

# ALL ASSES DO NOT GO ON FOUR FEET

*Patricia Reilly*

IT WAS MID-SUMMERS day 2017. Paddy was sitting on the dusty damp floor and the whole building was now an empty shell. All that remained were the ghostly reminders of the past. There wasn't much left to do now after he had boxed, crammed and decluttered his life away. He felt all alone in the world, with little to show for his fifty years on earth. He had no one to pass things on to. What was there to pass on anyway? It was all gone. How could he have let things go this far?

Paddy was the only son of Patrick and Eileen. His parents were mature when he was born. His father died when he was fourteen and his mother ran the business comprising of Post Office, Shop and Lounge Bar until she collapsed behind the counter and passed away in the summer of 2002. His mother doted on him and he wanted for nothing all of his life.

Paddy picked up a faded poster with a picture of the Celtic Tiger. This brought memories flooding back. His heart began to beat fast as he remembered the boom times and no doubt his fondest memory was of Inga, the girl who came on the train.

Paddy sought out a foreign worker to help him with the business. A recruiting agency from Dublin was contracted to send him a young man who would be grateful to work for the basic wage for one year. He just made it to Dromod station as the six o'clock train was pulling in. Less than ten people got off the train and Paddy looked around eagerly to see his new employee.

"Mr. Mc Hugh?" enquired a tall blonde slip of a girl who had sprung lightly from the train. "Who's asking" demanded Paddy as he looked her up and down. "I

am Inga, the recruitment agency from Dublin sent me", the young girl smiled. "There must be some mistake" muttered Paddy, I am expecting a young man. "You have a young woman instead" bubbled Inga.

"Is this your car? Making her way toward Paddy's dusty Audi she flung her rucksack into the back seat. Before he knew it, they were on their way back to the Village Pub, with Paddy griping about getting in touch with the recruitment agency in the morning.

"This is your place" Inga nodded in very good English, "I am excited to get started to work here" she chirped as she viewed Paddy's run down business.

Paddy was struggling with the work since his mother's death a year before, and the village had come alive with building projects and new initiatives. Madge Flynn and her daughter Teresa were managing the Post office and supermarket for Paddy and he lived on breakfast rolls and other fast foods from the small deli. There was a building boom in the village and everyone was benefiting from it.

Paddy was thirty five years old, his ginger hair hung to his shoulders in fine ringlets, he was overweight and lazy. He heard about the good foreign workers that came to building sites from the lads in the pub, and he decided that if he had a willing young fellow for a year, he might get things straightened out inside and especially outside where the place was a mess.

This woman was not in his plan, in fact he had little interest in women because his mother always said there would be no woman good enough for her son and his inheritance.

The front hall smelled musty and stale

as Inga entered the house. "You can stay here until Monday and I will get in touch with the agency and see if they have a more suitable place for you" Paddy explained as they entered the dishevelled kitchen. "Give the house a good cleaning to pay for your keep, and you can get supplies from the shop next door", he nodded. "Take the room to the right at the top of the landing".

He left the kitchen and proceeded to open up his bar for the evening.

Inga looked around. "A good cleaning" she thought, "This place is a mess and this guy is a donkey". She climbed the stairs to the first bedroom on the right. It had not been used for some time, like the other rooms she discreetly peeped into.

Madge Flynn looked up from where she was doing paperwork as the tall scantily dressed girl made her way around the supermarket filling her trolley. Madge always noticed someone new in town. What a surprise she got when the same girl introduced herself as Inga and told her that she was taking the trolley of food and cleaning items next door to Paddy's house.

At around ten o'clock that evening Paddy's locals, all men, sitting at the bar began to feel hungry as the aroma of garlic and grilled steak wafted into their nostrils. Paddy disappeared into the kitchen to find a feast fit for a king ready for him in the tidy kitchen. "Where are you from?" he enquired. I am from Latvia, my mother is dead and my father farms a small piece of land, he breeds donkeys. Paddy chewed and laughed at the same time. "We call them asses here in Ireland"

Inga picked up a photograph of a boy with curly ginger hair. "Is this you" she

inquired. "Yes that's me when I was in school, my nick name was ginger nut" they both laughed. And so it was, the spell was cast, he ate in silence and enjoyed every morsel.

Paddy returned to the bar licking his lips closely followed by Inga dressed in tight jeans and a low top. He poured her a large vodka and she took her place at the top of the counter.

