Lone Birthday Boy Dancing

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Chapter Six of "Rescue of a Rock and Roll Child"

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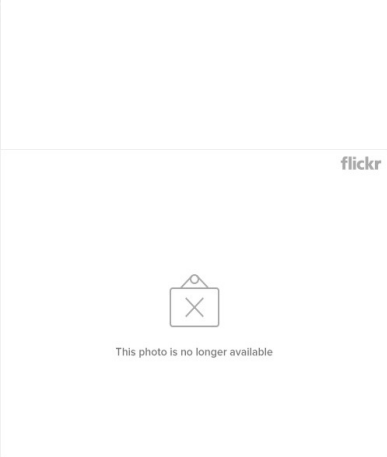

Strange Coldness Perplexing

the catholic nurse
all sensitive
caring noticing
everything
what can she think
of my hot/cold torment

always near blowing it
living in the fast lane
so friendly kind
the girls
dewy eyed
wanda abandoned me
bolton is in my hands

and yet my coldness
hurts
the more emotional
they stay
trying to find a reason
for my ice-like suspicion
fish eyes
coldly indifferent eyes
suspect everything that moves

socialising just to be loud
compensate for cold
lack of essential trust
warmth
i love them
despite myself
my desire to love

is unconscious and gigantesque

i never know
when i'm going to miss someone
strange coldness perplexing
i've got to work to get devotion
but once i get it
i really get people on my side
there are carl people
who can survive
my shark-like coldness
and there are those
who want something
more personal
i can be very devoted to those
who can stay the course

my soul is aching
for an impartial love of people
i'm at war with myselfâ ¦

The Joy of a Fool

Being a teacher at the Callan School of English was a dream job for me. It provided me with a social life on a plate, as well as enough money to finance the hours I spent each evening in the Champion public house in Wells Street, where some time after 7.30pm, after the final class had ended, student and teacher alike would meet to drink and talk and laugh and do as they wished until closing time. I'd usually leave at about 10.30 to catch the last train home from Waterloo, although, sometimes I'd miss it and have to catch a later trainâ ¦ in fact, I can swear I spent one night wrapped in newspaper on a station bench deep in the Surrey hinterland, Clandon perhaps, or Guildford . At other times, there'd be a party to go to, or the Callan Disco, held on an occasional basis in Jacquelineâ s Night Club in nearby Soho.

Most of the teachers socialised with their own kind, while I preferred the company of the students, although this situation was to become modified by 1990, when my friends were being chosen from among both the teaching and student bodies.

At night, it would be almost impossible to extricate me from my circle of favourites from Italy, Japan, Spain, Brazil, Poland, Franceâ ¦fact which proved irksome to my good friends, Stan and Noddy, at a certain stage in my short-lived Callan career.

Stan, a Callan teacher and resting actor, and Noddy, a young student from the great city of Sao Paolo in Brazil, were trying to organise rehearsals for a band we were supposed to be getting together, but thanks to me, this never happened despite some early promise, as Noddy was a gifted guitarist, and Stan a potentially good front man, fact which speaks volumes about my shallow attitude to endeavour.
As well as the perpetual party lifestyle, I spent my spare cash on clothes, cassettes, books, and of course, rent, that is, during those brief few months I spent as a tenant in Hanwell, West London at the house of a friend of my fathersâ from the London session world, Robbie Evans.

Rob was a small, dark, bearded, always nattily dressed Welsh fiddler, whose life, lived close to the edge, but with the absolute minimum of effort, incarnated a kind of preternatural Celtic cool that was deeply charismatic, yet ultimately tragic. I never knew a man to live so fast, and yet so elegantly, as my dear friend Rob.

I also spent several hundreds of pounds towards the end of my time at Callanâ s being initiated into the art of self-hypnosis by a Harley Street doctor who specialised in hypnotherapy and nutritional medicineâ ¦this, in the hope of finding a solution not just to my excessive use of alcohol, but the Obsessive Compulsive Disorder to which I was falling more and more prey in the late 1980s.

Yet, despite the drinking and the OCD, I was a genuinely happy person in those days, and any melancholy I affected - in my writings and elsewhere - should be taken with a pinch of salt in the light of the fact that for me, sadness was the ultimate mark of artistic and emotional profundity, and I coveted it with all the passion of one who was by nature essentially high-spirited.

