

Did Clark Gable Live Up to MM's Expectations?

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Clark Gable came into the life of Marilyn Monroe when she was seven years old.

"I was fascinated by Jean Harlow. I had white hair—I was a real towhead—and she was the first grown-up lady I had ever seen who had white hair like mine. I cut her picture out of a magazine, and on the back of it was the picture of a man. I pasted his picture in a scrapbook—just his picture. There was nothing else in the book. It was Clark Gable."

Marilyn was a very lonesome little girl, and she was imaginative and idealistic, too. A child like this, with no father of her own, is apt to substitute a "father image"—a sympathetic teacher, a kind neighbor, someone who seems to possess the qualities of the idealized father she never had.

With Marilyn, this ideal was in the man grinning with such careless dash from the pages of that magazine. And then he was a shadow on the screen. In Clark Gable, the little girl saw all the strength, masculinity, and charm of any child's ideal parent.

Screen shadow he may have been, but Clark Gable was much more real to this little girl than just a movie fan's "crush"—and he continued to be as real to her through the movie years to come. "Mutiny on the Bounty" was the first. Later there was "Gone with the Wind." Marilyn saw that epic over and over.

After Marilyn Monroe had become a star herself, she once told a reporter about Gable's influence on her childhood years, but she had no idea whether Clark ever read the story. Even then, she had not met him. While she was making movies at 20th Century-Fox, he was at MGM. Neither moved in Hollywood's party circles.

"Once he signed a deal with 20th Century-Fox for a couple of pictures," Marilyn recalls. "I went to Darryl Zanuck and asked him couldn't I please be assigned to a Gable picture. But nothing came of it."

At Last They Meet

The time finally came when Marilyn met Clark Gable face to face. It was at a party given at Romanoff's restaurant in honor of the opening of her movie, "The Seven Year Itch." Marilyn was with a group of people when somebody tapped her on the shoulder and the unmistakable voice asked, "Miss Monroe, may I have this dance?"

Marilyn wheeled. Gable stood there grinning—not Rhett Butler or Fletcher Christian now, but Clark Gable himself.

"I nearly collapsed. I'm sure I must have turned the color of my red chiffon dress. I don't remember what I said—or if I said anything. But I remember thinking, wouldn't he be surprised to know how I really feel about him?"

They danced. It was a very casual meeting. There were no others until last year when, in discussing "The Misfits," which was being written by Arthur Miller and in which Marilyn was to star, it became obvious that the leading male character was

developing in such a way that it could be played by only one star—Clark Gable.

Even after Gable had read the script, conveyed his excitement and enthusiasm about it to Miller and director John Huston, and agreed to play the role, he and Marilyn didn't actually meet until they arrived in Reno, Nev., to begin the picture.

Then he came over to her. "I don't know why this hasn't happened before—our playing together. It's really overdue." He laughed as Marilyn told him about her meeting with Zanuck when she begged to be cast in a Clark Gable picture. "We'll make up for it this time," he promised her.

He Was All 'King'

"He was everything I had expected him to be. They called him the 'King,' you know, and he was like that—he had a quality that commanded respect and admiration. I never saw anyone who had such an effect on everyone with whom he worked. The crew loved Clark. And he had that magnificent masculinity. But my biggest surprise was when we started our work together. That's when I realized what a real actor he was. That's when I became aware of his tremendous sensitivity. But, of course, that was what attracted me in the first place."

"Kay Gable and I became very close. She used to come out to the set and call to me, 'Hey, how did Our Man do today?'"

"I'd laugh. 'Our Man? I must say you are generous, Kay.' And it was a joke between us always. 'Our Man!'"

"There are so many things I'll never forget about Clark Gable. Little things, incidents, moments. His unfailing politeness. He was one of the greatest gentlemen I have known. He had concern for everyone."

"I had gone direct to 'The Misfits' from another picture. I was exhausted. I fought illness most of the time I was working on the picture. I had to go into the hospital for a couple of days. 'Rest yourself,' he'd say. 'Do like I do—take it easy.'"

"He had a great interest and feeling for other actors. We talked about them. About Marlon Brando, for instance. I've always felt Brando had a Gable quality in his maleness, yet had complete individuality, too. Clark believed, too, that Brando was the finest young actor of our day."

"Clark saw a rough cut of 'The Misfits' on the next-to-last day of shooting. He was so happy and thrilled. I hadn't been able to go, and he was so excited as he told me how well it had turned out. He told me that he thought it was the best thing I had ever done and that it was the best thing he had done since Rhett Butler."

Marilyn Monroe remembers one more thing. It was the last day of shooting. Gable, whose last role was one of his most strenuous, had done something which Marilyn considered "valiant."

She walked over to him. "Do you know something?" she said. "You're my hero. And I never had a hero before."



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