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Noon, Midnight, Talk, Song

by Kathleen Donohoe

Brooklyn, NY, 1994

Daniel's books are misaligned.

Grey contemplates them, touching the occasional spine, but gently, not to correct. What used to matter doesn't matter anymore and probably never did. He nearly smiles at his careless language and then notices a splash of red on his sock. This is not funny. He must stop wandering the apartment shoeless. After he pulls off and folds both socks, he places them on the back of the recliner where Chester is lying in the chilly March sun with his head on his paws, a somber dog now.

Grey paces the length of the living room. The dog sighs. Later in the afternoon, he will rouse himself and go stand by the closet where his leash hangs, though seven weeks in, he understands and has stopped wagging his tail. Saturdays, Chester used to get a bracing stroll down the Promenade with its view of Manhattan. In the winter when early twilight had emptied it of tourists, Daniel kept going and took Chester over the Brooklyn Bridge.

The books are not alphabetized either. Carruth beside Ginsberg beside Verlaine beside Joyce beside Howard beside Kafka beside Yeats beside Crane beside O'Connor beside McCullough beside Auden. Rilke, Roethke and Rushdie, though, have somehow found each other. Fallon is absent. Daniel kept his own two poetry collections sequestered in his nightstand drawer. He considered them books in rehearsal, permanent understudies.

A heavy footfall sounds on the stairs. Grey pays little attention just as he used to ignore sirens, such a constant in New York that there is no reason to believe they have anything to do with you until the night they have everything to do with you. The dyspeptic man on the fifth floor probably knows a smoker unused to walk-ups.

The building is a pre-war brownstone. The lack of elevator had charmed them both, but even before they followed the perspiring realtor up four flights of stairs, Daniel was in love. The building on the corner of the block, One Montague Terrace, wore a plaque to W.H. Auden who had lived there briefly. It was the first of the poet's Brooklyn Heights' home; the other, lost when Middagh Street was razed to make way for the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. Daniel read the plaque and recited a bit of "Funeral Blues" so well that a couple passing by paused to listen and applauded when he finished.

The harsh knock on the door startles Grey so that he turns in actual anger, as though a kiss has been interrupted. Chester lifts his head and growls low in his throat. Like Grey, he knows it is not, say, little Elise clutching a doggie bag, a meal some Friday night date paid for and she picked at, too shy to be voracious. Or Zee with a deranged story and missing underwear to prove it. Nor could it be Rory and Jacob with a meal cooked expressly for him, peach cobbler or rice pudding included. The early kindnesses are waning, not because friends are

growing less mindful but because Grey has not once said thank you.

Possibly, it is a student of Daniel's, but Grey believes that business is just about done. At the college's memorial service, held at the campus's non-denominational chapel, Grey told the collection of trembling apprentice poets and the more stoic lit majors that they could if they happened to be in Brooklyn, stop by. Often on a weekend, students had visited Daniel for wine and conversation.

Grey quickly realized that he should not have offered First, he is incapable of welcome, and second, more than half did live in Brooklyn. Out-of-state transplants too broke for Manhattan or the pricey Heights, they settled in Williamsburg and Park Slope and were often startled to discover that Daniel was a native.

Poor Columbi, he'd liked to joke, thinking they discovered us.

In the past month, Grey has sat through no fewer than three condolence calls. He is certain the students regrouped afterwards in coffee shops or bars discussing what on earth Daniel could have seen in boring research librarian, besides his looks, which are WASP handsome, quite good. Though he is only forty-five and Daniel was thirty-eight, Grey is sure the difference seems oceanic to them. And yet the students are no doubt delighted by the relationship Surely it makes Daniel even more quixotic, more worth holding on to.

Grey even received a handwritten note on excellent ivory paper. Jennifer? Jessica? Jasmine? referred to Daniel as Professor Fallon, which would have made him laugh. Grey tucked it into a volume of Ferlinghetti because it did touch him, the effort behind it.

Two more sharp knocks. Grey hesitates and then goes to the door. He presses his eye to the peephole. For a beautiful moment, he thinks Daniel got lost in time and has now returned to the present, aged but alive. The joy is sharp, brief, bitter. A single blink cures him of the notion. Michael O'Fallon is tall, as was Daniel. Daniel, though, had the slender-muscled build of the fastidious runner. His father, a retired fireman, is thicker through the shoulders with a prodigious beer gut. However, he does seem thinner than the he was that night at the emergency room. After he heads down the stairs without looking back, Grey leans against the door. Soon, he will not have to worry about pop-ins. He is moving, though the lease is not up until August. He will break it. He doesn't care about a monetary penalty, nor that everyone will think it's too soon. He has been accused of callousness before; he can take it.

