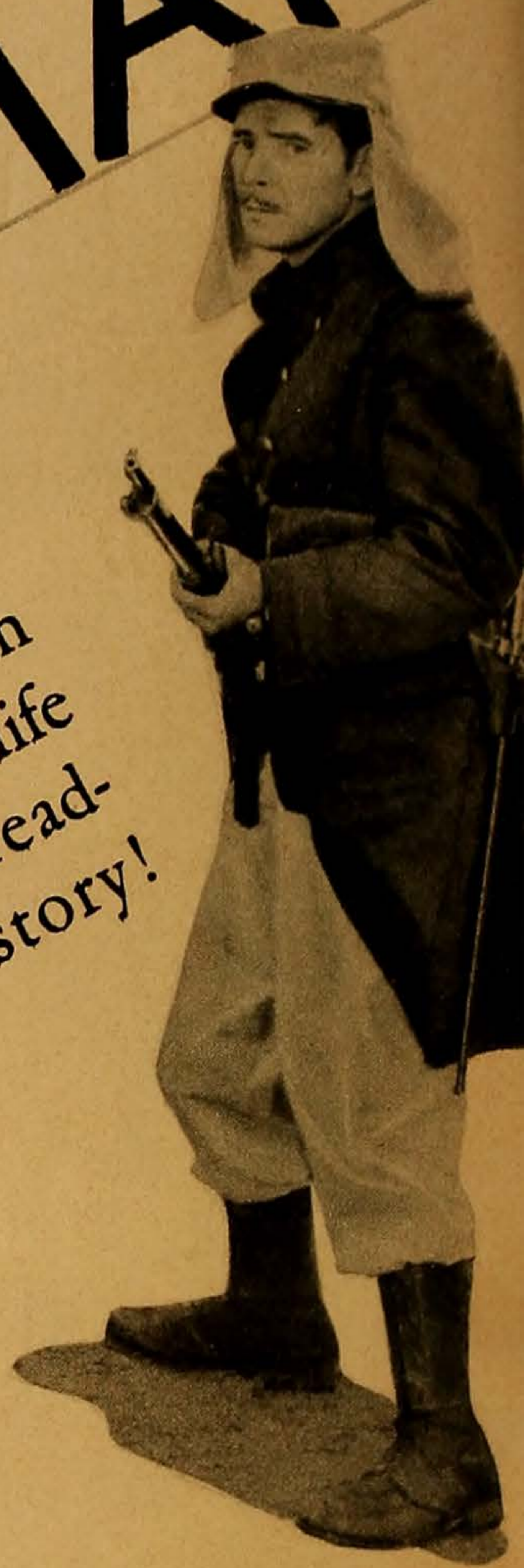


By Harry Lang

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF RONALD COLMAN REVEALED

Ronald Colman believes in keeping his private life private. Don't miss reading this revealing story!



Having finished *Under Two Flags*, Ronald Colman is now making *Lost Horizon*, under the direction of Frank Capra

THREE I've seen death reach out for Ronald Colman—first time was a few years ago in Spain on the ranch of the famed Spanish grandee who raises the fiercest and deadliest bulls used in Spain's bull-fights. Colman was traveling in Spain. He'd caught up, in Madrid, with Ruth Chatterton and George Brent. There they'd met a newspaperman who's a bull-fight fan. His delight is to take American visitors to the bull ranch, get them feeling good, and then urge them into a bull ring to make a pass or two at some of the bulls. "They won't hurt you," he tells them, blandly. "They're only young bulls." He doesn't add, though, the tales of the banderilleros who've been killed there, gored to death by those "harmless" young bulls. . . . They're not tales to talk about.

Well, anyway, Colman fell for the young American newspaperman's gag. Feeling good, he let himself be handed a red cape, and led into the ring. In the stands, Chatterton and Brent (George had already made a successful pass or two in the ring) laughed at Colman, baiting the bull. Of a sudden, the laugh changed to a cry of horror. Colman, after all a tyro at this sort of thing, had slipped, fallen full length. And the bull, already snorting with rage, was lunging at him . . .!

In a spot like that, one of two things may happen: the man on the ground may be gored, probably fatally. Or the banderilleros who stand about may, luckily, rush in and with their own capes and shouts and gestures, distract the bull and divert his attack. In this case, the bull charged straight for Colman, who couldn't possibly get out of the way. It looked like the end for him. Chatterton covered her eyes; Brent was leaping into the

ring. Then, by one of those quirks of fate, the bull caught the flash of a banderillero's madly-waving cape at one side, and in that instant he swerved, made for the other man instead of Colman. It was sheer luck—or maybe it was that same providence that saved Colman one day, later, at the M-G-M studios.

