

The Spindling Freckle-Face Who Became an Ultrastylish Star

By Rosalind Shaffer

Hollywood, Cal.

BEAUTIFUL sophisticated, humorous, versatile Myrna Loy, who is the heroine of "The Thin Man" and who wears very ultra clothes by Adrian with such chic, is exactly nine years removed from the overalls too-thin, freckle-faced youngster who at the early age of sixteen was taking herself very seriously. It had not been long, in 1925, since Myrna Williams had been riding horses for most of her waking hours when she was not in school in Helena, Mont. Her father, David Williams, managed ranch properties, and his daughter's idea of fun was to ride for hours at his side.

Dancing and dramatic work were her passions, and it was this bent in her nature that influenced everything in her life and school work. When her parents passed several winters in California, Myrna attended Santa Monica and Venice high schools, mixing very little with her classmates, but always in every program of dramatics or dancing given at school. A recluse in those days, preferring books, she remains one so far as the general run of Hollywood affairs is concerned. Social circles see very little of her. She has friends, but they are not the smart partying and restaurant-dining type.

Something of the quality in the thin, freckle-faced, unprepossessing youngster must have shone through, for after several unfruitful contacts at the studios she received a role as "Spirit of Northern Ice" in the prologue at the Egyptian theater, prepared for Charles Chaplin's "The Gold Rush." Previous to this a photographer, Henry Waxman, had noticed Myrna when she was dancing in a Fanchon and Marco chorus and offered to make photographic studies of her without pay, as he considered her to have camera possibilities.

Handicapped at the Beginning

Rudolph Valentino and his wife, Natacha Rambova, noticed the pictures and were very much impressed by them. Natacha at the time was seeking a cast for her one and only screen production, "What Price Beauty?", an exotic fantasia, and she was taken by a certain exotic something in the Williams girl that the camera revealed. Valentino and his wife went to the Egyptian to see the original of the photos, and the "Spirit of Northern Ice" impressed them still more. She was signed for the role, and the stamp of the exotic half-caste was placed upon her, a stamp that was to last for a long time and hinder her dramatic career's progress, though it did keep her earning money before the camera in a series of oriental half-caste roles.

Natacha Rambova it was who gave her the name of Myrna Loy and accented the lure in the heavily-lidded eyes by deft make-up and slanting brows. Myrna took it all seriously and accented the oriental lure with her clothes and with her natural shyness as an ally in the building up of the legend that she was a half-caste. "I even studied oriental philos-

ophy and tried to steep myself in oriental lore of all sorts to improve my characterizations," she says. "I had no idea how difficult it was going to be to get away from the type I was trying so hard to perfect."

"I took my career so seriously that I wore myself out with lessons and beauty treatments to improve myself," she confesses with a smile.

All of this diligence had won the girl a Warner contract. Previous to the Valentino recognition of her she had had only heartbreaks. At Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the very studio where she now is a star, she sat about in the casting office for two weeks, to be used finally as the model on which Kathleen Key's costumes for "Ben Hur" were to have their screen test. Myrna herself was so ignored she was not even given a make-up to put on. Then Christy Cabanne, associated in directing the picture, asked for her to play the Madonna in the Christmas sequence, an early piece of color photography. This hope was dashed, for the role was given to Betty Bronson whose sun long since has faded so far as films are concerned.

In Role of Oriental Charmer

A Fox contract, following the Warner one, found many wondering what the studio executives could see in the plain, overthin, freckle-faced girl who came and went so unobtrusively in no make-up and a simple tailored suit. The role of the oriental charmer Yasmini, who played opposite Victor McLaglen in "The Black Watch," an early sound film, and others that followed, simply were repetitions of the sort of thing she always was called on to do. Then in 1930 she played Warner Baxter's leading lady in "Renegades" and attracted a great deal of favorable comment, which was repeated in "Devil to Pay."

"Transatlantic," directed by William K. Howard, allowed Myrna Loy to "cross the color line" and play a white woman and a dutiful wife for the first time in her film career. It was this role that won her her contract with M.G.M., under which she has had her great recent success. She played in "Emma," "The Wet Parade," and "New Morals for Old," wearing very smart Adrian costumes and playing straight dramatic roles as a white woman. The tide changed, and for a time she was put back in the old seeress and vamp sort of thing. "The Mask of Fu Manchu" and "Thirteen Women" were of this sort. Meanwhile she played in "Vanity Fair," and then came "Topaze" with John Barrymore. "Animal Kingdom" was a smash hit.

"When Ladies Meet" found her with Robert Montgomery, Ann Harding, Alice Brady, and Frank Morgan. Her



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"Her success was growing. She could do sophisticated roles to perfection; she could wear clothes very well." (At right: How well she can wear them today is revealed here.)

success was growing. She could do sophisticated roles to perfection; she could wear clothes very well.

"The Barbarian," with Ramon Novarro, gave her a most sympathetic role. The interest of the two in dancing and in opera and music brought about a close friendship between them, but Miss Loy denies a romance.

On Right Track

In speaking of the tide of success and popularity that has been flowing her way she says: "The decisive change in my screen career has come during the last year. I know I am on the right track at last. I'm not a type any longer. 'Night Flight' and later 'The Prizefighter and the Lady' proved this to my satisfaction."

"Manhattan Melodrama," "The Thin Man," and "Stamboul Quest" are her current successes.

Aside from her screen work, Myrna Loy still lives very quietly. She likes to work at her sculpturing and modeling, which is something that has interested her since her days at the Venice High school. In the grounds of the school stands a statue of Miss Loy, representing the spirit of inspiration, one of three in a group modeled by E. F. Winebrenner, art instructor, to express the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of education.

Trips to the opera, to symphony concerts, and to see every famous dancer who comes to Los Angeles are the favorite recreations of Myrna Loy. Her own taste in clothes is conservative; she does not wear sport clothes by choice, only when active sports make it necessary. She prefers tailored clothes and is formal in her ideas. You will never catch her at a party in slacks or riding clothes.