



Scenes from his latest film, "The Pink Panther," reveal that David Niven's up to his old acting magic again. His costar is Claudia Cardinale.

Clark Gable and Charles Laughton—which happened to be sailing alongside at the time.

By another coincidence, actor Robert Montgomery was visiting the ship that day. As a result of a friendship struck up that morning—and Niven's acute need for money—Montgomery talked him into a screen test at MGM.

Soon he appeared in picture after picture—always dressed in sandals, serape, and sombrero. "It seems they were making nothing but Westerns, and my accent was so British, they always cast me as a Mexican—without lines." And there he remained until Sam Goldwyn put him under contract the following year at \$65 a week.

Niven was so elated at this stupendous salary that he rushed to the nearest automobile dealer to buy a new convertible—on time. When he drove it into the studio lot an hour later, the gateman told him that Mr. Goldwyn wanted to see him right away. "He told me I was starting my 12-week layoff period," Niven remembered. The car went back to the showroom, and Niven continued to ride streetcars and buses for another three months!

Until he rejoined the British Army in 1939 (unlike other stars, Niven received no studio pay while serving his country), he had appeared in 23 films and gradually established himself as an actor and a screen favorite. After six and a half years of service, he returned, but to his sorrow, Goldwyn insisted on taking up his contract where it had left off—with five more years to go!

Niven wasn't happy about his roles or his salary. One day he stormed into Goldwyn's office and demanded to be released from his contract. As he recalled later, "I believed my own publicity—that I was God's gift to Hollywood. But I must say I was a bit disturbed when Mr. Goldwyn gave in so easily. Still, I was pleased to have my freedom—until I found out that other studios weren't exactly breaking their necks for my services."

Working on the theory that when things are at their worst, it's time to do something spectacular, he took his wife Hjordis and their children, David and Jamie, to Barbados for a pleasant vacation, which drained his bank account to the last cent.

Fortunately, Otto Preminger offered Niven one of the leads in "The Moon Is Blue," which turned out to be a huge success, critically as well as financially. The career problems of David Niven—who had taken a small salary against a percentage of the picture—were over.

While David's professional life, in spite of setbacks, sounds like a romp, his private life has been touched by almost constant tragedy. David's father, William Graham Niven, was killed at 25 in the Dardanelles during World War I, when David was barely five. His mother, who was French, died when he was 18. He also lost one brother.

His first wife, the former Primula Rollo, was killed in California in 1946 during a parlor game at a friend's house, when she opened a wrong door and fell down the cellar stairs. David was left with the care of two sons—David, now 19, who is learning the legal aspects of the talent-agency business in Rome, and Jamie, 16, who attends school in Lausanne, Switzerland.

DAVID MET his second wife quite by chance. In 1948, a Swedish model, Hjordis Tersmeden, was flying from New York to Stockholm. She was temporarily stranded in London because of fog. On the plane, Hjordis met a friend of David's who asked if she would mind stopping at the studio with him so he could say hello to David. "She was sitting in my chair when I saw her," David recalled. "The picture had gone over schedule, and I was tired and upset that day, so I told the assistant director to get her out."

Either his anger wasn't very convincing, or it blew over fast when he took a closer look at the gorgeous blonde who had dispossessed him. He promptly reversed his point of view—and they were married a week later.

It shouldn't be surprising that David Niven would make a relatively quick decision on his choice of a mate when he sometimes debates for half an hour on what kind of hors d'oeuvre to select, or spends a week of sleepless nights before he decides what model car to order. It is only further proof that David has rightfully earned his reputation as Hollywood's most contradictory and unpredictable actor!

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By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

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