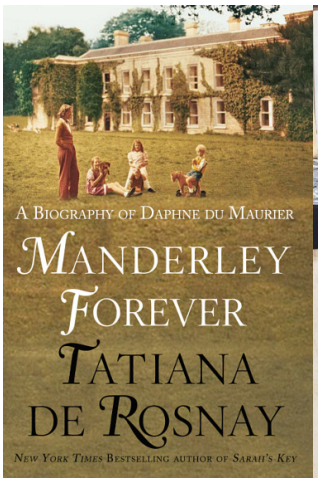

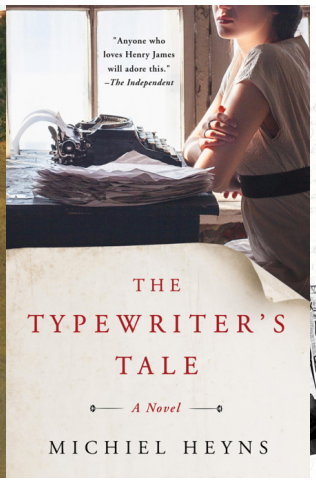

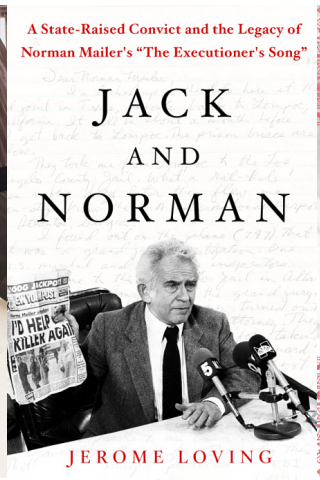

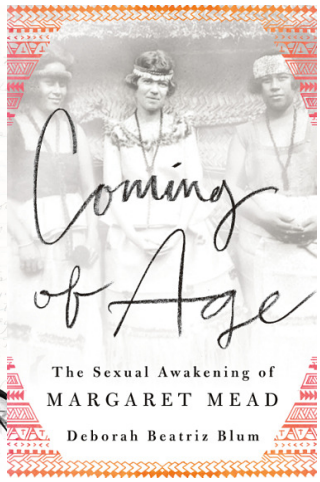

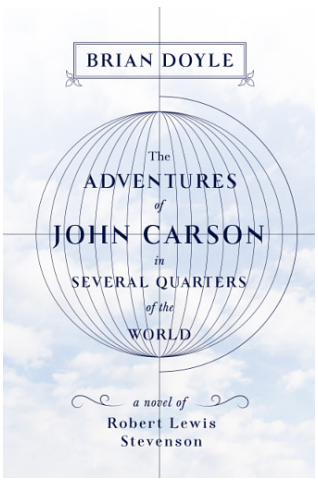

A Theme of the Season

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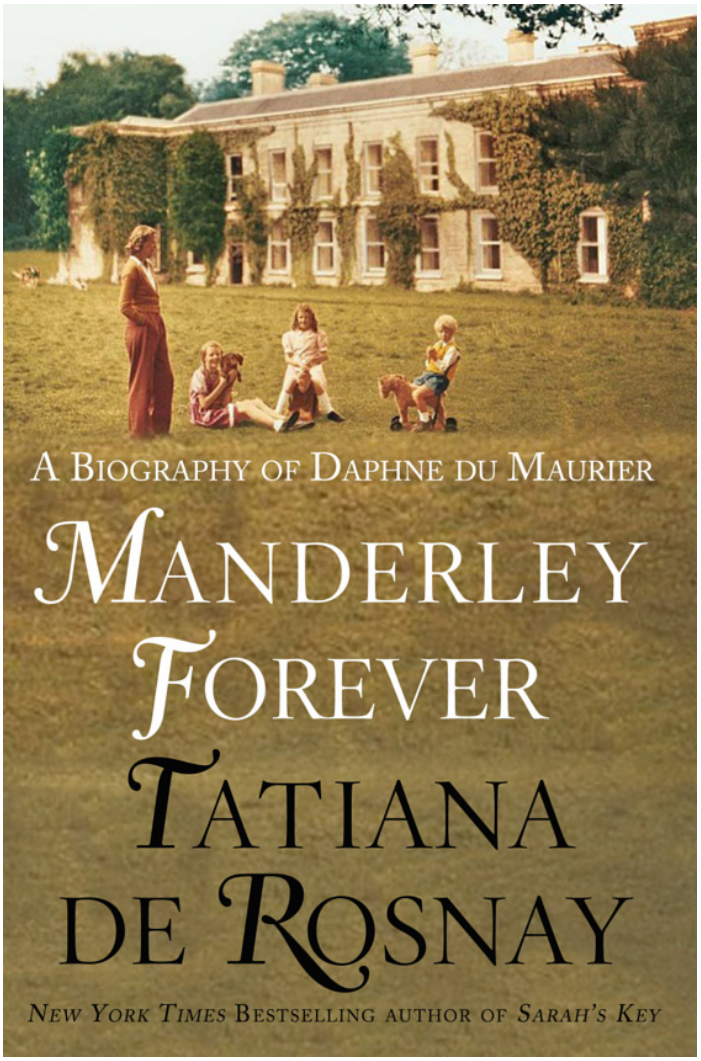

Manderley For Ever

A Biography of Daphne du Marier

Tatiana de Rosnay

The nonfiction debut from beloved international sensation and #1 NYT bestselling author Tatiana de Rosnay: her bestselling biography of novelist Daphne du Maurier

Bilingual bestselling novelist, Tatiana de Rosnay is the perfect candidate to write a biography of Daphne du Maurier.

As a thirteen-year-old de Rosnay read and reread Rebecca, becoming a lifelong devotee of Du Maurier's fiction. Now de Rosnay pays homage to the writer who influenced her so deeply, following Du Maurier from a shy seven-year-old, a rebellious sixteen-year-old, a twenty-something newlywed, and finally a cantankerous old woman.

With a rhythm and intimacy to its prose characteristic of all de Rosnay's works, *Manderley For Ever* is a vividly compelling portrait and celebration of an intriguing, hugely popular and (at the time) critically underrated writer.

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Meet the Authors

TATIANA DE ROSNAY is the author of ten novels, including *New York Times* bestselling novel *Sarah's Key*, an international sensation with over 4 million copies sold in thirty-five countries worldwide. Tatiana lives with her husband and two children in Paris, where she is at work on her next book.

DAPHNE DU MAURIER (1907-19089), was an English author and playwright. Her written works include *Rebecca*, *Jamaica Inn*, *The Birds*, and *Don't Look Now*.

Preface

When, at the age of eleven, I first opened a copy of *Rebecca*, I had no idea how important that novel would become in my life. Like so many other readers before me, I was transfixed from the first, mythical sentence: '*Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again.*' That book had such an effect on me that barely had I finished it before I started reading it again. I was under the spell of the 'du Maurier magic', her singular style, that famous psychological suspense. Before *Rebecca*, I had already written several short stories – in English, my first language – in my school exercise books. Afterward, when I wrote other stories, I signed them 'Tatiana du Maurier'. It was Daphne du Maurier who bequeathed me my taste (or obsession) for houses, for family secrets, for the memories held by walls. Each and every one of my novels bears her influence.

When, several years ago, Gérard de Cortanze suggested I write the first French biography of my favorite novelist, I felt simultaneously honored and nervous, but I accepted the challenge. I decided to follow in her footsteps, as if I were leading an investigation, traveling from London to Cornwall, by way of Montparnasse – because she adored Paris. This literary pilgrimage allowed me to discover how Daphne du Maurier wrote, the secrets of her life, her inspiration, her work.

I described her as if I were filming her, camera on my shoulder, so that my readers could instantly understand who she was. I studied her books, her voice, the look in her eyes, the way she walked, the sound of her laughter. I met and spoke with her children and grandchildren. Around the houses that she loved so passionately, I constructed the portrayal of an unusual and enchanting novelist, scorned by critics because she sold millions of books. Her macabre and fascinating world produced a complex, surprisingly dark oeuvre, far removed from the 'romantic novelist' she was unfairly labeled.

This book reads like a novel, but I did not invent any of it. Everything here is true.

It is the novel of a life.

Tatiana de Rosnay

I

London, 1907-1925

‘The child destined to be a writer is vulnerable to every wind that blows.’

Daphne du Maurier

Mayfair, City of Westminster, London.

November 2013.

There are usually crowds of people in Regent's Park. Visitors come here to walk around and admire the flowerbeds, see Queen Mary's rose garden, take boat trips on the lake. But on this very British gray and drizzly November morning, the park is deserted.

Queen Elizabeth was born in this upmarket district; Oscar Wilde lived here, as did Handel, Somerset Maugham and Nancy Mitford. In place of the previous century's patrician families, the elegant Georgian buildings are now home to luxury stores and fashionable restaurants, embassies and five-star hotels. Impossible not to notice that the people who live here or frequent these places have money. There are fur coats on display everywhere, while only the priciest, flashiest cars are parked along the sidewalks. In the London version of Monopoly, 'Mayfair' has been the most desired space on the board for more than eighty years.

To the east of the park are the Terraces, quiet residential streets so typical of London where rows of identical terraced houses stretch out toward the horizon, perfectly symmetrical. Chester Terrace is the longest, Clarence Terrace the shortest; Park Crescent is formed in a graceful semi-circle. The one I have come to see this morning is the most imposing of all: Cumberland Terrace. I read that it dates from 1826 and comprises only about thirty houses. It is located between the Outer Circle, the street that borders the park, and Albany Street.

It's not especially easy to find. Despite my map, I get lost several times, before spotting its neoclassical façade from a distance. I walk through the rain toward it, impressed by its immense size and its famous Wedgwood blue pediment. I don't dare move any closer; I feel as if

I am being watched. What could I say to one of the building's inhabitants if they came out to ask me why I was taking photographs?

I could say, quite simply, that I am here for her; that I am following the footsteps of her life, and this is where my journey begins. Because it was here, at number 24, under these huge ivory columns, behind that white door, that Daphne du Maurier was born on May 13, 1907.

Leaving the park after going for a walk, the little girl has to pass under that gigantic-seeming arch, then climb the steps that lead to the house, on the right. The white front door matches the cumbersome pram, which Nanny cannot lift up on her own. They have to ring the doorbell so someone will come to help them. The little girl bickers with her sister, Angela, over who gets to press the copper-colored button first, and she has to stand on tiptoes in her Mary Jane shoes in order to reach it.

Their childminder wears the same uniform, day after day. The little girl likes to look at it: the gray coat, the black hat, the veil covering her face. It is one of the maids who comes out to help Nanny with the baby carriage. She is wearing an apron and a white bonnet. They struggle to lift the pushchair with the baby inside it. From inside the carriage, Jeanne smiles, and the little girl notices the way everyone melts at her pink-cheeked sister's smile.

Inside the long entrance hall, the little girl sees coats, stoles and capes hung on pegs; she hears the hubbub of a conversation, peals of laughter coming from the living room, to her left; she sniffs out the smell of an unfamiliar perfume. Her heart contracts. That means there are ladies invited to lunch, that she'll have to go downstairs, later, after the meal in the nursery, to say hello. This does not bother Angela; in fact she's excited, already asking who is there with their mother. The little girl rushes upstairs, taking the steps two at a time, escaping while there is still time, and taking refuge in the large nursery on the top floor of the house, in that comforting warmth, near the doll's house, of the toy cupboard with two shelves (one for Angela, one for her), of the treasure chest covered with cotton cloth, of the old armchair that transforms so easily into a shipwreck run aground on a beach. She moves toward the fireplace, where flames crackle behind the fire screen. The table is set for three – Nanny, Angela and her – because the baby still sits in her high chair to eat. She looks out toward Albany Street, toward the army barracks.

Nanny's voice is raised and it pursues her, repeating her name several times over. It is telling her to wash her hands before lunch. Daphne doesn't want to wash her hands, she doesn't want to eat lunch. She wants to continue looking out of the window, watching the troop of Life Guards officers as they return from their morning patrol. Her father has explained that this is the oldest regiment in the British Army, its mission to protect the King and the royal buildings. No way is she going to miss seeing the glint of their shining armor, the plume of feathers on their helmets, the red lightning flash of uniforms. Since she stopped sleeping with Jeanne and joined her older sister on the other side of the nursery, she is woken at dawn every day by the bugle call, but this doesn't bother her at all.

During the meal, Nanny lectures Daphne about the need to finish her vegetables, and at dessert she orders her to eat every last morsel of her rice pudding. Daphne does not like rice pudding. Why must she always do what Nanny tells her? Because she's only a four-year-old girl? And yet she likes Nanny; she sees her more often than she sees her own mother.

After lunch, the dreaded moment arrives. Nanny rubs her face clean, brushes her hair. Angela admires herself in the mirror. The sisters wear identical embroidered mauve velvet dresses and pale pink pelisses; even the baby is dressed to match. They must walk downstairs, open the door of the dining room, and they must smile, in front of that sea of strange faces. Why doesn't Angela suffer during this ordeal? Murmurs of approval. The ladies are elegant, they wear large hats. Mummy too. Daphne finds this odd: how can anyone eat lunch while wearing such a big hat? Nanny hands the baby to their mother; the baby gurgles, and everyone coos over it. Daphne wants to run away, back to the nursery; she hides behind Angela, who is prancing around in her velvet dress in front of the ladies. Their mother gives the baby lumps of sugar. When they all stand up to move through into the living room, Daphne finds them too tall, too fat;

they laugh too loud, cackling like hens, and not only that but they all want to kiss her. It's horrible. She hates it. Angela puts up with the kissing gracefully (how can she?); but not her, no way, not kissing. She scowls, bites her fingernails. The ladies laugh – they think she's shy and sweet – but they notice the nail-chewing, the naughty little thing. Her mother shoots her a reproachful look. *We've tried everything with Daphne's fingernails…* Thankfully, no one is paying any attention to her now; she is free to go back upstairs at last. It's over. Until the next time.

She loves this view over the roofs of the city. Look, down there, that house painted red: why is it red? Who lives there? How can she find out? It looks like that house is not friends with the house next to it; it's different, separate. Daphne imagines living there, all alone. In that red house, no one would force her to finish her vegetables or her rice pudding, no one would order her to put on embroidered velvet dresses, no one would make her go downstairs to say hello to the guests. She would have a sword, like Peter Pan whom she admires so much. She would love to be able to fly like him, over the chimneys.

It's already time for lessons with Mrs Torrance, the governess. Angela, who is three years older than Daphne, is far ahead of her. Daphne struggles with her capital letters. Why isn't she able to master her Ss? She tries as hard as she can, leaning over the table, tongue between her teeth. *You're making lots of progress, Daphne, that's very good. Have you written before?* Daphne sits up proudly and gives the governess a haughty look. Yes, she has already written a book. Angela bursts out laughing: Daphne can hardly write at all, she's talking nonsense, she's only four. Mrs Torrance asks her, in a serious voice, what the title of her book is. Daphne replies: *John in the Wood of the World*. Deep down inside, Daphne knows that she is not telling the truth, that she has not written a book, that she just made up that strange-sounding title. The governess

understands; kindly, good-naturedly, she smiles at the little girl. Daphne starts work on her capital letters again. Silence falls in the nursery. There is no sound but the crackling of flames in the hearth. Time passes slowly. She looks up at the window and starts to daydream.

Peter Pan is there, hidden behind the shutter. He's come to fetch her, to take her to Neverland. Her, and no one else.

One day, Nanny leaves. The little girl asks her mother why. It's because Jeanne is no longer a little baby, Angela is nearly eight, and Daphne is six. They're big girls now, they don't need Nanny anymore. Daphne looks at Nanny, who is going away forever. Why are her eyes red? What is she doing with her handkerchief? She looks like she's crying. Daphne is surprised: she didn't know grown-ups cried too. After Nanny, there is a succession of nurses that Daphne doesn't like: a fat one who spends all her time eating snacks, another who hums annoying tunes, and yet another who scolds them constantly from morning till night. The walks in Regent's Park last longer nowadays: they are no longer simple strolls along Broad Walk to the zoo, where little Jeanne gets excited at seeing the wild animals. Sometimes, they go around the lake. Daphne's father tells her that a long time ago, before she was born, a tragic accident occurred here during one exceptionally severe winter. Back then, he explains, Londoners were crazy about ice-skating. Despite being warned, hundreds of skaters went out onto the frozen lake. But the ice was too thin, and it cracked. Horrified, Daphne sees the tragic scene unfold as she listens to her father. She seems to hear the fatal creak and snap of the ice, the screams of fear. The skaters were wearing heavy Victorian clothes (wide, frilly skirts and thick, elegant fur coats, their father specifies) and the victims were difficult to fish out. About forty people drowned. Daphne can't help thinking about this every time they walk around the lake, one hand resting on Jeanne's pushchair.

One of the nurses prefers a large, private garden surrounded by a fence. They have to use a key to get in. The nurse meets up with her friends there, and they sit under cover with a Thermos of hot chocolate and some cakes, and talk in low voices. The children are urged to play elsewhere, except for Jeanne, who stays close to them in her pushchair. Daphne thinks this unfair. She wants to stay under the roof and eat cakes too. The nurse orders her to go farther off

and enjoy herself. Daphne sulks, walking slowly down a path. There's no one here to play with, and Angela's having a lesson with Mrs Torrance. Where have the other children gone? Suddenly, she sees that boy. Older than her, at least seven, maybe eight, hair cut very short, light-colored eyes, looking like a bit of a thug. She doesn't like him at all, she's seen him before at the park. He goes up to her and kicks her. She doesn't say a word. She's not going to cry in front of him. *You're the little Frenchy, aren't you? Little French idiot.* She doesn't flinch. Go on, tell me your name. What's your name, Frenchy? Another kick. She mumbles her first name. Your surname, you stupid girl! She stands up straight, looks him in the eye, and pronounces her full name. What did I tell you? That's French, that is, du Maurier. Stupid Frenchy! Another boy appears, smaller, but looking just as mean. You're going to listen to us now, Frenchy. We're going to leave and you're going to stay here. If you move, you'll regret it. They walk away, sniggering. Daphne stands motionless, like a statue. How can she escape? Who could help her? The nurses are far off, at the other end of the garden. She doesn't dare move a muscle, staying exactly where she is, numb, freezing, trembling with fear. After an eternity, the boys return. You moved, Frenchy. We were watching. We saw you. She denies this, but they start laughing, nastily, and the kicks rain down on her again. This time she doesn't just take it, she kicks back at them. Her bonnet is askew, she's out of breath, her cheeks are red, she's hot. How stupid it is to wear a dress, to be a girl, not to be able to lift her leg up like a boy in pants.

