

*Searching
for John
Wayne*

AMERICAN TITAN

MARC ELIOT

New York Times bestselling author



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Searching for John Wayne

MARC ELIOT

Dedication

For Lily

Epigraph

It's just like I always said, that John Wayne, an actor, was more important to the mass psyche than any single American president. His longevity, his penetration—all of that ultimately has affected how human beings behave, what choices they make, who they think they are, more than any straight pragmatic political action and groupthink.

—**Jack Nicholson, *Vanity Fair*, August 1986**

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Prologue

“If I’d known that, I would have put that patch on thirty-five years earlier.”

—John Wayne

On April 7, 1970, the night of the forty-second presentation of the Academy Awards, Hollywood’s annual celebration of industrial-strength narcissism, film’s elite gathered at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in downtown Los Angeles to honor the pictures, actors, directors, cinematographers, screenwriters, and other skilled artists and technicians that were chosen by the Academy’s voting members as the “best” of the previous year.

John Wayne, nominated for his performance in Henry Hathaway’s *True Grit*, faced strong competition: Richard Burton in Charles Jarrott’s *Anne of the Thousand Days*, a star vehicle for the hugely popular Burton and the odds-on favorite in Vegas; Dustin Hoffman for his scarily brilliant work in John Schlesinger’s blistering *Midnight Cowboy*; Jon Voight in the same film for his poignant depiction of innocence corrupted; and the magnificent Peter O’Toole sorrowfully wasted in the cringe-worthy, no-chance musical version of *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, directed by Herbert Ross.

Three significant events took place that evening. The first was the official acceptance of late-bloomer Jack Nicholson into the Hollywood mainstream, who would go on to dominate it for the rest of the twentieth century and into the first decade of the twenty-first. He was nominated in the category of Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role, for his portrayal of the sympathetic, charming, and exceedingly vulnerable Hanson, a relatively small role that not only yielded an utterly unforgettable performance but signaled a cultural shift in American movies’ image of who and what a hero was.

The second was the awarding of a noncompetition, honorary Academy Award to Cary Grant, one of the giants of the industry’s golden age. Grant’s film career began in 1932 and lasted until 1966, when, still at the top of his game, he wisely chose to retire from the industry and go out on top. Now, four years later, he was finally being recognized for his remarkable accomplishment in helping to establish the iconic image of the romantic Hollywood leading man. It was hard to believe that Grant, who had appeared in so many films for many of Hollywood’s greatest directors (some greater than others, but most arguably made their best films with him), among them Alfred Hitchcock, George Cukor, Howard Hawks, Frank Capra, Leo McCarey, Stanley Donen, and Michael Curtiz, had never been officially acknowledged by his peers with a competitive Oscar. Grant, who was considered a troublemaker by the major studios because of his insistence on going freelance in an age of contract players, the first to do so and the first to pay for his freedom by being refused a real Oscar, was reduced to tears when, late in life, he finally received his honorary statuette.

The third, and perhaps most fascinating, was the competitive Best Performance by an Actor Oscar that John Wayne won for his self-parodic performance as Rooster Cogburn. Of the 164 movies he made in his long and brilliant career, including the twenty-four he did with John Ford, *True Grit* is perhaps the least Oscar-worthy in terms of pure cinema. However, for his long-overdue recognition—17 of the films he appeared in were among the 100 highest-grossing films of all time, collectively grossing more than \$400,000,000 (in twentieth-century dollars), and since 1951 he had consistently placed among the top ten box-office stars—this was the one Hollywood chose to acknowledge Wayne’s great contribution to American movies.

His astonishing body of work, those 164 movies over a fifty-year span, where he upheld not just the law of the land but “the American way,” defined him as Hollywood’s definitive Indian-fighting (and later on Indian-defending), two-fisted, six-gunned, wagon-trained, swinging-bar-doored, maiden-preserving, democracy-defending all-American hero, the most enduring on-screen symbol of the vanishing prairie. And, although he was never in the military, he fought America’s enemies in World War II with patriotic propaganda films that came complete with recruiting stations set up in theater lobbies. He was an avowed enemy of Communism and especially American Communists. At the height of his career, he set about to rid Hollywood of both and did a fairly effective job. However, by age sixty-three, with the wear, the tear, the weariness on his craggy face, with cobra eyes that looked almost Asian, and the sagging body of a Hollywood life ridden hard and put away wet, he was considered passé by Hollywood’s young ’70s honchos, some not yet even born when Wayne made some of his best movies.

