



WHEN F. W. Murnau surveyed the field at the William Fox studio, he immediately chose Janet Gaynor for the leading rôle in "Sunrise." Read what Ruth Waterbury has to say about Miss Gaynor's rise to prominence.

The Girl Who is Getting the Breaks

She's a red-headed kid
named Janet Gaynor

By Jean Millet

I AM wondering a great deal about Janet Gaynor's future. Consider what she has done in a single year.

For months every ambitious young actress in Hollywood has been after the part of *Diane* in "Seventh Heaven." It is regarded as one of the choicest acting parts of the season, one of those marvelous chances for characterization, a beaten, down-trodden girl of Montmartre who is transformed by love into beauty and courage. A wonderful part. Many a famous name in Hollywood made a screen test for it.

Janet Gaynor got it.

Just before that the pack was chasing for parts in Murnau's first American picture. Murnau, who directed Jannings and made "The Last Laugh," could make an artist of anyone, it was said. He had written the story himself, needing a cast of only three, a wife, a husband, another woman. A picture titled simply "Sunrise." What a part for an actress, a young, inarticulate peasant wife opposed to the other woman. The sort of thing critics always praise. The publicity of being under Murnau's direction. What a chance! Everyone went after it.

Janet Gaynor was selected, by Murnau himself.

Prior to that, there was the rôle of *Katie* in "The Return of Peter Grimm," an emotional part in a distinguished, compelling story, a special production.

Janet Gaynor played *Katie*.

Now, a single lucky break happens with fair frequency in Hollywood. Betty Bronson won "Peter Pan." Billy Haines got his "Brown of Harvard." Ronald Colman had "The Dark Angel." But such a break is luck, and little else.

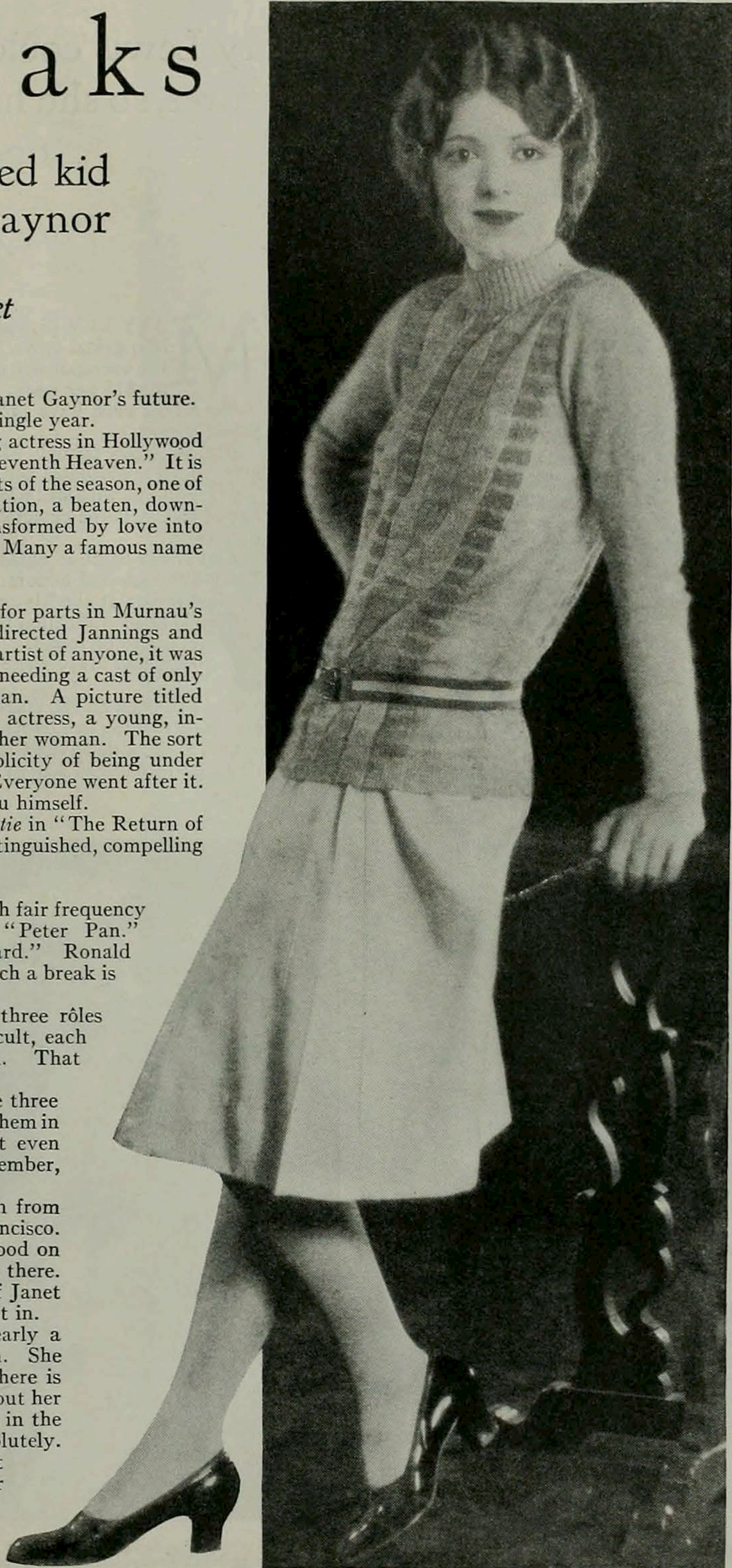
But three breaks, one after the other, three rôles in important productions, all very difficult, each different from the other, that is not luck. That is acting ability.

