The Look *of* Love

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PAUL RAYMOND

Soho's King of Clubs

Paul Willetts

A complete catalogue record for this book can
be obtained from the British Library on request

First published in this edition as *The Look of Love* in 2013 by Serpent's Tail
First published under the title *Members Only* in 2010 by Serpent's Tail,
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd
3A Exmouth House
Pine Street
London EC1R 0JH
website: www.serpentstail.com

ISBN 978 1 84668 716 7
eISBN 978 1 84765 302 4

Designed and typeset by folio at Neuadd Bwll, Llanwrtyd Wells

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

1 AN AUDIENCE WITH THE KING

FOR MOST MEN it was the raw material of pulse-quickening fantasy. But these auditions had, by the closing months of 1960, become little more than a tiresome ritual for the man sitting near the stage that morning at the Raymond Revuebar, the upmarket strip-club he'd opened just over two years earlier. Destined to establish himself as one of the world's wealthiest people, his face familiar to British newspaper readers, the man in question was a thirty-five-year-old Northerner who had changed his name to Paul Raymond, a durable memento of his own abortive stage career. His sharp suit, cut in the continental style worn by Marcello Mastroianni in the previous year's hit movie *La Dolce Vita*, contributed to an impression of well-groomed prosperity and suave self-assurance. Such was his fastidious poise, you could almost have been persuaded that he also shared the Italian actor's dark good looks. Instead, he possessed the long, clean-shaven, pallid features of a medieval effigy. Any fleeting associations with the frigid hush of some bucolic parish church were, however, dispelled by the cigarette between his lips and the sight of his receding, wavy brown hair which he oiled into a crisply parted quiff, resembling the spirals of whipped cream piped on to the desserts served in the fashionable restaurant downstairs. Recurrent doses of cod liver oil and malt extract had failed to vanquish his unhealthy facial puffiness.

Smoke rings unspooled above Raymond as his doleful, dog-at-the-dinner-table eyes scrutinised the hesitant young girl who had ventured

onto the otherwise empty stage. It extended fifteen feet into the terraced auditorium, around which tables and chairs had been arranged. Those seats would soon be filled by the usual attentive, smartly dressed crowd: film producers, businessmen, aristocrats, politicians, singers, gangsters, barristers and movie stars, quaffing overpriced drinks while they watched the show. At present the audience was sparse, just the inevitable technicians, plus Raymond and the journalist who had come to interview him about his controversial club.

Raymond had grown accustomed to encounters with the press. His latest interviewer was Ernest Dudley, courteous, fruity voiced and almost two decades his senior, though the age gap seemed greater because Raymond shaved off a few years whenever journalists asked how old he was. Until recently, Dudley had enjoyed nationwide fame as a BBC radio presenter. Nowadays he concentrated on working as a novelist and screenwriter. In between, he'd picked up a commission from *Today* – a popular weekly news magazine – to write a three-part feature about Raymond.

Had Dudley requested a press clippings file on his interviewee, he'd have been presented with a sheaf of yellowed articles from national newspapers. These bestowed on Raymond a range of flippant titles, including 'Mr Striptease' and 'the King of the Keyhole Shows', the latter rendered doubly pertinent because Raymond claimed to have obtained his first sight of naked female flesh by peering through a keyhole. The object of King Paul's bug-eyed scrutiny was one of his unsuspecting aunts, gingerly lowering herself into her bath.

Flavoured with disdain, the newspaper cuttings portrayed Raymond as a stereotypical wide-boy. But Dudley's interviewee bore no resemblance to the brash and sleazy profiteer who emerged from so many of these. Contrary to the stereotype, Raymond had manners as immaculate and formal as his custom-made suits. He had a gruff, carefully modulated voice with a slight stammer that hinted at vulnerability, only a trace of a Liverpool accent discernible in his

nasal, constricted delivery. He had a temperament that was phlegmatic, guarded, watchful, initially even a little shy and abrupt with strangers, his old-fashioned decorum prone to be misinterpreted as coldness. And he had practised charm with which he kept journalists at a distance while purveying an illusion of intimacy, of privileged access. He'd woo them with his self-deprecation, his bracing, ostensibly guileless candour, his ample stock of dryly humorous stories about his rackety past, stories garnished by a catchy laugh redolent of a misfiring lawnmower. Mouth realigning itself into a contagious half-smile, cigarette waved with a theatrical flourish, he'd say, 'I've never had a good write-up and I don't expect yours to be the first.'

