by what will be the front door of the shed, and I fasten it down. At this point, screws are old news to Brandon and Sam. Can Friv walk through from the interior of the shed to the exterior, Northwest to Southeast? Yes. Can she walk back through? Yes. "That's a relief," I say. "If the Door that faces East sends us back in time, and the Door that faces West sends us forward in time, what would a Door that faces Southeast do?"

Sam says, "I don't know, but we'd all rather you were settled before we find out."

Brandon says, "You still believe that somehow these Doors make some sort of sense?"

I say, "I do. OK, if you're insisting we finish the shed, then let's finish the shed. Let's get to the walls. And remember! If you need to pass through a framed opening, go through the metal door!"

Brandon says, "I think we are very careful." I can't tell if he actually thought "too careful," and was careful to not speak it aloud.

Sam says "And when are you going to tell that to your cat?"

The back wall is simple. I am not framing any windows into the shed, and the back wall is rectangular, so that went up very quickly. We frame it out and lift it up. It is much easier with three people than it would have been all by myself.

"Now, the side wall is going to be trickier," I say.

Sam says, "You described how you are going to build roof trusses. We can frame most of the wall as a simple rectangle, and then add a roof truss at the top."

"Sam, how is it that you understand a framed house better than I do?"

"I have been building my whole life. I would be embarrassed if I didn't."

With this change, the side walls go quickly too. Again, we three raise the wall.

"The next wall might be a Door," I say. "We had better go tend to your horse and farm, before we try anything risky." I can't bring myself to call his horse by either of the two names he suggested.

"I can handle it," begins Brandon, but Sam and I are already heading for the Eastern door of the lean-to.

Fine. An uneventful mucking in the Cork morning, and

we return to a fine Maine afternoon.

We frame the front of the shed, which is basically just the footer and the header, with a six foot opening for the barn doors. Essentially it makes a place to put the roof trusses on. And then we lift it up and affix it into place.

Brandon says, "I want to just walk through and be done with it. I want to know right now if we need to do something special for this opening." And so he does. Before I can protest or Sam can join him, Brandon hops up through the metal door, and then steps out through the opening made by the framing of the front wall.

And simply steps down back by me and Sam. "Well, that got my heartrate up," I say. We three then head up back into the shed, and find ourselves in the shed. I remove the metal doorframe, and we all three step back and forth together again, in the now stark shed opening.

"Maybe it's the location. Maybe the lean-to is in a special spot. Or maybe it's the orientation," I say.

"You'll know if it's the orientation when you build the house," says Sam, "if you run it East - West."

"Or maybe the Doors just use their own rules," Brandon persists.

With three people and a simple plan, the roof trusses, the roofing, and the siding are all quick. A small shed is normally a weekend job. Between my adequate woodworking skills, Sam's perceptive housebuilding eye, and Brandon's strong back, we complete it all by twilight.

I gratefully move my plastic tubs of artwork into a corner of the shed, and set up my sleeping roll into

another. I feel a great relief.

"Brandon, you were right. I did need this."

"Aye."

As the sky begins to darken, I say, "I haven't spent the night here since that first evening, four days ago. I think this is the evening. I'm going to light a fire, and break out my whiskey. Care to join me?"

Sam says, "My family will worry if I don't come back."

I look at Brandon and wonder what he will say. He could easily stay the evening, I know. He could even stay the night. I've stayed the night at his farmhouse, but it was in different rooms. Here, I have just the one room, just the one bedroll. I recall the letter from Stephan in my pocket. I wonder what it says, but I wonder more what this new dear friend will say.

Brandon says "I don't drink before noon. Have a restful evening, Friv. We did well here this day. Sleep well and safely, and tomorrow we can move on to Seattle."

The two of them walk off. They walk just a little stiffly, still unused to the new modern boots. I feel the old peace that comes with solitude. Well, solitude and a cat. This night, I feel a hole I didn't feel before. I wonder, am I a city girl after all? Have I become accustomed to Brandon's presence? Am I scared of the future and need reassurance?

21 OPERATION SEATTLE FLOWERSTALL

An uneventful night. I set out my bedroll in the new space, feeling the coziness and warmth of real solid walls around me. Even if they are just shed walls, with exposed framing and no insulation, it is a huge step toward a homestead. I whistle Bran in. He had been an apartment cat his whole life until this move here, and he is also clearly comforted by the housy space. Purring, Bran settles in between my feet at I nod off.

I sleep in for a change. Wow, I'd been burning the candle at both ends. Between Main and Cork, I had eighteen hours of sunlight.

I wake up slowly, get dressed, set the stove on for my morning coffee and a camp breakfast of instant oatmeal and raisins. Once that is done, I start repotting some of the plants we brought forward from Cork. I wonder how time travel will affect plants? Will there be something like transplant shock?

I think of Sam's offer for me to stay in Ireland, and the transplant shock I would feel. Even just the hundreds of little things every day, like the shape of candlesticks. I thought candlesticks were just a good default wedding gift, and their shape was more decorative than anything else. Sitting at the table with Brandon one evening, I noticed that the candlelight was shining from a pleasant height above the tabletop. These simple examples would be more of an adjustment than the large ones, like cooking over a fireplace or getting water from a well.

From a well! Of course, I'll be getting water from a well. Did I get a date from Al before I chased him off with my lip buzzes and other carryings on? I don't think so. Strange

to worry about that at the same time I am about to embark on Operation Seattle Flowerstall.

As planned, Sam and Brandon have themselves a normal night's sleep too, and then show up early in their morning, or just before noon in Maine. They look sprightlier than normal. Not spritelier, though. After a few days, they seem as solid as any I've met. Sam is more solid than most. I think of the two meanings of the word "pixelated." After being immersed in such a digital world back in Nashua, life on my site in Maine, and on the other side in Cork, is less pixelated. It is both smoother, and less pixie-like.

They have a small wooden wheelbarrow with them, with brown and green and soft gray shawls woven with delicate patterns in the weft. Into the cart, I nestle my herb pots. I change into a new Elizabethan dress that Brandon brought. With all the bright clothing we saw the Seattleans wearing, we figured that muted colors would actually be more contrast. And so, rather than the creams and blues and greens of my previous costume, I am wearing, like Sam and Brandon, shades of brown. Black, we had decided, would be too somber, and gray would not allow enough visual excitement.

We had spotted and intersection neat the space elevator, with a good view of four broad streets, near to some small shops. Moreover, it was out of sight of our entrance, but nearby it. "Are we all ready?" I ask.

"Aye," says Brandon, with a twinkle. Sam just nods.

Another deep breath, and another step through, and we three emerge into the damp, gray air of Seattle. I glance behind. The "EXIT" sign is there. I am not surprised that we come out again where we came out before. Brandon's warning, that the Doors might not always behave as we

expect, makes each passage a slight moment of trepidation.

Sam sees the sun fairly high in the sky as a brightening of the veiled of clouds. "I do not know which way is south, or the time of year. It may be near midday."

I grimace. "That would be a blessing. The quarter-day shift between Maine and Cork is hard. I would be good to have one easy thing."

We wheel our cart the few minutes to the intersection and then lean it up to better display our shawls and pots. We strike a pose, and hold it, until we see four passersby close at hand. Brandon spreads both warms wide in a sudden gesture. 'The is our cue.

"Friends, be aware! Here we are, three travelling purveyors!"

"Beware? Beware of what?" Sam plays the clown.

"No, no, no. Not 'beware.' 'Be a ware.' " I play the straight man.

"A ware? Nay, we have some wares. We have fine fabric, the likes have not been seen in these parts for seven hundred years!"

"In these parts? Where are we? Wares for where?" Sam japes.

"Now, you're both being foolish. You know these fabrics have never been seen in Seattle, ever."

We get a few people stopping by to watch for a moment. Even bad street theater is a novelty. This feeds on itself. The germ of a crowd grows a larger crowd, as people stop

to see what it is that others are watching.

One man holds up one of George's shawl with an appraising eye. "And what is this?"

Brandon ad libs, looking at the man's outfit. "You have a very good eye, sire. Traditionally, that would have been sold to cover a small table. But more and more people are valuing the delicate patterns in the weave for the very finest fabrics, and display them on the wall. This excellent piece would probably be displayed by someone of remarkable taste."

The man fingers the fabric. "What is the material?"

Brandon says, "You will look all year and not find its like. This is pure wool, sheared from ewes at the peak of their yearly growth. You can see the length of their fibers. Nothing else."

The man's eyebrows rise. "No joke?"

Sam capers. "If we were joking, I would claim this came from a ewe to you." I exaggeratingly roll my eye, not much of a stretch.

"How much?"

This one is all Brandon's. We have a feel for the value of the current currency from the local eatery near us. One lunch costs about one CU, whatever that stands for. "You are in luck. This is our first day here selling our wares. We want to build the news of our visits. Normally, we would charge 150 CU. This day only, we will sell it for 100 CU."

I wait to see if Seattle is a place where people bargain. Apparently not.

"Too much," says our laconic fellow, and continues on his way.

When the crowd disperses moments later, I say to Brandon, "I thought we had him. I guess we need to shoot a little lower."

We set up to act out our second fixed scene to draw a second crowd. Again, we strike a pose and break into our action at Brandon's signal.

"Are you going to Scarborough Fair?" starts Sam.

"Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme," Brandon and I continue.

Sure enough, we have a dozen people watching by the end of the song, including one girl of about age eight. At the end, Sam says "Faith, that was sweet breath."

Brandon asks, "Why friend, do you mean I have a harmonious breath?"

"No, sir. I mean your breath is sweet."

I play the straight man. "It is the chewing of the parsley herb that keeps breath sweet."

"What can you tell me about the chewing of thyme?" asks Brandon.

"You do not chew thyme," says Sam. "Time chews you in the teeth of days and years. Instead you use thyme in its season."

I nod. "He japes true. You do not chew thyme, you season

bland food with it." I pull out a dish of small buttered squares of bread, some with and some without our herbs. I hand it around through the crowd.

"Surely you have sage advice for this good crowd?" asks Sam.

"Yes, I do." I say, very seriously. "You can easily grow these yourself. You will see their green beauty as they grow, smell their fine scent, feel the satisfaction of tending living things, before you finally taste them."

"Hear, hear!" says Sam. "See, getting yourself some herbs just makes sense."

Again, it is not hard for me to roll my eyes.

A man in a bright purple tunic asks "How much?" Maybe all Seattleans are misers with their words.

Brandon says "No more than what you paid for your lunch today." OK, he's going for volume. That's fine. The herbs and pots cost nearly nothing. And I painted the two dozen pots easily in the previous morning, awaiting Sam and Brandon.

"One CU?" He pronounces it "coo." No wonder we didn't complete the last sale.

"That's right. For the cost of one lunch, you will double your pleasure of fifty lunches."

"Thyme, please." These men make Mainers sound like poets.

Brandon hands over one pot with the words "Thyme enough" painted on rim. "In life, lack of time make all

things sour and time enough makes all things possible.

The man hands over a coin. OK. I was worried that Spacey Seattle might be on a purely virtual economy. Maybe it's because our amounts were so small.

A woman in silver and blue asks for rosemary. This one is painted with "To everything there is a season."

Brandon intones "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."

"Under heaven?" asks the girl. "Will these grow on Habitat A?"

"I don't know," I say, taken aback.

"I'll find out!" she says, and runs off toward the space elevator.

We sell a pot of parsley, painted with "Speak to me with sweet words." We are just about to hand around the plate of herbed breads again, when the girl comes back with a middle-aged man in hand. His tunic is as bright as all the others we've seen. To my eye, it looks a little more corporate. The main give-away was the words "Habitat A / farm module" written vertically up the left side of the tunic, with a name on back, across the shoulder blades. "M. Conner."

