

## Song of the Rails Excerpt

The Irish Pub sat on a neighborhood street in Cicero, a nearby suburb. But there was nothing ordinary about the place. It was noisy, smoky, and reeked of cabbage. As we walked in, people called to Patrick and slapped his shoulder. I stepped into a world of Irish music, pints of beer, and lilting brogues.

A pretty red-haired girl sidled up to us, flashing a captivating smile. She wore a peasant style blouse with a full skirt cinched with a wide green belt at her tiny waist. "The special of the day is corned beef and cabbage, your favorite, Patrick. Shall I dish you up two servings?"

Patrick looked at me. I nodded, and the girl floated away swaying her hips just enough to turn heads.

"A charmer, that Maureen, she's the owner's daughter," Patrick explained as he pulled a chair out for me. "She flirts with all the customers. It's good for business you know. But let one man lay a hand on that lovely body and Duffy would throw him out before he knew what was happening. Ah, here he comes now, the man himself."

A middle-aged, florid-faced man came up to the table carrying two pints of beer dripping thick foam down the sides. Bulging biceps, a nose broken too many times, and hands thick and scarred gave him a no nonsense look. The muscles of his neck and chest were so overdeveloped that even his shirt stretched tight. An unlit cigar protruded from thin lips that spread into a welcoming smile as blue-green eyes twinkled in the Irish face.

"Drink up, Patrick. And one for the lady, on the house."

"Thanks, Duffy. This is my friend, Eve. I want you to give her special service whenever she comes in here."

I found myself blushing as the big man bowed over my hand in mock obeisance. "Your wish is my command, fair lady. And if this Irish buffoon doesn't treat you right, report to me. I'll set him straight."

I laughed as Duffy winked at me and squeezed Patrick's hand in a gesture of long term friendship.

"He's a great guy," Patrick said watching his friend saunter off to greet another customer. "Give you the shirt off his back if you needed it."

"It wouldn't fit too many people," I said sizing up those muscles.

"He did some professional boxing in the old days. Was pretty good at it, too, until one night he killed a man in the ring." He held up his hand to avoid any questions.

"I don't want you to hold that against him; it wasn't deliberate. The fellow had a weak artery in his head. When Duffy hit, the thing burst. He was dead before the doctor even got to him." A look of pain skirted Patrick's face.

"Duffy never got over it. He hung up the gloves and never fought again."

Patrick took a long pull on his beer, sighed, wiped his hand across his mouth, and sat back. "That tastes good," he said.

I sipped the beer. It wasn't my favorite beverage, but this had a mellow biting taste that was pleasant on my tongue.

"You don't sip beer, my dear. You sip brandy and whiskey. Beer is meant for gulping. Go on, take a nice big swallow." He smiled as I gripped the sweating pint with both hands.

"Like this?" I tipped my head back, filled my mouth with the foamy brew, and swallowed hard.

"Just like that." He laughed as he wiped the foam off my upper lip with his napkin. "Now here comes our dinner."

The smell of the succulent cabbage made my mouth water. I hadn't realized how hungry I was.

"Dig in," Patrick said. "And enjoy."