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He's also been a buddy of mine for twenty-five years, which had absolutely nothing to do with the story you're about to read.

For Redshift he presents an absolute treat: an alternate history concerning Marilyn Monroe and James Dean.

Ting-a-Ling

Jack Dann

It was the same dream, the same ratcheting, shaking, steaming, choo-chooing dream of being back on the ghost train with his mother. She is imprisoned in a lead casket in the baggage car and he *knows* that she is alive and suffocating. But he can't reach her, even as he runs from the car of the Silver Challenger Express to another. The cars are huge and hollow and endless, and he is exhausted; James Dean, forever the nine-year-old orphan, on his way again-and again-and again- to bury his mother in Marion, Indiana.

Mercifully, the whistle of the train rings-a telephone jolting him awake.

"Hello, Jimmy?" The voice hesitant, whispery, far away.

"Marilyn? ..."

"Well, who do you think it is, Pier Angeli?"

"You're a nasty bitch."

"And you're still in love with her, you poor dumb fuck, aren't you."

Fully awake now, he laughed mordantly. "Yeah, I guess I am."

"Jimmy? . . ."

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry. I love you."

"I love you, too. Are you in Connecticut with the Schwartzes or whatever the fuck their name is?" Jimmy felt around for cigarettes and matches . . . without success. He slept on a mattress on the floor of the second-floor alcove. Shadows seemed to float around him in the darkness like clouds.

Marilyn giggled, as if swallowing laughter, and said, "Anti-Semite. You mean the Greens and I'm not staying with them anymore, except to visit and do business. I'm living in New York now-like you told me to, remember? I'm at the Waldorf Towers. Pretty flashy, huh? But that's not where I am this very minute."

"Marilyn ..."

"I'm right here in L.A., and I've got news, and I want to see you." She sounded out of breath but that was just another one of her signatures.

"I got a race in the morning," Jimmy said, feeling hampered by the length of the phone call and the darkness as he felt through the litter around his mattress. "It's in Salinas, near Monterey. You want to come and watch?"

"Maybe I do . . . maybe I don't."

"Shit, Marilyn. What time is it? I've got to get up at seven o'clock in the morning. And I've got to be awake enough so as not to crash into a goddamn wall. And-"

The phone was suddenly dead. Marilyn Monroe was gone.

Jimmy should have known better. But it was—he got up and flicked on the light switch—two o'clock in the morning. Not late for Jimmy when he wasn't racing; he'd often hang out with the ghoul Maila Nurmi and the ever-present Jack Simpson at Googie's or Schwab's on the Sunset set, which were the only places in L.A. open after midnight, or he'd drive . . . or talk through the night to Marilyn, who would call whenever she felt the need.

The lights hurt Jimmy's eyes, and although he hadn't been drinking or doing any drugs, he felt hung over; and as he looked around his rented house, forgetting for the instant that he needed a cigarette, he remembered his dream . . . running through the clattering passenger cars of the Silver Challenger. "Momma," he whispered, then jerked his head to the side, as if embarrassed.

But eventually the light burned away the dream. He found the cigarettes in his bed, the pack of Chesterfields crumpled, the matches tucked inside the cellophane wrapper; and he sat on the edge of the alcove, his legs dangling, and smoked in the bright yellowish light. Below him was a large living room with its huge seven-foot-tall stone fireplace. He had bought a white bearskin rug for the hearth, and on the wall was an eagle, talons extended, wings outstretched, a bronzed predator caught in midnight. It belonged to Jimmy's landlord Nick Romanos. He could almost touch his pride-and-joy James B. Lansing loudspeakers that just about reached the ceiling. Below . . . below him was the mess of his life: his bongos, scattered records and album covers, dirty dishes, dirty clothes, cameras and camera equipment, crumpled paper and old newspapers and books . . . a library on the floor. The walls were covered with bullfighting posters and a few of his own paintings, but pride of place was given to a bloodstained bullfighting cape that was cut into spokelike shadows by the bright wheel lamp that hung between the beams of the ceiling. Jimmy gazed at the cape and remembered when the Brooklyn-born matador Sidney Franklin had given it to him as a souvenir. That was in Tijuana. Rogers Brackett had introduced Jimmy to the matador, who was a friend of Ernest Hemingway. Brackett introduced him to everyone. All he ever wanted in return was Jimmy's cock.

