

THE HOMESTEAD
HOT SPRINGS
VIRGINIA

November 17, 1947

Dear Miss Montgomery:

"Many Moons" was the first thing I took up after a series of five eye operations which lasted from October, 1940 to April, 1941. I had one of the worse cataracts in history and also one of the most mysterious eyes. I was shot by an arrow when I was six in Falls Church, Virginia, and the sight of my right eye was given up as lost also. Doctors regard it as a miracle that I did not go stone blind when I was six. Of the 30,000 recorded cases in medical history only three of us did not go stone blind. One great doctor said that I saw until the cataract set in in 1940, although I did not have any apparatus of vision. He said I could call it E.S.P. or God. Another man said it was like playing a piano with both hands cut off at the wrist.

The terrible strains of the operations resulted in a severe nervous breakdown which struck me one Sunday night in June, 1941, after I had written the first 300 words of "Many Moons". I began to shake all over but I continued to write. I managed to finish the story that night, which is something of a miracle for me who has often taken eight weeks to write 4,000 words. I used to write on the typewriter and I often did stories over from beginning to end from five to ten times. I had to take up a new system of writing with the loss of 8/10ths of my vision, and starting with "Many Moons" I used a soft black pencil and yellow paper, since black on yellow is the most visible of all color combinations. This is why it is used on all American highways for traffic signs. Since I could not see what I was writing, I used to run my thumb down the page to keep track of where I was, but I often wrote over lines. Now through practice and strong glasses I write over only when I get tired. I write on both sides of the paper and get only 20 words on a side. I use 200 sharpened pencils.

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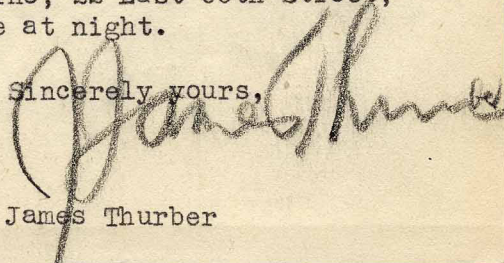
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The original draft of "Many Moons" was accidentally left on the kitchen table in the summer house of a friend of mine on Martha's Vineyard, and I did not get it until the following spring. The breakdown had made it impossible for me to write during that summer and winter, anyway. When I had the story copied it ended without the three attempts to conceal the moon. E. B. White, whose criticism has always meant a great deal to me, in both writing and drawing, suggested that the story seemed incomplete the way I had it. The little Princess just went to sleep with the golden moon, and without any problems. I thought up the solution myself, but I gratefully acknowledge the nudge from Mr. White.

The story was condensed in Reader's Digest without my consent, since the publisher had all reprint rights at that time. I retain ^{my} ~~them~~ self now. It was also done on Radio Reader's Digest. I regard "The Great Quillow", my second fairy tale, as being better than "Many Moons" and it was seven times as hard to write. My final expression in this field, "The White Deer", took me a year and is better than the other two. It was brought out as an adult book. I have no doubt whatever that because of my nervous condition I entered the world of fairy tales partly as an escape. It helped a lot.

I am nearly 6' 2", and I weigh only 155 lbs. I have a thick thatch of hair that is now nearly white. My complexion has been described as "a cranberry in candlelight". I am extremely nervous as a result of not only five eye operations, but of two pneumonias and a ruptured appendix, all within sixteen months. I was given up for lost because of peritonitis, but I had to finish "The White Deer" so I did not have time to die. For further information about my personality write to Mr. White or Joel Sayre at The New Yorker, or Miss Ann Honeycutt, an old voice teacher of mine, 22 East 66th Street, New York City. I sing only late at night.

