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Second serial installment

MOVIE MADNESS

by

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Chapter VI.

Jane was typing a "rush" script, entitled "Lawless Laws". It was "Western" of the sort manufactured over night ^{in a flash} on a ~~Movie~~ lot. She had reached a place in the story where the hero was suspended on a rope over the top of a chasm above a swollen river. On a log jam, which was rushing furiously down the river headed for deadly falls, lay the Golden Haired Heroine.

On the opposite bank the blackhearted "Heavy" was taking unerring aim at the suspended Hero, while hidden by a transparent veil of Jungle ivy, a faithful Indian friend of the Hero awaited his chance to spring. The Noble Hero was half way down the rope, when the Heavy's rifle shot grazed the rope, and at the same moment the Indian leaped. As Heavy and Indian closed in a death grapple, the rope began to break. Anguish of the heroine on the logs was shown in a closeup of a lovely face over which glycerine tears were pouring. There was a cut back to the rich New York home of the Hero, and a "fade into" the gorgeously gowned mother, pausing at Bridge to internally pray, just at the moment that the rope busted and down into the river went the Hero. By one of those blessed Movie coincidences, although the river was revealed rushing along at a frantic rate, and the rock to which the rope was attached was stationary, nevertheless the hero falls just

within a stone's throw of the ~~harbore~~.

Jane typed breathlessly. The author, a fresh faced youth, a product of Larchmont, New York, grinned as he watched her. "Johnny" as everyone called young Mr. Heglin was sorting the pages of the script. Jane pulled the last sheet from the typewriter.

"Rip snorter, eh?" said Johnny.

"Terrible" said Jane, and they both laughed.

"What're you doing tonight?"

The inevitable invitation was coming. Jane had had many of them of late, and especially from Johnny~~x~~ who had a real "crush" on her.

"Mending runners in silk hose".

"You should worry about 'runners'. Lets go----"
Nellie Ross was ^{calling} across the room to Jane.

"Ja-ane! Here, dearie".

Jane picked up her note book, shook her head at Johnny, hurried across to Nellie's desk, pulled out the slat.

"Not dictation this time. I've some wonderful news for you dear. Theres a request come through from ~~one~~ one of our biggest directors to have you as script girl on his set".

"What does a script girl do?"

"Hold script for the director right on the set. Sor
Sort of secretary--makes notes of everything shot. Fine oppor-
tuniry and training for continuity work".

"Oh Nellie--how gorgeous! Thanks so much".

"Don't thank me--the call came in".

Johnny Heglin was at her elbow.

"What set is she going on?" he inquired.

"Ladies of the Jury"

"Harron's?"

"Yes, Mr. Harron's picture".

Johnny whistled. He drew Jane to one side.

"Stick to your typing" he advised. "Its safer".

Jane replied indignantly:

"Think I'm going to throw away an opportunity like this".

Johnny knotted his young brows.

"Wish I could give you a job" said he gloomily.

"Know anything about cowboy or ranch stories?"

"Not a thing. I'm eternally and infernally feminine and sentimental" laughed Jane.

"God help you then!" said Johnny, going off . shaking his head, his continuity under his arm.

Millie had come over to Jane's desk. She had heard the news via Nellie Ross.

"I told you Harron was stuck on you " she said laconically.

She did'nt seem overly pleased. All the girls in the department were looking at Jane and exchanging significant glance with each other. Jane, in her happiness and excitement was oblivious to all this. Nellie Ross called out sharply:

"Well, what the idea?"

There was the click and clack of a dozen typewriters resuming work.

Down the sunlit streets and alleys of Filmo City sped Jane Mercer. Her heart was as light as a feather and she felt as if she were literally treading on air. Up the steps of Edmund Blanton's office she ran.

"Is Mr. Blanton in?" she asked eagerly of the henna-haired young woman in charge of the outer office.

