

CHASING DANNY BOY

Place: Dublin, City Centre, Temple Bar

Time: January-June 20, 1999

Characters: Dermid

Oscar O'Sheen

The Brothers O'Morna:

Goll O'Morna, Conan O'Morna

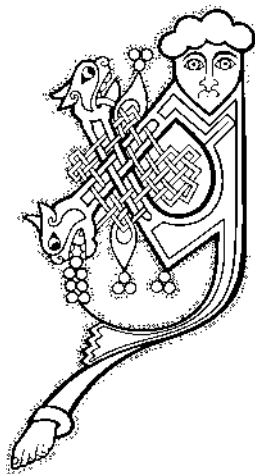
The Yanks from Chicago: Wethers,

Frankie X, Knuckles, Patch

The He-She Banshee

Gran

Brigid, Dermid's sister



Glossary:

23 June 1993: Irish Government legalized homosexuality and the age of consent doing away with the laws that sent Oscar Wilde to prison.

Wilde One's Pub: Oscar Wilde meets Marlon Brando; Irish dramatist Wilde (1854-1900) jailed for homosexuality; wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Banshee: the screaming banshee, often female, signals imminent death

Cuchulainn: Ireland's most famous mythic warrior, formerly known as Setanta, swelled up to huge proportions in battle, and was killed by the wicked Queen Maeve's sorcerers. His statue stands in Dublin's General Post Office on O'Connell Street commemorating the martyrs of the Easter Rising in 1916.

Dermid and Grania: the Romeo and Juliet of Celtic mythology

Dolphin's Barn Junction: a neighborhood in Dublin

DART: Dublin Area Rapid Transit system of light-rail trains and subways

Eamonn Owens: redheaded young Irish movie actor—with the map of Ireland in his face—in films, *The Butcher Boy* and *The General*

Great Famine: the potato famine of 1845-1848 killed more than a million Irish and forced another three million to emigrate, mostly to the U.S., thus making emigration into a feature of Irish culture. Presently, 3 million Irish live in Ireland itself; 7 million Irish nationals live temporarily elsewhere, extending Irish culture and genes throughout the world.

Firbolgs: an ancient tribe in Ireland

Gardai: police

Aer Lingus: an international Irish airline

Lir, the Children of Lir: Lir's four children were turned into swans by their wicked stepmother's spell which also gave them the extravagant gift of song. (Lir is pronounced "Lear")

Mickey: like "Mick," an American derogatory term for an Irish person

Otherworld: the night world of myth and legend where heroes, enchanters, tricksters, and fairies live

Paddy Goes to Holyhead: a satirically named rock band

eejit: idiot

Tuatha de Danaan: originally the people of the gods of Dana, the tribe who arrived in ancient Ireland on the feast of Beltane, May Day, landing at Connacht, displacing forever the earlier tribe, the Firbolgs

shebang: party, the whole thing, a celebration

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JACK FRITSCHER

CHASING DANNY BOY

Love hides where? The question dogged Dermid on the hunt. His gang of lads, slumming through Dublin, looked for love hiding inside the pubs, revealing in doorways, cruising through the pathways of St. Stephen's Green. Across the clipped lawns and cobbled quads of Trinity College. On Bachelors Walk beside the black water of the Liffey flowing under O'Connell Street Bridge. Night times, pissing in a construction dumpster on the corner of Dame Lane where one door led up to a Turkish sauna and another door, guarded by beefy hooligans, opened into the crowd of lads at the Wilde One's Pub.

Chasing scores down in Dolphin's Barn Junction, the south inner city, where a crowd beat some Aids junkie to death. Right in the street. Fifteen rib-kicking anti-drug vigilantes cheered on by a scrum of women and children. Steel-toed boots striking sparks on the cobbles. Junkie blood on the steel shutters. In the Barn, anyone who risked the vigilantes and dared the dark streets turfed out by the dealers could score grass, acid, ecstasy.

Dermid and his boyo's were full of themselves with the success of their hunt. They had outsmarted the dealers and outstepped the vigilantes. Inside the Wilde One's, the queer pub air hung thick in a silken blue cloud of smoke that shimmered with the thump of the disco beat from the dance club upstairs.

"Was that love?" Dermid, at twenty, was a pub-wonder at discussing a premise in detail, standing with a pint among his friends. A pearl of foam hung on his short-clipped dark red goatee. Not a single freckle marred his perfect white face

or cheeks ruddy as rowanberries.

“Was what love?” Oscar O’Sheen asked. He was happy with their raid into Dolphin’s Barn, hunting and scoring sixteen hits of acid he could sell for double to the kids in from Galway for Saturday night outside, two blocks away, on the trendy streets of Temple Bar.

“Was it love when that old Aids junkie threw his skinny fucking body across his twenty-three-year-old partner to protect him from the steel-toed shoes.”