But Brackett knew *everyone*.

Jimmy could still feel the dark presence of his recurrent nightmare. It blew through him hot, fetid air, the hurricane of a fucked-up past. . . of memory. He had named it, thus making it tangible, absolutely real.

Black Mariah. Black Mariah. Black Mariah . . .

Suddenly frightened, feeling small and vulnerable as his thoughts swam like neon fish in deep, dark water, he huddled close to himself on the landing. He wanted to cry.

Momma . . .

He flicked his half-finished cigarette in a high arc across the room and wondered if it would start a fire. If it did, he would sit right where he was like a fucking Buddha and die without moving a muscle.

If it didn't. . . he would race tomorrow.

The phone rang again. He picked up the receiver.

"Hi," Marilyn said. "You ready to go out with me?"

Jimmy laughed. "Why'd you hang up on me?"

"Because you were treating me bad. I've changed. The new me doesn't take shit from

anybody, not even from the person I love more than-

"More than who?"

"Anybody."

"More than Arthur Miller?" he teased.

She laughed. "Maybe a little, but you'd better see me now because who knows what could happen later."

"You're married, remember?" Jimmy said.

"But not for long, honey." There was a long pause, and then Marilyn said, "No, not for long." The sadness was palpable in her voice.

"Well, you want me to hang up again or what? ..."

"No."

"You going to see me then? . . . Please, Jimmy, I don't want to be alone right now. I'll come over to you." Then, changing mood, "And who knows, we might both get lucky. Anyway, I'll show you my new car. It's a gift. And it's fabjous."

"From who?"

"I got it for doing a show with Art Linkletter. It's a Caddy DeVille convertible, and it's perfect for your cute little ass. I love it." She giggled and blew into the phone. "I'll give you a ride."

"You sure you didn't get it for riding that pink elephant in Madison Square Garden? That was a stunt-and-a-half."

"It was for a good cause. Now make up your mind, I'm hanging up ... one . . . two . . ."

"Okay," Jimmy said. "I'm awake. But how the hell am I supposed to drive to Salinas tomorrow?"

"I'll bring you some pills."

"I can't drive stoned out. You want to kill me?"

"No, Jimmy."

He knew she was laughing at him.

"I'd show you the new Porsche, but it's at my mechanic's. I can pick you up with my station wagon. Where are you?"

"No, I want to drive," she said. "I'll be at your place in fifteen minutes. I've got something to tell you that you won't believe. You're still on Sunset Plaza, right?"

"No, Marilyn, I moved, remember? I'm in Sherman Oaks. 14611 Sutton Street. It's a log cabin, you have to-

"I'll find it. Bye."

"I can't stay out long."

But Jimmy was speaking to dead air.

Although he couldn't be sure when-or if-Marilyn would arrive, Jimmy waited outside on the road for her. He wore jeans, a white T-shirt, scuffed black penny loafers, and the bright jacket that Nick Ray had bought for him to wear in *Rebel without a Cause* after Jack Warner ordered the film to be re-shot in color. Eartha Kitt had told him to wear the jacket, that it would bring him luck. Something about its color.

Jimmy grinned as he thought about Eartha. He had once tried to seduce her, but she only

laughed at him and curled up on his couch. "You shouldn't screw your friends ... or your car," she said. Jimmy could still hear the purr in her voice.

It was a cool night, with the promise that tomorrow would be a perfect day to drive his flat-four 547 Porsche Spyder. He daydreamed about dancing with Eartha in Sylvia Forte's dance class in New York. He daydreamed about driving, dancing, driving; but there was nothing, nothing better than speed, the adrenaline surge that would open deep inside his chest, the pressure in his eyes as the liquid silver curve of the hood swallowed the road in one long, drawn-out gulp, and the beautiful, perfect, third-eye sense that he was about to rise, to lift right off the pavement, to go so fast that the car would shudder like a plane as it became airborne; and he'd rip a hole right through the sky.