"He's in conference" said the latter briefly, and returned to an incipient flirtation with an assistant director that Jane had interrupted. The latter was looking at Jane out of the tail of his eye. He had made the discovery that she was exceptionally pretty.

"Could'nt I see him just for a moment" asked Jane.

"I said he was in conference" returned the girl, impatiently, and rolled her eyes toward the ceiling expressively. The Assistant director gave Jane the faintest flicker of a wink, and reaching across knocked on Blanton's door. A moment later, Blanton himself loomed in the doorway. Jane saw the distinct lighting up of his somewhat weary eyes.

"Mr. Blanton, I did'nt mean to interrupt your conference but I just wanted to tell you about my good news".

"One minute".

He turned back, spoke to someone inside. Gerald Keith, star of Blanton's picture then in production strode out sulkily. He was a tall goodlooking, nattily dressed young man, with the frame of a prize fighter and the weak face of a spoiled girl. He moved temperamentally toward the door, when he chanced to see a large new photograph of himself on the wall of the outer office. Instantly he paused. When at last, reluctantly he turned from a survey of his pictured self, it was

to encounter the deeply admiring gaze of the henna haired stenographer. He felt in a much better humor, and went off whistling right merrily.

Inside the office of Blanton, Jane was telling ^{him} ~~Blanton~~ of the marvelous opportunity that had come to her. Her kindling ~~joyousness~~ met no response. His face had darkened. She faltered:

"I wanted you to know first of all".

"Why?" he asked shortly. "What have I to do with it"?

She was hurt, stammered.

"Well I owe everything to you. I would'nt be here if it was'nt for you".

"You feel that way, do you?" demanded Blanton, his keen glance raking the flushed and glowing young face.

"Of course I do".

"All right then. Will you do what I tell you?"

"Why yes, but---"

"No buts about it" said he grimly.

He remained a moment in thought, pursing out his lips in a way he had and silently whistling.

"You're not going to work for Harron. That's that".

Her startled, disappointed gaze left him unmoved.

In the dictatorial way that was either assumed or natural with him, he ~~continued~~ said roughly:

"Now don't start to cry. Cut out the blubbering".

"Who's blubbering?" asked Jane indignantly, surreptitiously wiping away an angry tear. A curious grin briefly illuminated Blanton's face.

"That's settled then. You don't work for Harron".

"I'm terrifically disappointed" she said.

"That's all right. Life's made up seventy five percent of disappointments. Besides, I've something else in mind for you".

Her expression was more hopeful.

"What?"

"Well we'll see if we can't get you in the Story department. Would you like that?"

"I'd adore it".

He beamed.

"O.K. Now trot along. I'm busy".

"Mr. Blanton---" She went as near to him as she dared. Her violet eyes sought to entrap his. He glanced at her, started, frowned, looked away. "Why are you so kind to me?"

"Speculation. I discovered you and want to realize on my investment".

He grinned, looked at her again, and added softly:

"I'm a hardboiled miser, Jane".

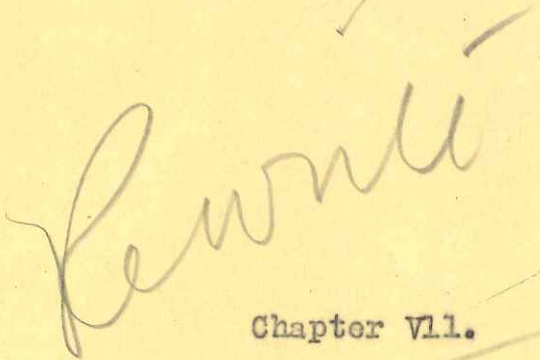
She was disappointed. She didn't know what she had expected him to reply. She could not read his mind; could not suspect even that he was thinking she looked as fresh and sweet as a Spring violet.

"I see" she said. "Your interest in me is just-- impersonal?"

"Absolutely" said he solemnly, and suddenly shouted: "Now young woman, scat! Raus mid dir!"

