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PATRICK McGOOHAN

ferocious goody two-shoes

Is this virtuous—and sexy—British actor too good to be true? Ooo-ooo-oooh?

by Jeannie Sakol

☐ I keep having this dream about Patrick McGoohan.

It's a dark, creepy-crawly night, rife with distress for us fair damsels. I am racing through the Alley of Death, chased by Bad Guys with poor social skills, and it looks, my friends, like curtains or even worse, when all of a sudden who steps from the shadows?

Patrick McGoohan!

He frowns fiercely at the Bad Guys, says a few crisp words, and gives them a shove. They run. He then frowns fiercely at me for being out by myself and thus inviting woe. When he convoys me safely home, what, in the tender warm of the downstairs hall, does he do?

He shakes my hand!

Friends may smirk, but it's *my* dream. That's what Patrick McGoohan does, and I am glad. The man is genuinely a Good Guy. He acts with gallantry from strength, one feels, rather than default. He is bigger, stronger, smarter, classier than the Bad Guys. Further, it is his stated belief that men should honor and protect women.

At a time when the Hero Scene has become a playpen of fornicating games, it warms my bed socks to dream of Pat McGoohan. Alias John Drake of "Secret Agent," alias Number Six of *The Prisoner*, alias Jones of *Ice Station Zebra*, he shines with knightly fervor. Legend stuff. Arthur the King, yes; Arthur the discothèque, no. On the screen, always; in real life, absolutely.

As John Drake, Mr. McGoohan made television history by refusing to fire a gun or fondle a girl. "I abhor violence and cheap sex," he said at the time the series started ten years ago and happily repeats when circumstance warrants. "I believe in romance. Casual sex destroys romance. Besides, it is my view that a hero be a good man."

In "Secret Agent," art was forced to imitate the life-style of its hero. Or its hero would have walked out. Therefore, McGoohan *is* John Drake. He lives by a rigid code of self-discipline and a strict sense of privacy. He is intuitive, complicated, courteous, and a tenacious loner.

A devout romantic, what the Irish call "a darlin' man, a *daicent* man, a grand man," McGoohan has the Celtic Thing, that bardic blend of mysticism and virility which sometimes drives its possessor to the bottle or the cloth and the women who love him crazy. He walks the line of righteousness with the power and passion of a man committed to an ideal, and if you don't like it, too bad . . . a ferocious Goody Two-shoes.

When Mr. McG. refused to squeeze cold triggers and hot thighs in "Secret Agent," the British TV producers had a collective fit, all doom-and-gloom. With James Bond making more money for the movies than popcorn, how could any filmmaker have a kiss-kiss bang-bang series without either kiss or bang?

"Call me Prissy Pat," McGoohan said at the time. "A lot of old horse is being written about my attitude toward TV, but it can be summed up in a few simple words. I see TV as the third parent. It doesn't give you bulging muscles to say a four-letter word. The love life planned for John Drake would have made me some sort of sexual crank. Every week a different girl? Served up piping hot for tea? With the children and grannies watching?"

The brass pleaded. Just a few little gratuitous slaughters? Just a few little leering grabs and fakey groans?

McGoohan refused. For once, the Good Guy really won . . . and in terms the back office could understand. "Secret Agent"—called "Danger Man" in Britain—became one of the all-time successful television series. And its hero emerged as the highest-paid TV star in Great Britain. The series earned over $8,000,000 in the United States alone and is still trooping along in reruns.

A few months ago, I went to see Patrick McGoohan in Oslo, where he was scouting Norwegian locations for a film he plans to produce—Henrik Ibsen's *Brand*.

I had heard the actor was cold, difficult, belligerent, impossible, edgy, curt. Also, brusque, aloof, and churlish. One person conceded McGoohan was also tall.

The first thing Mr. Good Guy says to me is "I'll give you ten minutes."

That is about as long as it takes me to find my pen at the bottom of my safari bag, once I can get the straps open and assuming the pen is not back on the bathtub ledge where I scribble Great Thoughts while inking my eyes. I seek to enslave my hero with a provocative question: "How's everything going?"

"Mind your own business."

Patrick McGoohan does not suffer interviews gladly. He considers his personal life personal, his eighteen-year marriage to Joan Drummond, a onetime actress and the daughter of a London divorce lawyer, a private purlieu, and the lives of their three daughters beyond discussion.

