

T. M. WRIGHT

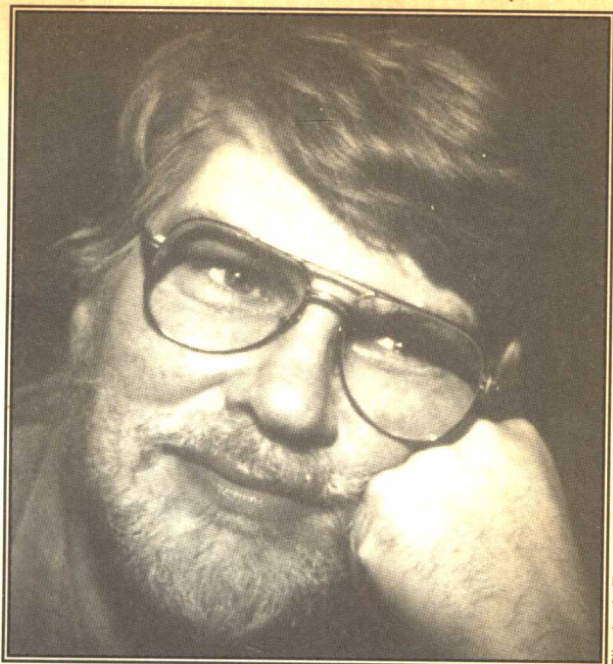
Author of A Manhattan Ghost Story

"T. M. Wright
is a rare
and blazing talent."
—Stephen King



Sleepeasy





Elizabeth Eastman

T. M. WRIGHT

According to Ramsey Campbell, T. M. Wright is a “one-man definition of the term ‘quiet horror.’” Since 1978, he’s published 22 novels in fourteen languages, including the classic *Strange Seed* as well as *A Manhattan Ghost Story*, which has for a long while been in pre-production at Disney Studios. He’s currently editor of *Writer Online*, voted by *Writer’s Digest* as the number-two place (out of thousands) to be published on the web.

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RAVE REVIEWS FOR T.M. WRIGHT!

"T. M. Wright has a unique imagination."

—Dean Koontz

"T. M. Wright is a master of the subtle fright that catches you by surprise and never quite lets you go. He is one of the finest modern interpreters of the ghost story."

—Whitley Strieber

"Wright convincingly proves that he understands, as few do, how to give a scare without spilling blood all over the page."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"T. M. Wright is one of the best ghost story writers around."

—*American Fantasy*

"I have been an unabashed fan of T. M. Wright's since reading his first novel."

—Charles L. Grant

"T. M. Wright is a brilliant writer. His impeccable prose is hypnotic and the rhythm of his words entrancing."

—*2 A.M. Magazine*

"Keep an eye on T. M. Wright."

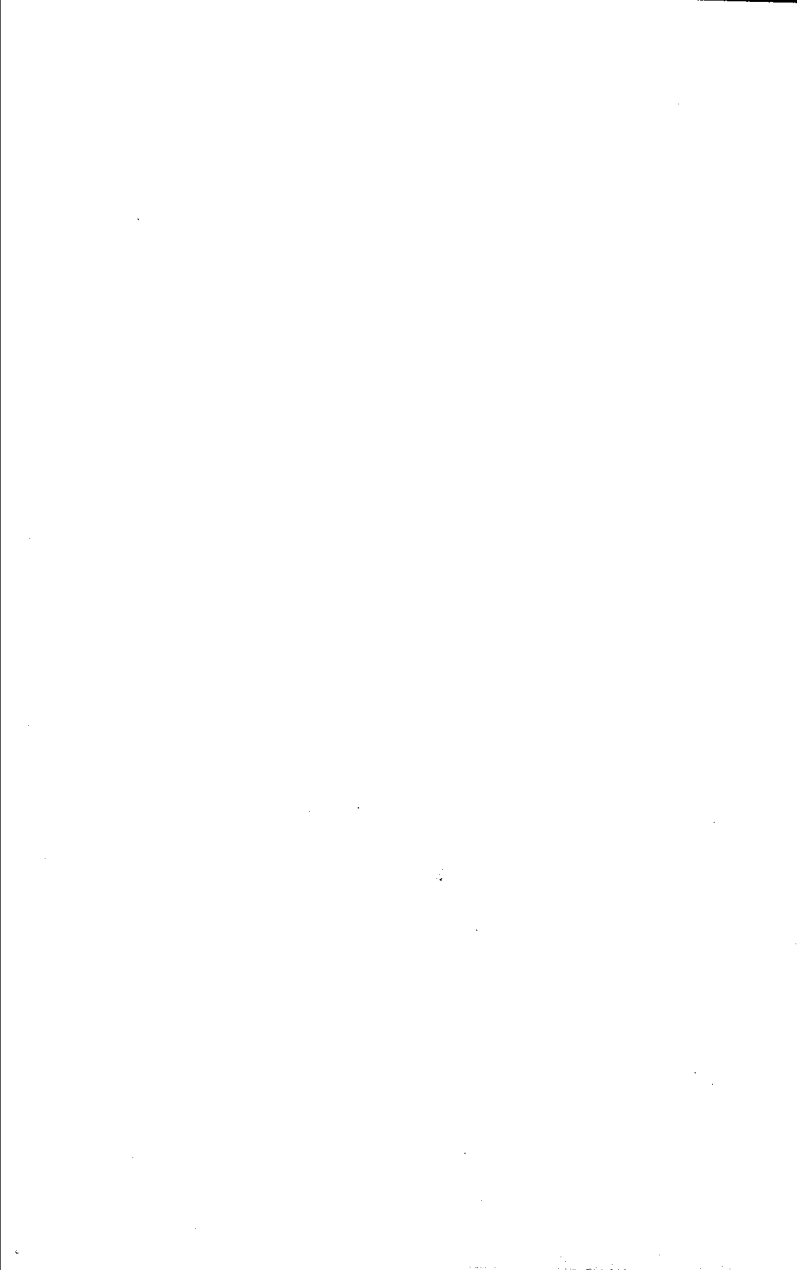
—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Wright's slow escalation of terror is masterly."

