

Wish Upon a Bar

By Jay Philia

I miss what she's sayin' cuz I'm starin' at her tits. They ain't huge but they ain't small, neither. Round and jiggly is what they are mostly, not like some of the saggy stuff I see coming through here. God bless 'em but it's not my style. Bigger is better but bouncy is best. And I—

“Are you dissatisfied with the conversation already? I had presumed that was a considerable part of a barkeep's job?” She says this with a smile so I know she's not all mad. I smile back.

“I'm sorry miss, I got rather distracted,” I say.

“Claire,” she says, and pushes out a small hand. I push out a big grubby one and shake.

Claire. Her name's just one quick clip of the tongue, no more. Seems there's not much more of her than there needs to be. Ponytailed hair falls just over her shoulders. Lips painted like ripe tomatoes but none of that clown-smear on her face. No earrings. No colored nails. Green button-up blouse, no pattern. A skirt as black as her hair trails to her heels.

“Have you been partaking?” she says, and nods towards the tap.

“No, no, not on the job miss. And not on a night like tonight. Ought to be my busiest,” I say. It lands like an arrow piercing my pride on account of nobody else being in the bar.

“Yes, I would presume tonight would be your busiest. With a name like McLanahan's. And please, call me Clair. That is, if you'll bother to share with me your name?” She's sidled up to the bar now, sitting astride the worn out stool. Hands in view. No ring.

“Oh, yeah, yeah, sorry miss—Clair. Kyle. Kyle McLanahan.” I say.

“Is this your bar?” she asks.

“My father's,” I say, and my heart twists in pain. “Well, was my father's. Mine now,” I clear my throat and speak louder than a fool. “So, what'll it be? On the house.”

“Quite the profitable business model you have,” she says, but again with a smile. “I'll have a cherry whiskey.”

I grab a glass and get to work. I'm sweatin' but not working hard. I've half a mind to drop one of the ice cubes down my back.

"Here y'are," I say, clanking the drink next to her. I need to order more coasters but with what money I'm not sure.

"Cheers," she says, and sips from the straw. A long sip. A real long sip. She finally sets it down. We're there in silence when she says "I'm sorry for your loss."

My eyes start to whimper and I look away. Be less embarrassed if I pissed myself.

"My father...died recently too," she offers. My head whips over to hers.

"I...am sorry. I'm real sorry, Miss Clair," I say, my throat caught. There's a whimper in her eyes too and she sniffs. I notice—didn't see before—but her nose is like one of them Who-things from *The Grinch*. There's hardly anything there! Tiniest nose I ever saw. No wonder she doesn't mind being in the bar with me.

"Well, Kyle, the apps told me that this was the wildest establishment I'd be able to find on this side of town," she says. I leap up to embrace the change of topic but crash land when I realize it's not a change at all.

"I'm sorry to be such a disappointment, Miss Clair. It used to be, I can promise you that. Back when," I turn around to point and it's not there.

"What?" she asks. She's halfway through her drink. The top of her straw is splotted with red. The lamp-lights seem to find just enough space on her white shirt buttons to do a bit of a dance.

"I can't seem to find a picture of dad," I say. "My father, that is. I know I have one, and I mean to hang it up right here, pride of place, but. I can't find it." A lump grows in my throat.

"Anyway, this used to be the wildest cellar pub in all New England. But that was my dad's magic. I can't seem to find that, neither." I turn my back to hide my face. I hear her slurping again so I go to make her another. Just as I *clank* it down she says:

"I'm rather confident that I'm a disappointment to my dead father, too."

I almost stagger back at the bluntness. Not the bluntness, really. Hell, I've had patrons tell me things they'd dare not tell their priest. But Miss Clair seems so...

"I know I seem rather put-together," she says, as if reading my mind. She crosses her leg and I strain not to peek. "I mean, I am put-together. I'm nothing if not a person of privilege. Private school, private university. I just..." something new is coming into her voice. A quivering. "I just passed the bar this week—" she bursts into tears! She's bawling right in front of me!

I grab some napkins—what I have left of them, anyway, and push 'em towards her. There's a knot in my stomach. What's she mean, she passed the bar this week? She's in a bar now. Lord have mercy! Is she on one of those 12 step programs? Did I just shove her off the wagon!?

She dabs her eyes with the napkins I know all too well to be rougher than a cat's tongue and I'm glad as ever she doesn't have the clown paint on her cheeks. She breathes deep.

"I...went to law school. Father paid for it all, of course. He paid for everything. Paid for it, but also insisted that I go. I..." here she breathes deep again "I told him I didn't want it. I told him that after I graduate, I would have to search for a different vocation. Anything else. I can't see myself in law. But he begged me to take the bar, to at least take the bar. By that point he had started to get sick, you see. And how could I have said no to him? I knew where he'd come from. I knew what he had climbed to get to where we are now. So I scheduled for the bar and...and he died."

I expect her to burst out again, but she doesn't. If anything she's calmer than before. Meanwhile I'm standing in my own stupid, thinking she meant my kinda bar. Didn't even pass my mind to think of the law kinda bar.

"He knew I would pass. I didn't think I would, but he knew it. He was always so confident in my ability. But after he died, and after I passed...I knew I couldn't do it. I couldn't go through with it. I promised father I'd sit for the bar and I did. He saw me through. But...surely, just because you're capable of something, doesn't mean you have to do it, if you don't want to, right?"

