

“This is a book that wound up teaching me a great deal about Hollywood, the social history of California, the movie business, the trials of female actors in American show business, and the life of a woman who has been so mythologized that often the real woman is obscured from actual view. Donald Spoto has accomplished what I would have thought was impossible: he has made me into a Marilyn Monroe fan after all these years.”

—Erica Jong, *Washington Post Book World*

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—*Free Press* (Columbus, Ohio)

“Spoto puts new life into the tradition of biography, and his book is fresh and important. His life of Marilyn Monroe does much to remind us that biography is a branch of history.”

—*London Sunday Telegraph*

“[Spoto] has researched Monroe’s life quite brilliantly and his riveting book comes up with the facts pure and simple.”

—*Birmingham Post* (London)

“[A] well-written and well-researched work.”

—*Arkansas Democrat Gazette*

“[*Marilyn Monroe*] digs behind the usual drivel to celebrate a woman of warmth, wit, and considerable resources, all backed up with Spoto’s renowned research, objectivity, and evident admiration. [An] inspired biography that will endure longer than most.”

—*Empire* (UK)

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MARILYN
MONROE

THE BIOGRAPHY

DONALD SPOTO



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for ELAINE MARKSON

with gratitude and devotion

She brings him good every day of his life,
and when she speaks it is always wisely.
Praise her for all she has accomplished.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

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- 2* JUNE 1926–JUNE 1934
- 3* JUNE 1934–NOVEMBER 1937
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It *is* glory—to have been tested,
to have had our little quality and cast our little spell . . .
to have made somebody care.

HENRY JAMES,
The Middle Years

If one tells the truth, one is sure,
sooner or later,
to be found out.

OSCAR WILDE,
*Phrases and Philosophies
for the Use of the Young*

THE KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY of many people made this book a reality.

Lisa Callamaro, in the offices of my agent Elaine Markson, introduced me to Gordon Freedman, film and television producer of admirable integrity and intelligence. He first suggested this book and introduced me to the family of Milton H. Greene and the representatives of Greene's Estate. A Marilyn Monroe's friend, photographer and business partner, Greene had kept massive and detailed archives covering much of Marilyn's life—materials that include her production and legal files as well as various personal documents, tapes and letters. I owe Gordon Freedman enormous gratitude for providing access to those who made this historic cache available to me.

Equally so, Joshua Greene and Anthony Greene were more than helpful, providing tangible assistance and amiable encouragement at every stage, as well as access to their father's photographs of Marilyn—especially that which graces the jacket. Amy Greene, their mother, opened her home and extended her family to include Marilyn for several years; candidly and generously, Amy shared unique and unprecedented memories, impressions and anecdotes with me. Knowing her and her sons (and, through them, more about Milton Greene himself), it is easy to understand how Marilyn matured so much in their company.

* * *

The writer Elaine Dundy, always a helpful colleague, put me in touch with the archivist and genealogist Roy Turner, who arranged for me to have exclusive access to documents gathered by him and Marilyn Gemme over almost two decades. Much nonsense has been written about my subject's early history and family background, but Roy Turner and Marilyn Gemme first pursued the facts with an honorable passion for truth. My research was immeasurably enriched by theirs.

Through my colleague James Spada, I met one of the most helpful people for this book: from the very beginning, I was assisted (almost daily) by Greg Schreiner, a gifted musician and composer who is also the co-founder and president of Marilyn Remembered. This association—more than a fan club—is composed of talented people, some of whom knew and worked with Monroe, all of whom are devoted to celebrating her talents. Greg provided me with crucial introductions to many people I might otherwise have overlooked; he pointed me to important bibliographies; and he was ever ready to answer questions and provide concrete help.

Likewise, I owe very much to Roman Hrynyszak and Michelle Justice, who direct a similar group called All About Marilyn and who regularly publish a magazine that helps set the record straight on many matters pertinent to our subject. They could not have been more generous with their time and efforts in helping me reach people for major interviews.

Patrick Miller, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Hollywood history in general and of Marilyn Monroe's life and career in particular are remarkable, has for years hoped that a true and full account of her life would one day be published. This book would have suffered enormously without Patrick's extraordinary help and advice.

Marilyn Monroe's three husbands survive. James Dougherty cheerfully clarified much and provided more than a glimpse into his married life with Marilyn when she was Norma Jeane. On the matter of his brief marriage to Marilyn, their divorce and moving reunion, Joe DiMaggio's intact silence is well known and can only be respected. Arthur Miller pointed me to his own extended memoirs on his years with Marilyn and confirmed several important points I put to him in writing.

Eleanor Goddard—known as Bebe to her friends—is the step-daughter of Norma Jeane's foster mother, Grace Goddard. Bebe spent part of her adolescence with Norma Jeane and has a clear understanding of how she became Marilyn. In tracing this dynamic, Bebe was unstintingly forthcoming in replying to my many questions.

