
Nuala Lyons

Movie Fan

A graphic of a film strip with a black border and white sprocket holes. Inside the strip is a photograph of a man and a woman in silhouette, standing on a beach and holding hands, looking at each other. The background is a bright sunset over the ocean. The text "Movie Fan" is centered in white above the couple.

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Ciara Callaghan has successfully completed a screen test for her first movie. She joins her partner, Rory Corcoran on site in Alaska as he finishes his own movie but things begin to unravel for her and her partner.

Misfortune dogs her footsteps, as she struggles to discover who wants to stop her taking the part of the leading lady in the Movie. Will she be able to unmask this person; are they working alone or are they being paid to injure her?

Her future, perhaps her very life, depends on her being able to outwit this clever enemy.

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by Nuala Lyons

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First Edition

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The Hotel Trilogy

The Gallagher

Home City

Movie Fan

Children's

Call of Friendship

For the Boys
Paul, Neil, Conor and Gary

Keep your friends close and your enemies closer - Sun Tzu

1

Ciara Callaghan slipped into a seat ten rows behind Tom Maguire, the director, and watched the final rehearsal. She had worked before with most of the actors, directors and staff of the Gate Theatre. They knew of the devastating rift with her partner, Rory Corcoran, a brilliant up and coming actor in his own right. In fact, Ciara's best friend, Doreen, was the leading lady in this current production.

Thoughts of this rift, caused by Rory's actions, overwhelmed her senses so completely she didn't hear a single word of the play; the internal debate continued relentlessly in her head, causing a dull ache that wouldn't go away.

Over and over it played in her head, again and again and again; the never-ending pain, the constant tears, her wounded brain:

Rory has chosen his career over our love.

"See you all Monday," Maguire said to the cast when he was satisfied. He turned to Ciara.

"How are you doing?"

"Managing - thanks."

"We all struggle with hurt but how are you coping?"

"Terrible. I miss him so much. I can't get him out of my mind. Not a minute goes by but I wonder how it happened."

“I’m sorry. I know it’s trite, but it’s so true; I feel I have to say it: time is a great healer. Give yourself time. The memories will fade. They won’t go away, but they appear to wound a little less with each day.”

“What does?” asked dark-haired Doreen, flashing her brilliant blue eyes as she joined her childhood friend and the director.

“The pain of losing a partner,” Maguire replied, getting up and gathering his belongings. “Try to give her some comfort,” he urged Doreen, and left the auditorium.

Noise, chatter and laughter echoed from back stage.

“Come on. It’s lunch time,” Doreen said. “Everyone will want to talk about Rory. Let’s go.”

“Fine, but I’m buying. You paid for lunch yesterday. I’m not having you take care of me like a mother hen. The bastard broke my heart, not my head, nor my bank balance.”

She ignored the stab of pain in her chest at the sound of his name. Her nerve-wracked body betrayed her as she got out of the seat, causing her to stumble into the aisle.

Straightening up, she swished her long burnished curls over her shoulders and followed her friend up the slope to the exit.

Bright late July sun blinded her eyes after the dimness of the theatre. She fumbled in her bag for sun glasses, which hid her bloodshot eyes and afforded her a mask to hide behind.

“Don’t say a word ’til we get indoors,” her friend pleaded. “I’d have to shout to be heard over this traffic and I don’t want to strain my throat. You know I must have the perfect relaxed voice for Opening Night.”

The glimmer of a smile reached Ciara's stinging eyes as she remembered the times she'd had to gargle, honey mixed with cider vinegar, to sooth an aching throat before she walked on stage.

They fought their way through tourists, down O'Connell Street and over the bridge, past College Green and up the busy pedestrianised Grafton Street to their favourite pasta restaurant.

The staff, who knew them as long-standing customers, led them to a quiet area at the back of the second room. They settled in at a corner table.

Men and women looked up from their meals, recognising them as local actresses; a silence fell as their eyes lit up with the excitement of being in a restaurant with celebrities – minor though they were. Moments later conversations renewed. Rory's name echoed along the tables.

"Now," Doreen said, putting the menu down. "Tell me all about it."

"If I start I'll never stop," Ciara's voice trembled.

"They won't throw us out even if we stay for the entire afternoon. Listening is what friends are for. So come on; I'm listening."

