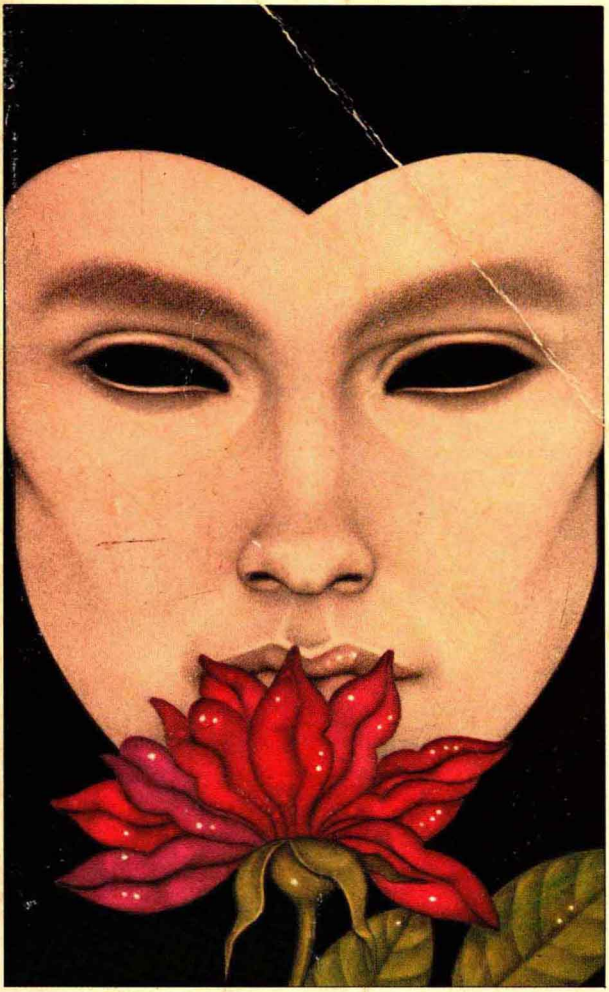
NOBEL PRIZE-WINNER

PATRICK WHITE

THE TWYBORN AFFAIR

"ONE OF WHITE'S BEST... SPLENDIDLY EVOCATIVE"
—*ATLANTIC MONTHLY*



PENGUIN BOOKS

THE TWYBORN AFFAIR

Patrick White, who was born in 1912, is a fourth-generation Australian. As a young teenager he was sent to England to attend public school and later returned there to study modern languages at King's College, Cambridge. Mr. White's first published novel was *Happy Valley* (1939), and since then he has had published ten novels, two collections of short stories, and a collection of plays—most recently, *The Eye of the Storm* and *A Fringe of Leaves*. During World War II he served as an intelligence officer in the Royal Air Force and was stationed in the Middle East and in Greece. Afterward, he traveled for several years in Europe and the United States before returning to live on a sheep farm in New South Wales. Mr. White now lives in a residential section of Sydney. In awarding Patrick White the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, the Royal Swedish Academy cited his writing as "an epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature." Mr. White has donated his Nobel Prize money to establish a fund for Australian writers.

by the same author

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The Twyborn Affair

Patrick White

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TO JIM SHARMAN

What else should our lives be but a series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become.

David Malouf

My suspicion is that in Heaven the Blessed are of the opinion that the advantages of that locale have been overrated by theologians who were never actually there. Perhaps even in Hell the damned are not always satisfied.

Jorge Luis Borges

Sometimes you'll see someone with nothing on but a bandaid.

Diane Arbus

Part One

'Which road this afternoon, madam?'

'The same, Teakle – the one we took yesterday.'

'Bit rough, isn't it?' her chauffeur ventured.

'We Australians,' Mrs Golson declared, 'are used to far rougher at home.'

It was an assertion she might not have made in company politer than her chauffeur's. She detected in her voice a sententiousness she found distasteful, particularly since the life she led at home was more comfortably cushioned than that of almost any Australian. Joan Golson had never known it rough.

'Rough – I bet it is – from what I hear.' Teakle was in the mood for divulgence.

So discreet, so English, such a dedicated member of the serving class, he surprised his employer by his remark. She would have liked to know what he had heard, but would not be so indiscreet as to ask. She suspected that English servants were given to taking liberties in the service of Colonials. It made her feel inferior.

In the circumstances she raised her chin, moistened her lips, and adjusted her motoring parasol, a collapsible one in tussore lined with bottle-green.

'The air of the pine forests,' she remarked, 'is so refreshing, I find, after that stuffy town. That's why I thought of taking the same drive as yesterday.'

'Yes,' agreed Teakle, very upright, very steady, 'the air at St Myool is pretty sewerish – what you'd call French.'

