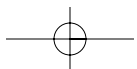
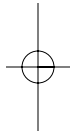
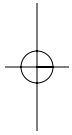


***The Devil and John Holmes***



John Holmes was a porn star. Eddie Nash was a drug lord. Their association ended in one of the most brutal mass murders in the history of Los Angeles.

**Deep in Laurel Canyon,** the Wonderland Gang was planning its last heist. It was Sunday evening and the drugs were gone, the money was gone, the situation was desperate. They'd sold a pound of baking soda for a quarter of a million dollars: There were contracts out on their lives. Now they had another idea. They sat around a glass table in the breakfast nook. Before them were two pairs of handcuffs, a stolen police badge, several automatic pistols and a dogeared sheet of paper, a floor plan. They needed a score. This was it.

There were seven of them meeting in the house on Wonderland Avenue, a jaundiced stucco box on a steep, winding road in the hills above Hollywood. Joy Audrey Miller, 46, held the lease. She was thin, blond, foul-mouthed, a heroin addict with seven arrests. She had two daughters, had once been married to a Beverly Hills attorney. A year ago, she'd been busted for dealing drugs out of the Wonderland house. Six months ago she'd had a double mastectomy. Her lover was Billy DeVerell. DeVerell, 42, was also a heroin addict. He had a slight build, a pockmarked face, a record of thirteen arrests. "He looked like a guy in a dive bar in El Paso," according to a neighbor.

Sharing the house with Miller and DeVerell was Ronald Launius, 37. Blond and bearded, Launius had served federal time for drug smuggling. A California cop called him "one of the coldest people I ever met."

The house at 8763 Wonderland rented for \$750 a month. There was a garage on the first floor; the second and third floors had balconies facing the street. A stairway, leading from the garage to the front door, was caged in iron. There was a telephone at the entrance, an electronic deadbolt on the gate, two pit bulls sleeping on the steps.

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Though elaborately secure, the house was paint-cracked and rust-stained, an eyesore in a trendy neighborhood. Laurel Canyon had long been a prestige address, an earthy, woodsy setting just minutes from the glitter and rush of Tinseltown. Tom Mix and Harry Houdini once lived there among the quail and scrub pine and coyotes. Later, in the Sixties, the canyon attracted writers and artists, rock stars and gurus. Number 8763 Wonderland Avenue had some history of its own: Paul Revere and the Raiders once lived there.

By the Eighties, former California governor Jerry Brown was living on Wonderland Avenue, and Steven Spielberg was building on a lot not far away. The house at 8763 had passed from a raucous group of women—neighbors recall naked women being tossed from the first-floor balcony—to the members of the Wonderland Gang. Things at the house were always hopping, someone was always showing up with a scam. Miller, DeVerell and Launius needed drugs every day. They were always looking for an opportunity. Jewelry stores, convenience stores, private homes—they would try anything, as long as it meant money or drugs.

“There was a lot of traffic, all day, all night,” says a neighbor. “Everything from Volkswagens to a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow. They threw brown bags of dope off the balcony. There was shouting, laughing, rock & roll twenty-four hours a day.”

At the moment, on this evening of June 28th, 1981, Wonderland Avenue was quiet. Five men and two women were meeting in the breakfast nook, sitting in swivel chairs, leaning against walls. The floor plan before them showed a three-bedroom, high-end tract house on a cul-de-sac in the San Fernando Valley. It had a pool and a sunken living room, a white stone façade. Inside was a painting by Rembrandt, a jade and ivory collection, sterling silver, jewelry and, most appealing of all, large quantities of money and drugs.

The man who owned the house was named Adel Nasrallah. He was known as Eddie Nash. A naturalized American, Nash came to California from Palestine in the early Fifties. In 1960 he opened a hot-dog stand on Hollywood Boulevard. By the mid-Seventies, Nash held thirty-six liquor licenses, owned real estate and other assets worth over \$30 million.

Nash had clubs of all kinds; he catered to all predilections. The Kit Kat was a strip club. The Seven Seas was a bus-stop joint across Hollywood Boulevard from Mann’s Chinese Theaters. It had a tropical motif, a menu of special drinks, a Polynesian revue, sometimes belly dancers. His gay clubs were the first in L.A. to allow same-sex dancing. His black club was like a Hollywood Harlem, jazz and pinkie rings and wide-brimmed straw hats.

The Starwood, on Santa Monica Boulevard, featured cutting-edge rock & roll. In the late Seventies, Los Angeles police averaged twenty-five drug busts a month at the Starwood. One search of the premises yielded a cardboard box containing 4000 counterfeit Quaaludes. A sign on the box, written in blue Magic Marker, said, FOR DISTRIBUTION AT BOX OFFICE.

Nash was a drug dealer and a heavy user. His drug of choice was freebase, home-cooked crack cocaine, and he was smoking it at the rate of two to three ounces a day. He always had large quantities of coke, heroin, Quaaludes and other drugs at the house. His bodyguard, Gregory DeWitt Diles, was a karate expert and convicted felon who weighed a blubbery 300 pounds. According to one eyewitness, Diles once chased a man out of the Kit Kat and emptied his .38 revolver into the man's car. The car was on the other side of Santa Monica Boulevard, across six lanes of traffic. The time was 2:30 in the afternoon. No one was injured.

Nash and Diles were well known on Sunset Strip. "Eddie Nash assumed he deserved a certain amount of respect," says one denizen. "If somebody fucked with him . . ."

Now, in the breakfast nook, a tall, gaunt man with curly hair and a sparse beard pointed to the floor plan he had sketched.

"Here, this back bedroom, that's Diles's room," he said. "He keeps a sawed-off shotgun under the blanket. . . . Here, this is Nash's room. There's a floor safe in the closet, right . . . over . . . here."

"You sure about this, donkey dick?" asked Tracy McCourt, the gang's wheelman.

"Hey, it's cool," said John Holmes, 36, the man with the plan. "I know Eddie. Nash loves me. He thinks I'm famous."

John Holmes was famous, at least in some circles. What he was famous for was his penis.

In a career that would span twenty years, Holmes made 2274 hard-core pornographic films, had sex with 14,000 women. At the height of his popularity, he earned \$3000 a day on films and almost as much turning tricks, servicing wealthy men and women on both coasts and in Europe.

Since the late Sixties, Holmes had traded on his natural endowment. His penis, when erect, according to legend, measured between eleven and fifteen inches in length. Recently, however, Holmes's biggest commodity had been trouble. He was freebasing one hit of coke every ten or fifteen minutes, swallowing forty to fifty Valium a day to cut the edge. The drugs

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affected his penis; he couldn't get it up, he couldn't work in porn. Now he was a drug delivery boy for the Wonderland Gang. His mistress, Jeana, who'd been with him since she was fifteen, was turning tricks to support his habit. They were living out of the trunk of his estranged wife's Chevy Malibu. Holmes was stealing luggage off conveyers at L.A. International, buying appliances with his wife's credit cards, fencing them for cash.

Holmes was into Nash for a small fortune. Now Holmes owed the Wonderland Gang, too. He'd messed up a delivery, had a big argument with DeVerell and Launius. They took back his key to Wonderland, and Launius punched him out, then hit Holmes with his own blackthorn walking stick. They told him to make good. He tried to think. Addled synapses played him a picture: Eddie Nash.

"So you go in," Launius was saying to Holmes, reviewing the plan. "You talk to Nash, whatever, you tell him you got to take a piss. Then what?"

"I leave the sliding door unlocked—this one," said Holmes, pointing to the floor plan, "here, in the back. The guest bedroom. Then I leave. I come back to Wonderland. Tell you it's all clear. Then you guys take him down."

And so the plan was fixed. At midnight, the Wonderland people scraped together \$400, and Holmes, whose pretense for entrance would be buying drugs, drove off to Nash's house.

