

PRINCESS AT LARGE

ROMAN HOLIDAY

(Paramount)

ONCE upon a time—this, I should warn you, is a rather conventional fairy story—there was a Princess who was as Good as she was Beautiful. She had a highly-developed sense of Duty, she could sew and cook and keep house (though she never got the chance to do so), she could, of course, speak several languages fluently ("So glad you could come, your Excellency" . . . "Enchantée de vous revoir, M. l'Ambassadeur" . . . "Guten abend, Herr Graf" . . . "Buon giorno, Signore"). And she almost always Did as she was Told.

Since she had dedicated herself to the Promotion of International Goodwill and Understanding, she spent her time travelling from one European capital to another. So it came about that she lived in a Suitcase in the middle of a thick forest of Protocol; and this forest, Birnam-woodwise, travelled with her wherever she went, effectively shutting her off from any close contact with Real People—like press correspondents and news photographers.

BAROMETER

FAIR: "Roman Holiday."
FAIR: "The Rose of Baghdad."

Now, you might reasonably suppose that this is the point at which a Handsome Prince should put in an appearance, hack his way through the Forest, and rescue the Princess. But there are no handsome princes left—unattached, that is—and by the time the Princess has reached Rome (where our story really begins) she is in pretty bad shape. Emotionally, I mean. Her engagement book is bursting at the seams, her feet ache from shaking hands with Important People, and she feels that if she doesn't get a breath of fresh air before squaring up to the next batch she'll Blow Her Top.

And she nearly does. What, in fact, happens is that she slips secretly through the Embassy front door, across the great courtyard, past the guards at the gate, and is well away from the Diplomatic Quarter before the sedative thoughtfully administered by her Physician in Ordinary takes effect.

So it comes about that Joe Bradley (Gregory Peck) finds himself with a



AUDREY HEPBURN

She almost always Did as she was Told

Sleeping Princess on his hands. Joe is a u.s. (sorry!), a U.S. newsman, but it is not until next morning that he realises that he has a scoop. From this point the story is highly predictable. If the Princess had fallen in with, say, Gene Kelly, I feel that her day of liberty would have had a gaiety and charm that Mr. Peck was not quite up to providing.

With him it becomes a fairly strenuous junket which leads first to a slight misunderstanding with the civil authorities and later (in a Tiber-side night-spot) to a full-blooded scrap with plainclothes police who are searching for Her Highness. Mr. Peck, who had set out to get a really smashing story, chivalrously forgets his duty and falls in love. The Princess falls in love, but remembers her duty in time to slip back to the Embassy before midnight strikes and her Prince Charming turns back into a reporter again.

Put as badly as that *Roman Holiday* sounds more humdrum than it is. The film is overlong (10,870 feet), it smacks a little too much (for me) of when-in-Rome-do-as-the-Americans-do, and there is hardly a turn of the story that can't be foreseen a thousand feet away. But it is skilfully photographed amid the fountains and palaces of the Renaissance and the splendid detritus of Imperial Rome. Some of the minor episodes are very neatly played, there are touches of sophisticated fun that surprise and delight—and there is Audrey Hepburn. She is, I think, quite worth the price of admission, for she has grace and vivacity and a bricks-without-straw acting capacity that freshens even the faded and stereotyped situation.

It is scarcely necessary to add that, seen in January instead of November, *Roman Holiday* invites laughter which

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