Indeed, it may be that it was this very carefree frivolity of mine, this absence of angst, that prevented me really getting anywhere as an actor.

Looking back, the overwhelming impression I have is of a man whose primary emotional condition was one of utter exaltation and enraptured joy of life, although it included a tendency to veer wildly between the effusive affection I aspired to, and the lapses of affect I dreaded.

This complex state of being, reflected by the piece featured at the start of this chapter, which was recently forged from notes scrawled onto seven sides of an ancient now coverless notebook, possibly late at night circa 1988, following an evening's carousal and in a state of serene intoxication, was at least partly responsible for my losing my position at Callanâ s in the early part of 1990. It was a devastating blow, but I'd asked for it, because I'd quit without warning, and then decided I wanted to return in my own sweet time, despite having earlier refused an offer to do so from the school itself.

I begged for the return of my beloved job...not just in person, but by letter and through poor Huw, but this time, they refused to be swayed and I don't blame them in the slightest, because up to this point, they'd shown incredible tolerance towards my insultingly slack approach to punctuality and other abuses of what was a very fair system, until finally their patience just snapped.

So...two years spent in the greatest job I ever had ended with the last of a triad of decades marked by persistent frenzied social upheaval and artistic innovation.

Reluctantly delivered from a job I genuinely loved, I briefly revived my acting career thanks once again to the influence of my dear friend Ariana. She suggested I might like to play Feste for a production of "Twelfth Night", to be staged in the summer at the Jacksons Lane theatre in North London. Somehow she knew the director, Sandy. So, after a successful audition for her, I set about re-learning Feste's lines, and arranging the songs according to the original primitive melodies. My hyperkinetic performance was well-received, and one well-spoken Englishwoman even went so far as to tell me that I was the finest Feste she'd ever seen. Itâ s a pity she wasnâ t a passing casting director.

Once again, the Fool of Illyria had served me wellâ ¦and in keeping with the festive spirit of the play, rehearsals and performances were accompanied by some pretty heavy partying by myself and most of the members of the cast, until the inevitable sad dispersal. Yet, if the play itself was pure joy to be involved in, the same canâ t be said for travelling to and from Highgate for rehearsals and performances, for it was during these lengthy trips across the capital that I started feeling the need to inure myself as never before against what I saw as nocturnal London's ever-present aura of menace.

Itâ s likely that years of hard living were finally starting to take their toll on my nervous system, for in addition to alcohol and nicotine, I'd been taking industrial strength doses of caffeine for years, initially in tablet form, and then in the shape of the coffee cocktails I liked to swill one after the other before afternoon classes at Callanâ s. This may go some way towards explaining the sheer paranoia which ultimately caused me to start drinking on the way to rehearsals, and then for the first time in my life as a professional actor, during rehearsals. However, Iâ d promised Sandy Iâ d not touch a drop for the actual performances, and was as good as my word.

Later in the year, I began another PGCE course, this time at the West London Institute of Education based in Twickenham, taking up residence in nearby Isleworth.

I began quite promisingly, fitting in well, and making good friends, and as might be expected, I excelled in drama and physical education. I didn't drink during the day and on those rare occasions I did, it was just a question of a pint or so with lunch. Iâ d mentally determined to complete the course, but as the following piece testifies, I was a hardly abstinent at night.

It was adapted in 2006 from a letter typed during my WLIE days to an old Westfield friend Lucinda, now a professional photographer. When it was recovered, having never been finished, nor sent, it was as scrap paper, lost in a sea of miscellaneous mementos.

A Letter Unsent

Dear Lucinda
I haven't been in touch
for a long time.
Sorry.
The last time
I saw you
was in
St. Christopher's Place.
It was a lovely evening...
when I knocked
that chair over.
I am sorry.
Since then,
I've had not
a few accidents
of that kind.
Just three days ago,
I slipped out
in a garden
at a friend's house...
and keeled over,
not once,
not twice,
but three times,
like a log...
clonking my nut
so violently
that people heard me
in the sitting room.
What's more,
I can't remember

a single sentence
spoken
all evening.
The problem is...

