

Exploding the Joel McCrea Myth

IN THE dark archives of Hollywood's social files, one finds—"McCrea, Joel—nice boy, heart-breaker." Blithely combining the two hopelessly antonymous terms, Hollywood has him docketed thus. Proceeding from these labels, many a magazine thesis has been written on Joel. Sometimes it is one way, sometimes another, sometimes both together in an ambitious attempt to make credible such an unlikely character as a clean-cut, wholesome home-breaker!

It is flying in the face of tradition, therefore, that I decline to select either the Jekyll or Hyde of Joel for comment. Because neither is there. He is not a simple, homespun boy. He is not a heart-breaker. He is, it is true, a forthright and honest young man with good manners. He is also an ardent admirer of charming, gay women. But, knowing him, these attributes are not predominant enough to classify him.

By some fluke, perhaps because of preconceived ideas in interviewers' minds, Joel has usually sounded "sweet" in print. Such a nice boy that the stomach was slightly turned.

"Sweet!" he raged noisily to me a few hours ago. "What's wrong with these people? They don't know McCrea. Why, I'd steal the milk out of their babies'

bottles!" Speaking slowly and punctuating his words with an angry fist on the arm of the chair, he added, "*I—am—not—nice!*"

He is, of course. But not nauseously. The average, human number of pleasant faults makes him palatable.

"I can see," he says, "where it all started. It's easy to trace back.

"It started as far back as my first part in pictures. I had done some extra work here and there, when a friend of mine took me over to Colleen Moore's set one day and asked her if there was a chance I might get a couple of days' work in her picture, which was just beginning then. Colleen had been having trouble finding the right type for her leading man. She looked at me and said, 'Just for fun let's give you a test and see if you couldn't do the lead.' It was one of those incredible miracles—I just happened to be the type and I got the part.

"Colleen was charming to me. She knew I was nervous as the devil and desperately anxious to learn something. And out of her kindly—and purely impersonal, God knows—helpfulness to me a big myth grew. You know the kind—star crazy about her leading man, producer-husband in a fury, leading man's career to be wrecked, etc. Since there was no vestige of anything

“Nice Boy”? No! “Heart-breaker”? Wrong again! McCrea tells you the real truth in this revealing story

By
Margaret Reid

but a very pleasant acquaintance to base it on, the myth evaporated. But Hollywood won't relinquish its labels that easily—fact or no fact, I was pigeon-holed as some kind of heart-breaker. Me!”

Rumor has, at varying times, linked his name optimistically with Marion Davies, Evelyn Brent, Frances Marion, Constance Bennett, Dorothy Mackaill, and others.

“The joke, by the way, is on the gossips,” says McCrea. “The only woman I've ever in my life been really serious about is a star with whom my name was never connected. It was the one time there might have been something to gabble about, but they never knew it. Which is one thing to be thankful for, I suppose.”

The other assumed romances were widely discussed, reported, speculated upon. Joel—young and certainly bewildered—was nevertheless a pretty level-headed young man already.

The legend of Joel the Irresistible, once it started, gathered terrific momentum. Young, handsome, well-bred and untouched by dissipation, he was swept into the swirling current of Hollywood social life. In all the places where stars are seen would be seen Joel Mc-



“I did have a crush on Connie Bennett,” the truthful Joel admits. Here are the two in a tender scene from “Rockabye.”

Joel, the he-man at home! (Bet he posed for this picture under protest!)



Crea, in the company of now one glamorous star, now another. Romance statisticians of the press were devoted to him for the frequency with which they could report “Joel McCrea and Miss Blank are ‘that way’ this week.”

