

A Persecuted Lady

Vindicating Jetta Goudal, who seems to have had more than her fair share of adverse criticism.

By Margaret Reid

INTERVIEWING has, for me, besides the fascination of continually changing interest, the charm of novelty. It is still something of a breathless shock to wake in the morning and realize that I have only to telephone to be given an appointment with any gentleman or lady star I care to name. I had a vague notion, at first, of making an engagement to talk to Jack Gilbert—say, once a week. But on reflection, that inspiration seemed a bit impractical, although in my letters back home I still try to give the impression that one of my chief duties is interviewing Mr. Gilbert with pleasing frequency.

Already I had talked to two extremely amicable people—Antonio Moreno and Charles Ray. Just for contrast now, I thought, it might be entertaining to meet one of the more startling exponents of temperament—one of the real thunder raisers. (Thunder being a polite term for what they call it in Hollywood.) No sooner was my decision made than at once, "But, of course—Jetta Goudal!" I cried Frenchly.

From time to time the Boulevard burns with anecdotes of the latest battle in which Jetta's adversaries have been worsted. There are tales of entire companies revolting because of her, stories of tantrums that have shaken the studio even unto the front office. Pola, in her first terrific days, one is told, was as a faint, gentle zephyr compared to the tornado of the Goudal wrath. Famous Players finally declared her contract broken. She was, they said, impossible to handle—her temperament too much to cope with. De Mille then signed her, but after three pictures had been made with her, articles were published stating that even Cecil could not manage her, and that she was again out upon the world. One of the most familiar sights in town is the spectacle of a director who is about to direct Jetta, surrounded by weeping friends, who press upon him lovingly wrapped bottles of arnica and veronal, little guns and bandages and Bibles.

Yes, definitely, I would do Miss Goudal.

"Now the most important thing," said Dorothy Manners, who is my buddy, and who has been interviewing all sorts and tempers of stars for a year, "is to get a meal out of it. Always say you are frantically busy, that the only spare time you have is lunch time. If the star is Jack Gilbert"—we both came to attention and saluted—"try to make it dinner. But never accept anything less than lunch. Don't let them ask you to tea as a substitute. That is likely to be a refined and very unsubstantial meal."

I drew out a pencil and added all that to my already colorful Rules for Success. Dorothy and I may not be very elegant about these things, but we do get along beautifully in the world.

So I was to meet Miss Goudal at twelve o'clock at the Ambassador where she lives—and have luncheon with her. A diplomatic press agent drove me to the hotel. He was not Jetta's press agent, but the representative of the Metropolitan studios, whither Jetta had gone from De Mille, for one picture. Such being the case, there was nothing in particular at stake for him. Yet, quite unprompted, he proceeded to draw me a picture of Goudal that sounded like a Study of an Unusually Amiable Lady. Her thoughtfulness, her hard work, her consideration for others: in short, what

a fine, if rather mild and unassuming girl she was. With cynicism distressing in one so young, I silently thought of something they make out of apples. Subconsciously, I resented the prospect of being cheated out of my thunder raiser.

In the broad, luxurious reaches of the Ambassador lobby, we waited. After a suitable interval, an elevator door gently clanged, and Goudal stepped out. Small, delicately built—weird, pale-olive face—inscrutable, greenish-gray eyes—oddly shaped, crimson mouth. She came toward us with hand outstretched and with the most irresistible, impish, contagious smile it has ever been my pleasure to see. She smiles with her whole face, and her slanting eyes almost disappear, except for two long, bright slits with sixty little devils dancing therein.

Warmly she took my hand, and was so happy to meet me, and were we angry that she had kept us waiting, and should we go right in to lunch now? I rise, in the face of the most lurid tales of past thunder-raising, to state that the charm of Jetta's cordiality is melting, breath taking. Had there ever, I thought amazedly, been a more delightful person to meet!

As we walked through the long foyer, eyes followed with absorbing interest the upright, graceful figure of Miss Goudal—for Jetta is indefinably a personage. I adjusted my hat nervously, hoping I looked at least like a personage's secretary.

Waiters bowed us to the most desirable table in the room. Forks paused midway to waiting mouths—a gesture of respect accorded only the most personable personages. Seated, Jetta toyed delicately with the menu, murmuring undecidedly over various complicated dishes with an ease that removed forever, in my mind, all doubt that her French accent was authentic. Years of secret practice with menus filched from the best hostesses could never produce such poise in ordering as is Goudal's. The accent is, I am convinced, hers by birthright. It may be possible that she has clung to it a bit longer than needful—but what of that?

She is Dutch, as well as French, you know. Or so it is said. No one has the vaguest idea of whether it is true or not. No one, in fact, has the vaguest idea of whether anything is true or untrue about her. Her withdrawal from the life of the colony is absolute. It may be a clever pose, or it may be that she actually does dislike contact with people. Either way, it is effective, for she is a riddle in a city of eager autobiographies.