He had been nominated twice before, once as an actor in 1949 for Best Actor in Allan Dwan’s no-frills war movie *Sands of Iwo Jima*, when he lost to Broderick Crawford in Robert Rossen’s neopolitical *All the King’s Men* (a role Wayne turned down because he disliked the film’s political message), and once as producer (Best Picture/Batjac, his own production company) in 1960, for his post-Disney “adult” version of the classic story of *The Alamo*, which he also directed. Wayne lost that time to producer/director Billy Wilder for *The Apartment*.

Why was Wayne perennially passed over? For one thing, he made enemies in the industry where many never forgave him for his politics, and because of it, some of his greatest performances, like Ethan Edwards in John Ford’s *The Searchers*, were famously ignored by the voters of the Academy. Made during the height of the blacklist, *The Searchers* provides not just the best performance in any Hollywood film of 1956, but one of the greatest performances in any film anytime, anyplace, anywhere. Five years earlier, Stanley Kramer’s monumental *High Noon*, a western written and coproduced by blacklisted Carl Foreman, was nominated for eight Oscars and won four, including Best Actor for Wayne’s friendly rival for most of their careers, Gary Cooper. Why? Perhaps part of the reason is that Wayne was the former president of the radical-right Motion Picture Alliance, begun by Walt Disney, Sam Wood, and others in the early ’40s, the tea-party-style posse of a politically divided Hollywood that helped ruin the careers of some of its best talent (and biggest moneymakers), including Foreman. In 1971, an unrepentant Wayne told *Playboy* magazine, “I’ll never regret having helped run Foreman out of this country.” It was not hard to tell which side the Academy was on.

But it wasn't only politics. As larger than life as he was for audiences, to the Hollywood studios that employed him and the voting Academy members, Wayne was, almost to the end of his career, considered a glorified B movie actor, his films never considered "quality" or "art," certainly not worthy of Oscar. The studio book on Wayne was that he was just another Hollywood cowboy, that he didn't have the emotional range of a Jimmy Stewart, the gritty elegance of a Spencer Tracy, the spitting toughness of a Humphrey Bogart, the street smarts of a Jimmy Cagney, the beautiful pain of a Marlon Brando, the urban cynicism of a William Holden, or the inherent populism of a Henry Fonda, all Oscar winners. He was just *there*, Hollywood's unanointed Duke, as dependable as oats. Yet, as film critic and historian Andrew Sarris, promulgator of American auteurism, rightly acknowledged on the occasion of Wayne's *True Grit* nomination, his "forty years of movie acting and thirty years of damn good movie acting . . . Wayne's performances for John Ford alone are worth all the Oscars passed out to the likes of George Arliss, Warner Baxter, Lionel Barrymore, Paul Lukas, Broderick Crawford, Jose Ferrer, Ernest Borgnine, Yul Brynner and David Niven . . . ironically, Wayne has become a legend by not being legendary."

And after Wayne's Oscar win, Sarris explained his special appeal: "I remember responding to him in a relatively uncomplicated way though he seldom functioned as a conventional hero. He could be accursed or obsessed . . . And on many other occasions the characters he played faced a twilight existence of loneliness and dependency . . . Wayne's most enduring image, however, is that of the displaced loner vaguely uncomfortable with the very civilization he is helping to establish and preserve . . . At his first appearance we usually sense a very private person with some wound, loss, or grievance from the past."

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE OSCARS, Wayne was on location in Old Tucson, Arizona, shooting *Rio Lobo*, the third and weakest film of a trilogy of late-career westerns for Wayne directed by Howard Hawks. When his day's filming was finished, Wayne flew in his private plane to LAX, where he was met by a limo and driven directly to the Beverly Hills Hotel. His third wife, Peruvian-born Pilar Pallete, and their three children, Aissa, fourteen, John Ethan, eight, and Marisa, three, were already there, waiting for him.¹ They had arrived earlier in the day and checked into two of the hotel's exclusive private bungalows, one for Wayne and Pilar and one for the kids. A bungalow over was an already sloshed Richard Burton and his wife, the equally inebriated Elizabeth Taylor.

Wayne and Pilar spent a quiet night together, and the next morning he was driven alone downtown to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion to rehearse for that evening's big event. His arrival drew the biggest reaction so far from the fans already filling in the bleachers on either side of the red carpet, some arriving at daybreak to catch a glimpse of their favorite stars. They didn't stop screaming, mostly positively, for Wayne from the time he emerged from the limo until he passed through the private entranceway of the Pavilion. Someone in the bleachers held up a sign that read JOHN WAYNE IS A RACIST. If he saw it, he showed no visible reaction.

