

Irish Accents

By Cindy Rae



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“So, we’re to be ‘Romeo and Juliet with Irish accents,’ are we?” the ghost of Ian O’Donnell asked his very-much-alive wife. It was October 31st, and the walls between the worlds were thin.

Brigit set down the feathered mask she’d worn last year, surprised at Ian’s sudden appearance on her borrowed New York apartment balcony, and for that matter, in her life.

Or perhaps I’m just losing me mind, along with all the other things I’ve lost, Brigit mused, seeing him standing across from her, his ginger hair being ruffled by the October wind. New York simmered and hummed over his shoulder, as her husband raised a familiar eyebrow at her.

Brigit didn't answer him right away. She couldn't. After all, it wasn't every day the dead came back and asked you about the film that was going to be made about your love story.

"Ian?" It was a question as much as a statement. The ribbons of last year's mask trailed through her nerveless fingers. She hadn't been planning on wearing it. She hadn't planned on going out, at all. It was just a thing she'd found, while going through some Samhain remembrances.

"The very same." He shot her a crooked grin, one made crooked by a fistfight in his teens that had broken his jaw. "So. Romeo and Juliet?" he prompted.

Brigit couldn't help but stare. There he was. Ian Padriac O'Donnell. Her Ian. Her Ian, looking very much the same way he'd had the week before he'd been killed. Green-eyed. Ginger-haired, and in need of a haircut. Sporting dark slacks and a dodgy charcoal jacket, and a three day growth of beard, the latter mostly shot with the same red shade that covered his head. Freckles were scattered across his face, though it took a day in the sun to really bring those out.

Not handsome, not really, not to anyone but her. Her scrappy, poetic, Ian. The Orangeman her father had hated. The one it seemed like half the world still hated, partly because she'd loved him.

"I've heard it rumored," she said, answering his charge. "You're a long way from home, Ian."

He opened the jacket and eased himself down on the wide railing of her balcony. His long legs barely bent. "Longer than you, considering. So. New York." He nodded toward the scenery. "Always said you'd come to see if the stories your Da told you were true. Did you miss me, Croppie?" He didn't need to ask, yet still, he did.

She stepped closer to him. "You know I did. I do. Every day."

She wrapped the burgundy shawl tighter around her, though she didn't feel the cold. *What is this? Am I dreaming you?* She didn't know. But she figured she'd just go with it.

He looked out over the city lights. "It's a long, long way from Derry. And Hollywood? He gave her a bit of a side eye. "Even farther." His familiar green eyes glanced down toward the park. "At least there's some green in it," he allowed.

Brigit stepped close to the balustrade and took in the New York night with him. Her blue eyes followed the downward direction of his gaze. "Aye. That there is. And you're right. It is far from Derry. I'd tell you it's a long way from the sound of gunfire, and the screams of dyin' men, but it isn't. Not really." She frowned, with recollection. "Last year, when I came here... I heard those." She looked back at his beloved face. "Michael McPhee died. Not so far from here. 'Twas Jamie Harlan. I... I didn't even know him."

Ian O'Donnell studied the beautiful face of his wife, now his widow. "Neither did I," he assured her.

Then, he changed the subject. "Your Da sends his love. He made me swear to tell you."

Brigit smiled, slightly. "I wish you could have known each other better. Loved each other. I swear he wasn't an evil man, Ian. It's just... the troubles. It all... did things to him. Losing me Ma, especially."

Ian rose from the railing of her New York apartment, or at least the one she used while she was here. It was a place her publisher had set up for her, a place that never felt like "home."

Brigit's young husband put his hands in his pants pockets, stretching the fabric of the last good suit she'd ever seen him wear. His answer, when it came, was a kind one.

"He's your Da. The man who taught you what love meant. And now he's chasing your Ma will you, nill you. They're fine, Brigit. He's fine."

It was Brigit who wasn't fine, and they both knew it. "It's been a hard year for you," he said simply.

