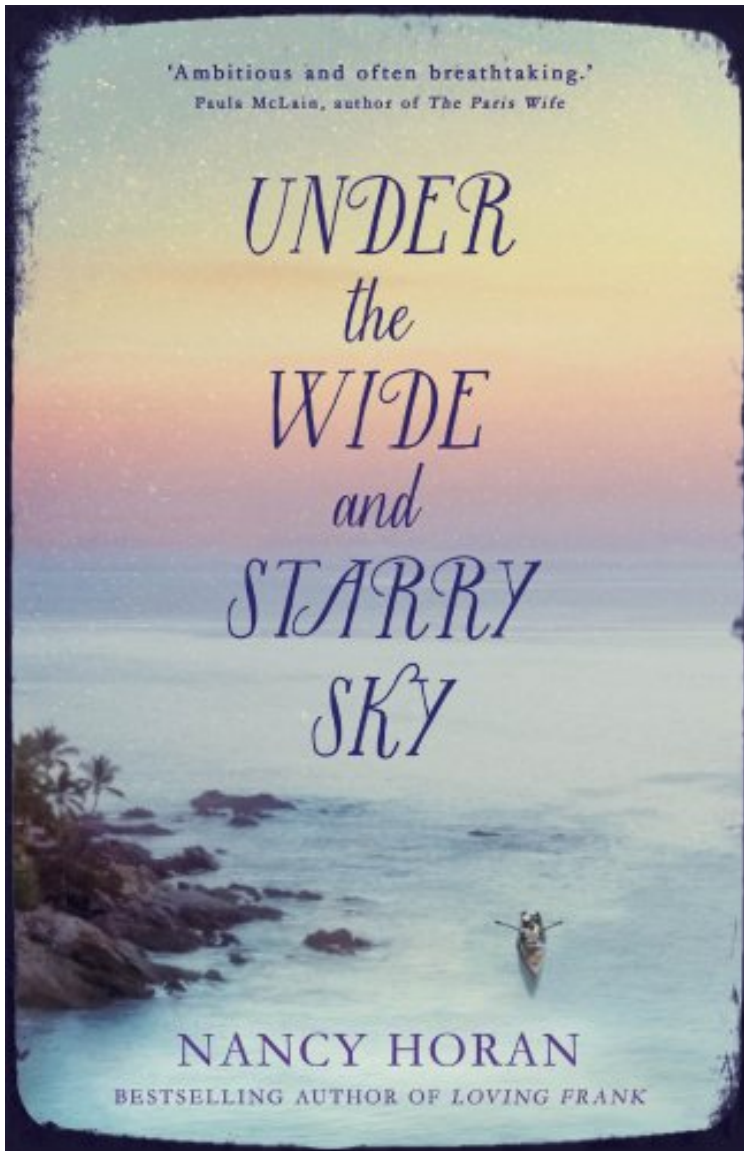


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Under the Wide and Starry Sky (English Edition)



Par Nancy Horan
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurTHE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERAt the age of thirty-five, Fanny van de Grift Osbourne has left her philandering husband in San Francisco to set sail for Belgium to study art, with her three children and nanny in tow. Not long after her arrival, however, tragedy strikes, and Fanny and her brood repair to a quiet artists' colony in France where she can recuperate. There she meets Robert Louis Stevenson, ten years her junior, who is instantly smitten with the earthy, independent, and opinionated belle Americaine.A woman ahead of her time, Fanny does not immediately take to the young lawyer who longs to

devote his life to literature rather than the law - and who would eventually write 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 decades as they travel the world for the sake of his health following their art and dreams eventually settling in Samoa where Robert Louis Stevenson is buried, with these words on his grave: Under the wide and starry sky, Dig the grave and let me lie. Glad did I live and gladly die, And I laid me down with a will. This be the verse you grave for me: Here he lies where he longed to be; Home is the sailor, home from sea, And the hunter

home from the hill. (Requiem, Robert Louis Stevenson) Extrait 1875 Where are the dogs? Sammy asked, staring up at her. Fanny Osbourne stood at the boats rail, holding an umbrella against the August drizzle. Her feet were planted apart, and each of her boys leaned against a leg. Around them, a forest of masts creaked in the dark harbor. She searched the distance for the shape of a city. Here and there smudges of light promised Antwerp was waiting, just beyond the pier. Well see the dogs tomorrow, she told him. Are they sleeping now?

