

Oh, Miss Hepburn

Rosie Baillie

At Home

'Would you look at the state of her.'

Albert Kemp remained in his armchair, looking at the front door as if it might reply. He turned his head and shouted through to his wife,

'Jean! I said, Jean! Did you see that?'

Jean hastened through from the kitchen, 'I think she looks smart in that uniform; she suits the dark green does our Christina.'

'That's as maybe, but she flounced past and out that door without so much as a good morning, let alone an explanation as to what in heaven's name she was doing last night in those...'

Jean put her arm on his shoulder to stop him, 'Bert, you need to calm down, think about your heart.' She sighed before patiently explaining, 'Apparently, they're called "culottes", and they're French.'

'Cu-whats?' Bert shouted in horror, before shaking his head, 'dear God Jean, I'll give her "they're French." I will never live this down. Last night, my youngest daughter went out in what can only be described as a pair of breeks.'

'Oh Bert, you should be proud of her, she made those breeks with her own fair hands.'

'See, even you think they're breeks Jean.'

At this, Jean chuckled. 'Well I suppose they are, but come on now, what's the harm?'

'Oh, there's a lot of harm. There's some queer ideas out there these days Jean, and ever since that lassie started working at the Pictures, she's been full of them.'

'Right, will I put the kettle on?'

'And have you seen this?'

'What is it?'

'Look on the mantelpiece.'

'I'm not seeing much other than a layer of dust.'

'Look, woman, my own dear mother's portrait has been shoved to the back row by a picture from the newspaper which she's put into a frame, and it's sitting here on our mantelpiece. It's that bloody Katherine Hepburn again. Tell me – what in God's name is that woman doing on my mantelpiece?'

There was no answer. Jean had retreated quietly back into the kitchen.

At the Post Office

'Right who's next?' barked Mr Jamieson.

Christina stepped forward, lifting her treasured possession out of her handbag. 'This,' she handed over the letter, 'is to go to the United States of America please.'

Mr Jamieson almost choked on his cup of tea, 'The United States of – well I never, and just what are you needing to send a letter out there for young miss?'

Christina paused. She knew from previous experience what reaction she would get so she would rather not have said. But she swallowed and looked the old postmaster in the eye. 'If you must know, I'm writing to Miss Hepburn in Hollywood.'

This time, Mr Jamieson had to put his cup down on the counter, 'Miss Hepburn in Hollywood? Dear oh dear. Isabel get through here; we've only got a letter going to Hollywood.' He rose a little in his chair as he pulled out the book of 'special' stamps with a flourish and said, 'I take it you know how much this will cost you?'

Before Christina could answer, he continued as he leafed through the pages of stamps, 'And what, tell me, has given you cause to write to this Miss Hepburn?'

Isabel, the postmaster's wife, came through at this point. 'Wheesht Mr Jamieson, it's none of our business, just you concentrate on getting the stamps right.'

On the Bus

'I just know she'll write back to me this time, Dot; I know she will.'

Dot was applying a final coat of lipstick as she glanced into her compact. 'I admire your optimism Chrissie, I really do, but what on earth did you put into that letter? I wouldn't know what to say.'

'Well, I didn't make it too long, because, as you know, she's a busy actress, and she's probably got someone who reads her letters anyway. I just kept it short and to the point.'

'I bet she gets hundreds of letters every day.'

'Yes, she will, but most of them will be from desperados asking Miss Hepburn to help them get a job in the movies. And she, or her letter opener anyway, probably just throw those ones in the bin, or the trash as I believe they call it. I simply told her how much I admired her, and told her not to read those nasty reviews, and –'

'And?'

'And, well, I told her how I worked as an usher at Greens, and I invited her to come and visit Scotland if she could ever spare the time.'

'Oh Chrissie, you are priceless, I'll tell your ma to get the spare room ready just in case.'

'Well, I thought it was only polite. She would love it here as well, the beautiful scenery, the chance to enjoy some peace and quiet.'

'Not if she stayed up at your house.' Dot got up from her seat as the bus neared their stop.

Christina looked out of the window as they came to a halt, 'Oh, here's Charlie, Dot, waiting for you as usual. He's certainly punctual; I'll give him that.'

'Punctual?' Dot laughed, 'oh you're such a romantic.' She brought out her compact once more, checked her reflection and shouted as she swept off the bus, 'You get going Chrissie, I'll see you in there, and don't forget –'

'Cover for you if you're late. Don't worry, I will.'

In the Foyer at Green's Playhouse

'Right girls, let's be having you, form a line please.'

'You'd think we were in the army,' Christina whispered to Dot as she scampered into the line. Mr Philips began his inspection. 'Now girls,' he bellowed as he looked up and down the line, 'If it's Good?'

'It's Greens,' the girls chorused back.

'And if it's Greens?'

'It's good.'

Christina held her breath as Mr Philips began to move down the line. She hoped as ever that he wouldn't stop in front of her, but his stick made its familiar tap on the floor as he turned to face her.

'Ah, Miss Kemp.'

'Yes, Mr Philips?'

'You are looking, how shall I put it, slightly unkempt, Miss Kemp?'

