~An Irish Duet~

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HIS 391
Dr. John Wertheimer
Chapter One: Óró Sé do Bheatha aBhaile

’Tis often said amongst scholars and great men that history repeats itself. At first, one might be inclined to scoff at this notion: times change, people change. But though the ways of the world are many, there are only so many ways a life can be lived. It mightn’t happen often, but occasionally – very occasionally – lifelines run parallel, like two lines of the same song. Not that anyone can prove such similarities. But I’ve heard of the stories of two young Irish maids, both raised in Dublin during times of great pain and peril. I say ‘stories’ of these mná, but I should say story. For, as you shall witness, their lives seem wrapped together as closely as two gold strands of one of those torcs, though generations separated their worlds.

Oh, aye, I’ll be telling you of two young women. I see those among you who scoff. ‘We want Fionn MacCool,’ you say, ‘we want O’Connell and Boru’ and Pearse. We want the leaders, the warriors, the kings, the great men.’ Well, I’ll tell you what. These men might be the ones that the written histories remember, the ones who spoke and fought and died. But they’d have done nary a thing without the women in their lives, even if those dusty histories can’t seem to remember their names. Don’t you forget; all women have a part to play – not only in the home, but also on

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1 Irish song, “Oh Welcome Home,” revised over the centuries for the different Irish rebellions against English rule. The earliest known is the eighteen-century Jacobite version, but in some renditions it speaks of banishing “the foreigners,” which is what the medieval Irish called the Scandinavians that come to their shores. “Óró sé do bheatha abhaile,” Irish Daily, accessed Dec 1, 2016, http://www.irishmusicedaily.com/oro-se-do-bheatha-bhaile-translations.


3 Irish for “women.” GoogleTranslate.

4 Ancient Irish/Celtic jewelry, made by twisting two stands of gold together to form an open circle, which is then worn around the arm or neck.

5 Legendary Irish hero and warrior of the Fenian Cycle.

6 Daniel O’Connell, Irish politician who was extremely popular, succeeded in engaging much of the Irish population in politics after decades of exclusion, and campaigned for the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829.

7 Brian Boru, High King of Ireland until his death in 1014.

8 Padraig Pearse, one of the leaders of the Easter Uprising of 1916.

9 Only a handful of women are mentioned by name in the Cogadh. Those who are named are nobility; Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, trans. James Henthorn Todd (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 143, 193.

10 Histories of the Easter Rising, while crediting the women of the Cumann na mBan women’s rebel group, tend to only focus on the eight or so leaders of the organization. W.E. Vaughan, A New History of Ireland: Ireland Under the Union 1870-1921 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Margaret Ward, Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism (London: Pluto Press, 1995). Everyday Irish women who filled the ranks of the group and those provided non-martial support during the Rising are often left out of the story, and I have yet to find a study on how women remembered the Rising, an event that’s aftereffect was arguably more important that what it actually accomplished. John Wilson Foster, “Yeats and the Easter Rising,” The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 11 (1985) and Joseph Valente, The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture, 1880-1922 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011). Similarly, beyond Lisa Bitel’s work, there is little scholarship dedicated to the role of women in creating the Viking-Irish identity that pervaded the few urban centers of early medieval Ireland. This story seeks to merge and address these two neglected aspects of history.
the battlefield, in the streets, in the shops...everywhere and anywhere. They’re as much part of the history as anyone else.

Sure, some of these men might have spoken rallying words or waged tremendous battles, and they had many a man and woman who fought and fell by their side. But ’tis the women who keep hold of those feats and sacrifices; and the women who mold and shape them into stories; and the women who make sure the future doesn’t forget. I’ve heard it said that throughout time, women have served the unique role as both the intermediary between cultures and peoples, and as the keeper of the old ways.11 Look back, hundreds of years ago, to those times when we don’t even know the authors of such works. All those annals, ancient manuscripts, dusty tomes. ‘Tis perhaps true that ‘twas mostly men that wrote them down, them bein’ the ones given the chance to learn to read and write.12 But I don’t believe for a half second they didn’t get some of their stories from their mothers, wives, sisters, women neighbors. Just because female voices aren’t heard in the scraps for the past we have doesn’t mean women weren’t speakin’.13

Near nine hundred years later, and it seems some things remain as constant as Ireland’s rain. The fight for Ireland’s independence, and those events that led up to that war in the 1920s showed itself long before the guns were brought out. The Celtic Literary Revival, which rekindled Irish pride in their culture and history, brings to mind those such as W.B. Yeats, Edward Plunkett, and A.E. Russell, but we mustn’t forget Lady Augusta Gregory, who worked to establish the Abbey Theatre, a space entirely devoted to cultivating Irish art, literature, and theatre culture, nor the women in the Irish country who gave her the stories to begin with.

And these stories themselves. Sure, ’tis possible to brush them off as faerie tales and old legends. But they’re important nonetheless, because they’re our tales and our legends. Our heroes and kings and queens and lovers and warriors. And while their impact might not be obvious in the halls of Parliament or in bills of legislation, these stories

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12 Many of the manuscripts from medieval Ireland are from monasteries, which were major centers of learning but restricted to male clergy. Mairé and Liam de Paor, Early Christian Ireland (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), 73.
13 In regards to the battle of Clontarf, all historical discussions and debates of the battle and society surrounding it that I came across never once mentioned the role of women. The only two women mentioned by name in the most cited account of the battle, the Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, are Gormlaith and Sláine, the wives of two major kings. The few scholarly discussions of them are taken from a literary interpretation, rather than a historical one. Similarly, though there is evidence of both male and female bards in medieval Ireland (though women were probably more uncommon), this dimension is often left out of the conversation. Mary Condren, The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); Mairé and Liam de Paor, Early Christian Ireland (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958); Mairé Ni Mhaonaigh, “Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature,” Ériu 52 (2002).
ARE WHAT DRAW FOLK TO A CAUSE.\textsuperscript{14} STORIES ARE IMPORTANT, SO BE SURE TO PAY
heed now…

\textit{Dublin, December 23, 1904}

Rosaleen\textsuperscript{15} slid her gloved hand into that of her mother’s, scrunching her face against the brisk winter wind and watery midafternoon sunlight. Mam was running a few last-minute errands before Christmas, and Rosaleen had accompanied her. She always loved visiting Cassidy’s Grocery,\textsuperscript{16} especially when Mr. Cassidy was there. The big man always had a laugh or a story on his lips, and treated Rosaleen as if she were a grand lady, although she was only ten years old. This afternoon, even though it had been busy in the store, he had snuck her a peppermint stick with a grin and a wink.

A loose newspaper cartwheeled down the sidewalk, caught in the breeze, and plastered itself against Rosaleen. She broke free of it, but not before she saw the bold headline: THE ABBEY THEATRE OPENS.\textsuperscript{17}

“Mam,\textsuperscript{18} what’s the Abbey Theatre?” she asked, looking up at her mother’s chapped face. Mam brushed a few windswept auburn curls from her forehead.

“It’s the new theatre they’re openin’ up on Marlborough Street,”\textsuperscript{19} she explained, “Mr. Yeats and Lady Gregory – I’m sure you’ve heard

\textsuperscript{14} Though the Celtic Revival has been widely studied, it is rarely brought into direct conversation with the more political and later militant independence movement that followed it. What is interesting about the Celtic Revival is that it touched a diverse range of areas in Ireland – not only the impoverished villages where Irish Gaelic was still spoken, but also the universities where interest in Irish archaeology was sparked. It was a pervasive cultural movement that touched more than those who rediscovered Irish mythology or attended plays at the Abbey Theatre, and I believe that it had an influence on people (particularly “ordinary” people) who later became involved in the independence movement. Gregory Castle, \textit{Modernism and the Celtic Revival} (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001); John Hutchinson, “Archaeology and the Irish rediscovery of the Celtic past,” \textit{Nations and Nationalism} 7 (2001); \textit{Perspectives on Irish Nationalism}, ed. Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989); Jonathan Githens-Mazer, \textit{Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland} (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{15} Refer to appendix for list of characters.


\textsuperscript{17} The Abbey Theatre opened on December 27, 1904. Historians mark its foundation as the culmination of the Celtic Literary Revival, as it showed the plays of W.B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, and other Irish nationalist writers involved in the movement. Gregory Castle, \textit{Modernism and the Celtic Revival} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.


your father speakin’ of them. It’s just grand Dublin has its own place for plays now, innit? Mayhap we’ll go someday, when you’re a wee bit older.”

Rosalene’s blue eyes widened with excitement at the thought. “Really?” she gasped, “Oh, Mam, please!”

Mam smiled fondly, smoothing back the blonde strands that had escaped Rosaleen’s green bow.

Rosalene skipped the rest of the way home, and held the gate open for Mam. The warmth of the kitchen was welcome after the December weather, and the Christmas trimmings made everything even cozier. Dad came into the kitchen from the living room to greet his wife and daughter.

“I see you were successful, then, Brigid?” he asked, taking a parcel from his wife and landing a swift kiss on her cheek.

“Thank you, Nathan.” Mam removed her hat and woolen coat, “How is your report coming?”

“Oh, slowly but surely,” Dad replied with a bashful grin, rubbing his blue eyes. Dad was an archeological expert at Trinity College. He’d

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20 William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory were two prominent literary figures in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Ireland. Involved in the Celtic Revival movement, which sought to renew interest in and prominence of traditional Irish culture and literature instead of having Ireland serve merely as an echo chamber for English art and literature, Yeats and Gregory established the Abbey Theatre as a place for nationalist Irish art. Besides their plays, Yeats and Gregory are also known for their works in Irish mythology and folklore, much of which they gathered from oral traditions. Charlotte J. Headrick, “Drama, Modern,” Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture, ed. James S. Donnelly, Jr., Vol. 1 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 152, accessed Nov 12, 2016, http://ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=nclivedc&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3434700109&asid=3b360c1e445b514d8de1813ef2eac70a.


22 Rosaleen and her family live in the suburbs of Dublin. If they lived within the city, their housing options would be limited to the mansions of the very affluent and upper class on Fitzwilliam Square and Merrion Square or the impoverished tenement slums of the intercity, where large families crammed into single rooms. For example, according to the 1911 census, 835 people lived in 15 houses on Henrietta Street. Middle class families left for the suburbs of Rathmines, Monkstown, and Blackrock for better living options. “Ireland in the early 20th century: The Suburbs,” The National Archives of Ireland, accessed Nov 25, 2016, http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/suburbs.html.


24 A professorship for archeology at Trinity was not established until 1934, but given the growth of the field in the late 1800s and early 1900s, I’ve taken the liberty of giving Nathan O’Donovan a position at the university.
been buried in work after the discovery of grave remains in County Clare.²⁵

“Dad, have you heard of the new Abbey Theatre?” Rosaleen piped up.

“Why indeed I have, child,” he said, “Mr. Yeats seemed to be quite excited for it, but it must be keeping him busy. I haven’t seen him in near a fortnight.”

Rosaleen tried to hide her disappointment. Dad always came home with the best stories when Mr. Yeats had been visiting. Mam noticed her glum look.

“Cheer up, love, you’ll get your stories soon enough, I’m sure,” she said lightly, with a sly wink at Dad. Rosaleen’s query was interrupted by the arrival of her thirteen-year-old brother.

“Donal, where have you been?” Dad asked sternly. Donal looked up, his brown eyes innocent and his freckled face flushed from the cold.

“Oh, sorry, Dad, I was just out with some friends,” he said, tousling his brown curls, “Lost track of the time is all.” Dad fixed him with a stern stare, but decided to drop the matter. Rosaleen started setting the table to help Mam with dinner.

Duibhlinn, Early Winter in the First Year of King Brian’s Reign²⁶

Róisín²⁷ sullenly glared at the snow-covered ground, hating the day even more. Winter was her least favorite season – all


²⁷ Pronounced ‘ro-sheen.’
cold and wet, the wind blowing through the wattle of the walls, furs getting damp after barely a few hours outside.  

“Come away from the door now, Róisín, you'll catch your death of cold,” the cook, Gudrun, scolded gently from the hearthside. Róisín returned indoors, lugging the large pot that had been filled with dirty water. She tried not to resent Gudrun's motherly reprimand, but she hated the pity that was in everyone's looks directed at her.

'Twas two and a half years since her family – Mamaí, Daidí, little Fiachra, Ronnat, and Almaith, and baby Tadhg – had arrived to Dublin to offer their services to the local ruler, King Sitric Silkenbeard had been delighted to have his court honored by the presence of not one, but two bards, as both Róisín's mother and father had been trained in the west of Erinn. They had travelled with their children along the coast, searching for a ruler that would provide patronage for their services, and had finally found a home in Duibhlinn.

'Twas two years since disease had come to Duibhlinn, and struck down not only her wee brothers and sisters, but also her

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28 Houses in Viking Dublin were rectangular wood-and-wattle structures with thatched roofs, built on small plots of land. Inside the house were typically benches surrounding a fireplace. Terry Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1987), 30.


34 In early medieval Ireland, “bards” were organized in a complex hierarchical system of professionals. These men of learning were divided into baird and filidh, of which the filidh were ranked higher in society as their poetry (called seanchas) was derived from history and mythology of the ancient Gaels. They were divided into different offices – the draoi (druid), fili (poet-seer), breitheamh (lawgiver), and seanchaidh (historian). The function of the baird and filidh were to compose either bardic verse which eulogized and memorialized great people and deeds or seanchas of ancient higher learning. The baird found patronage in the courts of kings and lords, both to entertain and to record events under their patron. John O’Kane Murray, *Lessons in English Literature* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co, 1887), 305; John MacInnes, “Medieval and post-medieval Ireland and Scotland” in “Bard,” *Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed November 16, 2016, [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02026](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02026).


36 “Erinn” is the Gaelic name for Ireland. Bardic verse was composed with an elaborate metric system and language of classical Gaelic, and baird and filidh were formally taught as apprentices under a professional for a period of about seven years. MacInnes, “Medieval and post-medieval Ireland and Scotland” in “Bard,” *Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online*. 
parents. Róisín, by the grace or wrath of God, depending on who you asked, survived the illness and was left an orphan at the tender age of eight. Fortunately, her parents had gotten King Sitric to promise to care for their children right before they got sick, and so Róisín had been taken in by the royal household, where she now worked as a servant. She knew she should be grateful for Sitric’s protection, but she still missed her family terribly.

“Róisín, stúlka,” Thora disrupted her miserable thoughts, “Go help Aideen with the robes for tonight.” Róisín nodded and left the kitchen. In the hall, she skirted around some big men, as solid as the ships on which their people, the Northmen, had come to Ireland’s shores, and as blonde as the gold the Vikings had taken from the Irish people. Spilling their tankards, they shouted at her in a language she didn’t understand. Keeping her head down, Róisín muttered her own curse in Erinn’s native tongue. She knew Mamaí would have scolded her for that – she was always reminding Róisín and other listeners that the Northmen had settled in the fertile land among a fertile people, and settlements along the coast had grown like the barley in the fields around Duibhlinn. There had been blood and violence between the Northmen and the Gaels in the past, but now they lived together in relative harmony, and the Northmen brought in as much wealth through their trade as they had taken away in the

37 Just like medieval Europe, Ireland also faced outbreaks of plagues, including smallpox and what was called “the yellow plague” that ravaged populations. P.W. Joyce, A Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland (LibraryIreland Online, 1906), accessed Nov 20, 2016, http://www.libraryireland.com/SocialHistoryAncientIreland/1-III-4.php.

38 Early medieval Irish social structure: women lived and operated under male protection, usually a father or husband. Bitel, Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland, 111.

39 “Girl child” in Icelandic; Icelandic is the language most similar to that spoken by the Vikings. GoogleTranslate.


42 The first Viking raids were around 750 C.E., and by 1002 they had settled in Ireland and married into the local population, despite the initial terror and violence they had brought. While they became part of Ireland’s settlements and increased the wealth of its people through their extensive trade routes, tensions still existed between the native Irish and these people from the North. In the Annals of Ulster, the Vikings and their descendants are referred to as “foreigners.” James Lydon, The Making of Ireland from ancient times to the present (London: Routledge, 1998), 21.

43 Today in Ireland, the native language is referred to as “Irish,” but since the annals from this time period refer to the people of Ireland as “the Gaedhil,” (the Gaels) I have chosen to refer to the language as “Gaelic” in the narrative, while calling it “Irish” in the footnotes.

44 A.T. Lucas, Irish Food Before the Potato (Cork: Munster Express, 1991), 12.

45 The native Irish referred to themselves as the ‘Gaels.’
early years. Still, Róisín preferred her own tongue, which sounded like singing without the music, to the Norse words she had picked up from Sitric and others around the town, words which felt stiff and fumbling on her lips.

Róisín found the chambers she was looking for, and presented herself to the young woman inside.

"Help me with these tunics a moment?" asked Aideen, a pile of woolen clothes in her arms. Róisín obediently moved forward and took some of the colorful cloth.

"Ach, tá na dathanna álainn," the serving girl sighed, shaking out one of the tunics and smoothing a hand over the blue-dyed wool, threaded through with red and green designs. Róisín smiled slightly, the beautiful clothing and sound of her native tongue lifting her spirits.

