

I AM A WOMAN AGAIN

Fabulous entertainer tells how she found happiness in love after medical treatment to correct her strange affliction

BY GLADYS BENTLEY

FOR MANY years I lived in a personal hell. Like a great number of lost souls, I inhabited that half-shadow no-man's land which exists between the boundaries of the two sexes.

Throughout the world there are thousands of us furtive humans who have created for ourselves a fantasy as old as civilization itself; a fantasy which enables us, if only temporarily, to turn our backs on the hard realism of life.

Our number is legion and our heartbreak inconceivable.

Some of us wear the symbols and badges of our non-conformity. Others, seeking to avoid the censure of society, hide behind respectable fronts, haunted always by the fear of exposure and ostracism.

Society shuns us. The unscrupulous exploit us. Very few people can understand us.

In fact, a great number of us do not understand ourselves. Somewhere along the line, after we discover that we are fascinated by a way of life different from that approved by society, we attempt to analyze ourselves. All about us we hear the condemnation of our kind. We hear the scornful word labels used in referring to us. We wince at the many harsh suggestions of what should be done to rid the world of the abnormalcy to which we cling. The censure which rages all about us has the effect of creating within us a brooding self-condemnation, a sense of not being as good as the next person, a feeling of inadequacy and impotence. To the great majority of us, at some time or other, has come the feeling that the world would be better off without us; that our families and friends would profit by our disappearance from the human race.

Of course, we all reach varying degrees of adjustment. Some of us, on the face of things, accept our predicament and defiantly try our best to live with it. Others, guiltily and grudgingly, but as if drawn by some magnetic force, give in to our way of life. But, forever, the majority of us are

trying to find excuses, alibis, answers to the eternal why. Almost all of us live in a restless, constant search for happiness.

If we cannot find happiness in our personal lives, we sometimes are able to attain it in the professional world, or the world of art and letters, to win a measure of recognition for our ability and talents even though the world frowns on our way of life.

That is my story.

I have violated the accepted code of morals that our world observes but yet the world has tramped to the doors of the places where I have performed to applaud my piano playing and song styling. These people came to acclaim me as a performer and yet bitterly condemn my personal way of living. But even though they knew me as a male impersonator, they still could appreciate my artistry as a performer.

My name has twinkled in bright lights of storied streets of great cities. I have become known from coast to coast and in many places outside this country, sometimes under the name of Bobbie Minton, my stage name at one time, other times as Gladys Bentley, the name I was given by my parents. I have been featured as the star in the swankiest supper clubs in the nation. I have earned the distinction of being the first, and in some cases, the only performer of my race to crash the star dressing rooms of the most plush glitter spots. I have earned the praise of the most cynical critics and have had highly-placed men and women respectfully thank me for a brief hour of joy my work has brought into their worried lives.

But, while I bowed before the loud applause of well-heeled, free-spending audiences; beamed at the warm words of the critics; while I earned large sums of money and thrilled to recognition, still, in my secret heart, I was weeping and wounded because I was traveling the wrong road to real love and true happiness. I could not find them in the cruel, unreal world of my strange private life. I was a big, successful star—and sad, lonely per-



Chatting with Billy Eckstine in Los Angeles club where she was featured recently, Miss Bentley takes break between shows. She owns house in Los Angeles.



Embracing Louis Armstrong, Miss Bentley thanks him for coming to opening at Los Angeles club. Engagement was one of few times she has played Negro spot.

With one-armed, one-legged Crip Heard Miss Bentley sings one of her novelty tunes. Current Bentley record hit is called *Easter Mardi Gras*.





Turning back cover of bed, Miss Bentley prepares to make homecoming husband comfortable. Singer has authored numbers for Mills Brothers and for comedian Timmie Rogers, as well as dance routine for Peg Leg Bates.



Taste-testing dinner she has prepared for husband J. T. Gipson, Miss Bentley enjoys domestic role which she shunned for years. She lives in modest, tastefully-appointed home directly in rear of similar home she purchased for her mother.

I AM A WOMAN AGAIN *Continued*

son—until the miracle happened and I became a woman again.

The miracle came about when I discovered and accepted the one glorious thing which, for so many years, I had bitterly fought with all my heart, mind and body; the love and tenderness, the true devotion of a man who loved me unselfishly and whose love I could return; the awakening within me of the womanliness I had tried to suppress.

