"It’s all about lying when you reach for the truth: scalpel, paintbrush and pen."

Art and the Scalpel

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Figure 1: Jonathon Wood Illustration

In "It Happened One Night" made in 1934 Clarke Gable leaves his hotel at 2.30 am, drives around New York writes a story for his newspaper and returns to his room. The time is still 2.30 on the clock (Aubrey Dillon-Malone)
The Canadian writer Margaret Atwood in *The Robber Bride* said, "Where to start is the problem because nothing begins when it begins and nothing is over when it's over." However if I had to pinpoint the exact moment I decided to embark on my biography of Hollywood artist/surgeon Jonathon Wood (who worked under the synonym of Dr Flesh) it was at 2.30 am, movie time in a New York hotel. Like Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*, Jonathon Wood hailed from Kansas then spent a fanciful seventy-five years working in Los Angeles and then mysteriously disappeared at the ripe old age of one hundred. Truth and fiction often became entwined in the writing and production of art works and for this project I blurred the boundaries as often as possible.

I have chosen excerpts from my book *Hollywood Flesh* that include an introduction, a description of Jonathon Wood’s studio, an encounter with an already dead Marilyn Monroe and an article supposedly written by Woods. There will also be a selection of illustrations and cartoons that I have attributed to him that span across his time in Los Angeles.

At the source of all construction there is a necessary connection between "reality" and "artifice". This paper will explore the ontology and game playing behind the artifice of a plastic surgeon/painter. The protagonist’s identity is fluid as is the identity of the subjects to his scalpel. Hollywood is up for analysis and it will be the satirical edge of the pen and paintbrush that subverts advantages gained by the surgeon’s knife as much as a world at large that believes "appearance is all".

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**INTRODUCTION**
‘It’s the real thing
It’s the real thing
Even better than the real thing’
(Bono, U2, The Real Thing)

Shangri-la is a Tibetan village: a breath-taking lost world reached only through a portal in the Himalayas. It is the fictional paradise created by James Hilton in his best selling novel *Lost Horizon*, where people don’t age and boast perfect health for centuries. However, should inhabitants of Shangri-la decide to leave, then time exacts its revenge with withering and devastating speed. This particularly seductive spin on everlasting youth and immortality found its way onto movie screens through Frank Capra’s 1937 film and became an immediate classic.

Jonathon Wood was celebrating his tenth anniversary in Hollywood on the day the film premiered in Los Angeles. He bore an uncanny resemblance to the movie’s leading man, Ronald Coleman, despite his sharper features and sometimes slightly cruel turn of mouth. Wood had arrived in Hollywood from the Mid West as a brilliant young surgeon to set up practice on Vine St. in offices still operating today. Cosmetic surgery was in its infancy. Nevertheless, there was great demand for the veneer of youth and beauty. Not every new migrant to Tinsel-town was lucky enough to be a Mr. Universe or Miss Tennessee. Most were just hopeful slobs, looking for a miracle, and for enough cash, Jonathon Wood could provide one.

The doctor however, was blessed with more than one talent. As well as creatively sculpting human flesh with his scalpel, he was adept with pen and paintbrush in
representing his witty observations on Hollywood Life. Because he socialised with the upper echelons of the 'movie set', his work was bound to come to the attention of one William Randolph Hearst and soon was regularly featured in Hearst's publications under the synonym of *Doctor Flesh*. His cartoons, quick line drawings and highly detailed paintings, gained instant notoriety and soon Dr. Flesh joined Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons as a powerful and feared chronicler of local culture and celebrity. His was a dark vision, which stood in stark contrast to the little-tattle confection of the gossip columns. A peculiar dichotomy emerged, which found Woods masking and removing the excesses of power and fame with a scalpel by day, only to tear away and expose them again with his paintbrush at night.