It was 1.6 miles from Wonderland Avenue to Dona Lola Place, which was fortuitous, because the stolen Ford Granada driven by the Wonderland Gang was running on empty. In the car were DeVerell, Launius, McCourt and a man named David Lind, a friend of Launius's. Lind and his girlfriend had come down three weeks earlier from Sacramento to stay at Wonderland. An ex-convict who'd served time for burglary, forgery and assault to commit rape, Lind had been invited to town, he would later tell a court, to practice his "profession," committing crimes.

McCourt drove up the hill on Laurel Canyon Boulevard, across Mulholland Drive, over the crest of the Santa Monica Mountains, down into the Valley. The sun was warm and diffuse. Sprinklers were ticking water across lawns. Rush hour was on. It was 8:30 Monday morning.

Though Holmes had left Wonderland at midnight, he had stayed at Eddie Nash's for six hours, smoking up the \$400 he'd taken to spend, helping himself to a little more of Nash's largess. Nash was extremely hospitable. He always called Holmes "my brother." They'd known each other for three years.

As night stretched into morning, Holmes had an attack of conscience, a

glimmer of an understanding that knocking over Eddie Nash might lead to a lot of trouble. Nash knew the Wonderland people. He'd never met them, but he had, through Holmes, given them a \$1000 loan. Holmes muttered something to Nash about the gang. He wasn't specific, but it really didn't matter anyway. Nash hadn't slept in ten days. He hardly knew what Holmes was saying. And, as Holmes's supply of coke dwindled, his conscience was overruled by his jones. He excused himself, left the room and unlocked the sliding door.

Arriving back at Wonderland just after dawn, Holmes announced the coast was clear. The time was right, he told Lind.

There was one hitch. DeVerell, Launius and McCourt, all heroin addicts, were out cold.

Three hours later, everyone was finally awake. Holmes drove to Nash's again to make sure the sliding door was still open. This time, the gang decided not to wait for his return.

Now, as McCourt turned right, off Laurel Canyon Boulevard onto Dona Pegita, he saw Holmes driving back toward them. Both cars slowed, pulled even in the middle of the street. Holmes rolled down his window, McCourt rolled down his.

"It's time," Holmes said, and then he smiled and raised his fist "Get 'em, boys!"

John Curtis Holmes had the longest, most prolific career in the history of pornography. He had sex onscreen with two generations of leading ladies, from Seka and Marilyn Chambers to Traci Lords, Ginger Lynn and Italian member of Parliament Ciccolina. The first man to win the X Rated Critics Organization Best Actor Award, Holmes was an idol and an icon, the most visible male porn star of his time.

Holmes started in the business around 1968, a time when porn was just beginning to surface from the underground of peep shows and frat houses into mainstream acceptance. The Sixties, the pill, "free love," communes, wife swapping, the perverse creativity of mixed-media artists who were pushing the limit, trying to shock—all of these things created an atmosphere in which porn could blossom. The pivotal event in porn history was the release of *Deep Throat*, starring Linda Lovelace and Harry Reems, in 1972. Though the movie, when it began to appear at theaters around the country, was branded as obscene and closed down almost everywhere it played, its producers contested the charges in the courts and eventually won. In the end, *Deep Throat*

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was massively consumed by an enthusiastic public. With the release the same year of *The Devil in Miss Jones* and *Behind the Green Door*, porn became part of popular culture. Suddenly, Johnny Carson was telling *Deep Throat* jokes on *The Tonight Show*.

One day in 1970, Holmes met Hawaiian producer Bob Chinn. Up to this time, Holmes had been doing mostly photo layouts, stag films and 8-mm bookstore loops. He showed Chinn his portfolio of stills, then stripped. That evening, Chinn wrote a three-page screenplay; a partnership was born. This would lead, in the mid-Seventies, to Holmes's most successful role, as Johnny Wadd, the hard-boiled detective, porn's parody of Sam Spade. Holmes's character, said Al Goldstein in *Screw* magazine, was "a thin, bony, trench-coated shamus, outrageously horny, bedding down with client and quarry alike." In Goldstein's opinion, "it was a goofy, crudely made series," but it was wildly successful. In a way, Holmes was everyman's gigolo, a polyester smoothy with a sparse mustache, a flying collar and lots of buttons undone. He wasn't threatening. He chewed gum and overacted. He took a lounge singer's approach to sex, deliberately gentle, ostentatiously artful, a homely guy with a pinkie ring and a big dick who was convinced he was every woman's dream.

Holmes went on to make more than 2000 movies. *Teenage Cowgirls*, *Liquid Lips*, *China Cat* and *Tapestry of Passion*. *Eruption*, a porn remake of *Double Indemnity*. *Dickman and Throbbin*, a lampoon of Batman and Robin. *Hard Candy*, a 3-D thriller. A porn "documentary" of his life, made in 1981, was called *Exhausted*.

In time, Holmes became known as the Errol Flynn of porn. And like the leading men of yesteryear, what was known of him was mostly myth.

According to legend—largely of his own making—Holmes was born in New York and lived with a rich aunt who'd been married fifteen times. The aunt sent him to fencing school, dancing school, a school of etiquette. They lived in London, Paris, Michigan, Florida. He lost his virginity at the Florida house, when he was six, to his Swiss nursemaid, Frieda.

In high school, Holmes said, he slept with all but three girls in his class. He graduated from UCLA with majors, variously, in physical therapy, pediatric physical therapy, medicine and political sciences. His first porn film was made while he was working his way through college. A girl from the dorm recommended him. Also while in college, he said, he danced "nude modern jazz ballet" and drove an ambulance.

When he became established as a porn star, Holmes said, he had a half



dozen agents pulling in work for him. He made films nonstop, and he took eighty to ninety telephone calls a day. He had twenty-seven fan clubs; people wrote for locks of his pubic hair. Men asked him to autograph their wives' breasts. Women asked him to deflower their daughters. One regular trick had him barge into her bedroom while she was watching TV, then tie her up and rape her. Her husband watched from the closet. Holmes said he'd had sex in airplanes, helicopters, trains, elevators, kitchens, bathrooms, on rooftops, in caves, storm cellars, bomb shelters in Europe, under a table in a restaurant filled with people, fifty feet underwater while wearing scuba gear. He'd been with three governors, two of their wives and one senator, who was "really a freak."

Holmes said he owned ten different businesses, that he was a gourmet cook, that he had written twenty-nine books, including a how-to manual combining cooking and sex. His penis, he said, was "bigger than a pay phone, smaller than a Cadillac."

Holmes's voice was sly and ingratiating. He sounded a lot like Eddie Haskell on *Leave It to Beaver* and bore some resemblance to the actor who played him. Above all, he said, he loved his work: "A happy gardener is one with dirty fingernails, and a happy cook is a fat cook. I never get tired of what I do because I'm a sex fiend. I'm very lusty."

John Curtis Holmes was born to Mary and Edward Holmes on August 8th, 1944, in Pickaway County, Ohio, the youngest of three boys and a girl. Edward, a carpenter, was an alcoholic. Mary was a Bible-thumping Baptist. John remembered screaming, yelling, his father puking all over the kids.

Holmes's parents separated when he was three, and Mary moved the family into a housing project in Columbus. They shared an apartment with another divorced woman and her two children. When Holmes was eight, his mother married Harold, a manic-depressive who worked for the telephone company. They moved to a house on five acres in wooded, rural Pataskala, Ohio. Harold drank a lot. Once, he rammed his own hand into a harvesting machine. He lost his thumb and three fingers. At the hospital, as he came out of anesthesia, he said to Mary, "I'll never have to work again." He didn't. Mary went to work on an assembly line at a Western Electric plant.

