

# GOING BACK

*By Deena Gomersall*



*ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES PITTS*

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**A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL**

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## GOING BACK

By Deena Gomersall.

### A VISION OF THE PAST

Date: Early August 1997. Martin Newsome was walking home with his friends Billy and Neil, a wide smile playing on his face as he grasped his latest purchase, a full-color poster of Shirley St. Claire.

"You baffle me Martin, you really do," Billy told his friend. "How come you're so hooked on Shirley St. Claire?"

"Come on man, get real! She is every man's fantasy... so beautiful, so shapely and so *sexy*," Martin responded almost dreamily.

"Yeah, and so *dead*," Neil butted in. "Sure, she WAS a sex goddess... for our Dads and Granddads. I agree that she *was* a stunningly beautiful woman but, damn it man, she must have died over forty years ago!"

"Forty-three years next month to be precise," Martin informed his buddy with an air of certainty.

"Yeah, whatever. What I'm saying is, why drool over a woman, no matter *how* gorgeous she was, who's been dead for so long? There's tons of red-hot babes if you want posters to cover your walls."

"You *gotta* be kidding! The young girls these days have totally lost the art of femininity. It's all this 'girl power' and dressing like guys. Shirley St. Claire was special! She was drop-dead gorgeous and she had *such* a tragic life.

"I would give anything to have been around while she was alive... help her out with her problems and give her the real love and support she so desperately needed."

"But she was a junkie, wasn't she?" Billy asked. "Wasn't that what led to her offing herself?"

"Uh, there were all kinds of allegations and rumors bandied around about her. Who knows the real truth? Personally, I don't think that she was but, even if it *was* true, who could really blame her? So many people were using her and stealing from her, trying to bring her down or forcing her into things she didn't want to do. I figure she just couldn't take any more of the pressure."

"Well, suicide is not the answer. That's the coward's way out. Don't you think she owed it to all her adoring fans to stay alive? And what about her daughter? How do you figure that poor little kid felt, her Mom killing herself when she was only six years old?" Neil asked pointedly.

"Well I don't care *what* you guys say, you won't change my views on her. I still think she was the sexiest, most talented woman ever born."

“Talented!! Okay, she could sing and dance and she wasn't a *bad* actress but that's the extent of it. She was a typical dumb blonde. Everyone knew that and you can't deny it. Man, she didn't have two brain cells to put together,” Billy mocked.

“What ever guys, what *ever*. You both going out tonight with the girls?” Martin asked in a bid to halt the onslaught of his idol as they reached his leafy suburban street.

“Yeah, sure. You gonna be taking Adele out? Okay, we'll catch you down at Brannigan's about eight,” Neil suggested as they parted company.

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Once home, Martin went straight to his bedroom which had become almost a shrine to the memory of Shirley St. Claire. He looked desperately across his walls for a space big enough to accommodate his new poster. Once he had pinned it up by way of shifting all the other pictures and posters into a more compact space, he stood back to admire his collection.

One of his very favorite posters was a photograph taken during a concert which had ultimately led to his idol's downfall. The poster showed Shirley on stage in Las Vegas wearing a long, golden tulle gown which was split to the crotch and had a halter neck and plunging front; gold, open-toed mule slippers with four-inch spiked heels and a headdress with red and white Marabou feathers. She looked feminine and beautiful in that photograph but her dazzling smile belied her inner sadness.

At this concert, for no known reason, she suddenly froze on stage and the show had to be canceled. There followed many allegations about her using drugs in order to cope with the breakdown of her marriage. Even her personal manager, Norrie Tilghman, admitted that she had been taking narcotics to combat stress.

Many of Shirley's close friends stood up in support of her and swore that they had never known the singer to use drugs. However, the damage had already been done; although she was to make a few more stage appearances after the L.A. concert, she never really got her career back on track.

It wasn't long after that when she jumped from the twelfth floor balcony, to her death, at a hotel in Phoenix, Arizona, where she was staying.

Martin stared hard at the picture. *Such* a waste of a great talent and beautiful woman. It was all so tragic; he really felt for her, felt he could understand her pain and the suffering she had gone through.

Martin's personal collection included videos of every one of the musicals she had appeared in and all of her songs on vinyl, along with some original 78's. He had both books and magazines depicting her life and career; yet, not even the most ardent researcher knew the real truth about the singer's personal life.

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Date: September 2nd, 1997. Several weeks later, Martin was out with his girlfriend and other friends. Adele mischievously tried plotting behind her boyfriend's back. Martin had gone to the bathroom when she turned to the others.

"Did you guys know that it will be Martin's birthday in two weeks?" she asked. "I was thinking of organizing a surprise party for him."

