

Plain and Fancy Petting

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The story of an ambitious amateur necker who crashes into the movies---and out

WILLIAM PERKINS' timid knock on the door of the bungalow, just off Hollywood boulevard in Yes Man's Land, was answered by a pretty young woman whose perfectly-arched eyebrows arched inquiringly a trifle higher as their possessor gazed on his stalwart and handsome figure.

"Your sign intrigued me," awkwardly confessed Mr. Perkins, stepping guilelessly over the threshold.

"It was placed there just this morning," she smiled. Her teeth were perfect. Her azure eyes were perfect. Her sable, bobbed hair was perfect. Her perfect apparel gave hints of hidden perfections. "I hope," she added engagingly, "you will be the first student of Melvini's School of Amatory Expression. Are you considering taking a course in necking?"

"I might be persuaded," weakened Mr. Perkins.

"Accept this chair," she invited, touching a light wicker chair. Mademoiselle Melvini then installed a graceful form in close proximity, tuning a battery of brilliant eyes on the prospective student.

"My dear sir," she dissertated earnestly, "love is what makes the world go round, terrestrial magnetism and Columbus to the contrary. And should we hide, starve or suffocate this fine emotion in our hearts and souls? No; it must have physical outlet. The most eloquent expressions of love come through glance of the eye, clasp of the hand, pressure of the waist, and oculatory rite. Would you be popular with the opposite sex? Learn how to pet properly; the crude lover is the unsuccessful lover. Would you aspire to enter the movies? Cult—"

"Indeed I would!" eagerly interrupted Mr. Perkins, leaning forward. "I may say that is the underlying reason why I came in."

"Ah!" articulated the lovely mademoiselle understandingly. "Yes, correct and superior technique in petting often proves to be the sesame to fame and fortune in the movies. Well, here is a student's contract; what sized dots do you like to sign on?"

Cannily Mr. Perkins wanted to know first as to the various courses and their prices.

"Our 10-day preparatory course includes two divisions, plain and fancy petting. Plain petting instructs the ambitious novice in the art of holding hands, kissing hands, making gentle union of the lips and minor convolutions about the clavicle. Accompanying this tutelage of material methods is given oral instructions in delivering efficaciously such simple terms as 'My dear!' and ranging to such complicated ones as 'My own dearest dear!'"

"The other branch of the preparatory course, fancy petting, includes thorough instruction by competent coaches and trainers in grabbing hands, seizing waists, terrorizing, subsidizing and mesmerizing hearts—also labial juxtapositions in relations varying from oblique to parallelism, from vertical to horizontal, with artistic mescegenations of each or all. Really, sir, love making is an art."

"I believe you," breathed Mr. Perkins candidly; "and I deeply aspire to cultivate such art. I'll take the preparatory course, plain and fancy petting. Can we start at once?"

"I want to say in advance, Mr. Perkins," she cautioned, "that all acts, minor and major, committed or perpetuated in this herein and aforesaid little contract, are strictly to be construed as casual, impersonal and also professional; and the pupil is hereby requested and warned to regard them as such and no other. Does this codicil penetrate?"

"It does," responded Mr. Perkins with simple dignity.

HIS first lesson was not especially difficult, albeit somewhat embarrassing in certain moments and positions. He found that professional contact with his teacher provided some sensations about 75 degrees above what is termed tepid. The teacher herself commended her first pupil on his aptness, said he made up in sincerity what he lacked in finesse, and told him to call the next night for his second lesson.

As young Mr. Perkins strolled back to the men's clothing store wherein he earned his modest sustenance, he meditated rosy that it would be pleasant indeed soon to be receiving \$1000 a week from some movie mogul for osculating various fascinating female profiles and other appurtenances thereof. Since Rudolph Valentino had passed away there had been a great void. It was not altogether lese majesty, whimsically he mused, to think he in time could fill



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the role of America's Perfect Lover: Lincoln had once split rails and Mencken inimitives, probably; why should not William Perkins too scale the heights?

Mademoiselle Melvini averred within a week or so that he was making marvelous progress. "You came to me, a dud," she affirmed, "and now you are almost a dilettante. Now let us try this scene again and get it down letter-perfect."

She relaxed back onto the settee in her charming negligee, a costume necessary for the lesson, put her shapely head on a cushion and dreamily closed her eyes. Her pupil stepped back a few paces and then coughed experimentally.

Mademoiselle Melvini opened her eyes in happy surprise, stretched forth two white seductive arms and yearned: "Whittington! Whittington! My true lover! How I have longed for you! Come, dearest, to me!"

WHITTINGTON needed no second bidding. Madly he stumbled toward the settee, fell on his knees, passionately ran one arm under her waist, the other under the snowy isthmus between head and shoulders, and bent his handsome brows in circumjacent of her wistful visage.

