



SWEETHEART OF THE

A.E.F.



Rita Hayworth, Hollywood's No. 1 Dancing Lady, is "my gal back home" to thousands of soldiers, sailors, & Marines on the world's battle fronts. She heats the barracks for the boys in Iceland and her picture snuggles close to many a fighting heart

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“**RITA HAYWORTH,**” a Hollywood columnist wrote, “is the smartest young lady to hit this dizzy town in years.” That was a couple of years ago and Hollywood sniffed, “Oh, yeah?” and with good reason, for Rita appeared to the almost naked eye (which she frequently did) to be no more than one of those pretty but dumb girls whose talents are best displayed in elfin bathing suits. Hollywood is full of them, and they usually end up as waitresses at drive-ins.

The Better Minds in Hollywood opined that if you asked this Hayworth what she thought of the President’s labor policy she might answer earnestly that she thought it was a horrid shame, that he worked entirely too hard. Or, they said, she might merely give you a blank stare, but they admitted it would be one of the most beautiful blank stares the world has ever known.

The columnist’s dope on Rita was correct. She has proved to be a cunning cutie in all the best senses of the word. Once the least promising of the group of glamour girls that included Hedy Lamarr, Betty Grable, Ann Sheridan, and Lana Turner, today Rita tops them all. She is the fastest-rising star in Hollywood, rated by Fred Astaire as one of the best dancing partners he ever had, a good actress and getting better every day, the darling of a hundred regiments, and as much on the minds of sailors, soldiers, and marines as Adolf Hitler—but certainly in a very much nicer sort of way.

She did it with talent, untiring ambition, and brains. It takes all three to make any top-notch—er—a star, the president of a corporation, or a first-rate general.

When Rita was about fifteen years old she made up her stubborn mind to be a great motion-picture actress. Some old fuddy-duddies may snort that if she was so darned smart it would have been more noble if she had wanted to become a United States senator or president of the Daughters of the American Revolution, or if she had longed to write deathless lines. But Rita’s lines are deathless enough for me, and I agree with her that it’s a lot more fun being a motion-picture star than a United States senator. And as president of the D. A. R. she probably wouldn’t get lovely letters such as the one that came from Iceland last winter:

“It is thirty below here, Miss Hayworth. Our stove broke down yesterday and we near froze to death, but the top found two of your bathing pictures and tacked them on the wall and the shack got so hot we had to break out fire extinguishers to keep it from burning down.”

Rita answers her fan mail from the

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fighting men with thousands of photographs. She received some letters saying that the pictures were beautiful but too large to carry, so she had a special kind made, small enough to fit a wallet and she sends that to the boys who write that they haven't a girl of their own and would she mind if they carried her picture into battle, for luck. Rita's secretary and only girl-friend, Pat Biddle, sorts out the best of the fan letters from soldiers, sailors, and marines, and now and then Rita cries when she reads them—even the ones that are funny—and that bewilders her, for she doesn't know why she cries over a funny letter from a boy she never met.

When Rita told me she had made 36 pictures and had been plugging away in Hollywood since 1935 I raised my eyebrows, but the record book proved it was true talk. Although her beautiful knees have been appearing in fan magazines for three or four years, few of us noticed her face on the screen until last winter, when she burst out as Fred Astaire's dancing partner in *You'll Never Get Rich* and left the folks gasping. She followed that by being gorgeous in technicolor in *My Gal Sal*, and while it was another girl's voice that did the singing for her, the magnificent dancing was all her own and she proved to have a nice sense for comedy.

On the heels of *My Gal Sal* came *Tales of Manhattan*, in which there were so many stars that it looked like an Academy Award dinner. She got back into her dancing shoes to make *You Were Never Lovelier* with Fred Astaire, and reports indicate that the title is an honest review of the picture. If that's true, she's likely to jump up into the sacred circle of The Ten Best Box-Office Names in Hollywood.

Rita was born in a New York hospital and named Margarita Carmen Cansino. Her father is Eduardo Cansino, a noted Spanish dancer. Her mother was Volga Haworth, of Washington, D. C., the daughter of a well-to-do printer, and had been a dancer in Ziegfeld shows.

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*This is the old Rita—
a Spanish dancer*

In Spain the Cansinos were to dancing what the Barrymores have been to the American drama. In the days when Spain was gay, Antonio Cansino, Rita's grandfather, was the idol of the populace. When Eduardo and his sister came to America in 1913, critics of the dance hailed Eduardo as a worthy crown prince and, as all old vaudeville fans remember, the Cansinos were headliners from coast to coast.