"Daddy, daddy, daddy, are you growing herbs in Habitat A?"

"Hush, Sarah. Let this man finish his business."

I finish showing the final customer how good the pot of bright green parsley looks sitting on a piece of coarse-spun

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beige linen, "for only 10 coo," and we are left alone, the two from Cork, the one newly from Maine, and the two Seattleans.

22 KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

"Daddy, daddy, are you? Are you growing herbs?"

"Not yet, Sarah, but it is an interesting idea," says her Dad. Then, turning to Michael and we two, he says "Good day. You've met my curious daughter, Sarah. I am Dr. Conner. Since we are meeting under these most informal of circumstances, please call me Michael."

Humph. Not that informal. Still, it is refreshing to find a Seattlean who utters more than two words in a row.

Brandon reaches out to shake his hand. "Delighted to meet you. We share a name. I am Brandon Conner, and these are my companions: Sam O'Reilley and" .. which name is he going to use? .. "Lady Friv Drawsome." Oh, great. Yet another name. What was I thinking when I chose an artist's alias? Oh, I remember. I was thinking that my life was too ordinary. Not a problem right now.

Brandon continues. "I am only sometimes an actor, and even more rarely a singer. Mostly I am a farmer. I see you are too. Here in this treeless city, my heart is lifted by the sight of another with dirt under his finger nails."

Michael nods. "I am a rarity. Sometimes I think I'm the only person in all of Greater Seattle who has even touched a leaf. How in the world did you interest these people in something green and growing?"

Sarah helps out before Brandon could answer. "They sang, and joked, and fed them, and told them it would make them feel good."

Brandon looks at one of the pots of rosemary, with the phrase "Never stop growing, and never stop believing."

"Whatever gets the job done. Who do you work for?"

I quickly field this one. I've heard enough politicians in my life to deftly sidestep the question. "This is just a pilot study, to test marketing strategies and to determine the price point." True enough. I did not add "and to give us a chance to look around without being locked up as lunatics or subversives."

"And what have you learned?"

"We have only this initial reconnaissance. This is the first day of the study."

"Oh, really? Well done! At least on the salesmanship side. Can I ask what you use for your growing medium?"

"Oh, aye, you want to know about our dirt?" asks Brandon. "It is special dirt just for cities."

I say "Light weight, well draining, with a balanced fertilizer. Since these are likely to be first-time growers, we paid particular attention to moisture retaining treatments."

Michael asks, "May I?" and reaches for a pot. He smells it, feels it, and even tastes it. "Fine, fine. And how are your herbs doing?"

"I wish we could tell you. I wish we had a chance to test this first," I say. "We put this together based on available materials, and Brandon's long experience."

"Best of luck."

"And do you have special skyship dirt?" Brandon asks.

Here's his payoff.

"Would you like to see? Sarah came and fetched me, but I had better get back to Heaven's Gate."

So. I deduce that 'Heaven's Gate' is the name of the space elevator.

"There is nothing we would like better. We'll bring our cart too, to compare," says Brandon.

As we take the short walk to the spaceport, I whisper to Brandon. "Is your last name really Conner?"

"Of course. I would never lie about my name."

I blush all the way to my toes. He takes my hand. "Friv, that's fine. You are an artist. You hold a mirror to the world. What you show is truer than what we see." I'm not so sure.

We soon arrive at what looks like the back entrance of the spaceport. I feel more conspicuous here, by far, than I did on the street corner. But Michael walks the halls with an air of complete certainty. We turn into a double-door into his lab, and wow!

Sam grins broadly. "That's the smell I was missing!"

We see racks and racks of hydroponic lettuces and carrots and bean sprouts.

Brandon is almost quivering with his eagerness to ask questions, when we hear a booming voice.

"Michael! Two days to liftoff! Michael!"

"Ah, here comes the force behind this all. His friends call him Izzy. Everyone calls him Dr. Kingdom."

Ouch.

The double doors open, and Dr. Kindgom strides in.

"Michael!"

"Yes, Dr. Kingdom?"

"Tell me who these people are! Tell me how you can be ready for the launch!"

"Dr. Kingdom, I'd like you to meet herbaceous expert Dr. Brandon Conner, and public relations experts Lady Friv Drawsome and Dr. Sam O'Reilly. They are on the urban task force for agricultural reeducation. I've seen them make more excitement in one hour than I've seen in a month of lectures."

"Hello. Michael! Tell me how can you be ready for the launch in two days!"

Brandon asks, "Pardon me, Dr. Conner, but how are your assistants?"

Michael sighs. "Non-existent."

Brandon says, "I find that hard to fathom. Who wouldn't want to work on this project?"

"Michael! Hire this man! Get your materials ready for launch!" And Dr. Kingdom spins on his heel and strides back out.

Michael says "That's that. Welcome aboard. We will be the Drs. Conner, saving the world."

"Please, call me Brandon. Michael, it would be my greatest pleasure to assist you in this launch."

I look at Brandon. "Are you sure about this?"

Brandon takes my hand again and kisses me carefully on the cheek. "Lady Drawsome, nothing is ever sure. But consider, Michael is practically family, in name and temperament. And, furthermore" and he bows to me in the "Be Fearless" pose.

I can't argue with that.

23 RIFTS

And so it is that I find myself back in Maine with Sam.

"I can't believe it. I can't believe it."

"Catherine-Friv. He is not dead. He is learning what he wants and needs to learn about growing plants on ships. You know how he sees how to draw the best out of each of us. Let him treat himself as well as he treated you, me, George, or half he people in the village. Let him have a chance at happiness."

"What do you mean? Is he unhappy on his farm?"

"Catherine-Friv, he lost his heart to Susanne, the daughter of the man to whom his father paid rent. Her father won't hear his suit. It is not enough to be kind and wise. Our dear Brandon has to have a fortune, to keep Susanne in good comfort. Brandon thinks this may be means to that good end."

"And it might keep sailors from dying as a side effect. Doing well by doing good. Sounds like our Brandon."

"Our" Brandon. Certainly not "my" Brandon. It's just as well. He may be tall and broad-shouldered enough to turn any daughter's head, and clever enough to keep it turned, but to me he was always a fellow adventurer more than a figure of romance. I figure he must feel the same, since he introduced me as a cousin.

"Catherine-Friv" my names made poor Sam uncomfortable, so he tended to use them both in Maine, and Catherine alone in Cork, "I have to go back. My family will worry. And Brandon's farm needs tending. Are you coming?"

"I sure don't want to go back to Seattle any time soon. I'll come, and tend his farm as I can. I don't know much. Is that OK? Will anyone think it strange if a woman artist, recently left adrift by her sea-captain, doesn't know her way around a farmstead?"

"No, it'll all be fine. Stay as long as you want. Bring your cat with you. Bring your artists materials and finish your painting. I'll send my daughter over to help you with the stove and other necessities once or twice a day."

"Sam, I couldn't ask that from your daughter."

"If it makes you feel better, bring that great ream of paper you got, and teach my daughter to read."

"Sam, how did I find you?"

"You walked through a door, and there we were. You'll have to ask be a harder question than that."

"Sam, what day is this? I mean, what day of the week?"

"It is Wednesday."

That's right. Day 2 was market day, Saturday. Day 5 - build the shed. Day 6 was today. "Is there a market on Saturday?"

"Yes."

"I guess I'll stay until market and church, or until Brandon shows back up."

And so it is that I find myself back in Cork.

I head to Brandon's farm, and go curry the nag. I wonder which of us feels more comforted by this.

I sit at Brandon's big table and look at my two letters. One from Stephan, and one from the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen. They both seem a bit irrelevant. Which to open first? Stephan's. It will be more interesting. The League is almost certainly just a check, and maybe a calendar of crafts fairs.

Slitting open Stephan's letter, I read:

Dear Friv,

I hope you get this letter. I guess I might never know. That's sort of the problem. I never know anything. I never know if you're OK, or if you're thinking of me.

What do you call this, when you never call? I sure as hell don't know.

I'm afraid I can't take the uncertainty. I hope you have a good rest of your life.

In confusion,
Stephan

I feel much less of a blow reading this than I did seeing Brandon stay behind in Seattle. Sitting in Cork, it is Stephan that feels like the whiff of smoke.

And now the other letter.

The second letter is typed, with an imposing severity. I shake it, and the check falls out. I see the memo, and it reads "Good Luck." Odd. Any clue in the letter itself?

"Dear Ms. Ochs,"

Not a good sign. This is the name I ran away from, My artist's name may be the one-syllable "Friv," but the checks have to go to my given name. I won't say me "real" name. Millie Ochs, god what an ugly, awkward name, Millie Ochs has not been the name I go by for a very long time. For a decade, "Friv" has been what my customers call me, as well as the gallery owners, the supply stores, as well as my fellow artists.

And now I have a choice of other names. "Catherine Dawson," "Lady Drawsome." So far, only I've only opened two doors. Will I need a new name in each one?

Enough putting off the rest of the letter.

"It has come to our attention that you are no longer residing in New Hampshire. As per the regulations surrounding the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, we are rescinding your membership. Please come claim your unsold inventory as soon as possible. We will hold it at the Concord showroom for two weeks.

Sincerely,
Peggy Nolan,
Secretary,
League of New Hampshire Craftsmen.

Great, just great. So much for a steady income while I build. So much, too, for languishing in Cork. I was seriously thinking of staying here through Sunday services - four straight nights. I had told Sam as much. But the letter was sitting three days at the post office and two in my pocket. Sam said his daughter would come help me with the farm in the morning. I don't have time today to run down to Concord. It'll be an hour drive into town, and

then four more to Concord. I'd have to leave before noon Maine time, which is before sunrise Cork.

Too late, far too late for today. Is there any way this could work? What if I head down there early in the morning, to get to Nashua by 9? That'll mean leaving at four AM, which is 10 PM Cork, and getting back at, oh, 3 PM Maine or 9 am Cork. Is that too late to tend the farm?

I walk over to Sam's house to ask him.

"Sam, I feel like I've inherited a farm, and I don't know what to do with it."

"Catherine, it's not as simple as that."

"Simple! I don't even know where to start! I wish that horses were like cats, and you could just leave them for a day to fend for themselves."

"I mean minding your cousin's farm is not as simple as just making sure the horse doesn't starve. I was referring to the rents. Most of the farmers here are tenants. Brandon will owe the rent on his farm at placeholderfest, in six weeks."

"He must know this. He must not have simply walked out on his farm."

"You know him well enough now. Is this a place to follow your dream?"

I think, "maybe, if your dream is to have an uninterrupted place to create." But that's not really true. Maine is as quiet, maybe more, and with fewer new frightening unexpected consequences.

"And if he's not back in time to pay the rent?"

"For sure, he'll foreclose. His landowner is a hard man, one Simon Prior."

"What an end to his adventures." I say morosely. It makes the letter from the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen seem small.

"You are taking this hard. It shows a kind heart."

"Yes, well. I also got some bad news myself." I tell Sam about Stephan's letter, and the League's dismissal.

Sam doesn't bother asking where California is, but hones in on the League letter. "Is this like our guilds? Will you have to not sell your art, or risk arrest if you do?"

"Is that how things are here and now? People think of our life as regulated, but it's nothing like that!"

"Then that's easy. I've seen such a market for your work. Especially where people can read."

"But still, how can I find time to tend Brandon's farm and get art? One day in and I've already skipping town."

"Catherine, this is not your town. Brandon is ours to watch for. Your help is welcome, but you are the stranger here. My daughter Lizzie will tend the farm tomorrow."

This all leave me feeling untethered here and in Maine.

24 OLD BUSINESS

"Since I'm here anyway," I say, "let me say hello to Lizzie." We'd met already at church, days ago. Between then and now, I'd built a shed, misplaced a freind, and lost a livelihood.

