HOMICIDE AT ROUGH POINT

THE UNTOLD STORY OF HOW DORIS DUKE THE RICHEST WOMAN IN AMERICA GOT AWAY WITH MURDER

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CHAPTER THIRTY

RENAISSANCE MAN

The deeper I got into untangling the forensics of the homicide itself, the more interested I became in understanding the victim, Eduardo Tirella: who he was; what drove him; and why he'd continued working for Doris, given the trajectory of his career and his capabilities as a designer across multiple disciplines from fashion to feature film. I understood *why* he went to work for her in the first place. After all, she had an unlimited checkbook that allowed him to travel the world assembling priceless artworks and honing his skill set. But once he'd completed Duke Gardens in 1964, why did he *stay on*, particularly after his life in L.A. and Big Sur was becoming so full?

The first time I focused on his name was in the summer of 2018 after CNN had replayed Trump's 2016 press conference in which he'd made that boast about being able to "shoot somebody" in "the middle of Fifth Avenue." At the time, I Googled, "Doris Duke" + victim + "Newport, RI" but all of the newspaper coverage reflected the official "accident" line.

By then, I'd already spoken to several of the Newport cops who had worked the crash scene and they'd uniformly told me that they'd sus-

pected foul play. But back in 1966 the great newspapers and wire services of the world had accepted the conclusion of the Newport PD and after that there was little else on Eduardo for decades. Even his six-year-long design of the 11 interconnected Gardens of The World at Duke Farms was dismantled by 2008. [807]

I spent weeks trying to locate any of his eight siblings who might still be alive, but all of them had died. That's when I found the obituary of his sister Anita which led me to his niece Donna. She greeted me warmly and said that virtually every day since Eduardo's death she'd prayed that the truth might come out.

It was through Donna Lohmeyer, over the last two years, that I came to appreciate the depth and breadth of the extraordinary man killed so violently and abruptly outside Rough Point.

UNDER THE WILDCAT

Eduardo Giuseppe Tirella was born on June 8th, 1924 in Dover, New Jersey, the 12th child of Severino (Sam) and Etilia Falgione Tirella, who had emigrated from Italy near Naples. [808] He was actually the second one of their children to be named Eduardo. They had lost another son at the age of 11 to pneumonia.

"In fact," Donna told me, "of the 12 kids, only 9 lived to maturity. But Eddie was closest to my mother, who was two years older. The other four sisters and three brothers were much older than the two of them. Since Eddie was the baby of the family, his mother shared a special bond with him and when he died, she passed away six weeks later -- many said of a broken heart." [809]

Sam Tirella prospered over the years, owning several meat markets, but he died when Eddie was 13, "So our uncle Al took over the family business and in 1942 he bought the Wildcat Roller Coaster at Bertrand Island, a small family amusement park on Lake Hopatcong in Mt. Arlington, New Jersey. Eddie's mother, my grandmother Etilia, owned and operated the cotton candy stand across from the coaster. During summers, all of the kids and grandkids worked at the park and Eddie, who was an aspiring singer, spent hours at The Villa (then called the

June Rose Ballroom) where another young Italian singer named Dino Martini -- soon to be known as Dean Martin -- performed. My family had a bungalow under the coaster where we stayed. In fact, my playpen was on the front porch. The cars of the coaster passed within feet and I'd wave to them going by.

"At Dover High, Eddie was very popular. He became a cheerleader and was active in theater. As they got older, he and my mother would hang out at The Wigwam dance club where Glenn Miller and Count Basie played. Uncle Eddie always had stars in his eyes, in the best sense of that phrase. He became an accomplished piano player and singer in his own right and soon dreamed of Broadway and Hollywood; aspirations that he achieved to some degree, but his entry into those worlds came through his amazing design sense and that began with fashion -- notably hats."

