

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

---



# Enchantment

Donald Spoto

# Contents

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Donald Spoto

Title Page

Dedication

Epigraph

Acknowledgements

List of Illustrations

1. 1929-1939
2. 1939-1946
3. 1947-1951
4. 1951
5. 1952
6. 1953
7. 1954
8. 1955-1956
9. 1957
10. January-June 1958
11. July 1958-December 1960
12. 1961-1962
13. 1963-1965
14. 1966-1970

15. 1971-1986

16. 1987-1990

17. 1991-1993

Picture Section

Notes

Bibliography

Index

Copyright

## About the Book

Born in Brussels in 1929, Audrey Hepburn was the daughter of a British father and a Dutch Baroness. But when she was five, her father deserted the family. With the outbreak of war in 1939, her mother thought they would be safer in Holland than Holland Park, but although they survived the German Occupation, the experience left its physical and emotional scars.

Back in England again, Audrey studied ballet with Marie Rambert. After a few West End musicals and minor film parts, she was spotted by the author, Colette, to star in a stage version of her novel, *Gigi*. And then Audrey's career took off. Her debut screen role was the Princess in the enchanting *Roman Holiday*. It won her an Oscar.

She went on to bring her unique grace and high spirits to a number of highly acclaimed films - from *Funny Face* and *The Nun's Story* to *My Fair Lady*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Robin and Marian*.

For a while it looked as though her personal life would follow the Hollywood dream. But her marriage to Mel Ferrer was not to last. She married and divorced a second time, and there were other passionate but short-lived affairs, some revealed for the first time in this book, but her relationships were never entirely successful.

With all the insight, background knowledge and innate sympathy for his subject, qualities that have made his

biographies of Hitchcock, Dietrich, Monroe and Bergman such international successes, Donald Spoto truly captures the spirit of an elusive, beautiful, talented and vulnerable woman.

## About the Author

Donald Spoto was born near New York City in 1941 and received his PhD degree from Fordham University in 1970. He is the author of 21 books, including internationally bestselling biographies of Alfred Hitchcock, Tennessee Williams, Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe and Ingrid Bergman. He is married to the Danish school administrator and artist Ole Flemming Larsen. They live in a quiet village an hour's drive from Copenhagen.

## Also by Donald Spoto

Otherwise Engaged: The Life of Alan Bates  
Joan: The Mysterious Life of the Heretic who Became a  
Saint  
In Silence: Why We Pray  
Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis Assisi  
Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: A Life  
The Hidden Jesus: A New Life  
Diana - The Last Year  
Notorious: The Life of Ingrid Bergman  
Rebel: The Life and Legend of James Dean  
Dynasty: The House of Windsor from Victoria to Diana  
A Passion for Life: The Biography of Elizabeth Taylor  
Marilyn Monroe: The Biography  
Blue Angel: The Life of Marlene Dietrich  
Laurence Olivier: A Life  
Madcap: The Life of Preston Sturges  
Lenya: A Life  
Falling in Love Again: Marlene Dietrich - A Photo-Essay  
The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee  
Williams  
The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock  
Stanley Kramer: Film Maker  
Camerado: Hollywood and the American Man  
The Art of Alfred Hitchcock

DONALD SPOTO

ENCHANTMENT

THE LIFE OF  
AUDREY HEPBURN



arrow books



for  
Ole Flemming Larsen

‘ . . . right next to the right one . . . ’

Tim Christensen,  
Danish Composer and Lyricist

'It was the coming true  
that was the proof of the enchantment'

Henry James, *The Sacred Fount* (1901)

## Acknowledgments

During the course of my research, many people who knew, worked with and had professional and personal connections to Audrey Hepburn shared their memories and impressions with me. Among them, I am grateful most of all to Jacqueline Bisset, Patricia Bosworth, Karen Cadle, Christa Roth, Marian Seldes, Michael Tilson Thomas, Frederica von Stade, Robert Wagner, Martha Hyer Wallis, John Waxman, Arthur Wilde, Audrey Wilder and Roger Young.

Andrew Lownie kindly put me in contact with Adrian Weale, one of England's experts in the field of military intelligence, who enabled me to clarify important details about Audrey's father.