In 1927, when Rita was nine years old, vaudeville was dead and the Cansinos settled in Los Angeles, where Eduardo taught dancing and acted as dance director for pictures. Rita was earmarked to carry on the Cansino name in the theater.

But dancing gave Rita a severe pain in the neck. She wanted to become a baseball player. Dutifully, however, she practiced dancing and learned to play castanets, mostly because she wasn't allowed to go out (*Continued on page 72*) and play baseball with the boys until she had finished her dancing lesson.

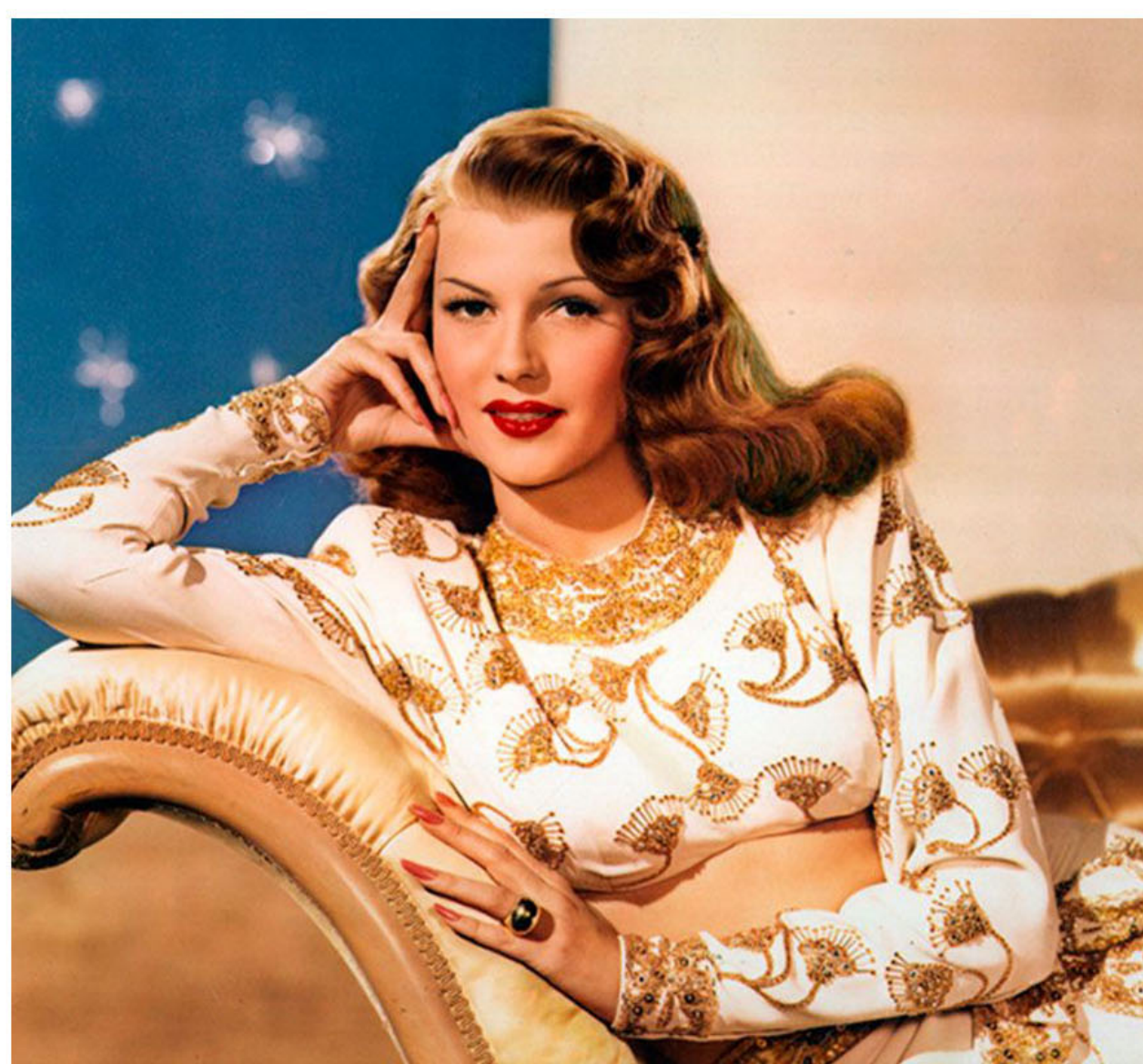
Not until she was eleven did showman's blood begin to surge through Rita's veins. For a school play her father taught her a complicated Japanese dance, and her mother rented an elaborate Japanese costume.

