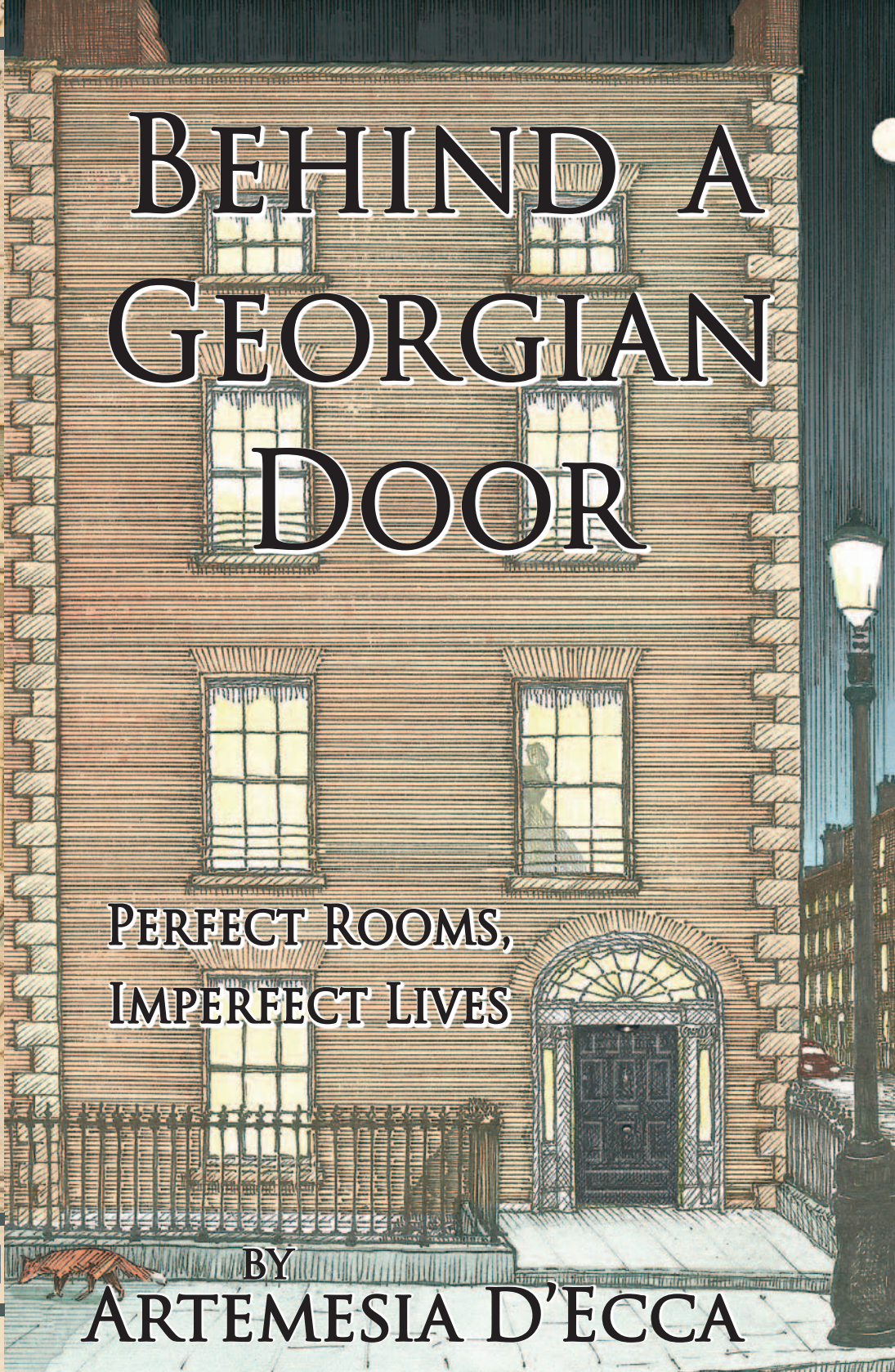

Behind a Georgian Door Artemesia D'Ecca

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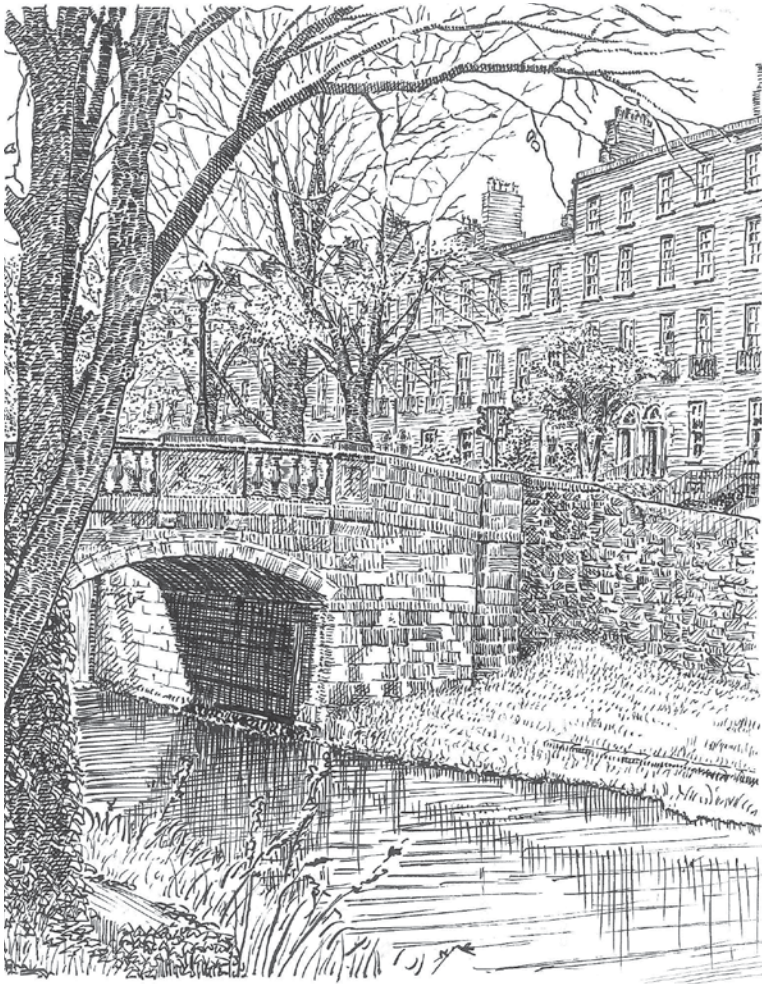

…At the front she looked on out on the canal's
prettiest feature—lovely little Huband Bridge…

Behind a Georgian Door

Perfect Rooms, Imperfect Lives

by

Artemesia D'Ecca

PHÆTON
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Behind a Georgian Door

