

The Misfits

Leigh Reynolds Mueller

Dear Marilyn,

I never got a chance to say thank you for that hug, for the way you put your arms around us. Pulled us close. “I just love little girls” you whispered into our ears, our hair, along our rounded cheeks. We were two little girls, being given a tour of a very grown-up movie set out in the middle of a desert, being introduced to polite but uninterested people, but you – you gathered us to your heart and told us you loved us.

I was only there to see the horse. They had an actual BLACK STALLION on the set, The one they would rope to tires while you screamed “Murderers!” But I didn’t know about that. I only knew that there was an actual BLACK STALLION that I could see, and pet its nose, its flaring nostrils.

I couldn’t tell you that I recognized the way you smelled, because it was the way my father smelled, and later the way I would too. Bourbon. I couldn’t tell you then that it was the smell of danger, of sudden flares of rage, of needing to hide, holding my breath and my little sister’s hand, tucked away to be unnoticed until the storm passed.

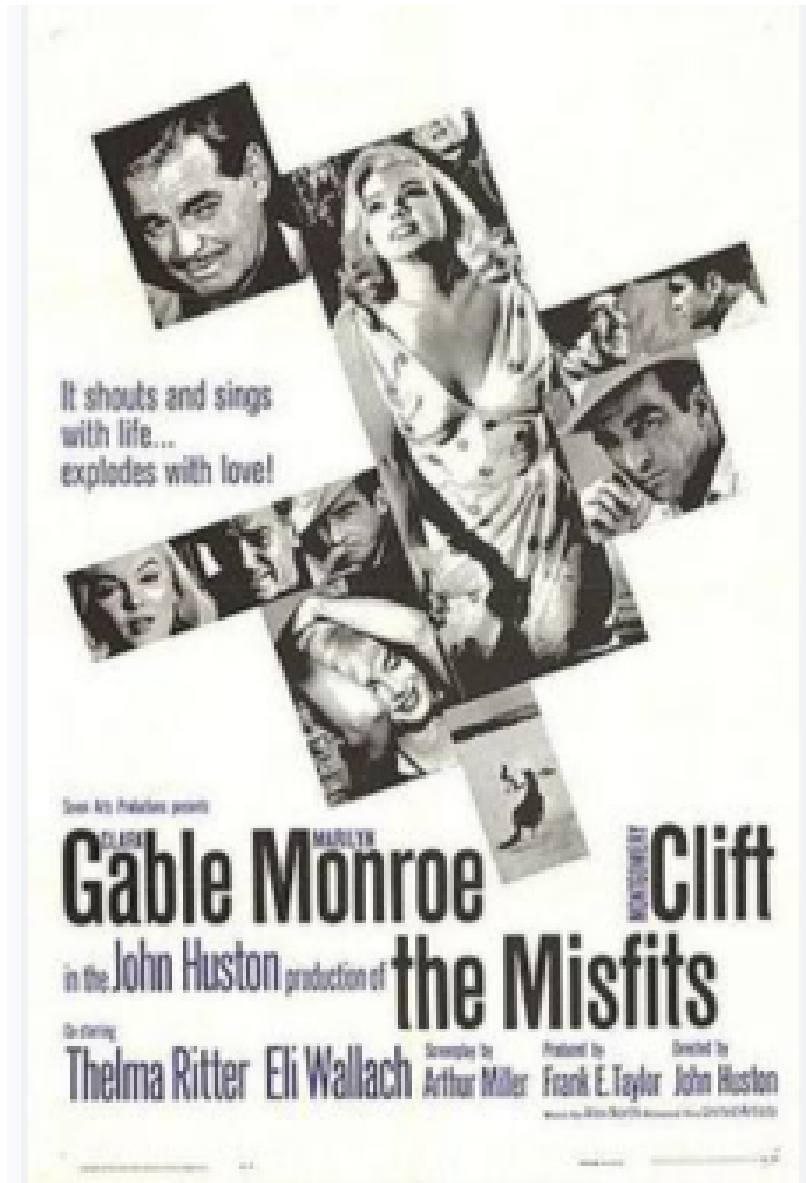
It had never before been the smell of sweetness and gentle hugs and I love yous. I carried it with me to the stall where the actual BLACK STALLION was waiting for his turn In the limelight, and when I met him, got to touch his velvet nose, I whispered to him, “I love you.”

How many years later did I finally see that movie? It was on TV and it was black and white. There you were, screaming, crying out for mercy for all of it, for the horse, for the souls of the men who would break it, for the pitiless desert of alcoholism, and I wept as I watched, because I knew. I knew you weren’t acting. I knew you had that same pain I had watching that movie on late night TV, having just one more shot before passing out.

You didn't get to live long enough to revisit that desert, so let me tell you they named that location Misfit Flats. And wild horses still run free there, the murders were stopped and that movie helped it happen.

So Thank You, Miss Monroe, for the kindness, the sweet benediction, the tender heart. Thank you for the mercy. I love you too.

Sincerely, Leigh Reynolds Mueller



Note:

“The Misfits,” filmed in 1960 in and around Reno was the last movie made by Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, Montgomery Clift and director John Huston. The press blamed Monroe for Gable’s post production fatal heart attack. It might be the most honest movie about alcoholism ever made.

The scenes from the round-up for slaughter of the mustangs by the characters played by Gable, Clift and Wallach were filmed in the desert near Silver Springs, NV. The emotionally wrenching images helped illustrate Velma (Wild Horse Annie) Johnson’s campaign to get the slaughter of wild horses for dog food ended.

A decade after "the Misfits" was released, The Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 was signed into law by President Richard Nixon. It is in danger of being overturned today, as pressure from the cattle lobby and others strive to remove the remaining wild horses from their habitats.