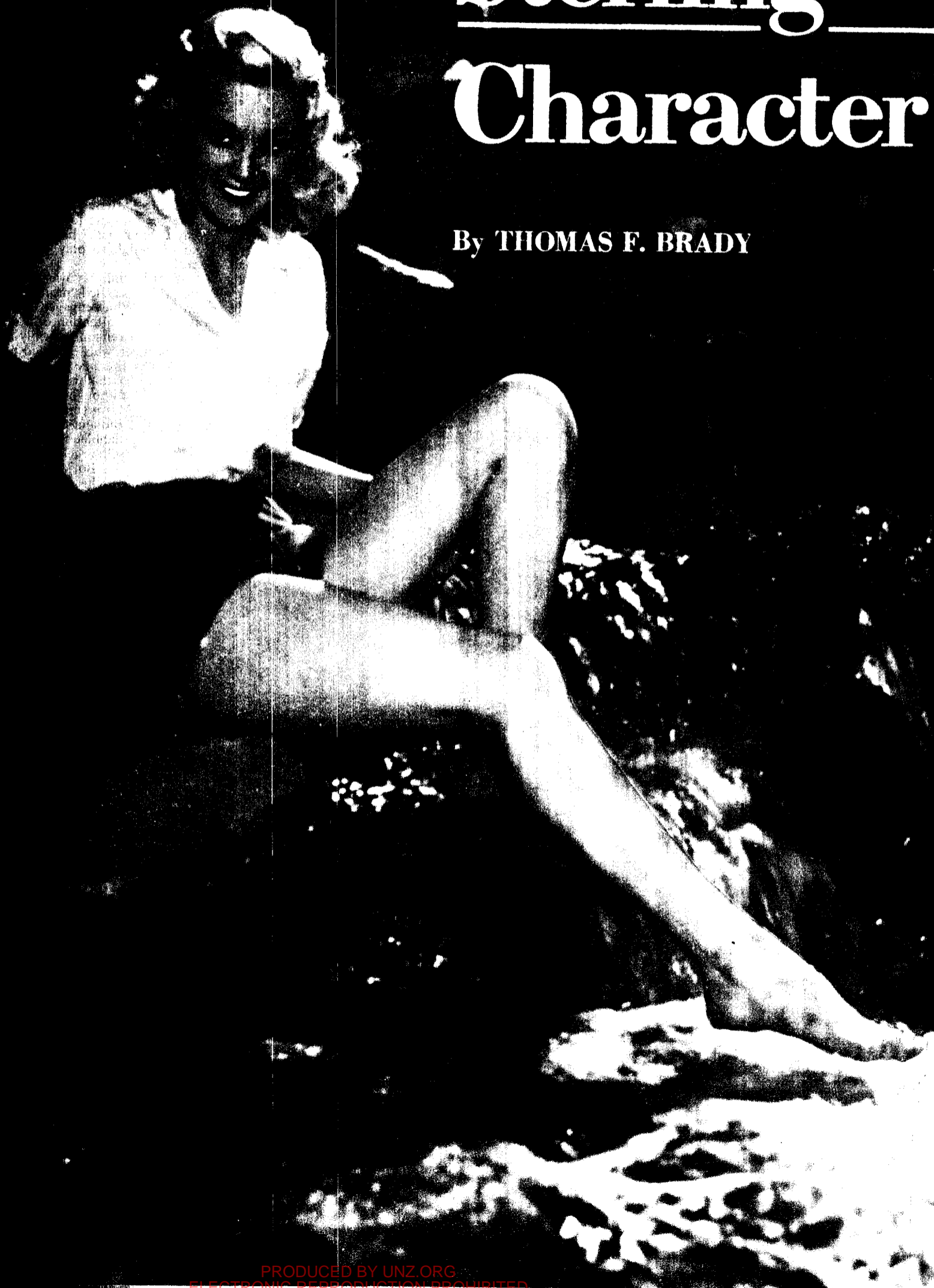


# That Sterling Character

By THOMAS F. BRADY



*For a girl who started in the Social Register, Jan Sterling has carved a strange career in Hollywood. She played wicked women so successfully in films that it took her three years to get a sympathetic role*



Jan and husband Paul Douglas go boating in their 360-foot pool

WHEN actor Paul Douglas saw a motion picture called *Ace in the Hole* in a Paramount projection room not long ago, he turned to his wife, Jan Sterling, the leading woman in the film, and said admiringly: "You may call me Mr. Sterling for the rest of the evening."