Not for the first time in my career, the personnel at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, provided me with expert help and guidance. Stacey Behlmer, Coordinator of Special Projects and Research Assistance, pointed me to many items I might otherwise have overlooked; at every stage of this project, she offered the most generous, enthusiastic and friendly support. Her colleagues were similarly gracious, each offering particular contributions: Barbara Hall, Research Archivist; Sandra Archer, Head of Reference Services; Faye Thompson, Photograph Department Coordinator; Kristine Krueger, of the National Film Information Service at the Herrick; Jonathan Wahl, Library Page Supervisor; and staff members Matthew Severson and Kevin Wilkerson.

At the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, I was fortunate once again to have the invaluable aid of Ned Comstock, Archivist in the Doheny Memorial Library; and of Haden Guest, Curator of the Warner Bros. Archives.

In the last years of her life, Audrey Hepburn gave herself tirelessly to the causes of UNICEF, the United Nations International Children's Fund. In Denmark, Anne Tennant helped me to contact the right colleagues at UNICEF's New York offices. There, I met a remarkable team of dedicated people who made available to me documents of singular significance detailing Audrey's years of service to UNICEF. I offer deep thanks to Adhiratha Keefe, John Manfredi, Fran Silverberg and Upasana Young. UNICEF also granted me permission to publish important photos; in this regard, I received very kind assistance from Ellen Tolmie and Nicole Toutounji. Also in the New York office, I must acknowledge Gloria Adwutum, Margaret Majuk, Patricia Moccia, Edwin Ramirez, Sharad Sapra, Veronica Theodoro and Maria Zanca.

Thanks to the kindness of Library Supervisor Gary Browning, at the Museum of Television and Radio in Beverly Hills, I was able to view Audrey Hepburn's early television performances.

Simone Potter, Senior Picture Researcher at the British Film Institute, cleared my way to selecting some of the most telling images in the book.

Rose Puntillo, Business Center Representative at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Beverly Hills, provided helpful and generous office assistance.

Thomas Smith was my research assistant in London; I acknowledge him with my thanks, affection and admiration. He tracked down obscure texts, scoured archives and libraries for articles and essays, and applied his first-rate scholarship at every stage. In the United States, was fortunate to have the help of Destiny Leake, who helped me

locate important letters in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Frank Turner, Library Director of the Beinecke, supervises an admirable staff - among them, Naomi Saito, Public Services Assistant.

Debra Campbell, chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, graciously provided me with a copy of her elegantly written and scholarly paper, 'The Nun and the Crocodile,' which clarified several fine points in the life of the novelist Kathryn Hulme, one of Audrey's closest friends.

Bernard Dick, author and scholar in several fields, pointed out to me important aspects of Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* and its movie version.

The esteemed playwright and screenwriter Robert Anderson has been a devoted friend and an advocate of my writing for over thirty years. During many long conversations, he confided personal memories of his relationship with Audrey, entrusting the details without restriction. I am grateful for his trust.

My brother-in-law, John Moller, is a talented graphic designer and a superb technician with a fund of creative ideas: he performed miracles as he transferred dozens of Audrey Hepburn photographs onto disks. This painstaking task, requiring an artist's eye and many arduous days, John dispatched with a cheerful, generous dedication of his time.

For various kindnesses extended to me during the course of my work, I express my warm thanks to Mary-Kelly Busch; Mart Crowley; Mary Evans; Lewis Falb and Gerald Pinciss; Mike Farrell and Shelley Fabares; Joshua Robison; and Erica Wagner. As always, Mona and Karl Malden have a special claim on my gratitude for their loving endorsement of me and my work.

In the London office of the Elaine Markson Literary Agency, Elizabeth Sheinkman looks after my interests in the UK with remarkable attention to detail, spirited enthusiasm and unfailing good counsel. As time passes and

book follows book, I am ever more grateful to be represented by Elizabeth and, in the New York headquarters of the Agency, by my incomparable friend, Elaine Markson, who has guided my career so judiciously for three decades. She and her colleagues - Gary Johnson, Geri Thoma and Julia Kenny - are, each and all, very dear to me indeed.

