

# DOWN AND OUT IN MONTE CARLO

## PROLOGUE – Angley School

It is 1974 and I'm teaching art at Angley, a state secondary school in rural Kent. It's a large school in fields on the edge of the lovely weather-boarded and hang-tiled village of Cranbrook. On a hill overlooking the village is a white windmill like an apparition.

On my first day at Angley, I am allocated a class of second years' as a form master; which essentially means you have to take the register every morning and afternoon. But, after meeting my class (all classes are named after their teacher, so mine is called 2TIL) I resolved to be more to them than just a teacher who calls out their names.

There are thirty-one of them, aged between twelve and thirteen, so it's a large enough group to have a demographic of all shapes and sizes, consisting of all classes (but predominantly middle class); of the introverted and the extroverted; of the immature and the mature; of the good-looking and not so good-looking; of the stable and the unstable; but there is a common denominator: they are all bright - both in intelligence and, in their individualities of personality.

I'm twenty-four years old and it's my first posting as a qualified teacher having completed a one-year postgraduate course in educational studies. I quickly learn I have had the luck to have been given the cleverest group of their year. And, probably, the brightest class in a school of eleven hundred children. I have failed to mention the hard- workers and the lazy blighters, but there is none of either category; they all apply themselves, but none are swots. Very early on I felt I could trust them - this might be a foolish and naive good intention of the fresh-faced teacher, but I believe it best to start with trust and if one has misjudged so be it - one of my first instructions is to tell them I don't mind them being naughty but they must never be boring. It was needless to worry there might be too much naughtiness and not enough amusement. One day they tell me they are to have a 'be nice to Mr Tilleard week'. It was a nightmare, but always amusing.

Kent still has the old grammar school/secondary modern system, but instead of the eleven plus there are two years when the twelve and thirteen-year-olds are continually assessed, after which they are separated and those that have 'passed' are sent to Cranbrook grammar school.

Every Tuesday afternoon the core curriculum is put aside and each teacher is given carte blanche to organise their class into creating an event of their own devising. All classrooms are no-go areas during lunch, but 2TIL need an area to rehearse so, against the rules, I let them use our classroom. They would bolt their lunch and repair to the classroom where they would write comedy sketches, mini-plays, compile little concerts and create double acts. Every Tuesday is a riot of imaginative shenanigans. In our corridor, there are other second-year classes whose teachers have trouble getting their little charges to come up with any ideas to fill the afternoon. Eventually, the teachers, having heard the laughter coming from our classroom, come to me and ask if their class can be my class's audience.

One of the new music teachers is Nick, who is the same age as me. One day he comes to me to say he has set the second years' a task of creating a musical where each number is in a different musical style – from madrigals to pop, from lieder to the blues. He has divided each class into small groups and each group must write a song in their allocated style. He says 2TIL have created a version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. He gets them to perform the songs for me. Their initial efforts are crude but by the time they have honed them their music is almost professional. What it needs though is a narrative, so Nick and I suggest to them that they use their Tuesday free time to write a story based on Snow White and incorporating their music. After a few weeks, they have a completed musical and Nick and I resolve that it must be performed. We petition the headmaster (a case here of nominative determinism, for his name is Mr Head) for permission to put the musical on for the second years'. He agrees we can do it one Tuesday afternoon. It means rehearsals must be organised.

I explain to the class they will have to rehearse after school and that the whole project is theirs - they are in charge. They must organise rehearsal times. They must also act, sing, play the instruments, design and make a set, organise costumes and make-up and sounds and – direct. Nick and I will be remote producers.

It works out at just under an hour long and after weeks of work, the first performance on a Tuesday afternoon goes very well. The second-year audience loves it. The headmaster attends. The next day Nick and I are summoned by Mr Head who is so enamoured of 2TIL and their musical he suggests it is put on again for all the parents of the second years', not just 2TIL's. One evening, after school, 2TIL perform it for what appears to be a large part of the village; 2TIL's second-year contemporaries liked it so much they must-have urged their parents to attend. It goes down well and there is a standing ovation. Of course, all the 2TIL parents are deeply proud of their children.

I relate this story because it is indicative of what fun and pleasure I have with my class – to show what a special group they are. But eventually, they will be taken from me.

I always look forward to Parents' Evenings because it furnishes me with a chance to find out what the parents of each of my pupils are like and, by so doing, get an insight into the child's upbringing. Some of the parents subsequently become good friends.

