

BELLADONNA* 19

Looking Back
a re-presentation,

“Dead Talk”

& two chapters from

Weird Fucks

by

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*deadly nightshade, a cardiac and respiratory stimulant, having purplish-red flowers and black berries

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There's a Snake in the Grass

from Weird Fucks

I'm on my way, one of four NYC college girls, heading for Bar Harbor, Maine, to spend the summer as a chambermaid, waitress, or piano player. Bar Harbor is on Mt Desert Island, linked with the mainland by one bridge only and, we are warned, if there is a fire, we might all be caught on the island. Only two lanes out, they caution in dour Maine tones, and the only way out.

Bar Harbor is full of Higginses. There are three branches of the family, no one branch talking to the other two. We took rooms in Mrs Higgins' Guest House. Willy Higgins, a nephew to whom she didn't speak, fell in love with me. He was the town beatnik, an artist with a beard and bare feet. He would beat at the door at night and wake all four of us. I'd leave the bedroom Hope and I shared to be embraced by this impassioned island painter who would moan, 'I even love your dirty feet.'

I was in love with Johnny. Johnny was blond and weak, his mother an alcoholic since his father died some years back. Johnny drove a custom-built racing car which had a clear plastic roof. He was a society boy.

The days for me were filled with bed-making and toilet-cleaning. I watched the motel owner make passes at women twice my age who couldn't read. We had doughnuts together at six a.m. I would fall asleep on the beds I tried to make.

At night Hope would play cocktail piano in bars and I'd wait for Johnny. Mrs Higgins watched our comings and goings and spoke in an accent I'd now identify as cockney. She might have been on the front porch the night Johnny picked me up in his mother's station wagon. We drove to the country club in the middle of the night and parked in the rough behind a tree. We made love on the front seat of the car. I actually thought of F. Scott Fitzgerald. He asked me to put my arms around him again. He whispered in my ear that although he knew many people, he didn't have many friends. He asked if I minded making love again. This would be my third time.

The rich boys who were sixteen and devoted to us NYC girls robbed a clothes store in Northeast Harbor. They brought the spoils to our apartment. Michael, a philosophy student and the boyfriend of one of us, insisted the stuff be returned within twenty-four hours or else he'd call the cops. The next night Bill returned the tartan kilts and Shetland sweaters that hadn't been missed. But he dropped his wallet in the store while bringing it all back and somehow or other the cops were at our door the night after. They spotted me as the ringleader. We went to Bangor for our trial and got fined \$25 each as accessories. They called it a misdemeanor. The newspaper headline read Campus Cuties Pull Kilt Caper. I didn't really want to be a lawyer anyway I thought.

Johnny never called again. I dreamt that Mrs Higgins and I were in her backyard. I pointed to a spot in the uncut lawn and said with alarm: there's a snake in the grass.

A guy who hawked at carnivals wanted me to join the circus and run away with him. I was coming down from speed and learning to drink beer. Some nights we'd go up a mountain and watch the sunrise. Bar Harbor is the easternmost point in America, the place where the sun rises first. I pined away the summer for Johnny and just before heading back to NYC heard that his mother had engaged him to a proper society girl.



No/Yes

from Weird Fucks

I *threw caution* to the wind and never used any contraception. Nancy finally convinced me I might get pregnant this way and made me an appointment at Planned Parenthood. It was a Saturday appointment and that night I had a date with John, a painter from the Midwest, a minimalist. So the doctor put the diaphragm in me and I kept it in, in anticipation of that meeting. Besides I had lied to the woman doctor when I said I knew how to do it – I was afraid to put it in or take it out. Let it stay there I thought, easier this way.

We met at the Bleeker Street Cinema and watched a double feature. Godard. Walked back to his place below Canal Street. We made love on his bed and he said, “I’m sorry. This must be one of my hair trigger days.” “What does that mean?” I asked. He looked at me skeptically. It was difficult, very difficult, for men to understand and appreciate how someone could fling herself around sexually and not know the terms, the ground, on which she lay. He said, “It means to come too quickly.” “Oh”, I said, “that’s all right.” I kept comforting men. He fell asleep fast.

I awoke at three a.m. with just one thought. I had to get the diaphragm out. If it were possible and not already melted into my womb or so far up as to be near my heart or wherever diaphragms go when you’re ignorant of where they can go.

I pulled a rough wool blanket around me and headed for the toilet in the hall. John awoke slightly and asked where I was headed. For a piss, I lied.