the boy asked. Yes, they're surely sleeping. Lanterns illuminated the other passengers, whose weary faces reflected her own fatigue. After a ten-day Atlantic crossing, she and the children had transferred to this paddleboat for the tail end of their journey, across the English Channel to Antwerp. Now they huddled on deck among the others-mostly American and English businessmen-waiting for some sign that they could disembark. Fanny had begun spinning stories about the famous cart-pulling dogs of Antwerp soon after they boarded the ship in New York. As her sons' patience waned during the long trip, the dogs' feats became increasingly more fantastic. They swam out to sea to rescue the drowning, dug through the mud to unearth gold, gripped trousers in their teeth and pulled old men out of burning buildings. When they weren't busy delivering milk around town, the dogs carried children through the cobblestone streets, calling upon bakers who handed out sugar-dusted cakes and apple fritters. Now, moored a few yards away from the great port city, Fanny hoped that the dogcart was not a thing of the past in Antwerp these days. Eleven o'clock, said Mr. Hendricks, the baby-faced surgeon from New York who stood nearby, eyeing his pocket watch. I suspect we won't be getting off this boat tonight. They watched a cluster of customs officials exchange heated Flemish with the captain of their channel steamer. Do you understand what's happening? Fanny asked. The Belgians are refusing to inspect anyone's trunks until tomorrow. That's impossible! There aren't enough beds on this little boat for all of us. The surgeon shrugged. What can one do? I am philosophical about these things. And I am not, she muttered. The children are exhausted. Shall I try to secure sleeping cabins for you? Mr.

Hendricks asked, his pretty features wreathed in concern. The doctor had been kind to Fanny from the moment she'd met him at dinner the first evening of the voyage. Why, art! she responded when he asked what had prompted her journey. Culture. Isn't that the reason Americans travel to Europe? The man had stared intently at her across the table, as if deciding whether she was mad or heroic for bringing her three children abroad for an entire year. My daughter and I will study figure drawing and painting, she'd explained.

I want her to have classical training with the best. Ah, he said knowingly, you, too, then, are a voluntary exile. I come for the same reason-the best of everything Europe has to offer. This year it's Paris in the autumn, then Italy for the winter. She had watched him maneuver a forkful of peas into his mouth and wondered when he had time to work. He was a bachelor and quite rich, judging from his itinerary and impeccable clothes.

His soft black ringlets framed an unlined forehead, round pink cheeks, and the lips of a putto. She had glanced at Sammy next to her, pushing his peas onto a spoon with his left thumb. Watch how Mr. Hendricks does it, she whispered in the boy's ear. I can see you have mettle, Mrs. Osbourne, the surgeon said. Do you have any French? I don't, but Belle knows a little. Hendricks emitted a worried hum. If the Old World is to work its magic you'll need to learn the language. Flemish is spoken in Belgium, but French is a close second. If you plan to travel at all, that's the better language. Then we all must learn it. Having determined the fastest route to the mother's affections, the surgeon smilingly made his offer. I would be happy to teach you a few phrases. Every afternoon for the remainder of the journey, he had conducted language lessons for her and the children in the ship's library. Now she told Hendricks, Don't ask about the sleeping accommodations quite yet. Give me a few moments. Fanny glanced over at her daughter, Belle, who shared an umbrella with the nanny.

She beckoned the girl, then bent down to her older boy. Go to Miss Kate, Sammy, she said. You, too, Hervey. She lifted the three-year-old and carried him to the governess. Do keep in the background with the children, Kate, Fanny told the young woman, who took Harvey into her arms. It's best the officials don't see our whole entourage. Belle, you come with me. The girl's eyes pleaded as she ducked under her mother's umbrella. Do I have to? You needn't say a word. Looking distraught would be no challenge for Belle right now. The wind had whipped the girl's dark hair into a bird's nest. Brown crescents hung below her eyes. Were

