

*THE TWIN TOWERS, MAJESTIC ALONG THE HORIZON, BRINGING A HALT TO THE DECLINE OF LOWER MANHATTAN.*

I'd heard my pop speak of them this way. The tallest buildings in the world until the Sears Tower went up in '73. Built at a time when New York's future seemed uncertain, the towers restored confidence. The Empire State sturdy like a man, the Chrysler sexy like a woman, the towers a show of incomparable mystique. That loony French dude walked a high-wire between them a few years back. The Human Fly hoisted himself up the south tower. I'd planned on taking Cheryl to Windows on the World for our anniversary, but now I'd need to find a new girl to show-off the sights. Seeing the skyline reflecting them on Halloween night, I thought that anything could be possible. Money for Emile's surgeries, really falling in love, moving out of my folks', finding a job worthwhile of sinking my teeth.

Downtown resembled a wasteland so I was surprised when we entered a factory-like space. Turns out, Jack with the Nose's uncle owned a toy distributor and let Jack have the place for a soiree. Andy Gibb's "Shadow Dancing" pumped from out of the doors once they swung open. Packed house. Wonder Womans, Sandra Dees, Debbie Harrys, Chewbaccas, Andy Warhols, New York Yankees who just won the 75<sup>th</sup> World Series, John Belushi from *Animal*

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*House*, Mork from *Mork and Mindy* (Nanoo nanoo!), two Coneheads, a Superman, a Sid & Nancy couple, and about eight warring guys strutting around as John Travolta. Maggs said he was dressed as an undercover cop, which really meant he was too lazy to come up with a costume. “Can you dig it,” he’d say to anyone who asked.

“Far out,” a few replied.

“Keep your enemies close, right?” Maggs said, and everyone agreed cops were bogus.

“Who are you?” a Chrissy from *Three’s Company* asked.

“Robin Hood.”

“Robin Byrd?”

She was on so much coke, it had crusted around her nostrils.

“Hood. Robin Hood.”

She tapped her temple in deep thought. “What have I seen him in?”

“Your nightmares,” I said, fucking with her but then she began to cry. Maggs rubbed her shoulder and led her away.

“Don’t scare the lovelies,” he said.

Jack with the Nose approached. I knew it was him, since his nose was really a sight. Not simply big, it had a presence, elbowing its way into conversations, bulbous and red like an old drunk’s, a whistle escaping from his nostrils every time he spoke.

“Jack, you know Jake,” Maggs said. “He’s looking for work.”

“Really, really?” Jack with the Nose asked. He was wearing a big purple pimp coat with a walking stick and large tinted sunglasses. “I work for Georgie.”

“I’ve met Georgie.”

“Yeah, how good are you at nabbing coats?”

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“That’s very specific.”

“We’re...uh...a *specific* kind of organization.”

“I just stole a Tiffany’s bracelet for my ex-girl.”

“Coats are a lot bigger,” Jack with the Nose said, and popped a cigarette between his lips.

“But do they have diamonds?”

“Come down to the Fish Market at the Seaport tomorrow night, you can talk to Georgie there. We’ll find something for ya.”

“Thanks, Jack, that’s real nice of you,” Maggs said.

Jack with the Nose brushed it off like it was no big deal, but it was clear he wanted adulation.

“Yeah, real nice,” I managed to say.

“Go,” Jack with the Nose ordered. “Mingle. Make some new friends. That Marilyn’s been eye fucking ya.”

He pointed his cigarette through the throngs of the party, past a heap of sloshed dancers feeling each other up, to where a Marilyn Monroe in her iconic white dress was having a difficult time keeping it from billowing up, yet there was no wind tunnel under her feet.

Clearly eye-fucking me unless she had a nervous tic, I knocked back a vodka shot being passed around and made my way over. She wore a mask, not of the plastic variety like a Halloween kid’s costume, but as if it had actually molded into her face. The hair was her own, styled perfectly, the color of sunrays. A vampy sway accompanied her movements as she danced to “Kiss You All Over” by Exile.

*Oh baby wanna taste your lips, wanna be your fantasy.*

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Did she know that over my bed hung a poster of Marilyn Monroe from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*? That I'd seen *Some Like It Hot* every time it was rereleased in the theaters. I didn't get along with my parents for the most part, but we had a love for movies in common. Maybe because you can go to a movie with people you normally argue with and no one has to speak. Maybe because movies seemed to calm Emile's fits when nothing else did. Restaurants were a no-no (he tended to throw food), but plant him in front of a big screen with a popcorn in his lap and the kid would go numb. For my folks, it gave them two hours off. Marilyn Monroe, man, I was a pip squeak when she died, so sad. But movie stars, they get to live on. Immortality at its finest. And at that Halloween party, she'd been resurrected for me, mouthing the words to "Kiss You All Over".

A whoosh of hot air pushed me towards her and we danced before we even spoke. Marilyn Monroe doing *The Hustle*, *The Bump*, *The Bus Stop* and *The Lawnmower* really a sight. I tried to keep up, but Disco ain't my thing. Give me the Stones, the Beatles, Springsteen, and always Led Zeppelin. My door locked, a pair of Koss Pro4AAs headphones, and "Houses of the Holy" spinning on my record player, a good joint to kick in around "The Rain Song". But this Marilyn clearly loved "Stayin' Alive" so I aped all the strutting John Travoltas at the party so she'd keep on eye-fucking me.