She looks at me. Just call me a priest! Hell if I know. I freeze and my eyes go wide.

"I'm sorry," she says, and gives her eye a final dab before putting the napkins in her purse. "I imagine you must think I'm rather silly, blubbering about...having wealthy parents and...*passing* the bar."

“No, Miss Clair. Not silly at all. We’ve all got our problems,” I say. The bar’s silence slaps me in the face again. Dad’s bar lookin’ this slow on St. Patty’s! I could drown in the shame.

“You must have really admired your father?” Clair cuts through the silence with a gentle smile.

“I didn’t admire any man more than Dad,” I say. I manage to smile back.

“What was so special about him?” she asks. Her voice is all soft like she’s cooing. It’s rough thinking about Dad still. The wound’s so fresh. But her care is genuine, I know it. She’s curious. The bend in her eyebrows say it.

“Well,” I say. Where do I begin? “This place, this was his. He came from Ireland, ‘bout a hundred years late,’ he used to say. But he brought Ireland with ‘im. He brought...a sense of family, of neighborhood, with him. Not a night went by that didn’t have a rowdy ruckus going on in here. Playin’ cards, playin’ music, drinkin’ of course. Just...active. Lively. Neighborly. It really was a magical place.” I start to well up again. What’s she doin’ to me?

“But that’s all gone now. Died with Dad,” I say. I turn around and pretend to wipe a glass. I hear a scratch of wood on wood and know she’s gotten up. I hear her walk away. Why not, too? The place is nothin’ anymore. I bite my tongue near til it bleeds to stop from tearin’ up. Damn if I don’t feel like the unluckiest sonofabitch in Boston.

Vreeuum!

“Motherfucker!” I’m swearin’ before I even remember I have lips! I turn round and—

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you,” says Miss Clair. She’s standing beside the jukebox with a mischievous grin on her face.

“No, no Miss Clair, no problem at all. It’s uh. It just hasn’t been used since...in a while,” I say.

“Oh, well, I don’t have to use it, I just thought...”

“No, no, go ahead Miss Clair. It...”

“...might liven the place up a bit,” she says these words right before I say ‘em myself. I grin like a fool.

“I bet it will. Play any song you like. It’s free to play—Dad always said it’d be cheaper to make the jukebox free and have all the lads stay longer and drink,” I say.

“Or lasses,” she says, and pokes her finger against a button to pick a track. A lively song from The Irish Rovers blasts through the empty bar. The waves of nostalgia wash over me like it’s high fuckin’ tide.

She’s walked back to her perch and motions for a third drink.

“You sure can handle your liquor!” I say.

She smiles.

“Who can’t, around here?” she says. “My family may be proper, but my aunt always says, we’re proper Irish, proper Catholics, and proper Massholes.”

“Your aunt sounds fun!” I say. She stares at something no one can see.

“She is,” she says it so soft I can hardly hear her over the Rovers.

“You still seem troubled,” I say. She blinks twice and takes a sip of her third cherry whiskey.

“Enough about my troubles. How often do people come in here and eject all their problems onto you without listening to yours?” My face gives her the answer.

“Do you want to run the bar now, now that your dad’s gone?” she asks. Her voice isn’t soft anymore, so I can hear her above the Rovers, but her face still is.

“More than anything,” I say.

“Because your father wanted you to, or because you want to?” she slurps again, the lights bouncing off the cubes in her glass. I know the truth but doubt I can convince her. I decide to try.

“I figure we’re opposite, you and I,” I say.

She pauses, glass still held high. “How so?”

I give a deep breath out. How do I explain it?

“You can do what your dad wanted you to do, you just...but you can’t. You don’t want to, so you shouldn’t, of course. But you can, if you wanted to. I *want* to do what Dad wanted me to. I do. I really do, more than anything, and more than just because he wanted me to. But I can’t. I’m not skilled at it. I don’t have Dad’s magic—”

Vreeuum!

Thud!

I jerk my head and she does the same. Two things happened: the track switched to a different song, this one slower, and the door burst open.

“Good evening.” The voice is clear and crisp and rather high pitched for a fella, if I can say so. But then again, he’s rather short. Not a leprechaun size mind you, though he’s really rather dressed like one. Green suit and all that. Not that it’s uncommon to see grown men dressed as leprechauns—at least not when it’s St. Patrick’s Day in Boston.

“Good evening,” I say back.

“Hello,” says Miss Clair.

The man walks up real quick to the bar then stops.

“Barkeep, would you mind serving me at this table?” he points to a round six-seater in the middle of the bar. “I’m expecting a couple friends,” he adds.

“Of course, we’d be glad of the company,” I say. “First round’s on the house.

The man smiles. Seems one of his front teeth has gold filling. It shines in the light. He’s older looking, enough that I’m nearly surprised he can walk as fast as he can.

“Oh, I’d be glad of the company, too,” he says as he sits. “Both of you are more than welcome to join our game.”

“What game?” Miss Clair asks. Her eyes are wide with interest.

“It’s an old card game. Not many people know it,” says the man.

“I suppose that makes it easier for you to win?” says Miss Clair, who nevertheless has moved to join the table.

The man not only smiles, but laughs, and I swear the laugh sheds ten years off his face.

“Everyone can win at this game,” he says.

I roll my eyes. A card shark if I ever saw one.

“What’ll you have?” I say. He looks confused so I point to the tap.

“Just a beer,” he says with a wave of his hand.

Vreeeum!

Thud!

