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VERONICA LAKE: REBEL



~added image

An artist at making enemies, she tells off movie big shots—and gets away with it!

By CARL A. SCHROEDER

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One of the most acute problems in Hollywood is Veronica Lake. Where, and at what precise moment, her time-bomb mind will explode with some new deviation from what studio bosses consider normal is an ever present question. Hence the grapevine of the movie industry constantly hums with rumors that unless Miss Lake "behaves," she will no longer be tolerated, but cast into oblivion. However, all concerned know that no one wishes Miss Lake to stop being spectacular any more than anyone in Manhattan really wants Mayor LaGuardia to stop going to fires.

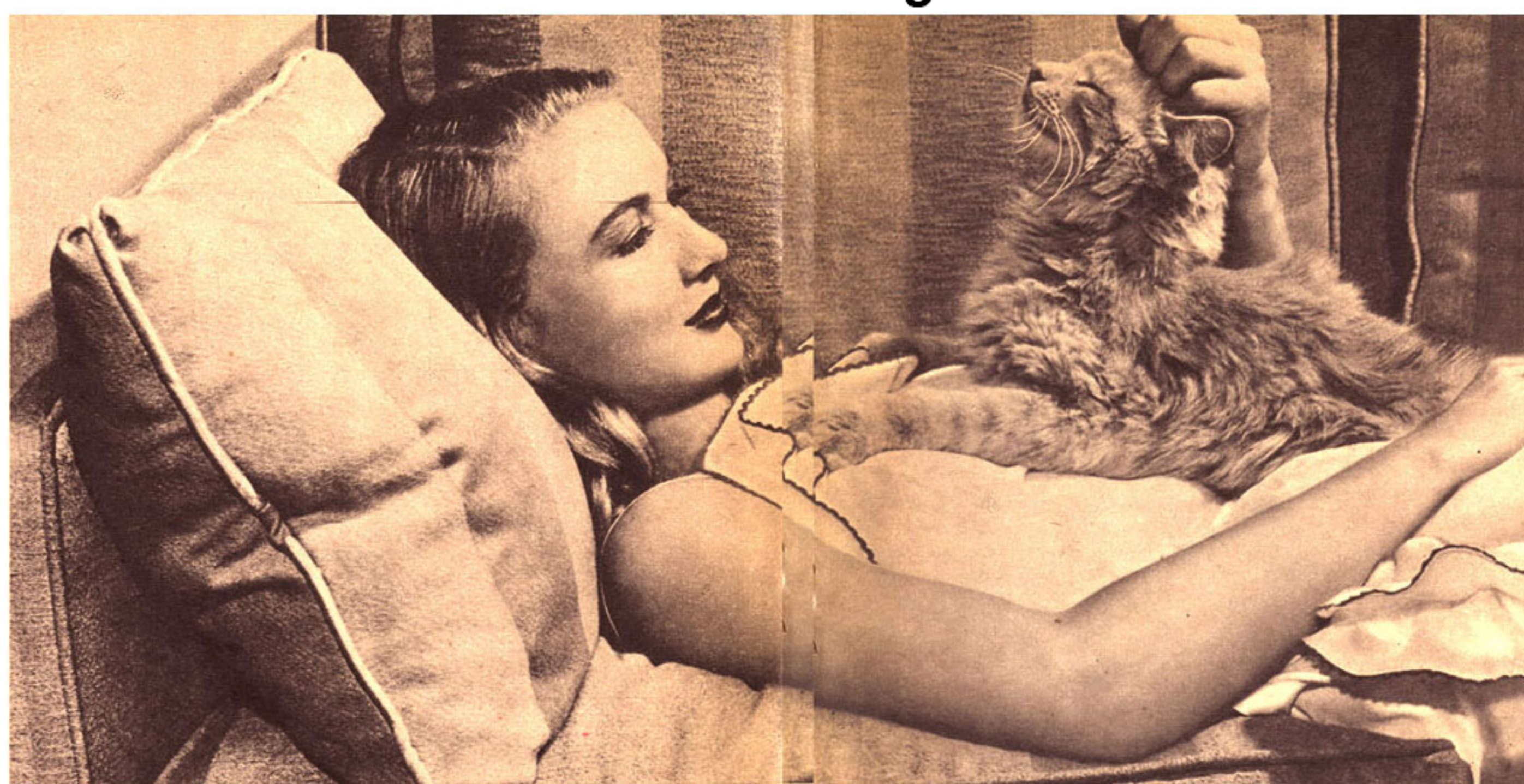
A portion of Veronica's personal philosophy applies neatly to the situation: "Women are always trouble to unimaginative men. Men expect women with whom they do business to behave like placid cows. When the business discussion is over, women are expected to be exciting and individual in the extreme, because that, too, is good business."

FABULOUS EARNINGS A MYTH

The \$1,000 weekly salary Veronica Lake earns for acting is about half of what most people imagine a top star makes. Likewise, her net earnings are probably no more than they would be if she had become a business woman instead of an actress, for she has a shrewd executive mind topping off her 5 feet 1½ inches and 99 pounds. She is sometimes irrational but in legend her foolish antics are magnified out of all proportion, usually by someone she has bested in a business conference.

When Veronica was a beginner, earning \$350 a week, she made her debut as a featured player in a picture called, "I Wanted Wings." The box office results made her Paramount bosses very happy. Contrary to usual practice, she was called into executive session and told by the studio head that as a reward for her work her salary would now be \$500 a week. The average young actress would have leaped into his lap and planted a red kiss on his forehead out of sheer gratitude. Veronica is reported to have exclaimed, "To hell with it—I get \$1,000 a week from now on, or nothing." She walked out of the office and refused to return for further discussion. She didn't get the \$1,000 then. They paid her \$750 instead. By hardboiled methods she gained a point, and lost one, too. In the three years that followed, her salary might have doubled.

