

PHOTOPLAY

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Those Fightin' Reagans

Three times before they have said goodbye. Is this the last round for Ronnie and his Jane?

BY GLADYS HALL

I WAS just before Christmas in New York. Jane Wyman paced the length and breadth of her hotel suite, awaiting a call from La Guardia Airport.

The telephone rang, as it had rung half a dozen times that morning. An official voice said, "Sorry, Mrs. Reagan, planes still grounded—ceiling zero."

"Call me again." Jane's voice was urgent. "I'll stand by. Keep calling."

Her pacing was resumed together with her vigils at the windows that framed a city blanketed in fog. Back and forth again went little Miss Button-nose (so pet-named by her husband) awaiting the wanted word from La Guardia that she could plane back to Hollywood—back to Ronnie?

Yet only the night before, Jane had told a friend, "We're through, we're finished, and it's all my fault."

Three times before, Jane has said goodbye to her marriage, then reconciled.

Is this the last round in the marriage ring that has encircled the fighting Reagans for ten sometimes stormy but all the time, we believe, in-love years?

That Ronnie is still deeply in love with Jane is very evident. In fact, he says so. When reached in Hollywood, and faced with Jane's latest verdict on their marriage, "It's a strange character I'm married to," Ronnie announced with a wry but unmistakably tender smile, "But—I love her."

That Jane is still deeply in love with Ronnie (or why her frantic eagerness to get back to where he was?) is, in our opinion, also very evident. "We're through, we're finished," she says. But somehow we do not take this too seriously. Words can be so many little masks to cover up the heart.

"They were blissfully happy together," a close friend says of them, "until the war came."

Yet it was during the war that they adopted a son who, in addition to their own little Maureen, is a bond between them—a bond they surely would not have sought, being responsible citizens, if there had not been peace between them.

What are the counts against them? What, in a word, goes? Is it that Jane (Continued on page 91)

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(Continued from page 37) has been married more than once before? Is there some hangover from a past Ronnie does not share? Some conflict, still unresolved, in Jane's memory?

We remember Jane and Ronnie when they first met on the Warner Brothers lot, where both were under contract. And what friends they were before ever they were sweethearts; such good friends as to make later misunderstandings between them seem improbable. We remember the personal appearance tour they made, soon after they met, with Louella Parsons and, before the tour ended, how madly in love they were and how insanely jealous Jane was of any girl who looked Ronnie's way. Many did. But Ronnie looked only at Jane.

Or are their troubles rooted in their careers?

BEFORE the war Jane, the pretty ingénue, was doing all right but there was nothing outstanding about what she called her "playing paper dolls" career. Ronnie, on the other hand, was zooming starward. Their home was very much the Ronald Reagans' home but that was fine with Jane; was, she felt and said, "the way a marriage should be."

By 1945, when Ronnie came home, Jane had been cast in "The Lost Weekend," in which she played her first really adult role. A little later, she gave her Academy-nomination performance of Ma Barter in "The Yearling." She didn't win the Award but even the nomination was an honor. More recently, Jane was seen in the much-discussed film "Magic Town." Also, in "Johnny Belinda," she plays the exacting but actor-exciting part of a deaf-mute.

Ronnie, on the other hand, has not been happy with his new pictures. He disliked his roles in "That Hagen Girl" and "Voice of the Turtle"—even though many, Photoplay included, enjoyed this last picture and his work in it. He made both of these pictures, actually, in gratitude to Warner Brothers who had kept him on the payroll throughout the war.

Off-screen, however, Ronnie has been extremely active in several endeavors which have brought him great prestige.

He became President of the Screen Actors Guild. He worked on labor negotiations during the long-lived strike in Hollywood. He also became a contributing member of his original home community when, late last summer, he gave a scholarship to his college at Eureka, Kansas. He called his gift (does this smack of professional jealousy?) the Wyman-Reagan Scholarship.

None of it adds up to the words "We're finished."

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Certain it is, however, that Jane last autumn was visibly unhappy; was nervous; was irritable—many times in public—with Ronnie. But Ronnie was cajoling, always very easy with Jane, and very sweet. Always in there, trying.

"Please remember," he told us, "that Jane went through a very bad time when, after the strain of waiting for another baby, she lost it. Then, perhaps before she was strong enough, she went into 'Johnny Belinda.' It was a taxing, difficult role. Perhaps, too, my seriousness about public affairs has bored Jane," he added slowly. "But you must believe me when I say that, less than six weeks before Jane left for New York, we were happy enough for her to tell me, 'I hope it can always be like this between us.' I hope so, too," Ronnie said, with an earnestness you could reach out and touch. "Because I believe we belong together."

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