

Matthew Brannon

LAURENCE HARVEY

As the literary form of the new bourgeoisie, the biography is a sign of escape, or, to be more precise, of evasion. In order not to expose themselves through insights that question the very existence of the bourgeoisie, writers of biographies remain, as if up against a wall, at the threshold to which they have been pushed by world events.

- SIGFRIED KRACAUER, The Biography as an Art Form of the New Bourgeoisie, 1930
in The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays, Oxford University Press, 2002

Call yourself an actor? You're not even a bad actor. You can't act at all, you fucking stupid hopeless sniveling little cunt-faced cunt fucking shit-faced arse-hole...

- LAURENCE OLIVIER to Laurence Havery from Robert Stephen's
Knight Errant: Memoirs of a Vagabond Actor, Hodder and Stoughton, 1995

In show business, it's folly to talk about what the future holds. Things change so fast. Today's project so easily becomes tomorrow's disappointment... The world of the film star is an obstacle race against time. The pitfalls and wrong turnings you can make are devastating. Often I fear for the sanity of some of my friends... The dice are loaded against you. There's so much bitchery around, you really have to fight hard to survive. Everybody is against you... you have to fight for... success, sell your soul for it even. And when one finally achieved success, it was resented. Not by the great stars like Frank Sinatra, but by the little, frustrated people. They're the ones to look out for, because brother, they're gunning for you.

- LAURENCE HARVEY from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, The Turbulent Life of Laurence Harvey, Scarecrow Press, 2003

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MATTHEW BRANNON

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POCKET EDITION!

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LAURENCE
HARVEY

MATTHEW BRANNON

AN IRRESPONSIBLE BIOGRAPHY OF
THE ACTOR

LAURENCE
HARVEY

MOTION PICTURES,
WHITE WINE, OLDER WOMEN
& LONG THIN CIGARETTES



LAURENCE HARVEY

BORN:

Zvi Mosheh Skikne, October 1, 1928
in Joniškis, Lithuania.

DIED:

November 25, 1973 (aged 45),
in London, England.

PREFACE

Between the actor and the analyst, whatever the distance or differences may be, the boundary therefore appears uncertain. Always permeable.

- Jacques Derrida, Passions: An Oblique Offering, Stanford U. Press, 1995

There is an intro. There is an epilogue. There are chapters with themes. There are a lot of quotes and references. Occasionally there are first-person accounts of various episodes. Then there are large quotes lifted from previous biographies placed throughout. Only thing it's missing are images.

I keep note of what does and what doesn't go into my autobiography. When it's finished, everything I've done is going to make sense. It will bring together my harshest critics and my most adoring fans. I've always thought an autobiography is as close as we can come to looking back from the grave. It's always upset me that I won't be able to attend my own funeral. I'd love to orchestrate the whole thing. Design my tombstone, select the music, the readings. The cadence of tears and laughter. So this will have to do. But it's a frustrating attempt. Because I want to be reading what you wrote. And I want what you wrote to be what I wanted you to. So this will have to do. I'll never get over myself. I'm going to leave a few things out. Not because I'm ashamed, but because I'm not sure I could do them justice. They might upset you. There's a lot you don't need to know. And I don't want it to be much longer than four hundred pages.

And when you get to the last page. I'm going to have a list of thank yous. Except I'm going to put everyone as initials only. So if you're one of them you'll know I wrote this just for you.

Harry talks constantly. Harry acts constantly. From fourteen years old till his death he is almost nonstop involved in either a theatrical or film production. There is no person behind the characters. His person is these characters. Harry puts out all day but Harry puts very little in. Literally. Harry's world is beyond his control. But what goes in Harry's mouth is in his control. And what passes his lips is very little. Even then he'll spit it out. Into his napkin. He does this in restaurants. And say it gets pushed to the back of his throat and he actually swallows it. He's known to excuse himself go the restroom and stick a finger to the back of his throat. Bring it all back up again. He can't stand to have that sewage in his very center. It makes him anxious. And say it's too late, it's already through his stomach. Then he'll have to rush it out the other end. The second half of his life he takes laxatives almost daily. He learns to spend a lot of his time in the bathroom. This is the only place he's truly alone. The only time that's his. All his Hollywood houses have phones in bathrooms. The word "shit" and "asshole" litter his daily conversation. To counter this dirtiness there's his notorious cleanliness. Harry cleans his bedroom, his apartment, his car, his house, his clothes constantly. They said you could eat off his mother's floor and you could say the same for his. From his poor early days to his later riches he keeps it clean. Laurence Harvey is anal. And his anus is important to him. And he will die from it.

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1.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

OWNING IT/EARNING IT.

He tells everyone he was born with the name Larusha Mischa Skikne. It's his choice. But on October 1, 1928, his first day of life out of the womb, he's Zvi Mosheh Skikne. In Yiddish it's Hirsh. Or, more familiarly, Hirshkeh. Life for the Jewish population in Lithuania is brutal, insecure, and dangerous. Hirshkeh is too young to understand, but it becomes part of him. This need to pass as something else. To not be yourself. To have a private pride. His father moves alone to South Africa in 1930. To find them a better life. Hirsh is two and left with a neurotic, suspicious mother. She's hysterical half the time. But she's obsessed with cleanliness. She talks ill of her neighbors. If you're criticized, you learn to criticize. He becomes vicious early. But he's not poor in relation to his neighbors and he goes to a good school. He doesn't do well. He gets into trouble. He spends a lot of time by himself. Day dreams and pretends he's not alone. The housemaid takes him to her friends. He does dances for her. They laugh and make him take his pants down so they can look at his circumcised penis. They stroke it. And he likes the attention.

At five, in 1934, the family moves to South Africa to join his father. Hirskeh has no memory of the man. On the way, on the train through Germany, Nazi soldiers board the train. Their papers are in order. He's too young to understand. His older brothers will tell him later of this precarious moment. How they just made it out. How they had to stay on the train and remain silent. Not long after the borders shut. Awful things happen to those left behind. The worst. In South Africa it's but news. It's a black cloud over one's shoulder. Something they can never forget.

His brothers attend Hashomer Hatzair, the Zionist Socialist camp. They plan to move to Palestine one day. Hirshkeh is forced to attend. One night in drag he appears doing a Carmen Miranda impersonation. The twelve-year-old boys around the campfire, laugh and applaud. An entertainer is born.

At fourteen he joins the dramatic society at school. At fourteen he begins to ask the prefects [chaperones of the dance] to dance. At fourteen he is already himself. He goes to the movie houses as often as he can. He wants to be Ronald Colman. He wants to be Rex Harrison or George Sanders. To be a British aristocrat separates one from all the miserableness he imagines. He hates his life in this desperate town. He tells his brother, "I'm going to kill myself one of these days. I feel so empty inside. Like an empty peanut shell. Life has no meaning for me."

Then the war is happening. Now the real horror is happening. Hirshkeh runs away. He enlists under the name Harry Hopkins. His mother catches him and brings him home. He'll have to stay for the time being. But he longs to be away from his mother.

On the other side of town are the bohemians. Who know things. About art and theatre. And they have sex with him. Men and women. He likes the attention. He picks up some habits. Learns to cut people down. Introduced to wit, flamboyance, and sarcasm. He's cutting school. He's getting

an education. He now knows what he wants. He knows who he wants to be with. He gets cast in his first play. It's not very good. It's called *The Man Who Ate the Popomack*. His only line, which he quoted all his life, "You can go to bed with a woman, you enjoy her, but as you lie in bed beside her, you say to yourself, 'Is that all?'"

Now at sixteen and looking around eighteen, Harry begs his parents to let him join the army. He lies about his age on the application and is immediately put in the South African Army's Entertainment Unit. It's 1944, the ugly violent conclusion to the war. But young Harvey's job is to entertain in Northern Africa. He's competitive and talentless. But they appreciate his manic jitterbug act. He makes no friends but plenty of enemies. He doesn't fit in. He's sent to an overworked army psychiatrist for his effeminate oddities. When asked why he showed no interest in women, he tells them "because they were too busy thinking and talking about themselves to hold an interesting conversation." In Cairo he's promoted to corporal. After an argument with another officer he's said to have yelled, "Go dip your head into the shit hole in the latrine." Harry is scatological.

He visits his brother in Galilee in the northern hills of what was then part of British Mandatory Palestine. His brother makes a festive dinner of boiled chicken, vegetables and stewed fruit. After dinner he entertains the families with impersonations of Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito. They love it. Harry leaves and vows to return to Palestine if and when

the British Mandate ends and an Arab invasion occurs. He mentions this over and over.

The war ends. He's discharged in Cairo. He applies for a grant for ex-servicemen to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. He fights hard. And gets a grant of £717.20. The first South African to receive the grant. He arrives in bombed-out blackened London wearing his army uniform and duffel coat that he had dyed dark blue. He finds a cheap apartment in Chelsea. He spends his money first on soap, a washcloth, a towel, a bucket, a broom & a scrubbing brush. He spends his first day scrubbing and disinfecting every surface in this small room. He makes this small space his own. He's in control. He lives on day-old buns that sell for half price.

It's October 1946 and he's called Harry Skikne when he begins his studies at RADA. He plays minor parts in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance*. He's immediately disliked by his acting peers, but he seems not to notice. He befriends local young homosexuals and takes up a room with one. They decorate their apartment in red and gold velvet with gilt trimmings. No one can say he doesn't work hard. He loses the cheap American accent of which he was so proud. He learns that actors must speak a sort of "BBC King's English." "The ideal was the dulcet charm of Laurence Olivier's voice, the crystal clarity of Ralph Richardson's, the fluid tones of John Gielgud's..." His ability to imitate is ferocious.

During *A Woman of No Importance*, he's noticed by one of Britain's top theatrical agents, a Gordon Harbord. Initially he assumed Harry to be some precocious American. Soon after, Boris (Harry's Father) signs permission to manage his son's career to Mr. Harbord. First order of business was to change his name. He'd already had a few. Sometime during school he'd changed his middle name from Mosheh to Morris and then just the letter M. Harry has no reluctance to shed his past like a soiled garment. His name should be of his own choosing and it should sound like a name someone successful would have. Harry becomes Larry. Harold becomes Laurence. Larry moves from apartment to apartment claiming to have lived in sixteen different locations in Chelsea. He then moves to Shepherd's Market near Mayfair. Shepherd's Market is the red-light district at that time. He claims to have lived above a fish market and beneath a whore. David Shipman, in his book, *The Great Movie Stars*, claims Laurence was a male prostitute. Whatever the case he was ambitious. And in an interview in *Queen* in 1962 he says, "Stardom or wealth, however gained, was my goal."

His good looks, ambition, and aggressiveness draw attention. A talent scout for Warner Bros., after seeing the end of *A Winter's Tale*, invites him to audition. Larry decides a decent meal for once would be just the preparation he needs. He's wrong. He's sweating. There's a foul smell coming from his pores. It's wrong and he doesn't like this chewed mass of the then, popular whale steak drenched in a thick sauce inside him. He can't be himself. He goes to the bathroom and sticks

his fingers down his throat. He splashes cold water on his face. He doesn't look or feel good. But his acting gets him through. He and they know it's the camera that really likes his face. He's made for film. He lands a seven-year contract at \$100 a week. He throws up again. Everything is going so well.

He buys a suit with all the money he has. Grey with wide lapels and narrow-beyond-belief trousers. He can picture it. He tortures his tailor. At the time, there were actually rations on material. He somehow pulls together not only the money but also the necessary coupons. He was participating in his definition of success. "It's natural to owe one's tailor," "I learned early in life that it was much better to have one good thing than a lot of cheap things. And that is the way I have tried to live." "I guess you might say I'm madly Savile Row."

