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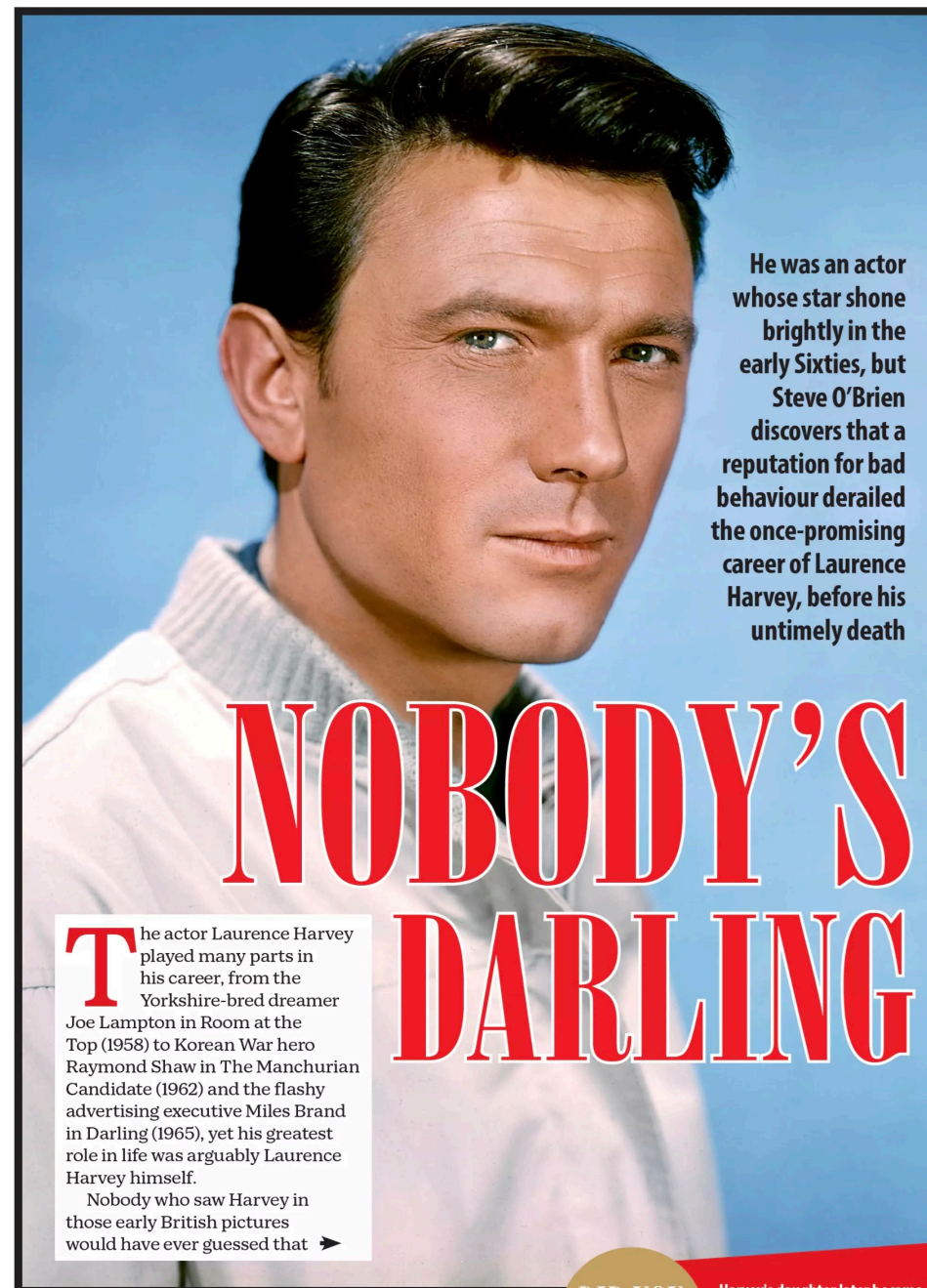
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He was an actor whose star shone brightly in the early Sixties, but Steve O'Brien discovers that a reputation for bad behaviour derailed the once-promising career of Laurence Harvey, before his untimely death

# NOBODY'S DARLING

**T**he actor Laurence Harvey played many parts in his career, from the Yorkshire-bred dreamer Joe Lampton in *Room at the Top* (1958) to Korean War hero Raymond Shaw in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and the flashy advertising executive Miles Brand in *Darling* (1965), yet his greatest role in life was arguably Laurence Harvey himself.

