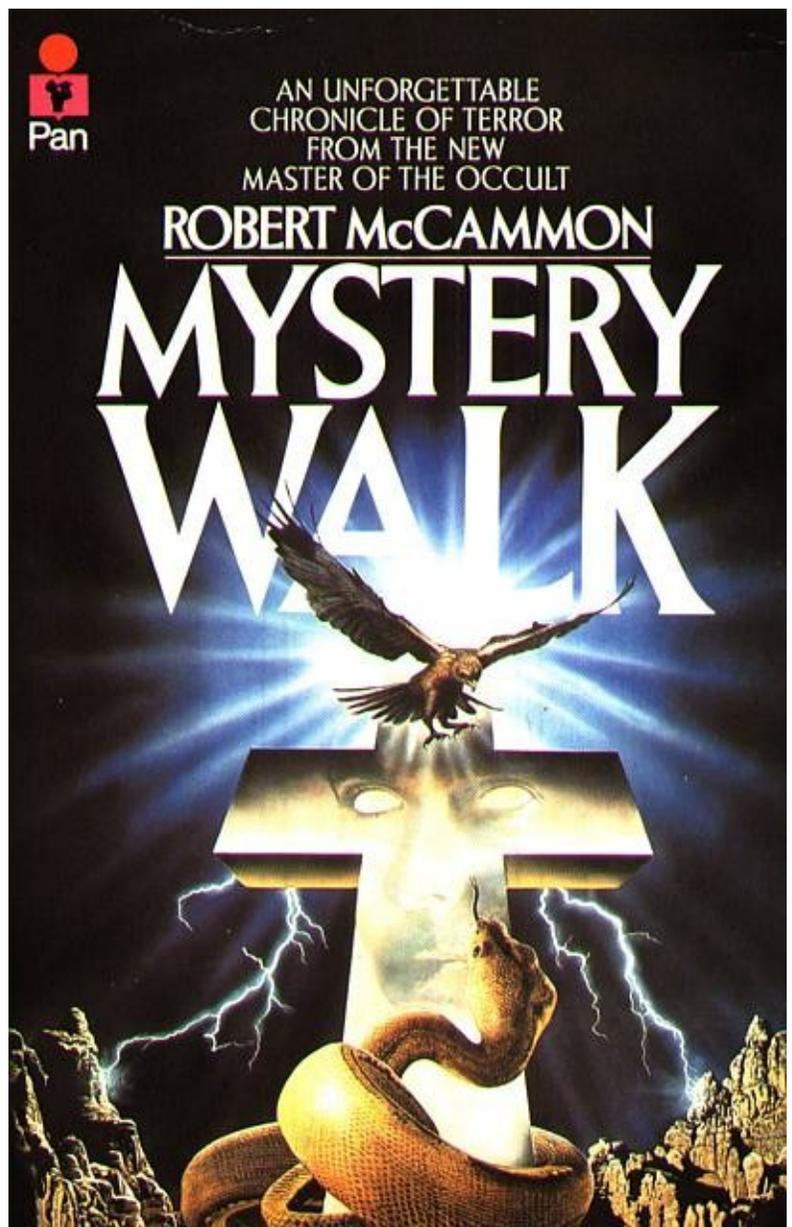


LIGHTS  
OUT!

The  
ROBERT R. McCAMMON  
Newsletter

Vol. 2 No. 2  
Issue 6  
October 1991

Final  
Issue



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“And Now, the End Is Here....”

A Look at Today by Hunter Goatley

Welcome to the final issue of *Lights Out!* I hope you will enjoy this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

We read last issue about McCammon’s plans for the future; I, for one, am glad to see the direction he’s taking. Over the past two and a half years, I’ve been more immersed in the horror field than I ever thought I would be; I’ve met some very nice people, including a number of authors whose work I’ve admired for years and authors just starting out. It’s been fun, but I’ve also had to pay a price: horror burnout. I’m pretty much sick of it, just like I believe a lot of authors and fans are. Since I started *Lights Out!* there have been novels like *Mine*, *Sunglasses After Dark*, *Black Wind*, *Savage Season*, *Moonbane*, *Mark of the Werewolf*, and many other excellent horror novels—just look at the recommended reading lists in *Lights Out!*

But look at the last few months—Stephen King publishes a quartet of novellas that most people ho-hummed about and an “unexpurgated” version of *The Stand* that was practically ruined by his (or his editor’s) updating the story to 1990; Dan Simmons releases a couple of novels that sound like all those cheap horror novels that real horror fans won’t read (ancient Indian curses?); Bantam tries to force a hit with Alan Rodgers’s *Fire* by comparing it to *The Stand* and *Swan Song*, when in reality the writing was atrocious and the story was a weak rip-off, at best; Pocket Books continues to churn out new V.C. Andrews novels, though Andrews has been dead for years (the new books are written by Andrew Neiderman—now there’s a writer for you); every publisher seems to have its own version of Anne Rice’s *Interview with a Vampire* (*Memoirs of a Vampire* was one title, I believe); and the latest rage, everyone publishes books written “in the tradition of *The Silence of the Lambs*”—which means they feature serial killers and gruesome violence, without any of the elements that made *The Silence of the Lambs* one of the best books of the decade.

Even the first Horror Writers of America anthology, *Under the Fang*, was disappointing. You’d have thought that some of the biggest names in horror would’ve contributed—but they didn’t. Sure, many of the names are recognizable, and some are even “hot.” But except for McCammon, none of them are the “heavy-hitters” that might have helped sell

more copies, which was supposed to benefit the HWA. And most of the stories didn’t feel like they were written to the world McCammon created, which was published here in issue 4.

I also just got to see Stephen Spignesi’s *The Shape Under the Sheet: The Complete Stephen King Encyclopedia*. What is the world coming to? It’s hard for me to believe that people will actually pay \$110 for this book and that Spignesi spent four years of his life on it. Who cares what book dealers think about King’s novels and the movies based on them? Who wants a listing of all the people, places, and things in King’s novels and stories? It’s exactly this kind of fanaticism that makes me glad that this is the last issue of *Lights Out!* I endeavored from the beginning to keep *Lights Out!* from becoming like *Castle Rock* was, but it’s obvious to me now that its mere existence makes it practically the same thing.

So after years of reading almost nothing but horror, I’ve been reading everything but. I’ve found myself enjoying the detective novels by Andrew Vachss (one of the best writers I’ve ever read), George C. Chesbro, Walter Mosley, and Jonathan Kellerman. Ken Grimwood’s fantasy *Replay* captivated me. And I read Robert R. McCammon’s *Boy’s Life* twice—and plan to read it again.

It’s pretty refreshing, actually, to find that there are writers in other genres that are capable of pulling me into a story. For so long, I only read horror because what little time I had to spend on reading, I wanted to read something that I knew would grab hold of me and not let go. Fewer and fewer horror novels are doing this to me, so I’m moving on and discovering new worlds.

I would like to take a moment to thank you for your patience with the delays, moves, printing problems, and everything else. I hope you enjoyed *Lights Out!* as much as I did, and I thank you for your interest!

Finally, a special thanks to everyone who helped out with *Lights Out!* in all sorts of ways. In particular, I’m especially grateful to Rick and Sally McCammon, who have been most helpful these last few years. Thank you!

On the cover: the 1984 British Pan Books edition of *Mystery Walk*. My favorite cover. . . . ■

<b>Lights Out!</b>	Published by: <b>Hunter Goatley</b>	Thanks to Jack Slay, Paul Schulz, Adam Rothberg, and you. Very special thanks to Rick & Sally McCammon for their friendship and hospitality over the last few years. And again, incredibly special thanks to Dana & Margaret Goatley!	This newsletter was typeset on a Digital VAX 6320, using the T <sub>E</sub> X typesetting system developed by Donald E. Knuth.
The Robert R. McCammon Newsletter	<i>Lights Out!</i> P. O. Box 9609 Bowling Green, KY 42102-9609		
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# The Address

## by Robert R. McCammon

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I began researching *The Address* as I was working on *Swan Song*, and it was supposed to be the next book after *The Wolf's Hour*. Little did I realize at that point what grief *The Address* was going to give me!

*The Address* is—or would have been, I guess it's more correct to say—about a haunted house in Beverly Hills, and about Hollywood between the years 1919 to 1991. It would have been a series of ten or so interlocked novelettes, each concerning the then-current resident of the house known as the Address, which was built by John Samson Wales, a silent film director in the mold of D.W. Griffith, Orson Welles, and John Huston. I got about two hundred pages into the project when I realized I couldn't finish it. It was too brutal, too tough, too horrifying for me to continue on with, and I had to flee from the Address because I just couldn't handle it.

I think it would have been a terrific book. It would have been a truthful book, and the truth—at least as far as I can see it—is that Hollywood has always been a gorgeous monster. It has always seduced its victims, fed them at the banquet table of fame and fortune, and then cut them off at the kneecaps when the dark, glittering bounties of Hollywood's feasts became too much to resist. The more I researched Hollywood's past, the more I found this to be true. The Motion Picture business, which began as sort of a lark for a couple of studios, rapidly became a power that beckoned idealists, artists, gangsters, murderers, con-men, and egotists by the thousands. And it surprised me, really, that the sexual and drug scandals we associate with the film community today have been going on since the beginning of Hollywood as a movie town. I wanted in *The Address* to focus on how Hollywood changed from being an orange-grove community into this seething, star-crossed behemoth, but the darkness I uncovered behind the facades actually depressed me so much I found it very, very tough going.

The main character of *The Address* would have been, of course, the house itself. The presence of John Samson Wales would have always been there, directing behind the scenes. The character of David Bonner, first introduced as an elderly man in a retirement home, would have aged through the novel as it progressed from 1919 to the last novelette.

I do have an outline of what each story would have been, so here goes:

**Fade In:** The opening section, in which David Bonner, John Samson Wales, and the Address are introduced. This is the section you're about to read. If you'll notice when John Samson Wales is telling David what movies he hopes to direct in the future, he's actually giving a list of what the other novelettes will be.

**The Prophecies of Nattie Dumas:** After "Nostradamus." Nattie Dumas is a star of silent comedies who's

been groomed as a bleach-blonde kewpie-doll and who gets a pie in her face at least once a film. She actually has much more intelligence and talent than her studio allows her, and they refuse to release her from her contract of doing these stupid comedies. Nattie falls down a flight of stairs in the Address, hits her head, and begins to have visions of Hollywood's future—the "talkies," "Technicolor," "Cinemascope," and everything including *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, and *E.T.* But of course, everybody thinks she's losing her mind. Nattie also has visions of the darker side of Hollywood's future: the immense urban sprawl, the drug gang wars, and so forth. The studio commits her to an insane asylum, where she creates a theater group from the inmates and stages the plays of Shakespeare, which were her first love as a young high-school thespian.

**The Lonesome Pardner:** Set in the late 1920s. Little Chubbs is a ten-year-old boy, an ex-member of the "Roughhouse Pugs"—a.k.a. "Dead-End Kids"—but he's gotten so fat the studio refuses to let him work for fear he'll have a heart attack. His guardians are a sadistic pair who have "rented" him from his family back in West Virginia, and they're the ones responsible for fattening him up because the studio needed a chubby boy for the Roughhouse Pugs series. The gruesome twosome put Little Chubbs on a starvation diet—and in this sequence, dear friends, yours truly began to realize he had bitten off a little more than he could chew. What follows is a look at the depths two insane and desperate people could sink to in an effort to salvage their meal ticket. However, Little Chubbs has a friend who appears to him in the attic of the Address: the ghost of the Lonesome Pardner, a cowboy star who bought the house after Nattie Dumas lived there and hanged himself because his voice wasn't good enough to carry over from silents to talkies. The Lonesome Pardner helps Little Chubbs escape the prison of the Address, and the two guardians murder each other with knives in an unappetizing spectacle.

**In the Walls:** An Al Capone-type and his henchmen move into the Address in the '30s after the gangster buys a film studio—the same studio, incidentally, that owned Nattie Dumas's contract and filmed the Roughhouse Pugs series. Of course, this guy is all big cigars and big mouth, and he fears only one thing on earth: rats. Which the Address delivers to him in the form of a maddening scratching in the walls.

**Alone:** In the early '40s, one of the most popular actors in Hollywood—the type of man honestly loved by both fans and the film community—finds himself alone on Christmas Eve. The elevator cable snaps and sends him falling to the bottom of the shaft, where he breaks both legs and suffers grievous internal injuries. The upshot of this is his struggle to climb out of the shaft. This is loosely based on the death

of William Holden, who similarly perished alone. Whether the character makes it or not, I don't know. I didn't get this far.

**The Midnight Express:** This section, set in the late 1940s, would have been about a talented, Oscar-winning but conceited male star who goes to sleep one night in the Address and wakes up black. He is soon thereafter run out of the house by his butler and finds himself wanted by the police on suspicion of foul play involving the white actor he used to be. The Midnight Express is the title of the black film community of that era, the residents of which felt they were on a train going nowhere. Actually, there were quite a number of all-black films made in the '40s, and the previously white actor learns a lesson in humility as he becomes involved playing a bit part in an all-black movie.

**The Bells:** In the '50s, an Errol Flynnish leading man sees the bottom of his glass. He is burned-out, broke, and has lost the good looks of his youth. He hires on to do a low-budget piece of crap in Mexico, and after a drunken binge he wakes up in a little village and gets involved with a Mexican woman and her young son, who are awaiting the next bus to civilization. The woman is going to testify against the local crime lord who killed her husband, and three of the worst fiends who ever drew a breath of brimstone are on their way to make sure she never gets there. This section would have involved a gang rape—not of the Mexican woman, but of the lead character by the three fiends, who are delighted to say they have met one of Hollywood's sex symbols. "The Bells" is the English translation of the village where the final showdown takes place, and a bell in the local church tower plays a significant part.

**Peppermint Summer:** Three of Hollywood's young, rich stars have taken up paisley, bellbottoms, granny glasses, and LSD as we roll into the '60s. They host a party in the Address in which everybody gets smashed on a wide variety of drugs, and in the ensuing orgy of tripping out, a new arrival comes to join the fun: a creature created by the mind-power of hallucinogens, bad vibes, twisted egos, and ambitions. Needless to say, you would not care to see what's left the morning after.

The sections for the 1970s and 1980s weren't decided yet. I think the one in the '70s would have been about a young director who falls in love with the picture of a star who'd been murdered in the Address in the '30s, and he becomes obsessed to find who killed her. Maybe. I was still trying to come up with the 1980s story.

**Jack of Hearts:** This was about the return of John Samson Wales in 1991. Or, rather, the return of his desires through the physical body of a writer who had come to Hollywood to do a screenplay on a Jack-the-Ripper story set in Tinsel Town. The guy is about to suffer a nervous breakdown, as every draft of his screenplay is torn to pieces by the studio, and he becomes an unwitting avenue for John Samson Wales to strike from beyond death. The screenplay writer starts acting out his script—at first innocently, to put himself in the character, and then with evil intent. At last he goes out to seek a female victim. And what female do you think he selects? I'll give you a hint: she's a sight for an old man's eyes.

**Fade Out:** A general summing-up. Exit stage left. Curtain. Lights up.

I honestly don't know if I would've destroyed the Address or not. It seems trite to me that it burn down or whatever, but if it remains standing, then John Samson Wales remains there as well, waiting for another return. So I don't know how I would've resolved the book.

As planned, characters—both living and dead—from other stories would have passed through the pages of later tales. The Address would have changed color and been redecorated to reflect the personalities of the owners, so the house would have taken on a chameleonic quality.

The darkness of *The Address*, a reflection of Hollywood's darkness, really knocked me for a loop. In some ways I wish I could've finished it, in others I'm glad I didn't. I know now that I won't. I'm on to other things, and *The Address* is an idea that now lies behind me. But I hope you've enjoyed reading about what it might've been like.

A final note: in the **Nattie Dumas** section, I identify the Address as being on Crescent Drive in Beverly Hills. When my wife, Sally, and I were in Hollywood for an autographing a couple of years back, we were driving around and—you guessed it—we found ourselves on Crescent Drive. And honest to God, there was a house fairly similar to my description of the Address on that street. Not that the Spanish style is so uncommon out there, of course, but still . . . it was more than a little eerie.

If you can, you should try to read something of the history of Hollywood and the silent films. It's really a fascinating story, and the way Hollywood changed over the years is a testament to both the artistry and the brutality of the film community. Hollywood is, and always has been, a place where temptations can steal the soul. Just writing about it wrecked me pretty badly for a while. As I say, I'm glad *The Address* is behind me. Its doors are sealed.

