NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

"Mary Fisher is small and pretty and delicately formed, prone to fainting and weeping and sleeping with men while pretending that she doesn't. "Mary Fisher is loved by my husband, who is her accountant. Hove my husband and I hate Mary Fisher.'

FAY WELDON'S

The LIFE and LOVES of a SHE-DEVIL

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The LIFE and LOVES of a SHE-DEVIL

"Fantastic...a carefully worked-out fable, satiric and finally bitter...Just about everyone in this novel is selfish and horrid, but Weldon tells her story with infectious, wicked glee. Just 'how' Ruth manages her revenge on Bobbo, Mary Fisher and the brats is what makes this malicious parable so palatable. And it's very funny."

Chicago Tribune

"A full-blooded fantasy of revenge... a black comedy from a post-feminist perspective, a searing tour de force of wit, invention and imagination. Written in a brisk, rapid style, it's about as compelling a read as one can find these days. It's also funnier than anything one routinely finds, these days or any others... wildly comic. This is an exceptionally toothsome read, propelled by Weldon's politely savage humor and by one of the most engaging heroines in recent memory."

Detroit Free Press (more)

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"Fay Weldon is blessed with an elegant, high style and a keen wit that never descends into mere sarcasm or venom. The grasping pettiness and confusions of both men and women are delineated with such exactitude that *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* emerges as a delightful triumph."

Minneapolis Tribune

"The fairy tale as fury tale. Logic burns down with the suburban house but the flames to follow are so bright that revenge romps to triumph over reason, even for the reader."

Los Angeles Times

"A remarkable tour de farce...Let me say, right off, that there are no lovable characters in this fable, and so what!...This is high comedy...devilishly delightful."

The New York Times Book Review

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"Brava! for Fay Weldon, grim humorist, the wickedest writer in English...Like Mary Shelley, Fay Weldon creates a sympathetic and superhuman evil-doer. Moreover, the novel lurches with good humor as we cheer along our improbable heroine.... Weldon carries ideas to their extremes. That's why she's so funny."

Houston Post

"Weldon breaks events and conversations into bulletlike one-line paragraphs, the more trivial the content the more fatally precise the expression."

The Village Voice

"Ruth and her revenge are a potent combination, scary and awesome...a fantasy most women have entertained.... Weldon takes chances and makes a leap into fiction of the imagination, exciting, at times thrilling, certainly threatening."

The Washington Post

ATTACK OF THE PARTY OF THE PART

Also by Fay Weldon:

DOWN AMONG THE WOMEN
FEMALE FRIENDS
REMEMBER ME*
WORDS OF ADVICE*
PRAXIS
PUFFBALL
WATCHING ME, WATCHING YOU
THE PRESIDENT'S CHILD
THE RULES OF LIFE
THE SHRAPNEL ACADEMY
THE HEARTS AND LIVES OF MEN

PLAYS

AFTER THE PRIZE ACTION REPLAY LOVE MY LOVE

^{*}Published by Ballantine Books

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fay Weldon was born in England but was originally was brought up in New Zealand and went to St. Andrew's University in Scotland, where she studied economics and psychology. Thereafter she had a series of "odd jobs and hard times" until the mid-sixties, when she started writing. Her fiction includes DOWN AMONG THE WOMEN, FEMALE FRIENDS, REMEMBER ME, OF ADVICE, PRAXIS, WORDS PUFFBALL. WATCHING ME, WATCHING YOU; THE PRES-IDENT'S CHILD; THE RULES OF LIFE; THE SHRAPNEL ACADEMY; and THE HEARTS AND LIVES OF MEN. She is the author of several plays for the theater and television. She has three children and lives in London.

Mary Fisher lives in a High Tower, on the edge of the sea: she writes a great deal about the nature of love. She tells lies.

Mary Fisher is forty-three, and accustomed to love. There has always been a man around to love her, sometimes quite desperately, and she has on occasion returned this love, but never, I think, with desperation. She is a writer of romantic fiction. She tells lies to herself, and to the world.

Mary Fisher has \$ (US) 754,300 on deposit in a bank in Cyprus, where the tax laws are lax. This is the equivalent of £502,867 sterling, 1,931,009 German marks, 1,599,117 Swiss francs, 185,055,050 yen, and so forth, it hardly matters which. A woman's life is what it is, in any corner of the world. And wherever you go

THE LIFE AND LOVES OF A SHE-DEVIL

it is the same—to them that hath, such as Mary Fisher, shall be given, and to them that hath not, such as myself, even that which they have shall be taken away.

