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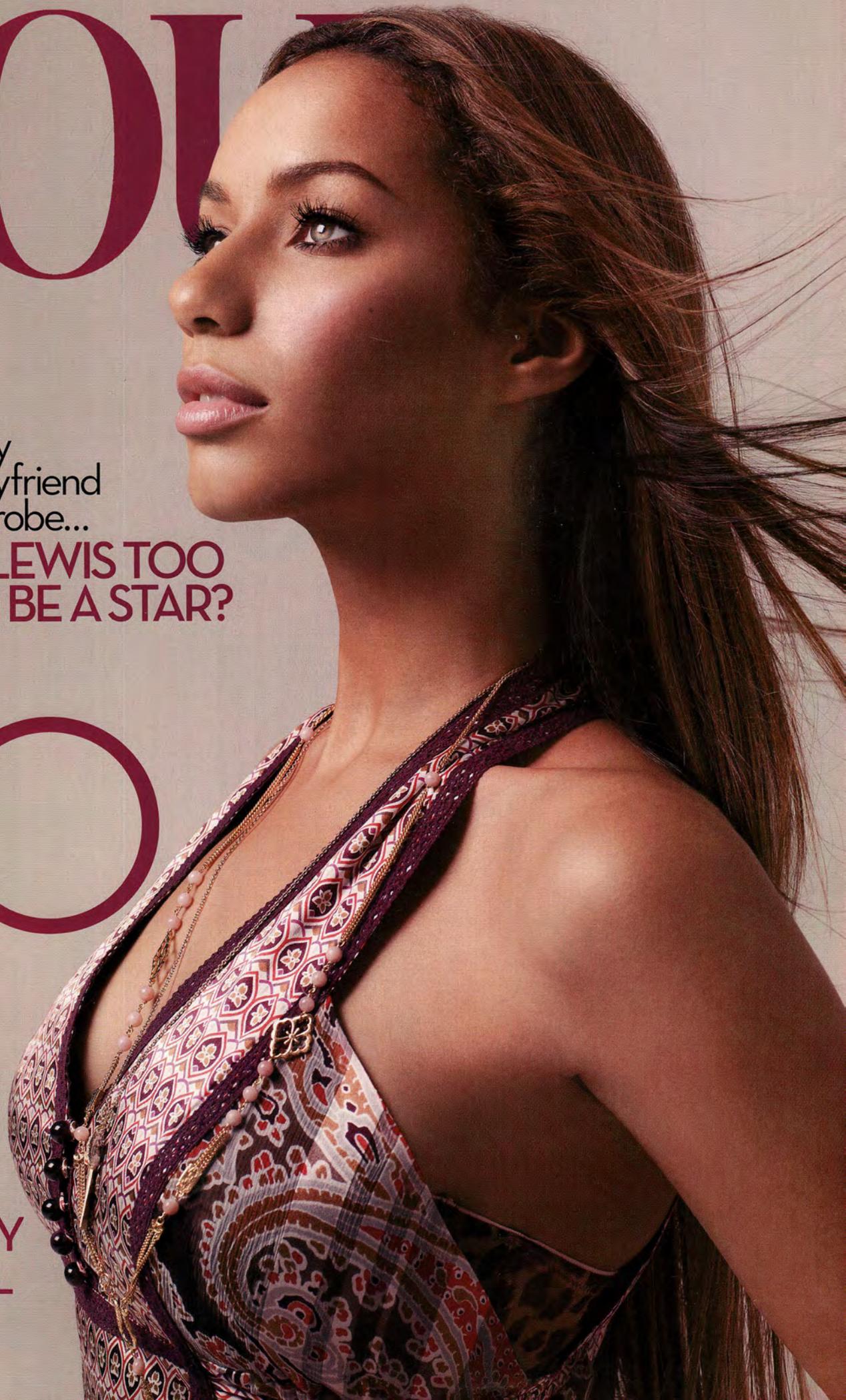
**IS LEONA LEWIS TOO
SWEET TO BE A STAR?**

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'I thought I was INDESTRUCTIBLE'

Dolores O'Riordan enjoyed huge success with the Cranberries, but it came at a high price. Now, after years out of the limelight, she is back – but this time with no entourage and no fuss

Interview Catherine O'Brien
Main photograph Mitch Jenkins

For anyone looking to restore their faith in the power of serendipity, the story of Dolores O'Riordan is a good place to start. When she was 18, a girl at school told her about three boys in a band looking for a singer. She met them and, within a week, they had written their first song together, called 'Linger'. Barely a year later, it reached the US top ten.

