WOMEN—ALWAYS WOMEN—MADE POOR IMMIGRANT INTO 'VALENTINO,' FLAPPERS' IDOL, 'PERFECT LOVER'

Alone and Friendless, He Landed in New York Only Nine Years Ago and Was Glad to Get a Job as Bus Driver. Then Women Yielded to His Lure and Placed His Feet on Ladder to Fame

"PERFECT LOVER OF SCREEN" WAS NOT SO PERFECT A LOVER IN REAL LIFE, WIFE DECLARES

Little Jean Acker, on Witness Stand, Revealed Pitiful Tale of Selfishness and Cruelty, and Told How He Struck Her and Knocked Her Down Right After Their Marriage

Jean Acker, wife No. 1, who tells such a pitiful story of her love tragedy

NINE short years ago, when an Italian immigrant named Rodolfo Guglielmi landed in New York, almost penniless, alone, friendless and without a definite idea of what to do, he might have murdered his wife—if he had one—and not have attracted more than a passing comment in the strictly local newspapers.

Today this same Italian, merely by divorcing one woman and going through a marriage ceremony with another, has a whole continent stirred to its depths and shakes to its very foundation an industry involving more millions of dollars than he could have dreamed of in hundreds in 1913.

Rodolfo Guglielmi is known now as Rodolph Valentino, "the perfect lover of the screen."

And in those nine years he has been helped onward and upward through the potent sway that some undefinable influence he possesses has over women—not merely the ordinary, harebrained movie flapper, but the most beautiful and talented women of the stage and screen.

What other man can boast of having swayed such a list as this:

Bonnie Glass, once famous beauty and dancer, favorite of Broadway's millionaire sporting clique, who could have chosen among the wealthiest and chose, instead—the unknown and friendless Italian boy.

Joan Sawyer, famous as one of the most perfect beauties of the stage.

Jean Acker, charming stage and screen actress, who became his wife for a tragically short period.

June Mathis, noted scenarist, who was so struck by his charm in a part little more important than that of an "extra" that she secured for him the principal role in her great screen production of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," and so made him famous almost overnight.

Natacha Rambova, formerly a stage dancer and recently art designer for Mme. Nazimova's screen productions, who became his bride in the Mexican marriage which now threatens to involve him in a bigamy prosecution.

Guglielmi Glad of Bus Driver's Job

Rodolfo Guglielmi was the son of parents in most ordinary circumstances and was born twenty-seven years ago in a little Italian town called Castellenata. They were just about able to give him an education in one of the provincial military and agricultural colleges and, with thoughts of a career as farmer, or, perhaps, landscape gardener in the golden land of America, he left his home and came to this country.

He spoke no English when he landed in New York. He knew no one. He had little or no money. He had no job in sight.

His first months here were vastly different from the luxury in which he is able to live today. He took any odd jobs he could find. He was even a bus driver for a while.

But Guglielmi had one talent to perfection, though he had never even considered it as a means of livelihood.

That talent was dancing.

And finally, by sheer luck, his dancing was seen by some lesser lights of the variety stage and they planted in him the idea of turning to account his nimble feet, his graceful agility and his charm.

At first it was a desultory sort of business. Then, with the cabaret furor, he got a chance and this chance brought him within the vision of Bonnie Glass, queen of the cabaret.

Bonnie fell completely a victim to his fascination. She took him up and trained him, she introduced him to people who had influence and she made him her dancing partner and landed him among the favorites of the night life in New York.

And then came Joan Sawyer, and Guglielmi went further up in the scale of the profession and managed to get quite remunerative jobs on the stage.

Woman Got Him Job in the Movies

One of these jobs was with a musical revue. It disbanded in California. Guglielmi was out of work and had no more money than he needed.

But women thought him good looking and one of them took him to the movie studios and introduced him to casting directors. He was "photographic;" he could wear good clothes and his dancing was perfection. So he was in demand as an "extra" and was soon given small parts.

One of these was with Clara Kimball Young in "Eyes of Youth." It wasn't much of a part. It was so small, in fact, that his name is not even found in the cast of characters.

But June Mathis, one of the most prominent and influential scenario writers, saw a private view of the film and was at once struck with the fatal charm of the handsome Italian.

"Who is that boy" she asked.

And they told her his name was Valentino—he had taken his middle name by that time, because "Guglielmi" was not good for professional purposes.

Jean Acker Tells Story of Tragedy

Miss Mathis did not meet him. But the tremendous impression he made on her is proved by the fact that when, some time later, she and Director Rex Ingram were casting "The Four Horsemen," she fought hard and successfully to have this unknown boy given a chance to play the principal role.

Meanwhile, Rodolph—he has lately changed his name to that spelling—had met Jean Acker, beautiful and successful screen actress.

It all began at a dinner party, and it ended so soon thereafter that Cupid never managed to catch up with them.

Miss Acker was invited to a dinner November 4, 1919. Rudolph was also a guest. He was attracted not only by the beauty of the little actress, but by something deeper. Before the party was over he had proposed, and those who remember him as the ardent Julio of "The Four Horsemen" will have to admit that he has all the technique of the successful lover. Jean accepted. They were married, it is said, that night in the home of Joe Engle, then manager of the Metro Studio, at which both were working.