Not sure whether this was a remark she should accept, Mrs Golson did not reply. Instead she looked about her at the landscape in a manner befitting the owner of a 1912 Austin in bottle-green, like

the livery of her temporary chauffeur and the lining of her little parasol.

To be strictly accurate it was *Mr* Golson who owned the high-set bottle-green Austin. If Mrs Golson overlooked the fact, she was hardly aware. She was unconscious that she lumped her husband in with her very considerable material possessions, perhaps because Mrs Golson was wealthy in her own right (not to be compared with E. Boyd Golson in his, but rich) and because, in her heart of hearts, she considered a woman could face the world with more panache than a man, anyway an Australian one.

'Mr Golson don't seem to care much for motoring.'

'He'd rather sleep off his luncheon!' Mrs Golson laughed, but she also frowned as though she had invited her chauffeur to share her vision of her husband asleep in a deep armchair in a public room.

'He likes to motor,' she added, 'but when there is a purpose.'

She hoped the man would leave it at that. For Mrs Golson was preparing to enjoy her own purpose in having herself driven down this rutted road, past these smelly salt-pans, through the grove of ragged pines, where the air was far less restorative than she had implied.

She was nursing the discovery made yesterday, which introduced a purpose at last into their hitherto rather aimless sojourn at St Mayeul. Undertaken as an antidote to several weeks of over-eating and over-dancing in London and Paris, Mrs Golson, and to some more bemused extent her husband, E. Boyd, had from the beginning regretted their stay at the Grand Hôtel Splendide des Ligures. Mrs Golson realised of course that it was Lady Tewkes who was to blame. This formidable personage, with rings growing out of the bone itself, and her casually incorrect version of the English language ('the Hôtel Splendide is an 'otel, dear gel, I can recommend with confidence') intimidated the less than confident Joan Golson of Golsons' Emporium, Sydney, and in her own right, Sewells' Sweat-free Felt Hats, which little Joanie had inherited from poor Daddy.

'It sounds charming,' Mrs Golson had assured her mentor.

Though more or less at home with vocabulary (everything not

actively 'horrid' was for Joan Golson automatically 'charming') she used it somewhat tentatively abroad. It was her accent which often teetered, or so she heard, however carefully she managed it, and however carefully the eyelids of the Lady Tewkeses refused to bat; the most arrogant among the English were so mercilessly polite. ('Oh no, Joan, not a trace, I assure you, one couldn't tell...') It didn't always shore up her smile; she could feel a tic at work in her dimple like a canker in the rose.

Her own accent apart, there was always Curly, the Australian husband. One could hardly call anybody 'Boyd', though his mother persisted in doing so, and 'Ernest' had a habit of becoming 'Ern' when the past cropped up in embarrassing guise, often in the most unlikely places, like the Grafton Galleries or Claridge's. Through sheer lack of defence Mrs Golson had settled for 'Curly', the little boy's nickname and clubland label by which E. Boyd was generally known, and which did not sound outlandish among the Bimbos and Jumbos, the Babies and Pets on the more rakish side of Epsom and Cowes.

Still, the unflinching eyelids, the non-committal smiles of the English when faced with what is regrettably colonial can become a strain. To land at Calais or Boulogne and find oneself simply and unacceptably foreign was by contrast a relief.

Tilting her head, her parasol, at the angle adopted by a lady enjoying foreign travel, Mrs Golson was jolted, swayed, tossed onward in her leather-upholstered motor-car along the stony, rutted road, through the straggling pines, and as she was subjected to all of it she mused more sinuously on her experience of the afternoon before, which she did so hope to repeat, at least to some extent. She would like to seize on certain details, perpetuate them in memory. If only she had kept a diary, but she never had; she was far too irregular in her habits. (Write to Eadie. Of late she had neglected Eadie. Eadie would have hugely enjoyed yesterday's 'snapshot'; one could hardly call it more.)

As she imagined sharing with her friend Eadie Twyborn her experience of the previous day, Joan Golson found herself straining

against upholstery still new enough to give out some of the perfume of leather, raising herself to the extent where her little motoring parasol might be carried off by the blast created by impetuous motion, while she parted the knotted gossamer protecting her face from wind, grit, and suicidal insects, to anticipate the pleasures of what she hoped to re-discover.

The evening before, Teakle had driven the car with uncharacteristic dash, a reckless rush, perhaps due to the deep ruts and bumps on the surface of the sandy road. Emerging from the pine-grove as they mounted, they almost shaved what proved to be the containing wall of that charming villa lurking beyond the branches of probable almond trees, less equivocal olives, the clumps and spikes of lavender, and lesser tufts stained with the flickering colours of faded, archetypal carnations.

