

The
Trouble
with
Shirley



by KIRTLEY BASKETTE

The Trouble with Shirley



"The trouble with California is me," says Shirley. She burns easily (and freckles a lot afterwards) so her husband Steve is always on hand with sun tan oil.

■ The cop at the Hollywood Academy Awards was separating the sheep from the goats. When the freckle-faced girl with the red-headed boys' haircut came up, there wasn't a flicker of a doubt in his mind where she belonged. "That way," he waved, "to the balcony."

Shirley MacLaine had figured it differently. She'd borrowed a formal from the wardrobe department, also a fur stole. She'd even had her tangle-top hair-do washed and set.

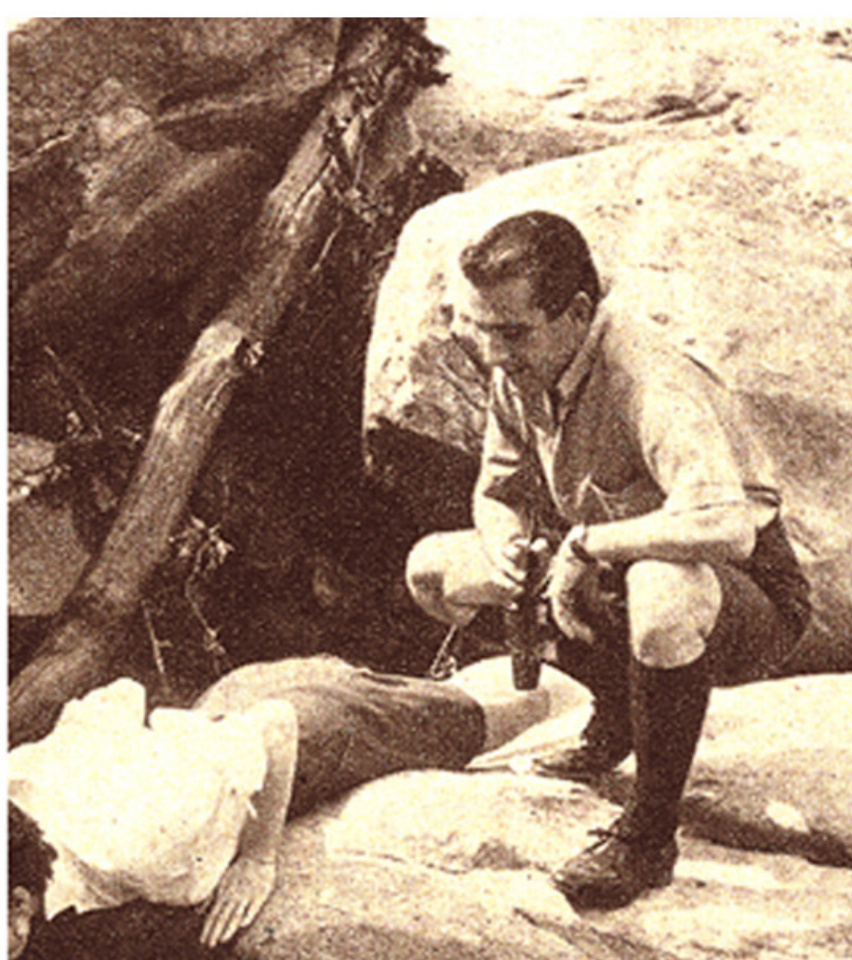
"I'm supposed to sit downstairs," she protested. "The studio said—Paramount—I mean. I'm an actress," she explained lamely. The cop yawned. "I'm a—a star!" Rashly she shot the works. That did it.

"Listen, sister," barked the law. "I've been pounding this movie beat since before you were born. I know a star when I see one—and that certainly ain't you. Upstairs now, where you belong!"

So Shirley went upstairs, to the Pantages balcony, where—star or not—she really did belong.