Today I am a woman again through the miracle which took place not only in my mind and heart—when I found a man I could love and who could love me—but also in my body—when the magic of modern medicine made it possible for me to have treatment which helped change my life completely. I am happily married and living a normal existence. But no matter how happy I am, I am still haunted by the sex underworld in which I once lived. I want to help others who are trapped in its dark recesses by telling my story.

Makes Mark In Show Business

BEFORE THE MIRACLE happened, I had made my mark in show business. At the age of 16 I left my home in Philadelphia and went to New York. I was lucky enough to get an audition in the office of a Broadway agent. Delighted with the rhythm and torchy numbers I did, he arranged for me to cut eight record sides. I received my first professional wages, a check for \$400. I was very excited.

My records had a gratifying success, but I soon found out that one could not just sit around proudly and rest on one's laurels as a new recording artist. I began going to bars late at night, sitting in for entertainers when they were on their rest periods and picking up tips. One night, in Connie's Inn, a little club near the old Lafayette Theater, I met a friend who told me that the Mad House on 133rd Street needed a pianist right away. Their pianist had gone to Europe with *Blackbirds*.

"But they want a boy," my friend said.

"There's no better time for them to start using a girl," I replied.

At the Mad House, the boss was reluctant to give me a chance. I finally convinced him. My hands fairly flew over the keys. When I had finished my first number, the burst of applause was terrific. One of the white customers walked over, handed me a five dollar bill and said:

"Please play something else. We don't care what it is. Just play. You're terrific."

The boss came over. "Play as long as you like," he said. "When you're finished, come to my office."

I continued for two hours, then went to hear my fate. I was offered \$35 a week and began work right on the spot.

For the customers of the club, one of the unique things about my act was the way I dressed. I wore immaculate white full dress shirts with stiff collars, small bow ties and skirts, oxfords, short Eton jackets and hair cut straight back.

The club where I was working was flourishing in the era of the Black Renaissance, that lush period in Negro art, literature and show business. Cultural-minded whites like Heywood Brown and Carl Van Vechten were sponsoring Negro artists. One night Mr. Van Vechten came to the club and that was the beginning of patronage by top-drawer society folk from downtown.

My \$35 salary went to \$125 a week and, what with tips from generous patrons, I did very well indeed. The club was renamed "Barbara's Exclusive Club" after my stage name—Barbara "Bobbie" Minton.

From Harlem I went to Park Avenue. There I appeared in tailor-made clothes, top hat and tails, with a cane to match each costume, stiff-bosomed shirt, wing collar tie and matching shoes. I had two black outfits, one maroon and a tan, grey and white. The elaborate mid-Manhattan club where I appeared had a 75-foot silver and onyx bar and mirrors everywhere. I was an immediate success. Soon I was living on Park Avenue in a \$300-a-month apartment. I had servants and a beautiful car. The club where I worked overflowed with celebrities and big star names nightly. I played for many affairs for New York's merry mayor, Jimmy Walker.

After Park Avenue came a string of successful engagements in the best white clubs all over the country, including Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Chicago. Next came Hollywood and an engagement in a small, intimate and beautiful San Bernardino club. The whole Hollywood colony turned out to see and hear me. Mary Astor frequented the club. So did Arthur Treacher, Cesar Romero, Bruce Cabot, Hugh Herbert, Cary Grant, Johnny Weismuller, George Burns, Gracie Allen, George Raft, Barbara Stanwyck, Robert Taylor, Alice Brady, Lawrence Tibbett and Ruth Chatterton.

This is a glimpse into the wonderfully-exciting career which was mine over the years. Although today there is not as much sensational publicity surrounding me, I am still a star, still enjoying success as a featured name in clubs and releasing records.



Making selection from jewel case, Miss Bentley decides on wardrobe for an evening out. Singer still lives more than comfortably, has fabulous wardrobe. She began writing songs and stories at age of eight, as result of lonely childhood.

Only I am not Gladys Bentley any more in private life. And neither am I unhappy as I was beneath the surface, when the stars came to pay me tribute in days gone by. I'm no longer frightened, frustrated and defeated after the applause has died down, the club become dark, the autographs signed and the patrons gone their way.

