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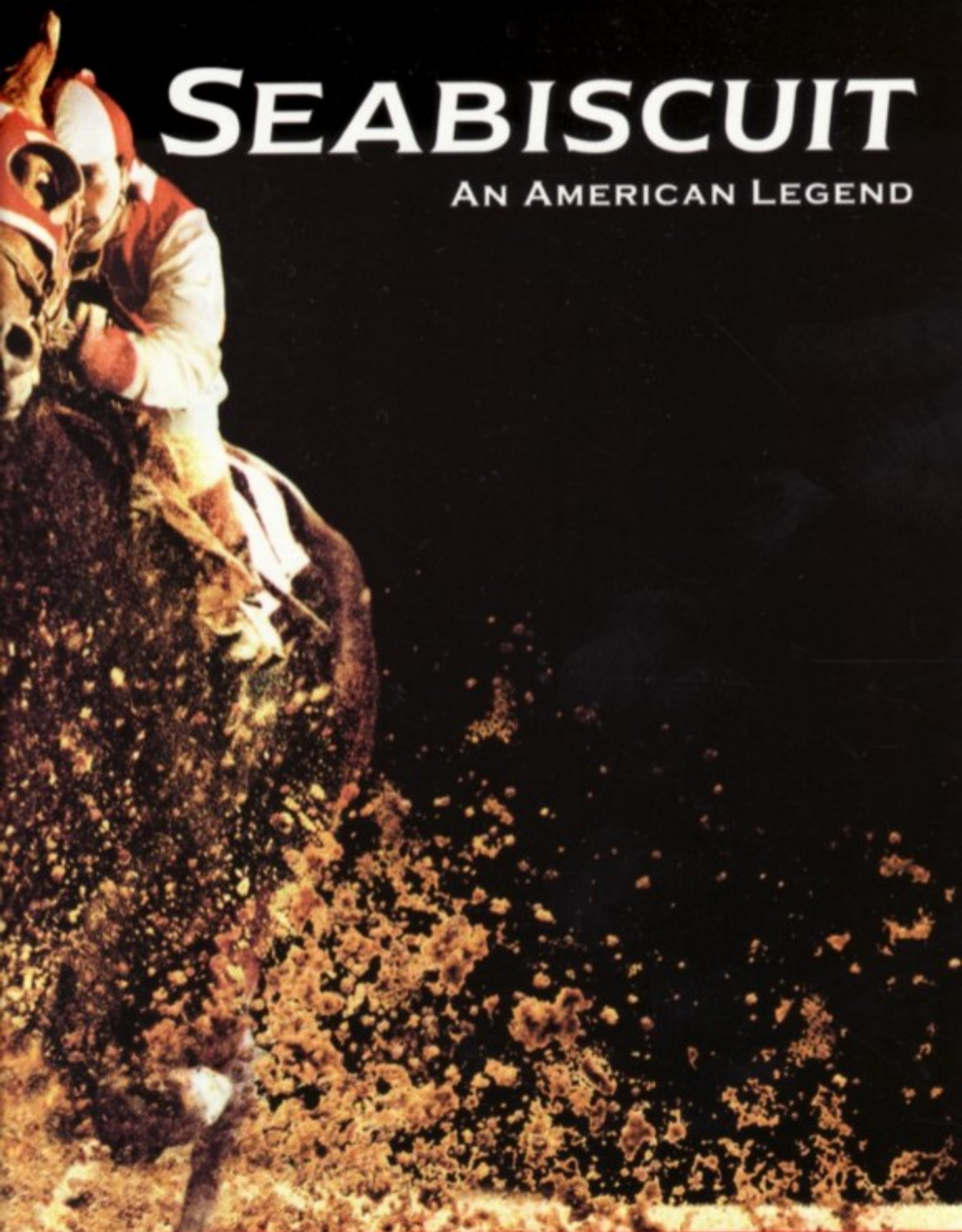

THE #1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER BY

LAURA HILLENBRAND

Chapter 1

THE DAY OF THE HORSE IS PAST

Charles Howard had the feel of a gigantic onrushing machine: You had to either climb on or leap out of the way. He would sweep into a room, working a cigarette in his fingers, and people would trail him like pilot fish. They couldn't help themselves. Fifty-eight years old in 1935, Howard was a tall, glowing man in a big suit and a very big Buick. But it wasn't his physical bearing that did it. He lived on a California ranch so huge that a man could take a wrong turn on it and be lost forever, but it wasn't his circumstances either. Nor was it that he spoke loud or long; the surprise of the man was his understatement, the quiet and kindly intimacy of his acquaintance. What drew people to him was something intangible, an air about him. There was a certain inevitability to Charles Howard, an urgency radiating from him that made people believe that the world was always going to bend to his wishes.