Lizzie comes in, looking, as before, all of her father's daughter. His strength is clear in her athletic stance. In my world, she would be celebrated, a Serena Williams. Here, she seems barely able to move in her long skirts.

"Tunics and hose may be more comfortable than trousers," I think, "but they both have it all over these horrible dresses."

"Lizzie, you father asked me to teach you to read."

She nods. Reluctant. Unwilling or nervous?

"Let's talk as we head to Brandon's farm." That's where all my paper is. And I want to find out how much of this is Sam's idea and how much is hers.

"How old are you, Lizzie?"

"I will be fifteen at the end of this summer."

"Can you read at all?"

"No, none in my family can."

"So why did your fatehr ask me to teach you?"

Now she gets excited. "He showed us the bag of this stuff, concrete. He told us what he did with your small shed. He says this is the secret of the Romans, rediscovered like the

writings of the ancient philosophers! I love stone, I do, but Da won't let me work with the stone, not much. He says I am too strong already, and that any man would be afraid I would crush him to a pebble in our wedding bed."

"Anyway, I asked 'How does it work,' and he said 'The recipe is all written on the sack.' But none of us could read it. He told us what you did, how thick the mixture was, but he could not tell us what the bag said."

"If I can read, then I work with the concrete instead of stone. From what Da said, it is so easy. If ladies can do sewing and needlepoint, than why not concrete?"

You'd have to be standing at a strange point of view to see mixing concrete and needlepoint as similar activities. Being a stone mason may be just that point.

"Lizzie, I will be happy to start to teach you how to read concrete bags. Especially if you come and tend my cousin's farm tomorrow."

I know it's traditional to start with "CAT." It's tempting to start with "CONCRETE," but that has the silent "E". I think about what was written on the concrete, and teach her "CAT" and "BAG" and "SET."

"Do you work with things that set?" I ask. A foolish - and maybe risky - question. But if Sam's told his family, then the CAT is out of the BAG.

"Of course," Lizzie says. "Mortar sets."

Oh. What do I know.

I show her how to mix up the words. SAG. TAG. "SAC" she says. "Well, that's one of the trickier words," I say,

"we'll have to get to that next week."

Eight letters down. Almost a third.

"Why doesn't your family read?" I ask. "I met the school teacher at church."

"Lots of boys learn to read," Lizzie says. "All fathers want their sons to read. Not all of them can be spared, if there is too much work to do. Very few girls learn. None in our village even went to school. But Queen Elizabeth can! Maybe it's because people don't like it when girls are whipped. Our queen could learn to read and write because nobody was going to whip her!"

"Lizzie, I would never lay a hand on anyone I was teaching. What a terrible thought!"

"Oh, it's the way of things. You know the saying, 'God made the buttocks for the teaching of Latin.' "

"No, I do not know that saying. How awful."

Anyway, Queen Elizabeth can read. I have her name and I can to, now, just a little bit!"

I can't argue with that.

I know that even a motivated pupil can't last more than an hour. She shows me what to do around the farm, some. Now that I know his rents rely on this farm, I pay more attention. "Why wasn't Brandon selling his food last week?"

"Partly because he's in between crops, I think. The chervil is passing and the cabbage is not yet up. Partly because he was helping you help George."

Did I cost Brandon a week of income, just before rents were due? I think about our money problems. I think his idea of finding a cure for sailor's scurvy is admirable. There must be some way to play the merchant. It's a little harder because I don't think I can spend modern currency in Cork or the other way around. Maybe if it were converted to metals. What a complication. And then there are all the time travel stories I've read where everything is going fine until someone gets too greedy.

Or too meddlesome. Who will Lizzie become, once I teach her to read? Will it change all of history? Will everything be different, now that Lizzie O'Malley can write GET SET GAS BAG?

I feel a little of Brandon's admonition that "this time it might be different" as I walk with Bran up to the Door in the midday sun. Since I have no connection here or there, I thought - better to walk to the Door in the sunlight on the Cork side today, spend the night in Maine, and wake up in Maine when the sun is up.

I'm looking forward to spending now my second night in the shed, My second night in a row. Maybe it is home. Sam and Brandon were right. When you travel a total of 1400 years a day, it's good to have a home base.

I step through. It's already late here. The sun has already gone down, and I step out into darkness. But not complete darkness. I see a van parked by my truck, with the cab light on and someone reading. The van says "Ted's Hardware and Lumber."

I got this property to get away from people. I take three deep breaths before I walk up to the driver's side door. I translate "What the hell are you doing here?" into Maine.

"Evening, Ted."

"Evening, Friv. How are you?"

"Fine, Ted. And you?"

"Fine. Better, now."

"Oh?"

"Well, I've been trying to hold your parents off. "

My Mainer laconicity drops. "My parents! What the hell, Ted!"

"I was in the police station, renewing my commercial license for the van. I was talking with Barry, that is, Chief Gray, about the bear that's been coming by his place, when the phone rang. It was your mother. She hadn't heard from you in a week. She was all ready to file a missing persons report. Barry was not eager to call out the search party, and he'd heard around town about your actor friends. So he knew I'd seen you. He got your mother's call-back information, and got her off the line. Then he asked me to come keep an eye on you."

"Oh. In that case, thank you."

"No sweat. I was hoping to see how the shed turned out anyhow."

"I can give you the penny tour. It's just the one room, but it's good to have something weather tight."

I show him the shed, as well as I can by flashlight. "Nice work," he says. "I like the barn doors. They might call for

some weather-stripping, come fall."

I agree.

"Are you going to follow a similar pattern on the main house?"

"I think I want to redesign the main house. My last plans were too small."

Ted picks up the charcoal drawing of George's family. "You're going to need a gallery."

"That's what Brandon said. I don't know about that. We're a little far from New York City."

"I'd like to see it by daylight sometime, if you don't mind."

The shed or the drawing? "Tomorrow would not be good. I have to run down to Concord on an errand. And after that, I might be helping out a friend. It's hard to say."

"Is that why you haven't been around? I noticed your truck here, and the place being awfully quiet."

"You have been snooping around!" I exclaim.

Ted raises his hands in surrender. "Only since your mother called."

"OK, OK."

Ted says, "As it happens, I need to meet with a supplier in Concord too. It might as well be tomorrow. We could share a ride. It would save on gas, and make it a more interesting trip."

I don't see any reason why not. And it would be good to be on the right side of the owner of the only hardware store in town. "Sure. When should I pick you up?"

"Oh, if it goes well with the supplier, I'll need my van. How about I get you at eight-thirty? Eight, if you want to grab breakfast in town before we go."

Going in someone else's van feels uncomfortably like being kidnapped. But the promise of a long sleep followed by bacon and eggs is too precious. "If you trust me to share the driving, it's a deal."

"Good. See you then."

25 CONFLICT AND CONCORD

I find myself tracking the days to market day and church, which means days in Cork. So it's Thursday in Cork. My life is much less tied to the day of the week in Maine than in Ireland. This is so disorienting. So, today is Friday in Maine, at 7:30 in the morning, getting toward mid-June, and I have shaken myself out of my bedroll and performed my ablutions. It will be a welcome thing, when I have my well and septic in. I wonder idly. Would it be so wrong to first bring in a toilet, and build my house around that? Well, yes.

Since we're going to stop for breakfast, I bring along my toothbrush and a facecloth. I may as well take advantage of running water where I can! Plus, there will be coffee. So it's a very quick rising this morning.

Ted comes by with his van at eight, as planned. A straightforward breakfast and then we hit the road. We are looking at ten hours, round trip, so we have reason to not dawdle.

In five hours down to Concord, there is time for a lot of silence and a lot of conversation. We could pass in amicable silence for a while before I couldn't help it any more. "Sorry about my Mom."

"It did seem unusual."

"Well, she runs one of the woman's shelters in Boston, and my Dad teaches political science. I'm an only child.

Between the two of them, they are, shall we say, nervous."

"Many parents start to trust their kids by your age." Did I tell him my age? Oh, right. I had to show him my ID the first time I changed at his store.

"They aren't most parents. And they'd say I'm not like most kids. Most kids get sensible jobs and settle down with someone. Most kids don't end up artists and alone."

"I don't know that most kids get sensible jobs."

"Well, they think I'm out of control. I just find it easier to tell them just enough to keep them off my back. I guess I told them a bit too little this time."

God, I don't like where this is going. I've dropped their name, moved from Boston to Nashua, and then to the back of beyond in Maine, and I'm thinking hard about just hiding in sixteenth century Cork. "Is it so hard to call your Mom?" Stephan would ask me. Hard enough that it might be easier to pretend to be an orphaned woman in Cork. Hell, it was too hard to call Stephan too.

Time for an overt change of subject.

"And what about your parents?"

"Well, nobody moved to Bottomsfield, so of course they live close and I see them about once a week." He looks over at me. "I mean, we don't get too many strangers hereabouts. Oh, Friv. You know what I mean. Why would anyone move here if they didn't already live here?"

"For the school system?" I ask. Very bad joke. At least literacy is higher than in Cork, but the high-school dropout rate is bad enough that there's flyers about it in the county

offices, for even the casual new stranger to see.

Ted grimaces. Not funny, Friv. Not funny.

"It really is beautiful," I say.

"There is that. But you can't eat the scenery."

Great. This will make the miles roll by.

"And what do your parents do?"

"Like a lot of people here, they do a mess of things. My Da's main job is an antique shop. That branched out to furniture restoration and repair. They have a few dozen apple trees too, and sell some jack locally. Nothing official, but the amounts are small enough that it's all legal. Most years, anyway. Ma helps out with everything. She does a lot of canning."

"Did you help your Da out? Is that how you got into the hardware business?"

"That's right."

"That's nice. I couldn't really help my parents at the shelter or with their poly sci classes."

"No, I guess not."

That was the most noteworthy conversation of the entire five hour trip into Concord.

We get in around 1:30. I am eager to get my task behind me. We stop at the league headquarters. "Care to come in?" I ask. "Or do you want to grab a sandwich while I do this?"

"I'm fine for now. I can help you move your stuff."

We go in the front way, like any tourist would. I am overwhelmed, as usual, by the number of moose and pine trees and bear in the shop. Once you look past those, there are some very fine pieces of work. Gerry blows the giant surreal glass blossoms. Judy creates the masks out of paper, some stunningly realistic, and some fantastical. I will miss working with these artists. But that's a path I chose when I moved to Meaine.

The woman tending the shop takes us into the back to where my work is stacked. Like Brandon before him, Ted looks them over critically. " 'Dream big,' " he reads. " 'Follow your heart.' I don't see 'Get up every day and do your job.' "

"That doesn't sell," I say. "But maybe I'll make some, just for you."

We package up them up, seven boxes worth. "There's a lot of work we're holding in these boxes,"

"About three month's worth."

Ted whistles. "I take it back. You do get up every day and do your job."

Conveniently, and not by chance, there is a good discount art supply store next to the League headquarters. It is a place that caters to working artists. No frills, but about 10% cheaper than any place within 200 miles. Certainly, it's the best place to get canvases between here and Bottomsfield. I want to start painting my drawings from market day, five days ago.

We grab a quick lunch before Ted's visit. "This is probably not a money-maker," Ted admits to me. "There are a lot of farmers near Bottomsfield that are just barely getting by. This guy has a set of discontinued drip irrigation systems. I'm hoping that if I get them, I can convince them to buy it."

Geez, is this a constant verity of the world? That farming is hard?

Ted meets with the supplier in a small warehouse on the edge of Concord. After several days with Brandon, I'm sort of surprised by how Ted doesn't negotiate. Deal done, and we head back to Maine. Maybe it's better Ted didn't bargain, just to save time.

