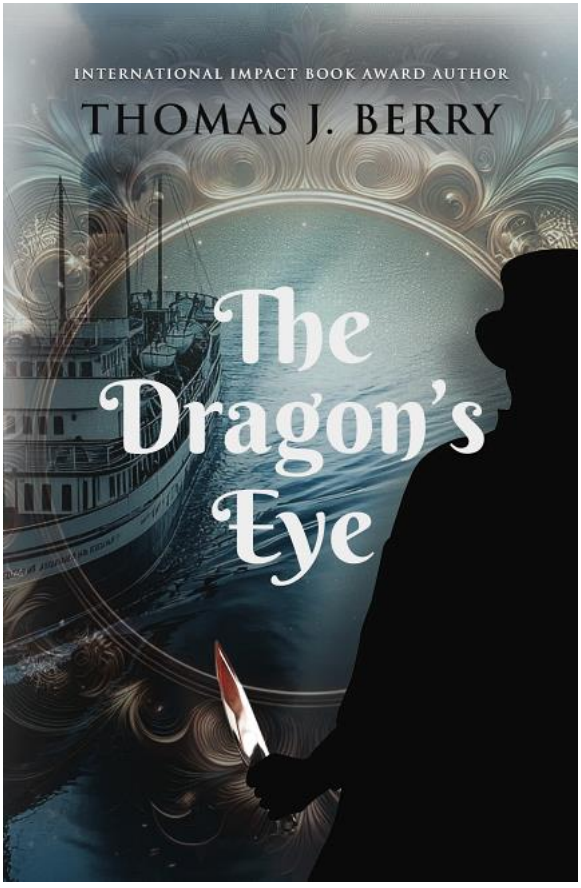

Globetrotters Nellie Bly and Elizabeth Bisland revisit their record-setting 1889 journey as they unlock the secrets of the Dragon's Eye off the coast of Japan and keep one step ahead of a mysterious killer from London.

The Dragon's Eye
By Thomas J. Berry

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INTERNATIONAL IMPACT BOOK AWARD AUTHOR
THOMAS J. BERRY
The Dragon's Eye

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This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

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First Edition

Novels by Thomas J. Berry

Lewis and Clark: Murder on the Natchez Trace
Texas Freedom: Last Stand at the Alamo
Crosshairs
Blue Line to Richmond
The Dragon's Eye

Gifts of the Gods
Iron and Bronze
Silver and Gold
Fire and Ash

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INTERNATIONAL IMPACT
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Blue Line to Richmond

"Blue Line to Richmond is a must-read for fans of historical fiction. Berry's meticulous attention to historical detail is unparalleled, and the strong writing keeps the reader engaged. It is a tale of war, suffering and unwavering hope. It is a story of those who wished to preserve the Union, regardless of the costs or the dangers to themselves. This story will leave an everlasting mark on those who read it. This is a book that is certainly deserving of a place on your bookshelf."

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"Berry's lucid historical insight gave this book authenticity, and the fast-paced narrative kept me turning those pages. Gifts of the Gods: Iron and Bronze is an example of historical fiction at its very best. Filled with memorable characters, adventure, war, love, hate, retribution, and forgiveness, there is certainly something for everyone within this book's pages."

- Mary Anne Yarde. The Coffee Pot Book Club

High Praise for
Lewis and Clark: Murder on the Natchez Trace

"A skillfully interwoven saga of twin stories of discovery. Thomas Berry has shown a great respect for and understanding of history as he takes us through his tale of what may have been, which includes an engrossing description of the Battle of New Orleans; the culmination of America's second war for independence. This book is quite highly recommended..."

- AllBooks Review

Critical Acclaim for
Texas Freedom: Last Stand at the Alamo

"Thomas Berry evinces a true love of history and a respect for accuracy that is quite rare. He exhibits a great ability to tell a good story. This book is highly recommended."

- AllBooks Review

Soaring Review for
Crosshairs

"Meticulously authenticated…a World War II saga that contains a vast amount of technical information, war strategies, experiments, failures, missions, losses, and weather-related catastrophes, all artfully intertwined into a compelling narrative."