Eddie started working in the millinery department of Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City, designing hats for stars like Mae West and Lena Horne. "We believe that's where he and Edmund Kara met," said Donna, "since Edmund designed dresses for Lena. Soon Eddie parlayed his friendship with Mae into a two year theatrical run of 'Diamond Lil' that started on Broadway. He not only sang in the show but designed her costumes. Eventually he and Edmund moved to Los Angeles where they shared a house on Stanley Hills Place off Laurel Canyon. He wasn't concerned about being openly gay on the West Coast, but he was closeted with the family in New Jersey."

Eduardo after the War, when he was a young hat designer at Saks.

FROM HATS TO CAFES TO HOUSES

By 1951 Eduardo Tirella had established himself as one of the pre-eminent millinery designers in Beverly Hills. He was cited in January of that year by *L.A. Times* gossip columnist Hedda Hopper for his design of a hat for actress Ann Sheridan, described as "the woman with the smartest head on her shoulders." It happened at an Ambassador Hotel charity event attended by 850 women. [810]

In October he was featured, along with Oleg Cassini, as one of "Saks' famous designers" in "Inside S.F.A.," a store magazine. [811] That same month Eduardo's design of an elaborate "Marie Antoinette-like headdress" for musical star Constance Moore, was featured in *Photoplay Magazine*. [812]

The Marie Antionette head dress for Constance Moore

While hat design was his "day job," Eduardo never abandoned his dream of making it as a singer. By early 1953 he was billing himself as "Eddie Tirella." In a review of a new show at L.A.'s Café Gala, a rival to the celebrated Coconut Grove, *Hollywood Reporter* critic Jac Wilson praised Eddie's "romantic ballads and novelty songs" calling him "a high spot in the talent lineup." [813]

He was also part of a review at the legendary Cabaret Concert Theater in Silver Lake, a popular venue for a number of gay and straight performers, located at 4212 Sunset Boulevard in an old studio where D.W. Griffith had shot silent films. [814]

By the late Fifties Eddie had moved from fashion to interior and landscape design. After a year at UCLA, he'd begun renovating houses. In 1958 *The L.A. Times* did a feature titled, "Rescued By Remodeling," on his transformation of a simple frame bungalow into a showplace, "restyled with Oriental colors, textures and landscape with the flavor of the far east." [815]

Writing to Eddie's sister Anita that same month, Broadway producer Charlie Wood, who was about to mount a play with Tallulah Bankhead, visited the tiny house, which he described as "a Japanese dreamland." "Surely," he wrote, "Eddie has advanced his reputation as one of the up and coming designers in southern California." [816]

Within months, Eduardo was introduced to Peggy Lee, who asked him to use those same skills to transform her modest ranch house in Beverly Hills into an Italian-themed garden hideaway. When the finished job was showcased on CBS's *Person To Person* in 1960, the legendary singer told host Charles Collingwood, "it was done by an Italian. Ed Tirella, a friend of mine." [817]

Soon Eddie was designing custom furniture for the stars, including a four poster bed in a tent-like enclosure for James Coburn. Gossip columnist Louella Parsons, another hat client of Eddie's from the early 50's, devoted half a 1964 column to the $5,000 bed which utilized 15 different fabrics imported from Venice. It was "a surprise," she wrote, "from Coburn's wife Beverly." The bed was waiting for the actor after his return from a two month shoot in Mexico for the film "Major Dundee" in which he co-starred with Charlton Heston. [818] In 2021 dollars that custom bed would have cost $42,000. [819]

"Eduardo Tirella and Edmund Kara each had exquisite taste," said film financier Steve Ransohoff, whose father Marty hired both of them that same year for his production of *The Sandpiper*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. It was Ransohoff who first discovered Sharon Tate and introduced her to Eddie and the circle of stars up at Big Sur who hung out at Nepenthe, the storied restaurant high above the coast. One of them was Kim Novak.

Kim Novak, Martin Ransohoff and Eduardo Tirella at Big Sur.