He moves into his own apartment. Inside there's a small bed/sitting room with green carpet, his army cot, and a closet. A toilet is tucked in the corner; he paints the seat pink. A small kitchenette with a two-plated gas stove. And a coin-operated gas heater for a small bathtub. He's spending more than he has, but living as he should.

He leaves RADA. How could he not? Overcrowded classes. Nothing to learn. But he doesn't go to Hollywood either. He stalls his American entrance. Despite the criticism and lack of support from the theatre world, time and time again Laurence pursues his theatrical education. He joins André Van Gysegem's Manchester Intimate Theatre Group. He plays

parts in *The Seagull*, *Amphitryon 38*, *The Kirby Fortune*, *The Beau's Strategem*, and *The Circle*. He says, "These are all works of the highest intellectual quality." He's arrogant. But he oscillates wildly between elation and misery. He's neurotic. He needs constant praise as well as constant direction. He's alternately open to suggestion and then pig headed. Over and over his fellow actors show their dislike for him. But directors cannot ignore the audience's love for him. This dynamic will repeat throughout his life.

His choice to postpone joining Hollywood causes a lapse in his Warner Bros. contract. He returns to London dejected and broke. Harry decides death is the only solution. Of the many ways to exit life Harry chooses to stick his head in the oven and turn on the gas, a popular choice at the time. However the stove's inside is too dirty and he can't bear the idea of putting his head in it so he spends the afternoon cleaning the apartment and his stove in preparation. The tidiness of it all must have been cathartic because when he finished he no longer wanted to die. He wanted to act.

He obtained a seven-year contract with the Rank Organization at a salary of £20 per week. It meant B-films. "I've sold out!" he writes his brother in Palestine. But first his name must change. Larry will be Laurence. He's only too eager to lose his name Skikne, it revealed too much. The producers of his next film suggest "Bang Cock" or "Jock Strap." He laughs it off. On the top deck of a London bus when they stop in front of Harvey Nichols he decides. Laurence Harvey.

His first film is *House of Darkness*. On screen appears "Introducing *Lawrence Harvey*." He plays a villain. It's a cheap Victorian melodrama.

As an alien in England he can't be paid. The only solution is to return to South Africa and have his father become naturalized as a South African citizen which would then turn underage Larry into a South African citizen and hence a member of the British Commonwealth. He was never able to be himself. And he's unsure who that is.

His clingy, hysterical mother causes him panic. But he can't help absorb her treatment of him as a "star" She cooks a kosher feast and invites all her friends over. He feels like a hostage in her home. Larry spends a lot of time in the bathroom, claiming, "It's the only decent room in the house." Here with the clean white porcelain sink, toilet, and bath, here with the scalding hot sterilizing water he can relax. Free from the disgust.

He leaves as soon as he can. "South Africa has degenerated to an inexplicable degree of laziness, exploitation, and has now even lost any foundation of culture and art it might have had."

I'm late. I'm driving fast. I'm playing Romeo.
I really am. At the Stratford theatre. I'm thinking of my
lines. How my Romeo will be received. How they're going
to be shocked and then convinced. They're going to love it.
I was meant for this. I'm driving fast. And you're riding a

bike. You're some old retired Italian police officer. You peddle slowly, weaving as you ride. I don't see you until the hood of my Jaguar breaks your spine. As I'm pressing the brakes your nerves are sending signals to your brain for emergency shutdown. You don't even have the luxury to think what it all meant. What all those years amounted to. You're dead. And my car is now ruined. I spend an hour dealing with the police. There's a chance you might live—they don't say. I get another car. I drive fast. I'm remembering my lines. I'm playing Romeo. I really am. After the show they tell me you're dead. Did I do that? Did I kill someone? No one writes about it. No one says a thing.

2.

THE TWO BEST FILMS
I EVER MADE.
STILL NOT ENOUGH.

One is essentially living a lie. The act of familiarity is easily acquired. Especially in Hollywood. Most familiarity is a kind of deception, anyway.

- Laurence Harvey, from Paulene Stone's One Tear Is Enough, Joseph, 1975

I'm so keen on perfection. Never am I satisfied with what I do. I must do better all the time... I wanted to do so well... But mind you, I've learnt my job before the cameras. Fourteen British films have shown me the way. I'd call it my film repertory. It was very useful. But I couldn't go on trying to lend perfection to imperfect parts, could I?... Truth is, I've discovered as I've gone on that I just don't know anything. Nothing at all. One dies without reaching the true heights in drama.

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

Sorry, but more than one, it is always necessary to be more than one in order to speak, several voices are necessary for that...

- Jacques Derrida, Sauf Le Nom (Post-Scriptum), Stanford U. Press, 1995

Laurence works almost nonstop. The fight is both real and imagined. External and internal. His success grossly exaggerated and sadly under appreciated. His perspective remains that of an outsider denied his dreams. He enters *their* world. Begrudgingly. On their terms. But as he learned when young, mimicry is his greatest weapon. With it he learns where to go, what to eat, how to eat, what to wear, how to wear, what to like and most important what not to like. No one ever sees him without a cigarette in an ivory holder.

His brother Robert arrives in London along with his wife, Anne. His brother is political, poor and struggling. An article he wrote on segregation in South Africa has been published in Jean-Paul Satre's journal *Les Temps Modernes*. The South Africans send Scotland Yard a letter labeling him an "*inflammatory and dangerous revolutionary*." Robert and Anne visit Larry at his new apartment. Ignoring his brother's concerns, Larry makes the mistake of taking him to a few industry dinners where everyone is shocked at the world he travels in.

They're such disgusting people. I just wanted you to see what awful people I've got to deal with. They're a true reflection of the society we live in. A society doomed for destruction. The most ruthless, crude and base and untrustworthy moguls have combined their weight to crush us and make all the decisions in our present world. It's absolutely disgusting. They buy everything and everyone, and we're forced to compromise and bow down to their shitty ideas. They've got the money, that's why, those ruthless, crude and base moguls.

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

Larry is oblivious to his brother's political and financial woes and only complains of his own slow career progress. He is willing to do the work but impatient with the pace. But soon enough American films begin to be produced in England. His roles grow. His fans increase. But so do his critics. By the time of *Cairo Road* in 1950, despite being critically panned, he finds himself surrounded by fans begging for his autograph. This dynamic remains throughout his career.

"So it seems I've made some enemies among the film critics. I can't think why. What are they scared of? I suppose I terrify the shit out of them. They'll respect genius—if they haven't succeeded in dragging it down into the mud! But they prefer the second rate. They can't stand anyone with talent. The minute they see someone with talent they rush to cut him down. Hell, I'm just a commercial commodity." He threatens to leave Rank Organization. They renew his contract at £35 a week.

Now he dines at the Caprice. He lunches on lobster and champagne at Claridge's. He goes to the Savoy. He makes friends with the maître d' and the chefs. He gets the best tables. Restaurants play a key role in his personal description of success. In Paris he learns how to order wine from Rudolph, the head barman at the Georges V hotel. He wears an overcoat with a bright red Chinese silk lining for shock value.

His relationship to film is ambivalent. He believes in the light, the timing, the costumes, the makeup, the endless rehearsals,

the endurance of it all. He believes and repeatedly insists that he is an artist of the highest order. His sham persona is offset by his honest desire.

Nineteen fifty-nine's *Room at the Top* will forever stand as Laurence Harvey's greatest film and the one that made people take him seriously (if only temporarily). It is considered the first *film* of the British New Wave—which is considered to have begun in 1956 with the play version of *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne. At the time it was shocking beyond compare. No one in England had seen sex portrayed and dealt with as openly and honestly. No one had addressed the class system and mocked the establishment as such. As well, it was the first British film to hire actors with regional or working-class accents who'd previously been relegated roles as servants, country policemen, and quaint village characters. The young audiences could relate and they loved it. And there was no turning back.

The story concerns Joe Lampton, a cynical social climber, who sees a way out of his constraining lower-middle-class status by seducing the impressionable young daughter of a wealthy local industrialist. He pursues her despite the advice of all around him, only finding sympathy for his efforts from an older married French actress. Soon enough his determination is derailed when he falls in love with the French actress. They spend days running away from her husband, making love and making plans for her to get a divorce. But just as his heart has decided to remain with his French mistress, he's informed

he's gotten the wealthy daughter pregnant and is forced to marry into the wool manufacturer's family. At the moment he submits to the fate he originally sought, he learns his French lover has killed herself.

The film is based on the best selling novel of the same name by John Braine. John remains on board as a consultant during filming. It was produced by Romulus Films and directed by Jack Clayton. Clayton brings a young Heather Sears to the role of the young girl Joe seduces. Heather was known to be friends with Picasso and Camus. James Woolf brings veteran actress Simone Signoret for the role of the suicide-driven actress. Simone was a French actress of some stature who was then suffering from McCarthy-driven black listing after her recent trips to Russia. For the role of Joe, Laurence wasn't their first choice but he fought hard and they took a chance.

People said that the only reason Laurence Harvey was so good in the film was because he *was* Joe Lampton, a poor working class kid who used a series of marriages to move up in the world. Although this analysis is not inaccurate, it denies Laurence credit for his acting ability. And it exaggerates his motivations. *Room at the Top* not only obtains Laurence a 1959 Academy Award nomination for best actor but also condemns him to the caricature of a "ruthless and self-seeking outsider." Much of the film depicts Joe Lampton ignoring and transgressing class boundaries, and the same fate was to follow Laurence throughout his own life.

It wasn't important that Joe Lampton was honest about sex, what was important was that Joe was honest about the whole business of class. Most ambitious working-class boys want to get the hell out of the working class. That was the simple truth that had never been stated before. The English working classes are the least politically minded in the world; they always have been. Give the English working class half a chance and he becomes a bourgeois.'

- John Braine, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's *The Prince*, Frewin, 1975

After *Room at the Top*, offers will come in at a steady stream.

The next film to enhance Harvey's reputation is 1962's *The Manchurian Candidate*. Between the two films Harvey will make nine other unfortunate films, aside from meeting life-long friend Elizabeth Taylor in *Butterfield 8* and working with John Wayne in *The Alamo*. They are: *Espresso Bongo* (1959), *The Alamo* (1960), *Butterfield 8* (1960), Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke* (1960), *Two Loves* (also known as *The Spinster*) (1961), *The Long and the Short and the Tall* (also known as *Jungle Fighters*) (1961), *A Girl Named Tamiko* (1962), *A Walk on the Wild Side* (1962), and *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* (1962). His workload is spiraling out of control and he had no distance from any of it. He says yes to things he shouldn't.

When he is asked what he earned from the constant production pace, he replies, "A nervous stomach. Hangovers. Headaches. And yet, when you put all these sorts of horrendous emotions together it adds up to something quite wonderful. I like more than anything to take a part—any character—and if

I have succeeded in giving any sort of additional qualities, if I have created a living flesh-and-blood character out of nothing—then I feel I’ve succeeded as an actor.”

With *The Manchurian Candidate*, once again Laurence is taken seriously. After all his recent misfires he has a real opportunity to make a respectable film, this time playing against Frank Sinatra for a lump sum of \$250,000.

The film is based on Richard Condon’s controversial and best-selling novel. In it a G.I. is brainwashed by the Chinese to kill the president of the United States in an effort to install a communist puppet. Sinatra owned the rights to the film and had asked John Frankenheimer (of *The Birdman of Alcatraz* fame) to produce and direct it. Sinatra literally got John F. Kennedy to call the studio heads and tell them he had no objections to the film being made; the studios are paranoid that it would be taken the wrong way.

The most iconic scene of Harvey’s career is shot one cold February morning in Central Park. The brainwashed Sergeant Shaw walks fully dressed and without hesitation off the edge of the pier at the Boat House into the freezing and icy lake. Sinatra, who’d had his doubts about Harvey because he was known to be friends with John Wayne—Sinatra hated Wayne—felt his hesitation turn to admiration as Harvey effortlessly played his part without complaint. (Although, shortly after, Sinatra told the press Harvey’s family had communist associations and that there was more than meets the eye to Harvey’s habit of kissing other men.)

