

the village VOICE

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Death of a PLAYMATE



DOROTHY STRATTEN was the focus of the dreams and ambitions of three men. One killed her.

BY TERESA CARPENTER

It is shortly past four in the afternoon and Hugh Hefner glides wordlessly into the library of his Playboy Mansion West. He is wearing pajamas and looking somber in green silk. The incongruous spectacle of a sybarite in mourning. To date, his public profession of grief has been contained in a press release: "The death of Dorothy Stratten comes as a shock to us all. . . . As Playboy's Playmate of the Year with a film and television career of increasing importance, her professional future was a bright one. But equally sad to us is the fact that her loss takes from us all a very special member of the Playboy family."

That's all. A dispassionate eulogy from which one might conclude that Miss Stratten died in her sleep of pneumonia. One, certainly, which masked the turmoil her death created within the Organization. During the morning hours after Stratten was found nude in a West Los Angeles (Continued on page 12)



LWE MEYER/BLACK STAR

# Death of a PLAYMATE

*In the end, Dorothy Stratten may be less memorable for herself than for the yearnings she evoked: In Snider, his lust for the score; in Hefner, his longing for the star; in Bogdanovich, his desire for the eternal ingenue.*

By Teresa Carpenter

(Continued from page one)

apartment, her face blasted away by 12-gauge buckshot, editors scrambled to pull her photos from the upcoming October issue. It could not be done. The issues were already run. So they pulled her ethereal blond image from the cover of the 1981 Playmate Calendar and promptly scrapped a Christmas promotion featuring her posed in the buff with Hefner. Other playmates, of course, have expired violently. Wilhelmina Rietveld took a massive overdose of barbiturates in 1973. Claudia Jennings, known as "Queen of the B-Movies," was crushed to death last fall in her Volkswagen convertible. Both caused grief and chagrin to the self-serious "family" of playmates whose aura does not admit the possibility of shaving nicks and bladder infections, let alone death.

But the loss of Dorothy Stratten sent Hefner and his family into seclusion, at least from the press. For one thing, Playboy has been earnestly trying to avoid any bad national publicity that might threat-

en its application for a casino license in Atlantic City. But beyond that, Dorothy Stratten was a corporate treasure. She was not just any playmate but the "Eighties' first Playmate of the Year" who, as Playboy trumpeted in June, was on her way to becoming "one of the few emerging film goddesses of the new decade."

She gave rise to extravagant comparisons with Marilyn Monroe, although unlike Monroe, she was no cripple. She was delighted with her success and wanted more of it. Far from being brutalized by Hollywood, she was coddled by it. Her screen roles were all minor ones. A fleeting walk-on as a bunny in *Americathon*. A small running part as a roller nymph in *Skatetown U.S.A.* She played the most perfect woman in the universe in an episode of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* and the most perfect robot in the galaxy in a B-grade spoof called *Galaxina*. She was surely more successful in a shorter period of time than any other playmate in the history of the empire. "Playboy has not really had a star," says Stratten's erstwhile agent David Wilder. "They

thought she was going to be the biggest thing they ever had."

No wonder Hefner grieves.

"The major reason that I'm . . . that we're both sittin' here," says Hefner, "that I wanted to talk about it, is because there is still a great tendency . . . for this thing to fall into the classic cliché of 'small-town girl comes to Playboy, comes to Hollywood, life in the fast lane, and that somehow was related to her death. And that is not what really happened. A very sick guy saw his meal ticket and his connection to power, whatever, etc. slipping away. And it was that that made him kill her."

The "very sick guy" is Paul Snider, Dorothy Stratten's husband, the man who became her mentor. He is the one who plucked her from a Dairy Queen in Vancouver, British Columbia, and pushed her into the path of Playboy during the Great Playmate Hunt in 1978. Later, as she moved out of his class, he became a millstone, and Stratten's prickliest problem was not coping with celebrity but discarding a husband she had outgrown. When Paul Snider balked at being discarded, he became her nemesis. And on August 14 of this year he apparently took her life and his own with a 12-gauge shotgun.

## The Pimp

It is not so difficult to see why Snider became an embarrassment. Since the murder he has been excoriated by Hefner and others as a cheap hustler, but such moral indignation always rings a little false in Hollywood. Snider's main sin was that he lacked scope.

Snider grew up in Vancouver's East End, a tough area of the city steeped in machismo. His parents split up when he was a boy and he had to fend for himself from the time he quit school in the seventh grade. Embarrassed by being skinny, he took up body building in his late teens and within a year had fleshed out his upper torso. His dark hair and mustache were

groomed impeccably and women on the nightclub circuit found him attractive. The two things it seemed he could never get enough of were women and money. For a time he was the successful promoter of automobile and 'cycle shows at the Pacific National Exhibition. But legitimate enterprises didn't bring him enough to support his expensive tastes and he took to procuring. He wore mink, drove a black Corvette, and flaunted a bejeweled Star of David around his neck. About town he was known as the Jewish Pimp.

Among the heavy gang types in Vancouver, the Rounder Crowd, Paul Snider was regarded with scorn. A punk who always seemed to be missing the big score. "He never touched [the drug trade], said one Rounder who knew him then. "Nobody trusted him that much and he was scared to death of drugs. He finally lost a lot of money to loan sharks and the Rounder Crowd hung him by his ankles from the 30th floor of a hotel. He had to leave town."

Snider split for Los Angeles where he acquired a gold limousine and worked his girls on the fringes of Beverly Hills. He was enamored of Hollywood's dated appeal and styled his girls to conform with a 1950s notion of glamour. At various times he toyed with the idea of becoming a star, or perhaps even a director or a producer. He tried to pry his way into powerful circles, but without much success. At length he gave up pimping because the girls weren't bringing him enough income—one had stolen some items and had in fact cost him money—and when he returned to Vancouver some time in 1977 Snider resolved to keep straight. For one thing, he was terrified of going to jail. He would kill himself, he once told a girl, before he would go to jail.

