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*Laura Hillenbrand*

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# UNBROKEN

## A WORLD WAR II STORY *of* SURVIVAL, RESILIENCE, AND REDEMPTION



RANDOM HOUSE
TRADE PAPERBACKS
*New York*

2014 Random House Trade Paperback Edition

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an imprint of Random House, a division of Random House LLC,
a Penguin Random House Company, New York.

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Random House Reader's Circle & Design is a registered trademark
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Originally published in hardcover in the United States by Random House,
an imprint and division of Random House LLC, in 2010.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Hillenbrand, Laura.
Unbroken : a World War II story
of survival, resilience, and redemption / Laura Hillenbrand.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8129-7449-2
eBook ISBN 978-0-679-60375-7
1. Zamperini, Louis, 1917–2014. 2. World War, 1939–1945—Prisoners and prisons,
Japanese. 3. Prisoners of war—United States—Biography. 4. Prisoners of
war—Japan—Biography. 5. World War, 1939–1945—Aerial operations,
American. 6. World War, 1939–1945—Campaigns—Pacific Area.
7. United States. Army Air Forces. Heavy Bombardment Group, 307th.
8. Long-distance runners—United States—Biography. I. Title.
D805.J3Z364 2010
940.54'7252092—dc22
[B] 2010017517

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

www.randomhousereaderscircle.com

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

*Book design by Casey Hampton*

# PREFACE

All he could see, in every direction, was water.

It was late June 1943. Somewhere on the endless expanse of the Pacific Ocean, Army Air Forces bombardier and Olympic runner Louie Zamperini lay across a small raft, drifting westward. Slumped alongside him was a sergeant, one of his plane's gunners. On a separate raft, tethered to the first, lay another crewman, a gash zigzagging across his forehead. Their bodies, burned by the sun and stained yellow from the raft dye, had withered down to skeletons. Sharks glided in lazy loops around them, dragging their backs along the rafts, waiting.

The men had been adrift for twenty-seven days. Borne by an equatorial current, they had floated at least one thousand miles, deep into Japanese-controlled waters. The rafts were beginning to deteriorate into jelly, and gave off a sour, burning odor. The men's bodies were pocked with salt sores, and their lips were so swollen that they pressed into their nostrils and chins. They spent their days with their eyes fixed on the sky, singing "White Christmas," muttering about food. No one was even looking for them anymore. They were alone on sixty-four million square miles of ocean.

A month earlier, twenty-six-year-old Zamperini had been one of the greatest runners in the world, expected by many to be the first to break

the four-minute mile, one of the most celebrated barriers in sport. Now his Olympian's body had wasted to less than one hundred pounds and his famous legs could no longer lift him. Almost everyone outside of his family had given him up for dead.

On that morning of the twenty-seventh day, the men heard a distant, deep strumming. Every airman knew that sound: pistons. Their eyes caught a glint in the sky—a plane, high overhead. Zamperini fired two flares and shook powdered dye into the water, enveloping the rafts in a circle of vivid orange. The plane kept going, slowly disappearing. The men sagged. Then the sound returned, and the plane came back into view. The crew had seen them.

With arms shrunken to little more than bone and yellowed skin, the castaways waved and shouted, their voices thin from thirst. The plane dropped low and swept alongside the rafts. Zamperini saw the profiles of the crewmen, dark against bright blueness.

There was a terrific roaring sound. The water, and the rafts themselves, seemed to boil. It was machine gun fire. This was not an American rescue plane. It was a Japanese bomber.

The men pitched themselves into the water and hung together under the rafts, cringing as bullets punched through the rubber and sliced effervescent lines in the water around their faces. The firing blazed on, then sputtered out as the bomber overshot them. The men dragged themselves back onto the one raft that was still mostly inflated. The bomber banked sideways, circling toward them again. As it leveled off, Zamperini could see the muzzles of the machine guns, aimed directly at them.

Zamperini looked toward his crewmates. They were too weak to go back in the water. As they lay down on the floor of the raft, hands over their heads, Zamperini splashed overboard alone.

Somewhere beneath him, the sharks were done waiting. They bent their bodies in the water and swam toward the man under the raft.

# PART I



*Courtesy of Louis Zamperini*

*One*

# The One-Boy Insurgency

In the predawn darkness of August 26, 1929, in the back bedroom of a small house in Torrance, California, a twelve-year-old boy sat up in bed, listening. There was a sound coming from outside, growing ever louder. It was a huge, heavy rush, suggesting immensity, a great parting of air. It was coming from directly above the house. The boy swung his legs off his bed, raced down the stairs, slapped open the back door, and loped onto the grass. The yard was otherworldly, smothered in unnatural darkness, shivering with sound. The boy stood on the lawn beside his older brother, head thrown back, spellbound.

The sky had disappeared. An object that he could see only in silhouette, reaching across a massive arc of space, was suspended low in the air over the house. It was longer than two and a half football fields and as tall as a city. It was putting out the stars.

What he saw was the German dirigible *Graf Zeppelin*. At nearly 800 feet long and 110 feet high, it was the largest flying machine ever crafted. More luxurious than the finest airplane, gliding effortlessly over huge distances, built on a scale that left spectators gasping, it was, in the summer of '29, the wonder of the world.

The airship was three days from completing a sensational feat of

aeronautics, circumnavigation of the globe. The journey had begun on August 7, when the *Zeppelin* had slipped its tethers in Lakehurst, New Jersey, lifted up with a long, slow sigh, and headed for Manhattan. On Fifth Avenue that summer, demolition was soon to begin on the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, clearing the way for a skyscraper of unprecedented proportions, the Empire State Building. At Yankee Stadium, in the Bronx, players were debuting numbered uniforms: Lou Gehrig wore No. 4; Babe Ruth, about to hit his five hundredth home run, wore No. 3. On Wall Street, stock prices were racing toward an all-time high.

After a slow glide around the Statue of Liberty, the *Zeppelin* banked north, then turned out over the Atlantic. In time, land came below again: France, Switzerland, Germany. The ship passed over Nuremberg, where fringe politician Adolf Hitler, whose Nazi Party had been trounced in the 1928 elections, had just delivered a speech touting selective infanticide. Then it flew east of Frankfurt, where a Jewish woman named Edith Frank was caring for her newborn, a girl named Anne. Sailing northeast, the *Zeppelin* crossed over Russia. Siberian villagers, so isolated that they'd never even seen a train, fell to their knees at the sight of it.

On August 19, as some four million Japanese waved handkerchiefs and shouted *"Banzai!"* the *Zeppelin* circled Tokyo and sank onto a landing field. Four days later, as the German and Japanese anthems played, the ship rose into the grasp of a typhoon that whisked it over the Pacific at breathtaking speed, toward America. Passengers gazing from the windows saw only the ship's shadow, following it along the clouds "like a huge shark swimming alongside." When the clouds parted, the passengers glimpsed giant creatures, turning in the sea, that looked like monsters.

On August 25, the *Zeppelin* reached San Francisco. After being cheered down the California coast, it slid through sunset, into darkness and silence, and across midnight. As slow as the drifting wind, it passed over Torrance, where its only audience was a scattering of drowsy souls, among them the boy in his pajamas behind the house on Gramercy Avenue.

Standing under the airship, his feet bare in the grass, he was transfixed. It was, he would say, "fearfully beautiful." He could feel the rumble of the craft's engines tilling the air but couldn't make out the silver skin, the sweeping ribs, the finned tail. He could see only the black-

ness of the space it inhabited. It was not a great presence but a great absence, a geometric ocean of darkness that seemed to swallow heaven itself.

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The boy's name was Louis Silvie Zamperini. The son of Italian immigrants, he had come into the world in Olean, New York, on January 26, 1917, eleven and a half pounds of baby under black hair as coarse as barbed wire. His father, Anthony, had been living on his own since age fourteen, first as a coal miner and boxer, then as a construction worker. His mother, Louise, was a petite, playful beauty, sixteen at marriage and eighteen when Louie was born. In their apartment, where only Italian was spoken, Louise and Anthony called their boy Toots.

From the moment he could walk, Louie couldn't bear to be corralled. His siblings would recall him careening about, hurdling flora, fauna, and furniture. The instant Louise thumped him into a chair and told him to be still, he vanished. If she didn't have her squirming boy clutched in her hands, she usually had no idea where he was.

In 1919, when two-year-old Louie was down with pneumonia, he climbed out his bedroom window, descended one story, and went on a naked tear down the street with a policeman chasing him and a crowd watching in amazement. Soon after, on a pediatrician's advice, Louise and Anthony decided to move their children to the warmer climes of California. Sometime after their train pulled out of Grand Central Station, Louie bolted, ran the length of the train, and leapt from the caboose. Standing with his frantic mother as the train rolled backward in search of the lost boy, Louie's older brother, Pete, spotted Louie strolling up the track in perfect serenity. Swept up in his mother's arms, Louie smiled. "I knew you'd come back," he said in Italian.

In California, Anthony landed a job as a railway electrician and bought a half-acre field on the edge of Torrance, population 1,800. He and Louise hammered up a one-room shack with no running water, an outhouse behind, and a roof that leaked so badly that they had to keep buckets on the beds. With only hook latches for locks, Louise took to sitting by the front door on an apple box with a rolling pin in her hand, ready to brain any prowlers who might threaten her children.

There, and at the Gramercy Avenue house where they settled a year later, Louise kept prowlers out, but couldn't keep Louie in hand. Contesting a footrace across a busy highway, he just missed getting broadsided by a jalopy. At five, he started smoking, picking up discarded

cigarette butts while walking to kindergarten. He began drinking one night when he was eight; he hid under the dinner table, snatched glasses of wine, drank them all dry, staggered outside, and fell into a rosebush.

On one day, Louise discovered that Louie had impaled his leg on a bamboo beam; on another, she had to ask a neighbor to sew Louie's virtually severed toe back on. When Louie came home drenched in oil after scaling an oil rig, diving into a sump well, and nearly drowning, it took a gallon of turpentine and a lot of scrubbing before Anthony recognized his son again.

Thrilled by the crashing of boundaries, Louie was untamable. As he grew into his uncommonly clever mind, mere feats of daring were no longer satisfying. In Torrance, a one-boy insurgency was born.

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If it was edible, Louie stole it. He skulked down alleys, a roll of lock-picking wire in his pocket. Housewives who stepped from their kitchens would return to find that their suppers had disappeared. Residents looking out their back windows might catch a glimpse of a long-legged boy dashing down the alley, a whole cake balanced on his hands. When a local family left Louie off their dinner-party guest list, he broke into their house, bribed their Great Dane with a bone, and cleaned out their icebox. At another party, he absconded with an entire keg of beer. When he discovered that the cooling tables at Meinzer's Bakery stood within an arm's length of the back door, he began picking the lock, snatching pies, eating until he was full, and reserving the rest as ammunition for ambushes. When rival thieves took up the racket, he suspended the stealing until the culprits were caught and the bakery owners dropped their guard. Then he ordered his friends to rob Meinzer's again.

It is a testament to the content of Louie's childhood that his stories about it usually ended with ". . . and then I ran like *mad*." He was often chased by people he had robbed, and at least two people threatened to shoot him. To minimize the evidence found on him when the police habitually came his way, he set up loot-stashing sites around town, including a three-seater cave that he dug in a nearby forest. Under the Torrance High bleachers, Pete once found a stolen wine jug that Louie had hidden there. It was teeming with inebriated ants.

In the lobby of the Torrance theater, Louie stopped up the pay telephone's coin slots with toilet paper. He returned regularly to feed wire

behind the coins stacked up inside, hook the paper, and fill his palms with change. A metal dealer never guessed that the grinning Italian kid who often came by to sell him armfuls of copper scrap had stolen the same scrap from his lot the night before. Discovering, while scuffling with an enemy at a circus, that adults would give quarters to fighting kids to pacify them, Louie declared a truce with the enemy and they cruised around staging brawls before strangers.

To get even with a railcar conductor who wouldn't stop for him, Louie greased the rails. When a teacher made him stand in a corner for spitballing, he deflated her car tires with toothpicks. After setting a legitimate Boy Scout state record in friction-fire ignition, he broke his record by soaking his tinder in gasoline and mixing it with match heads, causing a small explosion. He stole a neighbor's coffee percolator tube, set up a sniper's nest in a tree, crammed pepper-tree berries into his mouth, spat them through the tube, and sent the neighborhood girls running.

His magnum opus became legend. Late one night, Louie climbed the steeple of a Baptist church, rigged the bell with piano wire, strung the wire into a nearby tree, and roused the police, the fire department, and all of Torrance with apparently spontaneous pealing. The more credulous townsfolk called it a sign from God.

Only one thing scared him. When Louie was in late boyhood, a pilot landed a plane near Torrance and took Louie up for a flight. One might have expected such an intrepid child to be ecstatic, but the speed and altitude frightened him. From that day on, he wanted nothing to do with airplanes.

In a childhood of artful dodging, Louie made more than just mischief. He shaped who he would be in manhood. Confident that he was clever, resourceful, and bold enough to escape any predicament, he was almost incapable of discouragement. When history carried him into war, this resilient optimism would define him.

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Louie was twenty months younger than his brother, who was everything he was not. Pete Zamperini was handsome, popular, impeccably groomed, polite to elders and avuncular to juniors, silky smooth with girls, and blessed with such sound judgment that even when he was a child, his parents consulted him on difficult decisions. He ushered his mother into her seat at dinner, turned in at seven, and tucked his alarm clock under his pillow so as not to wake Louie, with whom he shared

a bed. He rose at two-thirty to run a three-hour paper route, and deposited all his earnings in the bank, which would swallow every penny when the Depression hit. He had a lovely singing voice and a gallant habit of carrying pins in his pant cuffs, in case his dance partner's dress strap failed. He once saved a girl from drowning. Pete radiated a gentle but impressive authority that led everyone he met, even adults, to be swayed by his opinion. Even Louie, who made a religion out of heeding no one, did as Pete said.

Louie idolized Pete, who watched over him and their younger sisters, Sylvia and Virginia, with paternal protectiveness. But Louie was eclipsed, and he never heard the end of it. Sylvia would recall her mother tearfully telling Louie how she wished he could be more like Pete. What made it more galling was that Pete's reputation was part myth. Though Pete earned grades little better than Louie's failing ones, his principal assumed that he was a straight-A student. On the night of Torrance's church bell miracle, a well-directed flashlight would have revealed Pete's legs dangling from the tree alongside Louie's. And Louie wasn't always the only Zamperini boy who could be seen sprinting down the alley with food that had lately belonged to the neighbors. But it never occurred to anyone to suspect Pete of anything. "Pete never got caught," said Sylvia. "Louie always got caught."

Nothing about Louie fit with other kids. He was a puny boy, and in his first years in Torrance, his lungs were still compromised enough from the pneumonia that in picnic footraces, every girl in town could dust him. His features, which would later settle into pleasant collaboration, were growing at different rates, giving him a curious face that seemed designed by committee. His ears leaned sidelong off his head like holstered pistols, and above them waved a calamity of black hair that mortified him. He attacked it with his aunt Margie's hot iron, hobbled it in a silk stocking every night, and slathered it with so much olive oil that flies trailed him to school. It did no good.

And then there was his ethnicity. In Torrance in the early 1920s, Italians were held in such disdain that when the Zamperinis arrived, the neighbors petitioned the city council to keep them out. Louie, who knew only a smattering of English until he was in grade school, couldn't hide his pedigree. He survived kindergarten by keeping mum, but in first grade, when he blurted out *"Brutte bastarde!"* at another kid, his teachers caught on. They compounded his misery by holding him back a grade.

He was a marked boy. Bullies, drawn by his oddity and hoping to goad him into uttering Italian curses, pelted him with rocks, taunted him, punched him, and kicked him. He tried buying their mercy with his lunch, but they pummeled him anyway, leaving him bloody. He could have ended the beatings by running away or succumbing to tears, but he refused to do either. "You could beat him to death," said Sylvia, "and he wouldn't say 'ouch' or cry." He just put his hands in front of his face and took it.

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As Louie neared his teens, he took a hard turn. Aloof and bristling, he lurked around the edges of Torrance, his only friendships forged loosely with rough boys who followed his lead. He became so germophobic that he wouldn't tolerate anyone coming near his food. Though he could be a sweet boy, he was often short-tempered and obstreperous. He feigned toughness, but was secretly tormented. Kids passing into parties would see him lingering outside, unable to work up the courage to walk in.

Frustrated at his inability to defend himself, he made a study of it. His father taught him how to work a punching bag and made him a barbell from two lead-filled coffee cans welded to a pipe. The next time a bully came at Louie, he ducked left and swung his right fist straight into the boy's mouth. The bully shrieked, his tooth broken, and fled. The feeling of lightness that Louie experienced on his walk home was one he would never forget.

Over time, Louie's temper grew wilder, his fuse shorter, his skills sharper. He socked a girl. He pushed a teacher. He pelted a policeman with rotten tomatoes. Kids who crossed him wound up with fat lips, and bullies learned to give him a wide berth. He once came upon Pete in their front yard, in a standoff with another boy. Both boys had their fists in front of their chins, each waiting for the other to swing. "Louie can't stand it," remembered Pete. "He's standing there, 'Hit him, Pete! Hit him, Pete!' I'm waiting there, and all of a sudden Louie turns around and smacks this guy right in the gut. And then he *runs*!"

Anthony Zamperini was at his wits' end. The police always seemed to be on the front porch, trying to talk sense into Louie. There were neighbors to be apologized to and damages to be compensated for with money that Anthony couldn't spare. Adoring his son but exasperated by his behavior, Anthony delivered frequent, forceful spankings. Once, after he'd caught Louie wiggling through a window in the middle of the

night, he delivered a kick to the rear so forceful that it lifted Louie off the floor. Louie absorbed the punishment in tearless silence, then committed the same crimes again, just to show he could.

Louie's mother, Louise, took a different tack. Louie was a copy of herself, right down to the vivid blue eyes. When pushed, she shoved; sold a bad cut of meat, she'd march down to the butcher, frying pan in hand. Loving mischief, she spread icing over a cardboard box and presented it as a birthday cake to a neighbor, who promptly got the knife stuck. When Pete told her he'd drink his castor oil if she gave him a box of candy, she agreed, watched him drink it, then handed him an empty candy box. "You only asked for the box, honey," she said with a smile. "That's all I got." And she understood Louie's restiveness. One Halloween, she dressed as a boy and raced around town trick-or-treating with Louie and Pete. A gang of kids, thinking she was one of the local toughs, tackled her and tried to steal her pants. Little Louise Zamperini, mother of four, was deep in the melee when the cops picked her up for brawling.

Knowing that punishing Louie would only provoke his defiance, Louise took a surreptitious route toward reforming him. In search of an informant, she worked over Louie's schoolmates with homemade pie and turned up a soft boy named Hugh, whose sweet tooth was Louie's undoing. Louise suddenly knew everything Louie was up to, and her children wondered if she had developed psychic powers. Sure that Sylvia was snitching, Louie refused to sit at the supper table with her, eating his meals in spiteful solitude off the open oven door. He once became so enraged with her that he chased her around the block. Outrunning Louie for the only time in her life, Sylvia cut down the alley and dove into her father's work shed. Louie flushed her out by feeding his three-foot-long pet snake into the crawl space. She then locked herself in the family car and didn't come out for an entire afternoon. "It was a matter of life and death," she said some seventy-five years later.