"My mother remembered just how kind Eduardo was to my twin brother Kurt and me back then," Steve told me in an interview for this book. "We were about eight years-old and our Dad wanted to take us to one of his film premiers, but we didn't have suits. When Eduardo heard that, he came over to the house in L.A. right away. He brought two suits from Saks where he'd worked, then measured us – making the chalk marks – and after the suits had been tailored, he brought them back just in time for us to make the premier." [820]

Around that same time Eduardo became enamored with Kaffe Fassett, a handsome young painter who was the son of Nepenthe's founders. When I tracked him down in London where he lives today, he shared a number of memories of Eddie as a designer and gregarious friend.

"During one of our first conversations," said Kaffe, who's now 83, "Eduardo told me that when he would decorate for people, the first thing he'd do would be to take them to the new house and sit them down. He'd make a bouquet of flowers and put it on a table, light candles and talk about the colors that the rooms could be. It all started with a bouquet of flowers. When I heard that, my mind just burst with imagination, thinking about how I would do a mural of nasturtium leaves. Eduardo always got my mind working, He was very inspiring to me as a young painter." [821]

As to Eddie's skills at transforming modest spaces, Kaffe related a story from around 1964 when he was living in an old mess hall at Anderson Creek, south of Big Sur.

"It was in the same complex where writer Henry Miller had lived," he said. "A series of old buildings that been used to house convicts working on the coast highway years before. I rented this huge space for $25 a month, which was fabulous, It was on the coast with the sea beating below and lots of flowers everywhere. When Eduardo came to visit me there, he said, 'You haven't done anything with your outdoors. It's just wild.'"

"I told him that I didn't have time to build a garden. And he said, 'Do you have the afternoon off?' I said, 'Yes,' And he said, 'Come on.' So we went to the beach and loaded a truck up with driftwood and stones and he built me a garden *literally* that same day. It was extraordinary. What Eduardo did with that garden exemplified his energy and imagination and that was very exciting to me."

FLOWERS AGAIN

Another story Kaffe told me underscored the infectious joie de vivre that Eddie inspired in other people; in this case, the woman who had founded Deetjen's Big Sur Inn, a kind of storybook wooden village of rooms constructed in the early 1930's by Helmuth Deetjen, a Norwegian immigrant and his wife Helen. They'd built much of it from material reclaimed from Monterey's Cannery Row. [822]

By the mid-Sixties Eduardo and Edmund had rented a two-story house in Mule Canyon from the Fassett family. Edmund lived there full time and carved works from redwood trees in a studio on the first floor.

Eddie commuted up from L.A. on weekends in his Morgan roadster.

"But before he and Edmund rented that place," said Kaffe, "Eduardo would stay at Deetjen's and he became fascinated by the old woman who built the Inn. At one point, in advanced age, she was holed up in her bedroom, seemingly very ill and near death. At least that's what she told everyone. So one day Eduardo said to me, 'Let's go down to the beach.' When we got there, he picked Sage and wild grasses and wildflowers and he assembled them into a beautiful bouquet. We drove to the Inn and knocked on Mrs. Deetjen's bedroom door to say hello. She was lying inside and moaning, saying, 'I don't want to die. I don't want to die…' Suddenly Eduardo grabbed the bouquet from my hands and threw open her door. He bounded over to the edge of the bed and shoved the flowers in her face, exclaiming, "You think that you're DYING? Well smell this! You're not dying, YOU'RE LIVING!' And the old woman came to, just like that!" Kaffe snapped his fingers.

"She just sat up and she started laughing… That was Eduardo Tirella, a force of positivity if there ever was one. He brought beauty to everyone who was fortunate enough to come into his life."

Pola Zanay, another artist back then, who would ride up to Bug Sur with Eddie on weekends, remembered that he was also a vegan chef, given to preparing elaborate feasts for his friends.

