

The Don

Story of an Actor

David Bloomberg first made his name in South Africa as a director of plays. Subsequently his career embraced the legal profession, the business world and civic politics where as the mayor of Cape Town in the seventies he was a fierce opponent of the apartheid system. At one time a columnist for Cape Town newspapers, his latest career as a writer started 10 years ago and relying on his understanding of theatre, *The Don...Story of an Actor* is his sixth book. It is indeed the story of a bisexual English actor who rises to the heights of his profession but whom also, due to his complex bisexuality and alcohol and drug dependency, plummets periodically to depths of degradation.

By the same Author -

Meet the People (1975)

Won't Forgive ... Can't Forget (2006)

My Times (2007)

The Chain Gang (2010)

Simon's Destiny (2012)

The Don

Story of an Actor

David Bloomberg



Arena Books

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David Bloomberg
***The Don** story of an Actor*

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David Bloomberg

In Memoriam

In memory of my dear Phyllis Orseck Cotton, who read the first few chapters of this story and gave it her imprimatur, before she unexpectedly passed away.

PREFACE

Both the character and the story of *The Don – Story of an Actor* are fiction born out of the recesses of my writer's mind but which may well have been influenced by individuals I encountered during my years of directing professional theatre. It is to those special actors, many of whom are no longer with us, that this novel is dedicated.

However, the book uses a literary genre where, as a device, the principal character, the Don, has illusory scenes with persons who were real and famous at that time. Therefore, in certain scenes, fact is merged with narrative to become a sort of utopian fiction. This is not to suggest that those scenes and their dialogue in reality ever took place. On the contrary, they are contrived but are believed to have credulity based on my knowledge and research of the real persons concerned and, in several instances, on my personal friendship with them.

To enlighten the reader I have provided as an appendix to this book factual profiles and backgrounds of Anton Dolin, Ivor Novello, Frank Shelley, Laurence Olivier and Tyrone Guthrie, who all appear in substantial scenes with the protagonist.

CHAPTER ONE

The offices of *Nathan Podlashuk Plc, Stage Producers* had been in the seamy part of Soho for over 40 years. Many of London's theatrical and literary agents, film and stage producers and those engaged in or on the periphery of the movie and entertainment world, chose to conduct their businesses in this vibrant district, a convenient stone's throw from the bright theatre canopies of Shaftesbury Avenue. Although bounded by the fashionable Mayfair and Covent Garden, and relying on the Royal Opera House for its cultural pretensions, the twentieth century also saw a proliferation of sex shops and diverse live sex entertainment dominate the sidewalks of Soho. That is not to say that the sex industry didn't operate above ground as well. Indeed prior to legislation in 1959, prostitutes crowded every Soho street corner, generously showing off their wares, which were available instantly in dingy bedsitters above the shop fronts. Imaginative and tantalising marketing added to the scene and a variety of prominently displayed postcards in shop windows told of 'French lessons', 'photo opportunities' or 'beautiful chest for sale' upstairs.

Although remnants of the sex industry surely remain, Soho underwent a considerable transformation from the mid-seventies and became a fashionable district for upmarket restaurants and media offices. Situated in Wardour Street and on the third floor off a narrow, wooden, rickety staircase, the headquarters of Nathan Podlashuk Plc had avoided any form of modernisation and existed in a time warp. For many years its neighbours had been brassy ladies who, judging by the joyous sounds that easily penetrated the thin walls, gave enormous pleasure to their clientele. Podlashuks, though, was engaged strictly in what was known in the industry as the 'legitimate theatre business' – although rumour had it that its principal, Nathan Podlashuk, was not averse from time to time of availing himself of the next-door merchandise in return for not complaining to the authorities. However, the era of Podlashuks having friendly but suspect neighbours had long passed and had

been replaced by a media relations company whose high-tech modern offices added respectability to the floor but seemed at variance with the retained ancient rickety staircase.

The creaky door, with *Nathan Podlashuk Plc* inscribed in faded letters on an opaque glass panel, opened into what might generously be called the reception area. In fact it was little more than a windowless space that had been partitioned off decades ago from the single room that constituted what grandiosely was described as 'the suite of offices'. The room housed a very old wooden desk, sundry ill-matching and decrepit tables, two unstable waiting chairs that would have once graced a dining table and a rotating desk chair that many years ago must have been elegant but now had soft, discoloured cushions replacing the worn-out leather upholstery. If there was a filing cabinet it was not nearly as noticeable as the files of varying dimensions and letters of great maturity occupying most of the desk surface. One table was piled high with thick volumes of *Spotlight*, the theatre trades' casting bible; another held ageing copies of the essential weekly rag, *The Stage*; and yet a further table had an early version of a toaster (which no longer popped up), a few chipped plates, a quarter loaf of sliced white bread, a tub of margarine and a jar of Marmite.

Every available space on the walls was taken with old production photos and posters, with the obviously more recent one's reclining on the floor. The incumbent of the desk chair, Agnes Armitage, a frumpy sixty-something old spinster, completed the picture with extraordinary compatibility. She had been in her job as assistant to the boss – which meant acting as receptionist, typist, clerk and general factotum – for some 30 years and, despising modern filing methods, claimed that she could find any required item in seconds from her surrounding mass of papers. Making no concession to modern styles, she dressed in a homely way, was loved by everyone who dealt with her, and was an indispensable part of Nathan Podlashuk Plc.

On the other side of the partition, at a kidney-shaped oak table sat the proprietor, Nathan Podlashuk, one of the most respected and successful theatre producers in London's West End. His offices gave no credence to ostentation of any kind, and eschewed the grandeur his success would otherwise have allowed. Having inherited the business some 40 years earlier from his father, Josef Podlashuk, the son converted the enterprise from light entertainment impresarios to the staging of worthwhile plays. His timing in this regard had been impeccable for the golden age of music halls then went into sharp decline; theatres were boarded up and the likes of the great male impersonators Vesta Tilley and Ella Shields ('Burlington Bertie, I dine at eight-thirty'), cheeky Max Miller, toothy George Formby, the beloved cockney Tommy Trinder and comedian Vic Oliver (rumoured an embarrassment to his father-in-law Winston Churchill) were to tread the boards no more. Straight plays were more Nathan's *metier* and plays of his that starred Michael Redgrave, John Mills, Ralph Richardson, Margaret Rutherford, Maggie Smith, Eileen Atkins and many more outstanding artists occupied West End theatres for extended runs and had made his production company a force to be reckoned with.

The occasional Shakespeare had also been within his compass and among his favourable foreign imports had been the plays of Tennessee Williams, William Inge and Edward Albee. Of medium height with a shock of white hair neatly parted, invariably wearing a plain pastel blue or cream shirt, with a checked sports coat and a bow tie being *de rigueur*, Nathan ran a tight ship that optimised profitability. The production company comprised himself and Agnes and, dispensing with the large fixed overheads that his competitors incurred, production and stage managers, public relations officers, designers and the like were all outsourced for each production. Nathan, however, kept his finger on the pulse of every activity and the contracts he offered to directors reserved unto himself the right to veto casting decisions. He attended most rehearsals and was not averse to offering his opinions even to the likes of Peter Hall or Howard Davies and was generally a shrewd operator as his string of successful productions over many years testified. Having fulfilled most of his ambitions and now entering

the possible twilight years of his career, Nathan was disappointed that he had never produced an Arthur Miller play. He admired the legendary playwright greatly and cherished memories that he had of his several social meetings with him when Miller had visited London, each time with a different wife. Apart from regarding Arthur Miller as America's greatest dramatist, Nathan's liberal instincts appreciated enormously the stand Miller had taken against American Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist witch-hunt both by defying the US House Un-American Activities Committee and by ingeniously exposing its corruption in his play *The Crucible*.

Nathan reasoned that if he was going to produce a Miller play it might as well be arguably the finest American play of all time, *Death of a Salesman*. In 1949 it had been the recipient of both the Pulitzer Prize for drama and the Tony Award for best play and, while it had been staged in London several times, Nathan believed that the play still had as much emotional impact and was as relevant today as when it premiered 60 years ago on Broadway and that it was time for a London revival. Determined to leave no stone unturned to make this a memorable event and a milestone in his career, Nathan had secured the services of the person he believed to be the foremost director of drama in the United Kingdom, George Mallet. He had based his selection not only on the string of successful plays that Mallet had to his credit both in the UK and on Broadway, but in the belief that he would adhere to the well-documented style of the original production and not try to impose an updated interpretation of the classic script, an inclination that present-day directors were often inclined to do. To that end the producer and director had already agreed to use both the original set design of Jo Mielziner and Alex North's haunting flute music. Auditions had gone well and save for a final decision as to who was to play the iconic Willy Loman, the play had been provisionally cast. Recently elevated to 'Dame' status in the Queen's New Year honours list, Mary Martinelli, with her long history of leading lady dramatisations, seemed an ideal choice for Linda Loman. Nathan had been successful in getting two leading 'name' actors to audition for the crucial role of protagonist Willy Loman, the delusional salesman who has visions of grandeur but whose deeply self-

deceiving neurosis results in the pain of underachievement in respect of himself and his two worthless sons. George Mallet was vacillating as to his choice and Nathan was most anxious for him to make up his mind so that a cast announcement could be made and rehearsals could commence.

Included in Agnes's desk equipment was a small antique brass hand bell, the type used in Victorian times for the lady of the house to summon the kitchen staff to the table to clear the crockery. To the annoyance of Nathan, Agnes always used it to announce the arrival of his next appointment; his point being that she could just as easily call out and he would receive the announcement equally clearly. On this occasion the tinkle of the bell advised him that George Mallet had arrived and he opened his door and ushered in the confident, charismatic and impeccably well-mannered director of *Salesman*.

"Well, George, how are we doing? Are you on top of everything? And, most important, have you made up your mind as to who is going to be our 'Salesman'?"

"Nathan, the more I study the script the more I uncover the nuances that make this such a remarkable play. There is more to it than Willy's painful conflict within his family; there is a larger issue regarding the indictment of American national values and the cost of having blind faith in the American Dream. In one respect, it is the story of the Common Man, a disillusioned salesman, but on a different level it is in the tradition of Greek tragedy. The protagonist is such a complex character; it is not difficult to cast the piece satisfactorily but to achieve a historic, definitive performance – which I know is what you want – frankly, I don't believe that either of the actors auditioned is suitable."

"Christ, George, I hear what you say but I've given you two of the best actors on the stage today ... If you don't cast one of them there won't be a bloody play."

"There is another actor whom I've invited to audition."

"And who's that?"

"Patrick Donovan."

“The Don?”

“Yes.”

“Are you out of your fucking mind?”

“No, I don’t think so ... The Don might have been out of things from time to time, but anyone who has any knowledge of theatre knows that he is our greatest actor.”

“And everyone also knows that he’s a loose cannon: an alcoholic who invariably causes disaster and mayhem wherever and whenever he treads the boards.”

“I believe his alcoholism is under control ...”

“What about his sexual activities? Anything that moves either in a skirt or pants ... Lock up your daughters – and your sons, for that matter.”

“Nathan, I’ve spoken to him and I believe I could keep him on the straight and narrow.”

“Maybe, just maybe, during rehearsals ... but what happens during the run? You know that I am looking at about six months. Are you going to be able to be his keeper for that amount of time? Your very generous contract runs out a week after opening night. What happens then?”

“Nathan, I understand how you feel, but there are medical means these days of controlling those who drink too much.”

“Drink *too much*? How about being so blind drunk on occasions that the curtain couldn’t go up? He hasn’t opened a play on the West End stage for at least 10 years – for ages no one would touch him with a barge pole!”

“Well, for a considerable portion of that time he was in rehab. Thereafter he worked for a while in rep and then played Crocker-Harris in *The Browning Version* at Birmingham ... Did a good job of it too – a very touching performance. Then he was in *The Seagull* at Oxford, which transferred to the Queens – again, excellent notices; and most recently I was at his opening of *Winter Journey* where his Frank Elgin was simply astonishing. I spoke to him afterwards and he seemed really well.”

“George, in the early sixties he played Frank Hunter for me in *The Browning Version* at the Haymarket – he was great then. But it was the unhappiest cast I have ever known: he was having

simultaneous affairs with the boy playing Taplow and with Crocker-Harris's wife. Talk about bisexuality ... I don't know if you know that the title *The Browning Version* refers to Robert Browning's translation of the *Agamemnon* – talk about Greek tragedy!"

"Nathan, I was very impressed with how Donovan fitted in to the American idiom in *Winter Journey*; not just the accent but his whole persona seemed to belong to the other side of the Atlantic. There aren't many actors in this country who can lose their Englishness to that degree. He's the only one I can think of who I know can do authentic American. Won't you at least consider the Don? At least hear him read for me? I've a good feeling that he'll be responsible and give a shattering performance. He has what Noel Coward called 'star quality in excelsis'."

"And how will he play opposite Mary Martinelli? Dame Mary, to be more precise ... How would she feel about being with him?"

"I think they'd be great together. I've worked with Mary a few times and she needs to be pushed. The Don would move her to a new level of intensity. To be frank, I've already broached the subject with her and she's very much in favour."

"Last time I saw Donovan, a couple of years back at a cocktail party, he wore theatrical make-up that was very noticeable."

"Oh, I think he still does: it's part of the aura of the Don!"

With that the Agnes bell tinkled and Nathan wondered who it could be. He certainly wasn't expecting anyone else.

"Actually, Nathan, that would be Patrick Donovan; I told you I asked him to read for us."

"I didn't realise it was imminent. You really have pushed this on me. I hope you know what you're doing. Oh well ... are we going to the rehearsal room in Rupert Street?"

"No, I'm happy here – if you don't mind."

"Be my guest ..."

Nathan opened the door and Patrick Donovan, clearly wearing make-up, made his grand entrance. He was elegantly dressed in a bottle-green polo-neck sweater, a blue suede casual suit over which hung from his shoulders a stylish Burberry raincoat. His silver hair

was excellently coiffured, he stood erect to his full height of 5 feet 10 inches and his rugged features completed the picture of a man who had clearly done some living in his time but was still handsome and surprisingly confident. There was no doubt that the aura of the Don had returned and filled the room.

“Nathan, my dear boy, how good to see you – it has been so long. And my friend, George, how are you, dear boy?”

“Patrick, you’re looking better than I’ve seen you look for years. What sort of regime has brought this about?”

“Nate, my dear, I had a few disasters, lost it a bit, took stock of my life and now I am in good shape: I look after myself these days.”

“Does that mean you’ve stopped drinking?”

“You always were indelicately blunt and to the point. Many still think of me as an alcoholic, dear boy; you know that. But I have steadfastly refused to be one of those pathetic people who stand up and proclaim ‘I am an alcoholic’; that is simply not me – not what the Don is all about. However, the Don took a decision that abstinence was not for him. He had gone on the wagon many times – and every time always ended with a serious binge. Instead he discovered what worked for him. He has a scotch every night, just two fingers, and that is his limit. However, when he is working he does have a small tot before going on stage. Not clandestinely mind you ... everyone in the cast knows about it. They appreciate that it’s for medicinal reasons, to steady the nerves, so to speak.”

“And how’s the Don’s sex life these days?”

“My dear Nate, you *are* an inquisitive so-and-so ...”

“What are you these days – Arthur or Martha?”

“Dear boy, I am neither hetero nor homo; let’s just say that I am a sexual beast. But of course, unfortunately, age does take its toll ...”

“Were you to play Willy Loman, I don’t think that Biff or Hap would take kindly to your advances. And as for Dame Mary Martinelli, I imagine she’d be horrified. Imagine how the Queen would feel if you tried to screw one of her Dames!”

“Dear Nate, you can advise Buckingham Palace that the Queen’s noble gentry are entirely safe and Biff and Hap can

concentrate on their scripts in the knowledge that the beast has been tamed. Nate, George, dear boys, I assure you that I am well, utterly reliable, a reformed character and back to my best form, which you may recall was described by eminent critics as of the highest calibre. I am totally familiar with the play, have been for years, and believe that I have a complete understanding of the complex character of Willy Loman, and am desperately keen to play him. Please, George, may I read for you?"

"Patrick, that's why I invited you ... Are you willing to read here or would you prefer to go to our rehearsal room."

"This is absolutely fine."

"Here's a script. Willy has a great deal of dialogue but only a few long speeches. Choose where you would like to read and I will cue you if you like."

"I have no need for the script."

George and Nathan exchanged glances.

"What a change – you were usually word perfect only by the last night!"

"You are a naughty boy, Nate."

George laughed: "Patrick, a word about characterisation to make sure that we are singing from the same hymn sheet. I know you've played many heroic parts and Shakespearean tragedies; this play is also a tragedy but on a different sound level. I want to attain an intimacy ... for the audience to be listening in as the story unfolds ... and this cannot be achieved by Willy declaiming to the last row of the balcony."

"George, I understand that completely ..."

"Like some of the classic roles you've played, Willy is also a tragic hero, not by noble birth, not because he has any elements of greatness, but because he has a fatal flaw that eventually leads to his death, which in certain ways mirrors Oedipus. He has a frail mind – sometimes not knowing whether he is living in the present or the past. His whole life as an insecure self-deluded travelling salesman is deception and he tries to live vicariously through his unwilling son, Biff. Willy clings to the salesman's belief that being well liked is the key to material success. As his pathetic life disintegrates and his mental health unravels, he imagines events

from the past as if they were real and pleads with people around him for guidance and help. Patrick, this is important: Willy is not old – Miller gives us a clue that he is 63 – but he is exhausted.”

“Dear boy, there is no difference of opinion between us; I agree entirely with your interpretation and believe I have an understanding of how you want this played. I am going to do the speech where Willy pleads with his long-time employer, Howard, for just 40 dollars a week.”

The actor took off his jacket, undid the half-zip of his polo-neck sweater, ruffled his white hair and, with his feet slightly apart, adopted a stooped position that assumed the very persona of Willy Loman. Facing the producer and director and with a very passable American accent, his mellifluous voice had a low intensity as he spoke some of Arthur Miller’s most famous lines.

Without the benefit of a script, even as a back-up, the Don gave a life to Willy Loman that neither Nathan nor George had seen beyond Broadway. He was fluent, word perfect, and entirely enveloped by his character. A stunned silence descended over the room, as the actor described how an 84-year-old salesman would make his living by donning his green velvet slippers in his hotel and, without leaving the room, would phone buyers in 31 states.

Agnes had opened the door quietly, augmenting the spellbound audience to three. Patrick continued to passionately relate how the salesman died on the train to Boston and how hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral – he died the death of a salesman.

The audience was silent, mesmerised for several seconds, and then broke into spontaneous applause. Agnes had tears running down her cheeks; George had a look of satisfaction on his face; and Nathan walked over and gave the actor a warm bear hug being careful not to get make-up on his face. The Don was back!

CHAPTER TWO

Patrick Brian Novello Donovan was born in County Cork with the far less-impressive name of Arthur Mullan having being registered at birth, and it was not until his impressionable late teens that he chose for himself the long nomenclature that he believed suited him more adequately. Shortly after his birth in 1932, his mother, Alanna, an English schoolteacher, suffered from headaches, chronic fatigue and aching muscles, which were first misdiagnosed as a postnatal condition but later confirmed as Lyme disease, which turned out to be fatal. Alby Mullan, Arthur's father, was ill-prepared and, if truth be told, ill-suited to raise an infant. After a troubled youth, Alby had ended up in a corrective home for 'undisciplined children' and, on being discharged, his strong body and good looks enabled him to land a succession of menial jobs, none of which lasted for any duration. His real Christian name was Ailbe, an old Irish name meaning 'white'.

He used to like saying to anyone who would listen that he was a descendant of the sixth-century St Ailbe from a monastery in County Tipperary whose fame derived from the fable (or fact) that after a blessing from him, an unpopulated river miraculously filled with an abundance of fish. To honour St Ailbe's remarkable achievement, the townsfolk built five churches at the best fishing spots along the river and Alby Mullan claimed identification with those houses of God. One night in the local pub, after a man challenged his claim to immortality, Mullan countered a tentative left to his body with a mighty swing of his right, which landed flush on the jaw of his assailant who crumpled to the floor. Witnessing this all-too-brief bout was Colm Riordan, a boxing trainer at the local gym who persuaded the winner that he might have a future as a professional boxer. Flattered by the attention and seeing no future anywhere else, Mullan allowed himself to be trained by Colm and eventually made his debut as a cruiserweight in the professional ring.

Competing at first against a bunch of palookas for minimal purses, he eventually graduated to more competent and recognised fighters and, as his unbeaten record grew, he received larger pay

cheques and was making a modest name for himself at monthly boxing tournaments. Seeking boxers for the preliminary bouts at his regular tournaments at Hoxton Baths in the working-class borough in London's East End, promoter Jack Solomon engaged Alby Mullan, who left Ireland for the first time and, having nowhere to leave his seven-year-old son, brought Arthur along with him. At the hostel where he was put up, Mullan befriended the manager, a bossy, blousy and substantial but not entirely unattractive lady named Beverley O'Sullivan, who accepted a ticket for the boxing tournament and agreed to look after Arthur on her ample lap. Attracted by his looks and the prestige he was gathering locally from successive victories and by the increasing purses, Beverley became Mullan's manager and lover and took him and little Arthur to live with her in her modest single-storey attached house in nearby Hackney.

After a convincing win in his first bout under Jack Solomon, Mullan became a fixture at the regular Hoxton Baths boxing tournaments. However, when he encountered a truly talented and experienced boxer for the first time, a Jamaican, Mullan ignominiously hit the canvas with a thud in round one, staggered to his feet just in time to beat the count and, with blood pouring from a substantial cut over his left eye, was saved by the bell. While his seconds worked furiously to stem the flow of blood, Beverley, from a ringside seat, with Arthur on her lap, screamed at the distraught boxer:

"Dickhead, what's the matter with you! Hit the black bastard – show some spunk!"

Above the roar of the crowd, Mullan heard her unmistakably raucous voice and through puffed lips managed to shout back, "Go fuck yourself, woman!" After taking further punishment, and with blood obscuring his vision, Mullan's legs started to buckle and this time he was saved by a benevolent referee who stopped the fight 1 minute 40 seconds into the second round. Back home, with the realisation that her charge's career in the ring had, at the very least, suffered a substantial setback, and having quenched their thirsts with considerable quantities of cheap liquor, Beverley vent her feelings:

“Arsehole! Call yourself a fighter? You showed no defence – you just back-pedalled the whole time. The only reason the black guy didn’t hit you more often is that he couldn’t catch up with you.”

“A shroud on you, woman, talking to me like that. I did me best ...”

“Well, it wasn’t feckin’ good enough, was it now? You’re a shite boxer and I shoulda known it. Fool I was to take you in here. Anyway, you’re no use to me now and in the mornin’ I want you and that miserable kid to feck off out of here.”

“Fat pig you are ... as the Irish say, may you fall without rising.”

In retaliation, Beverley swung a solid punch that landed solidly on Mullan’s swollen left eye resulting in blood spurting in all directions. He cried out in pain and lunged for her, intent on throttling the woman, which brought the yelling Arthur onto the scene as screams and cries and bar-room epithets filled the room. With noise from the heated commotion penetrating the thin walls, it was not long before police officers arrived in answer to calls from anxious neighbours. While used to intervening in cases of drunken domestic violence, the officers were more concerned with the safety of the child and, with the drunken acquiescence of his father, a young uncared-for and frightened Arthur was removed from a dreadful scene. The next morning Alby Mullan, accompanied by a string of colourful abuse, turned his back on Beverley and her home, called at the promoter’s office to collect his less-than-substantial loser’s purse and, having decided to retire from the ring, literally walked off into the maelstrom that is London intent on finding a job. Unable to locate his father, the social services officers in the police welfare department, with the help of the Catholic diocese, placed Arthur in St Joseph’s School for Boys in Kilburn, a boarding institution for ‘lost’ and orphaned children where he was to spend his formative years. St Joseph’s fell far short of the realm of ecclesiastically funded ‘public schools’ that, paradoxically, cater for the more affluent and influential members of society. The school survived being classified for blue-collar working-class

Catholics but instead was positioned intentionally on the lowest denomination of middle class.

Deprived of maternal care, Arthur's upbringing had been fundamental and unloving, and he had accepted this as the norm when he was placed often in the care of less-than-attentive family and strangers while his father had eked out a living and latterly pursued his pugilistic ambitions. Deprived of any continuous schooling, it was difficult to assess at the age of nine his level of intelligence. Socially he was inept and certainly did not present as a happy or communicative child and seemed to have rationalised and accepted in his underdeveloped mind that the cards he had been dealt were his lot in life.

At St Joseph's, under matronly care in the boarding establishment and by teachers in the classroom, it was soon recognised that as Arthur had not previously had any friends he was unable to engage in any social interaction and was experiencing difficulty in dealing with his peers. His responses to those in authority were dull, with no eye contact, his movements were clumsy and he was emotionally bland. The priests discussed his symptoms and thought it necessary to call in the school psychologist for an evaluation. After careful examination, Dr Mary Clark concluded that while Arthur certainly had indications of autism, possibly Asperger's Syndrome, his pervasive development disorder was more likely due to deprivation and lack of any loving attention. She also believed that he had a latent level of intelligence, which with careful nurturing would most likely become fully developed. And indeed Dr Clark's assessment proved to be accurate, for after several months the young Arthur began to show extraordinary progress in the classroom, even though his obsessive attention to detail remained an issue. Indifferent towards his classmates, Arthur never found or even sought a kindred spirit among any of the other scholars. Instead he responded to the warm attention he received from Father Brian O'Flanagan, the priest whose functions included theology, the choir and an emerging drama section. Father O'Flanagan's boyish good looks belied his some 40 years. His sweep of auburn hair, fresh-looking pink cheeks

and flowing full-length cassock inevitably aroused memories of Spencer Tracy in *Boys Town*.

By the time Arthur Mullan had reached 12 years of age he had matured considerably and a confident young man was beginning to emerge. In the classroom his interest in English and its literature was paramount; he was a vociferous reader and Charles Dickens and Mark Twain were among the authors whose works he devoured. Under special tutelage from Father Brian, his singing voice had developed to the extent that he had become the lead boy soprano – the ‘Treble’, as this special breed is known – in the St Joseph’s Choir. Arthur’s emotional rendition of Mendelssohn’s *Hear My Prayer* with its famous passage *O for the Wings of a Dove* brought tears to the eyes of the packed church and a music critic in the local *Kilburn Times* referred to his performance in glowing terms going on to say. “... This boy’s voice is superbly in the high-C range. Inevitably, very soon his voice will drop and one can only speculate as to whether a uniquely rich tone lies beneath his soprano and beyond the liturgical scene. In any event, watch out in future for the name Arthur Mullan.”

An early puberty, however, put paid to the soprano and a mellifluous lower-ranged speaking voice emerged. At 15, Arthur had instinctively developed a mature vocal resonance and he was enunciating his words and projecting his voice in a way that commanded attention. His classroom renditions of soliloquies from the prescribed Shakespeare plays impressed even those fellow scholars who had taken a dislike to him because of his aloofness and his non-participation in games or any other form of extracurricular activity. Once a month Father Brian accompanied his drama group to a play in the West End. The script would have been studied beforehand and after the performance the group staged readings at which Arthur excelled, invariably playing the leading male or female role. When Arthur announced to his teachers that he was going to be a professional actor, in order to prepare him for drama school, Father Brian took him more under his wing and, closeted together after classes in his private studio, they delved into the minutiae of acting and touched upon the theories and systems of Meyerhold and Stanislavsky. Inevitably rumour abounded at the

excessive time Arthur spent privately with his mentor in his studio and the budding actor was taunted mercilessly with insults from his fellow students. ‘Poofter’, ‘cocksucker’, ‘faggot’ and ‘fairy’ were some of the slurs hurled at him. “Has Brian got a big cock, pansy boy?” “Hey, brownie, what’s it like having an angel?” Arthur steeled himself not to respond to the taunts.

By the time he was 16, Arthur had rationalised that as he intended having a career in theatre, there seemed little reason for him to remain at school and the sooner he could enrol in an acting institution the better. Father Brian told him about a children’s play, *Where the Rainbow Ends*, which was presented at Christmas time each year at matinees at the Royal Festival Hall and was directed by the famous British *danseur noble*, Anton Dolin.¹ Brian explained that the fantasy told the story of a group of children who travelled on a magic carpet in search of their parents from whom they had been separated, and on their journey they were protected by a dashing and brave St George of England, clad in a suit of armour and played invariably by Anton Dolin himself. After each matinee, Brian had read, Dolin would rush to the theatre nearby where his company, London Festival Ballet, was staging *Giselle* and he was partnering the *ballerina assoluta*, Alicia Markova, in the title role. From the expression on his face, Father Brian could see that Arthur hadn’t the faintest idea either about ballet or Dolin’s credentials.

“Arthur, if you want to be a successful actor you must at least have some knowledge of ballet and absorb the splendid deportment, presence and athleticism of good male dancers. Anton Dolin is one of the finest dancers of our time and is already a legend, having been a principal dancer for Diaghilev, who was a great Russian impresario whose name you will hear often. Dolin is a great personality and has danced with most of the famous ballerinas of our time, but his present partnership with Alicia Markova is regarded by many as his greatest.”

Father Brian told Arthur that most of the children for the *Rainbow* production were from the Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts and indeed *Where the Rainbow Ends* was in a significant way

¹ See page 202

responsible for the establishment of that school. Italia Conti, herself a distinguished actress, had been asked to train the children for the first performance of *Rainbow* in 1911 and this led to her establishing her academy, which has become the oldest theatre school in the world. Arthur needed little persuasion that he should audition for some of the parts available and after being prepared by Brian he was thrilled to be selected for a minor role.

For day rehearsals and matinee performances, he commuted by train but when required in the evening he stayed overnight at a YMCA-recommended youth hostel in Bayswater. During rehearsals and during the first few performances, his ability and considerable stage presence caught the eye of Dolin and Arthur was progressively promoted until towards the end of the run he was elevated to play the leading boy, Crispian, and his weekly wages were significantly increased. When this happened, Arthur approached the stage manager and asked to be moved out of the communal dressing room and assigned accommodation on his own with his name on the door. Bill Giles, a veteran stage manager of long standing, told him to “piss off”: “Name on the door? I’ll give you a clip over the ear.” Perhaps not knowing about the incident, or if he did rather admiring Arthur’s youthful precociousness, when the run finished Anton Dolin gave Arthur a warm embrace and told him that he had great talent that should be developed. He also gave him his visiting card and suggested he make contact when he was ready to enter acting school.

Flushed with his successful first, tentative entry into professional theatre, Arthur wasted little time in confiding in Father Brian who agreed that the sooner the boy entered a good acting school the better. They agreed to meet that afternoon to discuss and plan his transition from a conservative Catholic school to the somewhat bohemian existence he would be leading in the world of theatre and how this could best be accomplished. That very afternoon Bishop McGovern, whose diocese included the region in which St Joseph’s was situated, paid one of his unannounced visits to the school. He preferred no fuss and liked to wander around on his own, talking to teachers and pupils he might encounter and even randomly going in to classes that might be in session. Something of

a free spirit, the bishop felt he gained a better impression of how the school was developing than he would from the detailed, rather boring reports he regularly received. On this occasion, following discussions with the headmaster and the matron, he looked for Father Brian in order to question him about his choice of the last play in the West End he had chosen for his drama students. It had been Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* and, because he had been told that it had an unmistakable lesbian theme, he questioned whether it was suitable for young Catholic scholars.

Reaching the room that had come to be known as Father Brian's studio, the Bishop found a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door. This, however, did not deter him and he pushed open the door to be confronted by a scene that was beyond his wildest contemplation. Sitting on a chair with his cassock pulled up to his waist and exposing himself was Father Brian – and kneeling in front of him was a lad performing fellatio on him. Bishop McGovern stood in the doorway stunned.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph! *Deus misereatur* ... What is happening, Father...? Have you no *shame*? May the Lord have mercy on you."

Father Brian adjusted his clerical robe and, sobbing, kneeled at the feet of the bishop while Arthur Mullan fled from the room and later from St Josephs, never to return.

CHAPTER THREE

Not particularly concerned at having been caught *in flagrante delicto* with the priest, and putting that episode – indeed that period of his life – behind him, it was a confident young lad of 17 who checked in to the youth hostel in Bayswater where he had previously stayed. Arthur Mullan had attained a maturity beyond his adolescent age. He was an inch or two short of six feet, had a shock of unruly auburn hair and a strong build, and had a distinctive and well-modulated speaking voice with a touch of the Irish blarney, all of which made him very attractive. Even with the shabby clothes that had been handed down to him at St Joseph's, or perhaps peculiarly because his clothes did not match his persona, people of both sex were attracted to him and found him to be an easy conversationalist.

Arthur did not seem to care that, to his knowledge, he did not have a relative in the world. He had no idea what had happened to his father, who had never made any attempt to find him and had no wish to try to establish contact with him. His last image of his father was of a drunken, beaten, bleeding pugilist and he did not think that that pitiful person could be of any help to him in furthering his ambition to be a famous actor. Indeed, should anyone ask Arthur about his parentage, he had decided that he would say he was an orphan. While his cultural experience was limited to having sung in the choir, seen about a dozen theatre productions, studied several Shakespeare plays in class, a season in *Where the Rainbow Ends* and private drama study with Father Brian (which certainly accelerated his experience in other directions as well), he had a clear understanding of the path he wished to follow.

The only person he knew who might assist him was Anton Dolin, but before contacting him he thought he would visit some of the drama schools that were known to him. Having worked in *Rainbow* with students from the Italia Conti he made this school in Archer Street, Soho, his first port of call. Not able to get passed reception, Arthur used his charm to elicit some basic information from which it was apparent that he needed to complete a detailed application form; he had to prepare a curriculum vitae and attach

suitable photographs; and he also had to get some tuition regarding audition pieces. While those requirements might – with some difficulty – be possible, the need to be accompanied by a parent if under 18 years of age, to have a school report and to have cash for the audition fee seemed to be beyond Arthur's resources. He thought that with some ingenuity he might be able to provide "the small bottle of water and light packed lunch" that was specified as a requirement for all those auditioning. Not disillusioned but a little wiser, Arthur, on leaving the premises, bumped into Amelia Chambers, a young student at Italia Conti who had been with him in *Rainbow*. They chatted while they walked together around Soho. He told her about his ambitions and she gave him some advice how to go about auditioning at the various drama schools.

"Arthur, I thought you were very good in *Rainbow*; and it was obvious that Dolin liked you, otherwise you wouldn't have got to play Crispian. You know you have a great voice."

"Thanks, Amelia. I just want to get into an acting school for a year or two – I don't think I will need more – and then I want to get into good plays in the West End."

"Well, slow down, boy – you need to get some rep experience, any sort of work, before you can think of the West End."

"I think rep is a waste of time. I believe in myself – that I have the talent – and I would like to go for the big time as soon as possible."

Amelia was taken aback by this display of braggadocio from someone so young and inexperienced. In her short learning career, she had certainly come across actors who had inflated ideas about themselves but never had she met anyone with such confidence. Of course, Arthur had a great voice and much charm, so who knows ... And, what is more, she liked him.

Passing a small deli, Arthur said that he was famished and invited Amelia to have a sandwich with him. From the very small amount of money he had he bought each of them a ham-and-cheese 'sub' and Amelia suggested they eat them in her bedsitter nearby in Berwick Street. It was the tiniest of flats and they talked a lot while eating their food perched on a sofa – the only piece of furniture to

sit on. Amelia told him that she was 19 and was in her second year at Italia Conti and had recently broken up with her boyfriend.

“Then you’re ready for a new boyfriend – and here I am!”

“Hey, wait a minute ... you’re pretty forward. In any case, you’re too young for me.”

“Come on, I’m 18,” he said, hastily adding on a year. “Don’t you want a boyfriend who is going to be a great actor?”

“You’re pretty full of yourself, you know. You need to put in a lot of study and work before you can even think of being just a reasonable actor.”

At that moment Arthur had stopped thinking about his acting career. He was thinking about advancing his career in another direction. So far his only sexual experiences – which he had undeniably enjoyed immensely – had been distinctly male, but he didn’t think that necessarily disqualified him when it came to women. Surely one couldn’t express a preference until one had exercised both options. Or so his mind was working ... What if both options were totally agreeable? Well, he would deal with that little problem if it arose. Meanwhile, in inviting him to her apartment surely Amelia was attracted to him and expected him to make advances. He found her attractive but, truth be told, his hormones were reacting favourably to anything that might be available within wide parameters, male or female. The only times he had witnessed a man and woman kissing was in the few movies and plays he had seen and, despite his confidence in other areas, he wasn’t quite sure how one initiated the action. However, he was not lacking in courage and, in a gauche movement, Arthur turned towards Amelia on the couch, wrapped his arms around her and fastened a clumsy long kiss on her lips. She was attracted by his looks – and that voice! – and wasn’t entirely taken aback by his advance and so she responded with enthusiasm.

“Wow, Arthur, you’re certainly a fast worker,” she whispered as she pulled her sweatshirt over her head, revealing exquisite pink breasts and aroused nipples. Arthur was transfixed and touched them apprehensively and gently. She then pulled down her jeans and guided his head towards her breasts, but he remained fully clothed, his head content where it was buried.

“Arthur, are you sure you’ve done this before?”

“Oh sure, many times ...”

“Well, you’d better take off at least some of your clothes.”

Arthur stood up and, while taking in her now naked body, nervously removed all his clothing and stood in front of her, embarrassed in his flaccid state. Amelia, used to her boyfriend’s readiness for action at almost all times, realised that Arthur’s outward confidence was a sham and that this was almost certainly a new experience for him. Tenderly she took him into her arms and, with some expertise, shortly had him ready for the act he so wanted to accomplish. Tutoring him with kindness to a consummation that was not the best experience she had had, she said: “Well, you’re a big boy now.”

Plaintively Arthur replied: “I usually do better than that ... Can we do it again?”

Amelia laughed. His confidence knew no bounds ... But she quickly dressed herself.

Arthur dressed slowly, embarrassed that his performance had exposed his inexperience and bewildered by this new experience. He felt that he had responded to the boys at St Joseph’s who called him a poofster. He was no poof! His sexual orientation remained a question mark but he did not see this as presenting a problem.

For weeks Arthur trudged around to all the acting schools he could find in London, but without credentials of any sort, no parentage, no money and no fixed address, doors were not opening easily for him. He had failed to be invited to even an audition at any one of the schools. In the evenings and whenever there were matinees, he usually managed to finagle his way past doormen to sit up in the gods to see dramas, comedies and musicals and, in an endeavour to make his knowledge and appreciation of the arts all-consuming, took himself to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where in acts of masterful deception he managed to get in to see *Madame Butterfly* and *Swan Lake*. He also kept in touch with Amelia and, as she remained without boyfriend, she allowed him to reprise his first experience with her acknowledging that he was learning fast! “Practise makes perfect, my boy – the motto is ‘Keep it up’.”

What Arthur didn't tell her was that he had also had a sexual encounter with a girl he had met in the upper circle at the ballet; nor that a middle aged man had made a pass at him in the Underground at Piccadilly Circus and that he had accompanied the man to his flat in Rupert Street, where he had been plied with liquor and had a sex experience lasting many hours which, apart from what he presumed was a dreadful hangover, made walking the next day decidedly uncomfortable.

In the meanwhile, however, something more positive had to happen with regard to his future because the money he had earned from *Rainbow* was fast running out. So, after careful consideration, Arthur decided to take the only option he saw open to him and telephoned Anton Dolin. The dancer said that of course he remembered him and invited him to visit him at his apartment late that afternoon. After some difficulty, Arthur found his way to Curzon Place, a small prestigious enclave off the top end of Curzon Street. Anton Dolin, Pat to his friends, was larger than life. His sinewy body, classic looks, well-contrived avant-garde dress sense and air of sophistication gave him an imposing presence. Very much the international man, he didn't suffer fools gladly and, with his urbanity and articulateness, held court with a voice that was usually staccato but could change, to suit the circumstances, into a mid-Atlantic drawl. Despite imbibing far more than one would expect of a successful dancer and in spite an ever-present Gauloises dangling from his lips – with the uncanny ability to converse with the cigarette stuck to his bottom lip – Dolin's daily *barre* gave him a superb degree of fitness. Wearing a maroon velvet smoking jacket, Anton Dolin answered the door to his penthouse apartment and embraced his young guest warmly. He then led the boy into his tastefully cluttered living room and introduced him to his friend David Davies who was languishing in a comfortable chair with a cocktail in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Having been asked what he would like to drink, Arthur said he would have whatever his host was drinking. Pouring him a stiff scotch, Dolin said:

“So tell me, dear boy, what have you been doing and how are you making out?

“Well, sir ...”

“Oh my god, please call me Pat.”

“Well, Pat, I have been trying to get into one of the acting schools but frankly they won’t even give me an audition. Problem is I don’t have parents, money or even a fixed place to stay. I have been living on the money I earned in *Rainbow*, but even that is just about finished.”

David Davies stirred in his chair and looked up.

“And what, Arthur, experience do you have as an actor?”

Arthur mentioned his stint in the choir, his tuition with Father Brian and drama group visits to the theatre. And of course his few weeks in *Rainbow* and, most recently, how from the gods he had seen most of the shows in the West End.

“Have you see *King’s Rhapsody*?”

“Oh yes, I saw it at a matinee – I loved it.”

Dolin, smiling, offered his opinion: “Bit of shit in my view – Arthur, how did you like my friend in it?”

“Mr Davies ... were you in it? What part?”

“Arthur, my boy, David Davies is Ivor Novello.”²

“Oh Jesus, forgive me ... I had no idea ...”

“Well, with all the make-up you wear on stage, David, how could the boy recognise you? Mind you, I see you’ve got a bit of Max Factor about you today.”

