

Top Gun heartthrob Tom Cruise

JUNE 2, 1986 ■ \$1.50

People

weekly

**GREAT
TRASH
FOR SUMMER**

DONNA MILLS
of *Knots Landing*
keeps TV steaming

Plus, the tackiest

- beach book
- movie
- model
- finger food
- July 4th junk



724414



SUMMER trash

There's sizzle on TV (Donna Mills), a hot line for gossip and rafts of trivial pursuits for the days ahead

It's that time of year again. You're tired of meltdowns, hand-me-downs, put-downs and even Hugh Downs, and your brain yearns for that annual passion of summer: great trash. Proust, the budget deficit and the chill between Australia and Indonesia can wait. For the moment, you'll contemplate Judith Krantz, another royal wedding and nothing deeper than Cher's navel.

As you succumb also to the lure of mindless summer reruns (and you know you will), zap to *Knots Landing's* Donna Mills. As the racoon-eyed, dizzyingly deceptive Abby Cunningham Ewing, Mills, 41, is prime time's standard-bearer for fun trash. Fun because Mills's brand of haute bitchiness—perhaps more so than any of her conniving TV peers—has you hanging on every icy slam, cringing at every lie, sizzling with every seduction.

At first glance she looks like just another one of those TV blondes, the ones with hair that has more tease than a cornerful of Times Square hookers. But Mills, who just ended her sixth season on the show and earns \$40,000 per episode, dispenses her brand of trash with class, with flair and with the conviction of a Bible Belt evangelist. "Donna exudes a bad-little-girl quality that enables her to get away with murder," says *Knots* producer Lawrence Kasha. Mills is proud of her contribution: "It's better to be on a show that delivers good trash than dishes out bad trash." Precisely.

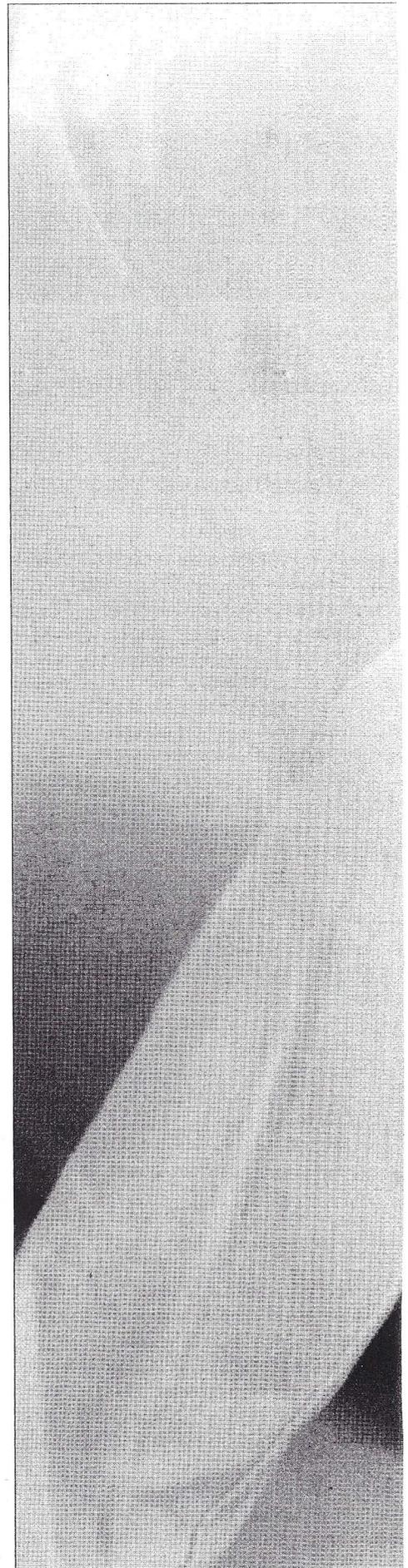
Just after dawn a housekeeper leads the way through a 16-room mansion in L.A.'s Benedict Canyon into Mills's

bedroom. There, she reclines alone behind the white linen curtains of her king-size four-poster bed. "I'm a mess," she says with a yawn as she emerges in a faded red football jersey that reaches her knees. Her hair hangs in knots and she is an hour away from applying her "glamour makeup" at the nearby marble vanity table that could fill five cosmetic counters. Still, she is a knockout. "Abby wouldn't be caught dead in this getup," says Mills, laughing. "She wears expensive silk outfits to bed. After all, that's where she earned them."

