

HELL'S AGENT

by Robert Friedman

Larry Schiller has got them all locked up: Jack Ruby, Lee Harvey Oswald, Lenny Bruce, Marilyn Monroe and Gary Gilmore. And his clients never leave him

"Jerry Hayes. Buick dealer. Salt Lake City. Pleased to meet you."

I took the hand thrust across my airplane seat. Missionaries and car salesmen love captive audiences. He sized me up immediately. "I'll bet you drive a foreign car," he said. I do.

I had come to Utah, two months after the vultures departed, to pick over the bones of the Gary Gilmore story. Now I was going to Los Angeles to meet Larry Schiller, the man who had cornered the market on Gilmore. Jerry Hayes, who was going to Los Angeles to confer with other Buick dealers about how to corner a bigger share of the car market, knew a thing or two about Gary Gilmore. He knew that Salt Lake City's rental-car business had never been better than in the weeks prior to the execution. He knew that Gilmore's two murders paled in comparison with the subsequent "Hi Fi murders" in Ogden, where a gang of youths had tortured and killed three customers in a stereo-equipment store, the Hi Fi Shop, by forcing them to swallow Drano. And he was convinced that capital punishment would cut Utah's growing crime problem in half.

But Jerry Hayes was not interested in talking about Gary Gilmore, or capital punishment, or the Buick business, or even the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, as I had feared. I was not prepared for what followed. As we arched over the desert, he took a shiny white



paperback book from his Samsonite briefcase. On the cover of the book were these words: *Alpha Awareness Training*. I had heard a little about Alpha Awareness Training, but not enough to differentiate it from est or Silva Mind Control. I had thought its followers were the same ex-acid, ex-guru exhausted masses that drifted between Werner Erhard and Wayne Dyer looking for instant wholeness. But a devout Mor-

mon Buick dealer from Salt Lake City, Utah?

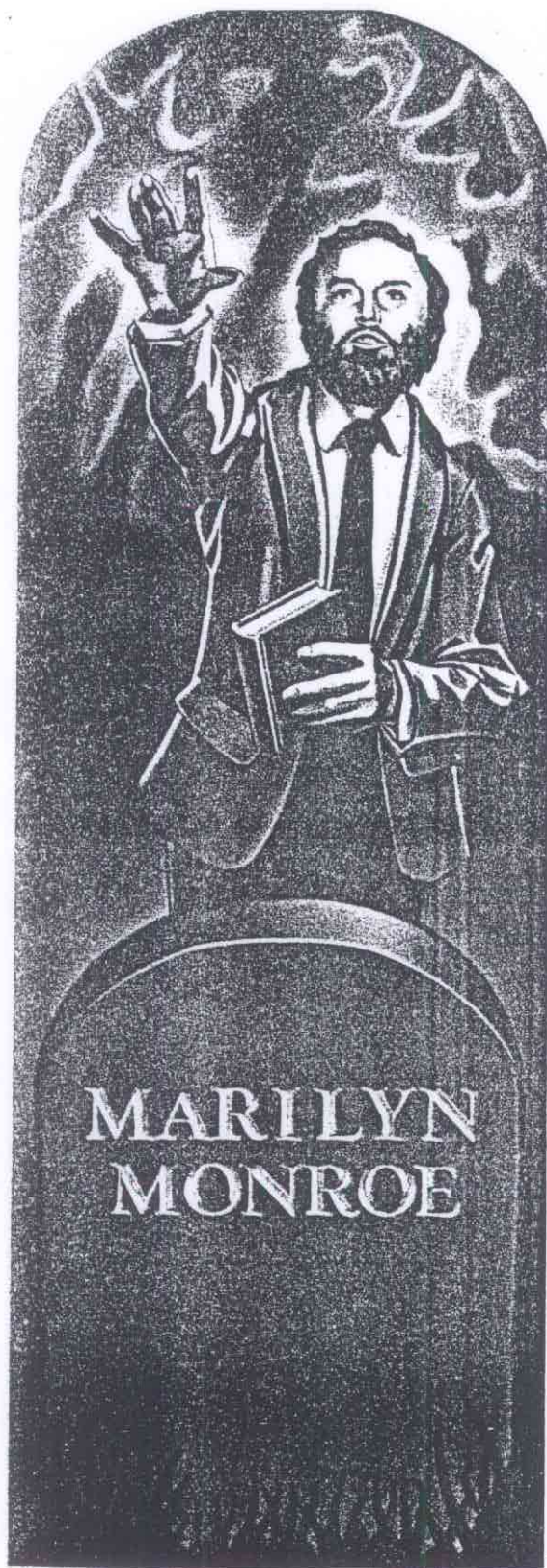
"I've been into Alpha for three years," he confided, sounding more Malibu than Mormon. "And business has never been better."

It all began, Jerry Hayes explained, during the 1973 Arab oil embargo. Automobile sales plummeted. So did Jerry Hayes's spirits. A friend, another car dealer, took him to hear Arlo W. Minto, the alpha of Alpha Awareness Training.

"The first concept," Jerry Hayes said, opening the white book to a heavily underlined page, "is that everything is okay. It took me a while to understand that. After all, how could the energy crisis be okay?" Exactly what I was thinking. Or the Hi Fi murders—were they okay?

He began reading whole passages from the book out loud, as if he believed the logic would be self-evident. Occasionally, he would turn his intense blue eyes on me in anticipation of the big sale and ask, "Do you get the concept?" I didn't. It seemed preposterous for

Robert Friedman is managing editor of More.



a grown man who sold Buicks to be saying it was okay if Buick sales were in a slump.

"The second concept," the undaunted Jerry Hayes continued, "is that there is no right and wrong. We get too ego-involved in trying to prove we're right." But what about Gary Gilmore, I asked. Wasn't it wrong for him to kill two people? "It's only a concept," Jerry Hayes answered. "Look at it this way. I have an Italian mechanic who works for me. He's like a surgeon. But he's always complaining about the other mechanics or about the customers. Now, instead of taking sides, I tell him everything's okay. And if he gets mad at me, I just calmly say to him, 'Cancel, cancel.' That means I don't accept what you just said. I cancel it out. Do you get the concept?"

I nodded. That meant I didn't get the concept, but everything was okay because we were in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles: formerly City of Angels, now City of Concepts. Jerry Hayes will be at home here. Everyone in Los Angeles has a concept. Not having a concept in Los Angeles is like not having a car: you can't get anywhere without one.

A concept in Hollywood is similar to what people in New York call an idea, except that it's shorn of all complexity, can be expressed in fewer words and is punctuated with dollar signs. A breakthrough concept, as it's called in Hollywood—a movie about a killer shark, for example, or a sequel to a movie about a killer shark—can be worth millions. Everyone likes to think that his concept is a breakthrough concept, and judging from the way people talk, breakthrough concepts are as common as Mercedes-Benzes.