Even his own parents, who rarely muster advice, suggested that he wait. Finish the winter, his mother said, but after a pause added that he should come back to the city in a tone that implied he has, for nearly two years, been living in the wild.

The city. Manhattan. He and Daniel had begun to talk about buying. Grey had not wanted to limit their options but Daniel would not consider leaving Brooklyn. He'd grown up in Windsor Terrace, a block away from Prospect Park. *Win-zuh Terr-ice*, he'd say, slipping into the accent he'd avoided because, he said, he lived in his imagination where it did not exist.

Daniel had lived elsewhere of course: Prague, for a semester while in college, after which he'd traveled through Europe. He'd gone to graduate school in California, which had made him miserable enough to know where he belonged. Grey pointed out that *he* hardly had such pedestrian loyalty to the Upper East

Side. Daniel laughed and said, who would?

* * *

Grey sits up from sleep and he is there, lying across the foot of the bed, propped up on one elbow and staring sadly at his enormous, dead erection.

What a waste, Daniel says. He is wearing jeans and a long-sleeved green shirt that Grey doesn't recognize.

There's no light for you to walk into?, he says.

I can't find one if there is, Daniel answers and Grey has to smile.

Daniel never liked to wear his glasses except when reading and contacts irritated his eyes. He also had a terrible sense of direction.

Grey starts to smooth his hair but stops before Daniel can tease him. He lays back against the pillow. Their bedroom is dark but he can see. He should feel Daniel's weight across his legs, but he does not.

Where's Chester? Daniel asks.

The couch, Grey says, ashamed.

Daniel saw the mutt's picture in the paper captioned, Adopt Me! Grey argued that the dog was already four years old. Obviously, somebody had given up on it. Daniel, though, said his boyhood dog had the same kind eyes. When Grey pointed out that he had hated that dog, Daniel folded his hands and explained that this wasn't quite true.

Finn had been a birthday gift from his father the year he turned nine. He could barely stand the hope with which the terrier would drop a tennis ball at his feet. His games with poor Finn were a pantomime performed for his father who had expected his only son to be a steadfast boy. Daniel had only wanted to read.

He pretended to live at Brooklyn's Central Library at Grand Army Plaza. He'd been orphaned gruesomely, something to do with dragons and so he, the deposed prince, was forced to stay hidden on unassuming Seeley Street with an unassuming family. The three-story library was his palace and across the street, the grounds of his estate. Other people called them Prospect Park.

You have to let Ches know he's welcome, Daniel says sternly. His feelings are easily hurt.

Daniel had been right. The old woman who'd owned Chester had gone into a nursing home. Chester had lived every day ecstatically, rescued from his stultifying existence. Every day with Daniel.

Someone came by today and I thought it might be one of your students. Maybe the Murnick, Grey says.

Murnick: a young man on the cusp who signed up for Daniel's classes so that he might study, not literature or writing, but Daniel. Nathan, the inaugural Murnick, still kept in touch with Daniel via email, perhaps more often Daniel admitted. Grey

could not be sure.

After Nathan, Daniel would come home at the start of nearly every semester with a grin splitting his plain Irish face. Found him!, he would crow and if it was a grad student or a senior, Grey wondered if this was the one Daniel would fall for. It would never be a freshman or sophomore, but a sparkling man of twenty or more who could speak Literature and Writing. Daniel had dated far less than Grey—for God's sake at twenty-five he was still bringing girls to family weddings. No doubt there was still some curiosity.

A student? Daniel says. No, you've scared them all away. Poor little fireflies.

I didn't mean to, Grey says.

Daniel rolls over on his side and props himself up on his elbow. Since his death, his eyes have grown even more intensely blue. Grey sees that his hands have healed. Throughout the winter, Daniel's chapped knuckles bled. Every night, Grey would take Daniel's hands and doctor them with lotion that cost so much he kept the price a secret. He would press Daniel's hands together between his own.

I was never going to leave you, Daniel says.

They had this conversation many times, but Grey likes it and it will never, ever bore him.