"All right, but if I get weepy I'll stop." She took a deep breath. "You know how I've wanted Rory's baby for a while now. I phoned him on set in America and asked him to come home so we could discuss starting a family. I never tricked him, never. He wasn't too keen on being a father – well I didn't think so – but he came to Dublin to talk about it. He spoke to Mark, who didn't offer advice one way or the other. No one, no one, ever said he had to agree to be a dad."

Doreen's hand covered hers as the waiter arrived at their table. Ciara nodded as her friend ordered for them.

"In the end, though, I asked him to give me a baby and he agreed. Oh, he tried to dissuade me, saying it wouldn't be good for my career to be pregnant before I was established as a movie actress, but I knew it was going to be fine. I could manage the pregnancy at the end of my shoot in New Zealand, and when the next part came along, I'd bring the baby with a nanny to take care of him or her while I worked. The mothers on the set in Alaska told me how to work it out. We could have done it. We really could."

"Take a drink of water," Doreen urged. "If he agreed to having a child, what went wrong?"

"Bloody *Beth Stone* is what went wrong." She all but screamed the name.

The restaurant was not full at this early hour, but the customers who were there turned to see what she was shouting about.

"Hush, hush. Take a deep breath. Count to ten."

"Sorry. I'm all right," she said in a quieter, sadder voice when she'd recovered. "Rory and I went to Alaska happy that we'd try to start a family. I mean he laughed and joked and we had sex; wonderful sex. It was heady stuff. I wasn't worried when the first months went by without conceiving, but then I heard a rumour that Beth Stone, the leading actress, was whispering *she* was carrying Rory's child.

"It was terrible. He must have had sex with her. Unprotected sex at that. I challenged her. She sniggered, putting her hand over her stomach. Heaven help me, I nearly hit her. That night I demanded the truth from Rory.

“He went cold, stared at me, never said a word, went out and drank a lot. He didn’t get drunk, though, because he was shooting next day. In the morning I lost it completely. I attacked him. I scratched his face trying to get at his eyes. He’s given *her* a baby, *the baby I ached to have.*” An isolated tear slipped down her left cheek.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Yeah.” She brushed the tear away with a finger. “I’m so upset. I feel ill, as if I have a terrible sickness. But you know, he never once tried to explain, or say he was sorry or anything. He remained silent, just put me on the plane to Ireland as if I were an unwanted mail delivery being returned to sender. All without uttering a sound.”

“After all the time you’ve been together, he should have explained, even if he didn’t want to. He didn’t deny he was the father, did he?”

“I told you. He never said a single word to me. *Not one word.*”

“The make up girls went for me after I put that long scratch down his face, but I could handle that. As for him! He was like ice. I’ve never seen him that way in all our years together, since we were seventeen and students in Trinity.” She sighed. “A long long time ago.”

A second tear inched its way down her cheek; her finger flipped it away.

Doreen squeezed her hand, picked up Ciara’s glass of red wine, holding it out to her. “Try and eat something. We’ll talk again and see what we can do. You still love Rory, don’t you?”

Ciara nodded. “But he doesn’t love me anymore,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

She sipped at her wine, then tried to chew some garlic bread.

Movie Fan

2

College Green was buzzing. Carpenters were busy sawing and hammering, getting the stage ready for the musical group and those personages who were engaged to open the Summer Festival.

Traffic was diverted away from Dame St– which meant more traffic jams on the quays; still, not many drivers were annoyed. After all, this was the summer time. The air hummed with excitement. Recession or no recession, people were going to enjoy themselves. It was party time for Dubliners.

Phil O’Doherty, six foot one, brown-haired, brown eyes, recently unemployed, was thrilled he’d got this job as sound engineer for the festival. If he were lucky, Ciara Callaghan, one of the people invited to declare the festival open, would talk to him. He’d been a fan ever since she’d appeared on RTE in a sitcom he liked.

He carefully fed out his wires towards the podium where she’d give the opening speech.

“Nearly there,” he smiled at her, standing there beside him, trying to impress this gorgeous TV star who was going to be huge in movies. He’d heard a rumour that she’d landed the principal role in a sci-fi film and, while this wasn’t his scene, he’d go just to see her. She was as beautiful up close as he remembered her the last time he’d seen her on TV.