“Patricia, darling, you should talk ... I don’t think you ever remove your stage make-up.”

“David, my sweet, we oldies have to do whatever we can to preserve the bloom of youth.”

Getting over his embarrassment, Arthur looked carefully at their faces and concluded that they were indeed wearing enhancing make-up. Then, plucking up courage in this exalted company, he asked Dolin: “Why did you introduce Mr Novello as David Davies?”

“Because that’s his real name. David Ivor Davies. Most of his old friends still call him David. Arthur, most of us in the top end of the business have stage names.”

“Are you not Anton Dolin?”

² See page 204.

“Not at all. Young man, have I got a mouthful – Sydney Francis Patrick Chippendall Heley-Kay but to make it tolerable I was known as Pat Kay until Diaghilev changed it to Anton Dolin.”

“Is that Serge Diaghilev – the one I have read about? Did you know him?”

“Know him? I knew him all right ... I was his lover – or, I should add, one of his many lovers.”

Not used to lovers being spoken about so openly, Arthur blushed noticeably.

Ivor Novello downed the remains of his cocktail and began to stir in his comfortable armchair.

“Arthur, before Patricia gives a resumé of his illustrious and over-active sex life, I must go – as you will know, I have a performance tonight. But, my boy, adopting a suitable stage name is something you will have to consider – better to do it at an early stage in your career before critics start to recognise you. What is your surname?”

“Mullan ... I can’t exactly see that up in lights.”

Dolin agreed entirely. “Arthur, we’ll have to work on a good name for you,” he said and then asked Ivor Novello if he couldn’t squeeze the lad into a small part in his show so that Arthur could gain some experience and earn some money. “I don’t want to give him a more inflated opinion of himself than he has already, but he was very good in *Rainbow*. I began to notice him in the chorus and when there was an opening I eventually promoted him to a lead.”

“Pat, let me see what I can do. Arthur, dear boy, come to the stage door at the Palace at 6 o’clock tomorrow and ask for me. I will leave word ...”

And with that, the most successful composer of musicals of his generation and idol of the stage, with an elegant swirl of the scarf around his neck, made his dignified exit. All that was missing was the thunderous applause that usually accompanied his departure from the scene.

Replenishing Arthur’s glass, Dolin sat uncomfortably close to Arthur on the settee.

“You have been privileged to meet one of the greats in theatre. His really special talent lies in the field of composing,

where he has given us some of our most memorable music. His musicals are astounding and he always provides a glamorous role for himself that suits his hammy style. Not much acting ability required, but he knows how to hold an audience's attention like no one else in his field and audiences just love him. So unfortunate about his recent bad experience ...”

“What was that?”

“He was imprisoned for four weeks for the misuse of petrol coupons for his Rolls Royce. The judge who sentenced him was not sympathetic and obviously wasn't one of his fans.”

Arthur was starting to slur his words, but did manage to respond that the court should have had greater respect for a man of such talent.

“Oh, it doesn't work that way, laddie ... But when Novello made his first entrance on stage in *King's Rhapsody* after his release, the entire audience rose to their feet and gave him an ovation that lasted five minutes!”

“I cannot believe that I have met Ivor Novello and that I am going to see him backstage tomorrow... Father Brian would wet himself if he knew this! What were some of the Novello hits?”

“Not many people remember that his first big hit – when he was just 21 – was *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, which was immensely popular during the First World War; during the Second World War his romantic musical *Perchance to Dream* featured the popular song *We'll Gather Lilacs*, which once again appealed to wartime sensibilities and expressed the feelings of families sundered by the war.”

Dolin rose and in a pose as if facing a crowded audience, with his head slightly tilted and his hands clasped in front of him, sang in a most appealing voice two verses from *We'll Gather Lilacs*.

Arthur was aghast. “That was just beautiful, Pat.”

Noticing that his young guest was now becoming more than a little unstable on his feet, Dolin poured him only a light one this time and suggested that they eat. Sharing with his guest his smoked salmon on brown bread and caviar on toast, prepared earlier by the housekeeper – fare that Arthur had never encountered before – the two sat at a table in the stylish kitchen.

It wasn't long, however, before the young man's head began to nod, and his eyelids flutter. The long day, combined with more alcohol than he was accustomed to, had clearly taken its toll.

"Arthur, you're in no condition to go home. You'll spend the night here in the guest room and be gone early in the morning. I have to be at rehearsal by 10pm."

Gripping the boy firmly by the arm, Dolin led a very unsteady Arthur to the guest room and showed him the en suite bathroom.

"You'll find everything you want here and there are T-shirts in this drawer. Have a shower and a good night's rest." With that he gave him a kiss on the cheek and added, "Don't lock the bedroom door – I just might pop in later and, erm, say goodnight to you ..."

CHAPTER FOUR

Anxious not to be late, Arthur arrived at the stage door of the Palace Theatre at 5.30pm to find a crowd of some 25 young people barring his way backstage. Shoving and pushing and clutching autograph books and photos of their idol, they were waiting for Ivor Novello to arrive in his chauffeur-driven Rolls, the one that had landed him in prison because its excessive petrol consumption had necessitated the use of illegal coupons. Attempting to weave a way through the excited fans, Arthur was met with shouts of “Get to the back, you fucking prick” and “Hey, smart-arse, where d’you think you’re going?” Explaining that he had an appointment to see the maestro, one bearded young man with a cockney accent and wearing a black woollen scarf and a matching cap called out, “You look like a Doris Day: bet he likes your Khyber Pass!” Roars of laughter followed, with taunting remarks such as “Wacheget? A Lady Godiva for a quickie ’fore the show?” and “Nah, he’s a looker, bet he gets a cockle”. Arthur merely showed them an obscene finger and reached the stage door, his next obstacle being old Fred who had guarded the players’ entrance to the Palace for 40 years, since he inherited the job from his father. “And where d’you think you’re goin’, young man?” Explaining that he had an appointment to see Mr Novello, Fred looked at the boy suspiciously and, after a few more questions, told him to talk to the stage manager, Grant Granger. Granger was in the process of admonishing a young stagehand for neglecting to carry out to his satisfaction one of his assigned duties. Known to all in the industry as GG, Granger had a fearsome reputation as a meticulous master of his craft. He had a glass eye as a result of a fencing accident that had cut short his ambition to be an actor. It was said that when one looked at him, it was only the glass eye that showed a glimpse of human kindness. Those who worked with GG and knew him well claimed that beneath the veneer there was indeed a beating heart and a compassion that surfaced from time to time. But not often ... Arthur, despite his youth, was not easily intimidated and with firm voice and standing tall, advised GG of his appointment. Dismissively, GG told him to wait at the side of the

stage where several young dancers were stretching and that he would talk to Mr Novello when he arrived.

“There’s no need for you to talk to him – I have an appointment.”

“Don’t you fuckin’ tell me what to do, you little fart ... or I’ll kick your poncy soul right out of here.”

Reassessing his bravura, Arthur thought it best to watch the dancers and eventually he managed to engage them in conversation. Most of them had been in the *King’s Rhapsody* chorus for the better part of a year, playing a variety of roles from village peasants to serenaders, from palace guards to court gentlemen. They all doubled as singers and dancers and were part of the mid-European romantic background for Novello’s lavish décor, melodious songs and colourful ballets. Occasionally one of them would be promoted to a minor speaking role, but the whole show revolved around the singing of the stars Vanessa Lee, Olive Gilbert and the sisters Zena and Phyllis Dare and, of course, Ivor Novello who, as the king of Murania, never sang a note but looked royal and handsome in various costumes, each more exquisite than the next. Then, as the young dancers regaled Arthur with their stories, GG appeared and told Arthur that Mr Novello had said he could audition and that he should return at 4 pm the following day.

“But I want to see Mr Novello – he told me to see him.”

“Now look here, you snot-nosed little shit, just fuck off quietly or I’ll help you on your way.”

Arthur backed down. It would not do to annoy GG – and it would certainly not do any potential acting career any good. But, having heard what was going on, several of the young cast advised him to prepare suitable audition pieces and to include at least one of the songs from *King’s Rhapsody*.

The next morning Arthur applied himself to preparing for his audition. For a spoken piece he had decided to perform Hamlet’s famous speech to the players. Hamlet had been a prescribed work at St Joseph’s and not only was he well acquainted with the play but

Father Brian in their studious private sessions had played for him repeatedly Laurence Olivier's recording of the speech, which he was told was regarded by many as the definitive rendering of the monologue. As he rehearsed the piece, Arthur could hear not only Olivier's voice ringing in his ears but also the pauses, the inflections and the ebb and flow of the words. After memorising and reciting the speech many times, he believed confidently that this audition piece, at least, would prove irresistible to the Novello company. While Arthur's prepubescent treble voice, with its superb high C, had long deserted him, there remained a uniquely rich countertenor voice that was not dissimilar to a female contralto and enabled his tessitura to be comfortably above that of a tenor. Taking the advice he had received, he decided to sing *Some Day My Heart Will Awake*, the only song he knew from *King's Rhapsody*, but being unsure of the lyrics realised that he would have to obtain the sheet music. For his limited dancing expertise he hoped that he could remember a routine he had performed in *Where the Rainbow Ends* and that it would suffice. Amelia could surely help him with the dance. After calling at Chappell in Bond Street, where a kindly assistant showed him the *King's Rhapsody* libretto and allowed him to scribble down the lyrics he required, he met with Amelia at her apartment. She was impressed with his three audition pieces and had no doubt he would do really well and, having chosen to settle his nerves in a generously intimate way, young Arthur left for the Palace Theatre with a smile on his face.

Fred greeted him warmly at the stage door and sent him in the direction of GG, who growled that he should wait on stage with others who were to audition. There was an immediate camaraderie between the young actors who happily exchanged their potted life stories – from which it was apparent that only Arthur had not attended any acting school or been extensively rehearsed for this audition. At 4 pm precisely Ivor Novello, wearing a white turtleneck under a deep blue velvet suit, emerged into the auditorium accompanied by his company manager and Olive Gilbert, his long-time leading lady and friend, and settled down in the centre of the third row. GG arbitrarily advised the order of the auditions and Arthur was told that he was last. In the wings the

aspirants were all showing signs of nervousness – all except Arthur, who declared that he felt only confidence, wondering momentarily whether his parting gift from Amelia had put him in this stress-free state of mind and body. If so, it would be a good idea to remember the prescription for the future ...

Watching from the wings, Arthur found the performances of the candidates to be, in his opinion, competent but less than inspiring and the silence from the auditorium was broken only with the call of “Next!” He did not know whether the lack of any comment was ominous or an indication of approval. GG’s eventual nod – “Get your arse out there” – was Arthur’s signal to take to the stage.

From the darkened auditorium a kindly voice that he recognised as Ivor Novello said: “And what are you going to do for us today?”

“I am going to do Hamlet’s speech to the players; then a short dance routine from *Where the Rainbow Ends* – I should add that dancing is not my forte; I think my talent lies in the spoken word. And finally I intend singing your delightful song *Some Day My Heart Will Awake* and if I could be accompanied on the piano that would be appreciated.”

“My, that is an ambitious selection you have for us. Well, don’t be nervous – you can start when you are ready.”

“Mr Novello, I am not at all nervous ... I will start now.”

In a loud and clear voice, Arthur began: “*Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.*”

Throughout the monologue silence reigned in the house – there were no calls of “Next!” – and after it ended with the lines “*Go make you ready*” there was generous applause from the three-person audience, applause that was broken only by the voice of Novello.

“Dear boy, you have a great mellifluous and distinctive voice and are clearly most talented. All the more reason that is not necessary for you to do an imitation of Laurence Olivier.³ It is

³ See page 208.

perfectly acceptable to steal from other actors – we all do it – it is part of the acting process ... we learn from each other. But it is important to remember that *you* are the words that you speak. It can't be any other way otherwise they lose their authenticity. You have this great instrument – a voice of your own. You have a head, a chest, a stomach, arms, legs, feet, a bum ... Use them all. Let *your* voice and *your* intelligence resonate throughout your being. Let your *own* discretion be your tutor – not Larry's."

"Thank you, sir, I understand entirely."

GG, having not previously heard Mr Novello say much more than "Next!" at auditions, was clearly impressed with the unexpected critique and – this time addressing Arthur in a much softer tone than previously – suggested that he perform his next piece. After he had fumbled his way through half the intended routine, Mr Novello's call of "Next!" mercifully ended the dance.

"I think, young man, you said that dance was not your forte. I concur ... Perhaps some lessons might advance your skills somewhat. You are going to sing for us?"

A pianist played the introduction and a perfectly poised and assured Arthur sang:

*Someday my heart will awake
Someday the morning will break
Music will open my eyes
Showing the skies golden with rapture*

*May be this gentle refrain
Someday will echo again
Bringing my lover's caress
Making my heart say "Yes"*

Again there was applause from the auditioning party, with Novello adding:

"Dear boy, you have a beautiful voice and here, unlike the Shakespeare, you were clearly not entirely familiar with the song and you gave it your own original rendition, which was for us fascinating. Come and join us down here."

Helped by a now felicitous GG, Arthur made his way from stage to auditorium and kneeled on a front-row seat facing Ivor Novello and his colleagues. All three shook Arthur's hand enthusiastically.

"Arthur, my boy, you have great talent and we are most impressed with you. Tell us about your background."

Arthur, claiming to be an orphan, gave a quick resume of his life at St Joseph's and how with the help of Father Brian O'Flanagan he had performed in the school choir and received an excellent review in the local newspaper; how he had been schooled in drama by Father Brian; how he had performed in Anton Dolin's Christmas musical, rising to play a lead; and how he had been trying unsuccessfully to get into drama school.

"Dear boy, are you still intent on going to a dramatic academy?"

"Not if I can get a job right away in theatre and learn the business as I go along. I want to be an actor – a great actor – and would like to get as much experience as possible in the shortest possible time."

"Wouldn't we all ... Arthur, I admire your ambition and confidence. But I must warn you, as talented as you are, fame does not come easily."

"Sir, I know that; but I am prepared to work really hard."

"All right, dear boy, you will join my company. You do understand that you will start right at the bottom as an extra, doubling many parts? But I promise you that as speaking parts become available you will be promoted – in a big company like this these opportunities occur regularly. This lady is Gloria Biggs, the company secretary: go with her and she will complete the formalities. You will have to join British Equity and I think Dolin and I suggested that you choose a more theatrical name for yourself. Gloria will tell you how to go about it. From tomorrow you will be a member of the *King's Rhapsody* company and you will have to attend dancing and singing classes and understudy rehearsals. GG will give you a schedule ... and, by the way, his bark is far worse than his bite!"

Listening attentively, GG responded: "I don't know about that ..." and leading Arthur playfully by the ear took him backstage to an administrative office.

After consulting with Gloria, Arthur Mullan signed an application to change his name by deed poll to Patrick Novello Brian Donovan and decided to be rash and spend his last available cash on taking Amelia to dinner at Lyons Corner House, in Coventry Street near Leicester Square.

The next day Patrick Donovan, with a new spring in his step, and an even more confident outlook on life, if such a thing were possible, presented himself at the Palace Theatre in the early afternoon to receive a friendly greeting at the stage door from Fred and a very warm welcome from his new best friend, GG.

"Great to have you in the company, kid. Sorry if I was a bit shitty with you at first, but I treat all the newcomers the same way until I find out if they're really any good. And, by gum, laddie, you're a talented one to be sure – your name will be up in lights one day."

That afternoon Patrick joined the dance class but, while he enjoyed the lesson and the routines, he certainly didn't distinguish himself. The singing rehearsal was something else, however; Patrick's voice soared melodiously above the other newcomers and the coach was lavish in her praise. At the rehearsal he had no difficulty in learning the entrances and exits of the numerous walk-on parts assigned to him and, fitted out in splendid costumes, he handled his first performance that evening with consummate ease.

With his first week's salary safely in his back pocket, Patrick's lifestyle began to change. Most of the young members of the cast lived in digs at places such as Brixton, Hoxton, Shepherd's Bush or Earl's Court, but Patrick saw himself as a cut above his colleagues and required accommodation in a more salubrious locality which would be in keeping with the career he visualised. After diligent search, he discovered a very small, furnished bedsitter, with a shower and toilet fitted into what was no more than a cupboard,

above the popular Tiddydolls restaurant. Minute the apartment might have been, but it was tucked away in the old very charming square, Shepherd's Market, which was in the heart of fashionable Mayfair. The village-like atmosphere, with an assortment of restaurants, pubs and food stores, as well as much-publicised presence of many attractive French prostitutes, gave the area an aura of class – if one could even call it that – that appealed to the aspiring actor. Patrick's next call was to outfit himself with clothes to replace his threadbare wardrobe of St Joseph's hand-me-downs. While his peers shopped for inexpensive 'with-it' clothing in Carnaby Street, he believed that classier, quality outfitting better suited his personal style. Every week he would invest a portion of his salary in additional clothing and after a while he cut a dapper figure with signature scarves and matching fedoras, complementing stylish turtleneck pullovers and sports coats and slacks. For inclement weather a Burberry trench coat with leather trim hung dashingly (never worn!) from his shoulders, making his appearance very *distangue*. At least once a month a representative of the theatrical cosmetic firm Leichner used to call back stage before performances to replenish greasepaint requirements and on occasion he would give demonstrations featuring the latest foundation colours, liners and mascaras. Patrick took particular interest in the products and applied himself assiduously to learning advanced skills of theatre make-up. Responding to jibes from his peers, he stated that no matter how good-looking one was, no one was perfect and a little help was never out of place. It was not long before subtle signs of enhancing make-up became a feature of his daily life off stage as well as on.

Patrick's progress in *The King's Rhapsody* was spectacular. Noticed from day one by the entire cast for his confident and appealing stage presence, management soon elevated him to speaking roles, including the small part of Jules, valet to the king of Murania, played by Ivor Novello himself. What better way for him to show his ability than to have a scene with the great man himself. Novello

recognised his exceptional talent and encouraged him to read a great deal and on days off to see as much theatre as possible in the West End. In a quiet moment backstage, he called Patrick aside:

“Dear boy, I am going to suggest that you leave this company in about six months and move on to gain more experience in straight theatre. You have far too much talent to live in my shadow. It will not have escaped your notice that in this show, as indeed in all my previous shows, the women are the leads and sing all the better songs. The only male lead is the role I create for myself. I foresee a great future for you as an actor and will be happy to guide you when the time comes. In the meantime, my love, use your time here to become absorbed in the profession.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Patrick did indeed use his time in the company to his advantage – to the extent that he befriended two cast members: a young woman and a man in his thirties and commenced passionate affairs with both. Alma, an attractive member of the chorus who played multiple characters, made her advances by whispering sweet nothings in his ear each time they met backstage and even on stage in crowd scenes when the occasion presented itself. She told him that she fantasised being intimate with him and speculated what a great lover he must be. After a while Patrick thought that it was time to remedy her speculation and her fantasies became repeated realities at his place and at hers. The only problem was that Alma was desperately in love with him, while for him the affair was an enjoyable but trivial episode. Pierre, on the other hand, chose a different approach. He sent Patrick impassioned *billet doux* professing his undying love and contended that the feelings simply had to be mutual and pleaded for an early consummation of their passion. When the two of them met in the theatre, as they did regularly, Pierre never said a word to Patrick but gave him knowing smiles that could not have failed to be noticed by others.

After a steady flow of love letters that became increasingly graphic as to what Pierre contemplated, Patrick rationalised that he was being unfair to the dear man and agreed to have dinner with him at his apartment after the show. Speaking for the first time, Pierre related that he had been born in Paris; that his gay father had been a well-known dancer in *Le Ballet de l'Opera de Paris* and that he had, uncharacteristically, had a one-night fling with a glamorous dancer from the Crazy Horse Saloon who bore his child. While he was still an infant his mother transferred her talents to London where she became a member of the Tiller Girls, John Tiller's famous dance troupe then resident at the London Palladium. After this verbal hors d'oeuvre, Pierre produced a lovingly prepared Beef Bourguignon accompanied by a Chateau Malbat, which he explained was not the worst Bordeaux but not the best but he thought entirely admirable for a dancer on a budget. Dessert was a

very intimate affair during which Pierre's frustrations were given full vent to the obvious relish of his appreciative guest who entered into the eroticism with enthusiasm. In the early hours, a weary Patrick mumbled:

"That was great, Pierre ... We must do this more often ... Once is not enough."

"Oui oui mon cher. Nous devons faire l'amour souvent."

It was not long before Patrick's affairs became common knowledge in the company and while some were impressed with the duality of his sexuality and his voracious appetite, the vast majority of the cast were firmly on the side of Alma and felt that she was being treated disgracefully. Advised by her friends to break off the relationship, she confessed that she was desperately in love with the boy and believed that with patience she could wean him from his homosexual inclinations. When Alma began to show signs of deep depression, feelings began to run high back stage and an aggressive group of players confronted Patrick and advised him not to be frivolous with Alma's affections – and warned him to either resolve his dual sexuality one way or the other or suffer the consequences. Patrick was impervious to the criticism and abuse hurled at him.

But his continuing relationships with both Pierre and Alma cast a gloom over a *King's Rhapsody* cast that had been an exceedingly happy one before the newcomer's sexual inclinations had intervened. Stage manager GG thought the matter sufficiently serious to have a discussion about it with Ivor Novello. As a result, Novello summoned Patrick to his home, a flat above the Strand Theatre in Aldwych reached by a minute rickety lift. Receiving Patrick in a cashmere dressing gown and comfortable black slippers with the initials 'I N' embroidered in gold, the astonishingly handsome actor looked every bit the matinee idol. Noel Coward had recently been reported in a press interview as saying: "There are two perfect things in this world – my mind and Ivor's profile!"

Greeting the young man warmly, Novello wasted no time: "Dear Patrick, I greatly admire your talent and like your very

forthright personality, but I cannot allow you to disrupt the spirit of my company. I have always prided myself on having a happy group of players and will not tolerate anyone who causes unhappiness in the cast. But for my respect for you I would have resolved the matter by summarily dismissing you.”

“Sir, I am so grateful for the opportunity that you have given me and I would not wish to do anything to upset you. However, if you’re referring to my sex life, I would have thought that this was a private matter that should be of no concern to anyone else.”

“If you are having sexual liaisons with members of my company, indeed with both man and woman, it is very much my concern; particularly as your affair with the woman, at least, seems to be causing her serious distress. In a way all the members of the company are my children and I will not see any of them unnecessarily harmed.”

“I have no wish to harm either person with whom I’m involved. Do you require me to have a preference for one sex over the other?”

“I cannot advise you about your sexual orientation. Most people identify as either homosexual or heterosexual, but I must say that I have known or at least heard about people who claim to be bisexual. Josephine Baker, Tallulah Bankhead, Sarah Bernhardt and Somerset Maugham are some names in our profession who spring readily to mind.”

“Well then, I seem to be in good company. I am attracted to both sexes: I am not being deviant – that is just the way it is. If that makes me bisexual then so be it. Surely I don’t have to make a choice.”

“No, you don’t but the morality of the situation is important. It is well known that I am unashamedly homosexual as indeed are many of my famous friends: Noel Coward, Anton Dolin, Terence Rattigan and many, many others. But we live in an intolerant society where the practice of our sexuality is still a criminal offence and we have to be careful and not flaunt ourselves. You probably know that the actor Bobbie Andrews is my life partner and even though we don’t live together permanently, we remain faithful to each other. No one is hurt or compromised by our relationship.

Dear boy, sweet Alma seems to be devastated by your being unfaithful to her and her suffering is compounded by what she sees as the bizarre fact that you are practising homosexuality at the same time. Surely you are sensitive enough to see this?"

"I have no wish to hurt Alma. She propositioned me and I responded as I believe most young men would. I like her but I am far too young and it is far too early in my career to contemplate a serious relationship."

"Then you should break with her in as gentlemanly a way as possible. And if you desire sex with a woman, or a man, it should be outside the company. It seems to me that you and Alma at this stage of your young lives have competing emotional systems that have led to confusion. You obviously have a very strong and intense sexual desire that needs satisfying but you must not let this cloud your moral judgment. Alma, on the other hand, while she may enjoy sex with you, has an emotional system that entails love and that is a far more complex problem for her to handle. So be careful, dear boy, and don't fool around with her emotions. To my cost, earlier in my life, I had a lot of experience in matters of the heart. One day I hope you will experience the wonderful emotional state that at my age satisfies me, and that involves attachment. It provides a feeling of security, stability and comfort that comes only with maturity. To combine the three emotional systems into one – sexual desire, love and attachment – makes for a very satisfying relationship. But now I am beginning to sound like a family psychologist ..."

"No, sir, I appreciate your advice ... I really do not have anyone to talk to about matters like this. I see now that I shouldn't have gotten myself into such a situation and I apologise for the upset I have caused you and members of the company. I will try to tactfully end both relationships – it is a lesson to me for the future to seek my pleasures away from the people I work with."

"Good luck, my dear; you know that I have great confidence in you and expect you to realise your ambition by becoming a great actor."

Patrick decided to end his affairs in different ways. As Pierre had initiated the relationship by means of letters, he decided to respond similarly and wrote him a letter that was reasonably affectionate but which made it clear that while they could remain friends their sexual dalliance was over. Alma was handled with much more sensitivity. At an emotional confrontation at her flat he drew on all his charm and skills to convince her that his sexual orientation remained a question mark, that he was not ready for a serious relationship and that it was not in her best interests for their situation to be perpetuated. After much sobbing, she accepted the fact that their affair was over, and Patrick was proud of himself that he even resisted her attempt to make love with him one last time before he departed. He thought Ivor Novello would have commended that act of sacrifice ...

Backstage gossip that following Novello's intervention Patrick had ended both of his relationships was well received in the company and hostility towards him seemed to subside.

From time to time directors from repertory theatres made approaches to actors that they had seen on stage and thought might be suitable for their companies. Patrick had begun to receive enthusiastic and relatively attractive offers from scouts who recognised his ability and potential. At the time even quite small towns would support a repertory company that would present a different play every week; either a revival, even Shakespeare, or a new play once the rights had been released after a successful West End or Broadway run. The company would consist of a 'leading man' and a 'leading lady', a male and female character actor and perhaps an *ingénue* for young romantic parts (who doubled as an assistant stage manager) and guest stars, usually 'has-beens' who would boost box office sales. Newcomers to the profession would often start their careers in weekly rep performing a play a week while rehearsing each day for the following week's play and this was both an exhausting exercise both mentally and physically. Nevertheless many actors graduated from this essentially British form of regional theatres and went on to attain universal recognition.

Patrick, however, did not believe that a play a week suited his ambitions. Having studied, in a perfunctory way Stanislavsky's method of acting he wished to have more time to research and develop the character he was portraying and this conflicted with weekly rep's policy of getting the play on stage within six days of rehearsal. However, one company did indeed interest Patrick and that was the Oxford Playhouse, where its exuberant director Frank Shelley had established an excellent reputation for quality theatre and was now presenting plays on a fortnightly cycle.⁴ Shelley, in turn, was impressed with Patrick's stage presence and voice and discussed his great potential with Ivor Novello, who recommended to his young actor that when the time was ripe he should consider the Oxford Playhouse as a suitable theatre for him to gain much experience.

And so it was that one morning, after a night of boozing in any number of pubs surrounding Shepherd's Market – which was becoming an all-too-frequent practice for him – Patrick was awakened at 10.30 by banging on the door of his flat. Staggering sleepily to open the door a crack, one of the waiters from the Tiddydolls restaurant thrust a copy of the *Daily News* at him saying, "I think you'll want to see this." Thanking him, Patrick drew the curtain, sat back on the bed and saw on the bold front-page headline: 'NOVELLO DEAD'. A coldness descended over the half-lit room, and a wave of nausea washed over him. Then, overcome with emotion, he broke into sobs. Four hours after the performance of the previous night, Ivor Novello had suffered a fatal heart attack in his flat above the Strand Theatre. His friend Bobbie Andrews was at his side when he died. Inside the paper an obituary described the multi-talented Welsh actor, composer and manager as the most popular and gifted British entertainer of his time. "He has left a prodigious legacy of music, plays and films ... Among his memorable songs were his big hit from the First World War, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, *We'll Gather Lilacs* during the Second World War, and *Rose of England* and *My Dearest Dear*. His musicals, *Glamorous Nights*, *The Dancing Years*, *Perchance to*

⁴ See page 206.

Dream, Gay's the Word and *King's Rhapsody* have dominated the golden era of the British musical stage during a career that has spanned some 40 years." Ivor Novello was 58 and was to be cremated at the Golders Green Crematorium. A separate report announced that as a tribute to his remarkable career, the Association of Theatre Managements had ordered the lights on the canopies of West End theatres to be dimmed for two minutes at precisely 7 pm that night. Further, following Novello's known wishes, *King's Rhapsody* would play that night and that Ivor Novello's role as the king of Murania would be played by Jack Buchanan.

Devastated by the news of his mentor's passing, Patrick sought solace in the nearest, and he thought appropriately named pub, The King's Arms, and began a drinking session that was to go on interminably. As he was a frequent visitor, the barman and many of the locals knew the lad from *King's Rhapsody* and they consoled with him and bought him rounds of drinks. "A great man ... He was like a father to me ... He had such confidence in me ... What a tragedy ... only 58." As the day passed, more responsible patrons realised that Patrick needed sobering up if he was to make the curtain that night but he refused the coffee that was offered to him. Instead he continued drinking and late in the day when the barman would no longer serve him and it became apparent that he was in no condition to appear on stage, kindly souls helped the almost paralytic figure across the road to his flat, left him on his bed and made him as comfortable as possible. The next day, nursing a mighty hangover, he chose the Shepherd's Tavern to drown his sorrows, a pub where he was well known to the publican and where a gentle soul and avid theatregoer finally persuaded Patrick mid-afternoon that he should sober up and make his way to the Palace Theatre. Several cups of coffee and a cold shower later, a still-worse-for-wear young actor arrived at the stage door to be told by Fred that he had been instructed not to allow him in. After Patrick remonstrated with him, Fred made a call on the intercom and a fiery GG presented himself.

"Where the fuck were you last night?"

"I'm sorry, but I was inconsolable ... What a tragedy ..."

“Inconsolable, were you? How the fuck d’you think the rest of us felt – but the show went on!”

“Forgive me ... I’ll never do that again.”

“No, you won’t, certainly not here anyway – you’re fired. In fact you fired yourself: if you ever read your Equity contract you’ll have seen that non-appearance automatically terminates your services.”

“Please, I loved Ivor ...”

“You’ve loved too many people around here ... Now just fuck off, pansy boy.”

For several weeks, Patrick Novello Brian Donovan was distraught and, between regular visits to a wide range of public houses, managed to give vent to his desires by picking up a host of acquiescing males. In addition he also had no difficulty in persuading a young lass he met at Ye Grapes, another cosy pub in the heart of Shepherd’s Market, to accompany him to his flat across the road. While he quite enjoyed the encounter – and she certainly did with lusty enthusiasm that reverberated around the old building – Patrick rationalised that by reason of his conquests in the past 12 days being 10 to one in favour of male, he was definitely homosexual; and that if he had sex with the occasional female who attracted him, that was a titillating bonus that didn’t qualify him to be classified as a full-blown bisexual.

Then, having in his own eyes satisfied his sexual identity, Patrick returned to the question of his future and made contact with the director of the Oxford Playhouse, Frank Shelley, who vividly remembered having seen him on stage in *King’s Rhapsody*. Shelley, born in England but of Italian stock – real name Mario Francelli – was at the time the traditional actor-manager, then already a dying breed, and had been responsible for taking the Playhouse out of weekly and into fortnightly rep. An excellent and versatile actor and director with a stentorian voice that pronounced every syllable immaculately, Shelley had recently married the actress Susan Dowdall and the fact that he had proposed to her *sotto voce* on stage

during a production had attracted much media attention. He had also inaugurated, attached to the theatre, a school of drama for young actors who received lessons in the afternoon and appeared in productions in the evening. In the company at the time were a number of young actors enthusiastically encouraged by Shelley, who believed they had promising futures. These included Maggie Smith, Ronnie Barker, Judi Dench and Michael Bates.

When Shelley interviewed Patrick at the Oxford Playhouse, there was an immediate rapport between the two. The director's knowledge and affable but slightly eccentric manner appealed to Patrick and the actor's voice and confidence resonated with Shelley who offered the young man a contract that would make him a member of the company and at the same time a student at the school. Before making the transition from Shepherd's Market to Oxford, Patrick said goodbye to his erstwhile girlfriend, Amelia, and she impressed upon him how fortunate he was to be taken in by such an illustrious company. Impressed by Oxford's large number of bars, Patrick had little difficulty in finding digs just off Hollywell Street in the closest proximity to a host of enticing watering holes.

At the time, as a relief from a heavy season of Chekhov, the company was performing arguably the most entertaining farce of all time, *Charley's Aunt*, and Frank Shelley himself was giving a hilarious performance in drag as Charley's Aunt Agatha from Brazil. Having been hastily seconded into the production in the small part of a valet, Patrick was able to see that knock-about farce was a serious and disciplined business requiring supreme timing and, in carefully watching Shelley, he realised that he was learning from a master.

Following *Charley's Aunt*, Shelley changed the intelligence level by staging first a number of well-tried thrillers and then cranked the cultural standard considerably higher by introducing a season of plays by George Bernard Shaw who had been largely responsible for the intellectual revival of British theatre. Patrick appeared in all the plays and was doing sufficiently well to have been noticed by regular theatregoers. The first Shaw play was *Mrs Warren's Profession*, which the Irish-English dramatist subtitled as 'The Third of Three Unpleasant Plays', and Patrick thoroughly

enjoyed his scene with Frank Shelley who was well recognised as a Shavian player and leading authority on the iconic and irascible playwright. Patrick was also cast in *Arms and the Man*, which the cantankerous GBS called “The First of Four Pleasant Plays”. For the final play in the Shaw trilogy, Shelley chose *The Millionairess*, a more recent play that had been premiered in the West End in 1936. In the cameo role of the Egyptian doctor, in which he wore a red fez with a black tassel on top, Patrick was outstanding. In the local Oxford newspaper, the drama critic praised his performance and advised theatregoers to keep their eye on “one Patrick Donovan, for much more will be heard about this huge talent”.

Patrick settled in well at the Oxford Playhouse and while his arrogance did not exactly make him a popular member of the company, his obvious talent was admired by all. He was, however, far more popular in the public houses that rather surrounded the place where he lived. Locals enjoyed his company when he would hold forth while perched on a bar stool and relate apocryphal stories about his upbringing in Ireland and about his imagined distinguished line of ancestry. He also threw in manufactured gossip from backstage at the Playhouse and his pub audiences were enthralled by these doses of Irish blarney, which became more outrageous as the more intoxicated the young actor became. Patrick used these ‘pub performances’ as rehearsals for the art of holding the attention of an audience and experimented with gestures and facial expression in order to further refine his art. Of course a great deal of drinking accompanied this entertainment. At first he was a regular at the pubs only after performances and on Sundays, but this changed when he started to pop in for a drop or two on his way to evening performances. Members of the cast began to notice the faint smell of liquor on his breath and when this became persistent and his performance in *The Millionairess* began to change nightly and become increasingly exaggerated, his indiscretion was brought to the director’s attention. In his tiny office, cluttered with

production posters and photographs, Frank Shelley, sounding like the friendly country vicar, confronted Patrick about his drinking.

“You do know that it is a convention in the theatre that one does not drink before a performance. I understand, my boy, that you are not always obeying that rule.”

“Well, I wouldn’t call it drink ... There are times when I just have a little something ... to calm the nerves so to speak,” and laughingly added, “for medicinal purposes, you know.”

“Patrick, you are one of the few actors I have come across who is absolutely devoid of nerves. Your confidence is astonishing and I admire it. You don’t require anything to give you Dutch courage. I have heard that you spend a lot of time after performances in some of our locals. Is drink a problem for you?”

“No, not at all ... I do go to some of the pubs after the show... to sort of wind down. I have made friends there and the atmosphere is quite convivial.”

“Well, my boy, what you do at night is your business but I want you to know that I will not tolerate drinking before a performance. Not even from someone who is as good an actor as you. I have big things in mind for you shortly, so please take this discussion as a serious warning.”

Patrick’s respect for Shelley was sincere and intense, and he determined to curb his drinking habits and to refrain from having even a tipples before performances. As a result he was rewarded with increasingly onerous roles, received consistently good mentions from local critics and even from leading London reviewers who attended the more high-profile productions.

Encouraged by his acting colleagues, Patrick decided the time had arrived for him to acquire an agent to represent him and Shelley facilitated an introduction to Cyril Goodman Artists. Goodman, himself, was a regular at the playhouse and had become well acquainted with Patrick’s work. He got on well with his new client and assured him that he would use his best endeavours to launch him in due course in West End theatre.

Having served his apprenticeship, and having grown into maturity, Patrick Donovan had graduated into being a leading man at the Oxford Playhouse and his name was a box office draw card

whenever he had a leading role. He had an amazing facility to age convincingly when required to play older characters; but at the same time he could as easily shed the years such as when the Playhouse decided to revive RC Sherriff's award-winning First World War drama, *Journey's End*. The play offered a compelling insight into life in the trenches and, when staged originally in the West End's Apollo Theatre in 1928, the parts of Captain Stanhope and his young officer, Raleigh, which were to become famous, were played respectively by Laurence Olivier and Maurice Evans. Calling for great sensitivity, the emotional relationship between Stanhope and Raleigh is pivotal to the play. This provided Shelley and Donovan with the opportunity to excel – to the extent that the revival drew most enthusiastic reviews that caught the attention of a London producer who negotiated the transfer of the play to the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket. Cyril Goodman's negotiating skills resulted in his client receiving an appropriate leading man's West End salary and, for the first time, the name "Patrick Donovan" was to appear over the canopy of a London theatre.

CHAPTER SIX

Alby Mullan had entered Wormwood Scrubs Prison as the guest of His Majesty but when the iron gates of C Wing clanked behind him six months later in 1953, it was Her Majesty to whom he was indebted.

The years had not treated him kindly and the good-looking features had withered, making him a characterisation of the handsome Irishman who once had been so attractive to the opposite sex. His nose had been broken at some stage during his less-than-illustrious boxing career and red capillaries running down his face suggested that defence in the ring had not been one of his strengths. Dressed in shabby and shapeless workman's trousers, the forerunner to jeans, dark grey T-shirt covered by a tasteless dark green windbreaker and with rough boots completing the ensemble, his outfit looked very much like prison issue for inmates not having their own clothes for their departure. With £5 in his pocket, being the sum total of his prison earnings, Mullan presented a bewildered figure.

While contemplating in which direction he should walk, a voice called out to him. It was that of a woman, seated in an old A40 Austin parked a short distance away. Ann McCartney, a not-unattractive but dumpy fifty-something, climbed out of the car and, while clearly repulsed by Mullan's unkempt appearance wrapped her arms around him – as a greeting rather than a demonstration of great affection.

"Christ, don't they have showers in that place? You smell like a rat crawled up you and died."

"Well, thank you for that warm greeting, sweetheart. You always did have a descriptive way with words. If you take me home I'll clean up in no time. Been dreaming of a hot shower – Her Majesty provides only cold showers that would freeze the balls off a brass monkey."

"How are you, Alby? Hope you weren't bugged in there?"

"Nah, I fought off the pansy boys ... Still able to take care of myself. How've you been?"

“Not too bad, love. Still working every night at the theatre. I’ve been promoted to head usher; they move me around to different theatres in the group and I have to train the new staff.”

Driving off, Ann tried hard to avoid a prolonged silence.

“Alby, why did you do it ... do such a ridiculous thing? What were you thinking? Dimitrio Hanos is such a sweet and inoffensive man. Minds his own business in his little corner shop – can’t make much of a living – and you rob him... take his meagre earnings from the till. What the fuck got into you?”

“I needed the money, Ann ... I was desperate.”

“Desperate for what? You were living with me and we were doing all right, weren’t we?”

“Ann, a man has some pride ... I couldn’t find work. I was penniless... I wanted some money so that I could take you out.”

“That’s pathetic, Alby ... Thank God you didn’t hurt Dimitrio.”

“I want to see him and apologise. Never done anything like that before ... Don’t know what got into me.”

“He’ll probably get such a fright when he sees you that he’ll call the police again.”

Having parked her car outside her tiny semi-detached cottage on the seamier side of Shepherd’s Bush, Ann started preparing bangers and mash while Mullan luxuriated in the hot shower he had been dreaming about for the six months. The couple had been together for a little more than a year when a rush of blood to the head resulted in his attempted robbery of the village shopkeeper.

Ann and Alby Mullan had met under unusual circumstances. He had been surviving on his wits, going through a succession of short-lived menial jobs, sleeping at Salvation Army barracks, dossing down wherever he could and at times, as a last resort, sleeping in doorways. Many a night he would hang about outside the Slug-and-Fox pub in Soho and spin some Irish blarney to one of the regulars who would invite him in and stand him a drink or two. On a good night, as a bonus, fish and chips might be thrown in. He told a good yarn and while most of the customers recognised an apocryphal story when they heard one, Mullan was an amusing and sometimes interesting character.

Ann was a lady who had fallen on hard times. Well brought up by middle-class Church of England people, her parents died when she was just out of her teens, and when she was in her final year of training at Hammersmith Hospital to become a nurse she had an affair with a newly qualified doctor. His self-proclaimed expertise in the 'rhythm method' was, however, fallacious to say the least and after Ann became pregnant he showed even less skill when he and two of his colleagues performed a back-room abortion on her. The pregnancy was indeed successfully terminated but so were the patient's chances of ever falling pregnant again. Dr Eliot Simpson and Ann did marry and the couple were happy living in Chiswick, while he worked at the Charing Cross Hospital in the Accident and Emergency unit and she nursed at the Kingston Hospital.