Dot stifled a giggle further down the line. Before Christina could answer, he continued,

'You could make more of yourself, Miss Kemp, accentuate yourself. Look at any of these other girls if you want to know how.'

'I'm sure I could Mr Philips,' Christina looked at her shoes.

'Now Miss McKenzie, you are looking...' He stopped for an uncomfortable amount of time as he looked Dot up and down, 'quite delectable today, quite delectable.'

He reached the end of the row of girls and then turned to bark out his usual, 'right, at your stations girls, we open at midday,' and, just before he retired to his office, he said, as if it was an afterthought,

'Oh Miss – eh – Miss McKenzie, I will require your assistance in the projection room at 1.30 pm sharp, Billy will be otherwise engaged.'

In the Stores

Christina and Dot were loading their trays with cigarettes in preparation for their first customers.

'Look, Dot, you don't have to go in there with old Mr Creeps, that's not part of our job.'

'I know it's not Chrissie, but look, it's fine. I'm a big girl; I can look after myself.'

'He'll look after you alright duck,' shouted Maggie, the kiosk supervisor with a wink as she squeezed past. 'Right then, Christina, Dot, and Ruth, you're on trays and walkarounds – don't say I'm not good to you; Betty and Janet, you're on the kiosk with me. We'll swap after the first showing.'

'I mean it, Dot, you could just come straight into the screen with me, say you forgot or... say you came in to keep an eye on me, make sure I didn't get too caught up in watching the film?'

'Like I could stop you from watching that film, how many times have you seen it so far?'

In the Screen

'Good afternoon Miss Hepburn, it's great to see you again,' Christina said silently to the screen as she leant against the wall in the aisle, by the door.

'This is my favourite time you know, I've done my rounds, the audience are settled, and it all goes quiet when the newsreel comes to an end. It's bliss. I bet you love it too, whenever you go to the movies. If you get time to go, I mean.

'Oh Miss Hepburn, I've got so many questions for you. You see in this bit where you break Cary Grant's golf club over your knee, and then he pushes you over? I mean, how dare he do that to you. I know it's a film, and all and you're acting, but I bet you would never let this happen to you in real life.

'And you know, here's another thing, Miss Hepburn,' Christina's reverie was interrupted by Billy, Mr Philips' projection room assistant opening the door. He leant in, checked the screen, gave her a wave and a wink, and ducked out again.

In the Foyer

'Billy, wait there,' said Christina as Billy loped along the passage towards the staircase. He stopped and turned around with a grin.

'Well, I do feel privileged. You're missing a bit of Miss Poison Ivy, just to talk to me?'

'Billy don't call her that. Listen I thought you weren't around today, Mr Philips said you wouldn't be here?'

'Were you missing me, Miss Hollywood? I'll tell you what, he's had me on a wild goose chase doing errands all over town that he insisted were urgent. And the last one, when I got to the tailors, his suit wasn't even ready to collect – I went all that way for nothing.'

'Oh, my goodness, he needed you out of the way, didn't he?'

'What? I can't think why.'

'I think I can.' Christina began to walk away, but she turned. 'Actually Billy, will you come with me, to the projection room? I just need to check on something.'

In the Projection Room

Christina paused outside the door, took a deep breath, and whispered to herself, 'I'm doing this for my friend.'

She opened the door quickly and sharply, in an effort to disturb the inhabitants of the projection room as much as she could. She saw them straight away. At the same time as they saw her. Dot leaning against the desk beside the projector, the buttons of her green blouse open down to her belt. Mr Philips was standing beside her, a smear of Dot's bright red lipstick on his mouth.

'Miss Kemp, what is the meaning of this intrusion? Miss McKenzie and I were just acquainting ourselves with the projection equipment.' He casually stood in front of Dot to enable her to do up her blouse.

'Anyway, that will do for now Miss McKenzie, perhaps we could resume at another time?'

'Yes Mr Philips,' said Dot as she slipped past, grabbing Christina forcefully by the arm as they went through the door.

In the Foyer

'Ow Dot, let go of me.'

'Oh, Chrissie for God's sake, what were you thinking?'

'I came to rescue you; I knew he was up to no good, are you alright? Did he hurt you?'

'Chrissie. I didn't need rescuing; I can look after myself.'

'But he's – Mr Philips, he's old, and he's married, he's –'

'He's someone who can look after me; he'll look out for me Chrissie. I need to do well here at Greens, I need this job, and I will do whatever it takes to get on.'

'But you don't need to do that. You shouldn't let him do that.'

'He wasn't – he didn't – look, Chrissie, it was fine, I didn't mind. I wouldn't expect you to understand.' With this, Dot flounced into the ladies toilet and slammed the door shut behind her.

Billy was about to speak.

'Just leave me, Billy, I need to get back to work.'

In the Screen

Christina took up her usual position again in the aisle nearest the door. She tried to immerse herself back into the Philadelphia Story, but she couldn't. She looked up at her idol on screen.

'Oh, Miss Hepburn, I hope you'll write back to me this time, there's so much I'd like to talk to you about, and I just know you would understand.'
