

A
MIND
OF
HER
OWN



by
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KATHARINE HEPBURN'S star rose on Broadway, in the so-called legitimate theater, with a series of jerks and starts and frequent swoopings back to earth. She had a reputation, partly justified, as a stubborn and self-willed young woman. She was fired from several important parts because she refused to obey the instructions of stage directors. She had, so it seemed, a self-confidence which definitely exceeded her talents as an actress. This last part of the general indictment was, however, untrue.

Time, in combination with Miss Hepburn's willingness to take orders—after a fashion—gave her a chance to play the lead in a show called the *Warrior's Husband*, which was a hit of the 1932 season. This resulted in glittering offers from Hollywood. A girl of unusual sapience, she was not dazzled by the customary promises that she would earn vast sums if, when and as she made good. She proposed to make good very promptly and she demanded, from the start, the terms that she wanted. What was far more important, however, was that she left for California with an essential scrap of information tucked under her red hair. This was the knowledge that eminence on Broadway means very little to the millions who attend the movies.

The studio which first hired Helen Hayes had been forced to conduct a newspaper campaign to inform motion picture audiences of the identity of this talented actress. Lynn Fontanne was almost a failure on the screen because the fans—who knew every fact in the lives of Clara Bow and Gary Cooper—had never heard of her. So Katharine Hepburn decided to make herself talked about in Hollywood and she succeeded, if anything, too well. She breezed off the train at Los Angeles and announced that she was an heiress with a magnificent home in New York. She said that she had been surrounded by servants, governesses and tutors since childhood.

"I always drive a Hispano-Suiza," she remarked airily when asked for her preference in motors.

She owned no Hispano, of course, but she hurriedly rented one and drove in splendor to the studio. When Katie found that these preliminary exaggerations were solemnly published she hastened to add other fascinating, equally imaginary details. One time she would say that she was married to a fabulously wealthy banker. The next time she denied that she was married at all

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"Is it true that you have three children?" asked one interviewer.

"I think it's six," she answered.

Hollywood, long accustomed to goofy people, found that here was a girl who could be even crazier. She beat the town at its own game.

One day, for example, she was invited to play golf and her eyes were deeply innocent when she took the club at the first tee and held it awkwardly.

"Show me how," she begged.

Anything for Publicity

She was carefully instructed. Then she drove and sent the ball spinning two hundred yards down the fairway; she had played tournament golf back home in Hartford, Connecticut.

There were similar, carefully staged antics at the RKO studio when her first picture got under way. An office boy brought her a batch of fan letters. She took them to one of the main streets on the lot and sat down in the center of it to read her mail while traffic passed around her. A few days later she conspired with the electricians and wired one of the studio chairs so that anyone who sat down received a shock. She bought a monkey and walked around with it on her shoulder.

Katie achieved her objective. She was talked about, interviewed and photographed long before her first picture was released.

Miss Hepburn's program would have been merely ridiculous, her grotesqueries would have been futile in the end except for the fact that she is almost as good an actress as she believes herself to be. Her first picture, *A Bill of Divorcement*, was a personal triumph. After the showing of *Morning Glory*, a story which partially paralleled her own career, Miss Hepburn was hailed by solemn New York critics as the most important screen discovery since the Great Garbo. This judgment is, perhaps, premature. Nearly every new Hollywood sensation is thus acclaimed. But that Katie is a fresh and arresting personality there is no possible doubt.

The secret of her success if there is one, probably lies in the fact that she is different from most of the pretties of the screen. She is not very pretty. Her face is bony. Her voice is rather harsh. But there is a warmth to her which shines out.

If an early beginning means anything, Miss Hepburn ought to be a good actress. She has, research discloses, been acting from the time she was three or four years old. As a small girl she had one talent which aroused envious despair in the hearts of her playmates: she could shed real tears at a moment's notice and without being in the least unhappy. The youthful Katie made full use of this gift. She would make some unreasonable request of her father and at his first refusal would begin to weep. Instead of being spanked she got what she wanted.

A Lady of Determination

Few of the biographical facts, as supplied by Miss Hepburn when she burst

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upon Hollywood, are closely related to the truth. She is not an heiress. She has only one husband and no children at all. There is nothing mysterious about her story. Neither, on the other hand, did she travel the traditional path from gingham to satins.

Katharine Hepburn is her real name. She was born in 1907 at Hartford, Connecticut, and is the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Thomas N. Hepburn, who still reside in that city and who view the rise of their remarkable daughter with mingled amusement and astonishment.

Katharine Hepburn had stage ambitions from the start and she was in no way discouraged because she fell far short in all conventional standards of beauty. She was thin, gangly and freckled. She handled herself badly. She was something of a tomboy. Even now, at twenty-five, Miss Hepburn is, as I have suggested, far from being a standardized beauty.

Katie's parents did not take her stage yearnings very seriously. She received a schooling which would qualify her for college. But she demanded that her father build a miniature theater and succeeded, by allowing a tear or two to appear in her eyes, in making him do it. There she put on plays with the neighborhood children.

All this caused no parental apprehension. Dr. and Mrs. Hepburn knew that nearly all small girls dream about becoming actresses. Katharine was an obedient child and did well in her studies. She was interested in swimming and was better than an average golfer when she reached her teens. She even took part in Hartford's social life and joined the local Junior League, to which she was eligible. Then she enrolled in the Class of 1928 at Bryn Mawr. The drama courses and college theatricals furnished confirmation for Katharine's belief that she had talent. She was the best actress on the campus. She quietly decided that she would go on the stage after graduation.

She found, however, that her father and mother could be as stubborn as she was herself. They refused to cooperate and hinted that she would be a flop.

