

PREFACE TO THE ED DENNEHY STORY

For the life of me I don't remember much of high school even though I was considered one of the best half-backs Joe Thomas, our coach, said I was. It was my JV coach who really meant more to me as a mentor. He actually played under Knute Rockne and I think not only did we win every game we played, but we held the distinction of doing that while we were losing at half-time in every game. Maybe we were winning in one or two of them, but most of the time we were losing. He gave the greatest half-time speeches ever. It made you roar with enthusiasm; hence we came out loaded for bear in the second half.

In school there was very little I remember. I do remember shooting spitballs at our history teacher when he had his back to us writing on the blackboard. I hesitate giving his name for fear of embarrassing him or his family. I slept in his class a lot, I remember that.

I do remember Mr. Brady, my math teacher, who was astonished that I got a 98 in my math Regent's exam. He also stapled my tie to my shirt because I always thought it was 'cool' to tuck my tie in my shirt between the 3rd and 4th buttons, and he didn't. Actually, he was the only one who believed in me. I never saw him at a football game, though.

I guess the funniest thing I remember was going to my accounting class dragging Ed Dennehy along with me by the collar, and him behaving like Quasimodo yelling "Sanctuary... Sanctuary!" all the way to class, as if he was my 'pet' who I was dragging to English class.

Ed, during this time, was the consummate actor. His brother, Brian, who acted in many movies, including *Cacoon*, one of my all time favorites, was considered to be second best actor or director in the family next to Ed, but I'll divulge much more about that as we go along.

Ed was probably disabled to some degree. He had to be the way he behaved. He was so carefree, and he was one of the best actors I've ever seen. Too bad we parted our ways after graduation. I went my way and he went his. Actually, if I followed him on his path of destruction, I might not have survived myself, so maybe it was best that I didn't go to Hofstra with him, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me just say, I never hung out with him during high school, but Drew did. If he didn't, he certainly had an influence on him before and after graduation. In fact, Drew and Ed founded USA Productions at Hofstra University in 1983 and they both were accomplished actors for that organization for years since its inception.

I actually reconnected with Ed around 1999, after I retired. I was to meet him at one of the Hofstra's theaters where Drew was acting, and Ed was directing. The reason why we reconnected was because I was making my rounds of yesteryear's friends because 9/11 showed me how fragile life is, a nostalgic move on my part being retired and wondering where my mentors were.

I first went on the internet and I found Ed as part of Hofstra artistic movement at the time. That's when I found out that Brian was his brother. Up to that point I never knew Ed's brother became the famous actor he did. Brian actually won two Tony awards since the writing of this book.

And little did I know that Ed was going to follow his passion for acting and directing. After taping all those interviews with him for months, it became obvious to me that I was better off following the path I did go. Still, it was Drew Keil who kept the candle lit for Ed for all those years. And it was Drew who managed Ed through his drinking and directorial journeys at USA Productions. And if you're reading this and wondering why it wasn't Ed who made it big in the movies, well read on and you'll find out.

CHAPTER ONE

If you were one of the lucky ones to see the stage play productions at Hofstra in the late 80s and early 90s, then you would've been astounded of the acting talent of a man by the name of Ed Dennehy. Nothing USA Production produced was more engaging than the *Morant* production. It was exciting to say the least.

For a participant it was a trying experience. For an audience member, today you can close your eyes and see the play all over again. It was that kind of experience. One could hear the boots marching, stomping on hardwood floors, and men shouting military orders, and drums drumming mixed with the sound of dogs barking.

For Ed, hours after the play, he could still see the shadows on the south wall of the stage representing two armless chairs silhouetted against a white background. Further downstage, a British flag acted as a banner to show what country he was in.

When the sound of marching boots faded, the voice of one British soldier emerged. "The enemy mutilates our soldiers in the dark of night, then runs away. We can't expect our soldiers to fight by conventional rules. We cannot judge their actions using past standards in this nasty Boer War."

Then the marching sounds picked up again, and the hypnotic cadence of the boots marching mixed with shouts of, "Harry... Morant... Harry... Morant..."

The sound of the doorbell ringing was followed by the sound of Ed Dennehy pounding on a door.

"Drew," Ed yelled. "Wake up. Let me in."

He rang again, then pounded some more.

"Drew, I have to come in. Something has happened."

Ed was hallucinating again; this time it was about the play he was just in, and Drew was one of the producers as well as Ed's best friend. Drew was upstairs in his bedroom sound asleep. The pounding on the door woke him and Mary, his wife.

The noises of the play were haunting Ed. As if this were a movie, the background sounds resonated to the foreground and the marching boots would march in place then stop.

In a gruff, commanding voice, Ed heard the command 'Left face'.

The snap of heels belonged to five military men dressed in 1900 British military garb. Four of the men had rifles braced on their shoulders, and the first soldier, who had a whip in his hand and was yelling out the commands, hollered, 'Ready,' which was command for the other men to hoist their rifles in the 'ready' position.

Ed shouted in his gravelly voice, "Wake up, Drew. We need to talk."

Then Ed heard in his mind as clear as if he were there, "Aim".

Of course, the four military men aimed their rifles.

Ed pleaded again to Drew, "I'm coming unglued. I need help".

Then Ed heard the word, "Fire" yelled out and he held his ears as if he didn't want to hear the guns fire. But the military men fired their guns, blanks, of course, and as the smoke cleared, the sound of marching boots picked up again. All Ed could see were two men lying on the floor, and two armless chairs turned on their side, silhouetted against a white wall.

The 'thud' noises of Ed Dennehy thumping his bushy head against the outside front door dominated the scene. This was 1988. The years of drinking had taken its toll on Ed, so he looked

older than his 40+ years.

"Drew. Wake up, for chrissakes," he yelled.

Drew Keil leaned out of his second-story bedroom window and appeared no worse off than Ed, having been woken from a dead sleep. He was the same age as Ed but looked much younger.

"Edward! Are you drunk?" Drew yelled, then added after a pause, "Again!"

"No. I'm sober as a doornail," which was NOT true. "I had another dream," which was true.

Mary Keil, was fully awake and secretly cursing Ed out for waking her up. She sat up in bed while Drew leaned out the window talking to Ed relatively loud so Ed could hear.

"Remind Edward it's three in the morning, please."

"We have a hit show, Ed. Why can't you just embrace it like normal people? Go home and sleep."

"But I can't go on tomorrow," Ed said.

"It's three in the morning, Ed. You mean, tonight." Drew turned and gave the thumbs up to his wife.

"Tonight ... Tomorrow ... I can't do a show in my condition."

"Oh, really, now!" Drew said. "We don't have anyone to take your place. We didn't have the money for an understudy, remember?"

"Yes. I know. Forgive me about that, but I can't go on tomorrow ..."

"Tonight!"

"Tonight, tomorrow, forever and a fortnight. I can't go on, and that's that. You don't understand, Drew."

"Go home, Ed."

Drew ducked his head back in and closed window. As far as he was concerned, the conversation was over.

"What is the matter with that man?" Mary said.

"I've known him my whole life, Mary, and I still can't figure him out."

Pinging sounds resonated off the bedroom window. Outside, Ed picked up pebbles the size of quarters. Any one of those pebbles could break the glass if Ed could aim right, but he couldn't. Ed chucked several pebbles at once just as the window opened. A couple of pebbles hit Drew in the face.

"Damn," Drew said to himself. "I was hoping this was a dream."

"You don't understand," Ed said.

"You're right. I understand very little about you, Edward."

"I can't sleep. I'm overworked."

"You're not the only one who put a lot of sweat into this show."

Ed knelt on the ground and wept with a theatrical flare. "I don't know where else to go. I feel like I'm sinking."

From inside the bedroom, Mary asked Drew what the matter was. "I'll be right down." Drew closed the window and turned to Mary.

"Nothing," Drew said, a little angry at himself for opening the window in the first place. "Everything," he added.

Drew walked downstairs and opened the front door, then headed into the den. Ed entered the house and shut the front door behind him.

"You've been drinking," Drew said. "I can smell you from here."

Ed stumbled into the den, sat down on the couch. Drew sat in the recliner adjacent to the couch.

Pictures of Drew acting lined the wall. Some of the photos were of Ed and Drew acting together on stage: Cyrano, Hamlet, John Barrymore, and Romeo and Juliet.

“The last drink I had was with you,” Ed said. “That was before midnight.”

“Time of day never stopped you.”

“Aye. For sure you're right,” Ed said with an accent. “And I've never been in more need of a drink than right at this moment.” Ed got no response, so he tried a different voice. “I'm sinking fast, I tell ya.”

A large globe on a tall pedestal sat in the corner next to a table, which had a coffee maker, and a miniature refrigerator packed with airport wine and beers. A half-bathroom was off to the right.

The Arts Section of Newsday, the biggest paper that serviced Long Island, sat on the coffee table accessible from recliner and the couch. The headline read, ‘Breaker Morant: Best Play of the Season’.

Drew sat on the recliner. “You know the rule. ‘No booze on show day.’ You have to go on tonight.”

“Do you not have ears to hear with? I'm not going on tonight.”

“Okay. I'll play your silly game. Tell me why.”

“Ernest.”

Drew gave Ed a highbrow stare, as if the men shared a secret of the meaning behind ‘Ernest’. Trying to find out the identity of Ernest was a long time experience for Ed. So, Drew waited for additional information but he didn't get any because Mary was at the top of the stairs bellowing Drew's name and wanting to know what was going on.

Drew walked to the door where he saw Mary at the stairwell. “Nothing, Dear. Ed's just having a panic attack, that's all. Go back to bed.”

Drew closed the door and sat back down on the recliner.

“I found out who Ernest is,” Ed said.

Drew let out with a deep sigh. A groan, almost.

“That's right. See? Now you understand. That's something to drink about, mate.”

“You've had enough,” Drew said.

Ed got up but Drew got up ahead of him. “Okay,” Drew interjected. “I'll get it. Sit down. You're getting one White Wine Spritzer. That's it. Just one Spritzer.”

Drew made Ed a White Wine Spritzer while Ed said that he read somewhere that a ship is made up of a million pieces of metal. “None of these pieces can float by themselves. But when you put all these little shits together, the tons of rivets, bolts, the angle iron, the engine, you got a ship that's built as big as the Empire State Building, and just as heavy, and it floats magnificently. We're like a ship, Drew. Too heavy to lift, but light enough to sail.”

“You know, you're full of shit, Ed.”

“We're all full of shit, but we don't stink.”

Drew placed a drink down on the coffee table in front of Ed. “What the hell are you talking about? I don't look into life that metaphorically. I like things well defined ... Literal.”

“This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not be false to any man.”

“Christ! Shakespeare at three o'clock in the morning. I'm going to have a drink, too.” As Drew headed back to the bar to make himself a drink, Ed picked up the paper, and confessed

he had worked his whole life for this moment. "I should be rejoicing, for crying out loud. I should feel whole and alive and well..."

"And floating," Drew said.

"Yes. Above all else, floating."

"But you feel you're sinking?"

"Exactly. Now you got it. I feel like I'm sinking."

Drew came back from the bar and hovered over Ed. "Because your heart, kidneys and liver haven't been welded together?" Drew placed his drink down next to Ed's drink and sat. "Like rivets of a ship," Drew added.

Ed thought about saying something about his analogy, but instead he said with a deadpan stare, "I'm leaving. I'm not going on tonight and that's that." Ed stomped over to the doorway but he couldn't leave because Mary was standing on the other side blocking his exit.

"Edward," she said just like a school mom, "if you would just stop drinking... That's all we ask."

"Good evening, Mary," he said. Ed headed back to the couch and Drew rushed to the door.

"Is someone dead?" she asked.

"Ed found out who Ernest is. I know. Confusing. I'll tell you later. Go back to bed. It's not worth your attention. But it looks like I'll be here for awhile. Don't expect me any time soon." Drew closed the door and then walked back to the recliner and sat. "Okay. What were we talking about? Ugh, yes! The Titanic."

"No. We were talking about Ernest."

"Okay. You need to talk. Go ahead. Talk."

"I finally saw what was in the trunk," Ed started. "Props. Masks. All these years Barrymore was trying to tell me things about me. My father, my brothers. Alice. Sue Anne! All the women in my life. I've been sinking all these years, don't you see?"

"Yes," Drew said, half-kidding and half-serious. "Now it all makes sense. You're reaching bottom. Outta control. You're sinking."

"Yes. We agree at last. Now, maybe we can explore my life so we can find out the last time I had control. Or maybe I never had control. Maybe I'm just someone's dream being pulled by ... Unseen forces."

"You're more likely someone's nightmare."

"I know you're trying to be funny, but you're right. I've never had control of my life, Drew. Barrymore controlled me. Oh, God! I've always been schizophrenic."

Drew took a deep breath, and raised his hands and arms, like a maestro, instructing Ed to take deep breaths as well to calm down.

"ACTING CLASS! You're giving me Sandy Meisner breathing techniques at this hour?"

"You've got until 9 AM," Drew said. "I'm all ears until then." Drew downed his drink in one gulp. He got up to pour himself another drink. Ed's drink remained untouched.

"Where?" Ed asked. "Where do I start?"

Drew came back and placed his drink on the coffee table next to Ed's drink. Drew sat and shrugged while Ed was stoically thinking.

"I've got this cold pit in my stomach," Ed finally said. "I always had a pit right here. I think I was born with a pit in my stomach."

"Blaming genetics, are you? Passing the buck? OK. Fine. Start with your parents then. Go ahead. Once upon a time... Go. I'm listening. Take your time. I have all day, or night, or

whatever time it is."

The sound of a typewriter in the distance had Ed sliding into another time and another place. "Father time? I hate what time has done to me. OK! Yes. My dad. Let's begin there. The time was 1945, and the place was London. More specifically, it was in Associated Press office.

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To begin Ed's flashback, Ed's mind drifted to the sound of his father, Edwin, pounding on an old black Corona typewriter. The time was August 6th, 1945 and we transition to London, England, where Edwin Dennehy was a reporter of the Associated Press office just after World War II pounding away at the old black Corona typewriter.

A US Flag stood at one corner of the room while a British flag stood at the other end. It was August 6th, 1945. The phone rang. Edwin picked it up and listened for a long beat, then hung up. He pulled the paper from his typewriter and yelled so everyone in the office could hear, "A second bomb dropped five minutes ago. War in the Pacific is over."

Edwin ran into the editor's office and handed Mr. Flock his submission. Mr. Flock seemed pleased after he read a little of it.

"My dad was an API correspondent in London during World War II," Ed told Drew, but Drew already knew this. Still, Drew kept quiet and let Ed tell his story his own way. Drew always remembered Ed's father as a rather large man, and Ed always described him as an amusing symbol for his appetites and cravings.

Ed talked about a secretary, an attractive woman in her twenties, or at least that's what his father told him.

She entered the office and asked if anyone wanted to go to Mooney's after work. Edwin and Mr. Flock nodded, more spellbound than anything else.

"Are you losing weight, Mr. Flock?" she asked. Like Edwin, she knew exactly what to say and when. Maybe that was why Edwin liked her so much, because she was just like him.

Mr. Flock, while stroking his belly, said, "This is my awning over the toy shop, Miss Pringle." Ed heard this story more than once from his father, but always when Hannah, Ed's mother, was not around.

Everyone in the office thought it was funny, including Edwin, who adopted the awning statement whenever he stroked his belly.

They all laughed at Mr. Flock's account as to why he was getting fat. Mrs. Pringle left and Mr. Flock silently took a long look at her as she put an extra swivel into her stride whenever she left the office.

"Dad loved working in London," Ed said. "He talked a lot about Mr. Flock and Ms. Pringle. My dad only mentioned her first name once, so I forgot it. He talked a lot about Mooney's bar, though."

Edwin sat at the bar with others who were celebrating the end of World War II well in advance of Japan surrender to the Allied forces. Edwin was very chummy with Miss Pringle.

"My father told me she had beautiful hair," Ed told Drew speaking as if he were as if he were at the bar. "He was always good at making people feel good about themselves, especially women.

"You sure know how to make a lady feel good, Edwin," Miss Pringle responded.

"London was a great place during the war for American service men," Ed said, "and for war correspondents. At least that's what my father told me."

Edwin Dennehy pumped out words on the typewriting machine alternately stopping as if

he were taking a breath. During late summer of 1945, sounds of jack-hammers and hammer-pounding permeated the air as post-war construction workers renovated nearby buildings from the effects of German bombardments of the early war years.

Since the Northern Conquest was over, Edwin Dennehy summoned his Gaelic family to London in the summer of '45, 'The Mother Country', as Edwin called it.

"He loved it Over There," Ed said "But my mother was far from home in America and she didn't like it so much.

"Although my brothers, Mike and Brian, were old enough to learn the different aspects of life in Great Britain," Ed continued, "they didn't like Britain very much. It really had nothing to do with Great Britain and had everything to do with that apartment they had to live in, and my father's behavior, of course. They told me my father was conspicuously absent that first night they arrived in London. They could tell my mother was angry the way she clanked the silverware against dinner plates while they were eating at the dinner table, and the way Mike and Brian huffed and puffed up the stairs into the new palatial apartment. They didn't take the elevator because it was broken.

"But it was the first night that set the tone. That night, my mom made her sons and herself dinner, and a fourth plate as well that sat at the end of the table without a consumer."

As they ate, Hanna's sons noticed the dirty windows and peeling wall paint but didn't say anything for fear of it getting back to Edwin. Mike remembered Hannah bringing Mike's empty plate to the sink to clean it and, when she turned on the hot water nozzle, a series of noisy, angry, air bubbles funneled out of the faucet before any water came out. This was definitely not what Hanna was used to.

Ed's brothers remembered that first night very well, as she dutifully took the plate of uneaten food from the table, laid a napkin over the plate, and clanked the silverware against the plate and put it into the refrigerator.

As Ed put it, "My mom never spoke fondly of London."

CHAPTER TWO

When Edwin finally came home, he took off his shoes and tip-toed into the dimly-lit kitchen as quietly as he could. He opened the refrigerator, took out the plate with the napkin over it, and put it on the table. While eating his cold dinner, the kitchen light flicked on.

“Our first day in London, Edwin! Couldn't you have ...”

“Don't start, Hannah. It was a very newsworthy day. I'm tired.”

Hannah looked around the apartment and said, “The kids and I don't belong here. You belong here, Edwin. We don't.”

Edwin got up and hugged Hannah then took two tickets from his pocket and bribed her with the theatre hoping to end the argument. She loved the arts, and the promise of going to the theatre was all she needed.

“They would go to the theatre a lot, back then, as Brian and Mike remembered it,” Ed said. “My dad loved the arts as well. He took mom to the theatre often to make up for his indiscretions, I'm surmising.

“Besides New York, what better place to be than London, as theater-goers. I can imagine my father putting his hand on top of Mom's while watching the play, and my mother quietly pulling away.

“You look exquisite,” Ed imagined his father saying. “And at first I can see her pulling away, but after a few pursuits from my father I can see her anger melting away. My father knew how to handle her, or was it he knew how to handle people.”

Ed admitted to Drew that he suspected his father tried to keep his mother in London by getting her pregnant with him. As Ed put it, “During the war of the sexes, a peaceful pact was made long enough to produce their third and last child. And that would be me.”

With her pregnancy showing, Hannah sat front in a middle seat of a plane with her two sons on both sides of her. She loosened her seat belt to ease the tension on her stomach.

Obviously, Edwin wasn't successful in convincing Hannah to stay long-term, even though she was pregnant. The summer over, she and Ed's brothers, went back to Connecticut.

“My mother suspected my father was screwing around,” Ed told Drew, “so she went back to Connecticut. It was her way of putting an end to shenanigans without creating a fuss. Dad stayed in London until there was an opening back in the States, or at least that's what I was told.”

The five Shannon sisters gave hearty welcomes when they saw Hannah, her two sons, and a belly-full of Neddy, a nickname Hannah gave Ed before he was even born. According to Mike and Brian, she seemed happier than she ever was.

Months passed when Edwin just appeared with suitcase in hand at Ed's Aunt Ursula's and Uncle Harry's house. He just plopped his two suitcases down on the front porch and entered the house, as if he has been there before.

Mike remembered that day when he got up from a dead sleep and saw Uncle Harry and Dad sitting at the kitchen table. As usual, Uncle Harry looked like a hobo, unshaven, slouching at the kitchen table and drinking – this time it was coffee. His hair was askew, and his red face bore the marks of Rosacea, but it was probably more because of his drinking, than anything else.

“Did she have the baby yet,” Edwin asked.

“Ursula took her to the hospital this morning,” Uncle Harry said. “They just called. She

delivered about a half-hour ago. Let's have a drink to your new son, Pops.”

“I gotta go to the hospital, Harry,” Edwin said.

Edwin walked briskly down the hospital’s maternity ward looking at each nametag on the wall while Harry lagged behind him doing the same. Finally, they reached Hannah’s room where her sister, Ursula, was holding Ed, who was wrapped in a blanket, asleep, in her arms. Ursula handed Edwin the baby.

“Wow!” Edwin said with surprise. “He's so small,” he added, afraid he might drop Ed. Edwin placed his son bedside and leaned in and told his wife that he got a job in New York with Associated Press. “A cut in pay,” Edwin said, “but there's promises.”

Hannah reached out for his hand. He gave it, lovingly. “We'll go to the theatre,” she said, “and give our children some culture.

A year later, at the Derby house, the Doctor Milano leaned in and took Ed's temperature while Hannah stood close by. The doctor read the thermometer.

“Holy shit ... I didn’t say that,” the doctor said, embarrassed that he lost his composure, if only temporarily. “I’m sorry.” The doctor, surprised at the hundred and three temperature, was thinking out-loud.

In the living room, Edwin sat on the couch reading a newspaper. Nine-year old Brian came in from the kitchen eating a cracker.

“Ed has Strep throat,” Brian said. “Is that bad?”

Just then Hannah came running into the living room, hysterical. “Edwin. Ice. We need ice.” And with that, Edwin rushed into the kitchen and got all the ice they had, which was only about two ice trays. Hannah grabbed Brian and said, “Go over to Mrs. Flanagan’s and tell them we need all the ice they have. Quick. Hurry.”

Back in the bedroom, tiny Ed was having a seizure. Suddenly, he stopped moving altogether. Dr. Melano rushed to the bed and pulled off a pillowcase just as Hannah and Edwin bolted into the room with trays of ice cubes.

Doctor Melano held open the pillowcase, and Ed’s parents poured the ice cubes into it. The doctor hurriedly put Ed into the pillowcase, and surrounded his body with the ice. The Doctor then pushed on Edward's chest in pulsating motions.

“When I was about one,” Ed explained to Drew, “I had what turned out to be Scarlet Fever. It developed into seizures, and I died.”

But, of course, the Doctor resuscitated him. When infant Edward began to cry, the Doctor told Ed’s parents he had a petite mall seizure, but all was well at the moment.

As it turned out Ed had Epilepsy, which the fever triggered. His extremely low magnesium levels was the real reason why he went into convulsions. Still, Ed was going to have to pay attention to the low levels for the rest of my life.

CHAPTER THREE

Several years later, at a family picnic given by Aunt Ursula and Uncle Harry, several Shannon cousins were chasing each other in some sort of 'hide-and-peek' game. Some adults were playing horseshoes off to the side. Hannah and her sisters cooked at the grille and laughed at a joke one of Hanna's sisters told.

Edwin sat at the picnic table reading the book, *Confessions of an Actor*, which was Sir Laurence Olivier's autobiography. Harry came over and plopped down a six-pack of beer and a bottle of scotch. Harry poured himself a drink, put an empty shot glass upside down on the bottle's spout, and slid the bottle over to Edwin.

Edwin looked up and saw Harry smiling at him. Edwin smiled back and then poured himself a shot and cracked open a beer. He drank the shot, and took a swig of beer, all without a fuss, as if he had done this many times before.

By all accounts, Hannah was very happy in Derby. However, Ed's father was not. According to Edwin, the hick-like suburban communities of Connecticut offered little culture for him or his sons.

"Oddly," Ed said to Drew, "the only person my father liked on my Mother's side was Harry, Ursula's husband, a flimflam man. Dad's antithesis from the other side of the universe. He was a cock-fighter and a gambler and he made good money at it.

Harry got up and head-nodded for Edwin to follow him. Edwin and Harry both grabbed their beers and disappeared to the barn. Once inside, Harry pointed to the wall where the heads and necks of dead cocks were on plaques and prominently displayed.

"They're my trophies," Uncle Harry said proudly. "You lose a fight; the bird loses its head."

They walked over to a cage where a rooster was squawking. Harry opened the cage, took out the rooster by the legs, turned it upside down, and held it in front of Edwin who backed up and, seemingly wanting no part of what Uncle Harry was doing.

"I know he doesn't look like much, Edwin," Uncle Harry said, "but he has won me a lot of money."

He put the rooster back in the cage, grabbed a flashlight, and then beckoned Edwin for silence as he quietly snuck over to a corner of the barn. He pulled up a floorboard and poked a flashlight in the hole exposing several stacks of money.

"Can't claim it to the IRS, though. It's against the law to have cock fights."

As the cock squawked, Edwin gawked at the money and trophies.

A few years later Ed's grandparents sat on the porch at their house in Derby looking out at the three Dennehy brothers who stood side-by-side according to height.

"My most awesome memory growing up in Derby," Ed admitted to Drew, "was my father's dad. He scared the crap out of me. Right off the boat from Ireland - a 6'4", 300 pound coal stoker. For whatever reason, he adored me. Probably because I was small compared to my brothers. I hated going there, though."

As Ed remembered it, one time Gramps struggled to get up from his chair. This huge man covered with soot, thumped down the porch and headed straight for Ed. Gramps reached out with his coal-stained hand and grabbed Ed's nose. He stuck his thumb between his fingers and said, "Gottcha nose". With that, Ed saw his reflection in a puddle by his feet and saw just

nose holes. He reached to get his nose back, but Gramps wouldn't give it to him. Instead, he picked Ed up, and then tossed a terrified Ed, and his nose, sky high.

From Ed's point of view, he looked down and saw Gramps getting smaller as he gained altitude. Gramps eventually disappeared as Ed ascended to the heavens. Two oceans appeared on both sides of the United States and Ed's nose flew up next to him as their climb came to a halt. Ed grabbed his nose, put it back on his face, and then came tumbling down in a frightful free-fall. Gramps caught him and everyone laughed. Except little Ed. He cried like the Dickens.

Ed remembered those early years at Derby house, at the family picnics, especially. Everyone lived within 9 miles of each other, so they had the family get-togethers frequently. Brian was 8 years older than Ed. Brian was clumsy at that age, but huge. He was like Gramps but Brian didn't smell as bad. Mike was a year younger than Brian. He was big too, although skinnier.

Brian stood at the end of the line because he was the tallest of 15 cousins, and probably the strongest. Brian looked like a big Pillsbury Dough Boy, though. Mike was leaner and the second tallest.

The older relatives played football on the side property. Six-year old Ed and the younger cousins played baseball in the back yard where a barn dominated the center field. The barn appeared old and mysterious. Haunted, maybe, according to Ed. A white chalk line ran in front of it as a home run mark if you hit the ball that far.

"I remember when I stepped up to the plate that first time and looked around the field at each one of his cousins. I didn't have the courage to speak the words that were running through my mind but I'll tell you what I was thinking; 'Playing at shortstop is Shanda Lear. At second base is Roman Vass. Lance 'Too Tall' Metropolis is on first. In between left and center field is Kenyon 'The Snail' Packard. And at right center is Lynn C. Doyle. The pitcher is the legendary Lefty Toothpick Turner. And the batter is none other than yours truly, Jim 'Powder Puff' Brokenstick."

The pitcher threw the ball and Ed hit a squiggler to the third basemen. Ed ran like lightening and beat the throw to first. Then it was cousin Johnny's turn. He stepped up to the plate and pointed to the barn, which stood like a picturesque center piece in a turn-of-the-century painting.

Besides the squawking rooster, there were a few cobwebs, maybe a few spiders, and old machine tools, like a table saw and a wood lathe. Sunlight shown through a small loft window and the sounds of cousins playing baseball could be heard inside the barn as a cloud past by the sun causing the loft to turn dark.

Uncle Harry was a retired machinist, and he had big rusty-old machine tools that stood around for years like sentinels in a ghostly, possessed place of the barn. Spiders and never-before-seen creatures were crawling around. Of course, the spookiness of the barn was more in Ed's mind than anywhere else.

It was in the last inning when Cousin Johnny got up and smacked the cork ball deep into center field. It broke the loft window and the ball disappeared into the barn. Uncles Owen and Harry staggered out of the house, yelling obscenities at the boys. Uncle Owen had a whisky bottle in his hand. The children, frightened, dispersed in all directions.