“Get over yourself,” Oscar said. “Maybe it was love of family, yeah, driving the men to kick the shit out of two dope-dealing heroin addicts ruining the neighborhood.” Oscar was a joker always playing tricks and acting out: “*Move the fuck out of the Barn!*” Oscar, who was very tall, drove his hands down in the way he learned from hip-hop American rap artists on Sky TV.

Dermid laughed and his blue eyes laughed. He liked the hunt, the drink, the talk, the fact of the lads all together.

“In those flats in Dolphin’s Barn,” Conan O’Morna, who was twenty-two and the darkest of the lot, said, “the addicts are dealers and the dealers are users and it’s fucking clear what they love.”

“But the junkie,” Dermid said, “when he was dying bleeding on the cobbles said, ‘Keep away from me: I have Aids.’ Was that not a kind of love of your neighbor even when he’s killing you.”

“Ain’t you just a fucking Jesuit,” Goll O’Morna said. “A truer Irish statement of suffering was never made.”

At twenty-four, Goll, the older blond brother of the dark Conan, was touted a dare-devil for all his adventures, and the three others had looked to him since they had been boys walking through the wet woods down in the Wicklow mountains, hunting wild rabbits and quail with snares, playing guns on and off the old Military Road, that wound like a scar through the mountains to the south of Dublin, long before they had practiced smoking cigarettes and shaved their heads down to a rasp and played at being post-U2 Iggy Pop rockstars calling their air group, Tuatha de Danaan.

Long before Goll had been sent off for six months to the Priory, which was what Conan and Goll’s Da politely called the prison, where Goll had turned fifteen and learned much more

about men's bodies than ever he learned about not stealing tourists' cameras down at the Irish Sea side in Bray where their fathers worked.

They had discovered their bodies together tutored by Goll. Curious. Sizing up. Joking. *You're fucking gorgeous*. Measuring up. Competing. Hardening up. Shooting first. Cumming last. White flesh slip-slapping. The serious dare to put that in your hand *your mouth* your ass longest deepest hardest biggest. What they had done in quartet, in trio, in duo, and back to quartet, circling, jerking, arguing, wrestling, which dick *which face* which hole, sucking with quick sucks each other's nipples, pumping shooting, pals lads rebels rockers mates friends for fucking ever.

The Tuatha.

One for all and all for one staring at the piece of paper Goll pulled from his pocket with the address of a man in Dublin who was a friend of a convict mate in the Priory who wrote down the name and told Goll that fags were a soft touch a lad could use if the lad weren't a fag himself.

A punch in the face could prove the Tuatha rebels weren't fags.

Together, stripped naked, they took grooming turns shaving each other's heads, standing barefoot in the pile of Dermid's red hair, sculpting black sideburns on Conan, and goatees on Oscar and Dermid, and on Goll a chinstrap blond beard.

Conan took a needle from his Ma's sewing kit and pierced their ears for gold rings Goll had filched. The three of them had held Dermid down to the floor and pierced his right nipple with a gold ring and he called them cunts and they rose up wrestling and laughing, hard and sexy and surprised, turned on in the mirror at the sudden changed image of themselves. The small bedroom exploded in a flash of revelation.

They were boys no more. Their manly heroism was in their pride and joy in each other. They were bigger than their little seaside town. Neither the amusement arcades and the fish-and-chip shops, nor even the casual summer trade of Brits lazing along the strand willing to pay for quick sex, could keep the lads long in Bray which was a red dot on the DART rail network that couldn't roll fast enough on up the commuter tracks into Dublin.

“Don’t look now.” Oscar punched Conan on the shoulder.

Conan in turn punched Dermid. “Your search for true love, Dermid, is over.”

Goll stubbed out his cigarette, exhaling hard, snorting a laugh. “There’s a Whore at the Door.”

The blue air in the Wilde One’s split apart opening a path down the bar through the crowd of regulars from the door to Dermid’s feet.

“It’s the He-She Banshee,” Conan said. “coming to take you away. *Goo-goo goo joob*.” It was the man to whose Temple Bar address Goll had taken them six months before.

Dermid winced.

The He-She Banshee was an irony of nature: one of Ireland’s high-hearted queens and the most handsome man in the underworld of Dublin, dragged up in a smart black suit of impeccable taste, with skin so fair that no light but night or fog had ever touched his face. He was a sort of gangster, not of the usual politics, but of porno, with ties some said to Amsterdam.

He was the owner behind the manager of one of the sex shops upstairs over a vacant lot on King Street offering Czech videos, and American gay magazines wrapped tight in plastic, and Taiwan toys inflatable and insertable. The shop existed beneath the radar of the Dublin Gardai, which gave Dermid and his friends the deluded idea that they too existed like an outlaw band outside the view of the police, free as the Banshee to do what they liked.