In my logical mind I knew that, Grey answers.

I liked talking to them. You were out at seventeen, Daniel says. You don't understand what it was like to be a grown man and still mute.

Tell me then.

Imagine being on a stage, Daniel continues dreamily, reciting your lines but waiting for the curtain to drop so you can get out of character.

Your father, Daniel, Grey says. I don't know what he could possibly have to say to me.

Considering that he had very little to say to *me*? Daniel sighs. Whatever it is, he won't give up easily He's very stubborn. When I was eighteen, he was still nudging me when pretty girls walked by.

Grey laughs. He didn't know yet.

I hadn't told them yet, Daniel says.

Do you have children? Grey asks.

Daniel laughs. Do you think it works like that? All answers revealed?

I had hoped, Grey says.

When he was twenty-three, out to himself but nobody else, Daniel donated sperm because he thought it was the only way he'd ever have children. These days, of course, gay couples were adopting or hiring surrogates. The two of them had

begun to joke about how their biological child would be perfect if he or she got Grey's looks and Daniel's charm. The joking, Grey knew, was a prelude to serious conversation.

Were it only so easy, Daniel sighs.

Have you seen your mother? Grey asks.

Evelyn O'Fallon died weeks after he and Daniel moved in together. At the funeral mass, it had disconcerted Grey to see Daniel kneeling and standing on cue, reciting the lines along with the rest. Daniel threatened to take Grey to Farrell's after, his father's favorite bar. A fireman bar, maybe a few stray cops. Old school guys. They could get an enormous styrofoam cup of Bud. Or Bud Lite, if so inclined. Grey was tempted to say yes if only to avoid what did indeed come next. They'd gone back to the O'Fallon's house where Grey was introduced to the extended family for the first time, a cavalcade of aunts, uncles and cousins. The cousins were nonchalant but the uncles and aunts shook Grey's hand heartily and pronounced their verbs as though he might be slightly deaf.

Daniel's father barely spoke to them but then he was barely speaking. He sat on the couch, stone-faced, and Grey wondered if it was shock or inebriation.

My mother? Daniel laughs. Not yet. Her first boyfriend died years ago. Maybe she's gone off with him. Poor Pop.

This can't be all there is for you, Grey says. There has to be more than this apartment.

There's you, Daniel answers softly. There's you.

* * *

Michael O'Fallon is at the door again.

Grey keeps his eye pressed to peephole. Mr. O'Fallon takes his hands out of his coat pockets and then returns them. He looks over his shoulder twice, though Brooklyn Heights is hardly a bad neighborhood.

Grey doesn't wonder how the man has gotten into the building for the second time. The other tenants are constantly leaving the outer door unlocked. He does wonder about the decision not to ring the buzzer.

Grey can avoid Mr. O'Fallon until he abandons the apartment, but he can't vanish. He is not quitting his job and the last thing he wants is a scene at work. His co-workers' quiet sympathy is already unbearable. He can practically hear the secretary's wispy voice on the phone: It's your partner's *father*. Though she might say dad.

Before Mr. O'Fallon can knock again, a sound Grey has come to detest,

he removes the chain lock and opens the door.

"Oh, hey," he says. His hands go into his pockets.

“Hello,” Grey says and waits.

“I came by last Saturday. You weren’t home.”

“I was here. I didn’t answer the door”

“Oh.” He clears his throat. “Listen, can I come in for a minute?”

Grey steps aside. He closes the door and watches Mr. O’Fallon glance around the apartment, which he has never seen. Perhaps he was expecting pink walls. He takes in the book shelves, the boxes on the floor. Grey has only managed to fill two, one shelf’s worth.

“You packing up?”

“Shouldn’t I?” Grey steps around him and then asserts his manners out of habit. “Come in, please. Can I take your coat?”

“No, I don’t want to bother you. This won’t take long.”

He can’t quite meet Grey’s eyes, which is both a disappointment and a relief. They are Daniel’s eyes.

“Mr. O’Fallon—”

“Call me Mike. I hear Mr. O’Fallon, I still look for my father. Crazy, huh? I’m sixty-seven.”

“If this is about Daniel’s ashes, we had a ceremony. Our friends came. I did ask you.”

“Jesus, I know,” Mr. O’Fallon—Mike—says, annoyed. “Jeannie told me.”

“You didn’t come.”

“We, ah,” He shifts his gaze around the room again. “No.”

