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DOUBLE TAKE

BY KEN WINNEY

They were called the double-takes and the horrid-torrids, the whole country went mad for them. They were more than plain motion pictures—they were a new way of looking at things.

Paul made good in Hollywood, all right, but not the way many people predicted. I wish the bastard *had* turned actor. He could have easily enough. The 1957 trend to picture heroes was back on the pale, frail, mother-me-baby cycle, and Paul Conrad's tall slenderness fit the casting specifications to the droop of a pathetic shoulder.

His deep eyes and pallid brow had every female on the set quivering for one of the rare glimpses of him. Glimpses were rare, because when he came to me out of Cal-Tech as a stereo-physicist he buried himself in the camera-sound lab and wouldn't even come out for lunch.

We men were interested in Paul, too. I was technical director at Medoc Studios, and I hired him because he claimed to have a patent on a special lens that solved the only remaining

problem we had before launching a colossal new projection technique. The industry needed something to drag itself out of its latest slump. The novelty was worn off the tri-di and stereo projections that hit so hard in 1953, and now television was pulling theater box-office out by its screaming roots again.

Paul was such a shy guy, I thought, that I had to coddle him and make much over him just to be safe. I passed the word on to all the important people on the lot to do likewise. We didn't want this cookie leaving us for *any* reason.

He didn't take to the assortment of glamor girls that I introduced to him, and this worried me. If some other studio got to him with the right babe—well, it was a chance I couldn't take. So I went all out. I persuaded Gloria Breen to befriend Paul. This was a rough decision

for me, because I was crazy about her.

She was a starlet who was graduating fast. She was so beautiful and talented that she didn't have to accept dates from producers to get parts, which is real talent even in Hollywood. In fact so far I was the only guy in the studio she'd even had lunch with, and I figured I was on the way in with her at the time I got this damned fool notion of hanging her on Paul as a company anchor.

I introduced them at the cafeteria, and that was the last time I had her with me. From then on they went out together almost every night. At the spots she would fend off the agents, predatory females and rival casting directors who stared at Paul hungrily from every corner. And Paul would sit there and talk with her.

Talk, talk, talk. That's all they did. Never even held hands. Hopper couldn't make much out of it, but she said whatever was going on it couldn't happen to a couple of nicer people.

Soon everyone wondered why they didn't get married. Oh, everybody was so happy for them, the shy inventor and the ambitious young actress. And I couldn't complain, because Gloria was only doing the job I asked her to.

Then I started getting uneasy about Paul on another score. His invention was the McCoy, and soon I didn't have to go around getting people to be nice to him. Our new secret process was mostly my idea, but it was beginning to appear that it was all Paul's baby. I had planned to make Paul my first assistant when I thought the front office would hold still for it, so it was a little shock when *they* told *me* to promote him. They intimated I was trying to hide his light under a bushel.

Well, we shot that first picture under tight wraps, and by the time the preview was ready, tension was so great around town that nobody lesser than a director, first vice-president or an arrived star could get a ticket to Grauman's for that night.

It was a flesh-potty little picture done on a B budget which we spent mainly on exotic lounging pajamas and interestingly designed chaise lounges. The critics shook their heads on the way in when we handed them spectacles in the foyer. I stood by and listened to their remarks.

"I thought Polaroids went out two years ago."

"This is new? Nuts, I knew Medoc was bluffing!"

"Like I was saying at Rotary this noon, pictures gotta go for-

ward or they go backwards. Medoc's slipping."

But Alf Moccho, president of Medoc, stood at the door and beamed, insisting that each couple get the right glasses. "Pink rims for the little girls, blue for the little boys," he repeated over and over with a smugness that stank of confidence.

We had the ushers double-check as they seated the patrons to be sure the men and women had the right color goggles.

Two hours later I wiped the sweat off my face and watched our distinguished audience do the same. They were bright-eyed and enthusiastic, but none stopped to fill out the audience-reaction cards. A few ducked their heads together to exchange remarks. I managed to catch a few of the whispers.

"Not much plot, but my God, what characterization!"

"Well, that *was* something!"

"Incredible! I had her on my lap!"

"Why, darling, when he leaned over me I thought I'd faint!"

Gloria came out on Paul's arm. I stuck out my hand to him expecting to exchange congratulations. They brushed by me with little nods like I was the doorman. I almost clobbered the sob right there and then. If I had I would have been better off.

At least I would have made the morning editions.

As it happened, our little bomb exploded the headlines, all right, but whose picture and whose name got the credit?

A dozen columnists ran interviews under Paul's quotes. They were his usual stuffy, reserved line of guff. So reserved that he forgot to mention me.

Then it came to big stupid me. He wasn't shy at all. I had been trying to build up the most egotistical slob in the colony. And all the time he was slipping the knife to me so gently I never felt it.

His steel got into my guts but good that same day. When I showed up for a scheduled victory conference after lunch he hailed me with a small, generous smile and turned to the gathered officials. "I want you to know, gentlemen, that I am grateful for this appointment, but I accept only on the stipulation that you allow me to keep Jake, here, as my assistant."

That's right. He had my girl. Now he had my job. And he was insisting that I take his old job. I've done a little acting in my time, and I managed to paste a big, wet smile on my face and make like the honor was overwhelming.

It wasn't easy to get to a guy whose success depended upon an

invention. Not only did he have a top salary—my salary—but within six months every studio in town was paying him a licensing fee to use his special lens. It's hard to undermine a man with a million dollars in the bank. I needed a break, and I finally got it.

Paul and Gloria were still inseparable. They were addicts for the "double-takes." They were called this because our new technique consisted of filming our pictures twice: once from the point of view of the heroine, through whose eyes the lady customers enjoyed the picture, and then again through the hero's eyes. The men never saw the hero, just the heroine as he leaned over to kiss her, etc. Likewise, the ladies *lived* the part of the female lead. The two pictures, projected simultaneously, were separated for customers of the proper sex by the pink and

blue-rimmed, polarized spectacles.

Without the restriction of having to satisfy both sexes with the same point of view, our producers went wild with their scenarios. As Fiddler put it, they leaned over forward on the love scenes. Another critic put it, "Why get married?"

Everybody liked them.

Well, as I said, Paul and Gloria were two of the best customers in town for the "horrid-torrids." So I wasn't too amazed to see them sit down in front of me one night for a repeat showing of "Come With Me." It was dark, and I leaned forward to make sure it was them, but they didn't notice me. I leaned forward just in time to catch them—

—holding hands? Playing footsie or something? Sniffing heroin? No, Hedda. *They were trading spectacles.*