"I'm so hot," she finally said, and I agreed she was hot but then she fanned her flush mask and I realized she meant it was hot in here. "There's a roof." She pointed up to the ceiling as if I'd never heard of a roof before and laced her fingers in mine. We ascended a twisty staircase and popped up two stories higher on a roof with no guardrails. The Hudson River behind us, the World Trade Center at our feet like I could reach out and touch the towers. The

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downtown quiet and restless. The future held a much different outcome for it than how it appeared then.

“I’m a genie in a bottle,” she said, in her cutesy voice, an exact replica of the screen legend.

Under us, “Stayin’ Alive” boomed. I randomly pictured someone stabbed in the back, crawling to get away from their pursuer. My mind went weird like that sometimes.

“Oh yeah?” I laughed. “What wishes can you grant?”

She stopped swaying to the beats, dead serious. “Any wish fulfilled...for the right price. Aren’t you tired of stealing from the rich to only give to the poor?”

I beamed. “You get my costume.”

She took small steps toward the edge, peered down three stories. “Now I’m cold,” she said. “I can’t win.”

“Here.” I removed my Robin Hood jacket and draped it around her arms.

“So gallant.”

I didn’t know what that meant, but I imagined it a compliment.

“Who do you know at the party?” I asked.

“No one. I was passing by, heard music, and wandered inside.”

“What were you doing down here?” In my knowledge, nobody came to Tribeca at night, maybe a prostitute or two, but it was pretty lifeless otherwise.

“Seeking a party like this and a kind of thief like you.”

She tapped my nose with her long fingernail and smiled. I could see it vaguely growing under her mask.

“Why Marilyn?”

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She thought about this for some time, as if she wanted to get the answer right.

“She’s two personas, Norma Jean and Marilyn. Kinda like me. Kinda like everyone. The self we keep hidden and the one we reveal to the world.”

“Very poetic.”

“I work for a company that encourages this dualistic nature.”

She lost me. Big words and such. The problem from never finishing high school. I must have looked confused because she continued by saying, “My boss believes we have these two sides. One deals with our traumatic pasts and we all have traumatic pasts, believe me. But you don’t always have to wallow in that sadness, you can be free.”

“Sounds very Hare Krishna.”

“It’s not religious at all. It’s about business. We fulfill wishes.”

“Any wishes?”

“For the right price, remember? What do you wish for?”

I wanted to tell her about Emile and all the surgeries he needed. That my pop was working two jobs and even my ma was doing some side hustle to make bread. That I gave them a cut of everything I stole and resold, even though they were kind of chumps. My pop had opportunities he passed on because he didn’t find them kosher. There was a Georgie-type on our block who had even more lucrative jobs he offered my pop years ago but Pop turned him down because he didn’t “like that racket” and made sure I’d never do work for the guy either. Pop was a fool. He could’ve had all the money he needed for Emile’s surgeries and likely would’ve avoided jail, but he was too high and mighty. He puffed out his chest, declared himself “good”, and the conversation was closed. So if I could really wish for anything, it’d be for him not to be a dupe.

I shuffled a lone Lucky Strike out of my front pocket and lit up. Filling my lungs and getting that queasy sensation I'd dreamed about all day.

"I'm stuck, ya-know," I said, like she was my therapist. A real face didn't stare back, only this frozen expression of a mask. I zeroed on her lovely rubber birthmark.

"You want more," she purred. "Yes, yes."

"Yes, I...I dunno. It's like I'm living, but I am really living?"

"You're not," she said, swiping the cigarette from out of my mouth and placing it in the hole where her lips were visible. "I can see that all over you. No job, right?"

I wanted the cigarette back, but was afraid to try. "I might be getting work from this guy Georgie..."

"Fish," she said. "That's a lot of nothing. That guy with the nose you were talking to, he's a lot of nothing. Small fish."

"And I'm guessing who you work for is a tuna?"

Her dead eyes stared back.

"A tuna? Like a big fish? I was trying to be—"

"I get it." She tossed the cigarette and put it out with her toe. "He's an up-and-coming fish, let's put it that way. And he'd like your whole..." She drew an imaginary circle around me.

"Milieu. The steal from the rich and give to poor bit we'll have to work on, though."

"So who do you grant these wishes to?"

"Those who line our pockets. You can take from the rich, charge a fee as long as you give something else back to them. Banks do it all the time. Anyway..." She glanced again over the ledge, leaning close enough that I thought she might jump, the backdrop of the Twin Towers framing her beautiful aura. I held her arm.

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“Oh sweetie, I ain’t about self-sabotage,” she said. “I could’ve killed myself a long time ago when I was really down in the dumps, but the Jiminy Cricket on my shoulder told me to hang on because something bigger waited on the horizon. He was oh so right.”

It was she who took hold of my arm then. Her touch frosty like she’d dipped her fingers in a bowl of ice.

“Let me take you away from here,” she said. “Let me show you what you’ve missing, Robin Hood.”

“It’s Jake. Jake Barnum.”

“Nice to meet you, Jake Barnum. I’m Marilyn Monroe.”

I cocked my head to the side. She laughed.

“What’s in a name?” she asked. “Your parents saw your birthed form and dubbed you Jake. They didn’t know you yet. They just assumed. It’s more powerful to name yourself.”

“So what should I be called?”

“You’re a *long* way from that accomplishment. But I have a feeling I know who you’ll be.”

“And who is that?”

“Why, Robin Hood himself. Mr. Errol Flynn.”