

Marilyn Monroe

It's 5 a.m. The morning after a blizzard. The full moon has just reappeared, casting an eerie metallic blue-gray cast across the rolling surface of snow, elongating the spectral shadows of trees as if they were caught in the act of some arcane ritual. Everything is black, white, and haunting gray.

Maslow just woke up. Now he stares out the window above the stove waiting for the water to boil for coffee. Venus sits above a faint promise of dawn. She, too, seems to be exposing herself—a little brighter than the occasion calls for.

He puts on muck boots and walks outside, the coffee cooling quickly. His feet know every knob and crevice on the path to his cabin out back, but the snow changes the calculus of his steps. A little coffee splashes over the lip of the cup.

In the reflected light, the ghostly forms of a car in the driveway, shovel against a barn door, and snow-covered bird feeder feel somehow off-limits, as if unwilling or unable to come alive in the human world until rekindled by the sun.

Inside the cabin, the moon pours through the old drafty Palladian window, which has let the last of the stove's heat escape during the night. He glances at the indoor thermometer. Twenty degrees. He opens the stove, stirs the coals, and begins to feed it with slivers of kindling. As the temperature climbs— 24°, 28°, 31° —he paces the frozen floor in heavy socks, drinking his coffee, stopping every few minutes to load increasingly larger pieces of split beech and oak. 34°, 38°, 44°. The moon begins to be filtered by some light clouds above the horizon and the delicate pattern of high oak branches. Soon the fire is hot enough to sit close to without shivering.

He remembers noticing this very same full moon late the previous afternoon in the eastern sky. Now almost 14 hours later, it is still a tree-line away from the horizon. He pictures it traveling in an arc similar to the high-summer sun—not

surrendering to the horizon until the last possible moment. Is it like this every January? Or does the moon truly follow a calendar all its own? Why has he never thought about this before?

The night sky begins to segue into a deep indigo cast, the first sign of the rising sun. In another few minutes, a chickadee, somewhat tentative, will arrive at the feeder, take a sunflower seed, crack it open, and then announce to its friends that day has begun and the coast is clear.

The stove has come fully alive. Maslow's jeans get so hot he has to push his chair back.

You might think that for those who travel the numinous trails of spirit, dawn would be the time to skedaddle, to disappear dreamlike along with the penumbras of night. But Maslow's soul mates aren't bound by earthly light. And he is not dreaming.

He knows someone is close by. The signature stillness in the back of his throat heralds a whisper in his ear or a wholesale assault on his senses. This morning it will be the latter.

"But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?" Maslow smiles to himself. For Shakespeare, the answer was radiant Juliet, brighter than any sun. For Maslow it is a creature of the moon.

49°, 57°, 63° and still rising.

Closing his eyes he feels her sitting on his lap, uncomfortably heavy—from her timeless burdens, not weight. Her arms drape around his shoulders, head resting against his. The collar of her terry cloth robe on his neck. It feels like the morning after. They are both sleepy. Her breath is warm in his ear. He has to lean closer to hear.

Who is she?

“I keep begging to be cast in a different role,” she’s whispers. “I’ve played this one for so long—the ditsy, drugged, delusional seductress who scares them all to death. Drones that most of them are. They battle for the right to conquer me, thinking that will bring them peace. But it only reveals a deeper, more urgent yearning.”

Her head stirs from Maslow’s shoulder. She cocks it as if he’d asked a question. He catches a whiff of Chanel #5. It’s her.

He can feel her smile as she rises lazily from his lap, walks over to the far wall, and looks at Maslow’s prize possession—an illustrated scroll of human history, with hundreds of images and captions, that covers five thousand years in twenty feet.

Hands on hips, she nods appreciatively. First slowly. Then more insistently. An engine revving.

She walks over and puts her fingertip on the far left edge and begins to slide it seductively across two thousand years of ancient history until she arrives at an image. It’s too far away for Maslow to see. But, after turning to wink at him, she reads its caption as if she were some esteemed professor of Historical Relativism:

“Paris son of Priam visited Greece and carried away Helen, wife of Menelaus King of Sparta 1204. Menelaus assembled the princes of Greece with their forces under the command of Agamemnon (Bro. of Menelaus)’ —I like that...*Bro*’—and, with a large armament, sailed to Troy, and after a siege of 10 years, took the City by stratagem’...*stratagem*, I like that too...sounds rather seductive, no?—and destroyed it 1184 B.C.’ Ahh, if they only knew...”

She continues walking slowly down the centuries, teasing them with her finger, laughing at some images, grumbling at others. She reaches Jesus...Maslow can tell...it’s the largest image...dead center on the timeline. Taps her finger on the

crucified forehead. Shakes her head slowly. “He had but one true apostle. And she’s nowhere to be seen.”