With her wide-brimmed sun hat and blue sundress, which came to the top of her knees, she appeared as if she'd stepped out of a picture.

"Thanks, Phil. It is Phil, isn't it?" she asked, giving him a friendly smile.

"Yes," he managed.

She'd actually said his name and smiled at him. He smiled back. Wait 'til he told the lads!

The sweat was dripping off his face, although he was wearing only a t-shirt and shorts. He connected the wires to the control box, which sat in the shade. The sun was burning any person who moved out from the shadow of the Bank of Ireland building. He'd put on UV cream, but he'd lost his hat somewhere. The heat scorched the top of his head.

"I'd like you to say a few words to check the sound," he managed, without stuttering. "If you wouldn't mind, Ms. Callaghan." But his face was plastered with a stupid smile, something he could never get off his mug whenever he met a good-looking woman.

"Not at all. Are there any sentences in particular you'd like me to say, to make sure the sounds don't slur?"

"No, that's okay. Just say whatever you want into the mike. I'll do the rest."

He was so lucky. After being on the dole, expecting he'd have to emigrate, he'd got this break. Now, the famous Ciara Callaghan was working with him. Oh boy! The lads'll go green with envy. He could see himself buying the pints tonight and he might, just might, buy a Lotto ticket.

Bending down he picked up a bottle of water with sweaty hands, twisted the top off, chugged nearly all of it straight down in an effort to keep his body hydrated. Management

had instructed all the workers to keep drinking water. This was the third bottle he'd downed in an hour. Perspiration leaked out through the pores of his skin as if he were a sieve.

He turned to Ciara, gave her the signal to speak. His startled eyes went wide, staring into hers, as he fell to the ground gasping.

She flew to her bag, ripped it open, grasped a pen-like object with her well-trained right hand, raced back and knelt beside Phil, all the time shouting at the top of her clear actress' voice, "HELP. Call emergency services. NOW!"

She pushed up his shorts to plunge the pen into his outer thigh...

Her pen was empty!

How could it be empty?

It couldn't be empty.

No way would it be empty.

She's checked it this morning before breakfast, as she always did.

Sweet dear Lord!

Empty!

She stared in disbelief, stunned.

Workers stopped.

They ran to help, pulled out mobiles, rang emergency services.

"The ambulance is on the way. What happened?"

"He's having an allergic seizure, going into anaphylactic shock," she said, finding her voice again.

The young man fought for breath, while his face grew red and swollen.

His pockets were empty.

Where was his pen?

“Does anyone have a pen or spray against allergies?” she shouted, as she began CPR. Her voice, clear as a bell, projected into the gathered people standing beyond the shadows of the Bank of Ireland, carrying with it the desperate imperative of a person struggling to save a life.

The question was echoed among the gathered crowd but not one person there had any emergency allergy medication.

There was nothing she could do except continue with CPR.

“I’m a nurse, Ma’m.” A man, dressed in smart casuals, speaking quietly, with a soft American accent, moved beside her. “Can I help?”

“He’s in shock. Anaphylactic shock,” Ciara told him, just as the ambulance arrived.

Professionals took over and did their job, injecting him, pumping his heart, struggling to save his life.

“What was the last thing he ate or drank?” the older of the two medics asked her.

“Water from that bottle there,” she answered, pointing to the now nearly empty container at her feet.

He picked it up, putting it on the stretcher with Phil.

They worked on him, cutting a hole in his windpipe, trying to force air into his restricted passageway, all the time talking to the specialists at the St. James Hospital emergency department.

In her heart she knew it was too late. Still, as they transported him to hospital, they tried every emergency procedure they had. The last she saw was the medics not giving up;

the older one, with the moustache, was straddling Phil's body, pounding his chest, while the other checked vital signs as the doors of the ambulance closed.

"He's gone, Ma'm," the nurse said. He walked away with his head down, bringing his entire face into the shadow of his sun cap.

"Yes," Ciara agreed. Sadness penetrated her voice as she turned away from the now distant ambulance to thank him for his help, but he'd disappeared into the quiet crowd.

