

The Singer - and the Song
by
Lloyd. Nelson

ONE

I was born with a very good Tenor voice. I've done nothing with it but I got a bit prominent for a while quite by accident.

By day I labour as a Broker's Clerk in Belker & Warrens Stock Broking firm in Wall Street. Its interesting work and you hear things. Weekends or Sundays anyway, in fact for most of my life so far I sing in Saint Patrick's Cathedral Choir. One Sunday Lucien Fasioli, the famous Italian-American singer comes along to do a solo.

He's singing that lovely thing, I can't remember who wrote it "I will come to you in silence; I will always call your name etc". It's a beautiful thing suited to a clear as a bell tenor voice. There's a large and influential mob here today including Presidential hopeful Jack Kennedy and his famous parents.



Lucien has a fine, fine voice but today is off the pace. He's had a throat infection and has come back a tad early. He starts to sound muzzy and to lose it. I without thinking chime in and carry him over, I don't even stand. Lucien rallies and we duet the song sort of, to my total surprise he gives me a high five, gestures for me to stand up and we run through it again, the crowd loves it. It's not my show and I quickly sit down as we finish, its Lucien's show but he's all heart and he waves me up again. The crowd give us an extraordinary hand.

I apologise to Lucien, "I did it unthinkingly or naturally," I say,
"Yes," he says, "and you did it fucking well. Will you hold steady here for a minute?"

I do and he confers with the Kennedy's and comes back quickly.

"Without going too deeply into the prospects, will you sing at Friday's Democratic Rally in Philadelphia?"

"Sure," I say, "but what do I sing?"

"America, America, we shall not flag or fail," he says, "at the start and the Star Spangled at the finish. We'll do it together like today and see how it goes."

I take a sickie from the Brokers Friday and drive my soft top Mustang quietly down to Philly. It's an unbelievable show. Jack Kennedy, despite his electoral disadvantage of being a Roman Catholic, is a hell of a Candidate and you could scent victory even, the outset of the real campaign. Lucien and I give America, America and the Star Spangled our very best shots and it goes like a rocket.

When I get back to work Monday my bosses come along together and say. "God help us, you take a sickie and appear on every television screen in America," and it seems we had.

"What's the story?" they say. The office phone rings and rings, people come in, complete strangers, they want interviews. I back off fast and hard.

"I'm just a campaign helper," I say, "I would qualify as President of the No Importance Club, talk to Lucien, I know nothing." The epithet about the No Importance Club gets hung around my neck in the press for the next 14 months and if it doesn't make me famous it at least makes me very, very well known.

TWO

Lucien comes around to have a sandwich. We go to a small but very good and busy Jewish deli/sandwich bar along a bit from Wall Street. "Well Jeremy," he says, "Philly was a trial balloon for a considered format and this will now be taken U.S.A. wide unless some disaster occurs. I've got to earn my living but I'll be at all the big buggers. Joe Kennedy Himself wants to strike a deal with you to come on board and do the rest of the singing." Blind Freddy can of course see this proposition looming and I have talked deeply with my bosses who are dead keen to help a potential President, there's a lot in it for them in so many different ways.

I give Lucien a considered and well typed memorandum which in short sets out that if the Kennedy's see fit to put a specified amount through the Brokerage firm each month and lodge a set amount with the firm with a buy and sell Authority the partners will make a bit of Money for the Kennedy's and will lend them my services for the campaign gratis. They will pay my wages and expenses and will also provide a travel card if I have to proceed for any reason independently of the campaign transport.

So, on this basis away we go.

I never attempt to buddy up close to the Kennedy's. There's a million types trying to do that already. I keep very well clear and liaise with one specified campaign man so that by picking up a phone know immediately where and when I'm wanted.

We proceed, swimmingly in the most, totally most, interesting period in my life. Being in Wall Street I have to present myself well, good New York hair cuts, decent suits etc, that's no trouble. I'm tall, presentable and introspective in that order. Nobody, nobody at all bother me, they all praise my efforts. However someone in the remarkable Kennedy machine can see that I will be at a loose end at times during the campaign and a beautiful girl with a university degree befriends me and we have a lovely time all over the country. I don't kid myself that my charm and good looks have brought her into the fold, someone is very perceptive. I don't look a gift horse in the mouth and am indeed most

appreciative of who ever was that thoughtful.

