



MIS-LEADING LADY

By Mary Mason Beale

Cute, titian-haired Roxy Hurst was the prize look-at-'em-and-giggle girl of Times Square. But on Hollywood Boulevard, where life and love is serious, and sometimes tragic, her heart-saving sense of laughter evaporated under the lazy Southern California sun.

ROXY HURST was nineteen, titian-haired, emerald-eyed, petite, vivacious, and laughter-loving. But if you tried to tell her how pretty she was, she would merely crow at you. "Applesauce!"

As that isn't the usual Hollywood answer to a compliment, she left a train of startled swains in her wake.

It began the day she and her father, Pat Hurst,

New York playwright, stepped off the train in Los Angeles, and found themselves in the midst of an elaborate reception in the sunbathed Spanish-style station. There was a host of celebrities from the Pinnacle Lot, where Pat Hurst was to lend his talents to the making of bigger and funnier productions. There were bands and flowers and photographers.

Roxy was a little bewildered by it, particularly

by the numerous young men who all seemed to have been created over the same pattern. Everywhere she looked she saw the regulation little black Hollywood mustache, flashing teeth, greased hair. Not a man among them wore a hat or even carried one.

Pretty Boy King made no more impression upon Roxy that day than did any of the other men. But Roxy made a deep impression upon Pretty Boy King. He was in the midst of a pretty speech when she interrupted:

“Applesauce! You can’t kid me, fella-me-lad. I’ve been kidded by New York newspapermen, than which there are none whicher.”

“I beg your pardon?” Pretty Boy managed politely.

“Well, maybe I can make it clearer,” laughed Roxy. “There are no men in the world more sarcastic than New York newspapermen.”

“But I wasn’t being sarcastic!” protested Pretty Boy earnestly.

Roxy wanted to say, “You’re too pretty to have sense enough to be sarcastic,” but she didn’t. Pat had warned her: “Don’t kid anyone who doesn’t kid you first. Life is serious and earnest in Hollywood.”

So she subsided.

If you had told Roxy Hurst, during those first few weeks of her hectic Hollywood existence, that she would come to love one of these “pretty boys” with a fierce devotion that blotted out everything else in the world, she would have laughed for a week. But that is exactly what happened.

Pretty Boy King was the man. Not only was he one of those perfectly groomed, sleek-haired, handsome lads, but very early in his career a newspaper movie critic had dubbed him “Pretty Boy” King. Joe Levy, shrewd little president of Pinnacle Films, thought it such an appropriate label that he tacked it permanently to King’s name. Pretty Boy King he became in the studio advertising, in electric lights over the theaters where his pictures were shown.

TO Roxy, Pretty Boy King seemed, at first, a shining example of everything a man should not be. As she got more accustomed to Hollywood, she accepted him as she accepted the rest of the young men. And because Pretty Boy King was—according to Pat—“always sitting on the doorstep ready to be stumbled over,” she got to know him

better than the rest.

“Really,” she told Pat one morning over the breakfast table, “Pretty Boy’s face is his fortune, sure enough. Ever notice how he bulges in his clothes? His sleeves are too tight—or else he wears woolen underwear that makes ‘em bulge,” she went on with a giggle. “He’s all beautiful face and feet with bulges in between. But he screens like a million. And boy, how seriously he takes this picture business! He trains like a prize-fighter. He goes to bed at nine o’clock every night, except between pictures. His hair is permanently waved. The girl at Jim’s told me so. He was getting a mud pack when I was in there yesterday.

“You ought to make a play out of him, Pat!” she added.

“You do the necessary research for me and I will,” Pat laughed lightly. “Give him the third degree. Take him apart and see what makes him tick. Bring me the pieces and I’ll scramble them together. We ought to get a play out of that.”

“Think I can’t?” she demanded.

“I think you’d find yourself exploring a trackless void.”

“Well, don’t forget that the desert blooms occasionally,” she returned.

That startled Pat, but he was too wise to show it.

“Want to lose us our meal ticket?” he asked.

“G’wan! A play kidding Hollywood would be so far over the heads of these serious thinkers that they’d take it for a classic. They’d never know you were kidding them. Hollywood isn’t Broadway.”

“Amuse yourself, baby,” smiled Pat, hiding his worry. “But don’t be surprised if you find Pretty Boy has an alarm clock for a heart.”