"'Tis a shame such glorious things are only worn on special occasions, 'tain't it?" Aideen asked, carefully laying out a green cloak embroidered with red designs, "Tonight's Christmas feast will be a sight, that's for sure." Róisín only nodded in agreement.

Dublin, December 26, 1904

Rosaleen sat in a chair in the corner of the kitchen, unaware of the smile that tugged at her lips as she was completely absorbed in her Christmas gift. It seems Mam’s prediction of future stories had been well-informed, for lying in Rosaleen’s lap was none other than Lady Gregory’s new book of Irish myths and legends. She’d scarcely taken her eyes off the pages since receiving the book, despite her brother’s teasing.

"Now what’s a girlie like you going t’do with all that reading? It won’t help you none with finding a job or a husband, or keeping your

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46 The extent of the Viking trading routes as far as the Middle East and Dublin’s relative proximity to the British Isles and therefore the Continent made it a trading hub of Ireland. ó Cróinín, A New History of Ireland, 477.
50 A description of the plunder taken from “the foreigners” around Dublin include “fine clothes of scarlet and green.” Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, trans. James, 78.
51 Irish Gaelic, “Oh, these colors are beautiful.” GoogleTranslate.
52 I’m assuming the finer clothes were for better occasions because of the special notice they received in Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh.
house orderly like,” he had drawled, looking the epitome of thirteen-year-old elder brotherliness with his cap jauntily covering his mop of thick brown hair that matched the exact shade of his eyes and freckles.

“Dad reads all the time, and tells me to do the same, so I shall,” Rosaleen had replied archly, “And real reading, not those nonsense cartoons you pass around to the neighborhood boys.” Donal’s mood had immediately soured.

“You don’t have any idea what you’re talking about, Rosie,” he’d snapped, “You’re just a girl, and a mite of one at that. You can’t possibly understand how those damn Brits have kept us under their heel for so many years, taking our land and money and jobs and prospects. But it won’t last much longer. Things are changing. We will win Home Rule, soon like.”

Rosaleen had barely suppressed a groan. Born in the year of the second rejection of the Home Rule bill, Rosaleen felt she had grown up her whole life hearing about this bit of legislation. Even her name had been affected by it – in a fit of Irish pride, her parents had named her ‘Rosaleen’ in honor of the many patriotic poems alluding to Ireland as a rose. Mam told her that both she and Dad had chosen the name, but

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54 The addition of “like” at the end of sentences is a tendency of speech patterns found in the west of Ireland.

55 “The Only Show in the Fair,” The Weekly Freeman in the Collins Collection of Irish Political Cartoons (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 1891).

56 A history of British oppression of Irish (specifically Irish Catholics) and limiting of their social, economic, and political opportunities led to a general feeling of resentment towards the British. While not all Irish wanted Home Rule or independence, relations between the general Irish population and the British government in the abstract were often strained. Donal is referring to the limited lack of Irish representation in British government, a number of laws in Ireland’s past that limited the education and jobs that Irish Catholics could have, and the controversial landlord system that exploited the Irish peasantry while benefitting the often English landlords. George D. Boyce, “Politics: 1800 to 1921—Challenges to the Union,” Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture, ed. James S. Donnelly, Jr., Vol. 2 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004). Gale Virtual Reference Library, accessed November 28, 2016, http://ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=nclivedc&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3434700327&aaid=6d58357421383c1079e17082697a022f.

57 The Act of Union of 1800 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland by dissolving the Irish Parliament and adding representatives from Ireland to the British Parliament, as a means for Britain to more effectively govern Ireland. The Home Rule movement, which began in 1870, called for Irish self-governance and came to be the defining political force of Irish nationalism until 1921. The first Home Rule Bill was presented to Parliament in 1886, then again in 1893, until it was finally passed in 1912. Because of the start of WWI, however, the British Parliament delayed its execution. “Lords Sitting of September 1893,” Hansard Archives, accessed September 25, 2016; Boyce, “Politics: 1800 to 1921—Challenges to the Union,” Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture.

Rosaleen suspected her mother had played a larger hand in that choice. Despite living in Dublin for nearly ten years now, Mam would forever be a daughter of Waterford. Politics bored Rosaleen, though it was all her brother seemed interested in of late. She knew he only listened to the radical talk because of his friends in the neighborhood, whose fathers worked in the shipyards and factories. When you added Mam’s increasingly mutinous opinions, about self-rule as well as women’s suffrage, it all became very confusing.

But enough of that now. Rosaleen was more than happy to ignore her grumpy elder brother and instead resume her reading.

“Irish women have suffered just as much under the English, those shliomadóir lófa!” Rosaleen’s mother spat, her cheeks flushed pink and her eyes sparking. Rosaleen looked up from her corner stool in the warm kitchen, momentarily distracted from the Fianna’s bloody battle of Dunbog by her mother’s strong language.

Mam stood in front of the stove, her brown curls frizzing from the steam of the pots. She glared at Donal who sat, his fists clenched on the lace tablecloth. Dad reclined in his chair, watching his wife and son with wary blue eyes.

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59 Historically, County Waterford and its neighboring county, Wexford, have been more rebellious than the more Anglicized County Dublin, particularly in regard to the 1798 Rebellion against British occupation. It was also the first place where the Irish tricolor flag was flown by Thomas Meagher in 1848. “Ireland,” Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations, 13th ed., ed. by Timothy L. Gall and Derek M. Gleason, Vol. 5 (Detroit: Gale, 2012).

60 Dublin faced severe unemployment at the turn of the century, and the most stable jobs were those in government, finance, or law. Dublin was also a port city, though its shipbuilding declined as the pace of industrialization grew. National Archives of Ireland, “Commerce, Employment, and Trade Unions,” Ireland in the early 20th century, accessed September 24, 2016.

61 Women in both England and Ireland increasingly called for women’s right to vote at the beginning of the twentieth century, though in Ireland the cause was often trumped by the quest for self-rule. In England, equal women’s suffrage was achieved in 1928, whereas Irish women won equal voting rights in 1922. Margaret Ward, Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 49.

62 Irish Gaelic curse, loosely translated to “damn bastards.” GoogleTranslate.

63 One of the many battles of the legendary Finn MacCool and his band of warriors, the Fianna. The Celtic Revival, including authors such as W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, took a deep interest in Celtic history. These authors looked in both archives and among traditional storytellers to obtain the tales, which they embellished with their own imagination. The movement, though cultural, was also deeply political as it gave many Irish a distinct historical identity of which to be proud. Augusta Gregory, Lady Gregory’s Complete Irish Mythology (London: John Murray Publishers, 1904).

“That might be so, but have they bled and died as much as the men of Ireland? Have they been so humiliated in their own land, walked upon until they forgot their own worth, ignored in Parliament for—” Donal’s rising voice was cut off by Mam’s hiss.

“Died? Humiliated? Ignored? Son, you’ve been listening to too many of those workers’ ravings. You know nothing of this. Not until you’ve watched your own mother starve and sicken and die so that her sons – yes, sons – might have a wee bit more in their bellies! Roads filled with women trying to find food for their children, ditches filled with starved bodies unceremoniously dumped without a thought or a prayer while Englishmen prance by on their fancy horses – then you will know the sufferings of women.” Rosaleen saw tears in Mam’s eyes as memories of her own mother’s horror stories of 1851 came back to her.

Ignoring his mother’s distress, Donal continued, “But even that scarcely—”

“Donal,” Dad interrupted him firmly, “you will do well to remember your Lord’s Commandments.”

Donal stared furiously at his father before dropping his gaze and mumbling an apology.

“You’d do well to pay more attention to Mr. Pearse at your school,” Mam continued, “He recognizes the oneness of women’s and Ireland’s freedom.”


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66 The Irish Potato Famine devastated Ireland from 1845-1852.
67 Rosaleen’s family, like most Irish citizens, is Roman Catholic; her father refers to the fourth commandment found in Exodus, “honor thy mother and father.”
68 Padraig [alternatively spelled “Patrick”] Pearse, was a leader of the 1916 Rising as well as a teacher at a bilingual school he established to promote the Irish language, which he saw as fundamental to reclaiming Ireland as a nation. Unlike later leaders of the cause for Irish independence, Pearse (along with James Connolly) supported the feminist and suffrage demands of many of the women also involved in the cause. Lisa Weihman, “Doing My Bit for Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising,” *Eire-Ireland* 39 (2004), 244.
69 Even radical Irish patriots did not always support the move for women’s suffrage and equality, believing that the women’s cause distracted from the more important fight for Home Rule. Augusta Gregory, *Seventy Years* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 285.
“He has a point,” Dad remarked mildly, eyeing his wife. “Women absolutely must be involved, but on the front they know best. Plenty of work can be done from the home; nursing, supplying food, praying. The gentler, more gracious sex has no business meddling in the mess of politics and violence.”

“The ancient Celts fought with women,” Rosaleen piped up from her corner. Her family turned, looking startled as though they had forgotten she was there. Donal scoffed.

“Nonsense. The Celts were true men – they didn’t need any women to fight their battles for them.”

“Tis true,” Rosaleen responded indignantly, “Their very god of war was a goddess, the Morrigu. Men were terrified of her. And then there was Aine and Clíodhna and Etain and... oh no, I’ve forgotten her name. She beat Cu Chulainn...” Rosaleen flipped some pages and was lost once again in the Celtic world, missing Dad’s half-glance at Mam, who smirked.

“Don’t look a’ me, I’m not the one who wanted her to have the book as a Christmas gift,” Mam chuckled, “Though now I do see the wisdom of it.” She turned back to the stove, still chortling, leaving her husband and son looking miffed.

_Duibhlinn, Early Winter in the First Year of King Brian’s Reign_ 72

“Oh, Róisín, come onnn!” Orlaith begged, tugging at her woolen skirt, “We all know you’ve got th’ best stories and we’ve been so busy the last few days and the big feast is tonight and we’ve finally managed to get away from everyone in the kitchen...” Róisín glanced at the small, whining girl attached

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70 While Irish nationalists did encourage widespread involvement, they generally designated the tasks of fundraising and nursing to women, rather than allowing them to participate more actively. Some women defied such views, but were met with resistance (to be further explored in chapters two and three). Weihman, “Doing My Bit for Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising,” 231.

71 Legendary women and goddesses in Celtic mythology who often took on the roles of warrior, ruler, and enchanter. Gregory, _Mythologies._

72 Duibhlinn: Early Winter in the First Year of King Brian’s Reign 1002CE.


to her skirt and tried not to sigh. She's made the mistake of promising a story to one of the sobbing children of the kitchen servants when she's been tasked to watch over him, and now all the servants' children knew of her abilities. She realized she'd never have a moment's peace unless she appeased the needy beasts.

"Alright," she conceded grumpily, causing a flurry of clapping and giggles amongst the nine children surrounding her in the woodhouse where she's been sent to fetch more fuel for the fire. Róisín perched on an over-turned bucket as her audience nosily settled in around her. Róisín considered the stories she knew, before deciding on "The Coming of the Gael."

"It is not known for what length of time the *Tuatha de Danaan* had their sway over Ireland, and it is likely it was a long time they had it. But at last they lost it all. It was at Inver Slane, to the north of Leinster, the sons of Gaedhal of the Shining Armour..."\(^\text{75}\)

Róisín barely suppressed a smile as she continued her tale, so delighted she was in her ability to draw reactions from her audience. Some of the children's eyes were so wide she thought they might near roll out of their heads.

"...and it is what the poets of Ireland used to be saying, that every brave man, good at fighting, and every man that could do great deeds and not be making much talk about them, was of the Sons of the Gael; and that every skilled man that had music and that did enchantments secretly, was of the *Tuatha de Danaan*."\(^\text{76}\)

There was a pause. Then a little boy with a dirty face and mop of red curls piped up, "But what happened to the *Tuatha de Danaan*?"

Róisín grinned, forgetting her earlier reluctance to story-tell, "Why, don't you know? They're still here in Erinn today.\(^\text{77}\) They stay under the rocks and hills, hiding from us Gael-folk, but if you're lucky, you might spot one someday. As to how they got to living underground, well, after they were beaten, they would not go under the sway of—"\(^\text{78}\)

Suddenly the woodhouse door flew open, and Ita,\(^\text{79}\) one of the grouchiest of the servants, stood there, radiating fury.

"What in the devil's name are ye all doing in here?" she screeched as the children scattered, "Lazing about, and us with..."

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\(^\text{76}\) Gregory, *Lady Gregory's Complete Irish Mythology*, 60.

\(^\text{77}\) The history of the *Tuatha de Danaan* is from where the stories of faeries in Ireland (the *Sidhe*, pronounced “shee”) come.


a feast tonight! I have half a mind to serve you up to the guests! Ye'd be a bit more use filling their bellies than doin' whatever ye were in here!"

Róisín, arms full of firewood, narrowly dodged Ita's fist, bitterly missing the magic of just a few moments before.

**Dublin, January 6, 1905**

“Dad, what are you being all mysterious for?” Rosaleen asked, skipping to keep up with her father’s long strides.

“Oh, you’ll see,” he said with a grin, a hand on his hat to keep it from blowing away in the wind. Rosaleen gave him a searching stare. She thought she’d be done with mystery now that all the Christmas gifts had been handed out, but Mam had been away to some sort of secret meetings and now Dad wouldn’t tell her why she was going to work with him. It had been months since Rosaleen had accompanied him to the College, but she always loved the sight of the grand buildings and students hurrying around with their serious discussions and loads of books.80

Dad nodded hello to the gatekeeper as they entered Trinity’s gates, who tipped his hat to Rosaleen with a wink.81 She stayed close to Dad’s side as they crossed the courtyard, intimidated as well as excited. Once in Dad’s office, he took her coat and put his briefcase on his already cluttered desk. Checking his watch, he smiled and muttered to himself. Rosaleen looked around, careful not to touch anything but fascinated by the drawings that were pinned to the wall.

“Dad, what’s this?” she asked, struck by an illustration. Dad peered through his glasses at it.

“Ah, yes, fascinating bit of art, isn’t it? They found it on an ancient stone cross in, ah, let me see, County Clare. These crosses are covered in all sorts of interesting illustrations. Some depict scenes from the Scriptures, but others might actually be moments from the daily life of

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81 Trinity College, as well as the colleges of Cambridge and Oxford Universities, has gatekeepers (also known as porters) to this day, so I presume it would have been similar in 1905.
the carvers’ society, which of course offers us a fascinating and unprecedented insight into the early Christianization of Ireland—”82

“Oh, bless it, Nathan, you’ll talk the poor child’s ear off,” a distinguished-looking man with tousled dark hair83 stood in the door of Dad’s office, grinning. Dad laughed, and strode forward to welcome him in.

“She has lived with me as a father for ten years now, so if her ears have survived this long, I figure they’ll last.” The stranger raised an eyebrow.

“So this is the famous Miss Rosaleen, is it? It’s a pleasure to meet you finally, young lady. I’m William Yeats.”

Rosaleen’s eyes widened. “P-please to meet you, Mr. Yeats,” she stammered, looking in shock at her father, who appeared immensely pleased with himself.

“I did try to have Lady Gregory come to call, but she’s holidaying in England,”84 Dad chuckled, “I figured Mr. Yeats would have to do.”

“Thanks for that, old friend,” Mr. Yeats said dryly, clearing some papers away from a chair before sitting down. Rosaleen perched on the edge of another chair, trying not to stare at Mr. Yeats, and failing.

“Now, Rosaleen, your father tells me you’re quite interested in tales of Old Ireland,” Mr. Yeats said kindly.

“Oh, yes,” Rosaleen nodded vigorously, “Just this Christmas I got Lady Gregory’s book of Irish stories. They’re all wonderful, but I particularly enjoy the ones about Queen Medb and the Morrígú.”

Mr. Yeats grinned, “Ah, yes, Erinn’s got some fierce ladies in her history. Now, have you ever tried your hand at writing a story?”

Rosaleen paused, “No, I hadn’t thought of it,” she said slowly, “Why, what would I write?”

“Oh, there’s a million stories out there,” Mr. Yeats said expansively, waving a hand, “I wager you’ve heard a few that even I haven’t gotten

my ears on yet. But until you pick up a pen of your own...” Mr. Yeats
dug in the pockets of his overcoat, and withdrew a small green book,
“Here are a few tales to occupy your time.”

Rosaleen accepted the book with both hands. Mythologies by W.B.
Yeats was inscribed on the cover in gold lettering.85

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Yeats,” she whispered, overwhelmed, “Thank
you so much!” Mr. Yeats laughed.

“You are most welcome, Miss Rosaleen. I know I’ve left it in good
hands. Now, if you’ll be so kind as to excuse me, I’ve got some business
with your old man.” Mr. Yeats and her father’s conversation drifted into
the background as Rosaleen gingerly opened her new book. Written on
the inside cover in flowing penmanship was the message:

To Miss Rosaleen O’Donovan,

May you find enjoyment in these pages, and
may tales just as wondrous fill your life. Go n-eirí
an t-ádh leat.86

Regards,

W.B. Yeats

Duibhlinn, Early Winter in the First Year of King
Brian’s Reign87

The Christmas feast was a sight, but Róisín scarcely looked
at the finery of King Sitric’s court. She only had eyes and ears
for the visiting bard. She’s been standing in a drafty corner of
the hall when she spotted the man enter, carrying his crwth.88
Immediately deciding that the servants could do without her,
Róisín snatched a goblet from one of the tables and made her way

86 Traditional Irish blessing for luck, literally translates to “that luck may rise with you.” “Gaelic and Irish
87 1002 C.E.
88 Bards accompanied their verses with either a harp or a crwth (form of plucked lyre). Karen E. McAulay,
“Bards,” in Music in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Encyclopedia, ed. William Forde Thompson,
towards the dark-bearded man, who was now removing his mud-
splattered cloak.