But Cupid was tired. He didn't stay long on the job. The marriage lasted one night. The following day, according to Valentino, his wife left him, and with the exception of a single day about a month later, she did not live with him.

Miss Acker agrees with her husband on these points, but she affirms that it was he who left her, the date of the desertion being December 5, 1919. Thenceforth communication between the two seems to have taken place through the medium of letters, telegrams and telephone. Many of these letters and telegrams were made public in the course of the hearings in Hollywood before Judge Toland in Supreme Court.

These letters and telegrams, together with testimony taken in court, form the basis of a story with a moral, the story of a marriage based upon infatuation, a love that flared brilliantly for a moment and then died.

Their marriage, Miss Acker testified, took place so near midnight that she could not remember whether it should be dated November 4 or 5. A quarrel took place on the following morning. Mr and Mrs. Maxwell Karger told of talking with Miss Acker six hours after the wedding.

"She came to me, said she was sorry they were married," testified Mrs. Karger. "Miss Acker threw herself on a bed and wept. She told me she thought she had made a mistake."

Karger testified that a few weeks after the wedding Miss Acker came to his office and told him she thought it best that they separate.

The quarrel as described by Miss Acker lasted until January, 1920.

Miss Acker later asked for a separate maintenance, while her handsome husband countered with a cross-complaint asking for a divorce.

Miss Acker testified that she did not find marriage an ideal existence and that the ideal lover of the screen left her not long after she became his wife. Not only that, but when she asked him why he no longer cared to live with her he replied she told the Judge:

"My success means more to me than anything in the world. I have a fine opportunity now. I don't want a wife. I want to be free."

Valentino, on the other hand, denied that he deserted his wife. He says that she deserted him the day after the wedding. He told of pleading with his wife to return to him, after they had quarreled the morning following their wedding.

JOAN SAWYER

Valentino Knocked His Wife Down

The most striking testimony offered by Miss Acker was that dealing with her allegation that her husband had struck her and knocked her down.

"I was taking a bath," she said. "He came into my apartment and started hammering on the bathroom door, threatening to break it down unless I opened it. So I opened the door, we argued; he hit me with his fist and knocked me down.

"After he knocked me down he seemed sorry. My face was swelling from the blow. It was the first time any one had struck me. I cried.

"He relented, begged for forgiveness, and I dressed and went down to the lobby of the apartment house with him.

"And then he told me he didn't want to be married to me any longer and intimated that he'd like to have me frame up some divorce evidence. I refused. I was ill at the time. He said he'd always be my dear friend, but he didn't want to be my husband.

"In the heat of anger I told him I was going to Reno to get a divorce. He said that suited him fine.

"'I have a future,' he said, 'and I don't want any woman hampering my career.'

"That was on January 10, 1920. I'd just returned from location, and so had he, although we'd been in different sections of the country."

JUNE MATHIS

On the morning of the day following, the pretty actress said, she asked her husband for money.

"I was not well and was out of funds," she testified. "He said he'd loan me money, but he wouldn't give me a penny."

And so on January 18 last she filed suit for separate maintenance.

After the marriage, according to her testimony, they went to her apartment and lived together "three or four days, after which Valentino went to his downtown bachelor apartment and stayed two weeks.

Rodolph Valentino as Gallardo, the Spanish toreador in "Blood and Sand," a picturization of the Ibanez novel of the same name. This is the latest part portrayed by the matinee screen idol

Valentino and "Natacha Rambova," wife No. 2, just after the wedding ceremony at Mexicali, Mexico

"BONNIE" GLASS

GRACE DARMOND

Letters and Telegrams Tell Pitiful Tale

He came back to her one day and she told him she wanted a bungalow—a home. He couldn't make up his mind what to do about it, and in the end they rented another apartment and moved in.

Then on December 15—little more than a month after they were married—they left the city "on location," she with one company and he with another. It was when she returned, about January 10, that the bathroom incident already related took place.

Valentino when called to the stand told of pleading with his wife to return to him, to substantiate which testimony he introduced a letter, dated November 22, 1919, which read in part:

"My Dear Jean:

"I am at a complete loss to understand your conduct toward me, and I cannot receive any satisfactory explanation through telephoning or seeing you.

"Since I cannot force my presence upon you, either at the hotel or at Grace's (Grace Darmond), where you spent most of your time, I guess I'd better give it up. I am always ready to furnish you a home and all the comfort to the best of my moderate means and ability, as well as all the love and care of a husband for his dear little wife.

"Please, dear Jean, darling, come to your senses and give me an opportunity to prove my sincere love and eternal devotion to you.

"Your unhappy loving husband,

"RODOLFO."

Other letters and messages that were introduced were:

"Los Angeles, December 15, 1919.

"Rudolph Darling:

"Your little Jean is not so well tonight. She still has a bad cold. I will ask Lask tomorrow whether I may come over and visit you for a short stay.

"Your voice did sound awfully good and cheerful tonight, and last night it made me so lonesome for you. I just burned my finger. It hurts me.