“But he hasn’t!” she cried. “He’s really awful decent!”

“Well, don’t get too serious,” said Pat, hoping his anxiety didn’t show too plainly.

“Me, fall for one of these Hollywood pretty boys?” scoffed Roxy scornfully. “The man who makes me fall, Pat Hurst,” she went on impressively, shaking a slim forefinger at him, “has got to be everything that you are, which is a big order. And on top of that, he’s got to be caveman enough to boss me and make me like it. Think any Hollywood pretty boy can do that?”

“That your story?” asked her father with over-casual lightness.

“That’s my story—and I’m perfectly willing to be stuck with it,” she replied firmly.

"You are," said Pat Hurst. "I hold you to it."

It was a bargain. To seal it, Roxy extended a slim hand across the breakfast things, and Pat grasped it.

"Furthermore," Roxy went on, "I promise not to get serious with a man you don't approve of. Does that make you feel any better about these male butterflies?"

"Sure does, baby," said Pat with relief.

"But I do think Pretty Boy King would make a marvelous play," she added irrelevantly. "Shall we collaborate on it?"

Pat looked so startled at her return to the subject that she felt moved to add. "In view of my promise, of course—"

"I hate to have you specializing on any one man," said Pat slowly. "You're so darned attractive—"

"Oh, applesauce!" scoffed Roxy. "That—from you! Pat!"

PAT really had been kidding about making a play out of Pretty Boy King. The Hursts kidded about everything. And Roxy wasn't more than half-serious, either—then.

But when Pretty Boy telephoned her that day, she sang gaily over the wire, "Out of all the world, Pretty Boy, I have chosen you—"

She purposely left a little pause here, that might mean anything and meant exactly nothing. At least, her mind thought it meant nothing, but if her heart hadn't been wiser than her mind, she couldn't have done it.

"—to dine me and dance me this evening," she finished with gay mischief.

"Where?" asked Pretty Boy delightedly. Roxy was so popular that being selected by Roxy herself as her particular escort was a decided mark of favor.

"The most conspicuous place in town," said Roxy carelessly. "I've got a new dress that deserves the proper setting."

"Cocoanut Grove?" asked Pretty Boy.

"Um," agreed Roxy.

The Cocoanut Grove's dinner dances were a social institution in Hollywood. Stars and directors and visiting celebrities fought for reservations.

And that evening, when they were seated beside the perfect dance floor, the orchestra playing the latest theme songs, and the stars who had sung them in pictures singing them to their assembled

confreres, Roxy said casually:

"Pat thinks you're in a class by yourself, Pretty Boy." Her bare dimpled elbows were on the table, and her starry green eyes were beaming into the man's black ones with an intensity that she didn't realize.

"He does?" asked Pretty Boy delightedly. "When Pat Hurst says an actor is in a class by himself, that means he *is*. Go on. Tell me more."

"He is considering writing a play about you," Roxy went on, half-kidding, half-serious. She didn't realize it, but she was kidding Pretty Boy King for the last time. Somehow, during the next few minutes, Pretty Boy became a serious matter to Roxy.

HE almost lost his poise at her words. Joy and relief—such a vast relief—were radiated from him that Roxy's heart did an unexpected and painful flip-flop. Then, just as suddenly as the revealing expression had come over his face, it was gone. Intent seriousness replaced it.

"It is bad business to tell the truth about your affairs in Hollywood, Roxy," he said, "but I'm going to confide in you. If your father really will write me a play, it will be a lifesaver. My contract is up for renewal, and unless something unforeseen happens Pinnacle won't renew it. I've had terrible stories lately, but the producers never blame a box office flop on the story. They always blame the actor. But if I can go to Joe Levy and tell him that Pat Hurst *wants* to write a picture for me, he'd resign me in a minute. Just because Pat approves of me enough to want to do a story for me. See? And with one good picture, I'd be all set again."

"Really?" asked Roxy in amazement. "Really—would it help you importantly?"

"Help me!" he repeated. "It would mean a new contract. It would mean continued stardom—with the exit door staring me in the face as an alternative."

"Why, Pretty Boy!" she said in soft distress. "I hadn't any idea—"

"I hope no one else has, outside the studio," he said. "Do you think you could get him to do it?"

