

∴ *Life with the Perfect Pictures Outfit* ∴



The Purple Goldfish

By
Thomas Thursday



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

TAKE it from me, movie press agents are born and unmade, as the bird says about poets or plumbers—I forget which. Anyway, Joe Woofley, the chap who manufactures the fairy-tale stuff for Perfect Pictures, and who could convince a squirrel that nuts are absolute poison, is now willing to admit that luck is luck, if not more. However, Joe meant well and—but let's come to life and tell the story.

About two weeks after we had released *Idiots Supreme*, a six-reeler about politicians, or the like, the exhibitors began to bombard the New York office with assorted complaints. J. Herbert Hammerheim, the boss, relayed the gems out to the studio and wanted to know what was the matter. Jimmie Muffoon, our great director, took one slant at the exhibitors' groans, two slants at the boss' letter, and then got as sore as three hours' worth of bareback riding.

"Can you beat it, Oscar?" he said to me. "They hand us a scenario that was rank enough to star in a Limburger serial, and then howl for results! Why, the big flounder ought to know that the only good men he has got on the staff are the director and cameraman. The rest add up like a row of zeroes."

"That's right, Jimmie," I agreed—being the cameraman myself. "Let's look at some of the moans from the theater owners, will you?"

"Sure, Oscar; have a slant!"

I did. Here are a few samples. Look them over for yourself:

DEAR SIRs: We booked your alleged feature, "Idiots Supreme," for a week, which was eight days too many. The very first night the audience wanted to have the reels run off backward. Claimed it wouldn't make any difference. They said it! If they made pictures during the times of Alexander the Great, Nero, Columbus, and Frank Merriwell, then "Idiots Supreme" must have been a hit. How's your press agent—dead? Insincerely yours, COMEDIA THEATER.

Here's another boost:

GENTLEMEN: This is in reference to your disaster titled "Idiots Supreme." Why waste good celluloid like that? There wasn't a thing the matter with it—except the following:

The scenario must have been written by a chap with family and liver trouble. The director couldn't direct a mouse to cheese factory. The photography was good bricklaying. Did you shoot that picture with a camera or a cannon? It was dead all over—and under.

What kind of a press agent have you got,
if any? Not yours truly,
PUFFWUFFS PALACE THEATER.

After reading another armful of those unblushing gems, I decided that *Idiots Supreme* must have fallen as flat as a dime's worth of Graham crackers. One exhibitor claimed that he was on his way East with the army and navy to see if he couldn't get even. And what they didn't say about poor Joe! It seems that Woofley fell overboard or asleep with the press stuff, or else pulled a bloomer.

"Well, Jimmie," I said, "it looks as if the dear folks don't appreciate our idea of high art, hey?"

"Art your grandmother!" snapped Jimmie, tossing his cigar butt at the ceiling. "Trouble is, we need nothing less than a new set of actors, a new set of actresses, a new press agent, and a new—"

"And a new director!" snarled Joe Woofley, as he came into the works. "You birds seem to think a picture is made by me. No press agent can put over a punk feature. Anyway, the best part of the whole thing was the press stuff!"

"Do you get paid for what you do?" asked Jimmie, wriggling his ears in disgust. "Take it from me, a chap like you would ruin the complete works of Shakesbeer by just looking at them! Oscar and I worked like Nubian slaves over that picture, and you go and spill the beans all over the pantry. Well, I hope you'll do better with *The Purple Goldfish*. Have you started to ruin that with your press ravings yet?"

"I'm going to get busy tomorrow, James," replied Joe Woofley, with a yawn. "And believe me, I'm going to use some great stuff. Of course, I realize how hard it is to boost bloomers, y'understand; but I'll see what I can do to save your latest disasterpiece. By-by, James!"

CHAPTER II.

THE OLDEST STUNT IN THE WORLD.

THE next day our great stars, Lulu Lovegood and Chesterfield Criddle, went off on their triannual vacation. Lulu breezed in to say good-by dressed up in the latest spring suit, with four-fifths of the spring busted or missing, and looked as sweet as the sugar supply. She was only twenty-five—for the past ten years—and was still subject to matrimony.

