



# The Curse of Beauty: The Scandalous & Tragic Life of Audrey Munson, America's First Supermodel

By James Bone

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**The Curse of Beauty: The Scandalous & Tragic Life of Audrey Munson, America's First Supermodel** By James Bone

**The tumultuous and heartbreaking life of a world-famous model whose riveting story of beauty, fame, passion, murder, and madness in the Gilded Age captivated a nation.**

As America was stepping into the modern era, one great beauty became the artist's model of choice. Her perfect form became the emblem of the Gilded Age and appears on the greatest monuments of New York and the nation. Supermodel, actress, icon—her beauty paved the way for a life of glamour, passion, and ultimately tragedy. She dated the millionaires of the fashionable Newport colony, became the first American movie star ever to appear naked in a film, but her promising film career collapsed, her doctor fell in love with her and killed his own wife, and on her fortieth birthday, her mother committed her to an insane asylum. She remained there until her death in 1996 at the age of 104 and is now buried in an unmarked grave. Her name is Audrey Munson.

Many readers will recognize Audrey Munson, and have walked by her in the street, without even knowing her name. She stands atop New York's Municipal Building. She sits as "Miss Manhattan" and "Miss Brooklyn" outside the Brooklyn Museum, is immortalized on the Manhattan Bridge, the Frick Mansion, the New York Public Library, and the Pulitzer Fountain outside the Plaza Hotel. In gold, bronze, and stone, she still graces bridges, skyscrapers, fountains, churches, monuments, and public buildings across the nation, from Jacksonville to San Francisco, from Atlanta to the Wisconsin state capitol.

From James Bone, the former New York Bureau Chief of *The Times* of London, this brilliantly reported investigative biography reveals, for the first time, the riveting truth of the forgotten life of an iconic beauty.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Audrey Munson was famous for posing naked and being cloaked in scandal. The Gilded Age model and silent-film star dated America's richest bachelor, was the toast of the 1915 World's Fair, and inspired scores of painters and sculptors in the beaux-arts style. This proto-celebrity vanished long ago but her neoclassical features and figure live on in allegorical monuments and paintings across the United States. In a new biography, *The Curse of Beauty*, journalist James Bone investigates the tragic muse who bared it all, attempted suicide and spent almost 65 years in an asylum." —**Wall Street Journal**

"Decades before Christy, Naomi, and Cindy, photography was still in its infancy when Audrey Munson became America's first supermodel. She lives on today in the timeless sculptures she inspired. But her story wasn't all beautiful. James Bone is a crackerjack journalist and tells her thrilling and ultimately tragic tale in this compelling book on her rise and descent into madness." —**Michael Gross**, author of *Focus, Model, 740 Park*, and *House of Outrageous Fortune*

"In *The Curse of Beauty*, James Bone delivers the vivid true story of Audrey Munson, the muse of the twentieth century. Her life shows us the rollicking triumphs and surprising costs of being The World's Most Perfectly Formed Woman." —**Bill Dedman**, coauthor of the No. 1 bestseller *Empty Mansions: The Mysterious Life of Huguette Clark and the Spending of a Great American Fortune*

"A must-read biography of one of the most intriguing and alluring figures of the art world, a woman who disappeared from history yet still surrounds us in our magnificent public monuments, including the two colossal figures by Daniel Chester French that welcome me at the Brooklyn Museum every day." —**Anne Pasternak**, Shelby White and Leon Levy Director, Brooklyn Museum

"James Bone knows everything there is to know about Audrey Munson, her life, her career, and the often incredible, scandalous, and outrageous activities of those around her. She was 'The Real Miss Manhattan,' and, thanks to James Bone's magnificent biographical study, she becomes The Real Audrey Munson." —**Anthony Slide**, former resident historian of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and author of *It's the Pictures That Got Small*

#### About the Author

**James Bone** is the former New York bureau chief of *The Times* of London newspaper. For almost a quarter of the century, he covered every major event in New York: Whether it was a celebrity scandal or a mafia trial, a Wall Street fraud or a record art sale, a high society wedding or a terrorist attack, he was there. He comes from a family of generations of artists on both sides, some of whom were active at the same time as the sculptors and painters in this book. He has reported from dozens of countries and some non-countries, from Afghanistan to Antarctica. His most recent posting was as *The Times* correspondent in Rome, Italy.

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