Singing My Him Song

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«HarperCollins»

McCourt M.

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Malachy McCourt, actor, gadfly and raconteur follows up his international best seller A Monk Swimming with this, the second instalment of his hilarious memoirs.Malachy McCourt grew up in Limerick amid death, squalor, poverty and abuse. When he went to America as a young man, he took with him a gargantuan appetite for what life had to offer – and an equal drive to forget what it had delivered so far. In A Monk Swimming, he caroused his way all over the world, becoming a familiar face in movies and television, and in bars from Paris to Calcutta.Now he tells us the rest of the story – how he went from world-class drunk to sober and loving father and grandfather. Bawdy and funny, naked and moving, and told in the same inimitable voice that left readers all over the world wondering what happened next, he tells as honest and entertaining a story as you could hope for.

Содержание

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to
Siobhan, Malachy, Nina, Conor, and Cormac, my children.
And to Fiona, Mark, and Adrianna, my grandchildren,
for filling my heart with joy, pride, and breathless love.

WILLOWBROOK WARS

A special dedication to some of the warriors of the Willowbrook Wars. It was a place of horror, brutality, and awful suffering with the Stars and Stripes high above on a flagpole in ignorance of the carnage below. When some parents, with the help of some doctors and other workers and a few legal minds, began a desperate revolution, they were called communist Vietcong terrorists. But that they persisted in the movement proves that all citizens are created equal and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, even if handicapped, mentally or physically. So, to those who rose up and exposed Willowbrook for the place of despair and death it had become, All Hail! And to the thousands of men, women, and children who suffered and died there, Rest in Peace, and may the atrocities committed there never occur again!

Time, memory, space, and human fallibility prevent me from mentioning all of the Willowbrook warriors and the names of the victims, but here are just a few: Rosalie Amoroso, Eleanore Ash, Dr. Bill Bronston, Kathy Bronston, Bernard Carabello, Tim Casey, Gene Eisner, Bruce Ennis, Ira Fisher, Jerry Gavin, Willie Mae Goodman, Charlie Haney, Connie Haney, Chris Hansen, Jerry Isaacs, Jane Kurtin, Elizabeth Lee, Marie Marcario, Mark Marcario, Anthony Pinto, Ida Rios, Geraldo Rivera, Murray Schneps, Vicki Schneps, Dr. Mike Wilkins, and many more. Thank you for your dedication to the best of humanity, and for your compassion and humor.

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Epigraph

For he comes the human child
To the waters and the wild
With a fairy hand in hand
From a world more full of
Weeping than he can understand
—W. B. YEATS

Part I

Behind Bars

On Sunday afternoons in 1963, the summer I worked in a Hamptons hostelry called the Watermill, myself and assorted staff would adjourn to the beach, armed with a largish cooler chock-full of ice, vodka, and orange juice. One of our number, Dan Cohalan, did a creditable job with the guitar, and, as we knew a reasonable number of songs with choruses, we were able to gather quite a number of children around to join in, and their parents were delighted to have us in loco parentis so they could go off walking, swimming, or having affairs in the dunes.

What a joy it was to hear forty or fifty silvery six- and seven-year-old voices raised in bawdy song, and sung with as much conviction as if they knew what they were singing:

Oh, I've got a cousin Daniel,
And he's got a cocker spaniel,
If you tickled him in the middle,
He would lift his leg and piddle.
Did you ever see,
Did you ever see,
Such a funny thing before?
D'ye know my Auntie Anna,
And she's got a grand piana,
Which she rams, aram, arama,
'Til the neighbors say, "God damn her!"

I taught them the occasional limerick, as well.

Rosalina, a pretty young lass,
Had a truly magnificent ass.
Not rounded and pink,
As you possibly think,
It was grey, had long ears, and ate grass.

I can only assume that the parents never asked to hear the new repertoire the silvery-voiced little ones brought home from their sandy Sunday school.

Not a few adults joined us, too, as we were the jolliest gathering on that strand. Two very attractive young women, Louise Arnold and Lynn Epstein, plunked themselves down on the sand at Cohalan's invitation, and soon became regulars. They revealed that they had produced some Off Broadway shows, which sparked my interest. I was of a mind to get serious about the acting trade, due to my newfound penchant for suffering.

It depends on where you are in life, I suppose, but some people think that to be a great actor it's necessary to be entirely miserable, and if misery is the grandest qualification, then it was, *Move over, Burton, Olivier, and Gielgud—McCourt is on the way.*

Sundays were not a joy unalloyed, as every child singing there might suddenly remind me of my own two, who seemed lost to me forever. That summer, my estranged wife, Linda, had informed me that she was going off to Mexico to divorce me. We'd been separated for two years by then, but occasional bouts of blind optimism had led me to believe that it would somehow all work out.

"What about the children?" I had asked her.

"What about them?" she asked. "We never did have anything resembling a marriage, so don't be a hypocrite and pretend we were a family." She spoke truth, but that didn't make me feel any better about it.

One Sunday, when it was too hot to sing, my morbid contemplations were knocked right out of my head, at least for a time. I was enthroned beneath my protective umbrella (this because

I have skin which, when exposed to the sun, makes the common beet seem albino), when out of nowhere there hove into my purview the most astonishingly beautiful and graceful woman I'd ever seen in all my life and travels. She had rich brown hair and striking almond-shaped eyes. She wore a modest white bathing suit and, as she stepped along the water's edge on her long lithe legs, the water glinting with sunlight behind her, her slim body and swanlike neck seemed to sway in time to music. Upon her right hip there was perched like a koala bear a bright-faced, blond-haired child in the two-year-old range.

It never occurred to me to think that the presence of a child might imply that there was a husband somewhere; in that moment I was so absolutely smitten that I couldn't conceive that any obstacles might stand between me and this vision.

I don't know how long it took me to realize I wasn't breathing, but a huge exhalation brought me back from near drowning on dry land. Turning to the nearest body on the beach, who happened to be Louise Arnold, I gasped the question, "Who in God's name is that vision walking toward us?"

"That's my friend, Dee, who's visiting me this weekend," sez she.

I was flabbergasted that a mere human being would know this celestial creature.

"I must meet her," said I, "and would you be kind enough to do the introductory honors." Louise was amenable, as she was quite the hand at matchmaking. "Dee!" she called out. "Would you come here for a sec?"

"Dee" came striding over, a somewhat bemused expression on her lovely face. Silenced by the presence of such beauty, I could only extend my own paw to shake her soft hand. The brain and the tongue had disconnected at once, and anything I thought of saying seemed stupid and banal. Finally, I managed to rasp out a "How do you do?" though my tongue felt inert.

Dee sat down and, as I'm not fond of nicknames or diminutives, I ascertained that Diana was her proper name. So Diana she was to me, although old friends and family still call her Dee. I mumbled something about it being a nice day. She agreed. A bit of silence, then I tried again, "A bit too hot, though." She agreed again. An agreeable woman, she was.

Shortly, Diana excused herself, and off down the beach she went, and I was left feeling like a complete ass. "By Christ, McCourt," I said to myself, "for all yer gift of the tongue, for all your much-vaunted charm and gallantry, you couldn't trot out the treasure trove of complimentary clichés you keep on hand in case of being caught without something to say?"

Diana was leaving that afternoon, Louise told me, so I asked Louise for her friend's telephone number, which she obliged me with on the usual matchbook cover. It was a RIverside-9 number, and to this day I haven't forgotten it. I made the vow to ring her immediately upon returning to the city, and I was to carry her number with me everywhere, but I never dared telephone, not even when I was filled with the bravado conferred by whiskey.

This was sacred business, which made my brain whirl and my legs go rickety—and there was still Linda, and the unresolved matter of the divorce. Or unresolved for me, anyway. It was well resolved for Linda; she was divorcing me.

Divorce is an odd thing, but so is marriage for that matter. Although you are generally present at your own wedding there is a certain unreality to the whole goings-on. There you are, having reached the age of reason, standing up in front of two to a couple of hundred friends, relatives, and neighbors, making promises to love, honor, and cherish, to have, to hold, to cleave flesh to flesh, till death do you part. A bloody tall order to ask of a twosome who in most cases have only known each other for a short period. The sort of commitment that if you are asked to make to a member of your own family, or a childhood companion, someone you knew and loved your whole life, your immediate response would be, "Not on your Nellie."

But at least you're physically present at your wedding ceremony, whereas at the divorce, equally momentous, changing your life just as much, it's not always necessary to be at the formal smashing of the union. According to my soon-to-be ex-wife, she was proceeding to Tijuana, our signed agreement

in hand, and there a sofa salesman who also repairs mufflers and works as a judge in his spare time will stamp a document declaring our marriage to be over and done—the parties of the first and second parts now free to proceed singly through life without let or hindrance from each other.

It's eerie enough waking up of a morning to be startled by another head on the pillow, who turns out to be your new marriage partner. You find yourself saying, "I'm married. *Jesus Christ, I'm married!* Now what will I do?"

But, then, another morning, you wake up with a vague notion that something important happened yesterday, and it dawns on you, ah, yes, Linda said she was going to divorce me in Mexico. There is no other head on the pillow, but it wasn't just a bad dream, you are unmarried again, but single no more, now you are divorced, such a serious word, even to a recovering Catholic like myself.

