

Chapter 23 – Interviews and More

Shane came by Katie's apartment for breakfast before their meeting with Sean's staff to prepare for the newspaper interviews. Angela and Katie were teasing and embarrassing him with the creation of a breakfast suitable for a Celtic god. The concoction turned out to be scrambled eggs with bacon, and toasted soda bread washed down with strong Irish tea.

Angela announced their wedding date, Saturday, October 10th. They all laughed together over the fact that she and Peadar had planned for everything except the date. Katie and Shane talked more about their own plans. They were looking for a suitable reception place and had narrowed it down to Fitzgerald's or the Faculty Dining Room. They were dining at Fitzgerald's tonight and expected to speak with the manager to discuss the possibility of a reception. They will have dinner tomorrow at the Faculty Dining Room and discuss the same possibility with the manager.

"What does Peadar like about the Faculty Dining Room," asked Shane?"

"I think he likes the convenience since we are going to be married in the University Chapel. He likes the Manor House atmosphere and the room is big enough. He thinks the food is good, and I agree. He likes to work with colleagues, and Lahinche or Ashford Castle is just a little too far to travel," responded Angela.

"Well, that is a good checklist, said Shane. It is close to the one I am following."

The first thing on Katie and Shane's agenda for the day is a meeting with Sean's staff. They drove over to the Academic Building because Shane had three big bundles of mail in his car that he wanted to leave in Katie's office for her interns to work on.

"Oh speaking of mail, said Katie, Bono sends his regards. I received a *thank you* note from him for sending him a copy of my dissertation bibliography."

"Really! Was it a form letter?"

"Oh no, said Katie. It was hand written on Paul Hewitt stationery."

"We'll save that one for attic floorboards. Our children and grandchildren will profit from that one."

Sean's staff enthusiastically welcomed them. For them, this was a break from academia and a chance to work in the real world of public relations.

Just as they did for the preparation for the Gay Byrne Show, they fired a lot of questions at them very quickly. Katie and Shane, by this time, were very smooth in their answers.

“I don’t think that anyone will ask you those kinds of pressure questions in this kind of interview, but we have to prepare for the eventuality,” said Rory Ahearn and his colleague, Edna McCabe agreed.

“This will be basic conversation. If there anything about the sea rescue or the Leveege incident that you haven’t yet told, now is the time to bring it out. They want to know more about you personally. The two of you just exploded on the news scene and while everyone knows about the two incidents and the tragic accident with the farmer and the playboy on the roadway, few know anything about you.”

“Think about the last book you read, your favorite band, your favorite song, reflections on your mother’s marriage. You are both loyal to the Church. They will want to ask you about that. Think about faith and religion in general and where you stand.”

“You are getting married soon. Think about your hopes and dreams for the future. You have three interviews this afternoon and two tomorrow. Don’t worry about repeating yourself. Each periodical has a different constituency of readers for the most part. You will get a lot of local and national coverage from these. It will be read once. It will entertain the reader, and then be gone by the next news cycle. Your first interview is with the *Irish Times* followed by the *Sunday Tribune*. Finally you will meet with people from the *Ireland on Sunday* which is a ‘slip in magazine’ for most of the Sunday papers in Ireland. You will almost certainly be the cover photo for that.”

“Edna and I have a lot of confidence that you will do well. They will have a photographer with them. It is best if you dress as casually as you are dressed now.”

Katie laughed. “What you see is what you get. We’ll go to the commissary for an early lunch and rehearse while we are eating.”

“It looks like you are all set to go, said Rory. Edna and I will be in the room this time so we’ll have your back if anything goes wrong. We’ll debrief you after the last interview.”

Katie and Shane made small talk through lunch in the almost empty commissary. They were very confident for these interviews and felt that was a good thing. They didn’t want to show any weaknesses that could be exploited.