Just as I start to pour the track switches and the door opens again. Two men gallop in, almost young enough looking for me to think of carding them. Almost.

“Gentlemen, welcome! We’re just about to get started. Even the barkeep is going to join us, won’t he?” the short man says. I’m about to shake my head when I see a pleading smile from Miss Clair. How can I say no?

The men who sidle up beside the old man already seem rather drunk, so I just bring a pitcher of Guinness for the table. Miss Clair pats the space next to her. I sit. The light’s catching on her buttons again. I get caught up in her chest before I can stop myself.

“So, how does this game of yours work, exactly?” says Miss Clair, and I finally look away. The two men are pouring glasses of beer for themselves, spilling most of it.

“Oh, we’ve plenty of time for all that. First, let’s introduce ourselves properly, and all take a drink of the beer that this fine establishment has offered us.” The old man says this with a smile. He has a way about him, I’ll give him that. Commands a room.

“I’ll start. The name’s Clive,” he says with a bow of his head. He takes a deep drink of his beer.

“I’m Micky,” says the young man to his right. He giggles and takes a drink of his beer, spluttering his giggles into the beer which then gets onto the table, which causes him to giggle even more. If I ran a *fine* establishment I’d cut him off, but that wouldn’t be the McLanahan way. Surely not on St. Patrick’s Day, anyhow.

“I’m Seth,” says the other young man as I get up to grab more napkins. He snickers in the back of his throat, sounding like a broken down car, but is careful enough not to spittle into his beer like his friend.

“And what is *your* name, good sir?” I look up and see the old man, er, Clive, asking this question, a glint in his eye as he looks straight at me. Almost as if he already knows the answer.

“Kyle McLanahan,” I say. “I’m the proprietor,” I add. I try to sound a bit fancier. I can feel myself start to lose control of the situation and I’m not sure that I like it. I don’t know this guy from Adam and he’s certainly a card shark, if not something worse.

“Why don’t you get yourself a drink while you’re up, Mr. McLanahan?” says Clive.

Another stab to my heart. I know I’m Mr. McLanahan, too, but it sure feels wrong to have someone use Dad’s name like that.

“I don’t drink on duty,” I say. I bend myself under the bar to find napkins. Folded behind a dusty pitcher are a small handful. The last of the batch.

“I’m sorry, Mr. McLanahan, but that’s the first rule of the game. We must all imbibe before we start. Equal footing and all that,” says Clive.

“I *am* three drinks in,” Miss Claire chimes in, raising her glass. Micky and Seth burst into giggles.

“Fine,” I say, grabbing another glass before I sit back down.

“And who is this enchanting young lady?” Clive says as he pours me a rather full glass. Come to think of it, I haven’t drunk much at all since Dad died. I didn’t want to drown.

“Claire,” says Claire. She takes a sip, her straw already scrounging near the bottom of her glass.

“Well then, we’re all properly introduced to each other,” says Clive, who takes another sip of his beer. “The game,” he continues, “is called Wish.”

“Wishhhhh,” says Micky. Seth starts to sing some Disney song about making a wish.

“Quiet!” says Clive. He slams his palm hard against the table and all of us jump. I look at his face. I can’t quite believe it, but I’m seeing it plain as day: he looks quite a bit older than when he came in. Crows feet crowd his eyes and his nose is red as a radish. A hush settles over the table. Hell, even the jukebox stops, though for what technical reason I can’t say.

Clive takes a sip of his beer and licks his lips. “Now, I’m sure we’re all going to have a pleasant time with plenty of frivolities. But this game does require focus for it to be fun. So Micky, Seth, lay off the beer for now and help yourselves to some peanuts.”

“I don’t have any—” I start to say, but then, I swear out of nowhere, Clive grabs a little crystal tray filled with peanuts. He scoots it over to sit between Micky and Seth, who each grab a handful with a sulk on their faces.

“Now,” says Clive as he reaches into his coat pocket. Miss Clair and I exchange a quick glance. The look on her face I’m sure matches mine: confusion, fear, and yet, excitement. But before we can say anything else the old man continues.

“The rules are simple,” Clive says. He’s brandishing a deck of cards and shuffling them with all the fancy tricks of a casino pro. “Aces high, jokers wild, first suit played trumps.” He says all this in one breath, then takes another drink. His glass is half empty already. “You play for tricks. But, in this game, it’s not all about the cards you’re dealt, but also the size and strength of your wish.”

“What sort of wish?” says Claire. She’s abandoned her drink and focused her gaze. Looks like the face of someone who passed the bar without trying. Steely and determined. Seth looks on, waiting for Clive to answer with a fistful of peanuts in his open mouth. Micky just pouts.

“Why, that’s up to you. Whatever wish you can dream up. Though I warn you, whoever deals has quite an advantage each round. In this game, the dealer plays first. And there’s quite a stock, you see,” Clive says, and sure enough he deals out a handsome batch of cards into the center, before he starts to deal out to all of us.

“I’ll deal first, of course, but don’t worry, you’ll each get a turn. And remember to think of your wish.” Clive says this and deals the last card. I pick up my hand. It’s not bad, as long as hearts aren’t trump.

“Are we ready then?” Clive says, and throws out his first card before any of us can reply. Miss Claire glances at it quickly and blinks twice. I do believe that’s a tell, if ever I saw one. I’m about to smile at my insight when I frown at what the card is: ace of hearts. Shit.