The film’s success once again serves to elevate his potential and buttresses his insatiable ego. Larry doesn’t have time to catch his breath. His recent divorce from Margaret Leighton allows him to travel the world endlessly. He barely pauses between films and is rarely at home or at rest. “Larry demands at least a half hour between films,” one actor joked. He once stated that he was looking into buying his own private plane. “Scheduled airplanes seldom leave at the moment I want to leave, or arrive at the time I have to arrive. Oft times I have to rush out of the studio without eating, and with my makeup still on, to catch a plane for Germany or some place.” “I’m only happy when I’m working. (The telephone is) a thrilling instrument. You can pick up the old blower and call Tokyo. Or get a divorce on it.” For the next two years Harvey once more falls into a string of miscast, misdirected, bloated, confusing but ambitious roles before returning as the classic rake his public image demands in John Schlesinger’s 1965 award-winning *Darling*. The films between include: *The Running Man* (1963); *The Ceremony* (1963), his directorial debut; *Of Human Bondage* (1964), a notorious nightmare production; and *The Outrage* (1964).

Repeating his audience’s projections from *Room at the Top*, people see parallels between his character in *Darling*, Miles Brand, and his public self. In this case he plays a wealthy cad who uses his allure to seduce, sexually corrupt, and drive characters to divorce, ruin, and near suicide. He plays against Julie Christie (who’ll win the Oscar for best actress.)

And, more amusingly, he stars opposite Dirk Bogard, who in real life was like a tasteful and completely British mirror to Harvey's vagabond Hollywood persona. Both men's sexual ambiguity and charm clouded everything they did. However Bogard's almost universal critical acclaim and consideration is the opposite of Harvey's suspicion and constant critical abuse. *Darling* would prove no exception to this attitude. "Harvey performed like a cut-price Kirk Douglas."

As expected, the film was very much condemned in England where it received an X rating and therefore couldn't be shown on Sundays. Everyone was nervous hearing of its release. At its center the film's heroine beds her homosexual photographer's boyfriend, sets out on a series of casual affairs, has an abortion, and attends a Parisian orgy only in the end to find security by marrying a boring Italian count with seven children. Larry believed in the film so much he offered to act without any money up front. As Laurence was considered the film's only true transatlantic star they quickly put him under contract. Laurence buys himself a £6,000 Maserati to supplement his London Rolls Royce.

Darling is followed in quick succession by the *Room at the Top* sequel, *Life at the Top*. The film received unfavorable reviews in contrast to the preceding Braine film but, retrospectively, it is a solid film of unique content that was an unfortunate victim of overly quick opinions. More unfortunate, Laurence himself was too self-centered and generally intoxicated to be paying attention to pause and evaluate his next move.

It was weird, but I saw no change in Larry Harvey, no change at all. He was still talking of film projects, but they were pretty appalling projects because Larry had no taste in films. He was perfectly amiable, perfectly charming; he was never anything else. But he still wore the mask.

I think there was a human being somewhere in there, but the thing about Larry was that he belonged really to the past. He was a "thirties" star, much what you'd expect a traditional film star to be.

He never gave me the impression that he was using people or offending people. He just didn't give a damn. Maybe this is one of the occupational diseases common to all actors. Who knows, perhaps artists in the end become devoured by their art, even possessed by it? They may exploit others, but in the deeper sense they don't mean to. To be fair, to get anywhere on the stage or in films or television you've got to be ruthless to some extent. You've got to consider your own advantage. I don't mean you must be a thorough going swine, but as in politics nice guys don't win acting.

- John Braine, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's *The Prince*, Frewin, 1975

Did I do some shit films? Of course. One has to if one wants to get anywhere in life. And some of those I tried to make something more than they were. But often a director or the studio would chop a film so much that my character didn't make sense at all. I can't be responsible for ALL of it. But listen, for all the horrible, terrible things you could say about me, I made a few excellent films that cannot be denied. I made over forty fucking feature-length films. I starred in at least as many theatrical productions and even directed two films myself. So many films not given a chance. So many films

ruined by a bad script, a bad co-star, an absent director. But that's how it is. A life's work abbreviated to but a handful of performances. And all the work you get stems from those. The studios are only trying to repeat earlier successes. But all the while you understand that when you made that said original film, the reason it was so good was because it was original. So therefore how is trying to repeat anything going to do anything but dilute what you've done before? The best is never to have done anything truly great at all. Because then, then you have it still as a possibility. Then you have a real chance. It's easy to make something better than ever if you've never really done anything. The trouble starts once you've had success. It's over. And your life is that of a dog chasing its own tail. What did they want from me? What did I want from me? It was all so simple, but I made it needlessly complex. I couldn't enjoy anything. I was sick with the cancer of self-consciousness. I could've been Nietzsche's dancer. The one above it all, on tip toes on the toupees of the fat industry bastards. But I ate the poison. I was addicted to the applause. And what can I say now? A cliché at its most dull. Nothing is more embarrassing than effort. No one is more unlovable than those that ask for it. I have nothing to warn you of. Only to remind you how awful it all is. How ugly something like success can be. How mechanical the arts are. But I made a few good films, Room at the Top in '59 (for which I should've won an oscar), The Manchurian Candidate in '62 (for which I really should've won an oscar) and I'd say Darling in '65 (for which I don't even need an award because I know it was that good.)

3.

ON EATING VERY LITTLE,
HAVING BAD TABLE
MANNERS, SCATOLOGICAL
HUMOR AND SPENDING
VAST AMOUNTS OF TIME
ON THE TOILET.

MY CONSTANT COMPANION:
WHITE WINE.

Laurence Harvey's eating disorder is well documented. In his one scene in 1969's *The Magic Christian*, Harvey does a strip tease. The fact that Harvey willingly submits to this scene demonstrates his body dysmorphia, so frail is his carriage. Larry's odd eating habits and fear of weight gain started at a young age. It's hard to pin down when his health begins to deteriorate and whether his extreme eating habits caused colon cancer or the other way around. But he lived much of his life enduring horrible intestinal pain and many of his homemade strategies did more harm than good. He is known to have spent a great deal of time on the toilet and almost fetishized the device.

With great and varied skills we create a delusion that enables us to coexist serenely with the most monstrous things, simply because we recognize these frozen grimaces of the universe as a table or a chair, a shout or an outstretched arm, a speed or a roast chicken.

- Robert Musil, from *The Man Without Qualities*, Knopf, Inc. 1995

It's his fifth glass of white. This is after rehearsal, at night in a foreign town in a restaurant. God knows how much wine he's had throughout the day. Laurence orders chicken. Using his knife he scrapes all the sides and sauce off. He then cuts the meat off the bones. Sets that aside. He's talking non-stop about what acting means to him. What the difference is between the stage and the screen. His hair perfect, his accent not so. He picks up the chicken with his thin long manicured fingers and knaws on the bones. His dinner companion, a young naive star, his Juliet, whose parents are worried for her, [Susan Shentall] is upset. It's her first time alone with the older actor. Why is this matinee idol so rude? How can someone so handsome be so rude? His scatological language is unrepeatable. She can't help it and says something about his behavior. Says something about how you can't act like this in public. He stops talking and takes his time to reply. After washing down a mouthful of gristle, cartilage, and fat with a half glass of chardonnay he looks at her and says "nonsense" and then continues on with his autopsy of the industry.

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When people come over to Laurence's, he knows how to entertain. At a time of strict food rationing after the war in London Larry serves smoked salmon from Scotland, Beluga caviar with vodka, piles of the finest roast beef, champagne and red wine for the meat. For desert, a chocolate crême with French cognac and then Scotch whiskey with the coffee.

But Larry rarely ate at home. He dined almost exclusively in restaurants, a habit he acquired almost before he had the means to do so. Larry recognized the power of being seen. Fine dining said much about a person. It was extremely important to him that he familiarized himself with haute cuisine. Second perhaps only to his accent, his choice of restaurants, food, and wine masked his humble Lithuanian beginnings. It had nothing to do with pleasure in the palate. Swallowing something meant nothing. Knowledge was all the nourishment you needed.

It begins in London when Hermione Baddeley is his co-star in the theatre. They became regulars at the fashionable Caprice, a place where many celebrities dined. Everything regarding fame can be done in reverse. You needn't become famous to dine in such dazzling atmosphere. You only need dine in such dazzling atmosphere and be perceived as famous. The difference is paper thin.

You learn what to order. How to pronounce it. You learn what goes with what and what doesn't. Most important is that you learn what someone who doesn't *know* would order and what someone who does *know* would. Then you have to up the ante and order *not* what someone who does know *would* order but order what they *wouldn't*, what they should if they *actually* had taste. And of course you don't eat it. The wine is enough. And she (Hermione) can't be overweight. You have to show her how to not be fat. Because she obviously can't do it herself.

Larry was the only person I've ever known who dared send back the wine in a restaurant. When I told him how embarrassed I was, he'd just say, "You mustn't be. You see, my love, you must impress them from the start. And there's no point in tipping waiters when you are leaving a restaurant. The time to tip is when you arrive. Then you're assured of absolutely marvelous service."

- Hermione Baddeley, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

Aware that actors look ten pounds heavier on the cinema screen than they actually are, he and Hermione began dieting rigorously, eating mainly fish and salads and drinking white wine. His other tried-and-true strategy for thinness would remain a lifelong habit of eating burnt toast and burnt potato skins. That restaurants indulge his requests is testimony to his charm. His narcissism was fed on the post-war cult of the body beautiful, which had spawned picture magazines filled with male torsos. When his agent, Gordon Harbord, looked for publicity photographs, Harvey produced a set of near-nude studies of himself. Harbord is so shocked that his face turns red and he has a hard time speaking.

You might call it a broadening of the mind as opposed to the broadening of the behind. I like that. The broadening of the mind as opposed to the broadening of the behind. That's what we mean when we talk about complacency. It's terrible to think that some people are just sitting around gathering fatty tissue.

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

Lunch at the Caprice on a Saturday with James Woolf. He plays with his Dover Sole, cutting it up and pushing it around his plate. Drinks his Pouilly-Fuissé, smokes Dunhills through a holder and plays with his asparagus dressed in the sauce he helped the Caprice create: *Sauce à la Harvey*.

Later stationed in Dublin with nowhere to go during the endlessly troublesome filming of *Of Human Bondage*, Larry ingratiated himself with the local restaurant The Soup Bowl. Actually, it is more like Larry forces his friendship upon the reluctant owners. Trapped in the rainy city—"Dublin is dullsville at night,"—and hating Kim Novak (his co-star), The Soup Bowl becomes his personal theatre. Walking from table to table, barging into the kitchen, demanding bottles to be sent here and there and talking over everyone's head. The owners accept this splurge of business reluctantly and are soon forced to stock unusual amounts of the best meat and fish and import cases of fine wine and champagne. Laurence lives on their credit. He offers to back the restaurant but is refused. The owners fear his drunken presence. Sometimes diners asked, "Who is that man? His language is awful." Kathy Powrie would whisper to Harvey, "Pack it in!" He would turn to her and ask innocently, "Me? What have I done?"

At The Soup Bowl I'm known to order steak with cauliflower au gratin, with perhaps a little Parmesan cheese and maybe some Mornay sauce. I'd never swallow the damn thing, just cut it a bit and even suck the juice from the meat occasionally. I don't swallow though. I spit the meat into my napkin. I know what happens when you eat like that.

Afternoons during filming across town at the Shelbourne, Joan Cohn, his second wife, would order two club sandwiches and a double Tio Pepe for him in hopes he would eat something. He'd touch nothing.