“It’s a free country.”

“Aye, and getting freer.”

Even being queer was suddenly legal. Vertigo spun the whole shebang. All of them could feel Ireland, poor little Ireland, no longer an isolated island, shrinking under the Euro and the internet and the Aer Lingus planes direct from Chicago. The Gardai were busy running bomb-sniffing dogs and drug-sniffing dogs through the strangers and tourists and daytrippers taking the jet-propulsion ferry back and forth from Holyhead in Wales to the Dublin port at Dun Laoghaire where the Banshee was always greeting someone or seeing someone off to the tune of “Paddy Goes to Holyhead.”

The Banshee fancied Dermid, but he was forty, an old man, a dirty old man to the lads. Still, as the convict had

predicted, he had money and, one by one, Goll and Conan and Oscar had, each more than once, trekked up the stairs to the rehabbed loft the Banshee kept as a pleasure penthouse on Wellington Quay looking back over Temple Bar. His interest in the muscular Goll was intensified by the sizeable Goll's wee stay at the Priory.

His appreciation of the sensuous hue of Conan's bog-dark looks had turned into a jape the lads used to provoke Conan who got his Irish up merely being reminded that the Banshee had told him the story about the Spanish Armada going down off the coast of Ireland: "From the looks of you, Conan, at least one of the greaser sailors made it ashore to at least one Irish whore's bed."

For the Banshee, as for everyone, Oscar, hip-hop, with pockets full of drugs, was always the life of any party. "A cool life," Oscar said, "is always played coolly before cool spectators."

Truth was, the Banshee after his fashion loved Dermid, but loved the pursuit of Dermid more. He chased the young man but purposely never caught him, as if captured, Dermid might vanish. Always the Banshee stopped the hunt short of erotic seduction. Or something stopped him. Curious. Were forces at work somewhere over, above, around, and through Dermid? Love hides where, indeed? And what hides love?

The Banshee noticed a peculiar thing. Dermid was unaware that he was the most cruised youth in the City of Dublin. Nobody ever won him or could buy him. Dermid's sex was confined within the brotherhood of the Tuatha. Those other three, fucked with drink and sex, were hard cases who had walked Dermid, like their vestal virgin, down to the commuter train tootling out of Bray. Four handsome wild boys from the Wicklow mountains.

The Banshee was an expert listening to pillow talk, hearing Goll's bragging, and Conan's whispering, and Oscar's mooing over all the sex rashomon among the four Tuatha.

He imagined the lads of the Tuatha in the fast-forward, slow-motion, and freeze frame of the porno videos shelved in his shop. *The hot wet mouths of those handsome handsome handsome four swanlike boys lipping down slow then eager on jutting cocks spit wet tongued fucking pink butt yes like dogs taking every shape cum spurting on lips nose eye lashes stripped naked in the shed barn woods no no no yes linen*

sheets stained with shit dewlaps hot young sweat browning each other those four drip cum into me cum into you fuck into you fuck me oh yes wipe it on me eat it eat it swallow more more fucking yes you and you and you those four ah ah ah.

The Banshee, flushed with the winter's night, walked through the Wilde One's crowd straight up to Dermid.

Goll stepped in front of the Banshee, and said, "Ain't you just the Lord of the Fags."

"Why hasn't," the Banshee said, "the Gardai arrested you yet!"

"Because I ain't yet fucked you to death," Goll said leaning in and kissing the Banshee's cheek.

"You'll have to wait," the Banshee said. "I can't stay." He turned to Dermid directly. "My, ain't you deadly good tonight."

"You spotty fuck." Goll laughed at the Banshee. He was jealous. He thought maybe Dermid had got a leg up by not fucking the fag.

The Banshee laughed back. "I said I can't stay. My dogs are outside. That great big doorman, with his girlfriend, is holding my hounds, mmm, leashed. I've come down simply to tell you four you must come up to my place tonight. Some Americans are in."

"Yanks?" Dermid said. "Why for fuck's sake, Yanks?"

"Because they're all rich," Conan said. "They smell like dollars."

"Faith and begorrah," the Banshee croaked like a stage Irishman, "they be comin' here to Ireland chasin' Danny Boy." He turned, chin up, for his exit, and threw back. "I have some white powders that will take you to the Otherworld."

"You're a right prick!" Goll was happy.

The Banshee gestured grandly to the pub full of men. "It's paradise this." He waved. "See you at the stroke of midnight. Cheers!" He disappeared out the door in a silken cloud of blue smoke.

"One time," Oscar said, "everyone left Ireland. This time, everyone's coming back."

"Jayzus, Jamie," Goll said putting his finger up his nose. "Yanks." Ireland was full of tourists looking for their roots. "The poor creatures."

