

MY LIFE

Illustrated by
Corinne Dillon



Slowly rage began to well up in me. Why should they look at me like that?

Last month Clara Bow told how her mother, who was of French descent, married her father, the youngest of a neighboring Scotch-English family of fourteen. The newly married couple moved to a small place in Brooklyn. Clara's father had difficulty making a place in life for himself. Troubled days came. Their first two children died almost at birth. Clara was the third. She grew up to be the tomboy of the neighborhood. She never had a doll in her life—but she had a place on the street corner baseball team.

At school Clara read of a motion picture contest. She went to a small photographer and had two pictures made for a dollar. They were terrible, but she sent them to the contest judges.

NEXT MONTH—A third thrilling installment.

HOPE is a funny and wonderful thing. Every bit of reason I had, every logical thought process I followed, told me I had no chance to win any contest to enter motion pictures. It was silly to even dream of it. There wasn't a single person who knew me, except my Dad, who wouldn't have laughed loud and long at the mere idea. Why, the contest was open to everyone in the United States. The world was full of beautiful girls, girls with clothes and education and advantages of every kind,

who wanted to go into pictures. They would enter such a contest.

What chance would I have?

I lay awake night after night telling myself all these things, preparing myself for what I felt was an inevitable disappointment.

Yet hope went on singing in my breast. Sometimes I think that is why hope was included with faith and charity by St. Paul, as the greatest thing to possess. Hope is the thing that enables us to try to accomplish the impossible, that urges us on to heights that, without the encouragement of its music, we would never dare attempt.

Finally, a letter came. My hands were cold as I opened it. I don't think I breathed for several minutes. I was afraid



One of Clara Bow's first portraits, made by Muray just after winning the contest

STORY *By* CLARA BOW

as told to

Adela Rogers St. Johns

Part II. *Miss Bow tells of the days when ridicule, disaster and defeat nearly ended her career*

to look. At last I did. It told me to come to the magazine offices.

That didn't mean anything. The judges in this contest were Howard Chandler Christy, Harrison Fisher and Neysa McMein. Judges of beauty, all right. No fooling them. Still, it was one tiny step nearer.

My school work was going all to pieces under the strain. I couldn't keep my mind on it for a second. I was just one big pulse of hope and excitement. Every teacher I had—I was in my third year—was sore at me. But I couldn't help it.

On the day set, I went to the contest offices. I sat rigid all the way. It seemed that ages passed. I had a fantastic idea that my hair would have turned from red to white by the time I arrived.

The office was full of girls and my heart just flopped when I saw them. Every bit of hope and assurance

oozed right out through my boots. Oh, they were pretty girls. To me they seemed the most beautiful girls in all the world. Blondes and bru-

nettes, no vulgar little redheads. They were elegantly dressed, perfectly groomed, with lovely, manicured hands and slim, delicate legs in sheer stockings. They had poise.

I hadn't dressed up because I had nothing to dress up in. I had never had a manicure nor a pair of chiffon stockings in my life. I had never even been close to the scent of such perfumes as filled that room. I wore the one and only thing I owned. A little plaid wool dress, a sweater and a woolly red tam. I hadn't thought much of that angle. I had only looked at my face, and that was disappointing enough.

But now, in this gathering, I was painfully aware of how I was dressed. I felt presumptuous to be there at all. Shame and humiliation overcame me.