For all her efforts, Louise couldn't change Louie. He ran away and wandered around San Diego for days, sleeping under a highway overpass. He tried to ride a steer in a pasture, got tossed onto the ragged edge of a fallen tree, and limped home with his gashed knee bound in a handkerchief. Twenty-seven stitches didn't tame him. He hit one kid so hard that he broke his nose. He upended another boy and stuffed paper towels in his mouth. Parents forbade their kids from going near him. A

farmer, furious over Louie's robberies, loaded his shotgun with rock salt and blasted him in the tail. Louie beat one kid so badly, leaving him unconscious in a ditch, that he was afraid he'd killed him. When Louise saw the blood on Louie's fists, she burst into tears.

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As Louie prepared to start Torrance High, he was looking less like an impish kid and more like a dangerous young man. High school would be the end of his education. There was no money for college; Anthony's paycheck ran out before the week's end, forcing Louise to improvise meals out of eggplant, milk, stale bread, wild mushrooms, and rabbits that Louie and Pete shot in the fields. With flunking grades and no skills, Louie had no chance for a scholarship. It was unlikely that he could land a job. The Depression had come, and the unemployment rate was nearing 25 percent. Louie had no real ambitions. If asked what he wanted to be, his answer would have been "cowboy."

In the 1930s, America was infatuated with the pseudoscience of eugenics and its promise of strengthening the human race by culling the "unfit" from the genetic pool. Along with the "feebleminded," insane, and criminal, those so classified included women who had sex out of wedlock (considered a mental illness), orphans, the disabled, the poor, the homeless, epileptics, masturbators, the blind and the deaf, alcoholics, and girls whose genitals exceeded certain measurements. Some eugenicists advocated euthanasia, and in mental hospitals, this was quietly carried out on scores of people through "lethal neglect" or outright murder. At one Illinois mental hospital, new patients were dosed with milk from cows infected with tuberculosis, in the belief that only the undesirable would perish. As many as four in ten of these patients died. A more popular tool of eugenics was forced sterilization, employed on a raft of lost souls who, through misbehavior or misfortune, fell into the hands of state governments. By 1930, when Louie was entering his teens, California was enraptured with eugenics, and would ultimately sterilize some twenty thousand people.

When Louie was in his early teens, an event in Torrance brought reality home. A kid from Louie's neighborhood was deemed feebleminded, institutionalized, and barely saved from sterilization through a frantic legal effort by his parents, funded by their Torrance neighbors. Tutored by Louie's siblings, the boy earned straight A's. Louie was never more than an inch from juvenile hall or jail, and as a serial troublemaker, a failing student, and a suspect Italian, he was just the

sort of rogue that eugenicists wanted to cull. Suddenly understanding what he was risking, he felt deeply shaken.

The person that Louie had become was not, he knew, his authentic self. He made hesitant efforts to connect to others. He scrubbed the kitchen floor to surprise his mother, but she assumed that Pete had done it. While his father was out of town, Louie overhauled the engine on the family's Marmon Roosevelt Straight-8 sedan. He baked biscuits and gave them away; when his mother, tired of the mess, booted him from her kitchen, he resumed baking in a neighbor's house. He doled out nearly everything he stole. He was "bighearted," said Pete. "Louie would give away anything, whether it was his or not."

Each attempt he made to right himself ended wrong. He holed up alone, reading Zane Grey novels and wishing himself into them, a man and his horse on the frontier, broken off from the world. He haunted the theater for western movies, losing track of the plots while he stared at the scenery. On some nights, he'd drag his bedding into the yard to sleep alone. On others, he'd lie awake in bed, beneath pinups of movie cowboy Tom Mix and his wonder horse, Tony, feeling snared on something from which he couldn't kick free.

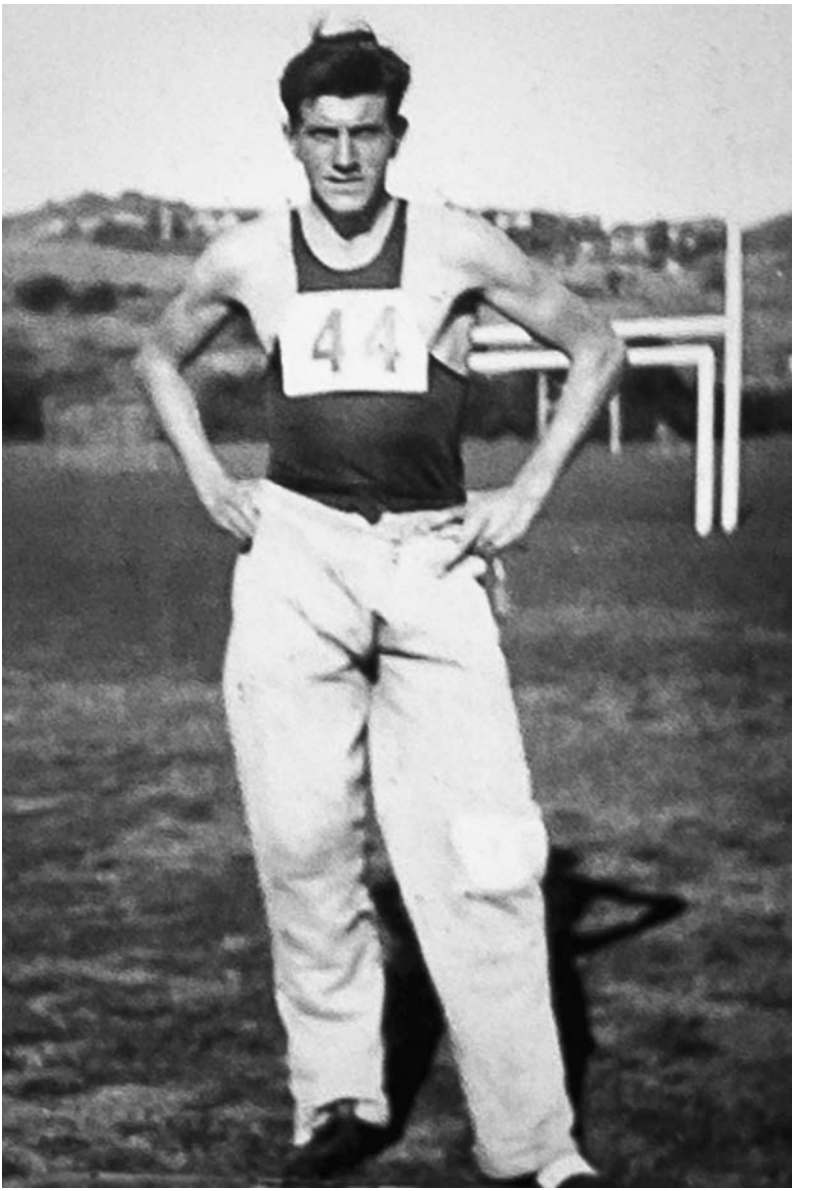
In the back bedroom he could hear trains passing. Lying beside his sleeping brother, he'd listen to the broad, low sound: faint, then rising, faint again, then a high, beckoning whistle, then gone. The sound of it brought goose bumps. Lost in longing, Louie imagined himself on a train, rolling into country he couldn't see, growing smaller and more distant until he disappeared.

*Two*

# Run Like Mad

The rehabilitation of Louie Zamperini began in 1931, with a key. Fourteen-year-old Louie was in a locksmith shop when he heard someone say that if you put any key in any lock, it has a one-in-fifty chance of fitting. Inspired, Louie began collecting keys and trying locks. He had no luck until he tried his house key on the back door of the Torrance High gym. When basketball season began, there was an inexplicable discrepancy between the number of ten-cent tickets sold and the considerably larger number of kids in the bleachers. In late 1931, someone caught on, and Louie was hauled to the principal's office for the umpteenth time. In California, winter-born students entered new grades in January, so Louie was about to start ninth grade. The principal punished him by making him ineligible for athletic and social activities. Louie, who never joined anything, was indifferent.

When Pete learned what had happened, he headed straight to the principal's office. Though his mother didn't yet speak much English, he towed her along to give his presentation weight. He told the principal that Louie craved attention but had never won it in the form of praise, so he sought it in the form of punishment. If Louie were recognized for doing something right, Pete argued, he'd turn his life around. He asked




*Courtesy of Louis Zamperini*

the principal to allow Louie to join a sport. When the principal balked, Pete asked him if he could live with allowing Louie to fail. It was a cheeky thing for a sixteen-year-old to say to his principal, but Pete was the one kid in Torrance who could get away with such a remark, and make it persuasive. Louie was made eligible for athletics for 1932.

Pete had big plans for Louie. A senior in 1931–32, he would graduate with ten varsity letters, including three in basketball and three in baseball. But it was track, in which he earned four varsity letters, tied the school half-mile record, and set its mile record of 5:06, that was his true forte. Looking at Louie, whose getaway speed was his saving grace, Pete thought he saw the same incipient talent.

As it turned out, it wasn't Pete who got Louie onto a track for the first time. It was Louie's weakness for girls. In February, the ninth-grade girls began assembling a team for an interclass track meet, and in a class with only four boys, Louie was the only male who looked like he could run. The girls worked their charms, and Louie found himself standing on the track, barefoot, for a 660-yard race. When everyone ran, he followed, churning along with jimmying elbows and dropping far behind. As he labored home last, he heard tittering. Gasping and humiliated, he ran straight off the track and hid under the bleachers. The coach muttered something about how that kid belonged anywhere but in a footrace. "He's my brother," Pete replied.

From that day on, Pete was all over Louie, forcing him to train, then dragging him to the track to run in a second meet. Urged on by kids in the stands, Louie put in just enough effort to beat one boy and finish third. He hated running, but the applause was intoxicating, and the prospect of more was just enough incentive to keep him marginally compliant. Pete herded him out to train every day and rode his bicycle behind him, whacking him with a stick. Louie dragged his feet, bellyached, and quit at the first sign of fatigue. Pete made him get up and keep going. Louie started winning. At the season's end, he became the first Torrance kid to make the All City Finals. He finished fifth.

Pete had been right about Louie's talent. But to Louie, training felt like one more constraint. At night he listened to the whistles of passing trains, and one day in the summer of '32, he couldn't bear it any longer.

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It began over a chore that Louie's father asked him to do. Louie resisted, a spat ensued, and Louie threw some clothes into a bag and stormed toward the front door. His parents ordered him to stay; Louie

was beyond persuasion. As he walked out, his mother rushed to the kitchen and emerged with a sandwich wrapped in waxed paper. Louie stuffed it in his bag and left. He was partway down the front walk when he heard his name called. When he turned, there was his father, grim-faced, holding two dollars in his outstretched hand. It was a lot of money for a man whose paycheck didn't bridge the week. Louie took it and walked away.

He rounded up a friend, and together they hitchhiked to Los Angeles, broke into a car, and slept on the seats. The next day they jumped a train, climbed onto the roof, and rode north.

The trip was a nightmare. The boys got locked in a boxcar so hot that they were soon frantic to escape. Louie found a discarded strip of metal, climbed on his friend's shoulders, pried a vent open, squirmed out, and helped his friend out, badly cutting himself in the process. Then they were discovered by the railroad detective, who forced them to jump from the moving train at gunpoint. After several days of walking, getting chased out of orchards and grocery stores where they tried to steal food, they wound up sitting on the ground in a railyard, filthy, bruised, sunburned, and wet, sharing a stolen can of beans. A train rattled past. Louie looked up. "I saw . . . beautiful white tablecloths and crystal on the tables, and food, people laughing and enjoying themselves and eating," he said later. "And [I was] sitting here shivering, eating a miserable can of beans." He remembered the money in his father's hand, the fear in his mother's eyes as she offered him a sandwich. He stood up and headed home.

When Louie walked into his house, Louise threw her arms around him, inspected him for injuries, led him to the kitchen, and gave him a cookie. Anthony came home, saw Louie, and sank into a chair, his face soft with relief. After dinner, Louie went upstairs, dropped into bed, and whispered his surrender to Pete.

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In the summer of 1932, Louie did almost nothing but run. On the invitation of a friend, he went to stay at a cabin on the Cahuilla Indian Reservation, in southern California's high desert. Each morning, he rose with the sun, picked up his rifle, and jogged into the sagebrush. He ran up and down hills, over the desert, through gullies. He chased bands of horses, darting into the swirling herds and trying in vain to snatch a fistful of mane and swing aboard. He swam in a sulfur spring, watched over by Cahuilla women scrubbing clothes on the rocks, and

stretched out to dry himself in the sun. On his run back to the cabin each afternoon, he shot a rabbit for supper. Each evening, he climbed atop the cabin and lay back, reading Zane Grey novels. When the sun sank and the words faded, he gazed over the landscape, moved by its beauty, watching it slip from gray to purple before darkness blended land and sky. In the morning he rose to run again. He didn't run from something or to something, not for anyone or in spite of anyone; he ran because it was what his body wished to do. The restiveness, the self-consciousness, and the need to oppose disappeared. All he felt was peace.

He came home with a mania for running. All of the effort that he'd once put into thieving he threw into track. On Pete's instruction, he ran his entire paper route for the *Torrance Herald,* to and from school, and to the beach and back. He rarely stayed on the sidewalk, veering onto neighbors' lawns to hurdle bushes. He gave up drinking and smoking. To expand his lung capacity, he ran to the public pool at Redondo Beach, dove to the bottom, grabbed the drain plug, and just floated there, hanging on a little longer each time. Eventually, he could stay underwater for three minutes and forty-five seconds. People kept jumping in to save him.

Louie also found a role model. In the 1930s, track was hugely popular, and its elite performers were household names. Among them was a Kansas University miler named Glenn Cunningham. As a small child, Cunningham had been in a schoolhouse explosion that killed his brother and left Glenn with severe burns on his legs and torso. It was a month and a half before he could sit up, and more time still before he could stand. Unable to straighten his legs, he learned to push himself about by leaning on a chair, his legs floundering. He graduated to the tail of the family mule, and eventually, hanging off the tail of an obliging horse named Paint, he began to run, a gait that initially caused him excruciating pain. Within a few years, he was racing, setting mile records and obliterating his opponents by the length of a homestretch. By 1932, the modest, mild-tempered Cunningham, whose legs and back were covered in a twisting mesh of scars, was becoming a national sensation, soon to be acclaimed as the greatest miler in American history. Louie had his hero.

In the fall of 1932, Pete began his studies at Compton, a tuition-free junior college, where he became a star runner. Nearly every afternoon, he commuted home to coach Louie, running alongside him, subduing

the jimmying elbows and teaching him strategy. Louie had a rare biomechanical advantage, hips that rolled as he ran; when one leg reached forward, the corresponding hip swung forward with it, giving Louie an exceptionally efficient, seven-foot stride. After watching him from the Torrance High fence, cheerleader Toots Bowersox needed only one word to describe him: "*Smoooooth*." Pete thought that the sprints in which Louie had been running were too short. He'd be a miler, just like Glenn Cunningham.

In January 1933, Louie began tenth grade. As he lost his aloof, thorny manner, he was welcomed by the fashionable crowd. They invited him to weenie bakes in front of Kellow's Hamburg Stand, where Louie would join ukulele sing-alongs and touch football games played with a knotted towel, contests that inevitably ended with a cheerleader being wedged into a trash can. Capitalizing on his sudden popularity, Louie ran for class president and won, borrowing the speech that Pete had used to win his class presidency at Compton. Best of all, girls suddenly found him dreamy. While walking alone on his sixteenth birthday, Louie was ambushed by a giggling gaggle of cheerleaders. One girl sat on Louie while the rest gave him sixteen whacks on the rear, plus one to grow on.

When the school track season began in February, Louie set out to see what training had done for him. His transformation was stunning. Competing in black silk shorts that his mother had sewn from the fabric of a skirt, he won an 880-yard race, breaking the school record, coheld by Pete, by more than two seconds. A week later, he ran a field of milers off their feet, stopping the watches in 5:03, three seconds faster than Pete's record. At another meet, he clocked a mile in 4:58. Three weeks later, he set a state record of 4:50.6. By early April, he was down to 4:46; by late April, 4:42. "Boy! oh boy! oh boy!" read a local paper. "Can that guy fly? Yes, this means that Zamperini guy!"

Almost every week, Louie ran the mile, streaking through the season unbeaten and untested. When he ran out of high school kids to whip, he took on Pete and thirteen other college runners in a two-mile race at Compton. Though he was only sixteen and had never even trained at the distance, he won by fifty yards. Next he tried the two-mile in UCLA's Southern California Cross Country meet. Running so effortlessly that he couldn't feel his feet touching the ground, he took the lead and kept pulling away. At the halfway point, he was an eighth of a mile ahead, and observers began speculating on when the boy in

the black shorts was going to collapse. Louie didn't collapse. After he flew past the finish, rewriting the course record, he looked back up the long straightaway. Not one of the other runners was even in view. Louie had won by more than a quarter of a mile.

He felt as if he would faint, but it wasn't from the exertion. It was from the realization of what he was.



Louie wins the 1933 UCLA Cross Country two-mile race by more than a quarter of a mile. Pete is running up from behind to greet him. *Courtesy of Louis Zamperini*

# The Paris Wife

A NOVEL

Paula McLain



BALLANTINE BOOKS
NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
McLain, Paula.
The Paris wife : a novel / Paula McLain.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-345-52130-9
eBook ISBN 978-0-345-52132-3
1. Hemingway, Ernest, 1899–1961—Marriage—Fiction. 2. Mowrer, Hadley Hemingway, 1891– —Fiction. 3. Authors' spouses—United States—Fiction.
4. Authors, American—France—Fiction. 5. Expatriate authors—France—Fiction. 6. Paris (France)—Fiction. I. Title.
PS3563.C383495P37 2011
813'.54—dc22
2010037878

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

www.ballantinebooks.com

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3

Book design by Caroline Cunningham

# PROLOGUE

Though I often looked for one, I finally had to admit that there could be no cure for Paris. Part of it was the war. The world had ended once already and could again at any moment. The war had come and changed us by happening when everyone said it couldn't. No one knew how many had died, but when you heard the numbers—nine million or fourteen million—you thought, *Impossible.* Paris was full of ghosts and the walking wounded. Many came back to Rouen or Oak Park, Illinois, shot through and carrying little pieces of what they'd seen behind their kneecaps, full of an emptiness they could never dislodge. They'd carried bodies on stretchers, stepping over other bodies to do it; they'd been on stretchers themselves, on slow-moving trains full of flies and the floating voice of someone saying he wanted to be remembered to his girl back home.

