



Beyond Marilyn

by Gabriella Apicella

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This extract is the beginning of a story that imagines Marilyn Monroe did not die on 4th August 1962, and describes the opening scenes of a feature length screenplay, also by Gabriella Apicella.

August 5th 1962. Los Angeles

Frozen feet poked out from beneath a matted blanket and as she turned her head uneasily, sunlight pressed heavily on her eyelids. Pulling the blanket over her straw-like hair, she wriggled to find comfort on his slippery leather couch. She hadn't wanted to sleep in his bed last night. And he didn't make her. That's why she had come here.

Her head felt heavy with medicated fog as he began to shake her shoulder. He was always panicking she'd OD by accident - as if she was that stupid. That was the sort of thing one of her ditsy characters would do, not her. And they said she couldn't act!

"Marilyn. Marilyn! Wake up!"

"I'm awake - gee...." and she tightened the blanket over her head.

"For God's sake Marilyn! Wake up! - Eunice is here."

"What?!"

"She's at the door."

"Well don't let her in!"

"I'm not about to. But you'd better go talk to her coz she ain't listening to me."

Easing herself upright, Marilyn unpeeled her sweat soaked t-shirt, and slipped the straps of her bra off her shoulders. After placing her dark glasses on and ruffling her already unruly hair, she wrapped her half-clothed body in the blanket and stumbled awkwardly towards the door, glimpsing herself in a mirror on the way.

A squat woman glared at her through horn-rimmed spectacles, and patronisingly addressed Marilyn as though she were mentally ill.

"We've been very worried about you. The General has been trying to reach you, and the Dr too."

"Well, as you see I'm fine."

"Yes. You didn't leave a message to tell me you'd be out."

"No I know. I fancied a fuck. I was going to come home, but he exhausted me so I decided to stay. You know how it is."

The older woman blushed and gritted her teeth, but allowed none of her frustration to enter her voice. "We should really be getting back."

"You go ahead. I'm going to finish up here."

"I really think - ..."

"You do? That's funny - me too. Bye bye." Marilyn put two fingers to her lips, kissed them and waved them like a coquette at Eunice before closing the door on her.

As she turned to face him, she saw him trying not to be amused, and giggled at his attempt to appear disapproving. Kissing him on the cheek before flinging the blanket back over the sofa and wandering down the corridor she called, "Can I borrow a shirt?"

He watched her unhook her bra and discard it as she walked towards his bedroom, and sighed, "Take whatever you want."

10th October 1962. New York

Drawing the face that had come to mean more to strangers than it did to her, a renewed frustration gnawed her gut. The ridiculous façade of baby voice, brainlessness and an exaggerated wiggle sewn into a suffocating costume bored her.

After this evening, it would be over. No more contracts bound her to this lie, and finally she would be free to start over. She'd outgrown the restrictive label and had been waiting for her time for too long. After tonight, it will all change.

Stepping into blinding lights her unblinking eyes, accustomed to the spectacle, shone effortlessly as she swayed her fabled body past the yells and whoops. Sheathed in white that matched her hair she burlesqued the fallen angel routine, knowing that all that could be perceived in the glare was her shape and the red of her lips, shining like a fresh cut across her face. She gave a wry smile as she thought of how the photos would look tomorrow - her standing beneath a banner emblazoned with, "Something's Got to Give," - like something out of a comic strip.

As she'd known they would, they asked why she was by herself. Deciding "desperate and unbalanced" would sell more papers than "independent and happy," the questions were of the usual offensive intrusiveness. Bastards. Fools. One of them had been tipped off about her future plans and after asking, "So Marilyn - I hear you're going on stage..." a ripple of ridicule reverberated through the pack. But it didn't matter. She'd been prepared for that and complemented the questioner on the superior functioning of his ears, ending the matter with the standard wink and giggle they still couldn't fathom the sincerity of.

Once inside the cinema, Marilyn posed for yet more photographs, whilst shaking hands with and thanking rows of people who hated her. Eventually she made it to the fire exit at the back of the building, where Pat waited by the door with a large black coat, scarf and dark glasses. Before the film had even started rolling, Marilyn

was on her way back home in the back of an anonymous cab, driven by a heavily tipped Italian.

Pat had tried to get in the cab too, but Marilyn couldn't stand any more nagging tonight. She had vowed to stop taking advice from those she paid money to - she was sick of being someone else's pay-check. Pat had looked hurt as the cab pulled away, but Marilyn recognised bad acting and knew that at the after-party later she'd even be relieved; without Marilyn there, Pat would be spoken to more than ever, and would have a blast fabricating false alibis.

Once home, where all was quiet, she went straight to the bathroom to dismantle herself. Standing naked in a crumpled puddle of white satin whilst removing all traces of artifice, Marilyn regarded herself for a few moments. She'd expected to feel relief instead of fear. She wondered if she should have postponed. Gone away for a few days first. To recover. She tossed the dress into the bathtub and turned the shower on. The stink of flashbulbs and crowds permeated walls like a virus.

