

Confidential

TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

July, 1955 * p. 13

THE **Wife**

Clark Gable

Forgot!



**JOSEPHINE DILLON...
THE FIRST MRS. GABLE**

It went in one big ear and out the other when the girl who had made him what he is today asked for a helping hand. So far as Rhett Butler was concerned, she was "Gone With The Wind!"

by Alfred Garvey



BRUSHED OFF BY GABLE, Josephine lives with her memories of him. She keeps pictures of Clark, and scrap-books of yellowed clippings in a chest that was a wedding gift to the couple from silent movie star Valentino.

YOU HAVE TO PARK YOUR ILLUSIONS with your car when you drive up to 12746 Landale Street in North Hollywood.

One glance tells you the building before you is a converted barn — and not much changed at that. Paint is peeling from its sides, its roof sags dejectedly. Inside are two large rooms, drafty and cold when the winter rains and fog roll in from the Pacific.

The furniture is worn and dilapidated. Wherever your eye turns, it picks up the giveaway signs of poverty. The penny-pinching, tomorrow's-rent-day, got-to-pay-the-gas-bill kind of poverty.

The tall, kindly gray-haired woman who comes to the door might be someone's grandmother. But she isn't.

She's Mrs. Clark Gable. The first — and the forgotten — Mrs. Gable. She's 71 now, a time of life when most women sit back with their memories and rock away their few remaining years. But that's not for Mrs. Gable. She works hard with, and desperately needs, the few drama students she coaches these days — to keep the wolf from the door. And it's just as well there's not much time for reminiscing; the memories would be more bitter than sweet.

Just three blocks away from the Landale Street barn is Ventura Boulevard, one of California's super-highways. When he's in Hollywood, commuting to and from his luxurious home at 4525 Pettit Street in Encino, Gable uses it daily. Sometimes he zooms by in one of his half-dozen racing cars, on his way to the studio



Clark Gable's first wife, now 71 years old, makes a meager living as a dramatic coach. She is shown here at the door of her combination living quarters and studio, housed in a dilapidated, made-over barn.

where he makes those he-man movies that have the world's women swooning at his feet. Nights, he's in the back of a sleek, chauffeur-driven limousine — bound for one of his new and youthful conquests.

Only a block. But it might as well be a continent, because forgetting comes easy to Gable. He's "King" Clark now, the unquestioned monarch of movieland. And a king can do no wrong.

... Or can he?

Is it wrong to ignore the woman who launched you on your way to the top, while showering gems, furs, gowns and money on a little French model? Is it wrong to hand one wife a million-dollar settlement — and let another grub to pay the grocer?

They Lived on Money She Earned

Not if you're King Clark and good at forgetting — forgetting such things as that summer in 1923, when the city of Portland, Oregon was having a Rose Festival and a talented actress and movie coach, Josephine Dillon, was hired to present the pageant.

She was hard at work producing the show in a downtown office building when the phone went on the blink. The man who came to fix it had big ears, a captivating grin and a consuming ambition. He wanted to be an actor. After the phone was fixed, he and Miss Dillon got into a long conversation about dramatics. He was back the next day for more talk, and again the next day.

When Miss Dillon left for Hollywood, he followed. A year later they were married in Los Angeles by gospel minister A. C. Smithers. Josephine traded the Dillon name to become Mrs. Clark Gable.

It didn't take her long to discover quite a bit about her new young husband. He didn't even have a grammar school education. He knew nothing about acting. And he was penniless. They lived on the money Josephine

THE WIFE CLARK GABLE FORGOT

made as a dramatic coach. There wasn't much of it, because her best pupil was her big-eared husband; his lessons were "on the house." He sopped up what she knew like a sponge.

They were poor as church mice. They had to budget to save 25 cents a week — so Clark could go to the movies. If they managed to save 50 cents, Josephine got to go along. It wasn't for amusement. In the darkened theaters, Josephine used to steal side glances at her young husband. He was studying the leading men like a hawk — learning, learning.