It's about eight when we hit Bottomsfield. "This was a useful day," says Ted. "Do you want dinner before we drop you and your boxes off at your place?"

"I'd love to," I say, "but there's something important I need to do tonight." I was thinking that there will still be some afternoon left for me to give another lesson to Lizzie.

"Friv, you don't have to bullshit me. I'm not your parents. If you've seen enough of me today to last a week, you can just say that." He takes the turn back toward my lot.

"Ted, really. It's not that. Please, just let it go."

It's a quiet drive back down to my site.

26 A NEW PLAN

What a lousy end to a long day, and here I am, planning to make it even longer. Friday night in Maine, Thursday afternoon in Cork. I head straight to Sam's place, looking for Lizzie. God, between the letter from Stephan, the dismissal from the League, and the fight with Ted, I am looking forward to talking to someone who knows what's going on. When Lizzie said that Sam told her about the concrete, I should have been frightened. I should have been worried that a secret shared is no secret at all. I should have been worried about a descent of which hunters from, oh, London I guess. Instead, I am pleased that she knows. Relieved.

Sam is there. "Hello Catherine. Lizzie will be along shortly. In the meantime, I was thinking about your house. I know you want to keep it simple. But here is something that I think will fit you well."

"This has been such a confusing week. I like simple."

Sam says, "Here is something that I think will be fast to build. In any case, the outside is similar to the shed. I think that will look of a piece as well."

"It is similar to what you drew earlier. I added a few things. One is that you had this thing you called a 'shed roof.' Since we construct the supports for the roof as a piece, we can just make mirrored supports. A gable is not any harder. And, since the house will be twice as wide as the shed, you'll have a more sensible attic space."

"Twice as wide? So sixteen feet across?"

"That's right. That will be a good size for the large living room, with the stone fireplace. You forgot to add the

fireplaces in the plan you showed us earlier."

"I hadn't thought of a fireplace."

"Of course you need a fireplace. How else would you stay warm this winter? I saw the steepness of the pitch of the houses around your place, and their wood pile, so I know you get cold winters."

"Sam, you amaze me. You saw a plan view, what, once? You worked on the shed. And from this, you can present a house plan for me?"

"Here it is. Basically doubling the shed. I know you know the sizes of these sheets of wood better than I do." Sam pulls out a something written on the back of one of that ream of paper I got from Mary. He gestures. "I took the house of William the glover's son. He's a small family, only himself, his wife, her mother, and two children. And then I added a place for a gallery on the North side. You'll want it protected from the direct sun."

"Again, I am just amazed, Sam."

"You know, Catherine, that yours is not the first house I have thought about."

"I know, I know. But people live very differently in my world in 2015 than they did - or do? so confusing. Argh. I give up. I'll just use present tense for both Maine and Cork. I live differently than you live. We spend more time spending time in the kitchen. The stoves are much less noxious. Cooking is much less dirty for use than it is for you. We have many more windows too. And our rooms are usually larger."

"Why? Why do you like larger rooms? Don't they get cold

in the winter?"

"You saw the stove I used to make us tea? That uses a liquid fuel that burns very easily. We burn a similar liquid to heat our houses."

"But you have such good wood around your house! And with those fantastic saws you have, it must be simple to collect enough wood for a winter."

"Ha! No, Sam, I wouldn't use a circular saw to cut down a tree. Yeah, if I wanted to heat just with wood, I guess it would take me maybe two or three weeks to set myself up, tops. But it's much more reliable to use the other stuff, the propane."

"Catherine, from what I know of you, you would not like needing to depend on someone else. I think you need a house you could heat with wood, in case."

"Yeah, you know me. Can I mark some ideas?" We end up with about half of the classic four-by-four house. It's sixteen by twenty-four instead of twelve by twenty-four, and now it's got a full pair of bedrooms instead of the open sleeping loft. It still has the six-foot open porch on the southern side, and now it has an enclosed gallery area with a separate entrance.

"Sam, this is twice the house I had planned on. How do you think I could do this before winter?"

"Would you mind if Lizzie helps? She really is eager to see this 'concrete' at work."

As if on cue, Lizzie walks in. "Hello Da. Hello Catherine."

I know Sam is right. I saw Lizzie's enthusiasm yesterday. "I

don't want to presume on such a new friendship. Would you really want to help be build this house?"

Lizzie almost bounces, but holds her tongue, waiting for Sam to answer. "Catherine, Lizzie and I are both excited to learn another way to design and build a house. I we finish this with some new knowledge and some bags of this concrete, we will be well rewarded."

"Sam, Lizzie, I can't express how grateful I am. But I can pay you back a little already now. Lizzie, are you ready for the next lesson?"

"Oh, yes!" says Lizzie. Oh, to have that energy. The long, eighteen-hour, days that this time offset is pulling on me is really taking its toll. Some time, I'll sleep. Some time. But the house, the art, the farm, and understanding the doors - how can I not use all the sunlight I have?

I spend another hour with Lizzie. Sam is looking on. "Lizzie, did you show Sam what we did yesterday?"

"Yes, Catherine."

"I mean, did you do more than tell him? Did you teach him what I taught you?"

Lizzie shrinks a little bit. "Don't strike me, please! I know I'm not any sort of teacher! I'm not trying to do your job! It's only, my father asked, and how can I hide anything from him?"

"Lizzie, Lizzie, you did nothing wrong. My God, what is education like here in 1597 Cork, that you would think I might strike you? Teaching someone else is the best way to learn yourself. Please, continue to pass on these lessons to whoever you want."

At the end of the session, Sam comes back in to where we are finish the second lesson. He shows me the modified plan. "When should we start?"

I don't see any reason to slow this down. I can explain about wiring and plumbing later. "Is tomorrow too soon? Then we can dig for the 'concrete foundation' before market day on Saturday."

"Right! Market day! Don't we have to help Brandon make his rent? Don't we have to do some harvesting and selling at market?"

Lizzie says, "Do not worry, Catherine. You are part of our family now. Sam tells me you have a small family - just you and your parents. You haven't seen what happens when a whole family works as one."

27 HOUSE DAY

I bid Sam and Lizzie a good night, and head back to Maine for a very good sleep. Good, but not long. Right about sunrise, I hear a knock on my shed door.

"Good morning, Catherine-Friv," says Sam, using his usual appellation for me when we're in Maine. "I brought Lizzie. But I thought, if I brought a few more, then we can pour the concrete tonight."

"God, Sam, I just woke up." I have to blink and shake my head.

"That's OK. I'll mark out the holes, and get us digging."

He backs out. I get up, dress, and fill my toothbrush. I step outside to brush and spit out the paste away from the building. No need to attract bears. I nearly choke on my toothbrush.

Not just Sam and Lizzie, who I expected, but his whole family. And his sister's Christina's family, the weaver George and their children. And two more families I didn't recognize. I grab Sam and pull him to the side. "Who are all these people?"

"The O'Reilleys you already know. That man there is Glenn, Brandon's father, and his son, Brandon's older brother. The fellow with the green hat is George's brother, and the one with the crazed blond hair is his other brother" and so on.

"Brandon's father? Surely he knows I'm not his niece! What did you tell them?"

"Brandon's father also know that he doesn't have any nieces that live on the other side of a fantastical door. Don't fret. You can tell them everything you told me."

"But Sam! There must be 30 people here!"

"Thirty seven. I knew we have more time in the morning that you do, so I told them all what you are doing here. You do not have to tell them a thing."

I say "OK, let's get digging. Have you told them all yet about the wonder of coffee?"

"Catherine-Friv, that is a wonder you do not have to share."

For me it's Saturday morning in Maine, and for these now nearly family, it's Friday just after midnight in Cork. With many hands making light work, we dig the foundation holes under my direction and Sam's.

Normally, I'd hire an excavator, or rather hire someone to operate an excavator. I'd dig this all out at once, making the big hole, and putting in a full foundation wall. Doing it this way, with a footer every two feet, with all this help, it's only digging three holes per person. Not so hard. And this way, Sam and Lizzie and the rest get to work with concrete first hand. Certainly Sam and Lizzie tell me it's a good deal for them. If Sam will end up bringing some concrete back to Cork, then he'll want other people to know how to work with it too.

The work goes well enough. We switch off enough that nobody gets worn out. I have two week's worth of dry goods now in the shed: boxes of granola, bags of dried fruit and sacks of nuts. During the digging, they sing these elaborate ballads with long story lines. They are easy to

sing along. A very few are familiar, like *Willie of Winsbury*. Some are very silly, like *The Friar and the Well*.

The well makes me think of one of the shadow boxes I make, with a wishing well on a fill, and the caption "Make a Wish." Despite his hard words at the end, I told him I'd make him a shadow box reflecting hard work and responsibility. The Buddhist sentiment of mindfulness at work, "Chop wood, carry water," could replace the other caption easily. It is a matter of ten minutes to me to effect the change and box it up for Ted.

I wonder again at the power of a tight community. I don't know how Sam could have talked all these relatives to get up in the dark and, on only his word, walk up to a strange door and walk through it.

Which all means there a responsibility laid on me too, to keep Brandon's farm afloat. While we are digging, I talk to George O'Reilly. He seems to know Brandon the best of all, even better than Brandon's own father does, and he was the beneficiary of the sketches during the last market day.

"George, should I be worried for Brandon? Is he well by, to pay his rents on placeholderfest?"

"Catherine," George says, "it depends how long he is gone. Where was it Sam said he went? Settle?"

"Seattle. It's through the other door."

"Well, he missed one market already, and it's coming up on the peak of harvest time. The Brussel sprouts, the leeks are coming ready. Plus, if he's much longer, then he'll have trouble getting the farm put to bed before the winter. There's winter crops to be sown, and carrots and turnips

to be pulled and put into cold storage. I can't say what Brandon's circumstances really are. I can say that missing two market days will not help."

"George, I don't know how long Brandon will be," I say. "How much did Sam tell you?"

"He said that there was a ship in Seattle that was preparing to have a farm on board, and that Brandon wanted to help get that ready. It sounded like Brandon stayed to help outfit the dinghy to carry up the farm. That was, when?"

"The day before yesterday."

"Aye, that's right. So today is when the dinghy would be due to launch to the ship. What Sam didn't know is whether Brandon would go on that dinghy or not, and, when he would choose to come back."

"That's close to what I know. I saw a, um, ship's manifest. Dinghies launched every week. I think it might take a fair trip to run a 'dinghy' to the ship, and I think there's either one or dinghies. If there's two dinghies, and Brandon did go up to the ship, then he could be up there another two weeks, or more. If he didn't go up in the ship, then he could be back any day now."

"If he misses two more market days beyond this one, with the main harvest coming in—well, that would be as bad as a hard rain flooding the fields. It would go hard for him."

I try to hide my look of dismay as I start to dig a new hole. George takes the shovel from me and looks me straight in the eye. He repeats the same line that Sam told me. "Catherine, Brandon told me that you are not his cousin. You have no obligation to his farm."

"George! Look around you! All these people are treating me as their cousin. How can I not return the relationship?"

"In that case, your help is welcome gladly."

My mind starts turning. Spending a week with Brandon makes you take a look at any situation as an opportunity.

I say "George, you are free to hang last week's unsold drawings at your cart today. But I have another plan for my art tomorrow."

28 MARKET, TWO

It is feeling almost normal by now, to finish a day's work in Maine and still have a good six hours of daylight in Cork. We cross over, and head down. I have a small contingent to help at Brandon's place. Most of the harvesting for market will happen the next day, but there are some items, such as brussel sprouts and cabbages, that can be picked tonight.

I ask some of the younger members of our troupe to come with me tonight: Lizzie, and young George, and his shy brother. First things first, getting ready for the substance of selling the goods. Here I am entirely willing to be led by them. And then it is my turn to take charge.