Micky and Seth both play high hearts, either because that’s all they have or they’re stupid at cards. More likely they’re stupid drunk. I manage to sluf a low club and Miss Claire a mid diamond. It doesn’t end up mattering. Either because we’re green or he really is a card shark— we’re slaughtered. Clive racks up tricks faster than Seth is eating peanuts.

“Well, not bad, for your first go,” says Clive, as he clamps together the cards and passes the deck to Micky to shuffle. Micky proceeds to drop half of them onto the floor. Seth snickers like a dying car again.

“I don’t understand,” says Clair, and I look at her face. It’s inquisitive, brows bent again and eyes sharp. “What was the whole wish part of the game? Were we supposed to share what our wishes were?”

Damn if I hadn’t forgotten the whole point of the game! But Clair hadn’t.

“No, no! You mustn’t share your wish out loud or else it won’t come true,” says Clive. He’s quick to say it, but not angry like he was at Micky.

“So then, what’s the point? You won. Can you tell us what your wish was? Or has it not come true yet?” Clair’s face is still roiling with focus and, at this point, frustration. I must say I find it more than a bit sexy. Someone who can stand up to bullshit? If I could get a girl like Clair I could save this bar...

“Have some patience, Miss Clair,” says Clive. “Some wishes take a bit of time before—”

Vreeeum!

Thud!

The jukebox had been off ever since Clive's little outburst, but all of a sudden it's turned back on and that's not all. The door swings open and on dead dogs, there's 10, 20, 30 people coming in! All crowding into my bar!

"Wel—welcome everyone. Happy St. Patrick's Day!" I jump up and start to say.

"Happy St. Patrick's Day!" the whole crowd cheers back to me. They fill in, sitting at the bar, at the six-seaters, at the booths. I've not seen it this full since before Dad died.

"Drinks all around, on me!" says Clive with another of his gold-glinted grins. The crowd cheers again. I rush behind the bar and start to pour as many pitchers from the tap as I can. "Hurry back, Mr. McLanahan, we can't go to the next round without everyone seated!" Clive says. I hurry as fast as I can, and it feels like St. Patrick's Day last, when Dad was well and singing a shanty and I was breakneck behind the bar pouring as fast as I could.

"Here you go, tips appreciated," I say, clanking down a pitcher at a table. "Tips appreciated, here you go. There you are. Thanks for coming. Here you go. There you are. Thank you," I'm skittering about like a headless chicken. The Dropkick Murphys are blasting and everyone's rowdy and laughing. I look up and catch Clive. He's laughing too, and damned if he hasn't shed 20 years from his face. Forget card shark. He's some kind've magician. Might be a malevolent one though. He's offered to pay for 30 people but he doesn't look like a Boston Brahmin to me.

"Well, welcome back, Mr. McLanahan. Quite the crowd you've got this evening, eh?" Clive says as I sit back down and wipe my brow.

"Look at you, what a success!" says Miss Clair. She reaches over and pats me on the back. I nearly jump a mile from sheer joy.

"Thank you, Miss Clair. Not sure how it happened. All of sudden, really," I say.

"Well, never mind that. Back to Wish. Micky, are you ready to deal?" Clive says.

Micky very much does *not* look ready to deal. The cards are all in one slipshod mess in front of him. From the look on his face, he's yet to regain the mental aptitude he had before getting sloshed. Though from the look on his face, I'm not sure what kinda mental aptitude that might have been.

“Yeah, yeah,” Micky says. He grabs the stack of cards and, I don’t know how he does it, but he manages to tap them into some sorta cohesive heap. I look over at Miss Clair and we burst out laughing. Clive and Seth join in.

“I’m doin’ it right, quit yer bullying,” Micky says as he starts to deal.

Clive takes a swig and clears his throat.

“Now remember friends,” he says, “think of a wish. Any wish you’d like. Not world peace, mind you. Keep it simpler. But focus on your wish, focus on it at least as much as on your cards, and you just might win the round. Or at least take a trick of two,” Clive smiles and takes another swig.

Miss Clair is staring at something again, something no one else can see, and she’s frowning. It’s not quite focused enough to look like she’s really decisive. Maybe she’s like me and can’t decide what to wish for.

“How d’you like that!” Micky says, and plays a king of spades. Maybe he’s sobering up. I look down at my hand. Not a spade to be found. Just my luck.

“Mmm,” Seth groans as he looks through his cards, he can’t decide what to play and I can tell it’s drivin’ Clive nuts. I swear the age lines on his face are coming back.

Just then I happen to catch what Micky’s doing. He’s staring at Miss Clair’s chest like she’s in a peep show! Not a bit of scruples or subtlety from the man. I check to see if Miss Clair sees him and she’s dead set on her cards. I remember I’m supposed to think of a wish. An idea pops in my head but it’s sure dirty, a wicked dirty wish indeed, but it stays in my head and it’s hard to get it out.

“For fuck’s sake would you play a card!” Clive slams the table again, and all of us jump. Seth drops half his cards from the fright and I’ll admit I catch a quick peek at them. Finally the drunk sonofabitch plays a mid-level diamond. I look down at my hand right quick, determined not to be yelled at.

“Fuckin’,” I say out loud, before I know what I’m sayin’. Looking right back at me is the ace of spades.

“What is it?” Miss Clair says. She looks at me curiously. I see Clive grinning.

“Do you see, Mr. McLanahan? How it pays to focus on your wish?” he says. I don’t know what to say to such a trickster, so I throw down the card.

