

Girl with a Funny Face

By Kyle Crichton



Imogene Coca's Broadway career was a fine example of success in reverse until the Straw Hat Revue. Now she's in a hit

MISS IMOGENE COCA is a young lady with the face of a junior gargoyle, the shape of a suspender strap and a name so appropriate that if a national contest were held to find a name for Imogene Coca, the name Imogene Coca would win. In every show in which she has appeared she has been hailed as a triumph, but the show has driven even the complimentary guests into the street. By some extraordinary mistake on her part she has now ruined this record by starring in a really good musical show called the Straw Hat Revue.

Just where she found her old musical shows has always been a mystery. Wherever any strange group began rehearsing a play in a barn, the moment would come when a big-eyed face would stick itself out from behind a stall and a voice would say:

"Could you use a funny actor?"

This would be Miss Coca and eventually she would be the leading actor and all the critics would say what a nice, funny girl and why didn't somebody give her some material to work with? In comparison with her past vehicles, the Straw Hat Revue shapes up as a major triumph.

The origins of the present show were no more promising than Miss Coca's other efforts. It is an extended version of what the summer-camp guests were seeing at Camp Tamiment at Bushkill, Pennsylvania, last year. Anyone who has seen Arthur Kober's Having Wonderful Time will know the whole story. Around New York there are dozens of these camps on the "borsch" circuit. There is a lake, a dance hall and a revue every Saturday night. It is paradise for the youngsters who have saved desperately all year for these two weeks of summer vacation. Some of these shows are so bad that they merely afford an excuse for the lads and lassies to slip out and do a bit of necking, but they have also been the source of some of our best musical material.

The Bushkill season had Miss Coca and her husband, Robert Burton, with Danny Kaye and Lee Brody. Miss Coca was getting room and board and about \$700 for the season. They rehearsed during the week and did the Saturday show and life was pretty slick. Then somebody inveigled Harry Kaufman of Shuberts down to see the performance; he liked it, booked it for the Ambassador Theater. Since then it has been merely a matter of taking in the money.

At any moment in the proceedings Miss Coca is likely to come forth with her big, forlorn-looking eyes and gaze at the audience with a sort of bovine curiosity, as if wondering how people of their intelligence could possibly be in a place like this. At another moment she is shot up out of the stage and appears as a water sprite, squeaking audibly at the joints as she propels her skinny frame about in a ballet number. In a burlesque of Carmen Miranda, singing the Souse American Way, she maintains an expression that is half fawn and half Hell's Kitchen. Without sufficient provocation she will burst into song, furnishing a cake-pan sort of soprano and an attitude of bravado which says that she will finish what she is doing, theater afire or not.

If she lacks beauty she certainly has personality. She had it even at the age of eleven when she launched her vaudeville career at the Dixie Theater in Manayunk, a section of Philadelphia where even the cops go about with bodyguards. But what she remembers particularly about that engagement was the audience.

"They ran up and down the aisles setting off fire-crackers," she says.

She came by her stage ambitions naturally because her father played the fiddle at the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia and her mother was a dancer.

She learned to dance, too, and played in a vaudeville flash act. Jimmy Durante saw her in this and hired her for the Silver Slipper Club, where she danced in the chorus and had one song number.

"It came in the second show," says Imogene, "and everybody was drunk by that time, so it didn't matter."

She kept going in and out of night clubs for years—the Fifth Avenue Club, New York, the Jay C. Flippen Club, the Piccadilly Club, Philadelphia, the New Yorker Club—but most of them folded after ten weeks or so.

"That was the day of the mobsters and gangsters," she offers, "and they paid very nicely every Saturday night, but I didn't want them (Continued on page 60)"

Turtle Soup

By Richard Howells Watkins

ILLUSTRATED BY DAN SWEENEY

It takes a bright young man like Lee to get a cottage, a pension and a ship captaincy out of a few cases of scrap iron

THE flat-nosed Virgin Islander at the winch kept his hand on the brake handle. But he did not check the descent of the solitary case.

