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From Broadway to Heaven

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ELINOR G. FLYNN

(With Ecclesiastical Approbation)

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From Broadway to Heaven

FROM time immemorial monuments have been erected to the memory of illustrious persons. Sculptors have carved their names in lasting marble and hewn their images in enduring stone. Artists have painted their likenesses and hung them in the galleries of the world. But the finest, the best monument is that which has been erected in human hearts and in the souls of men — a monument that is a loving tribute to true interior greatness, the only greatness that is really worth while.

You will not find a statue of Elinor Flynn in the Hall of Fame, nor her picture in the galleries of America, but there is in hundreds of hearts a cherished and lasting memory of this extraordinary, very sweet and very good girl. She was great, not perhaps as the world considers greatness, but great in the Christian sense of having mastered the art of right living and of having given a wonderful example for youth to imitate.

HER CHILDHOOD

Miss Flynn was born on Chicago's south side on the vigil of the feast of St. Patrick, March 16, 1910, and was baptized Elinor Golden Flynn. The name Golden was her mother's maiden name, and very appropriately was given to baby Elinor, for, as she grew to childhood, hers became a golden disposition and a golden character. Her smile was like a ray of golden sunshine that spread warmth and cheer wherever she went. Golden became Goldy, and by this name she was known to her familiar friends throughout her life.

Little Elinor was in this world only a short time when the first great affliction entered her life. When she was but three years old, the Angel of Death visited her home and on May 3, 1913, took her dear daddy, James E. Flynn, from her.

Her first school day in Chicago was spent at Holy Cross parochial school. Later she went to St. Xavier's and Loretto Academies. At the age of eight years she received our Lord in Holy Communion for the first time. It was the first link in the long chain that was to unite her loving heart to the infinitely loving Heart of Jesus. From that day weekly Communion became the rule of her life. She learned, too, to make her daily morning offering to the Sacred Heart, and became a sodalist of the Blessed Mother.

From her earliest childhood Miss Flynn, as she herself has declared, had a flair for acting. "I cannot remember a time," she says, "when I did not long to be an actress." As a small child she would assemble the children of the neighborhood and fit them out in costumes for her shows. Often times her stage was a vacant lot, and her audience a gathering of street gamins.

Sometimes in her childish, winsome way, she cajoled her kind and understanding mother into playing the role of a Prince Charming in a fairy play, while she herself was always the imprisoned princess.

Her attraction for acting was more than childish fancy. She had unmistakably real talent, which fact induced her parents to enter her as a pupil of the Luther School of Dramatics.

At about the age of nine years little Elinor began her dancing lessons under the direction of Mr. Harry Miller. And beginning while at St. Xavier's, she took piano lessons for about three years.

While attending dancing school, she became acquainted with a little miss who was a pupil of another dancing school. They arranged a Klever Kiddies Act of five numbers of songs and dances. The popular appeal of their performance obtained bookings for them in several south side theatres on Saturday afternoons. Yet, Elinor returned to her Monday morning classes with her usual simplicity and charm, as though she had already forgotten the applause of the seated theatregoers. Elinor's first real theatrical appearance was at the age of twelve.

At the age of fourteen Elinor took part in Gus Edwards' School Days Revue at the State-Lake Theatre in Chicago. The next year she received an offer to appear in his New York fall revue.

A "STEPPING STONE"

Doubtless in her youthful ambition she could already envision her name in electric lights on New York's Broadway. Already she could hear the frantic applause as she took her bow at repeated encores. But was all this so certain and so easy of attainment? Could the watchful care of her devoted mother protect her from the thorns of disappointment which lay scattered along her path? Or the loving companionship, which was hers, protect this lovely, blue-eyed colleen against the heart-breaks which lay between her and the goal of her ambition?

Dissatisfied with changes in the Edwards' agreement, Miss Flynn never appeared in the New York revue. However, she was soon signed by Fred Stone for his "Stepping Stones" during its tour of the east and middle west. On this 40-week tour Miss Flynn's mother was her constant companion. At the end of the season she obtained another contract to appear in the Stone new musical comedy,

"Criss Cross," which opened at the Globe Theatre on Broadway, November 15, 1926.

