

Irish Girls in the Brisbane Boarding Houses

They came from Cork and Galway, from the Shannon's silver bend,
From the lanes of Clare and Kerry where the rain would never end.
With a letter of introduction and a prayer against the fear,
They stepped into the heat of Brisbane in the summer of the year.

Chorus

Oh, the river carried sorrow as it drifted slow and wide,
And the Irish girls grew quiet with their longing pushed aside.
In the boarding houses' shadows where the southern night would fall,
They whispered homeward memories no one else could hear at all.

Verse 2

They scrubbed the floors at sunrise till their knuckles cracked and bled,
And they boiled the sheets and linens for the travellers newly fed.
With the clatter of the teacups and the footsteps on the stair,
They learned to hide their heartache in the rhythm of their care.

Verse 3

Some men were kind and gentle, some were rough with drink and rage,
And the girls would keep their distance, knowing danger in the age.
But they held their heads with dignity, though weary to the bone,
For the Irish in the colonies often walked their path alone.

Chorus

Oh, the river carried sorrow as it drifted slow and wide,
And the Irish girls grew quiet with their longing pushed aside.
In the boarding houses' shadows where the southern night would fall,
They whispered homeward memories no one else could hear at all.

Verse 4

At night they'd share a candle and a crust of day-old bread,
And they'd talk of turf-smoke evenings and the fields they used to tread.
Of the bells in distant parishes and the songs their mothers knew,
Till the tears came soft and silent in the darkened boarding room.

Verse 5

Some married local tradesmen, few returned across the foam,
Some vanished into Brisban, making Queensland their new home.
But the ones who stayed remembered, in a quiet, steadfast way,
How the boarding houses held them when their hearts were far away.

Final Chorus

Oh, the river carried sorrow as it drifted slow and wide,
And the Irish girls grew quiet with their longing pushed aside.
In the boarding houses' shadows where the southern night would fall,
They kept the flame of Ireland bright, that no one else could see at all.