

The Story Behind **MARILYN MONROE**

A blowtorch blonde gives Hollywood its first successor to Jean Harlow

by GRADY JOHNSON



PRODDED BY PROTECTORS of public morals, Hollywood for 20 years had been telling the world with traces of truth that its residents were home-loving, church-going folk. Belaboring the point, its publicity made glamour girls out as drudges with housemaid's knee whipping up an angel food cake quicker than you could say censorship-is-ruining-the-movies. Then along came Marilyn Monroe.

Merely by being her sweet, sex-conscious self—and there's disagreement over whether she's naive or cunning about it—this luscious blonde with the tree-ripened sex appeal may have reversed the opinion-molding field. At least, she has started others running with the ball.

Possessing a body of which she could be proud, Miss Monroe was inordinately proud. In cheesecake art, she shared as much of its loveliness as the law allowed and twice, she confessed, had posed for calendar art in the nude—without shame.

Seeing this 24-year-old blowtorch blonde emerge unsullied, actresses started changing press agents as

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Looking back on Miss Monroe—and who doesn't?—it is hard to say whether she was cause or effect. A few years ago, she would have been sternly reminded that film stars must publicly be sexless, not drink or smoke, and be kind to animals. Today, still a newcomer to the screen, this undulating creature has become the most exciting personality in town, an unchallenged successor to Jean Harlow with millions of dollars worth of herself awaiting public view in unreleased films.

Before she had been seen on the screen, she had become an astonish-

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ing pin-up girl. Military personnel, college boys and tan clubs everywhere voted her suggestive titles of honor. She became "Miss Cheesecake," "Miss Flame Thrower of '52," "The Girl We'd Rather Come Between Us and Our Wives."

Born in Hollywood and reared as an orphan ward of Los Angeles County, which "farmed" her out to board in 11 private homes before she was 16, this once-underprivileged, unwanted and unsure child has matured into perhaps one of the most beautiful women of all time. She has been pegged the most promising star of 1952 by Movie Columnist Hedda Hopper, and described by Saloon-and-Sex authority Earl Wilson as having "the year's most outstanding figure." Producer Jerry Wald says, "She walks like a young antelope. When she stands, it's like a snake uncoiling. When she speaks, you don't hear her words—it's as though she were whispering love to you." She even is developing a singularly unnecessary skill as an actress.

The furore over her reached a feverish peak several months ago when patrons of a Sunset Strip saloon detected a stimulating resemblance to the poodle-clipped, blue-eyed star in a lithographed nude on the bar mirror, entitled "New Wrinkle" and luxuriating on folds of red velvet. At the same time, a garage mechanic in nearby Glendale was said to have been fired for watching not the clock but a calendar called "Golden Dreams," featuring the lass's all.

As the news was shouted from roof tops, headlines, antennas and Korean foxholes, her studio was thrown into a minor state of alarm. Not since Hedy Lamarr appeared

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in the revealing old film "Ecstasy" had an actress been so daring—and Hedy had been excused on the grounds that her skin stint was intended for blasé Europeans and some cad had imported her shame and exposed it to innocent American eyes.

But Marilyn was as much as saying she did it for pay and she was glad. Her Studio Club room rent had been overdue, and what was a hard-working starlet to do if a photographer wanted to commit her charms to posterity's emulsion?

"Besides, his wife was present at the sitting," Marilyn pouted, and this made everything all right and proper. "I'm not ashamed. I've done nothing wrong, although if I had known I was to become a star, I wouldn't have done it."

Later, when a publication reproduced a nude along with other photos of herself, Marilyn stood in a drugstore all afternoon autographing them, proving, as a photographer said, that "if you convince a woman she has a beautiful body, she'll help prove you're right."

Asked her definition of how she dresses, Marilyn said: "For men. They're my only friends. Designers want me to dress like Spring, in billowing things. I don't feel like Spring. I feel like a warm red Autumn."

Shortly after the calendars achieved mass distribution, Marilyn's anatomy made news again when she fought a losing battle with her appendix. Before going under the ether, Miss Monroe was reported to have pinned to her nightgown a note to the surgeon: "Take only what you have to." While she did not write this, it emphasizes the kind of stories that

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Hollywood makes up to characterize its characters.

Her consciousness of nature's extravagance toward her is illustrated by another story. Walking across a darkened sound stage whose floor was covered with lamps, cables and boxes, when someone yelled, "Watch out for the equipment," she responded, it is said, by quickly zipping her sweater.

