

## **Exorcism and The Realization That Your Only True Stability Comes From Your Shoes**

My beautiful burgundy shoes weren't suitable for school, apparently the colour was wrong. Tell me how can a colour be wrong? It wasn't fighting any political, humanitarian or economic causes, it was just being burgundy, and presenting a splendid colour co-coordinated case in its teaming with a cherry pink blazer. There were also additional problems, the wedge was too high, and the ankle straps "were not to be encouraged" – so that morning I was sent home to change my footwear. I did not return.

The next day, sporting an inferior pair of regulation black shoes and a cavalier attitude, I attended my designated 'O' level religious class the tone of which was usually informal, addressing relevant topical issues and consciously heralding a new liberal bent, and headed by the perpetually anxious Father Jordan, a tall, white cloth-clad Franciscan monk. On arrival I was informed I was to be one of a number of teenagers chosen by the school, to attend a weeklong religious retreat in the Lake District. I suspected subterfuge, but at this point in my life didn't really know what that meant. Doubts rapidly turned to elation with the arrival of undisputable confirmation that it was not to be a silent retreat, relieving all my initial fears. I was aware there must be an underlying objective to this sojourn, but it constituted a week off school, and that overshadowed any reasoning. My questions during the Religious class debates had been contrary and controversial, my essays purposely provocative, this made Father Jordan uncomfortable – I knew this to be true; Father Kelly, an Irish Catholic priest who taught at the school, had already told me so.

A furious sky accentuated the daunting chiseled features of the manor, all set in a landscape that would never recognize the term forgiveness; this naturally appealed to the ever-present sensationalist within me. Once inside, a handsome oak staircase took precedence attended by a superfluity of ostentatious reliquaries and liturgical ornamentation. Mufti appeared to be de rigueur for the resident priests and nuns, some of who had accessorized with acoustic guitars thrown with a deliberate nonchalance around their backs. Our days were spent in groups stoically philosophizing on teenage concerns, and questions were answered in colourful and enlightening ways devoid of patronization. The evenings were spent languorously exchanging ghost stories into the early hours; the whole aura of the place lent itself to the total pleasure of communal petrification, and general scaring the be Jesus out of one another, I adored it but this is where everything went hideously wrong.

Day three, at day break I was summoned to the office apparently I had caused "mass hysteria" among my fellow houseguests the previous night - obviously I had found my own stories soporific and had slept soundly unencumbered by any form of disturbance and/or demons. A call had been hastily made to Father Kelly the old laconic priest at school, in regards of my immediate removal from the manor and he was

assigned - reluctantly I'm sure- that pastoral duty. As I waited in the music room, looking forward to seeing the refreshingly grounded priest, (I didn't suppose he was looking forward to driving over 50 miles to see me), I found one of my favorite albums, Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*. This had been the bane of my parent's life with my incessant and inexorable re- playing. As I placed it on the turntable I resigned myself to the wait and the consequent admonishment that lay before me. Before long, a pink- of- cheek, red-frocked priest entered the room, and requested that I come with him, I dutifully did. I was led to a small enclosure similar to a confessional box but larger, which contained a wooden seat and four red robed fretful faced priests. I was summoned to sit – I obliged, and then in sonorous unison the room swayed to the sounds of Latin incantation, sprinklings of holy water sprayed about me, through it all I could hear still hear the now faint sound of Tubular Bells. I was not alarmed; I was bemused and bewildered as only a fourteen year old can be, at this unnecessary farcical event unfolding before me. I wanted to laugh, but felt like this would be far too ill mannered, so indulged in the opportunity, to study the exquisite symbolist details of the scarlet liturgical vestments

I was asked to remove my shoes; I gazed down at the continually demonized burgundy ankle-strapped shoes and realized that they were the only thing providing me with balance and stability within those four walls, through hell and high water they were staying firmly where cobblers intended them to be.

What were those priests exorcising, teenage high spirits; petulance; the ability to entertain with a ghost story; pernicious leanings toward theatrical and dramatic; my taste in contemporary music; my proclivity toward burgundy wedged shoes? I never did find out, but suspiciously I have never listened to *Tubular Bells* since.

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