"Let's see if we can get one picture of each of you while the light is still good. The stalks of brussel sprouts are amazing to look at," I say. "In our markets, you always see them just already cut off. Look at that spiral! Let's do one of those first." The majestic scepter-like sprouts inspire me. "Young George, can you strike a pose?" So he stands, one arm on his hip, one holding the stalk triumphantly before you." I stand him before Brandon's house, and paint him in a royal style. This is my first time painting in Cork, since last week I was only doing charcoal. I pull out one of larger canvasses, and the oils. Somehow, using acrylics here just doesn't seem appropriate. And pastels or watercolors would be far too muted. Charcoal is right out - the color was really critical here. The point was not realism even as much as vibrancy.

It's time to sign it. I sign all the shadow boxes "Friv." So many names to choose from. But here in Cork, I'm known as "Catherine Dawson." So that's how I sign it.

I want to save Lizzie for the late-day sun. This means the next portrait is George's brother. Such a fresh-faced young kid, about fifteen years old, with curly hair and a snub nose. I pose him with a double-bunch of kale, fanned in front of his face, with his bright eyes peeking through as a jungle. I use a smaller canvas to emphasize the resemblance to some small, quick creature.

The final one is the one I want to spend the most care with. Lizzie is such a thoughtful young woman, with such fine control over her strong young body, It is a shame that she feels others only see her as the stonemason's daughter. I want to paint her as a softer archetype.

"Lizzie, lucky girl, I'll be posing you with a cabbage."

She looks doubtful.

I realize by now that I do not even want to paint her outside, anyway. We light a fire in the kitchen -- thank god they show me how to do that -- and I pose her where the fading light shines indirectly through the windows, and the firelight shines as a glow up onto her face. I arrange a shawl over her head, placing the folds just so, half-obscuring her face. "Lizzie," I ask, "Have you ever held a baby?"

"Of course."

"OK, remember what that felt like." I hand her a large green cabbage. "Cradle this in your arm, like a baby's head."

Perfect.

"Thank you, all three of you. I'll see you in the morning."

I go to bed hopeful, with a start on Brandon's cart, and a set of three paintings of healthy vegetables and healthy youth.

I wake up the next morning, at first a little disoriented. Is this the first full night I spent in 1597 Ireland? I'm not at all sure how to break fast, and god knows there's no coffee. No wonder the middle ages lasted so long.

Lizzie, young George, and his brother show up, as arranged, and we finish loading Brandon's cart, hitching up Poor Thing, and the three of them guide us all to market, artist, nag and cart. Brandon has a usual spot, into which we pull. I hang the three oil paintings, and set up an easel. At worst, we have a cart full of Brandon's usual, and he will at least not lose another week. I expect that the paintings and my presence will attract some attention, which might get the cart extra traffic. At best, I might encourage more vigorous sales.

"George," I say, dropping the "young" from his usual appellation, "remember, scratch your shoulder once if a customer buys an unusually large amount." As I hoped, people come by to look at the paintings, and one woman lingers long enough to see the carrots. She counts out her coins, and Henry scratches his shoulder.

"Excellent choice," says Lizzie. "You know that carrots are good for your hair. But you must know that already."

I pipe up. "These are my cousin's wares. I am Catherine Dawson, Brandon Conner's cousin. I am also a painter, as you see. You would look so beautiful posing with the carrots. May I paint you? You can come and show your family the portrait at Brandon's farm whenever you like. It will take a short spell of your time."

And so I paint the torso of some woman from a rear quarter view, with her hair flowing down to her waist, and a basket of carrots visible in her arms.

It feels great to actually paint. This time, too, it is for a good cause, which makes it all even more joyful. By the end of the day, I have added five more paintings to the three from the night before. I would say, eight more painting to my portfolio, except they are all signed "Catherine Dawson."

"It was a good day painting," I say to the three. "How did we do in sales?"

Young George answers. "It don't think at was as astonishing as your help at our stand last week, because most people buy vegetables most weeks, and only buy cloth occasionally. Still, I know you did no worse than usual, and perhaps quite a bit better."

Good enough for me. With luck, people will come by to see their paintings, and stay to buy something even mid-week.

Henry says "My Da says that you have to spend dinner with us tonight." And so I do.

29 HUMILITY, TRUST, AND HONESTY

Waking up alone in Brandon's farm, I feel nearly helpless. And more than a little disceveled. This is the second night, and, boy, do I miss my toothbrush. Between Cork and my homestead - still without a well or septic -- I surely miss indoor plumbing.

Lizzie comes over, as Sam said she would. She shows me how to heat some water for breakfast and washing, again. She showed me yesterday, but this is not easy. She is amused that I want to bathe already. I am amused that she would think that this sponge bath is luxurious. Before we go into town, I make other sketch of her in the kitchen. It takes a strong woman to just handle the hardware in a huse like this. And I say "Another reading lesson?"

"Of course," says my eager student. Teaching is easy when the student is willing.

On this Sunday morning, I show here what happend when you add an "H" to some letters. CHURCH. ASH. THATCH.

Not SUNSHINE - the silent E is in her future.

And then to church. The walk to the church and the settling in to the pew is vastly different than last week's. Then, I was the stranger in town, and Brandon introduced me to a few families as his cousin. Now the entire village knew me as his cousin, except for those same few families. I had also talked with more than three dozen of them at one or the other market day, and for some of them, I also had sketches or complete paintings. Walking up the path to the church, I heard greetings, and people asking after

Brandon. I worded my language similarly to how George but it. "He met a man who said he could show him a new way to farm. I do not know how long he will be gone. It may be a few days, or it may be several weeks." Or, I think, something terrible could happen, and he might never come back. Or, maybe Brandon is right about the unreliable nature of the Doors. Dispite the community feeling, it is with a somber heart that I enter the chirch and sit in Brandon's usual spot.

The service is similar to last weeks at the start. The same order of prayerrs and mostly the same hymns. As last week, the preacher rises to the pulpit to give his sermon. As last week, he begins with a bombast.

"THOU SHALT NOT LIE!"

Who, me? I try not to, really. I try to just tell the half truths when I can. Or say nothing.

Once again, pointing his long finger in a sweep across the congregation. "THOU SHALT NOT LIE!" Did his finger slow as he passed me? Certainly, we did not hide our descent down the hill from our foundation-setting yesterday. It was broad midday when we walked down. The door is not easy to spot, but perhaps someone saw this crowd coming down from nowhere?

The preacher goes on.

"Moses came down from the mountain with the rules of how to form a society that would be pleasing in the eyes of God. Thou shalt not have any gods before me. Thou shalt not kill. Compared to killing, lying seems as a small thing."

"It is because lying kills the heart of a society. WIth lies, we cannot help or be helped. With lies, we cannot open

ourselves to God, if we are closing ourselves our neighbors."

"And why do we lie?"

A long pause here, as everyone gets to squirm with their own answer.

"We lie out of pride. We are ashamed of something we did, or we want to appear greater than we are."

Well, that sums up my relationship with my parents in a few words.

"We lie out of mistrust. We are afraid of what others might do if they knew the truth. We are afraid of punishment or worse. Instead, we punish our selves and those we love most by holding our truth back."

Well, that sums up my hesitation about speaking of the doors. So far, everyone who has learned about the doors, it has been a good thing. Brandon, George, Lizzie, all their dozens of family. As with last week, I find the sermon strikes me very close to home.

I feel as if the priest has almost walked up to me to say "This is a chance to tell me the truth." I have never been in a confessional in my life ... do I go in one now?

Be fearless.

I do. "Father. I must tell you first, I was not raised a Catholic. I have never been inside a confessional before. May I confess?"

"Yes, you can speak, and I will listen, and advise you where I can. I cannot absolve you. Since you are not of our faith,

I can only give you a chance to absolve yourself."

"Father, I am not Brandon Conner's cousin. I only met him eight days ago. My name is not Catherine Dawson, it is Millie Ochs."

"I guessed as much. Neither Brandon nor his father mentioned a cousin."

"Brandon is a large-hearted man, and was looking to protect me. I did not come from Penzance, but from across the Atlantic."

"That is quite a journey! A rare one too, especially for a woman such as yourself. Such a difficult journey. No small wonder that you arrived destitute and confused. And no small wonder that you thought you had reason to be quiet. Much can happen on such a journey that can shake a woman's faith in God and man. You are safe in this booth with me. You can tell me. If anything shameful occurred, it brings shame of those who did it, not on you, my lamb."

How many stories of rape did this man have to hear? And how horrible, that he is presented with a woman with a secret, and his first and very natural assumption is that she is hiding a violation?

"Thank you father, but it is not that. My passage here was no more difficult than my passage into this confessional booth." True. Both are physically easy, and spiritually hard. "I don't know how. You might call it a new machine. You might call it a miracle. I was afraid you might call it witchcraft, but I assure you it is no such thing!"

The priest is quiet for a moment, and then speaks. "What is the difference between magic and miracle? What is the difference between the Devil's work and God's? Those

who try magiks are trying to cheat life or cheat death. If a neighbor gives you a gift of the loan of an ox, that is a blessing, and you accept it. You do not then go and raid his barn in the middle of the night. The miracle of the parting of the Red Sea saved the Israelite, but then they had to wander for another forty years before finding the promised land! A man with a fever is likely to die. If, by some miracle, he lives, then he still has the same hard life to lead as he did before the sickness."

"So don't be greedy."

"That is one part of it. I also say, I can tell this is a miracle and not a magik by how you have been acting. If you wished to, you could profit from this ... passageway. Instead, I have heard of your work with Brandon's farm. How could I not have? Your artistry is one of the most novel things we have seen in a year. From what I hear, nobody ever sees you still. You recognize this passage as both a wonder and as an obligation. If you were a witch, you would not be acting this way."

I begin to cry. Maybe I am overtired. No, that cannot be. I had a normal length day yesterday, and all I did was harvest fields, load a cart, drive a nag to market, paint all day, and teach two reading lessons.

After a while, I say, "Father, I thank you for your words, more than I can say."

He says, "Bless you, Millie Ochs, and go with God."

30 SUPPLIES!

It is a quiet walk down from the church. As we reach the bottom of the path to the church, Sam and George and the other families stop. Sam says "I believe that the foundations will be ready for a floor tomorrow. We are eager and willing to come again."

I say, "It is amazing what you can do. There is something I have to do first. Sam, you met Ted. I last left things with him in an argument. I need to tell him where I've been, and what I've been doing. So I need to go now, so I can reach him this afternoon."

Sam says, "He seemed like a good, solid man. I think he will listen to you now."

"I hope so. But Sam, I want to do more than tell him. I want to have him see all of you, tomorrow. When would you arrive?"

"The same as on Friday. About 2 AM from Cork, and so about 8 AM in Maine."

"You are all always most welcome, of course. And 8 AM would work, with my telling Ted and having him meet you."

Sam looks at Lizzie. "Do you want to show him more tonight? Do you want to take Lizzie with you? She would love to see the store that Ted runs."

I leap. "My pleasure."

Lizzie grins.

We walk up the hill, and step through to Maine, mid-afternoon. "No time to waste," I say. I grab the shadowbox I made for Ted, and we step into the truck. "Do not worry about the noise," I say. "Just think of this as my version of Brandon's Poor Thing." We head into town, down the dirt road, finer than any I'd seen in Cork, and eventually onto the asphalt. I take Lizzie's hand the first time a car passes us in the opposite direction. "This is all normal, Lizzie. In fact, this is a pretty quiet day. No need to be afraid." She nods, but her eyes stay wide open.

I pull into Ted's. Lizzie excitedly points at the sign. "T-E-D TED!"

"That's right!" I say.

We walk in. "Afternoon, Ted."

"Afternoon, Friv."

