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O. SOGLOW
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WATER SPECTACLE put on by Todd before he became involved in new movie processes was *A Night in Venice*, produced at New York's Jones Beach.

TODD CONTINUED

Ryunon had described Todd as "the greatest natural gambler" he had ever known. This pronouncement was a great disservice to Todd, who thenceforth tried to live up to the billing. Despite numerous personally experienced indications to the contrary, he refused to admit that he could not beat the percentages on horses and cards. Somehow he would get everything straightened out in the end.

To that end, Todd went to Hollywood, where he had a deal with Universal-International to produce a picture from Edna Ferber's novel, *Great Son*. To establish his identity with a bang in a community he expected shortly to take over, he decided to stage *Up in Central Park* in the Hollywood Bowl. It turned out to be one of his less brilliant inspirations. New and much bigger scenery had to be built, additional technical equipment provided, more singers and dancers and stagehands added to the troupe, the orchestra augmented. The deficits were sensational.

The Hollywood Bowl misfire was the prelude to a year of almost uninterrupted disaster. *Great Son* never got produced. The fact that Todd was simultaneously operations manager of the Del Mar Race Track near San Diego ("Where The Turf Meets The Surf") may have had something to do with it. Like a saloon keeper who samples his own wares too enthusiastically, he kept betting \$2,000, \$3,000, \$4,000 in an afternoon; sometimes a couple of thousand on a single race. At one gin rummy session he dropped \$15,000. His poker losses were staggering.

Bad luck was accompanied by tragedy: in the summer of 1946 Bertha, Todd's wife of 20 years, died of heart failure while under an anesthetic for a minor operation. The next year, a couple of months after Todd's marriage to Joan Blondell (from whom he was divorced in 1950), he was named defendant in an involuntary bankruptcy proceeding in the New York Federal Court. Liabilities: \$1,105,616.78. There were 116 creditors, ranging from the U.S. Treasury to Womrath's rental library to the Royal Window Cleaning Corporation.

With time out for adjournments the hearings on the bankruptcy lasted about three years. As the hearings went on it became startlingly apparent just how breezy Todd's business procedures had been. For instance, the usual way for a man to jog his memory in such a financial dispute is to consult his old check stubs. This wouldn't have worked with Todd. "It was a very lax, I admit, procedure," he testified, "but there were no stubs, if that's what you mean, there were no stubs."

Some men in Todd's predicament would have blown their brains out or at least headed for a sanitarium. Todd was saved mainly by his iron nerve and his creditors' realization that you can't win with a dead horse. While the bankruptcy hearings were still going on he dreamed up, promoted and produced a splendid musical comedy roughhouse, *As the Girls Go*, that starred Bobby Clark, cost \$375,000 and ran for 420 performances. How does a man in hock for \$1,105,616.78 raise \$375,000 to put on a show? Todd did it and followed it up with another big musical, *Peep Show* (278 performances), which featured several numbers composed

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