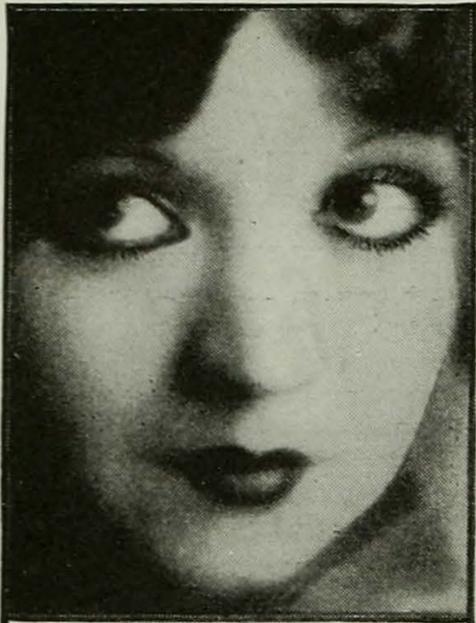
Those girls didn't leave me much room for doubt that the impression I made was as bad as I thought it would be. Eyebrows went up, noses elevated, there were snickers here and there. At first I wilted. Tears came up and choked me, but I beat them back somehow. I had learned not to cry in a hard school—on the pavement of Brooklyn with a gang of boys.

But slowly rage began to well up in me. Why should they look at me like that? Why need they be so unkind? I wasn't much, but I knew I wouldn't be as cruel as that to anyone that was worse off than I was. Suffering had taught me how bitter suffering can be, and I never, never wanted to inflict it on anybody else.

[CONTINUED ON
PAGE 116]



"Oh, I'm the girl all right," I pleaded. "But I've lost so many parts because I was too young that I put on mother's dress"



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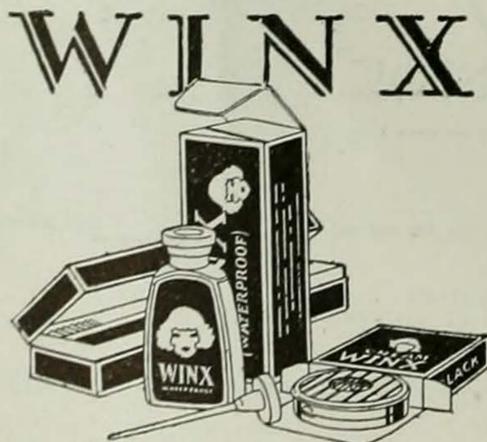
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My Life Story

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39]

So I managed to keep my chin up and my eyes began to blaze and for a moment I reverted back to the little street tomboy and wanted to sail into those pretty, painted, perfumed girls.

Just then the door opened and some men and a couple of ladies came out. They walked around the room, looking everybody over, very carefully, as though they had been so many statues. I tried to keep out of sight, I didn't know who the people were and I was too busy trying to keep from crying to have an idea of posing or making an impression.

SUDDENLY one of the men said, "There's an interesting face—that kid with the red tam and the gorgeous eyes."

I looked around. I was the only girl with a red tam. The blood came singing up and nearly suffocated me. The words kept ringing in my ears. "Interesting face." "Gorgeous eyes." Me—me—little Clara Bow.

They went back in. Several girls went in, came out. Pretty soon I was called. A few minutes before I thought of how I'd ritz those girls, if I should happen to get a summons. But when they called me I was too excited to remember a detail like that.

They talked to me. What made me think I could act?

Well, I couldn't exactly tell them. I don't know why I can act—if I can. Only, in the many hours I had spent in motion picture theaters I had always watched intently and I always had a queer feeling about actors and actresses on the screen. Sometimes what they did seemed just right. Again, I felt they were doing it wrong. I knew I would have done it differently. I couldn't analyze it, but I could always feel it. It just threw me right out of the feeling of reality about a picture when an actress made a gesture or used an expression that seemed wrong to me.

I TRIED to explain, and they all laughed a little, but kindly, and said I should wait for a test.

I think there were about twelve girls who had tests made that day.

They all wanted to do it first. I didn't. So I never said a word. I sat there, though, through every one of those tests and watched everything that was done, everything they were told, every mistake they made. They all had to do the same thing—walk in, pick up a telephone, laugh, look worried, then terrified. I got it finally so I knew how I was going to do it and just what I was going to think about while I was doing it.

Gradually, little by little, the tests narrowed down. I went back and forth, making new ones as more and more were eliminated. Each time I expected to be the next one to go—but I didn't. It was tough getting the carfare and I had only the one dress.