While playing in "Criss Cross" Miss Flynn was "discovered" by Mr. Joseph Kennedy, at the time a Hollywood executive, and later American ambassador to England. A meeting was arranged. A screen test was made and approved. And in March 1927 Elinor was on her way to Hollywood.

A PROMISING STAR

While in Hollywood Miss Flynn appeared in 39 pictures, working for the FBO (now RKO), Fox, Universal, Tec-Art, Paramount and other studios. She was Arthur Lake's leading lady in six pictures, and had two Western leads with George Chandler. She had bits and parts in pictures featuring Alice Day, Mary Carr, Pat Rooney, May Robson, Sylvia Sidney, Joan Bennett, Jimmy Dunn, and Sally Eilers. With Alberta Vaughn, George Gray, Al Cook, and Lewis Sargent, Miss Flynn made a series of comedies for Larry Darmour, of Lamour Comedies, a subsidiary of the present RKO.

The Hollywood Graphic in January 1931 said of Miss Flynn: "Among the younger actresses who seem to have all the requisites for movie success is Elinor Flynn . . . Elinor Flynn is a sincere and hard-working little troupier, and if she doesn't get to the top of the heap one of these days, it is because this great industry does not recognize real ability."

However, in October of the same year an automobile accident brought death to her step-father and serious injury to her mother. She herself did not escape injury. Thus the curtain fell on her Hollywood career just as her ambition seemed on the verge of realization, with a rosy future apparently assured and stardom within her grasp.

DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY

After a few months her old ambition was aroused once more. The footlights beckoned to her. She could feel the thrill of applause as she danced and sang.

Hoping thereby to enrich her experience in dramatic work and then become a great star on Broadway, the beautiful colleen decided to devote her time and talent to stock playing.

For over two years she was with stock companies, playing in Atlanta, Ga., Nashville, Tenn., Springfield, Mass., and Detroit, Mich.

Her stock premiere was in the role of Grazia in the now celebrated play "Death Takes A Holiday." Of her performance the leading man, Frederick Tozère, said: "She seemed to have an innate understanding of that part, which made the attraction that character had toward Death a believable and wholly understandable one — she instinctively lifted, by her characterization, any sense of the moribund from the play and brought to the audience the presence of a girl who had seen beyond this life, one whose every action said to the audience 'God is Love,' one from whom all fear had disappeared. One critic wrote: 'Elinor Flynn stepped straight into the heart of every member of the audience the moment she first came upon the stage.'"

WITH THE LONE RANGER

While playing in Detroit with the Jewell Players in tabloid stock, Miss Flynn was one of the cast on the Lone Ranger radio program. This was not her only radio experience. She played dramatic skits on the Sunday Cab hour; she was Madam Sax on the Sax Corset program, and later had a long

engagement with NBC on the Betty and Billy program, and with the Singing Lady.

The Detroit dual engagement was too exacting, and after five months Elinor yielded to the advice of her mother and relinquished her position.

BACK TO BROADWAY

After a much needed rest Miss Flynn again turned her eyes toward Broadway. By this time the depression had gripped even the play-houses of gay New York. She became more or less discouraged by the failure of promising plays in which she appeared, and determined, like many other actors and actresses, to seek an assured steady engagement with the Federal Theatres project. She toured the CCC camps with the Skinner Dress Suit Company, a federal project, chiefly in New York State and Pennsylvania.

At the end of the tour the company returned to New York City, and Miss Flynn appeared in federal plays on Broadway. There were, for example, "An American Holiday," "A Hero Is Born," "Sun and I." She was rehearsing for a later federal production, "Sing For Your Supper," but the final curtain had fallen upon her life before the play was produced.

A TRUE FRIEND

Elinor Flynn was a real girl. She loved sports; horseback riding, swimming, tennis. And she was a modern girl. A friend said of her: "She was a likable, lovable American girl, who could get as much fun out of life as anybody else, and at the same time remain a daily communicant."