Your own mind can be a remarkable thing, telling you things about the world that nobody else standing right alongside you would even suspect to be true. In my years of marriage to Linda, it didn't occur to me that my amorous extracurricular adventures might have consequences. Didn't I come home to her in the end, and shouldn't she be grateful for that? When she'd thrown me out, hadn't I broken into the apartment, ripping the place apart in a rage, and gone to jail for it? Didn't that show I cared? And during the years after, when I'd be off smuggling gold in India, or living on a houseboat on the Seine, couldn't everybody see I loved my children anyway? They were five and four that summer, Siobhan and Malachy, and if I'd been absent much more than I'd been present in the last few years, surely my drunken bouts of self-pity, my maudlin despair at having them taken away from me, counted for something. Why couldn't Linda see any of this? How could she want to divorce me?

I had to avoid that word, "divorce." I was still so bedeviled by remorse over wrecking the marriage I couldn't yet get the sleep I needed without having the drink, and lots of it.

T**hat summer, there was a huge debutante party for a young** thing named Fernanda Wood at one of the grander manses dotting the Arcadian landscape. A few of us plebeians popped over after our toils to join the festivities. Apparently, the mini-scions and -scionesses had made a decision to redecorate the Hamptons mansion wherein this bacchanal took place. They had hurled champagne bottles through the windows and attempted to set a number of small fires. The place was aglitter with flitting Caucasians, debs leaping half clad throughout the house, pursued by young bucks garbed in the remnants of tuxedos. Furniture in disarray, glasses smashed, ornaments shattered, chandeliers gyrating to twist music, until some of the higher-spirited lads began to swing from them, bringing them crashing down (predating that famous chandelier scene in *Phantom of the Opera* by many years), while shrieks and screams echoed throughout the house: It was simply the rich at play.

Somehow the press, local and national, got hold of the story, and there were sober articles and tut-tutting editorials re the younger generation and what they were coming to, and rich kids with too much money to spend and too much time to waste. There was a great deal of "In my day, sir" commentary, and headlines containing the words "rampage," "orgy," "volcanic eruption," "riot," "uproar," and every other synonym known to Roget and all the sauruses.

I, being somewhat of an adult, took a different view. I just cheered them on. But it was too rowdy even for us old hands at running amuck. We had gotten to the party just as it was breaking up—in the most literal sense—anyway, and as there didn't seem to be an intact glass to sip from, we departed, shaking our comparatively hoary heads at the wonder of it all.

As I drove down the road, I spied flashing police lights and, not wanting to face judges again, I congratulated myself on making the getaway. I found myself on the Montauk Highway, drunk at 2:00 A.M. It seemed to me a good idea to see how fast I could drive, and off I went.

'Twas a dark night with lacy swirls of sea mist floating toward me as I raced along the empty highway. The only indication of speed was the needle quivering on the dashboard; despite my foot savaging the accelerator, the damn car seemed to be encased in air, immobilized in a Bakelite night. The thought that I could crash and reduce myself to smithereens did float into the head, but I didn't respond, so it left of its own accord.

There were no other cars on the road, no house lights, nothing to tell me I was hurtling to possible destruction. My concentration was on the speedometer and stomping the foot on the accelerator and of course the thought of the soon-to-be ex-wife took over as it generally did in the small hours, spurring me to more teeth-grinding, jaw-clenching, screaming efforts to outrun the demons.

All that tumult being in my head, it took me a while to become aware of the sound of the tires on the road, a sound that seemed to form the words: *Stop it now. Stop it now. Stop it now.* And as I slowly touched the brake, I became aware of the high speed I'd been hitting and suddenly shuddered with the understanding of what this attempted suicide might have done to my children, Siobhan and Malachy, and then I stopped the car.

M**y friend Steve Epstein had little to do those days so he,** as they say, hung out with me. I owed Epstein for letting me stay at his digs back in the city, and there were times in the Watermill when I didn't present a bill to my pal. I would just add his bill to some nonparticular well-to-do type, or forget it altogether.

The summer was moving along slowly toward its end when my tenure at the restaurant suffered a similar fate. One night, Epstein arrived from the city with a girlfriend. I served them dinner and drinks for free, whilst neglecting to make out a tab. The boss, David Eaton, in a fit of sudden efficiency asked to see the tab I was keeping on Epstein. I said, "'Tis in my head."

"Oh yeah," sez Dave, "you write everyone else's down but not Epstein's?"

"Right," sez I, thinking rapidly. "He drinks so little it's easy to remember."

"What about the lobster dinner he had with that broad, and the bottle of wine and the cognacs they had after dinner?"

"All in the noggin," sez I, tapping the side of the head.

"I'm going to have you both arrested," sez Dave. "You for stealing and Epstein for trespassing, as I know he slept on the couch in the accommodations we supplied strictly for your personal use. I'm calling the state police right now, and I know them well."

I slithered over to Epstein and, speaking out of the side of my mouth as I'd seen Humphrey Bogart do in convict films, informed him that if we didn't get our asses on the highway we were likely to be guests of the county.

I was trying to speak in an understandable code yet not give the game away to the man's dinner companion. He was irritated, as he was making great progress with this young thing, and she had already indicated her readiness to have a mutual exploration of the nether regions of their respective bodies, but after I had pulled him into the kitchen and explained the situation the lust left him and fear of being stuck behind immovable bars took over.

What to do with the lust object? Give her money for the taxi and tell her your uncle is at death's door and 'tis necessary to get to New York City to open it for him. I handed over to him my paltry tips to pass along as cab fare, then nipped out the back door and dashed up to the hovel on the roof to pick up the few belongings. I met Epstein in the parking lot, where he was waiting for me as the getaway drivers do in movies. We dropped the young bird off at a gas station where there was a telephone, and then began the flight from justice toward the forgiving arms of New York City. I kept the sharp eye out for the flashing lights of the law while he gunned the engine and got the car up to about ninety-five mph, which was stupid, as it would only draw the police's attention.

It's amazing what the imagination can do when you've had a few drinks and have a voluble tongue to convince the other person of the imminence of a frightful incarceration. I was convinced that the entire police fraternity of Long Island was being mobilized to get us heinous criminals who had cheated a restaurant, and had Epstein believing the same. We were bedeviled, too, by the sight of the gas tank needle doing its delicate dance and gently touching empty, with no gas stations open at that time of the morning. We stopped at every closed gas station and practically sucked out the gas remaining in the hoses. At one of them, we discovered a jerry can half full of blessed petrol,

which we stole without so much as a "Sorry to have to do this." I would have stolen it from an old-age pensioner to avoid another night of durance vile. 'Twas that plus faith plus talking nicely to the car, now named Matilda, that got Epstein and myself to civilization and safety.

I deposited the odd bits of clothing in a room in Epstein's digs in Astoria, Queens, New York. The building was owned by the uncle and Epstein's mother, and the lad was living rent-free. There's nothing like a rent-free bed in a reasonably comfortable flat with a roommate who thinks you are the wittiest, wisest Hibernian he has ever encountered, and when I realized that the FBI was not coming after me for an unpaid dinner tab of $19.27 plus tax, I relaxed and circulated once more.

The atmosphere in the apartment was ripeish, to say the least, which I attributed to deficiencies in the housekeeping department, but upon inspection it seemed clean enough for a bachelor's digs. The smell seemed to get worse, though, and finally my nose led me to the epicenter of this horrendous stink. Under the place of my repose, my bed, I discovered a dead crow decomposing and giving nourishment to a full complement of maggots and other guardians of the environment. That foul of the air took its last flight out my window, accompanied by larvae, worms, maggots, and other bosom buddies taking their first and last flight, startling a gossip of elderly women exchanging dark forebodings in front of the building, and giving them fodder for even darker words about the world of dead carrion that flies.

Great barmen, like great hairdressers, are reputed to have what are known as followings; that is, they attract coteries of bods who like the way a bartender talks about sports, or mixes a martini, or in the case of the lasses, the bit of flattery and name recognition. 'Twas said that I had such a following. I wasn't being unduly modest when I said I didn't believe it, as I honestly wondered who in the name of Allah would follow me anywhere. But if Epstein believed this, as apparently he did, and if his uncle was going to finance my reentry into the bar biz, as apparently he would, who was I to say nay, and the search for a suitable premises began.

We found an out-of-the-way spot at 118 East Eighty-eighth Street called the Dublin Bay Café, apparently owned by a Dublin man name Larry Luby. We broached the idea of purchasing the joint but the man did not seem able to say yes or say no. He mumbled something about having to consult with somebody or other, that he didn't really own the place.

The real, but concealed, owners were a couple of shadowy speculators, a husband-and-wife team, smallish stout people named Joey and Tessie who, despite appearances, were brilliant at deal-making in real estate, saloons, diners, jukeboxes, and cigarette machines. Tessie did a wonderful good-kindly-mother act, whereas Joey did a lot of growling and talked about cutting people's balls off and other sporting events of that nature. Because of some legal difficulty with the SLA (that would be the State Liquor Authority, and not the Symbionese Liberation Army, though the one often seems no more reasonable to deal with than the other), they were prohibited from being licensees in any premi wherein liquor was vended.

So we negotiated with them, and settled upon an agreeable price, and all that was needed was the check from Steve Epstein's uncle, which we were assured was a routine matter and would be taken care of as soon as said uncle returned from whatever trip he was off on. But the weeks began to pile up and so did the pressure from the stout people to conclude this deal. I never did figure out whether Epstein was in a fantasy world about raising the money for the purchase of the place all along, or if his uncle just changed his mind in the end. Finally, though, Epstein confessed that his uncle had no intention of financing a saloon for his dopey nephew and his drunken Irish pal.