I no longer have to search for reasons to find why I became what I was. Today I am a woman again and no longer have to rationalize that "I was born that way." I do not have to go back to my childhood days to justify what I became.

But I want to tell my story to others, who perhaps can avoid the same pitfalls.

She Was An Unwanted Child

THE BEGINNING of my story, shocking but true, goes back to my childhood days.

We know that there are mothers whose yearning for a male child goes ungratified; mothers who let their daughters know, either openly or insidiously, that they are unwanted. They try to rid themselves of their disappointment by dressing their daughters in boyish clothes, giving them male names, forcing them into excessive participation in boyish sports.

There are parents who place their own selfish inclinations above the welfare of their children; who recklessly break up homes and go their separate ways. Many of us who have strayed from the paths of what society calls normal were once children in unhappy or broken homes.

Children who are rejected, abused, unloved, exploited or over-protected do not have a chance to develop that inner sense of security which will keep them from feeling abandoned and afraid.

However, not all children, in situations of this nature, react by feeling alone or fearful. Some children become aggressive, decide to take the reins of their destiny in their own hands.

That is the way I reacted to being an unwanted child.

I was the eldest of four children of a poor family. I was really the problem child of the family. My mother was very bitterly against having a girl. She had prayed and made all preparations for a boy until having a son became an obsession with her. Girls, she was convinced, were fated for trouble. She walked the streets, during her pregnancy, staring at little boys at play. She told herself:

"My little boy will be just like that."

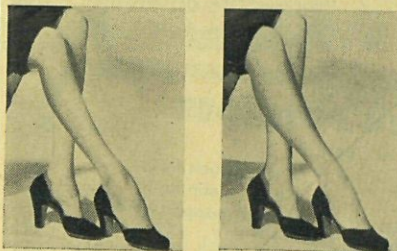
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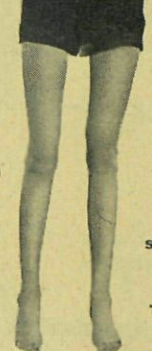
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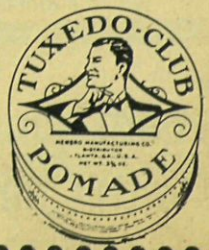


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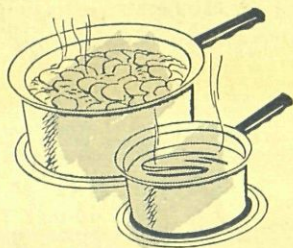
"They're the *best* scalloped potatoes you ever ate, too...brown and crusty on top, and deliciously creamy...smooth and rich underneath. The *double-richness* of Carnation makes the difference...just as it does in so many foods."

QUICK SCALLOPED POTATOES

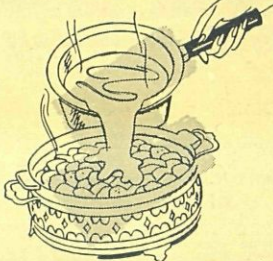
(Makes 5 to 6 servings)

4 cups raw, thinly sliced potatoes
2 teaspoons salt
1 2/3 cups (large can) undiluted Carnation

1 tablespoon flour
1 tablespoon butter
1/4 cup chopped onion



Cook potatoes in boiling, salted water until partially tender (3-4 minutes). Drain. Heat Carnation, flour and butter together until slightly thickened.



Place the potatoes and onion in buttered casserole. Pour sauce over potatoes. Bake in moderate oven (350° F.) about 30 minutes.

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Mrs. Bernadine Carrickett
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I AM A WOMAN AGAIN *Continued*

When they told my mother she had given birth to a girl, she refused to touch me. She wouldn't even nurse me and my grandmother had to raise me for six months on a bottle before they could persuade my mother to take care of her own baby.

It seems I was born different. At least, I always thought that. In later years I learned that "different" people are made, not born. Nevertheless, from the time I can remember anything, even when I was toddling, I never wanted a man to touch me. I would even run away from my own father. He felt terrible about his own child avoiding him, but I would never go to him. I acted the same way with my uncles and all the rest of the males who came into my home.