That was when they were shooting that Devil's Island picture, some time ago. There was a scene wherein Colman dives from a low pier into the sea. Soldiers swarm the pier after him, but Colman does not reappear. They believe he has drowned, and leave. But all the time, Colman is supposed to have come up under the pier while the soldiers tramp vainly overhead, seeking him. Something went wrong. The set wasn't strongly built. Colman did his dive neatly. The soldiers swarmed the pier. And Colman, as calculated, came up under it. But the pier, with the soldiers' weight, had sagged several inches. There wasn't room for Colman to bring his head out of water so he could breathe. The trampling overhead of the soldiers drowned out the noise of his knockings—and almost drowned Colman, too. By the time his plight was discovered he was so exhausted that it was an hour or more before he was sufficiently recovered to resume shooting. That was his second escape from the Old Man with the Scythe.

And the third—that was just the other day near Yuma, Arizona, where they were shooting *Under Two Flags*. In one scene, a knife is thrown to hit Colman, but it misses, sticks quivering into a post, just beside [Continued on page 70]

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The Private Life of Ronald Colman Revealed

[Continued from page 32]

his head. At least, that's the way the scene should have gone. 20th Century-Fox had hired Hollywood's most famous knife-thrower. In 20 practice throws, he had stuck the knife into the post. Then came the "take." Colman walked, unconcerned, into the scene. Director Frank Lloyd gave the signal for the knife-thrower to do his stuff. His arm flipped, the knife whizzed flashing. It zipped by Colman's ear so close he could hear it hiss. It hit the post—BUT it didn't stick—the knife ricocheted, grazed Colman's neck, and buried itself in the sand. One more inch and Colman's jugular vein would have been severed. Colman just grinned. Director Lloyd turned his back, fearing the worst.

SAY anything? No—he didn't say anything. Colman never says anything. That's his one predominant characteristic—the fact that he doesn't talk. He's a male Garbo, that way. Those escapes from death show that luck must be with him. He lived through those, he'll probably live through others. Live to go on and keep adding fine portrayals; live to go on enjoying life in his quiet, retiring fashion; live, perhaps, to marry again . . .

Yes, we might as well mention it. It's the question that is asked by the great majority of fans who ask about Colman: Will he marry again? He did have one unfortunate venture but it was ended by divorce not so long ago. As to his plans, if any, about women, Colman, himself, is as silent as three sphinxes. BUT—and this is significant!—there's a studio attache who works pretty closely to Colman, much of the time. "Marry again?" says this chap, when asked about Colman's love-life; "Oh, hell—I wouldn't be surprised if he runs off tomorrow, elopes and marries her." "Marries who?" you ask. And the fellow grins and apes Colman by not mentioning a name. But we in Hollywood know that his feminine intimates are Elizabeth Allan, Ruth Chatterton, and Benita Hume.

As for asking Ronnie—don't. Because he won't answer. Ronnie will not talk about women. He's a 100-per cent adherent to the gentleman's code. There has risen, from his silence about women, the legend that he's a woman-hater. Far from it, FAR! He's quite the ladies' man. As a host to women he's almost too solicitous. He showers them with those little attentions they love. Whoever happens to be with him, that woman must imagine that she's the only love in his life. What with jumping up and down to light her cigarette, help her in and out of her car, and see to her every imaginable whim before she's even aware of it herself, Colman, in a woman's presence, is the acme of perpetual attentiveness. What a man . . .! But talk about them? —NO! Not even his best friends know, from him, who's tops in his heart—whether it's Benita or somebody else. They can only judge and guess by his actions, and hers.

HIS HOME—and only recently has he consented to move into a Beverly Hills house—is a bachelor's haven. All his servants are men. The only time the female influence really disturbs it is when Ronnie's Filipino houseboy falls in love with some Boulevard blonde and fails to show up for work on time. Then Ronnie gets another Filipino. Major-Domo of the Colman menage is one Tommy Turner, whose duties are so inclusive that he's a sort of

"deputy-colman." If he wasn't such a swell guy, you'd call him Colman's "stooge." He's social secretary, housekeeper, liaison-man, companion and friend to Colman. Without Tommy as his buffer, Colman would suffer. Much of his hermit-like home life would be less easy on him.