“Shit fuckers,” says Micky, who grabs another handful of peanuts.

My victory doesn’t last. Try as I might to make ‘em, no more spades show up in my hand after that, and Micky makes almost a full run of the suit, with me, Clive, and Claire picking up a trick each.

Micky grins as he passes his cards to Seth to deal. He giggles like an orgasming hyena. Claire and I look at each other and roll our eyes.

“So how long’s it take a wish to come true?” Micky asks with his hands clasped together. Clive gives a long sigh.

“Well, that depends,” he starts to say.

“On what?” Mickey interrupts him. Clive stares daggers at him and Micky grabs some more peanuts.

“Well, you did quite well, Micky, in spite of yourself. But you didn’t make a full run of it. And we have no way of knowing what your or anyone else’s wishes were. It’s rare, but someone else could’ve wished for an opposite wish, which might slow yours down. Of course, someone could also wish for a complementary wish, in which case, it should happen any moment—”

“Oh!” Miss Claire interrupts the old man and my eyes dart straight towards her. Her face is flushed and her eyes are wide. The bar is still rowdy but our table, a bubble all its own, is stock still and silent. Then, all of a sudden:

Fwoooosh!

A noise fills the space, a noise like a balloon being filled with one of those fancy canisters. Motherfucker, her boobs are getting bigger! On dead dogs, they are! Right in tune with the fwooshing noise, they’re growing bigger and rounder, going up and out!

“Ughnnnn,” Miss Claire lets out a moan, and boy it’s not a moan of pain, I’ll tell you that much. Her boobs are growing still, slowly but nice and steady, the fwoosh sound still going, and it’s only then I notice she’s not wearing a bra! Now hold up...she was earlier, I

swear she was. I *know* she was, not that I shoulda noticed but I did. But then again, I did make that nasty little wish for her to not have one on.

Good lord, is this all Micky's wish?! Did Micky wish for Miss Claire to blow up like a balloon? Or at least, for her boobies to do so?

It stops. She stops growing, all of the sudden-like, and the fwoosh noise with it. Bits of smooth creamy flesh poke out between the white buttons in her green shirt. Miss Claire is wider-eyed than ever, and she's looking down at them. They've got to be at least double D's by now, though now I think it, that seems a bit small. F's maybe? G's? I'm not used to such letters.

"Holy shit," Micky breaks the silence. Seth's mouth is wide open, filled with half-chewed peanuts. One of them falls to the table and bounces to the floor.

Miss Claire lets out a big sigh.

"You alright, Miss Claire?" I say. I should take my eyes off her boobs but not a one of us can seem to do so, least of all Miss Claire. Luckily the rest of the bar is still singing and dancing and not paying any mind at all.

"Yes," she says, slowly. She takes both her hands and places them on her boobs. She pushes down a smidge and a *squeek!* sound comes out, like when you rub a balloon. She suddenly takes her hands off and the boobs bob up and down in rhythm, like a pair of twin bobble heads.

I look at Clive's face. I can't read it at all, it's like calculus. I can't tell if he's angry or happy or scared or thrilled. Micky, on the other hand, is forming a swimming pool on the table from his own drool, and Seth still hasn't properly closed his mouth.

"Well," says Miss Clair. She taps her boobs and they bob again, up and down, two smooth, fleshy, weightless balloons, covered only by her blouse, stretched though it is.

"That is quite the magic trick," she continues. "But, I suppose I did come here with the intention of having a wild time," and with that, she finishes her third cherry whisky and starts to pour beer into her glass.

Seth closes his mouth and starts to sweep up the cards. I realize, plank in my eye, my own mouth's been open too. I close my mouth and clear my throat, only to open it again and take a swig of my beer.

It's not that the shock is lifted. I think we're all still bowled over, except maybe Clive. But we seem to decide collectively that we'd better keep playing. Perhaps some of us already have in mind what our next wish will be. I know I do.

"Ok," Seth says quietly, after he's shuffled quite deliberately. He's laid out an ace of clubs. It'd be easier to nail jello to a tree than to focus on my cards. Mindful of Clive's palm, I toss one out quickly and take another swig. The round goes all cuckoo-like: each moment feels painfully slow, but before I know it I'm playing my last card. It feels like every other breath I'm looking at Clair's tits, and I can't hardly believe it but she's got a smug smile on her face every time she catches me looking.

"Well done, Seth, you can't chew but you can play well eno—" Clive doesn't even get to finish his sentence before it happens again.

Fwoooooosh!

My ears start ringing as the fwooshing starts. I lock my eyes right quick on Clair's chest, as does the whole table.

"Ohhhohoooo," Clair moans again, and it's wilder this time. She lays her hands atop each tit as they *squeeeeeek!* and stretch outward against her palms. More and more she becomes, and as she grows damn if I don't feel myself doing the same, my khakis gettin' mauled by the biggest stiffy I've had in years.

Clair's eyes are looking into some other plane, much more closed than her wide open and nearly wailing mouth. Her rubbery titflesh pokes more and more out the gaps between her buttons, and I wonder how they're not straining more.

Sshhhm!

The fwooshing stops and so does the growth.

"Ukhyuh," Clair lets out a strange sigh and breathes a bunch of deep breaths. Two proper beach balls stick out from her chest, flesh so smooth and shiny and round. And big. Real, real big.

