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Home Sweet Home

1931

NINETEEN THIRTY-ONE seems an uncharismatic date. What could possibly distinguish it or make it worth singling out? We needn't recall what this country was like then, with the Depression becoming a grim reality as Herbert Hoover began the second half of his one-term Presidency. Suffice it to say that 1931 was a forgettable year by most standards.

Yet it's not by such standards that an instance of architectural make-believe like the building of the Beach House needs be measured. The project would soon enter its sixth year. The equivalent for San Simeon is 1925, a few years after work got started there in the winter of 1919–20, a moment close on the heels of the Great War of 1914 to 1918. Compared with Hearst's other fantasies, San Simeon is thoroughly known; after all, the place went public in 1958, two years after the Beach House was razed. It's been under the microscope ever since, especially since the late 1970s and the first vital transfusions of Morgan-Forney data, followed in 1980 by the arrival at nearby Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, of the Julia Morgan Collection. San Simeon provides a yardstick against which Santa Monica's progress can be gauged. Mansion building took time, at least as Hearst (and increasingly Marion) pursued it, not only in a remote spot midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco but also in a more accessible one like Santa Monica.

Hearst would be a spry sixty-eight come April 1931; had he looked into a crystal ball, he'd have known that he had twenty more years yet

to live. Marion, ever the babe in the woods, had turned thirty-four on January 3 to Julia Morgan's fifty-nine on January 20. William Flannery, no longer on board, was still a youthful thirty-two at this juncture, wherever it found him—presumably in the Los Angeles area. For our purposes as we look back, 1931 stands out for the Beach House with special salience. By then enough groundwork had been done, enough preparation stood behind the place that it could start to function in its intended way as both showplace and periodic residence. But it's impossible to know whether the main building was literally to be "Marion's house," as many have long contended and as some always will, or whether Hearst and Marion had different plans at that point. The best we can do is to keep following the evidence, keep seeing where it takes us. The Morgan-Forney job ledgers, the rants and revelations of Hayes Perkins, the correspondence between Hearst and Morgan, the memoir of Alice Head in 1939—these and still other sources, some familiar, some entirely new, will have a bearing on our progress.

A standout among the new sources will be the George & Rosalie Hearst Collection, privately owned by William R. Hearst III, a grandson of William Randolph Hearst. Its interleaving in this chapter will add unique texture and shading

With regard to Morgan's efforts, her ledger in question was usually marked "Closed" once a job ran its course. So it was with New Santa Monica at the end of 1930. This left nothing more than $253 to be allotted to Beach House work by the Morgan office in 1931, a pittance compared with each of the past five years. It goes to show how far the project had advanced. The only thing in need of design, travel, and related costs on San Francisco's part in 1931 was the "Marion Davies Greenhouse," done in Santa Monica entirely between April and June. The very idea of a greenhouse, of course, bespeaks the later stages in most building projects more than their beginnings.

This isn't to say, though, that Morgan et al. had retreated to San Simeon and San Francisco. A month before the greenhouse project began in April, the Marion Davies Children's Clinic got under way in Sawtelle, West Los Angeles, a job slated to run throughout the current year and on to the end of 1932. Hearst's Examiner Building in downtown Los Angeles also got its share of Morgan's continued attention, mostly in the first half of 1931. Overall, San Simeon remained the lord of all creation for Morgan, while her office's input on Principia College in St. Louis, Missouri (jointly pursued with Bernard Maybeck), ran a fairly close second. There was also Wyntoon in 1931. And let us never forget, since it would soon have a major bearing on Wyntoon, the monastery mentioned in the Introduction that during these very weeks in 1931 was being dismantled in Spain for shipment to California—with Wyntoon as the improbable setting that only a dreamer like William Randolph Hearst could foresee.

In the preceding matters, except for Principia College in Missouri, Hearst and Morgan were as intertwined as any client and architect could be. Plus there was Marion to consider in this grand pageant, mainly regarding the new Children's Clinic—to portray things at their simplest and safest. Hearst without Morgan, Morgan without Hearst, the two of them without Marion. Can it even be imagined? Not very readily; not now in view of the data that's newly at hand. Morgan's career would have been vastly different without Hearst's presence, his influence, his wealth, the last of which conferred prosperity on her beyond question, though she always had to work hard to earn it and to maintain it, the same as Hearst's editors and publishers had to.

Even if the Beach House was initially regarded as Marion's place—it may have been, only to be viewed differently by her and Hearst once the thirties decade was further along—he approached the project paternally, controllingly, much as he approached filmmaking, whether it was a Marion Davies picture or one featuring other

Cosmopolitan stars. But especially one of her movies. Such was his indelible way.

He acted similarly toward his sons. Through Morgan, as of 1929, he saw to the remodeling of a house in the upscale Hillsborough-Burlingame district, south of San Francisco near San Mateo, to be used by his oldest son, George (b. 1904), a man still married then to his first of several wives. The house became steeped in the Colonial Revival with overtones of the White House; or rather with those of the Beach House. Hence this short telegram from Hearst to Morgan in February 1930: "Certainly you may have the doors left over from Santa Monica for George's house." Morgan's massive card-index inventory, the Pacific Coast Register, lists two English mantelpieces that were shipped from Los Angeles to the George Hearst job in June 1930. Of these, a Georgian example (stylistically, not familially) had been among the items sent out from New York in 1926 to get the Beach House off to its rousing eighteenth-century start. No one has extrapolated upon those mantelpieces, which would have been routine possessions for Hearst; no one, that is, has portrayed the Hillsborough house as boasting two or three dozen other mantels like the two in Morgan's inventory. That's what has been gullibly, hopefully, willfully done in Santa Monica's case. Distinct patterns of acquisition and application exist in all instances of Hearst's efforts (performances, we might better call them) as a builder, remodeler, and decorator par excellence. The little-known Hillsborough-Burlingame place exemplifies this as much as San Simeon or Wyntoon or Santa Monica do.

In any event, Hearst told Morgan in January 1931: "Please proceed with Burlingame house and get it in what you consider safe and satisfactory condition." If the Beach House could be Marion's for now, why couldn't Hillsborough be George's?

Ultimately it was all Hearst, as in William Randolph, the immortal W. R., the "Emperor on His Hilltop," as he'd been called in

1933 in *Incredible Land: A Jaunty Baedeker to Hollywood and the Great Southwest,* a lovable book by the British screenwriter Basil Woon, who saw San Simeon in 1929 ("the unbeatable highspot in twenty years of travel," he said while thanking Hearst). Julia Morgan was Hearst's personal architect, indeed—his family architect, as she's been loosely portrayed—for him and for a few others close to him.

But above all for him.

UPON THE NEW YEAR, Hayes Perkins, whose presence in Los Angeles at Christmas 1930 signaled the winter shutdown of Hearst Camp (the San Simeon hilltop's company town), had bigger things to worry about. He'd abruptly left Darkest Africa, as he called it—the Belgian Congo, no less—in February 1928, desperate to get his "septic" teeth treated lest the agony madden him further. He went to Europe but could find no relief. Thence he moved on to New York and finally on to San Simeon three months later, in May 1928, a place he'd known of since he'd spotted its spires rising in 1922—this from offshore as he sailed southward from San Francisco by tramp steamer to Los Angeles. "I will get my teeth fixed," he recorded in November 1930, after leaving the shuttered hilltop, "for they ache until I am half delirious with pain."