In the early 1970's I was lucky enough to become the beneficiary of Dr. Jonathan Wood's mentorship and friendship. On my first visit to the West Coast, I was researching Hollywood visual narrative structures for my PhD when we were introduced. He generously granted me several exclusive interviews, which provided a comprehensive overview of the movie industry since the late 1920's. Wood also shared intimate insights into the suburb nestled in the northern reaches of the big and ugly Los Angeles. The Hollywood Hills look south across a city which sprawls all the way to San Diego. At night a vast carpet of lights stretch below, each a flickering, restless heart beat. To the north, suburbs have devoured the once idyllic San Fernando Valley farmlands. Despite this, Wood viewed Hollywood as a place afflicted with a small town sensibility that has remained intact.

This, he explained, was because it has always perceived itself as a village and in the face of enormous growth, was fortified by that original alluring image. 'After all,' I can
hear him say, ‘image is our home grown commodity and the rest of the world has an
insatiable appetite for it.’

Wood viewed Hollywood as a Venus Flytrap for both our most saccharine and
sacrilegious fantasies, wooing the migratory moth to the flaming spotlights and tidy
narratives of the studios. In this context, gossip and dirty linen were what he described
as ‘a necessary antidote to the sanitised confections of cinema.’ To Doctor Flesh, it was
vital to establish symmetry between celebrities who regularly authored their own ugly
demise and celluloid’s insistence on the cloyingly happy final scene.

Jonathon Wood and I continued to maintain contact over a number of years. He was the
most gracious of hosts during my frequent visits to Los Angeles and although he reeked
of danger, arrogance and dash, I found him a most affable fellow and first rate
company. However, rumour and speculation always managed to intrude. Stories
abound of his connections to the mob and Sam Giancana. There has been talk of dark
séances and communications with the dead. His unchanged appearance and robust
health over some seventy years in Hollywood fuelled many trashy media articles which
intimated there had been a Dorian Gray-styled pact with the darker forces of evil.
Others suspected artful cosmetic surgery in an attempt to make some sense of the
spry, energetic presence of a man in his hundredth year. I used to imagine he had
found his own Shangri-la; a portal to a lost world somewhere in the Hollywood Hills, a
paradise perched up there on Mulholland Drive, a haven for himself and his glamorous
assistant, Georgina Swift. It wasn’t difficult to let one’s fantasies run amok in that
direction.

His home was stunning. Its designer was an exponent of the Bauhaus School, flown in
from Germany just before the war. The house exuded a Modernist clarity and embraced
a minimalist Japanese garden with spectacular views across the city. A huge salt-water
pool ran the length of his patio, and building on the penchant of the rich and famous for
populating their pools with all manner of marine life exotica, Flesh’s five-metre shark,
‘Choppers’ or ‘Chip Chop’ to his doting master, cast a sinister moving shadow along its
bottom. More than once, the local press had ventured that certain missing persons had
met their fate as pet food up on Mulholland Drive.

When I was in town, Woods would generally insist we meet at his favourite restaurants:
the Ivy, the Chateau Marmont or the Mondrian. On special occasions I would be a guest
at his home. It was an oasis in a town where architecture stitches together historical
references, defying both convention and aesthetics. Gothic, Tudor, French and Spanish
sit comfortably, not just from house to house but from kitchen to living room. An
inordinate number of them boasted a plaque with ‘Shangri-la’ in a cornucopia of exotic
fonts. My host often commented that no site is sacred in Hollywood and no individual
sacrosanct. He would cite the demolition of the M.G.M. backlot and estates such as
Pickfair as testimony to the town’s addiction to acts of self-mutilation, as signposts of
the shift from big ideas on a big screen to the shrunken visions of television. He was
given to quoting Malcolm Muggeridge and more than once, with a glass in his hand and
one too many down his throat, he would warble ‘Television was not intended to make
human beings vacuous but it is an emanation of vacuity.’ Then he would demand his
glass be refilled.
I was immensely saddened when I received the news that Jonathon Wood had vanished from his home on New Year’s Day, 2002. Although his personal assistant, Georgie Swift, wasted little time in notifying the Los Angeles Police Department, it would be another eight days before Dr. Flesh was officially classified as a ‘missing person’. She vividly recalls the morning newspaper of January 9th. Page three led with ‘Asteroid Misses Earth by a Stellar Whisker’... an asteroid big enough to obliterate a major country had missed Earth by a hair’s breadth on that Monday evening. Page two led with the story ‘Whoopi Goldberg Makes Comeback for Oscar Night.’ The article was accompanied by a colour picture of Whoopi in a black dress, standing next to the statuette, at least a head taller. Page one carried the news of the day beginning with ‘Hollywood Flesh: Missing’. There was a photo of a suave looking Doctor Flesh, a half smile playing on his face, the smile of someone enjoying a private joke. Four of his more controversial cartoons were featured. ‘You know, he will love this,’ Georgie confided to me on a late night phone call ‘... wherever he may be.’

