

The Female Hermes in Breakfast at Tiffany's

*Audrey Hepburn, Willa Cather,
and the Audacious Path of the
Feminine to Changing the World*

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Contents

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Dedication

*"Two drifters, off to see the world
There's such a lot of world to see
We're after the same rainbow's end
Waitin' 'round the bend
My huckleberry friend"*

*To John Mayer, my Tom Sawyer,
After all these years I'm still blown away
And find myself in a new land.*

Introduction

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Chapter One



A resounding miracle happened while filming the iconic opening Fifth Avenue scene in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* in 1960. In 2006, to mark the 45 year anniversary of the film, producer Richard Shepherd described, “The first day in the film we were shooting the first scene in the movie, which is when the taxi cab pulls up to the curb in front of Tiffany’s at 57th and Fifth Avenue,” with director Blake Edwards then continuing in dismay, “It came the time to shoot and it was as though god said, ‘Well, I’m going to give you a break now, but for the rest of your career you’re just gonna have to live off of this one. And *nobody* appeared. *No cars. No people. It was suddenly deserted.* With the sweep of his hand, C.B. DeMille wiped out the whole traffic situation and we had our shot.”¹

That was the dawn of October 2, 1960. I arrived this year, 2023, 63 years later, on the same day to see John Mayer at Madison Square Garden for two nights. I decided to stay right off the Square at the historic Washington Square

¹ Featurette *Breakfast at Tiffany's: The Making of a Classic* for the Anniversary Edition DVD (2006)

Hotel (Washington Square North) so that I would be exactly where the story had first originated (and of course also where Bob Dylan and Joan Baez had lived). The next morning on Bleecker Street to honor the wild discoveries of the past year about Audrey Hepburn and Willa Cather that have culminated years of dreaming, contemplating, writing, and research, I went into a hair stylist shop and had my long hair cut, a *Roman Holiday* freedom moment, into Audrey's charming, short pixie from the early 1950s after her gorgeous triumph of arrival in *Gigi* on Broadway and *Roman Holiday*—now on its 70 year anniversary. It was an absolute miracle Audrey ever made it here to New York City following what she had just been through with WWII with its slaughter, deprivation, and brutal, unrelenting destruction in her own childhood neighborhood in the Netherlands and being liberated a mere six years before, the trauma still fresh in her fragile existence. Her bright arrival was about to bring an answer to a different lineage of the feminine in radical move from the history of dark conquest, greed, discrimination, superiority, domination, and destruction. She was a very different kind of spirit, formed not from those extreme experiences into darkness, anger, or resentment, but instead into the frame of a kind, careful, gentle, caring, energetic and hopeful radiant person with an illuminated heart and smile, a deeply loving nature beyond boundaries—with a propensity for doing what beautiful it takes to make it above and beyond the blind evil and doing it with a bit of inspired fun and laughter and an undaunted, brilliant spirit.

This beginning miracle on Fifth Avenue at the very opening of the movie originates all the way fifty blocks down to Greenwich Village to the start of Fifth Avenue and also to 1904 when Willa Cather arrived in New York City to stay at 60 Washington Square South. This may come as a surprise as Truman Capote made such a big deal over his own image, writing, and fame. But it was there that Wilella Sibert Cather would begin to imagine her characters of Don Hedger and Eden Bower for her 1920 story "Coming, Aphrodite!" having

apartments in a red brick house on that same street as hers opposite Washington Square Park, a free-spirited Eden Bower moving in across the hall into their apartments of a floor that had been divided into two, and Don Hedger the artist-painter who would come to fall in love with her living there with his quite expressive dog Caesar.

