

Bashful Brenda

By Kyle Crichton

Brenda Marshall may not be a wizard in the art of repartee, but she can dream up a swell performance with a movie script in her hand



PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY CHARLES KERLEE

WHETHER Brenda Marshall has a sense of humor is beside the point. She may have it; she may not have it. The most that can be reported is that she is a serious lady who has little facility at chitchat. This is a deficiency in Hollywood, where fast talk is treasured. Through years of practice at the art, the colony has developed a language that is quite special. It consists of a rapid-fire and endless series of allusions and abstruse gags, and Brenda does not operate too briskly in this interchange.

The fact that this hasn't injured her film career may be set down to the circumstance that an actress is confined strictly to the words of the script. In this field she is all right. At least Warners' keep giving her such parts as *The Sea Hawk* and *East of the River*, and she keeps acting them competently. We mention the matter only to show that it takes all kinds to make up an industry.

Although her experience on Broadway was confined to one Federal Theater Project show, she is just beginning to rid her mind of the impression that the stage is dominated by a group of white-robed figures bearing aloft torches of pure white flame. Just when she took the vow to uplift the drama is not clear but she recalls that slight twinges were beginning to affect her even in those days when she was still living on a sugar plantation in the Philippines. She was Ardis Ankersen at that period and her

father was overseer of a large establishment on the island of Negros. Ardis (the future Brenda) lived on the island until 1930, when her father decided she needed the benefit of American training and sent her to San Antonio, Texas, where she lived with her stepmother.

"They looked at me pretty strangely down there at Alamo High and kept insisting that I do the hula-hula, and I never could get them straightened out about Hawaii and the Philippines and I never could convince them that I was an American of Danish extraction who just happened to be born over there."

Strictly No Improvisations

The acting thing was so firmly embedded in her mind that when she went up to Texas Teachers College for Women, at Denton, she specialized in voice, speech and dramatics. By the end of the two years the stage mania had her completely. There was nothing to do then but hie herself off to New York and enroll in Madame Ouspenskaya's dramatic school. Ouspenskaya's success as a teacher is so well established that it will do no harm to know that the school almost ruined our Brenda. Again it was her own fault. She was good at speaking lines but when Ouspenskaya asked for improvisation, that business of making up actions as the player went along, Brenda was stuck.

"I always selected the part of a deaf

mute," says Brenda, "and then just acted dumb. I'm not joking about it—I really did that."

Brenda was always hoping that they would put on a complete play some day and Ouspenskaya was always promising it and never getting around to it. Instead the improvisations went on endlessly and Brenda developed an inferiority complex. She could act when she knew what was to be acted but her imagination was on the down side.

"Now, we'll take this situation," the teacher would say. "The father is a drunkard and the daughter comes home from Vassar and brings with her a man from Williams who wants to marry her. Now, we'll improvise on that."

Without an instant's hesitation the other students would wade right into a soft one like that, making up lines and situations on the spot and weaving a great drama from it. In panic Brenda would assume the role of a maiden aunt, also a dipsomaniac, who slept fitfully in a chair and occasionally lifted her besotted face to mumble, "Whash thish all about?"

As if this weren't bad enough she lived in one of the many maidens' retreats in New York, those faintly virginal institutions where man can get no farther than the reception room and rules are strict for the girls. It didn't make life in New York very exciting for our heroine.

So the first summer after she came to

New York, she was pleased beyond measure to get a job with the Peterboro Players in New Hampshire. The company was directed by Richard Gaines and drama was taken seriously. Having a script before her and imbued anew with ambition, Brenda swung right into the spirit of the joint. She not only acted in everything the company presented but she also married Mr. Gaines. They lived on their two salaries and a cloud of dreams.

Movies? Phooey!

"Nobody in the world was ever as solemn as we were," she says. "The sanctity of the stage, the great mission of the drama and all that. We scoffed at Hollywood and the movies."

When the usual movie talent scouts came around on the usual routine visits, she refused to see them. They weren't particularly anxious to see her but she felt insulted when they went through the motions of doing their jobs. Then one night after doing *She Stoops to Conquer*, they met a young Oxford graduate named Hugh MacMullin.

"We liked him. He seemed to feel toward the stage as we felt. When we learned he was a screen talent scout with Warners', we froze up and practically asked him out of the house."

Next year he was back again insisting that she make a test and finally she

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One-Trip Darling

By Richard Connell

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL BLOSSOM

Mrs. Darling didn't care for plumbing. Mr. Darling did. An American dream that was like a nightmare for the happiest couple in Ashtabula

YES, I'm Darling. I'm *the* Darling. You've seen my face and name. I'm the Fellow with the Fish, to wit: A. B. Darling, retired, of Ashtabula, Ohio.

At times it's tough to be a man. If a woman doesn't like the name she was born with, she can change it. Same with her face. But a man's got to make the best of his.

I've made out pretty well, as a matter of fact, for a freckled-neck with a pushed-up bugle and a mushy tag. You can readily see how it would not help a plumber to have to advertise: "For your new house, get a Darling bathtub."

When I was a bashful young punky-dunk, learning my trade, I used to blush like a tomato when the boss said in front of strangers, "Hand me that wrench, Darling." So, when I set up my own shop, I called myself, "One-Trip Darling, The Plumber with a Conscience." Now everybody calls me One-Trip, even my wife.

On the ninth of last May I finally got to be fifty. I put in a day of work, and I was back in my shop, getting the putty out of my ears, when in marched a large, serious man and said, "I'm Higby from headquarters."

