

THE HABIT

Miss Cissie flung through the bedroom door smelling distinctly of horses and covered in splattered mud.

'Oh Jenny 'she said to her maid 'I've had the most wonderful day. Silver jumped everything divinely, we had such fun and I have a new admirer too. He's in the same regiment as Cousin Ralph. Help me get out of this habit would you? Is my bath ready?

Jenny smiled as her mistress disappeared into the steamy bathroom, singing gaily. She took the habit downstairs to the servant's hall to sponge and brush it ready for its next outing. The silk label read Roberts and Carroll, 9 Cork Street, London W1, Underneath Jenny knew was a handwritten label which said Miss C Hudson 6th September 1939. The habit had been an eighteenth birthday present from Cissie's late mother. As she worked she remembered how her young mistress had been so excited when the large cardboard box was delivered and how elegant she looked in her new habit. A perfect fit.

Two days later Jenny placed the cleaned habit in the walnut wardrobe ready for the next meet. The habit nestled in amongst its companions, the soft wools, beaded silks, furs and feathers, then the door was firmly shut and the key turned to keep out the moths.

Years later.....

When the door creaked opened again it was a very long time since daylight had fallen onto the clothes in the walnut wardrobe.

A gruff voice said 'wot shall we do with these owd clothes in 'ere Bert?

'Chuck 'em ont' floor and I'll get my Mavis to 'ava look thru 'em later' said Bert 'elp me wiv this wardrobe son, it's the last bit o 'furniture we're 'avin.'

Onto the floor tumbled all the clothes.

As daylight faded a scrawny, older woman kicked the pile of clothes on the floor and said to her weary daughter 'Want any o' them? 'Nah" said the daughter 'don't like old stuff but I'll take 'em down the Portobello 'cos old clothes fetch a good price.'

Months later.....

The market was bustling in the early morning. A smart, blonde, city girl swung through the stalls holding her Starbucks coffee. She stopped at a vintage clothes stall and couldn't believe her eyes. There, hanging high above her head was a navy blue, side saddle habit, just what she had been searching for. She asked the stallholder the price. They haggled and finally it was hers.

That evening, at home, she carefully pulled out the habit from the carrier bag and tried it on. A perfect fit and immaculate condition. Taking the jacket off, she felt in the pocket and pulled out a freshly laundered, lace handkerchief. Her fingers traced over the silk, Roberts and Carroll label and she felt something beneath. Very carefully she lifted it. Attached underneath was a smaller, white label and on it, handwritten clearly in black ink, Miss C. Hudson, 6 September 1939.

She gasped for she was also Miss C. Hudson!