



Photo by Donald Biddle Keyes

BEAUTIFUL Betty Compson—only her dearest friends know what hardship and despair preceded her screen triumphs. For the first time this inspiring story is told on the opposite page. It is a story that will interest every one.

Some Bumps on the Road to Stardom

Contrary to what many people believe, Betty Compson did not glide easily into stardom. Her real history is one that either will make you pause and hold back, or else will inspire you to push on. Whichever way it affects you, you will find it a story of unusual interest.

By Constance Palmer

THE popular idea of heroes and heroines of motion pictures is that they shoot meteorically to the dizzy mountain heights of success, and feed to satiation on the fruits pluckable there.

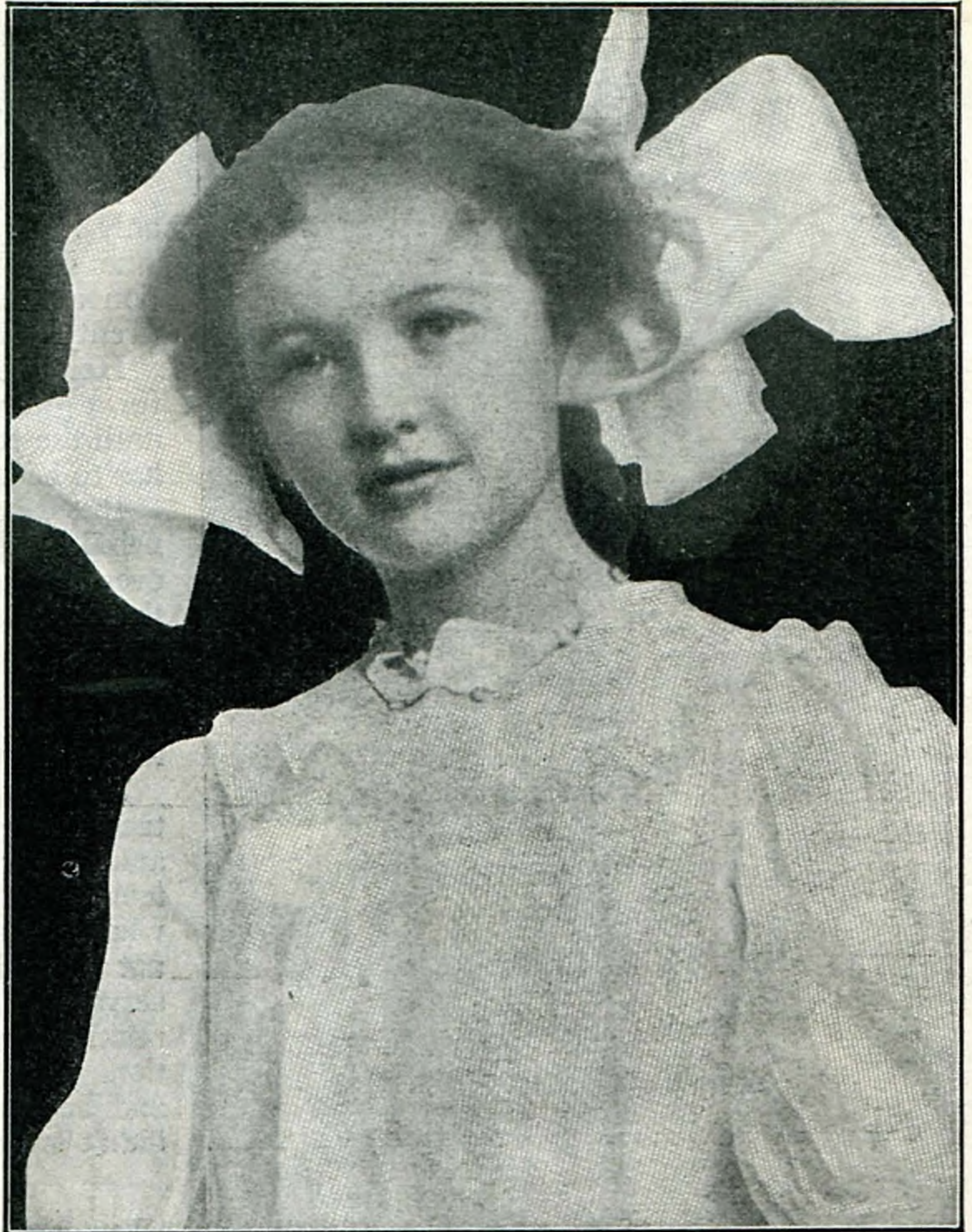
That makes a good story, but it doesn't happen to be true. In order to forestall contradiction, I will say that in some cases, extremely rare, motion-picture careers actually have been meteoric, but in many more cases, the struggle has been slow and bitter. The lurid tales of success based on the irregular interest of managers and directors may, in the prehistoric days before the all-revealing, merciless close-ups, have been true, but the substantial fame of performers to-day rests on a solid foundation of hard work. There is Betty Compson, for instance.

