1994

Gwen Bristow: A Biography With Criticism of Her "Plantation Trilogy".

Billie J. Theriot

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/5907

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
GWEN BRISTOW:
A BIOGRAPHY WITH CRITICISM OF HER
PLANTATION TRILOGY

VOLUME I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Billie J. Theriot
B.S., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1962
M.Ed., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1974
M. A., University of Oklahoma, 1985
December 1994
As a tribute in memory of

Mr. "Bob" Robert A. Maurin, Jr.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many have generously given the assistance necessary for the exacting and extensive work involved in making this dissertation a reality. The debt of gratitude I owe, foremost to God, and to others is much too great for the space permitted here; I have, therefore, only listed the names of many who have been of assistance. To those named below, as well as those not named, please accept my sincere thanks.

Foremost, for directing my dissertation, I thank my major professor, Dr. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw—unfailingly helpful, always ready to listen, critique, and support. Her thoughtful words of motivation and wise counsel have been of immeasurable aid and encouragement. I also thank my other committee members—Dr. Kevin Cope, Dr. Josephine Roberts, Dr. Rebecca Crump, and Dr. Emily Toth—whose support and assistance have made my task both enjoyable as well as possible. Others are as follows:

From Louisiana State University:

1. Dr. Malcolm Richardson, Dr. Jim Borck, and Dr. William Demastes, as well as Dr. Bainard Cowan, and Dr. David Madden and Mrs. Mary Duchein; Dr. Pierre Hart of the Graduate School;

2. Dr. Veronica Makowsky, former Louisiana State University professor;

From various libraries:
2. James A. Rogers Library at Francis Marion University--Paul Dove, Key White, and Roger Hax;
4. Louisiana State University--especially Barbara Wottkopf of Middleton Library and Faye Phillips of Hill Memorial Library;
5. Robert Bowling Library, Judson College--Ellen Faurot and Charlotte Clements;
6. South Caroliniana Library at University of South Carolina in Columbia--Dr. Thomas L. Johnson, Henry Fulmer, Laura Costello;
7. Southeastern Louisiana University--my colleagues, especially those of my department and my department head, Dr. Barbara Allen.
8. Tulane University Howard-Tilton Library--Bill Meneray and Leon Miller;
10. Abbeville Public Library--Doris K. Hughes;
12. New Orleans Public Library--Wayne Everad, Andria Ducrois, Collin Haymer, and Irene Wainwright;

11. Hammond Branch of Tangipahoa Parish Public Library--Joyce Purser;

12. Williamston Public Library, SC--Bruce Edelman

13. Marion Public Library, SC--Jim Hawkins;

Special Collections:

1. Angie Gwen Bristow Fensin and Roberta Bristow Abadie, for family documents and books; Eunice Bristow; Dr. Otis Allen Bristow of West Point, Virginia, for his family records;

2. Edward Stutts, son of Bristow’s friend Annie Laurie Carroll Stutts, and his wife Ann from Dothan, Alabama, for Annie Laurie Stutts’ scrapbook on the Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame of Bristow’s installation, her Conversationalist, the 1923 Judson College yearbook of Bristow’s junior year and Stutts’ freshman year, along with certain other materials;

3. Attorney Michael Hibler for legal documents, papers, letters from Bristow’s last few months;

4. Margaret Bowie for her Proper Gander and other materials from Bristow’s days in Abbeville;

Others:

Dr. David Blackwell, Veronica Kerby, and Ron Abels of Education Outreach at Southeastern Louisiana University; Louise Boyce, First Baptist Church secretary; Janet Vandiver, Abbeville High School counselor; David

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Krumwiedi and Shirley Seawright of Abbeville City Hall; Lynn West of Abbeville Press and Banner; Ruth Hall, Ruth Starnes, May Bond, and Virginia Ingram—Miss Bristow's contemporaries in Abbeville; Vickie Howie of the Abbeville Nursing Center and the only living high school classmate of Gwen Bristow; also of the Abbveville Nursing Center, Margaret Klugh, who at 102 remembers "Gwen very well";

Robert L. Crowell, publisher of Bristow's works and her personal friend; Dr. and Mrs. Jean Fleming, long-time personal friends; Patricia Manning Tanner and her daughter, Georgann Tanner Hoyt; Annette Duchein, Bristow's friend; and other friends—Catherine Biggs, (first wife of Bruce Biggs), the second Mrs. Bruce Biggs, Felicia Imlay (Catherine Biggs' daughter and secretary to Bruce Biggs), and Betty Gaskill;

Dr. and Mrs. Earl Corkern of Hammond, who treated me like family and gave me a place of total solitude where I could prepare for my examinations;

my family for their imperturbable patience and encouragement, especially my mother, who took over the responsibility of preparing the evening meal for well over a year; my daughters, two young women—beautiful within and without—who have brought into my life joy and absolutely no grief, for their understanding, patience, and support; and finally, to my husband, Harvey, whose patient support, tolerant aloneness, and thoughtful, kind retreating have enabled me to bring to this project what it has exacted in time, energy, and finances;
finally and very importantly, to a very special friend, Mr. Robert Maurin, Jr., now deceased since 1988, for giving me vision to set my goals higher than I would have known how to do alone and for unwavering faith in me, so that I have, with this dissertation, achieved a goal I would not otherwise have found possible.
PREFACE

At the edge of the open back porch, an upside-down number-three tub lay emptied and drying. Droplets of water gleamed from its aluminum sides, and arched tracks trailed us from our baths to the big feather beds. We raced to make every second count, for, if we were not rambunctious, we might read for a little while by the uncertain light from the single unadorned bulb, attached at center ceiling, in the white ceramic fixture with its bead-ended pull-string. It was there snuggled in the cozy depths of that feather bed after a day of farm chores that I first experienced the excitement of Deep Summer and The Handsome Road. Other Gwen Bristow novels followed, and none proved a disappointment. Through the years—as much of what I read and studied has seemed buried under more immediate concerns—I never forgot Bristow’s narratives that gave me so much pleasure when I was a young girl.

That girlhood, however, had its roots in "Bristow territory." As a native of Louisiana, I knew its sultry, hot summers and bugs. As a farm girl, native to the Mississippi Delta, I also knew its swamps and the threatening futility of fighting back the encroaching vegetation. I knew broad cotton fields stretching in the distance and neighboring plantations that seemed, to my childish imagination, grand yet somehow running to seed with their sharecropper cabins and barefoot inhabitants, the littlest ones in half shirts, playing naked-bottomed in their dirt yards.
I also knew our "colored" neighbors—the Lee Bells and the Isables. They were all good people whom we genuinely liked, with whom we exchanged lending and borrowing, helping and being helped—in spite of just a bit of a lingering, learned sense of our own superiority.

Nonetheless, we recognized we were all just people, struggling to get along. I remember my uncles building one family a wooden casket when their baby with the "water head" died. My grandmother cooked for them, and we sat on their front porch and grieved for and with them. Lee Bell let us children eat plums from his trees, and he sometimes called on us for help, but not often. He was a proud man. We knew one another well, and my experiences to a large degree validate Gwen Bristow's portrayal of human relationships in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century South.

As a student of literature, I often wondered why I never heard Bristow's name in any of my many college classes. The question yet remains because there is much in Bristow that merits consideration. True, as Thomas Johnson of South Carolina University has said, Bristow does not write on the multi-level of a Faulkner nor with the rebellion and daring of a Chopin; she does not reach into the darker human conditions, deviances, and psychoses of a Tennessee Williams; she does not punctuate her prose with trendy slang, profanity, or sexually explicit and provocative language. What she does, however, and does very well is bring to intense reality the time and place and people of her narratives. In this way, she presents a very strong case for her genre—historical, romantic fiction. Her characters come to life in the vivid, authentic settings that not only impart
knowledge but also entertain. Both her men and her women wage their battles with
life in their historic settings, and they portray their struggles within the bounds of
social and moral guidelines without sentimentality or moralistic preaching.

Bristow’s work is much more than "women’s romantic fiction." While her
narratives engage the reader, their reality piques the curiosity and challenges one to
further study. Bristow, furthermore, was a careful researcher, a prolific writer, and
an engaging public speaker.

In spite of all of these achievements (although she sketched a "self-portrait"
for publicity purposes at the request of her publisher, Thomas Y. Crowell
Company), up to now no biography of Gwen Bristow has ever been written. I have
undertaken the task with the hope my efforts will engender renewed interest in Miss
Bristow’s work; for, in spite of her romantic approach and her sometimes "faulted"
style, her keen perception of human nature and unique treatment of certain periods
in our history deserve another look.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DEDICATION** ................................................................. ii

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ................................................ iii

**PREFACE** ........................................................................ viii

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS** ........................................ xiv

**CHRONOLOGY** ........................................................ xvi

**ABSTRACT** ................................................................. xviii

**INTRODUCTION** ......................................................... 1

**CHAPTER ONE** .......................................................... 18

**BRISTOW AND ANCESTRY** ..................................... 18

  - Beginning a Theological Life ........................................ 22
  - Of Strong Matrilineage .................................................. 25
  - School Days, Good Days ............................................... 28
  - Lifelong Influences ....................................................... 32
  - Fundamental Differences ............................................ 35
  - A Stimulating Environment .......................................... 40
  - Endnotes for Chapter One ........................................... 43

**CHAPTER TWO** .......................................................... 44

**APPRENTICESHIP FOR INDIVIDUALITY** ................. 44

  - A Varied, Formal Education ......................................... 46
  - Journalism Takes Hold ................................................. 52
  - Bristow's Mystery Man ................................................ 66
  - Collaborative Efforts .................................................... 71
  - Family Rebel .............................................................. 75
  - Fiercely Private .......................................................... 81
  - Coping with the Depression .......................................... 89
  - Comforting Back-Tracking .......................................... 92
  - Endnotes for Chapter Two .......................................... 96

**CHAPTER THREE** ........................................................ 98

**CALIFORNIA AND AUTHORSHIP** .......................... 98
CHAPTER FOUR ............................................................................................................ 145
SUCCESS ..................................................................................................................... 145
Complex Creation ...................................................................................................... 147
A Struggling Society ................................................................................................. 154
On the More Personal Side ...................................................................................... 156
Introspective Notes .................................................................................................. 163
War Lamentations ................................................................................................... 167
Another Publishing Deadline Nears ...................................................................... 170
Bristow's Stance on Slavery .................................................................................... 178
A Self-driving Task Master ...................................................................................... 184
Bristow's Use of "Place" ............................................................................................ 188
The Sum of Its Parts ................................................................................................. 191
Bristow's Popularity ................................................................................................. 194
Bristow and the Critics .............................................................................................. 206
Bristow's Feminine Protagonists ............................................................................ 207
Endnotes for Chapter Four ....................................................................................... 212

CHAPTER FIVE .............................................................................................................. 213
THE PRIVATE BRISTOW ............................................................................................. 213
A Much-needed Holiday ............................................................................................ 219
Bristow, the Lecturer ................................................................................................. 222
Threats of War and Communism ............................................................................ 234
Tomorrow Is Forever ............................................................................................... 240
The Ranch Versus the Hotel ...................................................................................... 244
A New Novel in the Offing ....................................................................................... 246
Family Matters .......................................................................................................... 256
Endnotes for Chapter Five ....................................................................................... 260

CHAPTER SIX .............................................................................................................. 261
FROM PINNACLE TO VALLEY .................................................................................... 261
Jubilee Trail Completed—and a Sensation .............................................................. 262
Plaguing Illnesses ..................................................................................................... 263
Revolution or Gold Rush? ......................................................................................... 265

xii

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Movie and Fanfare</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Schedule and Rewards</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing Herself from Her Past</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another New Novel and Major Changes</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Friends and Greater Ties to California</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Yields Unusual Find</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes for Chapter Six</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINANCIAL SECURITY AND PERSONAL CRISIS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triumph in Three Arenas</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries over National and World Crises</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristow, Her Publisher, and Her Work</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Again at Home</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes for Chapter Seven</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRISTOW FACES NEW CHALLENGENCES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Private Bristow and Continuing Success</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calico Palace</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Social Life</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking &quot;Backward&quot;</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Long Tentacle of Fate</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Dreams Is Published</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facing Cancer with Courage</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossed Purposes</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Honors</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes for Chapter Eight</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Churches</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Interviews</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Libraries</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Foreign Countries Which Published Bristow's Works</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSTSCRIPT</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DS    Deep Summer
THR   The Handsome Road
TSG   This Side of Glory
TIF   Tomorrow Is Forever
JT    Jubilee Trail
CG    Celia Garth
CP    Calico Palace
GD    Golden Dreams
GB    Gwen Bristow
SC    South Caroliniana
SCol  Special Collections
CHRONOLOGY

1903  Born September 16, 1903, in Marion, South Carolina, to Caroline Cornelia Winkler Bristow and Louis Judson Bristow.

1905-6  Lives in Greenwood, South Carolina, where her father serves as editor at Baptist Press.

1907-10  Spends these years at Williamston, South Carolina, where her father serves as pastor.

1910-15  Lives in Abbeville, South Carolina, where her father serves as pastor and builds the structure that continues into the 1990's to serve the First Baptist Church of Abbeville.

1915-18  Lives in Columbia, South Carolina, where Dr. Bristow founds and superintends South Carolina Baptist Hospital of Columbia.

1918-20  Returns to Abbeville and finishes high school.

1924  Graduates from Judson College, Marion, Alabama.

1925  Goes to New Orleans on June 1 to look for temporary job.

1927  Publishes The Alien and Other Poems.

1929  Marries Bruce Manning January 14.

1925-34  Works as full-time professional writer: begins working for The Times-Picayune July 9, 1925; resigns November 28, 1930.
1930  The Invisible Host (with husband Bruce Manning), Mystery League, publisher.

1931  The Gutenberg Murders (with Manning), Mystery League, publisher.

1932  Two and Two Make Twenty-Two (with Manning), published by Mystery League.

1932  Returns to The Times-Picayune February 5, 1932.

1934  Resigns finally from The Times-Picayune September 21, 1934.

1934  Moves to California, summer of 1934.


1938  The Handsome Road, Crowell Publishers.

1940  This Side of Glory, Crowell Publishers.

1943  Tomorrow is Forever, Crowell Publishers.


1959  Celia Garth, Crowell Publishers, Literary Guild Selection.

1962  Plantation Trilogy (includes Deep Summer, The Handsome Road, and This Side of Glory and additional historical material before each book unifying the three novels), Crowell Publishers.

1965  Bruce Manning dies August 2, 1965.

1969-71  Serves as president of Los Angeles Center International Poets, Essayists, and Novelists Club (commonly known as PEN).

1971-  Serves as international corresponding secretary of PEN (Poets, Essayists, and Novelists).

xvi


1989 Francis Marion University purchases Annette Duchein library of
Bristow's works (personally autographed by Gwen Bristow to Miss
Duchein).

1989 October 19, 1989, is installed into Alabama Women's Hall of Fame,
Judson College, Marion, Alabama.

Affiliations: LALA (Los Angeles Library Association)

The Authors Guild, Inc., New York, New York Western

Writers of America, Inc.

California Historical Society

The Pen and Brush

PEN

xvii
ABSTRACT

Gwen Bristow was born September 16, 1903. Her father was a minister and church leader and her mother was a homemaker and housemother for residents of Southern Baptist Hospital nurses' home. Both had impressive genealogies. Bristow, a reporter in New Orleans for The Times-Picayune from July 9, 1925, to November 28, 1930, and February 5, 1932, to September 21, 1934, wrote for many periodicals throughout her life. Her marriage to Bruce Manning took her to Hollywood, where she lived from the summer of 1934 until late spring 1980. Bruce Manning's career as a script writer, director, and producer provided a milieu Bristow enjoyed but never entered professionally except to have her novels, Tomorrow Is Forever and Jubilee Trail, made into movies.

Having published one small volume of poetry, Bristow is best known for her historical novels: Deep Summer (1937), The Handsome Road (1938), and This Side of Glory (1940)—all published under one title, Gwen Bristow's Plantation Trilogy (1962); Jubilee Trail (1950), Celia Garth (1959), and Calico Palace (1970). Her fourth novel, Tomorrow Is Forever (1943)—a departure from her historical novels—is set in World War II and focuses on reasons for anti-war sentiment. Her eighth, Golden Dreams (1980) is a straightforward historical sketch of the Gold Rush.

An inexhaustible researcher, Bristow was admired for accuracy of historical detail in her fiction, all on national best-seller lists for months. Although not a feminist in the contemporary sense but an advocate for women's rights and abilities
in assertive, professional roles, she lectured and lived as a deeply concerned, aware
citizen and independent thinker.

Exclusive of documents she destroyed (as too revealing), her journals (1931-
1978) and papers depict her marriage, work, hopes, frustrations, family, friends,
attitudes, and reactions to local, national, and international affairs.

As author and lecturer, she was enormously successful financially. Although
some critics found her fiction "sentimental" and "romantic," more praised it for her
"objective" and "realistic" depiction of historical milieu. She wrote of nineteenth-
and twentieth-century Louisiana, the nineteenth-century western movement,
eighteenth-century South Carolina, and the nineteenth-century Gold Rush. A
talented writer, she made a significant contribution in the genre of romantic
historical fiction. She died in New Orleans August 17, 1980.
INTRODUCTION

Gwen Bristow (1903-1980), a woman of many talents, produced a prodigious amount of writing—poetry, lectures, newspaper columns, special news features, self-help articles, diaries, and novels. However, it is her work as a novelist for which she is most noted. In this capacity Bristow collaborated with her husband to write four book-length mysteries, one of which was dramatized on Broadway. It also played in smaller theaters across the country. This play and two of her novels were made into movies. Bristow herself wrote and published seven novels, all of which made the best-seller lists throughout the United States and had many reprints. They also sold extraordinarily well in at least twelve foreign countries, many in continuous print into the 1990’s (Schlessiger). (Books in Print, however, in 1994 lists none Bristow’s writings.) In 1980, the year she died, Lippincott and Crowell published her last and eighth book, Golden Dreams, which, although it reads like a fascinating novel, is a meticulously researched history. Finally, adding to her many other talents, Bristow was a superb lecturer in great demand, as well as a relentless and exacting researcher with an unwavering compulsion to write "a good book" (J 21 June 1938).

Bristow, who provides an intriguing study as a woman of many talents, faithfully recorded daily events in her personal journals throughout her adult life, which reveal a fascinating composite of herself, Bruce Manning, their home life, friends, and work habits, her attitudes and her struggles with her work and research,
the times in which she lived, and much more. As a writer whose work incited hundreds of interviews and critical reviews, she rose to fame rapidly. By the time her third novel was published in 1940, she had become a household name to millions of devoted readers and fans, and many critics, as well, who acclaimed her writing. For example, Albert Goldstein of The Times-Picayune in New Orleans, discussing The Handsome Road in his May 1, 1938, column, captures much of the essence of Bristow’s accomplishment, saying,

[It] has a significance . . . and you feel this significance after you have finished it because you cannot escape the fact that it is a grand story . . . that suggests a passion for honest creative effort and flawless craftsmanship.

For the sheer enjoyment that it furnishes as a narrative, and as an accurate and—what is just as important in any evaluation of "Southern" literature—an unsentimental picture of a forgotten time, [this novel] must rank with the superior novels of today. (Northridge)

Another ardent fan, Dr. Martha Boaz of the University of Southern California, where Bristow gave a lecture to a librarians’ conference, wrote to say,

You completely captivated your audience. I knew we were getting somebody good but I didn’t know how good until I heard you. It is not often that an author has talent, beauty, brains, and poise all rolled in one, but you have everything. With all this, you are a brilliant speaker. (J 15 Oct. 1959)

The rapidity with which all but the last of Bristow’s books became best-sellers also attests to her extraordinary popularity. For example, the totally unknown author Bristow received her first copies of Deep Summer on February 1, 1938. By April 12, it had already reached best-seller status in New Orleans, and the New York Herald-Tribune had put Deep Summer among the national best-sellers by May 17 (J 17 May 1938). It was still on the list in August, selling about a thousand copies a month, according to Bristow’s publisher, Robert Crowell, writing in 1940.
in Publishers' Weekly. Her second book, The Handsome Road, sold ten thousand copies and went into its second printing before ever going to the retail shelves May 2, 1938 (Northridge). It became a best-seller nationwide before the end of May. In June it was in ninth place on the New York Herald Tribune best-seller list, remaining there for eight months. Likewise, This Side of Glory, her third novel, issued March 20, 1940, received a favorable review in the Los Angeles Times four days later, and by April it was eighth on the national best-seller list (Crowell 1156).

In addition to her positions on the best-seller lists, many reviews acclaimed Bristow's work. For example, Margaret Wallace, writing for the New York Times Book Review March 31, 1940, characterized This Side of Glory as an "interesting psychological conflict" (7). Wallace's assessment implies that characters and narrative were sufficiently developed to be memorable as real people whose history readers follow with avid interest.

Bristow's other works of fiction were likewise well received by the public. Tomorrow Is Forever, published in 1943, "sold about as well as the others," wrote Robert Crowell, "and it was made into a movie!" (14, July 1993). Jubilee Trail (1950), an even greater success, was chosen by Literary Guild before its publication as its April selection with a guaranteed $50,000. It was on the best-seller list in Los Angeles upon publication in February 1950 and was sixth on the Herald Tribune list eight days later; beginning the new year 1951, it was ninth, having remained on the best-seller list continuously since publication (Northridge). Celia Garth, published February 6, 1959, was fourth on the Herald Tribune best-seller list by July 1, 1959. Calico Palace (1970), likewise well received, sold more than 23,000 copies before
publication date and was sixth on the New York Times best-seller list two weeks after publication (J 1970). Her final book, Golden Dreams, a departure from her historical fiction, was a straightforward factual account of the California Gold Rush. According to Charles Schlessiger in his letter of May 10, 1994, it "had moderate sales."

Besides being a public figure, Bristow was also a Southerner, and so she remained—in spite of her rejecting certain aspects of her early training and her emigrating to California, where she lived more than half of her life. Her wanting to rid herself of what she considered the rigidity and outdated principles of her home environment did not prejudice her literary focus in perhaps the most important works of her writing career—Deep Summer (1937), The Handsome Road (1938), and This Side of Glory (1940), collectively published under one title, Gwen Bristow's Plantation Trilogy, in 1962.

Furthermore, she refused to subjugate her concept of the significance of history to the restrictiveness of regional idiosyncrasies. Adamantly believing in the relevance of the past to daily living and the quality of life, she reminds her readers in her introduction to her Plantation Trilogy, published in 1962, that

the public events recounted here [indeed, as in all her books] did happen, the private events could have happened. Events like those did take place in the lives of millions of people.

All this is over now. But what we have today is the result of it. What people did is always important if we want to understand what they do. (xiii)

Since she was concerned with being "civilized" and socially well-mannered for heightened quality of life, along with studying the past to understand how to prepare for and to live in the present and the future, she created her tales to carry her
message, and she chose history as her vehicle. For Bristow the secret to understanding humanity lay not so significantly in the symbolism and literary interpretation of history but more in the examination of its tracks. She did not denigrate representative literature and she did not reject it; she simply took a different route for her individual style of writing.

Bristow’s concerns as a historian anxious about the choices that world citizens make perhaps superseded only to some small degree her belief in the ability of women and their right to strive to attain their potential. So intrinsic was this attitude that she herself lived it, and—consciously or unconsciously—she patterned her feminine protagonists after herself. Aside from her determination to escape certain tenets inculcated early in her life, to her tenaciously preserved sense of self-determination and self-worth there clung the cultural, religious, and parentally-instilled principles that formed boundaries beyond which she could not or would not venture.

For example, she frequently acted independently of her husband in taking assertive roles and in making decisions; furthermore, she did so with her own needs and interests under consideration (and even foremost, her journals imply). At the same time, she maintained that her actions had the complete support and approval of her husband; otherwise, she insisted, she would defer to his wishes. Her writings and many of her activities, however, reflect a repudiation of this claim, but the point is moot anyway: she was not required to make such a choice.

Underlying Bristow, the public person, was her skill as a crafter of stories. She was an intensely devoted writer and a very talented one, and at one level—as a
historian—she was also passionately concerned about local, national, and world events. Consequently, she thoroughly researched anything she felt might remotely relate to her project in hand. Her philosophy was that the narrator should be so immersed in her subject that she knew it as well as if she herself had lived it—insofar as that condition were possible. She worked laboriously for years on a single book, and her journals track her painstaking struggles with remarks, such as "This moves slowly, but it moves, and that is what counts," or "[T]hese things take me so long, but the way I do it must be the right way for me. I simply can't hurry and write well" (J 25 Mar. 1964).

However, all Bristow's arduous efforts in the end paid rich dividends for her journals, along with many news articles in her California State University collection confirm a broad and loyal following and enormous book sales. Also indicative of her status as a writer was her reputation with Crowell Publishing:

Bob wrote me some days ago, saying they have changed their policy and are going to publish mainly textbooks, reference books, and other "books that last," with very little fiction. However, as he said he was looking forward to "turning the place upside down" for my next book, I was not bothered. (J 6 Oct. 1960)

Later, having been too busy with her novel to respond quickly enough, she soon received word from Crowell, "worried lest [she] were considering another publisher." She telephoned him to report that leaving him had never crossed her mind (J 6 Oct. 1960). Crowell, however, was concerned. As he explains in a letter of May 10, 1994, "Of course, publishers go after each others' authors like vultures and they buzzed around Gwen like bees around a honey pot. She could have made a
deal with any of them." In addition to her publisher and her agent, she was very popular with a multitude of devoted readers, if not with the literary critics.

Bristow's focus, however, was not particularly on literary critics nor on the "mythical South" as described by Jack Temple Kirby in *Media-Made Dixie*, a South of "haughty aristocrats and faithful darkies" (10). At least, these were not her central objective. Instead, she was interested in the truth of the South, the good and the bad of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century (Caroliniana). That a "Southern myth" did exist would have represented to Bristow an even more urgent reason to peel back the layers of events to discover the historical reasons for the myth, the reasons why people lived and acted as they did in ways that made them become what they became. One unnamed reviewer defines her in terms of the "Arts and Sciences":

It is Gwen Bristow the artist, who shapes her many characters and her thousands of notes into the living novels. . . . But before a single word is written it is Gwen Bristow the scientist [the "one who has a passion for facts"], who delves deeply into the history and lore of the times of which she writes. (Northridge)

Although Bristow's focus is not on a symbolic and mythological South, she does employ symbolism extensively. For example, particularly picturesque and powerful is the image in *The Handsome Road* of the child Denis remembering his mother

when her faded old dresses had been somehow so soft, inviting for a child to rest his head against. He slowly began to understand that the soft old clothes had been remnants of her fluffy girlhood. . . . The heavy fabrics she wore later were like a shell around her. (301)

Not sentimental romanticism, this metaphor for a South proudly pulling around itself the rags of its past to Bristow was *history* with a message. Her
objective was public awareness of that message by encapsulating it in an interesting narrative.

Occasionally, her prose may sound trite or clichéd to the sophisticated ear, as in her description of the air in *Deep Summer*—"like velvet and champagne" (167). This style can also be somewhat juvenile in tone, particularly in *Tomorrow Is Forever* with its Hollywood setting and anguished heroine Elizabeth. Elizabeth's life dramatically epitomizes the dreams of a very young girl who experiences passionate and romantic love and marriage only to have to overcome the pain that comes with great tragedy. Ultimately, Elizabeth makes contributions and sacrifices that effect greater personal happiness and an improved society.

Another point is that Bristow's dialogue sometimes sounds artificial, and some of her characters occasionally lack development so that readers may feel that they have seen mannequins but not the real people. Some characters move in and out, providing the "window dressing" but in ways fail to take on adequate dimension for real individuality and personality. For example, when Spratt asks Elizabeth to marry him in *Tomorrow Is Forever*, she tells him she cannot bring to their marriage a love such as she had given her first husband. Spratt, in a "comradely fashion," replies that the sort of love she speaks of would make him panic.

[The] idea that anybody could possibly want to be adored like that, which you'll have to admit is ridiculous. . . . [If] that's what you were when you were a young girl I'm glad you got rid of it before I met you. I want you the way you are. (46-47)

To lend genuine credibility, such objectivity and acceptance need further delineation. Despite Spratt's centrality to the novel, the reader never really knows him. As another example, Spratt "[works] in a studio publicity department" (40), but the
story, told from Elizabeth's point of view, tells the reader up to a certain point but does not show the daily lives and thoughts of her characters. Because Bristow's focus is on theme more so than on characters, she provides inadequate clues to the person behind this willingness, even preference, to settle for a "comfortable" affection and what his everyday life is like.

In spite of its weaknesses, however, Tomorrow Is Forever strikes at justification for war and focuses on its ultimate horror:

We don't know what they've already destroyed—a cure for cancer, a new philosophical system. . . . [the] Einsteins, Chiangs, Curies of the future. . . . the books that will never be written. . . . They're destroying tomorrow, and tomorrow is forever. (132)

Bristow was also a very serious "student." She enrolled in university foreign language and art classes to enable her to research her subjects more efficiently, and she never stopped studying technique and character development. She recognized her weaknesses more and more as time passed so that by the time she was into her fifth novel and had come across her old manuscripts, she commented,

All those awful early attempts at writing what finally turned out to be the Louisiana trilogy! . . . I had really forgotten what I could do when I was utterly ignorant of the technique of telling a story. No characters—simply names; no idea of how to work up to a climax, no nothing. I wonder if every writer is as bad as this at the beginning. (J 25-26 Ap. 1944)

In addition to addressing the issue directly, Bristow, a voracious reader, also had very pronounced opinions about quality and subject. For example, she wrote,

. . . and Suddenly Last Summer, a Tennessee Williams outpouring, utterly revolting. About a homosexual who took a girl to Europe with him so she would attract young men on the beaches, for him; and who was finally murdered by a mob of boys who ate his flesh. If that's art I can live without art. (J 20 Ap. 1960)
Thus she approached her work: as she wrote, she studied and she learned, always striving to improve her own style and technique. Her writing reflects that effort. Although not so significant in subject and scope as her Plantation Trilogy, her other novels weave a tale around carefully documented history for a narrative that is both captivating and informative.

In spite of her popularity, Bristow, about whom an enormous amount of publicity and criticism appeared in the various periodicals during her writing career, has been virtually overlooked by the critics of scholarly works and almost summarily dismissed as a writer of "romantic women's fiction" (DeMarr 237) or "costume romance" (Walton 8). This last label, however, is inaccurate, and Bristow deserves more thoughtful consideration for her probing historical studies of life in the South, specifically in Louisiana, over almost a century and a half. Bristow vehemently believed in what she was attempting to do, and she pointedly addresses her critics in the following excerpt:

*Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, having wandered unsuccessfully among various publishers, finally appeared before a public that scowled in bewilderment at them. . . . In 1855 *Putnam's Magazine* reviewed Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and dismissed it in some puzzlement as a "curious and lawless collection of poems". . . . [and] *A Tale of Two Cities* was condemned by nearly all its first reviewers as being little better than trash. (Northridge)

With her ambition to write "a good book" and with her being so much in the eye of the media, Bristow was inevitably the object of criticism. Some critics read her work in a positive light. For example, when *Deep Summer* appeared in 1937, Margaret Wallace writing for the *New York Times Book Review* April 4 stated, "I found *Deep Summer* a tremendously vital and exciting story of the founding of a
Colonial dynasty . . . a grand job of story telling" (7). She continued, saying that Bristow

had here the makings of a very long novel . . . . It took a pretty careful job of literary carpentering to get everything in, to keep track of Philip Larne and all his relatives-in-law and his sons, legitimate and illegitimate. But we should have felt aggrieved, so deft are Miss Bristow's characterizations, if she had missed a single one of them.

Which is to say that, whatever its faults—and they are trivial in comparison with its virtues—Deep Summer is a grand job of story telling.

Other reviews referred to Bristow's "rare understanding of people," the "panoramic sweep" of her work, and "a conscientious piece of writing." At the same time, other reviews were not so complimentary, and Bristow smarted from their sting.

To succeed with her objective, Bristow believed it was necessary for the writer of historical fiction to interest readers in the people being written about. In this sharply abbreviated excerpt from her essay, "We Call It Lagniappe," Bristow explains her theory:

By the time a schoolboy is ten years old he finds nothing startling in the fact that Columbus discovered America, but if a story is given him in which one of Columbus' sailors is made as real as somebody he knows, the account of how he happened to ship on the Santa Maria and what happened to him on the way to America can make schoolboys and grownups sit up nights and keep waiting lists at the circulating library . . . .

An amazing number of learners . . . grimly cling to the notion that art should copy nature or life. Those writers who scorn the literalness of the photograph yet imagine themselves cameras! To them what is "true to life" is true to art and with this homemade aesthetic theory they excuse their graceless imitations. The truth is that all art is intelligent exaggeration. (Caroliniana)
Bristow's focus was not on Southern myth; the foundations for the Southern myth as a basis for a marketable product had already been established. Earl F. Bargainnier notes, for example, after the Civil War:

northern publishers and editors were not only welcoming but actively seeking southern writers. . . . Though the south had lost the War, it had conquered the national literary marketplace with its own myth of itself, no matter how little the myth corresponded to reality." (Bargainnier 7)

Bristow's contention was the same, and she conceded that achieving such an ideal level of awareness is impossible because the media sensationalize that which will sell and thus detract from that which is significant. Therefore, according to Thomas Johnson, professor of literature at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, to understand Bristow's goal, one needs to know and appreciate her genre, historical fiction. He does not view her work as merely popular romance but as fiction that enlightens and instructs, that encapsulates the unpalatable with a narrative so intriguing that readers can absorb the "cold, hard facts" enjoyably and memorably (Interview).

Bristow's objective in creating her narrative did not reduce her interest in making a living. She, in fact, quite candidly expressed her interest in the financial rewards in such statements as "Anyway the sales are excellent and Crowell has already ordered a second printing" (J 22 Feb. 1950), but sacrificing her literary integrity for economic gain would have violated her principles. At the same time, she repeatedly rejected "the frightened contempt of highbrow critics for a book plainly written for entertainment only" (J 22 Feb. 1950).
In addition to Bristow’s celebrity and achievement as a writer, there is another facet to this intriguing woman: she exemplified a model of the mid-twentieth-century women’s movement on a very conservative but assertive level.

All of her work demonstrates that her personal convictions supported woman’s right to create herself, to define herself—not according to the conception "born in the imaginations of white slaveholding men" (Jones 8) but according to woman’s instinct, intelligence, and emotions, to choose the person she is rather than accept the shape she assumes after someone or some outside influence twists and molds her into a form that best serves someone else’s notion of what she should be. Bristow’s women are forthright, intelligent, assertive, even occasionally stubborn when they have a point to make or when they have been abused. Moreover, they are loyal, but they are not "culture’s idea of . . . perfection" (Jones 9). Bristow had intensely studied history, and she was intent on learning the lessons it had taught.

In spite of her Southern heritage, Bristow had no aspiration to be the "ideal" Southern woman of the kind described by Anne Goodwyn Jones: "[M]ore] than just a fragile flower, the image of the southern lady represents her culture's idea of religious, moral, sexual, racial, and social perfection" (9). However, Bristow understood these attributes; she had been reared in their shadow. She had also conscientiously probed the past, not trusting only to history as interpreted for her but also researching original documents for herself.

If Bristow had been asked to assess her position relative to her own "Southernness," she very probably would have characterized it by saying she practiced "just being civilized." If, likewise, she had been asked for her definition
of "Southern mythology," she just as likely would have done so in equally terse
terms—"history" and "humanity." At the same time, she delineated the women in her
novels along the lines appropriate to their respective places in history. The major
difference was that her heroines always acted with intelligence, assertiveness, and
self-confidence. Furthermore, they resisted abuse or subservience in keeping with
verifiable history and Bristow's own demanding standards. In this regard Bristow
might well be deemed an advocate of women's rights. With a very firm confidence
in who she was, Bristow set about writing her novels and extensively patterning her
protagonists after herself.

As Bristow's narratives unfold, her paradoxically minor but monumental
representations of a society unfold dramatically and forcefully (minor because she
chose everyday events to portray monumental or very significant events). For
example, one man (Philip Larne) has ambition and dreams, and he works to make
them a reality. Another (Caleb Sheramy) divorces his wife because of her deceit.
Dolores Sheramy, like so many other women, feels forced out of her home. She
tries to support herself, but she cannot, and like thousands of others, she "takes up"
with a man (Thad Upjohn). A child (Benny), born of an illicit affair between a
white man (Philip Larne) and a black woman (Angélique, Judith's maid), grows up
to be angry with society. A wealthy girl (Ann Sheramy) takes a walk in the park
and accidentally meets a poor girl (Corrie May) waiting for her beau (Budge). Both
have dreams and by chance they have a conversation, but the years ahead are years
of hardships and challenges. Time brings to the scene Kester Larne, the grandson
of Ann Sheramy, and Eleanor, the granddaughter of Corrie May Upjohn, both
descendants of Dolores, five generations removed. The time, however, moves into 1912, and Eleanor has completed college and begins work as her father's secretary; her path crosses that of Kester Larne of Ardeith Plantation. Incident after incident is interwoven until a family, a way of life, an entire generation, an entire nation, and their futures are brought to life.

Bristow's plantation stories also employ certain elements commonly found in other novels about the South. For example, like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* in scope and content (Northridge), they are given a Civil War setting. Then, there are the other related elements, such as the plantations, the patriarchal society, the mistress of the plantation, the pampered Southern belle, the slaves, the poor whites, the mammy-white children relationships, the miscegenation, and immoral overseers.

As her stories demonstrate, Bristow was not only a special type of writer, but, on a more biographical note, she was also a very special type of woman, individual, and human being. She was not, according to Jean Fleming, her very close friend from 1958 to the time of her death, "a hugging person, not a patting person, yet you could feel very warm toward her (Interview 11 Nov. 1993). Agreeing with Fleming, Felicia Imlay, secretary to her father Bruce Biggs, Bristow's accountant during her years in California, recalls that "Gwen had a very persevering personality; if I asked a question, she had an answer; if not, she would find out. She was also very meticulous, and she was a lady with a capital L, a very lovely and charitable person, and she deserves to be remembered that way.
The son of Thomas Y. Crowell, Robert Crowell, who came to manage Bristow, was her publisher and a kind and thoughtful man. He treated Bristow with great respect and carefully guarded her business concerns with integrity and industrious concern. So congenial was this relationship that Bristow, in an interview with Norman Tanis of California State University Oviatt Library in 1976, said, "My first book was published by the Thomas Y. Crowell Company, and my next will be published by the Thomas Y. Crowell Company. Deep Summer appeared in 1937. Now I know that is about as usual as a Hollywood golden wedding, but I've had marvelous luck."

As for Crowell, he is enthusiastic and admiring in his recollections of Bristow, remembering her in a letter of March 5, 1993, as "a wonderful person," and adding, "I'd like to do anything I can to preserve her memory." Continuing, Crowell recalls:

Gwen Bristow was one of the most consummate craftsmen of any author I ever knew. She worked and worked on the research. In fact she said that was more fun than writing. For the publisher it was a little disturbing because it took her more and more time to produce. She was no book-a-year author. Jubilee Trail took 7 years. Celia Garth took 9 years, and Calico Palace took 11 years. I suggested that she might like an advance payment on one of her books. (She was never very much interested in advances.) So we paid her $10,000 on signing the contract. As the years went by I would say once in a while, "How is the book coming along?" It was an innocent enough question, but she took it very seriously and said that made her stay awake all night, and she lost a whole day's work as a result. So I kept quiet after that, and the years rolled on.

She would dig out every single detail about the times and places of the book she was writing. When she was producing Jubilee Trail, she had a map over her desk that she had made showing where every single store and residence in downtown San Francisco used to be over a century ago. Ask her a question about any tiny detail of the life of people in that far off period, and she could tell you in a minute.
She had very positive rules about [the] writing technique. . . . Once she had a manuscript I think she knew it by heart. When *The Handsome Road* was going through the presses, the editor—a new editor—remarked to me, "I am just changing a few little things." I didn’t say anything, but I was concerned. Sure enough a letter came from Gwen saying there should be no such correction, and she was changing it back the way it should be, in the proof.

In addition to Bristow’s legacy of historical insights portrayed through a kaleidoscope of romance, which, on the whole, she depicts interestingly and remarkably successfully, Bristow leaves behind a study of a love affair between an indefatigable researcher and the tools of her trade, as well as a revealing portrayal of the author whose writings on many levels and many planes offer her audience a personal and written account of the previously untold story of her life.
CHAPTER ONE

BIRTH AND ANCESTRY

Poetic, and almost prophetic, the front page of The Marion Star on the day Gwen Bristow was born proclaimed in its first column, "With soft September's brow entwined in grape leaves and a far-off look within her eyes, which speaks of vanished summer dreams, the autumn steals upon us to begin her russet reign." On this day, September 16, 1903, Marion's daily paper featured very few items that could be classified as newsworthy by contemporary standards. One column did report a hog cholera outbreak, and another focused on the game laws governing hunting behavior of sportsmen. There was, however, no world news on the front page—nothing of President Theodore Roosevelt's world policies and his determination to prevent any violation of the Monroe Doctrine. There was no front-page city council news and certainly no crime making the front page of this small Deep South city paper. Although one column, in fact, did state that according to the "gossips at [Waynesville, North Carolina] . . . Capt. Richmond P. Hobson, is to marry Miss Ruth Bryan, the eldest daughter of William Jennings Bryan," nowhere in the entire edition was there mentioned the fact that on that day in Marion a child was born to Dr. and Mrs. Louis Judson Bristow, prominent members of the community, where Dr. Bristow served as pastor of First Baptist Church. Thus, without fanfare, Gwen Bristow was born September 16, 1903, to a family of impressive lineage on both sides. On the paternal side, Burke's Landed Gentry
traces some of the English Bristows to Stephen Fitzhamon, an officer of King Richard I. The trail continues back to Rollo, first duke of Normandy, to the Fitzhamon family, who immigrated to England with William the Conqueror (O. Bristow). The name "Bristow," which formerly derived from the words, "Brick Stow" or "Bright Stow" is ascribed to the town Burstow in Surrey and also to the city of Bristol, England. Members of the Bristow family came to America early, the first landing in 1637. They made persistent attempts to establish roots (M. E. Bristow 43).

Another researcher of the Bristows, Peggy Hickman in Country Life, July 10, 1969, writes of one Nicholas Bristow, "Clerk of the Jewels to Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Queens Mary and Elizabeth" and his connection to King Henry VIII. This third son of John Bristowe of Leigh, in Surrey, had entered royal service and gained the confidence of his difficult, not to say dangerous, master several years earlier. He lived in close proximity to the King at the Palace of Westminster and, in the Letters and Papers of King Henry VIII, numerous notes exist showing his advancement and the small gifts of additional posts granted by the monarch. (O. Bristow)

Bristows were later found in both England and Bermuda, the possibility being that the Bristows who settled in Virginia may have come to America via Bermuda. One account tells that between 1680 and 1690, an elder Bristow living in Bermuda disappeared abruptly. His son John, Jr., died between March 4, 1680, and April 16, 1681, leaving behind a wife, Sarah (believed to have deeded the land to Oxford College),¹ and two daughters, Sarah and Catherine. One John Bristow, a sea
captain thought to be a descendent from these Bermuda Bristows, is believed to be
the first settler on the Rappahannock River in Middlesex County, Virginia (Bristow
family papers).

Several books\(^2\) and other documents trace the Bristow family of non-noble
British ancestry through two distinct lines of American Bristows. One of these
accounts maintains that the Bristows are descended from a John Bristow, who came
to America via Bermuda; the other story claims they are descendants of John's
brother Richard Bristow, who came directly from England in 1698. Both stories
agree, however, that the Bristows are descended from brothers and thus share a
common ancestry (Bristow family papers).

On the other hand, a second story tells of a John Bristow who lived in
Binstead, England, until his death in 1646. His will attests to his five sons and two
daughters, who were— from eldest to youngest—Nicholas, John, Jane, Richard,
Robert, Henry, and Alice. Without irrefutable proof that these siblings were Gwen
Bristow's ancestors, genealogists have nonetheless established the fact that the
Bristows in England of the same name and time did come to America. A Richard
and a Henry Bristow settled in New England, along with a Robert, "son of John
Bristow of Binstead," but Robert returned to England (O. Bristow).

Hard-working, independent, progressive, and contributing citizens, the
Bristow family have proved generation after generation to be outstanding members
of their communities and the nation. John Phipps Bristow (1799-?), for example, set
a pattern of achievement as a county judge (Wooley 61-62). Another ancestor,
Benjamin Helm Bristow (June 20, 1832-June 22, 1896) known as the "Border State Politician," served as United States attorney for the district of Kentucky, first Solicitor General of the United States (1870-1872), and finally Secretary of the Treasury during the second Grant administration. He resigned this position to become the Presidential nominee of liberal elements of the Republican party; however, he lost the nomination to Rutherford B. Hayes (O. Bristow).

Another of Bristow's ancestors, Senator Joseph L. Bristow of Kansas, authored the Seventeenth Amendment providing for the election of senators by popular vote. He is also credited with having helped Dwight D. Eisenhower gain admittance into West Point. His own son Frank H. Bristow (1886-1968) was a Rhodes scholar and a Fairfax County attorney. Another ancestor, Frank B. Bristow, together with his brother Joseph Q. Bristow, completed a book begun by their father, Fraud and Politics at the Turn of the Century. Still another ancestor, Dr. Otis Allen Bristow, a veteran of World War I, resided in West Point, Virginia, where he practiced dentistry for fifty-three years and was affiliated with a great many organizations. He fathered two sons, and his namesake, Otis Allen Bristow, Jr., also became a doctor (O. Bristow).

Along with a town named in their honor (Bristow, West Virginia, on Highway 28 just a few miles southwest of Washington, D. C.), the Bristow family members in this country have many other evidences of an illustrious record of personal achievement and service to their country. In Gwen Bristow's direct family line, George Bristow, who was born November 7, 1748, served in the Revolutionary War. Gwen's paternal grandfather, James Tazewell Bristow, served in the War
Between the States. A "forgotten" prisoner of war, he remained confined in
Poughkeepsie, New York, for nearly eighteen months after Lee's surrender. Finally
liberated, he returned home barefoot and so ragged that his wife, who had supposed
him dead, did not know him. After a long struggle, great hardship, and the removal
of Carpetbag government, he became an agent for the Cheraw and Darlington
Railroad and urged successfully the establishment of the Darling Manufacturing
Company because he believed cotton should be manufactured where it was grown.
He became secretary of the corporation and served in this capacity until his death in
April 1892 (Wooley 135-6). Louis Judson Bristow, Gwen Bristow’s father and
James Tazewell Bristow’s eighth child, was born January 19, 1876, at
Timmonsville, South Carolina (O. Bristow).

Beginning a Theological Life

Upon the death of his father, Louis Judson Bristow dropped out of school to
help the family. He went from news boy to "Jack of all trades." Never ceasing to
read and study, he eventually worked as a newspaper correspondent and also became
a member of the Darlington Guards. He served through the Spanish-American War
both as an officer and as a correspondent for the News and Courier, sending home
news of the South Carolina troops. Something of a writer himself, he later served
as a denominational press editor (First Baptist), as well as the author of the book,
Healing Humanity's Heart, a treatise on denominational hospitals (Bristow family
papers).
After being discharged from the Army, he attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and he was ordained a minister upon graduation in 1901. His first pastorate was Wedgefield, South Carolina, but he had moved to Marion by the time Gwen was born in 1903, where he served until 1905. After serving as pastor in Wedgefield and Marion, he went to Abbeville in 1910, delivering his first sermon in the Abbeville Baptist Church on September 15. Farsighted and dedicated, Dr. Bristow demonstrated exceptional financial and spiritual leadership. Although the congregation numbered few and had limited finances, he led the church in a very progressive and successful building program that included the original portion of the present church located on Church Street at Pinckney Street, along with the pastorium that fronted on Ellis Avenue. Both were dedicated on December 31, 1911. Some felt Dr. Bristow too optimistic and expansive in his building program. As Dr. Bristow had envisioned, however, instead of being too large, within twenty-five years the building needed further expansion. The pastorium, which had provided residence for forty-three years, was finally moved to a new location on June 23, 1955, and renovated for rental property (Harper).

Broader horizons soon beckoned. Recognizing the lack of hospital facilities for Baptists throughout the South, Dr. Bristow set out upon a new vocation. Resigning his pastorate in Abbeville on September 1, 1915, he accepted the position offered to him by the Southern Baptist Convention, a body founded in 1821 at Columbia, South Carolina, to support the aims of the church. Going to Columbia, South Carolina, Dr. Bristow worked tirelessly as head of the Baptist hospital there.
After it was well established, he returned in December 1918 to Abbeville to serve as pastor again for a brief time.

In 1921, however, he again saw the need for more and better hospitals, and this time he founded Baptist Hospital in Selma, Alabama (1921-1924). He continued his work, next founding the Good Samaritan Hospital in 1922 (for Negroes), also in Selma, Alabama, (1922). In 1924, he moved again, this time to New Orleans, where he founded Southern Baptist Hospital, which he superintended during the remainder of his working career. In 1945 he became general secretary of all Southern Baptist hospitals. According to family papers and church documents, when he retired May 1, 1947, he turned over to his successor a debt-free hospital complex, which had cost $2,250,000, and more than $700,000 in cash and government securities, having never closed a year during his administration with a deficit. Always the visionary, he had also added to the hospital property several acres around the hospital, which would have been invaluable on today’s market (Fensin, 26 Dec. 1993). He died at Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans on November 15, 1957, of a heart attack. As church and hospital records attest, he had served his church long and well, both as a practical man and as a visionary with many significant accomplishments, not the least of which was fathering the popular author Gwen Bristow.

James Gillis, a Tulane graduate who joined The Times-Picayune staff in 1931, remembers Louis Bristow as a "very influential and important executive" (Gillis, 6 Dec. 1992), and, Gillis goes on to say, "His history and record of accomplishments and affiliations are most impressive." Although Gillis had become
closely acquainted with Bristow and learned something of her father and her brother during the time he had been affiliated with the paper, he did not know her mother was living. At the time he knew Bristow, he had assumed that she was deceased (Gillis). While Bristow religiously lived by the rule that one does not "parade family matters before the public," the fact that she did not talk about her mother--or the rest of her family with the exception of Caroline, her younger sister--implied a pattern to which she adhered throughout her life except for rare occasions. Obvious clues continually surfaced in her writing and actions, however, that Bristow very early was moving away from her family and family's traditions.

Of Strong Matrilineage

During the time of Bristow's childhood and Dr. Bristow's posts throughout South Carolina and Alabama, her mother, Caroline Cornelia Winkler Bristow, filled the role typical of other contemporary women in the South, following her husband wherever his work led him and taking care of the home and their children. She also was active in her community, and she served in her church in such positions as president of the Women's Missionary Society (First Baptist).

Of Scottish, German, English, and French descent (Judson) Caroline Cornelia Winkler was born December 25, 1878, in Marion, Alabama, where her father, Dr. Edwin Theodore Winkler, also a Baptist pastor, was president of Judson College. Bristow's mother was a "member of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution because of the Revolutionary record of David Adams," descendent of President John Adams. This David Adams' and his second wife,
Mary Lawrence, had a daughter Sarah Elizabeth (sometimes known as Elizabeth Sarah) who married Cornelius D. Burckmyer. Their daughter Rosa Cornelia married Edwin Theodore Winkler, whose daughter Caroline Cornelia Winkler, married Louis Judson Bristow (Bristow family papers).

Bristow’s maternal ancestors, the Burckmyers, had lived in Charleston, South Carolina, since about 1700. Family documents depict Mrs. Bristow as "a woman of highest, Christian ideals, profound convictions, keen and trained mind, and charming personality" (Bristow family papers).

Bristow’s predecessors on both sides were very devout. Her grandfather, Dr. E. T. Winkler, moved Caroline and the rest of his family from Alabama to Charleston, South Carolina, where he served several years as pastor of Citadel Square Baptist Church. Upon his death when Caroline was quite young, his family moved to Summerville, South Carolina, where Caroline Cornelia Winkler grew to womanhood in the traditions of the Old South. Typical of all Charlestonians, her mother was a daily reader of the News and Courier. Especially catching her attention were the reports from Cuba by the young correspondent, Louis J. Bristow, and she often commented to her daughter Caroline, "I should like to know that young man." When the war was over, Mrs. Winkler continued to track the career of the young reporter through newspaper stories, following his progress through the theological seminary at Louisville to his becoming a minister destined to be called "The Fighting Parson" (Bristow family papers).

Shortly after Louis Bristow assumed his first post as pastor in a country church in South Carolina, the State Baptist Convention met in Summerville. Mrs.
Winkler asked that Louis Bristow be sent to her home as a guest, thus bringing him and her daughter Caroline together. They were married October 29, 1902, and began their married life in the little town of Marion. A little more than a year later, Caroline presented her husband with their firstborn. Proudly, he held a visiting child by the hand, saying, "Come in and see Aunt Carrie and Gwen."

"Gwen?" the child responded. "I have never heard that name before."

Louis Bristow looked down at the small bundle in his arms, grinned and said, "Just give us twenty or thirty years, and all South Carolina will hear of it, won't they, Baby?" (Bristow family papers).

These words many years later would prove prophetic. Meanwhile, long before she could actually write, Gwen's favorite "toy" was a pencil and a piece of paper. Even her father's sermons were not safe from her scribbling, for he frequently found the backs of their pages bearing her childish scribble. Then, at age six, she wrote her first story. It was about herself, a tale about a little girl who had stubbed her toe while playing barefoot in a corn field. She called her main character Eunice, the fictitious name she frequently called herself (Baton Rouge Mid-City Library). Bristow, never recalling a time when she had not wanted to be an author, said, "From the time I first discovered the use of a pencil I have never been able to see a pile of white paper without wanting to scribble on it" (Judson).

Bristow had one brother and one sister. Louis Judson Bristow, Jr., was born October 27, 1906, in Greenwood, South Carolina. He moved with his parents to New Orleans in 1924. There were only three years' difference between Bristow's and her brother's ages, but Bristow rarely mentions him in any of her writing. Her
brother, Louis Judson Bristow, Jr., (1906-1991), who served as a commander in the Navy, was a veteran of World War II. He became a medical doctor, who served for many years as head of Southern Baptist Radiology Department. When Bristow’s sister, Caroline, was born October 22, 1917, Bristow had only about three years remaining at home. Caroline, whose life would be knit closely to Bristow’s—especially in later years—was only nine when the family left South Carolina for New Orleans, where Caroline attended Lusher School near their home on Jeannette Street (Bristow family papers). Bristow’s journals have frequent entries about Caroline and with deep affection. Caroline, according to many sources, had a vibrant zest for life, but she did not live long and her life was traumatic for Bristow.

Bristow, likewise, pursued life with sparkle and energy. Her outgoing personality earned her friends wherever she went. For example, her friend and only living classmate, who attended the first six elementary grades with Bristow and graduated from high school with her, Victoria Howie (called Vickie by her friends), remembers Bristow as "really sweet and lots of fun; I liked her" (Howie). At eighty-nine, John B. Klugh of Columbia, South Carolina, who was in school with Bristow in the first and second grades at Abbeville Elementary School, remembers her in a similar manner—"really bright, smart, very nice. I liked her very much" (Klugh).

School Days, Good Days

Although Bristow indicated the site of her primary, elementary, and high school education as Abbeville on her application to The Times-Picayune in 1925
(Mundell), she actually attended several other schools. She began school in Abbeville with about fifty other children, taught by Miss Lemmon and Miss Penney. According to these students' recollections in their senior-class yearbook, progression to the second grade meant "one long contention" between the pupils in Miss Mattison's and Miss Causey's two second-grade classes. Their perpetual topics for argument centered around who had worn the prettiest clothes the previous day, which teacher was better or gave more whippings. Typical of children, however, their daily vowing never to speak again was promptly forgotten at each day's end (Bowie 5 Jan. 1993).

Bristow was an outstanding young student. For example, she earned all Excellent's from her second-grade teacher Lina Wakefield Mattison (Vandivar). She enjoyed her third grade with Miss May Robertson so much that, years later in 1958 upon receiving word of her death, Bristow called her "a great teacher if there ever was one" (J 22 Feb. 1958). Another aspect of her schooling that formed one of Bristow's favorite pastimes and helped her excel was reading, through which she could temporarily escape to a dream world of seemingly very real characters. A precocious child, she usually had a clear perception of situations and frequently asked very acute questions (Bristow family papers).

Best of friends, Bristow and Vickie Howie attended class together their first six grades and finally their senior year, which in those days was grade eleven (Howie). Each day after school, the girls rushed home to help their mothers, do their homework, or take a nap. Howie's mother, not well, needed her, but after her chores had been done, the girls were free to play. Howie, who wrote the class
history for their yearbook, recalled that Bristow's favorite subject had always been English and that Bristow had always wanted to be a writer. Bristow was a serious student, but, said Howie, "she was all right. She was a lot of fun." Howie also remembered that Bristow enjoyed sports. At school she played basketball and, as Howie recalled, "some other sport," but she did not recall which one. Typical of young people, she and Bristow occasionally got into trouble, but "we got back out" (Howie).

Although Gwen Bristow was quick to make friends, the depth of her attachment is unclear. At the time she appeared to lavish upon them a deep devotion, but she rarely cherished any sentimental ties after she and acquaintances of her youthful years had gone their individual ways.

Living in a small town, predominantly Protestant and largely Baptist, Bristow found life in a parsonage had its limitations. She very early exhibited her independent spirit. Social affairs in the home not infrequently included members of the church. Once, when her parents promised her a birthday party and plans blossomed, Bristow precociously asked, "May I invite my friends or is it a Baptist party?" (Bristow family papers).

Bristow joined the church on May 2, 1915 (First Baptist). Then on September 1, four months later when Bristow was twelve, she moved with her family to Columbia, South Carolina, where they lived at 1329 Hampton Street. Attending Taylor school as a seventh-grade student, Bristow found that her teachers-C. B. Elliott, Miss Nelle Summersett, Mrs. Sarah Moore, and Miss Clara Berg—provided excellent training for this aspiring writer (Lowry). As a reporter for her
school paper *The State*, Bristow wrote a story that year on the county field-day contests. When *The State* published Bristow's article in its weekly School Page, she was so excited at her celebrity status that she promptly spent the entire twenty-five cents she had in her pocket buying extra copies of that edition (Lowry 6-7).

In December 1918, the family moved back to Abbeville, where they lived until 1921. This tiny historic town, along with her family's consciousness of genealogy and history, left its imprint on Bristow's psyche. Indelibly part of Bristow's upbringing, it also played a significant role in her past, which she longed to escape.

In addition to its general sense of antiquity, Abbeville had figured basically and extensively in the Civil War in a most profound way: it had earned the name "birthplace of the Confederacy," and--ironically, also the "deathbed of the Confederacy" as events on the night of May 2, 1865, played out their historical and dramatic scenario in this unique town (Bowie).

Its best-known address is Burt House (Klosky 48+), not far from Secession Hill, which is known as the "birthplace of the Confederacy" because it was there, on November 22, 1860, some 2,500 to 3,000 persons held the "earliest known meeting that urged commitment to immediate secession" from the Union. Its Ordinance of Secession made South Carolina the first seceding state and, hence, set the nation one huge step closer to the War Between the States (Klosky).

Then, after the years of bitter struggle, almost one month after General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, gaslights flickered on the haggard faces of distinguished visitors assembled in Burt House. In
this meeting Confederate President Jefferson Davis, a "commanding figure even in
despair," pleaded the rebel cause to those assembled of his cabinet. He believed it
yet had potential for success (Klosky). This dwelling, that today remains a painful
reminder of the antebellum South, shielded in 1865 the gaunt President of the
Confederacy, who wept quietly but uncontrollably as his compatriots aided him up a
flight of stairs at the rear of the house and into a second-story bed chamber.
Finally, in this chain of events infusing historical significance into Abbeville was the
fact that the "last Confederate Council of War also took place at Burt House," an
event also giving rise to the label, "Deathbed of the Confederacy" (Klosky).

Lifelong Influences

Such well-known historical events permeated the atmosphere of Abbeville
when Bristow lived there during her formative years and surely affected her
perceptions of history. These events helped channel Bristow's vision towards Old
South history, values, and loyalties. Furthermore, although her home environment
seemed to contain supreme civility, gently restraining guidance, and careful spiritual
nurturing, it was a world of which she said, "I was trying to get out of . . . before I
was twenty years old" (J 13 Oct. 1965). It was guided by principles she found
outdated and unreasonable.

