

"I'm Not Going to Marry"



NORMA SHEARER—favorite daughter of the gods. Bright, proud and gallant. Wearing a sort of shining armor of achievement. But in her heart, what? Adela Rogers St. Johns' story of Norma Shearer is a rarely revealing study of this reticent young person. It's a keen analysis of the reactions of success upon a modern girl

Says Norma Shearer

To Adela Rogers
St. Johns

“What, after all, has a girl in my job got to give to marriage?”



As *Kathe* in “Old Heidelberg,” with Ramon Novarro and Lincoln Stedman—a picture that promises new and fresh laurels for the girl whose work comes first

JUST exactly what does the cup of success taste like anyway? Is there always a dash, or more than a dash, of bitter in its sweetness?

Does it turn to ashes upon eager lips?

You know how often you hear the price of success quoted as high, almost too high.

This Norma Shearer, for instance.

Beyond question the most successful of our younger screen stars. Bright, proud, gallant, the favorite daughter of the gods. Wearing a sort of shining armor of achievement.

In her heart, what?

It is so difficult to tell about the heart of a modern. Hearts are no longer worn upon the sleeve.

That is not now the fashion.

But one can always ask.

So I asked Norma Shearer, the two of us very comfortable over tea, very relaxed in the chintz comfort of a radiant sunporch. A time for confidences, for questions, for digging down and stirring around the psychological depths.

“Norma,” said I, lazily regarding the ends of my tennis slippers (we had been playing tennis), “has it been worth it? Is it worth it?”

“Is what worth it?” said Norma Shearer.

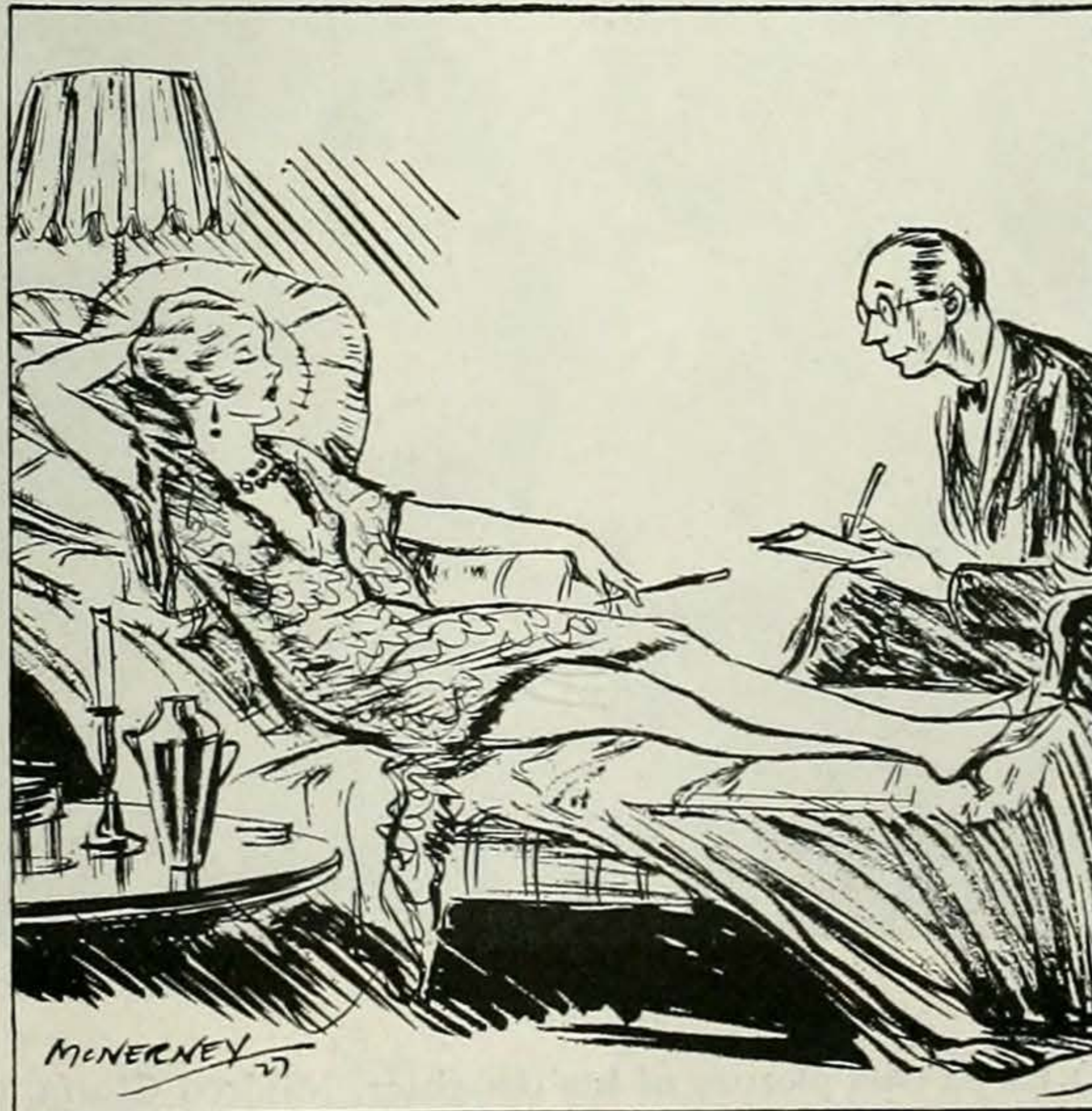
I do adore looking at Norma—so slim, so clean-cut, so coolly self-contained. Oh, a typical modern, that one.