After being made up in his dressing room and running through his paces—where to

go, where to stand, what hand to use to accept the statuette if he won, which side of the stage to exit—there were still a couple of hours to go before showtime. He lingered backstage, an informal schmooze space for nominees and friends, to see who else had arrived. Fueled now with drink, he told all the stars there who were interested, and the few who weren't, that he didn't think he had any chance in the world of winning. For one thing, he went on, he was too old, that the Academy preferred younger winners to keep bringing new audiences to the movies. For another, in a Hollywood that was making *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy*, his films had gone out of fashion.

He hated both of those pictures. Their drug-taking, antiestablishment themes, and, to him, glorification of homosexuality were all the proof he needed that he and his MPA gang had won the political battle against Hollywood's "Commies" but had lost the moral war. *Easy Rider* was "perverted" and *Midnight Cowboy* "a love story about two fags . . ." And what did *Midnight Cowboy* have to do with anything about cowboys anyway? Always polite, when Wayne ran into Dustin Hoffman backstage he graciously told him that he enjoyed his performance in the film.

As for his own in *True Grit*, it was, as far as he was concerned, essentially the same character he'd played since John Ford's 1939 *Stagecoach* some thirty years earlier, the only difference being that he was older. They hadn't given him an Oscar for that one, and he figured they wouldn't give it to him now.

There were two more rehearsals, for lights, cameras, and sound. By 2:00 in the afternoon, as the dancers, techies, camera operators, lighting focusers, and stage managers with earphones and clipboards crisscrossed the stage, Wayne found himself alone in the crowd. His mood brightened at six when Pilar arrived. She had left the kids with a sitter at the hotel thoughtfully provided by the Academy, which frowned upon children backstage during the big night. He saw her and smiled, the familiar grin that buried his eyes inside a squint and spread out and flattened his thin-lipped face. He swooped Pilar up in his arms the way he once famously had Maureen O'Hara in John Ford's 1952 *The Quiet Man*, and the young Natalie Wood in Ford's 1956 *The Searchers*, and carried her that way back to his private dressing room. He poured them each a drink as they patiently waited for the stage manager to knock on his door, open it halfway without looking in, call "places," and shut it behind him.

The telecast began promptly at 7:00 Eastern Standard Time. The live TV show opened with a filmed montage of Hollywood's greatest all-time stars, after which Gregory Peck marched onstage, his eyes ringed with glasses, and in his stentorian voice introduced each of that night's nominees, as they walked out and took a bow.

Wayne received the loudest ovation.

The last to take the stage was the show's honorary host, Bob Hope (there was no single official host that year), wearing a patch over one eye to spoof Wayne's performance as Rooster Cogburn in *True Grit*. The audience roared. It was the best indication yet that Wayne might at last win his longed-for and long overdue Oscar.

Wayne took Pilar to their seats on the aisle down front. Like all the major category nominees and their spouses or dates, they were placed close to the stage, the lesser ones put farther back. As the ceremonies rambled on, Glen Campbell, one of Wayne's costars, came out to sing the film's theme, "True Grit," one of the evening's five songs nominated as "Best." Campbell finished to a smattering of applause that sounded louder on TV than it did live, Wayne's cue to quietly slip backstage and prepare for his

entrance as a presenter for Best Cinematography.

When he walked out this time, he received a standing ovation and waited for the audience to quiet down before he spoke. "I'm an American actor," he said. "I work with my clothes on." A few giggles, a bit of applause. No one was quite sure in this era when it had become fashionable for actresses to "go nude" in mainstream films where he was going with that. His comic timing was, as always, less than perfect. "I have to. Horses are rough on your legs and your elsewheres." Ah. Laughter sprinkled throughout the house. He then opened the envelope and announced the winner, Conrad Hall, for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Soon after he presented the golden statuette to Hall, the two left together, stage right. During a commercial break in the action, Wayne was escorted back to his seat.