The look she received from Billy somehow did not go well with her suggestion.

"What's wrong? Doesn't Mart like surprises?" she asked cautiously.

"It's not exactly that Adele, it's more the significance of the date. Martin *never* celebrates his birthday," Billy told her.

Adele looked over the group of friends quizzically.

"It's his fixation with that 50's singer," Janetta, Neil's girlfriend informed her.

"Oh, why ? I know that he's smitten with her. I found that out from the big lug when I first started dating him four months back. Why should it affect celebrating his birthday, though?"

"Well, it just so happens that September the 15th, as well as being his birthday, is also the day that Shirley St. Claire jumped to her death back in '54."

"Really! Oh Wow. I knew that she had killed herself but I never knew the date. Uh, I guess that's a bit of a coincidence, isn't it ? Martin being such a fan and her dying on his birth date."

"No, not really, it's actually the reason why Martin took an interest in her in the first place. His dad, Frank, like everyone else's Dad, was a huge fan of hers and he was watching one of her movies on the box one day and happened to mention the fact to Martin. Martin sat and watched the rest of the movie and became enamored with her," Neil explained.

"I don't know why. I mean she was nothing really special, was she?" Adele responded.

The comment caused the boys to laugh.

"We kid Martin all the time about her but I certainly would never turn her down," Ray confessed, only to receive an elbow in his ribs from his girlfriend.

"Me neither," Billy added cautiously. "Let's face it, she was a real doll and so well-stacked! She may have been a junkie, but she sure was a babe."

"It was the agents and film producers that made her what she was, turning her into a sex siren. She probably slept with them all to get where she was," Cindy, Billy's girlfriend, butted-in, miffed at her boyfriend's disclosure. "Just because she was a dumb, blue-eyed blonde with double-D tits. They all knew she was a man's fantasy, so they had her play the part and strut her stuff on and off stage."

"Yeah, not very admirable when she had a young kid being influenced by her, a kid she hardly ever saw, preferring, probably, to put her career first," Janetta complained.

“We're all getting off the mark here. Okay, so she killed herself on the same day as that boyfriend of mine was born, but why shouldn't he want a surprise birthday party?” Adele asked again.

“Because he usually goes into a depression. Honestly. He never bothered with his twenty-first so he's hardly gonna celebrate his twenty-third,” Billy told her.

“Yeah. Well, he wasn't dating *me* then, was he? Life is for the living, I say, I'm alive and Shirley friggin' St. Claire is dead! If he wants to stay with me, then he had better start paying me some attention! I'm organizing a party and that is that,” Adele stated defiantly.

“Here here, girl,” the other girlfriends voiced their support.

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Date: September 15th, 1997. It was the date Martin most hated. Not only was he another year older but it was the anniversary of that tragic day, forty-three years ago when screen legend Shirley St. Claire, took her life.

For as long as he could recall, he had always felt depressed on his birthday, even *before* his Dad told him that Shirley had died on that same day. Birthdays just never brought any joy for him.

He began daydreaming as he walked home. If he could, he would travel back in time and save Shirley's life by talking her out of whatever depression had driven her to take her life. She would be so grateful to him that she would fall hopelessly in love with him. Him, a plain nobody without any money. Yet, to her, he would be a hero and she would pledge her undying love.

“SURPRISE!!”

Martin looked stunned and his dream dissipated into thin air as he glanced at the host of smiling faces wearing party hats and throwing streamers at him as he walked through the door. Over thirty people had crowded into the living room of his parents' house.

His eyes settled upon his mom, Sally, and he looked accusingly at her.

“Not Guilty! Blame it on that pretty girlfriend of yours,” his mom quickly informed him.

“Happy birthday, Mart,” Adele greeted her boyfriend as she stepped forward to give him a kiss and hand him a foil-wrapped birthday present.

“So this is all *your* doing?” he challenged, trying to look annoyed, but actually feeling quite pleased with the surprise. “Thanks, but I don't usually bother too much with my birthdays.”

“Yeah, so I hear. You are going out with *me* now. If you want it to *stay* that way, Buster, then you had better change your ways,” Adele threatened with a suppressed smile.

Martin looked deeply at his girlfriend with love in his eyes. “Thanks again. I don't deserve you,” he told her, returning the kiss.

"I know," she agreed as the congregation cheered.

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The party lasted into the small hours. Martin's parents, Sally and Frank, retired to their bedrooms. Martin, feeling intoxicated, was sitting on the sofa with Adele upon his knee.

"You know, this has really been gr-eat, I-ve realy enjoyed myshelf," he spluttered out.