John was a shy and lonely kid who kept to himself and had perfect attendance at Sunday school. He lost his virginity at age twelve to a thirty-six-year-old woman who was a friend of his mother's. At home, Harold picked on John. There were backhands, lectures, drunken rages. By the time John's

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half brother was born, John was spending most of his time in the woods, hunting, trapping, fishing, staying away from Harold. Then one day Harold threw John down the stairs and came after him. John swung and knocked his stepfather out. On his sixteenth birthday, Holmes joined the army. He served in the signal corps, spending three years in Nuremberg, Germany. He never went home again.

After mustering out of the army, at age nineteen, Holmes went to work as an ambulance driver, and soon thereafter he met Sharon Gebenini. Sharon was a nurse at USC County General, working on a team that was pioneering open-heart surgery. She was twenty, an army brat. They were married in August 1965 at Fort Ord, California.

One summer day in 1968, Sharon came home a little early from work. Her new boss, a pediatrician, had shut down the office for the afternoon, and she'd gone to the market, planned a special dinner for her husband.

Holmes, in those days, was a string bean, six feet tall, 150 pounds, hair still cut in a military buzz. When Sharon and John were first married, she says, he was very naive, looking for the perfect relationship. "He was very possessive. He wouldn't even let me meet the people he worked with."

Recently, Holmes had been drifting from job to job, trying to find a niche. He quit the ambulance service and got work stirring vats of chocolate at a Coffee Nips factory in Glendale. Then he sold shoes, furniture, Fuller brushes door-to-door. He drove a forklift at a meatpacking plant in Cudahy until his lung collapsed from working in the freezer. Just recently, he had begun training to be a uniformed security guard.

Unbeknownst to Sharon, Holmes had also recently started in porn, following an encounter with a professional photographer named Joel in the bathroom of the poker parlor in Gardina. Holmes was doing sex pictorials, dancing in clubs.

Now, home early from her office, Sharon left her purse in the foyer, squeaked down the hall on white rubber soles to the bathroom of their one-bedroom apartment in Glendale. The door was open. Inside was her husband, John. He had a tape measure in one hand, his penis in the other.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"What does it look like I'm doing?"

"Is there something wrong? Are you afraid it's withering and dying?" she said, laughing.

"No, I'm just curious," said Holmes.

Sharon went to the bedroom, lay down, read a magazine. Twenty minutes later, Holmes walked into the room. He had a full erection.

"It's incredible," said John.

"What?"

"It goes from five inches all the way to ten. Ten inches long! Four inches around!"

"That's great," said Sharon, turning a page of her magazine. "You want me to call the press?"

Her husband fixed her with a long stare. Finally he said, "I've got to tell you I've been doing something else, and I think I want to make it my life's work."

Holmes went on to say that he wanted to be best in the world at something, and that he thought pornography was it. Sharon had been a virgin when they'd met. She wasn't happy.

"You can't be uptight about this," John said, a refrain she would hear for the next fifteen years. "This means absolutely nothing to me. It's like being a carpenter. These are my tools, I use them to make a living. When I come home at night, the tools stay on the job."

"You are having sex with other women," said Sharon. "It's like being married to a hooker."

Holmes said nothing.

And so began the loops and the stags, and then Johnny Wadd was born. Holmes let his hair grow, started wearing three-piece suits. He and Sharon settled into a strange hybrid of domesticity. She paid for food and household expenses, did his laundry, cooked for him when he was home. John kept his porn money and spent it on himself. By 1973, John and Sharon were sharing the same house, even the same bed, but they were no longer having sex. Sharon had gone so far as to stop physical relations, but she couldn't bring herself to kick him out. "Let's face it," she says. "I loved the schmuck. I just didn't like what he was doing."

John bought himself an El Camino pickup and a large diamond solitaire that became his trademark in films. Then he designed a massive gold and diamond ring in the shape of a dragonfly, and a gold belt buckle, measuring eight by five inches. The buckle depicted a mother whale swimming in the ocean, her baby nursing beneath. John was into Save the Whales. He wore the buckle when he and Sharon sold bumper stickers door-to-door.

In 1974, Sharon became the resident manager of a ten-unit apartment

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court in Glendale. It was owned by the pediatrician she worked for; she and Holmes lived rent-free in an adjacent house. Sometimes he worked around the apartments as the handyman and gardener. He also renovated the house, outdoing himself in the master bathroom, recreating a backwoods outhouse, complete with a quarter-moon cutout, a shingled roof over the bathtub and a rough-hewn box around the commode.

Holmes was an inveterate collector of junk. He picked wire out of dumpsters and sold the copper. He went to garage sales and bought old furniture. He could repair anything, liked sketching and working in clay. He also collected animal skulls. Once, Sharon says, he got a human head from UCLA. He boiled it clean in a pot on Sharon's stove. They called it Louise. At Christmas, they decorated it with colored lights.

About this time, Sharon says, Holmes began working as a courier for the Mob. "He'd come home from one of his movie premières, take off his boots, peel down his socks and take out a wad of large bills. He'd say, 'Count this.' We're talking \$56,000 in two boots."

Jeana Sellers (not her real name) arrived in Holmes's life in 1976. She was a teenager, and her parents had just divorced. She'd driven out from Miami with her father and younger sister. Along the way, in Colorado, Mr. Sellers picked up a hitchhiker who was going to Glendale to see his girlfriend. Mr. Sellers had no particular plan; Glendale sounded just fine. By the time they pulled into the apartment complex managed by Sharon Holmes, it had been decided. The Sellers would stay there.

The complex had ten free-standing cabana apartments, built around a courtyard. Holmes's half brother and his wife lived there; this little community was the personal fiefdom of John Holmes. One day, Jeana was visiting a neighbor when Holmes came by to deliver a bag of pot. Holmes talked a while, looked Jeana up and down. "Too bad you're so young," he said finally, then left.

Soon after, the courtship of Jeana began. Whenever he returned from days or weeks away, Holmes would bring gifts: stuffed animals, roses, a ring. For her sister Terry, who was fourteen and overweight, he brought what he called "Terry food," pounds and pounds of candy. Holmes hired the sisters to do gardening around the complex. When they'd finish work, he'd make sandwiches. John had a van by then, and soon he began organizing camping trips with Jeana, Terry and Terry's boyfriend, Jose. "I was really charmed," says Jeana. "I was just taken off my feet. He treated me very special." John was thirty-one, she was fifteen.

One night Holmes told Jeana to meet him at the van. They went to the beach. "I didn't know what was going to happen, but I knew what might," she says. "We sat on the rocks, the moon was just right. We sat for a long time, and he was very, very quiet. He just stared. I played in the water. When I got out, he said, 'Let's go,' and we drove toward home. And then, just as we got to this intersection, he slammed on the brakes. It was dark, and there wasn't any traffic. He said, 'Would you make love to me?' I literally shook to death. I said yes. I loved him. We did it in the van. After that I was his."

In time, Jeana's father went back to Miami and took Terry with him, and Jeana moved in with John's half brother and his wife, David and Karen. Jeana dropped out of Glendale High School. During the day, she worked in a nursing home. At night, she baby-sat for David and Karen.

By 1978, Holmes was freebasing cocaine all the time. He'd been turned on to the drug on a movie set in Las Vegas and had been smoking ever since. Now he never went anywhere without his brown Samsonite briefcase. Inside were his drugs, his glass pipe, baking soda and a petri dish for cooking cocaine powder into rock base, a bottle of 151 rum and cotton swabs for lighting the pipe. Jeana was doing freebase too, almost every night.

"When he did coke," says Jeana, "he'd do it until it was all gone, and then he'd scrape the pipe and smoke all the resin he could find, and then he'd take a bunch of Valium. He'd have me make these peanut-butter chocolate-chip brown-sugar butter cookies. All the sugar helped him come down. He'd have a big glass of milk, and we'd turn on the cartoons, and then he'd go to bed in Sharon's room. I'd usually fall asleep on the couch."