Almost at the end of the four-hour-plus marathon, it was after eleven in New York, well beyond prime time, the Best Actor award was finally presented. The winner of the previous year's Best Actress Oscar, Barbra Streisand, handed it out. Streisand, sparkling in pink, after smiling and flitting around the stage in a grand star sweep, read the names of the nominees. Only three were actually present, and each had a TV camera trained on him. Jon Voight was standing in the wings, Richard Burton was in his seat looking supremely uninterested. Wayne, seated not far away from Burton, squeezed Pilar's hand. Babs teased the audience by opening the envelope as slowly as possible, looking at the name, and then saying, "I'm not going to tell you!" A light rumble of impatience rippled through the audience before she belted out in show-stopping ballad mode "*JOHN WAYNE IN 'TRUE GRIT'!*"

He bolted out of his seat, propelled as much by shock as glee. He unbuttoned his jacket as he walked briskly to the stage, no sign of his famous, oft-parodied pigeon-toed small-step gait. Standing at the microphone, he looked a bit heavy, his unnaturally brown toupee sitting on his head like a muskrat, giving Wayne's face an oddly unnatural box shape. He kissed Streisand lightly on the cheek without looking at her as she handed him his award, and then let out a breath-filled "Wow" filled with a lifetime of hopes, dreams, frustrations, and accomplishments. He lightly wiped a line of sweat from below his right eye with the knuckle of a bent forefinger and said, "If I'd known that, I would have put that patch on thirty-five years earlier." He waited for the genuine laughter to die down, then continued. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm no stranger to this podium. I've come up here and picked up these beautiful gold men before, but always for friends. One night I picked up two—one for Admiral John Ford and one for our beloved Gary Cooper. I was very clever and witty that night, the envy even of Bob Hope, but tonight I don't feel very clever, very witty. I feel very grateful and very humble, and owe thanks to many many people. I want to thank the members of the Academy; to all you people who are watching on television, thank you for taking such a warm interest in our glorious industry. Good night."

That was it. Short and sweet, no long and meaningless list of people to thank that nobody knew or cared about. As he stepped away from the mike, the music came up and Streisand, who had been standing behind and to the left, took him by the arm, and led him off stage right, to a career's worth of resounding applause.

After, Wayne spent two hours patiently answering questions for the press and posing for the paparazzi, with and without Pilar. Then they were off to the traditional Governor's Ball, the most prestigious party of the night. They didn't get back to the

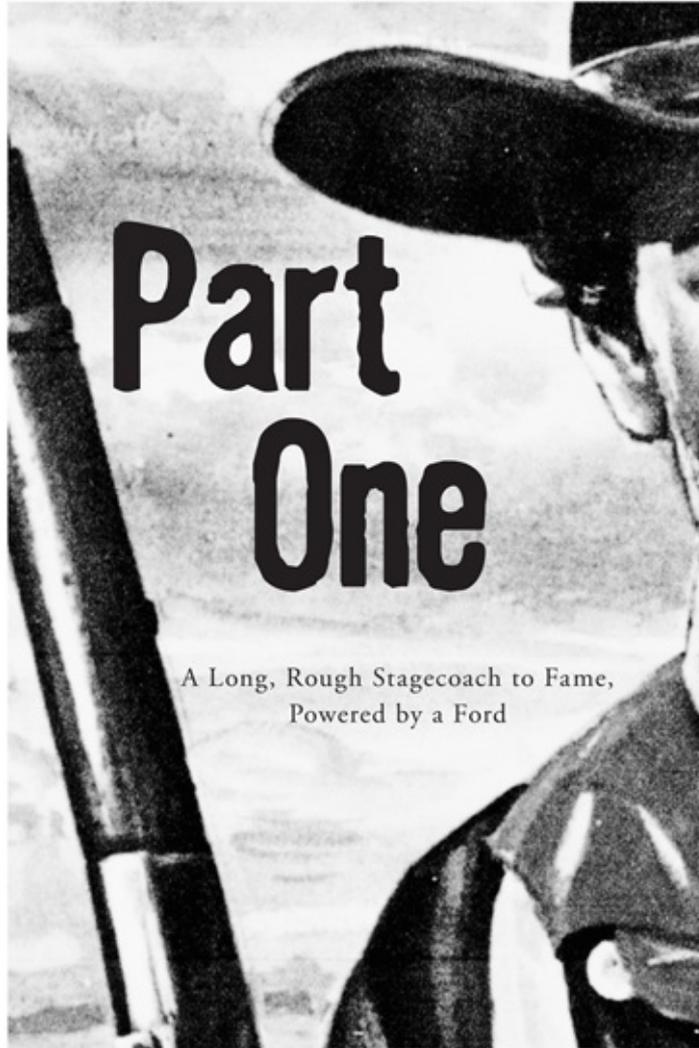
Beverly Hills until nearly one A.M.

Burton, meanwhile, empty-handed, had left immediately after the ceremonies with Taylor, and the two went straight back to the hotel, skipping all the parties, preferring to be alone, where they could drink, piss, bitch at, and moan to each other.