Nobody who saw Harvey in those early British pictures would have ever guessed that ➔

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Harvey's daughter later became a bounty hunter and was portrayed by Keira Knightley in the film *Domino* (2005)



he wasn't a wholly home-grown talent. Whether he was playing northern, as in *Room at the Top*, or officer-class English, as in *The Silent Enemy* (1958), he sounded like a true-blood Brit, someone as familiar with the hills of West Riding as the eateries of South Kensington. Even off stage he had the clipped English manner of someone who'd been raised on British shores, yet that persona was a fantasy, invented by the man born Larushka Mischa Skikne to working-class Jewish parents in Joniškis, Lithuania in 1928.

Harvey never attempted to conceal his past, but he certainly cultivated a new sophisticated persona after arriving in the UK in 1946. In his 1973 obituary in *The New York Times*, the paper described the actor as, 'a fastidious connoisseur of antiques, food and wine,' adding that, 'His baronial manner, cheeky wit and upper-class British accent gave the impression that he was of aristocratic birth.'

### LOW-BUDGET MOVIES

Trained at RADA (though he left after three months), Harvey's journey to the big time was a gradual one. Offered a contract by Associated British Picture Corporation, his early appearances were mostly low-budget B-pictures, graduating to more respectable fare in the latter half of the Fifties,

including leading roles in such films as *Storm over the Nile* (1955), *Three Men in a Boat* (1956) and *The Silent Enemy*. His breakthrough came with the kitchen-sink drama *Room at the Top*, a film that earned him a BAFTA nomination and an Oscar nod for Best Actor. Suddenly, Hollywood took notice of this enigmatic, brooding newcomer, with John Wayne personally picking Harvey to star as Texian Army officer William Barret Travis in 1960's *The Alamo*. Two years later, he stole the show from Frank Sinatra as the brainwashed Sergeant Raymond Shaw in political thriller *The Manchurian Candidate*, a performance that noted film critic Pauline Kael called, 'daring and assured'.

Harvey's star shone so brightly around that time that he shared top billing with Dirk Bogarde for John Schlesinger's awards-laden drama *Darling*. In fact, the two actors had many things in common – each of them had worked their way up from quota quickies and exuded a somewhat inscrutable screen presence. Not just that, but both felt they had something to hide in terms of their private lives in the early Sixties. Though Harvey had married in 1957 to the actress Margaret Leighton (they divorced in 1961), his sexual tastes ran in both directions. He was certainly intimate with James Woolf, a film producer who with his



Second wife Joan Perry was the widow of the notorious Columbia Studios boss Harry Cohn

brother John ran Romulus Films, who'd signed Harvey in the Fifties, though according to the actor's friend David Ambrose, 'The plain fact was that Larry would have had sex with a porcupine if it would have furthered his career.'