He became furiously ~~interested~~ absorbed in a pile of stills on his desk---went searching intensely through them, as if seeking some special photograph. Jane went out.

"That's settled then".


Chapter VII.

In the studio Inn, where at the noon hour the Filmo employes foregathered, there was one large table especially reserved for certain of the executives, supervisors, directors and writers. There, on the following day, Harron greeted Blanton with assumed affability, while the latter nodded curtly and perused the menu card. Harron's little eyes glittered. He leaned across the table, and above the hubub of noises, tried to get the attention of Bennie Minton, General Manager of Filmo.

Minton was a crafty looking little man, with eyes and mouth that turned up like a satyr's at the corners. He was always laughing softly, with his pointed tongue slightly lapped out, and his eyes shifting inconstantly. He ~~had~~ had a habit of talking with his hand before one side of his mouth, or back of an ear. He was not without ability, in an executive way, but he was handicapped by appalling ignorance and illiteracy. Moreover his mind was a ~~vast~~ cess-pool. ~~He expected dirty~~ He was a collector and retailer of filthy stories, and his entire conversation was peppered with lascivious and lewd allusions. All the girls on the Filmo studio lot knew of this weakness and feared to enter his private office, because of his straying hands and lips.

Seated on one side of Minton, and listening to his

latest rotten story, with pretended guffaws of delight was Ted Mable, Scenario Editor of Filmo. Mable had the face of a super-fox, very wary, very cunning. There was a razor like sharpness to his quick glance. As a salesman and politician he was without his equal in the industry. Moreover he had considerable reputation as a scenario writer and editor. This was due to his sharp use of his powerful position. He was enabled to put his name upon every picture regardless of whether he had contributed to the story or not. He had risen to his present very important position through the success of certain of his scenarios. He manufactured "sure fire" stories, that were built on a "movie formula", which the Sales Department termed "Box office". He would take a bit from this story, an idea from that, a character from a play, a situation from a submitted manuscript, an episode from a novel or a poem. Gags emanated from "College Humor", "Life" and other humorous publications, and he transposed big climaxes from pictures and books in such a way that the author himself would never have recognized his original product.

Mable was the man for whom Jane Mercer was now working, though her immediate chief was a Miss Dutton, story Editor of Filmo and under the supervision of Mable.

Minton and Mable, the General Manager and the Scenario Editor, were the "brains" and governing heads of Filmo, though officially they were both under Charlie Fulton, Director General and Personal Representative of the President. Charlie however was a nonentity, ~~that~~ or as one wise-cracking title writer had described him--official ornament of Filmo. He looked guileless and harmless, with

his round, moonlike face, his white spats and flashy sports checked suit and flamboyant vest. His cheeks were touched with rouge; he powdered his face and pencilled his eye brows. He was hail fellow with everyone and a born backslapper, and because of his flattering oily tongue he held his fine position and saw one administration after another come and go. It was he who always arranged the big hullabaloes for the Old Chief, as the President of Filmo was called. Annually the President made a trip to the coast, to survey the Filmo studios. Then it was that Fulton's ability as a show-man was revealed. The entire Filmo lot would be decorated with flags and banners, as though it were Armistice ~~and~~ or Election day. Banquets and extraordinary anniversary and birthday affairs ensued. The bedazzled old President of Filmo, who loved all this sort of adulation, would return to New York more than ever convinced that he was the greatest man since Moses.

Harron was knocking his fork against the side of his glass to attract Minton's attention. The noise brought a waitress scurrying across the room. Harron shouted:

"Minton! Heh there!"

Minton looked over his glasses; gave the director ^{his} attention.

"How about that script girl? What was the grand idea of sending me another girl in her place?"

Minton moved his fork through a piled up cone ~~of~~ of noodles. He twisted the slippery stuff about his fork.

"What script girl are you talking about?"

"The one I asked to be assigned to work with me. I talked to you about her".