"I found I liked it," Rita told me. "Not so much the dancing as wearing the pretty costume. I had to admit it was more becoming than baseball pants." Suddenly a look of alarm came into her eyes, "Hey," she exclaimed. "There's a war on. Make it a Chinese dance."

Rita had invited me out to her house for dinner. She was a stunning creature, her red hair flowing, as she sat curled up in a chair, and with that old hot-diggedy-dog in her eyes she pleaded, "Please say it was Chinese. I don't like even the word 'Japanese.'"

Stronger men than I am have been like putty in the hands of a beautiful woman. It was a Chinese dance.

When Rita says she was only thirteen years old when she started to dance with her father, one's natural impulse is to say, "Now, listen,



honey chile, no press-agent stuff." It happens frequently that when an actress tells you her current age and you check back on her career you find she must have been graduated from high school when she was four years old and married when she was seven. But when Rita says she was born on October 17, 1918, she appears to be telling the truth. Her mother dug up Rita's baby book and showed me the entry.

Rita and Eduardo danced for over three years at Tia Juana and at near-by Agua Caliente, the glittering racing and gambling resort.

She was sixteen when Winfield Sheehan, of Fox, went to Caliente one week end and sat at a ringside table. In one of her numbers Rita wore a Spanish peasant costume with pantaloons, and in the middle of the dance something came unfastened and the pantaloons dropped. Rita calmly stopped, pulled up the pantaloons, and went on from there. Rita says it was a most embarrassing accident. However that may be, Sheehan's eye was caught and the next day he sent for Eduardo and said he could use Rita in a picture called *Dante's Inferno*, starring Spencer Tracy.

Dante's Inferno was advertised (I copied it word for word) as "A Gigantic Modern Drama of Today and Forever! An Amazing Spectacle That Will Take Your Breath Away!" The truth was, as the social leaders say in Hollywood drawing-rooms, it stunk.

MARGARITA CANSINO was better than the picture and they signed her for a year. She was an Egyptian dancer in *Charlie Chan in Egypt*, an Argentine dancer in *Under the Pampas Moon*, an Irish jigger in *Paddy O'Day*, a Russian dancer in *Human Cargo*, and by that time a year had passed and her dancing had about covered everything and her contract expired.

That first year is distinguished mostly because it is the Year of the First Date. Rita's parents, in the Spanish tradition, had guarded her like the crown jewels. In Mexico, Eduardo had been her constant companion in public, and whenever he had to leave her he would lock her in her dressing-room so the stage-door Johnnies couldn't get in.

Pinky Tomlin, a nice, genial boy from Oklahoma, was in *Paddy O'Day* with Rita and invited her to go to the opening, and Rita's mother finally consented. Rita was in a transport of delight, but the more her mother thought about it, the more she became convinced she was making a terrible mistake. She'd heard about these Hollywood actors.

Pinky arrived. Rita, in ecstasy, introduced him to her mother, and Pinky and Rita started toward Pinky's car. Mrs. Cansino stood in the doorway breathing heavily, and finally could control herself no longer. She dashed down the walk and seized Pinky by the arm.

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"Mr. Tomlin," Mrs. Cansino moaned, "have you any sisters?"

Pinky blinked in bewilderment. "Yes. Sure. Why?"

"Remember them, won't you?" she begged, and feeling much better ran back into the house.

The only jobs Rita could get in the next year were in Western pictures at \$100 a picture. She fell off horses frequently but always was game and climbed back on, but after she made three pictures the director said the horses were complaining, and fired her.

Columbia Pictures gave her a chance as a Spanish dancer and she was so good that at the end of the picture they handed her a contract. She now was eighteen years old, a Spanish dancing Cansino, traditionally important, but out of date. She sat down and surveyed the situation.

I must state that although her father regarded her as the highest type of feminine loveliness, Rita was too much of a Spanish type to cause the boys in the balcony to yell "Wow!" when she came on the screen. Her long, shiny, blue-black hair was parted in the middle, pulled down tight back of her ears, and twisted into a bun in the back. Her brow was rather narrow and low, her cheeks round, and she was distinctly plump.

"I sure was a cold potato," Rita says bluntly.

"And now, five years later," I said, "you're the hottest gal in town. How come?"

She smiled her thanks for the compliment, shook her red head, and said, "I don't know. I just worked."

THE first thing Rita did was to change her name. Putting a "y" in her mother's name, she became Rita Hayworth.

The Cansinos went berserk. Eduardo has eight brothers and sisters, most of them dancing teachers, all over the United States, and they sent frantic telegrams of protest. "Doesn't she realize that Cansino is one of the great names of the theater?" they demanded. It was as if Diana Barrymore had decided her name was a handicap.

