

MOVIE MADNESS

Begin Here:

Drawn to Hollywood by the irresistible urge to write, Jane Mercer, a lovely, unsophisticated country girl, meets Edmund Blanton, a studio official. He urges her to return home, but when she refuses, he obtains a position for her in the studio stenographic department. She attracts the attention of Victor Harron, a director whose affairs with women are notoriously infamous. She is transferred to the scenario department and her scenario *Rose Petals* is enthusiastically received by studio officials.

She falls madly in love with Blanton, only to discover that he is married to Sylvia Lawrence, a famous movie actress. Jane's heartbreak is alleviated by word that *Rose Petals* is to go into production immediately. Harron, who is to direct the film, invites her to accompany him on a tour to the desert to select location scenes. In the hotel that night, he forces his way into her room and she strikes him to the floor with a heavy vase. Fearing that she has killed him, she rushes to the street just as Blanton, who has been searching for her, arrives. She tells him of her experience and he leaves her to go to Harron's room.

Now go on with the story:

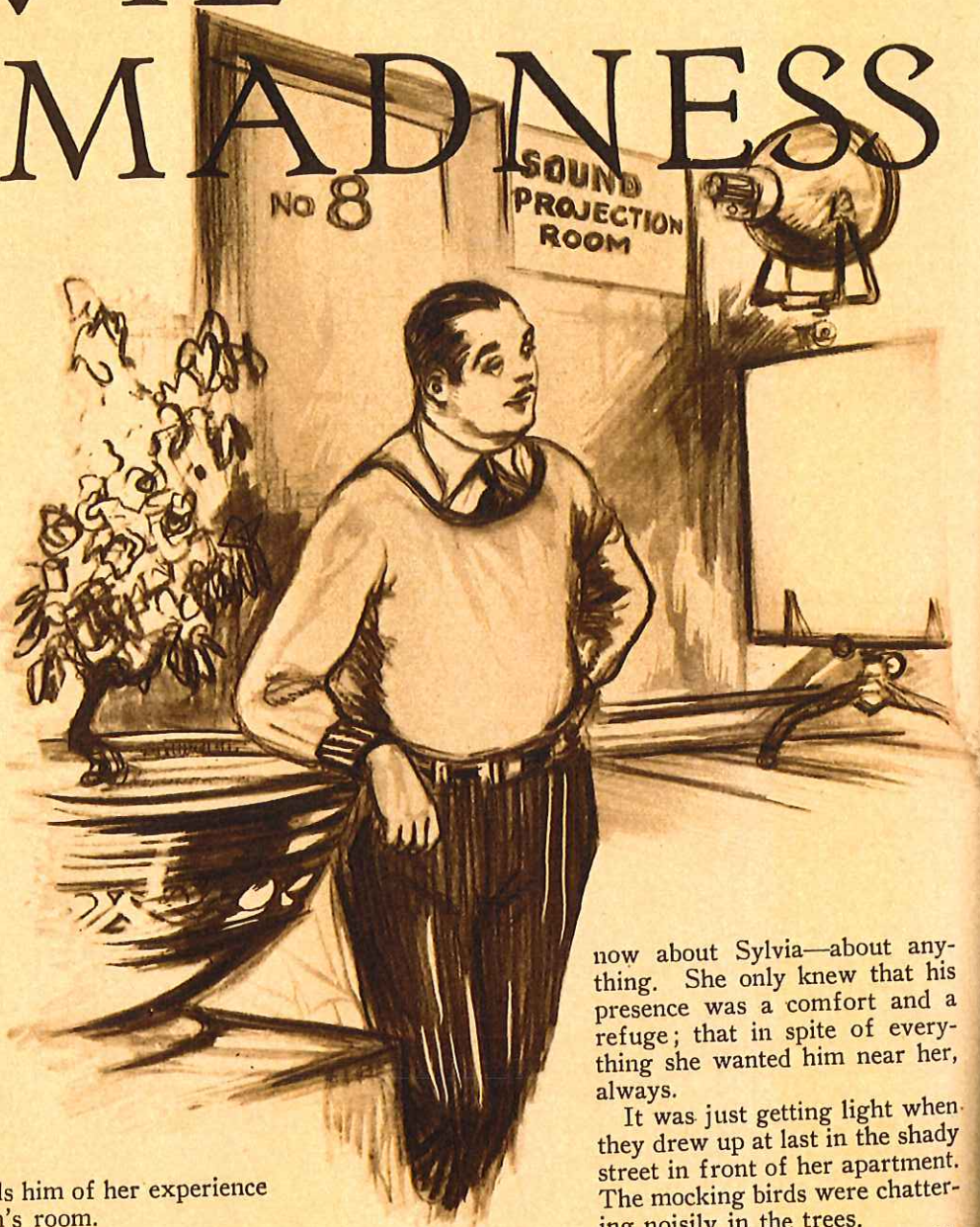
IT SEEMED a lifetime that Jane waited, huddled in the car under the cold desert sky, her mind peopled with fearful phantoms, before Blanton came.

