

Paula of the Movies

A Love Story in Three Parts

By Edwin Baird

PART III.

HER husband approached with self-assurance, chuckled her under the chin, tickled the goose with his walking stick, chatting, smiling, in his polished way. Presently they moved off together, she swinging her sunbonnet beside her and looking at the ground, he bending close to her face and whispering in her ear. The poultry fluttered about their feet. A horse thrust his head from a stable window. A windmill turned lazily in the distance. It was a pretty picture.

So much for the rehearsal. Now the business was repeated to the accompaniment of the camera's whirr-r-r.

Other pictures were taken, and all of them featuring Paula: Paula shocking corn to the pigs; Paula rubbing the muzzle of a horse; Paula milking a cow; Paula sliding down a hay-stack, etc. In all of them, too, her husband took part, and it was to be seen that his suavities were having their way with her. She was falling violently in love with him.

Except when their presence was demanded before the camera, the other players took not the slightest interest in what was going on, most of them preferring to wander about the farm and examine things unfamiliar to them. Sam, however, followed the director everywhere,—and so did all the members of the nutting party except young Peters and Bessie,—and, observing Paula and her husband with a heavy heart, he gradually picked up the thread of the story. Paula, of course, was a farmer's daughter, while her husband took the role of a city man who was trying to lure her from home—and succeeding woefully well. Paula's father was tyrannical and overbearing, though her care-free gaiety on the farm belied that. At any rate, she was making up her mind to run away from home in spite of Papa and Mamma and everything.

But Sam's interest began to wane too, when he saw that only Bess and Peters were not among those there. And how he regretted now his unfortunate response when she had asked if he didn't want to go nutting with her! How he wished now he had answered otherwise!

He wondered what Peters was saying to her—wherever they happened to be—and what she was saying to Peters; and this same wondering quite failed to brighten his cheerlessness.

Yes, the movies had begun to pall; the prospect of becoming a film favorite no longer appealed to Sam Llewellyn; and presently he went to Director Carney, tapped him on the shoulder, and asked:

"When do I start acting in this play?"

Carney turned and looked at him without a vestige of recognition behind the horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Who the devil are you? Oh, yes! I remember you now: you're the sub-wood-chopper. Well, I won't need you for an hour yet. Run away now and don't bother me. I'm busy."

Mr. Carney was indeed busy just then, and no mistake. Paula's tyrannical father was acting more like a bowery hoodlum than a man born and bred in the country; her mother had attempted to milk a cow on the cow's left side, with disastrous results; and the brother of this country maiden who wanted to run-away had unluckily examined the interior of a beehive, mistaking it for a pigeon house. And it was Mr. Carney's business to keep all of these people properly adjusted.

Sam, thinking to invest his hour's leisure profitably, started for the chestnut trees, making a pronounced detour for the benefit of any who might be watching him. He was not greatly surprised, on arriving there, to find no living thing except a squirrel. In a rather pensive cast of thought he strolled slowly back along the snake-like creek, his eyes fixed on the ground, which, however, he did not see.

But in a little while he came abruptly to a halt, and his eyes, no longer vacant, stared intently ahead through the lace-work of a willow and became riveted on a narrow footbridge spanning the creek near the Wrights' woodlot. Young

Peters and Bessie sat on this bridge in the world-old attitude of a man wooing a maid.

And Sam, standing not sixty feet away as one turned to stone, began to realize several things which he should have known sooner. He recognized now that the emotion aroused in him by the cinema actress had been only a hectic infatuation that had passed like a puff of hot wind, and he saw, too late, that he had always cared in a very real way for Elizabeth Dwyer. This sight of her now, almost in the arms of his rival, left no doubt about that.

Absorbed in each other, they were clearly oblivious to him—and to everything else around them, he bitterly thought—and Sam turned and retraced his steps while his heart filled with desolation.

On his way back to the barnyard he met the whole troupe of players and the

pitchfork; then the old man's wife hot-footed it after him, waving a dish pan; then the gal's brother comes running, and then half a dozen farm hands. All this time you're standing here, gaping for all you're worth. But when you see the farm hands you join 'em, understand? Run as hard as you can. Don't drop your axe, but carry it along with you and swing it over your head as you run as if you meant to chop somebody's arm off. Now then, do you get me?"

"I getcha," said Sam, who felt his vocabulary was improving under Mr. Carney's excellent tutelage.