Larry Schiller, the man I have come to see, thinks he may be riding a breakthrough concept. It is the story of a man turned into a killing machine by the prison system. The man is Gary Gilmore. If Schiller is as successful at marketing his concept as he was at buying up the rights to the story, he stands to make a lot of money. Already, he has sold the book rights for \$500,000 and is collaborating with Norman Mailer on the project. *Playboy* has paid him \$20,000 for a twenty-four-thousand-word interview with Gilmore that will be the basis of a Broadway play Schiller hopes to stage next year. He has a development contract to produce a six-hour television film for ABC. (ABC had originally paid him \$75,000 for the Gilmore story but announced shortly before the execution that it had pulled out of the project. The deal is now on again.) And he has been negotiating to sell the rights for a feature film that he estimates could earn more than \$10,000,000.

Like most concepts, the Gary Gilmore story is based on a premise: that people have not yet had enough of the man who wanted to be executed and are willing to pay to see him resurrected in a book, or a movie, or a Broadway play. Like many premises, this may be an illusion. Or, if newspaper headlines at the time of the execution are a better gauge, the premise may be an accurate reading of what America wants. Which is exactly what makes the concept business a high-risk investment.

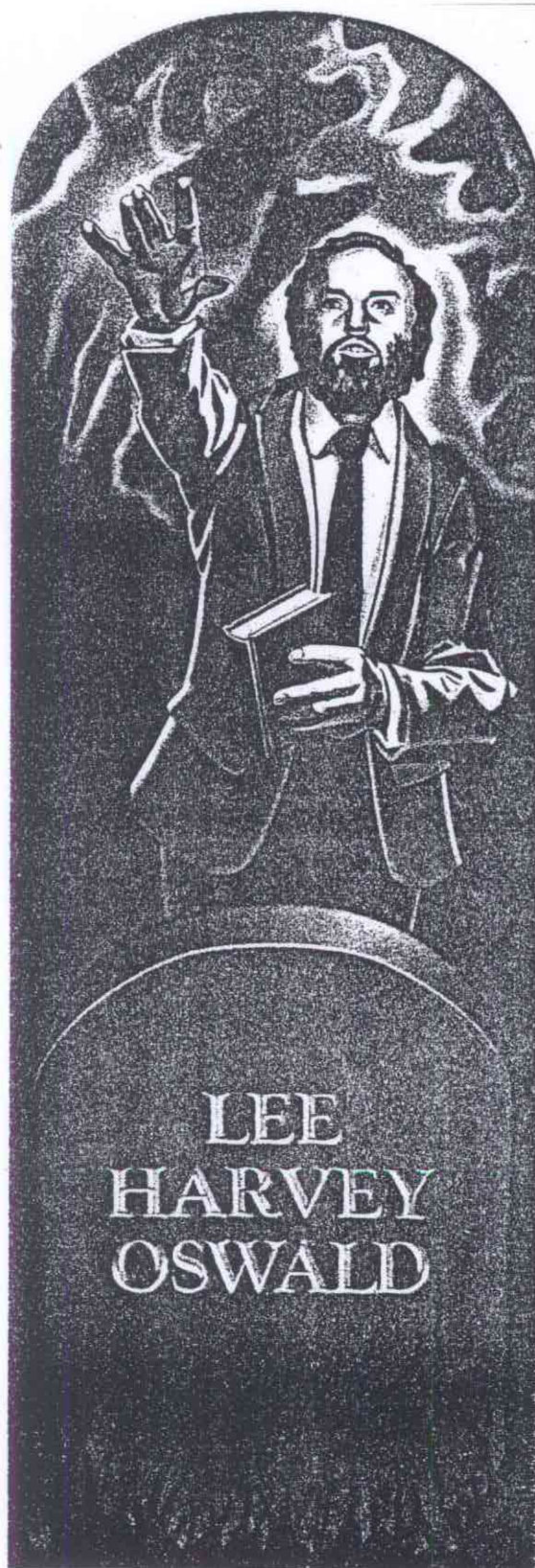
I came to Los Angeles carrying my own concept of Larry Schiller as Agent of Death. I had read all the

newspaper profiles of him from the Gilmore days. Barry Farrell, who was later to team up with Schiller on the *Playboy* interview, had said it most starkly, when he described him in *New West* magazine as a "carrion bird." ("Schiller was always a Moriarty figure for me, an evil genius," Farrell told me. "When I went out to Utah to write my *New West* article, I thought I had him in a vulnerable position. I went with my pencils sharpened. But everyone I spoke to turned me around. He was very honest." Ten days after the article appeared, Schiller called and asked Farrell if he would like to work on the Gilmore interview for *Playboy*.)

Buying the rights of the dead—or the about-to-be-dead, in the case of Gilmore—was nothing new to Larry Schiller. He had secured the rights of Lenny Bruce's ex-wife, Honey, as well as those of Bruce's mother and daughter, which he parlayed into an equal partnership in the successful biography *Ladies and Gentlemen, Lenny Bruce!* (Part of his deal with Albert Goldman, the book's author, was an unusual cover credit: "Based on the journalism of Lawrence Schiller.") He had bought the exclusive rights to a young woman's account of her losing battle with bone cancer, which became the basis of a book, *Sunshine*, and a TV movie. He had taken some of the last nude photographs of Marilyn Monroe several months before her death and, ten years later, had brought her back to life through the book *Marilyn*, which he packaged. He had interviewed Susan Atkins before she talked to a grand jury and had taken down her confession to the murder of Sharon Tate, then had sold the grisly story all over the world. He had conducted Jack Ruby's deathbed interview and before that had bought the rights to the photograph of Ruby shooting Lee Harvey Oswald. And before that, when he was just fifteen years old, Schiller had covered the Julius and Ethel Rosenberg story.

Here was a man who knew the value of death. Here was a man who understood that death is the ultimate story, the final concept. He had said as much to a *Rolling Stone* reporter in 1971 at a preview of *American Dreamer*, his film about Dennis Hopper: "Murder and prostitution excite me. Let's face it: the desire of all photographers is to photograph murder—with a knife instead of a gun, preferably. That's what makes covering wars so exciting."

My concept of Schiller as Agent of Death had been reinforced by a number of interviews I did before leaving for Los Angeles. Albert Goldman, who had had a bitter falling-out with Schiller over the Lenny Bruce book, was virtually screaming on the other end of the phone: "Larry is a voyeur at the ultimate obscenity. He finds the *most* lurid, the *most* gross, the *most* hideous thing anyone can imagine and gets the exclusive rights to it. That's his assignment in this world." David Susskind, who had bid against Schiller for the Gilmore rights (he said at the time, "Any contest between me and Mr. Schiller would be like the Dallas Cowboys playing the local high school"), sounded like the local high-school coach after the game: "Schiller swoops down on tragic events, like the death of Marilyn Monroe or the impending execution of Gilmore, vulturelike and ghoulishly, salivating all the time." Mark





Lane, who had been described as a "professional huckster" by Schiller in *The Scavengers*, his 1967 book attacking the critics of the Warren Report, quipped: "That would have been an appropriate title had it been Schiller's autobiography. Have you ever heard of anybody so completely committed to scavenging?" Wilfred Sheed, who had written *Muhammad Ali* for Schiller and who also had had a falling-out with him, warned me: "Larry Schiller is too unreal to hate."