\*

Three years previously, I am in my last year at Bristol art college doing a degree and dabbling in everything from etching to film. I am lodging with a friend called Hilary and her children in a Georgian terrace in the heart of Clifton, just around the corner from the bridge. Hilary is a divorced mother of two young children, her ex-husband is a department head at the art school. She has a circle of wayward and eccentric friends suffering a hangover from the indulgences of the 60s. One of these is an artist *manqué* I shall call Stanley. Stanley is ten years older than me and my contemporaries, and a drifter. He is also tall, slim, and handsome. At that time the zeitgeist –at its height exemplified by the personas of David Bowie – meant people were, or were pretending to be, bi-sexual; Stanley is an embodiment of that spirit which, with his good-looks, causes many to be attracted to his flame. Whether one was bi-sexual or not one had to display a leaning towards finding both sexes attractive. Our little coterie, under the persuasions of Stanley, would often visit the gay clubs, and play-act. One

evening, when I am not there, Hilary's phoney gay persona is uncovered and she is badly beaten up by the girls of the club.

Being art students we tend to dress flamboyantly. I wear a pale blue cotton suit with an un-lined collarless jacket made for me by Hilary from an Yves Saint Laurent pattern. Stanley, although knowing I am not gay, indicates that he considers me as a potential lover – even perversely, trying to get me off with his girlfriend, Pamela.

He is someone at a loose end and we know little about him. The little I glean is that he is an only child and his childhood was not too troubled, although he had an absent father. I know that later, drugs were a problem and that being handsome he attracted unwanted attention from both men and women. I do know that when he was in London and broke, he worked in Picadilly as a rent-boy. A slightly contradictory part of the nature of this self-obsessed man is a great love of the countryside and especially wildlife. His grandfather was an Olympic sprinter and his mother lives in a bungalow by the sea near Hastings in Sussex. He came into our lives suddenly and just as suddenly he left.

One day while I am at Anglely I get a letter from him – I assume he got my address from mutual friends. The letter is from Monte Carlo stating that after many vicissitudes he now lives there and is painting. His love and great knowledge of wild animals have come to fruition in the form of meticulous paintings of tigers, lions, leopards and suchlike. This results in him being taken-up by the rich and rare of Monaco. He is also living with a girl who is one of the Monte Carlo dancers. She has rescued him from a psychotic episode brought on by drugs. He says that a wealthy Monegasque lawyer is subsidising him and a friend, a French painter and stained-glass designer called Patrick. The lawyer, whose name is Michel, wishes to create a small artists' colony in Monaco and has provided Stanley and Patrick with two studios and all the art supplies they need. What Michel now wants is for other artists to join them. Hence the letter to me.

\*

It is now the summer term and the last for 2TIL. At the end of the term, the results of their two years of continuous assessment are revealed. Those who pass will go on to Cranbrook School, an ex-public school but now a grammar that still retains a public-school ethos; it's a mixed day and boarding school. Most parents want their children to go to the grammar to receive what they consider to be a superior education. All of 2TIL 'pass' and will go to the grammar – except for one. This child has parents who, first having consulted me, are refusing, out of principle, to send their child to a grammar school – they strongly disagree with selective education. My only advice is that a grounded and intelligent pupil like their son can only be a boon to a school like Angley, and there is no reason why staying should impair his education. In the context of other Cranbrook parents, their act is heroic, although they are fearful their principled stand may harm their child.

So, 2TIL are to leave. I cannot envisage my being lucky enough, two years in a row, to be given another class who will give me such pleasure as this group of thirty-one.

It is time to take-up Stanley's request and try my luck in Monte Carlo.

On the last day of term, I bid a sad farewell to 2TIL. I leave my lodgings in Sissinghurst and go to my parents near Canterbury. My father, who is both horrified at my giving up on a profession and admiring of my adventurousness, tells me I can claim back most of my year's PAYE tax – all I have to do is tell HMRC I'm permanently leaving the country. This is what I will have to live on in Monte Carlo having spent my teaching salary paying off a large debt incurred during all my years as a student.

## MONTE CARLO

In mid-July my girlfriend, the lovely Pamela comes to stay before we set-off for France and Monaco. Pamela - for it is she - is now my girlfriend, not Stanley's. She is a student at Manchester University doing History of Art.

The day arrives for our departure. It feels like a mini-adventure: we train to Dover from the little railway station near the village; take the ferry to Calais; then the train to Paris for a couple of days in a cheap hotel in

Montmartre before catching a train down to Avignon to stay with acquaintances who have a villa in Les Alpilles near St Remy de Provence. The acquaintances are called Kilmartin – Terry Kilmartin is the long-standing editor of The Observer's literary pages. He and his wife, the formidable Joanna, are friends of my great friend the painter Charles MacCarthy who is staying with them and has got us invited.

