

## The Girl with the ...

Dear Gloria,  
I'm trying to be a good academic and not think about the salacious aspects of your biography – marrying your stepson, bad behaviour on set, a fixation with the appearance of your upper lip – and focus on your performance on the screen. Unfortunately like the fan I am I find that the two are too entwined in my mind to easily separate them. You've been called The Girl with the Novacaine Lip, a title that trips off the tongue, branding you as a forever kissing machine with the added tinge of illicit substances. However, despite my research there is no definite answer as to when this Novacaine tag came about. One suggestion is that it originated in the 1950s when you started on a series of ill-advised cosmetic procedures. But quite possibly it is a posthumous tag created to embellish your star persona, a way of marking you out as a surgery addict with a strangely cute voice resulting from your curiously static upper lip. As it is with these titles the origin becomes unimportant and so you will ever be The Girl with the Novacaine Lip.

The most destructive thing about the focus on your biography is that it lessens the attention given to the characters you play.

CATHY LOMAX



You were so often typecast as the sassy girl with the quick mouth that you could have rolled out these women with little care or effort. Instead you gave all of your attention to every woman you played, even when the film really didn't deserve it, making your women tangible, real and nuanced. When I make paintings I try and capture something more than a mere likeness, I have to feel a connection to the image. As I watch you over and over on-screen I realise that to call you the Bad Girl of Film Noir, as one book title does, misogynistically reduces the level of craft you display. My Novacaine static-faced, multifaceted, painted tribute is testament to the plasticity of your characterisations. To me you are never merely black and white, rather your women, who are often tagged dangerous and bad, are in actuality real women in extraordinary circumstances doing what they have to do to get by.

Love always  
Cathy