Not only has Janet Gaynor won these three rôles in a single year—but she had won them in her second year in pictures. She didn't even attempt to break into movies until December, 1924.

That was shortly after her graduation from the Polytechnic High School of San Francisco. Janet's stepfather was called to Hollywood on business. The family decided to settle there. It was suggested that it would be nice if Janet were to get into pictures. So she did get in.

I don't know, after having spent nearly a whole day with her, why she did get in. She isn't beautiful. She isn't talkative. There is none of that swift flash of personality about her you get about a dozen girls playing bits in the studios. She's a darling kid. Absolutely. Nice as a glass of milk. But the fact remains that Janet, without influence or backing, went in among the beautiful girls storming Hollywood and came out triumphant. She got extra work and within six months she was playing leads. They were only

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Janet Gaynor has won three big rôles in a single year

himself. He can't help it. The tremendous sincerity of the man in pursuit of his ideas makes you forgive him.

Charlie is just as reliable, in big things and little things alike, as a young hurricane. Time does not exist, so far as he is concerned. Nor do people, in the ordinary sense.

Yet when he finds a human brain that has something to give, or a human character that is new and worth studying, he grabs it like an octopus.

He may bring home a tramp, a great psychiatrist, a colored washwoman, an English duchess, and spend hour upon hour talking with them.

His moods are mad, terrific, uncontrollable. Sometimes he is gay as a diamond, he will hold everyone spellbound for hours with his wit, his mimicry, his delicate and ever-fresh clowning.

At other times he will be almost in tears with nerves and depression, unable to say a word, trembling with strange apprehensions, his face a mask of tragedy.

All this a woman can understand and forgive, if she is big enough. And there is so infinitely much of the maternal in Lita Chaplin that I think she has the understanding heart.

But that isn't enough.

A woman married to a genius must be wise enough never to let him know he has been forgiven. She must be clever enough not to bore him with her sweetness, and yet not to annoy him with reproach. She must be an individual and still be only 00.99% of a marriage. She must have charm, but never intrude it and she must be a lightning change artist in moods to follow his.

And then it won't be enough.

Did Lita Grey ever have a chance—has she still a chance—to make a success of her marriage to Charlie Chaplin?