I have arranged to meet Charles in a bar/cafe in their local village of Mausanne. It's a very hot day and Les Alpilles is very arid, but it can get its annual rainfall quota in a single day – and it seems that that day is today. Pamela and I are in the bar waiting for Charles when it happens. The skies open and within minutes the street outside is a river, a torrent. The insouciance of the locals is remarkable – it seems they have seen this happen once a year for every year of their lives. To prevent the bar from flooding they calmly stack, in the open doorway, a wall of sandbags which have been stored in the bar for this eventuality. After an hour or more the rain ceases, the sun comes out and the heat returns, and the village and surrounding landscape can only be seen through a haze of steam.

Charles arrives late – I am used to his unpunctuality because he is always engrossed with whoever he is with in the here and now. He comes with some not very good news. He has forgotten to tell the Kilmartins he has invited us and, more importantly, he has forgotten that the Kilmartins have sold their villa and tomorrow are leaving for England. Pamela and I haven't the money for more hotels as we were hoping to stay with the Kilmartins for two days before going on to Monaco. Terry Kilmartin senses this problem and goes immediately to a hotel and pays for a double room for one night. The kindness of strangers - I promise I will one day reimburse him (I did - about twenty years later). We say thanks and bid farewell to the Kilmartins - Charles is to stay one more night with them and see us the next day. Pamela and I retire to our hotel where we learn that Terry has booked us into a quite expensive room for one night. We renegotiate and get a cheaper room for two nights for the price of our one.

Two days later Pamela and I arrive in Monaco where we track-down Stanley – who is furious. I have failed to warn him that Pamela is with me. He hates the surprise because she is now an ex-girlfriend and he doesn't want her to meet his new girlfriend, and vice versa. Pamela is upset – she is

a shy girl, very pretty and intelligent but not very confident. This is not a good start.

Stanley has arranged, through Michel, for me to have a flat for a month after which I will have to shift for myself. The flat is in a prime location up on the Rock, near the Palace, in a little square with a plashing fountain. It's on the first floor of one of Michel's properties. It's unfurnished – there is a bed but nothing else. It's in a grand nineteenth-century house and has spacious rooms (even more so, with no furniture) and a balcony over-looking the square.

We meet Michel, a typical Monegasque – quiet, unassuming, charming, undistinguished looking; and rich. For example, he has an office in his lawyers' chambers which he has recently had re-decorated – the wallpaper is made of real suede.

Stanley lives with his girlfriend in a flat in a new apartment block on the Italian side of Monaco i.e. about half a kilometre from the Rock. His English girlfriend, Monica, is very pretty and what one would expect a Monte Carlo dancer to look like. She is civil when meeting Pamela and me, but not forthcoming.

Stanley shows us the set-up Michel has created. There are two studios, both of which are in Beausoleil. If you are in a boat in the harbour and are looking at the familiar curving panorama of Monaco with its nineteenth-century villas and modern high-rise flats – the back-half of that city-scape is in France and this is Beausoleil. It's the service area to Monte Carlo – the servants, tradesmen, artisans and suppliers live here. They are the essential workers who keep Monte Carlo running.

One studio is for painting and is in an old public *bains-douche* down a flight of steps into a basement. It is a warren of rooms covered in floor-to-ceiling white tiles. The other studio is five minutes walk away on the ground floor of a nineteen-twenties apartment building. Patrick has an apartment on the first floor. The studio contains an antique stone-lithography press and an array of substantial limestone slabs for the lithographic designs. Off the studio is a small room with a broken-down coffee machine.

After a week Pamela must return to England. I put her on the train to Paris. It is, of course, a sad farewell and I know I will miss her. Pamela's subsequent letters are a solace, anxiously waited for.

Every morning I walk in the heat to the litho studio. I go down from the Rock to the road that skirts the harbour crowded with expensive yachts and up a long steep and narrow stone staircase to Beausoleil – and eventually to the litho studio.

Patrick is a master of the relatively modern print-making art of stone lithography. It was invented by a German in 1796 and is based on the immiscibility of oil and water. The star-wheel press in the studio is one of the oldest extant presses – it was made in 1810. Patrick proposes to teach me the skill. His English is bad and my French is worse, but somehow I start to get the gist.