Of course, Goldman, Susskind, Lane and Sheed all had personal reasons to despise Larry Schiller. Their remarks about him would have to be discounted. But it was reassuring to know that I was dealing with a character who makes the venom flow. After all, the Agent of Death can't be all sweetness and light.

Like all concepts, mine was superficial. There was no skull and crossbones on the door to Larry Schiller's office in the CBS building in Studio City, no contracts signed in blood on his desk. And the only implements of destruction were three tape recorders, dozens of cassette tapes, microphones, adapters and devices for recording phone calls. Larry Schiller was seated in front of an enormous blowup of an original Bert Stern silk screen on metal of Marilyn Monroe that was divided into twelve yellow and blue panels. He was wearing a blue denim suit, a white shirt with alternating red and blue stripes that was open two buttons down his chest, black leather loafers with gold braiding around the heels, a Tiffany digital watch with a black leather band and a Gucci belt buckle, the kind with the interlocking gold G's, on a belt that must have been at least a size forty-four.

He was on the phone. A disarming grin spread over his bearded face. "Nicole, darling, how are you? I've been trying to get you for three days." He motioned me to sit down. The Nicole on the phone was Nicole Barrett, Gary Gilmore's lover and partner in a failed suicide pact. When she was released from a Utah mental institution, I later learned, Schiller brought her to Los Angeles and set her up in an apartment. "I want to take you out to dinner tonight. So get yourself a baby-sitter. . . . Norman will be here next week . . ."

My eyes wandered around the office. I didn't see a typewriter, which didn't surprise me, since Schiller had described himself to me over the phone, rather grotesquely, I had thought, as a "writer without hands." On the wall opposite the Marilyn blowup was a poster of Dennis Hopper holding an automatic rifle in his left hand near the words: "Dennis Hopper is the American Dreamer and the camera is his weapon."

" . . . I don't want you going back to Utah for the divorce without me. . . . By the way, I just got a videotape of the press conference I gave after the execution . . ."

On a shelf, fourteen black loose-leaf notebooks were lined up impressively. Volume Five was marked "Nicole Barrett."

" . . . Yes, you can wear your Levi's tonight."

We spent the first hour circling each other. Schiller was wary of interviews; he assumed that I had been sent to do a hatchet job. "Not one person has said I should do this interview," he said. "At least you could say I'm a crapshooter." You (Continued on page 134)

the bobber. "You see that?"

"Come on, touch it."

"Geez, I got a bite! You see that hobber move?"

Paul Berlin held out the grenade. The thing scared him, and he held it very carefully.

"Touch it," he said.

But Cacciato, eyes bright, was leaning forward, testing his line, feeling for life at the other end. "A nibble," he whispered. "I swear, a real strong nibble."

Paul Berlin took Cacciato's hand from the line and pressed it to the grenade.

"I got one! No shit, it's a real bite this time!"

Berlin drew the grenade back and put it in his pocket and then watched as Cacciato lured his big fish. For a long time Paul Berlin sat at the crater. It was the same as Wisconsin. He closed his eyes. It was the same. Pines, campfire smoke, walleyes frying, his father's

ways so sweet.

He opened his eyes and saw Cacciato working with the paper clip.

"Any luck?"

"Sucker took my bait," Cacciato winked. "But next time I'll nail him. Now that I got the technique."

"Be patient," Berlin said.

He walked up the slope to Oscar's lean-to. In the morning, he thought, he would have to eat a good breakfast. That would help. The woods were always good for the appetite.

Eddie and Oscar and Doc Peret sat around a can of Sterno and took turns warming their hands.

"You talk to him?"

Paul Berlin put the grenade on the ground in front of them.

"You talk to him?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"You know how it is with a fisherman," Paul Berlin said. "Mind's a million miles away?" #

Hell's Agent

(Continued from page 78) could also say he had done his best to improve his odds. As a precondition for the interview, he had demanded that I agree to talk to certain people. I had offered no objection and already he had prepared a list of some fifty names. Many of the people he had already called. He had also demanded that for every negative statement about him in my article I include a positive statement. That, of course, I had refused to do. His desire to be interviewed obviously outweighed his fear of looking bad.

I soon learned that to interview Schiller I had to negotiate as well as to ask questions. Every few minutes, or so it seemed, he would stop my tape recorder and offer me a deal. Would I be interested in seeing the screenplay of *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald*, a four-hour television movie he is producing for ABC? Then I would have to promise not to reveal what happens in the last ten pages. Would I be interested in knowing the true story of what he was doing covering the Patty Hearst trial for *Time*? Then I would have to agree not to call *Time*'s bureau chief in San Francisco. If I refused the deal, it was on to something else.

But for all his game playing, Schiller was remarkably open, answering all my questions, admitting his foibles. Instead of the loathsome character I had imagined to go along with my Agent of Death concept, he was charming, almost likable. No doubt he was aware that his reputation preceded him and he was trying his hardest to show me the other side of Larry Schiller. I felt like a reporter confronted by the leader of a death cult and accused of misrepresenting the group in the press, then told: "You have to understand that human sacrifices are only a small part of our total program."

Which is pretty much what Schiller said when I asked him early on why he was attracted to all these death

stories. "I am drawn to unwarranted, uncalled-for deaths," he admitted. "Lenny Bruce didn't have to die that way, or the people in that little fishing village in Japan. [Schiller produced Eugene Smith's epic photographic study *Minamata*, which chronicled mercury poisoning in a Japanese town.]

"There's always a mystery behind that type of death, and there's no question that journalism feeds on deaths. That's what makes front page in all the newspapers—not people being born. But you have to look at the overall body of my work, okay. I'll show you books that I've done that don't fit into the pattern. I'll show you work that I've done that you won't believe came from me. I was indirectly involved in designing the artificial kidney that is used in every hospital in the country. [As part of a *Life* photo assignment, Schiller had once hired an engineering firm to construct an artificial kidney. The design was so good that it soon became widely used.] Nobody writes about that when they write about Larry Schiller."

So I let him show me. That afternoon he hauled a large carton into his office, sat down cross-legged on the floor, clipped a microphone to his shirt, plugged it into my tape recorder and began to emcee his life story. The first part was perfunctory: born in Brooklyn in 1936; father managed the Times Square Davega Store; moved to San Diego at the age of seven; started taking pictures of sporting events while at La Jolla High School. The only thing that seemed to set Schiller apart was his eye. When he was five years old, he just happened to be looking up the dumbwaiter in his Brooklyn apartment when someone threw an umbrella down. He lost the sight in his left eye.

At fifteen, he won second, third, fourth, fifth and ninth places in the Grafex photo contest. As a result, he had the opportunity to spend the summer carrying cameras for New York

City photojournalist Andy Lopez. It was the summer of 1952, and in between the routine fires and murders, Schiller took pictures of protest rallies against the impending execution of the Rosenbergs and traveled to Sing Sing to photograph the Rosenberg kids visiting their parents.

