



**MARILYN**

# Marilyn

Jack Dann

I was fourteen, and she was stone white and naked and blond.

She was hazed in the pale cold light pouring in from the frost-shrouded windows of my bedroom, and I remember the dust living clouds of dust swirling around her great diaphanous wings, which seemed to shudder as she stepped toward the bed. Those wings were white as tissue and seemed as fragile, as if they would break or crack or tear with the merest motion. She moved across my bedroom, which was filled with books and magazines and forty-five rpm records and pre-cut balsa models (a Spitfire MK XII that would be fitted with radio control) in various stages of completion, and I couldn't help myself, I was terrified that I closed my eyes.

I remember, as if it had happened last month, rather than forty years ago.

It was the year that Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper, and Richie Valens were killed in a plane crash in Iowa. Alaska became the 50th. *Rio Bravo* and *Ben Hur* came out that year; Navy beat Army 43-12, and Mafia boss Joseph Barbara and forty of his men were killed fifteen miles away from my home town in upstate New York.

I found the old book after my father died in 1987.

I was searching through the bedroom closet that he had always locked, and I was lost in the smells of cedar and old clothes. I found a Playboy card, a stiletto knife that he had taken away from me when I was sixteen, a taped envelope that contained an old photograph of a woman—certainly not my mother—wearing the skimpy outfit of a belly dancer, and there were tuxedo studs and cufflinks, a box of nude women, white plastic collar stays of varied size, check registers, an old will in a manila envelope, letters tied with a string, and my paperback edition of *The Fundamentals of Self-Hypnosis and Yoga: Theory, Practice, and Application* by Milton Erickson. I held it open in my palm.

Dad had never told me he had taken the book. Nor had he ever told me that he had taken the stiletto.

I remember how keenly I had felt the loss of the book at the time, but that was only because it was mine . . . because it was mine. I could find other books on yoga and hypnotism, which I did. I lived in libraries and learned clinical theories and models and techniques. It was the antithesis of the careful, quiet clinical process. For an instant—standing there in my father's closet, a grown man in the past—I saw myself, as if in a mirror: a thin, gangly, pimply-faced boy of fourteen once again, straight brown hair greased back, black pegged pants. The boy sneered into those books, indeed, as if he were looking into a mirror. A poor reflection of himself. Reading . . . reading about posthypnotic suggestion and methods for creating the state of *yoganidra*. The powers of *trana* and *Pranayama*. The story of the man and the bear.

I've often remembered that story of the man and the bear. It went something like this: There was a psychiatrist who was in a military hospital in Cornwall, he grew bored and occupied himself with a posthypnotic suggestion. He'd hypnotised himself to day boredom. All he had to do was say "Bear" and count to five and miraculously, a huge white polar bear with a long white fur would try to mount the nurses, frolic around the other patients, or hunch against the psychiatrist's bed and allow himself to be poked. The psychiatrist had to do was count to five and the bear would disappear. The bear had no weight, made no noise, could be moved with its curved yellow claws, remove bras, and dance with any of the variously undressed doctors, nurses, patients, and the bear every night as an antidote to counting sheep, but the apparition soon began to take on a different, more ominous aspect. It obeyed commands, and when it leered, a feat the psychiatrist was certain no other bear could manage, its fangs seemed much longer. "Bear", counted to five, and disappeared his ill-conceived creation.

But the bear was not so easily dismissed.

It appeared the next night, unbidden, and the next day it snapped at the nurses and bit the psychiatrist on the forearm. A sharp, excruciating pain for hours.

The psychiatrist had to hypnotise himself three times to get rid of it.

Nor did that work . . . entirely; and years later, the bear would oftentimes appear—a vague, threatening form in the distance, always looking behind him.

So I lay on top of the prickly wool blankets of my neatly made bed and waited for Marilyn Monroe to come to me, to change the adolescent into a full-blooded man who knew the moist secrets of women, who'd actually and really been laid, even if the

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