After about two weeks into the struggle with the intricacies of litho print-making Patrick tells me he is leaving Monte Carlo for Mauritius. He tells me he has a commission to design and make a stain-glass window for a church. He is to leave within days and doesn't know when he will return. This is a blow, but I shall carry-on by teaching my self from notes that Patrick has kindly written out in French.

And now Michel wants his flat back. He proposes a solution – I can camp in one of the rooms at the old *bains-douche* painting studio. I need, however, some basic equipment such as a camp bed, a sleeping bag and something to cook on. I have only just enough money for everyday essentials, so I can only buy the bare minimum. Michel says he can provide a camp bed and I have brought a sleeping bag with me. I splash out on a Camping Gaz – a small gas ring about five inches wide and eight inches high, and a small pan and a frying pan.

Needless to say, it's a wrench to move from the smart, although unfurnished, apartment on the Rock with its royal neighbours, to a sparsely furnished white-tiled old basement *bains-douche* in downmarket Beausoleil. My sleeping arrangements are the basic camp bed and the sleeping bag in a tiny room – being below ground most of the rooms are windowless. It is pretty squalid and gets even more so as the months wear



on – the sleeping bag, especially, and the increase in cockroaches. The latter, with black-humour, I think of as company – as pets, of sorts.

Every day I work in the studio perfecting the art of stone lithography using Patrick's notes in French.

The heat in Monaco is intense and as a young man I am slim and of about the right weight, but with the privations of being penniless, and the sweat and toil of humping very heavy litho stones around, and the effort involved in pulling the prints with the ancient star-wheel press, I am losing weight. The dilemma is that when it comes to the printing and, I am rotating the star-wheel, I must stand on the end of a plank attached to the press using my weight that, by a basic system, puts pressure on the arm that puts pressure on the paper as you pull the bed of the press through. But as the summer wears on and I am losing weight so I am getting lighter and lighter – unfortunately, so are the resulting prints.

I resolve that I'd better eat well. At home, my mother is a good cook and in my first days away from home at Bristol art school, after my second disgusting Vesta chicken curry, I determine I must learn to cook for myself. With the help of Katherine Whitehorn's seminal 'Cooking in a Bed-sit', I teach myself the rudiments. Now, in Monte Carlo, all I have is two pans and a tiny camping Gaz. But over the weeks and months, I manage to improvise all sorts of delicious dishes for one. My *boeuf bourguignon*, to me, is a triumph.

Not knowing anybody and, I'm afraid to say, having very poor French, means I have few distractions, therefore, I get a lot of work done. I am beginning to master the craft of stone lithography.

One of my entertainments is going to the local bar around the corner from the litho studio. The Bar Oscar is run by a tiny ageing widow called Madame Angel, who is a Beausoleil institution; she is the mother-hen and confidante of all the locals, whatever their age. Every morning, surrounded by her customers, she would erect her ironing-board in the bar and diligently iron all the freshly washed linen napkins for that day. The bar is frequented by the cleaners, waiters, doormen, of the Monte Carlo hotels, in other words, all the people that keep the Principality running smoothly, and the rich in comfort. It is also frequented by little gangs of Arab children (the working

population is largely from the old French Algeria) who love the pinball machine but can't afford it. I too enjoy *le flipper*, as it's known in France. The kids would beg a franc from me for a game, which I would always give because they were so adept at the game, that with that one franc they would win six free games - three of which they would give to me to play.

Madame Angel has a waiter and general factotum, a morose old and skinny Chinese gentleman in a pinafore called Pierre who gracelessly busies himself about the bar all day. Once, during the August holiday when France closes-down for a month, as does the Bar Oscar - making us regulars homeless, and at a loose-end for four weeks - I glimpse Pierre in a smart linen suit and Panama hat, swinging a silver cane as he strolls through the avenues of Monaco like an oriental boulevardier.

My source of entertainment in the evenings is to go to a casino and 'people watch'. The *Casino de Monte Carlo* is out of the question so I go to the casino in the Loewe's Hotel on the sea-front (the famous Tunnel Larvrotto, often seen during the Grand Prix, runs under the hotel). It is free to enter and there is no dress code. The clientele is the more déclassé rich American, not seen in the *Casino de Monte Carlo*. They seem to be mostly businessmen with their wives attending a company conference. One night I am admiring a vampish young Jerry Hall lookalike who is winning at blackjack. She is wearing a tight black and white leopard-print dress and is excited at her luck. Standing in front of me is a balding, slightly sweaty, overweight American middle-aged businessman who is also ogling the woman. I comment to him on her good-looks and her good luck. To which he replies: "Yep. My wife always wins".