## Fade In

### One

Night was falling, and the angels had come out.

It was their time: twilight, the realm of illusion, of beautiful shadows. Twilight lay across Hollywood like the purple robes of a magician, and in its folds were hidden tricks and treats.

*Fuck.*

There it was. He'd thought it. Did that make him such a bad boy? He didn't know, but of one thing he was sure: he clung to life, that red-tipped flower, like a talisman to ward off the stalking specter. He knew the specter's name, and knew the specter had its lusts too. Oh yes, the specter lusted for him. One day, perhaps quite soon, it would drift along the green-tiled corridor and into his room. Its grip would be sudden, he thought. Maybe as sudden as a heart stuttering

to a stop, or a brain's vein bursting into blue affluence, or a tired soul whispering *enough*. The stalking specter would find him here, as it sought and found so many others between the cool green walls, and it would carry him away in a final embrace.

But not today. Not today. His lust shielded him today. Death would not take him as long as a cinder burned in his loins, and that was why he stood at the window that was as narrow as a miser's nose and watched the angel standing below, on the boulevard called Sunset.

She had blond hair. Looking at it, at the way it caught the fragile light and moved around her shoulders, made his heart beat harder. Its color reminded him, of all things, of the wonderful vanilla ice cream he used to eat out of a blue glass dish at Laslo's Café on Melrose Avenue. That had been back in the '30s. Laslo's Café had closed in 1958, and a McDonald's stood there now.

He brought his mind forward from the past, and watched the blond-haired angel. She often stood on that corner; not every evening, but often enough to stake her territory. Frequently other young women—all in their early twenties, he figured, and of course they all looked like children to his ancient eyes—would pause in their labored prancing to stroll over and speak with his angel. Their conversations would be brief: what was there to talk about among members of their profession? He dared not think. Sometimes a red Porsche bearing a young Hispanic man would pull to the curb. The Hispanic man was often angry at the angel, particularly when she shrugged her shoulders in that way she had. Sometimes she got in the car with him and they drove away, sometimes he shouted at her and sped off alone. That was all right with the man who watched from the narrow window. He hated the vile thought of his angel sitting close enough for the Hispanic pimp to smell her perfume. Of course, he himself had never smelled her perfume. He knew, however, that she must smell of two delicious fragrances: youth and life. The first of those valuables had forsaken him, and the second was marching away, day by day.

He leaned against the wall, his thin body draped in pajamas and a red-striped robe. Bedtimes were early at the nursing home, which occupied the third floor of a brown stucco building. He watched his angel longingly. He would never know her name, he realized. That was a sad thought. A horrible thought. He would never know her name, as they passed each other on this insane carnival ride of existence, and she would never know that she was keeping the specter at bay.

She was beautiful. He'd never seen her face fully, but he knew she was beautiful. Her walk, the way she held herself: star quality. Where had she come from? Where did she live? How much did she charge? He caught his gaze creeping toward his wallet on the dresser. Certainly I could afford her, he thought. I'm not a poor man. Not exactly rich, to be sure, but. . . .

*Dirty old man, dirty old man, dump yourself in the garbage can.*

A jump-rope rhyme from fifty years ago. My God, what was I thinking? He pulled his gaze away from the wallet and back to his angel. There were three reasons why he

could never carry out his fantasy: one, Dr. Crosswaite and the nurses ran this place like a Mormon's Convention; two, he was approaching his eighty-eighth birthday and his hangydown had entered its eleventh year of beauty sleep; and three, it would break the spell if he so much as spoke to her. The coarseness of words would ruin everything. He feared hearing her voice. What if it was flat and nasal, without a shred of wit or intelligence, or Southern fried and swampy slurred? No, no! He couldn't bear to hear her voice or see the way her eyes would dissect him, because this fantasy, like all of Hollywood's best, was based on illusion.

Or delusion, as the case might be. The blond girl was young enough to be his granddaughter. Hell, his *great*-granddaughter, if push came to shove. And she was as far from being an angel as he was as far from his youth. She must have men by the score, he thought. Young men, of course, not old and dried-up like him. Would she smile at him, if he were to touch her golden hair with wizened fingers? Well, he'd had his moments of touching golden hair; his fingers remembered, if his mind was hazy about names and faces. He recalled listening to his own aged father ramble on, back in the '50s. His father slept a great deal toward the end, and said he loved having dreams because in those dreams he was always young and strong and handsome.

He'd never realized how important dreams were, until his own dreams began to deliver him from the present back into the past.

He watched his angel, waiting on the corner with a red clasp purse in her hand, her tight dress the deep purple of a bruise. Sequins caught the light and glistened around the swell of her breasts. He watched her legs tense as she strolled a few paces, watched the way her body moved: a tigress on the prowl.

This was a cruel city, in a cruel world. And what king of cruelty, he wondered, had chosen to put a home for the aged overlooking a boulevard where youth's parade was brazen and oh so bittersweet?

A red Porsche swerved from the evening traffic and stopped at the curb. The Hispanic pimp waved the blond-haired angel over, and she got into the car with a flash of thigh. The Porsche drove away, and just that fast she was gone.

Entrances and exits, the old man mused. The show must go on.

He looked along the neon-lit corridor of Sunset Boulevard. The sun, indeed, was setting. But not quite gone: a blush of orange fire glowed through the murk. Sunsets made him sad, as all endings did, no matter how beautiful.

It was on him, before he could stop it: ABANDON.

He saw the letters, scrawled in dark brown on rusted metal. And then the rest of it: ALL HOPE.

There it was, bleeding in his mind: ABANDON ALL HOPE.

He closed his eyes tightly and focused on the klieg light. It was a magic trick of his own that he'd developed over the years. In his mind he stared directly into a klieg light, its center burning with a blue-white incandescence that seemed like the heart of all pure, clean creation. Its dazzling radiance gradually made the hateful, ugly letters ooze and run like melting wax. And then, when the letters were gone, he

allowed the klieg light to go dim—slowly, slowly. Sometimes he did this forty times a day. He opened his eyes again; they were watery, and he wiped them with the back of an age-freckled hand. He didn't like remembering those words, but often they were on him before he could ward them off, like deformed rabbits leaping from a tophat. The trick of the klieg light had helped him keep his sanity over the many years. Without it, he might have put a gun to his head and blown his brains out a long time ago.

He knew there was a Hell. It was a real place. An earthly place. Oh, yes. Hell seethed between Vermont Avenue on the east and Beverly Glen Boulevard on the west. He was looking down right now on one of its arteries. Out there, in the purple-robed twilight, lay the territory of Hell. It was a beautiful land, a glorious and seductive land: would Hell be an ugly place? He didn't think so. At least, not ugly on the surface. It was underneath, far underneath, where the heart of Hell pumped.

ABANDON.

He flinched. It was coming on him again.

ABANDON ALL.

Someone knocked on the door.

He stood where he was, his eyes squeezed shut as the klieg light burned in his brain. The knock on the door was repeated. "Mr. Bonner, would you let me in, please?" It was the voice of Mrs. Hagen, the head nurse on the night shift. "Just a minute!" the old man managed to say, his wispy-haired head bowed and sweat glinting on his pink scalp. He stared into the klieg light with his inner eye. If he didn't let her in, she'd use her key. ABANDON ALL HOPE. Doors and keys, a terrifying combination. Hollywood doors were best left locked. ABANDON ALL HOPE. An iron door, a lock on a chain. The knock once more, this time hard and insistent. "I'm all right!" he shouted, but he heard in his voice that he was not. Keys jingled. One slid into the outer lock.

Oh God, the old man thought, as the smeared brown letters began to ooze under the klieg light's heat. Oh God, why did I open that door? Why did I open that—

"—door?" Mrs. Hagen said, the ring of keys jingling on the belt around her thick waist. He looked at her and blinked, uncertain of what she'd said, as the letters faded and the klieg light dimmed. "Haven't I asked you not to lock your door?" she repeated, the furrows deepening on the forehead of her square, thickly-jowled face. "It's not safe."

"I know. I'm sorry." It was all gone. He was all right now. He drew a ragged breath. "I like my privacy."

"What, you've got something going on in here the rest of us shouldn't know about?" Mrs. Hagen's dark brown eyes scanned the room. It was identical to the others: a bed, a dresser, a couple of chairs, a writing-desk, closet, and bathroom. The only difference was Bonner's file cabinet, full of old newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs and letters he never let anyone see. She knew David Bonner used to be a writer, but what exactly he wrote about she didn't know. Her job was tough enough without getting personally involved with these people. "You could have a heart attack and that locked door could kill you," she said, working her point like a bulldog gnawing a strip of rawhide.

"My heart's fine. Dr. Crosswaite says I have a strong heart."

"Dr. Crosswaite doesn't have to work here for twelve hour shifts. You go to the potty yet?"

He nodded. Another glance out the window. His angel had not returned, and the boulevard seemed diminished.

"It's almost dinnertime." Mrs. Hagen checked her wrist-watch. She was a heavy-set woman with curly, iron-gray hair. Beyond her, in the corridor, David Bonner heard the yowlings of Mr. Blumenfeld's mindless rage a few doors away. The television was going in the TV room: the canned laughter of a canned comedy. "Don't go locking this door again, hear?" Mrs. Hagen started to leave.

"I'd like a cigar," David said.

The woman stopped, frowning. "Now let's don't get into this again. No cigars. That's a rule. We don't want smoke in the corridor because it'll set off the detectors."

"You smoke on duty," he said. "I've seen you."

She put on a weary smile. "Mr. Bonner, I'm not likely to burn myself up in my bed. We're here to take care of you, whether you want us to or not. So you'll just have to go by the rules like everyone else. Okay?"

"What year is this, Mrs. Hagen?" he asked.

The question surprised her into silence for a few seconds. "It's 1991," she answered. "You know that."

"1991," David repeated. It was heavy on the tongue. "Mrs. Hagen, did you know that I was born in 1903? And that I was a reporter for the *Hollywood Bulletin* by the time I was sixteen years old? That in my life I have actually drunk whiskey, kissed women, and smoked cigars without burning myself up in my bed? Mrs. Hagen, where were you in 1903?"

She grunted. "I wasn't born yet."

"And neither were your parents, I'm sure." He pointed out the window, his pale blue eyes defiant. "You see those lights out there? I helped put them up. I helped build those buildings. I made this city, back when this was nothing but bean fields and orange groves. I worked in the days when there were no unions and nobody thought twelve hours was a long shift. Look at it!" His finger trembled with righteous anger. "Look at what I helped build! And you tell me I can't even smoke a damned cigar in the privacy of my own room?"

She stared at him, her gaze blank. He knew what her response was going to be, and she didn't disappoint him. "It's the rule. Smoke makes the detectors go off."

If he'd been five years younger, he might have picked up a chair and smashed it against the wall. Anger boiled and bubbled in his spleen, but it was a passing thing. Maybe it was just gas. He said, "To hell with it," and let his hand drop.

"Dinner's in ten minutes," she said, and left the room.

As soon as Mrs. Hagen had walked away down the corridor, David Bonner shut his door and locked it.

He returned to the window. The sun had vanished. He had always worn pajamas to that mad melee they called dinner, so he made no effort to change his attire. Tonight was Tuesday: that meant meatloaf, boiled potatoes, and green beans. Edible, but wretched. He watched the flow of traffic, remembering the time when the boulevard had been a dusty track and all around lay the fields. That Hollywood had ever been a town of buckboard sidewalks and timber shacks was

beyond the comprehension of anyone who hadn't witnessed it. Where Mann's Chinese Theater now stood there was once an orange grove. Where the Capitol Records building spiraled into the sky, more oranges. The fragrance of oranges had perfumed the air back then, long before the multitudes and the cars, the cranking cameras and soundstages and—

And the ghosts, he thought. Yes. That was before the ghosts.

Hollywood was a city of ghosts. It was built on bones, and ghosts moaned in its foundations. You could see ghosts, every day and night. They were captured on grainy black-and-white film, and they had names like Clara Bow, Ramon Navarro, John Barrymore, Buster Keaton, Boris Karloff, Joan Crawford, Jean Harlow, and . . . oh, there was a cast of thousands. They remained beyond death, images on celluloid. Ghosts, frozen in age and time. Hell never gave up its souls. Never.

He knew where the heart of Hell was. He knew where it pumped its black blood. Knowing it had robbed him of his youth. He had been sixteen one minute, and the next an old man. It seemed he'd always felt ancient, after that day; he'd always felt like a bag of rags kicked between God and the Devil. Finally, his skin and bones had aged along with his wrinkled insides.

David turned his thoughts away from the nightmare country. There was no peace to be found in it. He went to dinner in his pajamas, robe, and comfortable old slippers. In the dining hall, an errant elbow from Mrs. Vaseman overturned a plate of meatloaf onto her lap and she shrieked until Mrs. Hagen and one of the other nurses could get her cleaned up. Mr. Morgenthau scarfed his food down and nagged David for his hard little square of brownie cake. Mrs. McCombs—Lilah to her friends—sat across the table from David and smiled and flirted with food leaking from the corners of her mouth. Mr. Klint struggled up and hurried to the bathroom, but he didn't make it in time. David drank his coffee black, stared straight ahead, and swore he'd give a useless testicle for half a Havana.

After dinner, it was bingo time. Lilah asked David to sit beside her, but he declined as politely as he could. The orchids perfume she doused herself with was enough to knock him senseless. David got a *Sports Illustrated* from the meager little library room, then he trudged back along the corridor to his domain. Behind the locked door, in his sanctum of priceless privacy, he peered out the window. His angel was still gone. But tomorrow evening she'd be there again. It made the day worth looking forward to. Then he lay on his bed, put on his reading glasses, and read about Lakers stars who were twenty years old and making millions.

Lights out was at ten o'clock. Most were already asleep by eight. But at just after eight, as David contemplated whether to go watch television or find another of the magazines he'd already read a dozen times, there came a knock at his door.

"Mr. Bonner?" It was her again. David watched the knob twist back and forth. "Are you trying to get on my bad side tonight?"

Do you have a *good* side? he wondered. "I'm all right," he said. "I don't need anything."

"You have visitors," she told him.

It took a few seconds for that to sink in. Visitors? *Him*? Couldn't be his son, James. Jimmy was an accountant in Fort Worth, Texas. After David's wife Pat had died six years ago, Jimmy had put his father in this place. Why can't I live in Fort Worth? David had asked his son. I won't be any trouble. I promise I won't be.

But Jimmy and his wife, Rhonda, had decided. It was best for the old man to stay in California. He'd lived in Hollywood all his life, they said. He had friends here. He knew the city. Why did he want to live in flat, dusty old Fort Worth? If they couldn't figure that out, David reasoned, then there was no use telling them.

"Visitors," Mrs. Hagen repeated, on the other side of the door. "It's almost after visiting hours. What do you want me to tell them?"

Who could be visiting him this late at night? Sure, he sometimes got calls from the old crew at the *Bulletin*, but. . . . "Who are they?" he asked.

"An elderly woman and a young man. I'll tell them you've locked your door and you're asleep." He heard her rubber-soled shoes squeak as she pivoted and walked away.

David was already sitting on the edge of the bed. An elderly woman and a young man.

Who could they be? His reporter's curiosity had begun to smoulder around the edges. He stood up, shuffled his feet into his slippers, went to the door, and unlocked it.

In the corridor, he heard the commotion before he reached the nurses' station: "Asleep? Well how about fuckin' wakin' him up, then?" It was a young man's loud, uncouth yawp, a voice that smacked of rowdy belligerence. Mrs. Hagen answered at almost the same volume: "Keep it down! Don't you see the sign?"

"What sign? Oh, *this* sign?" David heard a ripping noise. That was the end of the placard that read QUIET PLEASE. "So how about goin' and wakin' the old dude up, or you want me to do it myself?"

Mrs. Hagen sputtered. Actually sputtered. And then David came around the corner, and he abruptly stopped at the first sight of his visitors.