“Well. They’re gone,” Grey says. “The ashes.”

“Jeannie said we shouldn’t go,” Mike says abruptly. “She said it was for you guys and me and her and the girls would be in the way.”

Grey is surprised that she would stand up to him. “You would have been welcome.”

This is partly true: Annie, Maggie and Jean would have been fine, but too many others knew the story of Daniel’s coming out to his parents when he was twenty-six. The acceptance from his mother beset by tears, a mutinous silence from his father that went grimly on for almost a year, until a fight over the name of Daniel’s first nephew, Cameron. Daniel believed his father was hurt that the baby, the first boy of four grandchildren, wasn’t called Michael though he hardly admitted this as he picked on his daughter about the choice until she began crying. And then he

turned on Daniel when he defended her. Escalation. *Fucking faggot.*

An apology was not issued for months and only then because Evelyn was diagnosed with the cancer she would beat once, but not the second time. For her sake, Daniel pretended to accept the excuse that his father had too much to drink. His father, in turn, pretended that he had not meant what he said.

For Daniel's memorial, Grey invited everyone to the Fruit Street Sitting Area, that spot at the very end of the Promenade where Orange, Pineapple and Cranberry Streets ended. There were benches there and it was called a park, rather generously. But Daniel thought the name was hilarious. There was a picture of him and Chester beside the sign. At dusk, by cold candlelight, they took turns reading a selection of Daniel's poems aloud. Grey held Chester's leash and listened.

The Secret to Falling

*Everyone fears doorways and drapes
or everyone loves the wildness
in their hearts.
When the sun and the moon slip off their clothes
and slip into your bed, it is under the curtain's
sentinel eyes.*

*It's not day or night,
and you are not awake or asleep.
The old gods conspire in a single,
Venetian beam.*

*"They are become
aged parents who know that even
when Eve offered Adam the glassy surface of her apple,"
she offered him the surface of a deep pond.
She offered him the secret
to falling.*

After, they'd gone back to Jacob and Rory's apartment and had a party. A gay Irish wake, Rory called it and Grey nearly laughed. Daniel was hardly wild. He'd spent his twenties in his own words, like a monk. Still, some of the stories told that night weren't suitable for relatives or homophobes.

"What did you do with them?" Mike asks.

"I scattered them in Prospect Park," Grey says.

"What are you kidding me?" Mike is so comically horrified that Grey wants to

laugh.

"You know it's illegal in New York? That's a public place. The water would have been okay," he says.

"It was getting dark." Grey shrugs. "Nobody saw me."

“Jesus,” he muttered. “Where?”

Grey considers lying but there is no reason to keep it secret. “Monument Hill,” he finally says. “I’m sorry if you’re upset.”

“It’s done.” Mike says abruptly.

Chester, who has been watching from his chair, now bounds over, tail wagging. Mike breaks into a grin. Perhaps something in the timbre is like Daniel’s, though Mike O’Fallon’s voice has been coarsened by cigarettes.

“Hey there,” he says, petting the dog. “What’s his name?”

Grey considers saying ‘Rex’ or ‘Butch’ but Mike won’t realize he’s being made fun of. “Chester.”

Mike glances up for a fraction of a second before he looks back down at the dog.

“You’re a good boy, huh? I bet,” he says.

As though the presence of the dog has made Grey a more familiar type of person, or perhaps because the two of them are no longer entirely alone, Mike relaxes a bit.

“Listen, the reason I came by, there’s something of Danny’s that I’m looking for. I’d like it back.”

Grey blinks. As if he’d stolen it “If it’s here, of course.”

“It’s got to be. I looked all over the house just in case but there’s nothing of Danny’s there anymore. I mean, some stuff from when he was a kid that Evelyn kept.” He strokes under Chester’s chin. “It’s a book by Percy French. He’s a poet.”

“Is he?” Grey says.

“Irish,” he says boldly, almost defiant. “Wrote songs too. Ballyjamesduff, Mountains of Mourne.”

“I don’t recall ever seeing it.”

“No?”

“Daniel did have an uncommon amount of books.”

“This one, Danny’s mother gave to him when he went off to college. She knew he liked poetry. I hate to put you out,” Mike says and then barks a cough. He clears his throat.

Grey is amused. Is it the word ‘out’?

“It’s something I’d like to have back.”

“Of course,” Grey says.

