

Marilyn Monroe didn't look in the mirror very often these days, but today was different.

Today, the image reflected back demanded more than a cursory glance. Familiar eyes stared back at the well-known body. They surveyed the porcelain luminosity of it, lingered a moment on the nipples, and came to rest back on their own reflection. A hat held the hair off the face. Marilyn reached a hand up and pulled it off, allowing waves of thick bright hair to tumble out, then reached for the scissors and began to chop away. Lock after lock fell to the floor. Hair shorn, but not quite short enough, the scissors were discarded in favour of clippers.

The eyes sought their reflection again but were drawn lower when they saw something caught in one of the nipple rings. Marilyn disentangled the curl from the ring, removed the rings from the nipples, ran a hand over the stubby head and looked down at white feet, on white tiles, surrounded by red hair.

'Ginger minger,' he muttered.

He scratched his bollocks, stepped into the shower, and wondered if his wife had left him. He marvelled at his calmness. Perhaps those anger management classes were working after all he thought, but then again it wasn't his wife that made him angry. What made Marilyn angry was all that fucking traffic and all those fucking people rushing around this ill-mannered fuck of a city. Marilyn knew that his hatred of rudeness and his love of swearing was a dichotomy. He also knew that he would never be able to use the word dichotomy in any conversation he had on a daily basis and this made him feel something he couldn't quite articulate. The lack of swearing led him to believe that whatever he felt about that it wasn't anger.

The water ran over him and his thoughts drifted back to his wife. She was more a source of bemusement than anger. Not only did Marilyn not know if she had left him, he

didn't know why she'd married him in the first place. Maybe she was just used to getting her own way or maybe she'd liked his motorbike or the leathers. Marilyn shrugged and stepped out of the shower. He was going to be late for anger management class if he didn't get a move on.

These classes had not been Marilyn's idea. They were a compromise his barrister had agreed upon with the judge, who had grudgingly allowed him to address his road rage by attending anger management, instead of sending him to prison. Marilyn didn't think his road rage needed addressing. What needed addressing was Peter the Porsche Prick, in his flash suit and flash car, who had been so busy talking on his mobile that he'd cut up Marilyn and nearly knocked him off his bike. When Marilyn had pulled up alongside to politely point out the driver's lack of road manners, Peter had flipped him the finger and then cut him up again as he pulled away. It was rudeness on rudeness. This prompted Marilyn to follow him to his destination, roar up behind him, rip Peter out of his car, and shake him until his teeth rattled and his fancy suit ripped at the seams.

Like some complicated Escher drawing, it turned out that Peter the Porscher had been on his phone chasing up Marilyn the Motorcycle Courier who was racing towards him to deliver his package on time. Marilyn would have made it too, if Peter hadn't cut him up so rudely and sparked his road rage. The police arrived as Marilyn kicked the car's headlights in to stop himself punching the man's lights out permanently.

Anger management it was then.



There was something quite disturbing about sitting with a group of men that looked like they could rip your body apart with their bare hands, while instead they painted watercolours. The pastoral scenes they were trying to recreate had no significance for them, since they'd all

grown up as inner-city boys with rare trips to the countryside. Most of them found it hard to interpret the scenes that were pinned to the board by well-meaning Tiggy Beckwith, who enthusiastically regaled them with stories about her childhood years of ponies and greenery and high tea in the nursery at four. She might as well have been a character from *Lord of the Rings* asking them to paint Middle-Earth. Still they usually sat quietly when she spoke about her childhood because she often stood in front of the window and they could see through her blouse.

Art therapy was Tiggy's latest effort in her quest to work the anger right out of them. She seemed determined to try everything and had introduced elements of dozens of therapy and recovery programmes. From the Twelve-Step Programme she had already taken the sponsor system and the twelve month pin badge. Marilyn questioned the wisdom of giving sharp implements as rewards to men who had managed to become less angry when they were still surrounded by men who were as angry as fuck and didn't like a show-off. He wasn't sure about the buddy system either. He didn't imagine that the first thing any of them thought about when they were raving mad was bringing another angry bastard into an already volatile situation. He had teamed up with Slash though, mainly to avoid teaming up with Steve, the American, who Marilyn found to be as silent and mysterious as a dormant volcano. Slash on the other hand was an open book, although he was the widest, meanest-looking one in the class Marilyn understood him. He'd known loads of blokes like Slash.

Tiggy had started art therapy using oils, and had encouraged abstraction. The clashing crimson reds and the thick black lines that expressed the reality and hard edges of their lives had only served to perpetuate their anger though. In addition, the presence of supposedly benign palette knives clenched in angry fists had been quite threatening. In the group therapy sessions they attended, Slash had quite happily shared with everyone that the

things he really enjoyed most in life were fighting and stabbing. He couldn't really see how painting was going to be a replacement for that. It was after this that the petite Tiggy had started them on watercolours. Slash had proved uniquely adept. He eschewed the idea of copying the picture that Tiggy brought in and instead painted scenes from his own life. Scenes that looked even more macabre when depicted in pale, washed-out colour.

Marilyn flicked a blob of blue onto his page and washed water through it. While painting might be working for Slash, it really wasn't doing it for him. He wished they could do something else instead. Creative writing maybe, although he wouldn't fancy reading aloud to this group. It could potentially cause as many problems as it might solve. He remembered only too clearly the ferocious fight that had ensued after a teacher had read out a story he'd written at school and someone had made fun of him for using the word "apparel". Articulacy wasn't a trait valued by the boys Marilyn had grown up with, or since spent his life around. He hid his passion for words because if he made it obvious it could alienate people and he didn't really want to do that: especially not in a class that contained a high percentage of men fulfilling conditions of their parole. Writing was a secret passion. He'd feel like a twat if anyone found out he'd kept a journal since he was ten.