There was such a subdued wistfulness in his voice, such a little-boy-lost-in-the-dark appeal, that the quick tears misted the girl's eyes.

"Pat was talking about writing a play *about* you—not *for* you," she said thoughtfully, her mind busy with a plan.

“Well, who can play me as well as I can?” asked Pretty Boy with a whimsical little smile that went straight to Roxy’s tender heart.

“You’re right, of course,” she said. “But you’ll have to help me. You’ll have to tell me just what sort of a play you’d like best.”

“That’s easy,” said Pretty Boy. “I sing a little, hoof a little, emote a little—and clown a whole lot. I’d like a chance at pathos, and a chance at refined comedy. You ought to come out to the lot and watch us work. I’ll tell you what,” he interrupted himself enthusiastically. “How would you like to play a part in my next picture? That would give you an idea of how pictures are built—”

“Me?” cried Roxy in genuine surprise. “An actress? Don’t be silly. I’d probably ruin the picture.”

It had been a spontaneous inspiration, suggesting to Roxy that she play a part in his next picture, but the more Pretty Boy thought it over, the better he liked it. It would give him the only chance he could possibly devise to be with her day after day, for Roxy was very popular and very much in demand.

“Will you let me suggest it to Joe Levy? You have such poise, such charm, such a gift of laughter,” said Pretty Boy softly. “The cameras would just cuddle you. And the microphone would wrap itself lovingly around that voice of yours. And you’d get marvelous material for Pat’s play.”

“I’d love doing it,” said Roxy happily, “if you think I could.”

It was the first pretty speech she had ever listened to that hadn’t brought forth her famous retort, “Applesauce.” But neither of them realized it.

Joe Levy fell for the idea instantly. Pat’s daughter in the picture would automatically provide reams and reams of publicity for it. She would be a good contrast to Pretty Boy, too, with her green eyes that would photograph light and her red hair that could be highlighted to photograph blonde. And giving her the part might make it easier to attach the elusive Pat Hurst to the Pinnacle staff permanently.

But he wanted Roxy to play the lead. The responsibility of that almost frightened Roxy into refusing. Suppose she ruined the picture! Pretty Boy said the producers always blamed the players for a flop.

“PAT,” she began at breakfast the next morning, “you’re going to write the sort of a play about Pretty Boy that he can star in himself.”

“Sez which? And why?” queried the surprised Pat, with a mocking grimace of turned-down mouth and raised eyebrows.

“I promised him you would,” Roxy told him, without a single twinkle in her green eyes. Deadly serious she was.

“Great Jezebel!” cried Pat. Despair showed all over his usually laughing face. “What next!”

“Plenty!” said Roxy. “Pretty Boy asked me to play in his next picture. It’s a comedy called *Punch Goofy*. It will give me grand ideas for your play,” she told him, all big-eyed seriousness.

Pat howled with laughter, but Roxy didn’t join him. She merely sat, waiting for him to finish his enjoyment.

“You’re not serious, baby?” Pat protested finally.

“Never more,” said Roxy quietly.

There was something about that mirthless quiet of hers that quite effectively killed all inclination to laughter on Pat’s part. Something happened to Roxy! Something serious. What had Pretty Boy done to his child? A sudden fury shook Pat Hurst.

A pretty boy—a picture actor who indulged in mud packs and permanent waves—banishing his baby’s laughter! And the awful part of it was that he didn’t know what to do about it. Whatever a father did or said under such circumstances was sure to be wrong. So he merely shrugged.

“Well, take him apart and bring me the pieces. I’ve worked with worse material—but not much worse.”

“Don’t say that, Daddy,” begged Roxy fervently. “He’s not so bad. Really, he’s—well, different. And he’s up against it for a good play. I like him. So would you, if you knew him. He’s nice and sweet and modest and wholesome—”

“But his clothes don’t fit,” teased Pat, to hide his very deep concern. Roxy—his child—gone goofy over a picture actor! It almost broke his heart. It would be hard enough to give her up to any man—but to a pretty picture boy!

“And good reason why they don’t!” retorted his daughter. “Know why? He’s got muscles like a prize-fighter! I danced with him last night and I know!” She brought it out triumphantly.

Pat shook his head in amazement.

