

**" WE'RE NOT
afraid "**

SITTING ON A POTENTIAL
MATRIMONIAL POWDER KEG,
BARBARA RUSH AND JEFF HUNTER
FACE DANGER SQUARELY

By Helen Weller

A strange thing happened at the glossy premiere of UI's *Magnificent Obsession*—something that could happen only in Hollywood.

As Jeff Hunter and his wife, Barbara Rush, walked into the theater, most of the crowd thrust their autograph books in front of Jeff. There was the unmistakable buzz: "Isn't she a lucky girl to be married to *him*."

It was a typical scene at a premiere—the handsome, popular movie star and his pretty wife by his side, basking in his glory.

Then, as the picture unfolded, a new star was born. Barbara, through a sensitive portrayal, had become the talk of the evening. "Who is she?" the audience murmured. "She'll be a great star."

As Jeff and Barbara walked out, the crowd swirled around them again—but this time many of them rushed to ask for *Barbara's* autograph. It was indeed Barbara's night and her movie future looks as bright as a gold nugget.

Already there are gossips quick to make something of Barbara's suddenly zooming career: "Now that she's becoming an important star, how is this happy marriage going to fare?"



The night of the *Magnificent Obsession* premiere was a turning point in the lives of Jeff and Barbara Hunter

During the three years of their marriage, Jeff and Barbara have been among the blithest young couples in town. Not a cloud shadowed their happiness, not the remotest threat to their marriage showed its sinister face. Their first year was the easiest. Jeff had captured the hearts of young moviegoers and had become one of the top leading

men at 20th Century-Fox. Although Barbara was an actress she wasn't getting ahead, but she was happy to submerge her career. It was Jeff's career, Jeff's earnings, Jeff's future that was everything in their household.

With the arrival of baby Christopher in the second year, Jeff's and Barbara's happiness seemed complete. Jeff's star continued to rise, and the only problem they had was when he had to go to England to make *Sailor of the King*. Still, it was a normal problem—the man of the house away on business. Plenty of married couples face it, and so did the Hunters.

But suddenly Barbara's career has catapulted upward. This is Barbara's year. It was Barbara who left on the long and far-off location tour—to Ireland to make *Captain Lightfoot* with Rock Hudson. And it was Jeff and the baby who remained at home.

Now what?

"I know the problems that face us," Jeff told me.

"I know them, too," Barbara interrupted. It was the day before Barbara left for Ireland. She smiled at her tall, husky husband and reached for his hand. "We're not afraid because we can face the truth."

"Look," said Jeff quickly, "we're not kidding ourselves. I know that in this town many of the broken marriages occur

when the man and the wife are both career-happy. But if two people accept the problems as a challenge that has to be met, there's nothing to fear.

"A lot depends upon the individuals themselves. You see," Jeff went on, "far from resenting Barbara's big break, I'm actually very proud of her. I've always wanted Barbara to continue with her career. She was an actress when I met her. It was that part of her personality that made me fall in love with her. I never wanted her to change. In fact, when she stayed home because of the baby and thought, for a time, that she wouldn't return to acting, I was disappointed. I knew that my girl needed the stimulation of acting if she were to be completely happy. This is as much a part of her as it is of me. When I saw the way people ran up to congratulate her after *Magnificent Obsession*, I was tickled. And I flipped when I read the rave reviews she got."

"He did, really," Barbara added, her eyes shining. "I'd never done anything important as an actress, you know, and after I got a taste of staying home with the baby I thought this was what I was meant to do. I was discouraged at not getting ahead in pictures and I thought maybe it would be better to stay home. But it was Hank," she said, using the name she calls Jeff, "who urged me to

take an active interest in my career again. If it hadn't been for him, I wouldn't have revived my career, I wouldn't have signed with UI, and I wouldn't have had *Magnificent Obsession* and everything else that followed."

"In her heart Barbara's an actress," Jeff explained. "She wouldn't have been satisfied if she didn't fulfill her creative ambitions. So I did my best to encourage her to stick to her career. That's my idea of marriage—not a husband who's so unsure of himself that he wants to keep his wife's ambitions and talents thwarted for fear she'll be competition, but a marriage where both parties are individuals and each should respect and encourage the other's individuality. It never occurred to me that Barbara's success might hurt our marriage. And it still doesn't. I'm not that kind of a guy, and she's not that kind of a girl."

"The only thing that's changed about me," Barbara added, "is that I'm doing more important roles in more important pictures. It means a lot to me when some people at the studio say to me now, 'Why, Barbara, I didn't know you could act!' That gives me a thrill. But it doesn't minimize Hank's own fine success or his active career. In fact, it just gives us both more to talk about."

Jeff was thoughtful for a moment, then he said slowly, "I don't say that every-

thing's going to run as smooth as silk. But we're not afraid to face whatever comes up. We've had to face up to some serious problems recently, and if more arise, we'll do the same. But we're not going to cross our bridges till we come to them."

What about money? Does Barbara's increased salary make her more independent at home, upset the budget wheels in the household?

"Both our salaries go into the same pot," Barbara explained. "We have loads of plans for the future, and money figures in them. But we never think, 'This is mine,' or 'I paid for this.' Everything we have is 'ours.' Besides, it so happens that Hank earns more than I do, so the balance is still as it should be. But, really, it would make no difference anyway. We have a common goal."

"We're not going to kid ourselves or anyone else," Jeff, the realist, went on. "There are certain situations that will come up now that there's a greater demand on Barbara as an actress. Acting is hard work and when you come home from a day at the studio you can be irritable and jumpy. With both of us working pretty hard, some of our arguments stem from the fact that we're terribly fatigued after a day's work, and often both of us come home tense. Then we have to watch out!

