

ABDUCTION

At ten o'clock on a Sunday morning in the late summer of 1975, I'm sitting at an upscale bar near Connecticut Avenue, in Washington, D.C. A wide variety of ferns hang down walls and from the ceiling. My eyes are watching the front door through the bar mirror. I'm waiting to see if my law students are good on their word to introduce their dean to some interesting women.



In they walk with a chic madam who runs an escort service, a perky blonde graduate student from Georgetown, and a young woman with long auburn hair.¹ They come to the bar and work their way into the party. I move to the end of the bar where the latter is in a conversation. At first, we ignore each other. Then, our eyes meet and lock. "I'm Fabienne," smiles the young woman with the auburn hair down to her knees. She extends her hand. A touch of insouciance holds a firm gaze, two dark eyes meet the blue of mine. Neither of us blinks.

We marry four years later, September 16, shortly after moving to Cincinnati in 1979; she with her MBA degree fresh from Boston University to work at GE's jet engine division in nearby Evendale; I to begin my second law deanship this time at the University of Cincinnati.

When we celebrate our 37th Wedding Anniversary three years ago, Fabienne is in hospice care. She's dying from metastatic colon cancer.

Children and grandchildren from my first marriage fly in from both coasts to surround her bedside. They want to join us on our anniversary and to say goodbye to

¹ Painting at left is self-portrait by Fabienne (2000).

their stepmother and third granny who is so fully part of their lives. They love her well and true, and she them.

“Oh . . . What a day this is,” she texts me from her bed. She smiles and chatters with them as they gather around. She can’t have children of her own but delights in the accomplishment of each grandchild and shares her grace with everyone.

Fabienne dies two weeks later, Sunday night, October 2. After the priests leave (it is Rector Philip DeVaul’s first day on his new job) we are by ourselves. Not for the first time I kiss her face, lips, and the tip of her nose, tell her I love her, whisper how beautiful she is and how grateful I am that she has come into my life. I hum to her. Tunes I don’t recognize. It’s OK if she lets go. I will take care of myself. We are in sacred space, quiet. Her organs are shutting down; then she fades away.

For the present I live alone in my home on Principio Avenue. Grief fills every crevice of the house where I roam and weep. In the backyard profound sorrow fills the sky between the great oak and the elms on the back slope. Every night I talk with Fabienne or myself out there under the stars or in rain or snow. I see fall come, then winter, and fall again and join the babble among the trees, speak in tears to the lizards and ants, and at night return the stare of deer’s eyes caught by flashlight while eating Fabienne’s garden.

I get a grief counselor and love from friends, parish and family. I read literature on great love affairs that turn into books during the unbearable grief that follows the death of a deeply beloved: Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Elizabeth Alexanders’ memoir, C.S. Lewis’s *A Grief Observed*.

We men have a hard time giving grief its due. We hold grief too closely: no embarrassing, sentimental displays; no choking back sobs; no feeling sorry for ourselves! So, tonight is going to be challenging, for the grief at my loss intertwines with an intimate love story. I tell this story from entries in old journals and notebooks that Fabienne and I begin keeping shortly after we meet as well as other written material.

Fabienne’s earliest journal is the one marked London June 15, 1976. That is nine months after we meet but forty-three years before I discover it. I’ve never looked inside any of her journals, nor she mine. She didn’t destroy any that I know of. Nor did she tell me what to do with them. So, they’re waiting to be opened and read after all those years—for the first time.

Also, I come upon an old journal of mine, a Christmas gift from a friend. I begin writing in this journal on New Year’s Eve three months after we meet.

A year ago, I decide to sell my house and move into an apartment. The movers find a small packet of two letters and a poem I’ve written to Fabienne. She’s stowed them in an old suitcase in the attic. The poem is dated October 13, 1975, the letters were written a few days later, not long after we meet. Looking over the two old letters I wince. In

them I'm brashly trying to seduce and abduct her psyche. You will see what I mean by this quote:

Would you be frightened of me if I stepped out of the darkness and let you see me after your friend leaves, just before you turn the key and close the door? We'd be away from there in a flash -- to my place. You wouldn't have time to scream. You wouldn't want to. I think you would like to see me in my place because you could stay with me always. We would open a different door, all right. . . .

So, I'll be waiting and watching for your lost, departed soul as it walks like a ghost. I'll be waiting to say hello to it, to walk with it to touch it. But maybe not. Maybe a rare moment or two is enough.

Whoa! What a clumsy move. If I write that in today's world, I'll never hear from her and might be strung up by my thumbs, but in the fall of 1975, she takes a lover's initiative and telephones. Her eyes do not blink when we meet for dinner.

Reading old love letters and poems is one thing but opening Fabienne's personal journals written only to herself is quite another. How might I make sense of these? In trepidation that compounds my grief, I hesitate after so much time has passed. What will they say? Will I be willing to face the flaws she sees in my character? Or her amusement at my Candide-like naivete. Before opening her old journals for the first time, I think it prudent to remember my own state of mind at the time she writes. One good way is to read my own contemporaneous comments that begin in the journal I get for Christmas that year.

The earliest entry is dated Saturday, January 3, 1976. I write:

Yesterday, Fabienne came over and I fixed fondue. She described her home life as a child, full of southern tradition in the family estate and in Georgetown. She had an English governess and was used to servants. They dined formally with service and had butlers until the money ran out. Her father is now dying of cancer at 81. [His name is James Beauregard Fadeley] He was for many years a Washington surgeon, with a farm in Calvert County, Maryland and a Georgetown townhouse. She is remarkably bright and well-bred, but at 24 is just finishing her undergraduate degree at Maryland University. She went to Tulane, then dropped out for several years. She wants to go to Yale Law School after traveling.

My journal tells of strolling the beach with her at sunset on the outer banks of Virginia during Epiphany and losing ourselves in the Freer Gallery on the Mall in D.C. in front of a few pieces of ancient oriental art. We're immersed in the intricate silence of ancient beauty, as if we are invisible, like all new lovers. By mid-January I'm certain the Fates and Furies will be sent by jealous gods. We see a playful *Rip Van Winkle* and hear Segovia's passionate guitar at the Kennedy Center. And after viewing *Waiting for Godot* at The Arena Stage, I turn the Theater of the Absurd into joyous optimism.

"She needs a man she can follow and commit to," I record from captivating dinner conversation, "while doing her own work. She needs the masculine side of a

relationship she trusts to make her feel whole. She rejects the ‘women’s liberation ideology.’”

Returning to Washington from a March conference in Philadelphia, I find Fabienne distraught. Her father has just died. She is grateful for the note of comfort I send. I give her some small gifts I brought back. Then, to quote my journal, “Fabienne said she loved me . . . I also think I am in love with Fabienne.” But I hold back telling her so.

And her mother’s blood-hound nose picks up the scent of her daughter’s serious involvement with me. Shirley, her mother, believes that Fabienne can do much better than that. Shirley’s eyes see an older man (with children) *supposedly* separated from his wife *in limbo* waiting the 18 months required before the *alleged* divorce decree is final.

Ruinous dangers lurk for her daughter who is two years out of an abusive early marriage, which I didn’t know about. And “Mater”—as Fabienne refers to her adventuresome Catholic and Anglophilic mother—plans a trip with her daughter to London for their third visit, on the pretext of celebrating her 25th birthday June 20 (and getting over her father’s death). Mater arranges with friends, the Lord and Lady Cyril Salmon, to throw Fabienne a birthday party at their home in Sandwich. There she will meet bright young women and handsome men her own age from the best schools in Europe. And forget me.

For sure, Mater has brought out her big guns. After all, Lord Salmon is Law Lord of the British Privy Council and a great jurist whom I’ve long admired. His rank and status are akin to those of the Chief Justice of the United States. It is from the Salmon’s home in Sandwich that Fabienne first writes in her new journal about her talks with Lord Salmon and what she is thinking about her mother’s concern. But the entry sleeps unread until I finally open Fabienne’s London journal two years after her death and forty-three years after we meet and read the following:

“Mother . . . fears my ruination, but I have no plans to ruin myself. Things are pretty well set in my mind – in my own self-interest. It will take a while to come to fruition. Either it will or not – and if not, I just back off and start over, with alternative plan II. I hope she understands that and doesn’t think I am getting in over my head. (I hope I’m not, too). I am not a self-destructive person, but I do feel confused and somewhat at the mercy of other people, especially at this juncture.”

I’m startled. Back then, Fabienne places a wager on me like betting on a horse to win the Kentucky Derby, then hedges her bet! She will not be a victim.

She cables, asking me to meet her return flight from London to Dulles, according to my journal, which I do on July 5th. She brings presents. Mater’s ploy must have backfired. A few weeks later, however, an entry in Fabienne’s London journal pierces this fantasy:

I am beginning to question my relationship with Gordon. I love him very much, but I wonder if he returns my love. I know he is a very intelligent man and a bon vivant. . . . I was never cut out to be a freedom loving liberation type. . . . So far Gordon has

promised me very little. It makes me sad to realize that he may not love me and wants to simply have a relationship with me.

I want to run from him and find someone who does love me. Someone whom I can have a full and acceptable bond with.

Instead of running away, however, she engages me in some deep soul-probes. She writes: “Gordon and I had a phone conversation, whose focus was my lowest common denominator; that is, where my motivation emanates. It came to me earlier in the day as I was walking to the Emporium and wondering what really motivates people to act with loyalty, integrity and honesty; not merely out of selfishness? What moves one person truly devoted to a job, a man, [a woman], an ideal? I decided that it was the balance of self-esteem and self-interest.”

Last year, I rearrange all our journal comments, each about the other, in chronological order to give them more context and flow. That should help me interpret the private thoughts and emotions Fabienne expresses to herself decades ago, as I’m now seeing them for the first time magnified through the clouds of my present grief.

Journal-explorers often deal with interpreting old personal writings from hindsight, similar to the way theologians collapse time and meaning in reading scripture through the agendas and genres of biblical storywriters.² Nor should we forget Captain John Smith’s journal, a purely fictional history of Jamestown that we believed for centuries! Or Samuel Pepys’s, Anne Frank’s, even Robinson Crusoe’s diaries, and Margaret Atwood’s fictitious testaments—eye-witness accounts of real or imagined events written to reveal concealed truths when found much later.

As I dig deeper into sources of interpreting old journals by reading them backwards through present eyes, over long periods of time, I come upon a typically effete French literary conceit. It’s an obscure footnote in a little-known scholastic’s work documenting a love diary kept by God. I shrug off my intrigue, but on a whim Google the footnote. Up comes a review of a recent English translation of God’s diary from Italian by an unknown seminarian.³

Google quotes the reviewer’s summary: “it is a pensive, stream of consciousness diary titled ‘I AM GOD’ written by the ‘original omniscient narrator, God.’” The reviewer thinks this God is irresistible, “a being of authentic complexity and paradoxical humanity.” And God has fallen in love—with an atheist.

This is blasphemous! I’ll just quote the reviewer verbatim, without presuming to clean up her summary or question the translation:

² This part of my paper is informed by *Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative* (2011).

³ See for summary and following quotes, *Cathleen Schine, Heaven Can’t Wait*, reviewing *I Am God* by Giacomo Sartori (2016), translated from the Italian by Frederika Randall (Restless Books, 2019) in *The New York Review of Books* (April 18, 2019 Issue).

God is not the sleepy fart that many believers imagine – let’s get that straight. He likes to keep up with what’s going on in the cosmos; he intervenes when he needs to although intervention doesn’t necessarily mean throwing a giant tantrum or staging a Biblical scale massacre. There are also moments (and these can go on for several million years) during which he just loafes around in his (as it were) slippers. . .

Then, randomly – out of the blue, you might say – God, one who ought to smite is smitten.

The reviewer then quotes God’s diary directly:

My eyes (if you know what I mean) fall on a . . . tall girl with two purple pigtales who at every opportunity is shoving her arm up a cow’s ass.

I order the full diary. Let’s see what God does with hindsight hermeneutics of, say, a couple of million years. While the bookseller is trying to find a printed copy, I keep reading what Fabienne and I are writing and talking about only decades not millennia ago as I, too (myself, as it were), am smitten.

Back to her own journal, Fabienne wonders if I am capable of a commitment. She will not be a victim. Since I have organized our journal entries chronologically, I can now easily compare her concern alongside my own contemporaneous feelings.

I’m astonished by what I wrote about her then:

A woman such as she is rare, but perhaps she is not yet established enough in her own power . . . So far, she is in my thoughts regularly, but she seems like someone who jumps from one thing to another, an uncommitted “will-o-the-wisp!”

A bon vivant and a will-o-the-wisp?

I am still trapped in this comical time-warp when God’s diary arrives in hard copy by snail mail. Right away, I look to see why the tall girl arouses God with such awe and strange feelings. His diary says she is a “punkie atheist geneticist making extra money by artificially inseminating cows with bull semen.” Her name is Daphne. She’s also a radical atheist who steals crosses from churches and burns them in her fireplace! God “can’t tear his eyes away from this particular atheist.” He is consumed by longing and writes:

I check on what’s in her digestive system, how each of her hairs is coming along, whether the pores of her skin are dilating and contracting properly. . . . Not that I neglect my normal divine duties: I surveil, I resolve, I save, I punish, I overlook, I admonish, I judge, I unleash, I even avenge However it’s her above all whom I scan.⁴

That’s not the perspective I am looking for. I need help to understand what Fabienne might do with her suspicion that I want only a relationship, especially after she’s declared her love directly. Does she write a “dear diary” lament or run away like a *will-o-the-wisp*? No! None of that. Does she do anything? Yes! So, what is it she does that

⁴ Giacomo Sartori, *I Am God* (2016) (translated from the Italian by Frederika Randall, 2019).

I might tell you in utmost respect for her privacy? God's diary is no help here, but I have a hunch that she has *something* in mind! Maybe to make me her victim?

In the spring of 1977, I am in full *bon vivant* mode. Fabienne has agreed to be my guest at a late afternoon reception that I am invited with guest to attend at an American Bar Association event honoring the justices at the US Supreme Court. Also invited and attending is the young woman lawyer who gives me the Christmas journal. She has accepted my suggestion that we have dinner after I take Fabienne home from the reception. Then, to liven things up, I've made a late date for an after-dinner night-cap with a third woman I am seeing off and on.

Fabienne's antennae are up, on high alert, as I introduce her to my young lawyer friend and then to Chief Justice Warren Burger who eyeballs what he imagines is under her hair which she wears down. By the time we reach her mother's apartment after the reception, Fabienne has easily figured out what I am up to.

"Won't you come in for a drink? Mother would love to see you." By now Shirley and I are friends and after London she believes Fabienne is a one-man woman. She charms me. "Have another." I am quite late for the dinner date. I rush through hollow dinner conversation. Parking is impossible. My night-cap date is still waiting in our chosen bar fuming, nearly drunk. Two women soon vanish from my life. She has *sabotaged* me! I'm secretly delighted.

By this past summer, I've gotten pretty far into God's diary. He is not doing so well and writes about it to himself: "It's this diary – N.B. not one *day* has ever gone by for me out here – *It's this diary* that's bringing me to ruin. You write, and the more you write the dizzier you become, and you end up with a headful of foolishness. Your reason begins to unravel, you fall in love. It's been happening to . . . ranks of adults, even eminent seniors, oblivious to the ridicule they invite. All of them dishing out sticky, sentimental phrases, choking back sobs and wetting their keyboards. . . . And now it's happening to me. *God or no god.*"⁵

Oh, come on, God! That is so jejune! You might have saved face and married her! We all can use a "mother in heaven." It's quite unlike you to feel sorry for yourself – and in the written word? I know what you are going through. Did you start keeping your diary when you fell in love? Let me tell you my story on the subject.

My eyes meet Fabienne's at the fern bar years ago – my time – and we definitely are hooked. Signals of intense desire ignite well beneath the surface of consciousness and smolder there with instant recognition. After three years we have an exclusive relationship, and I'm in London for a conference when my previous restraint is blown into the wind in a hotel on the Strand. The moment of decision comes that night, and with it a morning calm that carries me into the stalls of Covent Garden looking for an engagement ring. Instead, I spot an antique diamond engagement brooch to be worn over her heart and buy it.

⁵ *Id.*, at 206.

Back in Newport, Rhode Island, where I'm a visiting professor at the Naval War College, on leave from American University, I invite Fabienne down from Boston for a weekend in early November in 1978. She is finishing her MBA at Boston University. It's a beautiful season, and I have been talking with the provost at the University of Cincinnati concerning their national search for a new dean at the law school.

Fabienne is sitting in my kitchen with me before dinner. We're facing each other, and I pull her towards me. She slips off her chair to the floor onto her knees, and I ask her to marry me. Without a pause she says, "Yes, I'll marry you and be your wife and go with you to Cincinnati or wherever you go to start a new life. I love you." And her look of excitement and joy seems to say, "What took you so long." She tells anyone who asks that it is she not I on the knees in the proposal. She accepts me and I accept Cincinnati, where we move and are married.

After fifteen years of difficult experience at GE and two other corporations, Fabienne interviews to advance her business career, but she is in manufacturing, which is moving offshore. I'm prepared to follow her, but no good offers come her way. So, she goes back to fine arts school at DAAP to finish a BFA in painting and design first begun at Tulane before she changes her major to business. She also revives her childhood interest in essential perfume oils. She graduates magna cum laude.

To celebrate, we fly to Italy to explore the Lake District. We hike from lake to lake, eat Tuscan food, and stay at first-rate hotels – in Bellagio on Lake Como, in others near Lake Maggiore, Lake Orto; we view splendid art at each stop, flirting and romancing as if newly in love. We take the train to Florence and Rome!

*In Rome, we set out to locate Bernini's magnificent marble sculpture, The Ecstasy of St. Theresa. You know all about that one, God. Finding it in a small church, Santa Maria della Vittoria, we spend hours there it seems, as if back at the Freer Gallery. A *seraph* is piercing St. Theresa's heart with a golden shaft, giving the expression on her face both immense joy and excruciating pain, the light and dark sides of love sending her into erotic ecstasy, the same inner explosions within the shadows below consciousness, born in our fern bar gaze and reborn at our engagement and in Bellagio on Lake Como, after twenty years of marriage, as if new lovers.*

Fabienne now turns completely to art. She starts-up the Attic Gallery at Southgate House in Covington. She curates art shows and writes articles for City Beat magazine. As her paintings begin to sell, she moves her studio to the Pendleton Art Center, but longs for something more fulfilling after closing the Attic Gallery. She spends a decade as an artist, creating hundreds of canvases. She experiments with aromatherapy. And then she makes a bold move in 2005, creating her own business – as a perfumer. She's a good artist but the market for art suffers in the 2008 financial crash and she now leaves her work as artist entirely, storing all the paintings she hasn't sold or thrown out, and saving her art notebooks.

All of Fabienne's life experiences have come together in Possets Perfume, LLC. It's a profitable global e-commerce start-up. She is founder and president, happy and purposeful – "pleasure in a bottle." Her perfume oils are fascinating original creations from essential oils.

She trademarks the name “possets” derived from old English (as in “possets and nostrums”). She invests her own capital and is reborn: sole owner, not beholden to any corporation, nor in debt to a bank or the Small Business Administration, nor to a business partner or to me. Dr. Richard Wendel a fellow member of the Literary Club and volunteer from SCORE is her only guide in creating an effective business plan.

Over an eleven-year period, until she falls ill, Fabienne creates over 2,600 original perfumes. Smell is the most primitive of all the sensory organs. It cannot be measured because science has no grammar for primitive smell and thus cannot describe and protect new perfumes as intellectual property. She has the remarkable talent actually to smell an idea she imagines for a new perfume. Each new perfume taps into this sacred older language. She seeks to induce desire in others to want to buy her creations. She imitates the scent she smells in her idea and offers her creative approximation with artistic flare as pure pleasure. She uses counter-point metaphors, analogies, and metonyms from music, art and science – often wildness of the dark primitive pleasures from musk and ambergris. As poetry. And she begins writing a serial novelette, and irreverent essays, for postings on Posset’s website. She secretes all her perfume formulations on old hard drives not connected to the internet, like Darwin does when he keeps his notes secret, too, in the private Galápagos Island notebooks he squirrels away.

God knows these secrets: “Stop . . . stop! I’ve heard enough!” His diary already has recorded that the creation of humans is an unlucky accident: “My use of what Darwin claims as his own has caused great confusion,” He writes. “I assume that humans are mighty important and grateful for my unconditional love when in fact they are murderous and self-destructive of themselves and their beautiful home earth I made for them. They could disappear from circulation in the wink of an eye.”⁶

I hadn’t realized how exasperated God is with humankind, until He quits monitoring the precise details of Daphne’s physiology. He spells this out in an *aide-mémoire*, an addendum to his published diary accepting her own erotic journey into the arms of a lover. He lets her go and blesses Daphne and her lover. He has also lost interest in suffering as a savior and in tolerating the sa-tan’s mockery. God is grieving! In great sorrow He writes:

I will now set about to oversee the end of the overly aggressive homo sapiens who bring all this suffering on themselves and do not know how to deal with the unnecessary grief they cause. It will happen of its own accord, of course, if I just lounge about for two or three billion years and don’t mess around with black holes or the scheduled collision of Andromeda Galaxy with the Milky Way. Experiments with quantum mechanics vex me considerably, too. Andromeda and the Milky Way should be able to exist in the same space at the same time. And the Gilgamesh myth of searching for human immortality is a joke – memento mori (remember, you die). I’m exhausted by all this hard work and need a day’s rest. I’d like to shut down all these ventures, entirely. Maybe I’ll first think about it all and

⁶ *Id.*, at 188.

*then decide. . . . No, I won't think, the right choice will simply impose itself. Humankind is on its own. I AM GOD, as I said. Grief or no grief. And that's it from me.*⁷

Tom and Jennie Murphy come to visit Fabienne. As you know, our Club member, Tom, is an atheist philosopher at heart with a business instinct. He has taken an interest in buying her creation. Fabienne believes they will give *Possets Perfume* a new birth after she dies, so she asks me to sell her company to them. And I do. God's diary is no longer in the picture. But the primordial smell of explosive desire most certainly is.

How could I have been so fortunate that this unusual woman full of creation and love bursts into my life? When coming home late, bone-tired after packing and shipping her perfumes, she calls out, "Mr. Lion! Where are you? It is I, your lioness bringing home your dinner!

Oh! She is home – calling to find me. And my heart leaps up every time. Even at the gym when she is working out on an elliptical and sees me come in, she waves with excitement and smiles as if I'd just come back with tales from a long journey throughout the cosmos on patrol with God. "You never bore me," she says.

Her long auburn hair utterly captivates me, right from the start. Not once does she ask me to cut it shorter than just below her waist. Each morning she wraps or twists it into a tight or loose bun, a messy bun, a low donut bun with a colorful scarf or ribbon, sometimes a comb or chic snood – endless imaginative creations. I don't think a hairdresser ever touched her hair. And at bedtime? . . . Oh, . . . she lets it down!

When Fabienne's late stage colon cancer too soon becomes terminal, she texts me and a few close friends that God lovingly holds her in his arms, crying and suffering her pain with her.

She sends me more texts: "I've been reading the Book of Job. Want to take a look?"

"Awesome!"

"Such beautiful language. . . ." She writes slowly from her hospice bed. Her texts and talk intermingle: "Love you, my love, my time. I always did think . . . time was so precious . . . time with you the most precious Wish I could stay. . . . I reach out . . . for your hand."

"The love will always be there" she murmurs, "across time and always."

Then, she's gone. . .

My feelings like fireflies flutter up from under the shroud that buries grief – raw, unendurable grief. Every love story will break your heart into little pieces when your beloved dies. Loss. . . . Loss. O, loss, . . . Where has she gone? Were you ever here at all? Or in my wanderings did I just imagine you? Instantly I thought of an inscription etched in my memory from a book of Yeats's poems she gives me one

⁷ *Id.*, at 204-206 (paraphrasing chapter, "Extinction").

year in Ireland: "To Gordon," she pens, "My Golden Apple of the Sun. On our 21st Anniversary. September 16, 2000. See page 49.

I take the book from my shelf and on page 49, find *The Song of Wandering Aengus*, and sing its last four verses aloud:

*Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long grappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.*

After these many months, raw grief has become deep sorrow, and it is time: to put down my pen, close all the journals, and thank you for listening.