Marilyn drove into the gravel driveway. The top of the pink Cadillac was down, although she had neglected to snap on the decorative leather boot. She smiled at him, but she looked tentative, as if frightened that he wouldn't recognize her, or, worse yet that he *would* recognize her and turn away. She didn't look like Marilyn Monroe. That was the guise that she turned on and off like a lightbulb. Jimmy understood all about that. They'd even discussed it. They were both lightbulbs. Brother and sister lightbulbs. They were monsters that could turn into ... themselves, that which was perfect and beautiful and completely cool-hep-can-do-no-wrong, and when they turned themselves on to each other, it was like ... driving fast, except it was in the eyes *and* the crotch. She wore tan slacks, a man's sweater that was several sizes too large for her, and a black kerchief tied around her head. If it were daytime, she'd be wearing sunglasses—all part of the uniform of a private person. She wouldn't be wearing makeup either.

"Well, it's certainly ... pink," Jimmy said as he moved toward the driver's side door. "Do you mind if I drive?"

"Yes, I do. I'm driving." Marilyn leaned toward him for a kiss.

"But I have something to show you," Jimmy said. "Give you a kick like nothing else."

"You drive like a maniac, Jimmy. You scare me."

"You drive any differently?"

"I may be as crazy as you, but this is *my* car. If anyone's going to mess it up, it's going to mess up me. Now get in."

Jimmy put on his pout face, jumped into the backseat—which was littered with slacks, dresses, girdles, shoes, empty bottles of soda pop, receipts, candy wrappers, coat hangers, magazines, blouses, and books— and then crawled into the passenger seat beside Marilyn. She laughed and hugged him.

"What's all that garbage in the backseat? You're going to lose half of it in the wind."

"I don't care," she said, clinging to him. "You're right, it's all garbage." She smelled strong perfume. *Joy*, her favorite.

"You smell like a French whore."

Marilyn didn't reply; she just burrowed against him like a frightened child.

"You want to come inside and see my house?" Jimmy asked.

"No, I want to drive," and with that she shifted the car into reverse and stomped on the accelerator. Tires spun in the gravel as the Caddy fishtailed backwards into the street. Jimmy was thrown against the dashboard. Marilyn changed gears and laid rubber as she accelerated down the hill.

"You're high as a goddamn kite," Jimmy said. "You didn't even look to see if anything was coming, and you almost put my head through the windshield."

Marilyn giggled as she crossed over the double yellow line. "I love these wind-y roads, except it's so easy to get lost."

"You're always getting lost."

"I found your house quick enough, didn't I?" She raced around and down the mountain until she reached Mulholland Drive; then she turned onto the wide, straight road and accelerated until the car began to shake. The pages of magazines in the backseat snapped in wind, but miraculously the soiled dresses and blouses and slacks did not become airborne; it was as if they had all been carefully weighted down with heavier objects.

"Need to get your front-end fixed," Jimmy said.

Marilyn laughed and slowed down to eighty. There were few cars on the drive. She untied her kerchief, and her blond hair, stiff from too many bleachings, was swept back by the wind.

"So what's your news?" Jimmy asked. "I heard about your negotiations with Fox. Word is that you're going to get a hundred grand a picture."

"And I'm going to have director approval, too. John Huston, Billy Wilder, and Joshua Logan-they're already on the list. Fox isn't going to stick it to me again, I'll tell you that."

"We should be starting a company to make films. I'm going to be the best director you ever saw. Nick Ray thinks so, and he's the best director I know."

"You think the sun sets in his ass," Marilyn said.

"Well, he hasn't done bad for me. *Rebel without a Cause* is going to be a *big hit*."

"I hope so. I pray it'll be a smash."

"I should have insisted on doing my next picture with Nick," Jimmy said. "Man, I *hate* George Stevens. That bastard's got a God complex or something. He wouldn't even let me go on a race while I was working on his overblown abortion of a motion picture, and he wouldn't let me act either. All the good bits of *Giant* are on the floor. What an asshole. He couldn't wipe the shit off Nick's ass."

"So we're back to Nick's ass, huh?"

"Tell me if it's true about the money?"

