

Katharine Hepburn has in *Mary of Scotland* her most pretentious picture. And the tragic queen is her finest rôle. Fredric March plays opposite as *Bothwell*



HOW HEPBURN is "Queening" It

On the set with Hepburn as *Mary of Scotland*

By James Reid

"LONG, narrow eyes . . . russet hair . . . a classic brow . . . firm mouth and chin . . . beautiful, expressive hands . . . a lithe body . . . tall and graceful with a captivating smile . . . decidedly more fascinating than beautiful."

What is this—a telegraphic description of Katharine Hepburn? It might well be. Actually it is the picture of the appearance of Mary, Queen of Scots, that historians paint. Before she ever applies her screen make-up as *Mary*, Katharine has an advantage that no other actress, playing a historical character, has ever had. Feature by feature, she *looks like the woman she is to portray*. Moreover, she *thinks like her*.

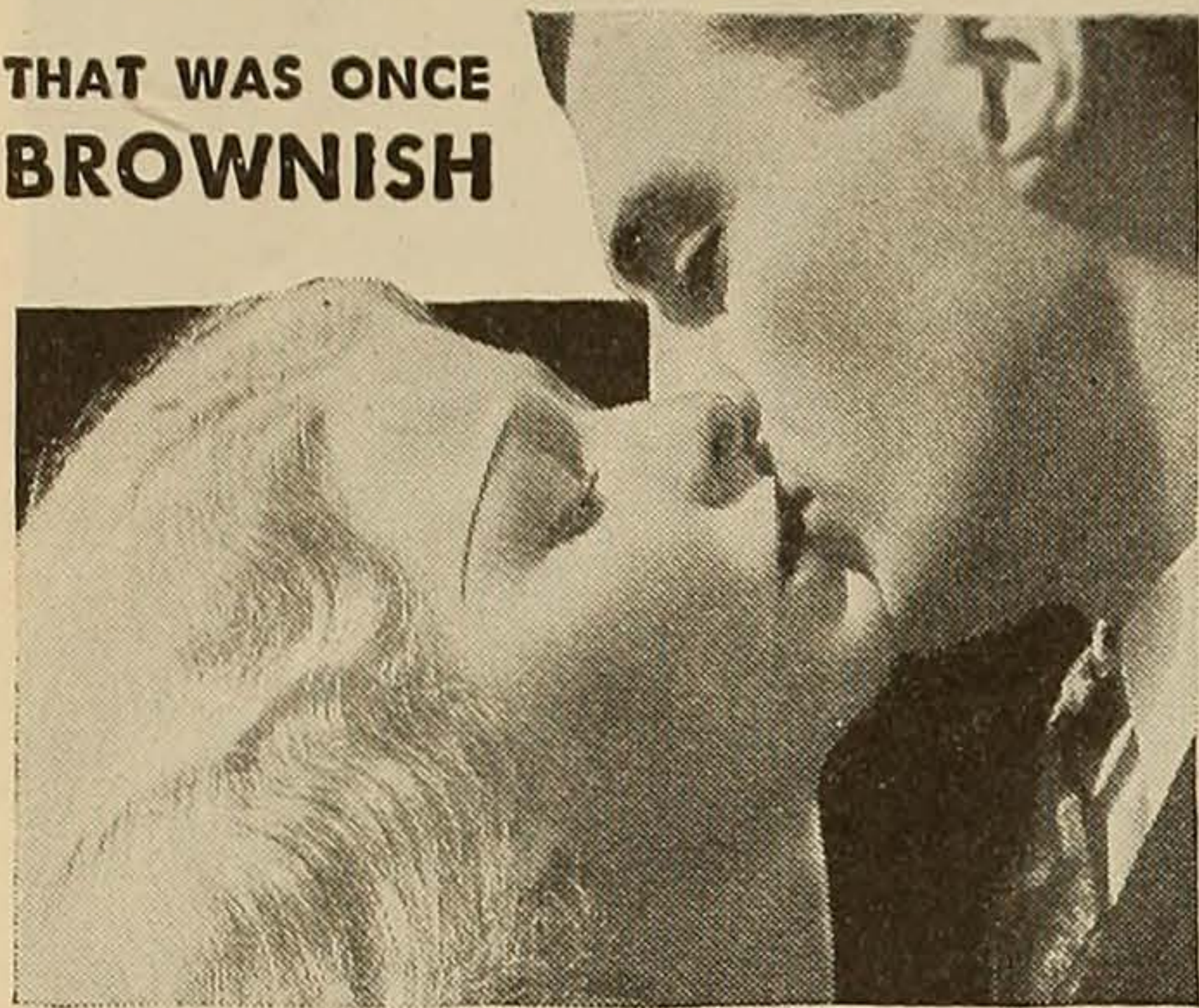
Nor are these the only uncanny coincidences in the production of *Mary of Scotland*. The name of the Earl of Bothwell, whom