When they got back to the Communications Department, Tom and Nora, representatives from the *Irish Times* were already there. Nora was the interviewer and Tom is her photographer. Both seemed very nice but seemed to Katie to be a little young for this task. They asked if they could use a tape recorder. Katie and Shane nodded to each other and gave their assent.

Nora addressed Shane first and asked if there was anything that he remembered that wasn’t covered on the Byrne show. “Yes, there are a few things I remember that I did not discuss elsewhere, except with Katie. I remember talking with my mate, Quinn, when we got out of the bay that I had never seen the sea so rough. I was afraid for the boat. They

are built to be battered but the sea that night was so high, higher than I had ever seen it before. I was confident that I could maneuver the boat but with great difficulty. We had coordinates where we would find the foundering ship but we were still about three miles away from them. When we arrived at the location I had steered upwind of the location in the hope that the storm and the drift would bring us to them. If you have even been to sea in a storm, you will know how dark it was. One of my crew, Mike O'Leary it was, saw a flash of light between the giant waves. I aimed for it and we found them. Their ship was nose down and sinking. Their lifeboat had capsized and the crew had lashed themselves together and were clinging to the craft. I maneuvered the boat to come up on the other side of the lifeboat so I would not crush the men. The water was so cold that those men would have perished in another few minutes. We lashed their safety line and dragged them aboard, the captain, the last to arrive. We had dry clothes and a heater in the cabin. We were still there when the Nina G started her last voyage to the bottom of the sea."

"It was only a few minutes later that we spied the rogue wave. It was at least six stories high, higher than any building on the campus. That is when the fear hit me. It was also when everything went into slow motion. I turned the boat into the wave and the force of it lifted us up. We were riding up the wall of the wave at about a 45 or 50 degree angle. It was like a great sea monster picking us up. My fright was that I would never see Katie again. And I prayed. The voice inside my mind shouted to concentrate. You have only one chance at this maneuver. I thought that maybe we could move across the top of the wave and down the other side of the wall. I kept watching for the top and the wave started to crest. I swung the boat around and into the pipeline that the crest created. Travelling at breakneck speed I held onto the wheel for dear life. I started to relax. I thought then that we would make it. Drowning was not an acceptable option. Time came back to normal. I could still see the fear in all the eyes around me."

"As capable as I am with a boat, I never had training for an event such as this. Believe me, I felt it was God whispering in my ear telling me what to do, and I'll remember those moments for the rest of my life. My mind and my soul were both fully alert until we ran out of the wave and the sea had flattened considerably. We radioed back that we were alright and proceeded home."

Shane tried to tell the story in a matter of fact manner but the story had drama of its own and Tom and Nora and even Katie were all listening with rapt attention.

"That is quite a story, said Nora. I knew the outline of the story but you brought us into it in a way that I could not have imagined."

Shane thanked her.

"I was petrified, said Katie. I could see early in the evening that the sea was rough and said a prayer for those who had to be out on it that night. We lost contact for a while after their SOS and the realization hit me that it was possible that they wouldn't come back. The sea is a cruel master. I knew all of the crew of the rescue ship as well as most of the crew of the Nina G and their families. When he had to go out with the boat, we were

discussing what it would take for us to be married. Then I had to contemplate the possibility of life without him. Then the radio crackled with the news that all were safe and on their way home. A tremendous weight came off me and I suddenly felt freer than I had at any time in my life. We saw the lights on the boat when we entered into the bay. I waited until I stopped crying while the boat pulled up to the dock. We had no idea what happened, just that they were in life threatening danger. The crew started to tell the story later on. I ran out onto the dock and I couldn't find him until I saw him walking through the crowd. I ran up to him and hung on to him so that nothing bad could happen to him again.

"And you went through something like that again at Leveegee," asked Nora?

