

In one moment, your life
can change for ever...

What Happened That Night



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From her position behind the stage of the reception room, Bey Fitzpatrick could see but not be seen. She was hidden from view by the silk banners that had been erected earlier that day, while the careful placing of the lights around the room meant that she was standing in a pool of shadow. As the hum of conversation increased, her attention was fixed on the women in their colourful dresses and sparkling jewellery. Like vibrant birds of paradise, they laughed and chattered as they accepted canapés and glasses of champagne from silver trays borne by expert servers. Bey had a sudden recollection that it was the male birds of paradise who possessed the colourful plumage, not the females. But tonight the women shone and glittered while the men played second fiddle in their tuxedos and white shirts.

The background music was lost in the hubbub of voices and bursts of excited laughter. The guests were eagerly anticipating the launch of the exclusive Ice Dragon jewellery collection, which would be unveiled later in the evening. It included three unique necklaces made from white gold and set with diamonds as well as either rubies, sapphires or emeralds. Each necklace cost a six-figure sum. And each one, Bey

knew, was truly exceptional, a piece that anyone would treasure.

She felt a flutter of anxiety as she scanned the crowd. She recognised some faces from the gossip pages of magazines or newspapers. There were a number of TV personalities. A famous singer. A prominent politician. And lots of business people. Every person in the room had been invited because they had already bought top-of-the-range jewellery from Warren's, the jewellery store. Not all of them could afford an Ice Dragon necklace, but each guest was flattered to have received an invitation to the launch. The atmosphere was filled with happy anticipation.

It's a make-believe world. The memory of his words echoed in her ears. *We only ever see people when they're rich and happy.*

He'd laughed, and so had she.

It had been a lifetime ago.

When things were different.

When she hadn't known half the things she knew now.

She shivered even though the room was warm. She was standing near the mullioned window and she could suddenly feel the chill of the night air through the clear glass. She glanced outside and caught her breath. Huge snowflakes were falling lazily from the heavy sky, turning the garden outside the ancient listed building into a carpet of white. The flakes landed on the window in a lattice of interlocking crystals that glittered as brightly as the diamonds inside the room.

There was a spider's web at the corner of the window pane, silvery white beneath the feather-light snow. She felt her mind shift into another time and place as she remembered a different night of snow and ice twenty years earlier, and a different spider's web. She remembered how she'd stared at

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it, willing it to stay unbroken, telling herself that she wouldn't be caught if it remained intact. She was suddenly there again, terrified to move, hoping that the mist of her breath wouldn't give her away, or that the beating of her heart couldn't be heard in the stillness of the night.

She felt the hand on her shoulder and she almost screamed out loud.

Then the lights went out.

Chapter 1

Diamond: a transparent, extremely hard, precious stone

Lola Fitzpatrick always had a choice to make on Friday afternoons: to stay for the weekend in the flat she shared with three other girls in Dublin, or to spend the days at the family farm instead. Left to her own devices, the choice was simple. Dublin was far more exciting and vibrant than a weekend at the farm could ever be, and at least one of her flatmates was sure to be around and ready to socialise. On the other hand, Cloghdrom was home. But returning there was like taking a step back in time. Socialising was limited to drinks in one of the local pubs (excluding McCloskey's, which was only ever frequented by elderly farmers), or enduring what was still called a 'hop' at the GAA clubhouse – scratched records played beneath a disco ball by Baz Hogan, who fancied himself as a DJ. From Lola's point of view, Cloghdrom hadn't even made it out of the 1950s, let alone reached the 80s; the general assumption of the inhabitants was that their sons would inherit the farm while their daughters would marry other farmers.

‘It's like *Pride and Prejudice* without the gorgeousness of

Pemberley,' she complained to her older sister Gretta. 'The men get the assets and we wait to be married off.'