It was in 1912, eight years earlier, at the Brevoort Hotel, Fifth Avenue's first hotel, at 11 Fifth Avenue right up from Washington Arch where Willa would sell her story "The Bohemian Girl" right before leaving for her first trip to New Mexico and the American Southwest. And extraordinarily, that trip would also culminate here on Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village from a street in Santa Fe that would come to meet Audrey's role and that miraculous opening scene, a mirroring and continuation of history opening in a phenomenal, numinous way. Willa had a further destination in mind with the title of her "Coming, Aphrodite!" that was at the end of that street in Santa Fe: a cathedral basilica held softly and intimately by the purple horizon of the Sangre de Cristo, the "Blood of Christ" Mountains. Her bringing history, mythology, and religion into her design and overall internally-inspired vision was her daring to tread where society's restrictions said she could not. But how could one imagine a different culture without crossing those restrictions for inspired cause? She did it with reverent estimation so that when it was finally seen, what she had done, it would show it was done with pure genius and in order to break it open to the very real and true experience of humans to the further dimensions of themselves that culture was erasing for its political, economic, life-eating machine. The boundaries that Huckleberry Finn crossed of where one must go to find autonomy and freedom, taking them where one must and running from the bullets, she answered with a map of complete cultural transformation, where to reclaim the true gold, where to find home, and where to find oneself, one's true history, one's true heritage, one's wholeness, even one's freedom and joy, even where the pitfalls are. It was finding her own Arch de Triumph de l'Étoile

in New York City at Washington Square, the Parisian triumph and star that powerfully radiates out, pouring its inspiration into the radiating streets—from this mother city she knew the deeper inspirations of from its heritage—giving Washington Arch this understanding and life down Fifth Avenue from the brilliance of Greenwich Village—the arts and not the mere politics—just as that Arch in Paris stands at the western end of the Champs-Élysées inspiring and lighting the city to different cause for humanity.



Four years before the making of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, as the spirit world and all atoms and molecules of nature were making their way even internally in every leaf, Audrey Hepburn would be first pictured here on Washington Square in a Greenwich Village bookshop in the movie *Funny Face* (1957) made up dowdily and hidden in the book rows of deep intellectual pursuits, the beatnik to upturning culture and not yet its known radiance, before her being the realization and embodiment of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, the Louvre's reason and inspiration itself, at the Latona Fountain with doves of her own body and spirit in flight in the gardens at Chateau de Versailles where the delicate feminine had once fallen, and the arrival of the spirit of the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, the heart and voice of Opéra Garnier, Place de

l'Opéra, and the now-known face of the white dome of Sacre Coeur, living and breathing. In France, too, the preeminent female French writer Colette had merely experienced a moment in a hotel with Audrey passing nearby when she knew that was her Gigi she needed to send to Broadway. Colette was born in 1873, the same year as Willa, thus unknowingly also sending the girl to pick up the mantle of genius of the American female author who would otherwise be sequestered and regionalized—and raided for false economic fortune and manipulative fame, and taking with it the heart and soul of the culture and its true possibilities. In Colette's and Anita Loos' *Gigi* Audrey would play a young courtesan in training—leading a very different path to at first, as Truman Capote wrote her, Holly Golightly's limited definition of her powers, but here getting her ready to defy the forces that had an appetite—to contain and devour her spirit and inner and outer remarkable beauty. Thus our 'dead' symbols in New York City and across to the American Southwest were about to be given their true existence by women standing in their own brilliance and radiance, and the earth would not be void.



As the forces moved, in 2007 the board of Washington Square Park did something the neighborhood thought odd. They dug up the fountain of the