So he was Painful Perkins, was he? Hearst's womanizing, the employees' intrigues, the sexual antics of Hollywood that we've been treated to—it could all make perfect sense now in view of the fevered mind that plagued Perkins. And yet as the eccentric diarist himself would have said, how could anyone ever *prove* it?

Early in December 1930 (his typist got Freudian again, citing the date 1961 in the old man's memoirs), Perkins told of having dealt with his misery at long last. This was in Los Angeles:

> On December 2nd I went to a dentist and had every tooth in my head drawn. I feel better already, though it is difficult to eat anything. My

> teeth were always a curse rather than a blessing. They have cost me a lot of money and driven me thousands of miles to get them attended to. Better I had had them out ten years ago.

Perkins recounted on January 14 that he'd gone "to the Alexandria Hotel," of all places; not exactly his league. Nonetheless, some people he knew were staying there, in the distant shadow of Hearst during his earliest years in Los Angeles right after the turn of the century, when his new paper, the morning *Examiner,* was headquartered just two blocks away. As to those friends of Perkins in 1931, the diarist said of them:

> They are enroute to the South Seas to do some moving picture work, and seem to be expecting a good time. I would like to go with them, but oh my! I'm almost broke again [having just bought life insurance].

What a small world it was in 1931. The hapless Perkins (whose mouth refused to heal, leaving him toothless and without dentures) found suitable work in Altadena, just north of Pasadena, with a man named I. S. Horne. As we'll be seeing, Horne had ties to Hearst and San Simeon:

> Horne asked me to help him out in his zoo at Altadena [known as Altadena Aviaries] while his regular men were taking part in a play in Hollywood with an elephant he has.

That was on Sunday, February 8. Perkins must have ingested truth serum in December instead of Novocain. He would have been dead-on concerning a wire Horne sent to the zookeeper Carey Baldwin at San Simeon—had Perkins known about it (he may in fact have). This was three days later in 1931, on Wednesday the 11th. The wire of Horne's informed Baldwin:

> Still holding baby elephant for Mr. Hearst; now working in lobby [Grauman's] Chinese Theatre Hollywood; can deliver soon as contract closes in near future; is excellent animal; hope Mr. Hearst gets him.

Horne's message marks the first appearance in these pages of the George & Rosalie Hearst Collection. It brings to mind Marianne, the baby elephant that, in turn, recalled Marion's film by that name, both silent and talkie versions of which dated from 1929. However, Marianne the elephant was a female. I. S. Horne's elephant was a male.

Transaction or not (evidently none was made), Perkins could report on February 23 that he had "plenty of work":

> Horne is a genial sort of person, bears a bad name I question whether he deserves. I have no day off, and am trying to cut the grass around the place and make it look presentable. He is a man of many angles, does a lot of business and makes a lot of sales. He has a big deal [pending] on the Hearst [account], and as I know just what Hearst has, it gives him an advantage. The animals Hearst needs I know, and Horne plays on these. He is almost frantic, for Willicombe, secretary to Hearst, offers $66,000 flat, and Horne wants $75,000. I think he'll make the sale.

Enormous numbers like these sound absurd, especially when it's Perkins blaring them. Yet exotic animals could be ruinously expensive, even if we divide by ten to keep Perkins in reasonable check. For instance, less than a week earlier (on the 18th), Willicombe had wired Henry Bartels, a competitor of I. S. Horne's based on Fulton Street in Lower Manhattan, New York; Willicombe's message read as follows:

> Mr. Hearst will take the pair of Bengal Tigers on your list which you said on telephone you would have in three weeks, at the list price of twenty-five hundred dollars less five percent as per your telegram to Mr. Baldwin.
>
> Mr. Hearst will also purchase the pair of black panthers at eleven hundred eighty-seven dollars net, and the female white rhea [an ostrich-like bird] for two hundred thirty-seven dollars net and the Emu [another oversized bird] for two hundred sixty-two dollars net if it is a female.
>
> Also this order is given with understanding that you guarantee safe arrival of the animals at San Luis Obispo, Calif.

To hear Perkins tell it, Hearst may as well have bought his camels and giraffes and, yes, even his tigers and panthers and rheas and emus from Lord Duveen, the patrician art dealer who'd sold Henry E. Huntington such icons as *The Blue Boy* in 1921 and *Pinkie* in 1927, both for San Marino, that chaste yet grandiose rival of San Simeon, not even five miles south of where Perkins was now cleaning elephant stalls and scraping bird guano. Insofar as the great Duveen and his peers such as Knoedler and Wildenstein went, several of Hearst's most earnest purchases from them of portraits and other works by Hals, Greuze, Boucher, Raeburn, Fragonard, Lawrence, and Rembrandt—all as "expertized" by scholars of the period, at times imperfectly, to be sure (or unsure)—began adorning the walls of the Beach House at the outset of the 1930s. In fact, bona fide Old Masters were more apt to crop up there than at the ranch, a fact not lost on proponents of the Beach House as the Marion Davies Estate, contender with the Huntington Art Gallery for the best collection of fine art that the Southland could boast before J. Paul Getty, Armand Hammer, and Norton Simon began dominating the scene after World War II.

AN ENTRY BY A DIARIST besides Hayes Perkins—dated January 15, 1931—throws some important light on the Beach House at this juncture. The writer was William Valentiner, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, a man we'll encounter again in the final chapter of this book. Valentiner had been at San Simeon earlier in January (from there, he wired a friend on the 9th: "Having a wonderful time in this grand place; Mr. Hearst is arranging for us to have a dinner in Hollywood to meet all the celebrities I can think of"). Valentiner may well have been recalling San Simeon when he wrote in his diary on the 15th of being a luncheon guest at "another house"—in this instance meaning 415 Ocean Front, Santa Monica:

> For lunch in another house, built by Hearst for Marion Davies, a long-stretched white building in the Colonial style, galleries of small columns and climbing flowers are building a fence around the garden, in which center there is a large swimming pool . . . and [above,] the reception-rooms, in English style, only one in French style with four good pictures by Boucher [the Gold Room?], a library with pictures by Rembrandt, Franz Hals, etc. It is possible to show a film here, when a button is pressed there appears on the wall a canvas in a precious frame, at the same time two doors open up as on a cuckoo-clock, the film can be heard through the big hall. Charming are the bedrooms, the enormous windows are made each of one large window-pane and with the ocean in the background it is like being on a boat. Friendly light-colored walls, gay curtains, and dark blue Chinese carpets fitting in astonishingly well with everything else. . . . White vases with lovely flowers, white orchids, and in the dining room loads of English silverware.