"You know, Ted. Friv was a fine name in Nashua. Here in Maine, I'll stick with Millie."

"That's fine, Millie. What can I do for you."

"Ted, I'd like you to meet Lizzie. Lizzie, this Ted."

"Pleased to meet you," says Lizzie.

"Same here," says Ted, looking at me a bit askance,

"Ted, Lizzie was the reason I couldn't have dinner with you Friday night. I told her father, Sam - you met Sam, remember?"

"Hard to forget."

"I told him I would teach her how to read, and I had to get to her place for the next lesson."

Ted says, "So, home schooled?"

Lizzie laughs. "Like we could afford our own tutor!"

I say, "Ted, it's much stranger than you could imagine. Can I take you up on your invitation for dinner tonight? I can tell you all about it then."

Ted says, "I think it will be a night well spent."

I say, "I think it will be too. And, as a further sign of my good will, here is the working-man's shadow box I promised."

Ted unwraps it and whistles. "This is really nice work, Friv. I mean, Millie."

"Thank you."

"It'll be about an hour, or an hour and half before I close up here."

"That's fine. I'm sure Lizzie will be happy to look around the shop that long."

Lizzie nods her head enthusiastically. "Especially the concrete!" she says.

I shrug and say to Ted, "She's not such a fan of the abstract."

31 THE SET UP

Ted points us toward the concrete goes about his business. Lizzie is hard to keep still. "I saw the even work the sawyers did, on your boards on the floor we walked on to," she said, "and my Da told me about the shed you built. Look at all these boards!"

"I don't know how your mills work," I say, "so I don't know if they can set something so they a consistent width. It's an interesting question, though. If you work with the same mill all the time, it doesn't matter if there's a big standard, all you need is the two of you to work together."

The concrete blocks, the concrete pavers, and even the concrete statues, that are the payoff for Lizzie. "Amazing," she says, "to think we can make stones already in the size and shape you want!"

I show her the different kinds of concrete bags. She knows the word "SET" and I teach her "QUICK." "Sometimes people write words funny on purpose, just to get your attension. Maybe like wearing a hat backwards." She sees one with a picture of a fireplace. "Well spotted, Lizzie. That's heat resistant, to use around stoves or fireplaces."

And so we spend a similar time walking the aisles, with my answering Lizzie's questions where I can. Some of them, I answer just by reading a label or instructions. If anyone needed an ad for literacy, this was it. "How dear is the fireplace concrete?"

"For one bag? Very cheap."

"Can I get a bag?"

"It needs to stay dry. How will you get it down to your house?"

Lizzie picks up the fifty pound bag. "How do you mean? I'll carry it."

Her father's daughter, indeed.

Finally, Ted closes up. "Do you both like fish?" he asks. We are agreeable, and we go to the "Daily Catch," a good, cheap local's fish fry.

"Let's get a booth," I say. "We have a lot to tell you."

And so, over fried clams, grilled scrod, and pasta with tomato sauce, I tell Ted what's happened over the last week. He listens patiently about the market, and where the drawing of George's family came from, and the space elevator. He doesn't really get talkative until I talk about the concrete footers we dug two days ago. At that point, he asks me about the height of the building, and the slope of the roof, and the plans for the flooring frame. "If you were starting fresh," he said, "you could have put in footers along the midline, but I can see where you want to have your barn-raising tomorrow. It's good that you have a simple plan."

"That's what I thought, too."

Ted sketches out the floor frame. "You want to make it out of two by tens to span the sixteen feet. I've got the sixteen-foot joists in stock. The other end, you can make out of two twelve-foot two by tens, if the footers are in just the right place. You'd be safer getting some extra eight-foot lengths in case you need to cut it down."

"And what about the fireplace?"

"That's a trickier thing. Sam's right - you'll want to be able to burn wood. But a fireplace is very heavy - I think it'll slow you down tomorrow. And it's dirty and inefficient. I think you'd rather get a wood stove."

"That would certainly solve a lot of problems."

Lizzie asks "What's a wood stove?" I draw one for her. "How would you roast anything in there?" she asks.

"Oh, I'll have a separate oven for that," I say.

Now that Lizzie has spoken once, she asks the question she's been holding all dinner. "Ted," she says, "what can you tell me about concrete?"

And they are off, vividly and non-stop, until the chocolate cake arrives and Lizzie is completely engrossed. It is my chance to say something I've held all dinner.

"I'm sorry I lied to you about Sam and Brandon," I say.

"If you were afraid I would never believe you," Ted says, "you'd be right. You fed me one barely plausible story already, about the Shakespeare festival. In your own story, you passed yourself off as agricultural reeducators in Seattle. Don't get me wrong, Millie. I admire you and your work, and I am having a most entertaining evening. I'm just not going to, say, invest any money in any sixteenth century lumber yards."

"I know you have no reason to believe me, Ted, and every reason to doubt. You and Mary are the closest thing I have to friends here, and I don't want to sour this. If you want proof, you can come see me drop Lizzie off tonight after

supper. And if you have any doubts after that, then come by for coffee and the barn raising tomorrow morning, about 7:30."

"You're on."

Lizzie says "Can we make that 'tomato' sauce?"

I say "Sure!" Let's see, lunch for thirty. I head over to the supermarket for a quick restocking. Not just the nuts and dried fruit and crackers and salami, but also paper bowls, plastic utensils, tons of pasta, sauce, chocolate, and, what the heck, bananas. "Expecting a big party?" the check-out clerk asks.

"That's right," I say.

And so we three all head down to my site. I give Lizzie a big hug. "Have a good afternoon," I say. Sure as her word, she hefts the bag of concrete and walks over to the door. I open it for her, and see the usual change in light from the Cork side. "Thanks for a great day!" Lizzie says. "It was most kind of you to talk with me" she says to Ted. And she steps through.

Ted sprints to the other side of the lean-to. "I have to see that again!" he says.

"Come by tomorrow, and you will see it thirty times over," I answer.

"Can I bring Mary?" he asks.

I hesitate only a moment. Trust. "Yes," I say.

32 THE BIG REVEAL

I spend the night snug as a bug in the bed in my shed. Up early enough to coffee myself. Coffee - a tasty beverage that stops you from hating the world. How did civilization function before coffee? I have a cup and watch the world wake up around me. The last quiet before the big reveal.

I hear the crunch of van tires on gravel. Out step Ted and Mary. I wait by the lean-to bench, and offer them two coffee cups.

"Morning, Ted. Morning, Mary."

"Morning, Millie" says Ted,

"Ted says you're going my Millie now," says Mary.

"Yes, that's right."

"He told me I'd be in for a for a surprise."

"That's right too."

The sky is getting lighter, and Ted and Mary walk over to the now-cured foundation posts. "Interesting choice," Ted said.

"Well, I had some help, and I think it was the posts or nothing," I say.

"How tall a structure are you putting up?" asks Ted.

"Over the front, just a single-story porch, and over the back, just a single-story gallery. The main building will be a story-and-a-half, with the bedrooms upstairs."

Ted and Mary look at each other. "Should be fine," says Ted. Oh, was this just an inspector/county clerk moment?

"Well, good," I say, "because here come the work crew."

The villagers come on out. I have the same families as before, and I introduce them all to Ted and Mary. There are two new faces whose names I do not even know: the priest and the schoolmaster. George introduces us, and I welcome them.

"Where did these people come from?" asks Mary.

"Mary, I thought all small-town librarians remembered every book every patron checked out. Can't you guess?"

Her jaw drops. "Ted, you beast! You could have prepared me! You knew, when you came by!"

Ted says "Yes, I did. I saved the pleasure for Millie."

I say "Mary, I don't know how or why, but this door opens to 1597 in Cork, Ireland. I've been spending about half my time there this week."

"And the other door?"

"That opens to about 2300 Seattle. Sam and I haven't been back through since our friend Brandon stayed behind to learn some new farming methods."

Sam says, "We wish him good luck and god speed. Now however, we are wasting daylight."

33 COMPLETELY FLOORED

Between Sam and Ted's knowledge and skill, the floor frame is knocked together in very short order. I help where I can, when I'm not preparing for the lunch break, including the not insignificant task of boling water for spagetti for thirty over a camp stove, and making a fire for smores.

As on Friday, there is singing of long ballads. Again, The Friar and the Well. By this time, I learn it well enough that I think I can repeat it to Al, when he comes out to dig next.

During the morning, I often see Mary and the schoolmaster talking together. When Ted joins them and points out Lizzie, the discussion becomes particularly animated. I can only guess that they are talking about the education of girls.

By late morning, the floor frame is down, the plywood subfloor in on, and the major framing for the walls for the main house are up. The window framing is simple - with such a small width, and the rooms going all the way through, almost all the windows are on the south wall. I don't plan for windows along the north wall any how. That's got to have a solid wall, anyhow, for paintings. The

two days of drawing and painting at the market in Cork has me all fired up. I have these Brandon-like ideas.

When the last wall section goes up, Sam and Ted together declare that it is time for lunch. Lunch is a poor word for what happens next. I dish out the pasta and sauce to great amazement and delight. The smores were an astonishing hit. I was most surprised by how the adults took to the toasted marshmallows. This day, many of the villagers tasted their first marshmallows. For half of those, they also tasted their seventh marshmallows. Last night, I thought I was being excessive, buying ten bags for thirty people. Now, I worry we might run out.

Henry and Sam's son pull out something like penny whistles, and start playing tunes. The girls perk up, and the Young George comes to a slight bow in from of Lizzie. George and Christina, Sam and his wife, and, soon, Mary and the school master line up.

Ted says "If Mary can fake it, do you think we can?" I smile and take his hand in the line.

So we are a mix of stomping feet and fluttering skirts, with the men showing off their well turned legs with every measure. Ted and I are hopeless, and the villagers kindly push us gently into the general position and direction we need to be, laughing all the while.

The suger-fueled children are adding to this mayhem, chasing each other around the field.

Amid all this noise, we do not even hear the crunch of a new vehicle on the gravel. It is not until the car door closes, that we all stop and look.

Out of the Bottomsfield police car step Barry and my

parents.

"Millie Ochs!" says my mother. "What is happening here?"
I am completely floored!"

Barry looks at Ted, who steps forward.

"Barry, what's going on? Millie's not a missing person! I told you I saw her three nights ago!"

"Look, I told them that. Your mother talked me into coming by. I saw her truck here, no Millie, and no other tracks besides your van's. I staked it out for two days, with no sight of Millie. Ted, I had no choice. I had to call her parents and tell her I was concerned."

I am sick of being talked about in the third person.

"Mom, Dad, I am fine! I am more than fine! Come here, and sit down. Barry too, if you have the time. Ted, please leave us alone for a while."

They sit. I start with the reassurances.

"These are all some good friends I've made in the last week." I start pointing them out by name. "That's George O'Reilly, a weaver, and his wife, Christina. That's Sam, who does stonework, and his daughter Lizzie. I'm tutoring Lizzie some too." I run through the entire list of the thirty-odd people.

Barry says, "Is Sam the immersion Shakespear actor you brought into town last week?"

"The same." Take a deep breath. My parents look at each other. They know me well enough to know I'm preparing myself for something hard. "But he's not acting. They are

none of them acting. They really are from 1597 Ireland."

"I knew it!" my mother cried. "First my daughter becomes an artist, and then she takes drugs and gets involved in a cult."

"Mom! And you wonder why I don't call!" I literally stamp my foot. Barry looks uncomfortable, even wary. He must have seen scenes like this turn ugly. I have to change my tack.

"Mom, Dad. I hope you believe me. I hope you trust me. Even if you don't, I am legally and morally an adult, and have been for well over a decade."

Dad says "We can't treat you like an adult if you act like a child."

I say "You define adult behavior too narrowly. I don't have to choose your path. You don't have to approve mine. Starting now, if you will listen, I will talk."