But Paul Snider never lost the appraising eye of a pimp. One night early in 1978 he and a friend dropped into an East Vancouver Dairy Queen and there he first took notice of Dorothy Ruth Hoogstraten filling orders behind the counter. She was very tall with the sweet natural looks of a girl, but she moved like a mature woman. Snider turned to his friend and observed, "That girl could make me a lot of money." He got Dorothy's number from another waitress and called her at home. She was 18.

Later when she recalled their meeting Dorothy would feign amused exasperation at Paul's overtures. He was brash, lacking altogether in finesse. But he appealed to her, probably because he was older by nine years and streetwise. He offered to take charge of her and that was nice. Her father, a Dutch immigrant, had left the family when she was very young. Dorothy had floated along like a particle in a solution. There had never been enough money to buy nice things. And now Paul bought her clothes. He gave her a topaz ring set in diamonds. She could escape to his place, a posh apartment with skylights, plants, and deep burgundy furniture. He would buy wine and cook dinner. Afterwards he'd fix hot toddies and play the guitar for her. In public he was an obnoxious braggart; in private he could be a vulnerable, cuddly Jewish boy.

Paul Snider knew the gaping vanity of a young girl. Before he came along Dorothy had had only one boyfriend. She had thought of herself as "plain with big hands." At 16, her breasts swelled into glorious lobes, but she never really knew what to do about them. She was a shy, comely, undistinguished teenager who wrote sophomore poetry and had no aspirations other than landing a secretarial job. When Paul told her she was beautiful, she unfolded in the glow of his compliments and was infected by his ambitions for her.

Snider probably never worked Dorothy as a prostitute. He recognized that she was, as one observer put it, "class merchandise" that could be groomed to better advantage. He had tried to promote other girls as playmates, notably a stripper in 1974, but without success. He had often secured recycled playmates or bunnies to work his auto shows and had seen some get burnt out on sex and cocaine, languishing

because of poor management. Snider dealt gingerly with Dorothy's inexperience and broke her in gradually. After escorting her to her graduation dance—he bought her a ruffled white gown for the occasion—he took her to a German photographer named Uwe Meyer for her first professional portrait. She looked like a flirtatious virgin.

About a month later, Snider called Meyer again, this time to do a nude shooting at Snider's apartment. Meyer arrived with a hairdresser to find Dorothy a little nervous. She clung, as she later recalled, to a scarf or a blouse as a towline to modesty, but she fell quickly into playful postures. She was perfectly pliant.

"She was eager to please," recalls Meyer. "I hesitated to rearrange her breasts thinking it might upset her, but she said, 'Do whatever you like.'"

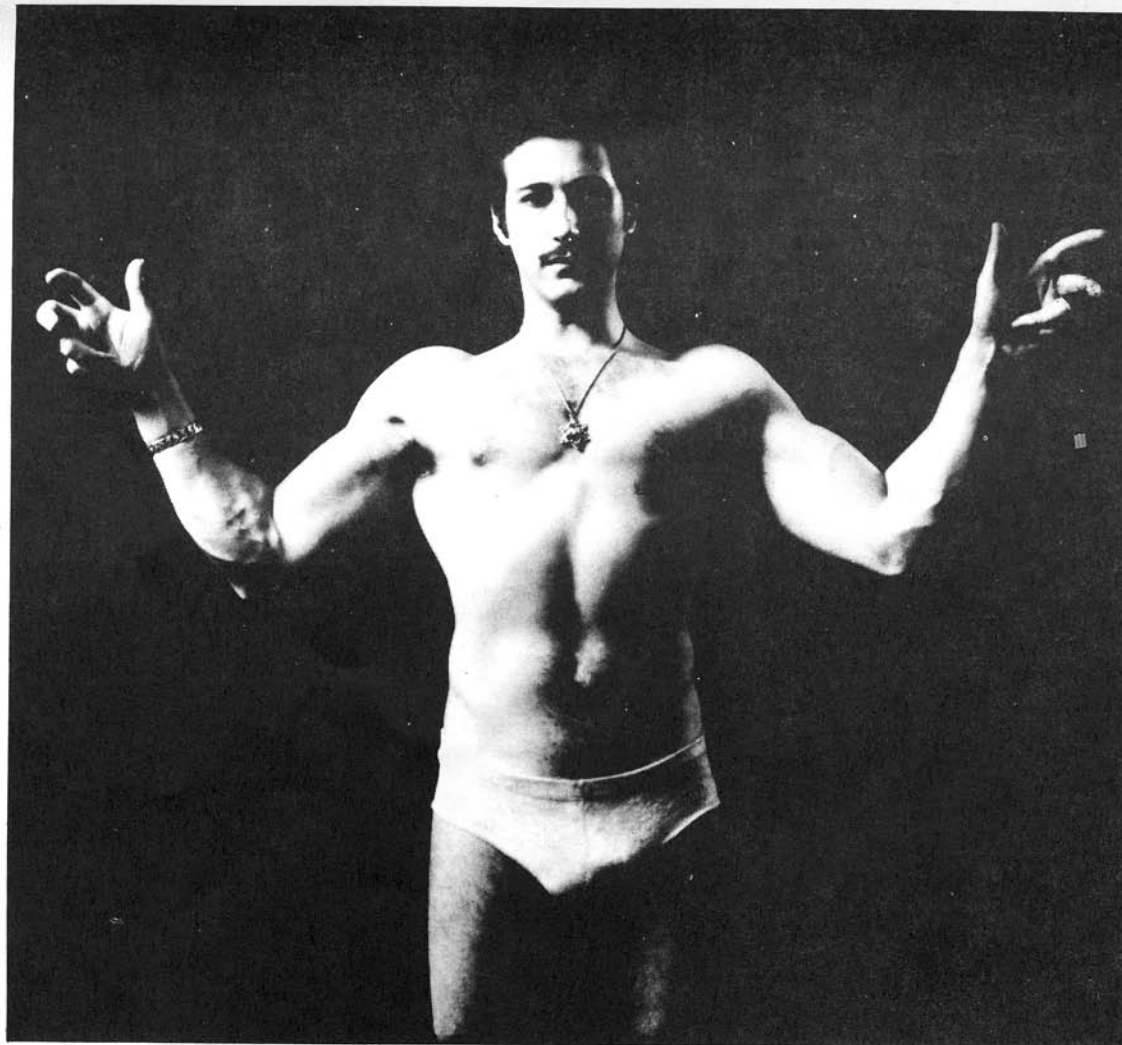
Meyer hoped to get the \$1000 finder's fee that *Playboy* routinely pays photographers who discover playmates along the byways and backwaters of the continent. But Snider, covering all bets, took Dorothy to another photographer named Ken Honey who had an established track-record with *Playboy*. Honey had at first declined to shoot Dorothy because she was underage and needed a parent's signature on a release. Dorothy, who was reluctant to tell anyone at home about the nude posing, finally broke the news to her mother and persuaded her to sign. Honey sent his set of shots to Los Angeles and was sent a finder's fee. In August 1978, Dorothy flew to Los Angeles for test shots. It was the first time she had ever been on a plane.

