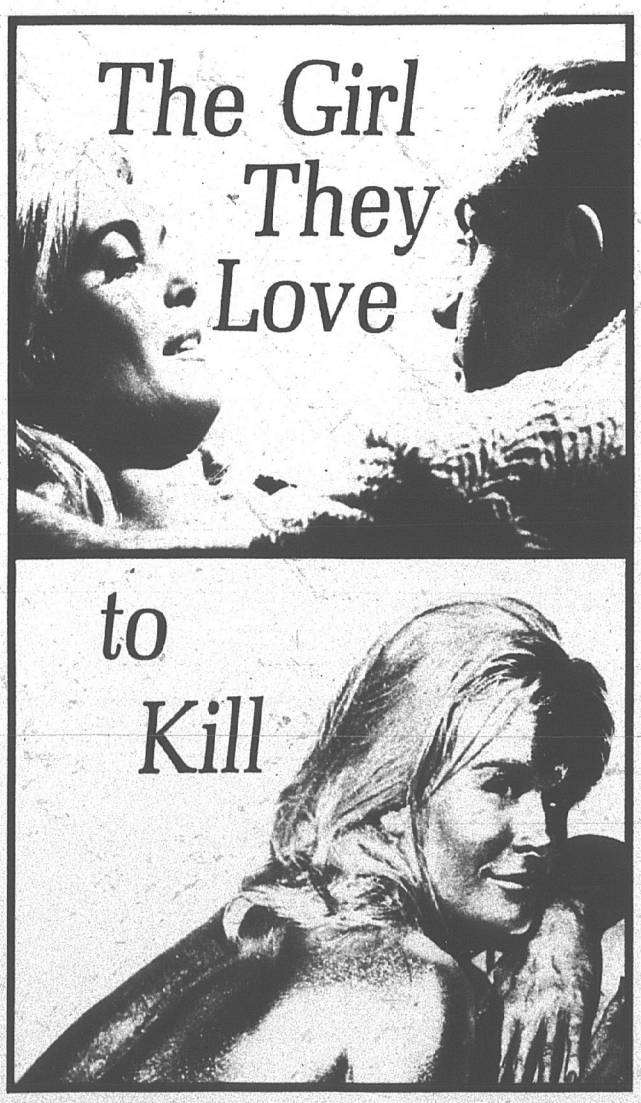
Shirley Eaton—



Shirley Eaton's career took on new luster after playing opposite Sean Connery in "Goldfinger" and being painted gold (below) by the murderous villain.

Her career seemed at dead end until she was shot in a Mike Hammer film and painted to death in a James Bond thriller

By JACK RYAN

"WHEN they came at me with those big paintbrushes and began to paint my body gold, I became apprehensive. I could get an allergy, you know. Or even die."

Blonde, willowy Shirley Eaton is not describing the now-famous death scene in "Goldfinger," in which she is gilded from head to toe by the villain and dies of suffocation. She is referring to the 1½-hour make-up that brought on her film demise and gave new life to her career after 14 years of relative obscurity.

Shirley's paint job was not too dramatic off-camera. "The brushes were cold but soothing . . . The only aftereffect was bloodshot eyes . . . No, I couldn't really have died." At this point, she leans forward with the conspiratorial air of a secret agent in "Goldfinger" and confides: "They left an unpainted spot on my tummy where my skin could breathe."

Shirley Eaton, 27, is one of several British actresses making film news with off-beat glamour. (Another: Honor Blackman is outfitted in black leather and carries an ominous whip.) But there is nothing offbeat about Shirley except an irresistible urge to prove she is an actress, not an ingénue (which she played for some six years) or a *femme fatale* (her fate for the past two years). For a girl who has had an easy private life, her professional one has been frustrating.

Shirley comes from a well-to-do family (her father owns a furniture business) in a good London suburb; now she is married to a better-than-well-to-do builder and lives in fashionable London exurbia.

"NO, MY LIFE wasn't pressurized," she admits. "Not unless I made it so. My mother took me to dancing and acting classes as a child, just as part of a broad education. I liked acting and, for no particular reason, tried out for a London play. I got the part—but with a hitch. I was only 12, and you can't take a job in England until you're 13, so I had to wait for my next birthday to begin. Waiting was training. You do a lot of waiting to get what you want."

Shirley's "waiting" was for producers to recognize her as somebody other than the pretty love interest in comedies such as "Carry on Nurse."

"Oh, how I wanted to do something serious," she sighs, shaking her long tresses. "But the British don't take to new ideas quickly. Luckily, American producers saw me in 'Come Blow Your Horn' in England—as the ingénue, don't you know—and asked me to play in a Mike Hammer film.

"It was wonderful! The author, Mickey Spillane, played his own character; and in the climactic scene with him, I ended up getting shot in the head. Not as stylish a way to go as being painted to death—but better than being an ingénue."

As "the girl you love to kill," Shirley's moribund career revived. In rapid succession came MGM's "Rhino," filmed in Zululand; "Goldfinger"; and Universal's story of World War II in Greece, "The Naked Brigade," which still is unreleased.

Off-camera, Shirley's life appears as peaceful as the English countryside, where she resides in a Tudor-style home with husband Colin and son Grant, 5½.

Colin is a frustrated author who inherited the family construction business, steered it to booming proportions, and now contemplates early retirement to pursue writing while traveling with Shirley to movie-making locations (or so she hopes).

Shirley doubts, however, whether Colin will ever become very involved in her career. "He has no enthusiasm for the theater. I suppose that was part of his attraction. We met at a party. He didn't care one way or the other about my acting. But he's tolerant of my career; he *accepts* it."

ACTUALLY, SHIRLEY spends only two or three months a year away from home, and she and Colin frequently rendezvous in Switzerland for skiing or the south of France when film shooting takes her from England.

"Other times," she says, "we're busy at home. I'm an excellent cook. I suppose it's because it comes naturally and also because I had a wonder of an Italian maid to teach me things. Colin keeps adding parts to our home in a sort of busman's holiday."

Shirley's background and experience have made her a poised and articulate woman, unhesitant in giving opinions in a casual, unassuming way that belies their unusual frankness:

American women: ". . . I find them overbearing. They don't seem to handle responsibility without making everybody feel the burden of it. . ."

American men: "I love American men. They really respond to a woman . . . The Englishman doesn't make such a fuss about a woman."

New American glamour queen, Carroll Baker: "She wears a low dress and a big fur, but she still looks like a little housewife."

And what about Shirley Eaton? Well, she is definitely off the gold standard. Shirley has found a new covering she thinks even more breathtaking. "In 'The Naked Brigade,' I'm covered with dirt. Women are their most glamorous when smudged."

There's another thing about "The Naked Brigade" that Shirley likes—she escapes death. The gold? She banks it nowadays.