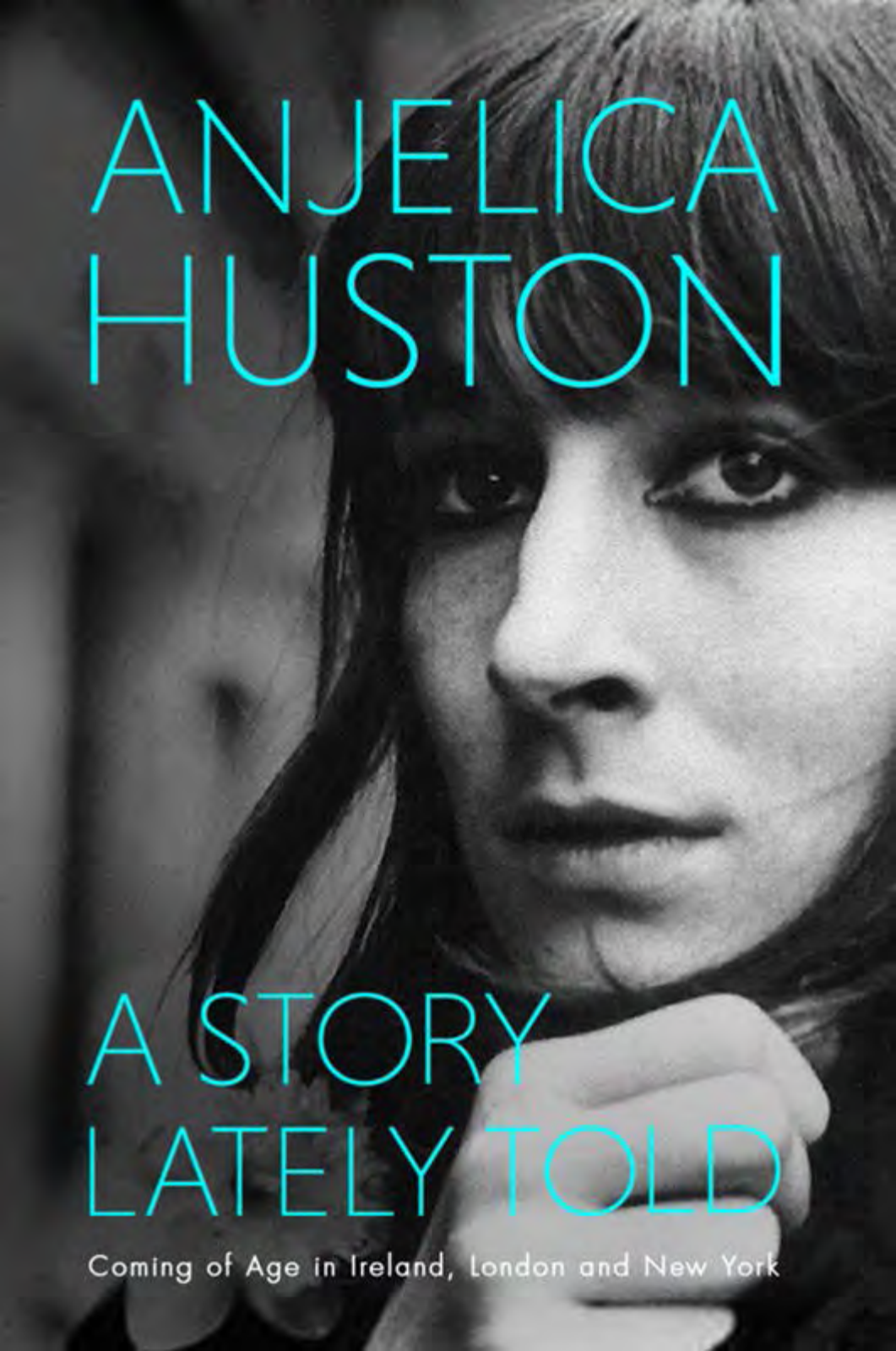
ANJELICA
HUSTON
A STORY
LATELY TOLD
Coming of Age in Ireland, London and New York

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ANJELICA HUSTON

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A CBS COMPANY

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For Mum and Dad

One for sorrow
Two for joy
Three for a wedding
Four for a boy
Five for silver
Six for gold
Seven for a story lately told

—Traditional children's nursery rhyme about magpies

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PROLOGUE

Anjelica in the yew tree at St. Clerans,
age seven

There was a shrine in my mother's bedroom when I was growing up. The built-in wardrobe had a mirror on the interior of both doors and a bureau inside, higher than I was, with an array of perfume bottles and small objects on the surface and a wall of burlap stretched above it. Pinned to the burlap was a collage of things she'd collected: pictures that she'd torn out

of magazines, poems, pomander balls, a fox's tail tied with a red ribbon, a brooch I'd bought her from Woolworth's that spelled "mother" in malachite, a photograph of Siobhán McKenna as St. Joan. Standing between the glass doors, I loved to look at her possessions, the mirrors reflecting me into infinity.

