

The Diary of Meaghan How

From the Diary of Meaghan How (#1):

Kilkenny, Ireland.

14th of August, 1846

It is what we feared most! The blight to the potatoes that has hurt so many of our neighbours has finally reached our little plot of land. Ma sent Michael and me to the small field where we grow our potatoes and we could smell the awful rotten stench before we even got there. We frantically dug into the ground, but what we found made me gag. Many of the potatoes were black with the rot and oozed a dark muck. Others were too small and covered in spots. How would we survive? We starved at the best of times and now there would be almost nothing to eat, outside the few eggs our chickens gave and the little milk we got from the cow. Patrick O'Donnel, a boy from a neighbouring cottage, says that this is all an English conspiracy to starve the Irish, so they can be rid of us. They take the best crops, like the corn and the wheat, for their English mouths and leave us with potatoes. He even thinks they poisoned the potatoes, though Ma says that's daft and it's a plant disease.

From the Diary of Meaghan How (#2):

Kilkenny, Ireland.

1st of September, 1846

We had a visit from Callow, Lord Farnsworth's bailiff and the man responsible for collecting the rent. I've had to explain to Michael again that we don't own our house and land but that it is the property of the English lord. Callow says that we are late with our rent and, unless we pay up, he will evict us. Ma begs with him that we have no produce to sell, what with the rotten potatoes and all, and Da still not returned from England. Callow says that it is no business of his and that we have one week to pay up or it will be the workhouse for us all. I hate that man! I don't understand how an Irishman can work for the English like that and be so cruel to his own kind. Ma is kinder! She says that he's only trying to feed his family too.

From the Diary of Meaghan How (#3):

Kilkenny, Ireland.

5th of September, 1846

It is more bad news! Da returned yesterday from England but he's been badly crippled by a kick from a horse that he was trying to shoe. Ma begged him not to but he insisted that he was going to get work with the public works crew that are building a stupid road out in the country. Patrick, the older boy next door, tells me that the English have found ways to pay very low wages to the Irish so they can feel better for taking all of our good food to their own country. The road the men are building leads nowhere useful and it's back-breaking work. Half the men and boys, like Da, are either crippled or sadly weakened from not enough to eat.

From the Diary of Meaghan How (#4):

Kilkenny, Ireland.

12th of September, 1846.

Oh, please Lord, no more bad news! Da managed to keep the cottage for a little longer by selling Clarisse, our cow, and giving the meagre price into the hands of the money-grabbing Callow and his cold-hearted English master. But this morning, Michael was not in his bed and Callow and his men showed up with my brother in irons. He had been caught stealing food on Lord Farnsworth's land, and Callow told us that it would be jail time for him for sure. He's only 12, my ma cried, but nothing could soften the heart of that man. Michael was in tears as they pulled him away down the track. I ran after them, but one of the men kicked me to the ground. Da will get him out, I'm sure of it!

From the Diary of Meaghan How (#5):

Kilkenny, Ireland

20th of September, 1846.

Maybe Michael is better off in Jail! Da is in too much pain to work now and there is precious little to eat. Our two hens have given up laying eggs. Ma says it's because they don't have enough corn to make them happy and she says we'll kill them and have at least one or two meagre meals with meat. We saw the smoke coming from Patrick's

cottage at noon. His da had died working on the road-my ma said his heart gave out-and they could no longer pay the rent. Callow saw to it that a lesson would be sent to us all by burning their little cottage to the ground, with the few sticks of furniture they owned still in it. Patrick's family was lucky themselves, I hear, to get out alive. Ma says that Lord Farnsworth wants us all off the land so he can clear it and make money from the crops that the English will buy.

From the Diary of Meaghan How (#6):

Kilkenny, Ireland

1st of October, 1846.

Michael returned to us today. They let him out early as he's come down with a fever, like many of those in prison, and they want 'to contain the sickness' as Callow told us as they literally dropped him at our door. Heaven help us if it's the black fever that is killing so many people in the countryside around us. 'Typhus' disease, my da called it, and he says that there's little way a man can fight it when his body is already weakened from the starvation. Ma, herself, is not feeling well, with the baby coming and barely not enough food to feed herself let alone the life inside her. Still, she continues to go up to the big house, where Lord Farnsworth lives, to work in the scullery cleaning. It's not much, she says, but she's smuggled a little food out, often the scraps that he feeds to his dogs.

From the Diary of Meaghan How(#7):

Kilkenny, Ireland

2nd of December, 1846

Good news at last! We've heard that Lord Farnsworth and some of the other English lords are arranging passage for us to a country called Canada, far across the ocean. Patrick visited me from the workhouse this morning. I will miss him. He told me that it's an easy way for the English to clear the land. The timber ships come across this way with wood from Canada for the English and would return empty if it wasn't filled with the Irish. It's a cheap and easy way for them to get rid of us, he says! They call these ships 'the coffin ships' because so may die on them from disease and the poor conditions. I know that I will be fine, but I worry about ma and the wee child. My little sister was born early and she's very weak. At least Da and Michael are a little stronger. They will need to be as we pack up our few belongings and make the journey on foot to the west of Ireland. I don't think I will miss it though!