

## Edna Purviance

Born: Olga Edna Purviance

*She faked her way into Charlie's heart.*

Oct 21, 1895 (Paradise Valley NV) – Jan 13, 1958 (Hollywood CA)

**W**HAT CAN YOU DO if you're wealthy, as Charlie was, after you find the girl of your dreams, and a romance doesn't work out as you had once envisioned?

And yet, your heart tells you that something memorable must be done to let the lady know just how deeply you cared. It must be something out of the ordinary. Something that says you're not just another guy who takes what he wants from a girl and disappears. That wasn't what happened. Charlie's head may have called off the relationship, but his heart still yearned for the lady.

*Yearned!* Yes, that's the perfect word. If you're Charlie and your situation is as described above, how about softening the ache by sending a monthly check to the lady for the rest of her life, no strings attached?

Never mind the cost, remember it's the act that's important. The lady already knows *who* you are. This is to let her know *what* you aren't, that you aren't like other men, and that's exactly what Charlie did.

Edna Purviance, born in 1895 to Madison and Louisa Purviance was the lady, and she received a check from Charlie every month from when they broke up in 1923, at the age of twenty-eight, until her death in 1958, at the age of sixty-two.

And here's the story of Edna Purviance and the lover who for 34 years, never quite quit caring.

When Edna was three, the family moved a hundred miles from Paradise Valley, Nevada, where Edna was born, to the town of Lovelock where they took over management of the Singer Hotel. Four years later, with the hotel in the throes of financial failure and their marriage on the rocks, Madison and Louisa divorced, with Edna remaining with her mother.

In 1904, Louisa married Robert Nurnberger, a plumber, and the family lived together until Robert's death in 1913.

Now eighteen and head-turning attractive, Edna packed her suitcase and traveled 300 miles west to San Francisco where she

moved in with a married half-sister, Bessie, who helped her find employment as a secretary.

Thirty miles across San Francisco Bay, near the town of Niles, a man named Charlie and a crew of script-writers, set designers, and construction workers were in the beginning stages of building a theatrical set for the filming of a silent movie titled, *A Night Out*.

Everywhere there were things needing done in preparation for filming, from matching the visual imagery of the movie set to the never-ending litany of script revisions, to identifying the perfect actress to play the leading lady, but overall, the project was on track.

Returning to the construction site after spending the morning and noon hour across the bay, one of Charlies' associates was enthusiastically telling anyone who would listen, about the strikingly beautiful girl he had seen eating lunch by herself in a San Francisco café.

That's when Charlie asked his associate if he remembered the name of the café. He did, and Charlie tucked "Tate's Café" into his memory.

On the very next day, Charlie was in Tate's Café describing the girl to the owner, who may have responded by saying something like, "There's only one girl who comes in here with that kind of beauty, and that's Edna, a secretary from across the street."

Not wanting to be appear too forward to the young lady, Charlie asked the café owner if he would mind arranging a meeting, so he could meet Edna. The café owner agreed, and Charlie met Edna, and Edna did not disappoint!

She was stunning!

But she also presented a problem.

Charlie knew that without any acting experience, she would never make it as a leading lady. Still, she was so very easy-on-the-eyes, so naturally beautiful, that he arranged to have her hired as "window dressing," a theatrical term used to describe someone strategically placed on a movie set to add interest, or intrigue, or pathos, in fact, anything that might help the audience understand the screenplay, especially in a silent movie.

But Charlie was smitten, enamored, a goner, twitterpated, in love, infatuated, whatever descriptor you want to use, and Edna's face and her smile ran through his mind like an endless loop of celluloid.

A few days later Charlie received an invitation to a dinner party and he asked Edna if she would accompany him.

She said she would.

At some point during the evening, Charlie told Edna that he could hypnotize her, and do it in a matter of seconds. Edna laughed, saying she had never been hypnotized in her life, and she couldn't possibly be hypnotized now.

Charlie pressed the issue and challenged Edna to let him hypnotize her, and she relented.

Charlie quieted the room and announced he was about to prove to his date that he could hypnotize her and do it quickly.

As the party-goers gathered around to watch, Charlie stood Edna against a wall, wiggled his fingers in front of her eyes while evoking some nonsense mumbo-jumbo, and then he leaned in close to her face and mouthed the words, "Fake it," and Edna collapsed as if she'd been shot through the heart, and in fact, she had to be carried to a couch.

Charlie was impressed!

Not only with Edna's ability to follow directions, but that faked collapse? He'd never seen it done better! It almost had him convinced, and with that, Edna had not only won Charlie's heart, but the role of his leading lady in the silent movie that was about to be filmed in nearby Niles.

The two became an *item* in lover's terms and were seen everywhere together, and many expected Chaplin – yes, Charlie was Charlie Chaplin<sup>1</sup> – to make Edna his permanent and very personal leading lady, but it wasn't to be, and it was Charlie who called off the relationship.

Later, he would question his decision and think about how he might let Edna know how much he cared for her, but what?

In addition to Edna's movie debut as the headwaiter's wife in Chaplin's, *A Night Out*, she was the farmer's daughter in *The Tramp*, Carmen in *Burlesque on Carmen*, the girl stolen by the gypsies in *The Vagabond*, and the immigrant in *The Immigrant*. In fact, she co-starred with Charlie in thirty-four movies.

If you're watching a Chaplin movie in which Edna has a role, and you're wondering which actress is Edna, ninety-nine percent of the time you'll be right if you pick the prettiest.

In 1923, after starring in *A Woman of Paris* (written, produced, and directed by Charlie Chaplin), Edna's movie career ended, but not her pay checks.

Even after she married Jack Squire in 1938, the checks from Charles Chaplin Productions kept right on coming and they never stopped until she passed away on January 13, 1958.

Charlie lived nineteen years beyond Edna's death, and in his autobiography, he says only, "I had reservations about Edna. I was uncertain of her, and for that matter uncertain of myself."<sup>2</sup>

But what Charlie proved, most certainly to Edna and now to you, was that the thing for which he was most guilty, was second-guessing with his mind, the feelings of his heart.

Granted, there may be times when second-guessing a relationship is the right thing to do, but you'd better be sure!

Because when second-guessing misses its mark, it doesn't matter whether you're famous like Charlie Chaplin, or virtually unknown like the rest of us, it shares a common name.

It's called loneliness.

And it hurts.

<sup>1</sup> *Stories from History's Dust Bin* (additional reading):

Vol 2, Jun 16: Charlie Chaplin with Stan Laurel

Vol 3, Oct 13: Charlie Chaplin with E. C. Segar

<sup>2</sup> *Charles Chaplin: My Autobiography*, Simon and Schuster, First Edition (1964).

*Ever has it been that love knows not its own depth  
until the hour of separation.*

Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) Poet, writer