When she reaches the Middle Ages, she stops for a closer look and bursts out in laughter. “‘Chivalry commenced in 912. The Knights swore to be true to their trusts as the champions of God and the Ladies.’ Champions? Hah! Rape by any other name! Even God was abused. Nobody won. Not even the nameless.”

She turns back to Maslow to see if he gets the point and laughs when she sees the look on his face.

As she slides her finger another few hundred years, Maslow carefully stands up, a little dizzy at first, and begins to move closer, barely daring to blink. He needs to know what she is looking at. A small image of a woman at a stake. Joan of Arc? No. He looks closer. America. 1600s.

“Yup, that’s Puritan values for you. Can’t control them? Well, then, tie ‘em up and light the match!”

She strokes her finger further across the timeline, pausing in mid-century. The twentieth. Stopping at a yellow sliver—the presidency of JFK—just three years in human time. A lifetime for her. Albeit a short one.

She begins lecturing again, but now like a schoolroom teacher. The most beautiful schoolroom teacher in history. Wearing a bathrobe, no less.

“I used the boys. The boys used me.” She giggles a little. “All’s fair...” She breaks briefly into song running her hands over her thighs. “Happy Birthday, Mister President.”

Maslow blinks. The bathrobe dissolves into a sequined dress, and then directly into a prim schoolmistress’s black suit with big buttons and a wide white collar.

“Ah the clever little boys and their cover-ups. They’d cover up their own mothers if they had the chance. Well, I died with a few secrets of my own. Certainly not the ones about sex, nor even particularly death. Those were just

Trojan Horses that concealed the true mystery—how hard we’ve tried for centuries to save them from themselves.

Maslow tries to stay calm. He is juggling multiple worlds, times, ideas, connections. She feels his confusion and turns to give him the full-glow knowing smile, her teeth sparkling from some unseen source of light.

“Jack thought *I* took our relationship too seriously. Hah! If he had known what was good for him, *he* would have taken it *more* seriously. My job, as always, was simply to bring the boys together.”

Gone now is the innocent seductress. Replaced by an emotional whirling dervish, rapidly changing tone, attitude, and intimacy. Wiser than her years...or even her lifetimes. “Now where was I? Oh yes, Trojan Horses...”

Now, with a little twinkle in her eye, she walks—this time, her famous “horizontal” hip-swinging walk, all the way back to ancient Greece and then returns again to the 1950s where she spins around, flings her arms back as if to burst into song, and smiles widely as she imitates the fake baritone of a 50’s movie trailer:

“With good old Joltin’ Joe as the brooding and not-quite immortal Achilles, and countless men *taking turns* (remember that phrase)—play fair, now boys—at supporting roles: the cuckolded Menelaus, the ravaging Paris, and the brave, but sanctimonious Hector and Agamemnon, both trying to defend their brothers’ honor while getting a little action on the side...eh Agi, eh Bobby? Not to mention all those dear, noble, elderly, modern-day Nestors and Priams, particularly kind Isidore, Arthur’s father. The only real one I ever had. And the legion of lovely Clytemnestras, stabbing their wandering husbands upon their return, even though they themselves had also taken lovers in the meantime! Hah!... Paula Strasburg was an excellent Sibyl, don’t you think? Or maybe Ophelia? A little dated perhaps, but I still cannot fully shake the hold she has on my spirit.”

Her monologue had begun slowly but now rises to an ecstatic pitch. Maslow's mind is a mish-mash of insight and innuendo as chaotic schematics of relationships spanning three thousand years zigzag across his neural pathways like an imploding organizational chart.

After a dramatic method-inspired inhale and exhale of breath, she begins again:

“Taking turns. I told you to remember that phrase. How else can I explain just how porous humans are, without destroying your sense of self altogether?”

Brilliant, Maslow thinks. Brilliant. Yes. Of course. Humans are porous. Why do I keep looking for boxes to put these people into when they have come from so far away to break out of them once and for all?

Marilyn raises her eyebrows knowingly. “You’re getting closer. Look how Arthur always cast himself as the cuckold and then the cuckoldee, the idealist and then the betrayer. By the time he threw me at the celluloid cowboys, he really had no idea which end was up. (Something I never lost sight of by the way.) But give the man credit. Knowingly or not, he captured the way spirit informs flesh. Even when they tie you up for it.

She sees Maslow shaking his head, trying to get it all straight. “A little slow on the uptake again...Mr. Scribe?”