Similarly, a special kind of relationship to Marilyn Monroe was enjoyed by her stand-in and good friend Evelyn Moriarty, who from 1960 to 1962 was very close to her indeed. Evelyn's detailed recounting of behind-the-scenes drama, her understanding of Marilyn, her important contributions during many interviews with me and her constant and warm encouragement were precious assets during the writing of this book.

Patricia Newcomb, Marilyn's last publicist and loyal friend, offered me unprecedented confidence and detailed many of the fine points of Marilyn's last two years. Rightly respected for her discretion, loyalty and veracity, Pat spoke at length and with admirable frankness: her signal contributions to the book are everywhere evident.

The late Rupert Allan was Marilyn's first publicist and her constant confidant. Loved and esteemed during his almost fifty years in Hollywood, Rupert encouraged me from the start, providing important introductions and offering me several lengthy, richly detailed interviews even when he was in failing health.

Jane Wilkie, a reporter, writer and editor who covered Hollywood for years, kept drafts of length revealing and unpublished conversations with James Dougherty and with Natasha Lytess—interviews she conducted during the 1950s. Jane welcomed me to her home and transferred to me the exclusive rights to these rich, hitherto unseen manuscripts.

John Miner was deputy district attorney of Los Angeles County and chief of its Medical Legal Section when Marilyn died, and in this capacity he was present during the autopsy. He pointed out details that enabled me to resolve at last one of the most disturbing and mysterious cases in modern history. Likewise, Arnold Abrams, M.D., director of the Department of Pathology at St. John's Hospital, Santa Monica, guided me through the thickets of medical and chemical terminology and clarified important points of the coroner's report.

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Diana L. Summerhayes, Deputy District Attorney in the Appellate Division of the District Attorney's Office, County of Los Angeles, cleared the way for examination of materials assembled by that office relative to the 1982 Investigator's Report on the death of Marilyn Monroe.

At the Discovery Unit of the Los Angeles Police Department, Larry Wulterin enabled me to obtain the official police report and ancillary documents on the death of Marilyn Monroe.

In the Louis B. Mayer Library at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, Alan Braun and Gladys Irvis dashed from floor to floor locating boxes that disclosed the rich matter relevant to Marilyn's years as a client of agent and producer Charles K. Feldman. Similarly, the staff at the Bill Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts in New York was swift and efficient in locating clippings and secondary source materials.

Interviews with those who knew Marilyn Monroe were of course key elements in preparing the biography. In addition to those named above, the following people enlightened me on various unique aspects of her life and work, and I am grateful to them all: Bill Alexander, William Asher, George Axelrod, Milton Berle, Walter Bernstein, Mervin Block, David Brown, Jack Cardiff, Lucille Ryma Carroll, Ted Cieszynski, Mart Crowley, Alex D'Arcy, Ken DuMain, Milton Ebbins, George Erengi, Michael Gurdin, M.D., Edwin Guthman, Joe Hyams, Natalie Trundy Jacobs, Joseph Jasgur, Ade Jergens, Jay Kanter, Douglas Kirkland, Ernest Lehman, Peter Levathes, Jean Louis, Esther Maltz, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, George Masters, Albert Maysles, Robert Mitchum, John Moore, Dolores Naar, Joseph Naar, Sherle North, Ron Nyman, Lydia Bodrero Reed, Vanessa Reis, Ralph Roberts, Milton Rudin, Jane Russell, Hal Schaefer, Michael Selsman, Sam Shaw, Max Showalter, Arnold Shulman, Allan and Marjorie Snyder, Mickey Song, Steffi Sidney Splaver, John Springer, Maureen Stapleton, Bert Stern, Susan Strasberg, Jule Styne, Henry Weinstein, Billy Wilder, Gladys Phillips Wilson, William Woodfield and Paul Wurtzel.

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At HarperCollins in New York, there is a veritable litany of good souls for me to honor.

I am fortunate indeed to enjoy the friendship and unswerving loyalty of my editor, Gladys Just Carr, Vice-President and Associate Publisher. With passionate dedication, sharp insights and constancy

good humor, Gladys guided this book at every stage, from contract to first copy; I am thus ever in her debt. Her assistants, Tracy Devine and Ari Hoogenboom, dispatched numerous daily tasks with trust and good cheer, making many rough ways smooth.

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During the early part of the research, Douglas Alexander was my tirelessly efficient and savvy assistant. He then accepted an opportunity to work on his own first book, an assignment that augured well for the world of letters.

Subsequently there came to the project Charles Rappleye, an editor and writer with noteworthy credits, and I gratefully salute his collegial service. He tracked down obscure facts and remote people, conducted investigations requiring the delicate but dogged persistence of a private eye and cut clear paths through a tangle of civil, legal and police records—thus successfully bringing to light significant matters relative to the final year of Marilyn Monroe's life.