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The places and the historical events and figures in this book are real, but the stories are works of fiction: any resemblance of the fictional characters to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

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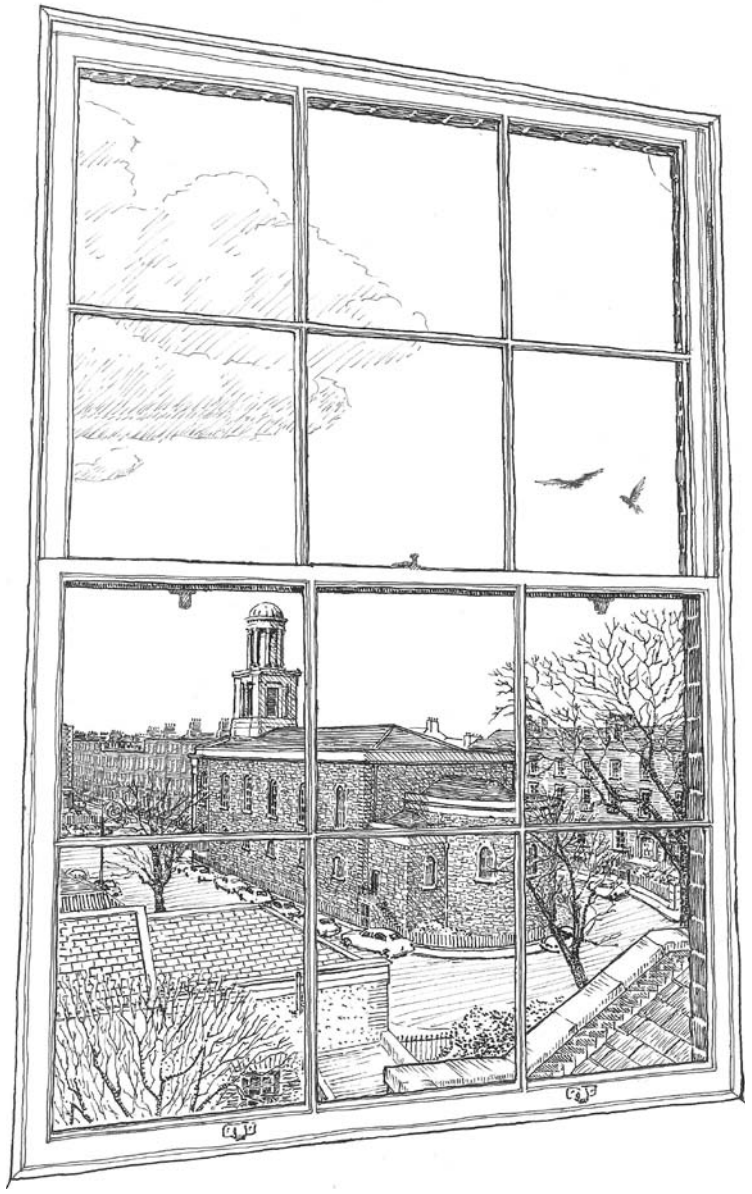