Back at Cumberland Terrace, she is still trembling. That night, at bedtime, the nurse gasps when she sees Daphne's bruises. Daphne says nothing. She doesn't want to talk about those boys. The blond-haired one is her enemy, her worst enemy. She has to watch out for him, always be on her guard. But there is one thing she doesn't understand. Why did he call her Frenchy? Is du Maurier really a French name? She decides to talk to Daddy about it. She asks

him the question later, in the living room, when she's sitting on his lap in front of the fireplace. Her father always smells nice, he is elegant, his blue eyes sparkle. He tells her that du Maurier is indeed a French name. His father, Daphne's grandfather, was born in Paris. He was a great artist and a great writer, but he died before she could get to know him, alas. He will show her his drawings and his books. The look in Daddy's eyes turns thoughtful. Paris is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, she'll see. Daphne must never forget that she is one-fourth French and she should be proud of it. She feels reassured. She trusts Daddy, he's always right. She doesn't care about her enemy. *He* doesn't have a famous grandfather.

Her father teaches her to pronounce their name correctly: she must say 'du' Maurier, not 'dou' Maurier. A sharp *u*, very French. As he strokes her hair, her father whispers that one day Daphne will learn to speak French fluently like her grandfather. He himself speaks it with an awful English accent. But he is certain, he knows for sure, that Daphne will speak it perfectly, she will be the most French of all his daughters. Sitting on her father's lap, Daphne starts daydreaming about this grandfather she never knew, a writer, an artist, born in the most beautiful city in the world.

One winter morning, in the nursery, the black letters on the white page soar up and come to life. Amazed, Daphne starts deciphering word after word: she can read on her own, in her head. She devours the books of Beatrix Potter, fascinated by the adventures of Benjamin Bunny. What a bore to have to go and eat dinner when she is dying to find out what the terrifying Mr McGregor will do! How can she leave Tom Kitten and Mrs Tiggy-Winkle? She has to explain to the nurse that what happens next in the story of Mr Jeremy Fisher is far more important than taking her bath.

One story frightens her, even more than her blond enemy from the park. *The Snow Queen*. She is paralyzed with fear by the evil monarch who takes little Kai in her sleigh of ice, and by that shattered mirror, whose tiny splinters get stuck in the little boy's heart and eyes. Thankfully, brave Gerda goes off to save him. Daphne is so frightened by this tale that one night, when she sees her mother climbing the staircase, she seems to have the beautiful and terrifying face of the evil queen. And yet Mummy is gentle and kind. Why is it only with her father that she feels such a strong attachment? Why does she want to be with him all the time? He often watches her, proudly. He watches his two other daughters as well, but there is a special relationship between her father and her, a connection she could never describe, a strong and almost secret connection, and she knows that Mummy has noticed it.

In the mornings, they have to be careful not to make noise in the nursery, as their parents' bedroom is just above. Daddy gets back late from the theater, never before midnight. And then he has to eat supper, so he doesn't go to bed until two in the morning at the earliest. Daddy can't bear noise, especially not the racket made by children laughing and jumping about. He doesn't like the sound of a dog's bark either, or a car engine backfiring, or a bird singing too loudly in the park. While she waits, Daphne reads. When she gets up, she walks on tiptoe, and so does

Angela. They have to wait for the maid to take Daddy's breakfast to him in bed. Her footstep on the stairs, her cheerful *Good morning, sir*: these are the signals that the girls can go and say hello to their father. He wears a green bathrobe over his silk pajamas, and she loves the pleasant scent that floats around him. Daddy is never in a bad mood. Daphne once got her bottom spanked, when she stuck her tongue out at Nanny, but that was a long time ago.

Her father is an actor. Every evening, he plays at being someone else, at the theater. To begin with, Daphne doesn't understand what this means: how can Daddy transform himself? It is only when she sees him on stage for the first time, in make-up and costume, that she grasps his mystery: Daddy is capable of being pompous Mr Darling one moment, and becoming scary Captain Hook the next. How does he manage to change his voice, his expressions, his mannerisms, even the way he walks, to such an extent? She is fond of the dusty smell of the theater, the bar she must push on the heavy door that leads backstage, the kindly stage manager, Bob, with his friendly winks. She enjoys watching these shadowy figures at work in the wings, the light show, the shifting backdrops, the last-minute details, the concentration in the eyes of Poole, the red-faced costumer who helps her father change his clothes. She never misses the chance to watch her father removing his make-up after the play is over. Daddy's work is not like other people's work. Her friends have daddies who go to the office each morning. Hers goes to the theater each evening. The theater is his life.

Mummy tells her daughters that she, too, was an actress when she was younger. That was how she met Gerald, in 1902, when they were acting in the same play, *The Admirable Crichton*. Daddy was playing the role of Ernest Woolley, while Mummy was Lady Agatha. The man who wrote it would become a very close friend of theirs: James Matthew Barrie, known as Uncle Jim, the author of *Peter Pan*. Daphne has seen a photograph of Mummy in that role: she was a beauty

back then, with her thick dark hair in a bun and her eyes accentuated by eye shadow and mascara. In the play, they fell in love, and in real life too. Mummy's name was Muriel Beaumont, her maiden name and her stage name. She took to the stage very young, but she decided to quit acting after her wedding. Angela asked her why, and Daphne could guess what her response would be. She had already understood that there was only a place for one actor in the du Maurier clan, one person only who would shine, one person only who would call the shots at Cumberland Terrace.

Gerard gets bored easily. He needs to be entertained, he needs a court. He likes to be applauded, admired, and Muriel knows exactly how to look after him, his house, his wellbeing, how to ensure he gets enough rest, the right meals, his afternoon nap. She invites lots of people, organizes outings, parties. She is the one who prepares his supper, in her bathrobe, late at night, when he comes home from the theater, starving; what he likes best is bacon and eggs, even at one in the morning. Everything revolves around her father, and apparently it has been this way since he was born. When Daddy was a little boy, he was the favorite son of the du Maurier family, the last of five brothers, and his mother called him 'ewe lamb'. Daphne finds it hard to imagine 'Big Granny' – serious-faced, imposing, always dressed in black – whispering 'ewe lamb' to Daddy.

Every day, her father gets up late, in no rush, and the household waits on him hand and foot. He takes his time choosing his shoes, his suit, and then goes off to the theater for rehearsals. He eats lunch at the Garrick Club, not far from Leicester Square, and in late afternoon – before taking his quick nap, before the curtain rises – he returns to the house and always gives his daughters a hug in the nursery, a cigarette perpetually between his lips. Daphne looks forward impatiently to Daddy's arrival. This is the hour of games and tales, and her father is funny,

sparkling: he makes them howl with laughter when he imitates the next-door neighbor with her stiff-backed gait, her pouty lips, the way she holds her umbrella. He adores making fun of other people behind their backs, while being perfectly polite to their faces. Daddy is skillful, creative; with his help, they start to invent a personal jargon, a sort of code that they add to little by little, and which enables them to communicate without anyone else being able to guess what they're really talking about. Sitting on a 'hard chair'*, 'see-me'*, 'tell-him'*, all have other meanings[1]. Daddy encourages them to put on plays at home. He watches enthusiastically, applauds them, calls Muriel over so she can applaud them too. Daphne always insists on being given the role of a boy. No way will she play a girl. Angela prefers to remain a girl. Besides, with her curves, it would be difficult for Angela to pass for a boy. How boring, to be a girl. Wouldn't Daddy have preferred a boy? Daphne is sure of one thing: she would have made an excellent son.

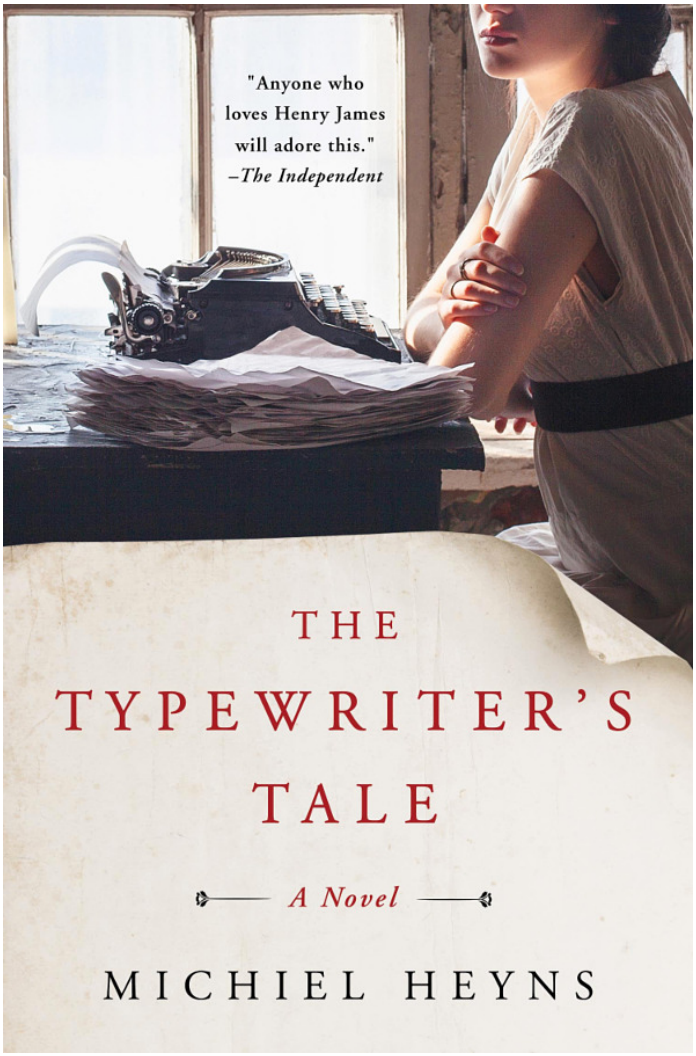
One summer evening, Daddy turns up at the nursery along with a small man with intense eyes, a high forehead and a big black moustache: the famous J.M. Barrie, the man who created *Peter Pan*, the author of several plays starring their father. Uncle Jim speaks with a rough Scottish accent. He is the legal guardian of their five cousins, the Llewelyn Davies boys, the sons of their Aunt Sylvia, Daddy's favorite sister. Daphne does not remember Aunt Sylvia, who died tragically of cancer when Daphne was only three. She doesn't remember her Uncle Andrew either, Sylvia's husband, who also died of cancer, a few years before his wife. All she knows is that Barrie adopted the five orphans, and he is now raising them himself. It was for them that Uncle Jim invented *Peter Pan*, the adventure of a boy who didn't want to grow up. The handsome and charming George, Jack, Peter, Michael and Nico were his inspiration for the Lost Boys.

[1] These code words were incomprehensible for anyone who did not belong to the girls' inner circle. See the glossary at the end of the book for the meanings of all asterisked words.

Sitting by the fire in the nursery, Uncle Jim asks them to perform his own play, *Peter Pan*. They know it by heart, performing it almost every night for their own pleasure, but they never tire of it. They are even capable of singing him the musical opening. Of course, Daddy will play both Captain Hook and Mr Darling, as he's done so brilliantly on stage many times. Angela plays Wendy and Mrs Darling. Jeanne takes the roles of Tinkerbell and Tiger Lily. Daphne does all she can to make sure she plays Peter Pan; no way is she letting either of her sisters take 'her' Peter! They leap from chair to chair, pretend to fly, wriggle on the floor in imitation of swimming mermaids, mimic perfectly the tick-tock of the crocodile that frightens Captain Hook so badly. It's such a success that Gerald insists his daughters put on their plays for guests downstairs, in the living room. Daphne understands why her father loves becoming someone else: it's true, she thinks, how intoxicating it is to put on a costume and change one's appearance. She no longer feels shy at all when she acts in front of her parents' friends. Mrs Torrance, the governess, helps the sisters to rehearse. The guests clap and cheer. And what if life was, ultimately, about pretending? For her father, this seems to be exactly the case, and he does it with such ease that she wonders if she might not manage it too. As well as ridding herself of her shyness, she could, at last, be something more than a mere girl. She could become a boy.

Gerald looks so handsome in his make-up, the way she loves to watch him on stage in his various roles, season after season: Arsene Lupin, elegant and cunning, the audacious Raffles, Hubert Ware, sinisterly attractive, and Jimmy Valentine, the safe-cracker with the tragic fate. Daphne notices the way the girls in the audience devour her father with their eyes. They seem to be in a trance from the moment he appears; they breathe differently, faster, as if they are in love with him.

One day, Daphne gets some sense of Daddy's aura. It is Angela's tenth birthday, and Gerald takes the family to lunch at the Piccadilly Hotel. On the sidewalk in front of the building, two passers-by turn around. They look excited, thrilled. Inside the restaurant, it's the same story: the insistent stares, the complicit smiles. She reads their surname on everyone's lips. *Du Maurier. Du Maurier*. She watches her father while he chooses his meal, the wine, while he leans down to reply to little Jeanne. Gerald is not really handsome, with his long thin face and his large ears, but he has a godlike radiance that attracts the gaze of everyone near him. She observes the waiters' obsequiousness, the bowing and scraping of the hotel manager who comes out to greet them, and, all the way through their lunch, the eyes of the other customers turned toward her father. Daphne is only seven, but for the first time she realizes how famous her father is, and how famous, too, is her French-sounding surname.



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The Typewriter's Tale

A Novel

Michiel Heyns

Told from the perspective of Henry James's fictional typist, Frieda Wroth, who becomes caught up in the friendships and rivalries at James's house

"Live all you can; it's a mistake not to."

This is the maxim of celebrated author Henry James and one which his typist Frieda Wroth tries to live up to. Admiring of the great author, she nevertheless feels marginalized and under-valued, a mere typist. But when the dashing Morton Fullerton comes to visit, she finds herself at the center of an intrigue every bit as engrossing as the novels she types every day, bringing her into conflict with the flamboyant Edith Wharton, and compromising her loyalty to James.

The Typewriter's Tale by Michiel Heyns is a thought-provoking novel on love, art and how life is fully lived.

Meet the Authors

MICHIEL HEYNS is Professor Emeritus in English at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. He is winner of the Thomas Pringle Award for journalism 2007, and the Sol Plaatje Award for translation, 2008 and was winner of the Sunday Times Fiction Award 2012 for Lost Ground.

HENRY JAMES (1843-1916), noted American-born English essayist, critic, and one of the key figures of 19th-century literary realism. He wrote *The Ambassadors*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Chapter One

8th November 1907

The worst part of taking dictation was the waiting.

'She found herself for a moment looking up at him from as far below as…'

She waited, Frieda Wroth, watching his broad back retreat to the far end of the room; turning, he resumed the slow tread down the length of the room. She reflected, not for the first time, on the piquancy of her situation, transmitting, through efficient fingers, the emanations of a writer celebrated for his sympathetic recording of just such disregarded lives as hers. Mr James himself had never shown any apprehension of this quiet enough irony: however preternaturally attuned his sensibilities were to the muffled chord of despair as sounded in the elliptical intercourse of his characters, in her he took for granted, apparently, a prompt attention and a cheerful readiness to assist merely mechanically at the slow processes of his deliberations and contemplations.

It had not occurred to her, in presenting herself for this position, that she would be treated quite so much as an undistinguished and indistinguishable appurtenance of the Remington she operated. It was not a matter of her working conditions – these were as pleasant as he knew how to make them – it was, really, only the metaphysical implications of her identity as a typewriter. She could not have formulated any confident theory on the nature and function of the human spirit, but she knew instinctively that it could not have been intended to serve as the animating principle for a machine. There were times when she veritably envied Mr James's fictional characters for the consideration he bestowed upon them, the vivid identities he invented for them, next to which her own pure functionality seemed abjectly utilitarian. To him she did not represent a potential or real subject: she was the typewriter, appointed to that task and confined to that identity.

Mr James paused in front of the fireplace, often but not always a prelude to utterance. Encouraged to 'read something' while he ruminated, she could yet never altogether concentrate on her book, anxious lest in her absorption she might miss the first fine utterance of his deliberations, as she had once done, to his evident but unexpressed irritation. Generally the most equable of men, he tolerated no interruption of his train of expression: for such a slow-moving vehicle, it was surprisingly prone to breakdowns. She thus preferred to amuse herself by trying to predict the outcome of his rumination, though so far she had succeeded only once, when the elusive word had turned out to be *thing.* This time, since it was a simile he was hunting, she knew only that when it came it would be almost exactly the opposite of what she anticipated, but she tried nevertheless to pre-empt this

perversity: *from as far below as...* a mountaineer all strainingly shading his eyes against the vertiginous slope of Mont Blanc?… an adventurer beneath some tower sung in legend in which a golden-haired princess is incarcerated?

'*…as the point from which the school-child, comma, with eyes raised to the wall, comma, gazes at the particoloured map of the world. Full stop.*' He resumed his slow, deliberate dictation and she clattered obediently after him, then halted, while he resumed his treading of the carpet. At the window he paused, a slight bow on his part signaling his acknowledgement of a passer-by possibly unaware of the courtesy being extended from the window projecting above the street. His politeness was such that it did not insist on a sentient object: Frieda had once, during a walk on Camber Sands, seen him doffing his hat to a passing ship in mid-Channel.

In the midst of such courtesy and consideration – the chocolate bars left on her machine in the course of his perambulations, the flowers sent to her room whenever George Gammon could spare any of the profusion from the garden – it seemed ungrateful to want for more. In undertaking the task of translating the inspirations of genius into legible characters, it had not been her idea, naturally, that genius should defer to her convenience; but she had dared to hope that it might in a manner share with her the secret of composition, afford her on rare but precious occasions a glimpse into the furnace of art blazing fiercely under the great brow. Subsequent experience had rendered her sceptical of the temperature of that conflagration: it was not, intellectually speaking, a glow at which one could warm one's frozen fingers; one could but marvel that so much light should produce so little heat.

