

HEIDI SEABORN

*from* **Divine Marilyn**

*[1929—Norma Jeane, age 3, with her mother]*

Momma came & made promises  
but stuffed me in a closet.

“Don’t make so much noise, Norma”  
I was a brown quiet mouse.

Momma fell down the stairs.  
Her head broke open.

*[1932—Norma Jeane at age 6]*

It was Los Angeles  
& our street was a bag  
of saltwater taffy bought  
on the boardwalk for a nickel.  
I didn't have a nickel

but I lived in a mint green  
farmhouse across the street  
from the pink bubble gum house  
that belonged to my grandma.

She & Momma went crazy & left me  
with the goats, chickens & a herd  
of foster kids. We sold brown eggs,  
apples, plums, lemons & watermelon  
from our stand.

I climbed the big fig tree,  
watched for Momma's return.

*[1935—Los Angeles Orphans' Home Society]*

The sun cut sharp  
angles down that scratch  
of dirt road, stopped  
short of the stone building.  
Someone had painted the inside  
walls sidewalk grey,  
ordered metal tables,  
chairs, beds, toilets. Sheets—  
once white now laundered winter grey.  
Every day I'd run  
outside into the lit sky.  
Lie on a patch of green  
weeds before walking  
to the cinderblock school.  
Its walls were covered with maps—  
countries the color of saltwater  
taffy like my first  
remembered home.

*[Undated—photo of Charles Stanley Gifford, Sr.]*

I will haunt this man, my father.  
Be his last dream as night unspools  
into day. I will be the white shadow  
on his gleaming forehead, slick in his hair,  
shaving nick on his throat.

I want to hollow his chin with my knuckle,  
slice his mouth like an apple—  
the mouth grinning  
as it breaches the picture frame.

But he's already gone—leaving nothing  
but a trail of scat for me to follow.

*[June 19, 1942—Portrait of Norma Jeane on her Wedding Day to Jim Dougherty]*

Instructions from my Aunt Grace  
at the end of my high school sophomore year:

“Marriage or the orphanage, your choice  
Norma Jeane.”

If I say yes, the dress is iced in lace  
& I am a ribbon-tied gift—a statue

in honor of {him}. In my brand-new  
shoes, I am a hand-me-down. Pass

the green beans & I will mind  
my peas & queue up for groceries.

I will whip up a wife for breakfast  
& bake rockets & bathe

in his glory. & when night growls,  
I will dutifully give him my promise.

[1944—Yank Magazine Pin-Up of Norma Jeane by David Conover]

There are so many men  
& I find myself wanting

to shed even this flimsy skin  
like a snake, reveal what lies beneath—

Instead, I trade  
a shimmer of my skin for their letters—

the envelopes emptying as I swallow  
each word from *dear* to *love*. Does the flash

tattoo my flesh with diamonds? Will I dazzle  
& distract? Does the camera see *me*? See

the blueprint of my bones?  
If I thrust out my hip,

will it save a life? & if I tilt my chin,  
bite my lips? What then?

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Note: this poem is from a larger work inspired by photographs in the exposition *Divine Marilyn* (2019) Galerie Joseph, Paris.