

The Merry Mania of Miss Merrie Holt

(Concluded from page 9.)

stop in Le Grande station. Merrie, wicked as she was, had actually arrived in Los Angeles, safe, sound, unrepentant and blissfully happy.

The next day Merrie started off early. Accordingly then she sought a Hollywood car.

The conductor was shouting something which sounded so like Merrie's stop that she scampered off the car and found herself in a blank, green roadside near to nothing apparently.

Ahead of her strode a man dressed in a fine suit of gray of the unobtrusive pattern of pin checks which manages on some men to become so offensive.

"Pardon me, sir. Will you be so good as to tell me whether this road will take me to the Renzov Film Company's place?"

"It will." On she trudged.

"Is that Renzov's?" she asked of another stranger after an hour's walk.

"It is."

Now that she was so near her goal, Merrie's heart began to pound with fright.

She had come to the first structure bearing the Renzov label.

Half way down the row there was a sign announcing:

EMPLOYMENT OFFICE: HOURS 9 TO 10.

Merrie tried the gate, but it was locked.

"What time is it?" she asked a grinning chauffeur.

"Nine o'clock, sister. That gate's been locked for a month; try the yard." He jerked his thumb to the left and Merrie went on to the next gate which was close beside a frame building with loophole windows, and ventured in.

There was a space possibly fifty feet square and it held at least a hundred men and women who were standing about in the sun which was already broiling hot. Everyone looked toward the gate as Merrie's foot struck a shingle lying in her path and sent it spinning.

There were flashy young people, middle aged ones, trying to look young, and even a sprinkling of the frankly old. All were brushed and groomed down to the last thread; many were on their uppers, others noisily new. There was every type, size and condition.

At last Merrie could endure it no longer. She turned to a man who was leaning with both yellow gloved hands on his cane staring at the earth. "Why can't there be a few benches here?"

"There are ten thousand too many extra people. It would never do to make them over welcome, would it?"

"Oh. And what are the yellow slips for?"

"Passes. They're making the pictures in there. Oh, I assure you, my dear young lady, beyond that gateman is sanctuary."

Another two hours of fruitless waiting. Merrie's heart began to sink and her head to ache. Tears of disappointment came so close to flowing that she had to hurry out to keep from sobbing like a five year old. She stumbled along a few steps before she got herself in hand. "Come! is this the way for the about-to-be-famous Merrie Holt to behave?"

A boy came along and she asked him if there was any place nearby where she could get something to eat.

"Slope down de line five shacks and there you are."

Merrie sloped, counting five, and brought up at the Thalia Cafeteria, surely the most curious place on earth as regards the costumes of its patrons. She took a tray and fell into line between a bead-hung Indian brave and a circus rider in the shortest and fluffiest of skirts.

Merrie filled her tray and chose a table at which two plain faced women sat sipping tea.

"Who are you working with?" one of them asked her.

"Nobody—yet."

They glanced at each other and smiled half pityingly.

"You've got to have gall and you got to have pull. Pull mostly. Get to know somebody big around here; like one of the directors; then you're all right. Don't mind whether you can

act or not. Don't mind if you have a figger like a broomstick and a face like a Swiss cheese, just get a pull." Concentrated, distilled bitterness trembled in her voice.

"Oh! I thought merit, ability and such things were what counted."

They brushed the crumbs out of their laps and got up. "Gall and pull, girlie, that's all you got to have here."

At last there was nothing left but the yard and Merrie knew that she might wait there to no purpose forever. She fled from Renzov's.

At the end of a mile she turned up an inviting lane, already soothed by the quiet beauties of the countryside.

There was a vacant cottage set back from the lane, a To Let sign on the fence, and a lovely garden running riot. Honeysuckle climbed over the porch and fought a flowery battle with a chaste, white rose. The place seemed deserted and Merrie, who was desperately tired, yielded to the temptation to turn in. She sat down on the porch in the lee of the vines and leaned her head back against the wall to rest.

She must have fallen asleep, for the next thing she knew there were voices on the other side of the honeysuckle. Merrie parted the leaves with her fingers and looked.

A couple of touring cars stood a little way down the drive, the chauffeurs reading magazines as if they had been there for hours. A moving picture camera was set up close by and the camera man with a choleric complexion she had no difficulty in identifying as the director. He was instructing a group of players. There was a bride and two bridesmaids, a mother, a parson, a groomsman and a bridegroom who was also the villain, by his looks.

The director grouped the wedding party under the rose-hung pergola beside the cottage and surveyed the effect from beside the camera man. "There now!" he barked, "that's right at last. Everybody hold that. Now, Dawes, you go ahead with the marriage service—open your book a little more—"

He raised his voice and called over his shoulder. "Here is where you come into this picture, Miss Owen, just as rehearsed. Remember you've got a breaking heart and you are desperate; you want to register that good and strong. When Dawes puts the question you rush in—ready?"