Colman detests any form of ostentation, or personal ballyhoo. He doesn't care about publicity. And as for his personal "flash"—why, there simply isn't any. He doesn't dress up. And his car—there's a perfect example. I don't think even Garbo would be seen riding in what Colman quaintly calls his automobile. It's a super-annuated old heap but he loves it. He likes to get into some old clothes, pull a battered cap down over his face, get in that ancient car of his and drive somewhere alone. That's his idea of a swell time. And it'll probably be the desert he'll drive to—where he can get away from people. Even in midsummer, when the thermometer is 'way up above the 100-mark, Colman will drive out to his desert shack just to get away from crowds.

Colman carries that gentlemanly trait of his of "not-talking-about-women" even further. He carries it to the point wherein he won't even talk about his enemies!—and that, in Hollywood, is extraordinary. Like anyone else who's found success, Ronnie has enemies—people who envy him, and who have done him dirt. But those who are close to Ronnie can't recall his ever having said an unkind word about anyone, no matter the provocation. The very deepest to which he's ever gone in expressing dislike for any individual was a few months ago, when someone asked him what he thought of a certain fellow who'd just played him an unspeakably dirty trick. Colman paused a minute, and finally said: "Er—well—ah—the fellow's a bit annoyin' . . ."

Social life for Colman is expressed in terms of a tennis game with Bill Powell. Bill is one of Ronnie's few close friends. Besides Bill, there are the Dick Barthelmesses, the Warner Baxters, and a few others. Warner's one of his pals, but it took Warner a long time to know him. Ever since he can remember, Baxter admits, Colman has been his ideal. And now, Warner, with Powell and Barthelmess, and "Liz" Allan and Ruth Chatterton and Benita—these constitute a sort of closed circle, a social world of their own. Their gatherings are confined to the walls of their own homes; they shun and abhor night-clubs. They believe in individual privacy. They are the few in Hollywood who have, for the most part, succeeded in keeping their private lives private. And Colman has ever been their ring-leader.

BESIDES tennis, boats are his great passion—boats and travel. He wants to own a boat of his own, but can't find one quite "crummy" enough to satisfy him. He doesn't want it for swank. They try to sell him fancy yachts like Chaplin's or Howard Hughes', but all Colman wants is a sturdy, old tub that'll sail the seas and not be pointed out by Catalina glass-bottom boat sightseers.

When and if he finally finds one like that, he wants to sail to out-of-the-way places, and not be "receptioned" to death. He hates that sort of thing. That's why he finds it so difficult to travel—he can't get

away from the fan-worship when he's recognized. He's tried hard enough. Usually, for example, he hires a courier when traveling abroad. The courier's job is to precede him from place to place and make hotel reservations. In a swank hotel he reserves rooms in Colman's name and in a little side-street dump he reserves rooms for himself. Then Colman slips into town, moves into the side-street joint, and lets the courier occupy the swanky suite reserved for the star! The courier tells the swank hotel proprietor that M'sieu' Colman has change' hees mind and weel not come to town. And in the meantime, Colman, *incognito*, is having the time of his life right there in town!

Once it didn't work. That, too, was in Spain. The courier had done his stuff, but somehow, the owner of the little side-street hotel had gotten wise to the gag. Colman didn't know this, though. Comfortable that night in his little second-rate room, Colman answered a knock at the door, was astounded to see the manager, resplendent in evening clothes, inquire suavely: "An, now, weel Meestair Colman please to come to de banquet?" Colman, aghast, investigated—and there in the dining hall, sure enough, was a banquet table with scores of the town's big shots waiting for him. Admitting defeat, Colman sat at the festal board, learned that the astute hotel-manager had plastered the town with posters announcing "un gran fete" at which Colman was to preside, and sold tickets to the banquet at five dollars a head! Next day, Colman left town on the first train.

