

THE STAR AND I
CHAPTER 12: Ireland's Own

As long ago as Derby Day, Mr Oxx seemed to target the Irish Champion Stakes, sponsored by Tattersalls, at Leopardstown in September, almost as his priority for the 'Star'. His focus became all-too-easy to understand in the light of Sea The Star's no-show in the Irish Derby. After all, Sea The Stars might be owned and bred and raced by a Hong Kong Chinese family, but he was otherwise Irish through and through.

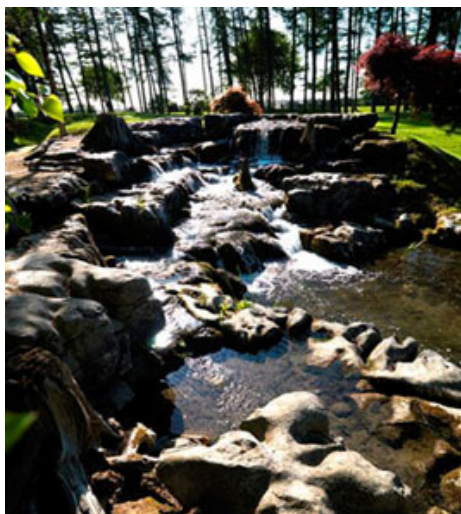


My owner is a young Chinese chap



However, I am an Irish horse

He was born and reared at the Irish National Stud under John Clarke's expert care and management. He was trained on the Curragh of Kildare by Mr Oxx, second generation Irish trainer, and ridden in all his races by Michael Kinane, the internationally famous jockey who had always turned down handsome offers to relocate overseas.



I was born and reared here at the Irish National Stud



I was trained here on the Curragh of Kildare by Mr. Oxx



I was ridden in all my races by Michael Kinane, eleven times Irish champion jockey

John Hynes, his devoted attendant, is a Galwegian who insisted on drinking the same water as the 'Star'. John always drank that water first, for reasons best left to the imagination.

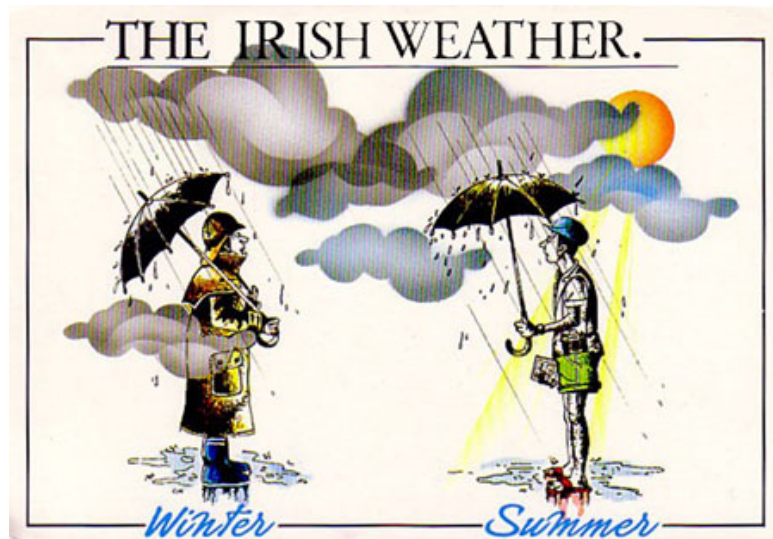


Here is my devoted attendant John Hynes



We share our bucket of water

By now, there was really only one opportunity left for Irish racing to enjoy their champion on his home turf. The Irish Champion Stakes was the only Group 1 still to be run in Ireland in 2009 for which the 'Star' was eligible. So, Leopardstown it should be. However, we still had to reckon with typically capricious, changeable Irish weather.



The capricious and changeable Irish weather

I should not have cared to be in Mr Oxx's position, torn between loyalty to the greatest champion he ever expected to come his way and his sense of duty to his countrymen. And all the while the weather gods continued to torment poor Mr Oxx. In constant contact with my equally worried mother, Mr Oxx could only repeat that Leopardstown had a remarkable, almost unique facility for producing good, fast ground, even in the aftermath of heavy rains.