I had been out of school a lot, going over to New York, and the teachers had been complaining and telling me I was

sure to flunk. What did it matter? If I failed in this, I'd go to work somewhere.

The day I went to the offices—it had in some marvellous fashion narrowed down to a statuesque blonde beauty and me—I got home about five o'clock.

Mother was sitting motionless in the dining room. Her face was white and I had never seen her eyes look like that, even when she had her worst spells.

She said, "Where have you been?"

Just that in the most awful, cold tone.

It seems that one of the teachers from high school had been there to tell her how much I was absent and that I would fail if something wasn't done about it.

Well, I told her where I had been and what I was doing. I told her it looked as though I had a chance to win this contest and if I did it meant a job in the pictures and a chance to make good and I could do lots of things for her.

SHE fainted dead away, not one of her choking fits, but just a dead faint. I was so scared I hardly knew what to do. I ran and tried to lift her up and threw water on her. She didn't come to for a long time and when she did she just sat and cried and cried.

"You are going straight to hell," she said. "I would rather see you dead."

I had never dreamed she would feel like that. I hadn't told her because I didn't want to disappoint her and put her through the strain of waiting, she was so nervous. Besides, I was ashamed. I knew she didn't think I was pretty or clever, and I thought she'd say I was a fool.

Dad came in just then and we tried to soothe her, but she just sat and stared at me, with those awful, burning eyes, and her face so white and still.

So I cried, too, and promised her I'd give it up right away.

But Dad told her she had no right to ask such a promise of me. He said he knew I had talent. He said I might not be pretty, but I was different, I was a type. He said I had a chance for a real success, with a big future and that outside that the best I could hope for was a job in a store or an office with long, hard hours and little pay and no future. He said pictures weren't any more dangerous for a girl, they weren't as dangerous as working in stores and offices and that I had always been a good girl and she had no right to feel that way about me.

FOR a long time she didn't answer, just sitting there white and still, her hands hanging down. At last she said, "All right."

Three days later they sent for me and told me I had won the contest and would have a good part in a picture and all the publicity that had been promised and everything.

It was hard for me to believe. I kept thinking they'd change their minds and every time the postman stopped at our door my heart stopped beating. They told me the judges had picked me because

I was "different" and had a unique personality.

I went back to high school and told them. The girls only laughed at me. Oh, how they laughed. They just decided that any beauty contest I could win must be a bum one. Every time they looked at me they giggled and giggled. So I decided not to go to school any more. It hurt to be laughed at. I thought maybe they would be glad.

THEN began a terribly hard time. I guess all contests are like that. For weeks, nothing happened. I waited and waited. I haunted the office. Panic was growing inside of me, driving me crazy. After all I had been through, all my great joy, was this going to be a failure?

But at last I hung around so much they decided to get me a job to get rid of me. Or maybe they really meant to all the time and were just busy. Christy Cabanne was making a picture with Billie Dove as the star. They took me over to him and explained the situation and he took one look at me and almost had a fit.

"Don't tell me she won a beauty contest," he said.

It almost broke my heart.

Anyway, he agreed to give me a small part.

But there was another stumbling block. I had to have four dresses to play the part and I had to furnish them myself. I didn't have four dresses. I didn't have one dress. Dad didn't have any money—yes, he had enough to buy about half a dress. So then I did something I'd never done before. I put my pride in my pocket and for the first and last and only time I went to some of my relatives for help.

IHAD an aunt in New York who was rich. They had a beautiful home and one of the girls had made a good marriage and the son was in Wall Street or something. I had never been in their house, but I went. I told my aunt the whole story. I didn't need much and I would pay it back out of the first salary I got. It was my big chance and it looked like I was going to lose it because I didn't have four dresses.

She put me out of the house.

While I was walking away, just sunk, I heard footsteps behind me and somebody called my name. It was her son, my cousin. He didn't know me at all, but he had heard our conversation. He was interested in pictures, and he didn't think about them as his mother did.

"I don't think you've got a chance, kid," he said, "but I like your spirit. Here's all the change I've got."