Mary loved, was James Hepburn. And the most amazed contemplator of these coincidences is Katharine, herself, who once said that she hoped some day to play the young Queen Elizabeth, the impulsive and auburn-haired "Tudor Wench" . . . and now is playing Mary Stuart, Elizabeth's most dangerous enemy, who challenged her right to the English throne.

Yet she completely ignores all intimations that she and Mary could be called "look-alikes"—and "think-alikes." Many another star would have found ways to emphasize such similarities. But not Hepburn. No, Katharine hasn't gone queenly on the RKO boys and girls, even though the studio has surrounded her with one of the most impressive casts in recent movie annals. In fact, she takes pains [Continued on page 66]

SHE WON HIM WITH Golden Hair

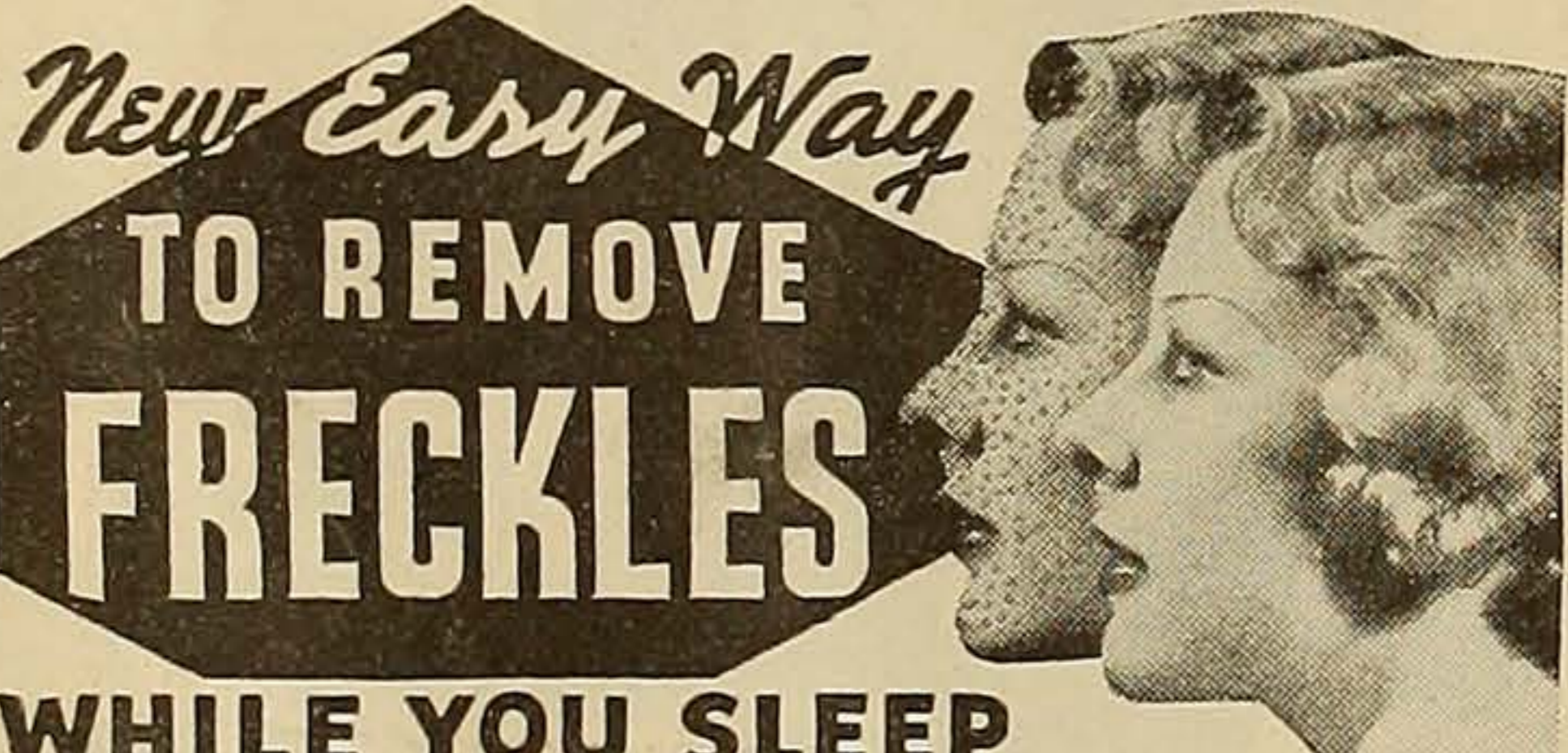
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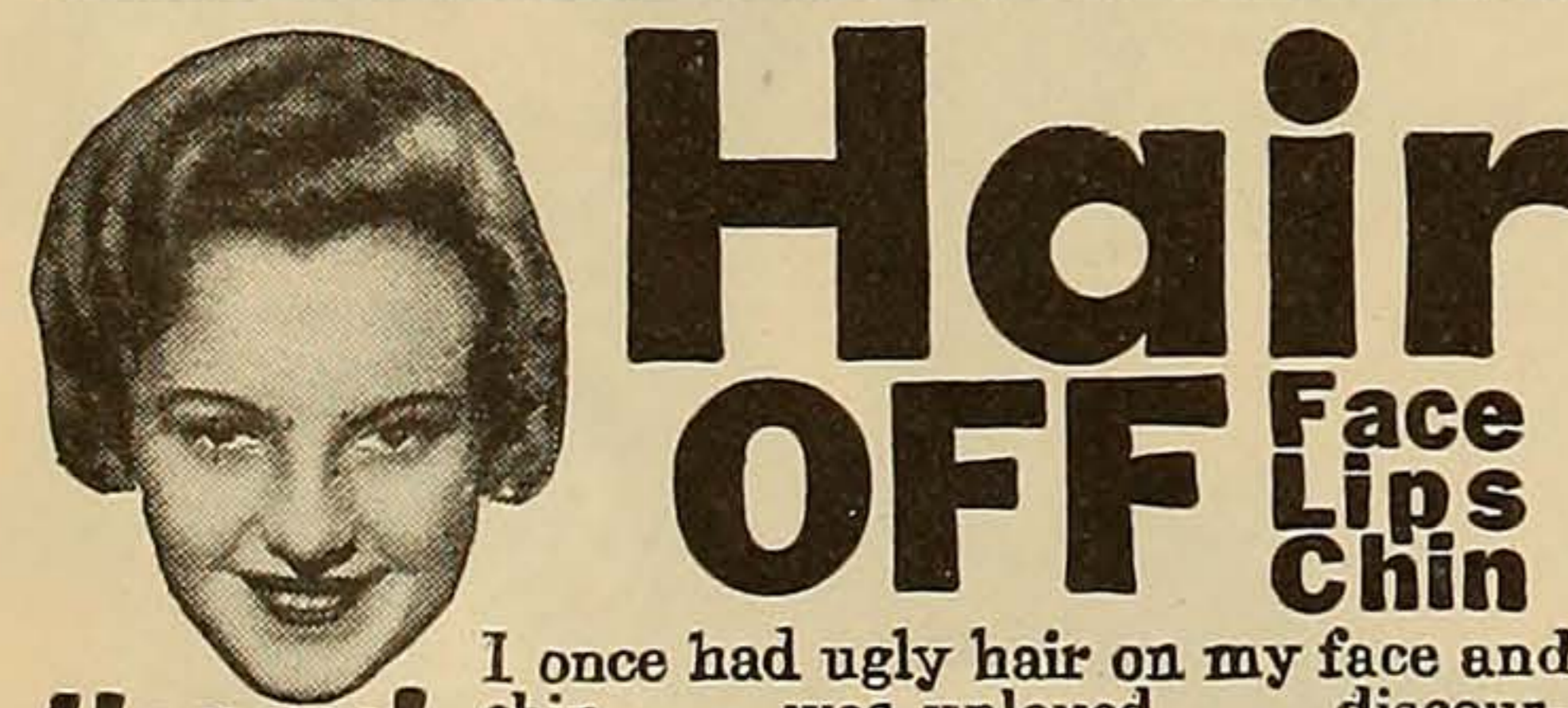
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How Hepburn is "Queening" It