She eased herself down so she sat opposite from where he stood, taking him in while the wind played with the uneven ends of his hair. He looked opaque, in spots, and more solid in others. But he seemed content to be right where he was, standing on the balcony of her borrowed apartment, while a Halloween Jack-o-lantern burned brightly, on a table to his left, and the ribbons of her old mask tangled tantalizingly, in the October breeze.

In spite of their proximity to each other, she seemed to understand he couldn't touch her. She didn't try to touch him.

"A hard year. It's been that," she agreed, knowing she'd had to face burying Sean, then going through his meager estate. All the while, the film rights she'd sold had indeed begotten the makings of a major motion picture, and that was now fully under way. Casting was done, and location filming had commenced. The world, it seemed, had not stopped because she'd become a widow, then an orphan. The world, it seemed, didn't stop for anything.

Ian tilted his fair head to one side, as he regarded her. "I remember the great bonfires, out past the farm. We'd all drive out, then dance a jig and pass a bottle. And pray a pretty lass as beautiful as you decided to come."

He smiled at her, and it was an oft-used grin. One that meant he was about to wheedle her for something, until he got it. Brigit was on her guard, even though she missed him.

"I remember it, too," she replied, recalling the night she'd met him.

"What is it you're wanting, Ian? Come to ask what I had carved on your stone? The one they're always knocking down, back in Derry?"

So far, he'd made no request of her. *Did ghosts visit you on Halloween to make small talk?* She had to admit she had no idea.

"I've seen me stone, and I've seen you weepin' by it. Or what's left of it, after the vandals got through. No man should ever see the second, much less the first. No, Croppie. I just came to chat w'you. Tonight of all nights, it's sure we can."

He seemed to breathe in the crisp, October air. For a moment, the gesture seemed to make him more solid.

"Tonight of all nights," Brigit agreed, remembering how she'd spent last Halloween: A great, huge man named Vincent had spirited her out of a party, then squired her through the park, and for that fact, saved her life.

But she hadn't seen Ian, then. *Too many other things to see, don't you know.* There had been a different beautiful owl woman, and a traitorous spy. A glittering party, a murder, and a rescue. It had been a very busy Samhain for her, last year. And that was all even before her reunion with Sean O'Reilly, bogside man and Derry brawler. International criminal. And father, to one Brigit Jean O'Reilly - O'Donnell.

"You spent last Samhain talkin' to someone," Ian prompted, an indulgent smile in his voice. "Someone who looked as if he could have sailed with Theseus."

"Or ridden with CuChulainn," Brigit returned his smile. "You'd have liked him, Ian. I did."

"It's sure I would have." He paused. "You need to find him, girl. Need to take it back. Not all of it maybe. But most."

Ah. Now that was a direction. One given to her by her dead husband. *Take it back?*

Brigit struggled to remember the advice she'd given Vincent, for a moment. *Forget you ever knew her, and you'll both be happier ... We kept on. Until he died for it... It could have been me. Sometimes... I wish it had been...*

Brigit shrugged, and stood, tugging the wrap tighter. "I dinna think he listened to me. But you're welcome to visit him yourself, you stubborn Irish Orangeman."

"I'm thinkin' he needs to hear it from you, Croppie," Ian said, extending a hand, as if he was about to play with one of her auburn curls. But he dropped the hand, and sighed, or at least to Brigit, he seemed to.

"Y'know it wasn't true, what you said. It never could be."

"I know no such th—" She stopped, and shook her head at his raised eyebrow. It was a gesture that had often communicated much, between them.

Now it was Brigit who sighed. "Ah, well, all right. If I see him again, I'll say something. Something... wise, and spiritual." The last was delivered with a wry twist of her lovely lips.

“They seem to think I’m good with that. Even if I think I hate it. ‘Juliet’ needs hopeful-sounding things to say.” She was aware that she’d almost snapped her last comment. Also, that this felt familiar. They’d both agreed and disagreed, all throughout their brief marriage. There’d been no other way to live, for an Orangeman and a bogside lass.

“There’s no hatred in you. Only grief.” Ian exactly echoed Vincent.

He was right, of course. Both he and Vincent were. But in a way, the very hard year had left her almost as tired of her own grief as she was of the fighting, back in her homeland.