Even to the most cynical sensibilities, there is something miraculous about the way Hollywood took to Dorothy Hoogstraten. In a city overpopulated with beautiful women—most of them soured and disillusioned by 25—Dorothy caught some current fortune and floated steadily upward through the spheres of that indifferent paradise. Her test shots were superb, placing her among the 16 top contenders for the 25th Anniversary Playmate. And although she lost out to Candy Loving, she was named Playmate of the Month for August 1979. As soon as he learned of her selection, Paul Snider, by *Hefner's* account at least, flew to Los Angeles and proposed. They did not marry right away but set up housekeeping in a modest apartment in West Los Angeles. It was part of Snider's grand plan that Dorothy should support them both. She was, however, an alien and had no green card. Later, when it appeared her fortunes were on the rise during the fall of 1979, *Hefner* would personally intervene to secure her a temporary work permit. In the meantime, she was given a job as bunny at the Century City Playboy Club. The Organization took care of her. It recognized a good thing. While other playmates required cosmetic surgery on breasts or scars, Stratten was nearly perfect. There was a patch of adolescent acne on her forehead and a round birthmark on her left hip, but nothing serious. Her most troublesome flaw was a tendency to get plump, but that was controlled through passionate exercise. The only initial change *Playboy* deemed necessary was trimming her shoulder-length blond hair. And the cumbersome "Hoogstraten" became "Stratten."

Playboy photographers had been so impressed by the way Dorothy photographed that a company executive called agent David Wilder of Barr-Wilder Associates. Wilder, who handled the film careers of other playmates, agreed to meet Dorothy for coffee.

"A quality like Dorothy Stratten's comes by once in a lifetime," says Wilder with the solemn exaggeration that comes naturally after a tragedy. "She was exactly what this town likes, a beautiful girl who could act."

More to the point she had at least one trait to meet any need. When Lorimar Productions wanted a "playmate type" for a bit role in *Americathon*, Wilder sent Dorothy. When Columbia wanted a beauty who could skate for *Skatetown* Wilder sent Dorothy, who could skate like an ace.



UWE MEYER/BLACK STAR

A happy skill in Hollywood. When the producers of *Buck Rogers* and later *Galaxina* asked simply for a woman who was so beautiful that no one could deny it, Wilder sent Dorothy. And once Dorothy got in the door, it seemed that no one could resist her.

During the spring of 1979, Dorothy was busy modeling or filming. One photographer recalls, "She was green, but took instruction well." From time to time, however, she would have difficulty composing herself on the set. She asked a doctor for a prescription of Valium. It was the adjustments, she explained, and the growing hassles with Paul.

Since coming to L.A., Snider had been into some deals of his own, most of them legal but sleazy. He had promoted exotic male dancers at a local disco, a wet underwear contest near Santa Monica, and wet T-shirt contests in the San Fernando Valley. But his chief hopes rested with Dorothy. He reminded her constantly that the two of them had what he called "a lifetime bargain" and he pressed her to marry him. Dorothy was torn by indecision. Friends tried to dissuade her from marrying, saying it could hold back her career, but she replied, "He cares for me so much. He's always there when I need him. I can't ever imagine myself being with any other man but Paul."

They were married in Las Vegas on June 1, 1979, and the following month Dorothy returned to Canada for a promotional tour of the provinces. Paul did not go with her because *Playboy* wanted the marriage kept secret. In Vancouver, Dorothy was greeted like a minor celebrity. The local press, a little caustic but mainly cowed, questioned her obliquely about exploitation. "I see the pictures as nudes, like nude paintings," she said. "They are not made for people to fantasize about." Her family and Paul's family visited her hotel, highly pleased with her success. Her first film was about to be released. The August issue was already on the stands featuring her as a pouting nymph who wrote poetry. (A few plodding iambs were even reprinted.) And she was

## SNIDER

Paul Snider had an obsession with Dorothy's destiny. It was, of course, his own.



UWE MEYER/BLACK STAR

going to star in a new Canadian film by North American Pictures called *Autumn Born*.

Since the murder, not much has been made of this film, probably because it contained unpleasant overtones of bondage. Dorothy played the lead, a 17-year-old rich orphan who is kidnapped and abused by her uncle. Dorothy was excited about the role, although she conceded to a Canadian reporter, "a lot [of it] is watching this girl get beat up."

## A Goddess for the '80s

While Dorothy was being pummeled on the set of *Autumn Born*, Snider busied himself apartment hunting. They were due for a rent raise and were looking to share a place with a doctor friend, a young internist who patronized the Century City Playboy Club. Paul found a two-story Spanish style stucco house near the Santa Monica Freeway in West L.A. There was a living room upstairs as well as a bedroom

which the doctor claimed. Paul and Dorothy moved into the second bedroom downstairs at the back of the house. Since the doctor spent many nights with his girlfriend, the Sniders had the house much to themselves.

Paul had a growing obsession with Dorothy's destiny. It was, of course, his own. He furnished the house with her photographs, and got plates reading "Star-80" for his new Mercedes. He talked about her as the next Playmate of the Year, the next Marilyn Monroe. When he had had a couple of glasses of wine, he would croon, "We're on a rocket ship to the moon." When they hit it big, he said, they would move to Bel-Air Estates where the big producers live.

