

RED VELVET SEAT

*Women's Writings on
the First Fifty Years of Cinema*

Edited by Antonia Lant
with Ingrid Periz



VERSO

London · New York

Miss Moss blushed until a pulse at the top of her head that she never had felt before pounded away.

"I always was one for pink," said she.

The stout gentleman considered her, drumming with his fingers on the table.

"I like 'em firm and well covered," said he.

Miss Moss, to her surprise, gave a loud snigger.

Five minutes later the stout gentleman heaved himself up. "Well, am I goin' your way, or are you comin' mine?" he asked.

"I'll come with you, if it's all the same," said Miss Moss. And she sailed after the little yacht out of the café.

[*Art and Letters* (London), 2:1 (New Series), Winter 1918-19, pp. 153-62.]

Our Own Movie Queen (1925)¹

Zelda Fitzgerald

The Mississippi River came carelessly down through the pine forests and phlegmatic villages of Minnesota to the city of New Heidelberg, for the express purpose of dividing the ladies and gentlemen of the town from their laundresses and their butchers and their charioteers of the ash can—who dwelt in sodden bad taste upon thither bank. On the high and fashionable side an avenue lined with well bred trees pushed itself out to where the river, by a series of dexterous swoops, brought the city to a tidy end.

On the low side there were huge chalk cliffs where the people grew mushrooms and made incompetent whisky, and there were cobblestone streets where casual water lay incessantly in dull little pools. Here, too, was the morgue, with its pale barred windows, and here were rows of sinister, dull red houses that no one was ever seen entering or leaving. Back further from the water were railroad yards and stockyards and the spot (mark it now with an X) where Gracie Axelrod lived—Gracie who backed into local publicity a short year since as "our movie queen." This is the story of her screen career, and of a picture the memory of which still causes bursts of crazy laughter, but which, alas, will never be shown again in this world.

Gracie's neighbors were fat Italians and cheerless Poles and Swedes who conducted themselves as though they were conversant with the Nordic theory.² Her father may or may not have been a Swede. He did not speak the language certainly, and his deplorable personal appearance cannot with justice be ascribed to any nationality. He was the sole owner of a tumbledown shanty where fried chicken of dubious antecedents might be washed down by cold beer, any time between ten o'clock at night and eight o'clock in the morning. Gracie fried the chicken with such brown art that complaints were unknown.

For seven months a year New Heidelberg was covered with sooty snow, and mere zero weather was considered a relief from the true cold: citizens were glad to

get home at night and there was little inducement to linger late around the streets. But dances were given in the best hotel and even Gracie had heard tales about the gaiety of the dwellers on the upper river bank. She had seen them, too, arrive in closed automobiles and come shouting into the shanty at small hours, behaving as if it were a daring thing to do.

Gracie was pretty, but too full blown for a girl of twenty. Her flaxen hair was a glorious smooth color, and would have been beautiful if she had not snarled it and brushed it out over her ears until the shape of her head was entirely distorted. Her skin was radiantly pale, her large blue eyes were faintly inclined to bulge. Her teeth were small and very white. There was a warm moist look about her, as if she had materialized out of hot milk vapor—and perhaps she had, for no one had ever seen or heard of her mother. Her whole appearance was as voluptuous as that of a burlesque show prima donna—that was the way Gracie felt about it anyhow, and if Mr. Ziegfeld (of whom she had never heard) had wired her to join his show, she would have been only faintly surprised.³ She quietly expected great things to happen to her, and no doubt that's one of the reasons why they did.

Now on Gracie's side of the river Christmas eve was celebrated with no more display than the Dante centennial. But on the high bank where the snow lay along the fashionable avenue as if it had just been unwound from a monster bolt of cotton batting, every model home set out a tree adorned with electric bulbs. It was a gorgeous sight, and Gracie and her father always came every year and walked a few blocks in the icy cold. They compared each tree to the last one, and were scornful and superior toward the trees that had no stars on top.

Tonight was the fifth time that Gracie could remember having taken this walk, and as she bustled about after the excursion and filled the shack with greasy, pleasant smelling smoke, she discussed it thoroughly with her vague parent.

"Honest," she complained, "if people ain't going to have better trees than them, I don't see why they want to get you out on a cold night like this for. There was only one place that didn't look like somebody was dead in it."

The place to which she referred was a great white house adorned with stone animal heads and Greek friezes which tonight had had suspended proudly from its arched porte-cochere, a huge electric sign which wished the passers-by a Merry Christmas.

"Who lives there, daddy?" she asked abruptly.

"B'longs to the feller that owns the Blue Ribbon," elucidated Mr. Axelrod. "I guess he must be worth a good lot of money."

"Who says so?" demanded Gracie.

"O, some people told me," her father answered vaguely. He was propped up back of the stove, his hat shading his eyes as he read the evening pink sheet. Just at the moment the paper was open over his knees at a full page advertisement: the Blue Ribbon Department store wished every one a happy New Year, and hoped they would attend the sale of white goods immediately after the holidays.