Nonetheless, during the years 1918-21, as Bristow settled into life in
Abbeville, where her family lived in the church parsonage, Bristow was
experiencing much of history that greatly influenced her life and thinking. This
house, for example was early American, a great rambling two-story yellow structure
that, with its dual chimneys, formed a picturesque, and, perhaps also an inspirational
environment to inspire an imagination like Bristow’s. Located on Ellis Avenue
behind the church on church property, this house undoubtedly also figured in
Bristow’s relationship with church and family (Boyce). She could get lost within its
many rooms or curl up in a comfortable chair to dream beside a roaring fire. She
might have masked her emotions (as she frequently did in her later life) for she
struggled with her negative attitudes about her adolescent years (J 13 Oct. 1965), but
likely, Bristow would always consider this house with mixed emotions. The
onslaught of events to come was momentous, and it is evident that the effects of life
in this place had a great impact on her life.

For example, growth in the church, along with changes in its needs and age
of the pastorium, finally led to moving the house on June 23, 1955, to Cabel Street
to make space for a three-story church educational building (First Baptist). Bristow,
frequently a seeming paradox who often struggled in her adult life against past
influences, would have viewed the "passing" of this childhood home with mixed
emotions. She had, after all, spent two very important periods of her life traversing
its floors, climbing its stairs, and peering through its windows. As a very small
child, she and her friends had played there. When she was a high school senior, it
again afforded her sanctuary, a place to plan her independence and career as a
writer.³

All relevant articles from family collections, church libraries, published
interviews, and every other source except Bristow’s personal journals and her closest
friends in California indicate that Bristow came from a close-knit and, according to
all public appearances, a loving family. According to family documents and all
obvious sources, Bristow's parents were deeply religious and humanely devoted to
the well-being of civilization, especially of their fellow Baptists nation-wide.
Furthermore, Louis Judson Bristow and Caroline Winkler Bristow seemed to move
in spheres dedicated to improving life and nurturing their family. Mrs. Bristow, a
petite, gentle woman, appeared to epitomize devotion, faithfulness, and dedication,
as well as strength of character and ability--qualities of the genteel Southern wife
and mother (Bristow family papers, church documents, and interviews).

Buried within the pages of Bristow's personal journal and from her friends,
however, are multiple clues that imply other facets to this proper, Southern family.
For example, Jean Fleming, Bristow's friend from California, saw a very
dysfunctional family in the Bristows. To Bristow ("who disliked her mother and
tolerated her father" (Tanner), her mother was a "whiner" with an "unbending
nature," a "real Victorian in the classic sense," with a "rigidness, an inflexibility"
which Bristow fled at her first opportunity (Fleming 20 Nov. 1993). For example,
she required that her children always present to the public manners of perfect
propriety with little or no allowance for their individual needs and preferences. In
illustration, one story relates that a portion of the Bristow dwelling, including the
kitchen, once burned. Parishioners alternately brought the family meals, and there
was "fried chicken for breakfast, lunch, and supper." Bristow came to hate the taste
of chicken, but, regardless, Mrs. Bristow required that her children eat it and "make
the people think what they had brought was the most delicious ever!" Not only did
Bristow resent her mother's attitude but she also refused thereafter to eat chicken (Tanner).

Almost more revealing are Bristow's words reflecting years of ingrained resentment upon another occasion of being served chicken:

I did not eat anything. I never do on these occasions, partly because I don't feel like it but mostly because the food is dreadful. It is always chicken, which I have disliked ever since I left the parsonage and didn't have to be a minister's daughter any more (J 22 May 1971).

Whether she actually disliked chicken, her rejection of it was a concrete part of her past that she could and did discard. Most telling, however, are Bristow's words "didn't have to be a minister's daughter any more" that reveal the emotional struggles which Bristow recreates in her heroine in Jubilee Trail. Bristow is Garnet Cameron doing what Carolyn Heilbrun in Writing a Woman's Life calls telling "it in what she chooses to call fiction" (11). Bristow is Garnet, to whom marriage to Oliver Hale (or, to be exact, Bruce Manning) meant freedom, finally, from all the rules of her home.

Fundamental Differences

Such experiences inculcated deep and lasting resentment of her home environment and religious training that she sought early to escape. Bristow makes clear her attitude in a journal entry:

After a day with Elizabeth Hare, I feel as if I had never left home, because she never has. After all these years, it is interesting, but almost appalling, to meet someone who is still living in the same world that I was trying to get out of before I was twenty years old. She lives in Birmingham, but I don't mean that she has stayed home in the geographical sense; I mean she still thinks in the way we were
supposed to think (and I never could) when we were both students at Judson. She is almost a professional alumna. Sent her daughters there. Goes back to the reunions nearly every year. Has the same emotional attitudes she had forty years ago. (J 13 Oct. 1965)

Bristow's direct reference here is her resentment of both church dogma and the rules of decorum practiced at Judson, as well as in her family. Although Bristow never lost her respect for the Supreme Being, her long-time consideration of her religious teachings and her irritation with judgmental and "narrow" views surfaced again and again in sundry ways.

For example, she directly addressed these issues in The Churchman in 1927, in an article which she opened with the question, "Is the South hopelessly in the grip of fundamentalism?" (18). Her term hopelessly, the key to her attitude, clearly implies a negative attitude toward the religion of her roots. As if in answer to her own question, she wrote,

The casual observer of a section where churches exclude members because they attend the theater, where students in denominational colleges are forbidden to hold open-forum discussions of religious issues, and where anti-evolution laws cling like barnacles to the ship of state, is likely to answer "yes" and dismiss the question. ("Fundamentalism" 18)

Fundamentalism, she argues here, accepts a "'Thus saith the Lord' of unquestioned and inescapable authority." It is a creed that finds it "hard to become reconciled to a scientific mode of approach that takes nothing for granted merely because it has not been questioned before" (18). In Bristow's view, among many surmised causes for Southern fundamentalism--from climate and geography to hard work and malaria--the truth is that its basis and tenets had their roots in the "inferiority complex" left by the Civil War. When faced with the enormity of
Reconstruction and the fact that its old social system had been swept away, the
South found it "easier to remember past splendors than to face what seemed a
hopelessly blank future. Tethered in this harsh reality, "the old customs and ideas
grew dearer and dearer in retrospect as the years passed," a condition providing a
false security and lethargic acceptance of what Bristow terms "The greatest god of
the social Parnassus [that] signs his name Status Quo" (18). According to Bristow
in this article, the lethargy in the South that the old religion had found "simple and
satisfactory" was not broken until about the turn of the century when sleepy cities
found themselves on the brink of industrial revolution and universities were
"spewing" forth thousands of "new-age" thinkers. Bristow believed, as W. J. Cash
states in The Mind of the South, that a basic impetus of the fundamentalist
movement went beyond its anti-Darwinian doctrine, its objective being

the objective of stamping out of all the new heresies and
questioning in the schools and elsewhere--the restoration of
the absolute conformity to the ancient pattern under the pains
and penalties of the most rigid intolerance. (339)

Parents, says Bristow, were then finding that "the supreme text of
condemnation [was] "We’ve never done it that way." Moreover, she continues,

If the democratic way of ascertaining public opinion--that is, by the
counting of noses--be correct, then evolution in the South holds about
as enviable a position as the idea of a spherical world held in
Galileo’s day. The majority of the members of the older generation--
those who were young in the eighties--together with nearly the entire
population of the rural districts, still cling with medieval tenacity to
the idea that evolution means an uncomplimentary hereditary kinship
with monkeys. The humor of the situation is apparent to the casual
onlooker; the tragedy of it is evidenced most strongly to one who has
lived under its influence and has seen the results it has brought about
in the religious faith of the young questioners. (18-19)
Bristow saw negative effects on "young questioners" in three main ways: the nurturing of more fundamentalists; the trapping of some "in the maelstrom of doubt at the more liberal colleges, . . . unable to maintain any bulwark of faith"; and the growth of a group of young thinkers composed of members who "have passed through the crucible of lost faith" only to bear always the scars of struggle (19).

She concludes that young people and members of the older generation "who have advanced with the times" are laying foundations for "a new era of religious thought in the South," which "promises to be more acute than it has been in the past" (19). On the other hand, she argues, it does not promise to be a deadlock," a statement implying her anger over what she viewed as her family's outdated and irrational religious dogmas. She says that liberal Southern thinkers believe the time is ripe for "a new birth of liberalism in thought and that with the scientific and industrial advance of the South there must also come an advance in the Southern attitude toward life" (19).

In November (1927), she followed with another article, subtitled "Southern Fundamentalism: Some Further Comment," in which she declares that the South is "section-conscious, and Fundamentalism is part of that section-consciousness." It is "the faith of their fathers, and the rural South in particular remembers those fathers with passionate devotion." These section-conscious people, she says, see "Modernism" as an "onslaught upon the Faith once for all delivered unto the saints" and "Liberalism as the evidence of a foreign invasion" (13).

Continuing, Bristow supports the right to "individual thought," based on the "sum of one's attitudes toward God and society," and a "spiritual force that enables
men to grapple with the problems of adjusting themselves to life as they find it without regard to hypothetical pearly gates." It is a "slow seeking after God, a gradual growth of one's conception of God as one's knowledge is increased by experience." She calls the search for God "often painful, always hesitating," necessarily the "search of the individual, who, though he is guided by the findings of those who have gone before him, is conscious that the Kingdom of Heaven is within himself" (13).

Thus Bristow, in both articles, explains her opposition to the doctrines of her upbringing. She considered her parents narrow-minded, and over the years, her resentment manifested itself in many ways. For example, Bristow, who liked to drink, fairly snapped with sarcasm at a letter "by a good Baptist lady saying she could not recommend [a certain book] for church libraries" because "there is so much drinking carried on" (J 8 June 1959). Likewise, as she had once noted, she never had "liked nuns with their expressionless faces. They always remind me of Hamlet when the queen says, 'The lady doth protest too much,' when they keep talking about how much they love their work"--like parrots without thought or individuality (J 6 June 1956).

Perhaps, however, Bristow gleaned the best traits from her parents--her father's extraordinary ambition to excel, albeit in humanitarian channels, and perhaps her mother's reserve, a quiet demeanor and a character of solid strength, total confidence in what was right for her, and a disinclination to be demonstrative. However, whether in a struggle merely toward self-determination or in a career in writing or one of unspoken rebellion, Bristow kept her own counsel and mapped her
own destiny. Certainly, from some source Bristow developed independence, confidence, and assertiveness, traits her fictional women always possessed. Says Jean Fleming, "She was something of a rebel, in that she was not conventional. In many ways, her characters are Bristow" (Fleming, 17 July 1993), an opinion shared by Felicia Imlay, daughter and secretary of Bruce Biggs, Bristow's accountant and friend for many years, who says, "Her characters are like her" (Imlay). Indeed, they do typify Bristow's apparent personal traits.

A Stimulating Environment

At any rate, steeped unequivocally in her Southern upbringing through her ancestry as well as her environment, Bristow would have found spending her final high school year of 1920 in Abbeville High School an excellent finale because of the opportunities to exercise her creativity and promote her social aspirations. With a faculty of five, eager to develop the minds of their proteges, the school provided her imagination many fertile opportunities. In a class of only ten, close friendships, artistic and cooperative activities, and friendly rivalries provided a full and well-rounded year (Proper Gander, Howie).

When she returned to Abbeville for her last year in school with the same children who had shared her first grade in elementary school, the class had dwindled from thirty-seven to ten--nine girls and only one boy. So small a group of eager young minds was the perfect setting to challenge the aspiring young writer, and this senior class plunged into their extracurricular pastimes and studies in ways that spilled over into club work, such as Latin and drama. Their one creation that was
both significant and lasting was the first yearbook for Abbeville High School. They called it Proper Gander (Bowie), and it featured on its cover a goose centered between the two words of its title. With a book tucked under its wing and a bonnet slung back to reveal bespectacled eyes, the goose stands behind an enormous circular magnifying glass through which it peers. With all the superiority and naivete of high school seniors, Gwen and her fellow classmates of 1920 recorded their last high school year in this book.

For this annual Bristow wrote the "Salutatory," in which she paid tribute to the school instructors and program, especially her Latin class and Miss Turner's teaching the "**Immense benefit to be derived from a study of the fifth book of Cicero**" and "**Amo, amas, amat**" (Bowie collection).

Bristow also wrote both poetry and plays while in high school, some of which were enacted (Howie), but none survive. Asked much later about those years, Bristow spoke of what was really important to her: "When I graduated from high school I covered myself with what I believed to be deathless glory by writing a play in two acts that was presented by the graduating class." Among her classmates receiving honors, Bristow earned a place with two other students in the "Superintendent's Report for 1919-1920" in Proper Gander (Bowie collection).

Bristow also enjoyed social events, such as the weekly Friday night dances. She enjoyed boy friends although there seems not to have been a particular favorite. She also enjoyed the varied sports in the school program (among them football, bicycling, and basketball). Vickie Howie recalled that she and Bristow played on the basketball team and "another one" [meaning sports activity], but she did not
remember which one (Howie). Bristow also possessed a lively sense of humor (Judson) as she demonstrated in her senior play by donning breeches and playing the part of a man, an unusual feat in those days and, therefore, notable and humorous.

Bristow's return to Abbeville was duly noted in Proper Gander with "though we felt so important then, our fame was made greater by the immigration of Gwen Bristow from Columbia High School" (Bowie collection).
Endnotes for Chapter One

1. Ann Gwen ("Angie") Bristow Fensin and Roberta Bristow Abadie Bristow are Gwen
Bristow’s nieces, the only two living daughters of Bristow’s brother Louis. Angie
Bristow Fensin, the older niece, is the caretaker of most remaining family papers and
all of the papers to which I had access. Reference to "Bristow family papers" in my
biography of Bristow, alludes to this collection. It is noteworthy that this particular
deed with the family seal is yet in the Bristow family papers.

2. For example, see Ross A. Webb, Benjamin Helm Bristow, Border Politician
(Lexington: U P Kentucky, 1969); Byron Gordon Wooley, John Bristow of Middlesex
According to Bristow’s journal entry of March 20, 1978, she knew of at least Wooley’s
book.

3. This information is derived from various conversations with people in Abbeville who
knew the family and from family documents in the Bristow collection.
chapter two
apprenticeship for individuality

Close-knit families, revered traditions, and attachment to locality—all were Southern values and predilections that would have been likewise typical of Bristow’s youth; however, they did not remain her values, if, indeed, they ever were. She discarded any with which she was dissatisfied. Quite early she began establishing her individuality and independence, and when she left Judson for Columbia University, she purposefully set out to chart her own course. For example, she did not cling to past acquaintances. When she left Abbeville for Anderson, Judson, and beyond, she maintained few old relationships. Quite expressive of her disinclination to revisit her past is her blunt refusal, "They’ll have it without me" (J 30 March 1974) whenever she received an invitation to attend her Judson class reunion. Classmate Victoria Howie does not remember seeing Gwen Bristow again after their high school graduation, nor did she receive any correspondence from her (Howie). (Bristow, however, recorded one other visit when she went to South Carolina to promote Celia Garth.) Her journals and papers indicate that she maintained only one life-long relationship from her Judson days: her friendship with Annie Lorrie Carroll Stutts, who had served as an usher at Bristow’s "Graduating Recital," February 25, 1924 (Judson). Whether she lacked real attachment to persons and places, or whether she intentionally turned away is a puzzle. Whatever the reason,
the rigidness of the upbringing she had always longed to escape reverted into a
"perpetua[al] pattern of being strict" with herself, directing her to her goal "without
wasting time or energy" or giving "a damn what others [thought]" if she believed
she was right (J 17-18 Dec. 1968).

What Bristow did take with her from her past was every academic skill she
had acquired, along with a belief that the theater was to be her destiny ("A Bow to
Gwen Bristow"). She wrote several more plays, the production of which so pleased
her, she said, that she was probably hard to live with. Toward the end of her high
school days and during her college days, however, she discovered the joys of
writing for profit and went into the essay business.

I would write anything assigned by any teacher to anybody, with a
price range of from twenty-five cents to three dollars, depending
partly on length and partly on whether the purchaser insisted upon
getting a good grade . . . or would be satisfied with a passing mark.
The emoluments of this undertaking kept me happily provided with
pickles, chocolate bars and eventually a typewriter. ("A Bow to
Gwen Bristow")

An anecdote Bristow would repeat in interview after interview, the story
reveals another significant divergence, quite incongruous with her strongly moral
upbringing and her adult behavior. Never qualifying this story with any regret, she,
in fact, seemed quite proud of her cleverly devised business (Bristow Self-Portrait).
In trying to understand, however, one might consider what a graphologist once
called "materialism" (J 16, 17 Dec. 1968) in Bristow and "her disregard for details
that became irrelevant to the goal she had in hand." In this regard, she possessed a
self-discipline that helped her accomplish what most people only dream of.
A Varied, Formal Education

Bristow began her college career at Anderson Baptist College in Anderson, South Carolina, where she remained only one year. Typically, however, she jumped into life there with all her usual enthusiasm. She served as president of the Lanier Literary Society and was an A student (Sororian). In a presentation by the Honorable Josephus Daniels, former Secretary of the Navy, Bristow was awarded a gold medal studded with pearls for contributing the best English composition during the year to the college magazine, the Orion. The decision had been "unanimous without consultation" by the professors of English in three colleges of the state (Northridge).

When Bristow transferred to Judson in Marion, Alabama, in 1922, her motive did not have anything to do with the fact that her mother had been born in Marion or that her maternal grandfather, Dr. Edwin Theodore Winkler, had once served as president of Judson College. She went, instead, because her parents were living in Selma, Alabama, where her father was superintending the Baptist hospital. Selma was about thirty miles from Judson (Bristow family papers).

Judson College, founded in 1838, shares with Wesleyan Female College, Macon, Georgia, the honor of being the oldest school of higher learning for women in the South. Founded as the Judson Female Institute and named in honor of Ann Hasseltine Judson, an early foreign missionary, it has since become an Alabama landmark. Maintaining the same entrance requirements standards as other institutions, Judson points to thousands of its women graduates who have gone on to "potent influence in almost every refined community from the Atlantic to the
Pacific" (Judson). Bristow, however, came away unimpressed, for the college had several rules that she found quaint and irritating. She might have found only tolerable its forbidding a student to be away from campus for any purpose except extreme duress or illness or to make unnecessary purchases or accounts with merchants, but the school catalogue dictated rules which Bristow considered more meddling than needful. For example,

Pupils often write for articles of dress which are expensive and unnecessary. Such articles cannot be worn on public occasion, and are unsuitable for the school room. We desire to inculcate simplicity of taste and to discourage the love of display.

To promote economy and prevent rivalry in dress, all resident pupils are required to wear, in the fall and spring, simple dresses of plain white wash material--skirt and waist or one-piece suit--and, in winter, tailored coat suits of navy blue and small tailored hats of navy blue, dark brown, or black (Bulletin, 1923-24).

Close supervision at Judson aimed to insure such traditions as "the deportment of pupils shall, at all times, be gentle and lady-like and conform to the conventionalities of refined life" (Catalogue 21). To this end, the catalogue continues,

The general health and cheerfulness of the pupils is [sic] the best testimony to the excellence of that system of management which, though imposing necessary restrictions, permits every indulgence and amusement not inconsistent with health and good order. Upon entering the college they become members of the president’s family. Under his supervision the care of their domestic life is placed in the hands of the regent, whose part is to look after their manners and habits, and to maintain a motherly oversight to all other interests. We try to secure for them the advantages of a well-ordered Christian home. Teachers and pupils sit at the same table, worship at the same altar, and mingle in the same social circle. (21)

Judson had other distinctions. It frowned on such "modern" conveniences as steam heat, so each chilly or cold morning, elderly black women kindled fires upon
the hearths of the "young ladies' rooms. Judson had strict rules governing behavior, and an infraction meant being confined to the school grounds (Bristow, "Author of Calico Palace" 16, 27). For example, Judson students were forbidden to speak to any man or boy on a downtown street (and there was a school for boys in town), even an old acquaintance, when they were allowed on weekdays to go shopping or to a movie (Saxon). "But the most dreadful sin was anything that could be classed as 'unladylike conduct'" (Saxon).

On Sundays, the seniors in black caps and gowns leading the other students dressed in their uniforms, all marched into church by twos, adhering to a rigid prescription for behavior that Bristow obeyed but did not like. Bristow, who once referred to Judson as "a church school" (Caroliniana), not only did not like the rules, and she judged herself with "I was not a great success at Judson" ("Author of CP"). As always, Bristow did nothing half way, and in 1923 Bristow was a junior at Judson. She directed her class in two plays that year. One was the October 12 performance of The Disturbing Element, a two-act comedy in which she also played the part of a Mr. Rosser Thorne, about sixty years old. In the second, a March 6 production of the three-act comedy, The Next of Kin by Charles Klein, she played Bascom Cooley, an unscrupulous lawyer (Judson). She also served as editor-in-chief of the yearbook and composed the junior class poem included in that year's annual:

Junior Class Poem

We have followed the road up a hill wrapped in vapor,
And the road beckons East to the edge of the dawn,
Where the morning star burns like a beckoning taper,
And the urge that it sends with its rays is, "Go On!"

We cannot see the end, for the blue sky enfolding,
   The daybreak enshrouds the hillcrest from our view;
We cannot understand what the future is holding,
   But we know that we climb to our great rendezvous.

At the end we shall meet with the world's great endeavor,
   With the right and the wrong at their unceasing strife,
For our road is not done, but it goes on forever,
   And we meet with the triumphant forces of life.

Let us go in the face of the morning and straightway,
   Where the day rises gold and the sky is empearled,
What we thought was the end we shall find was a gateway,
   And it leads down the hill to the heart of the world.
(Judson)

The poem is typical of the whimsical and audacious youth caught in the
maelstrom of emotion characteristic of "rites of passage" such as graduation; yet it
reveals more. Bristow may have sensed more poignantly than some her certain
"rendezvous" with the future obscured at the top of that "hill wrapped in vapor."
She may also have intuitively recognized the difficulties along her path, for she
would challenge almost every aspect of her upbringing. Hers would be "the road
not frequently traveled" because she would, with cutting and deliberate
independence, sever herself from family, friends, and traditions. She would not
tolerate anything that was not clearly in her perceived best interests.

Nonetheless, Bristow was well liked, as well as talented, and she received
many honors along the way, as in 1923 when she was voted "Most Original" in the
junior class. She served as junior class student council representative, editor of the
Dramatic Club, and first president of The Scrimshaws (Northridge), a writers' club.
For her junior recital, she presented "Her Tongue" by Henry Arthur Jones. In
addition, she played Mr. Reginald Blair, a wealthy old bachelor, in a one-act farce by Arlo Bates, and Dr. Freemantle (her family physician) in the play, *Fanny and the Servant Problem*, by Jerome K. Jerome. Always possessed of a merry sense of humor, she had fun with the usual word-teaser jokes typical of young people, such as "Gwen: 'Are you going to play hockey this afternoon?'; Margaret: 'No, I'm going to play hookey'" (Judson).

Finally 1924 arrived, and Bristow was a senior very much involved with her class of twenty-six. Her excellent academic record and her extended list of activities reflect an energetic young woman of sharp intellect, whose personal challenges and ambitions had early marked her for individuality and accomplishment. For example, her credits beneath her picture read as follows:

Editor-in-Chief Annual, '23; Dramatic Club, '23, '24; Honor Roll, '22; Scrimshaw Club, '23, '24; Editor Dramatic Club, '22, '23; Junior Class Poet, '23; President Scrimshaw Club, '23; Sorores Togatae, '23, '24; French Club, '23, '24; Latin Club Editor, '24; Pierian. (Judson)

Also on the staff for the yearbook, *The Conversationalist*, she served as departmental editor for the Latin Club. That year, continuing her interest in drama, Bristow played Frozine, a designing woman, in Moliere's *The Miser*, performed by the Dramatic Club (Judson).

In the tradition of the absurd, the senior class "Prophecy" predicted, "The next number is by the famous solo dancer, Gwen Bristow, with her agile pupil Marjorie Hart. Bristow has won the laurels from the Duncan dancers, and her pupil is a second Isidora." In addition, the "Class Will" focused on her writing with "Item XIII. Bristow leaves her spontaneous and inexhaustible flow of words to
Clara Lipscomb." For her Senior Recital, "If I Were King," Bristow was accompanied by Justin McCarthy (Judson).

The busy senior participated in yet other activities, such as in her club the Scrimshaws, an author's club which was organized in February, 1923. Only juniors and seniors who have an unusual appreciation of literature and manifest exceptional ability in writing are eligible for membership. It holds monthly meetings, at each of which a program of original work is presented. Talent is thus being discovered and developed, which, it is believed will some day result in a contribution to the literature of the South. (Catalogue 26)

For the Scrimshaws, Bristow prepared a contribution for their senior-year program entitled "How to Build Up a Story." She also composed the "Scrimshaw Song":

*Scrimshaw Song*

Let us look where the morning is rising  
In her coronet set with a star,  
From the sea where the shell abalone  
And the pearls of her poetry are.  

For we see that she beckons us eastward,  
With the nacrous-hued fingers of dawn,  
To the pinnacle-height of Parnassus,  
Where the steps of our masters have gone.  

We shall follow the trail of the morning,  
And our symbols of triumph shall be  
Our talisman called Abalone,  
And the treasures she brings from the sea. (Judson)

Bristow's "Scrimshaw Song" bears many similarities to her earlier poem written for her junior class. Both begin with metaphors, such as "morning," the "East," "vapor" (meaning, perhaps, fog, as in early morning), "dawn," "morning star." Her line, "... like a beckoning taper,/ And the urge that it sends with its
rays is, 'Go on!' focuses on a forward movement, directing her challenges to a
"road . . . not done, but [that] goes on forever" with "triumphant forces of life" "To
the pinnacle-height of Parnassus." It is typical of the attitude Bristow would
maintain and echo throughout her life as she did in 1969 when she said, "As usual, I
wished I were going to live another hundred years to catch up on all the books I
should like to read" (J 15 July 1969).

Bristow was also editor for the Sorores Togatae, a club including all fifty
students enrolled in Latin. At monthly meetings, members worked to revive the
classics and "to create a love for the beautiful in Latin literature." Members sang
Latin songs, presented Latin "playlets," and performed Latin "stunts" for fun and
instruction (Judson).

In Le Cercle Français, Bristow and other members studied French life and
history. Juniors and seniors ended their year by directing and presenting French
plays, the actors coming from the intermediate classes. Bristow was also in the
Dramatic Club, composed of all students in expression. It met every week to
promote social fellowship among the students, to gain ease and poise in social
intercourse, and to present at least one public dramatic representation every year
(Catalogue 26).

Journalism Takes Hold

Bristow, who longed for a career in journalism, dreamed of attending the
Columbia University Pulitzer School of Journalism. Her parents had agreed— if she
would complete her degree at Judson; however, she would have to support herself
because of her siblings' educational needs (Saxon). Thus, in a move that would become a life-long habit of independence, she devised her own way (writing essays for other people) to save money and also purchase the typewriter required at Columbia (Northridge).

Finally, on Monday evening, February 25, 1924, Bristow graduated from Judson with a double major in English and French (Judson), and that fall, she applied for admission into Columbia University. Upon arrival, Bristow won a scholarship of $90 for the first semester, renewable the second semester on condition that she "make good" and meet the requirements. Based largely on her Judson College record, this scholarship also required an entrance examination to the School of Journalism. Of the examinations, four were selected--parts of which were read before the class, and Bristow's was one of the four (Judson).

To earn money, she continued her Judson practice of writing themes for her friends and other students (Muse); she also worked as a nursemaid, typed theses, wrote biographies of successful businessmen for trade journals, and worked as a secretary (Judson) to a Polish baroness on Riverside Drive (Saxon). There, she was required to enter the house through the back door and eat in the kitchen until one day the baroness asked, "Mees Bristow, your fader, he vork on a farm?" To Bristow's reply that no, he was a minister, the baron, who had been listening and was horror struck at their on-going faux pas, exclaimed, "A university man!" Her employers immediately began treating her more like a guest, but Bristow's reaction was that the servants had been more fun (MacNabb).
At Columbia Bristow met Annette Duchein (Carter), who had been born and reared in Baton Rouge, where her father, a physician, had a home on North Street near the river. After graduation from Louisiana State University, Duchein had also chosen to study journalism at Columbia (Carter). Their meeting there seems to have made no particular impression on either, for Bristow mentions it nowhere in her papers and Duchein says she has no recall of their joint tenure at Columbia. At the time they could not know that their future would hold employment for both with the same company.

When Bristow went home to New Orleans from Columbia on June 1, 1925, she was twenty-three. Planning to return to Columbia in the fall, she took a summer job with The Times-Picayune, substituting for a reporter on vacation. From her first day, July 9, 1925 (Mundell), she quickly proved such an asset. As James Gillis recalls, Bristow was the kind of woman reporter you’d send to do the type of story you’d send a man on. She was perfectly capable of doing it. She had enormous abilities, and she had an easy, pleasant, ingratiating personality. But she was one of these people who could get tough and assert the rights of the press wherever it was necessary. But she really didn’t have to use force most of the time. She could go into sensitive situations and say, "Look, I’m Gwen Bristow of The Times-Picayune" or say to the police and the others, "How about letting me in here?" And, you know, she managed to do it pretty well! She was a very good writer, an excellent reporter. She had a great deal of charm, and she was a nice person. She could handle herself really well.

Her employer soon offered her a permanent position. Bristow enjoyed her work so much that she remained with The Times-Picayune, never returning to Columbia (Caroliniana). She would, however, note years later that the year at Columbia had
been "a golden year. . . . Thank heaven I knew it then; I remember walking around
knowing it couldn’t last forever and sucking every minute dry."

Unfortunately, however, Bristow would destroy her record of what she had
found "golden." Many years later, reading her journal from her days as a student at
Columbia School of Journalism, she came across her account of a "deplorable
episode" (J 4 Feb. 1974), the "episode" being one in which her friend had almost
tilled herself with a barbiturate. Afterwards, she had been unable to get it off her
mind. Believing herself wiser at the time of reviewing this entry than she had been
when she wrote it, she decided no longer to record names. In her new-found
wisdom, Bristow declined to say more, other than

\[\text{[it] keeps running through my head, day and night. I understand it}
\text{better now . . . I believe an IQ test would have reported that she had}
\text{an almost, or quite, genius intellect. But what’s the good of a high}
\text{IQ if you don’t use it to get peace and happiness? (J 10 Feb. 1974)}\]

She destroyed her Columbia journal to prevent her comments on her fellow-students
and others from being too

\[\text{. . . overwhelmingly embarrassing. . . . Reading them now, I think I}
\text{was a shrewd and remarkably accurate reporter of their foibles, but}
\text{this stuff should not be lying around. And of course, there was a lot}
\text{of unintended self-revelation. (J 4 Feb. 1974)}\]

Living in New Orleans, she at first stayed with her parents at 4501 Magnolia
on the grounds of Southern Baptist Hospital, where they had lived since February
1924. Dr. Bristow, in his superintendency, had built a nurses’ home as part of the
Southern Baptist Hospital complex, along with a nurses’ school and quarters for the
superintendent and his family. From there, Bristow could take the Napoleon
Avenue streetcar and go downtown to work at The Times-Picayune (Fensin, 26 Dec.
1992). The right to vote having been granted women in 1920, Bristow gave early evidence of her feminism and her life-long concern about public affairs by immediately registering to vote. By February 2, 1927, Bristow had moved to a new address at 4525 Magnolia at Napoleon, albeit also on the grounds of Southern Baptist Hospital. Perhaps her first open declaration of self-determination, it was followed by her move June 15, 1928 to 2628 Canal to a house owned by a Mrs. Catherine Reilly (Voter registration files).

Bristow’s work with The Times-Picayune provided excitement and adventure, such as covering the "great flood of '27," one of "those one-hundred-year storms." She recalled wading knee-high to the streetcar stop, only to learn that the streetcar was not running. Undaunted, she found her day wading knee-deep to interview people quite exciting. The incident proved typical of her style: she let almost nothing intimidate or thwart her in getting her story (Fensin and Gillis).

Bristow’s diversity and broad range of interests were evident early. For example, the September 1926 issue of Holland’s Magazine featured her article, "That Not Impossible She: Illuminating Comments from Some Hundred Men as to What Makes the Synthetic Paragon of a Girl." Serious research cloaked in humor, the article treats the perplexing and problematic subject of weight control with enough levity for high interest, and it documents early twentieth-century obsession with weight by both men and women. Men in 1926, Bristow wrote, "rose in chorus and the hundred hearts all beat as one: 'She must be thin,'"—though not always in those exact words. Like their contemporaries, some used the colloquialisms and slang of the day: "I prefer the slender type" or "No hefty mammies for me." From
the girls' views, "The masculine contingent would do well . . . to bring his date hyacinths instead of chocolates. Do this, and she will confide to her best friend that at last she has found one who understands her soul. Most girls are reducing"

(Judson).

Another of her titles proclaimed "Equal Rights and Lunch Checks: Should a Girl Pay if a Man Is Along?" One assignment for a random survey produced startling results:

Mussolini is an opera singer, Lady Astor runs a New York hotel, H. L. Mencken is the author of "The Blue Bird."

. . . Rosamond Pinchot is the French Minister of Finance, Cecil B. DeMills is the painter of "The Angelus."

To find out all of this we did not choose dumbbells to answer our questions. We asked men and women who read the daily papers and who, as far as we could judge, were as well up on the topics of the day as average Americans of fair or good education are expected to be. (Northridge)

Her creativity challenged, Bristow, nonetheless, succeeded with the title for the piece with "Who's Who Staggers Many Who Know What's What."

In an article that indicates her early concerns with women's special needs, her first paragraph of "June Bride Crop of 1928 Proposes to Forego Thrills at Bare Hint of Subjection," reads,

It all started when the June brides insisted on having the "obey" left out of the marriage ceremony. Now they are causing great consternation . . . for these feminist brides, having delivered the ultimatum that they aren't going to put up with anything that recalls the bride's quondam submission to her husband, are out to take away from weddings all the little frills that suggest this--rice and orange blossoms and throwing of shoes and all that sort of thing, all of which developed from ancient symbolism of the submission of the lady fair to the will of her lord and master. (Northridge)
Another article exemplifying Bristow's early inclination for serious research was a survey of New Orleans girls and what they wanted and expected in a man or in their marriage. More significantly, however, the article hints at Bristow's "Old South" standards, along with her belief in women's independence and competence. Men, she found, wanted independent women who did not "act like it." They did not want the aggressive woman who made an obvious point of opening her own door or taking off and hanging up her own coat. While they did appreciate competence in women and they no longer considered women inferior, they "[did] love to take care of them." The right choice between beauty and brains, she points out, would be brains—the type that knows the value of money and can run the house on a businesslike basis; one who can "beat me at poker half the time" (Bristow, "What Kind of Husband?"). Such characteristics of competence and reasonable independence represent the qualities for which Bristow expressed ardent appreciation. Two years after Bristow had left Judson, its newspaper, The Triangle, noted the Gorham Press (Boston) 1926 spring publication of The Alien and Other Poems, Bristow's only volume of poetry. The title poem had earlier won honors for Bristow, as noted in The Montgomery Journal on August 1, 1925:

Miss Gwen Bristow, a prominent member of the Scribblers club, . . . has an exquisite poem published in the Literary Digest of this week, taken from Munsey's magazine, called "The Alien." . . . She won a Federation prize last year for the best sonnet, called "In the Theater" (Northridge).

The Triangle, quoting Bristow, continues, "It will be a very slim little book with the poems that appeared in the Literary Digest . . . . I'll see that Judson gets a copy."

The article praised Bristow's work on The Times-Picayune and quoted her
impressions of New Orleans from an earlier letter to Judson in which she had written about her life as a reporter for The Times-Picayune:

I do regular reporting, which means interviewing convicts, getting descriptions of runaway girls, covering luncheons, writing obituaries of famous citizens and talking to famous actors who come to town. I have met more funny people than I ever knew existed. (Judson)

Bristow’s anecdote of her reporting experiences reflects her sense of humor and good-natured disposition:

I had to go down to get a story of an Italian service in one of the old cathedrals one day last summer, and got wedged in between two fat Neapolitans, and couldn’t get out for the crowd--and the priest delivered a sermon an hour long, in Italian. You can imagine how thrilled I was, especially as the cathedral was jammed to the doors, and the builders must have had an anti-air complex, and the good . . . worshipers had dined on garlic evidently. (Judson)

Toward the end of July and into August 1927, Bristow represented The Times-Picayune at the trial of Ada LeBoeuf, accused with Dr. Thomas Dreher of the murder of her husband. In an August 9, 1927, letter demonstrating again her sensitivity to women victims, Bristow described the event to her mother. In 1927 when a woman was still basically her husband’s "property," and the courts hardly made allowances for spouse abuse, Bristow’s reaction to the verdict, she reported as the most horrible experience I have ever had. When I rushed into the Western Union office behind the court room to flash my story, my hand was shaking so I could hardly write. I slept only three hours that night. Over and over I kept saying to myself--"They had to do it--I’d have done it, too--but O, why must the individual suffer so for the sins of society?"

Because, while Ada LeBoeuf deserves hanging if ever anybody did, and if I had been on the jury I’d have brought in the same verdict, you know and I know, and they know that she is being punished for her background just as much as she is for her sins. Born into a squalid home, reared in squalid surroundings, married when she was sixteen to a good ordinary fellow who was about as interesting as the kitchen sink, years of having babies and cooking and scrubbing and
wiping the babies' noses--of course she was thrilled at the attentions of the most prominent physician in town, and of course she went to pieces. I'm not excusing her, for of course plenty of other people who have sloppy backgrounds don't murder their husbands. She does deserve hanging, but so does the part of society that never gave her a chance. As for Doctor Dreher, I could pull the rope that chokes him and glory in it, for I can see absolutely no extenuating circumstances in his case. College bred, married to a woman as charming, as exquisite, as refined as any woman I ever saw, father of those three aristocratic children--where on earth was his excuse for making dates with Ada LeBoeuf in a nigger cabin? (Bristow family papers)

Bristow's use of "nigger" here reflects a passionate reaction to a highly emotional event, for Bristow was neither racist nor indifferent to standard language.

Not all bad, however, the assignment on the Ada LeBoeuf case garnered new friends as tension brought newspaper people together, whom she called "a jolly bunch all round," continuing, "... we liked them all. We had a peach of a time together. I have a date with the Houston Press man for March 10, when he insists he is coming to New Orleans for some newspaper business or other" (Bristow family papers).

If this "Houston Press man" was Bruce Manning, it was Bristow's first reference to the man she would marry almost a year and a half later. When they began dating is not certain, but accounts seem to substantiate their meeting at the LaBoeuf trial. As one Philadelphia paper reported it, "They spent part of their honeymoon talking to Ada LeBoeuf and Dr. Dreher" (Northridge). According to this same account, Pete Dailey, another news reporter, served as the "best man and chauffeur up to Franklin." A more likely account, however, is this one:

Less than three years ago [Manning] was assigned to cover a murder trial. At the table with him in the courtroom was Miss Bristow, then a star reporter for The Times-Picayune. There, at the murder trial,
started the acquaintanceship which led ultimately to the marriage and
the joint production of a novel. (Northridge)

Typical of newspaper sensationalism devised to enhance the market,
however, more conflicting stories circulated about Bruce Manning and how he and
Gwen Bristow became acquainted—with Bristow, herself, credited with some of the
variations. For example, one such story was about their meeting and marriage
appeared in the San Antonio Evening News. In this account Mary Louise Walliser,
who got her story from Buck Herzog of the Milwaukee Sentinel, who got his story
from someone else, reports that "one dreary Christmas," Bristow, working on a
Christmas feature about how the "down-and-outers were spending their holiday,"
got to the Salvation Army headquarters. Alone in a corner a "disgruntled young
man sat, sure he wasn’t fit company even for the other derelicts." Unable to get
him to talk, Bristow left after slipping him a dollar and a half and telling him to
clean up and buy himself a shirt. Responding morosely that he would probably
"buy himself a good spree with it," he let her leave (Tulane).

He decided, however, that he would probably feel better with a clean shirt.
The next day he waited for hours outside the newspaper office. When she appeared,
he approached her, decently groomed, and, grinning, he pulled back the flaps of his
cloak to reveal the new shirt. "See? I didn’t buy the bottle, after all." So pleased
was Bristow that she invited him to dinner. He agreed under the conditions that she
let him repay her as soon as he had obtained a job. Over dinner and in a long
conversation, the two began an acquaintance. Months later Bristow received his
letter, saying he had a job and was doing well working on a newspaper. He
enclosed a money order for the shirt and dinner, saying that he would some day go
to New Orleans and tell her all about it (Tulane). Nowhere does this story mention Bristow's helping him get a job.

Another version relates that she found him at the Salvation Army home, felt sorry for him, and got him a job with the States-Item, another New Orleans newspaper. Still according to Bristow's own version, Bruce Manning was a New York newspaper man who after an illness had been advised by his doctor to look for a job in a milder climate. He arrived in New Orleans during one of the brief but bitter cold snaps that do sometimes occur there in spite of the latitude, and the first words he ever said to me were, "Lady, where does the South begin?" We were married a year after that. He was a reporter on a rival newspaper, the Item. (Gwen Bristow, A Self-Portrait, 2)

These versions of the Manning-Bristow romance do not hint of his going away to return months later, nor do they tell of Bristow's giving him money or suggesting that he buy a shirt. Another Texas paper, the Houston Chronicle, whose source must have been the same as that of the San Antonio Evening News, relates an almost identical story. The Oregonian of Portland, however, simplifies matters: "They saw each other while covering a number of stories. Their marriage resulted from a hanging" (Tulane).

In perhaps the most sensational of all, another account says both Bristow and Manning had been assigned by their respective papers to cover a hanging in Franklin (undoubtedly the Dreher-LeBoeuf trial in Franklin, Louisiana), although this source names Franklin, Georgia, as the location. According to this story, neither wanted to cover the hanging, so Pete Dailey, on location to cover the same event, suggested they could elude the assignment by getting married. Acting on the suggestion, they then called their respective home offices, requesting permission for a honeymoon, which was readily granted. In this way they escaped the assignment (Tulane).
Even articles quoting Bristow leave credibility gaps. For example, besides the family version that she and Manning had eloped (Fensin), Harry Heintzin, in an article which he credited to Bristow, wrote in The Times-Picayune on January 11, 1954, "Twenty-five years ago Thursday they were married [in New Orleans]. 'My father married us,'" he quotes Bristow, "identifying him as the Rev. Louis J. Bristow, founder of Baptist hospital."

Their marriage license, however, names Franklin in St. Mary Parish as the site of their wedding. "R. Gudereau" signed as the "minister, judge or justice" presiding. One of the witnesses was one J. W. Dailey, husband of Abbey Dailey, who, when Bristow died, would take possession of Bristow's typewriter, an act evoking the fury of Colette Burns, Bristow's long-time secretary. Dailey would defend her action, claiming not to understand Colette's bitterness over the Bristows' not letting her buy Bristow's car and typewriter: after all, she, Dailey, had been friends with Bristow before Bristow's marriage; she had been a witness at the ceremony, and she had known the family, etc., etc. (Northridge).

Finally, among all the stories comes one from the widow of the late Hodding Carter, 1945 Pulitzer Prize winner for distinguished reporting (New Columbia 467). Betty Carter, remembering the years when she and her husband were friends of Bristow and Manning, recalls that in 1927 or 1928, a national man hunt was in progress. Bristow, ever on the alert for a newsworthy scoop, strolled through Jackson Square. Spotting a bearded and--what appeared to be--inebriated derelict lying on a park bench, she went up to him and began a conversation. Her ever-active imagination was wondering whether just maybe he might be the object of the
man hunt. As it happened, this "derelict" was Bruce Manning. In a compulsive spark of interest, Bristow began efforts to rehabilitate him (Carter).

Jean Fleming had at some point over the years heard basically the "Salvation Army" version of the Bristow-Manning romance. Knowing Betty Carter, however, Fleming's immediate reaction was that Mrs. Carter's version seems likely the reliable one (Fleming)--and yet, is it? The most recent one, which cannot be ignored, was broached by Manning's only daughter, Patricia Manning Tanner. In a May 25, 1994, telephone interview, she stated that she believes that Manning and Bristow met at Columbia. Her father, she said, attended Columbia "for a few months" in 1925, thus also challenging other claims that Manning had not sought formal post-secondary education. According to Tanner,

Bruce Manning's former wife was Ann (Bruce called her Billie). They were married in St. Joseph's Catholic Church [in West New York, New Jersey] on February 2, 1925. Patricia was born November 14, 1925. Seventeen months later, the marriage was over. Ann married Dr. Anthony Romain several years later, and they remained married until Ann's death in May of 1989. . . . Ann and Bruce always remained friends. They never had words of blame for each other. They were both happy that each other had found someone else. (Tanner)

According to Tanner, Manning and her mother had had a happy romance but an unhappy marriage and one about which Ann's father was displeased. Believing few--if any--could be good enough for his "little princess," Ann's father told Manning when the marriage fell apart that he would take care of his daughter and granddaughter. Part of the stipulation, however, was that Manning get out of their lives entirely, and Manning went to New Orleans, explains Tanner.
Whatever version of Bristow's meeting Bruce Manning is correct, Bristow had learned self-reliance and self-determination, and she married Bruce Mack-Manning (who soon dropped the "Mack" for "ethnic reasons") on January 14, 1929, in a civil ceremony in St. Mary Parish. A brief newspaper item announced,

Romance enlivened New Orleans newspaper circles Monday with the announcement of the marriage of Miss Gwen Bristow, feature writer for The Times-Picayune, to Bruce Mack-Manning, a news editor of the New Orleans Item. The ceremony was performed in Franklin Monday morning. Mr. and Mrs. Mack-Manning left immediately afterward on a short honeymoon before returning to New Orleans. (Northridge)

A more formal announcement states,

Dr. and Mrs. Louis Judson Bristow announce the marriage of their daughter Miss Gwen Bristow, to Mr. Bruce Mack-Manning, which was quietly celebrated Monday morning, January 14. Mr. Mack-Manning and his bride are at home in an apartment at No 627 Ursuline Street. (Northridge)

Knowing the circumstances, Fensin indicates that more lay beneath the brusqueness of the announcement than satisfying formal Southern etiquette. For one thing, Bruce was Catholic. With generations of Baptists on both sides of Bristow's family, her marrying a Catholic did not please her family, so she and Bruce took the quietest way--elopement. When they returned to give Bristow's parents the news, Bristow saw her mother's "hands in the pockets of her skirt swell the cloth as they doubled into fists" (Fensin).

The gesture, Bristow said, was her mother's first and only demonstration of distress at Bristow's choice in husbands. Good breeding had dictated acceptance of Bristow's wedding with grace. She employs the exact image in her story, This Side of Glory, when Eleanor defies her father over her intended marriage to Kester Larne.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
66

(47). Eleanor angrily clinches her fists in her pockets, too respectful to lash out; however, her father sees the gesture and heeds the unsaid warning. Bristow, recounting the incident in a letter, sent Angie a copy of the book and told her to look for it (Fensin).

Bristow’s Mystery Man

Aside from all the events related to Bristow’s marriage, considerable mystery surrounds Bruce Manning. The birth certificate in Bristow’s possession defies connection to him, except for the fact that at the top is the name "Bruce Manning" printed in what appears to be Bristow’s writing. It is, furthermore, one of the very few documents Bristow saved from Bruce Manning’s possessions after his death, when she methodically destroyed or disposed of, in an untraceable fashion, all of his personal effects except those which, according to her journals, she donated to California State University, Northridge, or to Tulane. The birth certificate has remained together with hers in an envelope among certain personal documents, such as their marriage license and Bristow’s identification and affiliation cards.

Various news articles add to the mystery with conflicting reports about Manning’s background. One release entitled "Script’s Personalities of 1942" says he was born in Cuddebackville, New York, on July 15, 1902. However, his birth certificate gives his date of birth as July 15, 1900, and names Jersey City, New Jersey, as his place of birth. Additionally, the Jersey City, New Jersey, Bureau of Vital Statistics substantiates this birth certificate. Much of the mystery remains,
however, taking on various twists, but all are complimentary, such as the following newspaper clipping:

Stories they spin about him in the Press Club in New Orleans could be brought up to date in Hollywood, with changes made, of course, in names, figures, and places. There's a recognizable flavor, for instance, to the story of Manning’s first big raise on his New Orleans newspaper job. The publisher took him off the city desk and made him promotion manager, with instructions to make a detailed survey of the paper’s operation and recommend any changes he thought necessary. Bruce walked back into the publisher’s office a week later with a report that the circulation manager was inefficient and should be fired. The circulation manager was the publisher’s brother, and Manning was back on the city desk the next day. Those associated with him in business today will recognize that forthrightness and honesty, as militant now as it was then. (Tulane)

This same source also asserts that Manning, educated in New York State, began his newspaper career in New York City, where his experiences took him through most of the news-writing fields. Spurred by wanderlust, he left his New York post, traveling "successively to Chicago, Kansas City, Miami, and points in between." His daughter, not meeting him until she was about twelve when he was in Chicago with an air show, can add little to this early mystery (Tanner, interview).

Bruce Manning’s parents were John F. McCurran and Helen Manning McCurran. By 1920, when John was forty-six and Helen was forty, they lived in a rented home in Jersey City, New Jersey. Manning’s father, a railroad conductor, had been born in New York, but his paternal grandparents had emigrated from Ireland. Manning’s mother, Helen, born in Ireland, immigrated to the United States in 1893 (Census). Both were Irish. They had two sons—Manning, born George Henry McCurran, nineteen years of age, and his ten-year-old brother James, both born in New Jersey (Census). Patricia Tanner believes they had five children, four
boys and one girl, all of whom died in a diphtheria epidemic; however, the 1920 census confirms only the two. Says Tanner in a recent telephone interview, "Jim was a pharmacist in New Jersey and New York; an alcoholic, he married several times, but when he went to California, he had stopped drinking" (25 May 1994).

Manning was "on the small side, with bushy eyebrows, thick hair, a wide, open smile and a friendly manner" (Northridge). According to this source, George Henry McCurran, alias Bruce Manning, who had finished high school but, according to one source (Northridge), had not sought further formal education, was employed as an advertising clerk.

Manning, as he came to be called sometime after his marriage to Bristow, chose New Orleans when, according to reports, his doctor advised him to look for work in a milder climate. Arriving there, he sought the type of work he knew best—newspaper work (Judson). In a "down period" when Bristow accidentally met him, he began an impressive career, soon earning a job as copy editor for the New Orleans Item, which in those days was an afternoon paper; later it was consolidated with the States and came to be called the New Orleans States-Item (Dufour).

Annette Duchein describes Manning as quite likeable with a quick wit. He loved jokes, and "we used to exchange pleasantries, "laughs" would be the word for it, but I enjoyed Bruce. Bruce had a fast wit. He and Gwen had a very compatible arrangement. I was with them a lot, and I never heard a cross word said" (Duchein, 20 Nov. 1992).

James Gillis recalls that Manning, "was a nice person. He had a lot of good humor, a lot of good stories; he was a very kind individual. So was Gwen. She
could be tough, but she was very kind. From all appearances, Gwen and Bruce had a very good relationship and were very devoted to each other" (Gillis). What really matters is that Bristow, in spite of the obstacles and whatever the varying stories, had committed herself to a marriage she would never regret. After some time, as Betty Carter recalls, Manning wrote a story, which was "somehow picked up by United Cigar Stores. He made lots of money on it and bought Gwen a typewriter with sterling silver keys with ivory letters" (Carter). Varying versions speak of such a typewriter, and the popular "Believe It or Not" column in 1940 reported, "Though masterpieces have been scratched with a penny pencil on foolscap, Gwen Bristow, author of This Side of Glory works best using green paper in a sterling silver typewriter with a violet ribbon." The "truth," according to Bristow, quoted in the Baton Rouge The Register, was that Manning gave her the silver portable typewriter. She concluded, "The green paper and violet ribbon I added for fun, and some reporter got hold of [the story]" (Varnado).

After Bristow returned to The Times-Picayune February 5, 1932, Gillis soon learned to enjoy her exceptional talent and amusing wit. One day he was chatting with her at the old Press Club, so called because it was frequented by newspapermen, but it was also a "speak easy," illegally selling whiskey to its members in spite of Prohibition. Since its members were required to have a key and the general public were not allowed in, the members entered and left at will and bought their own drinks. (Gillis).

In a period when women had hardly broken into the public work force, Bristow was in the Press Club reminiscing about the famous Leboeuf-Dreher case of
1929. In those days women were sent to cover only certain types of stories, and these did not include assignments considered "too rough." Instead, they were usually given the more "tame" or "domestic" types of story--weddings, fashion, funerals, and the like--hence, the name "sob sister." James Gillis recalls, however, that Bristow was a generally happy person, optimistic, and hard working. Little daunted her, and she was given the trial to cover.

As they sat that day discussing the events surrounding the LeBoeuf trial, Bristow's amusement focused on arrangements for her stay in Franklin, Louisiana, where the trial would take place. The two people sent from The Times-Picayune to cover the trial were she and Ken Knoblock, the dramatic critic for The Times-Picayune, who once had said of her: "She's full of ideas about newspapers and she'll try to do anything" ("A Bow to Bristow"). Loren Brooks, then city editor, had made the reservations at the one hotel in Franklin (Gillis).

When Bristow arrived in Franklin, continued Gillis, "... lo and behold, there was one room with only a double bed. Loren Brooks had made reservations for two reporters but only one room!" This very traditionally reared girl from a "very Baptist background" found the idea of sleeping in a strange town, with a total population of about four thousand, upon which the eyes of the entire world were turned at the moment, in a strange hotel, in the same bed with Ken Knoblock really funny. She concluded her story, all tongue in cheek, "I think if I decided to sleep with a man, I'd certainly take my own pick!" (Gillis).

James Gillis fondly recalls Gwen Bristow as the type who could work under almost any circumstance. Sometimes she worked alone; other times she might be
sent on assignment with two or three reporters. "But no one ever complained about Gwen. She was easy to work with. She didn't hog the credit or anything of that sort. She did her thing and she let you do yours" (Gillis).

During the early years of her marriage, Bristow's job on The Times-Picayune was profitable in ways other than her salary. Besides the valuable writing experience, her job placed her in the same social and business league with such writers as Charles "Pie" Dufour, author of the famous syndicated column "Pie Dufour's A La Mode" and many books on New Orleans; Margaret Dixon, news reporter and managing editor of the Morning Advocate; and William Faulkner and Lyle Saxon. Of these friends and acquaintances, Pie Dufour, especially, liked Manning and called him "Pixie" and "Leprechaun" because he was Irish and funny, always witty and spirited (Gillis).

Collaborative Efforts

When Bristow and Manning first married, they lived at 627 Ursuline Street in an apartment in the French Quarter ("A Bow to Bristow"). Life was fun and busy, but their nights were tormented by a neighbor who played his radio incessantly at its maximum volume, they were sure. No effort they made to coax or force him to lower the obnoxious noise proved to any avail, so they developed a game, imagining "the perfect murder" to eliminate the problem (Randazzo).

This game gave them the idea of writing a mystery to make extra money. To create their tale of murder (MacNabb), they worked two hours a night and six hours on Sunday. Finally, on April 25, 1930, they received a letter from Brandt
and Brandt,7 saying they liked The Penthouse Murders (the original title) and enclosing a copy of the "usual agency agreement" for their signature. The Mannings' original idea had been to make about $300, enough money to take a trip to the Gulf Coast. However, their work, which was published in 1930 under the title of The Invisible Host (Caroliniana), earned, instead, $1150 in the first payment ("Here for Premiere"). Later Owen Davis made it into a play called The Ninth Guest, which was staged on Broadway in early 1931. The Mannings in great jubilation were off to New York for its opening. The success of the drama continued until it had played in "nearly every state in the Union--including Alaska though not Hawaii. . . , and [Bristow] received a royalty check as [late] as [December 1973] for a performance in Jacksonville, Florida" (J 6 Ap. 1974). The play reaped many accolades, such as the following:

Yes sir, you may have seen a lot of mystery plays, but if you like your deaths and murders in groups, you "ain't seen nothin'" until you've sat through all three acts of The Ninth Guest. Boy, O'Boy, O'Boy, O'Boy! What a thriller! (Ninth Guest)

Ecstatic over their success, the Mannings had a grand time, returning to New Orleans more enthusiastic than ever in their chosen fields of work ("Bow to Bristow").

On November 28, 1930, Bristow resigned her job with The Times-Picayune. Earlier in the year, she had taken a three-month leave of absence from April until July (Mundell). With the success of The Ninth Guest, as she told Betty MacNabb, the Mannings "immediately got very proud and, of course, very silly." They quit their jobs with their respective newspapers and launched
a new era of their lives, which ultimately would take them to Hollywood.

Meanwhile, the Mannings remained on the Gulf Coast and in New Orleans. As occurs with old data, however, especially in cases where its subjects want personal information concealed to the degree Bristow appears to have done, discrepancies arise.

Such is the case about certain events in Bristow's life from 1926 to 1930. Besides the varying reports about her wedding, confusion also attaches to the writing of their first mystery. Most sources indicate that Bristow and Manning collaborated on The Invisible Host (known as The Ninth Guest in its dramatic form) after their marriage. The Triangle, Judson's newsletter, which is dated October 1926, however, implies they wrote this mystery sometime in 1925:

Gwen Bristow, class of '24, after her graduation and a year's study at Columbia was given a place on The Times-Picayune. Last spring she gave up this position in order to write a book with Mr. Manning. (Judson)

The date of the article, as well the statement that Bristow had left her job to collaborate with Manning is puzzling because Bristow's journals attest to their writing The Invisible Host after their marriage, which took place January 14, 1929, which exactly agrees with The Times-Picayune employment records (Mundell; J 5 Feb. 1932).

As a result of their success, the Mannings, by early 1931, were living the life of their dreams. They had employed a housekeeper and cook named Adèle White (J 20 Mar. 1931) and had set up housekeeping in the Mississippi Gulfport area on the Gulf Coast in one of the old Southern mansions (destroyed by Hurricane Camille in 1969) (Fensin) facing the Gulf of Mexico along
Highway 90. For a brief idyllic period, they lived there in a sort of Bohemian lifestyle, in what they "thought was the literary life, which meant having a lot of house parties and writing more detective stories" (Fensin). Their mystery, The Ninth Guest, was playing to "swell" reviews in Chicago and Philadelphia; the Gutenberg Murders (1931) was in the stores; and Bristow and Manning were being entertained and were entertaining a continual flow of visitors, including Mabel and John Carter, Annette Duchein, and Jim Largan, along with other literary people like James (Jimmy) Feibleman, Hermann Deutsch (MacNabb), and Hodding and Betty Carter (Carter). Bruce enjoyed his boat, fishing, occasional gambling, and golf; Bristow swam in the Gulf every morning before breakfast, sewed, crocheted, baked a cake or made fudge occasionally--according to some sources but not Bristow--and practiced shorthand each night. She generally wrote during the day.

Sometimes her family visited, but it was Caroline's visits which she enjoyed because, as Patricia Manning Tanner would say, "Let me tell you, the house came alive when Caroline came for a visit" (Interview, 25 May 1994).

In April 1931 their situation was good enough that they were able to hire a secretary. In this setting writing their third mystery, Two and Two Make Twenty-two (1 July 1931), they developed a plan of work that they liked: Manning, "using the synopsis and time-chart," dictated the action of the story. Winnie, their secretary, typed it, and Bristow, using Manning's action outline, wrote it. By July 27, 1931, very much pleased with their story, Bristow shipped Two and Two Make
Twenty-two off to New York, and Bruce's brother Jimmy from New York arrived for a visit, remaining until August 8 (J 27 July 1931).

Family Rebel

To say that Bristow was a very private person is both misleading and narrow; at the same time, it is perhaps the single characterization that best defines her. When she began using shorthand to record her thoughts, "lest [they] be read by too prying eyes" (J 12 Aug. 1931), the minister's daughter had achieved what Heilbrun describes as "woman's unconscious fall into a condition where vocation is possible" (51). From a sedate, reserved environment of a parsonage to backless beach pajamas worn in public, from speech free of profanity to punctuating her oral and recorded expressions with "damn's" and "hell's" and spending evenings with friends, such as "Hermann Deutsch . . . [at] rather too promiscuous" parties (Bristow's own words), and trading Sunday School for a day at the beach swimming and playing in the sand, Bristow moved into the 1930's (J 1931). Says Jean Fleming, with whom Bristow eventually talked about her background, her life had become much different from her upbringing. She did rebel, but she rebelled in a very lady-like manner because she herself was always a lady. Her feeling about her mother was over that terrible rigidity and sense of having to be so proper at all times. (Interview, 21 Nov. 1993)

It seems, therefore, that part of the reason for the drastic change was Bristow's relationship with her family. Despite the contradictory implication, while Bristow "loved" her family, she did not like them--except for Caroline, whom she "did adore" (Tanner). Perhaps the best explanation for this seeming contradiction
comes from Fraud. While it is usual to love one's blood relatives, at the same time, according to Freud,

Loving admits of not merely one, but of three antitheses. First there is the antithesis of loving--hating; secondly, there is loving--being loved; and, in addition to these, loving and hating together are the opposite of the condition of neutrality or indifference.