I was a lonely child. My brother Tony and I were never very close, neither as children nor as adults, but I was tightly bound to him. We were forced to be together because we were on our own. Although I knew he loved me, I always felt that Tony had it in for me, a bit, and that, a year older than I, he was always having to fight for what he had. We were in the middle of the Irish countryside, in County Galway, in the west of Ireland, and we didn't see many other kids. We were tutored, and my life was mostly fantasy—wishing that I were Catholic so that I could have a Holy Communion, and wearing my mother's tutus on the front lawn, hoping a husband would come along so that I might marry him.

I also spent quite a lot of time in front of the bathroom mirror. Nearby there was a stack of books. My favorites were *The Death of Manolete* and the cartoons of Charles Addams. I would pretend to be Morticia Addams. I was drawn to her. I used to pull my eyes back and see how I'd look with slanted eyelids. I liked Sophia Loren a lot. I'd seen pictures of her, and she was my ideal of female beauty at the time. Then I would pore over the photographs of the great bullfighter Manolete, dressed in his suit of lights, praying to the Madonna for her protection, taking the cape under his arm, preparing to enter the bullring. The solemnity, the ritual of the occasion, was tangible in the pictures. Then the terrible aftermath—Manolete gored in the groin, the blood black on the sand. It mystified me that even though he obviously had won the fight, there were also photo-

graphs illustrating the subsequent slaughter of the bull. I felt it was a gross injustice, and my heart wept for both the bull and Manolete.

I found that I could make myself cry, very easily. Tony began to question whether I wasn't using this ability to my advantage. I think he had a point. But for me, it was always about feeling. People often think that looking in the mirror is about narcissism. Children look at their reflection to see who they are. And they want to see what they can do with it, how plastic they can be, if they can touch their nose with their tongue, or what it looks like when they cross their eyes. There are a lot of things to do in the mirror apart from just feasting on a sense of one's physical beauty.

PART ONE

IRELAND

Tony Veiller, Anjelica and Mindy, Ricki with Shu-Shu,
Seamus, Joan Buck, John Huston, and Tony Huston
with Moses and Flash, the Big House lawn,
St. Clerans, Whitsun, 1962

CHAPTER 1

Ricki with Anjelica,
age three months, New York City

I was born at 6:29 P.M. on July 8, 1951, at the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, in Los Angeles. At eight pounds, thirteen ounces, I was a big, healthy baby. The news of my arrival was cabled promptly to the post office in the township of Butiaba in western Uganda. Two days later, a barefoot runner bearing a telegram finally arrived at Murchison Falls, a waterfall on the Nile, deep in the heart of the Belgian Congo, where *The African Queen* was being filmed.

My father, John Marcellus Huston, was a director renowned for his adventurous style and audacious nature. Even though it was considered foolhardy, he had persuaded not only Katharine Hepburn, an actress in her prime, but also Humphrey Bogart, who brought along his famously beautiful wife, the movie star Lauren Bacall, to share the hazardous journey. My mother, heavily pregnant, had stayed behind in Los Angeles with my one-year-old brother, Tony.

When the messenger handed the telegram to my father, he glanced at it, then put it in his pocket. Katie Hepburn exclaimed, "For God's sakes, John, what does it say?" and Dad replied, "It's a girl. Her name is Anjelica."

Dad was six feet two and long-legged, taller and stronger and with a more beautiful voice than anybody. His hair was salt-and-pepper; he had the broken nose of a boxer and a dramatic air about him. I don't remember ever seeing him run; rather, he ambled, or took long, fast strides. He walked loose-limbed and swaybacked, like an American, but dressed like an English gentleman: corduroy trousers, crisp shirts, knotted silk ties, jackets with suede elbows, tweed caps, fine custom-made leather shoes, and pajamas from Sulka with his initials on the pocket. He smelled of fresh tobacco and Guerlain's lime cologne. An omnipresent cigarette dangled from his fingers; it was almost an extension of his body. His tone was carefully unstudied and casual. His tastes were eclectic. At work he wore bush jackets and khakis, as if going to war.