As to Chesterfield, he represented nothing less than the creme de la milk—as they chirp in French—of all the movie stars. He wore a soup strainer, or mustache, and was subject to matrimony and assorted fits, if you know what I mean. Both had worked in our latest masterpiece, *The Purple Goldfish*, and they decided that they would need a vacation as soon as the gem was finished, if not before.

"Both going to the same place?" asked Jimmie.

"Yes, James." replied Lulu. "Mr. Criddle and I have discovered a splendid place up in the mountains. Quite reasonable as to price, too. Only one hundred dollars per week—each."

"Must be a regular charity hang-out, hey?" said Jimmie. "Here's five dollars—bring me back a toothpick."

"By the way, Mr. Muffoon," drawled Chesterfield, "I hear that *Idiots Supreme* failed to make a decided hit, as it were. What was the cause—poor directing and camera work?"

"Nope!" snorted Jimmie. "Bad acting, stale scenario, and defective press agency."

"Really!" bristled Chesterfield, swinging his cane with a temperamental twist. "I'm afraid you'll never understand true art—never. I trust, however, that *The Purple Goldfish*, which shows me at my best, will be a distinct hit."

At this point in the debate, Joe Woofley blew in wearing a big smile and a small hat, a fat cigar and a thin suit, a round face and a fat head, and—but, anyway, Joe looked happy.

"I hear that you birds are going away," he opened to the stars. "Glad to hear it! I'm going to spring some new press stuff for *The Purple Goldfish*, and I can get along better with you actorinos out of the way."

"Thanks!" sniffed Chesterfield. "Are you ready, Miss Lovegood?" he asked, turning to Lulu. Miss Lovegood was, and a moment later they breezed through the door.

"Well, Joe," said Jimmie as soon as the stars stopped twinkling in our midst, "what's the big idea—?"

For reply, Joe removed his puzzle lid, or hat, spread his two-hundred-odd—very odd—pounds over a chair, and then jerked a wad of papers from his inner coat pocket.

"What's that stuff—the history of the war?" asked Jimmie, after slanting the spoiled stationery.

"Guess again," returned Joe, smiling. "What

you see here is my idea of a great boost; something new and original. Of course, it might have been pulled once before, y'understand; but as the world's greatest philosopher remarked—I refer to the late Mr. Barnum—there's a sap born every minute, and forty press agents to take him."

"Cut out the lecture," I said, getting peeved. "Spring the grand scheme, will you?"

"Well," Joe went on, laying his hemp, or stogy, on Jimmie's new straw hat, "now that the stars are out of the way on a vacation, it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to say that they are engaged to wed and—"

"Haw, haw, haw!" exploded Jimmie. "Why, for the love of Pete, how do you get that kind of material, hey? Chesterfield wouldn't marry the queen of the world, much less Lulu. As to Lulu, she wouldn't wed the gold supply wrapped in silver! That idea is all wet, Joe—all wet!"

"As I was saying," Joe continued, as if Jimmie and I were then in Africa, "the idea, although not entirely original, is great stuff for the lady movie fans. It's all in the handling, y'understand. A dead press agent would murder it; but in the hands of one so talented as myself, it's bound to attract more attention than the Kaiser at London Bridge." At that, I noted Jimmie fanning himself with a slice of props.

"Oscar," he moaned, "you can see for yourself what handicaps we're working under. Believe me, it's enough to discourage a warthog! You and me work our heads off trying to put out a good picture, with bad actorinos and everything, and along comes this tossback from the stone age and gums up the works!"

"And furthermore," purred Joe, as if we had not yet arrived back from Africa, "that isn't all."

"Isn't all!" echoed Jimmie, running his fingers through his mop of three hairs. "Whaddaya gonna do, strangle everything?"

"We now come to the main stunt in the press stuff," continued Joe, taking a puff from his hemp stogy. "Mr. Criddle gives to his ladylove a pearl necklace as an engagement gift, the same being worth ten thousand dollars. Needless to say, this string of pearls is lost, strayed, or stolen. Reward for the return of the gems to Perfect Pictures studio will be two thousand dollars."