Dorothy was made uncomfortable by his grandiosity. He was putting her, she confided to friends, in a position where she could not fail without failing them both. But she did not complain to him. They had, after all, a lifetime bargain, and he had brought her a long way.

As her manager he provided the kind of cautionary coaching that starlets rarely

receive. He would not let her smoke. He monitored her drinking, which was moderate at any rate. He would have allowed her a little marijuana and cocaine under his supervision, but she showed no interest in drugs, save Valium. Mainly he warned her to be wary of the men she met at the Mansion, men who would promise her things, then use her up. Snider taught her how to finesse a come-on. How to turn a guy down without putting him off. Most important, he discussed with her who she might actually have to sleep with. Hefner of course, was at the top of the list.

Did Hefner sleep with Dorothy Stratten? Mansion gossips who have provided graphic narratives of Hefner's encounters with other playmates cannot similarly document a tryst with Dorothy. According to the bizarre code of the Life—sexual society at the Mansion—fucking Hefner is a strictly voluntary thing. It never hurts a career, but Hefner, with so much sex at his disposal, would consider it unseemly to apply pressure.

Of Stratten, Hefner says, "There was a friendship between us. It wasn't romantic. . . . This was not a very loose lady."

Hefner likes to think of himself as a "father figure" to Stratten who, when she decided to marry, came to tell him about it personally. "She knew I had serious reservations about [Snider]," says Hefner. "I had sufficient reservations . . . that I had him checked out in terms of a possible police record in Canada . . . We didn't get

side of her husband's nature—his itch for the big score. Hefner simply had more class.

Dorothy's possibilities were made manifest to him during *The Playboy Roller Disco and Pajama Party* taped at the Mansion late in October 1978. Dorothy had a running part and was tremendously appealing.

"Some people have that quality," says Hefner. "I mean . . . there is something that comes from inside. . . . The camera comes so close that it almost looks beneath the surface and . . . that magic is there somehow in the eyes. . . . That magic she had. That was a curious combination of sensual appeal and vulnerability."

After the special was aired on television in November, Dorothy's career accelerated rapidly. There was a rush of appearances that left the accumulating impression of stardom. Around the first of December her *Fantasy Island* episode appeared. Later that month, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*. But the big news of the season was that Hefner had chosen Dorothy Playmate of the year for 1980. Although her selection was not announced to the public until April, she began photo sessions with Playboy photographer Mario Casilli before the year was out.

Her look was altered markedly from that of the sultry minx in the August issue. As Playmate of the Year her image was more defined. No more pouting, soft-focus shots. Stratten was given a burnished high-

Hepburn and Ben Gazzara. It was to be directed by Peter Bogdanovich, whom Dorothy had first met at the roller disco bash in October. According to David Wilder, he and Bogdanovich were partying at the Mansion in January when the director first considered Stratten for the part.

"Jesus Christ," the 41-year-old Bogdanovich is supposed to have said. "She's perfect for the girl. . . . I don't want her for tits and ass. I want someone who can act."

Wilder says he took Dorothy to Bogdanovich's house in Bel-Air Estates to read for the role. She went back two or three more times and the director decided she was exactly what he wanted.

Filming was scheduled to begin in late March in New York City. Paul wanted to come along but Dorothy said no. He would get in the way and, at any rate, the set was closed to outsiders. Determined that she should depart Hollywood as a queen, he borrowed their housemate's Rolls Royce and drove her to the airport. He put her on the plane in brash good spirits, then went home to sulk at being left behind.

## They All Laughed

The affair between Dorothy Stratten and Peter Bogdanovich was conducted in amazing secrecy. In that regard it bore little resemblance to the director's affair with Cybill Shepherd, an escapade which advertised his puerile preference for ingenues. Bogdanovich, doubtless, did not fancy the publicity that might result from a liaison with a 20-year-old woman married to a hustler. A couple of days before the murder-suicide, he spoke of this to his close friend Hugh Hefner.

"It was the first time I'd seen him in a number of months because he'd been in New York," says Hefner. "He was very very up. Very excited about her and the film. . . . I don't think that he was playing with this at all. I think it was important to him. I'm talking about the relationship. . . . He was concerned at that point because of what had happened to him and [Cybill]. He was concerned about the publicity related to the relationship because of that. He felt in retrospect, as a matter of fact, that he . . . that they had kind of caused some of it. And it played havoc with both of their careers for a while."

Stratten, as usual, did not advertise the fact that she was married. When she arrived in New York, she checked quietly into the Wyndham Hotel. The crew knew very little about her except that she showed up on time and seemed very earnest about her small role. She was cordial but kept her distance, spending her time off-camera in a director's chair reading. One day it would be Dickens's *Great Expectations*; the next day a book on dieting. With the help of makeup and hair consultants her looks were rendered chaste and ethereal to defuse her playmate image. "She was a darling little girl," says makeup artist Fern Buckner. "Very beautiful, of course. Whatever you did to her was all right."

Dorothy had headaches. She was eating very little to keep her weight down and working 12-hour days because Bogdanovich was pushing the project along at a rapid pace. While most of the crew found him a selfish, mean-spirited megalomaniac, the cast by and large found him charming. He was particularly solicitous of Dorothy Stratten. And just as quietly as she had checked into the Wyndham, she moved into his suite at the Plaza. Word spread around the set that Bogdanovich and Stratten were involved but, because they were discreet, they avoided unpleasant gossip. "They weren't hanging all over one another," says one crew member. "It wasn't until the last few weeks when everyone relaxed a bit that they would show up together holding hands." One day Bogdanovich walked over to a couch where Dorothy sat chewing gum. "You shouldn't chew gum," he admonished. "It has sugar in it." She playfully removed the wad from her mouth and deposited it in his palm. Bogdanovich is less than eager to dis-

cuss the affair. His secretary says he will not give interviews until *They All Laughed* is released in April. The director needs a hit badly and who can tell how Stratten's death might affect box office. *Laughed* is, unfortunately, a comedy over which her posthumous performance might throw a pall. Although the plot is being guarded as closely as a national security secret, it goes something like this:

Ben Gazzara is a private detective hired by a wealthy, older man who suspects his spouse, Audrey Hepburn, has a lover. In following her, Gazzara falls in love with her. Meanwhile, Gazzara's sidekick, John Ritter, is hired by another wealthy older man to follow his young bride, Dorothy Stratten. Ritter watches Stratten from afar—through a window as she argues with her husband, as she roller skates at the Roxy. After a few perfunctory conversations, he asks her to marry him. Hepburn and Gazzara make a brief abortive stab at mature love. And Gazzara reverts to dating and mating with teenyboppers.