"Good, I'm pleased," she replied with a loving smile. "What use is it getting all depressed about someone who died generations ago just because it also happens to be your birthday?"

"Yo..our right. I love you Adele. Will you marry me?"

"That all depends," Adele replied.

"On *what*?"

"Well first, if you ask me the same question again tomorrow when you are sober. Second, if you get rid of all this silly fanaticism for Shirley St. Claire. I don't intend to compete with some ghost."

There was a silent pause that seemed to last an age before a reply was given. "Yeah okay, sure I will. I'll take down all my posters... every one of them and stop going on and on and on about her... so long as I can watch one of her films every now and again."

"You're impossible!" Adele laughed.

"Sho, will you marry me now?"

"I *said* for you to ask me again when you are sober!" Adele responded, poking Martin in the rib cage.

"I'd get my answer much shooner if you were to stay the night with me. Mom and Dad will be ashleep now, sho how about it?"

Adele kissed her boyfriend affectionately on his lips. "Nope, not yet, Sweetheart. I don't think it's proper in your parents' house; besides, you need to sleep the drink off. Cindy has offered me a lift home and I'll be taking her up on it in twenty minutes."

"I'll just have to go upstairs an' dream of Shirley St. Claire then," Martin threatened.

"You do and you'll stay a bachelor," came the warning response.

As the last of the party guests filtered out, Martin kissed his girlfriend on the doorstep.

"Thanks again for the lovely surprise. It really cheered me up."

Adele looked over her boyfriend's shoulder back into the house. "Tell your Mom I'll call early tomorrow before work and help clean up the mess," she offered. With a final kiss, she ran to Cindy's. Martin watched the car's tail lights as they vanished out of sight up the road.

Returning back inside, Martin looked around the now empty and strangely quiet room that smelled of stale beer and cigarette smoke. His dizziness warned him that he'd had plenty to drink and so he left the room, climbed the stairwell as quietly as he could and headed to his bedroom.

Now that the party was over and everyone had gone home, he felt exhausted and very sleepy. Without bothering to undress, he lay on top of his bed and looked around his room.

He was forced to blink several times to bring into focus some of the posters facing him. He found he was looking at his favorite one, the one with Shirley on stage in Vegas. How *wonderful* she looked in her golden gown and plumed headdress.

As he stared at the picture, he realized the smell from downstairs was filtering up into the bedroom; he could clearly smell the stale beer and cigarette smoke; he almost felt that he could still hear the merry chattering voices of his friends.

The voices seemed to be getting louder and the smell of drink and smoke stronger. He realized he had left the ceiling light on and had to blink as it was now dazzling him.

"Damn. Shit!" he groaned after trying to place his head on his pillow only to be rewarded by his room spinning around.

He looked at his room again. He desperately wanted to go to sleep but he would have to get up to turn his light off. It was very bright. He tried again, more cautiously, to rest his head.

The clinking of glasses could now be heard and a loud murmur of voices filled the air. As he stared through the bright light, he could make out a sea of faces all staring up at him; faces as far as he could see.

It was the realization that he was now standing upright that began to make Martin realize that something about himself felt wrong, *very* wrong.

He felt wobbly, off-balance somehow. He looked down toward his feet and saw his dainty red toe nails as they peeped from the glittering gold-colored, open-toed slippers he was wearing.

In total shock, Martin took several strides backwards. As he did, the deep slash in the halter-necked, golden tulle gown he wore parted to reveal an expanse of smooth, shapely leg.

Totally stunned, Martin gazed into the bright lights and the sea of faces peering up at him.

"Shirley. SHIRLEY!" he heard coming from the wings of the stage he was on. "Shirley, whatever is *wrong* with you? SING!" the stage manager hissed.

Martin glanced, open-mouthed to where the man was standing. The balding man clasped a hand to his forehead, then bellowed, "Bring the Goddamn curtain down."

Martin remained mummified as a heavy velvet curtain began to reel down from above. Moments later, a troop of dancing girls filed past him onto the front of the stage in an attempt to appease the bewildered audience.



"Shirley, for Christ's sake, what *is* the matter with you?" the stage manager, now by his side, was asking in exasperation.

"Uh, what?" Martin started to question in a soft, feminine, whispery voice definitely not his own."

"She sick or something? Someone, go fetch Zoe, fast... and get her back to the dressing room."

"Zoe?" Martin thought. That name rang a bell. Zoe Costello, Shirley St. Claire's personal dresser?

Before he knew it, a small, dark-haired woman was leading him from the wings back toward the dressing rooms. He was having a hard time tripping along beside her in the high-heeled slippers on his feet. Zoe was speaking but her words were not registering.

