

We Interview NITA NALDI

An Interview Playlet in One Act and Three Scenes

THE CAST

The Siren of the Screen.....Nita Naldi
 The Siren's Sister.....Mary Naldi
 We.....
 Mimi.....

Gladys Hall and
 Adele Whitely Fletcher
 Herself

SCENE I.

The entrance to the apartment house in the exclusive East Sixties, where Nita Naldi has her being with her sister, Mary. Gladys Hall and Adele Whitely Fletcher enter on time for the FIRST time in their checkered careers. They scan the bell names. Above one is flamboyantly inscribed "NALDI." A. W. F. rings efficiently. Almost the way she summons a bell-hop in lesser hostelrys. The door, clicks and the interviewers enter.

Photograph by Edward Thayer Monroe

Adele Whitely Fletcher (dubiously): "How do you know which floor it is?"

Gladys Hall (definitely): "You don't."

A. W. F. (over her shoulder as she mounts the stairs with her air of habitual ennui): "For all the help you are to me I might leave you at home and tell you about things."

Gladys Hall (quickly): "I've often thought of that myself. An excellent idea. However, as an afterthought, I really don't begrudge the time or taxi spent in seeing Nita Naldi. She's vital and human. Honest and beautiful. All the things a human being is supposed to be and a star so seldom is. You need offer no apologies for taking my time today, Miss Fletcher."

(At which juncture the interviewers reach the second floor and the door is opened by a dark girl clad in green silk pajamas and a mandarin coat, black-haired, with red and green combs in her hair. A girl reminiscent of Nita, younger and a bit simpler.)

A. W. F. (with her Blue Book manner forward): "Miss Naldi?"

Mary Naldi: "I am Mary Naldi. Nita isn't back from the studio yet. She expects you, however. Do come in. It's after six now. She'll be in presently..."

(The interviewers enter and the door is closed.)

SCENE II

The living room of the Naldi suite. Curtains cover the windows and shroud the rays of the setting sun. A broad divan of brocaded black and gold fronts the stone fireplace. A long table backs the divan and books are stretched the length of the table. Apart from the books the only other ornament on the table is the ornamental ornament of Charlie Chaplin's framed and affectionately autographed face. There are other autographed photographs about the room... Natasha Rambova Valentino decorates the piano. Rod-La Rocque in duplicate tops a secretary. And there are pictures of Nita herself here and there. Also a Raphael Madonna for reasons best known to Nita. There are shaded lights and brightly gleaming smoking stands of brass and copper. One large, sinky chair is covered in yellow satin. Gladys Hall selects it...

A. W. F. (as Mary Naldi deserts the room, a vivid little disappearing flash of green and black and scarlet): "The—er—slight gloom is kind to you, my dear Miss Hall. Otherwise I would doubt the wisdom of selecting that particular chair for a background. You have courage, my friend... most women would avoid it. And speaking of the gentle gloom here, I am reminded of your home. One gropes about in dark places... one feels something of a mushroom... or a mole..."

G. H.: "Or a bat. Brilliant light, Miss Fletcher, has never been employed by sirens."

A. W. F.: "I fail to see the connection. Forgive me if I am dull."

G. M.: "Oh, well... Incidentally, what are we to talk to Nita about, Oh Peer Among Editors!"

A. W. F.: "I have come seeking knowledge."

G. M.: "Of how she reduced, I'll wager!"

A. W. F.: "Correct, my tactful friend. And without being unkind... remembering your luncheon today... your dinner last night... your tea the day before... remembering these material things... you, too, might give a thought to what she has to say on calories and the daily dozen..."

(Here Mary Naldi returns.)

Mary Naldi: "I telephoned the studio. Nita left at six-twenty. That means she will be here in about fifteen minutes."

G. H.: "And what time does she have to be on the set in the morning?"

M. N.: "We get up at seven. I make Nita some coffee and when she has gone I go back to bed again. They usually have to be on the set at nine. Make-up takes half an hour. If some screen-struck girls could watch my sister, they'd realize that a screen actress has no easy time of it. Gee, most of the time Nita goes right to bed when she gets home, she's so dead tired. No wonder they need a rest between pictures."

A. W. F.: "Have you ever been in pictures?"

M. N.: "Once. I was an extra in Mae Murray's picture. That was when we were in California. Nita was furious. I had to tell her, 'cause she wanted to know where I'd been all day. She certainly keeps tabs on me. I have to tell her everywhere I go. She told me she'd rather have me stay at home than be an extra. Maybe if I can get a real part she'll let me work again."

G. H.: "What do you do with yourself all day?"

M. N.: "Gee, there's enough to do just answering the phone and the doorbell here. One or the other keeps ringing all the time. And then I run errands for Nita... there's an awful lot of them..."