Within this intricate web of shallow relationships Dorothy, by all accounts, emerges as a shimmering seraph, a vision of perfection clad perennially in white. In one scene she is found sitting in the Algonquin Hotel bathed in a diaphanous light. "It was one of those scenes that could make a career," recalls a member of the crew. "People in the screening room rustled when they saw her. She didn't have many lines. She just looked so good." Bogdanovich was so enthusiastic about her that he called Hefner on the West Coast to say he was expanding Dorothy's role—not many more lines, but more exposure.

Paul Snider, meanwhile, was calling the East Coast where he detected a chill in Dorothy's voice. She would be too tired to talk. He would say, "I love you," and she wouldn't answer back. Finally, she began to have her calls screened. Late in April, during a shooting break, she flew to Los Angeles for a flurry of appearances which included the Playmate of the Year Luncheon and an appearance on *The Johnny Carson Show*. Shortly thereafter, Dorothy left for a grand tour of Canada. She agreed, however, to meet Paul in Vancouver during the second week of May. Her mother was remarrying and she planned to attend the wedding.

That proposed rendezvous worried Dorothy's Playboy traveling companion, Liz Norris. Paul was becoming irascible. He called Dorothy in Toronto and flew into a rage when she suggested that he allow her more freedom. Norris offered to provide her charge with a bodyguard once they arrived in Vancouver, but Dorothy declined. She met Paul and over her objections he checked them into the same hotel. Later, each gave essentially the same account of that encounter. She asked him to loosen his grip. "Let the bird fly," she said. They argued violently, then both sank back into tears. According to Snider, they reconciled and made love. Dorothy never acknowledged that. She later told a friend, however, that she had offered to leave Hollywood and go back to live with him in Vancouver, but he didn't want that. In the end she cut her trip short to get back to the shooting.

Snider, by now, realized that his empire was illusory. As her husband he technically had claim to half of her assets, but many of her assets were going into a corporation called Dorothy Stratten Enterprises. He was not one of the officers. When she spoke of financial settlements, she sounded like she was reading a strange script. She was being advised, he suspected, by Bogdanovich's lawyers. (Dorothy's attorney, Wayne Alexander, reportedly represents Bogdanovich too, but Alexander cannot be reached for comment.) Late in June, Snider received a letter declaring that he and Dorothy were separated physically and financially. She closed out their joint bank accounts and began advancing him money through her business manager.

Buffeted by forces beyond his control, Snider tried to cut his losses. He could have maintained himself as a promoter or



# HEFNER

*Playboy has not really had a star. With all those beautiful women at his disposal, Hefner has not one Marion Davies to call his own. Dorothy exposed that yearning.*

anything. . . . I used the word—and I realized the [risk] I was taking—I said to her that he had a 'pimp-like quality' about him."

Like most playmate husbands, Snider was held at arm's length by the Playboy family. He was only rarely invited to the Mansion, which bothered him, as he would have liked more of an opportunity to cultivate Hefner. And Stratten, who was at the Mansion more frequently to party and roller-skate, was never actively into the Life. Indeed, she spoke disdainfully of the "whores" who serviced Hefner's stellar guests. Yet she moved into the circle of Hefner's distinguished favorites when it became apparent that she might have a real future in film.

Playboy, contrary to the perception of aspiring starlets, is not a natural conduit to stardom. Most playmates who go into movies peak with walk-ons and fade away. Those whom Hefner has tried most earnestly to promote in recent years have been abysmal flops. Barbi Benton disintegrated into a jiggling loon and, according to Playboy sources, Hefner's one time favorite Sondra Theodore went wooden once the camera started to roll.

"Dorothy was important," says one Playboy employee, "because Hefner is regarded by Hollywood as an interloper. They'll come to his parties and play his games. But they won't give him respect. One of the ways he can gain legitimacy is to be a star maker."

There is something poignant about Hefner, master of an empire built on inanimate nudes, but unable to coax those lustrous forms to life on film. His chief preoccupation nowadays is managing the playmates. Yet with all of those beautiful women at his disposal, he has not one Marion Davies to call his own. Dorothy exposed that yearning, that ego weakness, as surely as she revealed the most pathetic

glamour. Her hair fell in the crimped undulating waves of a '50s starlet. Her translucent body was posed against scarlet velvet reminiscent of the Monroe classic. One shot of Stratten displaying some of her \$200,000 in gifts—a brass bed and a lavender Lore negligee—clearly evoked the platinum ideal of Jean Harlow. Dorothy's apotheosis reached, it seemed, for extremes of innocence and eroticism. In one shot she was draped in black lace and nestled into a couch, buttocks raised in an impish invitation to sodomy. Yet the cover displayed her clad in a chaste little peasant gown, seated in a meadow, head tilted angelically to one side. The dichotomy was an affirmation of her supposed sexual range. She was styled, apparently, as the Compleat Goddess for the '80s.

By January 1980—the dawning of her designated decade—Dorothy Stratten was attended by a thickening phalanx of photographers, promoters, duennas, coaches, and managers. Snider, sensing uneasily that she might be moving beyond his reach, became more demanding. He wanted absolute control over her financial affairs and the movie offers she accepted. She argued that he was being unreasonable; that she had an agent and a business manager whose job it was to advise her in those matters. Snider then pressed her to take the \$200,000 from Playboy and buy a house. It would be a good investment, he said. He spent a lot of time looking at homes that might suit her, but she always found fault with them. She did not want to commit herself. She suspected, perhaps rightly, that he only wanted to attach another lien on her life.

