

# Flaming Kay Francis of the Films

## Life Story of Star Who Really Lives

By ROSALIND SHAFFER

**T**EMPESTUOUS, exotic, talented, Kay Francis zooms upward to a new peak of popularity with every succeeding film. She has everything that it takes to make an interesting screen personality and a fine dramatic actress. Beautiful, even with the severe manish haircut that she affected when she first came to the screen. Vivacious, clever, and unrestrained by the conventional standards that the average woman has set for her own life. Born of an actress mother, with the stage and theatrical trunks her home and friends through much of her childhood. Married and divorced twice before she was twenty-one, one a secret marriage. Married and divorced again in two years, after her Hollywood success. What?

If you think Kay Francis is a dignified, ladylike person who wears velvet tea gowns you're very, very wrong! Kay makes a party a very lively affair, as we've seen her do on at least one occasion. Life to her is a grand adventure, full of thrills. She isn't a person to be stopped by giddy heights.

She throws everything she has into the great adventure of living. If you find her fascinating in films, at least part of the reason is that she is so thoroughly alive and vibrant that you sense it, even on the screen. For many who through circumstances must live dull, drab existences Kay Francis is the vicarious thrill and color of life.

### Born in Oklahoma on a Friday the Thirteenth

Kay was born in Oklahoma City on Friday, the 13th of January. Her age is thirty. She was born Katherine Edwina Gibbs. Her mother is Katherine Clinton, a well-known stage actress of her time, but her father is never mentioned in any studio biography. Before Kay was four the family had lived in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and Denver. Then her mother returned to the stage in New York, and life became a series of schools and jumps about the country following her mother's theatrical career, on the road and in the big towns. Convents sheltered her early youth; later, Miss Fuller's school at Ossining and the Cathedral school in Garden City, Long Island, followed by a business college course. She loved athletics, and the long legs that nowadays make her eschew bathing suits and beach costumes carried her over the hundred-yard dash in 12 seconds flat. She learned to love tennis, which is still one of her favorite sports. In her senior year at high school she wrote a play and appeared in the leading role, that of a man.

Somewhere during these years she found time to be married to James Dwight Francis, wealthy and socially prominent, of Pittsfield, Mass., whose name she has preferred to keep professionally. She was then seventeen. It is interesting to note that during the last year, when censorship feeling ran high and the mayor of Pittsfield forbade the showing of Kay's film, "Dr. Monica," Kay's ex-mother-in-law, Mrs. Henry A. Francis, defended the film and in a statement to the press said she considered the performance of Miss Francis excellent and above criticism.

The marriage with Francis lasted for a matter of months. Kay left him and decided on a Paris divorce. She was then nineteen. In the interim she met William Gaston II, of a socially prominent Boston family. According to her confession to an intimate friend, it was a case of love at first sight. For many years after her Hollywood career had begun she refused to name him, saying it would injure him socially and politi-

cally if he were involved. Kay met him, however, shortly before sailing for Europe and her Paris divorce, through a friend who brought him to call. Kay sailed without seeing him again, but he turned up in Paris before she left, and a week of a gay whirl, which anyone knowing Kay can well imagine, drew the couple close enough that he changed his sailing and went home on the same boat with the dark-eyed charmer.

One week after their landing in New York they were married. It is said that Gaston was a student at Harvard at this time. In any case, he wished to keep the marriage secret. Kay, who had decided on a stage career during her trip abroad, had been lucky enough to get the part of the player queen in the modern dress version of "Hamlet," and ducked rehearsal to be married. A reporter spotted the couple at the New York city hall waiting in line for the license, but, according to Kay, he was bought off and the secret kept. The bridegroom's chauffeur was one witness, and someone



"Maurice Chevalier . . . helped her deny reports of an impending marriage . . ."

recruited from the officiating clergyman's household was the other. Not long after the marriage, a matter of months, Kay joined the Stuart Walker stock company, playing Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Dayton, and the bridegroom had to go west on business. The impossibility of having a home, due to the bridegroom's affiliations, and the stage ambitions of Kay, finally broke up the marriage. A quiet Paris divorce dropped the whole affair into the limbo of forgotten things and Kay was free to pursue her life alone at the age of twenty-one. Gaston is now the husband of Rosamond Pinchot.

### Though a Brunette, She Captures a Blonde's Role

Professionally Kay was making rapid strides under the tutelage of Stuart Walker. Following her work with him she returned to New York and appeared in "Venus," and in "Crime" she had a long engagement, 138 performances. Then "Elmer the Great," with Walter Huston, provided her with five weeks' work. Later she made her screen debut with Huston in "Gentlemen of the Press" in spite of the fact that the movie director wanted a blonde instead of a brunette. Her screen tests for the role were so good, he hired her anyway, and she was on her way in films. This was in 1922. She followed this with "Street of Chance," which had Hollywood sitting up and taking notice. Before long she was being publicized as the best-dressed woman on the screen,



Tempestuous, exotic, talented, Kay Francis . . . has everything that it takes to make an interesting screen personality and a fine dramatic actress. Beautiful . . . Vivacious, clever, unrestrained . . .

those long legs of her youth giving her an edge on other actresses when it came to wearing clothes well. Her great success at Paramount, where she was under contract, found her working hard, restless, and very nervous.

At this time we went to her set one day on a "three weeks' old" appointment for an interview. The studio publicity man approached her and reminded her of her appointment. Always afraid of interviews, Miss Francis burst into a flood of tears and hysterics, rushed across the set to the director, and begged him to protect her from any further interruption in her work. Ten years' experience with temperamental stars in Hollywood had left the writer totally unprepared for a reception such as this.

