

ANTHONY AND SHANNON: CHAPTER ONE

THE LUCK OF THE IRISH

For Falconi it had been a long, hard, and lousy week... As if working the streets were not enough, there was always the politics in police work that gave him an instant headache. The sad part is that his best friend Butch, and newly crowned Lt, had kids; and in this case, the Lou's teenage son did everything he could to defy his father. In fact, this was not the first time that Billy had gotten into trouble; in the past, he had done stupid things like get drunk and hotwire a farmer's truck and joy ride it through the farmer's crop (destroyed the farmer's entire corn crop for that season.) They had chalked that one up to silly boyhood prank and had even laughed about it, when not in plain view of Billy.

This time, however, Billy had gotten into real trouble; the kind there was no way his law enforcement police Lt father could get him out of; at least not without a lot of lies. And that was just it, the Lou had asked Anthony to tell a few little white lies to the judge in his son's defense. Bottom line is that this was getting to Falconi; because this time, Billy should pay the price for getting involved with drugs and the types who sold it.

For Shannon it had been an equally as bad week... they brought in a teenage boy, Jesus, who had been arrested for dealing drugs. Generally, Shannon could sit the youth down and read the kid the riot act about a life in prison and the damage dealing drugs did to an individual and their family; at times, even causing the death of an individual. That said, every once in a while, a kid came in that Shannon knew was never going to be turned around. In fact, the kid had not been locked down on the floor for even a day before he got into a fight with another youth and bit his ear off.

Thank the Lord, Shannon thought... the weekend was finally here and she could take a breather from work. As much as she tried to set aside the kids and their problems, it was difficult for her not to take each kid's story home with her. If she could have, she would have made life the way it should be for every kid... great home with a mom and a dad and 2.5 kids. You know, like the old television shows - Ozzie and Harriet or Father Knows Best. Sad part is that life was never like that for a lot of American homes.

Anthony was looking forward to spending another weekend with Shannon... he had come to despise the work week, when he went home to his lonely bachelor pad - would pop a tv dinner into the microwave - and spend the night catching up on more bad news on CNN... wars/ the economy/ national health care... just more to add to his headaches. At least he was not your typical bachelor, he did keep a clean pad and do his own laundry; he had learned to be meticulous were his police uniforms were concerned... learned that, not only at the academy, but once on the force. But tonight, he would be able to set aside the formality of his uniform and dawn his jeans/ a black sweater/ and his black cowboy boots. Shannon was supposed to be making a special dinner tonight and he

did not want to be late for it.

When Anthony arrived at Shannon's, his mouth was all ready watering at the mere thought of a home cooked meal; after all, Shannon was an excellent cook and he was fed-up with eating tv dinner's five nights a week. But when he entered her home, his nostrils were immediately assaulted with a strange scent. "What the hell is that smell?" he asked Shannon, wrinkling his nose and making a funny face that made Shannon giggle.

"Anthony, don't you know the smell of corn beef and cabbage?" Shannon asked, with a look on her face that clearly said 'Who doesn't know the typical meal of the Irish?' "I made this meal because we just missed Saint Patrick's Day... Now, sit down and put your bib on and prepare for a fest of the taste buds."

Like a disappointed two year old, Anthony made his way to the high chair... tied the bib behind his neck... and sulked. [Oh yeah, did Shannon ever mention that Anthony NEVER missed a meal, without spilling most of it either on his shirt or in his lap. Tired of forever treating his shirts or jeans with a Tide laundry stain stick before he headed back to his apartment, she had made a point to purchase him an over-sized bib.]

When Shannon placed the meal of corn beef, cabbage, and potatoes in front of Tony on the high chair's shelf, he immediately announced "I'm not eating this!" Shannon placed her meal down on the table and took her seat next to him and dove into her plate; totally ignoring Tony's threat not to eat. That said, she could feel his eyes boring a hole into her forehead. "I said, I'm not eating this... It isn't Italian and it isn't pasta!" Shannon shot back, giving him only a sideways glance, "Yes, you will young man! For once, try broadening your horizons. Rome wasn't built in a day, you know."

At that, Tony gave a waving motion with his arm and forced the plate of food to fling unceremonious on to the kitchen floor. Oh hell, Tony thought, there was that flash of Irish green eyes and the fling of red hair that he actually loved about Shannon. "You are such a bad boy!" she bit out. "I said that I was not going to eat that; didn't I?" Tony shot back at her, picking up one last leaf of cabbage and dropping it onto the floor to lay with the remainder of his plate of food that was now littering Shannon's freshly scrubbed kitchen floor.