Mr. Axelrod read the composition to his daughter. He always read her everything in the big type. They liked to hear each other's voices, and as Gracie was too busy with the chicken and her father with the reading to pay much attention to the content, it was a successful arrangement. To Mr. Axelrod reading in itself was enough and he would have enjoyed a Chinese newspaper just as much had the hieroglyphics aroused as familiar and soothing a sensation.

"He's a swell looking fella, too," Gracie remarked after a moment. "Every time I go in there I see him walking up and down the store. B'lieve me, I'd just as soon marry a man like that. Then you could just walk in the store and say gimme this or gimme that and you wouldn't have to pay nothing for 'em."

This was worth thinking about apparently, for Mr. Axelrod discontinued his reading, and looked Gracie over appraisingly.

In the long interval between the completion of the evening's preparation and the appearance of the first customer they speculated upon the advantages of being married to a man who owned a store like the Blue Ribbon. No wonder Gracie was as surprised and as disconcerted as if she had been caught breaking his huge plate glass window when Mr. Blue Ribbon himself walked into the shack, demanding, in a loud and supercilious voice, chicken that was all white meat.

I say that this respectable gentleman walked in, but perhaps this is an understatement, for what he literally did was to reel in. And Gracie recognized the man she had seen walking up and down the Blue Ribbon's gorgeous aisles.

He was an officious little man, fat in spots and not unlike one of those bottom-heavy dolls which refuse to lie down. Tonight the illusion was increased, for he swayed faintly with no partiality as to direction, as though if some one removed the weights from his great round abdomen he would keel permanently over and never again stand on his own initiative. There was a small cranium, a large jaw, and two superhuman ears—a comic valentine of a man with a pig's head. But he was affable, and tonight he was obsessed with the idea of himself, not as a comic valentine, but as a person of importance.

He announced that he was celebrating, and asked at large if it were possible that Gracie and her father did not know him.

"I should say," answered Gracie reassuringly, "why, you own the Blue Ribbon. I always notice you around every time I go in there."

If Gracie had made this speech in full possession of the facts in the case, it would have indicated an extraordinary subtlety and tact. For Mr. Albert Pomeroy did not own the city's biggest and best department store. But from eight in the morning until six at night he owned the departments of which he was in charge—notions, perfumes, hosiery, gloves, umbrellas, dress goods, and men's wear. Gracie has flattered not only him but his position in life. He beamed. For a moment he stopped bobbing around and focused unblinking eyes on Gracie.

"Not exactly," he managed, resuming his teetering. "I don't exactly own it. I run it. Blue Ribbon's got the money and I got the brains." Mr. Pomeroy's voice

rose to a sort of confidential shout and Gracie was impressed in spite of her disappointment.

"You any relation to him?" she asked curiously.

"Not exactly relation," explained Mr. Pomeroy, "but close—very, very close." He implied that they were in all but complete physical juxtaposition.

"Can you just go and say, 'This looks pretty good to me. I guess I'll take it,' and walk right out of the store with anything you want?"

She was now engrossed by the man himself. Her father was also listening intently.

"Not exactly," admitted Mr. Pomeroy. "I can't exactly take things, but I can get 'em for about twenty or twenty-five dollars less than the people who don't have the influence and don't work there."

"O, I see." Gracie enthusiastically handed a platter of chicken to her important customer. "I suppose that's why them girls work in there. I'd like to try it for awhile myself. I'd get what I wanted cheap and then quit."

Mr. Pomeroy's head waggled and his cheeks blew out, and he busied himself with his food.

"O, no, you wouldn't," he managed to say. "You wouldn't quit. You just say you'd quit." He waved a greasy drumstick in Gracie's face.

"How do you know I wouldn't quit, I'd like to know?" cried Gracie indignantly. "If I say I'm gonna quit, I'm gonna quit. I guess I can quit if I want to quit."

She became animated by the thought of quitting. She wanted passionately to quit, and doubtless would have done so immediately had there been anything to quit. Mr. Pomeroy, on his part, was incredulous toward the idea. It was inconceivable and beyond all reason to him that Gracie should quit.

"You just come down and see," he insisted. "Come down tomorrow and I'll give you a job. Just between you and me—our candidate's gonna win the Grand Popularity contest. Mr. Blue Ribbon says to me, 'Albert, old man, you pick out the girl and I'll make her the Grand Popularity queen.'"

Now one of the news items which Gracie's father had habitually read aloud of late bore always the headline, "Our City's Queen." The reading matter which followed explained how the Blue Ribbon, our largest department store, together with the *New Heidelberg Tribune*, our city's foremost newspaper, and the Tick-tock Jewelry emporium, and a dozen other business establishments were going to give some lucky young woman the opportunity for which every girl has always longed. She would be selected from the whole city of New Heidelberg, would "lead" all the affairs which centered around the winter carnival and, last and best of all, would win a chance to distinguish herself in the movies.

"Who's your girl and how do you know she's gonna win?" Gracie demanded.

"Well, the folks from all the stores that's in on the thing each choose their own girl. Mr. Blue Ribbon, he says to me, 'Albert, the jane that represents this store wins the whole contest.' Everybody can't win, can they?"

Mr. Pomeroy was growing eloquent. He would probably have talked about himself through the waning night, but Gracie's interest was aroused in another direction.