He soon found himself in a dressing room draped with a variety of gowns, hats, shoes and gloves. A large mirrored vanity surrounded with small light bulbs had a variety of cosmetics on its top.

"I *told* you not to take that stuff. Not before going on stage," Zoe was reprimanding as she began unzipping the gown in back, helping his motionless body out of it. Almost zombie-like, he lifted a leg to step out of the garment.

"Uh, what?" he muttered once again.

"You. Taking those drugs Norrie gave to you. I advised you not to. Drugs are dangerous," Zoe continued berating as she unclipped a feathered headdress.

Martin suddenly noticed a full-length mirror in front of him and gasped at his, or rather, Shirley St. Claire's, reflection.

He found himself dressed now in just a frilly white corset that inclined sharply at the waist before spreading out again over full, rounded hips; lacy underwired half cups that pushed up and out his DD breasts and chandelier earrings that swung heavily from his lobes. Martin stared, trance-like, at the beautiful image.

This *had* to be a dream, a drunken dream. He remembered clearly how he had wished he could go back in time to help Shirley St. Claire. Something, somewhere in this dream had got itself badly muddled up, though.

"Should I call a doctor for you?" Zoe asked.

"What? Er, no. No, it's all right now, Zoe, I'll be fine, you can leave now," he replied, once more in that sexy, breathy voice that was strange, yet familiar to him.

Zoe gave one last, concerned look before departing. As she did, Martin kicked off the high heels that were troubling his feet and sat down bare foot, his eyes still glued to the reflection in the mirror.

"This is just too weird, man," he thought to himself. "I've often dreamt of making out with Shirley St. Claire but never *being* her."

Surely this *had* to be a dream, yet it all seemed so vivid, so real. "What on earth did I have to drink at my party?" he asked himself aloud, still in Shirley's soft, whispery voice.

Martin sat in front of the mirror for what seemed an eternity as if waiting to wake up from his dream. Suddenly, he heard the door open behind him. Through the mirror, he saw several people enter the dressing room.

One of them was Zoe Costello, another was the balding stage manager. Then there was a third; a small man with a long, thin nose and pencil mustache who wore a trilby hat. Martin recognized him instantly from books and photographs as Norrie Tilghman, Shirley's personal manager.

"How you feelin', Honey? You've been in here for over a half-hour. We've managed to keep the promoters sweet by offering them an extra show at the end of your tour. So, what happened to you this evening?"

"What 'happened to her' was those pills you gave her just prior to her going on stage," the voice of Zoe snapped out.

"You keep out of this, Costello! This ain't none of your business. Shirley here has been suffering from stress and exhaustion and she needed a pick-me-up. She took them willingly."

"*Willingly?* Ha! You know she does whatever you tell her without question. She isn't smart enough to think for herself about what harm they may do."

At that, dream or not, Martin felt it necessary to defend Shirley St. Claire and speak up for her. "If you really don't mind, Zoe, I resent that," he responded. "I am *quite* able to think for myself. Those pills Norrie gave me were, like he said, just something to give me more energy. I *asked* him for them."

Martin tried to sound annoyed, but his soft breathy voice made it almost impossible to sound the least bit angry.

Norrie shot a baffled glance in Martin's direction before responding himself. "There, see. right from the horse's mouth. Now, if you will mind your own business and do what you are paid to do, you can get Shirley dressed and I'll get her back to the hotel."

Martin found himself being helped into a plain white dress which flared out at the waist and fell to mid-shin as the two men departed. He was given a pair of white, 2-inch block heels to step into and, after having his hair brushed out, was helped into a sable fur coat.

Norrie returned to lead him downstairs and into a chauffeur-driven limo. He was driven to a five-star hotel. On arriving, Norrie led him up to Shirley's room where he bid goodnight. Norrie was staying at the same hotel and had a room further up the hall.

"Now you rest up, Sweetheart. I need you in full working order for tomorrow night's performance," he told his star as he opened Shirley's door for him.

Once alone, Martin looked around his opulent room before struggling out of his dress and casting it onto a chair. After removing his shoes, he spent a moment to admire Shirley's delicate feet with their glossy red toe nails.

"Man, this is *much* too weird! This dream just goes on and on and it's *so* realistic!" he thought as he began removing the chandelier earrings from his lobes, actually feeling the tug of the wires as he drew them out.

He struggled to reach behind his back to open the small catches of the corset he was wearing. He gave the job up after twenty minutes; the corset still only half-open when his arms ached too much to carry on with the effort.

“This is ridiculous! Surely, in a dream, the damn thing should just come off by itself!” he grumbled, dearly hoping that this was indeed all just a dream and he would wake from it come morning.

