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**HOLLYWOOD IS DESCRIBED
AS THE CITY WITHOUT SIN;
MOVIE ACTORS TALK SHOP**

(Benjamin De Casseres in New York Herald-Tribune.)

When I was ordered to Hollywood I felt like Stanley when James Gordon Bennett ordered him to find Livingstone, dead or alive. As a matter of fact, I do not know exactly how Stanley felt, but, from my knowledge of the workings of the human imagination, I know that when he received that message he didn't sleep that night.

I didn't sleep the night of the day I was summoned to the town that has been called by the superior sophisticates "the capital of Moronia" and "the Barren Island of the Drama." All night long my brain was a "movie" of all the stories I had ever heard of Hollywood. A city of high jinks, wild women, vamping Romeos, all-night gin parties, petting picnics, vamp verbins, "dope" teas.

I had heard that a great rum fleet which supplied the thirst of a town that never slept was always anchored outside of Los Angeles. Great hieira of stars, producers and directors every week end to Tia Juana, where millions passed over the gambling tables and at the racetrack. If virtue is its own reward, I was told that Hollywood, like Paris, had never claimed the reward.

Hollywood was my Livingstone. Would I find it dead or alive? Alive, sizzling alive, I was told—so much alive that I'd never want to return to old humdrum, Volstead New York.

I had, in common with other "movie" fans, a curious notion that when one motored into Hollywood one went kersock into Bill Hart peeping from behind a house taking pot-shots at a gang of "movie" rustlers; Pola Negri coming slowly and majestically down the steps of Jess Lasky's residence on the arm of Theodore Kossloff, while Jimmy Cruze directed a thousand extras, dressed as smocked and bearded Bolsheviks, to pillage the "alace"; Janet Gaynor making old-fashioned love to Eugene O'Brien under a palm tree; Larry Semon racing down the street to disappear suddenly in a sewer; Buster Keaton being thrown off a boulevard trolley car; Charlie Chaplin standing on a snow-covered peak while a bear nibbles his trousers.

So with my imagination all set for fast and furious days and nights, I entered the most famous small town in the world to have my car stopped by a traffic cop to let a long line of sand trucks, grocery wagons, mail trucks and furniture vans go by. I was startled, stabbed into a state of hard-boiled reality. Could such commonplace, work-a-day things be in Hollywood the romantic?

Disillusion followed fast on disillusion—which was not Hollywood's fault, but the fault of a mind that conceives things and persons and places as they are not. Hollywood is, indeed, by the gift of the gods, romantically situated. It couldn't help that. But the town itself is a sleepy, humdrum, respectable, efficiently dead place. Unconventionality of any kind is looked on as a species of Bolshevism. As a substitute for unconventionality and individuality, "freaks" are permitted so long as they preach Uplift, Glad Tidings and Arty Artiness.

Respectability and gladness are the keynotes of Hollywood. "Movie" psychology influences, consciously or unconsciously, the minds of all the inhabitants: everything must "end happily"—your controversies, your day's work, your parties. Hollywood I found to be a kind of Utopia of which Little Lord Fauntleroy is King and Little Eva is his Queen Consort. The Glad Hand, the happy sparkle in the eye, the mellifluous voice, the slap on the back, the small favor, the lead-kindly light good-morning, are universal. It was the first thing I had to get by heart when I settled down in this town of eternal sunlight that rinses the soul clean of all earthly and carnal thoughts.

Gossip does, of course, from time to time break through the pellucid atmosphere of universal brotherhood. There are times when whispers about motion picture people and the arty artists buzz on the psychic radios, coming from no one knows whither, going to every one knows where.

This gossip is the one single blot on the "scutcheon of Hollywood, which is sans reproche but not sans peur. But spirit hovers over Hollywood protectingly, for no one ever squeals to the district attorney. This evil gossip, I soon found, was not native to the Hollywooders, but was a survival of evil in the souls of those, like myself who had emigrated from the Sodoms and Gomorrah of the Eastern seaboard. In fact, Hollywood is rapidly becoming a polished pearl set in the

benignant smile of Will Hays.