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to point out, mischievously, that if she is linked to James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, it could be only by the thinnest of genealogical threads—because, so far as history indicates, that doughty warrior died without descendants.

Fredric March—fresh from *Anthony Adverse* and *The Road to Glory*—plays *Bothwell*. Florence Eldridge (in private life, Mrs. March) has the brief, but powerful rôle of *Elizabeth*, who has reason to fear *Bothwell* in his love for *Mary*. The picture will open with a ghostly skirling of bagpipes, playing the *Bothwell* air, and will close with the same ghostly skirling. . . .

Your first glimpse of Katharine Hepburn as *Mary of Scotland* will find her in a small boat, rowed by French sailors, nearing the fog-bound shores of her native land. For twelve years, ever since she was a girl in her early teens, she has been in France. When the King dies she returns to trouble-torn Scotland, to rule her own people. Eagerly, she steps ashore in the fishing village of Leith, anticipating some sort of welcome. Instead, the dour villagers stare at her in stony, unfriendly silence. Her eagerness dies; she is chilled, though trying bravely to let no one know. (So eloquent is Katharine Hepburn's face in this scene that, while you sense instantly that *Mary* is a woman of destiny, you also feel that she is a very human person.)

In the small retinue landing with her at Leith are "the four Marys"—childhood playmates who have grown up to be her ladies-in-waiting—portrayed by Frieda Inescourt, Molly Lamont, Anita Colby (a new film find—startlingly beautiful) and Jean Fenwick. Resting for the night in a fisherman's cottage, *Mary* says to *Beaton* (Frieda Inescourt): "I wish God had given me some other kind of nose!" *Beaton* makes a critical inspection and answers: "It's a very nice nose. A Stuart nose." "But not strong enough for a queen," *Mary* sighs.

(So naturally does Katharine Hepburn play this little scene that you feel that, if she should ever be moved to talk about her own facial features, she would be as self-deprecatory . . . without reason.)

Later, at the royal castle in Edinburgh, a group of "robber barons," who have been dividing the spoils of Scotland and intend to rule the queen, are gathered to broach two delicate subjects—her Catholic religion and the importance of her marrying a Scottish Lord. When they hesitate to speak frankly, she embarrasses them with her directness. (This, too, is like Hepburn.) And when one of them finally suggests that she must change her religion, as *Elizabeth* has, *Mary* retorts: "My religion is no garment to be put on and off with the weather. You had better know that, all of you. I shall worship as I please and hope for all men to worship as they please in Scotland." (Katharine could not be anything but convincing in this speech. As passionately, she would defend her own right to think as she wishes.)

And when the Lords propose that she should marry one of them, *Mary* asks, "Suppose I don't choose to marry at all?" (A question that you could imagine Katharine, herself, flinging at an annoying questioner—if Leland Hayward, her handsome manager, were not so prominent in the background.)