She’d buried Sean, and done a daughter’s duty by him. And the next week, Hollywood had come calling, asking her if she would help them verify certain locations in Derry, for filming. The entire year had felt too surreal, sometimes, and that was saying something, considering it had included a year where she’d met Vincent.

“I’m tired of the grief, Ian,” she confessed to him. “Tired of the fighting. Of living in the cage the book made for me.”

“The book didna make that, my bonny girl. The times, perhaps, but nae the book. Dinna you regret a word of 300 Days. Not the writing of it, nor the living it.” It was softly given advice.

She tried to send him a smile. “If you command it, husband.” They both knew she was only pretending to be compliant. That, too, was a thing that had marked their marriage. It usually made him laugh, since they both knew she was anything but tractable.

This time, it didn’t.

“You know what I’m here to say, lass,” Ian almost whispered it.

Brigit did. Somewhere inside, she knew what this was about, and she rose from her perch and stepped around and away from him.

"Don't. Don't say it, Ian. Don't even think it." Her blue eyes were full of fire.

Rather than chase her, he simply sat back down on the balustrade, looking deceptively casual. Looking like he wasn't cornering her, when they both knew he was about to.

"And who's to say it's not you 'thinkin' up this whole conversation?" Ian asked, with a bit of a wry grin. "Do you think they'll say the great Brigit O'Donnell has gone mad, and is taken to speakin' with her dead husband, then? But only on Samhain?"

"It isn't just on Samhain that I speak to you," Brigit retorted hotly, the hint of tears in her eyes. She knew what was coming.

"Ah, but it's on Samhain I answered. This time. It's all right, darlin'. You know it is."

"No."

He all but chuckled at her, giving her the soft laugh she'd been previously expecting.

"No? And here I am. The one man you could never really say 'no' to," he reminded her.

She knew it was true. "Ian—"

"There's a problem with Romeo and Juliet, lass. It *ends* badly. For *both* of them," he interrupted.

His meaning was clear. They 'both' hadn't ended badly. Only he had.

"You're not comin' here to tell me I can just—"

"Move on," he interrupted her a second time. "It's all right, Croppie."

She whirled away from him, the ends of the burgundy wrap flying. She half-hoped he'd be gone, thanks to her losing eye contact with him. She clutched the pretty bit of fabric tight around her, trying to ward off a chill that had nothing to do with the temperature.

"Now you're the one who's mad," she accused, wondering if he was still there to hear it.

"I'm not. And neither are you, for thinkin' it," came his beloved voice, from over her shoulder.

"I didn't think it. I just..." She floundered for a word.

"Brigit. It's all right. It's time, even."

His voice had a soothing edge. The one she knew. The one she remembered. The one that had charmed her, and often convinced others.

"Three years and more. You've mourned me proper, girl, and far too deep. And Sean? Your Da was lost to you before he was even *lost* to you. We understand. I understand."

"It feels... disloyal, somehow."

She cringed at the thought. If there was one thing Brigit O'Donnell had never been in her life, it was 'disloyal.' In spite of some of the things her father had called her, in life.

Ian paused. "I love you too, Croppie. That willna change. No matter what you do. But I'd not see you wed to your grief. That's not what we were tryin' to make, together."

"What we were tryin' to make, together...", she simply echoed him, then turned back around to face him. He seemed so beautiful to her, then. Her handsome, yet unhandsome husband. The one she'd loved --until he'd died for it.

Ian's voice remained soft, yet convincing. "What you're fighting for, in Ireland... what we fought for... It will happen, beauty. It will. Have faith. There will be peace, yet."

"Can you see it?" she asked. "Can ghosts see the future?" She couldn't resist the question.

He shook his head in the negative. "Not even me own, nor yours. Not this ghost, at least." He gave her his smallest smile. But it was a smile, still. "Your Aunt Meghan maybe. But not me."

It amused her to think that some ghosts had the gift of prophecy, while others didn't. "Aunt Meg was a snip and a gossip."

"Still is," he agreed. "But she's family, and she told me I needed to see you, so I thank her for that. Before the grief takes hold. Before this movie they all have planned leaves you with more fame and ... nothing else."