THREE

Jack Kennedy walks up to me after a very successful rally held in St. Louis.

“Hi Jeremy,” he says, “you’re doing a great job.”

“Don’t waste time on me Mr. Kennedy,” I say, “you’ve got my vote.”

He Laughs, “Its Jack” he says, “you’re unusual, everybody, but everybody seems to want my ear.”

I reach into my jacket pocket and give him a short memo.

“I’ve carried this to 18 rallies,” I say, “in the hope that I could put it in your hand.”

“What is it?” he says.

“Well, it’s a very bright idea that if your publicity men have a vestige of a brain in their collective heads they will look hard at.”



Thus Jack Kennedy reads the memo and invites me along on its later execution. He speaks to the ex pat American students at Oxford. The venue is Christopher Wrens beautiful and historic Sheldonian Theatre. The students (and the real reason behind this idea) the media go through the roof. He allows one question and passes the call to

me where I stand near a side microphone. I thus recognise Felicity Greenlaw; she’s a girlfriend, is from Connecticut and is an English Lit student at Merton.

She’s beautiful and her voice has the clarity of a bell. She stands up straight in her academic gown (they’ve all worn them, a signal honour) and says, “Mr Kennedy, I quote the preamble to my question from Herrick:

Fair daffodils we weep to see
You haste away so soon
As yet the early rising sun
Has not attained its noon
Stay, stay
Until the hastening day
Has run
But to the even song
And having prayed together, we
Will go with you along

Tomorrow sir is the feast day of St. Michael,” Felicity says, “and Vigil Mass is on at St. Aloysius in 10 minutes. Will you join us? We will let you go after you have read the lesson.”

In a grandiloquent gesture (actually I wrote in into the original script and I know a secret service man with a pump shotgun under his coat will move into the confessional there the minute the priest moves out and that there is plenty of security men in the church already) Jack Kennedy says,

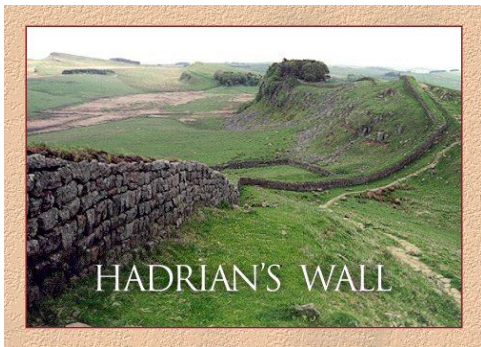
“It will be a pleasure Felicity. I will see you in Great Giles shortly.”

There is panic, hubbub, confusion and total confusion as our audience moves on the trot to St Aloysius. Kennedy steps up to the pulpit and in his pleasant Boston twang and in perhaps a foretaste of the future reads the famous passage from Ecclesiastes, ‘for everything there is a season, a time to live and a time to die’.

The world has no doubt that this is the greatest gesture seen in the green and pleasant land of England for a long, long time.

FOUR

We carry out the next leg of our project as outlined, in my memo when next morning in bright and windless weather we chopper north and Kennedy, beautifully and smartly dressed in flannels, tie and a magnificent blue wool



blazer makes a speech, no audience, just the T.V. cameras at Hadrian's Wall at Castle Crag. We set down just 50 yards away on a flat patch and walks up to the wall. His speech is of course directed at the Berlin Wall question which is on everyone's minds at that time. World reaction to this vision is indescribably favourable and laudatory.

He flags me down at our next Stateside rally in Denver and hands me a small package, it contains a card (tiny) and the plainest gold watch made by Omega, its inscribed and can only be described as just, just good looking or alternatively, in impeccable taste. I tell him it's totally unnecessary, I never wear a watch.