HE sat there for a long time after she left him, thinking it over. Poor kid! Why, she was hardly more than a baby! And this was her first love affair. But was it a love affair? More likely an infatuation with a handsome face and pretty manners. Would it not be the best possible cure for an infatuation for Roxy to work through a picture with Pretty Boy?

Roxy was to play a society girl in the picture, fascinated by a prize-fighter whom she had never met. The girl managed to get into the press box to be as close as possible to the man who so intrigued her attention. And out of her pretending to be a newspaper reporter, the story grew. Roxy had as big a part as Pretty Boy, and was promised as many close-ups.

She was terrified! She had been coached and rehearsed until she could go through her part automatically. But whether she would do it right when the cameras were grinding was something that only actual experience would tell her. And she couldn't ruin Pretty Boy's last picture! Why, it meant everything! If it wasn't a good picture, he might not even get a chance to star in Pat's play!

She *had* to do it! And do it right!

Her pretty teeth were clenched tight together the morning she marched onto the set—the morning they were to begin the picture. And it seemed to her that the director, Zolfa, picked the very hardest scene to do first.

She took her place before a typewriter on a plain pine table in the press box, her chin on a level with the ring floor. Her teeth chattered with fear. She was deeply grateful for her make-up, for fear drove every bit of color from her cheeks and lips.

Pretty Boy, in a gaudy bathrobe, followed by a group of men who were playing seconds and manager and referee, stepped into the ring. Why, they were already making the picture! She gasped.

Pretty Boy was led to the center of the ring and introduced to an imaginary audience. He bowed, turned to his corner, and removed his bathrobe. Roxy gasped again—this time in admiration, for Pretty Boy was bare to the waist. His heavy muscular shoulders, arms and back were browned from days at the beach. He was a gorgeously proportioned man in perfect physical condition. Muscles rippled rhythmically as he moved. No wonder his coat sleeves bulged!

And then the fight began. And it was a fight! Gloves smacked against bare flesh, feet thumped

the canvas covering platform, breaths came in short grunts as gloves found flesh. It was a real fight! She hadn't expected that.

SHE tried to remember what was coming. There was a scene where Pretty Boy was to be knocked through the ropes. He was to land on her typewriter. Over and over she had been rehearsed for that scene; had been cautioned that no warning could be given her when they came to it.

She sat on the edge of her chair, waiting tensely. It would come suddenly. That fall through the ropes hadn't been rehearsed. She knew why, now. It was dangerous! She would probably get a pretty hard bump when he landed, and her chair had been nailed to the floor to protect them both. But until this moment she hadn't thought what it would mean to Pretty Boy to sail through the ropes and land on her typewriter. She looked at the typewriter with distaste. It had a lot of sharp knobs and gadgets on the top. Why, he might get hurt!

Sitting there on the edge of her chair, tense, waiting, she tried to remember Zolfa's last instructions.

"We won't rehearse the fall," he had said. "It's too dangerous. We've got to get it right the first time. Mr. King will come flying through the ropes and land against your chest. We will cut for a second, while he shifts his position so that he lies sprawled and almost out right on top of the typewriter. Now you are startled, shocked, horrified. You love him, and it doesn't look to you as if he can get back before the count of ten, or that he could fight any longer if he did get back. You reach out and put your arms about him. Clutch him to you. You love him, you know. Whisper something to him. It will startle him back to consciousness. Then he will scramble back through the ropes at the count of ten. Got it?"

She had rehearsed it again and again.

"Remember," were Zolfa's final words, "he is a champion; a tremendously popular fighter. You love him because he is champion—and it looks as though he is about to lose his title."

Then, when she least expected it, a punch doubled Pretty Boy up. An awful punch! Through the ropes he came, all doubled up as if in pain. Unconsciously Roxy spread her arms to catch him. But he didn't land where Zolfa intended. He fell short. He landed exactly on top of the typewriter, with all its little sharp knobs and gadgets. He

grimaced in real pain, but he carried on. Then Roxy saw blood!

Her eyes widened in horror. Really hurt! She sat perfectly stiff, eyes and mouth aghast! So this was what it meant to be a picture actor. When Pat knew—

Pretty Boy moaned, giving her a cue. She put her arms about him and cuddled his head against her shoulder. He slumped in her arms. Poor kid! That was an awful fall! Full of indignation for the director who was responsible for it, she tightened her arms about Pretty Boy in fierce protection and, obeying the strongest impulse of her life, she covered his face with kisses. Fierce kisses. Adoring kisses. Pain-curing kisses.