He never did what the doctors told him. He wouldn't eat meat or drink milk. He had what I call Fat's Disease. He was terrified of getting fat. And when he did eat he'd bring it up afterwards. That's why I liked to go to Maxim's with him; at least he couldn't do it there. He began by taking one laxative tablet at each meal, but by the time we were divorced he was taking three or four at a time, like aspirin.

- Joan Cohn, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

Sydney Guilaroff, hairstylist of choice for MGM, said he saw Laurence put a finger down his throat in the men's room.

In Geneva he is hospitalized for pancreatitis, an inflammation of a digestive gland. He ignores their warnings.

By the end of his life, Laurence takes a laxative after every meal. While acting in *Camelot*, between matinees and evening performances, his chauffeur would bring him two newly laid eggs and fresh rye bread for tea. Harry would give away the bread.

I do this all the time—read scripts on the toilet. I enjoy it. As all the foul acidic bile and awful stool presses out of my abused anus I can counter the disgust by pouring fantasies of cleansing, restoring, life forever giving praise into my mind. And everything that's horrible gets wiped away. I become clean. I remove what's holding me back, what's dragging me to my death. Everything I've had to endure. And because the door is locked and no one can come in I'm assured that this is my time. My only real time to myself. I sit on my oversized black toilet with gold handle and seat. I feel the plush pink carpet under my feet over the pink and gold floor tiles. The shelves filled with scents and framed images from my time in the theatre. The antique mirrors I found and the two watercolors Jimmy gave me. I spend a lot of time in here. And if you need to reach me there's a phone. But I don't want to leave.

Larry used to go around the house cleaning up. He inherited my mother's obsession with cleanliness. He also inherited her taste for cooking, except that he couldn't eat.

- Robert Sinai, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

It is not without some astonishment, then, that we learn from psychoanalysis the transformations that sexual excitement normally undergoes, and how often it is that this zone is not without intensive stimuli. Intestinal catarrh at a very early age makes children "nervous," in the common parlance; in later neurotic illness it has a determining effect on the symptomatic expression of the neurosis, placing at its disposal the full range of intestinal disorders. Taking into account the erogenous significance of the outlet zone of the intestinal canal, which it preserves at least in a modified form, we should not scoff at the influence of hemorrhoids, to which earlier forms of medicine attached such weight in the explanation of neurotic conditions.

- Sigmund Freud, from Three Essays on Sexual Theory, Penguin Books Ltd., 2006

WHITE WINE

My head feels like a two-day-old opened oyster sitting in the sun along with the dirty dishes from a party no one's bothered to clean after. I feel the cigarette butts and ashes littering the creases of my dehydrated brain. I feel a pool of toxic urine congealing beneath my forehead and cheeks that somehow rest not on my pink satin pillows but on the loose, wet pages of a script on which I've managed to write meaningless notes all over. My tongue is but a soured bar of limp defrosted, uncooked fat, smothered meat while my teeth are each electric, brittle, frail outlets of sensitivity. I'm fully dressed except for my tie. And I can't help but laugh when I realize my fly is down and my grown man's penis is fully exposed. I hope I wasn't showing it off again, but that'd be better than if I pissed myself. I won't do that again. I recognize I'm home but I can't remember where I was, what I said, who I should add to the list of people who hate me. Who perhaps hope I should apologize but, never will. Whom I should avoid for the rest of my life. Who do I need to see today and did I really drink this whole bottle of salad dressing? And where do I need to be in the next half an hour. And then the next thing I know it's two hours later. I wake again only because the phone is screaming like some infant brat with a hollow metal pole banging against the walls of a steel trashcan. FUCK YOU AND EVERYONE YOU HAVE EVER KNOWN FOR DOING THIS TO ME RIGHT AT THIS MOMENT. But I pick it up blindly after knocking it off the bedside table onto the floor and pull my nauseous body over to say into the pink receiver, "Darling." And I'm in

luck it's Jimmy but he's furious. I swear I can feel his bitch spittle spraying through the phone. I'm obviously supposed to be somewhere. And it's "urgent," of course, but I can't even remember what character I am today and he has to tell me. I try to remember how funny or sad or angry they're paying me to be. Thank god it's not Shakespeare. That'd be too much, although from experience I know how to do it. You just really lean into your bloated old British actor bit. They love that. I say into the receiver, "But I'm already there, don't you see? Can't you see me pacing in the hallway, speaking my lines? Just tell the shit head you saw me working on a tough section. That I'm outside smoking. That it's not that I don't take it seriously, it's that I take it too seriously." I drop the phone. I never eat breakfast and they'll do my makeup on set and I have a driver so my only job is to not throw up. I take a handful of Anacin and ring for a Bloody Mary. I'm going to be fine. And, now that I think of it, I didn't say anything wrong and everyone loved me last night. I just have to get dressed.

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I understand wine to be the horizon line on which taste rests. I understand white wine to be the dieters' choice. I drink more wine than I do water. (I rarely drink water at all.) I drink wine: to say what I want to say, to attend dinners, go to premieres, listen to people I'd rather not listen to, pretend to be attracted, make myself more attractive, feel better after drinking too much the night before... to amuse myself. Because life without

wine is very very dull. And one has to put up with an awful lot if one's to reach the end. But as I age and my stature grows so does the quality of the wine I drink. I have my own wine bottled and on the bottle it says, "bottled for Laurence Harvey." I drink wine morning, afternoon, and evening and very early in the morning. I drink wine for over twenty-five years daily.

I limit my Brandy drinking. Because, you see, that's the problem-Brandy. I end up hitting people. I end up saying things. But when I'm in a bad mood sometimes it's what I need.

White wine became a subplot to Laurence's entire life. Along with his habit of smoking through a cigarette holder and his ineffable coif, it defined him. In the majority of candid photos and in the majority of recollections of friends and colleagues it appears repeatedly. It excuses and explains most of his eccentric outbursts. But as an actor his drinking both blended in and was tolerated. He surrounded himself with others who drink like he does. All his marriages but for his last involved heavy drinking. It's impossible to measure how it weighed on his mortality, but one can only imagine that as a food substitute it didn't serve his digestion well. John Wayne doesn't like wine. Pfff. Who does he think he's kidding? Mr. America. Please. He's an actor for Christ's sake. He's not a real cowboy. I'm more of a cowboy than him and Mr. Huston together. I've seen the dirt and slept under the stars more than they ever have. I bet John Wayne drinks

wine. I want John to like me. (I want everyone to like me.) Even if I hate them all. I want John to recognize me for the actor I am. I'm going to send him a few cases of vintage champagne. John Wayne doesn't like wine. Pffff.

After much debate Laurence had the wine removed from Wayne's tent. He's not going to let it go to waste.

It's my day off from Stratford-upon-Avon in 1952. I've been playing Orlando in As You Like It and I feel like I have the world in my pocket. I know the cast hates me. But I really really don't care. I'm spending this beautiful June day the way I want, doing something I always enjoy, as I know it upsets tourists. And the theatre won't dare reprimand me at this point. I'm wearing white trousers and the pale blue sweater I had Margaret buy me. I'm going to the oldest hotel in Stratford and I'm sitting outside by myself and I'm going to order champagne for breakfast and nothing else. Just sit by myself with my sunglasses and drink glass after glass. Let 'em stare.

Larry loves being in Palm Springs. Every morning he rises early (before noon) and fixes himself a bull shot of vodka, consommé, lemon juice, and Worcester sauce. He doesn't like to wear a shirt. He has a two o'clock lunch of salad and cheese with his very own white wine, followed by at least an hour in the sauna if not two. Then he'll go to his "super" toilet and make some phone calls. He likes to invite people over for a BBQ dinner. Maybe Sammy Davis, Jr., maybe Peter Lawford. He'll do the grilling, he'll say the things people will remember, but he's *not* going to eat.

4.

STAGE VERSUS SCREEN,
THE MORALITY OF ACTORS,
AND SOMETHING ABOUT
FINANCIAL SECURITY.
WHY EVERYONE HATES ME.
YOU'RE ONLY AS POPULAR
AS YOUR LAST FILM.

I cannot yield to failure. It would make far too many people happy.

- Laurence Harvey, from Paulene Stone's One Tear Is Enough, Joseph, 1975

Harry is too handsome. Harry's mannerisms are all borrowed and out of fashion. It's appreciated by some but embarrassing to others. His past is hopeless. He's from Lithuania. No one is from Lithuania. No one knows anything about Lithuania. No one knows what it was like to be a Jewish Lithuanian on the cusp of the Second World War. How very very dangerous and difficult it was. Not that Harry remembers much of it. He was six when he left. His immediate family got out. Many of his relatives didn't. He and his brothers went to a Zionist Socialist camp. His brothers move to Israel. He moves to Hollywood and London. People use his past to explain him. He uses his past to excuse himself. But he never wants to go back. Always wanting what's next to wash clean the past. To confirm his arrival and his status. His talent. To be recognized. Not to be nobody. To be loved by those who want to hate him. No one said it was easy.

I, on the other hand, have had to sacrifice and get a release from my film contract for that period and at great personal financial loss. I know I have done the right thing because I do not want to be just another film star, but a great and distinguished actor with a classical background which I can only get in the theatre, and now that I have reached a position where I am in demand in both spheres I want to maintain it on the highest possible level.

I'm going to play Romeo again, Oberon in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Troilus in Troilus and Cressida, parts that no other actor of my age has ever been asked to do before, here or in America.

- Laurence Harvey, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

For three weeks I went round like a drunken lunatic unable to decide and eventually turned down the theatre offer and the possibility of a great and distinguished future—for MONEY.

The director of the theatre told me I had ruined my career and for their part could go and sell myself and be sucked up and destroyed by the film moguls, and as far as they were concerned I was finished.

My sacrifice is a really great one and one I regret very much at heart if the truth be known. So far I have had to borrow money to exist because this theatre pays no money and cost of living here is something terrible.

- Laurence Harvey, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

REGARDING HOLLYWOOD

You always hear people sneering at the place [Hollywood]. No art, they say. Well, the only reason they don't go there is because they're not invited. True, you have this box office standardization. But take all those amazing technical facilities, those immense hangars equipped from top to bottom. Another thing I like is their general enthusiasm. They do talk in superlatives and it may seem false. But they're really enthusiastic. I'd say what the place really needs is creative vitality. So what I signed with Romulus Films for a whole batch of films that weren't so hot. It led to Romeo!"

- Laurence Harvey, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

This year, there has been nothing but controversy, filth, praise, and every other imaginable thing written about me in the Press which has unnerved and upset me very much. In spite of it, however, one manages to survive and fight it. I suppose when one really becomes a public figure of note and importance one must expect everything whether justly or unjustly written. People love me or hate me. I obviously don't foster detached emotions.

- Laurence Harvey, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

He's a kid from Lithuania and South Africa who makes his way to socializing with the millionaires who control Hollywood. And he himself knew his progress was not entirely due to his talents. It has much to do with his looks and with his unrelenting ambition. The feeling that he must

keep appearances at all times at whatever cost was very real. He could never claim not to be familiar with someone or something. Every bit of information was important. One part of him is observant and highly tuned to those around him, but another part had to upset and disregard and force his way. He lives in a fog of resentment. He hurt. So he hurts others. He takes their roles. He goes to the party uninvited and befriends the host. He says outrageous things. And if that doesn't work he sleeps with their wives or daughters. They don't want him there. But they don't have a choice.

In a 1968 article in *Esquire* he was asked why he's so hated. He said he's pleased to know they do. "Not since Billy Graham has there been a religious revival of such magnitude and scope, because people of every denomination are packing the synagogues and mosques and Kirks (churches) praying for my downfall."

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

I have been bashed, battered, mutilated, decapitated and massacred by the English critics. And I do care. I am deeply hurt. But is better than being ignored. At least they can't ignore me. It was the same with Olivier. He was 45 before he was recognized. His Romeo was also damned!