Now, offhand, I'd say I'm the most respectable fellow in Ohio, but I gulped, "I didn't do it." I don't doubt I looked as guilty as sin.

"I'm from the home office of the Frugality Insurance Company," he said, and grabbed my hand and pumped it as if he were jacking up a car. "Congratulations, Darling!"

I said, "What for?" "On your retirement," he said. "When did I retire?" I asked. "Today," he said. "I'll bet you're mighty glad you took out one of our retirement annuity policies twenty-five years ago."

"I am now," I admitted, "but there were times when I wasn't." "When was that?" he asked, and I said, "The first of every month." He laughed like a man who had taken lessons, and said, "Well, from now on, Darling, we pay you. Yes, sir, fifty dollars each and every week. All you have to do is loaf and fish. Pretty soft for you, hey Darling?" "It would be softer," I said, "if I liked to loaf or fish." He said, "Well, then, what is your hobby?" and I said, "Plumbing." And he laughed again on the company's time. Then he said, "Of course, you won't mind if we hold you up as an example?" I said, "Of what?" He said, "Of a man who looked ahead."

I said I didn't see what harm that could do and he whipped out a paper and a fat fountain pen and said, "We're getting up a series of little messages to the men of America, 'Things Young Husbands Should Know.'" "I'm an old husband," I said. "We just want permission to quote you as saying that you think it is a good thing to save money," he said. "Here's where you sign. It's just a formality."

After all my years in business, I should have known that, when a fellow says, "It's just a formality," you ought

to lock yourself in the safe till your lawyer gets there; but I felt careless that day because the time had come when I could stop working and not stop eating, though I didn't intend to stop doing either as I am fond of both. I signed.

"And now," this Higby said, "I'd like a picture of you." "Printing my pan might queer some sales for you," was my reply. "Folks might think that paying your premiums gave me these right-angle ears."

He argued, so I got out the only picture I had, taken in '28, when I had the new front put in my shop. I'm sitting in the window among the fixtures. Higby said no—it did not look very retired. "I'd like a recent one of you in your fishing togs," he said. "I don't have any fishing togs," I told him. "How soon are you going home?" he asked. "Not till six," I said. "I'll be back," he said.

Pretty soon he was back with a big bundle. In the bundle were a rod and reel and a complete outfit of fishing clothes—everything from hip boots to a hat with flies on it. "Now, just slip them on," he said, "so I can get a shot of you fishing." "What? On Main Street?" I said. "Don't worry about the background," he said. "Just put on this rig and I'll do the rest."

ONE reason I've made out so well is that I'm obliging. I put on the khaki britches, and checkerboard shirt. I'm tubby; but the man they were made for was tubbier. Higby got me out into the back yard, boosted me up on a packing box and began snapping his little camera at me.

I heard some titters. The boys in the barbershop next door were watching through the window. As I'm not a hard-drinking man, they thought I'd gone buggy. There I stood, yanking at the rod for dear life, with this Higby yelling, "I'm a big one! Don't give me any slack. Fight me, Mr. Darling, fight me!" He had tied the end of the line to his belt.

"Now start reeling me in!" he yelled. I reeled until my thumb got caught in the reel. Then he stopped taking pictures of me. I climbed down off the packing case and out of the clothes and I handed them to this Higby and he said, "Keep them. Compliments of Frugality." I said, "What'll I do with them?" and he said, "Why, wear them when you go fishing," and I said, "I never caught a fish in my life." He said, "You certainly must have had a lot of bad luck," and I said, "It wasn't so much bad luck as the fact that I've never gone fishing."

He slapped his head as if a thought had bitten him. He said, more to the ceiling than to me, "*The man who couldn't go fishing till he was fifty!*" "That's not me," I said. "I could have gone but I didn't want to." "Oh!" was all he said, and he gave my hand another jacking and hurried away. I tossed the rod and togs into the stockroom and went home. I thought so little of it I didn't even mention it to Doll. That's my wife. Her name is Doretta, but I



call her Doll, because that is what she reminds me of.

It was mighty nice, I can tell you, to see that fifty per coming in; but I had plenty of plumbing, so I just put the checks in the bank and let 'em lay.

COUPLE of months went by and, one evening after supper, I lit up my pipe and was getting ready to settle down for a quiet evening when there came one of those little homemade thunderstorms which blow up in the lives of all married folks. We haven't had many, Doll and me, in our twenty-five years. Sometimes I do something that makes her sore. I don't mean good and sore or even real sore, just sore. I've got a way of telling when my wife is sore that most husbands haven't. When she calls me One-Trip or, maybe, Popsy, I know everything is all right; but when she calls me Darling, I get ready to duck. By and large, though, we're what they call a "devoted couple." One of Doll's girl friends, who bridges at our house every

other Wednesday, nicknamed us "The Oldlyweds."

Now, I'm a fellow who likes to be comfortable around the house in the evening; but Doll claims that to see a plump party sitting on his front porch smoking a corn cob pipe, with his shoes and coat off, and his socks and suspenders showing, gives a wrong impression. I tried to please her by doing my sitting on the back porch. She said that was better, but, with her all neat and dainty on the front porch, and me, like a tramp, on the back porch, the neighbors would think we weren't speaking. And, furthermore, she said, it wasn't very nice for the people for two blocks around our house in every direction to get the idea that somebody's henhouse was burning. Doll said she liked to see a man smoke a pipe; but wouldn't I get just as much pleasure if I used tobacco?

This night I refer to we were eating supper and I was telling her about a very tricky plumbing problem I solved that day. I heard a sigh. Doll had a far-