"Harron's gone," he announced briefly, "if he's dead, his ghost wasted no time in walking. However, it's much more likely that your blow simply served to sober him up. Come, let's get back to town."

That long, restful ride back to town seemed to Jane, soothed by the gentle breezes of the night and the comforting feeling of Blanton's protecting arm about her shoulders, to be one of the most poignant memories of her life.

Afterwards, she could remember every detail of it, the phantom shadows of the eucalyptus trees etched dark against the sky, the delicate fragrance of the orange blossoms along the roadside, the frequent intervals when Blanton slowed down the car and kissed her.

She didn't resist any longer. It didn't seem to matter



now about Sylvia—about anything. She only knew that his presence was a comfort and a refuge; that in spite of everything she wanted him near her, always.

It was just getting light when they drew up at last in the shady street in front of her apartment. The mocking birds were chattering noisily in the trees.

Blanton drew her into his arms in a last passionate embrace.

"Darling," he murmured into her ear softly, "I love you! I adore you! Will you have faith in me? Will you trust in me to straighten things out?"

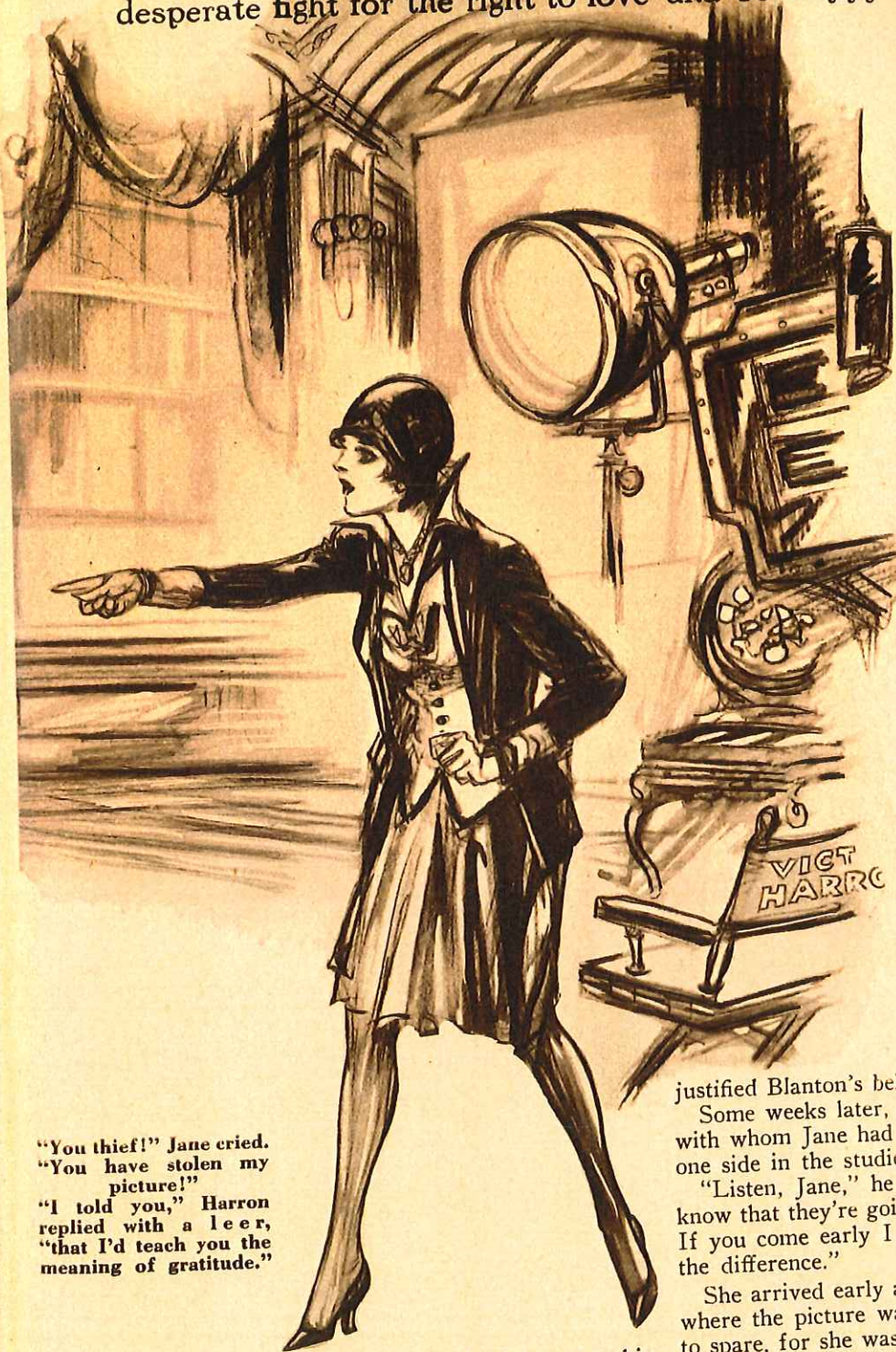
Jane looked up at him with eyes dimmed with tears, and nodded shyly. A great joy that choked back words welled up in her heart. She dared to think—to hope now, that all was not lost to her.