At the Hutchinson imprint of Random House, London, I am fortunate to be published by Paul Sidey, a treasured friend for over 25 years and an esteemed publisher in Britain. A man of incisive intelligence and leavening wit, he was from day one the most attentive, encouraging editor and the most genially sympathetic collaborator on this book. My life is much the richer for Paul's enduring fellowship.

Audrey Hepburn would have admired and loved Ole Flemming Larsen, whose name appears on the dedication page. A respected academic and artist, he spent many evenings watching and discussing her films with me. All during the course of my research, he contributed valuable ideas, and then he listened patiently as I read sections of the manuscript. Most of all, Ole has blessed my life with very great serenity and happiness, the consequence of a commitment deep and true; for that and for so much, I am grateful beyond my capacity to say?. I share this book, and my life, with him.

# List of Illustrations

## Section One:

- [1.](#) Audrey in 1939. © Lady Manon van Suchtelen. Courtesy of Joke Quarles van Ufford.
- [2.](#) As Natasha in *War and Peace*, 1955. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
- [3.](#) Audrey in 1938. Credit unknown.
- [4.](#) Dance recital in Holland, 1943. © Courtesy of the British Film Institute.
- [5.](#) With her mother, the Baroness Ella van Heemstra, 1945. Credit unknown.
- [6.](#) At a London rehearsal, with Babs Johnson, 1948. Credit unknown.
- [7.](#) In *Sauce Piquante, London*, 1950. © Courtesy of the British Film Institute.
- [8.](#) As Eve Lester, in *Young Wives' Tale* (1950), with Helen Cherry, Nigel Patrick and Derek Farr. © Courtesy of the British Film Institute.
- [9.](#) With James Hanson, 1952. © Courtesy of the British Film Institute.
- [10.](#) Relaxing with Gregory Peck, during *Roman Holiday*, 1952. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
- [11.](#) With director Billy Wilder and Humphrey Bogart, filming *Sabrina*, 1953. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[12.](#) With William Holden, in *Sabrina*, 1953. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[13.](#) With director King Vidor, cinematographer Jack Cardiff and co-star Henry Fonda: *War and Peace*, 1955. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[14.](#) With Mel Ferrer in *War and Peace*. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[15.](#) Rehearsing the ballroom sequence for *War and Peace*. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[16.](#) With Fred Astaire, during filming of *Funny Face*, 1956. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[17.](#) As Jo Stockton in *Funny Face*. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[18.](#) With producer Henry Blanke, novelist Kathryn Hulme, screenwriter Robert Anderson and director Fred Zinnemann, planning *The Nun's Story* in 1957. © Courtesy of Robert Anderson.

## **Section Two:**

[19.](#) As Gabrielle van der Mal/Sister Luke, in *The Nun's Story*, 1958. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[20.](#) Filming *The Nun's Story* in the Belgian Congo. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[21.](#) With Peter Finch. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[22.](#) With Mel Ferrer, preparing *Green Mansions*, 1958. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[23.](#) Singing 'Moon River,' in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 1960. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and



Sciences.

[24.](#) Filming the opening sequence of *My Fair Lady* with Rex Harrison, 1963. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[25.](#) With director George Cukor: the embassy ball sequence of *My Fair Lady*. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[26.](#) With Albert Finney, while filming *Two for the Road*, 1966. Credit unknown.

[27.](#) With Andrea Dotti in Rome, 1972. © Courtesy of the British Film Institute.

[28.](#) With William Wyler (recipient of the American Film Institute Life Achievement Award) and actress Merle Oberon, Los Angeles, 1976. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

[29.](#) Seated between Robert Wolders and US Committee for UNICEF president Laurence Bruce, Jr., transporting grain to Tigre, Ethiopia, 1988. © UNICEF/HQ88-0900/John Isaac.

[30.](#) With children in Vietnam, 1990. © UNICEF/HQ90-0081/Peter Charlesworth.

[31.](#) At a UNICEF-sponsored health-care centre in Honduras, 1989. © UNICEF/HQ89-0231/Horst Cerni.

