



Photo by Lumiere

Agnes—and a Bag of Peppermints

Agnes Ayres is as quaint and old-fashioned as her favorite sweet.

By Selma Howe

ONE day last winter I was in a little, New York shoe shop on Sixth Avenue, where the elevated railway shrieks and rumbles high overhead and the taxi drivers in the street below dodge the pillars that uphold that strange structure. Few persons knew about the shop in question, and most of those who did were members of the theatrical profession—for it was one of the few shops in this country which, at that time, sold the short-vamped French pumps, and everybody was afraid that if the whole town knew of its existence the price would go up and the supply would go down.

But Gloria Swanson, straight out of the West, knew all about it.

"It's on Sixth Street and Fiftieth Avenue," she calmly announced to our taxi driver, reversing her directions and thus upsetting his equilibrium; being a stranger in town little things like streets and avenues meant less than nothing to her. But finally we arrived, and just as Gloria was trying on her 'steenth pair of shoes, and deciding that she would have two bows instead of one, in walked a girl—a girl with sea-blue eyes and hair the color of bright new pennies.

"Gloria!" she cried, in a voice that you promptly wished you could hear again.

"Agnes!" cried that gorgeously gowned young person, hopping across the floor in her stocking feet. And then they embraced and kissed and embraced again, and finally settled down on the little bench beside me, and the newcomer was introduced as Agnes Ayres.

"And just think—we haven't seen each other for years—not since we both played small parts at Es-sanay, in Chicago!" Gloria told me. "And now here we are! Do tell me all about what you've been doing; of course, I've seen notices about your work, and some of your pictures—but tell me everything right from the beginning."

Photo by Albe

She's signed up for stardom now.



"Well," replied Agnes, "that's a big order, but I'll try. I guess that what I've liked best was the series of O. Henry stories I did for Vitagraph—I was *The Girl* in them, you know—I did twenty of them, and it was a wonderful experience.. I was under contract with Vitagraph for two years. And I supported Marjorie Rambeau and Nance O'Neil—you know how I always wanted to go on the stage, and used to beg to make personal appearances where my pictures were shown! Well, I kept that up here in New York, too; everybody else thought I was simply crazy, but I didn't care; I'd go to little theaters everywhere, and take mother along to sit in the back and tell me if she could hear me. The first few times she said it sounded as if a mouse might be squeaking somewhere. But I wouldn't give up. Then, pretty soon she said she could hear, and finally she said, 'For pity's sake, Agnes, put on the soft pedal; you're beginning to sound like a Kansas cyclone.'"

She paused to laugh at her own efforts, and Gloria laughed with her.

"We used to have such fun," she confided to me. "Agnes and I would go off in a corner at Essanay and eat candy and talk about our ambitions and make plans——"

"And that reminds me—I've got some candy right here," Agnes cut in, rummaging in her muff. I expected French bonbons at least, but she produced a bag of old-fashioned peppermints.

And she makes you think of that delicious, old-fashioned candy; she's just as wholesome and unassuming as it is; not a frill or an affectation about her.

She did twenty of the O. Henry stories before the camera.



Photo by Koehne

A girl with sea-blue eyes and hair the color of bright new pennies.

Not long after that shoe-store meeting, Gloria Swanson went back to the coast to begin another De Mille picture, and Agnes went with her, to play the lead in a Lasky production, "Held by the Enemy." That was the last of her free-lancing, for another producer, Al Kaufman, liked her work so well that he signed her up for stardom with a two year contract.

I saw her the other day in Hollywood, and as I crossed the hotel dining room to her table I wondered a little, foolishly; wondered if she'd have changed much, or if she'd be as sweet and unassuming as she had been that day in New York. But I needn't have; she was as natural as ever.

