



**DONNA  
MILLS**

Her Abby Ewing  
wants it all on  
'Knots Landing'



# Playing villain is paying off for Donna Mills

By Carolyn McGuire

Last year, the evil Mark St. Claire and the dreaded Wolfbridge Group wreaked havoc on the nice folks who live in "Knots Landing." This year they were replaced by the devious Paul Galveston, and although he recently died, his henchmen are busy carrying out orders.

Whoever shows up as the next villain, chances are his or her work won't be easy. That's because at least one resident—Abby Ewing—knows how to dish nasty with the best of them. Only Alexis Carrington Colby Dexter, played by Joan Collins on "Dynasty," and Angela Channing, portrayed by Jane Wyman on "Falcon Crest," rival Abby Ewing, played by Donna Mills, for best prime-time female villain.

"When we were casting the role of Abby, we were looking for a homey type, someone whom the other women characters would trust," says David Jacobs, creator of "Knots Landing." "It was our intention to have this nice person gain the trust of the other women and then cause trouble for them."

"We didn't want the other characters and the audience to know that there was a scheming person under this nice facade. We wanted her to come on as a good person and then evolve into a vixen."

And, did she ever. The woman behind the best eyes on TV is a former Chicagoan who believes she had to convince producers that she was right for the part. Until Abby came along, Mills generally was typecast as a victim.

"I think it had to do with being a blond and having blue eyes," says Mills. "I had an innocent, vulnerable quality. I just kept playing victims. It was fun at first, but I started to hate it."

"When I heard about the Abby part, I



Abby Ewing [Donna Mills] goes up against the evil Paul Galveston [Howard Duff], middle, while husband Gary [Ted Shackelford] looks on in "Knots Landing."

said this is a character that I'd like to play, but the producers are never going to cast me because they think I'm too soft. They don't think I have a hard enough edge. The only way I felt I could change their mind about me for the role was if I read for the part."

She did and the next day the role was hers.

Jacobs, on the other hand, says the producers were aware of Mills' role as a victim. In fact, this aspect attracted them to her. It was a perfect example of creative type-casting, he said.

Mills joined the "Knots Landing" [9 p.m. Thursdays on CBS-Ch. 2] cast as the divorced sister-in-law of Karen Fairgate [played by Michele Lee] in 1980, a year after the series premiered as a spinoff of "Dallas." At first, Abby worked as a bookkeeper at "Knots Landing Motors," but it wasn't long before she wrecked Gary Ewing's [Ted Shackelford] marriage

to sweet Valene [Joan Van Ark] and traded her calculator for a bigger job as Gary's wife.

Mills was born in Chicago as Donna Jean Miller. She graduated in 1958 from Taft High School as an honors student and enrolled as a speech and drama major at the University of Illinois. A year later she dropped out to pursue a career in Chicago area theaters and dance companies, appearing in local productions of "Guys and Dolls," "Bye Bye, Birdie" and "Come Blow Your Horn."

For three months, she toured in the national company of "My Fair Lady." From there she settled in New York and made her TV debut as a regular on the daytime soap, "The Secret Storm." Her Broadway debut was as the sultan's wife [Woody Allen picked her] in "Don't Drink the Water."

After her 1967 movie debut in "The Incident," she returned to New York for three years in another daytime soap, "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing." Then Mills got a guest spot on Burt Reynolds' TV series, "Dan August." That role led to an important career move. Reynolds' friend, Clint Eastwood, was looking for a female lead for "Play Misty for Me," a 1971 film. At Reynolds' insistence, Eastwood looked at the "Dan August" episode and offered Mills the part.

Next came a short-lived sitcom, "The Good Life," about a couple who traded their own business for jobs as a butler and maid. Mills co-starred with Larry Hagman. The show premiered on NBC in September, 1971, and was canceled the following January.

After "The Good Life," Mills did a lot of TV movies, usually playing a victim.

"Now, people can't remember those days. Because of Abby, they ask, 'Can you play anything but villains?'" she says.

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Mills with Clint Eastwood in "Misty" ...



... And Larry Hagman in "The Good Life."



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So why is Abby so nasty?

"She likes power more than money," says Mills. "She's got enough money. It's power and achieving that she most wants. Abby likes to be in control of things.

"In her own way, she loves Gary and it's not just because he's got the money. She doesn't want to lose him, and she'd also never do anything to hurt him. She would never want him to know about her affair with Greg Sumner [William Devane]."

Mills obviously enjoys playing Abby. Only when the character starts being too nice does she become concerned.

"Abby was introduced to stir up trouble," says Mills. "To make things sort of cook and bubble. It's important that the writers keep coming up with interesting and nasty things for Abby to do. If they don't, then things start to happen to her rather than her making things happen to others."

Mills recently formed a production company. One of her projects is an upcoming TV movie for CBS, "Crime of Passion." It's about a woman lawyer who becomes involved with a prosecuting attorney.

The 5-foot-4-inch, 107-pound actress who is in her '40s campaigned for Sen. Gary Hart in his presidential bid last year. She lives in a Beverly Hills home that is decorated with country pine furniture and French provincial prints. When she works, she's up at 5 a.m. for the start of a 12-hour day on the "Knots Landing" set. On her days off, she plays tennis or works out in the ballet studio that also serves as an office above her garage, home for her green jaguar.

Mills says her idea of a great evening is throwing a steak on the barbecue at home, relaxing in the jacuzzi or watching TV. The man in her life is music producer, Richard Holland, her boyfriend of five years.