…'I just wish it had a better history,' she said, staring down at the Georgian street vista. 'It's such a secret view and so undisturbed—if only it hadn't been built on all that misery'…

—*I*—

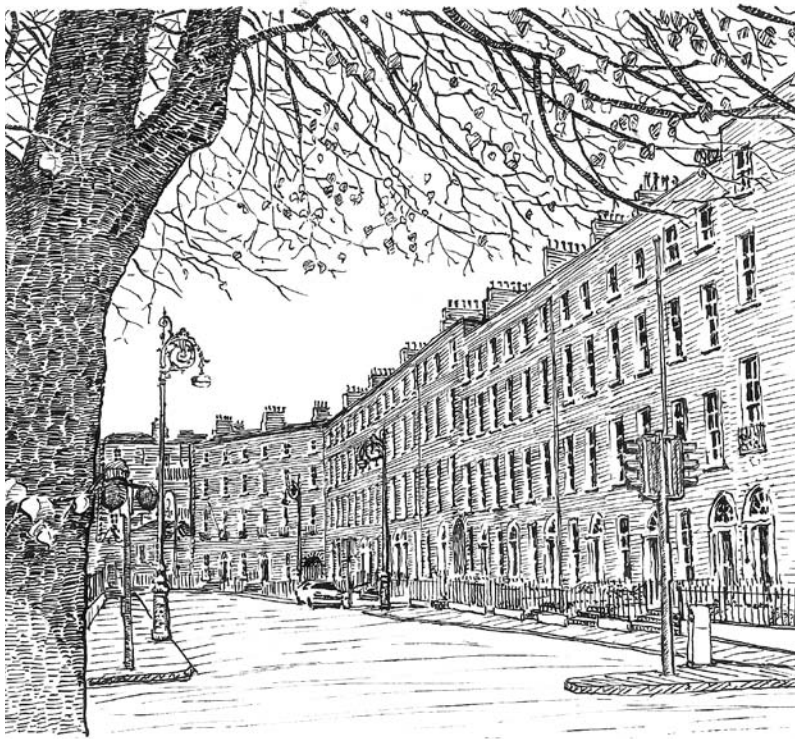
Christmas 2013

Herbert Place

I had a hot shower in the peach-coloured marble bathroom with the built-in television at the foot of the giant bath, and then Martin had a tepid one. There was a rule – Martin's – that the hot water would be turned on for half an hour in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening – never in between and never for longer. So I always got up early to have my shower first, and then went back to bed with Reggie and the dog. The house was unheated, but once I put on my cashmere bathrobe – another relic, like the glittering bathroom, of the far-away world before The Crash – and put a cap and a cardigan on Reggie, we were comfortable enough. When we pulled the goose-down quilt up to our chins, and Chauncey, the border collie, settled himself at our feet, we were in the warmest spot in the house. I used to spend the time reading to Reggie, and she was building a vocabulary that startled even me. Fond of long words, she would occasionally, and by sheer chance, throw one out with something close to accuracy.

'You're expostulating,' she had said suddenly the evening before when Martin was talking away heatedly – normal for him these days – about the new property tax which we hadn't a hope of paying. I hadn't even realized Reggie was listening to him. I certainly wasn't.