Of the wild rum and "strip" parties I found not a trace. Being a decadent New Yorker, I naturally went on the hunt for the far-famed night doings of Hollywood. A duller town after 10 o'clock at night I defy any one to find even in the Middle West. At 11 o'clock almost everybody is in bed. The answer—and it has been made to me scores of times—from motion-picture actors, actresses and directors to invitations for post-theater "parties" is almost invariably: "Can't do it—I'm up at 6 and on the lot at 8." Saturday night is sometimes an exception, when parties last until 1 or 2 in the morning.

The all-night party in Hollywood is virtually unknown. There is no night life on the streets at all. There is only one eating place open after 1 o'clock. At midnight Hollywood is noisy—mocking birds and nightingales by the thousands are wide awake. I used to prow around the town at night, my all-night New York complex seeking an outlet. I was eyes with suspicion by every policeman. I was not in a car and persons on foot after midnight are looked upon as potential crooks.

The "Times Square" (sic) of Hollywood at night is Cahuenga Avenue and Hollywood Boulevard. I went prowling down there three days after I arrived in Hollywood. Two newsboys were selling early editions of the Los Angeles papers. Not a human being was in sight. I peeped into the all-night restaurant and saw Tom Geraghty, Jack Pickford and George Fawcett sleepily spooning up ice-cream sodas. They had just come off the lot—late shooting. I went in, greeted them, and had just got into the opening bars of "Give My Regards to Broadway" when I was warned to "shut up!" It seems New York is a seditious word among the snoopers of Los Angeles. We have been ruled out of the Union.

All reality in Hollywood—and in Los Angeles—is sub rosa. Respectability is enforced. I felt the straitjacket fall over me the first week I was in town. Millions are at stake. No blemish must mar the pristine purity of the lives of the motion picture people. Their "home lives" are exploited to the limit. Secret dissipation comes out in the close-ups. Lines and wrinkles and haggard faces are not liked by the "fans" in the small towns. A breath on the mirror is fatal to a star and a producing corporation. Mum's the word. No one knocks. No one knows anything about anybody or anything. Abandon criticism all ye who enter the gates of Hollywood.

All is false, all is hard-working business. This uniformity is as stupefying as the climate. Everything in the life of the Hollywooder conforms to the "canned art." It was Wilde who said that Whistler invented the London fog. I found—or seemed to find—the same psychology of the reaction of the motion picture mind on the houses and scenery of Hollywood. The mountains look exactly like studio mountains. The sunsets seem to be painted on the sky. The houses are brittle, studio-looking things, unreal, pretty, ephemeral. They are, many of them, furnished to duplicate motion picture interiors: overloaded, tasteless, mathematically arranged party. There is no disorder anywhere. Upon entering many rooms of some of the motion picture directors, producers and stars I expected to hear "Lights! Camera! Shoot!" from some corner. Even at high noon, when walking down Hollywood or Sunset Boulevard, I never had the feeling that real sunlight was falling on the streets and houses. I'd instinctively look in back of me for a sun arc.

Books, art, literature, politics, religion and sex are subjects one hears rarely anywhere in this most respectable of towns. Such subjects are "European," "Eastern highbrow junk." The Mississippi River is the Atlantic Ocean to the Los Angelenians and Hollywooders; New York, the national capital; Philadelphia and Boston are foreign cities. The local papers seldom notice anything that happens north or east of southern California. The two best known words are "quiz" and "probe." One of these two words can be found every day in the Hollywood and Los Angeles papers in war type. Europe and all her affairs are farther away than Mars. This sylvan world-ignorance entranced me, fascinated me, rested me psychically and physically, fresh (or fatigued) as I was from the bloody trenches of New York first-page cables.

No matter how much they bore the big-city man from the East, the inhabitants of Hollywood never can bore one another, for they have three subjects that they hash and rehash night

and day, rain or shine, Yankees win or Yankees lose, come Michelmas or Candlemas. These three subjects of perennial and transcendent interest are real estate, automobiles and motion pictures.

