

LOVE AMID THE MOVIES

By Norman Springer

Illustrated by Irving K. Manoir.



W. Bess—"No, I won't talk to you!"

The little leading woman crooked her neck to look up into the eyes of the big man before her. Her pretty face was flushed with resentment. "And don't you 'Aw, Bess' me any more; I'm Miss Eaton to you."

"Aw, Bess—"

Bang! The dressing-room door slammed shut and came within a half inch of further elevating a nose already rather retrouse. Mr. James Winters, star rider and leading man of the Fearless Feature Film Company's No. 3 troupe, stared blankly at the blank face of the door. He swore.

Five minutes later his bosom friend, Tom Hastings, the camera man, found him slouched upon the bench in the studio courtyard, staring moodily into space.

"How goes it, Jim?" greeted Hastings.

Mr. Winters groaned.

"Just when we had it all fixed," he remarked plaintively, "and the bungalow and everything all ready—and she gets peevish and calls it off."

"Well," said his friend, "you know when a guy's engaged he hadn't ought to go around with a big blonde on his arm where his girl can see."

"Aw, you know, Tom, I didn't care for the blonde. I only did that to get Bess jealous. Look how she was cutting up with that geek Valencia—taking bouquets from him and givin' him smiles! I thought if I was to make out I was mad and show around with the blonde that she—Aw, what's the use?"

"What did she say?" inquired his sympathetic chum.

"Say! What didn't she say? Told me I was a deceivin' hound—and she wouldn't trust me around the corner with a female Hottentot—and it was all off—and give me back my ring. And last night she went to the photo players' ball with Valencia."

"Aw, well!" said Hastings. "There's just as good skirts in the ocean as was ever hooked. You should worry."

Jim Winters heaved a heavy sigh.

"You don't savvy, Tom. That little girl has got me going. I want her! And if I can't square myself somehow—"

He finished with a despondent shake of the head.

"Oh, come!" soothed the other. "Cheer up! Maybe she's just getting even with you for that blonde. You know, skirts are funny that way. She'll come around all right. What you want to do is to get her off alone some place and explain matters to her."

"I've tried," said Jim sadly. "I've tried for a week, and she won't listen. And she won't see me nights—sends down word she's out or busy—busy entertaining that persistent guy Valencia."

Hastings snorted.

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"What you want to do, Jim, is to make her listen," he said. "Women like to be bossed. Get her while you're working. Get her today—we're going out on the Mission road to finish up that 'Pedro's Vengeance' thing. Watch your chance and get her alone and talk your darn head off."

Jim felt of his nose and pondered dubiously.

"You don't know Bess," he objected. "She's spunky. If she don't want to listen, she won't. But I'll try. I got to square

myself some way—there is that little bungalow all ready."

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II.

OUT on the Mission road the Fearless No. 3 troupe were engaged in portraying the West as it never was. Bechapped

Then she noticed the set expression on the man's face.

"Oh, well!" she said with dignity. "If you're hoodlum enough to take advantage



Jim Winters threw the other man and stood over him.

of your size and make me listen while you insult my friends—"

"Aw, Bess—"

"—and brute enough to use force toward a lady—"

Jim Winters loosened his grasp on the girl as if his hands were burning—as his face was. He lifted her to the ground.

"Bess," he pleaded, leaning out of his saddle, "I was jealous, and—"

"If you want to know how I feel about it," cried the girl, "why, there!"

Stepping close, she swung her open palm stingingly against his cheek and started down the road.

Jim straightened up and stared after the slim figure swinging swiftly around the bend. He groaned in spirit and swore soulfully; then rode slowly after her.

When Jim rejoined the company it was preparing for the return to the studio. He turned over his horse to the hostler and sought the side of his friend, the camera man.

"Well, how's she going?" inquired Hastings. "Did you have a talk with her?"

"Talk!" snorted Jim.

He rubbed his cheek and looked across

the road, where Bessie was chatting and laughing with the very don who had so recently attempted to slit her throat.

Jim swore.

"I hate a Mex," he announced.

"Got a nice way with women, ain't he?" said Hastings, watching the girl's companion.

Jim mumbled profanely. Joe Valencia had a nice way with women. He was fully as large in body as Winters, and he had the graceful carriage, clear olive skin and speaking eyes of the Spanish Californian. He was handsome, notwithstanding a jagged scar on one cheek that gave a queer, sinister twist to his lips. Joe made a most attractive villain on the screen.

"For a nickel," announced Winters, "I'd go over there and knock his darn block off."

"Don't," advised his chum. "You're in bad enough now."

"And he ain't a Mex. He was born right here in Los Angeles. His folks got money; he's been to college."

"I don't care," growled Jim. "He's a Mex, just the same, if his folks been here forever. He looks like one, and I bet he packs a knife. And if he don't watch out he's going to get his."

"Maybe she likes him the best," suggested Hastings. "You oughtn't to butt in then, Jim."

Jim turned a face of misery to his friend.

"It's what I'm scared of," he said. "I'm afraid for her. You remember the talk about Valencia and the girl he was going with when he was with the Multiscope outfit? I tell you, if he acted like that to Bess I'd kill him."

"Easy," admonished Hastings. "Bess is a wise little kid; she'll look out for herself, all right. Don't you go roughhousing or you'll queer your last chance."

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III.

WHEN the troupe arrived at the studio Jim went to his dressing-room to rid himself of his make-up. While he was changing, Hastings stuck his head in at the door.

"Andy wants to see you," he announced. "He's got a new one—we commence in the morning. I'm going to load the boxes now."

After leisurely completing his toilet Jim went down to the little cubbyhole behind the glass-covered stages that Andy Fricket called his office.

Andy Fricket was the chief director and star scenario writer for the Fearless forces. He was a little, bald man, with mild-blue eyes, a superimagination, and one ambition in life—to turn out film—film with thrills.

When Jim entered Fricket was seated at his desk, nervously fumbling the typewritten sheets of a manuscript. Upon the only other chair in the office reposed the dainty form of Miss Bessie Eaton. She met Jim's pleading glance with an icy stare; a tilt to her piquant chin checked his greeting. Andy Fricket looked up as the door closed.

"Jim, turn around slow; I want to size you up."

Somewhat taken aback, Winters slowly pivoted himself on his heel as requested. "M-m-m!" mumbled the director. "You're big enough and ugly enough; only it's too bad you're bow-legged."

Jim shot a look at the girl. She was regarding the offending limbs with a quizzical smile.

"I know I'm a little bow-legged," said Jim in an aggrieved tone. "But you hadn't ought to call me for that. I got it from ridin' so much, and it don't register."

"No," remarked Mr. Fricket absently. "It won't matter. It's your mug I want. I got to find some one who can look like a brute; you'll do. Miss Eaton recommended you for the part."

Miss Eaton sniffed.

"Say," demanded Jim, aroused, "what you getting at? I know I ain't any prize

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