[32.](#) With a dying child in Somalia, 1992. © UNICEF/HQ92-1199/Betty Press.

[33.](#) As Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*, 1963. © Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

# 1

## *1929-1939*

THERE HAD BEEN bright sunshine when they left the English shore, but midway across the Channel, dark clouds swept overhead, and the wind had shifted from breezy to almost gale force. Now, as the ship headed for the Continent, they were suddenly caught in a late-winter storm. Cold rain whipped across the deck and stung their faces as the ferry rolled and pitched. But years later, the Baroness could not recall feeling any anxiety during the crossing, and therefore she had not communicated any fear to her two small boys as they steadied themselves against her.

This squall was far less threatening than the typhoon she had once endured in the South China Sea, nor was it as threatening as the violent conditions that routinely battered the ships that had taken her from Asia to South America or from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies. Thanks to the composure of the Dutch Baroness, her eight- and four-year-old sons could face the heavy weather cheerfully. But if she did not hold their hands tightly, the wind might easily sweep the children overboard. Better to take them inside for hot chocolate.

On her way to the ferry's cafe, she passed her husband in the small, smoky lounge bar. Warming himself with Irish whisky, he glanced towards her but did not interrupt his conversation with a fellow passenger. Her husband was not the boys' father - they were sons from her first marriage. And from his diffidence, no one in the room would have guessed that he had any connection to this handsome,

patrician woman and her two docile children. She heard him tell his drinking partner that he had left England to take up a new position in Belgium with great prospects. Indeed, she hoped for the best, for him as for herself and the boys: if at last he could hold a job longer than a month or two without succumbing to indolence - well, that might help secure the marriage, too. He was her second husband, and they had been married for three years; during that entire time, she reckoned that he had not worked a total of three months.

Her first husband had jumped from the matrimonial ship five years after their wedding, which was just four years ago, and she was left with two small boys when she was twenty-five; now, domestic storm clouds were once again on the horizon. And she was seven months pregnant.

She had some financial resources and a share of ancestral property, for her family was of old European aristocracy. And she had a title: she was the Dutch Baroness Ella van Heemstra, now also Mrs Ruston. Dutch baronesses were not a rare breed even in 1929; most democratic Netherlanders did not mind the last of the noble gentry using venerable titles - but only if their holders adopted no airs and graces and imitated the Dutch royal family, an amiably down-to-earth clan.

The four travellers reached Brussels safely and proceeded to a rented house. There, with the help of a relative who arrived from Holland, the Baroness prepared for the child's birth while her husband went off to his job with a British insurance company as a minor clerk with no confidential duties. He was bored from the first day.

On the morning of Saturday 4 May, the Baroness went into labour and by mid-afternoon she was nursing her newborn daughter. 'Saturday's child works hard for a living' according to Mother Goose.

Ella Baroness van Heemstra was born in the fashionable Dutch suburb of Velp, near Arnheim, on 12 June 1900. One of nine children, she was the daughter of Baron Arnoud Jan Adolf van Heemstra (once the governor of Dutch Guiana in South America - later Surinam) and his wife, Baroness Elbrig Wilhemine Henrietta van Asbeck; both families were titled aristocrats. The precise reasons for the baronetcies remain unclear, but in each case both sets of Ella's grandparents were respected jurists or judges with a long history of service to Crown and country. Their children, Ella's parents, inherited the titles according to the custom of the time.

Ella's childhood was not underprivileged: her parents owned a country mansion, a city house and a summer cottage, and they employed a small platoon of servants who attended them everywhere. Photos taken of her in her mid-twenties show a strikingly attractive woman with fine features, dark hair, a clear, translucent complexion and a certain dignified smile, neither girlish, coy nor seductive. She was, in other words, every bit the image of a somewhat Germanic-Victorian aristocrat, and it was, of course, the Germanic-Victorian style (overstuffed in furniture and formal in demeanour) that was the standard all over Europe - if not among the royal families, certainly among their social rivals, the landed gentry.

