



Sally Gail, Shamrock, 1985. Courtesy of Texas Gallery, Houston

# The Last Splash

David Crossley

Long ago, my friend Tom lived at the Shamrock Hotel where his father was the manager so we had the run of the place. We were at an age when everything is available and free and life can be about purpose or about waste and for the moment we had chosen waste. We had postponed our careers to concentrate on the luxury of the Shamrock with its glorious pool and the penthouses and all the other comforts and pleasures of a fine hotel. There was a constant flow of waiters with food and drink and cigarettes. Our gluttony and whims were terrible and expensive but everything was on the house so we denied ourselves nothing and when we were bored we made long-distance phone calls to Jawaharlal Nehru. Sometimes we stood on the 16th-floor balcony to drop kitchen matches which exploded when they hit the sidewalk and terrified the glamorous people coming and going.

Life was about existentialism, which meant lounging around the hotel pool which is the grandest in the world. We were very intelligent and educated then, so we could drink Bloody Marys in the sunshine and talk about Camus and be Camus and look at the waiters with quiet understanding before we suggested that they deliver steaks to us. Because of our endless credit, we were very popular around the pool and made many new friends every day, especially young women whose welfare our waiters saw to as the girls realized that with us they could fully address their desires.

Our favorite place to eat there was Trader Vic's, which served rich, poisonous dream drinks and lots of wonderful little snacks. When we went to someone's home for dinner we went out through the Shamrock kitchen and carried off armloads of huge, double-cut strip sirloins and mushrooms and pounds of butter. We took what we wanted at all hours.

The lobby was a wonderful place where people as privileged as we flowed in and out speaking European languages and

being rich. We had almost no money but in the world of the Shamrock none was needed. Many of our friends were rich so we always traveled in wonderful cars. Sometimes a young woman would pick me up from work in a white Thunderbird convertible and my co-workers would watch me and the beautiful blonde in the sun on our way to the Shamrock and the pool and Tom's private rooms.

Life at the Shamrock was more of a mood than a series of vignettes. It was often a question of whether a day or a week was in or out of control and if out whether there would be any dying or brain damage. Once we had a Roman toga party which occupied the entire 16th floor. We covered the floors with mattresses and squashed grapes with our feet and threw food and glasses at walls and were very personal with one another in our sheets. The damage to the hotel was significant, but I recall no consequences. Several people who were involved in this unruly life are now respectable and successful Houstonians. We became sophisticated at the Shamrock during the infancy of rock and roll and just barely prior to the widespread use of drugs among young people, so it could have been worse.

My long ago way of life at the great hotel has been beyond my means ever since, but I still love to go there and swim with my family and have a drink by the pool and listen to the European voices and remember that life can be dangerous and thrilling. The Shamrock has not changed at all except that it is threatened by the Texas Medical Center board, which is rumored to be ready around the end of June to turn the dream to rubble. I am unable to conceive of any justification for the destruction of such a perfect and rare place but I understand that there are men with no souls who have not lived well. They are able to contemplate this action because the Shamrock has always been about light and dancing and endless gaiety and not enough Houstonians are interested in these aspects of life now. ■

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