He had more or less liked Evelyn, who'd taught English at a Catholic elementary school for twenty years and truly believed St. something or other had found her engagement ring after she prayed to him when she lost it just days after it was put on her finger. Grey recalled how kind she'd been even as her smiles broke down, an indication of her disappointment over Daniel, her confusion.

"I can take a look," Grey says. He of course means later, when he is alone.

Mike's face flattens in relief. He almost smiles. "Yeah?"

"Of course."

Mike gestures to the wall of books. "Those're all Danny's? I'm thinking some have got to be yours."

"A few," Grey smiles thinly. "But most *are* Daniel's."

Mike looks away. "He was always reading, that kid. I can take a quick look here."

He gestures to the box.

Grey, almost violently, does not want him routing through Daniel's things.

"I'll do it."

Mike's jaw tightens then relaxes. "I *can* read."

Grey waits a beat. "I would have noticed it if I put it in the box. If it's here, it must be on the shelves. They're very much out of order but I know approximately where things are. It'll be quicker if I do it. Please, why don't you take a seat?"

Mike takes off his coat and Grey accepts it, opening the closet and hanging it on the hook on the back of the door. The navy blue sweatshirt Daniel wore running in the spring and fall is there and Grey covers it quickly with Mike's threadbare coat which is far too thin for the day's cold. He might as well wear a sign on his back that says "Widower." Overall, he is rumpled, even though it does seem that he has dressed up for this visit. He is not wearing jeans, but slacks (as he would probably call them) and a blue sweater. His black loafers are creased, worn but shiny as though they have been recently polished.

Grey pretends to search in earnest. Mike focuses on petting Chester.

"You have Danny's books?"

Grey is puzzled and then realizes he means Daniel's two poetry collections.

"Yes, of course. You can buy them in any book store or on Amazon."

"We have them," Mike says with a defensive edge in his voice. "Evelyn kept them on her nightstand."

Grey doesn't ask if Mike has read them. "He had enough new poems finished. His editor is planning on organizing them and bringing out a new book."

“I’ll have to tell the girls. They’ll be—they’ll want to know.”

Grey struggles with how mannerly he is supposed to be. Daniel often cited his father’s age. His generation had no language for being gay besides slang. Grey considered this a poor excuse. Daniel vacillated from fury to an eagerness to please, or at least not offend.

“Can I get you something to drink?” Grey asks.

“Thanks, no, I’m good,” Mike says, as uncomfortable with the niceties as Grey is.

“This new book, I don’t guess that there’s a chance it’ll be under O’Fallon?”

Grey barely stops himself from snorting. “No. That’s not how Daniel was known. They wouldn’t”

“He ever tell you why he changed his name?” Mike asks. He slips two fingers in Chester’s collar, as though making sure it’s not too tight. Chester looks up at Mike, anxious for his approval. Grey feels betrayed. He is not affectionate. He does not chat to the dog or play with him but he has been there.

“He didn’t quite change it.”

“Dropping the ‘O’ is changing it,” Mike says.

Grey sighs. “It was more to do with the Catholic connotations.”

“*Catholic?*”

“Daniel got tired of being asked his opinion of the Catholic church’s position on homosexuality, if he wanted to march in the St. Patrick’s Day parade. Fallon, as a name, was a little more neutral.”

“What, are you kidding me? Fallon is an Irish name with or without the O.”

“Daniel thought it made things easier.”

A silence falls. Grey scans the shelves. He is almost positive Percy French is not here, yet he also doesn’t believe Daniel would have thrown it away.

“It’s fucking crazy,” Mike says. “For years, I figured Danny’d catch AIDS and then, bam, AIDS is over. And then this”

“AIDS is hardly over,” Grey says.

“Yeah, well, you don’t hear about like you used to.”

Grey inclines his head in agreement but adds, “Drug therapy is helping a lot of people live longer but it’s still very much a global crisis.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Mike says.

Grey figures it's 'global' with which he lost him. "Daniel did not have AIDS, I promise you."

"I know," he snaps. "You don't get AIDS and then get hit by a car."