Dermid followed the Banshee out the door to pet his dogs. The girl holding the three leashes smiled at him. He pet the

dogs who licked his face and he smiled up at her.

"I'm Gran," she said looking freezing shoulders in her little tittie tanktop.

"Aye, you are," Dermid said. He rose up to his full height, and walked back into the pub, leaving her revealing herself in the doorway, vexed.

Oscar looked at Dermid. "Yanks are no problem," Oscar said. He signaled for pints all around. "Are they?"

For a fact, they all agreed, Saint Patrick's Day fucks Yanks up. Especially the queer ones. Those boyo's, coming out of the States, think, *don't yeh know*, wearing green at a parade and drinking piss-pints of Guinness, *puttin' on the Irish*, qualifies them for a duty-free trip to Ireland where life is One Great Big Fucking Saint Paddy's Day.

Drink up, lads.

Their travel agents all so eager to take the Visa and book them round-trip smack into one of those shimmering green fantasy posters of the Emerald Isle that turns out to be a night in Sligo. Ha!

Gimme a cigarette.

And, oh, it pains a man a bit. Them rich Yankee queens pretending they're married, out on their Irish honeymoon, buying Waterford crystal, swinging their cameras, hanging by their heels to kiss the Blarney stone, combing the highways and back-combing the byways, cruising for Eamonn Owens, standing posed like movie stars in Aran sweaters on the edge of windy cliffs, pissing out whiskey *too good for them* into the hedgerows by the roadside, leaning next to their Tour Bus, staring out like a bunch of Ryan's daughters at the westward sea.

Pretending they're standing in their immigrant great-grandfather's shoes, making jokes about always loving potatoes, talkin' imitation Irish, *starvin' far patatas*, taking panoramic snapshots of green fields crisscrossed with them rock fences, *bless us and save us*, that look so romantic to Yanks imagining stone fences built by red-headed men with uncut cocks white as perch.

Finish up, boys.

A fella has to love them, the American cousins, flying back economy class, tourists without irony, looking up long lost relatives who didn't particularly know they were lost, working

as they are at computer companies in Cork and belonging to the EU. The Banshee's waiting with some easy marks, so's remember to lay on the brogue and the charm and say "wee" a lot and don't tell them Yanks we never eat corned beef.

"So," very droll, Goll said, "here you are your first trip to Ireland."

One of the four Yanks said, "To Dublin actually."

"Actually," Goll's ear spun the funny-sounding American idiom. "Dublin *ag-shoe-alee*...as opposed to Dublin virtue-ally."

"Dublin. Yeah," Conan said.

"Where the love that dare not speak its name first learned to hiss." Goll licked his finger.

"Boys, boys, boys," the Banshee said. "Let's forego the old Dublin irony for some Irish hospitality."

"Ain't 'hospitality' the new name for a fuck," Oscar said. He inhaled deep and blew a spew of cigarette smoke into the Yanks' faces, muscelfucks one of them was, with big biceps and a stalactite crystal hanging very new-age between his bulging pecs. "You took your shirt off, I guess, because...?"

Attitude caused the posh furniture in the penthouse at the top of Wellington Quay to shift. Chic white chairs and plush white sofas and glass-top tables clattered back against the egg-white plaster walls. Red Berber rugs rolled up revealing the waxed pine of rough-hewn floors. Across the high ceiling, 12-volt track lights scooted into position. Candle flames guttered in the rising incense. Outside, below the windows of the penthouse, Dublin lit out in a maze through the ink-black Saturday night where anything was possible.

"Mmmm. Excuse me!" The Banshee moved like a stage director to arrange the eight men standing in the room. "Der-mid and Oscar," the Banshee said, "and Conan and Goll, this is Mr. Wethers."

Wethers stepped forward, solid, impressive, thirty, and himself a redhead. He offered his big hand all around. "You fucks and my boys are gonna get along," Wethers said. He pointed and named Knuckles, Frankie X, and Patch who nodded their heads atop their thick necks and said nothing.

"Tough guys, huh?" Conan checked out the tattoo on Frankie X's neck.

"Patch is from the Patch in Chicago," Frankie X said.

"Why's Chicago need a patch?" Oscar cracked.

“Wise guys, huh?” Knuckles said. “Who do you think you are? Sean Penn?”

Wethers laughed and when he laughed, all his boys laughed.

“You wanna know the Patch is the Irish northside,” Knuckles said, “and you wanna know why I’m called Knuckles.” He locked his thick fingers together and made snapping sounds like little gunshots.

“Brilliant!” the Banshee said. He pointed to a table. “Food. Drink. Et Cetera. Name your poison. Especially on the Et Cetera.”