“Something to clear the dust of the road, sir?” Róisín
offered the cup to the bard. He looked up from tuning the harp,
surprised.

“I thank ye, lass,” he said gratefully, taking the goblet.
Róisín nodded, and backed away, allowing him space for his
performance.

As far as the many bards she’d seen in her short life went,
he was nothing like she had encountered before. It had been so
long since she’d been in the presence of one that she would have
sworn he was God’s gift to the profession. She eagerly absorbed
his tale of the Fianna’s bloody fight at Dunbolg, and then a
story she hadn’t heard before. When the bard paused to eat some
of the food one of the servants had brought for him, Róisín
crept forward again.

“Ah, me little cup-bearer,” the bard greeted her with a
grin, “I thought I spotted ye listening. So ye now know they
call me Óengus mac Óengusa. But what ‘tis yer name, child?”

“I am Róisín, daughter of Liadan Muimnechan and Cuírithir
Ua Dalaig,” she said proudly. The bard raised an eyebrow.

“Not the Liadan of Muimnechan kin and Cuírithir of the Ua
Dalaigs of Connacht?” he asked with no small degree of awe.

“Why, where are they, child? Surely the king wouldn’t have
invited a poor soul like me in when he’s got your fine folks
serving him!”

With just a hint of a quaver in her voice, Róisín replied,
“They passed near three years ago now, them an’ my wee brothers
and sisters. ‘Tis only me now, and the king was kind enough to
offer his protection in return for my work.”

The bard’s eager face fell when he heard the news. “Ach,
leanbh, God bless ye.” he signed sadly, “I never had the

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89 Disregarding the discrepancies of oral tradition over the generations, this story would be quite similar to
the one that Rosaleen enjoyed while ignoring her brother.
90 Name of a bard in the *Annals. The Annals of Loch Cé: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from A.D. 1014 to
91 Liadan (pronounced li’a-dan), Cuírithir (their names come from *Cuírithir mac Doborchu*, a seventh-
century tragic love story that scholars believe to be historically true. Liadan was a poet and nun, loved by Cuírithir, a
poet and later monk. In the account, Liadan initially turns down Cuírithir’s proposal of marriage because she does
not wish to limit of her professional interests as a travelling poet. Peiraeus Public Library, “Names: Ireland
(Hibernia) Early Medieval Period: 400 - 1200 A.D.,” accessed Nov 27, 2016,
92 Muimnechan and Ua Dalaig are the surnames of two poets from thirteenth-century Connacht (western
Ireland), the bardic profession was often a family one, and the Ua Dalaig surname has been found in County Meath
(eastern Ireland), so it is not too much of a stretch to imagine members of well-known bardic families to travel
around Ireland, as Róisín’s parents had. What-When-How, “Bardic Schools, Learned Families (Medieval Ireland),”
ireland/.
fortune of meetin' your parents but I heard many a great things about 'em."

"Thank you, sir," Róisín said softly, then hesitated. "Sir, my parents taught me all they knew and I met many others of the profession growing up. I've the ear and the memory for the stories and songs, and I'm a hard and loyal worker. Please, I need a master to become a bard myself, and with none living here in Duibhlinn, I'm at the mercy of any travelling bard. Please, would you take me on as an apprentice?"

Óengus considered her gravely, and then sighed. "Ach, Róisín, I don't doubt ye've the talent or the spark. But the life of a bard 'tis a hard one, and not for a wee girlie like yeself. Ye're much better off in this fine king's home then out on the road with me." Róisín considered arguing, but Óengus looked as though his mind was made up. She nodded in thanks, and returned to her drafty corner. She listened to his stories for the rest of the night, noticing they were all about women who met sorry ends after they tried something of which their male protectors did not approve. Róisín rolled her eyes in the shadows, and resolved to find a bard master someday, whatever Óengus' dour warnings.

"…Deirdre was buried in Emain Macha, near to where Naoise and his brothers lay. Conchubar could not bear the thought of them touching one another, even in death, and he had stakes of yew wood driven into the ground between their two graves. But the wood grew roots down into the graves, and two trees grew up, and twined together."

~Chapter Two: Siúil a Rún~

Well, you know the old saying: time flies. And truly it did for these girls. They grew and learned and soaked up those stories of Ireland until it was part of their blood and bones. But time doesn't fly over a frozen landscape – no, the world changes with time. And great were the changes that these girls faced, and greater still were the changes that lay before them.

In storytellin', 'tis a great temptation to cast the world in black and white. Good and evil. Heaven and hell. But that's not the way the world is. Oh, aye, there might be darker patches and lighter patches, but we know just how grey and murky reality can be. GREYER and MURKIER than Dublin.

94 Also known as Deirdre of the Sorrows, this tragic woman in Irish Celtic lore refused to marry the elderly King Conchubar as ordered by her father, and instead ran away with one of his young warriors, Naoise. Deirdre’s lover and his loyal brothers were slaughtered in front of her, and then the slighted King Conchubar gave her to the man responsible for her lover’s death. Deirdre ultimately threw herself underneath a chariot rather than live with Naoise’s killer. Gregory, Complete Irish Mythology, 403.

95 Irish song, “Walk My Love,” is about a woman singing to her lover who has gone to pursue a military career.
ON A WINTER'S DAY, EVEN! AND SO, 'TIS THE SAME FOR OUR GIRLS. A BATTLE WAS BREWING, AND THE PLAYERS WERE PICKING SIDES. BUT YOU DON'T ROLL OUT OF BED KNOWING WHO TO FOLLOW TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH — NOT WHEN YOU'VE GOT MESSY, CONFUSING, COMPLICATED HUMAN BEINGS INVOLVED. WE'RE ALL TIED TO A MILLION AND ONE THINGS, AND HAVE THOSE TIES PULLING US IN A MILLION AND ONE DIRECTIONS. AND WE CHOOSE SIDES. BUT NOT FOR THE SIMPLEST REASONS.96


Duibhlinn, Late Spring in the Tenth Year of King Brian’s Reign
“A’níon mhín ó
Sin anall na fir shúírí
A mháithair mhín ó
Cuir na, roithléan go dtí mé.
Dúlamán na binne buí
Dúlamán Gaelach.


98 Francis John Byrne, Irish Kings and High-Kings (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973); P.W. Joyce, A Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland (LibraryIreland Online, 1906).


102 1012 C.E.
“Ye've got a bonnie voice,” a deep voice made Róisín jerk her head up from the corn she was grinding. Standing on the lane was a tall young man who looked to be about her nineteen years, his startlingly blue eyes shaded by a mass of coal black curls that tumbled from his head. His cloak was dusty, but well made, and Róisín caught the glint of his intricate silver brooch as well as the dagger he wore on his belt. She eyed him warily, cautious despite his disarming half-grin and sprinkling of freckles across his straight nose. Only a faint scar across his cheek and the battle marks on his hands and forearms marred his boyish appearance.

“Surely ye don't have no seaweed harvester chasin' after ye?” the young man drawled after the silence extended for too long. Róisín’s eyes narrowed.

“’Tis none of your business who does or doesn't chase after me, gasúr,” she responded shortly, but she was intrigued. Could this stranger understand Gaelic?

“Ach, don't wound me so!” the man put on a comically pained face, “My own máthair told me if I made nice to cailín deas they'd treat me kindly in return.”

“Not any sweet cailín in these parts,” Róisín retorted, her curiosity mounting. He had a strange accent, one that she had only heard from bards and merchants from the south. “You must be a'farin' some distance from your own máthair. Won't she worry after such a tender lad?”

The stranger cringed, then bowed mockingly, “Alas, yon harsh words have cut down my shield of manly mystery. Ye have found me out. ‘Tis true, I have travelled a distance, from the

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103 Dúlamán, a traditional Irish song about the wooing of a young woman by a seaweed harvester. The lyrics translated from Irish to English are “Oh gentle daughter, here come the wooing men/ Oh gentle mother, put the wheels in motion for me/ Seaweed from the yellow cliff, Irish seaweed/ Seaweed from the ocean, the best in all of Ireland.” “Celtic Women Dúlamán Lyrics,” Metro Lyrics (CBS Interactive: 2016), http://www.metrolyrics.com/dulaman-lyrics-celtic-woman.html.

104 Though the potato is most often thought of as the primary feature of the Irish diet, potatoes originated in South America and were not introduced to Ireland until the sixteenth century by Sir Walter Raleigh. In medieval Ireland, corn, wheat, and barley were the grain staples. Trinity College Dublin, “Diet: What did people eat in Viking-Age Ireland?” Battle of Clontarf, 2014, http://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/.

105 Given the number of pins and brooches found by archaeologists, such ornaments were fairly common—however, only the nobility could have afforded those elaborately-crafted from silver or gold. Raghnall Ó Floinn, “Viking Age art influences,” The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland, ed. Michael Ryan (Dublin: Country House, 1991), 160.

106 The standard weapons of Irish warriors were the spear and sword. Spears were the most common, given the wealth and skill needed to own a sword. Though Lorcan is of a noble family and therefore can afford such a weapon, I presumed that travelling with it would attract unwanted attention—for that reason he is armed with a dagger. Trinity College Dublin, “Weaponry in the Viking-Age,” Battle of Clontarf, 2014, http://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/.

107 Irish for “boy,” here used in a demeaning sense. Google Translate.

108 Irish for “mother.” Google Translate.

109 Irish for “beautiful women,” Google Translate.
south and a town not nearly as grand as this,” he gestured around at the surrounding houses and lanes. “Though, I will admit,” he added with a roguish wink, “our women are a sight prettier, and easier on a man’s pride.”

Róisín sniffed disdainfully. “More’s the pity. I hope you aren’t here on any proper business, or you’ll find out how womenfolk ‘round here will soon as snap up a reed such as yourself when they get a sight of ya.”

“I believe I’m already recievin’ a lesson in that,” the stranger said mournfully, looking dejectedly at the dusty and littered lane. Róisín eyed him for another moment, then, dusting corn granules off her hands, said, “Well, here we are gabbing, and you look as though your boots have worn near through. Might I help you find who you’re looking for, so you might take a weight off your feet?”

The man gave a genuine smile, “T’wold be a blessin’, lady,” he said with another small bow. Róisín blushed.

“I’m no lady,” she said hastily, dropping her eyes to her scuffed leather shoes. “My name is Róisín, daughter of Liadan Muimnechan and Cuirithir Ua Dalaig. I serve my lord, King Sitric.”

The stranger raised an eyebrow at the mention of her mother’s family name.

“You’re of Muimnechan kin?” he asked, peering at her, “As in the family of the banece, Uallach?”

Róisín looked into his blue eyes, “Yes, she was my aunt, though I never knew her. My mother told me stories.”

He grinned. “I’m sure she did. It’s an honor to meet a member of a family so blessed. I am Lorcán mac Morda of Leinster. I am here behalf of my father, lookin’ for the court of Sitric.”

Róisín looked at Lorcán with a new eye. What was a son of the High King of Leinster doing in Dublin? If he really was who

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110 The Vikings introduced the concept of urban centers to Ireland, so the biggest towns at this time were Dublin, Waterford, Cork, and Limerick. Terry Barry, “Norse Settlement,” Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture, ed. James S. Donnelly, Jr. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2004), 475.

111 Given the amount of debris and trash found by archeologists from street excavations, I presume the streets would have been rather unclean. Trinity College Dublin, “Viking-Age Dublin,” Battle of Clontarf, 2014, http://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/.

112 Hospitality to strangers was a strong tradition in medieval Ireland. Bitel, Land of Women, 93.

113 Viking Ireland exhibit at the National Museum of Ireland-Archaeology, Dublin, visited June 2016.

114 King of Dublin. Sitric’s mother, Gormlaith, was an Irish princess from Leinster and his father was the Viking Amlaíb Cuarán. Sitric reigned from 989 to 1036, during which he was often battling various Irish kings since Dublin’s port and command of trade made it vital for controlling Ireland. Trinity College Dublin, “Sitric Silkenbeard: Hiberno-Norse King of Dublin,” Battle of Clontarf, 2014, http://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/.

115 Banece is Irish for a “woman bard.” Uallach was a famous bard in the west of Ireland (County Kerry). She held the title of Ollamh Érenn, or chief bard for the Corca Dhuibhne clan until her death in 934. Annals of the Four Masters, Corpus of Electronic Texts online (Cork: University College Cork, 2015), Annal M934.
he claimed to be, but the exquisite craftsmanship of his brooch and the quality of his weapons seemed to support his story. Róisín sighed internally, remembering her place in the world.\footnote{Medieval Irish society – political, religious, and social – was highly hierarchical. James Lydon, \textit{The Making of Ireland from ancient times to the present} (London: Routledge, 1998), 64.}

She knelt to him.

“My lord, I ask your forgiveness for my impertinence. I did not know I spoke to the son of the powerful ruler of Leinster. Allow me to guide you to my king, and serve you in any way that I may,” she said stiffly to the dusty, pebbled ground.

“Oh, we were havin’ such a nice conversation,” Lorcán started forward, offering his hand as Róisín looked up, surprised, “Stop that bowin’, your family should be given as much honor as mine. More, since ‘tis your kind that remembers the rest of us for the ages.”\footnote{In a society where the majority of the population was illiterate and making books was incredibly expensive, bards’ command of oral history, particularly of ruling families, was the predominate way for recalling the past. Patricia Herron Ó Siodhacháin, “From Oral Tradition to Written Word: The History of Ancient Irish Law,” \textit{Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review} 101 (2012): 324.}

Róisín smiled at him as she dusted off her woolen dress.

“I thank you for that,” her head tilted as she reconsidered this strange young man from the south, “If you’ll come with me this way, I’ll take you to see the king.”

They headed off down the lane, Lorcán looking side to side at the houses.\footnote{Trinity College Dublin, “Viking-Age Dublin,” Battle of Clontarf, 2014, \url{http://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/}.}

“I’m not quite used to all these houses and people pushed so close together. Don’t you feel cooped up like chickens betimes?”\footnote{Archeologists believe that chickens and their domestication were introduced to Ireland by the Danes (Vikings). Mairtin Mac Con Iomaire and Andrea Cully, “The History of Eggs in Irish Cuisine and Culture” \textit{Arrow School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology Conference Papers} (2007), 1.}

Róisín turned to look at him, surprised. “That’s exactly how I feel, more often than not,” she blurted, “Some days I just have to go to the walls to breathe.”

Lorcán smiled pityingly, “Wee lamb. If ye could only see my home. Stretches of grass as green as ye wouldn’t believe, copses of dark trees by the clearest brooks you can imagine, singin’ with the birds as the mist coats everythin’ in tiny gemstones of water…”\footnote{Based on images of County Kildare. Google Images.}

Róisín watched him reminisce, wide-eyed. His home sounded just like one of the old stories, but here was someone who had actually lived beyond this chattering, muddy town. In her daydreaming, Róisín was unaware of the rain that began to fall. Laughing, Lorcán pulled her shawl over her messy auburn curls.

\footnote{Kingship was inherited down the male line, but since kings often had many sons from various wives, the younger sons were tasked with serving their father or brother king as warriors. Francis John Byrne, \textit{Irish Kings and High-Kings}, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 34.}
They headed down the lane towards the market square, picking their way through puddles and mud patches. Róisín unsuccessfully repressed a giggle when Lorcán plunged up to his ankle into a particularly deep hole.

“I'll tell ye this, Róisín,” he remarked wryly, shaking his wet foot, “Me pride in your presence has taken a beatin’ such as I've only known when wrestlin' with my older brothers. 'Tis very disheartenin’.”

“Oh, but you're just a poor lad from the southern lands of grass and rocks, I wouldn't expect you to be accustomed to our urban ways,” Róisín retorted before she could stop herself. But Lorcán just laughed out loud.

“Better than bein' a chicken in a muddy coop,” he teased. Róisín gave him a sidelong look, grinning in spite of herself as she hugged her shawl closer around her against the spring chill.

Dublin, March 31, 1912

Rosaleen pulled her coat collar up higher against the March gusts, hurrying to keep up with her mother down Mountpleasant Square.122

“Oh, blast this rain!” Mam said bitterly, glaring at the gray storm clouds dumping sheets of water on the city streets, “As if this day hadn't been bad enough already!” Rosaleen kept quiet. Mam had been in a foul mood since reading this morning’s newspaper. The gathering of anti-unionists in Belfast had been much larger, and much angrier, than expected.123 It was hard for Rosaleen to imagine that the Orangemen124 had such support, especially given the monster meeting in Dublin only a week ago.125 The swirl of people – they said more than 200,000 souls – the mass of humanity, shouting, chattering, blocking off Sackville Street126 as they listened to the likes of Padraig Pearse and John Redmond127 speak in support of the Home Rule Bill. The pressure across the city, and across the country, was beginning to rise. And things didn't look any better beyond the Irish Sea. Rosaleen had seen Dad closely reading the reports

122 Street of Ranelagh, a Dublin residential area located relatively close to Trinity College; Google Maps.
123 “The Union Jack in Ireland,” Courier and Argus, January 17, 1912 in British Library Newspapers online.
126 Now O’Connell Street, which is a major street that runs through the city center.
127 Pro-Home Rule, nationalist Irish poet and politician.
in the English papers\textsuperscript{128} about Germany and East Europe, only looking up to distractedly accept a cuppa\textsuperscript{129} or shoot surreptitious, worried glances at Donal.\textsuperscript{130} It seemed the whole world was itching for a fight.