"Ten minutes!" he repeats, doing his lethal, head-down squint through horn-rim frames, the eyebrows crunched and menacing, the mouth curling slightly downward on one side, and nary a trace of ho-ho-I'm-only-joking. McGoohan does not kid around.

At that moment my bag falls on the floor, upside down . . . the kind of cute meeting that once got the shopgirl and the millionaire together in the revolving door. There lies my life on the floor: a half-eaten Milky Way left over from *Faces*, chain belt, hairbrush, Q-tips, Kleenex, brandy, perfume, Dramamine, eyeshade, ballet slippers for plane prowling—and my magic instant-stain pen.

As we bob about picking up the stuff, I am able to take long, searching looks at McGoohan, the biggest, handsomest, zingiest Irish priest this side of Spencer Tracy Heaven. His eyes are a piercing cerulean blue—Winsor & Newton 348 straight from the tube—the rest of him a symphony of soft-key Technicolor, the tints vibrant yet muted. The skin tones are fair and autumny gold, faintly freckled . . . the hair thick and glinty, a caramel bronze. Balm to the eyes and nourishment to the spirit, he is 6′ 2″, forty-one years old, and projects the kind of tender strength that could

Photo by Transworld Feature Syndicate

pull a tree out by the roots or fix the hair ribbon of a weeping child.

His is a functional masculinity. He moves with the contained ferocity of a tightly wound spring. Control is perhaps the operative word for McGoohan. His voice comes at you in clipped, staccato jabs, as if he had a crisper in his mouth, with faint echoes of Orson Welles fire and the metallic insinuation of Laurence Olivier's Richard III. Not a sound goes to waste. The voice is succinct. Cold. Reassuring when it suits him. It carries his tune.

We're in the sitting room of Patrick McGoohan's suite in the Bristol Hotel, located in the heart of downtown Oslo. There are no hangers-on, no claques, no cliques, no secretaries, advisers, research teams, yes-men, cousins, or go-fors. A *Peer Gynt* breeze tears through open windows. It is 98 degrees below, but Pat has felt the need for a little fresh tundra air.

My gear restashed, it is now stalemate time. My host has not asked me to sit down so we both stand there. He draws at a small, black cigar. Menacing. Yankee go home. I feel like a blind date that didn't make it. I try to look small and helpless. He offers me a cigar. Breakthrough. I take one.

"Have you eaten?" he asks.

It is nine o'clock Nordic nighttime. I have eaten three groups of plastic plane grub and one 29-cent bag of Schrafft's blue mints: "I'm starved."

The restaurant is four Arctic blocks away. McGoohan puts a brown corduroy jacket over his dark blue suit with the side vents and the blue plaid shirt and the dark blue tie. No peacock he. An Eskimo maybe . . . no ski boots, no grandstand parka, no turtleneck, scarf, gloves, hat, earmuffs, *nor* any sign of freezing to death as he quick-marches me past several warm taxis through the streets to Blom's. It's at 41 Johansgate and is the local hangout for us artists and writers, the kind of place where you expect S. Z. Sakall as maître d' and José Iturbi at the piano playing "Song of Norway" with his knuckles. There are tiers of white-clothed tables, heavy wooden beams, and, by heavens, a grand piano played not by Iturbi but by Oscar Homolka's brother. A regular Joan Fontaine setting, except I'm not that thin and Charles Boyer is not having any.

Rose Tobias-Shaw, a longtime friend of Pat's who was casting director for "Secret Agent," was right when she warned me, "Look into those bright blue eyes and *die*!" But I settle, instead, into a pose of rigid hysteria.

"How long are you planning to stay?"

A few days, I had thought, following my hero around, at a respectful distance, of course, one eye out for trolls while he stakes out fjords for his future film. But short answers are best: "Oh, a few days."

"Nonsense! I'll give you ten minutes."

An hour and a half and some poached fish and white wine later, the tension has relaxed enough for me to call him Mr. McGoohan. All right, what do I want to talk about?

"Heroes."

Good start: "Why must we kill our heroes? We need them now as we needed them in the past. Julius Caesar. Henry the Fifth at Agincourt. Every real hero since Jesus Christ has been moral. We need moral heroes because they represent the generous, questing spirit of man. Without that we cannot survive."

Referring to the deaths of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, McGoohan says, "Why must our heroes die? Don't we want them? These men were heroes. They're dead —and there are no replacements."