Later, at the picnic table, while the families were in mid-feast, Johnny head nodded to Ed, and they snuck away without being noticed. Both boys crept up to the barn, and Ed pointed to the

broken loft window. “The cork ball's up there,” Ed said. “I’ll get it.”

“Be careful,” Johnny warned. “There are all sorts of animals in there. Dragons and stuff.”

Ed slowly opened the barn door, and looked in, cautiously, as if he really believed he would meet up with a dragon or something worse.

Cobwebs adorn the machine tools like Halloween decorations. He spotted a spider crawling up a web. Undeterred, Ed walked to the loft ladder, and held on to each rung tightly, as if his life depended on it. He slowly pulled himself up one rung at a time, then stopped because he thought he heard something, a rustling sound in the loft, perhaps. He didn’t hear the noise again so he continued until his head was level with the loft floor.

Ed started to sweat. He looked down and saw Johnny who waved him on, urging him to continue. Ed looked back to the loft and there, staring at him, were the eight eyes of this huge spider, each eye the size of an orange, and the spider itself was the size of a goat. The spider's palp (feelers) reached out and its jaws were crisscrossing, preparing to shear Ed's head off. Ed screamed and fell off the ladder and onto Johnny.

They both tumbled to the ground. Ed got up, ran to daylight and disappeared into the field and ran as fast as he could towards the house. Johnny got up, brushed himself off, and cautiously nudged closer to the ladder. He looked up and saw a normal size spider walking around on the top rung.

CHAPTER FOUR

Years later, Hannah and Ursula sat at the kitchen table at Ed's house. *"I remember when Ursula came over that one time," Ed told Drew. "She cried a lot. My mother tried consoling her, but nothing she said helped. Things changed around this time. It all started when Uncle Harry died, I guess. Uncle Harry and two other men were fishing, somewhere off the shores of Long Island. They were in a fishing competition. Five grand went to the one who had the largest catch.*

"The way I was told the story, was that he held tight onto the pole while furiously trying to snag this big fish that pulled him into the water. And I'll tell you this, he wasn't going to let go of that pole, no matter how big the fish was. I know Uncle Harry, and that was the way he was. He didn't let go and was pulled into the water, probably by a whale, is my guess. Anyway, days later his body washed up on shore. He was still holding onto the pole, clutching it, as if it were part of his body. He'd be damned if he was going to lose that prize. The line snapped, of course. There's a fish out there around somewhere with a nylon line and hook dangling from his mouth."

Aunt Ursula was inconsolable. Eventually, she gained enough composure to tell Hannah that just before the contest she learned Uncle Harry was having an affair. She called him a bastard. "And that's not all," she said. "I'm sorry to tell you, Sweetie, but he said Edwin is having an affair as well with that bakery woman in town. Men are bastards, Hannah. Can't trust them. We can never trust them."

Ed remembered his father moving them all to Long Island right after that. The entire Dennehy family gawked out the car windows looking at the New York skyline while crossing the Triboro Bridge. During that time, Long Island was casting itself as the hitching post for World War Two veterans who parked their hopes and dreams in little Cape Cods and cheap apartments a subway ride away from the nation's theatre capital.

"I remember that Mike and Brian were still much taller than me, even though I was pushing five feet at the time. I remember getting out of the car and Mike and Brian and me just stood there and stared at the apartment complex.

"Dad was tired of commuting to New York from Connecticut, and too embarrassed to stay in Derby after Aunt Ursula told everyone he was having an affair. And my mom elected for another geographic cure, so we settled in a barracks-like apartment in Glenn Oaks next to Queens for a while."

Edwin seemed upbeat, smiling, while the rest of the family stood in the middle of the living room with their mouths hung open. It was a small place and the view from the window showed just how close they were to the neighbors. Sort of a Cape Cod house one would expect in Levittown, which was built around the same time.

"I know everyone imagined something better," Edwin said when everyone looked out of the bedroom window and saw the tiny front lawn. "But we'll only be here for a little while. After my promotion we'll find a house. A nice one."

Ed told Drew he remembered sitting down and putting on a cheap pair of steel roller skates while the sound of roller-skates was all around him. I remember these expensive white leather skates stopping in front of me while I was putting on my skates. I looked up and saw Emily with her two dimples on both sides of her face, and I got up and we skated off into the

sunset with my cape blowing in the breeze.

“Her name was Emily and I told her she had beautiful hair.”

“Thank you,” Emily replied.

Ed skated effortlessly when he was with her.

“All I remember about Glenn Oaks,” Ed told Drew, “was discovering driveways and sidewalks and gliding up and down the block acting like Batman, feeling like the wind would pick me up and let me fly. And holding hands with a little girl who looked like Shirley Temple with dimples and curly hair ... Wow! I wish I could go back to that time.”

All he could remember at Glenn Oaks was the rumble sound of steel rollers on cement. Their next home was a little different. It was in Mineola, which was right next to Chaminade, his High School alma mater and where his brothers went. He found himself skating in a new world right away. It was like a kid-batman meets the greasers.

One day he looked up and saw a 'gang' of three kids who were wearing tight pants, t-shirts with the sleeves rolled up, and greased-back hair - the DA look.

Ed remembered one of the 'cooler' kids approached him and said, “Hey, you a sissy or something? Only sissies skate around here.” Of course, that was the end of Ed's skating career.

Ed could remember one day passing by his brothers, Brian and Mike, as they walked by on the crumbling sidewalk. Brian said, “Come on, Neddy. It's dinner time,” and one of the greaser kids said, in a very sarcastic tone, “Ooo. Neddy poo, it's dinner time. You have to go in Neddy-poo.”

Then my brother, Brian, went face to face with the kid, who was a foot shorter than him, and Brian poked his finger in the boy's chest and said, “My bro has the same name as my father. You got a problem with my father's name?”

Of course, the kid backed down. He was no match for Brian, but what Ed remembered was Brian calling him 'Neddy' in front of the greasers. If Ed was going to find his way with these guys, he was not going to do it as Neddy.

Later that day, at the dinner table, Edward stared at the two books on the mantle. One was the life story of Barrymore, Sr., and the other was about acting. There were a few artsy drawings that occupied space on the wall, one of which is the caricature of the "Ace of Hearts" in Alice In Wonderland. Ed remembered that night because that was when he announced to everyone that he would like them to stop calling him 'Neddy'.

“But that's your name,” Brian said.

“My name is Ed. Or Edward,” he fired back.

“I'm still calling you Neddy,” his mom said.

“You can. Moms are different,” Ed said.

But Ed's father understood. Everyone called him 'Neddy' when he was younger. “A guy's got to maintain a certain level of respect with the locals,” Ed's father told everyone at the table. “A name has a lot to do with that.”

“Exactly,” Ed said. Then he thanked his father for saying that.

Brian looked at the 'Ace Of Hearts' picture and said, “Okay. How about we call you Ace?” And that was the first day people started calling Edward, 'Ace'. It took a while, but it finally caught on.

Ed remembered one year at Christmas time, when it was fashionable to say ‘Christmas time’ and not ‘holidays’. Actually, every Christmas time was the same. Christmas was his father’s holiday, Ed remembered. Presents were spread out on the floor around the Christmas tree covering most of the living room floor. Hannah and the Dennehy boys were seated while Ed’s father read a tag and distributed the gift to its proper owner.

However, this one year, Mike was the first one, and he opened the gift while everyone watched. He appeared excited and said, ‘Just what I always wanted’. Everyone said, ‘Just what I always wanted’ if you wanted Edwin to pass you another gift.

Edwin picked up another gift. “From Grandma and Gramps to Neddy. Excuse me ... to Ed.

“No, No. Ace,” Brian said. “It’s Grandma and Gramps to ACE, remember?”

“My father didn’t like being corrected, least of all from us, so when he read the next tag and handed it to Brian who highbrowed no one in particular and sighed, as if he hated this process. He didn’t say ‘just what I always wanted’, which led to a screaming argument that ended the gift giving in a hurry.

That spring, Ed and the Greasers walked down the street. By this time everyone wore a leather vest, tight pants and pointy shoes, except for Ed who wore sneakers, baggy pants and a white t-shirt. They all had baseball bats and gloves and sneakers slung over their backs.

It wasn’t long before Ed dressed just like them, but he had a hard time adjusting to the pointy shoes. Eventually, Ed broke down and went to the baseball field with a purple vest, pointy shoes, and his hair in a DA. He was very tough-looking, just like the rest of the Greasers.

Ed remembered going to the field where a handful of kids in loose-fitting pants, crew cuts, etc., greeted them. He remembered playing them and when it was his turn to bat, he looked around much like he did at the Derby picnic with his cousins. He looked to left, then right, and around the bases. In his mind, he was being the announcer.

Ed pointed to center field with his bat, much like his cousin John did.

“I remember that day,” Drew said. “I played left field against you. I remembered yelling ‘No batter. No batter’ What a knucklehead you were then.”

“I was, but I was a greaser, at the time, trying not to be a straight-shooter, even though I was. I mean, I went from a caped roller-skater to the greaser with nose-picker shoes in a matter of weeks. Then I went back to grammar school and I became a straight-shooter again.”

The pitcher pitched to Ed and he hit a ground ball to the second baseman who had a crew cut and black sneakers. He threw to first, but Ed’s speed out-kicked the throw.

“Holy mackerel,” the second baseman said. “He’s fast.”

A straight-shooter, as defined by Ed, is defined by what he wore. He and Drew went to Corpus-Christi Grammar School where they wore uniforms every day. That made them straight-shooters in Ed’s mind.

“If you wore pointy shoes you could play both sides,” Ed said. “If you wore pointy shoes and wore your hair greased back, you were a ‘greaser’.”

In the Corpus Christi Grammar School yard, Ed was playing dodge ball with other students. He was wearing a blue and white uniform with striped pants. A closer look revealed Ed also wore pointy shoes and had his hair styled in a greased-back pompadour.

Girls played hopscotch and jump rope off to the side. A couple of Nun facilitated the school yard activities.

Daniel, a retarded boy, got hit in the head by Philip, a greaser. Daniel didn't retreat to the end zone, like he should have. Another greaser flipped the ball to Philip who hit Daniel again and yelled for him to go to the end zone. Daniel refused, and Philip hit him in the head again.

Ed got the ball this time and threw it at Philip. It ricocheted off his head and knocked a Habit off of Sister Francis Mary's head. She grabbed the habit and ran inside.

"I guess I felt cool," Ed said to Drew. "You know. It was a 'Rebel Without A Cause' moment. I mean, why did Philip have to do that to Daniel? Just to look big? From that day on, I stopped being a greaser: in spirit, at least. Those cheesy uniforms destroyed my image, anyway. Clothes seemed to be the key to me back then. The costumes in life make the man, right? I was a straight-shooter, and it was time that I acted like one."

In the Corpus Christi Chapel, Father Tully sat behind a closed door in the center confessional booth taking confessions. A boy exited a side booth and Ed entered and knelt down.

After a beat the sliding window opens, a welcome sign for whoever is in the booth to start listing the transgressions. "Bless me Father for I have sinned," Ed began. "It's been two weeks since my last confession..."

"Yes, yes," Father Tully said, impatient at the minor infractions he was about to hear. "Tell me your sins, son."

"I knocked a habit off a Nun's head with a dodge ball."

"Really now," Father Tully said. "That was you. I heard about that, Mr. Dennehy. Sister Francis Mary was very upset, I'll have you know."

"Yes, um..." Ed didn't know what to say, so he said, "It was an accident, Father."

"Well, be more careful, next time. Anything else?"

"Just the usual, Father. A couple of curse words. Dishonored my mother and father by talking back to them. That's it."

"Okay. Say ... I don't know, three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys."

Michael and his friend from school, Tom Cosgrove, and Brian sat at the table waiting for dinner to be served. Mike was trying to convince Ed that Chaminade High School was the place to go for high school. Actually, Ed didn't have a choice.

"But Chaminade High School is an all-boys school," Ed said, thinking he would have to give up the 'greaser' look for good if he went there. "I don't want to go."

"We all have to go to Chaminade. You got no choice about it."

"Says who?" Ed said.

"Says Mom and Dad, that's who," Brian piped in.

In the kitchen, Mom heard the conversation while preparing dinner. "Neddy," she yelled, "Chaminade's a good school. Brian's going there. Michael will be going there this year, and so will you. A little help, please."

Ed scampered in the kitchen and he came out shortly later with a bowl of mashed potatoes. Hannah follows right behind carrying a cooked ham. She placed it in front of Brian to carve. Hannah patted Ed on the head and he sat next to her.

"Thomas, I heard you want to go to Chaminade High School next year. How nice. You and Mike will be in the same class."

Mike made a face as if to say, "big deal". Brian gave a large slice of ham to Mom, a large slice to Michael and Mom and, trying to be funny, a small piece to Ed. Brian sobered up quickly as he stared at an empty plate and an empty seat at the head of the table.

“Should I carve something for Dad?” Brian asked.

“He said he's going to be late. Make a plate anyway, and I'll put it in the refrigerator.”

“Come on, Brian,” Ed said. “Give me a bigger piece than that. Mooomma...”

“Give your brother a bigger slice than that, Brian, will you please.”

“I was just kidding. Geeze, Mom. You baby Neddy too much. Excuse me, ‘Aceypoo’”

“Back then,” Ed said to Drew, “My mother treated me as if I was still ‘Neddy’. I couldn't do any wrong in her eyes. Maybe it was because I had epilepsy, or because I was the youngest child and so was she. I think she was unhappy, though. Brian and Mike were too busy in their lives for her. And my father? Well, we all kind of knew what he was up to.”

As the subway train clanked its way to New York City, Ed's reflection appeared on the train's inside window as he looked out. His father sat next to him reading a newspaper.

“I'll never forget when Dad took me to NY City,” Ed told Drew. I thought we were going directly to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but ... No. We made a stop.”

Ace held the pole tightly as the subway car rumbled its way through the city. A variety of people tower over Ed, people with long and pudgy noses; fat and thin; shabby and well-dressed - a cornucopia of 'types'. Ed was all eyes.

Somewhere in Manhattan Edwin walked his son into a deli. Edwin said his hellos and obviously knew Mr. Bellino, the proprietor who was behind the counter. Ed's father wanted Mr. Bellino to watch Ed while Edwin went across the street. Of course, Mr. Bellino said ‘yes’.

Edwin said he'd be just be a few minutes and off he went.

“I remember I ran to the doorway and watched him cross the street,” Ed told Drew. “He looked up and waved at a person who appeared to be a woman who hid behind a see-through curtain at a third-floor window. An hour later, Dad bolted out of the building like he was being chased. He crossed the street to the Bellino Deli Shop and didn't even notice me sitting on a bench eating an apple.”

Edwin turned around and blew a kiss to the lady at the third floor window. Ed looked up at the lady who blew a kiss back to Edwin. She noticed Ed and she half-hid behind the curtain giving a subtle wave of the hand. Ed, imitating her, subtly waved to the woman as if he was responding to the word ‘action’ yelled by a near-by director. He withdrew his hand and ran his fingers through his hair, capturing the mystery of the body language.

“Come on...Neddy,” Edwin said to his entranced son.

Edwin pokes his head inside the deli, and thanked Mr. Bellino for taking care of his son.

Edwin walked down the street and expected Ed to keep up even if he had to run, which he did. Ed looked back and saw the woman peeking out the window. “My father always seemed to have a woman on the side,” Ed said to Drew. “But this one was different. I was to find out later from Mike she was dying from cancer and Dad paid her medical bills.”

While Ed walked with his father on the streets of Manhattan, tall people, or people he perceived as tall, breezed by Ed as if they had a mission. He looked at their faces and they all appeared the same: stone-faced and mannequin-like.

Ed saw hundreds of men in every direction wearing gray-flannel suits. They were like Robots. They all danced to the same drummer.

What he remembered the most that day were the people. They whizzed by him as if they didn't have a care in the world, and they all somehow looked alike.

Except for a fairly well-dressed bum, who tried to stop them but Edwin breezed by, with his son in tow, and without a hitch in Edwin's step. Undeterred, the bum tagged along for a few strides and then finally said, "Sir, I got laid off, divorced, and kicked out of the house all in the same week. Won't you help me out and give me a dollar so I can buy food for my daughter?"

Edwin ignored the bum and picked up the pace. Ed had to skip a bit to keep up. The bum tugged on Edwin's coat and said, "Sir, I got laid off and divorced and kicked out of the house all in the same week. Won't you give me a dollar."

Finally, Edwin saw a bus stop sign, their final destination. "We're here," Edwin said, then they waited.

The face of another bum popped in front of Ed, and this time he was dressed in rags and had a goiter the size of a melon sticking out of his neck. Ed jumped back and yelped at the sight.

"Can't you spare a dime, boy?" Edwin pushed him back, and the bum fell down.

"Come on. Get outta here," Edwin said. The bum got up and left.

Edwin took his son to his API office that afternoon and advised Ed if he was good that he would take him to Museum of Natural History after he finished what he had to do.

Ed had heard of the place and figured it would be nice to go, so he sat at a desk and was quiet as a mouse. He watched his father talk to people, and mimicked his father as Edwin schmoozed with his coworkers. Edwin picked up the phone and dialed, and Ed, in his mind at least, picked up the phone and dialed. Ed had his hand to his ear, an imaginary phone, of course, and smiled and talked into his hand making puppet-like mouth movements.

Edwin didn't know it, but his son could hear him on the phone and was mimicking him. "It's me," Ed said to his hand which was the pretend phone receiver. "I'll be at the Museum. I got my kid with me, so be nice. You're my secretary, okay?"

When Edwin hung up the phone, Ed put down his hand as if he was hanging up a phone.

Later, at the Metropolitan Museum, Ed struggled to keep pace with his father as Edwin stepped up the large steps of the museum. Once inside, the statues were awesomely big, Ed thought. The people were all well dressed - more 'types' to memorize.

In the Medieval room, Lois suddenly appeared out of nowhere. As she talked, Edwin chuckled politely. He seemed to enjoy her company. Edwin introduced Lois to his son. Ed nodded politely, and then turned to the statue in front of him. It was dressed in a suit of armor. Ed bowed to him, as if he was accepting a challenge.

"Oh, you want to joust, do you?" Ed asked the mannequin in armor.

Ed was hallucinating, of course, thinking he was a medieval knight, as the statue moved from his post, according to little Ed's point of view, and it held out his sword as if it wanted to fight. A statue, close by, tossed Ed his sword, but the sword was so big and heavy Ed couldn't keep it off the floor. Magically, it shrunk to a manageable size and Ed started swinging it as if he was a swashbuckler.

Edwin and Lois watched Ed taunt the stationary statue in front of him which prompted Lois to tell Edwin that his son had quite the active imagination. Of course, he agreed as they watched Ed.

In Ed's mind, he was battling the moving statue with swashbuckling maneuvers, checking and countering the statue's every move. Ed dodged in and out, and heard the stinging sound of clanging steel when their swords met. He fought as if his life depended on it, but to his father and his secretary, Ed was just swinging at air.

To end the fight, Ed plunged the sword into the real statue's groin area, and the statue tittered a bit, then crashed to the floor.

Edwin and Lois watched with their mouths opened as Ed raised his arms in a victory pose over an imaginary foe who only he could see sprawled out on the floor, beaten and bloodied.

Lois clapped robustly, and Ed accepted the applause graciously, bowed and casually moved on. Before he knew it, they stood by a Van Gogh painting of Marie Julien. Edwin was near by looking at another exhibit.

"Ah, something I know," Lois said. "That's van Gogh himself over there. One day, just before Christmas, he cut off the lower half of his left ear and gave it to a prostitute."

"Why did he do that?" Ed asked. While Lois answered, van Gogh in the painting winked, then jumped out of the picture and landed on the floor. Marie Julien also jumped out and they both morphed into real people. Or, at least that was what Ed saw. Another hallucination.

A chair materialized and she sat in the exact pose as in the picture. A canvas on a tripod magically appeared and van Gogh started painting the picture that was on display on the wall. Ed seemed enchanted at what he was experiencing.

"There are many stories," Lois said. "One mentions that his brother, Theo who was going to spend Christmas with his fiancée instead of with Vincent. And Vincent got madly jealous."

While painting, Van Gogh said, "She's full of dung, Neddy, boy. Don't listen to her."

Edwin walked over, and from his point of view, everything was normal. Edwin listened to Lois while watching his son who was intently looking at the picture of van Gogh. Still hallucinating, Ed watched van Gogh paint.

"I thought he snipped his ear because of his brother's engagement," Edwin said. "And because of an argument he had with his good friend Paul Gauguin?"

"Well, Mr. Dennehy," Lois said. "I actually think he had impure thoughts of Gauguin ..."

Van Gogh reeled back and looked to the heavens. "Oh, good God," he blurted out. "How do these rumors start? Somebody hang me right now."

Van Gogh put his paints down and walked over to Ed. "Well, Mr. Dennehy," van Gogh said, "in Dutch the word for ear is 'lel', and the word for penis is 'lul'. Don't you see what I was doing? I was purposely causing confusion to avoid an argument."

While they talked, van Gogh got closer to Ed and said, "I have to admit, I was having homosexual thoughts of Gauguin, who was my friend. Maybe you are too to hear this. Hmm. But I do like the symbolism with the ear and penis, lel and lul. It was symbolic self-castration to show my love for Gauguin. Very ingenious, don't you think?"

Van Gogh reached for Ed's ear and grabbed it. A symbolic gesture of what Ed's grandfather did, Van Gogh put his thumb between his index and middle finger. "A piece of ear, no big deal," Van Gogh said. "I got ya 'lel' right here. See."

The hallucination held Ed's ear between his fingers, and the blood from the ripped-off ear dripped on the floor. Ed yelped and held his ear. Blood dripped through his fingers. "My lel. My lel," Ed kept on yelling. "He cut it off."

Ed checked his crotch.

"Oh, for crying out loud," Van Gogh said. "It's not your 'lul', boy. It's you're de neus. I got it right here."

Ed looked confused.

Lois and Edwin observed Ed pressing the side of his head, as if he had an ear ache.

"Your nose, silly," Van Gogh said. "De neus means your 'nose' in Dutch."

"An active imagination indeed," Edwin piped in.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hannah came down the stairs with a suitcase while Ed was by a mirror in the living looking at a small band-aid that covered the lower part of his left ear. He crouched down and swung his arms back and forth in front of him like an ape reciting, "Sanctuary. Sanctuary," as if he was play-acting.

Hannah grabbed Ed's hand and they barged out of the house and pounced down the porch. A taxi awaited them.

Ed and his mom sat in a booth of the diner. From the window, they saw Edwin pull up in a car.

"You wait here, Neddy," his mother said in a commanding tone.

Ed remembered that day his mother took him to the diner. She went outside to talk with Edwin. She seemed to have all the power, but he witnessed his father's behavior which turn the tables on her. At first, he tried to grasp Hannah's hand, but she pulled away. More talking. He touched her hair, her shoulder and gently touched her cheek. Ed mimicked his father as he watched, and pretended a girl was sitting in the booth with him: a slight gesture of the hand; a stern point of the finger; a gentle stroke of the hair.

Edwin grasped Hannah's hand, and Ed grabbed an imaginary hand, but saw that this time Hannah did not jerk away. She caved, as usual.

He kissed her hand and then Hannah walked back into the diner and took Ed's hand, and they walked out where Edwin was waiting with his car.

"I think my mother pampered me a lot," Ed said, "mainly because I was the youngest, and Mike and Brian were always gallivanting around and were never home. She was lonely."

Ed, Mom and Dad were watching a Chaminade High School football game from the stands. Brian was playing. He was a linesman, and was bigger than all the rest of the kids, but was being tossed around quite easily. Brian tripped and awkwardly fell. In the stands, Ed looked up at his dad and he saw a tear running down his cheek.

"When I looked up at my dad and saw him crying," Ed said to Drew. "I felt his humiliation because Brian couldn't defend himself. That was the only time I saw my father cry. He didn't even cry at his father's funeral."

At the funeral home somewhere in Derby, Connecticut, the Dennehy family sat in a pew while other people came up and viewed the casket. Ed's father actually looked like he didn't fit in the casket with his coal-stained hands folded on top of a mountainous belly. Ed looked at his grandfathers stained hands and felt his nose to make sure it was still there.

That next evening, in the Dennehy household on Long Island, the brothers watched 'Dracula Meets Wolfman' on TV. Ed was multitasking, watching TV while reading a book on John Barrymore, Sr. His brother, Brian, was also multi-tasking squeezing a rubber ball as an exercise while watching TV. Mike was just watching the TV.

A particular TV scene frightened Ed, so he got up and tried to get close to his brothers but they push him away - roughing him up a bit. After a beat, Mike tried to offer some brotherly advice. "If you want to conquer your fears then *be* Dracula or the Wolfman. Don't *be* the victim."

The Dennehy brothers were watching TV again. This time it was the fifth game of the

1956 World Series. As Larsen wound up and pitched, Ed wound up and acted out a pitch as Larsen threw the last strike of the game. Yogi Berra ran out and jumped into Larsen's arms, and Ed jumped on Mike, as the Dennehy brothers went nuts over Larsen's World Series perfect game.

Brian was doing pushups, working diligently to get in shape for the next season while watching TV. He was sick and tired of being pushed around on the football field, so he was trying to build up his strength. He got up and went and told Ed he was going to the basement to work out with weights.

Meanwhile, Ed was watching Humphrey Bogart on TV playing a Rick Blain in Casablanca. "Tell me," Ed said, as Humphrey Bogart, "who was it you left me for? Was it Lazlo, or were there others in between? Or ... Aren't you the kind that tells?" He changed the channel to the Knute Rockne story and then walked over to the mirror and he bent over like he had scoliosis, and said "I've come under unfortunate circumstances. Can't you spare a dime, boy?"

Then he morphed into Quasi Modo and while swinging his arms he said, "Sanctuary ... Sanctuary,"

Then, in an effortless transformation, he mimicked Humphrey Bogart, and said, "Tell me, who was it you left me for? Was it Lazlo, or were there others in between?"

But it was the Pat O'Brien as Knute Rockne portrayal that he loved the best. He went back to the TV and took a pad and pencil from the coffee table and began writing while actor Pat O'Brien gave his a locker room speech. He rehearsed his lines and got the first part down by heart.

"Now I'm gonna tell ya something that's gonna make you weep," he recited to no one in particular. "I've kept this to myself for years. None of you never knew George Gipp. He was long before your time, but you all know what a tradition he is here at Notre Dame. And the last thing he said to me was, 'Rock, sometime when the team is up against it and the breaks are beating the boys, tell them to go out there with all they've got and win just one for the Gipper. I don't know where I'll be then, Rock, but I'll know you did it and I'll be happy.'"

It was show time for Ed, so he went down to the basement where Brian was working out. "Can I recite a Knute Rockne speech to you? I changed it a bit."

Brian motioned for him to 'go for it' and continued bench pressing. Ed prepared. He crouched a bit, threw his notes on the floor. Tucked his left arm close to his body, as if he was holding a football, extended his right arm and pointed to nowhere in particular, as if he was posing. "We're gonna win today boys. We're going inside of 'em. We're going outside of 'em. Inside of 'em! Outside of 'em! And through 'em if need be. And when we get them on the run, we're gonna keep 'em on the run forever. We gonna go, go, go. We're gonna block and we're gonna run. And we're gonna run and block until they wish they didn't come here today. And don't forget, men. Today we're gonna win."

Brian stopped exercising. He had taken notice of his brother's acting talent and sat up on the bench to observe. Then Ed picked up his notes, read them a bit, then threw them back down and continued. "Make no mistake about it, boys, they'll give the ball to their unstoppable Bellino, their all-American fullback. But remember men, we too have a weapon that has never failed us. Brian Dennehy! Brian Dennehy against Bellino. That's the way it should be. That's how it will be. Bellino against Dennehy. And make no mistake about it, men, victory will be ours. The first platoon, men -- go in there and fight, fight, fight, fight! What do you say, men?"

The Dennehy family sat in the stands and watched a Chaminade Football game. A banner showing the year (1958 CHSFL Champions) was pinned to the chain link fence.

“Unlike his freshman year, Brian was all over the place, tackling and blocking,” Ed said to Drew. “He was a much leaner dough boy as a senior. At one of those games I was sitting in the stands with my brother and father, and we watched Brian recover from a block and he tackled the running back with such aggression that the ball went flying into the end zone.

“Brian was one of those rare cats who played both offense and defense making brutal tackles and blocking for large gains. In fact, come at the end of his senior season, he was the only player who made all-league on both offense and defense. College recruiters came to the house all the time. Brian finally settled on Columbia.”

CHAPTER SIX

That next year, Ed stood in front of his friends in the basement. It was dark, except for a few lit candles. All eyes were on Ed as he recited the Knute Rockne speech.