Rosaleen was brought from her dreary thoughts as she and her mother reached 823 Mountpleasant Square. They knocked and were bundled inside. After removing their wet things, Mam and Rosaleen entered the sitting room, where a number of ladies were already present. They looked like Mam – well-enough dressed, with chapped hands and tired faces, but fiercely resolute. Rosaleen was the one of the youngest women in attendance at only nineteen, but she knew this domestic tea scene belied the passionate conviction of these women. Agnes O’Farrelly sailed into the parlor after them, a stern look on her ever-serious face. Rosaleen sat up a little straighter in her presence. As the first female professor at University College, Miss O’Farrelly\textsuperscript{131} was an absolute hero in Rosaleen’s eyes.

“Good afternoon, ladies,” she began in her rich voice, “Thank you for coming despite the damp. Shall we proceed with the discussion? I’m sure many of you have seen the newspapers and the ruckus in the North. Of course, the question is how to respond to these anti-Unionists and make it clear that the majority of Ireland is for Home Rule, whatever the Orangemen might profess.”

As the women began debating, Rosaleen’s thoughts drifted. Try as she might, she could never stay enthralled with politics for long. Everyone claimed it was a momentous time to be alive, but it seemed more of the same to her. This was the third time that the Home Rule Bill

\textsuperscript{128} Reports from Irish papers were predominantly focused on the rising tensions over Home Rule, so English papers would have been more informative on international news. Githens-Mazer, Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland, 27.

\textsuperscript{129} Slang for “cup of tea.”

\textsuperscript{130} The threat of conscription in Ireland was a controversial topic between Great Britain and Ireland, as many Irish felt that British imperial motivations, including fighting a war, were not in Ireland’s interests. Githens-Mazer, Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising, 30.

\textsuperscript{131} Agnes O’Farrelly (1874-1951) was a professor of Gaelic at University College Dublin and one of the founders of Cumann na mBan, an Irish nationalist revolutionary women’s organization, in 1914. She eventually left the organization for its increasing radicalization. I haven’t been able to find any evidence of official women’s groups that met before the founding of Cumann na mBan, but it seems reasonable that it would have been preceded by some unofficial gatherings of women to discuss politics, as I portray here. Despite her education and teaching position, Agnes O’Farrelly is referred to as “Miss O’Farrelly” in contemporary newspapers. Marie Coleman, “O’Farrelly, Agnes Winifred,” Dictionary of Irish Biography Online (University College Dublin, 2015).
had been set before Parliament – what was likely to change now? Even the threat of war seemed unreal. The newspapers had sounded the alarm for far too long, and Rosaleen couldn’t imagine such a conflict. Germany, Serbia, and even England seemed so far away.

No, she was much more intrigued by some of the recent archeological discoveries Dad had told her about. Some of his colleagues at Trinity had returned to Newgrange to map out more of the passage tombs. Rosaleen still felt giddy at the recollection of the visit she and her father had made there two years before, for her seventeenth birthday. Her schoolmates had teased her terribly about the “waste” of her birthday present, but Rosaleen paid them no mind. Borrowing a friend’s automobile, she and Dad had made an adventure of it. The photo of her standing at the entrance of the tomb sat in a frequently-polished frame in her room. She inhaled, remembering, and the cozy sitting room of chatting women was replaced by the memory of the freezing, pitch-black interior of the passage tomb, the feel of the grainy stones on her grasping hands and the scent of earth heavy in the air.

“Rosaleen?”

The sound of her name snapped her out of her reverie, and she blinked rapidly, blushing slightly.

“Yes, Miss O’Farrelly?” she responded, mentally kicking herself for being caught daydreaming by the professor.

“How are your studies in Gaelic, child?” Miss O’Farrelly asked with interest, sipping her tea as the other ladies continued their conversation.

“Erm, an-mhaith go raibh maith agat,” she replied, fumbling slightly, “Bainim taitneamh as go háirithe ag léamh na scéalta na sean hIÉireann.”

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132 Newgrange and the other passage tombs in County Meath (north of Dublin) are prehistoric sites in Ireland. These tombs are built like hills and were used for burial rituals for the early Irish people. Newgrange is the most famous because of its size and alignment with the season; once a year, on the Winter Solstice, the light from the rising sun illuminates the inner chamber. Information from my visit to Newgrange, June 2016.

133 “Images of Newgrange throughout the ages,” Irish Archeology online, December 2012. Photo of a young girl standing at the entrance of Newgrange, circa 1910.

134 This description is based on my own experience at Newgrange in June 2016.

135 “Very well, thank you.”

136 “I particularly enjoy reading the stories of Old Ireland.”
Miss O'Farrelly, smiled, evidently pleased, “Sin iontach! Cé acu is fearr leat?”

She was to choose just one? A smile crept on Rosaleen’s face as she considered her favorites. “Medb agus an cath do eallach Uladh,” she decided after a moment.

Miss O’Farrelly chuckled. “Aye, well, that Medb was certainly a firebrand, wasn’t she?” she responded in English, the language examination apparently over. Rosaleen let out a small sigh of relief, and nodded. “Not entirely unlike your mother now, either?” Miss O’Farrelly teased Mam, who gave her a sharp glance.

“I know naught of what you’re talking about,” Mam said stiffly as Rosaleen gave her a curious look, “I’m no more of a rebel than you yourself, Agnes.” Her tone decidedly closed the subject, but Rosaleen was left pondering. Was Mam involved in something beyond these meetings? What was she so keen on hiding?

Duibhlinn, Late Spring in the Tenth Year of King Brian’s Reign

Róisín was fed up with all the secrecy. What was Sitric so concerned about hiding, even from lowly servants? The doors to the council room had been firmly shut all day, and only the queen had been permitted to enter with food and drink for the menfolk inside. None of the other servants or slaves took any interest, but Róisín was burning to know. She hadn’t seen Lorcán since she delivered him to Sitric’s hall two days prior, and she was wondering if he was at the center of all of this. What could Leinster possibly be planning with Duibhlinn?

She wasn’t allowed to mull over the puzzle too long, since shortly after midday a group of traders from Ulster were welcomed to the hall. Róisín was tasked with providing the

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137 “That’s wonderful! Which is your favorite?”
138 “Medb and the battle for the cattle of Ulster”; references the legend in which the legendary Queen Medb [also known as Maeve] singlehandedly sparks a war by capturing the kingdom of Ulster’s cattle – besides land, cows were the main sign of wealth in early Ireland and violence between competing clans revolved mostly around cattle raids. A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland, ed. Dáibhí Ó Crónin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 351.
139 1012 C.E.
140 Dublin was a massive trading hub for Ireland and the world beyond. Archeologists have found coins and artefacts from as far as the Middle East in their excavations of Dublin. The town itself was known for its shipbuilding, barrel-making, and fine metalwork. With trade so important to the life of Dublin, merchants and traders were respected by the king of Dublin. “The Vikings,” The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland, ed. Michael Ryan (Dublin: Country House, 1991), 153.
increasingly irritable men with sustenance while they waited to be greeted by their host. Though Róisín had no great love for Sitric, she burned with shame at the lack of hospitality the guests had been greeted with, and sent a quick prayer that the hall of Sitric be spared any of the curses reserved for those who broke with hospitable tradition.

At least travelers always brought news. Róisín kept her ears perked as she tended the fire at the end of the hall.

“—he’s strong enough, sure, but if he can’t keep the local kings happy, that’ll be the end of any extended rule he might claim,” a big, ruddy-faced trader was saying. “High King is a pretty enough title, but he’s got to have the force to back it, or ‘tis only a title.” Róisín’s interest was captured. It was Brian Boru they spoke of, then? Based on the bard songs she’d heard of the king, he was eight-feet tall with eyes that could knock a man senseless, and a powerful sword arm that would finish the job.\footnote{Not a description of Brian Boru specifically, but heroes and kings were usually described in exaggerated terms. Augusta Gregory, \textit{Lady Gregory’s Complete Irish Mythology} (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1994).}

She had her doubts. His daughter, Sitric’s wife, was certainly nothing special. Pretty enough, with a fine voice and clear hazel eyes, but she always looked so meek and miserable. Róisín felt some pity for Queen Sláine, but hadn’t she known it was her lot in life to be married off to some powerful lord to secure her father’s position?\footnote{The female relations of Irish kings were used as political tools as their marriages to a king’s ally or enemy would strengthen the bond between the two kings. Kings would have multiple wives and women would be married various times as their husbands fell in and out of power. Biter, \textit{Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland}, 83.}

Sitric wasn’t the handsomest of men, but he had a fine enough build, possessed a good amount of gold and slaves, and only hit the servants when he was halfway through a feast’s worth of mead. Sláine could have done a lot worse.

“He’s managed to satisfy them all up to this point, but I heard from—” the man dropped his voice. Róisín innocently drifted closer to the table.

“—hard enough. And you know what the two of them ending badly would do.” He gave a meaningful nod and took a swig from his goblet.

“I have heard Gormlaith is quite the woman,”\footnote{In the accounts written well after this period, Gormlaith was cast as a formidable woman, and is sometimes blamed for causing the conflict between her husband and son in the first place. \textit{Njál’s Saga}, trans. Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander (New York: New York University Press for the American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1955), 94.}

a brown-haired man with a crooked nose chuckled, “Me cousin once told me how she scolded Mael Sechnaill like a wee lad at his own feast for—”\footnote{Mael Sechnaill, the High King before Brian Boru, helped Boru quell resistance in Dublin and Leinster in 980, which ultimately allowed Boru to claim the title of High King of Ireland twenty years later. Gormlaith was}
“GIRL!” one of the drowsier-looking man bellowed, “Stop yer lazin’ about an’ git yon men more food, quick-like.” Róisín resisted making a face, and practically flew to the kitchen, eager to return to the gossip. She came back with more brown bread and cheese, avoiding the drunkard’s grasping hands as she set it before the now guffawing men.

“Hush now, you fools,” a younger, thin man hissed, “Careful what you say of Queen Gormlaith. You forget we’re in her son’s own halls, mind.” The chuckling died down a bit as the men snorted into their cups. Róisín eyes narrowed as her mind raced. Gormlaith? Sitric? She recalled stories of the king’s mother, but had never met the woman, as she had married Mael Sechnaill and left Dublin long before Róisín’s arrival. She’d also heard tales of the wedding feast of Brian Boru and Gormlaith, but that had been in her early years here, when she still missed her family too much to care about much else.

So, there was trouble between the High King and his Northwoman wife. And now the son of Leinster’s king just happened to be meeting in secret with this Northwoman’s powerful son? Róisín’s stomach dropped. They wouldn’t truly be planning... would they?

For all her love of the old stories of great battles and mighty warriors, Róisín hated war. She had seen enough fighting and bloodshed in her early years to last her a lifetime.145

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**Dublin, April 1, 1912**

Rosaleen was going to go mad. The tension in the house was unbearable. Both Mam and Donal were on edge about something – Rosaleen supposed it was the Home Rule Bill, which was to be read in Parliament on the 11th, but they were both so tight-lipped of late she could hardly tell what was bothering them. Dinners had been unusually quiet, the silence broken only by the sound of silverware on porcelain.

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married to Mael Sechnaill before Boru became High King, at which point she married Boru. Brian Boru gave his daughter, Sláine, to Sitric to further solidify ties between the two rulers. *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or, the Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and Other Norsemen*, ed. and trans. James Henthorn Todd (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867).

145 When Róisín travelled with her parents to Dublin, she probably would have witnessed some violence along the way. Besides personal disputes, local lords and kings often feuded with each other, particularly before Brian Boru became the High King and exercised that authority. Francis John Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 185.
and Rosaleen’s queries of Dad’s work that faded away when Mam and Donal remained wrapped up in their own thoughts.146

So Rosaleen had turned back to her books. Right now she was absorbed in Yeats’s account of “the Three O’Byrnes and the Evil Faeries,”147 lounging in a chair in the sitting room as Dad went through a colleague’s report, Mam read the paper, and Donal was out with his friends. The late afternoon light filtered through the grey clouds outside, the perfect atmosphere for the evil curse of the faeries.

“Dad, where did Mr. Yeats get all these stories anyway?” Rosaleen asked after the final O’Byrne brother had died.

“Hm?” Dad looked up distractedly, “Oh, well, you know a good bit of them were embellished by his own mind, but he got the bones of them from storytellers in the country. Aye, that’s how we met in the first place. He’s heard from Professor Hart148 of my work and connections in Wexford and Waterford, and he asked me if I could keep an ear out for any old tales I might hear in some of the smaller villages. ’Course I wasn’t an overabundance of help for the man, given my limited Gaelic, but I obliged.”149

“So where did the storytellers get them? Surely they weren’t written down from so long ago,” Rosaleen puzzled.

Dad chuckled, “Ach, no, of course such documents wouldn’t have survived the centuries. No, ’twas the tradition of passing the stories father to son, mother to daughter. Many of the ancient bards were in the same family line, you know. ’Tis a pity the tradition is dying out these days, but at least we have people like Mr. Yeats out there writing them down.”150

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146 Though “young adults” by today’s standards, it would not be unusual for kids of Rosaleen and Donal’s ages to live at home. Edward MacLysaght, “The 1890s and 1900s in Clare,” in Irish Life and Traditions, ed. Sharon Gmelch (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 1986), 108.
147 W.B. Yeats, Mythologies (New York: Collier Books, 1959), 27.
148 Name taken from Trinity College 1900 bulletin – I was unable to determine in which department Professor Hart taught, but he was responsible for overseeing the library, giving him the potential to meet Yeats. “Trinity College Bulletin, December 1900,” Book 4 (Trinity College Dublin: 1900), 36, http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/bulletin/4?utm_source=digitalrepository.trincoll.edu%2Fbulletin%2F4&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.
149 Yeats, “Introduction” in Mythologies, 3.
150 For an excellent work of historical fiction about travelling storytellers in twentieth-century Ireland, see Frank Delaney, Ireland: A Novel (New York: Harper, 2005).
Rosaleen stroked the cover of her treasured book, lost in thought. She did love having something she could pick up and enjoy at her leisure, but she thought of the praise for the bardic tradition not only in Ireland, but also Greece and other ancient civilizations. Had they lost something with printed books? But at least once they were written down, their accuracy would be preserved. Though could such stories ever really be “accurate?” She knew they were a bit make-believe, but it was nice to dream and—

“Oh, I don’t believe it,” Mam exclaimed suddenly, giving the paper an angry shake.

“What is it, love?” Dad asked distractedly, reabsorbed in his report.

“Oh, just the English bein’ their dour selves,” Mam said harshly, “Just listen to this,” she affected a pompous English accent, “Ill-Omened April 11 - To the Editor: Sir, On Thursday, April 11, 1912, the Home Rule Bill is to be laid before Parliament. On April 11, 1861, the American Civil War began.” Mam snorted. “I mean, really, scare-mongerin’ like that, and not even havin’ the nerve to be up front about it. They talk on and on about the Orangemen, but fail to mention the likes of Pearse and Redmond and the support even here in Dublin!”

“Yes, Brigid,” Dad said slowly, “But you cannot deny them in the North have their own crowds of supporters. Perhaps suggesting civil war is imminent is a wee dramatic, but I fear there will be some sort of conflict regardless of the way Parliament goes.” He paused, nodded, and returned to his article. Only Rosaleen heard Mam’s dark mutter,

“If that be the case, we’ll be ready for ‘em. Aye, we will.”

Rosaleen kept her head down, giving no sign that she had heard, but a chill ran through her. Something was definitely wrong with Mam, and it went beyond the Home Rule Bill. She intended to find out.

Donal was home late, as usual, but both Mam and Dad were too distracted to tell him off. Rosaleen waited for her moment to pounce. The opportunity arose when he went out to the stairs for a smoke."

“What do you want?” Donal asked, glancing up at her as he slouched against the railing, his hand cupped around his cigarette. Rosaleen wrinkled her nose at the smell, then decided to go for the direct approach.

“What are you and Mam up to?” she asked, studying his features closely. Donal blinked once, and then his usual mask of arrogant indifference slid back across his face.

“What are you talkin’ about now? Your head’s still stuck in all those books, just as it was when you were a kid,” he said dismissively. Rosaleen glared at him.

“I am nineteen years old, mind you, Donal O’Donovan, so you can get off your high and mighty steed right now. Just because I choose to spend my time reading and educating myself while you’re off doing heavens knows what with that gang of yours doesn’t mean you can shoo me away,” Rosaleen hissed.