Minton's tongue went into his cheek. He gave Blanton a sly flicker of a wink.

"Maybe some body else was stuck on her too" said he softly.

Minton caught just a glimpse of Blanton's face. He ceased to grin, licked his lips, his eyes gleaming behind his glasses.

Mildly interested Mable inquired:

"Who is the dame that all the excitement's about?"

Harron's loose mouth opened and then suddenly closed. He was looking into the steely, menacing eyes of Edmund Blanton. The latter's words cut across the table with cool precision.

"If you mention a girl's name at this table, I'll knock your damned face in" he said between his teeth.

There was a breath taking gasp all around the table. A gag man swallowed a huge lump of steak, choked coughed. Mable chewed methodically on fried ham; while Minton went on quietly lifting his noodles. At the adjoining table, where the "Foreign Legion", as they called the German supervisors, directors and writers, were lunching, there was a suspense of conversation. Everyone was waiting for something to happen. A quarrel between two directors; both of them highly important-- was not a matter of everyday occurrence.

Charlie Fulton

plunged in, as usual, like a clumsy "enfant terrible".

"Whats all the mjsic about?" he asked his wide guileless gaze going from Blanton to Harron and back again to Blanton. The latter had pushed back his chair, snapped his fingers at a passing waitress, got his check and leaving a quarter tip on the table, he was on his way to the Cashier's window, before anyone at the table spoke. Then Fulton asked eagerly:

"Who is she? Who is she?"

Harron's face was almost purple, the veins standing out and twitching. He glared around at the circle of faces.

"What the hell difference does it make? I'll get her yet. Watch me! I'm the waiting kind".

Chapter VIII.

Jane was a week in her position before she saw Edmund Blanton again. Then he dropped in on her one afternoon. Jane was hard at work, typing a synopsis she had just written.

"How are you getting on?" Blanton called from the door. Jane looked up, saw him and her head gave a great bound. Quite demurely, however, she answered.

"Sir, behold your handiwork! You see before you a perfectly contented and happy woman".

Blanton chuckled, and then in the way he had, frowned and cleared his throat severely. Jane was thinking how nice he looked in his loose grey tweeds, and his face cleanly shaven.

"Well, thats good news. See you again some day".

"Wait a minute. Don't go yet".

"On my way to a story conference. Must be off".

"Please stay a wee moment, won't you".

His eyes, lingering on Jane's flushed face, moved away unwillingly. He was blowing out his lips in the silent whistle.

"Thought possibly you'd forgotten about my existence".

"Thats likely" said Jane.

"You seem mighty happy and absorbed in your work; probably no time to think of an old crab like me".

"I adore my work; thats true enough; but just the same-
She had moved around to the other side of the desk and was now leaning across it, looking very earnestly at Blanton.

"Just the same---?" He repeated her words with pretended indifference.

"Just the same, you've been back of my mind all of the time" said Jane softly.

He plunged his two clinched fists into his pockets. His words were harsh and he turned toward the door.

"If that's true, it's more or less of a calamity. It would be better for you not to think of me at all".

Jane's face had paled; she was trembling. Blanton looked. He spoke roughly, yet with a singular tenderness underlying his words.

"I take that back. The fact that you have held me in your thought is the one compensating, beautiful thing in my life".

Before Jane could reply, he had closed the door sharply between them. She leaned against that door. She wanted to press her lips ~~against~~ ^{to} it. She wanted to laugh, to cry.

There was a rap upon her door, and she started, all aflutter and frightened, half fearing and half hoping that Blanton had returned. Johnny Heglin's smooth brown head was thrust in.

"Say ~~girl~~, I've tickets for the premiere of 'Say it again'. How about it? Going with me?"

"No--no---I'm sorry".

"Oh hell-o! What the deuce do you do with your evening anyway".

Jane had recovered somewhat of her composure. Her hands, trembling, slipped a sheet back into the typewriter.

"Oh one thing or another".