She knew she'd never sleep tonight, but crawled beneath the sheets anyway, and lifted the phone to her ear to call the only person she could.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"Did I wake you?"

"Don't you always! How did it go?"

"Read it in the paper tomorrow."

"I want to hear it from you."

"I played her well. I've drowned her in the bathtub."

"Oooh... Not a pretty way to go! How do you feel?"

She paused. She wasn't quite sure how she felt. Her head seemed filled with words pressing against the inside of her skull, and then two fell from her lips.

"Scared ... Free."

"Good. Perfect! You're alive!"

Marilyn did manage to sleep that night after all. And when she woke, she pulled on jeans, a shirt and left her house. She didn't even shower. Stopping at a newspaper stall on the way from 5th to the Studio, she picked up the day's paper; there was a picture of a movie star on the front page. She had looked just right last night. Smiling, she put the paper back down, and walked on, leaving the stall owner calling after her.

"Hey - Doll! I'm not a library!"

7th January - 22nd March 1963. New York

For three months the old man tirelessly berated her for up to 10 hours a day; correcting every nuance of pronunciation and inconsistent inflection. And for every day of those three months she'd kept her promise to the Dr. No pills. She looked like shit. Her dark roots were almost two inches long, and her clothes smelled musty. Without Pat around to organise her appointments, things had become disorganised, but it didn't matter. She'd moved into a tumbledown apartment in the Village, and each evening tip-toed across the patches of bare carpet that peeked between piles of half-read books, scripts and letters to bed, whilst the pages patiently waited for her to return to them. And she slept. Actually really honestly slept every single night.

She hadn't worn make-up since moving, never mind any jewellery or fancy dresses. Her friends had agreed not to take her picture since she moved, and with only one small book-sized mirror in the whole place, she was beginning to exist outside of her body. Occasionally someone would tell her what the word was in Hollywood - that

she'd been taken to a psychiatric hospital, that she'd lost all her money and was singing in a cabaret bar, and some even said she was homeless! But all too quickly she was being forgotten there, and that was just how she'd planned it.

No one had followed up on that reporter's question from the premiere, so when opening night came around it'd be more of a surprise, which was perfect. The Lord hadn't stood by his promise to help her - turns out he'd never taken her seriously in the first place, and offering to help was just another of his sarcastic jokes. But she was becoming good without his help anyway, and as she tasted each of the words she could feel them becoming her own inside her mouth, "Beshrew your eyes, they have o'erlook'd me and divided me,"

After rehearsals she'd started going to a bar nearby to wind down. It was full of young poets and kids in their twenties that hated all the commercial bullshit her face had once stood for. Some of them would get up on stage and shout their vicious words of frustration into the crowd of people that felt the same way. Others would arrive with a beaten up guitar and play songs that seemed to contain the whole world. She'd sit for hours soaking in their energy, unrecognised and relaxed. When anyone spoke to her, she'd give them a fake name: "May". They'd never expect to find Marilyn Monroe in a dive like that, so no-one questioned her too much. She told them she was an actress, that she was rehearsing, "The Merchant in Venice," and that she was new to the Village, so apart from her name, she never told them a lie. But then her name had never been hers anyway.

When Jimi came to visit, it was the first place she took him. He walked straight towards her at the train station - she was convinced she'd become unrecognisable, but he spotted her before he could even see her face. All the rubbish she'd told him over the phone was ridiculous - she looked more beautiful than he'd ever seen her - happy and natural. She talked incessantly about the play, how Strasberg had taught her iambic pentameter, how Olivier had never come through for her, how she already knew every line and was never late for rehearsals anymore. He'd heard it all before during phonecalls these past months, but seeing the delight spilling from her was captivating.

When they'd first met, Marilyn had been so blue, and yet everyone in the world envied her. Now she was happier than she'd ever been, and the people back in L.A. spoke her name with pity! She seemed to take even more delight in that, and giggled as he told her the most recent rumours that had erupted...

They got a cab over to the Village and Jimi was glad the gallery were sending his canvases over separately as they went straight to the bar. A friend of hers was playing, and she wanted to introduce them before he went onstage... As it happened they arrived way too early, and the place was deserted. Marilyn's friend wasn't there yet, and no one seemed to know who was due to play what when. It seemed to be that kind of place, where people just showed up when they felt like it, and Jimi almost felt proud of Marilyn for being drawn into a bar like this. If they'd known who she was they'd probably have spat her out, but she was breaking away from the symbol.

Looking at her sparkling eyes he was relieved they were alone. He didn't want to share her just yet.

After meeting only a year ago, she'd changed his world around - meeting Marilyn Monroe is likely to do that to a guy of course, but this was in a way he hadn't expected. She had been looking at his paintings one day, and began to ask him about them in a way no-one else ever had. He hadn't even recognised her at first, even after they'd met several times. It hadn't occurred to him that a movie star would talk to him about his artwork, or that he wouldn't recognise one straight away. They were in a café one day when he realised he'd never asked her name. "Marilyn," she'd said. He felt stupid. She felt awkward. But by that time they were already friends.