He handed me eighty dollars.

Eighty dollars may not sound much to buy four dresses. It wasn't. But it was so much more than nothing. I went to a second hand place, to a wholesale place, and I got four dresses. I know now they must have been pretty terrible. But then I thought they were magnificent.

The next day I went to the studio ready to work.

I had never put on a make-up. While I was doing the tests for the contest they had an actress who made up all the girls. Now I had to go alone. But I was encouraged when they put me in a dressing room with four other girls. I thought

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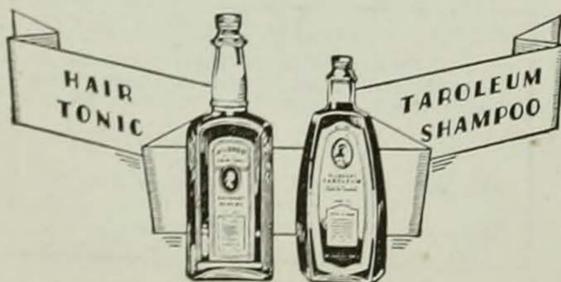


A NEW danger threatens the beautiful hair of American women. Tight hats are largely blamed for baldness among men. Now fashion decrees that women shall wear close-fitting hats over their bobbed hair. What will be the result—? Here are two simple treatments—approved by a well-known physician—to offset the harmful effect of tight fitting hats.

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WILDROOT



surely they would help me. But they didn't. They just laughed. They said, "Go ahead and learn like the rest of us did."

Sometimes I wonder about things like that. Most of the people in pictures are so kind. It seemed as though fate were just throwing everything in my way, giving me every possible obstacle. I don't think those girls meant to be unkind. They were careless and self-centered. Most of the unkindness in the world comes from thoughtlessness. I am sure of that.

I DID the best I could. When I came on the set Mr. Cabanne thought I had gone crazy. I looked like a clown. I tell you I didn't have to use any cold cream to take that grease paint off. I washed it off with good hot tears. The next day I watched the other girls and learned a little and got by all right.

My part wasn't very big but I had about five scenes. In one of them I was supposed to cry. Mr. Cabanne didn't seem to think I could, but I did. It was always easy for me to cry. All I had to do was to think of home. He said I had done it well and it seemed to please him. After that he was kinder, and helped me.

When the picture came to Brooklyn I was so excited I couldn't sleep. I asked some of the girls from school to go with me to see it. I guess maybe I wanted to show off a little. I wanted to prove to them what I could do. I thought of those five scenes and I felt sure they'd respect me after that. I'd be a real movie actress.

We went. They ran the picture. There wasn't a single shot of me in it anywhere.

The girls certainly made life miserable for me. You can't blame them. But it was a bitter blow to me.

But not the worst one.

Mother was growing steadily worse and her thoughts seemed to center on me.

She came up to me one day on the back porch where I was doing some washing and said, "I think I'll kill you. You would be much better off dead. This is a terrible world. Motion pictures are terrible. I think it is my duty to kill you."

I was frightened but—it was more than that. I was so sorry for her, I loved her so. I knew she loved me. I never mentioned pictures to her after that, but every once in a while she would start talking about how it was her duty to kill me. I told Dad and it worried him terribly and we had a new doctor but he said there was nothing he could do.

THINGS weren't breaking for me at all. Winning the contest hadn't seemed to mean a thing. I wore myself out trying to find work, going from studio to studio, from agency to agency, applying for every possible part. But there was always something. I was too young, or too little, or too fat. Usually I was too fat. When I told them that I'd won this contest, they only laughed. They said the woods were full of girls who'd won some bum beauty contest and they were mostly dumb or they wouldn't have been in any beauty contest in the first place. Which I guess maybe was right. And I couldn't wear clothes and I wasn't pretty enough.