'Twas left to me to inform the other folk that there was no money in the coffers and the deal was off. They weren't too perturbed, as they immediately had an idea for me. They would shift Mr. Luby to another location, and put me on the Dublin Bay license. I would move into one of the three studio flats in the building. Fine with me, and I immediately took over and changed the name to Himself and did the bit of renovation to make the joint more publike.

While all this was going on, Diana's telephone number remained imprinted on the brain, but I was hesitant to call her, as I was sure she wouldn't remember me. There was many a night I'd take out that matchbook cover and look at the RIverside-9 number, go for the phone, and then find a list of reasons not to call. She wouldn't remember me. She wouldn't be interested in me. There was the vaguest possibility she'd remember me, but suppose she said, "Why are you calling me?" or said she was deeply involved with someone, or demanded—angrily, of course—to know who gave me her number. So, even though my mind was slowly letting go of its obsession with my now ex-wife, Linda, and it came back again and again to a vision of Diana, with all its lovely promise, I never called. I'd say bollox on it and have another evening at the drink as we fixed up the new saloon, Himself.

I'd applied to that wonderfully corrupt agency, the State Liquor Authority, to be the official licensee of Himself and was eagerly awaiting approval, as the only blot on my record was the disorderly conduct charge from having barged into Linda's apartment in a somewhat violent manner a couple of years prior. They'd been handing out licenses fairly freely to the Mafia all over the city, and failing to take them back even if the licensee had someone garroted on the premises or put explosives in the toilet to blow the shit out of an enemy. So, imagine my astonishment when the official envelope arrived to inform me that I was turned down.

It was due to the fact that I had been on another license, five or six years previously, that had been revoked. While still a partner in my first bar, Malachy's, I'd briefly gone into partnership for a minute sum of money with one Lew Futterman in an establishment in Greenwich Village.

Lew, a progressive young fellow, whom I'd met during my rugby-playing career, had noticed that there was no place in all of New York City where couples who were not of the same race could get together to have a beverage and a bite of food without being given bad tables near the kitchen, along with insults and sullen service from waiters and bartenders. He had the logical and commercial idea that were we to open a spot where the miscegenationists could gather, not alone would we be doing God's work, we could make pots of money in the process, because, you see, black folks' money is the precise color of white folks' moola, and has exactly the same value.

I needed a bit of capital for this venture, so I spoke to the missus on the subject, as Linda's parents were well set, and there were indications of a trust fund lurking in some vault. She approached the parents and they, in concert, simultaneously, not to mention together, rose to their full respective heights with an "Aha! We told you he was a fortune hunter, this Mick, and he wants to destroy your fortune while making his."

A bit of tenacity extracted the necessary quids from the claws of the parent trustees, and Futterman and self were in business across the street from the Village Gate, in our new premi, which had a seafaring theme: ropes, lanterns, bits of nets, portholes, and it went under the agnomen "Port of Call."

Having dashed into this venture without careful thought or preparation, and without informing my partners in Malachy's of this new demand on my time, I found myself hoping that I could help run this place without anyone finding out I was connected to it. Futterman had the opposite thought: He was depending on my then celebrity and popularity to draw other folks besides the mixed daters. But before long, my other partners were in a rage because I'd brought disgrace on them with this questionable endeavor, and I was rarely to be seen uptown at Malachy's anymore. I was rarely seen downtown either, for that matter. On the pretext of drumming up business, I was anywhere but in the Port of Call or Malachy's.

The Port of Call was successful, at first, too; there was plenty of money flowing over the bar. Then the screws were applied. The local residents rose in high dudgeon over the dirty goings-on in this saloon, and a complaint campaign was begun. By way of their pressure on the local precinct, we had as many as five visits a night from the police, and there was hardly a night we didn't get a ticket: no soap in the bathroom, no toilet paper in the ladies' room, cigarette butts on the floor, serving minors, insufficient lighting, improper display of license.

Then came the health crowd: cook's head uncovered, a fly on the ceiling, temperature in the fridge too high, meat uncovered, spot of grease on the wall. And the Fire Department: extinguishers not full and in the wrong place, "Exit" sign not bright enough, curtain in bathroom not fire-retardant. We could have had a ticker-tape parade with the tickets we received at the behest of the Mafia chieftains who lived in the vicinity, but Futterman fought on. Myself, I had no stomach for this battle. It scared the shit out of me, and my partners in Malachy's were putting pressure on me to resign, as they said I was endangering our license, so I opted out. Futterman gave me back the initial investment, and we shook hands and parted.

'Twasn't long after that that the mob decided to wage open warfare, and there was a miniriot in the area, the local thugs revolting against the huge black peni being inserted into virginal white vaginas. They smashed the windows of the Port of Call and tried to set fire to the interior, and it was downhill after that. Shortly thereafter, the State Liquor Authority, a perennially corrupt crowd of yahoos, revoked the license, and that was that for the P of C.

When I resigned from the business, I neglected to inform the SLA in writing, so when the Port of Call license was revoked, I was still a licensee, and thus a criminal in the eyes of the Authority. This made me unworthy to be an owner of a saloon in this great and fair city of New York, as I was informed when I applied for my new license.

The real owners of Himself, Joey and Tessie, said we couldn't pull out now, as all our publicity had indicated I was the boss man, so I'd just say I was the owner. My so-called vast following would then trek their way by the thousands, and once more I would be the wise and wealthy lord of all I surveyed, the Malachy of yore.

At the suggestion of one Paul Fagan, another scion, whose family, according to rumor, owned Hawaii and half of the Pacific, I decided to have a formal launch for Himself. There wasn't the extra capital about for such a do, but our cook, Sudia Masoud, a capacious lady of devout Muslim leanings, assembled the sandwiches of cold cuts, and then hordes of black-tied lads and evening-dressed ladies descended on the bar. It was an inelegant joint, not a bit suitable for this gathering of Fagan's society friends, so there was naught to do but get pissed drunk and pretend that it was some kind of joke that called for getting dressed up in evening wear.

Once opened, Himself had the small problem that nobody could find it on an obscure side street of the Upper East Side. And when it comes to running a saloon, the presence of the owner on the premises, whether the real owner or not, is the key to the bit of success. Not far away on Second Avenue, Elaine Kaufman founded the famous Elaine's, still a hangout for the most famous authors and journalists in American letters. To this day, thirty-four or so years since she opened it, there is hardly a night that Elaine is not present to look after her business.

Not so myself. During the renovations of Himself, and after it opened, I was off again, tearing around the city on the usual quest for surcease from the little black demons that used my soul as a venue for their daily outings. The thought of spending the rest of my working life trapped in the confines of a bar was impinging on the consciousness and causing unrest.

When I wasn't running about the city, I'd sit in my monastic room, with the mattress on the floor, the one sheet, one pillow, and the one blanket on the chair, and cogitate on the uselessness and stupidity of it all. Here I was, an intelligent, well-read fellow, curious about the world, good company, easy in society, maybe not handsome, but good-looking enough, with a good sense of humor, with this doomed life's prospect.

D**uring all the time since July, I'd maintained contact with** Louise Arnold and her roommate, Lynn. Indeed, while I was still living with Epstein, I was sometimes the overnight squatter at their place when I'd had the snoot-full and didn't feel like facing the trek to Queens. In November, Louise invited me to some party that had to do with promoting a ski resort or skiing fashions, or some such. Having absolutely no interest in skiing or fashions connected thereto, I said, "Of course," and off with me to the party for the free cocktails.

I arrived at the threshold of the large room where the gathering was taking place. A goodly number had assembled by the time I got there. I stepped into that room and 'twas then my life changed forever. Standing by herself against the wall was the beloved Diana of my dreams. She saw me as soon as I saw her and I began to make my way through the thicket of blatherers that stood between us.

At that time 'twas rare for me not to know somebody at these gatherings, but tonight not one soul impeded my path. In short order, I was standing in front of Diana, encouraged by her lovely, warm, welcoming smile. With a greeting I took her hand, mine all atingle at the touch of her, and said, "I will never let you go again."

There was a band playing some music, and I asked her to dance. With my arms around her, the next words out of my mouth didn't surprise either of us as much as it seems they should have.

"Will you marry me?" I asked her.

Diana smiled and didn't say anything, but she didn't chase me away, either. As usual, I had my ordinary quota of whiskey; after all, a person has to celebrate meeting the love of one's life. (Conversely, of course, a person would have to drink because of losing the love of one's life. Or, indeed, misplacing her, or taking her to dinner, or to bed or to Spain, for that matter, and so goes the nattering, insistent voice of alcoholism.) But I was in good spirits, as they say, and as charming as could be to my newfound, refound love.

I took Diana home that night to what seemed to me a perfect night of lovemaking and was awakened by the gentle touch of her hand on the forehead as she held for me the cup of coffee in her other hand. And there was Nina, the silent, wondering, blond little Nina, just turned two, living in her own world of tongue-clicking and rhythmic head motions, totally baffling the professionals as to her nature. Some said she was retarded; others ventured that she was autistic. Someone else decided on brain-damaged, and one famous specialist said that she was perfectly normal and the only problem was having a nervous mother.

Whatever it was, Nina and myself got along quite well, as I'd grown up with people who bore all kinds of disabilities, physical and mental and emotional (if they are not one and the same thing), and it didn't strike me as anything out of the ordinary.