She had ended by asking herself what then she had expected, a question that she at various times answered variously – amongst which variety, however, a family resemblance could be discerned in the form of a small ungrateful subjectivity, a consciousness of a hunger unappeased, like some orphan in legend obstinately refusing to feast on the banquet spread before her by a prince. She was, in short, conscious of being just sweetly disregarded, a state which until recently she would have found preferable, at least, to some others – more particularly to the chronic regard of Mr Dodds, whose placid but persistent courtship she had been fleeing in betaking herself to this small seaside town so far from Bayswater. It was in that unimpeachable part of London that Mr Dodds dispensed his medicines from an apothecary's shop smelling always of tincture of iodine. There hovered about his presence, even in the Kensington Gardens where he took her on fine Sundays, the spectre of tincture of iodine. It was with her a moot point whether she was just where she was most in pursuit of enlightenment or in flight from tincture of iodine.

For the moment, however, this question had to yield before the resumption of the slow and yet fluent dictation: '*Yes, it was a warmth, comma, it was a special...*'

Gift? Grace?

'…*benignity, comma, that had never yet dropped on her from any one, comma, and she wouldn't for the first few moments have known how to describe it or even quite what to do with it*… My dear Fullerton!' The keys of her machine were still rattling, lagging slightly behind the voice, but her eyes were free to take in the sight of the novelist spreading his arms in welcome, a gesture that she had witnessed at the front door of Lamb House, but had not expected to see in the Garden Room. For Mr James to allow, much less welcome, anybody into the inner retreat of his genius was not so much unusual as unprecedented, and his young employee would have been at a loss to account for this deviation from custom had her wonder not been much more actively engaged in contemplating the cause and occasion of it. Of the man standing in the doorway extending in turn his arms to the novelist, it would have been possible to say many things, but none of them as simplifyingly, comprehensively true as that he was beautiful. Frieda had never before thought of men as beautiful. Mr Dodds, she had been told by her mother, was a fine figure of a man, and Mr Dodds was in the habit of stealing glances at himself in the mirror behind the counter of his apothecary's shop with a complacency suggesting that he shared her mother's high opinion; but he had never inspired in her anything other than a guilty but unrepentant sense of not being able to share the public estimate, such as she remembered cherishing on behalf of an aged aunt whom others affected to find Wonderful for her Age, and whom she had found simply Difficult. Mr Dodds was not particularly wonderful for his age, that age being hardly more advanced than her own; but he had Done Very Well for Himself, which was the same thing, morally speaking, in that it placed him beyond light-minded censure, and was assumed to render the size of his nose, which was considerable, irrelevant.

This newcomer, whom Frieda gathered to have returned very recently from America, and who was now with lively self-deprecation apologising for violating the sanctuary of sanctuaries, needed no such excuse for his nose or any other feature. One could admire him without consulting a list of his virtues and accomplishments. She wondered indeed whether he *had* any virtues and accomplishments: it seemed to her that to look like that was to be able to dispense with such things. The blue brilliance of his glance, the strong, humorous lines of the mouth, the very agility of the hands, spoke of a nature quick rather than solid (Mr Dodds was celebrated in Chelsea and Bayswater for his solidity), a temperament attuned to the enjoyment of others rather than to the cultivation of the self. She would have been at a loss to estimate the age of the visitor: next to Mr James he looked very young, too young to have been a friend of the older man's for as long as their mutual familiarity suggested. It was likely, then, that he was not as young as he seemed, and even this reflection enhanced rather than detracted from the interest he evoked in the young woman: anybody, in their allotted time, could be young; to

have lived and yet to have retained the freshness of youth was a far rarer achievement. All this Frieda took in, as they say, at first sight; or so it seemed to her later in recalling his so unexpected entry into, as it were, her life.

The two men were too deeply involved in the intricacies of establishing how gratified Mr James was at this proof of the confidence placed in him by his friend, to register the presence of a female typewriter; but having at some length settled the matter, her employer, with his habitual courtesy, introduced the newcomer to the young woman as his 'very good friend, Mr Morton Fullerton', adding, as if in self-evident explanation, 'Mr Fullerton is from Paris.'

The blue glance was turned upon her, and Frieda felt that she had never been looked at before: he seemed to be taking in not so much an impression of her as an impression of her impression of him, to register by some preternatural agency the confusion which prevented her from making any but the most conventional response to the introduction. There seemed little of force or originality to be said for the advantages of inhabiting the French capital, and Frieda did not make the attempt.

Mr James, perhaps conscious of a certain blankness in his amanuensis, apparently thought that more information would stimulate her to a more intelligent response. 'Mr Fullerton is the Paris correspondent for the *Times*,' he informed her. 'You will often have read his despatches.' Then, as this still left her mutely gaping, he elaborated: 'The trial of the unfortunate Captain Dreyfus now, no doubt you followed that? That was the work of my friend Fullerton.'

The visitor laughed. 'My dear Henry, I only reported the case, I didn't conduct it.'

Mr James was insistent. 'Ah, but to report so unflinchingly, so… so *heroically*, must have played its little part in the outcome of that tangled affair.'

Upon this Mr Fullerton turned to Frieda. 'You see, Miss Wroth, what it is to have friends who are determined to cast one in the heroic mould!'

His tone was jocular, but to Frieda's sense or fancy there was in the short glance that passed between them more than the acknowledgment of a common social situation: there was the recognition of a shared plight. Through the gaiety of his manner she discerned a consciousness of being confined to a role he found uncongenial, of, in a manner of speaking, also taking dictation.

That, however, was for later reflection. Mr James meanwhile had moved on, and was addressing her with just the slightest blush of consciousness. 'Miss Wroth, since our labours have been so pleasantly interrupted, I find I need not detain you any longer today. Let us declare this a half-holiday in honour of Mr Fullerton's visit.'

She glanced at her watch. It was only twelve o'clock, almost two hours short of Mr James's usual time; furthermore, in the past, on such rare occasions as he had terminated his dictation early, he

had always had revisions for her to type. She sensed that the visit was of such import to Mr James that he did not want the distraction of a typewriter rattling away in the Garden Room, an apprehension that Frieda was rational enough not to take personally. Mr James was once again addressing his favoured guest: 'Great as is my pleasure, Fullerton, in seeing you here so long before you were expected, I do regret the loss of the little ceremony of awaiting you at the station. Rye Station has rather a grand little air about it, don't you think, as if it were forever expecting to welcome visiting royalty?'

'Ah, then I thoughtlessly forewent the brass band and the schoolgirls' choir that you doubtless had organised against my arrival. I can offer no excuse other than my haste to see you. My ship docked at Liverpool several hours early; so, sacrificing your convenience to my impatience, I took the first train from Charing Cross.'

The two men passed into the garden discussing the relative merits of the *Campania* and the *Lusitania*, and Frieda gathered her effects for her premature return to her lodgings. To get to the street she had to pass through the door set into the wall separating the garden from the desultory traffic of West Street. She had at first, in her ignorance, passed through the house to reach the street, but had gradually become conscious of the unspoken disapproval of Mrs Paddington, Mr James's housekeeper. The privilege of unlimited access to the house, Frieda was to discover, was jealously guarded, as part of an implication of distinctions and boundaries, differences subtle but strong between 'living in' servants and 'living out': to be the latter was to be a kind of tradesperson, like the coal merchant who stayed only long enough to deliver his wares and then return to his proper setting. Thus, as neither guest nor servant, Frieda moved within firmly if not explicitly drawn margins.

Before unlocking the street door, Frieda paused for a moment to take in, as she often did, the beauty of the garden, which now, in the mild November sunshine, was a blend of mellow tones and soft accents. Her eyes wandered from the varied hues of the vegetation to the rich brick of the house and the old wall enclosing the garden; and then came to rest on the prodigious guest, now arrested on the lawn in conversation with his host. In the sunshine his hair shone a deep black, and when he suddenly laughed, startlingly in the still space of the walled garden, the sound was as a declaration of youth. As she put her hand on the doorknob, she looked back; and she found that he had turned and was regarding her with an expression which she had experienced only once before, on the Underground in London. On that occasion it had compelled her to leave the train at the next station; it now made her open the door quickly and escape into the street.

Chapter Two

1906

Frieda did not have strong views on the question of heredity, which Mr Dodds had denounced to her as the futile fabrication of a godless age. But if the years with her mother in penurious Chelsea, after the inconvenient death of her inconvenient father, had taught her anything, it was that she was, after all, the daughter of the man who had, so her mother grimly assured her, 'done for' them, through 'not having what it takes'. In response to Frieda's queries as to the identity of this exacting force, her mother had replied tersely: 'Life.' As this ominously adumbrated entity gradually took shape for Frieda, revealing itself to be a matter of dark corridors and thin soup, of clothes 'done over' and furniture propped up, of importunate tradesmen and inadequate relations, she concluded that, like her paternal parent, she did not have what it takes. Like him, too, she turned, when she reached the age of discretion, her back upon the fray, and found refuge in Literature, indeed in the very volumes that, as her mother periodically mentioned in an aggrieved tone, were all that he had left his wife and daughter with which, in her phrase, to bless themselves. Whether for the benefit of this benediction or purely for the redoubt it offered, Frieda from an early age took possession of her meagre patrimony, and found there, if not the solution to the many quandaries attendant upon What it Takes, then at least a consolation for not having found it. Literature was at worst less expensive than Life, and at best more amusing.

It had seemed natural then, when the time came for her to 'do something for herself', through the demise of her mother and the consequent drying up of her little pension, to turn her thoughts and her hand to this field of endeavour, really the only one she had cultivated with any

assiduity. But as her mother had long maintained, and as soon enough appeared from her own tentative enquiries, literature was not a gainful employment for any but its most successful practitioners. The problem with literature was that short of writing it oneself there wasn't very much one could *do* with it. Writing it herself was indeed an option to which she had addressed herself; but there, too, it transpired that writing was one thing, selling another, and to date she had not succeeded in persuading any buyer of the merit or the commercial viability – she was cynical enough to recognise the distinction – of her modest jottings.

In the midst of this perplexity, it was suggested by her Aunt Frederica, after whom Frieda had been named and who in consequence felt entitled to take an interest in her welfare, that Frieda should qualify herself as a typewriter. 'It's quite the coming thing, my dear,' she explained to her niece, over the cup of strong tea which she favoured, but of which she scrupulously took only one cup, in deference to what she called Frieda's reduced state. Her own state had been assured against reduction by the prudence of her late husband, a bank clerk of such seniority as allowed her, without gross violation of her punctilious regard for truth, to refer to him as *my late husband the banker*. 'It will take the place of hand-written communications forever. Somebody explained it all at my Women's Group. They have courses in it. It's called the mechanisation of the office.'

To Frieda, things in general seemed more in need of humanisation than mechanisation; but Aunt Frederica explained that the aim of the process was exactly for the machines to free human beings for more fulfilling labour and leisure. Frieda remained sceptical, having in childhood listened in wide-eyed dismay to her father's fulminations against the Industrial Revolution, leading her to wonder whether it was too late to reverse a process so self-evidently pernicious. Qualifying herself as a typewriter was clearly a capitulation; but Aunt Frederica's suggestion was at any rate less inconveniently radical than some others that she had ventured – she had once, before the death of Mrs Wroth, advocated emigration to Canada as the remedy to their ills. Besides, typewriting, Frieda imagined, would at worst mean some communion with words. She had the vaguest of notions of what the practice would entail: she thought it might resemble the automatic writing she had witnessed in a darkened parlour in Pimlico, at the behest of her friend Mabel, whose young man Charlie had been killed by the Boers at Mafeking and with whom she sought to communicate through the ministrations of Mrs Beddow.

Betaking herself with consciously heroic resolve to the Young Ladies' Academy of

Typewriting, an institution chronically advertised on the back of omnibuses, she was assured that for a very small sum she could be trained to produce a certain number of words per minute, a total which the tone of her informant seemed to suggest was prodigious. The small sum, it transpired, was larger than Frieda had at her ready disposal, but Aunt Frederica, pleased that her advice had, 'for once', been heeded, offered to make a handsome contribution.

Even then Frieda would have demurred. Her design upon the future, though very indefinite, had never included a vision of 'taking dictation', as she now discovered her function would be designated: it seemed so, in its suggestions of mere receptiveness, to deprive her of any independent agency. She might be poor, but she was not abject. But her destiny declared itself, as it happened, during one of the evenings in Mrs Beddow's dingily over-decorated parlour. It transpired that Charlie was a difficult subject: despite Mrs Beddow's ministrations, hitherto so manifestly successful in awaking the departed to the perplexities of the living, the young man stubbornly refused to make known his whereabouts, intentions, or sentiments. Two sessions of Mrs Beddow's fierce concentration produced nothing but a scrawl which even the eminent spiritualist medium herself was at a loss to elucidate, unless one were to take for an interpretation her firm declaration, in a tone less philosophical than aggrieved, 'Well I daresay the dead have their reasons same as us.' She shook her head with such emphasis that her wig shed motes of dust in the lamplight.

Moved to some form of exculpation of her late sweetheart, and yet also put out at the young man's failure to respond to the supernatural soliciting on her behalf, Mabel explained, 'He never did have much to say for himself,' in a tone to which apology and resentment contributed in about equal measure.

For her part, Frieda could sympathise with the reticence of the young man. Whatever the nature of the hereafter – and on this she had no clear idea despite the most earnest efforts of Mr Dodds to explain the teachings of the Methodist Church on the subject – she could not conceive of it as a state in which one was liable to being summonsed, at the whim of one's earthly relics, to account for oneself to Mrs Beddow. Explanations and explications she took to be the stuff of earthly commerce, from which one was exempted at death. If death was not a state of silence, there was very little to be said for it.

One evening, after Charlie had once again declined to declare himself, Mrs Beddow announced that she could feel 'trembulations' signalling, she informed her audience, an urgent need

to communicate on the part of one of 'Them'. Taking up her pencil in a shaking hand and assuming the rapt expression of one in the throes of revelation, she submitted to the urgings of her supernatural correspondent. These were of a vigour unprecedented in the generally rather staid proceedings in the little parlour: her arm was slowly lifted in the air and then flung down on the table with a force suggesting some impatience on the part of her visitant, as if it had taken hold of the limb in error and wanted to divest itself of the encumbrance as promptly as possible. The pencil clattered to the table, but Mrs Beddow caught and clutched it with remarkable address, her face under its unrefulgent wig retaining an air of expectant but serene exaltation despite the indignities visited upon her extremities. Frieda, who was constitutionally uncomfortable in the presence of agitation of any kind, feared that Mrs Beddow's *sang froid* would provoke a manifestation of even greater vigour on the part of an agency that had already unmistakably indicated its irritation. But she had reckoned without the force of character that had established Mrs Beddow as the most celebrated medium in Pimlico and Chelsea: her mysterious communicant seemed to have been cowed by her imperturbable mien into tractability and even co-operation, to judge by the large, confident movements of her hand, which was unmistakably forming characters on the blank sheet in front of her – characters with which Mrs Beddow seemed to have as little to do as with the flickering of the flame on the table. The arm, recovered from its recent violent convulsion, moved only enough to allow the hand its free range of expression.

The seizure lasted a few minutes, during which Frieda, whose commitment to the proceedings was at best provisional, weighed up her scepticism against the evidence of her senses. There was of course no effect that a combination of legerdemain and bad light could not achieve; but Mrs Beddow had struck her as the dupe of her own enthusiasm rather than a practised charlatan, vaguely foolish rather than consciously duplicitous. It seemed to the young woman that if the medium had dissembled, she might have done so with more regard to mere aesthetics and with more of the appearance of prosperity than was evident in the threadbare setting and general discouraged air of the dusty old woman. The shabbiness of it all guaranteed its sincerity, if nothing else.

Mrs Beddow emerged from her trance with an air of modest achievement. 'That was an unusually powerful visitation,' she informed her audience. 'It has left me quite drained.' Her audience, though sympathetic, was naturally more interested in the legible evidence of the visitation

than in its effects on the medium's constitution; even Frieda found herself hoping that Mrs Beddow was not so devastated as to be incapable of conveying to them the message from beyond. Once again, however, she found that she had underestimated the gumption of their hostess: pushing her wig into place with a determined air, she smoothed out the sheet of paper, and assumed a pair of reading goggles the sheer size of which seemed to confer authority upon the document scrutinised through its bulbous lenses.

It transpired that in straining to summon forth the reticent spirit of Charlie, Mrs Beddow had aroused the shade of Frieda's mother who, identifying herself rather grandly as Agatha (in life she had never been more than plain Aggie), made it known, through much misspelling (an effect, the medium reassured Frieda, of the vagaries of automatic writing rather than of educational regression in the next world), that she was concerned about her younger daughter's welfare, and recommended 'a corse in somthing usful'. Frieda, in spite of her sceptical view of the proceedings, recognised here, disconcertingly, the authentic note of maternal concern, peremptory and vague at the same time. *Something useful*: just so had her mother recommended, in Frieda's youth, 'something cheerful' to relieve the tedium of rainy days, without being able to name, when challenged, any definite activity rangeable under that hopeful rubric. In this instance, though her mother was no more inclined than usual to specificity of reference, Frieda had the advantage of knowing *something useful* that she might take a course in, and that would please Aunt Frederica at the same time. However one looked at it – and our young woman looked at it in a severely pragmatic light – Aunt Frederica pleased was more convenient as a visitor than Aunt Frederica displeased. She dared not, though, divulge to Aunt Frederica her visit to Mrs Beddow: as a member of the Society for Psychical Research, she turned up her nose at mediums like Mrs Beddow, whom she had once denounced as lower-middle class charlatans.

There remained the matter of Mr Dodds, whose views, expressed none the less freely for being unsolicited, proved surprisingly old-fashioned for one usually so respectful of the spirit of trade. Few things roused him to such dudgeon – indeed, dudgeon was not a frequent state with Mr Dodds – as references to Bonaparte's famous slight on the English character, though Mr Dodds was jealous not so much of the English character as of shopkeeping, which avocation, he had been heard to maintain, combined the ideal of service with the noble ambition to 'get on in life'.