Jeff Hunter & Barbara Rush

[Continued]



"Just the other night we had an argument that had absolutely no serious foundation at all. We blew up because we'd both been working that day and came home very tired. We'd planned to go out to dinner and Barbara's mother, who baby sits for us, was going with us. Since I was going to be home earlier, Barbara had asked me to get a sitter. I forgot all about it. When she came home and learned we didn't have a sitter, she became upset and thought it was all my fault. We had an argument. It blew over in no time and, P.S., we got a sitter and went out after all.

"We know there will be occasions when she'll come home from work more tired and nervous than she'd ordinarily be. That's natural. And I'll come in the front door in a foul mood myself, when a day's acting hasn't gone as I liked. We know it can lead to an explosion. But that still doesn't worry us. No one can live a thoroughly tranquil existence. Marriages aren't made that way.

"But on the credit side, Barbara is fulfilling her basic drive and she's a better adjusted person for having a good

career. I think if she stayed home and gave up her career, she'd have a different kind of fatigue—the kind that comes from frustration and conflict. Her work will make her a happier girl and easier to live with. I'm 100 per cent for her career, and we can overcome any little argument that gets stirred up if 'nerves' get in the way."

"Hank really is happy for any good thing that comes my way," Barbara said, her eyes shining. "It isn't just talk. Listen to this: I was anxious to get the lead in Captain Lightfoot but I thought it was too good to be true. I made a bet with Bud Westmore, head of make-up, at the studio. He bet me \$10 I'd get the part, I bet I wouldn't. One day Hank and I went to the studio and Bud came over and said, 'Just heard some news about you—and it adds up to the fact that you owe me ten bucks.' I was happy. But you should have seen Hank. He was so glad for me that he even paid my bet then and there!"

Jeff smiled, then he became reflective. "I deliberately tried to analyze my true reactions to how I felt about my wife's increasing stature as an actress. Let's be frank about it—in the past, any time there were publicity stories, photo layouts of us, I was the main one. Barbara was in it primarily as my wife.

"Well," Jeff went on slowly, "the other day a national magazine requested a big

photographic layout on Barbara. This was the test, I told myself. Would I feel at all strange at taking a back seat for the first time in our marriage? I honestly wanted to find out. The photog gave directions and it was 'Barbara do this,' 'Barbara do that.'

"Well," he grinned, as though he'd found the answer to a big challenge, "it didn't bother me one bit. I was glad for Barbara, just as she's been glad for me when any publicity break came my way. Neither of us is crowding the other, so why worry?"

"Our biggest problem is not so much our double careers," Barbara said, "but our separation from the baby. Jeff and I can follow each other. In fact, this summer he'll probably be in Europe, too, to make a picture. It's being away from Chris that's hard. But even there, we're lucky. My mother and sister live next door and Mother always comes in and takes care of the baby when I have to be away. There's no fear of leaving the baby to a strange nurse.

"Another reason we're not afraid that we might have to face the typical Hollywood problems," Barbara said slowly, "is that Hank is the man in the house. I'm acting because I love it, and I feel that I should certainly follow through the break I got. But I'm not a dominant or businesslike person, and I don't want to

run things. Hank, on the other hand, is a very smart businessman and has a strong and protective personality. He's one of those husbands a girl can lean on and say, 'Darling, you do all the planning and worrying for the family.' And," she said, her eyes twinkling, "he does!

"When he was away on location in England for four months last year, I was lost. It wasn't only a case of missing Hank, but I missed the man in the house. I didn't know how to plan, what to do, how to handle the money. Hank takes care of everything. I have no mind for money, but Hank does. He's like a mountain of strength to me. We have a business manager, but that's only for those times when Hank's away so that he can take care of things and I don't have to be burdened by finances. Otherwise, Hank takes a firm management of everything, and I'm satisfied to leave everything to him."

What about those times when Barbara will be working in a picture while Jeff is between films or on layoff? Many combustions in two-star marriages occur when the man has some period of enforced idleness while the wife's up to her ears in work.

"No danger there," Jeff laughed. "I'm never idle for a minute. I've got a million side projects outside of acting. I keep just as busy when I'm not in a picture as I do

when I'm working. I'm crazy about hunting, fishing and skiing. When I have a few days off, I like to get myself to the High Sierras and lose myself.

"As for me," Barbara said, "I'm a do-nothing girl when I'm not working. Hank is always Doing Things. That's great—it's healthy for our marriage. When I'm free, I love nothing better than to stay home and be with the baby. There are plenty of evenings when I sit and read a book, while Hank plays the piano or is buried in his photography. Neither of us is deprived.

"We're not on a Hollywood merry-go-round, either. Most of our friends are non-professionals. We want to have more babies."

"Three," interrupted Jeff.

"Three," said Barbara dreamily. "My career—whether it's going up or down—won't stop us from having our family. We're leading normal lives, and yet we have the excitement and common interest of our work. That's good for us. Hank and I would like to do a play together in stock. I'm not an outsider to his work, he understands mine. Is that bad?" she laughed.

"We don't know all the answers," said Jeff. "But we know ourselves. We're willing to make compromises in order to have our cake and eat it. But so far it hasn't been necessary for us to make too

many compromises. We're prepared for anything. No matter what typically Hollywood problems come up in the years ahead," he said slowly, gazing affectionately at his wife, "we feel that we can face up to them. We're not afraid."

Jeffrey Hunter is starring in 20th Century-Fox's Princess of the Nile.

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