“And make no mistake about it, men,” Ed acts out. “Victory will be ours. The first platoon, men -- go in there and fight, fight, fight! What do you say, men?”

Everyone cheered, and Ed took a few bows. Alice, a pretty girl who also was Drew’s sister, and a year older than Ed, clapped the loudest.

At Chaminade High School Auditorium, Ed, Mike, Hannah and Edwin took their seats in the front row. A poster on the side of the stage read, *welcome to the senior play, George Washington Slept Here, written by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman.*

Slightly after the play began, Brian bellowed his lines with such a force it surprised Ed, who was wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

“I really didn't want to go,” Ed remembered. “My parents forced me to go. But suddenly I saw Brian on stage and he was acting different. Peculiar. He wasn't himself. Brian walked across the stage bellowing his lines, and my passion to act had not left me since then. I guess I always wanted to act.”

When the play was over, the Dennehy's went up on stage and met the other actors. Ed saw a line of makeup creasing Brian's neck. “I know it was Brian, but he looked like someone else. Then I went to another play where Mike was the butler and he, too, was behaving unusual; that is, Mike was acting, and I loved it.”

But it was seeing Brian that convince Ed that’s what he wanted to do in life. He sat in his seat at the Chaminade Auditorium frozen like a statue watching Brian. After the applause subsided, Hannah nudged Ed.

“My mother saw how I was that night and knew instinctively that's what I wanted to do for a living. No words needed to be spoken. I was going to be an actor, and that was that.”

As Brian and Mike walked down from the stage together, Hannah gave her congratulations to both her sons. Ed looked at Brian and he saw the smudge marks on his clothes from his make-up, and took note.

“Well, did you like it, runt?”

“Yes, That’s what I want to do,” Ed said. “I want to mimic people.”

“Acting is a little more than that,” Brian laughed. He was going to say more, but Hannah nudged Brian and he fell silent.

Ed remembered that day clear as a bell. He also remembered the basement plays he put on in his house in Mineola. He remembered how make-shift it was.

Ge motioned for his non-acting friends to sit. A bed blanket hung over a clothes line, dubbing as a curtain. He finished lighting the candles around the 'stage'.

Ed flipped his black cape over his shoulder and walked to the center of the makeshift stage. His pointy shoes, tight pants, and his unusually styled pompadour made him a perfect weird-looking, Dracula.

Alice clapped the loudest again, as she came storming down the steps from the kitchen. “Sorry I'm late,” she said. She took a seat with the rest of the on-lookers as Ed appeared center stage. He spoke with a flawless Draconian accent. “Good Evening,” he said. “My name is Count Tribiculoso.”

John, in the audience, laughed loudly, causing a disruption of sorts. Ed walked up to him and got in his face and asked, "What are you laughing at?"

John stiffened. Embarrassed. "I ... don't know. I thought you were supposed to say 'Count Dracula'.

Keeping with the accent, Ed said, "All right, if you wish, my name is Count Dracula. There will be no talking or laughing during the show. The Thespians who perform for you today have spent years and years studying their lines and perfecting their roles. You, in the audience, must be silent, like you're dead. We, on stage, will perform life for you. We will resurrect you. Now, allow us ..."

And with that, Ed disappeared from view. Another boy standing in the wings, whisked the curtain away exposing a Drew, who had a wooden stake in his hand and a string of garlic about his neck. He looked around as if hunting something. Alice clapped softly and leaned into George Luka whispering ... "That's my brother".

In the corner of the dark basement, Ed's facial muscles contracted. Half visible in the dark shadows, and looking pale with white makeup on, he morphed into the character of Dracula, sucking air and looking like a demon. He moved like a Dracula and sauntered center stage, purposefully, so the audience could see him. They gasped in fear, the exact emotion Ed was looking for.

Later in the play, Ed chased Bob around the stage and, with a theatrical lunge, he captured him, bit his neck and drank his blood. Bob hollered with unusual robustness and then giggled because Ed was tickling him. Ed smacked him and said, "Stop. I am drinking your blood. You must die."

Bob fell limp and did a credible job of acting dead.

Later in the play, Ed was lying on a bench which was a substitute for a casket. Drew snuck up with a wooden stake in one hand and a rock in his other hand. Drew placed the stake on Ed's chest and hammered down with the rock. A spurt of red goop flew all over the audience, and Ed's eyes popped open and he howled in agony.

Everyone in the audience screamed. Being at the end of the play, the cast appeared in front and took their bows. Ed held up a popped balloon dripping with ketchup.

"The basement stories," Drew said. "I think that's where I got my inspiration for theatre, pounding a stake into your heart and the blood oozing all over and hearing the scream."

"Above all else," Ed said Shakespearean style, "hearing the screams. It also marked the beginning of my grandmother living with us."

CHAPTER SEVEN

A limo pulled up in front of the Dennehy's house in Mineola. Edwin rushed down to greet his mother, Victoria. She was slow-moving at her age, and took Edwin's hand as they slow-stepped their way into the house.

"I think my grandmother had a stroke or Alzheimer's, or something," Ed told Drew. Both his brothers were out of the house by now. They were both in college, so it was just Ed, Mom, Edwin, and now, Victoria, Ed's grandmother.

As Edwin walked up the porch with his mother, Ed greeted them. Victoria reached out to Ed's face and tried to make the 'got your nose' gesture, but she couldn't quite manage the routine. They continued into the house.

The next day Ed and Drew strutted down the hall of Corpus Christi Grammar School sporting their new Corpus Christi uniforms. Ed's tie was tucked in his shirt between the second and third buttons.

Ed admitted to Drew that he felt like an outsider at Corpus Christie. He didn't know exactly why. "Maybe it was because I didn't know how to blend in with my costumes," he guessed. His Corpus Christie clothes were his costume and it was very important to him, even then.

"I tried looking like a greaser," Ed admitted, "but that was hard to do with those uniforms. I mean, I had that greased-back hair look then, and pointy shoes and white socks, but those uniforms made me look like a straight-shooter. I couldn't shake that."

And then there was Sister Francis Mary. She approached Ed one day conspicuously hiding one hand behind her back.

"She hated me tucking in my tie between the third and fourth buttons," Ed told Drew. "It made me look like a hoodlum," she said, so, she pulled out a stapler from behind her back, grabbed my tie, and stapled it to his shirt to permanently leaving the tie hanging out instead of it being turned in.

Ed was having another stage play in the basement. While he set up the stage for more stories, Drew came walking down the steps with an ax. Drew didn't know what the ax was for, so Ed told him that he had a new skit that was going to knock the socks off the audience. "Just trust me," Ed said.

"Oh, it was wonderful back then, wasn't it?" Ed said to Drew. "All those kids sat on the floor and we scared the living bejesus out of them."

Drew and Ed duelled with wood furring strips while playacting. Ed swung hard, knocking a piece of wood out of Drew's hand and knocking over one of the candles that adorned the perimeter of the stage. Ed rushed over to put the candle upright.

"The candles were a good touch," Ed said to Drew, but Ed remembered running to the plywood wall, and looking left, then right, as if he was looking for someone.

He had nowhere to go, actually, so he turned around and leaned against the plywood which dubbed as an alleyway wall. He had his hands and arms outstretched, as if he was on a cross.

Drew felt his performance back then was over the top, but he still gave it his all. "Don't do this to me, Nicky. I would never turn you in," Drew recited back then.

Later on, impersonating James Cagney, Ed said, “This is the end of the line for you pigeon face. You’re a dirty rat, you see, and no one likes dirty rats, you see. Say your prayers, stoolie.” Ed picked up the ax, juggles it a bit, then took aim just as Alice jumped up and yelled, “Edward J. Dennehy. Stop.”

Ed ignored her, tossed the ax, and Alice screamed as it went flying, end-over-end. The blade impaled itself into the wood a few inches away from Drew’s left arm. Alice ran up the stairs and made a dramatic exit, as if she was part of the play. Of course, she wasn’t, but she was really angry.

Still, the audience thought she was part of the play and cheered her with gusto.

Still in grammar school, Drew and Ed were listening to a recording of John Barrymore, Sr. reciting a soliloquy in HAMLET on TV in the Dennehy living room. Ed turned off the TV and posed in the middle of the room in a dramatic fashion. For a moment he was John Barrymore.

“To be or not to be,” Ed acted out, “that is the question: whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune ... Damn. I forgot the rest. Why hasn’t Alice been at the basement stories?”

“She thought the ax show we did was too dangerous,” Drew said. “She says she’s never coming here again. She hates you.”

Ed posed this time and said, “O, that this solid flesh would melt,”

“Tutu?” Drew questioned. “It’s too...too. The character’s supposed to feel bad. It’s like a ‘so, so sorry’, kind of thing.”

Ed, never being drawn in to formalities, continued without pause, “Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue and skippingly with my legs.” He skipped in a circle, then bowed.

In the Dennehy kitchen, Edwin and Hannah Dennehy were putting on their coats getting ready to go to Broadway to see “The Hostage”, written by Brendan Behan. Seeing the worry on Hannah’s face, Edwin said to his wife not to worry. “You have all the emergency numbers by the phone” he said. “Don’t worry. Ed is old enough to be by himself.”

Hannah was more worried about Edwin’s mother, not Ed. Nevertheless, they left and Ed sat alone with his grandmother. After a few beats of silence, the grandmother said, “Oh, Lawrence, you are my Pip.”

Familiar with the signs, Ed realized his grandmother was hallucinating, which she did a lot in those days. Sometimes she thought Ed was Gramps. Sometimes she thought she was 30 years old again. And sometimes Ed just pretended to be her husband, which seemed the less stressful thing to do which might lessen the malady and cause it to stop even. But not this time.

“Oh, Lawrence, you are a sexy man,” Victoria said, and reached over the table with her hand.

“And you are a sexy woman, Victoria,” Ed said while taking her hand and caressing it.

“Do you think of me when you are in those coal mines?”

“Yes,” Ed said without hesitation. “When I’m in those coal mines working all day, and I see nothing but men sweating and farting, I think about you and I get a boner harder than an oak.”

There was a knock on the door and Ed could see through the kitchen window that it was Alice. He ran to open the door.

“Are we going to have a play today in the basement?” Alice asked.

“We can if you want. But it'll just be you and me.”

Alice walked in and went to the stairwell that led to the basement. Alice looked different to Ed this day. She was wearing makeup and a tight sweater. She looked older than her years.

She started to walk down to the basement. Ed hesitated at the top of the stairs - still in the kitchen.

“Where are you going, honey bunch?” Victoria asked.

Edward leaned into the living room and whispered loudly so Alice could not hear, “I'll be right back, my love.”

“Whoa!” Drew said. “Can we skip this part?”

“No. This is an important. Alice... She is a very important person. She's ... It was a wonderful thing.”

“Oh, good God!” Drew said. “God help me.”

Ed had to excuse himself to Alice because he had to put his grandmother to bed.

“Ed, where is Lawrence?” Victoria asked, fully recognizing Ed now.

“Upstairs, Grandmother.” Ed scooped his grandmother up in his arms and carried her out of the living room.

“My grandmother's mind snapped in and out of different realities.” Ed told Drew.

“There was no predicting it. I just had to go with the flow sometimes.”

Ed carried Victoria to her bedroom. “Where's Lawrence?” Victoria asked.

“Right here, Grandmother.”

Ed put Victoria down and pointed to the bed. “Your husband is in bed, see.”

Victoria looked to the bed and a loving expression enveloped her face.

“Oh, Lawrence,” she said to an empty bed. “I'll be right there.”

She turned to Ed and said, “What are you doing here? You can go now, Edward. Don't be a little snoop.”

Ed took the bathrobe from the hook on the door, and handed it to his grandmother. She took the robe and went into the bathroom.

In the basement, Ed skipped down the steps and saw Alice sitting on the floor.

“I thought you were angry with me,” Ed said.

“I was,” Alice said. “My brother told me you were very sorry, so I decided to tell you I'm not angry now.”

Ed sat down next to Alice.

“I saw my parents in bed the other night,” Ed said. “They were having sex.”

Alice moved close to Ed and they kissed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Ed smoked a cigarette in Drew's den. Drew bolted to his feet and walked over to the window to open it to remove the smoke. "My good sister is dead, for crying out loud. Can't you just leave her be. For Chrissakes, she was only twelve years old at the time."

"She was thirteen," Ed rebutted. "I was twelve."

"Whatever," Drew said. "Just stop, please."

"But it's part of the story. I have to be true to myself. Besides, you've known this for over two-decades. Why are you upset now?"

"It's not right."

"But it wasn't like that. It was something that just happened. We trusted each other. We experimented, and it felt right. Besides, if I want to find out why I'm sinking, I can't do it by cheating on the story."

Drew fell down in his chair and motioned for Ed to continue.

Ed and Alice were partially dressed in the basement of Ed's house. There were not going to be any basement stories on this day. Knowing this, Alice got up and pulled the 'curtain' off the rope and placed it on the floor. She lay down on the blanket and wanted to experiment. So, Ed obliged her.

And that's about all Ed said to Drew. Ed just said it was a beginning of a beautiful relationship and left it at that because he knew if he voiced the details, it would only sound dirty instead of innocent, and caring. And loving.

"Okay," Drew said, "So you had your first encounter with my sister. Let's move on."

So, Ed moved on to the Corpus Christi Chapel. In particular, the next step in Ed's life was the confessional booth. A whispering, chatty, two-way conversation was taking place inside the church's confessional and Drew was sitting in the first pew. Then, all of a sudden, Ed came out of the confessional booth and wiped imaginary sweat from his forehead and sighed. The center door to the confessional booths flew open. Father Tully stuck his head out and looked both ways. There was no one else on line, so Father Tully told Ed to come back next week so he could check on his progress.

Ed walked out of the church and slowly descended the steps. Drew bolted out of the church and hustled down the steps to walk with Ed.

"He said it was a mortal sin," Ed said to Drew.

"You see. I told ya," Drew said.

In a Corpus Christi Grammar School classroom, Sister Francis Mary drew two circles under the word SOUL on the blackboard. She wrote the words VENIAL SINS and MORTAL SINS below the circles. Ed sat in class and lazily watched Sister Francis Mary pound a myriad of dots on the first circle.

"And this is how your soul looks when you have venial sins."

And then she fills in the second circle completely with chalk and told the class this was the soul when it had 'mortal sins'. Burdened with guilt and dismay, Ed groaned the loudest.

"Sister Francis Mary had a way of categorizing sins, didn't she?" Ed asked Drew. "She told me that tucking my tie into my shirt was a venial sin."

"I'm just as Catholic as you are," Drew said, "and there's no way tucking your tie in

your shirt was ever a venial sin.”

“It was the insubordination that was the sin, numbnuts,” Ed said. “Anyway, you’d be happy to know my escapades with your sister would put me in the fires of hell for all eternity. I believe in Karma and you believe in hell. I wonder which is worse. If you’re right then yours is worse, and if mine is true, I’ll probably come back as a dog.”

“At last, we agree on something.”

Ed raised his hand in he classroom. “Yes, Edward. What is it?” Sister Francis Mary said. She really didn’t want to call on him, but it was so obvious that Ed was the only one with his hand up, that she had no alternative but to call on him.

“I was wondering,” Ed said. “If a baby was baptized and then died, wouldn’t he go right to heaven?”

“He’d go right to heaven since his soul is clean, yes,” the Nun said. “Have you another question, Edward?”

“Yes. If I had a baby brother, I’d want him to go to heaven, right?”

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, please give me patience. Yes, Edward. So what’s your point?”

“Well, this might sound terrible, most people think it is, but what greater love could I have than to kill him so he would go to heaven for all eternity? Wouldn’t this act of murder really be an act of mercy and love?”

Sister Francis Mary couldn’t speak she was so horrified at the question. And Ed couldn’t leave well enough alone, so he continued. “If I put a pillow over his face and smothered him or something, so it didn’t hurt, he’d have a fast ticket to heaven, right? So, if someone offered me a guarantee to heaven like that, I’d take it, wouldn’t I? That would be something that’s good, not bad, even though I killed him. Or her, assuming he was my sister.”

“That’s enough, Edward,” the Nun said. “Get up. Get up. GET UP.”

Ed stood up and Sister Francis Mary came over with a ruler. Ed held out his hands, as if he’s done this before, and the Sister smacked him a couple of times, and then told him to go to the principal’s office.

“So, anyway, I didn’t see eye-to-eye with the establishment, that’s for sure,” Ed told Drew. “And sex was not ugly for Alice and I, and it was not a mortal sin if I didn’t stop, because it was good and holy. And that’s that. End of story.”

Drew moaned loudly and said, “Continue. I don’t see you sinking yet.”

“Well, something happened that might change your mind.”

While Ed and Alice were down in the basement alone, Ed’s body convulsed in an epileptic fit. Alice screamed, and after a few seconds, Ed’s eyes opened, and he looked okay, but he appeared confused as his body relaxed.

Ed’s father ran down the steps in response to Alice’s screams. He saw Ed button up his pants and assumed the worst. In a fit of rage he began yelling, and kicked a chair, and while his rage continued, Alice ran up the stairs, crying.

“This happened when I was in eighth grade. And, as it turned out, it was the last time I had a seizure, and it was the last time I saw your sister in my basement.

“My point here is,” Ed continued, “my Dad made it seem like we did something that was dirty. What a laugh. Coming from him, I mean. I was true to your sister, Drew. I was.”

“Really, now,” Drew said. “Didn’t you have a thing for Maria Compos in eighth grade? How honest was that, you poking my sister while trying to seduce Maria.”

“Ah, yes. I forgot about her”

At the Corpus Christi Gymnasium, the floor was packed with eighth-graders – dancing and singing. Drew and Ed were by the punch table pointing at girls on the dance floor.

“That one over there with the pony tail,” Drew said, pointing. “She’s very pretty. Can’t dance for a hill of beans though.”

“Neither can you,” Ed said,

Without hesitation, Drew walked over and asked the girl with the pony-tail to dance, while a very cute Marie Compos came up to Ed and asked him to dance.

Later that night, in the coatroom, Marie and Ed were lying down, kissing. No one could really see them because they were tucked underneath the partition that existed between the coats and the public.

Sister Francis Mary, attracted by the moans Marie was making, ducked behind the partition and saw Ed making out with Marie. The Nun stood before them looking very rigid and intolerant. Several classmates stood behind the nun, giggling at what they saw.

He and Marie got up and walked past the Nun and the students as if nothing had happened. Some of the students patted Ed on the back as he walked past, and said, anything from, “Way to go Ed” to “Did you cop a feel.”

Ed walked to his locker and Marie went directly to the dance floor. Ed saw Alice by her locker and headed towards her instead. When he got there, he said, “Alice. I don’t know what you heard, but I just want to explain...”

“You don’t have to explain anything,” she said. “We live in America, don’t we? It’s a free country.”

“I know, but I just want to explain.”

Alice turned and faced Ed. “Okay. Explain,” she said.

Back in the den, Ed said, “You’re right, Drew. I wish I behaved differently. It was the end of our beautiful relationship.”

“Can we move on, please?” Drew just wanted to get on with the story, and didn’t like these pit-stops when it was connected with her sister.

CHAPTER NINE

Ed sat in a Chaminade Classroom wearing a Maras Jacket, and a button down shirt, and a cloth tie. He was now wearing a pair of Penny Loafers, and they were pointed.

The bell rang and the students in this all-male school filed out of the classroom. 'Ace' exited the room and met up with Drew who spun around, showing off a white Chaminade sweater.

"I made the cheerleading squad," Drew said.

"You look great," Ed responded. "You can cheer for me while I tear up the gridiron."

"I don't know, Ed. Chaminade's in a tough league. Some very big guys are out there. They'll flatten you out, like a pancake."

"They gotta catch me first."

"I know you're fast. But you only weigh a 135 pounds soaking wet. You'll get killed out there, and you won't have your brothers to help you out."

Ed dismissed Drew with a wave and headed into a class.

A field crowded with 14 year-old boys were running, punting, passing and kicking footballs. Four football coaches were directing the different disciplines. Ed, and a dozen other boys, line up on the 50 yard line. Bill Fowtes and his assistant, George Troop, were on the goal line. Bill blew his whistle and the boys sprinted the 50 yards. Ed crossed the finish line with Dick Noering and Bob Gately. It was hard to tell who finished first, so the coach had to take a guess. He pointed to Dick Noering who did a nine-nine in the hundred in his senior year. No one could beat him. Not even Gately, who was fast as hell and who weighed 170 pounds at the time.

"Dick weighed less than you did," Drew said. "The pads slowed you both down. Gately, not so much."

"Dennehy!" Fowtes yelled. "You any relationship to Brian Dennehy?"

"Yeah. He's my brother," Ed yelled back, proudly.

Coach Fowtes highbrows Mr. Troop and said to him, "We'll try him at fullback. He should grow into it in a couple of years."

"Gately weighed thirty pounds more than you and Dick," Drew said. "He gets hit, he gets back up. You get hit, you go in for x-rays."

"Yeah, That's how it turned out, but at the time they thought I was going to grow. Boy, were they mistaken."

Weeks later the team practiced on the field with full pads on. Ed played fullback; Gately set himself at the halfback position. Ed was given the ball, ran up the middle, bounced off a player or two, and scampered around in the backfield, dodging the defense. A defensive player barreled through and laid Ed out.

Coach Fowtes motioned for another player to take Ed's slot, and motions Ed to take the other halfback slot. On the next play, Pete Groh, the quarterback, fell back for a pass. He passed to Gately in the flat who was off and running, dodging and weaving. Gately got trapped by two defenders and got hit. But just before going down he flipped the ball to Ed who outkicked the rest of the defense into the end zone.

On another day, in a Sunday afternoon game, Ed had the ball and ran thirty yards sideways to gain ten yards forward. Edwin was sitting in the stands and clapped.

Drew, close by, lead a cheer, which drew the crowd in and they cheered wildly.

At the gymnasium, Ed, Drew and Gately stood around together at a post-game sock hop.

A girl walked up to Ed, and he went into a crazy improvisational Rumba.

After the season was over, at a basketball game, Gately, Drew and Noering were in the stands cheering. Chaminade scored and they jumped to their feet, cheering. Off to the side, Ed snuck out a flask and privately drank.

Before anyone knew it, flowers bloomed, spring arrived, and there were familiar faces running in their respective fields of interest. Gately, Noering and Dennehy ran against each other in a hundred yard dash.

Summer arrived and a bunch of football players were preparing for the upcoming season by running the track and exposing themselves to the hot sun and a lot of sweating. Ed was conspicuously missing.

"I remember that day," Ed said to Drew. "I was going to try out for the school play as a freshman.

Mike's friend, Tom Cosgrove, went to the seminary and graduated as a Marianist Brother. He came over to teach Drama at Chaminade in the spring of my freshman year. The lead roles went to the seniors. Still, I was kicking myself for not auditioning for one of the minor roles. Anyway, that summer my mom suggested I go to the Playhouse to get some experience. So, I hauled myself over to Mineola Theatre which was owned by Lorne Philbin. He owned five other theaters in the Northeast and rotated the summer shows between them."

Ed walked up to the front door. It was locked. He stopped in front of the billboard advertisement of Desperate Hours.

"Desperate Hours was playing at Mineola Playhouse. That's when I knew I was in the right place. I already saw the movie version with Humphrey Bogart and I was awed by his performance. The Broadway play was a springboard for Paul Newman. My dad took Mom and I to see it in a stage production with Sammy Davis, Jr. I remember telling myself that I could be that tough hood. Don't forget I used to be a greaser once."

While Ed stood in front of the billboard, Elenor, the ticket booth lady, appeared in the booth and waved him over.

"It's a little slow for a Saturday afternoon," she said. "We got some vacant seats if you want to go in. No charge. Show started already, though."

So, Ed walked into the theatre while the play was well into the first act. He sat in the back row, which was empty. After a couple of seconds, Elenor sat next to Ed.

"Her name was Elenor Flagstaff. A real sexy thing."

She leaned into Ed and kissed him, and then left, and didn't say a word.

"Oh, good God," Drew said. "Here we go again."

After the play was over Ed exited the theatre and saw Elenor in the ticket booth. She smiled and he tossed her a half-salute, and went around back and opened the backstage door, and walked in.

In the backstage of the Mineola Playhouse, the office door opened and a man and a woman came out. It was dark, Ed remembered. He couldn't see much. Then, the theatre's technical director, Leon Grote, came out of a room with a good-looking woman who Ed found out later was Kathy Noble, the theatre manager.

"Leon saw me," Ed said. "So, I told him I was willing to do anything if he gave me a job. After all these years, thinking about it now, it was odd that he hired me. But he did, for seventy-five dollars a week. I did everything from cleaning toilets to sweeping floors. I did much more than that, of course."

At the Playhouse, Ed was sweeping the floor when Kathy approached him and asked him if he had a driver's license? He did not have one, but he said he did.

“Even at that early age,” Ed told Drew, “I knew that telling a lie was okay in order to get ahead. It was a part of the game, and no one was going to get ahead by being righteous.”

“Good,” Kathy said. “Claudette Colbert is coming in today ...”

Wondering if he was going to rub shoulders with the elite, Ed said, “You mean, the Cleopatra ... It Happened One Night... Imitation of Life... That Claudette Colbert?”

Kathy responded by telling Edward that she wanted him to chauffeur her around.

Kathy tossed Ed a set of keys and told him to drive the Lincoln outside in back.

“Dent it,” she said in earnest, “and I’ll hog-tie you and stuff your mouth with your own entrails.”

“The only driving I did was when I stole my father's car,” Ed admitted to Drew “And I only did that once, since I got caught because I parked the car in a different spot. My father kind-of noticed that. I mean, what the hell, it was three in the morning and I didn't figure some jerk neighbor would come home from a binge and take my father's parking spot while I was out joy riding.”

Ed played the part well. He donned a limousine driver's cap and picked up Miss Colbert at the airport. He was a chauffeur for the day, and while driving her to the hotel, Ed eyed her in the rear view mirror while she was putting her makeup on in the back seat. Ed rode over a bump, and he winced at what he saw.

“My dear boy,” Miss Colbert said, “Do me a favor and find the smooth side of the road while I make myself presentable.”

“Yes, Miss Colbert,” was all Ed could say.

“If you can do that,” Miss Colbert said, “I’ll let you call me 'Legs'. Walter Winchell used to call me that, you know.”

“Later, I learned they also called her 'the fretting frog’,” Ed told Drew, “because she worried too much about how she looked during filming. But, to me, she was one classy woman: a genuine act; a sweetheart.”

At the Mineola Playhouse, he waited backstage to drop the curtain as he watched Colbert deliver her final monologue. He looked past Colbert, past the lights, and into the audience. Ed saw a veil of darkness due to the stage lights being pointed directly at him. He tried to focus, but the lights were too bright. Finally, he saw eyes looking at her. Hundreds of them. Eyes without faces.

Ed looked to Leon across the stage. He held his closed fist out instructing Ed to hold the curtain. Claudette finished her monologue and stepped back a couple of steps so the curtain would not fall on her. Leon motioned for Ed to drop the curtain, which he did.

Claudette looked to Ed and nodded. He lifted the curtain, so she could step forward and bowed for an encore appearance. She stepped back again as a cue for Ed let the curtain drop, which he did. Claudette exited the stage, and as she walked past Ed, she stuck a twenty-dollar bill in his shirt pocket. “Thanks for not dropping the curtain on my head, Edward,” she said.

Elenor Flagstaff and Ed were in bed in her apartment complex somewhere on Long Island. He tried to control her as she leaped around, more like a gymnast than a woman having sex. A knock on the door interrupted their foreplay, and the door opened without permission. Another woman peeked in, someone who Ed didn't know.

“You guys are making me horny as hell,” she said. “Either you quiet down or I'll come in and make it a threesome.”

Elenor motioned for her to hop in. The woman accepted the invitation and three of them begin made passionate love to each other.

“You gotta be kidding,” Drew said. “A ménage a trios! You're fifteen-years-old, for crying out loud. In my entire life I've never had ... Forget it. Zip past this, will ya.”

Ed continued with his story in the Drew's den, not knowing if he felt any closer to knowing why he felt he was having a breakdown. But he continued anyway.

CHAPTER TEN

At backstage in the Mineola Playhouse, Leon and Pat Hingle, the actor, were sitting in the front row of an empty theatre while Ed was sweeping the stage with a broom.

"I'm not one to cause problems, Leon," Pat said, "but I want my own dressing person. And don't give me anyone who uses more moisturizers than my wife, if you know what I mean. I've had a couple of bad experiences lately."

"How about him," Leon said as he pointed to Ed on stage.

"Yes. Give me that boy," Pat said. "He's fine."