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

It's because I never want to lose touch. The whole basis of acting is the stage. I need the continual experience. Actors must go on learning until they drop dead. I can't stand Hollywood actors crying and making announcements about their love for the stage—and then refusing to budge an inch from Hollywood while greedily pocketing the money from movies and TV specials.

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

The image he tried to project was the image of an English aristocrat, and he couldn't carry it off. If Larry was an aristocrat then the word has no meaning at all. Once he lost his market value, then what was there to sustain him? There was no inner life. I'm sure Larry couldn't love anybody; he didn't even love himself.

He had an exhibitionist quality in him, which is not the same as having a deep self-confidence. He was completely absorbed in the artificial world of outward show. He had even developed an accent, which in a way was absurd; it was the accent of an outsider, something contrived.

- Robert Sinai, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

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The play was fantastically well reviewed, Maggie was wonderful in it, but it only ran for about seven months, moving in that time from the Cambridge, around the corner to the St. Martin's. Laurence Harvey left Maggie during the run, not because of me — he had no

idea that we were having an affair — but because he wanted to marry the widow of a film mogul and thereby secure some serious money and improve his career prospects with the mogul's studio, which was Columbia Pictures.

Maggie was devastated, but she was well rid of Harvey. They were so peculiar together. They drank an awful lot, but they never ate anything. At home, or even if they went out to the old Caprice, they would have the finest food and spit it out. Steaks would be chewed and juices swallowed, and then the meat spat out into a napkin. God knows what restaurant staff made of all this carry-on. I'm convinced that it accounts for his cancer, from which he finally died in 1973, and her debilitating illnesses.

*Harvey was an appalling man and, even more unforgivably, an appalling actor. He had been in *The Country Wife* at the Royal Court, which transferred to the Adephe, and I noticed something quite unusual in him as an actor. He had not a single nerve in his body. Most actors make an adjustment in their nervous energy just before they "go on"; everything jumps a gear, and you become nervous, excited, concentrated, and you attack the stage and your role upon it, in this state. You undergo a profound physical and, I daresay, physiological, transformation, which is all to do with "becoming" another character, but also with the business merely of "performing."*

None of this happened with Harvey. In the dressing room, and in the wings, he would be smoking his Pall Mall cigarette in a long cigarette holder and probably sipping a glass of Macon. He would amble around, stub out his fag, cough up some phlegm, which he would spit on the floor regardless of who was around, and then he would wander on to the stage and start acting. Except, of course, it

wasn't acting. It was just an extension of his usual demeanor, but as he wasn't in the same class of personality as Gerald du Maurier or Ralph Richardson—great light actors whose technique fooled you into thinking that what they were doing was merely “natural”—nothing happened as far as the audience was concerned.

- Robert Stephens, from Knigh Errant: Memoirs of a Vagabond Actor,
Holder and Stoughton, 1996

They don't think you notice. But you do. You can't help it. Sometimes you sound paranoid when you refer to “them” and “they” all the time. But “they're” very very real. And it takes its toll.

If I sounded distant or cold or remote or whatever you said on the phone last night it is only because I'm beginning to find the weight of all the problems unbearable and am angry, annoyed and scolding myself for being so weak and stupid. It is impossible to even attempt to share any of it with you or anybody else and only I can and should solve them.

- Laurence Harvey , from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975



He had a lot going against him, but he was very forthright about that. He lived like a man who expected to die young. He was reckless with his money, his whole verve was reckless. He was extravagant emotionally. My view of Larry was that he was afraid of nothing. If he didn't like people he wouldn't be rude, but he'd be glad to see the back of them. If they persisted in staying, then he got rude, sure. If people behaved badly he bawled them out in the open.

- Richard Condon , from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

Larry was a very proud guy. He'd never go up to a producer and ask for a part. He felt he should have got certain parts and couldn't understand why he didn't get them. He was never really accepted by Americans. I think it was because of his behavior, his I-don't-give-a-damn attitude. So far as I was concerned he handled himself ridiculously. He would say things he shouldn't say, or didn't mean to say. For he really did care deeply and had a lot of pride.

- Jack Cushingam , from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

My brother's cancer was a product of his own self-destructiveness, of his suicidal impulses. I don't think Larry could bear the burden of acting all those parts and behaving as he did to others.

- Robert Sinai , from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

Larry is a peculiar study in failed ambition. He wanted to be at the top of the ladder. He lived as though he were at the top, but he wasn't. Only one thing was anathema to him—to be ignored. He was sensitive, but he didn't take other people's sensitivity into account. He wanted to be great. But to be great you must have compassion and humility, and these qualities were in short supply.

When the chips are against him and no one expects it , he's a better actor. When he's rejected by film, he seeks solace in the elevated world of the theatre. When he's rejected by theatre, he seeks solace in the box office records of his films.

It simply isn't possible to reconcile self-effacement and adventure. Humility is so bourgeois. One must disregard it at all costs... Making movies is like writing a very long suicide note. One must simply resist the temptation to sign it.

- Laurence Harvey, from Paulene Stone's One Tear Is Enough, Joseph, 1975

Knowing he couldn't become the world's heavyweight boxing champion, I guess he figured acting could pay almost as much. He acquired the flash and dazzle necessary for success in show business and an absolute belief in his own ability to think his way through what is essentially an emotional business.

- Richard Condon , from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

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You're only as popular as your last film.

5.

OLDER WOMEN.

None of this matters and I could never get it right.

Larry marries three times. And he causes more than a few divorces. Vicious things are said about him privately and publicly. He never contested any accusations and both gained and lost great amounts financially and emotionally from his marriages and their ends. The bad feelings and burned bridges from his many personal relationships formed the greater part of Laurence's reputation in the acting community.

Young women are not his thing. But they adore him. His theatre and film reviews are generally horrible. But the fan magazines love him. He returns home one night to find a fifteen year-old girl nude in his bed. He swears he didn't see her till he climbed into bed and she grabs his penis. The girl pleads for him to make love to her. Snot and tears run over her young face. But Larry kicked her out and had the lock changed. He is horrified (of what would become of his reputation).

He drinks a lot and he is insecure and no one knows who he is but these young women. He is bored and tired of pretending. And he makes mistakes when he's impatient. One night he's suffering through another party of rich potential film investors (or "shitty money bags" as he calls them) when he catches the eye of the wife of the known and then respected actor Robert Newton. Robert's known to be a total whorer. It's all too easy to remove her from the party. To act interested, to play the sophisticate. To pour champagne down her throat. To take her to the airport and catch a flight to Paris. To drink endlessly and do things sexually neither will remember. When he wakes up to her having a seizure from the alcohol he

has to rush her to the emergency room. Another threat to his image. He begs his sister-in-law to come escort the girl home. A scandal would be bad timing. No one must know. On the boat ride home the girl asks Larry's sister-in-law, "Is he a faggot—a homosexual?"

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But it's 1951 and he's going to play alongside Hermione Baddely in his ninth film—*There Is Another Sun* (later to be called *Wall of Death*). Baddely is a known comedic actress whom he'd met three years before through Douglas Sutherland while working together on his first film, *House of Darkness*. She'd left an impression at her informal but well attended brunch at her pink perfect house on Chester Square. He's now twenty-one, she's forty-two. No one sees it coming. She's not known for her beauty. But she's well loved with a colorful past. She had known Virginia Woolf. She had been close with Unity Mitford (of the "Mitford Sisters" [who'd been in love with Adolf Hitler]). In the acting world she was successful, sought after, and her connections were wide. Laurence courts her immediately. He drives her everywhere and flatters her at every turn. One night he claims to have lost his keys and she invites him in to sleep in her guest room. That very night he enters her bedroom and they become inseparable lovers. He moves in. Her son accepts Larry, but Larry's brother is confused by the "old lady." She feels young again. He drives her around top down at break-neck speed and they laugh through it all. They go to nightclub

after nightclub, drinking heavily at Les Ambassadeurs and working on their film, which turns out to be an unexpected success.

But his career is far from secure and all the drinking is taking its toll. It brings out the worst in him. He's moody. Everyone wonders what they're doing together. Behind her back he mocks her for being old and ugly. Calls her filthy names. When at a party of nearly all gay men, Larry flies into a misdirected jealous rage and strikes her in front of everyone. She flees but he chases her and strikes her repeatedly. The next day he orders three doctors to look at her bruised face. He has no idea what he's doing. She can make him happy. All his life he would claim she was the first person to be nice to him. One night on impulse he guns the car straight at her. She leaps out of the way as he slams on the breaks. Tears run down his face and they never speak of it. Their love is reckless.

They make plans together. They devise a diet. He throws out all the food in her house. They live off of chicken, fish, burnt potato skins, burnt toast, and white wine. He loses his baby fat and she literally shrinks. They do this and they drink and smoke. They love to attend parties. She connects him to a few theatre directors. He meets people. He tears up his contract with Associated British Pictures. It's going nowhere. Eventually he gets a new agent. Things are moving forward. He gets cast in *I Believe In You* with an eighteen-year-old Joan Collins.

And then there was Larry, Laurence Harvey—or to give him his full Lithuanian name, Larushka Skikne. He was flamboyant, eccentric, gifted, extroverted; he swore wittily; smoked endlessly; drank white wine incessantly; drove dashing cars; wore elegant and expensive suits; told fabulously amusing, naughty stories; and I became instantly smitten. He epitomized a lifestyle to which I knew I could become accustomed: the rich, fast life of fine restaurants, international travel, sophisticated parties and scintillating conversation. He took me under his wing. “I’m going to educate you, little girl,” he told me, sipping a vintage claret at La Rue, while a tinkling piano in the background played Gershwin medleys. Elegant women in black strapless cocktail dresses flirted delicately with suave, lounge-suited men, and red-coated waiters hovered discreetly.

“Living well is the best revenge” was Larry’s policy. And he certainly did. He tried to teach me some dress sense to make the most of my rather gauche appearance. He tried to educate me about wine and the mysteries of a French menu. He taught me to smoke with élan and swear like a trooper and a lady, but he refused to teach me about life’s greatest mystery. Sex. He had a zest for living that was unparalleled and thrilling, and I wanted him to be my first lover. I was convinced he was the one I had been saving myself for.

I didn’t know it but he was living with Hermione Baddeley, a middle-aged character actress not noted for her beauty. So when he asked me to a party at her house, I innocently and enthusiastically accepted. Immediately when we arrived she approached me, saying, “So this is the one you’re seeing, Larry, is it? This is “the new Jean Simmons.” She gave me a sarcastic look up and down, not

missing a detail of my less-than-expert outfit, her red curls bobbing, a cigarette hanging from carmine lips. “Let me tell you something, my dear, Jean has absolutely nothing to worry about. You don’t have her looks, you don’t have her talent—and you certainly don’t have half the overblown things the newspapers have been saying you have.” I burst into tears and rushed out the front door to escape her tirade. “That’s right, leave,” she called. “No guts, that’s the trouble with you young ones today—no guts at all!”

Larry caught up with me in Park Lane and tried to smooth things over. “Don’t worry, darling, she doesn’t mean it. Come back to the party—I really want you two to be friends.” “Oh, Larry,” I sobbed, “I’m so humiliated—I can’t face that woman—please take me home.” But the party had more interest for Larry than I did. He quickly plunked me in a cab, gave the driver a pound, me a paternal kiss on the forehead, told me he loved me and scooted back to Totie’s.

I should have realized then and there that Larry really loved only himself.

- Joan Collins . from *Past Imperfect, An Autobiography*, Simon & Schuster, 1978

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Laurence is too young. He doesn’t know what to do with his feelings. He can accept his guilt. You slap him first but he slaps you last. He throws his drink in your face. He grabs you by the arm and pushes you against the end table. He knocks your porcelain statue on the floor. He hits you in the face with the back of his hand. He’s too young. He drinks more and sleeps in the guest room.