Over the years, I've heard my father described as a Lothario, a drinker, a gambler, a man's man, more interested in killing big game than in making movies. It is true that he was extravagant and opinionated. But Dad was complicated, self-educated for

the most part, inquisitive, and well read. Not only women but men of all ages fell in love with my father, with that strange loyalty and forbearance men reserve for one another. They were drawn to his wisdom, his humor, his magnanimous power; they considered him a lion, a leader, the pirate they wished they had the audacity to be. Although there were few who commanded his attention, Dad liked to admire other men, and he had a firm regard for artists, athletes, the titled, the very rich, and the very talented. Most of all, he loved characters, people who made him laugh and wonder about life.

Dad always said he wanted to be a painter but was never going to be great at it, which was why he became a director. He was born in Nevada, Missouri, on August 5, 1906, the only child of Rhea Gore and Walter Huston. His mother's side of the family was of English and Welsh descent. Rhea's grandfather William Richardson had been a general in the Civil War as well as attorney general of the state of Ohio, and had lost an arm at Chancellorsville. A silver sword presented to him by his regiment was later passed down to my brother Tony. William's daughter, Adelia, had married a prospector, John Gore, who started up several newspapers from Kansas to New York. A cowboy, a settler, a saloon owner, a judge, a professional gambler, and a confirmed alcoholic, he once won the town of Nevada in a poker game.

After Rhea was born, in 1881, Adelia became the editor of one of John Gore's publications, but she had already decided she would have to leave him. Sent to a convent school, Rhea consequently underwent a spiritual crisis, having made a pact with God to sacrifice her life so that her parents might continue to live together.

As a young woman, Rhea, like her parents, was drawn to

journalism. She began writing freelance newspaper articles in St. Louis and was able to obtain free passes to shows and plays as a reviewer. When a show called *The Sign of the Cross* came to town, she went backstage to interview the leading man, Wilson Barrett. She noticed someone who appeared to be an older actor, wearing a full beard and carrying a staff, but with the air of a much younger man. It was Thanksgiving a few days later when she returned to the lobby of her hotel, feeling alone in the world, and fell into conversation with a young man wearing red slippers. He told her that his name was Walter and that he was an actor. He explained that his mother had made the slippers for him, and invited Rhea to dinner. She wrote afterward, "Had it not been for a pair of red crocheted slippers, things would undoubtedly not be what they are today—their laces have tangled my life and knotted my heart strings in a way that cannot be undone."

Walter was born in Toronto in 1884, the fourth child of Elizabeth McGibbon and Robert Houghston. His family, of Scotch-Irish descent, were educators, engineers, and lawyers. Elizabeth's mother was a schoolteacher, and Robert's father, Alexander, was a pioneer who had settled in Ontario, Canada. Walter was an indifferent student, but early on displayed a passion for the variety shows at the Shea Theater. He and his best friend and older cousin, Archie, were inspired to create their own shows in the basement of Walter's house. Walter's sister, Margaret Carrington, was a gifted opera singer, credited with being the first person in America to sing Debussy.

After several attempts at conventional jobs, Walter and Archie earned enough money to enroll in acting school, then joined a traveling theater troupe. Although they rarely received a salary, they loved the life and decided to jump a boxcar on a

freight train to New York. They were seventeen years old and ready to hit the big time.

Constant auditioning in New York soon paid off: both boys began to get small parts in plays, and Walter met the character actor William H. Thompson, who gave him "a whole approach to acting."

When Walter joined the touring company of *The Sign of the Cross* and performed in St. Louis, he encountered "a little girl, full of energy and everything pertaining to the arts." She didn't laugh at his slippers. Rhea was a petite five feet four, a horsewoman, a smoker, and a sports reporter. Walter and Rhea got married in secret on the last day of the year 1904, after knowing each other only a week. Rhea wore a black veil and an ill-fitting dress that she tried to cover up with her bridal bouquet for the pictures.

My father's first memory was of riding in front of his mother on a black horse over cobblestones. She loved a challenge, and Dad said she was better with animals than with people. Walter and Rhea separated when Dad was six, and he spent his early years in boarding schools. On holidays, he would travel with his father on the vaudeville circuit and with his mother to the racetracks and ballparks.