"Aw, can it!" she interrupted. "I bet I'd quit anyhow, whether you or Mr. Blue Ribbon wanted me to or not. I'd just quit and show you I'd quit."

Mr. Pomeroy had finished his chicken, and an automobile horn was blowing furiously outside the shanty demanding Gracie's attention, so he spoke one parting line.

"You come in tomorrow and see, Miss—Miss Quit," he remarked oracularly, and reeled out into the cold just as he had reeled in—with all the motion above the knees.

And that was how it happened that on Christmas night Gracie retired early and left Mr. Axelrod to shift for himself. She slept as determinedly as she usually fried chicken, and for about the same length of time. She was drinking coffee when she heard the first trolley pass a block below her house and, putting on a coat of some indeterminate fur that in damp weather smelled like a live animal, she minced over the ice and crusted snow to the trolley stop. The street she came along was steeply down hill, and if she had been an exuberant person she might have taken a little skip and slid all the way. But she didn't—she walked sideways to keep from falling.

The car was filled with steamy heat and melted snow, and workingmen puffing their ways to far parts of the city. Gracie reached the Blue Ribbon at the opening hour, and after some wandering among aisles and elevators located Mr. Albert Pomeroy.

He was more pompous and less verbose than when she had seen him before—but he remembered her perfectly and for the best part of an hour he initiated her, with severe finger shakings, into the art of being a saleslady.

Before Gracie had time to consider the question of quitting, a momentous occasion arose that drove the thought out of her head. She had been a participant in the activities of the store for less than a week when a general massmeeting of all the employés was held in the restroom after hours. Mr. Pomeroy standing on a bench, acted as general chairman.

"We are gathered here," he announced from his rostrum, "for the purpose of discussing the subject of selecting the Blue Ribbon's representative in the popularity contest now being held under the auspices of Mr. Blue Ribbon, one of the town's leading business men, and several other of the town's leading business men." He paused here and took a long breath as one slightly dizzy.

"We must choose our queen—with honesty," he went on, and then added surprisingly, "which is always the best policy. Everybody knows that we have here in this store the most beautiful ladies that can be found in this town, and we must choose the best one among them all to represent us. You have until this time tomorrow to decide who you will vote for. I want to thank you on behalf of myself and Mr. Blue Ribbon for your attention and—" he had prepared a strong finish for

his speech, but it was considerably marred by the fact that just at this moment a stray thought of the haberdashery department flashed into his mind.

"In clothing, I wish to say—" He paused. "In clothing, I wish—" Then he gave up and ended somewhat tamely with, "And that's the way it is."

As Gracie went out through the employés' entrance behind the tittering file of females she saw Mr. Pomeroy on the corner under the white arc light. She walked quickly over and spoke to him.

"Honest," she said, "that was a great speech you made. I don't see how some people can all of a sudden just make up a speech."

She smiled and disappeared into the winter lights and the furry crowds and hurried toward her street car. Unwittingly, she had made up a good speech herself. Mr. Pomeroy, though impervious both to ridicule and insult, was a sensitive man to compliments.

The next afternoon in the Blue Ribbon restroom, Gracie was somehow being heralded as a leading candidate for the honor of representing the store. She was surprised—and in the same breath she was not surprised. She never doubted that she would win, although she was a newcomer and there were five girls competing against her. Two of the five were prettier than Gracie and the other three were not pretty at all. But the ballot found a spirit of irritable perversity in possession. The pretty women were jealous of each other and voted for the ugly ones. The ugly ones were jealous of the pretty ones and voted for the newcomer, Gracie—and ugly ones were in the majority. No one was envious of Gracie, for no one knew her. And no one believed she could possibly win the contest—but she did.

And Mr. Blue Ribbon was as good as Mr. Pomeroy's indiscreet and intoxicated word. He "fixed it," and at the end of a month came the day of the coronation. It was to proceed up the main business street and then along the fashionable avenue to the river. In effect Queen Gracie Axelrod, in her royal coach, was to be borne through shouting mobs of faithful citizenry.

On a cold noon the cohorts gathered in front of the New Heidelberg hotel, where there was much scraping of fenders and blowing of horns. Gracie sat in her car beside Mr. Pomeroy, whose title was "Blue Ribbon Courtier Dedicated to the Queen of Popularity." Behind Gracie a blue pole arose, balancing over her head a bright, insecure star. She carried a sceptre and wore a crown made by the local costumer, but due to the cold air the crown had undergone a peculiar chemical change and faded to an inconspicuous roan. Of this Gracie was unaware.

From time to time she glanced tenderly at Mr. Pomeroy, and it occurred to her how nice it would be if his gloved hand should hold hers under the heavy robe. The thought was delicious, and she reached out experimentally until her finger barely touched his, just faintly suggesting an amour of digits to take place later in the ride.

The less important cars—loaded with representatives of fraternal orders and assistant queens from other stores—had begun to move slowly off, following the brass

band, and now the chauffeurs of the principal floats were coaxing roars of white steam from their engines. The mayor's car set up a cloud of noise and vapor.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Pomeroy anxiously of Gracie's chauffeur. "We don't want to be left behind."

"I'm afraid it's a little bit froze up." The chauffeur was unscrewing the radiator cap. "I guess I'd better get some hot water from the hotel."