Frieda had thus imagined that typewriting, as an indubitably commercial activity, would

meet with Mr Dodds's approval; and to hear him say then, 'You don't want to get mixed up with that kind of thing,' was as unexpected as it was, strangely, piquant. She had not yet had the opportunity of demonstrating the limits of her deference to Mr Dodds's conception of things, and the prospect presented itself as possessed of certain distinct attractions. To prove to oneself as well as to any bystanders that, bereft of choice as one was, one was not yet reduced to *that* choice, seemed some compensation for the absence of a larger freedom. Besides, if Mr Dodds objected to typewriting there must be more to it than met the eye.

They were seated in the Kensington Gardens, on the penny chairs that Mr Dodds took when the weather seemed set fair and there was no danger of having to abandon the investment before it had yielded its full value. Her indebtedness to Mr Dodds for this amenity did not prevent Frieda from enquiring 'Why not?' in a tone in which the interrogative was less in evidence than the disputatious. She did not want to hear Mr Dodds's reasons: Mr Dodds's reasons would be reasons only for Mr Dodds.

But whatever there was of the contumacious in Frieda's reply did not perturb this equanimous gentleman. He laughed fondly, as he did when he felt he had caught Frieda in a moment of adorable female weakness of mind. 'My dear girl, you don't know what you're about. Those typewriting machines make an awful racket. You might as well take a job as a mill girl and have done. Besides, you don't want to be one these… *independent* women who are forever bustling about taking omnibuses and things.'

Frieda wondered how she was expected to get around if not with the help of these useful vehicles; this, however, was extraneous to the question of typewriting, which now presented itself, not in the sober light of filial duty and compliance, but in the lurid glare of an independence of mind repugnant to Mr Dodds's notion of her destiny. She could not have said why, but she realised with a clarity lent sharpness and outline by the brilliance of the morning, that it was important not to accept, and to be seen not to accept, Mr Dodds's assessment of her possibilities.

'The thing is,' she accordingly said, 'that Mama specifically said to do something useful, and I can't think of anything more useful than typewriting.'

'A woman is at her most useful in pleasing her husband,' Mr Dodds complacently replied; then frowned and asked, 'When would this be that your mother told you this?'

'Oh, the other evening. At Mrs Beddow's.'

'Mrs Beddow?'

'Yes. You know, the spiritualist medium.' Frieda was being slightly disingenuous in pretending to think that Mr Dodds knew about Mrs Beddow: she had not told him about her visits to the medium.

'My dear child, you don't want to get mixed up in that lot. They've been proved to be impostors, one and all. Besides, spiritualism is explicitly reprehended in the Bible.'

'I don't see why,' Frieda obstinately objected. 'The Bible is full of spiritualists. What else is a prophet but a kind of medium? Or an angel if not a spirit guide?'

'In those days God chose to reveal Himself to man through human mediums. Today we rely on faith and prayer.'

'When you pray, does God reveal His will to you?'

Mr Dodds looked uncomfortable. As a rule he avoided conversations that were what he described as 'personal'. 'I believe He does, yes.'

Frieda found herself provoked to a spirit of contention by the image of Mr Dodds, no doubt in a kneeling position, his nose pointed heavenward, in communion with his deity. 'How? Does He speak to you?'

'Not as you are speaking to me now, but through – through a subtle influencing of my thoughts.'

'Do you mean telepathy?'

He looked shocked. 'God does not need telepathy. God is God.'

On this incontrovertible note Frieda abandoned the discussion, but resolved quietly not to be led in her decisions by Mr Dodds's strictures and certainties. If she were booked to make a mistake, let it be at any rate her own mistake.

Not so much in obedience to the dictates of her maternal shade, then, as in defiance of Mr Dodds's sense of propriety, Frieda betook herself to the Young Ladies' Academy. This turned out to be an alarmingly thorough institution, presided over by the formidable Miss Petherbridge, who proclaimed on the first day to her shivering gathering of prospective typewriters: 'We women have learnt to our cost that we live as second- class citizens in a Man's World. It is our duty to qualify ourselves to gain access to that world.'

Miss Petherbridge apparently intended a massive invasion of the citadel of male privilege, and her methods of instruction were in keeping with this militaristic ambition. They were, in a word, draconian, and there were times when Frieda wondered whether the price of admission to the Man's World was not higher than the privilege: from what she had seen of men, it seemed a moot point whether one would want admission to a domain so exclusively and invidiously populated by them. But she persevered, if only not to have to confess failure to Aunt Frederica: to brave the regime of Miss Petherbridge seemed less awful than to risk the displeasure of Aunt Frederica. She accordingly submitted to a system of instruction based, according to Miss Petherbridge, on the premise that thought, or what she called cognitive interference, impeded the transmission of information from the eye or ear to the fingers. 'You are an extension of the machine, and your function is to operate it,' she would enjoin her charges. 'Think of yourself as the medium between the impulse and its execution, and you will become an Efficient Typewriter.'

This designation, even when pronounced with all the dignity of Miss Petherbridge's most severe manner, failed to appeal to Frieda's imagination: to be an Efficient Typewriter was not the highest destiny she could conceive. When she mentioned this to Mabel, her friend, always more pragmatic than Frieda, rejoined, 'Well it depends doesn't it? – I mean depends on what it is you get to typewrite. It could be fascinating stuff. All sorts of things are being typewritten nowadays.' When pressed, Mabel was unable to produce an example of such material, and Frieda remained sceptical.

In the event, however, Mabel's faith in the possibilities of typewriting was vindicated. On the day that the Academy grandly called the Graduation, Miss Petherbridge summoned Frieda to her Office, an austere cubicle furnished with a desk and two chairs. Seated in the second chair was a portly, middle-aged man. His air of gravity was oddly contradicted – or emphasised, she couldn't have said which – by his green trousers and blue waistcoat with a yellow check, over which he wore a black coat. As she entered, he got to his feet – he had rather short legs, she noticed – and offered her his chair. She demurred, but he insisted: 'My habits are perambulatory rather than sedentary,' he explained.

Miss Petherbridge introduced the courteous gentleman as 'Mr Henry James, the novelist'.

'You will not have heard of me, my dear,' said the person so introduced. 'I am read by rather a small section of humanity.'

Frieda, who had been taught never to 'show off', wondered whether it would be showing off

to claim membership of this select group, then decided it would not. 'Oh, I know,' she replied. '*Daisy Miller*. *The Portrait of a Lady*. *The Bostonians*.'

The author looked taken aback rather than gratified. 'You have not *read* them?' he enquired, as if admitting to this might expose her to some regrettable but necessary chastisement.

'Yes, I have,' she admitted, and then thought to retrieve the situation by adding, 'All but *The Bostonians*, that is.'

This seemed but meagre consolation to Mr James. 'Gratified as I am to find that my productions are more widely read than I had imagined, I must confess that in applying to Miss Petherbridge for a typewriter and amanuensis – that is, my dear, a person who writes to dictation, from the Latin *manus*, a hand, though in this case it would be matter of typewriting, of course, rather than writing by hand – in applying here for a typewriter, as I say, I was hoping for a young person of absolutely no intellectual capacity whatsoever.'

Miss Petherbridge bridled slightly. 'I like to think, sir, that all my young women are above the average in intellectual capacity.'

'I respect your standards, ma'am, but I must confess that for my purposes the blanker the medium the better, in being the less likely to interfere with the process of composition. You see, my dear Miss Wort,' – he attempted to pace up and down while speaking, but the dimensions of the room enabled him only to rotate on the spot like a dog in a basket too small for it – 'you see, my dear, I would not be dictating to you a composition ready-formed and awaiting only to be delivered, like some… *pudding* got up in the kitchen and triumphantly produced in the dining- room; I would be creating the composition as I speak, a process which naturally entails frequent and at times lengthy pauses between dictations.' He looked at her searchingly, as if to demonstrate the nature of one of these portentous pauses. He had keen grey eyes, all the more striking for his sunburnt complexion. She nodded, not thinking any response was called for, and he continued: 'Now I have in the past had an amanuensis, a young person perhaps of more abilities or at any rate… *aspirations* than could be satisfied by her position, who thought to improve her usefulness by, on occasion, during these pauses, while I was so to speak considering the various possibilities open to me,' he widened his eyes and lowered his voice dramatically, as if reporting an atrocity too heinous to be breathed out loud, '*proposing to me her own poor helplessly orphaned candidates for adoption*.'

Frieda, finding her eye fixed by the brilliant, slightly bulbous regard of the novelist, and not

even quite sure of exactly what the departed amanuensis had been guilty, could think of nothing to say except, 'Oh, I would never do that.'

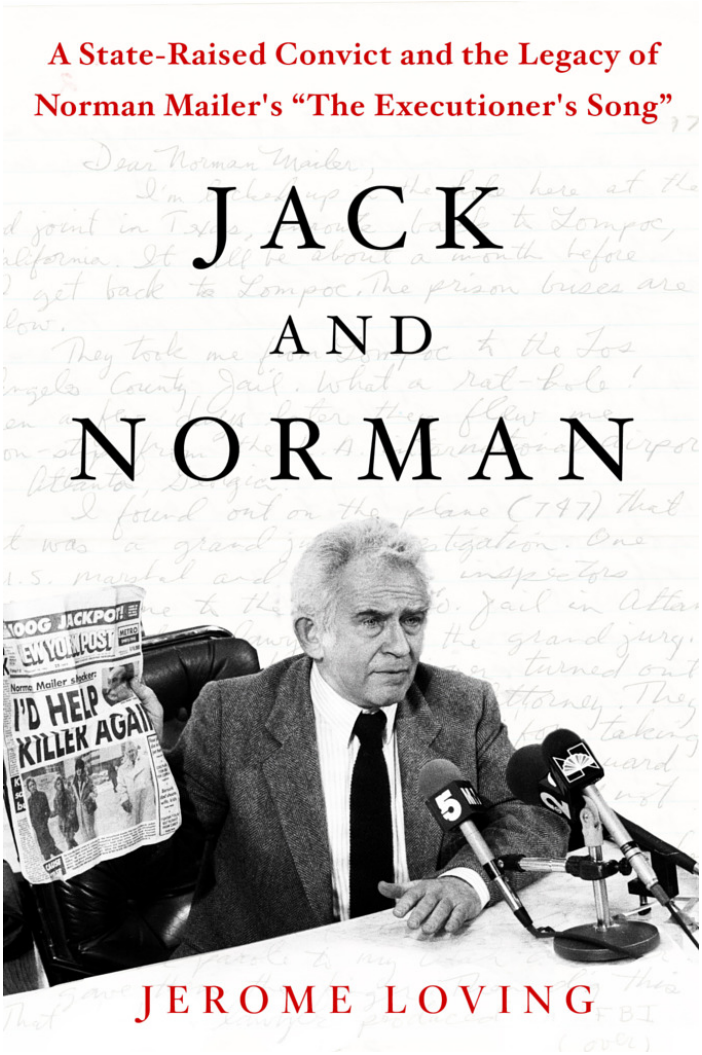
The great novelist seemed mollified by this reply. 'I would need you to be entirely clear on the… *non-participatory* nature of your function, other, of course, than rendering my spoken words in typewritten form as accurately as possible. You will be, as it were, the medium between my thoughts and the paper.'

'We can guarantee at least ninety percent accuracy in our graduates,' Miss Petherbridge contributed.

Mr James seemed but moderately reassured. 'My dear madam, I am sure that for communications of a strictly utilitarian nature, as between, say, a draper and a haberdasher, ninety percent accuracy is adequate; but a ten percent margin of error in transcribing my novels could mutilate my intentions and quite destroy my effects.'

Miss Petherbridge had some experience of punctilious clients. 'I am pleased to say that our graduates are also trained in the exacting business of reading proofs. Whatever minor errors may intrude in the typewriting process, are invariably spotted and eradicated at the proof-reading stage.'

There was a glint in the novelist's eye as he turned his weighty regard upon Frieda, a slight quivering of the mobile mouth, and she felt that he was extending to her an accord behind the angular back of Miss Petherbridge. 'Well, my dear,' he said solemnly, 'with ninety percent guaranteed and the other ten… *rodent* percent subject to eradication, I need not fear being misrepresented to my public by my typewriter. When would it suit you to commence your employment?'



Jack and Norman

A State-Raised Convict and the Legacy of Norman Mailer's "The Executioner's Song"

Jerome Loving

The tragic behind-the-scenes story of Norman Mailer's Pulitzer Prize-winning classic and one of the most sensational literary scandals of the 20th century

Norman Mailer was writing *The Executioner's Song*, his novel about condemned killer Gary Gilmore, when he struck up a correspondence with Jack Henry Abbott, Federal Prisoner 87098-132. With letters of support from Mailer, Abbott was released on parole in 1981.

With Mailer's help, Abbott quickly became the literary "it boy" of New York City. But in a shocking turn of events, the day before a rave review of Abbott's book *In the Belly of the Beast* appeared in the *New York Times*, Abbott murdered a New York City waiter and fled to Mexico.

Distinguished professor Jerome Loving explores the history of two of the most infamous books of the past 50 years, a fascinating story that has never before been told.

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Meet the Authors

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NORMAN MAILER (1923-2007), was an American novelist, journalist, essayist, playwright, film-maker, actor and political activist. He wrote *The Executioner's Song*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize. He also wrote *The Naked and the Dead* and *Armies of the Night*, winner of the National Book Award.

PREFACE

Early on the morning of Saturday, July 18, 1981, sometime between 5:00 and 6:00 A.M., two men would quarrel in a restaurant. Apparently the dispute was over the use of the bathroom at the former Binibon Café, an all-night joint on the corner of 5th Street and 2nd Avenue in the then seedy East Village of Manhattan. Both individuals were artists. Richard Adan, managing his father-in-law's restaurant, was an émigré of Cuba and an aspiring playwright. Jack Henry Abbott, who had been recently released from prison after twenty years, hoped to immigrate to Cuba and was the author of the newly published *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison*. Adan had yet to make his mark as an artist but was on his way. Abbott, who had taught himself to write in prison, had just produced a best seller. The *New York Times Book Review* for the next day printed an ecstatic appraisal, which New Yorkers would wake up to read before they heard the very latest news about the author.

The men quickly moved their argument outside where Adan tried to calm the waters by showing Abbott a place behind a dumpster where he could relieve himself. While doing so, Abbott worried that Adan was going to attack him or have him arrested for disorderly or threatening conduct. He had raised his voice inside when first refused the facilities. He also worried about what the two young ladies were thinking, one a student at Barnard and native of the Philippines and the other a resident of France, who had accompanied him to the café after a night of dancing and were sitting at one of the tables inside. Later Abbott claimed Adan had a knife. Abbott definitely had a knife. Emerging from behind the dumpster, he again confronted Adan, his anger at being refused the employees bathroom in front of his female guests still smoldering, and also poised from years of prison paranoia, to attack Adan. By this time the soft-

spoken night manager tried to diffuse the situation by turning his back on Abbott while inviting him to return to the restaurant. Suddenly, Abbott pulled out a four-inch blade, grabbed his victim from behind and plunged the knife into his chest, nearly slicing Adan's heart in half. Abbott ran back into the restaurant and announced that he had just killed a man and had to flee. The young women fled, too, but they didn't leave the area; instead they stood a block away looking back at the scene of the attack until somebody identified them to police as appearing to have knowledge about the crime and they were brought back for questioning. Adan lay dead on the littered pavement. Abbott would soon be on his way to Mexico.

***

Thus began and ended the brief and fleeting literary career of Jack Henry Abbott, even though he would write another book a few years later. That morning also changed forever the way Norman Mailer would ultimately view the artist or the writer as outlier, as he had suggested in the controversial essay "The White Negro" in 1959. Literary talent might not, should not, trump personal conduct—the man who had once stabbed his wife, nearly killing her, would finally conclude. Mailer had been one of the principal agents of Jack's release from prison. He had promised to employ the ex-con as a literary assistant, and he had written an introduction to *In the Belly of the Beast*. The book consisted of prison letters Abbott had written to Mailer while he worked away on *The Executioner's Song*, his magnum opus and the work that would win him his second Pulitzer Prize, in 1980. Without those letters from Abbott, who told him what it was truly like to grow up behind bars, as Gary Gilmore, the main focus of *The Executioner's Song,* had essentially done, Mailer said he could not have written the book he did. "Your letters," he told Abbott as he was finishing his work, "have lit up corners of the book for me that I might

otherwise not have comprehended or seen only in the gloom of my instinct unfortified by experience. Often the things you say corroborate my deepest instincts about what prison must be like."1 Aside from brief stays in city jails and seventeen days in Bellevue Hospital following the stabbing of his second wife in 1960, Mailer had never been in prison. Abbott and Gary Gilmore were incarcerated in the same prison at the same time—two in fact, the Utah State Prison in Draper and Marion Federal Prison in Illinois.

"When it got down to it," Mailer wrote in the introduction to Jack's book, "I did not know much about violence in prison." He read carefully Abbott's letters describing it, which Mailer wrote, "did not encourage sweet dreams." Unlike Gilmore's description of prison in his letters to his girlfriend, Abbott's were not romantic. Abbott "was not interested in the particular, as Gilmore was, but only in the relevance of those particulars to the abstract. Prison, whatever its nightmares, was not a dream whose roots would lead you to eternity, but an infernal machine of destruction, a design for the Dispose-All anus of a prodigiously diseased society."

***

This is the story of the Author and the Apprentice. It is the story of literary influence and tragedy. It is the story of a state-raised convict, the "by-blow," as Melville says of another of society's orphans in *Billy-Budd,* a novel that comes into play in our story, of an army drunk and a Euroasian prostitute. It is the story of a writer who set out all his life to write the Great American Novel and stumbled into its greatness as essentially a gifted journalist whose "true life novel" transcends the quotidian world of facts. Finally, it is the story of incarceration in America.