There was no back home anymore, not in the essential way, and that was part of Paris, too. Why we couldn't stop drinking or talking or kissing the wrong people no matter what it ruined. Some of us had looked into the faces of the dead and tried not to remember anything in particular. Ernest was one of these. He often said he'd died in the war, just for a moment; that his soul had left his body like a silk handkerchief, slipping out and levitating over his chest. It had returned without being called back, and I often wondered if writing for him was a way of knowing his soul was there after all, back in its place. Of saying to himself, if not to anyone else, that he had seen what he'd seen and felt those terrible things and lived anyway. That he had died but wasn't dead anymore.

One of the best things about Paris was coming back after we'd gone away. In 1923 we moved to Toronto for a year to have our son, Bumby, and when we returned, everything was the same but more somehow. It was filthy and gorgeous, full of rats and horse chestnut blossoms and poetry. With the baby our needs seemed to double, but we had less to spend. Pound helped us find an apartment on the second floor of a white stucco building on a tight curving street near the Luxembourg Gardens. The flat had no hot water, no bathtub, no electric lighting—but it wasn't the worst place we'd lived. Not by a long shot. Across the courtyard, a sawmill buzzed steadily from seven in the morning until five at night, and there was always the smell of fresh cut wood, and sawdust filtered in under the windowsills and door frames and got in our clothes and made us cough. Inside, there was the steady report of Ernest's Corona in the small room upstairs. He was working on stories—there were always stories or sketches to write—but also a new novel about the fiesta in Pamplona that he'd started in the summer.

I wasn't reading the pages then, but I trusted his feeling about them and trusted the rhythm of every day. Each morning, he'd wake early and dress and then go upstairs to his room and begin the day's writing. If things weren't hitting for him there, he'd take the notebooks and several well-sharpened pencils and walk to the Closerie des Lilas for a café crème at the marble table he liked best while Bumby and I breakfasted alone, and then dressed for a walk or went out to see friends. In the late afternoon, I'd head home, and if the day had gone well, Ernest would be there at the dining table looking satisfied with some nice cold Sauternes or brandy and seltzer, and ready to talk about anything. Or we would go out together, leaving Bumby with our landlady, Madame Chautard, and find a plate of fat oysters and good talk at the Select or the Dôme or the Deux Magots.

Interesting people were everywhere just then. The cafés of Montparnasse breathed them in and out, French painters and Russian dancers and American writers. On any given night, you could see Picasso walking from Saint-Germain to his apartment in the rue des Grands Augustins, always exactly the same route and always looking quietly at everyone and everything. Nearly anyone might feel like a painter walk-

ing the streets of Paris then because the light brought it out in you, and the shadows alongside the buildings, and the bridges which seemed to want to break your heart, and the sculpturally beautiful women in Chanel's black sheath dresses, smoking and throwing back their heads to laugh. We could walk into any café and feel the wonderful chaos of it, ordering Pernod or Rhum St. James until we were beautifully blurred and happy to be there together.

"Listen," Don Stewart said one night when we were all very jolly and drunk as fishes at the Select. "What you and Hem have is perfect. No, no," he was slurring now, and his face contorted with feeling. "It's holy. That's what I meant to say."

"That's swell of you, Don. You're all right, too, you know." I cupped his shoulder lightly, afraid he might cry. He was a humorist, and everyone knew the funny writers were the most serious sort under their skins. He also wasn't married yet, but there were prospects on the horizon, and it was all very important to him to see that marriage could be done gracefully and well.

Not everyone believed in marriage then. To marry was to say you believed in the future and in the past, too—that history and tradition and hope could stay knit together to hold you up. But the war had come and stolen all the fine young men and our faith, too. There was only today to throw yourself into without thinking about tomorrow, let alone forever. To keep you from thinking, there was liquor, an ocean's worth at least, all the usual vices and plenty of rope to hang yourself with. But some of us, a very few in the end, bet on marriage against the odds. And though I didn't feel holy, exactly, I did feel that what we had was rare and true—and that we were safe in the marriage we had built and were building every day.

This isn't a detective story—not hardly. I don't want to say, *Keep watch for the girl who will come along and ruin everything,* but she's coming anyway, set on her course in a gorgeous chipmunk coat and fine shoes, her sleek brown hair bobbed so close to her well-made head she'll seem like a pretty otter in my kitchen. Her easy smile. Her fast smart talk—while in the bedroom, scruffy and unshaven and laid flat

out on the bed like a despot king, Ernest will read his book and care nothing for her. Not at first. And the tea will boil in the teapot, and I'll tell a story about a girl she and I both knew a hundred years ago in St. Louis, and we'll feel like quick and natural friends while across the yard, in the sawmill, a dog will start barking and keep barking and he won't stop for anything.

# ONE

The very first thing he does is fix me with those wonderfully brown eyes and say, "It's possible I'm too drunk to judge, but you might have something there."

It's October 1920 and jazz is everywhere. I don't know any jazz, so I'm playing Rachmaninoff. I can feel a flush beginning in my cheeks from the hard cider my dear pal Kate Smith has stuffed down me so I'll relax. I'm getting there, second by second. It starts in my fingers, warm and loose, and moves along my nerves, rounding through me. I haven't been drunk in over a year—not since my mother fell seriously ill—and I've missed the way it comes with its own perfect glove of fog, settling snugly and beautifully over my brain. I don't want to think and I don't want to feel, either, unless it's as simple as this beautiful boy's knee inches from mine.

The knee is nearly enough on its own, but there's a whole package of a man attached, tall and lean, with a lot of very dark hair and a dimple in his left cheek you could fall into. His friends call him Hemingstein, Oinbones, Bird, Nesto, Wemedge, anything they can dream up on the spot. He calls Kate Stut or Butstein (not very flattering!), and another fellow Little Fever, and yet another Horney or the Great Horned Article. He seems to know everyone, and everyone seems to know the same jokes and stories. They telegraph punch lines back and forth in code, lightning fast and wisecracking. I can't keep up, but I don't mind really. Being near these happy strangers is like a powerful transfusion of good cheer.

When Kate wanders over from the vicinity of the kitchen, he points his perfect chin at me and says, "What should we name our new friend?"

"Hash," Kate says.

"Hashedad's better," he says. "Hasovitch."

"And you're Bird?" I ask.

"Wem," Kate says.

"I'm the fellow who thinks someone should be dancing." He smiles with everything he's got, and in very short order, Kate's brother Kenley has kicked the living room carpet to one side and is manning the Victrola. We throw ourselves into it, dancing our way through a stack of records. He's not a natural, but his arms and legs are free in their joints, and I can tell that he likes being in his body. He's not the least shy about moving in on me either. In no time at all our hands are damp and clenched, our cheeks close enough that I can feel the very real heat of him. And that's when he finally tells me his name is Ernest.

"I'm thinking of giving it away, though. Ernest is so dull, and Hemingway? Who wants a Hemingway?"

*Probably every girl between here and Michigan Avenue,* I think, looking at my feet to keep from blushing. When I look up again, he has his brown eyes locked on me.

"Well? What do you think? Should I toss it out?"

"Maybe not just yet."

A slow number starts, and without asking, he reaches for my waist and scoops me toward his body, which is even better up close. His chest is solid and so are his arms. I rest my hands on them lightly as he backs me around the room, past Kenley cranking the Victrola with glee, past Kate giving us a long, curious look. I close my eyes and lean into Ernest, smelling bourbon and soap, tobacco and damp cotton—and everything about this moment is so sharp and lovely, I do something completely out of character and just let myself have it.

## TWO

There's a song from that time by Nora Bayes called "Make Believe," which might have been the most lilting and persuasive treatise on self-delusion I'd ever heard. Nora Bayes was beautiful, and she sang with a trembling voice that told you she knew things about love. When she advised you to throw off all the old pain and worry and heartache and *smile*—well, you believed she'd done this herself. It wasn't a suggestion but a prescription. The song must have been a favorite of Kenley's, too. He played it three times the night I arrived in Chicago, and each time I felt it speaking directly to me: *Make believe you are glad when you're sorry. Sunshine will follow the rain.*

I'd had my share of rain. My mother's illness and death had weighed on me, but the years before had been heavy, too. I was only twenty-eight, and yet I'd been living like a spinster on the second floor of my older sister Fonnie's house while she and her husband, Roland, and their four dear beasts lived downstairs. I hadn't meant for things to stay this way. I assumed I'd get married or find a career like my school friends. They were harried young mothers now, schoolteachers or secretaries or aspiring ad writers, like Kate. Whatever they were, they were living their lives, out there doing it, making their mistakes. Somehow I'd gotten stuck along the way—long before my mother's illness—and I didn't know how to free myself exactly.

Sometimes, after playing an hour of passable Chopin, I'd collapse onto the sofa or the carpet, feeling whatever energy I'd had while playing leave my body. It was terrible to feel so empty, as if I were nothing.

Why couldn't I be happy? And just what was happiness anyway? Could you fake it, as Nora Bayes insisted? Could you force it like a spring bulb in your kitchen, or rub up against it at a party in Chicago and catch it like a cold?

Ernest Hemingway was still very much a stranger to me, but he seemed to do happiness all the way up and through. There wasn't any fear in him that I could see, just intensity and aliveness. His eyes sparked all over everything, all over me as he leaned back on his heel and spun me toward him. He tucked me fast against his chest, his breath warm on my neck and hair.

"How long have you known Stut?" he asked.

"We went to grade school together in St. Louis, at Mary Institute. What about you?"

"You want my whole educational pedigree? It's not much."

"No," I laughed. "Tell me about Kate."

"That would fill a book, and I'm not sure I'm the fellow to write it." His voice was light, still teasing, but he'd stopped smiling.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing," he said. "The short and sweet part is our families both have summer cottages up near Petoskey. That's Michigan to a southerner like you."

"Funny that we both grew up with Kate."

"I was ten to her eighteen. Let's just say I was happy to grow up *alongside* her. With a nice view of the scenery."

"You had a crush, in other words."

"No, those are the right words," he said, then looked away.

I'd obviously touched some kind of nerve in him, and I didn't want to do it again. I liked him smiling and laughing and loose. In fact, my response to him was so powerful that I already knew I would do a lot to keep him happy. I changed the subject fast.

"Are you from Chicago?"

"Oak Park. That's right up the street."

"For a southerner like me."

"Precisely."

"Well, you're a bang-up dancer, Oak Park."

"You too, St. Louis."

The song ended and we parted to catch our breath. I moved to one side of Kenley's long living room while Ernest was quickly swallowed up by admirers—women, naturally. They seemed awfully young and sure of themselves with their bobbed hair and brightly rouged cheeks. I was closer to a Victorian holdout than a flapper. My hair was still long, knotted at the nape of my neck, but it was a good rich auburn color, and though my dress wasn't up to the minute, my figure made up for that, I thought. In fact, I'd been feeling very good about the way I looked the whole time Ernest and I were dancing—he was so appreciative with those eyes!—but now that he was surrounded by vivacious women, my confidence was waning.

"You seemed awfully friendly with Nesto," Kate said, appearing at my elbow.

"Maybe. Can I have the rest of that?" I pointed to her drink.

"It's rather volcanic." She grimaced and passed it over.

"What is it?" I put my face to the rim of the glass, which was close enough. It smelled like rancid gasoline.

"Something homemade. Little Fever handed it to me in the kitchen. I'm not sure he didn't cook it up in his shoe."

Over against a long row of windows, Ernest began parading back and forth in a dark blue military cape someone had dug up. When he turned, the cape lifted and flared dramatically.

"That's quite a costume," I said.

"He's a war hero, didn't he tell you?"

I shook my head.

"I'm sure he'll get to it eventually." Her face didn't give anything away, but her voice had an edge.

"He told me he used to pine for you."

"Really?" There was the tone again. "He's clearly over it now."

I didn't know what had come between these two old friends, but whatever it was, it was obviously complicated and well under wraps. I let it drop.

"I like to think I'm the kind of girl who'll drink anything," I said, "but maybe not from a shoe."

"Right. Let's hunt something up." She smiled and flashed her green eyes at me, and became my Kate again, not grim at all, and off we went to get very drunk and very merry.

I found myself watching for Ernest the rest of the night, waiting for him to appear and stir things up, but he didn't. He must have slipped away at some point. One by one nearly everyone did, so that by 3:00 a.m. the party had been reduced to dregs, with Little Fever as the tragic centerpiece. He was passed out on the davenport with long dark wool socks stretched over his face and his hat perched on his crossed feet.

"To bed, to bed," Kate said with a yawn.

"Is that Shakespeare?"

"I don't know. Is it?" She hiccuped, and then laughed. "I'm off to my own little hovel now. Will you be all right here?"

"Of course. Kenley's made up a lovely room for me." I walked her to the door, and as she sidled into her coat, we made a date for lunch the next day.

"You'll have to tell me all about things at home. We haven't had a moment to talk about your mother. It must have been awful for you, poor creatch."

"Talking about it will only make me sad again," I said. "But this is perfect. Thanks for begging me to come."

"I worried you wouldn't."

"Me too. Fonnie said it was too soon."

"Yes, well, she would say that. Your sister can be smart about some things, Hash, but about you, nearly never."

I gave her a grateful smile and said good night. Kenley's apartment was warrenlike and full of boarders, but he'd given me a large and very clean room, with a four-poster bed and a bureau. I changed into my nightdress then took down my hair and brushed it, sorting through the highlights of the evening. No matter how much fun I'd had with Kate or how good it was to see her after all these years, I had to admit that number one on my list of memorable events was dancing with Ernest Hemingway. I could still feel his brown eyes and his electric, electrifying energy—but what had his attentions meant? Was he babysitting

me, as Kate's old friend? Was he still gone on Kate? Was she in love with him? Would I even see him again?

My mind was suddenly such a hive of unanswerable questions that I had to smile at myself. Wasn't this exactly what I had wanted coming to Chicago, something new to think about? I turned to face the mirror over the bureau. Hadley Richardson was still there, with her auburn waves and thin lips and pale round eyes—but there was something new, too, a glimmer of potential. It was just possible the sun was on its way. In the meantime, I would hum Nora Bayes and do my damnedest to make believe.

## THREE

The next morning, I walked into the kitchen to find Ernest leaning lazily against the refrigerator, reading the morning newspaper and devouring half a loaf of bread.

"Did you sleep here?" I asked, unable to mask my surprise at seeing him.

"I'm boarding here. Just for a while, until things take off for me."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Make literary history, I guess."

"Gee," I said, impressed all over again by his confidence and conviction. You couldn't fake that. "What are you working on now?"

He pulled a face. "Now I'm writing trash copy for Firestone tires, but I mean to write important stories or a novel. Maybe a book of poetry."

That threw me. "I thought poets were quiet and shrinking and afraid of sunlight," I said, sitting down.

"Not this one." He came over to join me at the table, turning his chair around to straddle it. "Who's your favorite writer?"

"Henry James, I suppose. I seem to read him over and over."

"Well, aren't you sweetly square?"

"Am I? Who's your favorite writer?"

"Ernest Hemingway." He grinned. "Anyway, there're lots of famous writers in Chicago. Kenley knows Sherwood Anderson. Heard of him?"

"Sure. He wrote *Winesburg, Ohio.*"

"That's the one."

"Well, with your nerve, you can probably do anything at all."

He looked at me seriously, as if he were trying to gauge whether I was teasing or placating him. I wasn't. "How do you take your coffee, Hasovitch?" he finally said.

"Hot," I said, and he grinned a grin that began in his eyes and went everywhere at once. It was devastating.

When Kate arrived for our lunch date, Ernest and I were still in the kitchen talking away. I hadn't yet changed out of my dressing gown, and there she was sharp and fresh in a red wool hat and coat.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I won't be a minute."

"Take your time, you deserve a little indolence," she said, but seemed impatient with me just the same.

I went off to dress, and when I came back, Kate was alone in the room.

"Where did Nesto run off to?"

"I haven't the faintest," Kate said. And then, because she clearly read disappointment in my face, "Should I have invited him along?"

"Don't be silly. This is our day."

In the end, we had a lovely afternoon. Out of all the girls in my class at Mary Institute, Kate was the boldest and most fearless, able to talk to anyone and make fun out of nothing at all. She was still that way and I felt bolder, too, walking along Michigan Avenue with her, and years younger. We had lunch at a restaurant across from the marble vastness of the Art Institute, where two regal lions presided over traffic and an ever-shifting sea of dark coats and hats. It was a chilly day, and after lunch, we huddled arm in arm along State Street, tucking into every interesting shop we came to. She tried to urge me to open up about things at home, but I didn't want to lose my good mood. Instead, I got Kate talking about her summer up in Michigan, the fishing and swimming parties and general rambunctiousness. All of her stories seemed to involve rowboats and ukuleles, full moons and campfires and grog. I was desperately jealous.

"Why do you get all the young men?"

"They're not mine, I'm just borrowing them." She smiled. "It's having brothers, I guess. And anyway, sometimes it's a nuisance. I spent

half the summer trying to encourage this one and discourage that one and all the signals got mixed and in the end no one even kissed anyone else. So there, see? Nothing to be envious of."

"Is Carl Edgar still proposing to you regularly?"

"Ugh, I'm afraid so. Poor old Odgar. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I actually said yes—as an experiment."

"He'd fall over."

"Or run away in terror, maybe. Some men seem to only want the girls beating a path in the other direction."

"What about Ernest?"

"What about him?" Her eyes snapped to attention.

"Does he like his women on the run?"

"I wouldn't know."

"How young is he, anyway? Twenty-five?"

She smirked. "Twenty-one. A boy-o. I know you're more sensible than that."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought I saw some interest." She gazed at me with intensity.

"I'm just bored," I said. But I'd always been a terrible liar.

"How about a new hat instead?" she said, and pointed to something towering and feathery I couldn't see myself standing beneath in a million years.

By the time we made it back to the apartment late that afternoon, the place was chock-full again. Kenley and his brother Bill, the youngest of the Smith clan, were trying to get together a card game. A fellow named Brummy was playing a ragtime tune on the piano while Ernest and another cohort, Don Wright, circled each other on the carpet in a spontaneous boxing match. They were stripped to the waist, bobbing and weaving with their fists up, while a group stood around egging them on. Everyone was laughing, and it looked like great fun until Ernest lit out with a right hook. Don managed to dodge most of it, and the match went on good-naturedly, but I'd seen the killer look on Ernest's face when he threw the punch and knew it was all very serious to him. He wanted to win.

Kate seemed unfazed by the boxing and everything else going on in the apartment. Apparently the place was always this crazy in the evenings, a good-time Grand Central. Prohibition had been under way for the better part of a year, and that "noble experiment" had spurred the popping up, nearly overnight, of speakeasies in cities everywhere. There were supposed to be thousands of these in Chicago alone, but who needed a speakeasy when Kenley, like many resourceful young men, had stockpiled enough hooch to pickle a herd of elephants? That night, there was plenty of open wine in the kitchen, so Kate and I had some of that, and then some more. As dusk fell, purpling and softening the room, I found myself on the davenport squeezed in between Ernest and Horney while they talked over me in Pig Latin. I couldn't stop collapsing into fits of giggles—and when was the last time I giggled anyway? It was surprisingly, intoxicatingly easy now.

When Horney got up to join Kate on the improvised dance floor, Ernest turned to me and said, "I've been thinking all day about how to ask you something."