What did she care that it wasn't in the picture? Pretty Boy was hurt and she loved him! What did it matter that he had never said a word of love to her?

And then he was fighting his way out of her clinging arms. She hung on, until quite forcibly he removed her arms. Then he picked himself up gingerly and pulled himself through the ropes. And she saw that his back was cut and bleeding in several places. The director saw it, too, and Pretty Boy's back was immediately photographed.

Roxy burst into tears. It dawned upon her that she had ruined the scene. And Zolfa had said it was too dangerous to do more than once! Fool! Fool! Fool! Just because she wanted to kiss Pretty Boy, kiss away his hurts, she had made it necessary for him to chance other hurts! She rocked from side to side in her misery, totally unconscious that a microphone was catching her sobs and a camera her grief.

Finally, when the action was finished and the great lights were out, Zolfa came over to her. Her face was buried in her arms. Her hand was twisting at the sharp gadgets of the typewriter, as if she would hurt them for hurting Pretty Boy.

"You got a lot of punch in that scene," said Zolfa. "I never thought of having you kiss him."

Roxy snapped upright. Relief, astonishment, disbelief chasing themselves over her tear-stained face.

"You mean—it's all right? Oh, was it all right? He won't have to take that fall over again?" she gasped.

"It's great. We'll play back the voices in a minute. I'll tell you about the film tomorrow. You're an actress, Miss Hurst."

"No, I'm not," she admitted. "It was—sort of—

spontaneous combustion—if you get what I mean," she wisecracked. She was ashamed of her emotion now.

"THAT big scene this morning," said Pretty Boy as he was driving her home at the end of the day, "you played it marvelously. You've got the secret of the camera all right. You let yourself go in the emotional scenes. Thank goodness you haven't any self-consciousness."

Roxy, who had been waiting all day for this moment, went cold all over. Waiting for it, and dreading it. She wanted to tell him she loved him, but she wanted him to tell her that he loved her first. And all he thought about was pictures, pictures, pictures! When she had been so overcome by his courage, his pride in his job, his willingness to take punishment, that she had forgotten all about the cameras! All she had wanted in that amazing moment had been to hold him in her arms, protect him, love him. What had he thought of the fierce kisses she rained down on his face?

She glanced at him curiously. He had thought she was acting? He went on talking about the scenes they would shoot tomorrow.

"Does your back hurt?" she asked suddenly.

"Not much. The doctor put in a couple of stitches at noon—"

"And you worked two hours with cuts that needed stitching up? You were on your back on that dirty floor a couple of times! Why, you might get blood poison or something!" she worried. "And you rehearsed all afternoon with some new stitches in your back! Didn't the doctor tell you to go home to bed?"

Pretty Boy laughed indulgently.

"You've got a lot to learn about pictures, Roxy," was all he said—about that. He had such a lot to say about Pat's play.

IT was an enthusiastic, starry-eyed Roxy who burst in upon her father, and she had only one subject of conversation. Pretty Boy's courage! He was marvelous!

"Spare me!" begged Pat.

"But, Pat," the girl protested, "you've misjudged him so! You thought he was just a pretty boy—and he's got stamina and courage and plenty of it! Plenty! And he laughed at me when I scolded him about waiting two hours to let the doctor stitch up his back!"

“And for that, you’re ready to fall in love with him!” teased Pat, bravely keeping up the pretense of lightness.

“Already in,” said Roxy. “And what’s more, I’m proud of it! Get a load of that, my darling parent!”

Pat sighed gustily, as if it was all news to him, and tiresome news at that. He would take it that way.

“Well, it had to happen sometime,” he said, with a pretense of comical resignation. “But you’ll get over it.”

“I never will!” cried Roxy, ready to fly into a rage. “I don’t want to! All I want in this world is to be half as important to Pretty Boy King as his precious pictures are. And I will be,” she added in a different tone.

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” agreed her father, unable to hide the catch in his voice. “You can be—pretty important—to a fellow.”