"Halloween was a major event at Nepenthe, where they had an annual Masked Ball," she told me. "The October before he died, Eduardo asked if I would help him decorate. He had purchased a huge pumpkin

and he had a gigantic pot that he could put the pumpkin into. He filled it up with vegetables and water and cooked it in this pot. He asked me to help him decorate a really, really long table in front of the cabin and we decorated it with flowers and fall leaves. It was beautiful." [823]

Flowers were an essential element in another Eduardo story that Donna Lohmeyer told me. It happened in June of 1960, just before her 8th grade graduation. Eddie was back home in New Jersey and Donna, who had long blonde hair, was greatly anticipating her end-of-year dance.

"I needed a trim," she told me, "and a nice German neighbor of ours had a daughter who had just started beauty school. She began cutting my hair, first on one side, then the other and then she tried to even-out the first side and before I knew it, I looked like Friar Tuck.[824] But uncle Eddie rescued me. He went into our yard and picked sprigs of orange blossoms. He teased the top of my hair into half curls and tucked a white blossom into each one, turning a pumpkin into a princess in a matter of moments. All I lacked on my way to that dance were glass slippers. But that's who he was. He got so much joy out of making the lives of people around him more beautiful. It was that quality that Doris coveted so much. She knew his Hollywood career was taking off and sensed he wanted to leave her. I had a sense of it too, at the time. After all, Doris Duke had dominated New Jersey for decades. My family didn't realize it, but the two of them were on a collision course."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

TAYLOR, BURTON, NOVAK & TATE

On the October day in 1964 when *The Sandpiper* started shooting in Big Sur, producer Marty Ransohoff, then 37 and on a hot streak, put two other films into production. [825] After co-founding Filmways, a company that had made a fortune on rural sitcoms in the early Sixties, he'd been responsible for a string of successful features beginning with the comedy *Boys Night Out*, starring James Garner and Kim Novak, who lived in Carmel Highlands and introduced him to Big Sur. [826]

In 1962 Marty bought land and built a house there. Before long he became friends, through Novak, with Edmund Kara and his partner Eduardo Tirella. [827] A year later, on the set of one of his TV series, *Petticoat Junction*, the producer spotted a pretty 20-year-old actress named Sharon Tate whom he put under contract. [828]

She got her first feature acting role in *Eye of The Devil,* a Gothic horror film produced by Ransohoff starring David Niven. By then Marty had become so impressed by Eduardo's design skills that he hired him for the production. Eddie soon introduced Sharon to Edmund, and she made frequent trips up the coast where she stayed at Deetjen's and spent hours at the house in Mule Canyon, taking Polaroids of his work.

Eduardo with Sharon at Big Sur. Sharon with Edmund.

"We used to go up to Big Sur with my dad," remembered Steve Ransohoff. "My brother Kurt and I would watch Edmund carve at the house up the street from Nepenthe. Sharon would come by and take us on hikes to the Elf Forest behind Deetjens. We'd go down to the beach with Edmund and Eduardo hunting for Abalone off the rocks. There was a driftwood beach we'd go to with Edmund where he'd get wood to carve. It was a kind of magical time, for us." [829]

The filming of *Eye of The Devil* proved a challenge for Ransohoff who lost his first two directors and settled on a third, while having to replace Sam Peckinpah on *The Cincinnati Kid*, starring Steve McQueen, after the hard-fisted director of *The Wild Bunch,* insisted on a darker, more realistic tone for the poker-themed film. [830]

Eduardo, Niven and Sharon (in a wig) on the *Eye of The Devil* set.

