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Millicent and the Mistletoe

By
De LYSLE FERREE CASS

MILlicent HERARD had not the slightest idea that she even remotely resembled Audrey Arlington, stellar member of the National Film Manufacturing company's cast. In fact, having only recently arrived in the big city from a downstate farm, she had not even seen any of Miss Arlington's celebrated moving-picture portrayals, much less heard of that opulent magnate of filmdom, the National Film Manufacturing company. Truth to tell, the very first time she learned of its existence was that evening when, worn out by a bootless tour of business offices where she had hoped for employment, she read its "ad" in the Help Wanted section of a newspaper.

Millicent had come to the metropolis abrim with the high hopes and dimly-remembered enthusiasm of youth. Incidentally she brought remarkable good looks with her too, although, being unsophisticated and from the country, she was not as self-conscious of them as most city girls of her age are. The home farm was hopelessly mortgaged and for several years past she had realized with increasing poignancy what a tax upon her aged parents' slender resources she was.

As a girl grows older she craves more and better things, and, no matter how slightly she may be indulged in the matter, her support is unavoidably more expensive from year to year. It was acute realization of this that had prompted Millicent to adventure citywards, armed with her diploma from the Tingleville Commercial college, proving her to be a fully trained stenographer.

Millicent had found no positions open, however. Nobody seemed in need of a stenographer without past experience or even a typist. Some business men, she found, wanted a girl in their offices, but they expressed themselves as being more personally interested in Millicent's good looks than in her Tingleville certificate. So Millicent wisely looked elsewhere. Wisely maybe, but fruitlessly. Then one evening in her bare hall room this second week she came across the two-line "ad" of the National Film Manufacturing company, which, it seemed, was lukewarmly interested in securing a girl "for filing."

A princely stipend of six dollars per week was the practical inducement offered. Six dollars loomed gigantic to our Millicent just then and, although the thought of being only an office girl was humiliating, it was considerably better than nothing. She determined to be first of the hundred-odd applicants at the studio on the morrow, and so, indeed, she was.



"Look! Look!"

On the way out next morning Miss Millicent occupied herself with a perusal of the newspaper and therein read a long account of the stupendous production which the National Film Manufacturing company was about to release. The names of fascinating Audrey Arlington, darling of the movie

fans, and of Ned Tolman, her handsome male "support," occurred frequently. The release was to be in no less than five reels, three of which the press notice stated were already done and desperate efforts were being made to finish taking the other two for a theater presentation by Christmas eve. "A mammoth, elaborate production . . . no expense spared . . ." etc., etc., ad lib.

Not knowing much about the movies, Millicent wasn't much impressed, however. At the moment her mind was fervently occupied with melancholy reminiscences of a "Ned" whom she herself had known—Ned Harkins, who had pledged eternal fidelity to her in the shadow of a haystack one moonlight night years before when both he and she were barely more than children. Ned—her Ned—had gone away to the big city three years before to make his fortune. She never had heard from him since.

Unclouded eyes, a fresh complexion and simple direct address won Millicent her interview with the office manager in the film plant. While he still was explaining her new filing duties, in rushed the chief director—hair ruffled and gesticulating in wild excitement.

"Audrey Arlington fell down in the middle of her big scene in the last reel of the Christmas release. . . . Complete nervous breakdown! . . . hysterical . . . are rushing her direct to the nearest hospital now. . . . What in heaven's name will we do? There isn't a girl in the whole stock company who can make up to look enough like her to complete the personification for this final reel!"

The head director kept wringing his hands and swearing frantically. The president of the company registered acute distress. Then his eyes accidentally fell upon pretty Millicent among her filing cases.

"Look! Look! Mr. Isaacsohn!" yelled the head director, pointing. "As I live, that girl looks enough like Miss Arlington to be mistaken for her on the street! . . . Come here, Miss—Miss whatever-your-name-is! Have you ever posed before a 'picture' camera? No? . . . well, it doesn't make any difference just now anyway. You're freed from that office job. I'll give you \$50 a week to substitute for Miss Arlington in this last reel. . . . No, I haven't time to listen to anything about it! Come on back to the studio with me right now! The 'set' is all up and we were right in the middle of the scene when Miss Arlington fainted. Ned Tolman, the leading man, is waiting. C'mon!"

Bewildered Millicent was pulled out of the busy offices and back to the huge glass-domed studio where the last reel of the famous Christmas release was being held in impatient abeyance for its principal.

"Listen now, miss," exploded the director as Millicent emerged from the dressing room clad in the same wonderful gown that Audrey Arlington had been wearing only ten minutes before. "Pay attention to what I say and don't stare at either me or the camera. Act natural; that's what we're paying you for! Walk inside of those tape lines on the floor and don't on any account move outside them. This scene is the parlor of your home. It's supposed to be Christmas eve. You're to turn your back to the camera and be tying a sprig of mistletoe to the chandelier. Mr. Ned Tolman, who plays opposite 'lead,' will do the rest. You simply act as any girl would under the circumstances. . . . Hey you! Get Mr. Tolman from his dressing-room. Tell him we're all ready again. Now in you go miss!"

Millicent did just as she was told although her heart beat fast and her head was in a whirl. With her back to the assemblage behind the cranking camera man, she raised both arms to tie the sprig of mistletoe to the chandelier. Quick footsteps sounded behind her and, an instant later, a man's strong arms were around her waist and his handsome face thrust close to hers for a kiss.

With a cry of mingled fright and indignation, the girl squirmed about in his arms and tried to push him away. Then for the first time she caught sight of the movie matinee idol's face. "Ned?" she thrilled in joyous amazement. "Ned Harkins! You are the famous Ned Tolman?"

"Millicent!" breathed he, clasping her closer as their lips met in a long, long kiss and the watching director yelled: "Fine! fine! Hold that!"

Presently the whirr of the camera crank ceased and the grins on the faces of actor, "extra," and "set" shifter broadened.

"Hey there!" finally shouted the head director. "Film's run out; scene's over! We've had enough of that kiss now!"

"But I haven't," murmured Ned, looking fondly down into his old sweetheart's happiness-flushed face. "Have you, Millicent?"

"Never! I could keep on doing it forever," she whispered softly back.

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