The characterization Jan had just finished on the screen was that of a wife with imagination so self-bound that while her husband lay trapped and dying in a cave-in she could not even share the avid tension of a mass of curiosity seekers. She could think only of running out—with the profits on hot dogs sold to the crowd and with a newspaper reporter who had, in effect, manufactured the disaster.

"Now," said Douglas with a wry sort of proprietorial pride, "my old friends will see the kind of girl I've married." And then, contemplating the 15-year difference in their ages, he added thoughtfully: "After that performance I begin to see you as an annuity."

*Ace in the Hole* will undoubtedly mark a high point in Jan Sterling's career. The picture is as cruel and polished an exposition of the vulgar human emotions and the cynical exploitation of them as the screen has seen. *Ace* is likely, therefore, to create extreme critical excitement when it is released this July, and Jan's work will not escape attention. Her achievement is not so much that she displays a consummate shallowness on the screen, but that you, the audience, can understand and even sympathize with a girl who has always wanted so much for tinsel excitement that her mind has grown hard and dull.

Jan Sterling says she decided to marry Paul

Douglas, after a rather unpromising courtship, because she liked him in a film called *Everybody Does It*. But if Douglas married Jan on the basis of her screen characterizations, he is either a masochist or a man with a peculiar flaw in his judgment. As a matter of fact, he is neither; he married her, he says, because he found he could talk to her or listen to her or be quiet with her, not only without discomfort but with positive gratification. After a year of matrimony, he still admires her as much as ever. But there must be moments when he wonders where she learned to be the woman she depicts on the screen—a woman who, thus far, has never been admirable.

In the seven films she made before *Ace*, Jan appeared twice as a gangster's moll, once as a promiscuous tramp who got murdered, once as a female convict called Smoochie, once as a mean and selfish village belle, once as a secretary hopeful of breaking up her boss's marriage and once as a married woman prowling after men other than her husband.

#### The Domestic Side of the Picture

The contrast between her personal life, which is pleasant and quiet, and the existence she portrays on the screen is just one of several paradoxes apparent to her friends.

The Douglasses live quietly in a great, bizarre house in Bel-Air, a suburb of Los Angeles. The house, erected by a local tycoon in the twenties, is a vast, pink place with a vague resemblance to a French chateau, and is a source of great amusement to its present occupants, for whom it is much

too big. It has giant bedroom suites, servants' quarters for a platoon, a breakfast nook the size of a normal dining room, a dining room the size of a mess hall, a balconied drawing room, and—obviously the original owner's jewel—a ballroom with an orchestra stage, fitted out with colored footlights.

The establishment has been through several changes of hands; at present it is owned by actress Marion Davies. The Douglasses have it at a relatively low rent because they got in at the tail end of a complicated chain of leases and subleases. They pay \$500 a month, which includes upkeep of the grounds.

Those grounds are the special delight of Jan's young friend Maggie, Douglas' six-year-old daughter by his earlier marriage to Virginia Field. A long, fat, 360-foot swimming pool winds through the place; better still, a 100-foot, rock-strewn waterfall, with a tremendous underground pump house to send the water back up after it roars down, was provided by the tycoon, apparently for Maggie's special edification. Finally, down at the bottom of the hill, there is a string of quiet pools filled with fish for her to look at.

The whole layout represents the Hollywood fable at its hugest, and the possibility exists that Jan, who laughs at the monstrous establishment when she thinks about it, enjoys it more than Maggie does.

Maggie spends one month out of every four with the Douglasses, and the other three with her mother. She sums up her opinion of Jan with the words, "She's nice"; further questioning indicates that her admiration is (Continued on page 78)



After playing selfish village belle in *Johnny Belinda*, Jan was cast as gangster's moll in *Appointment with Danger*, above. Others shown are Alan Ladd, left, and Paul Stewart



Jan finally plays a "good" girl in her latest film, *Rhubarb*, with Ray Milland



# NO TABLE for the Lady Plumber

You can get very tired of being suave. I had—and Cromwell knew it and disliked me for it. But I was good at my job and he'd never fire me

By JOE McCARTHY

THE Monaghans asked us over Saturday night to meet their week-end guests, a couple from New York named Fenton who were supposed to be a lot of fun. "You kids will love them," Evelyn Monaghan said. "They're a riot." No doubt the Fentons have a large personal following, but halfway through the first drink I decided that I'd rather listen to Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca.