Like a magician, he aimed his black plastic remote at a CD player and music exploded in volume and beat beat beat filling the penthouse with pulse and blood pushing the rhythms of the eight men sitting down *zip* smoking leaning pacing slamming a whiskey *ahhh* walking around one another looking *zip* checking sniffing *oh yeah* touching punching unbutton stroking rubbing the inside leg squeezing *don’t go there* groping sizing slow-stripping laugh snort *hey* pose smack smack smack *yeah fuck dude come on*, Wethers grabbing *zip* Dermid’s *zip zip* crotch: “*Show me what you got, Danny Boy!*”

“Don’t fuckin’ call me Danny Boy!”

Fighting words. Dermid’s goodlooks flushed blue, warriors from the weir possessed when confronted, *yeh fuckin’ shite*, punches tossed and blocked, lust rising, the room spinning round, men half-naked ripped naked, cocks gorging hard and rising, whiskey glasses dropped down on tables, *c’mere you little shit*, smoke inhaled deep, torn off shirts shed, nipples grazing nipples, the fighting stance of love, half nelson full hammerlock, penis poking butt slapping, *momentum, baby*, a harder dance rocking the room, *going farther faster than the fastest horse than the fastest jet than the fastest internet because sex between men, even if it goes slow itself, goes swifter in the end than the swiftest thing in the world, for men’s desire is a natural river that never stops while horses die planes crash satellites fall* and over the tub-thumping music the TV screen of silent Prague pornos shoots *digital bits of analog sex* into a room of grease lube oil spit shine sweat sheen O’Sheen red goatee tongue hunger *fingerknuckles nipple plucking* suck on me you him *fuckin’ cocksucker* friendly thighs suctioning *rush the enemy naked* possessed with warp spasm of Cuchulainn

into the *outrageous rage of the river of eros flowing*, the evening rising hard high clear brilliant, *sex sparkling like water gaining speed over rocks*.

"Everybody seems," the Banshee said, "sufficiently stoned." He looked with pleasure at the eight young gentlemen roaming his penthouse, sitting naked on his white furniture, walking naked about his table he had casually set with plates and knives and paté and white wine and biscotti because he had forgotten bread.

Oscar, thinking of the sixteen hits of acid in his trousers hanging on a lamp across the room, rejoiced to be a bit wrecked on someone else's stash.

"Drugs is the fucking glorious Otherworld," Conan said.

Dermid, always thinking of the hunt for the clarifying force of love hiding maybe somewhere in the penthouse, looked at the Yanks comparing them to his lads and his life and feeling weird.

Goll, thinking of the Americans, naked, circumcised, taking a break, well fed, huddling together laughing joking, liked their gangster style, four or five years older than him, tattooed, buftie boys, and imagined himself living back in the Patch in Chicago, an emigrant success at last, not like his Da and his grandfather and great-grandfather and all his family before him who'd never been able to get off their doffs and escape the emerald-green backwater of filthy gritty stupid old Ireland, and migrate out where there was money and sex and real luck.

"Danny Boy is a stupid fuck," Goll yelled. "A stupid fuck for staying stuck."

They all laughed at Goll standing naked and hard, throwing little amateur boxer punch-up punches, biff biff biff, in the middle of the room.

Wethers said, "Go fuck yourself, Danny, you stupid mick, cuz nobody else will."

"Fuck up, you," Dermid said. "You fucks only come to fuck us."

"Hey, fuck!" Knuckles said, "do we look British?"

Dermid stood up, blood boiling cock erect, hard, red, veined, big, thick, long, proud, stabbing into the sweaty air. He pointed at his prick, its big head mushrooming out the purple-red cowl of foreskin. "This what you want? This what you're chasing?"

“Fuck no,” Wethers said. “Turn around. Show off your fucking cunt butt.”

Dermid stuck his snotty fuck virgin butt out pulling his round white cheeks apart to the deep line of red furze growing thick and moist in his crack making kiss kiss kissy smooches. “You can kiss it.”

“Pucker up,” Patch said.

“Fuck you,” Goll said.

“Fuck yourself, mickey,” Wethers said. “Once me and my boys fucked a United States Marine Corporal while I made him sing ‘From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli.’”

“Fucking droll,” Conan said.

“Like me and my boys are gonna fuck the four of you...”

“I’m wetting myself,” Oscar whinnied, “fucking ass-bandits.”

“Shut up,” Wethers said.

“Yeah.” Francis X stood up.

“Yeah.” Knuckles stood up.

“Oh, yeah.” Patch stood up.

Goll pointed. “Look, ain’t they a fucking Hollywood western.”

“And the movie ends,” Wethers said, “with me and my boys fucking you four river-dancers while you sing ‘Danny Boy.’”

“I love musicals,” the Banshee said, drooling over the raw male energy in the room.

“I’ll make you a bet,” Wethers righted the room with good-natured belligerence, “that I can make you want to do it.”

“Name your bet,” Goll said.

“Never dare a Dublin man,” Conan said.

