

MANY WOMEN

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Ronnie Ford, Tap Dancer Extraordinary

By TED HAVILAND
CHAPTER I.

This is the story of a tap dancer, an extraordinary tap dancer, one of the best on the boards today. His name is such a familiar one to millions of people throughout the country that we won't use it in this story. We'll simply call him Ronnie Ford, and let it go at that.

Now where Ronnie was born and when that event in his life-history took place, no one seems to know with any degree of certainty. Baltimore has claimed him as its own, and Des Moines and St. Louis and Chicago, but nothing has ever actually been proved. I don't believe Ronnie ever

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really knew himself.

"What difference does it make?" he'd good-naturedly asked when we tried to worm it out of him in interviews. Every town he played was to him "my old home town." It was good publicity, part of his act. The folks in the gallery liked it, even though they didn't always believe him.

Anyway, Ronnie was born and grew up somewhere. His parents must have died when he was young; certainly they never contributed to his success as an actor.

He first came into public notice when he was thirteen. That was a long time ago; he must be in his late thirties now. But way back then he was gallivanting around on the stage like a seasoned trouper, and was a tremendous hit wherever he appeared. He had real talent and personality to go with it. And even then he was drawing down a salary bigger than that which many an actor is pulling down today.

A few years later he breezed into New York on the crest of a wave of popularity, and took the town by storm. He appeared in a couple of the best-known shows of that day and was one of the most popular entertainers in the country. And mind you—even then he was still a smooth-faced, slightly bashful kid of

maybe seventeen or eighteen.

He had a manager at first, but later he found that that dignity was helping himself to more than three-fourths of his earnings, so he learned how to take care of his own business. His bank account grew, he bought a home, furnished it, and looked forward to a bright and unclouded future.

It was while he was playing in one of the downtown New York theatres that he met a girl—and fell in love.

Jeanie Temple was three years older than he was. She was a chorus girl in the show in which he starred. She had danced in the chorus, she told him, for three years. But she wouldn't always be there, she added. Of course not. She was, she believed, cut out for bigger things. And she was out to get them, no matter what the cost.

She was a tiny bundle of olive-skinned beauty, with black hair and a careless, bewitching smile that captivated men. To Ronnie she seemed unaccountably different from the other girls in the chorus. She simply wasn't of their type. She didn't appear to be cold and calculating and resourceful as they obviously were. Her beauty was natural rather than artificial, and the liltiness and grace of her made her stand out from her sisters of the chorus as a real rose stands out among a down tissue-paper imitations.

Anyway, Ronnie fell in love.

Upon Jeanie Temple he lavished all the devotion of the first love of a boy of seventeen. He brought her to the theatre in his roadster every afternoon, and after the last show he could always be counted upon to escort her home. When spring came they spent the after-midnight hours parked in some lonely country spot, or wandering aimlessly through the violet darkness of some wooded park.

And usually they would end up on a bench beneath some towering tree, and Ronnie would vow that his love would be eternal. And when he told her how much he loved her and how much she meant to him, he actually meant every word he said, poor kid.

One moonlit night when they were sitting in a park, Jeanie wound her arms about him and pressed her soft hair to his cheeks and lifted her warm, parted lips for his kisses. Ronnie, all his life, never forgot the glory and wonder of that night. It was the night he asked Jeanie to



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Jeanie Temple—she was a chorus girl in the show in which Ronnie starred.

marry him; the night when hopes and dreams were strongest.

That Jeanie did not immediately consent to his proposal of marriage made his affection for her even deeper. She told him quietly that he was too young to think of such a step yet a while, but that she would

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