“Oh, aye, educating yourself, and for what now?” Donal demanded angrily. “So you can go off and get an education in England? Perhaps find yourself a nice English husband there who will pay for your precious books and let you lazily reading all day long, instead of working like an honest women? Oh, don’t deny it,” he sneered as Rosaleen spluttered in fury, “I’ve seen the way you look down as these good, solid lads in the city. Not good enough for Miss Rosaleen of the Library, with all her readin’ and education. Oh, sure, you can talk for days about Old Ireland, and the Celts, and the Vikings, but do you even know what’s happenin’ around you? You’re an embarrassment to Irishwomen. I’m surprised Mam hasn’t taken you to task for it yet, either. You’re an embarrassment to her. There she is, the only member of that sewing circle that dares to call themselves revolutionaries, actually doing something! When the fight does come, and be sure it will, me ’n my lads will have something to fight with thanks to what she’s done, while you’re—” Donal suddenly stopped his tirade. Rosaleen stared at him, feeling a little faint, and not from the awful accusations he’d made.
Mam was... what? Collecting funds? For what? Collecting weapons? Donal gripped her arm tightly as she swayed.

“Not a word,” he growled, his breath hot on her face. For all his bravado, Rosaleen saw the flicker of fear in his eyes. “Not a single word, you hear me?” He shook her slightly. Rosaleen yanked her arm out of his grip, and straightened, looking down at him from the upper step.

“I won’t,” she said coldly, “Not that I needed you to tell me. I’m not a fool, Donal. Though I don’t believe the same could be said for you.” With that, she turned and stormed inside, slamming the door on her brother.

“Rosaleen!” Mam shouted from the kitchen.

“Sorry, Mam, ’twas the wind,” Rosaleen said meekly, though her insides felt as though they were boiling. Mam and Donal were planning something. Along with others, it seemed. Rosaleen tried to ignore the building sense of fear. What was happening? Did Dad know? What was she to do?

Duibhlinn, Late Spring in the Tenth Year of King Brian’s Reign

That night, Sitric held a grand feast for Lorcán and the visiting merchants. After helping in the kitchen all day, Róisín cleaned herself up so that she could serve in the hall. It was the usual chaotic scene – men and women eating, drinking, laughing, shouting, dogs and children running underfoot, the place lit by the ruddy glow of the fires. Róisín was tasked with making sure everyone at the high table’s cups stayed full. She noticed Sitric and Lorcán’s particularly celebratory moods and new camaraderie as they slapped each other on the back, roaring with laughter at the other’s each increasingly bawdy stories. Sitric’s wife and Boru’s daughter, Queen Sláine sat quietly by her raucous husband, her face a still mask of serene

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153 In the mounting tensions immediately sparked by the conflict over Home Rule, The Ulster Volunteers (pro-Union force in Belfast and the north of Ireland) received arms from Germany in April 1914. Though this was largely a propaganda move, as they did not receive enough to arm all of their members, the message was clear. Later in 1914 the Irish National Volunteers (formed in 1913 in Dublin, pro-Home Rule) received two shipments of weapons from Germany as well. Because of the secrecy of the operation, I have not been able to find records of how the guns were paid for, but fundraising by revolutionaries seems to be one possibility for paying for the shipment. Githens-Mazer, Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland, 66.

154 1012 C.E.

indifference, but Róisín noticed she barely touched her food and
drink, and left the feast as soon as it was acceptable.

As Sitric ambled off to speak with the merchants, Róisín
sidled up to Lorcán.

“Oh, there ye ar’,” Lorcán said, slurring slightly as he
turned to beam at her, “I was afeared I would have to leave this
town without e’er setting another eye on that beautiful face of
yours.”

Róisín grinned, then glanced into his cup, “Oh, my lord,
that’s the drink affecting you now. You’ll turn a poor serving
girl’s head with that kind of talk if you’re not careful.”

“None of this serving girl nonsense,” Lorcán scoffed,
wavering a dismissive hand, “I know your family secret, remember?
The bardic magic is your blood, girl – tell us a story!” He made
to grab for her arm to pull her on to his lap, but Róisín neatly
dodged it and perched on the edge of the table. She noticed he
was mannerly enough not to pursue her.

“Alright, just one, since you speak so prettily,” she
 teased, “A strapping lad like you wants a war story, or there’s
a nest of serpents in the kitchen.” 156 Lorcán nodded eagerly, his
attention fixed. Róisín took a deep breath, and then, her voice
slightly deeper and more resounding, began the tale of the
children of Catalan’s revenge on Cuchulainn. Though the hall
bustled on noisily around them, it was as if a bubble of silence
surrounded the two of them. Róisín found Lorcán was the perfect
audience: his eyes never left her face and his own expressions
were easy to read as she told the tale.

“…Lugaid Cu Roi wanted Cuchulainn’s sword as a trophy, but
he had died with such a tight grip on it that Lugaid could not
get the sword free. He drew a knife and cut the tendons on
Cuchulainn’s hand to loosen his grip, and the sword fell and cut
off Lugaid Cu Roi’s hand. So fell Cuchulainn, king among the
warriors.” 157

There was a moment of stillness before Lorcán broke it.

“What in the name of Saint Brigid are ye doin’ in the
kitchens, Róisín?” 158 he said wonderingly. “A talent like that
could land ye at any king’s court!”

Rosin smiled ruefully, “Perhaps, but I haven’t had any
formal training. I glean what I can from the bards that pass
through Duibhlinn, but not a one will take me under his
tutelage. But there’s always hope.” She smiled wistfully, then
changed the conversation, “Now, I’ve told you a tale; ’tis only

156 Róisín expresses her disbelief that his response would be anything to the contrary; based on the legend
that one of St. Patrick’s miracles was expelling all the snakes from Ireland.
157 Last line of “the Death of Cuchulainn.” Gregory, Lady Gregory’s Complete Irish Mythology, 205.
158 Saint Brigid of Kildare is one of the “big three” saints of Ireland – the other two are Saint Patrick and
Saint Columba.
fair if you tell me one in return." Lorcán spluttered indignantly, pleading his lack of skill.

“Oh, alright,” Róisín relented, giggling, “But then at least satisfy a kitchen gossip's curiosity. The whole place was abuzz with speculation about what you were meeting with the king about for so long. One of the more foolish maids was convinced you’d both gotten in a fight and were bleeding out on the floor while we gabbed away.”

Lorcán’s grin faltered, and for a moment Róisín wondered if she had been too obvious. Maybe he hadn’t drunk as much as she’d thought— or she wasn’t as sly of a flirt as she’d convinced herself she could be. But the smile returned, and a devilish twinkle in his eye.

“I'll tell ye right enough, but 'tis not a story for a great hall like this,” he said slyly, “Come with me.” He led her to the side of the hall, in the shadows of one of the pillars.

Lorcán looked down at Róisín, who tried to appear as innocent as she could. “I like ye, Róisín,” Lorcán said slowly. “An' for some reason I trust ye. Now, I'm sure ye've heard of how Brian Boru became High King?”

“Of course,” Róisín said, wondering where this all was going.

“Well, the honorable Sitric's own mother married our beloved king, but it turns out he's not quite the man he made out to be. Oh sure, he claimed the title of High King of Ireland, but the true situation is far from it. Many families,” here he hesitated, then plunged on ahead, “including me own, resent paying a tithe to a man who gives himself airs. Sitric shares the grievance— despite being related to the king through marriage, Duibhlinn is still required to pay the tax leftover from the defeat of Duibhlinn nearly thirteen years past. It's an insult, and we won't stand for it!”

Lorcán had worked himself up at this point, and ended his “story” with a shout. Róisín stood before him, stunned. If she read Lorcán right, and took into account the rumors of men gathering to Leinster as well as

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159 Brian Boru of Munster declared himself High King of Ireland in 1002. Prior to the High Kingship, Boru ruled over Munster, after his elder brother was murdered by a member of the clan Ui Chairbre of Limerick (a Viking town). Building from this power base, Brian Boru began to make alliances and conquer enemies throughout Ireland, starting with his brother’s killers in Limerick. He then declared war on the High King of Ireland, Máel Sechnaill, and after years of fighting, the two agreed to a treaty and split Ireland between them in 997. Brian Boru received Dublin in his share, but Dublin under Sitric Silkenbeard joined with Leinstermen and rebelled against Boru. In the battle of Glenn Mána, Boru defeated his enemies and laid siege on Dublin until Sitric Silkenbeard recognized him as overlord in 999. With the wealth, ships, and power of Dublin on Boru’s side, Máel Sechnaill yielded the High Kingship to Brian Boru, breaking the Ui Néill dynasty. Brian Boru had to enforce his new authority by intimidating his rivals around Ireland until he consolidated his power around 1006. Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or, the Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and Other Norsemen, ed. and trans. James Henthorn Todd (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867).

160 Part of Sitric’s submission to Brian Boru required him to pay a tribute to the high king each year at Christmas. Trinity College Dublin, “Politics,” Battle of Clontarf, 2014, http://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/.
Sitric’s own suspicious stocking of supplies, these men were planning an attack on the High King of Ireland. Róisín realized Lorcán was watching her.

“Well, I can’t say it measured up to my story,” she remarked. Lorcán smiled, and then looked serious.

“Perhaps not, but then again, perhaps one day it’ll be the beginning of a grand tale. Another war story to add to your collection,” he said, softly. Róisín felt a chill, and saw a look of something akin to fear flicker across Lorcán’s face.

“RÓISÍN! Where’s that girl?” one of the servants barked from the main hall. Both Lorcán and Róisín jumped, and Róisín scurried to the man shouting for her.

“Queen Sláine is lookin’ for ye,” he informed her, “Best look sharp now.”

Róisín hurried off towards the backrooms of the feasting hall, her mind roiling with new information. Knocking on the door, she was bidden to enter.

The Queen still in the middle of the room, her forehead creased with worry as she wrung her hands. Spotting the kneeling Róisín, she immediately launched into speech.

“You speak the tongue of the Gael, yes?” she asked.

“Tá, mo bhanríon,”¹⁶¹ Róisín answered, confused as to what this was about.

“And do you swear on the peril of damnation to serve me and keep my secrets?” Queen Sláine demanded. When Róisín hesitated, she advanced, threatening despite her slight frame.

“Yes, I swear it on the word of God,” Róisín replied hurriedly. Queen Sláine relaxed slightly.

“We don’t have much time, so I’ll get to the point. My husband is plotting with Leinster against my father. Though my duty is to my husband, I have information that Gormlaith plans to break her bond to my father, so I feel no guilt for doing the same to save my kin.¹⁶² I cannot leave this place, nor can I trust any of the usual messengers to deliver this news to the High King. Though you are but a girl, I know you travelled with your family throughout the isle before their deaths and since then have spoken with every bard that has passed through this stinking town. You will be my messenger.”

Róisín was stunned. Queen Sláine continued.

“Of course you need no reason to complete this task other than my wish that you do so, but I remind you of the true rulers of Ireland – the Gaeidhil. ‘Twas us Gaeidhil born and raised on

¹⁶¹ “Yes, my Queen.” GoogleTranslate.

¹⁶² Though a woman’s loyalties were supposed to lie with her husband’s family, the rate at which women were divorced and remarried for political advantage makes this complicated. Sláine’s favor for her father’s forces are clear in her critical comments to Sitric about his armies as recorded in the annals of Brian Boru. *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh*, 186.
this isle, and us Gaeidhil whose blood was spilt when the savage Northman came to this peaceful land. And though they raid not as much as they used to, they still take from us – you see how wealthy the Northman traders are in this town in compared to even some of the kings whose ancestors are buried in this very land. We must defend ourselves, our religion, our traditions, against these barbarians and those Leinster traitors. You know the stories. You know who we are as a people, and we cannot be subjected to the rule of a foreigner!"¹⁶³

Not knowing what else to do, Róisín bowed. "My Queen, I am honored by this task you have given me. Truly, I am unworthy of so great a responsibility that one so illustrious as yourself would..." as Róisín mindlessly praised Queen Sláine, she considered the proposal. It was ridiculous. Surely Brian Boru had enough men on his side to crush even Sitric and his forces in Duibhlinn. And this talk of heathen Northmen was just as foolish. Why, most people in the town were a mix of Gael and Northman. It would be a pointless risk to go north, and Róisín tried to think of a way to get out of such a task.

But then she remembered the tales of Boru’s bards. Not only the bards of his court, but also the monks and scribes who were writing down his deeds and the events that happened under his reign. To be there, amongst those kinds of men... surely one of them would train her, so that she might be a proper bard. She thought of the rush she had felt crafting her story earlier that evening to draw every response out of Lorcán that she could, purely for the art of it.

"... and so I am honored to comply to your wishes," Róisín finished. Queen Sláine smiled gratefully, then bade her to rise so that they might prepare for her journey.

What have I gotten myself into? Róisín wondered as the queen led her away.

The following morning dawned misty and cool. Róisín had arisen early to walk along the walls before the bustle of the market gripped the town.¹⁶⁴ Standing on the palisade that stood at the gates of the town, she looked out towards the River Poddle, where the traders’ ships were docked.¹⁶⁵ Queen Sláine had

¹⁶³ Sláine’s speech mirrors the rhetoric in the annals at the time, which raged against the barbaric, pagan foreigners who had invaded Ireland, despite the Vikings’ presence and intermarriage with the Irish for over a century. Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh, 200.


¹⁶⁵ The “black pool” created by the River Poddle for which Dublin was named was the site of the docks. Wallace, “Dublin in the Viking Age,” in The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland, 161.
arranged for her to travel with some merchants to Ulster the following morning.

The sound of someone whistling a familiar tune broke the morning stillness. Róisín climbed down from the palisade and nearly tripped over Lorcán.

“Woah, there, Róisín,” he held her arm to steady her. Róisín straightened, blushing slightly.

“Are you off, then?” she asked, eyeing his travelling cloak.

Lorcán nodded in response. Silence hung between them like the overpowering smoke from a peat fire in a closed-up house,\textsuperscript{166} broken by the singing of a dreān from beyond the walls.\textsuperscript{167} Lorcán cleared his throat.

“I’m glad I came across ye afore I left,” he muttered. Róisín smiled.

“I’m afraid I don’t have the time to tell you another story, if that’s what you’re after,” she teased. Lorcán pouted, looking absurdly disappointed.

“Another time, then,” he grinned in reply, then bowed. “God bless ye, Róisín. May our paths cross again, by the grace of Heaven.”

Róisín bowed back, saying “Saint Patrick guard you from harm, Lorcán.” He nodded, then turned towards the town gates. Róisín watched his retreating back, feeling unexpectedly sad.

\textbf{Dublin, April 9, 1912}

It had been an ordinary enough day – Rosaleen had gone to school, home for lunch, Mass with Mam after classes, then work at MacMurray’s, and finally the local grocery.\textsuperscript{168} It had been as dull as a plate of unsalted potatoes as Rosaleen fetched sugar and flour and cloth for the customers. Dull, it was, until Finn Corráin walked in. His brown wool uniform immediately caught her attention, and then his grin, and then his accent.

\textsuperscript{166} Houses in Dublin did not have chimneys, so the only way for the smoke from the indoor fire to escape was through the small single doorway. Wallace, “Dublin in the Viking Age,” The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland, 159.

\textsuperscript{167} A wren (literally “druid-bird”). According to some thirteenth-century manuscripts, there was an Irish tradition of dreānacht (wren-lore), or the belief that the direction from which a wren calls reveals what type of person approaches and what their intention is, and the number of hops of the bird on the ground foretells the number of deaths in the near future. “Dreānacht,” Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language, \url{http://edil.qub.ac.uk/wow}.

“Good mornin’ t’ya, miss!” he greeted her cheerfully with an unmistakable northern brogue. Rosaleen arched an eyebrow.

“Good mornin’,” she responded politely, “What are you looking for?” The soldier’s grin broadened, “Oh, well, I was just lookin’ for cigarettes and playin’ cards, but it seems I found sommat else to look at.” He winked and Rosaleen turned scarlet. Suddenly Mrs. MacMurray was by Rosaleen’s side, looking sternly at the soldier.

“How might we help you?” the shop owner’s wife asked stiffly. The soldier straightened, the grin gone from his face, “Beg pardon, missus. If you have cigarettes and playin’ cards, I’d be much obliged.” Mrs. MacMurray sniffed, looking the soldier up and down.

“Go on and fetch them, then, Rosaleen. Be sharp about it – I’d prefer to get this young scoundrel out of my shop!” she ordered, not bothering to lower her voice. Rosaleen saw a hurt look pass over the soldier’s face. She knew that Mrs. MacMurray was a rather belligerent nationalist, but it didn’t seem fair to be so rude to the soldier just because it was his job to serve the King.

Rosaleen packed up his things, and handed them over. As he took them, the soldier whispered, “Rosaleen, is it? Lovely name. I myself got a sister back home named Violet. I’m Finn, Finn Corráin.”

“Pleased to meet you, Finn Corráin,” Rosaleen replied with a smile, “I’m sor—” But Mrs. MacMurray had returned from the backroom with a hard look on her normally kindly face, and with a regretful nod, Finn left the shop.