"Big Sur became an oasis for Marty," said Romney Steele, the granddaughter of Bill and Lolly Fassett, who opened Nepenthe in 1949. An accomplished chef in her own right, Romney authored, *My Nepenthe*, a compelling memoir in which she described how the site of the restaurant became the fixation of two other Hollywood icons, Orson Welles and his then wife Rita Hayworth:

> Returning from San Francisco during a War Bond Drive they decided to head back to L.A. on the new scenic route, Highway One. Looking for a spot to picnic, they ventured up a meandering dirt road that took them to a cabin on a hill overlooking the south coast. Entranced by the view, they went looking for a realtor to sell them the cabin. As the story goes, they gathered up the money between them, put $156 down to hold the purchase, measured the kitchen for a new stove and the windows for curtains, and then went on their way, never again to return. Within a year Welles and Hayworth divorced and later sold the cabin and property to my grandparents. [831]

Martin Ransohoff was so taken with Big Sur that he decided to use it as the backdrop for his next major production. He wrote a 38 page outline for *The Sandpiper* over a weekend, later engaging Dalton Trumbo to write the script, sharing screenplay credit with Michael Wilson. The plot revolved around a Bohemian painter and single mother who lived in what was described as "a shack," above the Coast. When her son is sent to an Episcopal school for troubled boys, she meets a buttoned down minister who quickly falls in love with her, only to face the moral dilemma of leaving his loyal wife and ending his religious career.

After offering the lead to Kim Novak who passed, Ransohoff flew to London where he presented the starring roles to Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. They had just made *The Yellow Rolls Royce,* following their scandalous tour de force on-screen and off in *Cleopatra.*

The principal target of the world's paparazzi at the time, the couple signed-on after Ransohoff guaranteed a $1 million payday for Taylor and half that for Burton, who for tax reasons, could only commit to shooting 29 days of the film in the U.S. [832] Then, after director William

Wyler got delayed, Ransohoff hired Oscar winner Vincent Minnelli and production commenced with Eva Marie Saint, another Academy Award winner, cast to play Burton's wife.

In an interview for her book in 2008, Ransohoff told Romney Steele that "Eduardo pushed me for the Nepenthe element in the film." By then, Marty was so impressed with Tirella that he was quoted as saying, "Anything he touches can turn into something beautiful." [833] He hired him to design the interiors for Taylor's "shack" and engaged Edmund Kara to carve the nude bust of Liz for in the film. They each received upfront credits and Eduardo appeared in several scenes, including a folk dancing sequence shot on Nepenthe's Terrace.

Eduardo, third from left, being filmed with a line of folk dancers for *The Sandpiper*.

Ransohoff then cast his protegé Sharon in a secondary role, but as he later confessed, when he brought her to the set, Taylor, jealous of Tate's beauty, chided him playfully, "How dare you bring that girl here while *mother* is on the stage." [834]

Playful or not, all of Tate's scenes ended up on the cutting room floor, though she attended the premier. By then, Ransohoff had advanced Sharon's career immensely by casting her in *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, a horror/black comedy, directed by the man who would become her future husband, Roman Polanski. Immediately following *The Sandpiper* she co-starred in *Don't Makes Waves,* Ransohoff's take on the craze for Malibu surfer films. In that film Eduardo was billed as "technical advisor" and played another cameo. [835] Over the next two years, his friendship with Sharon deepened as she spent more and more time up at Big Sur.

According to a biography of Elizabeth Taylor by Darwin Porter and Danforth Prince, which relied on interviews with her long time gay assistant Richard Hanley, [836] Burton, who was said to be bisexual, became smitten with Eduardo. One weekend during production, after Eddie had booked a singing job in San Francisco, Porter and Prince wrote that Burton accompanied him there, while Liz was rumored to have stayed behind in Monterey to spend time with the novelist and screenwriter Peter Viertel. Then married to Deborah Kerr, Viertel's many screen credits included *The African Queen.* According to Hanley (per Porter and Prince) the Burton-Tirella San Francisco trip "caused some jealous tension between Burton and Minnelli," who was also reported to be bi-sexual [837] and rumored to have "wanted Tirella for himself." [838]

Whether any of that was true, it was Eduardo's personal magnetism, along with his design skills that endeared him to so many people including Kaffe Fassett who worked on the dance sequences for *The Sandpiper.* At one point after shooting wrapped at Big Sur, the production moved to the Boulogne Studios in Paris where a reproduction of Nepenthe's terrace was built.