Mary tells the Lords, passionately, "Up until now I have never done anything of my own wish. . . . But I'm through. I am going to live my own life. . . . I refuse to marry. I love no one and I will marry no one. I am going to begin to be myself." (Again there is intense conviction in Hepburn's voicing of *Mary's* sentiments. They are words that Katharine, herself, might well have uttered at some time—to her independent self.)

"I shall take account of all the veiled insults that have been flung at me here tonight—under the guise of welcome," *Mary* tells the Lords. "I realize now what kind of support I may expect from you." (And there you have another very possible paraphrase of a Hepburn sentiment—which she might have felt when early interviewers seemed not at all concerned with her as an actress, but only as a personality; started rumors when they could not find the facts they sought; accused her of trying to "pull a Garbo.")

But do not get the impression that Katharine Hepburn, approaching the difficult, many-sided rôle of *Mary of Scotland*, is merely being herself. The fact that *Mary* utters many words that Katharine, herself, might have said is only one more sample of the uncanny coincidences that surround this picture. No actress ever studied more intensively for a rôle than Katharine Hepburn studied for this. Six months before the picture started, she spent her spare time reading every available book about the ill-fated Queen of the Scots, trying to reconcile the varying versions of *Mary's* virtues and faults and motives. When she sat down to study the script of Maxwell Anderson's play, she had decided what type of woman *Mary* was, how *Mary* thought, how *Mary* would have acted in any situation. When the picture started, under the direction of John Ford (who won the Academy Award with *The Informer*), she knew every line in the script. That is another old Hepburn custom—and an index to her phenomenal memory.

There is an impression, and God knows where it started, that Hepburn is temperamental, delights in battling with directors, and throws things. She doesn't always agree with her directors; neither does any other star who is worth her salary. But when a disagreement between Katharine and Ford arises, they settle it like this: Katharine says, "I don't think *Mary* would do that"—and explains why. "Right—I never thought of that," Ford admits. Or perhaps vice versa. They discuss situations pro and con, intellectually. Sometimes they shoot a scene both ways—and let the camera decide for them.

Incidentally, Katharine always sees the day's "rushes" (rush prints of scenes filmed). And watching herself on the screen, she is more critical than her harshest critic would be. She is never satisfied. Often she will say, "I'd like to do that over"—even though the director has not even contemplated a "retake." She is never tired, never complains, frequently suggests overtime.

Her concentration on a rôle has given rise to the canard that she carries the character around with her all during production. "Hams" have that theatrical habit; but Hepburn is no "ham." She may be one-hundred-per-cent conscious of what she is doing in a scene, the effect that she is creating; but between scenes she relaxes

one hundred per-cent. She needs no off-screen build-up of moods to be "in character." Nor is she harassed by the thought that New York critics will compare her portrayal with that of Helen Hayes in the stage play. She is not patterning after anyone.

One amazing thing about the starry ascent of Katharine Hepburn is that she has achieved her glamorous reputation without the benefit of glamorous gowns. In only one picture, *Christopher Strong*, has she been a fashion plate. She has not needed distinctive clothes to gain distinction. Simple and old-fashioned as her gowns were in *Little Women*, they started a trend because she, herself, lent them her own individuality. In *Mary of Scotland*, her first historical picture, she is wearing her first regally glamorous gowns.

And Hepburn, the disciple of slacks, loves the ruffs and velvets of Mary, Queen of Scots. When she began the picture, it looked as if, for the first time, she might have to relax between scenes on a reclining board (designed to keep gowns from wrinkling). But Hepburn is fooling everybody. She gallops across the stage, between scenes, as if she were wearing slacks; she sits down on steps or a box or a stool as if she were in ordinary clothes. (Incidentally, Walter Plunkett, who designed her costumes, is modernizing them for public consumption and predicts a *Mary of Scotland* vogue.)