Betty Compson is looked up to by millions of young girls as the epitome of everything they would like to be. She appears before them in expensive clothes, in expensive surroundings, and is made love to by handsome—and expensive—leading men. She has arrived: she is a princess of the enchanted realm. It is not my idea to blame them in any way for putting themselves in her place, and for being sure that were they given her chance, they could be as she. They look ardently into their bedroom mirrors, registering joy, anger, delight, sorrow. All the while they are more and more convinced that if they only were given a *chance* they would make good.

If they only knew that such chances are not given, but taken!

Betty Compson—and all the other girls you see on the screen—did not get there by posing in front of their bedroom mirrors and wishing they might have a chance. Probably they used their mirrors to powder their noses, and to see that their best hats were at the correct angle—then promptly forgot them as they sallied forth to *make* a chance for themselves. And they kept everlastingly at it. They learned by experience—and a disappointment is an experience, you know. And they also learned never to let an opportunity slip by.

Betty Compson was not born in the lap of luxury. She knew none of the advantages of money until she earned that money for herself. She was born in a little Utah mining town. Her life there was restricted to the meager benefits offered by such a town. But because there was within her the urge which drives men and women from the comparative safety of their homes



When she was twelve years old Betty Compson had just a trace of the gracious beauty that distinguishes her to-day.

STARS DON'T OFTEN TELL

much about the disheartening drudgery that preceded their success. They mention briefly early privations, struggles, disillusionments—and dismiss them with a shrug. These details are not glamorous, not pleasant to think about—but sometimes they are inspiring, as in the case of Betty Compson. She didn't want to tell this story, to dwell on the misfortunes of her past, but she was persuaded to do so, because as the ideal of hundreds of ambitious young girls all over the country, her experiences are of vital interest. Here you will find no fairy tale of a pretty girl's leap to stardom in a day—a week—a year; you will find the confidential history of a brave young woman who would not accept defeat.

clothes. Finally a compromise was arranged. It was decided that her mother accompany her.

Then followed several months of one-night stands, dirt, poverty, and discomfort. Any actor who has been booked on such time will realize the hardships of the existence. Finally it became impossible for Mrs. Compson to continue with her daughter, so she remained in Salt Lake City, where the company was playing at that time.

Betty, scarcely seventeen, was now doing a "single"—that is, appearing alone in an act in which she sang and played her violin. We've heard a lot about the dangers of such a life for a girl on her own, and this particular girl assures me that none of the stories are

into the wide world of chance, she took the only means of which she knew to quiet that urge.

She had played the violin at several amateur entertainments, so when an offer came from a small-time vaudeville booking agent, she decided to turn her musical ability to professional use. Her family was much against her taking the stage as a means of livelihood, for she was only sixteen at the time. The troupe was scheduled to play the small towns of Utah, Arizona, and Montana. The salary was small, and out of it had to be paid living expenses, railroad fare, and the price of



Perhaps it was the sordidness that Betty Compson brushed up against that fitted her for her dramatic work.

exaggerated. She tried all this time to save enough money to send for her mother, but still found it impossible as the months went by. Mrs. Compson was now, I believe, acting as housekeeper in a summer resort in or near Salt Lake. One would help the other financially as the occasion demanded, turn and turn about.

The experiences a girl would gain during such a hand-to-mouth existence, are of course merely to be guessed at by the girl who lives at home. Tiny second and third rate hotels, with many inconveniences; bad food; accommodation trains; murky, gas-lit, wayside stations at ungodly hours; the frequenters of such stations at more ungodly hours; the small-town audiences, made up of rough miners, farmers, and loafers; the lack of money; poor clothes—the unutterable dreariness of it, and the recurrence of that

terrible thought: "What am I getting out of it?—Where will I be when my freshness is gone?"

This is the fire that burns away the illusions of youth, and youth's delusions, too. But it is the fire from which will come the finished product—if the material is there.

Finally she was stranded in San Francisco. Penniless, her only thought was to get enough money to return to her mother. The fare to Salt Lake was sixty dollars, so she took a position as nursemaid to the children of a wealthy shipbuilder, at twenty dollars a month. Three months to get home!

Her life in this house was as happy as such a life can be for a girl whose ambitions are high. Everything went smoothly until the young son of the house fell in love with her and wanted her to be his wife. How many times has such a story been told?

But Betty insisted that she would not give up her career, nebulous enough in those days of drudgery, relieved only by an evening spent at the movies and a long walk home afterward through the quiet San Francisco streets. She would not allow her belief in herself to be shaken. There are women who are not fitted for a life of housewifery and the cares attendant. She knew she was such a woman, and was using every means in her power to climb to her particular niche.

