

# BLONDE AMBITION

By: Lindsay Hayward

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*For my mother,*

*“All we demanded was our right to twinkle.”*

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### Characters

THE BLONDE. Identifies female, 36. A legend.

SUGAR. Identifies female, 32. An actress.

THE GIRL. Identifies female, 24. A model.

NORMA JEANE. Identifies female. A child.

VOICE. Identifies female, unseen. Can be double cast or recorded.

### Time & Place

All action takes place in a dressing room on the set of Twentieth Century Fox's production of *Something's Got to Give*, May 1962.

### Author's Note

This is a dream play. All drama unfolds within the confines of The Blonde's mind, and not the film set. An overt attachment to reality is not encouraged. For example, the actors do not so much enter and exit, as exist when needed. The characters are to function as various schisms of The Blonde's personality, so there is no reason to keep roles within strict physical confines of Monroe's actual dimensions. (36-24-34 to be exact.) On the nudity, The audience needs only to understand that The Blonde is nude under her bathrobe and can be achieved with as much or as little masking as comfortable. Full nudity is not required for the action.

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## DARKNESS TO START

*In the black, an intercom clicks on*

**VOICE.** *(Unseen.)* Will Ms. Monroe please report to the set? Please report to set, Ms. Monroe. *(The soulful alto of Ella Fitzgerald is heard. Lights warm to a Twentieth Century Fox Studio dressing room. A total mess. There is a large dressing table with vanity which dominates the space. It is overflowing with cosmetics, make-up pots, discarded pill bottles, and tissues. Next to it is a waste basket filled with more pill bottles, and numerous lipstick smeared tissues. A couch is barely visible due to the volume of costume pieces piled on top of it. Dog-eared scripts, tabloids, and books juttred out from the furniture's towering fabric. More costumes hang half-hazard along a clothes rack. Two chairs, and a mid-century side tables complete the space. A record player with full collection spills out over the table. More books with a framed portrait of Lincoln-or perhaps Arthur Miller- litter the floor. A discreet minibar is tucked away behind the seating area. Tiny booze bottles along with a large red thermos rest on its surface. At the dressing table, glazing out of glass-less, three-side mirror, sits THE BLONDE, half made up, half-dressed in a state of inertia. A beautiful Renoir portrait.)* Final call for Ms. Monroe. Ms. Monroe, please report to the set. *(Languidly, The Blonde reaches for the intercom.)* Ms. Monroe please// *(She flips the switch. All goes quiet.)*

**THE BLONDE.** My lips are incredibly flat. That's the god's truth, I swear. When I was kid, they said my mouth look like two pancakes fighting on an oily riddle. Took me ages to figure out how to get 'em just

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right. The trick? You need at least two brushes, and three lipsticks create this world wonder. The Monroe's lips. Consider it a gift. Real artists can work on any canvas. And I've got a talent when it comes to my oral cavity. I can draw some real pretty lips too. *(The Blonde smiles again. The music stops as The Blonde picks up a cosmetic brush. She dully dabs it in a bottle before moving it towards her passive grin. As the brush nears her mouth, there is an intense moment of internal panic. The Blonde freezes, then abruptly lowers her arm. To regain a sense of control, her gaze wanders upward.)* Not a natural blonde either. Though everyone knows that. I was what they called a dishwater blonde. The polite term for mousey. Not that a girl wants to be thought of like a rodent. But how's bringing up a dirty sink is any better. Brunette's no bad word. Suited Jane Russell just fine. All things considered. Though I suppose there's a reason, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." *(The Blonde picks up a brush as if to pull it through her hair. Another hesitation. To change the subject.)* Still use Harlow's lady to get her exact shade of platinum. Now there's something most people don't know. I worshiped Jean Harlow. So, after my first hit movie, I made sure to find out who was responsible for her tint. That old fossil who comes in every two weeks for my roots. Did the exact same bleach for Hollywood's very first bombshell. Same strength peroxide, and everything. After a while? You hardly notice the smell. *(The Blonde reaches for a tissue to rubs off an offending spot.)* Mole was never real. It was all the studio's idea. *(She stares dreamily at her reflection until she and the audience become aware of music. The record has started to play again. The Blonde turns to find SUGAR by the player, having replaced the needle. Has she been there the whole time? Sugar is a work in contrast to a Hollywood blonde. Think Cherie from "Bus Stop", but with a more caustic demeanor. The Blonde defensively turns to the mirror.)* Here's something else folks may not know. Growing up in the orphanage? I was awfully