"It was not quite the same, said Katie. The intruders broke into the house and didn't know we were there. We went back to pick up some of my mother's things since she was living with me after they beat her. The element of surprise was on our side. Shane easily subdued three of them and the fourth had pulled a knife and they were maneuvering around the table. I picked up a frying pan and I don't know why or what I was going to do with it. One of the intruders that Shane knocked down got up again and picked up a walking stick. He smashed it across Shane's back and suddenly the knife wielder had an advantage. He had raised his knife to plunge it into Shane when I hit him on the back of the head with the frying pan. The guy who hit Shane with the cane ran out the door right into the waiting arms of the guards. The whole episode didn't take five minutes. I can't emphasize more that it was Shane who deserves all the credit for what happened that night."

"Katie, tell me more about you. You are a professor of Irish Literature at University College, Galway?"

"Yes, I am that. My dissertation was on Ancient Irish Literature and Mythology. That has been my area of teaching for the last few years. I hope to expand on that within the next few years.

"How are you going to do that?"

"Well I have been asked to do research on the literary roots of the 1916 Rising, especially in the poetry and writings of the Pearse brothers. I guess that I can announce now that we have made a major discovery of previously unseen documents, all signed by Eamonn Ceannt. Maybe I can ask through this interview that if anyone has any documents for that period in their homes, the University and I would be most interested. If anyone has a story to tell about that period, I would like to meet with them."

"How did you get the papers?"

"Well, it turns out that my grandfather was a night rider, that most dangerous of revolutionary jobs, delivering orders to rebel cells in the midlands and in Ulster. We

found the papers in our attic at Leveegee. I am praying that there are more papers in attics around the country.”

“Also, Dr. Nolan, President of the University recently announced a new thrust. We want to bring the ivory tower out into the community at large. We want to partner with communities and corporations and extend to them the incredible resources that we have. Our university system is the heartbeat of Ireland and we, at University College, Galway, have already taken the first steps forward to partner with our communities and professions. It gives our students *real world* experience. It gives the *real world* the opportunity to tune into the thoughtful research of the University. The effort expands our mission and the mission of our faculty. It brings us closer to the civilizing monasteries built by St. Patrick. For their time, they were the heartbeat of Ireland.”

At that point, Shane chimed in. “I recently had an opportunity to use the resources of the medical department. Believe me when I tell you that the University clinic is as well equipped and with physicians as well trained as in any hospital in America. Ireland is in desperate need of a better medical delivery system. The University College medical department is the model for what can be done in every community or region in Ireland.”

“The two of you are getting married soon. What is your attitude toward our changing Church?”

Katie laughed. “Both Shane and I are very committed to our Church. I think the whole world knows of our marriage preparation work with Fr. O’Malley. He reports that he is as busy with pre-marriage counseling as he has ever been in his entire ministry. I pray that every parish in Ireland could provide for its people the way Fr. O’Malley provides for his. As you know, the University has a Newman Center and Fr McCarthy is as vital to the good of the University as any administrator or professor. It is the soul of the University for students and faculty of all faiths.”

“The Church is not doing well in public opinion,” said Nora.

“I can only lay the blame for that on the Church herself. When priests stopped being prayerful, they stopped serving the people of God. When they became so engrossed in their own importance, they forgot the importance of their mission. We Irish do not like to be controlled. Each of us has a rebel gene. That is not a bad thing. When we are controlled by finding sin in every quarter of our lives; when we are controlled with the threat of Hell at every turn; when anything enjoyable is characterized as sinful, we begin to realize that this is not the faith that Patrick brought to Ireland. There are many models of Church and unfortunately too many of our priests and even some bishops pledge allegiance to models that are no longer relevant. The Gospel as a model for living is almost foreign to our experience of Church. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. We just celebrated that. He is waiting for the Irish people to catch up with him. Paul taught us that we are the mystical body of Christ, not the mysterious body. Shane and I like to believe we are in the forefront of that movement.”

“Amen to that,” said Shane.

At that point, Rory stepped in to say that we had other appointments and asked Edna and Tom if they could wrap up their work.

Nora laughed and said that this was the greatest interview she had ever done. She can't wait to see it in print.

Tom asked for a photo of Shane and Katie with their heads together.