On a very different note, right before Hayes Perkins returned to San Simeon in 1931 (having now become the janitor in Hearst Camp, the hilltop's company town), Hearst's head man from Cosmopolitan Productions—headquartered in New York as were most other Hollywood film interests—was a guest at San Simeon. He was there in 1931 to confer with Hearst. Edgar Hatrick ("Ed" or "Hat") heard from the home office on February 13 with news about the Chief's largesse. Some of what follows pertained to Santa Monica, as Hat learned from his assistant in the east:

> Chief's Nineteen-thirty [1930] advances including jewelry and Christmas gifts totaled two eighty-seven thousand five hundred [$287,500]. This does not include hundred twenty thousand advanced February this year and seventy-five thousand advanced last November to Piedmont Land [&] Cattle [San Francisco: today's Hearst Sunical], which Clarke [Austin Clark] requested not to be reflected on Chief's account.
>
> All advances to Chief are charged to his personal account on our books and at end each year transferred to Spar holding [Star Holding Company] special account on Clarke's instructions.

> Airmailed to Ambassador [Hotel] yesterday itemized statements reflecting Nineteen-thirty payments on yachts amounting to fourteen thousand six hundred and coast expenses made up of payrolls, fan mail, food, Beach House [and] other miscellaneous items totaling forty-three thousand.

What can anyone say to that but . . . *wow!* Hearst was a big spender, as we've always heard. Here's specific proof beyond a doubt, almost beyond anything even Hayes Perkins might conjure. Financially, the real-life Hearst didn't dawdle. Neither did Marion, except in the minds of those who've seen *Citizen Kane* too many times.

Speaking of Marion and her film career, her last Cosmopolitan picture through Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had been *The Floradora Girl*, released in May 1930. In 1931, *The Bachelor Father* was released on January 10. *It's a Wise Child* followed on March 21; *Five and Ten*, made in March and April, would be released on June 13. After that in 1931 came a big lull: even in that era of speedy rehearsals followed by quick filming and equally rapid post-production, the second half of the year would murmur quietly: *Polly of the Circus* wouldn't begin shooting until December 1931.

The Cosmopolitan coin had another side for Hearst—newsreels. The same went for Ed Hatrick in New York. Hearst had been producing newsreels for MGM since 1927. In 1929 he began making newsreels simultaneously for Fox. He was someone who always spoke of newsreels in two words as *news reels* (although he indeed said *newspapers*).

FINE AND WELL, but all work and no play could make Jack a dull boy—or certainly could make W. R. and Marion a dull boy and girl, to call Mr. Hearst and Miss Davies by the names their friends used. It was Marion's turn to pine for a moment when the scampish newspaper

columnist Harry Crocker wired her at San Simeon from Los Angeles on February 9. He led off by mentioning her nephew:

> [Charlie] Lederer and I wrecked embassy [the Ambassador Hotel's Embassy Ballroom] as farewell party for Geordie [the British actor George K. Arthur]. At midnight we stowed him in car and shot him off for [the] boat. Claims rajahs are pikers [tightwads] compared to you when it comes to entertainment. Couldn't thank you enough and sent all kinds of messages to you all. Love.

George K. Arthur, who appeared in the Davies silents *Lights of Old Broadway* in 1925 and *Tillie the Toiler* in 1927, can also be seen in Ken Murray's nostalgic home-movies collection of 1970, *The Golden Days of San Simeon*.

All such bon-voyage high jinks aside, circumspection reigned when Gloria Swanson wired Hearst at San Simeon on Tuesday, February 17, 1931; she did so from Beverly Hills:

> I am having a formal dinner on Friday the twentieth at seven thirty o'clock. If you will not be at the Ranch, I would like the pleasure of your company.

The setting could just as easily have been Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford's home in Beverly Hills—Pickfair, as it was called—or by 1931 the Beach House in Santa Monica—with only the names being changed to protect the innocent. Despite that, Hearst wouldn't be showing up. It further meant that neither would Marion. Their days of being apart as they sporadically had been in the 1920s had ended by 1930 or 1931. As Hearst told Miss Swanson later on February 17:

> Many thanks but I am laid up with influenza and regret will be unable to accept your kind invitation.

An alibi, perhaps. Yet without Hayes Perkins, and without George Loorz's letter-writing that kicked in mightily as of 1932, how will we ever know? Nonetheless, as Neal Gabler remarked in his breakthrough

book of 1988, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood:*

> The irony was that for all the [film] community's insularity and self-absorption, its social life was still modeled after that of eastern high society, and anyone searching for the wild parties of lore was likely to be disappointed.

Fat chance that Gloria Swanson or anyone else on the coast could get Hearst to play the penguin, unless, to judge from old photographs, it was on his own turf—or on his own sands, shall we say—at the Beach House.

All the same, Colleen Moore strutted her *arriviste* stuff right under Hearst's nose just a week earlier, wiring a man named Duncan Cassell from San Simeon:

> Please phone Mary Brian and Joan Bennett. Invite them dinner party my house Sat. nite [February 14] 7:30 formal. If can't get them try Elsie Janis, June Collier [Collyer] or Hedda Hopper. Thanks.

Miss Moore would surely have included Harry Crocker to guarantee a fun-filled evening; after all, he was in heated pursuit of June Collyer leading up to that Valentine's weekend. He had to settle for kind thoughts instead, as a Hollywood florist learned from him on that unlucky Friday the 13th:

> Please send to Miss June Collyer 603 Roxbury Beverly Hills a ribband [decorative ribbon] of five gardenias for Saturday evening no card and charge Harry Crocker *Los Angeles Examiner.* Many thanks.

Crocker followed on Monday, February 16, by wiring Miss Collyer in Beverly Hills from San Simeon, where he'd been at the beck and call of his hosts in recent days:

> I am desolate I am upset I am grieved I am lonesome I am blue and it's all because Mr. Hearst has asked me to remain here until Sunday

> [February 22]. I want to see you I really do and I'm heartbroken. Will call you tonight. Love.

Worse news. Before 1931 was out, June Collyer married Stu Erwin, a stage actor new to films but one with a long career ahead of him. Crocker, ever the San Simeon Romeo in search of true love (and one smitten, like Hearst, by divine young actresses), found bliss in an Englishwoman named Liza Jenns; he and Liza were briefly married in the late thirties. She played the bitchy lover of Frederic March in David O. Selznick's classic tearjerker of 1937, *A Star Is Born*, the woman spurned by March in favor of the wholesome Janet Gaynor.

No more superstitious about Friday the 13th than Crocker had been, the young actress Sally Eilers, still in the midst of her first marriage (she had three more to go), wired her husband from San Simeon. He was on the vaudeville circuit in Flint, Michigan, that weekend. His name? Hoot Gibson—the Hooter, as his dear Sally and no doubt a few other cowgirls liked to call him:

> Darling: Will you be my Valentine forever? Received wire here. Glad you are coming home. Wire me money to deposit Monday [February 16]. Needed badly. Will be home Monday morning. Should I get apartment? Probably better if possible, to stay at Ranch awhile. All here send their best. I send my love.