Another form of evening entertainment is gate-crashing private views in the numerous art galleries. I hear about these in my capacity as an artist and there is, of course, no dress code for artists; the more badly dressed the more plausible you are as an invitee. At a vernissage - as private views are known in French (literally 'a varnishing') - it unfashionable to serve wine the drink of choice is Scotch whisky or, to be very chic, Irish whiskey. I go, and guzzle the drink and wolf the canapés, and don't talk to anyone because nobody seems to want to talk to me. And look at bad paintings.

During my first month, I hardly see Stanley, he seems to hole-up with his girlfriend in his flat in their large apartment on the waterfront. I presume he is painting his pictures of leopards and tigers, but I see no evidence. I get a feeling he regrets his invitation to me to join the little art scene in Monaco – not much of one now that Patrick has gone. Also, he has little confidence in the merits of his own art\* and I sense a certain rivalry. Michel is also somebody I hardly see.

Then Stanley announces that he too is leaving Monte Carlo. Monica has been offered an autumn job dancing in Lisbon, and he is to join her. I am now truly alone. One good thing Stanley does before he departs is to lend me Patrick's old Solex bike. It's a black and ancient moped that was invented during the war and mass-produced after it. It's driven by a motorised roller that clamps onto the front wheel. All well and good until it rains and then there is no friction for the roller to grip the wheel. Stanley stipulates that it is to be used sparingly. I adhere to the instruction, but once or twice in desperation for a change of scenery, I take the poor old thing up the various Corniches into the mountainous hills behind Monaco for a day out exploring remote villages and churches.

A break from my isolation and from work is the arrival of my brother, Michael and his then-wife, Mo. They are touring France on holiday and come for a few days bringing with them my very welcome Dansette record player - the silence while working is intrusive. They are joined by Jonathan, a good friend of mine from art school days.

After Michael and Mo leave, Jonathan and I decide to go to Florence on a mini camping holiday – he has brought a tent with him and I've received some of the monies from my tax rebate. We catch the train to Florence changing at Genoa – except we don't. At Monte Carlo railway station we inadvertently get on the wrong train. We should have realised immediately that it is the wrong train as this one is very smart – we discover the whole train is devoted to First Class and subsequently all the passengers are well-healed. We enter a compartment where there is a beautiful, well-dressed woman with a younger girl. We settle opposite and it is then we discover I error; the woman, who is Italian and speaks good English, has taken one look at us and knows we are not First Class material (the rolled tent being a give-away). She is very sympathetic and explains to us our error. There is a

danger we will be fined heavily if discovered. The woman and the girl chat and whisper to each in Italian, occasionally glancing at me and Jonathan. The lingua franc of flirtation has some English words so Jonathan and I understand when several times the word 'sexy' is uttered by the two women. I have to explain that Jonathan is very handsome, tall and half-Russian.

We are interrupted by the ticket inspector. Jonathan and I are afraid that it is inevitable that we will be discovered travelling with the wrong tickets. He checks the women's tickets but when he asks for ours the woman explodes in rage. We are all startled at her performance, as it out of all proportion. But the most startled of all is the ticket inspector. It appears she has told him he is being rude to her two male friends who are her special guests and that as she is a valued and well-known customer of the train company she will be reporting him. He is flustered, apologises and beats a retreat.

We, of course, are very grateful, which begins a conversation: we learn that she is a frequent visitor to Monte Carlo, as her husband is a professional gambler; we learn that she is returning to her home in Milan without her husband who remains in Monte Carlo; we explain we are going to Florence, that we are artists and will be camping. She whispers to the girl (who is her au pair and confidante) and then suggests to us that we forego Florence and come and stay with her in Milan. We thank her for her kind offer and in a mild panic, I say to Jonathan that I want a coffee and let's repair to the dining car. We need to consult with each other.

I'm not unattractive, but I know it is Jonathan they are after. That, and a boring natural caution, incline me to turn down the invitation. Jonathan is too modest to realise it is he they are after and thinks it could be a brilliant adventure. I am convinced that it will all end in tears (my mother's mantra) and we will be stranded and broke in Milan when the whole purpose was to see beautiful Florence. Jonathan reluctantly agrees. All my life I have come to regret these moments of being 'sensible' – because to not do something you know what is going to happen – that is - nothing. But to do something you know something will happen – for good or ill.