Mary's heart ruled her head, to her own tragic downfall; Katharine's head rules her heart. Therein, they are different. But Katharine resembles the woman she is portraying in many ways—emotionally, as well as physically. She has the same fierce loyalty to friends and family. ("Pick a fight with a Hepburn, and the whole clan will accept the challenge," she herself says.) She has the same respect for truth, for frankness. (In one scene of the picture, she asks Alan Mowbray, playing the English Ambassador, "But how can there be understanding without frankness?" That was typical of Mary; it is also typical of Katharine.) She won't evade, won't pretend, even to put herself in a good light. Someone asked her to pose for a certain photograph; for a personal reason, she wouldn't. She could have evaded; she could have posed and then had the negative destroyed and the person making the request never would have known. But she did not feel that that would be doing the square thing.

Mary was no politician; neither is Katharine. If she is fine to you, that is the tip-off to how you stand with her. If she is cool, that also is a tip-off. You don't have to guess about her attitudes. And you know that if she likes you, she will go to bat for you. She is always boosting some minor helper on her set. And it is not merely a gesture. She does nothing for the sake of making a gesture.

Some rumor manufacturer started the tale that she "demanded" Fredric March for the rôle of *Bothwell*. Perhaps you have visions of Hepburn issuing peremptory orders to the Front Office. The truth of the matter is that the Front Office, on its own, selected March for the rôle. And Hepburn was delighted. The bigger the artist opposite her, the happier she is. And she would be happiest in an all-star cast. With Hepburn, as with few stars of her individuality, "the play's the thing."

She always gets along with anyone who has ability. She and Ford, who is also an individualist, are working together in perfect harmony. She measures people by what they do, not how they look. And she expects—or wants—others to take her

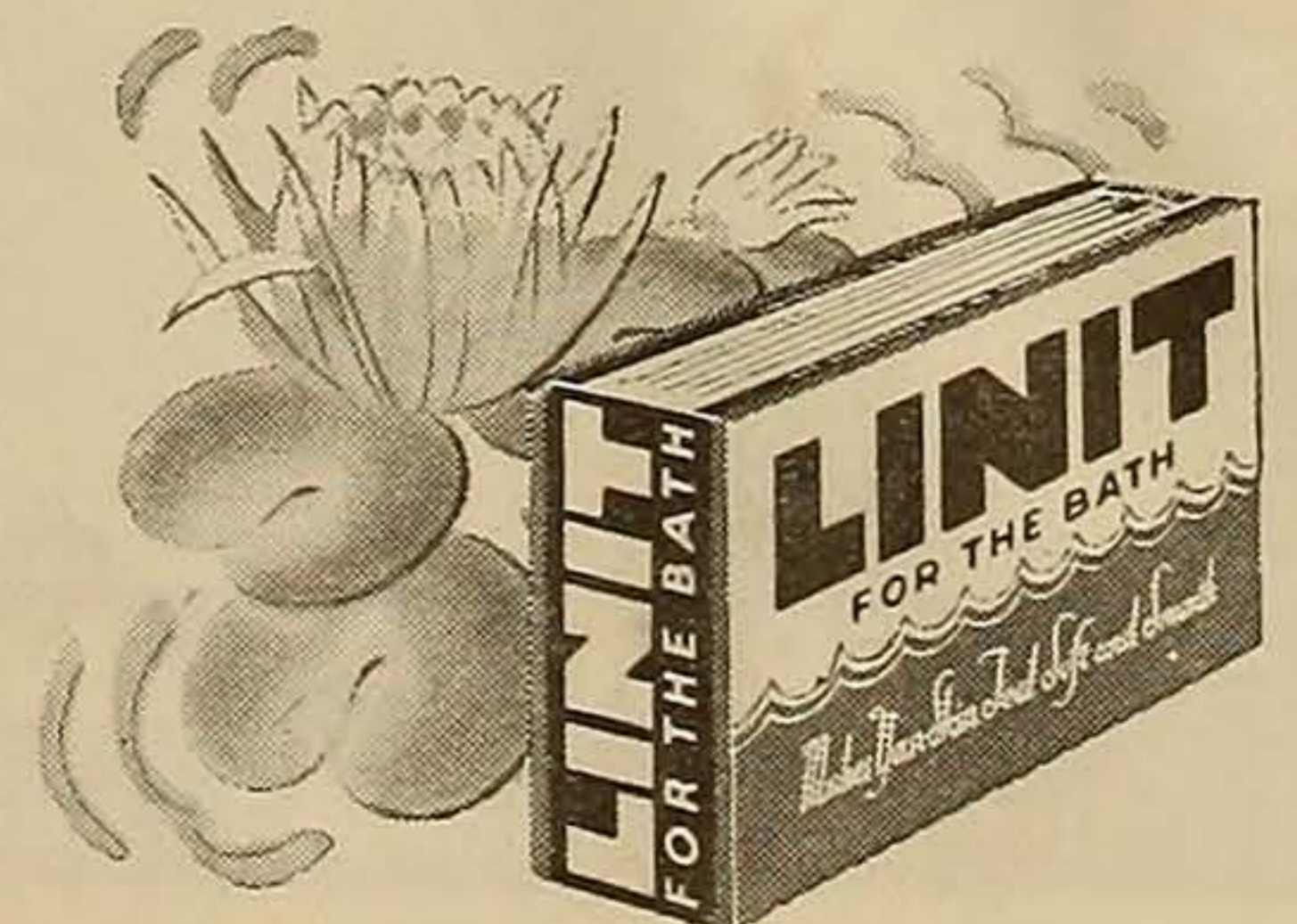
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How Hepburn is "Queening" It