The whole effect was faded, she remembered, now that the last mile quickened her vision of the desirable villa, shutters a washed-out blue, walls a dusty, crackled pink. A workaday cottage rather than a villa, one might have decided, if it had not been for those who were presumably its owners.

With almost voluptuous parsimony Mrs Golson proceeded to restore to her picture of a garden the two figures trailing towards a terrace on which the house stood: the elderly man, a stroke of black and yellow, ivory rather, in a silver landscape, and ahead of him this charming young woman (daughter, ward, wife, mistress—whatever) leading her companion through the rambling maze, the carnation tones of her dress dragging through, catching on, fusing with those same carnations which she reflected, while absorbing something of their silver from the lavender and southernwood surrounding her.

The long thin brown arms of this girl, the perfection of her jawline, the grace of her body as she turned smiling to encourage the dispensible (anyway for Joan Golson) man in black. (Yes, write to Eadie, write tonight—who would so much appreciate this graceful creature strolling with unconscious flair through her unkempt garden.)

Mrs Golson realised she was perspiring in anticipation of reunion with the scene she recalled. She started searching for her handkerchief. On finding it, she fell to dabbing where the moustache would have been. And sat forward.

Yesterday, much as she would have liked to, she could scarcely have ordered Teakle to drive slower as they coasted, slow enough, alongside the garden wall, while its owners (tenants?) continued following the path. She could only look, and hope it would not be too quickly over. As for the couple in the garden, they turned at one point and looked back with the blank stare of those who cannot believe, and rightly, that strangers passing along the road can enter into their charmed lives.

Not long after the car had passed, Mrs Golson ordered her chauffeur to turn, and they headed back along the road to St Mayeul. Nobody was visible at the villa. Mrs Golson had relapsed against the upholstery, while the prudent Teakle drove into the dusk and the direction from which they had come.

On entering the Grand Hôtel Splendide she caught sight of Curly's head, its hairless dome rising above the padding of the chair in which he was sleeping off a late luncheon, till night should propel him towards his dinner. Joan hoped to slip past, but Curly seemed to sense her presence: he rose and, slightly lurching, asked,

'Enjoy yourself, treasure?'

She might have replied if, in her memory, she had not still been driving up the rutted road beyond St Mayeul.

As she was again this evening, slightly raised against the car's upholstery, furling the collapsible parasol, raising the gossamer veil well in advance of what she hoped to see, knowing that, despite the motion of the car, anyone at all perceptive would have noticed her trembling.

She was in a positive fantod long before hearing the mild explosion which suddenly occurred, when the collapse of nervous stress, and the swivelling, and final listing of the car as the driver brought it to a halt, almost tore her apart.

'Oh, damn—*not*,' Mrs Golson all but shouted, 'surely not a *panne*,

Teakle!' A private joke which on another occasion it would have amused her to share with her English chauffeur at the expense of the despising French, it had nothing joky about it today.

'Looks like it,' Teakle replied, and jumped down with an agility she would not have expected of a man his age.

Teakle's virility should have been some consolation to his mistress, but she could only feel irritated – by motor-cars, men, the frustrating of a plan which nobody but herself knew about. She was considering whether to stand around helpless by the roadside, or remain sulking inside the car, when she realised that what had seemed tragic might prove a godsend.

'I am going to walk on ahead,' she announced laboriously while climbing down. 'The exercise – the air – will do me good.'

'Won't be much more than a jiffy,' her servant assured her.

'Oh, but take your time!' she insisted, already starting up the hill. 'Don't, please, exhaust yourself,' she advised with exemplary concern. 'I'd hate *that*,' she panted.

'Nothing to it,' the man grumbled, perhaps put out to think that she might be questioning his professional skill.

Mrs Golson turned. She was looking at her watch. Her voice sounded almost martial as her strategy formed and firmed itself.

'In fact I shall definitely want to walk for at least half –, no, make it an hour. And you needn't pick me up,' she added. 'I'll return when I feel I'm ready. I'll meet you here. By then you'll have repaired this exasperating *puncture*.'

'Only change the wheel,' he muttered, somewhat disconsolately it sounded.

If she had sounded stern, it was that Joan Golson had never felt so much her own mistress. In her naughtiness, she made haste to get away before her servant should offer advice, or turn into a nanny or a husband and exercise some form of restraint. But he did not murmur, and as she escaped up the hill, she was conscious of her foolishness in thinking she might be of importance to him, to anybody, except as a source of rewards (to Curly perhaps, though he, too, expected rewards) least of all to the charmed couple at the villa