As Rosaleen headed home later that day to help Mam with dinner, she sang softly to herself,

“I wish I was on yonder hill,
’Tis there I’d sit and cry my fill,
’Till every tear would turn a mill,
Is go dté tú mo mhúirnín slán.
I’ll sell my rod, I’ll sell my reel
I’ll sell my only spinning wheel,

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To buy my love a sword of steel,
Is go dté tú mo mhúirnín slán
Siúil, siúil, siúil a rún
Siúil go—”

Suddenly, she heard hurried footsteps and then her name shouted. Turning, she saw Finn galloping towards her.

“Hello,” he said breathlessly, stopping before her, his cap askew. “Hiya,” Rosaleen giggled.

“I didn’t get to say goodbye properly, or even really talk to you earlier, so here I am!” Finn explained brightly. Rosaleen waited.

“Er, so... you’ve been workin’ in the shop long?” he asked after a pause.

“Only a few months. How long have you been in Dublin?”

“Just a few months myself, comin’ from just outside of Belfast. I suspect me accent gave me away, dinnit?”

Rosaleen smiled. Another pause, this one even longer. She heard a wren chirping in the distance.

“I’d best be on my way home – I’ve got to help my Mam with dinner.”

“Of course!” Finn exclaimed, looking guilty, “I beg pardon for keeping you, Miss Rosaleen.”

“It’s quite alright,” she said with a smile, turning to go, “Good day t’you!”

“Maybe I’ll see you at the shop again sometime!” he blurted out. Rosaleen just smiled and continued homeward, telling herself that her cheeks were pink only because of the chill breeze.

Because of her new job, she was no longer able to attend Man’s meetings at Miss O’Farrelly’s home, but Mam had brought news for her this week.

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170 Traditional Irish song “Aiúil a Rún (Walk My Love).” The Irish translates to “And may you go safely, my darling/ And may you go safely, my darling/ Go, go, go, my love/ Go quietly and go peacefully.” “Siúil a Rún,” Celtic Lyrics Corner, accessed Dec 1, 2016, http://www.celticlyricscorner.net/clannad/siuil.htm.
“Miss O’Farrelly had something for me to ask you,” Mam said as Rosaleen hung up her coat.

“What is it?” Rosaleen asked, wondering what the professor could possibly want with her.

“Well, as it turns out, she’s been making inquiries about your school standing and such. And it seems she was pleased with what she found. She wants you to work at the University College as a typist and help her with her own studies and work. After a few years, she hopes you’ll enroll in classes yourself.”

Rosaleen froze, staring at Mam, who was beaming.

“Mam?” she whispered.

“Oh, my Rosaleen,” Mam gathered her into a hug, “I’m so proud of you. ’Tis a great honor, and a wonderful opportunity. I had no idea that was why Agnes asked me all those questions about you, and it ’twas the hardest thing in the wide world, waiting for her to be sure so I could tell you.”

“But the University College...” Rosaleen babbled over Mam’s shoulder.

“Oh, hush now, don’t you start a-worryin’,” Mam released her from the hug, wiping her eyes, “We’ll sort that all out. Now, I’ve already talked to your father and of course he was pleased as a cat in the cream, so you have his permission to write an answer to Miss O’Farrelly as soon as you can. Why don’t you start that – oh, there’s your father now! And Donal!” Mam hurried off to greet the menfolk and tell them the news.

Dad came rushing in to the sitting room, belting out a modified version of “The Star of the County Down.”

“From Dublin Bay down to Ashton Quay
From Galway to County Down
No maid I’ve seen like my brilliant Rosaleeeeeeeen
That I met in Dublin town!”

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Rosaleen laughed as he clumsily waltzed her around the room, singing terribly off-key, his hat still on his head. Mam, giggling, plucked it off and swatted him with it.

“Oh, stop that, Nathan, you’ll break somethin’, I’m sure of it. Come now to supper, you lot, it’s nearly ready.” She chuckled, heading to the kitchen. Dad bowed to Rosaleen.

“**My little scholar,**” he said proudly, following his wife.

Donal remained in the room with Rosaleen. She suddenly felt a chill in the air.

“Well,” Donal said after a moment, not looking at her, “That’s it then.”

“That’s what?” Rosaleen asked, trying to keep his mood from ruining the shining moment.

“You’re one of them, now,” Donal muttered, “You know how they are at the college, Brit-lovers all alike.\(^{173}\) The end of the precious Rosaleen, the proud, little Irish rose of the O’Donovan family.” Rosaleen stared at him, breathless and trembling with anger.

“No,” she said heatedly, “No, Donal, it has nothing to do with that. The whole world doesn’t revolve around Home Rule and Sinn Fein\(^ {174}\) and your crazy friends. I’m doing this for me, for my life. And I’ll have you know that I met a perfectly decent Irish soldier of the British army today. In fact, he was a good sight more decent than you. You can’t just hate an entire people because their government has rotten laws. You need to grow up and see that, Donal, before you do something foolish.”

“Rosaleen!” Mam trilled from the kitchen. Rosaleen took a deep breath, and then fixed a smile on her face before heading to the kitchen, leaving Donal behind.

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\(^{173}\) Donal is confusing University College Dublin, which was known for its emphasis on Gaelic studies and its professors involved with the Celtic Revival, with Trinity College, which had a much more conservative and English-favoring tradition. Susan M. Parks, “Higher education, 1793-1908,” *A New History of Ireland: Ireland Under the Union II, 1870-1921*, ed. W.E. Vaughan. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 568.

~Chapter Three: The Foggy Dew~

Now, the brave leaders of the Easter Rising, for all their follies in planning, certainly got one thing right: they remembered the ladies. Padraig Pearse himself read the Proclamation of 1916, which was addressed to “Irishmen and Irishwomen.” And it wasn’t just in name – no, those daughters of Ireland were fighting side-by-side with Ireland’s sons that fateful Easter. But seemingly, the scholars who write such learned histories have indeed forgotten our ladies. Oh, sure you can find tomes on Pearse, Connolly, Diarmada, Clarke, MacDonagh, Ceannt, and Plunkett as easily as finding a Guinness at a Dublin pub. But it takes a wee bit more searching to find the women, like Markievicz and Skinnider, and you can near forget about the women under their leadership. Not that I’m saying all the lads in the Irish Volunteers can be named as easily as the Apostles, but goodness knows there are enough songs about them and their deeds for fair Erinn. But the women who raised the money, smuggled the guns, kept the secrets, patched the wounds, and battled alongside them? Hardly a trace.

‘Tis truly a pity such scholars have neglected the bold daughters of Erinn. Why, I’ve heard tell of stories to rival any fanciful novel! Women dressing as men to aggravate the Brits plaguing Dublin, hiding bomb detonators in a hat of the latest fashion, feigning disinterest by working on a lace doily while British soldiers raided her home, the papers they were searching for hidden in her skirt lining… indeed, stories seem to make my job too easy, so little livening up they need!

But, sadly, in the tragic wake of the Rising, feminists faced increasing hostility. Angry, frightened men fighting for a new order needed stability somewhere in their lives, and they wanted it at home.

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175 Irish song about the Easter Rising of 1916.
176 “Poblacht Na h-Eireann, The Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to the People of Ireland, IRISHMAN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom…” Poblacht Na h-Eireann, accessed November 15 2016, http://www.easter1916.net/proclamation.htm; see appendix for a copy of the Proclamation.
177 Thomas Clarke, Padraig Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Joseph Plunkett, Éamonn Ceannt, Seán Mac Diarmada, and James Connolly all led different aspects of the 1916 Easter Rising and signed the 1916 Proclamation, which announced the birth of the Irish Republic and Irish National Government and called all Irish men and women to assert their right “to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies.” “The Signatories, The Executed,” The Proclamation 1916, accessed November 15, 2016, http://the1916proclamation.ie/the-signatories-the-executed/.
178 All of these exploits are mentioned in the memoir of Skinnider. Margaret Skinnider, Doing My Bit for Ireland (New York: The Century Co., 1917).
179 Lisa Weihman’s article “Doing My Bit for Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising,” argues that women who played a “non-feminine” role in rebel activities (including fighting and dressing men’s uniforms) were seen as a threat to the legitimacy of the cause, and so were left out of the narrative even then. Subsequent historians have followed suit, either underestimating the role of women or leaving their experience out of the conversation altogether. With a growing interest in women and gender studies, more scholars have directed their
Women threatened how the world viewed their cause – in those days, ‘fightin’ like a girl’ ‘twas an insult. The leaders who had viewed the rebellion as a feminist statement as much as a national one were dead, the cause disheartened, and the memory of women fell by the wayside.\(^{180}\)

And it nearly goes without sayin’ how women scarcely grace the pages of the manuscripts of old. After the goddesses and enchantresses of old, Ireland apparently lost her womenfolk.\(^{181}\) Even the queens, Gormlaith and Sláine, hardly get in a word edgewise,\(^{182}\) and they’re beaten for their trouble when they do.\(^{183}\) Perhaps ‘tis true that war was mostly a man’s world, but I don’t believe for a second that those army camps were nothing but a mass of men. Women might not have been in front of the armies, but I can promise ye that women were behind them.

And just so, our Rosaleen and Róisín, as well as countless other women, were right in the thick of it, as we shall see…

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\(^{180}\) Many of the women who fought in the Rising never spoke of their experiences after it for fear it would damage their professional and personal prospects. Margaret Ward, “The Proclamation of the Republic, Easter 1916, was ‘the only instance … where men fighting for freedom voluntarily included women’ (Hanna Sheehy Skeffington),” Socialist History (2003), 85.

\(^{181}\) “Despite the prominence of women in early Irish sagas and the consequent attention accorded them by modern commentators it is widely recognised that the historical documents of the medieval period give them scant space.” Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, “The Banshenchas Revisited,” in Chattle, Servant, or Citizen, ed. Mary O’Dowd and Sabine Wichert (Belfast: W & G Baird Ltd, 1995), 70.

\(^{182}\) The few scholarly studies of Gormlaith and Sláine are from a literary standpoint, and I was unable to find any historical analyses of their role in the conflict. Máire Ni Mhaonaigh, “Tales of Three Gormlaiths in Medieval Irish Literature,” in Ériu 52 (2002).

\(^{183}\) Sláine is mentioned twice in the account of the Battle of Clontarf, in which she mocks her husband Sitric’s forces and he hits her. Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh, trans. James H. Todd (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 193.
Dublin, April 17, 1916

Rosaleen hurried down Sackville Street, her basket suddenly hanging heavier on her arm as she passed the British soldiers\(^{184}\) by the GPO.\(^{185}\) She smiled demurely at them, lowering her eyes as she walked by, but not before she saw their appreciative looks. If only they knew how fast her heart was beating, and not from the pangs of romance. In her basket were the many rounds of ammunition from Cork that had been smuggled to Mr. MacMurray the night before.\(^{186}\) Rosaleen had been tasked to carry it to the Countess Markievicz’s home across the River Liffey, a journey she’d been making often in the past few months.\(^{187}\) Her age, sex, and job in the shop had made her the perfect courier.\(^{188}\)

“Miss Rosaleen?” She recognized the northern accent before turning around.

“Oh, hello, Finn!” she said, smiling and hoping she came off as pleasantly flustered instead of panicked. The young soldier grinned back, his cap askew. As usual.

“How have you been? I haven’t seen you in a few days, though I keep meaning to stop by the store.” Rosaleen noticed his comrades nudging each other and whispering. She also noticed their now displeased looks and decided to ignore them.

“Quite well, thank you,” she said breezily, “Yes, we’ve been quite busy, but, um...” she trailed off. There was a pause as a tram rattled by.

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\(^{184}\) The Royal Irish Rifles were stationed in Dublin before shipping out to Europe for WWI. They, the Royal Irish Lancers, Sherwood Foresters, Royal Irish Regiment, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and the Dublin police force were all called in to fight the rebels in the Rising. “British Soldiers Killed in the Rising,” irishmedals.org, accessed November 18, 2016.

\(^{185}\) GPO stands for the General Post Office, located on O’Connell Street, the main street that runs through Dublin. GoogleMaps.

\(^{186}\) Margaret Skinnider discusses the supply and gun running done by women couriers for the Irish Volunteers. Skinnider, Doing My Bit for Ireland, 42.

\(^{187}\) Skinnider describes the Countess Markievicz’s home as a headquarters for the Irish Volunteers. Skinnider, Doing My Bit for Ireland, 47.

\(^{188}\) Women were used as couriers by the Irish rebels because British soldiers’ were less suspicious of women, and they could easily hid weapons, money, and correspondence in their skirts. Weihman, “Doing My Bit for Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising,” 235.
the sound of the tracks not loud enough the cover the shouts from a few of the teenage boys on the tramcar.189

“Go back home, bloody soldiers!”

“Damn Brits!”190

Rosaleen blushed as Finn glanced at his passing hecklers.

“They seem to forget that many of us are just as Irish as they are, even if we wear a royal uniform,” he remarked mildly.

“Um, yes, well, I really must be off,” she said, not looking at him, “Mrs. MacMurray needed this delivered, and I should return soon. It was lov-

“Please, let me carry that,” Finn said gallantly, reaching for the basket. Rosaleen jumped back.

“Oh, no, I-I couldn’t,” she said, smiling broadly to cover up her overreaction as Finn looked at her in confusion, “I wouldn’t want to get you in trouble or-or, well, lovely to see you. Goodbye!”

She all but ran away, not waiting for his farewell. Once she passed the Parnell Monument, she paused to catch her breath.191 That had been close.

Though, if she thought about it, maybe her beating heart wasn’t reacting only to that close call. She resumed her purposeful walk, trying to banish any lingering thoughts of Finn’s smile.

**Howth,**192 **Spring in the Twelfth Year of King Brian’s Reign**193

Róisín paused a moment by the stream, setting down the bucket she had just filled with its clear water. Here she could steal a few moments from the chaos of the army camp, with its clatter of spears and shields, men reeking of sweat and blood,
the screams of the wounded and captives, the constant movement and noise.

Róisín recalled how her stomach had churned at these sights and sounds during the first weeks of the campaign. Watching the men march along in a parade of glory, shield bosses bright and men shouting victory cries, Brian Boru and his sons at the head, Róisín had been surprised at the blood that rose in her as well - for a moment she longed for the chance to pick up her own spear and shield, and charge at the invading foreigners to reclaim Erin for her true sons and daughters.

She now shook her head at her own folly. How that pretty picture had faded after the first raid. She’d seen injured men before, and heard the panicked screams of the newly-enslaved, but never in such numbers. Somehow the tales of Fionn MacCool and his men never quite captured that part of battles. She had made herself numb to these horrors, and it was only at moments like this, when she stood alone by the rushing water with nothing but the blue heavens overhead and green ground beneath her feet, did she realize how long it had been since she’d taken a deep breath.

With a sigh, she hoisted her bucket and headed back to the camp. Old MacLaig had been quite irritable, and the dust stirred up by the men and horses had set him coughing again. Róisín felt as though she did nothing but fetch water for his wearied voice. Still, she had learned much from him, and she was

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195 The practice of making captives from war into slaves was used by both Irish and Vikings. Dublin was a central point for the slave trade, so Róisín would have been familiar with the practice. “10 Unmissable Objects from Clontarf 1014,” National Museum of Ireland, accessed November 17, 2016, http://www.museum.ie/Archaeology/Exhibitions/Current-Exhibitions/Clontarf-1014/10-Unmissable-Objects-from-Clontarf-1014.


197 MacLaig has been identified as Brain Boru’s chief bard (Kinkora). In early medieval Ireland, “bards” were organized in a complex hierarchical system of professionals. These men of learning were divided into baird and filidh, of which the filidh were ranked higher in society as their poetry (called seanchas) was derived from history and mythology of the ancient Gaels. They were divided into different offices – the draoi (druid), fili (poet-seer), breitheamh (lawgiver), and seanchaidh (historian). The function of the baird and filidh were to compose either bardic verse which eulogized and memorialized great people and deeds or seanchas of ancient higher learning. The baird found patronage in the courts of kings and lords, both to entertain and to record events under their patron. John O’Kane Murray, Lessons in English Literature (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co, 1887), 305; John MacInnes, “Medieval and post-medieval Ireland and Scotland” in “Bard,” Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed November 16, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02026.

198 Bardic verse was composed with an elaborate metric system and language of classical Gaelic, and baird and filidh were formally taught as apprentices under a professional for a period of about seven years. MacInnes, “Medieval and post-medieval Ireland and Scotland” in “Bard,” Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online.
grateful to be under his protection, particularly around all of these men.\textsuperscript{199}

She had just turned when she heard cheery whistling. Recognizing the tune, she spun around, drawing a little knife she had filched from a drunken warrior earlier in the campaign. He had tried to grab her and had slapped her when she shoved him away, so she felt her little theft was justified.

“Who's there?” she called as the water from the dropped bucket seeped into her shoes,\textsuperscript{200} still not believing her ears.

“Ach, Róisín, I'm wounded. Ye didn't remember me little tune?” Lorcán emerged from behind a cluster of rocks on the other side of the stream. Róisín stared, surprised despite recognizing his rendition of ‘Dúlamán.’

“I did recall it, I'll thank you very much,” she retorted, still holding the knife, “I just didn't believe that even you would be stupid enough to be here.”

Lorcán scoffed, “Ye're one to talk. What's a pretty, young, unmarried lass like ye doin’ amongst all those hardened warriors?” He paused, and then asked in a would-be casual tone, “Ye aren't married to one of 'em, now, are ye?”