WHEN Jane returned to the studio the next day, she was filled with a frightened curiosity to know what had happened to Harron. Had he been badly hurt? Would he nurse a grudge against her as the result of their experience of the night before? Or was he so befuddled with liquor that he had forgotten entirely what had happened?

She was not kept long in suspense, however. Harron's condition was studio gossip. He had appeared at the

¶ The smashing conclusion of this absorbing story of a young girl's desperate fight for the right to love and be happy in Hollywood.

Illustration by
EDWARD BUTLER



"You thief!" Jane cried.
"You have stolen my picture!"
"I told you," Harron replied with a leer, "that I'd teach you the meaning of gratitude."

studio that morning. There was an ugly scar across his cheek, patched up with a surgeon's tape, and he was in a foul and evil humor.

Quickly the gossip spread.

"Harron's been drunk again!" said everyone.

But Jane's name was not mentioned. No one asked her about it. Apparently, either Harron's pride kept him silent, or the incident had failed to register in his alcoholic brain.

Late in the afternoon, all of the stenographers being rushed with last minute work, Jane herself went over to one of the sound stages to pick up a script that was to be rewritten.

Coming suddenly around the corner of one of the big,

barnlike buildings, she bumped smack into Harron.

"Sorry," he said, then a gleam of recognition came into his eye. He had caught Jane's bare arm to steady her in the impact. She felt his fingers burning deep into her flesh with a grip of anger and hatred. For just one second the smoldering eyes stared balefully into hers. Then the director dropped his hand and passed on without a word. In that brief encounter, Jane knew she had made an everlasting enemy of Victor Harron.

LIFE settled presently into more normal channels. About twice a week Blanton called to take her out, but he seemed no nearer freedom than before.

At the studio, *Rose Petals* was a sensation. In the lunchroom, on the lot, everyone was talking of the forthcoming picture, now almost ready, except for some final re-takes before it was to go into the cutting room.

Jane could hardly contain her excitement. One success, such as this, and she would be made. Her salary would mount into dizzy figures.

Furthermore, she would have justified Blanton's belief in her.

Some weeks later, one of the boys in the cutting room with whom Jane had struck up a friendship, called her to one side in the studio café.

"Listen, Jane," he whispered, "I thought you'd like to know that they're going to run *Rose Petals* this afternoon. If you come early I can slip you in. No one will know the difference."

She arrived early and slipped into the miniature theater where the picture was to be shown. There was no time to spare, for she was scarcely seated when the door to the dark little cubicle opened and men entered, feeling their way about for seats in the artificial dusk.

Jane cowered back in her seat, fearful lest she be discovered. Presently she recognized a familiar voice. Harron had come in.

She was excited beyond words when she heard the first strains of the theme song, and then saw the grayish blur of the title sheet on the screen.

"Filmo Productions presents—" she read. Then another flash—

"ROSE PETALS."

"That's a lousy title," said someone.

[Please turn to page 105]

Movie Madness

[Continued from page 73]

She blinked twice at what she saw next, to make sure her eyes did not deceive her.

"Story and continuity by Victor M. Harron."

