



**I**N 1917 Francis X. Bushman was on the film heights. Then everything was swept away. The suddenly revealed knowledge that he had a wife pushed him from his pedestal. "Don't marry," Bushman says to his fellow stars. "While the whole world loves you, don't marry! I never want other stars to suffer as I suffered."

# What Killed Francis X. Bushman?

"Marriage," he says,  
"Murdered My Career"

By  
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**A** LONG, narrow room with cabinets from the floor to the ceiling. Five secretaries gracing the center. Thirty thousand letters regularly each week to be answered. In addition, at least five thousand photographs and little notes to the fans during each seven day period.

The tall, handsome, virile man, who was the owner of all this, walked through the door, spoke to the messenger boys, to the five over-worked women. He rubbed his hands in satisfaction. Had any other man reached such a pinnacle of adoration?

He was a god; a world worshipped hero.  
This was in 1917.

"Ah, at that time, I was so intensely popular that I felt permanently established. My friends were numbered by thousands. Tens of thousands. Nothing could shake my faith in myself. No one could have told me that all of this glory would not last forever. I was a god and I felt secure in my heaven.

"Then, overnight, it all vanished. Overnight, there were no more letters. The secretaries were dismissed, the cabinets and messenger boys faded. They were no longer needed. The idol had fallen."

Francis X. Bushman took his hand from the head of *King*, the champion Great Dane who has suffered with his master through the long years of trials and heart-breaking experiences, swept it through the air to the low couch between us.

"With a motion like that, everything was swept away. From a hero, to—what would you call it?—that was the way I tumbled.

"—And all because of the women." He smiled; a wan, shadow-like hint of cynical amusement.

"**Y**OU see, they thought I was not married. From 1902 until 1918 I kept my secret. I had an unwritten agreement with my producers that my wife and five children would be kept a secret.

"After much argument we had agreed to a secret divorce. Then overnight she changed her mind and sued me. Overnight, it was all over.

"The Metro people for whom I was working sent a man all over the country. He returned and made me this statement.

'You were always a possible lover, a possible husband. The love of young girls for you while you were single was not wrong. But as a married man—'

"'Is it as bad as that, Harry?' I could not believe it. He was right; exhibitors refused to book my pictures.

"**O**F course, there was talk. Gossip. My fans had wanted me to marry Beverly Bayne. I had thousands upon thousands of letters suggesting it. Just as the world wanted Vilma Banky to marry Ronald Colman. But, when I did marry her, I had already married. There had been talk—oh, there was a momentary reaction. I had thousands of letters from those who were glad, happy we had married. But it was never the same. Motion picture days seemed over. We went into vaudeville together."

We were silent a moment. Bushman—the forty-three-year-old Francis X. Bushman—stroked the head of his great dog, while his eyes visioned the glories of the thirty-year Bushman.

"I always tried to save Valentino," he continued slowly, "from the suffering, the heart-aches, the awakening which were mine. You know he lived up here, next door to me. I used to warn him, tell him that the American public is more fickle than even the most fickle of women. Tried to save him again and again. But Rudy only laughed. He couldn't believe me. What had happened to poor old Francis X. could never happen to Rudolph Valentino!"

**A**NOTHER long, uninterrupted silence. Somehow, I could not bring myself to talk when this man was reminiscing, living over the days of his unparalleled glory—

"Then one day Rudy came over. It was when Natacha was interfering with his pictures. She had written this one, supervised it. It was about to open at a downtown Los Angeles theater.

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Mr. Bushman, with Beverly Bayne, at the apex of his success, in "Romeo and Juliet"

# What Killed Francis X. Bushman?

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"Rudy looked worried. He held out his hand, took mine, and said slowly, 'Well, my picture goes on downtown, Bush. I am afraid if this one is bad, I am done for—'"

"Rudy had awakened. He had seen his popularity waning—"

This time I did interrupt the silence. "Then what would be your advice to young men like Richard Dix, John Gilbert—"

"NOT to marry!" He flashed out his answer without a second's hesitation. "While they are at the height of their popularity, while the whole world loves them, they should not marry."

"I know,—know from experience about these women. Oftentimes they marry, themselves, yet with regret. They are closing the door to their screen lover. The duties of life are drab realities at their best. In the midst of the grey, dull everyday happenings, these young girls and, yes, married women, go to the movies where they can sit and dream, unseen, about what might happen or might have happened. They choose some hero. Perhaps *they* have closed the door upon him, but they do not want these screen heroes to close that same door, to ruin their dreaming. They do not want to know that the man about whom they have been dreaming belongs to another woman—"

"Ah, yes, I believe that the young star and the young man who hopes to be one, owe it to their producers and to themselves not to marry."

"What about love affairs?" I queried.

"That is different! Girls and women of today do not hold love against a man. They expect it. In a way it adds to their hero's glory. Girls of today even hope that they may be among the ones to receive such affection. Why, I get hundreds of letters from women anxious for just such an experience. That is where

the world has changed since I was a hero. The boys of today have it on me there. Ten years ago gossip hurt; today it helps. But marriage— No! Never."