"Uhhh..hyuh," Clair makes a strange noise again and practically slaps her palms against her tits. They wobble up and down real quick, hitting the table with each bob. Heavens above, seems like Miss Clair herself starts to drool. She takes her tits in her hands again

and *squeeeeeeeks* across each of them, running her hands against each outer side. It's muffled by her blouse but not by much. And I don't know how much longer that thing can hold on.

"Well, Mr. McLanahan. Your deal," Clive says, and the lot of us blink as though we've all been in a trance. Everyone takes a drink of their beer, with Ms. Claire straining to reach around her tits to get to her mouth. I don't bother to ask if she's alright, as it's quite clear she's far beyond alright.

I shuffle. Suddenly I can focus quite well, though most of my blood is not pumping to my brain. I guess I know the reward I'll get, but only if I play my cards right.

Miss Claire is resting her elbows against her beach ball boobs as she holds her cards. She could splay her cards out face forward right now and neither Micky nor Seth would be able to say what they were.

But my mind is dead set on one thing, well, technically two. After all, big boobs are good but bigger is better. Just how big can Miss Claire get? That thought, that wish, is bouncing around my brain like a superball as I pick up my cards.

Holy fuck! I almost drop all my cards in shock. A royal flush, jokers, it's some sort of miracle hand! I can't lose. My god, how big can she get?!

I play out the ace of spades and practically lick my lips in anticipation. I start taking tricks like Bobby Orr taking trophies, when all of a sudden Micky says "I sure wish her boobies keep growing!"

Vreeeum! The record stops. The crowd around us is still laughing and chatting and distracted but at our table it's dead silent and our card playing stops.

Flap!

I look over and Seth has just slapped Micky! Miss Claire and I look at each other in shock.

"Fuck you! What was that for?" Micky says, one hand holding his slapped cheek.

"You idiot! You heard the rules! Clive says if you say your wish out loud it won't come true!" says Seth, spitting with rage. The whole table, Claire included, groans.

“Is that true, Clive?” Claire asks. She places her cards underneath her beach balls, no doubt to take a break from holding them up so high.

Clives sighs and takes another sip. “Any wish uttered aloud becomes unwinnable, for whoever has wished it, for that round. We have to play this round through, but for anyone who shared in Micky’s wish, you’re out of luck.”

Seth glares daggers at Micky, who does look rather embarrassed, or disappointed. Miss Claire sets her elbows back down against her mega boobs with a *squeek!* and frowns. The rest of the hand is like a funeral. I take the final trick and we all pass our cards to Claire. What a waste.

What’s not a waste is what happens next. Watching Miss Claire shuffle is a game all its own. More interesting than watching the Red Sox, that’s for sure. Cuz with each tit bigger than her head, handling the cards is no picnic. She can either see what she’s doing with the cards, by having them on top of her boobs, or maneuver the cards easily, by having them under her boobs but on top of the flat surface of the table. But she can’t do both. After trying it both ways, she decides to shuffle blindly against the table. The gentlemanly thing to do would be to help her, but something tells me that would be against Clive’s rules, and besides, the smirk on her face tells me she quite likes the attention.

“Now,” Clive claps his hands together as Claire starts to deal, her boobs wobbling frantically as she passes out the cards. “This is our last round, as Wish goes around the full table but once. Keep in mind the power of multiple people wishing the same wish. And remember, wishes must remain unspoken.”

“That means keep your mouth fuckin’ shut!” Seth hisses to Micky, who grimaces and glares back.

Claire meanwhile has closed her eyes and is breathing real deep. Must be some sorta mindful technique or something. Damn, if there’s anything hotter than her boobs growing bigger, it’s that she wants ‘em to grow bigger still!

I pry my eyes away from her overblown balloons and look at my hand. It’s the most random mess of colors and shapes I’ve ever seen in my life. I almost ask if “no face, no play” is a rule in Wish when I spot a rogue ace.

“Alright, boys,” Miss Clair says, and tosses out an ace of spades from atop her balloon boobies. She’s come to play. And plans to win big.

The round goes by in a blur. I try to focus on my wish for Miss Claire's titties to grow even bigger, which is easy only because I can't really focus on anything else. Seth is focused too, eyes parting with his cards only to make sure every opening of Micky's lips is to take a sip of beer and not to say something stupid. And Miss Claire, her face is made of steel. You can just tell she wants it. Wants it real bad. Her eyes are narrowed and tight and each look down at her cards is a thoughtful one, complete with a small bite of her lips. All the cards seem to line up too, almost like we're all willing her to win 'cuz we all have the same wish she does. Even when Micky plays a high card, Claire somehow has a Joker to beat it. I don't quite get it either, because she's taking every trick and is supposed to go first, but somehow—I must be past my limit on the beer—but somehow it seems like we're almost playing backwards, 'cuz Claire is always first and last. I find myself playing an ace and I curse myself but it's the only card I've left to play, but then somehow Claire plays another card—no one stops her, not even Clive, it's like it's all of a sudden how the rules go—and it's a card type I ain't never seen before, but we all recognize it as higher than an ace. Now I know I'm sloshed. This surely can't be happening. I look over at Clive's face and blink up a storm—I swear on dead dogs he looks near as young as Micky and Seth. When he came in he coulda been either of their grandad's, let alone father!

Then, just like that, the round is over. Miss Claire's won every trick, and the smile on her face is—

FWOOOOOSH!

The noise starts real sudden like and it's loud, much louder than it was before. Almost sounds like someone trying to fill a hot air balloon rather than just a party balloon. Micky, Seth, and I all look to Claire's chest, and Claire looks down. She grips the sides of her chair like she's about to go on a roller coaster.

