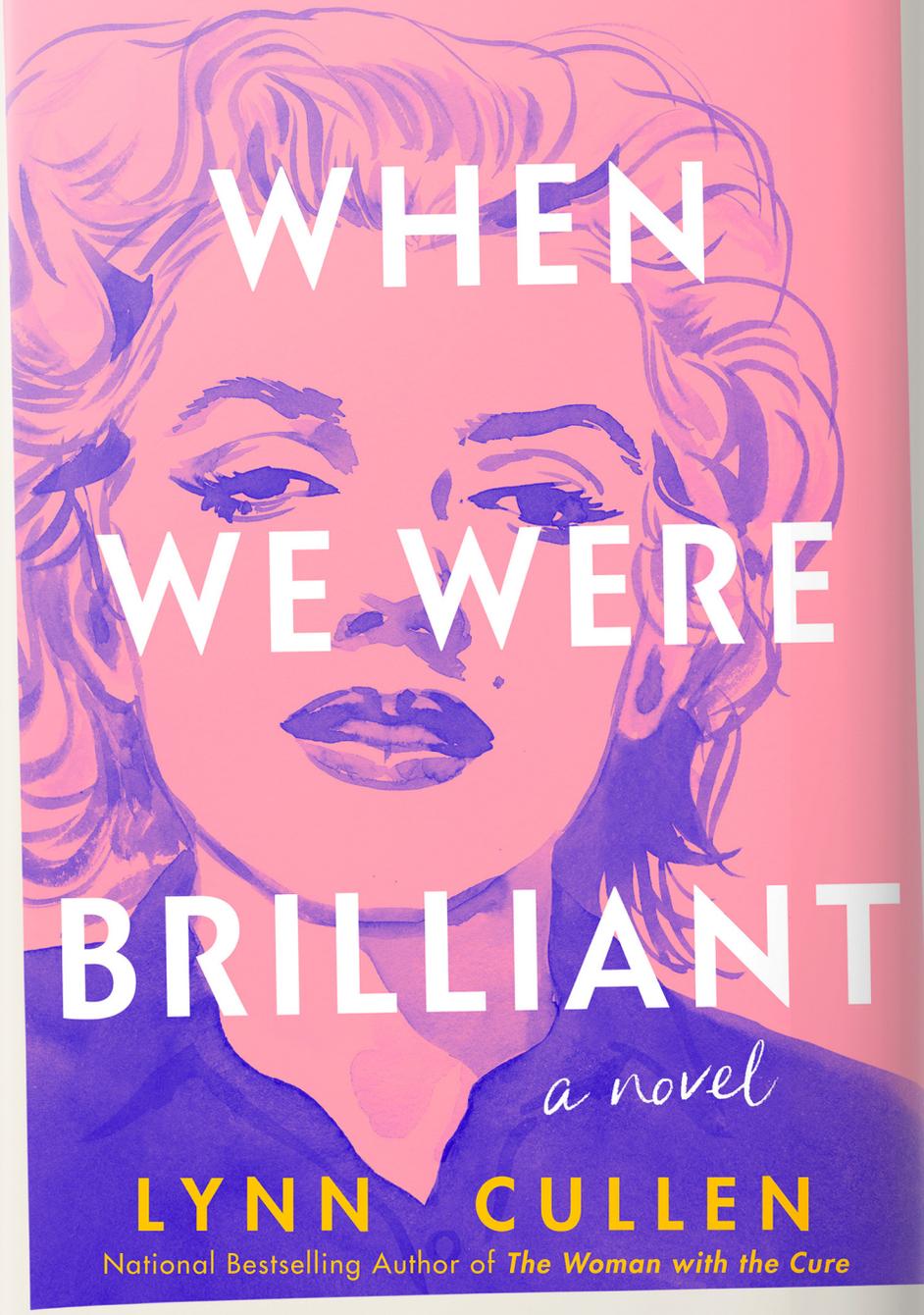


BOOK CLUB KIT

"Powerful and poignant . . . quite simply brilliant." —KATE QUINN



BERKLEY

Dear Reader,

Who is the woman behind the most famous face in the world? I've yearned to understand Marilyn Monroe since I was eight, when I saw her in *The Seven Year Itch*. I felt a tenderness toward the enigmatic woman who so lightly flitted from the reach of those who would trap her, though I couldn't explain why.