Tragedy, however, began to intervene in their otherwise content lives when Eliot became addicted to various prescription drugs he obtained from the hospital pharmacy by surreptitiously prescribing them for fictitious patients. After several warnings, which he ignored, Dr Simpson was dismissed from the hospital and reported. The Medical Council had little difficulty in striking him from the medical register. While undergoing psychiatric counselling, he took an overdose of drugs and died in his sleep.

Ann was devastated and her distress was exacerbated when she discovered that her husband had spent every penny they owned and had mortgaged their home to the hilt, leaving her in considerable debt. When she recovered from a nervous collapse she was forced to surrender her house to the bank, lost her nursing job and through the kindness of friends stayed with them. Ann showed great resilience, however, and found work and eventually was able to rent a house of her own in Shepherd's Bush.

Ann's meeting with Alby Mullan took place one night when after late shopping she took a very bad fall on the pavement right outside the Slug-and-Fox. Mullan was standing outside and, reasonably sober, rushed to her aid. She was bleeding from a graze on her knee, her belongings scattered around, and she was in a state of shock. Declining the ambulance that bystanders wanted to call, she assured everyone she was just fine to take a taxi home. Mullan

flagged down a taxi, helped her into it, insisted that she couldn't go home alone, and before she could refuse he was sitting next to her. On the way home he apologised that he had come out without any money ... Still, she was grateful when he carefully dressed her injured knee and made her a cup of tea, and finally she relented when he insisted that he spend the night on her couch in case after effects of the accident became a problem during the night. Although disparate souls, their friendship grew and they found common ground that offered some comfort while she worked and he moved from job to job hoping for better days. In the evenings, over a tippie or two, Ann would question Mullan about his past and his upbringing in Ireland. One evening he told her about his wife Allana who had died when their child Arthur was about seven years old; how he had become a boxer and had moved to England with Arthur; how he had lived with Beverley, who became his manager, until one night after he had lost a fight she had thrown him out.

"So what became of the boy?"

"I don't know. I enquired some days later at the police who told me that he had been taken to a Catholic school in Kilburn."

"Didn't you ever contact him?"

"No, I had no money and was so ashamed. What could I offer the boy that a good Catholic school couldn't? I thought it best that I leave him there."

"And what has happened to him?"

"I don't know. Arthur must be a young man, in about his mid-twenties now ..."

"Maybe he's been successful and is rich ... Though with your genes, Alby, I doubt it."

Having showered and put on the clean shirt and trousers Ann had laid out for him on their bed, they tucked in to the bangers and mash, which Mullan said was by far the best meal he had had for six months.

"Tomorrow, sweetheart – by God and by Jesus – I am off looking for a decent job."

“Alby, I could probably get you work at one of the theatres as a doorman. I know you would hate it – you would have to wear a uniform and a cap – but at least it’s something.”

“And look like fucking Father Christmas?”

“They wear a red uniform with gold braid: you would look very handsome.”

“Well, we’ll see ... Maybe as a last resort.”

Journey’s End enjoyed a spectacular opening at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket. The audience was spellbound, gasped when the field hut blew up and at the end gave a standing ovation to the cast, applauding particularly wildly when Frank Shelley and Patrick Donovan, the two leads, stepped forward together, hands clasped, to take their bows. Visitors crowded backstage but Patrick, receiving congratulations from many people introduced to him by Frank Shelley, remained calm and unemotional as if he were a veteran of the stage and that a sensational first night was to be expected. That is until Shelley ushered into his dressing room an elegant figure.

“Patrick, I want you to meet Larry.”

Laurence Olivier wrapped his arms around Patrick.

“Dear boy, that was one of the most impressive debuts in the West End that I have ever seen. I originated the role of Stanhope in 1928 and I only wish I had given a performance as moving as yours. You have a great future ahead of you. We must talk about your appearing with me at the new National Theatre ...”

But Patrick wasn’t hearing any of it. He had dissolved into tears. Years of suppressing his emotions under a facade of haughtiness suddenly deserted him and pent-up feelings poured forth. The experience of having the greatest living actor congratulating him was more than he could bear, and there was the sudden realisation of what he had really achieved, on his own, in his short life. Had a touch of humility crept into the persona of one Patrick Donovan? Sensing his discomfort, Olivier put his arm around the young actor and whispered, “We’ll be in touch.”

The reviews matched the reception of the first-night audience and phrases such as “acting of the highest calibre” and “remember the name – Patrick Donovan” graced the marquee of the theatre the following day. Patrick was hounded by the media for interviews, but after dropping his guard in the daunting presence of Olivier, he had regained his equilibrium and gave impressive but suitably vague accounts of his early upbringing in Ireland and his aristocratic heritage. Cyril Goodman, his agent, couldn’t believe his good fortune that he suddenly had one of the hottest pieces of acting merchandise on his books and his office was inundated with scripts and propositions to put to the actor.

To celebrate his new status, Patrick moved out of his Oxford digs and relocated to the Shepherd’s Market; except this time not in a poky bedsitter but in a furnished apartment in gracious Carrington House, with its impressive arched entrance from Hertford Street. Not one to ignore old friends, Patrick responded to a congratulatory telegram he received at the theatre from Amelia who had meant much to him in assisting him years before with his audition material; and perhaps more importantly in advancing his quest for manhood. He was pleased to discover that she had a small part in a West End play and one night after their performances she visited him at Carrington House for a late supper and a felicitous reunion. She was suitably impressed with both the apartment and his advancement in matters of the flesh.

Father Brian O’Flanagan had not quite lived down the most embarrassing episode of having been caught with his cassock up. For a short while he had been removed from frontline teaching at St Joseph’s, but no disciplinary action was ever taken against him by the authorities. Reinstated with drama classes he was popular with students but because word inevitably leaked out about his indiscretion, the boys often sniggered and joked about him. It was also rumoured that he enjoyed further liaisons with some of the favoured boys but his discretion now was such that nothing was revealed.

Father Brian thought often about Arthur Mullan. Apart from having a strong physical attraction to him, he had liked the boy enormously and admired his talent. He wondered whether he should have a conscience about what had transpired between the two of them, but passed his own judgment that the boy was obviously gay and the sooner he learned the practices of the genre the better. As far as the scriptures were concerned, he knew too that Jesus had been silent on the question of homosexuality; indeed Father Brian had some doubts as to the sexuality of the son of God himself. He also found himself conflicted with the seemingly unambiguous directive in the Old Testament's book of Leviticus, which prohibited "lying with mankind as with womankind", but told himself that this referred to abusive sex rather than a loving consensual relationship. In an attempt to salve his conscience and justify what he saw as his peccadilloes, Father Brian had researched the testaments exhaustively and had concluded that in 31 123 verses homosexuality was only mentioned some six or seven times, which he saw as the degree of importance God attached to the subject. His research also told him that there was a substantial segment of priests who believed that as they had vowed themselves to celibacy and abstention from marriage and sexual intercourse, a little gratification from homosexual acts was tolerable and not regarded as serious sin. His credence was that "love your neighbour as yourself" took priority over everything else in the Bible and that those heterosexual Christians who used the 'clobber passages' in the Bible to outlaw homosexual sins were being cynical by condemning acts that they were not tempted to commit. In any case, he convinced himself, there were degrees of sin. Didn't Jesus say that Judas's sin was lesser than Pilate's sin? Of course he did and therefore there was undoubtedly distinction in humankind's transgressions of the testament just as the courts distinguished between theft and murder. Finally he came to the conclusion that there was a modern view which allowed him to see a 'blow job' as a kind of loving Holy Communion ...

Father Brian had followed Patrick's career discreetly. A friend associated with the annual *Where the Rainbow Ends* knew of Patrick's advancement to *King's Rhapsody*, his name change and

his subsequent years at the Oxford Playhouse and from there the priest was able to stay in touch with Patrick's career. He had resisted going to Oxford to see the young man perform but after his huge success in *Journey's End*, Father Brian's vicarious delight was such that he determined to see a performance and perhaps go back stage to congratulate his former pupil. Attending a Wednesday matinee, his canonical cassock contrasted with the frumpish dress of the usual matronly afternoon audience, many of whom were bussed in from distant suburbs of London. Sitting in the fifth row, he was enthralled by the performance and at interval, standing in the foyer, he took great delight in eavesdropping on the chatter and beamed with pride when he heard all the favourable comments about the actor Patrick Donovan. He had to restrain himself from intruding on the conversation to say: "His real name is Arthur Mullan and I gave him his first training."

The second act was superb and the entire audience once again rose to their feet to give the cast a standing ovation. Frank Shelley and Patrick, the two leads, took a curtain call on their own and when Shelley gestured his younger colleague to step forward there were loud cheers and tears rolled down the face of Father Brian. Determined to try to get backstage, Brian joined the crowd at the stage door waiting for autographs. Respecting his clerical attire the fans allowed him to the front where, when he asked the security man if he could see Patrick, he was told that there were strict instructions not to allow anyone into Mr Donovan's dressing room. Eventually the guard agreed to take his name to the actor. On a scribbled piece of paper, the priest wrote, "I would so like to see you again – if only to congratulate you on a magnificent performance. Brian (Father)." Told that the actor was showering in preparation of the evening performance, Brian was eventually taken back stage and a door, with a big gold star and '*Patrick Donovan Esq*' embellished below, was opened. And there in an armchair sat the young actor in a white towelling gown, his feet propped up on a stool.

"Arthur, dear boy, you were absolutely superb ... So many years gone by... I must congratulate you."

After all this time, all these years, Patrick had remained nonchalant about his experience at St Joseph's. There had been no regrets, and no resentment. And yet the prospect of this encounter unsettled him. He had never anticipated having to confront his disgraced mentor – and yet here he was.

“Have you come here for another blow job, Father?”

Patrick realised that his retort had sounded harsher than he had intended, and he immediately regretted it.

“Oh, Patrick, forgive me. Please. That was so many years ago ... I am still ashamed. I have said so many Hail Marys, have confessed my sins and have asked for absolution and have done penance. I believe the Lord has forgiven me my trespasses. And I pray that you can too.”

“Father, I have no ...”

“Please, Patrick, won't you call me Brian?”

Patrick's mellifluous voice filling the dressing room.

“Brian, I have no problem with the sexual element of our relationship – even though you cannot deny that you took advantage of a vulnerable young boy. The fact is, though, that I rather enjoyed the blow jobs. I find it more difficult, however, to forgive your abandoning me when I ran away. You certainly wouldn't have had any difficulty in finding me and I have to say I could have done with some help at that stage.”

“I know. It was unforgiveable of me ... but my situation with the Church was such that I was frightened and confused. I was more concerned with asking the Holy Trinity for forgiveness than caring for the one who had been wounded.”

“Brian, I have to tell you – don't believe I was wounded. In a way, I think, I was liberated. You certainly inculcated in me a love for culture and theatre particularly, and I will be ever grateful to you for that; but it was already time for me to move on. I had had enough of saying my Hail Marys every time the school clock struck the hour; I certainly had a surfeit of cruel teasing from the bunch of ignoramuses who were my classmates – ‘Are you Father's fuck? What's his cock like?’ And I had had enough of algebra and other subjects that were never going to be of any benefit to me on the stage – where I already knew I was meant to be.”

“I had no idea, dear boy, that your classmates were so cruel. How dreadful it must have been.”

“Well, Father – sorry, Brian – it’s all in the past and no longer worries me. If you want my complete forgiveness, I gladly give you complete absolution and don’t require you to do any penance.”

“Patrick, you are now a great actor. Your name is up in lights and you have a wonderful future. I have read some critics calling you the next Olivier ... I am truly happy for you ... May I see you again some time?”

There was not a hint of hesitation in Patrick’s response. “I don’t think so.”

Father Brian was not entirely surprised. “And I accept that. I can understand that you wouldn’t want past male dalliances to surface in the media ...”

“Frankly, Brian, I don’t give a fuck about anyone finding out about my sexual proclivities, male or female: it is entirely my business. The fact is that I have moved on from those dreary days of Christian education at St Joseph’s. I live in a rather different world today. Now, it was nice seeing you but I have to get ready for the evening performance.” Patrick saw the resignation in the eyes of the priest. “You will remember, Brian, the elementary indoctrination you gave me into Stanislavsky’s method acting: well, to some extent, I still follow the great master and I now have to prepare myself.”

With that Patrick rose to his feet, put his arm around the priest and ushered him towards the door.

“Patrick, before I leave I have a small gift I would like to give to you.”

Father Brian took from his pocket a thin gold chain holding a small cross and handed it to Patrick.

“I would be thrilled if you would consider wearing this. It is discrete and it won’t be seen under your shirt ... It certainly would mean very much to me.”

Patrick slipped the chain around his neck.

“I am deeply touched, Brian ... Truly. I will wear it always – if not for religious conviction at least to remind me of the person who started me in my career. Thank you so much. And, Brian,

please know that all is forgiven and there are no hard feelings. Go well ...”

“God be with you, my son.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Well into the run of *Journey's End*, there were rumblings among the cast about Patrick Donovan's sobriety during performances. It did not appear that his acting was affected in any way, but his fellow players believed that their star was drinking and were apprehensive that disaster might be looming. Frank Shelley let the matter ride as long as he could but eventually he could no longer ignore the concern and between performances on a Saturday he once again confronted Patrick in his dressing room.

"The cast is of the opinion that you are drinking before the curtain."

"Is my performance not up to scratch?"

"Your acting is great as usual, but that is not the point. You know that it is a firm rule in the theatre ... we have dealt with this before ... that there is no drinking before a performance. You are embarrassing me, Patrick and you are placing your brilliant future in jeopardy. Why are you doing this? Do you have a problem?"

There was a long pause before Patrick braced himself in his armchair and, looking Shelley in the eyes, responded in a low deliberate voice:

"Yes, Frank, I do have a problem. In fact I have problems, plural."

"Well, tell me about them ... Can I not help you?"

"I don't know. I don't for one minute believe I have a drinking problem. My problem is my nerves. God knows, I am beside myself with nerves before each and every performance – always has been the case. I know I give the impression of supreme confidence, but that is purely a show for others. I simply can't keep my nerves in check ... I feel positively sick and often throw up right here in my dressing room; I then pull myself together and the seemingly confident Donovan emerges full of braggadocio to others. I don't crave alcohol but I do have to calm my nerves before going on stage; and I find that a swig from the vodka bottle does the trick. If my acting is unaffected I don't see that there is a problem."

“Patrick, we all suffer from nerves – stage fright, performance anxiety, or whatever you want to call it. If you weren’t nervous, it would mean that you don’t care about your performance. Being anxious before you step on stage means that you care about the quality of your acting and that you want your performance to be skilfully crafted, engaging and professionally executed. You may be fine now with just a tot of vodka but as time passes you will find that a tot will no longer be sufficient and eventually your performance *will* suffer and instead of stardom you will be on a slippery slope.”

“Frank, I just can’t go on with my nerves jangling. Friends have suggested that I take various drugs but I have stayed away from that. The vodka works fine: I choose it because it is odourless – I don’t know how anyone believed I had been drinking.”

“Probably because there were variations in your performance dependent on the amount you have consumed. I knew from my scenes with you that you were taking something, but kept quiet about it – waiting for an opportune moment to confront you.”

“You said, Frank, that you would help me. What do you suggest?”

“I think you should consult the company doctor, Mark Walters, who is a general practitioner but has a dual qualification as a psychologist and has a great deal of experience in this area. Can I arrange an appointment for you?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“You said you had ‘problems, plural’; is there something else I should know?”

“This is even more embarrassing ... You probably know that I am having simultaneous affairs with a man and a woman.”

“I had heard this rumoured. You’re not the first person I have known who is bisexual ... ‘ambisextrous’ is the word most commonly used. You are not unique Patrick; people who are unable to determine their precise sexuality have been around for a long time and there are many in our profession. I don’t want to breach confidences or aid and abet rumours, but as discrete as he believes he is, it is well known that Larry Olivier – an apparently happily married man – has frequent dalliances with those of his own sex.”

“The great Olivier may be able to get away with it, Frank, but many, many others who are bisexual are denigrated in the eyes of the public and are looked upon as freaks. People think that we are confused or indecisive. There is no uncertainty in my mind about the sexes. Years ago when I became sexually aware I was attracted to people solely with a prurient interest in mind. Now it is different: I am attracted to people because of who they are ... whether they are male or female or gay or straight makes no difference. And the chances are that if we like each other sufficiently the normal progression is to indulge in sexual pleasure. After all, an orgasm is an orgasm is an orgasm!”

Frank threw his head back and laughed heartily at what to him seemed like a truism. He appreciated that Patrick was an extraordinary young man who was obsessed with his talent and who chose to take sexual pleasure from wherever it was available.

“The trouble, Patrick, arises when you fall in love with one or both of your simultaneous lovers. As the Bard so eloquently put it, “therein lies the rub!”

“Oh, I’m aware of that – ‘the pangs of despised love ...’”

“Patrick, Shakespeare has lots of good advice: he cautions in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that ‘the course of true love never did run smooth’ and that ‘love looks not with the eyes but with the mind’.”

“Don’t worry, Frank, I will ‘let my own discretion be my tutor’ ...”

“Touché, Patrick, I’m sure you will. It has been a most rewarding experience for me these past years seeing you shed your rough edges and mature into a brilliant actor and a fine human being. But you are still at the threshold of what is going to be a great career – please don’t ruin everything. I will arrange for Dr Walters to see you soon.”

“Thank you for talking to me, Frank. I do appreciate everything you have done for me. Any success I have achieved is your success as well. I love you, Frank.”

“I love you too, darling boy. But we must get ready for the evening house ...”

Gregory Packer was an aristocratic dilettante in his mid-fifties who professed great knowledge in the arts and most matters cultural. He was passionate about antiques and his two-storey townhouse in Eaton Close, Belgravia, was cluttered with collectibles and antiques acquired over the years in towns in the Cotswolds such as Tetbury, with its numerous antique shops, and Stow-on-the-Wold, perhaps the quaintest of the market towns in that typically English mink-and-manure belt. He was also not averse to browsing for treasures in the bustling Portobello Road Market where he once picked up a splendid pair of Louis XVI chairs at a fraction of their real value. The amount he spent on celebrating this acquisition with his friends would have enabled him to purchase the same chairs at Mallett in New Bond Street. Among the collectibles that most interested Packer were lace fans and he had a passionate interest in Belgian bobbin lace fans with mother-of-pearl frames. Among his antique Irish lace fans was a sixteenth-century gem of museum quality laid on burgundy velvet and inside a gold frame, which was the centrepiece of a display of fans that covered a wall in his living room.

Gregory Packer was a familiar figure at the prestigious auction houses of Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams and when he arrived in his silver chauffeur-driven Bentley S2 with its maroon interior he was warmly met by a doorman who would escort him onto the premises. Always a dandy in dress, he would, as the mood took him, switch with consummate ease from semi-formal complete with spats and bowler hat to a structured sporting three-button Harris Tweed hacking jacket with its distinctive ticket pocket detailing and a trilby hat to match. His most recent success at a Christie's auction was an exquisite William IV writing desk, which was green lacquered with parcel-gilt and had a green leather panelled top fitted with a gilt-brass pierced gallery at each end, five drawers and gilt mouldings all resting on gilt-wood scrolled feet with brass casters. This serious acquisition dominated Gregory's mahogany-panelled book-lined study.

Gregory Packer was born with a silver spoon and had never worked a day in his life. He was schooled at the iconic Eton College, founded in 1440 and regarded as the chief nurse of English

statesmen, and arguably the most famous public school in the world. Without having achieved anything like an illustrious academic record and having not participated in any form of sport, he passed on to Oxford University because it was expected of him. There he read History, disdained any exercise, avoided any rebellious groups or left-wing societies and concentrated his hedonistic pursuits on an epicurean club, which indulged his sensual pleasures for gourmet food and seriously fine wines. Men proliferated at this club and Gregory found that he was attracted to several of these gourmands, which led to relationships that determined his acceptance of his sexuality. During his second academic year, his father Sir Alistair Packer and mother Lady Margaret were tragically killed in a plane crash and their only son came into a substantial fortune. Gregory would much have liked to inherit his father's title as well – he believed titled status would have suited him – but his father was not a baronet and as a result the title was not hereditary. No longer seeing any advantage in acquiring a degree in History, Gregory concentrated on selling the family's stately home in the Surrey village of Windlesham and the large apartment on Grosvenor Square opposite the American Embassy. With the help of the family solicitors, Wm. Easton & Sons in Bolt Court, Fleet Street, he also reigned in all the family investments gleaned originally from his father's formidable iron-and-steel business in Sheffield. Gregory always took great delight in telling his friends that his mother used to iron and his father used to steel! When all this had been accomplished, Gregory Packer Esq. indulged himself by living in style and entertaining at the Savoy Hotel, placing all his assets with Coutts, private bankers to the Queen, and purchased for his seat of residence his townhouse in Eaton Close. Ensconced there, the years ticked by with Gregory enjoying an elegant but fruitless lifestyle – although his generous philanthropic and well-publicised contributions to the arts did make him *persona grata* with the cultural sect. His sexual liaisons were frequent and without passion and usually with men whom he believed to be below his station in life. One-night stands with partners who were overawed by the luxuriousness of his home and

intimidated by the antique French four-poster in his bedroom were all very well, but they were not enduring or satisfying.

Gregory Packer had read the rave reviews of *Journey's End* and knew that the young lead, Patrick Donovan, had been praised by all the critics and hailed as a new star. However, believing that the subject matter of RC Sherriff's old play wouldn't interest him very much, he delayed going to see it until one Wednesday morning he decided on the spur of the moment that he would attend that afternoon's matinee. In fact, he found the play so riveting and Donovan's performance so astonishing that he returned to the theatre for the evening performance. This time he focused particularly on Donovan – his movement, his voice, his presence – and found himself obsessed with the actor. Thursday night he saw the play once again and, returning to his townhouse, he settled down at his antique desk and wrote to Patrick Donovan.

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My dear young star, Patrick Donovan,

You have illuminated my life! I have now seen your last three consecutive performances and am thrilled with your acting and don't believe that I have ever seen anything quite as good ... and in that I include Olivier, Richardson, Redgrave and the rest of them. You are a star and I cannot wait to see you in future productions.

You are also a fine-looking man and I am mesmerised by your stage presence and the timbre of your voice. I was kept awake last night wondering if these captivating qualities reveal themselves off stage as well. How exciting it would be to find out ...

I have reasoned that there is only one way to resolve my speculation. Would you have dinner with me after a performance one night or lunch or dinner on any Sunday? Perhaps lunch on Sunday would be better as in daylight I would be able to see more clearly whether those eyes are really as blue as they appear on stage. Please phone me at the number on this letterhead and whenever it is convenient for you my driver will collect you at the stage door or from your home wherever that may be.

Oh, I am sure you will want to know who this person is who is so intent on intruding in your life. Well, I have no claim to fame: I

was schooled at Eton, spent a year or two at Oxford and for many years have lived on my own at Eaton Close and am a quite harmless patron of the arts.

With fond good wishes and looking forward to hearing from you,

Gregory Packer.

For several months following Frank Shelley's earnest warning to him concerning sobriety, Patrick had managed to discipline himself and control his nerves without recourse to the bottle before performances. Despite the fact that the play was still attracting excellent houses, it was scheduled to end its run in two months and the agent, Cyril Goodman, was exploring the many offers he had received for Patrick's services. These had come from commercial managements, the Old Vic, Olivier at the National Theatre and from the newly formed Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon. Goodman had no difficulty in keeping the name Donovan in the public eye as newspapers, radio and television were constantly seeking interviews. Patrick coped with these commitments like an old professional. He was distinctly opinionated and confident but very polite and charming and, with that special voice, came across as a likeable and very intelligent actor with his feet firmly on the ground. Asked often if there was anyone special in his life he would smile and say that he had many friends but at this stage he was concentrating on his career and was busy reading the many scripts offered to him by his agent.

One night, less than an hour before curtain, an assistant stage manager delivering stage laundry to the dressing room found Patrick slumped in an armchair, breathing heavily, sweating profusely and mumbling. The stage manager was immediately summoned and after a cursory glance notified Frank Shelley. Shelley suspecting a stroke instructed the stage manager to call the doctor immediately. Dr Mark Walters practised nearby in Soho and within 10 minutes he was in the dressing room examining the actor with his stethoscope and taking his pulse and checking vital signs.

Shelley, looking at his watch and seeing that it was now no more than half an hour to curtain asked:

“Mark, what is it? Is he OK?”

“Sure, he’s OK ... he’s just drunk.”

“Christ, what do we do to sober him up?”

“Time is the only real cure for drunkenness. People try black coffee but I am not optimistic.”

Black coffee was produced swiftly and, after getting him to take a few sips, Patrick stirred and sat upright. Taking in the small gathering around him, he asked: “What is all the fuss about? I’m just fine – was just taking a little nap. Having a little trouble tonight, Frank, with my lines. I am going to take the script on stage with me just to refer to it from time to time.”

“By Jesus you won’t!” shouted Frank. Immediately he turned to the bewildered stage manager, “Tell the understudy he’s on tonight.”

With that, Patrick swallowed some more coffee and rose unsteadily to his feet.

“No fucking understudy is going to replace me. It’s in my contract ... Unless I am sick, I go on. And I’m not sick so if you kind gentlemen would give me some space I want to check my lines and get ready.”

The doctor and Shelley had a *sotto voce* conversation: “Frank, he might have been drunk earlier in the day but he’s already coming out of it. His condition has improved enormously in the 10 minutes we have been with him.”

“Twenty minutes to go ... Can we take a chance, Mark?”

“Tell him you are going to reassess his condition in 10 minutes.”

Ten minutes later Shelley made his way back to the dressing room and found Patrick in costume and in reasonable control of himself. His speech was slower than usual and slightly slurred, but – miraculously – he seemed to be improving by the minute.

“Patrick, are you sure you are able to go on – and without a script?”

“Frank, would I ever let you down?”

Shelley thought, “You little shit, you have let me down already,” but thought that any last-minute confrontation would be counterproductive. Instead he told a hugely disappointed understudy that it was status quo and that he was back as an extra. Shelley then quickly briefed the cast, apologised to them for imposing this situation on them and asked them to be especially alert in their scenes with Patrick. And then the stage manager called, “Overture and beginners!” and minutes later the curtain went up on a full house.

Patrick Donovan remained in control and while his performance was what critics would call “different”, overall he was his usual brilliant self. However, Shelley and the rest of the cast were on desperate tenterhooks in their scenes with him as Patrick, as the mood took him, rewrote Sherriff’s lines and did not always deliver them in the sequence the playwright intended. None of this was discernible to the audience, of course, who believed that the actor had given an incredible performance and he was rewarded at the end with a thunderous ovation. With his nerves on edge and shaking with anger, the usually implacable Frank Shelley stormed into Patrick’s dressing room:

“You little shit! The cast are beside themselves at your behaviour ... That was the most nerve-wracking experience I have ever had on stage. You rewrote the fucking script!”

“Well, I thought it was an improvement! The audience loved it ... We got a great standing ovation – the best so far in the whole season. So what’s the complaint?”

“That’s what rankles us ... We sweated through the performance because you were drunk and *you* get the applause! Patrick, this can never happen again. You have an appointment with Dr Walters at 11 am tomorrow. Make sure you’re there.”

And with that a distraught Frank Shelley left the theatre with some of the cast, seeking the nearest pub to calm their frayed nerves.

After a satisfying late-night rendezvous with one of his regular young studs and a shared bottle of good red wine, Patrick woke early with a clear mind and remembered that an appointment with a doctor had been imposed on him. He was well aware that he was drinking too much and recalled having binged before last night's performance. However, he also remembered how much he had enjoyed himself – how he had felt liberated and not confined by the script, how smoothly the performance had gone for him ... He felt as if he was on automatic pilot – and what about the thunderous applause he had received at the end? No doubt in his mind: a suitable beverage before a performance brought out the best in him. And tough if this caused problems for the other actors! Ensemble acting was all very well but a cast working together solely in the interests of the play ignored the fact that some actors are better than others. It caused stars to sublimate their talents in order to accommodate inferior acting. Patrick believed that if he gave full reign to his capability it would raise the standard of others in the cast. Or so was his selfish train of thought ...

But out of loyalty to Frank Shelley, he decided to keep his appointment and arrived at Dr Mark Walters' rooms in Dean Street at precisely 11 o'clock.

"Well, Patrick, how are you feeling today?"

"I've never felt better, doctor – top of the world."

"That's somewhat surprising ... You were certainly not in good shape when I saw you last night."

"Oh, I probably had a bit too much to drink on an empty stomach but I was just fine by the time the curtain went up. And afterwards I felt quite invigorated after what I believe was one of my best performances."

"So you are not concerned about your drinking and the harm it can cause you? How it might ruin your career?"

"Frankly, I don't regard my drinking as a problem. Last night I might have overdone it a bit but I came through just fine."

"Patrick, surely you are aware that excessive alcohol intake over a long period is capable of damaging nearly every organ and system in the body. Liver disease, cardiovascular problems, damage

to the central and the peripheral nervous systems, the list is long. The brain is particularly vulnerable to the toxic effects of alcohol.”

“I thought doctors recommended a daily drink as it benefited the heart.”

“That opinion is rather controversial. There is some evidence of perceived cardiovascular benefit from drinking a glass or two of wine a day; the French certainly believe this. The trouble is people abuse the quantity ... The English are notorious for binge drinking and, believe me, there are no health benefits from getting drunk. There is no harm if you stick to one drink a night after a performance, but if you can’t control your drinking and are a compulsive drinker and can’t do without it, then you’re undoubtedly an alcoholic.”

“Doctor, I will be frank with you. I do have this urge to drink every day ... As it gets close to theatre time I have a shot or two to steady my nerves – without that I have difficulty performing. And after the show I must confess that I do often drink to excess. Is there something that you can give me to stop this craving – perhaps to deal with my nerves in some other way?”

“There are several medications that may work – sometimes – to cut down on the craving. But not everyone regards this as a good way to sobriety. There are clinics that put patients on one drug and if that doesn’t work they try another and so on. My own view is that treating alcoholism with medication amounts to simply substituting one drug for another.”

“So what is the answer?”

“You won’t like the answer – it’s abstinence. You have an illness and the only way to cure the illness is to eliminate the cause. Some people find that Alcoholics Anonymous works for them but, according to statistics, the AA has a poor success rate. Only 5 per cent of people who attend their meetings remain abstinent after three years.”

“Doctor, I can’t see myself attending those meetings and standing up and saying, what I’ve heard is required, ‘I am an alcoholic.’”

“There are also clinics that treat alcohol dependency with a range of treatments that offer counselling, psychological guidance

and inspirational lectures and aftercare. But one has to be admitted to these rehab clinics for a certain length of time.”

“That is out of the question for me.”

“The most successful way to quit drinking is to make a conscious commitment to yourself that you will never drink again. Patrick, it can be done. It is difficult for people who have nothing else in their lives but you have so much going for you. At this stage of your life you probably haven’t done any serious damage to your body. After a few weeks on ginger ales and lemonade your whole outlook will change and you will be in full recovery mode. When asked to have a drink say, “Sure, I’ll have a ginger ale or a lemonade.” People will admire you for it. Tell them that you have started to put on weight and have decided to stop drinking. And any friend who doesn’t respect your decision is not worth having as a friend.”

“Doc, I’ll give it a shot ... I will just keep quiet about it and my friends will surely notice that I have stopped drinking.”

“No, Patrick, that is not the way to go about it. Keeping this decision to yourself can actually lead to failure. Keeping it to yourself means you are worried about potential ridicule if you fail. Keeping it to yourself makes it easier for you to slip back from time to time because no one will know. You must tell everyone that you no longer drink alcohol ... Tell them any story you like as to why you quit. This will reinforce your commitment to yourself and make you stronger in resisting temptation.”

“What about my stage nerves, doc?”

“I will give you a mild tranquiliser that will help you and that won’t dull your performance in any way. Take it as long as you need to ... but my prediction is that you won’t need these pills for long.”

“That sounds great.”

“Patrick, I am also going to prescribe something that you must promise me you will take every morning of your life. Its name is *Disulfiram* but is better known under its brand name Antabuse. It is harmless *but* if you drink alcohol after taking it you will be horribly sick young man.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Having pledged to himself that he would no longer drink, and ensuring that he took his Antabuse daily, Patrick's new virtuous life placed him once again in good stead with Frank Shelley and the cast of *Journey's End*. Cyril Goodman was feeding scripts to him to consider but Patrick still refused to audition.

"Cyril, I have been acting for quite some time now, playing a variety of roles, and any director or management that hadn't seen me previously has had every opportunity during the past year to catch my performance in *Journey's End*. My capability should be well known by now and I think it would be humiliating and downgrading to have to suffer the indignity of reading for someone in order to be cast."

"My son, no one doubts your ability; directors merely want to see if you are suitable for a certain part – that's the way it's done, has always been done. To see whether you and the director see eye to eye."

"If they are any fucking good, the directors should be able to surmise whether a role is right for me. And if I have read the script and want to do the play they should know that I consider myself right for the part. If you think that is arrogant, I'm sorry."

"But, Patrick, the biggest names in the profession read for parts ..."

"Well, that's their problem. I do *not* audition!"

A script that Patrick had approved was Terence Rattigan's drama *The Deep Blue Sea*. He thought that the part of Freddie Page, a much-decorated Battle of Britain pilot who falls in love with an older woman, the estranged wife of a High Court judge, was absolutely right for him. Following his great success with *French Without Tears*, *The Winslow Boy* and *The Browning Version*, Rattigan was considered one of England's most successful playwrights. *The Deep Blue Sea* was rumoured to have been written originally about male lovers, based on his own experience, but at a late stage he had opted to turn into a heterosexual love story. In

what was to be a Rattigan season, *The Deep Blue Sea* was planned to have a fixed run of three months and was to be followed at the same theatre by another Rattigan play, *Separate Tables*, the collective name of two one-act plays. The principal roles in both the one-acts were to be played by the same actors; the male parts being a hot-blooded politician in the first play and an ex-military officer in the second. After the all-male cast in his present play, Patrick welcomed the opportunity to appear in two mixed-gender plays, both of which were world premieres by a distinguished playwright and management agreed to engage his services for the two plays – without audition. Cyril Goodman negotiated an excellent deal for him to receive a top West End salary and for name recognition above the title of both plays.

Alby Mullan, with the help of Ann McCartney, was eventually persuaded to accept a job as a doorman at Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket. Provided with a red uniform and cap, both of which had seen better days and multiple bodies, his 10-hour shift for minimal wages commenced daily at noon. His vague job description included sweeping the pavement in front of the theatre, keeping queues orderly, welcoming patrons and helping elderly people out of taxis – which he did with such aplomb that he often was rewarded with a generous tip. But for him the most depressing chore, which had not been specified, was getting folk who had slept the night in the doorway to gather their pitiful belongings and move away. His heart bled for them, for their experience was not unfamiliar to him.

In the meanwhile, unbeknown to her man, Ann McCartney – largely out of curiosity – had set out to see if she could find Alby's son Arthur. Her first port of call had been St Joseph's in Kilburn and the trail had eventually taken her to the Oxford Playhouse where she was told by a janitor that he believed the person she was looking for was now known as Patrick Donovan. Patrick Donovan, my God! The rising star of the London stage? She kept the information to herself for a while until one night, unable to contain

her excitement another minute, she sidled over to Alby and informed him that she had something important to tell him.

“The last time a woman said that to me about 30 years ago she told me she was pregnant. Look even though I’m 60, I can still get it up. But you, nah, pregnant? Not a chance. So what is it?”

“Alby, love, I have found your son. I have found Arthur.”

“What ... how d’you do that?”

Ann told him of her enquiries, and how they had led eventually to her discovery.

“So how old would your Arthur be now, love?”

“Must be, what, 28 or 29? Well, where’s the little bugger then...? I bet, like his father, he hasn’t achieved much. Poor bastard.”

“Oh, but you’re very wrong, Alby. Very, very wrong. Your Arthur is enormously successful. He has changed his name and is now known as Patrick Donovan – a very well-known, handsome and successful actor. Here ...”

She showed Alby a copy of *The Daily Mail*, which on its Arts page carried a large photograph of the handsome Mr Donovan and an article under the caption ‘Donovan to star in new Rattigan plays’.

“Well, glory be to God. Always knew that snotty-nosed little youngster would do good.”

“You knew fuck all ... You abandoned him – and it’s bloody marvellous that he has achieved all this on his own.”

“Patrick Donovan – has a nice Irish sound to it ... Well, I’ll be buggered. D’you think he’d like to meet his old dad?”

“Not if he’s got any sense, he won’t.”

“He should be good for a few quid to help his old man.”

“Who did so much for him ...?”

“Well, if I’d won that last fight, things woulda been different. Could have gone on to be a champion, I could ... Had it in me. Then I woulda looked after him good and proper.”

“Like hell you would’ve looked after him. You, Alby Mullan, were never cut out to be a father.”

“Where’s he acting? Would love to see what he looks like in the flesh.”

“He’s appearing in *Journey’s End* – on at the Theatre Royal right across the road from you.”

“Jesus, I thought the name Patrick Donovan was familiar ... see it every day up in lights over the canopy. I can just pop across to say hello to him then.”

“Don’t you go hounding the young man for money. It’s not right. You’ve done sweet fanny adams for him. You never even gave a thought as to what had happened to your son. You’re entitled to shit!”

The letter Patrick had received from Gregory Packer had lain, along with quite a pile of other fan mail, on the table in the dressing room for some weeks. As the play’s run was nearing an end, he thought that he should start tidying up and perhaps respond to some of his ardent fans, many of whom had asked for a signed photograph. The Packer letter intrigued him and he read it several times. Patrick concluded without too much difficulty that the man was queer: no straight man would write such an affected letter. As his social life had become routinely boring and his sex life clinically satisfactory but unexciting and less than inspiring, he reasoned that there was little downside in his making contact with this self-confessed ‘harmless patron of the arts’ who seemed infatuated with him. After a pleasant chat on the phone, it was arranged that Gregory’s silver Bentley would be at Carrington House at noon on Sunday to take Patrick the short distance to Eaton Close for lunch.

Patrick gave careful consideration as to what would be appropriate to wear for such an occasion. Should one dress down, jeans and checked linen shirt; or should one be classically English semi-formal with a navy blue suit? Eventually Patrick decided to looking theatrically *tres elegante*, as he thought behoved a West End star, and he dressed in a navy corduroy suit embellished with black leather trim, a cream silk shirt, silk burgundy cravat with black suede moccasins and burgundy socks, all adorned with an eye-catching cream silk handkerchief cascading out of the top pocket of his jacket.

On the dot of the appointed hour he eased his body into the red leather-trimmed seat of the silver Bentley and learned from the uniformed driver that it would take only five minutes on a Sunday to reach his employer's residence. Not in the least apprehensive as to what might lie ahead, Patrick was confident that this was going to be an enjoyable experience.

Met on the doorsteps of a fashionable Close house, Patrick shook hands with his elegant host who seemed to him to be some 25 years his senior. Indeed the greeting was not the conventional brief clasping of respective right hands; Gregory Packer had embraced his guest's right hand with both of his hands and caused the three hands to move up and down like a metronome and for what seemed like an eternity before enveloping Patrick's right elbow with a vice-like grip from his own left hand. After this demonstratively tactile meeting, Patrick was ushered across the threshold and into the lavishly over-decorated living room.

"Pat, if I may call you that ..."

"No, I would rather you not actually. Patrick would be just fine or even Mr Donovan, but I am not Pat."

"My dear man ... I do understand. Dreadful the way our language has been decimated by abbreviations. I saw in the newspaper recently that our prime minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, was referred to as 'Al' and the leader of the opposition, as Hal Wilson. Preposterous!"

But Gregory wanted to settle his much-anticipated guest as quickly as possible.

"Now what can I get you to drink? I have an excellent vintage Dom Pérignon chilled and ready to be opened."

"Thank you, but I don't drink ... I'll have a ginger ale or, if that is a problem, just mineral water, sparkling if you have it."

"My, it just shows how unreliable these theatrical rumours are. I had heard along the grapevine – that's not intended as a pun! – that you were rather partial to a spot or two."

"Your grapevine source is clearly behind the times."

"Well, it will have to be mineral water – I'm afraid we don't run to anything, forgive me, as plebeian as carbonated soft drinks. You don't mind if I have a little champers?"

“Absolutely not ... What a lovely home you have – such good taste. You must have had a great decorator.”

“No decorator, my dear boy. I do everything myself. I am a frustrated interior designer and every piece you see here was bought by me, mostly in the Cotswolds. I should have become a professional decorator but being professionally lazy doesn’t allow much time for anything else! This Canaletto of course doesn’t come from the Cotswolds; it was bought on auction at Sotheby’s a few years ago and cost an arm and a leg. Do you like Canalettos?”

“I don’t know if I have ever seen one before. Frankly, Gregory, I don’t know much about art; and I certainly haven’t been to Venice.”

“Oh, my dear boy, you simply must do Venice. Quite unique. Canaletto was a Venetian painter – early 1700s or something like that. His father’s name was Bernado Canal and his son’s mononym became Canaletto, which means little canal. Rather sweet, isn’t it?”

A white-coated butler entered with a silver tray carrying a glass of Champagne and a Baccarat tumbler with sparkling water and a slice of lemon.

“You remember Stuart? He drove you here; versatile chap, aren’t you, Stuart? He trebles as my driver, butler and general factotum.”

Patrick looked quizzically at Stuart with a flicker of recognition.

“You look quite different, Stuart, in your driver’s cap and uniform. I might not have recognised you as the same person.”

