

Sic Transit

by Grant Bailie

He was that famous actor—now famously forgotten—most renowned for his exits. He could burst through an in or out door with the best of them. Better than the best of them; he was the best of them. With the subtlety of his often noisy art he could convey a myriad of emotions or motivations. Did he leave reluctantly or resolutely? Fearlessly or fearfully? Hardy or heartbroken? Was he exiting a room or entering a world? Wood or glass, swinging or revolving, tent flap or manhole—no port of entry was beyond his talents. Even the automatic door—the Achilles' heel of so many a fine thespian—could be made an accomplished partner in the theatrical arts in the hands of our now forgotten actor.

The legendary, perhaps apocryphal, story of his discovery is that he first caught the eye of a powerful agent (now also forgotten) while he (the once famed actor) was quitting his job as busboy at a fashionable downtown eatery (now a dry cleaner's). The Agent was thoroughly enjoying the house specialty--a tulip petal and gold flake salad with a sesame and honey vinaigrette sprinkled with a precise and patented blend of parmesan, feta, roasted red pepper flakes, dehydrated goose liver, eye of newt--but enough about the Agent and his entrée.

Back to our hero and his exit. Through kitchen doors first, one imagines, with a bang of flattened palm against steel. And then throwing his white apron resolutely to the floor, striding his way passed the tables of stunned, curious or impressed diners. The front door thrown open, a backwards glance, a step into the brightness of the outside world and he is gone, swallowed up by sunlight and promise. Is there applause? Perhaps. At any rate, the Agent, who has stopped mid-chew, gold flakes clinging to the corners of his mouth, can well imagine applause. He tosses his own napkin onto the table and rushes out after his new discovery. After some confusion of

traffic, and some more confusion involving the two waiters and the manager who had followed him out with a little matter of the bill, the Agent tracked down the ex-waiter, future star, future ex-star and signed him to a contract.

From there his cinematic rise is best told in cinematic terms: a montage of his name in larger and larger letters, clapping hands, flash bulbs going off, red carpets unrolling, adoring fans, accolades, headlines and golden statuettes. Applause, applause, applause.

I see him now in a white robe, on a chaise-lounge, by an Olympic-sized pool. He sips something pink from a tall glass and speaks on a cream-colored phone with a reporter about his latest film. Yes, the garage door had proved something of a unique challenge, but he was proud of his work there, as well as in the subsequent sequence where he exits through a solid wall. It is good to stretch as an actor, of course. It is good to explore the boundaries of one's craft.

But how long can it go on? How many scripts can be doctored to include the maximum amount of dramatic comings and goings? How long can the public's interest be held for the subtleties of knobs turning, openings flung open or slammed shut, or closed softly.

Run the montage in reverse: the applause fades away. The crowds and headlines become smaller. The red carpet is rolled up and the flash bulbs left un-popped as our hero walks by. His name is smaller and smaller until it is not there at all.

What to make of the gold statuettes, in their variety of phallus, globes and eunuchs; they do not go away so neatly as the crowds--cannot be made to perform in my reverse montage to suit my clever purposes. They gather dust for awhile before being sold at auction to help with the house payments. Before that, perhaps, the inevitable scene where his accountant explains how foolish his investments and expenditures had been. The well is dry; the

Olympic-sized pool is cracked and empty. The house is sold and a series of smaller and dingier homes begins, all ending in obscurity a cardboard box, a back alley, a flop house or mysterious death. Did he not wander one drunken night into the wine dark sea? Did he not die alone in his one room apartment, his body eaten by his dozen beloved, inbred and hungry cats? Or to go for cheaper irony: have him trapped in a burning building, strangled and blinded by smoke, unable to find the door.

Or he lives still. He is the old man in the park, feeding squirrels. He is the crazy person with bags and bags, escorted from shopping malls by security. He rides the city bus back and forth, frothing at the corners and talking to himself. His is the shape you see sleeping in the corner of the train station beneath a gray blanket, stinking of piss and failure. There but for the grace of God, you say. There but for the grace of God. Sign of the cross. Toss a coin. Salt over the shoulder. But let ye among you who has ever had an Olympic sized swimming pool and somehow lost it cast the first stone.

