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WEEDONE

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"O-O-O-O MY FEET!"

THEY'RE KILLING ME!

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437 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 16, N.Y.

The
Most
Interesting
People
I've Met

(Continued)



Beatrice Lillie

Beatrice Lillie has been captivating audiences since she emerged from the music halls in London when only a young girl. To discuss the greatness of her artistry would be superfluous. Let's talk about Bea Lillie the woman who has the great capacity for friendship.

Like so many troupers, Bea lives most of her life in hotels. Many years ago, she took up painting as a hobby. She thought it silly for a rank amateur to spend a lot of money buying canvas; instead, she saved the cartons in which her laundry was returned and used them. She painted only flowers.

One Christmas she gave me a painting of a vase of small white flowers among which nestled two small red ones. "Now you can tell everyone you own an original Walt Kuhn," Bea said.

"You're crazy, Beattie," I told her. "To begin with, he painted clowns, not flowers; furthermore, a Walt Kuhn is worth three or four thousand dollars."

"I will explain," she said in her clipped tones. "I had a cocktail party one evening and invited Walt Kuhn. I had just finished this painting of the white flowers. Walt picked up my brush, daubed some red on it, and painted in the two little flowers. 'Now, Bea,' he said, 'you own an original Walt Kuhn painting.'"

Bea worshipped her 19-year-old son who joined the Royal Navy during the early days of the war. He went to sea as a member of the crew of the *H.M.S. Prince of Wales*. The ship was sunk in the Indian Ocean, and her

son was listed as "missing." Those of us who were friends of Bea were afraid that her grief might destroy her during the anxious days that followed.

She was appearing at the Haymarket Theatre, and each night she would go on stage to sing her gay songs and then would retire to her dressing room to collapse. She always clung to the hope that her son might have been saved.

One day she asked me to call upon A.V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, to see if there was any news of her son. Alexander (now Lord Alexander) made a thorough investigation and finally told me that the youngster's name had been moved from the "missing" to the "killed in action" list.

"I can't tell her. Will you?" I asked. The sympathetic Lord of the Admiralty agreed to meet us at the Savoy for a late supper after Bea's show. That night the gentle A. V. Alexander told her the truth: that there was no use hoping any longer.

Bea took the blow with stoic silence. I took her home. It was a night of an unusually heavy blitz, and our cab driver stopped about five blocks from her apartment and told us that he could not go on because the street was littered with glass.

"The stuff is still coming down," the cabbie said. "If you two have any sense, you'll duck in somewhere—I'm going to."

"I am going home," Bea said tonelessly. And that was that.

It was a long and frightening walk. I have always felt that Bea Lillie would have welcomed death that night.

That's the Bea Lillie I know, the one you don't see on the stage.