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# THE FACTS OF LIFE

## CASANOVA BROWN

(International-RKO)



**CASANOVA BROWN** confronts Gary Cooper with what his prospective father-in-law (Frank Morgan) describes as "a very droll situation—fatherhood on the wedding eve." In order to put one of the cinema's favourite sons in this delicate but perennially popular dilemma, a new independent studio named International, has hired Nunnally Johnson to re-write and reproduce the old stage hit, *Little Accident*, by Floyed Dell and Thomas Mitchell, and has given to competent Sam Wood the job of directing the film.

That is a fairly massive array of screen talent for any studio to muster, and on principle I wish International the best of luck in their bid for independence. In actual fact, however, although the producers may bend they do not break any of the rules of picture-making, certainly not those of the Hays Office. Like most films which attempt to deal with some of the facts of life, *Casanova Brown* suffers somewhat from an excess of delicacy. It is another of those stories (c.f. *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*) which are so elementary in their conception of conception that they come close to supporting the gooseberry-bush theory of creation. Boy meets girl; an early morning call on a Justice of the Peace; girl goes back to break the glad news to her parents at breakfast; the parents are not gladdened, and the girl, being a minor, stays home with mother while the hour-old groom departs sorrowing—and then, hey presto, the required interval of time having elapsed, there is the girl in a maternity hospital!

It seems to be almost as simple as that in *Casanova Brown*. But in other respects, life is not so simple for the hero, the heroine, or their little accident. Anybody, even a mild Professor of English, who is saddled with the name of Casanova (inherited from "an historical character who was rather fast") starts with a handicap when trying to convince fond parents that he will be a suitable son-in-law. But his name is almost the least of Casanova Brown's worries. When his mother-in-law, an ardent star-gazer (Patricia Collinge), informs him that the marriage has catastrophic possibilities because Sagittarius is at that moment in the fifth solar house of Neptune, she is not softened towards him by his assertion that astrology is sheer bunk. In addition, mother-in-law disapproves of smoking almost as heartily as she approves of horoscopes, and when the agitated bridegroom manages, with the aid of a hidden cigarette-butt, to burn down her palatial home, it does almost look as if the stars in their courses are fighting against him.

Therefore, Professor Brown leaves his bride (Teresa Wright) and her smouldering parents among the ashes of their home and, some time later, imagining that the marriage has been annulled, prepares to wed a girl in his home town (Anita Louise). But on his second wedding eve comes word of the

blessed event resulting from the first—an item of news which sends the hero rushing off to a maternity hospital in Chicago and precipitates the story into a farcical welter of father-love and mid-wifery.

THE hero's initial encounter with his bride's parents and the conflagration arising therefrom provide the film with one of its three or four really funny situations. Another occurs when he goes to the maternity hospital seeking information, and finds himself, to his acute embarrassment, being apparently treated as a patient. And a third arises when, having kidnapped his daughter to prevent her being put on the adoption market, he struggles with the Feeding and Care of Baby in a way which the Plunket System would never countenance.

In general, although they are not likely to set the Pacific on fire with their first venture, International do succeed in turning out a cheeky, occasionally witty farce, which fails to reach the top of its class only because the same theme was much better handled in *Bachelor Mother*, because some of the whimsy is laboured, and because Gary Cooper, for all his versatility, has now rather too many grey hairs on the temples and too many crowsfeet around the eyes to be completely convincing as a fond parent with his first-born. He is required to be not merely proud of his biological achievement; he has to be absolutely gaga about it. For such a part somebody more essentially juvenile was needed. Cooper might have got away with it a few years ago, but anno domini is now fighting against him. His present air of determined nonchalance and desperate male helplessness when confronted with the facts of infantile life suggested to me nothing so much as a husky high-school boy who has been caught galumphing about in rompers in a play-pen.

## CLAUDIA

(20th Century-Fox)



I PREFER the rather more realistic treatment of the facts of life (and death) which is contained in this picture. And although it may be only a passing phase, I am also predisposed towards films which put the emphasis on character rather than on incident.

Claudia, the child-wife, is very much a "character"—an exasperating, even a maddening creature; the female equivalent of the hobbledohoy, neither a girl nor a woman. But as portrayed by Dorothy McGuire, who first created the role in Rose Franken's play on Broadway, Claudia's gawky posturing, her infuriating fidgeting, and what the psychologists would call her mother-fixation, are not merely believable but even authentic. There is, of course, exaggeration in the role: so much so that Claudia is less a portrait than a caricature of a type which, fortunately for the sanity of the human race (and particularly of husbands), is fairly rare. Yet, as in all good caricature, there is a solid basis of exact observation.

(continued on next page)