

“Tully’s Anniversary Party”

“Drinks are on the house, then, lads! Drink up, now. Tully’s got it covered!”

Tully was in a rambunctious good humor, fit for entertaining the world tonight. There would be no miserable Scottish pinching of pennies on Tully’s anniversary birthday, none of it. The big, amiable Scot had rented the banquet room at a nearby hotel and had invited enough guests to crew a square-rigger from Edinburgh to Inverness. He was going to throw a party to remember.

He had left the coffee shop early, in order to oversee the caterer’s buffet and keep a sharp eye on the all-important bar. The bartender’s name was Donny McDougal and Tully had asked for him specifically. Donny wore a white tuxedo shirt, black bow tie, black vest and black slacks with black satin trim down the outside seams. With his curly red hair and long red beard, he looked like a pirate taking tango lessons.

“Best bartender this side o’ The Hangman’s Rope in Glasgow!” Tully boasted to anyone who would listen.

Donny had worked up a sweat unloading boxes and kegs from the delivery van outside. He had cleaned himself up before the guests began arriving, though after hustling to serve the first round of drinks he was dripping wet again. He kept a spare hand-towel nearby to mop his brow.

A bagpipe band was warming up in a corner, inflating and tuning their instruments. They produced a strange, wheezing cacophony that gave no hint of the stirring melodies and archaic harmonies that would soon be forthcoming. They weren’t due to start playing for a half-hour. But once the crowd got sufficiently lubricated and the pipers and drummers had limbered up, it would be a stiff soul indeed that wouldn’t respond to the pipes.

When push came to shove, of course, Tully would lead the dancing, singing and drinking.

“First in all things, lassie, that’s Tully. And mind ye don’t catch yerself laggin’ behind or old Tully’ll leave ye in the dust!”

Tully had singled out one particularly charming lassie from the crowd of young admirers gathered around him. She must have been a friend of a friend, since he didn’t know her, and she couldn’t have been more than twenty-three. But that didn’t bother Tully, who sucked in his belly and turned on the charm, regaling her and the others with inflated tales of bravery and danger.

“Did I ever tell ye about the time I almost lost me leg?”

Not waiting for an answer Tully jumped right into the tale.

“A gale was blowin’ out of the North Sea and we was smugglin’ casks of precious whiskey up the coast. I was reefin’ the storm jib when a mighty billow leaped over the gunwale and smacked me across the back like the flukes of ol’ Ahab’s whale. I grabbed the bobstay just before it swept me into the deep. There I was, hangin’ by one hand while the wind was shriekn’ and the waves—”

Tully stopped to take a deep draft of ale.

“Ahhhh,” he purred, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and winking at the rapt and bonnie lassie. “The waves,” he resumed, “was poundin’ the ship, shiverin’ her timbers, sure. I swung me leg back over the rail and just then a keg o’ rum busted loose from where we had ‘em all lashed, and slid right across the deck toward me leg.”

Tully took another draft of ale.

“What happened then, Tully?” The young lady, Gwen, had put her hand on Tully’s bicep.

“Ye’ll never believe what happened next, lassie.” He set the tankard down, slipped one arm around her waist, and raised his other arm in the air. “I used that bobstay like a bloody bowstring and shot myself right over the cask and landed on my feet in time to wrestle that cask back into its place, lashed secure with all the others. Never lost a drop.”

“And what about your leg? The leg you almost lost?”

“Oh, that. No, nothin’ happened to me leg after all. See, I’ve got it right here.” And Tully knocked on his kneecap to demonstrate that his leg was not made of wood. “But I come so close to losin’ it that time, that the captain awarded one cask o’ whiskey, ‘cause I saved ‘em all!”

“Wow, Tully, pretty impressive. Do you still have any of that Scotch left?”

“Heavens no, lassie, me and the lads drank it all. Sold the cask at a tidy profit.”

Tully was leaning over young Gwennie when the double doors to the banquet room swung open. Tully turned to see which guests were arriving. His beaming face soon darkened, though, as he watched Fex, Sal and Coo saunter into the party.

“What the bloody hell do ye think yer doin’ here,” shouted Tully.

In anticipation of the party’s success, Tully had hired a well-staffed taxi stand. He wouldn’t brook any Prohibitionist tee-totaling on his birthday, though he did make a concession to the health nuts by ordering lots of bottled sparkling water—not Perrier, of

course, but Highland Spring Organic Sparkling Scottish Water, flown in especially for the occasion.

He circulated among his guests, slapping some on the back, kissing others, and pinching a choice few as opportunity allowed. But no one was left untouched by Tully's blessing.