"So, I became Pat Hingle's personal dresser," Ed told Drew. "Here I am, I'm 15 years-old putting a corset on a man twice my age so he could play Cyrano de Bergerac. He played On the Waterfront, The Land Before Time. He was in the Batman movies, for crying out loud. What a summer this was becoming."

The billboard displayed Carol Channing's name, who was starring in The Millionaires at the time at the Mineola Playhouse. He and the cast were rehearsing on stage while Leon approached Ed, and gave him money and a laundry ticket stub. He wanted Ed to go next door and pick up Carol's clothes from the dry cleaners. Before he left, Ed pointed to the man rehearsing his lines with Ms. Channing and wanted to know who he was.

"That's Art Lowe, Carol's husband," Leon said. "He owns a lot of movie theaters. Now go."

Ed left, fulfilling one of his duties as a gofer (go-for) duties, and came back with the clothes. Ed noticed everyone was taking a break, so he handed the clothes to Carol. She inspected them and didn't like what she saw.

"You little twit," she said to Ed. "Look at this dress. There's coffee stains all over it."

Arthur Lowe grabbed the dress and said, after inspecting it, "What's the matter with you, boy? Can't you do a simple thing right?"

"How am I going to go to Duffy's house now, Arthur? I must wear my red dress. Do something."

"You will pay for this," Mr. Lowe said.

"Mr. Lowe," Leon said in a soft tone trying to distill the anger. "Edward didn't do this. He just went across the street and got your clothes from the dry cleaners upon my request."

"Then we must see the proprietors of the dry cleaners right away," Ms. Channing said. "This is totally unacceptable. I cannot wear this dress with coffee stains on it."

A little later that night, after the rehearsal was over, the door flung open at the backstage of the Mineola Playhouse, and Leon and the dry cleaner owner walk in. Channing and Lowe were waiting for their prey.

Of course, they argued with the owner, but that didn't matter to Ed.

"I knew I was in the right place watching these two snipping people," Ed said to Drew. "This uppity witch married to this billionaire, just as bitchy, and screaming just as loud at this poor Chinaman. Ed then broke out into a song, "Well, hello Dolly, say good-bye Dolly. It's so nice to see you go."

Ed stopped before going further. "Actually, Channing hadn't played Levi Dolly yet. That would be a few years later."

In the late summer of '62, Leon and Ed stood outside the Playhouse alone and quiet. Ed

had a script in his hands. Several other 'wannabees' were sitting inside the office of the Mineola Playhouse rehearsing lines.

“Thank you for the audition,” Ed said, “but what if I do get the part in the Days of Dancing gig? I have to go to school in three weeks.”

“It's only five lines, Ed,” Leon retorted, “and judging from the way Shelly Winters is behaving, I think your few lines are not going to last much longer.”

Ed faced the door and Leon motioned for him to go in.

Once inside the office, Ed placed a copy of the script down, and shook hands with Tim Everett, the director, who sat behind a long desk with Kathy, the theatre manager.

“Okay, Mr. Dennehy,” Everett said. “You're here for the Shore Patrolman. Read. But here. I want you to read something from Casablanca.” Tim hands new sides to Ed. “Read the lines marked in yellow.”

So, Ed read. As he did, he portrayed Humphrey Bogart reciting the lines from Casablanca, then James Stuart, then Peter Fonda. It was if the real characters were right behind him mouthing the words, with Ed mouthing the same lines as those actors behind him. The mannerisms of Ed and Bogart, for example, were identical. The image of Bogart stayed behind Ed while the others vanished.

After the reading was finished, the director sat expressionless at the table. Finally, he yelled, “Leon?”

“Yes, Tim. I'm right here. You don't have to yell.”

“Get this boy an Equity Card.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Ed and Elenor were in bed at Elenor's apartment. In the heat of passion, Ed whispered to her that he loved her. And later that week, at a hotel somewhere within close driving distance of the Playhouse, Ed walked up to room 103, and he knocked on the door. Kathy, the theatre manager, greeted him. She was dressed in a loosely tied bathrobe, and she pulled him in and began to disrobe him.

"I had no idea what was going on. Unbridled naivety, that's what it was. I know I'm not a good-looking boy, yet I'm getting screwed by older women. And more than one woman at times. And I'm not even in tenth grade yet. I didn't have time to integrate what sex was, or should be."

"You're never going to define it and be able to make it sound okay." Drew said. "You're a deviant. So, let's leave it at that and move on."

At the Playhouse, Ed sat in the front row of the empty theatre watching the rehearsal. Director Tim Everett sat in the back of the theatre watching. At the rehearsal, Shelly Winters, who was broad at the beam even then, acted on stage with Robert Walker. She strutted forward and began reciting her lines, stumbled, and then tossed the script to the floor.

"I'm cold here," Winters said, not even completing her first sentence yet. "I'm cold. I have no lights on me."

"It was a disaster," Ed told Drew. "Here she is, this tent-of-a woman, far removed from her ravishing self of the nineteen forties, complaining she was cold in the heat of summer."

Tim came running from the back of the theatre, ran past Ed, and up the stage steps.

"You know, I have won an Oscar," Shelly Winters said. "I have won a Tony. I have won an Emmy. And you're telling me that you can't get some heat in here."

"Right away," was all Tim Everett would say before he started looking for the thermostat.

Later on at a bar, Walker and Ed had been drinking for some time. The bartender drafted up two beers and placed them in front of Ed and Robert. Both men put their empty mugs down, then picked up their newly filled mugs in unison and took take healthy swigs.

Walker laughed, then said, "You know, James Stewart worked with her in Winchester and after it was filmed he said that she should've been spanked. I never knew what he meant until now."

"She's a little too big for that now, don't you think, Mr. Walker?" They both laughed.

"Anyway, don't pay attention to any of that Hollywood 'look-at-me' crap. That's all it is. Just crap."

Walker and Winters were playing to a live audience while Ed watched the action backstage. Tim Everett was standing behind Ed who was wearing a pure white shore patrolman's uniform with a white sailor's hat and a black SP arm band with a gun, while playing with the billy club strapped to his hip.

Ed was waiting to go on stage for his day of glory while Robert Walker finished his lines and left the stage through a prop door. After a few beats, Tim tapped Ed on the shoulder and Ed walked up to the prop door from back stage, and knocked.

Winters opened the door from the stage side, and Ed entered the stage. He looked out into the audience, and saw a wall of darkness.

"Hello, Ma'am," Ed said acting out his role. "I'm looking for Bart West. He is AWOL

from the Navy. We have word he is here.”

Ed saw a duffle bag, which was a prop and asked if he could look around.

“Look if you must,” Shelly Winters acted out, “but I don't know who you're talking about.”

Ed looked in the second room, then came back and said, “Okay Ma'am. If you do see him, please call the base security office.” Ed started to leave the stage, but Winters cast a seductive look and backed up to the bed. He grabbed her, threw her on the bed with some difficulty, and roughed her up a bit (acting). She then screamed, thrashed about, and slapped Ed across the face.

The curtain fell as he ripped off the top of her dress. The audience responded with a thunderous applause.

In a Chaminade classroom, Ed sat watching Brother John Brady as he wrote on the blackboard. Ed was wearing a madras jacket with a checkered tie tucked into his shirt.

“So, my summer dreams went up in smoke. My hopes went from this-is-going-to-be-a-Broadway-New-York-City-hit, to a two-week-run-at-the-Mineola-Playhouse. Then I went back to school. But I was only 15 years old, mind you, and I was ready to rumble.”

John Brady turned from the blackboard where he wrote: “2000 WORDS: WHAT I DID FOR THE SUMMER”.

“Your first English assignment,” Brady said, “is a two-thousand word composition on what you did for the summer.”

The bell for the next class rang, and Ed chuckled to himself.

“There was no way I was going to write about my escapades that summer,” Ed admitted to Drew. “Mr. Brady wouldn't have believed me anyway. Hell, I didn't even believe it myself.”

Coach Flynn paced the Chaminade Football Field sidelines in front of his players who were sitting on benches watching the game. He leaned down and whispered in Ed's ear, “Dennehy,” he said, “Tell O'Keefe to come out. Forty-eight option pass.”

Ed ran onto the field shouting O'Keefe's name and gave the instructions to the quarterback on the next play. The ball was given to Ed and he ran around end and passed to Gately for a modest gain.

Weeks later, holly and other Christmas ornaments decorated the hallways in the Chaminade building. Ed stared at the Audition section of the bulletin board at the words “Desperate Hours” - Come One, Come all’.

Brother Tom Cosgrove must've seen Desperate Hours at the Mineola Playhouse during the summer and decided to have it as the senior play. Ed couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the audition notice.

Tom sat at a table on stage supervising the sign-up process for the audition. Several students waited around the stage while Ed stepped up and logged in his signature on the sign-up sheet. He remembered Tom telling him that he was not going to discourage Ed from auditioning, but don't expect a large role. Those roles were for the seniors.

Ed told Brother Tom that he didn't expect special treatment just because Ed knew him, but he'd like to audition anyway. And they agreed. Tom was not going to give him special treatment.

At the dining room table a few nights later, the script “Desperate Hours” sat on the table in front of Ed. He opened the script and began reading. He posed, pulled at his hair, and then looked up to the wall ... “Sorry to bother you ma’am, but it looks like I lost my way.”

Then, Ed. in a more dramatic pose acted, as Bogart, “You, Hilliard, I seen what you been up to! Clickety, clickety, click...”

Then he was Cagney, “You, Redhead...keep that pretty mouth shut today, see...”

Then Ed morphed back into Bogart again. “You know! You don't know nothin'!”. Then he was himself, “And the bastard walkin' right up 'n cloutin' me. I can still hear the way the bone cracked.”

Ed tossed the script into the garbage just as Hannah opened the door and walked into the house with bag of groceries. Before going into the kitchen, she picked up the script from the garbage with her free hand, and tossed it back on the table.

“It's no use,” Ed said. “They give all the good roles to the seniors.”

“Don’t let a dumb tradition stop you. Go get it changed.”

A student finished his cold read for the lead role, then exited. Ed walked up and prepared himself physically. He was Bogart, and no one was going to stop him.

Tom sat in the front row reading Ed's resume.

“I didn't realize you did so much over at Mineola, Ed. Okay, why don't you turn to page twelve. Do Winston.”

“Brother Tom, may I do the Glenn character, the monologue at the end? I know, I know, it's the main character. But if I did the monologue it would be more than you asked and more than enough to make a decision on where to cast me.”

“If I cast you at all, Edward,” Tom said. He paused in case Ed changed his mind. Ed didn't. “Okay. Fine. Go ahead.”

Ed looked up and paused. He tossed the script to the floor. Ed's vision of the audience is the same 'eyes' looking at Claudette Colbert during her monologue. Hundreds of them. Except now the eyes are looking at him. He played to the eyes. Ed struggled to find his own voice.

While Ed recited the monologue, a collection of actors, who Ed had imitated over the years, loomed behind him as ghost-like figures: Pat O'Brien, John Barrymore, Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, the NY City bum, and Brian when he was acting in the high school play. The procession of the images collided with Ed's image as he was trying to overtake them, or finding his own voice. As he acted out the monologue, his image failed to stay in focus as the next character's face appears. The chaos in Ed's head ended and he finally finds his own voice speaking the lines.

“No! You ain't gotta Goddamn, stinkin' thing to say! You, Hilliard, I seen what you been up to! Clickety, clickety, click. I can see them wheels goin' around in there, Pop. Don't ever try that again! You know, I knew an old man like you, Pop. Always callin' the tune. Outside his house, nobody. Inside, Mister God. Little punk went to church every Sunday... took it from everybody... licked their shoes...”

Ed's image finally dominated the others as he found his own voice. He was confident and had purpose.

“...be a Punk ...be a nobody,” Ed acted out “Take it from you shiney-shoed, look-down-your-noses sonsabitches with white handkerchiefs in your pockets!”

Ed snatched an imaginary handkerchief from the imaginary Hilliard's breast pocket, spit in it, throws it to the floor. “Clickety, clickety, click...you remember, Pop...I could kill you just

for kicks.”

Brother Tom’s mouth hung wide open.

In Tom’s classroom at Chaminade the next day, Ed knocked on the door and entered. Tom sat at his desk and, when he saw Ed, he threw his pencil down and folded his arms.

“You wanted to see me, Brother Tom?” Edward asked.

Tom, frowned a bit. He did not say anything.

“I just want to be in the play, Brother Tom. I’ll take anything, really.”

“I wanted you to come because I wanted to tell you in person not through a paper on the wall that had your name on it.” He stopped talking for dramatic effect, and then said,

“Congratulations, Ed. You’re the first underclassman to win the lead in a senior play. May God help us? It’s one of the times in my life when I say, ‘What have I done?’” Tom laughed and extended his hand and they shook robustly. “Good job. Now let’s see if you can do it.”

On Chaminade stage with all the senior student actors, Tom introduced the cast and didn’t make mention of Ed’s acting abilities. He got the three female parts from Sacred Heart Academy in Hempstead.

“Let me introduce you all to the three ladies from the Sacred Heart Academy. They will be playing the female parts. Joyce Linton, Lynn Donovan and Joan McGuiness.”

Tom began the rehearsals right away. Ed found his position on stage, slinging a gun over his shoulder, crouching down because he was being hunted. He moved around as if he owned the stage. During the rehearsal of this play, Ed realized how important it was to create your own movement. It was the movement that was so important, or the blocking, as they called it in the business.

At home Ed studied his lines and recited them in front of the mirror. He went through a myriad of facial expressions that became a language in and of itself to Ed.

On stage, Tom tried to get Ed to stand and not crouch so much. But Ed was so into his part, that it was hard to contain or subdue him from going ‘over-the-top’ at times.

During a particular rehearsal Joyce slapped Ed in a scene, and Ed summoned a theatrical face, a contorted, twisted look of anger. Tom just nodded his approval.

At rehearsal in the high school auditorium, Ed walked across the stage and took Joyce’s face in the palm of his hand, and forcibly pushed her away. She stumbled across the room and onto the floor. Ed then took his time as he revealed a scowling face to the players, and to the imaginary audience, then sat down on the couch. He slammed his foot on the coffee table and the knick knacks on the table wobbled in place. None fell. The other student-actors were mesmerized at his portrayal and gave him an ovation for his efforts.

“Knock it off, everyone. Okay. That was terrific, Ed,” Tom said. “Good movement, good projection. A little too heavy on the foot though.”

Tom turned to the others and told them to get some rest because tomorrow was the big day.

The next day, Ed sat in the middle of a classroom biting on a pencil in a nervous, fidgety way. He looked at the clock which told everyone it was 3:45 PM.

The teacher faced the class and said, “The mind is constantly in conflict with itself. Freud understood this conflict as a cause of human unhappiness, and led him to believe the mind was

divided into three parts: the ID, the EGO, and the SUPER-EGO.”

The teacher slowly paced in front of the room. “The ID is the most primitive force. It causes the instant gratification in us. It wants what it wants, and it wants it now without constraint.”

During the teacher's ego-definition, Ed looks to the left and sees a man who looks like John Barrymore, Sr. with a suit, hat and overcoat from another era sitting in a front row seat and pointed to Ed, as if to say that Ed was the ID. Ed was used to hallucinations and that’s what it was, he surmised. Ed stayed focused on Barrymore as the teacher continued.

“The ego acts as a middleman in the ID’s relations with reality. The Ego strong-arms the ID, or suppresses its urges until an appropriate situation arises. For example, fear stops us from peeing in the classroom, forcing us to wait until the class is over where we go to the men’s room, or the woman’s room.”

Barrymore pointed to himself, then disappeared.

Ed shook his head. Barrymore was not there anymore. As the teacher explained the super-ego, Ed looked to the right and saw a scraggly-looking person who looked like a puppet or a ragamuffin man, with his head bent, and his face painted.

“The superego uses guilt as a means of enforcing the process already established between the id and ego. For example, if you do something which is acceptable to the super-ego, you experience pride. Conversely, if you do something wrong, you feel guilty, depressed.”

Ed does another double take and the Ragamuffin Man is gone. The bell rang and Ed sighed. “I’m losing my mind,” he said to himself.

A student came up from behind and patted him on the shoulder. “Good luck tonight, Ed,” he said.

“Was that Ernest,”

“Yes.”

“Why did you call him a ‘Ragamuffin Man’ .”

“Because he reminded me of a Ragamuffin cat, very docile-looking.”

That night, from the backstage at Chaminade’s auditorium, Ed watched the auditorium fill. Then he saw his two brothers come in. Mike came in by himself and sat down, and then Brian walked in with his wife, Judy. Brian was wearing a military uniform, and Judy showed signs of pregnancy. Hannah and Edwin walked in behind them, and took their seats next to their sons.

From backstage, Ed was nervous and he commenced deep breathing exercises to relax. He peeked out again and saw every seat was taken. Student Ed backed up against a wall and took several, quick breaths just as Brother Tom walked up and told him that jitters were normal, especially the first night.

“I never saw an audience of a thousand people staring at me before,” Ed said to Brother Tom. “The Mineola Playhouse had lights in the front. You couldn’t see their faces. That sort-of scared me.”

“You’ll be fine,” Tom assured him.

In the middle of the first act, Ed, with a dungaree jacket over a prison suit, prowled the stage as if he owned it.

Ed took Joyce's face in the palm of his hand, a little more intense, perhaps, than the rehearsal scene, and tossed it like a shot-put. She went flying to the floor.

A resounding 'thump' had the audience responding with a collective gasp, a spontaneous reaction to the horror of the inhumanity portrayed by Ed.

Later in the play, Ed sat in a chair and repeated the rehearsal scene from the night before and put his foot on glass table. This time his foot caused the knick-knacks to rattle badly. Ed's face began to sweat. He lost concentration. He tried to speak, but couldn't. Actor Ed moved his foot and the knick-knacks rattle more than at rehearsal.

"What happened in the next few beats are as clear as day," Ed told Drew. "I knew I was speaking my lines, but I was in another world. Unconscious almost. I turned around and looked on stage. It was as if something had washed over me. Like an invisible curtain, or something."

Ed physical body rose and left behind his spirit self in the chair. Spirit Ed looked to his left and saw the entire stage as a hazy vision. In this haze, a see-through curtain appeared, and Ed's spirit got up and walked through the curtain. Behind this curtain was the image of John Barrymore, the same image that appeared in the classroom. Off to the right, sitting in a corner, was the same Ragamuffin Man as well. A sign in front of him read, "My name is ERNEST".

"Who are you?" the spirit Ed asked.

"Well, Neddy," Barrymore said. "who do you think I am?"

"You look like John Barrymore, Senior, but he's dead."

"In the spirit, as they say." Barrymore bowed and Spirit Ed looked dumbfounded.

"Come on, my aspiring thespian. Makes you think about what's real and what's not. Doesn't it? Now listen, Neddy. Don't crumble out there. You've just experienced the glory of stage. Something goes wrong, what do you do? Someone misses their cue ... Worse; someone forgets their lines and freezes? Oh, I hate that." Barrymore gets very close and whispers in Ed's ear. "That's what acting is all about, Neddy. Preparing for the unpreparable. You've read my book. You know what I'm talking about."

Barrymore pulls out a flask, takes a swig, and offers Spirit Ed some. He takes the flask and tries to take a drink. "There's nothing in it," Spirit Ed exclaimed.

Barrymore took it back, tipped the flask and liquid pours out. Barrymore then pointed to his head and said, "The key to it all is up here." Barrymore waited for that statement to sink in. Then he added, "Now. Listen to me, Neddy. You're on remote right now ..."

Barrymore put the flask back in his pocket and pointed. They both looked out beyond the curtain and saw Actor Ed performing.

"You think an actor is measured by collecting types," Barrymore said, "and mimicking their motions and emotions will get you by? But do you know what the wisdom in acting is?"

Spirit Ed shook his head, afraid to speak.

"Neither do I. Just have some humility and leave it at that." Barrymore looked through the curtain and watched the physical Ed acting. Barrymore nodded and seemed aloof.

"But Mr. Barrymore," Spirit Ed said, "maybe you can tell me. How will I know if I'm any good in this business? Is it a measure of humility?"

"Are you trying to trick me, Neddy?"

"No. No, course not," Spirit Ed said. "I want to act more than anything, but when I compare myself to someone like you ... I mean, if all it is, is humility, then it looks like I'm a better actor than you. According to your biography ..."

Alright, alright, alright. Enough."

"Actually, I can't hold a candle to you, Mr. Barrymore."

"Don't worry your head about success, Neddy. You're here talking to me because you are one of us now. There's no turning back. You've crossed over. Maybe someday you'll find out

why. But for now, just go out there and don't overdo it. Let them have your character in dribs and drabs. Not all at once.”

In the corner, the Ragamuffin Man yelled out ... ERNEST! Don't forget to tell him about Ernest.”

“Don't pay any attention to him,” Barrymore said. “He's always there, like a bad coin.”

There's a rumbling sound, which they realize is the audience clapping outside their curtain. The Spirit Ed whips around and sees himself still acting on the other side of the curtain acknowledging the applause.

“You have to go, Neddy. Can't stay on this side too long. It affects your brain, somehow. Like booze.”

An unseen force pushed Spirit Ed towards the curtain.

“But how will I know if I'm any good?” the Spirit Ed asked.

“Good, better, best. There're just empty words. Don't listen to all the 'method' crap. Find the truth in yourself, my boy, even if you have to lie. You want to act, then act.”

“But how will I know ...”

“You'll know it when people start returning your phone calls.”

Spirit Ed continued to shuffle back to the curtain, but didn't go through.

“That's a little theatre humor. Hey, you'll just know it. Listen to this.” Barrymore took a couple of deep breaths, then began to act. “To sleep, per chance to dream, there is a moment in every lifetime when all the stars seem to gather together and become as one and that moment belongs to you. I was there at night on that dark stage, when suddenly I saw it could all be mine if I wanted it, but the moment would not wait for me. It passed me by.” And then Barrymore asked Spirit Ed, “Was that good?”

And Spirit Ed said, “Yes. My God, yes.”

“I knew it was good, too. So go. Don't let this moment pass you by.”

Just before the Spirit Ed was pushed forward onto the ‘real’ stage, the Ragamuffin Man yelled out, “ERNEST! My name is Ernest.”

“So I morphed back into my body,” Ed said to Drew, “and I find the play has progressed on without me. I became painfully aware that my reality was on stage. And all the stuff that happens in your reality was now my fake world. This stage, whether it is a chair, or a room with expressionistic walls, was my home. And my life in Mineola, in school, all of it, was the unreal world where I had to do the real performing. What transpired that night was a powerful, touchable event that just happened to me. I'm telling it to you honestly; it wasn't something I just thought up. It happened to me. It was an event that came to me by an outside force. Like I was a victim, or something.”

And on stage, the acting Ed moved into another gear. “No! You ain't gotta Goddamn, stinkin' thing to say! You Hilliard, I seen what you been up to! Clickety, clickety, click. I can see them wheels goin' around in there, Pop...”

As Acting Ed continued the monologue, the faces in the audience were attentive, enthralled, especially the Dennehy family who were absolutely flabbergasted at the talent they were witnessing. The faces of Edwin, Mike and Brian were in awe. Hannah's was tearful.

“I shifted into another gear,” Ed said to Drew. “when I came back from the curtain. I didn't even know there was an audience out there. I'm not talking about a conscious thing here and saying, this is how I reacted. I'm talking about, I have moved into a different place and I knew I was going to stay there.”

After the play was over, Ed took a bow to a standing ovation. The curtain came down,

and everyone clung to each other around Ed. It was like he had scored the winning touchdown in a championship game.

Ed was being dragged along backstage when Mike hustled towards him and pulled him aside. "That was the best performance I've ever seen from anyone," Mike said. "Your mother is still sitting in her seat, crying. That's how good you were."

Ed looked out into the audience and saw Hannah crying. Off to the side he saw Edwin and Brian having an argument. Brian was about to leave to get back to North Carolina."

Brian pointed a finger into Edwin's shoulder. "What's your problem?" Ed heard him say. "You've never forgiven me for enlisting in the service. Is that it, Dad?"

Hannah motioned for Edwin to stop, but to no avail.

"It's not just that," Edwin yelled so everyone could hear. "You didn't complete college. You were more interested in partying and fooling around. You enlisted in the service, got your wife pregnant, and now where's your future? Got the whole picture, now?"

Brian walked over to Judy, extended his hand and pulled her out into the aisle.

"Brian," Hannah beckoned, "aren't you going to congratulate your brother?"

Brian looked up at the stage and saw Ed peering out. Brian bowed down, giving Actor Ed and congratulating gesture. He then kissed Hannah and left

"Let the new golden boy have his time in the sun, Mom. I have to be back to camp."

He left with Judy and was halfway up the aisle when he made gestures for Judy to wait and stomped back to his father. "As far as fooling around is concerned, I had a good teacher now, didn't I?"

He looked back to the stage and yelled out, "Great job, Ed. I'll see you soon."

Ed waved to Brian then turned back to Mike and they embraced.

"Brian was at odds with my father again," Ed said. "I don't ever remember Brian saying anything about that night. My brother Mike, on the other hand, just got hired as an FBI agent and he came down to surprise everyone with the good news and to see the play. He loved it. Talked about it for years. He was so supportive. I love him for that."

Mike was whisked away from the commotion that soon took over the stage. Actor Bill Sheahon popped into view, then Tom Cosgrove followed, and a host of others expressing their delight at Ed's performance. Bill Sheahon came over and told Ed that he was having an opening night party, but Ed couldn't shift gears back to the real world.

"It was as if I was lost space/time, like a dream, let's say," the Ed said. "The real world no longer existed for me ... Not the same way. My stage life was now my real world. Mike was in front of me raving how good I was. Brother Tom Cosgrove came over and told me I'm a born actor. But their words offered no comfort. I was absolutely frightened because what I perceived was my whole life suddenly wasn't real. I didn't ask for it to happen. I couldn't leave the stage or go to the party. I couldn't leave the dressing room until everyone was gone, including my parents and my brother."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Ed decided to walk home by himself. The bright lights of the cars, and the clear sky on a Spring night created a philosophical mood he couldn't shake.

"So, I got permission from my mother to walk home alone," Ed told Drew. "It wasn't far. Besides, she sensed I needed time alone to come down from my cloud nine. As I walked I wondered what would happen in my next performance. Would I step onto stage and have a normal theatre experience and go home afterwards to my real world and eat dinner in an artistically modern post World War Two home? Or would I be confronted with this invisible, gauzy curtain again, and find myself living in an alien world and calling it my real world? The fact was, and I didn't know this at the time, I switched realities. My stage life became my real world that night, and this was how it was going to be for the rest of my days. Very scary indeed. And that's the reason why ninety percent of all our good actors are hog-tied crazy people. They're on drugs, booze, or are residents of loony bins or shooting someone. They're all nuts because I assume they all stepped through the same curtain I did. It was the scariest place in the world to be. I was sentenced to live my everyday life in a two-dimensional, unreal world. Do you understand me, Drew?"

"I never knew this about you," Drew said. "This is quite a surprise to me, Ed. I always thought Ernest was a dream. I didn't know you were a psychological nut case."

"Well, maybe I was. I mean, here I was standing on a cliff. Either I fall off and go insane, or I commit my life to a world that was arguably insane in and of itself. I pitched my tent on that cliff, and that's where I lived from that night on. But that walk home from Mineola that night was problematic in that tomorrow I would go back on stage the next day and be 'home'. Going home meant going back on stage the next day. I wasn't walking 'home', really.

"The three-dimensional green and blue world, YOUR real world, is now my stage. Over the years, the monumental events in life, like getting married, having children, should've been the milestones of my life, but instead they were, 'oh, that's kind of nice.' My milestones became the creation of my plays or characters in this new surreal, theatre world. Kind of scary stuff 'cause suddenly you've stepped into a new reality of a R Crum cartoon world. Intellectually you know this isn't real, but there's something inside you that says you must go there because that's where the art is. Your children don't come with you. Your wife doesn't come either. And it doesn't matter if you lose an ear, or a spouse or two, or the love of a daughter or son because the worst of it is, when you go there, you never know ... You never know ... If you'll ever return."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

In Drew's den, Ed puffed away on a cigarette. Drew coughed, then got up, opened a window and tried to rush the smoke out of the room.

"So much for starting from the beginning," Ed said. "I still feel like crap."

"You're not finished yet," Drew said. "You told me about the curtain already, years ago, but I thought Ernest was part of a dream thing."

"What do you mean 'thing'?" Ed said. "I'm not making him up. It really happened. I saw John Barrymore and I saw Ernest."

"Ok. Maybe you should just continue," Drew advised.