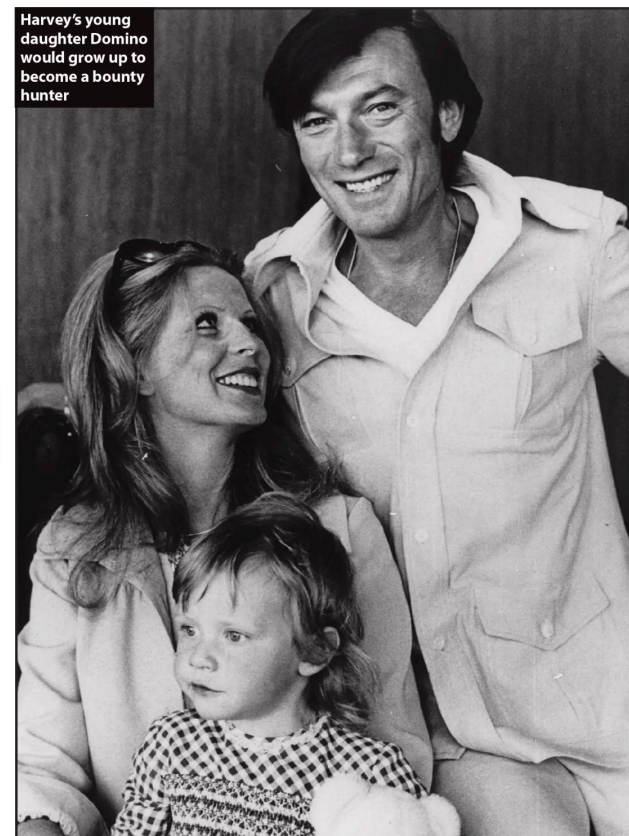
If the general public were oblivious to Harvey's bisexuality, it was an open secret in Hollywood. Frank Sinatra's valet George Jacobs revealed in his book *Mr S: My Life With Frank Sinatra*, that Harvey often made passes at him while visiting the singer, something of which his employer was fully aware. 'He has the handicaps of being a homo, a Jew and a Pollock [sic], so people should go easy on him,' he quotes Sinatra as having said.

### STUTTERING CAREER

Still, Harvey did remarry, twice, first to Joan Perry in 1968, who was 17 years his senior, and then in 1972 to Paulene Stone (18 years his junior), with whom he had his only child, Domino.

Outside of his private life, things were just as chaotic. While Dirk Bogarde found himself becoming one of the Sixties' most in-demand and respected actors, Harvey's career faltered in the latter half of the decade. As similar as they were, Harvey simply didn't have the range of his Rank-tutored rival, and certainly many of those within the acting community didn't rate him, personally or professionally. As the actor Robert Stephens summed up in his autobiography, Harvey was 'an appalling human being, and even more unforgivably an appalling actor'.

Harvey's final years saw him in a succession of mostly forgettable euro-putting productions, and a smattering of TV roles, including episodes of *Night Gallery* (1972) and *Columbo* (1973). More than becoming a great actor, Harvey had dreamed of being a superstar, but neither came to fruition. His final film, before he died of cancer aged just 45, was one he directed himself, the horror *Welcome to Arrow Beach* (1973). Sadly, it was



Harvey's young daughter Domino would grow up to become a bounty hunter

savaged by the press (the *Los Angeles Times* called it 'a dreary, tedious tale') and received only a limited theatrical release.

Laurence Harvey was Sixties cinema's nearly-man, an actor who, at the close of the previous decade, looked like he had the world at his feet. But things failed to go his way, and in 1968 he characterised his Hollywood career as, 'a pissy little one'. 'I'm not a big star,' he lamented to David Ambrose, adding, 'I never have been.'

But BAFTA and the Academy have never given out awards for roles that actors play in their real lives, so he never received any recognition for reinventing himself, from those dirt-poor

beginnings in Lithuania. Maybe the problem with Harvey was that he never realised how far charm and kindness go in furthering your career. There are testimonials from countless actors about how challenging he was to work with. 'Acting with Laurence Harvey is like acting by yourself, only worse,' Jane Fonda famously said, while Sid James found him, 'pompous and full of his own importance'. But being unpleasant was something Harvey bizarrely relished. Recalling a time when someone asked him, 'Why is it so many people hate you?' he replied, 'Do they? How super! I'm really quite pleased about it!'



Harvey appeared with Julie Christie and Dirk Bogarde in *Darling*... the romantic satire about Sixties swinging London

His first marriage was to actress Margaret Leighton who had made her name on stage and, later, in films including *The Winslow Boy* (1948)

**DID YOU KNOW?**

The actor reprised his *Room at the Top* role in a 1965 sequel, *Life at the Top*, directed by Ted Kotcheff.