The boobs are pushing up and out again, and that green blouse of hers doesn't stand a chance. There's just too much boob. Cheeky little things, those dollops of rubbery, shiny titflesh, they're pushing out between the first 3, then 4, then 5 buttons. The light's catching on the buttons as they bend and twist against the rising titflesh.

Pop!

Splash!

“Ooooh!”

One of the buttons explodes off the blouse and a mass of titflesh charges out into the world. The button lands with a splash in some surprised fella's drink and he looks up just in time to see Miss Claire making, well, making an orgasm sound I'd say.

Pop!

Splash!

“Oooohoo!”

It happens again, only this time Miss Claire can really only be described as orgasming. And blimey, I think she's rubbing herself, too! Her hands certainly aren't by her side anymore, and her eyes are completely closed and her lips are wide and wet with spittle. The middle two buttons, the ones that sat atop the very peak of her oozing balloons, are gone, and her blouse isn't so much taut as stretched and getting disheveled. Her tits are just...I mean they're fucking huge! They're growing out to be yoga balls and they seem just as light as air. And there seems no sign of them slowing down!

Pop! Pop! PoPoPoP!!

The balloon boobs roar outward, the fwooshing going on all the while, the buttons just zooming out every which way. They land in people's drinks, they hit and nearly crack the windows. Miss Claire is moaning like a banshee as her blouse rips in two and falls, outta sight and outta mind. Her tits are spreading across the table like some sorta spilled drink. Micky and Seth rush to grab their pints but I miss mine and—

Crash!

The glass falls to the floor and cracks. I don't give it a second thought, I'm still staring at Miss Claire's massive globes. They're rising towards the ceiling too, perfectly round, with puffy pink areolas each big as a rug and shiny, rubbery nipples that poke out like two pink pitchers of beer.

“What the fuck is happening?”

“Her fuckin'...her tits! They're blowing up like balloons!”

I blink my eyes and realize that's not Micky or Seth talking, but some other lads in the bar. Of course, how could I expect them not to notice tits the size of a pool table!?

“Holy fuck, that’s hot as shit man!”

“She’s moanin’, dude, she’s into it!”

“Ohhhohhhohhoooo!” Miss Claire is moaning for sure, moaning like a wild beast.

I stand up and my cock is like a crowbar in my pants, making not so much a tent as a fuckin’ big top circus.

“Miss Claire, are you alright?” I say, loud enough for her to hear me above her own moans, and the fwooshing sound. She still hasn’t stopped growing. I reckon the wish was mighty strong since I have to believe all of us wished the same thing. Her balloon bazongas are taller than I am now, and stretching out past the other side of the table. Micky and Seth are standing to the side, mouths agape, and the rest of the bar has formed a circle around our center table.

“Yesss, yesss, yesssss!” Miss Claire says, and I hear some sorta splatter sound. I look down and Miss Claire’s legs are..you couldn’t call ‘em wet, you’d have to say drenched. Pussy juices dribbling down from between her skirt and down onto her heels and my floor. Oh, to be a floor board right about now!

“Fuck yeah, fuuuuck!”

I jerk my head to my right and well, no other way to say it but some guy’s also jerking it, ‘cept not his head. He’s just standin’ right there, cock in hand, really giving it a proper rub down as he stares at the blimp that is Miss Claire. Other lads see him doing it and all of a sudden, on top of the fwooshing noise and Miss Claire’s moans and sloshing pussy juices, the bar becomes a chorus of *ziiips* as cock after cock enters hand after hand.

“Now gentlemen, this isn’t that kinda bar,” I say, as if telling the wind not to blow in a hurricane.

“Mmmm fuck me, boys, fuck my titties!” Miss Claire says.

“Fuck yeah!” says the first masturbator. He steps to it and replaces his hands with Claire’s titflesh.

“You...ughhh..too, Kyle, I want you,” Miss Claire can’t move her neck much, but I can tell she’s angling for me. I throb more than ever before. I carefully unzip, my cock painfully hard, and I shimmy outta my pants and toss them aside.

“Oh yes!” I say. I thrust myself against the shiny, swelling dome of flesh that is Miss Claire’s right tit. My cock *squeeks* loudly against the rubbery skin and I release a jet of pre right then and there. Her tit has a smoothness to it that I never coulda imagined, with a god-almighty, stars-in-your-eyes good kinda pressure from them growing ever bigger.

From all the grunts around me I imagine the other fellas feel the same. Seems like there’s five of us fucking her tits now, not that I can really make out who they are. We’re all thrusting our cocks against her shiny, bulging balloons, running our hands up and down them with sheer lust. I can’t even tell if the jukebox is still going, that’s how loud we all are. Hardness against rubberiness, the girth of us guys against the growing roundness of Miss Claire, each landed thrust making a *squeek!* like a balloon being pinched. I love it beyond words. And I know I’m not alone.

“Yes, yes, more, more!” Miss Claire howls with a pleasure so strong it’s almost otherworldly. Before long we all have a rhythm going, all of us thrusting against Miss Claire’s tits just at the same time as she’s fingering herself. It seems we’re all building towards something, our thrusts are getting harder, Miss Claire’s moaning louder, and fuck, her tits are just blowing up and out, more, more, more, a baby elephant each but lighter than fuckin’ air!