## Two

The young man was a bull on two legs. His hair was shaved to a dark stubble, his thick black eyebrows merging over a hooked nose. His eyes were deep-set under a menacing overhang of a brow, and his eyes were fiercely, almost-scarifyingly, blue. Nothing about him could be called handsome, nor even pleasant; he looked like someone who'd only recently chewed his way out of a mental hospital. He wore a battered black leather jacket, covered with military patches, that strained around his husky shoulders. A t-shirt splattered with multi-colored paint and faded jeans with ripped-out knees completed his outfit. From his left earlobe dangled two thin gold chains with crucifixes on them, and a tiny gold ball was sunken in the flesh of his nose. The two pieces of the QUIET PLEASE sign lay on the floor, on either side of his cruddy boots.

"Mr. Bonner!" For once, Mrs. Hagen looked relieved to see him. "Do you know these people?"

The young bull, who was as sallow as the man in the moon, he'd never seen in his life. Surely he would have remembered such a mother's nightmare of an acne-pocked face. He turned his attention to the elderly woman who silently stood nearby.

If the young bull was fire, the old woman was ice. She was thin and small, maybe five feet tall, if that. Her hair was white gossamer, her eyes brown and steady. A multitude of lines seamed her face. How old was she? David wondered. Seventy-five? Eighty, at least. Her arms and legs were frail, but she had a hidden toughness he could sense, like a separate presence. That was his reporter's intuition at work. She wore a lavender dress, a black sweater draped around her shoulders, and a string of pearls decorated her wrinkled throat.

"You know me, don't you?" she asked, in a voice made raspy by decades of cigarettes and whiskey.

He thought he might have gasped. He wasn't sure.

She came toward him. "It's been a long time, Mr. Bonner." She stopped, keeping a distance between them. "Jack Lange told me where to find you. You look . . . not so very well."

Jack Lange was the managing editor of the *Bulletin*, and one of the few people with whom David kept in contact. "You're . . . you're . . ." He couldn't get the rest of it out.

He didn't have to. "Yes," she said, "I am."

By the sheer force of willpower, David kept his knobby knees from buckling. He reached out and put his hand against the wall to steady himself. The klieg light was primed to flare, but this time the hateful letters didn't emerge.

"We need to talk," the old woman said. "Right now."

"Talk. Yes. My room?" He looked at Mrs. Hagen questioningly, asking permission. She shrugged, and the young bull scratched a match on the side of the nurses' station and lit a cigarette. The detectors did not go off.

David escorted his visitors to his room. He closed and locked the door, his hands shaking. "I'm sorry it's so small," he said. "But it's clean. They keep it very clean."

"Man, this place is a fuckin' cell." The young bull exhaled cigarette smoke through his nostrils in blue streams as he looked around. "Stinks in here. Smells like a tomb."

"Mind your manners," the woman said crisply, and the kid scowled and lumbered over to peer out the window. She sat down in one of the chairs, her hands in her lap and her back straight and rigid.

David felt sloppy in his robe and pajamas. When had he gotten so slovenly? The old woman had a fine figure, though he could see the violet networks of varicose veins in her legs. He made a nervous circle of the room, deciding on a place to sit, then chose the chair at his writing desk.

"Still a reporter, are you?" she asked, and her mouth smiled. Her eyes, nestled in webs of wrinkles, did not. Perhaps they had seen too much to allow the frivolity of a smile.

"I don't write anymore. I just . . . observe."

She nodded, watching him carefully. "You do remember my name, don't you?"

It came easily. This person had never been very far from his nightmares. "Olivia. Your last name is—"

"Marchette," she supplied. "I never married."

He understood that, of course. "Did you stay in Hollywood?"

"Oh, yes. I've had . . . shall we say . . . a checkered life." Another cool, remote smile. "I was a waitress for a while. Then I worked at a factory in Anaheim. Plumbing supplies, if you can believe that. I put some money into a lounge in Santa Monica and lost everything, then I started again. I worked at the Broadway for fifteen years. I retired as a buyer in their millinery department in 1966." She placed the tips of her slim fingers together. "I've always pulled my own weight, and I've never spent one day on welfare. If anything good came out of . . . what happened to me"—David saw her eyes narrow a fraction, as memories were being dredged up—"it was that I knew I would survive, one way or the other. I was going to live, no matter what it took."

"Shit!" the kid at the window suddenly bellowed. "Look at that!" Smoke bloomed around his face. "Cops are runnin' some fucker down on the boulevard! Haul ass, dude!"

"Listen," David said, unnerved by the young man's crudeness. "This is my home. Please don't curse like that."

The kid stared at him, black brows knitted. "Curse like what?"

"Does he have a name?" David asked Olivia Marchette.

"They call me Meat," the kid answered, his glare heavy-lidded and ominous. He plugged the cigarette back into his mouth, then returned his attention to the drama on the street below.

"How long has he been out of a cage?" David inquired.

"Meat is a decent young man," Olivia said. "Decent for this age and time, at least. He does my driving for me. I can't negotiate the freeways anymore."

"Fuckin' straight," Meat rumbled.

How the young roughneck and the elderly Olivia had gotten together, David couldn't guess. This city had always been bristling with shocks. Olivia suddenly dealt him another. She leaned forward slightly, her gaze boring into his. "He's come back, you know."

David wasn't sure he'd understood her. "What?"

"He's come back. To the Address. He's living there again."

The Address. That's what she'd said. The Address. He blinked, his bones full of winter. "I . . . don't understand. . . ."

"I've followed your career," Olivia said quietly. "All through the years, ever since it happened. I always searched for your name in the paper. I wanted to see you, when I was in the hospital, but the doctors didn't think that would be wise. May I call you 'David'?"

"The Address." Speaking it made his throat clutch. "What about the Address?"

"He lives there again." Olivia's eyes had taken on a feverish glint. "Do you know what that means, David?"

He shook his head, or thought he did. Everything seemed blurred around the edges. He took his glasses off and cleaned the lenses with his robe.

"It means," the old woman continued in her quiet, placid voice, "that we have to kill him."

David stopped cleaning his glasses. He looked into Olivia's out-of-focus face. "Him? Him who?"

"You know who I'm talking about. You might be old, but you're not crazy. And I'm not either."

Yes, he did know. "He's already dead." David heard his voice: hoarse and whispery. "He's been dead since 1919."

"Oh, no." She gave a ghastly, terrible smile. "You're wrong, David. He's been waiting for another chance. Now he's found it, and he's come back."

*The Address. He's come back. We have to kill him.* David felt faint. His heart was kicking. He was an old man, he didn't have the strength for this. Maybe his heart wasn't as strong as Dr. Crosswaite said. The smeared brown letters began to flare, there on the rusted iron door in his mind: ABANDON . . .

"He told me he'd come back," Olivia said. "He stood there and laughed with blood on his mouth, and he said death couldn't hold him . . ."

. . . ALL . . .

" . . . no, it couldn't hold him. He stood there and said the Devil was his master, and I believed it. I still believe it. And deep down, you believe it too, don't you, David?"

. . . HOPE . . .

"No." It was a feeble gasp. "He's dead. Long dead."

"His body died. His flesh decayed and fell off the bones. His bones turned yellow in a box. But what he was—what he is—always stayed in the Address. You know it, better than anyone. You know what the Address has done to people. It was always him, directing behind the scenes. That was his passion." Another awful smile began, then faded. David feared he might be sick, and he gauged the distance to the bathroom. But he remained where he was, because Olivia Marchette had seen the heart of Hell just as he had, and that sight had forever marked and joined them. She was not insane. She was brimming with cold rage, but she was not insane. He found himself staring at the small swell of her breasts, and he wondered if Meat knew she had no nipples.

"We're going to kill him." Olivia's voice was deadly calm. "Come with us, David. Help us."

"Help you?" He looked from Olivia to Meat, who was watching him balefully, and then back to the old woman. "I . . . I can't kill anyone!" He put his glasses back on, and Olivia's face came into focus again. "I'm old and used up. And . . . no, I can't believe this. He's dead! He died of a stroke in 1919!"

"He's living there right now. I know. For over sixty years I've been watching that house and the people who've lived in it. I've followed them in my car when I could drive, and I've had detectives follow them when I couldn't. I've always been watching the Address, David. Every day, every week, every month, every year. I've been watching it, and I've been waiting." She lifted her pencilled-on eyebrows. "I've read your articles, and I know that you've been watching the Address, too. Why?"

"Because I'm a writer. That was my job."

"It was more than your job. If anything happened in that house, you wrote about it. You kept track of who moved in and who moved out. You know everything about it, don't you? And why did you keep such close watch on the Address?" She paused for a few seconds, and then she

answered for him. "Because in that house is where you lost your innocence. Just like me. That's why, isn't it?"

"He's dead," David said firmly. He looked away from her intense stare. "And I don't believe in ghosts."

"Oh, he's more than a ghost," Olivia said. "Much more. He's got a new face now. A new pair of hands. A new set of teeth. I've seen him. Meat and I follow him. He's come back, and that's why we've got to kill him."

"My God! Lady, you're talking about *murder!*"

"I'm talking about justice," she corrected.

"So you're in on this too?" David asked the shaven-headed kid.

"She told me the story. I believe her, man." He blew a smoke ring. "Hell, she's payin' me good money. I'm a contract player."

"What does that mean? You're a hired killer?"

"I've been paid to do lots of things." It was said with a measure of demented pride. "Drive cars, collect money, do some strongarm shit. Whatever." A little thread of smoke leaked from his thin-lipped mouth. "Yeah, I spiffed somebody once. Few years ago, when I was eighteen. I met this dolly on the Strip, a fourteen-year-old runaway from Arizona. Anyway, I took care of her for a while. Kept the sharks away from her." He tapped ashes onto the floor. "She was a puppy, you know?"

"No," David said, "I'm afraid I don't."

"She was clean in the mind," Meat went on. "I had a job, so I couldn't lifeguard her all the time. Fuckin' badass named Spines got hold of her. I found 'em in a motel on the Strip. Spines had her smashed on crack and tied up on the bed, and he was takin' pictures while he . . ." Meat stopped speaking. He smoked his cigarette some more. "I took Spines to a quiet place, up in the hills," he said. "I broke his bean open with a baseball bat, and I took his brains in a sack to the dog pound. Where they keep fuckin' pit bulls and shit. Those dogs chowed down." He gave a dark grin. "So yeah, I know about justice, man. I'm a real freak for justice."

"Oh, Jesus." David let go the breath he'd been hoarding. "A killer. You're a killer."

"I draw a line," Meat told him. "You stay on your side of it, we're friends. You cross it, you go to the house of pain. That's my law."

David stared past Meat, out the window toward the glittering sea of lights. A killer, he thought. Here in his own home. But in his time he'd known many killers. Not just killers of flesh, but murderers of soul and spirit. Those were the killers who were beyond earthly justice. One generation of soul-murderers begat another, until soul-murder was a game and a pleasure. And now this woman was sitting in his room—his home—asking him to return to the place where his own soul had been murdered on a sunny day in 1919.

"You know one thing for certain, David." Olivia had correctly read his tortured expression. "You know that he did terrible things because no one said he couldn't. It's as true now as it was then; maybe more true. If he's not stopped, what will he do this time?" She nodded toward the window. "Think of it. Him loose in this world. Who would say no? Who would even notice?"

David didn't respond. He didn't know what to say, and his brain seemed knocked out of joint. Meat dropped the cigarette butt and crushed it out with a bootheel.

After a while, Olivia Marchette stood up. She winced a little, her knees stiff with arthritis. "We're leaving now. I wanted to see you, and I wanted to tell you what has to be done. I don't know when it'll happen. Sometime soon, I think. He's found new hands, and they won't be idle long." She walked to the door, and Meat clumped away from the window. "I'd like you to be with us when it's done," she said. "If you choose not to be, I'll understand. But we can't let him live. Not again."

She unlocked the door and turned the knob. The door began to open.

"Just a minute," David said. She waited, while he stared at his hands and worked his knuckles. "Do you . . . have a phone number?"

She told him, and he wrote it down with a Flair pen on a yellow sheet of paper.

Meat left the room and stalked on along the corridor, but Olivia lingered. She said, "We're linked together, David. Ever since that day, we've been linked. We know terrible truths, don't we?"

"Yes." His mouth was as dry as a dead leaf's skin.

"I hope you'll call me. It's only right that we do this together. But if you don't, I'll do it alone."

David nodded, his eyes glazed.

"It was good to see you again," she said, and she closed the door behind her. He listened to her footsteps, moving toward the real world: the violent, brutal, fascinating, frightening real world.

He sat there for a long time, staring at nothing and seeing everything, his mind full of the klieg light's glare. Then, slowly, he stood up and crossed the room to the file cabinet. He opened the top drawer. It was full of file folders with different names and dates on them, all clippings of articles he'd done for the *Bulletin*. At the rear of the drawer was a battered manila envelope. He withdrew it, placed it on the writing desk, and opened it. He slid a yellowed, creased photograph out. It slithered into the light.

It was a photograph of a house: a Spanish-style mansion of white stone, with a huge stained-glass window in front. You couldn't see it in the picture, but David knew that the stained-glass showed a matador plunging a spear into the flank of a bleeding bull. The mansion had a roof of red tiles—yellowish-gray in the picture—and David knew that under the roof was a cavernous attic. The house had two floors and a sprawling basement filled with little rooms and niches. The house had an elevator and curving staircases with gleaming mahogany bannisters. Palm trees and palmettos decorated the grounds. Manicured walkways snaked across a smooth, rolling lawn, leading to a tennis court and a swimming pool around back.

It was a beautiful house. It was the Address.

The house stood on the edge of Beverly Hills and West Hollywood, on a street lined with palm trees, in one of the original old neighborhoods. It had been built in 1916, in the days when Hollywood actors and actresses used to sit on their front porches and read scripts, and if a carload of fans

happened to come along, they might be invited in for coffee. That was before the star machinery was set in motion, before human beings were groomed like expensive dogs and paraded around on short leashes. It was before dreams had become mixed up with nightmares, until you couldn't tell one from the other.

There was such a Hollywood, once.

He recalled a scene from *The Grapes of Wrath*, when the wizened Granny in the Joad family's broken-down, straining old truck had looked across a stagnant river toward California, the land of milk and honey. She had taken her corn-cob pipe from her mouth, and aimed a glob of spit at the promised land.

Nothing was as it seemed. Nothing. The stars were tarnished on Hollywood Boulevard, where the heels of hustlers, hoodlums, and broken children ground away the pavement. On the nightbreeze you could hear the voices of ghosts, rising from the sweet green cemeteries and the marble mausoleums: *Listen to us. We came before you. Listen to us, we have tales to tell. Listen . . . Listen . . .*

But no one ever listened.

David brought a file folder from the cabinet and opened it. Inside was a clipping held together by aged strips of tape. Its headline said: PORTRAIT OF A GIANT. The byline was By David Bonner, *Bulletin* Reporter. At the top of the article, the date was inked in: August 10, 1919.

He sat down at his desk, the article and the photograph before him. He had to lower his head to read, because the print was small and faded. But he knew the story by heart. This had been his fourth assignment for the fledgling *Bulletin*, a show-business tabloid. It had been a summer job, spent mostly editing other people's stories. The only reason he'd gotten this assignment was that the older writer who was supposed to do it had come down with the flu, and there was no one else available on such short notice. His luck, and his misfortune.

He stared at the photograph. The Address's image bloomed in his lenses. How many times had he studied this picture? How many times, over the years, had he driven past the house? Call it fascination. Call it obsession. Some might even call it madness.

He moved his fingers over the lines of the house. The day he'd first seen the Address was as fresh as a wound in his mind. It was within reach, if he wanted to go there. If he dared to. Olivia Marchette talked of murder—of justice—and it all began with this house, in 1919. He had to go back, to the beginning, if he was to decide whether to go to the telephone and dial her number or the number of the Hollywood police department. He had to go back, to the Hollywood of silent films and raw possibilities, when he was sixteen years old and the world was golden.

David Bonner slipped back in time, and the walls of his room began to fade. He heard a bell ring, followed by the squeaking of wheels. The conductor announced, "Santa Monica and Sierra!" and David stood up.

## Three

The streetcar ground to a halt. Sweating under a white shirt that smelled of Ivory soap, David stepped off the streetcar and started walking along Sierra Drive with his bookbag under his arm. He had a jaunty, worlds-to-conquer stride, a slim and energetic figure in his brown pinstriped suit, his pants held up by suspenders and his starched collar clenched by a bowtie with red and brown checks. His wavy brown hair was slicked back with brilliantine, his face rosy-cheeked and scrubbed, his eyes blue and sparkling. The August sun beat down, but the sky was azure and the air smelled of oranges and roses.

