

the ladies want to be his consolation prize

• Divorce wasn't the problem—Jeff Hunter and Barbara Rush almost tripped over each other racing to court. Nor was it money—they're both loaded, had a long-term insurance policy stashed away that would have put them on easy street when the fans got tired of them, or vice-versa. The worm in the apple was custody of son Christopher. Said Jeff: "He's the only thing in my life really worth fighting for. I hope Barbara will agree to joint custody. But if there's to be a fight, now's the time to do it." It was a fight to the finish. But in January, they started the new year with an amicable settlement about custody. The ink was barely dry on the divorce papers before Jeff made a twosome again. Debra Paget was first. Said Sheilah Graham: "Debra's consoling Jeff." Then there was Nancy Gates. Said the HOLLYWOOD REPORTER: "Jeff's trying to forget it all with Nancy." Next came Rita Moreno. Said the H. R.: "Rita thinks Jeff's the nicest." Then

Helene Stanley, Johnny Stompanato's ex. The list goes on and on, but it all adds up to a great big, brightly lit torch. Sidney Skolsky put it this way: "Jeff never speaks of it. He hasn't sought comfort in the bottle or anything like that; he's just a lot quieter than he used to be." Meanwhile, Jeff's furnishing his bachelor apartment in Westwood—designing and building all the furniture himself—as though he intends to keep his third finger ringless for keeps. Barbara's still in the family home, dating Floyd Simmons, watching Jeff's fan-magazine coverage double since she left him at court. If she's torching it, too, the lady isn't talking. The closest they've come is being part of the same crowd at the Academy Awards. Sentimentalists say they should have waited—they never did get to celebrate an anniversary. First time, Barbara was working all day, Jeff all night. Second year, Jeff was on location in England. Third, he had the flu. Fourth? Well, it's all over now.