Miss Flynn had a host of friends. Her childhood friendships she cherished through the passing years. She was an excellent actress, but in her

friendships there was no acting, no make-believe. She was deeply sincere, affectionate, unselfish, and wonderfully loyal.

She found pleasure in a sacrifice made for a friend. One of her friends has paid her the following tribute: "Deeply sincere in everything she did, this lovable, pretty little creature radiated happiness and goodness wherever she went. Her love for singing, and dancing, her good-fellowship, her keen sympathy with the trials and hardships of others were easily visible attributes, which earned the friendship of many. Beyond all this there was a self-sacrificing nature by virtue of which many received material and spiritual help in an unobtrusive manner, and none were burdened with her own weighty problems of existence."

And a former director of the Federal Theatre project says of her: "Elinor Flynn I knew primarily as an actress. But that was over an uninterrupted period of nearly three years—and rehearsals are intimate and revealing affairs. She was clever; she was capable; she was tireless; she was understanding; she was cheerful and cheering. I was about to say that she made everyone her friend. But in that statement there would be a suggestion of effort on her part; and the friendships she drew to her came spontaneously as a tribute to her rare endowment. She didn't 'make' friends; she attracted and kept friends, as effortlessly as she acted. I was happy to have become one of them—as I am happy now in the memory of her and that friendship."

HER DEAREST FRIEND

Elinor's dearest friend and, whenever possible, her constant companion was her mother. The feeling that existed between them was more than a



ELINOR WITH HER MOTHER

filial devotion between mother and daughter. It was a comradeship that elicited the admiration of all who knew them.

When circumstances did not permit the mother to be the traveling companion of her daughter on the tour of the CCC camps, daily letters passed between them.

Elinor's closeness to her mother can be seen from this message which accompanied a Mother's Day gift: "To the dearest—sweetest—and most wonderful of mothers in all the world. Just a thought for all your unselfishness and devotion you have given me. — Your Goldy, forever."

THE FATAL ACCIDENT

At the end of June, 1938, Miss Flynn and her mother left New York City to spend the week end and the Fourth of July with relatives in upstate New York. Her heart was filled with music, and from her lips came the song—her swan song—"Thanks For The Memories."

While there, Elinor and a young gentleman friend accepted a holiday dinner invitation at Bolton on Lake George. In order to avoid the heavy holiday traffic they determined to leave early and return late. However, even this precaution did not prevent the serious accident on the return trip in which Elinor received a compound skull fracture, dying instantly.

She was buried from St. Mary's Church in Glens Falls, and laid to rest in St. Mary's cemetery in South Glens Falls. On her tombstone have been inscribed the very fitting words—words which characterize her whole life:

"Trust Him, He is ever faithful;
Trust Him, for His will is best;
Trust Him, for the Heart of Jesus
Is the only place of rest."

A STRONG CHARACTER

Elinor Flynn was an unusual girl. Hers was a forceful character and a charming personality. It was her strength of character which enabled her, even when surrounded by powerful worldly influences, faithfully to adhere to the lofty principles and high ideals which she had set for herself. No amount of coaxing could make her swerve from this path. With a sweet, unaffected smile ingeniously and inoffensively she would change the subject, and the matter was closed. She held the spontaneous respect of everyone.

DEEPLY SPIRITUAL

One might expect such a person to be a kill-joy and a prude. Elinor was neither.

At times when one speaks of a person as being deeply spiritual, there looms in the mind a gloomy spectre of harsh, cold austerity. This is partly due to the fact that in the past so many biographers of the saints seemed to suppress the fact that the saints, too, were human.

While we do not wish to anticipate any action of Holy Mother Church, we can say that Elinor Flynn was deeply spiritual, and, oh so delightfully human, and willing to enjoy all the best fun that life has to offer.

Delightfully human—and yet, so deeply spiritual. Dr. Fulton J. Sheen said of her: "She was one of the finest Catholic young women I ever knew, deeply spiritual and forever radiating it to all who knew her."

The key to her spiritual life, naturally, was almighty God. He was in everything she did. Her faith, hope and charity were beautiful. She was a complete stranger to human respect, and never

went out on the stage without first having made the sign of the Cross. Hers was a real Christian hope, based upon perfect resignation to the will of God. Her attitude in bearing trials and crosses proves that hers were not meaningless words when she prayed: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."



