



# Memories of Marilyn

■ *When I was a small boy, I used to plague my baby-sitters. "Read me a story," I would demand. "Read me a story!" And, invariably, the choice would narrow down to "Cinderella." Over and over I'd hear the story of the unwanted waif who lived in ashes and dreamed of better things. My eyes would light up as I listened to how the Prince fitted the glass slipper to her foot. And long after I had gone to bed, the line "and they lived happily ever after" would linger in my mind.*

*As I grew up, I became aware that there were other possible endings. I learned that many Cinderellas cannot cope with the Prince or the palace; that, often, the end of a story is only the beginning of a life.*

*Since then, I've written many words about many people searching for many things. And of all the happiness-seekers I have met, one stands alone as the true mirror-image of the Cinderella my baby-sitter used to read about. Her name was Marilyn Monroe.*

*I first saw Marilyn Monroe in 1950. I was a writer, assigned by a magazine to do a piece about her. She was almost unknown, and I arranged to meet her at the Beverly Hills Hotel for an interview. I stood in the lobby for an hour, waiting for her to show up.*

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And then she came in. I'd have known her anywhere.

She looked trim and neat in a black fitted suit with a jacket that buttoned just above the navel, and a skirt that clung to her eagerly. She wore no stockings with her very high-heeled shoes, nor did she wear a blouse. But just above the button of the jacket nestled a huge blooming red rose. As she walked briskly into the lobby, every head in the place turned her way, but as she drew closer, I could see it was not the startling costume that was attracting attention. It was her posture, her stance, her walk. But most of all, it was her face.

It was framed by silky blond hair of a maddening color and sheen. Her eyes smiled all by themselves, and her mouth was parted as though she were about to speak and say something nice.

When she saw me, she put out her hand and her mouth smiled and she said, simply, "Jim."

I took her hand, and I forget what I said. Then I walked her into the lounge and we sat down.

We sat there two hours or more and politely sipped drinks and became friends. After a time I was able to take my eyes from the rose and look at her face.

"Well," I said, "they tell me you're going to become a star."

"I am?" she said.

Her attitude was all wrong. She didn't slop all over a man who could write something that might well make her famous. She trusted me, not entirely, but a little too much. And when I began to ask her questions, she answered most of them honestly; and when she didn't know the answers, she didn't make them up. It was a lousy interview. But it was a wonderful two hours. Two of the best.

I saw Marilyn Monroe quite a lot after that. And she'd always smile at me, a little warmer, I thought, than she smiled for other people. And I considered her a beautiful, naïve child who could never muster the guile to be a movie star. Then one day I was in the 20th Century-Fox commissary having lunch and she came in and sat at my table and ate with me. When she finished eating she said, "Let me get up first and you look at the back of my skirt and tell me if it fits tight enough." It did.

"Now I'll walk away and turn," she said, "and you tell me if it fits tightly enough from the side." It did.

And as we left the commissary side by side, I thought, "This little animal is learning."

I lived at Malibu and Marilyn

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came to see me one afternoon. She pulled a rather ancient Pontiac up in front of my place and came to the gate wearing a pair of denims and some sort of skimpy halter. We sat on the porch and fed the sea gulls. And when the sun crossed the yardarm, I mixed drinks and she sat on the floor and grew all soft and orange. She rocked gently to some music on the radio, and as it grew darker, she talked and I was afraid to turn on a light for fear she would stop.

"I never had anything like this," she said. "I never had a house or a home. Or, a sea in front of my door. Or, *anything* that was really mine alone. My mother died when I was a baby and I lived in an orphan asylum or foster homes. Once in a while someone would love me—but never for very long. I never belonged to anyone—and no one ever belonged to me.

"I was married once," she said, "and for a while I thought at last I would have a family. But it didn't work out. I don't even know where they are.

"And, once I was in love with a man. He was old enough to be my father and people called me a dumb blonde because they didn't understand. And then he died. While he was sick he made me promise that if he died, I would hold him in my arms, and he said life would come into him again. I was standing in the hospital corridor when they told me, so I ran into the room and I held him for half an hour. And then I knew it was no use, so I left. That's all there has been in my life. I wonder if there will be anything more?"

Later, I loaned her a shirt and took her down the road to a small saloon, and we sat at the bar and laughed and played Skee-Ball, and later on we went back to my house and I put her in her car. I thought of something before she left, so I ran back into the house and got it and brought it to her. She laughed for a full minute.

"That's a BB gun," she said. "What's it for?"

"I think," I said, "that when one has a beautiful guest, she should be given a present."

"But it's a BB gun," she said, and went off into another gale of laughter.

"The most precious thing a boy can give a girl is his BB gun," I

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said.

She stopped laughing and held it tightly. "I'll always keep it," she said.

The next day Marilyn telephoned. "I'm in a hurry," she said. "I just wanted to tell you it's hanging over my bed. Good-bye."

In any good relationship there must be a quarrel or two. Marilyn had been getting along very well, indeed. She was truly a star now. I wrote about her, but seldom saw her. I got most of my information from other people. I had a piece coming out in a magazine and I had played up the death of her mother pretty big. And then a boy threw a newspaper against my door and I went out and picked it up and looked at it.

*What am I afraid of?*

*Why am I so afraid?*

*Do I think I can't act?*

*I know I can act, but I am afraid.*

*I am afraid and I should not be  
and I must not be*

*—Marilyn, random lines*

There on the front page was a story by a syndicated columnist telling of his discovery of Marilyn Monroe's mother—and an interview with her. I picked up the phone and called the man at Marilyn's studio who looked after her.

"You tell that lying blonde," I said, "that she has just made a jerk out of me with an editor I do a lot of business with, and she can take her hearts and flowers and peddle them someplace else in the future."

"She's in the hospital," he answered.