Grey can argue with the logic but instead he turns abruptly to the shelves. He does not want to visit Daniel's death. He does not want to be asked if there were any last words (there weren't) or if he suffered (probably) or if he'd heard from the driver, the dark-haired, wild-eyed girl bleeding from her brow in the corridor, unable to sit still for stitches. Eleven stitches, Grey would learn from the newspapers. Not quite drunk, but close. She begged every passer-by for absolution. *I didn't see him.*

Of course she hadn't with the January night winter-dark and Daniel dressed for running in his usual navy blue or black. Daniel as ever, composing poems as he ran. Grey had warned him to be careful. He had suggested Daniel not go running after his night class which didn't end until nine o'clock. Just skip a day. Daniel always laughed and

pointed out that he didn't do his usual six miles. He didn't go over the Brooklyn Bridge. It was nothing but a quick jog around the neighborhood to clear his head.

The girl had not been in touch, which Grey appreciated. She clearly understood that there was nothing she could say.

"I don't think the book is here. I'm sorry." Grey says. He does not mention that there are more books at Daniel's office. The college has left three messages asking if he can make arrangements to pack it up. Grey has not yet called them back.

"Oh," Mike says. He scans the shelves himself, squinting.

"If I come across it, I'll let you know."

"This is a good dog." Mike nods at Chester. "Danny had a dog when he was a kid. He ever tell you?"

"He told me you got him a dog to try and turn him into a 'normal' boy." Grey keeps one hand on the shelf as though for balance, almost giddy with revenge that Daniel never took. *Fucking faggot.*

Mike stares at him so hard that Grey begins to perspire. He appears to be considering where land the punch so the bruise won't show. He bends over to pull Chester to him in a hug.

Then he stands and gets his coat from the closet. Grey remains at the bookshelves,

a sentry. He waits for the door to slam but Mike closes it behind him quietly.

* * *

Grey is sitting on the couch staring at the three boxes sent by the college. They are on the floor in front of the bookshelves, precisely where they have been since

they were delivered on Wednesday, unannounced, with a note explaining that some students of Daniel's did the job.

Grey called in sick to work on Friday. He thought perhaps the shock of doing such a thing would propel him to put Daniel away. Instead, he spent his free weekday much as he spent the weekends, reading and ignoring voicemails and emails in between deep naps that he falls into as though he's been shot with a tranquilizer dart.

Grey is not surprised to by the knock. As he gets up to answer, he realizes that he has been expecting it for almost an hour.

Mike steps inside without being asked. He is wearing the same coat and gloves, but no hat. His ears are alarmingly red. The temperature has dropped precipitously as of this morning.

Mike is carrying two cups of coffee, which is odd in and of itself, but odder still for its prescience. Grey ran out of coffee yesterday and has not bothered to go out and buy more, as badly as he wants a cup. His head is hurting.

Mike puts down the coffee and takes off his gloves and coat which he tosses over the back of the couch. "You look like shit."

"Fuck you."

He laughs. "Don't curse much, do you?" He greets Chester, who jumps up on his leg, his tail frantic. "Hey, boy! Good boy."

"My father said it was the surest sign of a poor education."

"Your father's pretty rich, from what I understand."

Grey crosses his arms over his chest. "He is, yes."
"What's he got to curse about?"

Grey rubs his eyes, which are gritty in spite of all the extra sleep he's been getting. Perhaps because of it.

"Sorry. I should say what the fuck has he got to curse about."

Grey smiles thinly. It is kind of funny. His sense of humor may be rougher than Daniel's but Grey is beginning to realize the tenor is similar.

"I didn't find the book. I told you I would call you," he says.

Mike hands him a cup of coffee.

"Come on, sit," he says.

Grey sips the coffee and sinks into Chester's chair before he realizes that his pants

will be covered in dog hair. He decides it hardly matters and does not get up.

Mike settles on the couch. As if they are friends.

He is about to speak but then instead picks up a half-full bottle of Stewart's Black Cherry Soda that is on the coffee table, sans coaster.

"Danny loved this stuff."

"I know," Grey says. He himself does not drink soda, except for an occasional root beer, but Daniel frequently bought the Stewart's 16 oz bottles for the picture of the Brooklyn Bridge on it. Different flavors were named for different Brooklyn neighborhoods. Orange is Flatbush, Cream Ale is Coney Island. Black Cherry is Brighton Beach. This is what Daniel tasted of the first time they kissed.

"He had a thing about the bridge," Mike says.

"His cathedral."

"He called it that?"

"Yes. Queer of him, huh?"

Mike shrugs. "He was seven the first time I brought him over it. I told him that men died building it, most of them Irishmen. He asked how many died and I have no idea, so I say hundreds. I think it was way less. He asks me if the bridge is haunted and I said it might be."