"So, I go back to my life as a Chaminade student, and there I am, at the Chaminade baseball field soon after the play opened. I watched the designated pitcher throw to Coach Fowkes. Then Fowkes waved for the next pitcher to come to the mound, which was me. So, I got up from the bench and swaggered my way to the mound like Humphrey Bogart might. I was an actor playing a sports figure going through the motions, I suppose. Anyway, upon reaching the mound, I strike a dramatic pose and facial expression at an imaginary crowd. I was being someone else, I forget who. Maybe it was Whitey Ford, someone like that. I mean, at the varsity baseball tryouts, I couldn't just walk to the mound as Ed Dennehy, throw some pitches and exit. No. I WAS Sandy Koufax, or John Barrymore playing Sandy Koufax."

"You were Ed Dennehy playing John Barrymore playing Sandy Koufax," Drew said.

"I don't know. Maybe I was. But what happened that afternoon was pretty spectacular. I threw the ball and it tipped off Fowkes' glove. He stood up and just stared at me. I was just as surprised as Fowkes was. I reared back and threw a magical pitch. A slider. I made the team based on that one toss. Fowkes soon figured out I was a one-pitch wonder and he used me sparingly."

At the Mineola library, a poster on the wall advertised the "Zoo Story", directed by Ed Dennehy with Drew Keil as Peter, and Ed Dennehy as Jerry. Ed and Drew were rehearsing on a make-shift stage.

"Oh, I remember the Mineola Library gig," Drew said. "That was the summer before our Senior year, wasn't it."

"Zoo Story had, possibly, the greatest monologue ever written," Ed said.

"Where do you want me to start?" Drew said.

Brian entered just then in a full Marine dress uniform; hid from view while Ed and Drew read from their scripts.

"I'll start. Okay, here we go," Ed said. "Nobody's holding you here; remember that. Keep that in your mind."

"I know that," Drew said.

"You do? Good." Then, sweeping his arm as if reading from a huge billboard, Ed said "The Story of Jerry and the Dog!"

Ed saw Brian in full uniform. He bolted off the stage and they hugged.

Mike, Ed, Hannah, Brian and pregnant Judy pose while Damian, the photographer, snapped a picture. The photo showed a broad smile from everyone. Damian then took photos of

the three boys while Judy and Hannah went into the kitchen. Edwin was conspicuously missing.

"I'll never forget that day," Ed told Drew. "Brian comes home from the military with his pregnant wife Judy to live with us. The media attention made Brian a hero of sorts. It was really my dad pulling strings at one of his news affiliations. In reality, Brian got knocked around in Saigon playing football. It was just a police action over there at this time.

And my father? All of us didn't know 'where' Dad was, but we all knew 'what' he was doing."

To break the somber mood, Mike took out his wallet out and showed Ed his FBI badge.

Ed takes it and flashes it around. "FBI. Where were you last night around 7 O'clock?"

Later, in the dining room, and the dinner finished, Hannah and Judy gather up the plates and head into the kitchen.

"Dad's empty plate sat at the head of the table the whole time," Edward said. "Brian informs us our neighbor, Walter, got him a truck driver job in his meat packing place. A transition job to get his bearings, Brian told us."

Hannah came back in with a cake and candles.

"Ah, yes," Ed said to Drew. "Christmas in July. Those were the good 'ole days."

CHAPTER FORTEEN

Even though it was Ed's senior year at Chaminade, he was still acting at St. Aiden. Sue Anne, a girl Ed would wed sometime later, roamed the stage with Brian and Ed as if all three owned it.

Large posters were plastered on the walls behind them advertising "West Side Story". Brian was the director and he paced back and forth shouting commands at Ed, Drew and others who graced the stage with their dancing.

"That's right. I remember," Drew said to Ed. "Brian started a theatre group at St. Aiden's where you met Sue Anne."

"That's right, and Brian barked instructions like a mad man. But that didn't keep me and Sue Anne from dancing together whenever we could."

"I do remember we performed in front of an audience at St. Aiden's auditorium while Brian watched approvingly. At the time, my brother worked at a restaurant while he directed us. Remember, Oklahoma. He directed us in that as well. And then we got hit with the assassinations. First it was JFK. I remember seeing the funeral on TV. Kennedy was a big hero of mine. Of course, I remembered that Christmas. As usual, we gathered round the tree and Brian gritted his teeth while Dad gave each present its just due. I remembered it because I lied awake at night listening to my Dad and Brian yell at each other about that Christmas day.

"Before I knew it I was a senior rehearsing for the Chaminade School play, which was Our Town. The night of the opening, I remember seeing me father, mother and Sue Anne, sitting together in the third row. Sue Anne was the only relationship I had at that moment. She was going to Mercyhurst College, hundreds of miles away."

In bed, Sue Anne's head laid on Ed's shoulder. She was sound asleep. Both were under the covers but Ed stared at the ceiling wide awake.

"I loved her," Ed admitted, "but I was going to college not too far away from where I lived and I sensed I had a bit of skirt to follow."

Ed sat in Hofstra auditorium where it had gradual seating. Good-looking women strutted around as if they owned the place.

"I received a few scholarships," Ed told Drew. "Hofstra had the best undergrad drama curriculum, so I accepted their offer. Their New College Program attracted a lot of good-looking 'girls'.

"No matter where I went I wore a costume to fit the occasion. That first day at Hofstra I wore a madras jacket, a cloth tie, and tight black pants, and I sat alone inspecting others with their t-shirts, denim and skull-bone decals.

"I felt empowered, I guess, with my madras jacket and penny loafers. It was more like a social gathering, actually. I wasn't very good at such events, so I needed to feel good with what I wore. Even now I don't relate with people very well. I'm bad at small talk, unless it's about theatre. Then I could go on forever about the most trivial stuff. Like I could answer, who played the third gunslinger role in the only western Humphrey Bogart ever made?"

"So, while watching the students come in the auditorium, to pass the time I tried to guess where people came from by the way they dressed. My madras look made me the preppy Long Island guy pretending to be rich. Now, a guy by the name of Paul Levine came in with his army jacket, bandanna, the grunge look before the grunge look was popular. You know, the hair down

to the waist. Stoned. Bohemian. White collar in the mid-60s means a gray flannel suit with a white button-down shirt and tie. If you're a drama student at Hofstra, it means you had the grunge look. The greaser look, my music, gone forever. The English invasion. Damn those Brits!"

While sitting alone, a beautiful Polynesian student, by the name of Diane Swartz, eyed Ed while he made polite conversation with the people around him.

"I know it's not your opinion of me, Drew, but there I was, the cream of the crop, my talent in question. I was with the elite, hovering in the background. Maybe I was girding myself for finding out I wasn't this wonder boy everyone was telling me I was."

Diane got up and Ed appeared enamored at her slender, gorgeous body as she walked towards him. She sat by him and said, "Who's your favorite actor?"

Ed didn't answer because he didn't have a favorite actor, pre se. He liked all the older actors like James Stewart, Cagney, Bogart, and the like. But favorite ... He really didn't have one, so he just remained quiet.

"Come on," Diane said. "You must have a favorite actor."

"James Dean. No. Wait, Brando. No, no. My favorite of all time is Montgomery Clift.

"Oh, yeah," she responded. "Me too. He's great. You went to Catholic High School, didn't you."

Ed's mouth hung open as Diane eyed Ed's penny loafers, white socks, Madras Jacket and a skinny cloth tie with a tiny knot. She fiddled with his tie.

"Collegiate type ten years ago, maybe," she said. "Do you have polo shirts in your closet? Deck shoes, maybe. Cloth belt. I'm just kidding. You look fine."

Diane laughed. Ed tried to as well, but gave her a twisted smile instead.

Paul Levine eyed Diane. He took a seat close to her.

"This Paul Levine comes over to say hi. He's a real Maynard G. Crebbs kind of character," Ed said. "He tried his best to let Diane know he was interested."

"Paul twirled a half-smoked joint between his fingers, an offering, I guess. Diane rebuffed him just as Margo, our Proctor for the day, high kicked her way on the stage with her black calf boots. She slapped a paper on a desk of a student in front row."

"Check your name, pass it along. I'm Margo," Margo said, "a grad student, assistant to Miriam Tulin. She instructed me to tell you if you remember anything, remember this: Be on time. And now, here is Miriam Tulin.

"Tulin swooped down the center aisle in a black leather skirt, a black cape and pumps, holding a long cigarette holder with nothing in it, wearing sunglasses, and glanced at everyone at once, oozing eccentricity."

"Action is reaction," she said. "And theatre is transaction."

She then sauntered out of the room, and Margo immediately got up before anyone could react. She faced the room of bewildered students and told them to come back the next day at one PM.

A little later, at the Madison Theatre at Hofstra, Paul, Diane and Ed were huddled together in the theater's alleyway smoking a joint. Diane and Ed laughed, but Paul was very serious.

"So, to celebrate my introduction to Miriam Tulin, one of the most respected acting coaches on the East Coast, Paul introduced me to pot," Ed said. "He was such a post-Ginsbergian character. Very serious and intense sort of character."

"But what I remember the most about that time was Diane's apartment. And I remember

we laughed a lot.”

At Diane’s apartment complex, Ed and Diane hung on each other, laughing while they stumbled up to the apartment door. Diane unlocked it and Ed leaned against the door and fell in, but stayed on his feet.

Diane guided Ed past the kitchen and past a bedroom.

“That’s my roommate. She’s also my cousin, Barbara. Be quiet. Shhh.”

They disappeared into Diane’s bedroom. A loud thump sound could be heard.” Ed said. *“Or at least, that was what I was told. My first night at Hofstra, I passed out. Good start in my new life.”*

Paul and Diane are center stage at Hofstra’s Madison Theatre providing a cold reading from *Zoo Story* to Miriam Tulin. Paul Levine read without emotion, and Miriam bolted to the stage.

“Paul,” she yelled. “You’re trying to get Diane, I mean, Peter, to kill you. It sounds like you’re reading ingredients of a ketchup bottle. You got to be in her face. You’re disturbed. Yes?”

She then turned to the rest of the class. “In class don’t be afraid to go over the top,” she yelled. “We always can tone it down if we have to. It’s much harder to raise the stakes especially if you’re not a volatile person. Paul, do it again.”

Miriam sat down, and Paul began the monologue with more energy. While Paul was performing, Miriam leaned over to a student and whispered something to her. The student got up and walked onto the stage and yawned and stretched, distracting Paul in his monologue.

“No ... No ... No, Paul,” Miriam said.

“She’s distracting me.”

“Exactly, Mr. Levine. Think about it. A performance is filled with distractions. A chair tips over by accident, or your foot gets caught on the rug, a cup falls off the counter by accident. You’re not on camera where I can yell ‘cut’. You’ve got to work through it. Use it. Get energized from it. Sit down, Mr. Levine. Dennehy! Do Jerry.”

With that introduction, Paul and Miriam take their seats, and Ed jumps on stage holding his fist high then slowly bringing it back down to his chest. He looks out into the audience and then to Diane. He tucks his chin to his chest. Ed was over the top and he didn’t appear to be coming down.

Diane was reading as Peter. “You’re full of stories, aren’t you?”

Ed walked across stage, then back again. He got in Diane’s face, then tossed the book to the floor. He knew the monologue.

“You don’t have to listen,” Ed acted out. “Nobody is holding you here. Remember that.”

“I know that,” Diane recited.

“You do? Good ... All right.” Ed posed then yelled out, as if reading a billboard, “**THE STORY OF JERRY AND THE DOG.**”

“All right. The dog, I think I told you, is a black monster ...”

In another moment, Ed acted, “I half opened the door that led into the entrance hall, and there he was; waiting for me.”

Again, in another moment, Ed acted out, “I decided: First, I’ll kill the dog with kindness, and if that doesn’t work ... I’ll just kill him.”

Just then Ed noticed that Barrymore, in a trench coat, was sitting with the students miming a perfunctory, silent clap. No one saw him except Ed, but that gauzy curtain appeared and Barrymore jumped on stage behind it. He waved to Ed, whose spirit side-stepped his way to

the curtain while his body continued acting in front of the class. The Ragamuffin Man sat on the floor, lethargic.

"I thought you were a delusion since I haven't seen you for so long," Spirit Ed said.

"Life is a delusion, Neddy. Become a Buddhist and you'll find that out. You're on your way, my boy. That's a tough monologue you're doing."

"Don't react, Peter," Actor Ed said, "Just listen."

"You're in the zone," Barrymore said. "I love that saying. In my day we said 'You got what it takes'. I like 'you're in the zone' better. It implies at times you're on and at times you're not. It has a better hook into reality, don't you think, Neddy?"

"Mr. Barrymore," Spirit Ed said. "Why are you here?"

"Look at you. You remind me so much of myself when I was that age. I worked for a newspaper as an artist back then, did you know that?"

Actor Ed swept the stage and with a swirl of John's hand, Actor Ed fast forwards the monologue then slows to normal speed.

"He turned his face back to the hamburgers," actor Ed said, "smelled, sniffed some more, and then ... RRRRAAGGGGGHHHH, like that ... He tore into them."

"Edward Albee," Barrymore said, "What a playwright he was. 'I wish he was around when I was in my prime. What you do in your prime is important. When the world treats you like the dog in your monologue you will ultimately ask yourself if you wasted your life ...'"

Just then, the Ragamuffin Man yelled out, "ERNEST."

"Who's that man?," spirit Ed asked. "And why is he always calling out to Ernest?"

"I call him different names at different times," Barrymore said. "Let's call him Deter for now. But don't mind him. Look at you out there. You listen to Miriam. She's one of the best. Ah, let's see if we can move this along."

Kohn swirls again. Actor Ed fast motions then slows down.

"But it was always the same:" Actor Ed said. "snarl, sniff; move; faster; stare; gobble; RAAGGGHH; smile; snarl; BAM." Barrymore swirled his hand again. "So, I decided to kill the dog," actor Ed said, somewhere in the monologue. Barrymore swirled his hand again and we move ahead, then stop.

"The day I tried to kill the dog I bought only one hamburger and ... a murderous portion of rat poison ..."

"Okay. Here we go." Barrymore said to spirit Ed. "Listen to this. This is funny, Neddy."

Actor Ed moved in perfect harmony with the words. "He smiled benignly, wrapped up the hamburger in waxed paper, and said, 'a bite for ya pussy-cat'. I wanted to say, 'no, not really; it's part of a plan to poison a dog I know'. But, you can't say 'a dog I know' without sounding funny ..."

"That was a killer," Barrymore said. "Wasn't it funny?"

"I suppose," spirit Ed said.

Just then the Ragamuffin Man, or Deter, yelled out 'ERNEST'.

Spirit Ed moved toward Deter.

"You talk to him, I'm gone," Barrymore warned.

"A little melodramatic, aren't we?" Spirit Ed accused. "Why is he always here with you?"

"I mean it," Barrymore warned again. "Don't talk to him."

Ed reached Deter, bent down and peered into his eyes. Ed looked towards John who had disappeared. Ed turned back to Deter.

"Who are you?" Spirit Ed said. "Deter? Is that who you are?"

Deter nodded.

“Who's Ernest, then?”

“Help me find him,” Deter pleaded. “I'm lost without him. He's my... My... Everything.”

Miriam stands up to stop Actor Ed's monologue. She's hardly audible, but we know she's giving instructions to Ed. But Deter's voice is loud and clear. “Help me find him?”

On stage, Actor Ed blinks as his spirit reenters his body.

“Love your exaggerated movements, Ed, but tone it down,” Miriam advised. “This is what I want from all of you, class. If you're over-the-top, we can work with that. The essence is buried in extravagance, you see. We can trim the fat, yes? A magnificent performance, Ed.”

On another day, in front of the class, Ed exaggerated his steps and flailed his hands.

“No ... No Edward,” Miriam said. “Not so big. Improvisation is moderation. Tone it down more. MORE trimming.”

“No matter what I did on stage,” Ed admitted to Drew, “it always looked like I had a weapon in my hand. She was responsible for removing it. I learned how to act because of her.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Ed moved into an apartment, carrying a box, as did Diane, who was the most steady companion of Ed's at the time. Although his parents contributed \$100 of his \$170 monthly rent, he contributed \$70 gained partly from Diane's contributions to monthly rent, but mostly from him hustling pool at the local bar that resided on Biddel Street, his own little Haight Ashbury in the middle of downtown Hempstead. Long Island.

Ed convinced his mother that he should get the apartment by telling her that he needed the alone time for his studies. She didn't know that he just wanted a bedroom for his dalliances.

"I was out of control with women," Ed told Drew. "But Diane was the most steady at this time. I didn't want to share her. So, she moved in with me."

Diane was a compelling presence the Hofstra stage. He was Mr. Antropus in *Skin Of Our Teeth*, his first big staging at Hofstra, and Diane was the boardwalk Beauty Queen who wandered around in a skimpy bathing suit. It was the start of their long-term relationship.

While they were together, Ed did most of the cooking. This one night, while he was cooking, the apartment flung. It was Barbara, Diane's cousin, who already had a key. She walked into the kitchen as if she owned the place and she had dinner with Ed and Diane. Afterwards, she went to her car, got her suitcase and came back again.

"Diane's cousin went to Hofstra," Ed told Drew. "She was too gorgeous to be a business major. They were advanced ladies, already involved in the NY scene by way of Queens, I think. They were sexually active and so was I. Barbara moved in with us in the spare room. I should've realized that was not a smart move."

On stage, Ed, in a wonderfully over-the-top performance, used movement as a means of conveying his motivation.

"According to Wilder," Ed said, "Mr. Antropus goes to Atlantic City, meets a beauty queen and has an affair. It was a far out farce, like my life."

"You'll get no arguments from me," Drew said.

Ed acted less over the top, more refined. Miriam Tulin sat in the first row of the audience. "Keep it simple," she said, "Less is more."

In the bedroom, Ed was making love with Diane, and Barbara appeared out of nowhere and under the covers, slowly and with purpose. The movement quickened.

At Hofstra, Ed found his bearings, as Tulin weighed in and said. "Slower. Slower. I know it's a farce, but keep it simple. No extravagant moves. Yes. That's it."

Eventually, Diane got pregnant, but Ed didn't know what to do.

"We were in sculpture class at Hofstra," Ed said, "and Jesse Gilham told me where to go for a fix. He called it 'a night appointment'. This was before Roe vs. Wade, and Jesse knew of a doctor who would gladly perform the abortion for \$300. Later, Jesse told me the good doctor had a daughter who died of a wire hanger job. The doctor was reluctant to perform the procedure, but sympathized with women who didn't have any alternatives. He didn't want anyone else to end up like his daughter."

While driving to 'a night appointment', Liz Mayer, fellow student, drove Ed and Diane to a building in New Jersey where Diane was to get an abortion. Ed got out of the car and escorted Diane in the building.

"So, I went with two girls to New Jersey. Diane was getting the abortion. Liz Mayer was

helping us out. It was all very hush-hush.”

Ed came out of the clinic and jumped in the car where Liz was waiting.

“It’ll be about an hour,” Ed said to Liz who puffed on a joint and handed it to him. She moved closer to Ed, and before he knew it, he quickly succumbed to whatever she wanted.

“A fling with Liz, a leading lady in some of my plays, began that night while Diane got an abortion,” Ed said. “And then two months later I was driving Liz into New Jersey to get an abortion.” This time, they were alone.

“Some things you’re not proud of,” Ed said to Drew. “I spent a lot of money in my lifetime. Some of it on booze, part of it on drugs, and part of it on women. The rest I spent foolishly.”

“That was not funny, Ed,” Drew said. “I knew Liz. She had a bout with depression after that.”

“Yeah. I know. Like I said, some things I’m not proud of.”

Ed and a dozen drama students were on the Hofstra stage at the Madison Theatre rehearsing an improvisational scene while Dick Mason directed them.

“So, I transferred to the regular drama department because they spent more time doing and less time in the classroom. Dick Mason’s improv class seemed like a waste of energy at first, but I’m always a behaved student. Respectful of the process.”

At the Hofstra Madison backstage, Ed’s first performance under Dick Mason was a smashing success. Mason took special notice of Ed’s performing to a packed audience, especially the way Ed moved on stage.

“My first foray into the jungle of Shakespeare under Mason’s tutelage was in the role of Orsino,” Ed said. “I was a sophomore performing in a major production directed by Dick Mason. It just wasn’t done. But there I was trying to summon all this raw emotion spouting that beautiful language. ‘Music be the food of love’. I didn’t have a clue on how to match movement with this grand language. I could do naturalistic movements as long as the speech was natural. But this was entirely different. The improv class helped me find a connection, so I did a Marlon Brando version of Orsino playing with this leather thong that hung from my doublet, delivering my lines through my fingernails.”

In another play, Mason sat in the first row directing rehearsal. The script lay on a seat next to him.

“We were doing He Who Gets Slapped,” Ed explained, “which had this grandiose language similar to Shakespeare. This was the play where I learned to marry physical movement with language. It was a crystallizing moment for me. But I struggled. It didn’t come easy.”

Mason marched on stage, waving his hands like a maestro.

“Now quiet,” he yelled. “No action. Stay still. Now, jump ... Yes. Okay ... Okay.” Barrymore appeared, miming Mason, who strutted across the stage instructing on the art of movement. Ed struggled, but began to follow Barrymore’s lead and found a respectable marriage with cadence and the words. As Ed danced across the stage, Ed said to Drew, “I become happy when I heard the music.”

“No ... No, Neddy. Like this,” Barrymore said floating across stage like an angel. “If music be a kind of love ... Play on ... Play on ...”

On performance night, Barrymore is dressed in a Russian outfit, complete with a men’s trapper-fox raccoon fur hat with real fur and leather. “I looked ridiculous,” Ed said, “but finally, I

get it. I'm an acrobatic clown who had a crazy physical thing going on, with Barrymore acting like a jerk, and me following his lead. It trained me so that even to this day I can't stand static on stage. Everyone has to be moving. If I'm standing more than ten seconds I want to move."

The theatre was packed and the audience was entranced watching Ed moving across the stage, reciting his lines perfectly.

"I become happy when I entered the ring and heard the music," he recited. "I wore a mask and felt humorous. I could say anything like a drunkard. Do you understand?"

"Yesterday when I, with this stupid face, was playing the great man, the philosopher ..."

The actor-Ed does a two-footed thump, thump, and lands on his feet striking a monumental pose while looking at Mason in the front row.

"I wanted to act by doing and there was no shortage of that with Mason. But directors have to tell me, 'it's OK, Ed. Don't move. Just stay put.'"

"It's okay, Ed," Mason said. "Don't move. Just stay there."

Barrymore backs off from whatever he was doing and watched Acting Ed carefully and is moved by Ed's performance, who he smiles, bows and exits the stage.

On a small stage at Hofstra University, Ed measured the stage with Jessie Gilham. Ed and Jessie also rehearsed while taking measurements. Jesse read lines, took large steps and marked the stage with chalk.

"Now here I am," Ed said, "I'm a success as an actor, but now I want more. So, I tell Mason I want to direct on the main stage. Only one underclassman has ever done that. Seven years earlier, Francis Coppola directed Street Car. Now, Mason tells me to direct a show in the fall of my sophomore year at a smaller stage and if I do well he'd give me a shot at the main stage my junior year. So, I decide to direct Zoo Story. Why not. I knew it well enough. But it needed movement. So, Jesse and I measure every inch of the stage. If I was to choreograph the movement with the language, I needed to know what my boundaries were. But the stage was so bare. Zoo Story takes place in a park. If I was going to impress Mason, I needed to change the stage into a ... Park."

At Bill's Meadowbrook, a bar in Hempstead, Student Ed walked in and sat down at the bar. Tank Pascuello, rather large man, and the owner of the establishment, drafted up a beer and served Ed.

"I met Tank through Brian," Ed said to Drew. "The Meadowbrook bar was a football hangout, really. Especially, a New York Jets hangout. I remember the first time I met Joe Namath and Weeb Ewbank."

Joe and Weeb, and several other jets players, enter and a minor fuss was made as they belly up to the bar. Tank left Ed to serve his celebrity customers.

"The New York Jets worked out at Hofstra, the only stadium with Astroturf back then."

Tank leaned over the bar and said a few words to Joe and Weeb and then pointed to Ed. After a beat, Tank waves Ed over.

"Tank introduced me as the next Jimmy Dean," Ed said to Drew. "The next thing I knew, I was talking to them about my Zoo project and asked Weeb if there was any extra Astroturf laying around. He said he would check it out."

The next day at the Madison Theater at Hofstra, a truck pulled up to the back entrance of the theatre. Ed opened the backstage door and the driver opened the back of the truck exposing a hundred yards of Astroturf.

"I can still remember those men installing the Astroturf. The stage was barren in the

beginning but they fit the turf in place, and before you knew it, a slope was built and a park appeared, complete with a rolling hill, lamp posts, benches, etcetera. It was amazing.

The curtain rose to a packed theatre. Jesse, who was Peter in the play, was seated on the bench reading a book. He stood, cleaned his glasses, sat back down, and continued reading. Ed, who was Jerry in the play, entered. He glided across the Astroturf stage while music from the Collector played. He stopped and faced Jesse.

“I’ve been to the zoo,” Actor-Ed recited.

Jesse ignored Ed.

“I said, I’ve been to the zoo.” Jesse still ignored Ed, so he yelled, “MISTER, I’VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!”

And so the play began, mesmerizing those who saw it

Later, with music blaring, Ed moved in a more stylistic way than ever before. “All right,” Actor-Ed said. “ALL RIGHT!”

Ed looked toward the hill at nothing in particular, and swept his hand across the sky as if he were reading the billboard, and yelled “THE STORY OF JERRY AND THE DOG!”

While Ed stood on a bench, climbed up a lamp post, or walked across the stage, he was impeccable in reciting his lines.

Jesse delivered a 10-page monologue while Ed sat on the bench listening.

“Albee leaves it up to the director and actors to find the action,” Ed said. “Well, I don’t care who you are, Mr. Albee, you can’t just hint at movement. Doesn’t work theatrically. So, I had Jerry sit on the back of a bench or climbing the lamp post. He was all over the place.”

Later in the play, the music accents Ed clicking open an ugly-looking knife.

“You are mad!” Jesse said. “You’re stark raving mad! YOU’RE GOING TO KILL ME!”

But before Jesse had time to think what to do, Ed tossed the knife at Jesse’s feet. After Ed made several menacing moves, Jesse picked up the knife. As the play continued the music from The Collector played.

“I saw the movie Collector around this time,” Ed told Drew. “The music in it was so haunting. So I used it in the play.”

A base-sounding boom, boom ... boom, boom bellowed everywhere, and then the soft sound of a flute stole the show, and then the music suddenly goes into another BOOM, BOOM ... BOOM, BOOM sound.

The knife was still in actor Jesse’s hand. Ed charged him, impaled himself on the knife and fell on the cue of silence. After a beat, the music played again and Actor-Ed crawled, wounded. Fake blood was all over the place and the lights faded. Actor-Ed got up on one knee. A pin light glowed over him as his body fell one last time, curling into a ball. A soft flute sound mixed with the distant, happy voices of people and birds chirping permeated the audience. One voice rises above the rest—“What a beautiful day in the park.”

Then a more sinister sound of BOOM ... BOOM

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The BOOM ... BOOM sound from the theater is transferred to Ed in his kitchen of his apartment chopping a cube of hashish at the kitchen table while Diane, Barbara and Paul Levine pass a bong to one another. Ed takes a hit and passed the bong to Paul.

Ed snatched a whiskey bottle from the table and filled four shot glasses. They all down it quickly and Ed quickly poured another round. Barbara passed out into Paul's arms. He picked her up, took her into her room. Ed and Diane escape to their bedroom.

"Diane and I are still together my junior year," Ed said to Drew. "Diane's cousin, Barbara, was now going out with Paul Levine. She had a room of her own, but spent most nights with Diane and I. Paul, mind you, always had an eye on Diane. Always."

"Why do I feel something bad is going to happen," Drew said.

"Well, because it is."

Ed rehearsed with a host of other people on a Hofstra stage. Laura Faye slapped Actor-Ed on the ass as they cross the stage.

"The Harlequinade is a very funny Noises Off type of British comedy by Terrence Rattigan. I bring this up because I started seeing a girl on the sly. Laura Faye, a senior, who played opposite to me..."

Ed finished his performance in the scene, then headed backstage. He met Laura and she apologized for slapping him so hard. They kissed. She led him away into the shadows.

The Dennehy clan, including the wives of Brian and Mike, sat at the table in the Mineola house. The doorbell rang. Ed got up. It was Sue Anne.

"My life is somewhat crazy now," Ed said. "We're having Thanksgiving dinner and guess who pops into my life."

"Natalie Wood," Drew said.

Ed brought Sue Anne into the dining room and everyone made a fuss over seeing her, especially Brian.