But the adventures with women continue in Florence. The tent next to ours, in the campsite by the Piazza Michelangelo overlooking Florence, is occupied by two attractive young German girls whom we get to know and who take us in their camper-van to San Gimignano where, significantly, I notice that in the fresco on the Seven Deadly Sins in the Duomo the one depicting the consequences of Lust is particularly gruesome. The four of us spend our days together in and around Florence but we don't pair-off, largely because Jonathan and I become rivals for the attention of the prettiest of the girls. And there isn't time for the dilemma to be settled before I have to return to Monte Carlo, and Jonathan to England.

There is a lovely English girl cashier at the Nat West Bank in Monte Carlo. Occasionally I have to go to the bank to get my small tax rebate which, in a system that is reminiscent of the hey-day of the 20s and 30s, is 'wired' to me from my bank in England. The girl is flirtatious. One evening I am at work in the litho studio when the bank girl walks in. She says she knew my address from the particulars I had given the bank and she has omitted to take some sort of number from me and is here to rectify the omission. Stanley is there, smirking in the background. I take the girl to Madame Angel's to complete the transaction. She tells me she normally works in Oxford but volunteered to come to Monaco. She lives alone and knows no one. I give her a brief history of how I too came to be in Monaco; I describe my domestic arrangements in the painting studio and say I would love to invite her to supper but it's a little difficult. She says she at least has a kitchen and invites me to supper. We arrange a date for three days hence.

I anticipate the evening with thoughts that she is an attractive girl and even if nothing comes of it romantically, at least she may be a friend – at last someone to talk to. She lives about fifteen minutes walk away, which in Monaco is the other side of town. I arrive in the dark at her small apartment clutching a bottle of red. She has prepared a good but simple meal. However, we have nothing in common. I'm sure we both tried, and both wanted the evening to succeed but the atmosphere was simply awkward. I had a feeling she was unhappy in Monte Carlo and that she wouldn't last long. A few weeks later I have to go to the bank. She is not there. I enquire after her and am told she has gone back to Oxford.

Every two weeks or so a long letter arrives from Pamela in Manchester. They are love letters with news of her life as a student. Every morning I wait with anticipation for the post – I am reminded of home-sickness at boarding school when each morning one desperately waited for the post to arrive with a letter from home. When a letter from Pamela does arrive I have a ritual of savouring the moment: I pocket the missive and go to my local café, where I order a coffee and a treat of a *pain chocolat*, I sit at a table and gently open and read her long letter - more than once, of course. I then order another coffee and write a long reply.

I have a rare meeting with Michel. He tells me a consortium of shops and businesses in a shopping centre want a design for a large billboard and Michel asks if I will submit a design. I go away and produce a not very inspired idea but it has a striking graphic of palm trees and a big simple typeface for the shop and business names. It's a twenty-foot long billboard so the strong simplicity might work. The consortium is very happy with the design so I produce a large template for the poster-printing company and eventually, I am proud to see a huge picture of mine gracing the streets of Monaco. And I am paid a proper fee in cash which I keep in an old tobacco tin under the camp bed.

At the meeting with Michel is a friend and associate of his called Hugh – a Monegasque. He is about my age and I like him – he is friendly and modest and interested in art. He is well-connected, being a Bellandro de Castro, the 'second family' of Monaco, after the Grimaldis. He says he has a friend with an art gallery up on the Rock and he will ask his friend to have a look at my work. We arranged to meet for a drink.

We meet at Madame Angel's (I don't think Hugh and the man from the gallery have ever been in such a bar). Maurice, the art gallery owner who, for an art gallery owner, is a charming and sympathetic man. He asks to see my work, so we go round the corner to the litho studio. He is not very *au fait* with stone lithography and is keen to learn about its history and techniques. He offers me an exhibition. I am, of course very happy to get the exposure and maybe I will sell something. He says he will come back to me with dates.

The date he proposes is the last Sunday in November. The gallery is rather happily called *La Galerie L'Absinthe*. Maurice gives me the usual gallery verbal contract: that he will take 35%; I must pay for the printing of the vernissage invitations and for all framing. Despite the money in my tobacco tin, I resolve to do some commercial lithos based on my little collection of old *Belle Époque* photos of Monaco.

I continue my occasional visits to the Loewes casino for my evening entertainment. When studying people gambling one notices the methodology of each type of gambling – roulette is clearly very different from blackjack - it is pure chance, but with blackjack, the player has a bit of control. He can watch a game and join in at what he considers to be an opportune moment, he can take note of the cards played, he can make informed guesses, which roulette doesn't allow. As an experiment, I try a few games of blackjack, and to my satisfaction win. I leave it at that and watch a few more games, and the types playing, and then go home.

