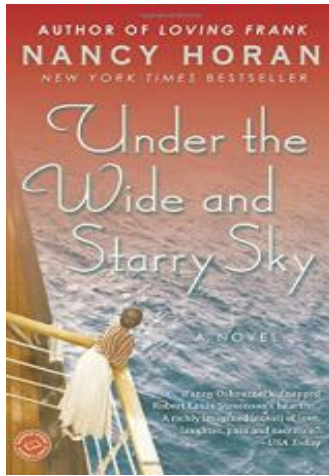


# Under the Wide and Starry Sky

by Nancy Horan



## About the Book

From Nancy Horan, *New York Times* bestselling author of *LOVING FRANK*, comes her much-anticipated second novel, which tells the improbable love story of Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson and his tempestuous American wife, Fanny.

At the age of 35, Fanny van de Grift Osbourne has left her philandering husband in San Francisco to set sail for Belgium --- with her three children and nanny in tow --- to study art. It is a chance for this adventurous woman to start over, to make a better life for all of them, and to pursue her own desires. Not long after her arrival, however, tragedy strikes, and Fanny and her children repair to a quiet artists' colony in France where she can recuperate. Emerging from a deep sorrow, she meets a lively Scot, Robert Louis Stevenson, 10 years her junior, who falls instantly in love with the earthy, independent and opinionated "belle Americaine."

Fanny does not immediately take to the slender young lawyer who longs to devote his life to writing --- and who would eventually pen such classics as *TREASURE ISLAND* and *THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*. In time, though, she succumbs to Stevenson's charms, and the two begin a fierce love affair --- marked by intense joy and harrowing darkness --- that spans the decades and the globe. The shared life of these two strong-willed individuals unfolds into an adventure as impassioned and unpredictable as any of Stevenson's own unforgettable tales.

## Discussion Guide

1. In order to separate from her unfaithful husband, Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne takes her children across the continental U.S. and the Atlantic to study art in Europe. Do you think it's the wisest choice, given the impact on her children? Would you make a similar decision under the circumstances? Are there other options she could have pursued?

2. At first glance, Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson might seem an unlikely match. Why do you think they are so drawn to each other? Why does their relationship endure?
3. THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE has become a phrase synonymous with the idea of the divided self. At any points in the novel, does Louis seem to live a double life? Does Fanny? In what ways do Fanny, Louis, and other characters struggle with their own identities?
4. After criticizing a story of Fanny's, W. E. Henley incites a quarrel with Louis that threatens their friendship. Does Fanny deserve the criticism? Do you think she and RLS enhance or hinder each other's artistic ambitions and accomplishments?
5. Take a look at John Singer Sargent's painting "Robert Louis Stevenson and His Wife" (1885; currently in the Steve Wynn collection). What do you think of his portrayal of Fanny and Louis?
6. Many of us feel the need to shape a story out of the facts of our lives. In making these stories, we sometimes create myths about ourselves. Does Fanny invent myths about herself? Does RLS do the same?
7. The Stevensons travel all over the globe in search of the ideal climate for their family, from Switzerland to the South Seas. How do landscape and environment affect each of them?
8. Many of Louis's friends find Fanny overprotective of her husband. Do you agree or disagree? Are her actions justified?
9. In Samoa, late in their marriage, Louis suggests that the work Fanny does is not that of an artist. He tells her, "No one should be offended if it is said that he is not an artist. The only person who should be insulted by such an observation is an artist who supports his family with his work." Do you agree with this? What does Fanny consider her art? Do you agree with her views?
10. Why do you think Horan chooses "Out of my country and myself I go" as the epigraph for this book?
11. What is Robert Louis Stevenson's literary legacy? In what ways does reading UNDER THE WIDE AND STARRY SKY change your view of him and his writing?

## Author Bio

Nancy Horan is the author of two *New York Times* bestselling novels. *LOVING FRANK* remained on the *Times* list for over a year. It has been translated into 16 languages and won the 2009 Prize for Historical Fiction awarded by the Society of American Historians. *UNDER THE WIDE AND STARRY SKY* was named one of the best books of 2014 by the *Washington Post* and was chosen as a "Today Show" Book Club read. The setting of *THE HOUSE OF LINCOLN* is Springfield, Illinois, where the author was born and raised. She worked as a journalist in the Chicago area before embarking on her career as a novelist. She now lives with her husband on an island in Puget Sound.

Photo Credit: Kevin Horan

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## **Under the Wide and Starry Sky**

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