And her charity, her love for God, is very easily seen from her own words. One day while rehearsing for a play in New York City, a fellow actor asked her why she went to Mass every morning and to church so often. She replied: "Well, Paul, if you have a good friend whom you don't see often, you get lonesome, don't you? I consider our Lord as my best and dearest Friend, and I get

lonesome if I don't see Him, so I go to see Him every day." What a wonderful example!

Her charity towards her neighbor was just as striking. She would share her last dime with a poor person whom she met on the street asking for alms.

How indifferent we are about others' lives! How reluctant to go out of our way to make them happy! We rarely concern ourselves with others' thoughts, and seldom look into the depth of human hearts. It is always thus with strangers, and often, too, with friends, even though their minds be all awlirl, troubled and harassed by a multitude of weighty cares; even though the heart, perchance, be torn with grief because of failure, blasted hopes, and bitter disappointment. We do not understand. We will not understand. A cheery smile, a kindly word, a helpful hand would bring new freshness into the life now so empty, so forlorn and hopeless. And yet, how niggardly we give! How often do we fail those who stand so much in need of thoughtfulness, of kindness, of love!

While in Detroit Elinor and her mother were on their way to a midnight New Year's performance. A poor man, looking cold and hungry, stood near the curb. People hurried past him. No one seemed to see him, and much less did they care. There was no warmth, no love in his life. What a merciless, heartless, cold, unfeeling world!

But there was one who saw him, and did care. And that one was beautiful, good tender-hearted Elinor Flynn. She stopped, took some change from her purse, and gave it to the poor man. Accompanying the gift was a sweet smile that came from the very depth of her great heart. And how filled with joy was that heart when the poor man loudly blessed its owner! Returning to

her mother's side, Elinor said softly: "Mother, I can enjoy my evening better. I made that man happy."

HER HUMILITY AND PIETY

Elinor Flynn was very beautiful and very talented; but she was just as humble as she was beautiful and talented. "What impressed me most," says one of her professional associates, "in her love for God" was her humility in accepting severe criticisms in her work, smilingly, though many times with tears in her eyes."

With such a disposition, it was, perhaps, natural for Elinor to be truly pious. Often did she visit St. Francis Church, the Franciscan church on Thirty-first Street, which she was wont to style "a miniature heaven." Her deep, solid piety could not escape notice.

Just as the beauty of the rose is seen in all its grandeur only when the flower is full blown, so it was in the last few years of our Elinor's life that the sweet flower of her deep spirituality showed its beauty most. The good Lord had lavished physical beauty and charm upon her, and she was grateful and unspoiled by His gifts. He had been generous to her with His graces. She knew it, and used them to draw closer and closer to Him. Those who saw her in prayer, could suspect this fact. Hence one of her friends could write: "Whenever I visit the little shrine church of St. Francis of Assisi, nestled in a secluded garden that is hidden in the shadows of New York City's towering skyscrapers, I always remember Elinor Flynn at prayer . . . How I loved to watch her pray! Every movement had a grace; every manner a meaning. An inner light seemed to shine through her beautiful face. Just to look at

her, one knew that she felt the presence of God in her soul."

Each day of the week, for Elinor, had some special devotion in church. Her principal devotion centered about the Blessed Mother and the Passion of our divine Savior.

GOOD FRIDAY IN THE WOODS

It was in April, 1935. Elinor was playing the leading role in the Skinner Dress Suit Company in the CCC camps of Pennsylvania. In that year Good Friday fell on April 19.

A Catholic young lady of the cast—like Elinor, a fine colleen—asked Elinor if she intended to keep silence from noon until three o'clock, and she replied that she would like to do so.

There was no church within miles of the camp, so the two young ladies decided to withdraw from the rest of the company and take a walk, and just walk until they would find a place suitable for prayer and meditation.