She raised her head, exaggeratedly sniffing the air, and said, "My partner, Mr. Milton Green, thank you, is negotiating everything. We'll see what happens."

"It *is* true . . . you bitch." Jimmy laughed and moved closer to her; she put her arm around his shoulder.

"My *corporation* will be paid, but I might take just a teeny bit for *myself*."

They laughed hysterically.

"And your corporation should buy you all the pink Cadillacs you can drive."

"I'll have a different one every time I go out."

"Are you going out much?"

"Constantly, and I have to drive back and forth from New York to the Greens in Connecticut. Do you think I would condescend to drive the same car every time I go to Connecticut? That would be like wearing the same dress to every party. No, sir-ree, I'll buy myself a *fleet* of new Cadillacs."

Jimmy ran his finger over her sweater and played with her breasts. Marilyn didn't seem

notice, although her nipples became erect.

"I love these," Jimmy said.

"You could fool me. Your squeezing them like you're trying to make mud pies." Jimmy stopped touching her and stared ahead. His long brown hair, which was greasy and needed a wash, was tousled, and his eyes narrowed as they always did when he was concentrating. He pushed his thick-lensed glasses against the bridge of his nose; it was a nervous habit.

"Go ahead, you can make mud pies," Marilyn said.

"I never did that to Pier."

"You never squeezed her tits?"

"She didn't like it, maybe because they're tiny."

"So what did you do?"

"We just fucked."

"That's it?"

"Cuddled."

"You want to cuddle me?" Marilyn asked.

"Yeah, maybe, I don't know."

"I'll stop right here, we can do it right here. If we got caught, tell me *that* wouldn't make good copy."

"I want to talk for a little while," Jimmy said, sounding childlike. "And I want to drive."

"What do I get if I let you drive?"

"A cuddle and a ting-a-ling."

"A what?"

"You got to let me drive to find out."

"Okay . . . you drive." With that Marilyn slid onto Jimmy's lap and let go of the steering wheel. Jimmy grabbed it and pulled himself into the driver's seat.

"Jesus H. Christ!"

Marilyn giggled and let her hand rest on his crotch as he drove. She scolded him when he didn't get an erection. "I can't do two things at once," he said.

"What if I do this?" and she slid across the leather seat so she could put her head on his shoulder. She bit him gently through the stiff denim of his jeans until he became hard. "Well, *that* seems to work," she said. She unzipped his fly, carefully worked his penis out of his shorts, and teased him with her tongue.

"You really do have a death wish, don't you," Jimmy said.

"If you say so. Do you want me to stop?"

"You probably should."

"Just think of it as a cuddle. My treat. I'm as good as any of those goddamn directors or producers you always used to complain about, aren't I?"

Jimmy laughed at that.

"Well? . . ." Marilyn asked.

"Yes," Jimmy said.

"And do you want me to stop now?"

"No." He gave in to warm wet bliss.

"Well, then you'd better *say please* or I'll stop."

"You're a bitch, Marilyn, do you know that?"

"*Say please*. I'm going to count to three. One . . . two . . ."

"*Okay, please.*"

"Nope, too late," she said. She sat up and smiled at him.

"Too late is it?" Jimmy said, stepping hard on the accelerator. "I guess it's time to teach a lesson."

Marilyn giggled. "Better put that thing back in your pants first." Jimmy grinned at her, adjusted himself, zipped up his fly, and said, "This ain't finished yet."

"Well, I would hope not. I expect to get some satisfaction for my persistence, and just remember you *said please*."

Jimmy turned off the headlights. "It's going to be *you* saying *please* very soon now."

"Turn the lights on, Jimmy, what are you trying to prove?"

"See those taillights up ahead? Must be a big Buick or maybe a Caddy like this. Well, this is going to be like one Caddy kissing another. We'll just give his bumper a little a sweet little kiss, maybe something like your kissing my dick."

"What are you talking about?" Marilyn asked. "You really are as crazy as everybody says. But rather than fear, there was an edge of excitement in her voice. "Now turn the lights back on and let up on the gas. I'm telling you right now, if you mess up this car, I'll take a tire iron to that new porch of yours."