"Well, hurry up, then," complained Gracie. The car ahead of them was pulling out. "Let's start anyhow," she went on excitedly. "You can fix it when we get back."

"Start!" exclaimed the chauffeur indignantly. "Start! How can I start when it's froze up?"

The tail of the procession was a hundred yards up the street, and several automobiles that had no connection with the celebration had turned in and followed behind it.

Another car, containing a stout young man in the back seat, drove up alongside Gracie.

"Are you stuck?" asked the young man politely.

"Of course we are, you crazy fool!" shouted Gracie, whereupon the crowd laughed.

"You better get in this here car," suggested the young man, unabashed.

"Maybe we better jump in," said Mr. Pomeroy uncertainly. "When these things freeze up—"

"But how about all them decorations?" interrupted Gracie.

Willing onlookers began to tug at the ornamental star with the idea of transferring it to the other automobile, whereupon the support creaked, groaned, and collapsed neatly into four pieces.

The tail of the parade had by this time rounded a bend and was passing out of sight far up the street; the music of the band was already faint and faraway.

"Here!" commanded Mr. Pomeroy, breathing hard, "get in!"

Gracie got in, and someone threw the star in after her for good luck. The young man drew the robe over them and they set off at full speed—but in less than a block the long-delayed cross traffic brought them to another halt. When they overcame this obstacle a quarter of a mile of tight-packed cars still interposed between Gracie and the procession ahead.

"Tell your chauffeur to honk!" said Gracie indignantly to the fat young man.

"He isn't mine. They gave me this car. I just got into town, you see. I'm Joe Murphy, the assistant director."

"We got to get up to our place, ain't we?" shouted the queen. "What do you suppose everybody's going to say when they don't see me?"

The chauffeur obediently honked, but as everybody else was honking, too, it produced little effect. The other cars, having attained a place in line, were not

disposed to relinquish it to an undecorated machine containing an obviously intoxicated young woman who kept threatening them with a long blue stick.

When the procession turned into the fashionable avenue Gracie began to bow right and left to crowds that should have lined the way. She bowed to groups or individuals impartially, to babies, to responsive dogs, and even to several of the more pretentious houses, which answered her with cold plate glass stares. Here and there some one nodded back at her politely, and one group gave her a short cheer—but they obviously failed to connect her with the colorful display ahead.

Gracie bowed for over a mile. Then two young men on a corner yelled something that was perfectly audible to her. They yelled it over and over again, and several small boys on the sidewalk took up the cry:

“Where’d you get the gin, sister? Where’d you get the gin?”⁴

Then Gracie gave up and burst into tears and told Mr. Murphy to take her home.

The movie, *New Heidelberg, the Flowery City of the Middle West*, was being filmed in the outskirts of the city. On a morning of February thaw. Gracie stepped gingerly from the street car at the end of the line and, with the other city queens, navigated the melted snow and mud puddles that almost obliterated the ground. The lot was already crowded and Gracie, as leading lady, tried to locate those in charge. Someone pointed out a platform in the center, and told her that the active little man who was pacing nervously back and forth upon it was the director, Mr. Decourcey O’Ney. Gracie elbowed her way in that direction.

Mr. Decourcey O’Ney had come early into the pictures and back in 1916 had been known as a “big” director. Then, due to one of those spasms of hysteria which periodically seize upon the industry, he had found himself suddenly out of work. His acquisition by the “Our Own Movie” committee was especially played up by the *New Heidelberg Tribune*.

He was commenting to his assistant director on the undeniably swampy condition of the ground when a plump young lady with a big suit box under her arm appeared beside him on the platform.

“What can I do for you?” he asked absently.

“I’m the movie queen,” announced Gracie.

Mr. Joe Murphy, “assistant director” and man of all work, confirmed this fact.

“Why, sure,” he said warmly, “this girl was elected the most popular girl in the city. Don’t you remember me, Miss Axelrod?”

“Yeah,” said Gracie grudgingly. She had no wish to be reminded of the late fiasco.

“Have you any experience in pictures?” inquired Mr. O’Ney.

“O, I seen a lot of ’em and I know just about how the leading lady ought to act.”

“Well,” murmured Mr. O’Ney, alarmingly, “I think I’ll have you gilded to start with.”

"Mr. O'Ney means that he'll show you how to do," said Joe Murphy, hastily.

"By the bye," said Mr. O'Ney politely. "Can you scream?"

"What?"

"Have you ever done any screaming?" And then he added in explanatory fashion, "The only reason I ask you is because I want to know."

"Why—sure," answered Gracie hesitantly, "I guess I can scream good enough, if you want somebody to scream."

"All right." Mr. O'Ney seemed greatly pleased. "Then scream!"

Before Gracie could believe her ears, much less open her mouth, Joe Murphy again interjected: "Mr. O'Ney means later. You go over to that house and put on your costume."

Somewhat bewildered, Gracie set out for the ladies' dressing rooms, and Joe Murphy looked after her admiringly. He liked blondes as full blown as himself—and especially those who seemed to have materialized out of the vapor from warm milk.