Since she told me this story, I have often thought that the tact and graciousness of manner for which she is remarkable among her associates, must have been developed to a great extent during this second phase of her career. No matter what kindness she met with in the household, the family could not have been pleased at the infatuation of their son for a servant in their employ. There were times, of course, when relations were strained. You can imagine for yourself the situation. But Betty earned her sixty dollars, bought her ticket, and boarded the train for Salt Lake. When she arrived, she didn't tell her mother that she hadn't eaten on the way.

Soon after this an agent booking from Salt Lake City sent her on a tour of the Northwest, with what is called a "girl act."

"Oh, yes—I was one of the 'merry-merry!'" Betty assured me, with her open smile. "And let me tell you that was a marvelous lot of girls! Every one of them has made good."

They played Seattle, Portland, Spokane, and Vancouver, and during their stay in the Canadian town, she made the acquaintance of a gentleman who offered to give her a letter of introduction to Al Christie, then of the Universal Film Company. Mr. Christie and his brother have since built their own studio, but at that time were renting space from Mr. Laemmle.

While playing a previous engagement in Los Angeles, Betty had gone out to Universal to inquire about the possibility of work. They had taken a test of her, but had said there was no opening at that time. The gentleman whom she met in Vancouver wrote them in her behalf, but before she heard from them again, she had finished her Northwestern tour and was back in San Francisco.

Mr. Christie remembered her, and wired that there was now a place for her in his company. The task was to get back to Los Angeles. She wired her mother to make arrange-

There is depth, soul, to all of Betty Compson's characterizations.



ments to meet her in Los Angeles, and to live there with her if the Christie engagement became permanent. She also asked her mother to send money for the fare, but did not mention food. Again she traveled hungry.

In accepting the Christie offer she had not told them the day of her arrival. Meantime her mother had closed her affairs in Salt Lake and was on her way to Los Angeles. Betty knew she could stay for at least a week at the little hotel where she had engaged a room, without being asked to pay her bill. Meanwhile her food consisted of the most economical purchases—doughnuts and coffee, pork and beans—everything well known to the impecunious.

Then everything came right at once. Mrs. Compson and a money order she had sent her daughter arrived at once. Betty by this time had notified Mr. Christie of her arrival, and her work had started. They found a boarding house which was less expensive than the downtown hotel. Circumstances began slowly to improve.

But clothes were a difficult obstacle at this time. It was not a general custom three years ago for the smaller companies to furnish an actress with a modern wardrobe. When period costumes were required, they were rented from a large costuming company, but an actress must not wear the same modern gown in two different pictures. Consequently, when two people are living on forty dollars a week, and one of them *must* appear prosperous, the problem takes ingenuity to solve. Mrs. Compson sat up nights, altering, combining, and eliminating, until every possibility was exhausted. But this same problem is one which must be met by most beginners in pictures. For every such need there is usually a solution. In this case

there are establishments where one may rent clothes—evening dresses for from three to five dollars, according to their elaborateness and newness. Betty paid many of her dollars for the use of such gowns, and thus bridged a gap on the road to success.

After perhaps a year and a half of comedy work—invaluable for training the brain to quick thinking—she felt that there



Photo by Woodbury

Betty Compson's radiance has not been dulled by adversity.

must be another daring step onward. She left Christie's and sought a chance as an emotional actress. But chances were few, and those who gave them out were very wary. Several times she was on the verge of securing an engagement at Lasky's, which she had set as her goal. But something always seemed to interfere—sometimes studio politics, sometimes pure chance. At different times during this period, she filled engagements with other companies, as leading woman in five-reel features, and once as the heroine of a serial.

A friend of mine and of Betty's told me that at this time many people who knew her well were afraid that she could not stand the strain—that she was going under. Again the lack of money was a constant menace. How long she was going to last was a matter of conjecture.

Then came "The Miracle Man," the maker of three stars—Thomas Meighan, Lon Chaney, and Betty herself. The opportunity was given these three people by the late George Loane Tucker to show what they could do. This picture is considered one of the greatest in film history. It was filled with what we speak of professionally as "hokum"—briefly,

Her comedy days were trying, but they trained her to quick thinking.

hackneyed situations—but because of the viewpoint of the man directing the picture, it was made into a great thing. It was transformed not only into the expression

Continued on page 96



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Some Bumps on the Road to Stardom

Continued from page 45

of an idea, but into a work of art which was the inspiration of ideas.

