

Me

Stories of My Life

Katharine
Hepburn

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by KATHARINE

HEPBURN



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ALSO BY KATHARINE HEPBURN

The Making of *The African Queen*

Me



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Me

Prologue

I have a friend who keeps asking me why I am writing this book. Especially as I have said a thousand times: “No, that is personal. No, I won’t talk about that.” What made me change my mind? I wonder myself. Something changed me. I think—and I am not saying I know—I think that I’ve always thought of myself as an actor. Now in the last few years I’ve seen that creature whom I created sitting around saying, “Hey, what goes on, what are we going to do? We’re wasting time. Let’s get going!”

Shut up! I’m sick of you. I’m not going to hide behind you anymore. Who are you anyway? You’re not me. You’re “that great big beautiful doll.” You’re the lucky side of the coin. You were born at the right time. You looked right. You sounded right. You were lucky. You caught on and got rich. Good. I’m glad that you’ve had a good time. Now I’m going to take over.

What is that you’re saying? Who am I?

Well, I’m me—I’m what is called the power behind the throne. I am your—your character. Isn’t that what they call it? Your “Do this. Don’t do that.” Your fundamentals.

I run your ship. You’re the ship. You’re getting a bit long in the tooth and I may not be able to sell you as easily as I used to.

You have a right foot which doesn’t work all that well. I mean it hurts. In 1982 you ran into that telephone pole. Stupid of you.

Making a fancy comment about that shipyard just at the southeast edge of Saybrook Point. Listen—so it hurts! But at least they didn't have to cut it off. Yes, of course it threw your whole body off balance—and now your back is painful too.

Gosh, what do you expect! You've just taken your body for granted. You're lucky you had a good one to begin with. Oh yes, those two shoulder operations—rotator cuffs—isn't that what they were called? Yes, of course the right hip is fake. When did that go bad? In 1973.

Oh, that was a while ago.

Well, you're lucky—that operation really worked. Oh hell, you're lucky! You can see! You can hear! You can bicycle! You can garden! Yes, kneeling down—but that's restful, isn't it? Kneeling down?

Anyway, here's where I come in—your character. I don't think that you ever realized how handy I've been for you. I've been there. I tell you what that means—I'm your backup when you make a decision which is poor—and what you become involved in doesn't work. Here I am to try to explain it away.

You know what I really am? I'm my *main* gift from my parents. And when I realized this, I also knew why I had suddenly become interested in writing this book. I wanted to discover the real reason back of all the fluff. That bit of fiber which can be developed in all of us—there it is—waiting to be used. That is what suddenly struck me. How did I make it work? How did I have brains enough to survive *The Lake*—and the early failure of my movie career—the box-office-poison period? And how did I develop such a handy head of common sense? That is what can really keep you afloat. You can say, "You had money enough to swing it." Yes, I had. But money alone doesn't do it. I wasn't going to starve but I could have been defeated.

It's finding out where you went wrong and correcting it.

For instance, *The Lake*. I let Jed Harris, the producer, push me around. I knew that I was being pushed around and I didn't talk back. I didn't say, "Look, I am the one who has to sell this and if you make me into a mush, I'll just be a mush." And I was a mush.

The tale of *The Lake* and my survival was extremely important to me. I learned responsibility to say, "Talk to me. I'm to blame."

And the movies. In the same sort of half-assed way I let myself say, "Yes—O.K.," instead of, "No—I don't like it."

To learn responsibility—each of us has to learn responsibility.

Here we are. Live up to your potential.

But what to do! Well, don't you see what I'm doing and why I'm doing it? I am writing my life story. I've been driven to it. What else can I do? I have to say that's probably why people write their life story.

So before you begin to read, I have to warn you that the book which follows does not follow a path. When I say story—I mean stories of my life. And when I say stories I'm afraid I mean flashes—this—that—no no the other thing.

It's a hell of a long time ago that I leaped down that stairway in *The Warrior's Husband* with a stag on my shoulders. I had no idea that someday in the future I would be wondering if I could walk down a stair without falling down the damned stair. What is this thing called "living"?

Now we come to ME.

I guess that I must try to realize that I have had the most extraordinary use of this body—this back—these legs, etc. I have subjected them to the toughest treatment and they have performed great feats. I really can't blame them for sort of stiffening up. They've given me great service. They are tired.

Let us rest, Kath, let us rest. We just want to take it easy. Give us a break.

Oh no, not a break! We've had a break—give us a rest!

WRITE A BOOK!

I



Parents

Before I tell you anything about myself, I would like to tell you, or at least identify for you, the world into which I was born. My background. I mean of course my mother—my father. My two parents.

Mother died when I was forty-odd.

Dad died when I was fifty-odd. Thus I had them as my . . . Well, they were always for over forty years—*there*. They were mine.

From where I stood:

Dad at the left of the fireplace.

Mother at the right of the fireplace.

Tea every day at five.

They were the world into which I was born.

My background.

My mother:

Katharine Martha Houghton was born February 2, 1878. She was the daughter of Caroline Garlinghouse and Alfred Augustus Houghton.

Alfred Houghton was the younger brother of Amory Houghton, who was the head of the Corning Glass Company. It started in Cambridge, Massachusetts, moved to Brooklyn and ended in Corning,