“**I**S success worth it? You’ve had full measure, my girl. You’ve made the bright dream come true. But—haven’t there been sacrifices, hasn’t it been terribly hard work, is it all that you thought it would be when you peered up at it a few years ago?”

She was silent a moment, and very still. Always thinks before she speaks, does Norma.

“There have been sacrifices,” she said, slowly. “Plenty of them. There still are. And it has been hard work, gruelling work. Nobody knows. Sometimes I think the keynote of succeeding nowadays is self-denial. But—I wonder if I can explain to you about success.”

Hesitating, she was unusually lovely, a little softened, her eyes wistful.



Interviewer—“Tell me about your next picture.”
Star—“You may say that it will be my biggest, most important rôle.”
Interviewer—“What is the name of the story?”
Star—“Oh, we haven’t selected *that* yet!”

“Success is like a treadmill. By that I don’t mean in the work alone. But—you never really get anywhere. I am in the same place today in a way that I was when I started. As you climb, new distances open ahead all the time. It looks just as far now to the goal I have set myself as it looked years ago when I was a camera model and wanted to be a motion picture star. The farther you go the farther you want to go, the more worlds you see to conquer and so you never get bored, it never—what was it you said—turns to ashes.

“You call me successful. I suppose I am. But—but—I want to do big things. I want to play big rôles. I’m just beginning. Everyone is, that really desires to do fine work. You’re always straining, always reaching ahead toward the thing you haven’t attained, haven’t accomplished. Don’t you see?”

“Motion picture success is like a woman a man loves but never possesses. It is so uncertain, so fickle, so hard to grasp. No—it never bores you. Here today, gone tomorrow, always dancing ahead of you with new allure, sort of leading you on.”

WE sat in silence, stirring our tea, and it was borne upon me how young Norma Shearer was, how terrifically young, to be talking about success. I have seen girls just being graduated from finishing school who looked no younger.

A maid came in. The fitter had come. A secretary came in. Family matters—bills, bungalows for relations, this, that and the other arose. Norma dealt with that quietly enough. Mr. Lubitsch was on the telephone. Would Miss Shearer come at nine the next morning for tests for “Old Heidelberg”? Miss Shearer would. And a maid was instructed to send for the hairdresser to wash Miss Shearer’s lovely tresses. The head of the publicity department was on the phone. Mr. So-and-So of Such and Such a magazine

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"I'm Not Going to Marry," Says Norma Shearer

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was in Los Angeles—very important man. He wanted to lunch with Miss Shearer. And Miss Shearer said she would be delighted. Mrs. Samuel Goldwyn's secretary was calling, and would Miss Shearer and Mr. Thalberg come for dinner on Saturday night at eight, and they were dressing. Miss Shearer told her secretary that if she had no other engagement for Saturday night she would be delighted to dine with the Goldwyns.

"I adore Frances Goldwyn, don't you?" she said.

"That seems to be chronic in Hollywood," I remarked. "What is it? She seems the most thoroughly adored person in town."

"SHE'S so sweet and natural," said Norma Shearer, and then more slowly, "and don't you know, too, in a way, she has time for friendships. She has time to do all the little courtesies and pleasant things that make for charm. That lack of time is one of the prices people like me pay. I never have time to do anything. Never. I work too hard."

And it came to me as I thought over the last few moments, that the moment a girl like Norma Shearer achieves great success, as she has done, she becomes the head of a family. Really. I have seen it in many cases. There may be fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers-in-law by the score; but a Norma Shearer becomes head of the family and all the burdens incidental to being head of a family fall upon her shoulders. Her word is law. But also she has to settle all family complications, meet all family obligations. Being head of a family, even when that family defers to your slightest wish, is quite a business.

"Are you going to marry Irving Thalberg?" I asked her.

Rumor has been very busy lately in Hollywood with the romance between Norma Shearer and that young genius of the screen, Irving Thalberg. The slender, dark-haired youth who looks like a romantic violinist and is really the shrewdest of producers.

Her eyes widened a trifle, but she answered swiftly, and very honestly.

"No. I am not going to marry anybody. I don't think a woman in my position has any right to marry. I never expect to marry while I am on the screen.

"WHAT, after all, has a girl in my job got to give to marriage? Nothing. How can I be a good wife? How can I fulfill the duties of a wife?"

"Marriage, I believe, depends upon the woman very largely. We aren't quite modern enough yet to ignore the need of woman's time and work and thought devoted to marriage. Eventually of course, with women growing independent as they are, we will have to evolve an entirely new marriage relation, in which the husband and wife are equals. But that hasn't come yet.

"When a man—suppose we say a man screen star—has worked hard from nine until seven under the lights, maybe on a hot day, maybe with everything going wrong, he wants to go home to a wife who is fresh, sweet, interested in him, ready to pet him and take care of him, to soothe him and rest him. Doesn't he?"

"Well, when I've worked hard from nine until seven, I want to collapse, too, and be taken care of and thought about. Can you expect a husband to do that? I'd hate that kind of a husband. Naturally.

"But I couldn't cope with the other thing—trying myself to be a help to some man. It can't be done. I've got nothing left to give. I

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for your baby*



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