“Well, sir, you as an actor will appreciate I have different parts to play.”

Patrick was a little unnerved. There was something sinister about Stuart ... his face seemed familiar but he couldn’t imagine where he would have seen him previously.

With glasses in hand, Gregory lead his guest around the living room pointing out some of his notable antiques and identifying the paintings on the walls, all of which – he added frequently – had cost a small fortune! The tour included a visit to the impressive study and while they were there the phone rang. Answering the call, Gregory seemed to be engaged in a call of a personal nature and

Patrick discretely left the room and wandered back to the living room. Stuart slipped into the room behind him and, putting his finger to his lips, spoke to Patrick *sotto voce*:

“You don’t remember me?”

“Your face does seem very familiar.”

“You’d remember the body better. I’m ‘Big Dick’ ... Now you remember? The chap from Ecstasy Anonymous? I’ve been to your place several times.”

“Aah, yes, I remember you ... What are you doing here?”

“This is my day job. I only work for the agency on my nights off. And of course I have to look after the boss when he’s lonely. Real sex fiend he is. Don’t worry, guv, I won’t say anything. *Shh* ... here he comes.”

“So what are you two talking about?”

“Stuart was saying he has heard some good things about my acting and would love to see me on stage. And I have promised him a complimentary for my next play.”

“Showing a cultural bent, are you, Stuart? Good for you. And now I think it’s time for us to sit down. First course, please, Stuart ... He is really a dear chap – some rough edges, but I think I have made a gentleman out of him. I sent him to Fanny Cradock for cooking lessons and he did very well indeed. Great character Fanny – I am sure you have seen her and Major Johnny Cradock on TV. Among her many inspirations was the prawn cocktail, which she originated. I just love watching Fanny and Johnny’s cooking show on television – both in their evening fineries knocking back glass after glass of a good vintage Champagne while they turn out delicious duck *a l’orange* followed by their sensational flambéed cherries jubilee. Adorable couple ... But I am talking too much. I do hope you enjoy Stuart’s – or should I say Fanny’s – *oeuf en gelée*?”

“It is wonderful. I particularly like the little black eggs on top.”

“Caviar, dear boy. Beluga – the very best – really makes this dish.”

Patrick indeed did like the egg surrounded by small pieces of ham in aspic and the accompanying olive bread. Not being a cook

himself, he imagined Stuart, apart from his more sensuous accomplishments, must have a fine culinary talent to produce *hors d'oeuvres* as special as this.

The conversation between host and guest flowed freely and Patrick felt quite relaxed in Gregory's company. At his host's request he poured out a profile of his life, embellished with considerable Irish blarney, and Gregory was suitably impressed with the stories of his life-changing encounters with Anton Dolin, Ivor Novello and the past years with Frank Shelley. Stuart reappeared to present on a silver platter and with considerable flourish his Beef Wellington, the traditional preparation of the best cut of loin of beef surrounded by *pâté de foie gras* and wrapped in a puff pastry. It looked as if it belonged on the cover of *Gourmet* magazine. Ever curious, Patrick asked the derivation of the name and received several obscure explanations, the most plausible of which seemed to be that the dish was named after Arthur Wellesley, the first Duke of Wellington. This seemed to satisfy him – as did the beef, which was carved at the table by Gregory with Stuart in attendance to pass the plate to the guest.

"Patrick, the story of your life is most vivid but you don't talk much about your friends. I imagine you have a huge circle of friends and admirers."

"I certainly know many people, most of them in the profession, but frankly I have never had any close friends."

"That is most surprising. I don't want to pry into your private life but I would have thought that a handsome man like you would have many – how shall I say this delicately? – intimate friends."

"Well, I wouldn't say that great personal friendships necessarily produce emotional or intimate relationships. Let's just say that I don't have friends about whom I feel emotional or even great ardour. But I would *like* to have friends about whom I was impassioned; maybe it will still happen. And until it does, I guess pragmatic friendships will have to suffice."

"I presume you don't have any lady friendships?"

"You presume incorrectly: my choice of friendships makes no distinction!"

"Keeping your options open?"

“You could put it that way.”

“Well, I always say that sexuality is not only about sex: it embraces cultural and philosophical aspects of life. Some people believe that sexual behaviour is determined by genetics; others believe it is moulded by one’s environment and associations. I don’t buy the genetics theory – I have known many homosexuals whose parents were as straight as a die. And what about the Church? Why do people enter the Church knowing that it involves deprivation of sexual pleasures? And as soon as they are ordained they seek out young choirboys! Never young girls, mind you ... What is it about the Church that attracts queers? And if God made people who are homosexual, why does the Church condemn homosexuality?”

Patrick had been paying more attention to his Beef Wellington than to his host’s gratuitous ranting about sexuality.

“This is indeed a hobbyhorse of yours, Gregory ... You should use a soap box in Hyde Park one Sunday and let your views be known.”

“Well, what are your views?”

“My dear new friend, I am what I am. I don’t think about it; I don’t complain; I am pretty relaxed and just take it as it comes.”

“It seems that I think more about these things than you do. We were discussing friendship: do you think that friendship leads to sex? Or is it the other way around – is it sex that leads to friendship?”

“Gregory, I certainly don’t have the answers to the metaphysical matters that seem to haunt you. What I do know is that Stuart makes a fine Beef Wellington and I am enjoying it.”

After replenishing the meat on his plate – without having to call in Stuart to assist – Gregory resumed his conversation.

“At the risk of boring you, do you think that two men can have a deep relationship that doesn’t involve sex?”

“Of course I do. William Shakespeare wrote 126 love sonnets addressed to an adolescent boy, described only as ‘Fair Youth’, and while they express intense affection and friendship there is no reference to sexual love. Another good example is Abraham Lincoln and his lifelong friend Joshua Speed. They even shared a bed together for some years when Speed couldn’t afford his own

accommodation, and while some people have concluded that Honest Abe was homo, there is no evidence to prove it. He certainly married and had children ...”

“I suppose that one day men will marry each other ... I mean, why shouldn’t they?”

“Good idea. But with the existing prejudice towards homosexuality we are light years away from a man marrying someone of his own gender.”

An excellent *tarte Tatin* brought the lunch to a close and Stuart served coffee and dark chocolate with caramelised orange peel to the two men who had retired to comfortable armchairs in the living room.

“I do hope that I am going to see you again, Patrick.”

“I see no reason why not, my dear Gregory. Although I have to confess that I am going to be extremely busy over the next few weeks. I am shortly going into rehearsal for the two Rattigan plays. But we will indeed make a plan, I assure you.”

And with that, Patrick rose, indicating that he was ready to leave.

“So soon, dear boy? I feel I am only getting to know you. I hope my talking about friendship and sex hasn’t made you uncomfortable?”

“Not at all, Gregory. As you get to know me better, you will learn that I do not baulk at talk of sex. I am perfectly comfortable discussing the issue ... But I do have to get back and read some scripts my agent has sent me.”

“And how remiss of me ... I haven’t even shown you the sleeping quarters. I believe guests should be orientated when they visit a new apartment. I have a rather beautiful French four-poster in my bedroom ... Are you sure?”

“No, Gregory, I have to leave now. But there is always next time.”

“Oh, I’m encouraged by that – it means we are going to be friends.”

“Absolutely. I see Stuart is waiting to drive me home.”

Patrick put out his hand to say goodbye but Gregory waved it aside and took the younger man into his arms and then moved to

kiss him on the cheek but at the last moment pulled Patrick's face towards his and planted somewhat more than a casual kiss on his lips. At the front entrance, the Bentley was waiting and Stuart, now resplendent in his chauffeur's uniform, was holding the rear door open. With Gregory sadly waving goodbye, and with the Bentley's pre-selected gear engaged, the car glided off on its short journey while its back-seat occupant contemplated what he thought had been an interesting, albeit an ostentatious soiree. Patrick knew instinctively that he was going to see more of his new patrician friend and had little doubt that on the next occasion he would be unable to avoid a viewing of the much-heralded four-poster.

As they neared the Shepherd's Market, his thoughts were interrupted by Stuart:

"I say, guv, I must congratulate you; you're probably the first lunch guest to escape without an inspection of the bedroom. The boss usually expects a little activity – if you know what I mean ... – after a good meal. You won't be so fortunate next time."

"Que sera, sera ..."

Patrick could not help but admire the young man. Stuart was tall, athletic and – by all accounts – very well endowed indeed, a physique well defined and carefully honed as a youth spent hauling cargo on the docks of Portsmouth. But clearly, his dreams lay elsewhere and, taking full advantage of his chiselled looks, his ambitions took him back to the City where he had been born. In London he had moved swiftly into a life of service, first as a doorman, then as a waiter, and finally as a manservant. Not unlike Patrick himself, his sexual preferences remained ambiguous but, true to his curious nature and fierce determination to succeed, he quickly learned which bent would serve him best. It wasn't long, therefore, that he had attracted the attention of the likes of Gregory Packer, and settled into a life of at least some comfort. Although he never quite managed to lose the accent and other trappings that told of his lowly beginnings, he was happy to enjoy the pleasures that this life offered to him. And the actor Patrick Donovan was a rewarding diversion for the ambitious young man.

"You know, guv, I don't have to get back immediately – traffic jams and so on ... How would you like it if I came up to

your apartment for a short while. The boss wouldn't know and it would be nothing to do with the club. Just a little gift from me to you, so to speak. I mean, I know your preferences – you seemed pretty satisfied last time ...”

“That would be very nice, Stuart. After all, I've been on my best behaviour the past several hours. Would be nice to let my hair down. After all, we actors do need our relaxation.”

After dropping Patrick at his front door and finding parking for the Bentley, Stuart climbed the steps to the first-floor apartment where he was welcomed by Patrick who had already changed into a white towelling robe and velvet slippers. Little formality ensued and in the bedroom Big Dick wasted little time in exhibiting his prowess and, in clinical fashion, performed what was expected of him leaving a prone actor thoroughly satiated.

As Stuart saw himself out, Patrick lay back on his bed – a comfortable one but less pleasing aesthetically, he was sure, than a particular four-poster – and chuckled at the turn of events that resulted in his host's servant, an employee of a sex club, servicing him admirably after a splendid lunch that he had prepared. A plot that might have come from the pen of Tolstoy ...

CHAPTER NINE

Alby Mullan noticed that across the Haymarket the Theatre Royal had put up large posters advertising “*Journey’s End* – LAST 7 PERFORMANCES”. His heart skipped a beat. Time was running short – it was now or never. So, later in the day, after he had received a rather generous tip helping an old lady out of her taxi, he crossed the road and for two shillings bought himself a single ticket high up in the Second Tier for the early performance on Saturday.

Dressed in the finest Oxfam clothes he could muster, which made him look slightly less down at heel than usual, Mullan had arrived early for the performance, forked out sixpence for the programme and read the profile on Patrick Donovan with some amazement. Looking at the photograph of the elegant young man, he wondered how his abandoned son could have done so well for himself, become so sophisticated and risen to the top of his profession. Turning this over in his mind, Alby ran the gamut of emotions: he preened himself that the son he had fathered had achieved such success; and yet he despised himself for the cold-hearted way he had left the youngster and for over 25 years had never even bothered to find out what had become of his own flesh and blood. He asked himself whether the man who now called himself Patrick would be able to forgive him. But he reasoned – somewhat optimistically – that blood is thicker than water and that any child would be pleased to renew acquaintance with his father. With this rationality, he determined to go back stage after the performance and introduce himself.

Then the lights dimmed, the audience fell into a hush and Alby Mullan settled back into his seat as the curtains parted. And then, when young Arthur appeared, his heart skipped a beat and he cleared his throat afraid that his emotions would get the better of him, but he sat through the performance enthralled and at the final curtain he rose and cheered along with the entire audience. He longed to be able to tell those alongside him that Patrick was his son.

At the stage door he exchanged greetings with Mike, the doorman, with whom he was on drinking terms. On occasion, between performances, they would slip into Ye Old Grapes in Panton Street and exchange yarns about their illusionary pasts and what they contemplated optimistically for the future.

“Well, what brings you here, Alby?”

“I want you to let me in to see Patrick Donovan.”

“You gotta be joking, mate. Strict instructions not to let anyone in. Great actor Donovan, but a snotty-nosed sod. What you want to see him for, anyways?”

“I’ve just attended the performance and I want to congratulate him. Bloody marvellous ...”

“Fuck sake, Alby, you think I can let in every person who thinks Donovan’s marvellous? There would be a queue from here to Marble Arch. Anyways, mate, since when are you a patron of the arts?”

“Since this afternoon when I saw my son on stage.”

“Your son? Who’s your son then?”

Mullan did not answer. He just looked his drinking buddy straight in the eyes. Then it dawned on Mike.

“Wait. You fuckin’ kiddin’ me! You out of your fuckin’ mind, Alby. Patrick Donovan your son ... I thought your name was Mullan. Next you’ll tell me Laurence Olivier’s your fuckin’ brother.”

“Listen, mate, Patrick’s name is Mullan, Arthur Mullan: he changed it some years ago. Haven’t seen him for ... must be some 20 years. Please, my pal, help me – I have to see him.”

“Shit, probably get my balls chewed off. What do I tell him – his father wants to see him?”

“No, tell him to do you a great personal favour. A great friend of yours just wants to say hello and get his autograph – will only keep him two minutes.”

“Well, hold on, old pal, I’ll do my best.”

Mike knocked at the dressing room door and there was a brusque, “Who is it?” When Patrick heard it was Mike the doorman, Patrick told him to come in and Mike, cap in hand, explained his request.

“Christ, Mike, you know I don’t have visitors between performances.”

“Please, Mr Donovan, sir, do this just once for me. If the guy doesn’t leave in two minutes I will come and haul him out meself.”

“All right, then, show him in – but, remember, just two minutes.”

So it was that an elated but distinctly nervous Alby Mullan was shown backstage and led to the star’s dressing room where Mike announced him, whispering, “Remember, mate – two minutes. That’s it.”

Mullan stood trembling, as Patrick lay slumped in an armchair. Much as he tried, he couldn’t hold back. Tears began to run down his face and no words would come. Looking up from the pile of fan letters he was reading, the well-modulated but firm voice asked:

“Well, what is it? What do you want?”

Taking a deep breath and steadying himself against the door, Mullan plucked up the courage to speak.

“You know who I am?”

“For God sake, man ...”

“My name is Mullan. Alby Mullan – Arthur, I’m your father.”

Without changing his position in the armchair, Patrick slowly lifted his head from his letters.

“Well, glory be to God ...”

There was a stunned silence as both men tried to take in what was happening.

“Where the fuck have you been for the last quarter of a century?” Patrick finally heard himself say. “Not doing too well, I imagine, judging by your appearance. What have you come here for? Money, no doubt.”

“Arthur, boy, I don’t want anything from you. Well ... I wouldn’t say no if you felt inclined to help your old man. Saw you on stage today and wanted you to know how proud I am of you.”

“Well, I can’t say the feelings are mutual. And please don’t call me Arthur: I abandoned that name years ago because it had no pleasant associations for me. If you must call me anything, then it should be Patrick – good old Irish name: that should please you.”

“Patrick, tell me about yourself ... You married ...? D’you have children?”

“None of those things.”

“I bet you have lovely girlfriends, fine-looking man like you.”

“No, I don’t. Mostly boyfriends, actually.”

“Boyfriends? Christ, don’t tell me my son’s a poofter?”

“I am what I am and it’s got fuck all to do with anyone – least of all you, the one who threw me to the dogs.” Patrick could feel the anger flush his cheeks. “You know I ended up at St Jospeh’s, at the mercy of those sexually frustrated priests? Well, they taught me – very well, I might add – the pleasures of the flesh. Not that it’s anything I regret, mind you. Some things just come naturally, I suppose. But, good God, don’t *you*, you of all people, judge me!”

Mullan was clearly uncomfortable, shuffling his feet as he struggled to respond. The true horror of what he had visited upon his son had hit home.

“Patrick, my boy, I know, I know ... I’m not sure if I can ever forgive myself. But I do love you, my son. This is a bad time ... Can we keep in touch?”

“No, Alby – I can’t bring myself to call you ‘Dad’ – we cannot keep in touch. You gave up that right years ago, at a time when I could have used a father. I wish you all the best but there is no future for us ... Please leave me alone. And stay out of my life.”

Patrick could feel his hands trembling. He never expected to ever have this conversation.

“I’ll respect that, son. But times are tough for me just now. I know toffs don’t carry money with them but if you did have a few quid you could offer your old dad, I’d be much obliged ...”

Rising from his chair, Patrick fumbled in a dresser drawer and pulled out a crumpled £5 note, which he handed to Mullan at arm’s length.

Immediately, the tone changed, the atmosphere in the room a little less tense, a little more charged with indignation.

“Christ, only a fiver... I get that as a tip so for helping an old lady out of her car.” Mullan coughed into his hand, not so sure whether he could save the situation now. Anyhow, thank you, son ... Suppose you don’t want me to sell the story to the *Daily Mirror*

that the big star Patrick Donovan is the son of the old fighter Alby Mullan ...?

“No, I certainly don’t want that.” A shiver crept down Patrick’s spine. He suspected that what was about to unfold should come as no surprise. “That, Alby, would be another despicable act in your chronicle of life achievements.”

“Don’t worry, Patrick ... Good Irish name you chose for yourself – much better than Arthur, I must say. I only want continued success for my son ... as far as I know, you’re my only son.”

Mullan moved towards his son, to embrace him, but Patrick kept him at arm’s length and with no more than a perfunctory farewell ushered his father towards the door and guided him through it. Here he watched as the prematurely old man shuffled out into wintry light of a London afternoon ...

Returning to his armchair, Patrick sat pensively with his chin resting in his hands. He thought he had handled the bizarre situation admirably and reasoned that had he allowed his father to re-enter his life, the old man might have been a millstone around his neck – one that could have caused him considerable embarrassment. On the other hand, however, Alby Mullan was his only flesh and blood. There remained a niggling doubt. Perhaps there were reciprocal duties in a father-and-son relationship? The fact that Alby had let his son down did not necessarily mean that Patrick should respond in similar fashion. He couldn’t help but feel sorry that he hadn’t treated the old man more gently and offered him substantially more money. The thought that Alby might be desperate enough to make contact with a newspaper was too horrible to contemplate. And he seemed the sort of person who might just do that. Remembering that Mike the doorman seemed to know Alby, he made up his mind to locate his father at some point and make at least some amends by giving him a more meaningful gift. But for now the show must go on ...

At a company party following the final performance of *Journey's End*, Patrick eloquently paid tribute to his mentor, Frank Shelley, who had taught him so much and had guided his fortunes for so long. He announced that Frank had been like a father to him – the father he didn't have. This was now the parting of their ways as Shelley was returning to the Oxford Playhouse and Patrick would be appearing in the Rattigan plays for a different management. *The Deep Blue Sea* was to be a new milestone in the career of Patrick Donovan. He fitted in to his leading man's role with consummate ease and developed a good rapport with the skilled director, Frank Butler, and the rest of the star-studded cast.

It was not long, too, before Gregory Packer returned to the scene and, during rehearsals when his evenings were largely free, Patrick spent many a night at Eaton Close where he became entirely familiar with the layout of the apartment and specifically the four-poster bed. Stuart was often in attendance to serve the meals but, with a wink to Patrick, he would discretely disappear when it became apparent that his presence was superfluous.

On occasions Patrick spent the weekend at the Eaton Close apartment and Gregory arranged outings to the ballet and opera at Covent Garden and to the latest plays in the West End. Patrick was often recognised and was regularly requested to provide an autograph for admirers, while Gregory watched with immense pleasure. They dined from time to time at the most fashionable restaurants, their favourites being L'Ecu de France, the Mirabelle and the Caprice.

There was no doubt that a warm affection had developed between the two men. Gregory revelled in his friendship with the handsome star, and Patrick enjoyed the sophistication that had been introduced into his life and the attention the older partner paid to his every whim. One evening when Gregory was in a confessional mood he told Patrick in the strictest of confidence that his man Stuart was also 'one of us' – "You'd never say he was, would you?" – and admitted that during a period when he was depressed and there was no one else in his life he had accepted the young man's offer of sex.

“And you know, Patrick, my dear, the cockney fairy was damned good at the job; very professional and considerate – a really good lover.”

“How long did this go on for?”

“Oh, for a couple of weeks until I got over my depression and found someone with whom I was also socially compatible. I hope I haven’t shocked you?”

“Not at all ... Stuart obviously served a purpose. What’s he like, I mean physically?”

“My dear boy, he is very well hung. He has a piece of equipment there that is something to behold ... and he knows how to use it.”

“How did you manage to end this affair with him?”

“I wouldn’t call it an affair ... No more than a few purely clinical unemotional sessions together. But I did enjoy them – they were most satisfying. How did I end it? When the time was appropriate I thanked him and told him enough was enough and he returned to his more conventional duties. And the matter has never been mentioned again. Patrick, dear boy, I hasten to mention it, but if you ever felt the need for a little variety, we could always involve Stuart, or you could have him on your own. I would understand completely and would rather keep it in the family, so to speak, than have you stray.”

“Gregory, I really don’t think so – that’s not my style.”

“No, of course, my dear Patricia, it isn’t ... I shouldn’t have mentioned it.”

“Did you just call me ‘Patricia’?”

“Yes, I hope you don’t mind. Just my little expression of deep affection.”

Alby Mullan couldn’t wait to get home to Shepherd’s Bush to tell Ann about what he still hoped would lead to a reconciliation with his son.

“First I must tell you he’s bloody amazing in that play. The best acting I’ve ever seen ...”

“Probably the only acting you’ve ever seen.”

“Don’t you believe it, woman. Back in Ireland ...”

“Oh, cut the crap about your cultural life in Ireland. What’s he like – Patrick?”

“A great man ... very handsome, distinguished, polite... You can tell he has good genes.”

“Such blarney! Was he pleased to see you?”

“Yes, I’d say he was. A little shocked at first but when he got to know his old man he seemed really affectionate. I was supposed to stay only two minutes but by the time we had reminisced a half-hour had gone by and I insisted on leaving to allow him to get ready for the evening performance.”

“You going to see him again?”

“Oh yes, he said we must stay in touch.”

“I hope you didn’t touch him for money.”

“No, I’d never do a thing like that.”

The Deep Blue Sea opened out of town with three nights in Leatherhead followed by a week’s run in Richmond before moving onto the West End. Gregory, wearing black tie with a black red-lined cape over his shoulders, was in attendance and paused outside the Lyric Theatre to take in the sight of the Donovan name in lights above the canopy. The cast gave a brilliant performance and received a standing ovation that rose to a crescendo when, answering the call for ‘author’, Patrick led Terence Rattigan from the wings onto the stage.

The first-night party was held around the corner from the theatre in Soho at the restaurant Gennaro’s and there was great excitement when after midnight the first morning newspapers arrived, all of which carried favourable reviews. Patrick received unanimous praise in all the papers and *The Times* notably said: “This handsome young actor has a special quality and confirmed his position as one of our leading actors.” During the course of the party, Patrick was pressed repeatedly by those not knowing of his addiction to have a celebratory drink and eventually he succumbed

to temptation and accepted a glass of Champagne. Within minutes the Antabuse, which he took routinely, exacted its toll and he became violently ill, sweating profusely and vomiting. The company doctor in attendance was extremely concerned – until Patrick managed to tell him about the medication he was taking.

Gregory, with the ever faithful Stuart on standby with the Bentley, managed to get Patrick home to Eaton Close where he took a sedative prescribed by the doctor. Patrick slept until midday with Gregory phoning to assure management that the actor would be fine for the performance that evening. Groggy but not too much the worse for wear, Patrick and Gregory sat down over a light salad lunch to conduct a post mortem concerning the events of the previous night.

“Well, I have certainly established that the cautions I received from the doctors were accurate and justified. Booz and Antabuse are not happy companions. One of them has to go and my vote is that it should be the Antabuse.”

“Not, dear boy, if you are going to start hitting the bottle as I believe you once did. That won’t be good for your career, not to mention your health.”

“Gregory, do you know how difficult it is for me to dine with you and to watch you drinking Bordeaux and Burgundy and super Tuscan wines while I drink fucking Cokes and sparkling water? It is extremely frustrating. What I have in mind is that with your help I could have a drink or two at dinner without getting carried away. I know I used to binge drink ... I didn’t know when to stop, and the drunker and more talkative I became the more encouragement I received from others to drink more. With your help, my friend, I am sure I could be responsible, and having a drink or two with meals would certainly make life more enjoyable. And it would certainly make our relationship more sociable and meaningful.”

“As long as you allow me to monitor your drinking and you agree to stop when I believe you have had your quota. And of course no drinking before a performance – you seem to have conquered the stage fright without the need for alcohol.”

The two men shook hands on this and embraced warmly.

“You are so good to me, Gregory ... I do love you.”

“Dearest Patricia, you light up my life. I don’t know what I would do without you.”

So it was that each night thereafter, after the performance, Patrick would have a single glass of wine; and on Sundays the quota would be extended to include a glass at lunchtime. The arrangement worked well and Patrick felt that the conviviality of the meals strengthened their relationship. Gregory had pleaded with Patrick to give up his home in Carrington House and to move in with him.

“Patsy, you are just pissing away your money living on your own. You have most of your meals here and sleep here several nights a week and most weekends. What is the point of maintaining a separate residence?”

“I just feel it gives me some independence. A place of my own ...”

“I want you to feel that my place is yours as well. You can have the guest room as your own – though I hope you wouldn’t spend many nights there – and I would fit it out as a study for you. Not a desk, but rather a Regency table I think would look good there. What do you say?”

“Gregory, I would want to contribute in some way... a rental or whatever would seem right.”

“Now you are being ridiculous; I wouldn’t dream of taking any money from you. It would be a privilege for me to have a great actor living with me and, Patsy, don’t you forget this, I love you.”

The second Rattigan play, *Separate Tables*, was equally well received and Patrick’s performances in the dual roles in the two one-act plays once again drew superlatives from the critics. Patrick Donovan was no longer one of England’s most promising actors; he had arrived and was regarded as representing the best the English stage had to offer. Together with his agent, Cyril Goodman, Patrick read dozens of scripts, both revivals and works by the new wave of playwrights and had meetings with managements and directors who were anxious to work with him.

Patrick was cast in plays at the Royal Court Theatre, the Old Vic and at the new National Theatre on the South Bank. At the National he worked with the great Sir Laurence Olivier for the first

time. Regarded as the greatest actor of his time in the English-speaking world and the foremost interpreter of Shakespeare of the twentieth century, many a young actor felt diminished in his presence. Whether due to arrogance or conceit, Patrick was not humbled by the great man. In fact the two of them got on really well together and formed a valuable friendship. Larry, as he was known to one and all, advised the younger man not to attempt to copy his style of acting.

“Pat, my boy, don’t be influenced by me because you will then end up doing an impersonation of an older actor. If you copy my voice and mannerisms people will say that you are doing an Olivier.”

Patrick’s memory flashed back to his audition for Ivor Novello when the same point had been made: that having listened to Larry’s recording frequently, his ‘speak the speech’ monologue mimicked the Olivier rendition.

Sir Laurence continued: “You must find something new in each role you play. If you stamp yourself and your mannerisms all over the part you are playing you will end up impersonating yourself. Although I am not a *method* devotee there is something in their craft: getting really inside the character of the person will result in a unique interpretation each time. The process of acting is like falling in love. The newness, the excitement of the relationship should be fresh and have no constraints. It is a rediscovery of life and, by the same token, it is an interlude from real life.”

“Larry, do you do a great deal of research into each character you play?”

“Absolutely, one must research in order to have a complete understanding of the role. An actor must be a good understander, either by intuition, observance, or both, and that puts him on the same level as a doctor, a priest or a philosopher. There are many dimensions in the art of acting but none of them has validity unless they are invested with the complete illusion of truth.”

As Patrick looked at his hero, he saw his dark and hypnotic eyes trained on him and wondered whether they contained a sexual significance. While Laurence Olivier was married several times (his first wife ending her life as a lesbian), and was officially ‘straight’,

the truth about his known bisexuality was subject to denial and an extraordinary voluntary press censorship prevailed. It was always suspected that from an early age he had been involved with his childhood friend the actor Denys Blakelock, a known homosexual, and that he may have had dalliances with bisexuals such as theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, actor and playwright Emlyn Williams, and with movie star, Marlon Brando. Noel Coward also featured on the list of Sir Laurence's supposed homosexual relationships, as did a surprisingly long and flamboyant friendship with American entertainer, Danny Kaye. In the light of this, all known to Patrick, he wondered whether he should be affronted that Olivier made no move towards him to bind their new friendship. But Sir Laurence's attention at that time was probably focused primarily on the forthcoming production where Patrick would be playing Iago to the great man's Othello. The combination of these two talents was hugely successful and resulted in Patrick being invited to remain with the National Theatre for some time.

Cast in smaller roles, sometimes no more than walk-ons, Patrick managed to steal scenes under the very noses of established actors by using an inventive gesture or two to compelling effect. Once in a Feydeau farce he walked on as a butler, had no lines, but with suitably Chaplinesque humour brought the house down and drew the ire of the leading actors when in the following day's review in the *Telegraph* the headline read: "Without a line, the Don steals the show." This was the first time that a critic referred to Patrick as 'the Don'. The name, however, resonated and thereafter newspapers and theatregoers invariably referred to Patrick as 'the Don'. Following his stay at the National Theatre, Patrick went back to the West End to appear in a succession of new plays.

Soon Gregory's persuasive way prevailed and his lover said goodbye to the Shepherd's Market and moved himself and his now considerable Savile Row wardrobe into the elegant townhouse Number 5, Eaton Close. True to his word, Gregory had transformed the main guest room into a comfortable study. Ample built-in

wardrobes accommodated the actor's clothing. The handsome – and specially acquired – Regency table had a green leather, gold-inlaid top with carved bow legs and a matching swivel leather chair. Completing the suite was a comfortable sofa and a wing-backed easy chair. One panelled wall included bookshelves that housed the complete works of Shakespeare and assorted volumes Gregory thought appropriate for an actor's reading and research. Subdued wall-to-wall carpeting and exquisitely soft silk drapes had been chosen by Gregory, and a selection of Toulouse Lautrec and Degas prints decorated the walls. Pride of place in the room was, however, given to an original Raoul Dufy oil, a colourful painting of yachts at a Cowes regatta, acquired specially by Gregory at a Christie's auction for a huge sum of money. A large standing lamp had a shade made cleverly out of the poster of *Journey's End*.

Patrick fitted into his new accommodation with consummate ease and while he was a joint occupant of the four-poster down the hallway, most of his day was spent in his study, reading scripts or learning lines. Gregory drew great pleasure from the fame of his companion and revelled in his role of ministering to his every need. On opening nights, Stuart and the Bentley would take the Don to the theatre, usually some two hours before curtain, and would then return to collect Gregory, resplendent in black tie and theatrical cape, to ensure that he was seated in about the fifth row well before curtain.

Gregory melded into the first-night scene, and theatregoers – after identifying the critics and other well-known theatrical personalities – would point out Gregory as well. During a play's run, Stuart would be waiting at the stage door with the Bentley – Gregory already ensconced inside – to drive the two of them to a restaurant for dinner or home for a quiet supper.

The Don was happy and contented in his new lifestyle. He viewed Gregory as a good-hearted fop and appreciated his love and devotion. However, while there certainly was reciprocal love, he had to admit to himself that his own passion and commitment were not of the same intensity and he had misgivings as to whether the sexual side of their relationship was sufficiently spectacular to prevent him from straying in the future. It had been a long time

since there had been a woman in his life and this was a deficiency that preyed on his libido. That he was basically bisexual had been kept from his lover – as was the fact that he and Stuart had known each other intimately. So, at the back of his mind Patrick feared that there was an inevitability that these matters would surface one day and he wondered how Gregory would react.

Patrick was always full steam at rehearsals and each performance was a challenge to him, always striving to improve. Woe betide an actor who was not always alert for there was nothing mechanical or static about the Don's acting; his dynamic style introduced new nuances, gestures and business that surfaced at almost every performance. Enormously confident, his aura imposed itself on each role he played and casts understood that they were in the presence of a master and responded by stretching their own capabilities. Despite his star quality, or perhaps because of it, managements did not find Patrick the easiest person to work with. Always entirely professional on stage, he was high maintenance in peripheral matters. His dressing room was required to be furnished to his specific requirements and dressers were changed frequently when they did not live up to his high expectations.

He was a difficult man and stage staff knew it was in their interest to stay out of his way as much as possible. As he sought perfection on stage, so was he intolerant of mediocrity off-stage. Managements were wary of the fact that he was essentially an alcoholic, even though he seemed to have his drinking under control. His past history of alcohol abuse was well known and they respected the fact that his drinking now took place after curtain and was confined to a glass or two of wine. However, they lived in fear that he would one day return to his previous ways.

A very excited Cyril Goodman told Patrick that his recently acquired friend, Sir Laurence Olivier, was presenting a play written by the great director Sir Tyrone Guthrie⁵ and both knights had

⁵ See page 209.

asked that Patrick Donovan play the lead. The play was *Top of the Ladder* and Guthrie, who was dividing his time between Canada and London, would be directing himself. It was unusual for Olivier to be producing a play, particularly as he was not acting in it, and this was taken as an indication that he saw great merit in the script. Guthrie, a towering figure in theatre and opera, was arguably the most important British director of his time. His talents were not confined to writing and directing plays, however – he also had enormous ability in running and administering theatres and theatre companies. A man of great height, Guthrie was sensitive about his stature and, peculiarly, would never reveal how tall he was. A lady who once posed the question, “How tall are you, Sir Tyrone?” received the response, “How thick are your ankles?”

Much admired by actors, Guthrie’s firmness in directing bordered on arrogance. He knew what he wanted and would not tolerate any deviation. His productions were usually all action with much business going on during dialogue; prolonged pauses were not his style. In fact, Cyril Goodman was concerned that Guthrie and his client might clash temperamentally but the director assured him that he had seen Patrick in many of his recent performances and looked forward to working with him. The play was due to open at the St James’s Theatre in two months’ time and, as this fitted in well with Patrick’s schedule, a contract was concluded.

Top of the Ladder was a most unusual play consisting of isolated images, not in chronological sequence, depicting the life of the main protagonist, Bertie, from childhood to old age; one moment in his boy pyjamas and the next in black jacket, striped pants and a bowler hat. It was not the primary intention to tell a story or delineate a character but rather to drive at the emotions of Bertie’s life using the technique of flashbacks. The dialogue was clipped and consisted largely of short phrases, a particular feature of the piece being the repetition of those phrases. The scenery was to be sketchy, with a large ladder, broad at the base and tapering down as it rose from stage to the flies. The ladder was to dominate the stage. Bertie, too, was on stage throughout and it was clear that the production was going to present a considerable challenge to

Patrick who had not previously encountered a work as *avant-garde* as this.

In the early stages of rehearsal, Guthrie insisted that all the parts be played naturalistically and Patrick responded in the child scenes by using the voice and movements of a child. This did not please the director and resulted in a major confrontation in front of the cast.

"I don't care how fucking famous you are, your direction makes no sense."

"Don't *you* talk to me like that! In the Glasgow try-out the actor playing Bertie did not use a childish voice – his voice made no concession to naturalism – and it worked perfectly well."

"Well, if that's the way he played it, he's a cunt! How can I act like a child and use a man's voice?"

"Because I tell you so. Your contract gives you no rights regarding artistic expression."

Patrick walked right up to Sir Tyrone and crouched before him, adopting the stance of a boxer and playfully dancing around him shooting out left jabs.

"Bloody obstinate man. What do you know about theatre? Let's settle the matter here."

The ridiculously incongruous scene of Patrick squaring up to the giant Guthrie brought howls of delight from the cast and both men cracked up laughing, which diffused a potentially serious conflict. Guthrie, it seems, had revealed a sense of humour that had not previously been apparent ...

"God, I was scared ... On reflection it seems that both ways are theoretically defensible and perhaps it should be done whichever way suits the personality of the actor. So let me hear how it sounds."

The rehearsal resumed with Patrick using a child's voice when appropriate and it seemed so right that Guthrie never referred to it again. Indeed by the time opening night came around, the leading man and his director had become firm friends. When 'Actors and beginners!' was called by the stage manager, Sir Tyrone had come backstage to wish the cast good luck. Patrick put

his arm around him and led him to the house curtains and peeped through them at the audience.

“Tyrone, they are the enemy out there: I am going to attack them and subdue them ... They are then going to see the greatest fucking performance of their lives. Lucky people! I’m doing it for you because I love you.”

“That’s the Don speaking ... I love you too, my friend.”

Top of the Ladder was not, however, a complete critical success. Many of the critics said that the dialogue was repetitious and that the story content was slight in relation to the length of the play. However, there was unanimous praise for the Don: “a tour de force” ... “performance to remember” ... “The Don scales new heights with every performance”.

When management at Her Majesty’s Theatre, Haymarket, discovered that the doorman was indulging in petty racketeering – a favourite ploy was to charge patrons to advance them to the front of the ticket queue – Alby Mullan was summarily dismissed. Since meeting with his son, he had carefully monitored Patrick’s career and knew that he was living at 5 Eaton Close.

Patrick had neglected to make further contact with his father, as had been his intention, and it often prayed on his mind. Consequently he was not entirely uncomfortable when Alby Mullan showed up at his residence one Sunday morning, shortly before aperitifs were to be served, and Stuart announced: “Sir, a Mr Mullan wishes to see you.” Patrick had told Gregory about his reunion with his long-lost father and had confessed his conscience at not doing anything to improve his welfare. He had known that another meeting was inevitable. And now was a good a time as any, he supposed. Patrick and Gregory had a quick discussion and it was agreed that father and son should meet privately in Patrick’s study. Stuart, curious in the extreme as to the identity of the caller, and with a look on his face that indicated that the visitor came from a lower social strata, duly announced: “Mr Andy Mullan, Sir.”

"It's Alby. Alby Mullan," grunted Mullan through clenched teeth, as he stepped into the room.

But on this occasion Patrick was more affable. In fact, he hated to admit, he was strangely excited about the prospect. After an awkward embrace – somewhere between a handshake and a hug – the two men sat and the tension seemed to dissipate a little, as if both men had resigned themselves to this tumultuous nature of the on-again-off-again relationship between them. They conversed happily together, mainly going over Patrick's career since their last meeting.

"Son, I didn't tell you that I was working across the road from the Haymarket as a doorman at Her Majesty's."

"So you are also in the theatre business?"

"Was: I was fired recently and since then have been looking – unsuccessfully, sorry to say – for work. To be frank, I am seriously down on my uppers. Mike, the doorman at the Theatre Royal – he's my friend, you know – he's the only one who knows about our relationship. As God is my witness I haven't told another soul. Oh yes, there's Ann, the woman I live with, but you could trust her. Good sort, really."

There was a brief silence, as if something remained unsaid. Patrick waited. There was more to come, of that he was sure.

"Mike has a friend who is a reporter at the *News of the World* who would pay a fortune for our story. In fact, Mike feeds him snippets of information about members of the casts and always gets a handsome tip for doing so. But I told him, 'Mike,' I says, 'Mike, I'd never do anything like that, you know. Not to me own flesh and blood.'"

"I appreciate that, Alby: revealing the truth about my background would interest a lot of people ... The fact that I have made it on my own, without any parental support, would be admired by many, I suppose, but I must admit it would be a huge embarrassment to me."

"Patrick, I wouldn't even contemplate it. But, to be frank, if you could help your old man out, it would really be appreciated. I know you must be a big earner these days – and well deserved, I

might say. Looking around here ... pretty comfortable place you got here, my boy."

Patrick excused himself from the room and, after a brief discussion with Gregory, Gregory opened the large safe hidden behind a Canaletto water scene – not the one of Venice but of the Limmat river in Zurich because Gregory felt that a painting of a scene next to the gnomes of Zurich was a fitting and secure position for the safe. With an envelope containing £250, Patrick returned to his study.

"Alby, this is a gift for you to help you over the hard times. I am sure if the positions were reversed and you were able you would do the same for me."

"Absolutely. Glory be to God, you're a good son, Arthur. Patrick."

"Well, I don't know about that. And let's not embellish this gesture unduly. It would be good to see you from time to time, but please don't expect handouts like this each time. I wouldn't want money to further tarnish any kind of relationship we may be able to salvage from here on."

Following a more conventional, somewhat warmer embrace Patrick guided his father to the front door and said goodbye. He watched as the dishevelled and prematurely stooped man sauntered down the road and wondered how long this largesse would keep his father away from the avid clutches of Fleet Street.

While Patrick Donovan had appeared in Shakespeare productions at the Oxford Playhouse, the real challenge of the Bard still awaited him. For a few years the newly formed Royal Shakespeare Company, already regarded as the foremost classical theatre company in the world, had been endeavouring to attract him to its home at Stratford-upon-Avon in the Warwickshire countryside. Theatrical performances had been staged in Stratford from at least William Shakespeare's time but since the building of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre the town had become inextricably identified with productions of the Bard's plays. Following Anthony

Quayle as director, Glen Byam Shaw – an authority on Shakespeare – assembled an impressive cast of actors who had the training, style and experience he was seeking and that was required for authentic Shakespearian productions. Mr Shaw had seen most of Patrick's recent stage appearances and believed that his voice and presence were unique and particularly suited for the heroic roles.

However, despite Cyril Goodman's negotiating skills, the Donovan contact for Stratford was substantially below the top money he had been earning in the West End. His agent convinced him that accepting this contract in no way diminished his standing and that Olivier, Gielgud and Richardson had all agreed to less than their true commercial value. Glad to be assured of this, Patrick in any event had little concern for the lowering of his income as Gregory took care of all his expenses and his stage earnings were accumulating in an investment account at Coutts Bank and were growing significantly.