Oh-h, boy! Without blinking an eye Joe had the nerve to sit there and tell us about the oldest press stunt in the universe and points west!

"Do you mean it?" howled Jimmie, looking as pleased as an eel after mugging the worm and grabbing the hook. "For the love of Annie, why don't you tell them something new?"

"And now, James," Joe went on, as if Jimmie had said nothing more than zero, "seeing that the scheme has your absolute approval, I will depart—thanking you one and all for your kind attention."

"Go to Hongkong!" snapped Jimmie, as Joe slipped out of the door.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING DUE TO HAPPEN.

LET me say at once and immediately that Joe got away with it, hook, line, and—fish! That bird must have either hypnotized or sandbagged the newspaper editors, or else promised them the radium supply.

Joe's layout sounded like this: Lulu Lovegood, supreme artist of the silver sheet—that's Joe's stuff—is reported to be engaged to Mr. Chesterfield Criddle, the king of screen idols—that's more of Joe's nightmare. Well, Mr. Criddle gives his intended fighting partner a string of pearls, valued at nothing less than ten thousand dollars. Great stuff, hey? Like convincing a landlord that he can't get all the money in the world. So far, so bad!

Now, here comes the bright idea, just as bright as midnight at the bottom of Lake Michigan, not that I've ever been there, you understand. However, while the engaged stars are taking a prehoneymoon trip in Chesterfield's new supersix Tireoff roadster, the string of pearls make arrangements to slip from Lulu's neck, or something like that. Result: they are lost. Furthermore, the said string of pearls was formerly the property of the ex-Princess of Woof. Reward for the recovery of same: two thousand dollars, which, as far as I know, is all the money in the world, if not more.

Bear in mind, missus or mister, Lulu and Chesterfield don't know anything about the gag. And, since they are so far away in the mountains that they won't get a chance to read anything, it's a ten-to-one shot that they are going to be some surprised when they return to civilization, wherever that is. All of which is enough of that.

We will now check off fourteen days on the calendar in order to set this yarn ahead two weeks. No trouble at all!

When I landed into the studio bright and late

Monday morning, I noticed Jimmie looking as tickled as if he had a feather down his back. He was wearing a new suit and an old smile, and was fondling a letter in his hand as if it were a check from home.

“What’s the idea, Jimmie?” I greeted. “Have you been eating shredded joke books for breakfast?”

“Wait till you see this, Oscar!” he roared. “Here’s a letter from a bird up in the woods saying that he has found the necklace that Lulu lost in Joe’s imagination, and that he’s on his way down here to claim the reward. How’s that, hey?”

“Are you kidding?” I asked. “Let’s see it, will you?”

It was the goods. Take a look for yourself.

DEAR SIR: I see by the paypers that you hav lossed a purl neclace well I hav found it whare it was lossed and am cuming for the reeward of too thousand dollars. Hav the mony in smal bills as they aint no chanct of changing it in the genral store if its more than five dolar bills. Yores trooly, CAL CORNWELL.

Harvest Center, New York State.

Well, I leave it to you! Joe Woofley offers a reward of two thousand spenders for a necklace that has never been lost, strayed, or stolen, and along comes a hayshaker from the country claiming that the same has been found. Boy, page Hans Christian Andersen! Not bad, hey? Right away I thought that there must be something phony—as they say in the telephone works—about the whole thing.

“What do you make of it, Jimmie?” I asked.

“Well,” replied Jimmie. “I don’t think that this Cal Cornwell is a hick, but a wise guy who’s trying to get away with something. Look at it this way: This Cornwell bird reads the press dope of Joe, then decides to test the thing out. His idea being that, if the story is a fake, then Perfect Pictures will have to give him something for keeping mum. Pretty clever, hey?”

“Clever?” I said. “Sure! It’s just as clever as washing feathers in molasses! You’re all wrong, Jimmie, all wrong. I figure it out this way: This chap Cornwell is a genuine hick who has found a necklace, one that no doubt is sold at every five-and-ten-cent store, and imagines that the same is

the one that Lulu lost—in Joe’s imagination. And—well, anyway, the joke is on Joe!”