The night of that phone call saw the beginning of my project on Doctor Flesh’s Hollywood. As executor of Jonathon Wood’s estate, Georgina made sure that I would have sole access to the art works which appear in this book. Many have been previously published in newspapers and magazines and span the period from 1927 to 2002. I have chosen not to present these in chronological sequence, instead favouring thematic chapters. During one of our many conversations, I pressed him about the focus of his art. ‘Hollywood, of course,’ he replied ‘the screen, the suburb, the sex, the scalpel, decay, death .... and that’s just the beginning.’ I would like to acknowledge the tireless dedication Georgina has shown in collating and making available to me, diaries kept by Wood since 1955 and for three long and gruelling interviews he granted me on
the subject. In these, she candidly talked about her personal relationship with Jonathon Wood, as well as their long professional association. This book is an idiosyncratic take on Hollywood from the perspective of a remarkable individual who witnessed its evolution as well as playing a pivotal role in shaping it.

**Dr. John Forrest**

**ART WORKS: SELECTED PUBLISHED ILLUSTRATIONS ON SHOWBUSINESS 1933 - 2001**

**NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

The most daunting of tasks in compiling this book has been the selection of Jonathon Wood’s paintings and drawings. Georgina Swift made literally hundreds of works available to me from his estate. My selection comes from drawings syndicated and published in newspapers across the United States, and paintings which appeared in glossier magazines with higher print resolution. Miscellaneous works that until now, have remained unpublished because they overstepped the censorship laws of the day, have also been included. My final choice of paintings and drawings was predicated on their narrative potential, rather than their artistic merit, a decision with which I suspect, Jonathon would not have been happy. However, throughout my research, my main objective has been to explore the question of why this particular man made this particular work. From my meetings with the artist, I was struck by his uncanny knack of predicting events. More than once I have wondered if he instinctively knew that I would eventually become his biographer. On my initial visit to his home on Mulholland Drive, I was permitted into his studio. This, I would later discover from Georgina, was an uncharacteristically hospitable and intimate gesture. At the time I was mainly aware of his ambivalent attitude to the work he had created. Over dinner he had dismissed them as 'cartoons, a laugh, not the fucking Sistine ceiling.' Yet later, I found his detached studio to be locked tighter than Fort Knox. It seemed a contradiction that he would so closely guard what he had described as his ‘inconsequential doodles’ yet boast that he never locked his house which contained many exotic treasures from his extensive travels.

The studio was in stark contrast to the rest of his home. Gone was the sparse and considered order of his living quarters. One entire wall served as a pinboard, crammed with photos, scrawled sentences and newspaper clippings. Another housed metal, stacked drawers, literally stuffed with hundreds of paintings on card, and ink drawings on paper. Random pieces of paper were strewn across bench tops, some of them napkins with thumbnail sketches on them, or sheets torn from cheap, lined writing pads. His easel sat by a bank of windows, surrounded by three spotlights augmented by overhead track lighting. A huge draughtsman’s desk sat in the middle of the room and the bin beside it was overflowing with screwed up balls of paper. Works in various stages of completion were propped up against every vertical surface, and the floor boasted as much spilt paint as a Jackson Pollock.