The Cranberries went on to have number-one singles in 26 countries and sell more than 40 million albums worldwide. Dolores, a wisp of a woman with a hypnotic, powerhouse voice, was catapulted from the backwaters of Limerick to the global stage, becoming one of Ireland's richest women. But then, almost as suddenly as she had appeared, she vanished. Seven years of relentless touring and recording had led to a catastrophic breakdown. She had therapy, recovered, had three children and focused on 'just being anonymous'.

In late 2005, just as Dolores was

thinking of getting back to work, she took a call from the American actor Adam Sandler, who was directing and starring in a film called *Click*. "'Linger' was one of his favourite songs, and he had this wedding scene in which he wanted me to perform in a cameo,' she explains. Her daughter Dakota was six months old at the time 'and I was still nursing her, but I thought, "I can't refuse".' So she weaned Dakota, flew to Los Angeles and, from the moment she stepped on to the film set, 'I enjoyed myself so much. It was like being called back.'

Having fled the spotlight for so long it was a big step for Dolores to re-enter the fray with her debut solo album and accompanying world tour last year. The difference this time, she says, is that she is doing it on her own terms. 'In a band, you are always rushing, working to schedules, feeling you are part of a package. Now I don't have to worry about anyone else – I can just be myself.'

We meet in a plush Park Lane

hotel in London. A decade ago, as part of the Cranberries, Dolores would probably have arrived with an entourage and conducted interviews in a lavish suite. Today, she is alone and happy to sit in a quiet corner of the lounge.

Up close you can see the subtle signs of her star status – lusciously layered hair, gleaming dentistry and a French manicure. But at 36, she still has about her that fragile

yet feisty air of the goth teenager who used to paint her nails black and pale her face with baby powder. Her only jewellery is her wedding band. 'I don't like bling,' she says. 'Don [her husband] bought me lots of jewellery, but it was just something else to stress about. When you have four bracelets, you constantly ask yourself, "Which one shall I wear?" The easiest thing is not to wear any.' Her jeans and pumps are similarly understated. 'I was a fashion victim for a while, and I do love tailored clothes. But I don't feel I have to prove myself by wearing expensive stuff. What is important is what's in your heart.'

To understand the ambitious, uber-cool yet at times crushingly insecure Dolores, you have to appreciate her earliest years, growing up in rural Ballybricken. Hers was a classic Irish Catholic childhood – convent education, Mass every Sunday and saint's day. There was hardship – her father had suffered brain damage in a



Cranberry solo: Dolores on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* last year

NECUPHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW HARRIS. STYLING: REBECCA LEARY. HAIR: SIMON IZZARD AT MANDY COAKLEY. MAKE-UP: LOUISE CONSTAB AT MANDY COAKLEY

◀ car crash two years before Dolores was born and never worked, so her mother toiled to pay the bills, childminding and doing housework by day, followed by shifts at a local factory at night.

As the youngest of seven – she has five brothers and one sister – Dolores had an attention-seeking, rebellious streak, but mostly she did what she was told. She played the church organ, sang Gregorian chants and wasn't allowed to go to discos or wear make-up. 'My mother had this notion of me becoming a nun,' she recalls. 'But I was thinking rock star, and when I was 18, something inside me flipped. One day I ran away, and it broke my mother's heart.'

Within weeks of leaving, she had hitched up with the Cranberries and was touring Ireland in an old bread van, before signing a jaw-dropping six-album deal, and travelling to America. She shudders to think of how hard the wrench must have been for her mother. 'We made our peace a couple of weeks after I left, but I never moved back. You take your parents so much for granted, then later you're sorry for having been such a pain. I thought I knew it all. It was only when I got to my 30s that I realised I knew a lot less than I thought I did in my 20s.'

