

TEXT 1

Mam says she can't spend another minute in that room on Hartstonge Street. She sees Eugene morning, noon and night. She sees him climbing the bed to look out at the street for Oliver and sometimes she sees Oliver outside and Eugene inside, the two of them chatting away. She's happy they're chatting like that but she doesn't want to be seeing and hearing them the rest of her life. It's a shame to move when we're so near Leamy's National School but if she doesn't move soon she'll go out of her mind and wind up in the lunatic asylum.

We move to Roden Lane on top of a place called Barrack Hill. There are six houses on one side of the lane, one on the opposite side. The houses are called two up, two down, two rooms on top, two on the bottom. Our house is at the end of the lane, the last of the six. Next to our door is a small shed, a lavatory, and next to that a stable.

Mam goes to the St. Vincent de Paul Society to see if there's any chance of getting furniture. The man says he'll give us a docket for a table, two chairs, and two beds. He says we'll have to go to a secondhand furniture shop down in the Irishtown and haul the furniture home ourselves. Mam says we can use the pram she had for the twins and when she says that she cries. She wipes her eyes on her sleeves and asks the man if the beds we're getting are secondhand. He says of course they are, and she says she's very worried about sleeping in beds someone might have died in, especially if they had the consumption. The man says, I'm very sorry, but beggars can't be choosers.



It takes us all day to haul the furniture on the pram from one end of Limerick to the other. There are four wheels on the pram but one is bockety, it wants to go in a different direction. We have two beds, one sideboard with a mirror, a table and two chairs. We're happy with the house. We can walk from room to room and up and down the stairs. You feel very rich when you can go up and down the stairs all day as much as you please. Dad lights the fire and Mam makes the tea. He sits at the table on one chair, she sits on the other and Malachy and I sit on the trunk we brought from America. While we're drinking our tea an old man passes our door with a bucket in his hand. He empties the bucket into the lavatory and flushes and there's a powerful stink in our kitchen. Mam goes to the door and says, Why are you emptying your bucket in our lavatory? He raises his cap to her. Your lavatory, missus? Ah, no. You're making a bit of a mistake there, ha, ha. This is not your lavatory. Sure, isn't this the lavatory for the whole lane. You'll see passing your door here the buckets of eleven families and I can tell you it gets very powerful here in the warm weather, very powerful altogether. 'Tis December now, thank God, with a chill in the air and Christmas around the corner and the lavatory isn't that bad, but the day will come when you'll be calling for a gas mask. So, good night to you, missus, and I hope you'll be happy in your house.

Mam says, Wait a minute, sir. Could you tell me who cleans this lavatory?

Cleans? Ah, Jasus, that's a good one. Cleans, she says. Is it joking you are? These houses were built in the time of Queen Victoria herself and if this lavatory was ever cleaned it must have been done by someone in the middle of the night when no one was lookin'.

And he shuffles up the lane laughing away to himself.

