

THE TOWERING AND THE DEAD

S E A N P E N N

THE LAST AND—AND CERTAINLY MOST significant time that I spent with Norman—was a few weeks before he passed. I was with Richard Stratton and Norris and John Buffalo at the Brooklyn pad. Over the last couple of nights, I've tried to close my eyes in a dark room and reconnect with those eyes of his that have been so discussed tonight and ask him what I should say here. In a voice from the cosmos, I heard his voice say, "Whatever it is Penn, write it on a Blackberry, that way you'll know when it says 'full field' it will be brief enough." Well, that's not really true but it is true in relationship to Norman, because he understood unpredictable women, and I was forced to write it on a Blackberry, due to some such unpredictable circumstances in the last twenty hours or so. So, here it is, a bit less than a "full field."

Norman Mailer had a deep and very personal respect for what was earned. The boxer, a warrior in the ring whose prowess comes only with years of lonely warfare with his own mind and heart, the early morning runs, foot work, trunk work, bag work, punishing years of sparring, and collecting a refinement of his instincts in the brutal competition of the game. He respected the ambitious politician, who began forming their goals and hungers and cutting their trails at University, then slogging through the bureaucratic quagmires to hone his or her D.C. navigational skills. Norman himself was both a natural of the highest order, and an earner—one who has left us with a literary legacy that can only be observed as towering.

And now, Norman Mailer is dead. He has earned something unique. This one sentence, "Norman Mailer is dead," is itself a literary line for our times of contest winners, and *poseur* dolls and dolts. "Norman Mailer is dead" is a lament of what greatness once was, and a bold reminder of what greatness should be aspired to. Thank you, Norman Mailer.