Mary Fisher earned all her money herself. Her first husband, Jonah, told her that capitalism was immoral, and she believed him, having a gentle and pliable nature. Otherwise no doubt by now Mary Fisher would have a substantial portfolio of investments. As it is, she owns four houses and these are cumulatively worthdepending on the state of the property market—anything between half a million and a million dollars. A house, of course, only means anything in financial terms if there is anyone to buy it, or if you can bear to sell it. Otherwise a house can only be somewhere to live, or somewhere where those connected with you can live. With luck, the ownership of property brings peace of mind; without this luck it brings aggravation and discontent. I wish unluck in property matters on Mary Fisher.

Mary Fisher is small and pretty and delicately formed, prone to fainting and weeping and sleeping with men while pretending that she doesn't.

Mary Fisher is loved by my husband, who is her accountant.

I love my husband and I hate Mary Fisher.

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Now. Outside the world turns: tides surge up the cliffs at the foot of Mary Fisher's tower, and fall again. In Australia the great gum trees weep their bark away; in Calcutta myriad flickers of human energy ignite and flare and die; in California the surfers weld their souls with foam and flutter off into eternity. And I am fixed here and now, trapped in my body, pinned to one particular spot, hating Mary Fisher. It is all I can do. Hate obsesses and transforms me: it is my singular attribution. I have only recently discovered it.

Better to hate than to grieve. I sing in praise of hate, and all its attendant energy. I sing a hymn to the death of love.

If you travel inland from Mary Fisher's tower, down its sweep of graveled drive (the gardener is paid \$110

a week, which is low in any currency), through the windswept avenue of sadly blighted poplars (perhaps this is his revenge), then off her property and on to the main road and through the rolling western hills, and down to the great wheat plain, and on and on for sixty miles or so, you come to the suburbs and the house where I live: to the little green garden where my and Bobbo's children play. There are a thousand more or less similar houses, to the east, north, west, and south: we are in the middle, exactly in the middle, of a place called Eden Grove. A suburb. Neither town nor country: intermediate. Green, leafy, prosperous, and, some say, beautiful. I grant you it is a better place to live than a street in downtown Bombay.

I know how central I am in this centerless place because I spend a lot of time with maps. I need to know the geographical detail of misfortune. The distance between my house and Mary Fisher's tower is one hundred and eight kilometers, or sixty-seven miles.

The distance between my house and the station is threequarters of a mile, and from my house to the shops is seven hundred and twenty-five yards. Unlike the majority of my neighbors I do not drive a car. I am less well coordinated than they. I have failed four driving tests. I might as well walk, I say, since there is so little else to do, once you have swept the corners and polished the surfaces, in this place which was planned as paradise. How wonderful, I say, and they believe me, to stroll through heaven.

Bobbo and I live at No. 19 Nightbird Drive. It is a select street in the best part of Eden Grove. The house is very new: we are its first occupants. It is clean of

resonance. Bobbo and I have two bathrooms, and picture windows, and we wait for the trees to grow: presently, you see, we will even have privacy.

Eden Grove is a friendly place. My neighbors and I give dinner parties for one another. We discuss things, rather than ideas; we exchange information, not theories; we keep ourselves steady by thinking about the particular. The general is frightening. Go too far into the past and there is nonexistence, too far into the future and there you find the same. The present must be exactly balanced. These days spare ribs are served, Chinese style, daringly, with paper napkins and finger bowls. It smacks of change. The men nod and laugh: the women tremble and smile and drop dishes.

It is a good life. Bobbo tells me so. He comes home less often, so does not say so as often as he did.

Does Mary Fisher love my husband? Does she return his love? Does she look into his eyes, and speak to him without words?

I was taken to visit her once, and stumbled over the carpet—a true Kashmiri rug valued at \$2,540—as I approached her. I am six feet two inches tall, which is fine for a man but not for a woman. I am as dark as Mary Fisher is fair, and have one of those jutting jaws that tall, dark women often have, and eyes sunk rather far back into my face, and a hooked nose. My shoulders are broad and bony and my hips broad and fleshy, and the muscles in my legs are well developed. My arms, I swear, are too short for my body. My nature and my looks do not agree. I was unlucky, you might think, in the great lottery that is woman's life.

When I tripped over the rug Mary Fisher smirked, and I saw her eyes dart to Bobbo's, as if this were a scene they had already envisaged.

"Tell me about your wife," she would have murmured, after love.