Mrs. Fenton was doing the talking. She was letting us rubes on Long Island know how much time she spent in the smart Manhattan night spots.

"Ted and I were at the Côte d'Azur on Thursday," she announced. "Larry Cromwell sat at our table for a while. You've probably read in the columns about Larry Cromwell. He owns the Côte d'Azur. It's almost impossible to get in there unless they know you. I guess it's just about the most exclusive place in town, isn't it, Ted?"

Ted said it was, just about.

I felt like pointing out that 21, the Colony and the Stork Club had not yet resorted to barkers on their sidewalks to entice customers.

Ted mentioned the name of a well-known movie actor and said, "I understand he was turned away from the Côte d'Azur last year. That will give you some idea."

Ted had it wrong. The movie actor was not turned away last year. He was turned away in 1939. And Ted had left out the best part of it. Cromwell fired the doorman for two weeks and sent the movie actor apologies and gifts and begged him to come back. When the movie actor came back a week later, whoever was on the door didn't recognize him either and he was barred a second time.

"We were with Bill Westcott, a man who handles Ted's advertising," Mrs. Fenton said. "Bill is one of Larry Cromwell's best friends."

I knew Bill Westcott's type. I would give ten to one that Cromwell wouldn't know Bill Westcott if he fell over him. Before the Fentons arrived that night at the Côte d'Azur, Westcott grabbed Cromwell by the lapels and explained that he wanted to make an impression on a customer. He arranged with Cromwell to be greeted by his first name.

"Have you, Mr. Delessio?" Mrs. Fenton was saying to me. I had not been listening.

"Have I what, Mrs. Fenton?" I said.

"Please, folks," Evelyn Monaghan said. "A little less formality. In this house, you are Lillian and Ted and Maggie and Andy. After all, you're already becoming old friends."

Evelyn meant well.

"I was asking you if you've ever been to the Côte d'Azur," Mrs. Fenton—Lillian—said to me.

"Oh," I said. "No. Not recently."

"Now you stop it, Andy," Evelyn Monaghan said. "Lillian, I'm afraid Andy's being coy. Or he's trying to rib you. He's not only been at the Côte d'Azur, he worked there for ten years. He was Larry Cromwell's right-hand man."

"Really?" Mrs. Fenton said. "My, what a simply fascinating job that must have been. Why did you ever leave it?"

"Maggie made me a better offer," I said. "She said if I married her, she'd give me a job out here in her plumbing business."

It took Mrs. Fenton a moment to digest that one.

"You actually mean you left the Côte d'Azur to go into the plumbing business?" she said.

"Well, the plumbing-supply business. We don't fix leaks. We sell faucets and pipes and things to the plumbers who do fix them."

"But why, how, did you ever bring yourself to make such a change?" Mrs. Fenton said. "Good heavens. It must have been so interesting, so glamorous working with Larry Cromwell. He's such a charming person. After ten years with him, how could you possibly be contented in a small town like this?"

I flashed an SOS at Maggie and said, "It's a long and pretty dull story."

Maggie came to my rescue. "I don't want to interrupt," she said. "But, speaking of plumbers, did you hear the one about the plumber who wanted to buy his wife a mink coat?"

While she was telling it, I slipped out to the kitchen to help Hugh Monaghan fix another round of drinks. When I came back, they were talking about something else and nobody, thank Heaven, mentioned Larry Cromwell or the Côte d'Azur for the rest of the evening.

WE BROKE away from the Monaghans and the Fentons around midnight. When I came into the house after putting the car in the garage, Maggie was upstairs getting ready for bed. The cocker spaniel jumped all over me and I let him out the back door. I took a couple of bottles of beer out of the refrigerator and poured them for Maggie and myself and waited in the kitchen for the dog to return from his tour of inspection so I could lock up for the night.

I looked at the clean, comfortable kitchen and listened to Maggie moving around upstairs and I thought how happy I had been in the two years I had lived in this house. I thought about the afternoons lying in the sun with Maggie at (Continued on page 72)

ILLUSTRATED BY FREDRIC VARADY