My conscientious trainer felt it his duty to promote Irish bloodstock

In the midst of all this by now familiar uncertainty, my work had taken me to Vancouver where I had become embroiled in a particularly intricate, demanding project. Incidentally, my mother and Christine had arrived there ahead of me. And all the while D-day drew nearer. . . Less than 24 hours beforehand, Mr Oxx called my mother to say that the situation was still unclear. He had walked the course repeatedly, hoping and praying that it would dry out sufficiently and in time.



Hoping that Leopardstown racecourse would dry out sufficiently in time

At that point, we calculated that I would have to travel for 18 hours to reach Leopardstown. I weighed up the options. Whether I flew via Chicago to Dublin or from Seattle, I would be very hard pressed to reach the racecourse in time to see and greet my 'Star'.



American Airlines had just reintroduced his direct flight from Chicago to Dublin

As she so often does, my mother resolved my dilemma. She advised me to stay in Vancouver with her and Christine, reasoning that if Sea The Stars did run – and win – his performance should become an absolutely Irish celebration. It would be Ireland's first and last opportunity to acclaim the greatest racehorse on earth, savouring an out-and-out Irish wonder horse. The presence of a 'foreign' owner would, she persuaded me, only constitute a distraction in this context.



If Sea The Stars won, his performance should become an absolutely Irish Celebration



: The presence of a 'foreigner' wearing his habitual i-phones would only detract from Sea The Stars' 'Irishness'

After 27 years, I knew better than to argue, particularly as I was by no means certain to reach Leopardstown in time anyway. Besides, my impending presence must surely put further, unnecessary pressure on poor Mr Oxx to run the 'Star', perhaps against his instincts. My mother sets great store by intuition. Indeed, she is an exceptional woman in this regard. Why so? Because my mother concedes that we males may also possess and exercise powers of intuition. Had she not continually said to Mr Oxx that what was right by him was right by us?



Realize that intuition is the subconscious that can help guide crucial decisions, not to override other thinking patterns but to complement them.

Mother taught me what intuition was when I was still a child



Mr Oxx's powers of intuition?

These dictated that I should watch the race from a Four Seasons Hotel bedroom in Vancouver Central. The reason was very simple. It had been from that very location that I and student friends from London had watched the 'Star' win the Beresford Stakes twelve months previously.



Being Chinese, we obey Feng Shui



Our decorator has to consult the Feng Shui Master before all refurbishment!!

Indeed, it seemed that the last year of my life had revolved round my 'Star'. Was I complaining? Most surely I was not. What is a good upbringing and education about, but to teach a person to appreciate his or her good fortune? My mother always told us "Yesterday is history, today is present and tomorrow is mystery." My sister and I have learned from our childhood how to cherish what we have because 'today is present' and not to regret any past loss, because it was already history and could not be rewritten.



Appreciation of one's good fortune



Today is present

Actually, my enjoyment and appreciation was confined in this instance to the gods and myself, committed as I was to looking in from the solitude of my hotel bedroom. As for Christine, Feng Shui dictated that she must go shopping – such a penance for females – As for my mother, she was not saying what she might do. That was her business but I knew that she stayed in her Harbour view house and looked in on the William Hill betting website.



