

SHIRLEY TEMPLE SHEDS A TOOTH



By Leonard Hall

One afternoon, not long ago, a dust-covered courier spurred his exhausted steed up Broadway. The clatter of hooves awoke the dozing thespians along the sun-baked curbstone, and roused the managers of the film basilicas from their vesper pinochle. The flap ears of Times Square strained to catch the rider's message.

"Shirley Temple has lost a baby tooth!" he croaked, and galloped on toward Albany, filling the happy Hudson Valley with his horrid tidings.

As lamentations rent the air, I returned to my Tom Collins with a quiet smile and a heart wherein hope was newly born. Soon Shirley Temple would lose All her baby teeth—become, in fact, a Crone. Her adorable babyhood would become gangling adolescence. Growing pains, sweet and terrible, would shoot through that darling, dimpled body. Some day—soon, perhaps—the citizens of the United States could go to the movies without beholding Shirley Temple.

Since she floated down among us mortals on a rose petal a year and a half ago, the Miracle Baby has dominated the American screen. Millions of film devotees, innocently entering their favorite neighborhood theatres for a spot of Ginger Rogers, have come face to face with our little golden-ringed friend, patting Mr. James Dunn's cheek with one hand and twanging "Love Is the Sweetest Thing" on his heartstrings with the other.

In the past year and a half this glorious babyhood has been exhibited in no less than ten films of feature length, a fact that may seem incredible to the layman. In eighteen months her producers, frantically cranking the overheated cameras in a race with Time, The Great Dentist who yanks baby teeth, have shot the miraculous mite upon us in a bewildering burst of celluloid.

In such fashion can the loveliest childhood ever lent us by the angels become a common scold. Thus can America's Lollipop become, alas, America's Pain in the Derriere.

In ten straight films, as alike, essentially, as so many Carioca dancers, The Little Child Has Led Them—with never a stain upon her innocent sweetness, and never a flare of temper marring her pink and gold perfection.

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It is precisely this appalling perfection of stage and screen children which has enraged countless baby-loving entertainment seekers since the dawn of theatrical history.

It is always sufficiently horrible in the theatre, with the smirking tot joining the hands of Mummy and Daddy as the final curtain shudders down. Thrice ghastly the mechanical marvels of the speaking screen, which can hurl such maudlin monstrosities at us every eight weeks, with the monotonous regularity of Old Faithful!

It is the fault of neither Shirley nor her frenzied entrepreneurs that she has been forced to Lead Them. After all, not even a Miracle Mite can play Juliet, or do a striptease, or ride a mustang, or solve a murder mystery with scotch and soda. A whole herd of pitiful scenarists have been unable to hammer anything together for her save "Father, dear father, come home with me now!" And in all truth, there is really nothing else to hammer!

True, their quirks and dodges have been ingenious. In *Bright Eyes* Miss Temple leaped fearlessly from a storm-tossed airplane in the arms of Mr. Dunn aforesaid. In the course of *The Little Colonel* she flawlessly accompanied Mr. Bill Robinson in his celebrated stair dance—obviously a commonplace accomplishment among the little missies in the stately homes of the Blue Grass. She reformed the boozing Gary Cooper in *Now and Forever*. In *Our Little Girl* she comforted Mr. Joel McCrea when his wife was running around with other men, and brought the two together on schedule in the last hundred feet of film.

In the confection of all this celluloid saccharinity, her producers fell into but one grievous error, from the point of view of Miss Temple herself. In the picture *Bright Eyes* they inserted, as an evil force, an eight-year-old chunk of human ratsbane named Jane Withers. This appalling child kicked and yowled and bit her way through the film so magnificently that millions roared with glee, and she stole the picture from Miss Shirley with the greatest of ease. Coughing behind their hands, the producers whisked Miss Withers behind the garage, spatted her soundly, and unobtrusively slipped her a contract.

For it is precisely these sinful human brats we love. Who of us can forget the reptilian Sid of Master Jackie Searl in *Tom Sawyer*—his magnificent sneers, his superb pediculousity? Time will erase the memory of Coogan in Chaplin's *The Kid* before I forget the

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anonymous sunbeam who flattened the nose of the great comedian in *The Pilgrim*. Which would you prefer—a curly-pated seraph tugging at Mr. Lionel Barrymore's fake mustachios with love in her heart, or the redoubtable Spanky McFarland of *Our Gang* heaving a half-brick into a neighbor's greenhouse? Why, ten million American hearts beat higher when Baby Leroy dunked W. C. Fields' best hunting-case watch in the vegetable soup in an unforgettable moment of *The Old Fashioned Way*! What can a Temple offer beside these gifts to sorrowing Mankind?

In spite of the manifold agonies of what is now known as The Shirley Temple Era, she came out of the Everywhere into Hollywood at a most opportune time.