"Sue Anne was a woman I loved who transferred to Hofstra," Ed said. "I thought we'd be a 60s version of Harriet in Ozzie and Harriet. I mean, she goes away to college and I do my Darwinian thing at college. Then she comes home, but I'm already involved with Diane and Barbara under the same roof, and Laura. Virginia Walsh, oh, yes. She was in there, too. I forgot about her. Oh, God! How do I sort through all of this?"

"Take your time," Drew said. "Mary's asleep."

At a house party somewhere in Mineola, Long Island, a joint was passed around until Ed took it from Virginia Walsh, a blond-hair beauty. He inhaled and passed it on. Virginia grabbed Ed's hand and they meander through the crowd until they reach a bedroom and entered.

"Virginia was a quirky, perky blonde who played opposite me in Romeo and Juliet. Irresistible."

Dick Mason sat in the front row of the Hofstra theatre watching a rehearsal. Ed walked down the aisle and Dick waved him over. He sat next to Dick, and as they watched Tom Chesleigh rehearse, Mason said, "Tom's the best senior actor we have. He has presence, doesn't he?"

"Tom's a brilliant actor, Mr. Mason," Hofstra-Ed said.

“I’m sending him to RADA. I want to send you too, Ed.”

“I don’t know if you can imagine, Drew. But me. To The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts? The London RADA? The London RADA? Every year London RADA comes to the States and auditions hundreds of students for two slots in their program. Two slots! But they only select Seniors.”

“True, this is Tom’s gig,” Mason said as if he was preparing for an argument, “but I want you to go as a practice-prep for you to win next Spring. The audition is in Richmond. Wanna go?”

“Like he had to ask,” Ed said. “RADA produced all the major English actors ever. Anybody who’s was anybody in English theatre had some affiliation with RADA.”

“I’m concerned about you, Edward. I’m hearing rumors.”

“Mason was like a father to me,” Ed said. “He meant well, and I listened to him.”

“I see many students tangle with personal matters. They never seem to disengage. Disengage, Edward.”

“So, I disengaged,” Ed said to Drew.

Lois Clark sat next to Tom while Ed and Laura sat in the back on the trip to Virginia. As Tom turned onto the LIE, he reached under his seat, grabbed a beer and passed it back to Ed who opened it and shared it with Laura. This set the tone for a crazy weekend of sex, partying and auditions.

When Ed and Laura entered a hotel room, Ed fell onto the bed and Laura disrobed him not allowing him any time to rest.

“I heard we had to keep it quiet because of Diane,” she whispered into his ear. And with that, they started a heavy night of sex and alcohol.

The next morning, the sun’s rays shot through the blinds and sprayed Ed’s face. He opened his eyes. The clock read 8 AM. He bolted out of bed.

At the University of Richmond gymnasium that morning, several lines of actors waited as Ed bolted into the gym. He spotted Tom and rushed over to him. They smelled each other’s breath, and Tom handed Ed a piece of gum and took one himself. An Administrator handed them a number as they sign the register.

“Tom’s audition was at 3 PM,” Ed said. “Thank God mine was at 5 PM. I went right back to the hotel, took a shower. Had sex with Laura, then I slept.”

Back at the gymnasium, it was 3 PM and Tom found himself doing the ‘moment before’ routine and ‘ohmming’ in front of several judges. Then he started his monologue.

Tom finished his monologue with great flare. At 5 PM, Ed handed his registration to the attendant and began his Hotel Telephone Monologue in front of the same judges.

“In the hotel room where I lived,” he began, “there was a telephone in the hallway. Sometimes I’d pick out a number at random from the telephone directory and I’d wait for someone to say hello. And I would say, hello, and I’d hang up...”

At the hotel bar, after the auditions, Tom sat in a booth with the girls and took notice of Ed who came prancing in waving a piece of paper. Tom took out his notice and waved it at Ed.

“The Saturday audition cut 600 people down to 60 finalists,” Ed told Drew, “who’d come back on Sunday for another spin. We both made it into the finals. The fact that Tom and I both

made it was amazing.”

The next day, at the University of Richmond Gymnasium, Tom performed his monologue as impeccable as the previous day, and then it was Ed’s turn. He stepped up and nodded to the Judges. He saw John Barrymore in the stands in his 1930’s garb. Barrymore tipped his hat, and sat down.

Ed nodded, posed for a moment, then performed. “To sleep, per chance to dream, there is a moment in every lifetime when all the stars seem to gather and become as one and that moment belongs to you. I was there at night on that dark stage, when suddenly I saw it could all be mine if I wanted it, but the moment wouldn’t wait for me. It passed me by.”

On the car ride back home, Tom drove while Ed, Laura and Lois slept. “Tom won,” Ed said, “and this girl from Texas also won. And for the first time ever, a junior came in as an alternate. And that was me.”

Tom eased up to Ed’s apartment and pulled over to let Ed out. He appeared the worst of the four from all the partying with his Einstein hair and his walk – always acting.

“Oh, did we party,” Ed said to Drew. “We were knocked out from booze and pot. I called Diane, and told her we had to stay one more night and wouldn’t be back until sometime mid-day Tuesday. But ... we got back on Monday night.”

Ed walked into his apartment and saw a familiar bandanna and army jacket on the floor.

“As I found out later, I had forgotten I told Diane I’d be home on Tuesday. Diane learned about Laura, and with Barbara out visiting family, or something, she called Paul Levine. Certainly, justifiable.”

Ed followed the line of clothes to the bedroom to see Diane in bed with Paul. When he attacked him, Diane got into the thick of it.

“The way I remembered it,” Ed said, “the shadows on the wall showed the battle. I looked outside and saw the clouds start to cover the moon. The yelling and screaming became half-muted sounds to me. I mean, I get all self-righteousness on Paul, but I don’t remember a thing, except later I find out I broke his nose.”

The sound of the door slamming resonated in Ed’s mind. “But a struggle continued inside.

“All I remembered was a slapping noise and sobs while I looked outside and saw the clouds half-cover a full moon.

“She said I forced myself on her. But I blacked out, I was so angry.”

“You self-righteous prick,” Drew said. “How convenient. You forget.”

A cloud passed over the moon entirely. There were more screams.

“I just don’t remember much about that night, Drew.”

Back in Drew’s den, back to present-day, Drew got up from his recliner and headed to the mini-bar.

“Diane transferred to Queens College that very week,” Ed said. “So did Barbara. I never saw them after that. Ever.”

Drew poured himself a drink and walked back to the recliner.

“How convenient denial is.”

The ice cubes in Ed’s glass were melting. Today it was Drew who was drinking.

“I haven’t told anyone this, Drew. Ever. I’m so ... totally sorry.”

“You shouldn’t be telling me you’re sorry.”

“What happened then was a shocking end to an empty existence.”

“Lying to 4 or 5 women at a time?” Drew pondered. “English fails me right now. Insane would be an understatement. Empty is even more of a cover-up.”

“I just didn't know how to break out of this craziness. I truly wanted to have a sane relationship with only one woman. But it wasn't working out that way.

“Really? And which woman would that have been?”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Ed's flashback continued. He walked up to Sue Anne's house and knocks of the front door. Sue Anne answered and let him in.

"I was shaken by what happened with Diane," Ed continued. "All my dalliances kind-of dallianced out of my life as Sue Anne danced back in. I wanted a long term relationship with her, but I was afraid I'd screw it up with her too. I needed to restructure my life. Disengage, as Mason put it. So, I went over to her house and told her I was going away for the summer. This was the summer before my senior year."

At the Penn State University Campus, Hofstra-Ed emerged from the middle of a pack of students and walked up the steps and into the Drama Department building.

"Because of my third place finish at RADA, Mason got me a paying gig as a resident actor at Penn State for the summer.

Ed found himself at the Penn State Drama office. A student-worker greeted Ed at the reception area/

"Is Mr. Manfold in? I'm Ed Dennehy"

"You're the RADA chap, right?" the student-worker said. "Mr. Lowell mentioned you were coming. The whiz kid from Hofstra. You have company."

Just then Virginia Walsh sneaks up on Ed and surprises him. He steps back and holds his chest. He can't speak.

"I heard you were coming for the summer, so I asked Mr. Mason to put a good word in for me too and viola ... Isn't this fantastic?"

"So much for restructuring my life," Ed said. "Virginia Walsh, the blonde-beauty I met just before going to RADA. came waltzing back into my life. I mean, every time I'd get chummy with a woman it would end up ... like my dad, I guess, trying to make a woman feel like a queen for a day. Actually, I think it was related to Alice somehow. I was trying to retain the naive devotion we had for each other."

"Please," Drew pleaded. "Somebody shoot me."

"You can go in, Mr. Dennehy," the student worker said.

Ed entered and Lowell Manfold greeted Ed with gusto. After they share niceties for a second, Manfold said, "I don't know how much they told you but State has a Theatre Company. We do 6 shows over the summer. It's an Equity company. I see you worked Equity at the Mineola Playhouse."

"Manfold thought I had my Equity card from the Days Of Dancing gig - the Shelly Winters' fiasco - but it expired since then, and I never renewed it. I was going to tell him it expired but just then this flaming fag, Bob Shnyder, pops his head into the office."

"Come in, Bob. I asked Bob in to meet you," Manfold said as he politely introduced them.

Bob offers his fingertips and they gingerly shake hands.

"As part of our mentoring program," Manfold continued, "Mr. Shnyder was picked to show you around campus."

Later, Ed and Bob walked down the hall of the Penn State Drama building.

"Bob was gay," Ed said. "You could tell the way he walked and talked. That's one accent I haven't been able to master yet, but he walked like this." Ed got up and walked toe to heel rather than heel to tell and he walked with a little swivel in his hips. "I'm an expert on

movement, remember. Accents are a different story."

At Penn State, Ed faced Bob. "No offense Mr. Shnyder," Ed said, "but I can find my way around here myself. Thank you and good day." And with that, Bob Shnyder was left standing alone.

"I'm not homophobic, mind you", Ed said to Drew, "I was just a snot-nose kid back then. I didn't want to be hanging around ... I mean, he was trying to hide it. You could tell he was a flaming fag, and ... it was 1960-something, for crying out loud. People weren't coming out of the closet yet. I was ..."

"A jerk?" Drew said.

"Yes," Ed replied. "A jerk."

"So, I played Nick in Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf," Ed said, "in a converted milk barn that ended up as the model for the Mitzi Newhouse in NY. A perfect theatre-in-the-round. We were rehearsing at the Pavilion Theatre."

Lowell stormed on stage and stopped the rehearsal. He grabbed Ed and put his arm around him as they casually walk away.

"Guess who I just talked to?" Manfold asked. "The head of Equity in New York. Steven Grey. He says you haven't paid your Equity dues in four years."

"It was too late for a student deferment," Ed said, "and Grey threatened to close the theatre if he didn't get any dues from me. Mason was nice enough to pay the fee."

The curtain fell to a packed theatre at the Penn State Pavilion,. Ed and the lead female in The Woolf play waited for their cue. They bowed to the accolades. In the audience, Rose Marie Haynes sat in the front row and clapped hard. Ed spotted her and she blew a sensual kiss at him.

"Oh, good grief," Drew said. "Why don't we move on to your senior year at Hofstra."

That Autumn, Ed sat in a Hofstra classroom, and the words 'Structure and Plot' boldly appeared on the blackboard next to the words, 'Stanley Young.'

"There's a turning point here," Stanley said. "The point of no return, everyone see it?"

Ed spotted Deter outside the classroom while Stanley talked about structure and plot.

"It was in my senior year playwright class when I saw Deter making faces outside the window of the door," Ed said.

Deter peeked through the glass window and waves to Ed. Ed's spirit slides out of his body and walks through the door.

"What are you doing here?" Spirit Ed asked.

Deter walked down the hallway, and spirit Ed followed him and the gauzy curtain followed them to the edge of the subway cement stairs. Subway noises emanated from behind the gauzy curtain in front of them. Deter took Ed's hand and led him through the curtain to the New York Subway where Ed and Deter suddenly appeared on the subway platform just as a train passed by. The train's raucous rattle waned as Deter led Ed to a bench. They sat. It was dark, scary and mysterious all at once. Ed looked around. Danger hid just around the corner.

"I think Ernest was in my apartment," Deter said.

"But I thought you were Ernest", Ed said.

Ed started to speak again, but Deter put his finger to Ed's lips.

"Shh. Don't speak," Deter said. "Love's first duty is to listen ... You have too many lovers, Neddy. All your life you've been learning to smile at mailboxes and lampposts. Life must be very confusing."

Deter looked around and said, "Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; May the outward and inward be one."

A distant train rattle gets progressively louder. Beads of sweat appear on Deter's face. The train doesn't stop. Deter seemed relieved. He looked at Ed, smiled, and then disappeared.

Virginia was looking in a jewelry case at rings at Fortunoff's Store.

"I don't know what's going on with the Deter thing," Ed told Drew, "but soon it's Gin's birthday. I still had money in my pocket from the summer job, so I buy her this 300 dollar ring, but she thought it was an engagement ring."

While Ed performed on stage at Hofstra in a main-stage production, Virginia was backstage showing her ring to fellow students. "Ed bought it for me," Virginia said. "We're engaged."

"ENGAGED!" Ed yelled at Drew. "Can you believe it. It was a birthday present, for chrissakes. A friendship thing."

Ed and Sue Anne sit opposite each other at a diner, eating.

"Sue Anne and I went to the same diner my mom took me to when I was a kid; when she going to leave my dad."

"I'm pregnant," Sue Anne said.

Ed sat back in the booth as if he were punched in the chest. "I'm going to have this child and I don't even know how to take care of myself," Ed said. "I remember the look on her face. Sadness. Or maybe it was strength. That day reminded me when my dad came rushing to get my mom at the same diner. The way he touched her."

Ed leant over the table and stroked Sue Anne's hair, and gently rubbed her cheeks. She responded by grabbing his hand and kissing it.

"I loved Sue Anne. There was only one thing to do. Get married. But I had to contend with Virginia."

Now, don't forget. This is my senior year at Hofstra," Ed said. "I'm acting in four main productions. And here I am, engaged to Virginia. I had to end that affair, which was going to be very messy and difficult."

Ed talked to crew members who were sitting in the first row of an empty theater.

"Most of my time that year was spent preparing to direct Brig. Keep in mind, only professors or graduate students directed main stage productions. Mason liked what I did with Zoo Story so I became only the second underclassman to direct one. This was a big deal. I was in charge of money, costumes, everything."

Ed and Virginia sat in a booth in mid-conversation at a diner somewhere in Mineola Long Island.

"Sue Anne Senff is pregnant?" Virginia said rather loudly. "Are you saying you are the father?"

Ed slowly nodded. Virginia slapped him and left.

At Virginia's apartment, Ed parked his car and noticed ambulance's lights were flashing. He started to walk towards her apartment, but just then Virginia was brought out on a gurney. Her wrists were bandaged.

"Two nights later she cut her wrists. Days later, it was sleeping pills."

Ed and Sue Anne, appear cozy together watching a movie at a movie theater.

"I love Sue Anne dearly, but I'm committed to Virginia because ... well, she needed me more than Sue Anne."

"At Virginia's apartment, she stood on the ledge of the balcony when I came bursting through the door and bolted onto the balcony and took her off the ledge and into the living room. She called me and said she was going to jump to her death if I didn't marry her."

"Virginia eventually calmed down," Ed told Drew. "She sat next to me while I drove to my parents' house. Now, all this was happening at Thanksgiving time. My plans were to wean her off me after the holidays. I still haven't told my parents about Sue Anne, and I wasn't about to do it during Thanksgiving dinner. So, I told Virginia she could come with me to dinner under one condition – not to say a word about Sue Anne or the pregnancy. And she agreed."

"So, I escort Virginia in the house, and we are greeted by Brian and Judy, and their two children, and Mike and his wife, and my mother and father, of course. Everyone was in good spirits, half blottoed from the egg-nog. I think Brian spiked it with a lot of rum"

"By this time Mike was married. Brian had two kids. Everyone loved Virginia. Even the kids loved her. What was there not to like? She was a gorgeous blonde creature, a real pixie with a great sense of humor."

Later, while eating, Ed seemed nervous because of Virginia's congenial attitude. And then, somewhere between serving the stuffing, and Brian taking his second helping of meat, Virginia tapped her glass with her spoon. The clinking noise was followed by silence. Everyone was giving her the attention she craved.

"I have an announcement I'd like to make," she said. "I don't know if Ed told you yet, but Sue Anne is pregnant, and Ed's the father. And he's breaking off our engagement to marry Sue Anne."

Ed slammed his elbows on the table like daggers. His head fell effortlessly into his hands, hiding from the commotion that statement caused.

"What are you doing?" Edwin yelled. "Are you insane?"

"My father was always the one to yell then later try to figure out the mess. Yelling is all I heard."

"What the hell's the matter with you?" Brian said.

"Self-righteous Brian liked Gin," Ed said, "but he was partial to Sue Anne from directing her in West Side Story at St. Aidan's. He was unhappily married with two kids. I mean, what the hell was he trying to prove?"

"Everyone continued yelling except for my mother. She just smiled and nodded. And Virginia? She smiled, patted me on the hand while everyone else talked trash about me in third person, like I wasn't even there. I noticed that Gin didn't have the friendship ring on and I mentioned that to her."

"I hocked it," Virginia said. "And now we're even."

Ed and Sue Anne stood in front of the priest at a church. The immediate family sat in the pews, and Brian was the Best-Man. Tempers were cooler than before. Under the direction of the Priest, Ed kisses Sue Anne. The family mingles. Hugs and kisses for everyone.

"So, there I was," Ed said, "a 21 year-old wannabee actor, a soon-to-be father scared out of my wits. Sue Anne and I moved in with my parents. I was no more prepared to be a dad than I was to be a neurosurgeon. I tell Mason I can't go to the RADA auditions... that my mind couldn't prepare for it. Even if I won I couldn't go to England, I told him. I had responsibilities

now. He appeared extremely disturbed.”

Ed was coaching movement to the actors who were dressed as inmates on a Hofstra stage. ”So, I put all my effort into *The Brig* that spring.

“I rehearse the inmates separate from the guards like a drill sergeant.”

A student actor walked in late. Director Ed yelled, “Hit the deck and give me twenty for being late. You know the rules.”

As the student actor did his push-ups, Ed drew three chalk lines across the stage. He moved Brian and the other GUARDS to their proper positions and they began their rehearsal.

“Prisoner number one requesting permission to cross,” one of the student actors said.

“Prisoner number one may cross,” Brian yelled out like a real drill sergeant.

“I recruited Brian and four other guards who were ex-marines as big as Brian,” Ed said. “I rehearsed them by night and the students by day. I wanted to keep them apart as long as I could. Then I rehearse the inmates and guards only one time together. The day before opening night.”

There was a packed audience the next night when Brian and the three ex-marines walked out on stage shouting orders. The student/inmates appeared frightened for real. Brian banged his stick on the table.

“The Brig was an exercise in human behavior. It was just a day of life in a US marine brig. It was grueling, vicious male treatment of the inmates.”

The BANG of Brian's stick brought a chill reaction in the audience.

“I remember that play as if it were yesterday. One of the students, who was an inmate in the play, asked permission to cross the line. I remember Brian’s response. ‘This place is a pigsty,’ he said, and then Brian hit a student/prisoner in the leg with a billy club. Another guard commanded a prisoner to do ‘twenty’ on the spot. Another jumped to a barbed-wire fence and got caught on the wire. The guards trap him and beat on him.

*“There’s no plot per se to *The Brig* except for the daily repetition of violence. The only dramatic arc was a soldier who broke under the pressure. What I keyed on was the juxtaposition of the music to the action. The haunting soft music mixed with obvious times when the drums were needed.*

“Some of the audience left before the end because it was so gruesome. I knew subconsciously that in real life I ought to be punished for my own behavior. I was transferring that feeling into my work, I guess.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Ed graduated from Hofstra. Sue Anne was due, and she moved in with her mother while Ed went to Penn State for another summer gig.

Some of the resident actors were returning from the previous year, and some were new. The new and old mingle on stage at the Penn State Pavilion. Ed walked into the Theatre and the old students greeted him with gusto. He jumped on stage and Lowell Manfold came out of the dark shadows of the backstage. He greeted Ed and gave him a script.

“So, Sue Anne moved in with her mother while I went to Penn State for another summer gig. At the Thyrst bar where all the actors at Penn State actors sat at a table drinking. I sat next to Susan Martin who ignored me. She had the female lead in She Stoops To Conquer,” Ed said. “I had the male lead. In the beginning, she didn't want anything to do with me until an actor-friend raised his drink and gave me a toast.

‘To Edward Dennehy,’ he said, ‘who'll be a Daddy soon.’

“That’s when all of a sudden Susan threw a quick look at me, as if she was interested. She moved her chair closer to me.

“Not many people knew Sue Anne was pregnant, so some were surprised.”

The bartender held the phone up and signaled Ed to take the call, which he did. After a beat Ed came back to the table. Ed held his hands high in the air. “I am the proud father of a healthy nine pound baby girl,” Ed said proudly to the group.

Everyone cheered. Once Ed sat down, Susan moved closer to him.

“The call was my mother to tell me Courtney was born,” Ed said, “Now, suddenly, Susan was my best friend. That night we slept together.”

Jill Sodenberry held up her glass ready to toast.

“Can we skip this part, please,” Drew pleaded.

“And then Donna Radar held up her glass as a toast, and threw a seductive look my way. And then there was Donna Rader,” Ed said.

“Dear, God,” Drew exclaimed. “What kind of man are you?”

“I didn't say I was proud of it,” was all Ed said in his defense.

At Ed’s tiny apartment at Penn State, Sue Anne was burping Courtney, their new born, in the living room while Ed sat in a chair reading a script. She got up and put Courtney into an open drawer that was made-up as a crib.

“This is only a summer gig,” Ed said to Sue Anne. “When it's over we'll move back to Long Island and I'll find work. We'll get the baby what she needs then.”

A few weeks later, at Sue Anne’s mother’s house, Ed entered with a suit case in hand and was greeted by Sue Anne with Mrs. Senff who was standing in the background, hovering.

“You went to school to be an actor?” Mrs. Senff rhetorically asked. “What kind of work is that?”

“Mother,” Sue Anne said.

“So, Sue Anne and I moved in with her mother who was a lovely lady of Gestapo persuasion. One of those motivational kind of people.”

Ed lugged a trunk up the stairs of a Brooklyn Apartment Complex while Sue Anne has Courtney.

“I made well over five grand that summer,” Ed said. “What with Equity and playing

pool, which paid for my booze and other living essentials, I was rolling in the dough, so to speak. The first thing I did with the money was get an apartment in Brooklyn.

Later, Ed and Sue Anne unpack clothes while Courtney is nearby crying.

“I think she needs to be changed.”

Clumsily, Ed changed her.

At the Amityville Theatre, Ed handed out scripts to Brian and other actors.

“Brian had three daughters at the time,” Ed said. “He was still driving a meat truck. Good money, but he felt trapped, as I did, and needed to assuage his muse. He started the Amityville Theatre Group and knew I was idle so he asked me to direct.”

Two actors get up and move according to Ed's instructions. Brian is off to the side watching. Looking disgruntled.

“I drove to Amityville every day for a community production of Street Car for a big \$500. Brian hired me as director expecting I'd put him in the role as Stanley. But I cast someone else as Kowalski and cast Brian as the upstairs neighbor. I don't think he ever forgave me for that.”

Ed weighed meat on a scale, and grabbed a drink hidden behind a side of beef. He repeated these two actions over again. And again.

“Brian got me a meat scaler job,” Ed said. “I went in at 4 AM, worked to noon, and auditioned in afternoons. I'd go in the freezer to get warm with my bottle of brandy. They told me beer was better. The carbonation would make you warmer. Not for me. Brandy and whiskey was my recipe to get through the winter.”

At Ed's apartment, on another day, Ed sat on the couch watching the Jets on TV. Sue Anne adjusted her coat over a swollen belly. She kissed Ed.

“What I'm about to tell you is something no one knows, except Sue Anne and I,” Edaid. “Here she was pregnant again, with Brendon. And she left me alone with Courtney.”

“I'm going to Jennifer's,” she said. “I'll be home after the game.”

After Sue Anne left, Ed bolted to the kitchen, took the garbage can top off, and pulled back the plastic bag. He reached down and pulled out a bottle of vodka and poured a drink and mixed it with orange juice. He took a swig directly from the vodka bottle before putting it back.

Later, in the living room, a drink sat by the table as Ed watched football on the TV. He ignored a far-off, ominous sound of a baby's cry. Suddenly, Barrymore appeared and sat in a chair opposite Ed.

”Hmm,” Ed hummed. “Where have you been?”

”Could ask you the same question,” Barrymore retorted.

“What's that supposed to mean? I've been here.”

“Well, let me see,” Barrymore said, “you're in Middle Village with a wife and a baby. You're a meat scaler, whatever that is or means, with no acting prospects.”

”I'll get some.”

Meanwhile, Courtney is wailing and has Ed scrubbing his head with his fingers. “Is that anger at yourself, I see,” Barrymore said, “or is it dismay over succumbing to Sue Anne's wishes? Or at an innocent baby girl, perhaps? Or maybe at an unborn boy?”

“SHUT UP,” Ed yelled, and then got up and left.

Ed came back with Courtney who was still crying. He laid her on the couch and ran to the kitchen. He came back with a baby bottle and shoved it in Courtney's mouth. But she continued to wail.

“Shut up. Shut up. SHUT UP!” Ed wailed back.

Unexpectedly, Ed had a seizure. His eyes rolled back in his head and he collapsed.

"To this day I don't know what happened except I went into a rage and I blacked out." Ed said. *"When I came to and got up, her face was blue. She was silent and wasn't breathing or moving. I freaked out. I frantically nudged her, turned her over, and finally I blew a puff of air in her mouth and she started breathing again, and started crying. And so do I."*

"I walked her around the room to calm her down. I thought she died. I thanked God a 100 times that she didn't. I looked around thinking Barrymore heard my ranting, but he left. He couldn't take the heat, I guess."

Ed put her into a play pen. It was eerily quiet except for Ed's heavy breathing. He sat, frozen. Courtney grabbed her blanket, and sucked on her pacifier and fell asleep.

"I knew I couldn't be left alone with Courtney after that. Sue Anne was three months pregnant with Brendon, and I'm a failure as a father and ... What can I say. I was mortified. Frightened!"

"And sinking," Drew said. "I'm still trying to understand. Good God, Edward. You are full of stories. When are we going to get to Ernest?"

"Soon, here I am, at the New York Subway Station sitting in a subway car with a script on my lap and minding my own business. The train stops and the door opens, letting passengers on. By the way, after I told Sue Anne what happened, it was the end. Our marriage faulted and didn't last much longer after that, and I was going nowhere as an actor. Zanuck hadn't offered me a job yet. Tennessee Williams wasn't pounding on my door. None of the great things I dreamt about were happening to me. Anyway, there I was on the subway minding my own business and as the door closes, I see Deter sitting on a bench. We make eye contact briefly before the train moves. I'm asking myself what is it with these cameo appearances of Deter and Barrymore? What was that about?"

"Well, as it turns out, shortly after the Courtney incident I won the 'Circle In The Square' play-writing contest with For All Those Who Hide Away, my senior project with Stanley."

Ed sat with the producer and Samantha, the director at an off-Broadway Theatre Office.

"They loved it. They asked this Samantha woman to direct it, but they redesigned it. Now, the play's about a transvestite and she was talking about using muscular types. That's not the way I wrote the characters. Anyway, they wanted a public reading to gauge the audience, to test the waters first at Circle in the Square Theatre."

Ed entered a village theatre and watched the ACTORS rehearse.

"So, I travel to the City to watch this woman butcher my play doing this super realistic interpretation. Quick dialogue, very theatrical. She had these budding James Dean and Marlon Brando types playing the torn t-shirt school of acting."

Ed gulped a beer and was swaying a little bit.

"So, I go to a bar near The Square. The more I drank the angrier I got at this woman who was treating my script like it was her own."

Ed got up with his attaché case and staggered out of the bar, and staggered to Circle in the Square Theatre. He sat in the balcony front row, and took out his camera from his case. He began snapping photos. As he listened to Samantha give directions and the actors performing, he got angrier and angrier. Finally, he got up and marched down the stairs to the mezzanine. He hopped on the stage, grabbed the scripts out of the actors' hands and, one-by-one, he put them into his case and walked out.

"I wouldn't've minded so much if they were doing a good imitation of Brando. But they weren't. Ah, who am I kidding. Another big mistake. I was beginning to walk toeless, because I was shooting myself in the foot so often. I shouldn't've done what I did. I know it."

In an Equity Theater somewhere in New York City, Ed auditioned in front of the director and casting people. He performed a 'cold' reading from the script and knocked their socks off.

"At this time I land the lead role in the Equity Library production of Much Ado About Nothing."