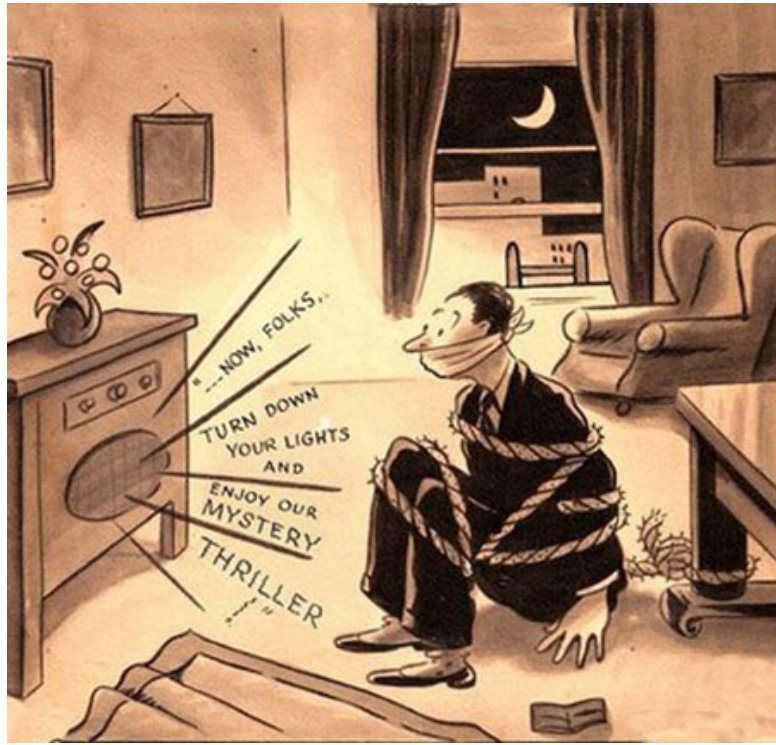
Christine delighted in that Feng Shui command - Shopping!

As is history now, the 'Star' met his date with his Irish destiny, applauded as he entered the parade ring and again as he went down to the start. This time, Coolmore fielded five against him, including Fame And Glory, winner of the Irish Derby and Mastercraftsman, winner of the Irish Two Thousand Guineas. But for the 'Star', each would rate as champion in his respective specialist sphere.



The Irish crowds applauded the 'Star' as he made his way out to the track

As luck would have it, the hotel's internet connection misbehaved, increasing my nervousness as the picture repeatedly broke up. All I had was the radio commentary, plunging me back from the 21st century to some dark, distant pre-TV time.



The hotel's internet connection misbehaved, plunging me back to some dark, distant pre-TV time

Happily, I could gather that my 'Star' had come up trumps once again. Indeed, it seemed that he had won by a much greater margin than Michael Kinane ever anticipated from the greatest racehorse he had ever ridden. Following a flurry of phone calls I rushed off to meet Christine - festooned with shopping bags - for a sibling celebration. Where? No need to ask. Vancouver is home to the finest pizzeria on the planet. Nourished by pizza and Coca-Cola, Christine and I made haste to extend the celebratory circle with our mother in her Harbour View home.



Sea The Stars won the Irish Champion Stakes for his country, Ireland



A pure Irish glory with all his Irish connections

Only when safely home in Hong Kong did I get the opportunity to watch and re-watch the Irish Champion Stakes in any degree of peace and comfort and continuity with my mother. The video replays only confirmed those audio impressions in that Vancouver hotel bedroom. The 'Star' had not just won, he had seen off both Fame And Glory and Mastercraftsman by greater margins than in their previous encounters. But it was not so much the race as the reception to which the 'Star' returned that had my mother and myself snatching at tissues, each and every time we re-ran the video.



Sea The Stars had seen off both Fame and Glory and Mastercraftsman



We were snatching at tissues each time we re-ran the video

Even now, setting down my recollections in tranquility, I find it difficult to convey the cocktail of emotions that Irish reception evoked. Yes, the 'Star' was our horse. He carried my colours. But the sheer, raw outpouring of emotion that greeted his return to the winner's enclosure, surrounded by his devoted, ecstatic Irish team screamed otherwise. Sea The Stars no longer belonged to an individual, to a family, to a syndicate, to a privileged elite. He had become a national treasure – Ireland's own.



Sea The Stars had become a national treasure-Ireland's own

Having got that off my chest, one mystery remains. Had my mother really wanted me present at Leopardstown on Saturday, 5 September, she could so easily have 'chartered' or 'borrowed' a private jet from any of her numerous good friends. On that Christine and I are firmly agreed. But she chose not to do so. We know that she insists to maintain a low key status but why? Ah, me, I will not ask her. Perhaps some questioned are best left unasked, lest the answer be other than one wishes to hear.



It is better for us not to know mother's true reasons