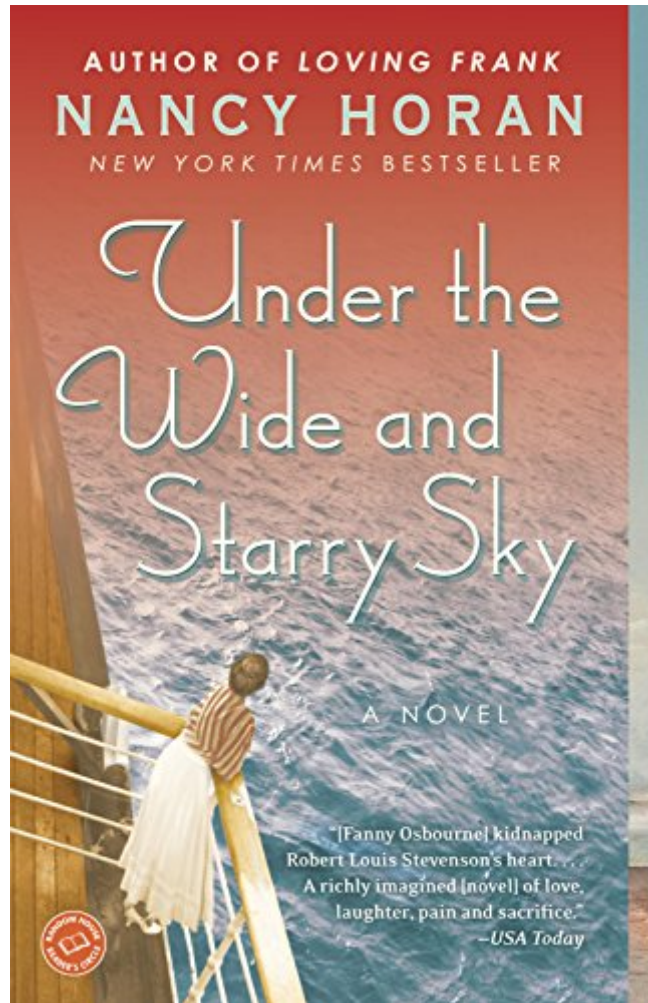


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Under The Wide And Starry Sky: A Novel



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • TODAY SHOW BOOK CLUB PICK • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE WASHINGTON POST AND ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Look for special features inside. Join the Random House Reader's Circle for author chats and more.

From Nancy Horan, New York Times bestselling author of *Loving Frank*, comes her much-anticipated second novel, which tells the improbable love story of Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson and his tempestuous American wife, Fanny. At the age of thirty-five, Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne has left her philandering husband in San Francisco to set sail for Belgium "with her three children and nanny in tow" to study art. It is a chance for this adventurous woman to start over, to make a better life for all of them, and to pursue her own desires. Not long after her arrival, however, tragedy strikes, and Fanny and her children repair to a quiet artists' colony in France where she can recuperate. Emerging from a deep sorrow, she meets a lively Scot, Robert Louis Stevenson, ten years her junior, who falls instantly in love with the earthy, independent, and opinionated *belle Americaine*.

Fanny does not immediately take to the slender young lawyer who longs to devote his life to writing "and who would eventually pen such classics as *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In time, though, she succumbs to Stevenson's charms, and the two begin a fierce love affair "marked by intense joy and harrowing darkness" that spans the decades and the globe. The shared life of these two strong-willed individuals unfolds into an adventure as impassioned and unpredictable as any of Stevenson's own unforgettable tales.

Praise for Under the Wide and Starry Sky

• "A richly imagined [novel] of love, laughter, pain and sacrifice . . . Under the Wide and Starry Sky is a dual portrait, with Louis and Fanny sharing the limelight in the best spirit of teamwork—a romantic partnership."

• "USA Today" • "Powerful . . . flawless . . . a perfect example of what a man and a woman will do for love, and what they can accomplish when it's meant to be."

