

Eileen and the Rock

Some of the lads still insist the stranger caused the Cashel family troubles. With all gathered around to toast the old man's demise and no one the wiser, up this stranger stepped to our host, the new laird of the manor, with a *hello brother; I'm here to claim my place*. Could have been asking for a pint for all the fanfare he spoke, and for all the quiet that spread about the drawing room you'd have thought folks were witnessing the return of the original prodigal son. The hush lasted long enough that all jumped when that vixen Eileen gave a keening wail and flopped to the floor like a rag-stuffed doll.

Down at The Deaf Justice Pub where Alan, now all of 80, still pours a Guinness the likes of none, there's others who blame the American lass, Eileen, for the grief. She a Boston Brahmin, lineage of Butler descent off the Mayflower so she liked to claim, but that was for shite. She was Southie Boston all the way and just the woman to bring down a solid local family.

Or, you could travel back to the *Birth Registry of 1930* for the blame, but that's asking for a kick in the balls around here, that registry being a most fascinating bit of

local history. A matter of pride, that's right, and you'll not be blaming a piece of moldering paper for some people's peculiar obsessions.



Eileen, now she was a pretty sort of girl, and on the day of old man Cashel's burial back in 1973, she sat demure as a buttercup amongst stinging nettles. She wore a clingy dress with a plunging V-neck, dark as night but hatched through with lighter strands to enhance her eyes—though Alan's the only one to say that these days; the rest of the locals merely thought as she looked soulful and innocent with her wide blue eyes and comely freckled chest. Her fiancé, Evan Cashel, wore the mandated black and cleared his throat every now and then to prove he struggled against tears, though some couldn't help noticing that his gaze rarely roamed far from Eileen's peeping cleavage.

This was the season of the flowering laburnum, whose yellow blooms scented the air sweet as harem baths while starlings busied themselves building nests in the chapel's eaves. Eileen, dear girl, missed the beauty of the day, not to mention Father O'Toole's eulogy, because her thoughts tended to gravitate to her two-carat diamond, which was bigger than those of the posh ladies on Beacon Hill, and surely her highness Mrs. Benedict would faint to see her maid's daughter now.

From pleasant fantasies of showing-up Mrs. Benedict, Eileen's reveries returned as usual to the Rock of Cashel, where the pagan kings of Munster ruled and archbishops later prayed. Up there atop the hill overlooking the village, you've seen them, the ruins of the medieval cathedral and round tower. Quite the cachet to be buried there, so that Eileen in her wraparound dresses liked to say, and now that the old man was dead—God rest his soul—she was as good as in. She imagined resting in an open casket—mahogany

no less—with her face made up to perfection and a tearful procession winding up to the Rock. She'd not be lumped in with the rest of her Southie family, just another O'Leary brat with no future for her but to follow her mother into the servants' entrances of those Beacon Hill mansions and then at the end of a toiling life only have money enough for— heaven help her—cremation. Burnt to a crisp wasn't her way; she desired immortality by way of the ultimate burial plot.

By now, you're wondering why mere dirt held such *cachet*, as it were. This is where the *Burial Registry of 1930* enters the tale. In that fateful year the grounds around the old cathedral were closed to further burials except for certain local and living families of the time, which is to say the O'Tooles and the Shaunessys; the Finns and the McNamaras; not to mention the oldest clan of all, the Cashels. The precious dirt allotments passed on to the next generation if unused, and as old man Cashel preferred to be buried alongside his drinking mates, the rights to burial passed over the old man's son, who died of the drink at too young an age, and on to grandson Evan. Theirs was the last unused spot up at the Rock, which, of course, added to its *cachet*.

Old man Cashel was a tugboat of a man, wide as he was tall, always fat truth be told, and those kind purveyors of dirt back in 1930 were smart enough to predict he'd grow nothing but bigger as time passed. You might be saying that it was the old man's morbid obesity that caught Evan his fair Eileen. Canny, she was, and in the way of women who instantly size up dresses on hangers, she knew there'd be space enough to fit herself in beside Evan up at the Rock. That girl set herself upon Evan and poor bloody sod with a wart for a brain knew nothing but bliss at her hands—literally, for she was demure by appearance only.



There's some that claim they noticed the stranger in their midst that day, but could be the whiskey talking for all that, Alan having held a pre-funereal wake at the pub for those as considered the old man their mate in the pints. Regardless whether or not they noticed at the time, there *was* a stranger yonder by baby Finn's grave marker, standing still as a sentinel next to the limestone angel. Irish, to be sure, but not local. Not an O'Toole or a Shaunessy, not a Finn or a McNamara. He wore his hat the proper way of the Dubliner and leaned against the angel with the nonchalance of, God help us all, a Prod.

Eileen, that minx, noticed him straight away and imagined lashing him up to the canopied bed soon to reside in her private bedroom suite. Looked to be packing a sporting rod in his trousers, so she observed, and looked to be a working man at that. She sniffed with remorse that brought on the sympathy from more than one spectator, all the while her thinking she'd be hard-pressed to rid herself of her old desires: those wild Southie lads with their roughened hands and untidy manners. She clenched her thighs together rather than feel them quiver at the thought of well-worked muscles on lean bodies, none of these cream-fatted hairless expanses as sported by her dear Evan.

So it was that during old man Cashel's internment, pretty Eileen fantasized her way through the eulogy and managed to endear herself to everyone all the more for her chastely pressed legs. Afterwards, Evan with his Eileen led the way along narrow lanes to the family manor. Evan, for his part, found death tedious business, but with Eileen on his arm he strolled along willingly enough, nodding at the passing comment made by his beloved about their wedding colors, cerise and silver.

“It will be lovely,” said she, “yet original. We’ll find the perfect altar cloth, which won’t be too ostentatious, nor too modest. Speaking of which, I was thinking of the McNamara’s plot up at the Rock. I took a turn the other day, you know, mourning our poor grandfather, and I walked past the McNamara’s spot without remarking it.”

“Hmm?”

Evan wondered if the cook had fixed up his favorite chops with mint. Surely she’d know to prepare the meal the same as any Wednesday despite the guests and the buffet table. There’d be nothing but bits and pieces for nibbling otherwise, which never suited him.

“And it seemed to me,” said Eileen with the special voice she kept for Evan. She practiced an hour each day in the privacy of her boudoir: a sing-song cadence low and sweet as a lullaby, void of pretense, filled with promised pleasures, all sure to mesmerize Evan to her way of thinking. “It seemed to me,” said she, “shocking that such a prominent family has no stone to speak of. Why, they’re as important to local history as anyone!”

“Right,” Evan said and pressed a hand against his grumbling stomach.

“Oh I agree,” said she, “it’s not right, and I can’t help but feel sad that our poor grandfather has nothing for himself there either.”

“Hmm?”

“Such an astute man, you get my meaning exactly. We’ll need to commission a sculpture for his spot. I’ve designed it in my head already. *Cashel* across the top with the doves he loved to shoot all around the name. Everyone knows what a good shot he was in his day.”

“Sounds grand,” Evan said.

“Oh I agree; and how grand that we came up with the idea!”

“Spot on,” he said and squeezed her arm, thinking her too perfect to know his mind before he did.

As they walked on, his thoughts returned to food and hers to the intricacies of grave marker design. She pictured a tall monument with plenty of space on the lower majority to fit Evan’s name and her own, plus modest but charming blessings perfect for tourist rubbings. Her name would then live on through the tour guides’ fond stories. She sighed and leaned against Evan’s arm, and all following thought how touching that she felt the emotion of the day so keenly.

All, that is, except the stranger. He kept to himself quiet as a nun’s bed until an hour later when confronted with 20-foot ceilings, Irish oak banisters, mullioned windows, and gold-leafing throughout. “So this is the family seat,” he said, and Alan later claimed to notice a tone to his voice, a curiosity with too much pride of place to be appropriate.



Now skip forward to the aforementioned hushed moment within the manor’s drawing room. Eileen, for all her sham, fainted honestly enough to hear of a new Cashel brother. No one knew what to do, caught as they were between helping her and rushing the stranger, who finally announced his name was Gabriel, rightful heir to the seat.

“Hold now,” Evan said, “I’m thinking.”

As said earlier: a wart for a brain, poor sod. While Evan pulled on his lower lip, the fair Eileen’s eyelids fluttered. She flipped a hand to be sure of the diamond, remembered the birth registry, and pushed herself to her feet with the fluid movement of

a woman with an agenda. She slipped in next to Evan and fashioned herself a winsome smile. “I’m sorry, you are?”

“Gabriel.”

“I’m sure we can straighten out this misunderstanding; meanwhile, please enjoy yourself for as long as you like.”

Now Gabriel, he was no fool. In an instant he knew Eileen for one step above the shady ladies who took him in after he fled the nuns. Those good whores were the ones to recognize him for genteel blooded. They insisted he seek out his birthright, that they did, and they taught him the finer points of self-preservation, not to mention a certain kind of scrappiness. Gabriel, he wasn’t a bad man, only one who had long ago wearied of the gritty side of life, especially after so many years spent tracking down his bloodline (and a fine tale this is for the future telling).

“On second thought,” Eileen continued with a wrinkle to her nose, “perhaps you’d like a shower before joining us?”

“Excuse me,” Evan said, listening to his grumbling insides instead of his sweetheart. “I’ll check on my meal.” The truth was, he couldn’t think on an empty stomach, not that food improved his processing, but never you mind: he was the kindest man you’d ever want to meet.

Meanwhile, in response to Eileen’s jibe, Gabriel wandered through the mob that stood transfixed stupid as puppets on strings.

What could the man be about? had to be going through a fair number of minds by then because Gabriel sauntered clear over to the other side of the room. That stately manor house—now part of the Irish national heritage and open to the public—sporting an

Italian marble fireplace big enough to spit a sheep. Gabriel parked himself behind one of the armchairs in front of said fireplace and arranged himself in a pose that looked to be straight out of a magazine for staid country living, with one ankle crossed in front of the other, hand in pocket and jacket slung behind his hip. A cocky kind of pose with his chin straight to the horizon.

“What the hell?” Alan muttered, and his wife—God bless her soul—hushed him sure enough, busy as she was memorizing details for the pub gossips.

If pretty Eileen still ogled Gabriel’s rod there’s no way of knowing because just that moment a crash of Wedgwood China sounded from the back of the room, and Evan was heard to yell, “Christ almighty, will you look at that?”

What, what? came the chorus except for Eileen who caught on quick enough when she spied Evan’s darting glances between Gabriel and the wall above the carved mantel. “You’re the bloody image of him,” Evan yelled. “Brother!”

Indeed! There stood Gabriel in mimic of a portrait, circa 1920, of right honorable old man Cashel in the prime of life with jodhpurs and riding boots, ankles crossed just so, arm cocked, profile jutting. Despite the watch fob, high-starched collar, and handlebar moustache, you’d not be mistaking Gabriel for any but the old man’s grandson. Some remarked later that the resemblance wasn’t obvious at first because Gabriel was thin to the old man’s fat but that the muttonchop sideburns turned the corner for them, this being the 1970s and Gabriel coming direct from Dublin, height of fashion he was by their parochial reckoning. Thick facial fur identical to the old man, no one could deny it, not even fair Eileen, who stood with her mouth agape before recollecting herself.

“Evan, darling,” said she, “I’m still feeling faint; could you fetch me water, please?”

“Of course.”

Gabriel cast an eyebrow in his newfound brother’s direction but said nothing. He wasn’t likely to at that point because he knew the lay of the land. Eileen, so he’d heard, enjoyed her way well enough, and her way was mistress of the manor with its all-important Rock of Cashel perk. Despite his bloodline, Gabriel knew himself to be on shaky ground. For a moment, he wondered whether to follow his brother or stay with the fiancée. Quick-witted devil that he was—the social calculation made in the blink of an eye—he said with purpose, “You stay with your pretty wife, Brother, while I bring the water.”

Despite herself, Eileen felt a blush rise. *Wife*. That most perfect of words. Gabriel felt her further measure in the instant even as Eileen caught herself again and aimed a suspicious glance at him. More than suspicious, hers was an eyeful of glint sharp enough to scare a lesser man than Gabriel. Meanwhile, poor Evan beckoned the maid to never mind the pork chop mess on the floor and run fetch another helping.

By the time Gabriel returned with the water, the family solicitor who was a Shaunessey huddled with Evan off in a corner. He’d pulled a mass of papers from his briefcase, and those who had a mind to perused hunting scenes along the walls near enough to eavesdrop on their conversation. Later, all at The Deaf Justice agreed that unlike logic might dictate, Evan begged the solicitor to find a loophole for Gabriel. Alan insists he heard the word *loophole* followed by Shaunessey’s response that he happened to carry just such a document. And Christ, but for the first time in his simple life Evan felt

decisive and certain. Poor Evan never liked being an only child, and on this day he almost cheered down the stone walls he was that joyful to have a brother, an older one at that, and a man of such obvious intellect to oversee the wretched financials that came along with the Cashel name.

Eileen watched her beloved with rising fear. She felt Evan's energy buoyant as a puppy and knew her place up at the Rock as good as gone to Gabriel if she couldn't guide her dim-witted love along the only correct path to their shared happiness. Gabriel must go. Nothing but a bastard son, after all, born of trash Christ only knew from which farmer's family.

"Forgetting your water?" Gabriel said then, and was that a knowing slight of eye in her direction? "Ay-well," he continued while Eileen tried not to mind his working-man's hands and the way their palms cupped the glass. "I was that sad to learn both my mother and father are beneath the ground—but finding a brother is the saving grace."

"The same mother too?" she said. "I find that hard to believe."

"What can I say but that unwed pregnancy was as taboo for a couple in love as not. They were too young to marry, so off I went to the nuns, all very hush-hush of course. I'm this glad my parents married in the end. Seems they even came to fetch me, but by then I was long gone."

Eileen felt faint. Gabriel, the heir apparent; not some bastard, but a full brother to her Evan, who was just then waving a codicil like he'd won the bloody pot of gold. "Holy hell, it's all here left in my own grandfather's writing!"

There's some who swear Eileen lost her polish then. Was that a most unbecoming curl of lip? The beginning of a snarl low in her throat? Alan swears it's so and that he

began to wonder about the fair Eileen the moment she grabbed the handwritten addendum from the solicitor Shaunessy with not a *please* or a *thank you*, not even a *simper* or a *coy blink*.

While Evan pulled Gabriel into a hug to embarrass the good Father O'Toole, Eileen read the following words and profound words they were:

As my son went the way of the dodo before me, I add this addendum to my last will and testament that his dying wish be granted. Namely, that if his oldest son who was left to the nuns with the name Gabriel ever be found, he be considered patriarch after me with the responsibilities and rewards this entails, which shall include ownership of Cashel Manor and lands, hostelries along the west coast and other business ventures, and burial rights at the Rock of Cashel. (At this, Eileen blanched white as curdled milk.) Evan as second son shall always have rights to life in the manor, a generous living, and an appropriate position within the family businesses.

You could have thrown out the whiskey and still called the wake brilliant the surprise that spread through the room. Old man Cashel, fair-minded and generous indeed! And no one the happier than wart-for-brain Evan who fairly skipped around the parlor calling out for champagne.

This could be a corseted story written by that randy bastard Oscar Wilde the way the entailment went down, yet so it was that even in post-war, post-independent Ireland the Cashels maintained the tradition of oldest son as heir. And dearest Eileen with no say in the matter, poor thing.

She let Evan's unseemly joy peter out on its own—it wouldn't do to appear churlish after all—and when he finally stood over the back of an armchair panting for a refill of chops with mint, she tucked an arm around his elbow and whispered into his ear.

Around the couple, guests toasted Gabriel, and Alan himself pulled out a fiddle. Gabriel let himself be feted while keeping gimlet glance on his almost sister-in-law. You might be asking what he thought of her now that he knew his position solid within the family. Why, he shouldn't have minded her influence over Evan now, perhaps even looked on their relationship with amused condescension, he having long ago lost all romantic notions about the fairer sex. Alas and however, he did mind her influence, her wiles, her provocative chest heaves, and most of all, her continued presence in his new home. He'd lived with enough tarts in his gritty days, and he could stomach no more. Simply put, he considered himself a lifelong bachelor with no needs except the shag on the sly. That he'd already pondered buxom Eileen for such a tumble goes without saying—a tart was a tart, after all—but to live with her? Now there was a potential hell worse than the nuns ever lashed into him.

While Gabriel sipped his champagne and imagined a ride on the fair Eileen before tossing her to the glue farm called the curb, that Eileen, she continued whispering into her beloved's ear.

“Oh, I agree, it's wonderful,” said she, “but our grandfather forgot to be fair.”

The chops with mint arrived and Evan tucked in with the alacrity of the starved. You'd have thought he'd gone without when in fact the remains of the first chop glistened on his chin. “Hmm?” he said. “I don't follow.”

“You’re just humoring me now, you wretch,” said she and reminded herself to put the lullaby into her voice despite her frayed nerves. “You darling wretch of a man, I know you get my meaning that something’s owed you for seeing grandfather through his illness.”

“Well,” Evan said.

“*Well* is right,” said she. “It’s your deep well of filial duty that saw his last days peaceful.” She resisted the urge to wipe meat juice off her darling’s face and continued, “Why even a token to show his gratitude.”

“Token?”

“Like the tokens of love you give me each day,” said she, all the while aiming her glint at Gabriel, who raised his glass toward her with a wink—how dare he? What could the horrid man possibly mean by that? Though deep down she knew his thoughts well enough, and indeed she did, for Gabriel had just then decided that the sooner he cut Evan’s cord to her joyful mound, the better for them all. Fair Eileen who knew the value of the female genitalia battled her vocal cords to remain sonorous into her beloved’s ear even as she absorbed—and enjoyed, don’t you be doubting it—Gabriel’s lingering stare at her breasts. Outrageous man.

“A token, that’s all,” said she. “No need to be greedy, after all. You and I, we have simple needs. A roof over our heads.”

“Which we still have,” Evan said, complacent with pork and unheeding of the gristle stuck between his teeth.

“Indeed,” said she, “and we’re the lucky ones. We have all we need to enjoy our living days.” She heaved a breath as much in disgust at her beloved’s continued chewing

like a cow at her cud as to cause her pert breasts to inflate against his arm. “But I fear for our dying days.”

Evan grunted a question mark.

“Gabriel doesn’t care about the Rock surely,” said she. “Not like you do, and besides, the two of you will never fit side by side in the plot. Our grandfather surely meant to leave his burial spot to you as his token.”

“Ah right, the token.”

His tone remained puzzled and Eileen pushed her breast more firmly against his arm. “You see my meaning as usual—how I love you. You and I shall nestle side by side into eternity with the tour guides to tell our love story. Why, our grandfather said so on his last day, you know, he was that fond of me. Poor man, he was too sick to change his will.”

“Too sick, indeed he was.” Evan slurped on bone strong enough to suction out the marrow. A minute later he said, “Oh, I follow.”

“Of course you do,” said she. “No doubt Gabriel will heed our grandfather’s intent even if it’s not in writing. At least I hope so.”

“Well, why not? He seems a jolly fellow, but.”

Hello, what’s this? A *but* coming just as she felt relief like the last breath before sleep? Never had Evan *butted* his dear Eileen, never had he seen fit to muster an independent thought while she whispered in his ear. Her previous fear turned to desperation at this oddity, and she blamed the interloper Gabriel who now tossed back a jig of whiskey and made merry with *her* locals. Look at him carrying on with them, quite in league as it were, and why should she be surprised what with his working-man’s hands

and atrocious manners to go along with his too-tight trousers. Imagine, introducing himself at our grandfather's wake; how gauche.

While Eileen's thoughts ran amuck, Evan considered the state of his stomach and decided another helping of chops with mint would not be amiss, this being a celebration and all.



Hold now, here's the pause required because Alan always calls attention to this turning point for the family Cashel. Most of the lads argue against him, but Alan works with a few brain cells even now and 'tis true that this was the moment of reckoning. Nothing momentous, mind you, just bits and pieces that went missing or astray, that if not, could have seen the family fertile to this day.

What went missing was a thought or two on Eileen's part. She that was canny was so lost in growing anger (self-righteous at that) that she missed the chance to hear her beloved out. Instead, she took that lingering *but* as a personal affront and huffed to the closest bathroom to throw a silent tantrum.

As for the wart-for-brain, if not for his cravings, he'd have finished the thought: *but I wouldn't want to hurt Gabriel's feelings*. Meaning he was on task to ask fair Eileen's advice on how best to approach his new brother about relinquishing the burial rights. Evan's thoughts strayed often enough, too true, but sometimes they returned. Only now, with his fiancée not there to help him along, as Alan says, all was lost.

If only fair Eileen had heard her beloved through, if only Evan had thereafter broached the topic with Gabriel, why it's some that say Gabriel was tempted to turn his attitude around. They'd be calling correct on that score because the moment Evan called

for yet more chop with mint, Gabriel felt within himself a welling solicitude toward his younger brother, a paternalism that took him by surprise. Look at the wanker with drippings on his tie: he deserved his happiness. Gabriel cared nothing for a patch of soil within a tourist attraction, and witnessing the weepy love in Evan's eyes for his Eileen nearly thawed Gabriel's heart enough to allow her respite—though in the opposite wing as he, of course. Alas, the potential melt iced over again when Gabriel observed Eileen's parting shot of anger, not to mention disgust, aimed at her beloved. He grinned to himself as he threw back another shot. Got you now, he thought.



There's nothing so grim as a woman who dares not scream, and Eileen in the bathroom was a sight to cause nightmares. She stomped back and forth on the area rug with fists waving in the air and mouth yawning open like that famous painting. Her neck tendons stood in relief and sweat (yes!) glistened on her brow, and when she finished, she stood heaving those lovely breasts in true agitation. For several minutes, she concentrated on her diamond. She let its refracting wink calm her back to her Southie street-wise roots. Why, the solution was obvious, that classic female strategy: nothing more than goodnight kisses for Evan until he saw the error of his *but*.

Back in the parlor with the festivities reaching a pitch to shatter glass, Gabriel lounged with his brother. They made quite the picture, Gabriel and Evan, sitting with knees spread and whiskeys in hand, both with the sturdy Cashel jaw, the one firm, the other slack, but the same nonetheless. "What say you?" Gabriel said. "I take it we're square?"

"You're feckin' straight we're square. This is the best feckin' day of my life!"

“Good, good.”

“Only Eileen seems a bit put out, she does.” Evan shrugged. “Must be the stress of the day. She’ll be fine given a moment.”

Gabriel had his doubts, which were confirmed two seconds later when Eileen regained the room. She flashed a smile at Alan that further gathered the tension around her jaw. “Play on,” she called with a tad too much shrill for anyone’s liking.

Gabriel noted the red leaking from her cheeks when she caught sight of them cozy on the couch, which was a tableau he had orchestrated especially for her. That scrappiest of fellows had also called for yet another chop with mint so that Evan sat there with yet more dribblings on his face and front, not to mention with his suit jacket open to reveal straining trousers—and not in the arousing way as Eileen was sure to observe. In short, Gabriel read dearest Eileen’s switch of allegiance clear as if she’d straddled him with her wraparound dress hiked to the heavens.



Mark this as the truth: For fair Eileen, it wasn’t much of a jump from withholding sex to tossing Evan away all together. Where everyone else in the room remarked on the brothers’ similarities, Eileen—she that was fastidious and dainty—convulsed at their differences. Why, that must be her beloved’s, rather *ex*-beloved’s, fourth chop with mint, and he with his shiny face and his suit all but ruined and his slack stomach near to popping off his trouser button. Clear as the best Guinness is dark, Eileen realized there would be no controlling Evan. The wart was doomed to follow in his grandfather’s obese footsteps. By the time they reached old age she’d be squeezed out of her place up at the Rock by 150 pounds of excess lard.

Gabriel, on the other hand, lounged weedy as a hawthorn branch. She sized him up and found him the better for his boniness. Even allowing for an extra 20, or 30, pounds, there'd still be space enough for her up at the Rock. In her imagination *Evan* disappeared off the grave marker to be replaced by *Gabriel*. Yes, Gabriel, who sat as lean and tidy as a dandy of old, clearly the master of his impulses, whether keeping them in line (food) or giving way to them (sex). She shivered, and it was this tremble that Gabriel caught from across the room. He kept his smile to himself, that he did, and right into his trap that Eileen came with hips a-sway and lips a-shine to settle between the brothers Cashel. "My two favorite men," said she. Her hand brushed Gabriel's thigh before settling on her own. The way he then positioned his bulge in her direction, why, she as good as had him seduced with Evan none the wiser. If Mrs. Benedict on Beacon Hill could see her now, the most popular girl to rival Scarlett O'Hara!

"Grand, grand," Evan mumbled between chews. "I knew you'd come around. Lovely, really. And Gabriel here just agreed to walk you down the aisle."

Gabriel tickled her ear with his breath. "With my heartiest congratulations." He cradled her hand in both of his and lifted it to his lips so slowly dear Eileen felt the melting between her thighs.

"Evan, darling," said she, "you might want to change now that you've got half a pig down your front."

She noticed neither the greasy kiss that landed on her cheek nor his response—*so good of you to notice; I'll do just that*—as her every sense converged on the press of her you-know-whats against Gabriel, who shifted closer with arm snaked along the couch cushion behind her.