G. H.: "Miss Fletcher here is anxious to know how Miss Naldi has grown so thin."

(A. W. F. glares in the yellow satin direction of G. H.)

M. N.: "Oh, she's beautiful and thin. She's just right, I think. Not that she ever was fat as some of the newspapers said. My goodness, you can't look like a woman nowadays without being called fat. Wait until you see her, though. She went to some woman here in New York who makes a business of reducing you. Mary Garden goes to her, too. She was there just before she sailed for Europe, a few weeks ago."

A. W. F. (eagerly. And it must be admitted in the interests of truth that

G. H. seems interested, also. In-between trying to make out the autographs on the various private and personal pictures hitherto mentioned, she seems to be making mental notes of what Miss Naldi is saying): "What woman do you mean? Who is she? What does she do? Do you have to diet, too?"

M. N.: "She's wonderful. Twenty-four treatments for one hundred and some odd dollars. First you sit in an electric chair for twenty minutes. Then a hot cabinet for twenty minutes. Then a shower as cold as you can stand it. After that they put an electric roller on you wherever you wish to reduce most."

(At this moment the tiny, old-fashioned, black-and-tan Mimi, so small that she looks like a fragile bronze cut dropped from the mantle, barks loudly . . . for Mimi. She has heard Nita at the door. After slipping into her room to remove her wraps, The Naldi comes into the living room . . . Swinburne or some poet with the gift of strong and gorgeous words might write flaming villanelles to her savage beauty. For it is a savage beauty. Sumptuous. Contemptuous. Scornful. Scathing. Proud. Conscious. Superb. A beauty that might have run riotous riot in some forest primeval or that might have stalked the streams and torrents of gargantuan mountains wrapped in the skins of the lynx and the leopard. A beauty that has been modernized but not subdued. Her long, heavy, black hair, glistening like the sea when it is slow and black, is coiled in one massive twist over one ear, brushed severely back from the rest of her face. From the one exposed ear hangs a massive, wrought-gold earring. Her skin is pale marble, as firm and as sculptural. Her mouth is scarlet and barbed with cruel words. Her hands are free from jewels, save for a band of gold.)

Nita Naldi (in her forceful, quick voice, not languorous and affected as one might assume): "I wasn't late to impress you. My car didn't show up, of course. I had to take a taxi. I take taxis these days. Once I was glad to have street car fare."

(G. H. and A. W. F. look at one another happily. Nita Naldi hasn't changed—press stories to the contrary. She still adheres to her old slogan of "Be Yourself." It could never be truthfully said that Nita is ritz, up-stage. And those players who have acquired affectations would do well to keep out of Nita's ruthless way, for she has a caustic scorn and there have been times when it has been vented upon a few unfortunates.)

A. W. F.: "Your little sister has been telling us about your experiences in reducing."

Nita (with a fond, quick glance at the "little sister"): "Isn't she cunning? Oh, reducing . . . I did it to satisfy them . . . those rotten stories about me. Jealousy, that's all. I never was fat, though some of the clothes I had to wear in some of the pictures made me look it. I'd admit it if I were. But finally, to shut them up, I got this thin (standing up and turning about, she displays with justifiable and gorgeously unconcealed pride a figure of slender but magnificent proportions). But first I told them, though, that they shouldn't judge a woman's form by what they see in Hollywood. They've never seen anything like me and they never will. I advised them to take a run, up to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and have a look at some real figures. If Venus applied to a movie magnate for a job, he'd put her in a Boyish Form . . . I don't know what's the matter with them, anyway. Or rather I do know . . . they can't get anything on me and it makes 'em sore. The things they've said about me . . . that I've bobbed my hair. Well, I never have bobbed my hair and I never will bob it. That's that. They say that I take iodine baths to dye my skin yellow. My God, I'm as yellow as that chair new seen by day. Why should I try to improve on nature? I don't want to change myself. Why can't they let me alone? All I want is to be myself—me—Nita Naldi. I don't want to look like a man. I don't want to be or look like something I'm not. And I don't intend to go about explaining my body every minute. Now there's a beautiful woman (points to the photograph of Natacha Valentino on the piano). She is marvelous looking. I saw her once, before I knew who she was, and I never forgot her. And even today, working with her in the studio, I can't keep my eyes from her."

A. W. F.: "And aren't they stunning together—Rudy and Natacha?"

Nita: "My God, yes! No couple has any moral or legal right to be as good to look upon as they are."

G. H.: "However, I have heard people say that they don't think Mrs. Valentino is good looking. I can't understand it . . ."

Nita: "I can. Men, I'll bet. Have you ever taken a look at the birds who sport the square-cut diamonds? There's your answer . . ."

(It would be evident to the most cursory observer that both G. H. and A. W. F. are impressed by the overpowering Naldi beauty. It is evident, too, that her entire lack of pose—her consummate honesty, pleases them more than any pose ever would. Nita doesn't need to pose. Moreover, if her conversation makes copy, well and good—if it doesn't, more's the pity—but that's that.)