Gretta laughed at her mutinous tones and told her that marrying a local lad wasn't the worst thing that could happen. She had to say that, Lola would reply; hadn't she been engaged to Mossy McCloskey (eldest son of the pub owner) practically since the day she'd left school? Which was fine for Gretta, who loved being part of the community and who never wanted to leave. Fine, too, for their older brother Milo, who was already married and working on the farm. But not fine for her, the youngest daughter, whose ambitions were very different, despite the fact that she could break a man's heart with a single glance from her vivid blue eyes and a toss of her luxurious dark hair.

Getting the job at the Passport Office in Dublin and moving into a flat with three other girls had been the start of a life that didn't depend on the weather and milk quotas and the happiness of the herd. It was a life where her opinion mattered, and having a drink with someone of the opposite sex didn't have everyone talking about their upcoming nuptials five minutes later. She hated having to interrupt it to go back to the old one, no matter that she did sometimes miss her family and the constant aroma of her mother's home-made bread wafting around the kitchen.

She was thinking about Eilis's home-made bread as she walked down Grafton Street during her lunch hour that warm Friday afternoon. She knew there was very little food in the flat – shopping was done on a need-to-get basis, and most times the girls raided the kitty and nipped out to the Spar around the corner for essentials. Lola herself had eaten out every night that week, although that was giving it a gloss it

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didn't deserve, she acknowledged; most times she'd just gone for pizza after a few drinks with the people from work. But she liked making plans at the last minute and having the kind of options that living in a city offered, even if she was pretty much broke after every weekend.

If nothing else, going home would save her a few bob and she could afford the dress she'd seen in Dunnes earlier, she mused as she strolled along Duke Lane. Though not being able to afford a dress in an inexpensive chain store said a lot about her current financial state. She knew she needed to cut back a little. She knew she was living beyond her means. But it was hard not to when her salary was basic and opportunities for fun were constantly knocking on her door. It would be different when she got promoted. She'd have money to spare then. Meantime, she was keeping her fingers crossed that her application for the next grade up in the Civil Service would be successful. Despite her love of late nights, she was a conscientious worker, and she felt she deserved her promotion. She'd been a clerical officer in the Passport Office for nearly four years. It was about time she started moving up the career ladder.

She stopped suddenly, her thoughts interrupted as her attention was caught by the sparkling diamonds in the window of Warren's the Jewellers. Warren's was an iconic store in Dublin and Lola knew a little of its history. It had been founded in the 1950s by Richard Warren, a watchmaker who realised that Dubliners wanted more than just utilitarian timepieces. He'd expanded to include jewellery that wasn't generally available in the city at the time, and established a reputation for good quality at reasonable prices. Over the years, and after his marriage to a Northern Irish beauty named

Adele Pendleton, the store had gone increasingly upmarket, until it relocated from its original premises near O'Connell Street to the current shop off Dublin's most exclusive shopping street. Although Warren's carried a variety of jewellery, it was most famous for the Adele collections, each named for a flower as well as for the founder's wife.

Lola gazed at the glitter of the all-diamond Snowdrops and wondered if she'd ever be able to afford anything as remotely beautiful as an Adele piece. Even in Cloghdrom they'd heard of Warren's – Betty Munroe, the wife of the creamery owner, had an entire Adele Rose set, which she wore to the farm festival every year. 'The money's in processing, not producing,' Lola had heard her father mutter to her mother during the last festival she'd gone to. 'I can't afford to buy anything like that for you.'

His words had stuck in Lola's mind and had influenced her decision to move to Dublin. She wanted to be the woman who owned beautiful jewellery, not the woman who stared at it from afar. And she wanted to be the woman who could buy it for herself, not someone who had to rely on a boyfriend or husband to give it to her. Every so often she would deliberately walk past Warren's so that she could look in the window and remind herself why she was here. To make money. To be a success. To prove that a woman didn't have to be married to have a good life. To be herself.

'Why don't you try it on?'

She jumped as she heard the voice behind her. A man had approached the shop from the other end of the lane and was now standing at the recessed doorway. He was tall, tanned and fair haired, and his electric-blue eyes were filled with humour.