"How did you feel when you got the part of *Messala* in 'Ben-Hur,' Mr. Bushman?" I switched the conversation out of sympathy. Tears were hovering on the eyelids of this greatest of screen idols and I thought the subject of his comeback might relieve the tragic tension.

He did smile for a moment.

"It was the most wonderful thing that ever happened. When June Mathis told me there was a chance for me in the part, I said, 'June, I'm not Jesus Christ, and I can't walk on the water, but I would if I could get a chance to play that rôle of *Messala*.'"

"But, after all, it brought me my greatest sorrow." He turned his head away, burrowed both hands gropingly in the hair of the great dog, now lying on the long lounge beside him.

"For you see—it was that picture that lost me my wife," he added.

"I thought, of course, Beverly was going with me. Then just a few nights before I left we were at a party. Someone said, 'Bush, is Beverly going with you?' and I answered, 'Yes.' Then she answered 'No.' She said, 'Italy stinks and is dirty. Why should I take Richard out of kindergarten here—' So I sailed without her."

"At first there were cablegrams and letters. Then they became less frequent and I learned that her mother was with her. But, still, I thought everything would be all right when I got back—"

"We were on the boat coming into New York. At a celebration breakfast. We were laughing and joking, eating and drinking, when about forty reporters and cameramen boarded the ship. We were all so pleased because 'Ben-Hur' was receiving so much attention. Then I noticed

they were swarming toward me. I felt so very proud. I had staged a comeback—"

"Then they popped that terrible question. 'What about your divorce from Beverly Bayne?' I just laughed and said they were always having us divorced and it was just another silly newspaper rumor. They flashed three newspaper stories before me telling about the suit. Still I wouldn't believe it and said, 'Why, Beverly will be the first person to meet me.'"

"But she wasn't. And that was the first I knew about it, at that celebration breakfast." Tears were in his eyes now, in real earnest.

"AND that isn't all," he added. "The divorce required that Richard, our son, be left in California. Her lawyer called up and begged to let her take him to New York. He gave his word of honor that Richard would be gone only six weeks. But that was two years ago and I have never seen him."

"Just yesterday I saw a notice in the paper that Beverly was on a yacht with Leatrice Joy and Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Nagel. That was the first I knew she had returned. I telephoned her lawyer and now, now, I'm waiting to see Richard."

"Do you still love Beverly, Mr. Bushman?" I breathed the question.

He looked away. "We were together ten years. You cannot wipe out such an affection in a moment. Do you think so?"

I left him there, hands burrowed in the head of the Great Dane, eyes dreaming of the boy he was awaiting; of the wife whom he had lost, the glory which had faded.

And I carried away with me his one great warning to other screen heroes, his words of advice born of experience so bitter that no matter what the comeback, what the future may offer in retribution, he will always advise all young screen heroes,—"Don't marry!"

## Why Mack Swain Entered the Movies



MANY are the reasons players give for entering pictures, but the story Mack Swain tells we believe the best of all.

Years ago when Hollywood was just a place where Japs raised carnations, Mack was leading man, manager, publicity agent and general whatnot for a road company that toured the tank towns playing a tender opera called "Human Hearts." The present Mrs. Mack Swain was leading woman.

They were traveling in Nevada. The night before they had played Frog Hollow. That night they were to play Mud Puddle, and to get there they had to change trains at Brown's Junction.

Mack, as boss, decided the troupe could

eat when they reached the Junction, sometime about two in the afternoon. As old-time actors, who didn't know days began before noon, the troupe agreed. Cups of coffee sufficed for breakfast. They looked forward to lunch. And then Brown Junction appeared out of the wide, open spaces—a covered shed beside a railroad track, and nothing more.

Only a cup of coffee behind them. No restaurant, no food in sight, and the down train to Mud Puddle not due till five o'clock. The hungry actors gazed about. Off against the horizon, some ten miles away, they saw a house. Wordlessly they hiked toward it. They simply had to eat.

The ranch woman who answered their knock was discouraging. "We ain't got a thing ourselves, except that hen out there," she said. "I'm sorry. 'Course, if you get that hen, I'll cook it for you."

There was lots of prairie, fourteen actors and one hen. They chased it. They tried to surround it. They tried to catch it. They cursed it. But they didn't get the hen. All they got was more appetite.

The hen disappeared somewhere into the eastern horizon.

The actors trailed disconsolately back to the ranch house.

"I didn't think you'd get her," said the farmer's wife. "My man's been trying to corral that hen for three years and he's right smart with a lasso, too. How'd you all like a nice glass of water?"

So you can understand why after hiking back ten miles and playing Mud Puddle that night and finally getting on to the Pacific Coast the Swains thought a twelve-dollar a week guarantee on the Sennett lot was big money.