G. H.: "What is your role in this new picture with Valentino?"

Nita: "A peasant girl. It's about time that they realized that all of the sirens in the world do not conduct their amours from perfumed chaises longues. Or in exotic rooms with tiger-skin rugs and spirals of incense. As a matter of fact, the most effective sirens I've known haven't carried about the trappings of allurements as the drama would have them. This is a truthful character and I like playing her. And I also love to play with Rudy. He's a darling. Not spoiled nor up-stage a bit. Just as he always was. Everyone loves him."

A. W. F.: "How did you like playing Sally Lung in 'The Ten Commandments'?"

Nita: "I was a bit off that role at first. I didn't know how Sally would get by Mr. and Mrs. Censor. As it was, they cut a lot of her out, being a leper and all that."

"That was funny, anyway, making that picture. I'd heard (Continued on page 31)



Said Nita: "Jealousy prompted the stories they printed about me. I never was too fat. I never bobbed my hair. I do not take iodine baths to make my skin yellow. It's yellow enough. Why should I try to improve on nature? I want to be myself—Me—Nita Naldi."

Above is Miss Naldi as the Eurasian charmer in a scene from "The Ten Commandments." Rod La Rocque is with her.

In the circle is Mary Naldi. And below is a new photograph of Nita.

Photographs left and below by Edward Tayer Monroe



We Interview Nita Naldi

(Continued from page 7)

some things about Mr. De Mille, how he shrieked and yelled at his company and all that sort of thing. So when I got there I just went to him and told him to look here if there was any yelling to be done, I could yell just a little bit louder than anyone else in that part of the world—and I never had a bit of trouble. He was as nice as pie to me all the way through.

"It was funny, though. You should have seen the sanctimonious bunch during the taking of the actual picture. Mr. De Mille felt that we should live our parts. We were supposed to read spiritual books and abstain from worldly pleasures. Of course that was the routine for most of the company. Such living was hardly the thing for my part! I thought at the time that if I had to live my role away from the studio it would have its difficulties. Nevertheless, I managed somehow without it."

(Indifferent gossip, which cannot be reproduced, of Gloria Swanson, of Rod' La Rocque, of Allen Dwan and such like, punctuates the rest of the time and then it suddenly and unpleasantly occurs to the interviewers that Nita has an early call in the morning and that they have not yet dined, though it is eight p. m. They begin to make their departures.)

G. H. (in mock formality after a MOST informal two hours): "It's been SO nice, seeing you again, Miss Naldi . . ."

A. W. F. (in exaggerated mock formality): "It's been so kind of you, Miss Naldi . . . really, we . . ."

Nita (with a crack on their two backs): "Be yourself, Gladys. Can the high hat, Adele . . . Be yourselves!"

A. W. F. (with resolution): "We will. It's the surest way to being original."

(Here G. H. and A. W. F. exeunt. Good-byes are called during their entire descent.)*

* Also unprintable for purely personal reasons.

SCENE III.

The interior of a taxi-cab. Needless to state, the vehicle is headed toward the nearest subway entrance. Movie stars always live in neighborhoods only reached by motor.)

A. W. F. (studying her reflection in her vanity case): "Lord, she's beautiful!"

G. H. (similarly occupied): "Magnificent, rather. When I realize that there are women in the world like that, I appreciate the constancy of the few men I know."

A. W. F.: "Don't mention it. For any slight favors the masculine sex have conferred upon me I'm truly grateful. It's a good thing to have such a woman as Nita Naldi brought to one's attention, lest one grow unduly vain."

G. H.: "And she's as honest in admitting that she is gorgeous to behold as she is in other things. She has swept away all of the cobwebs, hasn't she? She is nakedly truthful. She has dispensed with subterfuges, either about herself or about anyone or anything else. In the vernacular of our erudite set, my friend, she calls a spade a shovel."

A. W. F.: "That's really the best part of Nita. It makes her magnificent to talk to as well as to know. She's honest in what she thinks. Yes, even about herself. She admits that she's beautiful and that's the end of it. You get the fact that she takes no credit for being born good to look upon, but neither does she want the natural fact spurred."

G. H.: Well, I'm for her. If I were a man . . ."

A. W. F.: "But you're not, my dear. And here's the subway."

G. H.: "It always is. From Nita to a home-going Bronxite. Who said that life is filled with contrast?"

A. W. F.: "A wise man, my dear friend. Or a tired one. Probably an indigent interviewer who had just been to see Nita Naldi . . ."

(The interviewers disappear into the maw of the Interurban, with chests thrown out and Amazonian stride, trying to give an impression of the Naldi. No one looks at them and they vanish from sight.)

CURTAIN.

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