Hermione's lover, Francis de Moleyns, returns from Ireland. Irate about the young Harvey in his place he bursts into a gin-soaked cocktail party to punch Larry in the face. He's swinging wildly but Larry loses control and bashes Francis unconscious. His moods are black. He tells Hermione it's because of his "Slavonic" heritage (this is untrue). She allows his violence. She allows his involvements with other men. And it has nowhere to go but to end. She tells people later it was tiresome. One night Tennessee Williams, who's interested in Hermione, finds Laurence so unbearable he has the limousine they are riding in pull over and he jumps out. That's a good point for them to stop. Larry leaves to act for a season at the prestigious Stratford-upon-Avon. It's there he meets the woman to become his first wife, Margaret Leighton.

On our first meeting I tell her, "We nearly played together once before. I was up for *The Deep Blue Sea* and you were suggested for it, but they said you were too old for me." I knew that'd upset her. I knew that was my reputation: older women. I tell an interviewer, "I like them provided they have beauty, are slim and dress well. I like them a bit showy and I adore the mother image." But she isn't so old. Not really, she's only thirty and I'm now twenty-two. And... she's already married. I know she thinks I'm involved with Siobhan McKenna, but Siobhan's just a friend. But it makes Margaret jealous all the same. She's emotionally petty. We play lovers in *As You Like It*. She's the most beautiful woman in England and still painfully insecure. She's every thing Hermione is not. Thin, tall, blonde, very fashionable with an elegance that

comes naturally. So what if her eyes are a little close set. And I knock on her door and enter her bed every night. I'm happier then I've ever been. I have everyone's attention. And when her husband shows up, I just pull out, slip out the window, shower and show up to the party later with a shit-eating grin making rude jokes and kissing everyone. They know what I want them to know and nothing else.

By the time Margaret Leighton and Laurence Harvey act together in *Macbeth* their affair is well known and written about in gossip magazines. Despite their "open" marriage, Margaret's husband serves her papers on New Year's Day 1955 on the grounds of misconduct with her twenty-five year-old boyfriend. Laurence does what he thinks he's supposed to do, which is to propose. Later he claims he was forced to do it. He's in love and everything is going well. 1952 to 1959 is a period of steady ascent, career wise, for the Lithuanian actor. In 1957 they marry aboard a ship in Gibraltar where Laurence is acting in *The Silent Enemy*. Laurence's hair and beard are bleached for his role in the film. There's no honeymoon. They're both too busy. They buy a house at Bruton Place, a cobble lane off Berkely Square. They paint the front door pink. Rip apart walls, tear out the floor, steam all the wallpaper off the walls. Cover the entire living room in black velvet. Put a white, and, gold marble table over a purple carpet in the dining room. Install a mauve, and, white four-poster bed. Make all the bathrooms a blazing pink. Put phones everywhere. Mirror everything. Laurence shows off the house to a journalist who then writes, "Harvey has made his

house as gaudy as a brothel, as bright as a parrot's wings." His taste was always too much for them. They fly to Paris to redo Maggie's wardrobe from the House of Dior. He encourages her to overdress at every occasion, even when at home. He likes it when she's covered in diamonds, furs, and heels. They both use cigarette holders and smoke incessantly. And they both adhere to his diet. They keep a weekly standing reservation at the Caprice. When he's at home he barely eats. His health is as fragile as his temper. They have a *don't ask, don't tell* policy. He carries on with James (see chapter 6) and others. She's hopelessly having affairs with her co-stars. He begins to insult her in public and refers to her as "mother."

He lived life at quite a pace. He spent money like water! He had tremendous zest and a wonderful sense of humor, but his moods were controlled by events. Whilst he could always put on an act in public, in private he was often elated or depressed. He could worry over the smallest personal detail about himself. His depression often preceded minor illnesses, especially digestive problems. But when he was happy the excitement was uncontrollable and he affected everyone around. That's when I loved him most.

- Margaret Leighton, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

I would like to think I knew Larry Harvey. I felt he was concealing a certain amount, but not totally. What he didn't tell me I guessed, and there were moments when he came clean.

- Margaret Leighton, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

It was a curious friendship for both of us. What I mean is, it was new for both Larry and me. I found his company engaging, and he was so very courageous, determined you might say. I did think our liaison would work out, though at the beginning I was unsure. There was no uncertainty in either party about getting married. But I have no idea what contribution I made to his life.

Larry had an inadequacy in his makeup. But I can't tell you, or anyone, about it. It's too personal. But he was, oh yes, he certainly was aware of it.

- Margaret Leighton, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

We sat in her [Margaret Leighton's] ghastly, tasteless dining room—black table and gold knives and forks, dreadful!—then we went downstairs for a drink.

Laurence Harvey, Maggie's husband, started talking about Ralph Richardson and how eccentric he had become. His underplaying was so extreme, Harvey said, that you could hardly call what he did acting at all. Then he had a go at John Gielgud and started on Paul Scofield and his ridiculous honking voice.

Larry [Laurence Olivier] sat through it all quietly, then suddenly exploded. It was like a bomb going off. "How dare you," he screamed at the top of his voice. "Call yourself an actor? You're not even a bad actor. You can't act at all, you fucking stupid hopeless sniveling little cunt-faced cunt fucking shit-faced arse-hole..." God, it was awful. Harvey was just flattened like a bug against a wall. A terrible, glacial chill settled on the evening and there was no way of recovering the party spirit. So we all left, and as I went with Larry [Laurence Olivier] and Vivien to their chauffeured car,

he suddenly got very upset about what he had done. Which is what always happened. "I shall send the little bastard two dozen red roses tomorrow," he said (and he did), cross with himself and the way the evening had ended.

- Robert Stephens, from Knight Errant: Memoirs of a Vagabond Actor, Holder and Stoughton, 1996

I wish things had turned out different. Those were the best worst years. The years I got to define myself on a public scale. Jimmy believed in me and worked for me as hard as I worked. I learned so much and I gave it everything in every direction. But all they do is take and what you get back is so little in return for what you give. Maggie should've been right there beside me. But for her there was nothing beyond theatre. Film was cheap. But it was where my future lay. I knew. We spent more and more time apart. We had different ideas about money and success.

In her class she's incomparable. But it's terribly difficult to maintain a relationship on both sides of the Atlantic with two people being continually separated... I blame myself. I've never really grown up in the way I'd like to have. My capacity for giving to the emotional needs of another person and giving it to the job too I feel is an impossible task at such a distance. In this business one becomes involved in a new circle of friends. I still love Margaret and it's sad.

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

People believe I used Maggie—and perhaps I did. Lovers do use lovers, don't they? True lovers should never mind that; they should want it. She took me into another kind of society—the Terry Rattigans, the Noels, the Binky Beaumonts. It was a society I sought of course. It was rich and important and witty. But I did wondrous things for Maggie, too. Until she met me, she was a very cold, withdrawn, very high-strung creature. A beautiful brilliant, un-lived woman. I threw down barriers and showed her all the marvelous things about living. I taught her how to relish people, wine, literature, travel, food and paintings and love itself.

Maggie divorced me because of my adultery; she was absolutely right to do so, of course. I have been a very naughty fella; celibacy, I'm pleased to say, has never been my problem. But I think she would have forgiven even my unfaithfulness; what she could never forgive was my, for want of a better word, charisma.

- Laurence Harvey, from Paulene Stone's One Tear Is Enough, Joseph, 1975

*Joan Cohn is not the reason for my... divorce. I am not jealous of her—or indeed of any other woman—where Larry is concerned. The marriage [came] to an end because of other problems which have nothing to do with another woman... There has been a lot of talk about our separate careers pulling us apart, but when I was with Larry my career always came second to our marriage. No longer, I might add. Before I came to this decision about a divorce I made another. I had been in a successful play, *The Wrong Side of the Park, in the West End*. I decided to leave... so that I could travel anywhere that Larry went while HE was working. Those months apart were not my doing. I do not know what he is going*

to do, apart from his work. But I care what happens to him deeply. Still.

- Margaret Leighton, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

By the time Margaret divorces Larry, he's already living with Joan Cohn, the "wealthiest woman in Hollywood."

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They say the worst things. No one believes there's a pure bone in my body. They can't imagine it. They say she's too old. I meet her on Valentine's Day in 1960. I was suffering from my sinusitis and I saw her on the way to the rest room. I can barely breathe my heads hurts so bad. I didn't know who she was till Jimmy tells me she's the widow of Harry Cohn, head of Columbia Pictures. She was forty-five, I was thirty-two. A few days later I took her to La Rue and we ordered coq au vin and bottles of Pouilly Fumé. I drove her home to her mansion on North Crescent Drive in Beverly Hills—instead of saying goodbye I said, "Let's go to beddies." She liked that. Never forgot it. I didn't know one day we'd be wed. I didn't know it was over with Margaret.

She looks older. She has a temper herself. It is said her tension gave her previous husband the heart attack that killed him. But she loves Hollywood parties and the good life and making a show of it all. But she doesn't have the elegance or the beauty of Margaret.

But he very quickly grows used to it. The mansion with its thirty rooms. Fine paintings, imported furniture and chandeliers, large swimming pool, cabanas, guest-houses, screening room, her house in Malibu... Her luxury and her connections blur with his own career. But they also make him a suspicious person in Hollywood. It's inevitable people see their relationship as calculated on his part. The press paint his divorce to Margaret as if she were a saint and he a self-indulgent playboy. Joan is basically royalty at Columbia Pictures. In the press he's known as Joan's "boy toy." Zsa Zsa Gabor claims Larry complains at a Christmas party when Joan gives him a station wagon instead of the Rolls Royce he wanted. Eventually she'll buy him his first Rolls, pink. He buys his own house in Beverly Hills where he can store his wine (over 2000 bottles at a time) and be alone and attempt to maintain some semblance of independence. Their favorite hangout is the Bistro. He's doing well, but even with all he's earning his spending is outrageous. He wants to open a chain of antique stores. He hires architects to help him design houses (all with 15-foot bars and saunas.) In many ways his marriage to Joan camouflages any fluctuation in his success. He's certain it'll all work out in the end.

I adored her. In many ways she was good for me. But eventually it became an asphyxiating life. Everything had to be king-sized, the loving, the jewels... You couldn't buy ordinary diamonds. They had to be like the Koh-I-Noor. I had to have four gold watches, not one. Seven gold cigarette cases, a television set in every room. We were surrounded by sycophants and parasites, a lot of phoney gayety sustained by booze.

- Laurence Harvey, from Anne Sinai's Reach for the Top, Scarecrow Press, 2003

She doesn't mind if he goes with men and she'll tolerate his affairs as long as they're discreet. But she doesn't like Jimmy. And don't ask her about Pauline.

6.

WHAT'S SO GAY ABOUT FLORENCE OF LITHUANIA?

My main job during the filming was avoiding the advances of the dashing British star Laurence Harvey, who was such a sensation in Room at the Top in 1959. Women adored him, but he adored men, even though, as a career move, he married the beautiful young widow of Columbia mogul Harry Cohn, whose insane temper finally gave him a fatal heart attack. Echoing the future Forrest Gump, Larry would say to me, "You're like a box of chocolates, George. I'm dying to take a bite." It made my skin crawl, but after dodging the likes of Noël Coward and Cole Porter with Swifty Lazar, I knew all the right moves to keep Larry at bay without insulting him. Even though Mr. S [Frank Sinatra] was a dyed-in-the-wool homophobe, he was crazy about Larry, as well as in awe of Noël Coward, who had become a great fan of Sinatra. He couldn't understand why such brilliant men could be 'assfuckers,' as he derided them, yet "as long as they don't try to play drop the soap with me," he relished having them around. They were superb conversationalists, and he needed people "for the ladies to talk to" while he and his Dagos debated boxing and set off cherry bombs.