This domestic squabbling was suspended temporarily in January when it appeared that Dorothy was poised for her big break, a featured role in a comedy called *They All Laughed* starring Audrey

RON GALELLA

as the manager of a health club. He was an expert craftsman and turned out exercise benches which he sold for \$200 a piece. On at least one occasion he had subverted those skills to more dubious ends by building a wooden bondage rack for his private pleasure. But Snider didn't want to be a nobody. His rocket ship had come too close to the moon to leave him content with hang-gliding.

He tried, a little pathetically, to groom another Dorothy Stratten, a 17-year-old check-out girl from Riverside who modeled on the side. He had discovered her at an auto show. Patty was of the same status-essque Stratten ilk, and Snider taught her to walk like Dorothy, to dress like Dorothy, and to wear her hair like Dorothy. Eventually she moved into the house that he and Dorothy shared. But she was not another Stratten, and when Snider tried to promote her as a playmate, Playboy wanted nothing to do with him.

Paul's last hope for a big score was a project begun a month or so before he and Dorothy were married. He had worked out a deal with a couple of photographer friends, Bill and Susan Lachasse, to photograph Dorothy on skates wearing a French-cut skating outfit. From that they would print a poster that they hoped would sell a million copies and net \$300,000. After Dorothy's appearance on the Carson show, Snider thought the timing was right. But Dorothy had changed her mind. The Lachasses flew to New York the day after she finished shooting to persuade her to reconsider. They were told by the production office that Dorothy could be found at Bogdanovich's suite at the Plaza.

"It was three or four in the afternoon," says Lachasse. "There had been a cast party the night before. Dorothy answered the door in pajamas and said, 'Oh my God! What are you doing here?' She shut the door and when she came out again she explained 'I can't invite you in. There are people here.' She looked at the photos in the hallway and we could tell by her eyes that she liked them. She took them inside, then came out and said, 'Look how my tits are hanging down.' Somebody in there was telling her what to do. She said, 'Look, I'm confused, have you shown these to Paul?' I said, 'Dorothy, you're divorcing Paul.' And she said, 'I don't know, I just don't know.'"

When Lachasse called the Plaza suite the following week a woman replied, "We don't know Dorothy Stratten. Stop harassing us."

"Paul felt axed as in every other area," says Lachasse. "That was his last bit of income."

## They All Cried

During the anxious spring and early summer, Snider suspected, but could not prove, that Dorothy was having an affair. So as the filming of *They All Laughed* drew to a close in mid-July, he did what, in the comic world of Peter Bogdanovich, many jealous husbands do. He hired a private eye, a 26-year-old freelance detective named Marc Goldstein. The elfish Goldstein, who later claimed to be a friend of both Dorothy and Paul, in fact knew neither of them well. He was retained upon the recommendation of an unidentified third party. He will not say what exactly his mission was, but a Canadian lawyer named Ted Ewachniuk who represented both Paul and Dorothy in Vancouver claims that Snider was seeking to document the affair with Bogdanovich in order to sue him for "enticement to breach management contract"—an agreement Snider believed inherent within their marriage contract. That suit was to be filed in British Columbia, thought to be a suitable venue since both Snider and Stratten were still Canadians and, it could be argued, had only gone to Los Angeles for business.

Goldstein began showing up regularly at Snider's apartment. Snider produced poems and love letters from Bogdanovich

that he had found among Dorothy's things. He instructed Goldstein to do an asset search on Dorothy and to determine whether or not Bogdanovich was plying her with cocaine.

Even as he squared off for a legal fight, Snider was increasingly despairing. He knew, underneath it all, that he did not have the power or resources to fight Bogdanovich. "Maybe this thing is too big for me," he confided to a friend, and he talked about going back to Vancouver. But the prospect of returning in defeat was too humiliating. He felt Dorothy was now so completely sequestered by attorneys that he would never see her again. Late in July his old machismo gave way to grief. He called Bill Lachasse one night crying because he could not touch Dorothy or even get near her. About the same time, his roommate the doctor returned home one night to find him despondent in the living room. "This is really hard," Paul said, and broke into tears. He wrote fragments of notes to Dorothy that were never sent. One written in red felt-tip marker and later found stuffed into one of his drawers was a rambling plaint on how he couldn't get it together without her. With Ewachniuk's help, he drafted a letter to Bogdanovich telling him to quit influencing Dorothy and that he [Snider] would "forgive" him. But Ewachniuk does not know if the letter was ever posted.

Dorothy, Paul knew, had gone for a holiday in London with Bogdanovich and would be returning to Los Angeles soon. He tortured himself with the scenario of the successful director and his queen showing up at Hefner's Midsummer Night's Dream Party on August 1. He couldn't bear it and blamed Hefner for fostering the affair. He called the Mansion trying to get an invitation to the party and was told he would be welcome only if he came with Dorothy.

But Dorothy did not show up at the party. She was keeping a low profile. She had moved ostensibly into a modest little apartment in Beverly Hills, the address that appeared on her death certificate. The apartment, however, was occupied by an actress who was Bogdanovich's personal assistant. Dorothy had actually moved into Bogdanovich's home in Bel-Air Estates. Where the big producers live.

Several days after her return to Los Angeles, she left for a playmate promotion in Dallas and Houston. There she appeared radiant, apparently reveling in her own success. She had been approached about playing Marilyn Monroe in Larry Schiller's made-for-TV movie, but she had been too busy with the Bogdanovich film. She had been discussed as a candidate for *Charlie's Angels* although Wilder thought she could do better. She was scheduled to meet with independent producer Martin Krofft who was considering her for his new film, *The Last Desperado*. It all seemed wonderful to her. But Stratten was not so cynical that she could enjoy her good fortune without pangs of regret. She cried in private. Until the end she retained a lingering tenderness for Paul Snider and felt bound to see him taken care of after the divorce. From Houston she gave him a call and agreed to meet him on Friday, August 8, for lunch.