The picture, written by a local poetess, commemorated the settling of New Heidelberg by the brave pioneers. Three days were spent in the rehearsal of the mob scenes. Gracie, relieved from work at the store, came every morning and sat shivering in the back of a prairie schooner. It was all very confusing, and she had little idea of what her part was to be. When the day came for the actual shooting she acted as she had never acted before. Entering the covered wagon, she violently elevated her eyebrows and crooked her little fingers into grotesque hooks. During the Indian attack she rushed about in the center of a blank cartridge bedlam, waving her arms and pointing here and there at the circling redskins as if to indicate startling tactical dispositions. At the end of the second day Mr. O'Ney announced that the shooting was done. He thanked them all for their willingness, and told them their services were no longer required. Not once during the whole course of the picture had Gracie been required to scream.



Since Gracie had been "working days," Mr. Axelrod's business had fallen off. He went to bed at midnight just when he should have been most alert. It was lonely when Gracie wasn't there to fill the shack with warm chicken smoke, and he had no one to read the newspaper at. But he was vaguely proud of his daughter, and his drowsy mind grasped the fact that something apart from him was going on in her life.

He was flattered when Gracie asked him to accompany her one Thursday night to the private showing of the picture. Only the people closely concerned were to be there. The real showing would take place in grand style at the city auditorium.

The preliminary showing was at the Bijou, and when the small, select audience was seated and the red velvet curtains parted to show the screen, Gracie and her father became rigid with excitement. The first title flashed suddenly on.

THE FLOWERY CITY OF THE MIDDLE WEST
AN EPIC OF PAST AND PRESENT
GROWTH AND PROSPERITY

BY

HARRIET DINWIDDIE HILLS CRAIG

DIRECTED BY

DECOURCEY O'NEY

There followed a cast of characters. Gracie thrilled when she found her name:

MISS GRACE AXELROD

WINNER OF THE POPULARITY CONTEST

And, after a line of dots:

AS AN EARLY QUEEN OF NEW HEIDELBERG

The word "Prologue" danced before her eyes, and Gracie felt in her stomach the sinking sensation that preceded dental work. She looked steadfastly at the clumsy covered wagons creeping across the plain and she gasped as there was a sudden close-up of herself, acting, in the canvas oval at a wagon's back.

LET US NEVER FORGET THE NOBLE MEN AND
WOMEN WHOSE SUPREME SACRIFICE MADE
POSSIBLE OUR GLORIOUS CITY

There were the Indians in the distance now—it was much more exciting than it had been on the suburban lot. The battle, looking desperately real, was in full swing. She sought herself anxiously amid the heat of conflict, but she might have been any one of a score of girls who it seemed had been acting just as violently as herself.

And here was the climax already. A savage rode up threateningly. Bang! And Gracie, or some one who looked like Gracie, sank wounded to the ground.

"See that? See that?" she whispered excitedly to her father. "That was hard to do let me tell you!"

Some one said "Sh!" and Gracie's eyes again sought the screen. The Indians were driven off, a hearty prayer was said by all, and the fields were expeditiously plowed for corn. Then, to Gracie's astonishment, the whole scene began to change. The suburban plain disappeared, and one of the covered wagons faded before her eyes into a handsome limousine. From the limousine stepped out a modern young girl in a fur coat with hat to match. It was none other than Miss Virginia Blue Ribbon, the pretty daughter of the owner of the Blue Ribbon store.

Gracie stared. Was the pioneer part over, she wondered—in less than fifteen minutes? And what did this limousine have to do with the picture?

"They must of left out some," she whispered to her father. "I guess they'll have me doing some more in a minute. But they shouldn't have showed so soon how I got wounded."

Even now she did not realize the truth—that she was in the prologue and the prologue was over. She saw Miss Blue Ribbon standing in front of her father's store and then she saw her shopping in the Blue Ribbon aisles. Now she was in a limousine again bound for the fashionable avenue, and later in a beautiful evening dress she was dancing with many young men in the ballroom of the big hotel.

In the dim light Gracie looked at her program. "Miss Virginia Blue Ribbon," it stated, "representing the Queen of Today."

"They must be saving some of that western stuff for the end," Gracie said in an uncertain voice.

Two reels flickered by. Miss Blue Ribbon manifested an unnatural interest in factories, jewelry stores, and even statistics. Gracie's bewilderment was fading now and a heavy, burning lump had arisen in her throat. When the parade itself was thrown on the screen she watched through a blurry glaze that had gathered over her eyes. There went the automobiles through the cheering crowds—the minor queens, the mayor, Mr. Blue Ribbon, and his daughter in their limousine—then the scene ended—and she thought of her car, lost somewhere back two miles in the crowd.

Gracie wanted to leave, but she still felt that all the audience were watching her. She waited, stunned and unseeing, until in a few minutes more the screen flashed white and the movie was over.

Then she slipped into the aisle and ran quickly toward the exit, trying to bury her head in her coat collar. She had hoped to evade the crowd, but the closed door detained her and she came out into the lobby simultaneously with a score of people.

"Let me by," she said gruffly to a portly person who had wedged her against a brass rail. The portly person turned, and she recognized Mr. Blue Ribbon himself.

"Isn't this the carnival queen?" he asked jovially.