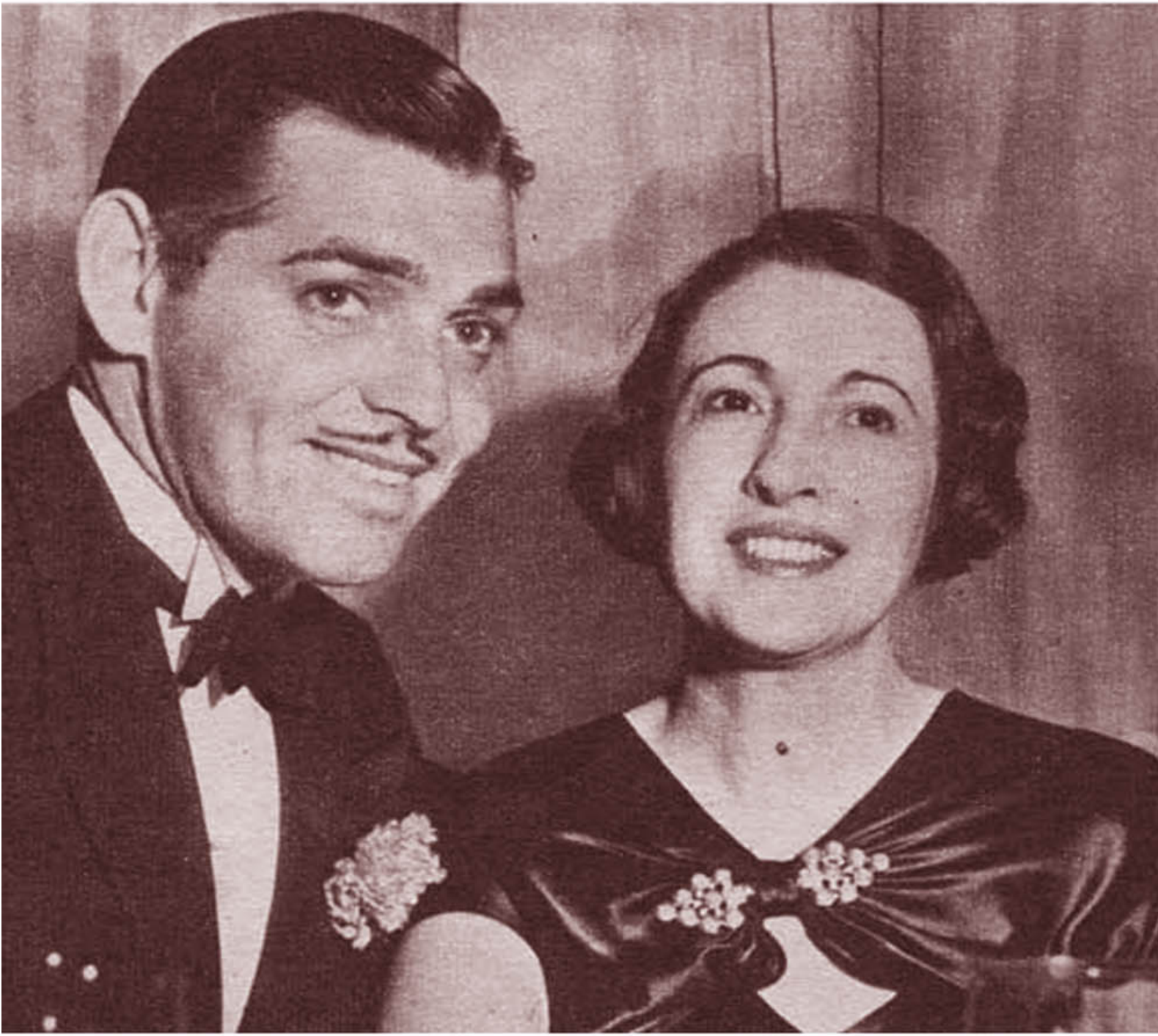
Three hard years passed before Clark got a bid for anything better than an extra's bit. Then Broadway beckoned. In New York, they lived in furnished rooms, while Clark tried and flopped, tried again and flopped again. Josephine coached and encouraged him, put him in his first pair of spats, bought him a cane and taught him how to use it.

