

Cupid's arrow strikes on a bus ride

By Cheryl Hoefler
GO! Magazine

Looking for a romantic movie this Valentine's Day? "It Happened One Night" (1934) is one that's sure to please both guys and gals. Newspaper reporter Peter Warne (Clark Gable) is a man's man, a typical guy many men would like to be and many women would like to be with. Likewise, socialite Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert) is a free-spirited gal who has a sassy, independent attitude that appeals to both sexes.

Andrews has secretly married wealthy mogul King Westley against her father's wishes. Not happy with her choice of spouse, her father strives to hide her away while he gets the marriage annulled. She runs off (actually, she dives off a boat in Florida) determined to get to New York to enjoy a lavish ceremony with her betrothed. Wow, what a girl.

Meanwhile, Warne has just been fired by his editor and is busy spewing a slew of grand (and drunken) words at his old boss — to the cheers of fellows listening outside the phone booth. Warne, declaring a "take



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this job and shove it" stance, is already a "hero" to the audience.

The pair cross paths on a bus headed for New York. Her odd behavior alerts him that there's something fishy (and intriguing) about this girl. He soon learns who she is and smells a hot scoop — plus a potential reward from her father and redemption with his boss. He proposes a deal to deliver her to Westley if she, in turn, will grant him an exclusive story.

And so northward on the bus they travel, eluding her

father's clutches, with a riot of adventures ensuing — and an unexpected budding romance. Spoiler alert: Ellie Andrews is the original "runaway bride."

"It Happened One Night," the first major work by director Frank Capra, is based on "Night Bus," a short story by Samuel Hopkins Adams. It was released in February 1934, just before enforcement of the Hays Code

(1934-1968), which established guidelines to prohibit sexually explicit or suggestive material, profanity, violence and religious ridicule. Previously, just about anything was fair game in the young silver screen days.

The racy subject matter in "It Happened One Night" might seem lame by today's standards. But what makes it hilarious is knowing just how close to the edge the movie pushed the limits of the times. In the classic scene where Andrews hikes up her skirt to hail a ride from a passing car, it's Warne's reaction at seeing her exposed leg (in public!) that's priceless.

The motel room scene stretches for six minutes. Capra allows the audience to really get absorbed into the implications of an unmarried couple sharing a room, undressing and sleeping together — with barely a hung blanket ("The Walls of Jericho") between them. The suggestion of a suggestion is a powerful thing.

As with most classic flicks, we get snapshots of days gone by — phone booths, "auto camp"

rooms for \$2 and hitchhiking as a safe means of travel (with or without your skirt hiked up).

Initially, expectations were not high for the movie's success. Gable and Colbert were not the first choices for the lead roles. Colbert reportedly told a friend soon afterward that she had just made the worst movie ever. Columbia was just a small, young studio at the time; there wasn't a lot of promotion and response was mild at first.

However, the second release resulted in a box-office smash. The movie snagged all five major Oscar awards that year — Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Screenplay. Only two others have accomplished that feat: "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (1975) and "Silence of the Lambs" (1991). "It Happened One Night" often ranks high on popular movie lists.

With that kind of backing, you can't lose! So, curl up in a blanket and grab some snacks. If you have donuts and coffee handy, Gable will teach you how to dunk properly.

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