In 1917, Dad was misdiagnosed with an enlarged heart and Bright's disease, a sometimes fatal kidney ailment. Rhea moved him to the desert climate of Arizona, where he was confined to his bed for nearly two years. In that condition, unable to leave his room, he invented stories. He also had started to draw and paint, which he did for the rest of his life.

A later, more accurate diagnosis allowed Dad to escape his detention, and he moved with his mother from Arizona to Los Angeles, where he acquired a serious interest in boxing. After school, he often took a long bus ride across town to watch the

matches at the Olympic Auditorium. Encouraged by a friend who shared his enthusiasm for the sport, Dad took boxing lessons at a city playground and eventually won a Lincoln Heights High School championship in his weight division and twenty-three out of twenty-five boxing-club matches. He dropped out of high school two years early, hoping to become a professional fighter, but his growing passion for writing, painting, and theater soon pulled him in other directions.

When Dad was eighteen, he reunited in New York with Walter, who was working on Broadway. Watching his father on the stage would provide him with the best education on the mechanics of acting, and enabled him to obtain a few small roles. When Dad underwent mastoid surgery that winter, Walter thought it would be best for him to go somewhere warm to recover. He gave Dad five hundred dollars and sent him to Vera Cruz, Mexico, for a couple of months. It was post-revolution, and the streets were filled with beggars and outlaws.

After taking a train to Mexico City, a journey made all the more exciting by the constant threat of ambush by bandits, Dad moved into the Hotel Genova, a former hacienda. Through its manager, a woman called Mrs. Porter, who had a glass eye and a wooden leg and wore a wig, he met Hattie Weldon, who ran the finest riding establishment in the city. Hattie introduced him to Colonel José Olimbrada, a soldier in the Mexican army who specialized in dressage. Because Dad was running short on money, Olimbrada suggested that he take an honorary position in the cavalry and have his choice of the best horses in Mexico to ride. By now he was running with a dangerous crowd, and soon Rhea arrived to persuade him to return to California, threatening that Walter would cut off the supply of money if he did not comply with her wishes.

Once talkies began in Hollywood, Walter Huston came into his own as a film actor. His first major role was opposite Gary Cooper in *The Virginian.* He would go on to become a great character actor and leading man, starring on stage and screen for the next twenty years. He portrayed Dodsworth on Broadway and appeared in the movie adaptation, in addition to acting in films such as *Abraham Lincoln, Rain, The Devil and Daniel Webster,* and *Yankee Doodle Dandy.* He had a beautiful voice and was famous for his rendition of "September Song," from the musical *Knickerbocker Holiday.*

Although Walter helped Dad get writing jobs on two films he was starring in, *A House Divided* and *Law and Order,* Dad's first few years in Hollywood were disappointing to him not only as a writer but in other ways as well. There was a marriage in 1925 to a girl he'd known in high school, Dorothy Harvey, that lasted only a year. Then in 1933 his career came to a halt when a car he was driving struck and killed a young woman who darted out into the street. Dad was absolved but traumatized, and left for Paris and London, where he became a drifter, down and out, playing harmonica for change in Hyde Park. After five years in Europe, during which he took the time to reassess his life, he returned to Hollywood, intent on making it.

In 1937 he married Lesley Black, an English girl whom he described as "a gentlewoman" in his autobiography, *An Open Book.* He divorced Black in 1946, when he was forty years old, and made Evelyn Keyes, the actress who played the sister of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind,* his third wife, on a spur-of-the-moment trip to Las Vegas after a vodka-fueled dinner at Romanoff's.

When the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began its intimidating interrogations in Hollywood in 1947, at the outset of the Communist witch hunts, Dad, with the writer Philip Dunne, formed the Committee for the First Amendment and, alongside a group of other well-known artists, such as Gene Kelly, Humphrey Bogart, Billy Wilder, Burt Lancaster, Judy Garland, and Edward G. Robinson, bought space in the trade papers to argue that the hearings were unconstitutional.

For several years following, many innocent people suffered as a result of having been labeled Communist supporters, even though many of them, including Dad, had never had an affiliation with the party. This experience fired his interest in working and living outside the United States.

In 1947, Dad directed Walter in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre,* for which they both won Academy Awards.

