

woman who comes in about three times a week.

Amazingly, she's turned quite domestic. Often she cooks her own dinner, and occasionally she does her shopping as well.

Ava always needs people around her to keep her busy. She loves to go to cafes and watch the Flamenco, the fast, vibrant Spanish dance that provides the excitement she craves. In fact, she is looking for excitement constantly and finds it in the frequent parties at her house, the fast cars she drives (two of which she's wrecked completely, once nearly killing herself), and in fighting young bulls, although her mishap last year has kept her from it since then.

From what Ava told me, I had the feeling she was running away in Spain just as much as she did in Australia, or Hollywood. But why? And from what?

The answer was given to me by a close friend who insisted Ava has become afraid that life is passing her by, that if she doesn't get the most out of every minute, there'll never be another one to take its place.

Also, Ava is 36, and the time is approaching when she will have to switch to character parts. In this respect, life has been kind to Ava. She is still strikingly beautiful and creates more excitement on the screen—and off—than ever before. Yet instinctively she knows it can't last forever.

Moreover, she doesn't have much financial security. "I was under contract to MGM for 17 years, and, believe me, I couldn't save anything from what they paid me!" she confessed. "Now that I'm on my own, I can put something aside."

Unlike Gregory Peck, who gets a percentage for

his role in "On the Beach," Ava is on a flat salary of close to \$400,000. As a resident of Spain she is exempted from American taxes—which should leave her a good-sized nest egg for a rainy day.

Nevertheless, in the past she's never been terribly smart about financial deals. Her divorce settlement with Frank Sinatra, for instance, is one of Hollywood's best-kept secrets, but it's believed that she got very little out of it. On the other hand, she tediously keeps track of her smallest expenditures. David Hanna recalled how he gives her \$50 in change whenever they go on a personal-appearance tour. Invariably Ava can give an exact account of what she's spent, and returns whatever change she has left.

Most of her own savings are tied up in her house, which she values at about \$70,000. Not much to show for 17 years in show business.

Although Ava claims, "I would like to quit work as soon as I can afford it," she admits, "but if I did, I wouldn't know what to do with myself."

This was borne out by producer-director Stanley Kramer, who told me, "When Ava's on the set, she wants to know how quickly we can get through so she can go home. When she's home, she calls me to find out how soon I can put her to work again."

Nobody close to Ava thinks she'll ever retire of her own accord, whether she needs the money or not. She's too restless to stay idle, has too many memories to let her rest.

She equates her three unsuccessful marriages—to Mickey Rooney in 1942, to Artie Shaw in 1945, and to Frank Sinatra in 1951—with Hollywood itself. She thinks the atmosphere, the rumor mills, the mode of living excludes personal happiness.

Ava's future undoubtedly will consist of more running away from Hollywood, from people, from herself. She's a woman without attachments, without a country. And she's not happy about it.

In spite of her dislike for Hollywood, Ava misses the United States terribly. "That's obvious, particularly on holidays," Hanna told me. "She'll fix typically American dishes and invite all her American friends to join her. And if there are none around, she'll ask others."

She misses her own family, too. Her father, Jonas Gardner, a North Carolina cotton and tobacco farmer, and her mother, Mary Elizabeth, are dead. Her sister, Beatrice, more mother than sister really, spends half her life with Ava, though she has a home of her own in Los Angeles. But there are still dozens of aunts, uncles, and cousins in Smithfield, N. C., whom she visits whenever she gets to the States, no matter how brief her stay.

But mostly she misses Frank—the times they've had together, the hours they should share right now, the future as husband and wife they will never have.

Ava didn't say it in so many words, but anyone who has known her as long as I have can tell by her reaction when I told her I'd seen Frank just a short time before, in Florida. Her eyes grew big and moist and her voice sentimental as she looked right past me at a vision visible only to her.

"Florida," she whispered, "it seems so terribly far away, doesn't it?"

Any place is far away, I thought, if it separates two people who are so fond of each other that the mere thought of the miles between them makes them miserable.

# to Dad with Love...



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