

Oh, Danny Boy

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

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At Montero's last night, with Deidre. I wore a padded bra. Proud of my tits. D. ordered a Bloody Mary, I had a vodka tonic. After the second drink I slipped out into the fog, and smoked a little weed. I could see Long Island College Hospital across the street. To my right, the BQE rose up out of the mist. Back inside, an Irish guy from Staten Island, walked in, wearing a 9/11 FDNY jacket. He served five years in the Bronx, and fifteen in Manhattan. Lost five of his friends. He looked at me, looked at my tits, my padded bra and said, Is this ladies' night? Oh Danny boy.

I played fifteen songs on the jukebox beginning with Aretha Franklin, vintage Barry White, the Isley Brothers. Then I moved on to power ballads from the 1980's and early 90's, REO Speedwagon, Verve, U2, Prince. Deirdre. and Danny started dancing, but I could tell he was warming up for me. Suddenly, Barry White came on; breathy, sexy, having an orgasm, *We got to get it together, baby.* Danny pulled me out onto the makeshift dance floor. He said, You're not going to lead, so don't even try.

He twirled me, pulled me into his big Irish beer belly, wrapped his thick, callused hands around my waist, sometimes dangerously close to my tits. It's hard to describe what I was feeling, but it was close to sheer terror. And exultation. He leaned in at one point, and whispered, I like it when you get your buttons pushed. I liked it, too.

I liked giving up my perfect control, to let a man lead me, to feel a man next to me. And for those few minutes, I enjoyed it. I know the role I'm supposed to play, I know the narrative. It's a relief to fall back into it; I'm canny, witchy, sexy, I'm fragile and feminine. This is what my mother taught me. It's how all girls behave, even me. It was fun for a couple of hours, but he was moving in for the kill. He

insisted I dance with him again, but I refused. The trouble began. The male ego is very fragile.

Case in point, he disappeared. I was relieved, but minutes later, he walked back in again. I said, Danny, We hardly knew ye. I laughed, but he didn't. He gave me the eye, the stinky sex eye, and ordered another Pabst Blue Ribbon. Deirdre played Lisa Stansfield. Now I felt responsible for his happiness or lack thereof. Which was oppressive. Its just a game, Danny boy, As he nursed his 8th or 9th beer. I said, Are you really driving upstate tonight? I had to fight the voice that said, Take care of him, take care of him. Oh Danny boy.

I went outside for another cigarette. He reappeared, sidled up to me and said, I'm sorry I'm stalking you. I replied, That's OK, I asked for it. But you had to hear my tone. It wasn't a come-on, it was ironic. Because I remembered how I would always find myself here in my 20's. A dance, a drink and suddenly the man wants to put his fingers in my pussy right there in the bar. If I said no I was a bitch.

Which wouldn't mean the man would go away either. He would keep buying drinks, but underneath is anger, beneath the smile is anger. This was the yin and yang last night at Montero's with Danny boy in the house.

He asked me to dance, and again, I said no. I covered the rejection by ordering a pizza. I said, stay, have something to eat. Deirdre, thank God, invited him to join our imaginary book club. Our first choice; *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. He said, Who the fuck is she? Deirdre proceeded to fill him in on all the lusty post-colonial sexiness and I went outside to wait for the pizza. My night was over. I had to let the man down easy. For him, it was the one rare night we he could lie to his wife. Tell her, honey I'm staying at the old firehouse in the Bronx. But it was a different story for me. I am not the woman in your narrative, Danny Boy. In case you haven't noticed, Danny Boy, I've been hobbled by my hard-won subjectivity.