That happened a year ago, but in Hollywood Shirley MacLaine is still sitting in the balcony, so to speak. What's more she likes it just fine. You can do what you please up there and nobody cares. It's comfortable, though glamourless—and the view is swell. Shirley MacLaine would rather look than be looked at anyway.

Not that there's anything wrong with Shirley's looks. On the contrary, she's a cute dish with twinkling blue eyes, deep dimples, a saucy nose over a wide, turned up mouth—and that copper hair, of course, gleaming like a new penny.

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*Shirley and Steve love Palm Springs.
On vacation, they hiked to Tahquitz
Falls and Shirley waded where other
expectant mothers fear to tread.*

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Moreover, her figure owes apologies to no one, including Marilyn Monroe. But with all this—well—Shirley just doesn't look like a movie star, nor act like one either. Glamour fits MacLaine about as well as it does Raggedy Ann, the tomboy you met at the lake last summer, or that freckle-faced kid from Kalamazoo.

The great Alfred Hitchcock tags her right on the buzzer: "Most newcomers can be compared to someone else already in Hollywood," he says. "But Shirley's in a new class all by herself." Hitchcock should know. He brought Shirley to Hollywood. In the process she did what few people have done to the roly-poly Englishman who likes to frighten people: She scared Hitchcock half to death first time she met him.

That was one rainy day in New York, two years ago when the famous director arrived on his way to Vermont to make *The Trouble With Harry*. He'd signed Shirley to star strictly on a scout's report and long distance personality test, sight unseen. When she showed up in a baggy trench coat, galoshes and scarf, then peeled them off to reveal a sweater and jeans, no make-up and a coiffure that seemed fashioned by a Waring mixer, Hitchcock paled. When every experience he probed for drew a blank "Nothing" he mopped his sweating brow. All Shirley could do was sing and dance, it turned out—and there wasn't a song or a dance in his picture. What's more, it was an offbeat movie about a corpse that Paramount hadn't been too happy about making.

Later he told her, "You had me shaking in my boots!"

But still later he also confessed, "We wouldn't have had a picture without you."

Since *The Trouble With Harry* the trouble with Shirley MacLaine is that—Hollywood or not—she can't be anybody but herself. She's made *Artists And Models* and *Around The World In 80 Days*. She's collected a flock of "most promising newcomer" awards and watched her fan mail turn into a Paramount problem. She's starred on tv's *Shower Of Stars*.

But when the publicity boys put the pressure on Shirley to show up at the premiere of *Strategic Air Command* some months ago, she borrowed another studio gown and ran the flashlight gauntlet through the lobby. Once inside, she right-faced and slipped out a side door where her husband, Steve Parker, was waiting to take her home. "I was half-way through a terrific book," she explained. "Besides, I'd already seen the picture."

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Shirley still has to borrow her glad rags when she steps out. She doesn't own a formal. Until Hal Wallis, her boss, gave her an MG on her birthday, she rattled around in a \$700 second-hand Buick. She sews her own clothes, and in one idle spell knitted a coat. To date she's been in one night club, *Ciro's* (to see an old pal of Steve's) and to no Hollywood social musters. She lives with Steve, a boxer pup named Caesar and a cat called Bolo in a two-room apartment on the tag end of Malibu beach, thirty miles from Hollywood. For a while she considered a job in a Malibu dime store between pictures.

Right now, to top it all, Shirley's pregnant. This has yanked her out of action just as her career gets rolling. That news is said to have turned Hal Wallis slightly green around the gills because he'd counted on Shirley for *Hollywood Or Bust* with Dean and Jerry. But Shirley thinks it's wonderful. "You know what I want?" she says eagerly. "Twins!"

Shirley was born in 1934, at 4 p.m. on the 24th day of the fourth month, April. Naturally, four's her lucky number and in her maternal mood, she'd like four children, twins at a time. There's a good chance, too, because twins run in Shirley's family. So does something else—talent.

