

Minus the Wand

By Ivan St. Johns

THIS is not a Cinderella story. It's one of those true-to-life yarns with which Hollywood abounds. Laura La Plante's fairy godmother was snoring the day Laura decided to become a motion picture actress and, as far as Laura is concerned, the fairy godmother has been pounding her ear ever since.

A few years ago Laura La Plante was poor, wretchedly poor. Now she eats caviar and rides in a limousine. But there were dried herring and "flivvers" along the way.

She was born in St. Louis during the World's Fair of 1904. Her mother was the daughter of a Missouri farmer, and paralleling the problems of the legendary "old woman who lived in a shoe" the farmer and his wife had so many children they didn't know what to do. They were Yankee stock, healthy and prolific, but very poor.

Rather than remain in the country, where it was all drudgery and no education or play,



Laura La Plante's fairy godmother slept as Laura plodded to fame for seven weary years



See the comic John Barrymore in "The Beloved Rogue." Regina Cannon, New York critic, says that he's as funny as Joe Jackson, only he hasn't got a bicycle

Laura's mother went to St. Louis and obtained work as a shop girl. Laura's father was a French dancing teacher.

"About all that I can remember of my life in St. Louis is that we were horribly, horribly poor," says Laura. "I don't know whether my father was a good dancing teacher or not, but I do know that we seldom had all that we could eat or enough clothes to wear. We left St. Louis and came out to Los Angeles when I was nine and I haven't been back. I have heard that it is a nice city. I only know that it meant misery for my mother and my sister and me.

THERE were times when mother used to send me to the home of a neighbor, a darling old German woman, for a nickel so that she could take a car down town to see if my father had given a lesson that day. A lesson meant that we could have some supper.

"God gave me one jewel in life beyond price," Laura told me. "My mother, whose faith and courage gave me hope and the will to endure failure and whose love and affection have been my rewards for what success I may have achieved in my work."

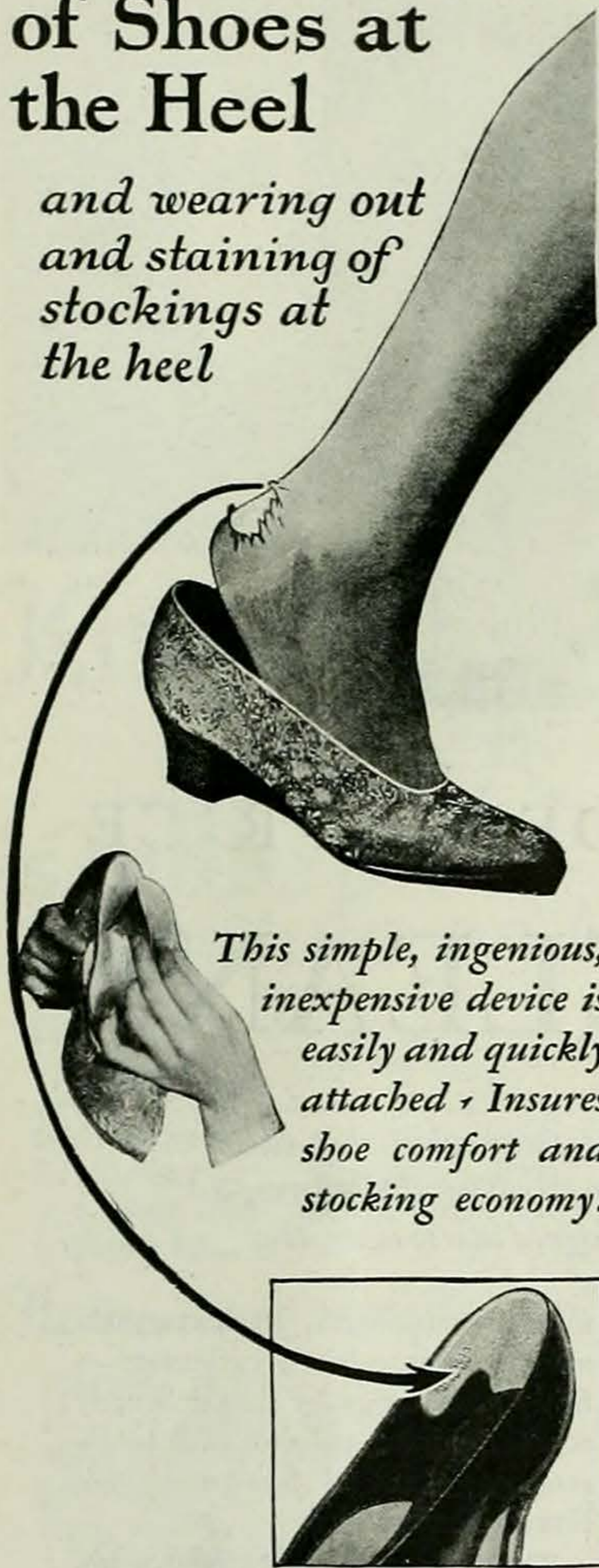
Laura lived with her mother and sister on "Bunker Hill," near the "Angels' Flight," above the Third Street tunnel for several months after the arrival of the family in Los Angeles.

The Gish sisters, just then coming into popularity, lived not far away. "But in a much better house," added Laura.

Laura sounded the first dramatic chord in a family far removed from any form of theatrical thought when she voiced her desire to become a motion picture actress. Her mother was in sympathy with the idea, [CONTINUED ON PAGE 116]

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Zukor is thoroughly international. He speaks four languages, English, German, Hungarian and motion picture. He can listen in several more. He thinks hard and talks softly.

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but there seemed no way to make the start.

Shortly after the expression of this ambition, Laura's mother decided to move to San Diego, where she was offered a position which would provide a better living for herself and youngsters. The father no longer contributed to their support. In San Diego Laura studied music, learning to play the violin. She still longed to get in pictures and during a summer vacation she went back to Los Angeles to visit some relatives of her mother.

She was fourteen and pretty, although a little too fat to be a heroine, as she learned quickly enough after a few trips to the studios, where she applied for extra work.

She met this situation with the same high courage which reflected the spirit of her mother and marked her own progress through the years to follow. She climbed hills, rolled on the floor, went without eating, which was not a new experience, and tried every conceivable form of exercise, until she was slender. Then she visited the Christie studios.

"I'm thin now," she said. "Can I have a job?"

SHE not only got a job, but worked steadily for three weeks at five dollars a day. It was a fortune to her and she promptly telephoned her mother and her sister, Violet, that she was established as an actress now and her mother wouldn't have to work any more. She little dreamed that she was to go for many heart breaking weeks without another job.

Her career from those first days as an extra child to a couple of years ago, when she was made a star by Universal, was punctuated with bitter discouragement. But she never lost faith in herself and her mother kept an ever steady shoulder to the family wheel of need.

"For a while it seemed that every bit of good luck that I had was overbalanced with misfortune," Laura told me. "When I played my first lead in a five reel picture, with Charlie Ray in 'The Old Swimmin' Hole,' I thought that I was sitting on top of the world. I hadn't given much thought to the theory that the world is round, but I found out after I'd taken a few falls."

Laura is an established star now and a favorite with the exchange lads who sell Universal pictures. Her triumph comes in the announcement that her newest picture to be released, "The Love Thrill," is to play at Roxy's new picture palace in New York. She has just finished "Beware of Widows" and is just a bit provoked because a contemplated trip to Europe must wait until she finishes another picture.

Does she remember when—? And how!

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