When my two brothers were born, I began to hate them as we grew up. I suppose the reason was that they were admired while I was scorned. I fought tooth and nail with my brothers at all times. At the age of nine and ten, I stole their suits and wore them to school. I think I began wearing their clothes, feeling that I was getting even with them, but soon I began to feel more comfortable in boys' clothes than in dresses. To the credit of my mother, after my teachers had sent me home to put on dresses several times, she did appeal to my father to stop me from wearing boys' clothes. I had withstood the fun poked at me by my schoolmates who followed me in the street. Now, I tried to withstand my parents, but they got after me so often that we finally compromised, agreeing that I would wear middy blouses and skirts.

I had always been large and stocky and looked much older than my years. I had always believed I was older, in mind and intuition, than the other children. Their company did not appeal to me and I spent most of my childhood alone. But I remember one person who did appeal to me in those love-starved, lonely, elementary school days. She was one of my teachers. During recess, I stayed in the class and helped her, dusting and arranging things on her desk, cleaning blackboards. Sometimes she would let me comb her long, beautiful hair. In class I sat for hours watching her and wondering why I was so attracted to her. At night I dreamed of her. I didn't understand the meaning of those dreams until later.

We moved out of the neighborhood soon after that. Mother began to take me from doctor to doctor. An atmosphere of whispering surrounded me in the home.

What my family did not know was that I didn't need a doctor, but love, affection and healthy interests to supplant the malignant growth festering inside of me. This is the tragedy in the relationships between many parents and their children once the secret of "being different" is out.

Who knows but what my whole life would have been different if I had been handled differently. Certainly my parents meant well. They just didn't know how to cope with a situation which to them was at once startling and disgraceful.

Strays Far From Social Norm

MINE HAS been a story of what sociologists and psychiatrists would perhaps term extreme social maladjustment. I have strayed far from the social norm and because I have been a victim of my own sins, I cannot but vehemently condemn and denounce those who defend deviation. For me it has meant a living hell as terrible as dope addiction. Certain it is that in many ways it is more difficult to tear away from my particular crime. And perhaps the most terrible and tragic part of my life is that I have hurt others too.

During the strange, heart-twisting existence which was mine for so long a time, there were men who loved me deeply and passionately. But they were hurt by my coldness and inability to respond. A few, whom I took frankly into my confidence, insisted they could make me over, re-shape my emotional attitude, if only I would marry them.

Yes, many strange things have happened to me. I have known,

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Working on book, Miss Bentley types manuscript relating true story of her life. She says she hopes to help people who are trapped in a modern-day "well of loneliness," has almost completed book-length manuscript.

I AM A WOMAN AGAIN Continued

in their private unguarded moments, some of the most brilliant stars whose fame has flashed across the fabulous Broadway and Hollywood scene.

I finally decided to try marriage when I met Don in Hollywood. He was a sailor, stationed in San Diego and one day, while he was on weekend leave, he telephoned my home. He said he was a friend of some acquaintances in San Francisco, and that they had told him to contact me if he ever came to Los Angeles. He wanted to know if I would be home on Sunday afternoon.

I don't even know why I consented. I hated sailors at the time. They represented to me the utmost aggressiveness in romance-minded men. But somehow I felt everything would be all right, that I wouldn't have any trouble out of him.

It was strange the way Don upset me. A sort of rebellion welled up in me, but I said nothing. He was such a gentleman, such good company.

I didn't resent his waiting on me and being around all the time either. Everyone began kidding me about his being my boy friend when they saw him in my car so much.

I was nervous about how to explain him to people. I began introducing him as my brother. Don just sat around, smoking his pipe and smiling.

One day I told Don all about my life. I admitted to him that he had me very confused because I couldn't understand what I was doing letting a normal man pay attentions to me.

He listened as if he understood every word. Then he told me that he had known all about me before he came to see me.

From then on, I began to look forward to Don's weekly visits. The loneliness of my weeks meant nothing to me, now that I could look forward to his coming to see me on weekends. He never brought up the subject of my love life and every Saturday night, he was right beside me on the piano bench at the after-hours spot where I worked.

With growing apprehension, I decided that things had become serious between us. I admired Don. He was the first person with whom I felt dependent. I accepted the things he did for me, even though I had a creed which made me want to reject him. All along, as Don and I had grown closer, I had tried to dismiss him, at first almost hopefully. Yet, deep down inside of me, I had nursed a sneaking hope that he was a real man. When I found out, over the period of time I had known him, that other women did not interest him—only me—I became utterly confused at his willingness to continue his quiet, comforting devotion without making the demands other real men would have made. There was but one conclusion to come to in all of this—that Don represented, for the first time in my life—pure, unselfish love—a miracle of love.