This Was the Beginning of the End

Clark was beginning to be noticed — by producers and directors. And by other women. On tour with a stock company in Houston, Texas he met an oil-rich widow, Rhea Langham. Josephine thought nothing of it until the Gables landed back in Hollywood and she discovered Rhea was there, too.

It was the beginning of the end. Josephine was only a little surprised when Gable came home one night in 1931 and asked for a divorce. She didn't have to inquire who was to be the next Mrs. Gable. Clark told her, in that clipped, vibrant voice that was to make him millions.

He was marrying Rhea. He didn't say and didn't have to say why he was dumping Josephine. She knew the answer; she'd given him everything she had to further his ambition and his career. She was through.



After seven years of marriage, ambitious Clark met rich widow Rhea Langham. Josephine had already given him everything she had to further his career, didn't have to inquire why she was being dumped.

THE WIFE CLARK GABLE FORGOT

Josephine went into court, charged desertion and non-support. She refused to accept a penny in alimony from Gable. As his star rose, she began slipping down the ladder.

If Clark Gable cared, he never showed it. Four years after their divorce, his second wife began calling Josephine on the phone, demanding she stop using the Gable name. It was the only thing Clark had ever given her and—for a few years—Josephine was stubborn. She clung to it, as it was bestowed on one glamour gal after another. And she kept track of it, as though she believed it might one day be hers again, exclusively.

Lives with Her Memories

But she gave it back to Clark some years ago. Today, she's Josephine Dillon once more. She can't forget her loving memories of Clark, though. Josephine is a religious woman who believes in two things—God and Clark. In a corner of her ramshackle, drafty studio there's a big chest—a wedding present from Rudolph Valentino—crammed with photos and yellowed newspaper clippings. All about Clark.

There are the headlined stories when he divorced Rhea . . . gossip column items linking him with Norma Shearer, Loretta Young and other queens of the Hollywood blue book. Stacks of pictures from the days when he married Carole Lombard, and then Lady Ashley.

Clark was at his peak of forgetting in those days. For the bad luck that had plagued Josephine all her life struck another blow—illness that kept her in and out of sickbeds for years. At about the time he was marrying Lady Ashley, Josephine's condition became so critical at a Hollywood hospital that she had to do something she had avoided all her life—ask Clark for help.

The sting of being a beggar was not to be her only pain. Although King Gable was earning \$300,000 a year at M-G-M, her plea went in one big ear and out the other. Friends advanced the pittance she needed to get back home. Back to work she went, to pay off her debts—never again to ask the idol she created for one penny.

THE WIFE CLARK GABLE FORGOT**"He Is My Creation"**

But she cannot hide the fact that Gable is still her pride and joy. In those rare moments when she'll talk about him at all, she says merely, "He is the King and I'm nothing;" or, "I follow his career closely. Frankly, he is my creation."

Even that recognition is denied her by Clark. In the only reference he ever made to her after their divorce, the King grudgingly said, "She taught me timing."

But then, royalty has a right to a bad memory. And Clark's partial amnesia may be a natural. There's evidence, for instance, that he may have forgotten his own age. His official biographies say he's 54. Josephine is 71 and recalls, all too vividly, that Clark is exactly 10 years younger than she — making him 61.

There's one possible explanation for the discrepancy of seven years. That's exactly the length of time he was married to Josephine.

It could be that he just decided to wipe out all recollection of those years —and deduct them from his age. If that's the answer, you have to hand it to him. When it comes to forgetting—
Gable is King. ▲▲▲