A Thrilling but Lethal Lifestyle

My Teaching Practice was due to take place towards the end of the first term but I was desperately behind in my work, so provisionally removed myself from the course in order to decide whether it was worth my staying on or not. In the event I chose to quit, and met with the head of my course to discuss this, and she was very agreeable, making no effort to dissuade me.
However, rather than return to my parents' home, I stayed on in Isleworth to rekindle my five-year old career as a deliverer of novelty telegrams, while continuing to work as a walk-on artist for the TV series "The Bill", based in the south London suburb of Merton, Surrey.

I also became half of a musical duo formed with a slim young man from the north of the land with short reddish blond hair and brilliant light green eyes who rejoiced in the name of Simon de Wynter, although his true surname was a sight more Mancunian. Iâ d met him through an ad heâ d put in the Stage newspaper for acts for a variety show he was putting together at the time, before going on to perform as Mr Denmark for him a few times.

We began as buskers in Leicester Square, before settling down for rehearsals in the hope of getting some gigs, our repertoire consisting of early Rock and Roll and Motown classics, as well as a host of originals, most written by Simon, with one or two contributions by yours truly. I wanted to call the band Venus Xtravaganza, but we settled for Simon's choice of The Unknowns, if we were ever called anything at all.

Although he was specialising as a singer-songwriter at the time, Simon has since developed into a true Renaissance manâ ¦actor, comedian, songwriter, performer, writer, film maker and esoteric thinker. We remain close friends to this day.
Then, early in 1991, I took off to the seaside town of Hastings for a month or so to attempt to pass a TEFL course in that beautiful old town that's since become a major London overspill area. How vividly I recall the thrill of seeing seagulls hovering over central Hastings soon after arriving at the station for my interview, which I passed, but I couldn't say it went well. I constantly avoided my interviewer's eyes until she virtually ordered me to look at her, then saying something like: "I said look at me, not stare". This as if to emphasize her belief that I didn't stand a snowball's chance in Hell of passing.
Winter 1991 was arctic in a way I haven't known an English winter to be since. Not literally of course, but I can remember wearing several coats just in order to be able to bear a cold that apparently doesn't exist any more in this country. I worked like a Trojan but I was struggling terribly, tormented by OCD and its endless demands on my time and energies in the shape of rituals both physical and mental. I didn't drink at all during the day, but at night I was sometimes so stoned I was incoherent. Predictably perhaps I was failed. I asked the authorities if they might reconsider, but they made it clear to me that their decision was final.
It was a bit of a let-down for sure, but I'd loved my time in Hastings, even while continuing the search for some kind of spiritual solution to my mental troublesâ ¦this leading me to a "church" in Claremont Road which was far from the kind of Iâ d ultimately to seek out. At least part of the reason for my torment may be provided by the following extracts from a letter my mother wrote me during a fascinating but fruitless sojourn:

"...I had a chance to look at your library...I could not believe what I saw. These very strange books, beyond my comprehension, most of them, and I thought what a dissipation of a good mind that thought it right to read such matters...I feel very deeply that you have up to your present state, almost ruined your mind. Your happy, smiling face has left you, your humorous nature, ditto, your spirited state of mind, your cheerful, sunny,

exuberant well-being, all gone. Too much thought given to the unhappiness and sad state of others (often those you can not help, in any way)...I've said recently that I am convinced that anyone can get oneself into a state of agitation or distress or anxiety by thinking or reading about, or witnessing unpleasant things, and the only thing to do is to, as much as possible, avoid such matters, to not let them get hold in the mind. Your fertile mind has led you astray. Why, and how?"

How many millions of mothers over the course of the centuries have asked this of offspring who've been inexplicably drawn to the shadowlands of life only to lose their way back to sanity? Only God knows. Most of course, successfully make the journey back before settling into a normal mode of life, but the danger of becoming lost is always there, especially for those who remain in the shadows far beyond adolescence. Eternal adolescence is arguably one of the prime features of our era, facilitated by its exaltation of youth. And while there are those who'd insist that far fewer young people today are in thrall to the dark glamour of self-destructive genius than in previous Rock eras, the worldview still very much exists.

Rock, as I see it, has never been just a simple popular music derived from various Folk genres, so much as an enormously influential international subculture of varying artistic and intellectual substance. Some critics have even gone so far as to describe it as a religion, and they have a point, as Rock has possessed a spiritual dimension since its inception, and an intellectual one since about â 65.

