

COPPERS, CROOKS AND CORRUPTABLES:

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CHAPTER 1

The brick, mortar and lumber walls under a tin roof was a cottage according to the aristocrats in London, but a mansion in contrast to the windowless dwellings it overlooked, occupied by Irish tenant farmers whose dwellings consisted of walls of packed mud, roofs of interwoven straw and a dirt floor. But to Robert Leary, it was a house with many rooms rather than just one that he was proud to be looking after with his father and mother away on business. What that business was, didn't concern the 19 year old lad who was determined to become a man on his own terms once he got 'lettered' as a doctor. Yes, admittedly it was to treat animals and not people, but animals, be they small or large, domesticated or wild, friendly or defensive, they were creatures Robert could better understand and relate to than people.

When Robert's fellow upper middle caste classmates at boarding school in Edinburgh claimed that 'you never know if an animal is hurting or is thinking because it can't talk', he would reply that 'you just have to listen with a more sincere, patient and intelligent set of ears, and eyes'. The dirt poor, illiterate Irish tenant farmers taught him more about animals, and himself as well as more than his American born expatriate mother and English father could. Or did. It was not because Robert considered his privileged parents to be uncaring. They just had more of a...global perspective than he had, for the moment anyway.

Robert's dreams of being effectively Purposeful involved serving others one to one rather than discovering this or that, or achieving that or this, in such a way that what you did affected thousands, or millions of others. But after he would become a veterinary doctor, he could give people he didn't know the knowledge they could use to make life better and possible for animals he didn't know. Yes, to give to the world globally and one to one, at the same time.

Such was what Robert imagined possible when he envisioned his name on the kind of book he was not only reading at the kitchen table of the Leary 'cottage', but trying to absorb in anticipation of getting his formal acceptance to the Royal Veterinary College in London after having taken his entry exam and passing it with flying colors. It was now just a formality to get the approval sent to him by post. His entry into his chosen occupation and Calling secured by his knowledge of animal biology, his father's ability to easily afford the tuition as well as a voluntary contribution to the facility, and his mother's uniquely aristocratic American skill of charming any man into doing what she wants him to without letting him tread on any of her sacred ground. Indeed, Robert was well suited physically for the job of keeping animals alive as long as humanly and humanely possible. He was nearly 6 feet tall, generously muscled, his chin chiseled in the manner of a leading man in any theatre production, with a thick mane of flaming red hair generously flowing down towards his chin accompanied by light blue eyes. Such enabled him to appear to be more 'Viking Irish' than American or English, for reasons he never understood nor were explained to him.

It had been a long night of absorbing the editions of The Veterinarian Journal, the most recent ones he could get anyway after leaving London and taking his entrance exam. Yes, they developed legs after he had read them in the library, and followed him home. But he was, after all, going to go back to London soon, sneak them onto the shelves, good as new. Better than new actually, since he had hand written additional information onto the articles which he got from farmers plagued with major veterinary, and human medical, problems who had little or no money for diagnostics and treatments. Yet, they somehow were able to work medical miracles for their four legged (and perhaps more deserving than two) patients.

The morning sun climbed up into the sky, waking Robert up from a nap which he slipped into three hours ago at the kitchen table downstairs. It shone through a window, a luxury for most of the occupants of the Emerald Isle, providing a view of Patrick Collins. The sixty going on twenty six year old mailman who usually delivered news about the world outside of Cork county from the back of a horse. This time, he was driving a wagon, a tarp over the back. When he dismounted from the buckboard, the most eagerly greeted visitor to the Leary 'mansion' seemed just as ready for retirement as the swaybacked, excessively haired mare pulling the cart. But against the requests of his painful, weak AND abnormally swaying left foot, 'Uncle Patrick' got to the door before Robert could amble to it.

Upon opening the door, Robert noticed something unusual under the sac of mail slung on the mail carrier's shoulder. "A double barrel hand pistol, Mister Collins?" he said with an accent that was part-English, part Irish and part Yankee American, showing his visitor to the kitchen table. "Is there another rebellion going on?"

"Make a man hungry, and he tries to work with others get more food for him and is family, don't ya know," 'Uncle Patrick' said with as heavy a brogue as one could hear in Cork County. He helped himself to a seat, then a half eaten scone from a bowl in the middle of a table and a hearty cynical laugh through his overgrown white mustache, which amounted to more hair than he had anywhere else on his scar filled wrinkled head. "But, deny a man and his family ANY of this!" he proclaimed, his fingers clenched on the scone. "And any man will do somethin'....desperate. Ta feed his family like..." Collins pointed Robert's attention to the windows facing the East, South then North. "Like....what's normally there that ain't there right now."

"Huh?" Robert asked, puzzled.

