

The girl who fell from the sky

I had known Peter on and off over several years when I was an undergraduate. We often met while waiting outside the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin to get cheap standing room tickets for concerts. He had a wonderful, lively air about him and yet I am not sure that he is still alive. He was handsome and well dressed and gave the appearance of having everything, and yet he had a severe kidney disorder which meant that in effect he spent more time in hospital, than out. Transplants were rare in those days, or maybe there were complications in his case. Anyway, during the time that I knew him he was limping along on one ailing kidney and his parents were regularly sending him to the United States for treatment. From this it may be gathered that his family were well off, and it would appear, well placed; they had amongst their friends rich Irish-Americans who provided a link to help Peter.

In order to get into a concert one had to be well up in the queue and that meant that one had to get there early and endure a long wait. The comradeship in the queue had all the elements of an Irish pub except for the alcohol and as might be expected our conversations ranged wide. Of these I remember only one topic, but there was good reasons for that. The body of a girl had been washed up on the west coast Ireland some years earlier and the continued rumblings in the newspapers left one in no doubt that there was something deeper. Later one read that her name was Virginia Domenech. However, that was that. Nothing more was heard and it was soon forgotten by all except suspicious persons like myself. Thus when the subject came up at one of our concert waits, it confirmed my view that, at least in Ireland, the legend of the king with ass's ears still holds true.

One of Peter's family friends was a retired Harvard medical professor, now living in Ireland. It would appear that within a short time of the discovery of the body of Virginia Domenech, this professor was asked to assist at an exhumation of a hotelier in Westport?? who had hanged himself. Some of the details have evaporated with time, so we had better call him *Maguire*. He was the owner of the Ramblers' Rest and at first sight he would appear to have had little to do with the case of the American girl. It seems, however that he had moved to Britain like so many Irish people at that time and had 'done very well for himself'. The Irish are an unquestioning people. They admire success, but frequently fail to ask how it has been achieved. It was just so in this case. On the proceeds of his success *Maguire* returned to Westport and started to buy up property, eventually coming into the ownership of the Ramblers' Rest which had a clientele, mainly from Europe. What was generally unknown was that fact that his success was based on his involvement in drugs. His hotel in this remote Irish town was being used as a distribution centre for the European mainland. The continuous movement of continental visitors who were ostensibly coming for the fishing would not excite curiosity and provided an ideal front. From this point on Peter' story, while covering many of the facts, is sometimes at variance with the accounts published at the time. In his recounting, Maria Domenech was a narcotics agent who was on the trail of a traffic route. Her mother was also in the same business. Her search was leading inexorably towards *Maguire* and Westport. It seems that she was unaware that her boyfriend worked for the mafia. In Peter's story Maria was thrown out of a helicopter in the vicinity of the Cliffs of Moher. The helicopter had been rented at Shannon and it is reported that the pilot was never seen again. The disappearance of the mother was a further attempt to ensure that the FBI did not trace back through anything that Maria might have told her mother. And, finally, just as the police closed in on the boyfriend, he was found dead.

Peter's story continued. On a certain day the Irish police at Shannon noted the arrival of two men who were recognised as Mafia hit men. The subsequent hypothesis was that they had been sent to remove *Maguire* who was now a liability. However, by then their journey was unnecessary. *Maguire* had saved them the task by hanging himself in his hotel. It seems that they made a single phone-call, which may have confirmed that *Maguire* was now dead. Shortly afterwards, they booked a return flight to New York. The part played by the retired Harvard medical professor was simply to confirm that the exhumed body of *Maguire* showed signs of drug use.

Sometime later I was recounting this story to a group of people who were assembled in the Capri on Sorrento Road, Dalkey, the home of the aunts of William Fay, then Irish Ambassador in Washington. One of the group was a senior civil servant, who appeared astonished that I had gained access to this information. He confirmed the facts as being more or less accurate, but would say no more.