Shannon shot straight up, her chair falling backwards to hit the floor with a clank, and than bend down to begin to pick up the mess that Tony had made on her newly scrubbed kitchen floor. She began to cry and that just about broke Tony's heart... "What's the matter Mommy?" he asked with real concern in his voice. "Oh Mommy has just had a bad week, I was really hoping that we could enjoy this meal and just have a quiet and peaceful weekend. But some naughty little boy just had to ruin everything!"

Anthony made his way out of the high chair and bent down to help Shannon wipe up the mess that he had created. "Don't cry Mommy; tell me all about your week" Anthony demanded more then asked.

Shannon went on to explain about the gang banger/drug dealer that Anthony himself had dropped off at her detention center for young male offenders. "You know that kid, Jesus, that you brought to the center?" Shannon asked. "Yeah sure", Anthony thought back on, "Real punk, if you ask me." He immediately did not like the kid, had put up a real fight and it had taken several officers to place cuffs on him and restrain him. If he was giving Shannon any grief, he would soon find a way to deal with the kid on his own terms.

"Well", Shannon went on to explain, "He bit off another kid's ear; and do you know why?" She did not wait for Tony's answer, before blurting out "Over a stinkin' pair of sneakers that he wanted off of the other kid." Shannon would never understand the law of the streets to these kids... they seemed to live by one rule... If you were with another gang, everything they had, that you could take, was fair game. She had tried to have a talk with this, Jesus, and convince him that getting a real job and not selling drugs on the street was the way to go. His response to her was "Lady, why should I work for minimum wage flippin' burgers at Micky D's, when I can make more than \$5,000.00 a day on the street dealing drugs?" Right there and then, Shannon knew that this would be one of those kids that she could not turn around or convince to lead an upstanding life.

Anthony responded with his own story of his lousy week... "Shannon, you know my best friend, Butch; right?" he asked. "Of course, I remember Butch; he is only glued to your side on most of your fishing trips and sport outings" Shannon answered him. "His son, Billy, is in a pack of trouble and is mixed up in gang activity and drugs. Butch seems clueless about it all, as he sits behind a desk all day in the precinct and doesn't see what is going on at street level in the city. I think Butch's son, Billy, needs a stay in your detention center; I think that he is basically a good kid and that you can turn him around."

Shannon just shook her head and yelled, "Do we really need to discuss all of this right now? I had a perfectly decent meal prepared and you wrecked it. All I wanted was a peaceful weekend!"

"Okay, that does it!" Anthony explained. "Leave the meal, we are going to go have some fun." He grabbed Shannon's hand, placed her sweater over her shoulders, as they passed by the hooks by the front door and headed to his Ford F150 pick-up truck. They sat pretty silent for the twenty minute drive that soon found Shannon in the parking lot of the zoo.

The couple of kids paid their fee into the zoo and began to stroll among the cages of animals... stopping to make monkey sounds by the baboon who was swinging back and forth on a rope that had an old rubber tire for a seat. They also stopped to admire the faces on the seals, as they dove in and out of their water sanctuary; they reminded them of the face on a puppy. Next, they headed into the reptile exhibit--- it was cold and dark--- and Shannon hung back, as she was not at all fond of slithering ugly snakes that seem to fill the glass cages with pure evil.

"Yuck!" she said as she turned to her left and did not find Anthony standing there... nor to her right. She followed the entire length of the reptile exhibit and could not find Tony anywhere. In a panic, she rushed outside to try to find him. She searched everywhere that

the two had gone to explore... no Anthony! No monkey sounds by the baboons! No making sad puppy faces by the seals! No sticking their tongues out to mimic the snakes! WHERE was he?

Now, Shannon knew just how every mother who found that their child had wandered off must feel... in a total PANIC mode. After having searched what is typically the adult area of the zoo, Shannon was hot and tired and decided to make a stop at the concession stand for a cold drink, before continuing on with her search for Anthony. The stand was in the part of the zoo that was in the children's zoo, it had just recently been added on to the zoo and was all ready a big hit with kids of the city.