"Really?" I didn't know if I was more surprised or flattered.

He nodded. "Would you want to read something of mine? It's not a story yet, more like a sketch." He tucked his chin nervously and I almost laughed with relief. Ernest Hemingway was nervous and I wasn't, suddenly. Not in the least.

"Sure," I said. "But I'm no literary critic. I'm not sure I can help you."

"It's all right. I'd just like to get your take on it."

"Okay, then. Yes," I said.

"I'll be right back," he said, and bolted halfway across the carpet before turning around. "Don't go away, all right?"

"Where would I go?"

"You'd be surprised," he said, mysteriously, and then ran off to fetch the pages.

Essentially, the story wasn't a story, he was right. It was a darkly funny sketch called "Wolves and Donuts" set in an Italian restaurant on Wabash Avenue. But even though the piece was unfinished, the voice was acid sharp and hilarious. We went into the kitchen for better light

and a little quiet, and as I read, Ernest paced the room, his arms swinging and pawing the air as he waited for me to answer the question he couldn't bring himself to ask: *Is it good?*

When I'd turned the last page, he sat in the chair opposite me with an expectant look.

"You're very talented," I said, meeting his eyes. "I've probably spent too much time on Henry James. Your stuff isn't that."

"No."

"I'm not sure I get it completely, but I can tell you're a writer. Whatever that thing is, you have it."

"God that's good to hear. Sometimes I think all I really need is one person telling me that I'm not knocking my fool head against the bricks. That I have a shot at it."

"You do. Even I can see that."

He looked at me intently, boring a small hole with those eyes. "I like you, you know. You're a good clear sort."

"I like you, too," I said back, and it struck me how comfortable I felt with him, as if we were old friends or had already done this many times over, him handing me pages with his heart on his sleeve—he couldn't pretend this work didn't mean everything to him—me reading his words, quietly amazed by what he could do.

"Will you let me take you to dinner?" he said.

"Now?"

"What's stopping us?"

*Kate,* I thought. *Kate and Kenley and the whole drunken throng in the living room.*

"No one will even notice we're gone," he said, reading my hesitation.

"All right," I said, but slunk off like a thief to get my coat anyway. I wanted to go with him. I was dying to go, but he was wrong about no one noticing. As we ducked out the door together, I felt Kate's green eyes flashing hotly over my back and heard her silent shout, *Hadley, be sensible!*

I was tired of being sensible. I didn't turn around.

It was a sheer pleasure to walk the chilly Chicago streets with Ernest at my side, talking and talking, his cheeks flushed, his eyes beaming. We

went to a Greek restaurant on Jefferson Street where we had roasted lamb and a cucumber salad with lemon and olives.

"I suppose it's embarrassing, but I've never had olives before," I said when the waiter arrived with our order.

"That should be illegal. Here, open."

He put the olive on my tongue, and as I closed my mouth around it, oily and warm with salt, I found myself flushing from the deliciousness but also the intimacy, his fork in my mouth. It was the most sensual thing that had happened to me in ages.

"Well?" he prodded.

"I love it," I said. "Though it's a little dangerous, isn't it?"

He smiled and looked at me appreciatively. "A little, yes." And then he ate a dozen himself, one after the other.

After dinner we walked under the elevated train and headed toward the Municipal Pier. The whole time he talked fast about his plans, all the things he wanted for himself, the poems, stories, and sketches he was burning to write. I'd never met anyone so vibrant or alive. He moved like light. He never *stopped* moving—or thinking, or dreaming apparently.

When we reached the pier, we walked along it all the way out to the end of the streetcar line.

"Did you know they had barracks and Red Cross units out here during the war? I worked for the Red Cross over in Italy, as an ambulance driver."

"The war seems very far away now, doesn't it?"

"Sometimes." A line of worry or doubt appeared on his forehead. "What were you doing in those days?"

"Hiding out, mostly. I sorted books in the basement of the public library. I'm told they eventually went to soldiers overseas."

"That's funny. I hand-delivered those books. Chocolate bars, too. Letters, cigarettes, candy. We had a canteen set up, but sometimes I went out to the line at night, on a bicycle. Can you picture it?"

"I can. It's a wobbly red bicycle, right?"

"The boy was wobbly too after he got blown all to hell."

I stopped walking. "Oh, Ernest, I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Don't worry. I was a hero for a day or two." He leaned against the railing and looked out at the lake, gray on gray, with just a ghost of white. "You know what I think about now?"

I shook my head.

"Silkworms. I spent a night in San Pedro Norello, a village on the front. Horney was there—that's where I met him—and our cots were set up on the floor of this building, right? It was a silkworm factory. They were up over our heads, in the eaves, chewing away in racks full of mulberry leaves. That's the only thing you could hear. No shell fire, no nothing. It was terrible."

"I've never thought of silkworms that way. Maybe I've never thought of silkworms at all, but I can hear them now, the way you did."

"Sometimes when I can't sleep, I think I hear them chewing. I have to get up and turn the lights on and look up at the ceiling."

"Are they ever there?" I smiled, trying to lighten the mood.

"Not yet."

We headed away from the brightly lit shops and turned toward home—and I was struck by how rare it was to hear a near stranger share something so essential about himself. He told it beautifully, too, with real feeling. I think I was a little dumbstruck. Just who was this Ernest Hemingway?

Suddenly he stopped walking and faced me on the sidewalk. "Listen, Hash. You're not going to run off on me are you?"

"I'm not much of an athlete," I said.

"I like your spine. Did I tell you that?"

"You did."

"I like it more than that, then," he said. Then he gave me a winning smile and started to walk again, tucking my gloved hand under his arm.

The next morning Kate came into my room without knocking. I wasn't even dressed yet.

"I waited past midnight. Where were you?"

"I'm sorry. Ernest invited me to dinner. I wasn't sure how I could say no."

"*No* is the easiest word there is. *Children* learn to talk by saying no."

I pulled my robe more tightly around my waist and sat down on the bed. "All right. I didn't want to say no. It was just dinner, Kate. There's no harm done."

"Of course," she said, obviously still flustered. "I just feel protective of you and don't want to see you get tangled up in something awful."

"Why awful? He doesn't seem like a bad fellow."

"He's not bad, exactly." I could see she was trying to choose her words carefully. "He's just young. He likes women—*all* women, apparently. And I see you throwing yourself at him, blindly trusting him, and it worries me."

"I'm not throwing myself at anyone," I said, suddenly angry. "I had dinner with the man. Honestly, Kate."

"You're right, you're right," she said. "I'm getting carried away." She sat down beside me on the bed and reached for my hand. "Forget I said anything, okay? You're a levelheaded girl. You'll know what to do."

"*Nothing* happened."

"I know. I'm terrible." She rubbed my hand with hers and I let her, but my head was fairly spinning.

"This is all too much to think about before breakfast," I said.

"You poor thing." She stood, smoothing her skirt, and then she smoothed her expression, too, while I watched, righting and simplifying everything. It was a good trick. I wished I could do it.

The rest of that morning passed in a daze as I brooded over Kate's words and her concern for me. Was Ernest really someone to watch out for? He seemed so sincere and forthcoming. He'd confessed to writing poetry, for goodness' sake, and those stories about being wounded at the front—and the silkworms! Was this all part of some elaborate ploy to take advantage of me? If so, then Kate was right, I was falling for it, heaving myself at him like a dumb country mouse—likely one of dozens. I could barely stand to think about it.

"Maybe we should hightail it out of here before anyone stirs," Kate said when we'd finished our coffee. "I don't have to be at work at all today. What shall we do? The sky's the limit."

"You decide," I said. "I don't much care." And I didn't.

Another kind of girl might have suspected Kate of jealousy, but I was very simple and trusting, then. More than this, I was inexperienced. At twenty-eight I'd had a handful of beaux, but had only been in love once, and that had been awful enough to make me doubt men and myself for a good long while.

His name was Harrison Williams and he was my piano teacher when I was twenty and just returned home to St. Louis after a single year at Bryn Mawr. Although he was only a few months older than I was, he seemed much older and more sophisticated to me. I found it both appealing and intimidating that he'd studied overseas with famous composers and knew loads about European art and culture. I could listen to him talk about anything, and I suppose that's how it started, with admiration and envy. Then I found myself watching his hands and his eyes and his mouth. He wasn't an obvious Casanova, but he was handsome in his way, tall and slender, with dark thinning hair. Most appealing of all was his impression of me as exceptional. He thought I could make it as a concert pianist and I thought so, too, at least for the hours I sat at his piano bench working through finger-cramping études.

I worried a lot about my hair and dress those afternoons at Harrison's. As he paced and corrected and occasionally praised me, I did my best to decode him. Did the tapping of his fingertip on his temple mean he had or hadn't noticed my new stockings?

"You have a lovely alignment at the bench," he said to me one afternoon, and that's about all it took to send me spiraling into a fantasy of my alignment in white lace, his alignment in morning tails and gorgeous white gloves. I played terribly that day, distracted by my own swooning.

I loved him for a full year and then, in one night, all my wishing came apart. We were both at a neighbor's evening party, where I forced myself to tip back two glasses of too-sweet wine so I could be braver near him. The day before we'd gone for a walk together in the woods just outside of town. It was fall, crisp and windless, with the clouds overhead looking like perfect cutouts of themselves. He lit my cigarette. I stamped at some yellow leaves with the toe of my lace-up shoes, and

then, in the middle of a very nice silence, he said, "You're such a dear person, Hadley. One of the best I've known, really."

It was hardly a declaration of love, but I told myself he did care for me and believed it—long enough for the gulping of the wine in any case. I waited for the room to tip just that much off its center, then walked up to Harrison, picking each foot up and putting it back down again, getting closer. I was wearing my black lace. It was my hands-down favorite dress because it never failed to make me feel a bit like Carmen. And maybe it was the dress as much as the wine that lifted my hand toward Harrison's coat sleeve. I'd never touched him before, so it was probably clean surprise that stopped him still. We stood there, locked and lovely as statues in a garden—and for several dozen heartbeats I was his wife. I had already borne his children and secured his loyalty and was well beyond the thorny rim of my own mind, that place where hope got itself snagged and swallowed over and over. I could have this. It was already mine.

"Hadley," he said quietly.

I looked up. Harrison's eyes were the pale blue of drowned stars, and they were saying no—simply and quietly. Just *no.*

What did I say? Maybe nothing. I don't remember. The music lurched, candlelight blurred, my hand dropped to the lace of my skirt. A minute before it had been a gypsy's dress, now it was funereal.

"I have a terrible headache," I said to my mother, trying to explain why I needed to go home that instant.

"Of course you do," she said, and her expression softened. "Let's get our girl to bed."

Once home, I let her lead me up the stairs and help me into my muslin nightgown. She tucked me into layers of quilting and put a cool hand on my forehead, smoothing my hair. "Get some rest now."

"Yes," I said, because I couldn't begin to explain that I'd *been* resting for twenty-one years, but that tonight I'd tried for something else.

That was my one brush with love. Was it love? It felt awful enough. I spent another two years crawling around in the skin of it, smoking too much and growing too thin and having stray thoughts of jumping from

my balcony like a tortured heroine in a Russian novel. After a time, though more slowly than I wanted, I came to see that Harrison wasn't my failed prince and I wasn't his victim. He hadn't led me on at all; I'd led *myself* on. The thought of love could still make me queasy and pale, though, more than half a decade later. I was still gullible, clearly, and needed someone's guidance—Kate's, for instance.

We tramped all over Chicago that day looking first for world-class corned beef and then for new gloves. I let Kate chatter away and distract me and felt grateful that she had warned me about Ernest. Even if his intentions were entirely above suspicion, I was far too susceptible just then. I'd come to Chicago wanting escape and I'd gotten it, but too much dreaming was dangerous. I wasn't happy at home, but drowning myself in fanciful notions about Ernest Hemingway wasn't going to solve anything for me. My life was my life; I would have to stare it down, somehow, and make it work for me.

I spent another full week in Chicago and every day of that time brought some new excitement. We went to a football game, saw a matinee showing of *Madama Butterfly,* roamed the city by day and by night. Whenever I saw Ernest, which was often, I strove to keep my head clear and just enjoy his company without conjuring up any drama in one direction or another. I might have been a little more reserved with him than I'd been before, but he didn't say anything and didn't force any intimacy until my last evening in town.

It was freezing that night—too cold to be out, really—but a group of us grabbed armfuls of wool blankets, poured rum into flasks, and then piled into Kenley's Ford and headed out to Lake Michigan. The dunes were steep and pale in moonlight, and we invented a game around them, climbing to the top of one—drunkenly, of course—and then rolling down like logs. Kate went first because she loved to be the first at anything, and then Kenley went, singing his way down. When my turn came, I crawled up the dune as sand shifted under my feet and hands. At the top, I looked around and everything was bright frosted stars and distances.

"C'mon, then, coward!" Ernest yelled up at me.

I closed my eyes and let myself fall, barreling down over the hard bumps. I'd had so much to drink I couldn't feel a thing—nothing but a thrilling sense of wildness and freedom. It was a kind of euphoria, really, and fear was a key part of it. For the first time since I was a girl, I felt the heady rush of being afraid and liked the sensation. At the bottom, I'd barely come to a stop when Ernest whirled me up out of the dark and kissed me hard. I felt his tongue for a hot instant against my lips.

"Oh," was all I could say. I couldn't think about whether anyone had seen us. I couldn't think at all. His face was inches from mine, more charged and convincing and altogether awake than anything I'd ever seen.

"Oh," I said again, and he let me go.

The next day I packed my bags for my return trip to St. Louis feeling a bit lost. I'd been so swept away by living for two weeks, I couldn't really imagine going back home. I didn't want to.

Kate was working that day and we'd already said our good-byes. Kenley had to be at work as well, but had been kind enough to offer to drive me to the station on his lunch break and save me the cab fare. After everything was stowed and ready, I put on my coat and hat and went to wait for him in the living room. But when a body appeared in the hall to fetch me, it was Ernest's.

"Kenley couldn't get away after all?" I asked.

"No. I wanted to do it."

I nodded dumbly and collected my things.

It wasn't much of a distance to Union Station and we passed it mostly in silence. He wore wool trousers and a gray wool jacket, with a dark cap pulled down nearly to his eyebrows. His cheeks were pink with cold and he looked very beautiful. *Beautiful* was exactly the right word for him, too. His looks weren't feminine but they were perfect and unmarred and sort of heroic, as if he'd stepped out of a Greek poem about love and battle.

"You can let me out here," I said as we neared the station.

"Would it kill you to give a guy a break?" he said, finding a place to park.

"No. Probably not."

A few minutes later, we stood together on the platform. I clutched my ticket and my pocketbook. He held my suitcase, shifting it from hand to gloved hand—but as soon as my train appeared, its silver-brown body trailing smoke and soot, he set it down at his feet. Suddenly he was holding me tight against his chest.

My heart beat fast. I wondered if he could feel it. "I don't think I've ever met anyone like you," I said.

He didn't say anything at all, just kissed me, and through that kiss I could feel all of him radiating warmth and life. There was so much I didn't know about Ernest and even more I wouldn't let myself ask or even imagine, but I found myself surrendering anyway, second by second. We were surrounded by people on the platform, but also entirely alone. And when I finally boarded my train a few minutes later, my legs were shaking.

I found a seat and looked out my window into the crowd, scanning the dark suits and hats and coats. And then there he was, pushing closer to the train, smiling at me like a maniac and waving. I waved back, and then he held up one hand like a sheet of notebook paper, and the other like a pencil, pantomiming.

*I'll write to you,* he mouthed. Or maybe it was *I'll write* you.

I closed my eyes against hot, sudden tears, and then leaned into the plush seat as my train carried me home.

# Big Little Lies

LIANE MORIARTY



Berkley Books
*New York*



BERKLEY
**An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC**
**375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014**

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Berkley trade paperback ISBN: 978-0-425-27486-6

The Library of Congress has cataloged the G. P. Putnam's Sons hardcover edition as follows:

Moriarty, Liane.
Big little lies : a novel / Liane Moriarty. — First American edition.
pages cm
ISBN 978-0-399-16706-5
1. Female friendship—Fiction. 2. Parenting—Fiction. 3. Women—Fiction. I. Title.
PR9619.4.M67B54 2015
823'.92—dc23
2015019201

PUBLISHING HISTORY
Pan MacMillan Australia edition / July 2014
G. P. Putnam's Sons hardcover edition / July 2014
Berkley trade paperback edition / August 2015

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6

Cover photograph © Yamada Taro / Image Bank / Getty Images.
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Cover design by Lisa Amoroso.

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# 1.

That doesn't sound like a school trivia night," said Mrs. Patty Ponder to Marie Antoinette. "That sounds like a riot."

The cat didn't respond. She was dozing on the couch and found school trivia nights to be trivial.

"Not interested, eh? Let them eat cake! Is that what you're thinking? They do eat a lot of cake, don't they? All those cake stalls. Goodness me. Although I don't think any of the mothers ever actually eat them. They're all so sleek and skinny, aren't they? Like you."

Marie Antoinette sneered at the compliment. The "let them eat cake" thing had grown old a long time ago, and she'd recently heard one of Mrs. Ponder's grandchildren say it was meant to be "let them eat brioche" and also that Marie Antoinette never said it in the first place.

Mrs. Ponder picked up her television remote and turned down the volume on *Dancing with the Stars*. She'd turned it up loud earlier because of the sound of the heavy rain, but the downpour had eased now.

She could hear people shouting. Angry hollers crashed through the quiet, cold night air. It was somehow hurtful for Mrs. Ponder to hear, as if all that rage were directed at her. (Mrs. Ponder had grown up with an angry mother.)

"Goodness me. Do you think they're arguing over the capital of Guatemala? Do you know the capital of Guatemala? No? I don't either. We should Google it. Don't sneer at me."

Marie Antoinette sniffed.

"Let's go see what's going on," said Mrs. Ponder briskly. She was feeling nervous and therefore behaving briskly in front of the cat, the same way she'd once done with her children when her husband was away and there were strange noises in the night.

Mrs. Ponder heaved herself up with the help of her walker. Marie Antoinette slid her slippery body comfortingly in between Mrs. Ponder's legs (she wasn't falling for the brisk act) as she pushed the walker down the hallway to the back of the house.

Her sewing room looked straight out onto the school yard of Pirriwee Public.

"Mum, are you mad? You can't live this close to a primary school," her daughter had said when she was first looking at buying the house.

But Mrs. Ponder loved to hear the crazy babble of children's voices at intervals throughout the day, and she no longer drove, so she couldn't care less that the street was jammed with those giant, truck-like cars they all drove these days, with women in big sunglasses leaning across their steering wheels to call out terribly urgent information about Harriett's ballet and Charlie's speech therapy.

Mothers took their mothering so seriously now. Their frantic little faces. Their busy little bottoms strutting into the school in their tight gym gear. Ponytails swinging. Eyes fixed on the mobile phones held in the palms of their hands like compasses. It made Mrs. Ponder laugh. Fondly though. Her three daughters, although older, were exactly the same. And they were all so pretty.

"How are you this morning?" she always called out if she was on the front porch with a cup of tea or watering the front garden as they went by.