That night he showed me the earlier pen and ink works from the late nineteen twenties through to the ‘forties. They were heavily worked, with multiple tonal applications and are in strong contrast to the sparse, purely linear renderings of his more recent work. ‘As my style evolved, I found I could say the same thing more economically. The Jess is more principle,’ he explained. When he showed me his paintings, I was struck by how
little these had stylistically changed across the years. They were obsessively detailed, almost photographic, in some instances. When I commented that they did not mirror the changes observable in his drawings, he had laughed, ‘well, the more is more principle is very persuasive in Hollywood!’ Later, he volunteered that the paintings were more spatial.

‘I was preoccupied with darkening the edges and illuminating the centres of my images. I tried to make the texts underneath do the same thing.

![Figures 6 and 7: The Early Years Jonathon Wood Drawings](image)

![Figures 8 and 9: The Later Years Jonathon Wood Drawings](image)

When I asked him about Hollywood, he became testy, pointing out that much of his work stemmed from his observations of ordinary people with ordinary preoccupations found in any suburb. ‘A lot of them are about sex, angst, growing old, and dying; issues that everyone has to deal with.’ When I persisted, noting that a substantial amount of his work had nevertheless concentrated on show business and celebrity, he responded with ‘If I’d moved to Detroit rather than out West, I would have found some way to make automobiles good for a laugh’. When I reminded him that he didn’t always go for humour in his work, his reply, whilst characteristically evasive, is worth recording here:

‘Exactly! A Ford Fairlane won’t make you chuckle, but an Edsel might!’
DIAL M FOR MURDER

‘When you look at Marilyn on the screen you don’t want anything to happen to her. You really care that she should be all right’ (Natalie Wood)

6TH AUGUST 1962 MULLHOLLAND DRIVE, 10AM

He looked at his watch as the minute hand approached the hour. It was a meditation, a ritual carried out on the patio, this time everyday. The Rolls Royce pulled into the drive..., his Rolls. What a beauty it was, a prize snatched up in the thirties; the driver’s seat in the open, his cabin enclosed, luxurious and private. Bang went the door, then the sound of brisk footsteps crunching on the driveway. She rounded the corner as the minute hand hit twelve and walked along the side of his huge salt-water pool. The shark, his shark, cruised beside her.
She put down the bucket to get better leverage, then heaved the meat and blood out towards the water. The shark rose out from the surface, caught the flesh and shook it violently. It sank again slowly and Georgina Swift turned and walked towards him... his Georgina Swift. She had been with him since 1933. English, still looking great, Georgie was comfortable and private. She was his agent, his secretary and his right arm. The left one he’d saved for his scalpel and paintbrush. Her hair was blonde today and her ample mouth broke into an ample smile. A good mouth, one made for talking.

‘Still in your dressing gown, Jonathon? Would you like me to slip into something more comfortable?’

‘No Georgie. As a matter of fact, I just woke up. It was like the sleep of the dead.’

‘You slept? You never sleep!’

‘Yes and somehow I’ve missed something. Somebody’s gone. I feel it ...Garland?’

‘You haven’t heard the news?

‘Stop answering my questions with another fucking question! What happened?’

‘Marilyn Monroe is dead.’

‘Shit!’ He swiped his bloody mary off the table, the glass splintering across the rock paving. The juice spread, working its way along the mortar towards the bloody pool.

‘Didn’t Louella call? She rang me this morning crying.’
‘Louella is not allowed to call here,’ he snapped, then frowned. ‘Louella cried?’ ‘Yes, she liked Marilyn. She was a staunch supporter.’

‘Even I like Marilyn, Georgie. I take it you’ve done some follow up?’

‘Oh, yes, Doctor.’

‘Did you throw some money around?’