Ed was rehearsing with the other Actors at the Equity Theater.

"This was my first job with New York actors. The read-thru was going OK when the director told us to take a break. So, I walk over to him asked when payday was. He told me they didn't pay the actors for their work, but promised me travelling money if I needed it. Once he told me that, I put the script down on a nearby table and as I walked out I told them they needed to find another Benedict. That didn't go over very well."

"So, then I bolted outside of the Theatre and charged across the street where the equity building was. When you're young, and told you're gifted, you become cocky and think in time you'll be discovered. You think you can change the world if it doesn't conform to your standards. It led me to commit a series of mistakes from which I never recovered. Quitting the Equity theatre was a big mistake. Anyway, I was on a roll. I walked briskly across the street to the Actor's Equity Building. I never met Steven Grey. But he was about to meet me."

Ed stormed into Steven Grey's office reception area and saw Grey's name stenciled on the door. He bolts in and a man wearing a button down shirt, glasses, business all the way, was sitting at his desk.

"What the hell's the matter with you people here," Ed said, "you were going to shut down a very prestigious regional theatre at Penn State because you didn't receive dues from me?"

"Ah, Mr. Dennehy, I presume," Grey said.

"You sponsor a theatre across the street where you don't pay the actors," Ed said to Grey. "Are you people nuts? You threaten to close theaters down when actors can't find paying jobs?"

"It was one of my finer moments in life," Ed said to Drew. "I don't have many of them, for sure. But Steven was terrified as I was Dante going through my second stage of hell. This was a bad thing I was doing, actually. He could get my name out there and blackball me. I mean, most actors struggle for their card to get to a position where I was. Up until that point, I got things handed to me. But my real education was coming at me rapidly. Cynicism was creeping in. It's so absurd the way the business functions. Actors will do anything. Act for free. I hate the process. But love the business. What can you do?"

Ed stormed out of Grey's office.

"I was drowning in remorse. I mean, I was a lousy father. A worse husband. I couldn't find work. Where was I going? What was I doing?"

"You were going to find Ernest," Drew said.

"Okay," Ed said after sighing deeply. "Here it is. I was dreaming that I was on the New York subway with a camera around his neck."

The train stopped at a particular station, and Ed looked through the window and saw Ragamuffin Man, Deter, as Barrymore called him. Deter was slouched like Rodin's *The Thinker*. Ed stormed out of the car, snapped a picture of Deter and then sat next to him.

"Ernest lives with me on Bleeker Street," Deter said. But I can't go home. I can't face him

any longer We seem to search in all the wrong places for answers ... Don't we?"

Ed shrugged. He looked down the tracks and saw the train's light. The noise got louder as it approached. They both stood.

"Well, my friend," Deter said, "There's really nothing much more I can do now."

Ed shrugged, not knowing what Deter was talking about.

"You must trust Barrymore now," Deter said. "You and he are so much alike, you know. Listen to him because he has been there. Done that. And he didn't wind up in a good place."

The noise of the oncoming train got louder, more menacing. Conversely, Deter remained calm. Suddenly, he kissed Ed on the lips and jumped in front of the train. Ed screamed which coincided with Courtney screaming and Ed awakened abruptly, thus ending the dream. It took him a beat to realize where he was. He turned to Sue Anne, who was awake because of the noise Courtney was making.

"Do you want me to get her?" Ed asked.

"No. I will," Sue Ann said.

So, Sue Anne got up while Ed lay in bed wide awake.

"I was hallucinated in my dreams now," Ed said. "Barrymore was an absentee mostly. I thought he was pissed because I talked to Deter. But Deter killed himself, so I was expecting JB to show himself soon. Sue Anne didn't trust me. Couldn't blame her. I had to do something. So, I did the only thing I could do. I ran away."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Ed sat in the Penn State drama office, which was really Manfold's office. Ed's hair was really long now.

"The Arts Company pays Equity scale to 12 actors who perform here and satellite campuses," Manfold said. "Two positions opened up and so did a spot on the undergraduate staff. You're the first person I thought of. You can teach, and be one of our resident actors. And you can go for your Master's Degree at the same time."

"You mean, I'll be collecting two paychecks for acting and teaching plus getting my Masters for free?"

"But didn't you end up in a scandal?" Drew asked, remembering there was something amiss in this story.

"Yes, yes," Ed said. "I'll get into that."

At Penn State Ed walked into a two-person office while Bob Shnyder straightened out his desk even though it didn't need it. They hesitated a beat before shaking hands.

"We don't have to get along, Ed. Just keep the room clean."

"Sure, Bob. Whatever you say."

While Ed got settled at his desk, Bob added, "Why do you wear your hair so long? You'll be giving a bad example to the students."

"I'm an actor too, Bob, and you'll never know when you'll need it."

"Bob was a dance teacher and taught the history of theatre," Ed said, "And I'm this long-haired hippy guy rooming with an old, proper, academic fairy where everything had to be neat and his way. We were two people who shouldn't have been sharing the same space. He was pathetic, in a way, yet there was something mystical about him; as if he had been through a world of hurt and knew something that you didn't.

"But he complained to Manfold about me so ... It was payback time."

Bob finally appeared and heard moans coming from the office. The door was ajar, and he peeked through the crack and saw a naked woman from the waist down, and with her legs wrapped around Ed's hips. Ed maneuvered her and sat her bare butt down on Bob's desk.

"Not my desk," Bob whispered to himself.

"That's it, baby," Ed said. "Move it around. Whew! Okay. We have to stop. Bob will be coming soon. That's enough."

That afternoon, Bob was alone in his workspace spraying the top of his desk and scrubbing imaginary dirt. He thought there was a dead mouse somewhere, and searched the smell until he found a pair of panties wedged between his desk and the wall. He took a pointer from the book case above the desk, retrieved a pair of panties from behind the desk, and tossed them on Ed's chair. Bob stepped to the side and looked at Ed's side of the room, which was a mess and in stark contrast to his half.

Bob walked out of his room and went to a classroom already filled with students. He wrote on the blackboard the words, HISTORY OF THEATRE, then turned to the class and saw several students with their eyes half closed. Two were actually napping right there at their desks.

At one of the Penn State's theatres, Ed had a wig on and acting to a packed house.

"I was doing Ionesco's Exit the King. Somewhere in the stage directions it says 'by some theatrical trick' the king's hair suddenly turned white. Now how the hell do you do that?"

An actor caused a ruckus, misdirecting the audience's attention. While the audience was distracted, Ed flings off his wig exposing his natural hair, which was long and dyed white.

In the audience, Bob Shnyder nodded his approval at Ed's misdirection and appeared to be the only one who was clapping at that deception.

In Ed's classroom the next day, two students stood in front of the class, and just before reading from scripts, they introduce themselves.

"Jonathan Frakes," one student said, "I live in Bethlehem. My major was psychology, but I'm switching to Theatre."

Another student said "Nathan Cook. Philly. Engineering."

They perform a scene flawlessly, then Teacher Ed called two more people up to the front to do a scene.

"My students all came from different backgrounds," Ed said to Drew. "Some already had their Equity cards. Others never stepped on stage before. I had to find a common ground to teach. Trust was going to be a key factor. How would I get that? I didn't have a clue."

Ed stood in front of the class ready to give a lecture. He began by saying, "Constructive criticism is a vital part in the learning process, whether you're getting it, or listening to someone else receive it or give it. All criticism is positive, but how does one learn trust? One way is by making the classroom a place to relax. Create a social atmosphere."

Ed left the room and came back seconds later with a cooler and set it in on a desk. He waved for the students to come up and, as they did, he passed out beers.

At another day, Jonathan Frakes was finishing a monologue to the class. "For your own sake, Jeff, and for the sake of my friendship with your father, please, don't say a word." Frakes said as he finished his monologue. Ed called on one of the students who had his hand raised.

"Overall I liked it, the student said, "but I think it lacked emotion where it was most needed. I didn't feel any empathy."

In Bob Shnyder's classroom, Bob asked a question and the hands went up quickly. He appeared thoughtful and the students seemed energized this time.

In Ed's classroom, on another day, some students were drinking beer. Two others were by the window smoking pot. Nathan Cook mugs the class and then recites, "Sir Thomas, I'll be plain with you."

Ed flew out of his seat and said, "No! No, class. We act within the line, not between the lines. To be or not to be, that is the question." He paused. "Yes. You make the pauses count, but you act out the line. You sense the pause before going into 'Whether 'tis nobler in the mind'. Versus this: 'To be or not to be ...'" Ed mugs the class. "See the difference?"

A student sat by the window smoking pot. He threw the roach out the window and yelled out "Stella ..."

"The party atmosphere was an experiment to take some barriers down," Ed said, as if he wanted Drew's approval. "It was working. Students went on to be successful, like Jonathan Frakes of Star Trek fame. And Nathan Cook, of White Shadow fame."

In the hallway, Bob Shnyder sniffed and followed the marijuana odors into Ed's classroom. He peered through the window of the door and saw students smoking pot by the windows. He shook his head and left.

In the Penn State Auditorium, Ed, and a few other actors, milled around the stage. Ed grabbed his bag as Liz Price kissed him. Ed patted her on the butt, and she retreated in one direction as he left in another.

“At this time, I was seeing Liz Price,” Ed told Drew. “She was a knock-out who could double for Candice Bergen. She was a student who sometimes took bit parts in the resident company.”

Ed left the theatre wearing a denim Cloud Suit. He flipped his long ponytail over a bright scarf, and put on his sun glasses. A cigarette dangled in his mouth. He threw a backpack over his shoulder and sauntered down the steps with a beer in his hand.

A man in the shadows across the street came out of hiding. He had a camera and took several pictures of Ed leaving the building. The next morning, one of the pictures he took made it into a local newspaper. The caption read: DRAMA PROFESSOR LEAVING CLASS.

“The fact was,” Ed said, “I was leaving rehearsal. This experiment blew up because some disgruntled student, or jealous peer, reported I allowed marijuana in my classroom. Stories snowballed to orgies and me having sex with students. I was accused of being a druggie and that was that. I was the center of a scandal. Next thing I knew I was threatened over the phone. I had to leave my apartment it got so bad.”

At Liz’s apartment house, Ed had a suitcase in hand, climbing the stairs. He put the luggage down, knocked on the door and Liz answered.

“So, I moved in with Liz. The papers said I was sleeping with a student, but she was not in any of my classes. Liz was 21 but that’s not what was reported. They were doing a Svengali on this girl. She was very mature and took it in stride. She was a knockout. I was in love.”

“You were married,” Drew said.

“Yeah, well, she didn’t know that.”

In a Penn State conference room, Lowell Manfold, Bob Shnyder, John Duquey and Richard Adleman sat at a desk in front of board members.

“It looked like an inquisition was taking place,” Ed told Drew. “All that was missing were the white wigs.”

Ed opened the door, walked in, and sat across from Bob.

“I was brought in to confront the key members of the Drama Department and the Board of Trustees. Newspapers with the unflattering photos lie on the table. I was ready to be hanged. I was becoming a victim of yellow journalism.”

“Really, Ed?” Drew said. “You were smoking pot with your students and drinking to excess. Yeah, you were a real victim of the First Amendment.”

“It was only two weeks when we did anything. A tenth of what was reported really happened. Don’t give me that look. That’s it. I’m leaving.”

“Sit back down. With all the crap I put up with you over the years. I’m just screwing around with you. Continue. So, the President of the Drama club is about to, what, Fire your ass?”

“I was in front of the board,” Ed continued, “my colleagues: Richard Adleman, John John Duquey, Manfold, and Bob Shnyder - teachers or department heads. They all had to do an assessment on my teaching methods as well as my character. John Duquey got up first, and he put a folder in front of the President then stepped back and began to speak. Funny who you think your friends are. John Duquey was this ultra liberal who wanted me out. Said I used questionable teaching methods, and I didn’t belong at Penn State. John Duquey sat back down and really didn’t do too much damage, and Lowell Manfold got up. I felt if anyone could bail me out, it was Manfold. But in his effort to not say anything negative, it really came out negative because he wasn’t saying anything positive. Next, Richard Adleman stepped up to the plate and

was hurtful as well. Said something like I smoked pot in and out of class and I shouldn't be teaching at Penn State. These cowards, my friends, were just trying to make sure their own jobs were secure. I wish I had a crystal ball so they could see how many of my students went on to great careers. The list is long. Anyway, the twif, Bob gets up, and I figured this the end of the road for me. I remember saying to myself, 'oh, boy, here we go, the gigs over.'

"President ... Chairman," Bob began, "Ed and I are office mates. People think we don't get along very well. Fact is, we tolerate each other. He has different methods. Different is not always bad. Did you know three of Ed's undergraduate students auditioned against graduate students, Equity actors, and beat them for acting jobs here at Penn State? Gentlemen, that never happened before. Don't get me wrong, I have issues with Mr. Dennehy. His things are strewn all over the place in my ... Our office. He's unkempt most of the time, or appears to be."

Bob stepped back. I felt he was acting a bit. But he continued. "Oh, yes," he said, "at times he's rude, disrespectful, and arrogant. But gentlemen, perhaps there is jealousy at play here? Perhaps. I want to leave you with some important issues. First, I have seen the results of this man's work on stage and in the classroom. He is one of the finest actors and directors this University has ever seen. Secondly, and even more impressive, his students have become better actors because of him. A teacher can only dream of getting the results from students that Mr. Dennehy has gotten from his. It would be a sin if we let Edward Dennehy go."

The stoic faces of the board members show them unmoved.

"This 60 year-old faggot dancer who couldn't dance anymore, who had been at loggerheads with me all along, went toe-to-toe with the President of the University. He stood up for me and didn't flinch. He had more guts than all the others put together. I guess when you live his kind of life during the '40s and '50s you developed a certain amount courage. I wish I was half the man he was."

Bob turned and shared a moment with a tearful Ed, then exited.

CHAPTER TWENTY

In their apartment, Liz sobbed in the bedroom as Ed left with two suitcases.

“They allowed me to resign,” Ed said. “So, I left the apartment Liz and I shared. I loved Liz, but what was I supposed to do? I couldn't stay. Not with this scandal that was getting national attention.

“So, I went to New York City and rented a Brownstown apartment complex from a friend of my fathers. When the stories hit the API center my Dad knew the spin. He believed my version and helped me find an apartment on the lower west side.

“So, I do the audition thing. After I moved in, I read for a Broadway production company. Nothing seemed to work. I make the casting rounds, but to no avail.”

A different NYC stage; Ed read from sides given to him. A man whispered in the Casting Director's ear.

“NEXT!” the director yelled.

In a small theatre in New York City, Ed performed to a small audience.

“I work where I can get the work. I got work, but there was not much money involved. Hardly paid for the transportation.”

At another Casting Director's Office, Ed read from the sides given him.

“But I keep at it,” Ed said. “What else could I do? The die has been cast, and I will die for this profession.”

Ed slept soundly at the new apartment, even with the honking and noise, which came from the street, would wake up a normal sleeper. Ed dreamt of a watch-peddler on the street who had a picture of Deter pointing to a building across the street from where he was. Like magic, Ed stood in front of Deter's apartment door which was slightly ajar. He pushed it open and he walked in to see a vacant room except for a trunk with the word ‘Ernest’ labeled on it. Ed approached it and lifted the lid. A telephone rang and woke him

“In my dream, Deter's quest to find Ernest became mine. Guilt, I guess, like I had something to do with his suicide. Something always woke me when I opened the trunk. This one evening it was Liz calling me. It was as if it were planned because I sensed the answer was in the trunk.”

Ed sat in a subway train car looking out to nowhere.

“Since Sue Anne and I were already divorced, I proposed to Liz. Before I knew it, I was standing with Liz in front of a Justice of the Peace and just like that we got married.”

At Liz's parent's house, Liz, her parents, and Ed ate at the dinner table. The mood was accepting, but somewhat tense. Ed acted like his father, tapping Liz's hand at the appropriate times, smiling, engaging in polite talk, which he hated.

In the brownstone apartment Ed took a swig from a vodka bottle while he rummaged through the Backstage Newspaper. Liz sauntered into the bathroom. Ed watched Liz in the bathroom putting her makeup on.

“She pursued a marriage with me in lieu of college,” Ed said. “I'm still living off my savings while I look for a job. She finds work easily. Smart. Gorgeous. One look at her and she's in-like-Flynn wherever she goes.”

Ed was in the middle of doing his Hotel Telephone Monologue for the URTA competition somewhere in NY City with 600 other wannabees.

“So, I finally go to the URTA and audition for jobs with the country's best theatre groups in the country.”

Ed stepped up to another camera and mugged it. He started his monologue and the theater owners took notice.

“You'd be astonished the different ways people say hello,” Ed bellowed. “Some people say it to you as if they were willing to give you a million dollars. And then others say it to you as if you'd be doing them the greatest favor if you'd drop dead at your earliest convenience ...”

As Ed continued with his monologue, a packed gym of hundreds of wannabe actors buzzing with excitement.

Ed walked into the Bucks County Playhouse Office where he was greeted by Lee Yopp. “Of the 25 offers I received,” Ed said, “I picked the Playhouse to test my laurels. The Bucks County Playhouse was the most prestigious regional theatre on the East Coast. and Lee Yopp was the most ambitious theatre owners outside of NY, so I felt my choice was a good one.”

“Oh, for crying out loud,” Drew said. “Everything has to be the best with you. Yopp was the most ambitious. Bucks was the most prestigious. Tulin was the best acting coach in the Universe.”

“One of the best on the East Coast, I said. And all I'm saying now is, Lee brought in big names, and had his own stable of actors. He hired me to do three shows that summer, and it turned into a four-year gig. And it got Brian his start.”

“I can't believe I'm drinking so early in the morning,” Drew said.

“You'll get used to it,” Ed replied.

In the middle of a play, at the BC Playhouse, Ed walked on from stage-right and recited a line and exited stage left.

“Anyway, Lee liked my performance of Richard in Lion In Winter so much that he invited me into their resident company immediately.

Chris Weatherhead, an actress, kisses Ed on the cheek backstage. To her, it was more than just a kiss.

“Liz stayed in NY to save money. She was faithful. On the other hand... I mean, we got married on a lark. Back then men were expected to...”

“You rationalize a lot, Ed,” Drew said. “You're a hard person to figure out by any standard.”

Ed rehearsed with the other resident ACTORS at the BC Playhouse while Lee Yopp sat in the first row watching.

“One month I'd have the lead in Julius Caesar playing Brutus ...”

Another night, Ed waits for his cue backstage. Once given he rushed on stage with a tray in his hand.

“You called, sir?”

“On Another night,” Ed said. “I'd have a bit part and with one line. It didn't matter.”

At the Playhouse, George C. Scott strutted in the BC Playhouse with a raincoat draped over his shoulders. He threw his coat on a chair, as if he were acting on the spot.

“Lee jobbed big stars in from NY and LA around a core of 12 actors,” Ed said. “One

time I remember he got George C. Scott there. This was before Patton when he began making more money than the Kennedys.”

“Sorry I’m late,” Scott said in his gravelly voice. “Where are we boys?”

Scott hopped up on stage. A Twelve Angry Men script laid on the table for his prevue, and Ed handed Scott his script.

“I’m off book. I’m Juror number three,” Ed said to Drew.

Ed began the soliloquy in front of Scott.

“The kid’s a dangerous killer. You could see it. He stabbed his own father, four inches into the chest. They proved it a dozen ways in court. Like me to list them for ya?”

“This is about somebody’s life here. We can’t decide in five minutes. Supposin’ we’re wrong.”

”That was good.” Scott said. “What’s your name?”

“I was learning to act with the best of ‘em,” Ed said. “I was paying my dues, so to speak. Cara Duff was in the show.”

Cara Duff MacCormick wore a purple scarf. She took it off and slid it over Ed’s face softly, seductively.

“I didn’t want to hurt Liz,” Ed said. “I did everything in my power not to.”

In Ed’s apartment, the purple scarf starts the line of hastily thrown clothes on the floor that trail from the living room to the closed door of the bedroom where lovemaking sounds from Ed and Cara dominate the sound.

“Your restraint is palpable,” Drew said.

“I know I’m not this sexy, wonderful guy,” Ed confessed to Drew. “She was away from home. Lonely. Ahe wanted to be part of the group. She seduced me so I’d throw my influence to get her into the company, not that she needed it.”

A knock on the apartment door, which is slightly ajar, caused it to gradually open. Liz walked in holding two suitcases. She saw the clothes on the floor and slowly follows the trail.

“Anyway, Liz quit her job in the city to be with me, only she came at the most inopportune time.”

Liz approached the bedroom door and saw Ed’s impropriety in real time. She turned and left.

“Last I heard she was manager of the famous Lawrence Ferlinghetti Book Store, City Lights, in San Francisco. It was a very short-lived marriage.”

At the BC Playhouse, John Carridine walked in as Ed and a few actors were rehearsing *Inherit the Wind*. After the introductions, Ed, Tony Idonza and several actors rehearse with Carridine. Lee Yopp sat in the first row of the audience, directing.

Ed was Hornbeck in *Inherit the Wind*. John was Darrow from the old school of acting. He measured pauses and line deliveries, and was keen on ‘just acting’. He didn’t swear to any ‘method’ of acting. Like Barrymore and Sir Lawrence Olivier, ‘just act’ and the project will fall into place.

“Tony Idonza walked across the stage and sat next to the Judge. Tony had a Brooklyn accent and appeared uneasy while doing this play. One of the resident actors, as the Bailiff, walked up as Meeker and asked him to state his name and occupation.

“George Sillers,” Tony said. “I work at the feed store.”

Another Resident Actor strolled up to Tony and asked, “If you had a son, Mr. Sillers ... or a daughter ...”

Then John Carridine bellowed out “Objection”. The Actor playing the Judge glanced at his script and looked confused. Lee Yeop stood and said loudly, “You’re objection comes in a little while, John. No objection, here. I believe you’ll say something like ...” Lee looks at the script, “Objection! We’re supposed to be choosing jury members! The prosecution’s denouncing the defendant before the trial has even begun!”

“I know the bloody script, Lee. I'm objecting because I have two complaints. First, this is my travel day. It's against my principles to rehearse on my travel day. And second, you have a lot of bloody pauses in this play. I think we can do with less pauses, don't you, Lee?”

“Okay, everybody,” Lee said. “You heard from the master. Less pauses.”

On another rehearsal day, Ed was standing next to John on stage, acting.

John said to Ed, acting, “Poor slob! You're all alone. When you go to your grave, they'll be no one to pull the grass up over your head. Nobody to mourn you. Nobody to give a damn. You're all alone.”

“You're wrong, Henry. You'll be there.” And then Ed paused a long time, then said, “You're the type. Who else would defend my right to be lonely?”

“I purposely gave the line with a long pause,” Ed said. “It felt so right but he was the only one who took pauses. I gave it to him in a rehearsal two days before the show. He didn't say a word to me until later when there was a break in the rehearsal. He made an extra effort to talk to me privately. “Edward ... Edward. That was absolutely beautiful. Don't lose that pause towards the end there.”

John then turned to Lee who was sitting in the first row. “You got too many goddamn bloody pauses in this play, but you leave that one in there, Lee. Good job, Edward.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

As Ed walked down the street in New Hope, Pennsylvania, several residents waved. Ed turned the corner, peeked inside a store front, and the owner waved, as if he knew Ed.

“For the first time in a long time,” Ed told Drew. “I was free, unattached. I bought a house and lived in this gorgeous town of New Hope. I was treated by its residents like I belonged.”

The sound of a toilet flushing distracted Ed a little. He was still nursing his first drink for three hours, which was a rare occurrence in the life of Ed Dennehy.

Drew exited the bathroom and said, “So, what's your point in all this, Ed?”

“I was part of the community, that's my point. I wasn't this peculiar thing wearing leotards spouting poetry on my tiptoes. Everyone in town appreciated art without getting weird about it. I went to Harry's bar and I'd hear him yell out, “Hello, Sally”, who was a seamstress; “Hello, Joe”, the mailman; “Hello, Ed”, the actor at the Bucks County Playhouse, all in the same breath. All equal billing. I had found my home, and was terribly comfortable. And my work as an actor there was probably the best it's ever been.”

“And Ernest. What about Ernest?”

“Yes, well, it was very quiet on that front. Barrymore was a ‘no show’ as well. But, that will change. I owe my career to Barrymore, really. Let me continue and let's see where it leads me. It's all starting to come to me now. Let me continue.

Ed began his flashback again, telling Drew that Tony Idonza was the only person he knows of who loved playing pool more than he did. They both needed money and pool was a perfect way to get it, they felt.

Tony and Ed exited the theatre and walked next door to the Playhouse Inn. Ed and Tony walked downstairs to The Menagerie Room, where the bartender drafted up two beers without them even asking. They slapped money on the bar, took hefty swigs and then headed for the pool tables.

While they played pool, Ed said to Drew, “So many actors came through BC Playhouse, but I remember Tony, an Italian from Brooklyn, was a charming guy, and a great pool hustler like me. While he learned how to act, we became friends at the Playhouse.”

“I'm going to Hollywood. Be a TV star,” Tony said one day.

“Save your money, Tony,” I said to him. “They don't want actors with New York accents. You'll end up doing commercials for the rest of your life.”

“I'll take voice lessons,” Tony said. “Come with me, Ed. We'll do a movie together.”

“I tried to discourage him,” Ed told Drew. “Most wannabees I met during this time fizzled away. Not him. He changed his name to Danza. Two years later I see him on a sitcom. The sweetheart made it. Did I ever tell you about my big meeting with Pachinko?”

“I'm afraid to say yes. You might as well tell me again.”

“We were in the Fifth Floor Lobby of this expensive apartment in New York City. Cara and I come bursting out of the elevators and Cara tells me not to drink too much that night because this party meant a lot to her. I think it was because Pachinko was going to be there.

“Cara Duff was supposed to be the new Julie Harris, so I guess she felt Pachinko, who just finished Whistleblower and was in the process of landing a job playing the son of Marlon

Brando in a Francis Coppola mafia picture, also a Hofstra alum, by the way. He was the only unclassman ...

"Yes, yes. I know," Drew said. "I think you said that already. Let's move on."

"Okay. Anyway, Cara and I walk up to the door and knock. I hear the noise inside, so the party was already in progress."

"Ok. Well anyway, while I fixed myself a drink at the booze table, I eyed Al Pachinko who had a group of party-goers surrounding him and paying attention to him like he was a god, or something. I guess, this was around 1973. Pachinko was going out with Carol Kane at the time, the hostess of the party."

A circle of admirers surround Pachinko and Ed slowly sauntered towards the entourage, then mingled with the group and listened to Pachinko.

"They were discussing Hoffman's performance in Lenny. Now here's the thing. I was trained in the British discipline. Everything happens on the line, so when I pause it has meaning. As opposed to the bastardization of the Stanislavsky method that people like Stella Adler misinterpreted."

"Brando is a brilliant method actor," Pachinko said. "His interpretation is a flawless and..."

"It's all psycho-babble," Ed piped in. "Actors were ruined by Adler or Meisner who taught them that research trumps acting. It's just an avenue to get the proper result, that's all. Strasberg started it. He gave his own spin on Stanislavsky. Then Adler and Meisner twisted it,"

Pachinko just stood there wide-eyed while Ed introduced himself.

"Ed Dennehy, king of horseshit," and then gave Pachinko a two-fingered salute.

"I suppose you think Brando is a hack," Pachinko countered. "Suffers from using method or motivational training?"

Ed had to wait a moment to reply for the laughs to subside.

"Adler had an astounding talent in Marlon Brando," Ed finally replied, "who took what was good from her misinterpretations and spit out the rest. If there were no Brando, Adler and Meisner would've been laughed out of theatre."

"Oh, I see," Pachinko told the group, including Ed. "Us dumb actors don't know how to differentiate ..."

"All I'm saying is Brando would've emerged anyway because of his talent," Ed interrupted. "and Adler and Meisner managed to screw up thousands of actors because he was so successful using their techniques. 'Why do I have to do this? Why do I have to do that?' It's all psycho-babble. All this motivation for everything. If you have to open a window on stage, you get up and walk across the stage and open the damn window. 'Oh, I have to do it because I have asthma or I'm claustrophobic.' You do it because the author or the director told you to do it. It's not complicated."

To Ed, the Wannabees seemed to be hiding behind the veil of silence.

"And, do you feel Dustin Hoffman is a psychobabblist?"

Everyone laughed, except for Ed. The crowd was getting larger.

"If you look at 'The Method,'" Pachinko said, "you look at preparation and interaction with other actors. Wasn't that the goal of Hoffman in Lenny?"