Jimmy laughed. "It's a Porsche, and you'd have to find it first." After a beat, he said, "Okay, now let's see what this pig can do." He put the Caddy into overdrive, and the red taillights up ahead seemed to be rushing toward them. "The dumb bastard doesn't even know we're driving right up his ass."

"Goddammit, Jimmy, slow down," Marilyn shouted, reaching for the steering wheel.

Jimmy knocked her hand away; his knuckles were white on the steering wheel. The speedometer read ninety. "You can scream, but don't touch."

Marilyn rolled up her window, as if that would protect her.

"No, roll it down," Jimmy said. "You got to be right there to hear it," The wind roared in her ears, a wonderful whistling whine, and Marilyn screamed as he drove Marilyn's Cadillac into the ghostly white Lincoln Continental ahead. But it was indeed just a kiss, as bumper clang against bumper-one bell-like note and a glimpse of a terrified woman wearing a chic red hat-and then Jimmy was pulling ahead of the Lincoln as the horn of an oncoming car blared. Headlights rushed toward them. Jimmy veered back into the right-hand lane just in time. Marilyn screamed.

"Did you hear it?" Jimmy asked "Ting-a-fucking-ling."

"Stop the car," Marilyn said.

"It didn't do no damage. It was just a kiss, sweet as a bell."

"Pull the car over right now, and put the lights on before somebody back-ends us or something."

"There's nobody else on the road."

"Jimmy!"

"Nobody else in the world." But he pulled over to the curb and turned off the engine. "E. Angel" played softly on the radio, cicadas roared in the bushes, and the distant yet pervasive thrum of the road and city was felt rather than heard. The sky was black and smeary gray; hazy and there a star was visible through the clouds or smog.

"Did you hear the ting-a-ling?" Jimmy said. His voice was low, childlike.

"Yes."

"I told you it would be a kick. You want to check the bumper?"

"No." Then after a beat she said, "I'm still shaking."

"Yeah, so am I."

"You could have killed us."

"Yeah, that's the idea, isn't it?"

"You could have killed that poor woman in the other car. She doesn't deserve that."

"How do you know what she deserves? Or who she might have just screwed over? What happens happens. You can't change it."

"So you couldn't help but drive into her car, right?"

"Yeah, in a way, I guess," Jimmy said. "Just like you couldn't help calling me up in the middle of the night and coming over to my house."

"Jimmy, hold me. ..."

Which he did, and they made love awkwardly and passionately and quickly on the front while the radio played "Maybellene" and "Ain't That a Shame." Marilyn began to cry when they were finished. "That bad, huh?" Jimmy asked. Marilyn smiled.

"Yeah, Jimmy, you were terrible."

After a pause, Jimmy asked, "What's the matter then?"

"I don't know . . . oh, fuck it, yes, I do. It's Joe. He drives a Cadillac . . . a blue one."

"So? . . ."

"So . . . being here, doing this . . . made me think about him a little."

"Did you see him since you've been here?" Jimmy knew Marilyn's husband Joe DiMaggio and didn't like him. The most famous baseball player that ever lived was so overcome with jealousy that he followed Marilyn around like a store detective; and Jimmy thought that he looked like a skinny, upchuck store detective with his big, narrow nose, greasy hair, and ill-fitting though expensive suits.

"No, I was going to call him, but I called you instead."

"He's a prick, Marilyn. How many times has he kicked the shit out of you?"

"It wasn't so bad, Jimmy. Maybe a slap, that'd be it. Not what you think. He'd just get crazy and then he'd be beside himself with guilt, and he'd be crying and begging me to forgive him and buying me every goddam thing he could think of. I could've opened up a flower shop every time we had a fight."

"That's not what you used to tell me."

"Well, I was upset. I needed somebody to talk to . . . someone I could talk to."

"So you were bullshitting me all the while, right?"

She sighed and twisted herself away from him. "No, Jimmy, I wasn't bullshitting you. You just don't understand."

"What don't I understand?"

"That Joe loves me."

"I love you."

She giggled, combed her fingers through her hair, and turned back toward Jimmy. "You to make mud pies."

"No, I mean it."

"I know you do, Jimmy. But you know what I mean; it's different with Joe. He loves me before himself. You and me ... I don't know. No matter what we do, it's different somehow. Joe loves me more than his career."

