



Jayne Mansfield: The Girl Couldn't Help It

Eve Golden

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Eve Golden's biography of Jayne Mansfield covers the life, death, and legacy of the oft-dismissed actress.

Throughout her career and ever since her premature death, Mansfield has been treated as a punchline, more than a performer. But while her physique, blatant attention-seeking, and unabashed femininity made for catchy (and cruel) headlines, Mansfield's rise and fall were not as straightforward—or as inevitable—as her reputation implies.

Golden reveals that Mansfield, though best known for playing ditzy blondes, was a complex individual. She wanted to be a serious actress, known for having “more than a figure.” At the same time, she reveled in her status as a sex symbol, even approving the use of her image on hot water bottles. She was an intelligent, multitalented woman who knew how to leverage the press to her advantage—so much so that it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the facts of Mansfield's life and the fables around it. And yet, Mansfield did make calamitous decisions that hampered her career and derailed her personal relationships.

From her underappreciated dramatic roles to her notorious mansion that was even too pink for her nine-year-old daughter, all aspects of Mansfield's wild life are explored here. Golden notes her contradictions and hypocrisies with amusing sarcasm, but, unlike Mansfield's contemporaneous commentators who often made lewd references to the actress's anatomy, without being crass or mean-spirited. Indeed, Golden is wistful when looking back at Mansfield's lost opportunities, incredulous about her wilder stunts, and admiring of her many charitable endeavors. The result is an engrossing picture of a woman who was both a throwback to classic Hollywood glamour and a harbinger of modern, “famous for being famous” reality stars.

Eve Golden's biography vivifies one of 1950s Hollywood's most vivacious, outrageous, and entertaining stars.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2021)

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