For the duration of his stay with the company, Patrick would have to live in Stratford and so Gregory instructed an agent to find accommodation that was superior to the array of B&Bs suggested by the company. The agent was eventually successful in securing an apartment in a substantial double-storey house near the theatre where the owner, a charming widow in her mid-fifties, lived downstairs and the whole of the upstairs would be available for Patrick. Furnished with heavy mahogany furniture in Victorian style and looking somewhat jaded, it was, however, clean, comfortable and spacious and the proprietor would provide breakfast and any other meals that would be required. Driven by Stuart in the Bentley, Gregory accompanied Patrick to supervise his moving in and stayed two nights to ensure that everything was satisfactory. It was his intention to visit at weekends and of course be present on opening nights.

Glen Byam Shaw intended that Patrick play Hamlet and without this undertaking the actor wouldn't have committed himself to an extended multi-play contract. However, Patrick agreed to be introduced to the repertoire and its ensemble style of acting with a succession of smaller parts all of which he fulfilled with distinction. His first major role came when he was cast as Malvolio, the iconic

steward of Olivia's household, in the comedy *Twelfth Night*. Although not intended to be a main role, played expertly as it had been over the years by a succession of great actors, Patrick felt that Malvolio had the capacity to elevate the status of the character to one of great prominence and importance. When he believes that Olivia loves him, Malvolio develops a serious case of narcissism, a condition not entirely new to Patrick. Reading from a letter written by Maria, he ponders the immortal lines: *Some are born great; some achieve greatness; and some have greatness thrust upon them*. Patrick's delivery relied on lengthy pauses with accompanying expressions as he contemplated each phrase. It was a masterly rendition as was his whole interpretation of this famous character and it was recognised as such with enthusiasm by local critics and by leading London critics who had come to Stratford especially for this opening night.

Hamlet was the next cliff to climb and Patrick had been studying the text and all available dissertations on the subject avariciously. He saw a great deal of similarities in the lives of the Dane and the Don and believed that there were many 'to be, or not to be' question marks in his own life.

But then a potential subplot arose at the first reading of the play when Patrick cast his eyes on the actor who was to play Ophelia. Her rehearsal tights hugged every outline and crevice of her sculptured body, fore and aft. When he could return his mind to the artistic side of this damsel he realised that she epitomised everything he believed Ophelia to be: aesthetic good looks, childlike and naïve, wan, slim, long blonde hair, fleet of foot as if moving on air, and most of all a look of frailty and innocence. Recently graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, director Shaw had seen Julie McGovern's end-of-year performances at the Academy and had earmarked her as a possible Ophelia. He relished the idea of casting her, rather than relying on one of the older, more established – and more mature – name actors available to him; of pitting her innocent youth in combat against the intense introspection he anticipated from the Don. Patrick liked the casting but saw other possibilities as well and invited Julie to his place after work so that they could go over their lines together in

solitude. Shortly after their private rehearsal began, Patrick took Julie into his arms and kissed her passionately, her tongue responding by quivering against his lips indicating that she was not averse to the intensity of his acting. Emerging for breath she said: "I had no idea the script called for this."

"This is additional business I dreamed up when I first set eyes on you. I hope you find it acceptable?"

"Absolutely, I find it totally appropriate."

"Stanislavsky always urged his method students to immerse themselves in their roles; I think that we should follow his direction."

And with that Patrick lifted Julie into his arms and carried her towards the bed. Lying next to her, he slipped his hand under her black RADA T-shirt and she assisted by pulling the garment over her head, exposing her small, young alabaster breasts whose disproportionately large pink nipples already indicated a state of arousal. As he pulled down her black sweat suit pants she unbuttoned his shirt and wriggled out of the thong she was wearing. Standing to shed his remaining garments, Patrick looked down and was highly aroused by his naked Ophelia – particularly when his eyes rested on her shaven mound of Venus. His tumescence excited her and she reached up pulling him towards her. Brushing aside preliminaries that were considered superfluous the two of them locked together with consummate ease and rocked together joyously, changing positions frequently to discover and explore each other's erogenous zones for increasing and satisfying pleasure. Julie's expertise belied her look of innocence and she tutored her lover in nuances of delight previously undiscovered by him. Elevating herself to the senior partner in the lovemaking she guided their passions to a simultaneous climax of extraordinary proportions and added a dimension to the play that Will Shakespeare had not even contemplated.

"My God, you're wonderful. Where did you learn all these delightful tricks?"

"At RADA one doesn't learn only to act; teachers constantly impress on students that they must emerge well-rounded

personalities; well versed in the ways of the world to cope with all different types of roles.”

“Well, they certainly did a good job on you!”

“We are also taught to look beyond the script – to try to discover what motivated the playwright ... to read between the lines. Isn’t that what we were doing?”

“By Jesus, we read between the lines all right!”

“Hey, what’s this business about your being a homo? I was warned to lay off you – that you were a fairy.”

“Well, I am a homosexual ... a practising one, at that.”

“Like fuck you are. You’re as much homo as I’m a dyke.”

“Believe me, and I’m being serious, I am basically homosexual but I regard myself as bisexual because, put simply, I enjoy women as well as men.”

“But what is your preference?”

“I turn to men out of need, for my sustenance, but when I find an exciting woman like you who appeals to me, my sexual excitement knows no bounds.”

“So are you now going to dump me and return to your male lover?”

“Julie, we are going to be together for at least a couple of months and after this experience I am not going to let you out of my system. What is going to happen with my lover/partner/companion, whatever the description, God alone knows.”

“Tell me about your relationship with him.”

Patrick settled in the bed alongside Julie, pulled the sheet up to cover their bodies and, with his arm around her, related his meeting with Gregory, how he eventually moved in with him, and how they had lived together for the past few years.

“What is Gregory like?”

“He is quite a unique character: some 20 years older than me, quite good looking – *distinguee* really – extremely wealthy and very generous to me. To be frank, he adores me and will be devastated when he discovers that I have been unfaithful to him.”

“If he breaks his relationship with you, will that concern you?”

“Concern me? My life will implode. He does everything for me, looks after me, and relieves me of every responsibility so that my only care is my work. My life will go back to square one.”

“I don’t want to be the cause of such an upheaval in your life. Shouldn’t I just get up and go home and we concentrate on the script just as Will wrote it?”

“Julie, I have to be honest, what happened between us was waiting to happen – if not with you, at some time it would have happened with someone else. I am not meant to be monogamous; I have surprised myself by being loyal to Gregory for so long. Although, I have to confess, there has been someone else on the odd occasion.”

Patrick then confided his experiences with Stuart, which Julie found intensely interesting.

“Mind you, Gregory did say some time back that if I ever found the need for some more excitement in my sex life, he would understand. But I think he had Stuart in mind for that function – certainly not a beautiful woman like you. Funny, another man temporarily in my life, I imagine he might tolerate, but a woman would be anathema to him.”

Julie turned to entwine herself with her lover and ran her hand slowly and sensuously down his back as far as she could reach and gently stroked his bottom. At the same time she brushed her lips against his, outlining his mouth with the tip of her tongue. Almost instantly she could feel that Patrick was ready for act two and the actors slowly and sensuously began to reprise their earlier rehearsal with more passion than even before, Julie assuming the role of dominatrix.

CHAPTER TEN

Safe in the knowledge that Patrick was deeply immersed in his rehearsals for *Hamlet*, Gregory had not communicated with him for a few days. However, he knew that there were no scheduled rehearsals for the weekend so on Saturday morning, dressed rather like a country squire in a checked tweed suit – as befitted a visit to the Cotswolds – Stuart drove him in the Bentley to Stratford-upon-Avon to spend the weekend there.

Arriving at Patrick's lodgings, the landlady explained that she had not seen Mr Donovan for the past day or so; indeed the last time she had seen him was a few nights ago when he told her he would be rehearsing upstairs with the lady who was playing Ophelia. A clearly agitated Gregory looked around upstairs and a forensic examination was unnecessary for him to conclude that when the bed was last slept in it had more than one occupant.

At the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre the stage manager and his crew were working on stage and told Gregory that neither Patrick nor Julie had been to rehearsal the day before. He said that the director was furious and if they didn't show up at 10 o'clock on Monday morning, drastic action might result. A distraught Gregory was driven around the town to haunts Patrick might frequent but there was no sign of the delinquent actor. Ensconced in the upstairs lodgings and having tidied the place and having changed the bedding, Gregory's vigil ended on Sunday night when an unkempt and somewhat under-the-weather Patrick materialised.

"Oh Gregory, my dear, I didn't know you were here – what a pleasant surprise."

"I have been here since yesterday morning. Where in Christ's name have you *been*?"

"Gregory, you know I wouldn't lie to you ... I have been rehearsing with my Ophelia."

"And why did you both skip rehearsal on Friday?"

"To be frank, we thought a few days together might benefit our performance."

"Patrick, have you gone out of your fucking mind?"

“No, I don’t think so ... Julie is a lovely person – good actress too – and I think our time together will help bring out the best in both of us.”

“Stop patronising me. You have clearly been having sex with the woman!”

“Oh yes, gorgeous sex! She is very good at that too.”

“Does that mean our relationship has ended?”

“No, I don’t think so – not as far as I am concerned.”

“You didn’t tell me that you were bisexual ...”

“Well, I thought I was at one time ... but I truly believed that was in the past.”

“We are lovers and have a deep commitment to each other.”

“We still do, but you don’t own me, Gregory. You have been astonishingly good to me in every way, but I am still my own man.”

“I never thought you would be unfaithful to me – and with a woman! It disgusts me ...”

“Don’t knock it, Gregory, if you haven’t tried it. Have you ever had sex with a woman? Quite nice really ... The sexual parts seem to fit so admirably– seem to be designed for each other. Whereas men have to improvise with each other to get their satisfaction ... Somewhat gross, isn’t it? I mean you and I love each other and all that, and I derive much pleasure from sex with you but I must say it’s a bit primitive ... Anatomically, it doesn’t really work.”

“You’ve never complained before. In fact, your orgasmic roars rather suggested that you were having a good time.”

“Clinical sex with a man is just fine, my dear Gregory; but the aesthetic enjoyment at the sight of a beautiful young woman’s naked form is something to behold ... the passion it arouses in one ... the quickened pulse ... the all-embracing irresistible urge to penetrate as God intended, that is a different dimension entirely.”

“Does this mean you have retired from homosexual activity?”

“Oh no ... this is undoubtedly a passing phase and when it wears off I am sure I shall return to my regular diet of manly passion.”

“Does love not come into this equation? I thought we loved each other ...”

“We do love each other, Gregory, and I am quite sure I will always love you. But sex is something else – a means to an end. To be frank, my friend, your manly body – well preserved for your age, I admit – does not send my heart aflutter. You do pretty well, mark you, and help me achieve the objective, but through no fault of your own, your age and gender are inhibiting factors.”

“And how should I react to this sexual revelation of yours ... just hang around until your ardour is spent? A week ... a month ... a year?”

“I don’t know, Gregory. I ask you to be patient. A crisis has arisen in my life and when it resolves itself I would hope you would take me back in your arms – both literally and figuratively. And then I am sure I will love you more than ever for your tolerance and understanding.”

Gregory was in a state of bewilderment: he loved Patrick on at least three different levels. He loved and admired the fine figure of a man he presented with his gorgeous body, mellifluous voice and charm; secondly, he drew great vicarious pleasure from his fame in the theatre; and thirdly, he at least, enjoyed a sexual life that he knew he could not better. He had been so sure of his relationship with Patrick that being cuckolded, so to speak, in these circumstances was difficult for him to bear. However, he thought good sense prevailed when he decided to be pragmatic, not to vent his extreme anger, nor to precipitate any action that might entirely destroy his relationship with Patrick. It was a frosty atmosphere until the two occupants of the double bed eventually fell asleep.

On Monday morning Hamlet and his Ophelia were summoned to the director’s office and were advised in no uncertain terms that absence from rehearsal would not be tolerated and should there be a recurrence, as difficult as it might be, the two actors would be replaced. Patrick gallantly shouldered the blame and said that it was his idea that they rehearse privately. While management had no qualms about dismissing the notion that the actors’ tryst was motivated by a desire to rehearse, they were spellbound by the rapport that developed between them at rehearsal and had visions that Patrick’s portrayal of Hamlet might be a definitive one.

As Gregory was not permitted to attend rehearsals and as he had exhausted the sightseeing possibilities of Stratford, his sense of pragmatism told him that he should return to London at least as long as the heir to the throne of Denmark was having an unscripted affair with one of his country's noblewomen. In the meanwhile, director Glen Byam Shaw became somewhat concerned by the passionate intensity of the acting between his two principals and particularly during the Mousetrap Play scene he was required to tone down the sexually suggestive remarks Hamlet makes to Ophelia.

"Too much, too much, kids – you are rewriting the play ... you are making it pornographic. At this stage, Ophelia should still appear naïve and be the epitome of goodness. Patrick, you *must* tone it down a bit. I know that Hamlet believes all women are whores but the 'get thee to a nunnery' is still to come."

Somewhat in awe of the famous Shakespearian director, Patrick suppressed his usual arrogance when it came to directorial suggestions and repeated the scene in a way that pleased Mr Shaw. Following their dressing down for missing a rehearsal, Patrick and Julie's behaviour was at first impeccable but into the third week they started to arrive later and later for rehearsals. Shaw admonished them and while the cast were entranced by the performances that were emerging, they were increasingly irritated by having to hang around waiting for the principals to appear. The actor playing Polonius, waiting for Ophelia to rehearse a scene with her, asked:

"What the fuck has happened to my daughter?"

To which Laertes raised a laugh by responding: "That's exactly what's happened to her! This sister of mine seems to need her early morning activity otherwise she will crumble prematurely into insanity."

Indeed Patrick and Julie did seem to be acquiring many of the traits of the characters they were portraying. He was becoming increasingly enigmatic and in general conversation with the cast and others there always seemed to be more to him than he was prepared to reveal. His melancholy disposition was very much like that of Hamlet, and his indecision – about mundane things such as

where and what to eat – seemed to encapsulate the ‘to be or not to be’ syndrome. She, in turn, was infatuated with him and seemed unable to cope with the routine of life and, showing great frailty, relied on him entirely. They both came alive in rehearsal and on their own behind closed doors, but outside the bedroom and the theatre their lives were less than inspiring.

For years, Patrick had been looked after and cared for and there was no doubt that in this respect, at least, he missed Gregory enormously. Gregory similarly pined for his lover but – practical in every respect – resorted, as an interim measure, to re-engage the intimate help of the devoted Stuart who was pleased to render the required services that satisfied his master.

The eagerly anticipated opening night of *Hamlet* arrived and the play received a tumultuous reception, with Patrick earning a standing ovation amid cries of ‘Bravo!’ Sitting in solitude in the rear of the stalls was Gregory who had entered the auditorium without his usual flamboyance and as he stood to his feet with the audience, tears of pride rolled down his cheeks. Wondering what the future would be with Patrick, he convinced himself that the affair with Julie was an aberration, that its occurrence was purely in the interests of art, and that sanity would prevail and that his lover would return to the fold.

The reviews of the play were brilliant. *The Times* critic rapturously wrote: “The role of Hamlet, believed to have been created by Richard Burbage, has been played by great actors such as Henry Irving, Edwin Booth, and Laurence Olivier: to those names add ‘The Don’ – Patrick Donovan, who last night soared to great heights in a performance I will never forget.” The *Daily Telegraph* review described Patrick’s performance as “near to a definitive Hamlet as anything I have seen” and added that “with imperious intelligence the vacillating egocentric prince brought off a coup by blowing the cobwebs out of the play”. Unfortunately, the critics were not as kind to Julie, and as one critic put it: “Her Ophelia was pleasing but a terribly sane little thing.” While Julie well recognised that the play was indeed about the Danish nobleman, she felt that Patrick’s performance strangled Ophelia and left little room for her to develop a persona of her own. This feeling

led to disagreement between the two and she blamed Glen Byam Shaw for allowing Hamlet to overpower all other members of the cast. Trying to pacify her, Shaw told her that in view of the play's tremendous success and the praise showered on the lead, he could hardly intervene at this stage to adjust the power and domination of Patrick's performance. Patrick, in turn, showed little concern for Julie's feelings and arrogantly reminded her that the play was about Hamlet and that "the rest of the cast are merely supernumeraries".

This was more than Julie could take and despite the enormous attraction of living with Patrick, she packed her belongings and moved out of his lodgings. Patrick watched passively as she left and, as this was not a performance night, *Hamlet* being in repertory with *As You Like It*, he calmly reached for the bottle and indulged himself with a generous helping of scotch. He then dialled the number of Eaton Close.

"Gregory, my darling man, have you read the reviews?"

"Of course I have. Stuart collected all the newspapers and I am thrilled at your success ... I had no doubt that you would be sensational. My only doubt was whether the environment you had created, living with that woman, would affect your performance."

"Well, obviously it didn't. Maybe the change was good for me. Nothing like a little sex with a lovely young thing to inspire one."

"For how much longer do you require inspiration?"

"No longer – Julie has left, departed ... fucked off."

"Oh really ... and are you now working your way through Gertrude, Hecuba and the young female assistant stage managers?"

"Gregory, really, it is over. I told you it was an infatuation ... it happens. In any case, I am now on my own."

"Is that an invitation for me to come back into your life?"

"You know you don't need an invitation. It was always going to be like this – a brief hiatus, so to speak. I am ready for you."

So it was that back in Eaton Close, Stuart was summoned and it was not long before the Bentley was on the road to Stratford-upon-Avon; and the lives of two men resumed as if nothing had ever separated them.

Hamlet ran to packed houses for an extended season and Patrick and Gregory quickly became part of the community life in Stratford and enjoyed living there. After discussions with Glen Byam Shaw, Patrick agreed to play the title role in *Macbeth* and went into rehearsal while *Hamlet* was still running. Gregory was reassured by the fact that both Lady Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's most wicked characters, and the outspoken Lady Macduff, were played by actors of maturity who would not raise the spirits of the most prurient male. As for the witches, Patrick reported that all three were sufficiently weird so as to appear on stage without requiring any form of make-up ... *Macbeth*, or 'the Scottish play', as cast members referred to it in deference to the superstition in the profession that one did not refer to the play by name, opened to uniformly good notices with the Don being singled out once again for acting of the highest quality.

It was during the run of the play that on occasion Patrick seemed to be acting irrationally. There was no question that his drinking had increased but at the same time he never became intoxicated and the alcohol he consumed did not seem to interfere with his performance. At his lodgings, for no apparent reason, his eccentricity manifested itself when he started locking drawers and cupboards and began to speak to Gregory in a stentorian voice as if he were a character from the pen of William Shakespeare himself. Sometimes Patrick would be found sitting in a chair, staring ahead in a catatonic state, and when Gregory asked him what he was doing he replied that he was receiving briefings from William Shakespeare about how to handle his plays. When told that he was hallucinating, he replied emphatically that this was not so and contended that it was Shakespeare, described by him as his guardian angel, who had directed him and not Glen Byam Shaw. Patrick insisted on the radio being on early each morning because – as he explained to Gregory – coded messages were being sent to

him by his friend Will, advising the times when he should be available for more detailed instruction.

His sexual relationship with Gregory had also become intermittent and one night, while making love in their accustomed manner, Patrick asked:

“Gregory, darling, things don’t feel quite the same. Where is your vagina?”

Shocked by the question, any feeling of ardour that might have existed dissipated fast and Gregory tried to explain to his partner that he was in bed with his male lover and not Julie.

“Oh come on, Gregory, I know that; but I remember you did have a vagina.”

At this point Gregory realised that there was something seriously wrong. Patrick seemed intent on removing himself from the real world and was increasingly lost in his own fantasies, refusing to be disturbed by human contact. Under the pretext that he should have a routine physical check-up, Gregory with great difficulty persuaded him to see a doctor who, unbeknown to Patrick, was a prominent psychiatrist whose practice included a wide range of patients from the arts world.

After a lengthy consultation, Dr Leslie Tucker took Gregory aside and spoke to him privately. He said that he did not want to breach patient confidentiality but found it necessary to talk to the person who would be taking care of Patrick. He had concluded that the patient’s emotional responses were abnormal, that he had distortions in his perception and interpretation of reality, and that he was clearly hallucinatory and paranoid. The psychiatrist did not find it unusual that Patrick still could perform on stage to his high standard as he believed that being word perfect and completely in control of his role, his performance was effectively a conditioned reflex. But he added as a cautionary note that woe betide anything disrupt the normal running of the play – there would be no knowing how Patrick might react. Gregory, when asked whether there was any known question of substance abuse – alcohol or drugs – related his partner’s long history of addiction to alcohol but was unaware of his ever using drugs.

“Mr Packer, there are several possibilities as to the cause of your friend’s erratic behaviour. I do not believe that he is psychotic and have a strong feeling that there has been a physiological intervention that is producing symptoms that have the appearance of dementia praecox, which can be the precursor to full-blown schizophrenia. There is also the possibility that he has a cerebral vasculitis, resulting from a bleed in the brain. But, to be frank, I strongly suspect that his condition is the result of taking drugs.”

“Doctor! What makes you say *that*?”

“Because he has raised blood pressure, an elevated rate of breathing; his temperature is marginally high and, most importantly, his pupils are dilated. In my experience, he appears to be a man who is taking serious doses of drugs. I asked him whether he took any drugs, and of course he denied it emphatically. He then volunteered what he called a confession – that he took aspirin on occasions for headaches.”

“I don’t know how he can be taking drugs ... I am never far from his side, except when he is on stage. I do all the shopping and buy all his requirements. He has little contact with anyone outside the theatre.”

“Well, it could be that someone in the theatre is supplying him with drugs.”

“These things are expensive, I believe, and he doesn’t handle money. At all. And on most nights I am with him in his private dressing room until his call.”

“Mr Packer, I am a psychiatrist, not a detective ... All I know is that it looks very much like he is on drugs – and my experience has been that people taking drugs are very inventive about getting their supplies.”

“Have you any idea, doctor, what type of drug he might be taking?”

“My guess would be that it is cocaine.”

“And how would he take it?”

“It could be orally or by intravenous injection, but I noticed some blemishes around his nostrils, which strongly indicate that he is snorting.”

“Through his nose?”

“Well, I don’t know of any other suitable orifice for snorting!”

“Would he need any special equipment for this?”

“Not really. Addicts use anything that they can roll ... For some unknown reason, probably availability, bank notes seem to be a great preference, or any firm piece of paper – although they often have a preference for a simple straw.”

The next step was a brain scan, which proved negative, and Dr Tucker advised that he would rather not medicate until Gregory had conducted an intensive investigation into the possibility of drugs playing a role. So for the next few days Gregory kept Patrick under close surveillance even gaining the ire of the stage manager by following the actor from his dressing room to the wings. Surreptitiously, while the Thane of Glamis was ranting about the possibility of Birnamwood coming to Dunsinane, Gregory searched the dressing room from top to toe but could find no evidence of drugs. Likewise at the lodgings his search bore no fruit. Then one morning when the Bentley arrived on one of its several runs each week to deliver the post and other requirements from the West End, Patrick spotted the car from the upstairs window and went down to meet Stuart who handed him a brown carrier bag. When he returned upstairs Gregory saw that the package bore the name *Geo F. Trumper*, the famous hairdresser in Curzon Street Patrick had frequented for many years to get his regular and insanely expensive haircuts. Trumper had been in existence for well over a hundred years and described itself as ‘gentleman’s barbers and perfumers’. The interior of the salon retained the original mahogany cubicles and display shelves that had been installed in the early twentieth century. Apart from haircuts, hair stylings, manicures and elaborate shaves, involving hot and cold towels and fragrant aftershave balms, it also kept a wide variety of gentlemen’s grooming items to which Patrick was addicted. While Patrick was taking his usual afternoon nap before a performance, Gregory was carrying out due diligence in the bathroom, inspecting the contents of the package from Trumper. The variety of cosmetics had been placed neatly in the medicine chest: there was a bottle of lime cologne, a wooden bowl of Rose Hard Shaving soap, a Lime After Shave glass crown-

top bottle, a plastic container of Lemon Shampoo and a 100-gram container of Trumpers Lavender Talcum Powder, which bore the description 'A light dusting powder with the delicate scent of the lavender fields'. To ensure that these products were what they purported to be, Gregory tested them all. However, when he tried to sprinkle the talc, nothing came out. Unscrewing the top, he found that the inside of the cap had been taped to prevent sprinkling and, smelling the white crystalline powder contents, he could detect no hint of lavender. And when he also discovered a few drinking straws tucked away in the bathroom, Gregory realised that he had uncovered the source of the cocaine and that the astute Dr Tucker's suspicions were accurate.

Stuart had already departed on his return journey and, in any case, Gregory felt that he would deal with him later to find out the source of the supply of cocaine for he did not believe that it was a Trumpers stock item ... The question was how to deal with Patrick about this discovery; he did not want to risk upsetting his equilibrium before an evening performance. Instead he decided he would make a further appointment with Dr Tucker and confront Patrick in the presence of the psychiatrist. After his nap, Patrick went in to the bathroom to prepare for his departure for the theatre and a short while after emerging, Gregory, watching his partner's every move, noticed that he seemed exhilarated and was in a particularly talkative mood, contrasting with his rather sullen state before his rest. He also stated that he was not in the slightest bit hungry ...

At the theatre that night, Gregory waited in the dressing room listening as he often did to the performance on the tannoy. Macbeth seemed to be in great form and the audience was spellbound by his portrayal. However, Gregory sat up with a start when it appeared that things were going array on stage. Well into the second act, Patrick commenced the speech, "*Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep ...*" at the end of which Lady Macbeth should ask him, "*What do you mean?*" However, the line did not come and the actor did not hear her cue from the prompt. There was what appeared to be an embarrassing pause, after which Macbeth commenced reciting Hamlet's famous speech to the players:

“Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you trippingly on the tongue ...” The knowledgeable audience knew immediately that this was the wrong play and there were gasps in the audience, and by the time the line *“Oh, it offends me to the soul ...”* was reached, there was laughter, followed by a stunned silence as Patrick sank slowly to the floor and the house curtain was brought down.

There was pandemonium back stage. Macbeth lay huddled in a foetal position on stage, there were calls for a doctor in the house and cries for an ambulance. Gregory rushed on stage to see what was happening and a manager advised the audience that Mr Donovan had been taken ill and the play would continue in 15 minutes with the stand by Macbeth. After being carried to his dressing room, the house doctor appeared and stated that the unconscious actor was having a convulsion or seizure, but that he could not rule out a cerebral haemorrhage or heart failure. The ambulance, on standby near the theatre, was on the scene virtually immediately and the patient, with Gregory accompanying him, was transferred to the accident and emergency department at the Stratford-upon-Avon Hospital.

While the patient was being administered oxygen and attended to by doctors, he regained consciousness, had no recall of what had happened, was bewildered by his surroundings and became aggressive. Tests for cardiac or cerebral damage proved negative and, after stabilising and then sedating him, the actor was admitted to a private room to spend the night under observation with a view to further evaluation in the morning. Gregory advised the doctors that there was a strong possibility that his friend had been under the influence of cocaine, that Dr Tucker had seen him a view days ago and that the psychiatrist suspected that the actor was a cocaine addict. By the time Gregory left the hospital, it was the early hours of the morning and Patrick Donovan was in a deep sleep.

The next day a shaken and sleep-deprived Gregory returned to the hospital, taking with him the container of Trumpers Lavender Talcum Powder. Dr Tucker was already at Patrick’s bedside and said that he had spoken to him briefly before he again fell into a

deep sleep, which the doctor said was consistent with the known after effects after cocaine wears off. Examining the ‘talcum powder’, Dr Tucker believed that it was cocaine hydrochloride but said he would send it to the hospital pharmacy for confirmation.

Over the next few days, Patrick woke occasionally, delirious and ranting incomprehensively, often delivering lines from a play he had appeared in, and consistently refusing food – leading to him being fed intravenously. He seemed exhausted and slept most of the time, but after a week, the hospital doctors concluded that as there was no apparent illness or sign of a cardiac or cerebral disease, and that as depression, hallucinations and drug addiction were not part of the hospital’s remit, he could no longer be kept there. They thus advised that he be transferred to a psychiatric health centre for addiction treatment. Dr Tucker concurred and it was arranged that Patrick would be admitted to The Monastery, a specialist nursing home in Putney that catered specifically for patients suffering from alcohol or drug abuse and eating disorders.

Under the care of a resident psychiatrist, Dr Emile Grutter, Patrick was slowly introduced to a detoxification programme that included low-grade saunas, nutritional supplements and moderate exercise. His deep depression, however, remained: he had developed chronic paranoia, believing that the nurses were poisoning him, and wandered around constantly pouring out lines from Shakespeare, Rattigan, Coward and other plays. On one of Gregory’s regular visits, he asked him to bring him his Trumpers cosmetics and that he had a particular need for the talcum powder he used after showering.

“Patrick, my darling, you know that you can’t have that talc: you know and we all know that it isn’t powder at all, is it? It is really cocaine. And it is that cocaine that has made you so terribly ill. My love, we are trying to cure you ... so that you will be well again and return to the stage.”

“Cocaine – I don’t know what that is ... The talcum powder goes on my body and makes me feel so good. *Hail Macbeth who shall be king hereafter!* I must go, Gregory, or I will be late for my entrance.”

Gregory watched heartbroken as the once fine figure of a leading man, now a decrepit image of his former self, shuffled off oblivious of his surroundings or mental state. In fact, it had been many weeks and there was no visible sign of any improvement. The doctors told Gregory that cocaine abuse and addiction presented a complex problem involving biological changes in the brain as well as a myriad other factors of a sexual, environmental and social nature. He was told that there were no medications available to treat cocaine addiction specifically and that anti-depressive drugs would continue to be administered in the hope they may have some affect. The doctors stated if there were no improvement they would consider using a transdermal patch, which was being developed, as well as a new drug, Disulfiram, which was in the trial stage of combating alcoholism and which might be affective for cocaine abusers as well. Gregory believed that a lot of the medical talk was little more than mumbo jumbo, that the doctors were groping in the dark, and he had difficulty in accepting that they really understood what they were doing. He was even more apprehensive when it was recommended that Patrick undergo psychoanalysis to determine the cause of his alcoholism and cocaine addiction.

“Dr Grutter, I don’t know if I am into all this Freud stuff.”

“You don’t have to be, Mr Packer. It is not you who would be receiving analysis.”

“Yes, but I do want to be assured that there would be some benefit from this psycho business. How will it help?”

“There is no guarantee. But Freudian analysis has been a recognised psychiatric tool for at least the past 60 years. It enables a skilled psychiatrist to gain an understanding of the patient’s mind by making conscious their unconscious thoughts. The practice is particularly useful in gaining an insight into a person’s depression, which is precisely what Mr Donovan is suffering from at present.”

“Is this the business where a patient lies on a couch ...?”

“Well, I believe Freud used that particular procedure but today psychoanalysts have their own methods. Essentially the skills haven’t changed much and patients are encouraged to reveal their dreams and childhood memories and repressive thoughts. It is a lengthy exercise involving several sessions a week and – to get the

best results – should continue for many months, perhaps even years.”

“Doctor, I have some doubt as to whether Patrick would ever reveal his inner thoughts to a stranger.”

“Mr Packer, he has – to some extent – done so already. During the past weeks my colleagues and I have talked to him from time to time. We already know that he had a dreadful childhood, was removed from his parents and placed in a Catholic school; that he was sexually abused at that school and ran away; that he became an alcoholic; that while he is a known homosexual, he is in reality bisexual; and more recently he has become seriously addicted to cocaine. And during all this turmoil he managed to become one of the most admired actors of our time. He is a classic subject for psychoanalysis.”

Patrick’s psychotherapy analysis progressed felicitously over many months (and at great cost to Gregory) to the great enjoyment of both analyst and patient. Eventually, the patient began to look forward to the sessions and saw them as wonderful opportunities for theatrical improvisations about incidents in his life – although the value was somewhat downgraded by reason that much of his material was apocryphal! The analyst, on the other hand, enjoyed the experience of having one of England’s acclaimed actors declaiming to him, privately and extemporaneously, many a classical speech or Shakespearean soliloquy and at the same time being handsomely rewarded financially! While nothing gained from these sessions seemed to contribute in any way towards Patrick’s cure or wellbeing, there was no doubt that with the passage of time he seemed to have been successfully weaned from cocaine and there was clearly a general improvement in his condition.

It was difficult, however, to assess his mental condition. He had become popular with both patients and staff at The Monastery, participating in many of the social activities, and was often the life and soul of the party at the home. However, as one of the psychiatrists wittily – but most unprofessionally – put it: “He is not a full box of chocolates.”

Patrick had become childlike in many ways; his thinking was impaired, his responses lacked acuity and he needed the assurance

that carers were on hand if he required them. The reasons for his mental fragility remained obscure and while doctors advanced theories, no definitive diagnosis was ever forthcoming. The opinion of most was that heavy doses of cocaine had caused brain damage that was not identifiable and was probably reversible, but only with the passage of time. After many months at The Monastery, Gregory could see no point in keeping Patrick there. He was no longer receiving any medical treatment and the doctors had come to regard merely him as part of the establishment without paying any specific attention to him.

Gregory had, however, heard of a home in the country that might be suitable for Patrick, and he promptly made a visit to the Golden Sanctuary in Chobham, which catered mostly for affluent elderly folk who were reasonably well but required care in secure and amiable surroundings. Situated in beautiful grounds with fruit orchards and an attractive aviary, the Victorian building had comfortable private suites for its inmates who all seemed to be a gregarious and happy lot. Patrick was most resistant to leaving The Monastery and repeatedly claimed that this was his home. However, after settling in at the Golden Sanctuary, he declared this was the best home he had ever lived in and he became a popular member of the establishment, often entertaining the staff and other inmates with long renditions from Shakespeare.

Gregory visited several times a week and took Patrick to lunch at many of the charming restaurants in the region. As Patrick's fragile mental condition had not been diagnosed, he was not receiving any official treatment, nor was he under any medical supervision. Even the notion of cocaine had receded from his mind but at morning sherry parties held in the home, it became apparent to the staff that Patrick was far exceeding the thimbleful offered on these occasions. To the obvious amusement of his sycophant friends, he would help himself to multiple tots and decant them into a larger glass and then offer toasts to the hordes of fans who inevitably gathered around him. On one occasion he repeated this procedure on several occasions, resulting in his consuming a substantial amount of Harvey's Bristol Cream and becoming very drunk. At the Champagne parties held often in the afternoons to

celebrate residents' birthdays, Patrick likewise drank in excess of the amount proffered and often became intoxicated. So it was that, at the request of management, Gregory spoke to his friend about his drinking.

"Dear boy, you have not been well and this drinking is not good for you."

"Absolute piffle! The amount I drink at these parties wouldn't fill a sow's purse."

"Well, I don't know how much you are drinking, but from what I've heard it is certainly making you drunk."

"Not drunk, my dear ... definitely not. A little bonhomie, that's all. If they mistake my natural exuberance and joviality for intoxication, then they are stuck-up prigs. I'd rather be myself than some of those old farts. Do you know that you can tell what a woman's vagina looks like by studying her face? The shape of her lips gives a good idea as to what her cunt looks like. No, of course you wouldn't know about such things."

With what seemed to be built-in identification antennae, it did not take long before Patrick and the cockney Colonel found each other.

"I say, old chap, I thought you were a little Doris Day. I have a little 'gay and frisky' in my room. We could have a drink and perhaps a little hanky-panky and get to know each other better."

Not requiring much encouragement, Patrick accepted the invitation, but he found the Colonel's idea of sex bumbling, passionless and uninspiring and definitely not to his liking. As a result, he chose to switch allegiances and responded to attention he had been receiving from the dowager, Baroness Gwyneth Heskon-Jones, a seemingly eccentric old lady who always appeared excessively impressed with her own nobility and required to be addressed by all as "M'Lady". Dressed always in multicoloured, shapeless kaftans that looked as if they might have seen better days decades ago, it was difficult to tell whether her excessive weight was behind the bulge around her midriff or whether her obviously ample bosom contributed to the mass by descending to

approximately her navel and thus becoming indistinguishable from her belly. To complement her outfit, and make her appearance even more bizarre, she chose to wear matching turbans, usually with a prominent jewel perched in the front. On festive occasions at the Sanctuary she often replaced the turban with a coronet, which she believed to be appropriate for her position in society. Unfortunately bunions on her feet did not permit her to wear shoes that might have matched her outfits and inelegant plimsolls had to suffice. Along with a pearl necklace, which was *de rigueur*, the Baroness carried, hanging around her neck, a pair of tortoiseshell lorgnettes, which she used periodically as a prop with great affectation. A lace fan designed for hot weather accompanied her as another prop and was used on even the coldest winter's days for gesticulating and pointing. The Baroness, the Colonel and the Don were only part of the interesting menagerie that constituted the Golden Sanctuary.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Baroness was born Gwen Brown in Hoxton in the east end of London, well within the sound of bow bells, the area that loosely defines where cockneys hail from. With the local accent, it was pronounced ‘Oxton’, a blue-collar area where Gwen’s parents made a humble living, her father driving a truck to deliver food and her mother working as a chambermaid in a nearby hotel. At the age of 18, with a cute figure and bursting to find adventure beyond the restrictions of Hoxton, she was fortunate to find employment at Harrods as a trainee saleslady, eventually graduating to working in the jewellery department. There she worked assiduously to rid herself of her cockney accent and managed to acquire an affected speech more in keeping with her Knightsbridge surroundings than her Hoxton origins.

Having moved into a bedsitter not far off Montpellier Square, she soon made local friends many of them being Sloane Rangers, a stereotype in London for upper-middle-class women who share distinctive and common lifestyle traits and values. With many Sloanies coming from Public Schools, universities or trendy colleges, Gwen – who had now elevated herself to be Gwyneth – managed to conceal her most modest upbringing and skilfully infiltrated a social level that had previously been only in her dreams. At Harrods her good looks and sprightliness attracted attention and she developed a clientele of her own and was soon selling expensive jewellery to the rich and famous, particularly men. This came to the attention of the chairman, who on his ritual morning walk around the store often stopped at Gwyneth’s jewellery counter to chat to her. He was not averse to running his hand over her bottom but she was determined to resist his advances, having set her sights on a customer who was much younger and considerably more appealing than the Harrods boss. He was Baron Cecil Heskon-Jones, a dashing figure of a man, Sandhurst Military Academy trained, and recently retired from the British Army at the age of 40 with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Apart from his military service, Cecil had never worked in his life, hailing from a

well-to-do Leeds family that for generations had been in stock-broking business.

Cecil had inherited considerable wealth from his family, as well as the title of Baron, which he found opened doors for him in the celebrated private clubs of London, not to mention important social circles. However, his eye had fallen on the attractive young saleslady at Harrods and he used every excuse possible to stop at her counter in order to become better acquainted. Gwyneth's responses were very encouraging for him, particularly when one day he asked her to recommend a fine piece of jewellery he wanted to present to a friend. She dutifully showed him a gold necklace she said she particularly liked and after he had paid the £2,500 and she had wrapped it and affixed a ribbon with a bow, he took it and presented the necklace to her as a gift. Overcome with excitement Gwyneth came out from behind her counter and hugged him enthusiastically, at the same time reminding herself that she also would be receiving a handsome commission for the sale. Thereafter, Gwyneth was a frequent visitor at the Baron's elegant home in the newly built Chelsea Harbour development and his rambling country residence in Chipping Camden in the Cotswolds; while going decidedly downmarket he regarded visits to her humble bedsitter as 'slumming it' and naughty and more than somewhat titillating. Apart from the obvious sexual enjoyment of each other's company, a deep affection developed between the two disparate persons and after a year of courtship the jewellery assistant became the Baroness Gwyneth Heskon-Jones. Management at Harrods held a reception in the executive quarters of Harrods to say farewell to one of the store's most successful salesladies.

So it was that a new life began for the young Gwen Brown, who made the transition from working girl to wealthy baroness with consummate ease. Dresses from Norman Hartnell, jewellery from Garrard & Co and open accounts at Fortnum & Mason, Harvey Nichols and Liberty became part of her life. The Baroness shunned Harrods, believing it was really a store for the middle class and tourists. The David Hicks-designed two-storey, fully staffed apartment at Chelsea Harbour was the last word in luxury with an internal glass lift easing the pressure of having to climb the glass

stairs that led from the reception rooms to the living quarters. Awaiting her ladyship outside the building was a chauffeur offering a choice of the handmade bottle-green Bristol 405, the only four-door car ever manufactured by Bristol, and a very comfortable black Mercedes-Benz W111.

‘The Willows’ at Chipping Camden, Cecil’s country estate, with its stables of riding horses and polo ponies, was a significant feature on the milk-and-manure circuit that abounded in that fashionable part of the Cotswolds, and the couple led a fast and elegant social life. Gwyneth took riding lessons and was soon able to join her husband in riding with the hounds. Both the Baron and the Baroness became prominent members of the local hunt and, dressed according to the strict rules of etiquette, they cut dashing figures as they galloped over the downs led by the dogs in chase of the elusive fox. The Heskon-Joneses also embraced various local charities that raised funds for cancer research, children from poor homes suffering from malnutrition and old-age homes, with the result that their photos appeared often in the local papers. When they visited the opera or ballet at Covent Garden, or West End theatres, they always spent a few nights at their Chelsea Harbour home and dined with friends at the fashionable Mirabelle in Curzon Street or L’Ecu de France, in Jermyn Street, two of their favourite restaurants and where they were always ushered in by the respective maître d’hôtel to their favoured tables.