At the Elaine Markson Literary Agency in New York—my professional headquarters for fifteen years—things are in the hands of vigilant friends: Geri Thoma, Sally Cotton Wofford, Lisa Callamaro, Caomh Kavanagh, Stephanie Hawkins, Sara DeNobrega and Tasha Blaine.

With very great love and gratitude, *Marilyn Monroe* is dedicated to my agent, Elaine Markson—the second time I make this gesture, and I pray not the last.

In a way, assembling the several hundred thousand words of a biography is easier than finding the few to express adequately the depth of my admiration for Elaine, who more than anyone has guided my career to its present felicitous stage. If I mention only her wisdom and humor, her warmth and honor, I merely list those qualities long familiar to her many friends, to other clients and to countless people in publishing. Elaine is ever the most patient and solicitous counselor, my prudent and devoted friend. Marilyn would have adored her.

D.S.
Los Angeles and New York
Christmas 1992

MARILYN MONROE

THE BIOGRAPH

MARILYN MONROE'S maternal great-grandfather was Tilford Marion Hogan, born in 1851 in Illinois to a farmer George Hogan and his wife, Sarah Owens, not long after their emigration from Kentucky. By the age of twelve, Tilford was six feet tall and reed-thin, but strong enough for rough farm labor. In 1870, at nineteen, he was living in Barry County, Missouri, where he married Jennie Nance. To support her and, by 1878, their three children, Tilford worked long hours for miserable wages as a day laborer; notwithstanding his efforts, the Hogan family income was always inadequate. For over a decade, they seemed constantly on the move in Missouri, living variously in farmhouses, log cabins, and shared servants' quarters and sometimes barns.

Despite the hardships and very little education, Tilford apparently had an inquiring and sensitive mind: he taught himself to read and took a fancy to poetry and the classics—genteel pursuits to which he could devote little time. Earnest, practical Jennie, citing the family's constant deprivations, offered him no encouragement in his literary interests. The marriage lasted twenty years and then, for reasons that remain unclear, they were divorced. Jennie took the children and returned to her mother's home in Chariton County, and Tilford went to live with his sister in Linn County.

Whatever the marriage problems, Hogan was much liked and respected by friends and neighbors for he was a generous man who shared spontaneously from his own meager supplies of food and fuel. His empathetic nature was perhaps all the more remarkable since his entire adult life was blighted by severe rheumatoid arthritis and chronic respiratory infections, conditions exacerbated by hard labor, poor diet and a ceaseless rhythm of poverty. In addition, he was virtually ostracized after his divorce, which was no commonplace among the zealous Christian citizenry of late-nineteenth-century Missouri. After 1891 (when he turned forty), he worked harder than ever and seemed prematurely old and frail; he also suffered a terrible loneliness without his children, who visited but rarely.

The liveliest of these was Della May (who later sometimes signed herself Della Mae), the second of Tilford and Jennie's three children. She was born July 1, 1876, while her parents were living briefly in Brunswick, Missouri. Not especially pretty but gay and mischievous, she was a precocious and energetic child who had no interest in her father's intellectual inclinations; quite the contrary, she was a habitual truant. Parents and teachers were outraged when, at the age of ten, she led classmates to a local pond for fishing and swimming. There was even graver concern over the matter of Della's conduct with those who often crept away into a family's barn late afternoons for a game of "Kiss-Me-Quick." By fifteen, she was long out of school, shuttling back and forth between her parents, enjoying the attentions of boys alert to her persuasive, unreserved charm.

Frisky young Della forestalled marriage until she was twenty-two, an advanced age for espousal at the time. In 1898, she met a house painter recently arrived in Missouri from Indiana named Otis Elmer Monroe, ten years her senior. Like Della's father, Otis nurtured goals loftier than mere manual labor. He insisted that one day he would study art in Europe, and he spiced their conversations with talk of French painters and of *Belle Époque* Paris, of which he had seen gravures in magazines.

After a proper courtship, on which the groom-to-be insisted, Della May Hogan and Otis Elmer

Monroe were married in late 1899. Photographs of her from that time show a woman of medium height with a strong, round face, dark eyes, an almost severe jaw and extraordinary poise: there is nothing demure in her stance. No portraits of Otis have survived, but Della later described him as fair-skinned, with reddish hair and hazel eyes. He was, she later said, "neat as a pin, always turned out like a gentleman—or at least a gentleman's gentleman." After a bad fall, he had a permanent scar on his left cheek, and this gave him a somewhat dashing, romantic look. Della seemed to think of him as a *roué*, a robust man of the world who had known danger.