I took right to this new family, and before long I was quite determined that I would now settle down and take care of Diana and Nina, and try to start seeing more of my own children, Siobhan and Malachy. But I'm the man who gave good intentions a bad name, as simply intending to do something good is no match for derangement and the disease of alcoholism. I still attempted to maintain the fiction that my drinking was harmless fun. I know now that before I could change, before help could be sought and accepted, I had to acknowledge that I had a problem, but I still wasn't quite ready. Love may conquer all, but it does not begin its activities with my timetable in mind.

I'd like to have the proverbial dollar for every broker or banker who has said to me, "I'd like to open up a place like this and have all my friends come and drink there, and I'd get someone to run it for me, and I'd come in on the weekends to say hello to everyone."

HA! I did forbear on most occasions from launching into a blistering response on how hard it is to run a saloon; the sycophantic air one has to adopt to keep good customers coming back, not to mention the vague unease of constantly selling booze to known alcoholics.

No matter how I looked at it, the reality of what I was doing bashed me in the brain every time. All around the world at distilleries, breweries, and wineries, people were pouring into bottles the fermented results of that which grows generally in fields. Bottles and barrels and jugs and jeroboams full of whiskey, beer, wine, vodka, gin, champagne, and bourbon, just to mention a few. And thousands of trucks, trains, ships, and planes were used to transport this stuff to wherever it is needed, and me calling up to order cases of it to sell to my so-called following. Some of them could take it or leave it, but there were others who I knew to be alcoholic (though of course I couldn't see I was one of them), but that didn't stop me from vending the stuff to them. Like any dope pusher, I had fixed expenses, and always, as is said, the rent has to be paid.

There was one lad, Chris, a member of a well-known acting family, who drank enormous quantities of Jack Daniel's every night. He was about twenty-two years of age and was spending on an average one hundred and fifty dollars a week at my place alone. I didn't mind the income, as it literally paid the rent in the early sixties, but I was worried about the damage being done to this young man. So I went to his father, who told me that the son had his own trust fund, and he had no control over it or him. When he found out, Chris was furious that I'd gone to his father. He told me that was the end of his days as a customer at Himself and stomped out.

I ran into him again years later, and he is a sober and mature man, and we are now quite good friends.

Jim Tierney was another one, a tall red-visaged literary type who could quote from *Finnegans Wake,* indeed, from a list of other classics as well. Brilliant as he was, he had a spot of difficulty in holding the job, so he generally hooked up with well-to-do ladies, one of whom was Sally Smith. On the first of the month she breezed in regular as the dawn to find out her beloved's consumption for the previous month and what the bill was. There was great comfort in this until the day she informed me that the free ride had come to an end and no more tabs would be picked up and good luck to you Malachy and off she went.

Jim arrived a few hours later and ordered his usual double Dewar's on the rocks. "A word with you, Jim," sez I.

"By all means," sez he.

"There is a substantial tab due from last month and your lady guarantor has decided not to pay any more of your bills, she tells me," sez I.

"She will get over that," sez he. "I'm delighted we are having this little confabulation," he continued, "as on the way here I was thinking that should I someday own a hostelry such as this, and if you were a habitué, it occurred to me that I should extend to you unlimited credit." He always did speak in flowery terms, which amused me when he was conning other folks, but, as usual, I was in a financial clutch and not in a mood to be so conned myself.

"You don't have a saloon," said I. "And I'm not a habitué, and you owe me seven hundred dollars, which needs paying now."

He slowly shook his head and assumed a disbelieving and disappointed look, and said, "I never thought I would see the day when my friend Malachy McCourt, bon vivant, man of letters, compassionate friend of the needy, would descend to the dungiest depths of sordid commerce by demanding filthy lucre from a man who disdains such transactions. If you persist in your demands I shall have no choice but to leave these premises and, when I do, I assure you I shall never grace your porte cochere again!"

Jim stalked to the door, opened it, turned dramatically, and, in stentorian voice, he bellowed, "And furthermore, *FUCK YOU!"* He marched off into the night, leaving me with the gob agape and somehow feeling that I was guilty of something.

T**hat other Limerick git, Richard Harris, had just finished** playing King Arthur in the movie version of *Camelot.* Harris had grown up among the toffs in Limerick, not part of my crowd, but I'd encountered him there once, in a game of rugby, and he had been among the Irish and British actors that made my first bar, Malachy's, home base. In a fit of noblesse oblige he now decided to once again move among us common people.

Wearily he told me he'd had his fill of the chicanery and falsity of Hollywood and the acting profession and that what he would like to do is work for me as a bartender. So it came to pass the man got behind the stick with another stalwart man, Jack Sandon, a fine barkeep, who never removed the cigarette from the corner of his mouth even to deliver the most stinging of insults.

Harris poured with abandon and without measure and never seemed to take money from any of the clientele, and there were many more than usual, as word got out and the dazzled came to gaze at this movie star boniface. One eve, a couple of cheery and quite inebriated elderly ladies told me

that my bartender was a very nice young man as he refused payment for the bottle of Dom Perignon they had imbibed. The hand was clapped to the forehead on receiving that piece of news.

But at the end of the week the King was surfeited with serving hoi polloi and gave me notice that he was quitting and going back to London. None too soon, sez I to myself. But there had been a deal. Harris had instructed Jack, my other barman, to write down all that he gave away, and at the end of the week he gave a check to Jack to give to me after he had left and that check covered all of what I had thought were free drinks. A generous man.

I **continued my brooding through all of it, and couldn't see** any way out of the dilemma of making the living. Running a public house (from which the word pub arises) means you are open to the public, and have to be prepared to greet any and all who walk through the portals, be they drunks, arseholes, fools, convicts, prostitutes, Wall Streeters, laborers, cadgers, the sad, the bad, the glad, and, horror of horrors, the boring. One of these had gotten my ear one quiet night, and was describing his work as a salesman of steel products and proudly showed me his business card, which was made from rolled steel. That was it, too much for me, so I hied my way to the back room to get away from the rigor mortis of his talk.

I was alone in the back room a little while later, dozing at the table, when I heard a commotion and a voice shouting in the bar, followed by a gunshot. A small parade entered the back room, where I had placed myself under a light so as not to startle the gunman. The little procession consisted of Jack Sandon, barman Ally Cobert, a serious waiter, the hilarious Bob Boland, who was also a waiter, a customer lady, some unknown man, and a young scion named Thomas Fortune Ryan, all with arms and hands well up into the air. They were followed by two lads of African-American descent carrying guns, who made loud and frequent reference to the fact that all of those in the assembled group had had some kind of sexual relations with their mothers.

We were seated at the various tables and told to keep our hands in sight. One of the gunslingers sat guard whilst his pal went out front to get at the cash register. The conversation did not touch on anything of importance, no reference to current affairs, theatre, or literature. Indeed, it was more demanding. Orders, in fact, emanating from our hold-up man. To wit, "Empty your motherfucking pockets," to the men, and "Gimme that purse, bitch," to the only woman in the group.

The cash register ransacker came back swearing that he couldn't open the motherfucking thing and some motherfucker better come and open it or some motherfucker was going to have his motherfucking head blown off. Jack offered to do the job for him and, while they were out of the room, Fortune Ryan asked our captor if it were permissible to smoke.

"Go ahead," sez the gunman.

Fortune R. picked the cigs out of his shirt pocket and, being a well-bred lad, offered one to the armed friend, who seemed highly offended that anyone would think he was a smoker. Ryan apologized for his assumption and timidly asked if the man had a match. The lad raised the pistol and told Ryan to put the cigarette in his mouth and it would be lit with a bullet.

Jack returned, along with the other fellow, who complained about the paucity of money in the register, and then shouted at Bob Boland to stop looking at him, and fired a shot past his head into a mirror to emphasize his point. We all looked pointedly elsewhere. Then we gallant six were herded into the cellar as the duo announced they were going to work Jack over until he revealed where the rest of the money was concealed. I said there was no more money, and I should know, as I ran the joint. The cold rim of a gun was placed at the right side of my head an inch from my eye and it was pressed hard into the skin.

I couldn't help but think that a simple pressure on the trigger was the next step, and that through that cool barrel would travel a sheathed bullet at a great blasting speed, entering my head, tearing and rending the flesh, the bone, and the brains, scattering them and splattering them on floor, walls, and ceiling.

Closing my eyes, I said good-bye to Diana and Siobhan, Nina, and Malachy, but my good-byes were interrupted by a snarling voice ordering me down the stairs, still alive, to my astonishment. I'd always wondered what I'd do when faced with the possibility of immediate death. Some people say you'd pray, beg for forgiveness, beg for your life, plead with God to save you, but I found myself strangely without fear, as if this were happening to someone else, a trifle curious to know what it is to be shot and to die.

In the end, the bandits didn't beat Jack, as they finally got the idea that there was no more dough, and off they fled into the night. Ally Cobert promptly locked the front door after them, which led Jack to ask him if he'd ever worked in a stable. Then, when the police arrived and asked how much money had been stolen, Bob Boland told them not much, but I'd written them a check for the rest.

D**espite the fist-sized cloud of Vietnam, hanging low and** menacing on the horizon, the sixties had come up smiling, with JFK and the charming Jacqueline riding waves of adulation from cheering and cheery crowds everywhere. Yes, we'd had the Bay of Pigs, but that was wriggled out of and had been planned by the Eisenhower crowd, egged on by Nixon. There were some nasty confrontations in the segregated South, but President Kennedy kept the lid on that boiling pot, and on Khrushchev, and on anything else unpleasant brewing in the world or beyond, as the Mayoman said.