WHILE SHE WAS recuperating from her appendectomy, she made news again by "confessing" she had a mother. Previously, she had played the role of a voluptuous Little Orphan Annie. She had said that her father was killed in an accident when she was very small and that her mother, an invalid, had placed her in an orphanage and then died.

Revising this on advice of counsel—every able-bodied male over 15 elects himself to give her fatherly advice—she revealed that her mother, a former film-cutter at a studio a stone's throw from the orphanage where she lived much of her life, was alive and receiving support from her. She hadn't talked of this before, she said, because her rearing in an orphanage would have embarrassed both.

This admission came none too soon for her employers, who had been harassed by women belatedly seeking to crush the little gold mine to motherly hearts, and an occasional man claiming to be her father. It became ludicrous when a Hollywood mortician telephoned her studio that he was holding the body of her father, who had just died.

"You'll have to write us a letter," said a secretary, weary of such developments. "Yours is the second father this week!"

Such has been the impact of this full-lipped, full-breasted girl, who has hitched a sex wagon to Hollywood's fastest climbing star. A sudden epidemic of ecstasy over her charms had her displaying them in three pictures simultaneously.

Currently, she is without question one of the best equipped females in the business. Five feet five, 118 pounds, with a 37-inch bust burgeoning over a 23 waist and 34-inch hips, she has short feathered corn-silk hair, an unusually large head (hat size 23) which gives the camera much to work with, full moist lips, big blue eyes, a honeyed voice and an out-of-breath way of speaking.

She has an absent-minded professor's preoccupation with her affairs—walks as though in a daze, is always late to appointments. Resigned to being late, she has taken to postponing all engagements an hour in hopes of being on time. This has caused many to call her beautiful but dumb. Yet she is an avid reader of psychology and biography, and says with a straight face that she spends her evenings curled up with Thomas Wolfe. At least, it is known that she was bright enough to skip the seventh grade and win a prize for an essay on Abraham Lincoln.

Vine Street wolves feel that fate was kind in exposing her to them in easy stages. Seeing her suddenly as she is today is regarded as too much of a stimulant to tired males. An example of this was seen in a sales convention of 20th Century-Fox representatives from branch offices all over the United States.

These pin-striped gentlemen, assembled at the studio commissary to meet the stars, never had seen Marilyn, either in the flesh or in

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films. Her sudden appearance in a low-cut black-lace gown—she was late arriving, of course—caused necks to turn and mouths to open as if pulled by the strings of a single puppeteer.

Film-exchange managers, vice-presidents, producers, directors, exploitation men and actors, each felt in his own mind that he, personally, had discovered an exciting new personality. It has been like that for six years. A succession of people discovered her.

Each appointed himself an unofficial agent to talk her up. Grips, electricians, messenger boys, the studio bootblack, the mail clerks, all discovered her and talked about her. It was inevitable that higher-ups heard. Grown wise to the ways of Hollywood by birth, six years' experience in 13 pictures, and a 15-year-old marriage which failed in two years, the young lady is not unaware of the commotion she has caused. She falls into her role so enthusiastically that photographers accustomed to coaxing skirts up and blouses down have to use reverse English on her. "Killed" photographs of her have become collectors' items.

Having become a star by public demand, she will not, she says, permit the dignity of her new station to let her forget what folks want. She will continue posing for cheesecake—not coyly cover up as many another leg artist has done upon achieving stardom.

There's a charming selfishness in the decision. Photographs of herself hold a childish fascination for Marilyn. After a sitting with photographers, she will consult half a dozen men for advice on which

look best. If they like a shot which she doesn't, she will argue for hours, insisting that some be retouched, that others be discarded.

As a rule, women don't like her. They know well the weapon she is using, and call her surplus of ammunition unfair. To men, women say of her: "Isn't she the most beautiful thing you ever saw, but"—and these "buts" cover objections ranging from the kind of clothes she wears, the way she wears them, to the way she walks, talks and acts. They charge that she carefully plunges her neckline to greet visitors and can't tolerate male attention to another girl in her presence.

When a woman columnist criticized her "organic clothes," male admirers contended that Marilyn would look good in a burlap sack. Forthwith, she posed for a picture in one and looked so good that 427 newspapers printed it.

"Girdles and wire stays should never have been invented," Marilyn says. "No man wants to hug a padded bird cage."

Although a day seldom passes without some suggestive witticism being attributed to her, Marilyn is no flippant conversationalist. "I want to find myself," she says vaguely. "Way deep inside. And enjoy being myself. It isn't easy. Nothing's ever easy as long as you go on living."