Not long after the wedding, Otis told Della to pack their clothes. Because he was guaranteed better wages than for occasional house painting, he had accepted an offer to work for the Mexican National Railway. They settled just across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas, in a town later known as Piedra Negra (then called Porfirio Díaz, named for Mexico's incumbent president). Della, at first unhappy to have left America, often stood on her front porch, gazing at the bridge across the Rio Grande in Texas. But she was an adaptable soul and soon relaxed into her self-appointed role as a kind of unofficial teacher to the Indian and Mexican women, for whom she was also occasional midwife. In autumn 1901, Della was herself pregnant, and on the morning of May 27, 1902 she delivered a child she named Gladys Pearl; a Mexican civil judge certified the birth five days later.

In 1903, Otis and Della learned that there were better jobs to be had in Los Angeles, where tram trolleys and railway cars were proliferating to connect the various sections of that swiftly growing city. The Monroes moved to California in the spring, leasing a small, one-bedroom bungalow on West Thirty-seventh Street, in the south-central sector of the city, whence Otis went out to work for the Pacific Electric Railway. With a wife and daughter to support, he found his dreams of painting watercolors aboard a Seine houseboat fading into oblivion.

In 1905, Della gave birth to a boy named Marion Otis Elmer, and the family required larger quarters. Family notebooks record that theirs was a peripatetic life over the next several years, and that they lived in at least eleven rented and furnished houses or apartments between 1903 and 1907. With such instability and few possessions to call their own, Gladys and Marion, although not obviously deprived of necessities, had uprooted and insecure early lives; constantly on the move, young Della herself had once been, there were also few opportunities to form sustained friendships. In addition, Otis often failed to return from work at night; just as often, when Della confronted him, he insisted he could not recall where he had been. Because he occasionally drank heavily, Della was not surprised by these memory lapses. The Monroe marriage was thus sorely tested throughout 1907.

Then, early the following year, at forty-one, Otis Monroe's behavior and health deteriorated with alarming rapidity. His memory was erratic, his responses often inappropriate, he suffered severe headaches and became uncharacteristically slovenly. His fits of rage, frightening to Della and the children, alternated with fits of weeping, and the poor man soon developed violent tremors in his hands and feet, sometimes followed by seizures that, at least once, sent six-year-old Gladys in a panic to stay with neighbors for two days.

During the summer of 1908, Otis became semiparalyzed. Admitted in November to the Southern California State Hospital at Patton in San Bernardino County, he was diagnosed as suffering from general paresis, the final stage of neurosyphilis, or syphilis of the brain. The disease had been known and diagnosed in Western civilization for at least two centuries; the first successful drug treatment, by the German bacteriologist Paul Ehrlich, was being developed that very same year, too late to benefit Otis.

After three months, Della could no longer endure visits to her husband: he was completely demented and virtually beyond recognition; in addition, she found full-time domestic work to support her children. Nine months later, without having ever left his hospital bed, Otis died at the age of forty.

three, on July 22, 1909.

His harrowingly swift mental deterioration had terrified Della, and she told her children that he had gone mad and died a lunatic—perhaps from drink, perhaps from bad conduct. But the medical file released to her after his death and preserved for decades in family records clearly reveals that Otis Elmer Monroe died of an organogenic (not a psychogenic) illness. The dementia was the result of a systemic disease, not a genetic predisposition. More important, at least one physician believed the form of syphilis was of the so-called endemic type—that is, the deadly spirochete had been contracted not through sexual activity but through the dangerously unsanitary, virus-infested conditions in which he had worked in Mexico. (The incidence of syphilis in Mexico during the period 1880–1910, although not always clearly demarcated in its types, was virtually epidemic.) Della, Gladys and Marion Monroe wrongly believed their husband and father had died of insanity, when in fact he was killed by an infection that destroyed his brain tissue.

* * *

How acutely this information affected Gladys and Marion at the ages of seven and four is difficult to know, but they must have taken their cue from Della. At first she affected a stoic, matronly melancholy, working earnestly and taking the children to one or another nearby Protestant church “to pray for the health of their own spirit.” Despite this transient fit of piety, Della still had the restlessness and exuberance that had characterized her youth—she was, after all, only thirty-three years old. By 1910 she was entertaining eligible bachelors and widowers in her home at 2440 Boulevard Street. Gladys, by all accounts an extroverted, active girl, thought she would soon have a new father. “Mama liked men,” she said later, “and we all wanted a papa.”

For that they waited two years, during which Della was engaged (or acted so) several times before she finally settled on a new husband. On March 7, 1912, at the age of thirty-five, she married Lyle Arthur Graves, a shy, earnest man of twenty-nine who had come from Green Bay, Wisconsin, worked with Otis at Pacific Electric and was that year a railway switchman supervisor. The new family moved to Graves’s house at 324½ South Hill Street, later part of the central Los Angeles business district.

Not much time passed before Della realized she had made a mistake, for Lyle, too, was inclined to excessive drinking—or so she claimed when she took the children after only eight months and moved to a residential hotel. A month later, at Christmas 1912, she went back to Graves, apparently because she needed the support. But the reconciliation did not last long, despite Lyle’s generous gifts for the children during the holidays, and his ceding to Della the management of his salary. Five months later, on Gladys’s eleventh birthday, Della left Graves; on January 17, 1914, she was divorced, charging him with “failure to provide, dissipation and habitual intemperance.”