Schiller couldn't remember exactly when he had had his first concept. But over the next twenty-five years—as a free-lance photographer, a photographer for *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, a record producer (four documentary albums for Capitol Records on LSD, homosexuality, John Kennedy's assassination and Lenny Bruce), a journalist, a book packager (some fifteen titles, including eight volumes of the series *Masters of Contemporary Photography*), a film director (*American Dreamer* and *Hey, I'm Alive* for ABC television) and a concept director (Academy Award winner *The Man Who Skied Down Everest*)—he had so many concepts that he couldn't keep track. The night before our interview, he told me, he had stayed up late rummaging through his files, throwing all the important concepts into the cardboard carton that was now on his office floor.

The box was like a magician's hat: from it he pulled a lifetime of magazines, photographs, books, records, advertising brochures, letters and what he likes to call war stories. "You have to understand," he said by way of introduction, "that when I start an endeavor I have an overall concept, okay. I'm willing to take other people's advice, but I want to be the final person to determine how my concept is represented." He plunged into the box.

Concept: "To shoot black pubic hair on a black girl against a black background." The point of that history-making concept, I was told, was to publish the first pubic hair in *Playboy* without anybody's noticing it. The pictures of black dancer Paula Kelly appeared in August, 1969. Schiller's concept worked, except that people noticed.

Concept: "The front of Barbra Streisand's face looks nothing like her profile." This concept was turned into a *Life* photo spread, and the pictures still earn royalties. Over the years, Schiller has snapped a lot of stars. After leaving Pepperdine College (he was practically the only Jew at the Church of Christ school), he "shot fan magazines. I did Fabian's first kiss. I did Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh in the swimming pool. I did everything."

Concept: "The hands that replaced Von Tripp." This *Life* photograph was a dramatic shot of the face and hands of Ricardo Rodriguez, who had replaced Von Tripp on the Ferrari racing team. To get the picture, Schiller strapped himself to the Ferrari and was driven around a racetrack at seventy miles an hour. Schiller had a reputation as a fearless photographer, the man who could bring back any picture. He strapped himself to the horizontal stabilizer of a small plane to shoot sky divers; he took a helicopter into the Grand Canyon to photograph a story

about rafting on the Colorado River; not knowing how to swim, he dove a hundred sixty-seven feet into the Pacific to cover a treasure hunt.

Concept: "*Marilyn Monroe had to be lovable, huggable and fuckable.*" This rather crass concept was the guiding principle behind Schiller's book *Marilyn*. "I conceived the project in 1972," he recalled, pulling from the box a *Time* magazine cover featuring Monroe and Norman Mailer, who wrote the book. "I knew from the very beginning we were going to have a *Time* cover. And I understood from the very beginning the concept of a cover, okay. Marilyn had to be alive, not dead. I didn't want a book about just another dead movie star. You follow what I'm saying?"

As I followed Schiller from concept to concept, often at breakneck speed, I felt as he must have felt when strapped to that Ferrari. But I was getting the picture: I saw how much he had been defined by his camera, indeed had become a personification of the camera. One "war story" attached to an issue of *Newsweek* was particularly revealing.

It was summer, 1965; Schiller had just walked away from a \$70,000 business loss from manufacturing motors for Leica cameras. *Newsweek* called and asked him to cover the Watts riots. He hadn't taken any pictures in a year and the assignment was just what he needed. He hired an armed driver who doubled as a bodyguard and another man to backlight the riots with a strobe. Braving bullets and overcoming the technical problems of photographing black people at night, Schiller brought back some excellent pictures. "One night," he recalled, "I met a black guy

who was practically nude in an alley. He had a knife at my throat. I said, 'I guess you've gotten to the point'—it was a James Baldwin line I had read, not my line—'where you're no longer going to die for your cause—you're only going to kill for it.' And I said, 'If you kill me, nobody is going to take a picture of it.' He just turned around and walked away."

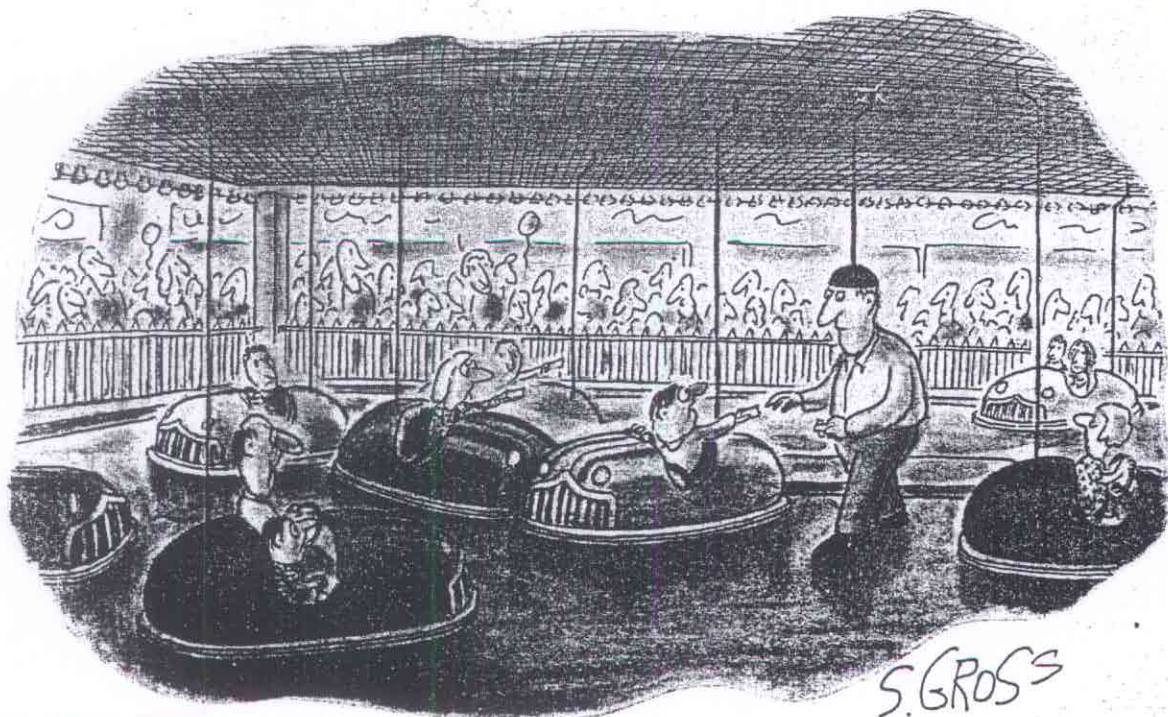
No doubt the story is exaggerated. I have trouble imagining Schiller—or anyone, for that matter—quoting Baldwin when a knife's at his throat. But the point about the power of the camera is not exaggerated. The camera, and by extension the person behind the lens, represents attention. It holds out the possibility of fame. And that is something the black man in the Watts alley, or Susan Atkins, or Gary Gilmore, finds irresistible. Once Schiller understood the lure of the camera, the flashbulbs and the shutters were no longer necessary. They could be replaced by tape recorders, or money, or charm, or simply attention. "Schiller symbolizes the photographer in our society," Wilfred Sheed observed. "He is attention personified. You want to be famous. He wants to make you famous."