—*The Sun Times (U.K.)*

"Nobody does ghosts better than T. M. Wright."

—Kim Newman



For Mary Anne, with love

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Chapter One

These were the last words that Harry Briggs uttered in this life: "Hey, you! What in the hell do you think you're doing?"

He was calling to a craggy-faced, red-haired man standing not far off, in a field of new snow. The man didn't answer him.

The last living thing that Harry Briggs saw was his wife, naked and beautiful, rising into the air as she prepared to dive.

Harry had thought more than once of shucking his career as a professor of philosophy and doing something completely different. What did philosophy have to offer anyway? Only lots of unanswerable questions. What did anyone need with unanswerable questions? They only made life more difficult. Who the hell cared about Camus and Kierkegaard and Sartre anymore, except his students, who *had* to care about

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them if they wanted a passing grade. The answer to the question of humanity's existence on the earth was simple—people were put here to enjoy themselves. To smell the heady aromas of salt air and pine forests, to make love when and where the urge struck and to eat themselves into oblivion. *Living* equaled hedonism. Philosophically, Harry knew it was so. But putting that philosophy completely into practice was impossible for him.

The last film that Harry saw in this life was *The Maltese Falcon*. It was one of his favorites; along with *The Big Sleep*, *Trouble in Mind* and *Chinatown*. He liked detective films because he thought their heroes were ballsy, no-shit kinds of guys, and that was the kind of guy he had always wanted to be. A 1940s kind of guy. The kind of guy who used words like "buddy," "Java" and "gams," and who called attractive women "hot numbers" or "classy dames." The kind of guy who, beneath this gruff, absurd and anachronistic exterior, was single-mindedly on the side of *good*. Harry wanted to be single-minded.

His last meal in this life was potatoes au gratin and ham.

His last conversation was with his wife, Barbara, shortly before she went for one of her nude swims. Their conversation was, ironically, about death and dying, about being dead and what came *afterward*. Barbara maintained that it would be peachy if, afterward, after death, everyone had a chance to create their own private universe, complete with their own kinds of people and their own kinds of houses, and smells and sensations, *et cetera*. A place where wishes were made real. A place, and people, as easily molded as wet clay. Harry conceded that this would

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be wonderful, but he doubted that *anything* happened after death.

"It's just not in the cards," he said.

"And how would you know?" Barbara said.

Harry shrugged. "I guess I wouldn't," he conceded, because he was always on the lookout for a fight brewing and always wary of participating in one.

Barbara pursed her lips. She was an exquisitely beautiful woman, he thought. She was even beautiful when she was pursing her lips.

"C'mon, Harry, don't be such a wimp," she said. "Give me an argument, for Christ's sake."

There were a couple of reasons that Harry didn't want to give Barbara an argument. Most importantly, she was right: how would he know, indeed, what happened after death (and, for that matter, how would *she* know)? Secondly, if he got into a long, philosophical discussion with her, she would delay her nude swim, and that would be a pity, because the longer she delayed it, the more likely she would be to simply not do it. The hour was late, after all. And it was Christmas Eve, so, even though the pool was heated, the air wasn't.

Harry shook his head. "No, you're right, darling. I really wouldn't know anything about what happens after death. No one would."

"Including me?"

He shrugged again. "Well, sure."

"You just want me to get naked, don't you, Harry?"

He grinned, then fought the grin back because it was not, after all, the way a ballsy, no-shit guy reacted to such a question. "We'll both get naked," he said, stone-faced.

"Oh? And what are you going to do once you're naked?"

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He said nothing for a moment, then answered, "Swim, I guess."

"Swim?" She smiled. "Harry, the act of swimming requires that you actually get into the water."

"Sure, I know that. Of course."

She sighed. "Keep your clothes on, Harry. Just watch me. I don't want you stepping out of character."

Harry's last dessert in this life was muskmelon and strawberries with whipped cream. It was one of his favorites.

The last book he read was *Jurassic Park*, which he thought was entertaining but preposterous.

And his last coherent thought in this life was, *Barbara? Is this a joke?*

Afterward

Chapter Two

Harry had been driving for a long time on a road that seemed to snake endlessly through fields of tall grass and nodding sunflowers. He wasn't sure how long he'd been driving. It felt like centuries. He'd stopped for coffee and for meals—at friendly little restaurants that rose up magically from the fields of tall grass and sunflowers—and he'd stopped to stretch his legs, but he hadn't stopped to sleep and he thought that he should be getting tired by now. He supposed that it was midafternoon when he decided this, and that he was sweating because the road that cut through the nodding sunflowers and tall grass was supernaturally hot.

He didn't notice until the deed was done that a fat, black spider had crawled up from somewhere inside the car's front seat and bitten him on his bare forearm. He saw the spider—it was staring at him with tiny red eyes—and he saw the slight discolored area on