‘Mountains of it’

‘Fill me in, but first go and put on my favourite Marilyn song.’

Georgie disappeared inside. He heard Monroe’s voice begin; ‘There is a river called the river of no return...’ He blew perfect smoke rings at the pool and watched with narrowed eyes as the shark travelled from one end to the other. Georgie cleaned the broken glass, replacing it with a fresh cocktail and loaded his cigarette holder. She slithered into a seat across the table and had already begun to pull typed papers from her briefcase.

‘OK Georgie, what have you got?’

She pushed several sheets towards him. ‘This is a memorandum to the Director of the FBI dated July 18th. It’s highly confidential, of course.’

He smiled. ‘As confidential as Hoover dressing up in women’s clothes?’
‘Maybe not;’ she smiled back, ‘but let’s not go looking for trouble over that.’ He scanned the document and started underlining paragraphs.

"Marilyn Monroe attended a luncheon at the residence of Peter Lawford with President Kennedy. Informants characterized Monroe’s views as positively and concisely leftist."

‘So, what’s new?’ he snapped. ‘The whole god damn world knew about that when she sang Happy Birthday to him at Madison Square Gardens. Practically fucked him from the stage. What else?’

‘I talked to my man down at the Los Angeles Police Department. He says it’s all hush hush, but Marilyn’s housekeeper, Eunice Murray, is already making travel arrangements... she’s going to disappear, Jonathon.’

‘And?’

‘Well, the first officer’s on the death scene said Marilyn’s legs were straight and parallel; she looked as though she had been placed in that position.’

‘Hmm, hardly consistent with a belly full of barbiturates.’

‘Exactly what the police officer thought. There is pain and distortion associated with overdoses. The body twists up every time.’

‘Splendid Georgie... proceed.’
‘He said there’s talk of a man, a **great and famous man happily married with children, a man who is not going to divorce his wife**, but has been having it on the side with Marilyn. And may be this man went to her house with Peter Lawford that night.’

‘Hmmm .... an out of towner, I’ll wager, Georgie.’

‘That’s what I thought too, so I checked the airport’s comings and goings over the last few days. I’ve got nothing positive, but rumour has it Bobby Kennedy was in town and has already left’

He whistled for Georgie’s sake. But he was ahead of her, way ahead of her. ‘So what are the cops doing?’

‘Well, this officer told me he didn’t think any arrests would be made, and the F are Saying hands off Fishy huh?’

Flesh looked down at his feet and watched an ant try and negotiate its way around his slipper. He lifted his foot and ground it to a smudge.

‘Anything else?’

‘Well, Chief Medical Examiner Curphey wouldn’t talk. Neither would his side kick Tom Noguchi, so I went down there and luckily a very friendly young assistant happened to be having a cigarette outside. Well. We got acquainted and he got even friendlier. He reckons it was an overdose of Nembutal and chloral hydrate pills. Now here’s the interesting bit. Initial tests aren’t showing any traces of the drug in the mouth or oesophagus.’

‘What about the crooning dago? He’s been dating her. He’s the Kennedy pimp.’

‘NO’ Georgie answered. ‘Sinatra's clear.’

‘And what about her analyst Greenson? Dr. Ralph Greenson,’ Flesh sneered.

‘Now come on Doc, he did take her in, you know. She was like one of the family.’

‘Oh yes, Georgie, a fine man, a mighty fine man indeed. Not without ambition either.’

‘Yeah, well, we know how many times you tried to get her up here, Doc, just the two of you in Cosyville. Did you ever treat her? If you did, it got past me.’

‘Oh yes, Georgie, I treated her. I treated her very badly, I’m afraid. The odd flesh wound here and there. Malicious but not vindictive.’

‘Sure, Jonathon’. Georgie turned away.

‘Hand me some fresh paper and three envelopes, my dear,’ the doctor continued, pulling a gold pen from his dressing gown. He wrote quickly, folded the paper into the envelopes, addressed them, then looked up and smiled.