Entertaining veterans from Korea at El Toro Marine base, she precipitated a near-riot by crossing her legs around the microphone stand while singing a torch song. This cruelty to the love-starved lads caused them to climb the bandstand and crowd her so closely that

shore patrolmen feared for her life.

She told the Marines, reading her script perfectly: "You Marines always whistle at girls—blondes, redheads, sweater girls. Take their sweaters away and then what have you got?"

STRONG MEN WEEP when Marilyn tells of her childhood. Born Norma Jean Daugherty, she says she took the name "Baker" because her father was a baker, later changed it to Monroe after he was killed. When her mother went to a hospital as an invalid, a friend was appointed her legal guardian and turned her over to the county.

Her first job was setting tables at the orphanage for 100 children three times a day. "The superintendent paid me five cents a month," she recalls.

When she was five years old, she was first farmed out. "A family would keep me for a few months or a year and get tired of me, I guess. There were families who wouldn't dance, drink or play cards, and families who did just the opposite. Most of them were poor—some of them unemployed studio workers—and the board the county paid helped with the groceries.

"I guess I made some of them nervous. I remember hearing one woman say to her husband, 'I can't stand the way she looks at me, and she eats too much. We've just got to get rid of her.' "

This unwanted existence, she says, made her stutter for several years. "I was gawky, all knees and elbows." In school plays she was chosen to play the role of boys, once "Jack" in "Jack and the Beanstalk."

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Finally, when she was 13, students at Emerson Junior High School saw into the future. They voted her their "Oomph Girl."

By the time she was 15, she started looking for escape. Mrs. E. Anna Lower ("Aunt Anna"), with whom she was living, had to go back East. "Rather than move in with another family, I married a merchant seaman. We were divorced two years later—about the time that friends wrote me that Aunt Anna had died. Never mind who he was. He's happily remarried now and his new wife doesn't know about me."

Finally in 1945, Marilyn's mother was released from the hospital. The following year Marilyn went to live with her for a while, but, she says, never got to know her intimately.

While inspecting parachutes for Reginald Denny's aircraft factory, Marilyn began posing for photographers. In one month her picture was on the covers of four magazines. A film-talent agent, the late Johnny Hyde, vice-president of the William Morris Agency, saw them. He took them to Howard Hughes.

Hughes, who knows a pretty thing when he sees it, wanted her for his RKO, but 20th Century-Fox beat him to her. Signed to a contract, she did a bit in "Scudda Hoo Scudda Hay"—but this ended up on the cutting-room floor.

One of the mysteries of her career is that the studio dropped her—as did Columbia six months after she had played a burlesque queen in a musical, "Ladies of the Chorus." (Marilyn philosophically calls this her period of "Pulling myself up and slipping back.")

Subsequently, she was a chased

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blonde in Groucho Marx' "Love Happy," and made a personal-appearance tour around the country publicizing it—her first time away from home. She did well in "Asphalt Jungle" at M-G-M, then was cast, as a free-lancer, in 20th's "All About Eve." Darryl Zanuck saw the rushes of her as "a graduate of the Copacabana School of Dramatic Arts" in that film, called her agent and put her under long-term contract.

She landed progressively better parts in "As Young As You Feel," "Let's Make It Legal" and "Love Nest." By the time RKO borrowed her for "Clash By Night," she had attracted so much attention via publicity that she was given star billing, although the part didn't warrant it. In the first half of this year, she was co-starred in "Don't Bother To Knock," "Full House," "We're Not Married," "Monkey Business" and "Niagara." Her studio has further indicated her stature by assigning Marilyn to play Lorelei Lee in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," a part previously announced for Betty Grable.

Where she goes from here onward is up to the public. Her drama coach, Natasha Lytess, feels that her early suffering has given her the depth to become a great actress. "Her soul doesn't belong in that body," she says. Likewise, crusty Leon Shamroy, Oscar-laden cinematographer who would rather insult a star than praise one, says, "She is Jean Harlow. Period." At least, efforts have been made to obtain the screen rights to Harlow's life story as a vehicle for her.

Shamroy, who regards actors as only part of his photographic

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scenery, reminding them often that "A mouse (Mickey) is a bigger star than you," filmed Marilyn's first test. "She was a scared little girl then and she's a scared little girl now," he says. "Don't believe those stories you hear. She's a good girl."



Coronet
October
1952