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Frank Brennan
Excerpt
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Irish Rose

‘You were great, Mary!’

‘When is your next film, Miss Flynn?’

‘You must be thinking about an Oscar now, Mary!’

The reporters all wanted to speak to her. All the photographers took pictures of her. Her long, black hair and clear skin were every fashion photographer’s dream. Mary Flynn, Ireland’s most photographed face, was famous and beautiful.

Mary smiled her famous, beautiful smile. She could not ask for a better night. In all her eighteen years she had never known such happiness. First a rich and world-famous fashion model, and now a film star, too. It all seemed so right. It was meant to be like this, she just knew it.

The truth was that Mary Flynn had always wanted to be an actress. She wanted, more than anything else, to show the world that she was not just a beautiful face. She was intelligent too and tonight the world would know it.

It was 31 July 2004 – the first night of the film *Irish Rose* in which she starred with the famous Declan Knight. People were already saying that she was as good, perhaps better, than he was – and he was Ireland’s biggest film star. He had been in some big Hollywood films. But it was Mary that the photographers loved. They always did. She could tell. Everybody else in the film was forgotten once she made an appearance. Declan himself knew this. She saw it by the look on his handsome face. ‘He’s jealous!’ she

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thought as the taxi took them both to the hotel in Dublin for the after-film party. 'He doesn't like the public loving me more than him.'

Soon they were drinking champagne in the hotel. Photographers took yet more pictures for the next day's newspapers. The hotel had many mirrors in it and one was just ahead of Mary as she stood next to Declan. She saw him in the mirror and knew he was the best-looking man in the room, even though he was well over thirty. She also knew that everybody was looking at her – not him. She could see herself in the mirror, her beautiful long hair, her beautiful red dress. Yes, this was her night all right. Hers and nobody else's.

'How about a few words from the new film star, Miss Flynn?' asked a reporter.

Mary smiled. She thanked everybody for their kind words. She thanked the director and the other people who had made the film. She also thanked her manager and her mother. Oh, and Declan, of course. He was good, too. All the things people said about them arguing during the filming weren't true at all. Not really. Declan looked red and went to get more champagne. Silly, jealous man. You'd think he'd know better. Why, he'd even asked her out on a date while filming – at his age! She had refused, of course. Too old.

The director of *Irish Rose*, Chas Gorman, came up to Mary. He had always taken care of her. He whispered in her ear and told her once again she was great – now she could go and enjoy herself and leave the rest to him. Mary knew she was great, though she never got tired of hearing others say so. But now she needed to get away from the

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reporters and photographers for a while.

As she walked away, she saw a handsome young man with dark red hair across the room. He was looking at her with a smile on his face.

Mary was used to having handsome men around. She expected no less. But this man was different. He had a look in his eyes that seemed to say, 'I know what you want, I know what you need.' His eyes looked deep into her own eyes as though they were hungry for her. His eyes said there was nobody else in the room for him. Only he completely understood her. Only he, said his eyes, wanted the intelligent woman behind the beautiful face in the photographs. His smile was that of a man who wanted her, both body and mind, more than any man she had known.

Mary felt her heart jump wildly. Or was it just the champagne? She felt her face go red. She turned away from the man – who was he to look at her like that? Mary looked again. The man was gone.

The evening continued and it went wonderfully. Mary was busy listening to lots of important people, who all told her how great she was. She smiled and laughed and laughed and smiled, but she ate very little. She did, however, have another glass of champagne.

Mary suddenly decided that she wanted to dance. There was music playing, but it was too quiet; you couldn't dance to it. And there was no dance floor! What kind of party was this? Why was there nowhere to dance? Why was there no real music to dance to? She was the Irish Rose and she needed to dance! The whole world must see the beautiful, intelligent Mary Flynn dance on this, her night of nights!

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But there was nowhere. Everybody was talking, drinking and eating, but there was no dancing. It was getting late, too. It was a warm night and she needed some fresh air.

There were some glass doors open at the far end of the dining room and she walked towards them.

‘Mary, darling! You look so beautiful!’

It was Celia Jones, a famous English fashion model. Mary knew Celia was jealous of her. ‘Ah, well, let her be jealous,’ Mary thought. ‘She’s nearly thirty and will soon be too old to model. She hates me because I’m younger and more beautiful than she is, or ever has been. And I can act, too!’

Celia was holding onto the arm of Declan Knight. She looked pleased with herself. He was smiling like a boy with a new toy to play with.

‘You’re so lucky to have a great actor like Declan to teach you about film acting, darling!’ Celia said while Declan looked down at her with that stupid smile still on his face. ‘I expect he’s just like a father to you!’

‘Thank you, Celia,’ Mary answered. ‘And you sound just like my mother. But then you are almost the same age, aren’t you?’

Celia laughed weakly, then led Declan away towards somebody else. She wasn’t pleased.

‘That got you, you old cow!’ thought Mary, pleased that she had made Celia feel uncomfortable. She turned and walked quickly to the doors.

Mary felt hot. She needed to get outside. In just a moment she was in the garden.

The hotel was beside Phoenix Park, the largest park in Dublin. The hotel garden was right next to it, near a wood.

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Mary walked past the people with drinks in their hands, past the smiles and past the tables and chairs. She had never realised the garden was so big. All at once she seemed to be by herself in the garden. But she was not alone – the handsome man with the dark red hair was also there. At the back of the garden there was a gate that led into the wood. As she walked to the gate, she heard music. It was Irish dance music and it was coming from behind the gate. So there was a dance! Why hadn't anybody told her? The handsome young man was close by and she knew he was looking at her. The man opened the gate. Mary knew he wanted her to follow. She did, though she did not close the gate behind her because she had to return to the party soon. But, oh, how she wanted to dance!

Once she was through the gate she saw a light in the middle of the wood. She started walking through the wood towards the light. She saw that there were many dancers there, all dancing to the wild music of violins, drums and guitars. They were laughing loudly as they danced. The women were beautiful, and the men were shouting with happiness as the music played. They weren't students. Maybe they were travelling people who were having their own party. Mary didn't know who they were.

Then the man with the dark red hair came up to her. She asked if she had to pay to join the dance but he just smiled. Oh well, she could always pay later. And he was good-looking, after all. And she just knew he understood exactly how she was feeling. She would dance with him. But just one dance. The man picked up a bowl full of fruit from somewhere and offered it to her. Mary was not sure if she should accept. She remembered how, when she was a