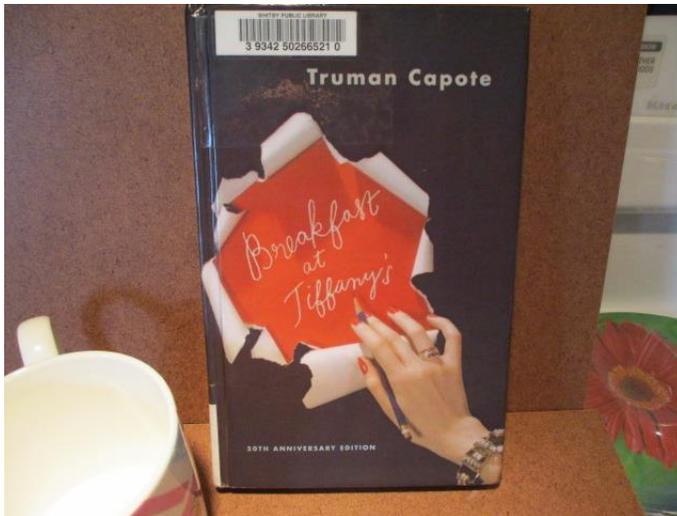


Breakfast at Tiffany's

By Rod Fraser



THIS NOVELLA WAS published in 1958 and the film, starring Audrey Hepburn and George Peppard, was released in 1961. I recall watching the film more than once. I also remember reading the book in the 1960s, then again recently for this review. I highly recommend both, or either. They are each different, but captivating in their own way.

The main character in the book, Holly Golightly, lives in New York City, and earns her living as a party girl during the war years of the 1940s. She is young and attractive. At the time we meet her, she is

eighteen years of age.

Holly is a flirt, lots of fun, flighty, unstable, a charming personality, and a companion to men who have the financial wherewithal to lavish her with money and expensive gifts. These are not long term relationships. The men are looking for a fling, not a permanent arrangement. She is looking for a husband.

The story also involves a young man, the narrator of the book. He is never named, but Holly calls him, 'Fred', because he looks like her brother Fred, who is currently serving overseas in the army. Unlike the film, the book suggests the narrator is gay, and their friendship is close, but platonic.

This is not surprising. The author of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Truman Capote, was a well-known gay man in the New York City social scene of the 1950s and 1960s.

The story starts when the narrator moves into an apartment on the upper-East side, where Holly is his neighbor. She has a habit of misplacing her key, so she frequently rings 'Fred's' apartment to let her into the building. 'Fred' describes her as, "just under nineteen years old, thin and chicly dressed with a boyish haircut."

Over the twelve months (or so) that this story

takes place, 'Fred' observes Holly around town in trendy restaurants and nightclubs. He becomes her friend and confidant. One night, she visits his apartment after an ugly fight with one of her lovers.

As they talk, she tells 'Fred' that she regularly meets Salvatore Tomato (a notorious gangster) in prison each week, to deliver a 'weather report'. These are encrypted messages sent to Sally by his lawyer. Holly is paid \$100 per visit to perform this service. She is completely oblivious to the criminal implications of what she is doing.

As the months pass, Holly becomes engaged to a Brazilian politician, Jose Yberra-Jaeger. She plans to marry in the not-too-distant future and move to Brazil to take up a new life with her husband. During this time, she and 'Fred' become closer. At Christmas, 'Fred' gives Holly a St. Christopher medal from Tiffany's, her favorite store in New York. She gives 'Fred' an antique bird cage she knew he admired.

It turns out Holly has an interesting and private past. She is not Holly Golightly. Her real name is Lulamae Barnes. She and her brother, Fred, were orphans and struggled to survive in dysfunctional foster care during the depression. After running away from one such home, they were taken in by Doc Golightly, a horse doctor from Tulip, Texas, who provided them with a home and care.

Doc Golightly, a widower, had four children who required a mother, so he married Holly when she was fourteen years of age. A few years later, Holly came to understand this life was not for her, so she left and traveled to New York City to reinvent herself. Doc Golightly, a kindly man, followed Holly to the city, to try and convince her to return with him to Texas. She slept with Doc one night, but convinced him to return home alone.

'Fred', the narrator, learns of all the complexity of Holly's early life and it deepens his affection and understanding of this troubled young woman, barely an adult, coping in a world that may well overwhelm her.

HOLLY IS ARRESTED a few months later for being an accomplice in the 'drug smuggling' ring involving mobster, Salvatore Tomato, and his lawyer. The details of the arrest and the alleged crime are sensationalized in the press, so Holly's friends want nothing to do with her. Her Brazilian fiancé writes her a letter telling her the engagement is over. He could never marry a person tainted with scandal. His political career in Brazil would never survive.

She is alone in the world, except for 'Fred', who struggles to find her help. One former friend, when approached by 'Fred', pays a lawyer to represent Holly during her arrest and trial. She is released on

bail shortly thereafter.

When she talks to 'Fred', she tells him she plans to skip bail and fly to Brazil. She asks 'Fred' to provide her with a list of the fifty richest men in Brazil. Holly explains to 'Fred', that even if she was able to avoid prison, she was finished in New York. She would never find a wealthy husband or be able to live as she did before, with a series of lovers willing to keep her financially.

'Fred' accompanies her on the ride to the airport, with her luggage and cat, whom she drops at the curb in Spanish Harlem, explaining "this is the right kind of place for a tough guy like you."

Holly flies to Rio de Janeiro and the news of her leaving the country is on the front page of the newspapers, but only for a few days. It is revived once again briefly, when Salvatore Tomato dies in prison on Christmas Day of that year.

'FRED' HEARD FROM Holly the following spring. She sent a post card explaining she moved from Rio to Buenos Aires and is now involved with a wealthy married man. Holly promises to send 'Fred' her new address soon, but never does.

In the final paragraphs of the book, 'Fred' confesses his sadness Holly never kept in touch. He had so much to tell her. He had sold a couple of his

short stories and was moving out of his apartment. He had other news of their friends and acquaintances. But mostly, he wanted to tell Holly he had found her cat.

"I kept my promise. I found him. It took weeks of after-work roaming those Spanish Harlem streets.... But one day ... flanked by potted plants and framed by clean lace curtains, he was seated in the window of a warm-looking room."

"I wondered what his name was [for Holly had never named him]. I was certain he had one now, certain he'd arrived somewhere he belonged ... I hoped Holly had too."

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