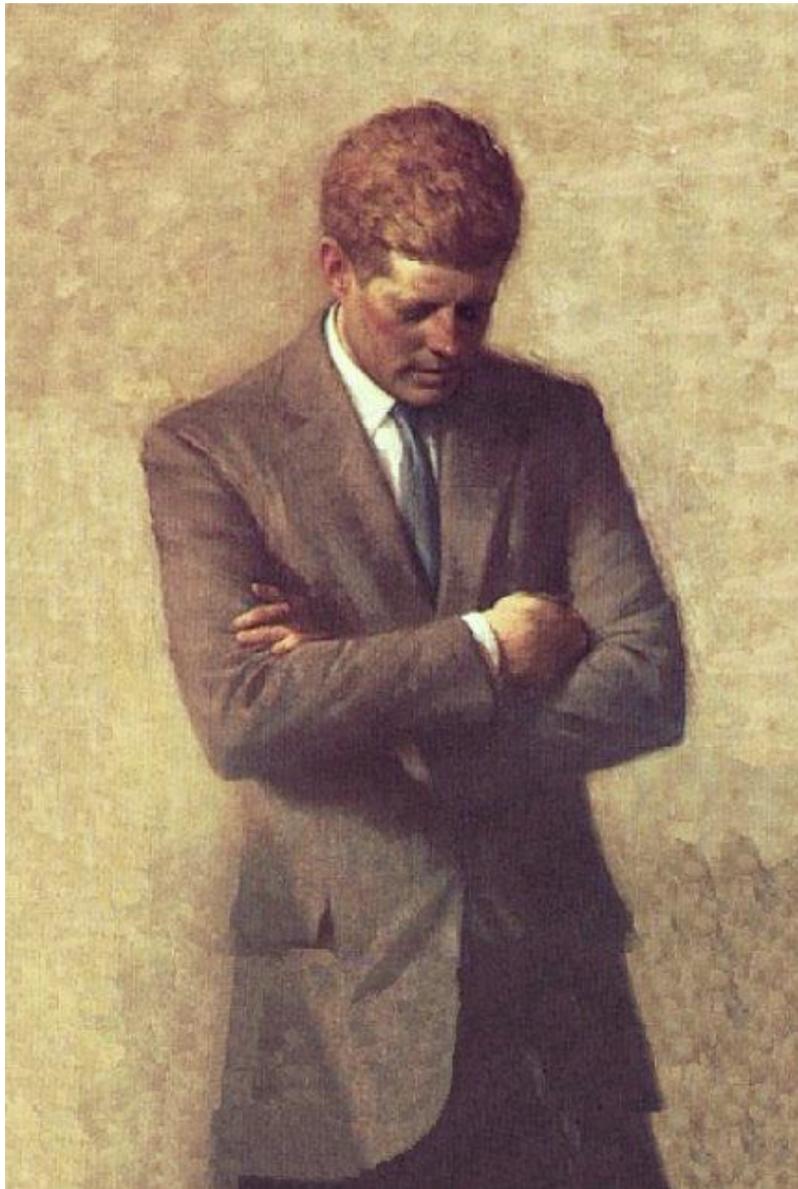




The First *Rose* of Summer

As told by President John Fitzgerald Kennedy on his return flight to USA after visiting Europe

July 2nd 1963



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'The First Rose of Summer'



