

AN EVENING/1961

with *Daglas* *Kirkland* Marilyn

at the magazine I had developed a reputation for accomplishing this on more than one occasion, starting with Elizabeth Taylor, moving on to Marlene Dietrich and others, with a success that even I did not fully understand. I had simply been honest with each of my subjects during the shoots, and made no secret of how thrilled and aroused they made me. But I truly felt that it was they themselves who had created the images as I talked excitedly and kept clicking away. There seemed to be little more to the magic than this, but it worked!

How had I found my way to *Look* magazine in the first place? It was through a combination of luck and hard work.

During the Korean War, as Marilyn's fame was exploding, I was a teenager living in Canada where there was no draft or required military service. Then later, when I had moved to the United States and the Vietnam War was heating up, I was exempt because I had kids. None of this was planned; it was just the way things had worked out.

I was in the right place at the right time when *Look* hired me as a photographer. The Sixties had begun and the youth movement permeated American culture. A popular expression of the day was, "Don't trust anyone over thirty." I was in my mid-twenties when an opening came up on the photo staff at the magazine and I got it. I couldn't believe my good fortune.

*Look* was very powerful at that time and, surprisingly, they seemed to need me. Even more surprising, they started treating me like some sort of wunderkind — which in my heart I knew I was not — but I enjoyed the privileges anyway. This meant flying first class, staying at the best hotels and eating in the best restaurants. All of this was a long way from the life that I'd left in Fort Erie, Ontario less than ten years before.

These were exhilarating times in America. In the streets, big new pink and purple tail-finned "dreamboats" flashed by, as a young JFK and Jackie moved into the White House, bringing with them not only their political friends and intellectuals but "hip" personalities such as Peter Lawford, Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe. Everything felt fresh and new and there was an electric optimism in the air. As youth pushed previous generations and their old ideas to the sidelines, older people struggled to look and act younger. From my perspective everything seemed very positive. While there were the unquestionably troubling realities of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War and America's paranoia over communism, my life felt like it was clearly on a roll.

As I sat waiting still later into that evening, I asked myself, Where had Marilyn come from? And apart from that, When was she going to show up?

It appears that Marilyn's beginnings had made her even less likely to succeed than mine. I had grown up in a small town surrounded by a warm, caring family but her childhood had been much harder. Records indicate that Marilyn Monroe, who was born Norma Jean Mortenson (Baker), in Los Angeles on June 1 of 1926, had never known her father, who had been killed when she was very young, or her mother, who spent much of her life in a series of mental institutions. At 16, she had started working a job and married a defense plant worker named Jim Dougherty to escape a continuing unhappy life in foster homes and orphanages. The marriage didn't last long but miraculously her factory job did lead to some part time pinup modeling work. The Seventh Division of the U.S. Army Medical Corps even voted her, "The girl they'd most like to examine!" Then in August of 1946, she landed a contract with Twentieth-Century Fox for \$125 per week. Stories have circulated about sexual favors she had had to perform for studio executives and other people in high places to win her opportunities as an actress. Were these real, or products of overly-active imaginations? Who knows what she'd been subjected to, to get to where she was? Certainly Marilyn had worked for everything she'd gotten.