[Continued from page 67]

measure by the same standard.

Mary of Scotland had courage. She stood steadfast to what she thought was right. Similarly, if Katharine thinks that she is right, she stays with her decision. The men on her set respect that courage. And I could not find a woman at RKO who did not like her. She has a brand of independence, poise and courage that other women would like to have. Stay on a Hepburn set for a time and you will soon have this impression: She is not trying to be a Hollywood Personality; her interest is in trying to be a good actress.

See her at the studio or at her home, and you soon have this impression: Most of her "eccentricity" is a myth. Gossip writers make much of the fact that she usually wears slacks to work. So does Ginger Rogers; so does Ann Sothorn; so do most of the other actresses in Hollywood. When they have to report for work at 7 o'clock in the morning, changing into costumes as soon as they reach their studios, why should they dress up? Hepburn is sensible, not eccentric, in pulling her hair back under a beret and wearing tailored slacks to work. She can get out of them easily and quickly when she reaches the studio. When she appears in public, she avoids attention-calling by wearing a dress, coat and hat. She uses very little make-up. You can see her freckles—most of them on her arms, very few on her face.

Her dressing-table is located just off the set, and is unenclosed. It might as well be parked in the middle of the Lincoln Highway, for all the privacy that she has there. The answer is that, among those who understand her, she has no need for privacy. The lowliest "extra" thinks nothing of powdering her face before the star's mirror—on a Hepburn set.

She has a big home in Beverly Hills, surrounded by five acres of ground, on which she has a swimming pool, a tennis court, gardens, fruit trees, countless walking paths. Whenever she is there in the daytime, she is out in the sunshine. Indoors, she likes to wear very sheer, ultra-feminine negligée. It is one of her few extravagances. She attends few parties, gives few, has few close friends. The closest, perhaps, is Director George Cukor, who was responsible for her coming to Hollywood to play in *A Bill of Divorcement*. She has a housekeeper, a cook and a chauffeur-gardener; she also has a personal maid on the set, but not at home. The reason for her small circle of friends in Hollywood? When she is in Hollywood, she is working; when she is finished with a picture, she flies East to be with her family.

Though *Mary of Scotland* is her first biographical picture, she hopes that it will not be her last. She still would like to film *Tudor Wench*, dramatizing the young Queen Elizabeth. Also, she would like to play *Joan of Arc*. And she has reasons: "I enjoy this experience of playing a historical character. I have been able to make a real study of Mary from authentic information about her—I have been able to see her from all sides, not just one, as a novelist might see a heroine. And out of that study, I hope I have learned enough about her to bring her to life—as a ruler who was also a very human being, with virtues and faults and honest emotions." And that's how Hepburn is "queening" it. . . .