"Directed by Victor M. Harron."

SHE put her hand to her mouth quickly to keep from crying out. The screen was a mist. She did not see the cast of characters nor the opening scenes at all. A monotonous theme pounded in her brain, over and over again: "Harron has stolen the credit! Harron has stolen the credit!"

Presently the story began to get a grip on her. It was her story, to the letter. The plot, the characters, even the dialogue, had been preserved. Practically nothing had been changed but the name of the writer. Slowly, she saw the picture unfold before her, her picture; a love story, whimsical, delicate and charming, a picture that had already cast a spell over that critical little audience in the projection room.

When the picture came to an end, a storm of enthusiastic comment filled the little room. The onlookers gathered in enthusiastic knots, lighting cigarettes, talking it over. Jane took advantage of the commotion to slip outside.

She was waiting there when Harron came out.

As he came through the door, she faced him, fists clenched, eyes blazing. "You—you thief, you!" she cried; "you have stolen my picture!"

For a moment Harron's face registered only amazement, that she should know. Then a bland mask settled over his features.

"Whaddya mean, stole your picture? That's not the story you turned over to me. Why, I've made a million changes in it." He leaned closer. "Besides, baby," he said in a harsh whisper, "do you remember my telling you I'd teach you the meaning of gratitude?"

For a moment blind, unreasoning rage swept over Jane. She struck Harron a resounding blow on the cheek. Then bursting into tears, she turned and fled.

HALF an hour later found her in Blanton's office, sobbing out her story. Blanton's face set in hard lines as he listened.

"I ought to kill him," he snarled, "but first I'll go to Minton and see what can be done."

Minton, the general manager of Filmo Productions, leaned back in his chair, chewing impassively on a cigar.

"How do you know she wrote it?" he said.

"Because I saw it myself months ago," Blanton replied. "Look here, Minton," he added hurriedly, "I've got to leave for Nevada tonight, and I want your assurance that this will be taken care of before I go. Can I have it?"

"Okay, Blanton," he said blandly, "don't worry. I'll fix it for you."

Outside, Jane was waiting.

"It's all right, darling," he said. "Minton assured me he'd take care of it."

Inside, Minton turned to his secretary.

"Take a memo to Jane Mercer, scenario department."

'My Dear Miss Mercer:

Effective today, your services are no longer required.

Sincerely yours,

H. Minton,

General Manager.'

He turned to his secretary with a wry smile.

"When a girl is making trouble between two men, get rid of the girl," he said.

NEXT morning when Jane came to work, rested, happy, and feeling that all was well with her and the world, she found the terse little message on her desk. It was so sudden, so overwhelming that at first she could not believe it.

She felt dull, drained, lifeless. All the fight, all the first blaze of anger had gone out of her. What was the use of all the struggle for anything, if they could take it away from you that easily?

There was but one place for her to turn now for refuge—Blanton. He ought to know, anyway.

"Mr. Blanton has left town," said the secretary in her shiny brittle voice when Jane asked for him.

"Left town?" asked Jane in amazement; "when will he be back?"

"He said he would be gone indefinitely," returned the girl, parrot-like.

"Where—did he go—can't I reach him somewhere? Oh, I must, I must see him!" she cried, trying to check the feeling of desperation that kept rising within her.

"He left no word. I don't know what you can do."

Jane turned and hurried out of the office to keep from bursting into tears.

When she reached her apartment, Jane flung herself face down on the davenport and had a good, long cry. But it didn't help much.

Her career was over now. Done for. No one would ever believe that *Rose Petals* was her picture. And Blanton, in her hour of need, had deserted her. A million doubts assailed her.

Only one thing remained to be done. There was one last hope. Harron! She would go to him, make one last appeal for fair play. Throw herself on his mercy. There might be some humanity in the man after all.

Jane's fingers trembled as she slipped into her prettiest dress, as she applied her make-up more lavishly than usual. To go to Harron's house—alone—at night. It was a desperate measure.

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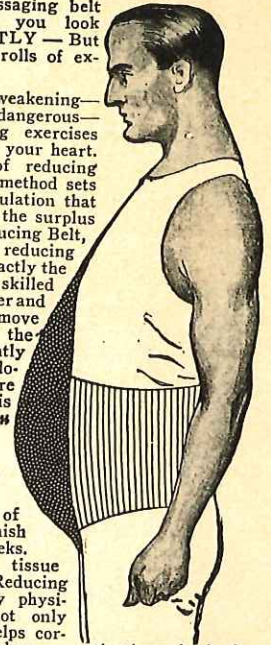
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He would be sure to misunderstand. Yet it was her last forlorn little hope. She had to go through with it.