Real estate, automobiles, "movies"—they have nothing else "to cut to" except the weather. And on the latter they have two old wheezes which are worked on every newcomer until he is rooted five years in the place. One is, "This is unusual weather" whenever it rains or it is cold (and I have experienced the coldest winter nights in Hollywood that I have ever experienced, when I had to wear double thickness Glastonbury woolens and a huge automobile coat), and the other is to take you to the top of a high hill and, pointing seaward, exclaim, "You can see Catalina from here on a clear day!"

I had been fed up for years on the extravagance, the waste, the devil-may-care spendthrift spirit that prevailed in Hollywood. Again I was disillusioned. Thrift is everywhere the watchword among these sorely maligned people. This thrift is provincial French. There is a savings bank on almost every corner in Hollywood. Everybody banks. Everybody has a checkbook. First your car, then your bankbook; only an "act of God" can ever destroy the faith of a Hollywooder in those two spiritual aids.

As to rum, there is more rum consumed in one block in the Forties in New York City in one night than in the whole of Hollywood in a week. Gin is the staff of life at all parties. Scotch is hard to get, is of inferior quality and comes very high. It is only served, I observed, at hotel farewell parties when super-directors and multimillionaire producers are going to Europe "for new material." At these parties respectability and discretion are again the watchwords. At the first horse laugh or loud wise crack the headliners retire and leave the evening to the night-hawks in the titling and scenario departments, who, being, nearly all of them, New Yorkers and San Franciscans, haven't, and never had, any reputation to lose. But this is as it should be.

From time immemorial the public has associated the lives of actors with loose living, ribaldry and immorality. It is a heritage from the days of troubadours, strolling players and the mountebanks of fairs. From those days to the thousand of actors who work in Hollywood is a span from the romantic age that is past to the hard-boiled business age in which we are all encrusted like flies in a colossal pot of jam—or hot lead. What Lizzie reads about her favorite female or male "movie" star in the bunk, junk and punk "movie" magazine and the actual facts are as far apart as the Volstead act and a dry America.

From 9 o'clock in the morning until sometimes after 2 o'clock the next morning these actors and actresses, high and low, work, sweat, fume in the most unromantic and dismal surroundings conceivable; their faces heavy with make-up, their bodies carrying pounds of strange clothes, others courting pneumonia with hardly any clothes at all—all the slaves of a megaphone, a whistle and a bell. When they leave the studios at night they are often as completely "all in" as the subway digger. There is the weight of nervous strain as well as the weight of physical strain.

Go on the loose, raise Cain, hit it up? They have neither the will nor the power after what they have gone through. I found them more sedate and intelligent, as a whole, in their few hours of leisure than an equal batch of Wall Street brokers, doctors, lawyers or newspaper men after they have quit the job. The eye of the director is on them the next morning at 9 o'clock; and he knows at a glance whether they've been asleep or not. And in Hollywood, as on Broadway, on the heels of every screen employee there walk twenty candidates for his or her job.

The motion picture people get a "wild kick" out of two things—both of which make a New Yorker laugh with a superior laugh. One is to be seen all dressed up in their doo-dads in the Cocoanut Grove at the Hotel Ambassador for the tourist yokelry to stare at. Like the music unto a gambler's ear of the click of the rolling ball it is to hear whispered in the Grove, "That's Pola!" "That's Milt Sills!" "That's John Barrymore!" "That's Bebe Daniels!" "That's Norma!" Besides, it's good business. The other "adventure" is speeding in their cars. A fine the next morning means country-wide publicity, which is manna and caviar to the kings and queens of the silver screen. But they are not unique in this respect. Ball-players and politicians have the same weakness.

A Saturday night dinner at Doug and Mary's house at Beverly Hills is the tamest affair imaginable. No drinks—not even pre-soup cocktails. Perfect cuisine. After dinner motion pictures, bits from the film that Mary or Doug is making. "Movies," auto (Continued on Page Three.)

FEEDS

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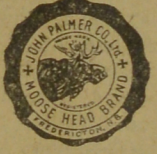
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