Her mother, Kathryn, acted and taught dramatics and her dad, Ira, played about every instrument you can name in his own dance band before they met, married and settled down. Shirley has a hunch she was named after Shirley Temple, whose kiddie career was brightest about the time she arrived in Richmond, Virginia, where Ira, by then, was the respectable principal of Westhampton school.

If so, it was a solid idea. Because by the time Shirley MacLaine Beaty (as they christened her) turned three years old she was doing just what Curlytop did at the same age—making the bigger kids blush for shame at dancing school.

"The original objective," Shirley recalls, however, "was not a career—but to straighten out my feet." Shirley was slew-footing around like a duck and it worried her mom. To her dismay all the classic ballet positions turned her toes out even wider. But Shirley took to ballet like a duck to water and from then on, until just the other day when the obstetrician ordered "Stop," Shirley's been working out at the bars, doing *arabesques*, *jetés*, *relevés*, *entre-chats* and other muscle stretching contortions. "I wore out leotards like most kids wear out shoes."

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As a result, although she's a big five-foot-seven girl today and properly padded, Shirley moves about like a cat. She was also strong enough to take Jerry Lewis' dare, hoist him up and gallop him around piggy back on the set of *Artists And Models*. But that's the result of another kind of training, for when she wasn't doing splits, Shirl the girl was making like a junior Babe Didrickson. Scotch-Irish and redheaded, "Powerhouse" Beaty (as the kids called her) was not the jacks and hopscotch type. She preferred mixing it up with the boys in soccer, touch football, baseball and track. She was pretty handy with her dukes, too. Her frustrated brother, Warren, three years younger, seldom got a chance to enjoy a good scrap. "I was always stepping in and fighting them for him," admits Shirley.

Kids and men

At thirteen, however, Shirley was modeling misses'-size clothes in a department store. About the same time she started dancing on an early tv setup at the Wardman Park Hotel for \$12 a night. And, if in her junior year she rah-rahed the Washington and Lee High football team on to victory as cheer leader on Saturday afternoons—come evening, Shirley Beaty wouldn't be seen dead with such kids. She stepped out with college men from Georgetown University.

Most of this took place, obviously, around Washington, D. C. Shirley's dad moved the family near there when she was eleven, giving up education to sell real estate, which he still does. This was a relief to Shirley, who always found it embarrassing to be sent into the principal only to find herself face to face with her old man. But while her house was just across the Potomac in Arlington, Va., the capital sights that most school kids journey miles to see never met Shirley's blue eyes. Washington to Shirley was just one thing—the School of Ballet. "By then I was on a single track," she confesses. "Dancing was all I ever wanted to do." When she was only fifteen she started trotting off to New York all by herself to plug away summer vacations at the American School of Ballet and the Ballet Theatre.

It was during her third New York summer session, after her junior year, that Shirley got her feet wet—and caught the show business bug. A revival of *Oklahoma!* needed chorus girl replacements and Shirley thought she might as well try to help out on expenses. 500 applicants boiled down to sixteen, and the sixteen boiled down to one. But Shirley was it. "Sometimes," she observes philosophically,

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"it helps to be tall and redheaded."

But by summer's end, Shirley proved that she had something attached to her head besides hair. It was pretty tempting to be asked to go abroad that fall to the Berlin Art Festival with *Oklahoma!* But it also meant signing for a road tour afterwards, which meant, not graduating from high school. Shirley called the folks down south for advice. "Make up your own mind," they told her. Shirley did. She settled for the diploma instead of \$75 a week and the European trip. She's never regretted it. But the minute she got it she beelined back to New York. This time she stayed—and strictly on her own. She had just turned eighteen.

Things started off okay. Shirley got a summer job with St. John Terrell's Music Circus at Lambertville, New Jersey. She danced one musical by night and rehearsed for the next by day, and loved it. But that fall Broadway lowered the boom.

"Fifty-one was a very rough season," Shirley remembers. "Out of 8000 Actors' Equity members, only 800 were working. I belonged to the 7200."