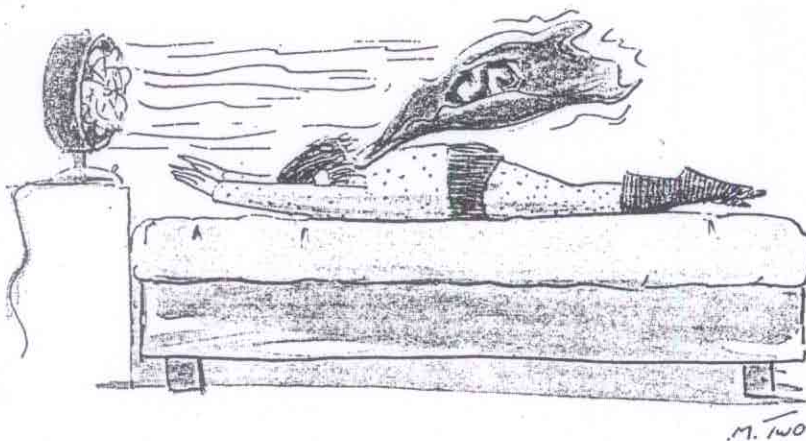
The camera, if it is pointed in the right direction at the right time, also has the power to make the person behind the lens famous. In 1962, Schiller got his first real break. Marilyn Monroe gave it to him. He was on the set of George Cukor's *Something's Got to Give*, a film that was never completed, taking pictures of Monroe for *Paris Match*. In the middle of a pool scene, she took off her bathing suit. Cukor's cameras continued to roll and Schiller

snapped away. Only one other photographer was on the set. "I went over to him," Schiller recalled, "and said, 'Two sets of pictures will only drive the price down.'" They entered into a partnership on the set. But he had to get Monroe's approval before he could sell anything.

"I would sit in her T-bird down the block from Schwab's and show her the prints," he said. "She would drink Dom Perignon and edit the pictures with pinkie shears. She had the right to destroy a negative if she didn't like it. One day, I showed her a beautiful *tushie* picture—a beautiful ass shot. I knew she'd love it, okay. And she said with a laugh, 'Why do you think I should release this picture?' I looked at her and said, 'You're already famous, Marilyn, now you can make me famous.'" Monroe released the pictures and Schiller promptly sold a set of them to *Life* magazine for \$10,000. It was his first big sale.

Monroe loved the attention of the camera; Schiller gave it to her. It was exploitation by mutual consent. But sitting in her Thunderbird, cutting negatives with her pinkie shears, she never dreamed that the overweight photographer with the *tushie* shots would get her on the cover of *Time* magazine ten years after her death. Or that one day he would be involved with a company called The Legend and the Truth Marketing that would offer by catalog "a number of full-color remembrances of Marilyn Monroe," including the picture book *Marilyn*, with text by Norman Mailer, a series of eighteen- by twenty-four-inch posters, a calendar, a datebook, a jigsaw puzzle and a deck of playing cards with





her picture on the backs.

Schiller was understandably defensive about *The Legend and the Truth* when he pulled the brochure from the bottom of the box. He was no longer the photographer exploiting an image on the set of *Something's Got to Give*; he was now a big-time promoter. "I was offered a lot of money to do a lot of things I thought were in very bad taste," he said. "Marilyn's whole life was based on exploitation and she condoned it. She enjoyed seeing herself on pillowcases and ashtrays. But I felt it was in bad taste. I turned down offers to do T-shirts, shoes, endorsements for nylons and for sheets with her nude body on them."

The Marilyn Monroe concept was a pinnacle of good taste compared with the last item Schiller dragged out of the carton at the end of the afternoon. It was a copy of a paperback book, published by New American Library, entitled *The Killing of Sharon Tate*. "More chilling than *Helter Skelter*," the cover promised. "The bizarre story of the Charles Manson blood orgies, including the confession of Susan Atkins, participant in the murders." The author was Lawrence Schiller.

Paul Fitzgerald was one of the people Schiller insisted I see. As Patricia Krenwinkel's lawyer, he had cross-examined Schiller during the Manson trial about his role in the Susan Atkins confession. Schiller was so impressed with Fitzgerald as an adversary that he subsequently hired Fitzgerald to defend him in a lawsuit brought by Honey Bruce. (The comedian's ex-wife claimed that Schiller had provided money for her heroin habit to induce her to grant him additional interviews for the Lenny Bruce biography. Fitzgerald negotiated an \$8,000 settlement.)

Fitzgerald's Beverly Hills law office was tastefully furnished: Oriental rugs, parquet floors, chrome and leather chairs and soft lighting. The photograph of a Mansonite with a shaved head, the newspaper clippings about the Tate murder that were attached to the wall and the framed letter from Squeaky Fromme seemed out of place. Fitzgerald, in his late thirties, had

deep, dark circles under his eyes.

He had prepared himself for our interview. Several hours earlier, at lunch, he had jotted down on a napkin all the bad things about Schiller he could think of and all the good things. The dirty half of the napkin went like this: "Aggressive, hostile, ill-mannered, rude, inconsiderate, overbearing, must be the center of attention, pain in the ass to be with, thinks he knows everything, unique ability to get people to hate him, has enemies everywhere, difficult to work with."

"Sounds like a nice guy," I said. "I thought he was your client."

"Let me give you the other side of the ledger," Fitzgerald replied, turning over the napkin. "Unbounded enthusiasm, courageous, takes risks, doesn't hide behind pretenses, fights for what he believes in, not intimidated, extraordinary capacity for work, utter confidence." On balance: quite a character. "I think I'm one of the few people who doesn't hate him."

Fitzgerald first met Schiller in a Los Angeles courtroom during a sentencing hearing for Charles Manson in 1971. Schiller had been called to testify about the circumstances surrounding his interviews with Susan Atkins, and particularly about whether a judge's gag order had been violated by publication of her confession in the *Los Angeles Times*. Fitzgerald, a public defender assigned by the court to represent one of Manson's accomplices, Pat Krenwinkel, was convinced that the interviews had been arranged with the cooperation of public officials keen on generating negative pretrial publicity. And he believed that Schiller had been responsible for the story's appearing in the *Times*, even though Schiller denied under oath that he had anything to do with the publication of his interview in the newspaper.

"I set out to get Schiller," Fitzgerald recalled. "But he was like mercury. I couldn't pin him down. He slipped and slid." He went to his shelf of lawbooks and pulled down a dark brown binder containing a transcript of the proceedings.

