

SAROYAN

THE

WHOLE

VOYALD

and other
stories

SAROYAN

The Whole Voyald

by the same author

*

MAMA, I LOVE YOU

THE LAUGHING MATTER

TRACY'S TIGER

ROCK WAGRAM

THE ASSYRIAN

THE ADVENTURES OF WESLEY JACKSON

DEAR BABY

PEACE, IT'S WONDERFUL

MY NAME IS ARAM

THE TROUBLE WITH TIGERS

THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE

THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE, AND TWO OTHER PLAYS

RAZZLE-DAZZLE

DON'T GO AWAY MAD, AND TWO OTHER PLAYS



THE
WHOLE
VOYALD

and

Other Stories

by

WILLIAM
SAROYAN

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Twenty-two years after the publication of my first book of short stories, I offer the twenty-two stories in *The Whole Voyald* to the towns I know and love best: Fresno, San Francisco, and New York.

Voyald is a way of saying Void, Voyage, and World at the same time.

W.S.

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A Writer's Declaration

On 15th October 1934 my first book, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories*, was published. The year 1934 seems quite near, but the fact remains that it was twenty years ago, as I write. Many things happened in those twenty years, several of them to me.

I didn't earn one dollar by any means other than writing. I wrote short stories, plays, novels, essays, poems, book reviews, miscellaneous comment, letters to editors, private letters, and songs.

Nothing that I wrote was written to order, on assignment, or for money, although a good deal of what I wrote happened to earn money. If an editor liked a story as I had written it, he could buy it. If he wanted parts of it written over, I did not do that work. Nobody did it. One editor took liberties with a short piece about Christmas, and the writer of a cook book to which I had written a free Preface added a few lines by way of making me out a soldier-patriot. I protested to the editor and to the writer of the cook book, but of course the damage had been done. During the Second World War I wrote no propaganda of any kind, although I was invited several times to do so. The point is that for twenty

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years I have been an American writer who has been entirely free and independent.

I consider the past twenty years the first half of my life as a published writer, and the next twenty I consider the second half. At that time I shall be sixty-six years old, which can be very old, or not. I expect to be more creative in the next twenty years than I was in the first twenty, even though I start with a number of handicaps. To begin with, I owe so much in back taxes that it is very nearly impossible arithmetically to even the score by writing, and I have acquired other personal, moral, and financial responsibilities.

I have never been subsidized, I have never accepted money connected with a literary prize or award, I have never been endowed, and I have never received a grant or fellowship. A year or two after my first book was published I was urged by friends to file an application for a Guggenheim Fellowship. Against my better judgment I filed an application, which was necessarily if not deliberately haphazard. How should I know what I wanted to write, for instance? I couldn't possibly describe it. My application was turned down and I began to breathe freely again.

I am head over heels in debt. I expect to get out of debt by writing, or not at all. I have no savings account, no stocks or bonds, no real estate, no insurance, no cash, and no real property that is convertible into anything like a sum of money that might be useful. I simply have got to hustle for a living. I mention these matters impersonally, as facts, and not to arouse sympathy. I don't want any.

Had my nature been practical I might at this time know financial security, as it is called. There is nothing

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wrong with such security, I suppose, but I prefer another kind. I prefer to recognize the truth that I *must* work, and to believe that I *can*.

I squandered a great deal of money that I earned as a writer and I lost a lot of it gambling. It seems to have been my nature to squander and to gamble, that's all. I gave some away, perhaps a great deal. I am not unaware of the possible meaning of the discomfort I have felt when I have had money, and the compulsion I have had to get rid of it somehow or other. I think I have felt the need to be only a writer, a writing writer, and not a success of any kind.

The ability or compulsion to hoard money has always seemed to me a complicated if not offensive thing. And yet I have always had sympathy for those who have been experts at hoarding, at legal means by which not to pay taxes, at timely thrusts into new and profitable areas of money-making, such as investments, real estate, inventions, oil, uranium, government contracts, the backing of plays, manufacturing, and marketing. The noticeable shrewdness of such people has always amused me, even when I myself have been the party to be outwitted.

When I was in the Army, for instance, in the snow of Ohio, in the dead of winter, a very capable money-man who was quite rich and young and not in the Army flew from New York to Ohio to discuss with me changes he felt I ought to make in one of my plays on which he had paid me a thousand dollars in advance. I met him whenever the Army regulations permitted me to, and I heard him out, which took a great deal of time I would have preferred to keep to myself. The man talked around and around, and it suddenly occurred

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to me that what he was really trying to say but couldn't was that he didn't feel the play would be a hit, and that he was helpless not to do something about the thousand dollars. This did not astonish me. I took a cheque for a thousand dollars to his hotel and left it at the desk, along with a short note. I wanted to see if my hunch was right. It was. We were supposed to meet the following night. We didn't. He flew back to New York with the cheque, cashed it, and I never heard from him again. There was no legal, or even moral, reason for me to return the thousand dollars. I simply couldn't bear to see him so upset about the small sum of money, all the while pretending that he was concerned only about art.

At one of the biggest moving-picture factories in Hollywood, when I discovered that I had been hoodwinked into making a poor deal, I met the executives who had done the brilliant hoodwinking, I established that they *had* done it, and I got into my car and drove to San Francisco. I was informed several years later that I had left behind wages due me under the terms of the hoodwinking agreement that amounted to something between five and fifteen thousand dollars. I never investigated the matter. The factory and its chief beneficiaries were hoarding profits by the millions, working diligently and profitably with the government on shabby propaganda films, and yet six or seven of the executives found it absolutely necessary to act in unison and to outwit the writer of a story they wanted desperately, from which they acquired three or four more millions of dollars. I have no idea what they have done with their money, but I am sure it has been something cautious and useless.