park which had been more central in the park since the early 1870s (when Willa Cather was born in Virginia in 1873) and moved it over to be in line with Fifth Avenue and to be aligned with the Arch, New York City's Arch de Triomphe de l'Étoile, the culmination, or origination, of Fifth Avenue and the flow of the city from this Bohemian artistic front. They reopened the park with this alteration in May 2009. On the same block two doors down where Willa sold "The Bohemian Girl" to *McClure's Magazine* stood Mark Twain's last New York home where he had lived from 1904 (just down from where it would turn into a river in 1960), and the year Willa arrived, to 1908, just four years earlier as she was selling this story, taking less money than she was actually offered in that moment, being an editor herself, agreeing to take more money later. Twain had just passed in 1910 in Connecticut, but of course where he had taken American literature still resounding, and resounding with her. And so when Fifth Avenue went quiet and solitary that October morning for Audrey to arrive at Tiffany's with her Danish and coffee, the taxi her raft arrival, it also turned into the arrival of Huckleberry Finn's river in its contemplative solitude, and Audrey's Moon River, this time a female's culmination right on the avenue where Willa dreamt that feminine blooming could lead somewhere new and completely restructure the foundation of American culture with a different value system from its cultural heritage. Not somewhat different. Radically reimagined to where it would be rooted and grow differently from what Willa herself had witnessed at its roots. What she saw from what was seeded of the feminine (from many cultures), she knew that it could be cultivated differently and grow into a more vibrant and strong individual flower, and thus cultural garden. And, she knew how. It was in her deep contemplation that shows story to story. This flower that arrived that morning in the taxi would literally go on to have gorgeous flowers named after her to somehow honor her spirit. What Audrey was bringing was this natural affinity with Willa's work, cosmic, but also not by accident in the human participation.

Breakfast at Tiffany's screenwriter George Axelrod, a native New Yorker, was aware of Willa's writing as well as this literary and even Willa's personal connection to Mark Twain. Willa and Twain became friends at the end of his life there at 21 Fifth Avenue, and she would sit by his bed and listen to him. Imagine how priceless, these two geniuses, male to female and the fate of American culture through insight and humor. It was certainly taken to heart by Willa, this moving forward with American literature, and she knowing her path, the very hope and answer, and even love, was the feminine from Twain's line of the road-taking drifter trickster. She was already writing it as in her 1909 "The Enchanted Bluff"—a place where she would herself go after that that held the answers and the magic dust. Even Ernest Hemingway who stayed at the Brevoort in 1926 (the year before the publication of her *Death Comes for the Archbishop*), is well known to have said of the literary import: "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." Willa revered it as well as one of her favorites. It reopened American possibility. From this the very street in front of her, Fifth Avenue, Willa saw as this continued flowing forth, from what she knew of herself, the stream that Axelrod would recognize as the literary continued river in her "Coming, Aphrodite!" from Greenwich Village:

After lunch Hedger strolled about the Square for the dog's health and watched the stages pull out;--that was almost the very last summer of the old horse stages on Fifth Avenue. The fountain had but lately begun operations for the season and was throwing up a mist of rainbow which now and then blew south and sprayed a bunch of Italian babies that were being supported on the outer rim by older, very little older, brothers and sisters. Plump robins were hopping about on the soil; the grass was newly cut and blindingly green. Looking up the Avenue through the Arch, one could see the young poplars with their bright, sticky leaves, and the Brevoort glistening in its spring coat of paint, and shining horses and carriages,--occasionally an automobile, misshapen and sullen, like an ugly threat in a stream of things that were bright and beautiful and alive.

Axelrod then opened his screenplay:

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - DAWN

There is a magic about Fifth Avenue at this hour. An emptiness. A quiet. A moment of limbo as the street lamps fade in the face of the purple onrush of dawn. Presently, on this morning in early September, a lone taxi-cab speeds up the Avenue. It slows down briefly as it passes the International Building with its many air-line windows, then picks up speed again and continues on to the corner of 57th Street where it pulls to the curb and stops.

Along with the song playing with the lyrics “my Huckleberry friend,” showing Axelrod’s and lyricist Johnny Mercer’s awareness of this literary river of Fifth Avenue, it is quite obvious of Mark Twain and not so obvious about Willa—*yet*—the avenue turned miraculously into the lonely Mississippi headed into unknown territory where the soul must drift alone, except now the arrival from the raft is a singular, undaunted, free spirit of a female in Audrey Hepburn with a careful natural guard in herself of what treasure within would be protected while declaring a spirit as no one had quite experienced before in exquisite and elegant softness and graceful assuredness. This is no accident on the part of Axelrod and Mercer that this arrival is female in this specific milieu. This arrival is a knowing reclamation of the female character and destiny that Willa set forth. A careful examination of her works brings this more and more to light and reopens the cultural possibilities of what she saw so much different and further than everyone else. They also knew it had fallen into the wrong hands of ego and greed.