‘Jack loves a good head job. Did you know that Georgie?’

‘Doctor I do draw the line at some things.’
‘You’re off the hook, honey. Jack will have his head job a head job to end all head jobs.’

‘And Bobby?’ she asked.

‘Let him sweat. Now, run along and post these,’ he instructed, passing her the envelopes. Only Sam Giancana’s name meant anything to her. Who the hell were Jack Ruby and Lee Harvey Oswald? She knew better than to ask and quickly packed the briefcase, rose, then gave a circular wave of her hand.

‘What the hell was that?’ he sighed

‘All the kids are doing it.’

‘Go!’ he barked. He stood as she left, then quickly moved inside. He went to the record player and hit the button.

"There is a river, called the river of no return ...." sang Marilyn.

‘Marilyn showed her long standing friend, Robert Slather, a cluster of notes from nature. Marilyn said she had made Bobby Kennedy and her small red diary, which he found contained notes of conversations with Bobby and references to political matters of a highly controversial the notes because "Bobby liked to talk about political things and he gets mad at me because I don’t remember what he tells me."

Peter Underwood
THE BIG SLEEP


Take a walk through Westwood Memorial Park sometime if you are ever in the vicinity of Hollywood. I have spent an inordinate amount of time reading plaques and catching up with long lost friends there. What I find most intriguing about this town, is how much effort is made in life to enshrine one’s self in death. The desire to speak from the grave seems to be a particularly Californian take on immortality. Where I come from in Kansas, people die quietly and without fanfare. The dead prefer to move on, without a backward glance, leaving relatives to choose a gravesite and settle on the adequate In Memory Of for their headstone. Given I have no relatives left in the mid-west and in all probability will be thrown in a hole here (if they can find the body), I request an epitaph borrowed from the title of a favourite film, The Big Sleep. Yep, this story of romance and a frame-up, of plastic surgery and a new identity is close enough for me. When my goose is cooked I require no witty sign off, no speeches, no hugs and kisses, just that simple little message.
I can hear that venal bastard Harry Cohn right now, bellowing from the grave: **If you want to send messages, use Western Union.** Had it been the thirties, you might have imagined him shouting this from the mountaintop just above the Hollywood sign, Moses in a suit. That, however, was not cheap Harry’s style. Instead, he would bark the memo to his secretary in his shit-box of an office, located at the tacky and relatively minor Columbia studios. He founded them with his brother, Jack in 1924. There was an old joke in this town that you had to stand in line to hate him. I didn’t. In fact I was quite fond of him. After all, he gave Marilyn Monroe her first six-month contract in 1948. Ten years later he was dead. At his funeral I commented to friends about my surprise at the large crowd he had managed to pull. Red Skelton leaned over to a group of us and said: **Give the public what they want and they’ll turn out for it.** It was little wonder Cohn was so universally disliked. Harry was only pleasant to those to whom he was answerable; the gangsters who helped him gain control of Columbia. Like all studio bosses he was a despot, the general whose actors were the troops and did as they were told.

In the beginning, Marilyn was compliant, already having heard what becomes of those bra’ enough to speak their minds. She was probably aware of the fate of a feisty sailor turned screen star several years. He had been imprudent and shot his mouth off with an unscripted line. At this time, *Popeye* may only have been a flickering black and white image, but he did manage to utter the immortal words *I am what I am*. Hollywood was not prepared for such provocative sentiments and Harry exploded. *Popeye*’s words were tantamount to treason so Cohn shored up allies far more powerful than himself in Louise B Mayer, Jack Warner and Howard Hughes. Their voices rose as one, **You are what we make you!** and behind them a Busby Berkley chorus line of directors, makeup artists, costume designers, lighting specialists and studio shrinks chimed in with a
And so say all of us! The subversive Popeye was finished, relegated to the purgatory of B grade cartoon status forever. Sailors should know better than to rock the boat, quipped Mayer.