Della herself had known a rootless and restless childhood (her parents having separated when she was thirteen), and although she may have expected more from adulthood, she knew not how to find or nurture the proper components for herself or her children: there was, quite literally, no place like home.

Gladys was the most affected: her father had died mysteriously after a terrible sickness; men were welcomed and then dismissed by their mother; gentlemen callers arrived and departed; Graves was her new father for only a few months, then he was not, then he was again, then he was not. For Gladys, on the edge of young womanhood, men were impermanent, unreliable transients; at the same time, her mother’s conduct implied that men were also in some way necessary to a woman’s life. Della continued to enjoy—indeed required—male companionship. Her daughter was, then, receiving mixed signals about marriage, family and parenthood.

By the end of 1916, Della and her children were living in one room of a boardinghouse at 26 Westminster Avenue, just a short walk from the Pacific Ocean in an area south of Santa Monica known as Venice, on the shore of Santa Monica Bay, twelve miles from downtown Los Angeles. Planned by a man named Abbot Kinney (who made his fortune in the manufacture of Sweet Caporal cigarettes), Venice, California, was planned to resemble its Italian namesake.

Kinney envisioned romantic canals connecting the streets, and beaches and shops linking homes on flower-banked shores via charming arched bridges across the canals. Construction of lagoons and cottages was begun in 1904, and in 1905 the canals were filled with water. Kinney persuaded merchants, hoteliers and restaurant owners to build in the architectural style of the Venetian Renaissance, and to complete the effect he imported two dozen gondoliers from Italy, who arrived with an appropriate repertory of their native airs and lyrics. Throughout the first two decades of the century, Venice was the so-called Play-land of the Pacific, and in 1925 it was incorporated into the City of Los Angeles. Della had visited the place once before; now she chose it as home for herself and her children.

When they arrived, Gladys was fourteen years old. Bright and flirtatious, she made her presence known at every school and social gathering. Her light brown hair sparkled with red highlights, she had a high, vivacious voice and was quick to laugh, and like Della she craved attention, especially from older men—not surprisingly, since she had had so little from her own father. Her eleven-year-old brother Marion, meanwhile, was soon dispatched to live with cousins in San Diego, for Della believed a boy should be raised in a household headed by a man. Already tall and strong like his grandfather Hogan, Marion was a champion high-school swimmer; at nineteen he falsified his age and married a younger classmate named Olive Brunings. Marion Monroe was neither the first nor the last of his family to contract a teenage marriage.

On New Year's Eve of 1917, dancing at a waterfront parlor, Della slipped on an overwaxed patch of floor. Before falling, she was literally swept off her feet by a handsome, six-foot widower named Charles Grainger. Within days, he was visiting her almost every evening at Westminster Avenue.

To Della, Grainger's life was more impressively exotic than anything ever planned by Otis Monroe. Grainger had first worked as a rigger in the Los Angeles oil boom of the 1890s. Then, in 1915, he shipped out to India, and from there he went on to Southeast Asia, where he was a drilling supervisor for the Burma Oil Company. Since his return to Southern California, Grainger had been employed only sporadically by the Shell Company. He lived not far from Della, at 410 Carroll Canal Court, Venice, a modest two-room bungalow along one of the many channels of inland Venice. That address was more appealing than 26 Westminster, and when she saw it Della was charmed.

That year, cohabitation was no more socially acceptable than abortion or divorce, but Charles and Della discussed living together at Carroll Canal Court without marrying; she simply began to call herself Mrs. Grainger, and no one was the wiser. This decision not to marry was probably his, for Grainger's job prospects were frequently uncertain while he hoped for a new overseas assignment. Della's relationships with Otis Monroe and Lyle Graves had been deeply troubled, and now she and Charles Grainger often lived apart for days or weeks at a time. In addition, he was helping to support two teenage sons in northern California and could not have rejoiced at the prospect of being legally required to provide for Della and her daughter. Wary of adjusting to yet another father and displeased that her mother was again living in an irregular situation providing her with no sure emotional support, Gladys was unhappy and let Grainger know it by surly moods or silence. As a result, Della found her daughter something of a nuisance, for Charles's offer for them to live with him was not forthcoming.

An expedient development then occurred. A twenty-six-year-old Kentucky businessman named John Newton Baker, visiting Los Angeles, was smitten with the fourteen-year-old Gladys, and she with him—not least because attachment to a man meant independence from Grainger. On May 1, 1917, swearing that her daughter was eighteen and had just relocated from Oregon, Della cheerfully witnessed the marriage, turned over the room at 26 Westminster to the newlyweds, and promptly moved over to her lover's bungalow. By 1918, Grainger had found a job very different from oil drilling, but at least he had regular wages as a supervisor at the Pickering Pleasure Pier in San Monica. All of them might, for the time being, have prided themselves on their various ingenuities.