But finally I got a job. Elmer Clifton

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was going to make a picture called "Down to the Sea in Ships." He wanted a small, tomboy type of girl to play a second lead. He hadn't much money to spend and couldn't afford to pay much salary for this part. He had been at a casting agent's office and they had been going over all the people they knew without hitting on the right one. The contest manager had sent Mr. Clifton copies of the magazines containing my picture. After the agency visit he happened to open one of them to a picture of me. It was one in the red tam and was part of the publicity from the contest, so you see it did do me some good.

HE said, "Who the dickens is that? Clara Bow. Cute name. That's what I want. Send for that kid."

They sent for me. But I was terribly discouraged by then. I was so sick of being told I was too young or too small. So I decided to take a desperate chance. I put my hair up, sneaked one of mother's dresses and went over done up like that.

When Mr. Clifton saw me he said, "Great heavens, you're not the girl I saw in the picture. I wanted a kid, to play a tomboy part. You won't do at all."

Just think. I had guessed wrong and nearly missed my chance. I started explaining so fast the words stumbled over each other. I said, "Oh, I'm the girl all right. But I've lost so many parts because I was too young that I put on mother's clothes to see if I couldn't look older."

That made him laugh and I went home and got my own clothes and came back and got the part and fifty dollars a week. That was more money than I knew there was in the world.

But we had to go away. They were going to make the picture up in New Bedford. I'd never been away from home a night in my life and I knew mother wouldn't let me go. But Mr. Clifton arranged for the cameraman's wife to go along and be with me as a chaperon—so Clara Bow went on her first location with a chaperon.

I WENT home all happy and thrilled. Mother was sitting there, and she was very quiet and didn't say much. She looked well, though, there was color in her face. Father was working and we had dinner and she was quiet, but very pleasant and sweet. Then I went to bed. I hadn't told her about the job. I thought I'd wait until father was there.

I don't know how long I had been asleep when I woke up and realized there was somebody in the room. My heart was beating hard and funny. The door was a little open and in the light from the other room I saw mother standing there, in a white nightgown. Her hair was braided over each shoulder and hung down to her knees.

In her hand was the butcher knife. I said, "Mother?"

She didn't answer. Just came closer to the bed.

I said "Mother, darling, what are you doing?"

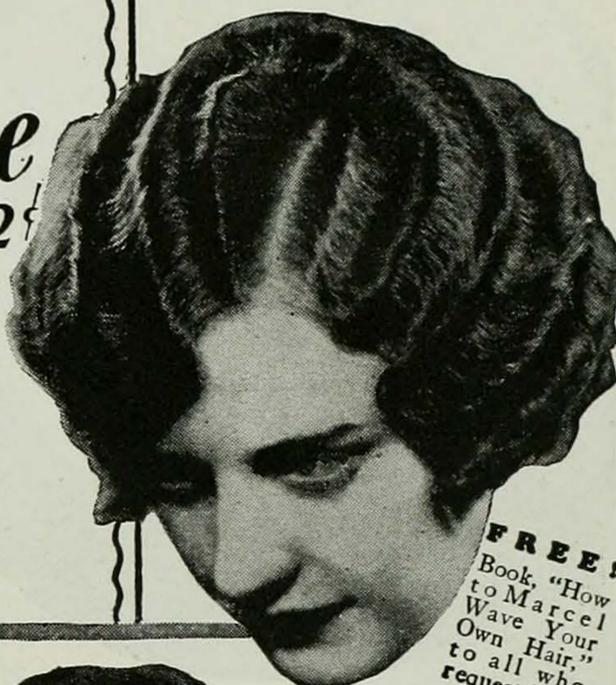
She pinioned my hands down. "I'm going to kill you, Clara," she said very quietly. "It will be better."