David Bonner walked toward his appointment, his heart pounding and butterflies whirling in his stomach. Mr. O'Keefe, who'd been down on the roster to do this interview, was sick. Everyone else was already working on stories, the deadline was tomorrow, and there'd been no time to change the date. When a man—a giant—like John Samson Wales said he had an hour to spare, you didn't ask him for an hour some other day. And so David, the youngest member of the *Bulletin's* staff, found himself pulled off a beauty contest assignment and on his way to Beverly Hills. In his bookbag was a list of questions Mr. Donnelson, the managing editor, had given him. "Just ask the questions and get the answers right," Mr. Donnelson had told him. "When you go out on business for this newspaper, you're not a kid anymore. You're a reporter. I expect you to behave with good sense and good manners. Anything to say? Then make it snappy, we've got a deadline!"

David was on a street splashed with the shadows of palm trees, far from the racket of cars in downtown Hollywood. Here everything was green and serene, like an oasis. Across the street a governess in white pushed a baby stroller, and up near a house of red bricks two couples were playing badminton. The houses belonged to famous actors and actresses, producers and directors for all the major studios: Triangle, Realart, Paramount, Goldwyn, Novaglyph, Fox, Selznick, and five or six others. A sleek crimson Mercer Raceabout, its driver a wiry man with curly dark hair and a blond woman in the passenger seat, rumbled past. David heard the woman laugh, like the sound of a cool stream over stones, and he recognized Charlie Chaplin at the Mercer's wheel. Without his Little Tramp makeup, Mr. Chaplin looked just like a normal person. David knew many of the actors and actresses by sight, people like Gloria Swanson, Hale Hamilton, Antrim Short, Nazimova, Lon Chaney, and Dustin Farnum. Like Mr. Donnelson said, the Hollywood society was eager to know what everyone else in Hollywood was up to, what movies were being shot and where, who was signing contracts with which studio, and so on, and that was why the twice-monthly *Bulletin* had found its audience after only six issues.

He came around a gentle curve where pampas grass grew next to the street, and there it was.

The Address was not the largest house in Beverly Hills, but it cast an imposing shadow across the emerald lawn. David had seen the Address's photograph in the *Bulletin's*

files; other Beverly Hills mansions had romantic names—Meadowfaire, The Sherwood, Glen Grove, The Duchess—but John Samson Wales had simply christened his home The Address. The driveway's iron gate was open, and a white Stutz Bearcat was parked in front of a garage built in a Spanish style to complement the main house. Stands of palms decorated the grounds, and a wall of white stones separated the house from John Samson Wales's nearest neighbor. David had never been inside a mansion before, and the prospect of being in the presence of John Samson Wales made his stomach do slow flipflops. He recalled Mr. Donnelson's speech of encouragement, then he took a deep breath and continued up the driveway. The house grew larger before him, and David had never felt so small.

Sunlight glinted off the door's brass knocker, fashioned in the shape of the two masks of comedy and tragedy. David reached for it, rapped on the oak slab of a door, and waited as a bead of sweat tickled the short hairs on the back of his neck.

There was no response from within. David gave it a minute longer, then he reached for the knocker again.

Before his hand could get there, a square inset on the door slid back, and a frosty gray eye peered out. "Who are you?" It was a bass voice, powerful but quiet, like restrained notes from a kettledrum.

"I'm..." His senses abandoned him. His own voice sounded reedy and high-pitched: a kid's voice. "I'm... David Bonner, sir. From the *Bulletin*." He fumbled in his coat for his billfold, brought it out with some difficulty, and showed the gray eye his newly-typed press card.

"I was expecting O'Keefe."

"Yes sir, but... Mr. O'Keefe is sick."

"You're just a boy," John Samson Wales said, behind the doorslit. His voice held an irritated edge. "You don't know anything about me."

"I've brought a list of questions." David wrestled with the bookbag, trying to get it open. The buttons were stubborn, his fingers unreliable. He could feel the gray eye watching him, and silent judgement in the air. *Come on, make it snappy!* he thought, and he gave a violent tug at the buttons. The last two buttons suddenly popped off; the bookbag opened, spilling forth David's notepad, lapboard, fountain pen, and a new bottle of ink. He yelped with horror as the bottle shattered on the white stone steps. Dark blue ink splattered his shoes, trouser cuffs, and the immaculate walkway, streaming into the seams. Tears sprang to David's eyes. Ink surged around his shoes, his heart was galloping, and he could hardly draw a breath because his lungs felt crushed. The man behind the door was one of the most respected, successful directors in Hollywood, and David had just fouled his front steps with Sheaffer's Number Four Blue. David got down on his knees and frantically began wiping up the mess with pieces of notepaper, but all he managed to do was smear it around. The door's inset snapped shut. David crumpled up ink-damp paper, shoved the sodden clumps into his bookbag, and kept wiping with fresh sheets, his face burning with shame and his eyes red-rimmed.

A bolt was thrown back. The door opened. "Move aside, boy."

David lifted his head, and stared up at the man who towered over him.

John Samson Wales, director of eight hit movies, was indeed a giant. He stood over six-feet-four-inches tall, from the shock of his unruly gray hair to the soles of his gold-brocaded Persian slippers. A blue silk robe enveloped his massive, barrel-chested bulk, a white ascot draped around his throat. His thick eyebrows were still dark above the wintry, bullethole eyes, and he had a short gray beard streaked with brown. John Samson Wales's face was tanned and leathery, wrinkled like a fleshy pineknot. In the photographs David had seen of the man, John Samson Wales resembled a well-groomed, tuxedoed diplomat; in person he was more the surly barbarian. The man stepped over him as David scuttled aside, and Wales strode along the flowerbeds that stood beneath the huge stained-glass window. He bent over, picked up a garden hose's nozzle, and turned the faucet. When water shot from the hose, Wales aimed it at the puddle of ink.

David stood up, his legs shaking, the bookbag and his notepad and lapboard clutched in his arms. He felt dizzy, and he leaned a hand against the white wall beside him. He jerked his hand back—too late!—and his horror was renewed as he saw he'd left a blue handprint on the stones.

"My God, boy!" Wales boomed, as he washed the ink off his walkway in indigo tides. "Do they let you out often?"

"Let me out?" David's voice cracked. "Out of where?"

"Well, they've got to keep you locked up somewhere! You're not safe! Walking destruction! Mind that glass there!" He swept the water past David's ink-blotched shoes. The walkway and steps were still blue-stained. "Italian tiles!" Wales lamented. "From a quarry near Pisa! Do you know where that is?"

"Italy," David answered.

"A geographical genius, to be sure." Wales turned the spray on the boy-sized handprint. Most of the ink washed off, but the outline of David's hand and fingers remained. "Have you had any experience in painting houses, boy? No, forget that! My God, I shudder to think of what you might do with a paintbrush!" He let the water stream on the offending blue stains for a moment or two longer, then he shook his gray-maned head and walked back to the faucet, where he turned off the flow and let the hose fall. Then his hard gaze was riveted on David, and David felt himself recoiling. Wales said, "Well? Take them off!"

"Take them off?"

"Are you a parrot? Your shoes! Take your shoes off! I've got carpets from China in there!"

It took a few seconds for what Wales was saying to dawn on him. The man was inviting him in. David unlaced his shoes and left them on the blue-blushed steps, and he crossed the threshold into the Address. John Samson Wales shut the door, threw the bolt, and they stood in a high-vaulted entrance foyer with a large crystal chandelier overhead.

"I suppose we ought to make the best of this, huh?" Wales lifted his thick eyebrows. His voice echoed in the foyer, and off to David's right a grandfather clock ticked softly and steadily. David's arms were folded around the bookbag like a

shipwrecked sailor grasping a bit of floating debris. "Relax, for God's sake!" Wales said. "I'm not going to bite you!"

"Yes sir." David wasn't sure he could make his legs move. He had an image of himself rooted to the checkerboard floor, covered with cobwebs.

"Come on, then." Wales motioned to him. "Follow me. And if you get any ink on my walls, your paper will get the bill!"

"Yes sir." He uprooted his feet and followed the man deeper into the Address.

The house opened before him like a magnificent flower. Its walls were white, adorned with framed oil paintings in blasts of vibrant color. A staircase with gleaming mahogany railings curved up to the second floor, but David saw a small elevator too, its mesh doorway open and the inside walls panelled with beautiful, red-hued wood. He got a glimpse of a dining room: a long table lined with high-backed chairs, sculpted terra cotta cherubs and ornaments on the walls, a pair of crossed sabers above a huge fireplace of white marble. David's feet were cushioned by thick carpets of interlocking designs, and he had the sensation of walking through mystic Oriental gardens. A room with sky-blue walls and a ceiling painted with clouds held bookshelves and a vast array of books, the room so high that a ladder on rollers stood available to reach the upper shelves. At its center stood a massive tortoise-shell table and a world globe illuminated from within. The next room had scarlet and gold wallpaper, and here hung dark portraits of lean, austere-looking men and women in the severe black clothes of Puritans. David followed John Samson Wales through the rooms, the house offering a bounty of surprises: one room was full of chessboards and what appeared to be antique games, another held a silent aviary of stuffed birds under glass domes.

"This way," Wales said, motioning David through a set of double doors. David went in, and stood in a large room that was half white stone and half glass, with a panoramic view toward the rear lawn, tennis court, and a swimming pool landscaped with palm trees and low ferns. A fireplace of rough rocks took up one wall, and before it was a conversation pit of cowhide chairs and a sofa. "We'll talk here," Wales told him. "I can give you forty minutes." He glanced up at a little gold pendulum clock on the mantel, below a massive mirror whose frame resembled the bark of a golden tree from an enchanted forest.

"Sit down."

David eased into one of the cowhide chairs. The ink on his hands had dried, and though his nerves were still jangled, he was feeling more in control of himself. The lushness of the Address, its beauty and sense of order, was soothing to him. He lived with his mother and father on a small farm over the hills north of Hollywood, and never in his life had he been inside such a place as grand as this; he was overwhelmed, trying to take it all in.

"No," Wales said. "Not there."

"Sir?"

"Not there," Wales repeated. "Sit in the other chair."

David moved, though the other chair was only a few feet away and it was identical to the chair he'd first occupied.

“That’s better.” Wales crossed the room to a sideboard where glasses and crystal decanters were arranged. He opened a decanter of red wine and poured himself a glass, as David got himself situated with his lapboard and his ink-stained list of questions. “Did you say your name was David?”

“Yes sir. David Bonner.” He found his pen, but he realized quite suddenly that without ink he wouldn’t get much writing done.

Wales spoke the name. It sounded like beats from a bass drum, the way he said it. “How old are you, David?”

“Sixteen, sir. I’ll be seventeen in—”

“They sent a sixteen-year-old boy to interview me? My light must not be shining as brightly as I thought!”

“Oh . . . no, sir! I mean . . . Mr. O’Keefe has the flu. The deadline’s tomorrow, and nobody else could come. I’ve done other stories for the *Bulletin*.”

“Other interviews?”

“No sir,” David admitted. “This is my first one.”

“A virgin,” Wales said. “This should be interesting. Do you drink, David?”

The question surprised him. “Ah . . . no, sir.”

“I’ve never known a reporter who didn’t drink. A little wine won’t hurt you. Even children drink wine in France.” He poured a glass full for David and brought it to him. “Here, take it,” he urged, when David hesitated. David took the glass. “A toast,” Wales said. “To a successful interview.” He clinked his glass against the boy’s, and drank. David’s last association with alcohol had been two bottles of apple beer in the back of the barn, which had made him sick and earned him a stern lecture from his mother on the virtues of temperance. Still, his mother wasn’t here, and even children drank wine in France. David sipped gingerly at the wine, enough to wet his tongue. It was a lot stronger than apple beer and didn’t taste nearly as good.

“Fruit of the vine,” Wales told him. “A civilized man drinks wine, David. You remember that.”

“Yes sir.” He put the glass on a table next to his chair, and then he had to ask the question: “Uh . . . Mr. Wales, do you have a bottle of ink I could borrow?”

David feared the man would growl and bluster, and that this would be the straw that broke the camel’s back. He couldn’t have been more wrong. Wales even offered a half-smile. “A bottle of ink? Ah yes, how else are we to do this? All right, I’ll see what I can find.” He turned and left the room by another doorway, his robe billowing around him like a blue flag, and David was alone.

David gazed through the glass at the lawn, the tennis court, and swimming pool. Out on the property’s edge, a Negro was pushing a lawnmower. David had seen no house servants. Wales had answered the door himself; did he have no butler or maid? Most of the Hollywood people did, so why didn’t Wales? A mansion like this must be hard to keep orderly without servants. David stood up and strolled around the room, a carpet with red and gold circles underfoot. Twenty feet above his head were exposed wooden beams, and David realized with a start that from them hung skulls; not human skulls, of course, but the skulls of animals. He wondered if Wales was a hunter. It struck him as a little

strange that Wales would have hung the skulls up and not mounted stuffed heads as trophies. And then he came to a table flecked with gold leaf, and on that table was a small ebony egg on a pedestal.

It begged to be touched. *Careful, careful!* he cautioned himself. He lifted it off the pedestal. The egg was ceramic, weighted at the base. There was a small lever on it, and that too begged touching. David listened for the sound of John Samson Wales returning, but he couldn’t hear the man; the Address had swallowed him up. Then he gently moved the little lever, and an amazing thing happened.

With a whirring of tiny gears, the top of the egg began to crank itself open. As the lid came up, a little figure rose from the depths. It was the figure of a man, also made of ceramic, and when it reached its apex, the figure began to spin and whirl like a dancing dervish. In the figure’s right hand was what appeared to be a hammer, and as the miniature man spun, the right arm twitched, making the hammer strike down, lift up, then strike down again and again with fierce little blows.

The display of Lilliputian vigor enthralled him. Who had made this, and where had it come from? He could see the hole where a key fit to wind the mechanism. The figure began to slow its gyrations, and the hammer blows slowed as well. It occurred to David that the Address was a magic box, filled with such wonderful mysteries. What other treasures were here, David couldn’t begin to guess, but he longed to go through the nooks and crannies of the house.

The figure had almost ceased moving. The whirring of gears was an erratic whisper.

“Do you like it?”

The voice was just behind him. David jumped, started to turn around, but before he could Wales’s hand slid down and took the egg from him. Their fingers touched for a second. Wales’s flesh felt moist and cool, like moss on the underside of a stone.

“It’s fascinating, isn’t it?” Wales asked. A briar pipe was gripped between his teeth, a curl of blue smoke escaping the scorched bowl. “I found it in a little shop in Madrid. I had to have it, of course.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

“No apologies. What good is a reporter who lacks curiosity?” He pushed the figure down into the egg and clicked the lid shut. “No harm done. Your ink bottle is by your chair. Shall we get to work?”

Wales sprawled on the cowhide sofa, as David sat in the chair and busied himself filling his pen—a more cautious operation there had never been—and getting his lapboard and notepad ready. The list of questions was a blotched mess, but most of the queries were still legible. His heart was beating hard again; the moment of truth had arrived. He began: “The first question on my list is—”

“No, that won’t do,” Wales said, with a puff of pipe smoke.

“Sir?”

“Forget your list of questions. We won’t do the interview that way.” He drank from his glass of wine and licked his lips. “I want to know about you first.”

“Me? I’ve already told you my—”

"You've told me nothing," Wales bulldozed on. "I want to know where you live, who your parents are, and why a sixteen-year-old boy isn't playing baseball on a summer day instead of sitting here with an old sonofabitch like me."

This was a puzzling turn. David shifted uneasily. "I... live on a farm. North of Hollywood." He shrugged. "It's not much."

"I see the plot. Your father wants you to work on the farm, but you'd rather be a reporter, right?"

"That's sort of it, I guess. I mean... I'm just working for the *Bulletin* for the summer. I got on as a copyboy, but Mr. Donnelson asked me to write a story about a hot dog stand where a lot of actors and actresses eat, and he said I could be a good writer if I applied myself."

"He must believe in you, if he sent you here." Wales smoked his pipe in silence for a moment. His gray eyes were not nearly so cold now; they had warmed with interest. "Can you name three of my films?"

"Yes sir. *Bitter Harvest*, *Rebecca's Wish*, and *The Fortune of Domingo*."

"Three actors or actresses I've worked with?"

"Mary Pickford, William S. Hart, and John Barrymore."

"You've been doing your homework. Or does the motion picture business hold a genuine thrall for you?"