"Busy, Mrs. Ponder! Frantic!" they always called back, trotting along, yanking their children's arms. They were pleasant and friendly and just a touch condescending because they couldn't help it. She was so old! They were so busy!

The fathers, and there were more and more of them doing the school run these days, were different. They rarely hurried, strolling past with a measured casualness. No big deal. All under control. That was the message. Mrs Ponder chuckled fondly at them too.

But now it seemed the Pirriwee Public parents were misbehaving. She got to the window and pushed aside the lace curtain. The school had recently paid for a window guard after a cricket ball had smashed the glass and nearly knocked out Marie Antoinette. (A group of Year 3 boys had given her a hand-painted apology card, which she kept on her fridge.)

There was a two-story sandstone building on the other side of the playground with an event room on the second level and a big balcony with ocean views. Mrs. Ponder had been there for a few functions: a talk by a local historian, a lunch hosted by the Friends of the Library. It was quite a beautiful room. Sometimes ex-students had their wedding receptions there. That's where they'd be having the school trivia night. They were raising funds for SMART Boards, whatever they were. Mrs. Ponder had been invited as a matter of course. Her proximity to the school gave her a funny sort of honorary status, even though she'd never had a child or grandchild attend. She'd said no thank you to the school trivia night invitation. She thought school events without the children in attendance were pointless.

The children had their weekly school assembly in the same room. Each Friday morning, Mrs. Ponder set herself up in the sewing room with a cup of English Breakfast and a ginger-nut biscuit. The sound of the children singing floating down from the second floor of the building always made her weep. She'd never believed in God, except when she heard children singing.

There was no singing now.

Mrs. Ponder could hear a lot of bad language. She wasn't a prude about bad language—her eldest daughter swore like a trooper—but it was upsetting and disconcerting to hear someone maniacally screaming that particular four-letter word in a place that was normally filled with childish laughter and shouts.

"Are you all drunk?" she said.

Her rain-splattered window was at eye level with the entrance doors to the building, and suddenly people began to spill out. Security lights illuminated the paved area around the entrance like a stage set for a play. Clouds of mist added to the effect.

It was a strange sight.

The parents at Pirriwee Public had a baffling fondness for costume parties. It wasn't enough that they should have an ordinary trivia night; she knew from the invitation that some bright spark had decided to make it an "Audrey and Elvis" trivia night, which meant that the women all had to dress up as Audrey Hepburn and the men had to dress up as Elvis Presley. (That was another reason Mrs. Ponder had turned down the invitation. She'd always abhorred costume parties.) It seemed that the most popular rendition of Audrey Hepburn was the *Breakfast at Tiffany's* look. All the women were wearing long black dresses, white gloves and pearl chokers. Meanwhile, the men had mostly chosen to pay tribute to the Elvis of the latter years. They were all wearing shiny white

jumpsuits, glittery gemstones and plunging necklines. The women looked lovely. The poor men looked perfectly ridiculous.

As Mrs. Ponder watched, one Elvis punched another across the jaw. He staggered back into an Audrey. Two Elvises grabbed him from behind and pulled him away. An Audrey buried her face in her hands and turned aside, as though she couldn't bear to watch. Someone shouted, "Stop this!"

*Indeed. What would your beautiful children think?*

"Should I call the police?" wondered Mrs. Ponder out loud, but then she heard the wail of a siren in the distance, at the same time as a woman on the balcony began to scream and scream.

**Gabrielle:** It wasn't like it was just the mothers, you know. It wouldn't have happened without the dads. I guess it *started* with the mothers. We were the main players, so to speak. The mums. I can't stand the word "mum." It's a frumpy word. "Mom" is better. With an *o*. It sounds skinnier. We should change to the American spelling. I have body-image issues, by the way. Who doesn't, right?

**Bonnie:** It was all just a terrible misunderstanding. People's feelings got hurt, and then everything just spiraled out of control. The way it does. All conflict can be traced back to someone's feelings getting hurt, don't you think? Divorce. World wars. Legal action. Well, maybe not every legal action. Can I offer you an herbal tea?

**Stu:** I'll tell you exactly why it happened: *Women don't let things go.* Not saying the blokes don't share part of the

blame. But if the girls hadn't gotten their knickers in a knot . . . And that might sound sexist, but it's not, it's just a fact of life. Ask any man—not some new-age, artsy-fartsy, I-wear-moisturizer type, I mean a real man—ask a real man, then he'll tell you that women are like the Olympic athletes of grudges. You should see my wife in action. And she's not even the worst of them.

**Miss Barnes:** Helicopter parents. Before I started at Pirriwee Public, I thought it was an exaggeration, this thing about parents being overly involved with their kids. I mean, my mum and dad loved me, they were, like, *interested* in me when I was growing up in the nineties, but they weren't, like, *obsessed* with me.

**Mrs. Lipmann:** It's a tragedy, and deeply regrettable, and we're all trying to move forward. I have no further comment.

**Carol:** I blame the Erotic Book Club. But that's just me.

**Jonathan:** There was nothing erotic about the Erotic Book Club, I'll tell you that for free.

**Jackie:** You know what? I see this as a feminist issue.

**Harper:** Who said it was a feminist issue? What the heck? I'll tell you what started it: the *incident* at the kindergarten orientation day.

**Graeme:** My understanding was that it all goes back to the stay-at-home mums battling it out with the career

mums. What do they call it? The Mummy Wars. My wife wasn't involved. She doesn't have time for that sort of thing.

**Thea:** You journalists are just loving the French-nanny angle. I heard someone on the radio today talking about the "French maid," which Juliette was certainly not. Renata had a housekeeper as well. Lucky for some. I have four children, and no staff to help out! Of course, I don't have a problem *per se* with working mothers, I just wonder why they bothered having children in the first place.

**Melissa:** You know what I think got everyone all hot and bothered? The head lice. Oh my gosh, don't let me get started on the head lice.

**Samantha:** The head lice? What did that have to do with anything? Who told you that? I bet it was Melissa, right? That poor girl suffered post-traumatic stress disorder after her kids kept getting reinfected. Sorry. It's not funny. It's not funny at all.

**Detective-Sergeant Adrian Quinlan:** Let me be clear: This is not a circus. This is a murder investigation.

# 2.

## Six Months Before the Trivia Night

Forty. Madeline Martha Mackenzie was forty years old today.

"I am forty," she said out loud as she drove. She drew the word out in slow motion, like a sound effect. *"Fooorty."*

She caught the eye of her daughter in the rearview mirror. Chloe grinned and imitated her mother. "I am five. *Fiiiive.*"

"Forty!" trilled Madeline like an opera singer. "Tra la la la!"

"Five!" trilled Chloe.

Madeline tried a rap version, beating out the rhythm on the steering wheel. "I'm forty, yeah, forty—"

"That's enough now, Mummy," said Chloe firmly.

"Sorry," said Madeline.

She was taking Chloe to her kindergarten—"Let's Get Kindy Ready!"—orientation. Not that Chloe required any orientation before starting school next January. She was already very firmly oriented at Pirriwee Public. At this morning's drop-off Chloe had been busy taking charge of her brother, Fred, who was two years older but often seemed younger. "Fred, you forgot to put your book bag in the basket! That's it. In there. Good boy."

Fred had obediently dropped his book bag in the appropriate basket before running off to put Jackson in a headlock. Madeline had pretended not to see the headlock. Jackson probably deserved

it. Jackson's mother, Renata, hadn't seen it either, because she was deep in conversation with Harper, both of them frowning earnestly over the stress of educating their gifted children. Renata and Harper attended the same weekly support group for parents of gifted children. Madeline imagined them all sitting in a circle, wringing their hands while their eyes shone with secret pride.

While Chloe was busy bossing the other children around at orientation (her gift was bossiness, she was going to run a corporation one day), Madeline was going to have coffee and cake with her friend Celeste. Celeste's twin boys were starting school next year too, so they'd be running amuck at orientation. (Their gift was shouting. Madeline had a headache after five minutes in their company.) Celeste always bought exquisite and very expensive birthday presents, so that would be nice. After that, Madeline was going to drop Chloe off with her mother-in-law, and then have lunch with some friends before they all rushed off for school pickup. The sun was shining. She was wearing her gorgeous new Dolce & Gabbana stilettos (bought online, thirty percent off). It was going to be a lovely, lovely day.

"Let the Festival of Madeline begin!" her husband, Ed, had said this morning when he brought her coffee in bed. Madeline was famous for her fondness of birthdays and celebrations of all kinds. Any excuse for champagne.

Still. Forty.

As she drove the familiar route to the school, she considered her magnificent new age. Forty. She could still feel "forty" the way it felt when she was fifteen. Such a colorless age. Marooned in the middle of your life. Nothing would matter all that much

when you were forty. You wouldn't have real feelings when you were forty, because you'd be safely cushioned by your frumpy forty-ness.

*Forty-year-old woman found dead.* Oh dear.

*Twenty-year-old woman found dead.* Tragedy! Sadness! Find that murderer!

Madeline had recently been forced to do a minor shift in her head when she heard something on the news about a woman dying in her forties. *But, wait, that could be me! That would be sad! People would be sad if I was dead! Devastated, even. So there, age-obsessed world. I might be forty, but I am cherished.*

On the other hand, it was probably perfectly natural to feel sadder over the death of a twenty-year-old than a forty-year-old. The forty-year-old had enjoyed twenty years more of life. That's why, if there was a gunman on the loose, Madeline would feel obligated to throw her middle-aged self in front of the twenty-year-old. Take a bullet for youth. It was only fair.

Well, she would, if she could be sure it was a nice young person. Not one of those insufferable ones, like the child driving the little blue Mitsubishi in front of Madeline. She wasn't even bothering to hide the fact that she was using her mobile phone while she drove, probably *texting* or updating her Facebook status.

See! This kid wouldn't have even noticed the loose gunman! She would have been staring vacantly at her phone, while Madeline sacrificed her life for her! It was infuriating.

The little car appeared to be jammed with young people. At least three in the back, their heads bobbing about, hands gesticulating. Was that somebody's foot waving about? It was a tragedy waiting to happen. They all needed to concentrate. Just last week, Madeline had been having a quick coffee after her ShockWave

class and was reading a story in the paper about how all the young people were killing themselves by sending texts while they drove. *On my way. Nearly there!* These were their last foolish (and often misspelled) words. Madeline had cried over the picture of one teenager's grief-stricken mother, absurdly holding up her daughter's mobile phone to the camera as a warning to readers.

"Silly little idiots," she said out loud as the car weaved dangerously into the next lane.

"Who is an idiot?" said her daughter from the backseat.

"The girl driving the car in front of me is an idiot because she's driving her car and using her phone at the same time," said Madeline.

"Like when you need to call Daddy when we're running late?" said Chloe.

"I only did that one time!" protested Madeline. "And I was very careful and very quick! And I'm *forty* years old!"

"Today," said Chloe knowledgeably. "You're forty years old today."

"Yes! Also, I made a quick call, I didn't send a text! You have to take your eyes off the road to text. Texting while driving is illegal and naughty, and you must promise to never ever do it when you're a teenager."

Her voice quivered at the thought of Chloe being a teenager and driving a car.

"But you're allowed to make a quick phone call?" checked Chloe.

"No! That's illegal too," said Madeline.

"So that means you broke the law," said Chloe with satisfaction. "Like a *robber*."

Chloe was currently in love with the idea of robbers. She

was definitely going to date bad boys one day. Bad boys on motorcycles.

"Stick with the nice boys, Chloe!" said Madeline after a moment. "Like Daddy. Bad boys don't bring you coffee in bed, I'll tell you that for free."

"What are you babbling on about, woman?" sighed Chloe. She'd picked this phrase up from her father and imitated his weary tone perfectly. They'd made the mistake of laughing the first time she did it, so she'd kept it up, and said it just often enough, and with perfect timing, so that they couldn't help but keep laughing.

This time Madeline managed not to laugh. Chloe currently trod a very fine line between adorable and obnoxious. Madeline probably trod the same line herself.

Madeline pulled up behind the little blue Mitsubishi at a red light. The young driver was *still* looking at her mobile phone. Madeline banged on her car horn. She saw the driver glance in her rearview mirror, while all her passengers craned around to look.

"Put down your phone!" she yelled. She mimicked texting by jabbing her finger in her palm. "It's illegal! It's dangerous!"

The girl stuck her finger up in the classic up-yours gesture.

"Right!" Madeline pulled on her emergency brake and put on her hazard lights.

"What are you doing?" said Chloe.

Madeline undid her seat belt and threw open the car door.

"But we've got to go to orientation!" said Chloe in a panic. "We'll be late! Oh, *calamity*!"

"Oh, calamity" was a line from a children's book that they used to read to Fred when he was little. The whole family said it now. Even Madeline's parents had picked it up, and some of Madeline's friends. It was a very contagious phrase.

"It's all right," said Madeline. "This will only take a second. I'm saving young lives."

She stalked up to the girl's car on her new stilettos and banged on the window.

The window slid down, and the driver metamorphosed from a shadowy silhouette into a real young girl with white skin, sparkly nose ring and badly applied, clumpy mascara. She looked up at Madeline with a mixture of aggression and fear. "What is your *problem*?" Her mobile phone was still held casually in her left hand.

"Put down that phone! You could kill yourself and your friends!" Madeline used the exact same tone she used on Chloe when she was being extremely naughty. She reached in the car, grabbed the phone and tossed it to the openmouthed girl in the passenger seat. "OK? Just stop it!"

She could hear their gales of laughter as she walked back to her SUV. She didn't care. She felt pleasantly stimulated. A car pulled up behind hers. Madeline smiled, lifted her hand apologetically and hurried back to be in her car before the lights changed.

Her ankle turned. One second it was doing what an ankle was meant to do, and the next it was flipping out at a sickeningly wrong angle. She fell heavily on one side. Oh, calamity.

That was almost certainly the moment the story began.

With the ungainly flip of an ankle.



# Eat Pray Love

## One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia

Elizabeth Gilbert

RIVERHEAD BOOKS
NEW YORK

RIVERHEAD BOOKS
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC
375 Hudson Street
New York, New York 10014



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First Viking hardcover edition: February 2006
First Penguin Books paperback edition: February 2007
First Riverhead trade paperback edition: April 2016
Riverhead trade paperback edition ISBN: 978-0-14-303841-2

Printed in the United States of America
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Book design by Elke Sigal

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# 1



I wish Giovanni would kiss me.

Oh, but there are so many reasons why this would be a terrible idea. To begin with, Giovanni is ten years younger than I am, and—like most Italian guys in their twenties—he still lives with his mother. These facts alone make him an unlikely romantic partner for me, given that I am a professional American woman in my mid-thirties, who has just come through a failed marriage and a devastating, interminable divorce, followed immediately by a passionate love affair that ended in sickening heartbreak. This loss upon loss has left me feeling sad and brittle and about seven thousand years old. Purely as a matter of principle I wouldn't inflict my sorry, busted-up old self on the lovely, unsullied Giovanni. Not to mention that I have finally arrived at that age where a woman starts to question whether the wisest way to get over the loss of one beautiful brown-eyed young man is indeed to promptly invite another one into her bed. This is why I have been alone for many months now. This is why, in fact, I have decided to spend this entire year in celibacy.

To which the savvy observer might inquire: "Then why did you come to *Italy*?"

To which I can only reply—especially when looking across the table at handsome Giovanni—"Excellent question."

Giovanni is my Tandem Exchange Partner. That sounds like an innuendo, but unfortunately it's not. All it really means is that we meet a few evenings a week here in Rome to practice each other's languages. We speak first in Italian, and he is patient with me; then we speak in English, and I am patient with him. I discovered Giovanni a few weeks after I'd arrived in Rome, thanks to that big Internet café at the Piazza Barberini,

across the street from that fountain with the sculpture of that sexy merman blowing into his conch shell. He (Giovanni, that is—not the merman) had posted a flier on the bulletin board explaining that a native Italian speaker was seeking a native English speaker for conversational language practice. Right beside his appeal was another flier with the same request, word-for-word identical in every way, right down to the typeface. The only difference was the contact information. One flier listed an e-mail address for somebody named Giovanni; the other introduced somebody named Dario. But even the home phone number was the same.

Using my keen intuitive powers, I e-mailed both men at the same time, asking in Italian, "Are you perhaps brothers?"

It was Giovanni who wrote back this very *provocativo* message: "Even better. Twins!"

Yes—much better. Tall, dark and handsome identical twenty-five-year-old twins, as it turned out, with those giant brown liquid-center Italian eyes that just unstitch me. After meeting the boys in person, I began to wonder if perhaps I should adjust my rule somewhat about remaining celibate this year. For instance, perhaps I could remain totally celibate *except* for keeping a pair of handsome twenty-five-year-old Italian twin brothers as lovers. Which was slightly reminiscent of a friend of mine who is vegetarian except for bacon, but nonetheless . . . I was already composing my letter to *Penthouse*:

*In the flickering, candlelit shadows of the Roman café, it was impossible to tell whose hands were caress—*

But, no.

No and no.

I chopped the fantasy off in mid-word. This was not my moment to be seeking romance and (as day follows night) to further complicate my already knotty life. This was my moment to look for the kind of healing and peace that can only come from solitude.

Anyway, by now, by the middle of November, the shy, studious Giovanni and I have become dear buddies. As for Dario—the more razzle-dazzle swinger brother of the two—I have introduced him to my adorable little Swedish friend Sofie, and how they've been sharing *their*

evenings in Rome is another kind of Tandem Exchange altogether. But Giovanni and I, we only talk. Well, we eat and we talk. We have been eating and talking for many pleasant weeks now, sharing pizzas and gentle grammatical corrections, and tonight has been no exception. A lovely evening of new idioms and fresh mozzarella.

Now it is midnight and foggy, and Giovanni is walking me home to my apartment through these back streets of Rome, which meander organically around the ancient buildings like bayou streams snaking around shadowy clumps of cypress groves. Now we are at my door. We face each other. He gives me a warm hug. This is an improvement; for the first few weeks, he would only shake my hand. I think if I were to stay in Italy for another three years, he might actually get up the juice to kiss me. On the other hand, he might just kiss me right now, tonight, right here by my door . . . there's still a chance . . . I mean we're pressed up against each other's bodies beneath this moonlight . . . and of course it would be a *terrible* mistake . . . but it's still such a wonderful possibility that he might actually do it right now . . . that he might just bend down . . . and . . . and . . .

Nope.

He separates himself from the embrace.

"Good night, my dear Liz," he says.

*"Buona notte, caro mio,"* I reply.

I walk up the stairs to my fourth-floor apartment, all alone. I let myself into my tiny little studio, all alone. I shut the door behind me. Another solitary bedtime in Rome. Another long night's sleep ahead of me, with nobody and nothing in my bed except a pile of Italian phrasebooks and dictionaries.

I am alone, I am all alone, I am completely alone.

Grasping this reality, I let go of my bag, drop to my knees and press my forehead against the floor. There, I offer up to the universe a fervent prayer of thanks.

First in English.

Then in Italian.