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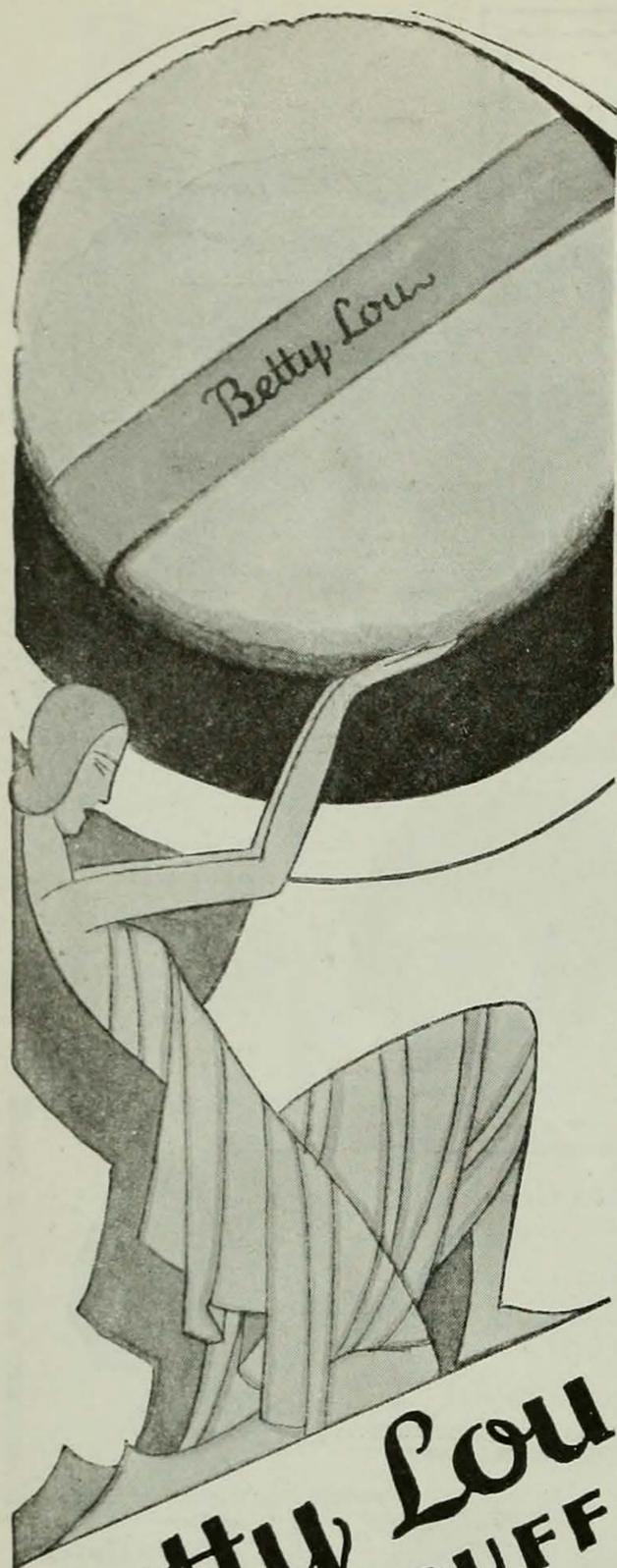
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The room went all black. I fought to keep consciousness. I knew if I didn't I was lost—we were both lost. I kept thinking. "Oh, poor mother, poor mother, how terrible she will feel if she ever knows she has done this. I mustn't let her."

I moved. The knife came closer. The hands tightened like steel.

I STARTED to talk, to plead, to soothe, watching her all the time. She didn't seem to hear me. Her eyes burned into mine. I don't know how long it was, but it seemed hours. At last, when she seemed to relax for a final effort, I made a desperate spring, as swiftly, as strongly as I could. It knocked her away from me. I ran across the room and out the door and turned and locked her in.

Outside I was so weak I could hardly move. I could hear her inside trying the door. The handle turned. I wanted to go back in and comfort her. But I was afraid to. I was too terrified to stay alone. I went downstairs and asked the lady there if I could sit there awhile. She looked at me, but didn't ask me any questions and she said I could stay.

I sat there all night. At five o'clock, I heard Daddy's step. I ran to meet him. Poor Daddy. We went up together. There was no sound from the room. We opened the door and she was sleeping on my bed, as peacefully as a child, her hands folded, the long, golden braids over her shoulders. When she woke up she didn't know anything about it.