The brutal, mindless antihero who dominates so much of films and TV dismays him as an affront to masculinity. He sees James Bond as a computerized stud. "Virility plus masculinity do not add up to promiscuity!" he declares. "In a fair fight Drake would beat Bond anytime."

To even begin to understand the complexities of a man like Patrick McGoohan could mean a lifetime study of James Joyce, Irish Catholicism, the history of Ireland from Brian Boru to Brendan Behan, the heroes and scoundrels, and the woven threads of poetry, idealism, mother love, and thwarted sexuality.

Like Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, Patrick McGoohan pretends his own devastating sex appeal does not exist. The temptations of the flesh are mortal sins, and he fights them with the fury of St. George against the dragons. Aware of the pitfalls and prerogatives of his profession, he maintains a constant self-vigil, especially when he is away from his family: "Boredom and loneliness, damaging in any circumstances, become totally destructive to those who are insecure in their personal lives."

Patrick McGoohan likes women; he'll protect them, but he's scared silly for his immortal soul and private happiness —and he's probably right. "I've married my first wife and my last wife!" he proclaims.

At one time Patrick McGoohan very nearly became a priest. The only son of a rural Irish family is traditionally expected to take the cloth, and Pat seems to have looked forward to the calling. With his four younger, adoring sisters as congregation, he would deliver "sermons" and enjoy the prospect of a turned-around collar—until the age of sixteen, when he decided, "My sense of vocation was inadequate."

It came as a mild surprise to learn that Patrick Joseph McGoohan was born in New York City. The date: March 19, 1928; place: the Astoria section of Queens, just across the Fifty-ninth Street bridge from Manhattan. His parents were a handsome young pair, Thomas and Rose Fitzgerald McGoohan, who had come steerage to America in 1925 from a farm in County Leitrim. Tom got a job with the Edison Company. Rose, an accomplished seamstress, went to work for Macy's. But by the time baby Patrick was six months old his parents were so homesick they returned to Mullhehmore, where McGoohans had lived for four hundred years.

Looking back dreamily, the actor recalls his first seven years as being "rich in the simplicity and discipline of country life." Nostalgic for the McGoohans' forty acres, the tall hay barn, and stout white farmhouse with its thatched roof, he warms to the memory of "fat rambling roses that covered the garden wall in summer, their scent filtering indoors to mingle with other smells of peat fires, oatmeal cookies, and new-mown hay."

The rustic idyll collapsed in 1935 as the world depression reached the small farm, which could no longer support the family. Once more, Tom McGoohan emigrated, this time to England. From there, the story of Pat's youth teeters between Dickens and soap opera. The boy, taken from his fresh green fields to the dank industrial grime of Sheffield, where his father found work, came down with bronchial asthma. Ill most of the time, he withdrew into a moody, sullen shell, made few friends, got poor marks at school.

One good result of World War II was the evacuation of Patrick and his sisters to the Leicestershire countryside, where the antiseptic fresh air took care of his asthma. In new surroundings Pat became a whiz kid at math, won a scholarship to Ratcliffe, a respectable Catholic school, hurled his stringbean body into boxing and became captain of the team. He was sixteen years old, 6′2″, shy, gangling, and clumsy by his own description when he finished school. Having decided against the priesthood, Pat became one of the "Wallflower Delights," a pack of local teen-agers who paid threepence to attend Saturday dances at St. Vincent's Youth Club, skulking around in Bogart mackintoshes, drinking lemonade, too terrified to ask girls to dance.

One particular Saturday, a certain Father McDonagh asked Pat if he would take a small part in a club play. The role called for him to carry a bucket of coal across the stage. That was it, group, but McGoohan "discovered that being on stage, sheltered by the bright glare of the foot-

lights, was a much better cloak than a mackintosh."

Pat may have fallen in love with the theatre, but it was many hard years before the affair was reciprocal. To support his beginning dalliance with his new mistress, McGoohan, at twenty, took a job as teaboy at the respected Sheffield Playhouse, spending two years sweeping floors, building sets, working lights—and brewing tea. Finally, an actor zapped out with appendicitis in true soap-opera style, and Patrick McGoohan made his professional debut: "At twenty-two, an actor at last."

Enter next mutual love, in the person of Joan Drummond, a new actress in the company, straight from the glamorous Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts . . . at eighteen years old a sophisticated Londoner, a vivacious mixture of her Viennese mother and Scottish father: "She was a glowing sunburnt-to-mahogany girl with black hair and dark eyes. I found her overwhelming and fascinating." Within a year, on May 19, 1951, they were married at St. William's Church, Sheffield, between a rehearsal of *The Rivals* and a matinee of *The Taming of the Shrew*. In 1952 baby Catherine was born.