Life for the aristocratic couple was glorious, even if at the same time rather meaningless and the only thing they sought and which eluded them was an heir to the family title and fortune. This was in no way due to lack of effort on their part, however. Told by his doctor that he had a low sperm count, Cecil took vitamins and fertility supplements, including folic acid, gave up smoking, lost weight and ensured he ate a healthy diet. Gwyneth thought that frequency of intercourse would improve her chances of falling pregnant and that female orgasm was essential for conception. This placed considerable demands on the Baron who began to think that adoption would be a far less challenging course to follow. His wife, on the other hand, also believed that sexual positions might play an important part and began a study to determine the optimum

anatomical angles to facilitate conception. Working her way through myths and recommended methods, she also experimented with more adventurous styles from that bible of advanced sex positions, the *Kama Sutra*, which included such exotics as the Catherine Wheel, the Padlock and the Butterfly. While these athletic strategies produced mind-blowing and bed-creaking orgasms for both, they did not induce pregnancy. Consulting her doctor for his advice, Gwyneth was embarrassed to learn that the prosaic tried-and-tested missionary position was regarded medically as optimal for conception. This news came as a great relief to Cyril who was having regular physiotherapy to cure strains attributable to the *Kama Sutra*. However, it became obvious that progeny for the Baron and Baroness was a most unlikely proposition and their sex lives finally dwindled to mundane once-a-week encounters.

As the years rolled by the hectic pace of the Heskon-Joneses' social life slackened and when at the age of 62 Cyril was diagnosed with prostate cancer, which already had metastasised into his cervical spine, the couple sold the Chelsea Harbour apartment and withdrew entirely to The Willows. Intensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy did not prove effective and after a while the Baron was admitted to a hospice and was put on morphine for palliative care. As his pain and discomfort accelerated, the doctors increased the dosage of morphine until Baron Heskon-Jones passed away peacefully just weeks after his admission.

After a barely respectable period of mourning, the now enormously wealthy Baroness announced her return to the social scene by hosting an extravagant party at The Willows for 250 of her closest friends. Catered by a rising name in the culinary world, Raymond Blanc, from nearby Oxford, the display of food was memorable and guests spoke about that particular evening for many years thereafter. Still attractive, Gwyneth became increasingly promiscuous and had little difficulty in attracting men much younger than her who found her proclivity for sexual sessions challenging to say the least. "What do you mean twice is enough?" she would say to some exhausted stripling on her bed and yearning for sleep. As the years rolled by and cellulite formed on her thighs, buttocks, pelvic region and abdomen, she consulted a succession of

doctors to recommend ways of dealing with the unsightly subcutaneous fat. They recommended more physical exercise, massage and diets and she followed their advice to the letter, even employing a personal trainer to visit her after breakfast three times a week. After a short while she persuaded her trainer that sexual activity was also exercise and he obliged until early-morning exhaustion got the better of him and the young stud retired reluctantly from his well-remunerated job. Gwyneth then succumbed to advertising that promoted cellulite creams that 'would dissolve fat and smooth the skin'. After wrestling to apply the products herself, she engaged a young masseur to massage her and rub the creams into the affected areas. To present herself as visually more attractive and alluring, she also followed the advice of a young female friend and shaved all her pubic hair. While the applications of the creams were totally ineffectual in achieving their bodily purpose, they happened to be very close to now highly visible erogenous zones, which led to the masseur easily being enticed to perform services beyond the scope of his professional calling.

One day when well in her late fifties and with her beauty having long receded, and her trim figure having deserted her, the Baroness was found by her staff slumped in her study, mumbling incoherently, confused and with a visible drooping of her left facial muscles and arm. An ambulance was called and rushed her to hospital where she was diagnosed with having suffered an ischemic stroke. Fortunately swift medical intervention stopped the bleeding in the brain and managed later to dissolve the clot that had formed. However, Gwyneth was left with serious disabilities resulting from stroke damage, and rehabilitation was to prove a lengthy and arduous process. After a week in hospital and with her condition stabilised, she was transferred to an Oxfordshire rehabilitation centre where she remained for almost a year. Having regained full power of speech she was prone to order staff around as if they were her own domestics. There was much rejoicing at the Centre when the doctors suggested that she was well enough to be moved to a less clinical home and it was her solicitors, who had taken over the running of her affairs in their entirety, researched the available

suitable homes and decided on the Golden Sanctuary. Ensclosed in the largest suite the home could provide, and now a dowdy woman of ample proportions, Gwyneth eschewed the demands of modern fashion and emerged in kaftans and accessories, rather enjoying her new image as an eccentric.

In fact, it was this eccentricity that appealed to Patrick Donovan. He thought the resident plebeians were a dull lot – rather like a ‘matinee audience’, he used to say: no sparkle or wit, no originality, seeing out their dreary lives in each other’s mundane company. Whereas the duchess: she dressed differently, commanded people around with authority, had style and a patrician quality, was outspoken – she was a personality! Gwyneth, similarly denigrated the residents and, conveniently having developed amnesia regarding her own background, called them ‘the proletariat’. She not only knew of the Don, but had attended and admired several of his West End performances, most notably his great Hamlet in Stratford. The man was not only arguably England’s greatest actor but he had class. Both Gwyneth and Patrick were sufficiently delusional to ignore their respective upbringing in the slums of Hoxton and Dublin and to fantasise that they each came from aristocracy. With time on their hands at the Golden Sanctuary, Patrick and Gwyneth spent many hours together and grew closer. To the chagrin of the carers, they would sneak out of the home and have a taxi take them to local restaurants for lunch. What was of real concern was the fact that the two used to weave their way back to their suites rather the worse for wear. Both had been cautioned by their doctors to stay off alcohol for their respective conditions, although the doctors were prepared to turn a blind eye to the thimble full of wine and sherry that was occasionally served in the home. Patrick used to call it ‘sacramental wine’ and when receiving it invariably asked whether they were celebrating the Eucharist. To the annoyance of the more devout, he would say ‘body of Christ’ and put out his tongue, inviting receipt of the Communion host.

Gregory, however, was more than a little disconcerted by this developing friendship: he was funding Patrick’s recovery in the hope that his lover would return to the fold and recover sufficiently

to resume his acting career and once again live with him at Eaton Close. Closeted in Patrick's suite, Gregory cautiously questioned him.

"Patrick, my dear, I am hoping that you are soon going to be well again and resume your career. You know that you owe it to your great number of fans to act again. Dear Cyril is still receiving offers from managements regularly."

"Oh, Gregory, believe me, I will be able to act again really soon. I rehearse every day with the Baroness."

"But, Pat dear, she has no experience in the theatre. Are you not expecting too much from her?"

"She is a wonderful lady – knowledgeable on so many subjects. She is good for me."

"Am I not good for you? Did I not take care of you – look after you? I love you, dear Patricia."

"I love you too, Gregory ... but I love Gwyneth as well. She has plans for us to leave this place, for me to live with her at her home, The Willows, in Chipping Camden. She has staff there and she says they will get me into great shape to make my comeback."

The blood drained from Gregory's face, and his hands began to tremble.

"Patrick, I can't believe what I am hearing. After all I have done for you ... you ... you are leaving me for this *woman*?"

"Don't call her 'this woman', Gregory, she is a baroness."

"Perhaps you have forgotten, Patrick ... You have been ill. You already have a home – with me at Eaton Close. You have your own room there. I pay for everything you need; I look after you. How can you do this to me?"

"Oh, I remember our home together. And I will return. Just have to get well first. Don't worry, Gregory, Gwyneth will take good care of me until I'm ready to return to Eaton Close."

Realising the futility of the conversation, which confirmed that Patrick had not yet regained his mental acuity, a saddened Gregory embraced his partner warmly and took his leave.

After five years at the Golden Sanctuary, Gwyneth's doctors confirmed that she was well enough to return to The Willows. While a shadow of her former self as far as looks were concerned, she had no remaining disability following her stroke. In the interim, she had become a character who commanded attention by reason of her style of dress, which looked as if she had raided a theatrical wardrobe, and by the dominating personality she imposed on anyone who got in her way. She did not suffer fools gladly. Gwyneth had conned herself into believing that she really was aristocracy and that The Willows was the seat of her baronetcy. Barging into Patrick's suite one morning she informed him of the decisions she had taken.

"Patrick, darling, I am leaving here next Monday – have spent enough years in this dismal place – and returning to my country estate where my staff will take good care of me."

Patrick immediately stepped into the role of conflicted lover, torn between his existing commitments to Gregory and his devotion to his current flame. He couldn't allow the Baroness to think he simply assumed that he would be returning with her to the country.

"Oh, Gwyneth, I'll be so sorry to see you go."

"Go? Good God, darling, I'm not leaving you behind."

"But I have to stay. Gregory will be very upset with me ..."

"My dear man, it's all been arranged. I have told the office that you are to be leaving with me and they have advised your friend to stop his monthly payments to this ghastly, sanctified retreat."

"Oh my ... But who will look after me? I mean I don't make much use of the medical facilities available here but it is comforting to know that carers are always available if I need them."

"Pat, I have good people working for me, and I intend looking after you myself. We will have you in fine shape very soon and you will be ready to appear on stage once more."

Naturally, Gregory was distraught when he learned that his worst fears were being realised. Despite Patrick's warning, he had harboured a secret and somewhat optimistic belief that, when a decision was finally called for, his lover would not hesitate to return to Eaton Close with him. And now the unthinkable had happened:

Patrick had chosen the Baroness over him. Gregory's whole life centred on Patrick. He had nurtured him through alcoholism, depression and drug dependency. He had waited in the wings when Patrick had deviated from his sexual norm and had strayed towards female company. He had brought him back into the fold and, most importantly, he loved him deeply.

Not particularly religious, Gregory did however subscribe deeply to the biblical injunction that 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. This he was prepared to do. He was determined to retrieve his love and get him back on stage to the high pinnacle he had attained. Truth be told, he had given up a life of his own and his very being centred on his partnership with the Don. In a highly emotional state he rushed over to the Golden Sanctuary and first spoke to the Baroness.

"You are hijacking my friend. I am in charge of him – he is nothing without me – you seem to want to control his life."

"Absolute nonsense, darling, I am extending the hand of friendship to him. We get on rather well, you know, and I believe I can have him back onstage in a few months."

"You know nothing about my Patrick's past, what he has been through. He belongs to me. He is homosexual ... Do you know that? We are lovers and he needs me. My home is his home. Do you know what you are doing, woman? You are interfering in the lives of two people who love each other dearly. Patrick is mentally frail – he is recovering from a nervous breakdown. And you are taking advantage of him – I know not why ... perhaps to prop up your own miserable life?"

At this, the Baroness abandoned all sense of propriety. Her blood began to boil, and a flush rose to her cheeks, a fire in her eyes.

"How dare you! How dare you talk to me like that! Know your place: you are a parasite – you have no life or ambition of your own ... you cling to this great actor because he is all you have. Without him, you are nothing – nothing! Let him breathe free. He has agreed to come home with me. I will look after him, and once he is starring in the West End again he can decide his own future. Now fuck off!"

Distraught, and shaking with emotion, Gregory slumped in a chair in the corridor. After five minutes he had recovered sufficiently to walk down the corridor to Patrick's room. Opening the door quietly he found his soul mate dozing quietly in a chair with the *Daily Mail* lying unopened on his lap. Pulling up another chair, Gregory looked at the man whose life he shared. Gone were the striking, youthful looks he first had known but his face, now in its maturity, had a nobility that still made him attractive. He looked everything that he was not – wise, confident and decisive. Much improved from the depths of his dementia, he still had a child-like quality and was easily influenced. Patrick began to stir and opened his eyes.

“Oh, Gregory, why didn't you wake me? So nice to see you, dear boy. Have you heard the good news? The Baroness is taking me away from this place and is going to look after me at her country estate. You must come and visit me there.”

“I thought you would come back to Eaton Close, where we live. Don't you know that I would take great care of you, as I have always done?”

“Gregory, you are indeed wonderful to me, but the Baroness believes that the country air will do me a lot of good. She says we will take walks together, that her chef will prepare special meals to make me strong again ... She believes she will have me back on stage in no time. Won't that be glorious?”

“But we could do all that at home ... Won't you change your mind – for us, Patrick? You know that we love each other. We are lovers, my dear boy.”

“Gregory, I simply couldn't do that to the Baroness: she has planned everything. You will come and see me on my first night, when I make my comeback?”

With tears in his eyes and the realisation that he was unable to break the stranglehold that Gwyneth appeared to have on his frail partner, Gregory rose from his chair. He walked over to Patrick and wrapped his arms around him, holding him tight in a long embrace. Then, giving him a last glance, Gregory walked slowly to the door and left.

Baroness Gwyneth Heskon-Jones hosted a cocktail party at the Golden Sanctuary to say farewell to ‘the proletariat’ – the staff and residents. Dressed in a multicoloured kaftan that hung straight down from her ample breasts, she chose on this occasion to wear her diamond tiara. With an antique fan in one hand and her lorgnettes in the other, she used these props to gesticulate while she addressed the gathering, expressing her lukewarm thanks for their limited cooperation during her long stay. Standing next to her and beaming with pride, the Don was dressed splendidly for the occasion in a herringbone hacking jacket and a silk cravat. When called on by his enthusiastic fans to speak, he responded.

“The Baroness is really my spokesperson. She is going to care for me and get me back on stage. I hope you will all be at my first night. Meantime, as Sebastian said in *Twelfth Night*, ‘I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks and ever thanks, too oft good turns are shuffled off with such uncurrent pay.’”

CHAPTER 12

Comfortably ensconced in the guest accommodation at The Willows, Patrick – nearing the age of 50 – was extremely well cared for by an attentive Gwyneth and her staff. After enquiring as to the guest's dining preferences, the chef served steak-and-kidney pie, cottage pie and Melton Mowbray pie, trout *meunière* from nearby streams, and varieties of ploughman's lunches. Instead of desserts, Cotswold Cheese, a Double Gloucester with chopped onion and chives blended in, White Stilton with apricots, and Windsor Red were some of the favourites served with toast or rustic bread. A masseur and trainer were on hand to take care of Gwyneth and Patrick's physical wellbeing, which included long walks into the town of Chipping Camden and neighbouring areas.

Word soon got around that the Don was staying in the area and he was greeted warmly everywhere, many seeking his autograph. Patrick truly became the country squire and enjoyed all the attention and adulation that came with the being a celebrity in rural England. While he was entirely relaxed in Gwyneth's pleasant company, as his intellect returned he found that they really had very little in common and because their conversations were devoid of any substance, many an evening was spent listening to classical music, his preference being for Beethoven and Brahms while he tolerated her occasional choice of Frank Sinatra and Dusty Springfield.

One night shortly after he had turned out his bedside lamp at 10 o'clock, he heard his bedroom door open and saw Gwyneth standing there, a white negligee, silhouetted by the dim light in the passage.

"What do you want?"

"I want you, my darling."

"You've got me – what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. It is time we got to know each other more intimately."

Patrick was more than a little startled.

"Have you gone crazy? You know I'm homosexual."

By now, Gwyneth was sitting on the side of the bed.

"I also know that you have had affairs with women; you have told me so."

"I am only sporadically into the vagina business."

"I am a woman, you know."

"You're not a woman – you're the Baroness."

"Baronesses have needs too, my dear."

"I didn't know that there was a quid pro quo for my staying here: that you required to be serviced."

"You put it so elegantly. You are still a very handsome and desirable man: I am not immune to your attractions."

Gwyneth had sidled into bed alongside him, her arms across his chest.

"I am not a stud, you know. Rumour has it that you were very attractive in your young days and that you accepted the love of many men. I'm sure you had your fair share."

"That's all very true."

Patrick was determined to sway her.

"Can you not live with those memories?"

"Darling, I love you and you have rekindled the fire in me. I have yearned for you during the many months you have been here but resisted until I thought you were completely well. You now seem to me to be in robust health and I can wait no longer."

She had successfully unbuttoned the front of his pyjama top and was stroking his chest and circling his nipples with her fingertips. He just lay there inert and bewildered, and watched in the glow as she slipped her negligee over her head. The kaftans that she wore had never allowed him even to contemplate her body. The sight that he beheld brought instant nostalgic visualisation of the young female bodies he had slept with; never had he seen flesh like this. Her breasts were of gigantic proportions and drooped down even past her navel to meet up with a sizeable roll of fat, all of which concealed both her abdomen and pubic mound.

"I don't know if I can do this ... I fear I might be a disappointment."

"It may be a long time ago but no man has ever disappointed me – and nor will you."

With that she kissed him passionately and at the same time slid her hand down to loosen his pyjama pants and ease them down his legs. He did little to assist her but when her hand began an intimate and gentle exploration, tumescence became an involuntary reaction. All the time she spoke words of endearing love to him but when her mouth replaced the action of her hand, silence prevailed save for a soft moaning from the top of the bed. When the time was ready she rose from the depths and straddled his still prone body, accommodating him in a warm and comfortable place. Patrick let out a gasp of delight but at the same time saw the picture in front of him as one of the more disgusting sights he had ever seen. However, with Gwyneth gyrating and panting with simultaneous squeals of delight, nature took its course and reached an inevitable climax with a satisfying whimper from him and a roar from her that conceivably could have aroused the night staff. Rolling on to her side alongside him, exhausted she whispered: "Thank you, my darling ... That's exactly what I was after. And you did not fail me."

"My pleasure ... but I hope this is not going to be a nightly or even a regular performance. Now fuck off quietly and let me get some sleep."

The next morning Patrick appeared for breakfast as if nothing had happened. The Baroness, on the other hand, had a glint in her eye and addressed him with terms of endearment she had never used before. Nevertheless, the idyllic life they had been leading continued unabated – save that at night Patrick now locked his door.

Then one day when Gwyneth had a long-planned session at the dentist, the chef, Aubrey, dropped a bombshell. Patrick was seated in the dining room, expecting lunch, which was served personally by the chef promptly at noon each day. Usually, there was a dignified silence as the hostess and her guest sat back while the chef dished for them. This day, however, alone in the dining room with the debonair Patrick Donovan, Aubrey was inclined to be a little bold. In fact, he was downright forthright.

"You know, sir, that I am a homosexual?"

"Excuse me?" Patrick spluttered.

Aubrey smiled. "I think you heard me, sir ..."

Patrick smiled slowly in return. Aubrey intrigued him. Patrick was generally very adept at identifying at first meeting those of the same sexual persuasion, but it had simply never occurred to him that the dear man may be a homosexual.

Aubrey was a good-looking, well-built man in his late thirties, sensitive and reasonably cultured.

"I tried to identify myself to you through my cooking."

"What on earth do you mean, Aubrey? Is there a sexual connotation in the wonderful food you prepare?"

"Actually, yes ... but you obviously missed it. The rice pilaf that I serve is always phallic in shape with a pea on the tip. Often the veg are arranged on the plate with a sexual innuendo. And the rolls I bake in the morning are often shaped to represent a man's full set of equipment!"

"How remiss of me to have overlooked that. Come to think of it I did notice some of these symbols on occasion but thought it was may be no more than my very prurient imagination."

And so this brief interaction between Patrick and Aubrey over salmon and potatoes on a late Wednesday afternoon led to the inevitable conclusion, one that neither man was intent on avoiding.

Gregory was leading the life of a hermit. His pride prevented him from visiting The Willows; occasionally he would phone but when the Baroness answered he simply aborted the call. When staff answered, he asked to speak to Mr Donovan, and when Patrick was available quite affable, albeit rather stilted conversations took place that reassured Gregory that his partner was being well cared for and, importantly, that he appeared stronger in voice and more lucid each time.

Cyril Goodman, virtually sidelined as the Don's agent, had received a call from the prominent repertory company, The Thespians, which operated to a high standard a delightful and well-patronised small theatre near Chipping Norton. Members of the company knew that Patrick was living in the area and some of them

had spoken to him in the village. They knew from newspaper reports that he had been ill for a long time and there were many rumours as to his health, but from chatting to him they believed he had made an excellent recovery and was now in good health. Cyril was asked whether the actor would contemplate a season of say three plays with their company in order to facilitate his comeback. While the actual plays could be discussed, the modest salary offered was not negotiable as the scale of pay, even for guest stars, was set in stone and would not approach the amount Mr Donovan had been used to.

Goodman conferred with Gregory and mentioned to him the three plays the company had in mind and Gregory undertook to visit The Willows and have an initial discussion with Patrick. Stuart, with Gregory aboard the Bentley, knew the way to the town of Chipping Camden where a pedestrian gave explicit directions to the Baroness's estate. As was to be expected, Gwyneth gave Gregory a frosty reception and demanded to know what business he had with her guest. After explaining the purpose of the visit, she enquired haughtily why Mr Goodman couldn't discuss the matter with her. She also added that she was a patron of The Thespians, as had been the late Baron Cecil, and for years they had given the company a substantial annual donation. She believed that this was therefore a local matter that she was perfectly capable of handling. Gregory's deep-seated animosity towards the lady was rising but he endeavoured to keep calm and explained that Mr Donovan was contracted to Mr Goodman who was required to negotiate an Equity contract. There were professional matters to be discussed with which even he was not familiar. If Mr Donovan was going to make a serious re-entry to the stage, Mr Goodman was the person to handle all the details – as he had done previously in the actor's career. Cuttingly, Gregory added that this was professional theatre and not some amateur charity romp.

At this point Patrick entered the living room and a seething Gwyneth, having been rebuked, cowered while Patrick gave Gregory a warm welcome with a bear hug and a kiss on both cheeks. As the two men walked arm in arm to the library, Gwyneth,

uninvited, accompanied them and sat watching while they became absorbed in discussion.

Patrick was thrilled to learn that there was an opportunity for him to work again. He assured Gregory that he was well, perused the newspaper daily, had read several novels, that he was not taking any drugs and that his alcohol intake was limited to a drink each night at dinner. Gwyneth confirmed all this by nodding and added that the transformation was entirely due to her efforts. She asked why his comeback couldn't be in the West End but both men agreed that he needed to regain his confidence in smaller productions before submitting himself to the strain of major plays where he would be at the mercy of the leading London critics.

Gregory added icily to the Baroness, "*Festina lente*, my good lady" and then compounded the rebuke by explaining gratuitously that it meant "make haste slowly".

Gwyneth responded angrily: "Don't you patronise me – I am familiar with Greek sayings." This brought muffled mirth from the two gentlemen ...

After some discussion Patrick indicated that in principle he approved and then asked Gregory which plays had been mentioned.

"The matter is open for discussion but the plays suggested to Cyril are *Pygmalion*, *Private Lives* and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. Seems like a good season to me."

"Oh, they're wonderful – wonderful, dear boy! I know them all very well. Somerset Maugham, Coward and ending with the new boy, Pinter – just great. Mind you, I have a deep understanding of *Pygmalion* and *Private Lives* – have always wanted to play Elyot – but I haven't the faintest idea what *The Birthday Party* is all about. But it certainly makes for great theatre and Stanley is a wonderful part. Oh Greg, I'm so excited ..."

"Well next, dear boy, Cyril must come and see you: you have a lot to discuss: rehearsal times, the number of performances a week ... billing ... who will direct ... and much more ..."

"I don't want to do two performances a day – no matinees."

"OK ... Then this, too, is for you and your agent to discuss."

Having been silent for some time, Gwyneth asked: "And where do I fit in to this?"

“Well, I don’t know if you do, Baroness.”

“Look here, Mr Packer – if that’s your name – the Don is my guest and lives here and we are lovers ...”

“Darling, *that* is something of an exaggeration,” Patrick blushed.

“I don’t think so ... I am weaning him from homosexuality, Mr Packer.”

“That’s a dangerous thing to attempt, Baroness.” Gregory was almost a little amused by Gwyneth’s little outburst, her last-ditch attempt to hold on to her part-time lover.

“I don’t want fairies on my estate,” she continued.

“Then, dear, you’d better get rid of your chef,” quipped a bold Patrick.

“What do you mean?”

“Aubrey’s a homo ... knew that from my first day here.”

“Well, I’ll be damned ... Don’t tell me you’ve been involved with him!”

“No, we’re just friends.”

After discussions between Cyril Goodman and Patrick, the agent met with the director of The Thespians and it was confirmed that rehearsals for the first play, *Pygmalion*, would commence in three weeks; that the play would open three weeks later; that each play would run for two weeks, followed immediately by the next one. The director would not agree to omit the Saturday matinee but agreed that the theatre would remain dark on both Sundays and Mondays, although there would be rehearsals on the Mondays. Mr Donovan would be given star billing, on his own, above the play’s title and he would receive £100 a week during the first three weeks of rehearsal and £200 a week during the run of the plays. This was the Equity minimum for guest actors starring in repertory productions.

Patrick was later driven by the Baroness to the Chipping Norton theatre where he was introduced to the director and some of the permanent members of the company. And when he posed for photographs with them, Gwyneth imposed herself into the group. The *Chipping Norton & Camden Times* featured a photograph of the group on the front page under the headline, ‘Donovan to Act in

Thespian Plays'. Underneath they ran a story stating that the Baroness Gwyneth Heskon-Jones had negotiated the deal.

It was a sunny afternoon in the Cotswolds, Gwyneth was on a shopping expedition in London and Patrick was relaxed in the front garden, reclining in a deck chair with script in hand and occasionally dozing off. He stirred at the sound of a car approaching down the private driveway approaching The Willows and was surprised to see his father, Alby Mullan, emerge. The driver, a woman, remained in the car. Father and son greeted each other cordially.

"Patrick, I've been so worried. I read that you were ill but had no idea where you were. For ages I have tried to contact you, but that snot-nosed butler at Eaton Close refused to say."

"I have been ill, Alby, for quite some time, but am now fully recovered and will be returning to the stage soon. You see I am trying to get some lines drilled into this old brain. How did you find me?"

"Oh, my lady friend Ann, the woman I live with, she's a smart one. I think she found out the name of your agent. He also wouldn't give her your address but said that you would be appearing at a theatre out this way and Ann phoned around. Clever lady, I would like you to meet her. She drove me here: that's her in the car."

"Ask her to come over."

"I will – in a minute."

"Are you working, Alby?"

"Well, that's the problem. Have had several jobs but am now unemployed again. Not much work around for old boxers like me. My friend Mike – you know, the theatre stage doorman – he says that all my financial problems would be over if I would give an interview to one of the tabloids. Says I could make a killing ..."

"Alby, you assured me you wouldn't do that."

"Of course I wouldn't, my son ... you know flesh and blood and all that. But the problem is that Mike says I'm an idiot and that if I don't give the press an exclusive, he will."

“That’s selfish of him. I remember Mike ... I thought he was quite a decent chap. Did he say how much he would get for an exclusive?”

“He thinks about a thousand quid. You see, he knows a lot ... And, unfortunately, I confided in him the past – you know, about my being a boxer ... and after the night I was thrashed, how you got shoved into a Catholic school. But he knows more than that. Apparently a priest, a Father something came to see you at the theatre and afterwards told Mike lots about you. Mike has gotten hold of the guy and, according to him, the priest told him a lot of stories.”

Patrick could feel his blood pressure rise.

“That’s awful, Alby. I don’t deserve this sort of publicity – I didn’t do anything wrong. It was you who abandoned me.”

“I know ... I am so ashamed. But here’s the good news. I think I can square Mike for say 250 quid. He’s not really a bad guy but, like all of us working chaps, a little short of money.”

“How long would that keep him quiet?”

“Oh no, that would be for good. I’d be sure to tell him that – no, there is honour among us. If he takes that, it’s to shut him up for all time ... I’d see to that.”

“I don’t like this, Alby ... I think this is what they call extortion. I am very reluctant to give Mike any money to mind his own business. But if you are sure this will keep him quiet, well, I will go along with this; but, Alby, this is the last money I am parting with to you. If you contact Gregory Packer, the man I live with, next week at Eaton Close I will tell him to have an envelope for you with £250. But that’s it, Alby – no more.”

“You’re a gentleman, Patrick ... Can see you have good breeding.”

Alby called out for Ann to join them.

“So honoured to meet you, Mr Donovan. Alby is so proud of you – he truly loves you, you know. Talks about you to me so often. Tragic that the two of you were parted for so long. He’s really a good man: pity everything seems to have gone wrong for him. He was so keen to see you, Mr Donovan, that I phoned all over before I got this address. And it’s been my pleasure to drive him here to see

you. What a pleasure for me to see father and son together. I hope, Alby, you didn't touch your old dad for money?"

Patrick was feeling very well, entirely confident that he had successfully overcome the addictions that had threatened to ruin his career. He had little memory of the unpleasantness surrounding his downfall, such as his collapse on stage during *Macbeth*. The fact that he was having a clandestine relationship with Aubrey, Gwyneth's chef, amused him. The Baroness had on several occasions attempted a repeat performance of her single night of pleasure with him, but his memory of her body made sure that he took great pains to avoid being seduced by her again. Their relationship was cordial and he went along with her pampering while preparing for his comeback. Indeed during the process of learning his part for *Pygmalion*, she was happy to assist by cueing him his lines.

But now that he was thinking rationally once more, the one thing that worried him was his behaviour towards Gregory. While he acknowledged to himself that his friendship with Gwyneth had been helpful at the time and that his stay at The Willows had aided his recovery in no uncertain manner, he realised that the hurt he had inflicted on his partner was cruel and unforgiveable. So it was that, under the pretext of going to the theatre for a costume fitting, Patrick managed to escape the suffocating presence of Gwyneth and met Gregory for coffee in an adjoining village.

"Gregory, you are the staff of my life and always will be. I love you, my dear, and am mortified by the way I have treated you."

"Oh darling man, I understand entirely that you were not well and that it was not the real you, the real Patrick Donovan, who rejected me. I love you more than I can say and always will."

"I want to come back to Eaton Close, Gregory, and resume the wonderful life we had together. I never want to appear in Stratford again: it was there that everything went so horribly wrong."

“Not everything, Patricia: you had immense success in your Shakespearian appearances. Ken Tynan of *The Observer* wrote recently that your performance in *Hamlet* will be the yardstick by which the role is judged in the future.”

“That’s kind of him; but I yearn for the intimacy of our lives together. Not just the physical intimacy – although I miss that too – but the feeling of togetherness, thinking alike and doing everything with each other. It was bliss ...”

“Well, dear boy, why don’t you come home to me? Now, I mean.”

“I wish I could, Gregory. But this woman has such a hold on me. She has been wonderful to me but her attention has become oppressive. She has made a career out of taking care of me. Perhaps I needed that attention once but now I feel like a prisoner and it is clawing. I must get away, but I can’t do it now with this approaching season of plays. This comeback is so important to me and I don’t want to do anything now that will have unpleasant repercussions.”

“Whenever you’re ready to come home, I will be waiting for you.”

“My plan – if *Pygmalion* goes well – is to escape at the close of its run and to be in Eaton Close just before *Private Lives* opens. Stuart will have to do a lot of driving between Belgravia and the Cotswolds and I hope that will be all right?”

“Absolutely, as long as you don’t have him undertake any clandestine errands for you.”

“Oh, Gregory, believe me those days are past.”

“I hope so, my dear. Cyril has several offers to discuss with you once this season is over. I long to see your name up in lights in the West End again.”

There was just a moment’s silence before Patrick continued.

“Gregory, there is one thing that disturbs me greatly and is preying on my mind. I had another visit from my father a few days ago.”

Patrick related the details of Alby’s visit and asked Gregory to have an envelope ready with £250.

“I somehow doubt that the stage doorman, Mike, is involved in this. This seems rather like a father extorting money from his son. It is shameful and ugly but what can I do? Isn’t it appalling that Father Brian spoke about me to a doorman. I wonder what he told him. I am so worried that a story about my background will appear one day – that would be devastating.”

“Patrick, I know how you must feel but I think you are worrying too much about this. You have done nothing wrong; there is no stigma. If a story did appear most people would believe that you have done amazingly well in overcoming a horrible start in life.”

“Gregory, I have told so many people about the aristocratic upbringing I had in Ireland. In interviews, I made up stories about my ancestry ... praised my parents as wonderful, caring and genteel people ... whereas the truth is that I never knew my mother and my memory of my father is one of a drunken boxer with blood running down his face.”

“My darling, people would be understanding and love you even more.”

“That may be, but I would feel dreadful and humiliated if my actual background or even my private life came into the public domain. I don’t know if I would be able to cope with that.”

At the first rehearsal, the customary reading of George Bernard Shaw’s most popular 1912 play took place under the watchful direction of Timothy Godwin, a young director who had made quite a name for himself with imaginative productions for The Thespians and other well-known repertory theatre companies. The reading went very smoothly and all were impressed when from time to time the professor of phonetics, Henry Higgins, closed his script and continued word perfect. Godwin commended the professionalism of the Don, whereupon Patrick replied that knowing one’s lines in advance did not suit all actors but it was the way he preferred for himself, allowing him to concentrate on characterisation rather than trying to remember his lines. Patrick also congratulated the pretty

young actress playing the bedraggled cockney flower girl on her excellent reading. It was her first major part with the company since leaving RADA, having during the past 12 months played a series of minor roles. She was pretty and pert and Patrick had to remind himself not to even think of reprising his performance with Ophelia.

Godwin reminded the cast that his production would be traditional and adhere strictly to the original script, particularly the ending. He told them that many directors had tampered with the script to provide a happy ending; even the famous director of the original production, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, at the hundredth performance in the presence of Shaw, to sweeten the ending in order to please the audience and himself, had Higgins romantically toss a bouquet to Eliza. Shaw was outraged and to pacify him, Tree said: "My ending makes money; you ought to be grateful." Shaw allegedly replied: "Your ending is damnable: you ought to be shot."

Rehearsals proceeded extremely well. Patrick's mellifluous voice suited Higgins admirably and was an inspiration to the cast who learned much from working with a consummate professional. Before opening night, Gwyneth administered a small tot of whisky to calm Patrick's nerves and at the end of an excellent performance the cast received a standing ovation. Patrick would not take a solo curtain call and insisted on Eliza sharing the plaudits. The Baroness, with her diamond tiara in evidence, and wearing a new kaftan specially designed for the occasion, was everywhere to be seen before the performance; from a prominent third-row seat she led the laughter and applause throughout, and afterwards mingled with the departing audience, graciously receiving congratulations as if she were Sarah Bernhardt herself. The local press was enthusiastic in its praise and in different ways paid homage to Patrick's triumphant return to the stage.

Pygmalion played without untoward incident to sold-out houses for two weeks, during which time Noel Coward's comedy of manners, *Private Lives*, was in daily rehearsal. A difficult piece to perform, it requires quality professionals to play the couple who can live neither with nor without each other. Consequently the company had brought in a well-known Gertrude Lawrence-type actress to play Amanda opposite Donovan's Elyot. Amanda sang *Some Day*

I'll Find You beautifully and their styles matched perfectly – in the hilarious comedy, the classic love scenes and when their relationship became distinctly stormy.

After a brilliant opening night, Patrick mingled briefly at a backstage celebration before letting it be known that he was very tired and was going home. The Baroness, as had become her custom, was lingering near the exit to the theatre, vicariously enjoying Patrick's success and receiving congratulations from the departing audience. By the time she came backstage to look for and congratulate Patrick, she was told that he had said he was tired and had gone home. Perplexed because her car and driver were still outside, she rushed home to find that not only was he not there but that a gentleman had collected his belongings.

It had transpired that Gregory, who had not attended the start of the performance, had crept in to the back of the auditorium to watch the second act and had been waiting outside in the Bentley with Stuart next to the stage door. By the time Gwyneth discovered that Patrick was missing, he was well on his way to Eaton Close. To prevent a distraught Baroness calling the police to report a missing actor, as soon as he got home Gregory phoned her and told her not to worry as Mr Donovan was safe and had decided to return to his home. Needless to say, the Baroness did not take the news well. Before he was able to replace the receiver, Gregory was bombarded with abuse and language he did not find becoming for a baroness.

The next morning Patrick was up early and the Bentley left Belgravia at 8.30 so as to have him at the Chipping Norton Theatre at precisely 10.00 am to commence rehearsals for Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. Bi-weekly rep was not an easy way of life but it was far easier than weekly rep, which was the order of the day when Patrick had started life as an actor. It was a tough assignment for Patrick to be rehearsing *The Birthday Party* for seven hours during the day and then to be performing *Private Lives* at night and to be travelling daily between Belgravia and the Cotswolds. However, seated in the back of the Bentley he either worked on his script or napped and seemed to be coping well with the ordeal.

What he found particularly challenging was that the two plays were from different generations and were totally dissimilar in every

possible way. The Pinter play had been the playwright's second full-length play and it received abysmal notices when it was first produced in 1957, many critics confessing that they hadn't the faintest idea what the play was about. However, after it closed, following a few performances, its integrity was rescued in a late review by the eminent *Sunday Times* critic, Harold Hobson, and the play went on to become a classic. Considered in the genre of the Theatre of the Absurd or Comedy of Menace, Patrick had been cast as Stanley, a dishevelled man in a decrepit boarding house who speaks in clipped and ambiguous words with long pauses interrupting his speech. With a cast of seven, the play calls for great ensemble acting and it proved a wonderful experience for Patrick to become absorbed in a new style of acting. Although briefed by the director that the play was deeply political and concerned about an individual's need for freedom and resistance, Patrick wasn't quite sure that he got that and chose to concentrate on the characterisation of the Stanley he was playing and let the audience decide for themselves what the play was all about.

The play was well received and once again Patrick received great notices. A feature article in the local press paid tribute to the success of the Thespian season and stated what a good idea it was to bring in such a brilliant and versatile actor as Patrick Donovan to play the leads. The article ended by saying that it was believed that the theatre company was negotiating with Baroness Heskon-Jones for Mr Donovan's services at some future date. On the last night Gwyneth was standing at the stage door with her car parked nearby and her driver holding the back door open. As Patrick emerged she grabbed him by the arm and tried to lead him to the car.

"This way, my darling ... Congratulations ... Great performance ... I have a wonderful dinner waiting for you at home."

"Gwyneth, what are you doing? I don't live with you any more."

"Yes you do, sweetheart ... You've just been away on a small vacation."

"No, I'm back at my permanent home. Please let go of my arm, Gwyneth."

At this point, the Baroness had had enough, and threw all decorum to the wind.

“Bloody little queer! Took advantage of me, you did – after all I’ve done for you! You’ll hear more about this ... You’ll be sorry.”

Hearing the commotion, Stuart whisked Patrick away from the woman now wild with rage, ushered him into the car and drove off at speed.

CHAPTER 13

Gwyneth was devastated. Her whole life seemed to have fallen apart. Once the belle of the ball in the high life of the Cotswolds, when the ravages of time had taken their toll on her pretty face and her increased weight had warranted a dress size four times larger, her popularity had waned. There was even talk that the Baroness had come from the wrong side of the tracks and, shorn of her beauty, it became increasingly apparent that her social background contradicted common assumptions of what it meant to be titled.

After her stroke, the shallowness of her friendships became apparent to her and not a single so-called friend either called to see her or visited her in the various hospitals and nursing homes where she was resident for long periods of time. By the time she was admitted to the Golden Sanctuary, seeking some form of identity that would distinguish her from the crowd, she had metamorphosed into an eccentric, recognised by her kaftans and turbans and other accoutrements. The appearance on the scene of the distinguished and handsome Patrick Donovan seemed an ideal opportunity, one not without risk, to attach herself to the ailing actor in the hope that his star might rise again and that she could be a part of that success. What a good idea she thought it was to have persuaded him to live with her at The Willows, to care for him and nurture him. It was an investment that she thought might just pay off.

And indeed it had. With his friendly personality on visits to the village and subsequent stage successes, she saw to it that much of the lustre rubbed off on her and she felt that her celebrity status was being restored. Following interviews with her in the local newspapers, with accompanying photographs, the surrounding towns were abuzz with news about the Baroness and what an amazing feat she had accomplished in restoring the integrity of the Don. In conversations in the villages she did not demur from this praise and had no hesitation in accepting the fact that she had made an invaluable contribution to the cultural life of the Cotswolds.

Gwyneth brooded sullenly about this abrupt turn in her fortunes: How could he have done this to her? What ingratitude –

had the man no conscience? God, she had even tried to cure him of his homosexuality and believed she was on the road to success in this area as well. Bloody queers ... disgusting perverts. They had no morality, no shame. She was damned if she was going to allow the matter to rest here.

The offices of solicitors Coolidge & Brown had served the gentry of the Cotswolds for the better part of a century. The waiting room was set in a time warp with the walls covered with portraits of the partners over the years and a decrepit wooden table carried back numbers of *Country Life* and *Cotswold Style*, magazines that seemed to suit the reading taste of the practice's clientele. Norman Brown, grandson of a founding partner, had looked after the affairs of the Heskon-Jones family for many years and was a trustee of the family trust that enabled the Baroness to receive a generous monthly grant, allowing her to live according to the style to which she had become entitled. With his blue-spotted bow tie not exactly complementing his pin-striped charcoal suit, the solicitor sat quietly in his office meditating until the appointed hour struck when he rose and ushered his client into his dingy office and looked down at her from the elevated position behind his file-cluttered desk with his pince-nez perched on the very tip of his nose.

"Good to see you, Gwyneth. I don't have that pleasure very often. Nothing too serious, I hope ... I have read what a wonderful contribution you have made to the dramatic arts by reviving the career of that actor – known as the Don, I believe."

"That is precisely why I have come to see you, Norman."

Gwyneth wasted no time in relating to Brown how Patrick had come to live with her; how she had paid all his expenses with the expectation that she would be reimbursed one day; how he had not paid her any rental for board and lodging, she believing that when he was reinstated as a high-earning actor she would be recompensed. And how he had deserted her abruptly – the sod! She wished to sue him for the money he owed her.

“Gwyneth, my dear, was there ever any agreement between you and the actor, written or implied, that he would be paying you board and lodging?”

“Well, I am sure it was understood ...”

“Was any amount ever mentioned?”

