

SLEEP TIGHT IN NEW YORK CITY/ HER DEAR OLD DONEGAL

At 3:00am, she would invariably materialize by the jukebox, caressing an Amstel and looking like dynamite. Although the affair was casual, our routine was quite formal. I would send her over a drink and then hover nearby, until she got rid of whatever jerk was trying to pick her up. Then we'd have one last Amaretto, go back to her place and fuck our brains out.

At best, I was number three in her life but I didn't care - I had a girlfriend in Manhattan that she either didn't know or care about. I knew all about her! The Donegal boys didn't like her, although they always watched her back. They weren't too keen on me either, but I was an improvement on number two.

I only saw Angel Hernandez once. He was waiting for her, outside the Village Pub, in a souped-up convertible. Without a word of apology, she jumped in. Anticipating trouble, he gave me one of those long Latin glares. But she squeezed his knee and he peeled out, leaving me standing there like a spare prick at a wedding.

Neither of us mentioned the incident with Angel. She enjoyed mystery and I respected her for it. In the gray Bronx mornings we had little enough to talk about and she was always edgy, if polite. I could almost hear her sigh of relief when she'd close the door behind me. She never answered the phone when I was there and rarely acknowledged its ringing.

She never mentioned the fellow she'd left behind in Gweedore. But I saw his picture in her apartment. Dark, brooding and handsome, if you liked that kind; but probably a real pain in the arse on a daily basis. In the picture she was wearing a short summer dress and an engagement ring. I noticed the ring because I loved her hands. Long slim fingers, soft as crushed silk with a hint of steel underneath. She was a good looking woman, with coarse dark hair and eyes as black as anthracite, but it was her hands that turned me on.

One morning, I watched her search for cigarettes. She glanced warily at me, but I pretended to be asleep. She threw on some clothes and raced down to the bodega. Within seconds, the phone rang. I picked it up and listened. He was calling from a pay phone near the pier, because I could hear the waves crashing and the cry of the gulls. He didn't say anything and I kept my cool. We listened to each other breathing across the ocean. Then he hung up.