At first, Gladys Baker was a happy young bride, and scarcely seven months later she bore a son they named Jack. The following year, in July 1919, their daughter Berniece Inez Gladys was born.

Given her father's death and her mother's subsequent emotional inconstancy, Gladys had no precedent for domestic stability, nor, apparently, did she herself desire a conventional home life. Quickly wearying of motherhood and its demands, Gladys preferred to entrust Berniece to neighbors (just as she had given up Jack) while she went to dance halls and beach parties with friends or strangers; her husband, meanwhile, worked long hours as a general merchandising agent.

On June 20, 1921, Gladys filed for divorce, accusing Baker of "extreme cruelty by abusing [her] and calling her vile names and using profane language at and in her presence, by striking [her] and kicking [her]," all this despite the fact that she had been "a good and loyal wife." Her virtue was not unchallenged by Baker, however, who counterclaimed Gladys's lewd and lascivious conduct. The court forbade her from taking her children away from Los Angeles.

While this legal melodrama proceeded, so did the precarious affair between Della and Charles. By March 1922, Della had returned to him and again departed, moving with Gladys to a four-bedroom rented bungalow at 46 Rose Avenue, Venice—another street only as wide as an alley, and a few steps from the shore. Signing a lease as "Della Monroe," she agreed to rent out two of the bedrooms, earn a wage as housekeeper there and pay one hundred dollars a month to the absentee owners, Ade Weinhoff and Susie Noel. But as late as June, not even the first rent check had been posted. This caused a furious dispute between Della and Gladys, each accusing the other of squandering or stealing cash. Neither of them held jobs, most of their funds came from Grainger (with only the remnant of a small final sum from Baker), and these amounts the two women spent on good times, for Della and her daughter had gentlemen admirers. Their brief span as roommates ended in July, when a formal eviction notice arrived. With Grainger's permission, Della moved away from the beach to an empty bungalow he owned in Hawthorne.

The Bakers' final divorce decree took effect in May 1923. That same month, John Baker took Berniece and Jack and went back to his native Kentucky. Gladys traveled there once, about a year later, but the children were strangers to her and she left them in the permanent custody of their father. Perhaps from guilt and remorse for her negligence, Gladys made only infrequent attempts to contact them over the years. Jack never saw his mother again (he was reported to have died in his twenties) and it would be several decades before Berniece was reunited with her. Gladys, who had not much experience of emotional stability with Della, could not provide it for her own children.

Free of every family encumbrance and obligation, Gladys then moved east to the section known as Hollywood, where she took a job on the fringe of the movie business—as a splicer (or cutter) of negative film stock at Consolidated Film Industries, located at the corner of Seward and Romaine streets.

No matter how mechanical the work may have seemed to Gladys, she saw at her bench each day many of the images that were produced to entertain America. In 1923, 43 million people (forty per cent

of the country's population) paid an average of ten cents each to see a total of 576 silent, black-and-white films released that year. This was the era of stars like glamorous, sophisticated Gloria Swanson and demurely heroic Lillian Gish; audacious Douglas Fairbanks and sensual Rudolph Valentino; exotic Pola Negri and comic Marion Davies. Among the biggest hits of the year were Lois Wilson and Ernest Torrence in *The Covered Wagon*; Lon Chaney in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; Mary Pickford in Ernst Lubitsch's *Rosita*; Edna Purviance in Charles Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris*; Cecil De Mille's first version of *The Ten Commandments*; and Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last*. Gladys was one of a vast working population flooding into Hollywood: four years earlier, 35,000 people worked at some capacity for the movie industry; by 1923, the count was 130,000.

Consolidated was one of several labs developing and printing the dailies or rushes, the first rough reel of scenes for viewing by producers, directors and executives the morning after filming. Working six days a week in a crowded room, Gladys, wearing white gloves to protect the negative film stock, cut the pieces of film marked by studio editors and passed them along to those who patched together the sections ordered for the final release negative.

Not long after she began work, Gladys was befriended by a supervisor named Grace McKee, who was soon to become the most important influence on Gladys after her mother. Even more significantly, Grace deeply affected the life of Gladys's next child, Norma Jeane. By the end of the summer of 1923, Grace and Gladys were sharing an apartment at 1211 Hyperion Avenue, east of Hollywood, in the section later known as Silver Lake.