The Hooter answered the next day. "My Darling Darling," he promised her, "I am your Valentine forever and you are mine." Alas, business was "still bad." He'd be leaving Michigan on the 17th, not to reach Gloria Swanson's in time for her proper dinner, but to perform in Omaha and, he hoped, "pick up [a] grand"—a cool thousand, that is, as we ourselves can only hope, too many years later to make a whit of difference.

IF HEARST WAS TRULY under the weather at San Simeon in February 1931, he could always commiserate with Hollywood's most fragile, most debonair prodigy, Irving Thalberg of MGM. He did so on Monday the 9th, wiring Thalberg at Culver City from his remote hilltop:

> If [the screenwriter] Willard Mack does not produce melodramatic results for "Way to Treat a Woman" what do you think of trying [Bayard] Veiller? He is given to melodrama. [P. G.] Wodehouse is good for humor but do you not think this picture needs the [dramatic] punch?

The closest film to what Hearst mentioned isn't close at all: *No Way to Treat a Lady*, a comedy-thriller dating from 1968 and starring Rod Steiger and Lee Remick.

Where there's smoke, there's fire. In Thalberg's case, his right-hand man and senior partner wasn't far behind—Louis B. Mayer, *The Lion of Hollywood,* to use the title of Scott Eyman's biography of L. B. Hearst wired the *Washington Times,* his evening newspaper in the nation's capitol, on February 10, 1931 (he also owned the morning *Washington Herald*). The Lion would be in town soon to see his friend President Hoover:

> Louis B. Mayer will be at Mayflower Hotel tomorrow [Wednesday]. Please interview him and print picture and be very nice to him. He is good friend.

So much for the Perkins nonsense in October 1930 that "Hoover almost chased Mayer out of the place."

The Hearst-Davies-Mayer-Thalberg foursome had the upcoming comedy-drama *Five and Ten* to consider in this first part of 1931. Once Hearst and Marion would leave San Simeon to be closer to its making—its scenes to be shot in just three or four weeks, not months—the king and queen of Hollywood (Mayer's term for them) would be digging in at the Beach House. Hearst's days at the Ambassador Hotel

were numbered. He was mostly a homebody, the same as Marion was. Santa Monica was ready enough now, at long last. The Beach House would be doing the Hearst-Davies entourage the honors whenever those two principals were in town. Things would be that way almost always from here on: *the two of them*. The times when Hearst had entrained for New York, there to make whatever peace with his wife was left to be made—such times were nearly over. In turn, the times when his absences had led to Marion's stepping out with Charlie Chaplin or some other fast fellow were likewise over; they were times as bygone as an episode like Thomas Ince's strange death in 1924 after a party on Hearst's yacht near San Diego. Moreover, Chaplin, who'd sailed with them then, had recently gone to England, the native land he'd not seen in a decade.

Home sweet home in Santa Monica it was now for Hearst and Marion, alternating with San Simeon and Wyntoon until the mid-1940s. Had they not sold the Beach House after World War II, the place would probably have functioned that way for them until Hearst died in 1951, almost thirty years after Tom Ince exited stage left.

This is too far ahead of our story, though, a time as distant as Hearst's passing. Twenty years before, on March 10, 1931, Irving Thalberg sent a wire to San Simeon. Daily shooting on the new film would begin in a few weeks:

> Dear Chief: Must tell you I appreciate your attitude on *Five and Ten* more than anything you have ever said or done for me. Can only say that will try my best to make a good picture of *Five and Ten* and it will be considerably more along the lines you want than now appears on the surface and guarantee that the next one [*Polly of the Circus*] will be exactly along the lines you want. Regards.

Hearst answered Thalberg the next day, March 11, his words so calm they seem to be from someone much less mythical, so unlike Orson Welles's thundering Charles Foster Kane:

> Many thanks Irving for very kind telegram. I know [the] picture will be fine and I have no business to be worrying about it. Merely took advantage of your willingness for me to express my opinions.

Hearst heard from Ed Hatrick of Cosmopolitan Productions-International Films that same day, March 11, about Marion's latest picture, *It's a Wise Child*. The film had wrapped a month earlier and would soon be released. Hat was in Culver City at the Bungalow on the MGM lot (the one Joseph Urban designed, not Julia Morgan), a facility synonymous with the West Coast headquarters of Hearst's International Film Service (the corporate parent of Cosmopolitan Productions).

Hat told Hearst that day in March:

> My advertising campaign for *It's a Wise Child* is all laid out on new plan; however the important and unique part of campaign is a number of very small teaser ads which occupy very little space [and] which I would like to run on dramatic page [in the Hearst newspapers]. The other copy could be run in other sections wherever necessary.
>
> Could you send order to papers asking them to run small teaser ads on dramatic page and then if they have not space for larger copy to run it in general run of paper? I will prepare next campaign differently and along lines of previous campaigns as far as space is concerned.

Hearst answered Hatrick that afternoon, as calmly, as moderately as he had in wiring Thalberg about *Five and Ten*. Hearst told Hat:

> Will telegraph papers [to] run on dramatic pages all your advertising marked for dramatic page; so you can decide that question yourself.

Before the Hearst party pulled up stakes at San Simeon in mid-March, southbound for Santa Monica and Culver City, more film matters were crossing desks—Hearst's, Hatrick's, Willicombe's. It was a radically different concern this time from *Five and Ten*, namely, the Universal Pictures blood-curdler *Dracula*. Hearst and the horror genre? Stand-up wags could go far with this one. Yet even they'd have

to admit that *Dracula* falls well outside the usual mix of costume dramas, historical yarns, and lighthearted fare that lay at the core of Cosmopolitan Productions.

In our quickest passing here, the Universal matter went as follows. Hatrick, Culver City, to Willicombe, San Simeon, on March 13:

> Please advise Chief I think it would be mistake for *Chicago American* [Hearst's evening paper in that city] to tie-up on *Dracula* contest. I don't think any of our papers should tie-up with any motion-picture people on contests because as a rule the pictures get everything and the papers get nothing. On our [properly arranged] tie-ups we get fifty percent, and for our papers to go in on mere speculation cheapens our proposition.

Little wonder that a wire left San Simeon for Chicago later that very same day in 1931 under Hearst's signature. It advised the paper to "do nothing on *Dracula* contest" pending further word from the ranch. As for his view of the horror genre, Hearst thought it mostly loathsome, nothing he aspired to in his own films. Yet as money-making "tie-ups," as Hat would have said, a dollar was surely a dollar. There were plenty of them to be scooped up in preying on the public's innocent zeal for the ghoulish and the frightening that the advent of sound had intensified lately.

AGAINST SUCH A BACKDROP, the words of Alice Head, still the managing director of Hearst's National Magazine Company in London, are like a breath of pure and wholesome air.

> The spring of 1931 found me once more en route for the States to attend Mr. Hearst's birthday party in California [his sixty-eighth] on April 29th. . . . The boat docked [in New York] at nine a.m. on April 24th. I drove straight to the Ritz Tower [owned by Hearst, at Park Avenue and 57th Street], and left the same afternoon with Dick Berlin [of Hearst Magazines] and Frank Davis by the "Twentieth Century" for Chicago.