By this time, Sharon had befriended Jeana. "The poor girl was emaciated," Sharon says. Sharon's first act was to move Jeana out of Karen and David's and into a garage apartment in the complex. A few months later, Jeana moved into the guest room of the house. "I knew the whole picture," says Sharon. "He was picking on a kid that didn't know any better. I had to let her know there was another world out there, that John was not God Almighty."

"John was terrified that I was going to confront her. But I had no reason to confront her. Why? Why would I confront her? He meant nothing to me in that way."

Holmes was gone now more and more, making films in Europe, San Francisco and Hawaii, doing private tricks, traveling to film openings across the country. At the same time, Holmes was acting as an informant on matters of porn and prostitution for Sergeant Tom Blake, an L.A. vice detective. He

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began spilling to Blake in 1973, after he was arrested on a movie set. It is debatable whether or not Holmes ever told Blake anything he could use.

Also during this period Holmes spent much of his time with his best and only friend, Bill Amerson, in Sherman Oaks. Amerson, a menacing six feet four, 250 pounds, tells tales of his own involvement in drug dealing and organized crime. He says he played pro football and worked as a stunt man, specializing in motorcycle crashes. He was now in porn—writing, directing, producing.

Amerson and Holmes had met on a shoot in San Francisco in 1970; they were kindred egos ever after. “John was like a little brother to me,” says Amerson.

Amerson named John the godfather of his children and gave Holmes his own room at his house. Holmes and Amerson went hunting, deep-sea fishing, camping. Mostly, says Amerson, he and Holmes excluded women. “John didn’t particularly care for women. At times, I think, he disliked women. He would rather be out in the woods. He was really a simple kid. He liked going to Disneyland, he liked all the rides. He was really sensitive, but he didn’t want anyone to know. A puppy getting hit by a car, a dead bird, strange things made him cry. We spent hours talking about reincarnation, about life, about God, or the lack of.”

Holmes started to become erratic around 1978. On sets, he was harder and harder to deal with. He’d lock himself in bathrooms, in closets. People who worked with him joked that you had to leave a trail of freebase from the bathroom to the bedroom to get Holmes to work. Amerson would get calls from directors. He’d go to the set, usually a rented house in the San Fernando Valley. He’d find Holmes “going through drawers, looking for something to steal. He’d turned into a fucking burglar.

“John got strange,” says Amerson. “He got wild eyed. He didn’t make a lot of sense when he talked.”

Soon the man who once claimed to be making almost \$500,000 a year selling his sexual charms was working as a drug delivery boy for the gang of outlaws and junkies who lived on Wonderland Avenue. He stole luggage, broke into cars, visited old girlfriends and tricks and ripped them off, charged \$30,000 worth of appliances to Sharon’s credit cards. For a while, he and his half brother David tried to make a go of a combination antique store and locksmith service. Jeana ran the store, the Just Looking Emporium. It didn’t last long.

The night the store closed its doors for good, says Jeana, John was strung

out and paranoid. "That was the first night he punched the shit out of me," she says, and thereafter, the beatings were regular. "One time he beat me so I'd sleep with these two black guys from his answering service. I think he couldn't pay the bill. Then he beat me 'cause I slept with them."

By early 1980, Holmes and Jeana had moved out of the complex for good. They stayed in motels sometimes, but mostly they lived in Sharon's Chevy Malibu. Or at least Jeana did. "I was famous for waiting in the car," she says. "We'd drive somewhere to do a drug deal. He'd get out. I'd wait. Sometimes it would be two days. I'd have a six-pack of Pepsi and a coffee can to pee in. And my dog, Thor. He was a little Chihuahua. John and Sharon gave him to me."

So it went, until they were busted in January of 1981. At that point, Holmes had Jeana, now twenty, turning tricks. She was living in an apartment in the Valley with a porn actress and high-priced hooker named Michelle. In the early hours of January 14th, Jeana and Michelle were visiting an apartment in Marina Del Ray. While John was waiting for them in the parking lot, he stole a computer out of a car. Thus far, Holmes had been pretty lucky. His connection as an informant for the L.A. police had kept him clear of being busted. But now Holmes was committing felonies almost every day. His luck had run out. The cops got them in the parking lot.

The next day, Eddie Nash bailed them out. Jeana didn't want to go back to Michelle's. John insisted. She refused. He punched her in the stomach, dragged her through the door. "Get some sleep," he told her. "You gotta work tonight."

John went to take a bath. Jeana heard the water shut off, heard John get into the tub. She wasn't going back to this. Enough was enough.

"Honey!" called John from the bathtub. "Get me a cup of coffee, will you?"

She was halfway out the door when she heard his voice. She froze for a moment, then took a step back inside. She took a deep breath. Then she was gone.

Jeana ran, with Thor in her arms, to a Denny's restaurant. A little old man lent her a quarter. She called her mother in Oregon, asked for a bus ticket. Mom said okay, but it couldn't happen until tomorrow. Jeana sat down and cried. The man bought her a bowl of chili, then sneaked her into his nursing home. Jeana slept the night on the floor by his bed. The other residents thought it was the scandal of the age. In the morning, many of them brought her toast from the cafeteria.

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Jeana said goodbye, then called the Glendale bus station. She told the ticket agent that John Holmes, the porn star, was looking for her and wanted to kill her. Please, she said, don't tell him anything. The agent agreed to help. Then he asked how she was getting to the station. He and his son came and picked her up.

As Jeana expected, Holmes showed up at the bus station. The ticket agent played dumb. Holmes followed the wrong bus all the way to San Francisco.

Tracy McCourt turned right onto Dona Lola Place, drove 100 yards into the cul-de-sac, parked, cut the engine. DeVerell, Lind and Launius pushed aside the chain-link gate to Nash's driveway and filed around to the right, behind the house. The sliding glass door was still open, as Holmes had said.

They went inside, opened the door of the guest bedroom, peered out. Lind took the lead and charged down the hall, a short-barreled .357 Magnum in one hand, a stolen San Francisco police detective's badge in the other. Diles and Nash were in the living room. Diles was wearing sweat pants, carrying a breakfast tray. Nash was wearing blue bikini briefs.

"Freeze!" yelled Lind. "You're under arrest! Police officers!"

DeVerell and Launius covered Nash. Lind made his way behind the shirtless, blubbery bodyguard. He shifted the badge to his gun hand, his left, then took out the handcuffs with his right. As he fumbled with his paraphernalia and Diles's thick wrists, Launius came over to help, tripped, bumped into Lind's arm. The gun discharged. Diles was burned with the muzzle flash. The right side of his back, over his kidney, began to bleed. Nash fell to his knees. He begged to say a prayer for his children.

"Fuck your children!" said Launius. "Take us to the drugs."

Lind rolled Diles onto his stomach, handcuffed him, threw a Persian rug over his head. Then he joined the others in Nash's bedroom. Everything was where Holmes had said. Lind put his .357 to Nash's head, asked for the combination to the floor safe. Nash refused. Then Launius forced the stainless-steel barrel of his gun into Nash's mouth.

In the floor safe were two large Zip-lock bags full of cocaine. In a gray attaché case were cash and jewelry. In a petty-cash box were several thousand Quaaludes and more cocaine. On the dresser was a laboratory vial about three-quarters full of heroin.

Lind taped Nash's hands behind his back, put a sheet over his head. He found a Browning 9-mm under Nash's bed, then went to Diles's room, where he found more weapons. Meanwhile, Launius asked Lind for his hunting



knife. He went over to Diles, pulled the rug off his head, edged the knife against his neck.

“Where’s the rest of the fucking heroin?” he demanded.

“I don’t know,” said Diles.

Launius pulled the knife slowly across Diles’s neck. Blood flowed.

Suddenly, outside, Tracy McCourt began honking the horn of the get-away car.