"Fitzgerald: Now, it is your testimony that you had nothing to do with

the sale of the published story *Two Nights of Terror* by Susan Atkins that was printed in the *Los Angeles Times* on December the 14th, correct?"

"SCHILLER: I had nothing to do with the authorization of that publication. . . ."

"Fitzgerald: Do you know, to your own knowledge, how the *Los Angeles Times* physically received the printed word that ultimately was printed in the newspaper?"

"SCHILLER: To my knowledge, I do not know as a fact."

"Fitzgerald: Do you have any knowledge that it was received over a wire service?"

"SCHILLER: It has been told to me that it was received on rolled paper, which is normally used on a Wirephoto machine. . . . Now, that is hearsay. I have never seen it, but it was told to me."

The examination of Schiller by Fitzgerald and the other defense attorneys went on for pages. But Schiller, who identified himself to the court as a "journalist and communicator," revealed little.

"The Atkins confession was one of the worst cases of virulent pretrial publicity I have ever seen," Fitzgerald said. "It was not just about her, but she implicated others. I mean who ever heard of an accused murderer being taken out of jail to a lawyer's office to tape a confession for commercial purposes? But Schiller didn't give one shit about the other defendants' rights."

Schiller didn't see it quite the same way. "This was a big journalistic scoop," he said later. "Susan Atkins hadn't testified in front of the grand jury; she hadn't even been indicted. We discussed the question of pretrial publicity and decided that her right to free speech was more important than another person's fair trial."

But it was a question about exploitation that most exercised Schiller. Fitzgerald suggested that Schiller had induced Atkins to cooperate with promises of money. "He has an amazing ability to get people to do things against their better interests," Fitzgerald said. "He has a way of convincing people they have money coming to them. That they deserve it. He had Susan Atkins believing she was going to be famous." (Schiller paid no money up front for the interview, but the *News of the World* in England bought the rights for \$40,000 and book sales brought total revenues to about \$100,000. Schiller took twenty-five percent off the top; the rest was divided among Atkins and her lawyers.)

When I asked Schiller about the exploitation charge, he exploded. "What situation was I exploiting? There were no indictments, no charges. I was just getting a story. And there were a lot of people who wanted that story. I don't think that's exploitation. Do you? If I wanted exploitation, I wouldn't have given the story to the *Los Angeles Times*, but to the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* or the *Daily News*."

But what about the book *The Killing of Sharon Tate*? "I made a mistake. I

allowed it to be sensationalized. Atkins' confession was fantastic, a fine piece of journalism. I published that. It was on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*. It was widely received. But I didn't follow it up. The lawyers wanted to publish the book quickly because they wanted the money. And I succumbed to the pressure. It was a journalistic disaster."

So Schiller had been responsible for the interview appearing in the *Times* after all?

He grinned and shut off my tape recorder.

The next day I had lunch with Schiller and Nicole Barrett at the CBS Studio commissary. Though I had seen her picture in newspapers countless times, I was struck by how pretty she was. She arrived at the office early wearing a new white denim gaucho-pants outfit. Her auburn hair was cut short, making her look even younger than she was. At twenty, Nicole Barrett had already been married three times (she was thirteen the first time) and was the mother of two children.

I was interviewing Schiller about *Minamata*: how he had rescued photographer Eugene Smith after Smith had been beaten and partially blinded by agents of the chemical company that had polluted a Japanese fishing village with mercury; how he had virtually held Smith under house arrest in Los Angeles to get him to finish the book; how Schiller's relationship with his wife, Judith, had begun to crumble over his involvement in the project. "I gotta watch this," Nicole said when she walked in. "You being interviewed."

In the previous weeks, since bringing Nicole to Los Angeles, Schiller had conducted more than twenty hours of taped interviews with her. He had probed her sex life with Gary Gilmore, her affairs with other men, her suicide attempts and her traumatic childhood. The night before, he told me after lunch, she had broken down crying under his questioning.

Yet for all the grilling, Schiller was according her star treatment. She had been an important figure in Gilmore's life, at least the last few months of it, and Schiller needed her cooperation. He treated her like a daughter, showering her with attention. (Shortly after she was released from Utah State Hospital, he flew her to New York for a day to take her skating in Central Park. "She was depressed about being poor," Schiller said. "I wanted to show her that blacks and Puerto Ricans who are poor can have a good time.") But there was also a sexual undercurrent in their relationship: the mutual seduction of a movie director and his starlet. Nicole clearly enjoyed being in Hollywood and posing for the camera Schiller represented.

We stayed away from the subject of Gary Gilmore at lunch. Schiller did most of the talking. He told stories about how he had come to do Jack Ruby's deathbed interview (Ruby's lawyer had called in 1967 with an offer: Would Schiller be interested in inter-

viewing Ruby for \$4,500, the amount Ruby owed the I.R.S. in back taxes and wanted to pay off before he died?); how he had negotiated to buy the rights to Madame Nhu's story for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1963; how he had been in Dallas hours after the Kennedy assassination and had bought the rights to the photograph of Ruby shooting Oswald for \$10,000 ("That's Larry Schiller writing a check conceptionally. I didn't clear it with anybody first. I only had the concept of cash in my pocket").

I asked Schiller about this "concept of cash." "I wish you didn't have to gain access by using money," he said, "but sometimes you do. Take Nicole. If I hadn't written her a note at one point making her an offer, she might not be here now." (Nicole was paid \$25,000 for the exclusive rights to her story. Part of the money is being held in trust by her mother.)

"But the relationship is not based on money at this point," Schiller said, turning to Nicole. "Or is it?" Nicole giggled. "Even when you use money to gain access, it doesn't mean you're going to get the truth, that you're going

to get the story. More than likely, people take the money and run." That, apparently, Schiller was doing his best to prevent.

Later that afternoon, Bessie Gilmore, Gary's mother, called from Oregon. Schiller put her on hold while he quickly rigged up a device to record the conversation. Bessie Gilmore, a virtual recluse, had refused to talk to anyone about her son, including Schiller. Schiller was flying up to Oregon that weekend to try to coax her into cooperating. She was a crucial part of the Gary Gilmore story and the challenge of winning her over was irresistible.

"How are you, Bessie?" Schiller opened in his most charming telephone voice.

Apparently, things were not well. She informed Schiller that she had changed her mind and didn't want to see him.

"But Bessie," Schiller came back, "maybe thirty million people around the world are going to read this book. You owe it to yourself and to Gary. This is something that is going to last as long as mankind."

Bessie was not impressed with Schiller's appeal to posterity. He tried a



"Run! Flee for your sanity! Second bananas are making their move!"

different tack, his voice becoming more emotional.

"He loved you, Bessie. To the last minute. He wasn't thinking of Nicole, but of you."

Bessie was softening. Schiller moved in for the kill, his voice rising, almost shouting: "I've got to understand the fiber of the man. We owe it to Gary to do this as best we can and to do it right."

It was over. He hung up the phone and grinned. Bessie had changed her mind again and had agreed to an interview.