Paddy never got in touch with the recruitment agency, before long his house was spotless, the back yard was put in order and Inga had made a start on the lounge. She convinced Paddy to tear down the wall dividing the lounge and the bar resulting in one large modern bar which drew in the crowds. Before long Paddy had to employ staff for weekend work. Who would have believed it, his mother would be proud of him.

Ten months passed and although it was not love at first sight, they gradually developed a liking for each other. He invited her out for dinner to the most exclusive restaurant and he asked her if she would stay with him for another year. Inga agreed and that night Paddy became a real man, and from then on Inga shared his bed and his life.

Paddy had it made, he was on top of the world. Inga's sister Janata came to work with them for three months, then she left. "Going to see the world" she laughed as she planted a kiss on Paddy's forehead. Paddy bought five houses from a property developer from the plans. Inga thought this was not a good idea, but Paddy convinced her that everybody was investing in property and the bank were only too happy to lend money to a businessman of his calibre.

"All asses do not go on four feet" she cautioned him. He laughed at her, "you can take the woman away from the ass in Latvia, but you cannot take the ass away from the woman". "Come on, give up the old poverty thinking, you are with the Celtic Tiger now, we work with tractors and big machinery. When I get rich I will

buy a tractor for your father and he can let his asses rest".

Sauntering down the stairs to the smell of grilled rasher, Paddy noticed Inga's rucksack in the hall. "Where are you going"? He enquired. "I'm going to see the world" she laughed pinning up her long blond hair. "Will you take me to the train"? "You can't go, I need you here. I thought there was something special between us".

"I must go Paddy, it is two years to the day since I came here, I did my work as well as I could, I pleased you in every way and now I must leave". "Please stay", he pleaded. "Marry me" he groaned, going down on one knee.

Inga laughed as she stretched out her long hand to help him up. "I could not possibly marry you Paddy, Life is but a parcel of moments, and the past two years were part of that life, I got paid the minimum wage to work for you and you were happy".

Inga got out of the car as the train was pulling in, she stretched out her two arms and pulled Paddy to her and kissed him on the mouth. "It was good while it lasted" she whispered. "But I love you and we are rich".

"You are rich Paddy and you love only yourself, I have realised that I became a substitute mother to you with sex as a bonus. That was hard work not love and I would prefer to be happy with my father on his farm with his asses and be valued. She disappeared into the train.

Paddy watched the train vanish down the track. "It was good while it lasted", he whispered to himself and the tears ran down his cheeks. Life went on for Paddy.

Slowly and very surely the recession crept in. The big houses that he invested in had problems and could not be sold. The building boom came to an end and the foreign workers left. The post office and supermarket shut down and multinationals opened shops in the nearby town.

Teresa Flynn decided to go back to college and Madge got a job in Tesco's.

The pub became quiet, not worth opening. Most of the businesses in the village had closed down. The banks were owed money and they took possession of Paddy's assets. His business and home were sold at the Alsop auction. He had nothing left. Now he was saying good bye to what was once all his.

Paddy's thoughts returned to the present. His hair, silver now was receding rapidly. The auctioneer told him that the new owners would be moving in today. He was leaving the home and business that were in the family for five generations.

He got to his feet and as he opened the door he was greeted by a hardy young man with a fair-haired little girl in his arms "Hi, I am Vladas", he smiled in broken English. "My wife and I have just purchased this property, we hope to open a restaurant and hostel for hill walkers and cycling tourists. My wife is a very good cook and business woman", this is our daughter Roza.

"I wish ye luck" Paddy voiced seriously, offering his hand to the sun tanned stranger. A tall young lady arrived, "This is my wife Inga". Paddy's mouth dropped open as the familiar long hand reached out to shake his.

"Is this your mother's trunk with all the books about Leitrim" she enquired. "Yes, my mother collected every *Leitrim Guardian* since the beginning, the year I was born.

I continued to add to the collection and I am waiting for the 2018 edition". Inga smiled, "I loved looking at the Leitrim history in these when I lived here with you". With a tear in his eye Paddy responded, "This ass did not know the worth of his tail until he lost it". Inga thought for a moment and she laughed gently.

Two young boys emerged through the door, both identical with curly ginger hair. Inga smiled knowingly at Paddy, "These are my twin sons, Patrick and Peter, and they are twelve years old and love it here already.

They are two ginger nuts and they