“Forget it!” said Lind. “Let’s get out of here.”

At 10:00 a.m., Lind, McCourt, Launius and DeVerell walked through the door of the Wonderland house.

Holmes jumped up from the couch. “So what happened? How did it go down?”

“Don’t tell him anything,” snapped Lind.

Launius, DeVerell and Lind went into Launius’s bedroom. They’d decided, before leaving Nash’s, that they would short Holmes and McCourt in the division of the loot. Working quickly, Launius removed about \$100,000 in cash from the briefcase and hid it in his room.

Meanwhile, Joy Miller and Barbara Richardson, Lind’s girlfriend, left the house and drove down the hill to the Laurel Canyon Country Store for gas and cartons of cigarettes.

When they returned, the men were at the glass table in the breakfast nook. Everyone was busy. Holmes and Lind weighed the cocaine. Launius counted the Quaaludes. DeVerell counted the money. On the table were eight pounds of cocaine, 5000 Quaaludes, a kilo of high-quality China White heroin and \$10,000 in cash. The jewelry would later be fenced for \$150,000. Lind, Launius and DeVerell, the three who’d carried out the robbery, were to receive twenty-five percent each. Holmes and McCourt went halves on the last share.

As soon as the weighing was done, Holmes went to the kitchen to cook some cocaine powder into rock, then went into the bathroom to smoke. The rest of the Wonderland people took turns injecting heroin and cocaine. After a while, Holmes came back into the living room. He complained about his share of the money. It was only about \$3000. He knew that Nash had a lot more than that lying around the house.

An argument ensued. Launius punched Holmes in the stomach. “Get the fuck out of here!” he screamed.

For the first few months, while she was in Oregon with her mother, Jeana

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had refused to take Holmes's calls. She'd gotten a job at a nursing home and was paying her mom rent, trying to rebuild her life. But Holmes kept calling. He sent flowers, presents, photos of them with the dog.

By May, Jeana began taking his calls. By June, she was thinking, "Well, I'm not doing anything here." On June 27th, two days before the robbery at Nash's, she flew to Los Angeles.

John was carrying two suitcases when he met her. "Oh, shit," she thought, but she didn't say anything.

"I didn't want to believe I'd fallen for a line again," Jeana says. "He was sweet. He was great. There wasn't any trouble. We went to a motel, had a nice reunion. No drugs. It was really nice. He was like the old John. Then he left."

On the day of the robbery Holmes still hadn't come back. Management asked Jeana to leave. Holmes hadn't paid for the room.

Jeana packed her suitcase, gathered up her Chihuahua. She didn't have any money. She didn't know what to do. She couldn't call Sharon. They hadn't spoken in two years. Jeana was somewhere downtown. She didn't know where. She walked the streets, tried to think. A pimp tried to pick her up. Then another. Then she ran into a woman preaching fire and brimstone on a corner. The woman took her to her house, put her to work painting a wall. Meanwhile, Jeana called Holmes's answering service and left the number. Holmes finally called on the afternoon of the 29th, after the Wonderland Gang kicked him out. He showed up at the house in the early evening. "He had the biggest pile of coke I'd ever seen in my entire life," says Jeana. "He took over the kitchen. He cooked coke all night long. He even had the Holy Roller's sister smoking."

In the morning, they went out to get food. "When we came back, the door was locked," says Jeana. "The Holy Roller was up in the balcony, waving a Christian flag, praying and hollering, singing 'We Shall Overcome.' She said John had cut some coke with an old tarot card and she believed it was a sign from the devil. I said, 'Please, just let me get my clothes and my dog and we'll leave.'"

Gregory DeWitt Diles, six feet four, 300 pounds, barged through the front door of the house on Dona Lola, dragging John Holmes by the scruff of his neck.

"In here," said Nash.

Diles shoved, Holmes skidded across the carpet. Nash shut the bedroom door.

Wednesday afternoon, July 1st, two days after the robbery. Jeana was tucked into another hotel in the Valley. An hour before, Holmes had run into Diles. Holmes was wearing a ring that had been stolen from the boss.

Eddie Nash was fifty-two years old, six feet tall, gray haired, strong and wiry. His family had owned several hotels before the creation of Israel in 1948. Nash told a friend that he missed the moonlight and the olive trees of his homeland, that he'd spent time in a refugee camp, that his brother-in-law was shot by Israeli soldiers.

The youngest son in the family, Nash arrived in America with seven dollars in his pocket. He worked for others for a time, then opened Beef's Chuck, a hotdog stand on Hollywood Boulevard. Nash was on the job day and night, wearing a tall white chef's hat, waiting tables himself.

June M. Schuyler, an elementary-school teacher from Santa Barbara, remembers meeting the "nice-looking, very-light-skinned foreign man" at Beef's Chuck. She was living in Hollywood while her autistic son attended the Belle Dubnoff School for Brain-Damaged Children. The school was a block away from Nash's place. She'd often take her son there for lunch.

From then, wrote Schuyler, in a letter to a judge many years later, "Ed Nasrallah began a courtship that was as old-fashioned as they come. For many months he took me out to dinner, introduced me to his mother and other relatives. There never was a sexual relationship between us. I said 'No' and I meant it."

Over the next year, Nasrallah brought her grape leaves, hummus, pots of Turkish coffee. Schuyler said that Ed loved her son exceedingly and that he offered to "fix it up for you to take him to a top brain surgeon. . . . No strings attached."

By the mid-Seventies, Ed Nasrallah had become Eddie Nash and had amassed a fortune. He was also a drug dealer and a heavy user. His drug of choice was freebase; sometimes he mixed the crack with heroin. Nash was missing part of his sinus cavity, one of his lungs had been removed, and he had a steel plate in his head.

For the last several years, Nash had rarely left his white-stone ranch house in Studio City. At home, Nash walked around in a maroon silk robe, or sometimes in bikini briefs, his body covered with a thin sheen of sweat. His voice had a smooth Arabic lilt. "You want to play baseball?" he'd ask his ever-present guests, lighting his butane torch, offering a hit off his pipe.

"The consumption of alcohol and drugs was an ongoing, everyday affair," says an attorney who is a longtime acquaintance of Nash's. "The cast of

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characters would go from two or three to ten or more. It was amazing, the haphazard way in which people would come and go. You'd walk into the house, there were various girls walking around in various states of undress. Some were quite attractive. Others looked like they'd been sucking on the pipe a little too long.

"When you met with Eddie, you met at his place, on his terms. I believe that cocaine paranoia created within him the desire to stay within that closed environment that he had control over. If anything, one of the themes in Eddie's life has always been control. He wanted to be in charge. He wanted to be the Arab man in his tent. The master, the giver of hospitality. All his lawyers—I think he had maybe six or seven working on different things—all his managers, employees, customers, everyone, would come to him. He'd have Jimmie, the cook, prepare these elaborate spreads. You could walk up, whisper something in his ear, and he'd make it available. Whatever. You just had to ask, and he'd give."

According to court testimony, Nash had a fancy for young girls, whips and a game with a revolver called Russian roulette. One woman who had sex with Nash remembers "a lot of temptation. There were piles of cocaine in front of you. Jewelry, wads of money. You'd be left in a room for hours, and then you'd be called in. There were two-way mirrors in the bedroom, anything you wanted would be made available. In a way Eddie would assess you on what you took or didn't take."

In early 1981, Nash's second wife—the mother of his two sons, aged eight and five—filed for a protection order against Nash. After she left him, according to a court affidavit, "I took the children to Oklahoma to my aunt and uncle's farm, together with my parents. My husband hired a girl to follow us. She came to the farm to find out if a certain man was with me. After she left, my husband called on the telephone at the farm and said to come home immediately. When I refused, he said, 'Don't come back to California or I will have two men waiting at the airport to kill you, and I will have your parents killed.'"