Róisín rolled her eyes, ignoring the blush that crept over her cheeks. “I'm not, not that it's any of your business. I'll have you know that I'm under the tutelage of the King's fili.”\textsuperscript{201}

Lorcán looked impressed. “So ye did it, now, did ye? And now ye're helpin' him compose those tales about battles and such. Who would've guessed?” He shook his head, grinning broadly in a way that made Róisín fight back her own smile.

“Never mind that, what in the name of St. Columba\textsuperscript{202} are you doing this close to our camp?” Róisín hissed, looking around. Now Lorcán rolled his eyes.

“I thought I'd drop by for a bite of supper, seein' as your lot just raided Howth. I'm sure they plundered all the best

\textsuperscript{199} Early medieval Irish social structure: women lived and operated under male protection, usually a father or husband. Bitel, \textit{Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland}, 111.

\textsuperscript{200} Shoes in medieval Ireland were made out of leather laced together. National Museum of Ireland-Archaeology, Dublin, “Viking Ireland exhibit,” June 2016.

\textsuperscript{201} Róisín is currently in her seven-year training under MacLaig to be a professional bard, though she uses the term \textit{fili} (singular of \textit{filidh}) because it denotes a higher rank. MacInnes, “Medieval and post-medieval Ireland and Scotland” in “Bard,” \textit{Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online}.

\textsuperscript{202} One of the “big three” of Irish saints, St. Columba is famous for the founding of many monasteries, including the one at Kells that produced the famous \textit{Book of Kells} and one on the isle of Iona, off the coast of Scotland. “St. Columba,” \textit{Catholic Online}, accessed November 19, 2016, \url{http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php? saint_id=419}.
cows,” he said dryly. “I'm scoutin', o' course, Róisín. Don't ye go and tell on me now.” She glared at him. “I should,” she said threateningly, but without any real conviction. “Aye, just as I should kill ye or carry ye off or sommat equally unpleasant,” he retorted lightly, “But I won't. I've no quarrel with ye.”

Róisín sighed, and sheathed her knife. Lorcán grinned, and precariously crossed a few stones to reach her side of the stream. “It's good to see ye, Róisín,” he said, still smiling, but very sincerely. She softened, and smiled back. “It's good to see you too, Lorcán. I'm glad you've managed to stay out of too much trouble.”

“Oh. Aye, well, that's debatable.” Lorcán's grin slipped a little, and Róisín saw a look in his eyes that she recognized from many of the soldiers returning from the latest battle or raid. Róisín hesitated, wanting to comfort him, but Lorcán blinked and looked back down at her. “Actually, it's a blessin' I've run into ye,” Lorcán mumbled, “I haven't been able to stop thinkin'—well, ye can make quite an impression.”

Róisín felt herself blushing again, but kept her face impassive. She refused to admit aloud that she had also often thought of him. “I have sommat for ye,” he said, digging through a pouch at his belt, “'Twas given to me for luck, but Heavens knows I've been given enough tokens for good fortune, and- ah ha!” He pulled out a small brooch, made of twisted silver in the shape of a small cross with a blue stone at its center. Róisín was stunned by its craftsmanship. Chuckling at the look on her face, Lorcán reached for her hand and dropped the brooch in her open palm. “May it bring ye fortune and the blessings of all the saints,” he said softly, closing her hand around it.

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205 Bitel argues that women were never directly targeted by men in wars or feuds but instances of rape, assault, and abduction still occurred, particularly in during unstable times caused by war. Bitel, *Land of Women*, 223.

206 Description based on the Kite Brooch, found in Waterford, Ireland, thought to be from the late eleventh or early twelfth century. Waterford was the first town in Ireland to be founded by Vikings, and many Irish-Viking artefacts have been discovered there. The Kite Brooch is gilded, but many other Hiberno-Viking brooches were only silver, given its prolific trade at the time. Máire and Liam de Paor, *Early Christian Ireland* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), 156.
“Lorcán, I can't take this!” Róisín protested, “It's, well, it's beautiful and far too fine for the likes of me! Please, I cannot accept such a gift!” But Lorcán refused to take it back.

“Consider it advance payment, then,” he said with a grin, “for that great tale ye’re to sing about me some day. Tell the world how bravely and boldly I fought, and what a handsome warrior I was. There, ye won't even have to make anything up for that bit.” Róisín laughed. 

“Alright, though I think I might need to change some of the details,” she retorted with a grin, “Thank you, Lorcán.” He shrugged, smiling shyly. Suddenly, a horn sounded from the camp.

Lorcán was immediately alert.

“I've best be off.” He gazed at Róisín, wavering, “Róisín... take care of yerself. Saints guard ye.”

“And you, Lorcán,” Róisín whispered back, “Please be careful. God bless you.” He nodded, then bounded back across the stream and took off like a hound over the hill. Róisín watched him go, clutching the brooch and whispering into the spring breeze,

O great Mary,
Mary, greatest of Marys,
Most great of women, Queen of the angels, Mistress of the heavens...

Dublin, April 20, 1916

Countess Constance Markievicz’s home on Leicester Street seemed even more mad than usual. Rosaleen was nearly knocked off her feet as she entered by a youth in an Irish Volunteer’s uniform. 

“Oof! Beg pardon, miss!” he yelped, setting her straight before dashing off through the gate. Rosaléen let herself in the front door, knowing Madam wouldn’t mind. Inside, the chatter of excited voices

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208 From the Litany of Mary, thought to be composed in the eighth century. “Ancient Irish Prayer to the Blessed Virgin,” The Furrow 2, no. 8 (1951): 451.

209 “The Irish Volunteer Force (IVF) was a paramilitary body publicly launched in Dublin on 25th November 1913... the 1,600- strong rebel force in Easter week contained 1,300 Volunteers and over 200 from the Irish Citizen Army; this composite garrison was designated by the insurrectionary leaders as ‘the Army of the Irish Republic.’” “The Irish Volunteer Force/Irish Republican Army (IRA),” BBC Wars & Conflicts: 1916 Easter Rising Profile, accessed November 16, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/easterrising/profiles/p016.shtml.

210 Margaret Skinnider always refers to Countess Markievicz as “Madam.” Skinnider, Doing My Bit for Ireland, 26.
overwhelmed her. Peering around, Rosaleen saw many familiar as well as strange faces. The fresh-faced Mr. Padraig Pearse was engaged in a lively debate with the worn but dignified-looking Countess, dressed once again in a man’s uniform.211 Rosaleen looked on it enviously – she had wanted to join the women who marched in men’s clothes with the Irish Volunteers, but both Mam and Dad had forbidden it.212 Hovering at Madam’s elbow was Miss Margaret Skinnider, looking at her idol with her usual awestruck expression.213 Rosaleen walked towards the back of the house, smiling at a few of the other women couriers she knew from the parish. In the dining room, Kathleen Clarke sat with papers scattered in front her, looking frustrated as she pushed her frizzy curls away from her face.214 Rosaleen paused, then ventured in.

“Anything I might help you with, Mrs. Clarke?” she asked. The older woman looked up, startled, then grinned.

“Hello there, Rosaleen! Oh, for the last time, call me Kathleen, wontcha? We’re certainly acquainted enough at this point.” Rosaleen nodded shyly, still not used to this energetic woman’s friendliness. Kathleen sighed, looking at the scrawl on the papers in front of her.

“I’m about to go cross-eyed from all these numbers. I know ‘tis important work for the cause and the men, as Thomas so kindly keep reminding me, but sometimes this accounting drives me half mad.”215

“I could split the stack with you,” Rosaleen offered, “I’ve had a fair bit of practice working in the MacMurrays’ store.”

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211 Photo in Skinnider’s memoir shows Markievicz dressed in a brown wool uniform jacket, pants, and boots, with a pistol and large feathered hat that was fashionable for ladies at the time. Skinnider, Doing My Bit for Ireland, 14.

212 Skinnider speaks of her own experience dressing in Irish Volunteer uniform and patrolling the streets with the other male members, and mentions other women who similarly dressed in men’s uniforms. Skinnider, Doing My Bit for Ireland, 40.


214 Kathleen Clarke’s husband, Thomas Clarke, was one of the leaders of the Rising, and her brother, Ned Daly, was also involved; “A Revolutionary Woman… Kathleen Clarke,” Stories from 1916, accessed Nov 14, 2016, http://www.storiesfrom1916.com/1916-easter-rising/kathleen-clarke/.

215 Thomas would not allow Kathleen to participate in the Rising, saying that it would be up to her to administer financial aid to the wives and families of the dead rebels after the rebellion. She was also pregnant at the time of the Rising, but lost the baby soon after the events following the rebellion, namely the execution of her husband and raids on her house. Kathleen Clarke, Revolutionary Woman: 1878-1972, An Autobiography, ed. Helen Litton (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 1991), 59.
“Wouldya?” Kathleen looked up, relieved, “Ah, God bless ye, Rosaleen. Both Thomas and Ned can go on and on about how hard their work is, but I’d like to see them wrestle with these bloody papers for an afternoon!”

Rosaleen clucked her tongue in sympathy, “My brother Donal is the same way. Always so dismissive of letters and numbers, he is. I’ll be just a moment, I’m to find my mother, but then I’ll be back to help.”

“Last I saw she was upstairs in the study,” Kathleen said helpfully.

Rosaleen headed up the stairs and down the hallway. Passing an open door, she glanced inside and spotted one of the courier girls – Min, she thought her name was – with Sean MacDiarmada… locked in a passionate kiss. Rosaleen turned scarlet and hurried past, praying to all the saints that they hadn’t noticed her. In her embarrassment, Rosaleen paused outside the study room door to collect herself. She paused before entering, hearing not Mam’s sweet voice, but the hushed conversation of several men.

“…positive the arms have shipped from Germany, then?”

“Aye, and Casement said they’d be delivered to Tralee by Holy Thursday. He’s a sly bastard, that one – slipping guns under the very nose of the English!”

“An’ you’re sure the lads there know where to meet him?”

“Ah, quite your frettin’, you’re worse than me ol’ Mam, God rest her soul!”

“Well, that’s the arms then. Everybody knows their orders. Keep your lads on alert, but don’t let them suspect too much, now. All we can

216 Mary Joseph “Min” Mulcahy was the girlfriend of Sean MacDiarmada, one of the leaders of the Rising. In terms of social conventions, these two normally wouldn’t have engaged in such risqué behavior, but in such dangerous times in such a bustling house, who’s to say the excitement didn’t cloud their judgment. Min Mulcahy account in *Erin’s Tragic Easter: the Irish Rebellion of 1916 and its Martyrs*, ed. Maurice Joy (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1916), 372.

217 *The Thursday before Easter Sunday.*

218 Roger Casement joined the Irish Volunteers in 1913 after a serving in the British consulate. He was sent to Germany on behalf of the Volunteers to raise an Irish Brigade from Irish prisoners of war. After trying to deliver a shipment of arms from Germany to Tralee Bay in a German U-boat on Good Friday, 1916, he was captured by British forces. Casement was imprisoned in Pentonville Gaol in London, where he was tried for High Treason and hanged on August 3, 1916. “The Executed Leaders of the 1916 Rising,” 1916 Commemorations, accessed Nov 18, 2016, http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/1916_Commemorations/The_Executed_Leaders_of_the_1916_Rising.html.
do now is keep our mouths shut and pray to God. This Good Friday will be one even Protestants take note of, that’s for certain.”219

There was a pause, and Rosaleen could imagine the men inside crossing themselves. Inside she was reeling. Guns from Germany? Irish Volunteers at the ready? All for Good Friday? Suddenly the increase in activity, the constant presence of some of the foremost men of the movement for Irish independence, the perceptible heightening of tension began to fall together.

They were rebelling. Erin’s sons and daughters were about to rise against centuries of English rule. And it was going to happen here in Dublin, within the week.

Rosaleen first thought of her brother, rash Donal, strutting around in his Irish Volunteer uniform and boasting about his hatred of the English. But Rosaleen knew her brother. He was still just a scared, loud, little boy.220

Mam. She must have suspected something. Though she wasn’t as in the thick of it as the Countess, Rosaleen knew her mother heard and saw more than she let on.

And then for some reason her thoughts flashed to Finn. Any sort of fighting from the Volunteers, and they would surely call in the Royal Riflemen, Irish or no… Rosaleen shuddered at the thought. British uniform or not, that smelled of civil war, and Rosaleen knew from years of reading into Ireland’s past that Irishman fighting Irishman only ever ended in blood and tears.221 She closed her eyes.

219 The Easter Rising was originally planned to take place on Good Friday, but was pushed back to Easter Sunday because of the delay in the shipment of arms from Germany to be delivered by Casement. “The Executed Leaders of the 1916 Rising.” 1916 Commemorations, accessed Nov 18, 2016, http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/1916_Cmemorations/The_Executed_Leaders_of_the_1916_Rising.html.

220 Following the Rising, Elsie Henry wrote, “The Sinn Feiners have been most courageous, especially the unfortunate young boys who were led in all unknowing, and went on through with it, fighting desperately. They were so young, Miss Reed said, and so terrified, pale with fear and agitation.” Elsie Henry, The World Upturning: Elsie Henry’s Irish Wartime Diaries, 1913-1919, ed. Clara Cullen (Portland: Merrion, 2013), 161.

221 Following the infighting between Irish kings in the medieval period, some rulers began recruiting troops for across the sea, specifically the Norse and English. When the English began to attempt to conquer Ireland under the Tudors, the Anglo-Irish were placed above the native Irish, though many English looked down on anyone with Irish blood. The tensions that developed between the (usually) Presbyterian Anglo-Irish and Catholic native Irish often manifested itself in harsh laws and failed rebellions. A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland, ed. Dáibhí Ó Crónín. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee
Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus...

Clontarf, Holy Thursday in the Twelfth Year of King Brian’s Reign

Róisín trotted through the camp, doing her best to stay out of everyone's way. Rumors of dragon-headed ships coming into Dublin Bay had ignited the camp the day before, and it still swarmed like a kicked hive of bees. Suddenly, a young lad with fiery hair collided into her.

“Watch it!” Róisín barked, then softened at the boy's startled look. Apparently the pre-battle nerves were affecting her as well.

“Sorry, Róisín,” the boy piped, and Róisín now recognized him as the son of one of King’s servants. “MacLaig was looking for ye. He’s with the King now, in the King’s tent.”

Róisín raised an eyebrow. She had caught glimpses of the King, but had only been in his presence a handful of times. But she had liked what she had seen. Though an old man, Brian Boru still radiated energy from his bright blue eyes, while his silver hair and beard lent him an aura of wisdom. MacLaig had it easy, spinning the tale of a heroic warrior-king such as Boru. She followed the lad through the camp, and into the King's tent.

Boru was surrounded by his warriors, including his eldest son, Murchad. Róisín bowed to them as she entered, but they paid her no mind, deep in discussion over a map. She walked over to MacLaig, sitting by his harp.

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222 “Hail Mary” prayer, commonly said by Catholics.
223 1014 C.E. The Battle of Clontarf evidently took place on Good Friday, though some historians believe this date to be the result of historical revision, in order to cast Brian Boru as a Christ-like figure. *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, trans. James H. Todd, xxvi.
226 Servants did accompany Brian Boru’s troops to Clontarf, according to sporadic mentions in the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, trans. James H. Todd, xxvi.
“Master, you wanted to see me?” she asked quietly, so as not to disturb the intense debate of the men.

MacLaig looked up distracted. “Ah, yes, fair Róisín, sit at my feet a time.” Róisín obliged. The old bard sighed, and Róisín saw how the months on the war path had taken their toll on him. His dark brown eyes were framed by deeper wrinkles and had lost some of their lively spark. Róisín wondered how heavy a burden remembering the names of the dead could be.

“The sun rises and sets, and we are like the passing dew. And though brightly it shines, quickly too it fades. And so it is with the lives of men.” MacLaig fixed Róisín with a fierce stare. “But the deeds of men – these shine on, unworn by time or sun, like the silver of a warrior’s sword and sheen of a queen’s crown. And thus it is set before us, the filidh of our people.” Róisín felt chills run over her body. No matter how often she heard him speak, MacLaig always had that effect on her. It was said that the angels themselves had blessed him with a golden tongue and silver words.

“Róisín, time moves quickly. I need you to be my eyes and ears. The King’s deeds will be sung by me, but you shall provide voice for the warriors who follow him. Go about the camp. And remember.” Róisín nodded, momentarily breathless at MacLaig’s faith in her. She began to get up to set about her task, but her teacher laid a gentle hand on her shoulder.

“Thank you, Róisín,” MacLaig smiled.

Outside, the grey spring air created a mist like that which had brought the Tuatha de Danaan to Ireland’s shores. Róisín saw men being marshalled into order, eyes shining, mouths shouting in anger and excitement, scarred hands flecked with dirt. And everywhere the glint of steel – strong, keen, clean, azure, and glittering despite the mist. Straight, quick, sharp swords and spears and shields and steel, gripped by the strong, blood-soaked hands of warriors. And Róisín knew that this graceful steel would soon bite and maim and mutilate and kill, just as these men would be bitten and maimed and mutilated and killed.

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230 Though MacLaig’s age is unknown, he died two years after the Battle of Clontarf. Cogadh Gaedhel, xx.