Last week, my assistant Georgie and I, tried a new vegetarian restaurant on Melrose and we were appalled to see I yam what I yam written across the top of their chalkboard menu. Poor old Popeye is, I am sad to report, as dead as the proverbial doornail. Boop Boop Be Doop sang the sensational Betty Boop. This time the words slipped past the studio moguls, who had no appreciation for ambiguity. In fact they slipped by just about everyone until drama teacher, Lee Strasberg, chanced upon them. Although Boop Boop had an opacity that eluded him, Be Doop was to become his grand obsession. One must remember that Betty sang Doop with an almost silent p and to Strasberg's slightly impaired ear, it sounded like Be, Do. And so it transpired that these two words became the cornerstone to his legendary Actors’ Studio in the Fifties. It was here the Method school of acting was born from a simple formula of being and doing. From the school's angst-ridden corridors, the likes of Marlon Brando and James Dean shuffled and mumbled their way to stardom. They were the new rebels, who once again thumbed their noses at the moguls and just like the old rebels, were destined to end up in cartoon oblivion, or dead. The last words of James Dean are significant in so far as they encapsulate the aspirations of everyone in Hollywood. As he thundered along Highway 446 in his silver Porsche Spyder, a country boy named Donald Turnupseed pulled his Ford out onto the road ahead. They've GOT to see me! Jimmy shouted to his passenger, Roiph Weutherich. But on that late afternoon of the 30 September 1955, Turnupseed didn't see Jimmy and all Strasberg's exhortations to be and do were now abruptly done. It would not be so quick for poor old Marlon. He was going to be done, but done nice and slowly. First came the dreadful scripts, confusing an already wildly erratic intellect, then the pampering and feeding of a voracious appetite. Gently, he was prodded and coaxed away from the fire of method acting and nudged towards the warm and garish glow of Loony Tunes.
Never one for remembering lines, a lazy Brando may just settle on That's all Folks as an epitaph. I strongly recommend recycling George Sander's 1972 suicide note, which fits like a glove. Dear World, he wrote. I am leaving you because I am bored. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool.

Aaagh! may have been Elvis Presley last grunt on 27 August 1977. It's only a guess, but probable scenario, when 225 pounds of flesh that has ingested fourteen different drugs, hits the toilet floor face down. Perhaps he'd called to the chef downstairs: Another ten jelly, peanut butter and bacon sandwiches pronto! But if so, it went unnoticed, as did the last words of fellow glutton, Mama Cass. Lou Costello managed to get out that was the best ice-cream soda ever, just before the end. To my knowledge, Elvis is the only one of the three however, to have subsequently been sighted feasting at McDonalds.

For my readers who enjoy a more dignified death ... Ladies and Gentlemen, let me introduce Gary Cooper! He quietly passed away in his own home with loved ones at his bedside. It was at midday 12 May 1961, High Noon. Humphrey Bogart just four years earlier had played host to guests every afternoon at 5.3Opm until the night he died. Riddled with cancer, a sherry in one hand and a cigarette in the other, he would entertain guests in half hour blocks until 8.OOpm. Each farewell from Bogie was a resolute Goodnight. It was only on that last night that he took Spencer Tracey aside and said, Goodbye Spence. Later still, in the final farewell he quipped, I should never have switched from scotch to martinis. Bing Crosby managed an even more upbeat tone with his last line that was a great game of golf. Bing may have taken his cue from Rudolph Valentino who got the ball rolling when he said: Don't pull down the blinds; I feel fine, then promptly dropped dead. The late and great Douglas Fairbanks
set the benchmark for optimism however, when, with irrepressible bravado, he boasted: "I never felt better."