"Where was Lenny Bruce on screen?" Ed said. "Hoffman has the feeling thing going when the roles call for it. Rizzo in Midnight Cowboy. Nobody does it better. But when playing a real person there's documentation, and you should use it and just do it. I mean, Bruce had that nasally thing going on from too much cocaine. And he stuttered, and he tugged on his ear this

way. It's right there in the films. Hoffman didn't use it.”

Pachinko takes a deep breath, prepared for the moment before, and using his gravely voice: “‘To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’ ... Now, I could have never competently recited that unless I prepared myself totally. If not right now, then some other time where I've integrated the 'moment before' so cogently I can borrow on the memory of it whenever I want to.”

“Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,” Ed continued the monologue, “and by opposing end them: to die, to sleep no more; and so on, and so forth..” Ed used his gravely voice as well. The crowd was silent now. They just stared at Pachinko. “I was just copying a John Barrymore recording I heard years ago,” Ed said. “The operative word there was ‘copying’.”

“Hoffman studied Bruce for months...”

“But Hoffman pulled on his ear with his right hand,” Ed said. “Lenny Bruce was a lefty.” Someone walked past Ed and hit his elbow causing Ed to thrust his drink on Al by accident. Pachinko wiped his face, then saw Ed's impenitent face, and began swinging.

“It was a damn accident. And all I was trying to say was this motivational training can be helpful at times. It's merely a tool, not to be used for every damn activity on stage.”

Cara burst through the maddening crowd and pried them apart.

“Cara stopped seeing me after that episode of male testosterone behavior.”

Inside the BC Playhouse, Ed was sitting in a chair on stage to a packed audience. Brian Dennehy appeared at the rear of the stage and watched Ed act.

“Do you know what happens to a man who works all his life, retires and finally gets to do what he wants?” Ed said while acting on stage.

His fellow actor said, “No. What?”

“He dies.”

The curtain fell to the thunderous roar of the audience applauding. Ed jogged off stage and bumped into Brian. They hug.

“I got fired,” Brian said.

Later that day, at the BC Playhouse, Brian sat down on stage looking out at the empty house, except for Lee Yopp who sat in the front row. Brian had a script in his hands.

“Brian just got a job as a broker but it didn't work out. He lived sort of a Lomanesque existence on his severance pay. No prospects. But he wanted to act. Most people get out of theatre to make money. Not Brian.”

Lee motioned for Brian to read from the script, which he did.

“This was my 4th year. By this time Lee and I were good friends. He saw right away Brian's talent. And being this big, burly type, well...”

Owned by the Bucks County Playhouse, the Lambertville Music Circus Tent opened in 1949 and converted into a theater in the 70's for shows and concerts.

Brian roamed its stage and was in the middle of doing a monologue to a half-full tent playing 'The Barber' in Man Of La Mancha and got an Equity card for it. Joel Jons acted opposite him.

“Joel Jons was a resident actor with connections,” Ed told Drew. “And he led Brian to New York City and got him an audition in a theatre Off-Broadway show. Brian was playing to a packed house on stage having the supporting role of the Drunken General in Ivanoff. It was a scene stealing role. Susan Shane, an agent, was in the audience taking notes and noticed Brian, this hulking guy stealing scenes.”

“So, after the show, Susan comes backstage, finds out he needs an agent, hands him her card and tells him to come her office on Wednesday.”

“‘Ma’am’, Brian said, like a boy who was looking to buy candy, ‘Could you lend me 20 bucks until Wednesday? I live out at West Gilgo Beach and I lost my wallet...’

“She gave him \$20 and left. He immediately goes to a bar and drinks it up. Smart thing actually, because now she has a financial stake in him. It was only 20 bucks but enough to want to see him again. Brilliant!

“So, she walks into her office to find a message from Walter Bernstein on her desk. Now here's the stroke of fate. Walter Bernstein is casting in NY for Semi-Tough, a movie where he's looking for a hulking white guy to play a southern pro football player whose career is going to seed. They'd been auditioning forever and can't find their type. So, she sets up a Wednesday audition for Brian and tells him to go to the Plaza to Room 420 and after the auditions she told him not agree to anything, just have them call her then come right back to her office. Walter introduced himself and Michael Richie, then handed Brian the script and asked him to read with the best southern accent he had. And southern accents Brian could do.”

Once Brian auditioned, Walter looked at Richie who gave a nod, and then Walter told Brian that they were shooting in Dallas in two weeks.

“How does thirty-five thousand sound,” Walter asked.

“No disrespect intended, Mr. Bernstein, but can you call Mrs. Shane and deal with her.”

“Then Brian makes his polite exit,” Ed said, continuing the story. “And he fast walks back to Susan's office. To him \$35K sounded like a gift from the gods. But by the time he got to Susan's office, she had the offer was up to 250 grand. Two weeks and one night later he was drinking with Burt Reynolds and Kris Kristofferson at the hotel bar. Now Brian will be the first to admit that his physique was the reason he got his start. But I got the bum his Equity card. I got him his start.”

“I was on stage at the Bucks County Playhouse, rehearsing,” Ed said, “and Lee comes in and places eviction papers on the stage and walks out. I read the papers and, sure enough, we were being evicted by a bank, it looked like. Ironically, while Brian's career takes off, mine flounders. It seems grant reductions plus the financial disaster to revive the Music Circus forced Lee to declare bankruptcy.”

Ed remembered that fateful night when he said his last words of a monologue and exited the stage in tears almost. He walked over to his favorite hideaway spot backstage, which was by a picture that was on a wall above a cutout in the wall that was made long time ago. When Ed discovered it, he put a box in there with money. No one stole it in a month, so he figure it would be a safe place for his booze knowing no one would take it. He wasn't wrong. He retrieved a flask and took a swig. Then another. When he put the flask back he returned to the stage drunk as a skunk.

“The theatre went from the best Equity Regional Theatre Company on the East Coast to a community theatre playing ... ♪Oklahoma where the wind comes sweeping down the plains. ♪

“Towards the last days, I drank a real lot,”

Ed stumbled on stage and slurred his words. He looked out to a half-filled audience and saw a man who was standing up and taking notes while watching the play.

“Steven Grey got wind of my drinking,” Ed admitted, “and sent someone to check me out. I got caught stumbling, mumbling my lines. Steven fined me a thousand bucks, and suspended me for a time.”

Ed headed back to Long Island, pulled into the parking lot of a bar, and parked.

“So, I leave the Playhouse. My first stop is my favorite gin joint back home. As an imaginary Barrymore exits the bar, he tips his hat and gives me a two-finger salute. I blink, shake my head again, and Barrymore vanishes.”

When Ed entered the bar, everyone, including the bartender, looks like Barrymore to Ed. He shook his head again and the people changed into regular-looking folks.

“Some people see pink elephants when they drink a lot,” Ed said. “I see John Barrymores.”

Just then, at the bar, Drew snuck up from behind and poked Ed. Once Ed realized who it was, they embraced. Drew sat and talked.

“That’s when we reunited, remember?” Ed said to Drew

“My life has never been the same since,” Drew admitted.

In a theater somewhere on Broadway in New York City, Ed and Drew sat in the front row watching Christopher Plummer perform Barrymore. Plummer sat most of the time and moved very little on stage.

“Plummer did Barrymore, a one-man show, on Broadway, remember? You wanted to take it on the road. Coincidental?”

“Serrreendippity-dopity.” Drew was well into his fourth drink at the time.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Back in Drew's den where this story began, Ed and Drew sat opposite each other.

"You should stop drinking, Drew. Mary's going to blame me."

"Never mind about her," Drew said. "So, Plummer didn't want to go on the road, and you jumped at the chance."

"He performed Barrymore OK, but I had more of a connection to him than he did, and he didn't move at all. I knew it would work with movement. Our rendition became a very physical interpretation. You were a great Frank. I mean you were the catalyst, remember? Frank, that is, you, made things happen."

"How could I forget. But it was all you, 'Ace'. You were the show. You always were the show."

"What a night that was! You, I mean, Frank, tried to get me, I mean, Barrymore, to say his Richard III lines, remember? But he doesn't want to do it. Barrymore's been doing it for a thousand years and just wants to chat and booze it up."

While the coffee brewed, Ed picked up a cane close by and theatrically dueled and flailed the cane at no one in particular.

"Are you doing 'movement' now?" Drew asked, rhetorically.

"Humor me, Drew. I mean, Frank. Go ahead. I'll speak the lines first. Ed recited "Yolanda from Kalamazoo once strolled after dark by the zoo. She was seized by the nape and humped by an ape, and sighed 'what a heavenly screw'."

Ed walked to the coffee urn while he continued to recite, but he was getting confused and losing sight of what the monologue was. "Have you ever had delirious tremens? Blah, Blah ... He died at sixty-two. Hank drank a quart of whisky a day for what we say in New York was a natural cause. He was hit by a cab!"

Ed laughed while he poured a cup of coffee. He brought it over to Drew who was holding his head, in pain. He takes a sip.

"Start me off, Frank," Ed commanded.

"I'm not playing," Drew said. "I have a headache. This happens to me every time I'm with you, whether I drink or not."

"Come on Drew ... Frank. Start me off."

"Now?"

"Now is as good a time as any."

"No, 'now' is the first word I say as Frank," Drew said.

In the Tremont Theatre in Boston, Drew began his flashback. A billboard right outside the theatre reads, Barrymore, starring Ed Dennehy. And in small print it read: produced by Drew Keil, also playing Frank.

Ed recited to a packed audience, "Now is the first word. Now is the what ... Now is the what?"

Drew, who sat in a chair at a desk between the stage and the first row of the audience, was feeding Ed, playing Barrymore, lines of the play. Drew yells from below, 'Now is the winter of ...'

"Now is the Winter of what?" Ed yelled.

"OUR DISCONTENT," Drew yelled back.

Ed moved across the stage - always moving while acting on stage. "Now's the winter of our discontent. I just said that, don't you listen? Maybe I should do Hamlet. No, too late. And too old. Alas, Richard is the only role worthy of my age and my condition. Besides, middle age actors should never play Hamlet."

Just then, Actor Ed sees Barrymore in the last row of the audience, but Ed continued reciting. "I tend to stagger. My whole family staggers. My father, God rest his soul, was a great staggerer. 'Staggering is a sign of strength, Jackie boy', he would say. 'Only the weak have to be carried home.'"

Barrymore now was sitting in the first row quietly, clapping.

"Interestingly, Barrymore came back," Ed said. "The apparition, I mean."

"What about Deter? Ernest? That's what got you started on this expedition, anyway."

"Deter's dead, remember? But Ernest? That's a whole different story."

Ed tiptoes in Deter's apartment and opened the trunk and bright light spewed out, as if he rubbed a Genie bottle.

"I kept dreaming about the trunk," Ed said, "with the word E-R-N-E-S-T on it. The same dream all the time. Whenever I opened it, a blinding light came out."

"Maybe it was Ernest trying to tell you something," Drew said.

"Anyway, Barrymore was a wonderful play. I loved it. Next we went to New Orleans, remember?"

In the Palace Theatre in New Orleans, actor Ed was on stage doing Barrymore.

"You may know this. For a period of time I was a political cartoonist for the Evening Journal."

Actor-Drew recited, "Really?"

"Come here, Jacko, my boy," actor Ed, now playing Barrymore's boss. "Why is it you're always drawing Teddy Roosevelt standing in tall grass? Why is that, Jacko?"

Actor Ed, switching to playing Barrymore, recited, "Because, my dear fellow, I never learned to draw feet. I also had a fatal flaw which got me fired. All my drawings looked like me ... That bad boy in me who I always loved."

Actor Ed stopped and picked up a hidden bottle of booze that looked like a soda bottle. He snuck a swig. He faced the audience and continued...

In a theatre somewhere in North Carolina, the billboards advertise Ed performing as Brick in Cat on the Hot Tin Roof. While Actor Ed and others rehearse the play, Ed's spirit was right behind him still doing Barrymore.

While Rehearsing Cat on the Hot Tin Roof, Ed's spirit recited his lines in Barrymore. "Acting is a scavenger profession. A junk pile of all the arts. It's just we three, or is it two, were trapped in a family cul-de-sac. The Drews and the Barrymores. The Barrymores and the Drews. Hell, they even wrote plays about us."

In a theatre somewhere in Ohio, the billboard read, 'Ed performing Mark Twain'. As Actor Ed stomped across stage like a gazelle, as Mark Twain, his spirit was still reciting Barrymore. "We were the royal family of American Theatre," Spirit Ed said. "And I was the Clown Prince. Somewhere along the way, the public got tired of us. Not that I can blame them. But it paid well, and that, my friends, is the narcotic."

In a dingy hotel somewhere in Michigan, Actor Ed tossed and turned in bed, moaning. An empty Vodka bottle sat on the night table. In a panic, almost, he rushed from his bed to the bathroom. The sound of him vomiting competed with the outside sounds of cars honking, and of a city waking up. His spirit left him and while Actor Ed vomited, Spirit Ed recited, “Things are beginning to click for me. I don't feel old yet. They say that man isn't old until regrets take the place of dreams.”

‘Yes,’ Actor Ed said while he bent over the toilet. Then he got sick again.

At the New Stage Theatre in Jackson, Mississippi, the billboard read: Ed and Sandy Duncan in Star Spangled Girl.

The audience laughed at Actor Ed walking oddly due to staged sunburn. He dialed the phone but it dropped in the garbage. He was unable to retrieve it because the clothes rub against his skin and he moved oddly because it hurt (acting). One woman cackled hideously at Ed's antics, which caused the audience to laugh even harder.

Sandy Duncan came out on stage and the audience quieted some. Actor Ed tried to hide a cough (ominous in real life). The Barrymore continuity remained. Spirit Ed as Barrymore recited, “Agh, Katherine, my curse. Blue mirrors for eyes. xx A tatty-haired debutante. Every vowel, a diphthong. Oo-oh. Katherine and I were ecstatically happy for twenty years. Then we met.”

Interrupting mindful experience of Barrymore, Sandy back-slapped Ed a 'hello' and Ed did an over-the-top Jackie Gleason pain routine. The cackling woman lets out a hideous laugh again, igniting the audience in non-stop laughter. Sandy sat down on the edge of the stage and waited for quiet. Actor Ed took his cue, and did the same. When the audience finally stopped laughing, Sandy let out with a hearty laugh, just like that cackling lady did, and the audience started up again and couldn't stop laughing.

In a theatre somewhere In Los Angeles. Ed performed Hadrian the 7th swarming the stage as he puffed on a cigarette and although he was doing his lines in the Hadrian play, Spirit Ed was right behind him still doing Barrymore.

“Our last night in Florence,” Spirit Ed recited, “on the cupola, on the roof of the hotel where we stayed, we watched the sunrise, and as the dawn broke, there it was, in all its glory ...”

In another city somewhere in the United States where Ed was performing Zoo Story, Spirit Ed followed Actor Ed reciting Barrymore, “... The river Arno, the Uffizi Gallery, the Santo Croce Church of the Franciscans where Galileo and Michelangelo were buried...”

On another city, he was doing Hadrian again. Ed put his cigarette out in his hand and the audience gasped. Barrymore was in the audience, awestruck. The curtain fell and rose again. When Ed came out to receive the applause, he saw Barrymore on his feet applauding wildly. Ed bowed to him, the ominous cough still present.

Spirit Ed, still performing Barrymore to Drew, sang, ♪*Pardon me boy. Is that the Chattanooga Choo-Choo; Track 29, Boy, you can give me a shine...* ♪

Ed swaggered out of some bar in Los Angeles with Spirit Ed close behind, still doing Barrymore who walked alongside of them. Barrymore, acting, said, “I don't have to tell you divorces cost more than marriages. But, God dammit, they're worth it.” JB laughed.

Spirit Ed continued acting, “He said only the weak have to be carried home. He used to drag me along on his nightly binges ... Then he'd slogger home without me.”

As physical Ed stumbled along, but recovered nicely. Spirit Ed continued. "People used to comment on how much I looked like my father. Yeah, well, I'll be damned if I would be like him. The lunatic."

"He was a madman," Barrymore said. "And he got worse. He had nearly killed Ethel. It's true. It's all pathetically true. Agh, Neddy boy, some mistakes are too much fun to only make once."

Ed, in bed with a woman somewhere in America, had trouble making love to her as Barrymore sat in a chair nearby.

"Hello from Hollywood," Barrymore said, "Luella Parsons with a scoop about Bad boy JB. His latest indiscretion? Last night at the fashionable Jason's grille where Mr. B relieved himself in a potted palm next to a table of delegates from the Daughters Of The American Revolution..."

Ed sat up, lights up a cigarette and coughs (ominous). He gave Barrymore a deadpan stare while the woman sat up. His spirit self is not there anymore.

"It's okay," the woman said. "Don't be ashamed. It happens."

"Ooo! Sorry, pal," Barrymore said. "I didn't mean to cause you performance problems."

Me And Jezebel appear on the billboard somewhere on Long Island. Ed's picture, made up as Betty Davis, dominates the billboard.

Ed, dressed as Betty Davis, recites a monologue in a gravely voice, which sounds just like Betty Davis. Barrymore shared the stage with Ed.

"What are we doing, my boy?" Barrymore asked. "Betty Davis never waived her hand like that. She did it thusly."

Barrymore was dainty with his movements. Ed continued acting on stage while Spirit Ed came out and said "I do not discuss acting with you."

"After everything I've taught you? Come on." Barrymore pondered briefly. "Ah, yes. Ever since the Pachinko incident. But you do look a little awkward there, Neddy, as if you're trying to be fruity. You didn't get much direction on that, did you? Except from Bob Shnyder, maybe."

"I'm a choreographer," Spirit-Ed said. "I provide the movement. Motivations will come from that. A good director conveys 'what' he wants not 'how' he wants it. The 'what' gets you a Tony. The 'how' gets you mediocrity. Get with it, JB."

"Me thinks you protestith too much." Barrymore said. "Agh. How in the hell does a guy do Betty Davis, anyway?"

They pause to listen to Actor Ed playing Betty Davis.

"Like that," Spirit Ed said.

Actor Ed paused his monologue long enough to cough.

"You better get that cough checked, Neddy. It's affecting your performance. Anyway, the hardest thing about doing Betty Davis is getting into the makeup, am I right? Where there's documentation, you should use it and do it. Right? Say yes."

Spirit Ed takes a growling look at Barrymore before jumping back into Ed's body. The curtain falls to a roaring applause.

On a stage somewhere on Long Island, Actor Ed performs on stage twirling two steel balls between his fingers. He roams the stage with two other males.

“Anyway,” Ed said to Drew, “the years rolled on and wise-ass Barrymore comes and does as he pleases. I did a unique Bogart I thought.”

“Actually,” Drew surmised, “you did Ed Dennehy doing a Marlon Brando doing a Humphrey Bogart.”

At backstage in another theatre on Long Island, Ed appears anxious as he climbs a ladder reminiscent of the old barn in Derby. He takes a swig from a flask hidden in a nook. He hallucinated, and spiders the size of volley balls crawl out, just like years ago at his cousins house. He yelps.

Ed jumps out of nowhere from the top of the hill, which is built to the rafters, and rolls down to the stage screaming because he is drunk and afraid of the phantom spiders. Actor Ed sees Brian and a producer walk in as they take a seat in the audience. Ed staggers about, slurring his words and before long the Producer got up to leave. Brian tried to sway him to sit back down, but the Producer waved Brian off and exited.

“One of the rare times I'm drunk on stage and wouldn't you know it! Brian came in with a big-wig movie guy. Didn't try to help me much after that. I guess I can't blame him.

In a theater somewhere in New York City, Ed was performing his Hotel Telephone Monologue in front of a director in an audition.

“... the telephone is a marvelous invention. Imagine if you could make a long distance call direct to God. Know what I'd say? I'd say, "hello", and then I would hang up.”

“I then began a ten-year road tour.” Ed said to Drew.

On a stage somewhere in America Ed was performing Henry the Fifth, and a very good one, Ed thought. He perform a host of roles all across America. He did: Freddy Treeves in *The Elephant Man*; Simon Stimpson in *Our Town*; Vladimere in *Waiting For Godot*; the good guys and bad guys in *Twelve Angry Men*; Willy Loman; Darrow; Richard The Third; Hamlet Harlequinade...

Ed was in a hospital bed reading the novel, *Billy Bathgate*. He coughed just as Barrymore walked in.

“I told you to stop smoking,” Barrymore said.

“I have a drug resistant TB,” Ed replied.

Barrymore walked over to the closet and opened it. He pushed the clothes aside and exposed a makeshift bar.

“A man gets bored being cooped up,” Ed said.

Barrymore picked up an empty cigarette pack from the night table, inspected it, and then put it back down. *“What's the use talking to you anymore. You don't listen.”*

Barrymore picked up the script on the night table, titled, *Breaker Morant*. He started to read it. *“I'm to play the lead in Breaker Morant if I ever get out of here, but...”*

“Yeah, yeah. Virus's drug resistant. What clued you in that you had a problem? The incessant coughing. Maybe it was the blood on the pillow?”

“The infection's small. They'll take out just a little piece of my lung.”

“You'll be out of pocket for over a year. No acting and no directing.”

“Did you find out what Ernest is about yet?” Drew asked.

“You know I didn't.”

“Well, you should,” JB said. “Keep that dream going. Open that trunk. The truth is in it. Blinding as it is. Sometimes we can't see the truth even when it stares us in the face.”

“How can I see when a laser is shooting you in the eyes.” Ed puts the book down and asked JB who Ernest was just as two NURSES enter.

JB told Ed that he'll find out soon.

“It's time, Edward,” one of the nurses said. She strokes Ed's arm, smiles, then injects him. This will make you very relaxed.” She leaned in and whispered, “I know what else will relax you.”

“Have you no shame?” Barrymore said.

“Hey, it gets very lonely around here,” Patient Ed said “Bug off. I'm not married now.”

“Since when did that matter?” Barrymore said.

The nurse looked around, confused as to who Ed is talking to.

“Ah, just practicing my lines,” Ed said to the nurse.

Barrymore followed Ed as he was wheeled out of the room.

“You're getting more like me every day, Chum. Do you think you'll die?”

“This is good stuff. Gotta try this.”

“This Breaker Morant script!” Barrymore said. A bit boring, but I have an idea. Have Drew play the defense attorney. You direct it and play Morant. You can change it a bit. I can see it now. First scene: Morant and Hancock are being executed; the boots marching; dogs barking, commands are shouted; then what you see are four soldiers marching on stage. The music and the marching boots ... Can't you envision it? A holy moment.”

The gurney broke through double doors and Barrymore disappeared.

In Drew's den, Ed lays on the couch, as if he is talking to a shrink. He is oblivious to the fact that Drew has fallen asleep. “So, I got permission to make changes to Breaker Morant. Now I had plenty of time to change it. I must've done something right...”

Ed picks up the paper from coffee table, still oblivious to the fact that Drew is asleep.

“The Newsday critic here says it's the best damn play in the five boroughs and Suffolk and Nassau Counties, but I was still depressed and now I know why. Last night I found out who Ernest really was in my dream.”

Ed opened the door to Deter's vacant apartment. He stood over the steamer trunk and opened the lid. Instead of blinding lights, the trunk is filled with costumes, hats and other props used to disguise or change the appearance of an actor.

One by one Ed takes out the costumes and disguises. On the back of one gown are the letters E-R-N-E-S-T.

In Drew's den, Barrymore appeared in the other chair. He nodded at Drew and Ed turns around and looked. Drew was sound asleep. They chuckled.

“God, Neddy!” Barrymore said. “There's just so much good stuff you left out: Sir Lawrence, Peckinpah, Joe Flynn, Pat Paulson, Chester Morris. Oh, he was a great Captain Queeg, wasn't he? And the country tour of you and Joe Namath. And the tryst you had with Rose Haynes, the underwear heiress? She proposed to you, for Chrissakes. You'd be on a yacht smoking a joint and sniffting cognac right now if you made different choices.”

“As hypocritical as this sounds, I was married. I do have priorities.”

“And then there was Smith Tooson who directed Of Thee I Sing. That was a great

audition you served up.” ♪With your drums and guns and drums and guns, hurroo, hurroo; With your drums and guns and drums and guns; The enemy nearly slew ye; Oh my darling dear, Ye look so queer; Johnny I hardly knew ye. ♪

“I was drunk and gave so much Irish sentiment I almost made Smith cry,” Ed said. “It was like that slider pitch I threw to Coach Fowtes. A once-in-a-lifetime-thing. When they found out I couldn't sing they recast the part with a guy from the city.” After a long pause, Ed asked, “What about my dream, John? What was Deter trying to tell me?”

Ed waits for an answer. Instead, Barrymore sings. ♪I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see. ♪

“That's it, isn't it? The props. Ernest is me. I retreated to my stage life to avoid my responsibilities in this life, didn't I?”

“What's real? What's fake, Neddy?”

“My denial was literally blinding me. The light was my denial. Very good, Edward. Now, at last, I can have a drink. Want one?”

“Soda's fine,” Ed replied. “Now, listen to me, John. I went through that curtain and I sacrificed my personal life all these years. I ignored people who mattered. Family. Children.”

“You met me. What am I, chopped liver?”

“What has that gotten me?” Ed replied.

“What, or where, has your series of romantic encounters gotten you?” Barrymore took both drinks back to the couch and handed Ed his soda. They toast. “To a job well done. To us. And to Deter. Freud would be proud.”

Ed drinks, puts the glass down and then stretches his legs. “Does that mean I have to study up on what the Super-Ego means?”

“That's solely up to you.”

“Well, let me tell you, I languished as an unrecognized artist for so long, but I've always been able to make choices few artists make. God, I feel so giddy.” Ed hops around the room then stops. “Why did you bother with me, John?”

“Theatre is about distractions and movement. Most actors don't get that. You did. Right from the beginning, you did.”

“Why do I feel so light on my feet? Haven't felt like this in ... who knows how long. You know what I've noticed, John? I noticed that people with family seem happier. Family is important, isn't it?”

Barrymore points to everywhere in the room. “This is the cartoon life,” he said.

“The hell it is! I want a den and walls to pin pictures on. I've avoided it for too long. I avoided my responsibilities ... My children. I want Sue Anne back. I don't want to wear any more masks.”

“Please. Next thing you'll tell me is that I'm the ghost of the past.”

“You cynical bastard ...”

*“I've seen you in *Inherit The Wind*, and I've been wanting to tell you this for some time. Gene Kelly played a much better Hornbeck than you.”*

“And I've noticed the real world people who are late are much jollier than the people who wait for them? I get that now. I was always afraid I was going to miss the curtain call.”

“Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once ...”

“Yes, you've told me that before. You're repeating yourself.”

“I suppose I am,” Barrymore said. “That's a sure sign that it's time to go. Well, Neddy, I guess there's nothing else new for me to say. It's time to say good-bye.”

Ed went to object, but Barrymore held his hand out like a traffic cop and said, "This is it, my friend. We've been on a long journey together. You don't need me anymore. Just the memory of me should do."

Ed goes to object again, but Barrymore stops him again.

"No," Barrymore promptly said. "There's nothing else to say." He smiled, lovingly. "I just had an inspiration," Barrymore said. "When you finish tonight, at the end of the play, just before you get shot, look out into the audience and stare through them and say... 'Shoot straight, ya bastards. Don't make a mess of it.; That would be exciting, I think.'"

There is a hard knock on the door and Barrymore vanished. Mary walked in and ...

"It's seven in the morning, Edward!"

Ed walked over to Mary who retreats at his effort to hug her. "I'm sorry for disturbing you so early in the morning, Mary. It will never happen again. Really."

They both look at Drew sprawled out on the recliner.

"I know I'm not the only one in this world, but I'd like to be considered the world to one person. You two have so much. So, much."

He kisses her and leaves.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Ed was back on the Hofstra stage where the night began. The sounds dominate the acting: boots marching, stomping on hardwood floors, and men shouting military orders, and drums drumming, mixing with the sound of dogs barking.

Two white armless chairs were the sole props. Ed and another actor moved into position and sat in the chairs. Both had military uniforms on. Actor Ed looked out into the audience and saw Barrymore in the back row.

“Ready!” One of the actors yelled out.

Barrymore got up and watched the finale while standing.

“Aim!” The same actor yelled out.

Ed reached out to Barrymore and clenched his fist and withdrew his arm. Ed's eyes filled with tears. Ed shouted before the last command was given, “Shoot straight, you bastards. Don't make a mess of it.”

“FIRE!”

Ed fell from the chair, tipping it over. The THUDS of the two bodies hitting the floor provided context to the shadows on the wall of the two chairs on their sides.

Actor Ed's eyes were facing the audience. He saw Barrymore standing in the aisle, giving a two-finger salute. Barrymore then turned and exited the theatre.

A tear from Ed's eyes hit the floor. He closed his eyes and died (acting). The curtain fell as the audience applauded exuberantly.

- THE END -