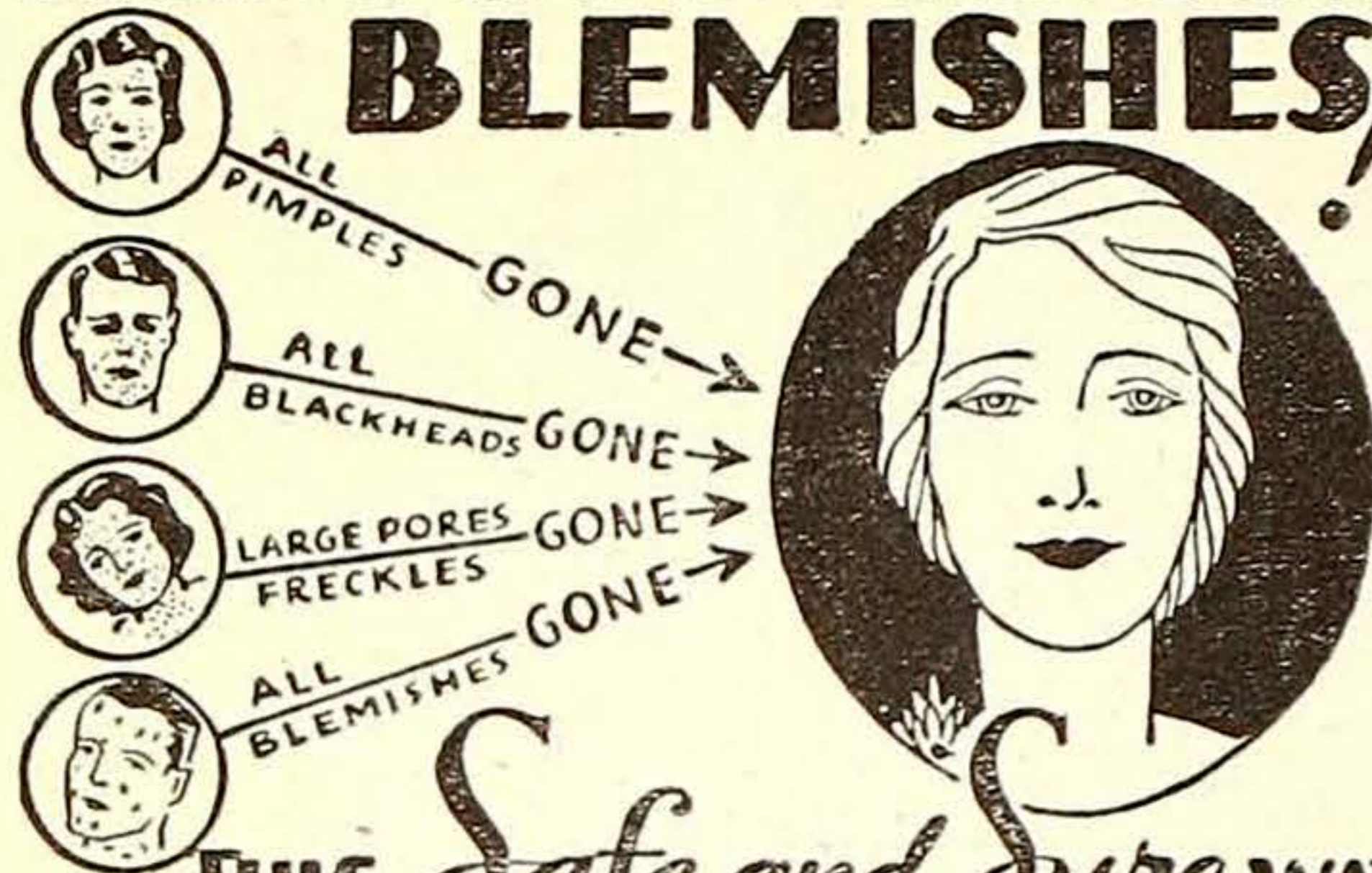
Had Joel been “that way” as many times as reported, loud cries would have been heard issuing from Casanova's grave.

“Of course, they had to give it up finally. The most zealous Pinkertons never saw me coming out of some lady's house at dawn. It was all a snare and a delusion. They were disappointed, I suppose. And to justify themselves they said these aren't really affairs after all. It's just that he's such a thoroughly nice boy the women like to go about with him.”

“And that's where the two tags came from. As simple as that!”

Both are equally distasteful to him. As is any public babbling about the personal elements which should be personal business. Because of the particularly arresting celebrity of the stars with whom his name was linked, he could not possibly have avoided the publicity, even had he been a schooled diplomat. And because of the unpleasant sensation of having had a spotlight at his (Continued on page 92)