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‘It would be lovely,’ she said, ‘but a waste of time. There isn’t a hope in hell I could ever afford it.’

‘No charge for trying, though,’ he said.

‘I doubt the owners would be happy with people loading themselves up with their jewellery just for the fun of it.’

‘I’m sure the owners would be delighted to see one of their creations on someone as beautiful as you.’

Lola looked at him in surprise. No man had ever complimented her in quite that way before. The nearest a man in Cloghdrom had come to acknowledging her looks was to tell her she was a bit of all right. As for Dublin, most of the so-called compliments she’d received in the last few years centred around wondering if she was as good in bed as she looked out of it.

‘Honestly,’ he said. ‘That set would look stunning on you.’

‘It’d be false pretences.’ She gave him a rueful smile. ‘I’m so broke right now, a bread roll is the absolute limit of my budget.’

He laughed. ‘The bread roll situation is one thing, certainly. Maybe we can deal with that separately. But the problem with fine jewellery is that often the most beautiful women can’t afford it. So it’s hanging around the crêpey necks of older women who can. And not that they don’t look great, but they couldn’t hold a candle to you.’

‘All the same,’ she said, still taken aback by his confident appraisal of her looks, ‘I won’t go in.’

‘Pity. I would’ve liked to have seen it on you. I’m sure my dad would too.’

She looked at him in confusion.

‘I’m Philip Warren,’ he said.

She looked at the name above the shop before turning back to him.

'You own it?' she gasped.

'Not personally,' he clarified. 'It's our family business, but it'll be mine one day.'

'Wow,' she said.

'So it would be really cool if you came in and tried on the set.'

She hesitated.

'Take a chance?'

It was those words that decided her. She believed in taking chances. She'd said so to her parents the day she'd left Cloghdrom.

She nodded and followed him inside.

The shop was more opulent than she could have imagined. The pile of the mink-coloured carpet was so deep that she was afraid her high-heeled shoes would ruin it, and she walked cautiously after him, conscious of the indentations she was leaving in her wake. Instead of long counters, there was a polished walnut desk in one corner, in front of which were placed two chairs upholstered in purple velvet. There were three glass displays on the floor of the store, as well as others in the window.

A tall, elegant woman wearing a ruby pendant and an Adele Rose ring nodded at Philip, who smiled at her.

'Hi, Lorraine. Is Dad in the office?'

She shook her head. 'He's still at lunch with Arjan van Heerden,' she said.

'Has he bought the stones?' asked Philip.

'And how would I know that?' asked Lorraine. 'He doesn't tell me the backroom business. I'm merely the sales assistant.'

Philip laughed. 'Oh, Lorraine! You know we couldn't even open the door to the shop without you. It's a pity he isn't

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here,' he added. 'I wanted him to see the Snowdrop range on . . .' He turned to Lola. 'I'm so sorry. I was too dazzled by you to ask your name.'

'Lola,' she said. 'Lola Fitzpatrick.'

'I wanted Dad to see Lola modelling the Snowdrop,' he said. 'Don't you think it would look gorgeous on her?'

Lorraine looked at Lola critically, dismissing her inexpensive trousers and blouse but taking in her flawless complexion, her dark curls and her deep-blue eyes.

'Yes.' She nodded. 'It would suit her very well.'

'So let's have a look.'

'I'm not sure . . .' Lola was aching to try on the Snowdrop set, but she felt completely out of her depth.

'You'll love it,' Philip assured her.

Lorraine took the jewellery from the window display. Then she approached Lola and fastened the diamond necklace around her neck, taking time to arrange it exactly. She did the same with the bracelet on her wrist. Finally she slid the Adele Snowdrop ring onto the third finger of her right hand and stood back to admire her handiwork.

'Stunning,' said Philip.

'Amazing,' agreed Lorraine.

