

DISCOVERIES

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Wyman, Anne Cabot

KIPLING'S CAT:

A Memoir of My Father

Protean Press (240 pp.)

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A moving tribute to a distinguished father and the history of a New England patrician family.

Boston Globe journalist Wyman is the daughter of extraordinary parents—Anne McMaster Cabot and globetrotting scientist/diplomat/artist Jeffries Wyman. The author's story is a sad one—after her mother died in 1944, she was more or less orphaned at age 15 and raised by relatives and boarding schools. Her father immediately took off for parts unknown, at first with the U.S. Navy and then alone, pursuing his passions around the world. Wyman writes from personal memory and also from letters, diaries and photographs in her collection. She writes with forgiveness and a stiff upper lip, but it is abundantly evident that she was bereft, longing to be close to a man who possessed so many gifts but lacked the gift of intimacy. Wyman is a professional writer, with a keen eye for telling detail. She characterizes people with a couple of deft brush strokes—her father is Kipling's wild cat who "reserve[ed] his right to roam," and (quoting Kipling) "walks by himself...waving his wild tail and walking by his wild lone." Wyman's mother sometimes smoked a pipe, loved old clothes, hated fussy muslin curtains and knickknacks and resented her four big brothers, who "appeared like four great high walls imprisoning [her]." Characterizing her father's relationship with his second wife, Wyman writes, "Father believed in getting on with life; Ros believed in bathing in it." The prose is crisp and clear, rhythmic and eloquent. There is a bit too much namedropping, and many of these names belong to individuals who may be well known in their fields but who are meaningless to the general reader. Her constant discussion of her father's travels is vivid, but can become monotonous for the reader. Still, this portrait deftly brings a fascinating figure to life.

This account of life with, and all too often without, a brilliant, difficult parent is a true pleasure.

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