almost there, darlin. Fanny Osbourne grabbed her daughters hand and pushed through a sea of shoulders to reach the circle of officials. Of the Belgians, only one lanky gray-headed man had a promising aspect. He started with surprise when Fanny rested a gloved hand on his forearm. Do you understand English, sir? she asked him. He nodded. We are ladies traveling alone. The official, a foot taller than she, stared down at her, rubbing his forehead. Beneath the hand cupped over his brow, his eyes traveled artlessly from her mouth to her waist. We have come all the way from New York and have experienced nothing but chivalry from the English officers on our ship. Surely there must be some way . . . The Belgian shifted from foot to foot while he looked off to the side of her head. Sir, Fanny said, engaging his eyes. Sir, we entrust ourselves to your courtesy. In a matter of minutes, the plump little surgeon was trundling their luggage onto the pier. On deck, the other passengers fumed as a customs man lifted the lids of Fannys trunks, gave the contents a perfunctory glance, and motioned for her party to move through the gate. Bastards! someone shouted at the officials as Fanny and her family, along with Mr. Hendricks, followed a porter who loaded their trunks on a cart and led them toward an open horse-drawn wagon with enormous wheels. Near the terminal, masses of people waited beneath a metal canopy. Women in head scarves sat on stuffed grain sacks clutching their earthly valuables: babies, food baskets, rosaries, satchels. One woman clasped a violin case to her chest. They come from all over, said the surgeon as he helped the children into the wagon. Theyre running from some war or potato field. This is their last stop before America. You can be sure the pickpockets are working tonight. Fanny shuddered. Her hand went to her breast to make certain the pouch of bills sewn into her corset was secure, and then to her skirt pocket, where she felt the smooth curve of her derringer. Take them to the Htel St. Antoine, Hendricks ordered the driver as the last trunk was hoisted into the back of the vehicle. He turned to Fanny. When you know where you will be staying permanently, leave a forwarding address at the desk. I will write to you from Paris. He squeezed her hand, then lifted her into the wagon. Take care of yourself, dear lady. Less than an hour later, ensconced in the only available room of the hotel, she stepped behind a screen, untied her corset, and groaned with relief as it dropped to the floor, money pouch and all. She threw a nightgown over her head and climbed into bed between her slumbering boys. In the narrow bed an arms length away, Belles head protruded from one end of the sheet, while Miss Kates open mouth sent up a snore from the other. Fanny leaned against the headboard, eyes open. It had been a harrowing monthlong journey to get to this bed. Twelve days travel on one rock-hard train seat after another from California to Indianapolis. A few days respite at her parents house, followed by a mad dash by wagon across flooded rivers to catch the train to New York before their tickets expired. Six thousand miles lay between Fanny and her husband. Whether he would send her money, as he had promised, was uncertain. Tomorrow she would think about that. Tomorrow she would enroll herself and Belle at the art academy and wangle a ride on a dogcart for the boys. Tomorrow she would find a cheap apartment and begin a new life. She got out of bed and went to the window. Across the square, Notre Dame Cathedral soared above the other night shapes of Antwerp. The rain had stopped, and the unclouded moon poured white light through the lacy stone cutwork of the church spire. When the cathedral bells rang out midnight, she caught her breath. She had believed in signs since she was a girl. The clanging, loud and joyful as Christmas matins, hit her marrow and set loose a months worth of tears. If that isnt a good omen, she thought, I dont know what is. She climbed back into bed, slid down between her boys, and slept at last.

From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* A richly imagined [novel] of love, laughter, pain and sacrifice . . . [Fanny Osbourne] kidnapped Robert Louis Stevensons heart. *USA Today* Powerful . . . flawless . . . a perfect example of what a man and a woman will do for love, and what they can accomplish when its meant to be. *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* Spectacular . . . an exhilarating epic about a free-spirited couple who traveled the world yet found home only in one another. *Booklist* (starred review) Horans prose is gorgeous enough to keep a reader transfixed, even if the story itself werent so compelling. I kept re-reading passages just to savor the exquisite wordplay. . . . Few writers are as masterful as she is at blending carefully researched history with the novelists art. *The Dallas Morning News* A classic artistic bildungsroman and a retort to the genre, a novel that shows how love and marriage can simultaneously offer inspiration and encumbrance. *The New York Times* Book Operatic, global in its setting . . . [The years in the South Seas are] deliciously reminiscent of the adventure novels Stevenson wrote, and Horans delightful reimagining is just as entertaining. *The Washington Post* Nancy Horan has done it again, capturing the entwined lives of Fanny Osbourne and Robert Louis Stevenson so uncannily, it reads like truth. Sarah Blake, author of *The Postmistress* Horan has a distinct knack for evoking the rich, complicated lives of long-gone artists and the women who inspired them. *Entertainment Weekly* Fanny and Louis are wild-hearted seekers, and Nancy Horan traces their

incredible journey fearlessly, plunging us through decades, far-flung continents, and chilling brushes with death. Ambitious and often breathtaking, this sweeping story spills over with spirited, uncompromising life. Paula McLain, author of *The Paris Wife* A delight from start to finish . . . as stirring as any of R. L. Stevensons famous tales. Hudson Valley News A dazzling love story . . . Horan deftly brings to life a woman shamefully overlooked by history, and celebrates her contributions to the man whom history remembered. BookPage Horans empathy for both Louis and Fanny allows her to capture their life together with all the complexity and nuance of a real-life relationship. . . . This beautifully written novel, neatly balanced between its two protagonists, makes them come alive with grace, humor, and understanding. Publishers Weekly From the Hardcover edition.