She snatched the want-ads practically off the newspaper trucks, haunted theatrical agencies until the secretaries got insulting and auditioned for anyone who'd look and listen. But it was only, "We'll call you" which is the same thing as "Sorry Kid." She cut off her last name, also her red hair. No use. Then she was asked to travel as danseuse for a trade show.

Glamorizing refrigerators wasn't exactly what Shirley had slaved all those years for, but by then she wasn't picky. So the rest of the year Shirley barnstormed the South and Midwest on one night stands, pirouetting around her frigid partners while the salesman delivered his pitch. "We set up in every two-bit place you could think of," says Shirley. "Tank town hotels, auditoriums, drafty halls and casinos. We slept on busses and at flea-bag hotels. I got an infected foot but had to dance anyway. It wasn't elegant but it was a living." It was more than that. She made \$165 a week and expenses. By spring she'd piled up a stake for another crack at New York. Ironically, when she got it she didn't need it. "Because right then," Shirley grins, "I got lucky."

"Hey, Red!"

The first job she tried out for she bagged—in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Me and Juliet*—although she was the last chorus girl picked. In fact, Shirley

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was halfway out the door when Bob Alton, the choreographer yelled, "Hey, Red—you didn't leave your name and address."

"Why?" inquired Shirley bitterly.

"Don't you want your job?" She's always thought that was a silly question.

Shirley wasn't too surprised at this luck. It was fourth day of the fourth month, April—her birthday.

Me And Juliet kept Shirley in a steady job for almost a year. Then kind fate provided her with a steady date—a man named Steve Parker. That's Shirley MacLaine's legal handle today—Mrs. Stephen Frederick Parker.

She met Steve in the Theatre Bar across from the stage door of the Majestic. A chorus mate took her there one September night after the show. It was the first bar Shirley had ever entered. She doesn't drink. But when the girl friend, who knew Steve, introduced him, Shirley remembers a sudden dizzy spell which couldn't have come from her 7-Up. "I just flipped," she sighs. "It was boom!—like that."

Steve Parker's a handsome, dark-haired Vermonter, twelve years older than Shirley. He was already a veteran actor, stage director and producer. At that point he was staging the famous Lambs' Club shows. He seemed to know everybody in and everything about show business. As he talked, Shirley was fascinated. What fascinated Steve about Shirley she can't imagine unless it was a feat she performed of cramming a beer glass into her generous mouth (She later cowed Jerry Lewis with the same stunt which even that flap-mouthed comedian can't do). Anyway, Steve took her home. Shirley dates about everything important that's happened to her from that night.

"Steve gave me a completely new slant on show business," explains Shirley. "He made me realize what a really big world it was. Until then I'd thought dancing was everything. But when Steve talked my head buzzed with tv, movies, stage plays. I guess you'd say Steve gave me big-time ambition." Something else, too—love—the real thing at last.

Going steady with Steve Parker built up Shirley's confidence. In February she quit *Me And Juliet* cold to gamble for a better job in *The Pajama Game* which George Abbott was lining up for Broadway. 1000 girls had the same idea, then seventy-two, then twelve and finally six. Shirley was one of the six, with a song and dance bit of her own and—the big item—understudy for star Carol Hancy. But at first she didn't think about that.

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"From the start that Haney gal looked like the type who'd go on with a broken neck," Shirley reveals. "But I crammed up on her part. Lucky I did."

Because just before the third night on Broadway indestructible Haney ripped loose the ligaments in her ankle. The same night Shirley's subway broke down and she arrived barely a minute ahead of curtain time. Bob Fosse, Carol's partner, was clutching his hair with one hand and Haney's costumes with the other. He practically shoved Shirley out on the stage. She just had time to yell to her roommate (in the same show) to call Steve and get him over there fast.