The heavy door opened into a dark hall. The toilet door opened, just a toilet and no light. I stood in the dark and threw my leg up on the toilet seat as shown in various catalogues not unknown to the wearer. Begin searching for that piece of rubber. Think about Margaret Sanger and other reassuring ideas. Can't reach the rim. Reach the rim; finger slips off. Reach it, get it and pull. Can't get it out. It snaps back into place as if alive. Go into a cold sweat. Squat and try. Finger all the way up. Pull. Then try kneeling. I'm on my knees with my finger up me, the blanket scratching my skin. It seems to be in forever. This is a Herculean task never before recorded. An adventure with my body. In forever.

I pulled the blanket up around me and stood, deciding to leave it in for now and have it removed surgically if necessary. In a colder sweat I left the dark toilet to return to the reason for all this bother. I couldn't pull the loft door open. It seemed to be locked or blocked. Began banging heavily against the metal door. Hot sweat now. When John finally opened the door he found me lying flat out on the blanket, a fallen angel, naked at his feet. I'd fainted. He revived me and we were both stunned. 'The door,' he said, 'was open.' That's what they all say. He gave me a glass of water and we went back to bed.

The next morning, even though he said our signs were right, my fainting has indicated other signs. Signs and more signs. I walked toward Canal Street and a sign on the wall read Noyes Electrical Company which I read No/Yes Electrical Company. No/Yes, I thought, that's a strange name for a business.



Dead Talk

I *am Marilyn Monroe* and I'm speaking from the dead. Actually I left a story behind. I used to be jealous of people who could write stories, and maybe that's why I fell in love with a writer, but that doesn't explain Joe. Joe had other talents. I didn't even know how famous he was when we met. Maybe I was the only person in America who didn't. I was glad he was famous, it made it easier for a while, and then it didn't matter, even though we fit together that way. The way men and women sometimes fit together. It doesn't last. I got tired of watching television. Sex is important but like anything that's important, it dies or causes trouble. Arthur didn't watch television, he watched me. People thought of us like a punch line to a dirty joke. Or maybe we had no punch line, I don't know. Anything I did was a double entendre. It was different at the beginning, beginnings are always different.

Before I was Marilyn Monroe, I felt something shaking inside me, Norma Jean. I guess I knew something was going to happen, that I was going to be discovered. I was all fluttery inside, soft. I was working in a factory when the first photographs were taken. It was during the war and my husband was away fighting. I was alone for the first time in my life. But it was a good alone, not a bad alone. Not like it got later. I was about to start my life, like pressing my foot on the gas pedal and just saying GO. And the photographs, the first photographs, showed I could get that soft look on my face. That softness was right inside me and I could call it up. Everything in me went up to the surface, to my skin, and the glow that the camera loved, that was me. I was burning up inside.

Marilyn Monroe put her diary on the night table and knocked over many bottles of pills. Some were empty, so that when they hit the white-carpeted floor they didn't make a sound. Marilyn made a sound for them, something like whoosh or oops, and as she bent over she pulled her red silk bathrobe around her, covering her breasts incompletely so that she could look down at them with a mixture of concern and fascination. Her body was a source of drama to her, almost like a play, with its lines and shapes and meanings that it gave off. And this was something, she'd like to tell her psychiatrist, that just happened, over which she had no control. After three cups of coffee, the heaviness left her body. The day was bright and cloudless and nearly over. She thought about how the sky looked in New York City, filled with buildings, and how that was less lonely to look at.

Marilyn just wanted to be loved. To be married forever and to have babies like every other woman. Her body, in its dramatic way, had other ideas. Her vagina was too soft, a gynecologist once told her, and Marilyn imagined that was a compliment, as if she were a good woman because her vaginal walls hadn't gotten hard. Hard and mean. But maybe that's why she couldn't keep a baby, her uterus just wouldn't hold one, wouldn't be the strong walls the baby needed. Marilyn's coffee cup was next to her hand mirror, and she was lying on her white bed looking up at the mirrored ceiling. She was naked now, which was the way she like to be all the time. When she was a child, the legend goes, she wanted to take off all her clothes in church, because she wanted to be naked in front of God. She wanted him to adore her by her adoring him through her nakedness. To Marilyn love and adoration were the same.

