

SNAFU (March Paddy Whacker Challenge)

by David Russo

The unpublished writer enjoys a beer in the hour before last call, successfully avoiding the post-church crowd. They show up in droves to Delaney's hoping to drink away the funk of another Sunday guilt sermon. Sometimes a few stragglers will hang around and want him to pray with them. The writer would tell them about his days in the service, fighting on the shores, fighting in the country, fighting in the cities.

This always captured the imagination of those churches; too occupied in their own war against the Jews and the Protestants, those Catholics always appreciated soldiers and veterans.

"All the more reason to pray for good *hic* health and making it back home alive, right my boy? *hic*"

The unpublished writer remembered the carnage that surrounded his Foxhole in France and decided he was done praying. All around lay the evidence that no one was listening. The drunken pastor stumbled away.

He starts a conversation with Janie - the lone bartender at this time of night who has one son, no husband and a dead sister. Between the two of them, lives are quite allegorical: you can only love someone as much as you are prepared to be loved. The unpublished writer is a cautious but still pragmatic man, yet accepts a shot of whiskey when a golden-haired woman approaches and makes an offer:

"I thought you could use a drink" she says.

The writer looks bleakly at the almost empty glass of Guinness in front of him and begins to speak.

"Take it. You've got that look of someone who can survive a few shots" the blonde continues. They toast to nothing, tap the bar with their glasses and shoot. The blonde grimaces and lets out a breathy exhale from the burning sensation.

The writer looks around-the bar is empty minus Janie, himself and the philanthropist holding a shot of Johnnie Walker. He finally spots her table; a purse, car keys and three empty shot glasses. She was sitting alone. He extends an invitation.

"Do you want to sit down?"

"I could use the company." It wasn't a conversation starter, and given the purpose of walking here at 1A.M., this was probably convenient. They sat in silence listening to Celtic music playing over the speakers.

The writer begins to think of the money that stands to be made from producing pseudo-authentic songs of Irish theme, and selling the tapes to 'pubs'. Such fake ambience for an environment established on panache. A foggy mirage of the never-ending Saint Paddy's Day celebration that is Delaney's Irish Pub.

"I'm Patrick" the writer lies.

"Patricia" and they shake hands, smiling awkwardly.

He laughs, imagining if his name actually were Patrick and he ended up bedding a woman named Patricia. Of course he couldn't let something like that happen-it's the principle of the matter, such quixotic irony.

"I suppose that's kind of funny", Patricia says.

The writer begins to explain to her the relationship of bad irony and hypothetically dating someone with a name of feminine nomenclature. They laugh together as the writer removes a cigarette from his coat pocket, and strikes a match three times before getting a flame.

He leans in pull the flame, stops and thinks, then lights.

"Smoking is a terrible habit; why do it?", Patricia remarks, prompting the writer to stop mid-drag and think about the father he buried twelve hours ago. He glances down at the ash, thinks some more and snuffs out the menthol. As a courtesy, he pours a drop of Guinness over it to keep the smokey ash from blowing around.

At 2 A.M. Patrick's watch chimes and he starts to adjust his coat and invites the blonde over to read his work. She politely declines in the following manner:

"I should, but things are pretty SNAFU at home."

"You should?"

The unpublished writer watches her leave after helping with her coat. He smiles when she looks back through the glass pane door, and frowns heavily when she digs into her pocket, removes a band and places it back on her finger.

"How about that," Janie the dyke bartender starts "tough break, she was cute".

Patrick stews for a moment. "Yeah. SNAFU for the both of us. Hey, you got a smoke? That was my last one".