"Well listen here--you've got to get out a bit. You can't narrow yourself down to going to the studio and going back to your flat. This is a damned provincial town. We talk, think, live just Movies and more movies. Its bad for you. The damned place gets into your blood".

"I love Hollywood" said Jane dreamily.

She typed three words. Blanton's face formed before the type.

"You're hopeless. First thing you know you'll get the town's worst infection---Movie Madness".

"I've got it already" said Jane.

"Rot. We all feel that way at first; you'll get a good nostalgia soon. This picture game is the limit--its not normal. "

Jane merely smiled. In a vague way she was wishing that Johnny would go, and she had her wish, for a few minutes later, he heaved a big sigh, said:

"All right then. I'm off--cut to the soul".

Jane went back to her typing. Her mind reverted to Blanton. She thought of him with a passionate eagerness--and yet with a yearning tenderness.

The telephone on her desk rang. She reached over, picked it up. Her heart gave an ecstatic leap as she heard his voice.

"Whats your address?" he asked.

"Apartment B. 10 Sunburst Ave".

"O.K. I'll be there about 7.30".

She heard the receiver hung up and she thought her heart would burst with joy.

Chapter IX.

Jane had a warm, luxurious sense as she settled down on the low seat of Blanton's car. He asked her quizzically whether she had ever ridden in a Rolls Royce before, and she answered swiftly:

"I should say not!"

He laughed. She had never seen him in a mood like this. His eyes were lighted. She could feel them searching hers. He asked suddenly:

"Happy, Jane?"

She answered swiftly.

"Oh very"

"That's all that matters. The main thing is that you should be happy."

"How could I help being" she asked breathlessly, "when I'm with you?"

He gave her arm a little squeeze. Then sat back in the seat and they rode along in this thrilling silence for some time. He studied the girl's oval face, occasionally lighted by the street lamps and vanishing again into shadow. Suddenly he asked her how old she was.

"Nineteen and a half" she said.

He could see her smiling hesitantly, trying to get up

the courage to ask his age. Before she could put the question he had answered it.

"Thirty seven. Twice your age, Jane".

Her swift reply was so utterly ingenuous and young and impulsive that he could not refrain from laughing, though he sobered immediately. Jane had said:

"I like middle aged people".

"So you think me middle aged?"

She was overcome with confusion. Why had she said such a stupid thing. He pursued the subject grimly.

"To a girl of nineteen thirty seven is pretty old, eh?"

"Oh dear, I did'nt mean that".

She was distressed. He seemed to be ruminating over her words.

The car was going down Hollywood Boulevard. There was a parade of cars moving along slowly. They turned down Gower and on to Sunset Boulevard. Presently they drew up before the brightly lighted Authors Club.

The chauffeur opened the door. Jane saw a seething crowd of Motion Picture stars, directors, producers, writers and celebrities. She felt a moment of panic, and then a warm sense of relief and joy, for Blanton's hand was under her arm. She felt its pressure.

It was the kind of affair that the newspapers would refer to the next day as brilliant. Hollywood excelled itself in adjectives. It was a Paradise for publicity men and women and slush and sob writers, who rolled over their pens gilded names, and whose articles reeked with hysterical accounts of

the question.

how this or that star looked so beautiful and sweet and lovely and so forth and so on.

The dinner was good, but Jane was too excited and happy to know or care what she was eating. Blanton took a singular satisfaction in watching her. Nor was he the only one in that room interested in the girl's lovely young face.

At a table nearer the stage, a dark haired "sheiky" type of young man ~~whispered~~ advised the woman with him to stop nagging him long enough to see what he was seeing. The woman, who had a magnificent head of red hair, craned her neck ~~and~~ caught a glimpse of Blanton and stood up in order to see his companion. She stared incredulously.