Nash is said to have had political, police and crime connections. According to one Los Angeles law-enforcement official, "Ed Nash was a very well-known figure in the Sixties around Hollywood with police, and it was never an antagonistic relationship."

One of Nash's friends and overnight guests was, according to a law-enforcement official, an Israeli with a military background, "the so-called reputed godfather of the Israeli Mafia." A report by the California State

Department of Justice revealed that the Israeli Mafia was active in California during the late Seventies and early Eighties and was involved in drugs, arson, extortion, gun-running and a number of murders, including the death and dismemberment of two Israeli nationals at the plush Bonaventure hotel in downtown L.A.

During his six or seven years of heavy drug use, said the attorney, "Nash lost over a million a year directly attributable to drugs. His business empire totally atrophied as a result of the coke. What really cracks me up is people believe he was a dope dealer. That's bullshit. He was consuming it. At an alarming rate."

On the afternoon of Wednesday, July 1st, 1981, Eddie Nash was again consuming drugs at an alarming rate. He'd been ripped off for eight pounds of cocaine, but the Wonderland Gang hadn't found his private stash, and now he was bubbling his glass pipe furiously. He'd sent two of his minions out to score more drugs, but they hadn't yet returned. Two customers waited. They did hits off Eddie's pipe, eyed the door.

One of the customers was Scott Thorson. Thorson had driven from Lake Tahoe to score from Nash. Or perhaps he had flown from Las Vegas. In court testimony years later, he would say, in answer to this and many other questions, "I don't recall. I really don't recall." Thorson was the live-in lover of the entertainer Liberace. He was also in Liberace's Las Vegas act. Wearing jewel-bedecked livery, he would chauffeur Liberace onto the stage in a glittering mini-Rolls-Royce, open the door, take his master's fur coat. Then Liberace would make a joke about having the only fur coat in the world that had its own limo. During one special engagement, Thorson danced with the Rockettes. Liberace called him Booper, treated him like a son, a lover, a pet.

Thorson had been addicted to cocaine for several years. It began, according to Thorson's book, *Behind the Candelabra*, when Liberace ordered him to have cosmetic surgery. First, however, Thorson had to lose thirty pounds. A doctor of dubious practice prescribed a salad of different drugs to aid the weight loss. Pharmaceutical cocaine was one of the ingredients.

In time, the surgery was completed, and Thorson was made into a young vision of Liberace. He remained addicted to coke. At the moment that Diles barged through the door with Holmes in tow, Thorson was with Eddie in his bedroom, doing hits. Nash was very upset.

"I'll have them on their knees!" Nash ranted to Thorson. "I'll teach them a lesson! They'll never steal from anyone again!"

Thorson was excused, and Nash closed the door. Diles smacked Holmes,

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threw him across the room, shoved him against a wall. "How could you do this thing!" Eddie Nash screamed. Diles hit him again. "I trusted you! I gave you everything!"

Nash and Holmes had met three years earlier at the Seven Seas. Nash was a big fan of porn. He invested in movies, leased office space to several porn-related operations. Holmes was one of the greats in the business. Nash liked having him around. He introduced him to all his guests. "I'd like you to meet Mr. John Holmes," he'd say.

For his part, Holmes did anything he could for Nash. Frequently he brought him girls. On Christmas Day 1980, he'd even presented Jeana. Nash reciprocated with a quarter ounce of coke. Holmes thought Nash was the most evil man he'd ever met, but he couldn't quite figure him out, so he respected him.

Now things were not so friendly. Holmes was crumpled on the floor. Diles leveled a gun at his head. Nash was leafing through a little black book that Diles had taken from Holmes's pocket.

"Who's this in Ohio?" Nash screamed. "Who's Mary? Your mother? Who's this in Montana? . . . Is this your brother? . . . I will kill your whole family! All of them! Go back to that house! Get my property! Bring me their eyeballs! Bring me their eyeballs in a bag, and I will forget what you have done to me! Go!"

Thursday, July 2nd, 3:30 a.m. Sharon Holmes switched on the porch light, spied through the peephole. Christ, she thought, John. She hadn't seen him in three months. His clothes were ripped, he was bloody from head to toe. He stared straight ahead, unblinking. She opened the door, folded her arms against her chest.

"Well?"

"Accident . . . car . . . um . . ." he stammered. "Can I . . . come in?"

They went to the bathroom. Sharon, a registered nurse, rummaged through a well-stocked medicine cabinet, brought out iodine and cotton swabs. She reached up and took John's chin in her hand, turned his head side to side. Funny, she thought, no cuts, no abrasions. Just blood. "You had an accident in the Malibu?"

John looked down at Sharon. His eyes blinked rapidly. They'd been married sixteen years. Sharon always knew when he was lying. That's probably why he always came back. "Run me a bath, will you?" he said.

John eased into the tub. Sharon sat on the wood-covered commode.

“What now?” she thought. He dunked his head, put a steaming washcloth over his face. Then he sat up. “The murders,” he said. “I was there.”

“What do you mean you were there?”

“It was my fault,” John said, his eyes welling with tears. “I stood there and watched them kill those people.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I was involved in a robbery,” John began, and he told the story. The setup, the robbery, Nash’s threat to kill his whole family, Sharon included. “So I told him everything,” John said. “I told where the robbers lived and how to get there. I had to take them there.”

“Who?”

“Three men and myself.”

“Okay, you took them there.”

“I took them there. There was a security system at the house. I called up and said I had some things for the people inside and to let me up. They opened the security gate, and the four of us went up the stairs, and when the door opened, they forced their way inside. Someone held a gun to my head. I stood there against the wall. I watched them beat them to death.”

“You stood there?”

“There was nothing I could do.”

“John, how could you?”

“It was them or me. They were stupid. They made him beg for his life. They deserved what they got.”

“Blood! Blood! So much blood!” Holmes was having a nightmare. Tossing and moaning, punching and kicking. “So much blood!” he groaned over and over.

Jeana was scared to death. She didn’t know what to do. Wake him? Let him scream? It was Thursday, July 2nd, 1981. After bathing at Sharon’s, Holmes had come here, to this motel in the Valley. He walked through the door, flopped on the bed, passed out.

Jeana sat very still on the edge of the bed, watching a TV that was mounted on the wall. After a while, the news. The top story was something about a mass murder. Four bodies. A bloody mess. A house on Wonderland Avenue. Jeana stood up, moved closer to the tube. “That house,” she thought. Things started to click. “I’ve waited outside that house. Isn’t that where John gets his drugs?”

Hours passed, John woke. Jeana said nothing. They made a run to McDonald’s for hamburgers. They watched some more TV. Then came the late-night news. The cops were calling it the Four on the Floor Murders. Dead

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were Joy Miller, Billy DeVerell, Ron Launius, Barbara Richardson. The Wonderland Gang. The murder weapon was a steel pipe with threading at the ends. Thread marks found on walls, skulls, skin. House tossed by assailants. Blood and brains splattered everywhere, even on the ceilings. The bodies were discovered by workmen next door; they'd heard faint cries from the back of the house: "Help me. Help me." A fifth victim was carried out alive. Susan Launius, 25, Ron Launius's wife. She was in intensive care with a severed finger and brain damage. The murders were so brutal that police were comparing the case to the Tate-LaBianca murders by the Manson Family.

Holmes and Jeana watched from the bed. Jeana was afraid to look at John. She cut her eyes slowly, caught his profile. He was frozen. The color drained from his face. She actually saw it. First his forehead, then his cheeks, then his neck. He went white.

Jeana said nothing. After a while, the weather report came on. She cleared her throat "John?"

"What?"

"You had this dream. You know, when you were sleeping? You said something about blood."

Holmes's eyes bulged. He looked very scared. She'd never seen him look scared before. "Yeah, well, uh," he said. "Um, I lifted the trunk of the car, and I gave myself a nosebleed yesterday. Don't worry."