"So that's me fate? I thought you said you couldn't see the future," she chided."

"I can't. Why should I have in death what I never had in life?" he asked philosophically. He rose again, and took a small step in her direction. She liked it when the distance closed a little, between them.

"But I tell you what I did have. I had you. Beautiful, stubborn, full of fire you. I had you, Brigit. And my life was blessed for it."

"And I had you." A lone tear escaped her lovely blue eyes. "I had you, Ian. You were the blessing of my days."

His look grew tender. It was that look that had first charmed her into his life, and eventually, into his bed.

“And we always will have that. In fifty years, or sixty, no matter what other love you choose, we’ll have that. We’ll know. I’m going to chase you down and get a dance with you, the day you come over. Count on it, Croppie.”

Fifty years, or sixty. Or one. All of them seemed like a long time to live without love, or anything that approached that. A long time to live without believing in fairy music, or the magic that could happen around a bonfire. She knew he was right. Even if part of her rebelled at hearing it.

“I will. I will dance with you,” she replied, letting another tear fall.

“Oh, Ian...”

“Brigit Jean.” When he used her first and middle name, she knew he was serious about something. “You lived a piece of a life. You wrote a book, and it was a fine one. A great one, even. They made you a symbol.”

She nodded, knowing it was all true.

“Don’t let them make you a monument,” he cautioned. “Monuments are cold, and made of stone. And my Brigit was never cold. Nor made of stone. If you never find your way to love again, of some kind or another, that’s what you’ll be.”

He let that stand a moment, so she could take in his words. “It does nae have to be like it was with us. But it has to be love. It’s all right you been thinkin’ it, been wonderin’. It’s all right, Colleen.”

“Ian. I love y—”

“And don’t you think I know it? You mind me now, girl. Come Samhain next, I want to see you dancin’ around a bonfire somewhere. And with your heart in it, now.”

She shook her lovely head, but she didn't disagree with him. "You're a harder taskmaster than the hardliners in Ulster." She knew she'd just insulted him. Lovingly.



"Says she who takes the taskmasters to task," he returned. "What truths might you find, if you're but open to the possibilities?" he countered.

"I'll try." She could promise him no more than that.

"That's all I'm askin'." He turned back toward the park, pushed back his battered coat and put his hands in his pants pockets, again. He continued looking out toward the deep greensward of the park. His next words surprised her. Mostly because she had no idea what he meant.

"Brigit... he's more than you know."

"Who is?" Brigit asked, now confused by him.

Ian glanced back at her and shot her a grin that was utterly conspiratorial.

"You'll see. You'll see, when you meet him again. All I can tell you is... it's nae a mask. There's no disguise in him, no artifice. He's the purest ... man I think I've ever seen, if that's the right word for him. You can sense the spirit in him on both sides of the divide. It's nae a mask," he repeated. "And Catherine knows it."

"Catherine Chandler?" Brigit asked, searching her brain. *Why would you know about her?* Aside from the help she'd given Brigit with Sean's legal situation, she hadn't seen the beautiful attorney in over nine months. *Catherine. And before, Ian was chiding me about the advice I gave Vincent. Vincent and Catherine...* She knew they were a couple. Her adventure last Halloween had told her that much.

"That and no other. They'll help you, Brigit. Help you believe in the fairy stories, again. You need to. Your heart is built for it."

Vincent and Catherine. It... it wasn't a mask? But... but that made no sense.

Brigit struggled to recall Vincent's words to her, as he'd spirited her through Central Park: *'She brings me . . . such joy . . . and such pain, as I have never known. I have no place in her world; she has none in mine. Our bond endangers everything: people I love, secrets I'm sworn to keep, beliefs I've lived by...'*

Brigit gasped. It made no sense, until it did. Her startled eyes stared Ian down. "You aren't sayin'..."

"Well, that's it then," he removed his hand from his pockets and clapped them together. "I'll send your love to your Ma."

Ian began to fade, before her wondering eyes.