Thankfully, it is Barry that speaks next. "Why did you say they were from 1597 Ireland?"

I say, "I can't explain why, but that door doesn't lead to the far side of the lean-to."

"Show me."

I show him. Just enough to step to the stones and back. Barry says "Mr. and Mrs. Ochs, as near as I can tell, your daughter is not missing, she is in no danger, and she is not in an altered mental state. I have no reason to detail her further. Millie, do you want me to escort your parents off your property?"

"Only if they wish to go."

At that moment, the door from Seattle opens, and Brandon steps through, wearing the corporate tunic and loose pants of the Heaven's Gate space elevator uniform. Sam and George step quickly up to him, with warm greetings. I am not so reserved, and give him a large hug.

"Brandon, I was so worried about you!"

"Friv, you know I'd land on my feet."

"I'm going back to using Millie, the name my parents gave me. And speaking of my parents, Mom, Dad, Barry: meet Brandon. He's one of my closest friends."

"Pleased to meet you." Brandon says. I can tell he's dying to get past the chit-chat. And so can Sam. "Myabe I'll just continue to call you Lady Drawsome, to avoid confusion."

"Well?" says Sam. "Did you learn what you wanted to learn?"

"Yes. At least, I think so. I'll have to do some growing back home to see. Michael was sore disappointed when he learned I was no herbology expert, but was instead a rough farmer who barely knew my letters. Still, he needed help, and I do know plants. I gather his Seattle has fewer farmers than we have stained glass window piecers. We got the farm launched on time. Not that Dr. Kingdom didn't come in every four hours to berate us to hurry. Like you can hurry a plant! Although, to hear from Michael, yelling at a plant might give it some of the breath it needs to grow."

"Once we launched, Micheal had some time to relax. We sat down for a fine meal, and, you'll be relieved to hear,

some good ale."

"Brandon," says he. 'I admit you are a strange one, but you are a good worker, and you know your plants. And Dr. Kingdom is right, that I need an assistant. Would you be willing to stay and work with me?'

"I was sorely tempted to stay on just one more week, but I'd heard all the stories of fairy abduction my whole life. I'd stay one week, then one more week, then one more, and then I would try to come home and find all I knew was gone. Besides, as you know, Lady Drawsome, I do not trust these Doors."

I nod. Brandon continues.

"I say to Michael, 'I cannot stay.' He says 'I can pay you well.' I say 'You cannot pay me a single coo,' which was a lie, since I could surely take a coin or two from him. But by this time, I had figured that I cannot be paid, since I was in none of their records. He says 'But I owe you for the work you did these last few days. I owe you double for the long hours you worked, and triple because you let us launch on time.' At this point, we had started in on the second pint of ale, and we were both feeling mellow."

It was so easy to picture Brandon steering the conversation, as I've seen him do a half-dozen times before.

"I say, 'Oh, you can pay me Michael, and I think you'll enjoy the paying. I have a farming puzzle, and I think you have the answer.' Now, this was just the snare needed to catch this rabbit. Nay, the rabbit was happy to be caught, and for sure I had no plans for the skinning or eating. I say 'Now, what would you grow for a long voyage? Say, several months long?' He thinks, and throws out some

names of plants: spinach and sheffield lettuce and some others. He says, 'Who are you working for, really? What voyage is this?' I reassure him that it is not for any of his rivals, and order another round of ale. 'To make this an abstract problem,' I say, 'what if this were for a sailing ship, bound across the atlantic.' I describe the conditions."

"And then I see the light dawn. 'Brandon,' he says, 'That wasn't a costume you were wearing, was it?' I tell him it was not. His face goes ashen. Lady Drawsome, he must have read the same stories you read, about butterflies and murdered grandfathers. But I am not worried."

"Why not?" I say.

"Oh, you shall hear. I say to Michael, 'I know you are afraid that the path we have all walked for the seven hundred years between us will be overgrown. You do not need to be afraid. And I can prove it to you.' Michael says, 'How?' I say 'After these two days working together, and your hospitality lodging me at night, I am more convinced than ever that we share more than a name. I believe you are my great-grandchild and I am your great-grandfather.' At that Michael laughs and says 'A few more greats than that, but yes, I think maybe so too.' 'And I know that you had half-way decided to help me.' Michael admitted that was so. 'When you half-way decided, did you half-way vanish?' Michael admitted that he did not. I press on. "Seven hundred years ago, we Connors were men of our word. From what I have seen of you and your family, that is a constant. Swear to me you will help me solve the puzzle of sailing farms, and I swear I will release you if the path between us grows murky."

I stare in wonder at my kind, perceptive, persuasive friend.

"Michael is glad to swear, relieved to swear, eager to swear.

We do, and, as I hoped, nothing happened. Such a strange feeling, for nothing to be better than something. But you and I felt that already, that night of our tests with the first Door," directing this last comment at me.

I say "That's right." Ted looks a little relieved, to hear I show a little sense. My parents don't react to that tidbit about their daughter at all. Barry and Sam and George are all attending.

"Well, the next part of the story, only a farmer could love. We go back to Michael's lab and talk about some plants I know, like spinach and kale and peas, and some that are new to me, like the new Sheffield lettuce developed just for the Heaven's Farm. He gave me some seeds. You'll forgive me if I keep them close to my heart." He taps his tunic.

"Well done!" I cry. "You return victorious!" Sam clasps his friend's hand in warm congratulations.

And then another steps through the Door from Seattle.

34 TRESPASSING

"Michael" says Brandon. "Welcome to Maine!"

"Maine? I thought you came from Ireland."

"This is the central hub, the land belonging to the lovely and talented Lady Drawsome." I bow. "Ireland is through the other door."

Judging from the manic grins on the faces of both the Conners, the events of Brandon's tale are only just past.

"Brandon, I swore to help you. I never swore that I would lose all my curiosity. Your story was so unlikely. I had to follow you."

Michael spreads his arms wide. "This is incredible. Look at this: all these people here in Maine -- what year?"

I answer, why not? "2015."

"All these people in 2015 Maine from 1597 Ireland. What, about 2000 kg worth, at least. And they all came through as simply as I just did?"

"That's right." I am starting to get uneasy.

"And what other doors are there?" asks Michael eagerly.

"Just the two." I say.

"How can that be? How is it that there isn't a research lab surrounding this shanty, probing the limits of this thing?"

"Because it's my land, and I don't want that. Michael, we only met that one afternoon. What is behind these questions?"

"The need to know!"

The priest says "Need? Are you sure of that word?"

Michael looks confounded, as if someone questioned his need to breath. He opens his mouth to answer, and doesn't get a chance.

Another figure steps out from Seattle.

"MICHAEL!" shouts Dr Izzy Kingdom. "MICHAEL! Tell me the meaning of this!"

The imposing presence of Dr. Kingdom sends a shudder through the crowd.

I do not like this man. I step up. "And what are you doing here?"

Dr Kingdom ignores me. "I saw you two" stabbing a finger at Michael and Brandon "on the surveillance footage, conspiring and stealing Heaven property."

"Heaven?" the priest asks me, quietly.

"It is the name of his main ship," I reply.

"It is an arrogant name for a ship," he says.

Brandon says, "I am no thief. I am taking some mere seeds in payment for my work."

Dr. Kingdom says "I say you are a thief, and a liar too. I found no listings for any Brandon Conner in any records I could search."

Brandon says "You did not search the right places. I am recorded well enough. My birth is in this man's church leger, and my name is clear in the payment of my rents."

"Church? Rents? Michael, what is your mad assistant ranting about?"

Michael sighs. "Dr. Kingdom, Brandon Conner was born in Ireland, 700 years before you and I."

Izzy straightens, and grins. "Ah! just as I came through this door," and she jabs his thumb past his ear, pointing behind himself, "so must that door lead further back to Ireland." and he points his index finger forward.

We hold our breath, but Izzy is sure now of his conclusions.

"Michael, this is marvelous! This makes a vacation to Heaven seem mundane. Can you imagine! How much could we charge people to see the original performances of Shakespeare plays! There must be other delights too. Hangings?"

What a horrible man. I tried to tread lightly, partly out of fear of altering the time stream, or whatever the physics

turns out to be. I tried not to get greedy. Brandon and Sam followed my lead, and Michael was the most concerned of all of us. This loud, bullying man could bring down three worlds.

I turn to Police Chief Barry Gray, who stood up at the first sounds of the altercation.

"Officer Gray, I would like to report a trespasser."

Barry looks relieved to have this cast in more familiar terms. "Miss Ochs, would you like me to ask him to leave?"

"Very much so. In particular, to leave through the same door he arrived from."

Officer Gray turns to the second Seattlean. "Dr. Kingdom, I order you to depart from this property. If you do not leave peacefully, then I will be required to arrest you and escort you off the property by force."

Izzy looks amazed. I wonder how long it's been since anyone talked to him that way.

"Michael, if you value your job, come stand by me. We can figure out how this works, and buy the land out from under this lightweight ten years before she is even born."

Barry says, "That's enough. I arrest you under charges of trespassing, conspiracy, and land fraud." He continues with the Miranda rights. Barry draws his gun and continues. "I don't know who you are, or what you're capable of. I have to proceed on the assumption that you are armed and dangerous. If you make any sudden moves, I will shoot." He takes the handcuffs from his belt, and hands them to Ted. "Ted, I deputize you to handcuff this man."

Even handcuffed, Dr. Izzy Kingdom is an imposing figure. I shudder to think of his threat. "Officer Gray," I say. "I modify my request. This bully and thug is too much of a threat if we let him return to Seattle. We'll all be a lot safer if you escort him through the other door."

Barry shakes his head. "I can't do that. I've seen enough to kick him off your land. But to exile him? That should take a trial, and I'm not sure you want that visibility."

Michael says, "I vouch for him. Dr. Kingdom is ambitious, but he's not insane or cruel. In the building of the Heaven habitats and the Heaven's Gate elevator, not a single worker has been seriously injured. Return us to Seattle and dismantle this doorway. By the time we crack the physics behind of this amazing transport, if we ever do, we will know what is safe and what is not."

Brandon embraces Michael. "Then this will be a final goodbye."

I say, "Michael, Brandon trusts you, and so I do too. Take care of yourself, and look out for Dr. Kingdom." I turn to Barry. "Let me get a crowbar, and then let's do this."

Ted says, "Get two."

Barry points at Sam, George, and Young George. "I could use three strong men." They step up. "Take him by the elbows when I say so." He hands Michael the handcuff keys. "You can release him on the other side. That's beyond my jurisdiction."

Sam and Young George march Izzy up to the door, with George and Barry, gun still drawn, walking just behind. Izzy hesitates just one step at the threshold, his jaw tight, before stepping through. The four remaining men part to

let Michael through, who steps briskly through the Door. Sam, George, and Young George stand as portable portcullises as Ted and I pull nails and take down the door frame. Moments later, the frame is a pile near the lean-to.

"Shall I test?" says Brandon. "I'm at least dressed for it."

"Be my guest," I say. Brandon steps through the space where the Door to Seattle had been.

Nothing unexpected happens.

35 A DOOR CLOSES, A WINDOW OPENS

"Well," my Dad says. "That was something."

"So" my Mom says, "did you see a Shakespeare play yet?"

"No, Mom."

"Well, I hope you aren't too busy to take me and your father to London now that we're here. What a clever man that fellow was. Scary and rude, but clever."

"His idea of a Shakespeare tourist trade certainly would get you on your feet," my Dad says.

"I'm on my feet now!" I say. "I run my own business and I'm about to have my own house."

"Or, to put it another way, you are unemployed and you don't have a roof or utilities," my Mom says.

"I bet you could charge a hundred thousand dollars a seat for Shakespeare," my father continues.