“We ain’t Eurotrash,” Oscar said.

“Fucking us,” Dermid said, “will be stepping up for you, because what you’ve been doing will make you blind.”

He started laughing, and he was figuring fast what to do to rescue the lads and his ass, and his laughing and the whiskey and the grass stepped him out of time, slipping to another time, another Yank, who had come on strong, taking him on a long drive in a rental car out from Dublin City Centre north along the road to Howth at the northeastern end of Dublin Bay.

The ride had been lovely, really. Dermid had never been the few kilometers north, looking out east over the Irish Sea so familiar from down south in Bray, and then back west toward Dublin, but that City view over that posh neighborhood

had disappeared, driving back, when the honestly handsome Yank had cut off the road and driven though the dunes along the beach, grinding gears through the sand, his hand on Dermid's knee.

The tall grass spotting the rolling dunes gave way to the miles-long flat sandy shore of Dublin Bay marked off in the distance by the twin stacks of the electricity works guiding in the jet planes to Dublin International. The car sped across the smooth sand, daring the broad lazy inrolling green green waves of low tide, leaving wet tire marks behind in the white froth.

What was it with these Yanks showing off?

The beach was deserted. The car roared. Then stopped. The Yank, with a rasping black stubble of a three-day beard, came on strong, stronger than in town, with wet tongue kisses, demanding Dermid's ass, and Dermid thought of his mam telling his sister Brigid going on a date to always take bus fare home just in case.

When his sister made it home, she was, she was, she was very, and she said she was going to keep it. One time, that taboo would have been the end of a girl's name and the shame of a family, but in the vertiginous new times, pregnancy was a style and paid for and given little knit booties and pennies enough for a ride in the stroller to MacDonald's.

Only one last taboo remained, and that too was a style, and legal, except when paid for, which is what, in that car on that beach, the Yank with the expensive American teeth had told Dermid he'd do. For fun, Dermid had said *how much*, knowing no matter what bumboy price the Yank put on his hole, he'd refuse, but at least he'd know how much a Yank thought his Danny Boy ass was worth, which, when he heard the price in Irish pounds, was almost mystical news.

That time the wisdom had come to Dermid of how to save his ass. The handsome Yank, grabbing and groping, was all big-dick talking big-dick big talk, because really what the Yank wanted was Dermid fucking him, which Dermid did, in the car, in the sand, on the beach, in the late afternoon, feeling brilliant actually at turning the tables and driving his dick in and out of the athletic-built Yank in a fierce fuck that brought the Yank to tears, shooting his cum, untouched by hands, crying, putting his hands on Dermid's rosy white

cheeks, touching his red red goatee, staring into his blue blue eyes, saying the kind of illuminated fuck-poetry men with stars in their own crossed eyes say after sex, "Some men have a look other men recognize, but you are as yet unmarked," and Dermid was told later by the Banshee that the Yank meant that Dermid had not yet ruined his body with the usual poisons of the adult world.

"Fucking you," Wethers stepped into Dermid's face, "maybe I'll become a permanent resident up your Irish hole..."

"Ah, the bragging of the wee folk," Dermid said.

"...and make you want it," Wethers said.

"Don't tease tossers," Goll said. He stood shoulder to shoulder with Dermid facing Wethers' three boyo's. "As for this back-up group of wah wah sissies," Goll said. "We're the Tuatha!" He strummed his headbanger air guitar. "Waaaah!"

Dermid looked at Goll. The four Tuatha looked at each other, *fighting lads we are*, then looked at the four Yanks, *fucking Firbolgs*, then looked a warning at the Banshee, the would-be queen of the Tuatha, and ran like berserkers, shouting, across the room, jumping the Yanks, surprising them, and a terrible row shook the penthouse, arms and legs tangling, yelling, *wankers*, chest to chest, heads butting, cocks and tongues and bollix swinging, *we are the champions*, the hounds of the Banshee yapping barking, flailing fists gut punches pec slaps *you want a piece of me* music thumping Depeche Mode *wrestle this* thighs spread feet dug in sharp jabs soft palms strong fingers interlocked *get down* veins startling on forearms *on your* cockheads unsheathing excitement *knees* body slam onto couch shoulders into pillows, tongue-puking Yank deodorant, leg lock fierce breathing tight choke hold *choke on this* porno video bits jerking sweat rising smoke from ashtrays candles incense ram it *Dermid!* battling across the floor up against the wall *ouch goddamit* pressure of flesh drive of thigh sweat in the small of backs dust spiraling up in the fuming cones of track light *watch your fucking teeth* rising in pairs then threes *Goll Goll!* falling back in pairs physical primal animal *jay jay jaysis* teeth bared cocks rampant, Wethers rising, huge engorged blue veins *fuck jab 'em* thrust boys cries ravaging triumphant fluid *what forces work* spear impale, steam billows from the bodies clouds the smokey room, onscreen actors in the Prague video freeze in violet haze of digital bits, the dogs howl,

muggy penthouse windows inside sweat with juice, outside a mist drifts lifts rifts through the high orange light glowing cumulus over Temple Bar and a dark fog rolls up from the cold black waters of the Liffey carried in by the ancient tide from the Irish Sea on the cum cum cum cries of night birds.