1

GILMORE IN THE FLESH

Norman Mailer was less than halfway through a first draft of *The Executioner's Song*, a book of just over 1,000 pages, when he heard from Federal Prisoner 87098-132. "Violence in America: A Novel in the Life of Gary Gilmore" was then the working title for what would arguably become Mailer's magnum opus. As in the case of his book on Marilyn Monroe in 1973, the author got the basis of his story from Lawrence Schiller, a photographer for *Life* magazine and a media entrepreneur. Schiller had purchased the rights to the Gilmore story. The convicted double murderer was executed by a Utah firing squad on January 17, 1977. It was the first execution in the United States since 1973, when the Supreme Court had ruled the death penalty as it was then practiced cruel and unusual punishment, in part due to a lack of uniform criteria. The states, especially Texas, where Gilmore was born, quickly rectified the problem, and the high court approved the changes in 1976. Yet even Texas, which has easily led the field in executions since their resumption, took another six years to execute somebody. No one state, certainly not Utah, apparently wished to be the first to resume the death penalty in America. When Gilmore insisted that his sentence be carried out on schedule, bypassing the normal appeal process, he became a household name, his "death wish" sounded around the world, his picture splashed on the cover of *Newsweek* and most tabloids. He was quoted as telling the judge who had delivered the death judgment: "You sentenced me to die. Unless it's a joke or something, I want to go ahead and do it."

Hardly a year later, on February 9, 1978, Gary Gilmore's "ghost" wrote to Norman Mailer. His name was Jack Henry Abbott. Like Gilmore, Abbott had been practically "born" into prison, grown into adulthood as a "state-raised convict." His earliest memories, he said, were that of a string of foster homes he had run away from. Gilmore, on the other hand, had come from an intact, if also dysfunctional family. After repeated run-ins with the law, he had entered the adult prison system as a habitual criminal, at about the same age that Abbott graduated from six years of reform school and, after only seven months of freedom, had also entered adult prison. In age Gilmore and Abbott were only four years apart--Gilmore born on December 4, 1940, Abbott on January 21, 1944. Both became career convicts.

Abbott had read "somewhere" that Mailer was working on the Gilmore saga, still sizzling in the public memory since the sensational execution in which the condemned prisoner's last words to the prison warden were allegedly, "Let's do it." Abbott claimed that he had known Gilmore at Utah State Prison—had even cared for or written to the same girl from prison—and considered him a "good convict," a man of honor who was respected in prison because he was feared in prison. Abbott had been in prison long enough to know its evil firsthand. "Only after fifteen years in prison," he told Mailer, "does one begin to see what is happening to us." He urged him not to listen to anybody who had been in and out of prison for twenty years. That kind of convict knew nothing, he said. Neither did "those sheltered ghetto shit talkers" who would die of fright when confronted with the violence he had faced. "I can tell you stories and help you. I'd like to."**1**

***

Abbott was thirty-four when he first wrote to Mailer from the federal prison in Butner, North Carolina, where he was being held temporarily. He had begun his adult imprisonment in 1963, in the Utah State Prison in Draper, where Gilmore had also been confined--and executed. Convicted at the age of eighteen of forging checks worth in excess of $20,000 from an establishment he had burglarized, Abbott was initially sentenced to a maximum of five years; his time was extended to a term of three to twenty years for killing an inmate and assaulting another. That was in 1966. Five years later in 1971 he escaped from Draper, possibly the first prisoner to do so, and remained a fugitive for six weeks. He was apprehended after holding up a bank in Denver for the "express purpose," he told Mailer, of getting into the federal prison system. For this crime, he was sentenced to a term of nineteen years, after which he was to be returned to Utah to complete his twenty-year sentence. Of his last twenty years of incarceration, including the first six at the Utah State Industrial School for Boys, he had been "free" only six weeks.

During his confinement at Draper, he claimed to have spent more than five years in solitary confinement. According to Warden Sam Smith, "The majority of [Abbott's] time in prison [there] was spent in segregation and Maximum Security because of numerous and repeated disciplinary reports." Even so, Abbott was given a parole hearing for May 1966, "provided he held a clean institutional record"--which he did not maintain. Between 1966 and 1971, when he escaped with another inmate, Abbott had received thirty incident and disciplinary reports, including the assault of two prison guards.**2** When Mailer read this report, on the eve of Abbott's release in 1981, he naively scoffed at "friend Smith" calling Abbott "a management problem." Despite clear evidence in Abbott's letters to the contrary, the author

of *The Executioner's Song* was willing to bet that Abbott was no longer violent or a danger to society.

Some think Abbott was simply good at conning his middle-class friends. Jerzy Kosinski, probably best known for the dramatization of his novel *Being There*, evidently thought so. He and Abbott had corresponded in the early seventies, when Kosinski was president of the American chapter of P.E.N. and involved in the "Prison Movement." As president of P.E.N., he had reactivated its prisoners' program in which books were sent to prisoners, who were encouraged to enter writing contests in the various genres. Abbott submitted fiction, but it was surely based on the hard facts of a lifetime in prison. "He wrote his first letter to me in 1973," Kosinski told an interviewer, "because he had read *The Painted Bird*; and because in the novel the boy is saved by the Red Army, Abbott assumed . . . I was like him, a Soviet Sympathizer." This misunderstanding eventually led to an unpleasant parting of the ways in which Abbott, a Marxist-Leninist and a pro-Stalinist, accused Kosinski of using without permission ideas from some of his letters in the novel *Cockpit* (1975). "Abbott," the latter complained, "embarked on the most sustained, vile barrage of personal, sexual, political, and aesthetic abuse, dissecting my novels and filtering them through his notion of my betrayal of mankind . . ." (Later, Abbott tried to make amends, but Kosinski had had enough and answered no more of his letters. "I didn't reply, and he abandoned me as a potential rescue system." He waited, Kosinski added, until he came upon Mailer, hoping he would be more receptive than Kosinski to his boiling sense of outrage.**3**

As Abbott would write in *The Belly of the Beast* (1981), as a sixth-grade dropout, his formal schooling consisted almost solely of reading in prison. By 1978, he had become a

communist and was running informal prison seminars on Marxist-Leninism. He was steeped in the works of many other philosophers, works by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre, for example. "Over the years," he wrote in his blockbuster book, "my sister had books sent to me from a single bookstore, and the people who owned it searched out titles they did not have in stock, free of extra charge, to send to me."**4** Ninety percent of his vocabulary he had never heard spoken by the time he wrote to Mailer. His IQ, he noted, was 138 (for whatever that's worth today, Mailer's was supposedly 170), and Abbott claimed that he had spent his life as a "good convict"—that is, not an obedient inmate but one who never "snitched," an assertion that would ultimately be challenged.

***

Initially famous for *The Naked and the Dead*, in 1948, Mailer spent the next thirty years trying to return to the same literary heights. Since the publication of the best novel to come out of World War II, his name hadn't ever been altogether out of the limelight, or the journalistic headlights, for that matter, but it hadn't been there entirely for his best-selling fiction or even his first Pulitzer for *The Armies of the Night* in 1969. Dependent solely on his writings and beset by alimony and child support payments, as he went from wife to wife, he wrote too fast. His career pattern bore an uncanny resemblance to that of one of his literary heroes, Theodore Dreiser. Like Dreiser, who first became famous with *Sister Carrie* in 1900 and again with *An American Tragedy* in 1925, Mailer would begin and essentially end his literary career with masterpieces. Indeed, if Dreiser is, as he is known, the "Father of American Realism," Mailer became his literary son with his pair of deterministic novels. As an undergraduate at Harvard, Mailer had taken a seminar taught by the renowned scholar Howard

Mumford Jones that focused on Dreiser and William Faulkner. It was a new connection even for the late 1940s, long before we came to see clearly the psychological underpinnings of *An American Tragedy*, which Mailer would use as his model for telling the story of Gary Gilmore. Mailer was intimately familiar with both of Dreiser's masterpieces, if not his entire oeuvre. In *Marilyn* he had suggested a parallel between Carrie Meeber and Marilyn Monroe, each a *jeune fille* in the urban jungle of America. While on the West Coast as a hopeful screenwriter, an experience that provided the basis for *The Deer Park* (1955), Mailer tutored Shelly Winters on the role of Roberta Alden, the factory girl who is seduced and murdered in *An American Tragedy*, help that convinced director George Stevens to give her the part in *A Place in the Sun* (1951), a dramatization of the novel. Roberta, Mailer told Winters, is "a girl completely without artifice." So was Carrie in the beginning of *Sister Carrie*, the girl next door or kid sister, before she found her footing in Chicago and New York. **5**

Sister Carrie had come right out of Dreiser's tattered youth and peripatetic family, whereas *An American Tragedy* had come from the newspapers. The first had been fiction; the second had been "fact," or creative non-fiction. Dreiser's books in between never quite made it as American classics, at least not in the way *Sister Carrie* or *An American Tragedy* did. The same pattern was becoming evident for Mailer, whose fictional work between *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Executioner's Song* had the same kind of belabored plots as Dreiser's middle works. In both cases, the dialogue had a tinny sound to it, and the plots were somewhat overwrought, as if an argument rather than a theme were at the heart of it. In *Barbary Shore* (1951), for example, whatever plot Mailer envisioned evaporates into a political argument about the dangers of post-World War II fascism.

Both writers required a flesh-and-blood protagonist to relocate themselves in their writing lives. Mailer's turning point from fiction to fact, or creative non-fiction, probably came first with *The Armies of the Night* (1968), for which he won both the Pulitzer and the National Book Award. Having taken part in the 1967 march on the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam War, he married in his narrative the historical and the fictional to drive one of the first nails into the coffin of a war that was unwinnable. This non-fiction pattern was continued elsewhere, most notably in *The Fight* (1975). In fact, one of the chapter titles in this short work is called "The Executioner's Song." It applies to Mohammad Ali's destruction of heavyweight George Foreman in the "Rumble in the Jungle" in 1974. Mailer had been ringside to cover the fight for *Playboy*, but the story he subsequently wrote about the former Belgian Congo became something more than journalism. In modern-day Zaire he found in Ali the "psychic outlaw" he had envisioned in "The White Negro" (1957), somebody who would strike back at society for its hypocrisies. The Prison Movement of the early 1970s may have fueled his fascination with such a hero, though he appears in earlier fiction, indeed as early as Lieutenant Hearn in *The Naked and the Dead.*

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From the very beginning Jack Abbott was clearly looking for another "potential rescue system." Doubtless, Mailer saw that, but he was nevertheless drawn into Abbott's world. It was a journey deep into the dungeons of the nation's incarcerated, an exploration Mailer needed for his book. Yet he was also smitten by Abbott's prose style. The convict had his own "voice." Hence, as the apprentice sought to acquire Mailer's support as he approached his first parole hearing in the federal system, perhaps he thought as early as 1982, he not only educated

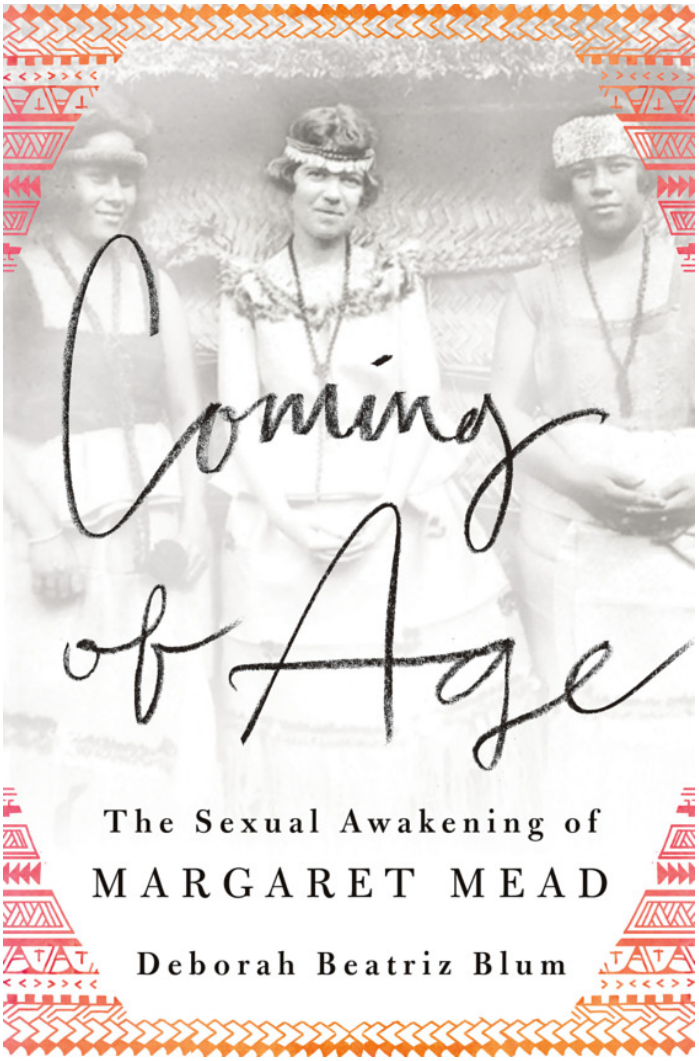
the author but also intrigued and infatuated him. His problem, he told Mailer, was that as a state prisoner in Utah, he had been labeled one of the "most dangerous." Now in the federal system he was having the same problem. Just the year before, he had been found "guilty" of tying up a guard and stabbing him. Yet for some reason he was indicted only for striking a prison doctor who was trying to "zonk" him with Thorazine.

Saying that he couldn't write ("wish I could!"), he proceeded to astonish Mailer with stories of overpowering detail, drama, and irony. He offered the novelist access to his state and federal files as long as it was merely for the purpose of comprehending prison, saying that Mailer would never get another chance to obtain material as valuable as he was offering him. "Frankly," he said, "there is no prisoner who has been involved in so much in-fighting at prison as myself who is still alive." There wasn't, he added, a single federal penitentiary that would willingly accept him as a permanent transfer. Only somebody like Jack Henry Abbott, Mailer soon came to realize, could get the author inside the head of Gary Mark Gilmore; only he could approximate the condemned man's inner rage and paranoia brought on by a lifetime behind bars. Abbott signed off, as he would throughout their long correspondence, even after he had been let out and killed again—"In Peace, Jack."

Mailer responded to Jack's first letter almost immediately. It had been delivered through a third party, the literary agent Morton Janklow; so he probably didn't read it for a week or more. On February 23, 1978, he wrote Abbott that he was in the middle of the book and had only six months to "get the writing done before I'm dead broke." His advance was "half of a half million," but he had fourteen people to support. That meant, he later added, that he

needed to make at least that much money every year. He was now married to his sixth wife, Norris Church, who had just given him his eighth child, John Buffalo Mailer, born April 16, 1978.

What he was trying to write in *The Executioner's Song* was a "factual" novel. He would soon realize from Abbott's letters that Gilmore's seeming twin hit powerfully on the psychology of violence in prison: "There are parts of this book," he told Abbott, "that I don't pretend to understand and prison life is a big part of it." He sought to capture and dramatize the psychology of violence in prison. Already, in his first letter, he thought that Abbott had convinced him he had much to learn about prison. Yet he wondered just where they would start. They had little more than six months to correspond before his publisher's deadline. He was also slightly edgy about Abbott, saying that he hadn't quite "understood" the prisoner's reference to "sheltered shit-talkers who would die of fright if confronted with real violence." Abbott would approach the same racism in *The Belly of the Beast*, which came only in part from the original prison letters he would send Mailer. "How would you like to be forced all the days of your life," he wrote, "to sit beside a stinking, stupid wino every morning for breakfast? Or for some loud fool in his infinite ignorance to be at any moment able to say (slur) 'Gimme a cigarette, man."**6** In his letter to Mailer of October 8, 1978, the fool is a "loud nigger." Also left out of the book: "And I just look into his sleazy eyes and want to kill his ass there in front of god and everyone because it's not [that] he is black but that anyone with sense knows if he is not my friend he doesn't dare hit on me for anything."



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Coming of Age

The Sexual Awakening of Margaret Mead

Deborah Beatriz Blum

The true coming-of-age story of Margaret Mead whose life challenged the social and sexual norms of her time

Coming of Age focuses on five years in Mead's life when she began to question the traditional attitudes towards sex, marriage, and courtship that dominated the early 20th century.

In 1921, Mead moves to New York City to attend Barnard College and experiences the blush of many firsts: dating, marriage, and an affair. She leaves in 1925 to spend nine months studying the native people of Samoa. There she witnesses their openness and sexual freedom, while struggling herself against the invisible chains of society's influence. By story's end, Mead has found sexual liberation, professional fulfillment, and grown into her own identity.

Drawing on letters, diaries, and other historical documents, Blum recreates the dramatic life of one of the most provocative thinkers of the 20th century.

Meet the Authors

DEBORAH BEATRIZ BLUM is the author of *Bad Karma: A True Story of Obsession and Murder*. She has been a writer, producer and director working in the film business for most of her adult life, where she's written and directed documentaries for National Geographic, Discovery and the History Channel.

MARGARET MEAD (1901-1978), was an American cultural anthropologist. She is the author of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, along with some forty other works . She served as Curator of Ethnology at the American Museum of Natural History, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom following her death in 1978.

Chapter: Girls, Unmarried As Yet

"I wish that you wouldn't tell me all the bribes that Dadda concocts because you know that I can't accept them, it would be a moral defeat for me to give up and come home. I am going to finish this year out. It wouldn't be worth anything to me if I don't."
-Margaret Mead to Emily Mead (5545)

March 1922

Margaret surveyed herself in the full-length mirror that hung on her closet door. She was dressed in the outfit that Mrs. Stengel, her mother's dressmaker, had made for her - a sensible tailored navy blue linen suit, appropriate for the month of March and the importance of the occasion.

Twirling in front of the mirror so she could see herself from behind, and she sighed. Barely over five feet tall and weighing less than one hundred pounds, her body looked more like it belonged to an adolescent boy than a twenty-year-old woman.

From the next room she could hear peals of laughter. Her roommates were yelling and talking, all at once. "Quiet ladies," came Leonie's voice, rising above the others, "I have to read you something. This is serious."

Turning back to the mirror, the task at hand, Margaret's gaze settled on her hairdo. Her hair, long, wavy and honey-colored, was ordinarily her best feature. She usually wore it loose, over her shoulders. This was the hair her grandmother had lovingly brushed every night before she went to bed. This was the hair the others envied. But now, in deference to the seriousness of the occasion, the final debate of the year between Barnard and the girls from Wellesley, she had arranged it in an elaborate coif, a concoction that had taken nearly an hour to effect. The style - parted down the middle and wound over wire "cooties" - was not flattering.