Although Bristow never admitted her negative attitude about her parents in writing, her habit of seeming to ignore them surfaced early. Jean Fleming concurs: "Gwen loved her parents in her way," but the anecdote Bristow frequently repeated carries an undercurrent of Bristow's pain or anger--or both. She said that her father read her novel Deep Summer and reacted gravely, "Gwen, I think it is a very good thing that you didn't try to become a teacher." Bristow always concluded the story with "To this day, I have never made up my mind whether this was a compliment" (Bristow family papers).

Thus, while family documents point to a loving, nurturing home environment with a wholesome, harmonious atmosphere, the secret of Dr. and Mrs. Bristow's relationship with their children, and most specifically with Gwen, remains buried as a result of a Southern culture that frowned upon making a public display of family affairs, a culture thoroughly instilled in Bristow.

According to Carolyn Heilbrun, "The brutal truth . . . is that all women must destroy in order to create" (17), and Bristow, determined to be independent of her parents' confines, created a life for herself by "writing them out." In almost daily journal entries from 1931 to 1979, Bristow rarely mentions family, and especially and notably not on holidays and other special days. For example, in 1931 Bristow lived in New Orleans, but she hardly mentioned her family that entire fall and
winter—not even at Thanksgiving when she records that she "played silly card games with the Perkinses until late in the evening and had a lot of fun." The same omissions occur on other special days and even at Christmas, with Bristow recording,

> a perfectly swell Christmas. Bruce won seventy dollars last night shooting craps, which enabled us to buy presents and take care of other necessary expenses. We went to a cocktail party at Casey and Beatrice's, then to another at the Salmons'[Clarke Salmon, managing editor of the New Orleans Item and his wife Katherine (Gwen Bristow, "New Orleans Research Provides Local Historical Footnotes," The Register May 1976: 1+)], where I won a dollar playing roulette. Then to dinner with the Feibleman's, where Bruce became gloriously drunk and wound up by turning over on top of the Christmas tree, so we put him into Jimmy's bed and the rest of us went out to Suburban Gardens. (J 25 Dec. 1931)

Bristow likewise seems to have ignored her brother's successful internship at New Orleans Charity Hospital, as well as his wedding. After completing medical school, Louis Bristow went to Anderson, South Carolina, to work. There he met Roberta Burns, and they were married July 2, 1935, at Anderson, South Carolina, but Bristow did not attend the wedding (Bristow family papers). Furthermore, over the years when Bristow returned to New Orleans at rare intervals for lectures or research, she always stayed in a hotel, not once recording a stay in the home of her parents or her brother. It is only fair to point out that her choice of lodging may simply have reflected her enjoyment of hotels, for she never stayed in friends' homes, either, if she had a choice. She genuinely preferred staying in hotels for their convenience, luxury, and special services. Therefore, when she was in New Orleans, her visits with her family usually were over dinner in a restaurant, but her journal entries are limited to such lines as "Mother had dinner with me at the hotel"
(J 26 Ap. 1938), or "I called my father and had dinner with him at Kolb's. After dinner he came up to my room and he and Annette exchanged stories" (J 20 May 1938), or an entry reflecting anger and embarrassment:

[d]inner last night with daddy, and it turned out to be the annual Rotary Club Banquet at the Country Club; I didn't know we were to go there, and found myself the only woman there not in evening dress, but with heroism that daddy would never dream of, I took it and (I believe) acquitted myself nobly. (J 25 May 1938)

Bristow's silence about to her family speaks volumes. Jean Fleming explains that Bristow almost never talked about her father, and she "detested" her mother, "hating" her "whining" and her unbending nature. At another time Fleming uses the word "despised" to define Bristow's attitude toward her mother. Fleming recalls, "[Mrs. Bristow] would say things like, 'Oh, Gwen, don't do that!'" adding, "I think that, in a way, Gwen blamed her mother for Caroline's drug problems" (Fleming).

Furthermore, says Fleming, "Gwen's relatives . . . were strangers. She visited New Orleans only out of a sense of duty and to do research" (Fleming). Patricia Manning Tanner concurs, saying that Bristow "disliked her mother and she only tolerated her father" (Tanner). Not until many years after her parents' deaths did Bristow rationalize the emotion she had not understood. In an expressive letter of November 29, 1979, Bristow tried to comfort Jean Fleming, whose father—of whom Bristow was quite fond—had died:

Dear Jean,

I am writing this with sympathy and admiration. There is an intimate something about the death of a mother or father. They were the first people we knew in our lives, the first we depended on, long before we knew we needed to depend on them. They were just there, like the walls of the house, and it never occurred to us that the walls could fall down.
I believe we always keep, without realizing it, a bit of this sense of unshakable reverence. We don't realize it until the walls do fall down, and then we have a sudden sense of emptiness. It is not only sorrow, but a sort of childish bewilderment. We miss them!

I can't help you get through it. Nobody can. But I do know what it's like and you'll have my love and sympathy while you are going through it.

... You both united in letting him know all the time that he was loved and wanted. Give Howard my love. And I wish the best of everything to you both. You deserve it.

Gwen

At another time Bristow commented that although "Howard says Jean is getting along well, nothing makes the loss easy. I know" (J 8 Oct. 1967).

The two people who perhaps knew Bristow best also characterized her in very telling statements: Manning once wrote his wife, saying, "Nobody knows what a funny kid you are but me"; the second came from Jean Fleming, who said, "Gwen was not expressive. About the most emotional statement I ever heard her make was "Bruce is dying and it is breaking my heart."

Annette Duchein also came to know Bristow well, and the friendship lasted over many years. Eventually, distance, time, and diverging interests took their toll so that of that acquaintance, Duchein, when interviewed in 1992, had not, "thought about Gwen in a long time," but she remembered their relationship in this way:

Gwen and I were great friends—on a basis that didn’t involve holding hands or patting each other on the back. It was not that kind of warmth in the association. But I don't know that Gwen had that kind of approach with anybody. I think Gwen, in her approaches with everybody, unless with Bruce, was matter-of-fact. I liked Gwen. I liked her way. It was not my way at all. I had a closer warmth, I thought, in approaching people, but you have to learn to accept individuals who may become your friend on their terms. She had a good sense of humor. I think I have a sense of humor so that we had a meeting ground there. And Gwen would just cut her eye at me at something that she thought funny. She might not change her expression, but I knew what she was thinking.
She did not have what I think of as . . . warmth. She was not approachable, certainly not a terse character, but I don't think she ever warmed up. I never thought of Gwen as being anything but matter-of-fact. As a matter-of-fact, she and I had that kind of relationship. Really. It was a close relationship, but yet you couldn't call it a warm relationship. (Duchein)

Apart from others' views of her, Bristow's self-concept was sharp and unmistakable, and she determinedly demonstrated what Heilbrun calls her "selfhood, the right to her own story, [that] depends upon her ability to act in the public domain" (17). Bristow achieved her status in her own way, yet she seemed not to realize the extent to which she projected her "self." For example, once as she was reading to study technique, she expressed amazement at how much authors reveal of themselves through their characters. However, this is exactly what Bristow did, perhaps even in her personal life as her journal entry of June 2, 1954, indicates:

When I went into Sale's Market yesterday afternoon, Mr. Sale asked me, "Are you writing another novel about the South?" When I said yes, he said, "I thought so. You are becoming more Southern every day--your speech, your mannerisms, your whole general personality." We both had a good laugh. I had not thought of it. He said, "It just proves how the subconscious comes out on top, doesn't it?"

Bristow, says Jean Fleming, also recreated the same character as her feminine heroines, and that character is Bristow--in varying roles. For example, in Jubilee Trail shortly after Garnet and Oliver Hale are married, Garnet is delighted that Oliver remembers her earlier wish to visit an "improper" variety theater. Garnet says, "I want to go places I'm not allowed to go," reminiscent of Bristow's earlier attack on fundamentalism because it "exclude[d] members because they attend the theater." In Jubilee Trail, Garnet explains that she does not know why she should want to go to the variety theater. "It's [just] there . . . [with] crowds of
people going in. Well-dressed people, too" (24), and her curiosity to experience the unknown demands satisfaction. Garnet is also elated because Oliver promises her freedom when he tells her that she is finally "unwrapped from the pink tissue paper and out of the closet" (Bristow, *Jubilee Trail* 33). To Garnet

... Oliver ... was simply wonderful. Garnet had loved him very much when she married him, but she hadn’t been able to imagine how much fun it was going to be to have him with her all the time. Oliver was an ardent but considerate lover. He liked her the way she was, and had not the faintest wish for her to pretend to be anything she wasn’t. He answered all her questions, he took her everywhere she wanted to go, whether it was proper or not. (*JT* 34)

One could read *Gwen* for *Garnet* in this passage. For Bristow marriage to Manning was her ticket to freedom. She had traded her mother’s continual efforts to control and shape her for almost total self-determination. Manning, a man from New York and no Southerner, loved Bristow as she was, and Bristow no longer had to pretend—except before her parents. Otherwise, she acted on her new-found freedom to go "everywhere she wanted to go, whether it was proper or not."

**Fiercely Private**

Determined to maintain her privacy, Bristow refused to be chained to custom simply because she had been so taught or was related to someone or had lived somewhere. She did not tolerate for very long people she found obnoxious or pretend politeness to people whom she considered bores or who wanted something of her that she had no desire to give. She noted in her journal on September 28, 1967, the type of people she enjoyed: "George and Marge Bregar came over this
evening. Oh I do enjoy talking to them. So wise, witty, urbane, and never a word about their own insides." In another entry she recalled,

My visit with the Flemings was, as always, a joy and delight. It is so refreshing to be with people who are well informed and quick-witted, who get the point of every joke the moment it is told, who understand every allusion, who are genuinely interested in the world around them. (J 6 Sept. 1968)

She also thoroughly disliked being "claimed" by people who happened to have some real or imaginary connection, such as being from an area where she had once lived. Showing her irritation at such intrusion into her personal life, she wrote,

A letter has come from a woman in Marion, S. C., who is going to do a paper on me for her book club. Wants to know all about my life in Marion. I’ll have Colette write her that I left there when I was about a year old and have never been back. I have more home towns than Homer. Thank heaven I never had to beg my bread through any of them. (J 4 Oct. 1967)

Bristow’s reaction to a South Carolina librarian’s request for autographed copies of all her books because Marion was Bristow’s "old home town" was emphatic:

I don’t mind getting the books and sending them to her, but for some reason the "old home town" business annoys me. I was born in Marion but my parents moved away, to Greenwood, when I was about a year old and I have never seen the place since then. My earliest recollections are of Greenwood, then Williamston, then Abbeville, then--Oh for pity’s sake, I haven’t got any "old home town" (J 26 Jan. 1976).

No small part of Bristow’s desire for privacy was a result of her acute awareness of her heritage. Declaring herself a "Southerner now and a Southerner for life" (Northridge), Bristow loved the beauty of the moss-draped oaks, the old plantation homes, and Southern manners. Incongruously, however, she could not discard as readily as appearances seemed to attest the values so carefully inculcated
by that Southern upbringing. Although Anne Firor Scott refers to the nineteenth century when she says in *The Southern Lady*,

Boarding schools for young ladies, to which more and more girls were sent as the century wore on, emphasized correct female behavior more than intellectual development. In at least one school the girls wrote their English compositions on such subjects as modesty, benevolence, and the evils of reading novels (7),

Scott’s point is relevant to Bristow. Hating both the boarding schools (i.e. colleges) and—by all implications—their moralistic programs, Bristow, nonetheless, battled a conscience that pricked because of her drinking, smoking, and occasional early use of profanity. [She apparently dropped the profanity, however, for according to Patricia Tanner, "She was very disciplined, charming; I never heard her say a foul word" (Letter 9 June 1994)]. Her strong dislike for the boarding schools she had attended was so great that when Bristow received a letter from the president of Anderson College requesting that she make the commencement address, she reacted vehemently:

This is the third successive year they have asked me to do this. By this time you’d think they would have gotten the idea that I don’t want to go. I don’t want to, and I won’t. I spent a brief unhappy time there and I don’t want to be reminded of it. Those little schools that my parents sent me to were simply dreadful places for me. I was a total misfit. I simply could not fit the mold that the pupils were supposed to fit, and I felt like the man in Victor Hugo’s *Man Who Laughs*, stuffed into a bottle to make him grow into a monstrosity. Well, I broke out of the bottle and I can’t get back into it and I am not going to try. It’s not the fault of the schools, of course. I’ll send as tactful a refusal as I can write. (J 4 Oct. 1971)

Although she once told her friend Jean Fleming that the past held little meaning for her, those old ties seem not so nearly dead as Bristow might have wished. For example, on one occasion in responding to a letter from the former
Judson acquaintance requesting an update on Bristow's activities, Bristow revealed an affection and concern that seems to refute her declaration of caring nothing about her past. What may also have been merely a projection her "public self," on November 5, 1932, she wrote,

> It has been so long since I've had any news from Judson that I don't even know what she's doing—and like thousands of other graduates of Judson I count my recollections of Miss Kirtley the most vivid and most cherished of all. Please give her my love. (Judson)

Bristow's letter continues:

> And is Miss Dawson still there? If she is, you might tell her for me that the Latin she taught me has been of inestimable value, for the ability to read church manuscripts is a decided help to anybody who attempts to cover the news in a city as replete with Catholic institutions as New Orleans. Only yesterday I was called on to translate the title-page and some excerpts from a vast tome published in Antwerp in the seventeenth century, containing the missives of three of the popes, so that a story of its arrival in a Catholic library in New Orleans could be adequately written—and did I remember Miss Dawson!

She had also sounded genuinely reminiscent in the November 1924 issue of Judson College The Triangle: "[Bristow] writes enthusiastic letters of her work and says, 'If I make good, I will have to thank Judson. I found there fineness of ideals and steadiness of purpose'" (Judson).

Yet when an alumna of Judson wrote Bristow in 1956 that Judson wanted to present her with a distinguished graduate award, Bristow again affirmed that she did not look back with fondness on her days at Judson (J 11 July 1956); however, her sense of Southern etiquette dictated a tactful and thoughtful response. Having chosen to leave her alma mater behind, she found its codes—rejected but intrusive—ingrained in her psyche and reinforced by parents born in the 1870's when the South was still reeling from the Civil War and influenced by Old South social tenets. For
example, one such tenet, as Anne Firor Scott noted, forbade suffrage to woman to "protect" her from the "turmoil" of "Society" and prevent strife which "would characterize family life and in the end . . . [result in] utter disaster, since the first principle of religion is obedience" (169). Although it seems unlikely that Caroline Winkler Bristow would have agreed in essence with such a position (as the fact that she promptly registered to vote upon gaining the privilege seems to attest), her "Victorian rigidity" and Louis Judson Bristow's strong religious principles would have reflected something of this stern philosophy. Bristow's mother, at the least, would have given token adherence to the social tenets that incited women to obedience under the stern warning that "The woman who does not obey her husband will not obey God who enjoins her submission" (Scott 169).

Also, standards altered more slowly because "[s]ubstantial numbers of southern women were slow to see any advantage to themselves and were afraid to believe in something which displeased men" (Scott 169). Bristow's mother, as well as her father, held to such tenets as modesty in manners and a disapproval of what, in the early twentieth century, would have been considered unladylike behavior. Their attitude applied likewise to the choice of certain professions for women, as Bristow's father clearly made evident in his hope that she would become a teacher (Bristow family papers).

Furthermore, other codes of conduct were precisely defined. For example, as Scott avers, after the war men's drinking was significantly troublesome to women, aside from its correlation with violent crime, because it led to a threatening social instability and created hardship in many families. The interest of the [Woman's Christian Temperance Union]
in "social purity," a euphemism for control of venereal disease, also represented an attempt to control male behavior. Hopes of putting an end to the double standard in social behavior ran high as women emerged in public life. This goal continued to be a spoken or unspoken part of the platform of women's groups for three decades in the twentieth century. (147)

Manning's Catholicism and his pleasure in drinking and parties were not endearing traits to Bristow's parents, but they would have abhorred their daughter's liberated participation in such "pleasures." Bristow, however, was unlike other "women in the South . . . endowed with faculties for glorious work" who merely struggled against the "environments which the masses of average men . . . fixed for them" (Scott 167). In Carolyn Heilbrun's words, she was an "accomplished woman who [was] educated enough to have had a choice and brave enough to have made one" (59). Therefore, having kept the bargain with her father that if she would graduate from Judson she would be allowed to go to Columbia University, she focused on her independence.

One old residual quality to which Bristow did cling was that women "be given to suffering in silence" (Scott 4). That it was a precept by which women were supposed to "endear [themselves] to men" (Scott 4) was hardly responsible for Bristow's embracing it, however. More likely, in her resentment of what she called her mother's "whining," Bristow came to detest making personal problems and attitudes evident for the world to see. Bristow further maintained her defenses with what she came to call her "carefully cultivated public personality" (J 28 May 1938) so that with guarded cheerfulness and repartee, Bristow established her position and maintained a distance between herself and the public.
In her independence and determination to keep from unwelcome eyes what she considered private, Bristow became increasingly discriminating about what she noted in her journals. Although she faithfully recorded her aches and anxieties, she also frequently stated her appreciation of others who did not discuss aloud their troubles, and she often reminded herself not to speak her problems aloud. Furthermore, she occasionally took stock to ascertain that no untoward evidence had been left behind.

Thus, expunging personal information became her lifelong practice. She even wanted to keep her correspondence private, as she would imply on September 13, 1975, after going through many years’ accumulation of old letters sent to her by Bernice Baumgarten from Bristow’s New York agency Brandt and Brandt. Bristow wrote,

To my surprise, they have kept every letter I ever wrote the company, a carbon of every letter the company ever wrote me, every letter Bernice Baumgarten wrote to publishers about me or my work, and their replies. This goes back to the days when she was trying to sell Meeting Place. (I’m glad she didn’t.) The reaction from publishers ranged all the way from "So bad it’s funny" to "Promising but just not quite good enough to print." It is all like standing behind a door and hearing people talk about me. (J 1 Oct. 1974)

The letters contained facts even she had not known, she noted, such as exchanges between Bob Crowell and Bernice Baumgarten about her book Tomorrow Is Forever. Keeping only a few of the interesting ones "not so personal as to be embarrassing," she destroyed most. Thus, as she protected herself, she also shielded her friends through her lifelong practice of the old Southern principle that "one does not air one’s dirty linen in public."
Ultimately, it would be her excesses that caused problems for Bristow. Some time earlier having picked up the habit of smoking, and--in spite of Prohibition, which would not be repealed until 1933--Bristow more and more frequently relaxed or had a good time "getting tight" and occasionally even "disgracefully drunk."

Both were indulgences she would battle most of her life. Manning did likewise, and both of them enjoyed the frequent parties, playing various card games for money, and listening to or attending the Tulane football games. Soon they had fallen into the New Orleans social whirl of parties and drinking (J 1931).

Bristow, however, recognized changes that implied excess with remarks such as "I smoked so many cigarettes last night that my mouth feels like the inside of a stovepipe" (J 1 Jan. 1947). Although she found drinking helped her relax and cope with daily stresses, she waged an almost continual battle to "stay on the wagon" (her phrase for not drinking), along with twinges of guilt:

Last night I dreamed my mother and father caught me smoking in church. I woke up feeling scared and guilty, and was oh so relieved to find myself safely in bed. Now what, I wondered, prompted any such idiotic notion in my sleep? I have not had a cigarette in nearly 16 years, and never in my life smoked one in church, not in the presence of either of my parents, who thought it a wicked habit. (J 22 Sept. 1971)

Then later in 1976 when she went to New Orleans for her brother's second marriage, an incident indicates Bristow was prepared to defend her independence:

Eunice was a pupil of my mother's in a Sunday School class years ago when she was a teen-aged girl. She must have been an ideal pupil, for she has never smoked, and has not had a cocktail to this day. When the waiter paused at our table to say "Cocktails?" I asked, "Do you mind, Eunice?" She said, "Why no," so I ordered a Rob Roy. I thought I might as well begin right now by being honest and letting her know I do like cocktails before dinner. (J 17 Mar. 1976).
Coping with the Depression

Toward mid 1931, Bristow and Manning began to worry about finances. Finally, in August, they heard from Brandt and Brandt, but Bristow noted, "Bernice does not think much of Two and Two Make Twenty-Two. She advises a revision of which I do not approve. But we've got to sell the damn book or else start selling oranges on the corner, so what we shall do I cannot tell" (J 20 Aug. 1931). On August 24 she and Bruce went to New Orleans from their home on the Gulf Coast to find a place to spend the winter, opting finally to stay at a Mrs. Blakemore's on Prytania Street. For three days they remained in the city, searching during the day for an office downtown, and enjoying the city in the evenings. In spite of getting "tight on absinthe at Lyle Saxon's," from which she woke with a hangover, Bristow enjoyed their search. Finally settling on a "marvelously quiet office in the Balter building," they bought furniture and left New Orleans on August 27. Bristow "love[d] the idea of writing books in [her] own office (J 27 Aug. 1931).

Then on September 15, they completed the move to New Orleans, and, working in their own office, they began the Mardi Gras Murders (J 1931). Despite being back, Bristow did not spend time with her family. Soon her days assumed a pattern that included such activities as a hairdo in the morning, lunch out, a movie, or work, and time spent with friends.

However, writing was a dominating force in her life as her journal entry of August 31, 1931, reveals:

Read Nietzsche in the evening and was enthralled by the superman conception. Reflected on the [question]: Would I pay the price Nietzsche paid to produce a lasting work of genius? I damn well wouldn't. I would pay a great deal, and would find compensation for...
terrific sacrifice in the consciousness that I had written a good book; but not my health nor my sanity nor my love.

Working busily at writing, Bristow established a pattern which she would pursue the rest of her life. With Adèle to cook and do most of the housework, Bristow settled into a routine of going to the office morning and afternoon, not knowing "when [she had] been happier. [She loved] it--the desks, the privacy, the whole business atmosphere" (J 1 Oct. 1931). Meanwhile, the contract for *Two and Two Make Twenty-Two*, written while they lived on the Gulf Coast, finally arrived September 24, 1931, (J).

In October her old friend Annette Duchein rented the front room of their office and began working at night on "her Cajan novel" (J 2 Oct. 1931), and Bristow and Manning alternately or together worked on *The Mardi Gras Murders*. It was also at this time that Bristow recorded that in "accordance with Pitkin's advice," she had bought a little file box for clippings that might give her ideas (J 10 Oct. 1931). Thus began another life-long habit of filing ideas from her research.

Tracing Bristow's actual progress with her writing is difficult since she eventually destroyed many of her papers (J 22 Sept. 1954), and her journals for most of 1932 through 1936 are non-existent. Her 1931 journal, however, reveals her busily occupied with writing and not always with the mysteries she and Manning co-authored. For example, October 29, she noted,

... as I do not want to go on with the Mardi Gras story without discussing the next scene with [Manning], I let it alone this morning, and instead began to outline my own story idea about the woman who came down to South Carolina to spend the summer. It's a perfectly splendid idea if I can do it justice. (J)
Her journal also demonstrates the fact that Bristow’s mind seldom strayed long from her writing in spite of her other activities. For example, staying at home after attending a wedding while Duchein and Manning went "on another round of parties," Bristow spent the afternoon of November 13, 1931, "musing rebelliously over Arnold Barnette’s description of the Average Reader. Recognizing the portrait, [she] wondered if [she] wanted to be rich and famous bad enough to write for the Average Reader the rest of [her] life." Concluding that she did not, she also realized,

Of course, I am writing tripe now. But I am writing, honestly, the best that I can. And I know I have improved in the past year. And I had rather write something recognized as good by the few people who know than write perpetually according to a moronic pattern. Yes I would. I like to write. I had rather turn a good phrase that says what I mean than have a new evening dress. (J 13 Nov. 1931)

Defining her idea of writing, she recorded in her journal,

The joy of writing is in approximating a bit of reality as closely as possible by means of words, and if you can’t do that, why write! I don’t mean naturalism entirely--I mean the reality of sensation and mental adventures as well as physical facts. I want to write what I think and know and find out. (J 13 Nov. 1931)

The Depression affected writers of the time just as it did others, in this case, sending Manning and Bristow in search of a more secure income. As Bristow wrote her niece Angie years later, "We were having a wonderful literary life on the coast and in the city when the Depression, which I had heard of but ignored, swooped down upon us and sent us scurrying for shelter" (Bristow family papers). "[V]ery broke" (J 10 Jan. 1932), the Mannings by January 26 were looking for an apartment on Ursuline Street in their old neighborhood, where they moved in February. They were very glad to be back. **Two and Two Make Twenty-Two** had finally appeared

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
on the market and seemed promising (J 21 Mar. 1931). Manning, who shortly after returning to the city had found work with old friends Dorothy and Jimmy Feibleman in advertising, later found temporary work with Air Carnival when his advertising job with the Feiblemans played out. The Mannings set out very conscientiously to pay their debts and get "square with the world" (J 21 March 1932).

Comforting Back-Tracking

At The Times-Picayune, the editor, George Healey, responded sympathetically to Bristow's request for her old job. She reported for work February 5, 1932 (Mundel; J 5 Feb. 1932), and soon Manning was writing radio scripts about a gangster named Angelface for the New Orleans radio station WWL (Eunice Bristow). In addition to this regular work, Bristow and Manning had just finished The Mardi Gras Murders. When it went onto retail shelves in November to moderate sales, Manning was independently working on a play, and Bristow was working on one of her own novels (Judson).

Thus, back among people with whom they shared interests, not the least of which was the excitement of journalism, on the night of November 8, 1932, they attended a victory party held by the press to celebrate Franklin Delano Roosevelt's election to the Presidency. James Gillis, still a novice reporter, remembers sitting and chatting with the Mannings about the election. He also recalls Bruce Manning as a very talented writer but one who mainly did promotional work for the New Orleans States-Item. He was, said Gillis recalling that evening, "a very nice person, very, very nice. They were a wonderful couple" (Gillis).
The Mannings became increasingly the subject of interviews and news articles, most of which were positive and, according to acquaintances, well deserved. However, Bristow not always feeling "likeable," would record her attitudes at such times with something like "Luckily my carefully cultivated public personality provides an answer" (J 28 May 1938).

Bristow worked with The Times-Picayune the second time until September 21, 1934 (Mundell). When she left this time, she had worked there a total of eight years (Caroliniana). In retrospect she declared that she had had "the time of her life." She had covered or been in some way connected with the paper or staff during many dramatic and historic events, such as the Huey Long assassination. In Bristow, in New Orleans for a visit, rushed over to The Times-Picayune office to watch the excitement and confusion, which she describes in a September 12, 1935, letter to her husband:

Clarke [Salmon, a fellow newsman and old New Orleans friend] said he had been getting wires from all over the country—"Will there be revolution in Louisiana can we count on you for coverage." . . . The town is simply bristling with out of town newspaper men, and in Baton Rouge they say it’s impossible to get a room. A guy from the Mirror (New York) sent back a story about "the balance of power now lies in the perfumed lap of Alice Lee Grosjean," [state auditor] which so far seems to be the prize statement of the affair. . . . Everybody was rushing about for pictures and files and telephoning his grandfather’s uncle’s nephew’s third cousin in Baton Rouge to plead for details. The wires were singing with inquiries from all over the country, and nobody knew anything. . . . Dr. Vidrine of Charity hospital was in Baton Rouge hovering over Long and he began giving out statements that the wound was not serious and where was the fire anyway.

Dr. Urban Maes went up, Dr. Jimmy Rives and a Dr. Sanderson. But Vidrine was there on the spot.

Well, Monday was such a day! The stuff that got into print was bad enough, but the stuff everybody was saying not for publication was worse. For instance, the dialogue went like this:
"I asked Captain Walker Ross: 'What's the latest news from Long?''
"He said, 'Well ma'am, he's not dead but we're hoping for the best.'"
"Says Ralph O'Leary, 'Our one hope is that Dr. Vidrine had about two hours to mess him up before the good doctors got there.'"
"Says Pete: 'I wouldn't have killed him myself because I've got to take care of my family, but I wish Dr. Weiss had told me he was going to do it, for I'd have been glad to buy him a good gun.'"

... Walking through the hotel lobby past groups of people was like walking through one single group engaged in a single conversation. And I did not hear one single person express a hope that he would live. (Bristow family papers)

It was an event of especially dramatic implications for the Mannings and their journalist friends, for as Patricia Tanner recalls, Bristow and Manning had one special attitude in common: both hated Huey Long. As she recalls the anecdote, "at the newspaper office, the joke was that when the staff received the news that Long had been shot, they started looking around for Manning, hoping he had not gone to Baton Rouge, in fear that he just might have done it" (Tanner, 25 May 1994).

All in all, the newspaper had provided a profitable career for Bristow, which in later years she would claim to miss (Muse, "Her Characters"). She and Manning had just purchased a home on Claiborne around the corner from Baptist Hospital when RKO bought The Ninth Guest for a movie in 1933 and asked Manning to go to California to write the script ("Bow to Gwen Bristow"). Thinking it only a temporary jaunt, the Mannings did not at first sell their house (Eunice Bristow). Manning's big break, however, seemed finally to have come in 1934 when his book Party Wire was published and Hollywood bought it for a motion picture, and Manning was again asked to write the script.
Bristow's prospects did not appear so promising. She would later sheepishly admit to having written two novels very early into her marriage, which even she knew were not worthy of publication. By the time they left for Hollywood, she had written two more (Gwen Bristow, n.p.), one of which she called The Meeting Place (J 1 Oct. 1974). As before, neither was accepted. Her efforts, however, along with her writing as a journalist and collaboration with Manning had provided a valuable apprenticeship before the Mannings moved to Hollywood in the summer of 1934 (Judson).
Endnotes for Chapter Two

1. As Bristow had been horrified that her former school mate was "still living in the same world that [she] was trying to get out of before [she] was twenty years old" (J, 13 Oct. 1965), so she continued to express throughout her lifetime dismay that people from Anderson and Judson colleges continued to repeat their invitations to her to return for various functions. She also repeatedly explained that she had nothing against the colleges; they were fine, but that she simply had not felt she had belonged when she was there, and she did not want to go back.

2. In Lyle Saxon’s version of Bristow’s biographical sketch, the term used is "Polish baroness." In this account, having discovered Bristow’s lineage "through some outside source," the baroness, not the baron, was horrified at her faux pas. In the second two sketches (see Endnote 3), Bristow uses the term "Central European baroness," but only the second mentions the horrified exclamation, which is attributed to the baron.

3. At least three accounts of Bristow’s life were written--the first by Lyle Saxon, Gwen Bristow, A Sketch of Her Life (originally called Gwen Bristow, As I Knew Her (J 15-16 Jan. 1938); the second, Gwen Bristow, which Bristow wrote, published 1940 or 1941 (determined by list of her novels on the cover--only DS, THR, and TSG being listed); and finally the one she discusses in her journal January 7, 13, and 17, 1970, which probably is the one some sources call Gwen Bristow: A Self-Portrait.

4. Voter registration records in the Tulane Avenue branch of the New Orleans Public Library show also that Bristow’s mother, likewise, registered to vote.

5. Patricia Tanner believes that McCurran was "too ethnic for her father’s profession." Therefore Manning took his mother’s maiden name although he may never have done so officially. Patricia Manning officially changed hers because "it was just so much easier" [to have the same last name as her father’s].

6. With a photocopy of Manning’s birth certificate in hand, I went to the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Jersey City, New Jersey. Upon my request for a copy of George Henry McCurran’s birth certificate, the document was located and shown to me, and upon further request, I was given a photocopy. It is identical to the one Bristow identifies as "Bruce Manning."

7. Bristow and Manning engaged Brandt and Brandt as their agent for their first book, The Invisible Host as shown in their first contract dated June 24, 1930 (Bristow family papers). Thus began a business relationship that also evolved into friendship. The relationship remained as long as Bristow was alive, after which time Brandt and Brandt continued to serve Louis Bristow, Jr., as agent for Bristow’s interests.

8. When Louis Bristow brought his sister to Louisiana at the time of her terminal illness, he engaged the law firm of Nicaud, Justrabo and Rousset. Jean Fleming,
outraged at the circumstances, wrote a letter to these Louisiana attorneys shortly after Bristow’s death. Fleming sent me the handwritten first draft 10 May 1993.

9. Journals. (Bristow’s journals and conversations with her friends and acquaintances reveal that she very painstakingly avoided expressing her emotions, with very rare exception. They also reflect that in the early years she almost never mentioned her family and very seldom saw them.)
CHAPTER THREE
CALIFORNIA AND AUTHORSHIP

When Manning and Bristow first moved to California, they lived briefly at 8231 Fountain Avenue, Hollywood. Having made up her mind to give up writing, Bristow began a new, exciting life as wife of a successful Universal Studios script writer. The rejections of the four earlier novels were proof enough, she decided, that she could not write well enough to be published (Self-Portrait 4). Typically, Bristow destroyed these. She would not have wanted anyone else to see them.

At first Bristow tried to keep busy playing bridge with other studio wives, but all of her efforts, along with the excitement around her, her husband’s success, and the heady glow of the movie capital were no cure for her life-long addiction to the pen. Years later, Manning would jokingly recall that she turned back to writing because, when a girl friend after a game of cards "bawled her out for trumping an ace, she figured she would have to amuse herself another way" (Heintzen). Bristow felt driven to satisfy her cacoethes scribendi, as she called her compulsion to write.

Finally, although she "felt like a hopeful idiot to be trying again" (Bristow, "Concerning Original Manuscript"), she set up a work area in her bedroom and in 1934 she began what would be her Louisiana plantation novels (DeMarr). "There was no reason for writing the novel," she said later, "except I was unhappy not writing it" (Baton Rouge Mid-City Library). It was to be set in Louisiana, a state
Bristow had grown "to love with the inexplicable, comprehensive love that we
give places or persons who are not ours by right of birth but are more intensely
ours by right of having been chosen" (Tulane).

Bristow planned a series of three novels about fictitious families who
might have lived in Louisiana in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth
centuries. She wanted her separate stories to be connected by history,
geography, and family ties—representative of the people of Louisiana, who
typically are native born and remain through generations. To achieve her
objective, she focused particularly on the Mississippi River, which serves as a
metaphor for the people of the state and their achievements. In a preface to the
1962 collection of the novels, issued as the Plantation Trilogy, she wrote of the
river:

... if you have any acquaintance at all with the Mississippi you
never call it a lazy river. You know better. That river can hurtle
past you at the rate of sixty thousand tons of water every second of
the day. It can tear up an oak tree as easily as your fingers can
snap a twig. It can crack any embankment ever built by the might
of man. Under its look of slow quietness, that river has fearful
strength.

The people who live by the river have grown to be like it. They
move gently. They speak slowly. They live in rhythm with the
river, and like the river they have a strength that shows only now
and then. But it is there.

No idle people could have done what they have done. They
have tamed one of the most dangerous watercourses on earth and
turned it into a channel of commerce instead of a constant threat
of destruction. They have built skyscrapers on land so soggy that
their ancestors were afraid to drive the lightest carriages across
it . . .

But this civilization of theirs is not quite like any other. These
people have their own way of doing things and thinking about
things. In many respects they are an admirable folk. In others, if
you don't understand them or even if you do, they are
exasperating. But, right or wrong, they are themselves" (ix).
Born and reared in the South, Bristow realized very early that she shared many of its traditions and attitudes. Even so, there was much about Southerners she could not explain, and so she began to research the people, concluding that "the personality of a people is the fruit of their history." In some respects she found that the white, non-slave owners had been worse off than the slaves, and she planned to depict the poor white's plight (Caroliniana). Upon completion of the story she had in mind, she would have written three novels, all of which take place in extremely difficult times.

**Writing Louisiana**

*Deep Summer* (1937) depicts the early settlement of Louisiana as the Larne and Sheramy families build a dynasty and create a plantation out of land that was part jungle, part swamp. Philip and Judith (Sheramy) Larne and Mark and Caleb Sheramy (Judith’s father and brother respectively) also help create the society Bristow’s research verified as typical of early Louisiana.

In *The Handsome Road* (1938), the descendants of the *Deep Summer* characters continue the saga. Bristow does not rehash the Civil War; instead, she concentrates on the events and changes in the lives of her characters as they experience the physical, emotional, and ethnic bombardment of the war era. Taking her story through crucial stages in the development of Louisiana and its people, Bristow created a narrative set from 1859 to 1885.

*This Side of Glory* (1940), continues with the descendants: Eleanor Upjohn, the great-, great-, great-granddaughter of Caleb Sheramy (brother of Judith Sheramy
Larne), and Kester Larne, the great-, great-, great-grandson of Philip Larne and Judith Sheramy Larne. With the elimination of slave labor and the ameliorated economics of poor whites, industrious people like Fred Upjohn, son of Corrie May of *The Handsome Road*, has improved life for himself and his family. Thus a new class is born, but when the old aristocracy and this new "upstart" class intermarry, problems are inevitable as people learn to adjust.

Bristow's Louisiana stories not only began her novelistic career but also established her as a popular writer of historical fiction. Her novels have even been "used as texts in a number of European universities," according to Julia Baumer, a tribute to Bristow's four to five years research for each one" (Caroliniana).

Bristow articulated her theory about the advantage of historical settings in reply to a question about her interest in Louisiana:

>'Historical' is such a colorless word, so forbidding, that it hardly hints at the excitement you can find in the beginnings of things. Not only historical beginnings, either, I have always felt that historical background is what you might call 'valuable lagniappe' to a story. By lagniappe I mean, in the Creole sense, something else thrown in for good measure.

>'You mean that you feel there is such a thing as too much history in a historical novel?' [the interviewer] ventured.

>'Not too much,' she replied, 'It is merely the way it is applied to the story. It is, after all, the people you are interested in. If you get your reader interested in the people you write of, he is interested in anything that happens to them. It isn't the period that is fascinating, but the way the period affects the people of whom you write. You have to, as an author, steep yourself in the names and dates of that period, but you mustn't neglect to soak your mind in the contemporary documents of that period, too. (Caroliniana)

When she had completed a few chapters, her old friend Jeannette Deutsch arrived in Los Angeles. Full of uncertainties, Bristow hesitantly asked Deutsch to read her script. Deutsch, who had never been to Louisiana and knew little of the state,
nonetheless knew a captivating story. Her response was not only encouraging but goading. During the remainder of Bristow's work on the novel, Deutsch pushed and scolded her into continuing. "Stop paralyzing your mind with self-doubt and get the book written," Deutsch would say. When Bristow had finally completed Deep Summer, she dedicated it to Jeannette Deutsch and with great trepidation mailed it off. It was rejected by four--Dodd Mead (undetermined date), D. Appleton-Century of New York (March 23, 1936), The Penn Publishing Company of Philadelphia (April 14, 1936), and Dodge (also undetermined date) before she sent it to Crowell publishers. J. Walker McSpadden, representing Thomas Y. Crowell Company, notified Brandt and Brandt May 26, 1936, saying,

> We are disposed to take over the book rights to Deep Summer by Gwen Bristow with the idea of making it an early spring book. It is too late for our fall list.

> However, we do not feel justified in making much of an advance on this novel, as the former work by this author is of no special value for publicity purposes; it was in another field. We would pay two hundred and fifty dollars advance on day of publication, against a royalty of ten per cent, rising to fifteen per cent after five thousand copies were sold. (Bristow family papers)

Brandt and Brandt would notify her January 15, 1937, that Crowell planned to publish Deep Summer March 30 (Bristow family papers). Bristow was so thrilled with the acceptance of her book that the delay mattered little. To celebrate, she immediately took a taxi to the Brown Derby on Vine Street for lunch. Looking around at the various celebrities, she thought ecstatically, "You are merely movie stars, but I have written a book" (Tulane). She went home to begin working feverishly on her next (Tulane).
Meanwhile, events in Baton Rouge were in progress that would bring back into Bristow's life a former colleague at The Times-Picayune, Annette Duchein. "When Annette Duchein worked for The Times-Picayune, she was a very reliable person, a very intelligent, good person, as well as a good writer," says James Gillis, who also recalls that at that time four women were employed as reporters for The Times-Picayune—Gwen Bristow, Podine Schoenberger, Annette Duchein, and Margaret Dixon, all of whom gained recognition in their individual careers and undoubtedly influenced one another (Gillis).

Duchein resigned from her job with The Times-Picayune "about 1932," and "went to South Carolina to work in public relations for a textile company, where she advanced rapidly to vice-president" (Gillis). By 1937, however, Duchein had returned to Louisiana to work for a Louisiana State University outreach program, which functioned under the auspices of the General Extension Division of the university. In her new role, she founded the Book Circle,1 in an effort to make books, especially contemporary ones, more available to the surrounding areas. Her objective, she says, was to "take the library to people" (Duchein, 20 Nov. 1992).

In those days people's ability to travel was greatly restricted, if not entirely nonexistent, and roads were bad. Library facilities were also limited, but Duchein's Book Circle worked to improve the situation. Traveling over two thousand miles a month, she distributed books and gave book reviews two to four times a day to thousands of Louisiana women ("Gwen Bristow, Annette Duchein, Novelists"). She arranged with the owners of Claitor's Bookstore (then a popular business in Baton Rouge) to borrow books for her presentations in exchange for the advertisement.
derived from her work. Traversing the state giving book reviews, Duchein afterwards provided the novels for the women to read on a basis of exchange among themselves. Duchein chose with great success books she believed appropriate for particular groups ranging from five people to as many as five or six hundred. Returning on her next visit, Duchein collected the books in exchange for the new ones. Women who paid a small fee toward additional books generally made up her audience.

Always alert for ways to improve her own work, Duchein called Bristow in March when *Deep Summer* was about to be published, inviting Bristow to travel her circuit and make talks to her audiences (Duchein, 15 Dec. 1993). It was a call that changed Bristow’s life. In making her first lecture tour through Louisiana, Bristow began a second facet of her career—that of lecturer, eventually traveling throughout the nation. She was so well received that for many years people came to know her in that capacity almost as well as they knew her as an author (Northridge).

In January 1937 Manning and Bristow had just that January settled into their home at 726 North Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills (Northridge), and Bristow was well into *The Handsome Road*. With little idea of what she was getting into, Bristow agreed to Duchein’s plan, and thus began Bristow’s frenzied promotional tours.

Apart from her writing and her lectures, Bristow sometime previously had recognized that she drank too much, and she noted in her journal entry of January 3, 1937, "I am still on the wagon and drank cokes." Regardless of her intentions, however, more and more alcohol accompanied her good times. She drank in the afternoon, writing, "we walked a long way, and came back and drank old-
fashioneds" (J 2 Feb. 1937). She drank in the evenings, noting such reasons as "Felt so well I drank too many Scotch and sodas" (J 22 Feb. 1937). At other times under stress, she drank to calm self-doubts that "The book is amateurish. . . . I got so depressed I drank some gin, a bad idea but I was really in a state. . . "(J 20 Oct. 1937). Another time she said, "Maybe what I need is a binge" (J 27 Ap. 1939). Bristow recognized this pattern of behavior as detrimental, but she did not abstain often or long. However, regardless of her pleasure in the indulgence, her writing remained her priority. The alcohol never took control as it did with several of her friends, including Deborah Clyde, Bruce Manning's long-time secretary.

Life, however, was pleasant for Bristow, and the year 1937 became one of the most exciting of her life, she believed. She was happily married and she had many friends. In addition, she had her priceless independence from her family although Manning's highly demanding job frequently left Bristow without him to share her good times as well as her bad. As a result, when Manning went to New Orleans to film Mardi Gras scenes on January 31, 1937, Bristow was alone on February 1 when she received her first six copies of *Deep Summer*, which would go on sale March 30. Following the pattern their marriage had developed whenever work required their attention, Gwen celebrated with friends, and Manning shared her joy from a distance. She was alone, too, on February 8 when her doctor informed her she needed immediate surgery. Omitting the nature of the surgery, she noted on February 11, "Practically in shreds with pain, and no sleep." By the time Manning had returned from New Orleans on February 16, however, she was sitting up, and toward the end of the month, she left the hospital (J).
On March 4 her parents arrived for a visit, remaining until March 17. Bristow noted only briefly, "To Perino's for lunch with mother and daddy" and "Daddy went to a Rotary Club luncheon. . . . Mother and I had lunch with Jeannette. . . ." However, the evening her parents left, she wrote, "Mother and daddy left tonight, so Bruce and I, after taking them to the station, had dinner at Perino's and then went to Gertrude's [a friend from the movie industry], where I celebrated a bit too merrily" (J 4-17 Mar. 1937).

Tour of Duty

March had arrived suddenly, and it was time for Bristow to keep her promise to Duchein. Leaving Los Angeles for New Orleans March 23, Bristow arrived March 26 via train, going directly to the St. Charles Hotel to prepare for her lecture tour. She saw only her family and a few friends who dropped in before Duchein arrived on March 28 to begin the promotional lectures the next day. Accompanied by Duchein's sister, Scott (Mrs. John Barton), Bristow and Duchein, in smaller towns without meeting facilities, gathered their audiences in the fire station, the Baptist Church Sunday School rooms, the courthouse, the schools, the country club, the parlor of private homes, even front porches (Duchein, 20 Dec. 1992).

Once a girl of about twelve told Duchein, "I'm going to do a paper about Gwen Bristow. Can you tell me when she was born?" Duchein responded in all apparent seriousness, "She was born in 1865." The child accepted her answer and recorded the date. In a whoop of delighted laughter, Duchein later recounted the incident to Bristow, who noted wryly that the child never paused a second to think
that for a "woman of nearly a hundred years old, I was well preserved"
("Concerning Original" 27).

In this three-week tour, Bristow gave twenty-six lectures in twenty-one
Louisiana towns besides attending all the dinners, teas, coffees, luncheons, and
autographing sessions. In celebration of the successful tour, Bristow’s friends gave
her a party, highlighted by a song someone had written for the occasion called "In
the Deep Old Summer Time." Bob Crowell’s gift to her was the ten-thousandth
copy of Deep Summer in beautifully hand-tooled green leather ("Concerning
Original" 27). Her exhausting and hectic schedule had allowed her about six hours’
sleep each night, resulting in weight loss and much weariness. Bristow, however,
had met hundreds of people and had had a grand time. In her letter to Crowell in
December 1937, her reaction to the tour focused on the university and the economic
factor:

For some reason the Louisiana State University has adopted me as
their fair-haired child. How long this is likely to last I don’t know,
but as long as it does it seems to me we ought to take advantage of it,
and the university is all set to release a publicity campaign on my new
book. This includes another lecture tour by which I understand my
last one is going to look like a little chat with a few friends—last
spring I spoke in 21 towns in nine days, which I thought was pretty
fast work, but this time it seems I’m to hit practically every hamlet
big enough to have a post office. Also a lot of other stuff is to be in
the papers, at the university itself and in women’s club programs. I
don’t know all the details of this, but anyway it sounds to me like a
big break. (Caroliniana)

As Bristow would tell Crowell in another letter April 7, 1938, she was
willing to do whatever was necessary to sell books, but she was doubtful about a
June schedule: "Aside from the fact that I’ll be reduced to a rag and a bone and a
hank of hair, did you ever tackle a summer in the Deep South?"
Bristow had not only provided her audiences with a live cultural outing, but she had also reached many potential readers. It was a lesson she never forgot. Apart from the physical toll the tours exacted, she continued her lectures throughout much of her writing career because, as she frequently noted in her journal, the lectures "sold books." Upon publication of *The Handsome Road* in 1938, Bristow would repeat the exhausting tour, this time covering thirty-six towns in fourteen days. She found the tour grueling but so stimulating and enjoyable that when her third novel was published, she would make another lecture tour in the Middle West.

Sales of *Deep Summer*, modest in comparison to subsequent novels, increased steadily, a trend due to enthusiastic advance sales and direct company promotions. In his advance campaign, Crowell, who had sent out about one hundred copies to bookstores across the United States, asked each recipient to give the novel a try. Response was both quick and positive. Also helpful was Bristow's lectures to promote the novel.

Bristow returned via the *Sunset Limited* to California on April 29, and Annette Duchein, whom the Mannings called on July 31, 1937, with an invitation to visit them would arrive August 6. It would be a working visit, planning for the next series of lectures, but it would be also a time when Bristow could express her gratitude for the exposure the Louisiana lecture tour had given her work, and the Mannings tried to make Duchein enjoy her visit.

During the visit, Duchein recalls, Bristow showed her the next Louisiana plantation story (J). Duchein remembers telling her, "Gwen, this is not going to do. You're going to have to get it down some kind of way. You can't publish anything
this–this inclusive. You’ve got to divide it" (Duchein). Although Bristow mentions no help from Duchein such as Jeannette Deutsch had given, some of the harshest criticism of The Handsome Road focused upon an overly broad scope and inadequate character development.

In this regard Bristow seemed in agreement, for she frequently lamented, "Writing is such awful, painful work" (J 11 Jan. 1937) or "This is such a lot for so little writing--weeks of preparation for a chapter that will be read in twenty minutes--but the easier anything is to read the harder it has been to write" (J 13 May 1937). Even when she believed her story was on paper, she was anxious: "I feel jubilant, although I know there are probably agonies of revision ahead" (J 29 Sept. 1937).

Extreme Self-Discipline

In May 1937, upon the completion of their swimming pool, Bristow thought "the final attainment of my heart’s desire--is going to make it very hard for me to do any work this summer" (J 11 May 1937). Being "hard," however, did not mean "impossible" because Bristow was a person of careful, faithful--if not rigid--habits. She was not slothful nor was she a quitter. Along with her writing, Bristow maintained careful records of everything in the form of journals--from information for tax purposes to her personal statistics to everyone’s social security numbers and dates of significance to her--in brief, what she did each day, a near regimen of reading, writing, research, note taking, social correspondence, and exercising. In her journals she complained about the weather, her bouts with "the curse" [her menstrual cycle], each time she felt ill, what was wrong (with a few exceptions),

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
each time she went out to eat (usually twice daily when she did not have a cook)—in fact, anything but her personal emotions, which she rarely mentioned.

Her journals also reveal, with frustration and with triumph, that she worked very determinedly. Frequently, she laments feeling "lethargic" or "indolent," because she was either ill or had stayed up working too late or had drunk too much, but she typically ends on a note of optimism.

Her pattern of self-discipline also affected the way she took care of her body. Adhering to a careful regimen of exercise for physical maintenance and well being, usually an hour daily, she walked three miles, swam, played "medicine" ball, followed a particular exercise workout, or rode her bicycle to maintain her weight, stamina, and flexibility. Standing 5 feet, 4 inches tall (in later years 3 and 1/2), she maintained her weight at about 110. Even as she aged, she carefully maintained her appropriate weight and grooming. In 1940, as she continued to do periodically, she noted in her journal her specific measurements, as well as her weight, which by then was temporarily at 127.

Sources disagree about her looks, some reporting her eyes as blue and others, as hazel-green; her hair, blonde, dark blonde, brown, even a "lively redhead." However, her legal documents state that she had brown hair and green-hazel eyes, and those who knew her concur.² An attractive woman, Bristow throughout her life was extremely conscious of her appearance and well being, even having minor plastic surgery on her ears in 1937 so that they fit more closely to her head, a wen removed from her face (J 8 Jan. 1937), and her lashes and eyebrows regularly dyed. Furthermore, a manicure and a hairdo were weekly necessities,
"always good for [her] fainting spirits" (J 27 Oct. 1937). She likewise made regular visits to her doctors to safeguard her general health, as well as the care of her teeth and eyes.

The sad irony is that the very thing Bristow pursued so avidly to maintain her health and youthful shape may have been what brought about her death, says Jean Fleming, Bristow’s friend from 1958 until Bristow’s death. Fleming believes that Bristow’s terminal lung cancer was caused, not by the cigarettes she had earlier given up, but by heavy pollution since Bristow routinely walked to keep her hair appointment with Luie, or she walked that same route on her frequent exercise jaunts, a distance of about three miles. It was near Ventura Boulevard, one of the most polluted areas of Los Angeles (Fleming, 16 Nov. 1993). Bristow, later aware of her danger, would note in her October 23, 1967, journal entry:

The smog has been thick and dreadful of late. It has given me a chronic cough. I wish I could get away from it, but I don’t know where to go, and I hate to think of moving anyway. After living in Los Angeles thirty years, I have most of my friends here, and my interests.

In addition, an extremely clothes-conscious Bristow chose her outfits with great care, often recording in her journals what she bought or wore and noting that her appearance garnered praise from her associates. Just as frequently her journal records her own words of appreciation for the way she believed she looked. Always on the alert for interesting clothes, Bristow also noted, appreciatively, details of what other women wore.

For the time being, however, a waning 1937 found Bristow comfortably "at home" in her new state of California and well launched in her chosen career as
novelist. Her husband had a promising future in the movie industry, and she and Manning had made many friends. With her novel Deep Summer doing remarkably well, Bristow, who in later years would reconsider Deep Summer with chagrin upon discovering that she thought her writing in the novel was "amateurish and uneven and bad," for the time being was delighted with life and its possibilities.

Bristow’s First Novel
Deep Summer gave Bristow some of her greatest thrills, and the story of its publication provided Bristow with an interesting anecdote for interviews along with an incident drawing her and her publisher into a unique publisher-author relationship.

In the 1930’s, says Robert (Bob) Crowell (manager of Bristow’s account with the company), the Thomas Crowell Company did not cater particularly to fiction. Crowell, Sr., (father of Robert Crowell, who managed relations with Gwen Bristow) was a cautious man in the habit of making small offers on prospective manuscripts, "half wondering whether they would be accepted," when he proposed to Bristow a $250 advance against royalties, which even in those days was minuscule. Lo and behold it was accepted, and we became the publishers of a fine writer of historical fiction.

Gwen never ceased to tease me about that advance. She kept saying with a wicked smile, "He was the last of the big spenders." (Crowell, 3 June 1993)

Despite the humor of the situation, it was the beginning of mutual friendship and trust, in both their business and personal lives.

Thus, Deep Summer was published. It is set in tropical Louisiana on the fictitious Dalroy Bluff, "four days' journey above New Orleans" (19). Mark
Sheramy, together with his family—his wife, son Caleb, and daughter Judith—have floated down the Mississippi River on a flatboat toward their new home in West Florida in Louisiana. Puritans in their quiet garb and sober demeanor, they pose quite a contrast with the debonair young Philip Larne in his satin coat, silk stockings, and silver buckles. Both Sheramy and Philip Larne, each in possession of a three-thousand-acre land grant from the King for services rendered during the French and Indian War, are on their way to claim their property.

Sheramy, following his Puritan ideals, judges Philip Larne as "godless, improvident, untrustworthy" (21). As the younger son by law disinherited, Philip, angry and forever in trouble with his older brother, had finally gone off to fight the French in the French and Indian War. Later, when he still could not stay out of trouble, he had resorted to going to sea, where he "earned" a share of the slaves and other booty taken from pirates on the high seas. Determined to be a planter, he is, upon meeting the Sheramy family, on his way with his ill-gotten possessions to claim his acreage. During the last days of their journey, Philip and Judith manage to have several conversations and fall in love.

Eloping with Judith the night they arrive at their destination, Philip takes her to a cabin of "only four walls with a door and a couple of holes for windows" (33) thrown together by his slaves. As the slaves work to clear the land for planting the first crop and to cut timber to build their home, the roaring fire needed for cooking adds to Judith's misery as the "sun poke[s] fingers of hot light through the chinks between the logs and through the windows" (32). In the six weeks since she has been in Louisiana, the sky has "been like a cup of brass turned down over the forest
that Philip proudly called 'the plantation'" (32). Pregnant, Judith thinks, "If I start fainting in June, I will probably die in August" (32).

Judith, however, endures the early hardships, the unrelenting sun, and homesickness to become the mother of three children and the mistress of a plantation with all its responsibilities and complexities. She also endures two major events that alter history, both their personal saga and that of the Southern culture: Philip's affair with Angélique, Judith's maid, and the trouble brought by Judith's naive brother Caleb, whose actions, which are the fruit of naivete, change the course of history.

Caleb goes off to New Orleans to buy slaves, sees a lovely girl with "black hair piled high over a comb," a mouth that was "warm and red like a strawberry" and a "complexion as flawless as a baby's" (87). Too smitten to act reasonably, Caleb brings Dolores home as a his bride. After some time, all her efforts to hide her past avail nothing to halt an exuberant visitor's greeting of his former tavern acquaintance. Fortified with only her pride and a few items she has stolen from the Larnes, Dolores slips away. The result is her ultimate journey to the wharfs and Rattletrap Square, while Puritanically rigid Caleb keeps their child. Becoming the common-law wife of Gideon Upjohn, Dolores embarks on a life with hardships so severe that she--and others like her--are old at thirty-five. They and their children create the "poor white trash" dynasty of Rattletrap Square, while her son by Caleb, along with Judith and Philip's children, helps create the aristocratic plantation class.

When Deep Summer appeared, the Cincinnati Times-Star noted "Miss Bristow's rare understanding of people" (Caroliniana). Another critic identified only as H. E. A., writing for the April 3, 1937, Albany, New York, News praises the
book as "a story of rare perception and panoramic sweep, the latter by implication, because only the immediate details . . . are emphasized." The May 11 Duluth, Minnesota, Herald calls it a "conscientious piece of writing." Albert Goldstein, commenting in the April 4, 1937, of The Times-Picayune, notes that "As 'Southern' literature, it is fresh, original material, important in its implications." Says another unidentified reviewer, "If it takes a story of the South by an unknown writer to create the sensation of Anthony Adverse and Gone with the Wind, then there is already a candidate" (Northridge).

In addition to the more general praise, the Durham, North Carolina, Herald on April 4, 1937, focused on its enchanting beauty and lyricism. "The river was silky in the late sun. On shore the light pierced the live-oaks with golden spikes, and the wind in the long gray moss made a soft undertone to the shouts of the boatmen. While the men tied up the flatboat Judith leaned over the side washing some 'kerchiefs and a pair of her father's nankeen breeches. It was hard to get clothes clean in the river. No matter how hard one scrubbed they had a yellowish tinge when they got dry.

Bristow's idea for Deep Summer and her two subsequent novels set in Louisiana grew out of a typical news assignment. Reporting on the funeral of a very prominent New Orleanian, Bristow marveled that a woman of such obvious wealth and social prominence had been unable to sign her name to certain legal documents. Later research led Bristow to discover, as Ann Firor Scott points out in The Southern Lady, that although "the institution [of slavery] sometimes created "bonds of friendship and mutual dependency across the color bar" (47-48), "... more often it meant for women the burden of total care of a totally dependent people" (163), "a burden of work and responsibility [which] was simply staggering"
This woman whose funeral Bristow attended was typical of such an era, when many of its women had had no chance for any sort of schooling (DS xi).

Bristow knew of these and other common complaints about the institution of slavery, but the history of this woman led Bristow to contemplate another aspect of the issue—the fact that, having come from this class, the deceased woman had found no opportunity for learning even how to sign her own name (Northridge). From Bristow's reveries sprang the desire to tell the story of the poverty-stricken poor whites or the "poor white trash," who, "no matter how free you may be called, you can't earn much when you have to work in competition with slave labor" (DS ix).

Bristow, turning her attention from typical myths of the South, endeavored to "present both the beauties and the defects of the South in the most important period in its history" (Caroliniana). To accomplish her objective, she spent hundreds of hours pouring over microfilm in libraries throughout the nation. In her mind,

Newspapers emphasize what people think is important. They reveal more than any history book. . . . Reading the film of pages stained and yellow with age, though difficult, [is] like reading the fictional story of a people's loves, hates and conflicts. (Northridge)

Among her acquaintances her research habits became so legendary that her friend Irving Stone once asked her whether she had finished researching and finally got down to work (Northridge). The teasing altered Bristow's thinking little, however, for she felt her "slow careful way of writing" (J 30 Nov. 1963) was required to achieve just the right historical ambiance to effect a sharing of that history for its didactic values, as well as her passion for writing. To accomplish her objective, romantic fiction couched in history was simply the best medium.
Revealing a Multifaceted South

Bristow would have agreed that there are many elements of the Southern myth in her writing besides nostalgia for the past. For example, Philip Larne’s personal story is typical of the romance of the Old South—the disillusioned, rebellious, and disinherited younger son setting out to seek his fortune; the scar from a duel; and his courting of Judith with his dreams of a grand manor and a great dynasty. Another basis for myth in Bristow’s story is that Judith’s father Mark Sheramy and her husband Philip Larne do not purchase their land, but begin with a land grant from the king, an acquisition different and yet in novelty not unlike Gerald O’Hara’s land as a prize taken in a poker game in Gone with the Wind. Philip’s dream typically has

a double line of oaks leading to the door . . . vast and spreading like these in the forest, with long draperies of moss brushing our shoulders as we ride underneath. You’ll be a great lady, Judith. We’ll found a dynasty, you and I, and a hundred years from now the rulers of Ardeith will be proud to remember us, first of the house, who came down the river together. (19)

However, to Bristow, these "mythical" similarities exist because these people might have existed. The public events recounted here did happen, the private events could have happened. Events like these did take place in the lives of millions of people.