And then—just to get the point across—in Sanskrit.

# 2



And since I am already down there in supplication on the floor, let me hold that position as I reach back in time three years earlier to the moment when this entire story began—a moment which also found me in this exact same posture: on my knees, on a floor, praying.

Everything else about the three-years-ago scene was different, though. That time, I was not in Rome but in the upstairs bathroom of the big house in the suburbs of New York that I'd recently purchased with my husband. It was a cold November, around three o'clock in the morning. My husband was sleeping in our bed. I was hiding in the bathroom for something like the forty-seventh consecutive night, and—just as during all those nights before—I was sobbing. Sobbing so hard, in fact, that a great lake of tears and snot was spreading before me on the bathroom tiles, a veritable Lake Inferior (if you will) of all my shame and fear and confusion and grief.

*I don't want to be married anymore.*

I was trying so hard not to know this, but the truth kept insisting itself to me.

*I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to live in this big house. I don't want to have a baby.*

But I was supposed to want to have a baby. I was thirty-one years old. My husband and I—who had been together for eight years, married for six—had built our entire life around the common expectation that, after passing the doddering old age of thirty, I would want to settle down and have children. By then, we mutually anticipated, I would have grown weary of traveling and would be happy to live in a big, busy household full of children and homemade quilts, with a garden in the backyard and a cozy stew bubbling on the stovetop. (The fact that this was a fairly accurate portrait of my own mother is a quick indicator of

how difficult it once was for me to tell the difference between myself and the powerful woman who had raised me.) But I didn't—as I was appalled to be finding out—want any of these things. Instead, as my twenties had come to a close, that deadline of THIRTY had loomed over me like a death sentence, and I discovered that I did not want to be pregnant. I kept waiting to want to have a baby, but it didn't happen. And I know what it feels like to want something, believe me. I well know what desire feels like. But it wasn't there. Moreover, I couldn't stop thinking about what my sister had said to me once, as she was breast-feeding her firstborn: "Having a baby is like getting a tattoo on your face. You really need to be certain it's what you want before you commit."

How could I turn back now, though? Everything was in place. This was supposed to be the year. In fact, we'd been trying to get pregnant for a few months already. But nothing had happened (aside from the fact that—in an almost sarcastic mockery of pregnancy—I was experiencing psychosomatic morning sickness, nervously throwing up my breakfast every day). And every month when I got my period I would find myself whispering furtively in the bathroom: *Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you for giving me one more month to live . . .*

I'd been attempting to convince myself that this was normal. All women must feel this way when they're trying to get pregnant, I'd decided. ("Ambivalent" was the word I used, avoiding the much more accurate description: "utterly consumed with dread.") I was trying to convince myself that my feelings were customary, despite all evidence to the contrary—such as the acquaintance I'd run into last week who'd just discovered that she was pregnant for the first time, after spending two years and a king's ransom in fertility treatments. She was ecstatic. She had wanted to be a mother forever, she told me. She admitted she'd been secretly buying baby clothes for years and hiding them under the bed, where her husband wouldn't find them. I saw the joy in her face and I recognized it. This was the exact joy my own face had radiated last spring, the day I discovered that the magazine I worked for was going to send me on assignment to New Zealand, to write an article about the

search for giant squid. And I thought, "Until I can feel as ecstatic about having a baby as I felt about going to New Zealand to search for a giant squid, I cannot have a baby."

*I don't want to be married anymore.*

In daylight hours, I refused that thought, but at night it would consume me. What a catastrophe. How could I be such a criminal jerk as to proceed this deep into a marriage, only to leave it? We'd only just bought this house a year ago. Hadn't I wanted this nice house? Hadn't I loved it? So why was I haunting its halls every night now, howling like Medea? Wasn't I proud of all we'd accumulated—the prestigious home in the Hudson Valley, the apartment in Manhattan, the eight phone lines, the friends and the picnics and the parties, the weekends spent roaming the aisles of some box-shaped superstore of our choice, buying ever more appliances on credit? I had actively participated in every moment of the creation of this life—so why did I feel like none of it resembled me? Why did I feel so overwhelmed with duty, tired of being the primary breadwinner and the housekeeper and the social coordinator and the dog-walker and the wife and the soon-to-be mother, and—somewhere in my stolen moments—a writer . . . ?

*I don't want to be married anymore.*

My husband was sleeping in the other room, in our bed. I equal parts loved him and could not stand him. I couldn't wake him to share in my distress—what would be the point? He'd already been watching me fall apart for months now, watching me behave like a madwoman (we both agreed on that word), and I only exhausted him. We both knew there was *something wrong with me*, and he'd been losing patience with it. We'd been fighting and crying, and we were weary in that way that only a couple whose marriage is collapsing can be weary. We had the eyes of refugees.

The many reasons I didn't want to be this man's wife anymore are too personal and too sad to share here. Much of it had to do with my problems, but a good portion of our troubles were related to his issues, as well. That's only natural; there are always two figures in a marriage, after all—two votes, two opinions, two conflicting sets of decisions, desires and limitations. But I don't think it's appropriate for me to discuss

his issues in my book. Nor would I ask anyone to believe that I am capable of reporting an unbiased version of our story, and therefore the chronicle of our marriage's failure will remain untold here. I also will not discuss here all the reasons why I *did* still want to be his wife, or all his wonderfulness, or why I loved him and why I had married him and why I was unable to imagine life without him. I won't open any of that. Let it be sufficient to say that, on this night, he was still my lighthouse and my albatross in equal measure. The only thing more unthinkable than leaving was staying; the only thing more impossible than staying was leaving. I didn't want to destroy anything or anybody. I just wanted to slip quietly out the back door, without causing any fuss or consequences, and then not stop running until I reached Greenland.

This part of my story is not a happy one, I know. But I share it here because something was about to occur on that bathroom floor that would change forever the progression of my life—almost like one of those crazy astronomical super-events when a planet flips over in outer space for no reason whatsoever, and its molten core shifts, relocating its poles and altering its shape radically, such that the whole mass of the planet suddenly becomes oblong instead of spherical. Something like that.

What happened was that I started to pray.

You know—like, to *God*.

## 3



Now, this was a first for me. And since this is the first time I have introduced that loaded word—*GOD*—into my book, and since this is a word which will appear many times again throughout these pages, it seems only fair that I pause here for a moment to explain exactly what I mean when I say that word, just so people can decide right away how offended they need to get.

Saving for later the argument about whether God exists at all (no—here's a better idea: let's skip that argument completely), let me first explain why I use the word *God*, when I could just as easily use the words *Jehovah*, *Allah*, *Shiva*, *Brahma*, *Vishnu* or *Zeus*. Alternatively, I could call God "That," which is how the ancient Sanskrit scriptures say it, and which I think comes close to the all-inclusive and unspeakable entity I have sometimes experienced. But that "That" feels impersonal to me—a thing, not a being—and I myself cannot pray to a That. I need a proper name, in order to fully sense a personal attendance. For this same reason, when I pray, I do not address my prayers to The Universe, The Great Void, The Force, The Supreme Self, The Whole, The Creator, The Light, The Higher Power or even the most poetic manifestation of God's name, taken, I believe, from the Gnostic gospels: "The Shadow of the Turning."

I have nothing against any of these terms. I feel they are all equal because they are all equally adequate and inadequate descriptions of the indescribable. But we each do need a functional name for this indescribability, and "God" is the name that feels the most warm to me, so that's what I use. I should also confess that I generally refer to God as "Him," which doesn't bother me because, to my mind, it's just a convenient personalizing pronoun, not a precise anatomical description or a cause for revolution. Of course, I don't mind if people call God "Her," and I understand the urge to do so. Again—to me, these are both equal terms, equally adequate and inadequate. Though I do think the capitalization of either pronoun is a nice touch, a small politeness in the presence of the divine.

Culturally, though not theologically, I'm a Christian. I was born a Protestant of the white Anglo-Saxon persuasion. And while I do love that great teacher of peace who was called Jesus, and while I do reserve the right to ask myself in certain trying situations what indeed He would do, I can't swallow that one fixed rule of Christianity insisting that Christ is the *only* path to God. Strictly speaking, then, I cannot call myself a Christian. Most of the Christians I know accept my feelings on this with grace and open-mindedness. Then again, most of the Chris-

tians *I* know don't speak very strictly. To those who do speak (and think) strictly, all I can do here is offer my regrets for any hurt feelings and now excuse myself from their business.

Traditionally, I have responded to the transcendent mystics of all religions. I have always responded with breathless excitement to anyone who has ever said that God does not live in a dogmatic scripture or in a distant throne in the sky, but instead abides very close to us indeed—much closer than we can imagine, breathing right through our own hearts. I respond with gratitude to anyone who has ever voyaged to the center of that heart, and who has then returned to the world with a report for the rest of us that God is *an experience of supreme love*. In every religious tradition on earth, there have always been mystical saints and transcendents who report exactly this experience. Unfortunately many of them have ended up arrested and killed. Still, I think very highly of them.

In the end, what I have come to believe about God is simple. It's like this—I used to have this really great dog. She came from the pound. She was a mixture of about ten different breeds, but seemed to have inherited the finest features of them all. She was brown. When people asked me, "What kind of dog is that?" I would always give the same answer: "She's a brown dog." Similarly, when the question is raised, "What kind of God do you believe in?" my answer is easy: "I believe in a magnificent God."

GILLIAN FLYNN

# GONE GIRL

A NOVEL

B\D\W\Y
BROADWAY BOOKS
NEW YORK

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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Published in the United States by Broadway Books, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, a Penguin Random House Company, New York.
www.crownpublishing.com

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Originally published in hardcover in the United States in slightly different form by Crown Publishers, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, New York, in 2012.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available upon request.

ISBN 978-0-307-58837-1
eBook ISBN 978-0-307-58838-8

Printed in the United States of America

TEXT DESIGN BY ELINA D. NUDELMAN
COVER DESIGN BY DARREN HAGGAR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BERND OTT/GALLERY STOCK

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Paperback Edition

# NICK DUNNE

THE DAY OF

When I think of my wife, I always think of her head. The shape of it, to begin with. The very first time I saw her, it was the back of the head I saw, and there was something lovely about it, the angles of it. Like a shiny, hard corn kernel or a riverbed fossil. She had what the Victorians would call *a finely shaped head*. You could imagine the skull quite easily.

I'd know her head anywhere.

And what's inside it. I think of that too: her mind. Her brain, all those coils, and her thoughts shuttling through those coils like fast, frantic centipedes. Like a child, I picture opening her skull, unspooling her brain and sifting through it, trying to catch and pin down her thoughts. *What are you thinking, Amy?* The question I've asked most often during our marriage, if not out loud, if not to the person who could answer. I suppose these questions stormcloud over every marriage: *What are you thinking? How are you feeling? Who are you? What have we done to each other? What will we do?*

My eyes flipped open at exactly six A.M. This was no avian fluttering of the lashes, no gentle blink toward consciousness. The awakening was mechanical. A spooky ventriloquist-dummy click of the lids: The world is black and then, *showtime!* 6-0-0 the clock said—in my face, first thing I saw. 6-0-0. It felt different. I rarely woke at such a rounded time. I was a man of jagged risings: 8:43, 11:51, 9:26. My life was alarmless.

At that exact moment, 6-0-0, the sun climbed over the skyline of oaks, revealing its full summer angry-god self. Its reflection flared across the river toward our house, a long, blaring finger aimed at me through our frail bedroom curtains. Accusing: *You have been seen. You will be seen.*

I wallowed in bed, which was our New York bed in our new house, which we still called *the new house,* even though we'd been back here for two years. It's a rented house right along the Mississippi River, a house that screams Suburban Nouveau Riche, the kind of place I aspired to as a kid from my split-level, shag-carpet side of town. The kind of house that is immediately familiar: a generically grand, unchallenging, new, new, new house that my wife would—and did—detest.

"Should I remove my soul before I come inside?" Her first line upon arrival. It had been a compromise: Amy demanded we rent, not buy, in my little Missouri hometown, in her firm hope that we wouldn't be stuck here long. But the only houses for rent were clustered in this failed development: a miniature ghost town of bank-owned, recession-busted, price-reduced mansions, a neighborhood that closed before it ever opened. It was a compromise, but Amy didn't see it that way, not in the least. To Amy, it was a punishing whim on my part, a nasty, selfish twist of the knife. I would drag her, caveman-style, to a town she had aggressively avoided, and make her live in the kind of house she used to mock. I suppose it's not a compromise if only one of you considers it such, but that was what our compromises tended to look like. One of us was always angry. Amy, usually.

Do not blame me for this particular grievance, Amy. The Missouri Grievance. Blame the economy, blame bad luck, blame my parents, blame your parents, blame the Internet, blame people who use the Internet. I used to be a writer. I was a writer who wrote about TV and movies and books. Back when people read things on paper, back when anyone cared about what I thought. I'd arrived in New York in the late '90s, the last gasp of the glory days, although no one knew it then. New York was packed with writers, real writers, because there were magazines, real magazines, loads of them. This was back when the Internet was still some exotic pet kept in the corner of the publishing world—throw some kibble at it, watch it dance on its little leash, oh quite cute, it definitely won't kill us in the night. Think about it: a time when newly graduated college kids could come to New York and

*get paid to write.* We had no clue that we were embarking on careers that would vanish within a decade.

I had a job for eleven years and then I didn't, it was that fast. All around the country, magazines began shuttering, succumbing to a sudden infection brought on by the busted economy. Writers (my kind of writers: aspiring novelists, ruminative thinkers, people whose brains don't work quick enough to blog or link or tweet, basically old, stubborn blowhards) were through. We were like women's hat makers or buggy-whip manufacturers: Our time was done. Three weeks after I got cut loose, Amy lost her job, such as it was. (Now I can feel Amy looking over my shoulder, smirking at the time I've spent discussing my career, my misfortune, and dismissing her experience in one sentence. That, she would tell you, is typical. *Just like Nick,* she would say. It was a refrain of hers: *Just like Nick to . . .* and whatever followed, whatever was *just like me,* was bad.) Two jobless grown-ups, we spent weeks wandering around our Brooklyn brownstone in socks and pajamas, ignoring the future, strewing unopened mail across tables and sofas, eating ice cream at ten A.M. and taking thick afternoon naps.

Then one day the phone rang. My twin sister was on the other end. Margo had moved back home after her own New York layoff a year before—the girl is one step ahead of me in everything, even shitty luck. Margo, calling from good ole North Carthage, Missouri, from the house where we grew up, and as I listened to her voice, I saw her at age ten, with a dark cap of hair and overall shorts, sitting on our grandparents' back dock, her body slouched over like an old pillow, her skinny legs dangling in the water, watching the river flow over fish-white feet, so intently, utterly self-possessed even as a child.

Go's voice was warm and crinkly even as she gave this cold news: Our indomitable mother was dying. Our dad was nearly gone—his (nasty) mind, his (miserable) heart, both murky as he meandered toward the great gray beyond. But it looked like our mother would beat him there. About six months, maybe a year, she had. I could tell that Go had gone to meet with the doctor by herself, taken her studious notes in her slovenly handwriting, and she was teary as she tried to decipher what she'd written. Dates and doses.

"Well, fuck, I have no idea what this says, is it a nine? Does that even make sense?" she said, and I interrupted. Here was a task, a purpose, held out on my sister's palm like a plum. I almost cried with relief.

"I'll come back, Go. We'll move back home. You shouldn't have to do this all by yourself."

She didn't believe me. I could hear her breathing on the other end.

"I'm serious, Go. Why not? There's nothing here."

A long exhale. "What about Amy?"

That is what I didn't take long enough to consider. I simply assumed I would bundle up my New York wife with her New York interests, her New York pride, and remove her from her New York parents—leave the frantic, thrilling futureland of Manhattan behind—and transplant her to a little town on the river in Missouri, and all would be fine.

I did not yet understand how foolish, how optimistic, how, yes, *just like Nick* I was for thinking this. The misery it would lead to.

"Amy will be fine. Amy…" Here was where I should have said, "Amy *loves* Mom." But I couldn't tell Go that Amy loved our mother, because after all that time, Amy still barely knew our mother. Their few meetings had left them both baffled. Amy would dissect the conversations for days after—"And what did she mean by…"—as if my mother were some ancient peasant tribeswoman arriving from the tundra with an armful of raw yak meat and some buttons for bartering, trying to get something from Amy that wasn't on offer.

Amy didn't care to know my family, didn't want to know my birthplace, and yet for some reason, I thought moving home would be a good idea.

My morning breath warmed the pillow, and I changed the subject in my mind. Today was not a day for second-guessing or regret, it was a day for doing. Downstairs, I could hear the return of a long-lost sound: Amy making breakfast. Banging wooden cupboards (rump-thump!), rattling containers of tin and glass (ding-ring!), shuffling and sorting a collection of metal pots and iron pans (ruzz-shuzz!). A culinary orchestra tuning up, clattering vigorously toward the finale, a cake pan drumrolling along the floor, hitting the wall with a cymballic crash. Something impressive was being created, probably a crepe, because crepes are special, and today Amy would want to cook something special.

It was our five-year anniversary.

I walked barefoot to the edge of the steps and stood listening, working my toes into the plush wall-to-wall carpet Amy detested on

principle, as I tried to decide whether I was ready to join my wife. Amy was in the kitchen, oblivious to my hesitation. She was humming something melancholy and familiar. I strained to make it out—a folk song? a lullabye?—and then realized it was the theme to *M*A*S*H*. Suicide is painless. I went downstairs.

I hovered in the doorway, watching my wife. Her yellow-butter hair was pulled up, the hank of ponytail swinging cheerful as a jump-rope, and she was sucking distractedly on a burnt fingertip, humming around it. She hummed to herself because she was an unrivaled botcher of lyrics. When we were first dating, a Genesis song came on the radio: "She seems to have an invisible touch, yeah." And Amy crooned instead, "She takes my hat and puts it on the top shelf." When I asked her why she'd ever think her lyrics were remotely, possibly, vaguely right, she told me she always thought the woman in the song truly loved the man because she put his hat on the *top* shelf. I knew I liked her then, really liked her, this girl with an explanation for everything.

There's something disturbing about recalling a warm memory and feeling utterly cold.

Amy peered at the crepe sizzling in the pan and licked something off her wrist. She looked triumphant, wifely. If I took her in my arms, she would smell like berries and powdered sugar.

When she spied me lurking there in grubby boxers, my hair in full Heat Miser spike, she leaned against the kitchen counter and said, "Well, hello, handsome."