As an adult, my way of understanding people and situations is to write a novel about them. I'd wanted to write about Marilyn for decades but couldn't find a unique angle into her story. And then, two years ago, realizing that Marilyn is most famous for her photos, I wondered about the many women who'd photographed her . . . and found that Marilyn sat for only one: photojournalist Eve Arnold.

As I pored through Eve Arnold's art photography book, *Marilyn Monroe*, a completely different person than the familiar icon emerged from the pages. This Marilyn is down-to-earth and not particularly glamorous. She challenges us to see her in raw moments of triumph, sorrow, fear, bravery, and humor. In fact, she looks so different in Eve Arnold's photos that if a wall were papered with hundreds of Marilyn's photos by her many male photographers along with Eve's, you could easily pick out Eve's shots.

What was it about Eve that let Marilyn open herself up in a way she hadn't done with anyone else? What did the photos say about their relationship? What did they say about Eve's special ability to get her subjects to reveal that which is genuine, which is unique, within them? What do Eve's photos say about what it was like to dream and despair, to struggle and to achieve, as an ambitious woman in the years between 1952-1962, the decade of Marilyn and Eve's friendship?

Yet, as sympathetic and revealing as Eve's photos of Marilyn are, she withdrew them from the public upon Marilyn's death for twenty-five years. Why?

Using Eve's photos and words from *Marilyn Monroe* as my guide, I've constructed a story that I hope gets us closer to appreciating the brave, frightened, bold, and brilliant woman behind the icon we've come to know as Marilyn Monroe, while discovering the singular talent of Eve Arnold.

Now that I've written *When We Were Brilliant*, I know why I have always felt so tender towards Marilyn. I hope that after reading it, you'll want to take her under your wing, too. Tell her, Eve sent you.

Yours in the power of books,

Lynn Cullen

Discussion **QUESTIONS**

1. What impressions of Marilyn Monroe did you have before reading this novel? Did this story change your perception of her at all?
2. Had you seen any of Eve Arnold's photographs of Marilyn Monroe before reading this book? If you looked at any while reading, did you recognize them? Many people claim they can tell that a photograph of Marilyn was taken by Eve before seeing the photographer's name—do you see that to be true? Why or why not?
3. Did you know that Marilyn had endometriosis? How do you think it changed the course of her life, career, and happiness?
4. If any, which of Marilyn Monroe's movies have you seen? Now that you know more about Marilyn's state of mind while she filmed some of her biggest films, do you think about her talent differently? Are there any films you'd like to watch again, or for the first time?
5. Do you think our society's treatment of celebrities, and in particular female celebrities, has changed much since Marilyn's time?
6. Eve captured many historically significant moments during her photography career, but she feared being best known for her photographs of Marilyn Monroe. Do you think being "Marilyn's photographer" detracted from her other work?

7. Eve struggled with feeling like an absentee parent, but her sense of purpose in her career ultimately took precedence. What example did she set for Francis? How has being a working mother changed from her era to today?
8. Marilyn had quite a few high-profile relationships. How did her identity shift based on each man? Did you think any of the men she chose had a positive influence on her life? Why do you think she pursued relationships with each of them?
9. Marilyn dreamed of having a child. How do you think her life might have been different if her dream had been realized? What was it about her own childhood that made her so eager to be a parent?
10. What about Eve's and Marilyn's childhoods allowed them to connect with each other the way that they did? Why do you think it was so hard for each of them to build meaningful friendships or relationships otherwise?
11. Do you think Eve made the right decision to embargo her photographs of Marilyn after Marilyn's death? Do you think the conversation around Marilyn would have been different, had Eve released the photos earlier? Do you think the conversation around Marilyn has shifted since the time of her death?
12. Friendship, empowerment, recognition, and perception are all major themes in this story. How do you think each of these played into Marilyn's short, illustrious life? How do you think they played into Eve's longer, incredibly impressive career?