All this is over now. But what we have today is the result of it. What people did is always important if we want to understand what they do. (DS xii)

"Just to find out how southern people came to be southern people was a question that fascinated me," Bristow said, in a 1937 interview with Freddie Kolstad, of her motive behind Deep Summer. She continued,

Then when I found out that most of the settlers came from New England after the French and Indian wars, that tickled me because
those staid people of Puritan ancestors were the ones who came to be the southern ladies and gentlemen of the typical old South... The transition of a typical New England character, Judith Sheramy, into a typical southern type, Mrs. Philip Larne, is the theme of Deep Summer which traces the founding of the Larne dynasty from the middle of the 18th century to about 1810. (Northridge)

Thus Bristow, very much aware of the critical bent, appeared very much aware of (if not encumbered by) the negative reception to her work, as when she wrote for The Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association in June 1938,

> When we observe that "Little Women" was briefly dismissed as "a lively story for the young;" that "A Tale of Two Cities" was called "tawdry," and that two of the leading American literary journals did not think "Uncle Tom's Cabin" of sufficient importance to review it at all, it makes us modern readers feel more at ease in confessing that sometimes we are confused in our judgment of the new books. (Caroliniana)

Although it is true that Bristow's fiction has a strong appeal to the younger reader, along with that appeal comes entertainment that instructs. Furthermore, the young reader encounters well-rounded characters, both men and women, who appreciate one another and their roles in society while they accept their challenges in a realistic, creative, and self-respecting manner. On the other hand, a more thoughtful, older reader finds in Bristow's writing much to challenge one's critical yen, as well. According to Thomas Johnson of the University of South Carolina, Bristow also appeals greatly to the older student, presenting especially fascinating studies in the patriotic propaganda relative to World War II in Tomorrow Is Forever. Bristow, then, deals directly with history and people in realistic roles, as opposed to the more contemporary themes on social relationships between individuals and within families, manners and morals, or feelings of alienation and isolation.
As Thomas Johnson of South Carolina University has said, Bristow does not write with Faulkner's versatility and depth of characters. Her protagonists are unlike Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda who seeks self-definition by groping through the maze of ancestral mythology, trying to figure out "how so much suffering and confusion could have been built up and maintained" (14) in order to come to terms with the present. On the other hand, Bristow is like Porter in that she does set her stories within the confines of history to trace family lineage and depict human and social behavior. Bristow's attitude was, "What better way is there to learn than through literature so fascinating that it compels the reader forward while he also learns his history!" (Northridge).

Despite Bristow's commitment to historical accuracy, she incurred negative criticism on two points by seemingly violating her own precepts. The criticism was, first, that her "interests are too divided" to develop her characters in adequate depth, and second, religion is treated too superficially (Northridge). If such criticism is justified, the cause may be rooted in what Margaret Wallace in the April 4, 1937, New York Times Book Review calls Bristow's "careful job of literary carpentry to get everything in." The second criticism, termed "one glaring omission," undermined character development and credibility, noted the unidentified reviewer, who continued,

Religion played, not a picturesque, but a primary role in the lives of the Puritans of that period. Their moral principles were far more than prejudices, their religion was a philosophy of life. (Northridge)

In disregarding the religious elements, he wrote, Bristow had neglected an important aspect of the historical milieu.
Religious Avoidance

In her personal life, Bristow likewise circumvented the matter of religion. However, perhaps she omitted religion in her narratives simply because she did not feel or recognize the need of it to get her story told. Another possibility may also reflect Bristow's own attitude about her personal life. She may have found dealing with religion to be personally uncomfortable, and so she ignored it.

At the same time, her journals attest that although she did not forget her religious training nor cease to believe, she did throw off the restraints of her religious upbringing. She made no public demonstration of religious belief, noting in her journals only three or four times after leaving her parents' home that she ever attended church, and according to Jean Fleming, "Gwen and Bruce were not church-going people" (Fleming 17 July 1993). Furthermore, in general, Bristow relegated religious teachings to an occasional literary reference, and so it is perhaps not surprising that she seems to treat religion inadequately in her novels.

For example, in Deep Summer when Philip brings Judith home to their new house, Bristow makes one of her rare references to anything spiritual when Judith

snatched her baby out of the nurse's arms and ran to the master bedroom and dropped on her knees by the bed. . . . "Please, God, help me to be good. Make me good enough to deserve everything--the big kitchen and slave-bells and glass in the windows. Make David a good boy and kind to poor people who haven't got a palace like this to live in" (67).

Later, there is a slave uprising instigated and led by Benny, Philip's son by his slave Angelique. As Benny rides toward her,

Judith raised her gun. Her hand was quite steady. She took aim and fired.
He reeled back for an instant, recovered and struck at his horse. Judith fired again. He fell to the ground. "Look out, ole miss!" somebody cried behind her, but she was hardly aware of danger. She forced her horse into the seething black mob, catching the bridle in the bend of her elbow as she reloaded her gun, and as she passed the spot where Benny lay huddled she leaned over and fired into his body again. (319)

One reviewer for the April 17, 1937, Philadelphia Record, wrote of this incident:

This splendid woman, who had been so courageous, so forgiving, at the very end of her life commits a crime. She’s done everything in the world to straighten up everything, to readjust her scheme of living. Then . . . she walks into the thing she hates, the son of her husband’s old mistress. She catches him in the spot where he’s wrong. Bang! Society applauds her, but her life is ruined. She’s a New England Puritan, or any kind of puritan you like; she knows what she’s done. She’s a murderess, and a murderess from the lowest of low motives, namely, possessiveness and sexual jealousy. (Northridge)

Judith, however, hardly portrays a woman with a weight on her conscience as she meditates over her past and future. Rather, except for a knee lame from the night of the slave rebellion, she is well and anticipates many years "free alike of ecstasy and pain. . . . Judith smile[s] in her quiet triumph, marveling that not until she gave up the keys had she understood that in doing so she had paid the cost of peace" (329).

In another instance, Bristow dismisses religion as "a confusion of languages and forms" (167), as she depicts a scene where Philip has taken his family to attend the new Spanish governor’s inauguration:

It had been a picturesque ceremony under an array of flags, though half the spectators did not understand enough Spanish to know what was being said. Judith had attempted at first to have her children taught what she referred to as all three of their native languages, but she had given up, owning that it was hard enough to learn good English in a place like this. They had picked up Creole French, and David had sufficient Spanish to read the regulations posted on the
church doors. Of what went on inside the churches they knew very little. Religion had become such a confusion of languages and forms that they found it easier to let it alone. (167)

Bristow lets the narrative demonstrate the effects of an absence of spiritual nurturing on pioneers' lives by portraying how, through the years but without great success,

Judith had tried to make them pious. She taught them to pray "Jesus, make me gentle, meek and mild like thee," which they dutifully recited and as dutifully forgot, knowing as well as she did that these were not the virtues required for subduing the raw majesty of Louisiana. (199)

Thus, Bristow does not so much ignore matters of religion as she resists the urge to use religion to "fix" or "explain" to her readers.

Bristow in Impressive Company

During the period when Gwen Bristow was writing, she was in the company of such talented contemporaries as Margaret Mitchell, Daphne de Maurier, Margorie Kinnan Rawlings, and Rachel Field. For example, Bristow's Deep Summer was on the June national best-seller list with Mitchell's Gone with the Wind, Somerset Maugham's Theater, Walter D. Edmonds' Drums Along the MoHawk, Virginia Woolf's The Years, Caroline Gordon's None Shall Look Back, Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, and Lloyd C. Douglas's White Banners (Northridge). The Handsome Road, shortly after its release, was eighth on Publishers' Weekly national best-seller list just behind A. J. Cronin's The Citadel, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' The Yearling, Kenneth Roberts' Northwest Passage, and Phyllis Bottome's The Mortal Storm (Northridge).
As her fame grew, Bristow enjoyed the limelight, noting, "[W]e . . . went to
the Colonial, where we are beginning to be greeted as honored patrons" (J. 7 July
1937). Already quite active socially, Bristow’s rising celebrity status, coupled with
Manning’s popularity as a director and producer, served to enrich further their
acquaintances and activities. Nonetheless, they lived relatively simply but with great
physical accommodation. Outings for meals altered with the status of the cook, but
the Mannings’ social life usually centered around having dinner with friends at their
favorite restaurants or entertaining in one another’s homes, watching football games,
drinking, and spending the evenings in worthwhile conversation. Bristow relished
her literary affiliations, walking, swimming, crocheting, and playing word games.
She also enjoyed her cats. Manning delighted in gambling, especially in going to
Las Vegas. Both enjoyed their individual careers and being with each other.

Also significant in their social life was their enjoyment of the theater and
sharing books and movies with their friends. Both had many friends, some of whom
they enjoyed mutually, but they were equally content not to be a part of something
the other was doing. Whenever possible, Bristow had friends in to swim with her,
lunch, and chat. As time lengthened with the Mannings’ secretaries—particularly
Deborah Clyde (and many years later, Colette Burns Kolsbun), they often
accompanied Bristow (or Manning) on outings.

Among the many friends and acquaintances acquired through the Mannings’
professional and literary affiliations were Joe Pasternak, director and producer of
MGM Studios, who was Manning’s "very best friend (Tanner); Ray Bradbury,
science fiction writer; Irving Stone, biographer; and Pauline and Leo Townscend,
script writers. Through the years Bristow also came to be active in several literary organizations, such as the International PEN Club, Western Writers of America, the California Historical Society, the Los Angeles Library Association, the Screen Writers' Guild, the Pen and Brush Club, and the Authors Guild, Inc. (J).

The Mannings added to their busy lives by frequently having house guests, and both Manning and Bristow seemed to enjoy them. For example, in May 1937 their friends Hart Bynum from Plaquemine, Louisiana (J 2 May 1937), and Tommy Langan from New York (J 13 June 1937) arrived in May and June respectively to stay with them until they could find suitable apartments. Lively medicine ball games, lengthy swimming sessions, and conversations filled their days whenever they were not busy at their respective careers, which always took priority.

May was an especially busy month for Bristow. Hard at work on her second book, she resolved to work some every day, "swimming pool or no" (J 12 May 1937), for swimming was almost a passion with her. She was also studying the Civil War because "[b]revity is far easier to attain if one knows exactly what one wants to say and then makes every sentence count" (J 12 May 1937). Additionally, she had just reached Volume 28 of Harper's (the December 1863-May 1864 issue), along with struggling to complete the Civil War in order to write the chapter she had in mind when she received word that the Herald-Tribune had put Deep Summer among the national best-sellers. She commented, "[A]m I thrilled! So thrilled that I'm even plowing through the Civil War records without being half as bored as I was" (J 17 May 1938).
The Civil War, however, was not finished with Bristow. Daily she read, struggling to learn the last detail so that every bit of data, as well as every nuance in her story, would have exactly the right tone. She recorded her frustration:

After the chapter ending with the execution of Budge I want to get through Ann's experiences in the war in one chapter, but you've got to know everything in order to choose what to leave out, and I'm fed up with it. The facts of battles and campaigns are bad enough, but wading through these quagmires of vituperation is awful. Nothing is more boresome than exaggerated emotional flares after the reason for them is gone. One thing I'm sure of--after I get this damn book written I'll never read or write anymore about the Civil War: I almost wish I hadn't started it, but it's impossible to take a story through nineteenth-century America and not take it through the war. But oh dear, I'm so tired of it! (J 21 May 1937)

And, indeed, her May 26, 1937, journal entry implies clear justification, for she records that she had

been through 31 volumes of Harper's Magazine, 1850-1865, turning every page and reading everything that seemed of the faintest value, and this in addition to the months of other research I have done. And all this Civil War stuff for a chapter of about 20 pages.

Bristow had had a busy, socially active summer, along with working on her second novel. It had been an exciting time for her, too, because in spite of publication of Deep Summer so recently in the year, it appeared on the New York Herald-Tribune national best-seller list two weeks in May, and on the list by Publishers' Weekly as a candidate for the best-seller list May 20 (J 17, 26 May 1937). Bernice Baumgarten of Brandt and Brandt wrote to say that Deep Summer had been sold to the McClure Newspaper Syndicate, making three times the book had sold (J 10 June 1937). This meant that Crowell's had published and sold it and that, as Bristow's agent working with Crowell to make the most of her novel, Brandt and Brandt had sold the book as a paperback and had sold serial rights, all of
which paid Bristow royalties—adding to her "days of glory," as Manning and her friends teasingly labeled them. Later that month, *Deep Summer* continued on the best-seller list and on the "What America Is Reading" list, moving up one notch.

Along with hard work, frustration, and a generally busy agenda, Bristow had a healthy sense of humor and mischief. On the morning of June 5, 1937, she retrieved her best news-reporter-cajoling manner and approached a lady on the pretense of renting an apartment. Her real mission was to occupy the woman so that a friend could elope with the woman's daughter. "And I did it well—I haven't lost my reporter's cunning for making anybody in the world like me," she wrote; "I turned on enough charm to sink a battleship, and kept her out a long time so as to let them get good and gone" (J 5 June 1937).

**At Work and Play**

She had worked on Chapter 9 of *The Handsome Road*, collecting "a pile of manuscript nearly two inches thick consisting of discarded scenes written for this chapter. It has kept me writing for months. Now I believe the rest of the story will be easier" (J 19 June 1937). Still, when July 12 arrived, she again lamented that the Reconstruction Period of her book continued to be "a heavy job." The seemingly endless, uncompromising ferreting out of every shred of retrievable history was an arduous task. In fact, she grew so tired that on January 20, 1938, she wrote in her journal, "The third book--the one that was to follow *The Handsome Road* is worrying me. I am not sure I want to write it. It somehow doesn't seem half as important as the first."
To remarks that she "worked too hard on getting these thousands of little
details right," Bristow explained her philosophy about such efforts in her journal
entry of July 28, 1937, by saying,

I don't think so. It makes the difference in a good competent book
and a sloppy one, and I believe the reader recognizes the difference
even if he isn't well-informed enough to spot mistakes. Besides,
there's a nice feeling of integrity about doing the job the best you can.

Meanwhile, although Hart Bynum and Tommy Langan were still with them,
Bristow was getting her work done, along with her daily swimming and other social
outings. Her August 4 journal entry notes,

Bruce came in early, bringing champagne and caviar in honor of
my being a best-seller. . . . A wire this morning from my brother
saying he and Bobby have a daughter . . . Ann Gwen. I wired Bobby
a basket of fruit and flowers. (No, that happened yesterday. I must
be going nuts.)

Although on occasion there were through the years problems with their
landlords or some obnoxious renter, Bristow recorded none with their guests.

Typically, through the progression of years, Bristow's journals reveal more and
more clearly that Bristow recorded her "problems" and her attitudes selectively.

Her journals imply her concerns with keeping personal problems and attitudes from
public scrutiny. For example, on September 22, 1954, she wrote,

What fun I have been having today. Several days ago I received a
note from daddy saying he had come across a lot of my old
notebooks, and he was sending them to me because he didn't want to
throw them away if I set any value on them. The box came yesterday
afternoon. The notebooks proved to be a lot of stories I had written
as a child--the oldest one when I was eleven year old--and also a diary
that I kept, beginning at fourteen, in a series of fat composition
books. I haven't done much today but read them. I have laughed,
sometimes I have nearly cried, but most often I have shriveled with
shocked embarrassment. It's appalling to discover what a silly,
posing little fool I was. Also, I am horrified at the candor with which I set down my opinions of people, including those I didn’t like. My impulse now is stuff all the notebooks into the incinerator; but somehow my curiosity won’t let me do this until I have finished reading them.

Recording much about her writing and activities, Bristow only once or twice notes a feeling of irritation with Manning; and about her family, she mentions almost nothing other than an anguished record of her sister Caroline’s tormented life. However, Bristow routinely recorded her and Manning’s health problems and concerns, those of her friends, and problems about or of her friends.

There were no improprieties. Neither did she behave in a way to arouse suspicion, for Patricia Manning Tanner says, "Bristow would never have had an affair" (Interview). If she had, she would never have mentioned it. There is no reason, however, to suppose she did, and the closest she ever came to hinting of an impropriety is the entry of August 29, 1937:

Bruce tumbled into bed as soon as he got home, so Hart and I sat around and had a few drinks and got very clubby. (Tommy had gone out with Jack Sullivan), then we had steaks at Eaton’s.

Whatever the case, Bristow was no prude, but she did not generally appreciate the treatment of sex and various neuroses in what she read and saw, as she explains when she enjoyed The French Line, starring Jane Russell:

The theater [was] packed; partly, no doubt, because the Catholic Church has condemned this show as indecent, but also because it’s really a grand rollicking piece of entertainment. And not indecent at all. I’m glad I’m not that prudish. (J 27 Feb. 1954)

When she saw a screen version of Tennessee Williams’ Streetcar Named Desire, however, she commented, "... magnificent sets and performances, but sex-among-the-crackpots is not my idea of entertainment. I guess Tennessee Williams is just
not my dish" (J 19 Ap. 1952). Furthermore, although she regularly read Playboy and even once contributed a brief response to one of its articles, (Bristow, "Paying the Muse"), she thought Jacqueline Susann's Valley of the Dolls was interesting but just plain dirty. I really cannot understand why some people think realism must include four-letter words and general obscenities. I have heard all those expressions but I don't think they are amusing. (J 21 June 1966)

Likewise, she "found Shirley Ann Grau's new book The House on Coliseum Street dull. She writes well, but it is hard to be sympathetic with her self-centered neurotic heroine" (J 10 Aug. 1961). Grau, who in 1955 had married into the Feibleman family (J 5 Aug. 1955), long-time friends and acquaintances of Manning and Bristow's, was, therefore, of special interest to Bristow. On the other hand, Bristow's comment about the Biography of Sarah Bernhardt was, "What a complex, admirable, silly creature, and how well Carnelia Otis Skinner describes her" (J 13 Ap. 1967).

Amid all of her reading and busy social activities, however, Bristow's attention was seldom far or long from her writing. She finally completed The Handsome Road on Wednesday, September 29, 1937, and she recorded in her journal, "I feel jubilant, although I know there are probably agonies of revision ahead. But right now I have finished." She would set it aside for a while before reading it for revisions.

Meanwhile Crowell sent word through his western representative that if Bristow could have The Handsome Road ready by the end of the year, perhaps he could bring it out in the spring (J 4 Oct. 1937). In late October, however, Bernice Baumgarten wrote, saying that Deep Summer was still selling so well that Crowell...
might not want to bring out *The Handsome Road* until the next fall because he thought that a new book might stop the sale of the first (J 25 Oct. 1937).

Finally Bristow was at a point where she felt really free to take a respite from her new book, so somewhat whiling away the time in this interim, one evening when Manning had retired early, Bristow read *Deep Summer* again. Her "days of glory" shattered as she read, and she recorded her distress:

> My reaction was terrible. The book is amateurish and uneven and bad. I got so depressed I drank some gin, a bad idea but I was really in a state, afraid to read *The Handsome Road* for fear it would be no better. (J 20 Oct. 1937)

Partly from her distress over *Deep Summer* and somewhat because of her difficulty with her new book, Bristow neglected her journal for almost two weeks. Furthermore, in late November 1937, the Mannings decided to redecorate their home and install new furniture throughout. Manning saw it as a good time for Bristow to spend Christmas in New Orleans and stay for the Sugar Bowl game (J 26 Nov. 1937). Meanwhile, her routine was further disturbed by their moving into the Beverly Hills Hotel on Sunday, November 28, where they would live while their house was being renovated. It was not in Bristow's nature, however, to contemplate long that which she could not alter, so she set her problems aside and tackled her editing task. Helping to improve her spirits further was the news from Brandt and Brandt that the Danish publishing firm of Berlingske Tidende of Copenhagen had purchased rights to *Deep Summer*. It was her second foreign contract (J 8 Nov. 1937), the British having been first (Bristow, letter, 13 Ap. 1937).
Louisiana Bound

By early December, although not entirely finished (J 3 Dec. 1937), Bristow nonetheless felt free enough to set out on December 5, taking along a copy of La Tragédie d’un Peuple to translate in spare moments (J 6 Dec. 1937). Although unplanned initially, it would be a protracted visit to Louisiana—upon Manning’s suggestion. He and several co-workers, he said, had been ordered "locked in the Beverly Hills hotel" until they finished the Darrieux picture [Manning’s current movie] (J 9 Jan. 1938). He recommended that she extend her stay since there was little reason for returning to California simply to stay in another hotel. Another reflection of the numerous reasons many people liked Bruce Manning is his letter to her in New Orleans, saying,

Gwen Darling--

Let me start out by telling you I love you more than anything else in the world. Miss you more than you know even if I am going nuts here and putting in no less than fourteen hours a day, Sundays included.

I got a big thrill out of taking you to the plane and of course a bigger thrill out of what you told me from Shreveport. Isn’t that magnificent and isn’t it great that it’s happening in New Orleans. That’s the perfect setting for it; the perfect audience is there and you as you keep adding sensation on sensation keep them up and cheering from scene to scene. What a gal!

I’m sorry I am here but I’m glad I’m not there, in a way. Your part is a star part and it’s an old rule that the supporting player does better off than on when the star has her big scene. It’s a subtle way to steal a scene. Were I there I’d be underfoot; here, people [there] say: Isn’t it too bad Bruce isn’t here. Whereas if I were they’d say, "What the hell is he doing hanging around?"

What a nice life we’ve had. And how lucky we have been. Nothing like this had ever occurred to me even in my most hopeful dreams. You are growing so big, and while you Bristows mature late, your maturity is something that adds more and more to the swell you were back when a dollar on a Sunday was the biggest thing of the week.

I’m sure you are the reason I like New Orleans so well. Every street of it, as I see it in my mind, is a superimposed you coming up the block, your head held down and your books under your arm.
I love you so much. No one knows what a funny kid you are but me and no one can suspect the fun you're having but me. It's swell. . . . (Dec. 1937).

Signed "Forever, Bruce," it is perhaps the one existing letter Manning wrote to his wife, other than one or two business letters giving financial information. Full of love and pride, along with a few chatty details about his activities in her absence, it reveals the charm and generosity of spirit that enabled him not only to endorse but also to encourage his wife's independence. It reflects the same enlightened, balanced psyche that led him to comment,

I have always felt that women have the same right as their husbands to capitalize on their talents. Gwen seems to be able to manage a home, cook a meal or write a book with an absolute minimum of flurry or fuss. Perhaps that explains why I am one of her most enthusiastic fans. (Northridge)

His comment about her managing a home and cooking is either to be very loosely construed or he fabricates for the sake of appearance. Bristow did not cook. She rarely made the sandwiches they sometimes ate, instead, having her various secretaries make them or heat soup and even occasionally cook. As Patricia Tanner says,

I never remember her being in the kitchen; I cannot remember seeing her standing in any kitchen. She did not even make sandwiches. They even lived in the Belle Aire Hotel [sic] because she liked the convenience. She could wake up, call down for breakfast, and before long it appeared, and then the dishes could be sent away—no inconvenience. (Interview 25 May 1994)

Bristow's "managing" the house consisted of hiring maids and helping familiarize them with her preferences. Assessing her own culinary skills with "I simply cannot cook, I cannot" (J Feb. 20, 1964), she made almost no attempts to cook in spite of
the fact that she collected recipes. As she once good-naturedly related to friends that she had won a door prize of two cookbooks; all laughed hilariously, knowing she, as she put it, "[could]n’t boil an egg" (J 1 Oct. 1965). Always, Bristow had a housekeeper to come in to work, who occasionally also cooked when she could not find a cook to live on the premises. Furthermore, although in many interviews Bristow claimed to put her husband first, her journals and her friends reflect no hint that she was ever called upon to sacrifice anything for that principle. Furthermore, from all indications, her husband supported and aided her in her independence.

Bristow also carefully scheduled her time for her writing, becoming very much upset at interruptions of any type—were they people, events, or personal illness. She was most serious about her task of creating life on paper, in much the same vein as Carolyn G. Heilbrun implies in Writing a Woman’s Life when she speaks of telling a woman’s live "in what she calls fiction" (11). A major difference, however, was that, while Bristow was truly revealing her own "self," she was also intent on bringing the historical setting to life, as well.

Bristow perceived life in a rather straight-forward manner, not layered and intricately complex. This attitude seems somewhat contradictory, for Bristow emerges as a complex person in her relationship with her family and her husband. However, Robert Crowell, in recalling the woman he had known very well for about forty-four years, says,

Gwen was not a complicated person. . . . When it came to foreign affairs, her outlook was very simple. She said, 'People from various countries get along perfectly well here in the USA. Why can’t they get along with each other in their native lands?’ (This was before some of the troubles we are having now.) (Crowell, letter to the author, 10 July 1993)
Thus, Bristow apparently meant what she said and did what she wanted to do without allowing herself to be concerned about what she could not change.

Meanwhile, *Deep Summer* continued to sell well; the December 31, 1937, Salisbury, North Carolina, *Post* would report it as a best-seller, along with Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (Northridge). One year later in New Orleans, it was third after A. J. Cronin's *The Citadel* and Kenneth Roberts' *Northwest Passage*. Following Bristow's *Deep Summer* was Lyle Saxon's *Children of Strangers* (Northridge).

Celebrating the New Year in New Orleans at the Sugar Bowl game between Louisiana State University and Santa Clara, Bristow's irritation with her mother seems obvious in her notation, "... Louis, Bobby and Caroline called for me and we picked up mother, who made many remarks about how silly we all were to sit through a football game in the drizzling rain, but it was enormous fun" (J 1 Jan. 1938). Implying conspiratory rebellion against parental restraints, she continues,

> Then back to the St. Charles to dress, then to a cocktail party at the Clarke Salmons, then dinner at the hotel with Caroline. Dressed her up in my clothes and we went to a party at Armand's in honor of Paul de Kruif. Lyle Saxon brought us back to the hotel, where we sat awhile in the bar. Everybody was dancing the Big Apple and I got sentimentally homesick for New Orleans and sad at the thought of returning to Hollywood where gaiety is so much less spontaneous. (J 1 Jan. 1938)

Bristow spent much of her time visiting with old friends, like Phyllis and Marley Cassidy. Bristow noted in particular Marley's comment that "when he was reviewing plays in New York he found he could learn a lot more about technique from a bad play than a good one, because in the latter the technique was invisible" (J 2 Jan. 1938). Bristow also spent time with other friends, such as Betty and
Albert Goldstein, columnist for The Times-Picayune; Mrs. Anne Barton Gihon, better known as Barbara Brooks (the only name Bristow ever called her), who wrote an advice column for the lovelorn in the New Orleans Item (Northridge); Grace Hendon, an old schoolmate; and other old friends, like the Feiblemans, Martha Lemann, a relative of the contemporary author Nancy Lemann (Lemann), and Annette Duchein.

Along with her fun, which included attending a rehearsal of The Ninth Guest (J 3 Jan. 1938), surprisingly still in demand, Bristow remained concerned with the more significant aspects of her story, so, not entirely satisfied, she continued revisions even after she had decided in December that she had them all done (Bristow, letter to Robert Crowell, 10 Jan. 1938). Since Crowell finally had the manuscript, she mailed her typed notations to New York on January 10, commenting in her letter,

I made a few changes, minor ones, and I altered the scene where Corrie May pitches the ten-dollar bill at Ann to make it evident that Corrie May’s reaction to her own behavior was not as triumphant as she had expected. This makes her rather more sympathetic, and I believe more consistent.

By the first of December, requests had begun to reach Crowell for information on this new author (Caroliniana), and Bristow’s trip to New Orleans seemed the perfect opportunity to satisfy this need. Accordingly, on January 15 she called Lyle Saxon and invited him out for drinks over which he agreed to write her biographical sketch (J 15 Jan. 1938). When she called the next morning, Saxon was still yawning over his Sunday paper, so they agreed to meet for lunch. After "dictat[ing] to Lyle Saxon the facts of [her] life," Bristow stepped out into the
bright sunshine. Thinking that the day was too lovely to return to her hotel, she walked down Chartres Street, pausing at an old book shop to purchase a copy of *The Young Lady's Friend* because she had read hers "nearly to pieces." She also chose copies of Marion Harland's *The Hidden Path*, Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Young Ladies*, and "an ancient thing called* *Excelsior* or *Politeness and Education*.

After an enjoyable afternoon and supper with Pete and Abbey Dailey, she decided again to "go on the wagon" commenting, "I've been drinking too much" (J 16 Jan. 1938). However on January 23, just five days later, she recorded that "Margaret Dixon came in today from Baton Rouge and we had a grand time talking about everything, and I fell off the wagon to the extent of several Manhattans."

When Bristow had proofread Lyle Saxon's script, *Gwen Bristow As I Knew Her, by Lyle Saxon* (J 15-16 Jan. 1938), she sent it to Crowell January 31, 1938 (Bristow, letter to Robert Crowell, 31 Jan. 1938). With Saxon's permission (Bristow, letter to Robert Crowell, 26 Mar. 1938), Crowell and Bristow agreed on minor changes, and Crowell quickly released it. However, Saxon's brief account of about sixteen hundred words relates only a sketch of the high points. It focuses mostly on her career, revealing nothing of her personal attitudes and emotional complexity, an omission which again reflects her reticence to reveal her private life to the public.

Bristow's visit to New Orleans lasted over two months. When she boarded the train for California February 10, she had visited with friends, gone to parties, movies, and live performances, rested, visited with family, done publicity work, and...
continued her French translations. She returned to a "chipper" Manning twenty pounds lighter, and they "both talked [themselves] hoarse." Their house was not completed but she was "delighted" with the "modernistic and very attractive" living room and bedrooms that had been finished (J 13 Feb. 1938).

The next day marked another milestone for Bristow: opening a postal savings account, she kept a resolution to save some of her Deep Summer earnings. Then her Southern upbringing took over, and she began the task of writing thank-you notes to New Orleans (J 14 Feb. 1938).

Another side of Bristow was that she could be very exacting, as indicated by her letter of February 22, 1938, to Crowell Publishers to discuss the galleys for her new book, The Handsome Road. Saying she liked some of the suggestions for change and noting that even the most careful can err, she asked,

[W]ill you tell [the proof reader] that some day if I ever meet him he and I are going to fight a duel if he offers me any more dangling participles like "Stranded alone, this had to happen to her." I corrected it, making the unrelated phrase a relative clause, but this happens to be one of the two or three mistakes in grammar that give me the horrors and I practically turned green when I saw it.

Immediately, she softened, saying perhaps he should not tell him after all; instead, he might delicately suggest over a cup of tea that for a "company that publishes Roget’s Thesaurus to turn loose copy with dangling participles in it is criminal," and that, besides, if he does it anymore I’m going to clutch him bald-headed.

When Bristow had finally read the galleys of The Handsome Road, she was well pleased. Especially delighted with the beautiful print, she urged that the "Handsome Road" song be placed in the front. Although she would later dedicate two more of her books to "Bruce," she urged in her letter to Crowell February 22,
1938, that they not omit the page that has "For Bruce" on it, "as this is the first thing I ever wrote that my husband was terribly pleased with."

Together, Apart

Just as the Darrieux picture had kept Manning home during Bristow's trip to New Orleans, Bristow likewise felt she needed to get back to work. Such was the case when Manning called on February 18 from Pomona, California, where Joseph Pasternak, the producer, and he had gone for a preview of his latest movie Mad About Music. A jubilant Manning related that he was getting time off to go to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. "Delighted" for him, Bristow spent her time during his absence being with friends, reading, updating her scrapbook, crocheting, and working (J 18 Feb. 1938).

On February 23, as she began outlining her third novel "as yet unnamed," Manning's secretary Deborah Clyde called to say Manning had telephoned that he would be home about Monday, February 28, and that he would be bringing Barbara Brooks, their friend from New Orleans (J 23 Feb. 1938). When Monday arrived, however, he wired from Phoenix that a flood had indefinitely delayed the train. Bristow's reaction was, "I was disappointed at the loss of my prospect of seeing him and Barbara tomorrow, so I called Gertrude . . . and went over there . . . and played crossword-lexicon, a new game I brought back from New Orleans. . . " (J 3 Mar. 1938). There was no mention of concern, no any hint of jealousy, at his returning with a woman, two days late.
As Bristow's journals matter-of-factly portray her and Manning's lives in her day-by-day accounts, there were no such scenes. Indicating many women as friends and acquaintances in Manning's life, Bristow nowhere implies infidelity or a even a hint of concern. Likewise, Bristow treated her male friends basically as she did her women friends: if she wanted company or if she wanted to go to a movie or to lunch and Manning was unavailable—and sometimes if he was available, she freely called a male friend. If there was ever discord between them, Bristow implies not a trace of it in her journals.

In spite of his vacation, Manning entered Cedars of Lebanon Hospital on March 14, two days after Brooks left because of a "touch of flu and a heavy touch of overwork." While he was confined, Bristow went to Universal Studios, where Jack Pierce, the studio makeup man, did her face "with perfectly enchanting cosmetics," and Bristow came away feeling the pictures taken for publicity purposes "should be awfully pretty." Between then and her planned departure for New Orleans for her second barnstorming lecture series, Bristow worked on publicity: Annette has sent me the list of papers I must write stories for announcing my lecture. There are about forty papers and I am to write two stories for each. Heaven knows when I'll write the lecture. (J 16 Mar. 1938) She worked steadily, fighting off a bout of nausea and diarrhea, commenting, "It does exasperate me so to be sick!" (J 22 Mar. 1938). At Manning's insistence she hired a Miss Slanina, who had telephoned asking for work (J 31 Mar. 1938), and began writing her lecture on Sunday, April 3. By April 5 Sweden had begun publishing Deep Summer (J), and on April 14 Bristow received her pre-publication copy of The Handsome Road and thought it beautiful.
A Road Again Taken

With Man Against Himself by Karl A. Menninger in her hands, Bristow boarded the train on Sunday, April 24, for Louisiana and the second of her lecture tours. She had reviewed her lecture on the train and planned one more rehearsal when she reached the St. Charles Hotel (J 24 Ap. 1938). Meeting her were her parents, old friends Pete and Abbey Dailey, and Barbara Brooks. She and her mother had dinner that evening at the hotel, but the next day, she and Duchein were hard at work on their publicity strategy. Her first lecture was at a tea on April 29, and the days thereafter became a blur of changing clothes, traveling, lectures, "pink" teas, luncheons, and autographing books (J Ap. 1938).

In no way dull, her first big event was on May 2 when she autographed a book for Governor Richard Leche, at an event opening one series of her lectures in Baton Rouge at the Capitol. A friend later playfully teased Bristow that she was one of "the two best politicians in Louisiana slapping each other on the back." Assuming what she came to call her "public personality," Bristow was, indeed, a politician, as her episode on May 5 demonstrates when, after a lecture at the New Iberia City Hall, they went to a pink-punch party given by Mrs. Walter Burke, who in the course of conversation told me the trouble with Hitler was that he came out of the garbage can, no social background at all, and I said yes ma'am, meekly; then for some reason the talk drifted to theology, and I was glad of being a minister's daughter so I could sound intelligent. (J 5 May 1938)

During this tour, on May 2, 1938, Crowell published The Handsome Road, the second of Bristow's books, and Bristow dedicated it to Manning because "Bruce Manning is my husband and my best friend" (Bristow, "Concerning the Original").
She included in this one an introduction called "The Two-Edged Blessing"—a metaphor for the cotton gin, a preface telling why this new invention was both a blessing and an affliction. She wrote that removing a cottonseed from cotton was like pulling "a burr out of the coat of a long-haired cat, and that to get one pound of clean cotton fiber, you must get out about seven thousand seeds." Therefore, human removal of these seeds was simply too time consuming and expensive, and that

\[\text{[if]}\] the lords of cotton would have built their fortunes with laborers who worked for wages, \ldots there would have been no Civil War. \ldots

The cotton-gin changed the realm of textiles as the automobile change the realm of transportation. [With this new invention] the mills were begging for cotton and more cotton. \ldots Thousands and thousands of slaves were brought in. (Trilogy 259-261)

It is also one of the original manuscripts Bristow presented to Louisiana State University Middleton Library through Scott Duchein, who had accompanied Duchein and Bristow on the 1938 tour. Bristow continually marveled at this good-natured friend, Scott Duchein, whom she found to be always cheerful, never tired, and unfailingly flawless in her appearance ("Concerning the Original Manuscript," 27).

In presenting Bristow as guest speaker in May 1938, Annette Duchein recalled that Bristow had spoken at Louisiana State University before she had written a first novel. Duchein reiterated Bristow’s early intention: to write an objective novel about Louisiana, climaxing in the Civil War years, a story devoid of nostalgia and petulance concerning the war period. One did not, Bristow had asserted in that earlier lecture, need to "get romantic about Louisiana. It’s all so romantic as it is"; one need only tell people the facts. For example,

You can tell them what a bayou looks like in spring when it’s a ribbon of purple hyacinths bending through a grove of oak trees. You can tell them how Father Mississippi sounds, some April when that river really
river really gets mad, when he growls and bangs at the levees, just to let us know that he used to drown this country every year and if we don't look out he can do it again. How the garden smells in the dark, when the night-blooming jasmine opens and the dew on the grass is so thick it comes through your shoes. And how a fresh-picked handful of cotton feels in your fingers—fluffy-soft, with the seeds like little cocoons in the softness. Oh, you don't need to make up any glamour about Louisiana. Nobody can make up any glamour half as good as the facts. (Bristow, "Writing About Louisiana")

Rather than try to reconstruct the lost cause of the South, Bristow wanted to depict the various classes in Louisiana and the way time had affected them (Caroliniana). Proving her right in her approach, she believed, was Crowell's letter of May 7 reporting The Handsome Road sales to date were already 12,300.

Meanwhile, her tour continued, with Bristow writing Crowell June 4 from the St. Charles Hotel to say she would follow his advice and let Atlanta wind up her "public life for the present. The schedule . . . in Atlanta sounds like enough to kill a rhinoceros. . ." (Caroliniana). Crowell wired Bristow that The Handsome Road was "fifth in the list of best-sellers in tomorrow's New York Times Book Review" (Caroliniana). Bristow's Louisiana lecture tour also attested to her popularity, some 4300 having attended by mid-May" (J 18 May 1938).

All in all, Bristow gave thirty-two lectures in Louisiana in 1938, her last being June 1, with very few days interspersed that could be called "free." Finally, on June 6, she boarded a plane for the three-hour trip to Atlanta for a week of luncheons, two dinner parties, speeches, newspaper and radio interviews, autographing books at sessions both in Rich's and in Davison-Paxon's, and picture sessions, to "say nothing of shaking hands with several thousand members of the
local population." She was so tired that as soon as she got on the plane for New Orleans, she fell fast asleep (J 1938).

No less exhausted, Bristow, glad to be boarding the train for California at noon on June 21, noted in her June 20 journal entry, "[Annette and I] are going to miss each other; this scampering about has been such fun." Ending this tour that had kept her away three days short of two months, Bristow felt

that another episode in my life was closed; I have written The Handsome Road and there's probably nothing more I can do to sell it, so that's an ended chapter. It's high on the best-seller list, so all this business has been successful. I'm terribly glad of it.

I don't know how soon I shall go to work on a new book. Of course I'm really working on it all the time, in my mind, figuring characters and incidents no matter what else I'm doing, but I mean I don't know when I'll begin writing. (J 21 June 1938)

Undoubtedly not yet happy with the quality of her work, Bristow continued in the same entry,

Bernice Baumgarten has indicated in her last letters that she wants me to write my next book so it can be a magazine serial. She doesn't understand even yet that I want to write a good book and anything else, to my mind, must be pure lagniappe.

She would keep studying, writing, and trying to produce "a good book."
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

1. This information comes from several sources. Besides Duchein, herself, see, for example, "Author Gwen Bristow Is Flying to Atlanta: Mr. and Mrs. Frank Neely to Entertain Novelist and Miss Annette Duchein," Atlanta Journal 5 June 1938. (Northridge).


3. Journals, novels, and conversations with friends of Gwen Bristow support this reading of Bristow. As Jean Fleming said in a telephone interviews, 30 Nov. 1993, "Bruce was not a good Catholic, and they did not go to church. They were more likely at the Wild Goose [a restaurant] having brunch on Sunday morning."
CHAPTER FOUR

SUCCESS

Whatever Bristow thought of her latest book, public response to *The Handsome Road* was impressively favorable. It was serialized in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, beginning August 21, 1938. The novel sold rapidly, quickly gaining intense attention by the media and reviewers. Caroline B. Sherman, writing for the *Land Policy Review* of Washington, D. C. (May-June, 1939), praised *The Handsome Road*, substantiating her opinion with the theory of Alvin Johnson (economist and member of many editorial boards) that "more works of fiction are essential for one who wishes to know the world than works of any other character" (Northridge). To illustrate her point, Sherman says that "the majority of southern rural novels, such as Erskine Caldwell’s *Tobacco Road*, Paul Green’s *This Body the Earth*, David Cohn’s *God Shakes Creation*, and Annette Heard’s *Return Not Again* in which sharecroppers and tenant farmers dominate, are centered emphatically on the scene of today." By contrast, Gwen Bristow’s *The Handsome Road* "answers as few novels do the question, 'Where were the humble southern white people during the Civil War?'" At the same time, some discredited its literary merit, like John Kenneth Merton in *Commonweal Life* June 3, 1938, who thought Bristow lacked "integrity" (Northridge).

Bristow, who often expressed gratitude and delight that "the sales are excellent" (J 22 Feb. 1950), frankly admitted in later years to writing a "book . . . for
for entertainment only" (J 2 Feb. 1950), but she diligently struggled to maintain a faithful representation of its historical milieu.

Many years later Mary Jean DeMarr, writing for American Women Writers, would rate Bristow's work as merely "popular" and "modest," calling it "the sort generally considered romantic women's fiction" (215). However, Bristow's contemporary, Eugene Armfield, writing for the Saturday Review in May 1938, had found Bristow's characters to be "recognizable human beings, not commonplace but not so exceptional as to be out of reach" because of "Miss Bristow's . . . ability to handle the complex details of another period" (6).

However "modest" (DeMarr) Bristow's literary contribution may have been, according to a November 27, 1938, issue of the Atlanta Constitution, "The long, steady sale in Atlanta of Bristow's delightful novels of the South has helped keep them on the publisher's best-seller list far longer than many other famous successes" (Northridge). The same situation was true throughout the United States as records sales continued to climb, not only nationwide but also in several foreign markets.

Such sales also attest to Bristow's success as she set out to portray what her research had uncovered--"how the Southern culture began and how it developed . . . like seed, blossom, and harvest" (Caroliniana). Bristow's fictional representation of the "blossom" segment of the development of the South, The Handsome Road depicts the fulfillment of Philip Larne's dream (the "seed") that he and Judith would "found a dynasty, . . . and a hundred years from now the rulers of Ardeith will be proud to remember us, first of the house, who came down the river together" (DS 19).
Complex Creation

As Philip Larne had envisioned, he and Judith had built a "manor, . . . [with] a city of slaves in the cabins behind it" (19). However, not a part of Philip Larne's dream was the nightmare that "city of slaves" would produce. He had not envisioned his literal "city of slaves behind" Ardeith manor would figuratively be also between the aristocrats of the plantation and the poor whites of the Rattletrap Square, effectively polarizing segments of the white South through no fault or control of those slaves or the poor whites. The result was three societies--white poor, black slave, and aristocrat--existing in close proximity geographically but not ideologically, socially, or spiritually, which is, in essence, Bristow's story. Tracing the development of this third class, the poor whites, as an integral segment of the socio-economic structure of the times was important, Bristow believed, to the total picture of the emerging South.

In Bristow's The Handsome Road, people of two cultures, the aristocrats of the plantations and the poor whites of Rattletrap Square, personify the results of dreams built on the foundation of human enslavement and an economic system that relegated segments of the social structure into an economic impasse. At the same time, an innocent third part of society waited. It would obey its masters on the one hand, and scorn the other as it watched the drama unfold and waited for change.

In creating her story, one of Bristow's biggest challenges had been Corrie May. In trying to conclude The Handsome Road, Bristow struggled with the problem that was so subtle it continued to plague her until January 27 when she finally recognized that "Corrie May's story is really the interesting one." The
Handsome Road was nearly complete when she realized that she needed to "open with Corrie May instead of Ann. That's the answer, I feel sure," she wrote in her journal November 5, 1937. With this realization she discarded some parts and collapsed two chapters about Ann into one, finally resolving her dilemma.

Indeed, Corrie May is an interesting character, a very complex one. Foremost, she is "poor white trash." The very nature of class victimizes and entraps her so literally that she is imprisoned by abysmal poverty and ignorance. Her "prison" of "walls" and "abrupt right angles" confines absolutely, permitting only a few steps forward before halting her progress or permitting a repetition of seemingly useless pacing. Her kind cannot earn a decent living in it or, in most cases, move out of it. Yet Bristow successfully creates a highly believable protagonist in spite of the fact that Corrie May refuses to accept her fate complacently, choosing, instead, to battle the aristocrats; her emotions relative to her parents and the death of her brothers; her feelings for Budge, who is begging her to marry him when her better judgment warns her such a marriage is sure repetition of ghetto life; and even the United States government and the Carpetbag faction ensconced in her town.

The Handsome Road, set at the height of the Confederate South, depicts full-blown the plantation system with its master, southern belles, gracious manners, and great wealth juxtaposed in harsh contrast against the poor whites of Rattletrap Square in all its squalor and problems. Spanning the years 1859 to 1882, it is a tale of dying cultures. One, the aristocratic, is a culture that is caught in the strangle hold of its own complacency and blindness. It culminates with the dying Old South.
and the onset of a new era, with a new society rising from the anguish of the old aristocracy and the hopes and ambitions of the brash and boisterous poor whites and blacks demanding their place in the new South—typical themes along broad, sweeping lines.

Along with the slaves, Bristow's feminine protagonists, both "white trash" Corrie May Upjohn and aristocratic Ann Sheramy Larne, are prisoners of a system not of their making or choosing. Because Ann "could not help being aware . . . the road she had traveled had been so very smooth that she had no standard by which to recognize either the peaks or valleys of experience," (75) she

nodded when [Denis] asked her again if she would marry him. . . .
[Ann] was aware of a puzzling, unsilenced corner of her mind asking if there was anything he could give her besides romantic adoration, and she was unsatisfied because she did not know. (74)

At the other end of the spectrum, Corrie May, listening to snatches of conversation while working in the Larne manor, finally understands:

She didn't know how many there were, but there must be at least six hundred. A baby in arms was worth a hundred dollars, an adult fieldhand five hundred to a thousand depending on his age and strength. An expert cook or seamstress, a lady's maid or butler, two to five thousand—Corrie May whistled softly. No wonder Denis Larne had gone to war. No wonder rich people wanted everybody to fight Yankees. But why in the name of reason should a fellow like Budge go out and fight their battles for them? (162)

Inheriting some of her political savvy from her father, Corrie May had paid more attention than even she had realized when "old man Upjohn" typically had ranted, "Tell you, fault of organization. Some folks got too much and others ain't got enough" (13). Besides understanding her father's politics, Corrie May is
familiar with his ways. She knows that no help will be forthcoming from her father, because her Pa, of course, he never did anything but talk. In the winter pa got on a houseboat with some other traveling preachers and they went up and down the river saving souls, and there wasn't a parson on the river could beat old man Upjohn when it came to sermons with rolling lines about Babylon and Sodom and hellfire and great white thrones, but in the summer time old man Upjohn didn't do anything, just sat on the stoop talking politics and religion and all like that. And while it was fine to preach, that didn't put victuals into anybody's belly. (THR 3)

In this society that puts poor whites at the mercy of the self-serving upper-class whites, the reality of economics means that "slaves are too valuable to be allowed to live that way" (DS 210) and while "[t]wo dead white men cost Mr. Larn a hundred dollars, [t]wo dead slaves, even cheap ones, would have cost him a thousand" (THR 49). Furthermore, as Corrie May recognizes, the Negroes, who are obviously well fed and cared for, have so much contempt for her kind that even their music declares that they would "radder be a nigger dan po' white trash!" (41).

Brash and headstrong, Corrie May has qualities which lead her into great trouble because there is no one with wisdom and experience to teach her. In a kind of "oxymoronic" complexity, Corrie May is imprisoned by her "ignorant intelligence." Specifically, she is victimized by her own ignorance of books beyond rudimentary literacy skills, for, as she tells Denis Larn, "I can set down my name" (48). As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese had found, "Some southern women of all classes and races found access to schooling" (Plantation Household, 45). Without guidance, however, Corrie May erringly directs her own life along an impractical and foolhardy path for herself in an attempt to alter what she sees as terrible injustices. She wants to force matters into some kind of "rightness" for herself.
At the same time, even proximity sometimes pierces no barriers between classes. Ann, too insulated and conditioned by prejudices and ignorance of the situation, mentally and emotionally dismisses Corrie May as trash with few and inconsequential needs. Corrie May, likewise, finds no common ground; instead, she grows to despise the wealthy, beautifully mannered, "kind" Larnes. In reverse intolerance, she finds their very tolerance and charity some of their greatest cruelties.

Corrie May Upjohn, of Rattletrap Square, once honest, forthright, and courageous, changes when she awakens to the realities of her world. For example, her two brothers' deaths are a double tragedy for a family which desperately depended on the pittance they occasionally earned. Aside from the economics of the situation, Corrie May feels doomed by what she understands from her mother's answer to Corrie May's question about what color her mother's hair had been:

Kinda of lightish, like yourn. . . . You favor me, the way I looked in those days. Your pa said I was the prettiest girl he ever seed. . . .

"Ma," she asked in a faint, frightened voice, "when was that?"

"Huh? That would be--about thirty-nine, I reckon" (17-18).

To her mother's response, Corrie May reasons, "Thirty-nine, forty-nine, fifty-nine. . . . Her mother must be thirty-five years old," but already "Her face had the lined, weathered look of a piece of cloth left out in the rain" (18). Thus, aware of her mother's situation, like that of all the women of Rattletrap Square, Corrie May feels entrapped by Budge's courting and helpless, as though something infinitely stronger than herself were beating her back against a destiny planned for her ages ago.
They were all forcing her to it, her mother and father and Budge as surely as the great folk who owned the slaves. (19-20)

Marriage to Budge is but a sure sentence to "this region below the wharfs where women were old at thirty-five and decrepit at forty, and where half the babies born did not live a year" (93).

Corrie May may ruin her life, but, typical of Bristow's feminine protagonists, she tries to find answers to effect positive changes even if it means seducing the immoral, former overseer and Carpetbagger Gilday because nothing is beyond him--extortion, theft, lying, preying on the helpless--to become rich enough to see to it that "some bastards gonta pay for [his struggles in life]" (THR 229). In spite of this act, the reader yet sympathizes with her plight. She is what Anne Firor Scott calls "a distinct type among American women," who, in making an "effort to free themselves were more complex than those of women elsewhere" (xi) Corrie May, with her determination, astuteness, and independence is far removed from what Scott calls the "typical" poorer women in antebellum times who "lived, bore children, worked hard, and died, leaving little trace for the historian coming after" (xi). Instead, she portrays the type who helped break apart "life in the South between 1861 and 1865 and . . . put [it] back together in a new mold" (xi).

Ann, also of The Handsome Road, has bitter lessons to learn with the onslaught of the war, and, true to her blue blood, she learns and accomplishes with finesse the tasks fate has decreed for her, even in the face of her terrible losses, namely, rearing her son to carry on the tradition of his father and Ardeith plantation. To her sister-in-law Cynthia's acrimonious accusation, Ann responds, "I'm not creating a legend, I'm giving my son an ideal" (303). As much a prisoner
of her social stratum as Corrie May is of hers, Ann, is not the mindless, retiring woman whose meekness has left the South to the ravages of slavery and patriarchy. She knows the "stage props" at her command, and she maneuvers them craftily, at least until she is devastated by her husband's death in the war.

Something of a transition character who does not hold to the past and does not know the future, Cynthia, Ann's sister-in-law who "can't make pretty phrases" (181), has learned the futility of a destroyed way of life. Typically a Southern belle left unmarried by the War and a rather minor character and one on whom Bristow has regrettably done some of her "literary carpentry," Cynthia, ironically, is the link through which vision for the future can begin. She recognizes the Old South influence shaping the development of young Denis. She would, given the opportunity, make the needed adaptations, and she knows the Anns of the world cannot. Those who can are yet to come; they will be the Eleanors (of This Side of Glory) and even the Corrie Mays.

Corrie May also sees young Denis, whose "exquisite syllables" (277) reaffirm the beauty and worth of the old traditions; he will perpetuate the old graces and values. To Corrie May he is "just like [Ann], and all of them, putting fine manners ahead of good sense" (277). At least one more generation is needed to close the gap between them and reality. Therefore, Ann and her kind will continue, rather blithely unaware of how those in the "Rattletrap Squares" of the world live. Unwittingly insuring their isolation, Cynthia locks the iron gates around their desolate mansion, shutting its occupants away from the hurtful world of Reconstruction and reality.
Finally, Corrie May's ultimate degradation, living on the charity of a kind black family until her child is born, is her mythical trial by ordeal, making her ultimately and metaphorically, both "poor white trash" and a "Negro." Also symbolic of her purging and new-found wisdom, she names her son Fred for the black man in whose home she has lived while waiting for him to be born. Corrie May, says Bristow, may make mistakes, but she is open-minded and grasping at constructive change. What is left after her ordeal is a woman of strength and the wisdom to pursue wise choices for an improved society. While the Anns and Cynthias of the world may retreat, the Corrie Mays form the new breed of the New South that will move toward the liberation of women and slave, alike, to regenerate an entire culture. With maturity and greater wisdom, she supports herself and her son by taking in laundry, and she sees to it that he is educated so that he will "walk the road" she never attained.

Her mind went back to the Larnes too. She remembered how she had fought them and how utterly they had conquered her at every turn. But she looked at the unconsciously disdainful figure of Ann's son, perfect embodiment of a tradition that no longer had any reason for existence. It came to her like a flash of glory that though her son had inherited no tradition he had the strength of which fresh traditions were made (330).

A Struggling Society

Although The Handsome Road spans the Civil War, Bristow's real story lies elsewhere--in the hearts and lives of people caught in the backlash of the politics and economics that create the "need" for such a war. It depicts great mental and emotional ignorance, misunderstandings and miscommunications, false optimism and enormous disappointments. There are misplaced values and lessons learned too late
for one generation but which will benefit the next. Bristow, with a best seller
whose imagery and narrative provide powerful studies in the psychology and myth
of the South (Northridge), also delineates a thoughtful and objective portrayal of the
women "imprisoned" in its society. It is, according to Annette Duchein, the first
novel to parallel the effects of that period on the "po' whites" and the aristocrats.
Furthermore, while sympathies generally are with the aristocrats, Bristow delineates
the plight of the poor whites in relation to the aristocrats in

  a serious and well executed effort to show without prejudice the effect
  of the war in Louisiana on the 'po' whites' as a class, their feelings
  for the aristocrats, and for the slaves, as well as the story of the
  aristocrats who carried the burdensome traditions in a way that
  inevitably concerns the reader with their plight. (Caroliniana)

More than the "grand, gallant and brave men fighting for an ideal," notes
Duchein, The Handsome Road portrays a society also fighting for its money, tied up
in slavery. Departing from the romance of the war, Bristow takes a hard look at
some of society's injustices wherein poor whites with no slaves were conscripted to
fight for slavery, while Southerners with over twenty slaves were exempted to attend
to matters at home; poor men in the North were likewise conscripted while rich men
could buy exemption (Caroliniana). About The Handsome Road, Duchein wrote,

  Ann Sheramy is a sane interpretation of a southern lady of the fifties--
  Corrie May is a first presentation of a type which existed in the same
  period and has been overlooked by novels of the time. Miss Bristow
  writes the inner relationships and reactions of these two women with
  psychological validity. (Caroliniana)

Another quality underlying the fabric of Bristow's work is her exceptional
ability to weave into her narrative the daily actions and events that not only depict
traditions evolving from this unique culture but also infuse them with life and
reality. She makes subtle use of history to revitalize the sometimes incomprehensible values and traditions of a people that laid the foundation of the Southern way of life. The Handsome Road was an immediate success.

By July 1, Danish and Norwegian translation rights to The Handsome Road had sold, and by July 11 Deep Summer had gone into its twelfth printing. Finishing the synopsis of her third book on July 23, Bristow set it aside to "jell," planning to take a break with Manning, who had a vacation starting the next day. She could not, however, resist beginning "the invaluable process of seeping one's self in a bygone atmosphere until it is real as today" for her next project, and she began with The Ladies' Home Journal for 1910 (J July 1938). Working a little each day, she also found it "such fun having Bruce home" (J 29 July 1938).

In June 1938 an adoring public was relatively new to Bristow. Thrilled with her growing fame, she wrote enthusiastically to her publisher June 12, "Tell the folks I was very glad to do it, and if there is anybody else who would like a book autographed don't hesitate to send it to me." In reacting to what she considered another honor, that of having her novel published in Braille, she told Crowell in a letter written July 5, 1938, that she had always considered blindness the "worst possible affliction, and I love feeling that I've written something inspiring enough to be given to people who have that to contend with."

On the More Personal Side

Meanwhile, neither Bristow nor Manning was really well. Both continued to lament about "falling off the wagon," feeling they should give up the alcohol. At
his doctor’s orders, Manning lost thirty pounds, and after a bout with the flu in August, Bristow’s doctor diagnosed her anemic with low metabolism, and he prescribed iron shots (J 1938). Never slowed for very long, however, Bristow began taking driving lessons. In September 1938 Bristow recorded in her journal, "I’m ashamed to own up to how hard I find it to learn to drive a car. It’s a real mental hazard."

About this same time, Bristow, who typically observed current events with intense interest, was becoming increasingly anxious about conditions in Germany and Czechoslovakia; she recorded, "Bruce says he’s sure there won’t be a war over Czechoslovakia. I hope he’s right. War is just so horribly stupid," but war would remain on her mind because toward the end of this same year, Bristow was working very hard on her investigation of data for This Side of Glory. Her research led her to probe very thoroughly into World War I. One day, after a particularly diligent scrutiny into 1914, she and Bruce attended a dinner party, where several guests said they thought the United States should take another chance at fighting Europe’s battles. To Bristow’s expression, "I believed in one war; I’ll never believe in another," came the response, "But this time it’s different. This would be really a holy war." Nearly biting her lips through trying to keep her temper, Bristow said little at the moment but she was simply "quivering with rage that anybody would think any bomb-dropping expedition was holy" (J 7 Oct. 1938). Her attitude would form the basis for her "propaganda" novel, Tomorrow Is Forever, which she would publish in 1943.

Bristow also found other sentiments of her associates and friends occasionally hard to accept, and she expressed her concerns in her journal. For example,
Gertrude got into an argument with George Coburn about the economic needs of society. Gertrude thought capitalism had made many errors; Allen Scott went further and said there should be no private ownership of the means of production... These arguments seem to me so fruitless. I cannot see how economic readjustment will solve the problems of the race. Plenty of people who have enough to eat are unhappy. But of course, I am not by nature a reformer. I am an observer...

I spent a good part of the morning listening to Mr. Hitler speak from Berlin; he has the supreme gift of the demagogue, taking two hours of beautiful words to say virtually nothing. (J 17, 30 Jan. 1939)

Bristow had another personal reason for her horror of the war--her brother Louis; however, ultimately, his military involvement was limited to the Panama Canal area and Key West, Florida, before he would return home, finally to settle for good in New Orleans.

Along with Bristow's concern about the war, she was having another personal struggle--cigarettes. Knowing that smoking was not good for her, she recorded in her journal October 8, 1938, "I decided to stop smoking for a month, too ["too," meaning along with an accompanying vow to stop drinking], just to see if I could; as I've been smoking for 14 years it will be a real test of character." On October 19, her "eleventh cigaretteless day," she recorded that she missed her cigarettes "comparatively little" during the day, but in the evening, she missed them "intensely, and nibbled chocolates as an unsatisfactory substitute."