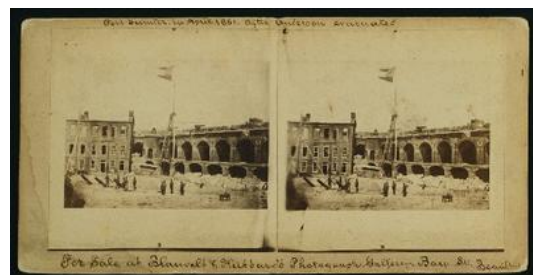
“Perhaps for the grandkids,” he grins. (Years later when I'm in the Church I auction it with the provenance of the card at Christies at a time when the greatest antique auction house in the world is selling the Duchess of Windsor's Jewellery. Like everything else put up that day it brings enormous money which I donate in its entirety to Guys Hospital.) He shakes my hand,

“I'm open to any more good ideas,” he says.

I hand him another memo on the spot. He reads it immediately putting up his hand to still the clamour of one of his top aides.

“You know, Jeremy?” he says, “Oxford and Hadrian's Wall internationalised my views overnight. This idea will do the same for inside the nation. Let's do it.”

Thus Jack Kennedy in the dyeing days of his successful and exhilarating campaign gives a sound bite speech at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbour. Articulating my written words he says.



“The first shots in the Conflagration that turned the world as our American forebears knew it upside down were fired just here over a hundred years ago. I’m firing the last shots in my campaign for the Presidency from this historic national monument. Come with me on the journey; let us start a new conflagration that will overturn the world as we know it now for the better. Let our children and our children’s children say this was a volley deserving of the powder that propelled it.”

It brings things to a tumultuous finish.

FIVE

At the finish of the whole campaign Joe Kennedy himself walks over to me.

“Jeremy,” he says, “you sang like an angel right through this long show, the ideas you contributed were pure highlights. We want you at the armoury when the results come in and if they go the way I expect, on the White House staff.”



Roman Head, found on Benwell Hill.

“Why thank you Mr, Ambassador,” I say, “the trip has been as interesting as has been fascinating. It was nice of you to invite me to join you on the Golden Road to Samarkand. But I’m for off. But I hope and will pray that the wind may stay at the backs of you and your formidable clan.”

He’s touched by this and wipes his eye.

“But what will you do?” he says.

“Holy orders, for the church.”

Joe Kennedy rallies, a twinkle comes into his shrewd, knowing and oh so intelligent eyes.

“Mmm, what about an all expenses paid tour to Rome and a job interview by the Pope?”

“Mr Ambassador,” I say, “I don’t have a doubt in the world that you could arrange that, but no.”

We laugh at each other and part.

SIX

I pass on the armoury and all that. I know well enough from studying history that after the inauguration of a new president it’s only down hill after that. My gap year at the seminary lobs along and whatever the standard of governance, and some questions are being asked in that regard, the Kennedy’s are setting a cracking pace in the White House of great style and élan, the like of which may never be seen again. A celebration is planned at Carnegie Hall, a sort of anniversary celebration and Lucien wants me along. The church doesn’t mind so I go. The world is there and Lucien hams it up beautifully. He tells the multitude that his support singer hasn’t shown so he will have to recruit from the audience. He selects a few at random and they being well worded up run disastrously through their notes. Lucien throws up his hands and says he’ll try one more and points at me. On stage we try a few notes and he says you’ll do and asks me

what do I think we should sing.

“Oh, something patriotic I think.”

We zap into ‘America, America’ which we have sung in just about every city in America. The audience realises at this point that we've played them as suckers and respond amusingly and marvellously.

We zing it out and move onto the ‘Pearl Fishers’, ‘the Gendarmes Duet’ and end on Bonnie Prince Charlie’s song ‘Will you no come back again?’ Its a hell of a show, the very best we've ever done and its the finale of the whole thing, the crowd have heard it all before and such is the power of recall of television that they give us a hand to end all hands and we are persuaded to stand up straight and serious and fade out strongly on Tosti's ‘Farewell (Goodbye for ever)

But it’s not quite the end. Lucien and I get called out for another round of Tosti at the ambassador’s funeral.

“You had better go,” the archbishop said, “otherwise they'll be ringing the pope.”

In retrospect, say what you like about the Kennedy’s, they sure give life one hell of a shake, even Old Teddy, the lightweight of the family (Not in a physical sense) makes his presence felt in the Senate quite often still.