I smoke 'roll-ups', but in France, roll-up tobacco is not popular so the quality is very poor, it is coarse flavoured and dry as dust. So dry it pours out of the end of the roll-up. In the litho studio is the broken espresso machine that gives one electric shocks but if one is careful one can at least get the steam-nozzle to work. I put the dry tobacco in a sieve and - trying to avoid the electric shock – steam the tobacco so it is wet enough to not fall out of the ends.

One evening I get out the tobacco tin to roll a cigarette and I look at the money. There is quite a lot of it. I think that maybe I will try a bit of gambling but under strict self-imposed conditions. In 1975 a pound sterling was worth about ten French francs. I decide I will take a quarter of what I was paid, a decent sum when compared with the cost of living, and, of course, I am still left with three-quarters of my savings. I will go down to the casino and play blackjack. If I double this original amount I will stop playing. As a treat, I trundle down to the casino on the old Solex.

The Loewes casino is not luxurious or glamorous like the main one in the Place de Casino; it is a big modern open space filled with roulette and blackjack tables. It is based on a Las Vegas joint. The girls are scantily clad and the croupiers fascinatingly skilful – they are one of the main sources of

my evening entertainments. If one is playing at a table, the waitresses in their mini-dresses attentively ask if one would like a drink – all drinks are free if you are at a table, and it is the waitresses job to make sure the punters are continuously drinking. I am at a blackjack table so, to keep in the spirit of the occasion, I order a dry Martini. It's only nine o'clock. I play cautiously and slowly increase my winnings. About midnight I am more than three-quarters to my goal of doubling my original stake – I've been playing for three hours.

Half an hour later I'm within what I estimate is a couple or three more games of achieving my goal - if I play in the same cautious way as I have so far all evening. I am then determined to cash in my winnings and go home. I play in the same cautious way for the next twenty minutes – but what I have gained in three and a half hours I lose in those twenty minutes. It is, of course, the way of chance tempered by what one thinks is educated guessing. My main emotion is that the *management* has beaten me.

I get on the Solex and drive home back to my dark basement. I am despondent and annoyed. I can't let them get away with it. I grab a hand full of notes from my tobacco tin and return to the casino.

Mentally and emotionally I have to start all over again. I settle at a blackjack table and order a dry martini - I keep them coming, after all, they are free. It is now one-thirty in the morning – the casino is open all night. At four a.m. I have lost everything.

I leave the table and wander through the Loewes hotel foyer where I see a row of lift doors. I enter a lift and press the button for the top floor. The doors open at the top and I find myself alone on the roof. It's a warm night and the lights of Monte Carlo shine below me and up in the hills behind. I'm not drunk but not sober either and probably a bit shell-shocked. There is a big swimming pool so I slip off my shoes and strip naked and dive in. The water is warm but refreshing. After a while, I get out and realise that I'm dripping wet and have no towel. Never the less I climb into my clothes which become sodden. I descend in the lift to the foyer where I have to squelch pass the curious guests and staff, wiping water dripping from my face and wet hair. And climb onto the Solex.



It is now about five in the morning and the dawn is emerging as I cruise damply through the empty streets to my windowless basement bedroom. I eventually fall asleep on my camp bed in my well-used sleeping bag amongst the cockroaches.

It's very interesting the ability to be both dispassionate and objective at the same time as being overwrought and remorseful. It is like being two people in one body. It's like being the pushmi-pullyu creature in Dr Dolittle. One moment I am addressing my self in the third person and saying, "Tilleard, there is no point in crying, it's spilt milk, the bottle is smashed, you can't put the milk back". But another voice is saying: "I am a fool, why did I behave so stupidly, I used to think of myself as a sensible person; if only I could turn the clock back". The pushmi Mr Reasonable is an out of body thing that hovers over you telling you there is nothing you can do about it, so get over it - while the pullyu is a Mr Remorseful buried inside, who keeps chiding and scolding.

I go to Stanley's apartment, he has given me a key in case of emergencies, and, like a sinner with a stain on his soul, take a shower.

I am now busy organising, with the gallery, my exhibition. Even with my bad French I have to arrange the printing of the invitations and the posters. I give the printers the necessary wording and designs and they send me the proofs. On checking the proofs I notice they have spelt Galerie as Gallerie, which was not in my design. I have to inform the printers of their mistake – a foreigner with bad French explaining to a Frenchman that he cannot spell. I'm also organising the framing which has to be negotiated as it's expensive. When I show them my prints based on the *Belle Epoque* photos of Monaco they are so enamoured of the series of six they offer to waive all fees for the framing if I give them a set of the six. This will save me a lot of money and is tantamount to a first sale.