At the age of nineteen, Ella concluded a respectable but undemanding upper-class education, at which she excelled mostly at singing and amateur theatricals, to the point where she expressed a desire to become an opera singer. Her parents thought little of that and instead purchased her a first-class ticket on a long steamship journey to visit relatives who worked for Dutch colonial companies in Batavia - the Latin name for the Netherlands, later Jakarta - in the Dutch East Indies (later Indonesia).

There Ella blossomed and flourished. Much in demand for her fine voice - which she put to good use entertaining at

parties - for her clever repartee and her air of sophistication, and for her genteel flirtatiousness, Ella impressed many eligible young men and their parents in the colonies. On 11 March 1920 - five months after her arrival and three months before her twentieth birthday - Ella's parents travelled to Batavia for her marriage to Hendrik Gustaaf Adolf Quarles van Ufford, who was six years her senior and held a respectable job. Business was thriving that year in the Indies, at least partly because at home the Netherlands began to experience a severe depression and relied on the colonies more than ever.

Van Ufford's mother was a baroness with a respected Dutch and French pedigree, and everything augured well for a happy and profitable union. On 5 December of that same year, Ella bore a son they named Arnoud Robert Alexander Quarles van Ufford (always known as Alex); and on 27 August 1924, they welcomed Ian Edgar Bruce Quarles van Ufford. But things soon went very wrong. When Hendrik returned to the Netherlands at Christmas 1924 to discuss a transfer from Batavia, Ella and the toddlers accompanied him. Early in 1925, she and her husband registered their divorce in Arnhem, for reasons that may forever remain unclear.

At once, van Ufford took ship for San Francisco, where (he said) he had a good offer of work; there, he soon met a German immigrant named Marie Caroline Rohde and was married forthwith. With that, Hendrik Quarles van Ufford withdraws from this story; the public record shows only that he returned to the Netherlands years later, where he died on 14 July 1955 at the age of sixty.

And so, that spring of 1925, the twenty-four-year-old Baroness Ella van Heemstra van Ufford was left with two babies and no husband. Her friends in Holland noted that she had become somewhat imperious, perhaps from defensiveness about the dissolution of her marriage, but

she had a title, a Dutch home with her parents and a nanny for her sons.

These benefits notwithstanding, Ella surprised her parents by returning to Batavia, and there she renewed a friendship she had earlier formed with a dashing, courtly Englishman she had met even while her marriage was foundering. Joseph Victor Anthony Ruston, eleven years older than Ella, was born on 21 November 1889 in Onzic, Bohemia, where his London-born father, Victor John Ruston, had worked and where he had married a local girl named Anna Catherina Wels. Her maternal grandmother's maiden name was Kathleen Hepburn.

When Joseph and Ella were reunited that spring of 1926, he was still wedded to Cornelia Wilhelmina Bisschop, a Dutchwoman he had married in the East Indies. They were living entirely on her family inheritance, which was certainly helpful, for Ruston never really had any sort of career - nor much of a desire for one. Later identified by Hepburn biographers as an Anglo-Irish banker, he was neither Irish nor a banker. 'the sad truth is, he never really hung on to any job,' according to one of his grandsons. But he had a calm manner, a handsome expression, dark eyes like velvet (Ella's description) and, thanks to Cornelia, a fine wardrobe. He sported a little moustache like an artist's brush, and he photographed well; it was not difficult to understand his appeal to Ella, who in any case was eager to find a new father for her boys.

Joseph found Ella cultivated, elegant and as enamoured of the good life as he, and they enjoyed attending cotillions, military parades, fine restaurants and sporting events. Cornelia, apparently complaisant and much on her own, luxuriated in the rarefied precincts of colonial life, with a home lavishly appointed in ivory and gold (common for the white Europeans), and there was no shortage of natives to look after their needs. Daily life among the wealthy could neatly be described in terms of a Somerset Maugham

novel: the setting was not a dreary backwater outpost but a rather chic preserve for the few advantaged foreigners who controlled the economy. The direct rule by the Netherlands over the Dutch East Indies greatly expanded from 1900, and Dutch strategies to control both the economy and tax revenues meant that virtually every exported item was shipped through Batavia.

