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Room
to
Dream



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I get ideas and a lot of times I don't know what they are or how they fit, but I write them down and one thing leads to another, so in a way I don't really do anything. I just stay true to the idea. I probably wrote four drafts of *Blue Velvet*. They weren't totally different, but I was finding my way, and I gave Kyle an unfinished draft of the script when we were shooting *Dune*.

I didn't like the song "Blue Velvet" when it came out. It's not rock 'n' roll, and it came out during the birth of rock 'n' roll and that's where the power was. "Blue Velvet" was schmaltzy and didn't do a thing for me. Then I heard it one night and it married with green lawns at night and a woman's red lips seen through a car window—there was some kind of bright light hitting this white face and these red lips. Those two things, and also the words "and I still can see blue velvet through my tears."

These things got me going and it all married together.

If a character comes along and you're the only writer around, they kind of introduce themselves to you and then you know them. Then they start talking and you go deeper in, and there's stuff that's surprising because everybody is a mix of good and evil. Almost everybody has a bunch of stuff swimming in them, and I don't think most people are aware of the dark parts of themselves. People trick themselves and we all think we're pretty much okay and that others are at fault. But people have desires. Like Maharishi says, built into the human being is always wanting more, and that desire leads you back home. Everybody finds their way eventually.

An important piece of the *Blue Velvet* script came to me in a dream, but I didn't remember the dream until quite a while after I woke up from it. So, imagine me for some reason going over to Universal Studios the day after I had a dream that I didn't remember. I went there to meet a man and went into the secretary's room and the man was in the room behind her. In this secretary's room there was either a couch or a chair near her desk, and because the man wasn't ready to see me I went and sat down on this chair and waited. Sitting on that chair I remembered my dream, and I asked the secretary for a piece of paper and a pencil, and I wrote down these two things from the dream: a police radio and a gun. That did it for me. I always say I don't go by nighttime dreams because it's daydreaming that I like. I love the logic of dreams, though. Anything can happen and it makes sense.

So Richard Roth and I went and pitched this *Blue Velvet* idea to a friend of his who worked at Warner Bros. I'm telling this guy about finding an ear in a field and a few other things about the story, and he turns to Richard and says, "Is he making this stuff up?" I went ahead and wrote two drafts of the script and showed this gentleman at Warner Bros. the second draft and he hated it. He said it was horrible.

I had a lawyer who didn't tell me that pitching *Blue Velvet* to this guy at Warner Bros. put the thing into turnaround and that if I wanted it back I had to do something about it. I don't know what happened exactly—this is a horror story to me. I went off to Mexico and made *Dune*, and during that time I thought I had the scripts for *Blue Velvet* and *Ronnie*

Rocket and that they belonged to me. When the dust settled after *Dune*, I sat down with Dino and Rick Nicita, and somehow it came out that Warner Bros. owned the script for *Blue Velvet*. I just about died. So Dino picked up the phone and called the head of the studio—and the story was that Lucy Fisher was running down the hall to tell him not to sell the script, but Dino got it from them and that was that. I guess you could say he gave it back to me, because he made it possible for me to make the film and gave me final cut, but that's how Dino ended up with the script. Richard Roth was attached to the film up to a certain point, but eventually he decided it was best to let Dino run the show. But Richard's listed as executive producer of the film and he made his contribution. It was Richard who came up with the name the Slow Club, which is where Dorothy Vallens sings.

Fred Caruso was the producer on *Blue Velvet*, and I love Fred, bless his heart. There are some people that talk in a way that gives you a feeling of assurance and safety, and Fred had that. He was very calm, very Italian. He just had a way about him and he could always talk me down. Fred often said to me, "I don't know what you're doing," but he was really a good producer.

We went to Wilmington and Dino was making thirteen films at the studio and we were the lowest on the totem pole, but we had the greatest time. We were the poorest film on the lot, but *Blue Velvet* was like going from hell to heaven, because I had tremendous freedom. I didn't really give up anything when the budget had to be reduced, either, because I could work around things. There weren't so many rules in those days, and now there are many more rules, and it's harder and harder to keep the money down. It forces you to either give up something or blow your brains out.

We all had a blast and became really close. We were away in a place, and we'd all have dinner together, we'd see each other every day, and everybody was there for a long period of time, and that doesn't happen anymore. People come in quick now, then they go away, and you don't have dinners. I don't know what's changed. Now it's like tremendous pressure. Tremendous. And it just kills me, I can't tell you. Shoots have to go faster. *Blue Velvet* started in May and went until Thanksgiving, and the days of long shoots like that are over.

I remember Dino came to dailies the first day of the shoot and we'd done a day of Steadicam up and down the staircase to Dorothy's apartment, and when we got it back from the lab Fred realized the lens in the camera he'd used was broken and it was so dark that you almost couldn't see anything. Dino sees that and he starts screaming, and I said, "Dino, calm down; the lens was broken, and we've just gotta reshoot it."

Kyle played Jeffrey Beaumont because Kyle is an innocent, and he's kind of all-American in a way that makes you think about the Hardy Boys. Jeffrey is curious and he's a detective—well, everybody's a detective—but he's got that going on, and he likes women, and he likes a mystery. I looked at a lot of people before I found Laura Dern, and she's perfect for Sandy. Sandy is smart and she has this playful nature. She's a good girl, but that mind . . . she's got a dreamy thing swimming in there, and a curious thing. She's the daughter of a detective. Laura embodied this person that Jeffrey could be pals with at first then fall in love with, and they didn't have a dark love. They had a pure love.