I was in my monastic bed in the apartment above Himself when the phone rang around noon on November 22, 1963. 'Twas the soft-spoken Diana asking if I'd heard any news on the radio about the president being shot. My tendency is always to move into comforting mode, so I said it was probably a mistake and that there would be clarification very soon.

It wasn't a mistake, and the clarification came much too soon. The man had been shot and he was dead. Within me, I had held a pride that an Irishman had made it to the White House, and it told me that America was opening up to me, too. There was a wit about the man, and the way he would poke fun at himself and the brothers made me think he was like me, someone I could have a drink with. When he was shot, it felt as if it had been done also to me, as if they had told me that the dreams I had for the future and my life in America weren't possible.

If you could collect a dollar for every time the words "I can't believe it" were uttered in those gloomy days, you would be among the wealthiest of the world's denizens. We, Diana and myself, spent all that weekend together cementing our love in the grief of the day. We walked, talked, played with Nina, turned the television on and off and on again. Listened to people raging on the radio as to whether ball games should be canceled, whether Broadway plays should stop, was it profoundly disrespectful to go to movies. I did manage to get to work, but Himself was empty, the gloomiest place to be. I went to P. J. Clarke's at one point, to immerse myself in a crowd, but it was nearly empty, too. There was a lot of staring into glasses going on during that weekend. I'd look up, shake the head in disbelief, say something inane, and go back to staring. One fellow stood up in the back room at P. J. Clarke's and announced that if anybody said anything against President Kennedy he would deal with them personally. Needless to say, there were no takers. Of course, there were mutterings all over town about conspiracies and dirty doings by Nixon, who had been in Dallas that morning, and about Johnson and the coincidence of the assassination taking place in Texas, his home state. Then came the arrest and killing of Lee Harvey Oswald, leading to a confusion that has never been dispelled.

But time passed, as it always will, and everything eventually went back to normal, or whatever passed for normal. Diana still smiled and remained silent when I'd bring up the subject of marriage. She was virtually a prisoner at home, having to take care of Nina, and was still trying to get a straight diagnosis on whether the child was retarded, brain-damaged, or autistic, and she was still not getting one.

Diana was, and remains, the most remarkable woman I've ever met. As a young girl, she had studied ballet with George Balanchine, at the School of American Ballet, and attended the Professional Children's School in New York City, whose curriculum was designed for kids involved in show business. Her father and mother, John and Bernice Huchthausen, encouraged the odd schooling

despite the long commute from Ossining, in Westchester County. Diana got a scholarship to Smith College, from which she eloped shortly before graduation. She went into the publishing business, as a foreign rights manager at Harper and Row, and started up a literary magazine with her husband. But then came Nina, and then divorce, and she was now limited to taking in typing, which was somewhat akin to taking in washing. She wasn't even that good at it, and didn't really care to be, but she did type *Catch-22* for Joe Heller. He paid her as an act of charity, she sez, as her work was quite bad.

We spent many nights together, but there is no denying that on drinking nights, when the opportunity presented itself, fidelity, never my strong suit, was right out the window, without a second thought. Whiskey was and is a wonder to me in that it made me comfortable enough to be something of a lady's man, and it transformed me in my mind from a guttersnipe to a wit, a sophisticated, erudite man-about-town. I prided myself on never stuttering, stammering, or stumbling in the course of an evening's peregrinations. I had the ability to speak the most arrant nonsense and appear as if I were in command of facts and statistics to confound any listener.

There was a night when I did a long monologue on the accomplishments of Leonardo da Vinci, ending it with a peroration on the magnificence and beauty of his sculpture the *Pietá.* Some know-it-all spoilsport piped up that it was Michelangelo had done the job. I tried to oil out of that one by saying that I wanted to make sure everyone was paying attention.

Late in 1964 Diana suddenly told me, quite upset, that she didn't think our relationship was going anywhere and that it had to come to a halt. She had to look out for herself, she said, and it was true that I was taking her very much for granted. I gave her no sense of commitment, but assumed that she would always be there whenever I was ready to grace her with my company. Not infrequently, I didn't bother to show up when I said I would. Nonetheless, this was completely unexpected, and I was stunned. Not having a terrific speech ready, I agreed we should separate.

There followed days of grief, anger, and sorrow over my latest loss, which of course called for some serious drinking. When I thought about what Diana had said, in my few sober moments, I had to agree she was right to be quit of me. Here I was, stuck running a smelly saloon that not only was losing money, but was a totally illegal operation anyway, as the man on the license was only a front. We were always late with our taxes and with Con Edison, always failing health inspections because a damn sewer pipe was leaking into the cellar, where large gray rats didn't bother to scuttle off when we came down for beer and supplies.

Sometimes I'd have no money left to pay myself after the secret owners came and took their weekly share. I was trapped in this place by my fear and self-loathing, feeling savagely inferior to everyone around me. There didn't seem to be any exit in sight.

Now, the woman of my enveloping dreams, the woman who seemed to hold out some hope of a future, had seen fit to leave me because our relationship was going nowhere. I managed at frequent intervals to curse God and the donkey he rode in on.

But for once in my life, instead of saying, "Bollox on it!" I took a positive action. After a week of this, I picked up the telephone and called Diana and poured out from my soul a torrent of love, of loneliness, of longing to see her and be with her again. I yowled that I would lay down my life for her, that all I had was hers and that she must marry me.

There was a silence on the other end of the phone, and then that gentle voice spoke, saying she had missed me too. "Yes," she said. She would marry me.

"When, when, when," I said, rushing headlong.

"December first," she said, after a moment's thought.

It was September then, and as soon as I realized how little time there was between then and now, I slammed on the brakes. "That's too soon," said I. From the loneliest man in the world to the most terrified: elapsed time, two seconds.

"All right then, when would you like to get married?"

"March first," I blurted, for no good reason.

"That's fine," sez my beloved, and so we were engaged and committed to say the I dos and live happily ever after.

Ha.

Of the bad habits available, I missed very few. I drank too much, ate too much, philandered too much. I had managed, though, to somehow remain a nonsmoker, a state I remedied at about that time. There were still commercials for cigarettes on television then, and an advertising campaign for Lark cigarettes featured a truck traveling around the country with someone on board shouting, "Show us your Lark!" to people in various walks of life.

I auditioned to be one of the sham workers and, not being a smoker, I had to practice. I reasoned that I'd never get addicted like my mother and father before me, as I really disliked the damn things, but in the course of doing the commercial I got hooked. I got paid around three hundred dollars for the day's work and proceeded to spend thousands of dollars to maintain my new habit, not to mention my damaged health and yellowed teeth and the hundreds of little burn holes I put in various garments (my own and others') over the years.

I also got to do some other commercials during this period. I played Henry VIII for Imperial margarine and again for Reese's peanut butter cups. Large, bearded Irishmen seemed interchangeable with English kings on Madison Avenue. My pal, Dick Hope, husband of the witty Marilyn, took up a professional challenge one night at the bar, to wit: Could he create a commercial for his client's product, Colgate-Palmolive lime shave, using me, a bearded man. Not only did he do it, I got the part. What he had me do was act the bartender role (less a stretch than Henry VIII) and squeeze a lime into a drink. Instead of lime juice, out comes shaving cream, which I lathered onto my beard, saying, "Now why would they go and tempt me to shave?" A poet, a scholar, and, above all, a decent man was Richard Hope.

I also found myself a panelist on *The David Susskind Show,* a syndicated television program that had a huge viewing audience. This particular show had as a theme folks who had to deal with the public and the difficulties they encountered. There was a waitress, a hairdresser, a taxi driver, and myself, from the saloon business. As was my wont, I had fortified myself against vocal aridity with a few jorums of whiskey.

Susskind was his usual expansive self, very sincere, trying to accommodate the nervousness of the neophyte panelists. Many successful people get the backlash from the begrudgers, and David Susskind did not escape. In those days, people were quite vociferous in their opinions of him, which were quite low, similar to those who speak ill of Geraldo Rivera in this generation, saying he's not to be taken seriously. However, it was not generally known that this man Susskind, a successful producer of television shows, movies, and Broadway plays, employed many of the writers and performers who had been blacklisted by the Hollywood and congressional scumbags, and risked his own career in doing so. I believe he should be judged by the good he did, which was quite a bit, and more than enough for me.

On this panel, the talk wandered about the table—complaints about the vagaries of the public, and the stupidity of certain segments thereof, the paucity of tips, and the insecurity of jobs. There were calls from the public as well, one of which was from a hairdresser who could only be described as extremely effete in manner. He complained that because of his profession, he was always being teased about being a homosexual (the word "gay" still being public property at that time), though he said he wasn't. He added that he had ample proof of his manhood, being an ex-Marine.

The gruff New York taxi driver who sat beside me said, "Why dontcha wear your Marine uniform while you're woiking?" The image struck me, in my somewhat liquored state, as so funny that I began to laugh and couldn't seem to stop. As I leaned back in my chair, it broke, tumbling me to the floor, helpless, on national television, with the cameras following me. Eventually, I recovered, got back onto a new chair, and continued the discussion.

What I didn't know was that Diana had alerted her mother and father, who had yet to meet me, to the fact that I was going to be on the show. Her father's response the next day was, "You are going to marry *that*?"