- AllBooks Review

Chapter 1

Amiens, France
April 2, 1902

The dark, stone house rose into view as my carriage crested the small rise. It was larger than I imagined, more foreboding perhaps on this cloudy night, but nonetheless fitting. The owners had extended me a personal invitation, and I was too intrigued to pass up the opportunity.

The driver stopped beside a high wall, then jumped down next to the small palfrey. I looked around carefully at the large homestead of one of France's most prolific writers and smiled. No, I was not about to forgo such an offer.

The evening sky was dark as pitch, with heavy clouds blotting out what feeble sunlight still remained above. It had been that way most of the afternoon since the London ferry docked at Boulogne. Although it was early spring, I pulled my shawl tighter across my shoulders to stave off the chilly air.

My door opened, and Robert Sherard extended his hand. "Step right this way, Miss Bisland. I notified them your train was delayed. They are expecting you."

I had passed through France over a decade ago under quite different circumstances, but this was my first visit to Amiens. For the first time, I noticed a door set within the stout framework of the wall. Course heavy vines, ancient as the stones, had crept their way from the grey earth, reaching ever upwards. My guide pulled a heavy key from his breast pocket, opened a wrought-iron door set in the wall, and ushered me through.

The exterior of the house was illuminated by a gaslight set on a pole thirty feet away, but a soft glow from the large windows on the first floor told me the occupants were still up, despite the late hour. It was a quarter past eight. I had not eaten since breakfast. My stomach rumbled. I was hopeful they had some food available to me.

Sherard was a tall man of 40, with blond hair and medium build. He had met me at the train station and escorted me to the mysterious rendezvous here. I knew him by reputation only. He was an author of several obscure novels, but I had not become acquainted with any of them. Sherard told me he knew Oscar Wilde and Victor Hugo, both literary giants of the era. His rich British accent hinted at an Oxford education, but I was only guessing on that point.

He knocked once, twice, then waited patiently before the heavy oak door. How many trips had he taken to this estate? How many foreign guests? Once again, I began to question my very reason for being here.

After a few moments, the door creaked slowly open, its ancient hinges protesting loudly. A small face appeared from the shadows within. It was a woman, probably in her mid-70s if I was to wager. She did not speak but simply nodded in my direction. Sherard offered no explanation, but now it was I who needed patience. We followed the woman into the recesses of this dark old house. I looked around again, this time with wonder and awe.

We climbed a set of marble stairs and entered a glass-walled conservatory. I saw greenery on all sides, long hanging jasmine, small potted shrubs, and an area of tropical plants sporting purple, white, and yellow petals. Our hostess did not pause or linger here but passed through toward the far end. Despite her age, she maintained a quick pace.

New York City, especially the outlying plains of Long Island where I call home nowadays, had nothing on this. Long corridors, mostly left in shadow, led to separate areas of the house. Along the one path upon which we walked, I could see no farther than the small glow from torches hanging along the walls.

Finally, we emerged into a larger room, where a crackling fire roared comfortably against the back wall. Several cushioned chairs were situated around it. I saw ornate furniture and heavy shelves laden with books and knickknacks. A soft bearskin rug dominated the floor in front of a sofa. I stepped hesitantly forward, suddenly unsure of myself. I saw no one as yet. What exactly had I walked into?

"Madame Bisland!" came a male voice off to my left.

I turned toward the sound and felt a lump in my throat. Standing before me was an older gentleman with white, wavy hair and a full beard that I had seen more than once in literary magazines across the world. He had invited me into his home, and I was at a loss for words. All I could do was smile.

He was standing in a doorway of another room, and I could see a larger table deep within, lit only by the glow of a candle. He was older than the pictures I had seen, but that was to be expected. He had had great success in the past few decades, penning exciting novels that merged fantasy, literature, and cutting-edge science into realistic stories that the world was clamoring for.

The legendary Jules Verne hobbled forward toward the fireplace, aided by a heavy cane. He gestured me toward a comfortable chair next to him. I

looked back at Sherard, who simply nodded. I took my seat carefully and reached out to warm my hands against the heat of the flames.

The famous author spoke a few words in French, and Sherard addressed me for the first time. "Miss Bisland, Monsieur Verne has asked me here not only to be your guide, but to act as a translator. He bids you welcome to Amiens."

"Thank you, Mr. Sherard. I am most grateful for his kind invitation. Please let him know I have a decent understanding of the French language. I grew up in New Orleans but haven't used it in quite a while."

"Ah, very good! Let me first introduce you to his wife, Madame Honorine Verne." Sherard gestured toward the woman who took a seat on the other side of her husband. She still had not said a word since my arrival. She smiled pleasantly when she heard her name, but the words of the Englishman were foreign to her. Despite my moderate proficiency in French, I silently thanked Sherard for being here.

"I am honored," I replied. "But between you and me, I'm not quite sure why I was invited here. I've done nothing special in my life to warrant such attention."

I was startled when Robert Sherard chuckled at my remarks. What had I said?

"All in good time," he remarked. He turned to his host once more and conversed rapidly in French for several minutes while I stared into the fire, pondering once more just what I was doing here. I caught a whiff of dampness from the old stone chimney, but the burning logs had fused the air with a dry, charcoal scent. It was an old house indeed, probably built before any of the estates that sprung up around Manhattan, or even the Deep South that I was fond of.

I caught a few words of their exchange but not as much as I'd hoped. I had taught myself the language as a girl so I could read *Confessions* by the famed Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his native tongue, but that was a long time ago. I enjoy reading old books and had once written a monthly review column for *Cosmopolitan* magazine back in the day, but I was sorely out of practice.

I closed my eyes against the warmth of the blazing hearth. I had left Charles, my husband of 10 years, back in Oyster Bay, but truth be told, he was often busy in Washington, D. C. these days, working for a prestigious law firm. He wouldn't have time to miss me too much, at least not until I returned in two weeks. We both liked to travel quite a bit when we were able. Excursions across Europe every other year were not uncommon, but the Far

East held particular appeal for me. We've visited Japan four times together, although my first trip there was quite a solitary affair.

Sherard turned to me. It was evident I had not quite kept up with their dialogue. He smiled pleasantly. "Monsieur Verne understands you are a writer yourself, Miss Bisland, and an enterprising one at that. He has read the wonderful memoirs you published about your long trip and takes great pride in the small role he played."

So that's what this is about. It was not a subject I spoke about freely for many reasons. I never wanted the fame that unfortunately came with the title of 'globetrotter' or to be part of the race which caused such a stir back in 1890.

"It's been twelve years, Mr. Sherard," I replied, "but I'd be more than happy to answer any questions he has about it. As to the race itself, all I can say is my editor earned a great deal of publicity from the stunt. I lost the wager, so perhaps Monsieur Verne should be talking to Nellie Bly instead of me."

At the mention of her name, the great author drew his head back and laughed. His eyes twinkled. Had he known my old rival before? I felt like I was taking an exam and had forgotten to study. My hosts had all the answers and were holding them close to the vest. I was getting a bit frustrated, and perhaps it showed.

"Miss Bisland," Sherard began, "you will have to forgive my host. He is quite taken with your story and longs to hear more about it. He is a world traveler himself, you know, and would often take his ship into the great harbors of Egypt, India, or the Mediterranean researching his stories. Alas, his injury has prevented him from taking part in those excursions for some time."

"I can certainly understand," I replied. Verne had written several highly regarded books that were translated in multiple languages. They often took the reader along for a wild ride through incredible situations no one else had ever dreamed of. That, at least, we had in common!

"Monsieur Verne asks if you still write anymore. Didn't you used to pen a column for *Cosmopolitan*?"

I was startled that he remembered that. "Yes, I had a little book review column back in the mid-80s. I was one of only two female writers on staff at the time."

It was a fun chapter in my life, I will admit. The monthly magazine catered to the traveling reader, telling first-person accounts of foreign adventure. It also included poems and short stories, both of which were of

particular interest to the well-versed literary critic in me. Before my editor shoved me out the door to race around the world in November 1889, I had just reviewed works by Leo Tolstoy, Don Juan Manuel, and the collected poems of Emma Lazarus. Books were a safe haven for me. I could lose myself in their pages while keeping out of the dangers the characters often found themselves in. It was a wonderful arrangement, I had to admit. And it paid handsomely!

"It was your editor's decision to send you around the world, then?" Sherard asked inquisitively. "Not yours?"

"I had no real interest in such things," I agreed. "I enjoyed the life I had in New York. The morning my editor approached me with the idea, I was busy arranging a great salon at my apartment. I had invited many people of influence - politicians, entertainers, and talented artists of renown. But John Brisben Walker was also a man of influence, and he usually got what he wanted. And that day, he needed me to chase a fantasy for him."

"You mean my fantasy?" a woman's voice echoed behind me.

I turned around, startled, and put my hand to my throat. A ghost stared back at me. A living apparition from my past.

Chapter 2

Nellie Bly, as I live and breathe!"

The middle-aged woman entered from a side hallway and approached the small gathering. She wore a satin gown with a full skirt, very different from the famed checkered dress she was often pictured in during her world journey a decade earlier. Nellie had adorned herself today with a beautiful rhinestone necklace which twinkled in the firelight.

"Have you two ladies met?" Sherard asked.

"Not officially," Nellie replied. She stopped a few feet away and looked me up and down as if appraising a fine piece of jewelry. The memories from those three months we spent traveling the globe came flooding back to me as if they were yesterday.

It was true we had never met before, mainly because my editor thought I should head in the opposite direction around the globe and try to beat her back to New York. Somewhere out on the Indian Ocean late in December 1889, two large ships passed each other, probably only a few miles apart. It was the closest we ever got until now.

It suddenly dawned on me. Our host had arranged this meeting from the very beginning. He had brought the two of us together for some purpose, but to what end, I still remained in the dark. Perhaps Nellie was as well.

"It is delightful to finally make your acquaintance," I offered, and held out my gloved hand. My former rival paused a moment as the briefest smile crossed her lips. She met my gaze evenly before reaching out and making contact. She still had a strong grip for a woman who lived the high life in New York City these days.

"We have so much to discuss, my dear," she said. "First off, you can call me Nellie, but I have to admit, it is only a moniker. My real name is Elizabeth, like yourself. My former editor in Pittsburgh recommended I change it back in the day. My husband, Rob, calls me Betsy, but no one else does. The world knows me as Nellie, so why not use it?"

She is a talkative one, I thought to myself, but I shouldn't be surprised given her long career as a newspaper journalist. She used to write regular articles for *The World* in Manhattan, many of them undercover investigations, if I remember correctly.

"And you can call me Beth," I countered. "How have you been getting on these days?" Where to begin?

"We travel quite a bit, but only for pleasure, of course. London, Vienna. Rome is nice this time of year. Rob owns a manufacturing company in Brooklyn, so we have to find time for work once in a while!"

"Yes, indeed," I said. "We've both come a long way since our globetrotting days, haven't we?"

"Well said," Nellie agreed. "The journey only took a few months, and the fame was just as short-lived. I tried the lecture circuit afterwards, more for the steady income than anything, but alas, the press that once championed my cause was the first to attack when I attempted to make a living off it. Too unseemly, they wrote, for a simple woman to lecture a group of intelligent men. Show me a man, I say, who traveled the world in 72 days, and I might agree! Fortunately for me, my husband has a successful business…and he's very old, besides!" She laughed at her own expense.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Miss Bly," before I caught myself. "I mean Nellie."

"No need," she retorted. "I also wanted financial independence, and when my husband goes, I'll finally get it. No crime in that!"

My shocked expression was hard to repress, but the former journalist just winked at me. "My daddy had money, but he died when I was young. My poor mother was thrown to the curb with only my brother and me. The three of us were left to fend for ourselves. It was a hard life after that, but it taught me how to be resilient. Most importantly, I learned to make my own financial gains and keep them. A woman needs to look after herself!"

I admired her tenacity and told her so. "It seems we are more alike than we realize. My family was near destitute when the Civil War ended, and I made my own way publishing literature in New Orleans. It was not quite as dangerous as the undercover work you're known for, but it paid the bills."

"That is a lost art these days," Nellie remarked ruefully. "I jumped at the chance to get dirty because I was young and willing to do anything. I just wanted a break! Danger lurked around every corner sometimes. The first job I ever took in New York was getting myself committed to a lunatic asylum so I could report on the abuses there. I almost didn't make it out!"

Robert Sherard chuckled, and I suddenly remembered we were not alone. Jules and Honorine were looking at us with bemused expressions, but they could not have known what we were discussing. Their guests were getting acquainted, and it was enough.

"I'm glad you two are being civil," Sherard replied. "Monsieur Verne was not quite as confident as I that two former rivals would strike up a friendship so quickly."

"Why wouldn't we be?" I inquired. "This has been a pleasant reunion of sorts."

Sherard welcomed Nellie to sit beside me in front of the fire. She had arrived late that morning, he explained, at the invitation of the Vernes. Our host, however, had not given her any more details as to the reason for the visit than he had me. The esteemed author was content for now to stare pleasantly into the fire as we reminisced about times gone by.

I sensed a familiarity between Nellie and our translator, something that extended beyond a simple introduction. Perhaps even to the French couple whose hospitality we now enjoyed. Was I the only one who remained on the outside of this little group?

"Have you met the Vernes before?" I asked, turning toward Nellie. It was a simple question but held a sizeable weight behind it.

She looked at me for a moment before nodding her head. "Yes, on my way through France back when you were evidently heading to the Far East, although I had no idea about that at the time, of course. I thought my little adventure was a solo affair, a race against the clock as it were."

"*The World* never told you about me? My editors at the *Cosmopolitan* assured me the race was a bona-vide competition." Part of me felt a little hurt. Irrelevant, even.

Nellie ignored my comment, intent on her own tale. "Mr. Sherard here was working as the Paris correspondent for my newspaper at the time. They arranged for the Vernes to meet me for a few hours so they could include the story on the next day's front page. They all picked me up at the train station, and Mr. Sherard translated for me. I didn't know a lick of French back then, and I'm ashamed to admit, I still don't."

I sat back to let this information sink in. Sherard worked for Nellie's newspaper back then. Was he still employed there? Jules Verne had obviously accepted Nellie's claim to his fictional round-the-world record and even publicly supported her on her quest. They had met in person and had articles written about the affair. I don't recall that he even acknowledged that I too had beaten his 80-day record set by his British millionaire character, Phileas Fogg.

Nellie had won the race back then, besting me by four days. She had received all the fame and accolades that came with it. Her picture was on the cover of every major publication from Argentina to Trinidad, with tons of press and publicity, loved by millions around the world. She deserved it all, and I had no real issues with the outcome. I had scant interest in fame or glory for myself. I often had to fight with my editor to leave my name out of

the articles I used to write for the *Cosmopolitan*. Nellie had won. It was enough for me.

I had gone on to do great things with my life. I was happily married and financially settled. Yet, at the moment, I couldn't help feeling a bit insecure…a little out-of-place, as it were. It was a silly notion, perhaps, but there it was.

As the silence grew, Jules looked over at us and sighed heavily. He stood slowly and turned to face us, his expression growing serious. There was clearly something weighing on his mind. Right now, however, all I really wanted was to hear his speech and head for home.

As before, Jules Verne spoke through his translator. "In the fall of 1889, I was initially approached with the idea of meeting an intrepid young woman hoping to break the fictional round-the-world record my character, Phileas Fogg, had set in one of my novels. Can she circle the globe in under 80 days? The world seemed to be mesmerized by this audacious undertaking and so was I. My wife and I were delighted to get a few hours with Nellie on her way through Paris, and we supported her efforts."

"You even showed me your map upstairs," Nellie interjected with a laugh. "One set of lines tracing the path taken by Phileas Fogg and one for me. I was quite taken with the attention you showed then. My journey was of little consequence, at least in my eyes. I was proud to see you had taken such delight in it."

Verne nodded when he heard Sherard's translation. "Yes, quite so. But your story wasn't finished then. You too, Miss Bisland, were on your own race and, had I known of it earlier, perhaps we might have made our introductions sooner. Be that as it may, we are joined together tonight. I welcome you both into our home, not as rivals, but as colleagues."

"Colleagues?" Nellie asked.

"Indeed," Verne replied. "I hope you will put aside your differences and aid me in one last, final enterprise. If not for yourselves, then for the adventure of the journey, a simple quest that I cannot make myself any longer."

"What journey is that, Monsieur Verne?" I inquired. I had only packed for a few weeks. Where did he expect us to go?

Verne paused a moment before taking his wife's hand in his own. For the first time tonight, I felt his speech falter, ever so slightly. He was a proud man who had worked hard his entire life and received acclaim and fortune for his efforts. What he had to say was not easy for him to admit. Sherard's voice softened a bit as he continued to translate the author's words.

"When I wrote years ago, I would often take my ship and travel the globe, conduct my own research about the world around me. I would pen such fantasies, but they were based on scientific evidence, plausible events that might take place in our future. Alas, I am old and infirm now. I fear I have lost my touch. It is a hard thing to accept."

"Getting old is difficult for all of us," Nellie replied.

"Age will catch up to everyone, yes," Verne admitted. "But before God takes me, I feel I have one or two interesting stories left to tell. I am working on a new project, but it is one I cannot do alone anymore. I need answers to difficult questions, and you are the most experienced and reliable people I know who can get it for me."

"Just where do you want us to go?" I asked in a halting voice. I could accept London, or even Germany. Only a day's travel either way.

He looked toward Nellie, hoping, I believe, for understanding. Then he gazed in my direction. What did he see behind my hazel eyes? I was a little scared at what he might find.

It was time to put the cards on the table. "Japan," he answered. "I want you to find information on a mysterious area of the Pacific off the Japanese coast. The locals call it *Ma no Umi*. I call it the Dragon's Eye."

Chapter 3

The Dragon's Eye?" I exclaimed with a start. "Do the fishermen believe there are sea monsters lurking around them?"

"Perhaps," Verne replied cagily. "But no Westerner truly knows for sure."

"What is your interest in this, if I may ask?" Nellie inquired, her journalistic mind already at work.

The author asked Sherard to put more wood on the fire. The air outside was growing colder, but the evening was just getting started. I anticipated we were going to talk all night.

"Three months ago, I got a letter from an old friend, a world traveler who knows his way around. He's never raced for time the way you two have. He and his wife stop and enjoy the sights in many colonial ports. Europe, Africa, and the Far East, primarily. San Paulo once back in '75."

"What did he tell you?" I asked.

Verne leaned forward, and instinctively we did the same. We were the only ones in the room, but I think the old man was worried about something. I had no idea what was bothering him.

"Howard Manchester is an American, actually, and we first met in New York decades ago. We both got married but kept in touch over the years. He and his wife, Kathryn, had arranged a tour of the Japanese islands with two other couples, British citizens the lot of them. Went out on a small craft southeast of Tokyo."

"Sounds like harmless fun," I inquired. My husband, Charles, and I had once sailed from Yokohama south to some of the remote harbors ourselves a few years ago.

"On the surface, perhaps, but there was more to it than he had let on. My friend was searching for an island believed to be the lost kingdom of the Yamatai. He is a historical researcher by nature. He spent two years exploring quite a bit of the Australian coastline a while back."

"But something happened," Nellie remarked quietly. It was not a question.

Verne looked at her and nodded. "Yes. They ran into some strange phenomena. He couldn't really describe it, but my friend was the only one who made it back alive."

"His wife and friends?" I gasped.

"Swept away, from what I could gather. But his letter was vague at best."

"Storms can move in suddenly, from my experience," Nellie offered. "It seems like they got caught up in a tropical gale."

"That was my first impression as well," Verne admitted, "but his letter described a few things that made me rethink my position."

"We are not sailors," I explained. "At best, we are ship passengers who travel from port to port. Sometimes quickly, I will acknowledge. However, if you want to really investigate this, what you need is a team of nautical experts. People who know the local islands and waters. You don't need us."

The author who had sent Phileas Fogg on his way around the world sat back in his chair and looked at me with widening eyes. "On the contrary, my dear Miss Bisland. Such experts would hunt the oceans far and wide and come up with nothing. My friend, Manchester, loved history but cared little for science. It was the folklore that drove him to seek out the Yamatai. I don't think he ever expected to find it. But he did discover…something."

"The storm was a freak occurrence, perhaps," Nellie said. "A powerful one that claimed the lives of most of his party, but I don't think you can attribute it to anything else, sea monsters or otherwise."

"If that were all to the story, I might agree with you," he exclaimed. "But I did some digging of my own. My library is full of old books and rare documents. Treasures for an educated man!"

"What else did you find?" I asked. What more could there be?

"The area of water he claimed to be in touched on a large section of the Pacific, and there are many recorded instances of lost ships, strange sightings, and violent weather. It's south of the shipping lanes. Most travelers would never encounter it, but the locals would know. There must be untapped stories and interesting bits of lore about the area, the fabled Dragon's Eye."

"You want us to sail into the heart of this fierce storm?" I asked incredulously. "Risk our lives? For what, exactly?"

"Nothing of the kind," he replied reassuringly. "I am building a new novel around this premise and require some research into what might be out there. Travel to Tokyo and ask around. Find the right people, fishermen perhaps, with knowledge of the waters. If there is more to it than mere storms, they might be willing to share some stories with you. Things I cannot find in books or discover under a microscope."

"Sounds like you need a journalist," I laughed, shifting my gaze toward Nellie. "I've never been much of an interviewer."

"There's where you are wrong," Verne countered. "You ladies went on adventures around the world a decade ago. I've read both of your biographies and realized you are very different in many fundamental ways. You, Nellie,

are a go-getter who scraped by with a determination to succeed in journalism. You are sharp and get to the point quickly. There was nothing you would not do in your quest for answers. It's what drove you to suggest the race-around-the-world in the first place, I imagine."

"And what do you know of me?" I asked hesitantly.

"Miss Bisland, you have a flair for the dramatic," he said with a smile. "Your literary style is flowery and full of vivid descriptions. Nothing gets past your inquisitive eye. Separately, you each could do this job adequately. Together, there is nothing that you would miss, no stone unturned, as it were. I'd like you to work together…for me."

"You paint a pretty picture, Monsieur Verne," Nellie said. "The two of us traveling and working side by side. But if we are so different, as you say, you are simply putting two snakes in the same basket and waiting to see which one emerges victorious. You want fireworks. You might just get it."

"There is another reason behind your request," I remarked suddenly. "Something you are not quite willing to admit, even to us, I reckon. Why did you choose Nellie and me for this mission, if I may call it that? Why not some of your other friends or colleagues?"

After Sherard finished translating my comments to our host, Verne grew silent. He looked into the fire. I wasn't sure if I had said something wrong, but it nagged at me, and I couldn't let it rest.

We gave him the time he needed. As the silence filled the room, even Nellie grew pensive, which was something I hadn't expected. She was a talkative one!

"I'm sorry," he finally said, after Sherard repeated his sentiment. He started to rise from his chair. "I am growing tired. Perhaps we can pick this up later."

Honorine turned to her husband and touched his hand. She said something to him in her native tongue, and Verne fell silent. *C'est bon. Disleur.* I understood enough French to make it out. "It's alright. Tell them."

The old man sighed and sat back down. He patted his wife's hand reassuringly, and she simply nodded. After decades of marriage, they had learned that just a few words can fill an ocean of meaning.

He pointed to his cane. "I used to travel the world myself. Now I can hardly walk across the room." He paused, as if trying to make sense of something. "My nephew, Gaston. He…is not always right in his head, you see. Three years before your race around the world, he rushed into our room, claiming that someone was following him. He grabbed a pistol from a drawer

and waved it around at us. I was able to wrestle the gun away but not before it went off and wounded me in the foot. Never been right since."

"I…I'm sorry," Nellie stammered. "I had just attributed it to old age, I guess. Never really gave it much thought."

"It's my burden to bear," he replied. "The State put Gaston in an asylum in Paris for his actions. My injury goes to the heart of why I brought you here. You, Nellie, became an extension of me when I saw you in 1889. You were going on the adventure I no longer could. And Elizabeth too! It was a remarkable feat that will never be equaled. At least not until man learns how to fly like the birds! Now that would be a real page-turner, but I don't think the reading public is ready for it yet."

Honorine tilted her head in our direction and finally spelled out what her husband could not. Sherard smiled as he translated for her. "Jules has had a very fulfilling life, you know, but he feels stifled sitting at home. You two have become his new arms and legs, his eyes and ears! This journey is important for his research but most of all, it will allow him to live it vicariously through you both. No one else could possibly give that to him. I hope, for his sake, you will at least consider it. We will pay for all your expenses, of course."

"I will admit, the offer is very intriguing," I offered. "But my husband expects me home in two weeks. And I haven't done any traveling without him in years."

"You will have each other," Jules spoke up as his Paris correspondent continued to translate for him. "There is safety in numbers, and Sherard has agreed to escort you as far as the Suez."

The world has changed quite a bit in the last decade, but my feelings toward chivalry have not been dissuaded. Most people were horrified when I set off alone around the world back then. I took trains and ships without the protection of a male escort and was quite vulnerable to anyone wishing to take advantage of me. But I know, just as I did then, that as long as I stay with a tour group or among the company of fellow Westerns, I feel someone would gladly come to my aid if I needed them. And I would have Nellie with me, someone who was more strong-willed and opinionated than I ever could be. I was beginning to come around to his idea.

"I was never in it for the adventure…at first," I remarked, "but as time went on, I found the entire affair stimulating and quite exotic. And I love the Far East most of all. The people of Japan are the cleanest and friendliest I ever came across."

"Count me in too," Nellie replied. "I do have one question, and I hope you don't find it intrusive."

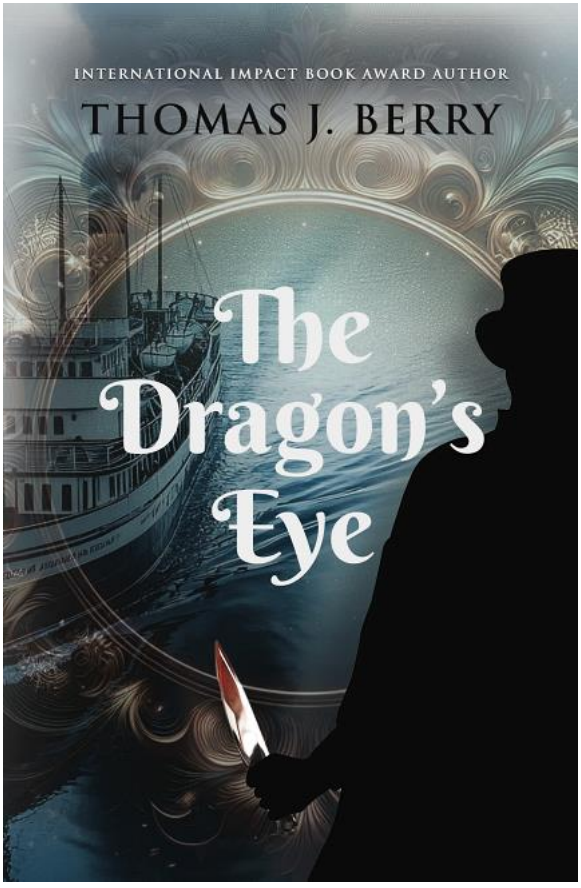
"Since you have agreed to my request," he said with a laugh, "you can ask me anything."

"You mentioned your nephew was sent to an asylum for his crime. My first assignment for *The World* was going undercover in a women's insane asylum to report on the horrible abuses going on. Have conditions for the mentally ill changed in Europe since then?"

"Gaston is currently at the Salpetriere asylum in Paris. It's on the Boulevard de l'Hopital near the Seine River. Very progressive facility. They've done away with the chains and restraints, cut back on the violent treatment. The doctors feel it will help the patients, but not every city has followed their example."

Nellie grinned. "I would very much like to see the place for myself before we leave. The horrors I've witnessed, if only for a few weeks, were enough to give me nightmares. Perhaps I can bring some valuable suggestions home with me to my friends in New York."

"We see Gaston once in a while," Verne said thoughtfully. "We are the only family he has left. Perhaps we can pay him a visit together. And while we are in Paris, we can show you some of the more amusing sights. The city erected a large tower on the Champ de Mars the same year you visited me a decade ago. They say it's the tallest structure in the world, a monument of sorts celebrating the anniversary of our Revolution. Some call it hideous, but others find it striking. Designed by Gustave Eiffel, I believe. If you have not seen it yet, it might be worth a short detour."



Globetrotters Nellie Bly and Elizabeth Bisland revisit their record-setting 1889 journey as they unlock the secrets of the Dragon's Eye off the coast of Japan and keep one step ahead of a mysterious killer from London.

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