But while she didn't look her best, the hairstyle, Margaret reasoned, wasn't going to matter; it was going to be what she did on stage. For such a slip of a girl she had a remarkably powerful presence – and she knew it. She'd once said to a friend, "If I were a man, I would probably be one of those bantam fighters… I think of myself as being small and fighting back… and so I speak with the voice of someone who is David vis-a-vis Goliath." (Banner 189)

Straightening her wire-rim spectacles and grabbing her handbag, she headed for the door.

The year was 1921, and Margaret Mead was a sophomore at Barnard College in New York City. Ever since she'd transferred to Barnard in the fall she'd shared a dormitory style apartment at 606 West 116th Street with four other girls. Although the roommates had been thrown together by chance, she and the others - Leonie Adams, Pelham Kortheuer, Deborah Kaplan and Bunny McCall - got along quite famously. Margaret had immediately taken charge of the room, selecting fabric for a new set of drapes, organizing formal afternoon teas, and introducing her roommates to Luther's friends at the seminary.

She was immensely happy.

Every letter home bubbled over with news of the matinee she'd just seen, from Madame Butterfly to Hedda Gabbler, or the special little bookstore that she and Luther had discovered, or the outing they'd made to Coney Island. She told her mother, "I don't see how I ever could have gone anywhere else. To be up in here in this wonderful place and part of this great cosmopolitan university. … I just love it, love it, love it." (7650-51)

Margaret had the plain but endearing face of an eager schoolgirl. With blue eyes, set under eyebrows that were unfashionably thick, she exuded a bit too much determination to be called pretty. She took her grades very seriously and was in the habit of reporting all her academic triumphs to "Dadda," the name she called her father, Sherwood Mead, a professor at the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce.

She could be "extravagantly talkative," (JH 56) and in spite of having a penchant for delivering strong opinions, often expressed in a bossy tone, she had a quality about her that prompted friends and family to address her in letters as, "Girlie," "Little Girl" or "Dear Little Mar." (letters and Kinship 14) Luther went one step further, calling her "Pretty Little Girl."

Dadda, however, had come up with his own special moniker, one that was more fitting. He called her "Punk," a term of endearment that made special reference to her stubborn streak. (BW 25, Kinship 14)

Margaret had come to New York at a time when girls, including all of her roommates, were rebelling against the institution of marriage. They prided themselves on being what the magazines called "Flappers;" girls who drank, smoked and dressed like tomboys. They sat up late into the night discussing how James Joyce's *Ulysses* had been unfairly banned and agreeing that the so-called Bolshevik take-over was a bunch of reactionary propaganda.

And while these girls might have dreaded ending up old maids every bit as much as their mother's generation had, they maintained they were *not* attending the university merely to find a husband. It was not commitment they were after, but adventure and romance. They idolized the Greenwich Village poet Edna St. Vincent Millay for extolling

the virtues of free love, and subscribed to her motto, "My candle burns at both ends; it will not last the night."

Margaret and her roommates so personified the Flapper attitude that one of Barnard's professors singled them out, remarking to Leonie, "You girls sit up all night readin' poetry come to class lookin' like ash can cats." The nickname stuck. From then on they were known around campus as the 'Ash Can Cats.' (JH 43)

And every one of them ridiculed the idea of marrying young and starting a family; everyone, that is, except Margaret. In spite of the sea change that was occurring around her, Margaret was whole-heartedly committed to marrying Luther Cressman. As far as she was concerned, there was no need to date anyone else.

"He made all the nonsense about dates – or not having dates irrelevant." (BW 100)

Basking in Luther's devotion, Margaret did not feel she was "among the rejected and un-chosen." (BW 100) From the safety of a secure relationship, she watched as the others surrendered themselves to the highs and lows of dating. While her roommates turned their dressing tables into shrines dedicated to the promise of the night, littered with pots of make-up, mascara brushes and perfume bottles, Margaret's was covered with books. Her vision of the future included marriage to an Episcopalian minister, setting up house in a rural parish, raising six children and immersing herself in a career, as yet to be determined. (JH 40)

Margaret was the only one of her friends who had not yet cut her hair in the new style, "the Bob." Chopped off at chin length, with a fringe of bangs over the forehead, this wildly popular hairdo was the emblem of the Flapper. Above all, it was a statement

of something they all believed in – a woman's right to be assertive in the world. (JH 42, Kinship 29)

But for Margaret, her hair - long and golden – was the one aspect of her looks that she prized. And while she was quick to reject any focus on her outward appearance, routinely deflecting Luther's compliments, she was loath to cut it off, writing home to her mother, "I haven't bobbed my hair yet because the apartment objected." (7669)

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Margaret, now crossing campus, couldn't help but reflect on how different things were since she'd transferred to Barnard. Just last year she'd been a freshman at DePauw University in the small town of Greencastle, Indiana. Looking back, it seemed like someone else's life.

For a girl who'd grown up on a farm in Bucks County, on the outskirts of Philadelphia, DePauw had been an unlikely choice. In fact, it had never been a choice at all. But when the question of what college to attend had been raised and Margaret had announced she wanted to apply to Wellesley, her mother's alma mater, Dadda had said she wasn't going to go to any college at all. His decision, he said, was based on bad news he'd received about one of his private business ventures. He simply couldn't afford the tuition. (BW 34-37)

Fortunately, Emily, her mother, had figured out that the easiest way around Dadda's objections was to appeal to his vanity. When she suggested that Margaret attend *his* alma mater – DePauw, Dadda promised he would find the money to send her. (JH 37)

Margaret had looked forward to DePauw with excitement, and a touch of apprehension. While she could hardly wait to partake of the "intellectual feast" she imagined was waiting, her main pre-occupation had been how to make friends, and lots of them. Her mother had tried to help by letting her plan her wardrobe with a dressmaker and helping her pick out the color scheme for her dorm room, which they had finally decided would be old rose and blue.

Once at DePauw Margaret had immediately thrown herself into the whirl of Sorority Rush, writing to Mother:

"The invitations to the sorority rush parties came out this morning. I received a Kappa invitation for which I understand I should be extremely grateful… I'm going to their party tonight. My roommates both got Tri Delt invitations. These are not bids to enter the sorority, it's just a preliminary rush party." (5512)

She arrived at the Kappas early, before any of the others. She was wearing a dress she had designed herself, an eccentric gown that was supposed to "represent a field of wheat with poppies against a blue sky." The skirt, made of a stiff silver-green material, was accordion pleated; the blouse was a loose fitting, diaphanous affair, cut from Georgette crepe. (BW 87, JH 37)

She and the other rushes mingled in the foyer, before they were guided down a receiving line of sorority girls and into the parlor. Seated on a straight-backed chair, she sipped tea and kept up a constant flow of small talk. Caught up in the excitement of the moment, she failed to notice how the Kappas were reacting.

Apparently, the sorority sisters found Margaret's Main Line accent pretentious, her homemade dress frumpy and unfashionable, and her lack of make-up an unforgivable social gaffe. (JH 37) It was not until five days later that she learned she was one of only a handful of freshman who had not received an invitation to join a sorority. Ostracized by

the popular girls, excluded from the fraternity parties, she spent nearly every weekend alone in the dorm. (BW 90, 94, 95)

It was the first time in her life she had experienced organized rejection. The pain was intense. When she turned to her parents, Dadda did not coddle her:

"Don't let this fraternity thing get on your nerves. If you do good work and make yourself strong in your class, they will be fighting for you before the year is out. I hope you will throw them all down and do it publically, that is, if you are sure they are as snobbish or as clannish as you say. I am disturbed that you pay any attention to the matter." (7350)

Margaret was not appeased. As the weeks dragged on, her letters dwelled on how lonely she felt. Her father wrote again:

"Mar… Really, I can't make you out but I have an abiding faith in your ability to get what you want, if not in one way, then in another. The only way to get what you want is to find out who has the disposal of it, then bring pressure to bear on that person. Organized pressure is most effective. Don't waste time in organizing the "ins," the "outs" are the people to work on. Make yourself indispensable to some of them." (7352)

But Margaret was still miserable. And she was desperate to go home for Christmas. Then her father dropped a bombshell. Writing her that money was short, he said he couldn't afford to bring her back.

Margaret immediately turned to her mother. "Please let me come home. We have sixteen days now and surely that is long enough to justify the journey. Please, mother, I never was so homesick in my life." (5547-48)

Then Dadda sent another letter suggesting that if the DePauw experience was *that* unsatisfactory, perhaps she should consider coming home at Christmas and staying for good. She could enroll at the University of Pennsylvania and spend the spring in town.

Margaret rallied with a storm of protest.

"Dear Dadda… I am not to be tempted. Has not long acquaintance with me convinced you of that? All the alluring things you propose, through mother, are lovely of

course. But I would like nothing better to finish what I've begun. I stay here the rest of the year, and nothing, not being allowed to come home at Christmas, or the prospect of a winter in town will make me change my mind." (8612)

Telling her parents that "it would be a moral defeat" to give up and come home, she finished out the year. (5545)

Now, a year later and looking back on all of it, Margaret was quite pleased with the way she'd comported herself. She didn't realize it, but Dadda was too.

***

On this blustery March day, Margaret made her way across campus, towards Barnard's small Brinckerhoff Theater. With her arms clasped around her, she put her head down and marched forward into the cold wind.

Three weeks earlier, when the subject of the debate had been posted, Margaret had been thrilled. The topic, "Resolved that European Immigration should be further restricted," was one that totally engaged her interest. She had immediately announced "I'm going out for the negative…," but when the teams received their assignments, Barnard was selected to represent the affirmative. It would be their job to argue that the flow of immigrants should be stopped. Although the "popular" position, it was anathema to Margaret's politics. (5956-57) In a letter home she wrote that she "did not believe in a restrictive immigration policy" and complained that debate practice was "crawling along," saying, "I have such a strong emotional bias it is extremely difficult for me to get up any interest in the matter." (7722) Her father, however, dismissed her misgivings, and

congratulating her on being chosen to compete in the final debate, told her to "write out every possible argument of the other side" and to make her rebuttal "snappy."

For as long as Margaret could remember, Dadda had coached her in the art of public speaking. In high school, before every competition, they'd gone to work on her delivery.

Each night after dinner father and daughter would retire into the den. Dadda sat in his chair, his legs propped up on an ottoman; Margaret stood in the center of the room, facing him. As soon as she started, Dadda would yell, "Look me in the eye! Pick someone to speak to!" The first rule he told her was to avoid "the lawn sprinkler method;" he never wanted to see her "scatter her words" over an audience. (BW 37)

Thanks to Dadda's coaching, Margaret had come to understand that the success of one's presentation had as much to do with body language as it did with the content that was delivered.

Today's debate, the final competition between the squads from Barnard and Wellesley, was the most important of the year and it was going to be a difficult one for Margaret, considering her emotional bias. She was resolved to view the event as a contest, not as an expression of her personal point of view. She had written to her mother, "Goodness knows whether I'll do well or not, but I'd like to have you and Dadda here." (7682)

Once inside the auditorium Margaret took her place among her teammates. The Wellesley girls were already assembled. The Chair directed the speakers to move to the stage. (Columbia Bulletin)

A girl from Wellesley spoke first: "The time once was when we welcomed to our shores the oppressed and downtrodden people from all the world, but they came to us because of oppression at home and with the sincere purpose of making true and loyal American citizens… "

When it was time for her to speak Margaret rose from her chair and walked to the podium. She looked out at her audience, cleared her throat. "It is time that we act now, because in a few short years the damage will have been done. The endless tide of immigration will have filled our country with a foreign and unsympathetic element."

The words tasted bitter as she spoke them. Reminding herself that public speaking was play-acting, she went on, "Those who are out of sympathy with our Constitution and the spirit of our government will be here in large numbers, and the true spirit of Americanism left us by our fathers will gradually become poisoned by this uncertain element…." (Vassar News 3/21/21)

As she surveyed the faces that looked back at her, Margaret found she wasn't nervous. She found that her voice, surprisingly, did not waver. She felt in command of her facts. She felt she knew more than her opponents. When she returned to her chair and sat down, she allowed herself to take a deep breath. She was pleased with both her performance and herself.

And then it was all over, and the audience was clapping. There were a few nervous minutes while the judges conferred. Then the decision was announced; Barnard had lost overwhelmingly. (Columbia Spectator 3/21/21)

The judges had voted unanimously for the Wellesley team.

Margaret rose from her seat and began to shake hands with the victors. She couldn't get over it. How was it possible? Her body felt cold and clammy; she noticed she was shaking. As she walked through the auditorium she overheard someone say that Barnard had all the facts, but had fallen short on style. Someone else said the Barnard girls should have worked harder to master the technique. (7728)

Was it true, she asked herself. Had *she* fallen short on technique? Was her delivery weak? Had she been slumped over while she was speaking?

Suddenly she was conscious of her hair, which had been coiled in place all day. The pressure of it, pulled back and pinned up, was unbearable. Reaching up she began to yank out the bobby pins, one by one, letting the hair tumble down. Her fists closed around the hair clips and she shoved them into her coat pockets.

When she returned to the apartment all the girls were gone except for Leonie, who was sitting at the kitchen table, bent over her typewriter, furiously pounding the keys. Margaret kept her face averted as she moved to hang up her coat.

"I'm nearly finished with my article," Leonie called out.

Margaret heard a bang as Leonie slapped the carriage return. Walking past her and going into the bedroom Margaret threw down her jacket and began unbuttoning her blouse.

Then she felt someone's shadow behind her and heard Leonie's voice. "Listen to this. Coolidge actually singles out Barnard from all the other schools. Barnard, can you believe it? He says, 'You can't go through Barnard without knowing the principles of socialism…'"

Margaret looked in the mirror and saw Leonie's reflection looming over her, waving a typewritten page in one hand and holding a cigarette in the other.

Leonie thrust the paper towards her. "Tell me what you think of this as a title, "Cheer up, Mr. Coolidge"?

Leonie's editorial was a rebuttal of an alarmist opinion piece, written by Vice President Calvin Coolidge, published earlier that week. Titled "Are the Reds Stalking Our College Women," it alleged that anarchists and radicals were overrunning the nation's best colleges and endangering America's young women. (Enemies of the Republic in Delineator) The imagined foes, as conjured up by Coolidge, were spreading a gospel that was "…hostile to our American form of government, to the established personal right to hold property and the long recognized sanctions of civilized society." (Enemies of the Republic)

Margaret and her roommates had pronounced the Coolidge piece laughable. All week long they'd read parts out loud, reacting with jeers and derision. There were no agitators on campus, unless they themselves were the agitators. (BW 103)

Now Leonie, recently named the editor of *The Barnard Bulletin,* and well known around campus as a promising poet, had taken on Coolidge. She intended to run her editorial on the front page of the *Bulletin*.

For Margaret, the coincidence was more than ironic. While Leonie had been framing an attack against the Vice President, Margaret had spent the day defending his restrictive immigration policy - a policy that was, as far as she was concerned - paranoid, reactionary and wrong.

***

That night Margaret and Luther went to dinner at Galati's. They had planned to try for last minute seats to see Katherine Cornell in *A Bill of Divorcement* but Margaret's head hurt too much to sit through a play.

Knowing her as he did, Luther was not surprised that Margaret was taking her defeat so hard. Margaret was not anything if not determined – and competitive.

Through dinner Margaret pondered the loss, revisiting those pivotal moments in the debate, trying to identify the turning point when things had gone wrong.

"What didn't I do?"

"You had the weaker argument," said Luther.

"Yes, but I *knew* how to present it. At least I thought I did."

"Maybe it's not losing that bothers you," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe it's being on the wrong side."

"You always refuse to understand how a debate works. I *have* to be on whatever side they assign me to."

"Yes, and you have to exploit whatever weakness you can find in the other side, even if you don't believe it."

"That's politics," she said.

"Well?"

"Well, nothing. That *is* politics." (BW 110)

Margaret went back to the apartment feeling glum. When she stepped through the door, she found the lights out, the rooms empty. All the girls were out.

She hadn't liked what Luther had said and she didn't accept it. She was good at public speaking, at debating, and that talent might get her somewhere. She had no wish to see that skill denigrated; that is, not until she discovered something else to take its place. (BW 110)

She moved on into the bedroom she shared with Leonie.

On Leonie's side of the room, clothes and under-garments were heaped on the floor, strewn about on every available surface. Cigarette stubs filled the ashtray. The desk where Leonie wrote her verse was buried under piles of books and crumpled papers. Apparently, the disorder left Leonie unfazed.

Leonie's verse was so good it had already been published in a highly respected poetry journal, *The Measure.* And Margaret was the first to give her credit, saying, "Leonie was a real poet, whereas none of the rest of us are a real anything yet." But that didn't mean that it was easy to accept. (BW 107) For Margaret, to be celebrated as poet was to achieve near mystical stardom. This was partly due to the cult of personality that had sprung up around the soldier-poets of World War I, and partly because it was one of the few arenas in which women could shine. Amy Lowell's name was familiar to every English major and Edna St. Vincent Millay's voice, low and timorous, was as recognizable as her shock of red hair.

Now Leonie – one of her own roommates - seemed to be on the verge of gaining acceptance into this elite sisterhood. Leonie's poetry gave her not only a celebrity status

on campus, but also a unique identity, something Margaret desperately wanted for herself. (BW 109 -111)

Margaret spotted one of Leonie's evening bags lying on the floor. A pouch made out of delicate beadwork, with a zigzag pattern of yellow and purple. This was a handbag designed for the nightlife, its style as reckless as Leonie herself. She had to wonder, how ever was Leonie able to pull serious work out of the chaos of her life? The infatuation, the ecstasy and the heartbreak that always seemed to trail in her wake? For a girl as conscientious as Margaret, who relied on self-will and determination, Leonie's success was maddening.

