

## THE WORLD'S WIFE

### Norma, limerence of Hugh Hefner

**MY NAME IS NORMA**, although you likely know me as Marilyn. Mr Hefner certainly did. You know I never actually met him? But I'm getting ahead of myself...

Actresses don't make much money when first starting out. I was a pretty girl, everyone focused on that, my car payment was coming due and I didn't have it. My friend Tom Kelley offered me \$50 to pose for some pictures. 'Tasteful, unrecognisable,' he'd said. 'Practically anonymous. Just camera practice for me.' I was twenty-two, going nowhere, and trusted him. I got my check and paid my bills, never even saw the final shots. Tom and I lost touch.

Things picked up. Auditions were going well and I'd started booking big projects: *All About Eve*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Love Nest*. Work was steady, my name was known, and it was a new one at that. Marilyn. Everything was coming together.

But then.

Four years after Kelley's, I learned there were racy photos of me, scandalous ones, in a new magazine for men.

Not anonymous. Not just practice.

Kelley had sold the photos. The buyer – a calendar company – then sold the rights to the hotshot publisher, Hugh Hefner.

He paid \$500 and put me on the cover of the debut issue, splashed me across the inside. Sweetheart of the Month, later changed to Playmate. The first centrefold.

From \$500, he made millions.

I contributed 50 cents toward his fortune myself. Had to buy a copy to see the pictures.

He didn't consult me or ask my consent. For years, men brought me that issue to autograph. I'd smile and sign, a good sport. Afterward, I could never wash my hands enough.

I launched his empire. He stole my peace.

It's funny, isn't it – for a certain man, there's no price too high to buy a woman's humiliation. And there's no payment that woman can then make to get her dignity back.

Even in death it continues, his incessant presence. When I passed away, he purchased the burial plot next to mine. A man I'd never met! A stranger who used me, a repeat violator, now lies beside me, as though he were beloved. As though he were family.

I suppose it's fitting. He only ever saw me as a body.

What I'd like, even now, is to reclaim my body, the space it takes up, the accessibility.

In life, I loved Brooklyn Heights. The views of the Manhattan skyline, all the people.

Take me from LA, quietly, remove the pseudonym nameplate from the mausoleum, toss the flowers and pennies. Wipe away the lipstick tributes. Ship me cross-country to New York, preferably to a small plot in Green-Wood Cemetery.

Leave Mr. Hefner to his insatiable infatuation, his riches built on fantasies. Leave me, at last, to me.

Yes – a small plot in Brooklyn, and for good measure, those adjacent on each side. On the stone, have it say Norma. ■

