

Chapter 8

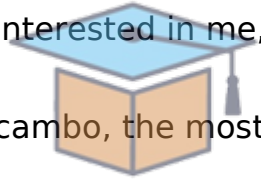
Chapter 8 marks a pivotal point in my career, where *Little Women* became an enticing promise that remained just out of reach. Instead of being granted the role I longed for, I was pushed into a series of sentimental comedies, films designed to mold me into the quintessential Hollywood blonde. Sunset Studios saw my rising popularity as an opportunity to keep me in a specific lane, ensuring that my image was carefully curated to fit their vision. Though I yearned for more challenging roles, I quickly realized that resisting the studio's demands would be futile, and so I played along, embracing my newfound stardom as best as I could.

My first leading role came in *Father and Daughter*, a touching drama where Ed Baker played my widowed father, and together, we navigated new love and loss. This film solidified my place as a bankable actress, though I knew that my path to true artistic fulfillment would be a long one. In the midst of filming, Harry, ever the strategist, encouraged me to attend high-profile dates with Brick Thomas, a former child star whose ego was large enough to fill the entire Sunset lot. These outings, carefully orchestrated by the studio, were meant to generate publicity and craft a romantic narrative around me. Though I played my part, smiling through staged interactions and perfectly timed laughter, the reality was far from glamorous.

One particular night, I accompanied Brick to Chasen's, dressed to perfection while he showed up in casual clothes, only to be redressed by the studio stylist. Paparazzi swarmed us, cameras flashing as we pretended to be engrossed in each other's company. Brick, always self-absorbed, assumed I had idolized him as a teenager and smugly asked if I had posters of him on my walls. Resisting the urge to roll my eyes, I played along, knowing the game I had to participate in. Later that night, as we changed back into our everyday clothes, he leaned in, hinting that we could turn the rumors into reality. I laughed it off, brushing him aside, realizing just how transactional

Hollywood relationships could be.

Despite my distaste for these empty encounters, I continued the charade with other actors, enduring dull conversations and lackluster chemistry. Then, everything changed when Harry arranged a date with Don Adler. Unlike the others, Don exuded a charm that felt both effortless and magnetic. He arrived at my apartment holding a bouquet of lilies, his smile warm and inviting. The sincerity in his gesture caught me off guard—after so many staged interactions, it was refreshing to meet someone who seemed genuinely interested in me, beyond what the cameras captured.



Don took me to Mocambo, the most exclusive nightclub in town, where we danced under the soft glow of chandeliers, surrounded by Hollywood's elite. Unlike other men who sought to possess me, Don simply appreciated my presence, treating me as someone to admire rather than control. His confidence, his wit, and his unwavering attention made me feel seen in a way I hadn't before. As we danced the night away, I found myself drawn to him, the lines between performance and reality blurring. By the end of the evening, as he walked me to my door, he asked when he could see me again. For the first time in my carefully managed Hollywood life, I didn't need to fabricate an answer—I wanted to see him just as much as he wanted to see me.

The moment felt different, more real than any of the orchestrated dates I had endured before. Don wasn't just another industry pawn looking to elevate his own status—he made me feel special, as though I was more than just a rising star. Perhaps, I thought, this was what love was supposed to feel like. Yet, even as I let myself believe in the possibility of something real, I knew that in Hollywood, love and ambition were often intertwined in ways that could be both exhilarating and dangerous.