Mills came to the show six years ago in an attempt to spice up the *Dallas* spin-off and its ratings. "Without Abby," says one co-star, "the show would be pretty bland fare." She began getting more on-air time and petty jealousies flared. Now, things on the set are civil. "I've never seen her play the star," says Ted Shackelford, who plays Gary Ewing. There is no disagreement about her sultry looks. "Donna," says co-star Michelle Lee, "has the kind of beauty that sometimes intimidates women."

There is good reason to feel threatened. Mills just signed a \$1.1 million contract with Fabergé, the company once represented by Farrah Fawcett and Margaux Hemingway. "I go shopping with every female star from *Dallas* and *Knots Landing*," says the shows' designer Bill Travilla, "and Donna is the only one who stops traffic on Rodeo Drive. She has the best tush in Hollywood." Mills, however, doesn't flaunt what mother nature gave her. "I'm not one of those teasing types who leaves herself open for come-ons," says Mills,

CONTINUED





Don't let another Thursday night pass if you are one of 214 million Americans yet to catch the come-on of *Knots Landing's Mills*.

who won't even flirt. "Once men get up close, they figure out that I'm just plain Donna and the fun is over."

A better reason why men keep their distance is Mills' on-again, off-again beau of seven years, Richard Holland, 35 and the ex-husband of singer Chaka Khan. A onetime rock guitarist and advertising agency exec, Holland now describes himself as a writer-producer. Last November he moved into Mills's \$1.5 million home, the first time they have lived together. "I never met a man who was worth giving up my privacy for before," says Mills, whose former flames include movie executive Allen Adler and actor Vic Valaro. Notes Holland: "We decided to try living together and remodeling at the same time. Not too bright."

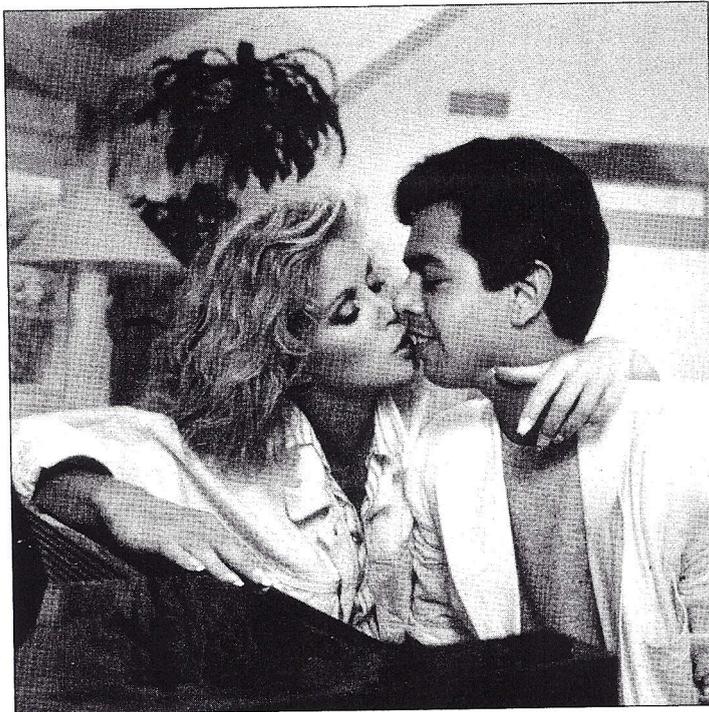
Mills and Holland call their relationship "turbulent," and it has nothing to do with what color to paint the den. Sometimes charming, sometimes sullen, Holland is forever lazy. "I'm not as driven as Donna," he says. "I could go for three months without moving." All of that fuels whispers around town that Holland is along for the free ride.