Marilyn took the hand mirror and opened her legs. Her pubic hair was light brown and matted, a real contrast to the almost white hair on her head, which had been done the day before. It was as if they were parts of two different bodies, one public, one private. My pubic hair is Norma Jean, how I was born, she once wrote in her diary. It was hot and the air conditioner was broken. She could smell her own smell, which gave atmosphere to the drama. Her legs were open as wide as they could go, and Marilyn placed the mirror at her cunt and studied it, the opening into her. Sometimes she thought of it as her ugly face, sometimes as a funny face. She made it move by flexing the muscles in her vagina.

He said he'd marry me but now I know he was lying. He said I should understand his position and have some patience. After all he has children and a wife. I told him I could wait forever if he just gave me some hope.

Marilyn took the hand mirror and held it in front of her face. She was thinner than she'd been in years. Her face was more angular, even pinched, and she looked, finally, like a woman in her thirties, her late thirties. She looked like other women. The peachiness, the ripeness that had been hers, was passing out of existence, dying right in front of her eyes. And she couldn't stop it from happening. Even though she knew it was something that happened to everyone, it was an irreparable wound. Her face, which was her book, or at least her story, did not respond to her makeup tricks. In fact, it betrayed her.

Marilyn needed to have a child, a son, and she wanted him with the urgency of a fire out of control. Her psychiatrist used to say that it was all a question of whether she controlled Marilyn or Marilyn controlled her. Marilyn always fantasized that her son would be perfect and would love her completely, the way no one else ever had.

Sometimes I meet my son at the lake. One time he was running very fast and seemed like he didn't see me. I yelled out Johnny, but at first he didn't hear. Or maybe he didn't recognize me because I was incognito. He was so beautiful, he looked like a girl, and I worried that he'd have to become a fag. Johnny said he was running away from a girl at school who was driving him crazy because she was so much in love with him and he didn't care about her at all. I asked him if she was beautiful and he said he really hadn't noticed. Johnny told me every time he opened his mouth to say something, she'd repeat it. Just staring at him, dumb like a parrot. As his mother I felt I had to be careful, because I wanted him to like women, even though I didn't trust them, either.

Marilyn had asked her housekeeper to bring in a bottle of champagne at five every afternoon, to wash down her pills. And because champagne could make her feel happy. Mrs Murray knocked very hard on the door. Marilyn was so involved in what she was thinking about, she didn't hear. Marilyn was envisioning her funeral, and her beautiful son had just begun crying. There were faces around her coffin. But his was the most beautiful. No, Mrs Murray said, he hadn't telephoned.

I told Johnny that more than anything I had wanted a father, a real father. I felt so much love for this boy. I put my arm around him and pulled him close. I would let him have me, my breasts, anything. He looked repulsed, as if he didn't understand me. He had never done this before. He had always adored me. Johnny wandered over to the edge of the lake and was looking down intently. I followed him and stared in. He hardly noticed me, and once I saw again how beautiful I was, I felt satisfied. Maybe he was too old to suck at my breasts. But I wanted, even with my last breath, to satisfy his every desire. As if Johnny had heard my thoughts, he said that he was very happy just as he was. He always lost interest anyway when someone loved him.

The champagne disappointed her, along with her fantasy. Deep down Marilyn worried that they had all lied to her. They didn't love her. Would they have loved her if her outsides had been different. No one loved Norma Jean. She could hear her mother's voice telling her, Don't make so much noise, Norma Jean, I'm trying to sleep. But it was Marilyn now who was trying to sleep, and it was her mother's voice that disturbed the profound deadness of the sleep she craved. If she couldn't stand her face in the mirror, she'd die. If they stopped looking at her, she'd die. She'd have to die because that was life. And they were killing her because she needed them to adore her, and now they wouldn't.

I hear my mother's voice and my grandmother's voice, both mad, and they're yelling, Save yourself, Norma Jean. I don't want to be mad. I want to say goodbye. You've got my pictures. I'll always be yours. And now you won't have to take care of me. I know I've been a nuisance and sometimes you hate me. In case you don't know, sometimes I hate you, too. But no one can hate me as much as I do, and there's nothing you can do about it, ever.

Her suicide note was never found. Twenty years after Marilyn Monroe's death, Joe DiMaggio stopped sending a dozen roses to her grave, every week, as he'd done faithfully. Someone else is doing it now. Marilyn is buried in a wall, not far from Natalie Wood's grave. The cemetery is behind a movie theater in Brentwood.



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