

from **MARILYN MONROE – From Beginning to End**
Newly Discovered Photographs by Earl Leaf
From the Michael Ochs Archives
Text by Michael Ventura

Blandford Press, 1997 – Out of Print

1950 – THE LAST OF THE SECRET YEARS

*I knew how third-rate I as. I could actually feel my lack of talent, as if
it were cheap clothes I was wearing inside.*

But, my God, how I wanted to learn. To change, to improve!

I didn't want anything else. Not men, not money not love, but the ability to act.

Marilyn Monroe

On the cloudy afternoon of May 17, 1950, Earl Leaf showed up in the yard of a Beverly Hills mansion to photograph a no-name starlet. It was just another gig. He shot a roll and started to pack up. “Poor kid,” he later said, “she thought I was going so soon because it was no good. She pleaded with me to stay a little longer. She said, ‘I can climb trees, do hand-stands, cartwheels – anything you like.’ And for twenty minutes she knocked herself out trying to give me original poses. I couldn’t make her see that it was unnecessary.”

She played with a dog, she bounced a ball, she hung from trees, arranged flowers, hosed the lawn. She changed clothes three times. And she *did* do cartwheels and hand-stands. She even read a script, and in two different outfits – obviously a pose she insisted on. That was her first attempt on record to ask the media and the studios to take her seriously.

This is very much the young woman Emmeline Snively described. Snively gave Marilyn her first modeling job at the Blue Book Agency in 1945. (Its offices were in the Ambassador Hotel, the same place where Marilyn’s last love, Robert Kennedy, would be

killed in 1968.) Snively said, “Girls ask me all the time how they can be like Marilyn Monroe. And I tell them, if they showed one tenth of the hard work and gumption that that girl had, they’d be on their way.”

Does the woman in these photographs, two weeks from her twenty-fourth birthday, look like someone who had by then studied *The Human Fabric*, an authoritative work on anatomy by Andreas Vesalius? She marked the book “in detail,” as biographer Graham McCann put it, “and even at the end of her life would still instruct young friends with an encyclopedic knowledge of the human bone structure.”

Does she look like she’d studied make-up with such subtlety that even master studio make-up craftspeople, the best in the world, would be in awe of her? Whitey Snyder, one of the masters, and the make-up man who prepared her corpse for the funeral, said, “Marilyn has make-up tricks that nobody else has and nobody else knows.”

Does she look like someone who preferred, all her (unmarried) life, to live alone, and who read incessantly, even desperately? Does she look like someone with a natural flair for language, using it always with freshness and originality?

Does she look torn between ambition and insecurity? Between knowing she was special and feeling she was worthless?

Does she look literally tortured by gynecological pains at their most extreme, a true “curse” (as they said in her generation) which had gripped her from her first periods. As McCann wrote, “No biography of Marilyn Monroe contains an adequate appreciation of the effect these illnesses had upon her outlook, her behavior (particularly her ‘lateness’), or her own aspirations.”

Does she even look like a sexpot? Or like someone who, at least in her youth, was said by her first husband and others to have an insatiable sexual appetite, and – what can I tastefully call it? – a commensurate sexual aptitude?

Does she look like someone of whom Arthur Miller said, with what turned out to be gruesome irony: “Being with her people want not to die.” Does she look doomed?”

...

The Beverly Hills backyard in these photos belonged to Johnny Hyde, the dying super-agent who shunned his family to take Marilyn for a mistress. He did everything he

could for her, tried to protect her, certainly loved her. When he was dying, he offered to marry her. He was a millionaire. He wanted her to have it. She would have been fixed for life. She turned him down. Told him, “I do love you, but I’m not *in* love with you.” Hyde asked friends to try to convince her to marry him. She told one that she couldn’t because when Johnny Hyde touched her she felt “no buzz in the arm.” She couldn’t marry anybody who didn’t make her feel that, not even a drying man who was marrying her only to protect her future – a future he clearly didn’t have much confidence in.

That young woman is in some of Earl Leaf’s shots [that day]. A kind of clarity and a distinctive integrity. Not “integrity” as some would define it – she’d sleep around, do work she didn’t believe in. Her integrity was to her own, secret emotional center, and to her own version of authenticity.

1952 – First Year of Stardom

“The truth is I’ve never fooled anyone. I’ve let men sometimes fool themselves. Men sometimes didn’t bother to find out who and what I was. Instead they would invent a character for me. I wouldn’t argue with them. They were obviously loving somebody I wasn’t. When they found out, they would blame me for disillusioning them – and fooling them.”

Marilyn Monroe

It is a different face. Just before Johnny Hyde’s death in December of 1950 she’d had cosmetic surgery: her nose was softened some at the point, and her jawline was accented every so slightly. They were subtle, brilliant choices, worthy of a woman who’d made her own study of bone structure. It’s not that this face is more beautiful than the other; it’s simply a more expressive instrument... It’s now a face that could, as she put it, “do anything.”

Marilyn Monroe knew the worth of her creation. “I want to grow old without face-lifts,” she once said. “They take the life out of a face, the character. I want to have the courage to be loyal to the face I’ve made.”

...

When beauty is a gift, it's both a blessing and a burden. When beauty is a choice, it's a journey. The lost-little-girl, born-to-be-doomed, victimized character who's usually presented in biographies as Marilyn Monroe, doesn't jibe with the starlet who created her own look, perfected her gifts, embarked on her journey. What she found on that journey was many times more terrible than she'd anticipated, and it destroyed her. But being destroyed by the consequences of your own journey isn't the same as getting run over by somebody else's. Marilyn Monroe deserves to be remembered as much more than a victim.

Copyright by Michael Ventura, all right reserved.