"My beloved," he crooned, "oh, my beloved, how—Say, do I put my right hand on that second negligee button in back, or the third?"

"The third," almost snapped his beloved, the look of rapt expectancy leaving her eager eyes. "Proceed!"

Somewhat chastened, Mr. Perkins proceeded with his lesson. His hold tightened on the alluring form and he softly sugared: "Oh, my dearest darling, though the cruel world may keep us apart in body, in spirit I am with you."

"Whittington!" she sighed blissfully. "Whittington, do not wait! Press me to your heart."

Whittington did not wait; he placed his head lower, pulled her head higher, and pressed her to his heart. Simultaneously he also pressed his mouth to hers in one long impassioned kiss, which he terminated suddenly to inquire, "Do you think I need a shave?"

Mademoiselle Melvini's countenance behaved as though some icy water had been dashed on it. "No, you do not need a shave, Mr. Perkins," she said. "I will, however, go so far as to say I think you need to put more zeal and fire into your physical manifestation of love, and that it is not unwise at times to forget the minor subtleties of technique. Well, Mr. Perkins, I will see you tomorrow evening. Good-bye."

Probably, or probably not, pursuant to the realization of this theoretical

surprise, the editor of a newspaper in Los Angeles received a note the next day, which he read rather skeptically and then tossed to a reporter. "I've heard," he grunted, "of a lot of new stunts but this one is a horse on me—a commercial school of amatory expression. Go out and see if it's worth a stick or a kick."

The reporter, young and romantic, fared forth and fared well at the fair hands and loquacious lips of Mademoiselle Melvini, who seemed tremendously astonished to see a real reporter on her humble bungalow steps.

SHE then elucidated how millions of young people did not know how to pet, and thus eliminated romance, that requisite factor for happiness, from their lives; how a kiss in time saved nine, or got nine more, just as the kisser wished; how, finally, she had helped scores of romance-starved male and female youths to attain that essential amatory poise and perfection, consequently making bright their drab careers and procuring for all sweet-hearts or beaux, wives or husbands.

"Here," she glowingly appended, exhibiting some photographs, "are pictures of my star pupil in some uxorious poses with his mentor, myself. This lad is truly amazing, a real genius at the art of love making. Gaze again on these pictures and note how artistically and thoroughly he agglomerates with his vis-a-vis, making of two a compact mass of erotic ecstasy."

The reporter was impressed and so was the public when it perused his piece—three columns

"And please don't forget me while you are scaling. Remember that in my humble but meticulous way, I have done my bit to contribute to your phenomenal success."

"All I am, all I ever hope to be," enunciated Mr. Perkins fervently, "I owe to you, Mademoiselle Melvini. Well, goodbye."

"Goodbye, Mr. Perkins," she said, "and whatever happens I hope your participles won't graduate from the microphone in shrill soprano."

It wasn't the new star's voice, however, that caused Jake Ginsberg, et al., to throw up fat hands in guttural despair; it was something else. William Perkins dropped by a week later to tell his erstwhile necking trainer all about it. "They say," he declared miserably, "I don't squeeze and pet in the right manner to please the fastidious and romantic public. Charabelle Dixon, the female lead, says she would rather have a cow lick her than me kiss her. She says I am clumsy in my courting, and also automatic. She says further that I am no good, and Mr. Ginsberg is willing to let me go for \$10,000 if I go quietly and with no back talk."

"They are all saturated," calmly denounced Mademoiselle Melvini, "and I don't mean with wisdom. Mr. Perkins, here is what's wrong: you have never necked with anyone except me and consequently you are off your stance and stride with Miss Dixon. I know you and your amatory whims as no one else does, and kindly tell Mr. Ginsberg that if he doesn't want to throw away that \$50,000 to write me a letter, Mr. Ginsberg, however, did not write her a

put one's heart into it," Mr. Perkins said. "That is the secret of success," Mademoiselle Melvini answered. "One must love what one does!"

THE director, however, eventually and astonishingly, advised his boss that that individual had signed up a pair of chumps, and if he wanted any adjectives he could supply them in gross lots, and he meant two kinds of gross lots. Here, gloomed he bitterly, was a graduate of the new school of neckers who had his art down supreme and superior; here, too, was the lad's comely and competent teacher. Their act, obviously, should be a wow, but it was a wail.

He said that they held hands, embraced and kissed not only wisely but too well and far too longingly and, further, too lengthily. He declared that whenever they were a dozen feet apart they sighed like furnaces to get together again, and when they were together again it took a crowbar to pry them apart. He stated that no matter how much he begged and threatened they seemed to think they were at a private necking party and not acting in a studio. He deplored, also, that every now and anon he was mortified and angered when their dignified vowels and consonants degenerated, consciously or otherwise, into mere babies' prattle. That they made John Gilbert and Greta Garbo look like a pair of middle-aged college professors playing postoffice! He sobbed, in sad conclusion, that the Lord only knew how the picture would get by the censors, and he hoped his boss would break even on his investment in The Great Necker—certainly he could ask no more.