But for Joseph, Ella's greatest appeal was her title - about which he joked so often that she recognised how seriously he took it. Never mind that the title was a centuries-old honorific used by other ladies in Batavia - and never mind that Ella took an office job to support herself and her boys. Joseph, besotted with all things that had a trace of the upper classes, took to introducing her as his friend the Baroness. At the same time, he understood that marriage would not promote him to a baronetcy; still, he greatly valued her background and breeding and, perhaps most of all, he saw her family's affluence as a very comfortable cushion in life - indeed, as a plush settee on which he could, when so inclined, rest and relax. Which was most of the time.

When Joseph said he could obtain a speedy divorce from his wife, Ella accepted his proposal. Fortunately, Cornelia Bisschop Ruston made no objections, for she had romantic interests elsewhere. Papers were drawn up, signed and countersigned on all sides, there was a quick divorce, and on 7 September 1926, Ella and Joseph were married.

For a brief time, the Baroness was flattered by her handsome husband, who was at least a presentable escort in society. But she was also alert, and soon she became impatient with his idle and morose comportment. Alas, Joseph Ruston was revealing himself as a common adventurer who had married her for access to her money and the chance to live in the capacious light of her aristocratic family. He made no effort to work for a living, and he seemed to have an excuse when, in November, a

Communist revolt caused massive rioting and was put down only with great difficulty. How, he protested, could he go out to work in so unstable a colony? From this time, Joseph Ruston's conversations were peppered with fervent anti-Communist declamations.

But languor, political tirades and the trivialities of social life were not in Ella's character, and she had no appreciation of those qualities in others, the general public discord notwithstanding. Within a year of the marriage, there were heated arguments about money, Joseph's idleness and his alarming emotional indifference to her two sons. In muted desperation, Ella wrote to her parents, who suggested that Joseph might do well to meet some of their business associates in London. This he agreed to do; he very much missed England in any case, and he considered London far more agreeable than Batavia. Hence, in late 1928, Joseph, Ella, Ian and Alexander took the long journey from the East Indies to Britain.

They arrived on Christmas Eve and leased a flat in fashionable Mayfair, a few steps from Hyde Park. The holiday season, Joseph insisted, was no time to hunt for employment, so he waited until February. A colleague of his father-in-law then made Joseph an offer of employment at a British insurance company in Belgium, and in mid-March the Baroness and her husband again packed their luggage, boarded the storm-swept ferry for France and proceeded to Brussels by train.

At the end of May, the newborn baby nearly succumbed to whooping cough. She stopped breathing and began to turn blue, and the nanny froze with panic and called out to Ella. Adding audible prayers to her procedure of turning, spanking and warming the infant, Ella effectively saved her life.

On 18 July, six weeks after their daughter was born, Ella and Joseph Ruston registered the birth with the British



vice-consulate in Brussels, for the law considered the child English by descent from her father. According to the document, she was born at 48 rue Keyenveld, also called Keienveldstraat, in the Ixelles district, south-east of the centre of Brussels. The child's full legal name was Audrey Kathleen Ruston; throughout her life, Audrey carried a British passport.

After World War Two and the death of the last Hepburn relative in Joseph's maternal ancestry, he legally changed his surname to Hepburn-Ruston, which he thought very posh. The Hepburn clan, which may be traced centuries back in Scottish-Irish history, had dozens of various orthographies, among them Hebburne, Hyburn and Hopbourn. Among his most notable forebears - or so Joseph said - was James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell and third husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. But the multiple branches on the Hepburn tree and the doubtful genealogies at several critical junctures render difficult any positive verification of this grand assertion.

The van Heemstra-Ruston house in Brussels was but one of Audrey's childhood residences. She often spent time with her grandparents at their estates in Arnhem, Holland and, outside Arnhem, at Velp. Ella also took her to visit cousins, most of all when Joseph was absent. He was frequently dispatched to the finance management company's London office, and when he was at home with the family, he often attended somewhat sinister political meetings in the city centre.