After hearing from her, Snider was as giddy as a con whose sentence has been commuted, for he believed somehow that everything would be all right between them again. The night before their appointed meeting he went out for sandwiches with friends and was his blustering, confident old self. It would be different, he said. He would let her know that he had changed. "I've really got to vacuum the rug," he crowed. "The queen is coming back."

The lunch date, however, was a disaster. The two of them ended up back in the apartment squared off sullenly on the couch. Dorothy confessed at last that she was in love with Bogdanovich and wanted to proceed with some kind of financial settlement. Before leaving she went through her closet and took the clothes she wanted. The rest, she said, he should give to Patty.

Having his hopes raised so high and

then dashed again gave Snider a perverse energy. Those who saw him during the five days prior to the murder caught only glimpses of odd behavior. In retrospect they appear to form a pattern of intent. He was preoccupied with guns. Much earlier in the year Snider had borrowed a revolver from a friend named Chip, the consort of one of Dorothy's sister playmates. Paul never felt easy, he said, without a gun, a holdover from his days on the East End. But Paul had to give the revolver back that Friday afternoon because Chip was leaving town. He looked around for another gun. On Sunday he held a barbecue at his place for a few friends and invited Goldstein. During the afternoon he pulled Goldstein aside and asked the detective to buy a machine gun for him. He needed it, he said, for "home protection." Goldstein talked him out of it.

In the classifieds, Snider found someone in the San Fernando Valley who wanted to sell a 12-gauge Mossberg pump shotgun. He circled the ad and called the owner. On Monday he drove into the Valley to pick up the gun but got lost in the dark. The owner obligingly brought it to a

observed. Some actresses are killed before their films come out. And when that happens, it causes a lot of chaos.

Bogdanovich had somehow discovered that Dorothy was being trailed by a private eye. He was furious, but Dorothy was apparently not alarmed. She was convinced that she and Paul were on the verge of working out an amicable agreement and she went to meet him as planned. According to the West Los Angeles police, she parked and locked her 1967 Mercury around 11:45 a.m., but the county coroner reports that she arrived later, followed by Goldstein who clocked her into the house at 12:30 p.m. Shortly thereafter, Goldstein called Snider to find out how things were going. Snider replied, in code, that everything was fine. Periodically throughout the afternoon, Goldstein rang Snider with no response. No one entered the house until five when Patty and another of Paul's little girlfriends returned home, noticed Dorothy's car and saw the doors to Snider's room closed. Since they heard no sounds, they assumed he wanted privacy. The two girls left to go skating and returned at 7 p.m. By then the doctor had



DAVID MCGOUGH/RETNA

# BOGDANOVICH

*Most of the crew found him a selfish megalomaniac, but the cast, by and large, found him charming. He was particularly solicitous of Dorothy.*

construction site where he showed Snider how to load and fire it.

Dorothy, meanwhile, had promised to call Paul on Sunday but did not ring until Monday, an omission that piqued him. They agreed to meet on Thursday at 11:30 a.m. to discuss a financial settlement. She had been instructed by her advisers to offer him a specified sum. During previous conversations, Paul thought he had heard Dorothy say, "I'll always take care of you," but he could not remember the exact words. Goldstein thought it might be a good idea to wire Snider's body for sound so that they could get a taped account if Dorothy repeated her promise to provide for him. They could not come up with the proper equipment, however, and abandoned the plan.

On Wednesday, the day he picked up the gun, Snider seemed in an excellent mood. He told his roommate that Dorothy would be coming over and that she had agreed to look at a new house that he thought might be a good investment for her. He left the impression that they were on amiable terms. That evening he dropped by Bill Lachasse's studio to look at promotional shots of Patty. There, too, he was relaxed and jovial. In an off-handed way, he told Lachasse that he had bought a gun for protection. He also talked of strange and unrelated things that did not seem menacing in the context of his good spirits. He talked of Claudia Jennings, who had died with a movie in progress. Some playmates get killed, he

arrived home and noticed the closed door. He also heard the unanswered ringing on Snider's downstairs phone. Shortly before midnight Goldstein called Patty and asked her to knock at Paul's door. She demurred, so he asked to speak to the doctor. The latter agreed to check but even as he walked downstairs he felt some foreboding. The endless ringing had put him on edge and his German shepherd had been pacing and whining in the yard behind Paul's bedroom. The doctor knocked and when there was no response, he pushed the door open. The scene burnt his senses and he yanked the door shut.

It is impolitic to suggest that Paul Snider loved Dorothy Stratten. Around Hollywood, at least, he is currently limned as brutal and utterly insensitive. If he loved her, it was in the selfish way of one who cannot separate a lover's best interests from one's own. And if he did what he is claimed to have done, he was, as Hugh Hefner would put it, "a very sick guy."

Even now, however, no one can say with certainty that Paul Snider committed either murder or suicide. One of his old confederates claims he bought the gun to "scare" Bogdanovich. The coroner was sufficiently equivocal to deem his death a "questionable suicide/possible homicide." One Los Angeles psychic reportedly attributes the deaths to an unemployed actor involved with Snider in a drug deal. Goldstein, who holds to a theory that both

were murdered, is badgering the police for results of fingerprintings and paraffin tests, but the police consider Goldstein a meddler and have rebuffed his requests. The West LAPD, which has not yet closed the case, says it cannot determine if it was Snider who fired the shotgun because his hands were coated with too much blood and tissue for tests to be conclusive.

And yet Snider appears to have been following a script of his own choosing. One which would thwart the designs of Playboy and Hollywood. Perhaps he had only meant to frighten Dorothy, to demonstrate to Bogdanovich that he could hold her in thrall at gunpoint. Perhaps he just got carried away with the scene. No one knows exactly how events unfolded after Dorothy entered the house that afternoon. She had apparently spent some time upstairs because her purse was found lying open in the middle of the living room floor. In it was a note in Paul's handwriting explaining his financial distress. He had no green card, it said, and he required support. Dorothy's offer, however, fell far short of support. It was a flat settlement of only \$7500 which, she claimed, represented half of her total assets after taxes. "Not enough," said one friend, "to put a nice little sports car in his garage." Perhaps she had brought the first installment to mollify Paul's inevitable disappointment; police found \$1100 in cash among her belongings, another \$400 among his. One can only guess at the motives of those two doomed players who, at some point in the afternoon, apparently left the front room and went downstairs.