"Good! Now then, let's see you chop a little wood."

Sam spat on his hands, gripped the axe, glanced briefly at the bridge, then displayed some plain and fancy wood-chopping, an occupation neither new nor novel to him.

"You'll do," said the director, who



In half a minute he had Bessie around the waist and was slushing to dry land with her.

crowd of curious onlookers, and all headed for the creek. Carney carried an axe, which he promptly handed to Sam.

"Time for your stunt now. C'mon!"

Sam fell in with the rest, the axe slung across his shoulder, and was conducted to a woodpile scarcely a step from the bridge. It was several minutes later when he trusted himself to look that way, and then he saw that his rival and Bessie, having been interrupted in their sweet solitude, were now standing and observing matters with indubitable interest.

Meanwhile Director Carney had been explaining certain things to Sam:

"Here's the idea: The heroine of this sketch elopes with her city admirer. An auto waits in the road yonder ready to start with 'em. They chase this way. You stand here chopping wood. When you hear 'em coming you look up and register curiosity—"

"Register—" ventured Sam.

"Sure, register! Let your mouth sag open and distend your eyes; look as curious and surprised as you know how. Well, this gal's daddy finds she's gone and chases after all, brandishing a

cheeks reddening a little. He wondered if she were blushing because she was ashamed of him.

However, there was no time now to wonder about such things. All was ready for the final start. Four cameras were stationed along the gently sloping hill to pick up the chase as it moved toward the road. One of these cameras stood twenty feet from Sam.

Carney shouted through his megaphone: "Chop wood, there!"

Sam picked up his axe, with a last glance at the bridge. Bessie was still leaning against the handrail, and it occurred to him suddenly that she shouldn't do that. He remembered having noticed last week that the rail was rickety, decidedly unsafe. Maybe he'd better warn her.

While he was contemplating doing this he heard Carney shout to him again, angrily this time, and he brought the axe down on the log before him with tremendous vigor. Simultaneously the nearest camera set up its soft purr, which denoted the play was on in earnest.

"Look up, there!" yelled Carney through the megaphone. "Register surprise—mouth open, eyes wide!"

Sam ceased his chopping, just as he had done in the rehearsal, and looked toward Paula and her husband tearing madly down the hill and glancing back over their shoulders as if fearing pursuit.

And right there Mr. Llewellyn's career as a film favorite ended. He heard a piercing scream from the bridge, and in the instant he required to look that way he learned that his contemplated warning was of no use to Bessie now. The handrail had broken. Bessie was in the creek.

In this moment, also, young Peters lost his one and only chance of becoming a successful suitor for the hand of Bessie Dwyer. He hesitated in the aperture made by the broken rail, irresolute, undecided, it would seem, whether to plunge to the rescue or allow the young lady to wade ashore by herself. Perhaps he thought the water was a trifle too cold on this November day for impromptu plunges.

It was cold, icy, in fact, but that didn't restrain Sam Llewellyn, who needed less time to reach a decision than Mr. Peters required. Dropping his axe, forgetful that the cameras were churning away as if nothing untoward had happened, he rushed headlong for the creek.

In half a minute he had Bessie around the waist and was slushing to dry land with her. Ten seconds more and he was kneeling over her on the bank. And here an interesting happening occurred. The play, it seemed, had come abruptly to a stop, and all the performers were hurrying toward the bridge. Director Carney was among the first to arrive, and his stormy face boded a tempest as he flourished his megaphone and demanded:

"What in hell do you mean by it! You've gummed up everything! You've —"

"Here," broke in Sam, springing quickly to his feet, "shut up, and give me that coat!" And thereupon, with no more speech, he removed the natty gray overcoat from Director Carney's back and wrapped it around Bessie.

And now he was hastening with her toward the farmhouse. He heard Carney shout through the megaphone:

"You needn't come back! You're fired!"

And some how those words were the pleasantest he had heard that day. Bessie, considerably frightened and little the worse for that, was soon quite all right in Mrs. Wright's kitchen. Muffled in several blankets, she sat toasting her bare feet near the oven, sipping hot tea and talking to Sam, who was holding her unengaged hand and gazing into her hazel eyes as if he saw a glimpse of heaven in each of them.

"But you haven't told me yet, Sam, how you happened to be with those moving-picture people."

"It's a long story," said Sam, pressing her hand between both of his, "and

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