Whenever he returned from a day's or a week's business, Joseph was welcomed excitedly by his adoring daughter. But by all accounts, he doted on her no more than he did on Ian and Alex. Ella taught Audrey to read and draw, to enjoy the standard children's classics and good music, and the child longed to show her father what she was learning. But he showed little interest in her, and Audrey's response to

his coolness was typical of any child: she redoubled her efforts to win his love and approval – alas, to no avail.

Audrey could always rely on her mother's care, protection and instruction, but (like her husband) Ella was not given to overt displays of affection. A Victorian baroness to her fingertips, she was now more than ever restrained, having lost the spontaneity and gaiety of her youth. She was a serious mother who always had her daughter's best interests at heart, but the warmth in that heart was cooled by her conviction that dignity forestalled cuddling, and that anything more effusive than a perfunctory good-night kiss was indecorous. Much later, Audrey considered that her mother had been greatly hurt by the failure of her first marriage and the obvious emotional bankruptcy of her second.

Photos taken during childhood show an alert, bright-eyed, smiling and poised girl, and if her mother or half-brothers were in the picture, there was usually an impish grin on Audrey's face. She always treated household servants as if they were family friends; she loved to be outdoors and to play the usual games and pranks. Ian and Alex recalled that Audrey accompanied them on country walks and hikes, and they enjoyed playing charades. 'and we were sometimes very naughty,' according to Ian. 'Against Mother's wishes, we did a lot of tree-climbing.' But when Audrey was five, her half-brothers were fourteen and eleven, and they were dispatched to boarding school; henceforth, their times together were only occasional.

In time, the clever, resourceful and cheerful child became aware of her parents' increasing arguments and was confused by the cold war that prevailed when they sat down to dinner. The atmosphere became so strained that Audrey often wept in secret, for if she did so in the presence of others, she was scolded. 'As a child, I was taught that it was bad manners to bring attention to yourself, and to never, *ever* make a spectacle of yourself . . .

I always hear my mother's voice, saying, "Be on time," and "Remember to think of others first" and "Don't talk a lot about yourself. You are not interesting. It's the others who matter.'" And of course the marital problems were never discussed in front of the child.

One of the issues was certainly Joseph's right-wing political perspective, which Ella (though she, too, was essentially conservative) found increasingly bizarre.

Belgium was a stable society, but the collapse of the American economy in the autumn of 1929 triggered a worldwide Depression. In Brussels, where the electorate was essentially conservative, the government was granted emergency powers to regulate all trade and commerce at home and abroad - in the Congo, for example, which brought vast revenues from mining. Extremists, Revolutionary Socialists and German-influenced National Socialists were officially barred from holding office, but their numbers increased alarmingly.

By 1934, Fascists could be found in virtually every government agency in Belgium - not in control, but certainly influential. At the time, Audrey had no idea that her father's political sympathies were so right-wing, that Fascist ideology more and more appealed to him, and that he made frequent forays to political assemblies that were comprised of apprentice Nazis. In fact, both Joseph and Ella had prejudices that embarrassed Audrey Hepburn for the rest of her life.

In the spring of 1935, her parents were collecting funds and recruiting for the British Union of Fascists, under the leadership of the notorious Oswald Mosley. The 26 April issue of the *Blackshirt*, Mosley's absurd and fuming weekly, featured a photo of Ella and a ringing endorsement in English so flawless it suggests her husband's hand:

We who have heard the call of Fascism, and have followed the light on the upward road to victory, have been taught to understand what

dimly we knew and now fully realize. At last we are breaking the bondage and are on the road to salvation. We who follow Sir Oswald Mosley know that in him we have found a leader whose eyes are not riveted on earthly things, whose inspiration is of a higher plane, and whose idealism will carry Britain along to the bright light of the new dawn of spiritual rebirth.

The statement's purple prose says nothing specific. But eleven days later, Ella and Joseph were lunching with Hitler in Munich, accompanied by several of Mosley's closest allies and three of the Mitford sisters. They returned to Brussels in mid-May, having missed Audrey's birthday.