The interruption silenced Martin in mid-sentence, and both of us began to laugh, joined almost immediately by a bewildered but willing Reggie. None of which sounds too remarkable, but in the climate of dour edginess in



…'I've driven up this street a thousand times,' the taxi driver said, 'and I never knew there was a real house in it. I thought it was just offices and those bedsits they don't allow any more where everyone shares a bathroom.'…

—*II*—

George Washington's Bed

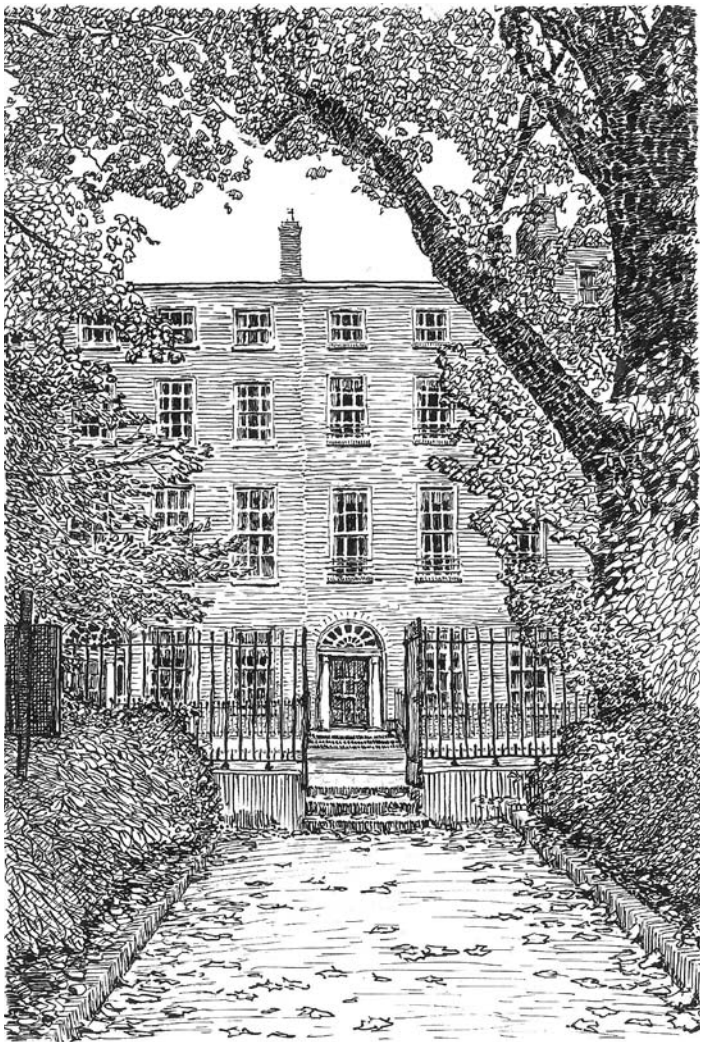
Upper Pembroke Street

Maybe there were other 70-year-old widows even more resented by their son and daughter-in-law than she was, Mrs Moynihan was thinking as she looked wistfully at the photo of the pretty house overlooking Lake Zurich that she was moving out of, in a hurry, that afternoon. But if so, she didn't envy them.

'You have to do something about her,' Clara said to Roderick. 'She's moving into a five-star hotel, for God's sake. It's your money she's spending. There'll be nothing left.'

Mrs Moynihan had not visited Roderick and Clara in Dublin since her husband Con – Roderick's father – had died two years earlier. God, how she missed Con. In the forty-three years they were married, the only night they had spent apart was when she was in hospital having Roderick. Even then, she had fought against going to the hospital. She had wanted to have the baby born at home in her own bed, but that ignorant lump of an obstetrician had bullied her and she'd given in and had it in hospital. What a mistake that was. Still she'd come on a lot since then. A pompous fool wouldn't be able to get the better of her now, although that didn't stop plenty of them from trying.

Sometimes Mrs Moynihan wondered – seriously wondered – if Roderick was really her son, or could that chaotic hospital have made a mistake. She even had a DNA test done once, without telling Con, and the test



…When I was young, my friends used to love visiting Merrion Square. Sometimes I wished I were less my grandfather's grandchild, and could see the Square through their eyes. We all thought the houses were beautiful, but I was never able to find their history romantic, the way my friends did…