“Maybe you’re right, Oscar. Joe will be here tomorrow afternoon, and I guess Mr. Cornwell will arrive at the same time. And then there ought to be some fun!”

CHAPTER IV.

WHO GIGGLES LAST, GRINS BEST.

THE following afternoon, the three of us, meaning Jimmie, Joe, and myself, were sitting in the studio awaiting the appearance of a chap by the name of Cal Cornwell.

“What do you suppose Mr. Cornwell’s game is, Joe?” asked Jimmie.

“Do I look like a ouija board?” Joe flared out. “But I figure that friend Cornwell is a wise bird from some rival company who has an idea that he’s going to kid me along. I can see that without looking.”

“What do you intend to do?” I asked.

“Kid him back, stupid; kid him back! When he blows in I’ll let him think that he’s getting away with his game, and treat him like the king of the universe. However, he’ll be sorry that he ever picked on li’l Joe Woofley, believe me!”

At that point, as the fellow said after rising hastily from a tack, the studio door opened slowly and quiet-like, and in walked an animated version of “Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight?”

He first presented us with a bird’s-ear, I mean eye, view of his face and neck, which same he stuck cautiously around the edge of the door. Seeing that we didn’t look any more dangerous than five dollars’ worth of benzine flirting with a bonfire, the queer-looking flipper favors us with the balance of his makeup. And—but let me describe this bird before I forget it: He’s wearing a new hat and an old suit, blue eyes and a green look, a set of number fourteen shoes with red socks, a soft collar, and a hard face, and—well, anyway, I saw at once that he led a fast life in a slow town.

“Smatter, are you sick?” asked Jimmie.

“Good gracious grief—no!” exploded the stranger with a smile that was as catching as the flu.

“That’s Cal Cornwell,” Joe buzzed in my ear. “He’s a good actor, but he can’t fool me!”

“What can I do for you?” asked Joe, favoring the newcomer with his most expensive smile. “Sit

down, won't you?"

"Yes—yes; I'm plumb tired! Been ridin' on them old trains more'n eight, now, hours to get hereabouts. I got in the wrong door outside, and they tells me to come in here and see a man called Woofley. Be you him?"

"That's me," replied Joe, grinning. "What's on your mind?"

"Well," replied the stranger, removing his hat, "my name is, now, Cal Cornwell, from Harvest Center. Maybe you got the letter what I sent about findin' the string of purls?"

"Oh, so you're the chap who found the necklace," purred Joe as if he had just made a great discovery—same as Columbus. "Er—have you the gems on your person?"

"No, sir," replied Cal. "I, now, got 'em right here in my shirt. Wait a minute and I'll unhitch 'em for yer. Ma sewed them in so, now, the city slickers wouldn't get 'em. Haw, haw—yer can't fool ma!"

Mr. Cornwell removed his coat, vest, and then ripped out about three inches from the front of his shirt. The next thing we knew a string of pearls was laid before our wondering eyes. And I'll say now that they sure looked good! Joe gave them an examination as if they had been drafted for the army, or something, and then shot Cal a wise look.

"So you found them in the roadway, hey?" asked Joe, twirling them around his fingers.

"Yes—yes; I did, yer know! Y'see, I run the, now, delivery wagon for the general store, and was deliverin' some middlings up at Sam Hoops' farm. Well, when I unloaded this here, now, bag of middlings, the darn bag went bust, and some of the stuff went all over the ground. I started to scoop the middlings up, and when I gits near the bottom, I sure enough finds that there string of purls! Ain't that, now, luck, mister?"

"Fine!" exclaimed Joe. "However, Mr. Cornwell, since Miss Lovegood and Mr. Criddle are still away on their vacation—I don't know just where—I'll have to ask you to leave the necklace here until she can see whether it is hers. If they're not hers, y'understand, then I'll send 'em back to you, parcel post. If she says that they belong to her, then I'll slip you two thousand dollars. How's that?"