"Clumsy," he would have said. He might have added, if I was lucky, "No beauty, but a good soul." Yes, I think he would have said that, if only to excuse himself and deny me. A man cannot be expected to be faithful to a wonderful mother and a good wife—such concepts lack the compulsion of the erotic.

Would he also have remarked, in guilty and excited mirth, "She has four moles on her chin and from three of them hairs grow?" I imagine so; who could resist it, giggling and squealing and tickling in bed, after love, assessing life?

I am quite sure at some time or other Bobbo would have said, in the manner of husbands, "I love her. I love her but I'm not in love with her: not the way I'm in love with you. Do you understand?" And Mary Fisher would have nodded, understanding very well.

I know what a life is like: I know what people are like. I know that we all make common cause in self-deception and wishful thinking, and who more so than adulterous lovers? I have time to think about it, when the dishes are done, and the house is quiet, and life ticks by, and there is nothing to do except wonder whether Bobbo and Mary Fisher are together now, now—how strange time seems! And I think and think and I act each role, sometimes him, sometimes her. It makes me

feel part of the whole both make. I, who have been made nothing. And then Bobbo rings and says he won't be home, and the children come back from school, and a strange familiar silence descends upon the house, a thick, white muffling blanket thrown over our lives: and even when the cat catches a mouse, the yowls and yelps seem to come from a distant place, another world.

Bobbo is a good-looking man, and I am lucky to have him. The neighbors often remark upon it. "You are so lucky, having someone like Bobbo." Not surprising, their eyes go on to say, that he's away every now and then. Bobbo is five feet ten, four inches shorter than I am. He is six inches taller than Mary Fisher, who has size 4 feet and last year spent \$1,200.50 on shoes. In bed with me, all the same, Bobbo has no potency problems. He shuts his eyes. For all I know he shuts his eyes when he's in bed with her, but I don't really think so. It's not how I envisage it.

What I think is that the other women up and down Eden Grove are better than I am at telling themselves lies. Their own husbands are away often enough. How otherwise but by lies do they live, do they keep their self-esteem? Sometimes, of course, not even lies can protect them. They are found hanging in the garage, or cold and overdosed in the marital bed. Love has killed them, murderous in its own death throes, flailing and biting and poisonous.

And how, especially, do ugly women survive, those whom the world pities? The dogs, as they call us. I'll tell you; they live as I do, outfacing truth, hardening the skin against perpetual humiliation, until it's as tough and cold as a crocodile's. And we wait for old age to equalize all things. We make good old women.

My mother was pretty enough, and ashamed of me. I could see it in her eyes. I was her eldest child. "The image of your father," she'd say. She'd married again, of course, by then. She'd left my father long ago, far behind, despised. My two half-sisters both took after her; they were delicate, fine-boned things. I liked them. They knew how to charm, and they charmed even me. "Little ugly duckling," my mother said to me once, almost weeping, smoothing my wiry hair. "What are we to do with you? What's to become of you?" I think perhaps she would have loved me, if she could. But ugly and discordant things revolted her: she couldn't help it. She said as much often enough: not of me, particularly, of course, but I knew the patterns of her thought, I knew what she meant. I was born, I sometimes think, with nerve endings not inside but outside my skin: they shivered and twanged. I grew lumpish and brutish in the attempt to seal them over, not to know too much.

And I could never, you see, even for my mother's sake, learn just to smile and stay quiet. My mind struck keys like a piano dreadfully out of tune, randomly played, never quiet. She christened me Ruth, wanting, I think, even in my first days, to forget me if she could. A short, dismissive, sorrowful name. My little half-sisters were called Jocelyn and Miranda. They married well, and disappeared, no doubt into contentment, bathed in the glow of the world's admiration.

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Mary Fisher, dweller in the High Tower! What's for dinner tonight? Perhaps you don't even know. Perhaps you leave that to the servants. And who's for company? Perhaps you have yet more lovers to choose from: to gaze out with you, through plate-glass windows, over harbor and sea; to watch the moon rise and the sky turn color? Perhaps you never eat, but with a mind half on food, and half on love to come? Lucky you! But tonight, whoever else, you shan't have Bobbo. Tonight Bobbo is eating with me.

I shall open the French windows from the dining room onto the garden; that is, if the wind doesn't get up. We have some very pretty night-scented stock growing up the side of the garage. We have double-glazing.

The bill for keeping Mary Fisher's windows clean was \$295.75, only last month. The sum was transferred from