Let us consider this Lita Grey Chaplin, who has tried, like the Empress Josephine, to be the wife of a genius.

In the first place, she is still—after three years of marriage and two experiences of motherhood—at the age when most girls are being graduated from high school.

She is a slim, dark beauty. For she is a beauty. She has now the perfect and arresting loveliness of a rosebud. Her eyes are enormous and dark as a blackbird's wing in her white face, and her dark curls cluster close about her perfect head. Her mouth is almost heart-shaped and she has slim legs, like a gazelle's.

Everyone likes her, and feels a little sorry for her. She is gentle and sweet, she is a nice little thing, quite interesting to talk to. She dresses with exquisite taste. I think she would have made a marvelous wife for almost any man, for she instinctively desires to please and there is much about her that is pleasing. Her nature is happy and placid and kindly. Her disposition is obviously domestic and maternal.

If she does succeed in averting this threatened break, it will be because she has developed, through suffering and motherhood, to the selflessness necessary to the wife of a genius.

At first, domesticity appealed to Charlie Chaplin. It was a new rôle. It soothed his heart, worn and frayed by intense and frequent emotional upheavals.

But as an ordinary man loves life, so a genius loves many lives.

THE wife of a genius must either be great enough to supply all these herself—and the woman who can do that is rarer than a

mermaid—or she must be willing to sit at home and keep the fire burning and the children fed, until her husband returns.

Return he will. I believe that Charlie Chaplin loves Lita, his wife, as much as he could love any wife. I believe he means to be kind to her, and I know that he loves his children.

But that is not and can never be enough for him. He must be free—free to allow those impulses that bring created art into the world.

If Lita Chaplin can leave him free, if she cares enough to leave him free and to realize that she is playing a great part in great things by doing it, the marriage may still come through.

Tom Mix once made a profound remark to me. Tom is a profound thinker.

He said, "There are many things a woman may be to a man, some of them good, some bad. But there is only one thing she *must* be to him, if their love is to be successful—and that is an inspiration."

If Lita Chaplin can grow to the measure of that—but I do not know whether one woman could ever inspire Chaplin. His sense of the dramatic is so intense that he must have an entirely new phase of womanhood to inspire each new phase of his work. He is like Napoleon in that.

THE greatest marriage of genius of which I know was that of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Personally, I am not yet convinced that Browning was a genius, but certainly Mrs. Browning was, for she wrote poems of a beauty surpassed only by Keats himself.

And to me she put into words the sort of love that must exist to make marriage to a genius a success, the sort of love without which no genius should ever marry.

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of everyday's Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose With my lost saints—I love thee with the breath,