"Sure, until the government gets on my ass."

"OK, then you sell your land for even more," says my Dad.

"You'll be able to move out of this Podunk town and back to Massachusetts," says my Mom.

"Mom! They can hear you. They're standing right here."

"Oh, that's OK. I'm sure they already know how awful this part of Maine is."

Gaaaaaa.

"Look, I don't need a fortune, and I'm not exploiting sixteenth century Ireland."

My Dad says, "But you are."

"What?"

"Look at all the free labor you got."

"I fed them," I say, but it sounds weak. "And I helped them out with some artwork."

George says "That's alright. We offered. And Mistress Ochs has paid us well enough, with clothing and paper and such."

"Millie, honey, come walk with me."

We walk. My Dad says, "You paid them with trinkets and baubles. You have essentially just opened up a monopoly on a new third world country. Look at how you've gained for what you've paid. I'm sure you could finish your house for the price of a few more shirts and some more spaghetti

dinners. But any such trade can't stay at that small level. You can control it, and become very well off indeed. Or you can stand by and be trampled by those that will control it. Your Mom and I worry about you. We'd rather you don't get trampled."

I say, "Thank you Dad. You know, I never thought you'd get to teach me any PolySci, or that I'd need it quite so badly. But there's a third way." I glance over at the priest.

We walk back to the gathering, hardly a party.

I go and stand by the fire and clap my hands loudly.

"Friends, dear friends. Thank you all for coming today."

Many shouts and hazzahs.

"I've known some of you for just over a week," nodding toward Brandon and the O'Reilly's, "and some of you for about a day" nodding at the priest. "But I will remember you for my entire life."

Brandon says, "Dear Lady Drawsome, how can you forget me if I won't go away?"

I say, "That's the nub of it. Despite appearances, I think my father is a wise man. He just gave me a warning, a vision of what would happen if I kept this Door open. You think it might make us all richer. Certainly, I feel richer in spirit for it."

Lizzie cries, "I too!" And the thought of walking away from her makes me falter.

"But that is a lie. Both our worlds would be impoverished. In the four hundred years between us, it has happened

dozens of times, and is still happening today. I have to say goodbye and close the Door."

That's enough. I choke up and start to cry.

In ones and twos, they come by, embrace me, and walk through to Cork. I actually smile when a small child asks if they can take the s'mores. His mother starts to chide him, but I give him a fierce hug and my OK.

When Lizzie is about to go, Ted goes up to her just at the threshold. "Lizzie," he says, "there's a concrete factory in Maine that gave me this brochure. It's been gathering dust for five years. I hope you find it useful." I look over, and it isn't any slick four-page color sales pitch. It is one of those terrible, dry, dull pamphlets on the history and manufacture of this or that - of concrete, in this case. Perfect.

The priest comes to say goodbye. "Be calm in your heart," he says. "You are doing the right thing." "Father," I say, "I couldn't have done this without your words yesterday."

The last is Brandon. I feel like the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. "I'll miss you, Brandon, most of all."

"And I will miss you too, terribly and every day."

"Is there no chance you would stay?"

"No, lass. I have a navy to save, and a fortune to make, and my beloved to wed." We take each other in our arms, and I cry again. When I stop, he dries my eyes with his ridiculous corporate tunic, and kisses me on the forehead. From the threshold, he turns around, looks at me, and strikes that "Be Fearless" pose.

BOOK TITLE

"My dear Lady Drawsome, I cannot tell you to be fearless. I will hold your actions today as an example of what courage can be." And then he is gone.

EPILOGUE THE FIRST: THREE MONTHS AND THIRTY YEARS LATER.

It's now early September, and I got a remarkable letter today. To say how I got it, I need to tell the happenings of the last few months.

After Brandon stepped through, only Mary and Ted and Barry and Mom and Dad were left. I walked up to the door frame and put my head against it. Ted walked up to me and put his hand on my shoulder. "Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked.

I nodded, unable to speak.

"Then go, sit with by the stream. You don't need to be the one to actually tear it down. I can do this for you."

Mom took me down to the stream and sat with me. "Honey, I can't begin to imagine what you're thinking. But I'm here."

When the doorframe was all taken apart, everyone was shuffling their feet, ready to go. Finally, Chief Gray said he had to back on duty. He was my parent's ride. Mom, who's

seen more than her share of traumatized women, insisted I drive them back to the motel, and stay with them that night. Mary took Bran, and I spent the next few three days with them in town. Indoor plumbing. Sleeping in. Napping during the day. There weren't many stores to browse in town, but I think Mom took me to them all.

Two days in, Mary came by and asked for my help with the adult literacy class. She claimed she was shorthanded. I knew she was drawing me out, and I knew she knew I knew, but we could both pretend that it was that I was doing her the favor. I've become a regular at the Thursday night classes. One of them said last month that reading has opened a door for her. I couldn't help myself, but gave her a fierce hug right there. A powerful good feeling.

After three days, I couldn't stand being idle any more. I told Mom and Dad that I was heading back to the homesite. If Dad wanted to come by during the day, Friday, to help me with the house, that was fine. It only took another day before they weighed the effort of house-building and decided that their little girl was fine. I still don't have cell coverage at the house, so I still don't have a phone. But I got a skype account and I call them from the library computers once a week. I think Barry is glad I do. It keeps them off my back.

The next day, I took out the largest canvas I had and began transferring the sketch of George's family. Ted came by and handed me a DVD. He had taken photos while I was talking with Mom, Dad, and Barry. "Don't worry," he said. "This is the only copy." I used the library computers to print them all out too, nice and discrete. I haven't yet trashed the original. I'll do that after I've painted them all to my satisfaction. At this rate, that'll be in two years or so.

I'm seeing more of Ted, and painting more. They're

connected. That Saturday night, he asked me to dinner and to hear his friend's band at the pub in town. I figured it was a charity date, but Ted assured me that I was the most interesting person to come to town in twenty years. As well as the most eligible fresh meat. "If I don't take you out first," he said, "I'll never even be able to get my name on the list." We're known around town as a pair, and my Mom calls him my "boyfriend." What an awkward word when you're thirty-five.

Anyway, that first Saturday night, we hatched a Brandon-like plan. Ted would advertise that Wednesday is "demo day," starting with the new drip irrigation. For the flyer, I'd do a sketch of how it worked. And then, anyone who bought one - I would, if they wanted, come do a sketch of them putting it in, and a painting when the crops come in. Then they could buy it for twenty bucks, or Ted would display at the store for a hundred, of which they would get half. "Brandon would love this," I said. It gets people to the store, gets them considering the drip irrigation, it might get them some art or some extra cash, whichever they needed more, it adds dignity to their work. We've been doing that now for the last three months, and I get to sketch someone every two or three days, and paint someone once or twice a week. As the paintings are starting to hang in Ted's store, more people are asking for painting. Or maybe it's as the crops are starting to come in. These are the quickie paintings, like I painted at Brandon's stand that the second day. I could paint them from photographs, but somehow people feel like this is a "real" painting if I do it right there. As in Cork, I use oils, to get the vibrancy of the color. These are almost color sketches, quick one-hour paintings.

I had briefly toyed with some sort of art-for-labor trade, to get some free work on my house. Talking to my Dad kept me on the straight and narrow there. That would be just

exploiting the difference in our situations, just as much as if they were in a poor foreign country. Al put in my septic and well, so I have running water, thank god. I did a lot of the work myself, and hired out the technical things. Al's nephew was a good and affordable second hand for raising the roof rafters and nailing in the siding. I offered them the same deal, sell them a painting or give them a cut, but they both declined. They told me that they wouldn't look as good as the farms and farmers I paint. They're probably right. I seem to have found my subject matter. Three months later, I have a frame of the house all buttoned up, with a roof, and windows, and doors, and insulation. I have running water and a wood stove and a propane oven and range and a shower with hot water and a toilet that flushes. I don't have the porch in the front or the gallery in the back up yet, and the bedroom is downstairs for now. Maybe I won't move it up until the promised crowds of admirers start knocking. But it is a palace. I've been reading about Elizabethan England, and I can honestly say that this winter, I will live like royalty. Better!

The real major task, besides the house, has been the portrait of George and his family. Compared to the quick paint-sketches I have been making, this one needed to capture the joy on their faces as well as the detail in their environment. I particularly wanted to honor George's skillful fabrics. I know, I know, that's aspiring to a task that Rembrandt would tackle. I had two false starts, but the third one came together, and at the end of August, it was the center piece in my entering a juried art show.

Which brings me to the events of today. The art show opened early, about seven this morning, for us to hang. I had the large painting of "George O'Reilly, a weaver, and his family" dominating my space, with six of paintings of Maine farmers with their crops. George's was not for sale. The others were marked up to \$300 apiece, with the

agreement still standing, that they would get half.

At the end of the show, a shy dark-haired man approached me. "Millie Ochs?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Have you ever heard of a man named Brandon Conner?"

I freeze. "And what's your name?" I asked him.

"William Conner," he says. "There's something I have to show you. We have some ancestral paintings that have been handed down. And believe it or not, they have your name and Catherine Dawson's on them."

I met him after the show, and he pulled out the seven paintings of Henry and Lizzie and the other five shoppers. They were carefully wrapped up, but I knew them by their shapes. William had a print out of a photo with the words "Hold these in the family of CONNER, in trust for MILLIE OCHS in MAINE, AMERICA, in the year of our lord MMXV."

William say he was looking for me all year, but didn't find me until my name showed up in the art show. I assured William it was me, and even showed him my driver's license. I said that after four hundred years, I don't blame him for being careful. But I told that I knew what each of these were. I reel them off. I wax rhapsodic about Lizzie and the cabbage.

So here I am, in the hotel room in Kennebunkport, unwrapping these paintings with Ted and William. They are exactly as I remember, a little faded and a little dirty and a little cracked. Except that two of them had canvas tacked to their backs too, which I know is not how I left

them. With a little fear, I pull out the tacks on one, and find a letter tacked between the frame and the new canvas. I do the same on the other and find another letter. The first one is labeled "To my dear Lady Drawsome, from Brandon Conner, November 9, in the year of our lord 1597."

"Dear Friv, Catherine, Millie. You know writing is not easy for me, and I do not know if you will get this. If you do, this is a short note. All are well. The rest of the harvest was good. I paid my rent on the farm. I have your eight paintings, and I will see if they make it to you over eight centuries."

The second is labeled "To my dear Lady Drawsome, from Brandon Conner, July 2, in the year of our lord 1603."

This one is longer, and in a different hand.

"Dear Friv, Catherine, Millie. Lizzie is helping me write this. I hope this letter gets to you. It has been five years since we met, and five years since my last note. I am sorry for the brevity of that. I will make amends here."

"Sam and George are well. In fact, they are now family. Henry wed Lizzie three years past, and they have two healthy children, one of which they named for you. Lizzie is as hale as ever, and she is now part of her father's business. She does only the kitchen hearths and fireplaces. She claims this is woman's territory, and that this work is fit for a lady's disposition. When strangers are around, she handles only the tiles and smaller stones, and the wonderful new concrete. I've seen her rival her father though, when few are watching."

"The paintings by 'Catherine Dawson' have attracted some interest from the next towns over, and I get visitors even

midweek. Some of these even buy my produce. Business is good."

"My farming of the greens and peas in water is going well enough that I have interested the Admiralty. They sent an inspector the summer before last, and sent me a sum of money to continue this work. Between that and the increase in the farm, I was able to woo and win Susanne. We were married two months ago."

"We all think of you often. This one-way letter is a poor way to talk to you. God speed, and all our love"

"Brandon and Susanne Conner"

And in faint handwriting, looking like it was added later with a different ink, I read "Love too, from Elizabeth and Henry O'Reilly."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR