



Oh the Glory of It All

Sean Wilsey

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"In the beginning we were happy. And we were always excessive. So in the beginning we were happy to excess." With these opening lines Sean Wilsey takes us on an exhilarating tour of life in the strangest, wealthiest, and most grandiose of families.

Sean's blond-bombshell mother (one of the thinly veiled characters in Armistead Maupin's bestselling **Tales of the City**) is a 1980s society-page staple, regularly entertaining Black Panthers and movie stars in her marble and glass penthouse, "eight hundred feet in the air above San Francisco; an apartment at the top of a building at the top of a hill: full of light, full of voices, full of windows full of water and bridges and hills." His enigmatic father uses a jet helicopter to drop Sean off at the video arcade and lectures his son on proper hygiene in public restrooms, "You should wash your hands first, before you use the urinal. Not after. Your penis isn't dirty. But your hands are."

When Sean, "the kind of child who sings songs to sick flowers," turns nine years old, his father divorces his mother and marries her best friend. Sean's life blows apart. His mother first invites him to commit suicide with her, then has a "vision" of salvation that requires packing her Louis Vuitton luggage and traveling the globe, a retinue of multiracial children in tow. Her goal: peace on earth (and a Nobel Prize). Sean meets Indira Gandhi, Helmut Kohl, Menachem Begin, and the pope, hoping each one might come back to San Francisco and persuade his father to rejoin the family. Instead, Sean is pushed out of San Francisco and sent spiraling through five high schools, till he finally lands at an unorthodox reform school cum "therapeutic community," in Italy.

With its multiplicity of settings and kaleidoscopic mix of preoccupations—sex, Russia, jet helicopters, seismic upheaval, boarding schools, Middle Earth, skinheads, home improvement, suicide, skateboarding, Sovietology, public transportation, massage, Christian fundamentalism, dogs, Texas, global thermonuclear war, truth, evil, masturbation, hope, Bethlehem, CT, eventual salvation (abridged list)—**Oh the Glory of It All** is memoir as bildungsroman as explosion.

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