Cal's face beamed like a months' collection of sunsets. "I'm satisfied, mister," he agreed. "But, now, don't fergit my name and address—it's Calibert Cornwell, Harvest—"

"All right, Cal," Joe interrupted; "I've got it right here in my pocket."

"Thanks, mister—by-by!" After which Mr. Cal Cornwell breezed out.

"Now what do you know about that!" exclaimed Jimmie as soon as Cal's presence no longer disturbed us.

"Well," said Joe, looking as wise as Solomon thought he was, "I'll agree that that bird is a pretty good actor; however, if he's not trying to put over a li'l' joke for a rival company, then my name isn't Joseph Barnum Woofley! I'll admit that the trick is fair, y'understand; but, as Shakesbeer didn't say, he who giggles last, grins!"

CHAPTER V.

THAT TRUTHFUL LIE.

DURING the next few days we did more guessing than an armful of ouija boards. For a joke, Joe put the necklace in the safe and awaited Cal's next move. But Cal didn't move.

Jimmie still insisted that Cornwell was a wise guy who was trying to collect two thousand cherries on his nerve, while I still argued that Cal was a real hick who had found a string of imitation pearls. As for Joe, that complete course in wisdom was positive that the whole thing was the frame-up of a rival press agent.

And then we all woke up!

We were hanging around the studio one morning, busy doing absolutely nothing, when who should blow in but Lulu Lovegood and Chesterfield Criddle. Lulu was wearing a Parisian suit and a winning smile and looked as tan as a seashore vacation. As to Chesterfield, he looked as happy as nine-tenths of Coney Island in August. All of which had me guessing, knowing that the star wasn't famous around the studio for his pleasant disposition.

"Hello, everybody!" piped Lulu. "I'm both sad and happy at the same time."

"Same as usual!" put in Jimmie, who never could understand the ladies.

"Shall we tell the folks the good news, dearie?" drawled Chesterfield, toying with his infant mustache.

"Might as well," replied Lulu, blushing like an armful of roses.

"Then permit me, gentlemen," said Chesterfield, "to introduce my wife, Mrs. Chesterfield Criddle,

née Lulu Lovegood.” After which he slipped his arm around the lady’s waist.

Oh, boy!

“Are you really married?” asked the puzzled Joe, “or have you been reading my press dope about *The Purple Goldfish*?”

“Maybe you lost a pearl necklace, also?” snapped Jimmie, who thought that they were kidding us.

“Who told you about that?” inquired Chesterfield suspiciously.

“Well, of all things!” exclaimed Lulu, her eyes as wide open as winter. “You folks are sure great guessers!”

“Do you mean to say that Mr. Criddle bought you a pearl necklace and that you lost it?” shouted Joe, his eyes looking as shaky as a glass of water riding in a flivver.

“Exactly,” replied Lulu with a sad look. “It was Chesterfield’s wedding gift, and I must have lost it while auto riding along the State road.”

Wow!

The next thing I knew Joe pushed me out of the way and dashed for the safe as if he was inspired. A couple of seconds later he displayed Cal Cornwell’s necklace before one and all.

“Is this it?” asked Joe breathlessly. “Is this it, hey?”

“Yes!” cried Lulu, grabbing the pearls with both hands. “Isn’t it just too wonderful? Joe, you’re a darling!”

Well, after Joe was revived he told the whole story about his press stuff and Cal Cornwell. And maybe Mr. and Mrs. Chesterfield Criddle didn’t keep their eyes wide open! Boy, you know it!

“And was it really worth ten thousand dollars?” asked Joe.

“Precisely,” replied Chesterfield, throwing out his chest. “We must reward Mr. Cornwell for his honesty. How much do you think would be right, Mr. Woofley?”

“Two thousand dollars!” piped Joe. “And listen, how much do I get, hey?”

“Here’s a good cigar,” returned Chesterfield. “You don’t expect to get a reward for guessing, do you?”

Did Calibert Cornwell get the two thousand dollars’ reward? Yes—yes! He did, you know! They tell me that that bird is now dashing around Harvest Center in a wild flivver, with a tame li’l lady in it; all because Joe told a lie that came true, and because a bag of middlings busted in the road.