Their second date had been at a wine bar in Cobble Hill, Grey's first trip to Brooklyn in years, Daniel talked about his interest in Brooklyn's history, the bridge in particular. Men died to create it. You can say they were poor workingmen and they needed the wage and maybe there was no more to it than that, but they did it. They went up into the sky and balanced hundreds of feet over the water and built the bridge. I believe it's haunted, he'd said, but not by lost souls. Why would they want to leave?

Mike coughs and puts his coffee cup down on the table. He sits back and folds his hands. He begins jiggling his foot. "Listen, I'm sorry for running out of here the way I did. I shouldn't of done that."

Grey shrugs.

Then Mike speaks slowly and in a voice so low that Grey has to lean forward to hear him.

"The dog, when he was a kid--I got Danny that dog because he had no friends."

"Excuse me?"

Mike sighs. "The other boys picked on him. Mostly it was stupid crap like taking his hat and throwing it down a sewer. Telling girls that he liked them. One time, this kid John McNamara, he takes Daniel's glasses and he pisses on them. Two other kids do it too. Then he makes Danny put them back on. Jeannie told me. There was a code, you know, around the neighborhood. Let the kids settle shit between themselves. But this shit—I went to their fathers and said you tell your sons to knock it off or I'll knock their fucking heads together." He stops and

breathing hard through his nose, fixes his gaze out the window.

I was picked on. *Tell me*, Grey had asked. Boys will be boys.

“And you got him a dog?”

“I got him a dog,” Mike says. “I don’t know. I thought it would help, give him something to talk to the other boys about. If not, then at least he’d have someone. Something.”

It occurs to Grey how egregiously annoyed Daniel would be with this conversation. He sips his coffee and tries to think of something to say that is not betraying Daniel.

“I know you already did your thing to say good-bye,” Mike says, “but I wanted to let you know me and the girls are having a Mass said for him next Wednesday. That’s the sixteenth.”

“A funeral mass, like the one for your wife?”

“No, no. It’s too late for that and there’s no coffin. It’s a Mass said in his honor. When the priest says “pray for the souls of the faithfully departed,” he’ll say especially Danny O’Fallon and whoever else. We’re keeping the O.”

Daniel would make an orgasm joke. Grey hides his smile.

“My niece is going to sing. That’s Danny’s cousin, Ellie. There was a big thing not long ago about not singing anything but hymns in church but Father Joe who’s saying Mass said it’s okay. We’ve known him a long time.”

“Does he know that Daniel was gay?”

Mike shrugs. “Didn’t ask.”

“If he knows your family then somebody’s probably mentioned it--”

“I’d say he knows and doesn’t really care.” He is getting impatient.

“Isn’t that a bit hypocritical?”

“How many divorced butts are sitting in the pews on Sunday? How many pregnant girls get a church wedding?”

Grey gives up. “What is your niece going to sing? Danny Boy?” He is kidding.

“His mother used to sing it to him.” Mike raises his chin slightly. “I figured you should know. It’s at ten o’clock.”

Grey will not go. He can’t. The only possible way to get through such an event would be with Daniel beside him jabbing him in the side, strangling on his laugh, and that cannot be.

“We wanted you to know. We get it that you lost him too.”

“*Too*? He was my partner!” Grey says. “I lost him more than anybody.”

Mike’s eyebrows went up. “Yeah? Danny should be beside his mother but we let you have it your way. Legally, I was his next-of-kin. I could’ve said something. I didn’t.”

For a moment, Grey is not sure he can talk. He deliberately puts his cup of coffee on the table. “I did what Daniel would have wanted. He said if he was going to be buried anyplace it would be in Prospect Park next to Montgomery Clift.”

“Montgomery Clift? The actor?”

“He’s buried in the park in that Quaker cemetery,” Grey says. “Daniel was kidding. He wanted to be cremated, believe me.”

Mike snorts. “I’ll fall down dead right here if you tell me Danny wrote that down. I’ll bet money there was no will. He didn’t think ahead, that kid.”

Grey is unnerved by this correct guess. He has so often heard Daniel’s stories of his childhood in which he highlights his singular status as the only boy in a family of four, eons apart from the man raising him. Perhaps he partially believed Daniel’s fantasies of being fostered by the O’Fallons, but not of them. It is startling at any rate to hear Daniel’s father speak of Daniel with such familiarity.