"I don't care if she's in Valhalla," I said, and hung up.

Ten minutes later, the phone rang. "Do you know who this is?" she said. She always said that, and always the same way, low and husky, with an intonation that said she'd die if you didn't remember her.

"I know who it is," I said. "What now, little faker?"

"Please don't be angry with me," she said.

"Honey," I said, "what difference could it make? You made a fool of me. And I don't blame you. It's every mouse after his own cheese in the picture business."

"Let me explain," she said.

"What for?" I said. "You don't need me or anyone now. You're a star. So to hell with it."

She sobbed. "I never knew my mother," she said. "She's been sick for many years—and I was ashamed."

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"That's ridiculous," I said, "this is the twentieth century."

That didn't make much sense, even to me, but Marilyn seemed to know what I meant.

"Can you come and see me tomorrow?" she asked. "I'll tell you all about it."

"You don't have to tell me anything," I said. "I understand."

"Thank you," she said. "You don't hate me?"

"Of course not."

"I'm glad," she said. "I don't have very many friends and I can't afford to lose any."

"Rest well," I said.

*"I guess I had known it all the time. I knew I belonged to the public and to the world. The public was the only family, the only Prince Charming, and the only home I ever had ever dreamed about."*

*-Marilyn-*

I went by the next afternoon and Marilyn was lying in a hospital bed with the shades drawn. She had on a worn terry cloth bathrobe and no makeup, and she looked very tired. But she was very beautiful. There was an air of fear in the room and a feeling that tears had been shed freely. And I sensed tragedy.

I sat there for an hour or more, and once in a while one of us would say something. Marilyn never mentioned her mother, nor did I. Neither of us could talk about it, I suppose. When I left, I just got up and winked at her and walked out. I never saw her much after that day. But nobody will ever know her better.

Once in a while she would call. I had read in the papers that she had met Joe DiMaggio and that they were in love. She'd call and say, "Do you know who this is?" And my voice would get warm and I'd say, "Of course I do." And she'd mention Joe casually. Once I said I thought he was one of the greatest outfielders of all time, and she said, "What's an outfielder?" I shook the phone to clear it and explained it to her. "No," she said. "He's a pitcher."

"What difference does it make," I told myself, "if they're in love."

And then one day she was talking, and suddenly she closed her hand around the mouthpiece of the phone and whispered, "I've got to hang up now. He just came in."

I figured Joe was jealous. But the third time it happened, I figured it was a pretty unhealthy situation.

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As you know, Joe and Marilyn got married. I was never quite able to figure out why. It came at the time that Marilyn's new agent went into the studio and told them she wanted \$200,000 a picture, and the roars of rage were heard in Panama. The next natural step is for an agent to tell a star to take a vacation, and I presume this is



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what happened. My guess is that Marilyn reached for something to hold on to—and because DiMaggio also was on the loose, they got married.

When Marilyn came back, she returned to work. An agreement was reached, but no contracts signed.

By this time Marilyn Monroe was a star, the like of which Hollywood hadn't seen since the days of Jean Harlow and Garbo. But I knew she was frightened and dreaded every moment of it. I remembered the night she telephoned about midnight.

"I'm in terrible trouble," she said.

"What kind?" I asked.

"I went to Glendale tonight," she said, "and saw a sneak of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. I was awful. I can't act and I looked hideous. I guess the best thing I can do is just quit and leave town quietly."

I think that was the last time she telephoned—and I seldom saw Marilyn socially after that. But I watched a newsreel on television one night which showed her leaving a hospital after an operation. Her face was weary with illness and fatigue. And the only companion she had was a nurse. I felt terrible that night. The sight of a woman coming home from a hospital without a friend to look after her or drive her home was bitter.

And I stood on a lawn one day in front of the home she had shared with Joe DiMaggio. A

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seething mass of reporters and photographers fought for a picture or a word while she was being walked to a car by her attorney. This wasn't the girl who had laughed when we played Skee-Ball in a busy saloon with no one paying attention to her. It wasn't distress at the breakup of the marriage that made her hide her face—it was terror of the press and the crowds.

*“...Joseph Conrad wrote that when we are born, we fall into a dream.*

*Norma Jean Mortensen, called Norma Jean Baker, called Marilyn Monroe fell into a dream and made the dream come partially true.”*

*-Maurice Zolotow*

At the time of Marilyn's divorce, a friend of hers telephoned me.

“You tell me the answer to something,” she said. “Yesterday Marilyn got a divorce. Where do you think she was last night and the night before that?”

“Hiding,” I said.

“Right,” said the woman, “but why in Frank Sinatra's apartment—with Joe DiMaggio?”

I sighed a long unhappy sigh for a confused old friend. “Where else could she have gone?” I said.

The little girl with big eyes that smiled so eagerly was right where a million girls in the world dream of being someday. She was probably the best-known woman in the world. She was certainly considered one of the most beautiful. The girl who had held a dead man in her arms for half an hour after he died because she had no other friend, danced at parties with Clark Gable and got a thousand mash notes a week. But her success was a tragedy, a sad, sad tragedy, for, despite her Cinderella-like rise from the ashes, Marilyn never was able to cope with success.

The last time I saw Marilyn Monroe was at a Hollywood restaurant one night. She gave me her hand and it was moist and cold, the way it always was when she was frightened. She didn't look well, and when she smiled the corners of her lips trembled as though she ought to be crying instead of smiling.

“How have you been?” she asked.

“Fine,” I said. “How about you?”

“Okay, I guess,” she said.

I sat there for another minute or two, then I had to get the hell

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or two, then I had to get the hell out of there. The last thing I noticed as I left was the fond and familiar way she held the glass in her hand. I was frightened that she'd found a friend she thought she could depend on. ●●

- Jim Henaghan



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