That's why, several days later, when he said to me seriously: "Bobbie, do you know that as long as I have known you, I have



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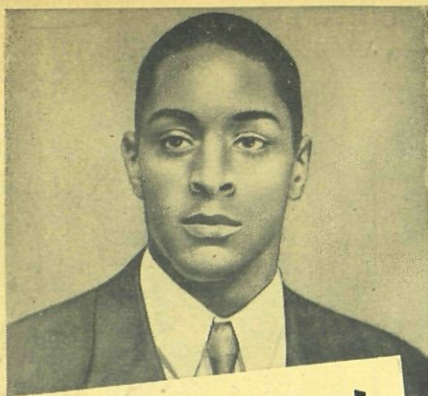
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I AM A WOMAN AGAIN *Continued*

never kissed you, but I would like to," I looked at him for a while and answered:

"Let me kiss you, Don."

I was still afraid. I had made a bid for happiness too often before. I had been hurt too deeply.

I sent him away because I was afraid. The tears in my eyes reflected the tears in his.

I spent the most miserable week of my life, eating very little, being sent home from work one night. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday went by.

Then Thursday morning came. I woke up and the first thing I saw was my Unity book. I had become a loyal believer in the teachings of Unity. I picked it up and it fell open at a certain page. It read:

"You are feeling very upset during this cycle. It's because you are leaving God out of this union, but you must remember God is above all things. Just put your faith and trust in Him and things will turn out all right for you . . ."

My mind was made up now. I wanted to marry Don but I was haunted by doubts and fears. To me, happiness meant going all out, one way or the other. Suppose I were to get married and my old habits were impossible to suppress. Eventually I would lose him. I knew that, if I married, I would have to make a clean break from my old life.

I decided to go to my physician in Los Angeles. I told myself that I wanted an examination for an overweight condition. I had once weighed more than 400 pounds. However, I was quite relieved when he decided to give me a thorough examination. I confessed to him then that I was thinking of getting married.

"That's just what I wanted to hear," the doctor told me. "Now I can tell you what I've known for a long time. Your sex organs are infantile. They haven't progressed past the stage of those of a fourteen-year-old child."

He told me I should be treated, taking three shots weekly for six months. The injection of female hormones, which would overcome predominant male hormones, would affect me greatly, he declared.

The treatment was expensive but it was worth every penny it cost.

Then I was ready to tell Don I would marry him.

Gets Married Again To Columnist

EVEN THOUGH our marriage did not last, I will always have a special feeling for Don because it was his loving tenderness which turned me back toward the path of normalcy and made it possible for me to share the kind of love and affection which the majority of people appreciate. Don brought me happiness, not only the happiness which existed during our marriage, but the joy of knowing that, after all, I was as much a woman as any other woman in the world.

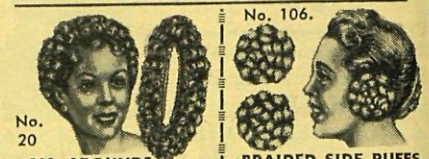
Today, I am again happily married—and I hope and pray this marriage will last—to J. T. Gipson, well known West Coast theatrical columnist. My records on Okeh, Excelsior and Swing-time Labels are still selling. I am still writing new songs and making club appearances.

I'm writing a book to let the world know the frank story of my life in every intimate detail. I want the world to know that those of us who have taken the unusual paths to love are not hopeless; that we can find someone in the opposite sex who can teach us love as love really ought to exist. Maybe I can do some good, help someone somewhere by letting everyone know how I became a woman again.

Certainly I can personally testify to the tragedy and heartbreak that my abnormal life has caused. And if I can steer some unknowing youths—tempted by the lure of something different—from succumbing to the snare and instead turning to the path of righteousness, I would feel some redemption from my sins.

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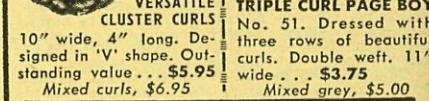
GLAMOUR (right) Has cluster of curls. Covers entire head. Low price . . . \$9.95 Mixed grey, \$12.95



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