“No, he was too mentally frail to discuss financial matters.”

“Then I am afraid, my dear, that your claim against him is thin, to say the least.”

“What about doctors’ fees and suchlike, which I paid on his behalf?”

“Well, you might have a chance of recovering monies that you outlaid as long as you have explicit receipts. But frankly I would not encourage this action. Why don’t you just put it down to experience?”

“Look, if you won’t handle this matter I can go elsewhere, Norman ...”

“Come now, Gwyneth, I’m sure that won’t be necessary. If you are firm in your intention I can write a letter on your behalf and we can see what response we get.”

Back at Eaton Close, Gregory was disturbed to hear of Gwyneth’s histrionics and feared that they had not heard the last from the Baroness. Over a drink he and Patrick discussed taking a vacation. Over the next two days Gregory examined many vacation ideas and finally came up with the thought that they should take a Mediterranean cruise. Patrick liked the idea as it would give him ample opportunity to read scripts. Cyril Goodman, following Patrick’s successful season at Chipping Norton, had received many approaches for Patrick’s services and several promising scripts had arrived. However, before any detailed planning could take place, a registered letter reached Patrick from the Stratford-upon-Avon firm of solicitors, Coolidge & Brown.

26 June 1981

Dear Sir,

We are instructed by our client the Baroness Gwyneth Heskon-Jones to claim from you, as we hereby do, an amount of £148,625 being in respect of accommodation provided for you and repayment of amounts disbursed on your behalf.

We are advised that at a time when you were a resident at the Golden Sanctuary you approached our client to afford you board and lodging at her country home, The Willows, and that further you requested that our client and her staff attend to all your requirements during what was seen as your prolonged rehabilitation following alcoholism and drug addiction. Our client agreed to provide these services and, as you were not able to handle your own financial affairs, she disbursed considerable sums of money on your behalf concerning your health, wellbeing and sexual proclivity.

As it is now apparent that you no longer wish to be resident at The Willows, the contract between you and the Baroness Heskon-Jones has terminated and our client's claim is determined as follows:

** Luxury accommodation and full board @ £225 per day for 455 days*

£102,37

5

** Scotch whisky, Champagne and fine Bordeaux wine @ £50 per day*

£22,750

** Weekly visit from The Pink Friendship Club @ £100 per session for 65 visits*

£6,500

** Doctors' fees*

£2,500

** Masseurs*

£2,000

** Transport to the village and to the theatre*

£5,000

** Clothing and toiletries*

£7,500

Total £148,625

We are instructed that unless we receive payment of the aforesaid sum of £148,625 within 10 days of the date of this letter, legal proceedings will be instituted against you for the recovery thereof.

*Yours truly,
Norman Brown
Coolidge & Brown*

It was an ashen-faced Patrick who showed the letter to Gregory.

"I'm not the least bit surprised that the bitch has acted this way. But what is this business about The Pink Friendship Club?"

"Gregory, that is an absolute fabrication. I swear. No one from any club, homosexual or heterosexual, ever visited me there. I can't believe she would be so vicious."

"You mean to tell me that you were celibate the entire time you lived there?"

"Most of the time, yes ..."

Patrick then related the story of the night Gwyneth had seduced him. His description was very funny and he even got a laugh out of a very tense Gregory. He then confessed that towards the end of his stay he had had an affair with the chef but insisted that Gwyneth had no knowledge of this. This also got a wry smile from Gregory.

"Patrick, dear boy, did you ever enter into any sort of contract with this woman? Did you know that she was going to charge you for staying with her?"

"Absolutely not. She persuaded me to come and live with her – that the country atmosphere would do me good ... that I would be her guest and that she was going to look after me. There was never any question of payment. Gregory, forgive me, but when I was at that Sanctuary place, I was not well. As you know, I was suffering from the after effects of cocaine, alcohol and God knows what else – you don't know half of what I had been taking secretly. My mind was scrambled and the solace she offered me sounded most attractive."

"Patrick, you know that I never liked the woman, but I will not burden you with a whole series of I told-you-so. I can't imagine that she has any claim against you but we had better treat it seriously and have a consultation with my lawyers Williams, Butler & Sons. Of course what she is really after is the publicity that would flow from such an action. You know I can forgive you for

having sex with the chef – that must have been rather kinky: did he have his chef's hat on? But having sex with that bitch ...”

“What the fuck could I do – she sat on top of me!”

And the two men dissolved into laughter at the image.

Two days later the Bentley stopped in Fleet Street at the entrance to the diminutive and ancient Bolt Court. Gregory and Patrick made their way under the arch, past a plaque that indicated that Dr Johnson once lived there, and into the early Victorian building that housed the old esteemed firm of Williams, Butler & Sons. What might be described as a boutique firm of solicitors, the practice seemed to have survived over the years with the same set of city clients, the only change being the different generations who headed these institutions. Not likely to dirty their hands with criminal work, the firm was strictly commercial in its work although when one of their clients was unfortunate enough to require matrimonial services they would deign to act. The solicitor who welcomed Gregory and Patrick to his office was George Williams, another beneficiary of nepotism dating back to the founding partner. He had been to school with Gregory and they exchanged backslaps and fraternal greetings that irritated Patrick no end. However, when Gregory produced the letter they had received and explained the facts, Mr Williams grasped the situation immediately and Patrick was pleasantly surprised at the forcefulness of his reaction.

“This is pure bloody blackmail. We must teach this woman a lesson. The effrontery!”

And when Gregory suggested that his friend George negotiate some sort of settlement, he replied: “No way, my friend – not a bloody penny. I would like to make some enquiries in the Cotswolds; I have many contacts there. You say, Mr Donovan, that you had no dealings with The Pink Friendship Club?”

“No, I haven't even heard of it.”

“Well, I intend calling for receipts in respect of any monies she disbursed on your behalf.”

“There won’t be any receipts in respect of The Pink Friendship Club, of that I am quite sure.”

After further discussion, Patrick and Gregory took their leave – but not before the two classmates gave each other what seemed like a secret handshake and exchanged some college banter. Wasting no time, Mr Williams, who seemed to be enjoying this diversion from the usual dry commercial matters he handled wrote to Coolidge & Brown.

4 July 1981

Gentlemen:

We are instructed by our client to acknowledge receipt of your letter. Without admission of liability and without prejudice to his rights, our client would be obliged to receive for his consideration all receipts held by your client in respect of monies your client expended on his behalf. Specifically this should include all receipts from doctors, masseurs and from The Pink Friendship Club.

*We are yours very truly,
Williams, Butler & Sons*

Cyril Goodman received an urgent call from the Birmingham Repertory Company enquiring whether Patrick Donovan would be available at short notice to play the lead in a revival of Terence Rattigan’s acclaimed *The Browning Version*. The company had been well into rehearsals when the leading man took ill and knowing that Patrick had been in the play earlier in his career and that he was a fast learner of lines, the artistic director believed Patrick would be a good choice provided he was over his addiction problems. After discussing the matter with Cyril and Gregory, Patrick agreed to play Andrew Crocker-Harris, the ageing classics teacher at a British public school. Indeed, ever since he had played the secondary role of the young schoolmaster many years previously, he had yearned to revisit the play in the lead. With his academic life passing away, Crocker-Harris feels that he has become obsolete and Patrick empathised greatly with him and believed he could do the characterisation justice.

Hastily learning his lines, Patrick and Gregory took the train to Birmingham where they were met by the play's director who drove them to the Hyatt Regency Hotel where they would be staying for the remaining week of rehearsal and the three weeks of the play's run. Patrick fitted into the production with astonishing speed and ease, his professionalism being admired by the whole company. It was an excellent production and Patrick was singled out for a huge amount of praise.

No sooner had the play opened and been acclaimed when Goodman was contacted by Frank Hauser, the eminent director who had succeeded Frank Shelley at the Oxford Playhouse and had now returned as a guest director. Hauser had heard of Patrick's great success in the Cotswolds and wanted to offer him the part of Boris Trigorin in Anton Chekhov's acclaimed play *The Seagull*, which was scheduled for production. Patrick, early in his career had played secondary roles in other major Chekhov works, but Trigorin was a major protagonist and presented a huge challenge to an actor and could not be turned down. Wondering momentarily whether he had the confidence to do the part justice, Patrick quickly came to the belief that the tumultuous years were behind him, that he had settled down and that he had the will to reinstate himself as a leading man in the West End. His self-assessment was that in his middle age he had developed a new maturity that would not allow him to go off the rails again. He found it strange that while his libido was undiminished, he had no urge to stray in order to have an affair with either man or woman. Neither did he have any longing for drugs or heavy alcohol that had consumed large parts of his life. He drank, certainly, but in great moderation and enjoyed his single sun downer with Gregory and the glass of wine that might accompany dinner. His life with Gregory had settled into a loving relationship that made them quite the married couple and he wondered why homosexuals couldn't marry. He recalled Jesus's words from the King James Bible, 'Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friend.' While Gregory had not been placed in a position to make the supreme sacrifice for him, Patrick was well aware that his partner idolised him and certainly attended to his every need with loving devotion. This increased

Patrick's conscience concerning the times he had been unfaithful, particularly with the opposite sex. He now knew that he loved Gregory with all his heart and couldn't understand how he had succumbed to being hijacked by the Baroness. Greg called her 'the witch of The Willows', and he consoled himself with the belief that he must have been seriously out of his mind at that time.

Looking at himself in the mirror with appreciative narcissism he considered that notwithstanding the way he had abused himself over the years, he was still a handsome man; no longer a matinee idol, he reluctantly conceded, but with a little more Leichner make-up applied appropriately he thought that he might still cause a heart to flutter here and there, male or female. All his professional life he had worn make-up, off stage as well as on, and while he thought it was sufficiently subtle not to be noticed in everyday life, his colleagues and those close to him were under no illusions. Looking at his face critically, he thought a little more judicious use of Leichner's tinted foundation would give a flawless finish and cover the deepening lines that were appearing on his face. Greg had encouraged him to use various creams that were claimed to reduce lines and wrinkles, but Patrick remained loyal to Leichner products. With his black-enamelled make-up box, with its divisions for liners, creams, tubes, brushes and moisturisers and with a magnifying mirror built into the inside of the lid, Patrick believed he could work miracles and could age or rejuvenate his face with the flick of his Leichner tools. He found that greasepaint was an invaluable acting aid; changing his persona enabled him to lose his nervousness and facilitated more easily his getting inside the character he was playing.

It was sun-downer time at Eaton Close and after the ubiquitous Stuart, in the role of a trusty butler, had served drinks and a dish of salted cashews to his two charges, relaxed in armchairs reading the daily newspapers, he asked if he could speak to them on what he thought was a serious matter. Stuart's usual manner of communication was by means of pithy comments or one-liners,

which he thought sufficed, but as this looked like being a proper conversation, Gregory took the unusual step (for him) of inviting his general factotum to sit.

“You know, gentlemen, that in the course of my duties I cannot help overhear from time to time some of your conversation. It’s not eavesdropping, mind you – I know my place – it’s just that you, sir, talk rather loud to Mr Patrick even when I’m around.”

“Stuart, I’m not going to modify my tone when you’re around; what is it, man?”

“Sir, I have heard you mention The Pink Friendship Club. Of course, you know that I am like both of you, a little ginger beer ...”

“Ginger beer?”

“Yea, that’s cockney for ‘queer’. No disrespect intended, sirs – nothing wrong with being queer. I always says the only queer people are those who love nobody.”

“What’s all this got to do with The Pink Friendship Club?”

“Well, sir, we homosexuals, in my sort of class, we’re like one big organisation and we’re all friends, so to speak, we seem to know what’s going on about ourselves ...”

“For God’s sake, get to the point, Stuart.”

“I have a friend at PFC, that’s what we call the club, and he told me that one of the chaps there was going – quite often late at night – to The Willows.”

Gregory swung round sharply in his chair to face Patrick with a look of horror and disbelief on his face. Stuart continued ...

“I wanted to make sure that the chap visiting Mr Patrick was decent and discrete, if you know what I mean. I had good intentions ...”

Patrick sat bolt upright: “Stuart, that’s an absolute lie, I never ...”

“Sir, the chap from the PFC wasn’t coming for you. He was visiting the Baroness!”

Gregory stood right up at this point:

“The Baroness? Are you sure?”

“Absolutely, I have spoken to the chap – his name is John Pixie, Mr Pixie, but his friends, with good reason, call him ‘Long John’. Sir, you should hear what he says about the Baroness. She

just loves her sex – can't get enough of it. And all kinds of sex, if you'll excuse me, gentlemen, anal too."

Patrick, with a smile of relief on his face, entered the conversation: "Well done, Stuart. I am delighted that you tried to look after my interests. But isn't the club only for homosexuals?"

"It's intended to be – but they also employ a few all-rounders. I'm told that in the Cotswolds there are lots of single women – you know, widows and divorcees, who like to have a bit of night exercise. And some ladies, when their husbands are away, like to have a little rough action. They are prepared to shell out a lot for an escort to have no-strings-attached hanky-panky on a regular basis."

Gregory and Patrick were so delighted with Stuart's news that they invited him to join them for a drink.

"No thank you, gentlemen, I know my place. But I thought this information would interest you."

Gregory shook hands warmly with Stuart: "Very well done, Stuart. Do you think Mr Pixie would come to my solicitors in Bolt Court and give them a sworn statement? I would, of course, make it worth his while."

"Absolutely, sir. Long John owes me one ..."

Naturally, the response from Coolidge & Brown proved interesting. In its reply it said that the Baroness was busy collating the various accounts that were required but as she did not have any invoices and statements from The Pink Friendship Club and as she had failed to make contact with personnel there, she was abandoning that portion of her claim. Solicitor George Williams found the abandonment intriguing and, following a prescient hunch, engaged a private investigator to infiltrate the machinations of The Pink Friendship Club to see if there was any interesting explanation for the Baroness withdrawing her claim.

The Seagull, universally regarded as one of the best works of Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov, was first produced in St Petersburg in 1896 but was a famous failure after not being well received by audience or critics. Chekhov was devastated and three

years later he persuaded the famous director, Stanislavsky, to restage his poignant love story at the Moscow Art Theatre. This time the play was a resounding success, with Stanislavsky – the seminal Russian director of his time – emphasising and focusing on its great characters rather than the plot, and *The Seagull* went on to take its place as one of the great plays in the history of modern drama.

Patrick read the script time and time again and became increasingly intrigued with the complexity of the character he would be portraying. Boris Alexeyevitch Trigorin was an esteemed and obsessive middle-brow writer of fiction and was the dutiful lover of the beautiful Irina, a renowned Russian actress who identified herself with the intelligentsia and the artistic community. However, during the relationship Boris succumbed to the romantic flattery of Nina, a nineteen-year-old beauty who is the daughter of a rich landowner. He has an affair with her but after their child dies he becomes bored with her. Patrick pondered on the character of Trigorin and his research led him to believe that he should keep his interpretation simple and not stylised or romanticised. As always, Patrick was word perfect at the first rehearsal, having benefited from Gregory cuing him his lines for several weeks and the young director, Elias Shaw, was very impressed. Dressed in bohemian style with a black polo-neck sweater and maroon corduroy trousers and wearing a generous application of theatrical make-up, the Don intrigued the cast, who were very aware of his great talent – once regarded as the best actor in Britain – as well as of his much-publicised frailties. Patrick, on the other hand, surveyed the cast, his eye falling on the two very attractive actresses playing Irina and Nina and the extraordinarily good-looking young man playing Treplev, the struggling young writer who is something of a dreamer. In bygone years he undoubtedly would have befriended Treplev who he immediately identified as queer; and he would have been contemplating which of Irina or Nina would be his first conquest. But, while the same urges were indeed present, times had changed and he directed his mind to focus entirely on Chekhov's masterpiece.

Elias Shaw complimented Patrick on being word perfect from the start and said how much he looked forward to working with him. Not long out of RADA, Shaw, only in his mid-twenties, had had an illustrious start to his directorial career, with his first few productions receiving glowing praise from the critics. However, *The Seagull*, a heavyweight classic with an outstanding cast of distinguished actors, was a notch up the scale and he looked forward to the challenge albeit with some trepidation.

Following diligent and imaginative sleuthing, solicitor Williams' investigator managed to infiltrate The Pink Friendship Club by gaining the cooperation of the club's young secretary. While she knew that at night when she was off duty The Willows was an active client, she knew no details and could not locate the appropriate records, which had all mysteriously disappeared. Mr Williams advised Gregory accordingly, who told Stuart who then arranged to meet his friend John Pixie for a drink at the Bell & Whistle pub in the Cotswold town of Chipping Norton. Seated in the corner of the pub with a beer and sufficiently distant from a noisy game of darts so as to have a degree of privacy, Stuart saw the tall figure of Pixie approach. Casually but neatly dressed in tight jeans and sweater, the man known to his intimates as Long John had a rugged handsomeness and athleticism that made him seem younger than his 40-plus years. The two friends greeted each other warmly and after Stuart had provided a Guinness, they engaged in chitchat.

"So how you doing, Long John, in the sex department? You strictly a Friend of Dorothy or d'you switch hit from time to time?"

"I'm kept busy, Stuart, with graphic designing during the day, but I do a lot of work for the Pink Club, mostly at night. Decent organisation ... They send me on top-rate gigs. Money's good and the action keeps me fit."

"D'you do dollies too?"

"Absolutely. My old dick here is adaptable and always ready for a little action –particularly if the money's good. He appreciates

getting well paid – it spurs him on! I respect women who need my services. It may not be socially acceptable but they have physical needs too. I try hard to give them the pleasure they want. It's a good deal: they satisfy their sexual appetite and I earn an honest living."

"Long John, I've heard that you have been servicing that Baroness down the way ... Tell me 'bout her."

"Jesus, how'd you hear about that? Supposed to be top secret."

"Shit, you know that nothing much stays private in this business. And we old faggots somehow always find out what's happening. What's she like?"

"A fucking nympho! Can't ever get enough. As long as I keep going she climaxes multiple times – never misses. I used to charge her only by the hour but now I insist on a fee every time she has an orgasm. I told her that my billing rate is not by the hour but by the orgasm. No come, no pay ... but up to now I've always been paid!"

"She probably fakes 'em ..."

"Don't be a cunt. When she comes it costs her money. What she does do is to try to conceal her orgasms, but I don't let her get away with that!"

"She adventurous then?"

"Oh boy, she's no vanilla. Likes it in all directions ... Greek, clit, pussy, reaming, French ... even likes to give me a blow job and sometimes likes to beat her own meat in front of me."

"You ever service the man who was staying with her?"

"You mean the actor, Donovan? Never."

"You ever bump into the guy?"

"Nope, my times were always arranged after he had gone to bed. The old fart retired early and she was always careful to see that the coast was clear before I came in. She used to talk to me about him – sort of pillow talk between takes ... You know he was one of us – a real FOD. Her Ladyship told me he was too disturbed to service her. Couldn't get it up; but she worked on him one night and her description was hilarious! Eventually she sat on him – and, boy, there's a lot of her – and they both ended up hitting the jackpot. Thankfully for my job, she found it all too exhausting and didn't attempt to jump the bugger again."

“Long John, d’you know that the Baroness is threatening to sue Patrick Donovan for his upkeep while he stayed at The Willows and has included The Pink Friendship Club’s charges for you fucking him on a weekly basis?”

“Why, the fuckin’ bitch! As God is my witness, I’ve never even seen the man in my life. Why would she do such a thing?”

“Because he ran out on her. You know, a woman scorned ... or whatever the saying is. She’s trying to rub his nose in the shit.”

“Well, the Club has records of my weekly visits to her – I’m sure that Donovan’s name is never mentioned. They used to send her monthly accounts, which she always paid promptly. Of course the accounts never specified how many orgasms she had on each occasion but the money due was not always the same – if you get my drift. The next day I used to tell the boss or secretary how much to charge for the massage.”

“John, there are no records at the Club – they’ve been destroyed.”

“Fuck me ... what’s going on here? I guess if there’s no record I won’t have to declare anything in my tax.”

“Mate, all I want to know is that if I require a statement from you that you have never had sex with Patrick Donovan, you’d oblige?”

“Sure, that’s the fact. Say, how are you involved in all this?”

“My day job is to work for a guy, Gregory, as his butler/driver and Donovan’s his live-in lover. They both treat me as a confidant ...”

On returning to Eaton Close, Stuart carefully removed his microphone watch with the connection to the recorder in his inside jacket pocket and played the tape for an intrigued Gregory and Patrick.

CHAPTER 14

Rehearsals for *The Seagull* were well underway, with Patrick giving a deliberately even and low-key rendering, devoid of histrionics, his mellifluous voice almost hanging on each word of Chekhov's dialogue. Director Shaw, however, seemed perturbed and after a passage between Trigorin and Nina, he interrupted the scene.

"Patrick, I find you are slowing up the essential pulse of the piece. It's all rather pedestrian – dull and low key ..."

"Dear boy, I am doing so deliberately because I believe it to be in keeping with the character."

"Well, how do you see the character?"

"I am surprised you ask that. I thought at the first read-through we had agreed that Trigorin was not a brilliant or forceful writer, that he was not stylish or a poseur and held himself somewhat aloof from the family and friends on the estate. Low key, dear boy ..."

"Not so low key, I hope, as to put the audience to sleep ..."

"Good God, I hope I never do that!"

"What I am trying to say is that I am missing any power in your performance. I have seen you in many of your roles where you have established an almost hypnotic hold over the audience. Yet your great voice is so subdued ..."

"Well, then, help me with the interpretation. What is my motivation – apart from my salary?"

This brought sniggers from other members of the cast who were embarrassed by this altercation between the young, inexperienced director and the Don.

"Your motivation is in the script: put the character under the microscope."

"That is exactly what I have done – with great diligence – but you do not seem to approve of the characterisation I have come up with."

"It is not the celebrated Don the audience will be expecting."

"Screw the audience! Chekhov calls for great ensemble acting – we cannot all be on the same plain. We have to complement each

other. I see Tregorin as a reluctant and acquiescing member of the clan – not a forceful character.”

“I don’t see that in the script.”

“For Christ sake, the script is the starting part. The author provides the words and actors have to interpret those words – you must allow an actor some room for creativity.”

The altercation was obviously draining on the young director.

“I’m sorry there’s this conflict between us. Let’s leave it for the moment and we can revisit it privately.”

“Very well. But, young man, don’t be afraid of conflict and discussion. It is healthy and vital in our profession and invariably brings out the best in us. We have to all draw on our life experience.” And with a smile Patrick added, “And God knows I have had enough life experience to draw on for the rest of my days.”

Gregory arrived at George Williams’ office and played for the solicitor the recording of Stuart’s conversation with Long John.

“Well done, Gregory – or rather good job, Stuart. Once I hint to the Baroness’s solicitor that we have this evidence, believe me nothing more will be heard from her. What a pity actually ... Possessed with this information it would have been wonderful to have cross-examined her!”

28 August 1981

Messrs. Coolidge & Brown

Gentlemen:

We have now had an opportunity of investigating this matter thoroughly and on the basis of the evidence in our possession we are instructed to repudiate your client’s claim in its entirety. While your client has been unable to supply any details of monies paid to The Pink Friendship Club, we have in our possession evidence she would understand and explains the true nature of contractual dealings between that Club and The Willows.

We are closing our file in this matter, which we believe to be in your client's best interests.

Yours very truly,

George Williams

Williams, Butler & Sons.

While rehearsals for *The Seagull* proceeded well, the dissension between the director and Patrick on interpretation lingered on without the two of them being able to reach complete understanding. Patrick clearly did not enjoy taking instruction from such a young and inexperienced director, whereas Elias Shaw believed that he enjoyed directorial control. Not wishing to upset Patrick excessively, he treated the Don with courtesy and infinite patience but was unrelenting in striving for what he required. Finally, in order to resolve matters, Patrick lifted the tempo of his performance substantially at the final dress rehearsals in order to pacify his director. However, it irked Patrick that he had been required to alter his performance to please a young director whom he regarded as still in a learning phase.

The day of the opening night, Patrick brooded on the matter and came to the arbitrary and unilateral conclusion that there was no reason why he should give what he considered to be an unsubtle and inferior performance that would serve only to harm his reputation. If the critics were not enamoured with the interpretation, he knew that it was he who would be blamed, not the director. Without Gregory seeing, he steeled himself with what he regarded as a medicinal dose of alcohol, and while being driven to the Oxford Playhouse he went over in his mind the performance he intended giving that night. In his love scenes particularly he slowed the tempo considerably, lowered the timbre of his voice and introduced a delicacy in his delivery that he had not been allowed to show at rehearsals. Catching the eye of Nina opposite him, she realised what was happening and responded in an eager tremulous voice that created a delicate scene of great beauty that held the audience spellbound. This was a new and different Patrick Donovan, and spurred on by the visible response from the cast and the stillness of the audience – the feeling that an actor gets when he

is 'holding' his audience – he produced a performance of great sensitivity, which delivered Chekhov at his most tender and poetic. At the final curtain, a standing ovation reflected the audience's appreciation and as the principals each stepped forward for their personal 'call', it was clear that the Don had created magic.

Watching from the back of the stalls, Elias Shaw was enraged. So filled with anger at the actor deliberately changing his performance that he was unable to appreciate how well it had been received and how overwhelmingly successful the production had been. Disdaining congratulations, the director stormed backstage and barged into Patrick's dressing room, where the actor was already in a robe and toning down his Leichner make-up slightly to bring it in keeping with his off-stage appearance.

"How *dare* you give that performance! That was the most devious and unprofessional act I have ever heard of in the theatre. You sabotaged my production."

"Why don't you calm down, dear boy?"

"Don't you patronise me with your 'dear boy' act. I am going to take this up with the producers and with Equity."

"Why don't you just celebrate the fact that the audience loved your production and that you are responsible for a hit?"

"It wasn't my production; that's just the point."

"Well, you can claim it as your own; everyone will be applauding your sensitivity and directing skills. The critics are going to praise you. Accept it with good grace and move on. Just realise in future that good, experienced actors can be quite helpful in shaping the characters they play."

The following day the theatre critics signalled unrestrained approval, several specifically heralding an unusually poignant and sensitive performance from Patrick Donovan. All the critics, in one way or another, claimed that the production was another step up the ladder for the most talented young director, Elias Shaw. *The Seagull* enjoyed a capacity season at the Oxford Playhouse and then transferred to the Queen's Theatre in the West End for a limited three-month run.

With Patrick's name up in lights again, Gregory felt the time had arrived for the actor to replenish his rather jaded wardrobe and

a shopping spree took them to that Mecca of men's bespoke tailoring, Savile Row, and then to Burberry and Aquascutum nearby. Shirts at Turnbull & Asser in Jermyn Street and, in the same street, Foster & Son had been providing shoes for the well-dressed man for over 150 years. After a haircut at Geo F Trumper, under the ever-watchful eye of Gregory, a well-equipped and confident Patrick Donovan was back in business in London's West End.

But on their return from shopping, a somewhat agitated Stuart greeted them at the front door.

"Mr Patrick, while you were out a rather dishevelled man came to see you. I thought I recognised him, but couldn't be sure ... Name's Mike – dunno if he's got a surname – the guy who was the stage doorman at the Theatre Royal when you were playing in *Journey's End*."

"What did he want, Stuart?"

"Wouldn't say, but I don't like the look of the old geezer. I took the liberty of saying that you didn't like to see people here and I gave him your phone number and he said he'd call. I hope that's all right. But whatever he wants, it don't look like good news to me."

"That's all right, Stuart. I certainly don't want to see him and prefer not to speak to him either. I remember the man very vaguely and can't imagine what he wants."

"Sir, if this bloke is any trouble to you, you just let Stuart here know and he'll take care of the situation – if you know what I mean. I may be a humble man but I's got my contacts and you will never see or hear from him again."

"That's very kind and loyal of you, Stuart, but I don't believe that such drastic action will be necessary."

While *The Seagull* was running in the West End, Cyril Goodman was dealing with enquiries about Patrick's services. There were new scripts, offers from Ireland and revivals, and after carefully sifting through the offers, there was one proposal that interested

him greatly. It wasn't West End but it was from the Nottingham Repertory, a much-respected provincial company that had a reputation for staging important theatre. The play that they wished Patrick to appear in was a revival of Clifford Odets' *Winter Journey*, which had been billed as *The Country Girl* on Broadway in 1950. Regarded as a classic backstage play, it offered what amounted to an Ibsen thesis: a middle-aged actor, after his enslavement to alcohol and drugs, comes out of retirement to play a leading part. Cyril knew that the main protagonist, Frank Elgin, was a great role and that its originator in London in 1952, Michael Redgrave, had emerged himself from a dark period to triumph in the part. It seemed to Goodman that Patrick was so well versed in the requirements of playing Frank Elgin that not much research would be required by him. But, more important, he believed that it would be a good career move for the Don to take the lead in a typical American play, a genre in which he was untried. Goodman diligently found the 1954 movie *The Country Girl* and screened it for Patrick. It starred Bing Crosby, with heavyweights Grace Kelly and William Holden in supporting roles, and Patrick's reaction was that he was pleased to have seen it "as I now know how it should *not* be played".

Patrick was thrilled with the idea of appearing in *Winter Journey*. After being part of an ensemble in *The Seagull*, he relished the opportunity to have a big starring role where he would not be limited by restraint but would be able to give full vent to the histrionics that would be required. The experienced American director, Josh Heilbron, met with Patrick, and the two men seemed to be in accord, sharing a mutual passion for the play. Coming from the deep-burrowing naturalism of the Stanislavsky school, Heilbron emphasised that he would not be looking for a technical performance, but would require the actor playing Elgin to immerse himself in the part.

"I specifically don't want the type of acting one sees so often on the West End stage – excellent as it may be – where the actor remains aloof from the performance; where he makes no attempt at real characterisation or emotion but rather declares himself to be a

detached professional performer participating in a general plot. I hope you don't think I am disparaging English acting ..."

"Not at all. I know exactly what you mean. And after some of my recent experiences with technically good but timid English directors I am really looking forward to working with you."

"The English way, historically, has been that 'you are in the theatre witnessing actors' whereas Stanislavsky's approach, which I prefer, is that 'you are part of the action witnessing life'."

Enthused by the prospect of working with Heilbron, there was another reason why *Winter Journey* appealed so much to Patrick. He had long admired and felt he had an affinity with the late Michael Redgrave who had also been through a crisis in his own life caused by drinking excessively. Further, despite having fathered three hugely talented children – Vanessa, Corin and Lynn – Redgrave was a known bisexual, a fact that seemed to leave his wife, the excellent actor, Rachel Kempson, totally unfazed.

Cyril Goodman, with efficiency reserved only for his star client, finalised Equity contracts with Nottingham Rep, which provided for London rehearsals until the end of the run of *The Seagull*. Gregory, in turn, took great delight in the high spirits of his friend who seemed to be enjoying a new lease of life. Patrick thrived in his West End run where he enjoyed a very amicable relationship with the cast and his general *joie de vivre* augured well for the future.

As anticipated, there was a call from Mike.

"Don't know, Mr Donovan, if you remember me. I'm Mike, who was the doorman at the Theatre Royal when you played in *Journey's End*. Great performance, if I may say so; I used to sneak to the front sometimes to watch you. Never seen better acting ..."

"Thank you, Mike; what is it you want?"

"Well, sir, you may remember that I used to do you some favours. I recall that you liked a salt beef-on-rye sandwich, light on the mustard, which I used to fetch for you from the Nosh Bar in Windmill Street. Not there any more – all them old delis seem to

have disappeared. Now it's all Pret a Manger and Starbucks, I suppose some folk like 'em but it's not the same these days. Oh, and there was that friendly priest who I allowed in to see you one day in your dressing room. Not very interested in clerics, mind you, but he was an interesting man and afterwards we had such a nice chat about you."

"Mike, I am rather busy, what is it that you want exactly?"

"Sorry, sir, the missus says I am so long-winded. Fact of the matter is that my grown-up son has that cancer blood disease – leukaemia, I think it's called – and to add to it his wife is proper poorly and can't look after him. I'm the only one they can turn to and, to be frank, I am too old to work and am really down and out."

"I have to go – what is it you want, Mike?"

"Sir, if you could help me with a loan. Two thousand quid? I know that's not a lot to you these days, but it would allow me to have someone look after my son and his wife for quite some time."

"Mike, I hardly know you ... Why should you impose on me like this?"

"Sir, you're the only kind gentleman I can think of who might want to help me. All those toffee-nosed actors I knew wouldn't want to help "

"But, Mike, there must be someone with whom you are better acquainted?"

"Well, Mr Donovan, there's one other way for me to lay me hands on that amount of cash, of course ... There's this newspaper guy from the *News of the World* who's been on at me to give him an exclusive. Says that when I was in charge of the stage door I must have picked up a lot of stories about actors and their life stories. You know, not the ones that their publicity agents hand out but, you know, the real dirt ... Says they're experts at making stories seem even worse than they really are. This journalist, he says he could get me a lot of money if I, so to speak, spill the beans. What d'you think I should do, sir?"

"Mike, I believe you know a man who says he is my father."

"Oh Alby, fine chap he is ... interesting career he had as a boxer ... bit down on his luck these days, I believe."

“He approached me recently and asked for money which he wanted to give you. And I did give him money for you.”

“Never heard from him, sir; as God is my witness, I have never gotten any money from him. We had a beer together a month ago and have not seen him since.”

“Let me think about this ...”

“Sir, me and the missus are desperate ... I’ll call you in a coupla days to find out if you can help an old man out; if not, I’ll have to go the other route, if you understand what I’m getting at. Mind you, my friends will love it if old Mike gets a big splash in one of them tabloids.”

Rehearsals for *Winter Journey* commenced each day at noon and were held in Al Burnett’s Stork Club, a basement nightclub in Piccadilly near St James’s Church. Patrick disdained using Stuart’s services with the Bentley and preferred to walk each morning from Eaton Close. Gregory thought a little exercise might benefit him too and decided to join Patrick, so it became a healthy morning ritual for the two men to walk together, often greeted by passers-by who recognised the Don. If rehearsals ran late, the two would cross the road to Bentley’s Oyster Bar & Grill in Swallow Street for an early dinner, after which it was a short walk to the Queen’s in Shaftesbury Avenue for Patrick to have a nap in his dressing room before the performance.

Patrick found working with Josh Heilbron exhilarating. The American’s approach brought a new dimension to Patrick’s work and for the first time for years he felt that he was really benefiting from sound direction. In the ‘Take 5’ breaks from rehearsal, the two men were often closeted together and Patrick thrived on his director’s tales about the legendary Clifford Odets, the author of *Winter Journey*. As an actor, Josh had worked with Odets in the late fifties, a few years before he died and subsequently had become a specialist in his plays. He had appeared in a revival on Broadway of Odets’ first and most famous work, *Waiting for Lefty* – the play that dealt with trade union corruption, which the author had directed –

and later, when Josh took up directing, he directed *Awake and Sing*, *Till the Day I Die*, *The Big Knife*, *Golden Boy* and *The Country Girl*, the American title of *Winter Journey*. Patrick learned that Odets was one of the founders of Group Theatre in the USA and worked with Lee Strasburg and others in introducing the method style of acting. He also enjoyed stories of Odets' humble background, that he was a champion of the under-privileged and that he sought to introduce his left-wing political views into plays that dealt with important social issues. It was clear that Patrick felt some identification with Odets.

After *The Seagull* closed, Gregory and Patrick moved to Nottingham where rehearsals for *Winter Journey* continued. They had obtained an excellent suite of rooms with its own catering facility at the Sunnyside B&B, within easy walking distance of the theatre, and settled down comfortably to provincial life. In fact, the city of Nottingham was very much to their liking. With two universities, it has a young population, good restaurants and the locals proved very friendly, particularly those who recognised Patrick from his photograph on posters that proliferated throughout the town.

At rehearsals the cast responded with enthusiasm to Josh Heilbron's dynamic style of directing. He was not like many restrained English directors who manipulated the traffic on stage with the odd interpretive comment thrown in. Josh was all action, beating out the tempo he required with an outstretched arm and urging the actors on rather like a cheerleader. "Keep going, kid ... Now sock it to him – tell him how you feel ... Fuck me, that was great!" His passion for the characters was contagious and there was a general feeling in the company that the Nottingham Playhouse was going to have a big hit on its hands.

Patrick was in complete control of himself and during the final run-throughs Gregory administered the now customary small tot of whisky to Patrick shortly before his first entrance. The cast had been told about this unusual ritual, which defied the age-old stage taboo, but they accepted it, especially as – far from harming Patrick's performance – it seemed to stimulate him to even greater heights.

The opening night of *Winter Journey* justified the company's sense of anticipation and was an unmitigated triumph. Gregory, in the audience, joined in the applause, which rose to a crescendo when the Don stepped forward. The press were in accord and called Patrick's performance "imaginative casting leading to a most impressive piece of acting". It also praised Josh Heilbron's direction for making character more important than the plot and his courage in introducing to the English stage "a style of acting popularised by American actors". One critic, unusually, added a rather personal note about Patrick:

"The uncertainties that were Frank Elgin's ghosts reportedly are Mr Donovan's too. I believe the actor won't mind my saying that he has gone through a dark period during which he was hospitalised for causes that are endemic in the entertainment industry. Mercifully this most gifted actor has now recovered and we look forward to seeing more of the Don in the future. This has been a most important evening in the annals of English theatre."

After all the glowing notices, Patrick, accompanied by Gregory, met with Josh Heilbron for a celebratory lunch.

"Josh, I must thank you. I found it extremely stimulating to be working with you. You are a great director and you really brought out the best in me."

"Believe me, I so enjoyed this experience with you. To be frank, pal, I was told you were a difficult son of a bitch and I was concerned as to how we would get on. You know by now that I don't take shit from anyone ..."

"Well, you weren't entirely misinformed. I guess I have been a pain in the arse to some directors but Gregory here has reigned me in and keeps me on a short leash. I have started to feel my old self and the confidence has returned – but you have certainly opened my eyes as to what I could achieve. I believe, given the right parts, I can exceed even my own expectations."

"Pat, you should seek out the heroic roles. There are many American playwrights whose work would suit you: Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Arthur Miller, the new playwright David Mamet, they all have written leading male roles that would suit you. Come to think of it, I heard that producer Podlashuk is

contemplating a revival of *Death of a Salesman* and has George Mallet in mind as director.”

“I would love to be in any Miller play; I have never seen *Salesman* – read it, of course. Do you think I am right for it?”

“Right for it? Christ, you’d make a tremendous Willy Loman – right up your street. And George Mallet, he’s a pal of mine ... Excellent director with a lot of experience in the States with method actors. Great, no-bullshit guy. You’d get on well with him. I’m gonna invite George to come up and see our play. What d’you think, Greg?”

“Josh, I have been keeping quiet. I saw Paul Muni in the original London production and, as I recall, he was remarkable. However, more recently I saw Dustin Hoffman as Willy and I thought his interpretation was way off the mark – or he was dreadfully miscast. Having now seen Patrick in *Winter Journey*, I truly believe he would be a superb Willy Loman.”

CHAPTER 15

George Mallet attended a performance of *Winter Journey* and afterwards sat at the bar with Josh.

“Beautiful production, my friend – and as for Donovan! Christ, he’s bloody marvellous. I think he would make a phenomenal Willy Loman. What’s he like? Easy to work with?”

“George, I was warned not to touch him with a bargepole. Many people over the years have had terrible trouble with him.”

“What sort of trouble?”

“Oh, the usual: drink, drugs and sex and at times just fucking difficult. Apparently he was inclined to screw anything that moved and was indifferent as to whether they were wearing skirt or trousers. I’m told that he has been through several rehab programmes but he seems to be OK now – he certainly was with me.”

“Would I be taking a chance?”

“I had confidence in him and it paid off. You would have to get used to the fact that he takes a swig each night before going on. Makes no bones about it – says it steadies his nerves ... At first the cast didn’t like it but they got used to it and the consensus was that the booze gave him a boost that enhanced his performance.”

“Well, I suppose I could live with that.”

“One other thing ... Before this play he appeared in *The Seagull* and I am told he gave the young director a hard time – to the extent that he disagreed with the director’s interpretation of Trigorin. Apparently, he went along with him during rehearsals but on opening night changed the character of the part completely.”

“What did the director do?”

“Sulked like hell at first but as the play and Donovan got raves, he disappeared happily into the sunset. Let’s go back stage and you can meet the Don.”

There was an immediate affinity between George Mallet and Patrick. The actor was already out of costume when George arrived in his dressing room and although he was about to leave for home, the two sat down and chatted.

“Patrick, I have been engaged to direct Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* for Nathan Podlashuk. The play has been cast, save for Willy Loman. Are you familiar with the play?”

“I have never seen it performed but of course I know it well. Have read it several times.”

“Podlashuk has two top names lined up for me to choose from for the lead. But you could well be my Loman ... Would you be prepared to read for the part?”

“Since my name went up in lights in the West End, it has been my immodest principle never to audition for a part. But by God and by Jesus, would I like to read for you!”

With either Gregory or Stuart answering the phone, Patrick had been able to avoid further conversation with Mike but the matter continued to play on his mind. Although Gregory repeatedly reminded him not to dwell on the matter and by no means to give in to an attempt at extortion, he was extremely worried as to the mental affect this was having on Patrick. With rehearsals for *Salesman* about to start he did not want this worry to precipitate in any way some of his past behaviour. However, on a Sunday at home, Patrick unfortunately did answer the phone.

“Mr Donovan, I’m glad to have got you at last. I think you have been avoiding me. Have you reached a decision? Can’t wait forever, y’know.”

“I need more time. I would like to help you ... How is your son?”

“My son? Yes, my son. Very bad. I need to raise the money by next week otherwise it’ll have to be Plan B.”

“Well, phone me next week and we will see.”