Soon there was a deep alienation of Joseph from his wife and daughter. Disconsolate, inarticulate, disinclined to work, dependent on his wife and contemptuous of Jewish, Catholic and 'coloured' people, he seemed never to have anything to say to Ella and Audrey, and this naturally affected his daughter's spirits: 'I became a rather moody child, quiet and reticent, and I liked to be by myself a great deal. I seemed to need a great deal of understanding.' As for her private playtime: 'I didn't care for dolls. They never seemed real to me.' She preferred the companionship of dogs, cats, rabbits and birds, which she drew in chalk and ink with remarkable virtuosity. On the live animals she lavished the sentiments for which she longed and which her parents were unable to provide. 'I myself was born with an enormous need for affection and a terrible need to give it,' she said more than once in adulthood. 'When I was little, I embarrassed my mother by trying to pick babies out of prams on the streets and at markets. The one thing I dreamed of in my life was to have children of my own. It always boils down to the same thing [in my life] - not only receiving love but wanting desperately to give it.'

Small animals and the children of passers-by always received her embraces - such were her attempts 'to give it'. As for 'receiving love', even the semblance of it under the guise of basic domestic security: that was shattered for

ever when, at the end of May 1935 – without prior threats or warnings – Joseph Ruston packed his clothes and, apparently without a word to anyone, walked out of the door into rue Keyenveld, never to return.

According to some third-hand sources, Joseph had squandered much of Ella's living trust and a great deal of the money his father-in-law had settled on him at the time of the marriage. Others claim that he had become an abusive alcoholic. But because the principals remained silent it is impossible to know for certain the catalysing events for the separation. Both Ella and Joseph were stern, aloof, critical characters, although in Ella's favour it must be said that her sacrifices on Audrey's behalf, her work to support her daughter's lessons and interests, betokened a real devotion of which Audrey was always convinced: 'My mother had great love, but she was not always able to show it . . . Of necessity, my mother became a father, too.'

Neither Joseph nor Ella ever wrote or spoke publicly about their marriage or its finale, and Audrey, who was just six at the time, rarely alluded to it in later life, and then only in a few words: 'I worshiped my father. Having him cut off from me was terribly awful . . . Leaving us, my father left us insecure – perhaps for life.' The departure of her father was, she added in 1989, 'the most traumatic event in my life. I remember my mother's reaction . . . [her] face, covered with tears . . . [I was] terrified. What was going to happen to me? The ground had gone out from under me.'

According to Audrey's elder son, this abandonment 'was a wound that never truly healed' and he claimed that his mother for the rest of her life 'never really trusted that love would stay.' She once alluded to this when she said that she felt 'very insecure about affection – and terribly grateful for it'. The abandonment of 1935, she added, 'has stayed with me through my own relationships. When I fell in love and got married, I lived in constant fear of being left.'

That day made Audrey withdraw from the few friends her mother allowed – a withdrawal that must have been partly from shame, partly from a mixture of sorrow and confusion for which she had no words, and partly from the cloud of guilt that darkens the soul of every child when a parent walks out. Did she do something to cause it? Was she in some way unlovable? Her mother assured her that was not the case. Would her father return? Ella doubted that very much. Would she never again have a father? On this matter Ella was silent.

‘Other kids had a father, but I didn’t. I just couldn’t bear the idea that I wouldn’t see him again. And my mother went through sheer agony when my father left. Because he really left. I think he just went out and never came back. I was destroyed at the time. I cried for days and days. But my mother never, ever put him down.’ (According to one of Audrey’s sons, however, Ella ‘spent the war spewing poison about [Ruston], about his disappearance, about his lack of support of any type’.)

There was, though, some consolation. Audrey’s maternal grandparents arrived from Holland, and took the girl and her mother to the family home in Arnhem, about 50 miles south-east of Amsterdam, where the old baron had been mayor from 1920 to 1921.

By the time lawyers drew up the terms of a legal separation Joseph had relocated to London. To the astonishment of Ella’s family, he asked for visiting rights with Audrey – and to everyone’s shock, Ella granted him those rights. This may have had less to do with compassion for his outcast state than with the fact that Ella had decided to place Audrey in a completely new setting – an English boarding school.

At the time, the notion of sending a well-born six-year-old child abroad to school was not considered anything but proper, generous and, for the child, an important maturing experience. In addition, Dutch unemployment was at