She hung around Hartford for several weeks and then departed quietly for Baltimore where, she had heard, Edwin Knopf was organizing a new stock company. Knopf saw something in the girl. He took her on and she played small parts. She was told that her acting was not too bad but that her voice was awful. It was rough and harsh. She jumbled her words together. So she went to New York, where she studied under Frances Robinson-Duff, a lady of

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such outstanding ability as a teacher that nearly all well-known actresses have been her pupils at one time or another. Katie learned how to breathe, how to speak, how to walk—all the groundwork of being an actress.

By now her parents had forgiven their erring daughter; they had never been really angry. With their aid she supplemented study with a trip to Europe. She also got bits to do in summer stock. Meanwhile, for no very good reason, her already ample self-confidence was increasing. Theatrical agents, whose offices she haunted, said that she was not pretty enough. She answered haughtily that they were stupid and began to call on producers themselves. It was while she was thus making the rounds that a British playwright arrived in New York to supervise the casting of his forthcoming production. He found that the star, an eminent although temperamental lady, was satisfactory. So was the leading man. But a young girl tentatively chosen for a minor although important rôle seemed quite impossible. He ordered that a call be sent out for other candidates.

Katharine, her ear always tuned to such calls, came abruptly into his office and announced brusquely that she would consent to take the part. The British dramatist was somewhat amused; this girl was so tall, bony and freckled that her air of assurance was a little absurd. He was, however, having trouble finding the right girl. Most of the applicants were so lovely to look upon that the lady star, fearing competition, flatly rejected them. This girl was homely enough, he pondered, and when she read the lines with unusual feeling he gave her a trial. The star enthusiastically endorsed her and rehearsals began. A good deal of sympathy was wasted on Katie during the first few days; surely she would fail. But the critics at the first night made notes on their program that an unknown young woman, Katharine Hepburn, had assets more important than mere beauty. She had a curious blend of charm and intelligence. She could also act.



Faith—Not Stubbornness

This incident, in which the unknown young girl makes good, is probably the only conventional one in Miss Hepburn's career. Katie or Kate or Heppie, as

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she is variously called, did not bother to be grateful for the opportunity given her. She had—still has—a hard, factual, realistic little mind. Katie knew best, she was sure, how Katie's advancement to stardom was best achieved and no longer did stage directors, dramatists or fellow actors feel sorry for her. Instead, they cursed her and decided that she was one of the most troublesome women in the business. She was chosen to play the leading feminine part in a play called *The Big Pond* but had a fight with the director and was fired. Then she was offered a rôle in *Death Takes a Holiday*. She quit because the producer insisted that she play one scene in a manner which she believed faulty. Even the chance to be opposite Leslie Howard in *The Animal Kingdom* did not impress Miss Hepburn. She was engaged for the part, disagreed with the interpretation and again was fired.

"It was not stubbornness," she has since said. "It was faith in myself."

Then preparations were made for *The Warrior's Husband*, that amusing and ribald drama about lady soldiers and their too, too gentle husbands. Katharine Hepburn was considered but rejected on the theory that she had no reputation and therefore would not fill the theater. But after various actresses had been tested she was engaged. She had precisely the right dash and arrogance for the part. After the first night Katharine Hepburn was a new Broadway luminary and the movie barons began to make offers. Katie viewed them coldly out of her blue-green eyes. But she signed with RKO-Radio Pictures when she was promised the part of Sidney in *A Bill of Divorcement*. John Barrymore would be the star. Billie Burke was to be in the cast.

Katie proceeded to steal the picture from Mr. Barrymore and Miss Burke. The heads of RKO, after viewing the first rushes, tore up the contract they had signed with Miss Hepburn. She was given a new one with a gaudy salary and was officially proclaimed a star.

A Legend of Holy Terror

Katie Hepburn, after *A Bill of Divorcement*, was in a dangerous spot. It was going to be difficult to find another story with half the appeal. So it proved. Her second picture, *Christopher Strong*, was mediocre. At this critical point her stubborn self-confidence came to her aid. She insisted on playing the rôle of the young actress in *Morning Glory* in her own way. She demonstrated her versatility. She offers further proof of it in the production of *Little Women* in which she gives a moving performance as Jo March.

Katie has grown a little more sober in recent months. Her pranks are less obvious.

Miss Hepburn gives fewer absurd interviews, too. She no longer makes a mystery out of the fact that she is married to Ludlow Smith, a New York business man. In Hollywood, however, first impressions last. Press agents and studio officials are very much in awe of

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Katie. The fact is that she is gracious enough and friendly enough. But the theory persists that she is a holy terror, recalcitrant and excitable.

This, even though untrue, is an almost unprecedented triumph for so young an actress. Katharine Hepburn has surrounded herself with an aura of invincibility and it is a very valuable asset during the inevitable disagreements and arguments which accompany the making of motion pictures. Hollywood always exaggerates everything and now it is said of Katie that no one can get the best of her. It has been done, however, and the victor was, as it happens, an insurance agent. He kept calling her home to urge that she take a policy. *His* was the best of all policies, he insisted. *He* was the star salesman of California. After ten or fifteen of these telephonic importunities Miss Hepburn decided to retaliate. She could not sleep one night. At three o'clock in the morning she picked up her telephone and routed the agent out of bed.

"I want you to see my new picture," she said. "It's amazing, magnificent, astounding. You owe it to yourself and your family. It opens tomorrow at ten o'clock."

Then, laughing to herself, she went to sleep. But at noon she was called to the telephone and the insurance man greeted her cheerfully.

"When can we close the deal?"

"What deal?"

"Why, I've just seen your picture, as you suggested, and now you ought to take one of my policies. That's fair, isn't it?"

Katie surrendered. She told him to call.