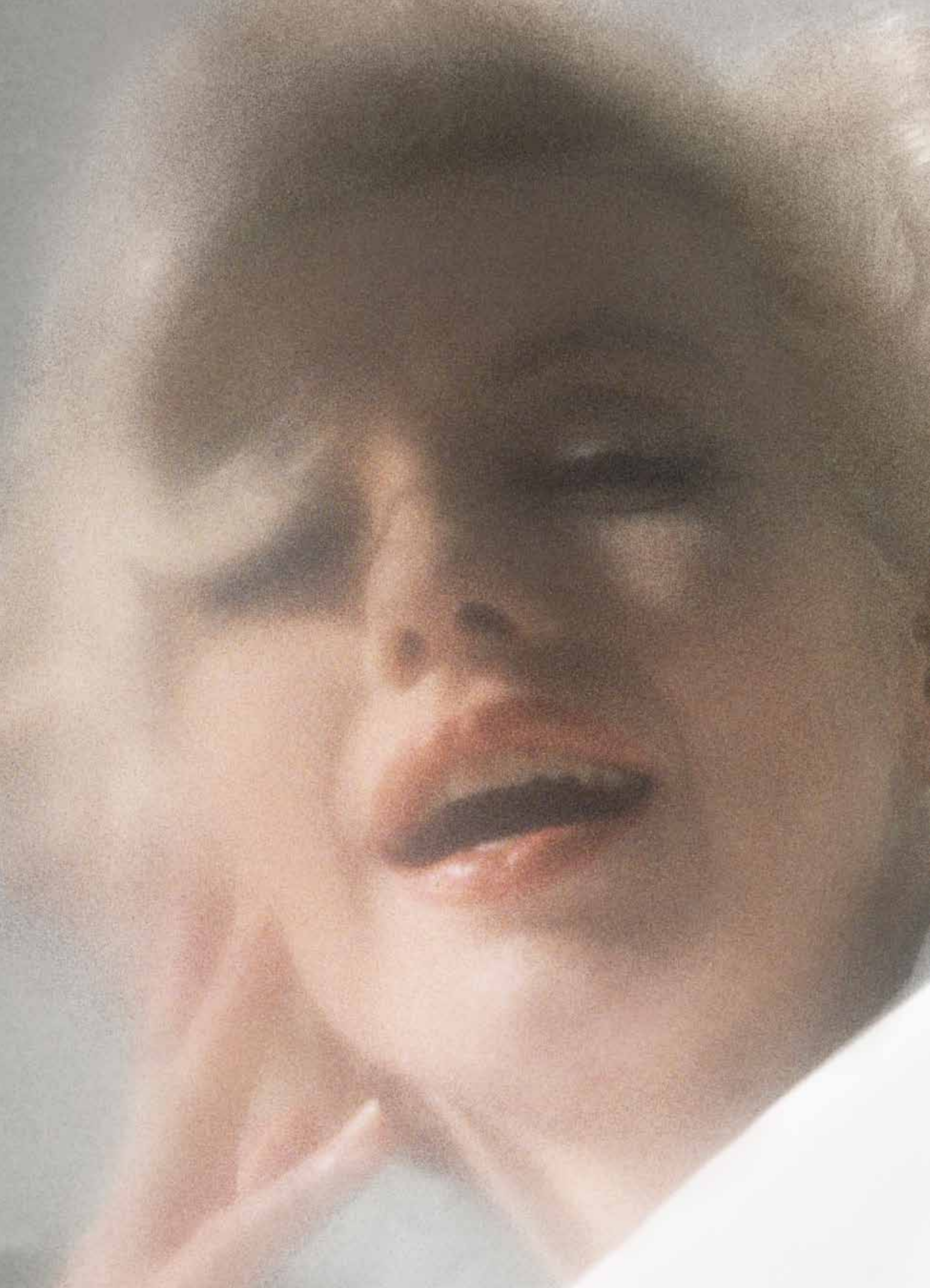
I remember my wife Marian reading an article in a woman's magazine in the early days of our marriage which said, "If your husband thinks of you as Marilyn Monroe in the course of lovemaking to help achieve orgasm, this is alright." It still amazes me, to think of how much Marilyn's name and the fantasies which she represented, had penetrated our psyches. I also remember angry remarks made by threatened suburban American housewives. While their husbands joked about Marilyn's 37 – 23 – 37 inch bombshell figure on "boy's night out," their wives would insist that she was nothing but a whore, and a dumb one at that.

Through much of Marilyn's life, things had been cruel and hard to win. She'd done everything within her power to pull herself forward but she still didn't have it completely right, in her personal or professional life.

Sitting still longer in the rented Hollywood studio I realized that time was passing by as I started thinking more about my conversations with Marilyn regarding the photo session, a couple of nights earlier.

As I had walked into her small garden apartment on Doheny Drive in Beverly Hills, I was struck by the apparent simplicity of her life. Her home was definitely not what one would expect of a great movie star. It was little bigger than a deluxe hotel room with a kitchenette. I arrived with two of my *Look* magazine colleagues, Jack Hamilton and Stanley Gordon. Marilyn directed them to sit on the only two chairs in the room and then slapped





Before we left that evening, her agent took me aside and quietly told me that Marilyn had been ill, and had recently lost a lot of weight. Losing the weight had pleased her, because she had always been worried about being too heavy. But now she was fixated on her breasts, which she thought were too small! Once more it seemed as though winning in life would always be hard for her, even with all of her success. There always seemed to be demons hovering over her shoulder.

