

PROJECT

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*on
Gloria Swanson*

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Nugent

On "Gloria Swanson"

Real name Mr. Winston

When 'Gloria Swanson' came to New York and became one of the most popular 'hostesses' to be found in any of the night clubs, he had already left behind him a colorful career in Chicago. Mr. Winston, who had adopted the name of the glamorous 'Gloria Swanson' as his own had been a darling of the underworld and sporting element in the windy city. In 1928 he was hostess at the 'Book Store,' a speakeasy-night club which immediately grew in popularity once he was known to be a permanent fixture there.

'Gloria' had been a perennial winner at the 'drags' in Chicago. His net and sequin evening gowns were well known, habitual and expected. As a matter of fact there were very few persons who had ever seen him in male attire at all. Seldom coming on the street in the daytime, breakfasting when the rest of the world was dining, dining when the rest of the world was taking their final nap before arising for the day, his public life was lived in evening gowns, his private life in boa-trimmed negligees. Prohibition was at its most successfully unsuccessful, crime at its peak, graft the order of the day and life lived at highly accelerated pace. Winston, plump, jolly and bawdy; with a pleasant 'whiskey-voice'; with his every gesture and mannerism more feminine than those of any female; his corsets pushing his plumpness into a swelling and well-modeled bosom; his chocolate-brown complexion beautiful

Nugent

'Swanson'

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and his skin soft and well-cared-for; was just the sort of playmate for the fast-living element. He had the free loud camaraderie that distinguished the famous Texas Guinan. Gangsters and hoodlums, pimps and gamblers, whores and entertainers showered him with feminine ~~gaw~~ gee-gaws and trappings; spoke of him as 'her,' and quite relegated him to the female's functions of supplying good times and entertainment. He could also cook. His 'Book Store' was a rendezvous protected by the fact that his 'protector' was a big shot; a well-known underworld figure. and all went well until his 'boy friend' had a fit of jealousy, a tantrum of violence during which he practically wrecked the joint. It was then that all protection ceased. The police began raiding the place, but even that novelty began to wear thin and soon it was no longer the same pleasure spot it had been. So 'Gloria' came to New York where he had little trouble in finding employment in a popular cellar night spot on 134th Street in Harlem. Here he reigned regally, entertaining with his 'hail-fellow-well-met' freedom, so perfect a woman that frequently clients came and left never suspecting his true sex. He also sang bawdy parodies and danced a little, all very casually and quite impersonally, lifting modestly to just above the knee his perennial net and sequins, velvet-trimmed evening-gown-skirts displaying with professional coyness a length of silk-clad limb. He had come to New York at a time when 'male' and 'female' impersonation was at a peak as night club entertainment. Jean ~~Malin~~ Malin was the toast of the notorious gangster 'Legs' Diamond's Club Abby; the Ubangi Club had a chorus

of singing, dancing, be-ribboned and be-rouged 'pansies,' and Gladys Bently who dressed in male evening attire, sang and accompanied herself on the piano; the well-liked Jackie Mabile was one of Harlem's favorite black-faced comediennes and wore mens street attire habitually; the famous Hamilton Lodge 'drag' balls were becoming more and more notorious and gender was becoming more and more conjectural. Onto this scene swept 'Gloria Swanson,' with her 'loud friendly expansiveness, her 'boy friends', furs and evening gowns; her ever-ready wit and lace-draped apartment. He easily became and remained queen of them all. That is, until Mayor La Guardia's police began to object to the sexes confusing the less sophisticated denizens of New York with such indiscriminate interchange of habiliment and behavior. 'Gloria's' admirers could not even recognize 'her' in the masquerade forced upon him by this sudden tightening of some 'stupid' law. And masquerade of the most successful and impenetrable sort it most certainly was when 'Gloria' wore male attire. Then, 'never-raining-but-that-it-pours,' the erstwhile glamorous 'Gloria' became ill; an illness that put an end to his attempt to readjust himself to the constriction forced upon his talents, and 'she' was forced to withdraw from public life altogether.