To help with her problems, Bristow continued to enjoy the invigorating discussions she and Manning frequently shared with many of their friends, who were writers or actors. For example, she enjoyed her friend Gertrude Spiegalgass's "ingenious idea to explain the hidden story of the sonnets: that Shakespeare loved Mr. W. H., lost him to Christopher Marlowe, turned in angry despair to the dark
lady, then lost the dark lady to Mr. W. H" (J 11 Oct. 1938). Bristow enjoyed the lively academic exercise. The movies being another pleasure, later during her Chicago lecture tour, she would take time to see Grapes of Wrath as a movie and would think it was a "splendid picture, with more of an impact than the book, for there seemed less straining for effort. The book became self-conscious and artificial in several places" (J 3 March 1940).

At home in dealing with her domestic responsibilities, Bristow expected faithfulness, loyalty, dependability, and efficient service from her housekeepers and cooks, and in return she treated them with dignity and fairness. For example, when her maid Mabel became ill, Bristow took her to her own physician, Dr. Melnik, who ordered her to bed to prevent her bronchitis from developing into pneumonia, and Bristow paid her hospital bill. (J 8 Sept. 1938). Always fair-minded and empathetic, Bristow in another instance wrote, "It really delights me to see a Negro making good. Their struggles are so unfair" (J 30 July 1941).

On the public side, Bristow had enjoyed the attention her fame brought, but certain accompanying aspects became quite wearisome to her. To cope with the increasing requests for personal information, she developed a standard reply:

Dear Friend:

Because of the large number of letters I receive from students and other readers, asking where they can find information about my work, it is not possible for me to write a separate answer to each one. So I have made a list of sources, which are standard reference works in nearly all public libraries.

You can find biographical data in Twentieth Century Authors, edited by Stanley Kunitz; and additional material in the "First Supplement" to this book, also edited by Kunitz. You can also find biographical facts in Who's Who in America, Who's Who Among American Women and Who's Who in the West.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

I hope this list will help you. Thank you for the interest that prompted you to write.

Cordially yours,

Gwen Bristow" (Caroliniana)

As fall 1938 progressed, Bristow reacted to the escalating world tension, monitoring it with shrewd and close attention, very much upset over the news that "Czechoslovakia is to be split up for Hitler, but no war. It's wonderful to feel war averted, though one has a sense of shame that it has to be avoided by partitioning a nation to satisfy the mad dog of Europe" (J 30 Sept. 1938).

A weary Bristow sought escape. With her current secretary Ethel at her side for company, Bristow practiced driving. By the end of the day, she had driven for seven hours with "not a bit of trouble. It's wonderful to know I can drive, really; after this--we got lost and had a lot of fun--I'll never be scared of handling an automobile again" Bristow announced (J 30 Sept. 1938). Jean Fleming, however, says that Bristow never gained great competence nor total confidence as a driver (Interview, 20 Nov. 1993). Patricia Manning Tanner would concur: "Gwen hated to drive and didn't want anybody in the car with her when she was driving" (Tanner, letter 9 June 1994).

Manning, who had developed "producer's stomach," was eating a diet of what Bristow referred to as "pureed vegetables and similar trash" (J 31 Oct. 1938). He remained in good spirits, nonetheless; and seemingly always attuned to Bristow's emotional well-being, he suggested during a particular period of stress that she take
a trip to New York as a vacation. Thinking it a splendid idea, Bristow left on
November 15 for New York, where she stayed until December 4 (J 1938). Her trip
was for publicity, as well as leisure, and she felt Robert Crowell and Bernice treated
her "like an honored visitor." She went to plays, met the editors of the Saturday
Review of Literature, who wanted a picture to put in their Christmas issue, and held
several autographing sessions. It was on this trip that she also began her third novel,
This Side of Glory (Northridge), using so much hotel stationery she kept the
bellboys busy renewing her supply and amazed at the extent of what they thought to
be her correspondence (Judson).

When Bristow returned home, she was thrilled to find Manning had furnished
her study with a crescent-shaped desk, bookcase, table, and scrapbook cabinet, all of
mahogany, along with a sofa and an easy chair in a "dull striped linen to match the
drapes, a greenish gray rug and white venetian blinds" (J 7 Dec. 1938). Having
completed "forty to fifty pages" in long hand while in New York, as well as
deciding to call it This Side of Glory (J 3 Journal 1938), Bristow was quite excited
to find a "new" office to end the old year and for beginning the third novel in her
Louisiana plantation series. January 3, 1939, found the first two chapters taking
shape although her work did not always flow readily, and she lamented,

I let Bruce go to the movies . . . while I came back to my desk. I
felt guilty about not going with him, but I couldn’t be content without
attacking this chapter again, and being a writer himself of course he
understood. It is now nearly midnight and I feel drugged with
exhaustion, but I have rewritten nearly all of the chapter, condensing
and--I think--improving it. Oh dear, this anguish of trying to write a
book! But I’ve no right to complain, as I write only because I want
to. (J 11 Jan. 1939)
As she continued her writing, Bristow, by 1939, had also become a very popular public speaker much sought out throughout the entire nation. Her intense, extensive research had made her quite knowledgeable about a number of subjects, and one of them was women. Hence, on February 7, 1939, Bristow interrupted her writing to lecture in La Porte, Indiana, speaking on the topic "Women Have to Be Clever" (Northridge). Comparing the position of American women to that of women in other countries, Bristow emphasized the need for women to keep abreast of the times and be alert to all subjects. She emphasized the responsibility of American women, saying that in a nation like the United States where men are more interested in war and the rougher phases of life, women must be the guardians of culture, be prepared and ready for their responsibilities, and be worthy of them (Northridge).

Back home again, Bristow was soon hard at work on her novel when, on April 16, 1939, Robert Crowell and his wife visited her in her home in Beverly Hills. After Crowell said he was "delighted with it" (Northridge), Bristow completed the initial draft of This Side of Glory May 24, 1939. It was a manuscript of 404 pages, which she recognized was probably too long (J 24 May 1939). Characteristically, an anxious Bristow sought Deborah Clyde's and Jeannette Deutsch's opinions. Much encouraged by their positive response, she continued the revisions.

Finally, having given the final version to Ethel on June 17 to make a clean copy, she rewarded herself with some leisure-time activities, like swimming, learning to ride a bicycle (a feat she also found quite difficult), or discussing
favorite books and authors with friends (J May 1938). After one such revisiting of Shakespeare, Bristow decided she would "love to have known Shakespeare" (J 1 May 1939), whose *Hamlet* touched her "almost beyond speech" with its "magnificence" that left her "too moved to go on [reading]" (J 21 Ap. 1939). She concluded Shakespeare "must have been wise, generous and entertaining but that Milton was almost certainly a prig and a pedant and a very disagreeable fellow to have around" (J 1 May 1939). A discussion of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* found Bristow in agreement with her friends Buddy and Marie DeSylva that a book that makes all the people who can afford a square meal unmitigated villains, is consequently too one-sided to have real integrity in its presentation of the economic problem. Books that are two-sided are less stirring but lack of prejudice, or an attempt at it, is the essence of artistic integrity. (J 23 June 1939)

Another of her favorites was Jane Austin, and after reading *Emma*, Bristow remarked, "I do wish that woman had written fifty books. She is marvelous" (J 28 June 1939).

**Introspective Notes**

On Saturday, June 24, 1939, Bristow went for a relaxing drive in the countryside. The jacaranda trees were in full bloom, and a mass of "purple flowers" lined the streets. Later that day Bristow noted in her journal, "This is Caroline's [her sister] wedding day [to]--Pat Riley--and I do hope she's going to have a marriage as happy as mine. She is such a darling."

Caroline, who had attended Woman's College to study art (Northridge), had returned home from visiting with Bristow in February and making sketches for
Bristow’s third book, *This Side of Glory*. The June 21 New Orleans *States* reported, "Caroline doesn’t think that her sister Gwen will be able to come from Hollywood for the wedding. She is too busy getting *This Side of Glory* off to the publishers." Indeed, Bristow, having only recently returned from New Orleans, made no plans to attend (J 1939).

True, Bristow was no idle person, but for the moment her book was not on her agenda. She was enjoying life, as she noted on June 25:

> We are having such a wonderful summer! Bruce and I are both so healthy and happy we go around glowing and finding the world lovely and even the headlines undisturbing. We play outdoors barefooted . . . and I am brown as an Indian.

These carefree times with Manning were the times Bristow loved. She was quite happy in their relationship without children, and she and Manning never had any. It was about this time that Manning’s thirteen-year-old Patricia, who lived in New York, arrived for, what Bristow calls in her journal, "a visit." As Bristow recounts this time, she apparently took Patricia’s visit in stride, as she had visits by others, saying, "She’s a nice child. . . . As she likes to swim and ride a bicycle, I took her down and got a bicycle for her and we played together all day." Patricia remained until August 27, and Bristow undertook to teach her typing, take her shopping, and enjoy California. Typical of Bristow’s verbal emotional void, however, Bristow left no account of any feelings other than the superficial daily activities and that she liked Patricia (J 1939). For her part, Patricia Tanner remembers Bristow

> was a most comfortable person to have as a stepmother; she was always polite, gracious, never cross; sometimes distant. I never felt I really belonged; I felt more like a visitor. I never felt free

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
to open the refrigerator. She was kind, good, concerned; just not warm or loving towards me. (Interview)

Jean Fleming, however, recalls Bristow’s talking about this "visit" after she and Bristow had become close friends. It was not originally intended to be just that; Patricia had, Fleming believed, actually considered the possibility of living with her father and Bristow, but the arrangement did not work out. There was no particular reason that Bristow ever verbalized, even to Jean Fleming; it just did not work out (Fleming, 20 Nov. 1993).

Bristow, however, never wrote in her journals of wanting children. In an entry in 1931, she had complained about an acquaintance’s incessant "bewail[ing] her fate so stupidly. God knows she elected to have a husband and children, and lots of other women with children have managed to write books" (J 11 Oct. 1931). Niece Angie Fensin remembers that "[Bristow] wanted children but maybe couldn’t [have any]." She had once told Angie in a letter that "Anne" was one of her favorite names and always thought if she ever had a daughter, she would name her Anne. "Then," Gwen’s letter had continued, "I got mixed up with a guy named Manning and the combination became impossible, and so I compromised by naming one of the heroines in one of my books Anne, but I hope you turn out to have more sense than the girl in the book" (Fensin).

As Bristow grew older, she found children a nuisance, as she would indicate many years later in an August 12, 1964, entry: "But when I went out to the pool I found that Mrs. Crawitz was giving a birthday party for her grandson and the pool was jumping with brats." On another occasion when her landlord said he was renting an apartment to a couple with two children, Bristow threatened, "My lease
plainly says no children in the pool and if this is changed I shall move" (J 1 Feb. 1966). Her attitude never altered about children and teenagers although there were rare exceptions, such as Howard Fleming, Jr., son of Howard and Jean Fleming. Bristow genuinely enjoyed young Fleming's industry, his intelligence, and his ability to carry on a conversation. About most children, however, she was generally negative: "I wonder if adolescents ever realize what nuisances they are. No, not until they grow up and see other adolescents being nuisances to them" (J).

Another matter of growing tedium was her fans. She faithfully responded to every letter as quickly as she could, generally taking time to write her own responses in spite of the fact that she had a secretary to assist her. She found the task an intrusion on her work, however, and, as she facetiously quipped in an August 3, 1937, journal entry, "I wrote a few letters (answering fan mail is such fun!). . . ."

Again she made another of her rather frequent complaints about more letters from youngsters who want me to do their . . . homework for them. What idiotic questions they ask, and how impertinent some of them are, questions about my personal life that I wouldn't answer to anybody. One . . . today . . . absolutely illiterate. The girl wanted "information" about "things" and made out a list of "questioses." And she is in high school in Pennsylvania" (J 29 Jan. 1965).

Although she disdained requests from unknown high school students seeking help to meet assignments, Bristow was, nonetheless, a generous person. She eagerly shared her work with students when it was more focused. Frequently she could be found at Receda High School [where her friend Jean Fleming taught English] chatting with the students or reading her galleys, provoking them to think, to challenge, and to respond (Fleming).
Bristow, along with everything else in her life, never strayed from her writing for long, but in late summer, 1939, her writing came hard:

I was assailed by a dreadful and not unfamiliar temptation—the whisper within me, "This book is so hard to write, why do you do it? You don't have to." I suppose everybody who can eat without working has the same demon sometimes. (J 11 Aug. 1939).

The next morning, she recorded, "Kept awake awhile last night by what Iago called "a raging tooth"; two days later, having had it extracted, she complained, "[It] left me rather limp, so . . . I spent the day lying on the sofa reading." Reflecting a typical reaction, she wrote, "I am frightfully annoyed at having my work interrupted this way" (J 14 Aug. 1939). For five days, her daily entry echoed this lament. Then, after one day at work, she was feeling bad again, and she "hated this intrusion of physical ailments. It makes me disgusted with myself" (J 19 Aug, 1939). Ten days later she wrote, "Isn't it ridiculous--Europe trembling on brink of war again, millions of men mobilizing, civilization in peril and all I can think about is my own personal discomfort. What an idiot I am" (J 23 Aug. 1939). The following day, however, when her "ex-tooth" had her in a "quivery state," Dr. Melnik found her blood pressure had dropped twenty points (J 24 Aug. 1939). In this manner, throughout her life, she logged her complaints, but she steadfastly chided herself to say nothing unpleasant or personal aloud. When she felt better, she as faithfully recorded, "How wonderful it is to feel better!" (J 30 Aug. 1939).

War Lamentations

Her physical pain did not, in spite of disclaiming it, stop her anxiety over the war: "I don't see why some of the people committing suicide all over Europe don't
try taking a shot at Hitler first, if they want to die anyway" (J 24 Aug. 1939). True
to form, glad for the distraction at such a point, she was delighted when Leo
Townsend called saying he and Pauline had returned from vacation and wanted an
evening out (J 25 Aug. 1939).

Soon she began struggling with a new malady, which she described it as "A
strange, quiet sadness . . . compounded of weariness and nostalgia." She thought
"longingly of New Orleans. Perhaps only a reaction from the labor of finishing the
book and illness" (J 26 Sept. 1939), her journal reflects more to her melancholy:

Well, Europe seems to be in for it, and so to a smaller extent do we.
And I hereby state that I think it is all the most horrible piece of
savage lunacy since the barbarians invaded Rome. And this, the day
of the bombing of Warsaw, is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the
battle of the Marne, in the war to end war! (J 1 Sept. 1939)

She felt mesmerized by the radio although she agreed with a friend, who said she
was "tired of listening . . . . Two or three old men . . . running around with brief
cases and meditating on whether or not to murder humanity. It's all too insulting."
Bristow soon wanted to hear nothing until a decision of war or no war had been
made, yet she felt compelled to listen several times daily (J 30 Aug. 1939).

Then, on Saturday, September 2, asleep after having worked late, she was
awakened by Manning's pounding on her door and calling, "England is declaring
war! In about ten minutes Chamberlain is going to speak." After the Prime
Minister's announcing war between Germany and the British Empire, there followed
instructions by the British Broadcasting company about such steps as closing
theaters, forbidding sports gatherings, and describing the signals for air raids.
Bristow
listened, and felt tears pouring down my cheeks. It is very seldom that I cry. Bruce said, "Hitler is mad. There's no other way." I said, "We can make radios, fly the Atlantic, conquer diseases--wouldn't you think we could find some way to stop war's being necessary?"

Talking with Manning until four in the morning about the First World War and its purpose of being the "war to end all wars," she exclaimed, "Wouldn't you like, right now, to drop in at Doorn and say, 'Mr. Hobangolern, now twenty-five years later, what do you think?" (J 2 Sept. 1939).

Up again at nine to listen to the radio all day, Bristow mourned,

Oh, if we can only keep out! It's not our war. It's the direct result of the rapacity of the victors at Versailles.

Tonight, when we heard of the bombing of the steamship Athenia, I was reduced to a state of nervous horrors and decided I might just as well stay away from the radio if I expected to get anything done during the next few months. It makes me shiver with disgust at the whole human race, that we should not have learned any better than this. (J 3 Sept. 1939).

Bristow's love of history and her consciousness of the wisdom of heeding its lessons caused her to tell Ethel to "lay in a supply of soap and typewriter paper" because her notes on World War I warned her that the price of these items would rise since the ingredients are necessary for munitions manufacture. She lamented,

I find it hard to believe that the embargo on munitions is going to last. In fact, the present war is repeating 1914 to such an extent that when I read the newspapers I feel as if I were reading history. It is discouraging--worse than that--to realize how little the human race has learned. A radio speaker has just observed: "While I don't want to revive the baby-killing talk of 1914, it is a singular coincidence that seventy-five per cent of the Athenia's passengers were women and children." Oh Lord, I said in my mind when I heard him, now we're going to begin all over, singing the hymns of hate. What war does to people's bodies is trivial compared to what it does to their minds. (J 6 Sept. 1939)
With a feeling of such dread, Bristow and her friends worked to find creative, interesting activities—anything to avoid talking about the war. Following such an outing to a friend’s, she recorded,

One difference between this war and the last is the lack of enthusiasm. There is instead a feeling of nausea. During the past few days I’ve received three letters from friends in New Orleans... and every one of them says, "I'm sick about this war." At least we have learned to discount drums and flags and glory. (J 8 Sept. 1939)

Another Publishing Deadline Nears

In spite of the threat of war, with her book finally in Crowell’s hands, Bristow needed only to finalize its editing. The task included verifying small but important elements, such as Bristow’s reference to chromosomes in her novel. Bernice Baumgarten had inquired whether they had been discovered by 1912 (J 11 Sept. 1939). Bristow from her long-ago experience knew how important such details could be. She was always thereafter prepared, and this time was no exception. Besides the Encyclopaedia Britannica verification of their discovery in 1873 and naming in 1888, she referred Baumgarten to J. B. Priestley and Gerald Buclitt’s I’ll Tell You Everything, a thriller mentioning chromosomes (J 11 Sept. 1939).

Recalling with happy fondness her friend who had done so much to promote her first two books, Bristow dedicated This Side of Glory to Annette Duchein, writing "For Annette Duchein—though frankly, my dear, the whole edition is for you! Devotedly, Gwen" (Bristow, TSG, SCol). Thereafter, Bristow always sent Duchein an inscribed and autographed copy of her latest work with such notations as the one in her Plantation Trilogy: "For Annette—for the archives. Remember?
Affectionately, Gwen"; or in Celia Garth, "For Annette Duchein, My dear Skeeta¹, whom I love, and who showers the world with love of her own--Gwen Bristow."²

Bristow had promised Crowell the manuscript by the end of the week, and with Ethel typing clean copy, she set out to meet her deadline, struggling in the unusually hot temperatures. September 17, a Sunday, dawned to find Bristow with an abscessed tooth, which caused her to write, "I really feel as if I have lived my life until now without knowing what pain was" (J 17 Sept. 1939), and she worried about finishing. However, when September 20 dawned on what would be the hottest day in twenty-six years at a temperature of 107.2, This Side of Glory was ready to be mailed to her publisher Robert Crowell (J 12, 20 Sept. 1939), who had also become her friend.

Bristow’s "Southern" tact and personality served her well in the Bristow-Crowell relationship. Her immediate success won Crowell’s generous support, but her hard work, congenial disposition, and professional integrity won his lifetime enthusiasm and friendship. When Robert Crowell’s father, Thomas Y. Crowell, made Bristow his negligible offer for her Deep Summer manuscripts in 1937, there began a business relationship founded in skepticism and anxiety, which blossomed into solid confidence and respect. With time the association between Bristow and Robert L. Crowell broadened and deepened into mutual admiration for each other’s character and ability. Because of that relationship, in those earlier years she and Crowell or someone from the publisher’s office wrote letters, sometimes two a day. As the years passed and Bristow required longer to produce a book, the correspondence decreased, but the friendship deepened.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Some of the correspondence between Bristow and Crowell was simply "chatty" bits of information, such as Bristow's "Thanks for sending me the best-seller lists. I beam like a Jack-o'-Lantern at every one of them" (July 2, 1938); or Crowell's August 18, 1938, one-sentence letter to Bristow, "You will be interested, I am sure, in this letter from one of your fans." Most was typical business correspondence between publisher and author, such as the special planning of sketches for jacket covers on which Bristow and Crowell Publishers spent much thought, time, and money.

Although Crowell's business relationship with Bristow was always handled in a most professional manner, he could write her in teasing informality, "Whenever you want more dough, just say so" (June 14, 1966). Likewise, Bristow might write a similarly lighthearted note, which said nothing more than, "Going through some old papers last night, I came across this picture of you. Don't you think you're a handsome brute?" (July 29, 1966).

When the Thomas Y. Crowell Company was to be restructured in 1968, Bristow wrote that she "was certainly astonished to learn that the Crowell Company had a new president. . . . Anyway, please keep in touch with me" (Jan. 26, 1973). In his customary, thoughtful manner, Crowell responded, "Don't worry, I'll always be keeping in touch with you . . . of all people" (Jan. 31, 1973). He kept his word. As for Bristow, when Bruce Manning died, one of the first people she wrote was Robert Crowell, who had always represented the company in Bristow affairs. He had invested heavily into promoting her books, and she had worked extraordinarily hard in public relations and public awareness of her work. In these campaigns,
Crowell sometimes flew to attend a speaking engagement or a publicity promotion of hers. He liked Bristow's work, and, of course, she was an excellent business investment for Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers. From Bristow's standpoint, Robert Crowell was an honest, dependable adviser whom she sincerely liked as a person.

Crowell, likewise, was justified in his admiration of Bristow's business integrity, as she proved time and again. For example, culminating her 1940 lecture tour through Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan, Bristow went on to New York for publicity work with Crowell. She was very ill very early in her tour, however, having had flu, which she had virtually ignored to honor her speaking engagements and publicity functions. This illness had come after months of overwork, and according to her doctor's diagnosis, she had paralyzed her adrenalin gland so that, like an automobile out of gasoline, she was "running on empty." Her blood pressure had dropped to 104, and when she arrived in New York, her every act was executed only through sheer determination of spirit (J April and May 1940).

Crowell, meanwhile, had orchestrated publicity interviews and photography sessions he felt crucial to the sale of Bristow's novel. Although he continually offered to cancel arrangements, Bristow refused to let him. Instead, she forced herself to put on her "public personality" and carry through each one, only to collapse in her room after each session. Through sheer strength of will, Bristow met all of her business engagements (J April and May 1940).

For his part, Crowell levied intense efforts and big sums of money to promote Bristow's novels. As each novel was readied for the retail stores, Crowell often purchased entire pages in the big newspapers and highly visible, full-page
advertisements in nationwide city papers such as the Times-Picayune and New York Herald. Elaborate sketches and interesting excerpts piqued the public’s interest.

Likewise, when This Side of Glory was ready, Crowell, considering the novel its "big book for the spring," allocated $5,000 for an immediate advertising campaign, holding an additional $2,000 in reserve for follow-up advertising after the reviews began to appear (Northridge). On his "Let’s Talk Shop" page in Publishers’ Weekly on January 27, 1940, Crowell ran the page, noting "Only 56 buying days until BRISTOW!" followed by successive others, each indicating the remaining days.

When This Side of Glory did appear March 20, 1940, it, too, was an immediate success, a fact supporting Crowell’s belief in Bristow. This book, which had taken two years to complete, concluded her Louisiana saga covering more than 160 years of American history. The American Revolutionary War occurs in the first of them, and World War I forms the backdrop for This Side of Glory, a title that occurred to Bristow from an incident on May 28, 1938, when she attended a lunch hosted by women, "very rich and bored stiff." There, a Mrs. Virginia Shaw Putnam said to her, "Your life is like a fairy tale." Bristow’s mental response was to be glad her "carefully cultivated public personality provides an answer." She would not have wanted to speak aloud her exact mental reaction to the remark. Later recalling the incident, she recorded, "My third book keeps cropping up in my mind at odd places. I feel now like calling it This Side of Glory because no matter what we get in this world it’s never quite perfect, always this side of glory" (J 28 May 1938).
The novel begins in 1912, thirty years after *The Handsome Road* ends. It is the story of the "new South." Fred Upjohn, whose mother was Corrie May of *The Handsome Road*, has become a levee engineer and a successful representative of the new upper-middle class. His lovely daughter Eleanor, who is twenty-two, has completed college and is serving as his secretary. Also of *The Handsome Road*, Denis Larne, who inherited Ardeith, has a grown son, Kester, who is twenty-seven.

Kester and Eleanor fall in love and marry, but they are as culturally divergent as any two people could be and both are very proud. Like her father, Eleanor has held Kester's type in contempt, agreeing with Margaret Wallace that "the Larne family was running to seed" (Wallace, *Gwen Bristow's Tale of Louisiana*, 7). Fred Upjohn assesses Kester as "that indolent hand-kissing scion of a worn out line" (44), having "ancestors like the plague, [and] too blue-blooded to work or do anything else except drink and chase women and look mournful about the Civil War" (39). To Eleanor, at first, he is "Lazy. . . . Extravagant."

With a certain clarity, Eleanor recognizes the difference between them, and she tells Kester, "You're a southerner, . . . and I'm an American" (34). Kester Larne, utterly charming, vivacious, and irresponsible, has mortgaged Ardeith until it is only in regard for his social standing that the bank allows him to hold the place. Eleanor Upjohn, practical, sturdy, and calculating, discovers within a year the bankrupt condition. Worse, the situation is a matter of happy indifference to Kester in spite of Eleanor's horror and humiliation. Her father had taught her that debts must be honorably respected and repaid quickly. In spite of her anger, Eleanor loves Kester's "gracious trivialities" (119), telling him,
I think they're beautiful. They're what I want to learn from you, . . .
gentleness and tact and how to make people love me. The civilization
your people created is the most beautiful I've ever seen or heard of--
gallantry and high breeding and ideals, the moon over the cotton
and the darkies thrumming banjos along the river. It's the South of
legends and poetry, and it's true. (119)

At the same time, Eleanor also recognizes that his "civilization" has become
exactly that--"the South of legends and poetry," which cannot solve their problems.
She is of the new breed, she tells him, coming "out of the tenements and the
steerage . . . hard and brash and uncouth . . . Americans, more than you are,
because we've got the qualities that made it possible for the American nation to be.
We're the second pioneers" (119). In a reversal of roles, she must teach him. The
old patriarchal system has not disappeared, but it functions as mere vanity without
any of old its ability, business acumen, pride, discernment, energy, and
determination.

Several patterns of contrasting characterizations are interwoven in the story.
For example, one is Eleanor's vigor and mental astuteness, coupled with sharp,
aggressive business acumen versus Kester's laziness and good-natured indifference to
matters of business and the "security" of his heritage. Another pattern is Eleanor's
bustling efficiency versus Kester's carefree ineptitude, and another juxtaposes
Eleanor's pride in what she and her family have made of themselves with Kester's
pride in his heritage. Yet another pattern deals with Kester's ability to cast aside his
duties and march romantically off to war versus Eleanor's ability and determination
to win their home battles against almost insurmountable debt--the Southern woman
being left to carry the burden of the plantation. With these is the complex issues of
jealousy and insecurity as people violate class demarcations and threaten the sacred institutions of social status and heritage.

That Eleanor rescues the plantation, making her and Kester wealthy beyond her wildest dreams is not her only violation of Kester's Old South notions. When she modernizes the plantation, Kester accuses Eleanor of "[cleaning] out everything that made Ardeith warm and lovely, a place to be born in and live in and die in. You've swept away every track of the people who built it and loved it. You straightened the dent in my great-grandmother's coffeepot" (310). He "hate[d]" what she had "done to Ardeith . . . every button and every engine" (309). Like Ashley Wilkes of *Gone with the Wind*, he misses the old life, saying, "This place was beautiful when I had it. It was lazy and wasteful and nobody did very much work and everybody had a grand time. Now it's a mill for the manufacture of cottonbales. It's hideous" (309).

*This Side of Glory* is Bristow's transition novel, the move from Old South to New South. Kester, product of the plantation aristocratic patriarchal system of soft voices and male domination, once called Eleanor "white trash" for her lack of demure and soft-voiced responses, lack of imperturbable control, and wifely deference. Their story symbolizes the clash of two ages, two cultures, two civilizations, the erupting of a mountain of incalculable experiences personified to produce new beginnings for a people, a nation, even a world.
Their children, they come to realize, are "going to be better people" (810) if the New South learns what the Old South would teach. The New South, Bristow is saying, can be a better place for everyone.

With no hint of moralizing but simply an awakening, a growing wiser with adversity, This Side of Glory is a product of Bristow's profound respect for history and an integrity that denied her the position of omniscient revisionary. To usurp such a stance, in her mind, would be a denial of truth since, to Bristow, history was what really had happened, "what folks of the period wrote about themselves. . . . the way the period affect[ed] the people of whom you write" (Northridge). Accordingly, Bristow saw her role much like that of the lighting technician for a drama already in place. Her task was simply to focus her audience's attention by heightening, lowering, or directing the light from one character to another, from one scene to another. In what might, therefore, be interpreted as Bristow's response to several issues--namely, the accusation of "literary carpentering" and the charge of the "glaring omission," as well as her "failure" or "refusal" to develop "adequately"--Bristow believed, "As Voltaire or somebody said, 'The way to be a bore is to tell everything'" (J 31 Aug. 1962).

**Bristow's Stance on Slavery**

Therefore, in quite a similar manner, Bristow takes no pronounced or announced position on the issue of slaves, choosing, rather, to weave them naturally into the story as her research found them. According to Eugene Armfield, writing for the May 7, 1938, Saturday Review, Bristow is interpreting "the South and its
past in critical terms," (6) "depicting life in Louisiana at high points of the state's
history" (5). Instead of trying to portray the "pleasant rural peace [of the
"plantation regime"] . . . as an alternative to the confusion of the materialistic New
South" (MacKethan 10), Bristow focuses on a portrayal verified by scholarly,
unbiased research. She conscientiously resists artificiality, the exception, and the
extreme, an approach she would have called "honesty in delineation," not
"stereotyping."

She does not deny the existence of such atrocities as "sexual exploitation of
black men and women by their white owners" as Catherine Clinton points to in The
Plantation Mistress (201), or the practice of miscegenation; indeed, her character
Philip, who "had left [his wife, Judith] this unborn child of his as permanent
evidence" (DS 176), is thus guilty. Furthermore, she does not deny atrocities, for
Philip, in refusing Judith's demand that he "[s]ell Angelique down the river" (DS
183), says,

You're asking me to murder her. . . . A girl like Angelique chained
to the wall every night, at the mercy of every African savage on
board and every filthy boatman, bearing her child in a slavecamp
somewhere in the marshes around New Orleans--why don't you ask
me to cut her throat and be done with it? (183, 184)

Bristow, however, was not a "sentimentalist" or "romantic" in the literary
sense. She simply related that which her research proved typical, in somewhat the
same vein as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese conveys Mary Chestnut's inability to
"embrace Stowe as an authority on the woes of southern women, black or white,"
feeling that "Harriet Beecher Stowe knew nothing about human nature--and less
about Southern ladies." To Chestnut, while "the topic [of slavery] was not nice, yet
she felt that Stowe reveled in it"; and unlike Chestnut, who "took slavery for

granted as the foundation of her world" (359-62), Bristow, who thoroughly

researched her subject, took nothing for granted.

Bristow depicts slavery as a reality of the times, but she, like Mary Chestnut,

"could only have concurred with Louisa McCord's sneering association of Uncle

Tom with the sensationalist fiction of their day" (Fox-Genovese 360). Furthermore,

Bristow's treatment parallels the fact, as Fox-Genovese points out that "The

transgressions and wanton violence that Stowe depicted were not sanctioned by

southern laws, which held masters to account in their treatment of their people"

(360). Bristow depicts the lives of slaves in each of her three tales as her research

had convinced her they typified daily living, depicting nothing in emotional extreme.

Each story has its drama and trauma, but there are not the "toms, mammys, and

pickaninny types" that constitute the stereotypes described by Jack Temple Kirby in

Dixie-Made South (73-74).

Instead, in Deep Summer, apart from the actual fact of their being slaves,

Philip is a kind master, and Judith teaches her children "not to strike the Negroes"

(180), and she expresses being "ashamed to think a son of [hers] would strike a boy

who can't fight back" (180). When David returns home, he "call[s] greetings to the

Negroes who were pouring out of the house and fields to assure themselves that the

young master was really back" (223).

At the same time that slavery is not a major issue in Bristow's writing except

as it figures in the development of the two divergent white classes of the South, the

slaves, like religion, are an element of the overall ambience of her plantation tales.
In an inverse sort of way, the slaves in Bristow's writings immortalize their own narratives through their own sense of family, the naturalness of their musical lamenting, and their arrogance, especially toward the one group to whom they felt they could and did feel superior, the "poor white trash," the second white class in Bristow's narratives.

Of Bristow's inclusive portrayal, Margaret Wallace, speaking specifically of Bristow's third novel, assesses her work as having "a mellow and ironic perspective usually possible only to very long novels." She further notes that "Miss Bristow writes with simplicity and candor, without sentimentality," giving her "most expert piece of straight story telling" (7). Such literary integrity implies that along with her concern for realistic portrayal of the Southern whites lay Bristow's consciousness of the rich history of the Southern blacks. For example,

On the back gallery they talked about [her pregnancy] in happy voices. The servants in the house had all been born in its shadow, most of them of families that had belonged to Ardeith for generations. No slave had been sold from Ardeith in forty years. They were as integral a part of the clan as their masters. The approach of an heir was an event to be mentioned with thanksgiving to the Lord. (THR 109)

The author of these lines was the type of researcher who would spend years for understanding to support an accurate portrayal, who actually did spend nine years for just one novel (Crowell, letter to the author, 3 July 1993).

She is the writer, says her stepdaughter, Patricia Manning Tanner, who spent at least two weeks of every season in the locale where her narrative is set so that she would know and understand it firsthand, even to the subtleties of the weather and the plants. She unearthed its recipes and with help tried them out to know what their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
food tasted like and what the rigors of preparation were (Northridge). She is the
writer, continues Tanner, who,

if she said it took twenty minutes for a character to go a certain
distance, you may be sure she herself had walked or gone the distance
in the very same way she described her character's moving and had
timed it. She knew. (Interview)

Therefore, if Bristow sounds like a whimsical Joel Chandler Harris
reminiscing about "a place of peace and comfort, the estate of a gentleman whose
slaves were well cared for, his crops well tended" (MacKethan 1), it is incumbent
upon the reader to temper judgment of the degree of sentimentality or romanticism
in Bristow with the acute consciousness that she is the researcher whose years of
insatiably devouring every record she could find provoked her belief that the modern
world perceives with "hindsight" vision.

Bristow's "narration and the rich texture of background" in portraying the
beginnings of these diverse cultures in Louisiana against their colorful political
background, says one writer, greatly enhances and sustains the reader's interest
(Caroliniana). Bristow further contributes to historical realism by providing other
elements like her depiction Philip, a pillar of the newly formed society, building an
empire with the labor of smuggled slaves. Also contributing to the image is the fact
slave labor is the means by which the swamps become sugarcane plantations and the
thrown-to cabins become magnificent mansions. Bristow portrays not only the
economic system that removed virtually all remunerative work from the poor whites
through slave labor but also the careless behavior of Southern aristocrats which
helped create the hideous squalor in which poor whites live at the fringe of the prosperity and luxury.

The result, as Bristow demonstrates, is a panorama of family pride, personal attitudes, feelings of having been wronged, all the events and actions that ultimately create an avalanche of circumstances that alter the course of history and its prevailing social/economic system. Therein Bristow portrays the evolving of the "poor white trash" culture, alongside that of slavery--but it is history, says Bristow.

Upper-class whites are not unaware of these events, as Bristow demonstrates in Deep Summer when, having just returned from a chance visit to Dolores, Philip and Judith discuss the matter:

"Philip, did you notice that all the people we saw down in that beastly district this morning were white?"

Philip leaned his elbows on the bureau and looked out of the window. "It's a pretty shameful confession to have to make, isn't it?- -but slaves are too valuable to be allowed to live that way."

"I didn't know there was anything so awful in the world," said Judith. "It's not just Dolores--it's all of them. What did they ever do to deserve that?" (176-177)

Furthermore, the selfishness and blindness of the plantation classes return to them as surely as harvest follows planting as the concentrations of squalor and discontented slaves spawn heartbreak and rebellions, such as occur in Deep Summer:

Benny looked up at her after a moment, lifting a face like pale bronze, with fine-cut, almost aquiline features and large dark eyes with curling lashes. . . . [Judith] did not know if it was a single feature of his or the general expression of them all or something in the cool arrogance of his attitude that had set her heart pounding. She had resolved bitterly that she was not going to try to find this child. . . . She did not even know if Philip had made any effort to recognize him. (215-216)
Judith, after both emotional and mental deliberation, asks the child his mother's name. Not only does Bristow reiterate Judith's awareness of the problems inherent in the institution of slavery, but she also empathizes with the plight of the slave in a direct and objective manner:

"Her name's Angeli--" But the effort of forcing out his voice was too much for him, and he broke from her grasp and wheeled around, covering his eyes with his arm and sobbing against the trunk of the tree.

In her sudden wave of resentment that he should be alive and concrete before her she hardly knew he was crying. She simply saw him, with unthinking detestation. But then, he tried to swallow his tears and when he could not stop them he tried to explain them, and she heard the words struggle out between his sobs.

"I'm--so--sick--of bein'--a nigger!" (216).

Judith's maternal and humane instincts betray the barriers she had erected as a result of her personal jealousies: "With an impulsive movement Judith drew him away from the tree and took him into her arms. He sobbed on her breast. She stood holding him, weak with compassion, for his wrong was so much greater than hers" (216-217).

After the Larnes' visit to Rattletrap Square, whatever motivated Philip's attitude that slaves were "too valuable to be allowed to live that way" hardly lessened their guilt or responsibility for the plight of the slave or for the shanty neighborhoods whose inescapable filth and stench propagated and nourished plague spots, often with terrible results.

A Self-driving Task Master

The Bristow who set up the little table in her bedroom in 1934 to write a story because she "was unhappy not writing it" (Muse) and began what became,
finally, her three novels set in Louisiana, did not approach her task lightly. She adamantly believed in understanding history for the purpose of improving life, both in the present and in the future. To achieve this critical objective in reading and studying history, Bristow mapped the direction, saying one should avoid the "hindsight concept of history. The best way is by reading the "film of pages stained and yellowed with age, though difficult" and "find out what folks of the period wrote about themselves" (Northridge). Her objective was to create an awareness and an appreciation for the significance in the words, "What people did is always important if we want to understand what they do" (Trilogy xiii). In creating her portrayal of "public events [that] did happen" and "private events [that] could have happened" (Trilogy xiii), Bristow makes a serious attempt to reveal truth for its redemptive qualities for posterity. Recognizing the flavor and authenticity in her work, Eugene Armfield notes, "It may be that historians will alter some of the details of her picture. But no doubt life in a small river town in Louisiana . . . was like the life" as Bristow portrayed it (6).

At the same time Bristow stressed her point about historical background as the "valuable lagniappe to a story," she also declared that it "has to be entertaining and it has to be authentic." There is no room for "cheating," Bristow concluded, underscoring the fact that "No matter how obscure the period, if you cheat because you think nobody knows about it anyway, you'll be appalled at the number of readers who do know and who are very happy to tell you" (Northridge). Therefore, regarding the historical novel, Bristow advised,

[S]oak yourself so utterly in the period that you know about ten times as much about it as you'll ever need to put into your story. You go
to the library and read every mortal thing you can find on your subject, till your eyes begin to flutter, you have pains in the back of your neck and your fingers ache from taking notes. Good modern histories are the starting place, but don't stop with them. Once you have a general idea of the period, with names and dates set down for reference, put the modern histories back on the shelves and leave them there. It's time to find out what the folks of that period wrote about themselves.

For modern histories are all hindsighted. They emphasize what the course of later history has shown to be important. What the people who were actually living through world-shaking events thought about them was in most cases very different from what the modern world thinks about them. (Caroliniana)

Acting on her own advice, Bristow read hundreds of books, keeping thousands of pages of notes on everything she could find preparatory to beginning a book. She read such works as Lewis P. Jones's *South Carolina: A Synoptic History for Laymen*; Mary Boykin Chesnut's *A Diary from Dixie*; Nell S. Graydon's *Tales of Columbia*; Elizabeth Coker's *La Belle*; and Charles Fraser's *A Charleston Sketchbook: 1796-1806* (Caroliniana).

Bristow also advised reading any available newspapers and magazines for thorough saturation in a period until "you remember it as if you were remembering it out of your own experience." In this way, she found, the aspiring author finds that materials offer "three fascinating problems: classification, selection and intensification." She believed that since all ideas (or literary materials) concern people, predicaments, or places (or ideas about them), the writer must bear in mind the need to select and manipulate material conducive to keeping the purpose named and sharply focused. Both technique and feeling, carefully controlled and adequately developed, Bristow argued, are vital to a plot with life (Caroliniana).
Bristow, therefore, studied technique carefully, reading such works as F. A. Rockwell’s *Modern Fiction Techniques* and Thomas W. Duncan’s article "A Professional Writer’s Secret Weapons." To gather background material for *This Side of Glory*, she read the "*Literary Digest* files beginning in 1912, files of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Harper’s Bazaar* for the same period, and the files of *The Times-Picayune* covering the war and postwar years." As a result, she found that the "war and immediate postwar years are . . . as remote from the present as the 1860's . . . and I was appalled at the weeks and weeks of research I had to put in to get the background authentic" (Caroliniana).

In addition to wide reading, her journals also reflect Bristow’s critiques of their qualities. For example, her sarcasm equaled Emerson’s in his reaction to the Brook Farm enthusiasts’ plan to "build their own houses, raise their own food, make their own clothes, . . . and turn out literary work in their odd moments" when he said, "Tell that to children. . . . [T]he greatest of all arts, the subtlest and most miraculous effect, you fancy is to be practiced with a pen in one hand and a crowbar or a peat-knife in the other" (Caroliniana).

Bristow believed there was no shortcut to good writing. She, therefore, painstakingly approached her task of forming her narrative, recreating a period about which so little was generally known that she searched for materials "with a sense of wondering discovery, proud as an explorer of every new fact" (Caroliniana). She discovered after writing, however, that her document often "was spattered with little essays that would have been fine in a book called *Life and Customs in Colonial Louisiana*" without connection to the characters who peopled her story. Clearing
them out was like cutting off her thumbs to fit new gloves, she wrote, but the effect was that of "getting rid of a lot of rubbish" (Caroliniana).

Her work bears the fruit of her efforts, however, for she was able to weave quite unobtrusively much of the historical flavor of pioneering white settlers [coming] from the southeast and from New England to the east bank of the Mississippi River. . . . [revealing how the] land and their experiences change them, and the central family develop[ing] into several branches: two wealthy, plantation-owning lines of descent, one landless poor-white line, and one black line. (DeMarr 237)

**Bristow's Use of "Place"**

Another aspect of Bristow's objective was place as it figured into these people's lives. The plantation of The Handsome Road is a place of tranquility and prosperity. The manor that "Even around in the back . . . was beautiful with those tall white columns going up to the roof" (38) and the great hall where "[y]ou could drive a mule-team right through it and have room on both sides" contrasts harshly with Corrie May's house that is lost in a maze of "alleys [that] twisted around the saloons" and "crossed one another" so that it "was hard to find your way around" (12). Everything from Ann's "beautiful hands . . . long and white, with polished nails and not a shadow of dust under the edges" (10) and the clean, well-dressed slave girl with "gold rigs in her ears" (39) impress upon Corrie May the drastic crudeness of "her own faded dress" that "had been clean when she left home, but it was soiled now with the summer dust, and her feet were dusty too, and hard with going barefooted all summer" (38).
Symbolic of the poor, Corrie May from Rattletrap Square is imprisoned in filth and absence of opportunity—also the result of *place*. Corrie May, the personification of the "'po' white trash," likewise recognizes the cause for her people's troubles—perhaps unable to verbalize it because of lack of education, but she knows. Corrie May, however, is more thoughtful and intelligent than most, and she is very much aware of life's imbalances and injustices. She understands basic economics that dictates no jobs for the poor who must earn a salary "when there's niggers doing 'em for nothing" (*THR* 54). Corrie May must, therefore, bear the responsibility of her family because, as she says, "my mother, she's all wore out grieving . . . and my father--well he ain't no 'count. He'd go offn his head with a hundred dollars . . . spend it all in about two weeks" (35). By contrast, Ann from the plantation, who "had had very few decisions to make, and these she had made in whatever fashion seemed at the moment likely to cause the least trouble for herself" (61) cannot see the troubles and want around her for a lack of personal need has blinded her to the deprivation of others. Her slaves, likewise, in an enforced way, also know nothing of the deprivation of "poor white trash," as they demonstrate when Corrie May hears them singing, "Nigger nebber walk up de handsome road,/ But I radder be a nigger dan po' white trash!" (50).

In this manner, Bristow reduces the significance of "place" and the slave issue to that which is necessary for authenticity. In *This Side of Glory*, for example, the physical characteristics of "place" have changes. The slaves have, of course, been freed by the war, and memories of those old days have long faded in its first-quarter-of-the-twentieth-century setting. Blacks have remained on the land,
however, either as hired help or sharecroppers, and Kester knows "exactly why paid laborers were economically better than sharecroppers" (122). He understands that by

riding to the end of a row and spending ten minutes in conversation with a darky--conversation that included an exchange of gossip about Kester's baby and the darky's baby and the weather and the looks of the river this spring--Kester could guarantee [Eleanor] that the field would be plowed by sundown, and be right about it. (122)

Kester could mention a fish-fry or join the workers for a few words or a turn with a hoe alongside them, and before long, the work was done and no one had thought of extra pay (122). The "new" setting is the postwar plantation under the guidance of an exuberant, rather irresponsible heir, who has not inherited sufficient work ethic along with the plantation.

Moreover, this plantation "running to seed" is the realistic setting for a man such as Kester. When Eleanor asks him how he made everyone like him, his simple answer, "Like 'em back" (122) suggests another key to Bristow's philosophy regarding the issue of race. Kester's untroubled existence and his friendly, one-of-you approach acts as a complementary backdrop for his genuine like and concern for those who work on his plantation and for his equally lazy indifference to his unending fields. Having never had to work for those fields, he recognizes no urgency relative to their care. Such a disposition, according to Bristow's research, typifies the dying breed of plantation aristocracy when poor work ethic and disorganized, lackadaisical farming spelled doom, along with the fact that it taught generations little regard for efficiency and hard work.

Kester epitomizes the plantation owner who cannot accept the challenge of change in ways feasible to rescuing his land. Also true of "place" at this time are the
attempts to modernize as Eleanor has modernized the plantation. Out of sync with both ages, Kester does not understand how anyone can "love living in a place that looks like the Ford Factory" (309). To him the "place was beautiful" when it "was lazy and wasteful and nobody did very much work and everybody had a grand time" (309). Eleanor's success in getting the plantation out of debt had made it "hideous" to his thinking, a "mill for the manufacture of cotton bales" (309). He longs, instead, to plant a few watermelons in these exquisite fields and let a few pickaninnies eat them on the levee. And as long as we make a living I don't care if I cut your precious profits in two. I'm going to get Ardeith back to something like what it used to be. (312)

The Sum of Its Parts

Bristow's perception of her subject was, as her novels attest, more than a land of slaveholders and slaves. Although Eugene Armfield agrees, he sharpens his focus, finding, specifically of The Handsome Road, that only "in a certain sense" does Bristow's Trilogy portray a past age as a "historic novel." He regards the novel significantly as "the story of two women whose lives were shaped by their times and by the impact of terrific experiences, which they share with other men and women" (5). Bristow's own attitude supports this interpretation while also delineating her purpose:

Everybody who writes about the South writes as if the South began in 1860. Or rather, as if the particular civilization that collapsed with the Civil War just happened to be there--as if everybody woke up one morning and there it was, slaves and colonels and white-columned manors all having blossomed into being over night. I tried to ask, How did it happen to be here? . . . I decided to write a book that should attempt to show through a group of typical characters how culture peculiar to the Old South came into being. (Caroliniana).
In evaluating Bristow, it is important to maintain a perspective on what she was attempting. One reviewer (unidentified) dismissed the theme of Deep Summer as "the now popular one of the rise of Southern prosperity, . . . [with] weak character development" (Northridge). Although one can agree that Bristow does not depict all characters sharply and clearly, without excusing this deficiency, perhaps one may find her "flaw" somewhat diminished if one recognizes that character was not her focus. In addition, as another unidentified reviewer for the North Georgia Review argues, Bristow's The Handsome Road "is a book of types rather than of characters. And the types are in the main determined by the economic and sociological status of the individuals dealt with" (Northridge). Furthermore, the theme of her Plantation Trilogy is not just "the now popular one of the rise of Southern prosperity." Much to the contrary, Bristow seeks to effect a more significant, vital understanding of past events to promote an enhanced life for future races, nations, and cultures.

Understanding Bristow’s purpose, the historical essence and her focus of approach, and, in particular, the enormity of her appeal to the popular culture that formed the bulk of her audience is essential to the understanding of an author who was responsible for some of the most widely read and enjoyed books in fiction.

Bristow, therefore, in setting out seriously to satisfy her cacoethes scribendi, made use of all the "valuable lagniappe" she could provide in a faithfully treated historical milieu. There was more to Bristow, however, than being an aspiring writer stalemated at the reference stacks. Fierce ambition fueled her focus, and early in her career she began to see another appealing aspect—that of providing
entertainment" (J 25 Feb. 1947), along with historical enlightenment in the form of a "good book."

Out of this climate, Bristow’s Trilogy became a "depiction of southern history from the perspective of the poor white" as a "complement to the familiar myth of the magnolia-laden Old South" (DeMarr 238). Reassuringly, the flatteringly high appeal of her worldwide popularity convinced Bristow also that "for sheer entertainment [she] was doing all right" (J 25 Feb. 1947), and for the time being, she valued her position among the top best-sellers.

Later, however, with recurring intensity and frequency, Bristow’s needs would have changed. With her husband’s and sister’s illnesses and with expenses mounting, her motivation would become, "I’ve got to work! I must earn some money" (J 17 Aug. 1956). Furthermore, although she often continued to express her love for her chosen career, her writing would also give her refuge from her own internal battles, such as Manning’s "black depression" (J 24 Sept. 1956) and her sister Caroline’s "one long scream of anguish" (J 24 Aug. 1956). It would give her needs not only a focus, "Oh, I thank goodness for my work" (J 17 Aug. 1956), but it would also enable her to cope with the forces that drove her to declare, "I will not sit around brooding" (J Ap. 28, 1956). As time passed, outside influences seemed to have little effect on Bristow’s writing. She simply continued her career, moving from one project to the next as time passed and ideas formed, unceasingly the exacting and resolute researcher. Always an audience awaiting her next tale, for she was extraordinarily popular.
Bristow's Popularity

A study by Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, offers certain possibilities in helping to understand Bristow's phenomenal popularity. For example, Bristow's overriding objective to write "a good book" that would be both "entertaining and instructive" (Northridge) finds strong support in Radway's study. "[M]any women," Radway states, want to read "something informative," and something that satisfies their "need to read as an escape." The Radway study also concludes that such reading provides "good therapy" and is "much cheaper than tranquilizers, alcohol or addictive [television]" (52). These reasons all spotlight several prevailing conditions that contributed to the popular acceptance of Bristow.

First, when Bristow began publishing, the especially hard-hit rural South, along with the rest of the nation, was coming out the Great Depression. Additionally, there soon followed World War II, and when it was over, women of America, and most particularly of the middle class, were

[among] the shock troops of the antipuritan revolt . . . . Having shown during the war that women were as capable as men in the workaday world, and having won the right to vote, women now demanded full social equality as well. (May 102)

Publication of Bristow's *Trilogy* spanned almost this entire era, and social reform had *not* kept up with women's state of mind. Furthermore, as Radway states, the conditions of women's lives demanded something to substitute for the deficiencies, which were very many, very real, and very broad.

Also contributing to the popular acceptance of Bristow was the fact that, generally speaking, the daily existence of these women was quite barren and problematic, not so very far removed from the difficulties of women that Elizabeth
Fox-Genovese in *Within the Plantation Household* and Catherine Clinton in *The Plantation Mistress* elucidate from the Old South—just more changed in locus than in character. As the Radway study finds, "until recently, social custom kept [women] out of the full-time paid labor force and in the home," and their reading habits could be closely correlated "to the way the act of reading fits within the middle-class mother's day and the way the story itself addresses anxieties, fears, and psychological needs resulting from her social and familial position (45). The "family . . . remained the center of most women's lives," where women "who made wifehood and motherhood the central purpose of life far outnumbered working women" (Scott 213-215).

The condition wherein women in general had "to cope with social pressures . . . no matter what [their] internal need for achievement might be. . . [and] satisfy it within the bounds of a decent domesticity" began to change early in the twentieth century. However, that change was slow in coming, especially for the majority (Scott 220). Adherence to codes of fidelity in both marriage and family traditional values (along with a starkness of life—at least partially due to the absence of electricity in parts of the rural South until well into the forties) all worked to keep women in situations from which they sought vicarious escape.

Scott also notes that "in view of the deep conservatism of the majority of southern women, many . . . who never registered to vote" were still under the domination of their husbands' or fathers' will in much of their daily existence as well as their finances (186-194). Few avenues were open for many women still much confined like "one plantation mistress [who] likened her life to that of a caged bird"
bird" (Clinton 179). For example, towns were often distant, even if women could have gone to shop or to attend cultural events. It follows, then, that the theater was also too far away for convenience; however, the theater represented a double jeopardy in that it also posed a moral dilemma. Thus, the "real answer to the question, 'What do romances do better than other novels today?' was actually the single word, 'escape'" (Radway 87) that it provided.

In addition to the domestic climate of the times, the social appeal of Bristow's writing also served as reason for her popularity. An unidentified writer in 1939 said, "The author [of The Handsome Road] has a decided knack for making a reader feel contemporary with the people of her novel" (Northridge). In much the same sense, Radway looks at Angela McRobbie's assertion that "representations are interpretations" (5), finding that "reading as a form of behavior operate[s] as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of actual social subjects" (7) to satisfy their emotional and psychological needs. Thus, reading allows women to leave their responsibilities behind without the guilt of desertion. It allows them to experience their fantasies without the sin of committing (117) within the constructs of a time frame available to them. Hence, reading the romance proves a safe, accessible, and "permanent" form of escape, as well as the opportunity to experience personally (albeit vicariously) the romance, the adventure, the love, and the excitement of their dreams. Radway concurs, furthermore, with Dorothy Hobson whose earlier Crossroads study found that reading "comes alive and communicates when the viewers add their own interpretation and understanding..." (8).
Sales records, reviews, and best-seller lists nationwide underscore Bristow's popularity almost equally throughout the United States. As Ernest May discusses in *War, Boom and Bust*, progress toward the liberation of women began in earnest after World War II, and with its advent, American women everywhere exacted greater personal rewards, part of which included for many enjoyment of Bristow's books. If one were to consider the starkness of life in only the rural south in the late 1930's and 1940's, one could readily recognize the fact that women clung to their everyday lives out of necessity more than contentment, and reading provided escape accessible through no other avenue. In the essentially "patriarchal marriage" of the rural South, women generally "saw themselves first as wives and mothers" (Radway 7). In such circumstances, points out Lucinda MacKethan in *Daughters of Time*, when women are 'mythically,' in the home, their "'heroism'. . . is confined in myth to bearing and raising children (39). Like that of women everywhere, their dissatisfaction with the resulting social fabric led "ultimately to repetitive romance reading" (Radway 9).

As Radway discovered in her Smithton studies, the resulting evidence convincingly shows that romance reading meets significant needs. In essence, reading as a way of escape becomes something of a reader's declaration of independence (11), like Corrie May's refusing to marry Budge. Women by the thousands whose stark lives had taught them early about being poor with too many children could empathize readily when Corrie May tells Budge:

> Suppose I got married to you. Suppose I worked my hands off, cooking and picking cotton and raising young uns. Then suppose a mule kicked you and you died. What would I do? I couldn't pay rent so I'd get turned offn that piece of ground. And could I work for
somebody? Could I sew or scrub or take in washing? Who do you know that's gonta pay a white woman for doing them things when there's niggers doing 'em for nothing? I ain't gonta marry you. I'll be double-damned if I am. (THR 44)

Another very appealing quality in Bristow is her strong female protagonists--Judith, Corrie May, Eleanor, to name three from her Plantation Trilogy; Garnet, Kendra, Marney, Florinda, and Celia, from other novels. Bristow's women are vibrant and real. Although Bristow was not the outspoken feminist, she believed ardently, as Robert Crowell says, "in the importance of women in the world outside the kitchen and the nursery (neither of which she entered herself)" (Crowell, letter, 10 July 1993). Her feminine protagonists exhibit warmth, love of family, courage, and determination--even aggressive action against that which is unreasonable and repressive--with graciousness and femininity. Her men recognize and appreciate the independent strength of their women.

Radway's study also considers that the typical preference for heroines is one for who

is differentiated from her more ordinary counterparts . . . by unusual intelligence or by an extraordinarily fiery disposition," ". . . explicit[e] refus[al] to be silenced by the male desire to control women through the eradication of their individual voices. . . . Although the women are unusually defiant in that they are capable of successfully opposing men, they are characterized by childlike innocence and inexperience . . . completely unaware that they are capable of passionate sexual urges. (123-129)

Judith is daring and impetuous, maintaining an on-going battle for status even though "Before she had been in the house a month," she echoes Mary Chestnut's "heated assertion, 'There's no slave, after all, like a wife' (Fox-Genovese 359) when she "agreed with the proverb that the mistress of a plantation was the biggest slave
on it" (DS 79). Yet while she valiantly asserts her independence, her romantic husband respects her competence, "annoyed at the inefficiency that became evident as soon as Judith took herself out of the establishment" (186) and loves her so much he "would rather lose every acre of the plantation than see [her] suffer" (190).

Eleanor Upjohn, another memorable heroine of This Side of Glory, is the emerging woman of the new age. Like Judith, she raises her voice, she demands, and she fights for what is hers and for what she believes is right. She admires Kester's manners and graciousness. At the same time that she admires his "beautiful" and "gracious trivialities," she also fearlessly tells him what she sees as the truth: "But my people are closer to facts than yours. And if you withdraw, if you try to live on gallantry and beauty alone--here we come" (119).

Another strong contribution to Bristow's popularity was her characters' appeal to women. Bristow's women are vastly different from what Scott describes as the "marvelous creation" of the antebellum southern women of the upper class--the submissive wife whose reason for being was to love, honor, obey, and occasionally amuse her husband, to bring up his children and manage his household. Physically weak, and "formed for the less laborious occupations," she depended upon male protection. . . . She was timid and modest, beautiful and graceful, "the most fascinating being in creation . . . the delight and charm of every circle she moves in" (4).

Mary Jean DeMarr in American Women Writers writes that Bristow's "female protagonists are more rounded, more assertive and independent, more interesting than most in that genre" (238). Possibly Ann Sheramy Larne of The Handsome Road is Bristow's only representative of what Lucinda MacKethan in Daughters of Time sees as "still enshrined [in a] system of patriarchal dominance" (6), where she
was expected to be "nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident, and dependent. . . [with] one right, and that is the right to protection" (Jones 8). However, as Peggy W. Prenshaw points out, even Ann, has her own clear perception of her relationship with her husband, as she demonstrates in her "recit[al of] her ladyhood resumé." As Prenshaw further notes, Ann recognizes that she "obey[s] her husband with docile respect but she got out of him anything she really made up her mind to have" (18). Differing from the stereotype to which MacKethan refers, Bristow's Ann employs these traits to serve her own purposes. Then, as hardships later teach her to understand broader aspects of life, she knows how to discard all the "stage-prop[s]" (THR 57) to save her plantation and rear her son. Indeed, Bristow's women are generally independent, intelligent, and assertive in pursuing their goals.

In her characters Bristow's readers found women to emulate, women with qualities they aspired to or dreamed of, such as independence, courage, perseverance, and intelligence. Her characters recognize their battles and fight them. They are assertive, not aggressive; gentle, not weak; genuine, not hypocritical. Furthermore, they are what they are without apology, being the best they can be, all the while making an occasional mistake but learning and making progress. At the same time, Bristow's male characters treat women with respect, generally allowing them to be loving and loveable, capable yet feminine.

Bristow, along with her heroines, provided real and imaginary models that women admired. If, as Radway states, "representations are interpretations" and reading as "a form of behavior operate[s] as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of actual social subjects" (7) to satisfy their emotional and psychological...
needs, not only could readers transform their own lives vicariously through Bristow's characters but also through Bristow's own life as she revealed herself through her lectures. Bristow spoke to her audience through her personal life as a living example of the admirable, self-confident woman she portrays in her novels.

Bristow also provided a strong force in her own popularity through her lecture tours and her frequent appearances to sign autographs. As a guest lecturer, she spoke to thousands of fans and autographed hundreds of books and gave her audience a sense of acquaintance and shared interests. Not only did her presence project a likeable, genuine person, but also, in spite of the fact that in later years she frequently sighed to her journal, that although she was "tired of making these talks," she recognized that "they d[id] sell books."

Furthermore, although Bristow rewrote herself through her women characters, she chose to state more directly her deep concern for the significance of history through a male--Kester, thus providing a powerful psychological boost to women's imagination. In this, she portrays a more subtle study than just a wife's saving "the family farm." In choosing woman to mastermind the rescuing of the plantation, along with making a fortune, Bristow reiterates a theme of survival that is grounded in matriarchy. She also reaffirms woman's significance. On the other hand, Kester's problem, clearly, is a lack of interest, not intelligence. He can go to war and win his medals, thereby escaping both the arduousness of rescuing his plantation and the threat to his authority and manhood; at the same time, his absence provides a plausible and forgivable explanation or excuse for what he cannot or will not do at home.
In addition to providing a means of "escape" and making readers feel contemporary with their characters, Bristow was also providing reading that informs, something Radway points out is important to readers of the romance: "similarly located readers learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes that they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter"; hence, they produce "similar readings" (8). Says Radway, such women give "remarkably similar answers" to questions about their reading habits and preferences; furthermore, they "referred constantly and voluntarily to the connection between their reading and their daily social situation as wives and mothers"; in this way, Radway draws a correlation between the social situation of these women and their reading choices (9). In this regard, Radway's findings also parallel Bristow's own views:

The South, as every student of American history knows, is a historical and social unity, not a geographical area, and the man from Virginia feels that the man from Arkansas is a much nearer neighbor than the man from Ohio, regardless of the map. Many Southerners are far more conscious of being southern than they are of being American. ("Southern Fundamentalism" 15)

Furthermore, Bristow accomplished not so much "satisfying something of the group's equally insistent emphasis on the [capacity of romance] to instruct them about history" as reaffirming the readers' confidence that what they were demanding was right (Radway 186). Bristow's emphasis on history both satisfied women's desire for instruction and reaffirmed the rightness of their focus. Interestingly--and truly in character--Bristow accomplishes this objective in a manner contrived to hone the female reader's instincts for accomplishment and yet not insult the male ego by having Eleanor succeed in the all but impossible task of salvaging the plantation and Kester assume the role of soldier in defense of his country.
Along with such female models, Bristow likewise demonstrates in Kester Larne the mentality she greatly feared (TSG). He is one who reads history ("I’ve skimmed through dozens of volumes a century or two centuries old," but, like so many others, he does not believe any of them. He explains, "... and every one of them laments the simplicity of an age just past and sighs over the complexities of the present" (16). A key word here is "skimmed." Bristow’s repeated message implies that if history is to be reliable, understandable, and truly meaningful, it must be researched and studied as closely to its origin as possible. Bristow thus implies there is danger in one such as Kester who does not learn. On the other hand, Bristow seems to imply at the same time that woman (Eleanor in this case) has the wisdom, and she points to Kester’s loss of touch with reality: "You seem to think the angels are going to take care of you." Kester retorts, "Well, they always have. And now they’ve sent you to do it, haven’t they?" (579). Women who wish men would learn about women’s needs and expectations understand Bristow’s implication that Kester’s is an unacceptable attitude.

There can be little wonder Bristow appealed to women of her time. Not in a reactionary or aggressive vein but in the role model she herself portrayed, in her positive lectures, and in her feminine protagonists, Bristow was fighting for the cause of women. Says Mary Jean DeMarr, Bristow’s novels conclude with the conventionally happy solution of marriage, but for [none of her women] is the marriage a retreat from autonomy and each man recognizes the value of the woman’s assertiveness and strength. (238)

When Radway’s Smithton women "insist that romantic fiction is fantasy and their reading activity simple escape, they seem to state the obvious": the reading
experience is only a vicarious, for-the-moment enjoyment. This type of reader does not want complexity and the weighty matter of critical response on an scholarly level. "And yet," she continues,

the group's equally insistent emphasis on the [capacity of the romance] to instruct them about history and geography suggests that they also believe that the universe of the romantic fantasy is somehow congruent, if not continuous, with the one they inhabit. (186)

Thus Bristow's theory about the "lagniappe" qualities of history finds sanction in Radway's research. Increasingly, Bristow proves herself not only the progressive woman ahead of her time but also a very intuitive one, as well.

Along with Bristow's work providing role models, vicarious escape, and instructions, Radway's study also reveals commonalities among readers of romances that undoubtedly swelled the number of Bristow fans. For example, most readers of romances, she found, are between the ages twenty-four and fifty. Among this group, there is a high attendance in religious services (55, 58). In addition, most of the Smithton readers are married mothers of children, living in single-family homes in a sprawling suburb of a central midwestern state's second largest city (population 850,000 in 1970), . . . The community is essentially a "bedroom" community in that roughly 90 percent of those employed in 1970 worked outside Smithton itself. (50)

Bristow's novels proved to be the type of reading that violated no one's conscience and at the same time provided excitement, romance, and challenge. As Bristow's niece Angie Bristow Fensin laughingly points out about Bristow's style, even Bristow's "Victorian" mother was hard pressed to take offense at Bristow's work, although once Mrs. Bristow did express a wish that Bristow wouldn't write all that [whispering the word] sex" (Fensin). Sex, even eroticism, is in vogue so
pervasively in modern novels that contemporary readers would wonder to what Mrs. Bristow was referring. Therefore, the implied censure is unfounded in the minds of today's audiences, and it might have titillated only the most uninformed experience in Bristow's lifetime. One unidentified admirer wrote,

I wish more of us could be like Gwen Bristow. She must be a very fine character. Just think, in a whole book—nothing smutty, nothing to raise one's eyebrow, nothing but fine, clean, wholesome reading—that held so many people's interest. (Northridge)

As Angie Fensin also pointed out, as does Peggy Prenshaw in "Rereading Gwen Bristow's Plantation Trilogy" (16), Bristow depicts perhaps "the most horrendous childbirth scene in all of American literature." However, while it is quite sensational, it is appropriate to the sequence, it is natural, and it is told without excess or artificiality, as one can readily attest who (apart from the experience of childbirth itself) has really experienced the tropical Louisiana heat and humidity or contended with the native insects. It is also quite romantic.

Finally, among all the reasons for Bristow's popularity, according to Margaret Wallace, she wrote "convincing study[s] . . . with simplicity and candor, without sentimentality" ("G B's Tale of Louisiana" 7). Although several of Bristow's books sold better and were more popular than her Trilogy, her Louisiana novels do constitute Bristow's "most important and most original work" (DeMarr 237). This fact, due partially to Bristow's skill with her craft, can also be attributed in part to the era in which she published her three most popular works. Simply stated, she wrote at a time when her work had extraordinary appeal to very broad groups of women all over the world. Her ability to earn that popularity can be attributed, at least in part, to Bristow's intense research and her ability to synthesize
an enormous fund of knowledge to create a background for her skillfully narrated
tales of a romantic and colorful past era.

Bristow and the Critics

To dismiss Bristow's literary contribution as "modest" denies appropriate
regard for what she did achieve. Barbara C. Ewell, in her introduction to Louisiana
Women Writers notes that there are some "glaring omissions of writers [with]
contributions to Louisiana literature, among which are . . . Ruth McEnery Stuart,
Anne Rice, Gwen Bristow." She suggests that we take "another look . . . at the
heritage of Louisiana women writers" (13).

If critics followed Barbara Ewell's suggestion to "pursue the many roads of
interpretation that [can] not all be taken" (Ewell 172) in any specific manner, writers
such as Gwen Bristow would not be so quickly and dismissively pigeonholed as a
"historical romantic writer." Peggy Prenshaw acknowledges that Bristow's
plantation novels "are historical romances with many of the stereotypical characters
and plot details that are familiar to readers of the genre" ("Rereading" 16), but she
also points to Bristow's giving "us a character who grows beyond the stereotypical
belle" in Ann. Likewise, writes Prenshaw, "Corrie May Upjohn comes to see and
understand the self-defeating contradictions that grow out of the social conditions of
her life" (18).

A talented writer of fiction and creator of memorable and intriguing
characters, Bristow crafted narratives that earned her a world-wide following and
considerable wealth. As the Radway study demonstrates and as Prenshaw notes,
Generations of girls who did not read much of anything, whose experience was limited by education, opportunity and convention, have gone to fiction to escape a stifling or a boring or a confusingly chaotic reality, and have come back with structures they use to organize and interpret their feelings and prospects. (20)

Thomas Johnson of Columbia University in South Carolina also finds popular reason to take another look at Bristow's writing. Working closely with South Caroliniana Library on its Bristow collection, Johnson especially likes *Tomorrow Is Forever*, as do his students. According to Johnson,

> Even though the critics may not praise her works highly as writing that can be taught on several levels, such as those of Faulkner, she is important because she is a very skilled craftsman at what she does. And for her genre, romantic historic fiction, her work is extremely well done.

> She is accurate in her history, and she writes a fascinating story that deserves to be studied for her expertise in this particular genre.

> A purely fictional story *Tomorrow Is Forever*, is important because of the World War II propaganda, and I teach it that way; also because she deals with racial issues on a very frank basis, but she is also a very broad-minded person, not biased, not prejudiced.

Additionally, Judge Harris Dickson, lawyer turned writer "by accident" and author of *The Black Wolf's Breed*, *The Revenels*, and *She That Hesitates*, links Bristow with some who have been judged great by time and critics by saying he firmly believes in the coming literary renaissance of the South, already evidenced by such writers as William Faulkner, T. S. Stribling, Erskine Caldwell, Roark Bradford, David Cohn, Lyle Saxon, Ben Ames Williams, Stark Young and Gwen Bristow. (Leisure)

**Bristow's Feminine Protagonists**

Jean Fleming, who knew Bristow very well, says, "I always thought ... she really had [portrayed] the same person over and over again" patterning her
characters after herself (Interview 17 July 1993). Indeed, many are the analogies that can be drawn between Bristow and her protagonists, both men and women; and Bristow, who never stopped trying to improve, with good cause came to create characters with improved individuality and definiteness with each novel as she gained confidence and skill as a writer.

Typically, as in her own life, although Manning was vital to her emotional happiness and she loved him and proved her role as wife was important to her, Bristow nonetheless demonstrates in her journal that her focus lay predominately with her own concerns. Likewise in her characterization, Bristow's males are crucial to her narrative, but her focus lies more significantly with her feminine protagonists. For example, in her Plantation Trilogy a major theme is the rise and demise of Southern woman. Although these characters are Southern, like Bristow, they are not the "personification" that Anne Goodwyn Jones speaks of as wearing "Dixie's Diadem" that are "not a human being [but] a marble statue, beautiful and silent" because the "idea of southern womanhood specifically denies the self" (Jones 4). Bristow allowed both herself and her characters the scope of individuality and fulfillment reasonable with the times.

For example, as Edna Pontellier is like the youthful Kate O'Flaherty Chopin (Toth, 330), so Judith Sheramy from Deep Summer--like Bristow as a young woman still under her parents' influence--somewhat tractably approaches life. She might be said to represent the birth-to-young-adult stage in the evolution of the Southern woman and not a Confederate woman--at first. She is nonetheless a very vital and assertive wife, mother, and mistress of their domain. A product of "those staid
people of Puritan ancestry" (Northridge), Judith is New England stock in transition
ward a typical Southerner, "created" as part of her husband’s dream for a
plantation and a dynasty. Ann Sheramy Larne of The Handsome Road is the
Confederate woman in all respects, and Eleanor of This Side of Glory is the "new
woman," "freed," ironically by the white Southern male (i. e., her doting father).
Her heroines gain greater depth and dimension, as well as more definiteness and
greater assurance.

In Judith (DS), as in all her women, Bristow creates a spirited and intelligent
woman, but Judith is sketchily delineated. Most scenes stop short of going through
an experience with her. Bristow sacrifices Judith’s attitudes, emotions, and actions
to the broad panorama of conquering and settling a territory and the shifting of
governments and revolution and progress. Judith, however, recognizes Philip’s
attempt at control beyond her perception of fairness and right when their son has
exceeded his allowance once too often:

[Philip] came close to her and took her arm. "If you give David one
more indigo order after I’ve told him he can’t have it, that’s the last
order you sign on this plantation."
"Philip!" She jerked from his grasp. "Do you mean after all these
years you want me to ask permission every time I buy a yard of
ribbon?" (255)

Although her attitude clearly demonstrates a spirited, thinking individual, she lacks
the self-awareness concerning what is right or wrong for her that Bristow’s feminine
protagonists in The Handsome Road and even more so in This Side of Glory
develop. Corrie May (THR) is not intended to be a "lady," and Eleanor (TSG) is
no "mealy-mouthed "proper" Southern belle, but with forthrightness and mental
acumen, they strive for what they need. Eleanor, who literally works herself nearly
to death to salvage Kester's plantation from certain bank seizure, will speak her
mind. She listens in emotional agony as Kester lays her sacrifice to waste when he
flares that she wants to be "nigger-rich" (310) With a rashness she later regrets,
Eleanor says,

"It's your turn to listen." She stood in front of him, speaking clearly.
"I've paid the price of your irresponsibility and now that I've done it
I'll be damned if I'll take your contempt. Has it entered your head
that by every shading of right and justice this plantation belongs to
me?" (313).

Bristow's women come to know what they want, and they seek it actively, as
Garnet does, in Jubilee Trail. She recognizes the crucial issues of life wait beyond
the apprenticeship of school medals and academic achievements. A mature woman
(for her time) in the evolution of the American woman, she "found no relish in
saying one thing and meaning another. . . . Garnet wondered if there was not,
anywhere on earth, a young man who would talk to her as if he and she were two
reasonable people living in the same world" (2-3).

It follows, then, that Bristow does not try to soften Eleanor's aggressiveness
in This Side of Glory in her writing the ambitious side of Eleanor's character.
Bristow allows Eleanor free rein in her wartime profiteering that had, in Kester's
terms, made Ardeith "a mill for the manufacture of cottonbales" (TSG 309). With
the exception of Eleanor, who occasionally slips (but justifiably because she is of the
twentieth century and all others are of earlier times), Bristow's women are
intelligent, thoughtful, industrious, assertive, and—if not "ladies" in the Southern
sense of the word, they are "ladylike" in a general sense. Furthermore, in terms
that depict traits evident in Bristow and Manning's marriage, Bristow creates her
feminine protagonists with a clear vision. She knows them well, for they, as Emily Toth says of Kate Chopin, "are a soul very much like her own" (21).

Additionally, Bristow's men likewise have Bristow's or Manning's traits for she, likewise, understands them. They are strong and aggressive, yet gentle and reasonable, considerate yet confident but in a manner indicative of leadership rather than dominance, as in Tomorrow Is Forever when Spratt tries to comfort Elizabeth when their son is to go to war:

That night Spratt came into her room.
"Thought I'd sleep in here with you. Mind?"
"Mind? I was just going in to sleep with you. Spratt--I was all right, wasn't I? [referring to maintaining her composure with the family]
"You bet you were." They got into bed and he put both his arms around her. "Now you can say anything you please about it. If you feel like crying, that's all right with me" (192).

They are a complement to the women, and they ultimately, because of lessons learned, inspire trust and love and individuality.
Endnotes for Chapter Four

1. During her college summers, Duchein served as a counselor in a Tennessee summer camp, where she worked hard to keep the children motivated and active. "She's acting just like a mosquito," said one Texas child of her. "She goes around to people and she sticks them and makes them get up and do something". Thereafter, all the children and most adults called her "Skeet" or "Aunt Skeet" (Duchein, 20 Nov. 1992).


3. Journal, 1940. Although the date in the journal is April 28, the actual date should be May. Because of Bristow's travels and illness, she did not make daily entries or record her comments under the appropriate dates.
GWEN BRISTOW:
A BIOGRAPHY WITH CRITICISM OF HER
PLANTATION TRILOGY
VOLUME II

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
The Department of English

by
Billie J. Theriot
B.S., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1962
M.Ed., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1974
M. A., University of Oklahoma, 1985
December 1994
CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRIVATE BRISTOW

In spite of being highly visible as a writer, lecturer, and wife of movie writer-producer-director, no one really knew Bristow through her public life. According to her friends and journals, her relatives did not know her, and Bristow made sure her journals or papers held little information about her intimate relationships with others. For example, did she and Manning ever quarrel? Since she never expressed jealousy in her journals, was she ever its victim? Did she have reason to be? Since she and Manning for most years of their marriage slept in separate bedrooms, what type of marriage did they have? Why did Bristow have no children? Did she "despise" her mother? Bristow took the absolute answers to these questions to her crypt; nonetheless, her journals do reveal many aspects of her life. Evidently, Manning drank more than Bristow did, but either might make almost weekly a decision to "go on the wagon" (J).

Another aspect made clear in her journals is Bristow and Manning’s support of the each other. Theirs was a happy, congenial marriage in spite of their divergent work schedules and separate apartments. As for their sleeping habits, says Jean Fleming,

[Gwen] said she had decided early on that she couldn’t sleep with someone. At the Lassen place they lived in separate apartments across the hall from each other, he sleeping in his room, she, in hers. They also had separate buildings for working, but they were together for their evening meals. (Interview, 17 July 1993)
Throughout their marriage, Bristow writes positively about her husband and
marriage and makes it clear they never considered divorce. Whatever their time
together, going out or remaining at home, they enjoyed each other and cherished
those times. Bristow’s love for Manning is apparent throughout her journals. For
example, September 8, 1938, she wrote:

Bruce came in, and we sat up smoking cigarettes and talking until
about two. We see so much less of each other than we should like,
but even a little of what we have together is worth unlimited
indulgence in anything else.

She frequently referred to her marriage as "the best years of [her] life" (J 12 Jan.
1949), and she disinterestedly shrugged at rumors that she and Manning were being
divorced, saying only, "Some folks have mighty little to talk about" (J 23 Jan.
1949). Her notations about Manning without exception reflect a solid, warm, and
loving relationship.

Bruce and I had a fine evening together. . . . Bruce looks wonderful.
. . . Bruce is such fun. . . . I told him I was worried about Caroline
and he said I was to come out to the ranch in the morning and he
would talk it over with me. I rather hate to bother Bruce, but he is
such a dear about straightening me out when my emotions get tangled.
(J 17 Ap. 1948)

Bristow also respected Manning. Typical of her attitude, she said, "Bruce’s
observation is so keen and his judgment so accurate that sometimes he seems almost
clairvoyant about people" (J 5 June 1949). She also valued his opinion of her work:
"Bruce has made several good suggestions, and I have been incorporating them" (J 2
Jan. 1949) or "I know he is right."

Patricia Manning Tanner recalls, "If they ever had a problem, I never saw it"
(Interview). Tanner also recalls two anecdotes demonstrating their mutual affection:
Gwen would always tell him to take the ear of corn with the smallest kernels, and she would take the ear with the bigger ones because she thought that's what he wanted. He went along because he thought she liked the bigger ones. By accident they discovered their tastes were just the opposite after all those years! (Interview)

Tanner also remembered that

during the Depression Bristow had only one slip, which she would have to wash for the next day. She would complain about having one slip. Finally, my dad sold a story, and when Gwen got home, my dad had bought at least ten slips. He had them hanging all around the room, one over the lamp, one on a chair, and other places so she'd be sure to see them. They were hanging everywhere! My dad no longer wanted to hear first thing every morning about Gwen's having only one slip. (Interview)

When Manning or Bristow had to travel, the other accepted the fact as a quite natural part of life. One or the other, and especially Bristow, might be away weeks at a time, as she was when she made her lecture tours. When forced to be alone, each would call a friend or several friends for dinner or evenings out. Neither ever demanded the other's time or allowed himself or herself to be unduly handicapped by the other's plans. Since they never knew when something would bring an abrupt change to their plans, their play was likewise spontaneous:

When Bruce came in he and I took off our clothes and went swimming. It's such fun to swim naked; even the scantiest trunks are a nuisance. After dinner we went over to Gertrude's and were having a pleasant evening when she got a phone call from the studio saying the story she is working on must all be changed . . . . (J 23 Sept. 1939)

Bristow also had definite ideas about a wife's role. Reporter Medora Field Perkerson, writing for the June 1938 for the Atlanta Journal found Bristow quite vocal and opinionated about the role of wife and the Southern woman:

An understanding attitude and mutual respect are, after all, prerequisites to every successful marriage. . . . But women in public
life must learn to divide their time wisely, if they hope to enjoy happiness at home as well as success with their careers. . . .

For the job of being a wife must always hold first place over every outside interest. . . . (Northridge)

Although the statement reflects Bristow's seemingly definite ideas about a wife's role, it also may have been her "public personality" speaking, for there are several "discrepancies" between this statement and her requirements for the time she required to write. The woman who said, "If I did not have the complete approval of my husband, I would abandon my literary work" (Northridge) also said, "I won't see people during my sacred hours, so that's that" (J Feb. 1939). She is the same woman who said (speaking in defense of one of her novels), "Anyway the sales are excellent and Crowell has already ordered a second printing" (J 22 Feb. 1950). It is a statement making very clear her awareness of business and her aspirations. Also demonstrating her business awareness was her attitude that she did not want to be a career public speaker because "to be popular you cannot say anything except what your audience already believes. You are weighing every phrase by what they want to hear instead of by what you want to say" (J 12 Mar. 1940).

Her journals also depict a carefully fabricated "public personality" calculated to please her fans, and her journals, which she consciously edited, are replete with her irritation at her illnesses or other problems, including people, that interrupted her writing. Furthermore, although she never complained about Manning's interrupting her, on more than one occasion, Deborah Clyde took him to her house to care for him so that Bristow could write, travel to research her subject, and promote her novels.
When Bristow made public statements about a "man's helpmeet" sounding outdated and there being definitely a place for the traditional role of woman in the home, Bristow undoubtedly believed what she said. At the same time, she approached life with an assertiveness and progressiveness that had not become the norm for the 1930's. She believed, however, that times had changed to open doors to woman beyond the old male-dominated roles circumscribed by her sex. She believed that a woman had achieved the privilege to develop other sides of her life, and she concluded that it is the "smart woman who remains feminine, along with her success in other capacities" (Northridge).

Wittingly or not, Bristow also gave herself another role—that of model for her fictional characters. Once she remarked that she was increasingly amazed at the degree to which an author revealed himself or herself in his or her writing. This statement mirrors herself, perhaps more than any other writer she could have had in mind. For example, from *Tomorrow Is Forever* Elizabeth Herlong might well be describing Bristow and Manning as she tells her husband Spratt of an interview with Kessler:

[Kessler] reminded me of all that you and I have together... of what it means to be married for twenty years, to have built a citadel of refuge for each other--" she was looking directly at him as she spoke--"he made me see this, all new and fresh as if it had just been given to me, what we have, and how much I love you."

Spratt took both her hands in his. "My dear girl," he said gently, "did it take that to make you know?"

"Do you know how much I love you, Spratt?"

"Of course I know," said Spratt.

... Spratt was not a romantic lover. His devotion to Elizabeth was far more evident in what he did than in what he said, and he accepted her affection for him in the same way. Now he told her so, still holding her hands and smiling at her tenderly as he spoke.
"Don't you prove it with every step you take and every word you say?" he asked her. "Why, Elizabeth, I get it every time you answer the phone. It comes across. You say, 'Yes, Spratt, this is Elizabeth,' and you might as well be saying, 'Spratt, here's the one human being in the whole world who's always on your side, who believes in you no matter what kind of fool you make of yourself, who knows you better than anybody else on earth knows you and in spite of it somehow still thinks you're a swell guy.' I get it every time. Do I have to tell you that?" (255)

Thus, while Bristow portrays character and emotion somewhat as she seemed to treat religion in her life and writing—with such economy that she sometimes transfers the burden of determining depth of feeling to her reader—she, nonetheless, created authenticity in milieu and fascinating narrative.

In her work Bristow's demands upon herself were often grueling, such as—while preparing for a lecture tour—preparing sixty-two publicity items, ranging from five lines to two pages, ready to mail to various newspapers, along with other related tasks that she had to complete within a few days. She had various ways of rewarding herself, however. One was pretty clothes, of which she was especially fond. Therefore, she would clean closets and get her wardrobe ready for another season. Also helping her spirits was a football game with Manning, as well as the positive reactions to *This Side of Glory*. Gertrude Spiegelgass, Bernice Baumgarten and Bob Crowell had all read it, with Crowell writing, "Well, you've done it again. You certainly have" (J Sept. 1939).

Bristow's state of mind, however, was not improving, and, when Manning called to say he had to work and would not be home for dinner, she expressed her distress:

I finally lost my determination to be gallant and voiced a protest against the intolerable dullness of Hollywood. The place is awful.
Everybody works all the time and leisure conversation concerns nothing but pictures and political theories based on misinformation. (J 2 Oct. 1939)

A Much-needed Holiday

When Manning got home at three, they sat and talked, and Bristow said she was going to New York and "see some reasonable people." With Manning's blessings, along with their discussing the possibility of taking an apartment and living half the year in New Orleans, Bristow was off to New York with plans to rendezvous in New Orleans since he had a brief holiday coming (J 2 Oct. 1939). Her holiday was dimmed only by a somber mood as she felt sickened by the threat of war. It distressed her that after twenty years of moving toward "dispassionate observation of the last war," public sentiment was swelling to the effect that Germany was guilty of criminally starting [the war] and that it should have meekly accepted the Versailles treaty. Asserting, "I am not pro-Hitler, heaven knows; I am not pro-German. But I should like to be, I try hard to be, pro-sanity and pro-reason and anti-emotional thinking" (J 20 Oct. 1939).

In spite of the tumult, however, New York provided an exciting and restful holiday. She visited with old friends, visited the World's Fair, and had cocktails with executives from the Saturday Review and found it "so pleasant to meet these people of awesome reputation and discover how simple and charming they are" (J 25 Oct. 1939). After a stopover in Atlanta to visit with Annette Duchein, she flew into New Orleans on October 30, where Manning met her. At Antoine's for dinner with their old friends the Feiblemans, the waiter brought out a surprise in the form of a
baked Alaska with "Welcome Gwen Bristow" in large letters. She was "so touched
and so happy to be home," she wanted to cry. After spending the evening visiting
various clubs, Manning finally took her to the apartment he had rented at 538 St.
Peter Street in the upper Pontalba Building (incidentally the setting for the apartment
of a character in The Mardi Gras Murders). Totally enchanted, Bristow noted,

It's good to be here. Jackson Square is full of palms and flowers and
the cathedral bells chime every quarter of an hour. The antiques and
souvenirs in the shop windows on Royal Street don't seem to have
been changed since the last time I was in town. And the people, oh
God bless them the gay charming friendly people, who always manage
to convey the impression that you are the one person they've been
most wanting to see--how I love them... I love being here! The
air is so soft and wet. There is a caressing feel to it. Indescribable.
(J 31 October, 1 Nov. 1939)

The New Orleans visit, marked by visiting with friends, such as Margaret
Dixon, Lyle Saxon, and the Feiblemans, was short-lived. After only two weeks, on
the morning of November 14, Manning waked Bristow with the news that Pasternak
had wired him that he must get back to California to begin a new picture. Bristow
accepted the news as "probably a good thing, as I certainly won't do any work as
long as I'm here" (J 14 Nov. 1939). As usual, it was work which ultimately
directed her focus.

During her two weeks' visit in New Orleans which Bristow documented, she
appears to have continued her puzzling pattern of behavior toward her family. Not
until after she had been in the city six days, quite crowded with friends and outings,
did she mention that Caroline took her to see her mother. Although there is a skip
in Bristow's entries of several days, only the day before leaving for California, did
she record, "Then up to see my father who has been suddenly taken ill with some
stomach trouble. Daddy is such a grand person. It hurts me to see him sick" (J 14 Nov. 1939). Finally, on the day of her departure, she visited her father, and her mother and sister saw her and Manning off on the train (J 16 Nov. 1939). Again, Bristow had spent no family days, no times "catching up on family news."

Going home to California, however, she recorded an uncharacteristic affection she seemed unable to match with actions. Contradicting her attitude which she expressed later in life to her friend Jean Fleming, she wrote:

Bruce says he wants to make my father an allowance with the condition that he spend it only on his own enjoyment. I think it is wonderful of him; Daddy has spent his whole life doing things for other people with no thought of anyone's doing anything for him. How fortunate I am that the two men closest to me, my father and my husband, should be such splendid types of mankind, so noble and generous always. (J 17 Nov. 1939)

Upon arriving home November 18, she noted, "Six weeks ago I was restless and unhappy from an excess of solitude, now I am looking forward to another quiet period." "Quiet" to Bristow meant getting into her old routine of writing, exercising, and visiting with friends. It was as if she had left the "real world" behind for a while because she had been able to dispel even the war from her mind for a time. It intruded into her ordered world, however, shortly after her return when Russia attacked Finland. Bristow lamented, "The world is in such a mess. I try not to think too much about it, for it does no good, but one can't help being indignant and distressed (J 1 Dec. 1939). As usual, Bristow got busy, this time writing her first book review and sending it off to The Saturday Review of Literature. When the December issue including her review arrived December 27, she was "rather proud" (J 4, 27 Dec. 1939).
The war, however, was not the only cause for her anxiety. Manning’s health was again causing her concern. At the University of Southern California versus University of California at Los Angeles football game where "Bruce drank too much and had too much fun generally," he collapsed. Their doctor’s examination revealed a heart condition, after which he told them Manning simply had to go on the wagon and lead a quieter life. It is a difficult sentence, for Bruce is always the life of the party. He is so attractive and everybody likes him so much that his temptations to too much hilarity are almost irresistible. (J 9 Dec. 1939).

Bristow, the Lecturer

Bristow ended 1939 working on magazine articles and on her lectures for her Middle Western tour. Once done, her tasks, with the help of her maid Sarah and her secretary Ethel, were to get ready for Christmas and to "pound" her lectures into her head because she "hate[d] people who read from the platform" (J Dec. 1939).

The year 1940 opened with the Mannings spending their typical New Year’s Day, this time watching Southern California beat Tennessee in the Rose Bowl and finding it dull in comparison to the Sugar Bowl with Texas A & M beating Tulane 14-13, which they had listened to during their ride to the Rose Bowl (J). Bristow, however, lost no time getting back to work. She was having Madame Irene at Bullock’s Wilshire fit her dress. It would be, Bristow thought, a lovely blue dress, a bit darker than royal but not so dark as navy. It was made of heavy silk crepe, draped at the shoulder with the drapery repeated in the skirt. Both drapery would
have a diagonal lift to the left side, and she would wear a bar pin of brilliants diagonally to follow its lines, all complemented by a matching draped turban of blue jersey (J 3 Jan. 1940).

The dress was created especially for her upcoming lecture tour, when one of her topics would be "Clothes and Politics," with the message that "clothes reflect what's going on." For example, she said, in "times of depression--perhaps as a gesture of gay defiance--women "get all dressed," and they "undress during a war--lack of materials probably contributing to the scarcity of attire." War, she said, also affects fashion by the "breaking down of propriety--women are less modest." With governments conferring with designers and directing that fashions dictate less material, the result is shorter skirts and low shoes requiring less leather (Northridge). Having found that styles move in cycles and that "Dresses have been streamlined in the early years of the century, hooped in the middle years, and backsweped toward the end of the century," Bristow predicted that "unless history runs a different course for the first time since . . . Queen Mary of England along in 1550, the ladies of America in 1950 or thereabouts may find themselves wearing hoop skirts" (Northridge). She would express delight with her prediction when the 1950's did arrive, for although women did not generally wear hoop skirts, they wore a close replica--the very full skirt over layers and layers of petticoats called "can-cans" for about the same effect without the discomfort of hoops (Northridge).

In another of her topics for this lecture series, "America Keeps a Diary," she found a "journal" of America in its magazines and newspapers from its beginning to
its present, in what "we have written about ourselves, and also, for the sake of contrast, what some European magazines of the same periods had to say about us." Her lecture, "We can Say What We Think," expounded the value of an uncensored press in keeping government out of Americans' personal lives, as well as the value of Americans' minding their own business and being at peace with their neighbors (Northridge). Undoubtedly influencing the theme of her lecture was the anti-capitalistic propaganda that circulated in Hollywood in those troubled days as Europe struggled to fight a war and the United States struggled to remain neutral.

Having once been a news reporter, Bristow recognized the historical value of the first-hand recording, and to those sources she always turned for her own research. Bristow, however, apparently destroyed all of her old lecture scripts. Thus, for posterity the value of news reporters for Bristow is evident: to get as close to the eye-witness account as possible, and had it not been for them, no record of Bristow's outstanding work as a lecturer would remain.

Typical of her findings, as Bristow dug deep into such material for her research on This Side of Glory, she concluded that "no phase of the times better reflects changes in popular philosophy than best-selling books," such as Harold Bell Wright's The Eyes of the World in 1914, Booth Tarkington's The Turmoil in 1915, or Frances Wilson Huard's My Home on the Field of Honor (Goldstein).

Bristow also found the disillusionment of the post-war world, "created a demand for more realistic and cynical books," a demand met by such works as Sinclair Lewis' Main Street and Scott Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise. The top playwright, Bristow found, was Eugene O'Neill, both on stage and in book form.
In addition to "war-induced" literature, Bristow found the language expanded with such new words as reservist, mitrailleuse, armistice, entente, enfilade, camouflage, Landsturm, landwehr, and belligerent.

Along with her extensive knowledge, Bristow sometimes exhibited a natural, hearty sense of humor, as when she said, "I'm not denying women are silly sometimes. Why shouldn't we be? The Bible says the good Lord made us to be suitable mates for men. Well, we've always been suitable mates for men." Her point, as she hastened to explain, was today we are more than that. Today, American women are probably the most influential group in the world. Some of us may be appalled at the responsibility that comes with such power. But whether we like it or not, here it is.

Women spend 85 per cent of the money being spent in this country, so nearly all advertising is directed toward us. Women make up 78 per cent of the moving picture audiences. Three quarters of the radio listeners are women. Women read more than two-thirds of the books that are read in the United States.

This is a vast challenge. For it means that women's acceptance or rejection of what is offered this country through these channels of public opinion puts the stamp of success or failure upon that offering. . . . Today, as never before, women have to be clever! (Northridge)

Bristow continued, saying that in times of election (the 1940 Presidential election year, as a particular case in point) all women need do, with their accumulative of power, is use the vote to effect change (Northridge).

This early 1940's lecture, "Women Have to Be Clever," demonstrates not only Bristow's diversity and her concern for women but it also reiterates her savvy understanding that a public speaker "cannot say anything except . . . what they want to hear instead of by what [the speaker] want[s] to say" (J 12 Mar. 1940). It also confirms her goal to be as much entertainment as enlightenment at the same time her
penchant for history is evident in her many other lecture topics. For example, in "The American Tradition," another of her 1940 lectures, Bristow gave an analysis of the background that made us what we are; details of intimate domestic life among the log-cabin pioneers that influenced our present ideas more than political histories tell us; the social miracle accomplished by a people who, beginning with racial and religious differences as great as those that have split the map of Europe like a jigsaw puzzle, somehow managed to bury their mutual hatchets and form a unit so that today we can travel from one side of this continent to the other and still be at home. (Northridge)

Bristow worked industriously on her lectures in the same dedicated manner she set for her life and writing. Emphasizing this point is the fact that although she deeply loved her sister, Caroline apparently was not exempt from Bristow's ire, albeit Bristow typically and carefully tried to disguise the direction of her vexation. One such incident occurred when Caroline visited Bristow in California in February 1939, at which time Caroline was seriously ill with kidney problems, and Bristow noted, "Caroline is busy and happy."

In itself, the remark might carry no ambiguity, but later journal entries seem contradictory. On the one hand, Bristow wrote, "It is fun having Caroline here," but the next line was, "She has been so ill I must take her to see Dr. Melnik," a comment implying Bristow's chaffing at being unable to stay with her work, for finally she admitted, "We took so long at the doctor's I did not get a chance to write a line." Four days later she complained: "What with keeping house, taking care of Caroline and writing a book, my time is full." Two days later, her patience was wearing thin:

An awful day. I had resolved to see nobody during my working hours, and broke my resolution by asking Nanette to come to lunch--
she had just come in from New York. . . . but the day was awful in
the sense that I did no work and by night I was exasperated with
myself. So I resolved afresh not to let even my best friends interfere
with my work. I won't see people during my sacred hours, so that's
that. (J Feb. 1939)

The journal entry characteristically disguises the extent of Bristow's emotional upset,
for the next entry says, "My explosion of last night cleared the air. I worked
wonderfully today and got a lot done and felt very happy."

All in all, however, Bristow anxiously tried to take care of Caroline. She
arranged for Caroline's medical care, saw her through surgery and her needs for a
nurse, read to her, and otherwise entertained her as Caroline recuperated, making no
further recorded complaint (J 1939). Bristow's complaining, on the whole, had little
to do with Caroline, herself; typically, Bristow was irritated by anything or anybody
that interfered with her time to write.

Busy with her lecture, Bristow was thrilled with the advertising schedule
from Crowell for This Side of Glory (J 5 Jan. 1940). In the midst of it all, she
received a letter from her mother on January 7, 1940, saying her father was
critically ill. Until Manning arrived home and suggested that she call home to learn
how he was and whether she should go to New Orleans, she was too perturbed to
think of calling. However, learning he was all right, she and Manning went out and
spent the afternoon with friends. Later after two assuring letters from her mother,
she went shopping and to lunch with her friend Pauline Townsend at Perino's on
Saks' roof. Greta Garbo was there, but Bristow thought she looked so sloppy that
"she could not have got away with it had she not been a movie star" (J 8 Jan. 1940).
Always an avid reader, she began reading Freud’s *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* during her rest time, becoming so enthralled she could hardly make herself put it down at midnight. Manning, finding her reading, could not understand her choice; he found books that probe into the mind frightening. Bristow commented, "Bruce’s mind and my own work so differently: he is intuitive, I, analytical." His mind, she had found, produced flashes of intuition that were almost uncanny at times (J 9 Jan. 1940).

For example, a few days later upon Bristow’s fretting over a lecture she seemed unable to compose as she wished, Manning suggested that she give the lecture to him and Deborah and Ethel. They listened, and "the two latter were kind but not enthusiastic, and Bruce said frankly that while the basic idea was good the lecture was terrible." They discussed it and he offered some ideas. Encouraged, she set about writing it all over (J 23 Jan. 1940), thinking,

Odd, how everything I have ever written has been preceded by a period like yesterday. There must be a reason; maybe the ultimate resolution of one’s conscious and unconscious ideas produces a mental conflict of almost intolerable agony. At any rate, this morning I got up feeling gay and full of energy. After my usual short morning walk I sat right down at the typewriter and wrote steadily all day, stopping only for lunch, and by evening had half a new lecture written. (J 24 Jan. 1940)

To begin her lecture series, she arrived in Chicago at the Drake Hotel on a Saturday, February 3, 1940, to find flowers from Bruce, more from her secretary, and letters from Crowell and Bernice Baumgarten. She was off to an encouraged start for this first lecture series that was to be mainly in La Porte, Indiana. Having prepared according to earlier requests to speak on "Women Have to Be Clever," she
was not particularly pleased to find upon arrival at the Colston Leigh office that she was being asked to speak on "The American Tradition" and another on clothes. Not having prepared for these, she had to get busy learning those lectures (J 5 Feb. 1940). Additionally, the Fortnightly Club of Chicago wanted "America Keeps a Diary," and she worked especially hard because she wanted it to be exceptional. Each lecture went well, and she left for Kansas City February 24, where her lecture was also "very successful" so that, on the whole, she was well pleased with her work (J 24 Feb. 1940). It would take her into Ohio and Michigan next and then back into Chicago, where she was asked to sign a contract for an even longer speaking schedule. She refused, noting,

> Next year I shan't have another book ready, and I only do these things for books. My ambition does not include being a professional speaker. I want to write. A platform speaker is like a popular entertainer; to be popular you cannot say anything except what your audience already believes. You are weighing every phrase by what they want to hear instead of by what you want to say. I can do it, and evidently I do it well, for they all like me, but I don't want to make a career out of it. I want to write. In writing I can think more of what I really want to say, and say that. (J 12 March 1940)

Meanwhile, still carrying around La Tragadie d'un Peuple, translating at every opportunity, she was in Chicago March 2, when she received a letter from Manning. In keeping with their old agreement not to read each other's work before it was completed, he wrote,

> I've almost finished [reading This Side of Glory] and I think it's going to be the biggest one of the lot. My congratulations. You've done a magnificent job with both characters and Fred has captured a whole background through excellent characterization. . . . Even I, your husband, cannot wait to see how it comes out. Your writing is changing in style by virtue of your sharp editing. . . . Sometimes I have the feeling that you have cut too much to the bone and that more could be carried than you have carried in the way of rolling into the story. (J 2 March 1940)
Bristow's reaction was, "Probably he is right . . . for Bruce is such a superb critic that I usually find he is right."

From Chicago she went to New York City and visited with various business people, autographed books, and attended luncheons and dinners, including one "delightful" dinner given by Friends of American Writers, honoring Carl Sandburg, where she was asked to give a few "requisite remarks." Sandburg, she thought, was "rambling but worth hearing" (J 13-14 March 1940). Later in her autographing sessions, she found the Knock's Book Store and Marshall Field's already selling This Side of Glory even though it was not to go on sell for four more days. People were asking for it, she was told, so, Bristow concluded, her "lectures must be bearing fruit" (J 16 March 1940).

On March 18, she received a letter from Crowell informing her that advance sales were twenty thousand on This Side of Glory, and he had ordered its third printing. Several reviews were favorable, but the Saturday Review of Literature gave what Bristow considered the "worse review [she] had ever received on a book." Consoling herself with the good reviews, Bristow noted that the Sunday, April 7, Herald Tribune would have her book as eighth on its national best-seller list. Homesick and fighting exhaustion, she nonetheless kept her promise to her parents and detoured through New Orleans before reaching California in mid-May still ill from fatigue. She had been gone a few days more than four months.

With her doctor's help, Bristow began a daily regimen to regain her health as she pondered her "foolish" and "brutal" exertion for "worship of a god . . . partly if not entirely false" (J 30 Ap. 1940). She knew she had done her best with her
writing, a fact she did not lament. Her anguish stemmed, rather, from the 
realization that in chasing this "god" of success by working hard to publicize her 
books, she had used "all [her] charm and wit and personality to have [her] books 
bought by people who would not have the faintest idea what they were about when 
they read them" (J May 1940). She was 

sick of it--sick physically and more sick spiritually; sick of handing 
out delightful nothings from the lecture platform, of answering silly 
questions, of having [her] personality manhandled by a lot of babbling 
idiots who want to know all about the private life of an author and 
whose opinion of her books will be determined by the smartness of 
the clothes she wears. (J 31 Ap., 1 May, 1940)

She was gratified, of course, by having This Side of Glory become a best seller, but 
she had learned that one does not have to sacrifice one's "whole sense of integrity" 
to be a best seller. If so, commercial success was not worth it, she concluded, 
feeling that with this lesson she had "crossed another high hill barring the road to 
being grown up" (J 1 May 1940).

As always Bristow continued to struggle daily with an ongoing anxiety over 
local, national, and world events. Idled by her need to recuperate and melancholic 
because of a world on the verge of global war, Bristow wrote,

Here I shall add another impression of my journey. Something terrible is happening to the American mind. This country is getting all 
set to go out on another witch-hunt, aiming its hate and its guns at 
words and slogans embodied in the inhabitants of a certain nation. I 
see it happening and my own impotence against it makes me sick. Of 
all the people exclaiming against Nazi-ism and Fascism, I believe that 
not one in a thousand could define the system of philosophy 
represented by either word. They say "All Germans are evil." 
"Germany must be destroyed." The minute you suggest that even 
exterminating all Germans (if it could be done) would not destroy the 
force in human nature that makes Nazi-ism possible, you are looked 
upon with horror and accused of being a Nazi, a traitor, or a fool.
Democracy has its faults, heaven knows. But destroying any one group of people will not cure them. Improvement of anything, be it an individual, a nation, or a philosophic ideal, comes from within and not from without.

But try and say this today! You are looked upon as a dangerous influence. (J 2 May 1940)

Bristow and Manning had talked, with a sort of desultory despair, about Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway . . . "desultory" because there was a blank helplessness about our whole attitude. The horror of it was such that our imaginations were stunned. The most civilized nations in Europe, the one corner where an enlightened society still prevailed over the barbarism of the rest, going down to the abyss--it was so awful we felt stupefied before it. (J 9 April 1940)

Manning tried to calm her anxiety, suggesting that she think in terms of "nations and organized armies, as you thought of the conquests of Alexander when you were at school . . . the only possible emotional bulwark right now" (J 16 May 1940). Bristow, in spite of his suggestion, saw only "five million refugees. Running away from their gardens, trying to get somewhere where they won't hear guns" (J 23 May 1940). Meanwhile, rumors were rampant. Some felt the United States should enter the war immediately because "this war is different from all others[,] it will be bloody and destructive but when it is over the world will be peaceful and safe." Bristow reacted,

Yes, yes I've heard that before. I heard it in 1917, and I was so young that I believed it. But I'll never believe again that the current war is idealistically different from all others that ever happened, or that any war will make the world happy forever. (J 14 May 1940)

Finally, in spite of all the turmoil and emotional stress, Bristow was pronounced physically in "splendid shape" (J 31 May 1940), but she continued to agonize over world conditions. She fretted that Americans were becoming so anti-
Nazi that they were advancing toward the attitude she most feared, an unreasoning hate (J 22 May 1940). In her more logical moments, however, she believed that lying awake worrying over a situation one cannot control is foolish, "that refusing to suffer more than you can help over something you can't stop is merely common sense" (J 1 June 1940). Consequently, as the war gained momentum in Europe, Bristow pursued her own theory for coping—that of going forward with life in as positive a manner as possible. She spent her days healing, practicing piano (something she had just begun), playing, writing only for publicity purposes, visiting with friends, and being active in her literary associations. Seeming unable to return to writing novels, she attributed her stalemate to "fatigue from . . . years of intense work on the Louisiana trilogy . . . or the stunning effect of what is going on in the world, which certainly makes an attempt at literature seem a futile enterprise" (J 3 July 1940). It was not until mid-September that Bristow made any gesture relative to picking up her writing; even then, she merely jotted notes, which she found "the only antidote to war jitters" (J 12 Sept. 1940). When by mid-October she put away a synopsis of a possible story, saying she had no feeling for it as it seemed totally unimportant (J 9 Oct. 1940), but she set about trying out new ideas, wrestling with them throughout the remainder of 1940.

Bristow began 1941 working on a story she could not name or move forward with any ease. Saying the snag was one she knew well, she found it, like one's "twenty-seventh toothache," was no less painful. She nonetheless had faith in her determination, knowing from experience she would work through it (J 13 Jan. 1941). This one, however, would prove an attempt at a story she would ultimately
destroy in 1944 (J 24 Ap. 1944). Finding pleasure in her twelfth anniversary in
spite of everything else, she expressed her feelings about marriage:

How wonderful to have such a perfect marriage as ours. To know
that the one person whom I admire and respect above all others finds
me the most important person in his life--that's really to be supremely
happy. When I hear anyone speak cynically of the institution of
marriage I feel sorry for him. (J 14 Jan. 1941).

As This Side of Glory contributed to Bristow's growing fame and success,
Manning was experiencing his own triumphs. In late January 1941 he and Bristow,
traveling with friends Felix and Jill Jackson, stopped in New Orleans on their way
to Miami, Florida (J 22 Jan. 1941). Having earned the reputation of "never turning
in a flop," Manning had been promoted to producer, and they were going to attend
the world premiere of his first picture, Back Street, at the Majestic Theater in
Miami the first week of February. (Tulane).

Bristow again, however, succumbed to what she thought to be the flu. Her
blood pressure often dropped quite low, and she frequently battled exhaustion.
Although she "detested ill health" (J 22 Feb. 1941), she was too ill to continue the
trip with Manning; instead, determined to be with him, she arrived in Miami via
train two days later. She enjoyed the accolades that had begun to accompany their
success (J 2 Feb. 1941).

Threats of War and Communism

Toward the end of March, Bristow set aside a troublesome story for another
idea she had long had in mind. Excited again about her work (J 25 March 1941)
but also anxious about world events, she noted the Germans' progress in taking what
they wanted. The place names in the news gave her a sense of sacrilege: "Until now," she wrote, "I always thought of the Aegean as the sea over which Helen sailed to Troy" (J 9 Ap. 1941).

However in spite of the war, life moved rather typically throughout most of 1941 with Bristow always writing but not always with satisfaction. Therefore, when Crowell notified her in June that he wanted to reprint her Louisiana trilogy, she made herself read the novels again, and the effect was most disconcerting:

Any time hereafter I feel my ego rearing its head, all I'll have to do is read something I wrote sufficiently long ago to view it with detachment. It really does seem as if a woman who has spent her whole life trying to write could turn out something better than this. But evidently this one can't. I still hope that I'll be able to some day, but for the present I am utterly deflated. I am reminded of Nietzsche's aphorism about "I did this, says my memory; I did that, says my pride; and finally memory yields." That is possible if one has only memory to go by, but when what you did is there concrete before you, your pride certainly takes a blow on the chin. (J 12-13 June 1941)

She concluded that she would not give up, but "if there is a more unpleasant sensation than being brought face to face with one's limitations, I don't know what it is" (J 14 June 1941).

All this was but a part of a hectic year. Trying to facilitate her work, she rented an office in June in the California Bank Building at Wilshire Boulevard and Beverly Drive, "just a cubbyhole, but plenty of light" (J 30 June 1941). It was a short-lived arrangement, however, made impractical by her unstable health (J Aug. 1940).

Except for a happy visit with her sister, who was experiencing success with her art, Bristow's general lassitude was heightened by her distress over her writing
stalemate until she spotted an article in the Saturday Review of Literature by John R. Tunis in which he said, "The point isn't whether you can write. Hundreds of folks can write. The point is whether you can take it" (J 24 Aug. 1941), and Bristow was determined that she could. She put away her story (a second one for this year), and began another new one (J 29 Sept. 1941).

Deciding that part of her problem was that she had written before she had mentally formed ideas clearly, she began to crochet an afghan for Manning's Christmas present. To get it done and work on her writing, she had her secretary Ethel read to her, stopping when Bristow needed to "digest" information, or take dictation when Bristow decided to record some notes. Since she had decided to make her character a plant chemist, she launched a personal study into plant chemistry (J Nov. 1941).

However matters still suffered from interruptions. Besides having their house renovated, in October a Crowell representative insisted that she make a fifteen-minute talk, along with Willard Price, Irving Stone, and "a Mr. Malcolmson," at a Book and Author Luncheon in Pasadena. Her loathing for this type of event, of necessity, was subordinate to her loyalty to the bookstore sponsoring this particular one. It had sold five thousand copies of her books, and she did not want to anger this franchise (J Oct. 1941).

There were major issues at stake aside from their personal problems. As early as October, she and Manning had attended a meeting at the home of a long-time friend, where the discussion focused on working with the American Council on Soviet Relations. Other frequent lectures followed, such as one by a "Mr. Harris,
national secretary of the Council on Soviet Relations." Having attended, Bristow commented, "very interesting" (J 4 Oct. 1941).

Other meetings followed, such as the one on November 21 when she and Manning attended a documentary film on Russia, entitled A Day in the Soviet Union, sponsored by the American Council on Soviet Relations. The "wonderful achievements of the Soviets and the Communist ideal," Bristow thought, "with the old familiar world falling into shreds, [makes] the Communist possibility seems like a dream of morning" (J 21 Nov. 1941). Although the notion would fade as the war escalated, it was still lively, a fact which would become obvious when the Mannings moved to a ranch in early 1944. There, one evening the men started a political argument, but Deborah Clyde and Bristow escaped, quietly agreeing between themselves "that whatever opinions anybody might hold this country is on its way to some form of communism, and as neither of us had any objection we dropped the subject" (J 14 May 1944). What Bristow was thinking is unclear, perhaps even to herself, for the next year in wrestling mentally over the book The German Talks Back by Heinrich Hauser, she concluded, "The United States isn't perfect. But I can't think of any other country where I'd rather have been born" (J 4 Oct. 1945).

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the threat of war had been continuous for so long that it took several hours for Bristow to react. However, they were swimming as they listened to the news, and she or Manning—she did not recall which—exclaimed, "Let's have a party!" Calling their friends, Bristow recorded, they went to "Chaser's, dined on enormous steaks and fine wine and brandy, didn't get in until about 3 a.m. It was not until the next day,
Monday, that I remembered I had written this before in *This Side of Glory*, when Eleanor and Kester were getting jitters about the war declaration and Kester said, "Let's have a party" (J 8 Dec. 1941).

The next day Bristow had a hangover, but with a more reconciled and objective outlook, she noted, "It's war, and it's grim and terrible, and we on the Pacific Coast are going to get it if anybody does; but there is a certain feeling of relief in having no more suspense" (J 8 Dec. 1941). Rounding up aliens, practicing real or educational air alerts, going through blackouts, sealing all openings so that not a shred of light could escape—all the preventive measures soon became realities.

Meanwhile, the local Communists kept busy. Bristow attended a tea given by new acquaintances Arnaud and Suzan O'Usseau "for Mrs. Ira Wood, a defendant in the Oklahoma trials of Communists, [a woman who] told an astounding story of oppression and KuKluxery." Although Bristow was "glad to contribute toward her defense" (J 14 Dec. 1941), the fact that Bristow's intentions were entirely void of subversion is evident in her next entry:

> Our persistent cheerfulness continues. I am discovering my own experience was repeated generally. Now everyone seems alert, and relieved. The war is here and we're all too busy to worry—that seems the attitude. For myself, I'm going to write my book, and if I make any money from it, buy defense bonds. That seems my best way of fighting. (J 15 Dec. 1941)

Quickly involved in war efforts, Bristow busily knitted soldier's sweaters, and Manning, appointed air raid warden for their two immediate blocks, began his work by visiting each of his neighbors to become acquainted (J Dec. 1941). His task was to walk the area and ascertain total blackout at times when blackouts were ordered (J 30 March 1942). With her usual courage, Bristow tried to focus on the mundane to
eclipse the greater issue, refusing "to whine" about the fact that the Rose Bowl game had been moved to North Carolina since the Defense Department had decreed no outdoor celebrations. She anticipated a terrible year in the advancing 1942 (J Dec. 1941). For the first time in her life, Bristow made New Year’s resolutions, determined to do her part, whatever it might be, to win this war and take life well.

Indeed, the time did not bode well for whining. With regularity, Bristow fought colds and the flu, often feeling achy and tired. Along with everyone else, Bristow learned to adjust to war rationing, inconveniences, and war volunteer work. Although she accepted the challenge and enjoyed her work as well as her fellow workers, whom she found generally heroic in their efforts, it was demanding and physically strenuous, and she worked holidays as did everyone else (J 15 Dec. 1943). The real shock for Bristow, however, came at the end of the year when Manning was called to Africa. He and Bristow had plans to spend Christmas in Palm Springs when unexpectedly on December 19 he was asked to take an army assignment overseas. The military needed someone with "a great deal of moving picture experience . . . big, important, and just what he could do . . . the details . . . too secret for [Bristow] to know much about them, but it’s an important job at the battlefront." He was gone before the year was up, not knowing his destination or his duties (J Jan. and Feb. 1943). Bristow stayed busy with her volunteer war work, noting on February 6, 1943:

Planes were up by the hundred, and we were very short-handed, and I was on the Navy Board, where I’m still clumsy from lack of experience. This is where one plots all targets that are over the water, and the board is vertical, about ten feet long and eight feet
high. I wear head phones, and the targets are reported to me by a soldier at the other end of the wire, then I plot them with colored arrows and the navy man on the balcony calls the identifications to me and I put a suitable tag by the arrow. Easy on the head, but oh, what it does to the legs! One target will be over my head, the next a foot or less from the floor, so I stretch, squat, stretch, squat, run to the end of the board for arrows, target numbers and identification tags, stretch and squat some more. The targets come in so fast that for about three hours I was going as fast as I possibly could. . . . (J 10 Ap. 1943).

Indeed, she (with her co-workers) were busy, tracking as many as 560 flights within a four-hour stretch (J 17 Dec. 1942), sometimes "nearly seven hundred targets in six hours" (J 30 Oct. 1942), along with teaching shorthand to women who might be left as wage earners if their husbands were drafted.

**Tomorrow Is Forever**

It was not, however, until the end of the year when she and some friends were at dinner and had had too much to drink that her idea, which had been vague previously, congealed for her book that would be *Tomorrow Is Forever*, (J 1942). Bristow continued to fight ill health, mostly in the form of colds or flu, noting in her February 14, 1943, journal entry that others had certain illnesses, "but if anything happens to me you can be sure it's some form of respiratory infection."

Still her doctors did not order her to stop smoking, and she did not choose to do so in spite of her knowing cigarettes were not good for her.³ Later, on July 8, 1943, after not having a cigarette for two days, she would write in her journal: "As soon as I got the book done I quit smoking for awhile, for I smoke so much while I am writing that I think by this time my lungs need a rest." However, she would soon resume her habit, just as she would continue to say she was "going on the wagon."

---

³ Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
When Manning had been preparing for military duty, Bristow had maintained both the acceptance of the inevitable and a sharing of his excitement in her support for him in what he felt he had to do. Nonetheless, she soon found she was "not as well prepared to do without him as [she] had thought." Besides missing him "terribly," there were endless business details suddenly on her shoulders. Her remedy was her usual getting too busy to think and then to tumble into bed too tired to allow much free time to worry about him (J 6 Feb. 1943).

For Bristow, so susceptible to exhaustion, her twelve-hour days wore drastically at her strength. She boosted her morale with her reading, her efforts to write, trips to the library, evenings out with friends, and visits to the theater. Sometimes her ventures terminated with the unexpected, as when

with the Ryskinds, and Mary, Jessie and a friend of Jessie’s named Jean Dunn, and I, went to a Lesbian nightclub called Parrott’s. It was very amusing until a drunken blond Lesbian in pants came over and tried to make Jessie, when we decided it was time to depart. (J 13 March 1943)

Sometimes she amused herself watching people, such as those who came in to one of her old favorite restaurants, the Brown Derby, "badly dressed in expensive clothes, with grotesque table manners, evidently suddenly making big money in defense work." At such times, chiding herself that she should be ashamed for laughing at them, she concluded, "How our behavior does run behind our ideals!" (J 9 May 1943). These same ideals, however, provoked her to anger with an acquaintance who had "bought 24 cans of Spam on the black market. I was shocked and told him so. How anybody can do that unless he is actually starving, I don’t know" (J 27 March 1943).
Manning returned home June 29, 1943. An ecstatic Bristow struggled not to celebrate with a day off. Arriving at work the following day, she learned that her co-worker's brother had died in a concentration camp in the Philippines, but she was at work as usual, and Bristow felt guilty for even considering staying home (J 4 July 1943). Manning quickly went to work at the war film studio (J 8 July 1943).

Amid her war work, Bristow completed her book and mailed it to Crowell July 7, 1943. Although he was worried about its departure from Bristow's usual historical format, Crowell, however, immediately wrote to Bristow, assuring her that Crowell was no a fair-weather publisher and that "[Crowell] would publish the book and promote it as hard [the company] could. As it happened, it sold just about as well as her others, and it was made into a movie!" (Crowell, letter to author, 14 July 1993). Crowell published *Tomorrow Is Forever* that November (J 11 Nov. 1942 and 7 July 1943). As Bristow later learned, her agent, Brandt and Brandt, was also concerned "because of the way it was written." Neither Crowell nor Brandt expected it to be a success, and both frankly were startled when it was made into a movie. In retrospect Bristow would conclude many years later that Crowell and Baumgarten had been right in thinking her better at historical novels because *Jubilee Trail* did outsell *Tomorrow Is Forever* (J 1 Oct. 1974). In her own opinion, Bristow thought it "no masterpiece, but it's fair for such a quick job" (J 13 Aug. 1943).

*Tomorrow Is Forever* is a story set against the imminent threat of a new war as its main character Elizabeth Herlong remembers the havoc wreaked in her life by an earlier war. Married only a short while, she recalls how she had struggled
through the long days waiting for her husband to return from the war, but he was killed. In time Elizabeth moves to California to escape all that reminded her of him. There she meets and marries another man, and her marriage is exceptionally happy except for occasional unexpected and unexplainable plunges into an abyss of painful memories. However, as the war again threatens, a German refugee writer named Kessler whom her husband has hired, proves more and more an invaluable friend in helping the Herlongs cope with the impending departure of their son to this new war in the face of Elizabeth’s anxiety.