But Rita held firm, backed by the folks at the studio, who agreed that a Spanish girl wouldn't travel as far in pictures as an American one. But changing the name wouldn't be enough. Rita had her long, black hair cut short, then bleached. She looked worse than ever, so she tried auburn, lighter in front than in back. "That's it," she said, when she saw herself in the mirror.

However, her face was too round, she didn't have enough forehead. To lengthen her face, for three years she went every week to have her hairline moved back, at the top and on the sides, a hair at a time by electrolysis, until nearly an inch more of her forehead was exposed.

At first her hair was so tough it could hardly be bent by a hairdresser. Daily, her scalp was rubbed with heavy oil, steamed, shampooed, and brushed dry. Two evenings a week she spends two hours having her hair bleached and colored. Every night she combs and brushes it several hundred strokes. She has a slight permanent wave every six months.

After a year of these beauty treatments, Rita was a different girl. She dieted, played tennis, and swam, and developed the figure that sets cantonments on fire in Iceland. But still the public acclaim for her performances on the screen was so inaudible that you could hear a pin drop. Months passed and she did little except make stills for "leg art."

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At eighteen, Rita had married Edward Judson, who was twice as old as she. They were divorced last March. Judson devoted himself to Rita's publicity, he didn't mind being called "Mister Rita Hayworth," helped her dress beautifully, took her to all the bright spots where she would be seen and admired. Undoubtedly he was a great help, but it was Rita's talent and vitality and ambition that put her over.

THE first turn for the better came in 1939. Howard Hawks, the director, went to a night club with Harry Cohn, head of the Columbia studio, and Redhead Rita was there, hoping to be noticed in a tight, pearl-gray dress.

"There's the girl for the siren in *Angels Have Wings*," Hawks exclaimed. "Who is she?"

"Rita Hayworth," said Cohn. "She works for us. You've seen her on the lot a dozen times."

She got the part, and was stunning in it, everybody said.

"So stunning," says Rita grimly, "that the studio was paralyzed, as far as I was concerned. They didn't put me in another picture for eight months."

You could hardly blame Hawks for not noticing Rita on the lot. Off stage she is quiet and shy, very pleasant, but not one of those loud movie gals who run up and down the place yelling, "Hello, darling!" at everybody.

When I first met Rita she was waiting on the *You Were Never Lovelier* set, about to go out on the floor to dance with Astaire. She was cute in shorts and blouse but entirely relaxed, no fire shone from her eyes, she looked like no high-powered siren. But when the director called and the music started, the Hayworth time-bomb exploded, and for half an hour she was a laughing, sparkling, nimble-footed phenomenon who knocked you jittery with admiration as she and Astaire effortlessly and joyously performed a rapid and intricate tap number over and over again until the cameras recorded it exactly right.

In those eight months of idleness, Rita took another look at herself. Her pictures were in all the papers, she was beautiful, but she couldn't act. That was why she wasn't getting better parts. She was tagged as nothing but a specialist in leg art. Now she found time for a daily lesson from a dramatic coach and two or three singing lessons a week, to improve her speech. In her spare moments she hung around the sets watching the stars and directors, learning how to act.

As so often happens in studios, her own employers didn't realize how Rita had improved. Many an actor has been ignored on his own lot until some other studio borrowed him and gave him a chance. Ann Sheridan was having a fight with Warner Brothers and refused to play in *Strawberry Blonde*, and they borrowed Rita—perhaps not as much because they were sure she could play the part as because they were sure it would make Ann raving mad. Rita was her bitterest rival in the Oomph, It, Zing and Flame department.

Rita did all right, helped considerably by Jimmy Cagney, an old vaudeville companion of her father's. Then she was borrowed by Twentieth Century-Fox and went over on the lot where she had made *Dante's Inferno* and burned 'em up in *Blood and Sand*.

"Gee whiz!" they said at her home studio. "This gal can act!"

Columbia had signed Fred Astaire and was trying to find "another Ginger Rogers."

"How about trying Hayworth?" somebody offered.

They asked Astaire what he thought.

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"Eduardo Cansino's daughter is worth a try," he said. "Have her report at nine tomorrow morning. I'll see whether she'll do."

Here was the opportunity of a lifetime and it caught Rita unprepared. She had been so busy learning to act and had neglected her dancing. She hadn't danced, except ballroom steps, for three years. And unless you keep them in trim those dancing muscles won't work for you.