> The next day we boarded the [Santa Fe] "Chief" at eleven o'clock and arrived at Los Angeles on the 27th. . . . At Los Angeles we parted temporarily. They went to the Ambassador Hotel and I drove straight down to Marion Davies' house at Santa Monica, where I was to stay.

Although this was Miss Head's third trip to California, it was her first reference to the Beach House (a name she never used in her memoirs; she simply called it Marion's house). Miss Head had more to say within the same paragraph, which ran for hundreds of words:

> The next day [Tuesday, April 28] I joined Marion at the Metro-Goldwyn studios, and met Leslie Howard for the first time. He and Marion were acting together in a picture called *Five and Ten*, with Bob Leonard directing. Thanks to the kindness of Mr. Louis B. Mayer, who gives me the freedom of the studios during my visits to California, I have spent many interesting hours watching the shooting of various pictures. . . . After we returned to the house at night, Marion ate a hurried dinner and then spent two hours with her elocution coach [George Currie], who rehearsed her with the lines in her part for the following day. Then bed, and up again at six a.m. But on Saturday nights there was always a big and lively party and on Sunday mornings everyone slept late. An outstanding and popular Hollywood figure whom I often met at the studio or Marion's home was Ed Hatrick, who, with his shrewd and able colleague Miss [Ella] Williams, has managed the Cosmopolitan Film Corporation with great success for many years. Ed Hatrick has such a gay and responsive sense of humor, and takes his troubles with such apparent lightheartedness, that I can only look on and wonder how he does it. There is so much of the laughing cavalier about him. Yet he gets things done, he is a quick-stepper and some of his quips are almost legendary.

A typical quick step of Hat's was the message he'd sent Hearst at San Simeon on Saturday, April 4; Hearst and Marion had flown up from Santa Monica for the Easter weekend:

> Foreign department Metro [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] very optimistic about success foreign versions *Big House* [a non-Davies film through

> Cosmopolitan, mid-1930]. After close survey it looks as though we might get about seventy-five thousand for our share, which is far beyond my original estimate. However if we are to share in these versions it means that big portion our weekly receipts will be held up for next six months in order to amortize negative and print costs of foreign versions.
>
> If I do this it means I have to have about one hundred thousand to operate; at present I have about forty plus the hundred I borrowed. My newsreel revenue, which will help carry [us], starts about middle June. If I can keep this money for six months in order to carry my organization it will enable me take advantage of revenue from these foreign versions.
>
> I tried to get seventy-five thousand from Richard Clark [of Piedmont Land & Cattle Co., San Francisco] which was loaned by film service [International Film Service] some time ago but he said it was impossible for him to pay us anything. Will you please advise me what to do.

That Easter weekend, Hearst also heard from Ella Williams, Hat's assistant. She'd wired San Simeon from the Cosmopolitan-International headquarters—the Bungalow, informally—on the Washington Boulevard side of the Metro lot in Culver City:

> Mr. Hatrick [reports] as follows: "*[The] Bachelor Father* [a Davies film this time, early 1931] did forty-four thousand at Mastbaum Theater, Philadelphia. Receipts in this house range anywhere from thirty to fifty [thousand], so you could call this good week. New York was poor at fifty-one thousand; should have done at least seventy to be good. Will mail figures all key cities but want get comparisons so he [Hearst] can judge."

With that exception and a few others from the first part of April, the stage once more belongs to Alice Head. She had more to say regarding events at the Beach House:

> Mr. Hearst's birthday on the 29th was celebrated by a big fancy-dress ball. From the Metro-Goldwyn wardrobe department I was provided

> with a beautiful period gown of rose-coloured velvet and a white wig en suite. There were a number of Hearst executives present at the party, several of Mr. Hearst's sons, and among the film folk I specially remember Virginia Cherrill (now the Countess of Jersey), Billie Haines, Charlie Chaplin, Gary Cooper, Connie Talmadge, Norma Shearer, Leslie Howard and his wife, Aileen Pringle, Lupe Velez, Matt Moore, Clark Gable, and Mr. and Mrs. Sam Goldwyn. Frances Goldwyn is a lovely creature—beautiful and gay and *good*. I have always had the greatest affection for her and though we meet but seldom, possibly after a lapse of years, she is always the same, and we take up the threads of our friendship exactly where we left off. . . .
>
> After the birthday party we went up to the Ranch for a few days. Leslie and Ruth Howard, and Roland Pertwee [an actor and screenwriter], were among the guests.

Close on the heels of Hearst's return to San Simeon in May 1931, Hayes Perkins weighed in for us through his diary on Sunday the 3rd. According to the toothless janitor:

> Hearst went away [for the making of *Five and Ten*], but is back with forty-two guests. Most of them are Hollywood [people], but there are usually a few authors, artists and others of national or even a world-wide reputation among them. He is building a vast monument to himself here that will last for thousands of years. One wonders if it is worth while to him.

A rare alignment of the memoiristic planets occurred in late May. Alice Head's account in her book of 1939 can lead off:

> I believe this was the year when we had the Hawaiian fancy-dress ball. During the afternoon we were sent to the library [in Casa Grande, the main Castle building] to select our costumes. There were a vast array of grass-skirts, rolls of crepe de Chine, bead and shell ornaments and other requisites for "going Hawaiian" for the evening. . . . Mr. Hearst gave me a huge garland made solidly of flame-coloured carnation heads and thick as my wrist. . . . An Hawaiian band had been specially imported for the evening, and the cathedral-like interior of the Ranch

> was the scene of picturesque revelry. This was a very happy visit and I was loath to leave, but there was work to be done at home.

Hearst, however, had been less than gleeful two days before the costume party. On May 21 he wired Ella Williams at the Cosmopolitan Bungalow in Culver City:

> There is by no means enough choice of costumes. I hope you will be able to get some of those of which you showed me sketches on previous occasion. Am rather disappointed in those that have come [in] to date. They are quite ordinary. We should have some more original, some pretty ones and some comedy ones.

Just some more tut-tutting of the kind Julia Morgan knew so well? Probably. The more amazing thing is to find Perkins speaking without his frequent forked tongue—at least at the outset of the following paragraph dated May 23. The entry coincided with the Saturday of the festive romp:

> A big party has been arranged for tonight at the palace. Hearst has imported a lot of young female playmates and a Hawaiian band for the occasion. Today I saw him on the tennis court, which now has been screened by a high concrete wall to shut out the eyes of the hoi polloi [the masses . . . besides Perkins]. He was wearing a wide brimmed sun bonnet creation, tied under his chin with a red ribbon. His arms were filled with Hollywood beauties, all wriggling and twisting in his lecherous embrace. His giggles mingled with their squeals and muffled screams, and one wondered if they enjoyed it. But he pays them well, both in presents and publicity.