Gracie straightened up and seemed to draw the half ejected tears back into her eyes. She saw Mr. Pomeroy just behind his employer, and she realized that the floorwalker's leer was but a copy, on a small scale, of Mr. Blue Ribbon's business grin.

Then rage gave her dignity, gave her abandon, and Mr. Blue Ribbon and his employé started back as they saw the expression that transformed her face.

"Say!" she cried, incredulously, "just let me tell you one thing right to your face. I think the picture was rotten and I wouldn't pay a cent to see anything so rotten as that."

A lobby full of people were listening now; even the fountain in the center seemed puffing with excitement. Mr. Pomeroy made a move forward as if he would have seized her, but Gracie raised her hand threateningly.

"Don't you touch me!" she shouted. "I told you if I didn't like your old store I'd quit, and now I quit! When they go out and elect somebody queen they ought to make her queen of something except an old broken-down wagon." Her voice was soaring now to the highest pitch it had ever reached.

"I resign from the moving pictures!" she cried passionately, and with the gesture of one tearing up a million dollar contract, she pulled a program ferociously from her pocket, tore it once, twice—and hurled the white segments into Mr. Blue Ribbon's astonished face.

Two o'clock that night. There were no customers in the chicken shanty and Mr. Axelrod, worn out with the excitement of the evening, was long gone to bed when the door opened suddenly and a stout young man with a baby's face stepped inside. It was Joe Murphy.

"Get out of here!" cried Gracie quickly. "You go on out of this chicken joint!"

"I want to speak to you about the movie."

"I wouldn't be in another movie if you gave me a million dollars! I hate movies, see? I wouldn't dirty my hands being in one. And, besides, you get out!"

She looked wildly about her, and as Joe Murphy saw her eyes fall on a dish of sizzling chicken gravy he took an instinctive step toward the door.

"I didn't have nothing to do with it. They fixed up the whole thing. Say, I wouldn't keep you out of a picture," and then he blurted out suddenly, "Why—why, I'm in love with you."

Gracie's plate rattled to the floor, where it vibrated for a moment like a top.

"Well," she snapped, "this is a fine time of night to come telling me about it!"

But she indicated that he should come in.

"Look here, Gracie," he began, "that was a dirty trick they did you and I was wondering wouldn't you like a chance to get back at 'em?"

"I'd like to smash 'em in the face."

"That's the way Decourcey O'Ney feels about it," confided Joe. "He ain't a good business man, you see, and they beat him out of some of the cash they said they'd pay him."

"Why didn't he let me be the leading lady when I should of been?" demanded Gracie.

"He says they told him not to," said Joe eagerly. "They said you was just an accident and wasn't important at all and not to waste any footage on you."

"O, they did, did they?" cried Gracie, red with rage. "Wait till the people who elected me queen see what they done to that picture!"

"That's what I think," agreed Joe, "and my idea is that we ought to fix that picture up. Because, like you say, I been thinking how sore those people are going to be."

"Gosh, they're going to be sore," said Gracie, drawing a pleasant warmth from the idea. "I bet they'll get after old Blue Ribbon. They'll all get together and never buy nothing more in his store," she added, hopefully.

"That's right," agreed Joe with tact, "and that's why I think the thing for us to do is to try and fix that picture up. Mr. O'Ney, he's so mad he don't care what happens. He says for me to go ahead and do anything I want to. He don't care."

Gra
"I c
She
of cha
"I g
nine c
Wh
with h
soft, n
in her
"Sa
about
Joe
"M
"Th
you—
Joe

As the
in the
was ja
stupen
stage a
"Fe
story a
It show
pioneer
came o
He
but as
in the
efforts
splend
Ribbon
directo
had co
App
stood
glance
the re
"Th
not fo
city ar
Own l

Gracie hesitated.

"I'd rather have it so nobody would ever go to the Blue Ribbon no more."

She visualized Mr. Pomeroy, out of a job, bobbing into the shack after a scrap of charity chicken. But Joe shook his head.

"I got a better scheme," he insisted. "I'll come around tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Have your costume in a box—the one you wore in the movie."

When he went out, she stood in the doorway and followed his retreating figure with her eyes. The roofs were dripping, and the stars were out, and there was a soft, moist breeze. An earlier remark he had made was reverberating persistently in her head.

"Say," Gracie called after him, "what did you mean when you said all that stuff about being in love with me?"

Joe stopped and turned.

"Me? Why—I just meant it, that's all!"

"That's funny," and then she added, "Say, come back here a minute, will you—Joe?"

Joe came back.

As the public performance drew near, the pavements grew sloppier and the snow in the gutters melted into dirty sherbet. On the great Saturday night the auditorium was jammed to capacity. There was a big orchestra this time, which played a stupendous overture, after which Mr. Blue Ribbon himself appeared on the lighted stage and advanced to the footlights.

"Fellow New Heidelbergians!" he began in an inspiring voice, "to make a long story as short as possible, this movie is a real—a real epoch in the life of our city. It shows first in a great sweeping epic a picture of what I may call an epic of our pioneer days when our grandfathers and grandmothers yoked up their oxen and came over here from—from Europe—looking for gold!"