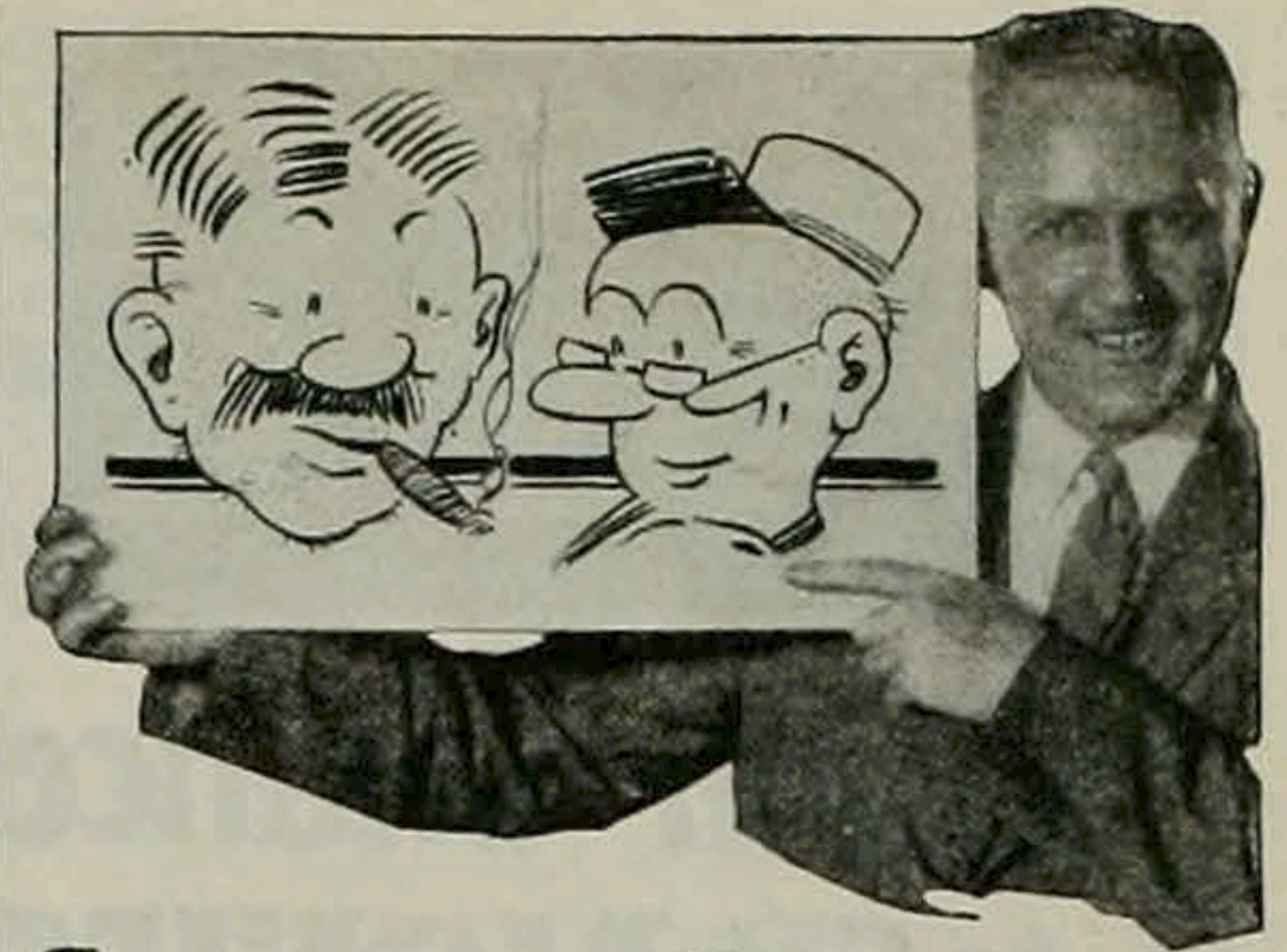
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and if God choose,

I shall but love thee better after death."

That's the only kind of love that can surmount the tremendous temperamental obstacles a woman encounters when she marries a genius. And it is the love of a superwoman, it is the divine fire that strikes, but too seldom into mortal clay.

If Lita Grey Chaplin is inspired with such a love, she may win through, and refine and inspire and increase the Chaplin genius. If she is such a superwoman as Elizabeth Barrett Browning was, she may be the thousand women in one woman, or the saint-and-mother woman, who alone can make a success of marriage to a genius.

Otherwise, this separation will be permanent, for the genius who burns up his whole heart and soul and mind in his work has nothing to give to help make a marriage a success. That must all be done by the woman.



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The Girl Who Is Getting the Breaks

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 63]

comedy leads with a small company, but they were leads—in six months.

Just at that time Fox needed a girl to be

in "The Johnstown Flood." Janet was sent for and asked to weep. She niagaraed so effectively they gave her a contract. When



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the film was released, Janet stood out of it as a balmy day stands out of the month of February. She followed that with "The Shamrock Handicap" and "The Midnight Kiss," inconsequential films both of them, in which she was perfectly delightful. That is the sum total of her experience up to "Peter Grimm."