Perkins said further on in the same entry (in a different context, having lent a friend money), "Perhaps I am a boob." He'd surely been one in Clara Bow's case—having assigned to 1929 the slanderous events she endured in 1931, courtesy of Frederic Girnau and his vile weekly called the *Coast Reporter*. In addition, Perkins had portrayed Miss Bow as being scarcely better than *hoi polloi* in Hearst's pale blue eyes.

Not so. Back on Wednesday, May 6, right after the post-birthday weekend that Alice Head mentioned, Hearst received a query from his evening paper in Boston:

> Would you object to our publishing sympathetic life story of Clara Bow at this time? Believe it has circulation possibilities.

The Hearst forces got right on it. From Los Angeles, Louella Parsons wired Joe Willicombe at San Simeon on May 11:

> Thanks for telegrams. Will have [Clara] Bow matter ready to start Monday May 18 or few days earlier if it is desired to begin it sooner. Have eliminated that portion as suggested.

Willicombe, on Hearst's behalf as usual, heard from the Chief's *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* newspaper on Thursday, May 14:

> Our understanding is Miss Parson's Clara Bow life story intended exclusively for Hearst papers in Hearst cities in view Parsons column runs daily in *[Pittsburgh] Post-Gazette* and they get full Universal Service nightly. Would like definite assurance if possible Clara is all [exclusively] for *Sun-Telegraph* before blasting promotion today.

No archives seems to have Willicombe's response. But on that same day, May 14, Hearst himself told the Boston paper that had made the original inquiry, "Certainly Clara Bow story was written for *Evening American* primarily at your suggestion."

On the receiving end, Hearst heard from Eleanor Patterson of his morning paper in Washington, D.C. (from Cissy Patterson, as she was better known). She said on May 14 that the *Herald* was "starting publicity on Clara Bow story tomorrow morning [Friday] and publication Monday [the 18th]."

Hearst subsequently heard from no less an editor than Arthur Brisbane on the very Monday in question. Brisbane represented the *New York Evening Journal:*

> Delighted write about Clara Bow, she deserves praise. . . .

> Perhaps editorially I shall write something in "Today" about Clara Bow and also write editorial about her with a nice picture.

"Today" was Brisbane's front-page column, not only in Hearst's papers in New York (three since the mid-1920s) but also in all his other newspapers around the country—and in plenty of competing papers that subscribed to writers like Brisbane and Will Rogers, whether such columnists were Hearst insiders or not (Oklahoma cowpoke that Rogers was, he tended to sit on the fence). Hearst thanked Brisbane for his input on Clara Bow.

The next day, Tuesday, May 19, another insider—Clarence Lindner, publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner*—received a wire from one of Hearst's West Coast executives who was at San Simeon, a man named Bart Guild:

> [Clara] Bow articles will be ready for release [next] Monday issue [May 25]. Suggest you contact Bill Wootten [Hearst's Universal Service telegrapher in Los Angeles] for promotion highlights. Would appreciate if you will forward on [tele]printer wire your ideas and copy [text] suggestions in your own paper, and outside promotion avenues that you will use, to Seattle [for Hearst's *Post-Intelligencer* in that city]. Thanks.

The synergy was pulsating now. It allowed Hearst to wire Clara Bow in Beverly Hills on May 25, the aforementioned Monday, following the Hawaiian costume party of May 23; his words were brief and to the point. "Glad you like articles. Very happy to be able to print them."

"HEARST AT HOME" was another product of May 1931, a feature on Hearst's "great summer palace in California," courtesy of *Fortune* magazine, a deluxe, oversized publication hailing from what seems an improbable period for journalistic sumptuousness. "Case notes on its history, its court life, and its contents," the subhead of the feature also

promised—and rousingly delivered. In an earlier instance of such coverage, *The New York Times Magazine* had profiled San Simeon in July 1929 with Hearst's implicit cooperation. The feature that *Fortune* came out with two years later is the more enduring one, thanks in large part to Erich Salomon's photographs. Collectors of Hearstiana know this. They also know that *Fortune* profiled Wyntoon in October 1935, creating through Peter Stackpole's photographs a companion to the May 1931 number. The two *Fortune* pieces have never been surpassed. Not until *Life* magazine published its "Unique Tour of San Simeon" in August 1957, six years to the month after Hearst died, was there a comparable, equally collectible portrayal (with photographs this time by Gjon Mili), befitting an anthology of such features on homes belonging to the rich and famous.

The Beach House in Santa Monica got no coverage of this in-depth kind in the 1930s. Nor little in the 1940s, with the main exceptions being Leo Rosten's book, quoted in Chapter 1, and Ilka Chase's memoir, quoted in Chapter 3. Had the Beach House received the lengthier attention in those years on par with what San Simeon and Wyntoon got from *Fortune,* its history would be writ differently to this day, so commanding and influential were such features: fundamental, authoritative, though surely not free of error. Later, about 1950, Joseph Drown's *Oceanhouse* booklet pointed in that same direction. But it did so ephemerally, impermanently, having little impact beyond its private audience and leaving little trace.

ALICE HEAD had more to say in her memoir of 1939 about events in May 1931:

> On this trip there was no question of rushing back to England immediately after Mr. Hearst's birthday party, because he had planned to come too [go abroad], accompanied by a small party of friends. We stopped in New York for a day or two, visited one or two theatres

> (referring to one particularly popular play, Mr. Hearst plaintively remarked: "I have seen the last act of this play three times. Why can't we get there *in time* for once!"), did a little shopping, and finally sailed in the *Europa*—the first time I have ever been on a non-Cunard boat [like the *Aquitania* or the *Mauretania*]. . . . My mother came to Waterloo [Station, London] to meet me and she had the great joy of making the acquaintance of Mr. Hearst.

When Hearst traveled, he did so in style. On the same day that he told the maligned "It girl," Clara Bow, how pleased he was to have helped her, Willicombe notified an underling in New York of the Hearst party's imminent arrival. This was on Monday, May 25:

> Kindly tell [Tom] White and [Geoffrey] Konta Chief leaving Los Angeles [by train] eight forty-five Tuesday night [May 26], arriving Chicago eight-forty Friday morning [May 29] and leaving on Advance Twentieth Century [the *20th Century Limited*] at eleven-forty Friday morning. . . .
>
> 2. Please notify Miller [general manager] at Warwick [Hotel] Chief and Star [Marion Davies] and party arriving Saturday [May 30] and ask Chris [McGregor] get things shaped up in apartments there. At hotel they will require also reservations for Mr. and Mrs. Townsend Netcher, Miss [Alice] Head, Miss Lenore Bushman, Harry Crocker and Edward V. Kane, also room for Joseph Jelinek [Yelinek], who is Chief's new valet, and rooms for three maids [the Christensen sisters].