On an afternoon in 1903, long before the big cars and the ranch and all the money, Howard began his adulthood with only that air of destiny and 21 cents in his pocket. He sat in

the swaying belly of a transcontinental train, snaking west from New York. He was twenty-six, handsome, gentlemanly. with a bounding imagination. Back then he had a lot more hair than anyone who knew him later would have guessed. Years in the saddles of military-school horses had taught him to carry his six-foot-one-inch frame straight up.

He was eastern born and bred, but he had a westerner's restlessness. He had tried to satisfy it by enlisting in the cavalry for the Spanish-American War, and though he became a skilled horseman, thanks to bad timing and dysentery he never got out of Camp Wheeler in Alabama. After his discharge, he got a job in New York as a bicycle mechanic, took up competitive bicycle racing, got married, and had two sons. It seems to have been a good life, but the East stifled Howard. His mind never seemed to settle down. His ambitions had fixed upon the vast new America on the other side of the Rockies. That day in 1903 he couldn't resist the impulse anymore. He left everything he'd ever known behind, promised his wife Fannie May he'd send for her soon, and got on the train.

He got off in San Francisco. His two dimes and a penny couldn't carry him far, but somehow he begged and borrowed enough money to open a little bicycle-repair shop on Van Ness Avenue downtown. He tinkered with the bikes and waited for something interesting to come his way.

It came in the form of a string of distressed-looking men who began appearing at his door. Eccentric souls with too much money in their pockets and far too much time on their hands, they had blown thick wads of cash on preposterous machines called automobiles. Some of them were feeling terribly sorry about it.

The horseless carriage was just arriving in San Francisco, and its debut was turning into one of those colorfully unmitigated disasters that bring misery to everyone but historians. Consumers were staying away from the "devilish contraptions" in droves. The men who had invested in them were the subjects of cautionary tales, derision, and a fair measure of public loathing. In San Francisco in 1903, the

horse and buggy was not going the way of the horse and buggy.

For good reason. The automobile, so sleekly efficient on paper, was in practice a civic menace, belching out exhaust, kicking up storms of dust, becoming hopelessly mired in the most innocuous-looking puddles, tying up horse traffic, and raising an earsplitting cacophony that sent buggy horses fleeing. Incensed local lawmakers responded with monuments to legislative creativity. The laws of at least one town required automobile drivers to stop, get out, and fire off Roman candles every time horse-drawn vehicles came into view. Massachusetts tried and, fortunately, failed to mandate that cars be equipped with bells that would ring with each revolution of the wheels. In some towns police were authorized to disable passing cars with ropes, chains, wires, and even bullets, so long as they took reasonable care to avoid gunning down the drivers. San Francisco didn't escape the legislative wave. Bitter local officials pushed through an ordinance banning automobiles from the Stanford campus and all tourist areas, effectively exiling them from the city.

Nor were these the only obstacles. The asking price for the cheapest automobile amounted to twice the $500 annual salary of the average citizen—some cost three times that much—and all that bought you was four wheels, a body, and an engine. "Accessories" like bumpers, carburetors, and headlights had to be purchased separately. Just starting the thing, through hand cranking, could land a man in traction. With no gas stations, owners had to lug five-gallon fuel cans to local drugstores, filling them for 60 cents a gallon and hoping the pharmacist wouldn't substitute benzene for gasoline. Doctors warned women away from automobiles, fearing slow suffocation in noxious fumes. A few adventurous members of the gentler sex took to wearing ridiculous "windshield hats," watermelon-sized fabric balloons, equipped with little glass windows, that fit over the entire head, leaving ample room for corpulent Victorian coiffures. Navigation was another nightmare. The first of San Francisco's road signs were only just being erected,

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