231 I copied this style from Gregory’s stories, since they were based on oral traditions. Augusta Gregory, Lady Gregory’s Complete Irish Mythology (London: John Murray Publishers, 1904).

232 The Tuatha de Danaan, coming from the mists of the North, were the legendary first people to populate Ireland and eventually became the Sidhe (the Faerie Folk). Gregory, Lady Gregory’s Complete Irish Mythology, 17.

233 Inspired by an excerpt from The War Against the Gaels: “steel, strong, piercing, graceful, ornamental, smooth, sharp-pointed, bright-sided, keen, clean, azure, glittering, flashing, brilliant, handsome, straight, well-tempered, quick, sharp swords, in the beautiful white hands of chiefs and royal knights, for hewing and for hacking,
The horror of what lay ahead broke Róisín's trance, and a wave of sound washed over her as the crowds of passing warriors moved though the camp. She could not move, only watch as they filed away, towards their deaths.

**Dublin, April 23, 1916**

It was late, but Rosaleen was still awake. She had crept to the kitchen to read, hoping that would put her to sleep, but she made the mistake of picking up *The Wearing Away of the Fianna*. Perhaps it was because of the hour and the tension that had increased throughout the week, but Rosaleen wiped away tears as the Fianna buried the King of Ulster’s sons, so uselessly killed for revenge.234

Whispering from the parlor drew her attention away from the bloody pages in front of her. Mam and Donal were awake as well.

“–St. Stephen’s Green,” Mam was saying, “Madam will be there, and some of the other nurses.”235

“Did you get a pistol?” Donal asked. Mam chuckled darkly.

“Yes, more’s the pity. I tried to give it back, but Madam told me to keep it. I still think one of you lads would be better off with it than me, given, well...”236

“Yeah, well, at least we know the Brits won’t have them.”

“Where are you to be? Everyone has been so tight-lipped about it all, I didn’t dare ask about your unit.”

“Redmond only told us to report to our stations at dawn,”237 Donal’s voice was rough with either fatigue or fear, “But I heard murmurs about

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234 In “The Quarrel with the Sons of Morna,” some of the Fianna accidentally kill their friends, the sons of the King of Ulster, while hunting down the Sons of Morna over a trivial insult. Gregory, *Lady Gregory’s Complete Irish Mythology*, 354.


237 John Redmond was the military commander of the Irish Volunteers and fought at the GPO; “The Executed Leaders of the 1916 Rising,” *1916 Commemorations*, accessed Nov 18, 2016,
posting up in the GPO.”

There was a pause, and then a rustle of fabric as if Mam had drawn Donal into a hug. More words were spoken, but Rosaleen couldn’t hear them, and she felt as though she didn’t want to. Chills had run over her body at their conversation. It was happening. And Mam and Donal were to be in the thick of it.

“Rosaleen?” Mam gasped, startled as she and Donal walked into the kitchen. Rosaleen stared back at her mother and brother, not knowing what to say.

“You’re going out there, aren’t you?” she whispered after a pause. Mam and Donal exchanged glances.

“Yes, a leanbh,” Mam said, moving from the doorway towards her. Rosaleen jumped up and ran to Mam, burying her face in her shoulder.

“And nothing I can say will stop you?” she asked, hugging her mother as she stared at Donal, tears streaming down her face. Donal’s stoic expression cracked.

“Rosaleen, you know why we’re doing this,” he croaked, his own eyes filling with tears.

“But why you?” Rosaleen sobbed. Mam drew away, placing a gentle hand on her daughter’s cheek.

“Because it’s our fight,” she smiled sadly, “It’s always been our fight. Oh, it’s the big men with the loud words and weapons whose names will be remembered, but it’s our fight.” Her dark brown eyes burned with conviction, “Remember that, Rosaleen.” She could only nod in response. Somewhere, a clock chimed.

“Half four, Mam,” Donal said gently, “We’d best go.”

Rosaleen hugged Mam tightly, and then turned to Donal, who unexpectedly seized her in a giant hug. Her face rubbed against his woolen uniform, a brass button cold against her cheek.


238 General Post Office on O’Connell Street; this was where the heaviest fighting of the Rising took place, where Pearse read the Proclamation of 1916. Githens-Mazer, Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland, 97.


240 Irish and British manner of saying “4:30.”
“Be careful,” she whispered. Donal tightened the embrace so she squeaked.

“You too, little Rose,” he muttered before releasing her. A swift kiss on each of their cheeks and they were out the door. Rosaleen watched them as they were swallowed by the early morning mists, standing unmoving, except for the tears that ran down her cheeks.

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241 Though technically an unofficial military force, the Irish Volunteers had uniforms, partially to justify their right to be treated as prisoners-of-war at the hands of the British. British authorities refused to recognize the uniforms, and so prisoners were charged with treason and sedition against the British government. Githens-Mazer, Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland, 73.
Ye all know what follows. The Battle of Clontarf and the Easter Rising. Children are raised on these tales, right beside their sweet honey and porridge.

They started out gloriously enough. Kings and warriors alike met on the field of Clontarf, steel shining. On the steps of the General Post Office, Pearse read out Ireland’s Proclamation of 1916, addressed to Irishmen and Irishwomen, declaring their freedom.

They were fierce fights. The Battle of Clontarf was a battle like none had seen before. Ships and men and steel and blood. The battle raged for two days before the forces of Brian Boru prevailed over those of Sitric and Morda. The Easter Rising was a brutal urban clash. The Irish Volunteers took the General Post Office, and the British troops bombarded the city. Many a civilian died in the crossfire, and many more cursed the foolish rebels for bringing hellfire to their city.

And they both ended in blood and tears. Brian Boru and his eldest son, slaughtered as they knelt, offering God prayers of thanks. The leaders of the Rising, surrendering to British authorities in hopes of sparing their city and fellow citizens, executed over the following days. Tragic tales of these days abound. Children are raised on them, right beside their bitter salt and greens.

The battlefield at Clontarf, Easter Monday in the Twelfth Year of King Brian’s Reign

Róisín still felt numb. At first she had recoiled at the wounded, the dead, the grief. But now she only saw and heard, and remembered.

They had won the battle. But the King was dead, and so was his son.

And so were many, many others. As warriors gathered their fallen comrades, Róisín recognized the man who had sung so

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242 1014 C.E.
beautifully that some joked that MacLaig had better watch his position in the court. She saw the drunkard from whom she had stolen her knife, the father of the young red-headed lad, the secret sweetheart of one of the servants, and so many others.

And she had seen Lorcán. His blue eyes, open and empty, face scratched and bloodied, a gaping wound in his side. She had fallen to her knees beside him, brushing his fair hair away from his empty eyes as she clutched the brooch he had given her. That's when she had become numb.

They spoke of it as a victory against the foreigners. She had already heard the songs for the glorious Gael. But it wasn't a victory. Róisín thought of Murchad and of Lorcán, and knew it wasn't a victory against any outsider. Irish had fought Irish. She now walked through the fields that had only days before been engulfed in blood and rage. She did not look down, but knew her skirts would be bloodied. In her had she clutched the brooch, so tightly that the engravings might be forever imprinted on her palm. She walked until she came to a copse of ash and birch trees, surrounding a giant, gnarled yew. Róisín slowly looked up at it, memories of Mamáí’s songs about the ancient sacred trees stirring in her mind and the monks’ teachings of the Easter miracle. The yew tree, a symbol of resurrection and renewal. The tree that remained green through the long dark winter, remembering the promise of the sun in its green needles. She approached the trunk, reaching out to its rough bark. In the quiet of the afternoon, the weight of her life seemed to suddenly crash down upon her, and Róisín dropped to her knees among the roots of the yew, sobbing the tears she had never shed for her mother, father, sisters and brothers; for all the friends she had refused to make and the ones she left in Duibhlinn; for the men she had spoken to over the past few weeks in the camp, now lifeless upon the ground; for the King and his

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243 It is estimated that about 4,000 of Boru’s men were killed, in contrast to the 6,000 Viking and Leinster troops that died. “Battle of Clontarf,” History of Clontarf, accessed Nov 14, 2016, http://www.clontarf.ie/history-of-clontarf/battle-of-clontarf.

244 Based on archeological digs, human remains in early medieval Irish society were usually buried with grave goods, though a few instances of cremation have been discovered in Dublin. Maire and Liam de Paor, Early Christian Ireland (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), 136.

245 Fighting against Boru were Sitríc, his mother’s allies (Vikings from the British Isles), and the King of Leinster and his Irish armies. Boru’s forces consisted of Irishmen from Munster and Ulster, but also Viking allies. “Battle of Clontarf,” History of Clontarf, accessed Nov 14, 2016, http://www.clontarf.ie/history-of-clontarf/battle-of-clontarf.

246 The Icelandic saga that includes the Battle of Clontarf mentions a forest into which some of the warriors fled. Brenna-Njals saga, ed. Einar Ol. Sveinsson, Islenzk fornit XII in The Viking Age: A Reader, 467.

247 Irish Gaelic for “Mom.” Google Translate.

248 Celtic mythology included the veneration of trees, each of which had specific power associated with it. The yew tree symbolized resurrection and rebirth. James Lydon, The Making of Ireland from ancient times to the present (London: Routledge, 1998), 86.
son; for Lorcán; and for herself and the uncertain future that lay ahead. 249

Róisín did not know how long she wept before the great tree, but after a time, she wiped her face of tears. Looking up determinedly at the overhead branches and the sky beyond, Róisín made a promise.

I will remember. And others will remember because of me.

Her glance dropped to her now open hand, where the brooch lay in the center of her bloodied, dirtied palm. Róisín thought for just a moment, and then began to dig in the soil amongst the roots. Gently, she laid the brooch in the hole, its silver and gems sparkling up at her.

"I swear it," she whispered, and then gently covered the brooch with dirt.

Róisín allowed herself one more moment, and then rose, brushing dirt and needles from her dress. Taking a deep breath, she turned and made her way back to the camp, allowing herself only a single backwards glance.

A field in Clontarf, May 6, 1916

Rosaleen walked through the thick grass with her arm looped through her father’s. They were silent, as they had been for the past few days, a reversal of when they had tried to fill the quiet left by Mam and Donal before the Rising.

A quiet that still hung in the air, after the Rising.

Donal had been in the GPO. He had been injured, and treated by one of the nurses, 250 but it had been too late for him by the time he got to the hospital. 251

Mam had been arrested, along with over fifty women, including Countess Markievicz and Miss Skinnider. Rumors about what the authorities would do with them changed hourly. 252

249 Following the Battle of Clontarf, because of the death of Boru, his son, and grandson, the unity of his forces fell apart and splintered again into smaller rulers and loyalties. Mael Seachlinn was made High King after Boru, but Sitric Silkenbeard continued to rule over Dublin, and no other Irish High King ever achieved that power and unity of Boru’s reign. H.R. Lyon, The Vikings in Britain (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 108.

250 Nurses serving the Irish Volunteers were located throughout Dublin, but especially at St. Stephen’s Green and the GPO. It was Elizabeth O’Farrell, a nurse, who delivered the message of surrender from Padraig Pearse to British authorities. Weihman, “Doing My Bit for Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising,” 229.


252 Of the 3,000 people arrested following the Rising, seventy-seven were women, most of whom were released on May 9. Six were sent to prisons in England, including Countess Constance Markievicz; Ryan, “Furies and Die-Hards,” 259.
Many more were dead. Mrs. MacMurray was hit with a bullet when she went to check on her store. Another man from their street had been shot on his way home.253 Names had trickled in of the rebels who had been killed. And the brutal executions of the leaders were on everyone’s lips.254 

Dad didn’t know, but Rosaleen had been out on the streets during the Rising. Desperate for news about Mam and Donal as gunshots and explosions echoed around the city and unable to sit at home doing nothing, she had headed out for St. Stephen’s Green.

When shots rang out on Baggot Street, she had ducked into a store doorway.256 Three soldiers in Irish Riflemen uniforms ran past her, and she had been shocked to see Finn among by, shouting with his cap askew. And then he was shot in the chest, and Rosaleen watched him fall into the street, his eyes open and surprised. And then empty.257

And now all she felt was numbness.

“You know,” Dad cleared his throat, “nearly nine hundred years ago, Brian Boru met the Vikings in battle in this very spot.”

“Did they?” Rosaleen immediately latched on to this welcome distraction, “Has your lot done any excavations here?”

“No, I’m afraid not,” Dad answered, “’Tis too large a space, unfortunately. However, locals have been known to turn up artifacts now and again. Perhaps we’ll keep a look out.”258

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253 Of the 450 people killed in the Rising, 254 were civilians because of the fighting in the streets between the British soldiers and the rebels. Part of the reason the rebel leaders decided to surrender was because of the civilian death toll. “The Signatories, The Executed,” The Proclamation 1916, accessed November 15, 2016, http://the1916proclamation.ie/the-signatories-the-executed/.

254 All of the signers of the Proclamation were executed – Padraig Pearse and Thomas Clarke on May 3; Joseph Mary Plunkett on May 4; Éamonn Ceannt on May 8; and Seán MacDiarmada and James Connolly on May 12. “The Signatories, The Executed,” The Proclamation 1916, accessed November 15, 2016, http://the1916proclamation.ie/the-signatories-the-executed/.

255 Women were used as couriers during the Rising. Weihman, “Doing My Bit for Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising,” 235.

256 Based on accounts from Elsie Henry’s diary on 26 April 1916 in which she describes walking around Dublin during the Rising; Elsie Henry, The World Upturning: Elsie Henry’s Irish Wartime Diaries, 1913-1919, ed. Clara Cullen (Portland: Merrion, 2013), 146.

257 The official count of casualties in the British forces were 17 killed officers, 46 wounded officials and 86 killed in other ranks, 311 wounded, and 9 missing. Of the policemen, 16 were killed and 29 were injured. “British Soldiers Killed in the Rising,” irishmedals.org, accessed November 18, 2016.

They walked to the edge of a stream. Spotting a large stump, Rosaleen perched herself on it while Dad stared into the babbling brook, looking for all the world like a man considering drowning himself in the few inches of water. Rosaleen looked down, unable to witness his grief as tears trickled down her own cheeks.

It was awful. All of it. And she had no idea what the future held, either for her or Mam or their family or Ireland. She thought of Donal and of Finn, and her heart broke for this breaking land. They might speak of Anglos fighting Celts, but it wasn’t simply that. Erin’s children were killing each other.259

As she wiped her eyes, Rosaleen noticed something glinting by her boot. Bending over, she brushed the dirt away from it. Gently, she lifted her discovery and placed it in her palm, where it shone dully in the afternoon light. It was a small brooch, made of twisted silver in the shape of a small cross with a blue stone at its center. It was beautiful and incredibly old-looking... yet strangely familiar.

“Dad?” Rosaleen called, “Come look at this.”

Her father ambled over, and, eyes alighting on the brooch, gasped.

“Why, Rosaleen, that’s exquisite! My goodness, look at those designs, ah, certainly Celtic with those animal heads but note the probable Viking influence in the more geometric design on the side. I dare say, this might indeed be from the time of Brian Boru himself! Strange to think of how it got here. Mmmmm, yes. Now, if you notice the twisted silver bit there, you’ll see...”260 Rosaleen let Dad’s enthusiasm wash over her as she inspected the brooch, and thought of all the old stories she had grown up with about women who might have possibly worn this work of art. And then she made a promise to herself.

I too will remember, and I too will tell stories. Of my people. Our people – not the leaders, but all those who lived and loved and died. I swear it.

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259 This is foreshadowing the Irish War for Independence, followed by the Irish Civil War, from 1916 to 1923, in addition to the conflict within Northern Ireland up until 1994.
~APPENDIX~

**Character List**

**1000s Duibhlinn**

Róisín Ua Dalaig: originally from west of Ireland and born in 992ce, grew up in Duibhlinn (Dublin) after her family’s deaths, later goes north to train as a bard in the court of Brian Boru

Lorcán mac Morda: son of the King of Leinster (south-east Ireland)

Sitric Silkenbeard: Norseman king of Duibhlinn from 989ce to 1036ce

Brian Boru: High King of Ireland from 1002ce to 1014ce

Gormlaith: married to Brian Boru, mother of Sitric Silkenbeard

Sláine: married to Sitric Silkenbeard, daughter of Brian Boru

MacLaig: chief bard of Brian Boru’s court

**1900s Dublin**

Rosaleen O’Donovan: born in 1893 to a middle-class family in Dublin

Brigid: Rosaleen’s mother, originally from Waterford, part of *Cumann na mBan*

Nathan: Rosaleen’s father, archeology professor at Trinity College, Dublin

Donal: Rosaleen’s older brother

Finn Corráin: Irish Rifleman, soldier in the British army stationed in Dublin, originally from Belfast (northern Ireland)
Countess Constance Markievicz: one of the leaders of *Cumann na mBan*, feminist activist, and leader in the 1916 Rising

Padraig Pearse: one of the leaders and organizers of the 1916 Easter Rising, also the founder of a boys’ school (which Donal attends) and co-author of the Irish Proclamation of 1916
POBLACHT NA H EIREANN.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE,
SEAN Mac DIARMADA, THOMAS MacDONAGH,
P. H. PEARSE, EAMonn Ceannt,
JAMES CONNOLLY, JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

65
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