Part of Chris McGregor's task was to provide art objects and furnishings from Hearst's Bronx warehouse for the temporary enhancement of rooms in the Warwick. Operations in the Bronx had begun in 1926, concurrent with the modernized warehousing long awaited at San Simeon. The first shipments of Beach House furnishings in 1926 had gone forth through McGregor from the Bronx (a facility once thought to have predated 1926 by years if not decades: a typical instance of a Hearstiana time warp and breach of context). No, there was no Bronx warehouse for Hearst in 1920, much less in 1910 or 1900. Nor was there one in 1895 or earlier still. He'd made do up to the mid-1920s with rented space, much as he'd keep doing in Los Angeles

and San Francisco, and even in New York somewhat, for several years yet to come.

Through an earlier message, which had gone to San Simeon on May 15, we can further see how much planning went into an excursion like the trip described by Miss Head. As one of Willicombe's people in New York had told him then:

> Holding [Warwick rooms] fifty-one, seventy-one, seventy-seven, ninety-three, seventy-six, seventy-eight, one thirty to thirty-six and one twenty-four and one twenty-eight, last two for maid and valet. Can get additional [rooms] for another maid or [they can] double up if you say so. Servant accommodations easy. Frank Mason says [David] Town told him Chief sails *Europa* June four. I know nothing of it. Must take up tickets May 25. Will you be east that date or shall I arrange getting additional cash here? Your accommodations okay.

Hearst pinpointed the dates and his itinerary when he told an editorial writer in Washington, D.C., "Expect to be in New York week from tomorrow." He said so on May 22, referring to Saturday, May 30. "Delighted to see Senator Morrrow," he also said. He meant Dwight W. Morrow of New Jersey, father of Anne Morrow Lindbergh and a former Ambassador to Mexico, who would die too young just a few months later, in October 1931. Hearst's final words to his man in Washington: "Leaving New York for Bad Nauheim June fourth." By that sentence he no doubt meant Europe in general, since his plans for the summer involved more than simply taking the cure in Germany.

Alice Head's next words in her memoir touch on this final point of Hearst's:

> The summer passed like a flash. I not only had to catch up with arrears of work at the office [in London], but I had to see that St. Donat's [in Wales] was ready for occupation and engage extra servants. We had some halcyon days at the castle and then Mr. Hearst went off for his cure at Bad Nauheim [near Frankfurt], and this time I stopped at home

> and worked hard at the magazines. He came [back] to England for one more visit to the castle and returned to the States in September.

Details like these, corroborated by Hearst's own telegrams and letters, make it more than evident that Alice Head is trustworthy, almost impeccably so. Hayes Perkins could prove his worth, as we've seen, but not on the level that she consistently did. Surely the Perkins of 1931 could have done better than make erroneous entries like this one on July 3 (or perhaps we should say do better than to *retain* such entries come their partly demented rewrites thirty years later):

> The work [on the hill] progresses slowly, and the other day, when Hearst was standing on the balcony overlooking his vast acreage he sighed and said, "It takes so long to get anything done!" [Never mind Hearst's current whereabouts in Europe.]
>
> But he is much more patient than most men would be in his position. Doubtless he does some of this to avoid the huge income tax he would otherwise be assessed, but he also does it to give men employment. Here he houses his [be]loved Marion, who means more to him than all else. He once said, "It rouses my passion to talk to her over a phone even!"
>
> Marion is as always a devout Catholic. She has images of the Virgin in her boudoir [in the Gothic Suite in Casa Grande], and attends mass frequently [in the nearby town of Cambria] to win the favor of the Holy Church. One wonders if the Church does not give Marion absolution to get a hold on this vast fortune of Hearst, for money and power mean more to this organization than the fruits of the spirit as set down by St. Paul.

Perkins's mental state aside (or whatever in God's name it was), he finally mentioned the place that concerns us the most—this again under July 3, ostensibly in 1931:

> Hearst has spent some $2,000,000 building Marion a palace at Santa Monica recently [the Beach House], and has spent fortunes otherwise in purchasing her favor. Yet he steps out on her continually. I might say

> much more, but why digress? He is cuckoo over that woman, we all see and know that.

Indeed, why digress at all? Only the sometimes pea-brained Perkins could possibly know—and he's been dead since 1964. One last paragraph occurs under that date of July 3, whether imaginary or not:

> In other ways Hearst is a most likeable man. He has an infectious grin that instantly puts all at ease. He will bestow this on his humblest employee as quickly as the greatest man. When he is alone in a group of men he stands out above all about him in personality. His one weakness is women, and in this he is a fool. Sober, almost abstemious in most things, he does sometimes eat too heartily. But he is the best boss I have ever known, and I'll forgive his sins if he will pardon mine.

It's a shame Perkins can't be better trusted. Was it merely his dental health? Or were there problems of a larger kind? There's precious little history to go on through this stretch; we can't afford to ignore him. We've got to tread lightly, though, whenever his words are "about," as he would say of their presence, their proximity, such as these under August 14, 1931, a Monday—a date preceding Hearst's death by exactly twenty years (a Tuesday in that future instance):

> Hearst is in Europe, and has been having a bad time in France. He has been asked to leave that country as quickly as possible, and is shrewdly making capital of it. This gives him the publicity his heart so dearly loves, and sells his papers among the American people. France is not dearly loved here now because of her repudiation of the war debt she owes us, so this helps Hearst and he knows it.

The conflation here is with events of a year earlier, belonging to 1930. Thus does Perkins show his liberality: he worked the timeline in both directions. More often when he erred, he did so in the established Hearstiana mode of describing events before their rightful hour, as with Clara Bow's agonies of 1931 being wrongly assigned to 1929. Left to his own devices, Perkins would readily have observed Independence

Day on June 2 or 3 and would further have placed it in some previous, mostly unfamiliar year like 1773.

A strange man, to be sure. An even stranger document, his pseudo-diary. It wouldn't be farfetched to call his musings *Perkinsian,* regardless of their subject. If only Orson Welles and Herman Mankiewicz had known him.

THE FINAL THIRD of 1931 has a minor bearing on Santa Monica. But without Alice Head to guide us or a diarist more reliable than Hayes Perkins, the month of September, which saw the Hearst party getting back from Europe, can safely be skipped. There's one prominent exception. On September 30, Irving Thalberg wired Hearst at San Simeon:

> Dear W. R. I am sure you have nothing to fear in *Polly [of the Circus]* as I believe you will be very happy about it eventually. Have talked to L. B. [Louis B. Mayer] regarding *Peg [o' My Heart]* and naturally we are both more than eager to make you both happy so consider yourselves *Pegged* [for a Davies film that wouldn't be made until 1933]. Kindest regards.

