

ECHOES OF IRELAND

By Brian C. Petti

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AUDITION #1-- for 1 m

From: MONOLOGUE FOUR (m), late 40s, modern-day New York Irish fireman, funny, relatable, devoted to family. New York City 2001.

I was always the smart one, and Neil was the looker. Now as the years went by we both came to grips with our respective places in the universe: I realized I wasn't all that bad looking and not nearly as smart as I thought I was. He realized he wasn't so good looking, or so dumb. But back then, those were the roles we took on. We loved each other, you know. We were brothers. But we resented each other a little too. More than a little, sometimes. Adolescent jealousies being what they are, we kept each other at a good distance for quite a while. Until we were both in our twenties, in fact. Which is when my loco white brother took the police officer exam. He failed it. He took it again, and he failed it again. He had just moved into his own place and he was seeing the girl he would end up marrying at the time. He was trying to be somebody, you know, like we all try at some point. I knew he was down and out...but I wasn't going to make it easy on him. If he wanted my help, he'd have to come to me and ask for it. And when he had no other options left, that's what he did. He couldn't look at me. He just said it outright: "Jerry, I need your help with this test." I said, "Whattya want from me? I can't study for you. If you spent fifteen seconds doing what you were supposed to do instead of running all over town, maybe you wouldn't be having this problem right now." Except...I didn't even say it as nice as all that. Neilie sat there and took it. And then he said, real quiet, "You're not getting me, Jerry. I'm never gonna pass that test. I need you to take it for me." That was it. It didn't matter who got the girls, or who had the brains or what petty nonsense was between us. I went down to city

hall with his ID, signed his name, and I made him a cop. We never had a cross word from that day on. I guess our bond was sealed.

Neil moved out to Jersey when his kids came along, and I stayed on with Ma and Pop until Pop passed on. After that I spent most of my time at the firehouse, 'cause listening to Ma go on about me finding a girl and raising a family made running into burning building seem the better option. I guess I was being careful like Pop was. Or maybe I was just hiding in those burning buildings, content with getting older and being alone. Either way, it was Neil of all people who ended up setting me on my path.

We both worked downtown so we ran into each other all the time. It was a big joke, the cop and the fireman brothers-'cause those two outfits were never really that friendly with each other, you know. The guys had a lot of fun breaking my chops, and I'm sure he took his share too. So this one time we were both down in Chinatown, watching the last remnants of this dumpster fire being turned into wet smoke. He asked after Ma and I asked after the family, you know, the usual conversation. So we're both looking at the fellas packing up the hose and he says to me, real casual, "So...you seeing anyone, Jerry?" So I says, "Whattya getting on the parade float with Ma?" He says, "Nah, nah, nah, it's not like that. It's just...there's this woman I know, that's all." That sets my teeth. So I says, "I don't think I need your help in that regard." And he says, "I know, Jer, I know. It's her you'd be helping. She's divorced. Three small kids and her creep of an ex ups and disappears on her. She works in dispatch. She's a good girl." That's how he did it, see, making it like it would be *me* helping *her*. We were quiet for a while. Then I says, "What earthly good would I be to a woman with three kids at my age?" So he says, "For Chrissake, Jerry, you're in your forties. Not dead." And that's how Neilie introduced me to my new family. I guess he really appreciated being a cop.

AUDITION #2-- for 1 w

From: MONOLOGUE TWO (f), 20s, Irish-born immigrant to America, feisty, able, filled with life. Downtown New York, 1875

How to describe the Cunygham clan...have ye ever been in a chicken coop during a thunderstorm? No? Have ye ever had eight cats in a bag? No? That's alright; it still wouldn't quite do them justice. And boys be smelly! And crammed as we were in that tenement basement where they hid the Irish away like forgotten clothes. It was miles from the farm back home, before the famine sent us out. But choosers, beggars cannot be. Peter Cunygham was a good man, all said, raising the brood on his own as he was. His three daughters ran the house for him, while the boys were off rolling in filth or whatever it was boys did. T'was Siobhan, the oldest daughter, who took a shine to me. Ne'er gave me the look like each bite of food I took was one less for her. T'was Siobhan who took me with her to clean in the hostels way uptown, the only places that would hire Irish girls as long as they were presentable enough. I started out helping her with her floors, but soon enough I had me own floors and me own pittance of a wage. And as long as ye didn't steal or get lazy or look twice at the high-and-mighty guests, they left you alone to your washing and spreading and folding. We had no extra to spare for the trolley, so we walked to and from in the rain and snow and sun when we were lucky. I saw every inch of the city that way and with all the time to pass I'd gab the trip away with Siobhan each day. We became quite close that way, talking to keep our minds off the wind whipping through our threadbare clothes. Not that she could ever take the place of... She was all I had, see. And I liked her for...talking to me like a person. For making it easier not having me Ma there. Everyone needs a place to fall, no matter who they be.

The little I had went into the house, save for the bit I sent across the pond at Christmastime. When I started bringing in more than I ate, the rest of the Cunyghams took to me well enough. And as I got older, I found there were a few positives to having those boys around. No one in the neighborhood would bother me, once they knew me relations. And among the four of them they knew about every dance going on in a fifty block radius. Small comfort for the stink of 'em, but they learned the value of a good bar of soap once the girls started hanging around in earnest. The dancing we did back then! Wherever there be a harp and a fiddle, there be a reel and a jig. Church basements, the backs of public houses, anywhere we could. We were the outcasts, see. The donkeys who did the jobs no one else wanted. We were nothing, except to each other. When we were dancing we could be anything. And dancing was free. It was at those dances I would see Michael through the years, me tour guide from the docks as I called him. I'd tease him about how he tried to feed me the blarney me first moment off the boat and he'd blush like a rose afire. That was fun.

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