Possibly more than any other artist of the sixties, itâ s Bob Dylan who helped invest mere Beat music with genuine artistic credibility.

Since Dylan's glory days as Pop's first true poet, there have been many Rock stars who've looked to earlier strains of Modernism for lyrical inspiration. In fact, it could be said that Rock has been the main engine of the avant-garde impulse in the West since the late 1960s, with all the nihilism this entails.

Those who â like me- grew to maturity in the said swinging sixties, were unavoidably affected on a deep and perhaps largely subconscious level by the cultural revolution of which Rock was such an essential part. For my part, I contend that from quitting formal education aged 16 to coming to faith some two decades later, I was in thrall to a cult of instant gratification that's been growing progressively more powerful throughout the west since about 1955.

If what I'm saying is false, then why didn't I build a future for myself during those years, in terms of a profession, a family, financial security, and so on? The truth is that before quitting the booze for good, I viewed all these with an indifference verging on contempt and it hurts me deeply to realise the extent to which I sabotaged my life with such a negative identity.

The following summer of 1992, I made another attempt at passing the TEFL course, this time at Regent's College named after the famous north London park.

However, by this time I was drinking all day every day, and the course was a disaster as a result, even though I worked hard and even gave some good classes. I still have some video footage of myself teaching and not for single second would anyone watching it believe that I was out of my head on booze.

It was a fabulous summer, and much of it I spent in a state of manic hyperactivity. Bliss it was to stride in the warm suburban evening sun to my local station with the Orb's eerie "Blue Room" throbbing over and over in my head on my way to yet another long night of drinking and socialising to the point of ecstatic insensibility. I could have passed out on any one of these wild nights and awoken again in Hell, but that didn't concern me.

The romantic decadence associated with the eighties was no longer even remotely current, and there was a new spirit as I saw it, a mystic techno-bohemianism which appeared to me to be everywhere in the early nineties. I wanted to visit as many clubs and venues as I could where it was being celebrated, but as things turned out I only ever went to one, Cyber Seed in Covent Garden, which was poorly attended and only lasted

a short time. However, had I not become a Christian, wild horses couldn't have prevented me from further exploration.

Later on in this final beautiful lethal summer of intoxication, soon after appearing as Stefano in "The Tempest" at the Conway Hall in Red Lion Square, I set out on *yet another PGCE course*, this time at the University of Greenwich in south east London. Bearing the suffix fe for Further Education its purpose was to train myself and my fellow students to teach pupils in sixth form colleges and other further education establishments. On top of this, there were the gigs with Simon, the novelty telegrams, and who knows what else, and I loved every second of a frenetic lifestyle which the following piece â almost certainly drafted on 8 October 1992, or perhaps a year earlier - serves to evoke it at its apex...and there's a twilight mood to it, with the birthday boy performing his Dionysian solo dance in defiance of the wholesale ruin of mind, body and soul he's so obviously invoking.

Lone Birthday Boy Dancing

Yesterday for my birthday,
I started off
with a bottle of wine...
I took the train
into town...
I had half a bitter
at the Cafe de Piaf
in Waterloo...
I went to work
for a couple of hours or so;
I had a pint after work;
I went for an audition;
after the audition,
I had another pint
and a half;
I had another half,
before meeting my mates,
for my b'day celebrations;
we had a pint together;
we went into
the night club,
where we had champagne
(I had three glasses);
I had a further
glass of vino,
by which time,
I was so gone
that I drew an audience
of about thirty
by performing a solo
dancing spot
in the middle
of the disco floor...
We all piled off to the pub
after that,
where I had another drink
(I can't remember

what it was)...
I then made my way home,
took the bus from Surbiton,
but ended up
in the wilds of Surrey;
I took another bus home,
and watched some telly
and had something to eat
before crashing out...
I really, really enjoyed
the eve, but today,
I've been walking around
like a zomb;
I've had only one drink today,
an early morning
restorative effort;
I spent the day working,
then I went to a bookshop,
where, like a monk,
I go for a day's
drying out session...
Drying out is really awful;
you jump at every shadow;
you feel dizzy,
you notice everything;
very often,
I don't follow throughâ¦

This is the alternative roman a clef version, so some names have been changed. Actually posted on 24 july 2010.

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