Grace McKee had been born in Montana on New Year's Day 1895 and christened Clara Grace Atchinson. By 1915, divorced and living in Los Angeles, she married a twenty-one-year-old garage mechanic named Reginald Evans. She longed for a career as a movie actress, but this never seemed a possibility despite a winsome smile and irrepressible ambition. Standing only five feet one inch tall, Grace was a spirited peroxide blonde who settled for her role as (thus the idiom of the day) "a good time girl," which meant that she was sometimes considered a bad one. Claiming that Evans had gone off to the Great War and died in 1918 (a fact that cannot be substantiated), Grace sliced three years off her age and, in 1920, conveniently forgetting about her first husband from Montana as well as Reginald Evans, she wed a draftsman two years younger than herself named John Wallace McKee. They did not remain together long, although it would be years before they divorced.

Grace, a woman without inhibitions, felt free to dart from one relationship to another. "She was a birdlike creature"—thus her volatile emotions, her small stature and her perky manner were aptly described years later by Olin G. Stanley, who worked with Grace at Consolidated.

She was freewheeling, hard-working and fast-living. Ambitious to succeed. A busybody. Whoever she wanted and whatever she wanted, she went and got. Partying and booze seemed the most important things in her life, and work was just means to that end.

As friends, Stanley added, Grace and Gladys were ever on the lookout for dates. "They did, you'd say, lots of fast living, lots of dates with fellows at the lab or from the studios." The women and their beaux hauled cartons of bootlegged liquor, widely available in the movie capital, for weekend jaunts to log cabins in the mountains, or to beach parties. When they cavorted an extra day and missed work or drifted off from the lab for an afternoon of fun, co-workers assumed Grace's and Gladys's responsibilities in exchange for a dollar or a drink. Gladys Baker and Grace McKee were typical "flappers" of the Roaring Twenties who chose to extend the recent women's suffrage amendment to include the various social and sexual autonomies long claimed by men.

In their way, they were simply imitating the more exotic and controversial movie stars whose startling images passed before them daily at their workbenches. On Grace's advice, Gladys lightened her brown hair to an almost defiant cherry red in 1924. "Until Grace took her in hand," according to Olin Stanley, "Gladys was really nondescript—a plain Jane. I wouldn't have given her a second glance in a crowd of three before that."

One who gave more than a second glance was a meterman for the Southern California Gas Company, named Martin Edward Mortensen, who met Gladys during the summer of 1924. Born in California in 1897, son of a Norwegian immigrant, he too had ended a first marriage several years earlier and now, at twenty-seven, was ready to settle down and start a family. He was instantly attracted to Gladys's pert, fey humor and her good nature. In addition, Mortensen, raised a devout Lutheran, was impressed by Gladys's interest in religion, although he perhaps did not know how novel and transitory a concern this was for her. That year, Grace had attended several Christian Science services with a boyfriend who visited their apartment on Hyperion Avenue and spoke of his creed. As usual, Grace's curiosities were at once shared by Gladys—although in neither case did the women consider joining the faith.

To Mortensen, then, Gladys seemed the ideal mate. For her part, she found him handsome, generous, stable and flatteringly jealous; he also looked more than five years older and bore a slight facial scar (and so perhaps unconsciously she identified something with her father). In any case, she saw no good reason to reject his proposal of marriage and security.

But their marriage on October 11, 1924, was ill considered, for, perhaps predictably, Gladys could not long match her husband in the area of marital fidelity. As she told Grace, Gladys found life with Martin respectable, secure and unendurably dull. Four months later, Gladys—as if taking a cue from her mother's relationships—simply left her husband and moved back with Grace. On May 26, 1925, Mortensen reluctantly filed a divorce petition in California Superior Court, claiming that Gladys "wilfully and without cause deserted [him] and ever since has and now continues to . . . desert and abandon [him]."

Gladys tarried in her response, and her husband several times tried to win her back. According to Olin Stanley, Mortensen often defended Gladys against detractors. Once, as Stanley arrived for work he observed a co-worker leering at Gladys and overheard him say to another man, "I sure would like to have some of that."

Some other guy then replied, "I hear all you have to do is ask," and with that a man sprang to his feet and grabbed this guy by the throat, shouting, "Don't ever let me hear you say anything like that about her again!" You know who that was? Why, it was Mortensen. He was still crazy about that gal.

Mortensen waited and hoped, but when Gladys never replied to his repeated overtures for reconciliation, he at last requested a final decree of divorce, which was handed down uncontested on August 15, 1928. In 1929, Gladys learned from friends in Ohio that a man named Martin Edward Mortensen was killed in a motorcycle accident. And that, she thought, was the end of it.

But in late 1925, almost ten months after she had left Mortensen, Gladys had learned she was pregnant. No longer living with Grace, separated from her husband and cited in a divorce petition, she turned to her mother for help. While every man in Gladys's life was keeping a far distance (and several of them were married), no one could have been less responsive to Gladys's abandoned condition than Della. With righteous indignation—all the more ironic since she claimed to be Mrs.

Grainger—she ignored her daughter’s pleas and plight and simply went ahead with her scheduled grand tour of Southeast Asia with her lover, who was to travel on business at the expense of Shell Oil.