All that section of Pennsylvania is mountainous and growing great stretches of pine and spruce trees. Even as early as that time of the year happened to be, foliage had appeared, and little anemones and wood violets blossomed in profusion along the path which led the young ladies for half or three quarters of a mile mostly up grade.

On their pious pilgrimage Elinor and her companion passed many little winding rivulets hastening on unconscious of any human beings. In many places water just seemed to spring from the sides of the mountains and trickle forth into the footpaths they crossed on their way.

A little dog—a sort of mongrel terrier—tagged at their heels. Then he would dash away into some

undergrowth and be lost to them for a while. But finally when they reached a spot that they thought would be suitable for their purpose, the dog caught up with them and did not stir during the whole time they knelt in prayer.

Their kneeler was a fallen tree trunk, pretty well stripped of its foliage. They recited the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary, and then with outstretched arms prayed seven Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glorias in honor of the Seven Last Words of the crucified Christ. At the conclusion of these vocal prayers both young ladies, actresses by profession, knelt for a while longer in silent meditation.

From the spot on which they stood Elinor and her friend could see for miles around the tops of the trees as they, too, stretched their arms towards their Creator.

It was a sunny day of blue skies and a few white clouds. And Elinor remarked to her companion how close God seemed.

HER ROSARY

Recitation of the Rosary was her daily habit. However late she came home from the theatre or from a social engagement, before retiring for the night she would say: "Mother, shall we now say our Rosary?" And before going to sleep she would entwine her beads about her wrist.

A FOLLOWER OF ST. FRANCIS

As a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, she was fervent and faithful. In the three years of her membership in the order she missed only two fraternity meetings, due to absence from the city.

One day while riding with her mother and others, she lapsed from song into silence. After a time her mother asked her a question, to which she replied: "Just a moment, mother dear, I'm saying my Third Order office." And when she was taken to the hospital after the fatal accident, her Tertiary cord and scapular were found beneath her clothing.

HER ROUGE-STAINED CRUCIFIX

St. Francis was intensely devoted to our suffering Savior. Elinor deeply loved her crucifix. In her room there was always a crucifix; in her childhood home in Chicago, on Ivar Avenue in Hollywood, in her hotel in New York, in her Broadway theatre dressing-room. And it was Elinor's crucifix that brought to two little children perhaps their first knowledge of God's excessive love for man.

Next door to her in Hollywood lived a little boy, who was wont daily to visit the Russell home. He loved to wander about the house and to look at the many pretty things on Elinor's dresser.

On one of his daily visits he stood, gazing at the crucifix in her bedroom. "What is that?" he curiously asked Elinor's mother. "V-n-y, child," she replied, "that is Goldy's God and your God, Who died on the cross." Then he heard the story of Calvary.

One day the little boy lingered longer than usual in Elinor's room, for the story of her crucifix had impressed him very deeply. Standing before it and with his upturned eyes filled with a pathetic look, he said: "Poor God!"

When Elinor learned of this, she was so happy to know that in her room that innocent child had found and learned about God. And later she

took time to tell the little boy more about the God Who so loves us and Whom she loved so fervently. A similar incident happened at the Breslin Hotel in New York.

In her early childhood Elinor had formed the habit of kissing her crucifix, which hung at her bedside, before she left for school and before retiring at night. As a beautiful young actress it was still her custom to kiss her crucifix before she left her hotel room. Once she forgot to do so. It was the day she left the hotel never to return. Bags in hand she was on her way to the auto that was to bear her upstate. Suddenly she realized that she had not kissed her crucifix. Then and there she deposited her bags, and back she went for the customary kiss—the last kiss for her rouge-stained crucifix.

ELINOR FLYNN—AN INSPIRATION

Elinor Flynn, the beautiful screen and stage actress and radio artist, by her life gives the lie to a world that says you can't love life and God at the same time. Her life should serve as an inspiration to the millions so sorely in need of the helping hand of example.

As a non-Catholic young man said of her: "She was an inspiration and a comfort, not so much by what she did for others, as by what she inspired others to do and to be."

The question might now arise in the minds of some persons: "Why should anyone make a fuss over Elinor Flynn? What did she have that we have not?"