He seemed to realize that there was some slight inaccuracy in his last observation, but as there was a burst of applause from a line of old, deaf, white-haired people in the middle of the house, he let it pass, and now turned to those without whose efforts this picture could never have been made. He wanted to thank first of all the splendid spirit of everyone who participated. This spirit had convinced Mr. Blue Ribbon that New Heidelberg could act as a unit. Next he turned to that distinguished director, Mr. Decourcey O'Ney. After constant triumphs in Hollywood Mr. O'Ney had come here because he had heard of the splendid spirit of the inhabitants.

Applause! Everyone turned to look at Mr. O'Ney. Mr. O'Ney on being located stood up and bowed. It was afterwards remarked by those nearest him that he glanced somewhat nervously around and that his eyes fell with most approval upon the red exit lamps over the doors.

"Then," continued Mr. Blue Ribbon, and this was true magnanimity, "let us not forget the young lady who was chosen by public acclaim as the fairest in our city and who adorns this work of art with her graces—Miss Grace Axelrod—Our Own Movie Queen!"



Fig. 5.13 Line drawing by Raymond Sisley, "I resign from the moving pictures," she cried passionately." Original illustration to "Our Own Movie Queen."

There was a storm of applause. Gracie stood up, bowed, and then sat down quickly, uttering a subdued ironic sound.

Mr. Blue Ribbon rambled on for some moments. Finally he ceased with a benign smile and, bobbing off the stage, took his seat down in front. The house grew dark, the orchestra struck up the national anthem, and the silver rectangle appeared upon the blue screen:

NEW HEIDELBERG, THE FLOWERY CITY
OF THE MIDDLE WEST

The preliminary titles were all as before. The wagons set off on the journey to outbursts of applause as the passengers were recognized by proud relatives and friends.

Then, to the surprise of those who had witnessed the private showing, a brand-new title flashed on:

MISS GRACE AXELROD
CHOSEN BY EVERYBODY IN THE CITY
TO BE QUEEN AND STAR OF THE PICTURE.
A PIONEER GIRL ... MISS AXELROD

Mr. Blue Ribbon gasped faintly. The audience, unconscious of a change, applauded.

Here were the Indians now, shading their eyes with their hands and beginning their immemorial tactics of riding around their prey in concentric circles. The battle

began, the
so real as t

The app
somebody
showed Mi
picture, bu
a derby ha
pole, whic
as to be se
Indian chi
that the al
trousers re

This tir
the suspici

The sh
the chief.
gartered S
that the s

The wl
somewhe

On the
dismayed
power be
embracing
about bui

Mr. Bl
distrangh
eyes. The
among th

MISS

And as th
episode t

began, the wagon train was brought to a stop, the bedlam of blank cartridges was so real as to be almost audible. Clapping broke out. A title:

WHEN THE WHITE PEOPLE WERE GETTING
BEATEN, MISS GRACE AXELROD, THE CITY'S
QUEEN, SHOOTS THE INDIAN CHIEF WITH A
GUN SHE GOT.

The applause which greeted this was punctuated with an occasional gasp and somebody snickered. But the action which followed was even more curious. It showed Miss Axelrod snatching a rifle from some one who leapt quickly out of the picture, but who gave the undeniable impression of having been a young man in a derby hat. Miss Axelrod knelt and fired the gun in the direction of a telegraph pole, which had sprung up suddenly on the prairie. There followed a scene, so short as to be scarcely distinguishable, of a man falling down. This was obviously the Indian chief shot by Miss Axelrod, but again the realists in the audience perceived that the aborigine, though he wore feathers in his hair, was dressed in modern trousers rolled up above modern garters.

This time a long restrained titter broke out, but the audience were still far from the suspicion that this was not the film as originally planned.

AS THE INDIANS WERE NOT YET BEATEN OFF
BY MISS GRACE AXELROD'S ATTACK, SHE
SHOOTS THE SECOND IN COMMAND AND THUS
COMPLETES THEIR DISMAY.

The shooting of the second in command was remarkably like the shooting of the chief. There was the lean telegraph pole in the distance, and there was the be-gartered Sioux who in the next flash fell to the ground. The resemblance indicated that the second in command might be the chief's twin brother.

The whispering had now thickened to a buzz, and a suspicion was abroad that somewhere, somehow, something had gone awry.

On the screen, however, the action had returned to normality. The Indians, dismayed by the fall of the second in command—apparently he was the real power behind the throne—began to retreat in earnest, and the settlers, after embracing each other with shouts of joy, sang a hymn of thanksgiving and went about building New Heidelberg.

Mr. Blue Ribbon had for some time been stirring wildly in his seat, casting distraught glances rearward and then glaring back at the screen with unbelieving eyes. The prologue was over, and Miss Virginia Blue Ribbon's triumphant progress among the marts and emporiums should now have been recorded.

MISS GRACE AXELROD, WINNER OF THE CITY'S POPULARITY'S CONTEST,
GOES ON A TOUR TO THE CITY'S BIG STORES.

And as the flickering letters flashed out, Mr. Blue Ribbon found himself gazing on an episode that was so cut as to expose only a back view of his daughter. She entered

the shops as before, she fingered materials, she admired jewelry—but whenever she seemed about to turn to her face to the audience the scene ended.