Bile and dread inched up my throat. I thought to myself: *Okay, go.*

I was very late getting to work. My sister and I had done a foolish thing when we both moved back home. We had done what we always talked about doing. We opened a bar. We borrowed money from Amy to do this, eighty thousand dollars, which was once nothing to Amy but by then was almost everything. I swore I would pay her back, with interest. I would not be a man who borrowed from his wife—I could feel my dad twisting his lips at the very idea. *Well, there are all kinds of men,* his most damning phrase, the second half left unsaid, *and you are the wrong kind.*

But truly, it was a practical decision, a smart business move. Amy and I both needed new careers; this would be mine. She would pick one someday, or not, but in the meantime, here was an income, made

possible by the last of Amy's trust fund. Like the McMansion I rented, the bar featured symbolically in my childhood memories—a place where only grown-ups go, and do whatever grown-ups do. Maybe that's why I was so insistent on buying it after being stripped of my livelihood. It's a reminder that I am, after all, an adult, a grown man, a useful human being, even though I lost the career that made me all these things. I won't make that mistake again: The once plentiful herds of magazine writers would continue to be culled—by the Internet, by the recession, by the American public, who would rather watch TV or play video games or electronically inform friends that, like, *rain sucks!* But there's no app for a bourbon buzz on a warm day in a cool, dark bar. The world will always want a drink.

Our bar is a corner bar with a haphazard, patchwork aesthetic. Its best feature is a massive Victorian backbar, dragon heads and angel faces emerging from the oak—an extravagant work of wood in these shitty plastic days. The remainder of the bar is, in fact, shitty, a showcase of the shabbiest design offerings of every decade: an Eisenhower-era linoleum floor, the edges turned up like burnt toast; dubious wood-paneled walls straight from a '70s home-porn video; halogen floor lamps, an accidental tribute to my 1990s dorm room. The ultimate effect is strangely homey—it looks less like a bar than someone's benignly neglected fixer-upper. And jovial: We share a parking lot with the local bowling alley, and when our door swings wide, the clatter of strikes applauds the customer's entrance.

We named the bar The Bar. "People will think we're ironic instead of creatively bankrupt," my sister reasoned.

Yes, we thought we were being clever New Yorkers—that the name was a joke no one else would really get, not get like we did. Not *meta*-get. We pictured the locals scrunching their noses: Why'd you name it *The Bar*? But our first customer, a gray-haired woman in bifocals and a pink jogging suit, said, "I like the name. Like in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and Audrey Hepburn's cat was named Cat."

We felt much less superior after that, which was a good thing.

I pulled into the parking lot. I waited until a strike erupted from the bowling alley—*thank you, thank you, friends*—then stepped out of the car. I admired the surroundings, still not bored with the broken-in view: the squatty blond-brick post office across the street (now closed on Saturdays), the unassuming beige office building just down the way (now closed, period). The town wasn't prosperous, not

anymore, not by a long shot. Hell, it wasn't even original, being one of two Carthage, Missouris—ours is technically *North* Carthage, which makes it sound like a twin city, although it's hundreds of miles from the other and the lesser of the two: a quaint little 1950s town that bloated itself into a basic midsize suburb and dubbed it progress. Still, it was where my mom grew up and where she raised me and Go, so it had some history. Mine, at least.

As I walked toward the bar across the concrete-and-weed parking lot, I looked straight down the road and saw the river. That's what I've always loved about our town: We aren't built on some safe bluff overlooking the Mississippi—we are *on* the Mississippi. I could walk down the road and step right into the sucker, an easy three-foot drop, and be on my way to Tennessee. Every building downtown bears hand-drawn lines from where the river hit during the Flood of '61,'75, '84, '93, '07, '08, '11. And so on.

The river wasn't swollen now, but it was running urgently, in strong ropy currents. Moving apace with the river was a long single-file line of men, eyes aimed at their feet, shoulders tense, walking steadfastly nowhere. As I watched them, one suddenly looked up at me, his face in shadow, an oval blackness. I turned away.

I felt an immediate, intense need to get inside. By the time I'd gone twenty feet, my neck bubbled with sweat. The sun was still an angry eye in the sky. *You have been seen.*

My gut twisted, and I moved quicker. I needed a drink.

# The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

By Rebecca Skloot

**PROLOGUE**

The Woman in the Photograph

There's a photo on my wall of a woman I've never met, its left corner torn and patched together with tape. She looks straight into the camera and smiles, hands on hips, dress suit neatly pressed, lips painted deep red. It's the late 1940s and she hasn't yet reached the age of thirty. Her light brown skin is smooth, her eyes still young and playful, oblivious to the tumor growing inside her—a tumor that would leave her five children motherless and change the future of medicine. Beneath the photo, a caption says her name is "Henrietta Lacks, Helen Lane or Helen Larson."

No one knows who took that picture, but it's appeared hundreds of times in magazines and science textbooks, on blogs and laboratory walls. She's usually identified as Helen Lane, but often she has no name at all. She's simply called HeLa, the code name given to the world's first immortal human cells—*her* cells, cut from her cervix just months before she died.

Her real name is Henrietta Lacks.

I've spent years staring at that photo, wondering what kind of life she led, what happened to her children, and what she'd think about cells from her cervix living on forever—bought, sold, packaged, and shipped by the trillions to laboratories around the world. I've tried to imagine how she'd feel knowing that her cells went up in the first space missions to see what would happen to human cells in zero gravity, or that they helped with some of the most important advances in medicine: the polio vaccine, chemotherapy, cloning, gene mapping, in vitro fertilization. I'm pretty sure that she—like most of us—would be shocked to hear that there are trillions more of her cells growing in laboratories now than there ever were in her body.

There's no way of knowing exactly how many of Henrietta's cells are alive today. One scientist estimates that if you could pile all HeLa cells ever grown onto a scale, they'd weigh more than 50 million metric tons—an inconceivable number, given that an individual cell weighs almost nothing. Another scientist calculated that if you could lay all HeLa cells ever grown end-to-end, they'd wrap around the Earth at least three times, spanning more than 350 million feet. In her prime, Henrietta herself stood only a bit over five feet tall.

I first learned about HeLa cells and the woman behind them in 1988, thirty-seven years after her death, when I was sixteen and sitting in a community college biology class. My instructor, Donald Defler, a gnomish balding man, paced at the front of the lecture hall and flipped on an overhead projector. He pointed to two diagrams that appeared on the wall behind him. They were schematics of the cell reproduction cycle, but to me they just looked like a neon-colored mess of arrows, squares, and circles with words I didn't understand, like "MPF Triggering a Chain Reaction of Protein Activations."

I was a kid who'd failed freshman year at the regular public high school because she never showed up. I'd transferred to an alternative school that offered dream studies instead of biology, so I was taking Defler's class for high-school credit, which meant that I was sitting in a college lecture hall at sixteen with words like *mitosis* and*kinase inhibitors* flying around.

I was completely lost.

"Do we have to memorize everything on those diagrams?" one student yelled.

Yes, Defler said, we had to memorize the diagrams, and yes, they'd be on the test, but that didn't matter right then. What he wanted us to understand was that cells are amazing things: There are about one hundred trillion of them in our bodies, each so small that several thousand could fit on the period at the end of this sentence. They make up all our tissues—muscle, bone, blood—which in turn make up our organs.

Under the microscope, a cell looks a lot like a fried egg: It has a white (the*cytoplasm*) that's full of water and proteins to keep it fed, and a yolk (the *nucleus*) that holds all the genetic information that makes you *you.* The cytoplasm buzzes like a New York City street. It's crammed full of molecules and vessels endlessly shuttling enzymes and sugars from one part of the cell to another, pumping water, nutrients, and oxygen in and out of the cell. All the while, little cytoplasmic factories work 24/7, cranking out sugars, fats, proteins, and energy to keep the whole thing running and feed the nucleus. The nucleus is the brains of the operation; inside every nucleus within each cell in your body, there's an identical copy of your entire genome. That genome tells cells when to grow and divide and makes sure they do their jobs, whether that's controlling your heartbeat or helping your brain understand the words on this page.

Defler paced the front of the classroom telling us how mitosis—the process of cell division—makes it possible for embryos to grow into babies, and for our bodies to create new cells for healing wounds or replenishing blood we've lost. It was beautiful, he said, like a perfectly choreographed dance.

All it takes is one small mistake anywhere in the division process for cells to start growing out of control, he told us. Just *one* enzyme misfiring, just *one* wrong protein activation, and you could have cancer. Mitosis goes haywire, which is how it spreads.

"We learned that by studying cancer cells in culture," Defler said. He grinned and spun to face the board, where he wrote two words in enormous print: HENRIETTA LACKS.

Henrietta died in 1951 from a vicious case of cervical cancer, he told us. But before she died, a surgeon took samples of her tumor and put them in a petri dish. Scientists had been trying to keep human cells alive in culture for decades, but they all eventually died. Henrietta's were different: they reproduced an entire generation every twenty-four hours, and they never stopped. They became the first immortal human cells ever grown in a laboratory.

"Henrietta's cells have now been living outside her body far longer than they ever lived inside it," Defler said. If we went to almost any cell culture lab in the world and opened its freezers, he told us, we'd probably find millions—if not billions—of Henrietta's cells in small vials on ice.

Her cells were part of research into the genes that cause cancer and those that suppress it; they helped develop drugs for treating herpes, leukemia, influenza, hemophilia, and Parkinson's disease; and they've been used to study lactose digestion, sexually transmitted diseases, appendicitis, human longevity, mosquito mating, and the negative cellular effects of working in sewers. Their chromosomes and proteins have been studied with such detail and precision that scientists know their every quirk. Like guinea pigs and mice, Henrietta's cells have become the standard laboratory workhorse.

"HeLa cells were one of the most important things that happened to medicine in the last hundred years," Defler said.

Then, matter-of-factly, almost as an afterthought, he said, "She was a black woman." He erased her name in one fast swipe and blew the chalk from his hands. Class was over.

As the other students filed out of the room, I sat thinking, *That's it? That's all we get? There has to be more to the story.*

I followed Defler to his office.

"Where was she from?" I asked. "Did she know how important her cells were? Did she have any children?"

"I wish I could tell you," he said, "but no one knows anything about her."

After class, I ran home and threw myself onto my bed with my biology textbook. I looked up "cell culture" in the index, and there she was, a small parenthetical:
In culture, cancer cells can go on dividing indefinitely, if they have a continual supply of nutrients, and thus are said to be "immortal." A striking example is a cell line that has been reproducing in culture since 1951. (Cells of this line are called HeLa cells because their original source was a tumor removed from a woman named Henrietta Lacks.)

That was it. I looked up HeLa in my parents' encyclopedia, then my dictionary: No Henrietta.

As I graduated from high school and worked my way through college toward a biology degree, HeLa cells were omnipresent. I heard about them in histology, neurology, pathology; I used them in experiments on how neighboring cells communicate. But after Mr. Defler, no one mentioned Henrietta.

When I got my first computer in the mid-nineties and started using the Internet, I searched for information about her, but found only confused snippets: most sites said her name was Helen Lane; some said she died in the thirties; others said the forties, fifties, or even sixties. Some said ovarian cancer killed her, others said breast or cervical cancer.

Eventually I tracked down a few magazine articles about her from the seventies.*Ebony* quoted Henrietta's husband saying, "All I remember is that she had this disease, and right after she died they called me in the office wanting to get my permission to take a sample of some kind. I decided not to let them." *Jet* said the family was angry—angry that Henrietta's cells were being sold for twenty-five dollars a vial, and angry that articles had been published about the cells without their knowledge. It said, "Pounding in the back of their heads was a gnawing feeling that science and the press had taken advantage of them."

The articles all ran photos of Henrietta's family: her oldest son sitting at his dining room table in Baltimore, looking at a genetics textbook. Her middle son in military uniform, smiling and holding a baby. But one picture stood out more than any other: in it, Henrietta's daughter, Deborah Lacks, is surrounded by family, everyone smiling, arms around each other, eyes bright and excited. Except Deborah. She stands in the foreground looking alone, almost as if someone pasted her into the photo after the fact. She's twenty-six years old and beautiful, with short brown hair and catlike eyes. But those eyes glare at the camera,

hard and serious. The caption said the family had found out just a few months earlier that Henrietta's cells were still alive, yet at that point she'd been dead for twenty-five years.

All of the stories mentioned that scientists had begun doing research on Henrietta's children, but the Lackses didn't seem to know what that research was for. They said they were being tested to see if they had the cancer that killed Henrietta, but according to the reporters, scientists were studying the Lacks family to learn more about Henrietta's cells. The stories quoted her son Lawrence, who wanted to know if the immortality of his mother's cells meant that he might live forever too. But one member of the family remained voiceless: Henrietta's daughter, Deborah.

As I worked my way through graduate school studying writing, I became fixated on the idea of someday telling Henrietta's story. At one point I even called directory assistance in Baltimore looking for Henrietta's husband, David Lacks, but he wasn't listed. I had the idea that I'd write a book that was a biography of both the cells and the woman they came from—someone's daughter, wife, and mother.

I couldn't have imagined it then, but that phone call would mark the beginning of a decadelong adventure through scientific laboratories, hospitals, and mental institutions, with a cast of characters that would include Nobel laureates, grocery store clerks, convicted felons, and a professional con artist. While trying to make sense of the history of cell culture and the complicated ethical debate surrounding the use of human tissues in research, I'd be accused of conspiracy and slammed into a wall both physically and metaphorically, and I'd eventually find myself on the receiving end of something that looked a lot like an exorcism. I did eventually meet Deborah, who would turn out to be one of the strongest and most resilient women I'd ever known. We'd form a deep personal bond, and slowly, without realizing it, I'd become a character in her story, and she in mine.

Deborah and I came from very different cultures: I grew up white and agnostic in the Pacific Northwest, my roots half New York Jew and half Midwestern Protestant; Deborah was a deeply religious black Christian from the South. I tended to leave the room when religion came up in conversation because it made me uncomfortable; Deborah's family tended toward preaching, faith healings, and sometimes voodoo. She grew up in a black neighborhood that was one of the poorest and most dangerous in the country; I grew up in a safe, quiet middle-class neighborhood in a predominantly white city and went to high school with a total of two black students. I was a science journalist who referred to all things supernatural as "woo-woo stuff"; Deborah believed Henrietta's spirit lived on in her cells, controlling the life of anyone who crossed its paths. Including me.

"How else do you explain why your science teacher knew her real name when everyone else called her Helen Lane?" Deborah would say. "She was trying to get your attention." This thinking would apply to everything in my life: when I married while writing this book, it was because Henrietta wanted someone to take care of me while I worked. When I divorced, it was because she'd decided he was getting in the way of the book. When an editor who insisted I take the Lacks family out of the book was injured in a mysterious accident, Deborah said that's what happens when you piss Henrietta off.

The Lackses challenged everything I thought I knew about faith, science, journalism, and race. Ultimately, this book is the result. It's not only the story of HeLa cells and Henrietta Lacks, but of Henrietta's family—particularly Deborah—and their lifelong struggle to make peace with the existence of those cells, and the science that made them possible.

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# The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

By Stieg Larsson

**A Friday in November**

It happened every year, was almost a ritual. And this was his eighty-second birthday. When, as usual, the flower was delivered, he took off the wrapping paper and then picked up the telephone to call Detective Superintendent Morell who, when he retired, had moved to Lake Siljan in Dalarna. They were not only the same age, they had been born on the same day–which was something of an irony under the circumstances. The old policeman was sitting with his coffee, waiting, expecting the call.

"It arrived."

"What is it this year?"

"I don't know what kind it is. I'll have to get someone to tell me what it is. It's white."

"No letter, I suppose."

"Just the flower. The frame is the same kind as last year. One of those do-it-yourself ones."

"Postmark?"

"Stockholm."

"Handwriting?"

"Same as always, all in capitals. Upright, neat lettering."

With that, the subject was exhausted, and not another word was exchanged for almost a minute. The retired policeman leaned back in his kitchen chair and drew on his pipe. He knew he was no longer expected to come up with a pithy comment or any sharp question which would shed a new light on the case. Those days had long since passed, and the exchange between the two men seemed like a ritual attaching to a mystery which no-one else in the whole world had the least interest in unravelling.

The Latin name was *Leptospermum (Myrtaceae) rubinette*. It was a plant about ten centimetres high with small, heather-like foliage and a white flower with five petals about two centimetres across.

The plant was native to the Australian bush and uplands, where it was to be found among tussocks of grass. There it was called Desert Snow. Someone at the botanical gardens in Uppsala would later confirm that it was a plant seldom cultivated in Sweden. The botanist wrote in her report that it was related to the tea tree and that it was sometimes confused with its more common cousin*Leptospermum scoparium,* which grew in abundance in New Zealand. What distinguished them, she pointed out, was that *rubinette* had a small number of microscopic pink dots at the tips of the petals, giving the flower a faint pinkish tinge.

*Rubinette* was altogether an unpretentious flower. It had no known medicinal properties, and it could not induce hallucinatory experiences. It was neither edible, nor had a use in the manufacture of plant dyes. On the other hand, the aboriginal people of Australia regarded as sacred the region and the flora around Ayers Rock.

The botanist said that she herself had never seen one before, but after consulting her colleagues she was to report that attempts had been made to introduce the plant at a nursery in Göteborg, and that it might, of course, be cultivated by amateur botanists. It was difficult to grow in Sweden because it thrived in a dry climate and had to remain indoors half of the year. It would not thrive in calcareous soil and it had to be watered from below. It needed pampering.

The fact of its being so rare a flower ought to have made it easier to trace the source of this particular specimen, but in practice it was an impossible task. There was no registry to look it up in, no licences to explore. Anywhere from a handful to a few hundred enthusiasts could have had access to seeds or plants. And those could have changed hands between friends or been bought by mail order from anywhere in Europe, anywhere in the Antipodes.

But it was only one in the series of mystifying flowers that each year arrived by post on the first day of November. They were always beautiful and for the most part rare flowers, always pressed, mounted on watercolour paper in a simple frame measuring six inches by eleven inches.

The strange story of the flowers had never been reported in the press; only a very few people knew of it. Thirty years ago the regular arrival of the flower was the object of much scrutiny–at the National Forensic Laboratory, among fingerprint experts, graphologists, criminal investigators, and one or two relatives and friends of the recipient. Now the actors in the drama were but three: the elderly birthday boy, the retired police detective, and the person who had posted the flower. The first two at least had reached such an age that the group of interested parties would soon be further diminished.

The policeman was a hardened veteran. He would never forget his first case, in which he had had to take into custody a violent and appallingly drunk worker at an electrical substation before he caused others harm. During his career he had brought in poachers, wife beaters, con men, car thieves, and drunk drivers. He had dealt with burglars, drug dealers, rapists, and one deranged bomber. He had been involved in nine murder or manslaughter cases. In five of these the murderer had called the police himself and, full of remorse, confessed to having killed his wife or brother or some other relative. Two others were solved within a few days. Another required the assistance of the National Criminal Police and took two years.

The ninth case was solved to the police's satisfaction, which is to say that they knew who the murderer was, but because the evidence was so insubstantial the public prosecutor decided not to proceed with the case. To the detective superintendent's dismay, the statute of limitations eventually put an end to the matter. But all in all he could look back on an impressive career.

He was anything but pleased.

For the detective, the "Case of the Pressed Flowers" had been nagging at him for years–his last, unsolved and frustrating case. The situation was doubly absurd because after spending literally thousands of hours brooding, on duty and off, he could not say beyond doubt that a

crime had indeed been committed.