Prodded by the hosts of decency, Mr. Will Hays and his cossacks were cracking down lustily on the bedevilled movie-makers. All the more alluring varieties of cinematic sin were placed under an air-tight ban, where they quietly smothered. Frantic producers pondered night and day and could only think up Miss May Robson and Master Jackie Cooper.

The Fox Film Corporation, among others, was in none too salubrious a state. True, they had Will Rogers and Janet Gaynor, but three of a kind would be better than a mere pair. At this parlous moment, Mr. Winfield Sheehan of that company gave Shirley Temple to the world, her parents to the contrary notwithstanding.

The story that Mr. Sheehan found her in a cluster of hollyhocks is probably apocryphal. It is more likely that, looking wearily at "kid tests," he beheld the shadow of sweet Shirley singing and dancing away, and said "Hire that one." Hired she was, at any rate, and she proved to be the only noteworthy moment of a long-forgotten musical film called *Stand Up and Cheer*, which made audiences sit down and moan from coast to coast.

It pleases me to think of the mighty men of Fox, surrounded by their satraps, sitting before that scene in awe and silent wonder, and when the lights came on again, whispering in religious tones, "Boys, you have just seen not merely a pretty little kid with a cute smile. You have just personally witnessed five million smackerinos!"

Imagine the company's delight when it found that the wonder child could not only pirouette, but act. Imagine the holy joy of the hosts of decency when they found that the innocent face of a little child was replacing the leer of lovely sin on the nation's screens!

The hour of Babies, just Babies, had struck like the Prussian Guard. Mothers all over the

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Republic tossed their curly-topped toddlers into their prams and started west over the old Santa Fe Trail. And Fox's producing rivals, infuriated by the gold strike and the staked claim on the Temple Bonanza, began combing the nurseries.



Uncle Louis B. Mayer of M-G-M, wandering through a field of buttercups bemoaning his fate, stumbled over little Cora Sue Collins and signed her before she could yell with pain. Uncle Carl Laemmle of Universal peeped into a little white cloud hovering over Hollywood—and there nestled one Baby Jane. He whisked her off the cloud and into his studio in a twink!

The film colony went baby-mad. Baby Leroy, Common, shot up twenty points in one day on the Bourse de Beverly Hills. While other companies began rehearsing their Number Two Companies of Shirley Temple, Fox started to cash in.

There was one small fly in the Fox honey-pot, at first. Shirley, no doubt at the instigation of the Kremlin, struck for more money, and got it. She got everything. She was moved into a classy dressing-room bungalow on the lot, completely re-done for the queen of the studio. Her mother was signed on, at two hundred and fifty dollars a week, to stay on Shirley's set for guidance, comfort, and inspiration. Her father, a branch-bank manager, found his counting room packed daily with widows and orphans who wanted to trust their little all to the institution presided over by little Shirley's Daddy.

The Temples moved into a new house, where daughter could have a glass-enclosed patio. Her money went into a trust fund. At the studio, love ran amuck. Fox loved Shirley. Shirley loved all her leading men. They all loved her. Everybody loved everybody—and Lord, how the money rolled in!

The fan magazines blew great gusts of cloying sweetness into the air. Every issue carried letters from readers beginning "Shirley Temple, a dainty elf whose angelic sweetness creeps into your heart to stay." No ghoul at heart, I yet preserve one article entitled "Why I Love Shirley." It purports to be a symposium of statements from the little one's leading men. All confess themselves better, nobler chaps since they felt the touch of her soft little hand upon their sin-furrowed

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cheeks. Mr. James Dunn is quoted as saying "She marked a milestone in my life I used to be grumpy." He neglected to add what he had become later.

Now, with the worst of the horror evidently passing, it is safe to wager that more than one Hollywood actor is beginning to smile again. For consider the indescribable misery of the unfortunate thespians told off to support an Angel Child. They infinitely prefer supporting a dog. At least, the canine cannot sing a little song, or nuzzle up and coo "I 'oves oo."

The unhappy mummies know full well that the eyes of the rapt audience are only for the dimpled morsel of divinity lent us for a few brief moments. Yet art is long, time fleeting, and jobs are jobs. Thrice has Mr. Dunn offered up his quivering white body on the altar of Shirley Temple's art. Gary Cooper, Joel McCrea, Adolphe Menjou, John Boles, dozens of other worthy ladies and gentlemen, have stood about nobly while the little girl spoke her piece. May the great Casting Director reward them according to their deserts!

This welter of unchecked love had to end sometime. That end now shows unmistakable signs of beginning. That first baby tooth fell to the studio floor with a crash heard 'round the world.

Miss Shirley Temple reached the advanced age of six years on April 23, 1935. The event was celebrated by a great birthday festival and the trooping of the colors at the studio in Westwood Hills. Yet, even as the nabobs of Fox stood about applauding and cooing, the cold hand of fear must have gripped their kindly hearts.

For soon another baby tooth must fall—and another—and another. In anguish, they now await the inevitable hour. And so, with Christian fortitude, do I!