Larry Schiller first "met" Gary Gilmore on November 27, 1976, at Utah State Prison. They were in separate rooms, on opposite sides of a corridor, fourteen feet apart, and could only talk by telephone. But they could see each other through two windows. It had taken Schiller three weeks to get that close. And it had taken some finesse: he had to pose as a member of Gilmore's legal team to slip past the prison guards.

Schiller was nervous. A lot depended on the impression he made on the thirty-six-year-old killer. Gilmore, overloaded with aspirin, sat in the other

room watching Schiller with a cold stare. He had a headache: Should he sell his one remaining asset—the rights to the Gary Gilmore story—to Larry Schiller or to David Susskind? Susskind was offering more money (his latest offer included \$150,000 up front) and more prestige, but Schiller had taken the trouble to come to Provo, to befriend Vern Damico, Gilmore's uncle and representative, and to sneak into the prison. Gilmore liked the style.

But after ten minutes, Schiller was ready to leave. He had made his pitch on the prison telephone and Gilmore had hardly said a word. Finally, Gilmore asked his first question.

"Who do you want to play me in the movie?" Schiller sensed a trap and was noncommittal. "Well, it's very important to me," Gilmore said. "If I'm going to be depicted on the screen, I want to be depicted the right way, and I might want that written in the contract."

"If that's going to be in the contract, I won't be part of it," Schiller replied. "I'm not going to write a screenplay based on some actor you want."

Gilmore seemed disturbed. "But I have somebody I want. Warren Oates. What do you think about Oates?"

"I think he's a fine actor," Schiller answered.

"Well, then, let's come to an agreement."

"No way," Schiller insisted.

Gilmore smiled for the first time. "That's good," he said. "I hate Oates."

Schiller had passed his test. The two talked on for several hours. "When I walked out," Schiller recalled, "I felt confident that I had the deal." The next day, he returned with Gilmore's two lawyers and executed an agreement, which was followed by Gilmore's statement: "I, Gary Gilmore, do hereby designate Lawrence Schiller to interview me to preserve the literary value of my life's history. . . ." Gilmore signed for less money than he would have received from Susskind: there was \$53,000 for Gilmore (all but \$1,000 of which he turned over to his lawyers, to Uncle Vern and to others), \$40,000 for the families of Gilmore's two victims and \$25,000 for Nicole.

Stealing the Gary Gilmore story away from David Susskind was indeed, as Susskind put it, like the local high-school football team beating the Dallas Cowboys. But Schiller had worked hard for his victory. He was on a plane to Salt Lake City early in November, two days after reading a newspaper clipping about the case. When Dennis Boaz, Gilmore's lawyer and agent at the time, blocked his way, Schiller decided to end run the attorney. He sent Gilmore a four-hundred-word telegram and a copy of *Sunshine*, the book he had packaged about a young woman with bone cancer who wanted to die. And he paid a visit to Vern Damico, the man who was closest to Gilmore and who would soon become Gilmore's representative. It was a smart play: Uncle Vern cleared the way for Schiller.

Vern Damico lives in a clapboard house adjacent to the City Center Motel in Provo. It was in the City Center Motel, on the night of July 20, 1976, that Gary Gilmore shot Bennie Bushnell in the back of his head. Living in such proximity to the scene of the crime must be eerie, I thought as I drove up to the house. But being inside was even eerier. Uncle Vern and Aunt Ida had turned their home into a Gary Gilmore shrine. On a table near the door was a pair of alabaster hands, clasped in prayer, resting on a Bible; next to it, a .45-caliber pistol and a box of ammunition. There was a Gary Gilmore scrapbook lying open on the coffee table and, in a closet, the clothes Gilmore wore when he was executed. "I got the shirt in here," Vern said, dragging his leg with the artificial knee toward the closet. "You can see the bullet holes going in and coming out."

Until recently, Uncle Vern ran a shoe-repair shop in Provo. He had lived all his life in that picturesque Mormon city nestled between two mountain ranges—Happy Valley, as the natives call it—and was unprepared for the onslaught that his nephew touched off last winter. But mending other people's broken soles had taught him humility.



"I'm sorry, he can't speak with you now—he's pumping iron."

His thick cobbler's hands, broad chest and deliberate way of speaking gave the impression of a man not easily knocked off his feet. When Paul Anka called Uncle Vern at the shoe-repair shop to offer \$75,000 for the Gary Gilmore story—enough money to buy all the shoes in Provo—Vern asked him to sing a song on the phone to prove he was indeed Paul Anka. And when Anka later offered to send shoes to Vern for repairs, Vern was grateful for the potential business but not impressed. David Susskind was equally unsuccessful. When he asked Vern on the phone from New York, "Don't you know me?" Vern answered back, "Don't you know me?" And when Susskind suggested that a movie about Gilmore could gross \$15,000,000, Vern knew he was only talking hypothetical money.

But Uncle Vern was impressed with Schiller. Schiller was there, in Provo, not just a voice on the phone. "He showed me a check he had from ABC for fifty thousand dollars to prove he was serious," Vern recalled. (It was, in fact, a blank check backed by ABC for an unspecified sum.) "But he didn't pressure us. He told me to get a lawyer and think it over. He was honest and sincere. One of the boys."

Schiller knew that the attention he gave Uncle Vern would pay off. "What made the difference," he said, "was that I told Vern, 'If I'm involved in this project, I'm going to be here in Provo, Utah. I'm not going to be sitting in an office someplace with a secretary who's going to say, "Mr. Schiller's out, he can't take your call."'"

Winning over Uncle Vern—like winning over Gary Gilmore, or Bessie Gilmore, or Nicole Barrett—was Schiller's specialty. It was like knowing what f-stop to use on the camera, how to get the seemingly impossible picture. "I have the ability to go up to any man's level or down to any man's level," Schiller once boasted to me. "I make myself at home in any situation. If I walk into a certain type of house, I might just feel like sitting on the floor if I have the feeling that the people who live there sit on the floor. I've sat in the presence of kings and queens, murderers and rapists, and I think I can deal with all of them."

Once he had Uncle Vern's confidence, it was only a matter of time before he got to Gilmore. Gilmore fired his lawyer and agent, Dennis Boaz, after Boaz had announced on *Good Morning, America* that he no longer supported Gilmore's right to die. Boaz, who had once told Gilmore that Schiller was "a snake," was replaced as Gilmore's agent by Uncle Vern. And two Provo lawyers, Robert Moody and Ronald Stanger, took over the legal case. Schiller made a point of impressing Moody and Stanger with his knowledge of contracts and trust funds and with his concern for the families of Gilmore's victims. By the time he walked into Utah State Prison, he had almost everyone lined up on his side.