Those very questions are an unconscious tribute to Elinor Flynn, for they acknowledge the simplicity of her life. She was deeply spiritual. No less a person than Dr. Fulton J. Sheen, a person-

al friend of Elinor, has made such a statement.

There can be no deep spirituality without deep love for God. Elinor experienced a sort of lovesickness and homesickness for God, as we can see from her reply to the young man who asked her why she went to Mass every morning and to church so often.

Late each afternoon or early in the evening again she made a visit to St. Francis Church, her "miniature heaven." She loved prayer. She prayed for favors; she prayed for success. And for every favor she received, prayers of thankfulness were sent heavenward by her grateful lips.

What is her rouge-stained crucifix if it is not a proof of a deep, sincere love for our divine Savior, a love which prompted her to sacrifice comfort and convenience in order to receive Him daily in Holy Communion?

Each time she bought new clothes, they were worn for the first time to church.

Elinor arose each morning with thoughts of God in her mind, and while dressing would offer to Him all her thoughts, words, and deeds of the day. And she closed her evening prayers with the words: "Thanks to God for everything." A truly grateful heart!

I might venture to say that there are, perhaps, few persons who are so concerned about the honor of God as to utter an ejaculation of atonement, or say, "Father, forgive him," when they hear profanity. Elinor Flynn did.

Existing simultaneously with true love of God is a real, true love of others. St. Paul says: "Charity is patient, is kind; charity does not envy; is not provoked; thinks no evil; does not rejoice over wickedness; bears with all things, believes all

things, hopes all things, endures all things. Charity never fails . . . (I Cor. 13, 4-8).

By these words St. Paul condemns a certain type of gossip as uncharitable, regardless of who the gossipers may be. Likewise does he condemn rash judgment, attributing to others intentions which they never had, words which they never spoke, acts which they never did. The Apostle condemns the unkind word and unkind deed just as he condemns calumny and slander, bitterness and revenge. He rebukes those persons who have no patience with the shortcomings of others, who exaggerate their faults — which sometimes are only imaginary — and broadcast them without any regard for the consequences.

"See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another" (Tcb. 4, 16). "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me" (Mt. 25, 40). "With what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you" (Mt. 7, 2). "And even as you wish men to do to you, so also do you to them" (Lk. 6, 31).

"Charity is patient, is kind: charity is not pretentious, is not provoked, thinks no evil. Charity bears all things, believes all things, endures all things."

Now hear what people say of Elinor Flynn. "I believe," says one person, "that during a certain period of Goldy's life, I must have known her better than any friend she had. We grew up together and were in each other's company practically every day until we both finished high school. She was always so kind and unselfish in everything she did."

Another person writes: "For five years we saw her daily and not once in all that time did we

ever hear or see her do an unkind or unbecoming thing."

A young man says of her: "She was always considerate and exceptionally thoughtful of others by doing some little kind deed, never refusing to go out of her way to be helpful."

Another person, who knew her intimately, declared: "I have known her to suffer privation in order to help one less fortunate than herself. I knew her innermost feelings. They only consisted of good towards others, and only seeing the good in everyone."

If there is anyone who still doubts that Elinor Flynn was an unusual girl, or who wishes to know what she had that they have not, let them just try to walk in her footsteps.

As for modern youth, they have every reason to be proud of Elinor Flynn. They can point to her with pride and say: "She was one of us. She belongs to us."



A PARTING WORD

No doubt Elinor's life has impressed you. Will you leave it at that? Why not make an honest effort to imitate it?

As you have noted Elinor was a good member of the Third Order of St. Francis. She regarded it as a haven of grace. If you are in earnest join the Third Order of St. Francis, pledge yourself to its model rule of life, live that rule to your best ability, and you are not only saving your soul, but you are treading the giant's course of sanctity led by St. Francis, the Seraphic image of Christ, preceded by hosts of saintly souls, surrounded by the prayers and good example of many hundred thousands of brethren, drawing after you many a soul precious to your Savior.

For further information on the Third Order apply to the nearest Franciscan Friary or to the National Secretary of the Third Order, 3200 Meramec Street, St. Louis, Mo.

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