

Home

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Photo - Crypt

Third Place - Short Story

Standing in this place was the eeriest and most amazing moment of his life. The rush of emotions, from fear to elation, had his head spinning. It was hard to believe that this journey had only begun eight short weeks ago.

Shawn had always known he was adopted, but never really knew the circumstances surrounding his birth or placement with his parents, the McNeeleys. He was the oldest child in a loving, gregarious Irish family. His parents came from a combination of working class folks I and old money. They were an odd pairing and one of which his mother's parents, the Doyles, did not accept initially. They were sure that their spoiled daughter would never be cared for as she had been as an only child. Eventually, however, love won out. They saw that their son-in-law, Ian, was devoted to Katy and worked diligently to provide for her every need. They grew to love and respect him like a son.

For their third wedding anniversary, the Doyles gave Ian and Katy a trip to Ireland. They wanted them to experience their heritage and perhaps to consider starting a family of their own. Ian and Katy were thrilled and made arrangements to be able to spend two weeks in the Emerald Isle. It was the first time they had been able to get away since their honeymoon.

As the day of departure neared, they checked and rechecked their itinerary; so many fun and exciting things were planned. They were careful to be considerate of their budget, but they had never been extravagant, saved carefully for the future, and hoped to manage something special in Dublin.

They could hardly sleep the night before leaving. The flight was long, but everything from take-off to landing went perfectly. Checking into their hotel, they found the huge bed was exactly where they needed to be to recharge their batteries. Waking up to rumbling stomachs, they decided to go out and find a restaurant to enjoy the local food and color. The Kennedy Pub turned out to be just the ticket. The meal and a pint of stout buoyed their spirits and boosted their energy. Afterwards, they walked the grounds of Trinity College, to work out some of the stiffness from the flight. Holding hands, like newlyweds, they could feel themselves begin to relax. As the evening air began to chill they decided to go back to the hotel and make plans for the next day.

Katy had picked up some brochures in the lobby that boasted of all of the most popular tourist sights. As they sat and watched the moonlight stream into the room, they discussed which of them they might like to see. Walking to the window, Ian pointed out The Spire of Dublin. They had just read that it was a monument, 120 meters above ground that was often illuminated by the sun during the day and now, as witnessed, had a light on its tip to act as a beacon at night. Arms around each other, admiring the structure, they were awed and Katy said she felt as if its beauty was an omen of some sort.

Ian said he might want to see Kilmainham Gaol, but Katy said she hadn't travelled all this distance to go to an old prison. Ian laughed and gave in to that. Katy suggested the Dublin 200 and they both agreed to that as well as St. Stephen's Green, a park with an original Victorian layout. Then it was a toss up between the Guinness Storehouse brewery, with tales of the famous beer and the rooftop bar with tastings or The Church. The Church had originally been St. Mary's Cathedral, then restored and

converted to a bar/nightclub that boasted some great live music. Katy liked the idea of an evening of dancing and relaxing. By now they were ready to sleep, heads full of what lie ahead.

By the beginning of their second week, they had experienced so much that they decided they needed a calm, restful day. They set off for St. Stephen's Green and found it to be an incredibly beautiful park. Strolling leisurely, they found a somewhat isolated area of benches around a fountain. As they approached, the first thing they noticed was a young woman with what appeared to be a tiny baby, laying on a blanket in the grass. She was so intent on washing the baby, probably with water from the fountain, she didn't hear them approaching. Then they heard and saw that she was crying.

"Are you ok, Miss?" Jerking her head up and quickly swiping at her face, she tried to compose herself. Her first words were "are you American?" Stating that they were, Katy once again asked if she needed help. Tears began to flow again. "I cannot take care of my son any longer. I have no job, no money and no father to help us. He did not ask to come into the world and deserves so much more. I fear he will starve or catch his death in the cold nights." Ian and Katy could hear the heartbreak in her voice. Then she asked, "Could you watch him a bit while I goto the washroom?" Without hesitation they agreed. When the girl stepped away, Katy raised the child to her shoulder and wrapped him in the blanket. They began to discuss how they might help. Running several ideas by each other they got caught up and did not notice how much time had passed. Until, of course, it became obvious that the young mother had no intentions of returning. Ian and Katy looked at each other and without a word began to walk back to their hotel. This was not exactly the way they had intended to start a family, but somehow knew that this beautiful child was meant to be their son. But how to get him back to the States was a quandary. First they must get food and clothes for him. They made a list and while Ian stayed with the sleeping baby, Katy went shopping.

Katy decided to call her father. He had friends in high places. After many questions he knew his strong-willed daughter was not going to change her mind about keeping this child. He made some calls and in two days they were flying home with their son, Shawn.

As Shawn and his siblings grew, they were often told stories of Dublin by their parents. Their only regret had been never making it to the crypt tour at St. Michan Church. While Katy had thought it might be on the macabre side, Ian had been disappointed not to go. Shawn grew to be fascinated by the stories.

Now, standing inside the church basement, staring at actual mummies, he couldn't take his eyes from the one known as The Crusader. The left arm was outstretched and Shawn noticed the bones of the hand resembled the size of his own. The legs had been broken and folded so as to fit in a normal sized casket (which now had disintegrated) of the time. It was said he had been six and a half feet tall. Ironically, so was Shawn. Eight weeks ago Ian had passed on to the next life. Katy, in her grief, had told Shawn that his father's last request was for him to go to St. Michan's Church and do the tour. Because she could no longer keep the secret, she told Shawn how he had come to be their son. She was sorry that there wasn't any real information she could give him, except that his birthmother had loved him so much that she had sacrificed their connection to guarantee a better life for him. She hoped he understood.

Leaving the church, Shawn knew it would be impossible to ever uncover his real heritage or find his mother or any other relative. But somehow he felt a pull to this place. Who would have guessed that being inside a crypt would have him making a life changing decision? Or that feeling a connection to a

skeleton, thousands of years old, might bring him a sense of peace he had never known? He called his Mom that evening and after telling her of the visit to the crypt he said, "I now hope you will understand that I must stay here. I'm not saying it will be forever, I just know that there is a reason for making my life here right now. I love you and am so grateful for all I have been given." He could hear the catch in her voice as she told him she did understand and wished him much love and luck on his journey. With his heart full, he set off in a new direction, seeking what he did not know, but open to any new possibilities.

Recently the head of the Crusader has been stolen and the tours are no longer available to the public.