After the dinner, when the waiters were moving the tables away and the diners pulling their chairs to places where they would have the best view of the stage, Jane was surprised to find seated on the other side of her the film director Martin Harron. She returned his greeting, given out of the corner of his mouth: "How's the girlie?" with the prim rejoinder. "Oh quite well"

In a confidential way, Harron leaned nearer.

"Have 'nt seen you lately."

"I've been working".

"So I heard. Understand you write "stories".

Jane's eyes lighted.

"Who told you that?"

"Your editor".

Jane was about to say something, when she felt the deliberate prod of Blanton's elbow. Like a guilty child she turned back, only to find him sitting up stiffly his face like a thunder cloud. He was furious with her.

His face had hardened to a grim forbidding mask. During the performance, which was good, comic fare, ~~was~~ elicited gales of approval and applause from the delighted audience, Jane made several efforts to speak to Blanton. He continued to ignore her, and her natural gaiety was dashed. She felt a sense of depression. Not till Blanton put his hand under her arm, as they were moving out of the Club, and guided her through the crowds to the door, did she feel some slight sense that perhaps he had forgiven her.

On the steps of the clubhouse, while waiting for Blanton's car, someone behind them said in a rather loud whisper:

"Who's the girl with Blanton".

"Don't know. New face. Darned pretty, what?"

A woman said:

"What will Sylvia say about it?"

"Ssh! They'll hear you. You can't imagine how your voice carries".

Blanton had helped her into the car. She was tormented with a new agonizing fear. Who was Sylvia? What was she to Blanton?

Blanton, in his corner of the car was staring out moodily, and Jane could see his brows knotted in a tight frown. They rode along in silence. Suddenly he spoke.

"Jane, do you value my friendship".

"You know I do" she replied tremulously.

"Promise me then that you'll have nothing more to do with that fellow Harron?"

"I scarcely know him. One has to be polite to people who speak to then"?

"No they don't. I want you to snub him. Cut him."

"Why?"

"Because I tell you to".

"But what do you care?"

He hesitated. She felt a tightness about her heart, and suddenly she said:

"Oh I believe you're jealous of him--are you?"

"Suppose I am" he replied huskily.

Jane said, with a most radiant look:

"~~That~~ That would mean that you care a lot about me then.

Do you?"

He replied with a sort of repressed force.

"So much that I can't bear to have any man--least of all Harron--even look at you. I'd like to carry you away--shut you up somewhere where no one in the world would see you but myself. That's how much I care".

She was pressing her hands together, her illuminated face turned irresistibly toward him. She said:

"Do you mean you're in love with me, Mr. Blanton?"

"I adore you!" he said, in a thrilling voice.

They rode along half a block.

"Jane--I've no right to speak to you like this.

Give me your little hand----"

She held back a moment. ~~The~~ full sweet lips parted, and in the half light of the car their eyes met with a passionate joy. He had drawn her roughly to him, and her face turned up against his shoulder.

"Jane--Jane---do you love me?"

She replied unfalteringly.

Oh I do-- I do---you know it. Oh--h---Oh--"

She felt almost as if she were passing out of herself; that she would swoon from sheer ecstasy in his arms. His lips never left hers till the chauffeur drew up suddenly before Jane's house.

Up the few little steps of the stoop, their hands fumbling as he unlocked the door. Inside the hall, very dimly lighted, again he took her into his arms.

Now, suddenly, like a vague distant pain, Jane recalled something. It lay in her mind coiled there like a serpent. She pressed back from him.

"I must ask you something".

"What is it, darling---my darling?"

"Who is Sylvia? What is she to you?"

The words struck him like a flail. He recoiled, and she could see his burning eyes staring at her with that look of intolerable pain. His words came stumblingly, as though he was scarcely aware of what he was saying.

"Tomorrow-----not tonight. I'll call you first thing in the morning.....tall you all --then".

He did not kiss her again. He seemed intent only upon getting away.

Outside, blindly, he plunged toward his car. His thoughts surged over him like a madman's.

"What have I done?" he muttered. "Good God! What have I done?"