“Daddy darling!” she cried, flying to him. “Don’t be so lugubrious about it! Nobody can ever take your place. Nobody! Ever! I’ve got to have you and Eugene, too. I’ve got to!”

“So he’s ‘Eugene’ now, eh?” asked her father, with a smile that would twist a little with pain, no matter how he tried to make it otherwise. “Not ‘Pretty Boy’ any longer?”

“Never again,” she vowed. “And listen, Pat. He wants this play of yours to help him get away from pretty boy parts. He wants to cut his hair short, so he’ll have to have it curled again. He wants to play real he-men parts. He is a real he-man, you know.”

“No, I didn’t,” murmured Pat.

“Well, he is! And I want you to write a story about how they made a pretty boy out of him, so that in the middle of the picture he can have his hair cut and change character. Lose that Pretty Boy character forever. He’s an actor! He’s a trouper! And they’re keeping him just a pretty boy,” she mourned.

“Well, if he’s going to be a son-in-law of mine,” said Pat grimly, “he’s got to prove that he can stand the gaff.”

“He wants to!” said Roxy earnestly. “But Joe Levy won’t let him—unless you write the kind of a play that will let him prove it. Joe thinks you’re the smartest playwright in the world. If you make Eugene get tough in a picture—and that’s what he wants—Joe will keep him tough all through his new contract. All Eugene wants is just to prove

what he can do—although,” she added, in a caressing tone, “why he has to prove it after that fight scene today is more than I can understand.”

“So you think he can fight, do you?” asked Pat curiously.

“You ought to see him!” crowed Roxy.

“He’d run a mile from a real fight,” baited Pat.

“He wouldn’t!” cried Roxy shrilly.

Pat just shrugged. “I’ll write him a play,” he said grimly. “And I’ll bet that all he does in it is to mug the camera for the close-ups. I’ll bet they have to double for him in every scene demanding action.”

“All you have to do, darling,” said Roxy with a smile, “is to write the play.”

WORK on *Punch Goofy* occupied every minute for Roxy and Pretty Boy. The new play, called *Pretty Boy Packs a Punch*, occupied every minute of Pat Hurst’s time. And he chuckled constantly as he wrote.

In *Pretty Boy Packs a Punch*, he did everything that Roxy had asked him to do and then some. He took a young college man for his leading character, sent him to Hollywood, had the producers make him into a regulation pretty boy, and made the whole world pick on the pretty boy because he was so pretty. And the star would have to fight his way all through the picture. *Pretty Boy Packs a Punch* was a biting satire, and Pat grinned to himself as he wondered how Pretty Boy could try its acid test.

Roxy and Pretty Boy finished *Punch Goofy*. Joe Levy gave Pretty Boy a new contract for one picture—Pat’s picture. The shrewd producer said, “Maype it will ruin you. Maype it vill make you. Ve shall see. Ve can always make new condracts.”

And as those weeks dragged into months, Roxy tried to make Pretty Boy tell her he loved her. She laid awake nights scheming ways and means of making him say it; of finding out whether he really did love her or not. He was attentive—on the lot and off of it. He dined her, entertained her, instructed her, complimented her—but he didn’t make love to her. And Roxy was tortured by an agony beyond belief because he wouldn’t.

Oh, could it be possible that he didn’t care? Was he only nice to her because of Pat? Already he was talking about his next picture and wanting Pat to write it.

The premiere of *Punch Goofy* came and went. Roxy and Pretty Boy appeared together. Roxy got

an ovation, for she was Pat Hurst's daughter and she had done marvelously well in the picture—for an amateur.

She didn't play in the new picture. The leading woman's part required an experienced actress. Pat wouldn't even let her see the script, and Pretty Boy wouldn't tell her about the story. He just beamed happily at her and told her the picture would be a wow!

So, all during the filming of the picture, Roxy wandered about, refusing invitations, moping, miserable. Pretty Boy was working so hard that he could rarely see her. He went to bed at nine every night. Anyway, toward the end of the picture, his head had been shaved; all his carefully cared for curls were gone, and he wouldn't appear in public at all.

FINALLY the picture was finished. There was to be a preview at the studio. Pat and Roxy were invited to attend, and Roxy almost died of nervousness waiting for the moment to come. It came at last—the moment that would tell Pretty Boy what his future would be. The moment that Roxy hoped desperately would tell her what her future would be, too. Oh, would she have to go through life adoring this man with every fiber of her being, with never a sign that he cared? She couldn't bear it! She'd ask him to marry her! She would! So she vowed as she sat beside him in the darkened projection room. She reached over and touched his hand.