It is curious that, given the power of the blasts, the little bedroom was not soaked in blood. There was only spattering on the walls, curtains, and television. Perhaps because the room lacked a charnel aspect, the bodies themselves appeared all the more grim. They were nude. Dorothy lay crouched on the bottom corner of a low bed. Both knees were on the carpet and her right shoulder was drooping. Her blond hair hung naturally, oddly unaffected by the violence to her countenance. The shell had entered above her left eye leaving the bones of that seraphic face shattered and displaced in a welter of pulp. Her body, mocking the soft languid poses of her pictorials, was in full rigor.

No one, least of all Hugh Hefner, could have foreseen such a desecration. It was unthinkable that an icon of eroticism presumed by millions of credulous readers to be impervious to the pangs of mortality could be reduced by a pull of the trigger to a corpse, mortally stiff, mortally livid and crawling with small black ants. For Hefner, in fact, that grotesque alteration must have been particularly bewildering. Within the limits of his understanding, he had done everything right. He had played it clean with Stratten, handling her paternally, providing her with gifts and opportunities and, of course, the affection of the Playboy family. Despite his best efforts, however, she was destroyed. The irony that Hefner does not perceive—or at least fails to acknowledge—is that Stratten was destroyed not by random particulars, but by a germ breeding within the ethic. One of the tacit tenets of the Playboy philosophy—that women can be possessed—had found a fervent adherent in Paul Snider. He had bought the dream without qualification, and he thought of himself as perhaps one of Playboy's most honest apostles. He acted out dark fantasies never intended to be realized. Instead of fondling himself in private, instead of wreaking abstract violence upon a centerfold, he ravaged a playmate in the flesh.

Dorothy had, apparently, been sodomized, though whether this occurred before or after her death is not clear. After the blast, her body was moved and there were what appeared to be bloody handprints on her buttocks and left leg. Near her head was Paul's handmade bondage rack set for rear-entry intercourse. Loops of tape, used and unused, were lying about and strands of long blond hair were discovered clutched in Snider's right hand. He was found face-down lying parallel to the foot of the bed. The muzzle of the

Mossberg burnt his right cheek as the shell tore upward through his brain. The blast, instead of driving him backwards, whipped him forward over the length of the gun. He had always said he would rather die than go to jail.

Goldstein arrived before the police and called the Mansion. Hefner, thinking the call a prank, would not come to the phone at first. When he did he asked for the badge number of the officer at the scene. Satisfied that this was no bad joke, Hefner told his guests in the game house. There were wails of sorrow and disbelief. He then called Bogdanovich. "There was no conversation," Hefner says. "I was afraid that he had gone into shock or something. [When he didn't respond] I called the house under another number. A male friend was there to make sure he was [all right]. He was overcome."

Bogdanovich arranged for Stratten's cremation five days later. Her ashes were placed in an urn and buried in a casket so that he could visit them. Later he would issue his own statement:

DOROTHY STRATTEN WAS AS GIFTED AND INTELLIGENT AN ACTRESS AS SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL, AND SHE WAS VERY BEAUTIFUL INDEED—IN EVERY WAY IMAGINABLE—MOST PARTICULARLY IN HER HEART. SHE AND I FELL IN LOVE DURING OUR PICTURE, AND HAD PLANNED TO BE MARRIED AS SOON AS HER DIVORCE WAS FINAL. THE LOSS TO HER MOTHER AND FATHER, HER SISTER AND BROTHER, TO MY CHILDREN, TO HER FRIENDS AND TO ME IS LARGER THAN WE CAN CALCULATE. BUT THERE IS NO LIFE DOROTHY'S TOUCHED THAT HAS NOT BEEN CHANGED FOR THE BETTER THROUGH KNOWING HER. HOWEVER BRIEFLY, DOROTHY LOOKED AT THE WORLD WITH LOVE, AND BELIEVED THAT ALL PEOPLE WERE GOOD DOWN DEEP. SHE WAS MISTAKEN, BUT IT IS AMONG THE MOST GENEROUS AND NOBLE ERRORS WE CAN MAKE.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Bogdanovich took the family Hoogstraten in tow. They were stunned, but not apparently embittered by Dorothy's death. "They knew who cared for her," Hefner says. Mother, fathers—both natural and stepfather—sister, and brother flew to Los Angeles for the service and burial at Westwood Memorial Park, the same cemetery, devotees of irony point out, where Marilyn Monroe is buried. Hefner and Bogdanovich were there and after the service the family repaired to Bogdanovich's house for rest and refreshments. It was all quiet and discreet. Dorothy's mother says that she will not talk to the press until the movie comes out. Not until April when Stratten's glimmering ghost will appear on movie screens across the country, bathed in white light and roller skating through a maze of hilarious infidelities.

Playboy, whose corporate cool was shaken by her untimely death, has regained its composure. The December issue features Stratten as one of the "Sex Stars of 1980." At the end of 12 pages of the biggest draws in show business—Bo Derek, Brooke Shields, etc.—she appears topless, one breast draped with a gossamer scarf. A caption laments her death which "cut short what seasoned star-watchers predicted was sure to be an outstanding film career."

Hype, of course, often passes for prophecy. Whether or not Dorothy Stratten would have fulfilled her extravagant promise can't be known. Her legacy will not be examined critically because it is really of no consequence. In the end Dorothy Stratten was less memorable for herself than for the yearnings she evoked: in Snider a lust for the score; in Hefner a longing for a star; in Bogdanovich a desire for the eternal ingenue. She was catalyst for a cycle of ambitions which revealed its players less wicked, perhaps, than pathetic.


As for Paul Snider, his body was returned to Vancouver in permanent exile from Hollywood. It was all too big for him. In that Elysium of dreams and deals, he had reached the limits of his class. His sin, his unforgivable sin, was being small-time.

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