Diana's parents, John and Bernice Huchthausen, didn't exhibit a wholehearted acceptance of me at first, and understandably so. That had been their first glimpse of me, drunk and falling off a chair on national television. Not long after, Diana and I spent a night together at the parents' apartment while they were safely away in the country. We thought. Early the next morning, sounds of a key being inserted in the lock heralded the arrival of the mother, who was quite shocked to see her daughter in the parental bed in the company of a naked, bearded man. There was a grim set to the lady's jaw and a steely glint in the eye, which I felt boded ill for our future relationship.

For all that, though, things did get smoothed out. I wrote a letter to Bernice apologizing for the seeming insensitivity and tawdriness of the in flagrante moment and vowing the honor of my intentions. She seemed to accept the apology.

I liked Diana's parents, and her sister, Heidi. Diana's father, John, an architect by profession, was also an amazing classical pianist. He wrote music, painted, drew cartoons, wrote poetry, and designed Christmas cards. He was very whimsical on occasion, too, a trait not usually associated with folks of German origin. He was one of ten children of a Lutheran minister from Minneapolis, but he wasn't at all hidebound by religion or by convention. He remained to the end of his tenure on earth a New Deal Democrat, and there was no saying anything against FDR.

Bernice, his wife, was of Swedish origins and working-class background. Her family name was Engstrom. She had studied art, interior design, and architecture, but, as a woman, she encountered restrictions in entering that last profession, and became an interior designer. Still, not bad for the children of Swedish and German immigrants.

After those initial, bumpy, encounters, we all got on fine. I never told or countenanced any mother-in-law jokes, either.

The situiation in French Indochina, or Vietnam, as it properly came to be called, was looming ever larger on the horizon. Lyndon Johnson decided that an errant floating log was a torpedo that had been fired at a U.S. destroyer, and persuaded Congress to grant him power to carry out any military action he wished under the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

I'd read a bit about Ho Chi Minh and his struggle against the savagery of the French colonials, and I knew he'd assisted in the war against Japan, so I was shocked to learn the U.S.A. was now attacking this patriot. Charles E. Martin, a cartoonist for *The New Yorker,* and his wife got me involved in my first antiwar demonstration in 1964. People on the sidewalks screamed at us and threw things, calling us scum, traitors, commies, and perverts, and letting us know that if we didn't like it here we were strongly urged to go to Russia.

I didn't know enough about the issues to really debate them, but I did know that the Vietnamese people had a right to live in their own country, and the French had that same right, only in France. Looking at those faces, twisted with hate, I wanted to tell them that it was their sons who were the likely dead and wounded victims of this war, and that they should join us to help stop the inevitable mass murder.

Little did any of us know that it would be more than a decade and three presidents later before it was all over. There would be fifty-eight thousand U.S. dead and a quarter million wounded, and several million Vietnamese dead and maimed before a semblance of peace would be restored.

M**y friend Hugh Magill and his wife had arranged for a justice** of the peace to marry Diana and me, on Monday, March 1, 1965. Louise Arnold, who had introduced us, now married to John Westergaard, a lovable, eccentric bear of a man, joined us for the mini-ceremony, as did Diana's mother and father.

We have only one picture of the wedding, taken before we left for the house of the justice of the peace, a man who bore the unforgettable name of Euclid Shook. I think he and his missus must

probably have had a martini or two that evening, as they were an unusually jolly couple, offering around the beverages, as we were in their home.

After the I dos, Diana, now McCourt, and self sped off to some old inn in Hartford, the Old Forge, I believe it was called. For two people who had both been married before, we were a shy couple that night. We turned on the television for comfort and diversion, and there was a movie playing which I fervently hoped would not portend our future. It was *I'll Cry Tomorrow,* with Susan Hayward, as dreary a film as you'd ever see and hope to miss.

In the morning I managed to get the car stuck in a snow bank, from which we were rescued by a French Canadian couple. Another stop, just a little later, to get in the backseat and steam up the windows, and then back we went to reality and life in New York.

At that time there was no housing crunch in New York. Newly built apartments were plentiful on the East Side, and the older and bigger apartments were available quite reasonably on the West Side. We opted for one on the West Side, with the several bedrooms and, as they say, two and a half baths, and they were just as glad to get us as tenants then as they would be glad to get rid of us today, as we are still there, and they could double or triple the rent as soon as we left.

We were both moving from relatively small places, and this new habitation seemed huge and full of echoes. We thought we would never be able to afford to furnish it. But Diana had some furniture, and I had access to a knife and spoon and a few things like that, so we set up housekeeping with what we could.

Merv Griffin had started his syndicated television show, with Arthur Treacher sniffing superciliously at all the vulgar goings-on while offering the occasional witticism (he told me that, secretly, he was having a jolly good time). My friend Tom O'Malley, possibly the best talent booker in the business, was involved from the start, and so I had a reasonably good run as an irregular regular with the show.

There is the illusion that all these chat shows consist of spontaneous and impromptu conversations between celebrities who know each other very well. Not so, old sport! All guests, no matter how well known, are prepped, as they say, by a talent booker. Particularly young actors and actresses ill read and lacking in wit, which is more often the case than you'd want to know. Vaguely humorous anecdotes have to be drawn out of them and inflated into stories, and then polished by the show's writers until they are actually funny, or else the whole interview is apt to reveal how boring the guests really are.

I, of course, was the ideal guest, replete with the story, the jest, the bon mot, or so it seemed to me. Griffin liked to come to Himself after the show, and there were nights there with Dom DeLuise, Jonathan Winters, Pat McCormick, and Jack Burns that can neither be remembered nor forgotten.

In the kitchen, the cook, the big-bodied, laughing Sudia Masoud, my favorite Black Muslim, eavesdropped all night and added her shrieks of merriment to the general uproar. She had been present when Malcolm X was shot down, and told me, "That was the cleanest assassination I ever did see." I forbore asking her how many others she had witnessed.

Diana developed a vague suspicion that she was pregnant, and a visit to the physician made it a certainty. We were told that a new child would make its way into this world sometime around the middle of October 1965. I informed my mother, Angela, that she was about to become a grandma again, and she launched immediately into the keening mode.

Now, for those who don't know, keening is an ancient Celtic expression of grief or sorrow, usually heard at a time of death. It is expressed by a high-pitched wailing sound with mourners beating breasts and giving vent to the odd shriek in the middle of the wail. While it was not quite the full frontal keen, the mother did a fairly good job moaning about what would happen to the other children, Siobhan and Malachy. If I couldn't look after them, how was I going to look after the new one?

There is nothing more aggravating than someone giving voice to your own unspoken fears.

We weren't doing well financially, and we were trying to cope with raising a handicapped child. Plus, I'd made a *haimes* of my role as father to Siobhan and Malachy, so I had my own doubts. I contributed what I could, but Linda took care of our children largely with money she got from her parents, who had quite a bit of it. Having settled in with Diana, I saw Siobhan and Malachy, now six and five, most weekends, but I was as apt to bring them home and then go out, leaving their care to Diana, as I was to stay and give them any of what they needed from their father. During their earliest years, I had been completely absent a good amount of the time, sometimes just too drunk to show up.

But the mother Angela was never comfortable with the women any of the sons married anyway, and announcements of pregnancies only served to deepen her gloom that liaisons were going to be on the permanent side. Yet when babies shouldered their way into the world, the mother became most maternal and loving, at least until the little ones reached the age of two or thereabouts. At that point, they got a bit of independence and she'd shift her attention onto the next infant.

On the evening of the thirteenth of October 1965, Diana announced that there were certain movements within her body that indicated a desire on the part of someone to take his leave of the womb. So it was off to the New York Hospital with us. We had taken some Lamaze classes with a lady named Elizabeth Bing, the natural childbirth guru, and for the first time, I had the sublime experience of watching the new life make its entry into our orbit. It was a boy, whom we named Conor Turlough. He was a long lithe fellow, and of course the most brilliant baby in the nursery.

N**ina, my stepdaughter, wasn't making much progress, and** the experts were now saying she was very retarded. She sat for long periods of time, crinkling cellophane paper from cigarette packs and rocking back and forth. She was for some reason terrified of solid foods, so even when she was six we were still getting her jars of baby food and spooning it into her mouth. It occurred to me that as she had all her teeth and seemed otherwise in good physical health, perhaps some solid grub might be in order.

I apprised Diana of my intention and suggested she absent herself and Conor from the house, as I didn't think it was going to be quiet or pleasant getting Nina to eat the hamburgers I'd prepared. (Were I doing it today, I'd probably select rice and beans or tofu, as I'm a vegetarian, on health grounds.) I sat Nina on a chair at the kitchen table, tied a large apron round her neck, and spread out some newspapers on the table and on the floor, and so began the battle.

I'd made about eight medium-size burgers, which I broke into bite-size pieces. I popped the first piece into Nina's mouth, where she allowed it to rest for a brief moment. When she realized what I'd done, her eyes opened up wide with fury and rage at this big person who'd forced foreign matter into her mouth. She let go with a yowl and spat out the offending morsel, which landed on my shirtfront, leaving a stain before descending to the floor. She quieted down, and I tried again, putting another piece of hamburger in her mouth, all the time speaking as softly and as soothingly as I could. Same result: Out came the meaty projectile, which just dropped to the floor. We sat for a while, me doing all the talking, as Nina did not and does not have speech.