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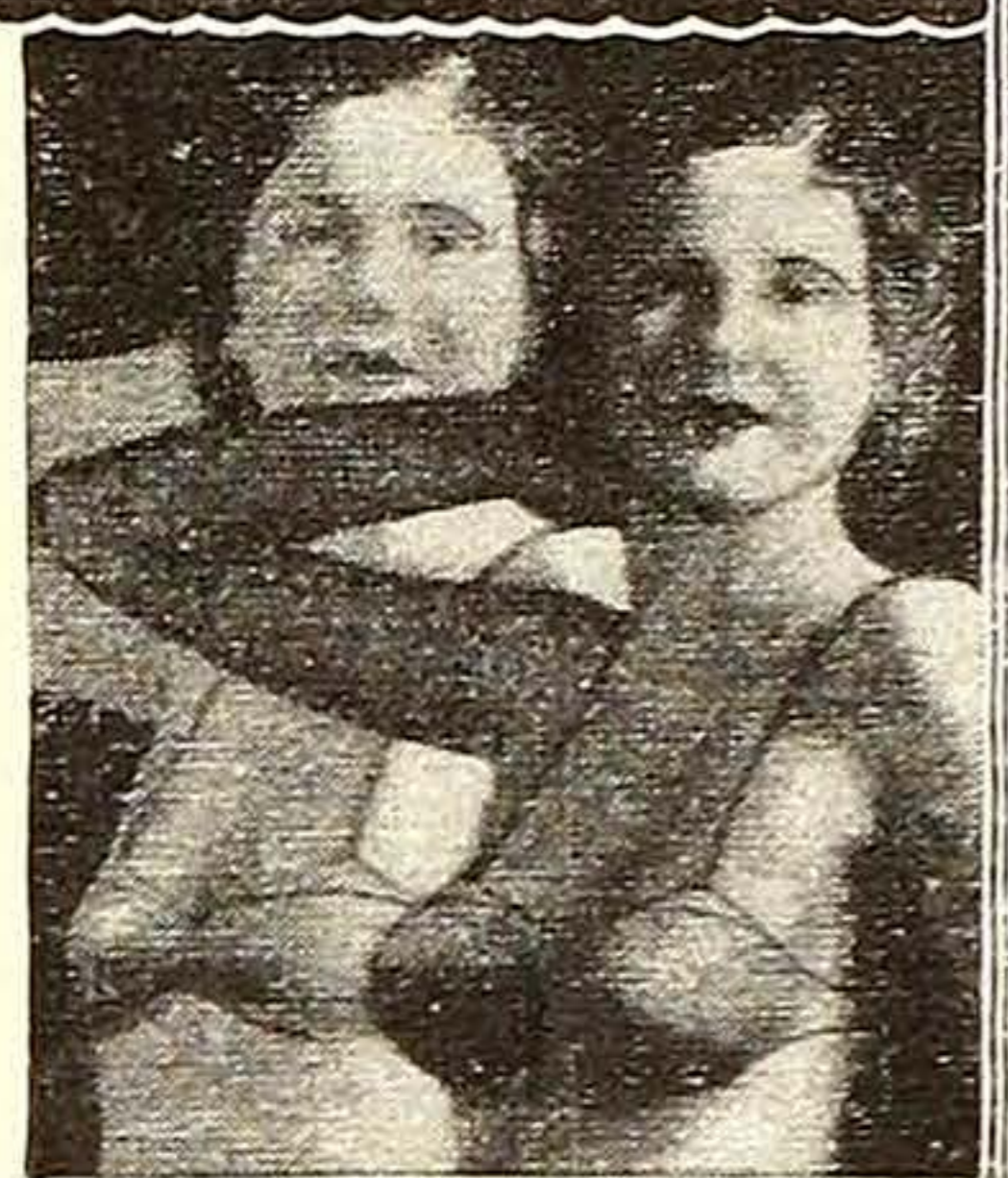
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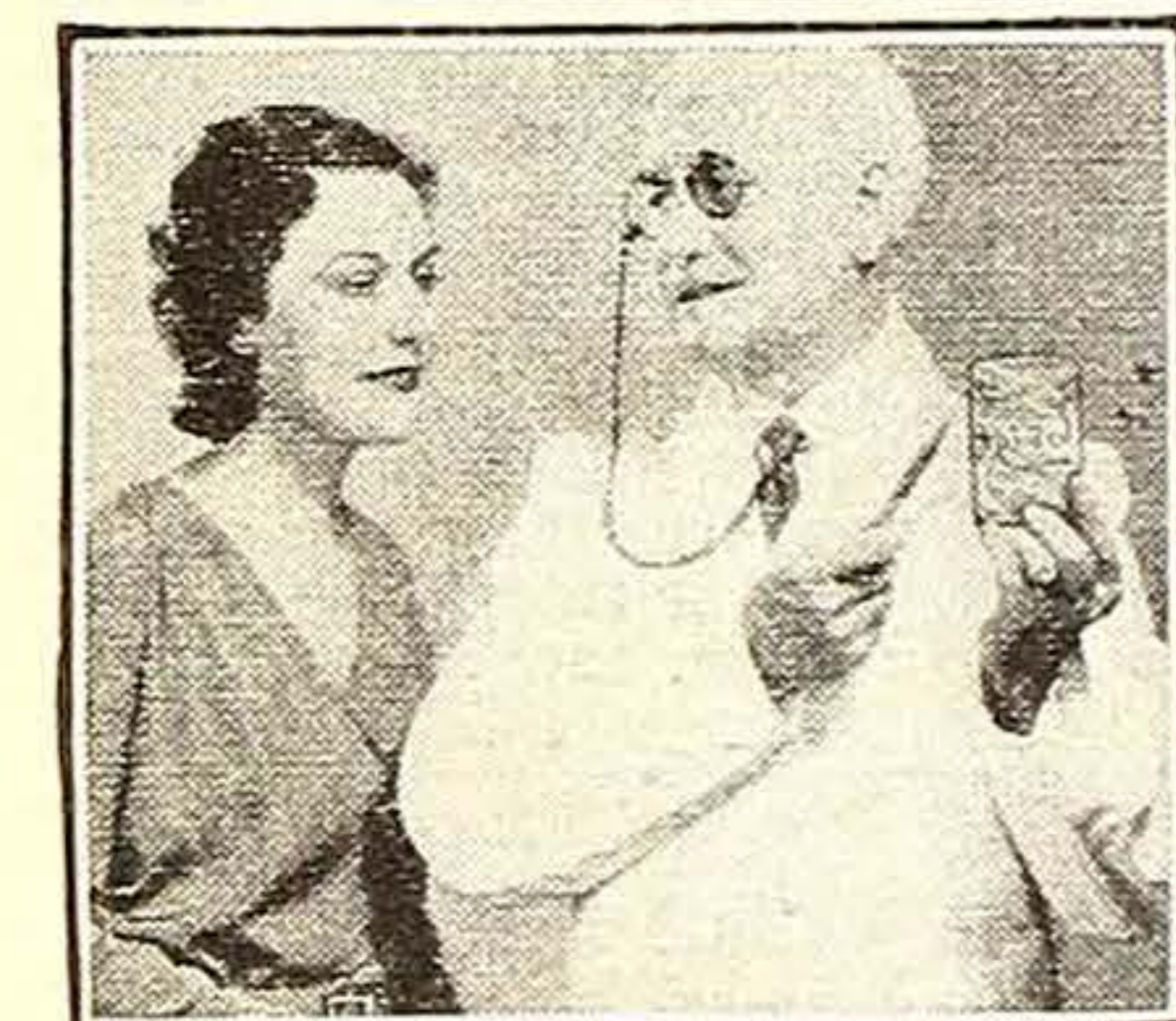
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sensation of having had a spotlight at his heels, it is likely that when he does marry it will be with a maximum of quiet and unobtrusiveness.