"Oh, I think the movies are keen," David replied eagerly. "They've got radio beat all to pieces. My dad jumps down my throat every time I say that, but I think it's the truth."

"So you think the movies have a future, is that it?" Wales cocked his head to one side, the pipe's stem gripped in his teeth.

"Yes sir, I do."

"It's important to have a vision, isn't it? I did, when I was your age. Do you know what *my* first job was?" David shook his head, and Wales went on. "I worked at the Chicago stockyards. I was fifteen, but I was as big as some of the men. I swung the hammer. Do you know what that means?"

"No sir."

"I killed animals." Wales released a blue gout of smoke that curled around his face. "When the pigs and steers were strung up, I hammered them on the skull. I could break their skulls with one blow. You had to conserve your energy, you see, because the hours were long. There was an art to it. You had to know where to hit them, so you wouldn't drive too many bone splinters into the brain. That was my first job, and I did that work for almost five years."

"Is that why you had to buy the egg?" David asked. "Because of the figure with the hammer?"

"Yes, that's right." A faint smile surfaced on Wales's mouth, but it didn't stay there very long. "I enjoyed the work. There was... something of God in it. There's something of God in directing, too. Can you understand that?"

"Yes sir. Because you create."

"And destroy," Wales added. "The creation of illusion, and the destruction of reality. I can make people yearn to be someone else, to live lives that can't possibly be theirs. I can make people open their eyes to the world, or close them. I can make silk into iron, and paper into brick." He frowned,

his thick brows converging. "Why aren't you writing this down?"

David got his pen moving, writing in the code of shorthand that he'd been teaching himself.

Wales sipped his wine, smoked his pipe, and lay on the cowhide sofa like a contented emperor. "Directing is my passion. Seeing what you have in your mind come to life... there's nothing to surpass it. To create the sets, to position the actors, to construct and decimate: what else is there, in this life?" He smiled again, this time broadly. "I'm a master puppeteer, and all the world's my stage. Or at least," he amended, "the world of Hollywood."

As John Samson Wales talked, David listened and recorded. Wales was fifty-eight years old, had been twice married when he was a young man, and had since given up women as being "impediments." He was to start work in September on a film called *Four Horsemen*, with Lillian Gish and Nigel Barrie. "I know my reputation is built on dark dramas," he said, "but I'd like to do other work too. A comedy, for instance. Starring Nattie Dumas, if I could find a role for her. She has wonderful eyes, wonderful expressions. I'd like to do a Western, something set in Mexico. I'd like to do a survival story starring one man, alone." Wales puffed on his pipe. Smoke wafted around his head, and to David it appeared to be the blue vapors of dreams. "A story about a gangster," Wales went on, his eyes shining with excitement. "A tale about a little boy, a young actor. A suspense drama. A ghost story. Do you believe in ghosts, David?"

David looked up from his writing and smiled. "No sir."

"You will," Wales promised. "When I finish my movie, you will." He held David's gaze for a few seconds, then he continued speaking. "There are so many possibilities, aren't there? The surface hasn't even been scratched! David, you're a fortunate boy."

"Sir?"

"You'll live far beyond me. You'll see things come true that I only dreamt about." He took a last pull on his pipe, let the smoke dribble out, and then he put the briar aside. A blue haze hung between the man and the boy, like a slowly shifting curtain. "Be sure to write that I'm a passionate man," Wales told him. "That I love life, and that I'm going to grip hold of it as long as I can. Write that, will you?"

"Yes sir," David said, and he obeyed the direction.

The clock on the mantel ticked on. The yardman pushed his lawnmower across the grass that bordered the pool, and a breeze made the palm fronds sway. John Samson Wales told David how he'd worked with Thomas Edison in New Jersey, trying to perfect the camera. That was before anyone had discovered Hollywood, Wales said. He'd invested every cent to his name to make his first film, in 1912, called *April Flowers*. It had doubled his money, won some attention for its camera and lighting techniques, and suddenly he was a Hollywood director. Wales stood up and walked to the glass wall to survey his property. "I carved this place out of the orchards," he said. "Me. Johnny Samson Wales, a kid who grew up next to the railroad tracks in Chicago. That's America for you, huh?"

"Yes sir."

"I used to walk to the stockyards. We lived close enough so the smell came through the chinks in the walls. Night and day, you smelled it." His voice was a throaty rumble. "I came home with blood all over me. All over my hands, all over my boots. When you hammer an animal's skull, it spews blood through the nose. Blood was in my hair, on my face, in my mouth. You have to breathe blood; it comes at you in a mist. And at night, the trains ran past and the house shook on its foundations. My father was an invalid and my mother was a drunk, and it was my hammer that kept us from the poorhouse." He turned his head quickly, his eyes dark and sunken-looking. "Don't write that. Say that I . . ." He paused, thinking it over. "Say that I was a good son," he decided, and he waited for David to write it down.

"Abandon all hope," David heard the man say.

He looked up. "Sir?"

John Samson Wales was staring into space, his gaze fixed on a great distance. His mouth moved again, but made no sound. He stood without moving for a few long seconds, his huge shadow slanting across the floor, and David waited with increasing nervousness for him to speak once more. Then, abruptly, Wales blinked and brought himself back from wherever he'd journeyed. "Oh!" he said, with a tight smile. "Abandon all hope. That was scrawled above the chute where the animals came into the slaughterhouse. Somebody put it up there as a joke. Not very funny, was it?"

David agreed that it was not.

"Do you like my house?" Wales asked, and as he came toward David, his shadow fell across the boy.

"Yes sir. I think it's swell."

"I think so too. I designed it myself. It was built to last for a long, long time. I love the Address; everything I am is right here." He made an expansive gesture with his burly arms. "You can write that down, too. Say that I'm a happy man. Say that there was never one any happier."

David obliged him. That would make a good quote.

Wales glanced at the mantel clock. "I have an appointment I must keep," he said. "I think that will finish the interview."

David began to put his material back into the bookbag. He had mixed feelings: relieved that the interview was over, and dismayed that he would have to leave this beautiful house and most likely never set foot in it again. The Address was electric with John Samson Wales's vigor; his life force filled the rooms. He could imagine the man pacing off the dimensions of the house when its foundations had not yet broken the earth, dust swirling off the toes of Wales's shoes. He could imagine Wales looking to east and west, surveying the rise and fall of the sun, and deciding where the rooms were to lie and how the walls would grow. To create something where nothing had been before: that was the God part Wales had talked about.

David got up from his chair. Wales stood before him, casting a Goliath of a shadow. David could feel the creative fire in the man, like the radiance of a hot oven. What could Wales teach him about the world and the secrets of creation? Wales was a wise man, that was for sure. "I'm glad you came today," Wales said. "You're a bright boy. You work hard and learn to seize the moment, you'll get somewhere."

"Thank you, sir," David answered, and he followed John Samson Wales through the magnificent rooms toward the way out.

He supposed he must have rubbernecked around a lot, taking in as much as he could for the last time, because when Wales opened the door and they were standing on the front steps, the man said, "I'm pleased you like the Address, David. Would you enjoy living here?"

"Yes sir. Who wouldn't?"

"Tell me this." Wales leaned forward slightly, his eyes glinting. "What would you have, if you could have anything in the world—anything—and no one would dare deny you?"

"I don't know." He glanced at the snazzy white Bearcat.

"I guess . . . a car like that one."

"You aim small," Wales said, and he closed the door in David's face.

David heard the latch click home. He was sealed out of the Address, out of its world of treasures. He felt a little light-headed; maybe his drink of wine was at work. But he had to catch the next streetcar and get back to the *Bulletin's* office in Hollywood. He paused to put on his ink-stained shoes, then he walked down the front steps. He took a look back at the massive door. Shadows lay over the brass knocker shaped in the image of the masks of comedy and tragedy. He could still see his handprint, outlined in ghostly blue on the white stone. Palm fronds rustled overhead, the aroma of oranges perfumed the air, and somewhere a sprinkler hissed.

He walked away from the Address, pulling himself free from its cool pond of shadow. One more glance back, at the monument John Samson Wales had built in honor of the God of creation, and David realized five or six houses the size of the one he lived in could fit inside its walls. A pang of envy hit him: a bite of jealousy, like a snake in the manicured grass.

Maybe someday, if he worked hard enough, he could have a house like the Address. Maybe he could even buy the Address itself, and then all those rooms would be his to fill with his own treasures. A troubling thought came to him: he'd never wanted to be rich before. He'd never given much notion to having a lot of money. Now, though, he saw that money was the vital grease of powerful wheels, and seeing that made him wonder if he could ever truly be content again. If you were rich, living in a mansion, no one dared tell you what to do or not do. You were the master of your own world. A house like the Address was freedom; absolute, uncontested freedom.

David finally looked away and picked up his pace, a kid with a streetcar to catch and worlds to conquer.

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## Four

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*He died in the house of his own design.*

That would have been the first line of the obituary, if David had been allowed to write it. Mr. Donnelson had assigned the job to O'Keefe, and the obituary was ready to run in the next edition under the headline JOHN SAMSON WALES, 1861-1919.

David had written Wales's last interview. It had made the deadline and been printed in the *Bulletin*, and two nights

later a stroke had killed the director in his bedroom, a script of *Four Horsemen* in his lap and a glass of red wine on his bedside table.

Why David had taken the streetcar back to Santa Monica and Sierra, he wasn't quite sure. As he walked toward the house, the sun was hot on his face through the towering palms. It was a Saturday, and he had not come to this place again on business for the *Bulletin*. John Samson Wales had been dead for three days, his funeral planned for tomorrow afternoon. David didn't care to go view the man's corpse; he'd wanted to see the Address again, and so after he'd done his morning chores on the farm, he'd bathed and put on his starched shirt, his pinstriped suit—his only suit—and his bow-tie and left the fields on a bus. He'd caught the streetcar in downtown Hollywood, and now, about forty minutes after leaving the farm, he stood in front of the house that Wales had built.

The white Bearcat was still there, and along with it in the driveway was a Ford Model T. The house looked exactly the same as before; he didn't know what he'd expected, but he thought that the Address would somehow reflect its master's death. Maybe he'd thought there would have been black curtains in the windows, or a black wreath on the door. David didn't know if Wales had any family or not; who was there, then, to claim the Address?

The death had stunned him. He couldn't get over the image of John Samson Wales, vibrant and alive and talking confidently about the future. Life was such a fleeting, fragile thing, it seemed: a dance of hours, and no one could say when the magic might suddenly cease. It scared him, in a deep place. White walls and gilded treasures could not hold death back, and what David couldn't shake was the thought that as John Samson Wales had been talking to him that day, the pressure had been building in the director's brain, building, building toward explosion. There had been a bomb in his head, waiting to go off, and Wales had been talking about ideas for movies that would never be made.

David stared at the Model T. Did that car belong to Wales, too? Its fenders were dented and the paint had faded. That was not the kind of car Wales would have driven.

Someone else was in the Address.

David walked a little closer up the driveway. His reporter's curiosity had flared. Who was inside the house? And doing what? He looked into the Model T. The leather of the seats was cracked and old, and on the passenger side lay a few pages of sun-yellowed newspaper. He circled the car, wondering whether to open a door and check the glove compartment. He was mulling it over when he heard the shout.

"Hey! What are you doing over there?"

The voice had come from the house. David turned toward it. A man was standing in the doorway.

"This is private property!" The man was middle-aged and paunchy, and he wore an ill-fitting dark blue suit. "Go away, kid!"

David had been about to retreat gracefully, but the word *kid* made him reconsider. He wasn't a kid, he was a reporter. There might be a story here. He stood his ground. "Who are you?"

"You want me to call the police?" the man countered. "I will, if you don't get off the property!"

That tore it. David walked toward the man, his stride easy and unhurried. He wasn't nervous; he knew exactly what he planned to do.

"You deaf, kid? I said I was going to call the po—"

"I'm a reporter," David interrupted. "From the *Bulletin*. My name's David Bonner."

The man didn't answer, but neither did he go inside for a telephone. David got a few strides nearer, and then the man said acidly, "You're not a reporter! You're just a kid!"

David was already digging out his billfold. He slid his press card out and showed it to the man when he reached the front steps. "There. That's my name. See?"

The man took the card, squinted, and read it. He had gray hair receding from a bulging forehead, his eyes small and wary.

"I did an interview with Mr. Wales in the last issue," David went on. "I came here to ask the questions."

"I read it. You did that?" The man held David's card out to him. "I didn't know a kid had written it. It was pretty good."

David returned the card to his billfold and put it away. He was learning how much power that little slip of paper had. "Are you a relative?"

"Me? No, I'm from the security company. Name's Andersen. With two e's. Eugene Andersen. I never met Mr. Wales."

"The security company?"

"You bet. Pioneer Security. I'm supposed to watch the house, make sure no windows get broken or anything. The bank people were scared somebody might try to get in, I guess. You never know."

David nodded. Behind Eugene Andersen, the front door was open. He glanced to one side, and saw his blue handprint still on the stones. *I'm part of this house*, he thought. The interior of the Address seemed cool and white, dreamlike. Why did I come here? he asked himself. Saturdays were his free days. Why had he come all this way, just to stand here on the steps?

Because, he thought, he would probably never set foot in the Address again. A mansion like this was not and most likely would never be part of his life. He might toil and sweat, labor and strain, but he would never own a house like this. The Address and its brethren would always belong to those who breathed a different air, and he would never find himself among their society. Maybe he just wanted to know that for sure, and now he did.

"Did you come to do another story?" Andersen asked, eagerness building in his voice. "The wife and I subscribe. You live in Hollywood, you want to know what the movie folk are up to."

"No, sir," David told him, "I didn't come to do another story." He saw the man's excited expression fall like a slow, rubbery avalanche. It was time to go home, he thought. He didn't belong here. This green oasis of life, with its white-clad governesses and badminton players, was not his world. He had farm dirt and ink under his fingernails, and standing in the presence of the Address told him that all his life he was

going to have to work hard for his living. But he couldn't resist just one more walk through the house; just one more, and that would be the end of it. "I . . . I came to get my pen." "Your pen?"

"Yes sir. My fountain pen. My mother gave it to me, and I left it here." He was amazed, and a little frightened, that the tale came so easily. "I left it in the room at the back that looks out toward the pool. Can I go get it?"

"I'm not supposed to let anybody inside," Andersen said. "No, if the company found out, I'd be in trouble. You wait here and I'll go look for it."

There was no use pushing it. David shrugged. "If you find it, you can mail it back to me at the *Bulletin*. I left it. . . ." Think fast! "I left it on a little table next to a black egg. If it's not there, I guess Mr. Wales put it somewhere."

"Okay, I'll take a look. You wait right here." Andersen went into the house and closed the door. David stared at the door knocker, the two masks. There was no pen to be found. Good try, but no ceegar. He turned away from the door, walked down the steps, and started toward the driveway.

He was almost there when the front door opened again. Eugene Andersen peered out. "Hey! Kid! Come here a minute, will you?"

David stopped at once. Andersen's voice had carried a high, nervous quaver. "What is it?"

"Just come here! Quick!"

David returned to the entrance. Andersen's face looked a little chalky. "Come inside," the man said, and motioned him through. David stepped across the threshold into the foyer with its crystal chandelier. Andersen shut the door, and David noted that his hands were shaking.

"I thought you said you weren't supposed to let—" David began, but Andersen snapped, "*Quiet!* Listen!"

David did. He heard the ticking of the grandfather clock, his own heartbeat, and Eugene Andersen's raspy breathing. "What am I listening for?"

"Wait. Just wait." Andersen glanced around, his eyes bright and beady. David wondered if the man wasn't off his rocker, and he moved a little nearer to the door so he could get out if—

He heard it.

A low, faint *boom*. There was a pause, then two more: *boom, boom*.

"That's it." Andersen stared at David, a vein twitching in the man's temple. "What the hell was that?"

David shook his head. A few seconds later, the faint noise came again, three of them this time: *boom . . . boom . . . boom*.

"I was on my way back when I heard it," Andersen said. "You . . . don't think . . . something's breaking apart in here, do you?"

David couldn't say. He walked through a short corridor off the foyer that opened into a huge room he'd not seen on his first visit. It was a high-ceilinged living room with blue velvet furniture, a fireplace of glazed slate-gray tiles, and a grand piano, and before him sunlight streamed through the magnificent, ceiling-tall stained-glass window where a matador speared a bleeding bull. He stood at the room's center, listening, as rays of multi-colored light slanted around

him and burst into iridescence on the gleaming hardwood floor.