October 1931 also has a minor bearing. It likewise has an exception worth noting; in fact, more than one. The impresario Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. of *Ziegfeld Follies* fame was in deep arrears following the Great Crash of 1929. At this moment two years later, Mrs. Ziegfeld (the actress Billie Burke, the good witch in *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939) was traveling with a theater troupe for the family's financial sake while Flo, as he was known, stayed at San Simeon for several days. Flo conferred with Hearst and with Sam Goldwyn, both of whom he hoped could help him make the transition from New York to Hollywood, there to prosper with musical productions in the new era of sound. Regarding the Beach House, Billie Burke alluded to its 321 Ocean Front portion in her memoir of 1949, *With a Feather on My Nose:*

> Jack Harkrider, who designed costumes for Flo, had found us a cottage in the Outpost district [the Westside], but Flo, with his sure instinct for the lavish, immediately discarded this and established us in the Marion Davies villa across the tennis court from the baronial William Randolph Hearst mansion on the beach at Santa Monica. And then began a round of entertainment. There was Norma Shearer and her brilliant husband Irving Thalberg, who seemed so youthful to be head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but then, Norma herself seemed little more than a child. And there was Paulette Goddard, who had played on the roof [the New Amsterdam Theatre Roof in New York] for Flo, and Harpo Marx, and Clara Bow and Hoot Gibson, Kay Francis, the glamorous Constance Bennett—and Frances Goldwyn, who had worried so about cutting off her hair for the [Booth] Tarkington play. But Flo when asked by Louella Parsons picked Sally Eilers as the prettiest girl in Hollywood.
>
> Everybody gave parties, Mr. and Mrs. Louis B. Mayer were neighbors [at 625 Ocean Front], William Randolph Hearst was a charming host, Marion was lovely and thoughtful, Jerry Kern and Joseph Urban were on hand, [and] Will Rogers was in residence at his ranch [in Pacific Palisades] and invited us out often to ride.

In her own memoir of 1964, Flo and Billie's daughter, Patricia, had this to say about the 321 unit at the north end of the Hearst-Davies compound; Patty turned fifteen in October 1931, in the midst of the period she described in *The Ziegfelds' Girl: Confessions of an Abnormally Happy Childhood:*

> We rented a house on the beach by the Pacific. The house belonged to Rose Davies, Marion Davies's sister, and even though it was completely furnished it was somewhat hotelish, so Mother added the contents of the barrels and crates [of items she'd shipped west "to make Hollywood homey"], along with five lemon trees in wooden tubs and wall-to-wall carpets in every room. . . .
>
> Our rented house was always filled with people—old friends like Will and Betty Rogers and Jack Harkrider, and new ones who seemed to have stepped right off the screen into our living room—Norma Shearer

> and Janet Gaynor and Richard Barthelmess, and producers Irving Thalberg and Sam Goldwyn.

Minor passages both of these, the one from Billie Burke in 1949 and that from her daughter fifteen years later. Yet they're important ones, important links, never mind their shallowness—or in Patty's case the doubtful information about Rose Davies. Such words, any such words, are hard to come by in the early history of the Beach House. (For its authoritative part, the *Bay Cities Directory 1930–31* contains a surprise. It lists "Goldwyn Saml" as the occupant of 321 Palisades Beach Road.)

As to Hearst and Marion Davies, last seen at San Simeon in the fall of 1931, they relocated from there to Santa Monica by October 23, partly for the upcoming *Polly of the Circus,* wherein Clark Gable would play Reverend John Hartley opposite Marion's role as the trapeze artist Polly Fisher.

We can skip ahead to December 7, for which the Hearst Papers at The Bancroft Library have Joe Willicombe writing to Hearst's controller in Los Angeles with "Yesterday the Chief at the beach house pointed to the pier at Santa Monica and told me this":

> The end of that pier was washed away. It should be built out again to protect the beach along here. I think somehow or other the injunction [against doing so] can be dissolved, and if we put that 40 feet or more out on the end of the pier we will get quite a lot of sand and more beach [at 415 Ocean Front].

Willicombe asked that action be taken for everyone's sake.

A conspicuous departure from the quietude that marks this last part of 1931 was recounted in the *Los Angeles Times;* an article headed "'Christmas Gift' Deadly" appeared on Tuesday, December 22:

> A bomb containing a highly explosive powder, delivered as a Christmas gift to the home of Marion Davies, blond film actress in Santa Monica,

last night was in possession of the Sheriff's office, where it is said the explosive, had it been effectively discharged, would have killed or maimed the actress.

The bomb, investigators of the Sheriff's office learned, was delivered in the mail to the beach home of the actress last Thursday [the 17th] and was opened by Miss Davies's servants on Sunday. . . .

Black gunpowder and several small sacks of a high explosive, said by the officers to be guncotton in all probability, were found in the gold-plated gift box, in which a key was to have set off the charge.

The actress, questioned by officers at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, where she is making a picture [*Polly of the Circus*], said yesterday that she has no idea who sent her the bomb. She displayed nervousness and expressed fear that a plot against her life existed. A guard was placed at her Santa Monica residence by the Sheriff's office pending completion of the investigation.

The package containing the bomb was mailed from Malibu Beach, the postmark indicated. A note contained in the package bore the name: "Miss Smith, 415 Malibu Beach," and requested that: "Please, nobody else open this but Mary." The Malibu Beach address was a false one, officers said.

Miss Davies on Sunday [the 20th] ordered her butler, S. J. May, to open several Christmas gift packages which had arrived during the week, she told investigators. May took the package into the pantry of the residence and opened all but the one containing the bomb, which, when he attempted to turn the key, gave off an odor of smoke.

Shaking the gilded box, the butler dislodged a quantity of powder which burned when a match was applied to it. May called police. . . .

Miss Davies's servants and her secretary, a Miss [Ella] Williams, told the officers the actress has received many threatening letters, obviously the work of cranks, in recent weeks.

The *Times* had more on the case the next day, December 23. The bomb "was the work of an employee or other attaché of a Hollywood film studio," the paper reported:

> After an all-day investigation of circumstances surrounding the sending of the bomb, Inspector Lowe said he is convinced the paper covering was addressed on a typewriter used in film studios for the typing of subtitles on films, and that the gilded "gift box" containing the explosive was of the kind manufactured expressly for use as "props" in the production of films.
>
> "At the M.-G.-M. studios, where Miss Davies is under contract, we examined two such typewriters," Lowe said. "While both machines were found to be of the kind used in addressing the package to Miss Davies, neither of them proved to be the one which typed the address. Our next move will be an examination of such machines in every Hollywood studio, as few, if any, business offices use such typewriters.
>
> "It would have been a simple matter for anyone planning such an act to obtain the gilded box in a property room of a studio. We believe a man was the sender. A woman would not have constructed the ingenious bomb, and no woman would have wrapped it with the Christmas wrapping inside out, as was the case."

Although the report concluded by saying, "the Sheriff's office was conducting an investigation that resulted in two suspected persons being placed under surveil[l]ance," no further reports appeared in the *Times*.

Much more festively, Hearst and Marion made good on Billie Burke's future recounting of the parties given all along Ocean Front. They did so on New Year's Eve, a Thursday in 1931. With Marion's thirty-fifth birthday falling on Sunday, January 3, why not make a grand weekend of the occasion? They did so in staging their famous "kids" masquerade: Clark Gable as a Boy Scout, Joan Crawford as Shirley Temple, Marion as a little girl in a sun dress and matching bonnet. "The beauty of this party was that the costumes were inexpensive," said Louella Parsons in her gossip column.

Its beauty was also that with an entire weekend as a cushion, these were winter mornings in Santa Monica when, as Alice Head would have put it, everyone slept late.