Then the astounding information blazed across the silver sheet that:

MISS GRACE AXELROD LOOKS THINNER HERE
BECAUSE SHE'S GOT ON A BETTER CORSET
THAN YOU COULD EVER BUY
AT THE BLUE RIBBON STORE.

For a moment there was no sound except a long sigh from Miss Virginia Blue Ribbon as she fainted away. Then with a low flabbergasted roar that increased to a din, pandemonium burst forth in the auditorium. Mr. Blue Ribbon rose choking from his seat and dashed for the back of the house, leaving a little path of awe that marked his passage through.

To the rest of the audience, history was being made before their eyes. A full close-up of Miss Blue Ribbon appeared, following the comment:

ONE WHO STUCK HER NOSE IN

After that the picture went on, but no one cared. It was a crazed howl from the gallery for "More Gracie!" which really terminated the entertainment. No one saw the end of the picture, in which the schoolchildren's black and white handkerchiefs spelled out the name of the city. The crowd was on its feet looking up at the balcony, where Mr. Blue Ribbon and other inarticulate, half-crazy citizens were trying to climb over the operator's back and stop the projector. A mob had gathered around Mr. Decourcey O'Ney, who stood calmly trembling. The only remark he was heard to make was that it would have been a bigger picture if he could have had everyone gilded.

Joe Murphy turned and whispered to Gracie,

"We better beat it before they turn up the lights."

"Do you think it went off good?" she asked anxiously, as they came out by a side exit into the almost warm night. "I thought it was a swell picture, and I guess anybody would of but a lot of soreheads."

"Poor O'Ney," said Joe thoughtfully as they walked toward the streetcar.

"Do you suppose them people will put Mr. O'Ney in prison?"

"Well, not in prison." He pronounced the last word so that Gracie demanded:

"Where will they put him?"

Joe took Gracie's hand and squeezed it comfortably.

"They'll put him in a nice, quiet asylum," he said. "He's a good director, you know, when he's right. The only trouble with him is that he's raving crazy."

Gracie Axelrod and Joe Murphy were married late in March, and all the department stores, except the Blue Ribbon, sent her elaborate wedding presents. For their honeymoon they went to Sioux City, where every night they went to the picture show. Since they've been back in New Heidelberg and started the restaurant, which

has made
authority
Photo Passi
opportun
Mr. De
Par Excel
A-Craze. G

[...] Wh
I like bes
I say this
not beca
of tracks
the pictu
film. As
scenes in
and deta

My ic
successfu
it was re
picture v
that win
on whic
that if tl
were to
it a sno
near the
not eage
the irate
all but f

The (
Sound.
to face i
time be
and my
the can
scarcely
they wo

has made them rather more than prosperous, Gracie has become the neighborhood authority on the subject of pictures. She buys all the movie magazines, *Screen Sobs*, *Photo Passion*, and *Motion Picture Scandal*, and she winks a cynical eye when a new opportunity contest is announced in Wichita, Kansas.

Mr. Decourcey O'Ney has been released from the asylum and engaged by "Films Par Excellence," at two thousand a week. His first picture is to be called *Hearts A-Craze*. Gracie can hardly wait to see it.

[*Chicago Sunday Tribune* (Chicago), 7 June 1925, Magazine Section, pp. 1-4.]

Beginning Young (1925)

Lillian Gish

[...] When anyone asks me to pick out from the many I have been in, the picture I like best, I answer without hesitation and without much thought, *Broken Blossoms*. I say this not because the picture was an artistic picture, which it was. I say this not because it was a compelling or tragic story with no clearing away, no laying of tracks, no getting ready for the tragedy—it was exactly all this; but because the picture was quickly and smoothly accomplished. It took only eighteen days to film. As I was just recovering from the influenza, I was not asked to rehearse. The scenes in which I could sit down were taken first, and the worries of production and detail were kept from me.

My idea of a really uncomfortable picture was *Way Down East*, one of the most successful of all moving pictures. This was rehearsed eight weeks before a foot of it was recorded by the camera. From the minute I read the play I knew that the picture was going to be an endurance test, and I went into training for it. During that winter there was very little snow, and as we had had only eight or ten days on which we could take snow pictures, a permanent call had gone up in the studio that if there were to be a blizzard, night or day, all the actors in the snow scenes were to report to the studio. The memorable day of March sixth arrived and with it a snowstorm and a ninety-mile-an-hour gale. As I was living at Mamaroneck, near the studio, I quickly reported and was made up as Anna Moore, ready, but not eager for the work to be done.¹ The scene to be taken was the one just after the irate Squire Bartlett turned Anna out of the house into the storm. Dazed and all but frozen, she wanders about through the snow and finally to the river.

The Griffith studio is on a point, or arm, which runs well out into Long Island Sound. The wind simply swept across this narrow neck of land with fury. I had to face it, but the cameras had their backs to the gale. I had only been out a short time before my face became caked with snow. Around the eyes this would melt and my eyelashes became small icicles. They wanted this, and they would bring the cameras up close and photograph my face. My eyes were so heavy I could scarcely keep them open. When I could stand no more and was half unconscious, they would pull me into the studio on a little sled and give me some hot tea. After