A little after one o'clock in the morning a pounding came on the Burtons' door. When neither one opened it, fear washing over them in this era of Charles Manson paranoia, Wayne, alone now and completely wasted, kicked it in as easily as if it were a stage prop. A stunned and frightened Burton and Taylor clutched at each other as they stared at him in silent disbelief. A grim-looking Wayne walked over to Burton, held out his Oscar stiff-armed like he was ready to tackle someone with it, and said, slowly, in that each-word-is-a-sentence style of his, "You should have this, not me."

After that, the mood changed. All three stayed up the rest of the night, drinking nearly 'til dawn, schmoozing and laughing and telling stories, along the way Burton confessing he was certain he would never win an Oscar, Wayne assuring him his day would come (it never did).

The next morning Wayne and Pilar and the children were driven to the airport for the flight back to Old Tucson. Playtime was over and for Wayne there were still a few more miles of film to shoot before he slept.



Chapter 1

Robert Morrison was born in 1782, the newest addition to the John Morrison British-Scottish-Irish clan of Counties Antrim and Donegal. While still a teenager, young Robert became active in the Free Irishman Movement that was opposed to the rule of the British Crown. Later on, when a warrant was issued for his arrest that would have certainly meant imprisonment and execution, he and the rest of the Morrisons hurriedly gathered their belongings and, in the black cover of the night, boarded a freighter bound for America.

They arrived in New York in 1799 and, still fearing the long reach of British justice and its East Coast thug enforcers, continued west, following along the rivers and trails of Ohio, Kentucky, and Illinois before settling in Iowa, where they believed they were safe at last. Robert became a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church and a brigadier general in the Ohio militia. He married and had a son named Marion—an Old French derivative for Mary or Marie, used by the British and Irish for males since medieval times—who fought in the Civil War and was wounded in the Battle of Pine Bluff.

Marion's son was the outgoing and ambitious Clyde Morrison, who attended the University of Iowa, in Iowa City, to earn a degree in pharmacy. He hoped to start a practice in Des Moines, which was still mostly farm country, and although Clyde had never worked a yard of land in his life, he figured all these farmers, and their wives and children, would need medicine and family supplies. Marion was not just smart; he was big and strong enough to make the university's all-star football team.

He had another, perhaps more surprising talent. "Doc," as everyone called him, possessed a deep and sonorous singing voice. Whenever he was asked to at the university's social gatherings, and even sometimes when he wasn't, he loved to break into song. If slightly annoying in its arrogant braggadocio, there was also something undoubtedly charming about a big, handsome, hulking athlete who loved to sing.

At one such university social gathering, a diminutive, vivacious blue-eyed redhead named Mary (Marion) Brown, sometimes called Molly, heard the tall, husky Doc perform, was charmed and, despite being pursued by all the handsomest and well-set young men at the college and in town, decided he was the one she was going to marry.

She made a plan.

In August 1906, at an especially intimate moment, she politely informed Clyde she was pregnant.

Because he was about to become a father, Doc had dropped out of the university, and before Mary started showing, he decided it might be best to relocate with her to Winterset, Iowa, the county seat and a robust farming community with a population of 17,770, forty-five miles southwest of Des Moines. There, Doc believed, he'd have a good chance of finding real work even without a degree. Soon after they settled in, they were married that September. The officiating was done by the Justice of the Peace

at the Civil Hall rather than by a preacher at the local church. On May 26, 1907, Mary gave birth at home to a big baby boy, thirteen-pound Marion Robert Morrison; big babies ran in the Morrison family genes. Marion was named after his grandfather, who was in turn named after his grandfather, and his mother, Mary.

Doc took a job as a pharmaceutical clerk, a “pill-pounder” in M. E. Smith’s, Winterset’s only drugstore. The work was menial, the pay reflected it, and it was difficult for Doc to provide Mary the lifestyle she had dreamed of. It took three long years, but by 1910, Doc had managed to save enough money for a down payment on his own drugstore in nearby Earlham, where they moved as soon as his pharmacy was ready to open for business. Doc hired one pharmacist, business boomed, and soon enough he could afford to hire a second, and contractors to build a two-story Victorian house not too far from the store. On Sundays, his day off, he proudly drove Mary and the baby around town in their new fancy one-horse carriage, pulled by Sadie, the family’s beloved steed.

