

JEFF HUNTER & EMILY:

A second Hollywood tragedy raises new questions about Jeff Hunter's mysterious death. He was so young, and still so unfulfilled.

He Had Changed So Much



• **JEFFREY HUNTER WAS** on his way to his office, in our building, when I ran into him in the elevator. I couldn't help noticing that he had a horse's bit sticking out of his pocket. "Emily gave it to me," he explained, with a wide grin. "I guess it represents the shackles of marriage or something. I use it as a key chain."

I didn't really understand that! But I did understand, easily, that Jeff was a very happy newlywed.

At 42, he'd just married Emily McLaughlin, who appears in the daytime dramatic series **General Hospital**. It had come as a complete surprise to everyone. Jeff was going with Sally Ann Howes when Emily first separated from Robert Lansing, after 12 years. She said Robert just wasn't interested in being married, and stayed away for long periods of time. Then Jeff suddenly took Emily to Mexico, to be divorced and married again.

A lot can be said against "quickie" Mexican divorces, but this one was a real blessing. If Emily had waited a year, for a California divorce, she and Jeffrey would never have had even their two brief months of happiness. On May 27—Los Angeles Election Day—at 9:30 in the morning—he died, in Valley Hospital, of brain injuries.

He'd been taken to the hospital in a fire department ambulance the previous afternoon. A friend had found him unconscious, with his right eye swollen, in his Van Nuys home. He was immediately given brain surgery, but he was dead 16 hours later. The county examiner's office said at first that the fatal injury was probably caused by a fall. But further investigation convinced them that he was already dying even before he fell. They now believe that he tripped on the stairs: it caused him to fall to the bottom. It may have been due to injuries he suffered on a movie location a few months ago.

Emily was not at home when it happened. She had to be placed under heavy sedation when the hospital told her he was dead. His body was taken to Meyer and Mitchell Funeral Home, in Van Nuys. Emily was so overcome that the funeral plans had to be delayed for a day. The funeral services were finally scheduled for 11 o'clock the following Saturday, at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Glen Haven Memorial Park, in San Fernando, Cal., was chosen for the burial.

Jeff's many friends began their own private mourning as soon as the terrible news arrived. His office workers remembered him as a very, very nice guy. He sometimes went to Little Joe's, the barbershop next to our office. The staff there described him in almost the very same words.

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JEFF HUNTER

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Jeffs behavior proves that they were telling the simple truth. His first wife, Barbara Rush, gave him a son, Christopher, 17. He had two more sons, Todd and Scott, 9 and 6, by his second wife, Dusty Bartlett. Yet he also adopted Steele, Dusty's son by a former marriage.

Jeff was married to Dusty for 10 years, until 1967. She said in the divorce hearings that he sometimes drank too much but the same could be said for many good men!

The tragic news was especially hard on his first wife, for Barbara was already going through a very sad time. She recently separated from her present husband, the press agent Warren Cowan. Barbara and Jeff were divorced shortly before he married Dusty, in 1957.

While Jeff was never a top star, he did have a very impressive career as a romantic leading man. He was born Henry McKinnies, Jr., in New Orleans, where his parents still live. When he left the Navy, he studied dramatics at UCLA. He was given his new name, along with an eight-year contract, by 20th Century Fox, in 1950. He made over 50 movies, including **14 Hours**, **Hell To Eternity**, **The True Story of Jesse James**, and **The Longest Day**, as well as a T.V. series, **Temple Houston**.

In 1960, he played his most distinguished role, as Jesus, in MGM's spectacular, **The King of Kings**. It almost ruined his career: people didn't want to see him in any other part afterwards. But recently, he was cast with Vince Edwards in a war movie, **A Band of Brothers**, and he was soon to leave for location in Korea.

This tragedy naturally calls to mind the fate of Jane Russell. The brunette star found her second husband Roger Barrett dead of a heart attack, in their home, two months after their wedding, about a year ago.

When such a thing happens (and thank God it doesn't happen very often!) you naturally feel a special, horrified pity for the widow. Here's a woman who was just starting out in married life, full of excitement and hope for the future, when suddenly everything ended. But there's another side to the sad story. In Emily's case, here was a woman who felt she'd been rejected by her husband, and who was sure her life was over. Then suddenly a man came along and made her a bride again—happy, loved and wanted. Even her two months with Jeff were more than Emily had dared to expect.

(You can send your consolations to Emily at **ABC-TV**, 1451 Prospect, Hollywood, Calif.)