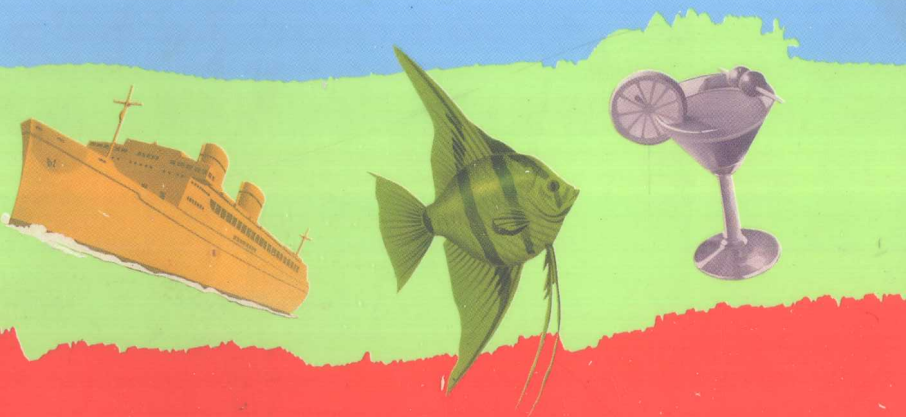


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£1 per book (paperbacks) and £3 per book (hardbacks).

Armistead Maupin was born in Washington, D.C. in 1944 but grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. A graduate of the University of North Carolina, he served as a naval officer in Vietnam before moving to California in 1971 as a reporter for the Associated Press. In 1976 he launched his daily newspaper serial, *Tales of the City*, in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The first fiction to appear in an American daily for decades, *Tales* grew into an international sensation when compiled and rewritten as novels. Maupin's six-volume *Tales of the City* sequence – *Tales of the City*, *More Tales of the City*, *Further Tales of the City*, *Babycakes*, *Significant Others* and *Sure of You* – are now multi-million bestsellers published in eleven languages. The first two of these novels were adapted as a pair of widely acclaimed television mini-series: the third, *Further Tales of the City*, is currently in production. Maupin's 1992 novel, *Maybe the Moon*, chronicling the adventures of the world's shortest woman, was a number one bestseller. As a librettist he collaborated in 1999 with composer Jake Heggie on *Anna Madrigal Remembers* for mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade and Chanticleer, the classical choral ensemble. Maupin's latest novel is *The Night Listener*. He lives in San Francisco, California.

Official Author Web Site:
www.ArmisteadMaupin.com

Also by Armistead Maupin

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MORE TALES OF THE CITY
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Babycakes

Armistead Maupin



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For Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy
and in loving memory of
Daniel Katz
1956-1982
and
once again
for Steve Beery

Memo to Lord Jamie Neidpath

Easley House may bear a marked resemblance to Stanway House, but Lord Teddy Roughton is nothing like you. You and I know that. Now the others do. Cheers.

A.M.

*When you feel your song is orchestrated wrong,
Why should you prolong
Your stay?
When the wind and the weather blow your dreams sky-high,
Sail away — sail away — sail away!*

— Noel Coward

One—A royal welcome

She was fifty-seven years old when she saw San Francisco for the first time. As her limousine pulled away from the concrete labyrinth of the airport, she peered out the window at the driving rain and issued a small sigh over the general beastliness of the weather.

'I know,' said Philip, reading her mind, 'but they expect it to clear today.'

She returned his faint smile, then searched in her handbag for a tissue. Since leaving the Reagans' ranch she'd felt a mild case of the sniffles coming on, and she was dashed if she'd let it get the best of her.

The motorcade veered onto a larger highway – a 'freeway,' she supposed – and soon they were plunging headlong into the rain past lurid motels and posters of nightmare proportions. To her left loomed a treeless hillside, so unnaturally green that it might have been Irish. There were words on it, rendered in white stones: SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO – THE INDUSTRIAL CITY.

Philip saw the face she made and leaned forward to study the curious hieroglyphic.

'Odd,' he murmured.

'Mmm,' she replied.

She could only hope that they had not yet arrived in the city proper. This tatty commercial district could well be the equivalent of Ruislip or Wapping or one of those horrid little suburbs in the vicinity of Gatwick Airport. She mustn't imagine the worst just yet.

Her original plan had been to arrive in San Francisco on board the *Britannia* – an operation that would have entailed the pleasant prospect of sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge. The sea had become quite treacherous, however, by the time she reached Los Angeles, and the same storms that had brought six

California rivers to flood level would almost certainly have played havoc with her undependable tummy.

So she had settled on this somewhat less than majestic entrance via aeroplane and automobile. She would spend the night in a local hotel, then reinstate herself on the *Britannia* when it arrived in the harbor the following day. Since she was almost sixteen hours ahead of schedule, this evening's time was completely unclaimed, and the very thought of such gratuitous leisure sent surprising little shivers of anticipation down her spine.

Where would she dine tonight? The hotel, perhaps? Or someone's home? The question of *whose* home was a sticky one at best, since she had already received feverish invitations from several local hostesses, including – and here she shuddered a bit – that dreadful petrol woman with all the hair.

She dismissed the issue of dinner for the moment and once more turned her attention to the passing scene. The rain seemed to have slacked a tiny bit, and here and there in the slate-gray skies a few dainty patches of blue had begun to make themselves known. Then the city materialized out of nowhere – a jumble of upended biscuit boxes that reminded her vaguely of Sydney.

'Look!' crowed Philip.

He was pointing to a dazzling rainbow that hovered like a crown above the city.

'How perfectly splendid,' she murmured.

'Indeed. Their protocol people are more thorough than I thought.'

Feeling giddier by the minute, she giggled at his little joke. It seemed appropriate to commemorate the moment by a cheery wave to the citizenry, but public assembly was quite impossible along this major artery, so she ignored the impulse and set about the task of repairing her lipstick.

The rain had diminished to a dazzle by the time the motorcade descended from the highway into a region of low-lying warehouses and scruffy cafés. At the first intersection, the limousine slowed dramatically and Philip signaled her with a nod of his head.

'Over there, darling. Your first well-wishers.'

She turned her head slightly and waved at several dozen people assembled on the street corner. They waved back vigor-