"Hold my hand, Pretty Boy!" she whispered urgently. "I can't bear the suspense if you don't! Maybe we've ruined you! Oh, Eugene!"

He took the cold little hand in both his big warm ones and cuddled it gently. Once in the dark he lifted the fingers to his lips. Roxy was so deliriously happy that she thought she couldn't bear it. She squeezed his fingers tight—tight.

The story developed on the screen in front of them. The action was exactly what Pat had written. And Pretty Boy played it to perfection, for it was Eugene King himself! His own story!

Pat sighed a little as he watched the story unroll. And then he found himself sitting on the edge of his seat, cheering with the rest of the little gathering when Pretty Boy won his fights, disappointed with the rest of them when he didn't.

He had written a biting satire. But when the camera finished with it, *Pretty Boy Packs a Punch*

was a marvelous story of peril and escape, of a young man fighting for his manhood. Pat hadn't counted on that.

There was a queer look in his eyes when the picture was finished. A look of reluctant admiration. Pretty Boy King was an actor! He also was a finished boxer! And what a physique the lad had!

The small select audience crowded around the two Hursts and the star with sincere compliments.

When Pat got a chance, he took Joe Levy aside.

"How much of that fight stuff did Pretty Boy play, and how much was doubled?" he asked the producer urgently.

"Ve didn't use a double in the whole picture," Joe Levy told him. "Pretty Boy wouldn't have it. Said nobody fought his fights—in films or out of 'em," he added proudly. "And say, Hurst, if you vill write all his pictures, I'll gif you both a contract that vill be nobody's business, so much money vill it make you."

"You mean you won't re-sign him unless I write his pictures?" asked Pat.

"Oh, yes! I'll re-sign him! I made him. After this, he'd make me a fortune. Oh, sure! I'll re-sign him. Today."

"Well," said Pat quietly, "I'd like to write his pictures."

PAT invited Pretty Boy to have dinner with them that night, but Joe Levy had already arranged for a conference. He wanted to get Pretty Boy's name to a contract before any other producer heard about this new picture. So Pat and Roxy dined together—without Pretty Boy—at the Trocadero.

"Changed your mind about him any?" asked Roxy mischievously, proudly over their dinner. "He's a he-man, isn't he?"

"He sure is, baby," agreed Pat, "and I sure would have enjoyed watching them make some of those fight scenes. That baby packs a mean punch."

"I told you so!" crowed Roxy, the fingers Eugene King had kissed in the darkness against her lips. "Now do you approve of him?"

"About eighty percent," said Pat quietly.

"What would make it a hundred percent?" asked Roxy anxiously.

"Haven't decided, baby," said Pat. "Don't rush me."

But he did decide a minute or two after they left

the Trocadero.

They had walked to the corner where their car was parked. They had almost reached the corner when they saw a near-accident. A man in dinner clothes, hatless, his white shirt front gleaming in the dusk, was in the middle of the street when a car swerved, apparently preparing to turn around and proceed back downtown. By a hair's-breadth the motorist missed the pedestrian, but the fenders grazed him, leaving a coating of dust on his clothes.

A furious voice yelled out:

"You dumb yokel! You bum imitation of a ham-handed track driver! Don't you know the traffic laws? Get out of that car and I'll teach 'em to you!" Pretty Boy's voice, hoarse with rage at his narrow escape.

The pedestrian was Pretty Boy!

Roxy stood against the building, clutching Pat's arm in terror. The man in the car was close enough to her so that she could see he was a tough-looking customer. He pulled to the curb and got out deliberately.

"What's that you said?" he asked of Pretty Boy.

Pretty Boy repeated what he had said. "And furthermore, I might add, you lopsided hippopotamus, that this is a crosswalk and pedestrians have the right of way. It's time you learned that—and I'm the fellow who's going to teach it to you!"

"Yeh?" grinned the motorist. "Well, do your talkin' after you sample this!"

And he doubled up his fist and drew back his arm. A slow deliberate motion. But Pretty Boy wasn't slow.