Sincerely yours,



James Thurber

West Cornwall, Conn.
January 14, 1948

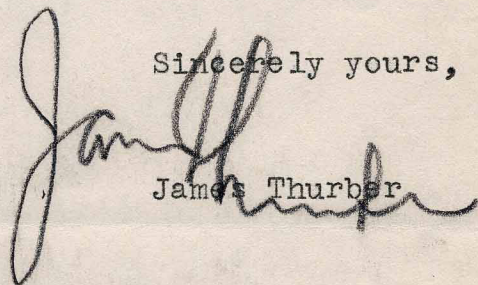
Dear Mrs. Montgomery:

The objections to your piece consist mainly of loud and indignant protest from both my wife and daughter who feel that the dialogue, since it was made up, definitely gives the idea of being unreal. In other words, you have romanticized the situation, since my daughter was not present at the time and Mrs. Thurber resents dialogue which is so unlike her, and also feels that the use of "Jamie," etc., has the effect of presenting her as a little soft and silly.

Of course the dialogue method helps you to pad out the story, but it seems to all of us that it would be improved by casting it into straight third-person prose. This would eliminate the feeling of artificiality that the dialogue is bound to give.

Maybe I could send you some further material but I don't know what it would be. I have always felt that straight journalistic accounts are better than fancied situations. Maybe you can see your way to rearranging the material.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Thurber".

James Thurber

Mrs. Elizabeth R. Montgomery
3209 Alki Avenue
Seattle 6, Washington

jt:jh

West Cornwall, Conn.
March 13, 1948

Dear Mrs. Montgomery:

Your new version is all right with me and, as I said, the original one was opposed by my wife and daughter who do not object to dialogue but felt that your version of how they talk did not do them justice.

The question of children liking dialogue better than solid prose has interested me for years. You are quite right that they like dialogue better but the trouble is that many children grow to be eighteen or twenty before they can throw off their awful addiction to conversation. Most girls in their teens prefer something like "Centennial Summer" to "My Antonia" simply because there is more talk in the cheaper novel. When they do get around to solid prose they find it better and just as interesting. I do not believe they should be catered to or surrendered to by adult writers and teachers. Indulgence should be tempered with discipline.

Mrs. Thurber and I were living in a house of our own that summer on the Vineyard and had left the manuscript at the house of some friends who live nearby, but this is a minor point.

My father was once with the Underwood Typewriter Company and I began typing when I was eight. I never learned the touch system but for nearly forty years I wrote extremely fast. You have to if you are a newspaper reporter, as I was. Not many reporters used the touch system but they all wrote swiftly. My father was something of a speed demon but he was not a touch man either. After six months a typist should be able to type with his eyes closed by memory of the keyboard, and most of us operate that way. The only hunt and peck people I ever knew were girls in their teens and young wives who got typewriters for Christmas. Those who still hunt and peck after six months or a year should give up and go in for basket weaving. I could still type but I would not be able to see the type, and a pencil gives you contact with your words. A great many writers use pencil and paper and then type it out later.

I'm sorry you have been put to so much trouble. All my best wishes for the success of your book.

Sincerely yours,

James Thurber
James Thurber JH

Mrs. Elizabeth R. Montgomery
3209 Alki Avenue
Seattle 6, Washington

jt:jh

James Thurber

"Many Moons"

Published by Harcourt-Brace Year 1942

Real name James Grover Thurber Pen name James Thurber

What do your family and friends call you? My family and my intimate friends call me Jamie. I am Jim to most people.

A. YOUR BACKGROUND

Date of birth December 8, 1894 Place of birth Columbus, Ohio

Father's occupation An honest politician Number of Brothers 2 and sisters None

Father's nationality American Mother's nationality American

Kind of home during childhood (farm, small town, city apt. etc.) _____

A series of two-story houses Where In Columbus

Amount of schooling (high school, college, etc.) Grammar and High School in Columbus and 4 years at Ohio State University. (Not graduated)

Economic status during childhood (poor, middle class, wealthy) poor, middle class.

Special interests as a child (sports, books, games, etc.) _____

I read more than anything else, but I liked games and could play them well;- In spite of the loss of my left eye at the age of six.

Childhood ambitions To become a newspaper man, artist and writer. I managed all of these.

When did you begin to write? At the age of six.

Why? You are a writer yourself and you know why.

Who encouraged you? Several friends and teachers in grammar grades, high school and college. My chief influence was the late Professor Joseph

What and when was your first success or recognition? Russell Taylor.