"What actually happened was too uncomplicated, of course, for Hollywood to consider. I was starting in pictures. I wanted very much to make a go of it. And I realized quite clearly that I knew nothing, absolutely nothing. I sincerely wanted to learn—so naturally I went with women of intelligence and knowledge, enchanted by their wisdom and technical experience. By a lucky fluke for which I am profoundly grateful, the stars I played opposite liked me enough to let me hang around and listen to all the shop-talk. I didn't break furniture at parties, or get drunk or try to mooch. I was no hanger-on in any way, which I suppose was a point in my favor. And people, the right kind of people, are always kindly disposed toward a real desire for knowledge."

Looking at him, and considering him, one really has to question the consistency of that high intellectual plane. Questioned, he is undisturbed.

"Oh, naturally I didn't look on them as school-teachers! I'm not blind. They are charming, glamorous—and I love to look at and listen to glamorous, sophisticated women. Inevitably I was romantic about them. I did have a crush on Connie Bennett, for instance. But, for the love of heaven, whose life *doesn't* contain pleasant relationships here and there quickened into romance?"

"The whole trouble is this cock-eyed business of magnifying the usual things of life into terrific, dramatic proportions—a chronic Hollywood failing."

It is not, however, a McCrea failing. Joel—forthright, unfooled by anyone or anything—has as level a head as you will find under the California sky. That expertly-publicized sun, the California, has done no more to Joel than give him an excellent tan. Around our studios, where success is often a form of sun-stroke, Joel is immune even to prickly heat.

"I am no actor—but I have the advantage of knowing it. As long as I play parts that are somewhere within the range of my own personality, I get by all right. I have really studied and worked until I am not entirely unsure of myself. The spark that makes great, destined actors just isn't in the old bean—or heart, or soul, or wherever it is it lights. But I like doing it anyhow—I like being a part of it."

"Also, since I have a good deal of Scot in me, I have no objection to the money I make. If I can keep on for five years more, I'll have an assured income of five hundred dollars a month for the rest of my life. That is a grand, concrete thing to work toward."

When he recently re-signed with Radio, friends attempted to persuade him to hold out for a shorter contract and more money than the raise the new contract provided. He is a good drawing-card and his present status would reasonably warrant such a move. But their advice was tranquilly ignored.

"Suppose I put up such an argument and executives called my bluff. Then where would I be? It might just happen that I'd fall into something better at another studio—and then again it might not. It's pleasant for me at Radio and I can look fairly confidently toward that income at the end of five years. I don't want Hispano-Suizas and marble swimming-pools. I

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