Like a tiger springing, he shot forward. One perfectly coordinated motion. One perfect punch—and the erstwhile motorist lay sprawled on the sidewalk. Pretty Boy stood staring down at the man, rubbing his knuckles absently. Finally the man stirred. He wriggled to a sitting position. Pretty Boy helped him to his feet. He stood wobbling a moment; then he said:

"I guess you're right, mister." And he wove a dizzy way to his car.

PRETTY BOY settled his coat over his shoulders, took out an immaculate silk handkerchief and wiped his knuckles, and started up the street.

Pat and Roxy watched him; Roxy rooted to the

spot, Pat shaking with delighted laughter. When Pretty Boy came opposite them, Pat clapped him on the shoulder.

"Congratulations!" he said. "That was a beautiful punch!"

"Did you hurt your hand, darling?" asked Roxy anxiously, unconscious that the endearing term had slipped out.

"Oh!" said Pretty Boy, surprised at their presence. "I'm sorry you saw that. I don't lose my temper very often, because I'm a trained fighter and these fellows who pick on pretty boys usually aren't. It makes a fight so unfair."

Pat was holding out his hand. Pretty Boy stared at it a moment, and then shook it. Pat had a hunch what Pretty Boy's hand would be like, but the firm grip of that muscled fist delighted him. Roxy was right, the cute monkey!

"Come back to the Trocadero for coffee with me," said Pretty Boy. "I'm celebrating. Joe Levy and I have signed a contract that I never in my wildest dreams hoped for. I'm safe! Come on back with me. I've got to propose to Roxy and I can't wait. You might as well hear it, Pat. I'll repeat it later when I've got Roxy alone, but I can't wait! It seems to me I've been waiting for ages—eons—eras! Roxy, will you marry me?"

There on the street corner! Roxy closed her eyes and sighed with delight, but she hurried to open them.

"Of course!" she said.

"I couldn't ask you until this contract business was settled," said Pretty Boy, taking both her hands and caressing her with his black eyes. "I couldn't ask you to be a has-been's wife—and it looked as though that was what I was headed for."

"I wouldn't have cared," protested Roxy. "I thought you were never going to ask me!"

"Hurry!" urged Pretty Boy. "There's a corner on the stairs—and I've got to kiss you!"

What he bothered to eat of his dinner, Eugene King ate with one hand. The other was clutching Roxy's tight, tight under the table. Pat stayed long enough to hear the details of the contract and to tell Pretty Boy that Joe Levy had asked him to write all his stories. Then he left them alone. And they were as alone in that crowded dining-room as if they had been on a desert island. They didn't hear the music. They didn't see the greetings of friends. They were absorbed in each other.

"When did you begin to—care?" asked Roxy

happily. That age-old question.

“That day I met you in the station,” said Pretty Boy. “But it took you an awfully long time to know that I was hovering, around,” he accused her. “Didn’t you know instantly—too?”

“Of course I did,” said Roxy, forgetting everything that had gone before that other moment at the Cocoanut Grove, when she had kidded Pretty Boy King for the last time—when he had suddenly become the most important person in the world to her.

A sudden thought made her eyes sparkle. “Eugene, tell me! You *can* tell me now. Why wouldn’t you tell me anything about this picture all the while you were making it?”

King grinned. “I was afraid,” he confessed in mild confusion.

“Of what?” Roxy demanded, staring. “Of what, silly?”

“That haircut.”

Roxy glanced at his head. There was only a

stubble showing. “I don’t understand,” she cried. “Afraid of a haircut?”

“And how!” He touched his fingers to the stubble. “I knew I’d look like a convict, and that if you saw it—”

“Silly!” she cried. “Oh, Eugene, I love you, permanent waved or bald!”

“You’re the loveliest thing,” said Pretty Boy softly, the tenderest smile in the world on his face. “There aren’t any other eyes so lovely as yours—nor hair—nor lips—nor teeth—”

“Really?” she asked delightedly. “Not even in Hollywood, where every girl is beautiful?”

“Not even in Hollywood,” Pretty Boy assured her.

“I’m so glad,” she sighed happily. “I want to be beautiful—for you.”

And she was the girl who used to answer every compliment with a jeering “Applesauce!” Roxy Hurst, it seemed, had acquired a taste for one very special brand of applesauce.