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Before my first book was published I was not a drinker, but soon after it came out I discovered the wisdom of drinking, and I think this is something worth looking into for a moment.

In 1935 I drank moderately, and travelled to Europe for the first time, but the following nine years, until I was drafted into the Army, I drank as much as I liked, and I frequently drank steadily for nine or ten hours at a time.

I was seldom drunk, however. I enjoyed the fun of drinking and talking loudly with friends—writers, painters, sculptors, newspapermen, and the girls and women we knew in San Francisco.

Drinking with good companions can be a good thing for a writer, but let a writer heed this humble and perhaps unnecessary warning: stop drinking when drinking tends to be an end in itself, for that is a useless end. I believe I have learned a lot while I have been drinking with friends, just as most of us may say we have learned a lot in sleep. There is, however, a recognizable limit to what may be learned by means of drinking.

In the writing that I have done during the past twenty years, what do I regret?

Nothing. Not one word.

Did I write enough?

No. No writer ever writes enough.

Might I have written differently? More intelligently, for instance?

No.

First, I always tried my best, as I understand trying. Second, I believe I was quite intelligent all the time.

Then, what about the theory of certain critics and readers that my writing is unrealistic and sentimental?

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Well, I think they are mistaken. In writing that is *effective* I don't think *anything* is unrealistic. As for my own writing, I think it has always been profoundly realistic if not ever superficially so. I don't think my writing is sentimental either, although it is a very sentimental thing to be a human being.

As I write, I am back in San Francisco, where I lived when my first book was published, where I have not lived in six or seven years, and the day is the thirteenth of October. I drove up from Malibu two days ago for a visit of ten or eleven days while my house on the beach is being painted inside and out. I did not drive to San Francisco in order to be here on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of my first book, but I shall be here on that day nevertheless.

Already I have walked in the various neighbourhoods of San Francisco I have known, to notice again the various houses in which I have lived: 348 Carl Street, 1707 Divisadero, 2378 Sutter, 123 Natoma: and the various places in which I worked before I had had a story published in a national magazine: various branch offices of the Postal Telegraph Company—on Market Street in the Palace Hotel Building, on Powell Street at Market, on Taylor at Market in the Golden Gate Theatre Building, and at 405 Brannan, near Third.

I was a clerk and teletype operator in the first three offices, but I was the manager of the office on Brannan. I have always been a little proud of that, for I was the youngest manager of a Postal Telegraph branch office in America, nineteen years old and without a high school diploma.

Yesterday I walked through the Crystal Palace

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Market and visited the stand at which I once hustled potatoes and tomatoes, the *Fiore d'Italia*.

I went into the building at Market and Sixth where the offices of the Cypress Lawn Cemetery Company are located. I worked there, too.

The vice-president said: "Do you intend to make Cypress Lawn your lifetime career?"

I said: "Yes, sir."

I got the job.

I quit a month later, but working there was a valuable experience. I remember the arrival of Christmas week and the vice-president's bitter complaint that owing to the absence of an epidemic of influenza the company's volume of business for December over the previous year had fallen 22 per cent.

I remarked: "But everybody will catch up eventually, won't they?"

The vice-president lifted his glasses from the bridge of his nose to his forehead in order to have another look at me.

"I'm a writer," I said. "Unpublished."

He asked me to look at some slogans he had composed for the company: *Inter here. A lot for your money.*

I said he had a flair.

I walked along the Embarcadero to the Dodd Warehouse, across from Pier 17, for I worked there a month, too. The trouble with that job was the floating crap games of the longshoremen every lunch hour in empty wagons or behind piles of lumber on the docks. My take-home pay every week was nothing, although I made a friend of the great Negro craps shooter and game manager who was called Doughbelly. The sunlight down there on the waterfront during those lunch-hour

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crap games was wonderful, and as I walked there yesterday I could almost see the huge old man calling the points of the game, and I had to remember that whenever he noticed I wasn't betting he correctly surmised that I was fresh out of funds and slipped me a silver dollar or two so that I might get back into the action.

Once, when I stayed away from the games for three days running in the hope of having a few dollars in my pocket for Saturday night, Doughbelly kept asking everybody: "Where's that Abyssinian boy?"

I was in the Dodd Warehouse eating sandwiches and reading Jack London, that's where I was.

It was at 348 Carl Street twenty years ago on this day, October 13th, that I opened a package from Random House and saw a copy of my first book. That was a hell of a moment. I was so excited I couldn't roll a Bull Durham cigarette. After three tries I finally made it, and began to inhale and exhale a little madly as I examined the preposterous and very nearly unbelievable object of art and merchandise. What a book, what a cover, what a title page, what words, what a photograph—now just watch the women swarm around. For a young writer *does* write in order to expect pretty women to swarm around.

Alas, the swarmers aren't often pretty. This is a mystery that continues to baffle me. Pretty women swarm around fat little men who own and operate small businesses. They swarm around chiropractors who are full of talk about some of their interesting cases and achievements. They swarm around young men who wear black shirts and have five buttons on the sleeves of their sport coats, who have no visible means of sup-