"Dearest boy of mine, I wish you were in my arms this very minute. Oh, I need you so.

"You remember the song, 'I'd Rather Be There Than Any Place I Know?'—well, that is the way I feel tonight. Try to be as good as possible. Remember, I don't expect too much of my good-looking dark-eyed boy.

"Heartful of love, sweetheart,

(Signed) "JEAN."

Two telegrams, offered by Valentino to show that Miss Acker repulsed his advances, are as follows:

"Los Angeles, December 29, 1919.

"Rudolph Valentino,

"Del Monte.

"Impossible to spend New Year's with you. Leaving Tuesday afternoon for vacation. Will wire address when arrive. Awfully disappointed. Can't be helped. My love. Phone me at ten tonight.

(Signed) "JEAN."

"Mojave, Cal., January 16, 1920.

"Rudolph Valentino,

"Los Angeles.

"Wire and telephone calls very sweet, but letter entirely too sarcastic. Make your own plans for East and advise strongly you do not come, as I am working much too hard to entertain any one, and hotel only have room for the company. (Signed) "JEAN."

Just as the separation suit was about to come up in Supreme Court, Valentino filed his counter suit for divorce, which he lately won. The long delay in the trying of the case was due to Miss Acker's illness, which Valentino testified in court he believed to be sham, adding that she frequently went on wild parties.

"Was Nothing When I Married Him"

She replied, denying Valentino's charges, characterizing them as "dirty and low-down", and claiming that her husband was making these statements to injure her. She gave an interview to a newspaper at that time, declaring that she would say more, but she didn't want "these awful things" to reach her mother in the East.

"In time I may have to bare some unprintable details in court, but it would break my heart now," she said. She contradicted her husband's assertion that her illness was assumed. "When you're in love and working oh, so hard to make a living—it's no wonder my health broke down under the strain. Moving picture acting is no snap.

"While still sick and weak I went from studio to studio, and they passed the word around that I couldn't finish the pictures I started, so it was hard to get work. I was getting better when these horrible things come out in court and made me suffer so that my health broke down again. Of course, there is no truth in these stories about my participating in 'wild parties.'

"If my husband only knew the pain I am undergoing, perhaps he wouldn't say those things about me. I don't want his money, as he charges, but I do wish I had his health and strength.

"I used to play in comedies, but this is a tragedy. An X-ray will be taken in a few weeks to determine whether or not I shall have an operation. Perhaps I shall never be able to play in movies again."

Among the statements made by Miss Acker, in support of her case are these:

"He deserted me. He was nothing when I married him, and as soon as he 'arrived' he lost interest in me. He has been digging into my life history for other love affairs."

Valentino won his divorce decree but it was not to be final for one year. He ignored that stipulation. He and "Natacha Rambova" went to Mexicali, across the Mexican border, and were married.

And then came the bigamy charge and the flight of the bride to New York, leaving Valentino to face the charge alone. The hearing will be held June 1.

The name of Winifred Shaughnessy, used by the bride on her trip East, is her real maiden name.

She is the stepdaughter of Richard Hudnut, the New York perfume manufacturer. Her mother, formerly the wife of a Salt Lake City man, later married Edward de Wolfe, brother of Elsie de Wolfe.

His Love "Noblest," But May Have Erred, Says Valentino

Valentino declares that he and his present bride will now wait for the legal year and then remarry, and will meanwhile adhere strictly to the letter of the law.

"It is needless to say," he says, "that this year's delay will not in any way lessen our love. I, of course, regret deeply that I should have done anything that would lower me in the estimation of the American people who have been so kind to me and have accepted me at every turn for more than I conceive to be my real worth, and who have graciously called me 'the lover of the screen.'

"I will say that the love that made me do what I have done was prompted by the noblest intentions that a man could have. I loved deeply, but in loving I may have erred."

Valentino Tells About Himself and Women

"I have a future. I don't want any woman hampering my career."—Jean Acker testified Valentino said this to her.

"Ninety per cent of marriages are proposed when the man is lonely—or intoxicated. The only way to escape loneliness is by marrying."—From an interview with Herbert Howe.

"In America democracy has been carried even into the home. There is no such thing as equality. The woman is not the equal of the man, intellectually or any other way."—From the same interview.

"My success means more to me than anything in the world. I have a fine opportunity now. I don't want a wife. I want to be free."—From Jean Acker's testimony.

Valentino's Wife Tells of Valentino

"He is an enigma. Our paths have only crossed, like ships that pass in the night."

"He was nothing when I married him and, as soon as he 'arrived,' he lost interest in me. He has been digging into my life history for other love affairs."

"I opened the door, we argued; he hit me with his fist and knocked me down. It was the first time any one had struck me. I cried."

Jean wrote to him later: "Your little Jean is not so well tonight. Your voice did sound awfully good and cheerful. It made me so lonesome for you. I just burned my finger. It hurts me. Dearest boy of mine, I wish you were in my arms this very minute. Oh, I need you so."

Left—Valentino and Agnes Ayres in "The Sheik." Right—Valentino's famous tango scene in "The Four Horsemen"