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lonely. So. After curfew each night? I'd crept up to the ward's only window. Tilt your head just right pass the metal bars, and you could just see the RKO Studio Sign. That logo lit up all night long. Flashing such star quality the whole sky seemed to glow. No, twinkled. I'd pressed up against the frame and watch that neon sign till morning. One day, I'd be an actress. Famous. And I'd never be lonely again. (*Sugar snorts.*) Never had any actual friends as a kid. My only one waited in the mirror. Spent hours in the janitor's closet bathroom, confiding in the girl reflected back at me. All light and laughter. Under the harsh fluorescent lights, she'd glided across grimy linoleum just like Shirley Temple. Only prettier. I'd tell her everything. Dreams, fears. Couldn't help it, everyone loves a good little girl. It's a shame some don't stay as sweet when we grow. Never expect reflections to be so cruel.

**SUGAR.** Don't blame the demons in the mirror for talking to yourself. Especially when the true spirit comes from the alcohol. Reflections are only that. Can't take the passing of time personally, darlin'. It happens to the best of us. What's worse is what's done to folks who answer back to those voices in their head.

**THE BLONDE.** I have never understood cruelty, never ever.

**SUGAR.** World of difference between cruelty and truth. Learned that at the Actor's Studio. Now drop the whole folksy, kitchen-sink act, honey.

**THE BLONDE.** I-

**SUGAR.** (*Interrupting.*) You're no rose tattooed babydoll riding off on a streetcar named Desiree. You married a completely different playwright, remember? The one that writes about salesmen, foremen, Puritans.

**THE BLONDE.** The third husband-

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**SUGAR.** (*Interrupting.*) Too many men, if you ask me. No emotionally damaged southern bell could survive in his sea of testosterone. She's drowned. Dragged down in all the repressed male emotion. Only somehow, *It was a cold house I kept.*

**THE BLONDE.** Your cruelty is showing again.

**SUGAR.** I speak the truth.

**THE BLONDE.** Which is what, exactly? Feels like I knew once. Now the memories come out wrong. Was it the playwright who wrote that movie for me, or Capote?

**SUGAR.** Your memory's not the problem. Truman Capote wrote "*Breakfast at Tiffany's*" about you while Arthur wrote "*The Misfits*" for you. Tennessee Williams wrote absolutely nothing regarding you. Which I consider a damn shame. And if we are giving it all up to Jesus? You did not grow up in an orphanage.

**THE BLONDE.** I did-

**SUGAR.** (*Interrupting.*) Two years.

**THE BLONDE.** At The Los Angeles' Home for Girls-

**SUGAR.** (*Interrupting.*) For less than twenty-four months 'cause Grace sprung you early. Just like she did from all those other foster homes. Your mother lives in Texas, which to the fine folks of California makes her as good as dead. But even if she does dress in white now, that don't make her ghost. She's still your next of kin.

**THE BLONDE.** Imagine it'd be easier if she were dead.

**SUGAR.** Knowing Gladys Mortenson, you don't have to imagine. And you had Grace, Jim.

**THE BLONDE.** My first husband.

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**SUGAR.** Easiest of the lot.

**THE BLONDE.** When you're still playing with paper dolls, it doesn't matter. I'd just turned fifteen. According to Grace, that was more than old enough to get married. I was a child, still Norma Jeane-

**SUGAR.** (*Interrupting.*) Oh no, don't you dare go rattling that demon's cage. Not now.

**THE BLONDE.** (*Defensively.*) You started it.

**SUGAR.** No, you did. With this. (*She gestures at the state of the dressing room.*) They are trying to shoot your come-back picture, honey. But instead of being a good girl and reporting to set, you're wallowing in self-pity, and Chanel No. 5.

**THE BLONDE.** I just need more time.

**SUGAR.** You've been here for hours. They're all waiting. Dean Martin, Cukor, the kid playing the kid. You always do this.

**THE BLONDE.** There's no such thing as instant glamour. What'd Grace always say?

**SUGAR.** Beauty is pain. Funny. The longer you go along, it seems like more pain for less beauty.

**THE BLONDE.** More cruelty.

**SUGAR.** More home truths. Never used to take you this long. Remember "*The Ladies of The Chorus?*"

**THE BLONDE.** That was different.

**SUGAR.** Only difference was the date of a calendar. Your first real picture. Once upon a time, you care about things like that. What a god-awful movie! Recall how hot that old studio boss got during the daily rushes?

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**THE BLONDE.** I don't remember.

**SUGAR.** The man turned so red always seemed about to choke on his cigar. Remember how one time he shot out of the screening room bellowing, WHO'S THE FAT BLONDE AND WHO THE HELL IS SHE FUCKING?