Nina made no attempt to get off her chair, nor did she keep her mouth shut tight to prevent me popping in the food. There were times during this hour-long battle that I was sure I was being bamboozled by this child, as she yowled without conviction, and her resistance was confined to spitting out the food. She'd sometimes have a look of disdain and amusement at this hulk of a man trying to feed her. Somewhere I had read that Annie Sullivan, who took on the task of teaching Helen Keller the rudiments of ordinary societal behavior, had had a similar siege and, heartened by that thought, I continued the routine. Pop, spit, talk. Pop, spit, talk. Pop, spit, talk. The kitchen floor and table were littered with hamburger. Splatter after splatter, it appeared soon enough as if it were raining hamburger meat in the kitchen.

I was about to admit defeat and sue for terms of surrender when my doughty and noble opponent decided to have mercy on me. She retained a chunk of burger behind closed lips and smiled her Mona Lisa smile at me, still not swallowing, but after a long, long interval I noticed little movements that

indicated something was headed toward the stomach, and that's how Nina ate solid food for the first time in her six years of life.

But this small step forward with Nina was just that and no more. With the new baby, Diana was overwhelmed, and there wasn't anywhere we could turn for help. There were no day programs suitable or, indeed, willing to take Nina. When we tried to take her out, she would stage screaming sit-down strikes on the sidewalk. We began to think about permanent residential care.

It is not an easy or simple decision to admit that you cannot raise your own child, but in the end, that is what we did. We found a small home in New Jersey run by a very kindly, bright lady and, soliciting all the financial help we could from family, we arranged for Nina to live there.

It was a bright, sunny day driving out there, but it was hard to appreciate as Diana was teary-eyed and heart-sore at the prospect of parting with Nina. It was hard for me, too, as I'd become very attached to this sweet, trusting child. Nina played quietly in the backseat, not knowing she was heading for a totally new life. When we dropped her off, we saw that a couple of the other kids were similar to Nina in age, condition, and behavior, something we took a bit of comfort from, because we figured Nina would not be an unknown quantity. In a sense we were now free—free to be married, to travel about, to go out, to be parents to Conor—but the price was high. As we drove away, we stopped to look back and saw Nina with her new mentor, standing on a rise outside the house, the sun lighting up her face and turning her blond hair to a light, golden aura. We both wept, because no matter how often we visited her, we knew that child would never live in our home again.

D**iana's sister, Heidi, had married her high school love,** Warren Washburn, a Marine, and they had become parents to Kelly, a brilliant little girl. Being married and a parent was no barrier to service in Vietnam, though. Warren, a charming, gregarious, devil-may-care sort of lad, assured Heidi and his family that there was nothing to worry about, a statement which can be depended upon to cause a lot of worry.

I don't know why I felt so strongly about that war, particularly as I didn't have to go there and slog it out myself, but I did. The French had treated the people abominably, with the usual colonial torture and murder, and then pulled out, leaving the U.S. to carry on the savagery. Of course, being steeped in Irish history and the brutal centuries-long occupation of Ireland had an influence on me. Colonial powers were always brutal, I knew, from what I'd seen and heard growing up, and what the French, and later the U.S., did to the Vietnamese seemed to me little different from what the English had done in Ireland. Indeed, I could never understand Irish people who supported that barbarous and diabolical attempt to bomb poor people into accepting an alien culture.

W**henever Richard Harris hove into town, I got the inevitable** visit at the saloon, and, of course, we went on the inevitable bender. Nearly always there was a brawl. Harris always drew attention wherever he went, and it was astounding to me how many "tough guys" felt the need to challenge the man to a fight. He usually charmed them out of it, but there were some who wouldn't be charmed.

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One night we were carousing in some club, and perhaps we were too loud, and perhaps our language may not have been of a pristine quality, but it was directed at no other humans but ourselves. So, when a blocky sort of fellow stepped up to our table and ordered us to "shut da fuck up," it was an astonishing interruption to our fun. I believe we both said, "*What?*"

"You hoid me," sez the blocky fellow. "My lady don't like dat kinda talk so shut da fuck up."

I ventured the opinion that if she was a lady she wouldn't be listening, and he glared down at us from across the table. "Fuck you, buddy," sez he to me.

Without so much as an "After you, Claude," Harris and myself dived for this belligerent lad, overturning the table. We got ourselves tangled in the tablecloth, swinging, punching, and swearing, only to discover, upon becoming untangled, that our provocateur had departed the premi with his lady, escorted by the owner and barman. Celebrity had once more won out over civility and good manners.

Some years before, when I was visiting Harris in Hollywood, I had gotten arrested for trespassing when I went for a midnight swim in his pool. He'd left me sitting in jail overnight, which he thought was very funny. I had not been quite so amused, and even though years had passed, I thought about revenge from time to time.

One day, during that same sojourn in New York, Mr. Richard Harris rang me and invited me to lunch at the Sherry-Netherland Hotel. When I arrived, I noticed outside a small throng of people carrying notepads and cameras. They were a minor mob of autograph seekers who'd heard Harris was in residence.

I proceeded to the Harris suite and was greeted warmly by the man himself. He got room service to bring up the lunch, and we were chatting leisurely, when the star suddenly bounded to his feet and bellowed that he had just remembered an appointment and must get in the shower, and would I answer the phone if it rang?

Moments later, Harris already showering, the phone rang and the concierge asked to speak to Mr. Harris.

"Speaking," I said.

"The fans here want to know if they could send a delegation of three up to your room to get signatures and pictures for all of them."

"Three?" I asked.

"Yes sir," sez he.

"Send them all up."

"But there's more than twenty of them," he protested.

"That's okay," sez I.

"It's your funeral, Mr. Harris," sez he.

In the bathroom, the star-turned-singer had launched into the song "How to Handle a Woman," from *Camelot.* When the bell rang and I opened the door, Harris warbling in the background, I was faced with about an acre of wide eyes and acne. I invited them all in and told them to make themselves comfortable and to help themselves to anything at the bar. I asked them to tell Mr. Harris that Mr. McCourt was called away on some urgent business and then I left.

When Harris regained his sense of humor and resumed speaking to me, he told me that he'd walked out of the bathroom bollox naked to discover that a considerable number of the citizens of New York were comfortably ensconced in his hotel room. He was not too amused by my prank, but I explained to him 'twas a small price to pay for having left me in jail overnight in California.

'Twas about then that I was temporarily rescued from the suffocating torpor of the saloon. One day, a very well-dressed man approached me at Himself and said he would like to talk to me about hosting a television show. There was a need, he said, for a natural kind of chat show with some humor and bite to it. I admit to having peered about to make sure he was talking to me, and indeed he was. I said I'd be delighted to do it and hands were shook and commitments made.

As it turned out, the first show had to be taped in California, because by the time I was scheduled to go on the air, I had fortuitously become involved in a movie as well. Richard Harris had introduced me to Marty Ritt and Walter Bernstein, a couple of stalwart survivors of the blacklist in the McCarthy years, who were now making a movie called *The Molly Maguires.*

The Molly Maguires were a group of Irish coal miners in Pennsylvania in the 1860s. They suffered the usual economic terrorism at the hands of the mine owners, and when they attempted

to organize, they were brutalized and fired. 'Twas said they had resorted to the bit of sabotage, and knocking off an occasional payroll, and for this some of them were arrested and hanged.

Sean Connery played the leader of the Molly Maguires (the name, by the way, lifted from a secret society in Ireland who were said to dress as women so as to escape detection when they made their forays against the Brit landlords), a man by the name of Black Jack Kehoe. Richard Harris played James McPartlan, an Irishman and an informer, who was paid to infiltrate the group and report on their doings.

Paramount Pictures took over a little village called Eckley in Pennsylvania, where little was required to take it back to looking as it looked in 1860 except to bury some telephone wires and spread some coal dust on the dirt road. On either side of this rough little road were still standing old company houses, little cabins, each with a garden patch complete with the outside lavatory in back. They had small porches out front, and on good days 'twas not unusual to see a retired miner sitting there coughing what was left of his life away, now that the coal dust had done the dirty work of destroying his lungs.

Pneumoconiosis is the doctors' name for this incurable disease, otherwise known as black lung, or silicosis. I was fascinated by these men, who spoke proudly of being miners, never regretting working in the nether regions, but dying all the while. They couldn't get comfortable, these old men, either sitting up or lying down, and their breathing was so tortured it caused palpitations in my own chest from my empathetic efforts to help their respiration.

Just as surely as those miners' lungs had been destroyed by their years in the mines, parts of that beautiful country had been destroyed by strip mining. Thousands of tons of coal dust had been spread over thousands of acres of lovely green land, giving stretches of it an appearance not that different from the surface of the moon. Though it was an abomination to the environment, it gave Marty Ritt a wonderful opportunity to shoot an oddly colorful but dead and deadly landscape.

So, to this forgotten town came a film company with lights, generators, rain-making equipment, cameras, trailers, a hundred or so crew members, and the actors Connery, Harris, Brendan Dillon, the beautiful Samantha Eggar, Bethel Leslie, Frances Heflin, the terrifically talented Anthony Zerbe, the huge Art Lund, and a grand actor named Frank Finlay who came over from Britain to play the part of the evil police chief. I had been cast as—what a surprise!—the local saloon keeper, in whose premises the Molly Maguires plotted their dastardly doings. My part had me attending wakes and going to mass to hear the priest condemn secret societies like the Mollies because, as usual, the Church was in cahoots with the capitalistic savages who were murdering the miners.