"Could I ask any more?" moaned Jake Ginsberg to his verbal assistant. "Sure, you couldn't ask any more," agreed his echo; and, perforce, a few days later William Perkins was handed a check for \$50,000 and told never to return to the Monolith Studio and his female lead was given a check for half that amount and the same sour advice.

WILLIAM PERKINS silently escorted a reticent Mademoiselle Melvini to her home. "I'm going down to buy out the store," he said as he left.

"After all, I'll call tonight if I may." He found her, in charming negligee.

Disconsolately he sat down in a chair. "He was right," he said finally, and desperately, "at least about me. I never could neck anybody but you and get a real kick out of it."

Mademoiselle Melvini dropped her book and her gaze. "I may as well cut down the cherry tree," she franked a confession. "I've sat on the veranda there and watched you go by to work for several years; a chap in your store whom I know told me of your movie aspirations. That sign was put there for your benefit only; I had no necking pupil but you. I got that reporter there; I sent Jake Ginsberg a marked copy of the article. I prayed devoutly you would

fail with Charabelle Dixon, and you did; I prayed devoutly we would last through at least one picture, and we did. You see, I was after a financial stake for material happiness—and you."

William Perkins stared at her, his face frozen with astonished joy.

Gradually his features relaxed and his eyes grew brighter. Joy dawned slowly, evenly, until it seemed that the sun had come up in their usual steady depths.

His mouth opened, and stayed that way, instead of rounding itself into the usual perfect oval which proclaimed imminent osculation. His stare was concentrated.

Mademoiselle Melvini giggled. "My real name," she said, "is Doris Brown, and I'm a stenographer. Also, this negligee hasn't buttons and you don't need a shave." She stretched forth two white seductive arms and yearned: "Whittington! Whittington! My true lover! Come, dearest, to me!"

Whittington needed no second bidding.

"We will be famous," Mademoiselle Melvini said. "We shall be examples to all men and women of the unlimited power of those who know the science of osculation. They shall see us, and go out to make romance blossom in other hearts. But we had better rehearse again, that it may become second nature to us." Forthwith they were immediately locked in each other's embrace, although there was no clicking camera on hand to record the intensity of the huddle into which they went.

And any sound-recording instrument would have sworn that it had found an interesting static.

"We shall be Romeo and Juliette come back," the instructress stated. "Beatrice and Dante, Cleopatra and Antony . . . all those who loved in ages past shall live again. And we shall prove that love is the greatest thing in the world!"

"Love?" the apt Mr. Perkins said questioningly.

"Certainly," she answered, although the color deepened in her cheeks. "For what other purpose have we been met together for lo, these many evenings, if not to practice those ancient rites which every man from Adam to Adam's youngest grandson has used when he would make the lady of his heart understand that he feels an all-consuming passion for her? We have been practicing the mechanism into which love shall put the soul. We shall teach men how to love."

"That last act needs polishing. I think I should be firmer . . . like this." The devotees of petting in its most intensive state began again.

"When one has work one likes it is easy to



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wide, a page deep, with four illustrations—the next day. Here, asseverated the article, in this modest, unassuming store clerk, William Perkins, is the real or potential Perfect Lover. His hugging, kissing, fondling, necking—en toto, wooing—were the height of artistic indefectibility.

"IF ALL those big words about him are true," said Jake Ginsberg's yes man to Jake himself at Jake's Monolith Studio in Hollywood, after reading a marked clipping, "the fellow must be good."

The boss grunted. "Well, we got to get a star for that new story before the public forgets it," he said. "Ain't I right?"

"Sure, you're right," said his official okayer. "If he screens good and his voice is good, we could use him, eh?" insisted Jake.

"Sure, we could use him," conceded his corroborator.

"Then write him a letter," ordered Jake triumphantly.

William Perkins, in blanching excitement, took the missive to his instructor in matters amative. "I have worked and waited, my change has come, and I am ready," he said. "They want me to take the leading part in The Great Necker."

The Great Necker, it should be chronicled, was the book of the hour, and also the month and the year. Its young hero had a yen for participating in intimate social contact with fair ones of the meeker sex. When introduced to a girl he always quaintly saluted her with a three-minute embrace and a two-minute kiss, thereafter remarking he was sure theirs would be a beautiful friendship. He never knew what a handshake or verbal greeting was, and he never bothered to discuss the tariff or football; he said everything with kisses, and when he petted a girl she stayed petted.

"I am to get \$50,000 for my work in the picture," rhapsodized Mr. Perkins. "I will scale the heights."

"I bet you will," agreed his monitor enigmatically.



Whittington needed no second bidding.