

# A NEW VALENTINO?

*The screen's latest "sheik" isn't fond of camels, Cairo, or Arab roles; but, like the Latin lover of the silent days, he does have a way with women*

band pays alimony only if there are children and if the wife isn't working. "We have a six-year-old son, Tarek Omar, whom I love very much," Omar told me. "But as for alimony, my wife makes more money than I do, so that would take care of that."

At present, Omar and Faten have worked out an arrangement that seems to suit them equally well. Faten works in Egypt the year round and visits Omar only occasionally, usually for no more than a week at a time.

Omar's father did not approve of his marriage to Faten. "But I couldn't let my father run my life," Omar insisted. "He had interfered once before. When I was 16, I was engaged to a beautiful French girl. We went together for six years, but my father prevented us from marrying. He wanted me to marry a nice Syrian girl. He said if I married the French girl he would have a stroke. So I didn't, and he didn't."

AS FAR AS NATIONALITY GOES, Omar has a difficult time deciding what he really is. His family comes from Syria (his real name is Michel Shalhoub), and he was born in Egypt, but he refuses to consider himself an Arab. Nor does he want to live in Cairo.

"I think I would like to settle in Paris," he told me. "It's close to both the European and American movie-production centers, and that's what I'm interested in. I don't want to play Arabs any more; I want to play South Americans, Italians, or Mexicans. I want to be identified with the Western world."

He didn't quite get his wish in "The Fall of the Roman Empire," in which he plays a Near Eastern prince who woos and wins Sophia Loren. But in his next film, Columbia's "Behold a Pale Horse," he plays a Spanish priest.

Omar was disappointed when he didn't win an Academy Award for best supporting actor in the fabulous "Lawrence of Arabia."

"I never thought I'd even get a nomination," he confessed, "but everyone I worked with told me it was a sure thing. So when I got the nomination, I was convinced I would get the award. The night before the presentations I stood in front of a mirror and practiced all the ex-

pressions I planned to use when I accepted the Oscar."

Omar wasn't the only one convinced he would win an Oscar. Against the rule of the Academy, a national-magazine photographer was sneaked into the auditorium and seated in front of Omar. Using a miniature camera, he was to record Omar's expression at the moment the award for the best supporting actor was announced.

On the fateful night Omar was seated next to Mary Badham, the talented youngster who played Gregory Peck's daughter in "To Kill A Mockingbird."



With Sophia Loren in "The Fall of the Roman Empire."

"We made a pact," Omar recalled. "I told Mary that if my name wasn't called out as winner, she would hold my hand, and if she didn't win, I would hold hers. We held hands all right—close to tears!"

Omar thinks he didn't get the award because the voters thought he was playing himself. He wasn't. Actually, he had never ridden a camel before and was scared to death every time he got on one!

It is difficult to predict Omar's future. But with his popularity becoming increasingly evident, producers certainly will give him the maximum opportunity to develop into a great star—possibly even a modern Valentino.



Omar Sharif (above) bears a striking resemblance to Valentino (below) in his dark, brooding good looks.