'OK!' said Tiggy. 'If everyone can put their brushes down and place their work on the table at the front, we can have a look at what we've done.'

Since they were now more proficient at painting, Tiggy had decided they should gather together towards the end of each session and critique each other's work. Today was their first attempt at art appreciation.

'OK, let's have a look at what Slash has done. What do you think, Bob?' she asked.

'Well, 'e's done it wrong, 'a'n't he? He 'a'n't done what you asked, 'as 'e? 'E's just painted what 'e wanted. 'E 'a'n't got any of them cows or trees in and there's no river, is

there? 'S rubbish.'

'Forget that he hasn't painted the same picture as everyone else. What more can we say about it? Dave?'

'E's used too many colours. 'Sall a mess, init? Crap,' said Dave.

'OK. Let's not be quite so judgemental. Let's try and find something constructive to say, even if we don't like it,' said Tiggy.

She scanned the room, quickly passing over the burglar contingent who always looked more interested in the doors and windows than what was really going on, avoided eye-contact with Steve, who never offered an opinion and indeed rarely spoke at all, and settled on dad-like Jim, who everyone liked. Jim could be counted on to do his best whatever was asked of him, which is why he'd ended up doing a three-stretch for his brother-in-law's stupidity. Pleasant as he was, he still had a temper and had ended up doing another eighteen months for GBH after he'd smashed his brother-in-law's face into the wall several times.

'Jim?' said Tiggy.

'I quite like the 'andle on the knife but I think he may 'ave fucked up the perspective. If 'e's standing to the right of 'er, the angle it's gone in at is all wrong, innit?'

'Good point, Jim,' said Tiggy, nodding ferociously and smiling encouragement.

'Marilyn, what do you think?'

'Striking...Frightening...Sensitive...And sad,' said Marilyn, lost in his thoughts for a moment by the sheer impact of Slash's picture.

'Yes!' said Tiggy. 'Well done!'

'Ooooooh!' jeered the class.

'See Miss, if you want a girly opinion, ask a girly bloke,' said Dave.

'What, and you think "'e's used too many colours" sounds manly?' said Marilyn.

Dave jolted to his feet. 'Oy! I'm fucking warning you. I'll fucking have you in a minute.'

Marilyn remained seated.

'Now, now!' said Tiggy, clapping her hands and trying to bring them to order as if they were a bunch of five year olds.

'Yeah, but did you 'ear what 'e said? Fucking ponce. I should do you right now.'

Marilyn settled further back in his seat, totally relaxed. He wasn't worried about Dave. Marilyn had confronted a lot of angry men in his life and, when younger, had dealt with them using a mixture of raw aggression and a fearless fighting style, which bordered on the reckless and psychotic. In recent years, he'd brought psychology and observation to bear to save his fists from being constantly bloody.

Dave was a blusterer. He might crack you over the head with a pint glass when your back was turned but if you could see him coming in a face to face confrontation he was all mouth and no action. He was the sort of man who liked getting angry and engaging in prolonged arguments. He wasn't the best person to have in an anger management class pondered Marilyn but then, really, which of them was? Who else were you going to find here if not angry people?

Marilyn saw Tiggy edge towards the panic button. They had moved from analysing the artwork to critiquing each other's critiques in a manner much less constructive than she had probably hoped for. Marilyn could see her wondering if she could get them back on track, or if she should get the hell out of there. Behind Dave he noticed American Steve start to get restless and he readied himself for action.

In Marilyn's opinion, Steve was the ticking bomb. He had the look of a man who had been around and seen the sort of violence that simply being on the streets didn't bring into

your life. Rumour had it that he was part Navajo and an ex-mercenary. He had the look of a soldier but something in his eyes said 'Gone feral'. He looked like someone who could scalp you before you even knew you were dead and who had fought in 'Nam, and called it that, even though he'd have been too young for that war.

Dave blustered on, ignorant to the potential for violence brewing behind him.

'Frightening, but sensitive and sad? What a load of shit!'

Steve rose slowly to his feet and Marilyn's attention rose with him. There was no way of knowing who he was pissed off at and everyone could now be fair game. Neither Marilyn nor anybody else was quite expecting what happened next. Steve ambled over to Slash, put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. The men stared, open-mouthed. Slash was crying.

'He's right,' said Slash. 'Monroe. He's right. It *was* fucking sad. I bloody loved that girl. Yeah, maybe she was a slag and she shouldn't have fucked that bloke from the pub but I didn't have to stab her. I still loved her, despite all that.'

The men rallied round. Steve may have been the most scary one in Marilyn's opinion but everyone else feared Slash. He was six by six, more vocal, and he really loved fighting. Violent solutions were his forte.

'Come on, Slash,' said Dave. 'It's all over now.'

'Yeah but it could've been different. We could've worked it out differently if I ha'n't stabbed her.'

'What counselling or sommat?' said Jim. 'Yeah, that could've worked.'

'Maybe you could've scared the shit out of her by shoutin' in 'er face but then let her go to her mother's for a bit?' said Bob.

Slash nodded.

‘Or maybe you could have slapped her within an inch of her life instead, and she’d’ve got over it without having to go to the hospital,’ said Dave, not really getting into the swing of the non-violent solution.

Slash looked at him doubtfully.

‘Yeah, or, or what Bob said,’ Dave back-tracked.

‘Well it don’t matter now, I s’pose. She’s gone and that’s that. I think me picture says it all though, don’t it, Tiggy?’

‘There’s definitely an air of regret about it,’ Tiggy agreed.

‘That’s alright then,’ said Slash.

‘Good session, everyone!’ called Tiggy, who was a person who easily bounced back from potential disaster. ‘Same time next week and critiques again I think.’