But at nine the next morning she was on the set, in practice clothes, game but scared. She had never met Astaire. "Hello," he said; "how's Eduardo?"

"Fine," she said, swallowing.

"Are you in good shape?" he asked.

"Perfect," she bluffed.

"All right. Let's do this one first."

Except for an hour off for lunch, Rita danced steadily until three o'clock. "I never saw a girl learn so quickly," Astaire said later.

She dragged herself to her car and got home and into bed. The next morning every move was agony, but she was back on the stage.

"How do you feel?" Astaire asked.

"Fine," she said, gritting her teeth.

Only when he called time for lunch did Astaire realize that Rita was far from "fine." She dropped into a chair and, game as she was, couldn't move.

Astaire was in a panic. "Why didn't you tell me you weren't in shape?" he asked.

Rita smiled proudly, "I'm a Cansino."

They got her to a masseuse, and she spent the remainder of the day in steam baths, under violet rays, and in salt packs. She rested a day; then, in fine fettle, danced five hours a day for five weeks, rehearsing for the picture.

TODAY, Rita has become Hollywood's Number 1 dancing lady. A Cansino could ask for no more.

"How does it feel to be on top?" I asked.

"On top?" she questioned. "I'm not on top. I've just started. I love to dance, but I don't want to dance all my life. My ambition is to become a great actress."

"Are you sure you can do it?" I asked.

"Check me up in ten years," she said confidently.

So put that in your tickler file. My betting is that if brains and breeding count, Rita will make it, for in Rita something has been added to the Cansino blood. You see, on her mother's side she had a grandmother named Maggie O'Hare.



Script

January 4, 1946: p 8

OUR COVER GIRL



When that excellent and enterprising magazine, *Yank*, conducted a poll last year to find out who was the overseas G.I.'s favorite pin-up girl, it was found that Marguerita had won it, pins down. Marguerita Carmen Cansino (Rita Hayworth to you) was an interesting choice for the G.I.'s to make. The old phony publicity has been finally shot to hell, it seems. The time is past when screen stars trembled for their popularity when they married and had babies, and were scared that they might no longer be able to fill the role of dream girl to millions.

Probably every G.I. in the expeditionary forces (except those who don't go to movies—there are some, you know) knew that their pin-up-girl-in-chief was married to Orson Welles and had a daughter, Rebecca. With the lack of self delusion which gives modern youth such a refreshing advantage over its elders, husbands and daughters were irrelevant. They liked her looks, they liked the way she danced . . . they just liked her. And they liked her well enough to have more pictures of her around than of anyone else. From personal observation, I have remarked that G.I.'s, provided you get enough of them, can be relied on to show good taste in most things. The result of the *Yank* poll confirms my opinion.

So a girl with a Spanish father and an Anglo-Saxon mother becomes the typical American girl to thousands of American soldiers abroad, and that, too, is as it should be.

"Gilda," Rita Hayworth's last picture in 1945, is a dramatic affair, with Rita as a glamorous siren. I haven't seen it but I understand it is an "acting part." I wonder how the G.I.'s, most of them civilians by the time they see it, will like that. Whether they do or don't, they'll get the old Rita back again in her next picture, "Down to Earth." This is to be a technicolor extravaganza, evidently about gods and goddesses, as Rita is to play Terpsichore, who, as *Variety* and other publications dealing with mythology frequently remind us, was the Muse of the Dance.

If Terpsichore did come to earth, she might well have had a professional career like Rita's. Since the private lives of both the muse and the star are unknown to me, I can't draw a comparison there. For that I'd have to read up on mythology for one, and tune in on the Hollywood grapevine for the other, neither of which I have done.

Rita "Terpsichore" Hayworth has had several incarnations. She began her dancing career at the age of four. She is next heard of at the age of fourteen, when she joined the parental Cansino dance act in earnest. Then came a series of B pictures. Her first "part of consequence" (as the Columbia publicity describes it) was with Warner Oland in "Charlie Chan in Egypt." Did she have taped eyes, à la chinoise, in this, or banana-and-coffee complexion, à la moresque, I wonder?

Then came reincarnation. Rita discarded her Spanish name, gave away her dancing costumes, did something to her hair line, stuck a y into her mother's family name (Joseph Haworth, same family, had toured with Edwin Booth) and so on to the big time and "Cover Girl" and "Tonight and Every Night."

I prophesy that there will be more incarnations, different versions of the Haworth Hayworth dramatic talent, and through them all the same bold, laughing, American eyes will not quite conceal that quick, appealing look of a rather frightened little Spanish girl. Perhaps that's what appeals so much to the G.I.'s.

—P. C.