“Uh uhh uhhh!” Miss Claire’s near the top now, near the top of some mega ultra orgasm, near the top of her limit—hell, she’s near the top of the ceiling with how much those balloons are filling!

I’m near the top too, about to shoot my load, and I know the other gentleman are too, if you can call ‘em that. We grunt, she groans, we grunt, she groans, build, build, build, fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh, bigger, bigger, bigger, until—

“uhnnnGUUUUUUH!”

Shhhm!

Flooosh!

Spla-spla-spla-spla-splaaaaaat!

Everything happens all at once. It's a fuckin' disco ball of swirlin', twirlin', crazy-eyed lust! Miss Claire moans something guttural, something real primal, and nearly floods the floorboards with more pussy juices than I thought possible to come from just one woman. Her breasts stop growing, but hot fuck they damn near reach the ceiling beams, as high as they are! And before they stopped, they seemed to have one final wave of blowing up, which damn if that didn't feel like just the right amount of nudge against my cockhead, perfect for all of us guys who were on the edge anyway. The hot, white cream spews outta me in great big loads, splattering onto her tits as I grunt and seal my eyes in a spasm. I blink and open them and can't begin to calculate how much cum covers her tits. Between all the other lads and I there must be a near gallon of jizz, all of it slowly dripping down the sides of her billboard balloon boobs.

I'm still blinking my eyes after my splooge from heaven when I catch Claire waving me over.

"Miss Claire," I say with a sigh of joy.

"Mr. McLanahan," she says, and at that moment I don't feel like an imposter, like I'm fooling anyone that I'm my dad. I just feel like the right and proper Mr. McLanahan. And it's what Miss Claire says next that seals the feeling for me.

"This is by far the wildest, and most neighborly, establishment I have ever found."

Miss Claire says this with a smile, and I smile right back.



"Love, would you tilt the screen for me?"

I look up from the tap I'm pouring. My wife's up on our new stage, about to sing her favorite—Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'." Of course, part of the reason it's her favorite is it always gets the crowd singing, though they replace "boots" with "boobs." It's hard not to, when the reason they're there is to watch a woman with tits the size of dumpsters.

It's also not hard for McLanahan's to pull a crowd damn near every night, and for much the same reason. I'm tilting the karaoke screen up so Claire can see it despite her boobs when I think about that a bit more.

“Whooo! Go Miss Claire!” shouts Seth from the back.

When I really think of it, sure, people come here for the boobs. Who wouldn't? But I think they *stay* for the neighbors. Dad's still gone, but his bar is back. Wasn't long after that first night that Miss Claire and I started seeing each other. We found out right quick we both had what the other needed. Miss Claire, sure, her boobs get people in the door, and damn if they don't keep me satisfied night after night. But her business acumen, as she calls it, is also second to none. She's the one who thought up that we need the stage, we need karaoke—folks can't just come in and stare at boobs for hours at a time, they need something to do. Though try telling that to Micky.

I needed Claire for sure, but in a strange way I think she also needed me. She was never going to be a lawyer, she's damn sure of that. But she still needed to use her mind, and she sure as hell has learned how to use her body too.

Sure, the Health Division gives us a bit of trouble, but between Claire knowin' the law and our promise to keep things on the level, we do just fine. We just make sure to keep clothes on and cocks in jeans. Nothing near as wild as that first night when we all seemed to lose control.

“Need anything else, love?” I say to Claire as she's about to begin singing.

“Just a cherry whisky,” she says. We kiss, just a quick peck, but it's enough to send the boys hootin' and hollerin'. I run my hand up the side of her right tit just to hear it *squeek!* in response.

“Now how come we can't do that to ya no more?” shouts Micky from the back.

“Proprietor's privilege!” Claire shouts back to him. Micky shakes his head and goes back to his drink.

I go behind the bar to grab a glass—we always seem to run out, now that we're a destination pub. As I search I start thinkin' about Clive. Damn if he didn't seem to just disappear out of thin air. One moment we were all playin' cards, and the next moment he's gone, and Claire's blowing up like a fuckin' blimp! Not that I'm complaining about the boobs, mind you. It's just I always wonder where he went.

I'm riflin' through some cabinet I haven't opened in years when I find it. Not a glass, mind you, that'll apparently have to wait. It's some sort of sharp thing. A picture frame. I blow off the dust and almost drop it in shock.

“Claire!” I yell, forgetting that she nor nobody else can hear me above the rowdy chants of “boobs are made for walking!”

It’s a framed newspaper clipping. It’s the press release of my dad’s opening of the bar.

“McLANAHAN’S OPENS: A PUB FOR ALL” it reads in big, black letters.

But what really catches my eye is the photograph. It’s captioned, “McLanahan greets first customer.” Staring back at me in the photo is not just Dad, who I’m real glad to see, of course. I know just the place I’ll hang this photo now I’ve finally found it. But another face is there too, with a twinkle in his eye and a glint in one of his front teeth. I can’t believe it’s him. And on dead dogs, he doesn’t look at all different than when he played cards with us that night. But I know the picture’s gotta be more than 20 years old! I shake my head in disbelief and look up to catch a glimpse of his handiwork.

I miss whatever Claire’s singing now cuz I’m starin’ straight at her tits. Weightless wonders, the pair of ‘em. Each boobie the size of a life-raft, wobbling right alongside the vibrato in her voice. I smile wide at the sight of a wish come true and damn if I don’t feel like the luckiest bastard in Boston. 💜