- George Jacobs, from George Jacobs and William Stadiem's Mr. S: My Life with Frank Sinatra, Harper Publishers, 2003

You don't need to know this. And if you do, well, it doesn't change anything. And your desire to know it... well, it makes me like you less.

I've decorated the space myself. On the mantel I put current invites to dinners, benefits, screenings, and opening nights. Right now there are about twenty. I eat out every night. Never alone and never with less than, say, four. Unless it's one of those publicity requirements and it's just myself and whatever starlet I'm working with. Or if I'm with James. James isn't handsome. He has a harelip. He refers to himself as Quasimodo. But his taste is superb. And he knows everyone. I've learned so much from him. He's put me in ten films so far. I let him touch me but never spend the night. I smoke before and after. I talk almost the whole time. He just looks at me. I keep my shirt off and fix us more drinks. I ask him about antiques. What distinguishes the value of one over another one? Why doesn't everyone prefer this over that? I ask him if he could see me playing Arthur in Camelot. I ask him when he'll let me direct my own feature. I tell him I'd rather be on the stage but the money is horrible. I tell him that during my love scene with Kim Novak (the world's most hideous) I made sure my breath reeked of onions. I overplayed it and push her legs apart with my knees. He laughs but he'll be hurt later. I fix us drinks. We make phone calls. He puts his hand on my knee. I look into his eyes and place my lips on his neck. I tell him I could never be without him.

Laurence's greatest ally, closest friend, and only consistent supporter was James Woolf. James along with his brother John had started Romulus Films in 1948. At the time they had only a handful of films under their belt, but the success of *The African Queen*, starring Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn,

served as an indisputable stamp of quality. For James (or Jimmy) it was love at first sight. He was to present a jeroboam of champagne at the Caprice as an award to the winner of the Easter egg hunt Romulus had organized. The winners were Hermione Baddely and the little-known Mr. Harvey.

That night Laurence's charm knew no limits. Sitting next to James, their legs repeatedly brushing, he held the whole table under his spell of both learned and natural charm. Wit and lewd jokes came like a "torrent out of his mouth." James said, "This guy came on like an absolute dynamo, telling stories marvelously as he does, doing impersonations, making wisecracks." And without hesitation, Romulus Films offered him a contract. John may have recognized the commercial potential of Laurence but it was James' love that served as fuel. James was openly homosexual in a time long before the 1966 bill to legalize homosexual acts between consenting adults in private passed through the House of Commons.

[He] was a rarity in British films at the time, and would still be so if he was alive today: a man of taste and judgment who loved craftsmanship and supported a director instead of suffocating him or using him as a surrogate talent for the film he himself would have liked to direct had he dared... He was an obsessional filmmaker, loving the wheeling and dealing, relishing the juggling with human talents that it involved, and taking pleasure in spotting youthful protégés and promoting their careers, thereby gaining a vicarious satisfaction from their success that was lacking in his own basically lonely nature.

- Alexander Walker, from Hollywood England, Stein and Day, 1974

He was a midwife for talent and smacked many of us into life... He had a quick mind that panned and found the nuggets before other prospectors on the trail had even arrived at the mine... Jimmy was a shield, quite fearless when tackling the front offices. He knew everybody and he was rich enough in his own right not to have to depend on the largesse of others when it came to getting a project off the ground. He had taste, taste in actors, taste in subject matter... There was a sadness about him at times because he had demons to fight, and in the end he died alone.

- Bryan Forbes, A Divided Life, Mandarin, 1993

Over doughnuts and a chocolate cake they made me a proposition. The most illustrious independent film producer in the country at that time was Jimmy Woolf. Room at the Top, which had launched Laurence Harvey into international stardom, had been made by his company Romulus Films, which Jimmy ran with his brother John. Romulus had a string of award-winning classic films to their credit, including The African Queen with Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn, and Moulin Rouge starring Jose Ferrer and Zsa Zsa Gabor. Jimmy was now planning to make Lawrence of Arabia, with David Lean directing

According to Charles [Russell] and Lance [Hamilton], Jimmy had taken a serious shine to me.

It was well known in the business that Jimmy was in love with Laurence Harvey. He had put his protégé into film after film, all of which had flopped, until he bought the film rights to John Braine's sensational best-seller, contracted the great Simone Signoret to play opposite Harvey, and finally made his lover a star. But Harvey kept marrying to further his career. Larry's whoredom was so

blatant it was disarming. As a teenager, fresh from South Africa, he started out living with Hermione Baddeley, a brilliant, talented but grotesquely blowsy star of intimate revue who was more than twice his age. Then he married Margaret Leighton—old enough to be his mother, but a woman of style and one of the best actresses of her generation. When this marriage was over, he married Joan Cohn, the widow of the Managing Director of Columbia Studios, who had taken over her late husband's job and was now a millionaire with all the power of the Hollywood Studios at her command. And throughout all these career marriages, he still managed to string Jimmy Woolf along—though not surprisingly, Jimmy's constancy wavered.

- John Fraser, from *Close Up: An Actor Telling Tales*, Oberon Books, 2004



There are things you should know. James wanted him in Hollywood. James loved films and loved California. He preferred to make films in England but Hollywood was untouched by the war. The sheets were perfect. And the steaks were bountiful. He took Larry to pool parties, introduced him to Bogart, Garland, Sinatra, Brando, Clift, and a Welshman named Burton. Larry tried to amuse. But after a few drinks he often reverted to amusement at the expense of others. People found him off-putting and vulgar with an oversized ego. His camp version of success was embarrassing. Woolf cautioned him. It was at these moments to protect his ego and never to have to succumb to humility that Larry would find shelter in

theatre's disdain of Hollywood. Larry would use his theatrical background as shelter from his dependence on Romulus and Woolf. But he never strayed far. And James continued to enable his fragile ego with roles, contracts, books to be made into films, constant travel, restaurants, wine, objet d'art. The two spoke on the phone constantly.

James Woolf fuss(ed) around him like a mother hen. The small man with a mouthful of bad teeth, wearing expensive clothes that looked cheap on him, nervously chewing cigars, was rather pathetic.

- John Braine, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's *The Prince*, Frewin, 1975

I don't remember his being two weeks out of work in ten years... Between movies there's always television, something, anything. Any form of exhibitionism, preferably the best paid. He's essentially an exhibitionist. I don't mean this in any derogatory sense at all... I think Larry would be the first to admit it I dare say he's already talked Time magazine to a standstill. He has no capacity for being supporting actor or a character actor in a supporting role. From his first day before a camera he was playing star parts and he can't conceive of himself as anything else.

- James Woolf, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's *The Prince*, Frewin, 1975

The rumors were that they were lovers. They rented adjoining flats in London's exclusive Grosvenor House. One in the name of Laurence Harvey, the other in the name of Larry Skikne. Later in life he will allow only James into his precious white Jaguar.

Woolf neglected himself and he tolerated Larry's heterosexual tendencies and image. That is until Joan Cohn, widow of Columbia Pictures head Harry Cohn, entered the picture. James must've felt a threat to his influence over the perpetually flustered Harvey. Both men were hopeless drinkers and chain smokers. While Harry's choice was for cigarettes and Pouilly-Fuissé, Woolf's tastes were for cigars, Hospice de Beaune, and secretly, and not so secretly, barbiturates. Something he always kept a prescription for. During the notoriously difficult filming of Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* in Dublin, for which shooting had run on for double than expected and was on its second director, things took a turn for the worse. Harvey was stationed at the Shelbourne Hotel and James at the penthouse of the Gresham Hotel. When Joan flew to Dublin to join Harvey, the men's tension escalated and the distance between the two increased. After a typical day of arguments, Woolf repeatedly called Laurence's hotel only to be told by Joan that Laurence wasn't there. That night at turn-down service, the housemaid discovered the unconscious body of Woolf. He'd made a suicide attempt with his nest of pills. Upon hearing this Laurence rushed to the hospital and spent the night pacing in the waiting room. Memories of their time flooded his panicked

heart. Fearing scandal Larry told people, "Don't bloody believe it. He's taking pills because he's in pain. He had a serious operation for hemorrhoids in America." Later he goes to his bar in the early morning to be consoled by the owner and says, "I hope he'll be okay. Jimmy's my life and my love." James survives and both men treat each other better. Laurence, when he moves into Joan's house, gives Jimmy his remodeled house and pool on Swallow Drive.

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"I don't really care what your fucking policy is. I insist you open Mr. Woolf's suite." I'd given up waiting for Jimmy. He wasn't one to be late. It had been two hours of calling his room and I didn't have a good feeling. I finally convinced the manager to open his room. And before we could see anything—I knew. I knew. I could smell the death from the first centimeter the room was opened. It was dark, the shades were drawn, the bedside lamps were on. And there he was. Just a sad man by himself in a white T-shirt, boxers, sock suspenders and copy of Valley of the Dolls laying in his limp hand at his side. His sad sad lonely face with slack jaw without an ounce of life left in him. He'd had a heart attack. Too many pills for too many, far too many years.

Two years later James Woolf dies on Sunday, May 29, 1966, at the Beverly Hills Hotel. His last film was the James Bond film, *You Only Live Twice* (for which Laurence had passed on the roll of James Bond, opening the door for Sean Connery). James left £31,241 net (£53,368 gross) before estate duty. The remainder of his estate was to be divided between his younger brother and business partner, John Woolf, and Laurence Harvey. At the Jewish Cemetery at Golders Green in North London, Larry didn't shovel dirt onto the coffin. He didn't move from aside the grave when the funeral was over. He stayed long after everyone had left looking into Jimmy's grave.

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Laurence becomes rudderless after James' death. He told friends he had loved James with a love that surpassed the love of women, deliberately referencing Oscar Wilde's trial. He speaks of him compulsively. "I feel utterly vulnerable without him." When Harvey loses his mentor, companion, and lover of fifteen years, he loses his self. He's for sale like he's never been.

I shall miss Jimmy enormously. I shall miss his wit and his gentle wickedness and his advice. In his company, I was electrified and enkindled and driven. I shall feel utterly miserable and alone without him. No woman will ever fill that void, no woman will ever be able to give me the love that Jimmy gave to me. It was unselfish and real and utterly without strings. It completely transcended sex, and what woman is able to compete with that?

- Laurence Harvey, from Paulene Stone's One Tear Is Enough, Joseph, 1975

Jimmy was father, mother, mentor, brother, lover—I don't mean in the homosexual sense—everything to me. When he died, I found myself very lonely, empty, vacant. I did a few films in remote places, everything to run away... You search and search for a small percentage of the kind of relationship in your adult life, and one... one never finds it.

- Laurence Harvey to the New York Post, 1968

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They called him "Laurence of Lithuania." Larry cheekily called himself "Florence of Lithuania." Larry never got to be himself.

7.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DIE.
ALONE WITH MY NEW
YOUNG WIFE AND
DAUGHTER.

Times changed. A different war, a different world. Laurence's 1940s childhood fantasies of film stars are no longer what audiences want. While working on *Camelot* James Woolf begins production for *Alfie*. He wants Laurence to do it, but he can't make the time. Terence Stamp, Larry's close friend, takes the role of Alfie for the theatre version that preceded the film but the results are lackluster. The film role then gets passed to their other friend and Terence's struggling roommate, Michael Caine. The film goes on to win a Special Jury Prize at the 1966 Cannes Film Festival and Michael is nominated for Best Actor at the Academy Awards. It's also the most popular film of the year in England and the first film to receive the "suggested for mature audiences" classification. It's what people want. And you can almost pin point this as the moment Laurence becomes a relic.

In the last few years in the industry the big stars have been the McQueens and the Redfords, the he-men. Larry was never that. Larry was the dandy Englishman. I never thought his American accent convincing, and he certainly wasn't the type to play the parts that make big stars in America.