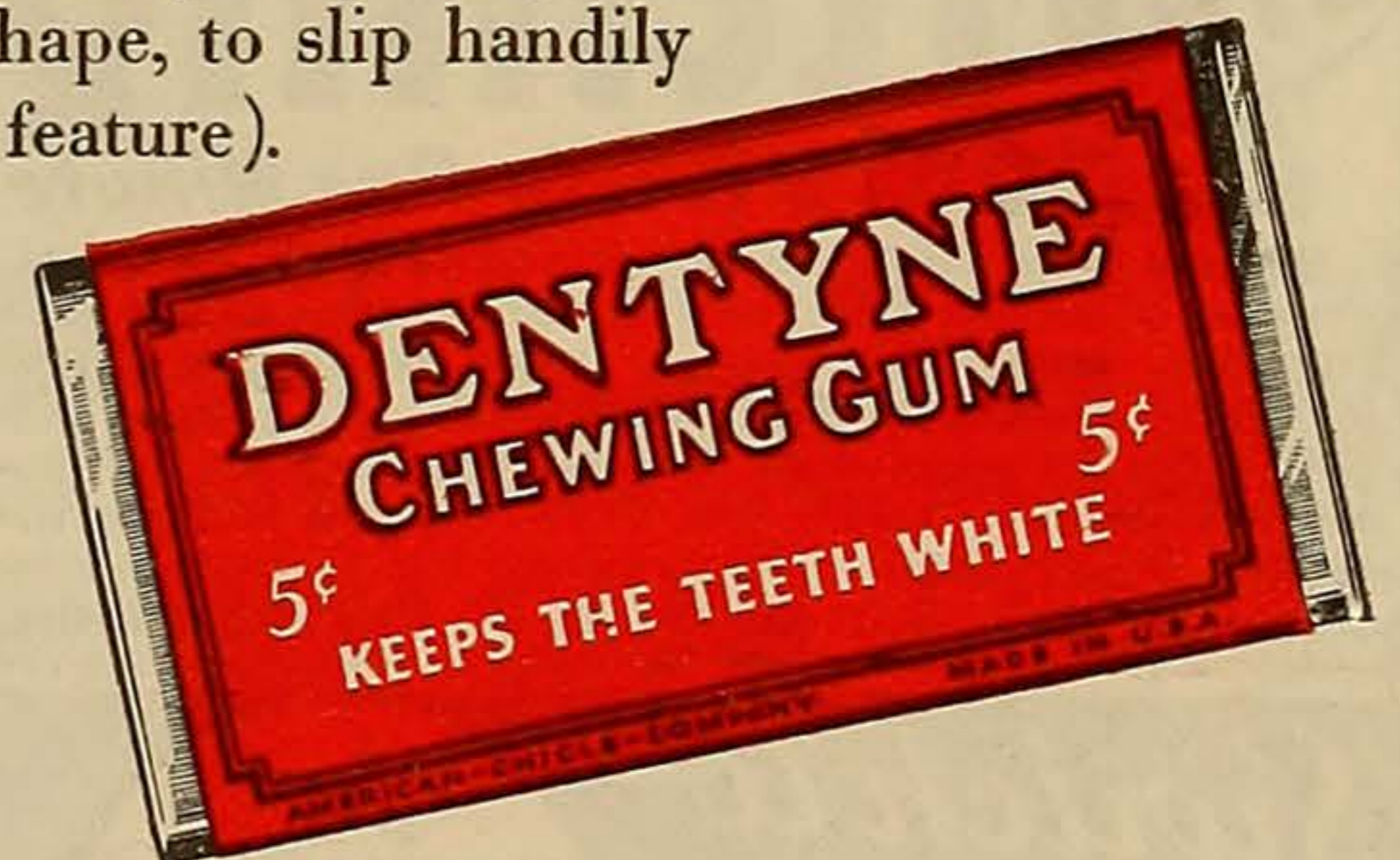
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