It cannot be reliably reported that Veronica Lake leads a glamorous life. She cannot afford expensive living. "Last year," she points out, "my doctor bills were more than \$25,000." She has reference to expenses caused by two operations undergone by herself, and one by her mother. She also has had considerable legal expense in connection with her divorce from Major John Stuart Detlie, a former Hollywood art director. (To be fair, it must be assumed that Detlie too had expenses in this connection.)



THE LAKE CAT'S NAME IS "S. C."—WHICH STANDS FOR "SOLID CITIZEN" IT HAS SIX TOES ON EACH FOREPAW. HAS BEEN IN BELIEVE IT OR NOT NO SWIMMING POOLS FOR HER

At the moment, Veronica lives more sanely than any other Hollywood star from the economic standpoint. She has no home of her own, but "boards" herself and three-year-old daughter, Elaine, in the home of Mrs. Rita Beery, ex-wife of Wallace Beery. They are fast friends, but have an exact business arrangement. Veronica's rent is \$50 a month, and expenses are shared. Even so, Veronica is only now beginning to save money. After she became a star, people wondered about her "funny" wardrobe. The clothes were whipped together by Veronica and a dressmaker at a cost of no more than \$20 a frock because she could not afford more.

Among the items in her budget is the sum of \$115 a week paid to her mother, a charming woman equally tiny as Veronica. The mother lives with the star's stepfather, in an attractive Hollywood apartment. They are independent, seldom see each other.

In romance, Veronica Lake has been much less successful, until recently, than in her business affairs. When Veronica filed suit against Major Detlie, early in December of 1943, she made this statement: "He objected to my career and couldn't understand why I had to travel about the country on tours. He thought it made me an unfit mother and that I didn't spend enough time with our daughter. He also objected to my friends."

To this, Major Detlie made no reply. None was necessary, for in California divorces such statements are routine and are not intended to reflect upon the character of the husband. The major ran into the same problems faced by any husband of an actress.

HAS SHE FOUND "THE REAL THING"?

Currently, despite Hollywood rumors, Veronica feels that she has found the man who will be the real love of her life. He is Andre de Toth, brilliant young motion picture director and producer. A Hungarian, Bundy (she calls him by his Hungarian nickname) has a European sense of the romantic. In his company the actress is less reserved, and in the past few months she has been less inclined to revolt against the discipline of motion pictures.

Rebellion at the habitual way of doing things has caused most of the "Veronica Lake trouble" at studios. She dotes on doing the unexpected. At three o'clock in the morning she drove to the top of a Hollywood mountain, tiptoed to the bedroom window of a newspaper friend, hammered violently on the window, shouting: "This is the air raid warden—all your lights are on!" The reporter leaped from bed, awakened his wife, stumbled through a completely dark house to find Veronica at his front door, smiling elfishly.

When she reaches the sound stage, Veronica wastes no time in pleasantries with fellow actors. She goes directly to her dressing room, waits until called, walks before the cameras and goes to work. In the evening she leaves silently. This habit shoos off unwelcome set visitors but does not add to her popularity.

Socially, Veronica is a dead loss to Hollywood's upper crust. The only large party she has given in the last year was a dinner for 50 newspaper friends to honor one of their number who joined the Navy. Because journalists and cameramen are notoriously liquid in their relaxed moments the affair was noisy and hilarious. Veronica's cupboard is bare of anything alcoholic. As a result, each guest brought his own bottle. The neighbors lost some sleep, that night, but generally they agree that Ronnie is a home-loving young lady, and not to be referred to as some stars are as "that horrible movie person."

On an average day off work, Veronica goes for long walks with daughter Elaine, both dressed in pinafores, or they drive to the market for shopping. No pictures of Elaine Lake will ever be used for publicity. "I just don't like the idea," Veronica says.

Veronica has few intimate friends but will go to a great deal of trouble doing favors for people she knows but slightly. When the husband of a young actress on tour began to believe the inevitable rumors about his wife's dates with other men, Veronica berated him unmercifully. She had seen the homesick girl herself on an Eastern trip. She stayed up half the night trying to get plane reservations for the husband to fly back, and convinced him that he should throw up his job if necessary to preserve his marriage. "Don't tell her you're coming," she said, "just walk in without warning. You'll know in a minute whether she loves you or not." The husband found out that Veronica was right.

Sidney Skolsky, the famed biographer of movie stars, reports that Ronnie sleeps in a nightgown, which is correct, and that she doesn't care about night clubs, which is only partly accurate. She hates night clubs as a place in which women parade their newest gowns and loves. But she can sit for hours in Mocambo and other quiet places gabbing with de Toth and friends who drop by.



~added image

HOW SHE HANDLES WOLVES

The most remarkable quality about the snippiest girl in motion pictures is the unconscious method by which she attains and holds the friendship of "right" people. Because of the odd "one-eye" coiffure that helped skyrocket her to prominence, and her sexy roles, she is constantly the sounding board for men who fancy their technique with women. During an evening, Veronica usually runs across some blatant male who levels *double entendre* remarks in her direction. Because she says nothing, the conversation turns bawdy. Then, fastening a direct stare at the chin of the offender, she says with a slight smile, "I think you are a consummate jerk."

Such forthright attitudes seldom win anyone a host of friends. In Veronica's case, the result is a considerable number of casual enemies whose constant criticisms create the talk that makes her a valuable "property" to her studio.



LAKE HAS FEW CLOSE FRIENDS. HERE IS ONE: CAROL ANN BEERY.



THE LONG BOB no longer covers Veronica's right eye but even when it did, it is claimed, she could spot omissions in any contract at a hundred yards.