Three weeks later, Dermid wondered how his butt that night had become part of the Irish tourist industry.

Wethers himself had popped his cherry.

Coming out of the Infirmary, Dermid gave thumbs up to Oscar sitting with Goll and Conan on the long wooden bench. "The nursie says I'm okay." They all laughed nervously. "Ain't we just the mystic knights of the Fianna defending Ireland from foreign troops." The English doctor, who had drawn their blood and swabbed each of them front and back, had told them they showed no signs of any social disease.

Yet.

Conan said Frankie X had whipped out a condom before he fucked him. Oscar claimed Patch shot dryfucking his thighs, and Goll admitted to no more than Knuckles had fucked his face. Then Oscar remembered that Patch had cum twice, *mmm*, once inside his butt. Dermid noticed how Goll denied that Knuckles had screwed Goll as well.

"It was all so fucking furious." Dermid studied Goll's expression.

"We was all so fucking stoned," Goll said.

"The doctor wants to check our blood in three months." Conan said.

"Fucking Aids," Oscar said.

"Fucking suspense."

"Fucking Yanks."

"Fucking us."

"Fuck."

At a curry cafe where they were not known, Dermid said, "Wethers and his boys put us well underfoot." He looked at the plates of sizzling tandoori. "I'll be changing my tune."

"What are you on about," Oscar said. "You turning down a life in Vaseline Alley?"

Goll sat a bit moony. He was remembering Knuckles who had whispered sweet nothings to him. What good did it do him to be sitting in Dublin with these gits when he could be working back in Chicago with "Wethers Bros. Bricks, Paving

& Landscape.”

He had drawn his brother, Conan, in on the intention, as much as the thought, that they two should be off to the States. Some fancy it was, but whether the Wethers or not, Goll was figuring his good old Dublin days were about over. He and Conan could lay bricks. In his pocket, he had two green card immigrant work applications, and Knuckle’s Chicago phone number on a slip of paper.

Who was chasing who?

Goll looked at the other three lads. They looked at each other. What feeling was shame—suddenly at a soul-piercing glance—turned to a loud exploding laugh of relief.

“Waaaaah! It was a fucking teen sex comedy,” Goll said, “...starring us!”

“Fuck us!” Oscar said.

“Fuck the Banshee!” Conan said.

“Indeed, fuck us,” Dermid said. He raised his glass. “Fuck the Banshee! Fuck the Yanks! The doctor said we flirted with death.”

“Jay Jaysis, Dermid,” Goll said already imagining himself leaving Ireland behind. “Lighten up, dude.”

Six months later, in summer, Dermid’s shaved head was grown out to a lustrous red. He felt like a new man. He rubbed his long fingers over his moustache and goatee. He faced himself naked in the full-length mirror at the Sauna on Dame Lane. What a fire trap. His body was tall and lean-muscled. His skin clear and unmarked. Eyes bright. He was happy the doctor told him his blood was clean. He looked at his cock hanging soft and thick and long between his thighs. He flexed the muscle between his bollix and his asshole to make his cock bounce. He looked only at himself, neither to the left or the right, ignoring the eyes watching him from the lockers and the showers.

Life in Dublin had speeded up too fast for him.

He could not go back down to Bray and live like Bridget with her kid in their parents’ house. He had found a room without a bath close to Dolphin’s Barn where he lived alone. He towed his shoulders and back. He had slowed his life down to a discipline.

Men could live without a bath or a kitchen.

He was tuning into the inner language of men.

Moving quiet around Dublin, ignoring what temptations he noticed, becoming a solid man, he said, working as a waiter among the starving young artists at the *Idée Fixe* Café, the good old *IF*, on Fowne's Street off Temple Bar.

"You've become a fucking monk," Oscar said. He was working for the Banshee. He had money. It was Oscar who brought the Tuatha de Danaan together one last time. He paid for the taxi to drive Goll and Conan out the M1 road to Dublin Airport.

Conan was worried about leaving the country, scared about climbing on the Aer Lingus jet, wetting his pants afraid about landing in Chicago and getting fucked all over again.

Goll was exuberant justifying himself "Seven million Irish can't be wrong living outside of Ireland!"

"Meaning what about the three million of us living here," Dermid said. "Do you think this is the land time forgot?"

"Love hides where?" Goll imitated Dermid. "Love hides where?" He shoved his hand along the taxi seat under Dermid's buttocks and laughed.