• "Fort Worth Star-Telegram" • "Spectacular . . . an exhilarating epic about a free-spirited couple who traveled the world yet found home only in one another."

• "Booklist (starred review)" • "Horan's prose is gorgeous enough to keep a reader transfixed, even if the story itself weren't so compelling. I kept re-reading passages just to savor the exquisite wordplay. . . . Few writers are as masterful as she is at blending carefully researched history with the novelist's art."

• "The Dallas Morning News" • "A classic artistic bildungsroman and a retort to the genre, a novel that shows how love and marriage can simultaneously offer inspiration and encumbrance."

• "The New York Times Book Review" • "Nancy Horan has done it again, capturing the entwined lives of Fanny Osbourne and Robert Louis Stevenson so uncannily, it reads

like truth.â •â "Sarah Blake, author of *The Postmistress* Â â œHoran has a distinct knack for evoking the rich, complicated lives of long-gone artists and the women who inspired them.â •â "Entertainment Weekly

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

File Size: 5013 KB

Print Length: 498 pages

Publisher: Ballantine Books (January 21, 2014)

Publication Date: January 21, 2014

Sold by:Â Random House LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00C0ALY9O

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #23,511 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #49 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Literary Fiction > Biographical #62 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Biographical #77 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Biographical

Customer Reviews

Perhaps you, like me, have never really given Robert Louis Stevenson much thought, beyond reading his books, which have become classics - *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Frankly, I chose this book to review because I was enthralled with Nancy Horan's first book, *Loving Frank*, the fictionalized account of the life of Frank Lloyd Wright. Both books center around very complex and sometimes very difficult men, and the women who love them to the point that they are willing to give up all personal ambition and commit to a life that tip-toes around their extreme self-absorption. There, the similarity ends, as you will find that Louis Stevenson (as he is called) can be very likable and charming - and, at times, a deep-thinking, kind-hearted companion. Louis is a prolific writer in very poor health - and his companion and soon to be wife, Fanny, fills the role of not only guiding his writing choices, but also keeping him alive, during numerous bouts of illness caused by lung weakness. They literally travel the globe to find a climate

and environment that will improve his quality of life and allow him to indulge in the non-stop writing binges which cause his health to falter. Sea air is found to miraculously restore good health, so Louis races around the boat deck while Fanny is below, consistently seasick. Fanny is not a complainer - her eye is on Louis and she is willing to endure just about anything to allow him to thrive and write. Fanny has great inner strength and creativity as well, and she is a wonder to read about. Louis's friends love him, but few appreciate Fanny, which does begin to gnaw as years go by.

Usually I prefer biography to the fictionalization of an historical person's life. Even--actually especially--in the cases where little is known about a person I prefer a nonfiction portrait using what information there is enriched with details about the daily lives, culture, religious beliefs, and living conditions of the time and place where he or she lived rather than novelized speculations about a real person's deepest thoughts, emotions and yearnings. I was therefore initially hesitant to try this book. In the case of Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife Fanny potential novelists or biographers have lots of information about their inner and outer lives, much of which the two of them wrote themselves in journals, letters, and stories. So why read this novel when there are several biographies that made use of the same background materials? Because author Nancy Horan used those sources to breath life into layered characterizations of Fanny, Robert, and their friends and families, creating the kind of deeply moving story that is good fiction's unique strength. When nonfiction manages to be this compelling it's often described as being as gripping or emotionally rich as fiction. Bohemian vagabonds, Fanny and Robert had a passionate relationship and were devoted to each other, but they were not without problems. Like her husband, Fanny had the soul of an artist. She painted and wrote, and she lived her life in large and creative ways, but she often felt marginalized by her husband's friends and fans, and sometimes felt devalued even by Robert himself. Several times when tragedies struck Fanny struggled through bouts of madness. Robert spent much of his life as an invalid, but an invalid who embraced the giddy joys of living all the more for his times of illness.

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