

VENI, VIDI VALLI

BY KYLE CRICHTON



Director Alfred Hitchcock was "absolutely amazed" at Valli's poise, awareness, assurance

NO MATTER what anybody tells you there was never a child in the history of the world born with only one name. With *no* name, yes; with one name, never. That goes for the well-favored lady named Valli who gives us the enigmatic stare from the opposite page. Nothing could be more ridiculous than the idea of her mother going around the house yelling "Valli! Valli!" You see . . . on the face of it . . . nonsense.

Caesar we can understand very well because anybody would try to lose a first name like Julius. Even Groucho Marx did *that*. After all the gags about Bonaparte surely nobody can blame Napoleon for getting snooty—but Valli! You go up to a friend and say, "Have you seen Valli—the most wonderful-looking creature on 'earth?'" and your friend looks at you with a horrified stare and you realize he's thinking of Rudy Vallee. You can see the complications.

But David O. Selznick wanted it that way and Valli is starred in a new something called *The Paradine Case* and we're stuck with Valli, and Valli is stuck with her name.

Selznick is a cute little fellow about foreign stars. He not only picks them up but he dumps them quick into a big picture. He did it with Ingrid Bergman and he is doing it again with Valli. Nobody ever had a tougher time than this lady from Italy. Selznick waited till the picture was about to start before ordering her to fly hence. They lugged her on the *Queen Mary*, met her at New York, dumped her on a plane and had her on the set in Hollywood twenty-four hours later. Not only that but they placed her in the hands of one Alfred Hitchcock, a great director and a wit some eighty degrees south of G. B. Shaw in subtlety.

At this juncture Valli's English was on a par with Hitchcock's Italian. She had reached a point where she could say, "The train she is rap-*eed*, not so?" Hitchcock, the humorist, helped her immensely by such instructions as, "In this scene you must show

FEAR. You must dilute your nostrils." Delighted yocks of merriment from the assistant director, a stray press agent and an English friend from Oxford who had dropped in for the bearbaiting. In addition he did the most dramatic and important scenes in the first four days of her appearance. It was a question of Valli triumphant or Valli sunk. We will report the result in the deathless words of Mr. Hitchcock himself.

"She launched into those scenes without a question, assured, poised and thoroughly aware of the import of the character and story. She is absolutely amazing."

But enough of this acting business; back to Valli as an Italian. She was born at Pola, the Adriatic port which is now part of Yugoslavia, but was taken soon after to Como, where the family lived while her father was a professor of philosophy and history at the University of Milan. Father had a notion that his daughter might become as cultivated as himself but little one-name Valli just simply made the house a *hades* until they let her go off to the Motion Picture Academy in Rome.

Well, you know how it always is in these stories; she was a downright sensation from the start; she was indeed. After doing a one-reel nonsense, she was seen by a big producer and signed as a star for *L'Ultima Nemica*, which means the ultimate something, and thereafter made three or four films a year with names that will not interest you. In 1940, however, she did *Piccolo Mondo Antico*, which means (and we've translated this ourselves) *Little Old World* and at the Venice motion-picture festival was awarded the international prize for the best acting of the year.

She kept going with her work until the Gestapo popped up in 1943 and suggested very firmly that it would be excellent if she now started making pictures for Germany. She observed that nothing would please her less. They bowed low and added that she had five days to change her mind. She

vanished, hiding with friends. In 1940 she married Oscar de Mejo, pianist and composer, and announced her retirement as an actress. Oh, no, you don't, said the Gestapo. So she got ill. In fact she had a special ill-making doctor hired for the occasion. He kept her sick till the English and Americans ran the Krauts out of there. After that it was helping entertain the American troops, more pictures and eventually Selznick.

We saw the De Mejo family in Hollywood and can report that they have the proper attitude toward life. "We don't do good here," shrugged Valli, "so we go back." She was wearing slacks and a small Italian-English dictionary. They had just been offered a splendid rental—a four-room house for \$500 a month. With this they were both shrugging. "You make good money, you don't save, you live . . . all right," said M. de Mejo. Valli brought out a picture of little Carlo, now age three. That seemed to be it with the De Mejos.


The lady takes English lessons from Florence Cunningham, the diction coach, and totes that little book around for the big words. They were trying to tell us at Selznick's that in an attempt to acquire an agile English, Miss Valli was collecting and reading the books of such as Artemus Ward and Petroleum V. Nasby. Now *that*, gentlemen, is the picture we want to see—Miss Valli with her quaint Italian accent imposed on the deliberately illiterate style of Petroleum V. Nasby.

But, quite aside from that, she is a tremendous actress, a looker of the first water, a very nice person and a lady of quality. She was so sensational in *The Paradine Case* that she was grabbed immediately for *The Miracle of the Bells* and everybody in town is trying to get her in a loan-out.

Furthermore, her first name is Alida, as you knew all along we knew. We suggest to Mr. David O. Selznick that he give this little girl a name; we mean a first name.

That chance of confusion with Rudy. Ugh! ★★★

Collier's for January 3, 1948



It's distressing to think that some people may confuse the gorgeous Italian actress, Valli, with Rudy



Vera was a career girl, an expert in her line—which was making trouble

PREVIOUS

BY OVIATT MC CONNELL



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