There is, however, a teasing familiarity in Kessler’s proximity, which continues until a flash of recognition makes Elizabeth confront Kessler, asking him if he is Arthur, her former husband. Refusing to allow her to know who he is, he helps her to see that

The two periods [her two marriages] were as different in meaning as they were in length. She had known all along that the second had a value greater than the first. But she had never placed them side by side, as Kessler had made her do today, to see with vehement clarity how her love for Spratt overpowered anything she had ever shared with Arthur. (188)

When Kessler dies, Spratt and Elizabeth adopt Kessler’s adopted German daughter; in doing so, they also come to terms with the nightmare of war:

Margaret’s heredity includes two of the finest minds [her parents] in Germany. If parents give their children anything of themselves, and we know they do, the chances are a hundred to one that Margaret is a genius. Only God knows what she’s capable of becoming, but they tried to destroy her. . . .

Elizabeth put her hands over her eyes. It seemed to her that she could see them, little boys like Brian, little girls with fat pigtails like Margaret, the Einsteins, Chiangs, Curies of the future, going in a horrible procession to annihilation. Suppose the bombs had dropped fifty years ago. She thought of sulfanilamide and the Four Freedoms, television and cargo planes, vitamins and the Panama Canal. Her
generation had these because the men and women who brought them into being had been allowed to grow up. (156-157)

In her fervency toward the tragedy of World War II, Bristow defines in *Tomorrow Is Forever* what is to her the real tragedy of war:

That's the real horror of fascism. We are sick at what they are doing today, but this is such a little part of it. Their awful crime is what they are doing tomorrow. We don't know what they've already destroyed—a cure for cancer, a new philosophical system, a rocket to the moon. Margaret got out, but the others who didn't get out—my God, the books that will never be written, the work that will never be done. They're destroying tomorrow, and tomorrow is forever" (158).

Bristow received more mail expressing thoughtful appreciation for *Tomorrow Is Forever* than any previous book (J 15 Feb. 1944), and its reviews were generally favorable. Although its theme was said to be perhaps borrowed, its "treatment is intelligent and up to date" (Northridge). In September 1943 International Pictures bought *Tomorrow Is Forever* for $50,000 (J 15 Sept. 1943). The movie starring Orson Welles, Claudette Colbert, and Natalie Wood was released in 1945.

Bristow's writing grew in popularity, and she maintained careful work habits; however, she could also be entirely the woman of the moment. Although she was devoted to her writing and its scheduled time and requirements, Bristow possessed a natural spontaneity that, occasionally at a moment's notice, she could joyfully move from one activity to another. Such free-spiritedness seems to have carried over into all phases of both hers and Manning's lives.

**The Ranch Versus the Hotel**

Bristow's final entry in her 1943 journal, "written after the beginning of the New Year," mentions not a word about selling their home and buying a ranch.
However, she opened her 1944 journal on January 23 saying she and Manning had sold their home in Beverly Hills and bought a "ranch," loosely defined in California as "any place in the country where the dwelling is surrounded by more than an acre of ground" (J 23 Jan.). The ranch, where they would move about March (J 3 Jan.), had fifteen acres, nut and fruit trees, vegetable gardens, and plenty of space. Bristow was thrilled because Deborah and her husband Walter would live on the place to manage it, and she would be free to do her writing.

Several other reasons influenced their decision to buy the ranch. Bristow and Manning normally each had a secretary. For the house, they kept two maids, but they frequently had trouble keeping live-in help, something Bristow required, a cook in particular. Bristow, who called herself "moronic about housework," said she "felt she was edging toward rebellion at the exasperating work load" of the town house during this war period. On the other hand, because the new place was no farther from Universal Studies than their previous home, Manning would be needing no more gasoline than previously, and war rations would have no bearing on the move. With the Clydes, the domestic situation seemed finally resolved at the new place; furthermore, the arrangements seemed better for having Bristow's sister, Caroline, who had been with them since November 20 (J 20 Nov. 1943; 7 Jan. 1944) recuperating from an illness. "Caroline," wrote Bristow at this time, "is such a darling and we have so much fun together."4

There were other changes as well. One pertained to Manning's mother, whom Bristow had previously referred to as Mrs. McCurran but whom she began
soon thereafter to call "Mother McCurran." Bristow and Manning invited her to take the room Caroline had been using until Mrs. McCurran left for Oregon—a period of about a month. Bristow seemed to have become quite fond of her, noting, "She is a dear, begging us to let her do needed stitches on our clothes, supervising the housekeeping, and [a quality always of importance to Bristow] never under any circumstance criticizing or asking questions." By the end of the month, Bristow had again altered her name for Mrs. McCurran from "Mother McCurran" to "Mother Mac" (J Jan. 1944). As time passed and for more frequent and longer periods of time, Mrs. McCurran stayed with the Mannings.

The Mannings and Clydes moved to the ranch on March 13, 1944 (J 13 March 1944). Deborah was to be ranch manager and housekeeper, and Walter, who was in the Naval Reserves, would drive up each evening to milk and do the other outdoor chores until they could hire servants. Meanwhile, however, a Mrs. Scheurn was to go in two days a week to do the laundry and cleaning (J 24 March 1944). They would manage until they could make more satisfactory arrangements. As for Manning, his contract with Universal Studios was up, and he did not want to renew it. With Bristow's blessings, he would stay home for awhile and work on the ranch. Provoked by the war shortages, Bristow decided to add sewing and horseback riding to her already busy agenda (J Ap., May, and June 1944).

A New Novel in the Offing

Bristow, exhilarated by her feeling of independence and freedom in their new home, got the idea for her new story as she lay listening to the wind that first night.
She would get the main feminine protagonist to California as the daughter of an army officer stationed there after the Mexican War (J 25 and 26 March 1944). Her story would be set in pre-Gold Rush Southwest, a project of several years' duration. Although her outlook, typically, fluctuated from despair over her difficulties with her story or her recurring health problems to exhilaration when she felt she had resolved a problem, she once again went happily about her research.

Much of her material, however, was in Spanish. Not knowing any, she enrolled for three semesters at the University of California in Los Angeles as a freshman, learning enough to translate documents (Hutchens). She also began a drawing class to help with her work, but, finding herself overextended, she soon dropped the art (J 1 March 1945). Part of her strategy also involved keeping a daily weather journal and going to the desert repeatedly to study such details as the effect of sagebrush on the senses of her characters (Hutchens).

In the midst of all this, the war raged on—or vice versa. In May 1945, Bristow wrote that the papers were reporting that the war had gone on in Europe five years, eight months, six days. Everybody, she noted, was tired. Too much had happened. Between April 12 and May 8, five major events had staggered the imaginations: the death of President Roosevelt, the execution of Mussolini, the reported death of Hitler, the meeting of the American and Soviet armies in Germany, and, finally, the announcement of victory in Europe. Wrote Bristow, "People simply can’t get excited anymore. Everybody looks tired" (J May 1945).

Meanwhile, the filming of Tomorrow Is Forever was complete, and although privately Bristow thought it was "pretty awful," she said aloud only that it was
"excellent." Her reasoning was that if one sells a book to the movies, one might as well decide to accept what the movies do to it (J 31 July 1945).

The Mannings' move to the ranch as accomplished had lasted the Mannings only briefly, for in October 1944 they took a suite in a hotel with the idea of staying there while Manning, who had been called back to the studio, worked on his latest production. Since Bristow had always liked hotels, the move met her approval (J Oct. 1945).

All along, while continuing her studies, Bristow walked the streets studying the area and retracing her steps until she felt she had accurate images of the way buildings had been situated in early California. From her carefully compiled data, she drew detailed maps. At times she thought she had a grasp on her story; at others, she felt it should be three books, and as she wrestled with herself and her ideas, her moods roller-coastered, as did her health.

The war dragged on, and then came the big shock: President Truman announced "that an atomic bomb had been dropped on some unpronounceable city in Japan" (J 6 Aug.) A puzzled Bristow finally understood: the atom had been split and an "eight-ounce bit of uranium had let loose the destructive force of 20,000 tons of dynamite. . . . [H]alf thrilled and half terrified," she anxiously waited to discuss the event with Manning, whose reaction was "if we can control this we'll be like gods. If we can't, we'll be dead" (J 6 Aug. 1945).

When the Japanese finally asked for peace, Bristow's reaction was again, "Too much has been happening. We yearn for a time when there'll be nothing
on the front page but murders and descriptions of the White House Christmas tree"
(J 11 Aug.), but the end was not yet. Drawn relentlessly to the radio, Bristow in
desperation wrote,

Those damn Japs are interfering with my life. It is extremely difficult
to concentrate on anything when you know men are being killed while
we wait for the biggest news of the decade. I was in bed reading
when Bruce . . . phoned me to turn on the radio, as it seemed to have
happened. That was just after eleven . . . They say a message has
been picked up from Domei saying the terms of surrender have been
accepted. This is not official. (J 13 Aug. 1945)

Then on August 14, Bristow recorded,

It's over. This afternoon I turned on the radio just before four, found
nothing had happened, turned it off and drove to Beverly Hills for an
appointment with the hairdresser. As I neared the Beverly Hills hotel
on Sunset the fire sirens started screaming. A second or two later
automobiles began honking their horns. All of a sudden, though
nobody told me, I knew what it was. A woman was in her car,
parked by the curb, listening to her car radio; as I have none I went
over and asked her to let me listen. A strange man stopped me,
grinning to exclaim, "Wonderful! At last! Over!" Everybody was
rushing about, faces alight with glory. I went to the beauty shop, the
Negro maid rushed out and caught both my hands and we danced by
the door. Marcel washed my hair--said he might as well keep
working to use up his delight.

Dinner tonight at Jack Skirball's. Jack Felton was there, with
some War Department films of planes and air-raids. We had a fine
time.

Life settled down rather quickly for the Mannings, and in October Manning
went to New York to confer with Oscar Hammerstein. Bristow, however, remained
in California, still weak from a bronchial infection (J Oct. 1945) that would continue
to plague her for several years (JS), but she returned as quickly as she was able to
her study, working at a drawing board preparing dozens of maps and keeping
calendar, working from the spring of 1944 to the spring 1949, on her novel that
would be Jubilee Trail. In bed with the bronchial infection, Bristow commented,
I have even tried to ask myself if I could possibly have any unconscious reason for wanting to be an invalid. I don’t think I have—at any rate, if I have such a reason, it’s mighty unconscious. And I don’t believe I have any particular stock of repressions and unrealized traumas. I think this is a genuine infection which for some mysterious physical reason I haven’t the power to resist. (J 13 Jan. 1946)

Whatever her "repressions" or "unrealized traumas" may have been, Bristow dealt with certain behaviors with a \textit{joie de vivre} that implies either she did not understand the dangers or that she lived in denial. Both she and Manning, in spite of repeated vows to stop, continued to smoke and drink excessively. Typical of Bristow’s frequent lament, she wrote upon awaking one New Year’s Day after having worked on her novel until eleven o’clock, "trying to smooth out Oliver’s telling Garnet about Charles, on the Santa Fe Trail," "I smoked so many cigarettes last night that my mouth feels like the inside of a stovepipe" (J 1 Jan 1947).

Manning’s care of himself was likewise negligent. For example, in late January after an evening at the races and a bar, he arrived home "very gay and shaky in the knees," noted Bristow, only to go out again to the hotel bar and drink more. Bristow continued, "He finally got in again about one, wonderfully drunk. I gave him some aspirin, undressed him and put him to bed, Bruce mumbling blissfully until he passed out."

On January 15, 1946, Bristow’s doctor finally told her to stop smoking. He also said she needed a tonsillectomy. Determined to cure her throat, Bristow vowed again to quit smoking. She struggled several days, avoiding writing because her hands automatically went to cigarettes when she wrote. Manning, in New York for additional work with Oscar Hammerstein and not having heard from her, called to
see whether something was wrong. Bristow replied, "[It] seem[s] I could either
swear off cigarettes or write a book . . . I could keep off well enough when I wasn't
trying to write."

Manning responded, "Nuts, as long as you stick to Parliaments, which have a
filter end, smoking isn't going to kill you and not writing, if it doesn't kill you, at
least makes your life not worth living."

Her conscience assuaged, Bristow said, "[T]hanks for your matchless co-
operation," picked up a cigarette, and got happily to work (J 26 Jan. 1946).

"Bruce," Bristow wrote later in her journal, "gets so upset about my chest. I keep
telling him it is not serious, but only annoying, but he bothers about it more than I
do" (J 12 Feb. 1947). Her illnesses would persist for a while longer before she set
out on a self-disciplinary plan to learn to relax in order to return to her writing
again in May (J 1946).

In March of 1947 there were more changes, and Bristow was less certain of
what she thought about them. One was that Manning decided to give up the extra
room in the hotel and move back to the ranch "since [he] spends so much of his
time at the ranch [and] we don't need the extra bedroom and it's a waste of rent" (J
18 Mar.). Another was that during this time, Mr. Scheurn came to work for the
Mannings to keep up the grounds and Mrs. Scheurn took over the job, beginning a
congenial relationship of long duration.

Meanwhile, Bristow remained at the hotel. Although she had "contemplated
moving to the ranch," she decided against doing so because she did "love staying in
a hotel--the privacy and the lack of responsibility gives such freedom to work" (J 9
Mar. 1948). Manning visited her, not daily, but very often, frequently spending the evening, taking her to lunch or dinner with their friends and his business associates, including Joe Pasternak, Claudette Colbert, and Oscar Hammerstein, or Abbey and Pete Dailey. By late July, however, after the hotel continued to raise rates, she decided to return to the ranch.

A delighted Manning suggested Bristow use the little "pagoda" in the yard for her office (J 25 July 1948), nicknamed "the bird cage" for its painted top and many windows. Refurbished to greater comfort and convenience, it became Bristow's living and working quarters to facilitate the lifestyle she found conducive to her particular work habits (J 19 Oct. 1948). Settling into ranch life, she found "roaming around the place, thinking, jotting down lines," occasionally doing some small chore, such as "squirting [poison] on the ants eating the roses" particularly rejuvenating. With a cook and a housekeeper and a yard man, as well secretaries to assist her and Manning, Bristow had few responsibilities or unmet needs. Thus she was free to "put on a hostess gown and [her] pretty new black satin slippers with the red and green decorations on the toes," either dressing for dinner or for friends who dropped in frequently for drinks (J 16 Aug. 1948).

Although she sometimes complained about the interruptions to her writing, Bristow also enjoyed life on the ranch until the heat that summer, soaring to about 110, made life so miserable during the day she could not work. At Manning's suggestion, she returned to the hotel on September 12 (J 14 Sept. 1948), planning to stay until November and saying, "I can't afford to stay at the hotel indefinitely, convenient though it is. Anyway, I like living with Bruce" (J 19 Sept. 1948).
Also contributing to the quality of her life were several personal pleasures. At the ranch, she enjoyed her cats, her orchard, and her hobby of crocheting, something she did often and with which she was, in fact, quite skilled. Sometime during this period of her life, she also discovered the joy of collecting early American magazines, ultimately, acquiring an impressive number of them (Caroliniana).

Still struggling with cigarettes and alcohol, Bristow had begun 1948 finally recognizing that she could not "tease" herself with a few cigarettes in the evening. She adamantly resisted, therefore, for a while, so that two weeks into the new year, she noted that she felt "so wonderful without cigarettes!" She had more energy and her cough had ceased; consequently, she decided to do without liquor too and see what a difference it will make to do without both of them. I'm probably going to burst with so much purity, but I'm tired of pushing around half sick. I want to know what it feels like to be really well. (J 12 Jan. 1948)

The time, however, had not yet arrived when she was finally free of these old habits.

The Manning household seldom had only Manning and Bristow, for besides the live-in domestics when they could keep them, there was often someone in the family visiting, and one or the other or both of their secretaries were there, as well as occasionally a friend or two. Typically, then, the house was full during the winter of 1948-1949, but by the end of March, all guests and family had left. Bristow wrote, "Now Bruce and I are alone, after having had people around all winter. It's fun sitting about together" (J 25 March 1949). As there had never been, there continued no hint of her wondering about Manning's whereabouts or
being suspicious of his activities despite his frequent absence or his activities, such as playing poker until the wee hours or all night and coming home to sleep far into the day. Manning spent time with his secretary or in Las Vegas or at the races to gamble, gambling being something Bristow said "bores me stiff," (J 10 Feb. 1949), at the movies, or with one or more of his acquaintances—often another woman.

Never does Bristow note an objection or a hint of resentment; but she reserved for herself the time and solitude she deemed essential for her priority—her writing. In general, she was satisfied with life and with her progress.

Matters were not so satisfying in the world, however. She wrote, "[W]arious horrible things are going on in the world," the most disturbing element was a question of war against Russia. Periodicals and lecturers waged a blitz of anti-Russian sentiment. Bristow's reaction was, "The past few years have got me so bewildered about propaganda that I have no idea what to believe anymore about international affairs" (J 27 March 1947). Whatever sympathies Bristow may earlier have had for Communist ideology, when the Communists took over Czechoslovakia in 1948, her reaction was, "It's so much like the Hitler steps preceding the last war that the whole world seems to be giving a shudder of despair. Why are we so helpless against these things?" (J 26 Feb. 1948). The last of Bristow's seeming Communists sympathies was apparently gone by mid-August 1948 when she wrote,

After dinner we listened to the broadcast by Al Capp, who is substituting for Drew Pearson while Pearson is on vacation. Capp was simply revolting. Instead of discussing the news he indulged in cheap wisecracks at the expense of Congress, the President, and the government and all wealthy people. It was not witty nor amusing, it was merely sophomoric sneering. From a man clever enough to do the Lil Abner strip it was astonishingly bad. Also it was bright red
communism. We were sorely disappointed, and also mad. (J 15 Aug. 1948)

Bristow, in fact, had very strong opinions about events of all types. World communities in the throes of ideological challenges worried Bristow, but she was always thrilled over achievement. For example, after reading Dr. Harland Stetson’s book on radio waves and sunspots, she wrote,

And oh, science is such a relief after half an hour of the day’s news! It is a better escape than anything else I know; the earth, the sun, the stars are there, and the laws of the universe are there, and we are part of a great magnificent scheme that stupid human beings cannot destroy. So much for the Hearst newspapers, the power--mad dictators--they don’t matter, because in the universe they just don’t matter. (J 27 Feb. 1948)

Manning, too, was thinking of radio waves in another manner: television was on the horizon, and he attended meetings, coming away believing it was "really the coming form of entertainment and it’s going to do a lot of strange things to the picture business" (J 6 Dec. 1948). Bristow, interested but too absorbed in her work to be distracted, finally wrote "the end" December 11, 1948, at 5:30 P.M. She had been at work on it since March 1944. She knew it was long at 1341 pages, but she hoped Crowell would not make her cut it (J 11 Dec. 1948). A few days later, however, Crowell informed her the Literary Guild wanted about a ten percent cut. Having "done one cutting job, [she was] so sick of the book that every line of it ma[de her] want to throw up" (J 17 Aug. 1949), but she went to work.

At the same time, hearing of Margaret Mitchell’s accident in Atlanta, Bristow was greatly troubled and hoped that she would get well. Upon the news of Mitchell’s death, she recorded she was "quite depressed about it. If she had died of disease, you’d say well, it’s too bad but we all have to die and now it was her turn;
but for a fine successful person to be struck down by a drunk—it's so tragic and useless and criminal" (J 16 Aug. 1949). As always, Bristow had strong opinions about current events, such as finding Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* a very fine job for its kind, but I do not see why so many authors are fascinated with revolting little mediocrities. If you prefer pleasanter subjects they say you are an "escapist from reality." Rats. Strength is just as real as weakness, courage is as real as cowardice, honesty is as real as cheating. And I prefer books and plays about people worth respecting. (J 8 Aug. 1949)

Although while she had been writing her book, she could hardly bear to read fiction, she was beginning to enjoy the arts again (J 17 Oct. 1949). After seeing *Finian's Rainbow* at the Philharmonic, she noted,

I was never more disappointed in a show. It started out like a gay, merry musical fantasy, with good music and a wonderful dancing chorus. Then all of a sudden it turned into a preaching on the race problem and the economic system. We felt cheated. I don't mind problem shows. I often like them, but I want the show to be honestly one thing or the other, and not try to slip me a message under guise of entertainment. The audience evidently resented it too, for they really sat on their hands. (J 5 Oct. 1949)

She also concluded that John O'Hara of *Rage to Live* must hate the human race because his book had no characters one could consider without disgust. In her opinion, they were immature, giving childish values to unimportant things (J 18 Oct. 1949).

**Family Matters**

A variety of personal and family matters also occupied Bristow throughout the remainder of 1949. Although they did not go to the wedding, Manning's daughter Patricia was married on Friday, November 4, to Edward Tanner, a Navy
doctor (J Nov. 1949). Bristow also completed the "most astounding questionnaire from the Literary Guild . . . with 20 pages of questions on everything from the color of my eyes to my opinion on international peace." It would take her "a week's hard work" to write her answers, and some of the questions she doubted that she could answer on subjects about which she felt she did not have competence to answer. It was, she supposed, the sort of thing that made good publicity, "But oh Lord, it's so silly" (J 3 Nov. 1949). She found in such an assignment that she wrote, rewrote, and discarded because, she said, "I always feel like a fool when writing about myself, and generally for the first ten drafts I sound like one" (J 13 June 1949).

Also, she had another bout with the flu that lasted two weeks. Recording on November 29 that she was finally well, she made no further entries until December 8. She had relapsed. Previously agreeing with her doctors that smoking had "nothing to do with the infection," Manning now suggested that she stop smoking. Taking his advice, she quickly felt better. Her fever left the following day, and by December 8, not having smoked for five days, she was "up and feeling fine" (J).

An idea for a new novel had occurred while Bristow was ill, but she struggled with new worries about her sister, whose worsened condition was aggravated by Caroline's efforts to care for her ill husband (J 9 Dec. 1949). Otherwise, Bristow's life was running smoothly, as was Manning's, who was well but very busy with his new picture and frequently out late with his stars Curt Bernhardt and Bette Davis.
Meanwhile, not until after a trip to New York to confer with Crowell and several months of editing, followed by the months devoted to its publication, did Bristow receive her first copy of *Jubilee Trail* on January 10, 1950. To her it was beautiful—a massive 570-page book that had ultimately required seven years to complete.

Opening in New York in the 1840's, *Jubilee Trail* tells of Garnet, a city girl, captivated by Oliver Hale, a prairie trader in New York to buy merchandise for sale in the Mexican provinces west of the United States. As Hale's wife, she journeys to New Orleans, up the Mississippi, and down the Missouri; then, in a wagon train, they lumber overland in wagons drawn by mule team and over the Jubilee Trail to California. Typical of Bristow, the novel maintains its historical integrity, tracing the excitement of life as the early Santa Fe Trail pioneers knew it. Her courageous heroine, curious about life, finds unexpected romance that rescues her from her dull existence and thrusts her into the vigorous, passionate life of the frontier, where she must live by her wits and determination in the face of many obstacles. She perseveres, and love again rescues her with the promise that she will live happily though not without challenges.

Reviews of the book were generally favorable, such as Beulah Canterbury's of Canterbury-Craine Book House in Canton, Ohio. In her review of January 23, 1950, she praised the "real" characters in *Jubilee Trail*, calling it

THE book of this mid-century year. Whereas Scarlett's [from *Gone with the Wind*] memorable driving force is love of the land, Garnet's is love of adventure with her "tomorrows always unknown." Here's hoping Garnet takes her place with Scarlett and Amber in reading popularity, and because she gains her ends by good rather than by selfish means, will surpass both of them. (Caroliniana)
The February 5, 1950, *New York Herald Tribune* carried the criticism, "The many and big pages of *Jubilee Trail* are packed with color and action. The book offers its readers a romantic and adventurous ride through a chapter of the past."

Fanny Butcher of the *Chicago Tribune Magazine* in the February 12 edition wrote,

> Against a colorful pioneer background, Gwen Bristow has told a tale filled with every imaginable excitement, physical and emotional. If *Jubilee Trail* were a piece of music instead of a book, it would take a pipe organ to do it justice, for only with every stop out could the full roar of its experiences be shared. If *Jubilee Trail* isn't made into a super-colossal motion picture in fact, it certainly will be one in fancy to every reader. Miss Bristow has that true gift of story-telling without which no novel is really great and with which even a melodramatic thriller is compelling. (Caroliniana)

All reaction, however, was not positive. Hoffman Birney in the *New York Times Book Review* had harsh criticism of Bristow's latest work for what he called her attempt to "write an epic of early California." He believed

> her purpose is defeated by her anxiety to tie off every possible loose end. No action, however trivial, is undertaken without endless deliberation and discussion, all faithfully reported. Six pages are required to tell that an arrow-wound must be cauterized with a hot iron; Florinda—who turns suddenly virtuous in California, by the way—brings Garnet and the reader up to date on her activities with a twelve-page letter. Since the final curtain is fairly obvious before the caravan leaves Santa Fe, this verbosity becomes tiresome. (Caroliniana)

Birney concludes his review, saying Florinda is "delightful as a sexy variety actress," but the "California climate does something to her. Her moral fiber is strengthened no end, but her personality is ruined."

Such a negative review, nonetheless, did little to diminish the success of Bristow's latest novel. As always she experienced the thrill of achievement with huge sales, augmented by the Literary Guild choosing it as its April selection, with a guarantee of fifty thousand dollars. Bristow was "thrilled nearly speechless."
Endnotes for Chapter Five

1. In all documents and in the many personal and telephone interviews I had with many of Bristow and Manning's acquaintances and friends, as well as family, those who knew agree they had an unusual living arrangement but there was never any indications of a troubled marriage. Patricia Tanner in the May 25, 1994, telephone interview concurs: "They had a very modern marriage in those days, even for today, but they understood each other and got along very well. Bristow would never have had an affair."

2. Bristow, too ill and exhausted to keep up her daily journal entries, tried to summarize her last two to three weeks away; consequently, her dates and events blur, and the time can be given only as April and early May.

3. In her journal Bristow notes in August 1941 that she had asked her doctor whether she should stop smoking for a while, and he said "dubiously," yes, if she could. She had done so for about three weeks.

4. This entry is from Bristow's journal, 7 Jan. 1944. The journal itself is somewhat confusing because she did not write this enter under the correct date; it is, however, the date under which the entry was made.

5. J, 13 Jan. 1944, is the date under which this is recorded; however it is a continuation of an entry begun under January 1 but dated by Bristow as January 23. It continues on every odd page of her journal, and she does not resume her daily entries until January 24.

6. This January 24, 1947, record in Bristow's journal, typical of many others, clearly illustrates Bristow's and Manning's nonchalant manner about their favorite vices.
CHAPTER SIX
FROM PINNACLE TO VALLEY

From the exhilarating heights of a major best seller to the depths of family crises, the 1950's would be a decade of extraordinary challenges and change for Bristow. After her achievements of the last ten years, she would be sorely tested by the reality of the next.

By early 1950 the Mannings were living at 17303 Lassen Street, Northridge, in what Bristow described to her old friend Annie Lorrie as a "country village out in the San Fernando Valley" (Judson). Bristow wrote that she was "just catching her breath" after finishing Jubilee Trail and that they very much liked their new home (Judson).

This place featured a modest frame house, bordered by walks and a swimming pool to one side in front. In the rear were three separate buildings, two of which served as Bristow's and Manning's individual studies, separated by an oversized double garage. All were connected to the main house by walkways. Manning's study was an immense den/bedroom lined with bookshelves from ceiling to floor and comfortably furnished with deep, stuffed chairs, ample tables for working, and a king-sized bed, where he could relax if he chose although he had a bedroom in the main house. Bristow's, similarly equipped, likewise had a king-sized bed with a solid padded headboard and a simple bedside lamp under a ruffled shade (Fleming).
large yard boasted several fruit trees near the main house facing a curving, paved
driveway and bordered by white rectangular stones. It was an arrangement whereby
Bristow could enjoy her five cats that often kept her company in her study (J).
While they lived here, Bristow hired Bruce Biggs as her accountant, a business
relationship that developed into a mutual and lasting friendship with Biggs and his
wife Catherine. Here, Bristow also wrote Celia Garth.¹

The 1950’s began mildly but busily for Bristow, who opened the New Year
with a resolution to practice faithfully her eye exercises to reduce eye strain (J 1
Jan. 1950). Although making New Year’s resolutions was out of character for
Bristow, her faithfulness in their execution was typical of the self-disciplined
Bristow, who genuinely believed the exercises helped. At the same time, she also
added to her reading of works such as Boswell’s Life of Johnson (J 24 May 1950)
some biographies of Revolutionary War heroes. She was struggling with recurring
bouts of fever and respiratory problems, but she was thinking about writing a story
set in this period.

Jubilee Trail Completed--and a Sensation

By the time Bristow’s Jubilee Trail was published on February 6, 1950, she
had studied technique to the extent she feel she had done well with her new novel.
She was "really delighted at [her friends'] enthusiasm. They like the story, but also
they both know enough about story construction to understand technique, and so few
readers can do that. It makes me enjoy their appreciation even more" (J 14 Jan.
1950). Since it was also her wedding anniversary, she added, "Today is my twenty-first wedding anniversary. I've had a wonderful marriage."

The enthusiasm over Jubilee Trail quickly increased to vast proportions, in the midst of which Annette Duchein arrived in California as early as January 2 for a visit. Sharing an apartment with her friend Doris Loyd, Duchein was considering a move to California and a writing career. Bristow thought, "In spite of all she says about staying here, I am still doubtful about her doing so. Giving up a position such as she holds in South Carolina is not easy, and I am not at all sure what satisfaction she expects to get in return for it" (J 1 March 1950). Somewhat as Bristow had expected, by mid-March Duchein had left California; however, she had gone without saying goodby or giving the Mannings an explanation.

Plaguing Illnesses

Bristow, however, had more serious matters on her mind. For one thing, illness continued to plague her and Manning. In May her old recurring ailment—afternoon fever and weakness—returned. Adding stress was her habit of worrying over world affairs, this time the threat of war in Korea (J June, July 1950). Furthermore, Manning, diagnosed in June with a stomach ulcer just after getting his blood pressure down to normal, was placed on a rigid sodium-free diet and reduced calories, to lose weight and to lower his blood pressure (J 14 June 1950). By this time Bristow was found to be "in excellent condition," and she vowed, "... this time I am off cigarettes for life and I mean it" (J 17 June 1960), thus beginning another struggle to quit smoking.
Her life remained complicated, nonetheless, for Caroline, who had arrived shortly after Bristow had begun to feel well (J 25 Aug. 1950), remained with them through October. Suffering from a congenital heart defect, Caroline, indeed, was quite ill, but finally rallying under Bristow’s care, she left to join her husband (J 29 Oct. 1950). Bristow’s anxiety increased, however, for Caroline’s going home to her usual responsibilities would, Bristow knew, only make her beloved sister ill again.

In the entertainment industry, according to Manning’s prediction, television had, indeed, become popular, but Bristow quickly discovered that it stole her time and bored her "half to death" (J 8 March 1950). Besides, she was studying in earnest for her new book, which she still hoped to set in the Revolutionary War period.

Jubilee Trail, meanwhile, was creating such a sensation with so much fan mail and expressions of interest by the movie and television industries, (J Feb., March 1950), that Crowell ordered the largest first printing in his company’s history--about 300,000 (Northridge). It shot to sixth place on the Herald Tribune best-seller list eight days after publication (J 27 Feb. 1950), as well as to the top of other best-seller lists in Los Angeles, New York, Boston, and elsewhere across the nation as it continued to move up. Bristow was elated when in April, Jubilee Trail, "her most successful novel" was again on the Herald Tribune best-seller list, this time, second (J 8 Ap. 1950). It stayed third on the New York Times best-seller list "just behind Robert Penn Warren’s WorldEnough and Time and Ernest Hemingway’s Across the River and into the Trees. Of the reviews, however, Bristow was not so jubilant:
I have not seen many reviews, but of those I have seen, some are quite awful—the frightened contempt of highbrow critics for a book plainly written for entertainment only. But some take it as it was meant, a story, and say it's a fine one. Anyway the sales are excellent and Crowell has already ordered a second printing. (J 22 Feb. 1950)

Although Bristow thoroughly enjoyed the piles of fan mail, responding soon became a real task, and she flatly refused to make public appearances to promote this book (J 8, 10 Ap. 1950). Then in July the Literary Guild launched a new nation-wide advertisement to run in thirty-six cities (J 24 July 1950). With this type of publicity, Jubilee Trail remained a best-seller in forty-two cities at least six months after publication (J 8 Aug. 1950) as negotiations for movie production continued. Bristow chose to hold out for her choice of movie deals being offered.

Revolution or Gold Rush?

Bristow, meanwhile, was also amassing much data on eighteenth-century America, which she filed chronologically. Studying such books as Henry Cabot Lodge's Story of the Revolution, she found she needed more background studies before she could use such a book so presumptive of a reader's "working knowledge of the times" (J 4 Jan. 1950). Therefore, she began a tabulated history of the Revolutionary Period, month by month, setting down events also in chronological order (J 15, 21 Sept. 1950). However, in spite of her better judgment, she yielded to pressure and put those notes aside to write a sequel to Jubilee Trail, ending the year by remaining on the best-seller list but very much worried about the Korean War. On a more personal level, she noted on June 7, "I hope I'm off" smoking "for life" (J 7 June 1950). As for "going on the wagon," as she persisted in calling
her effort to give up alcohol, she noted that she saw no reason why she should (J 31 Dec. 1950).

What she had decided she really wanted to do, partly because of the pressure from fans and partly because she had so much to tell, was write a story about the California Gold Rush (J 31 Dec. 1950) by taking John and Garnet of Jubilee Trail on into the Gold Rush era (J 26 Aug. 1951). What she did, however, was to begin the new year condensing Jubilee Trail for Eyre and Spottiswoode of London and negotiating with movie companies for rights to produce her novel. At the same time, having spent most of 1950 worrying about the threat of a war with North Korea, she also worried about the fact that President Truman had fired General MacArthur, whom she greatly admired and had followed closely.

She also again met Madge Kennedy, the movie actress, whom she had met casually years before. As a young actress, Kennedy had been considered "one of the great beauties of all times" (J 8 Ap. 1973). This time Bristow decided that Kennedy was also one of the most charming women she had met. It was the beginning of a lasting friendship. Bristow also picked up her cigarettes again—and quit again (J 13 June 1951).

Interrupting her work briefly for a brief trip to New Orleans, Bristow boarded the train on February 26, 1951, feeling she needed to see her mother, who had been ill. She also recognized the need to visit the rest of her family living in New Orleans. As usual, she stayed at the St. Charles Hotel, where, she said, she could get more done, although this trip was less business oriented than previous trips to the city had been (J 1951). When someone questioned her about the latest
Communist investigation in Hollywood, Bristow answered that she did not know of any but that she thought "probably one Communist goes a long way--like smallpox"

In California again, she took a brief research trip to San Francisco in August, returning home happily rewarded for her efforts, both in the information she had collected as well as her gratifying stops at various book stores. She found her book selling well and her visits proved good for public relations. Bristow was delighted to see "Bruce’s jolly figure coming toward [her] at the Glendale station," and they "jabbered merrily until late evening" (J 17 Aug. 1951). She also got immediately back into life at home, working on her writing project, visiting with friends such as Oliver ("Babe") and Lucille Hardy (J 5 Nov. 1949), and being honored for her writing by her friends and acquaintances (J 19 Aug. 1951).

The Mannings and their friends also watched the hearings before the Committee on un-American Activities. Bristow reflected "that just after Pearl Harbor half the people [she] knew were listening with interest to the Communists; [she couldn’t] be surprised that some of them went so far as to join the party" (J 18 Sept. 1951). At least two of her close friends had joined. As the hearings continued and Bristow and her acquaintances watched, she wrote, "I’m getting hardly any work done, but these are too fascinating to be missed. Thank heaven I never got mixed up with these people, even when (as I know now), they were trying to recruit me for the Party" (J 20 Sept. 1951). Later she noted on September 24, 1951,

I am enthralled by watching how these people work. They all so evidently parrot the same instructions. Today there was a new line: "I am not a Communist."-- "Were you a Communist yesterday?"--"I stand on the fifth amendment and decline to answer." If I ever had
any doubts that party members were more than ventriloquists’ dummies for the Kremlin, I’d have none after listening to the past week’s exhibition.

Still nagging was her desire to write the Gold Rush story, and she continued reading, collecting notes and pictures, and making maps. With no real steps taken in that direction, however, she ended the year signing the contract with Republic Studio to make Jubilee Trail into a movie, and Manning was hired to write the script (J Dec. 1951).

January 1951 found Bristow was still occupied with a sequel to Jubilee Trail. She had collected vast data but it was "all in separate pieces jumbled together, and no one central idea to connect everything or act as a focal point." In this familiar predicament, she noted, "It’s as though one would try to say that a toothache should be less painful because you have had one before" (J 26 Jan. 1952). Experience had taught, however, "If I fight long and hard enough, the pieces will come together in a coherent whole. But meantime!" (J 29 Jan. 1952). Finally, after struggling for about nineteen months, working almost daily, often long hours (J 14 June 1952), she concluded that there would be no sequel to Jubilee Trail. She simply "had no more to say about [her Jubilee Trail characters]. With a feeling of emptiness but "great relief" (J 28 June 1952), she had put away her notes and removed all the maps and pictures from her walls. It was the same day she saw the Pocket Books edition of Jubilee Trail on sale for the first time (J 1 July 1952). Manning characterized her "sort of dazed feeling" as "rather like a miscarriage," which Bristow agreed was "a good simile." However, Manning, too, was glad (J 1
July 1952), and by August she was reconsidering her idea for a story "of Charleston during the Revolution, against the background of Marion's men" (J 4 Aug. 1952).

Manning, meanwhile was working on the movie script for Jubilee Trail, finally finishing on July 16, the day of his deadline. Bristow, well pleased with his work, noted in her journal entry July 15,

For some reason, his mind simply will not operate at its best until he has a deadline breathing down his neck. He has to turn the script in by five p. m., and by that time both he and Deborah will be near a state of collapse.

But the stuff he has written is good. Today he gave me as much of the script as has been put into reading shape, and I was delighted at how well he has condensed the story.

Two days after he had finished the Jubilee Trail script, Bristow moved her eighteenth-century materials into her office, picking up her earlier idea to write a story about her native state (J 18 July 1952). She immediately began her research, finding the period "very ponderously written and . . . exclusively concerned with the Revolution . . . most . . . as if there were no human beings involved in great events" (J 11 Aug. 1952).

The year 1953 would focus on a trip to Charleston for research and "to absorb it until I can reproduce it the way it was in 1776" (J 15 Jan 1953). Her ever-thoughtful husband, who "like[d] women's clothes and [knew] a lot about them" helped her purchase the clothes she needed (J 16 Jan. 1953). Bristow's gross income for 1952, which had been $24,705.59 (J 17 Jan. 1953), an appreciable sum compared to the salary of $1,250, plus room and board, for a live-in nanny, cook, and housekeeper in New Orleans at the same time. Manning insisted that she deserved a mink coat, which turned out to be "long . . . [with] enormous sleeves" (J
270

22 Jan. 1953). She did not know about her deserving it, but she "love[d] the idea of having one" (J 19 Jan. 1953).

Her return trip from Charleston, February 25, 1953, took Bristow to New Orleans and Baton Rouge for a visit with her parents and to parties in her honor, interviews, autographing sessions, bookstores and broadcasting stations, and dinner with Harnett Kane (J 6 Mar. 1953). Then, although she had enjoyed her entire trip, she was exhausted and not a little glad to board the train on Sunday for California, March 8, alternately reading Desirée and resting (J 8 Mar. 1953).

The Movie and Fanfare

The remainder of 1953 saw Jubilee Trail doing very well on the British market (J 19 Mar. 1953) and Tomorrow Is Forever selling well in Norway (J 3 July 1953). Also exciting for Bristow was a "new 3-dimensional film called Cinemascope," which excited Manning and Joe Kane as Bristow had never seen them before. Already they were calling the current movies "'flatties in contrast with 3-D," and they were ecstatic about the possibility of using it for shooting Jubilee Trail (J 24 Mar. 1953). Bristow likewise found the events related to shooting the film quite thrilling, such as having a chance in November 1953 to treat her niece Angie, Louis Bristow's oldest daughter, to a visit to the Republic lot ("Novelist Gwen Bristow Returns"). There was also a special studio showing in November about which she wrote,

It was quite a gala affair--dinner first at the Tail o' the Cock with the Kanes, then quite a brilliant crowd of invited guests at the studio, and everybody treating me with great honor, which of course I lapped up gleefully.
The picture is beautiful to look at, and it's really very good. Some things I'd have done differently, of course, but that's to be expected. (J 27 Nov. 1953)

Later, however, after seeing it a fourth time, she would notice that there were many "details--good and bad" and that "Vera's first dance was much too long.
Altogether, however, it's all right" (J 3 March 1954). On March 9, 1954, the Hollywood Reporter would list Jubilee Trail as the biggest box-office hit in town since its opening (Journal, 9 Mar. 1954).

Meanwhile, Bristow very much enjoyed her celebrity status evolving from the Jubilee Trail production, but she had some reactions she did not make public, undoubtedly her "public personality" again checking her. For example, when Herbert Yates, producer of the film, asked Bristow to make a trailer, something she found to be fun, she thought that

[the] lines they gave me were quite idiotic, and I felt silly speaking such words of praise for a book I had written myself, but Mr. Yates had written them himself and had all an author's pride in his own creation. I did (with Joe Kane's help) get him to let me omit the words "glorious Jubilee Trail," but he insisted on keeping the lines that this was the "greatest American drama since Gone with the Wind," which is sheer gabble. However, I enjoyed doing it--being made up, having a director, performing before a movie camera for the first time in my life. (J 16 Dec. 1953)

Thus, with Bristow busily writing her new story, which would be Celia Garth and Republic Studios filming Jubilee Trail, the year sped by, ending with plans to premiere the story in New Orleans at the Saenger Theater on January 15, 1954 (J 15 Dec. 1953). For Bristow, especially, it was to be a really notable event. Seven of the principal cast of stars (Buddy Baer, Jim Davis, Joan Leslie, Ray Middleton, Pat O'Brien, Forrest Tucker, Vera Ralston, John Russell) and the directors would be
there. Also adding to the glamour and prestige of the evening was the fact that this particular opening event had been singled out to be attended by none less than the associate producer and director Joseph I. Kane and Herbert J. Yates, pioneer motion picture producer and president of Republic Pictures ("Opening Today").

Bristow and Manning arrived via train Sunday afternoon. On hand to welcome them with bouquets of roses were representatives of the Republic Studios (J 10 Jan. 1954) and Paramount Gulf Theaters. More exciting, however, was the premier at the Saenger Theater, where huge crowds had gathered in spite of the stormy weather. Greeting the crowd, which by then included the entire cast of stars of Jubilee Trail, were Louisiana's Governor and Mrs. Robert F. Kennon and New Orleans Mayor and Mrs. deLesseps S. Morrison (Seither). Also there was Margaret Dixon, a close friend of the Mannings and managing editor of the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, who had shared an apartment in New Orleans with Bristow for six months when Manning had first gone to Hollywood. So were Bristow's parents, as well as Hermann Deutsch, newspaperman from New Orleans, and Mr. and Mrs. Fred Dent (Lucille May Grace, former register of state lands), among many other well-known persons in Louisiana social and political circles. Even Robert Crowell, president of the Thomas Y. Crowell company and publisher of the book, had flown in from New York for the premiere ("Seen at the Premiere").

A fashionably slim Bristow in a silver-gray nylon net, its bodice embroidered with rhinestones over a very full skirt, exuberantly chatted with guests and reporters, such as Richard C. Seither from her old post on The Times-Picayune. This day was, Bristow responded to his question, "The biggest in my life."
event was a "happy mixture of old home week and family reunion heightened by "the glamour and the glitter of Hollywood" (Seither).

The festivities included the actual rolling out of a red carpet (many there had never seen that done), a street parade from The Roosevelt [Hotel] to the Saenger [Theater] on Canal Street, live television and live radio broadcasts, flashlights popping all over the place, orchids by the dozen—and, of course, the movie, itself. (Seither)

For Bristow it was a culminating occasion for several reasons. She had published five very successful novels. Her husband, talented and busy, had continued to rise rapidly in the movie ranks to become a very successful screenplay writer and producer of some of the enormously successful movies produced in Hollywood. They were both back in New Orleans, "where it all began," enjoying the fanfare focused on Bristow’s book Jubilee Trail, for which Manning had written the script. In addition, the Mannings would celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary on Thursday, January 14, 1954, the day before the film made its premiere at the Saenger (Heintzen).

Among the many celebration parties to honor the Mannings for their achievement was a special one given after the picture at "Diamond Jim" Moran’s by Governor and Mrs. Robert Kennon ("Seen at the Premiere"). Vera Ralston, in private life, wife of Herbert J. Yates, president of Republic Productions, Inc. and producer of the picture, ("World Premiere of Jubilee Trail"), in commenting on Jubilee Trail, called it a "light comedy with a dramatic background" that provided her first opportunity to play a part actually as she felt it. In Bristow’s opinion, however, "the leading lady was very much in the affection of the producer but not
mine. . . . That woman can't sing, can't dance, can't act" (Crowell, letter to author, 14 July 1993).

**Work Schedule and Rewards**

While in the city, Bristow, also very busy with promoting her book and giving interviews, told her curious fans that she worked in her own office, beginning at 10:00 in the morning and stopping at 12:30 for lunch. Often she went out to lunch with her secretary or with another friend, returning by 1:30 to work until 5 P.M. "I don't," she said,

> write all that time; sometimes I just sit looking at the typewriter, but if I do that long enough I'll start writing. . . . Six days out of seven, . . . you don't feel like writing, but you remember when you were writing for the newspaper and you had to write whether you wanted to or not." ("Here for Premiere")

Another time Bristow told New Orleans reporter Podine Schoenberger, "If I waited for inspiration I'd never get anything done. . . . Keeping office hours is no doubt a hang-over from my days as a reporter on The Times-Picayune" (Schoenberger). She credited her newspaper experience as wonderful training: "It knocks out any idea you might have that you have to be inspired to write" ("Here for Premiere); however, it was the interminable hours of meticulous research that opened the secrets of the past to provide authenticity against which Bristow set her stories. One book, she recalled, had led her to read "300 to 400 books on California" (Heintzen), along with many articles before she felt so immersed in her subject that she believed she understood it almost as if she had lived it. Bristow felt
she had to know everything about her subject and about the time in which it was set.

For example, explained Tanner via telephone May 25, 1994,

> She was very exacting. If she said it took twenty minutes for a character to go a certain distance, you may be sure she herself had walked or gone the distance in the very same way she described her character's moving and had timed it. She knew.

Added Tanner,

> Her professional skills were most exacting. She was her own characters' biographer. Before she ever wrote the book, she wrote the life of each person in careful detail. Most of the information never went into the actual novel, but she knew her characters well. For example in trying to make conversation, . . . I might ask, "When do you think [a certain character, such as Celia Garth] might have had her first kiss?" and Bristow could answer. She felt she had to get to the point where she really knew her characters personally.

Besides the very minute-by-minute thoughts, feelings, and actions of those who peopled the time, the weather, the foods, the recipes, the clothes, even the topography, another part of Bristow's strategy was going to the place where a novel was to be set; she would spend two weeks of each season in the area in research and study of every aspect of the place. In this way, she knew all of its seasons and their characteristics (Tanner). She kept each detail on file in metal file boxes whose number swelled as she worked, requiring longer and longer to produce a single book.

The rewards of her research lay not only in the end product but also in the many fascinating stories uncovered. For example, when she was doing research for Calico Palace, she found that on April 17, 1847, there were only seven vessels anchored in San Francisco Bay. On October 1, 1849, however, the newspaper Alta California listed the names of 249, a number which had grown to 321 by mid-
November. As news of the gold spread, these vessels from all over the world had arrived in San Francisco Bay, a destination soon equated with their almost sure death. All but those commanded by the most enterprising captains would not leave because the sailors quickly deserted to the gold fields (Bristow, "Gwen Bristow's Calico Palace Is Published").

The "vessel jam" in the bay had strange side effects. For example, "millions of rats" carrying pestilence and posing a constant source of irritation swarmed ashore from the abandoned vessels. Especially after dark these rats were a frightening nuisance under foot. Another strange fact of the deserted ships was that those lying closest to shore "gradually became entrapped by piers thrusting out long fingers all about them." Some ships were broken up for lumber to rebuild establishments destroyed by the many fires in San Francisco. One, the Euphemia, became a jail after the court had ruled that felons might be sentenced to "any penitentiary the governor might name." Another, the Apollo became the Apollo Saloon ("GB’s CP Is Published").

Bristow was successful, but, as she said, "if you want to write you must have a lot of talent or a lot of persistence--I have a lot of persistence" ("Here for Premiere"). That trait is very evident, not only in her earliest attempts to become a writer but also in her ongoing fortitude in meeting the demands made on her. For example, when she thought that, "after all those years of writing and rewriting, [she had] finally finished [Jubilee Trail], . . . [she] received a phone call from New York saying [her manuscript] had gone to the printer." The proofs were due back by December 3; they, in turn, would be mailed to her for final editing for a turn-
around to the publisher as quickly as possible. The crowning request was that the
minute she received the document, would she make a "street map of early San
Francisco, showing the location of all the buildings mentioned in [her] story? And
would [she] see to it that this map reached New York no later than three days after
Christmas" (Bristow, "How Am I Going to Spend Christmas?) Such rigorous
expectations dictated a Christmas day at her desk. It was a grueling job that she
performed through efforts both pleasurable and exhausting.

As a result, several times when she had completed a book, she vowed there
would not be another. Each time she made the vow, she also heard herself
responding to the question about which of her books she liked best, "Oh, the next
one! The one I haven't started yet" (How Am I Going to Spend Christmas"). The
"next one," as the year 1954 waned, was to be Celia Garth.

Distancing Herself from Her Past

Wherever she went, at the slightest excuse, enterprising reporters lost no
opportunity to reminisce about "one of their own" and to capitalize on a story so
directly close to their personal lives, in such phrasing as ". . . the Trucolor film
based on New Orleanian Gwen Bristow's best seller. . . ."5 Bob Ackerman of
Columbia, South Carolina, reporting for The State on February 5, 1954, wrote,
"South Carolina's own Gwen Bristow can be proud of the superb entertainment in the
movie version of Jubilee Trail in exciting and thrilling Trucolor" (Marion County
Library Collection). As far as Bristow's feelings were concerned, however, the only
two places she ever mentioned in terms of "home" were New Orleans and California.
Although Bristow, often reserved in her immediate reactions, her "public personality in control as usual, became more straightforward in later years. For example, six years after *Jubilee Trail* had been produced, in receiving a royalty check, she commented, "Imagine that picture, not good to begin with, still playing around" (J 25 Mar. 1960).

Meanwhile, she had maintained her exercise regimen and tried to view life in as positive a manner as possible, all of which she believed paid favorable dividends, for, as she noted on her birthday, at age fifty-one she was

five feet four inches tall; weighs 127 pounds; bust 36, waist 26, hips 35 1/3. Health, mighty near perfect. And in spite of all the news in the morning papers about wars, bonds, and the like, I certainly do enjoy my life. (J 16 Sept. 1954)

That afternoon she went shopping for rhinestones for her knitted dress and for a complementing black velvet belt set with rhinestones (J 16 Sept. 1954). It would be some time before she would be again at liberty to have such carefree, mundane things on her mind, free of other worries, for these were "burdensome times" as she would lament later (J 11 Feb. 1957). The years from 1954 to 1957 were very difficult ones. Caroline's health and emotional stability, aggravated by her drug dependency and her husband's ill health and drug problems, continued to decline, as Bristow found when she went to Chicago on a visit October 8, 1954. In what seemed typical of people in times of crisis, Bristow, in a more somber mood--and in one of the rare times she had mentioned going to church since she had left home in 1929--went to church with Pat and Caroline at the Fourth Presbyterian Church on October 10 and October 17. She noted of her second attendance only that the sermon was "excellent." Her pain, however, was evident for upon leaving
Chicago on October 20, 1954, she wrote, "It was not easy to part with Caroline. I do love her so, and she is not strong, in fact, so ill is she that even pleasurable excitement is dangerous" (J 22 Dec. 1954).

When in December she went to New York in response to a request by Pete Dailey to work on a project of special interest to him, the Harriet Hubbard Ayer story for McCall's magazine (J 1 Dec. 1954), she called Caroline from her hotel. Riley answered, instead, telling Bristow that Caroline had had a bad attack two days earlier, and, hemorrhaging from the throat, had lost about two pints of blood. She needed to remain quiet, he said (J 17 Dec. 1954). Therefore, Bristow, herself having been quite ill throughout her New York stay, did not call Caroline on her return trip to California. Her spirits, however, improved upon arriving home for Manning served her a supper of caviar and champagne in her bedroom, and she was ". . . oh, . . . glad to be home!" (J Dec. 1954). Correspondence via telephone, letters, and telegrams increased, but the news was seldom better.

Having lost about five months to Dailey's New York project, Bristow returned to her own work when McCall's decided against Bristow's doing the Harriet Hubbard Ayer story--agreeing, however, to pay her for what she had done (J 23 May 1955). Alternately feeling inspired and then vacant and worried about her sister who was extremely ill, Bristow spent 1955 in more confusion than ever before. Finally, one night in December in her first direct reference to her personal faith, she wrote,

Last night, as Bruce and I talked to each other about our general situation, I got despondent, and so did he. We seem to be having trouble and threats of trouble on all sides. Finally we decided to keep
our minds on one day at a time and count on God to see us through, as He has done so often before, and we felt better. (J 10 Dec. 1955)

She opened the new year feeling good about her book but very much worried about her sister, whose condition had been worsening. Though she almost never cried, she "shed tears at the start of the movie Oklahoma! . . . [recalling] how thrilled Caroline had been when she saw the stage show in Chicago" (J 20 Jan. 1956). Bristow was so worried that when Pat wrote that Caroline seemed better, Bristow recorded, "Oh, I thank God!" (J 23 Jan. 1956).

At Bristow's suggestion, a family friend took Caroline to California in March via the train. The idea was to give Caroline a change. However, soon there was another problem. Pat phoned this morning. The poor fellow is on the verge of a breakdown and I don't wonder; he simply has to go somewhere where he'll have no responsibility, for an emotional rest. Bruce and I talked it over. We can't have him here in the house; no room. He needs peace and quiet and cheerful companionship. We'll think of something. (J 1 Ap. 1956)

The situation troubled Bristow deeply as her March and April journal entries reflect:

Caroline wasn't very well this evening, and I had to help her take her sedative, also help calm her nerves. Bruce was out, and by the time he came in I was ready to drop. So he helped get Caroline soothed down, and I poured a drink of Scotch and fell into bed. . . . (29 Mar.)

I wish we had a lot of money right now, but we haven't; less, in fact, than we have had for years. (1 Ap.)

We have arranged things about Pat. Bruce asked Deborah if he could stay in her spare room. He will take breakfast and supper there, and she will bring him here when she drives to work in the mornings. . . . (2 Ap.)

Home to find Pat and Caroline alike in a highly nervous condition. . . . Caroline seems to think I have not made him feel welcome. Illness really does odd things to one's mind and emotions. . . . (11 Ap.)
Things are not going well with us. I shall try to keep my head. Thank God I have Bruce, and Deborah is a real friend.
I worked this morning. Now I am tremulous, but I shall try to go back to my book. Work is a relief from problems. (12 Ap.)

Unusually distraught after Caroline and Pat Riley moved to the Knickerbocker Hotel in Hollywood (J 13 Ap. 1956), Bristow wrote,

Last night, suddenly I started crying and couldn't stop. It's the first time I ever had a crying jag; I never knew what that term meant. I went into my room, thought I had controlled it, came back to the living room, felt tears pouring again. I cried till I was exhausted. Bruce was an angel and so was his mother, but I was fearfully ashamed of myself. (J 15 Ap. 1956)

Overall, Bristow, who was having a very "difficult time," was glad she "could lock [herself] up in [her] work." Finally on April 18, Manning went to see Riley and Caroline and brought back "a most encouraging report . . . [which] made [Bristow] very happy." Declaring that she did know how to help herself, Bristow "decided to keep busy and get healthfully tired," the "best way to keep from going nuts . . . ." She concluded, "[B]ut I've never had much trouble. I guess I can put up with it somehow, now that I have some." 77

Later, having heard nothing from Caroline and Pat for several days, Bristow finally went for a brief visit and found them comfortable but quite unwell. She did not visit again, making herself go out with friends, work on her book, and otherwise busy herself, declaring, "I will not sit around brooding" (J Ap. 28, 1956). She frequently did not sleep, however, unable to avoid worrying to the point of distraction (J Ap. 1956). Finally, Pat Riley again left Caroline with Bristow on May 3, so that he could go on to Eudora, Arkansas, to his family home to rest. In mid-May, Bristow's brother flew to California and took Caroline back to New
Orleans to their parents’ home. Again Bristow wrestled with her emotions, calming herself finally by telling herself again to get busy (J 19 May 1956). Her self-reprimanding proved of little avail because she continued anxious, hoping that they would all act wisely.

Matters were much better, however, relative to her writing. On May 9, Rosalie Stewart wrote from New York to say the Jubilee Trail movie was doing very well on the foreign market, news that was most welcome to Bristow since she felt she and Manning needed the money (J 9 May 1956). Desperate for a respite, Bristow took a brief trip to San Diego at the end of May. She enjoyed her visit, and there she met Colette Burns, also a writer, (who at times signed her name simply Colette Burns and at others, Colette Burns Kolsbun) and a woman named Miriam Purcell, who invited her to ride with them back to Northridge. She had immediately liked both women (J 27 May 1956), but it was Colette Burns who would become Bristow’s secretary and who would give her many years of devoted, capable service.

In June Burns took Bristow to see a Mrs. Douglass, a psychic, Bristow’s first such experience and one that proved exciting for her. Although she had never believed in such powers, she exclaimed, "The woman was amazing. I am just back, and still astounded . . . . She did seem to know more about me than a mere guess would have given her, and she knew about Bruce, whom she had never seen" (J 10 June, 1956).

The diversion did nothing to alter her daily realities as matters with her family continued to worsen, mostly due to Caroline’s illness and increasing petulance. Bristow found that "this situation is nearly driving me frantic, in spite of
all I can to do control my emotions" (J 23 Aug. 1956). The next day, Bristow lamented that she could send her mother only a small check to help with expenses since her and Manning's expenses were "frightful just now. ... a million dollars would not undo what has been done to Caroline. . . ." (J 24 Aug. 1956). Bristow, typically, never explained her meaning in "what has been done to Caroline."

However, Bristow later learned that Riley had also become addicted to drugs; he had not been well nor had he been attentive to Caroline, moving from post to post, and often making Caroline feel homeless and forced to work. Additionally, Bristow's comments to Jean Fleming years later implied that Bristow felt her mother was in some way at least partly responsible for some of Caroline's problems. At any rate, Bristow resolved after another long letter from Caroline "like a long scream of anguish," I am not going to sit down in middle of the floor and whine" (J 24 Aug. 1956).

In July Manning, finding his pulse irregular, went for a checkup to learn he had a blockage; a later examination revealed that he had had a heart attack. The doctor ordered a hospital stay of four to six weeks (J 26 July 1956), and Bristow considered immediately that they might have to sell their home for a less expensive place. She told herself that everyone has both ups and downs and that this was her "down." Manning, who had been too ill to work for some time, was worried about finances, but Bristow reassured him, noting, "I told him I lived happily in a 3-room apartment once and can do it again." She determined to do her best, but at the same time, she grieved, "Everybody who knows Bruce likes him. Oh, why do these things have to happen to the most lovable people?" (J 27 July 1956). Feeling "like a
skeleton at a feast," Bristow was terribly worried and scared as she tried to carry on. One morning after having finally slept naturally, she awoke feeling "like a million dollars." She expressed her gratitude, recording that "the Lord answered [her] prayer" because she had slept well in spite of having decided against taking a pill for fear she would allow herself to become addicted to sleeping pills (J 29, 30 July 1956).

Manning was also scared, so much so that he had his secretary Deborah Clyde take his dictated letter to the effect that should he die, "Gwen Bristow would not be responsible for any money owed Famous Artists, LTd. by Bruce Manning" (Northridge).

With Manning's and Caroline's illnesses and expenses mounting, Bristow wrote, "I've got to work! I must earn some money. Writing an amusing story does not fit my mood at the moment, but one thing I have learned--you can do anything you have to do." With "heartbreaking letters from Caroline and Mother" and Caroline "suffering tortures" (J 17 Aug. 1956) and a telephone call from her that "really knocked [Bristow's] day to pieces," Bristow wrote, "I cannot let this get me down like this. For my own sake, I've got to grow a crust. Life goes on and I've got to go on too" (J July 1956). She sought release through swimming, being with her friends, and continuing her work, repeating frequently, "I've got to work!" or "Thank goodness I have my work."