Everybody in town knew and liked Doc. They affectionately called him the town philosopher, for his broad smile and good nature. However, despite the outward appearances of affluence and harmony, the relationship between Doc and Mary had been a rocky one even before they tied the knot, and now Mary’s material demands didn’t help any; still, Doc worked hard to provide for his family. He lavished expensive gifts on Mary, believing he could afford it because business was good at the pharmacy. He didn’t know much about running a retail operation. To Doc, cash flow meant success. And whenever he was flush with it, he was an easy touch for every sob story that came through the front door. As young Marion later remembered, “He couldn’t pay his bills because he hated to press his customers to pay their bills.”

Mary announced she was pregnant again, but despite her “condition,” she took over the bookkeeping, and the business’s margin of profit slowly improved, but it was soon apparent to her that it was too expensive to run and would never be able to break even. Five years after Marion’s birth and two years after they had relocated to Earlham, the pharmacy that had once held such financial promise failed. On December 30, 1911, only a year after Doc had opened the store with such grand vision and hopes, and one day after their new baby was born—another healthy, but not as big a boy, who didn’t rip up Mary’s insides the way Marion had, who came forth with the help of a local midwife—the Morrisons were forced into bankruptcy.

For a while, Doc worked as a clerk for the new owner, eking out a living. Almost in the next breath, though, Mary kicked Doc out of the small house they were now renting and told him not to come back until he had a real job. His search for more lucrative employment led him to Keokuk, at the southeastern end of the state. There he could only find menial work, but the hard truth was that for all intents and purposes, he and Mary had separated.

In his absence, Mary raised the two boys by herself. The second boy she named Robert Emmett Morrison. Robert was her favorite name, and she had always called Marion Bobby, until her second baby was born. She then gave him Marion’s middle name and had his birth certificate changed from Marion Robert Morrison to Marion Michael Morrison, so that there would be no confusion between the two boys.

Her newest baby was also her favorite. Mary believed he was destined for greatness. The fawning favoritism she showered on Robert instigated a lifelong sibling rivalry

between the two sons. From the start, young Marion wanted to be his mother's favorite but knew it would never happen. It turned the boy distant and sullen. According to Pilar Wayne, "The happiest part of Duke's childhood ended the day his brother was born."

His missing father, whose presence would have likely been the solution to Marion's emotional conflict, made the turbulence that grew out of this Oedipal conflict worse. Marion's jealousy of his younger brother continued to cause problems between the two boys until one day with no advance warning Mary packed up Marion's things and shipped the boy off to Keokuk to live with his father. Marion had no complaints. Doc's presence more than made up for the separation from his mother and helped to restore some stability to the psychological merry-go-round he had had to endure.

IT WAS ALWAYS DIFFICULT FOR Marion to make new friends with a name like that. Despite his size, the other children at school picked on him because of it. In the local schoolyard they wanted to know why he had a girl's name, if he really was a girl, if he had snuck out of his house wearing boys' clothes instead of girls'. How, they asked, tauntingly, could anyone with a girl's name be a real boy? Marion decided the way to stop the teasing was to punch the biggest boy, the leader of the bullies. He did, got beaten up by the others, and came home covered in blood.

Doc was naturally strong and athletic but not a tough guy, a charmer rather than a fighter. He had taken up boxing as a teenager and after he cleaned the boy up, he showed him a few moves. Doc quickly realized that his boy had a natural athleticism about him that led Doc to dream that one day Marion would honor the family by attending Annapolis and playing football for the Naval Academy. But he also wanted his boy to grow up morally straight; otherwise Annapolis would have no place for him. As Wayne later recalled, "Doc gave me advice on any and all problems. He never had an unkind thought in his mind and rarely spoke harshly to me or anyone else. He never lectured me. But I remember three rules he taught me for living: Always keep your word, a gentleman never insults anybody intentionally, don't go around looking for trouble, but if you ever get in a fight, make sure you win it."

Before he lost his business and left Winterset, Doc had used his free time in the late afternoons to put together a football team at the town's Earlham Academy; his 1911 team was considered by scouts and local reporters to be the best of all the high schools in Iowa. Doc had hoped that Marion would one day play for it as a showcase for Annapolis. Mary had always thought both football and Doc's volunteer involvement with it were a foolish waste of time that could have been better spent working harder to save the family business. Her vision for Marion was to go to college to learn the profession of law.