Collins let out a sigh of pity, shook his head, then pointed his outstretched arm to the East. "Pigs you had there yesterday," he said regarding the empty pen whose floor was nothing but mud. "Chickens that was clucking away that spooked my horse as I drove by" he continued, walking towards South

window, motioning for Robert to follow him to take note of the feathers covering the broken wire fence. "And if that ain't a kick in the head, and the balls," he went on pointing to the most steadily built coral, the wooden gate smashed to pieces. "Athena, yer ma's favorite cow, and Persephany, yours, ain't there..."

"Where are they!" Robert gasped, grabbing hold of two halters and lead lines. "I, we, gotta find them!"

"They's gone, I suspect." Collins said. "Dangerous habit, not keeping yer livestock inside the house like yer tenants do, or used to do when they still had animals they didn't eat yet. And since it's been a year since anyone's been able ta pull a potatoe or anythin' else edible out of the ground. Or steal a boat and net ya can go out ta sea with ta catch fish in an ocean that'll swallow any floating craft around here into the deep six, and..."

"The tenants. MY tenants. They're my friends," Robert proclaimed. "They'll help me find those animals!"

"If ya can find them," Collins pointed out, placing himself between the door and an angry and scared 'protector of the house'. "They's all bugged off. From their farms and houses that ain't got no more animals in them. After, if they was smart, takin' yer animals, and sellin' them fer tickets to a better place. A better continent. America bein' closer than Australia."

"Why!" Robert screamed out. "Why and how could they do this? To me, and my parents, who lowered their rent. And, in some cases, let them pay late. Or not at all! Why did they steal from me? From us?"

"Ta feed their families, lad," Collins explained, fulling knowing that Robert didn't like that form of address.. "A man, or woman, will do anythin' ta feed his or her family. Even if it's at the expense of someone else's family. Selective compassion, don't ya know."

"That's..."

"What's been keepin' YOU with a full belly," Collins asserted picking up a scone from a full bowl, then knocking it on the table. "And with somethin' ta read," he continued, grabbing hold of the veterinary journals. "In a house that's got chairs and beds where ya can rest yer tired ass at the end of a tired day,

or any day instead a dirt floor ta sit on and straw for a mattress. All cause of yer Ma and Dad stealin' what they have to from someone else's plate so it can be put into yers.."

"But..." Robert interjected.

"But nothin'!" Collins barked out, after which he pulled out his hand pistol and shot a round into the floor.

"Yer father's a part time pastor, I grant ya that, and was a peace keepin' Cop at Scotland Yard fer a while. And he don't whip his employees at the textile factory he owns, but the cotton that comes inta there is picked off the ground by slave labor in America. And the sugar refinery he started, the cane comes from Cuba where it's still legal ta import slaves, and sneak them inta the Carolinas don't ya know. And yer Ma...who, I knows, is a vagina ownin' nurse whose smarter than any penis wigglin' doctor.---"

"Also...teaches Irish tenants how to read and write proper, legal English, while they teach her----"

"----Aye, I knows. Or knew. How ta speak and sing in Gaelic, but them times is over fer them, and....you, Robert, Sir, maybe somehow if ya can beat the impossible odds, Doctor Leary." Uncle Patrick reached into his mail bag and pulled out four envelopes. "Ya wants the bad news, the worse news or the maybe good news?"

"And you know which is which because you read them?" Robert pressed as he grabbed hold of the envelopes which were partially open.

"I likes ta be prepared to help people deal with bad news, and not miss opportunities if they's good news I gets to deliver. But, bad or good, depends on what ya does with it, don't ya know."

Robert looked into Collins' steel blue eyes, feeling them becoming warm, and sorrowful. It was the same look that the deliverer of mail for as long as anyone could remember had given Robert's father, mother and himself when news of their 'favorite adventure seeking' son Lawrence was reported to be lost at sea after setting off on Yankee clipper going for whales. Or maybe he was 'missing in action' in the countless number of 'wars against tyrants' started by the English that they won due to casualties inflicted on Irish 'volunteers'.

The first letter was from the Royal Veterinary College in London. "My application to be an animal doctor is rejected!" Robert gasped upon reading it. "Because I 'have a kind heart but expression of kindness and love is inappropriate for proper society and the veterinary profession'? What are they talking about?"

"Someone maybe reported you for lovin' animals too intimately, or maybe buggery with the wrong gender of two legged creatures," Collins said. "Somethin' I don't believe but if someone whose father has more money to donate with a son, or classmate who's got an axe to grind with you and didn't do as well as you did on the exam to get in." "

"Sean Whitestone," Robert blurted out of his mouth, recalling his various 'buds' at boarding school. "Whose girlfriend I 'stole'. Or rather protected from him."