"When we worked together in Paris I stayed in a charming hotel with Eduardo," Kaffe told me in an interview for this book. [839] "I had some wild adventures alongside him, going cruising. We were very close. Though there was nothing sexual between us, I loved and admired him, and

he was hugely supportive of my career as a painter. Eduardo was also a dreamer. He told me how, when he was young, he would drive by Doris Duke's property in New Jersey every few days and say to himself, 'One day I'm going to go into that place and see what it's all about. Now here I am creating The Gardens of The World with Doris Duke.'"

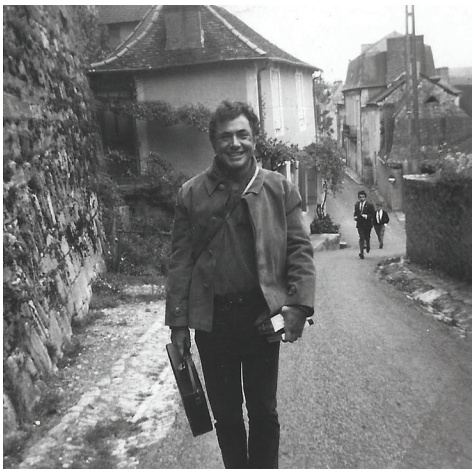
Kaffe's perspective on Eduardo was crucial for me in researching this book because he was the only surviving friend and contemporary of him, I could find, who understood what it was like to be a gay man in the 1960's. More importantly, as he related to me and recounted in his book, *Dreaming In Color*, Kaffe spent a memorable weekend with Eddie and Doris at Rough Point:

> At one point, Doris sent her private plane to fetch me and take me to meet them at her other family estate on the ocean in Newport, Rhode Island. It was a stormy night, but my flight got through. Eduardo and Doris were held up in NewYork and would come in the next day. When Doris and Eduardo finally arrived, the house came alive—dogs, music, conversation.
>
> Doris allowed me free run of the house to paint anything I wanted, so I set up my easel in a corner of the enormous kitchen and did a study of brown and white dishes and fruit. She was very appalled by that. She said, "You have all the treasures of Europe and the Orient here and you're picking bowls of fruit on a marble table in the kitchen?" [840]

Kaffe told me that when Eduardo traveled with Doris collecting art treasures, he would call her "Mrs. Green" so that "If they went into an antique shop, nobody would know that she was the richest woman in the world." [841]

"One thing that was sad to me," he said, was that Doris so wanted to be a jazz singer. That was her great longing, and of course, Eduardo was this incredible jazz man. He was always playing music and singing, and they'd go into clubs and sing, but when she sang, to me, it was in this wispy, sad little voice. So threadbare. She was so very big and tall and handsome; you'd think that she'd have a deep throaty voice like Marlene Dietrich. But her's was the voice of a child."

With respect to Big Sur, Kaffe said that Eduardo had "opened his eyes" to it. "One day he took me back into the canyon behind where he and Edmund lived. He looked at this tiny little waterfall, and the little ferns growing around it and he said, 'This is complete beauty. You couldn't create art any better than this.' And I stood there rather naïve. I had grown up in this place. To me it was ordinary, but he made me see it as magic.'"



Eduardo Tirella in 1966, months before he died, still scouting art treasures in Europe for Doris Duke.

LEARNING OF HIS DEATH

There seemed to be something spiritual in the way that Kaffe learned Eduardo was gone.

"I had a very, very strange mystical thing happen," he told me. "In 1966 I was walking down a street in London. I had a new boyfriend at the time, and I said to him, 'You have to meet my friend Eduardo. He's just the most amazing man.' Literally just before that, one of the songs he'd sing came into my mind. 'You're Nearer Than My Head Is To My Pillow.' [3] Just then, my boyfriend said he needed to pop into a shop and a few moments later he came out with a newspaper in his hand. He said, 'There's an article that says Tirella. Wasn't that his name?' And he opened the paper to a headline. He looked at me and said, 'He's just been killed.' I couldn't believe it, because Eduardo was one of the most alive people I've ever known."