It was part of a repertoire of lines Raymond trotted out during interviews, his delivery displaying all the brisk confidence of a former top-of-the-bill performer in provincial variety shows.

'I have read parts of a book, but never an entire book,' he delighted in telling reporters. 'Maybe I attempted to read the *wrong* sort of book.' Sometimes he'd justify this tone of gleefully mischievous philistinism by adding, 'Reading could destroy my instinct for what's popular. The average man doesn't read books. And *I* understand the mass trade. I believe I have the touch that the ordinary man in the street wants.'

On other occasions he'd strike a rare note of self-congratulation by gesturing to his luxurious surroundings and saying, 'Not bad for a lad who arrived from Liverpool with five bob in his pocket…'

Questions about the future of his lucrative, red-plush-adorned realm elicited the pronouncement, 'There'll always be sex – always, always, always.'

Forced to defend the nature of his business, he'd dispense another of his old favourites: 'It's simply that a normal, healthy chap likes to see a pretty girl without any clothes on.'

Raymond's routine captivated his current interviewer, who was fascinated by the contradictions of his personality, by what Dudley later described as 'his breathless audacity'. The first instalment of the eventual

feature series would pose the question 'Is his sort of entertainment harmless or a moral menace?' To counter the predictable accusations of immorality, Raymond – or maybe his publicist – fed Dudley a line about him being a devout Roman Catholic, spiritually at ease despite the apparent incompatibility between his religious faith and his chosen career.

Quizzed about the titillating contents of his newest show, which featured a naked woman dancing with a boa constrictor, Raymond shrugged his well-padded shoulders and said, 'But what harm can there be in showing beautiful girls in interesting acts? Everything is clean, wholesome and above board.'

Right then, Dudley was studying Raymond as intently as Raymond was studying the girl he was about to audition. Regular letters from girls like her arrived at the Revuebar: girls who fancied reinventing themselves as gypsy seductresses, Nordic goddesses or South American sexpots, girls from any social class, their letters enclosing a snapshot more often than not taken by an obliging boyfriend or brother on some windswept British beach. Frequently, Raymond's wife Jean – responsible for choreographing and producing the shows as well as designing the costumes – would attend the subsequent auditions and rehearsals with their four-year-old daughter Debbie, who'd throw tantrums unless Jean brought her along.

Since his wife wasn't there to help him reach a verdict on the current would-be recruit, Raymond had to rely on his own judgement. Not that he lacked belief in his ability to select the appropriate candidates. He told people that he always looked at a stripper's face first because that's 'what makes everything come alive on a girl's body'. The attributes of a perfect stripper had, he believed, the immutable authority of Old Testament scripture. Call them the Four Commandments. Thou shalt be between eighteen and thirty years old. Thou shalt be five feet eight inches tall. Thou shalt weigh nine stone. And thou shalt not have excessively large breasts, the preferred dimensions being between thirty-six and thirty-

eight inches. If they were bigger than that, he reasoned they'd be too floppy. Perhaps as a legacy of his strict upbringing, Catholic dogma mingling with middle-class squeamishness, Raymond was in those days reluctant to refer to them as 'breasts', let alone 'tits', 'bazookas' or any such lustful epithets. Betraying a streak of prudishness that Dudley found anomalous in a strip-club owner, Raymond insisted on calling them 'busts' or 'bosoms'.

His regal position within the club gave him the mandate for expressing absurd generalisations about the girls he auditioned. 'Very pretty girls', he was fond of declaring, 'often have bad figures, but girls with attractive figures invariably have pretty faces.'

In a reflection of changing fashion and his own changing tastes, what he defined as a pretty face and an attractive figure were remote from their equivalents thirty years later. Back in 1960, these paradigms of feminine allure could have subtly rounded stomachs, broad hips, pasty complexions, asymmetrical breasts and arms that didn't appear as if they were equipped to bench-press 100 lb. weights

Whenever Raymond scheduled auditions, he liked to claim that he wasn't just looking for the obvious attributes. No, *he* was looking for girls who were unselfconscious and capable of walking gracefully. As a rule, performers with at least a smidgen of showbusiness experience were favoured because he thought they lacked any offputting coyness. He said he was keen to recruit girls from what he termed 'good homes', girls from the quieter suburbs who, he felt, made the best strippers. He also said he wasn't, unlike some of his European colleagues, trying to find girls who derived a sexual thrill from what they did. His shows, he insisted, had nothing to do with sex. They were just 'two hours of refined, family-style entertainment'.