“I knew what he would have wanted,” Grey says.

“Me too. That’s what I’m saying. We didn’t stand in your way. I’m just saying, that’s all. We stood aside,” Mike says.

“You called him a faggot. A fucking faggot, if I recall.” Grey looks at Chester as if hoping to make the dog understand that this man is not really welcome. The dog remains at Mike’s feet, a traitor.

Mike swallows once. He rubs his knees. “I’m not proud of that.”

“Congratulations for being not proud of that. I think you should go.”

He holds up a conciliatory hand. “I quit drinking a year ago.”

Grey, who was about to order the man to leave again, tries to breath more slowly.

Daniel swore that his father would never, ever admit to a drinking problem. Never.

“Are you in AA?”

Mike snorts. “I don’t need that bullshit. I stopped. Period. Should’ve done it when Evelyn was alive. She didn’t have it easy, married to me.”

Grey purses his lips, a refusal to politely disagree. He sees, though, that Mike does not seem to expect it. “That doesn’t excuse what you said. It doesn’t take it away.”

“I should’ve told Danny. I meant to. I thought maybe this Christmas, if you came to Annie’s he would see me sticking with fucking cranberry juice. But then Danny

told her you guys had a trip planned. I waited. I shouldn't of waited."

"Christmas?" Grey says and then stops, but Mike seems to understand.

"You did go away?"

"We did, yes. To St. Lucia."

"He didn't tell you that you could've come to Annie's?"

Grey hesitates and then shakes his head. Probably, they wouldn't have gone anyway, but, he, Grey, had been reveling in their orphan status. His parents were in Florida, his holiday obligation to them discharged in a ten minute phone call.

Mike seems to grow smaller. He is blinking rapidly.

"Before, you said your partner? That's what you called each other?"
Grey nods. He is very tired.

"So it was a real relationship between you?"

"Real?" Grey echoes.

"Yeah, real."

"Are you asking, sir, if I loved your son or if I was just bugging him?"

Mike's face reddened and he rubbed his rough knuckles.

Grey shakes his head. "Now I really do have nothing more to say to you."

Mike tried to smile. "You could answer my question. You could say that."

Grey sighs. "I loved him. I loved your son, Daniel."

Michael O'Fallon's blue eyes are on him, a low, grave stare beneath a puzzled frown and Grey begins to cry.

As he pinches the bridge of his nose, an effort to stop the tears, he sees the shock in Mike's face, the embarrassment.

"Hey, hey, look pal," Mike says. "Hey, buddy."

Grey raises his head slightly and through the blur he sees Mike nudge Chester with his foot. Chester obeys and scampers over to Grey. He jumps up on the chair beside him and Grey buries his face in the dog's neck. He does not hear Mike get up but he must have because Mike is handing him a handful of tissues which Grey accepts wordlessly.

"Evvy's been gone two years. I wish I could tell you you'll get over it but it's a fucking lie."

Grey lifts his head. He is clutching the damp tissues. "It is, isn't it? I

thought so. Say it again?”
"A fucking lie."

"You still miss her."

"I miss her like it's the hour she died." Mike clears his throat. "And that's no bullshit."

* * *

But come ye back when summer's in the meadow

or when the valley's hushed and white with snow

'Tis I'll be here in sunshine or shadow,

Oh, Danny Boy, Oh Danny Boy, I love you so...

Grey is seated in the pew at Holy Name Roman Catholic Church in Daniel's place beside Mike, with Annie with her husband and children, with Maggie and her husband, with Jeannie, alone, quivering and glancing back to stare in wonder at the church crowded with retired firefighters, neighbors, grammar and high school classmates, and all of them listening as the shy cousin sings with the beautiful voice that will surely never be known outside her family.

Grey closes his eyes. He puts a hand to his rib.

Brooklyn-born **Kathleen Donohoe** received a B.A. in English/Writing from Marist College. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize for a story that appeared in *Hampton Shorts*. Her fiction has also been published in *Inkwell*, *New York Stories*, *Emrys Journal*, *Washington Square Review*, *The Recorder: Journal of the American Irish Historical Society*, *thelmagazine.com*, *Web Conjunctions* and *Harpur Palate*. She lives in Brooklyn, NY with her husband and son. She writes a blog on irishabroad.com and is at work on a novel.

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