Previous to this, Betty Compson had been striving to earn a livelihood more than for the development of herself. In this struggle, bitter as it was, she had been gaining poise and experience. Incidentally, I prophesy that no matter what good or evil fortune may bring her—and as a friend I trust it will be good—she will be able to cope with it, and turn it to her own advantage.

But now came the task of bringing forth from the innermost depths of her being those thoughts and emotions which experience had taught her to feel. These thoughts and emotions not only must be brought forth and expressed, but they must be shown in such a way that they would strike a responsive chord in the minds and hearts of thousands and thousands of men and women who were to see them on the screen. A million people may feel, but only one in a million can express.

She came almost directly to Mr. Tucker from slapstick comedy, but he had enough faith in her to place her in a heavy emotional rôle. He was practically placing in her hands his professional reputation as a reliable judge of character and ability. The manner in which she fulfilled his faith we all know.

But during this test-period, affairs with Betty were still in a more or less precarious state. We know now that she was making good, but she couldn't have been sure of it then. Her salary was very low. She was heavily in debt, and was doing her best to meet all her obligations. Mr. Tucker did not want her seen in public, feeling that it was better for her to come before her public simultaneously with the release of the picture. As time went on, he had supreme faith in their joint success.

Consequently, during those months, she saw no one, talked to no one, even by phone, and took her outings in trips to and from the studio. But there was no thought of complaint on her part. She realized that her big chance had come. She put herself wholly under the management of Mr. Tucker, knowing that his judgment was best, and thankful enough that he saw fit to give her the benefit of his wisdom.

In accordance with his plans, with the release of the picture, Betty Compson burst upon the public with the flaming brilliance that is a part of her. She was an overnight success, if you want to forget the bitter

years she had passed through to reach that hour.

I should like to end her story here, merely for the dramatic effect of it. In reality, the struggle was by no means over. Mr. Tucker made another picture with her, called "Ladies Must Live." Though made in 1918, it was not released until the latter part of 1921, owing to the producer's ill health. In fact, he did not live to see its failure. It did not approach "The Miracle Man" in theme or in treatment. So far as it went in furthering Betty Compson's career, it was totally negative. But by the time the public saw her in it, she was beyond being hurt materially by it, for she had been some months a Lasky star—she had attained her ambition.

But in the interval between the release of "The Miracle Man" and her signing with Famous Players, she had further struggles. She could not go back to small parts—just as she had advanced so well beyond them. Money was supplied, finally, by various financiers to start her own company, with a Goldwyn release. Here the new-fledged actress became business woman, with double worries. The venture was not a success, for a number of reasons. There were troubles financial, technical, literary, temperamental—any sort of trouble you want to name. There followed another period of inactivity and more or less anxiety. She was still in debt, for being a star with your own brand-new company does not mean necessarily that you are rolling in wealth. More often it is quite the contrary.

But at last she has reached the harbor toward which she has been making her stormy way. Sure, wise, and poised, "Radiant Betty" they call her. Her radiance has not been dulled by the uses of adversity, which, contrary to the poet, are far from sweet. On the contrary, that radiance has become the more brilliant from the rubbings, brushings, and elbowings of life.

There may be some readers of this article who are idealists. They will say I have talked too much of the importance of money in an actress' career and too little of art. They may be right, but one of my wall mottos has long been: "The lack of money causes more broken hearts than the lack of love." And we might add: "Or the lack of anything else."

I have tried to show that it has not made Betty Compson less artistic to-day because she was hungry yesterday. I have tried to tell you that because of her vicissitudes, she is able

to help you in the appreciation of the beautiful by showing you beauty of face and manner and action. That she has gained this beauty through trial and suffering, and that her art is intensified and heightened thereby, seems to me obvious.

Girls who contemplate a career in motion pictures ought to read her story again and weigh its facts carefully. How many of them would have the stamina to withstand the struggle and emerge unscathed? *And is it worth while?*

If, knowing these things, you still want to go into pictures every actress on the screen and on the stage will wish sincerely for your success—but none of them will advise you to go on. But if you must, you must, and all the advice in the world cannot keep you from it. The urge that drove them on and on, will drive you on. But remember where there is but one Betty Compson and few others who have won real success, there are thousands of girls who have failed. These are the girls you never hear of. Will you take the chance of being one of them?

Betty Compson's Story

is an inspiring one. But it is not the only case of its kind. There are many other players of distinction who have surmounted obstacles with just as much fortitude—and who have attained the heights for adhering to the same or to some other guiding principle of life.

Constance Palmer has been searching into the lives and experiences of several of the stars of note, weighing and analyzing, finding out what it was that made them succeed—for different factors enter into every case. She will take up some of the most striking and varied examples in a series of articles, of which the preceding one is the first. You will find them of unusual interest and a real source of inspiration, even if you have no wish or ambition to join the ranks of the players. Her next article will appear in an early issue.

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