As she sipped her Pepsi, she could not help but notice that there was quite a commotion coming from the area of the carousel... the other children were standing outside the area and pointing and laughing and giggling at something or someone riding on the carousel. Shannon shielded her eyes from the Spring day's sunlight and looked to discover what the fuss was all about. Shaking her head in disbelief, there was Tony riding backwards on the brightly colored carousel Tiger's back... going to town on a chocolate ice cream cone that was dripping down his chin and all over his black sweater front. "Oh crap, I should have thought to bring his dang bib with me!" she scolded herself. Well, at least, she found the wayward little lost boy.



"Anthony John Falconi, get your butt off of that carousel this very instant!" Shannon demanded. "No Mommy!" Tony responded with a defiant tone... "You come ride with me!" Shannon placed one hand on her hip and simply gave a firm 'Come here NOW!' motion with the other hand. Anthony made no attempt to move. "Oh for cryin' out loud" Shannon explained and went to purchase a ticket for the carousel... handed it to the teenager running the carousel (who had a look of total bemusement written all over his face) ...and climbed on the carousel herself. It took her several times around on the carousel and numerous ticket purchases to finally convince Anthony to climb off of the Tiger; all to the amusement of the adults and their kids.

Shannon took Anthony by his hand and said, "Okay Buster, that is enough of this for one

afternoon!” and made every effort to head for the nearest exit. Anthony broke free of her hand hold on him and Shannon had to run to catch up with him. “No, we have to ride the train first Mommy.” Once again, Shannon was on the run just to keep pace with the exhausting over-grown little boy.

The train ride was another fruitless effort on Shannon’s part to contain Anthony... they were not on the train for more than a few seconds, and he had made his way into the conductor’s car and was helping to drive the train... while letting out a joyful cry of TOOT! TOOT! Chugga Chugga Choo Choo!” Shannon just hung her head and folded her arms across her chest and gave in to the laughter that bubbled up inside of her.

Not a second later, Anthony hung his own head over the side of the train and vomited. Fortunately, the train pulled to a stop back at the station and Shannon was able to easily take Tony by his hand and get him out of the conductor’s box.

“Just what did you eat, Tony, while I was searching high and low all over this zoo trying to find my lost child?” Shannon asked bemused. “Oh Mommy... I had three hot dogs with mustard and onions/ French fries/ a snow cone/ cotton candy/ a large Pepsi/ and then there was that chocolate ice cream cone” Tony responded looking more than a little green around the gills.

“Well, that will teach you to be such a glutton; won’t it?” Shannon scolded Tony. He did not have it in him to argue any more, as they headed back to his pick-up truck. Shannon took the keys and got the little man into his seatbelt, rolling the window down so that he could get a little air to help aid in his distress. He vomited more than twice out of the car window, before they made it back to Shannon’s home.

“Ooooh, my tummy hurts Mommy” Anthony repeated over and over again, as they entered the house. Shannon lead him into the bathroom and got out a dose of Pepto to help ease Tony’s stomach ache. “No! I hate that stuff” he said through a sour face. Shannon simply stated, “Okay, but no spending the night, if you do not take your medicine.”

Anthony knew that he did not want to go home to his empty - cold apartment again... in fact, he doubted that he could even make the drive home. Still he gave it one last try and said “But Mommy, I hate the taste of that stuff; it tastes like chalk.” Shannon stood her ground, as well, and replied “Now, now, little man; it is cherry flavored... be a good boy and take your medicine.” Anthony wasn’t about to get in his truck and drive home, so he forced down the medicine half choking on it.

Shannon made a make-shift bed on her couch and had Anthony lay down there... covering him with his favorite baby blanket... the one with the trucks and trains on it. Not before too long, and after having sung his favorite bedtime tune to him... “Soft kitty, warm kitty, little ball of fur. Sleepy kitty, tired kitty, purr purr purr” Anthony was soon asleep. She brushed a wisp of dark hair from out of his eye, kissed him on the forehead, and said softly under her breath “I love you little man.”

Anthony was not sure that he had heard Shannon say that she loved him; he hoped so; but he was too ill and too tired to confront her. He dare not open his eyes and spoil the moment; so he resigned himself to let sleep overtake him.

Shannon made one last check of the door locks, before retiring to bed herself. As she lay trying to drift off to sleep, she decided that she was one lucky Irish lady. Granted this man could drive her crazy most of the time; but the bottom line is, that more than anything, he made her laugh and brought out the kid in her as well. In fact, Anthony had made her forget all about the wrecked dinner and her job; she laughed at that, before she fell fast asleep.