The two men knew that whoever had mounted the flowers would have worn gloves, that there would be no fingerprints on the frame or the glass. The frame could have been bought in camera shops or stationery stores the world over. There was, quite simply, no lead to follow. Most often the parcel was posted in Stockholm, but three times from London, twice from Paris, twice from Copenhagen, once from Madrid, once from Bonn, and once from Pensacola, Florida. The detective superintendent had had to look it up in an atlas.

After putting down the telephone the eighty-two-year-old birthday boy sat for a long time looking at the pretty but meaningless flower whose name he did not yet know. Then he looked up at the wall above his desk. There hung forty-three pressed flowers in their frames. Four rows of ten, and one at the bottom with four. In the top row one was missing from the ninth slot. Desert Snow would be number forty-four.

Without warning he began to weep. He surprised himself with this sudden burst of emotion after almost forty years.

## PART 1
## Incentive
## December 20-January 3

Eighteen percent of the women in Sweden have at one time been threatened by a man.

### Chapter 1
### Friday, December 20

The trial was irretrievably over; everything that could be said had been said, but he had never doubted that he would lose. The written verdict was handed down at 10:00 on Friday morning, and all that remained was a summing up from the reporters waiting in the corridor outside the district court.

"Carl" Mikael Blomkvist saw them through the doorway and slowed his step. He had no wish to discuss the verdict, but questions were unavoidable, and he—of all people—knew that they had to be asked and answered. *This is how it is to be a criminal,* he thought. *On the other side of the microphone.* He straightened up and tried to smile. The reporters gave him friendly, almost embarrassed greetings.

"Let's see . . . *Aftonbladet, Expressen*, TT wire service, TV4, and . . . where are you from? . . . ah yes, *Dagens Nyheter.* I must be a celebrity," Blomkvist said.

"Give us a sound bite, *Kalle Blomkvist.*" It was a reporter from one of the evening papers.

Blomkvist, hearing the nickname, forced himself as always not to roll his eyes. Once, when he was twenty-three and had just started his first summer job as a journalist, Blomkvist had chanced upon a gang which had pulled off five bank robberies over the past two years. There was no doubt that it was the same gang in every instance. Their trademark was to hold up two banks at a time with military precision. They wore masks from Disney World, so inevitably police logic dubbed them the Donald Duck Gang. The newspapers renamed them the Bear Gang, which sounded more sinister, more appropriate to the fact that on two occasions they had recklessly fired warning shots and threatened curious passersby.

Their sixth outing was at a bank in Östergötland at the height of the holiday season. A reporter from the local radio station happened to be in the bank at the time. As soon as the

robbers were gone he went to a public telephone and dictated his story for live broadcast.

Blomkvist was spending several days with a girlfriend at her parents' summer cabin near Katrineholm. Exactly why he made the connection he could not explain, even to the police, but as he was listening to the news report he remembered a group of four men in a summer cabin a few hundred feet down the road. He had seen them playing badminton out in the yard: four blond, athletic types in shorts with their shirts off. They were obviously bodybuilders, and there had been something about them that had made him look twice—maybe it was because the game was being played in blazing sunshine with what he recognised as intensely focused energy.

There had been no good reason to suspect them of being the bank robbers, but nevertheless he had gone to a hill overlooking their cabin. It seemed empty. It was about forty minutes before a Volvo drove up and parked in the yard. The young men got out, in a hurry, and were each carrying a sports bag, so they might have been doing nothing more than coming back from a swim. But one of them returned to the car and took out from the boot something which he hurriedly covered with his jacket. Even from Blomkvist's relatively distant observation post he could tell that it was a good old AK4, the rifle that had been his constant companion for the year of his military service.

He called the police and that was the start of a three-day siege of the cabin, blanket coverage by the media, with Blomkvist in a front-row seat and collecting a gratifyingly large fee from an evening paper. The police set up their headquarters in a caravan in the garden of the cabin where Blomkvist was staying.

The fall of the Bear Gang gave him the star billing that launched him as a young journalist. The downside of his celebrity was that the other evening newspaper could not resist using the headline "*Kalle Blomkvist solves the case.*" The tongue-in-cheek story was written by an older female columnist and contained references to the young detective in Astrid Lindgren's books for children. To make matters worse, the paper had run the story with a grainy photograph of Blomkvist with his mouth half open even as he raised an index finger to point.

It made no difference that Blomkvist had never in life used the name Carl. From that moment on, to his dismay, he was nicknamed Kalle Blomkvist by his peers—an epithet employed with taunting provocation, not unfriendly but not really friendly either. In spite of his respect for Astrid Lindgren—whose books he loved—he detested the nickname. It took him several years and far weightier journalistic successes before the nickname began to fade, but he still cringed if ever the name was used in his hearing.

Right now he achieved a placid smile and said to the reporter from the evening paper: "Oh come on, think of something yourself. You usually do."

His tone was not unpleasant. They all knew each other, more or less, and Blomkvist's most vicious critics had not come that morning. One of the journalists there had at one time worked with him. And at a party some years ago he had nearly succeeded in picking up one of the reporters—the woman from *She* on TV4.

"You took a real hit in there today," said the one from *Dagens Nyheter*, clearly a young part-timer. "How does it feel?"

Despite the seriousness of the situation, neither Blomkvist nor the older journalists could help smiling. He exchanged glances with TV4. *How does it feel?* The half-witted sports

reporter shoves his microphone in the face of the Breathless Athlete on the finishing line. "I can only regret that the court did not come to a different conclusion," he said a bit stuffily.

"Three months in gaol and 150,000 kronor damages. That's pretty severe," said *She*from TV4.

"I'll survive."

"Are you going to apologise to Wennerström? Shake his hand?"

"I think not."

"So you still would say that he's a crook?" *Dagens Nyheter*.

The court had just ruled that Blomkvist had libelled and defamed the financier Hans-Erik Wennerström. The trial was over and he had no plans to appeal. So what would happen if he repeated his claim on the courthouse steps? Blomkvist decided that he did not want to find out.

"I thought I had good reason to publish the information that was in my possession. The court has ruled otherwise, and I must accept that the judicial process has taken its course. Those of us on the editorial staff will have to discuss the judgement before we decide what we're going to do. I have no more to add."

"But how did you come to forget that journalists actually have to back up their assertions?" *She* from TV4. Her expression was neutral, but Blomkvist thought he saw a hint of disappointed repudiation in her eyes.

The reporters on site, apart from the boy from *Dagens Nyheter*, were all veterans in the business. For them the answer to that question was beyond the conceivable. "I have nothing to add," he repeated, but when the others had accepted this TV4 stood him against the doors to the courthouse and asked her questions in front of the camera. She was kinder than he deserved, and there were enough clear answers to satisfy all the reporters still standing behind her. The story would be in the headlines but he reminded himself that they were not dealing with the media event of the year here. The reporters had what they needed and headed back to their respective newsrooms.

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# The Lost City of Z

By David Grann

1

WE SHALL RETURN

On a cold January day in 1925, a tall, distinguished gentleman hurried across the docks in Hoboken, New Jersey, toward the S.S. Vauban, a five-hundred-and-eleven-foot ocean liner bound for Rio de Janeiro. He was fifty-seven years old, and stood over six feet, his long arms corded with muscles.

Although his hair was thinning and his mustache was flecked with white, he was so fit that he could walk for days with little, if any, rest or nourishment. His nose was crooked like a boxer's, and there was something ferocious about his appearance, especially his eyes. They were set close together and peered out from under thick tufts of hair. No one, not even his family, seemed to agree on their color-some thought they were blue, others gray. Yet virtually everyone who encountered him was struck by their intensity: some called them "the eyes of a visionary." He had frequently been photographed in riding boots and wearing a Stetson, with a rifle slung over his shoulder, but even in a suit and a tie, and without his customary wild beard, he could be recognized by the crowds on the pier. He was Colonel Percy Harrison Fawcett, and his name was known throughout the world.

He was the last of the great Victorian explorers who ventured into uncharted realms with little more than a machete, a compass, and an almost divine sense of purpose. For nearly two decades, stories of his adventures had captivated the public's imagination: how he had survived in the South American wilderness without contact with the outside world; how he was ambushed by hostile tribesmen, many of whom had never before seen a white man; how he battled piranha, electric eels, jaguars, crocodiles, vampire bats, and anacondas, including one that almost crushed him; and how he emerged with maps of regions from which no previous expedition had returned. He was renowned as the "David Livingstone of the Amazon," and was believed to have such unrivaled powers of endurance that a few colleagues even claimed he was immune to death. An American explorer described him as "a man of indomitable will, infinite resource, fearless"; another said that he could "outwalk and outhike and outexplore anybody else." The London Geographical Journal, the pre-eminent publication in its field, observed in 1953 that "Fawcett marked the end of an age. One might almost call him the last of the individualist explorers. The day of the aeroplane, the radio, the organized and heavily financed modern expedition had not arrived. With him, it was the heroic story of a man against the forest."

In 1916, the Royal Geographical Society had awarded him, with the blessing of King George V, a gold medal "for his contributions to the mapping of South America." And every few years, when he emerged from the jungle, spidery thin and bedraggled, dozens of scientists and luminaries would pack into the Society's hall to hear him speak. Among them was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was said to have drawn on Fawcett's experiences for his 1912 book The Lost World, in which explorers "disappear into the unknown" of South America and find, on a remote plateau, a land where dinosaurs have escaped extinction.

As Fawcett made his way to the gangplank that day in January, he eerily resembled one of the book's protagonists, Lord John Roxton:

Something there was of Napoleon III, something of Don Quixote, and yet again something which was the essence of the English country gentleman._._._._He has a gentle voice and a quiet manner, but behind his twinkling blue eyes there lurks a capacity for furious wrath

and implacable resolution, the more dangerous because they are held in leash.

None of Fawcett's previous expeditions compared with what he was about to do, and he could barely conceal his impatience, as he fell into line with the other passengers boarding the S.S. Vauban. The ship, advertised as "the finest in the world," was part of the Lamport & Holt elite "V" class. The Germans had sunk several of the company's ocean liners during the First World War, but this one had survived, with its black, salt-streaked hull and elegant white decks and striped funnel billowing smoke into the sky. Model T Fords shepherded passengers to the dock, where longshoremen helped cart luggage into the ship's hold. Many of the male passengers wore silk ties and bowler hats; women had on fur coats and feathered caps, as if they were attending a society event, which, in some ways, they were-the passenger lists of luxury ocean liners were chronicled in gossip columns and scoured by young girls searching for eligible bachelors.

Fawcett pushed forward with his gear. His trunks were loaded with guns, canned food, powdered milk, flares, and handcrafted machetes. He also carried a kit of surveying instruments: a sextant and a chronometer for determining latitude and longitude, an aneroid for measuring atmospheric pressure, and a glycerin compass that could fit in his pocket. Fawcett had chosen each item based on years of experience; even the clothes he had packed were made of lightweight, tear-proof gabardine. He had seen men die from the most innocuous seeming oversight-a torn net, a boot that was too tight.

Fawcett was setting out into the Amazon, a wilderness nearly the size of the continental United States, to make what he called "the great discovery of the century"-a lost civilization. By then, most of the world had been explored, its veil of enchantment lifted, but the Amazon remained as mysterious as the dark side of the moon. As Sir John Scott Keltie, the former secretary of the Royal Geographical Society and one of the world's most acclaimed geographers at the time, noted, "What is there no one knows."

Ever since Francisco de Orellana and his army of Spanish conquistadores descended the Amazon River, in 1542, perhaps no place on the planet had so ignited the imagination-or lured men to their death. Gaspar de Carvajal, a Dominican friar who accompanied Orellana, described woman warriors in the jungle who resembled the mythical Greek Amazons. Half a century later, Sir Walter Raleigh spoke of Indians with "their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts"-a legend that Shakespeare wove into Othello:
Of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.

What was true about the region-serpents as long as trees, rodents the size of pigs-was sufficiently beyond belief that no embellishment seemed too fanciful. And the most entrancing vision of all was of El Dorado. Raleigh claimed that the kingdom, which the conquistadores had heard about from Indians, was so plentiful in gold that its inhabitants ground the metal into powder and blew it "thorow hollow canes upon their naked bodies untill they be al shining from the foote to the head."

Yet each expedition that had tried to find El Dorado ended in disaster. Carvajal, whose party had been searching for the kingdom, wrote in his diary, "We reached a [state of] privation so great that we were eating nothing but leather, belts and soles of shoes, cooked with certain herbs, with the result that so great was our weakness that we could not remain standing." Some four thousand men died during that expedition alone, of starvation and disease, and at the hands of Indians defending their territory with arrows dipped in poison. Other El Dorado parties resorted to cannibalism. Many explorers went mad. In 1561, Lope

de Aguirre led his men on a murderous rampage, screaming, "Does God think that, because it is raining, I am not going to_._._._destroy the world?" Aguirre even stabbed his own child, whispering, "Commend thyself to God, my daughter, for I am about to kill thee." Before the Spanish crown sent forces to stop him, Aguirre warned in a letter, "I swear to you, King, on my word as a Christian, that if a hundred thousand men came, none would escape. For the reports are false: there is nothing on that river but despair." Aguirre's companions finally rose up and killed him; his body was quartered, and Spanish authorities displayed the head of the "Wrath of God" in a steel cage. Still, for three centuries, expeditions continued to search, until, after a toll of death and suffering worthy of Joseph Conrad, most archeologists had concluded that El Dorado was no more than a delusion.

Fawcett, however, was certain that the Amazon contained a fabulous kingdom, and he was not another soldier of fortune or a crackpot. A man of science, he had spent years gathering evidence to prove his case-digging up artifacts, studying petroglyphs, and interviewing tribes. And after fierce battles with skeptics Fawcett had received funding from the most respected scientific institutions, including the Royal Geographical Society, the American Geographical Society, and the Museum of the American Indian. Newspapers were proclaiming that Fawcett would soon startle the world. The Atlanta Constitution declared, "It is perhaps the most hazardous and certainly the most spectacular adventure of the kind ever undertaken by a reputable scientist with the backing of conservative scientific bodies."

Fawcett had concluded that an ancient, highly cultured people still existed in the Brazilian Amazon and that their civilization was so old and sophisticated it would forever alter the Western view of the Americas. He had christened this lost world the City of Z. "The central place I call 'Z'-our main objective-is in a valley_._._._about ten miles wide, and the city is on an eminence in the middle of it, approached by a barreled roadway of stone," Fawcett had stated earlier. "The houses are low and windowless, and there is a pyramidal temple."

Reporters on the dock in Hoboken, across the Hudson River from Manhattan, shouted questions, hoping to learn the location of Z. In the wake of the technological horrors of the Great War, and amid the spread of urbanization and industrialization, few events so captivated the world. One newspaper exulted, "Not since the days when Ponce de Le—n crossed the unknown Florida in search of the Waters of Perpetual Youth_._._._has a more alluring adventure been planned."

Fawcett welcomed "the fuss," as he described it in a letter to a friend, but he was careful about how he responded. He knew that his main rival, Alexander Hamilton Rice, a multimillionaire American doctor who commanded vast resources, was already entering the jungle with an unprecedented array of equipment. The prospect of Dr. Rice finding Z terrified Fawcett. Several years earlier, Fawcett had watched as a colleague from the Royal Geographical Society, Robert Falcon Scott, had set out to become the first explorer to reach the South Pole, only to discover, shortly before he froze to death, that his Norwegian rival, Roald Amundsen, had beaten him by thirty-three days. In a recent letter to the Royal Geographical Society, Fawcett wrote, "I cannot say all I know, or even be precise as to locality, for these things leak out, and there can be nothing so bitter to the pioneer as to find the crown of his work anticipated."

He was also afraid that if he released details of his route, and others attempted to find Z or rescue
him, it would result in countless deaths. An expedition of fourteen hundred armed men had previously vanished in the same region. A news bulletin telegraphed around the globe declared, "Fawcett Expedition_._._._to Penetrate Land Whence None Returned." And Fawcett, who was resolved to reach the most inaccessible areas, did not intend, like other

explorers, to go by boat; rather, he planned to hack straight through the jungle on foot. The Royal Geographical Society had warned that Fawcett "is about the only living geographer who could successfully attempt" such an expedition and that "it would be hopeless for any people to follow in his footsteps." Before he left England, Fawcett confided to his younger son, Brian, "If with all my experience we can't make it, there's not much hope for others."

As reporters clamored around him, Fawcett explained that only a small expedition would have any chance of survival. It would be able to live off the land, and not pose a threat to hostile Indians. The expedition, he had stated, "will be no pampered exploration party, with an army of bearers, guides and cargo animals. Such top-heavy expeditions get nowhere; they linger on the fringe of civilization and bask in publicity. Where the real wilds start, bearers are not to be had anyway, for fear of the savages. Animals cannot be taken because of lack of pasture and the attack of insects and bats. There are no guides, for no one knows the country. It is a matter of cutting equipment to the absolute minimum, carrying it all oneself, and trusting that one will be able to exist by making friends with the various tribes one meets." He now added, "We will have to suffer every form of exposure._._._We will have to achieve a nervous and mental resistance, as well as physical, as men under these conditions are often broken by their minds succumbing before their bodies."

Fawcett had chosen only two people to go with him: his twenty-one-year-old son, Jack, and Jack's best friend, Raleigh Rimell. Although they had never been on an expedition, Fawcett believed that they were ideal for the mission: tough, loyal, and, because they were so close, unlikely, after months of isolation and suffering, "to harass and persecute each other"-or, as was common on such expeditions, to mutiny. Jack was, as his brother Brian put it, "the reflection of his father": tall, frighteningly fit, and ascetic. Neither he nor his father smoked cigarettes or drank. Brian noted that Jack's "six feet three inches were sheer bone and muscle, and the three chief agents of bodily degeneration-alcohol, tobacco and loose living-were revolting to him." Colonel Fawcett, who followed a strict Victorian code, put it slightly differently: "He is_._._._absolutely virgin in mind and body."

Jack, who had wanted to accompany his father on an expedition since he was a boy, had spent years preparing-lifting weights, maintaining a rigid diet, studying Portuguese, and learning how to navigate by the stars. Still, he had suffered little real deprivation, and his face, with its luminescent skin, crisp mustache, and slick brown hair, betrayed none of the hardness of his father's. With his stylish clothes, he looked more like a movie star, which is what he hoped to become upon his triumphant return.

Raleigh, though smaller than Jack, was still nearly six feet tall and muscular. (A "fine physique," Fawcett told the R.G.S.) His father had been a surgeon in the Royal Navy and had died of cancer in 1917, when Raleigh was fifteen. Dark-haired, with a pronounced widow's peak and a riverboat gambler's mustache, Raleigh had a jocular, mischievous nature. "He was a born clown," said Brian Fawcett, the "perfect counterpart of the serious Jack." The two boys had been virtually inseparable since they roamed the Devonshire countryside around Seaton, England, where they grew up, riding bicycles and shooting rifles in the air. In a letter to one of Fawcett's confidants, Jack wrote, "Now we have Raleigh Rimell on board who is every bit as keen as I am._._._He is the only intimate friend I have ever had. I knew him before I was seven years old and we have been more or less together ever since. He is absolutely honest and decent in every sense of the word and we know each other inside out."

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