The next few years were rough, although Pat did progress to the Bristol Old Vic while Joan played the favored wife in the London production of *The King and I*. But they saw each other only once a week. By 1953 Pat, too, made it to London's West End, as a Protestant priest in a play called *Serious Charge*, which led to some forgettable film jobs, including one as the Swedish masseur who carried Laurence Harvey to a bath in *I Am a Camera*.

Eventually, Orson Welles picked McGoohan to play Starbuck to his Ahab in the stage production of *Moby Dick*. Producer Wolf Mankowitz, reminiscing recently about Pat at the time, told me, "The son of a bitch was moody, temperamental—and absolutely electric onstage!"

The J. Arthur Rank people "discovered" the Irishman then and signed him for some stinkers that barely rate late-late showing. By 1958 McGoohan managed to squeeze out of his movie contract and began to appear in American plays on that new medium, the telly. That's when he played Charlie Castle in Clifford Odets' teeth-gnasher, *The Big Knife*, that's when British TV pioneer Lew Grade saw him, and that, fans, is how Patrick Joseph McGoohan became John Drake.

Soap-opera time again: Why did a dedicated professional even consider taking a running part in a TV series if he still wanted to be a serious actor? Answer: He was thirty years old, and child Number Two was en route.

McGoohan, as we all know, took the job, and his strict moral code went with the deal. In one of the first scripts, he was directed to wrestle a juicy blonde on a bed with an aim to reaching a safe on the far wall. Pat refused: "John Drake is not James Bond. He is an ordinary man with a stubborn brand of courage. Hampering him with phony romance and festooning him with guns is ridiculous. He's tough, almost taciturn. The speed, suspense, and effect are better without this nonsense."

Not only did ladies go tilt but men, ratings, critics, and scholars, too. Kevin Sullivan, a Joycean specialist and a dean at Columbia University, told me, "The McGoohan character is a latter-day Philip Marlowe. Marlowe is a man with a strong sense of values. He doesn't take himself seriously, but he does feel it's better not to be on the side of permissiveness and violence, and that on balance—just as John Drake feels—he should be on the side of good. Bogart playing Marlowe had the same impact as McGoohan has on-screen . . . an inner cool stemming from their own intelligence."

Back in the Oslo restaurant, I am smoking my nth black cigar while McGoohan is growing bored with the subject of John Drake. He bends over to look at my notebook: "What else do you want to know? 'Textures'? What's this about textures?"

Textures interest me, so I had planned to ask Pat about them. Not straight out, like, "Hey, what textures turn you on?" More subtle. It is too late: "I was wondering how you feel about textures."

"Anyone who asks that question is a nit."

To change the subject, I show him the dot game, the one where you start off with six dots and have to connect two each time without breaking the lines. He wins, four times in a row.

"About *textures* . . ." McGoohan says, articulating the word with a disdain others reserve for scrofula. Sinful as the concept may be, he talks about textures he likes . . . the striking of matches, the feel of cool crystal, the petals of flowers, clean linens, a good woman. . . . *That* makes him self-conscious.

Over more white wine and with Oscar Homolka's brother playing "Deep Purple" and "Danny Boy" in the background, the talk rolls on: "I have a virile hope for the future. That's why I did *The Prisoner* . . . an allegory . . . a fable . . . a protest against regimentation and loss of individuality. We must not become puppets. That's why I'm doing *Brand*, a passionate rebuttal against our own times. Ultimately, each of us must live within ourselves, and I'm just an idiot like the rest of the crowd."

The conversation turns to family life. The McGoohans, he tells me, divide their time between a house in Switzerland and one in Mill Hill, ten miles from London. Last June, Patrick created a bit of a kefuffle with the town council by erecting a six-foot fence to keep Sunday day-trippers from peering in at him and his family in their backyard. Because he had not requested permission to build the fence, the local powers wanted him to tear it down. "While I readily accept this sort of exposure for myself," he told reporters at the time, "I think my wife and children are entitled to privacy. My wife was particularly affected, as she was cooking in the kitchen."