"He arrived in a T-shirt, stood in the wings and cheered me through," says Shirley gratefully. After her performance Steve had a pile of scribbled notes on her faults two-feet high. They went back to Shirley's apartment and worked all night. Next evening she was sharp as a tack.

Shirley stayed up on her toes another way: She scattered front-center tickets to all agents, producers, Hollywood representatives and the Mister Bigs of show business that Steve knew, figuring she'd shine in the spot a week at the most and she'd better make hay. But it was a month before Carol Haney recovered. "At \$7.20 a seat I spent more that month than I made," recalls Shirley ruefully. "But it was a good idea. I was so unimportant that I couldn't get an agent to handle me."

The hot ones

She had plenty of offers after that. But the hot ones came from customers who paid their way in. Hal Wallis, the Hollywood producer, saw Shirley first. He gave her a skimpy screen test in New York and signed her on a contract to come to Hollywood and stick around when the show closed. But Shirley's luck was running and the next man who looked had more definite ideas. "Doc" Erickson, Alfred Hitchcock's assistant, happened in *Pajama Game* the only other time Shirley stepped out of the chorus to pinch-hit for Carol Haney—one lone night two months later when Carol caught a virus.

That night Erickson called Hitchcock at a dinner party in Hollywood. "I've got your girl for *The Trouble With Harry*," he announced.

"What's her name?" asked Hitch.

"Carol Haney," Erickson said.

Only later did the change-of-cast insert in the program fall out to wise Mr. Erickson to his mistake. He hotfooted it

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over to the boxoffice and found out one trouble with Shirley—she was already signed by Hal Wallis. But the contract provided for an outside picture and so Shirley signed again—or Steve did, because he was her manager by then. In a few days he was her husband as well.

They got hitched at the Marble Collegiate Church on a Friday. Shirley quit *The Pajama Game* on Saturday and Sunday she left with Steve for Stowe, Vermont, to make *The Trouble With Harry*. Halfway through, the news about Shirley traveled to Hollywood. Hal Wallis put director Frank Tashlin to work writing in a part for her in *Artists And Models* and Mike Todd grabbed her next for *Around The World In 80 Days*. Hired one morning, Shirley was on the plane for Durango, Colorado, that night, with her red hair dyed black to play an Indian princess, of all things.

Around The World in 80 Days has almost turned into a case of around the calendar in 365 days for Shirley. But in between she and Steve got a trip to Japan, a terrific thrill to them both in more ways than one. Shirley first felt woozy bobbing in a fishing boat off the base of Fujiyama. But the Tokyo doctor said, "intestinal flu." The "flu" got worse on the plane home across the Pacific and a rabbit test in Hollywood told the truth. Shirley's due to be a mama in September.

This keeps her closer than ever to the Malibu duplex, which hangs over the waves right next to the stretch of beach the Parkers have bought to put up their own place soon.

The funny part about this California beachcombing existence is that Shirley can't stand the sun. It only makes her Irish complexion puff up pink like a boiled lobster and then brings out a few million more of her "spotted tan," freckles to you.

A while back when a car out of control ploughed into her MG, Steve got his neck in a brace from the bump and Shirley got a wrenched back. Although the accident happened in Hollywood, it turned out the lady who lost control lived right next door to them at Malibu. Moreover, when Shirley's lawyer came out to settle details, the same flustered lady backed out of her garage and smacked him!

Shirley tells that one only to prove that you never know what will happen, where or when—especially if you get panicky. Already plenty has happened to the powerhouse kid from Dixie. But she's keeping her red head cool, her fingers crossed and her ballet shoes hanging

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handy. "For all I know I might be back on Broadway dancing in a chorus again some day," she ponders. "It's up to the public. That's why I don't see much sense in getting all in a sweat."

For a girl who just wound up her twenty-first year this April, that's pretty sound philosophy, if a little fatalistic. There's only one flaw: Shirley forgets that the public has already spoken. They seem to say they like Shirley MacLaine just like she is. **END**

modern screen