Before I lose all those cynics out there amongst you, shaking your heads and thinking **oh sure, Dr Flesh**; for you valued readers, I will attempt to include some grittier fare. Not Sharon Tate mind you, this is a **family** (dysfunctional perhaps, but nevertheless family) publication. Let’s kick off with my old favourite, the wonderful Susan Hayward, who succumbed to cancer in January 1975. In her final moments, she turned to her friend Robert Nelson and asked: **how long will it take me to die?** Shortly after, she said with some bitterness, **but you said it wouldn’t hurt!** then exhaled her final breath. **America’s Sweetheart**, Mary Pickford, died at eighty-seven without a word. There may have been grunts and spittle, but otherwise nothing, for she had been incoherent for some time. Her legs had ceased to function from disuse and her body had shrunk, as if in retreat. In 1979, a small, silent, immobile black hole was left in Galaxy Hollywood. Eleven years later, bulldozers filled it in with the rubble from **Pickfair**, the iconic landmark built decades earlier with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary as reigning monarchs. There have been no subsequent messages from Mary, not even via **Western Union**. Jimmy Hendrix, unlike Pickford, enshrined himself by checking out early. He cast himself upon the River Styx (as opposed to the River Pheonix) on the tide of his own vomit at age 27. **Once you are dead you are made for life**, he had observed. Hollywood studio and recording bosses had also transformed themselves by the time of Hendrix's death on the 18 of September, 1970. Now, they sported long hair, beards, jeans and T-shirts. Their noses were crammed with cocaine and a few had heroin coursing through their arteries. Deathbed dialogue became totally **uncool** and finishing it fast, **de rigour**. There were the generic deaths enacted in anonymous motel and hotel rooms for Janis Joplin, John Belushi and a host of followers, too burnt out to think of a more imaginative end. There was the languid death of Jim Morrison in a bath as against the later frenetic demise of River Pheonix who died in a twitching break-dance on the pavement outside Johnny Depp’s **Viper Room**, just off Sunset Boulevard. Bruce Lee’s death had a Strasberg Method School smell to it. He was at the home of the lead actress in his planned new film **The Game of Death**, where he complained about a headache, then retired to the bedroom. Alone, he may have tried some Strasberg styled rehearsals with a little too much realism, just as his son was destined to do, years later, on the set of **The Crow**. The only thing we can say with certainty is that Bruce left his bedroom in a coma and died shortly afterwards. I admit that this assertion is based on rather flimsy evidence, but in all honesty I would try to pin any accusation on the Strasbergs. They took Marilyn Monroe in as one of the family, or should we say, as part of the family business. I saw Paula Stasberg working with Marilyn on **The Misfits**, down in Reno and it wasn’t healthy. To this day I won’t eat Strasberg sausage, because I believe it to be full of crap and that stuff can kill you.

**And God**, where the hell have **you** been? I’ve lived in Hollywood since 1927 and seen an avalanche of mortality but not had a sniff of **You**. O.K, so you didn’t get invited to Alfred Hitchcock’s death on 29 April 1980. Hitch’s last wish was not to have any truck with clergyman, and you made a hasty exit from Joan Crawford’s room as she lay dying. Big deal, don’t worry! She had two carers in attendance for Christ’s sake (whoops, Sorry, you weren’t there for that one, either). Anyway, I heard that as the cantankerous old bitch was slipping away, one carer began to pray at the bedside and Crawford summoned her last coherent words to bark **Damn it don’t you dare ask God to help me!** Nobody really blames you. Something better was probably happening on the 10th of May, 1977. You probably also managed to miss what Bette Davis had to say about
Crawford’s death. Davis’s mother always counselled her that it was polite to say something good about the dead. So, Bette, always a dutiful daughter, reflected, Joan Crawford? She’s dead? Good!

If the truth be known, God probably doesn’t give Hollywood or celebrity a second thought. He might be a tad sheepish, even apologetic about it, but at the end of the day, will just shrug and say I am what I am. That is, unless his feminine side has kicked in, in which case She will flutter Her eyes, pucker Her lips and go Boop Boop Be Doop.

AMEN

Figure 18: John Forrest (aka Jonathon Wood) Illustration