They were heady days, and Dolores loved the songwriting and performing, but she admits to having been naive about what it is to be a celebrity. 'Fame is weird,' she says. 'You're just trying to be normal, but then you find yourself in the darkness.' The Cranberries toured with Suede and Duran Duran, before headlining around the world. 'We were on a massive high, but at the time you don't feel it because you're waking up at seven and a make-up artist is prodding you because you've got a magazine shoot at nine, and you're doing tour, album, tour, album, and it's like that every day.'

She's not whingeing, just telling it as it was. And she blames no one but herself. 'I was a workaholic, like my mother. I could never say no.'

She wasn't good with men – a

'You take your parents so much for granted, then later you're sorry for having been such a pain'



Another day, another Dolores, far left: with the Cranberries in 1995. Left: leaving court with husband Don Burton after their former nanny Joy Fahy lost her case against them, April 2004

factor she puts down to her relationship with her father. 'We have the best relationship now, but he had been emotionally absent when I was growing up. The car accident made him that way, but at the time I couldn't see that.' There were a couple of messy liaisons before, at 21, she met Don. He was Duran Duran's tour manager, a Canadian ten years her senior, and he showered her with love. 'To this day, if we're out to dinner, he'll take my coat, give me my chair, check out the menu for what I like. He's a real caregiver, so protective of me.'

Dolores and Don married in 1994 in Tipperary – she famously wore a see-through dress – and spent their honeymoon camping in Galway. 'We only had five days before my next gig and I couldn't face staying in a hotel where everyone would recognise us, so we woke up the day after our wedding in a tent, hungover and starving,' she grins. 'We had a gas stove, but no food, so I walked down to the village shop for a tin of beans and there I was, on all the front pages. I put my head down, grabbed the beans, and ran.'

A year later she started having anxiety attacks – her limbs would seize up when she was about to go on stage or when she was with

strangers. She couldn't eat or sleep, and her weight plummeted to six stone. Interviewers described her as moody and erratic, and speculated that she had anorexia. In fact, she was just emotionally spent. 'When you have that sort of fame, you are bigger than your own self. I thought I was indestructible. It was only later, when I saw pictures of myself, that I realised how terrible I looked.'

Beechy Colclough, psychotherapist to the stars (he has also counselled Elton John, Michael Jackson and Robbie Williams), proved to be her salvation. 'He made me feel that it wasn't me who was nuts, just the world around me. He said, "It's your life. Stop being famous and get away." So I did.'

Taylor, now ten, was born a year after her breakdown. 'Having him gave me a whole new outlook on life.' He was followed by Molly, now seven, and Dakota, two. The Cranberries made a couple more albums but other band members were starting families too, 'and one of them had a seriously ill child and life took over'.

Dolores and Don moved to Canada, to a log cabin home in Ontario. 'The Canadians are very grounded. I could take Taylor to

school and sit in his class with a bunch of six-year-olds and just be Mum. I wasn't singing, wasn't performing, I had no website. And sometimes Don and I would go online and see all this banter on the unofficial sites, people asking "Where is she?" But it was important to disconnect myself.'

The one thing she never stopped, however, was writing songs. Her album *Are You Listening?* is a collection of 12 tracks, plucked from more than 30, that reflect the highs and lows of her past decade. It is dedicated to Don's stepmother Denise, who died of cancer in 2004. She had been like a second mother to Dolores. There are also ballads she has dedicated to her children, to Don and to her parents, and a blisteringly angry track entitled 'Loser'. She's not identifying her 'loser', so we can only speculate whether the lyrics 'A two-watt light bulb is brighter than you/I'm sick and tired of people like you' are directed at the former nanny who tried, and failed, to sue her and Don over negligence and false imprisonment claims in 2004.

Dolores seems a woman who has achieved a hard-won equilibrium. She and Don still have their log cabin, but their main home is now in Howth, Dublin, where Ronan Keating and other entertainment and media types are near neighbours. 'This is practical for the children. We're part of the community. Life has changed so much for me, but I'm a normal mother, and one of the things I'm most proud of is that I'm giving my children their own normality.' She recalls an ex-boyfriend saying to her once that if she had children, she would stop being an artist. 'But you know, living my life through their lives is my inspiration. Your career goes up and down, but your family is for ever. Becoming famous skewed my perspective for a while, but, underneath it all, I always knew that.' ❧

Dolores's album *Are You Listening?* is available on the Sanctuary label