Gregory was exasperated.

“Patrick, I heard what you said to that gold digger, and putting him off is not going to work. Tell him ‘No’ and let him do his worst. If his story doesn’t read well in print, we will get a good PR firm to turn it to your advantage. You will emerge more of a hero

having come from a background of poverty and deprivation. You'll see ..."

"Gregory, I hear what you say but I am trying to stall him until *Salesman* opens. After that, I am prepared to face the music."

Death of a Salesman was to be staged at the Lyric Theatre, the oldest theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue, and because a dance recital was being performed there using only black drapes, the stage was available for the five weeks of rehearsal. Patrick had a great affection for the Lyric, having performed Rattigan plays there many years previously. Seating just under 1 000 in its four levels, he knew that a well-projected stage voice reached past the upper circle to the balcony beyond. At the first rehearsal, after the cast had had an opportunity to get to know each other and, in accordance with tradition, wished one another good luck, all were seated in the first two rows of the stalls, with George Mallet on the edge of the stage facing them.

Making the actors stand up in turn, George made a few appropriate remarks about each of them and then put them at ease with a few choice stories about his own career. He then got down to business by reminding them of the play's credentials: that in 1949 it had won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for best play; that it had achieved five other Tony Awards, including the great Elia Kazan winning Best Director; that it had been staged countless times internationally with great success and it was his intention that with this outstanding cast the result would be a definitive production of the play.

"There is no place for mediocrity: we are the beneficiaries of a play regarded by most people as the best play ever written by an American. Its author, Arthur Miller, is a man of giant stature in world drama. His play had an enormous impact when it was first staged. Different socio-political and psychological points of view were expressed. People to the right saw it as a bomb placed with precision under the edifice of Americanism and dismissed it as communist propaganda. Others, to the left, called it absolute decadence. Doctoral theses were written about the play. Commercial firms complained that their difficulty in recruiting new salesmen was directly attributable to the play. General Motors

grumbled that sales of Chevrolet fell off because Willy Loman first says that the Chevy was the greatest car ever built, but later contradicts himself by saying ‘... they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car’. Studebaker sales were also affected because Willy criticised its steering. The emotional effect has been unequalled in modern drama. Different people saw different things about it. One man, on leaving the theatre, was quoted as saying ‘I always knew that the New England territory was no damned good!’ My friends, this play is a triumph of writing in plain understandable language and it rings with many phrases that have come into everyday usage. ‘He’s liked but he’s not well liked.’ ‘The woods are burning, boys.’ ‘A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.’ ‘Attention must be paid’... Linda’s rebuke to her sons for having treated their father with contempt and mockery.”

George emphasised to his cast that Loman never made a lot of money, that his name was never in the papers and that he was not the finest character who ever lived, but that he was a human being and terrible things were happening to him. He reminds them that Linda says he shouldn’t be buried like a dog.

Moved by their director’s passion for the play, a general discussion about the play then ensued. Patrick gave the appearance of being entirely absorbed in what was happening but had not participated in the analysis taking place. Trying to draw him into the conversation, George asked: “Patrick, as you well know, the success of this play depends on your interpretation of Willy. How do you see him?”

There was a long pause and while all had remained seated during the discussion, Patrick stood up to respond and faced the cast imposing his presence on them.

“I see Willy Loman as exhausted, old beyond his 63 years, unstable and with his mental state deteriorating, the boundaries between the present and the past merging as he lapses in and out of his memories. He has nostalgic flashbacks of an idyllic past when Biff was a college football star, fantasised conversations with his successful brother, Ben, and hallucinates about his reputation as a star salesman. He also speculates about the future and expresses his supreme confidence in the American Dream.”

“You certainly have a complete understanding, and I agree with everything you’ve said. D’you see a turning point in Willy’s mind – a crucial scene in the play?”

“Yes, I do. Willy’s collapse occurs in a flashback when his son, Biff, urgently seeking his help, surprises his father in a Boston hotel room with a woman buyer. This is a moment of calamity, a turning point, for both Willy and Biff. The raw emotions are different: severe guilt on the part of Willy and concomitant disgust for Biff who calls his father ‘a phony little fake’.”

“Absolutely correct. Patrick, how do you see the relationship in the present time between father and son?”

“Willy believes it is *his* right to expect Biff to fulfil the promise inherent in him and the fact that he doesn’t do so he regards as betrayal. However, his love for his son persists even after Biff tells him that he has been to jail and says, ‘Pop, I’m nothing! I’m nothing, Pop. Can’t you understand that?’ And Willy replies: ‘That boy – that boy is going to be magnificent!’”

The cast were totally absorbed in Patrick’s understanding of the play and its nuances. Captivated by his make-up-enhanced theatrical appearance and the unique timbre of his voice, there was optimism in the camp that *Death of a Salesman* was going to live up to their director’s expectations. The first reading of the play then took place, with Patrick – refusing the benefit of a script –giving it very low-key rendering to get the feel of playing opposite Dame Mary Martinelli and the rest of the cast.

Back at Eaton Close, enjoying his sun downer with Gregory, Patrick related the events of the first rehearsal.

“You know, Gregory, I have never felt so comfortable at a first rehearsal. George is such a sweet boy and he has created such a nice atmosphere. They all seemed to be very impressed with my understanding of the play and many complimented me on my first reading. Except that, thanks to you, I wasn’t reading ... I seem to be almost word perfect. And if my effort today pleased them – I was only coasting – wait until I am in full throttle. But I don’t want to get there too soon. I want to pace myself so that the full performance is reached only at the first dress rehearsal.”

“That’s great, Patrick; I’m so pleased it has started so well.”

"I owe it all to you, my darling. I am wonderfully relaxed these days ... I am more mature and at peace with myself and it's all because of what you have done for me and our love for each other."

"Patrick, your talent is all your own; I haven't contributed to that one iota."

"Oh, my dear, you have ... you have relieved me of all mundane responsibilities in life; I am waited on hand and foot, and you have provided a loving setting that has enabled me to concentrate on my art, to remain relaxed and composed allowing my theatrical juices to flow unrestrained. But *Salesman* is going to exhaust me – it is a really tough assignment and I am going to need all my strength to cope. I know that you will keep me in great shape for this."

"Patricia, my love, we have come a long way together ... two old queens. We have had our difficulties ... You gave me a tough time when you strayed, but you are back in the fold and I don't believe that our love for each other has ever been stronger."

"I love you dearly, Gregory. I believe our love for each other is very special. I would do anything for you. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.'"

Nathan Podlashuk was an astute producer. He attended rehearsals often and was so delighted with the progress being made with his latest production that, as he had hoped he would, he extended his three-month lease on the Lyric by another three months and secured an option for yet a further two months. And yet, knowing Patrick's track record, he was not so confident that he wasn't at least a little anxious about him and enquired often from George Mallet as to how things were going.

"Nate, stop worrying ... The Don's doing just fine. I have a very good rapport with him and he and Mary seem to love each other – in the best sense, that is. Biff and Hap were a bit in awe of him at first but they too have become firm friends; they call him 'Pop'.

“George, is Patrick’s performance what you expected?”

“He is still pacing himself and when he increases the intensity this will give everyone a lift. Look, he’s not in the style of Lee J Cobb who was a lumbering giant. Patrick will give a more intelligent rendering; he really has studied this play intensely. Legend has it that Cobb lacked emotion and that Elia Kazan, on the day of the opening night in New York, took him to a matinee performance of a Beethoven symphony in order to instil some passion in him. After Cobb received fabulous notices, Lee awarded himself a status higher than the theatre world gave him. He was great as Willy until he was told he was great and believed it; then he became less great. Patrick certainly doesn’t lack emotion; he is currently restraining himself and I am confident that our Don is going to surpass Cobb and give a better and more consistent performance.”

Because it had been agreed that *Salesman* would follow the style of the original production, Podlashuk had been successful in obtaining the rights to use Jo Mielziner’s innovative set design. Mielziner had been the most admired and successful set designer of his time on Broadway and his skeletal three-platform stage setting had become an integral part of *Salesman*. Likewise Alex North’s agent was contacted to obtain the rights to the incidental music he had composed. It was a fragile, wistful, haunting score arranged for flute and the lyrical quality of the recording would only enhance the play. North had composed the film score for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and went on to write film scores for *Spartacus*, *Viva Zapata*, *Cleopatra* and many others.

As the time for previews approached and costumes and props were being introduced for the first time, the cast became a little tense but soothing words from the experienced George Mallet assured them that they were doing just fine. With each rehearsal, Patrick was increasing the intensity of his lines and Mary was responding appropriately. Scenes between the two of them drew spontaneous applause from the rest of the cast while George just muttered, ‘Very beautiful, my darlings.’

There were two dress rehearsals prior to the first preview and at the first of these certain members of the cast mentioned that

Patrick smelled of liquor. After the run-through George went to his dressing room and spoke to his Willy Loman:

“Patrick, that was simply great. Is that it or do you still have more to give?”

“There is still some fine tuning, George, and a little more emotion I am saving for opening night. Didn’t Mary do well? She responds so well to me.”

“You are both wonderful together. Patrick, a couple of busybodies reported that they smelled liquor on you tonight.”

“Absolutely, I think I did warn you that I have a nip each night before going on. It controls my nerves ... fortifies me ... gives me courage. Way back it used to get out of hand, but nowadays it is strictly controlled and can only enhance my performance. I hope you don’t object?”

“No. It certainly violates the age-old principle of no liquor backstage but as your performance tonight was not affected in any way, I am prepared to turn a blind eye.”

“Thank you for your understanding, my friend.”

“By the way, when the stage manager heard that you smelled of liquor, he searched this dressing room from top to bottom while you were on stage and he couldn’t find a thing. Where do you keep the goddamned stuff?”

Patrick chuckled and pointed to a bottle of ‘Leichner Make-up Removal Spirits’ on his dressing table.

“This bottle certainly has spirits, but Gregory substituted scotch for Leichner and that’s where I get my swig.”

The previews were sold out, the performances went off without a hitch and the talk was excellent. Both producer and director were filled to the brim with confidence as the all-important press opening night approached. On the day of the opening, Patrick was quietly self-assured.

“You know, Gregory, I have never been better prepared for a play. George has done a wonderful job, Nathan is the complete

professional and every member of the cast is outstanding. This show, my boy, is going to be a hit.”

“I am so excited. I have planned a noon lunch for us and I then suggest you have about a two-hour nap. If we get you to the theatre around 5 o’clock – two and a half hours before curtain – how would that suit you?”

“Just fine. Nathan has arranged a party afterwards at Quo Vadis. I don’t know if I want to go.”

“Why not? Everyone will want to congratulate you ...”

“I’m going to be exhausted, Gregory, and I don’t want to drink. Perhaps we will just put in an appearance and two of us can come home and have a quiet glass of Champagne together. I would like that best.”

And, as predicted, the first-night audience sat spellbound. The Don came into his own, pulling out all the stops, and gave a heart-wrenching performance. When towards the end of the play, the sound of a car speeding off accompanied by a crescendo of music, the almighty noise of a crash, followed by the poignancy of a single cello string, all signalling Willy’s suicide, there were hushed gasps in the audience. Then followed the requiem, with hardly a dry eye in the auditorium, as Willy’s wife Linda, dressed in black, kneeled down stage facing the audience and in a hushed voice said her farewell.

“Forgive me, dear. I can’t cry. I don’t know what it is, but I can’t cry. I don’t understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can’t cry. It seems to me that you’re just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can’t cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can’t understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there’ll be nobody home. We’re free and clear. We’re free. We’re free... We’re free.”

Then, as Biff helps Linda to her feet, they began to walk off, only the sound of the flute filling the darkening stage as the curtain fell. There followed a magical moment that is rare in theatre: absolute silence for fully five seconds before rapturous applause erupted. Unusual in British theatre, every member of the audience rose to applaud with many cries of ‘Bravo!’ and several calls of

'The Don' as the curtain rose on the fully assembled cast. There were no individual curtain calls: Biff and Hap took a bow together and then Willy, holding Linda's hand, stepped forward to a crescendo of recognition. Patrick looked drained and exhausted and Mary Martinelli glanced up at him, hardly concealing her admiration. It was indeed a night to remember.

Backstage Gregory stationed himself at the star's dressing room, holding back a throng of well-wishers while Patrick discarded his stage clothes and pulled on a white towelling robe over his perspiring body. First allowed in were George and Nathan, who each hugged Patrick emotionally. The director told him, "You were absolutely sensational tonight – you really pulled out all the stops."

The producer, with tears streaming down his face, held both Patrick's hands: "My darling man, you were superb. Surpassed my expectations – it has been the greatest night in my life as a producer."

"George, Nate, my very dear friends, I am so happy that the Don didn't let you down and that it has worked out to your satisfaction. I owe you both a deep debt of gratitude for having had confidence in me."

Gregory then admitted all those waiting, included a frumpy old lady who reminded Patrick that she was Agnes Armitage, secretary to Nathan Podlashuk. "I was at your audition and I told Mr Pudlashuk not to be a schmuck and to cast you. Thank God he listened to me. Now would you mind signing this programme for me?"

The party at Quo Vadis was in full swing when Patrick entered to loud cheers. he shook hands, gave hugs, kisses and autographs, but after 15 minutes he and Gregory slipped out and into the waiting Bentley, which Stuart had skilfully manoeuvred outside the restaurant.

Sitting in the back together, Gregory held Patrick's hand and whispered: "It was indeed a night to remember. I'm so proud of you. I have a cold glass of Dom Pérignon and scrambled eggs with caviar for you at home."

“I couldn’t think of anything nicer. I do love you so much, Gregory.”

CHAPTER 16

The notices were universally ‘raves’ – as the profession likes to label highly successful critiques. Critics seemed to want to outdo each other with their superlatives and the last sentence of *The Times* review seemed to sum it all up:

“This was a memorable intellectual production on every possible level – human drama, moral statement, an exercise in brilliant acting and direction but the evening undoubtedly belonged to the brilliant Patrick Donovan. Take notice ... The Don is back!”

Among the hundreds of letters and telegrams Patrick received, he cherished particularly the warm congratulations from many of the actors and directors he had worked with over the years, some of whom had been in the first-night audience. A charming letter from Amelia, now a middle-aged mother of three children, brought back many nostalgic memories, particularly of his sexual initiation. And another letter of congratulations from Julie McGovern – “You might remember me as your Ophelia” – reminded him of yet another period in his life about which he had conflicting emotions. There was, however, also a letter that he found extremely depressing.

Mr Donovan

I have herd you have had a grate sucess in The Salesman and you must now be rolling in it. I can't wait any more. My address is Flat 4A 25 Shepherd's Bush Road and if you can't see your way clear to lending me £2,500 – a cheque posted to me would be good – I will have to keep an appointment I have with my reporter friend. He doesn't know the name of the actor I will be disclosing but he says if the story is big enough he will run it the day following the Olivier Awards sereminny. I don't know much about this sort of thing but he says it would have quite a bit of clout on that day.

Yours very sincerely, Mike.

Within days the first three months of the run were sold out and Nathan told an excited Agnes to instruct the PR firm, advertising agent and box office to open booking for the next three months.

While Patrick was enjoying the run and willingly giving one hundred per cent of himself at each performance, he was however taking strain, particularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays when there were two performances. In bed each night by midnight, he slept until midday, thus eliminating breakfast and starting his day with lunch. Despite 12 hours' sleep he was still tired when he awoke and because this concerned Gregory he arranged for a doctor to come to Eaton Close. However, after a careful examination, the doctor concluded to Gregory that Patrick was an old 55 but that he could find nothing wrong and suggested Patrick's languidness was probably attributable to punishment taken by his body in days of reckless living. He prescribed a course of vitamin B12, which might be useful in giving him a boost at a time when he needed as much energy as he could muster.

Well into the run of the play, Gregory began to notice that the scotch was disappearing faster than had been the case previously. Each Monday he filled the Leichner Spirits bottle to capacity and no one else drank whisky. Surreptitiously he marked the level on the label and a few days later was disturbed to find that the scotch was considerably lower. Without wishing to rock the boat, Gregory felt he had to raise the matter and did so one day at lunch.

"Patrick, my dear, I have noticed that the whisky is going faster than usual. Do you think Stuart is drinking?"

"I cannot bear false witness against Stuart. If this is the confessional, I must admit that I have occasionally increased the nightly dosage."

"But, dear boy, secret drinking is a breach of our pact ... This is not good. Everything had been going so well!"

"Gregory, my darling man, do you not appreciate that I am under strain? I love playing Willy Loman but the goddamn salesman is killing me. I also received a very depressing letter at the theatre from that man, Mike, and it seems as if he is going to carry out his threat of talking to that reporter. They plan the article to appear the morning after the Olivier Awards. That will give you

some idea as to why I have increased the dosage I have been taking ... When I wake, it calms my nerves – it helps me get through the day. And it is so bloody little, it can't do any harm."

At the theatre rumours began doing the rounds that the Don had been increasing his nightly tot. Not that it harmed his performance in any way noticeable to the audience, but the actors could determine an almost imperceptible change in his delivery and they had no doubt that his breath indicated increased alcohol. However, it was at this time that the nominations were released for the Laurence Olivier Awards, and the star's drinking habits slipped off the backstage agenda. The prestigious Olivier Awards were awarded annually to recognise excellence in professional theatre and were accepted internationally as the highest honour in British theatre. The actual awards, designed by the sculptor Harry Franchetti, were handsome brass busts depicting the man they honoured, Lord Olivier, as he was as Henry V at the Old Vic in 1937.

There was great excitement in the company when *Death of a Salesman* received five nominations in different categories. The presentation evening was arranged by the Society of London Theatre Managements and took place on a Sunday evening in the ballroom at the Grosvenor House Hotel. Entering on the red carpet at the Park Street entrance, and lit by television lights and camera flashes, Patrick and Gregory, dressed in their black-tie finery, made a handsome couple and Patrick waved to the crowd and responded to cries of 'The Don!' Asked by interviewers if he fancied his chances for Best Actor, he replied, "Well, if I take the notices I received seriously I suppose I must be in with a good chance."

It was a glittering evening and Patrick seemed to be enjoying the occasion immensely. He started off with a mild whisky that Gregory ordered for him but when walking around to the tables that beckoned him he accepted drinks from friends just to be sociable. When the results were announced, *Death of a Salesman* received awards for Best Revival, Best Director and Best Actress, and when Patrick Donovan was awarded Best Actor he received a tumultuous standing ovation.

At the culmination of the proceedings a Special Award was made to Nathan Podlashuk for his outstanding contribution to drama over many years. This caused the joyful members of the *Salesmen* company to gather around the award recipients, Nathan, George, Mary and Patrick, and in high spirits there were many toasts. Excluded by force of numbers from this inner group, Gregory watched anxiously, hoping that Patrick was not drinking as furiously as the others. But by the time he did connect with him, he saw that the damage had already been done and that Patrick was unsteady on his feet and very drunk. And still Patrick was reaching out for glasses of anything in sight and recklessly downing the contents. Propping him up with the help of George, Gregory managed to usher Patrick out of the ballroom and into a back lobby where the mumbling actor collapsed onto the floor. A passer-by identified himself as a doctor and asked if he could help. Gregory told the doctor that he thought Patrick had collapsed as a combination of fatigue and lack of adequate air conditioning but after examining him the doctor declared that the man was just plain drunk.

A message was sent to Stuart to bring the Bentley to the front entrance of the hotel on Park Lane, away from the waiting crowd, cameras and reporters, and with the assistance of some waiters, Patrick was carried to the waiting car.

From mid-morning the next day a very anxious Nathan Podlashuk was on the phone to Gregory wanting to know if he should alert the standby to get ready for the evening performance.

"I don't know, Nate. He was dreadfully sick when we got home last night – God knows how much he had to drink – and probably nothing to eat. He is still asleep and I think it best that I don't wake him."

"OK. Please call me as soon as he wakes and give me a status report."

Gregory sat alongside the bed waiting for Patrick to stir. At 1 o'clock he opened his eyes, mumbled something and collapsed

back onto the pillow and slept for another hour. When he awoke at last and sat up, Gregory enquired how he was feeling.

“Don’t let’s make a mountain out of this molehill, Gregory. I think I must have had a drink too many on an empty stomach. I feel dreadful, but after a hot shower I’ll be just fine. I’ve given many a great performance after binges that make last night seem like tea time at a nunnery.”

“Nate phoned to enquire about you and asked whether he should alert the standby.”

“Absolute bloody nonsense!” Patrick winced. “If I remember correctly I did win the Olivier Award last night and my audience won’t want to see some second-rate understudy. Tell Nathan I’ll be there – and I shall give the performance of my life.”

After his shower, a few morsels of dry toast and another two-hours nap, a passably sober actor made his way backstage and greeted everyone with a jovial wave and a greeting, “Good party last night, heh?” Nathan and George, unusually during a run, came backstage to say hello and decided to hang around in case ... The standby actor was also in attendance, lurking in the wings where Patrick would not see him. Mary Martinelli was scared out of her wits but the stage manager assured her that Mr Donovan seemed OK. Without Patrick’s knowledge, Gregory decided to hang around backstage after dropping him off at the stage door. Although this was against company rules, all were glad for Gregory to be there. As usual, at the ‘half’ the assistant stage manager looked in to Patrick’s dressing room and enquired if everything was all right. Patrick was made up, in his stage clothes and busy writing at his dressing table. The ASM always admired how Patrick personally replied to fan mail.

At the call ‘Beginners on stage!’ Patrick and Mary gave each other their usual hug in the wings. Mary was conscious of the odour of alcohol on his breath – perhaps it was a little stronger than usual. She then positioned herself in her stage bed. The faint stage lights came on, the auditorium lights dimmed, the house curtain was raised, and the plaintive sound of the flute was heard as Willy Loman, the salesman, entered slowly carrying two old suitcases; he mimed unlocking the door to the house, entered the kitchen, put

down the cases and gave an audible sigh. As the flute faded away, he ambled to the bedroom and sat on the bed holding Linda's hand and told her he was tired ... tired to the death.

And so another performance was under way of the Olivier Award Best Play, *Death of a Salesman* with Patrick Donovan and Dame Mary Martinelli, the recipients of the Best Actor and Best Actress awards. The play progressed without incident. Patrick showed no signs, certainly not to the audience, of anything untoward and gave a particularly dynamic performance. The cast, from Mary downwards, were on the other hand understandably apprehensive and, as a result, felt that they were below their best. At the intermission, on the way to their dressing rooms, Patrick gave Mary a big hug:

"Well done, darling – it's going particularly well tonight."

She smiled and nodded in agreement.

During act two Patrick continued to surpass himself but at the end, at his final exit, he was particularly emotional and distraught, tears streaming down his face. The requiem scene took place but at its conclusion, when the cast assembled hastily on stage for the customary curtain call, there were cries of

"Where's Patrick? What's happened? Where's the Don? He's missing ... Someone find him!"

"He's not in his dressing room ..."

With applause out front continuing unabated, but no Willy Loman present, the stage manager called out over the Tannoy: "No curtain call tonight! Alex, house lights and backstage working lights please."

There was pandemonium backstage as everyone searched for Patrick. The stage-door entrance to Wardour Street was open ... People outside were screaming and pointing ... A few yards away in Shaftesbury Avenue a red double-decker bus was stationary ... A man lay under the bus, just beyond its front wheels ... People were pulling the body clear of the bus ... Nearby policemen ran to the scene to hold people back.

The Lyric doorman was sobbing: "He rushed past me, pushed the door open and ran into the street ..."

A woman on the pavement cried: “Never seen anything like it. This madman rushed to Shaftesbury and deliberately threw himself under the bus’s wheels. It was horrible ... the driver probably never even saw him.”

The large crowd that gathered mingled with the audience making their way out of the Lyric Theatre. Above the theatre canopy the lights twinkled *Death of a Salesman* – Patrick Donovan while below in the street the Don’s real-life drama occupied the stage. From the people gathered around the body, several recognised the man being pulled from under the wheels of the bus and word filtered back that it was Patrick Donovan.

“Can’t be! I saw him on stage just minutes ago.”

“What? It’s not possible.”

“Oh my God ...”

Gregory was cradling Patrick’s head and, covered in blood, he was weeping inconsolably. Within minutes he was joined by a priest who kneeled down beside him and, noticing a gold chain around Patrick’s neck, pulled it out from inside his shirt and saw that it held a small gold crucifix. He immediately performed the last rites while George, Nathan, Mary and the *Salesman* company gathered around.

A letter addressed to Gregory was found on the table in the Don’s dressing room.

My darling Gregory

By the time you read this I should have shuffled off this mortal earth; or that is at least my intention. Perhaps by now I have been introduced to my Maker and will have discovered whether an Olivier Award in any way mitigates a life not entirely devoid of sin. You are probably at this time echoing Linda’s line from the Requiem: ‘Why did you do it?’

You, who have been so good to me, are entitled to an answer. After my behaviour a night ago I have finally come to the realisation that I am an irredeemable alcoholic – a recidivist if ever

there was one. The past years of so-called sobriety have been a hard-fought remission and unfortunately I have now returned to a drunken path where I cannot guarantee being responsible for my actions. I also cannot face the prospect of going to meetings with likewise smitten drunks and standing up to declare, 'I am an alcoholic.' I just cannot do it. And I think you know that. Likewise I cannot face the prospect of lengthy periods of rehabilitation, along with dregs of humanity in musty-smelling sanatoriums. This would all be too much for me to bear.

My nerves are shot and the billet-doux I received from that despicable doorman was the last straw in my deep depression. Were I to continue being Willy Loman eight times a week, I know that to accomplish this I would have to fortify myself increasingly each performance and eventually – to the embarrassment of myself and the rest of the company – it would end inevitably in a disaster. Far better that I leave and say goodbye on a high and give the standby an opportunity to prove himself.

My darling man, you have been like a saint. But for you my departure from this earth would undoubtedly have occurred many moons ago. I love you very deeply and am sorry that I am causing you so much grief. You deserve so much better.

My deep apologies to George Mallet and Nathan Podlashuk. I have never worked with finer professionals and I am sorry to have let them down. And tell Mary Martinelli that I love her deeply and regard her as one of the finest actors I have ever worked with.

And now, my dearest, I am about to go on stage and intend ensuring that my final performance is my greatest ever.

Good night, sweet prince.

Your devoted soul mate,

Patrick.

APPENDIX

ANTON DOLIN

Sydney Francis Patrick Chippendall Healey-Kay was born in England in 1904. Regarded as the finest English male dancer of his day, he started his career with the great Russian impresario, Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes where he changed his name to Anton Dolin and created the leading role in Nijinska's famous *Train Bleu*. He was later to originate many other iconoclastic ballet roles, notably in George Balanchine's *Prodigal Son*, Ninette de Valois's *Job*, and Michel Fokine's *Bluebeard*. Over a career in excess of 40 years, Dolin partnered the most famous ballerinas in the world but his partnership over many years with Alicia Markova, *prima ballerina assoluta*, made him arguably the finest male partner of his generation. His role of Albrecht in *Giselle* with Markova was regarded by cognoscenti as setting a standard for generations. Dolin danced and choreographed for the foremost ballet companies in the world; was *premier danseur* with the American Ballet Theatre when it was formed in 1940; and formed Festival Ballet in London in the early 1950s.

In the late '40s and early '50s, Dolin appeared at the new Festival Hall in a revival of the 1911 children's Christmas fantasy, *Where the Rainbow Ends*, directed by Italia Conti. Clad in a suit of armour he strutted the stage as an imperious St George, enjoying himself to such an extent that he acquired the rights to the musical, redirected it enlarging his role and introducing Alicia Markova in a cameo dance sequence as the Spirit of the Lake.

Pat, as Dolin was known to his friends, was not only a wonderful classical dancer but was a great flamboyant and aristocratic figure who was larger than life and who lived life to the full. Despite his strenuous dancer's regime of daily classes, rehearsals and a huge schedule of performances, he was an inveterate heavy smoker and skilfully managed to speak and demonstrate dance steps with a cigarette dangling from a moistened lower lip. His preference after performances was for good scotch and woe betide a host or bartender who served only inferior whisky. And rather than relax at home on a night off, he chose to be a high-

stakes poker competitor, playing with chosen cronies until the early hours. As Dolin saw little need to hide his homosexuality, there was never any question of his 'coming out'. He was automatically 'outed' at least by 1923 when he had a well-publicised affair with Serge Diaghilev that became a salacious *cause celebre* when Pat found himself in competition for Diaghilev's attention with rival dancer Serge Lifar. But most of Diaghilev's star male dancers were available to the impresario: they did not have to be seduced by him as they were consumed by their ambition. Later in his career, Anton Dolin nurtured the talents and had a long-standing serious relationship with the extraordinarily handsome, blue-eyed, blond and 26-year younger *danseur noble*, John Gilpin, who at the time was England's finest male dancer. Their living together was interrupted when Gilpin married a female dancer from Festival Ballet but cynics were soon justified when the marriage foundered and the status quo between Dolin and Gilpin was restored.

My friendship with Dolin began in 1950 at the Stoll Theatre, London, when my parents took me backstage to meet the dancer after his performance in *Giselle* with the incomparable Alicia Markova (later Dame Alicia). Before her marriage, my mother, Miriam Kirsch, was a dancer and her ambitious parents in Cape Town sent her to London on several occasions to have dancing lessons and to forge a career in ballet. Ballet was in its infancy in London and was staged on the bill as part of variety concerts. However, Miriam auditioned and was accepted by Anton Dolin into his first ballet company and in 1925 appeared in the first ballet he ever choreographed, *A Flutter in a Dove Cote*, at the London Palladium. He never forgot this and he and my mother always remained friends and their professional encounter is recorded in Dolin's autobiography. In subsequent years I met Pat Dolin on many occasions: at dinners in London with my parents; at receptions at his apartment off Curzon Street; and when he danced in South Africa in 1949 with Markova he visited our home several times, including attending a large cocktail party hosted by my parents and about which he comments favourably in the Autobiography. (By a strange coincidence, on that same visit Dolin met in Johannesburg Toby Fine, a young ballerina with the

Johannesburg Festival Ballet, who was chosen to dance the Queen of the Willies in the Markova/Dolin *Giselle*. Dolin recorded in his book that Toby was a ‘splendid dancer’ and before he left the country, he taught her the role of *Giselle*, which she was later to dance with distinction. Seven years later, Toby was to become my wife.) On several occasions in London, Toby and I went backstage to meet Dolin and Markova after performances and we were always graciously received by them.

In 1960, as an impresario together with Percy Tucker, we brought Celebrity Ballet to South Africa for a seven-week tour. Belinda Wright and John Gilpin danced together and Anton Dolin partnered Toby Fine. At the conclusion of a successful tour, Dolin wrote to Toby: “I want to say how very sincerely I have enjoyed watching YOU dance and dancing with you. I do not forget Johannesburg in 1949, happily I hope teaching you just a little and now dancing these seven weeks at your side. You are a fine, brilliant ballerina and I am proud and happy to have been your ‘cavalier’ in many *pas de deux*. My love to you and my deep admiration always, your South African partner, Anton.”

The encounters I had with Anton Dolin over a period of years taught me much about this formidable character and have enabled me to introduce him into my narrative with some conviction and confidence.

IVOR NOVELLO

Welsh composer singer and actor, David Ivor Davies was born in 1893 and when early in life it became clear that his enormous musical talent was going to result in a career in theatre, he adopted his mother’s maiden name and became known professionally as Ivor Novello. As a songwriter, his first enormous hit – which lifted the spirits of the troops and the British people at the beginning of the First World War – was *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. So enormous was the song’s impact that it was popularly adopted as an anthem for the war effort. In the Second World War he replicated his ability to feel the pulse and inspire the nation by writing *We’ll Gather Lilacs*. Meanwhile he had been making his way as a

songwriter, actor and scriptwriter and even had a stint in Hollywood plying these trades. Novello was so good-looking that film directors claimed that they had difficulty finding someone as beautiful to play opposite him ... In any event, as enchanting a character as they found him, his acting was not taken seriously because his androgynous look and heavy-handed theatrical style made him difficult to cast in the movies.

Back in England he had several of his shows produced, but in 1935 *Glamorous Nights* defined his position as the master of the musical. His subsequent hits, *The Dancing Years*, *Perchance to Dream*, *King's Rhapsody* and *Gay's the Word* made him the most successful musical theatre composer of the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s. Novello's shows were always glamorous, had scintillating décor, outstanding music and excellent singers and dancers; there was always a distinguished leading role plotted for himself, which required little singing or dancing but required him to drift on and off stage wearing exotic costumes, one more beautiful than the other. Ivor Novello was enchanting, inspired love in his audiences and was in his time the undisputed matinee idol of the West End. Even when he went to prison briefly during the Second World War after receiving an exemplary sentence for a minor contravention of petrol rationing laws, the audiences received him back with rapturous applause. Like his friends Anton Dolin and Noel Coward, Ivor Novello made no secret of his homosexuality but certainly showed more discretion, enjoying a monogamous relationship with his life partner, the actor Bobbie Andrews – although the two did not live together and maintained separate apartments not far from each other.

I was in my late-teens when Ivor Novello came to Cape Town in 1947 with *Perchance to Dream* and recall seeing it at the Alhambra Theatre. I accompanied my parents and, because my father was mayor at the time, I suppose African Consolidated Theatres could not exclude his son from the after-show dinner given for the cast across the road at the then famous Del Monico restaurant. I have a clear memory of the handsome Ivor Novello, was introduced to him and even had the courage to ask for his autograph. In London in 1951, I was fortunate to see Ivor Novello

in his huge musical success *King's Rhapsody*. This most popular British entertainer of the first half of the twentieth century died suddenly a few days after that performance.

FRANK SHELLEY

In 1966 the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) commissioned an indigenous play to be written by the well-known South African author and journalist James Ambrose Brown. I was contracted by CAPAB to work with Brown and to direct *The Years of the Locust*. Set in South Africa during the heart of the apartheid years, the central character was a well-intentioned Anglican bishop, fond of publicity and given to pontificating, who found himself conflicted between the principles of his faith and political idealism. Not knowing of any local actor who could do justice to this role, I decided to audition in London for the bishop and at the same time for other parts. Despite British Equity having advised its members not to work in South Africa, a succession of actors, many well known in the profession, auditioned for the lead in *Locust*. After two full days of auditioning, I was beginning to despair of success when Frank Shelley walked in and introduced himself – and before he even began to read I knew that I had found my bishop. His commanding looks, bearing, gushing sincerity, obviously dyed black hair, measured gait, and the ecclesiastical tone of his regular stentorian speaking voice seemed perfect for what I had in mind. As a matter of record, Shelley's performance in *Locust* (opposite the distinguished actress Yvonne Bryceland) received superlative praise in a politically controversial play that created much public debate but which at the same time broke box office records at Cape Town's Hofmeyr Theatre. At the conclusion of the run, Shelley remained in South Africa for several years, both acting and directing in different parts of the country.

London-born Frank Shelley encountered the actor Sybil (later Dame Sybil) Thorndike while reading English at Oxford University. She was so impressed with the quality and power of his voice in debates that she was instrumental in his transferring his talent to the Embassy Theatre School of Acting (now the Central School). After graduating, Shelley toured the provinces with Sybil

Thorndike and her husband Lewis Casson's Theatre Company before returning to London to work in many distinguished productions, including at the Old Vic in Laurence Olivier's *Coriolanus*. After a spell acting and directing at the Perth Repertory Theatre, he joined the Oxford Playhouse in 1946 and for the next 10 years, as its actor/manager, directed the company, which became the most prestigious regional theatre in Britain. During that time he nurtured the careers of many actors who were to become famous, notably Maggie Smith, Ronnie Barker and Judi Dench.

Shelley became a major figure in the golden era of repertory theatre and in the late 1950s and '60s he worked in the West End and all over England playing alongside such illustrious actors as Alec Guinness, Joss Ackland, Claire Bloom, Joan Plowright, Albert Finney, Judi Dench, Peter Ustinov and Ronnie Barker. The latter dedicated his autobiography to Frank Shelley, whom he called "one of the three wise men who directed my career; without men like these, there would be no theatre." A consummate and versatile actor and an astute director, he was regarded as a Shaw and Chekhov authority.

When Frank Shelley first came to Cape Town he stayed at my home until he found his own accommodation. He was a witty conversationalist and my wife and I enjoyed listening to many interesting stories of his career. I particularly recall his telling me of a tricky incident that occurred when he was appearing with Ronnie Barker in Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*. An actor not only missed his entry cue but was inexplicably absent for some five minutes and Shelley and Barker improvised a whole new scene that had some relevance to the plot. Shelley confided that, because of what he called the banality of Christie's dialogue, he and Barker did not find that too difficult! He also told me of another well-documented departure from the script when he had proposed marriage *sotto voce* mid-performance during the course of a play to actor Susan Dowdall who accepted and they were later married. They had four children but were divorced some 10 years later.

After returning to England from South Africa in the late 1970s, a whole new acting career developed for Shelley. He appeared in several West End plays, was contracted to the

Chichester Festival Theatre for several seasons, and worked in television and films. His final TV appearance was in 1992 in an award-winning film of Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* in which a distinguished cast included Michael Hordern, Cyril Cusack and felicitously his protégé, Maggie Smith. Frank Shelley, remarkable man of the theatre, died in 2004 aged 92.

LAURENCE OLIVIER

Laurence Olivier was 40 years old when he was knighted and was the youngest actor to receive this honour. Later he was the first member of his profession to be elevated to a life peerage and became Baron Olivier of Brighton. When asked if he should be addressed as Sir Laurence or Lord Olivier, he invariably responded, 'Just call me Larry.' During his lifetime he was a towering figure of stage and screen and was acclaimed as the greatest English-speaking actor of the twentieth century and the foremost Shakespeare interpreter.

Born in 1907, the son of an Anglican clergyman, he married three times, on each occasion to an actress: Jill Esmond (10 years), Vivien Leigh (20 years) and Joan Plowright, his widow (28 years). He had one son by his first marriage and a son and two daughters from his marriage to Joan Plowright. Having shown promise as an actor at school, he enrolled at the age of 17 at the Central School of Dramatic Art and subsequently began his professional career with the Birmingham Repertory. During an illustrious career involving stage, film and TV, he received 12 Oscar nominations, two awards and two honorary awards; nine Emmy nominations and five awards; three Golden Globe Awards; and three BAPTAs.

After the Second World War, Olivier became the artistic director of the Old Vic and was later the founder and inaugural director of the English National Theatre. The NT's largest stage, The Olivier Theatre, was named after him. Having met every acting challenge, Olivier was perturbed at the advent of the 'angry young men' period that invaded English theatre in the late 1950s and which he thought did not suit his style of acting. Anxious not to become an anachronism and to have a new challenge, he asked John Osborne to write a play for him and the result was *The*

Entertainer in which he had a shattering success playing Archie Rice, a pathetic music hall performer.

Laurence Olivier always claimed that his acting was pure technique and he was contemptuous of the Stanislavsky method style of acting popularised in America by Lee Strasberg and others. In one scene, while shooting the movie *Marathon Man*, the character played by Dustin Hoffman was supposed to be exhausted, having not had any sleep for three nights. The method actor, Hoffman, in order to be realistic stayed awake for three nights and went on a long run before arriving on the set dishevelled and exhausted. Olivier asked him, "Why are you so tired?" When Hoffman told him what he had done to get into the part, Sir Laurence replied: "Why don't you try acting, dear boy? It's so much easier!"

Much has been written about Laurence Olivier's bisexuality, it being strongly suspected that he had several homosexual affairs with, among others, actor Denys Blakelock, critic Kenneth Tynan, playwright Emlyn Williams, movie star Marlon Brando and American entertainer Danny Kaye. Much of this may have occurred during the actor's tumultuous marriage to Vivien Leigh when she suffered from manic depression but still found time to have a long-running affair with Australian actor, Peter Finch. In fairness, Olivier also had at least several heterosexual encounters, notably a much-publicised affair with actress Claire Bloom. (After Olivier's death, his son Tarquin repudiated his father's bisexuality and Joan Plowright denied his alleged homosexual affairs, but seemed to confirm his many affairs with the female sex.)

Upon his death in 1989, Lord Olivier became only the second actor since Edmund Kean to be interred in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

TYRONE GUTHRIE

Tony Guthrie was arguably the most important and influential British theatre director of his time. Between paradoxical extremes, this 6' 6" giant of a man was formidable but shy, very English in manner but privately a boyish Irishman, undeniably serious at work

but derived more fun from his productions than most of his contemporaries.

Born William Tyrone Guthrie in Tunbridge Wells, England, in 1900, he was a colossus in the world of theatre. After receiving a degree in History at Oxford University, he joined the BBC and produced plays for radio. Graduating to directing for the stage, he enjoyed many historic successes in England, becoming particularly noted for his imaginative productions and his attention to detail. He contended that in a production there were no 'extras', only some players with smaller parts than others. His worldly vision took him to many parts of the world where he not only directed plays, but created new theatres and theatre communities and taught people how to administer them. In Stratford, Ontario, Canada, he created a most successful Shakespeare Festival in a tent and when this became a fixture it led to the building of a magnificent theatre with a thrust stage. In fact Guthrie was the modern-day pioneer of this type of theatre and thrust stages at the Sheffield Crucible, Chichester, Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon and a host of other theatres throughout the world owe their shape and style to the vision of this peripatetic pioneer – the man who dispensed with the proscenium arch.

Guthrie was not only an exciting director but a visionary too and in his will bequeathed his home in Annaghmakerrig, County Monaghan, to the Irish State for use as a residential workplace for artists, known today as the Tyrone Guthrie Centre.

Sir Tyrone Guthrie (a second cousin to the swashbuckling American movie star Tyrone Power) was knighted in 1961 and died in 1971 and was survived by his widow Judith Bretherton.