**THE BLONDE.** *(In unison with Sugar, but softly.)* Who's the fat blonde, and who the hell is she fucking? *(Sugar shoots with laughter.)* Wasn't remotely funny. It was humiliating.

**SUGAR.** Especially since you had to screw a whole squadron of studio execs for one lousy B-picture. *(The Blonde slams both hands down on the dressing table. Hard.)* There's that old Oakie temper. Now. Stop stewing and start working before the Nembutal cocktail kicks in again. We both know you ain't chewin' aspirin. *(There is an air of challenge. The Blonde holds Sugar's gaze as she opens the cosmic pot.)*

**THE BLONDE.** Never was an Oakie. Never rode out of some dustbowl like Henry Fonda-

**SUGAR.** *(Injecting.)* Always did love him in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

**THE BLONDE.** I was born right here in the city of angels.

**SUGAR.** They called you Lil' Oakie though. In that first acting class. They all laughed at you. Flouncing around in mousey ringlets.

**THE BLONDE.** Polite term is dishwater blonde. Anyway, the real joke was all those debutantes' wasting their daddies' money on Acting 101. Show business runs in my family. Mother was a studio cutter. And my daddy could have been famous. The real one. Mother always was said- *(Sugar huffs in annoyance, turns on the record player.)* What are you doing?

**SUGAR.** CAN'T HEAR YOU!

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**THE BLONDE.** TURN THE MUSIC DOWN. (*Sugar turns down the music.*) I was talking about my real father. (*She immediately turns up the music again.*) TURN DOWN THE RECORD. I DON'T WANT-

**SUGAR.** (*Interrupting.*) WHAT DID YOU SAY?

**THE BLONDE.** I DON'T WANT TO- (*Sugar turns down the music.*)  
scream.

**SUGAR.** Not gonna hear that ridiculous fable again. Clark Gable was not your daddy. End of story. Now. Make yourself presentable. Because, frankly my dear, I don't give a (*Change of thought.*) Fix your lipstick.

**THE BLONDE.** You're upsetting me. Look. My hands are shaking.

**SUGAR.** They shake because of the pills, not me. Get Whitey in here to do the make-up then. He does it better anyway.

**THE BLONDE.** Don't need Whitey. I need a little sympathy. Doesn't hurt anyone to hear about my parents. Imagine if Gable had been- (*Sugar turns the music up one final time.*)

**THE BLONDE.** I CAN'T DO THIS IF I CAN'T HEAR MYSELF  
THINK!

**SUGAR.** YOU CAN HEAR YOURSELF JUST FINE. THAT'S THE PROBLEM. (*Sugar turns away from The Blonde dismissively. The Blonde turns back to the mirror. After a few feeble strokes she accepts defeat. The Blonde takes a pill from one of the many bottles on the table. Rubbing her temples, The Blonde lowers her head as the record skips once, then twice before the needle lifts. When the music starts again, it is a rousing big band number. THE GIRL has arrived. A classic pin-up wearing a large smile, and not much else. She possesses a natural wit just not the brightest bulb. The Girl erupts in bubbly laughter; she holds up a bottle.*)

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**THE GIRL.** Who wants refreshments? (*Giggling, she switches off the record player.*) Did you know chardonnay is best served at exactly 50 degrees Fahrenheit? It's a scientific fact. Brought to you by The Californian Association of Winegrape Growers. I was on their Girls of Grapes Calendar. Not the cover, mind you. Only Miss February.

**SUGAR.** The shortest month.

**THE GIRL.** Even if you were to count the leap year?

**SUGAR.** Consider it a leap you could count that high.

**THE GIRL.** (*Laughing.*) You're a hoot.

**SUGAR.** Aren't I just a proverbial barrel of monkeys?

**THE GIRL.** Never hurts to smile. It takes fifty muscles to frown, but only seventeen to smile. More frowning means more wrinkles. Something to consider, especially at your age. According to the American Dental Association/

**SUGAR.** Let me guess, made their calendar too?

**THE GIRL.** Got the cover.

**SUGAR.** Congratulations on your coveted Dental Dame title then. (*To The Blonde.*) Why is she here? And when is she leaving? (*The Blonde remains face down on the dressing table. No response.*)

**THE GIRL.** Golly, things could certainly lighten up here. (*She moves to the record player.*) Any requests?

**SUGAR.** None you'll take.

**THE GIRL.** Is she alright?

**SUGAR.** What do you think?

**THE GIRL.** Is she dead?

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**SUGAR.** No. Not if there's two of us.

**THE GIRL.** What can we do?

**SUGAR.** Managed to smuggle a stomach pump in with that get-up? Nope? Can't imagine where you'd find the room. Suppose not much then. And at the rate she's going, who knows how many are coming to the party?