Leaving. Her husband was leaving her. Again. But this time, there was a gentleness to it. He was leaving her with a bit of a riddle. And a bit of hope. And a bit of an order to have a life, again.

“Orangemen!” Brigit fumed. It didn’t stop him from going.

He smiled at her temper, and faded a little more.

“Fine, then. If you think you must! Love to me Ma. And Sean! Don’t forget me father!”

He shook his head at her as if she’d burdened him, with her request. But there was a subtle, crooked grin there, as well.

“Lord. The tasks you set me to, woman.”

She brushed her tears away. “I hear they’re casting a handsome devil for Romeo,” she chided his fading form. “So he barely looks like you at all.”

The fading green eyes twinkled, with merriment. “Just make sure they get the bonniest lass in Christendom for you, Croppie girl,” he returned. “And the one least likely to listen to reason.”

“I’m listenin,” she replied wondering if she hadn’t conjured this entire conversation. Her time in mourning had taken its toll on her. She found that part of her spirit truly was rebelling, now, longing to live a full life, again. Somehow.

“Ah, so *now* you’re listenin’ to good advice, are you? Hah! ‘May the road rise to meet you, darlin’.” Slan agus beannacht.” He continued to fade. She could now see the buildings clearly, behind him.

“Goodbye and blessings,” she replied, translating him. “Will I see you more?”

He shook his head, but the smile didn't dim. "I don't think so. I don't think you need to. Happy Samhain, Brigit. Happy Samhain, my love." He said, then wisped away from view.

"Happy Samhain," she whispered, as he left.

The fat jack-o-lantern remained on the table to her left, its interior candle flickering, and sending the smell of warm, raw pumpkin into the air. It grinned at her in a lopsided way that looked almost delightfully familiar. She wondered if she'd carved it that way on purpose, or if it had just been the fault of an unimpressive kitchen knife.

"You're supposed to scare away the spooks," she admonished it. "A great lot of good you did."

The carved face smiled cheekily, back at her. It looked pleased with itself, this traditional symbol of Halloween.

Ian's warning repeated itself, in her brain. *They made you a symbol. Don't let them make you a monument.*

She looked up from the pumpkin and out across the New York night, knowing that behind each light, a story was happening. Perhaps she might write about some of them. Perhaps.

But you have to know them, first, she thought, smiling to herself. *It's not just love I need to let meself be open to. Its stories. All the stories. Not just me own. Everyone's.*

She glanced down toward the park. The yellow light of a bonfire glowed invitingly. The flames waved and danced. So did the distant revelers, around them. *What fantastic truths might we find, if we were just open ourselves to finding them, first?*

She tied the wrap in front of her, knowing it was all she'd need, for the chill. *I need to go meet them, need to hear them. Need to dance with them, even,* she decided. *And one special story. One I think I want to know the ending of,* she realized. *I wonder if he's in the park? I wonder if they are?* she thought, conjuring the image of Vincent and Catherine.

She knew she'd have to either bluff her way past Thomas or slip by him, if he was posted by her door. She hoped he was gone to bed, considering the lateness of the hour. But if he wasn't... She shrugged her lovely shoulders, as she scooped last year's owl mask off the table.

There was a world, out there. A world where Romeos were courting their Juliets, and hoping for a better outcome than the two teenagers in Shakespeare's play.

It's nae a mask? she thought, adjusting her own. *Well, there's a story, isn't there? A wonderful one. Magical, even.* Perhaps the best one she could ever know. And the most romantic. She wondered if, deep down, some part of her hadn't suspected as much, all along.

Whether it is or it isn't, it's time for me to go. It's still Samhain. I haven't wasted it. She couldn't help but smile at her temerity. Ian had ordered her to be reveling by next year.

Well, she'd just have to show him who was boss, and do him one better. There was a lot of night left. A lot of ... adventure to be had.

And why not? Brigit asked herself. *After all, anything can happen, when you're truly ready and willing to walk empty-handed, among your enemies.*

And... among your friends.

She adjusted the owl mask and sailed out the door. The New York night, and all it held, was waiting for her.



*No matter where you are on Halloween, I wish you love.~
Cindy*