But getting Gilmore's signature on the contract was only a first step. Schiller had yet to get his story. An im-

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minent and literal deadline—Gilmore's date with the firing squad—was only weeks away. If, however, the courts decided that Gilmore could not be executed, then the value of Schiller's property would plummet. There were also logistical difficulties: Schiller could not visit Gilmore and had to conduct his interviews first by phone, then through Moody and Stanger as intermediaries. And getting Gilmore, a professional con artist, to open up and talk honestly about himself was not easy. Schiller recalled how he broke the ice: "I made a tactical move. I had to let him get something on me, so that he would feel he was on top." On the second set of questions Schiller sent in with the lawyers, he intentionally misspelled a number of words, anticipating some response. Gilmore took the bait and made fun of Schiller's spelling. Schiller sent a Mailgram back: YOUR DAMN RIGHT I'M A PISS POOR SPELLER STOP YOU HAVE TO BE BAD AT SOMETHING TO BE GOOD AT SOMETHING ELSE STOP I KNOW THAT YOU TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR WRITING. . . .

Gilmore responded to the praise. He stayed up late at night filling hundreds of pages with longhand answers to the questions Schiller and Farrell sent in with the lawyers—more than enough material for a dramatic interview. But Schiller soon found he had another problem. As Gilmore's deadline approached, Provo was becoming more and more like a circus town—and Schiller was perceived as the ringmaster. Watching Gary Gilmore jump through the hoop of death had become a big-top media event, and the hundreds of journalists who swarmed to Happy Valley quickly discovered that Schiller held all the tickets. As Barry Cunningham, who covered the Gilmore case for the *New York Post*, put it: "He was trying to sell Gilmore's corpse, limb by limb, to the highest bidder."

Schiller, of course, saw it differently. He was the one being exploited, a convenient target for the media that were frustrated by their inability to scoop the story. Indeed, at the same time the media were painting Schiller black, they were eagerly offering scalpers' prices for ringside seats. One of the highest bids, which Schiller turned down, was a reported \$100,000 from Cunningham's boss, Rupert Murdoch, for an exclusive account of the execution. And Schiller had passed up other lucrative offers to sell his seat at the execution or to sell the rights to his account of Gilmore's last seconds. "I cried the night before the execution," Schiller said. "I was being tempted by some very big money. More money than I will ever admit to. I became sick to my stomach. I had never planned to withhold the execution facts. From the first day I saw there was a possibility I would be invited, I knew I would give it to everybody."

Eight minutes after Gary Gilmore's execution by firing squad on January 17, 1977, Larry Schiller gave the whole world, free of charge, an account of what had happened. If he had cried the night before, there was no sign of tears now. His voice was matter-of-fact. If a camera could talk, it would have sound-

ed something like Larry Schiller at his post-execution press conference: "There was a slight movement in the hands, not upwardly, not downwardly, but in a very calming manner, and slowly red blood emerged from under the black T-shirt onto the white slacks. It seemed to me that his body still had a movement in it for approximately fifteen to twenty seconds. It is not for me to determine whether that is an after-death or a prior-to-death movement."

Moments before the execution, Schiller had gone up to Gilmore as he sat strapped in the death chair that was mounted on a plywood platform. It was the first time the two had ever talked without the interference of walls, glass partitions, telephones and prison guards. Schiller had pondered for days what his last words to Gilmore would be. As he approached him, Schiller asked, "What am I doing here, Gary?"

"You already got part of my life story," Gilmore replied. "Now you're helping me escape."

Wherever Gary Gilmore escaped to, chances are Larry Schiller will bring him back.

Concept: A Broadway play about Gary Gilmore. "My concept's very simple. Virtually a blank stage, okay. Down the center of the stage is a wall, okay. On one side of the wall, far away, is the prisoner. On the other side of the wall, far away, is the inquisitor. The inquisitor starts interviewing the prisoner. When he doesn't believe the prisoner, the light goes off the prisoner and goes to a family member, or the girl friend, and the inquisitor asks them questions. As the play continues, the two main characters get closer and closer to the wall. You follow? Because they supposedly understand each other. The inquisitor finds the prisoner lying. And the prisoner says, 'You don't understand. Our agreement was never based upon truth.' That's my concept. The directors are standing in line to direct it."

Concept: A six-hour television film about Gary Gilmore. After backing out of one Gilmore deal, reportedly for fear of appearing exploitative, ABC is now back on the Gilmore track. Schiller will produce the film and has already hired "one of the biggest directors" to direct. "It is the story of two generations, the 1950's and the 1970's. Gary Gilmore is merely a window that you look through to see the broader picture of life and death in the 1970's."

Concept: A feature film about Gary Gilmore. This one is still a few years away. Schiller admittedly has a problem selling a film about an unsympathetic character; Hollywood is not buying unsympathetic characters this year. "I'm still having problems on how to do it. I have not come to grips with the characters—whether Gary Gilmore is even the central character in the film. He may not be."

Concept: A best seller about Gary Gilmore. Norman Mailer will write the book and will receive half of the \$500,000 advance. He spent several weeks this spring traveling with Schil-

ler in Utah and Oregon, interviewing people who knew Gilmore. "The book's going to have a broader scope than just Gilmore. It has to."

It had better. The national appetite for Gary Gilmore is low. Having once consumed him, Americans are not likely to want to relive their gluttony and have Gilmore served up as a play, or a movie, or a book. There are other stories, more bizarre and grotesque, just now being cooked up. And, chances are, Larry Schiller will be there, too. #

Sex and the Lonely Guy

(Continued from page 117) selves. At a certain point, it becomes time to push on to the sliced prawns with black bean and garlic sauce.

Positions: There is much to be said for the basic positions. The top one has a Conquering Hero flavor, just as being on the bottom brings along with it a certain Gandhi-like strength. As a Lonely Guy, your best bet may be sideways. When you are ready to call it a day, you will not be tempted to leap off, gasping for air. All you need do is remain where you are and sink down for a quick chat, followed by a catnap. In addition to this, Lonely Guys look their best from the side.

Anthropomorphic Judgments: Try not to make anthropomorphic judgments about bodily features. A woman with sagging buttocks may turn out to have a soaring imagination. Tiny, mean-spirited little breasts can be hooked perversely onto a charmer of full and generous disposition. Be cautious about fat knees, however, which do tend to have an unfortunate effect on their owners.

Final Word on the Clitoris: Once and for all, there is a clitoris, and it must be dealt with. For a while, in the early Seventies, a theory took hold that there was none and that it was to be put in the category of flying saucers, with occasional sightings, none of them verifiable. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, its presence has now been established, although it does tend to wander off now and then. In any case, the Lonely Guy must be prepared to deal with it.

The Bad Times: There will be times when you may not feel terribly sexy. "How can I be tumescent," you will ask, "when I'm a little down?" On these occasions, think of the middle linebacker who plays with pain or the novelist who uses his grey periods to rip off best sellers. Use your downcast condition to advantage.

The results may surprise you. Walling sounds will be taken for passionate ones. An agonized teeth-gnashing grimace will slip by as a look of ecstasy. Cry out: "I can't take it anymore." Your partner will assume you're finding it all unbearably delightful.

Sex is too important to be sloughed off. Never before has so much of it been available to so many, including the undeserving. It is your responsibility, as a Lonely Guy and as an American, to go out and get some before it all goes away. #