

Bourne
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Bombshell

by Victoria Cooper

She was one of The Misfits before she died, in the desert with Clark Gable, her once teen heart throb now starred alongside her, she the love interest, the fought-over divorcee, the aging Gable competing for her attention with the oh so handsome, Montgomery Cliff. All three would be dead within five years.

She pulled off the blonde wig and peered at her reflection

Now they're going to see who I am.

Now they're going to know the real story.

She is called the "eternal shapeshifter", criticised for poor acting talent, but a unique ability to reconstruct American culture, something that could be reproduced, transformed, reborn into another age, another era, another product.

She released the clasp on the diamante earrings and set them down before her.

Now who will I be? What will I become?

The blackness is coming for me again, will I find the strength to defeat it?

She was as American as apple pie and the paranoid 1950s Cold War nation ate her up heartily, for she symbolized modernity, liberty, and in the midst of a civil rights war

she was whiter than white, a brand of classless glamour streamlined sexuality from cosmetics to peroxide. She committed suicide from barbiturates having suffered fears and frequent depression.

She pressed a tissue to her lips and pressed down.

Cold cream wiped clean the black kohl highlighting her eyes.

Would they even recognise me, do they care who I really am?

Books, songs, operas and films speculated for years over her death, was it suicide, was it accidental or was it a murder covering up someone no longer of use, but still knew too much? She was spied on, tormented by sensation hungry media desperate for a scoop on a sex symbol, the archetypal dumb blonde, “the girl” defined solely by gender relentlessly photographed through life and death.

“I never quite understood it, this sex symbol. I always thought symbols were those things you clashed together! That’s the trouble, a sex symbol becomes a thing.”

Her brittle hair beneath the wig springs back to life, and she shakes her head.

The mask has been lifted and the icon looks tired.

She was a thing and someone with a troubled life, an unstable childhood, someone who struggled for professional respect. There is argument over her body of work still, just like the arguments over the works of her body.

She reaches for the champagne glass and watches the bubbles rise to the surface.

She smiles.

Her eyes return to the mirror and she startles by the empty looking reflection.

Despite all the books, articles, films and stories we will never see her, we will never find out who it really was that sang in the rhinestone dress. She may have been a candle in the wind, she may have been brilliant, she may just have been one sexy broad that women envied and men fantasised over, but did we ever really see her?