On July 10th, police knocked down the door of their motel room and arrested Jeana and Holmes. For the next three days, Holmes, Jeana and Sharon were held in protective custody in a luxury hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Armed guards in the lobby, in the hallway. Room service. Holmes tried to make a deal with the cops. He wanted witness protection, a new name, money, a home. He wanted new names for Sharon and Jeana, too. He offered the police secrets. Names of mobsters, drug dealers, prostitutes, pimps. The police wanted to know who killed the Wonderland Gang. Holmes wouldn't tell.

"With Holmes, it was like he was center stage and the lights and the camera were on," says a detective who was present. "It was like he was doing a movie. Here he is, he has two women with him. All three of them are sleeping in the same bed. He stroked us, jacked us around. He told us certain things. That we were on the right track, that this is indeed what had happened, that this was the motivation, that this was how it came down. He played it for all it was worth, then he said he wouldn't testify. We cut him loose."

The three went back to Sharon's house. Sharon cooked dinner. Holmes



picked up Sharon's two dogs and Thor from the kennel. Later, the women dyed Holmes's hair black. Holmes and Jeana painted the Malibu gray with a red top. They used cans of spray paint. The finish was drippy and streaked, but it didn't matter. They were going underground.

Now it was midnight in the parking lot at the Safeway in Glendale. The Malibu was idling. Jeana sat in the front seat, Thor in her arms. Holmes leaned up against the back bumper, smoking a cigarette. Sharon stood with arms crossed. "Change your mind. Come with us, Sharon."

"No way, John."

"It can be the three of us, Sharon, like old times."

"You've got to be joking."

"You can't do this to me," he said.

"Why? Why can't I?"

"Because I love you."

Sharon looked at him. On their first date, he'd brought a bottle of Mateus and a handful of flowers. Sharon had watched through the window as he picked them from the neighbor's front yard. Now she shook her head slowly, walked around the car to the passenger side. Jeana leaned out the window, and they hugged. Over the years, they'd become like mother and daughter. "Take care of him," Sharon said.

"Hello, Jeana."

"Chris? Is that you?"

"How are you, Sis?"

"Fine. Where are you calling from? You sound close."

"I'm here."

"In Miami?"

"Yeah."

"What are you doing here?"

"Well, I, I, ah, came . . . with a friend. Listen. Tell me where you are. I'll pick you up."

Jeana hung up the phone. Her brother Chris, 16, lived in Oregon. She hadn't heard from him in, what, six months? Not since she was home. Now it was December 4th, 1981. After leaving California, Jeana and Holmes had gone to Vegas, then Montana, then headed south, visiting the Grand Canyon, the Painted Desert. Holmes broke into cars along the way.

The couple ended up in Miami, at a small run-down hotel on Collins Avenue. Everyone there was on some kind of slide. Big Rosie, the manager,

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let Jeana work the switchboard and clean rooms in exchange for rent. Holmes went to work for a construction company, painting a hotel down the strip. For extra money, Jeana solicited tricks on the beach.

"Everybody at the hotel got to know us," Jeana says. "We were real friendly. John was doing a lot of drawing. Drawings of the dog, of me. We'd have dinner with other people at the hotel, go to movies. We were like a normal couple. After a while, I said I didn't want to go out on the beach anymore. We had a big fight. I ran out the door, down to the pool, and he ran after me, the fool. Everybody was down there. He beat the shit out of me, then walked back up to the room. Everybody was just shocked."

The next day, while Holmes was at work, a delegation of residents came to see Jeana. A mother and daughter offered to help. The daughter had a kid and a job. She was moving to a house. Would Jeana want to be the live-in baby sitter? Jeana packed her bag, gathered up Thor, put Holmes' gun in her pocketbook.

Now it was December 4th, and she hadn't seen Holmes in two weeks. Her brother was in town; something weird was going on. Chris didn't have a driver's license. How could he rent a car?

They picked up a six-pack, went to a park, sat by a pond.

"Jeana, I've got to tell you. See that car over there? It's the cops."

"You little . . ." Jeana stood, walked away. Chris caught up.

"Listen," he said, grabbing her elbow. "People are after John, and they think you're with him. You're going to get hurt. Tell the cops what they want to know, 'cause otherwise John's going to be dead in a few days. You're probably going to be saving him."

When the cops got to his hotel, Holmes was there. "I've been expecting you," he said. He invited them in for coffee.

"How you doing, John?" said the man in the gray suit, leaning over the safety rail of the bed. "John? Remember me?"

February 1988, seven years after the murders. A sunny room in the Veterans Administration Hospital in Sepulveda, California. The man in the suit was Los Angeles Police Department detective Tom Lange. Behind him was his partner, Mac McClain. The Wonderland case was still open. They had a few questions for John Holmes.

"We want to talk to you about Eddie Nash," said McClain. "John? . . . Remember Eddie? . . . John? Are you awake?" Holmes's eyelids fluttered. He weighed ninety pounds, his fingernails were two inches long. He was dying.

Following his arrest in Miami, Holmes was tried for the murder of the

Wonderland Gang. His defense was simple: John Holmes was the “sixth victim” of the Wonderland murders, and Eddie Nash was “evil incarnate.” “Ladies and gentlemen,” his lawyer told the jury at the outset, “unlike some mysteries, this is not going to be a question of ‘Who done it?’ This is going to be a question of ‘Why aren’t the perpetrators here?’ ”

In the end, the most damaging evidence the prosecution could produce was a palm print on a headboard above one of the victims. Holmes refused to testify. The jury found him innocent.

Holmes remained in jail, however, on his outstanding burglary case. While awaiting that trial, he was ordered by a judge to tell the grand jury what he knew about the Wonderland murders. Because he’d already been tried, Holmes would not be able to invoke the Fifth Amendment. According to the law, he had to talk. He refused anyway. He’d underestimated Nash once, but he’d never do it again. Nash would kill him and his family if he talked, he was certain of it. He was held in the county jail for contempt.

In jail, Holmes went on a hunger strike. Two weeks later, it was reported that he’d lost only seven pounds. Jailers said other inmates were giving him candy bars. Later it was reported that Holmes interrupted his fast, ate a meal, then continued his fast.

Finally, on the afternoon of November 22nd, 1982, Holmes relented and testified. He’d been in jail eleven months in all, 110 days on the contempt charge. His attorney told reporters that he’d changed his mind because of “certain arrangements” that had been made and “certain circumstances” that had arisen. What he may have been referring to was the imprisonment, that very same morning, of Eddie Nash, on charges of dealing drugs.

Just after the murders, Nash and Diles had found themselves in a world of shit. Nash’s house was raided three times. Each time, drugs, money and weapons were seized. Each time, Nash made bail. Then Nash was arrested with three others on federal charges of racketeering, arson and mail fraud, an insurance scam. Nash’s three coconspirators were found guilty. Nash was acquitted.

In the end, both Diles and Nash went to jail. Diles got seven years on charges stemming from the drug raids. Nash was found guilty of possessing two pounds of cocaine for sale. At trial, his lawyer argued that the \$1 million worth of coke was not for dealing, that it was strictly for personal use. During recesses in the trial, Nash would go out to his car and smoke freebase. Then he’d swallow a few Quaaludes and return. His lawyer hired a young associate to stick Nash with a pin whenever he nodded off in court.

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The judge in the case was Everett E. Ricks Jr. It was obvious from his comments that Ricks, a hard-liner, considered Eddie Nash a plague. Ricks even came in from his sickbed to sentence Nash. Coughing into the microphone, Ricks called Nash “a danger to the public” and maxed him out. Eight years in prison, a \$120,350 fine.

Two years later, Ricks reduced Nash’s sentence to time served, and Nash was released. Ricks cited Nash’s need for delicate surgery to remove a sinus tumor. “I wouldn’t want to be operated on in San Quentin Prison,” Ricks said sympathetically.