In a voice that shook a little, she called a cab. Harron's house was in remote Pepper Canyon, where great mansions nestled against the mountainside among the trees and shadows.

THEY found the house after some difficulty. It stood alone, silent, grim, forbidding. For a moment, Jane's courage almost failed her when she had dismissed the cab and stood facing the great house.

Harron's white-coated Jap servant admitted her.

“Mr. Harron, he busy now,” replied the Jap in response to her query. “I tell him what name?”

“Miss Mercer, Jane Mercer,” she said with tense calm.

The Jap disappeared somewhere in the recesses of the house.

For what seemed hours she sat alone in the hallway, in an oppressive silence broken only by the monotonous ticking of the mission clock in the hallway.

She fought to keep down the growing panic within her. She had been mad to come here. She wanted to turn and run. Yet terror paralyzed her.

Suddenly through doors that opened to the right of the hallway she heard the sound of muffled voices. They were quick and angry, but so blurred by the doors intervening, that she could scarcely recognize them.

There was someone there besides Harron! Now was the time to see him, while there was someone else in the house. She would be safer then.

Frantically she ran to the doors and beat against them with her fists.

Harron, himself, opened the doors, wild-eyed, a glitter of baffled rage in his eyes.

He put a finger to his lips.

“Go upstairs!” he whispered; “I'll see you in a moment!”

“But Mr. Harron, I—”

“Jane!” called a voice from inside the room. A moment later the doors were hurled apart and Blanton stood before her.

“Jane, darling, what are you doing here?” said Blanton.

With a wild, glad cry Jane flung herself into his protecting arms and lay there sobbing, nestled against his heart.

For minutes she was unable to speak, while Blanton soothed and comforted her. Harron, meanwhile, paced up and down the room, clenching and unclenching his fists.

“I thought you had gone, Edmund,” sobbed Jane, at last. “I thought you had gone away and left me. They said you didn't leave any word. I—I was fired this afternoon. It just seemed like the end of everything for me, so I came here as a last resort to plead with Mr. Harron for fair play.”

“That's funny,” said Blanton. “We were just discussing the same subject. I had just offered Harron the choice

between signing a statement saying that you were the real author of *Rose Petals* or taking the most thorough beating he has ever had in his life. As yet,” he added, turning to Harron, “he hasn't given me his answer. But I'm not going to wait much longer.”

The two men faced each other across the table, their eyes crackling with mutual hatred. Suddenly Harron realized that he was beaten. He became again his usual bland, imperturbable self.

“It is really too bad to have such a fuss over a matter of such slight importance. It was all a mistake of the copy department, anyway. I intended that Miss Mercer should have full screen credit. If you still insist on my signing—”

“You bet I insist on it,” snapped Blanton.

“Very well, then.”

Harron sat down and signed his name with a flourish across the bottom of the paper Blanton handed him.

Jane and Blanton went out and down the steps. Blanton's car was just up the roadway. In the shadows, he paused for a moment and drew Jane to him in a long, passionate embrace.

“Darling!” he murmured, “I want you always.”

“Edmund, my dear,” said Jane, “you don't know what I suffered when I thought you were gone.”

“Get in,” he said. “We're going for a long, long drive. I have much to tell you.”

“How did you know I had been fired?” she asked.

He laughed.

“A friend of mine in Minton's office told me all that had happened. Believe me, I lost no time in getting after that rat, Harron.”

“But—but they told me you had left town. Tell me, I must know—were you going away?”

He looked down at her by his side, so small, so in need of protection.

“Yes, dear,” he said.

Her face fell.

Then he added: “You see, I had a little surprise for you.”

“What was it?”

“Don't you know where I was going?” he countered.

“Tell me.”

“Reno, Nevada!”

“Do you mean—”

“Do you know where we are going now?” he asked, as he swung the car into the main highway that led to the flying field, “to Reno, Nevada!”

“You see,” he added, “tomorrow I get my final decree of divorce. I wanted to keep it as a surprise for you. But now you know. In Nevada, we can be married day after tomorrow. Jane, darling, will you?”

Before she could answer, the car had come to a stop, and Edmund's lips were on hers in a kiss that seemed to last until the stars went out.

THE END