3 A song Judy Garland sang and recorded at her Carnegie Hall concert.

Four days after he died, Eduardo was laid to rest in the family plot at St. Mary's Cemetery in his hometown of Dover, New Jersey. The burial following a solemn high Requiem Mass at Sacred Heart Church was attended by hundreds of his friends and extended family. Taylor and Burton sent flowers. Martin Ransohoff and Kim Novak each sent chrysanthemums. [842]

For her thoughts on Eddie, I reached out to the legendary star of *Vertigo* and so many other memorable films. She sent me this reply:

"I loved him very much and miss his sweet voice in the songs he'd sing at parties and in the forest behind his house in Big Sur. So pure and filled with kindness and love for all creatures great and small. He did not deserve his ending!" [843]

Not long after the funeral, Peggy Lee sent this note to Anita, Eddie's sister:

"Words are never adequate, but somehow I felt I must try and tell you how much I share your love for Eddie. He will always live in our hearts. It would give you comfort if you could hear the beautiful things that are said about him almost every day by his friends to whom he has given so much. I have a particularly warm spot in my heart for you, because he had expressed his love for you so many times." [844]

As to the funeral itself, the headline in *The New York Daily News* under a page-wide photo of the gravesite read, "Doris Absent From Jersey Funeral Of Her Long-Time Friend, Eduardo." [845]

The heiress who was responsible for his death *did* send an arrangement of roses and the staff from Duke Farms drove up with flowers. But David Rimmer, the estate manager there, who'd been earlier barred from Rough Point by Duke's business manager Pete Cooley, told me that his offer to participate in the funeral was spurned.

"One of Eduardo's brothers had asked me to be a pall bearer and I was happy to do it because Eduardo and I had been so close, but when I asked Miss Duke she said, 'See Pete Cooley about it,' and when I called him repeatedly, he just hung up on me, so I didn't do it and I always felt bad about it. There was just no way Cooley wanted me involved.[846]

DORIS REPORTEDLY CONFESSES

As I reviewed the evidence of Sharon Tate's close friendship with Eduardo and the kind way that she'd treated Marty Ransohoff's eight-year-old sons, I was drawn back to the incident which began this book. It involved Sharon's sister Patti, then eleven, who had an abrupt encounter with Doris Duke's caretaker at Falcon Lair, months before Sharon was killed.

The nervous way that she'd entered the old Valentino estate to pick up Patti was indicative of Sharon's state of mind back then, two and a half years after Eddie's close circle of friends came to believe that Doris had killed him with intent.

Of course no one could say for sure what was in the billionaire's mind when she got behind the wheel of the Dodge Polara, but a month or so after my investigation of the death was published in *Vanity Fair*, I got an intriguing email. The subject matter read only "Doris Duke" and the message was cryptic. "If you care to give me a call… something of interest for you on Doris… I was (her) lover for five months – after the (man) she killed."

The email was written by Peter Byrne, an Irishman who had enlisted in the Royal Air Force during World War II and flown dozens of missions as a reconnaissance pilot. He later became a big game hunter and adventurer with multiple expeditions to the Himalayas. In 1967 he was running safaris to Africa and India.

When I contacted him in August of 2020, he was 90 years old, but seemed to have the energy and mental acuity of a 50 year old. He was happy to discuss his time in Hawaii with Doris Duke.

"I met her in June of 1967," he told me, "at a party in Honolulu, thrown by a friend of mine there named George Frelinghuysen." [847]

As reported in a piece from *The Honolulu Advertiser* on May 30th, 1967, Frelinghuysen was a "millionaire art collector… dubbed 'the host with the most,' who had arrived in Hawaii and moved into the presidential suite (plus an adjoining suite) at the Kahala Hilton Hotel." There he was expected to host a series of parties in the coming weeks. [848]

"Doris was there one night, and we met," Byrne told me. "I went home to her place at Diamond Head and stayed the night. I was hunting

in those days. I had my own Safari company in India and Nepal, and I worked for 7 months of each year. Then, moving into the Monsoon Season starting in May, I took 5 months off."