"That's why he wants you to give *up your* career."

"I'm divorcing him, isn't that enough? But I just can't be cruel to him. I can't do that. And no matter what, I'll always love him."

"Aren't you worried he'll get shitfaced again with his pal Frank Sinatra and break into your apartment like they tried to do last year? Christ, that was something. Did he go to court for you yet?"

"I don't know," Marilyn said.

"If you love Joe so much, what are you doing with Arthur Miller? Christ, he looks old enough to be your father."

"He's not old; he's only forty."

"I expect to be dead by then."

"You probably will be."

"So why are you getting rid of Joe, who loves you so much, and chasing this other guy?" Jimmy asked.

"What makes you think I'm chasing him?"

"You didn't tell me he loves you."

"Well, he does. He's crazy about me, and if he had his way, he'd have left his wife and kids for me, but I wouldn't let him do that. If you can believe it, I tried to talk him out of divorcing her. I don't want that on my conscience. But he says he can't live without me, and I love him."

"I can't believe that. But then I never understood your thing with Joe, either. Different strokes ..."

"Joe and me tore each other apart. I couldn't be what he needs. But everything is different with Arthur. He's smart in a different way. He teaches me things I didn't even know I needed to know, and he's behind my career a hundred percent. With Joe, well, you know."

"Joe must know, the gossip's everywhere."

"I was going to tell him, so he wouldn't read it in the rags, but I just couldn't. I'm such a coward."

"You want to go back to my place?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes, but *I'll* drive." They switched places, and Marilyn turned the car around and sped back toward Beverly Glen.

"So what's your news that you wanted to tell me?"

Marilyn laughed. "You won't believe it, *I* can't believe it. It would certainly solve all my problems."

"Tell me."

"I was approached by a guy who publishes *Look* magazine. I met him last week at the Greens in Connecticut. He told me that he was approached by some big shot who works for Aristotle Onassis, who practically owns Greece. You know about him?"

"Nope."

"And he owns half of Monte Carlo."

"How can you own half a goddamn country?"

"I don't know. It could all be bullshit, but that's what I heard. Anyway, this Gardner Cov... the publisher, who's actually a sweet guy, he asks me if I'd be interested in marrying Prince Rainier, he's the prince of Monte Carlo. I was so shocked I laughed at him, but he was dead serious. He asked me if I thought the prince would want to marry me, and I told him to give me two days alone with the prince, and he'll want to marry me. I'd be a princess, all troubles would be over."

"So what'd you say?" Jimmy asked.

"I told him to set it up. At least I'll get a trip to Monte Carlo and meet a prince."

"You're bullshitting again, aren't you, you bitch."

"No, Jimmy. I swear on everything holy, it's true."

"Why the hell would this prince want to marry you?"

"Thanks a lot."

"You know what I mean."

Marilyn turned onto Beverly Glen. It would be dawn soon, and she looked pale and w... and fragile in the dim, ambient streetlight. Her hair was *frizzed* by the wind. "It all has something to do with problems in Monte Carlo. The country is having a hard time, and Ona... figured that if the prince married someone glamorous, it would make the country more glamorous and bring in more money. Or something like that."

"So you think it's for real," Jimmy said.

"Yeah, I do."

Jimmy waited for her to laugh or joke about it, but she stared ahead and drove slowly up winding road, as if she wanted the ride to last as long as possible.

"Did you have a fight with Miller, is that what this is all about?"

"No, it's about my life and not getting anything right."

"What would make it right?"

Marilyn laughed and said, "If I knew that I wouldn't be here. If the prince makes the effort maybe he'll get me. Or maybe it will be Arthur. Or some secret somebody else you don't even know about."

"Why not me?"

"Because I'll always have you, Jimmy, just like you'll always have me."

Her timing was perfect. She drove into his driveway and kissed him good night.

"I thought you were coming in," Jimmy said.

"No, you go to your race."

"Where are you staying, I'll call you when I get back."

She gave him her generous lightbulb Marilyn smile and backed the car out of the

driveway. "Maybe I'll call you from Monte Carlo."