**THE GIRL.** Should we put out more chairs? *(The Blonde slowly raises up her head, and stares dully at the mirror.)* Oh, what a relief.

**THE BLONDE.** If only.

**SUGAR.** Aren't you a little old? For her? You're thirty-six. What does Miss Novelty Knockers offer?

**THE BLONDE.** I need her.

**THE GIRL.** I'm what the boys want.

**THE BLONDE.** She's what they all want. A pretty young thing with no lights on above-

**SUGAR.** *(Injecting.)* And legs spread below?

**THE GIRL.** What's wrong with having fun? We should all start to live before we get too old. Fear is stupid. So are regrets.

**SUGAR.** Fancy words from an unformed frontal lobe. As I recollect, you were the one who posed for those nekkid photos.

**THE BLONDE.** Not naked, nude.

**SUGAR.** There's a difference?

**THE GIRL.** One is artistic expression, while the other-

**SUGAR.** *(Injecting)* Pays the bills?

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**THE GIRL.** Not exactly.

**SUGAR.** What about a cup of coffee then?

**THE GIRL.** With change for the cab fare.

**SUGAR.** Who says no one values art these days?

**THE GIRL.** And it's not true that I had nothing on. There was the radio.  
*(She returns to the record collection.)*

**SUGAR.** Fine. She's mildly amusing. She can stay. Someone needs to provide comic relief.

**THE GIRL.** Is that a new single?

**SUGAR.** Sure. Keep looking, honey. Let me know if you get stuck, and I'll hum a few bars. *(To the Blonde.)* Back to business then. No amount of pancake will get ya on the right side of thirty again. Wanna fool the folks at home? Think less about the glow of yesterday's portfolio. Focus on the glare of today's set lights. Did you tell them to fix that little floozy's hair? There's only one blonde in a Monroe picture.

**THE BLONDE.** I told them. Seems cruel, making her go darker. She's only a kid.

**SUGAR.** Please. Give her a padded bra and a chance. You're the name. So you're the blonde. Besides. It's no worse than when that old brood mare demanded you wear cat eyes frames in-

**THE BLONDE.** *(Interrupting)* "How To Marry A Millionaire."

**SUGAR.** What a fluff film. A pretty girl in glasses? Why, the jokes practically write themselves. How can she get a man when she's got a stigmatism?

**THE BLONDE.** I couldn't see straight for the entire shoot

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**SUGAR.** No reason to make the damn things prescription.

**THE BLONDE.** I fell over everything. I feel over Betty Grable. Twice.

**SUGAR.** Everyone would laugh, saying “*There goes Marilyn, with her legs up in the air.*”

**SUGAR & THE GIRL.** (*In unison.*) Again.

**THE GIRL.** (*Shrugs.*) It was a joke.

**THE BLONDE.** I was the joke.

**SUGAR.** But that was before Strasberg, and the Studio. Who’s laughing now, huh? No one even remembers some war time hooper.

**THE BLONDE.** Grable’s not made a movie in years.

**SUGAR.** Chorus girls always get put out to pasture. Never forget it’s always: Thank you for your service, now shut the door on your way out.

**THE GIRL.** Are we talking about cows now?

**SUGAR.** Hooper not heifer.

**THE BLONDE.** Betty Grable was a dancer.

**SUGAR.** Though always was an air of barnyard about that one.

**THE BLONDE.** She tapped. She was very nice.

**SUGAR.** As I recollect that was one bonafide ballerina. A real bovine.

**THE GIRL.** I’m sure her performances were *moo*-ving!

**THE BLONDE.** You’re being ridiculous.

**SUGAR.** *Utterly* captivating!

**THE GIRL.** Did she take the bulls by the horn then?

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**SUGAR.** Hell yes. Studio had a whole stable of starlets that could chew scenery just as well.

**THE GIRL.** Are you sure that was the only thing they were chewing?  
*(The Blonde attempts to ignore the other two, but their amusement overwhelms her. In a moment of pure movie magic, The Blonde laughs as Marilyn Monroe.)*

**SUGAR.** Honey, this is Hollywood. Not so much if you chew-

**SUGAR & THE GIRL** *(In unison.)* IT'S WHETHER OR NOT YOU SWALLOW!

**SUGAR.** Whole damn city's a meat market. *(The Blonde continues to laughs now with a manic quality. Any star quality joy is gone.)*

**THE GIRL.** Get along little doggies!

**SUGAR.** That's what they call us, honey.

**THE BLONDE.** *(Near to hysteria.)* Bitch. *(This statement stops Sugar and The Girl cold.)*

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