I was glad to go away then. She didn't make any objection, when Dad explained it to her. But the shock had upset me more than I knew. All the thirteen weeks we were on location I was ill. I knew it was only nerves and I fought against it. But I couldn't sleep. I used to wake up crying all the time.

When I came home, mother was there. Dad told me he had had her away in a

sanitarium for treatment. They said she wasn't insane. You couldn't call her that because she was so intelligent. She could answer any question, talk well, be as calm. . . . Then once in a while these spells came on. But she seemed so much better Dad brought her home. She wanted to be at home.

But she began to be unhappy again about my going into pictures. Once she said, "You don't take me to the studio with you. You're ashamed of me. You think I'm crazy." That broke my heart. I was so proud of her.

So I decided to give up pictures. Maybe mother would be better. I couldn't bear to make her unhappy like that. So I hunted around and got a job answering the phones in a doctor's office. I hated it. The trip was long and the pay small, but it was all right.

And then I started trying to have a little fun. I just had to. I knew a lot of young people around Brooklyn, boys I'd been to school with. They were always asking me to go places. The boys seemed to like me and I liked them, though I had never been in love, not even a kid romance. I never had a love affair until after I went to Hollywood.

ONE night I went to a party with some young friends, two boys and a girl. We were having a fine time, dancing and playing the phonograph, just like a bunch of kids will, when the telephone rang.

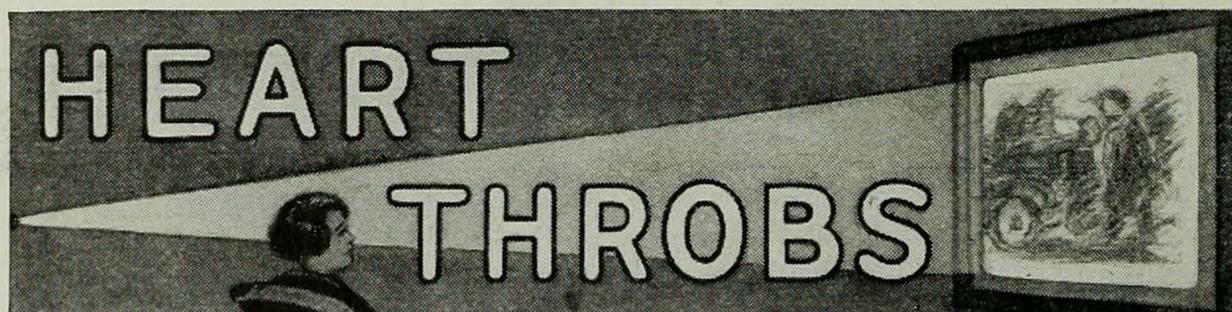
It was my father and he said I was to come home right away.

I didn't want to go. I said: "Oh, Dad, please don't make me. I'm having such a good time. If mother's having one of her spells, she'll come out of it all right."

That was the only time I'd ever said anything like that. But I was only a kid and I wanted a little fun.

But Dad insisted. He said, "You'd better come right home, Clara."

(To be Continued)



Jonesboro, La.

I had accumulated a small amount from my pension, which I receive from the Government due to injuries received in the World War. It seemed as though I was only one more despondent person in the world, as I had lost both my legs just above the knees while fighting for my country. I am unable to work.

As there is little entertainment to be found in the smaller towns, the movies have certainly helped me while away the long hours which I have to pass every day.

Upon entering the theater one afternoon, I noticed that "The Big Parade" was to be shown. I sup-

posed it would be "just another movie."

Instead, it was a masterpiece—superb.

I entered, a lonely soul. After seeing John Gilbert's excellent portrayal of the American Soldier, I left the theater, still with my loneliness, but also with new life, and a desire instilled within me to do something for someone, even though this seemed, at that time, impossible.

A National Red Cross Drive was on at this time, and later, that same afternoon, I gladly contributed my savings to this Great Mother.

T. B. W.