

Educating an American

by Ryn Cricket

“O.k., right, so Marching Season is a 600 year-old tradition,” Ian said as he leaned back on my floor, propping himself up on one elbow because I didn't have any furniture. “It's a huge celebration of the triumphs of war. We get ready for it for days in advance. It's almost bigger than Christmas.”

I sat in front of him cross-legged, absorbing every word, mostly because I loved to hear him talk. I loved when he read poetry, or left messages on my voice mail. But I especially loved when he would sit on the edge of my bed and sing me softly to sleep. “When we were boys, we would go around the whole village and collect wood, crates and tires, whatever would burn, and build a massive bonfire pile that could reach several stories high. On an even higher pole, we would fly the Irish flag until it burned, and then everyone would cheer.”

“The next day,” he continued, “on the twelfth, there is a huge parade that goes along the same route it always has for these hundreds of years. It's a tradition. But the Catholics want to stop it altogether. They have built up neighborhoods on the streets of the march. They knew the tradition before they moved there, but now they want it stopped. Sometimes, they even throw stones or bottle bombs at us.”

He leaned back with his fingers entwined behind his head. “Still, I wouldn't miss it for the world, which is why I'm taking my holiday on the 10th. Me da, Lee, Paul, and I will put on our orange and march right up in front like we always have.”

“You know, Claire,” Patrick said, “you don't have to take care of me. I'm a big boy.” We had this conversation every time Patrick was

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at my place. There's no denying that he's 6'4" and a strapping young man. I could never explain my need to take care of him, other than it was my need and not his. He was the older brother of seven sisters, so maybe sometimes it was nice to have someone take care of him.

"I can't believe Ian hung those pictures like a right smack in my face."

"What pictures?" I asked as I served an Ulster fry to his waiting plate.

"The army photo and the Mason's Certificate," Patrick replied. "He knows it offends me. I'm over every day, but he put them up on the wall. He wouldn't like it if I hung a picture of The Pope, now would he? And he's so happy to be going home for Marching Season. Do you know what Marching Season is? A bunch of Ian Paisley followers rubbing our noses in the fact that our country is separated. I bet you that our man Ian never told you that he was named after Ian Paisley."

I shook my head no.

"I'm sure he also never told you that Reverend Paisley's brother lives right here in Cleveland, but Ian has no interest in finding him because he is a Catholic priest.

"We were so poor for so many years. Me da couldn't find a job to save his soul. And then he heard about an opening at Long Kesh prison as a guard. Some call it 'The Maze' You might have heard of it? Cell Block H? Where Bobby Sands died?" Ian explained. Note to self: look up Bobby Sands. "So that's where me da has worked

since I was sixteen. The IRA has every prison guard on their death list." He then went on about how the IRA demanded special rules for their inmates and how they were allowed to wear what they wanted, but that the prisons in Ireland didn't show the same courtesies to the UVF prisoners.

I had taken him to church because his car broke down, and so he took me to breakfast. It was surprising to see how similar the service was to the Catholic services I had grown up with. Was the whole problem really over Mary? "You just don't know how dangerous it is." Ian said from the other side of the booth.

"But I'm American," I said incredulously. I expected to wear it like a superman cape.

"That makes it worse. You could never understand. I had a friend who fell in love with a Catholic girl. He had three warnings by the UVF to break it off, but when he wouldn't, they came in the middle of the night and shot them in bed together. And if they hadn't, I'm sure the IRA would have. What would they do if they found out you are Catholic?"

"I'm not Catholic." I protested. "I haven't been Catholic since I was 21. Do they have a thing against Buddhists?"

"You will never get it. I don't understand how you think you can change your religion and who you are just because you chose to."

And all the night's magic, seems to whisper and hush... I stepped out onto my balcony to see where the music was coming from.

"Hello, Claire!"

“Hey, Patrick! How are you?”

“Good, good.” He smiled.

“I was just about to watch ‘In the Name of the Father,’ if you're interested.” I yelled down.

In a few minutes he was at my door with 3 beers in his hand. He put two in my refrigerator and one was already open. As we watch the movie, Patrick gave me little side notes, like why everyone was clanging their garbage cans and making so much noise in the beginning. He said that it was common to hear that warning and everyone would run into their houses and hide. But when Daniel Day Lewis' character was being tortured, I looked to him for some kind of explanation, but he was crying.

“I don't care where we go as long as you wear THIS hat.” Ian said as he pulled my Victorian straw hat. Off of the nail on my wall. We went to the usual place —Mullarky's and we sat at the usual table —the Northern Ireland table. Patrick would talk about being a sheep farmer in the hills of Castlewellan, and Ian would talk about County Atrim and how Bush Mills was practically in his back yard.

The pub band was singing, and we sang right along with them, until they sang a rebel song. I saw Ian clench his fist so hard his knuckles were white. Patrick looked uneasy. “If we were at home, that band wouldn't make it out of here alive.” Ian whispered in my ear.

I slipped over to the singer during the break and told him that the guys at my table were from Ulster, and apparently that was enough said, because there were no more rebel songs.

*And I will play the wild rover no more.
And it's no, ney, never!*

“Right up your kilt!” We sang in unison, drinks raised. Ian and Patrick's pints still had the little smiley faces that I drew on the head.