Yet, he had movie star style. He was a showman projecting a grandiose image and spending money as if he was printing it. He liked to be thought as living the life of a millionaire; that was something he wanted to project, rightly or wrongly. Inevitably, it made enemies for him because people are always jealous of another's success. In his flat in Grosvenor House there were dozens and dozens of suits, and dozens of pairs of shoes and hundreds of shirts. He spent a fortune on clothes.

He was tremendously arrogant; that, perhaps, was part of his makeup. He wanted outsiders to know he believed in himself. I saw him play Henry V in New York and he was absolutely magnificent. If he had been content to stay with the Old Vic Company I think he could have had a great career in Shakespeare. But the critics never appreciated him. He had built up a reputation for being tough and unpleasant, particularly to the newspapers and they never really gave him a fair chance. I don't think they ever visualized him as Shakespearean Actor.

- John Woolf, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's *The Prince*, Frewin, 1975

Laurence attempts to smoke marijuana. Tries to listen to the Beatles and wear denim. Makes a go at being seen and dancing at nightclubs. He can't bear to be out-of-step with whatever is in fashion. But he's looking older than he is. The constant work and the constant drinking and the stress of it all has aged him. The late sixties don't suit him well. And despite his lifelong attraction to a certain older class, he starts perhaps to feel a midlife panic. One night at Terrazza in 1966 he's introduced to Vogue model Paulene Stone. No one makes much of it. Paulene later recounts that despite his ferocious charm, he had the sexual prowess of a virgin. But it's the start of what's to be his last relationship.

As the better opportunities for film and theatre are less and less offered to him or even appropriate for him, the more he risks on lower budget and foreign films, and even frequent television appearances in a desperate attempt to be relevant. Knowing no other way to exist outside of working constantly, he's both aware of his predicament and delusional. He puts his own money into a string of films no one endorsed that further and further weaken his reputation. He sells one of his houses to save the dubious and misogynistic Italian film *L'Assoluto Natura (She and He)*. As his income becomes unsure he spends wildly on remodeling and collecting antiques. Both were lifelong obsessions that he maintained grandiose plans for. To slow his spending is to admit defeat.

Curiously his relationship with Paulene progresses. It's unclear why. Neither is sure if it's more than what it is but they

make time for each other. He takes her for a weekend getaway to St. Paul de Vence in the south of France. He's still living with Joan Cohn and everyone involved seems to have some level of awareness. There's nothing unusual about the affair. Except, whether they know it or not, this affair is different. It could be that Paulene is young enough that Laurence's crazed talk, drunk wisdom, and endless romantic chatter are taken more seriously. Or it could be that she's more patient with his outbursts and moods and self-obsessive complaining. Or that she reminds him of his youth. What is clear is Paulene is more sympathetic to Laurence's crisis as a man at a time when everyone else's sympathy had expired. Joan possibly becomes a reminder of his inability to live up to his own fantastical standards. But they go through with it. Harvey and Joan marry on October 16, 1968, at a time when both knew better. The marriage seems to up the ante on their hollow love. But then there's this business of pregnancy. Paulene gives birth to Laurence's only child, Domino Harvey, on August 7, 1969. When Joan asks about Paulene, Harvey says, "It's nothing. Paulene's just a good kid."

I never really believed in it (Paulene). I just thought it was someone else for him to kick around. I couldn't watch him every minute, after all, and I would rather he went out with a girl than a boy. Anyway, I went out with men in Hollywood.

- Joan Cohn, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's *The Prince*, Frewin, 1975

Paulene learns of his marriage to Joan through the papers. Months later she will call Joan and tell her they've been lovers for five years. Joan doesn't respond much more than to say, "Yes, I know." But by the next year at the Royal Shakespeare Company when, during intermission, a group of young girls approach Harvey to say, "Paulene's pregnant. She's asking for you," Harvey quickly looks to see if Joan's caught that. It's gone too far. And it's too late.

Divorce papers are handed to Harvey at the Los Angeles International Airport. If Harvey seemed paranoid that all of Hollywood had it in for him, now there is finally some truth to the feeling. As with his previously failed marriage to Margaret Leighton when the London theatrical world cast him as the villain, Hollywood now saw Laurence as the guilty party in his divorce from Joan.

On Sunday, New Year's Eve, December 31, 1972, Laurence Harvey and Paulene Stone are married. The reception and party take place at Harold and Grace Robbins'. Later that night a room in the house is designated the orgy room for the guests. When asked why he married Paulene, Larry responds, "It's marvelous to have somebody who is genuinely eager to learn. I've spent six years shaping and molding Paulene; it would be an awful waste to let it all go now."

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His hopes to find a replacement for James Woolf are briefly ignited by George Barrie when they work together again on 1973's *Night Watch* with Elizabeth Taylor. George is also the owner and chief executive of Fabergé and creator of Brut cologne. But George is not James. And George knows that Larry is very sick. George knows that Larry's operation for an acute appendicitis was not an operation for acute appendicitis but was the first emergency operation to eradicate the long un-treated colon cancer. He knows Larry told Liz Taylor, "I guess they can say, I'm now a semicolon." Laurence is in so much pain during the filming of *Night Watch* he can barely act. He spends hours in the bathroom in his dressing room. People talk to him through the bathroom door. He's taking Pethidine (Demerol) regularly.

The operation scar across his midsection is enormous and not healing properly. Beverly Hills doctors prescribe cobalt ray treatments in an attempt to shrink it. Larry spends hours tanning. He's unable to sleep from the steady diet of painkillers. He's the thinnest he's ever been. Everyone who sees him worries about him. But all he'll talk about is his next film that he's convinced George Barrie and Fabergé will front most of the money for. Harvey will star, co-author, and direct the film— *Welcome to Arrow Beach*. An extremely violent horror film concerning a cannabilistic Korean War veteran set in Malibu.

Everyone involved understands it's ridiculous. The fact that the script actually makes it to film is baffling to his friends. But Harvey needs this in order to feel meaning in his life. He's convinced this is the film that the public wants. He works sixteen to eighteen hours a day on the film. He has cases of wine delivered to the editing room. He edits most of the film on his knees on the floor, his eyes burning with tears from the pain. Bottle after bottle of his Pouilly Fuissé, it's all he can do. He's now nearly 90 lbs.

George talks to his doctor and together they decide it couldn't do any harm, so Barrie takes Laurence on an around-the-world trip on the private Fabergé plane. Paulene is horrified. The trip will be his last moment to pretend to himself it isn't happening. Returning to reality causes him to become angry. No one discusses what's happening, allows him to talk of future projects. But everyone understands Larry is going to die.

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Apart from the physical pain that one has to endure from day to day, the biggest problem is overcoming psychological pressures. The weekly treatments and depletion of one's strength continually serve as a reminder, plus the fact that the doctors have forbidden me to do any work. Having been so active all my life, I find it extremely difficult to be suddenly so inoperative and helpless. I am trying to prepare various scripts for the future, and to keep as busy as I possibly can under the circumstances...

It seems when fate decides to deal its ugly blows, it does so with a vengeance. It is difficult enough trying to survive the daily problems with which we are confronted continually, without having these added burdens to contend with.

- Laurence Harvey to his brother Nahum Skikne, from Des Hickey & Gus Smith's The Prince, Frewin, 1975

How I survived that business I shall never know. I felt fucked in every possible way. But despite the fact that you've been knocked in the head and left bleeding in the gutter, with every kind of vehicular traffic trying to flatten you into total nothingness, you must somehow raise your poor splattered body from the earth and crawl back into the mainstream of life.

- Laurence Harvey, from Paulene Stone's One Tear Is Enough, Joseph, 1975

His pain is so great he's taken to the UCLA Medical Center where they perform immediate surgery. But it's too late. They tell him his cancer is going to be his end. He's installed at his house on Cabrillo Drive in a four-poster bed upstairs to receive blood transfusions in the comfort of his own home. On his forty-fifth birthday Elizabeth Taylor, John Ireland, Kirk Douglas, and Peter Lawford come over to celebrate. But they must speak quietly and they can only enter his room one by one.

At the very end Larry is alone with Paulene and Domino and Paulene's first daughter Sophie. They rarely discuss his illness. They install a television in his room. Harvey had always refused to watch television, calling it "atrophying." But he finds himself enjoying it. Especially *Upstairs, Downstairs*. Larry takes to eating ice cream for the first time in his life. (Perhaps in exchange for the sugar he was missing from the alcohol.) His room filled with flowers and cards. A printed cable from John Wayne reads, "Keep punching kid. Duke"

Paulene will write a book called *One Tear is Enough* in which she describes the last two months of Laurence's life. It's filled with long reflective moments from a man who never rested, now forced to stay, knowing that the world would go on without him.

The final curtain is such a dreadful bore, always too early or late. But it is perversely conclusive all the same and I shall not cry for any encores, dear-heart, I promise you that.

- Laurence Harvey, from Paulene Stone's *One Tear Is Enough*, Joseph, 1975

When they write my obituary I hope they'll say "L. Harvey, actor-director, he brought a bit of life and fun into his profession." That's the greatest tribute I could wish for. As far as my work goes, I know I've done a lot of rubbish but I'd hope I would be remembered for some of my stage performances and for the films like Room at the Top, Espresso Bongo, Darling, The Manchurian Candidate. And four films—four really good films— isn't a bad record for any actor in this business.

- Laurence Harvey, as told to the Evening Standard, 1970

It's the end of 1944. I'm sixteen years old. I'm a corporal in the South African Defense Forces, Entertainment Unit. From my station in Cairo I've received a week's leave of absence to visit my brother in his kibbutz in Galilee, part of British Mandatory Palestine. I take a north-bound ship through the Suez Canal. I stand alone on the prow of the ship as it silently cuts through the still glass-like water. On my left, gold sands blurred by the heat mask, the crowded city of Cairo. On my right, the Sinai Desert shimmering in the sun. The horizon a golden blaze into which the sea and sky blend. The stillness of this moment I carry with me forever. The feeling of entering the horizon, of being alone in a space between life and death, beyond context, being part of something larger than myself. It's the only truly peaceful moment of my entire life and in this hour I live forever.

Laurence Harvey died peacefully on Sunday, November 25, 1973.

He was cremated at the Golders Green crematorium in London on November 30, 1973. At his funeral Wolf Mankowitz read the eulogy:

*So for the last time,
your laughing sardonic face
looked into the pit
and creased with pain,
then
grinned finally
as with a shrug
you carefully lifted
your elegant bones into the wings.*

*O demon lover, white wine poet,
Litvak lunatic, little monster,
your positively last appearance
as a man
was so true that
only death could upstage you.*

*Rest now, lonely friend,
as you never did before,
in utter peace.*

In Los Angeles, Elizabeth Taylor along with John Ireland arranged a memorial service held at St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Westwood. John Ireland delivered the eulogy. Taylor says, "I still can't believe I'll never see him again. He was a part of the sun." Later an annoyed Rabbi Max Nussbaum of Reform Judaism's Temple Israel of Hollywood said kaddish (the prayer for the dead) for Harvey before 700 members of his congregation.

A memorial service with his ashes is conducted in St. Paul's Church, the parish church of Covent Garden and the headquarters of the Actors' Church Union, on January 4th, 1974. A plaque was dedicated in its sanctuary in Harvey's memory. It reads: "In memory of Laurence Harvey. Actor. 1928—1973."

In 1974 a Laurence Harvey Cancer Research Fund is established at UCLA.

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for C. B., A. C., and A. K.

There are but three other books (one still in print) which concern Laurence Harvey. This book is but a distillation and a fiction based on them.

Hickey, Des, and Gus Smith. *The Prince. Being the Public and Private Life of Larushka Mischa Skikne, a Jewish Lithuanian Vagabond Player, Otherwise Known as Laurence Harvey*. London: Frewin, 1975.

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LAURENCE HARVEY

*Motion Pictures, White Wine, Older Women
& Long Thin Cigarettes*

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