The privacy of Joan and the girls (there are now three—Catherine, seventeen; Frances, nine; and Anne, eight) is sacrosanct. No interviews. No photographs. Those who know them say that Joan at thirty-six is a radiant beauty in full flower who worships Pat and couldn't care a fig about having given up her acting career. "She's loving, demonstrative, vivacious—must be that Viennese blood! Absolutely devoted to Pat and perfect for him," a friend said.

A close-knit family, the McGoohans believe in old-fashioned parental responsibility. "If my daughter were to take drugs, it would be my fault, not hers," the father says. "I would not have given her the security or principles to live by. I would blame myself absolutely!"

Pat is against the Pill: "Malcolm Muggeridge said he thought the Pill was more dangerous than the Bomb. I agree, because it hits at the very root of what a human being is. It interferes with the natural functions of the body and we don't yet know medically what the repercussions of its long usage will be. But I'm quite sure the long-range psychological effects will be immense, because anyone who takes something like that without effort, which is simply a lack of willpower, must destroy some part of her spirit."

On the other hand, McGoohan approves of a recently enacted British law permitting sexual relationships between consenting males: "Homosexuals are a fact of society. It was a progressive and very humane bill."

The recent fad for meditation irks him by its notoriety: "Meditation is the principle of all religion—the oldest thing in history—so why is it publicized? When the Beatles went to see the Maharishi, it turned meditation into a new detergent—up for sale. Extraordinary!"

The growing permissiveness in films offends Pat even more: "We've seen just about everything. The only thing left is for someone to walk about and urinate through the screen. They'd say this is just life, a documentary on urination!"

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McGoohan's deep concern with man's eternal war between Good and Evil has been reflected in his roles from the time he had the muscle to pick and choose. As John Drake, Pat was the stylish Good Guy, with more depth of character than the script suggests. As Number Six in *The Prisoner*, his recurring cry was "I am not a number. I am a man! I will not be pushed, filed, indexed, debriefed, or numbered!"

As for Brand, though Ibsen conceived him over a hundred years ago, his search for meaning in life has a Today sound. "It is our time," Brand says, "our generation, that is sick and must be cured. All you want is to flirt, and play and laugh. . . ."

To show Patrick McGoohan I am not all frivolous, I mention George Bernard Shaw's essays on Ibsen, which I had read in prep for the trip.

"Nonsense! The man didn't know what he was talking about."

Another $1.95 down the drain. Though I *could* see how Shaw might have put Pat's back up. The great Irish dramatist, critic, and wit had said rather acidly, "Brand dies a saint having caused more intense suffering by his saintliness than the most talented sinner could possibly have done with twice his opportunities."

An actress friend of McGoohan's commented that a man acts best the things that are closest to him. "Pat is a monumental actor," she said, "but I hope he doesn't go the way of all Ibsen's heroes."

Happily, my ten minutes with Patrick McGoohan stretches into three days. He is all the Boy Scout things . . . courteous, considerate, kind. Each subsequent meeting—more black cigars, more fish, more wine—is arranged with consummate formality:

My phone rings.

"This is Patrick McGoohan."

Who else would be calling me in Oslo, Norway?

"If you're not doing anything—" he says each time, not putting me on but truly unable to accept someone's being in Oslo solely to see him.

We look at old farmhouses and churches, the fairy-tale kind with gingerbread trim and glistening icicles. Pat's a fast walker, a big strider, a sweet teaser who leads you through four feet of snow and then inquires, "Are your tootsies cold?" My famous-make paper boots add a certain humor to this question, but for once—friends, you can smirk—I do not complain. No opportunity. McGoohan holds the stage.

Fierce question: "Do you believe in God?"

Stern order: "Read a book called *Rain on the Wind* . . . by an Irish writer, Walter Macken . . . a lovely book, a grand book."

Shy disclaimer: "I'm not doing *Brand* to save the world, but because it's a good story."

On review, I decide that Patrick McGoohan is that Good Man who's so hard to find. He achieves with his acting and from his essential integrity what a woman wants her own man to do for her. He makes her want to be better. He is a gent who makes it appealing to be a lady. True, one worries about him. Is he having fun? Might goodness become tiresome? Can man flourish without the sudden, inspired vulgarity, the rare, erotic tap dance? Tantalizing is the sure probability that these both exist within him and activate the whole . . . subtle spicing that makes this particular Irish stew.

Patrick McGoohan leaves me, weeks later, with an odd sense of mourning I cannot shake. A sighing sob of loss, a wistful grief not for the chances I have wrecked but the ones that never came. ■