Eager to impress her potential employer, the girl currently onstage was wearing an unseasonal summer dress and a bit too much make-up, designed to give her the appearance of someone older, more sophisticated. Far from achieving the desired effect, the make-up

emphasised her callowness. You could tell she'd never been auditioned before. Nor had she, in all likelihood, previously set foot inside the Revuebar or any other strip-club.

She flashed a nervous, ingratiating smile at Raymond. He responded with a slight nod.

The girl glanced into the wings, as if seeking further instructions. Then she peeled off her dress. Now wearing nothing but her bra, panties and slip-on shoes, she stood awkwardly beneath a proscenium arch embellished by Raymond's gilded, cursive monogram.

Another uncomfortable pause ensued before she swivelled round and paraded in front of both Raymond and his interviewer. She could have done with some music to lend her movements rhythm. Ordinarily, a three-piece band accompanied the performers. In the band's absence, noises from the surrounding central London streets tended to leak into the theatre: shouts, wolf-whistles, the hum of cars and lorries, the angry insectoid buzz of scooters.

Under Raymond's direction, the girl was soon mincing round the stage and striking the requisite poses, shedding her initial reticence more slowly than her dress. Next time she met his genial, non-committal gaze, her expression had acquired a new-found coquettishness.

Speaking softly, he asked her to take off her remaining clothes. As she followed his instructions, he watched with the detachment of an antique dealer appraising a piece of china. Almost a decade in the skindustry had left Raymond blasé about female nudity. For him, this wasn't about ogling pretty young girls. It was about his abiding obsession – not sex, but *money*. It was about business, about profit and loss, about contributing to the cost of his next Bentley, his Savile Row suits, his daughter's school fees, his wife's haute couture outfits.

'Believe me, I get no special kick out of the job I do,' he assured Dudley. 'To the girls, I am no more than a doctor examining his patients.'

2 EDUCATING GEOFFREY

RAYMOND OFTEN DESCRIBED himself as a self-made man. Infused with an undercurrent of immodesty, it led many people who met him during the 1960s to assume he was part of the influx of predominantly northern working-class talent energising the London art and show business scene and pushing at the boundaries of what was deemed acceptable. His well-advertised past as an itinerant market stallholder and variety artiste, together with the vestiges of a North Country accent, conspired to reinforce that misapprehension. Here was someone whose name appeared to belong in a roll-call spanning actors, writers, fashion designers, photographers, musicians and painters, among them Michael Caine, David Hockney, Ossie Clarke, Joe Orton and John Lennon. If pressed on the subject, however, Raymond would admit to being *middle* class, yet that label conceals as much as it reveals.

He was the second child of socially and temperamentally mismatched parents. His gregarious, roistering father Francis – known as Frank – Joseph had grown up in godless poverty amid the slums of the West Derby area of Liverpool. And Raymond's paternal grandfather had worked on the city's docks during the nineteenth century, where he installed rigging on sailing ships. Defying the handicaps of this impecunious background, the future strip-club maestro's father had ended up running his own Liverpool-based 'forwarding agency' – what would now be called a haulage company. In 1921, aged twenty-six, Frank Joseph married a middle-class girl named Maud McKeown. Prior to their marriage, she'd been living with her Irish-born parents and her nine well-educated siblings, two of whom

were schoolteachers. Maud had grown up in a spacious house in nearby Toxteth, a district far removed from its 1980s incarnation as a symbol of urban decay. The rigidly stratified class system of the period meant that her elderly father, who had, by his retirement, achieved the exalted rank of superintendent in the Liverpool Constabulary, was unlikely to have welcomed her choice of husband. There was also the contentious matter of religion, the McKeowns being such staunch Roman Catholics that Maud's brother, Charles, had become a Jesuit priest.

Probably as a way of appeasing his in-laws, Frank Joseph agreed to let his children be brought up as Catholics and to change his palpably Jewish surname. Duplicating the middle name of another of Maud's brothers, Felix Quinn McKeown, he became Frank Quinn, ersatz Gentile. He and Maud liked his new name enough to bestow it on the son she bore him during the winter of 1923.