Some time before the close of her contract with Paramount the famous "talent kid" was made by Warner Brothers, who signed Miss Francis to a contract to begin as soon as her commitment with Paramount was over, a matter of some eight months. It was a totally unprecedented procedure. Miss Francis excused herself by saying that she was unhappy in the stereotyped roles she was being given at Paramount. The money, of course, was a large item, as the figure was most flattering.



"Her marriage with Kenneth MacKenna . . . for a time seemed a very happy one." (Miss Francis with MacKenna.)

him for the Christmas holidays at the Connecticut farm. Hardly had she landed there than wires began to buzz with the announcement of another one of those "amicable separations." Kay told the judge later that MacKenna criticized her acting and her clothes, which, of course, put the poor man quite in wrong with anyone who has ever seen her on the screen. MacKenna has had considerable success on the New York stage during the last season. He is the son of a well-known portrait painter, a cousin of Marguerite Churchill, and a nephew of Charlotte Cushman. MacKenna is his stage name.

In "The House on Fifty-sixth Street" Kay reached a high point as a dramatic actress. In the early sequences Kay played a Florodora girl,



"Temperamental in the extreme, Miss Francis refuses to pose . . . or to give interviews . . ." (Fleeing New York cameramen.)



" . . . so thoroughly alive and vibrant that you sense it, even on the screen." (Kay Francis as a senorita, from a colorful camera study by Ferenc, a famous Viennese photographer of Hollywood.)

and the black face costume, with the pink roses massed about her face against the blackground of the flaming lace bonnet, was most flattering. At about this time a large costume party was given and Kay appeared wearing the costume. She was exquisite. As the party warmed up, Kay insisted on playing "ring around the roses" in the middle of the dance floor with a group of pals, and as the fun became fast and furious Kay disappeared and shed the confining costume, all but the hat, and reappeared for the game in white duck shorts and blouse and tennis shoes. The combination was quite something, and as the hilarity proceeded Kay rumped about so hard that twice she fell flat on her face and had to be pulled to her feet by the circle of dancers, which included George Raft and Dick Barthelme among others. Later in the evening she made one of a merry foursome that rode a bicycle about the dance floor until the machine collapsed. No stars don't always go to bed early so they can work the next morning!

### Key and Maurice Both Deny Rumor of Engagement

Kay's propensity for marrying and being a good fellow was well illustrated when her European visit last summer when she and Maurice Chevalier were seen together so constantly that rumors of an impending marriage were circulating freely. When questioned Miss Francis denied them and stated that marriage was not for her. "I think rewed when I'm old and doddering," she said, smiling. Chevalier, also smiling, helped her deny reports of an impending marriage, but added that Miss Francis was the "ideal" good fellow. Some months back, in May of 1934, when Kay appeared at the studio with her arm bound up, with the explanation that she had cut her hand breaking the glass in the front door because she had forgotten the key, there was a great deal of laughter.



"Her charm of manner has won her many friends." (With George Brent in "Living on Velvet," now in production.)

and amusement at her expense. "No body believed the story. Like a black eye, the twenty-five stitches simply aroused merriment. It was exceedingly difficult to obtain evidence for the story in which Kay blamed it all on Wienie the dachshund, who had howled to go out at midnight and had been the cause of his mistress having the door slam shut on her. The explanation didn't gee with the one the excited maid told."

Just last week a party at the Trocadero with Maurice Chevalier playing general host to several of his lady friends, including Constance Bennett, found Kay all clouded up. She departed early.

Temperamental in the extreme, Miss Francis refuses to pose for fashion stills or to give interviews when she is not actually on the payroll at the studio. When she is on salary and is working before the camera she refuses to be disturbed. Interveners sashaying her about clothes drive her into tantrums. She hates to be known as the best-dressed woman, feeling that it detracts from the actress. Yet she is very fond of beautiful clothes and possesses a beautiful wardrobe.

### Spirits of Joy Alternate with Spells of Depression

Her health is not good. Very emotional, she is easily upset, and her vacations are frequently spent half dashing about madly and half recuperating in the hospital. Nervousness is her besetting ailment. Her spirit of high revelry is frequently paid for in fits of depression.

Exotic and temperamental as she is, she is quite feminine and home-loving, taking great pains about her home and its furnishings. It is an unpretentious residence, managed by a butler, a cook, and a personal maid. A Jap gardener is hired spasmodically, when Kay's interest in the yard sends her forth with trowel and hose to "do something about it." The garden usually looks quite scraggly and "between seasons."

Many comments used to be made on the fact that a second-hand car of inexpensive make, which she drives herself, was her favorite means of transportation. She still has it, but has acquired another, more impressive and in keeping with her circumstances. She cares nothing for swank or think is immaterial to Kay. Her charm of manner has won her



"For many who through circumstances must live dull, drab existences Kay Francis is the vicarious thrill and color of life."

**BACKACHE**

"Ben-Gay" quiets flashing pain—penetrates right to the trouble!

Rub on "Ben-Gay" generously. It goes right through skin, flesh, muscles—to wherever the pain is. "Ben-Gay" never misses. And "Ben-Gay" stays in the area until it kills those stabbing pains. . . . And it doesn't take this pain-killer long. The almost immediate hypo-sensitizing (pain-relieving) effect of "Ben-Gay" has never been equaled by its many imitators. Be sure you get the box with the red "Ben-Gay."

RUB PAIN AWAY WITH **BAUME "BEN-GAY"** IT PENETRATES