That night in bed, Margaret's thoughts returned to the question of her future. Talking to Luther had helped clarify things. (JH 35). But while he had made her understand that a life in politics, as a debater, was dishonest, he hadn't been able to point her in any specific direction. (BW 110)

What then was she going to do? She had no focus for her prodigious energy. Certain that a unique talent must be lurking within her, she was impatient to identify it. As one friend had said about her, she was "like a missile waiting to be directed." (BW 109 -111)

As she tossed and turned, her thoughts came back to the same conclusion she'd reached on many other nights: that no one, not Dadda, not Grandma nor Luther, were going to set her on her path; she and she alone would have to find that direction for herself.

***

The pair of scissors in the barber's hand was silver, sharp and shiny.

Margaret sat in a swivel chair in the man's shop looking out the big plate glass window. She wore a smock over her dress and her dark golden hair was spread like a canopy over her shoulders. She waited for the barber to make the first cut.

The barber grabbed her hair and pulled it taut.

Scissors make a distinct sound as they cut through hair: a crisp slicing sound, very final. The sound seems even crisper when the hair in question falls to a girl's waist and hasn't been cut in years. And when thick, wavy hair of a honey-colored hue has been dampened to make the cutting easier, the sound of it being severed at chin length seems to resound through the room.

Margaret watched large clumps of it fall to the floor.

Suddenly she thought about her grandmother, tiny little grandma who ruled the family with her kindness. When Margaret was a little girl, she used to love to sit at grandma's dressing table, with its frosted glass jar full of cold cream and the hand-painted handkerchief box. Before bedtime, ever night, she'd sit there while Grandma brushed her hair and told her stories of what it had been like for her, growing up. (BW 45-48)

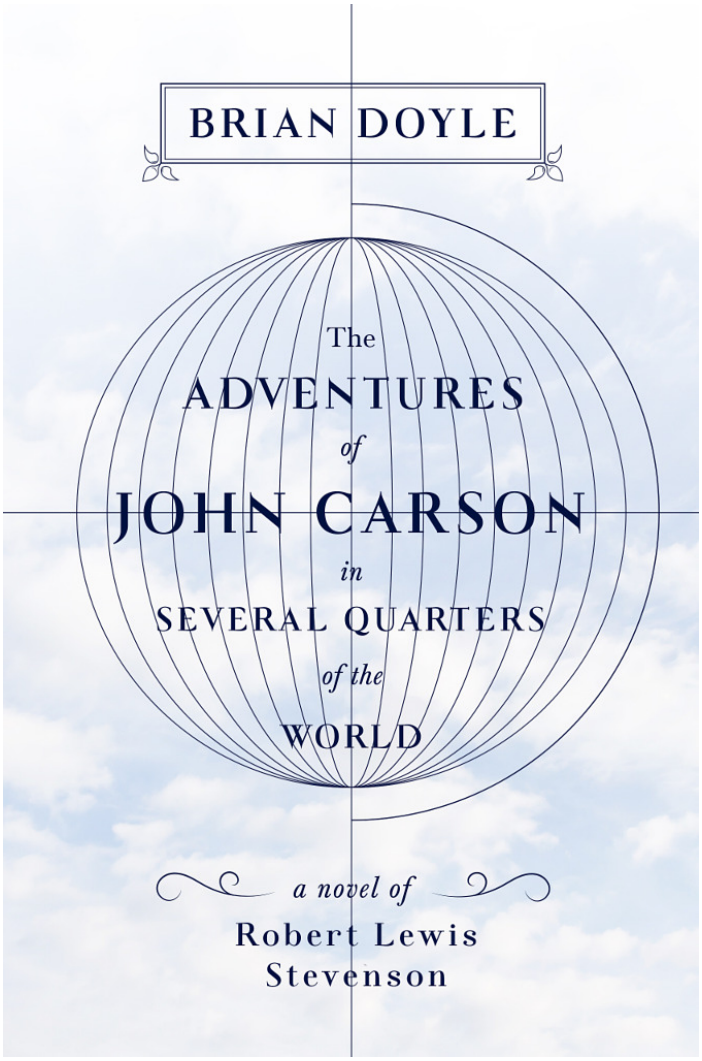
"She told me about me about Great-aunt Anna Louise, who could read people's minds and tell them everything they had said about her, and who had been a triplet and so small when she was born that she would fit into a quart cup… and about the time she had Lida cut off her hair and she said, 'Now they won't say 'pretty little girl' anymore.'" (BW 50)

Margaret looked down at the pile of hair accumulating around her feet. Straightening the spectacles on her nose as the barber turned her chair toward the mirror, she looked at her reflection.

The heaviness had dropped away from her.

She reached up to feel the short blunt ends of her hair. They felt healthy and strong. She stared at her herself. Her newly shorn locks stuck out around her face, untamed, unruly and boyish. The scissored-off hair would be easy to take care of, certainly a plus.

Now, like Anna Louise, no one was going to call her ‘pretty little girl’ anymore. Yes, somehow this new haircut was going to be more in keeping with who she was; with the person she wanted to become.



Adventures of John Carson in Several Quarters of the World

A Novel of Robert Louis Stevenson

Brian Doyle

An inspired take on Robert Louis Stevenson's planned-but-unwritten picaresque novel and his early life in 1880s San Francisco.

The young Robert Louis Stevenson, living in a boarding house in San Francisco, dreamed of writing a soaring novel about his landlady's adventurous and globe-trotting husband – but he never got around to it. And very soon thereafter he was married, headed home to Scotland, and on his way to becoming the most famous novelist in the world, after writing such classics as *Treasure Island*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *Kidnapped*.

But now Brian Doyle brings Stevenson's untold tale to life, braiding the adventures of seaman John Carson with those of a young Stevenson. *The Adventures of John Carson in Several Quarters of the World* is an adventure tale, an elegy to a literary great and a time-travelling plunge into The City by the Bay during its own energetic youth.

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Meet the Authors

BRIAN DOYLE is the editor of Portland Magazine and the author of twenty books of essays, fiction, poems, and nonfiction, among them *Mink River*, *The Plover*, *Martin Marten*, and *Chicago*. Honors for his work include the American Academy of Arts & Letters Award in Literature. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (1850-1894), was a Scottish novelist, poet, essayist, and travel writer. Most notable among his works are *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.*

Preface

From late December 1879 until April of 1880, before his marriage on May 19, Robert Louis Stevenson lived in a rooming house at 608 Bush Street in San Francisco. Tall, thin, poor, cheerful, young (he was 29) and hopelessly in love with Miss Frances Matilda Vandegrift Osbourne, originally from Indianapolis but then a resident of Oakland, Stevenson spent his days roaming the sprawling legendary city by the Bay, spending miserly sums on food and half a bottle of wine per night, and writing furiously to try to make enough money to support the family he would instantly have when married; Fanny already had two living children by her profligately adulterous husband, from whom she was finally divorced on December 15.

Stevenson worked up his notes from his travels across America, which became his book *Across the Plains*. He worked on a novella, which became his book *Prince Otto*. He wrote a dozen essays, at least, and various small articles for local newspapers. Missing his native Scotland, he worked on an autobiography, never published. He wrote poems, notably the famous requiem that would be engraved on his Samoan gravestone in 1894.

And he contemplated a novel, to be called *Adventures of John Carson in Several Quarters of the World*, perhaps based on the stories of his Irish landlady's husband or brother-in-law. He may not have even started it; no scrap of draft or sketch or notes has ever surfaced, and no intent scholar has traced the mysterious John Carson; but ever since I read about this unwritten book of Stevenson's, many years ago, I have dreamed about writing it for him.

It is an inchoate urge and I cannot easily articulate the reasons it so appeals to me. Something of celebration of a man by all accounts honest and kind and generous; something like rising to the delicious bait of a challenge; something of a detective story, perhaps, beginning with the sparsest of clues, ten words on which to build castles and ramparts and swirling depths of story; something like gentle homage to the writer of verve and dash whom I admire above all other writers in my language; something of a love song to one of the great American cities; and something surely of pure happy curiosity – to begin a story on a foggy street in San Francisco, many years ago, and see where in the world we might go…!

Brian Doyle

Chapter 1.

I met John Carson for the first time on Bush Street in San Francisco, where I was at the time living in a rooming house owned by his wife, Mary Carson. Though born in Ireland, Mary had for some time been a citizen of The City, as she called our rough and misty citadel, as if it was a ship upon the water; which in truth it was, for a few streets west lay the Pacific ocean, and a few streets east sprawled its impatient bay, like a tiny dinghy bobbing alongside a tremendous parent. To further the image, Mrs Carson's house, tall and thin, stood at the apex of a hill, and swayed like a mast in the afternoon wind, and often featured a sort of sea-beacon at its peak – the night-lamp in my room, where I scribbled the remarkable stories I heard during the day from Mary's husband John.

I was then a penurious man, forced to be so by circumstance, and I had much time on my hands, waiting for a marital entanglement to unbraid itself across the bay, and free the woman who would be my wife; and while I walked the city as much as I could, having learned that cities are best discovered on foot, I also had the open hours and eager ears for Carson's adventures, for he was a terrific teller of tales, and spoke in such a colorful and piercing way, with such adornments of elocution and wonderful mimicry, that whole afternoons passed as unnoticed as the tide, as we sat by the sitting-room fire.

He had been everywhere and done everything, it seemed, and he was eager to tell of countries and peoples, crimes and misdemeanors, mendicants and millionaires, and all the manners of living he had seen, from high to low and every shade between; and while Mrs Carson would occasionally offer tart reproof and call him to task about one detail or another, his flow was never stanched, so long as I was there to listen, and later record what he had said, in prose as close as I could get to the way in which he had said it; for he had an essentially riverine style of speaking, and his reminiscence would wander into pools and oxbows, there to swirl meditatively a while before returning eventually to the main stem of the story. But then other times he spoke so speedily that you were rushed headlong through the narrative rapids, before being released at last into a placid stretch, there to slowly regain your equilibrium, and smile with pleasure at the unforgettable rush of the voyage.

*

I had arrived at Mrs Carson's estimable house in December of the year 1879, and spent the latter half of that month recovering from illness, essentially confined to my attic room, and in little contact with the other residents except for the solicitous Mrs Carson, who was kind enough to bring me small sustenance, and what books she could find unclaimed in the house; during that time I much enjoyed Mr Twain's *Roughing It* and *Tom Sawyer*, and Mr Whitman's new *Leaves of Grass*, and a steady run of excellent books by Mr Henry James, whom I had met in England and very much liked, though he seemed far more English than American to me, and, I suspect, to himself.

Having long been in poor health I was all too familiar with the land of counterpane, and was used to spending my ill hours in bed, writing. I was then by trade a scribbler, a writer of slight essays and occasional pieces for the newspapers, and it was to the hunting of this small game that I devoted my energies that wet December; not until after the new year did I improve enough to shakily go downstairs and sit by the fire, and then stroll the neighborhood, and finally wander the towered salty city itself, from wharves to hilltop thickets and back again. From January to April, then, I roamed as freely as the fog in what proved to be one of the most turbulent and riveting cities I had ever seen – fully as lovely and avaricious as Paris, as arrogant and fascinating as London, as windswept and grim and prim and delightful as my own native Edinburgh. And of those pedestrian journeys there is much to tell; but my most memorable travels in San Francisco that spring were all conducted in a deep chair by the fire in Mrs Carson's house, as I sat mesmerized by the estimable Mr John Carson, gentleman and adventurer.

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I should begin by showing you the man, insofar as I am able, as he was then, at the prime of life and the peak of his powers. Taller than not, and burly rather than thick; as he said himself, while we saw eye to eye as regards our height, he was twice the man I was in volume. A dense head of hair, just beginning to silver at the temples; clean rough clothes somewhere between the utilitarian garb of a sailor and the unadorned simplicity of a reverend; boots that were worn but buffed, boots that had seen something of the world but would never allow themselves to appear in public with stain or scuff. No watch fob, no necktie, no hat; I once remarked to him that I had never once seen him in a hat, and he laughed and said he thought most hats were affectations and aggrandizements, very much like the useless showy feathers that certain birds developed in order

to lure unsuspecting females into their sensual bowers; the only hat he had ever worn and liked was a helmet, which had done its work well, and protected him from a shower of blows, any one of which would have been sufficient to make Mrs Carson a widow.

His face was like his clothing, rough but honest and open; no beard, by the express command of Mrs Carson, who disapproved of beards in general as disguises, and disapproved of his in particular as a brambly barrier between man and wife; and as he said with a smile, what sensible man, graced with the affections of the extraordinary Mrs Carson, would fail to do everything he could to encourage and fan those affections?

Sharp amused eyes, of a gray-green color, like the bay in mottled weather; dense eyebrows as thick as bushy caterpillars; large rough hands I would see at work around the house, carpentering this and that; as he often said, to build a house of mere innocent wood, and expect it to withstand a week of San Francisco's weather unscarred, was the airiest folly; it was no accident that Our Lord spent eighteen years apprenticing as a carpenter, for surely the Holy Family was planning to move to San Francisco, where Our Lord would have been able to carve a good living from a career of household woodworking.

An unadorned voice, neither mellifluous nor harsh; his voice was like the man, direct and amused but capable of sharp turns and dangerous calms. A tiny tattoo of a falcon below his left ear, less than an inch long, noticeable only in crisp daylight. A man of measured tastes in food and drink, well-read but not scholarly, sociable but not gregarious or garrulous. An aficionado of music, but none that I had ever heard; by his own account he loved the music of lands far away, the aboriginal music of Borneo and Australia in particular, and he rued his lack of instrumental skill, he said, for he would have liked to have that music drifting around the house, reminding him of his travels and his friends in farflung regions of the world.

He was fond of gently teasing Mrs Carson, and gravely proposing fanciful adventures and enterprises to her, such as purchasing one of the Seal Rocks islands off San Francisco, and building a ship upon it, in such a way that the rough surface of the island was completely covered by the ship, so that while in residence there husband and wife would always be at sea, but never in danger of foundering; or that they erect such a collection of stalwart canvas sails on the roof of their house, that in high winds they could sail north to redwood country for the day, or south to Half Moon Bay, there to wreak joyous havoc among the oysters when it came time for dinner.

Indeed there were so many of these speculative invitations to Mrs Carson, two and three a day sometimes, that in my first weeks in the house I thought him perhaps slightly unhinged, or even politely inebriated, but soon I came to see that the custom was something of a coded conversation or verbal waltz between two people who much enjoyed each other's company. I think now that I learned a great deal about marriage from John and Mary Carson, of Bush Street in San Francisco; for in my own marriage I have especially appreciated humor as a crucial virtue, and have seen for myself, perhaps too often, that wry wordplay and gentle jest are not only nutritious but sometimes the very seed of salvation.

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Mrs Carson's house, I have said, not Mr Carson's, or the Carsons' collectively; and that is a good place to let Mr Carson begin his story, for the house was not only the port and refuge to which Mr Carson returned again and again after his adventures, but the sweet old chapel of pine and oak, as he said, where he had courted "the extraordinary landlady," and been married, in the sitting-room, by the fire, by a priest with whom he had served in the War Between the States. So let us begin by that sitting-room fire, on a thoroughly moist day, early in the year 1880, as Mr Carson carries us back in time, to the year of Our Lord 1864.

I had just asked him how he met the extraordinary Mrs Carson, and so we begin:

"That was a year after a legendary San Franciscan dog named Lazarus had died and did *not* manage to come back to life, despite several days of close attention by the newspapers to a possible miracle," said Mr Carson from his chair on the other side of the fire. "October; I remember that your fellow ink-man Mark Twain was a reporter for *The Daily Morning Call*, and that he wrote a memorable article about visiting Lazarus's grave in the Odd Fellows Cemetery, and waiting there quite a long time for the dog to be true to his name, to no avail. *I* thought the article was amusing, but Mr Twain was soon gone from the newspaper staff, for unspecified reasons. I suppose he left so as to pursue his literary career, but I have always savored the notion that certain segments of city society were affronted by his light-hearted speculation about Lazarus rising from his grave in the Odd Fellows and floating over Lone Mountain, the mercy of the Lord having been profligately poured upon even so meek a citizen as old Lazarus, who was a disreputable creature, as I remember, although very fine rat-catcher.

"I had met Mr Twain that spring, when he arrived from Nevada, where he had been a silver miner and a newspaperman, often reporting from Carson City, from which he speculated

all Carsons came, perhaps hatched from tremendous pine cones and then set loose upon the world; indeed perhaps we were manufactured by seasons, he said, with Johns and Bills sprouting in spring and the Jims and Bobs arriving en masse in the fall, and the new females surging up the Truckee River by the thousands, more Susans in an hour than a man could count in a day.

"He was full of colorful ideas like that, and not loath to share them with you or anyone else; you never met a more cheerful headlong fellow in your life, and while some of his free talk earned him the threat of fisticuffs, not once in the time I knew him did anyone actually set about inflicting corrections on his person. But beneath the high spirits there was a darker man, as is so often the case with the publicly humorous. I saw that side of him here and there, when he was in his cups. But he was the sort of man that when most down on his luck was most generous and free; I remember when he discovered that his whole bulging trunk of silver mining stocks, which he had thought worth thousands of dollars, were not now worth a thousand cents, he laughed and took me to a dinner featuring a hill of oysters and a river of beer.

"The last I saw him was on this very street, down the hill toward the bay. He told me he was off to try mining again, this time for gold in the Sierras, because he had not a dollar to his name and must leave the city, but he would give me a tip worth more than Astor and Carnegie and Vanderbilt together, because he valued our friendship with all his soul, and would always remember that I was a true friend when he was down and dark and needed a grip and a grin to haul him from his dark crevasse. Up the hill there, he said, pointing to this very house, there is a building which I believe will loom large in your life. Do not ask me how I know such a thing. I do not know myself. I am a man of dreams and portents. I sometimes suspect I am a magnet for such things. There is Scotland and Wales and Acadia in my family tree, which may explain a certain predilection to omens and spirits. Also somewhere back a ways I have an ancestor named Ezekiel, who may have known the Biblical prophet himself, and lent a certain necromantic cast to the line ever after. Probably they ran a tavern together, or schemed to defraud the pharaoh of his crown. Who can explain these things? Not me. But trust me when I say that you and that willowy house up there will someday meet, and the auspices seem beneficent. So, John, this is farewell, for I don't know when I will be back in the city, or whether we will meet again in Tahiti or Timbuktu; but I have given you the treasure of a lifetime, I believe, with this advice, and I hope with all my heart that someday I will hear of your happiness, and know that for once I did a good turn by a friend, who did so many good turns for me.