Byrne said that for all that time he and Doris were virtually inseparable. "We lived in Los Angeles at Falcon Lair and in New Jersey and at her apartment in New York as well as Honolulu. But when it came to October, I wasn't feeling good about being with her. She made me nervous. She was very vindicative. She was very powerful, and she could be very, very mean. So right about then at the end of October, I said, 'I've got to go back to hunting. I've got bookings, and she said, 'If you walk out that door you're never coming back.' And to myself , I said, 'Great. Wonderful.'

"I left her at the end of October and saw her again a couple of times. Years later I was in New York and she called me. She had a nephew, Walker Inman. She wanted to get him out of her hair for a month and she said, 'I hear that you're going down to climb Kilimanjaro' and I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'Will you take him with you?' And I did. He wasn't a bad kid. Sadly, he later killed himself with an overdose of drugs. Anyway, (Doris and I) never lived together again."

At that point in the conversation I asked him if she'd ever spoken about Eduardo Tirella. Without skipping a beat, Byrne said, "I know that she killed him, because she told me."

All I could say was, "Wow." After the deal she'd made with the Newport police, I hadn't expected that Doris would make a confession, but the former RAF pilot was adamant.

"I'll tell you her exact words, which are in my mind to this day," he said. "We started talking about him and what happened with the car. As we talked, she was very cautious, but her exact words were, 'He got what he deserved. *Nobody* two times me.' Those were her exact words."

I had to take that for what it was: the account of a man who had reached out to me "over the transom," but his well-documented bona fides and his relationship to Frelinghuysen and Hawaii at the same time Doris Duke was there had checked out.

Based on what I'd learned from many of Eduardo's friends, I believed that Doris Duke had coveted his *professional* relationship with her as chief designer. But what if her jealously went deeper? What if she had harbored *sexual* feelings for the handsome designer who was twelve years younger? And if so, who did she think he was "two-timing" her with? She not only knew he was close to Edmund Kara, but she'd hired the two of them [849] to do the design work on The Self Realization Fellowship, a spiritual center she was funding high in the hills above Los Angeles. [850]

Then I thought of that weekend she'd spent at Rough Point with Eduardo and Kaffe Fassett. Though the two gay men were just friends, could Doris, whom Byrne called "a nymphomaniac," have suddenly become jealous because she *imagined* that there was actually something between *them* and she wanted Eduardo for herself?

In 2007, writing in *The L.A. Times,* Dr. David Buss, a Ph.D. and psychologist, concluded that "jealousy is possibly the most destructive emotion housed in the human brain. It's the leading cause of spousal murder worldwide (and) those who experience jealousy (themselves) suffer too. They feel anxious, depressed, angry, humiliated, out of control, sometimes suicidal."[851]

Every one of those qualities seemed to describe Doris Duke.

She'd killed Eduardo literally minutes *after* he'd announced he was leaving, following seven years as her "constant companion." That happened within months of that violent incident at Falcon Lair, where she reportedly got her jaw broken by Joe Castro, whom she'd stabbed in a jealous rage three years before that. Castro had told his L.A. lawyer Edward Brown that he'd twice saved Doris from suicide. In the months before the Falcon Lair incident she'd been depressed about the death of her second husband, Porfirio Rubirosa. Doris was notorious for her heavy use of drugs and alcohol. Could all of that explain the central element in any murder case: *motive?* And if she *did* confess to Peter Byrne was it because she harbored some sense of guilt?

It all seemed in keeping with what I learned after I located the first police officer who'd arrived outside Rough Point moments after Doris Duke had crushed Eduardo Tirella to death.

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