Still attired in the corset, panties and full make-up, Martin climbed between the smooth satin sheets on the bed. He was extremely tired, even in his dream, and was soon fast asleep. Throughout the night, he maneuvered his sexy body, trying to find a comfortable sleeping position where he was not crushing his large breasts.

Date: September 16th, 1997. Martin stirred and his mind slowly began to register the sunlight streaming in from his bedroom window. His throat felt very dry and he still felt dizziness as his brain began to recall his birthday party. As he came into full consciousness, he felt the constrictive clothing about his body and his hands automatically went up to his chest to feel for the corset.

There was no corset, no breasts, just his own clothing that he had fallen asleep on top of his bed in. He sighed with relief.

“Gee, what a totally bizarre dream I had. Why did I dream that I was Shirley? I said I wished I could go back in time and *save* her, not *become* her! So realistic, too,” he said aloud, still almost tasting the lipstick on his lips and feeling the weight of DD-size breasts upon his chest.

He remained on his bed for almost twenty minutes trying to remember all the details of his dream amidst his boozy headache. Finally, he got up in order to turn the light out that had been burning all night.

The odd dream stayed with him for most of that day. He had never thought about himself as a woman before, never thought of being anything other than a man. He had neither fetish nor fantasy in that direction.

Had he dreamed of being Shirley's lover, he might have understood it. Dreaming of being Shirley puzzled him greatly, though, so much so that he confided in his Mom about it. They were close and he told her almost everything.

“I think you’re right in believing you began dreaming that because of the amount you had to drink last night,” Sally told him. “I think you dreamed about Vegas because the poster was the last thing your subconscious recalled before you fell asleep.

“That it was Shirley St. Claire in the picture probably triggered your seeing yourself as her, the ceiling light acting as spotlights in your dream. The bit about the corset was probably caused by your mind being aware that you had fallen asleep in your clothes and your subconscious felt restricted. Dreaming about being Shirley could be because you have traces of lipstick on your mouth from kissing Adele last night and you could taste it in your sleep,” Sally suggested.

“Oh, speaking of Adele, you were asleep when she came to help tidy up this morning. She said she'll see you tonight.”

Martin agreed with his Mom's suggestions about why he had the weird dream. He assumed that the part of the dream about Shirley taking drugs was because he and his friends had argued about them the previous night.

He smiled now that it had all been rationalized. "The mind sure works in some funny ways, doesn't it?" he said to his mom. It had actually been quite pleasant to be Shirley in his dreams for a night. He had actually felt *feminine*.

Nothing further was mentioned about it. Indeed he kept Shirley's name out of the conversation when Adele came around early that evening. He had no intentions of telling Adele about his dream. He *was* still wanting an answer to last night's question, though.

"So, what about it?" he asked. "I am now sober and I would still like you to make me the happiest guy in the world by marrying me."

Adele looked affectionately into Martin's eyes. "You know, we haven't known each other very long and I really need to know that you are serious. Prove it to me by removing all of those posters from your bedroom wall and not mentioning her name in conversation again."

Martin looked hard at Adele. "You're asking an awful lot, you know? It's not like you are in competition with her for me. I mean, she's dead!"

"And *I* am alive. There is only room for one girl in your life. Is it me or some deceased Hollywood star?"

"Well, okay, you win. I hope this makes you realize how much I love you. I wouldn't make this sacrifice for just *any* girl."

The posters were taken down late that same evening, with some reluctance. Their removal left bright yellow patches all over his bedroom walls, which now looked empty.

Actually, it wasn't *too* hard. He adored the vision that was Shirley St. Claire and felt close to her, but he did truly love Adele. She was a catch and he felt really lucky that she was his.

Date: September 22nd, 1997. A party had been quickly arranged for the following weekend, to celebrate Martin and Adele's engagement.

In spite of having promised not to mention Shirley St. Claire's name, Martin couldn't help responding when some of his friends began goading him once again about the star's drug-taking habits and how she had betrayed her husband by sleeping with a film producer in order to get into the movies.

"Oh come off it, you guys. Everyone knows that she didn't have an affair with the dude; it was someone else who set her up so as to ruin her marriage. And she did *not* do drugs!" He was exasperated. "There was no trace of any substances in the postmortem that was carried out, and no evidence to support the claim that she had an affair with Philip Lauder, the film producer."

"So, what caused her husband to split with her and file for divorce and take the six-year-old girl? And why did Lauder's wife threaten to get revenge on St. Claire at that dance hall? That was well-documented," one of his friends persisted. "She was just a drug-taking whore, man. Yeah, real sexy... but deadly."