—*III*—

Grace Kelly's Dress

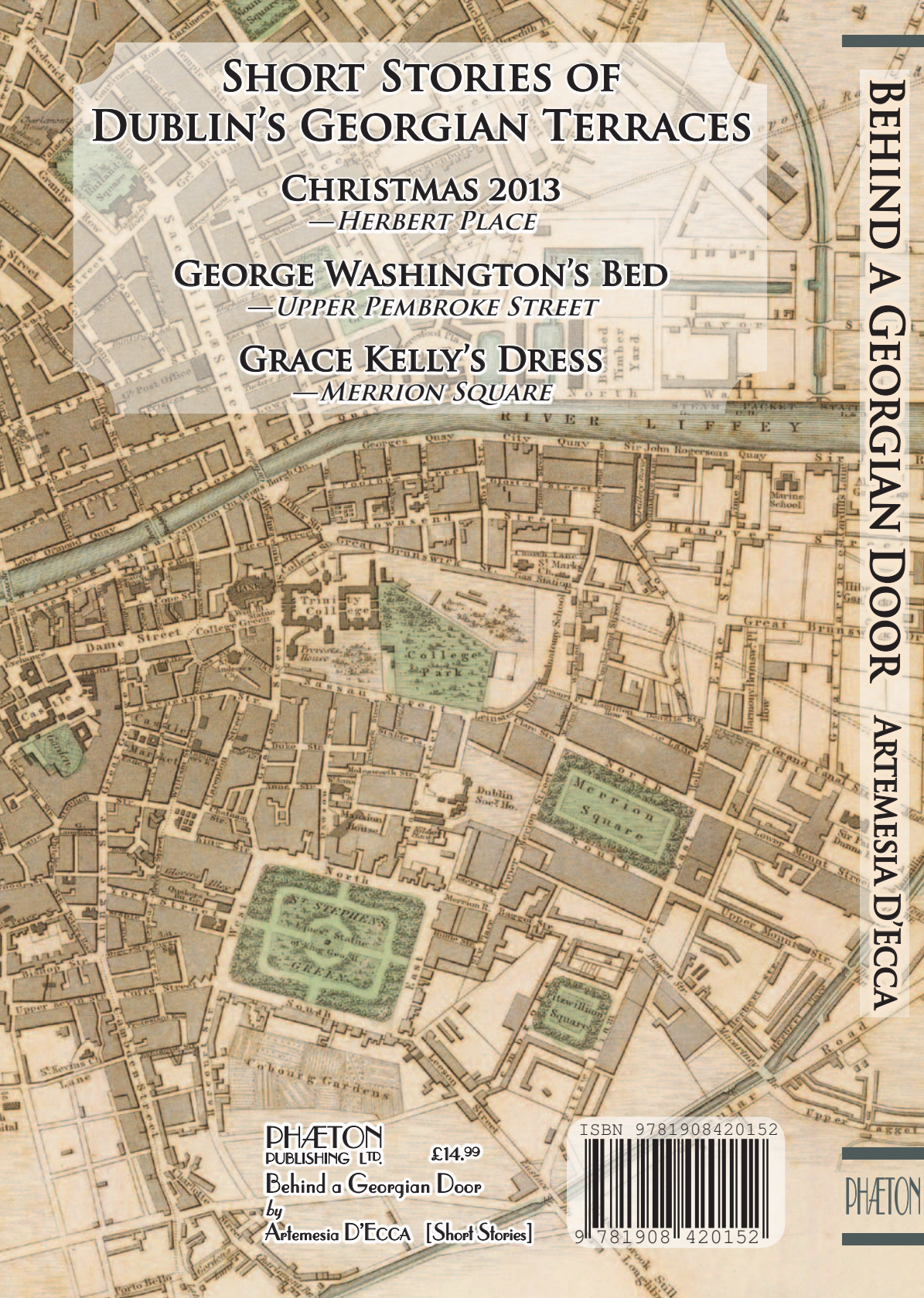
Merrion Square

For my fortieth birthday, Connie and Toby, who lived on the top floor of my house, and Bea and Paul, who lived in the basement, clubbed together and bought me a 1950s cocktail dress from a vintage shop in London. Black on top, it had a flared chiffon skirt that was white except for a branch pattern outlined faintly in black near its undersized waist. Lifting the dress from the tissue paper, I felt the respect of a priest raising a chalice – it was that unnaturally beautiful. It was also strangely familiar. But the waist…

'No, it's okay,' said Bea, seeing where I was looking. 'I measured. But you'll need a corset. We bought one of those as well.'

They had bought the corset from an American online shop. It promised to reduce a waist by up to six inches. 'With this thing, they say it's an advantage if someone has muscles as wasted as yours,' Connie said encouragingly. 'When there's no resistance, it's easier to pull things in. Your muscles are so useless now we should get you down to almost nothing.'

Wasted muscles or not, it took Connie and Bea, working together, half an hour to get me into the thing. It might have taken less time if any of us could stop laughing, but none of us could. Getting the dress itself on was a quicker job, but the fear of doing damage made us cautious. We all worried about putting too much pressure on fragile old seams as the fit was so tight, but in the end,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