She came to take me for lunch one day in Hollywood, a slim little girl in a plain little sweater and skirt. She might have been any little girl in any little town in America. Not a little city girl, by any means, but one of those gazelle-eyed small town girls who can create so much havoc in any good frat house. She has a little freckled face and a snub nose. Her eyes are very bright and rather wise and her hair is red and curly. She is just five feet tall and properly thin. She is rather gamin, but looking at her, the last thing in the world you can conceive of her being is an emotional actress.

Fay Wray? She and Fay had started about the same time and more or less kept step.

The cake was quite exhausted. Had I seen Olive Borden? Lucky Olive, beautiful and full of personality. It must be awfully nice to be like Olive. Should we go to a movie? She loved going to movies.

We went, stopping on the way to purchase some candy. We kept the bag on our laps and munched throughout the feature. Janet didn't think much of the picture and neither did I. Then I walked back to the little white house where she lives with her people and where supper was nearly ready, and as I saw her go hopping up the steps I simply couldn't believe that kid was an emotional actress.

That night John Roche and Elizabeth Patterson, distinguished troupers both of them, with long experience on the Broadway speaking stage, rang me up and asked me if I would go to the pre-view of "Peter Grimm" with them.

Identification of Pictures on Pages 60 and 61

1. Mrs. Daniels' only child—**BEBE**—at the charming age of seven years.
2. Mrs. Hersholt's little boy—**JEAN**—at the solemn age of four.
3. Mrs. Purviance's **EDNA**, posed by a photographer out in Lovelocks, Nevada.
4. That pretty little Compson girl—**BETTY**. Seven years old, but already taking violin lessons.
5. Mrs. Ray's handsome baby—little **CHARLIE**. And the pride of the home!
6. Little **BLANCHE ALEXANDER**, who changed her name to **SWEET** when she went into those funny movies.
7. Young **OLA CRONK** of Cawker, Kansas. She is now **CLAIRE WINDSOR**, you know.
8. Mrs. La Plante's daughter—**LAURA**. A serious child and no trouble to anybody.
9. **HOUSE PETERS** at the age of nine—a victim of bad direction and overdressing.
10. Mrs. Joyce's daughter, **ALICE**, always did know how to wear clothes.
11. Mrs. Boardman's **ELEANOR**—and the smartest child in the Philadelphia schools.
12. And Mrs. Barthelmess' boy, **RICHARD**. Just the model boy of the neighborhood.

The restaurant, on top a Hollywood hill, was quiet and cool. It used to be a religious center. Janet played with her salad and tried hard not to wiggle. It was, she said, her very first interview. Not that she had a theory about life or art or anything. Murnau wanted her to bleach her hair for "Sunrise." He wouldn't hear of her wearing a wig. He wanted her to be one of those pale, peasant girls, and her freckles were to show. But she had been at the hairdresser's three solid days. Everything had been on her hair from ammonia to white henna, and it simply wouldn't take, that's all. She pulled a crinkly little end of it from beneath her hat to show me.

Wonderful, though, her playing for Murnau. He didn't direct you. Just talked, quietly. It was a wonderful chance. Would I think it terrible if for dessert she ate a piece of cake?

We both had a piece of cake. Had I seen

I went along and saw Janet. I can not explain it. She was wonderful. Her work in that tense, emotional, difficult rôle could not have been bettered. "Isn't she amazing?" whispered John Roche. "She's absolutely right in every gesture, every movement."

"The technique it has taken us years to learn," sighed Elizabeth Patterson, "that child knows by instinct. She doesn't need direction. She simply is an actress."

We sat, tears in our eyes, and watched the final fade-out. We were silent for several minutes.

"I think the best thing I can do," said Elizabeth, "is to go back to Broadway. That marvelous child."

Two years in the business. She is getting the breaks and gaining the experience. I am wondering a great deal about Janet Gaynor's future.