I have always held onto this Hollywood thriller-like story, thinking that at some time more will come to light, but it never has. A Google search in November 2007 yielded no hits. I then did a trawl through the Irish Times archives on-line and while the material is not available digitally, it is available as an image archive, which can be reproduced at a cost. There were several hits for the finding of the body and the subsequent reports over a three month period. During a visit to Dublin I consulted back issues of the Irish Times at the Pearse Street Library. Details of the newspaper entries are given below. Some of my notes are in italics

5 May 1967 p.22 (*page refers to the page in the Irish Times for that day*)

There is an advert for Transworld Helicopters at Shannon Airport for the next full-time course which starts 6 June for October 1967 examination.

25 May 1967 p.9

First report of finding the body of a partially dressed woman

27 May 1967 p.11

photograph of the head/shoulders of a corpse. Body has obviously been dressed for the picture. Evidence of damage and repair using make-up. Police released this picture in the hope that someone might recognise her in Ireland or elsewhere.

7 August 1967 p.1

Priest in Limerick had passed on information to the police linking the body to drugs. A man at Shannon was involved with smuggling drugs through the airport (*and had presumably disclosed information in the confessional*) "girl was overdosed with drugs and had suffered multiple fractures.

17 August 1967 p.11

Identified as Virginia R. Domenech, formerly Maria Virginia Reivera Cruz of Puerto Rico. Fingerprint information ex Puerto Rico via Interpol (*first indication of confusion with her mother who had also disappeared at this point*) Body had been found by fisherman Martin O'Brien on 24 May. Death was due to fall and not due to drowning. She was 5'2.5" and 11 stone. She was buried at Drumcliffe Cemetery on 1 June 1967.

18 August 1967 p.7

She was not in the sea for more than 24 hours

19 August 1967 p.1

Because there was fingerprint information she must either be

- (a) a government employee
- (b) a missing person
- (c) a political agitator
- (d) a person with a criminal conviction

Gardai are now in touch with the FBI

21 August 1967 p.1

"Mystery Deepens" from UP

Maria Domenech (*the mother*) had not disappeared from her NY apartment until one week after the discovery of a body believed to be Maria Domenech in Ireland. Therefore the body is of her 25 year old (*incorrect age*) daughter, Virginia Domenech who had gone to Paris from New York for a holiday. A card was sent from Paris, but we now know she was already dead when it was sent. She could have entered the water 14 - 19 May. The mother's age was 51. She disappeared from her New York apartment on 30 May. This was reported to the police on 4 June. Her mother was a social worker attached to a Jewish School. She was divorced from Fernando J. Domenech, public accountant and her brother was New York department of Justice lawyer, Rafael Rivera Cruz. Virginia was a quiet girl, a social worker in the New York State Department. She had a kidney complaint (*so did my informant, Peter*).

24 August 1967 p.1

Shows picture of Maria Virginia Domenech whose body was found at Doolin Strand at 0910 on 24 May. Her address was 153 Bennett Avenue, Apt, 5T NY. She had arrived in London ex Paris on 22 May

4 September 1967 p.11

Inquest: death by falling from a height. She was naked except for black panties. FBI reported on 14 August that she was on the missing persons list. She had arrived ex Orly at 1630 on 22 May. According to FBI she was born in Rio de Padre on 3 February 1939 and lived at 103 Bennett Avenue, Washington Heights, NY. (*she was 28 years old*)

5 September 1967 p.11

"Double Domenech murder"

Virginia Maria Domenech was going to go Paris, Spain, Portugal. She went to Shannon at the request of a man. She shared the apartment with her mother.

11 September 1967 p.11

nothing significantly new

25 September 1967 p.??

"New turn . . . 28 year old Puerto Rican girl"

Interpol passed on the name of a 51 year old American to Gardai. He signed into the International Hotel at Shannon on 23. He arrived by car and booked the room for 4 hours, washed, shaved and came to Dublin. A man of the same name arrived from London on 22 May with a girl, hired a car. He had one travel bag when he had emerged from the aircraft. He returned on 24 May with 320 miles on the clock. He took the 7.30pm flight for Paris (*from where he presumably posted the card*). He was alone, but had two travel cases.

Virginia Maria Domenech had withdrawn \$9000 from her bank account for her European trip. Jewellery, bracelet and ear rings found near a castle at Doolin Strand are now in the hands of the Gardai.

Her body had been exhumed and sent back to New York for burial the previous week.

The following two references have not yet been checked as of 29 December 2007