Lola turned to look at herself in the mirror. The girl who looked back at her was a different Lola. The flashing brilliance of the diamonds made her skin seem smoother, her hair darker, her eyes a more vibrant blue. She was the Lola Fitzpatrick she had always wanted to be. The Lola Fitzpatrick who deserved chances and who would grab those chances with both hands. She felt a wave of confidence engulf her as she moved and sparkled beneath the halogen lights.

'Didn't I tell you?' Philip looked at Lorraine in satisfaction. 'She's a Warren's girl, that's for sure.'

'You have your father's eye,' said Lorraine.

'She's the kind of girl we want buying our jewellery,' Philip said. 'Young and beautiful and . . . and modern.'

Lorraine, who was in her forties, raised one of her delicately shaped eyebrows.

'Of course you're modern too,' said Philip quickly. 'But you're different, Lorraine. You're a grown-up. Lola is . . .'

'Young,' echoed Lorraine.

'Exactly. And she's the person we want to be selling to.'

'Maybe I am.' Lola finally looked away from her reflection. 'And maybe I can be a customer one day. But right now I couldn't even afford the clasp of the necklace, let alone the whole thing.' She sighed as she slipped the ring from her finger and placed it on one of the glass displays while Lorraine undid the necklace and bracelet. 'Thank you for letting me try them on. It was amazing. But I'd better be going.'

'You can't rush away,' said Philip. 'We haven't discussed your bread roll yet.'

'I'm due back at work.' Lola looked at her watch and gave a little shriek. 'In exactly two minutes. I've got to go.' She hurried to the door and opened it.

'Wait!' called Philip. 'Where do you work? Will I see you again?'

But Lola didn't answer. She was already running up the road.

She clattered into the office and looked around anxiously for Irene, the staff officer generally known as Dot because of her

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complete lack of interest in any excuses for lateness and insistence that all staff were at their desks on the dot.

‘She was asking for you a minute ago.’ Pat Burke looked up from the passport she was working on. ‘I told her you were dealing with someone from the general public.’

‘Did she believe you?’ Lola was still anxious.

‘Of course,’ said Pat.

Lola smiled. Pat was one of the clerical assistants who worked on temporary contracts with the Passport Office to cover the busy summer period. She’d started working there after the death of her husband a few years previously, and although she was still on a temporary contract, she worked eight months of the year and was far more experienced than Irene or Lola. Being older than most of the staff, Pat wasn’t intimidated by Irene, and as she knew more about the running of the office than the more senior woman did, Irene relied on her whenever there were problems. Pat, who privately thought that Lola was one of the hardest-working people there, was also very supportive of her because she never tried to take advantage of her temporary status as some of the other girls sometimes did.

‘Where were you?’ she asked. ‘You’re never late.’

Lola sat down at her desk and picked up one of the passport application forms so that she’d appear busy when Irene returned. But she smiled at Pat as she related her lunchtime experience.

‘Warren’s!’ Pat was impressed. ‘I’ve always wanted a piece of jewellery from there. I love those Adele rings.’

‘The Snowdrop was utterly gorgeous,’ said Lola. ‘The minute I put it on I felt like I could do anything. It was amazing.’

Pat stretched her hands out in front of her. Her significantly more modest engagement ring twinkled in the light.

'My husband always said that he'd get me one for our silver wedding anniversary,' she said. 'It would have been next year.'

'I'm sorry,' said Lola. 'I shouldn't have . . .'

'Oh, don't be.' Pat shook her head. 'He'd never have been able to afford it either. Those rings are seriously expensive.'

'I know. There were no prices.'

'So are you going to see him again?' asked Pat. 'Or was this just a business thing?'

'It was the weirdest experience of my life,' said Lola. 'And the only way I'd ever see him again is by standing outside Warren's looking hopeful. Which, quite honestly, would be a kind of creepy thing to do.' And then, as she saw Irene walking into the office, she bent her head over the application form and said no more about it.