

KATE KELLY

Marilyn

Marilyn was a movie star
springing fully formed onto the silver scene, like Athena
goddess of wisdom and war—a starlet playing her part
again and again, with leading men
until nothing was left
except the neglect that would not fade with peroxide or pills.
Your beauty astounds me,
your life grounds me,
in the dirty reality of women in the modern age,
on the stage of life,
bright lights and darkened rooms where young girls learn
that coming of age is all about numbers,
36, 24, 36 or thereabouts,
with or without help.
Marilyn was a movie star
driven by need, insecurity, vulnerability, repression, suppression
manifesting in neurosis, psychosis
any or all the above,
and searching for love through the celluloid screen
and selling the dream of perfection in breathy syllables and pouted words
formed by lips lapping at luxury.
A childhood survivor searching for a saviour
and shaped by the wisdom of the age.
You gave to us those moments you shine,
marking the subconscious of our being here
in place and time
where we all play our part of hero or, heroin...
taken when needed—or not
but there as an alibi, the convenient lie of addiction—of predilection of force
because we can all get pushy
we just don't all own up,
admit it—who really wants to be seen
truth or lie in the naked eye of the paparazzi,
like Marilyn Monroe,
pulling the fur coat around her shoulders
while flattened hair and puffy eyes cry to the world
Madonna and whore,
sinner and saint,
punished and praised, one and the same.
Marilyn Monroe, mother of gods who built their fortunes on your back
in more ways than one—
the executives, the movie moguls,
the athletes, the presidents—the decisions they made for you
to the greatest extent,
pray for us sinners, who see the beauty but not the pain,

notice the laugh lines but not the strain that caused it,
that fueled it,
turning Norma into Marilyn, again and again
with a need as bright as the bright lights of Hollywood
and showing us the way without meaning to,
as women do.
Marilyn, like Magdala,
tarred with the same brush
of misunderstood womanhood,
You stand before me, raised and revered
On the pedestal you climbed,
steadied and steered along the way by Adam's rib, the director's touch
who found it difficult to deal with your absence
and Madison Square Garden where you serenaded JFK
with the okay of 20th Century Fox executives,
who can form life from clay—you would think
but they didn't let you
instead,
they covered your eyes with desire
and you let them
because who really wants to start a revolution
when becoming an icon is better,
springing fully formed from the head of Zeus,
father of gods and men,
into the heart of human need,
where fallibility levels the playing field,
like it always does.
And you know,
we are after all
constructs of our own,
gazing at the stars with wonder
and frightened by our own shadow,
just like, Marilyn.

Kate Kelly is a writer, living and working in Peterborough, Ontario. Her first novel, A Harsh and Private Beauty, Inanna Press, came out in 2019, while her second novel, The Meadowlands, is due out in June 2023. She is a national slam poet, educator, singer/songwriter, and mother of three.