The exhibition is on the last Sunday in November. We hang the show and it is looking good. The whiskey, wine and canapés are all in place. In Monaco, a vernissage is earlier than in other countries. Maurice, Hugh, Michel, Stanley and I gather at four-thirty to greet the crowds. An hour later nobody has arrived, we check the invitations to make sure I haven't made a mistake with the date and time. Another hour passes and there are a few guests,

another hour and still just a smattering. I begin to wonder about Hugh and his important Monegasque connections and Maurice and his influential mailing-list. At eight o'clock we ask the few guests why they are there but not others. 'Oh!', they say, 'don't you know it's the first day of the ski-ing season - everybody has decamped to the pistes'. My main thought is, that like the skiers it is now downhill all the way, and surely Hugh and Maurice should have known. However, the exhibition is on for another two weeks and by the end, I sell enough lithographs to have made it worthwhile. I spend the next few weeks printing the orders and getting them to the framers or the gallery.

It is now mid-December and time to leave Monaco. I have promised my parents I will be home for Christmas. I book a night train to Paris for the 23<sup>rd</sup>. I finish printing the last of the lithographs. But I have one piece of unfinished business: I need to visit the casino for one more session - I have a desire to try and get my own back on the 'system'. I vow to take only a small amount of money and if I lose to go back home and forget the desire for revenge.

One evening, three days before I leave, I take the Solex to Loewes. I am not going to play blackjack, with my deluded ideas that one is more in control - I am going to the roulette tables where the chances are purely random.

The cashier changes my francs into black and white chips. At the roulette table, if one is lucky enough to find a seat the croupier changes one's chips into coloured ones, a different colour for each seat; if one has to stand one plays with the black and white chips. I have to stand. I begin by ordering a dry martini and by placing a small amount on black. Black comes up. All those standing are, of course, using black and white chips. The croupier pushes a pile of these towards me as my winnings. But there are far too many of them. Clearly, most of them belong to someone else. I look around but nobody is claiming them. I ask the man sitting in front of me if he knows who they belong to, he too looks around, shrugs and tells me I'm lucky and to take them all; which I do - and quickly slide off to another table hoping nobody notices.

There is a free seat, which means my chips are changed into coloured ones, thus immediately hiding any evidence of my ill-gotten gains. I decide, since

they are not really mine, to put the extra winnings onto a group of eight numbers, the chances are, of course, lower, but the reward much higher. One of the eight comes up and the croupier pushes a pile of chips towards me. I start to count them to see how much I've won. The croupier calls, "faites vos jour", but I'm too engrossed in my adding-up to notice that I have left all of my original stake on the eight numbers. It's too late and the wheel spins but, again, one of the eight numbers comes up. And another substantial pile of chips is pushed my way. I retrieve the stake and begin to add-up all my winnings. In these few minutes have won almost as much as I had lost at blackjack in all those hours. I have fortuitously achieved my revenge. I gather the pile of chips and go straight to the cashier to have them changed into francs. I climb happily onto the Solex and cruise back to the old *bain-douche*. I cram the money into the old tobacco tin, which can hardly take it, and then sleep the sleep of the just. Well, not the just - just lucky.

Three days later, in the evening, I am standing on the platform at Monte Carlo railway station with a small suitcase and a large portfolio. I am alone; I had said farewell to Stanley the day before – I think he was pleased to see me go – and Michel was too busy to be seen. Again, train departures have an underlying sadness, as when I said goodbye to Pamela; but I am going home.

After a winter's day in Paris, I catch the train to Calais and the night ferry to Dover. It's icy cold when I disembark at Dover docks. The wintry sun is just rising when I catch the train to Canterbury on the branch line that takes me to the little station in the village where I live. As the train travels slowly through the Kentish countryside I see through the window a hoar frost and, in the pale morning sun, the Kentish fields and woods have a thin white covering to the tops of the trees. I alight at Bekesbourne station. I am the only one there at that time of day and all is still. As I wait in the silence for my father to come to pick me up, I can see across the frosty fields the old house where Ian Fleming once lived. I have a little thought that perhaps he wrote at his desk, in his study, in this house, the story of James Bond at the casino in Monte Carlo?

My father arrives and I go home.

\* Stanley is now eighty years old and a world-renown wildlife painter.

THE END

Robert Tilleard 2020, Tisbury