"Some people treat Richard like he was nothing," Donna scoffs. "They hand him my umbrella and expect him to run off and put it away." Says Holland, "I've taken to telling them where they can put it."

Mills, whose tough-as-nails soap star act disappears with her makeup, is fanatical about keeping her 104-pound, size-4 frame svelte. Her high-protein diet rarely includes red meat, and she never eats after 6 p.m. Hypoglycemia keeps her away from sugar, which can trigger mood swings. "If I have two Snickers bars I contemplate suicide," she says. She drinks no alcohol, and exercises vigorously. "If I don't look good, I can't stop in the middle of a scene and tell millions of viewers that I had a busy week and couldn't exercise," she says.

Mills was born Donna Jean Miller in Chicago, only daughter of the now retired head of Union Oil's market research division and a dance teacher.

She planned to emulate her mother, Bernice (who died nine years ago), and by 5 was studying ballet. But she began performing in plays in high school and decided to study drama. In 1965 she enrolled at the University of Illinois but, never one for serious studying, dropped out before her final exams. She found stage work in Chicago be-



Donna and Richard Holland have endured several breakups: "We weren't meshing like people in a relationship should," she says.

fore moving to New York in 1966. She was a Broadway understudy and then got her first taste of trash to come: acting jobs on the daytime soaps *Secret Storm* and *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing*.

Later, she packed up for Hollywood and found herself in a guest spot on TV's *Dan August* with Burt Reynolds. "He was a real cut-up," she recalls. Burt, who happened to be great friends with Clint Eastwood, suggested Mills for the part of Eastwood's terrorized girlfriend in 1971's *Play Misty for Me*, her first film credit of note. "I liked Clint, but he was not the funny, outgoing man that Burt was," she says. After the cancellation of her short-lived sitcom, *The Good Life*, in 1972 (she and close pal Larry Hagman played domestics), Mills accepted practically any role that came her way. Those that did called for wilting female victims, and soon she was a specialist. "It got to the

point where I had been raped and maligned by virtually every leading man in Hollywood and I hated it," cracks Mills. "I tried to convince the writers that most women would take action in a crisis, not melt like an ice-cream cone."

Mills proved that point in 1980 when, after a year of virtual unemployment, she "launched a major campaign for the role of Abby. It was a ticket out of my victim period." Though the producers tried to brush her off as not their type, she insisted on reading for the role. It worked. After all those years as a victim, the bitch mode felt great.

Now she has her priorities where she wants them: Work comes first, everything else comes second. She expends her maternal instincts on Holland's 7-year-old son, Damien. The boy lives with mother Chaka, but Mills keeps a room for him and he stays with her when the singer goes on tour. As for children of her own, Mills is in no rush. "Some women can do it all," she says. "They can have a child and be back at work the next week. I would need to dedicate myself to a child, and I just don't have time."

While the rest of the world relishes her in reruns this summer, Donna's work life is in fast forward. She's putting the final dabs on a video on how to use makeup ("I get thousands of letters from women asking me for advice"), due out this fall. But a bigger, and perhaps more fitting project, is *Encounters*, the TV movie she is now producing. Mills plays a neglected housewife living out her sexual fantasies. "Honey, this girl isn't into affairs, she's into highly imaginative one-night stands," says Mills. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that some of the white-hot TV trysts may have come from Mills' own daydreams. "A couple of the fantasies are mine, but I'll never tell which ones," she says coyly. Once again, Donna will deliver a wickedly trashy role that has as much lasting value as a tube of half-used mascara. Then again, who would want it any other way?

JAMES GRANT