“And off he went,” said Carson, smiling at the memory of his friend. “I heard later that he had gone to the Sandwich Islands, and then around the world, and now he is a famous man, resident in a castle in Connecticut, he says; I had a note from him recently, with a copy of his newest book; our postman was much amused by the address, which was simply ‘John Carson, Bush Street, San Francisco, Where He Lives in That Tall Skinny House, If He Had Any Sense or Imagination at All.”

“And did you,” I asked Mr Carson, “turn on your heel that day, and walk right up the street to the house?”

“Oh, no,” said Mr Carson. “No, I did not, for ephemeral reasons – I think I was hungry, and down to the docks I went for oysters and beer. No, Mr Stevenson, I walked east that day on Bush Street instead of west, downhill instead of up, and there were many strange adventures before the moment that I did finally knock on the front door of this house, and discover that my life was changed from that moment forward, to my great surprise, and eternal pleasure, and endless gratitude.”

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That night, when I went upstairs to jot down this story, I realized that John Carson had not actually answered my question, and explained how and when he met Mrs Carson; and I was soon to discover that he was wonderfully deft at evading the skeletal facts of a story, especially that prized one, even as he was irresistibly fascinating at detailing the evocations and shadowy corners of a tale. No man I ever met was as riveting a storyteller in the matter of its moods and intimations, its scents and sounds; when John Carson told a story you were soon inside the story yourself, your feet on the sands of a beach in Borneo, your hands snatching at a fish in an Australian sea, your eyes scanning a ridgeline for enemy cannon emplacements; indeed after some long afternoons with John Carson by the fireplace I would climb the stairs to my room as tired as if it had been me walking miles through a pitiless jungle, or rowing from one end of a remote bay to another through sheets of rain, or salving and sewing the wounds of my friends by a guttering candle all night long – all things that John Carson had done, in several quarters of the world, when he was young.

Where was he born? He never did say; but he often spoke with great reverence and affection of Scotland, and the names of certain towns and rivers there tumbled familiarly off his tongue – Dalbeattie, Wigtown, Portpatrick, Kirkcudbright, the River Nith, the River Cree. It

seemed to me that he must have had cousins at least in that western corner of Scotland, if not closer relations, for he would occasionally speak of his 'people' in Caledonia, the old name for Scotland; he steadfastly refused to use English names and labels for anything, and grew sharp-tongued whenever he heard the phrases *Great Britain* or *British Empire* – "there is no such thing as Great Britain, only one country enslaving its three immediate neighbors, and much of the rest of the world, and to even acknowledge an empire is to acquiesce to its imperial murderous greed' – thus John Carson, in the rare moments when he was annoyed or angry.

Those moments were few; I never met a more equable man, or one more willing to listen to someone else's questions and inquiries and speculations; and he was the welcome sort of man whose attentiveness drew you out, welcomed your own anecdotes and tales, sparked your own conversational liquidity; so that sometimes I would arrest my own flow of talk, and realize that I had been talking for fully twenty or thirty minutes uninterrupted, with John Carson hanging on every word, and not waiting impatiently to interrupt, or turn the line of talk toward his own experience, or denigrate or supersede mine, as so often happens between parties who are less conversational than oppositional, or merely taking turns as monologuists.

Now, I have met some wondrous talkers in my day, some mesmerizing storytellers, genius sculptors of the spoken word, male and female, young and old, from the glens of Scotland to the craggy mountains of France, from the streets of London to the endless plains of America, and some of them, I suppose, have been so riveting and unforgettable in tone and cadence that their voices have soaked into me unawares, and been born anew in the voices of characters in my pages; yet John Carson was a new species to me, for I sat with him for weeks and weeks on a regular basis, and heard the whole spill and swirl of his life in his inimitable telling, a tremendous outpouring, over four absorbing months; it was as if I was at the university of the man, studying biography and personality and theatrical flair, history and geography and psychology all at once, and all under the one tutor, who was by turns exacting, and airy as a child on the shore of the sea. Some days he would spend an hour detailing a monumental single moment from his past; other days he would sprint through a whole year in that selfsame hour, and toss off such tantalizing casual bait as *that man wore a suit of crocodile skin,* or *I was then offered the daughter to wed, but declined* – but then never return to that corner of the story, however strenuously I tried to bend him back in that direction.

When I was a child in Edinburgh I had a nurse, Miss Cunningham, whom I loved with all my heart, and who was the first fine storyteller I knew; in her case it was not only tales from the King James Bible, that glory of muscular literature, from which she read aloud with a voice that encompassed all weathers in the telling, but also a limitless parade of stories of haunts and ghosts, of terrors and glowering mysteries, at which I quailed but which I loved, in that strange way we human beings do, to want more of the very thing that makes your hairs prickle with a delighted horror; and then in my own jaunts and voyages I seemed to meet more than my fair share of wonderful raconteurs, all of whom appealed to me greatly, and not only for the zest and entertainment of their tales, but because the invention and spinning of a fine story seemed like the greatest of joyful labors to me. Something in tales and telling sang to me, in ways that the engineering of lighthouses, or the dreary practice of the law, never had, or could; so there may have been no more ready or rapt listener in the world for Mr John Carson, when he sat down by the fire in the dawn of the year 1880 to tell me of his tumultuous life; and perhaps there was no storyteller of more immediate and lasting effect on my life and work subsequently than that estimable San Franciscan, whose voice I can still faintly hear sometimes, in full and headlong flow, on certain days when the wind is up, and the windows are a-rattle, and the fire is ticking low. Even now, many years and miles from that tall mast of a house, I will hear him for a moment, and be thrilled again, and remember the pleasure of his company, and the zest of his tales, and the warmth with which he spoke of his friends, some of which he did not expect to ever see again in this life, but whom he savored and esteemed for their courage and kindness, counting himself the luckiest of men, to have had such companions for a part of his road.

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The first adventure he told me complete, from beginning to end, with a proper setting-forth and returning-home, was his time in Borneo, in the year 1854, when he was not yet twenty, he said, and “wholly unattached, footloose and wandering wide, with neither a penny nor a worry to weigh me down; I felt then that no one cared for me and so I cared for no one, and so I did throw myself headlong into situations that a more sensible man would have avoided, or tiptoed gingerly around such scrapes; but not me, not then.

“How I got to Borneo is of no consequence; it was, of course, by ship, a long story in itself for another afternoon, perhaps, for that was a savage ship, and I was never so relieved in life as to be gone from it finally. Suffice it to say that I found myself on the coast of Sarawak, at

the tail end of that year, and while I spoke none of the local languages, I could *work*, the language that needs no words; and soon I found myself upriver on the docks as a laborer, loading and unloading ships and boats during the day, and acting as a warehouse guard for a local merchant at night. Though ostensibly Sarawak was at peace that year, after years of savagery among various tribes and interests, piracy was not uncommon, and even a boy as young as me was welcome as a sentinel, or first to fall under attack, more likely. Also the merchant believed me somehow to be a soldier of fortune, though I had never claimed such a thing, and so he paid me to defend his interests at night against the pirates.

"I have not told you, though, of the scents and sights of Borneo then, the immediacy of jungle and mud and river and insectry; the many kinds of monkeys in the trees, leaping with astonishing skill from branch to branch, and chattering like so many high-spirited small boys; the fishing-nets everywhere hung out to dry, and the palm-thatched houses of every conceivable size from sturdy house to tiny hut; and mud everywhere in every color of the rainbow from bright gold to the bleakest black; and alligators, and ants, and satin-wood trees, and gardenias of breathtaking size and allure – you could smell them from a mile away, it seemed to me, and even now I will be stopped in the street occasionally by a gardenia calling to me from some distant window; another language without words, I suppose, the inexplicable wonders of scent. This happened to me a week ago Tuesday on Mission Street and for a moment I was absolutely sure a flower from Sarawak had seen me passing below and called to me, with a sudden cry of recognition, as a sister would to a brother she had not seen in years, and had not expected to see again in this life; but I could not find the source of the scent, and walked home saddened, and inarticulate, when it came time to explain my long face to Mrs Carson.

"The sun-snakes, the flower-snakes, the mighty cobra-snakes, some as long as eight or ten feet, and terrifying indeed when they reared broodingly up, as tall as a man; and the boa-snakes, big enough to eat deer; many was the man who told me stories of snakes so big you could hardly believe them possible still on this earth, and of unlucky people who vanished into the maws of boa-snakes, and of tribes in the mountains who could live for a month on the meat of a single snake, were they lucky enough to capture one of the old chieftains of that race.

"And the birds! – so very many birds of so very many species! Trying to make some sense of their variegation and relationships and cousinly pattern was how I came to meet Mr Wallace. There was the crocodile-bird, with a song like a thrush, and pigeons and parrots of

every color, cuckoos and kingfishers, and ten kinds of eagle, two of whom dearly loved to eat snakes above all else. And all sorts of plovers and terns and stilts along the shore, and owls and swifts and woodpeckers in the forest, and what seemed like a thousand tiny songbirds of the warbler type, elusive as dreams among the fronds; my favorites of all of these were called sunbirds, tiny gleaming creatures that did indeed shine and glitter most amazingly, as if they had bathed every morning in the life-giving orb itself, and shimmered with its aura the rest of the day until dark, at which point they too subsided and vanished until tomorrow's resurrection.

"For two months, October and November, I lived a in shed near the docks, a tiny structure that had long been used for curing tobacco, the scent of which was so powerful that Mrs Carson says she smells it upon me yet, although she may be joking. Curiously I was not lonely, for during the day I was so busy, and so thrown into the tumult of people and commerce, that in the evenings it was sweet to lie at rest, and smoke a pipe, and listen to the orchestras of birds at dusk, before going off to my night-work at the warehouse; *that* job was the lonely one, for I was by myself, and could not sleep for fear of being overpowered by the pirates, who were famous for their silence at night, and were said to be able to approach even the most cautious wild animals unawares, which they would do in training for their marauding. But while I could not sleep, and was anxious of incipient violence, and armed myself with knife and stick, I could fill the hours with contemplation of the myriad birds, and begin to draw them, and compare their structure and style of life one with another, to try to see some pattern in their profligacy; how did the eagles and hawk-owls differ, for example, in what they sought as prey, and how they went about killing their daily fare? Did the one specialize in fish, and the other in small animals? How came the serpent-eagles to be so good at capturing that elusive food, and other eagles to choose another diet altogether?

"It was by chance I met Mr Wallace, who had sought among the natives for men and boys especially interested in local fauna to serve him as guides for the explorations he had planned into the wild country. He had found such a lad, of fourteen or so years of age, named Adil, whose family I had come to know and esteem, and occasionally sup with, and play chess with the children, bright young creatures who had learned the game from their elders. Adil it was who introduced me to Mr Wallace, persuading that gentleman that I would be the perfect additional companion for their perambulations, being of strong body and able to translate something of the local languages, bits of which I had picked up on the docks; ever it has been the

case that workers along the shores and beaches of the world are the quickest linguists, for the tidal wash is where all the languages of the world meet and compete, and a man there must be able to speak some of all, if he wishes to earn his bread and avoid being cheated. So it was that I had a little Malay, and Chinese, and Dutch, and even Dyak, for the warrior peoples of the interior did sometimes have concourse with the Malays and the Chinese, in between bouts of piratical endeavor.

"Mr Wallace had arrived in Sarawak on the first of November, at the invitation of the white rajah of those parts, the adventurer James Brooke, and he was for his first weeks in residence with the Rajah, with whom he too played chess, and discussed natural history, and smoked cigars, and debated the possibility that great apes like the local orang-outangs were our ancestral cousins and even perhaps remnant ancestors. During the day, however, he and his young assistant Charles, who had accompanied him from England, would explore the river and environs, utterly absorbed by beetles and butterflies. Occasionally Adil and I would help in these local jaunts, during which Mr Wallace's energy was a most remarkable thing to see; he was perhaps thirty years old or so, and a lean and active man, and relentless in his pursuit of insects; also he was an indefatigable walker, quite capable of fifteen miles in a day, and there were days when all three of us with him on his expeditions arrived home bedraggled and exhausted, the boys to fall asleep instantly but myself off to duty at the warehouse.

"It was on one of these long expeditions into the forest that Adil was lost. Charles and Mr Wallace decided to go deeper into the jungle, toward the mountains, in pursuit of new species of butterflies that would, Mr Wallace believed, be nectaring on plants at higher elevations; Adil and I turned back toward home. It was late in the afternoon, and we were both weary, and I was not due for work on the docks for days, the ships being scarcer in December, the close of the rainy season; so as night fell, we made a fire, and ate a small supper, and fell asleep under a thicket of palm fronds.

"I awoke before dawn, as has been my lifelong habit, to discover Adil vanished. For a few moments I thought nothing of it, considering that he might be gathering fruit, or wood for the breakfast fire; but then I noticed bent and broken ferns, and realized that he had been hauled away through the underbrush, perhaps by a leopard, or even one of the sun-bears said to be common in these forests, though I had never seen one; I had, however, seen lithe and powerful

leopards, and knew them to be quite capable of capturing and killing a boy, whom they might consider a species of monkey.

"Perhaps I should have sprinted back down to town, and alerted the Rajah and his people, who knew the whole country well, so that they could have mounted a search; but I did not. For one thing I liked the boy, a gentle soul, and was infuriated that he might be endangered, and me asleep while he was taken; and for another I could not bear to waste another minute between disappearance and pursuit; and also it seemed to me the trail was patently clear and evident before me, so that I could not turn away and walk in the other direction. So it was I set out after Adil through the trackless forests, armed with a knife and desperation.

"I suppose this sounds like a foolish quest now, that a boy of nineteen would leap into the dense forest in pursuit of a boy of fourteen, possibly taken by a leopard who would no doubt adamantly defend his prey; not to mention the myriad other dangers of that jungle, and the fact that I knew nothing of the country beyond the main trail along the river; but I was young, and angry, and afraid, and those are powerful engines of our actions, as you know very well yourself – you who journeyed through a hundred miles of remote mountains with no companion but a donkey, as you told me, and that just two years ago, so it is still fresh in your mind, and maybe on your boots, and in the moist spots in your coat that will never fully dry.

"The trail was clear enough where Adil had been carried through the jungle, and I followed it all morning without a break, hurrying as silently as I could, watching out for dangers; I was afraid in particular of the many snakes, and often stepped into a thicket with my heart in my mouth. Early in the afternoon I found a spot where Adil and his captor or captors had stopped a while by a stream; and here I examined the ground closely, to see if he had been hurt, and what manner of being had stolen him from our night-fire. I could find only the prints of human feet – two men, it seemed to me, of about the same weight and stature – and while there were signs of Adil supine and probably bound, there was no blood, or evidence of harm.

"Where Adil had lain, though, I noticed shavings of wood, as if someone had been carving or working wood, perhaps for a fire, though I found no ashes or embers. The shavings were fresh; but I could find no hint of the sticks, and I guessed that they had accompanied the fugitives, perhaps as weapons, or walking sticks of some sort.

"On I went until dusk; and then I found the most remarkable objects, cunningly placed in a tree bole in such a way that a man of my height would have to notice and remark them as he

stopped to choose between two divergent trails. Of all the things you would expect to find in the deepest forest of that densely jungled island, two roughly hewn chess pieces are perhaps the last; yet there they were, two small knights, fresh-cut from palm, and staring out at me from a shelf in a tree. In an instant I realized that Adil had left them for me, and was perhaps telling me that he had been taken by two warriors; and my heart sank, for the only warriors in Sarawak who did not fight for the Rajah were the men of the Dyak, the fearsome aboriginals who had battled the Dutch and English colonists for years, and swept down on merchant shipping with a terrible ferocity, and who fought the Rajah as he sought with equal ferocity to expunge their piracy from the local waters.

"Now I *was* afraid, for men are more savage than leopards and bears, who only wish to eat, or defend themselves, whereas men are violent for a thousand reasons, many of them beyond all understanding; but I pressed on, all night, walking as cautiously as I could, and looking closely for any other markers Adil might have left. By remarkable chance the night was clear and lit silvery by the moon. All around me were the cries of animals on the hunt or being hunted, a sea of sound I sometimes hear even now on the wildest winter days here, when everything is wind-whipped and the gulls especially shrill; but none assaulted me, though several times I surprised something large, which leapt away with a crash, and probably thought me a new sort of night terror inflicted on the innocent woods.

"I found a pawn, and then another, and then a third, and considered that Adil was trying to leave me a chess piece at roughly the same intervals. Then I found a castle, or rook; and this one caused me pause, for it was very hurriedly made, much more so than the others, and it seemed to me there was a splash of blood in the well of the castle. Perhaps Adil had cut himself, in his haste, or perhaps it was just a splash of rusty rain; in any event I took the message to be that he was arriving at a camp or stronghold of some sort, and I would be well-advised to double my caution. A few moments later I came to the edge of a clearing in the forest, and discovered exactly such an encampment, roughly fortified by logs and poles. Though I could see no sentinel or patrollers, I could hear the bustle of it, and see campfire smoke rising against the first straggle of dawn; and I sat down there in the fringe of the forest to consider what to do."

Just then Mrs Carson entered the sitting-room, and called us to dinner, and John Carson immediately rose to go; he laughed aloud at me sitting gaping in my chair, feeling abandoned, so to speak, and teetering on the precipitous peak of the story. "When Mrs Carson invites you to

dinner," he said with a smile, "you are wise to accept her invitation with alacrity, for her gifts in the kitchen are as legion as the rest of her virtues, and I can report from sad experience that the other guests in the house will not wait for the table-tardy, nor leave a scrap of savory for anyone who lingers by the fire. Plus it would not do to be anything but instant when Mrs Carson has offered a gift, which is what you have to call her wonderful productions. As for the story it can wait for us to return to it; stories are patient, as you know better than I do, having written books, and the story will be right here when we return to it apace." And away he strode to dinner, with me a step behind, marveling at the subtle pleasure and a story paused in full flow, the delicious tension of waiting; and after dinner I was happily inundated by memories of my beloved childhood nurse Cummy telling me stories in stages, a bit every night, as you would parcel out the most delicious candy.