That was some party Mr, President. “It certainly was Mr. President”, replied de Valera. They were a bit ‘liberal’ in their movements on the lawn out there, maybe they were trying to set a ‘precedent’, I said. We both chuckled at our intended puns, as we both were nearly set upon by the over enthusiastic garden party guests. I was coming to the end of a full day to the land of my grandfather .It was Friday June 28th 1963 and I was sipping Irish whiskey with my fellow Irish born President . We had just completed the tree planting ceremony on the lawn of Áras an Uachtaráin, (Residence of the President of Ireland) in the company of the great and good of Ireland; who in their excitement nearly set the two of us into the clay with the Irish Oak I was setting in the lawn. It was good to relax my painful back as I reclined in the rocking chair provided especially for me by my hosts Éamon and Sinéad de Valera. I regaled them both with details of the warm homecoming I had received earlier that day in my family homestead at Dunganstown, amongst the boys and girls of Wexford. During our whiskey drinking we distilled even further the thoughts and bonds of our developing friendship. I bid farewell to my Irish hosts, for I had to return to the American Embassy where I was hosting a function later. I persuaded my security people to allow me to walk the short distance or as the Irish would say ‘just down the road’ to the Embassy .As I rambled in the Irish evening summer from the Áras I met once again Pat Ruddy the gardener, he looked like a lone grave digger performing his duty as he neatly covered in the soil over the Irish oak we had planted earlier. I stopped to admire his work and complimented him on his rose garden nearby. He told me proudly, “Mr President, I may not be able to answer the Mass, but I know all the Latin names of all these roses, and of course your mother’s name is Rose”. He asked in his broad ‘Corkman in Dublin’ accent “Would you like to take some back to America for your mother”. Feeding off his enthusiasm I found myself saying that I would love to take some to lay on my sister Kathleen’s grave when I visit England tomorrow; for the roses would not last fresh by the time I got back to the States. “Which ones would you like sir?” I pointed to a rich red in full bloom in his garden. “I’ll pick them for you Mr. Kennedy and they will stay fresh in the house cellar until the morning and I’ll get one of the girls in the kitchen to box them up with a nice girly bow on them for ya”. I thanked him, swallowed and walked to the main gate. Our American Embassy once the home of The British Chief Secretary in Ireland (The Chief Secretary’s Lodge). As I entered the gates and walked up the avenue to the front door I was filled with conflicting and anxious thoughts. How this walk compared to my stroll up the boreen to the cottage at Dunganstown, where my paternal grandfather left to sail to Boston. As I looked up this large white house! which was enfolding me with facts of Irish history? .Walking like me very near here, eighty one years ago the British Chief Secretary was murdered by Irish nationalists. His name was Lord Frederick Cavendish. My sister Kathleen married his direct descendent William Cavendish on May 6th 1944, but died soon after in a plane crash as did her young husband in action during World War II. Tomorrow afternoon after my visit to





Galway and Limerick I was going to arrive in Waddington RAF base in Lincolnshire and lay the roses from the garden at the Áras on Kathleen's grave on the Chatsworth estate in Derbyshire.

Near to the front door of the Embassy there was a beautiful rambling rose (not as red as the roses next door!). I snatched a bunch and sniffed its scent and waved them toward the sunset sky, some old sweet rapture through me went and kindled in my tear shot eyes. I ushered to one of my aides, standing a distance off and I sent him back to the President's celler to add to the collection I would take with me to England the next day.

The large bath that awaited me upstairs in the Ambassador's guest room was so welcomed; to again rest my weary back and I submerged myself fully in Ireland. The day was not over. Washed and changed for dinner and having talked to Jackie on the phone; I was having a night in..... with one hundred and fifty people to dinner!

Well after midnight I excused myself as I had a busy day ahead. As I climbed the stairs I could hear the young Irish tenor Frank Patterson singing the haunting Irish melody 'The Last Rose of Summer'. I was quickly in bed and the last words I remember hearing in Ireland that night were "Thus kindly I scatter thy leaves o'er the bed, where thy mates of the garden lie scentless and dead"

FACTS OF HISTORY:

Kathleen Kennedy's epitaph reads- 'JOY SHE GAVE JOY SHE HAS FOUND' - with the acknowledgement that she was *'Widow of the Major Marquess Hartington killed in action and daughter of the Hon. Joseph Kennedy sometime Ambassador of the United States to Great Britain.'* With the added plaque on the ground stating *'In memory of John F Kennedy, president of the United States of American, who visited this grave on 29th June 1963'.*





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