She looks neither particularly French nor Dutch (said Miss Reid who had been in neither France nor Holland). But by appearance, she could very reasonably be taken to be Eurasian, with maybe a trace of Hindoo blood somewhere. I don't know that she is beautiful, but she is one of the most fascinating, electrically magnetic women I have ever seen. The surprising thing is, not that she fights for what she wants, but that she has *had* to fight for it. Surprising that cold-hearted officials could disregard the insidious persuasiveness of her personality.

I found that her reputation as a trouble maker is a poisoned thorn in her olive-tinted flesh.

"It is so ghastly unfair," she protests. "If it were all true, I shouldn't care. I don't mind what they print

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about me, so long as it isn't lies. If they were to write, 'This Goudal now—she has a funny-looking nose,' I'd read it and say, 'That is quite true.' But when they say, 'Goudal is fired again. Cecil De Mille admits that even he cannot curb her bad temper, and therefore severs her contract,' then—oh, I am angry, I am furious!"

"It is not true, then, that your De Mille contract is broken?"

"It is a lie, with no foundation other than some people's vindictiveness. Ever since the first publicity I received on going into pictures, it has been the fashion to—how do you say it?—pan me. I don't mean that I am really a tame little pussy cat. I know I'm not. I drive costumers quite, quite mad. For, next to acting, I love best designing my clothes—and they must be made exactly as I dictate."

The little devils gleamed again in her eyes, as if she enjoyed this picture of herself causing costumers to go crazy.

"But," she continued soberly, "I am not the wicked, scratching wild cat they say. Sometimes I'm really quite nice—particularly if I'm happy. As, for instance, on this picture, 'Paris at Midnight,' which I have just now finished. The atmosphere of the whole company was in harmony, in tune. E. Mason Hopper was the director, and such a clever, delightful man he is. Last night, when the last shot was finished and we were dispersing, Mr. Hopper said, 'Jetta, when we knew you were to work with us, we all got down on our knees and prayed. We expected—total annihilation. Now that we have gone through a whole picture with you, and know what you're really like, we shall take any unfavorable criticism you may get in the future as personal insults, and demand apologies for what must be stupid lies.'"

"As for the statement that De Mille dismissed me from 'The Volga Boatman' and broke my contract! Besides being malicious, it is absurd, considering his plans to star me now. When 'The Volga Boatman' was begun, my part was that of a cruel, calculating, merciless woman. But Papa De Mille decided that the theme was too heavy, too turgid, and he changed my part, injecting into it some comedy—quite broad comedy. Now, I know what I can do and what I cannot. And I knew that I could not give Papa De Mille what he wanted in his new conception of the part. So I begged his permission to step out. He did not want me to

leave at first, but finally consented. So here I am—just finished with this Metropolitan picture and starting again with De Mille as soon as we find a story for me."

"What sort of story do you think of doing?"

"Well—they think I am crazy, but I want to play children. Not exclusively, but fairly often. It is one of the things I feel I can do well—with this silly face and funny-looking nose. Papa De Mille wails at me, 'Here I try to make you *Lady Macbeth* and you want to be *Little Bo-Peep*!'"

"Mr. De Mille is such a difficult person to please. Do you—er—hit it off all right?" I asked.

"O-o-h!" Jetta cried, completely deserting her pistachio parfait. "I am devoted to Papa De Mille, devoted! I owe him so much—for his faith in me, his kindness, his sympathy. He doesn't mind it, that I think thoughts of my own. 'That is what I want,' he always tells me. 'I don't want a troupe of "yessers." I don't want twenty little De Milles marching round the set. I hire individuals, and I want them to remain so.'"

"Apropos, I wore the first bouffant gown ever seen in a De Mille picture. You know his weakness for slinky, form-fitting creations? Well, in 'The Road to Yesterday' I wore a bouffant black-velvet evening gown—and with his complete approval, too—because he knew I am happier in that type."

She appears to be sincerely hurt—this aloof, compelling Goudal—that people deliberately misrepresent her. And it is quite true, I believe, that the criticism aimed at her has been carried beyond the bounds of justification. Although she is as proud as Lucifer in her enigmatic shell, I think she wants to be liked. There is a faintly wistful strain in her, that comes to the surface but rarely, when she is unaware of it.

She has delicate little graces, as unmodern as her long, sleek hair. She has taut, sensitive nerves, yet her beautiful hands are always quiet.

As for the *tout ensemble*—I am sending form cards to all my friends and acquaintances, saying, "How could you be so mistaken about Jetta Goudal? You are wrong, all wrong. Why, she is a (I wish some one would coin a new word for this over-worked adjective. But since no one does, and it is my favorite, here it goes again) charming person!"