*Boom, boom. Boom, boom.*

A distant noise. Where was it coming from? Somewhere in the walls?

"You know what that sounds like?" Andersen asked, standing a few feet behind him. David already knew. "Like somebody knocking, doesn't it?"

"Yes," David said, "it sure does." Three more of them came: *boom, boom, boom*, an insistent, almost frantic noise, but muffled by the weight of the Address. *Do you believe in ghosts, David?* he remembered John Samson Wales asking. *You will, Wales had said. When I finish my movie, you will.*

For the moment, though, David held no belief in ghosts. Whoever was knocking was made of flesh and bone, not chilly ectoplasm. Andersen walked to a wall and put his ear against it, then he knelt on the floor and leaned his head down. The knocking noise was repeated several times, slower and softer, and it sounded to David as if whoever was doing it was running out of steam.

Andersen lifted his head. "I . . . think it's coming from under the house."

They found a door near the elevator that opened onto a narrow stairway leading down. Andersen flicked a switch that turned on a lightbulb, and they started into the depths of the Address. The knocking noise was feeble and erratic now, but they could hear it more clearly as they descended. David felt the flesh crawl at the back of his neck, his palms slippery on the stairway's metal railing. At the bottom of the staircase was another door, this one locked. Andersen produced a ring of keys from inside his coat and began to methodically try the keys in the lock, his fingers clumsy and fumbling.

*Boom, boom, boom* beyond the door, the sound echoing within the stairwell. Then silence.

Andersen tried nine keys before one slipped into the lock. He glanced at David, their shadows thrown large onto the walls by the bulb's harsh glare, and then he turned the key and opened the door.

"Holy moley," was Andersen's first reaction, followed by a low whistle of amazement.

Before them was a vast wine cellar, its racks cradling hundreds of bottles. The basement was illuminated by overhead bulbs that David reasoned must be powered by the same switch in the stairwell. The chamber smelled damp, but the bottles gleamed festively, free of dust. The concrete floor was clean and had been recently swept; David spotted a broom and dust pan tucked away in a niche. Small typewritten labels had been glued to the racks, indicating what kind of wine was stored in them. A couple of mousetraps were set on the floor in dim corners, and even the cheese in the traps had been cut in neat little chunks.

More of John Samson Wales's treasures, David thought as he looked around at all the bottles. Maybe there were thousands of them here, in meticulous arrangement. David walked along an aisle between the racks, and passed the dark rectangle of the elevator shaft on his left. Above his head, pipes wandered across the ceiling, and here and there moss had bloomed on the stones like intricate, blue-green fans.

## Lights Out!

The noise came then, and almost shocked David out of his shoes: *BOOM BOOM*.

It was close. Very close. David looked up and saw one of the pipes shivering. Somebody was knocking on the pipe, he realized. Where did the pipe begin? He followed it along the aisle, and Andersen walked a few paces behind him. The pipe snaked to the right, and continued at the top of a narrower corridor. Something squeaked and darted behind a pile of crates: the mouse Wales had been hunting. David wondered, as his heart pounded and his throat dried up, if the director would have mounted the mouse's skull in his den with the others.

The pipe ended at a wall, or more correctly, it continued on through the wall, but David and the security guard could go no further.

In that wall was a metal door, streaked with rust.

And on the door, in ruddy brown paint that had smeared and trickled down to the floor, was scrawled *ABANDON ALL HOPE*.

"What the hell is this?" Andersen spoke in a strained whisper, as if fearful of awakening the dead.

The metal door was bolted shut. A chain and padlock secured the bolt. David reached out and grasped the cold lock, and he could see the bright scratches where a key had slid into it. Andersen grazed his fingers across the letters, and reddish-brown flakes drifted from his fingertips. He looked at the splotches and splatters of brown on the floor, then he said quietly, "Hey. Listen . . . I don't think this is paint."

David stared at him. The glaring overhead light cast black shadows in the man's eyesockets and hollowed out his cheeks. Andersen wet his lips with his tongue, and he tried the first key on his ring in the padlock. It was nowhere near fitting. Neither were any of the fourteen other keys on the ring. Finally, Andersen balled up his fist and slammed it once, twice, and a third time on the iron door. A flurry of brown flakes swirled around him and the boy. They waited, as the seconds crept past.

"Smell that?" Andersen asked, and he sniffed the air.

David caught a hint of it: a sickly-sweet smell, there and then gone. He swallowed hard, because the odor reminded him of how a dead rabbit had smelled on the road in front of his house.

The pipe spoke with two weak beats and shivered above their heads. Andersen leaned against the door. "Who's in there?" he shouted. No answer came. "Can you hear me?" Again, no response. Andersen stepped back from the door, brown flakes clinging to the front of his jacket, and as the man blinked slowly, David could see him trying to figure out what to do. "The police," Andersen decided. He nodded, agreeing with himself. "Yeah, I'd better call the police." He turned and strode away in the direction they'd come, leaving David alone at the iron door.

He looked at the writing on the metal. *ABANDON ALL HOPE*. It was the sign from the Chicago stockyards that Wales had told him about, David remembered. Written as a grim joke over the chute where the animals went in to be hammered and slaughtered. Was it still a joke . . . or was there truth in it?

He saw it, then. Hanging from a nail about three feet to the right of the door, hidden by a slice of shadow. Neither he nor the security guard had noticed it before, in their absorption of the door itself. The key was very small, hardly a thing worth noting. David shouted, "Mr. Andersen?" but the man was upstairs and didn't reply. And then David reached up and touched the key, and it fell off its nail into the palm of his hand.

He looked from the key to the padlock and back again. The odor of decay wafted around him, just a trace of it. *ABANDON ALL HOPE*. What was behind that door? He heard the mouse scuttling in a corner, and then David grasped the padlock and slid the key easily into it. I shouldn't do it, he told himself. I ought to wait for Mr. Andersen. Shouldn't do it.

But it was his moment.

What good was a reporter without curiosity?

David turned the key.

The padlock popped open, the chain rattled free, and the bolt was unhindered.

Shouldn't do it. Shouldn't.

A thrill of intermingled excitement and terror coursed through him. He had the sensation of standing on the edge of a wilderness, about to step into the unknown. Beyond this door was something that John Samson Wales had wanted to keep locked up. A secret treasure, known only to the director. David eased the bolt back. All he had to do now was pull the door open. He paused a few seconds, maybe hoping that Andersen would return and tell him not to go in there. But David was alone, and it was his moment. Did he seize it, or not?

David gripped the door's tarnished handle and pulled at it. The door was heavy. He had to strain to get it open. The hinges, well-oiled, did not squeak. As the door came open, David saw that there was no light beyond.

A mousetrap cracked shut behind him. There was a faint little squeal.

From the dark doorway a smell of foul corruption washed into David's face and made him retreat a step. He put his hand to his nostrils, his stomach convulsing. The odors of rotting meat and excrement curled around him in a greasy embrace. There were other odors in there, too: the coppery tang of blood, the bitter smells of sweat and urine. An inner voice shrieked *Close it! Close the door!* But he didn't obey, because in his quivering guts he knew he'd found the secret heart of the Address, and what went on in here was done without light or mercy. Something was dead down here, that was for certain. Something had died and been left to fester and decay. David coughed and gagged, his eyes watering. He could see part of the chamber's floor, where light spilled in. Filth was smeared across the stones, and near the door was set two red clay bowls, like dogfood dishes. One was empty, the other held a little scummy water.

He was going to have to shut the door. He couldn't stand the smell; it was leeching into his pores. Whatever was in here would have to wait for the police. He started to shove the heavy door closed when the voice came.

"*Help me.*"

It was a hoarse whisper. A female voice, David thought, but he couldn't be sure.

"Help me."

"Who's there?" David's trembling voice echoed within the chamber. He stood right on the threshold, his nerves jangling and sweat beginning to drip down under his arms.

"Help..." A sob welled up, broke and gurgled. David heard the rattling of a chain, and at that moment he knew he'd reached a crossroads. Whichever way he went, he would never be the same again. The girl—it sounded like a little girl—was crying. "Please," she whispered between sobs, "please... please..."

David could stand it no longer. He decided on his direction, and he walked into the dark chamber. His shoes slid and crunched on vile things on the floor. He waved his arms about, seeking contact. "Where are you?" he asked, but the girl kept sobbing. David turned toward the door and shouted for Mr. Andersen once more, but Mr. Andersen was somewhere else, up on the first floor where sunlight streamed through the windows of the Address. David's left hand hit a cord. He found it again: a light cord, he thought it was. He yanked it.

The lightbulbs came on, a silent white explosion.

And in that blast, David Bonner was torn to pieces.

He saw the corpse on his left first, dangling from the wrists by chains to the overhead pipe. The woman was nude and only recently dead, her body swollen, her long brown hair hanging over her misshapen face, and her mouth open in a frozen scream. The pressure of the manacles around her wrists had turned her hands purple, and streams of blood had dried on her skinny arms. Blue-rimmed wounds in the shape of half-moons covered her torso, legs, the crushed flowers of her breasts, and her throat. Bites, David realized as his mind struggled for balance and his gorge rose. The corpse was covered with hundreds of bites.

He took a step to one side, and collided with something that was part tattered flesh and part skeleton. It swayed back and forth on its chains, and David stared into a battered face with brown blood crusted around the nostrils. The skull, matted with curly red hair, had been smashed, a portion of the head crushed inward. Abandon all hope, David thought, as the skeletal thing swayed on its chains and puffed its rotting reek into the air. Abandon all—

He heard someone moan, quite close to him. His own voice? He staggered back, his eyes wide with terror and saliva trailing from his mouth, and he hit another corpse that was horribly soft and wet. He heard a ripping noise, like sodden cloth tearing, and a thick, yellow and foamy substance was splattered all over the front of his coat. He had some of it on his hands, smelling of death and vileness, and he frantically wiped his hands on his trouser legs as he stumbled back and forth amid more bodies, some bony and emaciated, others bloated to bursting. Blood was in his mouth; his teeth had met in his lower lip. The chains rattled all around him, a hideous music. Crushed skulls drooped on necks, sightless eyes stared, and the torn flesh was branded with the marks of savage bites. The corpses swung and twirled on their chains, with David at their center, like dancers at a grotesque ballet. Panic took him, as his stomach heaved; he couldn't

find his way to the door through the naked and swaying bodies. They blocked his path, closed around him in swollen conjunction, and long hair thickened with dried blood struck him in the face like the lashes of whips. He scrambled for an opening, his fingernails clawing at dead flesh. A scream started, then clogged in his throat like a hard nut. He slipped, fell to the filthy floor, and crawled wildly through the chorus line of corpses. A wall of rough stones was before him, and David jammed himself against it and stayed there, the breath whooshing from his lungs and his body jerking with fits and starts. Blood was drooling down his chin, his eyes glazed and staring. He knew, in a cold place, how close he was to crying, and if he let the first tears squeeze out he would wail like an infant. He pressed his back against the stones, and he shivered and moaned and realized he'd found the true treasure trove of John Samson Wales.

Nine naked corpses hung from the network of pipes on the chamber's ceiling. All were female. Some were children. They had died trussed up like stockyard animals, waiting for the hammerblow. David closed his eyes and pressed his fists into the sockets. In his mind he saw the words scrawled on the iron door in dried blood, and another vision too: John Samson Wales in his blue silk robe, his pipe in his mouth, down here in this chamber with a hammer clenched in one fist, his body turning and cavorting, and the hammer striking with maniacal abandon like the figure at the center of the black egg.

The Address's secret had not died with its master. The secret was right here, on grisly display.

John Samson Wales had been insane, and here hung the crushed fruits of his vine.

David heard a whimper. He opened his eyes. They were watery and bloodshot with shock, and it took a moment for him to focus. He found a tenth body, hanging from a pipe.

She had blond hair. It framed her face like blood-spattered gossamer. She was thin and pallid, her eyes dark brown and deep-sunken, and she was perhaps eleven or twelve years old. She, too, was nude, her thighs, torso, and shoulders ravaged with bites. Teeth had been at work on the buds of her breasts, and they had been brutal. She'd gotten one wrist free of the manacles, streaks of blood all along her skinny arm. In her hand was what looked like a fireplace poker, with a wicked hook on the end of it. Within a few feet of her was a metal brazier full of white ashes. Other tools of various design and horrible intent were placed neatly in a rack beside the brazier, and David could see the empty space where the poker had been. The girl's knuckles were white, her hand curved into a claw around the poker's grip, and above her head the pipe was dented.

The girl and David stared at each other in silence, like fellow sufferers. He watched tears creep down her cheeks. They fell from her chin, one after the other, and formed a small puddle on the floor.

He felt old. Ancient, and tainted with corruption. He knew what had gone on, here in the Address. As the rest of Hollywood had gone about its business and movies had been made out of dreams, John Samson Wales had brought these women and children to the Address and directed his own

dream of destruction. Nothing would ever be clean again. Nothing.

A single tear streaked down David's face. That was all.

The world, a delight of sunshine and promise, had gone dark with evil.

He sat there, pressed against the wall, until Andersen came down with two policemen about ten minutes later. Andersen saw what David had seen, and he instantly turned tail and fled. The policemen called for more officers, a pair of chaincutters, and a morgue wagon. Someone helped David up from the floor, and he clung to the man with fierce strength as he was taken out of the chamber. Outside in the yard, under the Hollywood sun, the policeman washed David's only suit off with water from the garden hose, and David gazed blankly at his blue handprint on the house that Wales had built.

## Five

David sat in his room, seventy-two years away from his entrance into the corrupted heart of the Address. He picked up the clipping with palsied hands as the traffic of Sunset moved beneath his window. PORTRAIT OF A GIANT, the headline read. And that was how John Samson Wales was remembered today: a giant of the silent cinema. His picture, posed with Clara Bow holding one arm and Mary Pickford the other, was in the books on movie history. No story had ever been written on what David had found in the basement of the Address; it had simply never happened.

Novagraph Films, the studio that held Wales's contract, had worked quickly. Mr. Donnelson had ended up with a red Packard and a yearly salary as a "talent scout" for Novagraph. The *Bulletin* was moved to larger offices, two blocks away from the Novagraph film lot on Santa Monica Boulevard. What Mr. Andersen, the policemen, and the morgue people had gotten, David never knew. David's father had looked long and hard at the envelope of money a man in a dark suit and a diamond stickpin had brought him out at the farm, but he took it. David had signed a piece of paper, promising him a job at the *Bulletin* for as long as he wanted it, with steady salary increases after he finished school. His father got a new tractor, and his mother a sewing machine.

On a morning two weeks afterward, Mr. Donnelson had come to the farm, and he and David had walked a distance out onto the bean field. Mr. Donnelson told him the girl's name was Olivia Marchette, and that Wales had picked her and her mother up at the train station. Olivia's mother, Donnelson said, was divorced, and she'd come from Indiana with her daughter to find work in the movies. Wales kept a schedule of the trains, and he'd learned to spot young women with stars in their eyes. It was something the studio's investigators thought he'd been doing for a year or two, and he'd gotten very efficient at the task.

David had stood listening to Mr. Donnelson talk, as the sun beat down on the dusty field. He watched men in the distance, putting up poles for new telephone and electric wires. Clouds moved across the sky, casting pools of darkness

on the earth. David hadn't had a full night's sleep since the iron door had opened. His father and mother had bought him a new bicycle that had never been touched. He awakened, night after night, with the image of that door and the words—the warning and boast—ABANDON ALL HOPE ablaze in his brain, like a fire that meant to burn him up from the inside out. He no longer smelled the fields, or the wind, or the Ivory soap his mother washed his clothes with; he smelled the reek of tormented death.

"This is bigger than you and me," Donnelson said, squinting in the glare. He was a stocky, well-fed man, and bright beads of sweat glistened on his ruddy face. "Bigger than the *Bulletin*, even. Novagraph was built on Wales's movies. If this got out, the entire studio could fall. We're in business to help the film industry, and I can't see how making this thing public would accomplish anything. Can you?"

David didn't answer. The telephone and electric poles had his attention. And up in the sky, far above, sunlight glinted off a silver aeroplane just coming over the mountains.

"Wales is dead," Donnelson continued. "He's beyond the law now, and . . . well, he's received his punishment for what he's done, if you believe in Heaven and Hell. The rest of us have to stay here, and we've got to keep on living." He brought out a white handkerchief and mopped his face. "Are you going to be all right?"