"Or maybe when the admissions board asked you what's more important, the animals, the clients or the profession, ya gave 'em the wrong answer?" Collins proposed.

"Yes," Robert said, recalling the smell of the oak table at the Dean's board room, confessing and relating that the patients were the one's he served first, particularly if their owners were lacked money or social status. Or had the misfortune of being born in the Emerald Isle, like he was, but to a less important family than his.

"Or, ya did too well on the entrance exam," Collins offered, as Uncle Patrick. "Last thing an English teacher or professor or boss wants is a student who starts out bein' smarter than they he is, or could be."

It was a warning Robert's mother gave him when dealing with academic higher ups, and his father warned him about when applying for jobs outside the Ivy Towers. "So, what's in the other letter that opened up on itself?"

"Somethin' about yer Ma," Collins said, wiping tears from his eyes as handed it to Robert. "Put inta print by a writer who wants' to sell his boss' newspapers. The truth of the matter bein' worse than anythin' wrote down there in print." Anger overtook his tortured soul. "Yer Ma. Doc Mary. Raped, beaten ten hung up as a statement against another band of Irish anarchist thugs sayin' they was freedom fighters."

"After she delivered a speech to try to organize a charitable organization to feed, educate and shelter Irish orphans?" Robert asserted.

"An aristocrat married to an Irish turned English landlord is an aristocrat married to an English landlord to them. The murderers were jailed, but then escaped. Probably to New York according to the constable in Cork who they maimed and blinded. But not before he wrote down their names, and did sketches of them," Collins related, handing Robert five sketches of the most despicable faces imaginable outside of hell. "I risked my life cutting your Ma down, then snuck her into a funeral parlor and used their fixer chemicals so's that her flesh don't rot," he continued pointing to the back of his tarped wagon. "And so's if I got robbed on the road by any anarchists, communists or starving tenant farmers, her body ain't gonna be turned into stew. The fate of a whole bunch of dead human corpses during this potato famine that ain't been reported in any newspaper, or confessed to any priest, don't ya know. But I do know that in her Will---"

"---Which was stolen from your bag?!" Robert pressed.

Collins took in a deep breath, held it in his tense chest, then let it out, followed by, "She wants to be buried in her homeland."

"Which she said was here, in Ireland!" Robert yelled back.

"Her other homeland," Collins related. "America. A place called Brooklyn. According to her Will and what your father said about all of this." Collins handed Robert the last envelope.

Robert opened the letter from his father, dated a week after the article about his dead and mutilated mother. The first line read. "A smart man knows when to go into a business, Calling or new country. A wise man knows when to get out. I should have listened to your Uncle Thomas in America earlier than I did. But finally did. Which is why you are reading this while I am on my way to new businesses, new callings and a new country."

The rest of the letter related the economics about all of it, including how and why self-made industrialist John Leary sold his Irish estate to the highest bidder before the land which was unable to grow anything except grass and weeds became completely worthless. Less than worthless, unless of course Robert or his mother could come up with something to give to starving farmers that would enable them to eat grass and turn it into healthy human flesh, like the animals they used to have were able to. As to the textile factories and sugar refineries Robert's father owned, they had been sold to the highest bidder. As to where the funds from those sales went, Robert's father assured his son that they were on their way

to be better invested in a better country. A better country for both dirt poor Irish tenants and 'one bad investment away from becoming like those poor souls' landlords. Poor souls that John Leary said 'couldn't help becoming recipients of misery due to being genetically lazy and stupid', to no fault of their own of course.

As to what Robert should do, he was instructed by his father to buy a ticket to New York with whatever money was stored in the 'country house', providing the locations of such. A place which Robert called home since his coming out of his New York socialite expatriate mother's womb, allowing him, with the birth certificate he had, to be considered an American citizen upon arrival on the better fed and better sheltered side of the Atlantic.

"Whatever money you still have here, I suggests that ya hide it till ya gets to America," Collins advised Robert, as Uncle Patrick.

"And, how much would you charge to take me to the docks since I don't have any animals here that can pull a wagon?" Robert asked the last living sort of relative he still felt he had in the Emerald Isle.

"A promise that you'll become someon' or somethin' that I'll be proud of and you'll be proud of," Collins said with downturned eyes, followed by a bear hug and a farewell credo in Gaelic. "Which means, poorly translated..."

"Be well, and do well, because the other options will get me and others into deep shit," Robert replied, recalling that phrase from his mother. And, as he recalled, from at least three of the tenants who he visited in the last two weeks who were now not there anymore. Who just might be in the same boat as he was to board, though the lodgings en route and once arrived in America would be better for Robert. Or maybe not.