After shipping Marion to Keokuk, Mary had seriously considered divorcing Doc, until he and the boy unexpectedly returned to Earlham. Doc had come down with asthma and tuberculosis, not uncommon in the Midwest of the early twentieth century; he was spitting up blood and needed Mary's care. He told her his only chance of survival was to move to a warm, dry climate to try to recover. If he stayed in Iowa, he would surely die. He asked Mary to go with him to California and she agreed. She couldn't let this sick man make that trip by himself. He was, after all, still her husband.

Besides, in his absence she had come to realize that living without a man in the house was not as easy as she thought it would be. Now that Doc was back, even sickly and weak, she had to admit that it was good to have the family together, intact, and she nursed Doc during their journey west, in search of recovery for her husband and a new life for the boys.

IN 1914, THE MORRISONS ARRIVED in California, where land was cheap and plentiful, and the climate warm and dry. The journey had been a difficult one, via covered wagon along the grueling trails through Death Valley, where the temperature reached a blast-furnace heat of 118 degrees by day and dipped to below freezing at night. The family finally emerged on the other side, into a small farming community called Palmdale, a stopover for covered wagons and a vital link on the Transcontinental to the small western towns up and down the coast. Palmdale was a dusty, near-treeless western town consisting of a post office, saloon, hotel, smithy, two churches, and a one-room schoolhouse. Iowa, by comparison, was a lively metropolis. Here there were no pharmacies, and no apparent need for any. Medicine in Palmdale was a shot of cheap whiskey. If an illness persisted, a second shot. For man, woman, child, it was the standard cure-all.

A year later, his health improved, Doc registered with the government as a homesteader and was granted a near-worthless plot of desert property on eighty acres on the outskirts of Palmdale. The land was full of wild brush that attracted rabbits, snakes, and rats, all living together and off one another. It was full of everything but crops. Doc determined to clear it and make it suitable for planting. He converted an old plow he found into a harrow, something that resembled a giant comb similar to a rake; then he had Jenny, the new family horse, drag it back and forth for hours every day to gather up the brush and debris, which Doc then burned in the late afternoon.

While Doc built a new house, the family settled in a temporary shelter, an empty shack with no running water; they pulled it from an outside pump well. They used kerosene lamps to keep the place lit and relied on a woodstove and fireplace for heat.

Every day after school, eight-year-old Marion's job was to literally ride shotgun alongside Doc on his rickety wagon and whenever he saw a rabbit or a rattlesnake, to blast it. The rattlers especially gave him nightmares; if he didn't get one quickly enough, it could start rattling its tail, strike, lock its viselike jaws around his ankle, and sink its fangs into him, after which he would likely die a horrible death from the venom. Because of that dread, his weapon was always loaded with shot as it lay across his lap, ready to be fired at a moment's notice. Rabbits and snakes were the last remnants of what had once been called the Wild West.

A lifetime later Wayne still had vivid memories of these times, when the family was forced to move eight times in five years because of a lack of funds to pay their way: "Riding a horse always came as natural to me as breathing. As far back as I remember I was riding. I guess I started playing cowboy when I was not more than seven years old. We lived on an eighty-acre farm near Palmdale, California, on the edge of the Mojave Desert. It was barren, deserted country in those days and Palmdale was in the middle of nowhere . . . our house was a glorified shack and the land was in miserable shape . . . It was a hard life and we were living close to the margin of starvation.

Mostly we ate potatoes or beans or one for another. One Hallowe'en Mom gave us a big treat—*Frankfurters* . . . I'd be trotting late home in the afternoon, with the supplies tied to my shoulder, and there was a place in the road where it made a sharp turn around a cliff. I would pretend there was a gang of outlaws lying around that bend, waiting to ambush me. I managed to scare myself to death, almost . . . then I'd dig my heels into Jenny and she'd gallop down the road . . .”

Mary hated everything about Palmdale. There was simply nothing culturally involving and no chance of a good eastern-style education for her boys. There was never any real food for her to cook, and nowhere to go out for a decent meal. She had no friends, and there was nothing at all to do at night except listen to the haunted, distant howling of desert wolves. The idea of divorce once again began to fester inside of her.

By now, any vestige of what could be called love between Mary and Doc was gone. All her affection went solely, and openly, to Robert. She literally smothered the boy, as if trying to protect him from the raw elements of the West, while she all but ignored Marion. As far as she was concerned, he was Doc's boy, and he could have him. One time she left Robert on the porch with Marion to watch him for a few minutes so she could take care of something inside, when a rattlesnake went for Robert. Marion, who was never without his shotgun, blasted the creature just before he struck, but instead of this lifesaving act to save her precious Robert endearing the older boy to his mother, it only made her hate the desert, and her husband for bringing her there, all that much more.