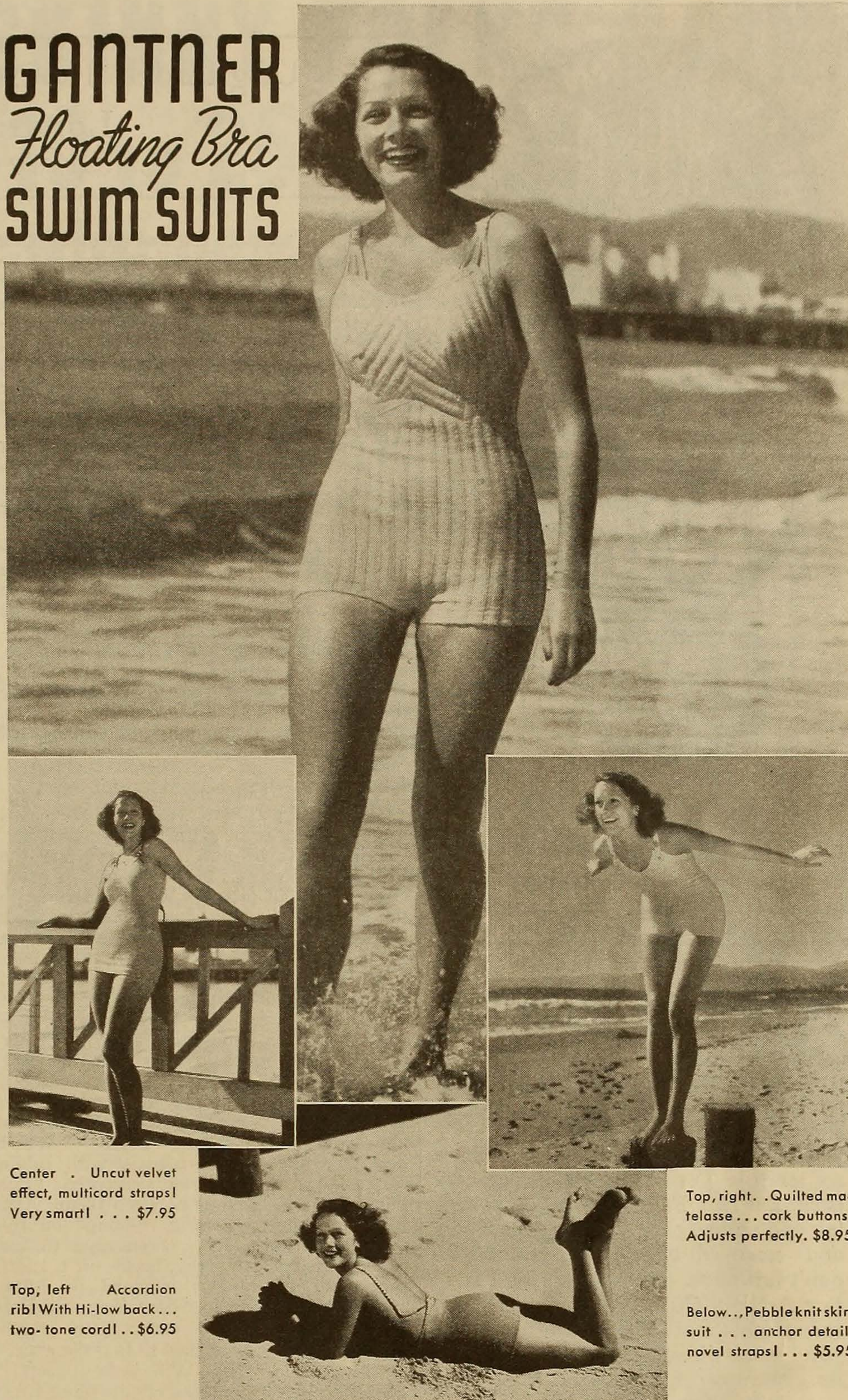
Yet with all his crowd-dodging, Colman is a charming fellow among those with whom he works. He's not snooty. To his co-workers, he's Ronnie, and not "Mister Colman." He doesn't "star it" around the lot. He doesn't have a private table at the studio commissary for lunch; he'd rather have a ham sandwich at the counter, with a fellow from the publicity department. This lack of swank manifests itself in downright timidity at times. Just the other day, at MGM, he wanted to visit a set next to the one he was working on. Between "takes" on his own picture, he wandered over, but the guard gave him a dirty look, not recognizing him. Colman, of course, could have said to the man: "Look here, I'm Ronald Colman and I want to visit this set." But did he? No—frightened, he fled to his Tommy Turner who arranged the visit.

IT'S HARD to sum the man up. His friends insist he's one of the grandest guys in the world. To others, he's a tight-lipped stranger. To interviewers, he's a terror, because they get nothing out of him about which to write. But once, to an interviewer, Colman himself said some highly illuminating things. He was discussing *Sidney Carton*, the character he portrayed in the memorable *Tale of Two Cities*.

"*Carton*," Colman said, "is the direct antithesis of the Hollywood yes-man. It was impossible for *Carton* to make compromises with others, or with himself, or with the problems of life. He was the most unheroic of heroes, but he had the fundamental fortitude to march to the guillotine with a smile on his lips, because he was strong enough to be himself. He'd never truckle to anybody; he'd always be himself, and damn the consequences. He utterly lacked the desire to court popularity, although he was a brilliant man. He lived his life without a thought for the impression he was making on those around him . . ."

That's what Ronnie Colman said about *Sidney Carton*. I wonder if he knew, as he said those words, that he was giving the best picture OF HIMSELF?

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