In view of Maud's unstinting religiosity, which surely extended to a horror of contraception, her relationship with her husband can't have been a great sexual success, otherwise there wouldn't have been such a gap between the birth of Frank Quinn, Jr and her next pregnancy. On Sunday, 15 November 1925 their second child was, along with a high proportion of children at that time, born at home. Maud's labour must have been accompanied by the echoey noise of tannoy announcements from the railway station not far beyond the end of their small back garden. The scene of his birth was 'Brentwood', a large semi-detached house at 20 Rathmore Avenue. His family's home formed part of a new development, set in the grassy, tree-dotted south Liverpool suburb of Mossley Hill, byword for prim respectability.

Like his father, whose reputation as a boozy womaniser he'd inherit, Raymond didn't begin life with the name by which he came to be known. He was, instead, baptised Geoffrey Anthony Quinn – a name better suited to a Whitehall mandarin than a nightclub owner.

His mother was a reproachful woman of puritanical thrift and severity, reflected in one of her favourite maxims – 'Much wants more…' This frugality encompassed both the material and emotional worlds. Perpetuating the aloof style of parenting favoured by so many middle-class parents during the nineteenth century, the era of her birth, she avoided physical contact with her children. Public displays of affection were, in any event, something she regarded as 'common'. She was, according to her second child, 'a terrible snob'. Lest it reflect badly on her, she wouldn't even permit her husband to bring copies of the downmarket *News of the World* home from work.

Statues of the Virgin Mary were distributed round their house, presenting an inescapable reminder of her oppressive piety. She's likely to have been behind the decision to send Geoffrey – and presumably his elder brother Frank as well – to a local fee-paying infant school, run by the Notre Dame order of nuns. Geoffrey would remember the experience with great fondness. He said they taught him to be 'polite and forgiving'. While he seldom forgot their lessons in politeness, he had trouble with the concept of forgiveness, his natural inclinations being closer to the vengeful eye-for-an-eye creed of the Old Testament.

Two years before completing his primary schooling, he acquired a younger brother named Philip, the arrival of whom in 1931 appears to have accelerated the dissolution of his parents' marriage. His father moved out of the house on Rathmore Avenue soon afterwards, leaving his mother in what was, during the early 1930s, the rare and socially awkward position of being a single parent. Nonetheless she refused to divorce her husband because that contravened the teachings of Catholicism.

Geoffrey's aunts on his mother's side of the family – Sarah, Winifrid, Josephine, Mary and Catherina – did their best to make up for the absence of his father, their ubiquity teaching him to feel comfortable around women. The support from the McKeown family may also have been financial.

He and his elder brother were told to respond to enquiries about their

dad's whereabouts by saying that he was working abroad. In reality their errant father was living with a girlfriend in a house on the waterfront at New Brighton, just across the river from Liverpool docks. Decades from then, Geoffrey would reminisce about a melancholy occasion when his embittered mother had taken him there and pointed out the house's lighted windows.

His father's departure and the subsequent dissembling must have provided a hurtful introduction to the world of adult duplicity. Tears were an obvious release for the pain endured by Geoffrey. But he had, under the influence of his emotionally straitened mother, been brought up to believe men shouldn't cry. As an adult, he declared, 'I think it's absolutely appalling to see a man cry. That's the most terrible, terrible thing of all time.'

After primary school Geoffrey moved on to St Francis Xavier's College, the Catholic boys' private school where his brother Frank was already in the third year. Referred to by pupils and staff alike as 'SFX', it was a Jesuit-run institution, located on the fringe of the city centre. It had a reputation for offering its 600 pupils a route into the prestigious civil service or even to university, higher education at that stage being a privilege available to a tiny percentage of the population.

Maybe as a consequence of some childhood illness, Geoffrey – generally addressed as 'Geoff' – missed the start of the academic year, only attending his first lessons on Thursday, 9 November 1933. Arriving there would have been an intimidating experience for him – fear of the unknown, of mingling with older boys, of coping with its harsh discipline compounded by its dismal architecture. The arched entrance to the school pierced the flank of a huge red-brick French Gothic-style building, the monumental buttresses of which resembled the ribs of a dinosaur. Not exactly guaranteed to soothe any ripples of anxiety endured by the seven-year-old Geoff, attired in his unfamiliar new school uniform – cap, tie, grey blazer, knee-length shorts and long socks.