Dennis Hopper is a great actor, and I really liked him in *Giant* and *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The American Friend*. I was told not to hire Dennis. They said, "No, you cannot do that—he'll get fucked up and you'll never get what you want," but I always wanted Dennis and I knew he was the perfect Frank Booth. I talked to a few other actors about the part, then somewhere in there his agent called and said Dennis was clean and sober and had just shot another picture, and that that director loved working with him and would be happy to talk to me. Then Dennis called and said, "I have to play Frank Booth because I *am* Frank Booth," and I said that's good news and bad news. I had no reservations about hiring him.

To me, Dennis is about the coolest there is. He's the rebel dream guy, and he has romance and tough guy rolled all into one, and it's just perfect. And it's a fifties thing, born out of the fifties. There's a scene with Dennis watching Dorothy sing and Dennis cries in that scene and that was totally perfect. That's a side of this romantic fifties rebel thing, where a guy could cry and it was totally okay and cool and then beat the shit out of somebody in the next minute. Macho guys don't cry now, and it's false, really, but the fifties had this poetry swimming through them.

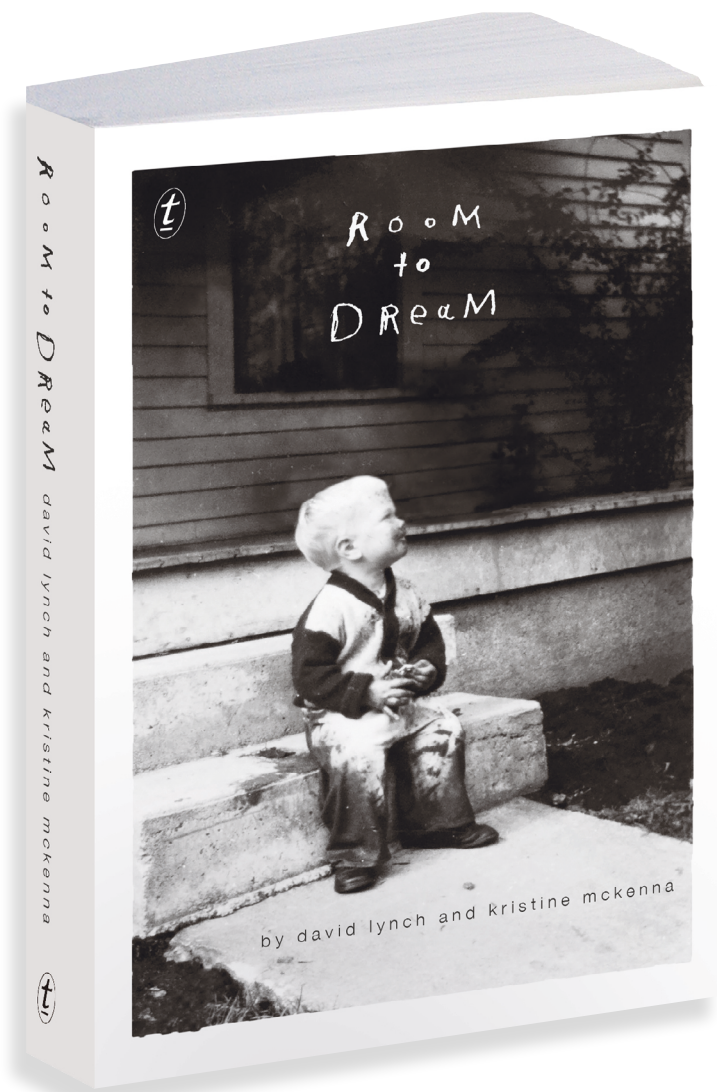
When Dennis has his first scene as Frank Booth with Dorothy I was

laughing uncontrollably, partly because I was so happy. The intensity, the obsession, the drivenness of Frank—and that’s the way it was supposed to be. When people get that obsessed there’s humor in it to me, and I loved it. He just nailed it. Dennis was Frank from the first second all the way through.

Dennis was originally supposed to sing “In Dreams,” and the way it got switched to Dean Stockwell was fantastic. Dean and Dennis go way back and were friends, and Dean was going to help Dennis work on the song and they were rehearsing. Here’s Dean and here’s Dennis, and we put the music on, and Dean is in perfect lip synch. Dennis is going along fine at the beginning, but his brain was so fried from drugs he couldn’t remember the lyrics. But I saw the way Dennis was looking at Dean and I thought, This is so perfect, and it switched around. There’s so much luck involved with this business. Why did it happen like that? You could think about it for a million years and not know it was the way to go until you saw it right in front of you.

So we know now that Dean’s going to sing. Frank says, “Candy-colored clown” and puts in the cassette and Dean picks up the light. Patty Norris [the production designer] didn’t put that light there. I didn’t put that light there. Nobody knows where it came from, but Dean thought it was for him. It was a work light, and nothing could be better than that being the microphone. Nothing. I love it. We found a dead snake in the street around the time we shot that scene and Brad Dourif got hold of it, and while Dean was doing “In Dreams,” Brad was standing on the couch in the background working this thing, and it was totally fine with me.

I met Isabella in this restaurant in New York on July 3rd, and that was a weird night. Real weird. I was with Raffaella De Laurentiis’s ex-husband, and we were going to go down to some club and we had a limo. I was in Dino’s world and I flew Concorde all the time and had limos to drive around in. I don’t know how it happened. So I was in Dino’s restaurant; one thing about Dino, the Italian food he made sure was the best. So we saw a couple of people from Dino’s office sitting over there, and when we were on our way out we stopped to say hello. We sat down and I’m looking at this girl sitting there and I said, “You could be Ingrid Bergman’s daughter.” And somebody said, “Stupid! She *is* Ingrid Bergman’s daughter!” So that’s the first thing I ever said to Isabella, and then we started talking.



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