"What about the girl?" David's voice was quiet and sluggish, the voice of someone struggling against a crushing weight. "What's going to happen to her?"

"I don't know. They'll take care of her."

"Who will?"

"The studio, I guess. Somebody." Donnelson probed a mound of dirt with the toe of his shoe, and yellow dust swirled into the air. "I saw her at the hospital. They've got a man guarding her. She wanted to know your name, and I told her. I hope you don't mind."

"No," David said, "I don't mind."

"I guess somebody will take her back to Indiana. She's got relatives who'll take her in, I'm sure. And the studio will pay her bills and probably give her some money."

"To stay quiet, you mean." Donnelson didn't respond. David said, "He was evil." His voice cracked. "Evil. Why didn't anybody know how evil he was?"

"He made good movies. Maybe one part of him was evil, but the other part was a genius. Maybe . . . I don't know . . . maybe nobody wanted to see anything but the genius. Maybe one part fed the other, like grist for the mill."

David nodded absently. Grist for the mill. Meat for the slaughterhouse. John Samson Wales would have liked that, he suspected.

"There's not much more I can say, other than that I'm sorry it was you. Seeing something like that . . . I know it's going to be hard to get over."

Not hard, David thought. Impossible.

They stood for a while longer in the heat-stunned field, the breeze stirring up little whorls of dust. Finally Donnelson cleared his throat and said, "I've got an assignment for you, when you're ready to come back. You're a good writer. You can make a career as a reporter, if that's what you want. It's

a tough life—I think you already know that—but it’s never dull.” He tried for a smile, but he couldn’t manufacture one. “Well, I’d better get back to the office,” he told the silent boy. “I hope I’ll hear from you, David.” He touched David’s shoulder, and then he began trudging toward the house and his new red Packard.

“Mr. Donnelson?” David asked, and the man paused. “What’s going to happen to the Address?”

“It’s a fine house. I’m sure it won’t be empty long. Why?”

“Will whoever lives there next know what happened?”

“No. They’ll just know the Address used to belong to John Samson Wales, and that Wales died in his bed. That’s all.” He squinted, his handkerchief at work again. A thin smile worked at the corners of his mouth. “You don’t believe in ghosts, do you?”

“No sir,” David answered, and he heard Wales whisper in his mind like the sound of the scorched August wind: *You will.*

Donnelson walked away. David stood alone in the field wondering why it was that God had let John Samson Wales lock the iron door on those people and bite their bodies with greedy teeth. God had given him the gift of creation; why, then, had Wales sought to destroy?

Grist for the mill. Meat for the slaughterhouse. The camera making dreams, the hammer forging nightmares.

He had a nightmare of his own that night. In it, he walked through the corridors of the Address, its walls white and clean, and he came to a room where the director sat in a high-backed chair, the pipe clenched in his teeth and a glass of red wine at his side. “I created this house,” Wales said, his face pale and shiny, like the face of a waxworks figure. “It’s mine. It’ll always be mine, no matter who lives here. You know that, don’t you, David?”

“Yes sir,” David had replied.

Wales had stood up and glided toward him, a Goliath in a blue silk robe. David retreated; his back met a wall. “But it’s our secret, isn’t it? And you’ll be quiet about it, won’t you? You’ll be quiet about it, because Novagraph gave your father an envelope full of money and you’ve got a job at the *Bulletin* as long as you want it. You’ve always wanted to be a writer, and if you’re a very good boy and you work very hard, you might live someday in a house just like this one. Isn’t that right, David?” The boy didn’t answer, and Wales’s huge shadow cloaked him. “Isn’t that right, David?”

“Yes sir,” he gasped.

Wales grinned, and lifted the hammer he held in his right hand. Clots of blood and flesh dangled from the hammerhead. “Abandon all hope,” Wales whispered, and the hammer came down.

The old man stood up from his desk, his knees popping. He walked to the narrow window and gazed down at star-spangled Sunset. His angel had not returned, flown away to darker fields.

*He’s come back*, Olivia Marchette had said. *Think what he could do, in this world.*

David returned to his file cabinet. He brought out another clipping, this one dated about three months earlier. It was a column in the *Bulletin*, written by a reporter named Les McKane, about the progress of various Hollywood projects. David had underlined a portion of it in red: “. . . while he’s working on the screenplay of *Jack of Hearts* for Diamond Productions, based on his own bestseller, he’ll be leasing the Address, one of Beverly Hills’s historic old residences.”

My God, my God, David thought. This was the man Olivia wanted to murder.

He didn’t know the Address’s new resident, had never heard of him before, but this mention of the house in Les McKane’s column had caught his eye. Anything pertaining to the Address found its way into David’s files; keeping watch on the house had become, over the years, his driving force.

I’m an old man, he thought. What can I do?

No, that was not the question. The question was: what *should* I do?

He wasn’t ready yet to decide. He put the three-month-old clipping away, and his fingers found another folder. This he opened under the desk lamp. It was a *Bulletin* article from 1921, with his byline. There was a photograph of a beautiful young woman, her mouth a lipsticked bow, her hair blond and curly. He remembered that it was the color of platinum. He stared at a word in the headline: ACCIDENT.

David hadn’t known all the details then, but he’d put them together over the years as he’d put together all the other stories. He was a reporter by nature, a bloodhound, a weaver of tales told between the lines. Bit by bit, line by line, he had divined the history of the Address, and it was contained in the file cabinet and in the recesses of his memory.

Did he believe in ghosts? And if he did, was it enough to help commit a murder?

The past, like a rusty lock, held the answer.

He gazed at the young woman’s face, then at the word in the bold headline again: ACCIDENT.

He’d never believed it was an accident. Especially not after what he’d later learned. Nattie Dumas herself never believed it had been an accident. He should have told her that day, should have told her everything; but he hadn’t, because the truth was vile.

He sat down, with the article and the picture of Nattie Dumas before him. He began to read it again, slowly and carefully. She hadn’t known what the Address would do to her; she hadn’t guessed what role it wanted her to play.

David could see the house in his mind, the sunlight glinting off the door knocker that was the double masks of comedy and tragedy. It was 1921, and John Samson Wales had been in his grave for two years. The spotlight was on Nattie Dumas, and the cameras began to roll. ■

## Things Unearthed...

News items of interest

### *Boy's Life* Selected by Literary Guild and Sold to Hollywood

Robert R. McCammon's latest novel, *Boy's Life*, officially released as a Pocket Books hardcover on August 5, 1991, was selected as one of the Literary Guild Book Club's main selections for August. This is the third McCammon novel to be selected by a book club.

McCammon had a "highly successful" autographing tour to support the book, according to a Pocket Books spokesperson. The book has received very good reviews, from such diverse publications as *Kirkus Reviews* and *Entertainment Weekly*. McCammon was also the featured author for "PW Interviews" in the August 2, 1991, issue of *Publishers Weekly*.

Film rights to *Boy's Life* were sold to Universal Studios several months before the book was published. No word yet on whether or not the movie will really be made, or who will direct if it is.

### McCammon's Next Novel: *Gone South*

Robert R. McCammon's next novel will be entitled *Gone South*. It is about a down-on-his-luck Vietnam vet who accidentally kills a person. Not knowing what to do, he goes on the run and is tracked by two unlikely bounty hunters: a bad Elvis impersonator and a man who grew up in a carnival freak show. A little more information can be found in the McCammon interview later in this issue.

The novel should be finished in October, and will be published by Pocket Books in hardcover. The tentative date is August 1992.

Speaking of Pocket Books, they just acquired the rights to the only two McCammon novels they didn't already

have: *Mystery Walk* and *Usher's Passing*. The books were reprinted by Ballantine in 1989. Pocket will be reprinting them soon, making the complete Robert R. McCammon catalog available from Pocket Books.

### McCammon to Narrate Audio Versions of Two Books

Robert R. McCammon will be narrating the audio adaptations of *Boy's Life* and his next novel, entitled *Gone South*. While the novels will be abridged by someone else, McCammon will be doing the readings. "I've always enjoyed reading to people, and I'm looking forward to these," McCammon recently told me.

The audio tapes will be released by Simon & Schuster Audio, with *Boy's Life* appearing in May 1992 to coincide with the paperback release of the book.

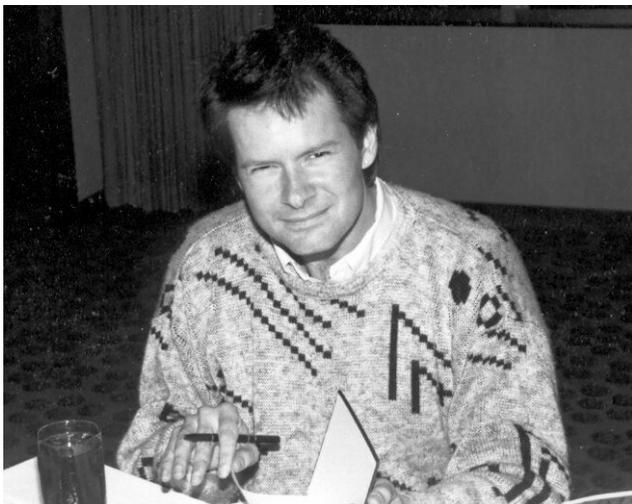
### McCammon Receives Another HWA Award

The Horror Writers of America presented the 1991 HWA awards in Los Angeles in June 1991. Robert R. McCammon received his fourth HWA award when *Mine* was awarded Outstanding Achievement in a Novel. The winners were:

- **Novel:** *Mine*, by Robert R. McCammon
- **First Novel:** *The Revelation*, by Bentley Little
- **Novella:** "Stephen," by Elizabeth Massie
- **Short Story:** "The Calling," by David B. Silva
- **Collection:** *Four Past Midnight*, by Stephen King

McCammon's other HWA awards were for *Swan Song*, "The Deep End," and "Eat Me." ■

Robert R. McCammon Mugging for the Camera—WFC '89



Robert R. McCammon and Chet Williamson—WFC '90



## Exclusive Interview: Robert R. McCammon

Conducted by Hunter Goatley

*Editor's note: This final Lights Out! interview with Rick McCammon was conducted in his home in Birmingham, Alabama, on August 31, 1991, a little over two and a half years after my first interview with him.*

**HG:** Let's start with your new book, *Boy's Life*. I've heard you describe it in other places as a "fictography." You also told me once before that you had written some stories featuring Cory when you were in college. Did any of those stories end up in *Boy's Life*?

**RM:** No, they didn't. There was one about a strip show, one about a carnival he sneaked into with his friends, and there was another one about a fiery, energetic travelling evangelist who Cory discovered got his energy from a bottle of whiskey. He was the only one who knew the preacher could not go on unless he was drunk.

There were a couple of others I did, but they really weren't tied together. I think I have had for years the idea of doing something like this book. I'm really pleased because it came together easily, but I've been working on it for a long time. I think the idea started back in college, maybe, and it took a long time before I was ready to do it. And when I was ready, it came together pretty quickly.

**HG:** It read like quite a departure from your earlier stuff—it's a grown-up novel about being a kid. . . .

**RM:** I think it's also a kind of wishful, and wistful, novel. It's a looking-back, but it also says you have to go on. You can't live in that time, but you can always remember what it was like. You can always carry some of what you felt—what you understood life to be then—with you, but you can't go back and live there; you have to go on. So it's nostalgic, of course, but I think it also says you should, hopefully, keep these feelings you had as a child. Rediscover these feelings and carry them with you as you grow older.

**HG:** Do you anticipate ever trying to visit Zephyr again in the future?

**RM:** No.

**HG:** What about the Lady? Do you think you'll ever go back and do her story?

**RM:** I thought about that, because I did almost 300 pages in first-person of *The Lady*. That really was a pretty good book, but I wasn't ready to write it.

**HG:** In the first interview we did, you mentioned that you weren't ready to write it. But after reading *Boy's Life*, I wondered if you thought now that it might be doable, whether you do it or not.

**RM:** That's an interesting situation with the movie rights. You know that we just sold the movie rights outright to Universal. They bought all the characters. So that would

preclude me from going back and doing anything. That was a sticking point—they needed *all* the characters

The book was about how she grew up and how she became almost like a Marie Louveau-type character. She went all through this magic life, full of majesty and power, and in New Orleans, when she was an older woman, it was like, "You go and sit in the back of the bus." Things like, "real life" was that she was less of a person, but she knew who she was. She knew who she was and the black community—the Dark Society, as they called it—knew who she was. She was queen of the Dark Society, yet through white eyes, she was an old nigger lady who needs to sit at the back of the bus. So it was gonna be: we don't really know what people are like.

The reason that *The Lady* derailed is the more I read about voodoo, the more I realized it was a way to control blacks. Apart from the sentimentalized and speculative, supernatural aspects of voodoo, it was a way to control the minds of black people. And I'm saying, well, you can believe in voodoo, and you can write a book that involves zombies and talking snakes, but then I came to a wall. The reality—the truth—is that voodoo was used—and is still used somewhat—to control black minds. So I thought, "This may not be good to do this book, because wouldn't the Lady realize that this is a way to control people?" So it came to a point where I wasn't sure this was a good thing to do. Her story would have been excellent, but I had a choice of paths there and I didn't know which one to take.

**HG:** Was she always planned as a character in *Boy's Life*, or did she just show up?

**RM:** No, she wasn't. She just showed up. The opening of *The Lady* involved *me* going to visit her in New Orleans, and it was quite a process to get in to see her; you had to go through a lot of people to finally get to see her. The opening sequence was: I'm talking to her in her house; we're in this room where the fans are turning and the walls were green with a leafy motif. I'm looking at the old Lady, and as she's talking, the room begins to change, and her face begins to change. Her face begins to get younger and younger and younger. And I used part of that in *Boy's Life*, when Cory is talking to her and she says, "What do you see?" and he begins to see her as a younger woman.

But she was a very powerful character in *The Lady*. Her face came from a poster that I found in New Orleans. The picture was a drawing of a black woman with a snake around her neck, and she had these emerald-green eyes. I thought it was a very stunning and stirring poster—and that's really where the entire idea came from.

The Lady had a snake she could talk to. This was before *Swan Song*: the snake had no name, but she called the snake *Sister*, so then I used *Sister Creep*—I just thought that worked out well. But I thought, if the snake has a name, it's got to be *Sssisster*, you know.

The Lady was known by no other name in the book than the Lady—when she was a little girl, people called her the Little Lady, and all through the book she was called the Lady. In the supernatural version of the book I was doing, her mother was murdered by LaRouge, who was a woman who always wore red and carried a monkey with her. She was one of the pretenders to the queenship of the voodoo society in New Orleans. So she murdered the Lady's mother, and the Lady escaped into the swamp and met this snake, Sister.

Sister finds herself—and this kind of keeps recurring in my books—Sister has the attitude that she can never love anybody, because loving is too painful. Sister tells the Lady that she had a mate and children, but she watched these white, pale-skinned beasts come into the swamp, and they killed her mate and her children. She would never love anything again because loving was too painful. Through the book, Sister goes with the Lady back to New Orleans to find LaRouge as the Lady grows up. It's kind of like *The Jungle Book*, in a way. So the story was kind of about sisters. It was really weird writing about the world from the aspect of a snake.

This was during the Civil War, and the Lady, who was just a teenaged girl, worked as a maid in a bordello. Sister would leave the house at night and kind of prowl around—she acted as the eyes of the Lady, out in the city. It would have been pretty interesting. More of a fantasy story, actually.

**HG:** At what point were you working on *The Lady*? You said it was before *Swan Song*...

**RM:** It was probably between *Mystery Walk* and *Usher's Passing*.

**HG:** It sounds like that period.

**RM:** Yeah. And then that kind of segued into the history of the Ushers.

**HG:** You said before that *Boy's Life* was a fictography, so a natural question is: how much of it is true?

**RM:** Well, as I said this afternoon, I think it's really about my feelings about life, about people, and kind of my attitudes. I'm not really sure that there are any actual scenes in the book that I lived through. Though I grew up near a house that was supposedly haunted by the ghost of a Nazi in the basement. He had this scarred face. I was over there with some friends, and we thought the house was empty—I was prowling around the house. There was a curtain over a window in the basement where this ghost was supposed to be, and as I'm looking in, the curtain in front of my face shook! And, really, my hair stood up! What we found out was that somebody had just moved into the house, and they were in the basement sweeping, and evidently the end of the broom hit the curtain.