DOC JUST COULDN'T MAKE THE farm work. A nearby dairy farmer felt sorry for the Morrisons, especially the children, and left milk at their door at dawn every day, without ever mentioning it or sending a bill. Clyde was humbled and appreciative, but Mary felt humiliated by what she took to be pitiful charity. Any real food they managed to get came from Marion's jackrabbit kills. She hated rabbit meat.

By 1916, the Morrisons' Palmdale experiment came to an end. Barely a year after they had arrived, Doc threw up his hands in surrender; he hadn't been able to conquer the land, the land had conquered him. He reluctantly abandoned the homestead, pulled up the family's roots, such as they were, and headed farther west, to a little town called Glendale, not far from a patch of land called Hollywood and just beyond there the Pacific Ocean. Glendale was not just settled but relatively urban, due mainly to the new business that had sprung up in Southern California—motion pictures.

GLENDALE (WHICH MEANS “VALLEY” IN Scottish or Gaelic, the likely origin of the name) is located at the east end of the San Fernando Valley, and by the time the Morrisons arrived, the community had proudly proclaimed itself “the fastest-growing city in America.” It had once belonged to Mexico but was taken along with most of Southern California by the American government in 1848 as the spoils of victory from the Mexican War. Peace began a renewed wave of relocation to California supercharged by the historic gold rush that brought people, goods, services, and money to its rapidly developing townships. In 1906, with its plentiful citrus orchards and vineyards, Glendale was incorporated as a city with homes built in the popular

California bungalow and Spanish Colonial Revival styles. The Southern Pacific connected Glendale to other communities and it increasingly thrived on the fast-growing moving picture industry's need for workers. Film brought a lot of money to the city. And movie theaters.

By 1916, the year the Morrisons arrived, Glendale's downtown already looked like a real city; it had commercial brick buildings, concrete sidewalks, and the houses all had inside plumbing, hot and cold running water, electricity, and a few even had the newest sensation, telephones. Over the next two years, Doc worked hard to make it in this thriving community. He got a job with the new Glendale pharmacy and became an active member of the Unity Chapter of the Royal Arch Masons. He rented a modest house at 421 South Isabel, and most nights after coming home from work he would take Marion out back to play football with him. He taught the boy how to run, cut, dodge, divert, tackle, throw, and catch. When Doc had enough money saved, he bought a car and every Sunday drove the family one hour to the beach at Santa Monica. Marion and Doc would race each other to see who could reach the water first. They would swim, splash, and play water football, coming out of the water soaking wet and laughing as they stretched out on their towels and let the sun dry and tan their skins. Mary was less thrilled with the beach. She felt uncomfortably overrevealed even with the typical Victorian bathing suits of the time, which covered women nearly head to toe. She put up with it because she believed that Clyde deserved his time of fun, as he had kept a good job, paid the bills, and provided a decent roof over their heads.

Although Glendale was a vast improvement over Palmdale, it was still a hard place for Marion to grow up. "From the time I was in the seventh grade," he later remembered, "I had a paper route. I was eleven years old and delivered the *Los Angeles Examiner*. Had to get up at four A.M. because it was a morning paper. And after school and football practice, I delivered drug orders on my bicycle. Later on I worked as a truck driver, soda jerk, fruit picker, and ice hauler."

In 1918, Marion was going to the Sixth Street Elementary School in Glendale. He called his pet Airedale that he had picked out of a kennel "Duke." Duke followed him to school every day and slept outside the nearby firehouse number 1 while Marion went to class. Some of the firemen took to calling Marion "Big Duke," and then just "Duke." He loved the attention and companionship of the firefighters. He was their mascot, and they were his first image of what big, strong, healthy men looked and acted like, as opposed to his father, who lived under the domination of his never-satisfied mother. For the rest of his life, he would be attracted to tough, strapping male figures and look to them for guidance, support, and camaraderie. He soon started telling everyone his name was really Duke. Even his parents started calling him Duke.²

Marion now had a new name, and a new body. At the age of eleven, he had already begun his growth spurt toward the six-foot-five height he would eventually reach. As his body filled out and he became stronger, he was still afraid of the bigger and tougher schoolhouse bullies, who, because he was the biggest kid in school, always wanted to challenge him and take him down to prove they were the toughest. One of them wanted to make Duke his personal punching bag and regularly beat him up after classes in the schoolyard. Following a pummeling, on the way to the firehouse to pick up Little Duke, a volunteer fireman saw him, took him inside, cleaned him up, and