While Truman Capote’s novella is dark and destructive by making the character of Holly Golightly a flippant, valueless, throw-yourself-away call girl with no destination, Audrey’s own character begins defying this defilement. This is no exploitable, throw-away girl-for-money and there is a clear shift away in the writing and production from that purposeful devaluing—and not just because Audrey did not want to play a call girl. Audrey was not an ordinary female, and these differences were giving credence back to what Willa was showing. Audrey was not seeking the spotlight, fame, or huge

money. Not only Audrey's radiant light, but her having being broken open to what power and greed will do with no concern over the millions it maims, murders, and destroys—bringing forth more strongly the good and life-affirming—made her not fodder as a Hollywood starlet for the machine, but a Being willing to take a stand against even the biggest destruction in any small (her own humility) way she could. And that is what is to be seen in this story. What Audrey does actually changes the course of humanity in our moment in a light, beautiful, deeply spirited way, that was actually brilliant and courageous through a string of light-hearted romantic comedies ranging from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* to *Paris When It Sizzles*, *My Fair Lady*, *How to Steal a Million*, and *Charade*. When looked at closely with seeing what was happening behind the scenes and what could not be said, Audrey's choices can be seen coming directly from her own sense of willingness to make things right and to give herself to making that difference in the most beautiful, kind, loving, fun-loving, but determined way possible. She would not sit back and let things be evil. Her entire oeuvre actually shows this. This frail, undernourished little girl studying ballet as hard as she could, carrying messages for the Dutch Resistance and performing to provide funds for them to make it through the atrocities and devastation, didn't lose her empathy, heart, care, or nerve after the war and when she got to New York City—the little "Dutch Girl" as author Robert Matzen calls her in his telling of her experiences during WWII, was not made of want of commercialism. This was a spirit forged into realness, big enough to surround all that was fake, that could bring forth natural and sublime beauty carefully and meticulously. It was deeply a part of her character. Her very differences are from within the internal spaces that Willa was demonstrating in the desperate need for America to evolve culturally in a different way, the willingness to know one's true roots, to grow, and to stand differently and be imbued with the spirit evident in its immigrants before they were white-washed, drained of joy, and fed to the machine so that the rich and

soul-sucking gentry in New York City could be richer.

Truman's own personal character, as all evidence now shows, was a desperate internal need to tear others down with no regard of the cost to them—the deeper the cut the better to him, the more evil the more important he would feel, unable to be looked away from—as narcissists are driven to diminish others to make themselves more grand, as well as to lie about it to cover the tracks, as with coming up with a stories about his mother as a basis for the Holly Golightly character (and tales of riverboat trips as a child and the Mississippi), or letting people continuously try to guess at the very-off-the-mark 'inspirations' of Holly while he remains star of the show with a deep secret as a "treasure" all his own—allowing no one to have that kind of 'admiration' but himself, the ego dragon with the belly full of something it can never have internally. Truman's dark secret about *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was none of those coquettish cover-ups. But he would also even darkly yearn and accept the attention of even being discovered to be evil and then purposefully pursued it as if to somehow prove his 'mettle,' the "I did something bad . . . and I'll go further for fame, power, and control"—whatever brings the spotlight and fame to fill his craving and to even show his need to hurt others, to claim them for himself, to own them. What is underneath the motivation is actually very dark as the proliferation of recent research shows of malignant personality disorders—far more common and pervasive than we ever knew. Because it has taken over our culture in the guise of admirably ambitious for money and power, its mask needs taken off. No one would take that on in the public arena and sacrifice themselves to the monster within Capote. That kind of personality looks to feed itself on both publicity, first and foremost, and always victimhood—being called out for the very transgressions it sought publicity from in the first place so it can be further the star, further the victim—it doesn't care about the depths it goes, as long as it takes you with it. It is something like needing the further it cannot have of "deep" intent, something