For years it was asserted by biographers that Gladys’s pregnancy was the result of her affair with Charles Stanley Gifford, foreman of the day shift at Consolidated Film. He had been separated from his wife, Lillian Priester, in October 1923 and a final divorce was granted to her in May 1925. Handsome and arrogant, he was known at home and at work as a wild philanderer, a designation of which he was frankly proud: his wife’s uncontested divorce petition noted that he “shamelessly boasted of his conquests with other women.” Among them was Gladys Baker.

But when her child was born, Gladys never claimed privately or publicly that Gifford was the father, nor did she ever seek from him relief or support for herself or the child. The simple truth is that the father could have been any of her boyfriends in 1925—Harold Rooney, a co-worker who was besotted with her; or the adoring Clayton MacNamara; or, perhaps most likely of all, Raymond Guthrie, a film developer who ardently courted her for months that year.

As for Gladys’s child, she never met Gifford and was never certain he was her father. To be sure, she tried to contact one or two men she said *might have been* her father (and Gifford may have been among them), but the accounts of her attempts at a meeting are notoriously contradictory. Evidence that Charles Stanley Gifford was the father of Gladys’s child is, on the contrary, utterly lacking. When asked if Gladys and Gifford even had an affair, Olin Stanley, who knew them both well in 1925 and 1926, was unsure. “Gladys was always shacking up with somebody. But Gifford as the father? Only God knows.”

The child was born June 1, 1926, at 9:30 in the morning, in the Los Angeles General Hospital, and the birth certificate identifies her as the daughter of Gladys Monroe of 5454 Wilshire Boulevard. So easy was it, then as now, to omit, invent and alter one’s record, that Gladys simply claimed that her two earlier children had died. She added creatively that the residence of her husband, a baker she designated as “Edward Mortenson,” was unknown. The child’s birth registration in the California Board of Health’s Bureau of Vital Statistics stated her name as Norma Jeane Mortenson. In her youth she was sometimes known as Norma Jeane Baker. From the age of twenty, she was Marilyn Monroe, but she declined to make that her legal name until seven years before her death.

IN 1917, beautiful, doe-eyed Norma Talmadge, then twenty, married the thirty-eight-year-old independent producer Joseph M. Schenck, who founded a corporation named for his wife and molded her career with astonishing success. By 1926, when the couple separated, Norma Talmadge had appeared in more than sixty films, most of them a series of somewhat damp melodramas with titles like *Smilin' Through* and *Secrets*, over which the star's luminous, expressive beauty somehow triumphed. For a film lab worker like Gladys, who coveted glamour and routinely saw images of Norma Talmadge everywhere, the name was more than an imitation: "Norma" expressed a kind of totemic longing, a benediction on her daughter's future. Double names for girls were popular at the time, and Gladys found "Jeane" a suitable addition.¹

Within two weeks of the child's birth, Gladys gave Norma Jeane over to a foster family sixteen miles away. The reasons for this are not difficult to fathom.

In the Roaring Twenties, moral and aesthetic standards were challenged in deed as well as in discourse—not only in America, but round the world. After the horror of the Great War, there were extraordinary explosions of creativity as well as bolder (and sometimes dangerous) amusements everywhere. Along with New York, Berlin and Paris seemed simultaneously to inaugurate the "Jazz Age," and life for a time seemed a cycle of uninhibited fun, excitement and experimentation. Europeans heartily imported the works of Americans like Hemingway, Dreiser, Gershwin and Jelly Roll Morton—but not the dark, imprecatory religious sentiments so deeply rooted in the American tradition.

The United States, however, was caught in the conflict between the new moral turmoil and the old Puritan repressions. In the 1920s, there were higher hemlines seen and more coarse language heard in public than ever before; there was widespread use of drugs as recreational gear (especially cocaine and heroin); and plays and movies routinely dealt with the dark underside of life. Contrariwise, by the peculiarity known as Prohibition, alcohol was then illegal. As the voices of moral vigilance became more strident, the country's penchant for the bogus remedy of extreme moralism (as distinct from authentic morality) led to the emergence of thumpingly righteous fundamentalist religions—California as in the South.

Other factors encouraged Gladys to place the baby with a "decent" family: she could not quit her job, there was no one to care for Norma Jeane while she worked, and her restless, nomadic life (like her mother's, as she may have apprehended) was unsuitable for mothering.

And there were less tangible, more elusive, perhaps unconscious (but nonetheless potent) reasons to deliver Norma Jeane to the care of others. Gladys had seen her father's deterioration and death, which (she had been wrongly told) were due to madness—a condition poorly differentiated but, it was then believed, invariably inherited. Disappointed, like Della, in marriage, Gladys had also found herself incapable of effective mothering. Hostile toward Della on account of the past and Della's recent abandonment of her during the latter part of her pregnancy, Gladys may have been, in a way, a classic type of parent who resents an offspring of the same sex.² In addition, she was plainly terrified

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