Two years later, Ricks, himself, was ordered held against his will for psychiatric observation. The fifty-two-year-old former jurist had been arrested after he allegedly punched his eighty-two-year-old mother and threatened to kill someone if she didn’t give him keys to a car.

After his release, Nash told a friend that jail had saved his life. He moved to a modest condo in Tarzana and set about rebuilding, taking college business courses at night. Drugs, inattention, back taxes and lawyers’ fees had depleted his fortune.

Holmes, meanwhile, had gone back to making films.

When he got out of jail, Holmes was jubilant. He greeted reporters, had dinner with his lawyer, then called Sharon. She told him to “get the fuck out of my life.” He couldn’t call Jeana. She was nowhere to be found.

Holmes had nothing to do and nowhere to go. His lawyer lent him a Volkswagen Beetle and \$100, and Holmes showed up at his friend Amerson’s house. While Holmes was in jail, Amerson had started a company called John Holmes Productions. He was marketing Holmes’s old films on video. Like all porn actors, John had been paid per day and had signed away the rights to his own films. His old friend was happy to pick them up. “Let’s face it,” Amerson says, “John was a product. I marketed him. That’s what it’s all about. It’s business.”

With all the publicity from the murders, John Holmes had achieved almost mainstream celebrity. The video boom was just beginning, and Holmes became a kind of Marlon Brando of porn. No longer the leading man, he was now the featured oddity. In *California Valley Girls*, for instance, he had one scene. He came in, sat on a couch. A girl entered stage right. Then another girl, another. At the end, there were six working at once on his penis.

Early in 1983, Holmes was shooting *Fleshpond* at a studio in San Francisco. One of the actresses in the cast was Laurie Rose. Laurie was nineteen; she

came from a small town outside Vegas. In the business she was billed as Misty Dawn, the anal queen of porn.

“That first time, we didn’t get to work together,” says Laurie, “but we were attracted. It sounds silly, but you know how you can meet someone for the first time and it’s like you know them already?”

After the film, John and Laurie, who looked like Jeana, began dating. Usually, they smoked freebase and had sex. Then, says Laurie, “the third time I went up there, he came up to me with the mirror and said, ‘You want a hit?’ and I turned to him and said no. He looked shocked. He said, ‘Why not?’ and I said, ‘Because it makes me feel funny and I can’t talk.’ So he went in the bathroom, and he locked himself in. He stayed in there like three hours, and I’m just sitting there, you know, twiddling my thumbs. Finally he came out and said, ‘You know what? This stuff makes me feel funny too. I’m going to quit.’”

In time, John and Laurie moved in together at Amerson’s. When Amerson raised their rent to \$400, they got their own place in Encino. John continued to make films, but he made Laurie stop. “He thought one porn person in the family was enough,” she says. “And the AIDS thing was just starting to come out. Nobody had gotten it yet; but it was still in the back of our minds. He thought, ‘Well, if I’m going to take a chance, that’s enough.’”

Apparently, Holmes had made good his promise and stopped doing drugs. John and Laurie stayed home a lot and watched videos. On weekends they went to swap meets and yard sales.

“Nobody ever came over,” says Laurie. “Nobody knew where we lived. His words to me were ‘Friends can get you killed.’ We were very careful. Then, when Eddie Nash got out of jail, John was very, very worried. We went on twenty-four-hour watch. For like three weeks, one of us had to be awake at all times. It was like being in a movie or something.”

By late 1984, John was working as an executive at Amerson’s VCX films. He was supposed to be doing sales and pre-production, writing and editing, in addition to acting. Amerson says Holmes spent most of his time playing cards and shooting darts. When VCX cut off Holmes’s salary, Amerson put up money to start Penguin Productions. Holmes was to run it. Laurie worked as a secretary. “John was tired of the whole industry,” she says. “He wanted to make a million dollars so we could just leave and be done with it.”

Then, in the summer of 1985, John tested positive for AIDS.

“He went fucking crazy” says Amerson. “He panicked, walked in circles around the doctor’s office, threw his briefcase down. He said, ‘I’m gonna die!’ and drove off.”

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“When he came back,” says Laurie, “he was laughing about it. We closed up the office and went to the beach. We played our favorite songs, walked, talked. John said he felt like he was chosen to get AIDS because of who he was, how he lived. He felt like he was an example.”

John continued making films for a while. His last film was *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empress*, starring Ilona “Ciccolina” Staller, a member of the Italian Parliament. By the time it was released, in 1987, Holmes’s health had already begun to slide. The word in the industry was that he had colon cancer. Holmes was telling people that doctors had removed sixteen feet of his large intestine. In truth, Holmes was operated on for hemorrhoids. Around that time, he also began developing complications related to AIDS. Amerson, meanwhile, accused his friend of embezzling \$200,000 from the company. He cut Holmes off, canceled his insurance.

“John was really sick by this point,” says Laurie. “We moved around a lot because the rent kept going up. I was working as a computer programmer. John would just stay home. He was in so much pain, you couldn’t touch him. He couldn’t walk. His legs and feet would swell up, his ears would bleed, he had infections in his lungs. His surgery wouldn’t heal up, either. He was very upset about the business. He’d made all these people millions and millions of dollars. We were really broke. He called some people, and they said, ‘We’ll help you out.’ But we’d never get the money they promised.”

On January 24th, 1988, John and Laurie were married in the Little Chapel of the Flowers, in Las Vegas. It was a simple ceremony. The bride wore white. “It was a big ordeal for him,” says Laurie. “He knew he was dying. He knew we wouldn’t have a life together.”

In February, Holmes was admitted to the VA hospital in Sepulveda. Soon after, Detectives Lange and McCain called the hospital. They wanted to see Holmes. After seven years, the district attorney was reopening the Wonderland case, based, in part, on testimony from Scott Thorson, Liberace’s ex-lover. Thorson, who was waiting to be sentenced on a drug-related armed robbery, had sought a deal with police. He was prepared to testify that Eddie Nash had sent Holmes and Diles to Wonderland Avenue and that Nash felt responsible for the “bloody mess” that resulted. Now the police wanted Holmes’s testimony.

Laurie was standing at the door when Lange and McClain appeared down the corridor.

“John, they’re coming,” Laurie said in a stage whisper.

Holmes nodded his head, put out his cigarette, closed his eyes.

“He was incoherent,” says Lange.

John Holmes died on March 13th, 1988. “His eyes were open,” says Laurie, “and it looked like he had looked up to Death and said, ‘Here I am.’ It was the most peaceful look I ever saw in my life. I tried to shut his eyes like in the movies, but they wouldn’t stay shut.”

Holmes didn’t want a funeral, but he did have a last wish. “He wanted me to view his body and make sure that all the parts were there,” says Laurie. “He didn’t want part of him ending up in a jar somewhere. I viewed his body naked, you know, and then I watched them put the lid on the box and put it in the oven. We scattered his ashes over the ocean.”

Six months later, on September 8th, 1988, Diles and Nash were charged with the murders on Wonderland Avenue. After a preliminary hearing in January 1989, at which Thorson, among others, testified, Nash and Diles were bound over for trial this summer; they are currently being held without bail in the Los Angeles County Jail. Nash’s and Diles’s attorneys maintain their clients’ innocence and question the credibility of witnesses for the prosecution.

“You know,” says Detective Lange, “there’s no mystery here. Every time you read something, they say it’s a big mystery. Or the local TV says it’s a big mystery. Or that show out of New York, you know, *A Current Affair*. Big mystery. Like aliens or something. There’s no mystery. John Holmes didn’t go to his grave with anything but a very bad case of AIDS. He told us everything initially, right after it happened.

“But it’s one thing to tell someone something,” says Lange. “It’s another thing to testify to it in court.”

(1989)