Leaving her apartment, we were told that admirers had been pursuing her to such an extent that she had moved to this new place to escape them, and that we must never tell anyone where it was. She had become fearful and paranoid over some of the fans with their excessive, persistent behavior.

Think of it: Here she was, alone and in hiding; her marriage to Arthur Miller now on the rocks; and only rumors of occasional dates with her ex-husband Joe Di Maggio, who had a reputation for not treating her well at all. Again, what kind of a payoff was this for all of her success?

It was now 9:30 pm, and I'd been prepared to work since 7:00. Was this shoot ever going to happen? Was I going to have to go back to New York empty-handed? This would be hard to explain to my bosses. Then I heard a sound at the front door of the studio.

She had arrived. She must have been wearing street clothes as she came in, but I can't remember them. All I do remember is an impression of her dazzling, misty whiteness. In my recollection she moved with a floating slow motion, more ethereal than real. That was the strange thing about Marilyn's voluptuousness and beauty; it wasn't really earthly. I felt like I was now seeing for the first time the Marilyn Monroe the world knew, and she was more spiritual than mortal. There was an air of fragrant intoxication rushing through my veins. The curtain was rising on one of the most amazing, memorable evenings of my life. We were about to begin our mystical floating dance together.

I was within  
a breath's distance  
of the  
goddess.





Through the years I have often been asked what really happened in that room with Marilyn.

**I can only say this:  
It was extremely intimate.**

When I looked down on her from the high position over the bed, I felt like I couldn't put film through the camera fast enough. I had no assistant there.

**It was just myself,  
the camera and Marilyn.**

I didn't even use a strobe light. It was just a flood light, a constant light, so that there was no interruption of flash.

**Frank Sinatra filled the room with his seductive, beautiful ballads.**

That was the atmosphere of the evening: quiet, soft, and enticing.





I was being  
invited to get  
into the bed  
with her.

What  
happened?





Celebrate Marilyn Monroe,  
whose monumental reputation endures  
well beyond the decades since her death;  
in a gorgeous presentation  
that is as glamorous as the actress herself.



Douglas Kirkland made his reputation soar in the worlds of photography and celebrity with the historic photographs he shot of Marilyn Monroe when a young artist at the beginning of his career. And his work brought her name to the lips of every fan and aficionado of the luminous star when they were first published in the anniversary edition of *Look* magazine in 1961, as well. The complete collection of the shoot is accompanied here by the photographer's own recollection of that one momentous evening. The photographs appear here in a book that is as glamorous as the star herself, and one that belongs on the shelf of every collector, devotee, and connoisseur of the icon that was Marilyn Monroe, the genius that is Douglas Kirkland, or both.



## Accolades for Douglas Kirkland and his work:

"For 30 years Douglas Kirkland has made his living by doing what some photographers might gladly do without charge: taking pictures of glamorous celebrities. In creating the kind of poster-perfect images publicity agents dream of—Marilyn Monroe clad only in silk sheets, for example—he has few peers."

— ANDY GRUNBERG *The New York Times*

"Though portraiture is a great strength — [Kirkland's] initial apprenticeship was with Irving Penn—it's his journalistic eye that makes for the most striking images."

— FRED SCHRUERS *Portfolio Magazine*



"Few photographers have had the honor of photographing the legend Marilyn Monroe; Douglas Kirkland is one of the lucky ones. Douglas happened to be one of Marilyn's favorite people and she made sure to let him know it. The photographs he has of her are breathtaking and obviously taken by a man who was mesmerized by her beauty and talent."

— JUDITH HABERT *About.com*

"Douglas Kirkland's portraits go far beyond the physical appearance of his subjects and capture the very essence of their being with disarming honesty and sensuality."

— ANNENBERG SPACE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY Los Angeles



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### SPECIFICATIONS :

144 pages, 9 ¾ x 13 ½; hardcover with cloth case  
60 4/c and 13 b/w photographs; 3,500 words  
\$60.00; ISBN 13: 978-0-9832702-0-1  
August publication in honor of the  
actress's death-date anniversary

Published by  
Glitterati Incorporated  
[www.GlitteratiIncorporated.com](http://www.GlitteratiIncorporated.com)  
[media@GlitteratiIncorporated.com](mailto:media@GlitteratiIncorporated.com) for inquiries

Printed and bound in China