My mother, Enrica Georgia Soma, was a ballet dancer before Tony and I were born. She was five feet eight and finely made. She had translucent skin, dark hair to her shoulders parted in the middle, and the expression of a Renaissance Madonna, a look both wise and naïve. She had a small waist, full hips and strong legs, graceful arms, delicate wrists, and beautiful hands with long, tapering fingers. To this day, my mother's face is the loveliest in my memory—her high cheekbones and wide forehead; the arc of her eyebrows over her eyes, gray-blue as slate; her mouth in repose, the lips curving in a half smile. To her friends, she was Ricki.

She was the daughter of a self-proclaimed yogi, Tony Soma, who owned an Italian restaurant called Tony's Wife on West Fifty-second Street in New York, where all of Broadway would come, including the Nelson Rockefellers, Frank Sinatra, and

Mario Lanza. Grandpa would teach them all how to sing. Ricki's mother, Angelica Fantoni, who had been an opera singer in Milan, died of pneumonia when Ricki was four. That broke Grandpa's heart. But he took a second wife, Dorothy Fraser, whom we called Nana, a pleasant, no-nonsense woman who raised my mother under a strict regime. Grandpa was dictatorial and prone to aphorisms such as "There's no intelligence without the tongue!" or "Through the knowledge of me, I wish to share my happiness with you!" When we visited, he liked to have us stand on our heads and sing "Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day." Then he would continue on with a few arias.

Tony's Wife had the warm, genteel atmosphere of Northern Italy in its dark wood, red carpeting, flocked wallpaper, and photographs of Grandpa in a bow tie posing on his head with various Hollywood luminaries. Off to the right, my uncle Nappy, in a sky-blue blazer, shaking up martinis behind the mirrored bar, bathed in a pink light. In the back of the restaurant were the kitchens, which I visited a few times with Grandpa, to see the pots boiling and the steaks sizzling, men in white shouting at one another through the steam.

The family lived upstairs in an apartment, which felt disconnected from the restaurant. It was quiet and dark with uneven carpeted floors. In the living room there was a piano with sheet music from which Nana played each morning for Grandpa to sing while he stood on his head. He claimed to have married Nana on the basis of her talent as an accompanist.

Grandpa also had a summer house, in Miller Place, a hamlet on the north shore of Long Island. Grandpa had great reverence for the foundations of the English language and spent long hours in his round blue mosaic tub meditating on a dictionary

in a bathroom atop his shingled two-story house, overlooking steep bluffs and the Sound below. When you ran down to the beach, the sand made an avalanche at your heels.

Philip was my mother's one full sibling. Angelica and Tony's first child, who had been called George, died as a baby. When my grandfather remarried, Dorothy gave birth to a girl and two boys—Linda, Nappy, and Fraser. Nappy was named after Napoleon, because Grandpa claimed to have Corsican blood running through his veins and thought he was a descendant of the great emperor. They all lived in the apartment above the restaurant.

Occasionally, Grandpa would have Ricki come downstairs to greet the guests, some of whom were likely to be show people—Tony's Wife had become a speakeasy for a time and had remained a favorite stopover among the Hollywood set ever since. One evening, my father walked in and was met by a beautiful fourteen-year-old girl. She told him that she wanted to be the world's finest ballerina and described how she wore out her ballet shoes, making her toes bleed. When he asked her if she went to the ballet often, she said, "Well, no," unfortunately, she couldn't. It was difficult, she explained, because she was expected to write a four-page essay for her father every time she went. So Dad said, "I'll tell you what. I'll take you to the ballet, and you won't have to write an essay. How about that?"

But Dad was called away to war. As he later told the story, quite romantically, he'd intended to hire a carriage, buy Ricki a corsage, and make it an event. Four years later, sitting at a dinner table at the producer David Selznick's house in Los Angeles, he found himself placed beside a beautiful young woman. He turned to her and introduced himself: "We haven't met. My name is John Huston." And she replied, "Oh, but we have. You

stood me up once." My mother hadn't seen him since she was fourteen. Having studied under George Balanchine and danced on Broadway for Jerome Robbins, Mum had been the youngest member to join the best dance company in the nation, Ballet Theatre, which later became American Ballet Theatre. Now, at eighteen, she was under contract to David Selznick, and her photograph had been published on the June 9, 1947, cover of *Life* magazine. Philippe Halsman had come to photograph the company's prima ballerina but had chosen to take my mother's picture instead. In the photo spread inside the magazine, she was likened to the *Mona Lisa*—they shared that secret smile.