“I must apologize for my earlier behavior,” he said. “Defensive, I suppose, that ready to be tossed out on my ass.”

His candor charmed her as did the way his fingers teased the back of her neck. She imagined the ring he’d gift her when she landed him gulping like a hooked trout. Not a silly emerald-cut, which didn’t contain nearly enough facets to shine light off in all directions. How could she have thought her ring superior when the classic round solitaire best showed a diamond’s brilliance?

“No matter,” said she, “but my, what a shock, your appearance, though pleasant in the end.” The perfect pause. “As I’m sure you can tell.”

“Indeed,” he said, and spied her erect nipples as proof. “It’s too bad—”

“Yes?”

“Oh that, well—I suppose we’ll need to discuss what you want from me.” His pause rivaled hers for perfection. “During the wedding ceremony, that is.”

“Gracious, so many details to a wedding. We should confirm how you’re to lay me down—rather, walk me down—the aisle.”

They agreed on the hour for a *tête-a-tête* over tea. Eileen suggested old man Cashel’s library on the other side of the manor, which, conveniently enough, contained a custom-made double-wide sofa and an inside lock.



If you’re picturing pretty Eileen a-straddle with her A-line skirt lifted, you’d be correct. Fast forward six hours into the evening with whiskey circulating and bawdy songs raised to the roof—the place was a drunken catastrophe by then—and you’d have witnessed that Eileen plying enough wares to make Gabriel’s whore-moms proud.

Gabriel settled her on his lap snug enough, only too willing to grab his shag on the sly. However, was that a tinge of regret shadowing his eyes? No, nothing but a wince as he adjusted his girth for an easier ride. He eyed the grandfather clock over Eileen's shoulder and grinned as she threw back her head with well-done groans of delight. She wasn't anywhere near a finale, and he for one didn't care because he had a timetable to keep. He hurried himself along until the world exploded and a satisfying limpness overtook him.

And just in time, Alan always adds when every bloke in The Deaf Justice sighs over the wondrous shudder that comes with the shag on the sly. Three, two, one, on the dot of 8:30 poor Evan burst into the room, Gabriel having previously unlocked the door while Eileen peeled off her panty hose. "Thank Christ you had Shaunessy remind me to come along for a chat. I'm drunker than a—hmm—can't think of it now."

Any man with brains enough to fart would have sussed out the situation straight away. But not Evan, no. Not to ping too dearly on the wart, but how could he not interpret his Eileen's bare buttocks for anything but *coitus interruptus*?

"Huh?" he said. "What the—?"

To hasten Evan's brain cells along, Gabriel made haste to push Eileen off his lap. "Can't you leave a man alone?" he said with a perfect cry of remorse and regret. "Why, she's just using us, Brother!"

"Huh?" said she. "What the—?"

Fair Eileen, reduced to the stupidity of her fiancé. Her hanging jaw 'twas a sight to behold, that it was. Gabriel would have laughed if he weren't studying Evan's

confusion, then denial, then hurt—then, thank Christ, outrage. After awhile even Evan couldn't mistake Eileen's sticky sprawl upon the oak floorboards.



You can imagine the rest: accusations, denials; insults, sweet nothings; rejection, tearful negotiations; and in the end, Gabriel and Evan, the closest of bachelor brothers to the end of their short-lived days. If Evan appeared sad at times, no one commented; if Gabriel, bitter, likewise. And if Evan never caught on that Gabriel played him for a dupe—for himself *coitus completus* after all—then no matter because he only meant to liberate his brother from that seductress Eileen.

Three husbands later, so it's said about Eileen, and with a solitaire the size of a sheep's ball at that. It might be she's the one in the fox fur that visits the Rock now that the brothers have passed on—the one from syphilis caught during his gritty days, the other from blocked arteries. She of the fox fur, who's been heard to mutter *impossible, how did they fit?* while pulling a tape measure out of her purse.

Down at The Deaf Justice, Alan still wonders aloud what might have become of the Cashel family had Evan landed himself a kind-hearted and homely lass, the type with modesty to bring home to ma and servility to bring home to da. Some argue that Gabriel would have tolerated such a piece of furniture, and Evan happily married might have swayed him toward ritualized monogamy himself. And then who knows? To this day, you might be seeing family heirs around the village rather than two brothers laid out side by side up at the Rock of Cashel.

THE END