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How Jackie Bouvier almost married an Irish lawyer

by John Cooney

NCR Today

The following is a story collected from a series by Michael Parsons at the Irish Times.

Jacqueline Bouvier, whose cultural upbringing was French, fell in love with Ireland years before she met and fell in love with John F. Kennedy, the rising star of America's most famous Irish-American family, according to further revelations in the archive of the late Fr. Joseph Leonard, a Vincentian priest based in Dublin.

The 21-year-old wealthy American graduate student first came to Dublin in August 1950 from Paris, where she had completed studies at the prestigious Sorbonne University. Accompanied by her stepbrother Hugh "Yusha" Auchinloss, they contacted Leonard, a family friend, at All Hallows College in Drumcondra, north Dublin.

Aged 73 and living in semi-retirement, Leonard, who was a widely traveled former World War I chaplain and bon viveur, struck up an immediate and unlikely friendship with the vivacious but self-conscious American woman who confided that she was looking for a husband.

Virtually acting as her chaperone, Leonard brought Jackie to the Dublin Horse Show, the Abbey Theatre and Jammet's Restaurant, which was the best place to dine, renowned for its French haute cuisine and Dublin Bay oysters. Jackie also shopped at the world-famous Waterford Glass.

Through the U.S. embassy, she met the then-Prime Minister John Costello, who was also a close friend of Leonard.

"Miss Bouvier, who was full of youthful vivacity and charm, delighted with everything she found in Ireland, and expressed the hope of coming frequently again," Costello recorded.

In late August, Jackie traveled to Scotland, where she sent her first letter to Leonard confessing that she was already "miserable at leaving Ireland" and was "homesick for it."

It would appear that Jackie had developed a strong crush on Declan Costello, the prime minister's 24-year-old son. Leonard suggested that Declan, who later became attorney general in a government headed by Liam Cosgrave from 1973-1977, would make a "suitable" husband.

Declan "sounds like absolute heaven," Jackie chirped to Leonard.

Cupid, however, was to steer Jackie into the arms of Bostonian John "Jack" Fitzgerald Kennedy, whom she married on Sept. 12, 1953, in St. Mary's Church, Newport, R.I., at a Mass celebrated by the archbishop of Boston, later a cardinal, Richard Cushing.

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For their wedding anniversary, Jackie and Jack visited Ireland in 1955, staying in "a great suite of luxurious pink rooms" in the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin.

Costello was abroad but delegated his son Declan to host a dinner for the American visitors.

By now, Declan was happily married to Irish beauty Joan Fitzsimons.

However, Jackie noted a sexual chemistry that attracted her lustful husband to Joan -- and herself to the cultured Declan.

"That night we dined at Jammet's and our happy marriage was nearly rent asunder because Jack was enchanted by Joan and I was enchanted with you -- but somehow we patched it all up at the movies," she wrote.

At Leonard's request, Senator and Mrs. Kennedy visited All Hallows, where Jack addressed the students of the Irish missionary order.

Writing to Leonard after their return to America, Jackie wrote: "You will never know how much our visit meant to both of us -- of all the places we've ever been together that was -- always will be -- the best.

"And why? All because of one person whom there is no one else like on this earth -- you."

Jackie went on to say that the Irish visit was "a fairytale visit that was too perfect to be real -- to walk back across the green (St. Stephen's Green) with you, and to throw coins into the fountain so that we would be sure to return to Dublin."

As Michael Parsons wrote in *The Irish Times*, "They never did together."

[John Cooney, a former Religious Affairs Correspondent of the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*, is the author of *John Charles McQuaid, Ruler of Catholic Ireland*, published by O'Brien Press, Dublin, and Syracuse University, New York.]

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