Putting the useless pen back into her bag, she promised herself she'd speak to the chemist about its failure. From now on she'd carry a spare. She wasn't going to put her life at risk because medication leaked out of a pen. Also, in memory of Phil, she'd make a serious written complaint to the medical authorities.

She spoke her sentence into the mike when another sound engineer arrived to ensure Phil's work was completed. It worked perfectly. But Ciara was shaking from the sudden death of the young man. She'd never been this close to a dying person. Being unable to save him shook her. She struggled to deal with this second emotional drama following on the heels of Rory's betrayal.

"Did you know the person who had the accident?" one of the Gardai asked. They'd come to see why so many people were gathered, obstructing bus and taxi traffic around Trinity College.

"I was told his name was Phil O'Doherty, that he was the sound engineer, but that's all. I was here to say a few words to ensure the sound was right," she acted out her favourite character in a TV sitcom, enunciating her words as if for the camera.

"I'm sorry. Ms. Callaghan," he said. "It must be hard when a person whose working with you suddenly drops dead. Are you all right? Is there anything I can do to help you?"

“I’m all right,” she said, with the hint of a smile, “the ambulance men have taken Phil to the hospital. There’s nothing more anyone can do.”

The crowds thinned as people began to drift away from the scene of the accident. Within an hour or so, the drama had diminished to a handful of people.

3

The man watched as the local TV star chatted with the sound engineer. He was a good looking young man obviously impressed with this beautiful red-haired woman working with him. The view was perfect from the front of Trinity College.

He'd been in the college earlier. The Old Library there housed the Book of Kells and he was interested in seeing that day's exhibited page with its lavishly coloured illustrations. *They say it was inscribed around 800AD, a masterpiece for its time. Well done to the guys who'd worked on it.* It was amazing it had survived until today, where it was treasured and kept under strict security in the university.

He stood, happy to watch the men as they hammered, joked and laughed with one another on the slowly materialising stage. Workers were the backbone of any country. They performed every day to make the world go round. All they required was a thank you, well done, at the end of the job. Just like himself. The difference was he never expected money for this particular job, or the necessary bits of interference. He did it because he loved her.

The young man had drunk two bottles of water before taking a third, which he poured into his mouth, straight down his throat. The weather was hot for Dublin. He'd checked it online, and learned that the temperature for this time of the year was usually moderate. Today it was up in the high twenties.

Drinking that much water, at one time, may be a sign of something wrong. The young man should check it out with his doctor, but then 'you can't put an old head on young shoulders'.

Oh! Perhaps he's taken her water. There were only three bottles on the stage. How stupid could he be! Taking another person's drink.

Something's happened!

He saw the woman rush around.

She's shouting for the emergency services. Well, so much for the work! Everyone's stopped.

The men laid down their tools as if they were on strike.

What's that she's shouting now?

Something about a pen!

Really!

Oh my! What a crowd! Where did all these people come from so suddenly?

She's doing CPR on the young man.

A woman in front of him asked, "Do you have any allergy medication?"

He shook his head, not wanting to engage in mindless conversation with strangers, and continued watching as the scene unfolded before his eyes.

An ambulance arrived. They relieved the actress of her attempt at CPR.

Police arrived and parked their patrol cars in the middle of the street, pushing the crowd back from the stage. He agreed with that. *They should have had tape all around that area. Those things were not safe until all the pieces had been joined or hammered together.*

The workers gathered around the man who'd collapsed, leaving their work half done.

A person could have an accident with all those loose boards.

The ambulance moved off, to the hospital no doubt, while the police continued to move people in the crowd out of the way of traffic.

Time for him to move.

What was that they were asking?

Had anyone seen a black backpack?

He waited a few minutes longer, curious to see if the police, Gardai they called them here, would tape the area off.

They didn't.

It was getting a bit boring just watching police, doing police things.

He moved off towards the river. It was such a beautiful day, he might amble along the boardwalk.

Pushing the strap up over his shoulder, he thought how stupid it was to leave your bag lying on the ground, while you worked in a big city.

It was asking for it to be stolen.

But then 'you can't put an old head...'

Later on in the hotel, the barman, who was watching the news on the TV, said to him, as he sat on a high stool sipping a cold beer, "That was a terrible tragedy. The poor young lad died from a seizure, just down the road from here."

"Dreadful," the tourist agreed, "but accidents do happen."

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