

## First Place Fiction ~ Ages 10-13

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### A New Family

The year was 1910 and a cool familiar New York City breeze blew through my long unruly red hair. I began to walk faster and faster. I saw my prize and my stomach grumbled loudly. I was hungry because I hadn't eaten since the day before. Suddenly I was running with a loaf of bread in my arms. I cradled it to my chest but I didn't dare eat any of it until I was out of sight. I didn't hear anything, not even the man yelling "thief, thief!" Silently, I slipped into the shadows and began to eat, savoring the taste of the fresh warm bread in my mouth. Soon, my eyelids grew heavier and heavier as darkness fell upon the city that never sleeps.

I groggily opened my eyes and absentmindedly pushed a long red curl out of my face as the feeling of peaceful sleepiness drifted away. My hand fell to my stomach, which was again grumbling. Apparently, the bread was long gone. I rose and walked out of the alleyway to be greeted by the happy rhythm and din of the awakening city.

I smelled something sweet in the air and I followed the smell until I found myself behind a rather wealthy looking woman wearing a fur coat and carrying a large brown paper bag. It would be dangerous to steal from such an important looking woman but I was dying to know what was inside. I gave in to my rumbling stomach and reached for the bag. As I grabbed for it, I heard a whistle being blown and the woman screaming. As the chaos descended upon me, I started to run, faster than I ever had before. I looked back to see three policemen running after me and blowing ear splitting whistles that rang a piercing tone through the air. I ran and ran until I came to some tracks and saw a train slowly coming toward me. I didn't even think, I just knew that my only chance was to get on that train as soon as I could. I saw an open door on one of the boxcars so I ran along the tracks and I jumped! For a split second time froze. I was in the air and the whole world dissolved into an exhilarating combination of horror and excitement. I landed with a thud just barely inside the door. I lay there for a minute, catching my breath. Beneath and all around me there were bundles of hay, and before long I fell asleep, listening to the rhythmic clacking of the wheels, among the soft, sweet smelling hay pillows.

I awoke to hear whispering voices around me. "Where did she come from?" I opened my eyes to see three puzzled faces staring down at me.

"I think she's awake Newt," whispered the smallest of the three. "Well her eyes are open aren't they" said the tallest, sounding impressed with his own joke and giving the small one a playful jab in the ribs. Resuming his toughness, the tall one nodded to me and said "you got a name?"

"Me name's Alice O'Reilly," I said, showing my thick Irish accent.

"And how'd you get on our freight train?" said the one who hadn't spoken yet. As I related my story, their eyes grew wider and wider until they looked about ready to pop out of their sockets.

"Hey! She's one of us," exclaimed the small one.

The tall one with brown hair and blue eyes said, "I'm Newton, but my nickname is Newt!"

The one with blonde hair and brown eyes added "I'm Larson. They call me Lars for short!"

"And I'm Ben," the smallest one with black hair and big green eyes, exclaimed.

"So, Alice O'Reilly would you like to be in our gang?" said Newt, showing his role as the leader of the group.

"Well, it's not much of a gang with only three people is it?"

"If you joined that would make four!" Newt insisted.

"Aw, but she's a girl!" complained Lars.

"That's blarney" I exclaimed, "I can do anything you can!"

"Blarney? Questioned Ben.

"Oh never mind," I said in a huff.

"Come on Lars, she seems pretty tough," said Newt,

"And she won't put up with any blarney," laughed Ben.

I let out an irritated sigh.

"Well I guess I'm outnumbered," said Lars with a smirk. "So, you in?"

"I'm in," I replied.

I had made new friends and now I was ready for some adventure. As the scenery changed outside the open boxcar door, I began daydreaming and lost track of the conversation.

I was startled when Newt asked me "So how did you get to New York City? You seem a long way from home." The smile faded off of my face as I held back the tears, threatening to come out. I had suppressed those memories long ago, but I had to give an answer to the three boys awaiting an explanation. "Well," I said, blinking back the tears, "Its sort of a long story,"

"We've got time!" said the three boys almost in unison.

I sighed and reluctantly began. "In the year of 1901, I was born. I grew up in Cork, Ireland, right on the coast, in a house overlooking the sea. We didn't have a lot of money but we were happy. When I was 6 my parents decided that they could find a better life for us in America, so we boarded a big ship to Ellis Island. It was a long journey but finally we reached New York. We found a small apartment in the city and my parents found jobs in a factory. Life wasn't terrible but in 1908, all that changed. My parents both caught a disease at the factory and, and..." a tear rolled down my face but I quickly wiped it away, I didn't want them to think I wasn't tough enough to be their friend. I looked away but suddenly I heard a snuffle! I looked over and each boy's eyes had begun to well up with tears of their own similar memories.

I began to giggle through my own tears, soon we all started laughing and all my troubles and bad memories were forgotten in the sudden outburst of laughter. Suddenly the train lurched to a stop!" We all flew forward but luckily the hay cushioned our fall.

"Guys, we have to hurry, you know the drill," whispered Lars.

"Wait, I don't!" I breathed in exasperation.

"Whenever we stop, someone always comes around and checks all the boxcars to make sure the cargo is okay and to make sure people like us aren't hitching a ride on his train. So we have to get off the train now!" Lars instructed hurriedly. Ben made a run for the door but stumbled on a bale of hay, Newt swung him over his shoulder and we jumped to safety just in time. We rolled down the hill where the train was stopped and began to make our way to the town we saw in the distance. Once we reached the town, we were all exhausted and hungry. We

walked around a while but then agreed to split up, try to find food, and then meet back in a bit at the edge of town.

After stealing a few small apples and a banana I found at a fruit stand. I went back behind the old warehouse, where we had agreed to meet. We equally split everything we stole between us and hungrily wolfed it down. Once we had finished, Ben suggested that we head back to the train. "We don't want it to leave without us. It is getting late," he said. We raced back to the train and joked and laughed all the way there. We reached the train, found our boxcar, and climbed in. We sprawled out among the hay, feeling very at home, we sat around and talked and told stories. Eventually, the boys fell asleep but I couldn't make my eyes close. I glanced out the door and rubbed my eyes. I thought "I must be dreaming." Had I fallen asleep? What I saw out the door of the train looked exactly like what I used to see at home in Ireland! At night I would look out and see this very same thing, only now I knew I was in a much different part of the world. I remembered the way that the moon reflected off the water and made it sparkle. For the first time in a long time I felt at home gazing out into the endless ocean, with my newfound family and thoughts of adventures to come.