



Audrey Hepburn: A Life of Beautiful Uncertainty

Tom Santopietro

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Tom Santopietro's reverent biography of Audrey Hepburn illustrates how the scion of an impoverished aristocratic family went from starving in Nazi-occupied Europe to becoming a legendary actress, fashion icon, and humanitarian activist.

Audrey Hepburn, as this comprehensive biography makes clear, led an extraordinary life. Born in Belgium to English glider pilot and polyglot Joseph Ruston and Dutch Baroness Ella van Heemstra, her remarkable achievements began early. As a preteen, she traveled through occupied Holland to distribute covert intelligence and supplies among resistance fighters while training to become a prima ballerina. Following the armistice and a move to a vaunted English ballet academy, she learned that her height would condemn her to a career of chorus roles. She shifted into modeling and West End musicals. A series of cameos caught the attention of Alec Guinness and French author Colette, laying the groundwork for the star-studded career to follow.

The biography is divided into five acts that match the stages of Hepburn's life as well as the spheres she operated in: Hollywood, fashion, humanitarianism, and her childhood and dotage. All of this is enriched by a torrent of details and insights. There are accounts of her lifelong relationship with Hubert de Givenchy and her turbulent one with William Holden; in-depth quotes from friends and family; and, drawing on Hepburn's own words, a rigorous study of her humility, self-doubt, and emotional struggle with her absent father. Throughout, the book is assiduous in capturing the specificity of her life. Facts, for instance about a photography session, are animated into lively scenes with energetic prose and visual flair. As the book ends, it expands outward, casting its gaze onto the ripples that continue to emanate from Hepburn's legacy.

A laudatory biography, *Audrey Hepburn* draws back the curtain on one of cinema's most enigmatic stars.

WILLEM MARX (March / April 2025)

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