**HG:** Bet that scared you!

**RM:** *Boy!* You know... But I was so excited, because I had real evidence that the ghost of the scar-faced Nazi was in this basement!

**HG:** That's funny. Of course, everybody knew somebody like the Demon...

**RM:** Yeah. I remember the girl, and she always looked like she had "mess" in her nose, and she always had little beads of sweat on her upper lip. There was always something kind of nasty about her.

And I had a bike certainly like Rocket, or at least I felt like it was like Rocket. This was during the time when I had gone to see *The Great Escape*, and I sat through that movie I don't know how many times. I loved the scene with Steve McQueen on the motorcycle, and when I'd get home from school, I'd get my jacket and I'd get on my bike and ride like... you know. So I had a *great* bike.

**HG:** One of the scenes that worked so well for me was also one of the book's few true fantasy sequences. It best captured those feelings of being twelve—when school was out and they went out in the field with their dogs, and the wings sprouted from their backs... That was neat.

**RM:** That was probably one of my favorite parts of the book. But it's funny: you either get that part or you don't get it. I was talking to somebody who said, "I don't understand. Didn't their mothers notice that their shirts were torn?" So either you get it or you don't.

It was also supposed to indicate that Cory had the imagination—and these guys listened to him—that he could talk them up. If they listened to him, he could tell them the story, "Now we're getting ready! Now our wings are..." So his imagination was developing to the point where his friends were willing to believe that he could take them flying. Which is, of course, what a storyteller does. A storyteller does take his audience flying.

**HG:** The book was a very Southern book, which also had a lot of appeal to me. Growing up in Kentucky, I used to deny that I was from the South. Fortunately, I don't have much of an accent. But when I went to Utah, and spent time out West where things are *really* different, I started really missing the South. I was back in Kentucky when I read *Boy's Life*, and I thought, "Yeah, this is the South that I remember that is different from every place else."

**RM:** Yeah, it's different. When I first began writing, I didn't want to be a Southern writer, and I didn't want my first book to be a Southern book. That seemed to be expected, that if you were born in the South and you wanted to be a writer, you did a Southern book. You know, all the characters were Southern, and everything was Southern, and you had this society of women on the front porch, and the men were in watching the football game or whatever, and that sort of Southern cliché. And I didn't want to do that. I think it took me a while to feel that I could do it and not be typecast as a Southern writer who could now only do Southern things. I consciously didn't want to do a Southern book for a while, and I guess the first Southern book I did was *Mystery Walk*.

**HG:** That's still one of my favorites, and I think that's why: because it's a Southern book.

**RM:** There's just something about the thick green wilderness that's just outside your door.

**HG:** We did *not* have that in Utah! It was carved out of the desert. I didn't appreciate the green and the overpowering humidity until I got out there and didn't have it. And I actually began to miss it.

**RM:** I'm sure there's a great heritage of folklore in every part of the country, but it seems to me that, in the South, it's just part of everyday life. I'm really glad that I could do a Southern novel and feel that I've done a good job.

**HG:** I think there was a lot of truth to the characters—the characters were more realistic in *Boy's Life* and in *Mystery Walk* than the others, because, I assume, you're able to draw them better.

**RM:** I also wanted *Boy's Life* to be not just about the murder—I wanted the murder to be the framework—but I wanted it to be about anything and everything. I didn't work with an outline, so it was about whatever came to mind. Whatever I could put in that would make sense in terms of how the story was developing. It was a lot of fun because I didn't know where I was going, basically. And it was a great trip.

**HG:** I liked the triceratops. That was neat. I remember the trailers that would pull up to the shopping centers with the large snakes. . . .

**RM:** Right. It just appeals to me that this guy in the carnival wouldn't care what he had. His attitude is: life is just crap—everything is bad. And here he has this *wonderful* creature that's been entrusted to him, and all he sees is the mess. That was pretty fun.

**HG:** Is there anything you wanted to say about *Boy's Life* that you haven't? How's that for an open-ended question?

**RM:** That *is* an open-ended question! Uh, I am amazed that it came together as it did. See, I was working on another book that didn't come together. This happens to me quite a lot—if you don't work with an outline, you can be working and suddenly it's like. . . . I started on a book in January, and it was strictly a mystery about a series of murders in a small country town. And it just wasn't going very well, though it would have been a good mystery. But it was like, "This is not. . . ." Then I began to hear this "Cory. . . . Cory. . . ." and I thought, "This may be the time to do it."

One of the worst things in the world is deciding when to let something go, and when to stick with it *just* a little longer and it'll come to life. This book was called *Fear the Headsman*—it was not trite, it just wasn't what I wanted it to be. So it got to be April and it was like, I've got to put this to the side; this is just not what I want to do. So I started the first line of *Boy's Life* on April 14 and finished it on September 23. It was ready; it was almost miraculous.

**HG:** I mentioned earlier today that it read like "Blue World," which you wrote in about a week. I think it shows in a book that the author enjoyed writing it, because. . . it went!

**RM:** Then again, some books I've done have been hard. *Boy's Life* was pretty easy. Some books have been very difficult, yet I'm satisfied when they come out. It just depends—each one is a little different, but *Boy's Life* really did flow; it was just ready. Really, it was like being on a train or something, and you're blind—you just had to trust that you were making the right track connections as you were going.

**HG:** What else can you tell me about *Boy's Life* and the movies? You told me it had been bought by Universal; can you tell me any more about it?

**RM:** No, I don't know any more. Of course, if that happens, it might be great and it might be horrible. So who knows. . . .

**HG:** Switching gears to *The Address*, you've already described in the preface to the story what happened to it. Are there any stories you particularly were looking forward to doing and kind of regret not doing?

**RM:** Yeah. I looked forward to doing "The Midnight Express." That's actually what they called the black film community: the Midnight Express. It was like, "I'm on the Midnight Express," because they felt like they were on a fast train headed nowhere. I looked forward to talking about the black film community.

I looked forward to doing "Alone," which I mentioned was about the William Holden-type character who was in a situation where if he didn't do something, he was going to die. Yet he was all alone; very popular actor—where were his friends on Christmas Eve? So I looked forward to those two.

There are probably some others, but some of them were tough, particularly the one about Little Chubbs. That one was just *wrenching*, and then the whole thing got so dark. You know, as a writer, you have to live in what you're working—you have to live there. Do you really want to live in this place? Do you want to get this in your head and in your soul? It was very intense, and it was just too much.

**HG:** Did you actually finish the story about Chubbs?

**RM:** No, that's when I quit. It was dark and grim, and the things that happened to this boy were just. . . . And yet it's true; it certainly has happened that young actors and actresses—children—were, in a way, purchased from their parents. And that's what happened to this boy—these two people, a man and a woman, would scout the country looking for a star, for children with talent. They found this kid in a talent show in a small town in Virginia, and "purchased" him from his parents—the parents were farmers who needed the money. They were just horrible to him. When they found out the studio needed a fat boy, they fed him up so he was fat. And then suddenly the studio said he was *too* fat, he couldn't run, he couldn't perform, we're afraid. So they put him on a crash diet. But the woman was insane, and she'd leave things like jelly doughnuts out to tempt him. So the spirit of this cowboy star who had hanged himself began to communicate with him to help him out of this situation. But I didn't know whether this thing in the attic was going to be beneficial or evil. It was just too much dark for me.

**HG:** The piece that I'm printing is strange compared with other things you've written. When Dave goes to interview John Samson Wales, there are touches of *Boy's Life* in that part. . . .

**RM:** The whole thing about this book was that you were enthralled with the beauty of what you saw. But it wasn't real.

**HG:** I read in *Publishers Weekly* that you have your next 10 books in-progress or outlined. Is that accurate?

**RM:** Well, there not physically outlined, but they are working in my head.

**HG:** Tell me a little bit about your next novel, *Gone South*.

**RM:** *Gone South* is more of a suspense novel than *Boy's Life*. I think it's also somewhat of a black comedy. It involves a Vietnam veteran who's lost his job and is dying of leukemia. His truck is repossessed, which is kind of the last thing he owns in the world. He goes berserk in the bank and accidentally shoots a loan officer, and goes on the run.

There are two bounty hunters after him. One of them grew up in a freak show—his brother Clint is inside him. There's a little head that hangs out on his right side and an arm that sticks out his chest. He's trained Clint to hold a pistol—he's trained him, and he feeds him Ritz crackers and stuff. The other one is a terrible Elvis impersonator. There's more to it than that, but that's kind of the framework to get the book going. But it's real different from *Boy's Life*. I should be finished with it pretty soon.

**HG:** Will that be published in May?

**RM:** Probably next August.

**HG:** I had asked subscribers for questions for you. Here's one from Dan McMillen: I've read that you have somewhat of a fascination with Nazism. I've also read that Dean Koontz shares this same fascination. What is the reason for your interests in that area?

**RM:** I think that comes strictly from my interest in history. I think it's just kind of a coincidence that *The Wolf's Hour* and *The Night Boat* both dealt with Nazis. I've always been interested in history—military history too—and that's where that comes from. I can't envision any other characters in my books being Nazis. I think I've gotten all the Nazi plots and sub-plots out of my system! Unless I come up with an Elvis impersonator who's a Nazi, or something. A man with three arms, and one of them gives the "Sieg Heil!" I think we may have finished up the Nazi phase.

**HG:** As I look around, I see lots of World War II games. . . .

**RM:** And books. I'm pretty much on my way to being either an expert or a bore on the subject!

**HG:** Speaking of World War II, your interest seems to be mostly European, instead of Japanese.

**RM:** Well, not really; there's some Asian and North African. . . . What interested me about that era is that it was the "white hats" versus the "black hats." And also the

experience—the conflict—was so far-reaching and varied. It was a time when people were just discovering technology and the limits of technology. The arms race between Germany and Russia and the United States and Britain. And all these fascinating characters: Churchill, Roosevelt, and of course Hitler, and then all the Nazi trappings—this idea that "we are the master race," and the Nordic myths. There's just so much involved in that period that it's fascinating. It'll never be like that again. It'll never be "white hats" versus "black hats" again—it wasn't really like that in Desert Storm, because they didn't really want to fight.

**HG:** The black hats were gray.

**RM:** All hats were gray. It'll never be like that again. The Normandy Invasion, for example. Nobody had ever done anything on a scale like that before. They didn't really know if it was gonna work—it was an incredible operation, and it worked. It amazed them that it worked. I don't know if it could be duplicated now. And the American willpower to do that! The American machinery was just getting geared up, and then the German willpower, and Russia was just coming into its own, and the Japanese were a maritime nation. It is a fascinating era. See—I can be a bore very easily about that era!

**HG:** I've only recently started reading anything about it. For some reason, in history in high school, we just kind of skimmed over it.

**RM:** You know, they had the fliers in the Battle of Britain, and they were all very young men—they were the pipe-smokers, with scarves around their necks and the leather caps. They got into their Spitfires and they flew them up, mission after mission. You had the Finnish snipers in the swamps of Russia—down in the swamps with that one rifle and that one bullet, waiting for hours for someone to cross the path of that rifle.

The experience of that war was *incredibly* varied—and fascinating.

**HG:** Desert Storm only lasted a hundred days, but it seemed a lot longer. I can't imagine a war that lasts for years.

**RM:** Well, they actually started in '38, because that's when Russia invaded Finland—Russia and Finland fought from about 1938 to 1940. Then in 1940, Germany invaded Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, and finally Russia. Really fascinating. Anyway, that's where all of that comes from.

**HG:** Mark Turek wrote: Because of horror "splatter" cinema, I've noticed the trend toward "splatter" horror fiction. Originality is hard to find except in a few cases; your most recent novel [*The Wolf's Hour*] was a very refreshing read, as was *Stinger*. What do you see on the horizon for the genre, and do you think we'll rise above the blood-and-gore rubbish?

**RM:** My feeling—and I know this is gonna get a lot of people upset—is that the future of horror is in films. Horror literature may be non-existent soon. Books have tried to mirror films because it's perceived that films are popular—they make a lot of money, usually—so the books have become

more like the films. I think fewer people are reading horror novels now. I think you'll see the trend continue in horror films, but I think horror novels are taking their last gasp. I wish that weren't so, but it seems to be so.

**HG:** Henry Gershman asked: Are there any plans for any major movie companies to make [films based on your work]?

**RM:** *Mine* has been optioned, "Night Calls the Green Falcon" has been optioned. These are both new options for television. I was always amazed that *Mine* wasn't optioned for film. You know, you read about some actress saying, "I can never find a strong part for a woman. Why won't anybody write a strong part for a woman?"

**HG:** And there are two of them there.

**RM:** Well, there are three of them! Then *Thelma and Louise* is hailed as the first woman road movie. Folks. . . .

**HG:** Mary Thornton sent: are you thinking about writing again about Michael Gallatin?

**RM:** I left it open so in case I did want to go back and do a sequel. If I do a sequel, it might be through a small press.

**HG:** Richard Kaapke of Las Vegas asked: at the World Fantasy Convention in Seattle, you mentioned that the eleventh hour being the wolf's hour came out of legend or folklore. Could you expand on that some, perhaps giving a pointer to those curious about the origins of that expression?

**RM:** I think that is Nordic. There was a name for every hour, and I think the eleventh hour is the wolf's hour in Nordic-Germanic mythology. Also, I wanted to use the idea of the eleventh hour—you always hear about the eleventh hour as being the last hour, the dangerous hour.

It's amazing to me how many people think. I get letters that say, "I really enjoyed *The Hour of the Wolf*." And when we first did the book, Pocket said, "Wouldn't you rather call it *The Hour of the Wolf*?" Well, it's not the hour of the wolf. In Nordic mythology, eleven o'clock is the wolf's hour—it's not the hour of the wolf.

**HG:** When Ballantine reprinted *Mystery Walk* and *Usher's Passing*, the original covers stated, "By the author of *The Hour of the Wolf*."

**RM:** Now why did they do that? I think it sounds much better as *The Wolf's Hour*. It is the wolf's hour.

**HG:** Well, "the hour of the wolf" sounds like. . . .

**RM:** It sounds like, "Let us now go to the drive-in and watch it on the B-movie drive-in screen." It's not that.

**HG:** Richard also wrote: knowing your distaste for screenplay writing, does this extend to collaborative writing too? Is there a writer that you would like to collaborate with on a new novel?

**RM:** I wouldn't say I'm distasteful of collaborative writing, because I think there are good books that have been written

by collaborators. Personally, I'm much more comfortable writing as a separate entity in solitude.

**HG:** Do you write in silence?

**RM:** No, I listen to all kinds of music—whatever interests me at the time. I have all sorts of things—rap, ancient Scottish music, sound effects—I've got a train trip sound effects [album]—just whatever.

**HG:** People are surprised that I can listen to Kiss at loud volumes while I am writing programs.

**RM:** It takes care of one side of the brain. It really does, because a lot of times I'll put on the music and I'll start working—and I don't hear it anymore, but I'm working. I think the music is taking care of one side of the brain, and the other half has just gone to work.

**HG:** I have noticed that I can put a CD on while programming or writing an article, and it'll go off and I won't even remember having heard the songs.

**RM:** I think it entertains the side of the brain that tries to distract you. It tries to say, "Oh, let's get up and do something." And that side likes to listen to music.

**HG:** Finally, Richard asked if there was anything particularly memorable about the 1989 World Fantasy Convention in Seattle? You can see how long I've had these questions!

**RM:** Well, it was my first trip to Seattle. I really like Seattle; it's the place I would live if the sun shone more. I have to have the sun. I was Guest of Honor there too—that was memorable. And I got such a good response from the fans.

**HG:** Ron Alfano wanted to ask about *Mine*: the storyline that you wrote, I felt, can be considered something out of today's newspaper headlines. Did you, [while] writing *Mine*, think along such lines, and have you received any strong reaction letters from (women) readers about the novel's contents?

**RM:** A lot of women readers have trouble particularly with the opening—they think the baby's being hurt. A few years ago, one of the members of the Weathermen resurfaced up in New York and robbed an armored car or something. She had been living as a fugitive for years and years. I kind of kept that in my mind for years, and finally I found the story that I needed. I think that's probably where it began. Kathy Boudin was her name, I think.

**HG:** To wrap things up, he also asked if you used an outline for *Mine*, since it was so contemporary?

**RM:** I never use an outline, I just let the story flow. And however the story develops is how it develops, because I want to approach it as a reader. I want to be reading it as the first time—I don't really want to know what's gonna happen. ■