Before he can respond or defend himself, she returns to teacher mode, speaking slowly, distinctly, and now without condescension. She might as well be giving a lecture in a philosophy class or a sermon on the mount.

“Most humans realize that they play multiple roles throughout their lives. But they don’t realize that, at the same time, multiple spirits are playing multiple roles through them. And the question is always the same—can I stay on course, and remain true to my eternal self? So before you start running around and making a fool of yourself, my dear Scribe, by starting rumors that I was Helen of Troy or,

God-forbid, the blessed virgin I must warn you that little tidbit is barely the tip of the iceberg. After all, is it my fault that Jack ignored my Cassandra warnings?”

“Whoa...whoa...” Maslow thinks to himself, although he has learned by now that thinking to himself is like shouting out loud to these people. *What* had she warned Jack Kennedy about? She died a year before he was shot. She was just teasing him.

“Whoa yourself...” she answers with full pouty petulance. She retreats into herself, walking away from the timeline on the wall and right towards Maslow. It feels like she is looming over him as she suddenly starts screaming: “Siege Troy. Blockade Cuba. You think these are the ravings of a mad woman? Hah! Pass the Nembutal, Chloral Hydrate, Champagne, and Vodka and I’ll really start telling some truths! Ah, what the hell,” she sighs now and shrugs, backing away, “I don’t need any sleeping aids where I am now...that’s one of the many fringe benefits.”

She looks out the window at the chickadees joining their lead scout at the feeder. The image seems to cheer her up and she turns back to Maslow with a bright smile, as if remembering something she’d been meaning to say:

“And how ‘bout the lovely Lady Diana?” She holds up one finger. “She appears on earth a year before I die...plenty of time for us to...uh...collaborate during her formative years.”

A second finger: “Her mother was almost as absent as mine. Although at least *she* knew who the hell her father was. Unlike yours truly.”

Now a wink and a third finger. “She also had a face that could launch a thousand ships.”

Maslow pictures the young Diana. The smile that could embrace and transcend human lust. Millions of men—who might not agree on anything else, were joined in their adoration of these women. Although, unfortunately, their love was anything but unconditional.

“Bingo!” she says encouragingly. “But you can’t blame us for trying. It would help if you let us finish our jobs.

She stops and looks at him quizzically, as if deciding how far she should go.

At that moment, Maslow remembers her stop on the timeline at the station of the Cross. “Mary Magdalene,” he says out loud.

“Bingo,” she says again, and with some unexpected kindness. “Sometimes it takes two to be one. So complicated for your poor little pea brain,” she clucks sympathetically.

She crosses her arms and holds up four fingers on both hands: “Oh, how hard we’ve tried to dissolve the opposites: Troy and Greece, Jew and Christian, Washington and Russia, war and peace, love and sex, puritan and profligate, communism and democracy; the royalty and the people, the mythic and the human, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost! Hah! Achilles and Hector. Joe and Jack. Charles—and legions of other men—and their true natures.”

She grows grown manic again, but now stops and takes a deep breath. Making it very clear she can turn it on or off. She looks appreciatively at the dumbfounded look on Maslow’s face and says: “That was a take wasn’t it? Put that one in the can Mr. Huston!” She giggles as a bright yellow male goldfinch lightly hits the window as if trying to reach her.

“Did you know, by the way? It was shortly before our marriage... Arthur and I. We were driving down a twisting dirt road trying to escape from a *French* photographer and journalist. They crashed behind us, killing the journalist. Which, I thought, made Diana’s exit a rather elegant touch. So many have died in pursuit of us.”

Maslow is stunned. The connection is obvious and eerie.

“I’ve still got it, don’t I? See why they call us bombshells? Kaboom!”

And with that she is totally off and running again. The words pour forth in one furious deluge. Her voice rises and lowers, switches back and forth between determined seriousness and amphetamined leaps of faith. She no longer looks at Maslow, but rather paces the floor, throwing one arm towards the timeline and the other to the rapidly lightening indigo sky, dropping all pretense of her multiple personalities being anything less than one whole glorious spirit.

“Remember the rage of all women pouring out of me into the desert sky. The rage of women who have been abandoned, abused, and ignored. The rage of women who know that the wildest horses lie in the human heart. A rage so powerful, it could force those three wounded stars to finally choose *themselves* over a woman—to *look to themselves instead of me* to find out who the hell they really are and what the hell they’re really made of.

“Of course, that was fiction.”

She calms down and looks right through Maslow. “Me too?” She says slowly. “You people have no idea.”

With that, she walks over to the door, flings it open dramatically, and steps out. A moment later, she turns back to Maslow and adds breathlessly: “Venus is spectacular this morning,” before disappearing into the dawn.