"You're a right prick," Dermid said.

"But together we're deadly grand," Goll said.

The Tuatha de Danaan laughed. All together. One last time.

In the taxi heading back through the warm June night to Dublin City Centre, Dermid wondered what it was that drove so many Irish out of Ireland. Himself, he was staying put. He looked at Oscar. Also staying put, he figured.

Oscar was a good friend. His sister Brigid had taken a fancy to him despite his hip hop phase. And a convenient thing it was, them both being from Bray, knowing each other since kids, and Brigid's boy looking so much like Oscar, it was a wonder to think about.

Brigid herself was a dirty old mouth, invited by Oscar, coming to that curry house for the Tuatha farewell supper, saying goodbye to Goll and Conan, laughing and wishing them well, and saying mystically later at the pub, well into her second pint, "The secret Irish purpose is spreading Irish blood all around the world." And what barbed thing had she meant, saying, "Wasting Irish blood," looking hard at him, "is a crime against the Irish nature."

"If being Irish is all a person is," Dermid had answered.

With Goll and Conan O'Morna headed out over the North

Atlantic toward America, Oscar in the taxi let Dermid climb out at Temple Bar.

It was half-ten and the crowds of kids, five years younger than Dermid, sat smoking and running and jumping on the steps of the plaza. Tourists from Galway and the States were strolling out of the small experimental theaters around Andrews Lane and heading to the expensive pasta restaurants like Paolo's where he'd like to work.

Dermid wandered on down the cobbled street of the pedestrian mall. Ninety minutes to midnight and the last light of the high summer twilight had finally darkened the lower sky.

Off Eustace Street, on the five-story outside wall of the Irish Film Centre, Dermid watched the rippling canvas screen wave under the huge Technicolor motion picture image of Liza Minnelli and Joel Grey dancing and singing loud over the crowd seated below in the courtyard enjoying the movie and the warm summer night. Middle-aged American queens were standing in the back rows singing along to *Cabaret* like it was fucking karaoke.

Maybe he should have gone back with Oscar to Bray. Maybe he should have flown off with Goll and Conan to America.

Down the street he walked through the crowds milling outside the music pubs from one spill of music to another. What a scene. One last tour of the street, was all he promised himself, and maybe a midnight pint over at the Wilde One's, when his ears pricked up, and his eyes lifted up, and he saw eight young girls singing on the corner, "We're Goin' to the Chapel and We're Gonna Get Married."

Something drew him to them. Their voices. Their innocence. Their fun.

Seven of them stood around a dark-haired girl whose head was swathed white in yards of net bridal veil. She was beautiful. The light of her beauty was shining on the walls of the small shop front as if her glow was the light of a candle.

Dermid watched several tourists watching her. Something was going on. People were putting money in the bridal box at her feet. He was curious. He walked up to the girls who were calling out "Sir, sir, madam, madam" to the tourists who walked by staring captivated, but a bit timid at stopping, figuring the girls might play them like street mimes somehow for public fools. Dermid walked straight up toward them.

“Sir, sir,” the girls called to him. Their pretty hands played through the white white white bridal veil floating around the dark-haired girl.

He smiled at them.

“Come here. Come here.”

Dermid ventured up.

“Sir,” the girls said, voices laughing talking saying singing sighing everything all together. “Sir. Please. Buy a piece of her wedding veil. She needs the money to buy herself a wedding dress.”

Two Irish women standing by, four white plastic bags of groceries hanging straight-arm down from their four dumpling hands, said, “Ha Ha Ha.”

“Performance art?” Dermid had seen everything at the *IF* Café.

The dark-haired bride with dark eyes smiled directly at Dermid.

“Brilliant.” He grinned.

One of the girls held a scissors. “I’ll cut you a piece. Yes? It will bring you luck on your path.”

“With the looks on him,” the two women standing by cackled, “he don’t need luck.”

“Aye, OK,” Dermid said. He reached into his pocket for coins and looked at the dark-haired girl and pulled out a pound note. “This is rich.”

The two women standing by said, “All these eejit girls want is seed and cash.”

The girl with the scissors cut a three-inch piece of veil into a patch.

“Come here,” the dark-haired bride said to Dermid, “and I will put a love-spot on you...”

“Are you a witch now?” He laughed and played along and went over to her.

“...that no one will ever see without giving you love.”

She put her hand on his forehead, and she touched the piece of net veil there, and minutes later on his way home, in the high June midnight, walking the long walk toward Dolphin’s Barn past the Wilde One’s, Dermid, already forgetting the incident, feeling cocky in his pants, strolled past the beefy hooligans guarding the pub door where, lighting a cigarette, the girl in the little tittie tanktop stood, calling to his back as

he rambled by, “Where you been hiding, lover?”