From out of the Caribbean sun that was blasting the steel deck of the Irene Maxwell, the case dropped swiftly into the shadowy depths of Number 2 hold. A splintering crash rose and was drowned out by the boom of vibrating steel. Before the ship had ceased shuddering, a swirl of rusty dust twisted up out of the hatch. And, close behind it, lifted a white man's voice, bawling condemnation.

Mr. Rand, the mate, already had blood in his eye. The old man was making another trip, quite against the mate's hopeful expectations. This mishap gave him an outlet for his injured feelings. He hurled a special word of his own at the black winchman and clattered down the iron rungs to the bottom of the hold. He found Lee Dobie, the second, already trying to patch up the badly smashed case with a hammer. The young second mate had his body spread out over the box in a peculiar, screening manner. Hastily he slapped on another piece of wood.

In spite of this Al Rand got a glimpse of the contents of the splintered case. It was a battered, rust-reddened gasoline motor of ancient make. He saw that much and then Lee Dobie quickly shoved another broken slat across his vision. Mr. Rand stood still, staring at the shattered case. His anger evaporated and his customary vigilant, self-seeking watchfulness took its place. He had never seen scrap metal shipped in cases before.

"The old man is looking for you," Mr. Rand said untruthfully. "Go up."

The usual devil-may-care Lee Dobie was sweating with uneasiness. Reluctantly he obeyed. Once started, he shot up the iron rungs as if there had been gunpowder under him. He wouldn't be gone long.

Al Rand seized the hammer, ripped off another slat and plunged his hand into the second case. Scrap iron! He could feel the rust under his hand. He peered in. Another ramshackle ex-motor.

LEE DOBIE was already clattering down into the hold again. Mr. Rand tapped on the slat. When Dobie jumped off the rungs the mate's eyes squinted suspiciously at the flurried young man. He glanced at the markings on the case and then around at scores of others, all part of the same shipment, and moved to the ladder. Halfway up, he paused and looked over his shoulder at Lee's bent back. A sudden grin twisted his lips and was instantly suppressed.

When Lee Dobie came up out of Number 2, Mr. Rand, though he was usually watching the old man, was lin-

gering unobtrusively in the starboard alleyway. He saw Lee head at once to the bridge, where old Captain Burbage was leaning wearily against the rail. The old man was talking to Jake Schenk, one of this interisland line's largest shippers and owner of those cases below. Lee Dobie broke in on them abruptly, for a second mate. He spoke rapidly, with his eyes turned down to Number 2. The old skipper and the sleek man of business listened to him with marked intensity.

"Well, what do you know?" Mr. Rand asked himself in increasing satisfaction and answered for himself: "The three of them are in it."

In the course of an unscholastic life Mr. Rand had read little, heard much talk and seen a great many moving pictures depicting villainy at sea. But, barring a little pilfering by stevedores or sailors, this was the first time he had encountered it in others in the way of his own career.

HE HIMSELF had a low opinion of villainy, derived from personal experience. It was dangerous. It didn't pay, except in a big way in Europe. But if you had the luck to get on the opposite side to villainy, he reasoned, you might make a handsome profit with very little risk.

Mr. Rand smacked his thick lips. "Turtle soup!" he breathed. "Turtle soup!"

He glanced over at the dock. There reposed a long, rust-reddened mound of scrap metal, old motors, frames, obsolete or worn-out bits of machinery, old rails and other bits of industrial garbage awaiting transshipment to England. It was all the property of Jake Schenk. It seemed to Mr. Rand that the pile had diminished a trifle since the loading of the Irene Maxwell with what purported to be a varied shipment of machinery and merchandise consigned by Jake Schenk to St. Kitts, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Barbados and Trinidad.

Suddenly somebody slid up alongside Al Rand. He started violently. But it was only Mr. Sproul, the middle-aged third officer. Mr. Sproul nodded toward the bridge and sniggered gently.

"Well, Chief, I see the old man's making another trip—and him too far gone to stand on his feet," he said. He tut-tutted indignantly. "You run him ragged enough last voyage so he'd ought to stay on the beach."

"Ar-r!" Mr. Rand's good humor momentarily departed. "Old Barebones

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He was boarding her alone, as matter-of-factly as it she were at the dock. He climbed rapidly