I also had to referee a strange football-like game invented for this film, a combination of soccer, rugby, basketball, boxing, wrestling, and mayhem. We played that scene on a blistering hot July day, on a field bereft of grass and rock hard. We were all dressed in the heavy woolens of the period, resulting in people falling down from heat stroke and exhaustion. To end the game, I was instructed by the director to run to a certain spot, look down the field, look at my pocket watch, blow my whistle, and wave my arms. I was so confused with heat and dust that, when I got to the designated spot, I took out the whistle, looked at it, and then attempted to blow the watch, which caused a huge hoot of laughter amongst the hundreds of spectators and players.

It was a most convivial company, with most of the shooting taking place during the day, and dining out and storytelling in the evenings. Marty Ritt had his story of being blacklisted and anecdotes brought back from Hollywood. Walter Bernstein had been in the army during the Second World War, on the staff of *The Stars and Stripes,* and had slogged his way through German-occupied Yugoslavia to get an interview with one Josip Broz, a.k.a. Marshal Tito. Of course, he had his own blacklist stories, and let us know that his screenplay for *The Molly Maguires* was a metaphor for informers like Elia Kazan and others who had squealed to the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Sean Connery was quite the reserved type until he decided you were safe enough to talk to, but turned out to be one of the best storytellers of all, especially about his early days in choruses of *South*

Pacific and other musicals. He had a good self-deprecating sense of humor. He was married then to a rather fiery actress named Diane Cilento, and they had a small son named Jason; they arrived to join Sean sometime after the film began.

Although provided with a driver, Connery always chose to drive himself. One morning, he arrived on the set with the windshield of his car smashed to smithereens, and he went on and on about how a body can't even park a car in a rural area these days without some goddamn vandal doing it damage, and if he caught whoever it was they were going to have their asses kicked good and proper.

We all made the usual murmuring sounds of sympathy and went about our business. Came lunchtime and we were joined by little Jason Connery, who, when we were all gathered around the table, piped up in his English accent, "Daddy, Mummy was so very angry to break the window in your car. Why did she do that?"

Sean whisked the lad away so fast we never heard the rest of the story.

It was altogether a pleasant summer, as Diana and Conor were able to come and live with me in a rented house. Some members of the company had set up a daycare center, so our lively three-year-old boy was kept occupied.

When you are on location with a movie company, there is a womblike quality to life itself. The film becomes the whole of your existence, and when you have a reasonable part you are well taken care of. They drive you back and forth, they feed you, they clothe you, all medical needs are met, with the result that you shut out the world and all its turbulences and troubles because you are too occupied with wondering if your closeup shots are going to be in the final cut.

That year was a strange one, with tragedy—personal, national, and international—hitting everywhere. My sister-in-law's husband, Warren, had returned from Vietnam safely and had gone to work at NBC. On the surface he was still the same ebullient and cheerful lad who went on that foreign venture, but a series of car crashes while drinking belied that. A researcher at NYU later came up with the statistic that veterans of the assault on Vietnam had proportionately more car accidents than any other group, and Warren had several. The last one occurred when riding with his brother Jimmy, who survived, but Warren suffered injuries that led to swelling of the brain, irreversible coma, and, after a few weeks, a merciful death.

For a while, though, I was seduced by the comforts of the movie actor's life and abandoned all protest and demonstrations.

W**hen our location shooting wrapped at the Pennsylvania** site, the company and all our families were airlifted to Los Angeles. We checked into the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, but that proved to be disastrously expensive, as we'd no kitchen facilities, and the per diem could not quite cover the expense of room service. Diana, we had discovered, was very much pregnant again, and all this gadding about far away from home was a bit too much for her, and getting settled was essential. As small as my part was, I still had a couple of months of shooting to do.

Despite my being in many scenes, I had only one line to speak in this entire epic, and a memorable line it was. When the informer James McPartlan appears in the village, he is understandably viewed with suspicion. The cover story he presents is that he is on the run from the police, for "pushing the queer" in Buffalo. No sir, that is not an assault on a homosexual in upstate New York; it was the jargon of the time for passing counterfeit money. When this sham criminal queried me on getting lodgings, I responded with, "There's a train leaving in twenty minutes."

There's another scene wherein the police raid my saloon and a magnificent brawl breaks out 'twixt the miners and the constabulary. At one point, the chief of police whacks McPartlan on the head to make it clear they considered him part of the mining riffraff and throw off any suspicion that he was their spy.

Harris and Connery, who was also in this scene, went to Marty Ritt and asked him to postpone shooting the fight; they were doing all their own stunts, they explained, and might get hurt, and it

would be better to do it last, just in case. Marty said that was good thinking, and added, "By the way, I like Malachy. Let's keep him, too."

I stayed on the production until the end, and that's how I came to be one of the highest paid one-line actors in movie history. As Connery pointed out, "If I were getting paid as much as you for each line, I'd never have to work again."

So it was that Diana and I were looking at a splendid house in Los Angeles that had once been owned by Will Rogers. The real estate agent told us it had last been rented to one of the Beach Boys. He'd let in a bunch of squatters and then abandoned the place, and it was now up for rent again. It sounded great, as it was furnished and the price was reasonable, and the only problem would be kicking out the squatters and getting some bed linens and a few other assorted items along those lines.

When we arrived for our inspection, we had a bit of difficulty getting in. Inside the house, a dozen or so young people were lounging about, with a good strong smell of pot permeating the whole place. They were not a friendly group; indeed, they were quite hostile in demeanor, which made me a bit uneasy, and made Diana downright fearful. Then we went out back to look at the swimming pool (in the shape of the state of California), which the real estate agent had warned us might need a little work. A little work, indeed. The bloody thing looked as if it had not been cared for in years, and it was half full of scummy water. However, that was not the focus of our attention.

Seated at the edge of the pool, his feet dangling, was a thin, smallish, bearded young man, dressed in a black shirt and jeans. We said an awkward hello, but there was no response from him other than a savage, hate-filled glare. Diana began making frantic signs to me, indicating that she wanted to get the hell out of there. I told her to relax, there was nothing to be concerned about, that I would take care of everything.

When we left, I told the agent we'd take the place.

Diana took me aside and said, "If you do, you will live in that house all by yourself, because I wouldn't live there if it were rent free." We continued to argue about it, and I eventually told the agent that I'd changed my mind.

Diana had told me that she had never in her life felt such malevolence before, and that she felt the people in that house were a threat to the baby she was carrying. I, being full of bravado, was going to boot them all out and take over the manse, but was glad I hadn't tried. The assorted gang in possession of the house were the followers of Charles Manson, the young man with hate-filled eyes seated by the pool.

W**e eventually found a reasonable house in Brentwood,** complete with garden, and I settled in for the remaining two months of the shoot. I began commuting to New York once a week to tape my new television show, *Sound Off with Malachy McCourt,* but the first show was taped in California, with Sean Connery and Richard Harris as guests. We shared a bottle or two of the whiskey beforehand so the wheels of talk wouldn't squeak, and though I was a bit nervous with first-show jitters, it all went smoothly, more of a conversation than an interview. Harris and Connery didn't let me down at all, as they were most supportive and quite entertaining.

I did my best to entertain, as well. At one point, I asked Sean Connery what I termed a "pedestrian question," to wit, "How did you get started in showbiz?" Sean said he was playing amateur soccer and doing amateur theatricals, when he got an offer to act for money and an offer to play soccer for money. "I had to make a choice between becoming a professional soccer player and becoming a professional actor," he told me.

Seeing my opportunity, I asked, "And what did you decide, Sean?" Connery began to answer, and then realized he had been sandbagged, recovering his equilibrium quickly enough to join in the laughter at his own expense.

M**y single spoken line in The Molly Maguires was scheduled** for the second-to-last day of shooting, and a grand day it was. Harris, as McPartlan, entered the soundstage re-creation of the Pennsylvania saloon and asked about getting accommodations, and I delivered my line:

"There is a train leaving in twenty minutes."

"Print it," Marty yelled. "Now, reverse shot, with camera on Harris."

"Print that one, too," sez Marty, after we'd done it again.

He chose to use the second take in the end, and my face was not seen as I spoke my single line, and thus a great closeup was lost to cinematic history.

The film was released to a good gush of publicity, but it wasn't successful. It's possible that hanging the hero, whilst the informer walked away smirking, didn't appeal to the average moviegoer. Nonetheless, the film has acquired a bit of, as they say, cult status, so it can be seen on television regularly.

It had been a marvelous five months, and I was delighted to have been part of such a congenial company and a bit downhearted at the ending of it all. However, I still had the television show and I was reveling in my new role as host. We shot in front of a live audience, and I felt as much like a host with guests in my living room as I did a talk-show host. I liked to walk down into the audience to talk to them during the show, and I think I was the first talk-show host to use a shotgun mike Phil Donahue–style, extending it to someone in the audience so he could speak his piece on the air.

One of my guests was Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique* and one of the early leaders of the women's liberation movement. At the time I wasn't too enlightened on feminist issues; if I look back on it now, it's hard for me to believe I held such Neanderthal views. There I was, wildly lib eral on the war, on labor unions, on every social and political issue you could name, but I held the traditional patronizing, conservative attitudes on anything having to do with women's issues. The other guest that night was the actress Pamela Mason, an acerbic Brit married to James Mason, who was anti–women's liberation in all its forms. I retain the distinct impression that Friedan showed me the error of my ways and managed to put Pamela Mason in her place, too.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.