"All ready, Mr. Barham," answered a voice from beyond the range of Merrie's vision.

"Right," said Barham, "Camera!"

The mimic ceremony proceeded while the camera man cranked steadily.

"Not so fast!" cried Barham, "good. A little more smile from the bride. Put the question, Dawes. Get ready, Miss Owen."

"Anybody got anything to say against this marriage?" asked the Movie Minister, making an impressive pause.

"Now, Miss Owen!" called Barham.

SHE came from behind a concealing trellis with a rush, her hand upraised. "Stop! This marriage cannot be! This man is my husband!" Tableau.

"Everybody register surprise! Stack it on!" cried the director. "All right; that's all, Camera. Now we'll take that rough stuff between the villain and the best man."

"So that is the way they do it," thought Merrie, watching the bride and her party walk back to the automobiles. I could look more tragic than Miss Owen did. She didn't look as if she cared such an awful lot."

Miss Owen locked arms with a young man who had not been in the picture and they wandered away into the garden.

"They are the worst pair of spoons I ever saw," observed the camera man, looking after them with a smile.

"I'll fire 'em if they don't quit strayin' off," Barham growled.

Another scene was rehearsed and taken and then the camera man seemed struck with a horrible thought. He examined his machine and mopped

his brow. "Say, Mr. Barham, I did a fool trick. We got to take this and the wedding over again; I haven't got 'em."

After a torrent of words suitable to the occasion Barham called, "Come on back, people. We're taking the wedding over again. Everybody hustle, for there's a change coming in the light."

Then he had the last scene re-enacted. The wedding party formed again and was ready as soon as the camera had done with the others.

"Let her go, Camera," ordered Barham, an anxious eye on the sky.

Merrie opened her mouth to call out that Miss Owen was not there, and then she had a great idea. Why not? Miss Owen was far down the road, the light might change before she could get back and the picture must be taken!

She got up, for the mimic parson had begun his question. The instant came and, unhesitatingly, with her face full of grief and determination she burst onto the scene from behind the honeysuckle. "I forbid this marriage! He is my husband! He is married to me!" She flung her arms out appealingly and fell at the astounded bride's feet in highly dramatic and effective style.

"Fine! Great!" crowed Barham. "Say, whoever you are and wherever you come from you have certainly got the goods."

"I'm awfully glad you think so," said Merrie, sitting up, "I'm looking for work and I'll be glad if you will give it to me."

"You are hired for the rest of this picture. The part begins with this scene."

"Oh," Merrie's face clouded. "I—I just wanted to show you what I could do. I don't want to take the part away from Miss Owen."

"Never mind her. She ought to be on the job. Pile right into the machine with the rest of the girls; we've got to boil right along to the studio."

"One part more or less will never hurt Owen," said the little bride kindly and Merrie's heart sang glory, glory.

At the studio there was light and time for one more scene. Merrie looked with all her eyes and listened with all her ears and she did her part in it acceptably.

"You're on my payroll, girlie," said Barham, and patted her in a fatherly manner; "come along to the office."

Merrie Holt walked on air to the car which would take her to Los Angeles. She found a seat outside and snuggled up close to the rail. What glorious luck she was having.

"Why, Miss Holt!" exclaimed the young man who sat down beside her, "fancy meeting you here!"

It was Bruce Archer.

"This," laughed Merrie as they shook hands, "is simply the crowning bit. I'm perishing to talk to someone I know. I want to brag and brag and brag. I'm a moving picture actress! I've got a job! I've had my picture taken for the screen! I've landed and I believe I'll make good!"

"By Jove, you're all right. Congrats and all that sort of thing. How did you do it so soon? Did you have a note to somebody?"

"No. I found out that one must have gall in this business, so I got some and used it."

"Well, I had a little pull," said Bruce. "I had a letter to one of the directors; he took me on and I'm to begin to-morrow."

"I'm so glad if you want to be an actor. I know how it is. Wh— it's an ache like toothache. How did the plasterer's case turn out?"

"Oh, I won it and left town the same day. Dad said he thought it was better to have a would-be Movie actor in the family than an actual ambulance chaser. Speaking of gall; do you think that I would have too much if I asked you to have dinner with me to-night?"

"Considering that you are my attorney, I think not. Besides, we are partners in iniquity. I was glad to get that five hundred dollars, but it was a rank hold-up just the same."

"A rank hold-up," repeated Archer happily, "on my side too."

"But," they said in concert, "I had to get into the Movies somehow."



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