How did you happen to write for children? I do not write for children as

children. I regard them as more intelligent and aware than adults. I never use big words on adults.

Anything else about your background which has a bearing on your writing.

Handwritten scribbles

B. THE WRITING OF THIS BOOK

Where did you get the idea for the book? Dont know - had it in mind for many years.

When? (Season as well as year) I started writing it in June, 1941.

Were the characters real people, or based on real people?

I believe that all good characters are a combination of the imaginary and the real.

Where were you living at the time? On Martha's Vineyard

What was your major occupation? Writer

Names (also nicknames) and identities of members of your household at the time. (If children, give ages.) My daughter, Rosemary, was 10. I have no other children. She and I have a thousand nicknames for each other, all of which we regard as strictly private.

Did you talk the book idea over with any of them? I talk all my writing over with my wife, Helen, who was a professional editor, and with my daughter, Rosemary.
Did you discuss it with an editor? I gather you mean publisher. I discussed only the artist, who was the publisher's selection and a good one.
Where and how did you get the material? (library research, travel, personal experience, etc.) Out of my little mind.

When did you begin to write the book? See above

Where? See above.

How much had you had published when you began it? (Give names of books)
About 12 books - no space here to list them.

What was your purpose in writing this book? The tremendous pleasure I knew I would get out of it.

How do you write? (typewriter, long-hand, dictate) See covering letter.

Where? (study, office, etc.) On a card table in the guest room.

Do you keep regular office hours? If so, what are they? No

Do you revise much? Yes Write easily or laboriously? Combination of both.

Do you let your family or friends read your work, or try it out on children? My wife and daughter are my best critics.

Who makes your final copies? (yourself, private secretary, public typist, etc.) Private Secretary

Did you make an outline before writing the book? I never make outlines.

Did you decide on the title first or last? I don't know. It was title of musical comedy Ohio State Scarlet Mask, 1923 which I wrote

How long did it take you to write the book? See letter.

Did you work on it steadily? See letter.

Did it go fairly smoothly or did you hit rough spots? (Details of any particular difficulty and its solution would be appreciated.)

See letter

Was your book accepted immediately by a publisher? Yes

Was it immediately popular on publication? Yes

Anything else about your writing that might be of interest, especially anything that concerns this book.

C. ILLUSTRATIONS

How much did you have to do with the illustrations of your book? Nothing.

If you did them yourself, which came first, the pictures or the text?

What medium did you work in?

How much experience had you had in illustrating?

D. WHAT SORT OF PERSON YOU ARE

What did you look like when you wrote this book? Dark or fair? _____

Tall or short? Tall Thin or plump? Thin

Color of eyes? Blue Wore glasses? Yes

Color of hair? gray Kind of hair--long or short? Medium

Curly or straight? Curly How did you wear it? _____

Any special features of your appearance (square jaw, dimples, stoop, etc.) Pointed jaw - mustache - high forehead

Are you quiet or talkative? Talkative Friendly or reserved? Friendly

Do you laugh a great deal or are you usually grave? Laugh

Are you quick-tempered or calm and placid? Quick-tempered

What sort of clothes do you wear most when writing? (sports, suits, slacks, etc.) Slacks, sport shirts, sport jackets, moccasins

Favorite occupations and hobbies? Owning dogs, used to bowl, play ^{knitting}

What is your normal speech like? (Meticulously correct, colloquial, slangy, abrupt, rambling, etc.) _____

What are some of your pet expressions and exclamations? _____

If strongly religious, give denomination. Non-practising Methodist

Any other details about yourself, no matter how trivial, which might help me to picture you in my own mind. See letter

Can you direct me to any articles or books which have been written about you? Thurber, Inc., Saturday Review by Robert Coates; The Legendary Thurber, The Ladies' Home Journal, July, 1946; Thurber, The Comic, Prufrock by Peter DeVries in poetry about 1943.

If you have a photograph or snapshot of yourself of about the vintage of your book, I would appreciate it. Of course I would return it promptly.