Conditions steadily deteriorated, with Caroline refusing to cooperate with any attempt to help her. She frequently called Bristow, frantic and suffering, feeling forsaken, and "depressed . . . no place of her own to live, no security" and having
bouts with "pulmonary hemorrhages, lasting for hours" (J 8 Oct. 1956). Bristow recorded, "I really hope I never have a chance to tell Pat Riley what I think of him" (J 18 Sept. 1956). The time came in early December when Bristow became so exasperated that she noted in her journal,

This morning I mailed three letters. One to Caroline asking what had happened, that she should change from a lovable considerate person into one who is so self-centered, begging her to go to a hospital. I sent a carbon of this to Louis and another carbon to Mother and Daddy, saying if she would not go willingly there was nothing to do but make her go anyway. . . . This whole situation, coupled with Bruce's illness, makes for a mighty trying piece of life. I feel so helpless. But I've got to keep my backbone stiff. And I've got to keep cheerful, and work.

So today, after getting those letters into the mail, I went on writing. This afternoon I took a long brisk walk and came in feeling better for it. (J 10 Dec. 1956)

Meanwhile, Manning periodically suffered "black depressions," which Bristow had been told are typical of heart cases (J 24 Sept. 1956), and they both worried about finances. They believed Manning could no longer work, and they were living on their savings (J 29 Sept. 1956).

Through all of this, Bristow persistently continued to work on her book set during the Revolution, feeling financial necessity along with the need to work off the tension over Caroline. It was to her "such a refuge in times of trouble!" (J 20 Feb. 1957). She was receiving a small income from royalties and $60 from securities when her finances improved. Much to her surprise, the December 15 mail brought a check for $11,404 from German royalties for the sale of her Louisiana stories. Matters had also brightened for Manning with prospects for work on a television script (J 22 Nov. 1956). He wanted to work and Bristow felt, along with needing the money, work would be "so good for his morale. Sitting around in idleness is
not good. He has been mighty courageous, but he hates it" (J 12 Dec. 1956). Their self-encouragement availed little, however, for Manning’s attacks of weakness continued.

Finally, a few days later, Bristow found some comfort from a surprising source. Visiting with Elizabeth Hutto from South Carolina, Bristow broke her usual reserve and told her "what Pat’s trouble was." To Bristow's "amazement . . . [Hutto] understood, because her sister Alice was also a drug addict. [Bristow] was never so astonished" (J 29 Dec. 1956), grateful that someone else understood.

On December 31 Bristow wrote,

"The last day of the year, and I must say I am not sorry to see this year go. It has been the most trying year of my life. . . . However, this year has not been wasted. I have a new book under way, and I put in a good day’s work on it today. (J 31 Dec. 1956)

The new year opened with Bristow lamenting that every word from New Orleans revealed that "The situation at home [was] appalling," and there was "nothing she could do" (J 7 Jan. 1957). Then Mother Mac became suddenly very ill and had gallstone surgery on February 16, 1957, but she lived only five days. Bristow grieved for Manning in his loss, comforting herself with the thought that, in spite of their loss, death was better than paralysis and mental confusion. With Deborah’s help, Bristow attended to the "revolting details of the funeral," finding the undertaker "oily, sanctimonious, disgusting" and, as for the funeral,

Everything about it was disgusting, including his effort to sell us a casket costing $3200, and trying to give the impression that we were going into the bargain basement when we insisted on something less ostentatious. I think fancy funerals are a relic of barbarism. . . . (J 21 Feb. 1957)
Otherwise, all went well for the funeral, except for Deborah, who had begun drinking again (J 15 July 1957).

After the funeral Bristow put herself immediately back into her work, delighted to find that the lines that had persistently eluded her earlier, suddenly flowed. "All of a sudden, [she] found [herself] writing with ease and joy. The lines just came. . . . Oh, it's wonderful when it works out like this," she wrote (J 2 Mar. 1957). As her novels sold more and more in Germany, her German correspondence increased. As was her nature, Bristow met the challenge head on by studying elementary German so that she could read her German mail (J 10 Oct. 1957). (Later, Howard Fleming, Jr., would translate Bristow's German mail.)

From Germany, meanwhile, she been honored earlier by the translator of her books, an author himself, with the dedication of his new book, Die Federschlange: "I dedicate this book to Gwen Bristow, to convey my respects to an author with great knowledge and empathy of the human being." Bristow thought it "a big compliment," which made her "very happy" (J 7 Nov. 1956).

In October, 1957, the doctor pronounced Manning in "good shape" (J 21 Oct. 1957). Bristow was feeling freer to go on with her work when she received word of her father's heart attack, followed within a couple of hours by word that he had died. Bristow wrote,

These things are inevitable, but hard to take. He was a magnificent man. His life was long and rich, full of achievement. He would have been eighty-two years old in January. I am glad the end came quickly and easily. (J 15 Nov. 1957)

She returned from New Orleans saying that her mother was standing up like the "rock of Gibraltar" and that she had never seen such courage, not having seen her
mother "break once" (J 16 Nov. 1957). Later, after an evening out, she wrote, "My father’s death has hit me harder than I realized at first, and I need some gaiety" (J 3 Dec. 1957).

It helped that the year ended on a happier note in that she was making progress with her work and Manning was better; furthermore, she thought 1958 got off to a good start also because she had spent the better part of New Year’s Day, as she always had except during the war, watching the bowl games (J 1 Jan. 1958).

Another New Novel and Major Changes

In February, the Mannings began refurbishing their home. It needed some work, but the real idea was that they were considering selling. A rather large house, it was quite expensive for the two of them (J 10 Feb. 1958), especially since Manning had not worked for nearly two years and nothing promising was in sight (J 7 March 1958) since his earlier prospects had fallen through.

Other changes were taking place. Bristow’s agent in New York had for many years been the senior Brandt, and her correspondence with this company had been through Bernice Baumgarten. In May, however, Carl Brandt, Jr., and his wife Carol were running the agency. Having her first opportunity to meet him in May when he visited her in California, she found him to be a "very good-looking young man, very New Yorky in formal shirt and tie, quite a nice fellow" (J 23, 25 May 1958). Bristow liked him.

Another event was that on Sunday, September 21, 1958, Jean and Howard Fleming visited the Manning house, which had been put on the market, and on
October 2, they bought it (Fleming, letter to Carol Brandt, 7 July 1980). In the interim, Manning had located an apartment complex called Carlton Village at 15501 Moorpark Street in Encino. Bristow agreed it was ideal. To satisfy their need for space, they decided on two apartments—Manning’s, Number 14 upstairs, and Bristow’s, Number 3 downstairs (J 14 Oct. 1958). However, when a later vacancy occurred in May, Manning moved to Apartment 9, a corner facility with a patio on the first floor (J 1 Feb. 1959). They would use the kitchen and dining room in his apartment (J 29 Nov. 1958). There was a swimming pool, and the manager told Bristow she could take two of her beloved cats. When the Flemings agreed to keep two of Bristow’s cats (J 29 Oct. 1958), she and Manning were well pleased, and they moved November 29, 1958 (J 29 Nov. 1958).

Amid all this bustling, Bristow finished her book in October 1958. As was her habit, she typed a clean copy (over carbon) and mailed it to Crowell on November 17. She had entitled it The Gallant Dressmaker and dedicated it to her mother, whose tales of her relative who had fought in the Revolutionary War alongside Francis Marion, the fabled "swamp fox," had inspired the novel. With his usual promptness, Crowell reacted: "The book is terrific. I don’t know how you do it" (J 4 Dec. 1958). Thrilled with his answer and assurance that all was in order, Bristow mailed him the carbon copy the day before Thanksgiving (J 26 Nov. 1958), and she discovered that she was quite tired. It had taken her four years of research preparing for Celia Garth before she had felt sufficiently immersed in the eighteenth century "mood to attempt the telling of a story set in that period. And the writing and the re-writing [had been] a painful chore!" (Mid-City Branch
Library. Through the years, her journals echoed her query, "I wonder how many of the people who say they would like to be writers have any idea of the hours of sheer drudgery that go into a book."

In cleaning up, she found she had over a thousand single-spaced typed pages of background notes on Celia Garth (her final title choice of her new book). This material amounted to close to half a million words of background material, besides the maps, pictures, and diagrams, not including the cards in her index file (J 30 Dec. 1958). Hence, when it came time to prepare some blurbs and anecdotes for publicity purposes, she felt "almost weary of the English language" (J 7 Jan. 1959).

With her typical perseverance but without her usual vigor, Bristow quickly began the work on publicity, which, unpleasantly, included firing her long-time California agent Rosalie Stewart. Bristow had had to call for her script only to learn Stewart had not even read it after keeping it more than a month. Adding to Bristow’s irritation was the fact that Stewart had "galloped through it, got pages out of place, and returned it in a general state of untidiness" (J 16 Jan. 1959), and Bristow, who had never broken with an agent, decided to seek a new agent. After nearly thirty years Brandt and Brandt were still her "good friends" and Crowell had published her first book in 1936; however, over this break with Stewart, she felt a "sense of relief." Manning helped her word her letter to Stewart, and she promptly hired Manning’s agent, Ben Benjamin of Famous Artists (J Jan. 1959).

Matters were not yet to go so smoothly, however, for she was both busy and ill. Just as she was getting the publicity material completed, her respiratory infection flared again. Having had no cigarette in over four years, Bristow fretted:
she believed not smoking had helped, but she could not understand still having so little resistance to respiratory problems (J 31 Jan. 1959). With the piles of letters and publicity stories to write and little strength to do them (J 5 Feb. 1959), preparing for the upcoming publicity trip to Charleston in May with its myriad details was difficult. (J 12, 19 Mar. 1959).

April 5, 1959, a cool morning brought a special delivery containing Bristow's first copy of Celia Garth. She was thrilled with

Celia’s picture on the cover, against the 18th century Charleston skyline, and the skyline repeated on the title page. The binding an interesting brick-red shade, with the courtyard gates of St. Michael's stamped in gold on the front. (J 5 Ap. 1959)

She was so excited that when she "... found three typographical errors," she thought them "... not important" (J 5 Ap. 1959). Crowell had sent out Bristow's publicity stories for the novel, and favorable responses began arriving as quickly as her new book appeared. The American News Company ordered ten thousand copies. Carol Brandt wrote that Eyre and Spottiswoode of London had made an offer, even much better than they had given for Jubilee Trail: "12 and 1/2% to 5,000 copies, 15% to 15,000, and 17 and 1/2% after that." Bristow was amazed:

I did not think the British would want to publish the book at all, for I have always been told they don't like anything that reminds them of the Revolution. I shall not really believe this offer till I see the contract. (J 15 Ap. 1959)

When May arrived, Bristow was ready for her trip to Charleston, "[t]hrilled about [Manning's] decision to chaperon" her (J 9 May 1959). Upon arriving at the Frances Marion Hotel May 15, the Mannings found a note from his daughter
Patricia. She and her husband were in the hotel, so Manning ran down to see them. Bristow, however, in her own manner of independent focus, "... did not go with him, as [she had] found a list of things to be done. ... So, having just had a bath ..." she got to work on her schedule (J 15 May 1959). Bristow did have dinner with them, however, just before they left for home two days later (J 17 May 1959). Through the years Patricia Manning Tanner would remember this as the last time she ever visited with her father (Tanner).

Bob Crowell, accompanied by his wife Ruth, met Bristow for publicity interviews and appearances. It was a trip crammed with business, and, noted Bristow, "[W]hen I didn’t make a fool of myself on the platform, Bruce was so happy he returned to normal and captivated everybody. ... I have never seen Bruce in better form" (J 18 May 1959).

Bristow also saw several of her old friends and schoolmates, including Vickie Howie (married to Davis Kerr) and Annette Duchein. With Manning returning to California and Ruth Crowell going sightseeing, Bristow and Crowell went "bookshop-hopping." Finally, dressed in her "lovely new Paisley top and olive-green skirt," she and Crowell attended "the big event of the Charleston visit," her "autographing party at the Book Basement" (J 20 May 1959). After several other stops, including the Library Society where there was a Celia Garth exhibit featuring original signed letters from Francis Marion and General Moultrie, Crowell and Bristow went on New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Amid her hectic publicity schedule, she also managed a visit with her family.
Bristow enjoyed her celebrity, telling her hosts, Orene Muse and others:

"Really . . . when writers act bored or say they don’t care a snap for being the center of attention with their latest book . . . then, I’m afraid they’re either pretty good actors or else they are great liars!" To other questions like "Do you enjoy reading your books in print?" she replied,

I despise them! . . . . After you’ve worked with the same characters for so long, you do rather hate them . . . and then nothing ever seems to be expressed as perfectly as you yourself want it to be expressed . . . . In fact, when I do get a copy of my just-off-the-press book, I sit for hours agonizing over this phrase and that . . . and thinking, "Oh, I couldn’t have said it that way! Why on earth did I do that? (Mid-City Branch Library)

Crowell agrees that Bristow "agonized" for hours over her phrases because Bristow took her work very seriously, but that she would "despise" her characters is more likely a bit of publicity tactic. She did, however, have "very positive rules about writing technique" that affected her treatment of them. She also had a sharp memory, capable, if one were to ask, of recalling "any tiny detail of the life of the people in that far off period, and she could tell you in a minute . . . . Once she had written a manuscript I think she knew it by heart" (Crowell, letter to the author, 3 July 1993). According to Crowell, any dislike she may have had for her creations more likely came from her continuing mental probing to determine what she might have done better.

Parting from Crowell as he left for New York, Bristow "had a little sentimental twinge to realize that [their] tour was over--at least the part we were to do together." He was, Bristow thought, "a really fine person and extraordinarily agreeable to work with" (J 26 May 1959). However, she carried out the remaining
promotion engagements, enjoyed the party given by Harnet Kane, who "was fun as usual" (J 28 May 1959) and visited with other friends.

In New Orleans, Bristow's "mother had set the table with her best linen and silver in [Bristow's] honor. But all [was] far from well" (J 29 May 1959). Although Caroline seemed her "fine, normal" self, her husband had periods of depressions, as did Louis Bristow's wife Bobby; Bristow was troubled, as well, over her mother, who declined to do anything by herself. Bristow, therefore, feeling helpless, did what she could and offered to pay expenses for her mother's visit to Caroline's. She attended church on Sunday with her mother, and she was relieved when it was time to board her train for California the next day. The stress of her schedule and the family problems made her realize she "miss[ed] Bruce . . . need[ed] some mental and emotional rest" (J May, June 1959). Discussing the problem with Manning upon her arrival at home, Bristow found "He agreed emphatically that as long as I can do no good there I should mind my own business" (J 3 June 1959).

As 1958 ended and the New Year passed, Bristow and Manning settled into their new home quite happily, quickly making new friends whom they enjoyed. Manning began swimming—something he had not done since the 1930's. His physical improvement delighted Bristow, for she worried continually about his health (J 1959). In December 1959, although Manning's health was precarious and would always be, Bristow and he, in talking over the series of crises they had experienced during the years 1954 to 1957, both would admit that they were much happier at the end of 1959 than they been during those troubled years (J 7 Dec. 1959).
New Friends and Greater Ties to California

In June 1959 she and Manning went to see the Flemings, who had purchased their house. There was an immediate accord among the four, and soon Bristow became an enthusiastic participant in projects with which she could assist Jean Fleming in motivating her students. Bristow found Jean Fleming—who taught high school English at Receda High School—a warm, energetic, and enthusiastic teacher and friend. The mutual appreciation soon grew in to regular exchange of ideas and lively conversation. Dr. Howard Fleming was at the time professor of history and chairman of the history department at the University of Southern California, Northridge; later he would also serve as Dean of Letters and Science, as well as Dean of Academic Administration (Fleming, interview, 20 Mar. 1994). Thus, sharing Bristow’s great love of history, he likewise enjoyed highly diversified interests, and the friendship between the Mannings and the Flemings was "a natural." They quickly developed the habit of sharing theater-dinner dates at least once a month, as well as books and articles they liked, and humor and games they enjoyed (Fleming, telephone interviews).

For example, Bristow and Jean especially enjoyed word games, such as seeking for and collecting unusual names. One of Bristow’s favorites were Zzzzra Zachary, and, she told Fleming in an undated letter, she even had the telephone number of "this character." Another bond, their professional interests, strengthened the friendship. Soon Bristow was doing a major portion of her research at California State University, and the Flemings, likewise, found Bristow to be a "meticulous and inexhaustible" researcher.
Manning, in no way in the shadow of these three, enthusiastically shared their conversations and joint pastimes (Fleming interviews and Bristow's journals). Although Manning was often depressed because he was unable to break into the television market, most of the time he was able to maintain his sense of humor. Thus, when Bristow was discouraged, he spurred her enthusiasm with the motto purported to hang above James Thurber's desk: "Don't get it right, get it written." Bristow appreciated its subtle motivation (J 16 Dec. 1959).

In spite of the fact that Bristow occasionally grew homesick for New Orleans or, as she once complained, grew tired of the busyness of the movie capital, she and Bruce truly enjoyed living in Hollywood, and she believed the experience only broadened her outlook and was enriching. While she had never mentioned any nostalgia for her native state of South Carolina, she frequently had voiced a love for New Orleans and a certain homesickness for the old city. As she aged and old friends in Louisiana died and she grew more and more attached to those she had in California, however, she also grew more and more content and distant from New Orleans. By 1959-1960 she had grown to feel that her friends were in California and she did not want to move elsewhere (Fleming and Bristow's Journals)

Research Yields Unusual Find

Bristow’s habit of thorough research effected some unusual excitement in preparing to write Celia Garth, as well as proof that even the most careful researcher may need to pursue the matter a little further even after being sure the work has been done. In her research she repeatedly found references to the British
marching to the tune "The World Turned Upside Down," which the British supposedly played during the surrender ceremonies of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown. Thinking her work incomplete without hearing the music, Bristow's next step was to search for it. No public, college, or university library, not Encyclopaedia Britannica with one of the greatest data gathering centers in the world, nor the Virginia Historical Society, and, finally, not even the Library of Congress could find the music. As Bristow told Charles "Pie" Dufour in an interview on May 2, 1959, "The World Turned Upside Down" seemed simply not to exist. As Crowell Publishers expressed it, it was a story belonging in league with the George Washington cherry-tree yarn (Northridge).

Then, suddenly matters changed. The Library of Congress finally traced the legend back to Alexander Garden, who had served in the Revolutionary War and had become a doctor in Charleston after the war. About forty years later, he began collecting informal anecdotes of the war, writing to veterans all over the country for contributions. His work led to the publications of two volumes, which then led to a third. Bristow family papers indicate that in this third, a book published in 1828, Alexander Garden's Revolutionary Anecdotes, Volume III, on Page 16, "The World Turned Upside Down" story appeared. Since Dr. Garden had not been in Yorktown, his source was one of his contributors (Dufour, "Uncovers Yorktown Myth").

Seventy years later, distinguished historian John Fiske, taking the story for truth, used it. Confident in his professional integrity, later historians repeated the story, thus perpetuating, unchecked, what appeared to Bristow to be a hoax.
Finally, however, researchers traced the tune "The World TurnedUpside Down" or "The Old Woman Taught Wisdom" to The Gentleman's Magazine of London about ten years before the Revolution. The meaning of the title, they had found, applied to the mother (Great Britain) being taught manners by the daughter (America), in response to the dispute over the Stamp Act, thus upsetting the usual order of things (Bristow family papers). As "Pie" Dufour concluded in his column on Bristow's work, "It is strange that in all these years, nobody seems to have been curious as to how this tune sounded until Gwen Bristow sat down to write a novel of the American Revolution" (Dufour).

However, this was not to be the end of the matter, for Dufour followed with another article about two weeks later. According to this column, a Don Seiwell, director of public relations for the United Fund, having seen Dufour's article, had written and avowed such music did, indeed, exist and that the Garden anecdote was authentic. Accompanying his note to Dufour was a photocopy of a fragment of the music to prove it. Wrote Seiwell,

I was a member of the celebration staff. . . . The story of that march, its disappearance from the world of music and its dramatic rediscovery in the staid old British Museum in London by a staff researcher had provided me with considerable material for the telling of the celebration buildup activities during the summer and early months of 1931. (Bristow family papers)

To explain how he had located the tune, Seiwell continued,

References to the march, "The World Turned Upside Down," were made in letters and diaries by a number of participants in that original surrender scene, British, as well as French and Americans. Researchers engaged by Dr. Thomas Wood Stevens, head of the Carnegie University School of Drama and director of the Yorktown pageant, were as intrigued by it as was Gwen Bristow. When they had exhausted all American sources without success, they traveled to
the libraries and museum of England, and—in a musty old room of the British Museum—it turned up as one of those off-chance discoveries for which all researchers yearn.

Also, Seiwell reported, the march was featured in a "concert on the celebration grounds by the US Army band of the Army War College, Washington, D. C. Capt. Kenneth J. Fielder was then its musical director. . . ." The tale of the tune, Seiwell said, was featured in stories sent from Yorktown on October 19, 1931, by correspondents of the New York Times, the Washington Star, the Baltimore Sun, and the Richmond Times-Dispatch, as well as others. Seiwell believed the music could be found in either of their libraries (Bristow family papers).

Although Bristow seems to have stopped just short of verifying her data accurately this time, she was careful about all details, and this concern extended to actions taken by others relative to her stories. For example, when Celia Garth was published, artist Robert Doares created a cover with Celia against a background picturing Charleston as it looked during the American Revolution, based on a print actually made in 1780. Bristow had sent this print to Crowell, and Doares had used it but had included no inference so that the reader could know the significance of the picture. Bristow wrote Rosalie Brody at Crowell Publishing, explaining that the picture shows

three famous buildings that play an important part in the story of Celia Garth. Two of these buildings are still standing and can be visited by anybody who goes to Charleston after reading Celia Garth and who would like to see the real setting of the story. (Caroliniana)

Bristow enclosed a copy of the 1780 print, carefully identifying the buildings and telling Brody that "if the reader can be given this information, it will make the book
more interesting." A few days later, Brody responded and agreed with Bristow in a letter carefully outlining plans to carry out Bristow's wishes (Caroliniana).

*Celia Garth* was doing well Bristow wrote her old friend Annie Lorrie on July 3, 1959, noting, too, that she was sending a recital program she had found at which Annie Lorrie had served as usher. "It brought me many happy memories," wrote Bristow, in a sentimental mood, thinking Annie Lorrie might like to have it. She also shared her good news: she had signed four foreign contracts for *Celia Garth*—England, Sweden, Germany, and Norway (Judson).

Mid-July came with Bristow determining to be very good about getting her mail answered and "sort of uncluttering" her life, "generally" doing all the things her publicity tour and other relative details had required. Now, she thought, if things go well, by Thanksgiving, she might begin a new book (*J 14 July 1959*). A real boost to her spirits had been the good news about *Celia Garth*, which "Pie" Dufour reported on September 11, 1959, in his "A La Mode" column of *The Times-Picayune*. He wrote that *Celia Garth* had been on the *New York Times*’ best-seller list for fifteen weeks.

Meanwhile, Manning's health continued to deteriorate. In September, not only had he not felt well, but he also had been unable to formulate an idea for writing, something which greatly depressed him. Bristow saw his situation as aggravated by the fact that

Deborah hasn't been here, and that slows him down because he really needs her, not only for typing, but to talk to about his scripts. She makes me so mad. She sits up there sick, and she will not see a doctor, or do one single thing to get herself well. If she were a Christian Scientist I'd understand it, for then she would be using some
mental self-discipline. But with her it's not conviction, just plain smart-alecky stubbornness. (J 10 Sept. 1959)

Deborah finally returned on September 14 after a week at home. Bristow hoped for Manning's sake she would stay, and dismissed the subject by saying that he was far more patient with Deborah's vagaries than she was (J 14 Sept. 1959). However, being patient and empathetic was part of Manning's disposition. For example, once extremely annoyed with herself for making a mistake in her bank records, Bristow berated herself but found "With his usual wisdom, Bruce asked, 'Why do you expect perfection of yourself? You don't expect of anybody else.'" At his words she laughed at herself and felt better (J 3 Oct. 1959).

Bristow would also help make herself feel better by addressing a convention of the School of Library Science at the University of Southern California. They would pay her expenses, and she would combine material from her biographical booklet, publicity anecdotes for Celia Garth, along with other material. Besides, the dean of the School of Library Science, Dr. Martha Boaz, had impressed Bristow by writing "a good letter" (J 6 Oct. 1959). Bristow's lecture was rewarded by a letter from Boaz (J 10 Oct. 1959). Her genuine praise of Bristow "as an author [who] has talent, beauty, brains, and poise all rolled in one," as well as "brilliance as a speaker" pleased Bristow so thoroughly that she saved the letter to re-read on days when she could not write and felt "like a moron" (J 15 Oct. 1959).

When the time came that she received word from her family that all seemed well and Manning's health seemed stable, she was back to work on her newest project, so that in early December a grateful Bristow noted,
Bruce and I had a long talk about the series of disasters that fell upon us 1954-57, and how happier we are now. Except for his health, which is precarious and always will be, everything with us is fine. (J 7 Dec. 1959)
Endnotes for Chapter Six


2. In commenting on Bristow’s popularity, Charles Schlessiger of Brandt and Brandt, writes, "I would say that her most successful novel is Jubilee Trail, which sold 115,000 copies in hardcovers from 1950 to 1978." Letter to the author, 10 May 1994.

3. This amount is based on salary paid by William Brown to Gladys Cashio for live-in help, 1950-1952.

4. Special Collections in Tulane University Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana, has some of Miss Bristow’s research files, as does Oviatt Library, California State University at Northridge.


6. Bristow’s journals reveal very difficult times for Bristow during the mid- to late 1950’s.

7. Bristow’s April entries in her 1956 journal continue her troubled record of events.

8. Jean Fleming’s understanding of Bristow’s reveries about these past troubled times was that Caroline Winkler Bristow, not understanding Caroline’s addiction to barbiturates and pain medication or her other problems, might have inadvertently caused Caroline greater stress, if not worse problems.
CHAPTER SEVEN

FINANCIAL SECURITY AND PERSONAL CRISIS

As Bristow began the new year, she could tell the time was right: she could "see" San Francisco, "feel" it, "get the sense" of it "so that other people can see it too" (J 19 Jan. 1960). She was ready to begin what would be her next novel, Calico Palace, but she questioned whether events were going to allow her to work. The answer seemed less clear. Manning's declining health, exacerbated by his frequent depression, troubled her. Feeling worthless because he wanted to work, he had found nothing his heart condition would allow (J Jan., Feb. 1960).

Financial worries, however, for a brief while seemed finally over. Three royalty checks for Jubilee Trail arrived, amounting to $17,045. In addition to a few other sources of small income, the German publisher had written requesting to publish a new edition of Celia Garth, which was still selling well in the United States and in England, and amazingly, The Invisible Host (Bristow and Manning's first mystery) continued in demand (J 21 July 1960). By mid-June Bristow summed up their situation:

Things are going well with us now. Regular income, Bruce feeling well--and delighted with his life here, the pool and his new friends--and myself well on the way toward a new book. We are happy, and nearly every day we congratulate each other on it. (J 13 June 1960)

Other distractions, however, soon surfaced. Besides her continual worry over her sister's illness, Manning was hospitalized with internal hemorrhaging,
followed by a heart attack on February 4. He did rally, however, and his secretary Deborah took him to her home to care for him so that Bristow could continue to work. Friends flocked to see him as much as his limited strength would allow, and Bristow wrote, "Everybody wanted to welcome Bruce home. I never knew anybody so universally liked" (J 15 Feb. 1961).

With expenses mounting again, a worried Bristow finally agreed to some of the many requests for lectures, provided she was paid a fee. She disliked the interruption and she no longer enjoyed the speaking circuit as she had in the 1930's, but it would be a way to earn some money (J 4 Mar. 1961).

Meanwhile, Bristow's mother entered Baptist Hospital in New Orleans with diverticulosis (J Mar. 1961). Unable to go to see her, Bristow she did her best to cheer her, writing almost daily although she was often "hard put to it to find something to say" (J 13 June 1961). She also wrote an anecdote of her mother's girlhood, which she sent with her mother's byline to Frank Gilbreth to publish in the News and Courier (J 25 Ap. 1961). Maintaining a pragmatic attitude, Bristow noted that "At her age [83] this has to be expected" (J 6 May 1961).

The doctor finally ordered Manning to stop smoking, and Bristow noted,

Bruce is having a hard struggle with cigarette withdrawal, and I'm having a hard struggle putting up with his nerves. Maybe he should quit the Miltowas and go back to cigarettes. . . . I am working on my book every day. . . . What with Bruce's problems here, and Mother and Caroline in Louisiana, it's not easy. But what would I do without work! (J 2 June 1961)

Bristow remembered her own ordeal over giving up cigarettes. It had been so bad that several years later, when Bruce and Catherine Biggs were at lunch with
Bristow, Bruce Biggs had offered her a cigarette. "Oh, no thank you," Bristow replied, "I know that if I so much as touch one, I won't be able to stop" (Biggs).

Now Manning's battle to stop smoking was affecting him so that he could "hardly say a pleasant word to anybody" (J 25 June 1961). With his "insulting everybody who came near," Bristow "begged Bruce to get off Miltowa," believing that "It's worse by far than cigarettes" (J 26 June 1961). He went back to his cigarettes.

In early July her brother wrote Bristow that their mother was "dying the slow, hard way; harder on others than herself" (J) and suggested that Bristow not write anymore since she no longer noticed the letters. On July 27, 1961, she died at Southern Baptist Hospital ("Mrs. Bristow Dies Here at Age 83"). Bristow recorded,

> We have been expecting this for several months, and I know the end is a release for her. Her incisive mind was gone, as her fine body had weakened. But even so, I have a great feeling of sadness. It is the scene of an important part of my life being over. Our parents are so important. They have influenced everything we have ever done or ever will do. To know they are no longer on earth is a strange experience, and hard to accept. My mother had a long and useful life here. I hope it will go on forever. (J 27 July 1961)

Although Bristow appears to have made little other reference to her mother's achievements, Caroline Winkler Bristow was a woman of noteworthy contributions. For example, "in honor of Mrs. Caroline Bristow, who was the housemother for nurses of Southern Baptist Hospital for many long and faithful years," the Board of Directors of Southern Baptist Hospital "voted unanimously on July 19, 1944, to name the residence 'Caroline Bristow Hall'" (Bristow family papers).

Bristow flew into New Orleans on July 28 for the funeral, arriving about eight o'clock at the St. Charles Hotel, by then called the Sheraton Charles. Although she spoke with her brother over the telephone, she did not see any of her
family that evening (J 28 July 1961). The service for her mother on July 29, conducted by the same minister who had read her father's service, was "simple and beautiful . . . but not easy to go through" (J).

Having dinner with her brother and his family at the hotel that evening, she found she "liked them all" (J 29 July 1961). She and Manning having decided prior to her leaving California that they wanted none of her mother's possessions, the next day after attending church with her brother and sister-in-law Bobby, she expressed her wishes that those possessions go to her nieces. She collected all the letters, cards, and telegrams, saying she would respond to those and any others they would send her. After dinner with Barbara Brooks and Katherine Salmon that evening, Bristow boarded the train for California (J 30 July 1961).

Family problems, however, were not the only cause for Bristow's distractions, for the world, too, was in trouble. Communism was making itself felt worldwide, especially in Cuba and East Berlin (J August 1961), and a worried Bristow had written earlier in January, "The United States has broken off all diplomatic relations with Cuba. The situation is frightening. I try not to dwell on it, lest it paralyze my power to do anything else" (J 4 Jan. 1961), but national anxiety over the progression of Communism became so great that earlier in the year Bristow had been required to sign a statement that she was not a Communist before she could keep a speaking engagement at Pasadena City College. She found the requirement absurd, saying, "I don't mind, as I am certainly not a Communist, but it seems to me that if I were, and planning to attack my country, I would be willing to swear I wasn't, just the same" (J 11 March 1961).
About this time Bristow interrupted her California story to write the introductory material for each of her first three novels—Deep Summer, The Handsome Road, and This Side of Glory—which were to be published under the one title Gwen Bristow’s Plantation Trilogy. She completed it and mailed it to Crowell October 5, 1961 (J 5 Oct. 1961). Crowell wrote, saying he really liked the material and suggested that she have an artist do a family tree for the trilogy (J 31 Oct. 1961). This done, she returned to her California story and discovered parts "thoroughly bad and must be completely done over" (J 24 Oct. 1961).

Triumph in Three Arenas

The jacket for Plantation Trilogy arrived January 18, 1962, followed the next day by the "dummy of a brochure they [were] preparing for booksellers. The beautiful jacket outside, and inside, the introduction and bridge articles I wrote for the book" (J 20 Jan. 1962). Excitedly, Bristow went to the Van Nuys Bookstore to show it to her friend, Betty Gaskill, only to discover Gaskill had moved to Encino Royal Apartments on Haskell Avenue, very close to Bristow’s residence. Bristow was pleased to have her friend closer, for, although Bristow and Manning got their mail at Post Office Box 144, their new address was 4733 Haskell Avenue, Encino, only two blocks from their old address of 15501 Moorpark Street.

Crowell, in issuing Bristow’s Plantation Trilogy, included an introduction, as well as chapter-long introductions explaining the backgrounds of each story and the dates and family ties from one story to the next. Then in November of 1962, Gwen made a gift of the original manuscripts of the three explanatory chapters entitled
respectively, "The Crooked River," "The Two-Edged Blessing," and "The Joining" to Middleton Library of Louisiana State University. Although she had written the stories in California, Bristow felt that, having been conceived and set in Louisiana, the idea for her characters and their story belonged in Louisiana. Dr. John A. Hunter, president of Louisiana State University, and Percy Roberts, chairman of the board for the university, accepted the script ("Concerning Original").

Spencer Phillips of the Abbeville Press and Banner had one "mild" criticism to make of Gwen’s Plantation Trilogy. He thought that her "intensely interesting introduction and historical interludes should have been amplified and made into full-length reading," because seldom "does one find facts and thoughts presented in her romantic and colorful style" (Caroliniana).

Her "romantic and colorful style" remained indicative of a woman who became equally excited about every achievement and anguished over every problem, from the national level down to her own until her strict self-discipline intervened. For example, on February 20, 1962, she exulted in her journal,

Oh, what an exciting day! John Glenn went around the world three times and was picked up safely. We saw it on television--magnificent coverage by both TV and radio--and so did several million other people. He went up at about a quarter to seven this morning (Pacific time) and the capsule was picked up a little after one. Even to be on the edge of the great adventure, as we were, was a splendid experience.

The capsule struck the water, then there were 22 minutes before the helicopter picked it up--such long suspenseful minutes that it’s hard to describe them. But when the television announcer finally said the capsule had been located and picked up, Bruce and I both burst into tears and applause together.

In brief, it was grand.
Her friends and acquaintances were another example of Bristow’s empathy. Various
ones over the years had asked her to lend them money, people like Margaret Dixon,
who had borrowed $2000 and had waited for twenty-five years to repay it. Bristow
wrote of the episode:

Bruce Biggs came over this afternoon. I wanted to talk to him about
trying to get Margaret Dixon to repay the loan I made her 25 years
ago. I need the money and she has a good job as managing editor of
the Morning Advocate. I have asked her for it and she ignored my
letter. Never lend money to your friends! I had heard the warning,
but I had to learn the hard way. (J 2 Oct. 1964)

Biggs was successful; at the end of a month, Dixon had repaid the debt. After all
this, nevertheless, Bristow had not learned, for when Leo and Pauline Townscend
also asked to borrow money, she agreed to lend it (J 20 Mar. 1968).

Finances, however, were not the only focus of Bristow’s compassion. She
worried about the fires that swept areas of California and about their victims, about
race riots and discrimination. She grieved about people she had known both well and
casually who had succumbed to alcoholism and people who had to be institutionalized
for nerve problems, or people who were ill. One was Pete Dailey, their old friend
and Manning’s best man, who had suffered a stroke. Dailey quipped that he would
sit in the sun and fish for the rest of his life, but Bristow felt sorry for Abbey Dailey
because Abbey Dailey had "loved living [in the Los Angeles area] with all the
excitement of the magazines and movie and television world (J 6 May 1962).

Worries over National and World Crises

As always, she continued to fret over national and world events, for the early
sixties were years of international crises. Two stubborn men guided the two most

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
powerful nations, and neither of them, Premier Nikita Khrushchev nor President John Kennedy, was inclined to back down. As tensions over Cuba mounted, Bristow worried,

[The] head of civil defense in Los Angeles got on radio and television and told everybody that if there should be a declaration of war all retail outlets would be closed for five days, so everybody should lay in a supply of food. So there has been such panic buying today that some markets have had to call the police to control the crowds. People have bought food by hundreds of dollars' worth, such items as 20 boxes of cornflakes at a time, and so forth. If a bomb does explode on us the food won't be eatable, so what? (J 24 Oct. 1962)

She had experienced depression and war. She feared both, but there were other issues equally basic to the well being of the United States. Internally, the United States was grappling with issues of race, and Bristow wrote,

There is an awful mess at the University of Mississippi about admitting a Negro student. It is disgraceful, and how the Communist countries are going to make capital out of it! I do not think Kennedy was wise in sending in Federal troops, however. In fact, I do not think he is a very wise man. Neither in this nor in the Cuban situation. However, as Bruce says, he's the best we've got so heaven help him. (J 30 Sept. 1962)

Part of Bristow's alarm was due to much that had been and was still happening in her city, such as the fast escalation of events into a situation that would result in the race riots of July 1963. Along with her fear of and her concern about the danger of these riots, she commented, "I am afraid somebody is exploiting the Negroes for a purpose and the purpose is not equality but trouble" (J 12 July 1963).

The state of Blacks had always distressed Bristow, and she expressed some of her impassioned agitation after reading James Baldwin's article in the New Yorker telling what it means to be a Negro in the United States: "Inside me was a mounting sense of horror and guilt. What a work of art he has produced, what he has made the
rest of us understand!" (J 26 Dec. 1962). Typical of her concern had been her
journal entry many years earlier:

Every time I see the date September 14, I wince. It was one of my annual horrors when I worked on The Times-Picayune . . . there I’d have to rack my brain trying to think up something to say about the September 14 revolt against the carpetbaggers in New Orleans, and I’d have to go down to the monument at the foot of Canal Street and stand in the broiling sun while somebody made a speech and put flowers on the shaft. Thank heaven I’ve done with that. (J 14 Sept. 1949)

**Bristow, Her Publisher, and Her Work**

In September 1962 Bob Crowell called Bristow to inform her of a proposed contract for her next book. Subsequently, in November Bristow received a letter from Crowell Publishers voluntarily extending the old contracted date for the delivery of *Calico Palace* to October 1, 1966. Since Crowell had for some years held Bristow’s royalties and paid them out to her in installments for tax purposes and for providing her with a regular income, this arrangement would simply continue her income against the royalties of the book she was then writing. Grateful for "such a thoughtful publisher," Bristow welcomed the news, for her book was far from being finished, and the money would be welcome (J 18 Sept. 1962). Bristow signed the contract and returned it, agreeing to have *Calico Palace* completed by October 1, 1965. She thought three more years should be ample (J 20 Sept. 1962). (She would, in fact, require six more years.) This new money, with payments to Bristow beginning in December 1962, would be placed in this same fund, thus allowing her an annual salary.
Increasingly, Bristow focused on how she wrote. While determinedly maintaining an exercise and recreation agenda, she recognized that she was "too much of a perfectionist," for she continued, "I know it, and this has been my trouble for years and it seems I can’t change" (J 25 Feb. 1968). She believed that everybody has to work by his own rhythm, and a long slow job with a thousand details just seems to suit me best. However I own I often have fits of dismay when I look ahead at the mammoth job I must do if I am to write this book. Rarely has any event been more amply documented than the gold rush. You must be sure, then sure again and again, of what you say. (J 21 Jan. 1960)

After repeated lamentings, such as "If writing a book was any harder, it would be impossible" (J 4 Nov. 1961), she would have cause to exclaim,

I worked and worked and worked. All of a sudden, just as I was about to stop and wash up for lunch, a paragraph occurred to me that may make it possible. . . . I am almost afraid to say so--I have tried so many ways to do it and have been disappointed in every one--but I think I hear the click. . . . Oh, I hope, I hope, I hope. (J 29 Aug. 1962)

Finally in February 1963, after so many months with her story and her family problems, she was unable to sleep. Lying awake, she made up her mind to destroy her document. Having struggled for almost two years, not counting the months of research, and as difficult as it was, she shredded over

a thousand false starts, bad descriptions, wooden dialogue, everything wrong. It was like a surgical operation. Painful, yes, but . . . I had a feeling of relief. Now I said to myself, now it’s done. Now . . . to make a fresh start. The bridges are burned behind me. (J 8 Feb. 1963)

A few days later, she reacted to her secretary’s dismay: "Colette was appalled to learn that I had thrown away my book. Well, I am appalled too, but it had to be done" (J 15 Feb. 1963). Then she was able to continue. Bristow felt she had not
only written widely but she had also studied technique over many years and was a competent judge of writing, for, as she later would write Jean Fleming, "I recognized the professional technique, being myself a pro" (14 July 1978). In 1963, however, her problems with technique and syntax were not over. When she finally had the "first chapter . . . in pretty fair shape," her followed her "own maxim of 'Cross the river first,'" and began the next chapter before allowing herself to stop for the day.

At other times, along with the usual research and jotting down ideas during her other daily activities, her ideas would take form. For example, when she was working on *Celia Garth*, her September 14, 1954, journal entry reads,

> Bruce and I had dinner at the Rafters. I have another good idea about Jason's [unreadable word], whose name I think is to be Guy Farlow. This is to have Nona notice him before Jason, in the shop. My story is beginning to bubble in my head.

At times after she had written, destroyed, and re-written repeatedly, she would recognize that the script simply was not right. Then suddenly it would fall into place. She described such an experience:

> When I got dressed toward twilight I was so tired I could hardly move. So Bruce made me a drink and there I sat, limp and worn, and all of a sudden I knew what was the matter with Chapter 6, Ronda's [the character's name before she changed it—as she did many times] entrance. I've got to turn it around, start all over, rewrite completely. But this time it will make more sense. (J 16 June 1963)

In another instance, she typically wrote, "This morning I woke up knowing what was wrong" (J 11 Feb. 1967)

> Her method was to compose at the typewriter (unless she was ill in bed, at which times she wrote by hand if she was able). Bristow, who could type about as fast as she could think (Northridge), would re-type until she was satisfied. As she
completed a chapter, she stored the original draft in her bank deposit box and kept the carbon at home. When she had completed a book, she mailed the original to Crowell, keeping the carbon to begin a final editing. Later she would send the carbon if and when it was needed. Crowell, in turn, sent her the galley proofs, which she edited and returned to Crowell.

Occasionally, someone at Crowell upset Bristow with an officious "blue" pencil, incurring Bristow's indignant wrath. After one such incident, she expressed in a letter to her publisher her indignation about "Blue Pencil [who] has tried to rewrite [her novel]. The letter demonstrates not only the meticulousness with which Bristow worked and the system she and Crowell followed in indicating changes, but also the rigorous labor required. In it Bristow attacks the offending editor:

In a separate package I am sending you the original manuscript of my book, as you requested. When you open this package, if you exclaim in dismay, "Who dealt this mess?" I should not be surprised. The script is about 400 pages long, and for about the first half of it, as I added or changed material according to your suggestions, I pasted the old copy, striking out the latter. But my indispensable secretary, Colette Burns, came to me several times, saying, "I can't make head or tail out of this," so for the second half of the manuscript I retyped whole pages entirely, to make the changes easier for her to read. You too will find the second half easier to read than the first, though here and there I lost two or three pages with Blue-Pencil's marks on them. I did not know you wanted me to send back the original pages, or I should have been more careful.

... As I have told you before, your suggestions were constructive and professional. I was glad to have them. But Blue-Pencil's changes were different. She struck out whatever she didn't like and substituted something she likes better. And what she likes better was a sort of schoolteacher elegance.

I wrote in plain, terse sentences, with short words. Blue-Pencil does not approve.

Example. In Chapter 16, when I used the phrase "they kept going till they got there," she prettyed it up to read, "until they reached their destination."
Over and over, she makes a newspaper pick up a pen and write itself. On page 124 was the line, "The New York Herald said bluntly of the vessels about to sail. . . ." Blue-Pencil changed this to "The New York Herald wrote bluntly."

Now this upcoming blooper on page 353 is just laughable and nothing else.

In Chapter 28, telling how Thomas and Rachel Larkin had designed their Monterey home by combining details from dwellings they had seen in different parts of the country, I referred to "the veranda'd plantation homes" of the South. Blue-Pencil changed this to "to the veranda-festooned plantation homes."

How on earth can anybody festoon a house with Verandas? . . .

I could go on, but this is enough. On the manuscript, Blue-Pencil’s comments and queries are written on pink fliers pasted to the edge of each page. Your suggestions, as you know, are written in brown pencil on yellow paper. The briefest of my replies are written on Blue-Pencil’s pink slips, but most of them are typed on slips of white paper and pasted to the right-hand edge of the page.

Again, I thank you for your good humor and your patience. You have more of both than I have. Probably you know about Winston Churchill’s reaction when one of his manuscripts was "improved" by a too-eager editor, but I’m going to repeat it anyway. Churchill had written a sentence that ended with a preposition. The too-eager editor, wanting to make everything just right, had changed the sentence, moving the proposition to the middle, awkward to read but oh so pompously correct. Returning the sentence to its original form, Churchill is said to have scribbled on the margin, "This is the sort of interference up with which I will not put."

I can’t say it so well, but I know how he felt. (Caroliniana)

Bristow moved easily, though not always willingly, from working on her novels to special projects, such as creating solicited articles or publicity work. For example, in June 1963 she send to the Baton Rouge Register a special tribute to librarians, whom she called "unsung heroes of our day-to-day living" (Bristow, "A Love Letter"). Crediting them with making "it possible for me to write the kind of books I want to write," she stated, "My books are mostly historical novels. To be any good at all," she continued,
a historical novel should illuminate the time in which it is set. It should make the reader feel, when he has finished the book, that he has been not only entertained, but enriched; that he has made a visit into the past, and because of this visit he has gained a better understanding of how the present came to be what it is. (Bristow, "A Love Letter")

Bristow called librarians "those blessed folk," the "facilitators" into carefully preserved data (Bristow, "A Love Letter) that made her narratives possible. In keeping with this philosophy and in aiding in the preservation of such data, Bristow was careful to donate her documents to depositories of her choice. Accordingly, in July 1963, Gwen presented the manuscript of the novel This Side of Glory to Dr. John Hunter, president of the Louisiana State University for the university library.

Crisis Again at Home

Bristow's writing, however, could not alter the changes in her daily situation. With trouble such as she had never had, Bristow had to find ways to endure. Her biggest anxiety was Manning; she was "distressed about [him]... He seemed bored. Not unhappy, just bored." She continued, "I've tried all I can, and I'll keep trying, but there seems so little I can do" (J 29 March 1963).

Crises still dictated much of Bristow's life as the outset of 1963 found her stalled on her novel, always a depressing situation for her. Besides Caroline's ongoing problems, Manning was so ill that in February he required an oxygen tank in the event of another heart attack (J 21 Feb. 1963). At times Bristow worried so about his frequent depression that she could not write; at other times, she would write, "Bruce was in much better spirits today, so I was too (J 30 March 1963). Caroline remained her other great worry. Her worries unabated, in November she wrote,
We have heard nothing from Caroline for some time. I try not to worry. I am concerned about her and about Bruce. There is no more I can do for either of them than what I am doing now, but I hate this feeling of helplessness. I want the people I love to be happy. (J 13 Nov. 1963)

She also reacted with horror at the news of President John Kennedy’s being shot: "So many people have said, 'I feel sick.' I felt that way--physically nauseated. All over, it was like seeing a whole nation in a state of shock. . . . The funeral was conducted this morning, long and elaborate, all shown on television but I did not watch. I do not like funerals" (J 25 Nov. 1963). Instead, she went upstairs to work, and as she struggled, berating herself for her slow progress, the mail arrived with a "big fat check from Germany, for sales of The Handsome Road and This Side of Glory, . . . books written more than twenty years ago, and they are still paying off. So maybe my slow careful way of writing is the best way" (J 30 Nov. 1963).

In December, Pat Riley sent a Christmas card, but Caroline had reached the point where she required a nurse in constant attention. With Bristow doing her best to set aside a worry about which she was helpless to remedy, the end of the year passed. As had become a fairly frequent occurrence in recent years, with its passing so had several of their friends and acquaintances. Therefore, when friends like Irving Stone and his wife Jean called to say they had returned from a research trip--he was writing a book based on the life of Abigail Adams--(J 19 Dec. 1963), Bristow was grateful and pleased. Leo Townsend and his wife Pauline, as well as Madge Kennedy were also back in town. Manning was in better spirits, at least temporarily, not only because of their friends but also because their old friend and producer Ed Caffrey had asked him to collaborate with him on a play (J 24 Dec. 1963).
At the same time, although Bristow was making slow progress on her current novel, the Germans were avidly reading her books and paying royalties. The German publisher Franz Schneekluth sent Bristow an "exquisite porcelain coffee set for Christmas and wrote saying he was bringing out Tomorrow Is Forever in the spring (J 28 Dec. 1963), another of the many tributes over which Bristow continually marveled.

With the year's close, in spite of having produced no book, she did believe she had it started to her satisfaction as 1963 moved into--and through--1964, not hearing from Caroline but telling herself that if she were needed, Pat Riley would surely let her know. In March Bristow sent Caroline an Easter card, commenting, "I still write to her, though I have not heard from her since New Year's. I think she knows I write, and maybe it helps her though she cannot answer." However, on October 7, 1964, much to Bristow's astonishment, she received a letter, penciled but coherent, from Caroline asking Bristow to write. This was Caroline's first communication since her New Year's telegram.

In December, it was Bristow's turn to be ill, having developed what she thought to be an allergy that caused her face to break out in red splotches. The problem turned out to be shingles (J 20 Jan. 1964), quite painful and annoying. Impatient to work, her December 21 entry reveals that she was upset even with the season itself:

... everything is being interrupted by the Christmas nuisance--and it is a nuisance, no matter what its compensation in the way of hearing from old friends. That part, the cards with Christmas notes I like. What I don't like is the annual parade of useless gifts--candy and jam and other sweet stuff, which I don't eat; little ornaments good for nothing but to catch dust, enough desk calendars to equip an office, and junk, junk,
junk. And every employee on the place standing with hands out for largesse.
Oh, I am in a bad humor and I should stop this. My face is a mess, and the splotches are tingling.

Bristow did observe Christmas by sending Christmas cards and presents, but she was distraught over the time lost with her writing. Besides, she was miserable, with her "face looking like a Halloween mask and everything [she ate] tasting like a hard boiled rat" (J 25 Dec. 1964). In such a frame of mind, she and Bruce canceled their plans to go out for dinner. While she remained in her room, friends Ed Chaffrey and Bobbe came in to see him, and Bobbe prepared lunch from Mrs. Scheurn's leftovers. Later in the day, Manning spent the evening with the Masterts, and Karl Mastert sent her dinner to her apartment, where she had spent her evening trying to work (J 25 Dec. 1964).

She was on only Chapter 11 when, on the evening of December 31, she donned her "gold cocktail dress with the split skirt" and she and Manning attended a small cocktail party, where her dress "was much admired." Later, at midnight Manning asked their neighbors over, and as Bristow, with an obvious lackluster tone, noted, "all had champagne and said Happy New Year" (J 31 Dec. 1964).

Although the year 1965 would hold much trauma for Bristow, it began normally with their annual Sugar Bowl game on television. That year after seeing Louisiana State University and Syracuse tie 10-10 in "a real thriller" (J 1 Jan. 1965), Bristow left Manning to watch the Rose Bowl alone. Her interest lay more with her work although she remained an avid adherent to daily exercise, determined to keep her New Year's resolution "to do Canadian exercises every day that I don't go
swimming. A walk is not the same thing—no exercise for the arms and shoulders" (J 1 Jan. 1965).

The year, however, allowed her only a peaceful start. Her first problem arose on January 2, when her long-time, faithful housekeeper Mrs. Scheurn told Bristow that her own husband's physical condition had deteriorated to the extent that she could no longer work full time. Besides worrying that it would be "hard to find anyone as brisk and dependable as [Mrs. Scheurn]" (J 2 Jan. 1965), Bristow fretted over political affairs, noting, "This evening we listened to President Johnson's State of the Union message. It sounds to me as if he wants to give everybody everything without wondering who's going to pay for it" (J 4 Jan. 1965), a concern exacerbated by the looming date for filing her income tax. Frustration with income taxes had been a long-time vexation, as she had earlier noted:

The income tax people are really giving us a sock. This whole business of income taxes is very discouraging. You make your return, you think you have paid what you owe, then suddenly they decide you owe more than you thought. We'll be able to spend precious little on ourselves, as it looks now. (J 3 June 1954)

Other problems again darkened her world. With her interest in world affairs, she was grieved on January 20 to learn that "Winston Churchill has had a stroke and is dying. Ninety years old. A really great man." On the twenty-fourth, she wrote, "Churchill is dead. I can't help feeling sad that such a magnificent life ever has to end." On January 30, although she "had not intended to watch [Churchill's funeral], ... but [finding] Bruce in front of the television set, ... [she] joined him for a while," noting that it was "a great goodbye to a great man."
In spite of her work for diversion and therapy, it seemed hardly adequate for her challenges for she awoke the next morning to Manning’s telephone call "from downstairs" with the news that Pat Riley had called to inform them that her beloved sister Caroline had died during the night in her sleep. Bristow commented,

The news has given me a harder jolt than I expected. Of course I really lost her long ago, of course I have been anticipating this for a long time, and her life had ceased to bring much joy to herself or anybody else. But she was my little sister and I loved her deeply, and she brought a great deal of pleasure into my life. I feel that something has gone out, like a light. May God give her peace. (J 31 Jan. 1965)

Bristow grieved for Caroline. However, in her reluctance to "break" or allow matters she could not help to complicate her life, she carried on as if nothing were wrong (Fleming interview), and she made no attempt to attend the funeral, which was to be in the Garden of Memories Cemetery in Metairie, Louisiana, where her parents were buried and where Bristow, though she little suspected it, would herself be interred some day.¹

As was her custom, Bristow handled her grief in her own way, and upon Caroline's death, she recorded in her journal, "Bruce and I decided to go out to brunch as planned and say nothing. It means nothing to anybody, and it will be good for us to get out of the house" (J 31 Jan. 1965). The next day, however, she found "It is much harder to take than I realized. We went to brunch and were quite gay---saw . . . friends, and said nothing of sorrow," but later in the day, Bristow "Simply started crying and could not stop. Bruce did not try to stop me; put his arm around me and let me cry" (J 1 Feb. 1965). That evening their friends and neighbors, the Masterts, invited them over. "Karl made Martinis and hors o’oeuvres, and it did Bruce and me a lot of good" (J 1 Feb. 1965).
Having never considered flying home to Louisiana for the funeral, she talked with Pat Riley the second day, took care of some financial business on Caroline's behalf, and awoke on the third morning, saying, "I shall get to work. That is the best cure for anything" (J 2 Feb. 1965). Perhaps it was, but meanwhile, Manning was very ill. He had been having attacks with terrible headaches, leaving his speech slurred. At his doctor orders to stop smoking, he had such terrible withdrawal reactions that Bristow sympathized, "[H]is nerves are driving him nuts. I haven't smoked for nine years and I had forgotten how trying withdrawal symptoms can be. Anyway, I don't believe it was as hard on me as it is being on Bruce" (J 8 Jan. 1964). Compounding problems, Manning suffered from what Bristow frequently referred to as "depression" or "black depression."

In February, Bristow, in much need of a vacation, went to Apple Valley, where she stayed at the Apple Valley Inn and visited the countryside with friends. Her interlude was interrupted, however, on Friday, February 11 when Walter Clyde called about midnight to say that Manning had had a serious heart attack, a "pulmonary edema." Very anxious about Manning, she packed to return home. Trying to be her most practical self, Bristow vowed, "I am not going to sit around moping. Work and cheerful company are what I need, so I have asked the Flemings," whom she repeatedly referred to as 'two of the nicest people I ever knew,' "to meet me for dinner this evening."

In this manner, she tried to force some normalcy into life, working as much as she could and going to the hospital to visit Manning daily. About a week later, she noted, "Mrs Scheurn cooked roast beef and a baked potato, which Deborah took to
Bruce in a heat-retaining dish. He says the hospital food is dreadful so we are sending him his noon meal every day." Hiring three nurses for round-the-clock to care for Bruce when he returned home, Bristow noted, "I would not sleep easily if I thought he needed me any minute. With this thrice-damned arthritis of mine, sleep is not easy anyway" (J 11 Feb. 1965).

Bristow continued to work as well as she could, recording May 20, 1965, "There is so little I can do to cheer Bruce, try though I may. And I have to work. Luckily I have learned to work under almost any circumstances, so I can keep at it." Mental decisions not always keeping pace with emotional pain, Bristow became increasingly "distressed about Bruce. He is growing weaker, and what is worse, he is losing interest in things. His black depression sometimes reaches depths that frighten me. . . . I must keep going. Thank God for work" (J 8 July 1965).

With her arthritis continuing to plague her, she had difficulty sleeping or working. Although her doctor found her in good health at her semi-annual checkup, she struggled with her occasional colds and other minor complaints, along with the interruptions created in dealing with Manning's illness and his recurring depressions resulting from his feelings of worthlessness. She also tried to carry on with the mundane chores of running a house, with visiting with friends like Pauline and Leo Townsend, some of her oldest friends from California. . . whose Bewitched series had just been bought, and with going to the library to do research.

Another problem was Deborah, Bruce's secretary of about twenty-five years. Deborah had become an alcoholic, and her erratic work was both inconvenient and painful to the Mannings, especially to Bruce, who grieved about her. Often when
events accumulated, Bristow went to bed with a book and drank a Scotch so that she could relax (J 1965).

Help came finally when Colette Burns was released by her company and began working for the Mannings each week day 8:30 to 12:30. She took Manning on drives, served as secretary, and generally aided wherein she could, especially in trying to cheer Manning. Bristow frequently recorded such attitudes as, "Thank heaven Colette is here. She at least can drive Bruce around, and talk to him while I work." However, the reprieve was brief. Her second great personal sorrow of the year came when Manning died in his sleep August 2, 1965. He and Bristow had been married thirty-six years and almost eight months. Bristow, in reporting his death in a letter to her old friend Robert Crowell, said, "... while he did not fear death, he did fear invalidism, and he was spared this" (7 Aug. 1965, Caroliniana).

Colette Burns had driven him out on Monday on a few errands, such as to the post office. Having returned, he chatted a while out in the courtyard with some friends, finally retiring at his usual time. As Bristow told Crowell in her letter, his failure to appear according to habit the next morning struck Bristow only with the thought that he must be sleeping late. She had gone to her study to work when Burns told her Manning had not yet got up, and "As it was getting close to noon, she and Mrs. Scheurn were alarmed" (J 5 Aug. 1965). Bristow, upon going to his room, found "that all was over." Bristow had known he was failing fast, but, she wrote in her journal, "there is no such thing as being 'prepared' for a thing like this. It is like being prepared to have your right arm blown off" (J 5 Aug. 1965). She concluded to
Crowell, "Bruce was a grand fellow and I was lucky to have him so long. Nothing lasts forever. He's gone, but a lot of people are mighty glad he was here."

Of his actual death, Bristow's journal entry states merely, "Dr. Rick, after making the final examination, said the end came to him peacefully, without a struggle" (J 3 Aug. 1965). Jean Fleming recalls, however, Colette Burns, who was with Manning nearly every day to see to his needs and take him wherever he wanted to go, had reported to Bristow that Bruce's sleeping pills had disappeared. Colette believed Manning's last two years of increasingly serious illness and depression had made the quality of his life undesirable for him.

That her beloved, outgoing, exuberant "Bruce" might have committed suicide would, however, have been unconscionable to Bristow, and she did not mention the subject—not even in her journal. Bristow had previously made her attitude about suicide clear when Marilyn Monroe died. Bristow's close friend actress Madge Kennedy earlier had been making a movie with Marilyn Monroe. The film "was scrapped," Kennedy said, "because of Marilyn Monroe's shenanigans." The fact that the company had run out of funds, said Kennedy, stemmed partly from the fact that Monroe showed up for work only six times in a month (J 16 Aug. 1962). Manning was the one who first reported to Bristow the nature of Monroe's death, to which Bristow had commented, "Poor girl. What on earth did she want out of life? She had beauty, fame, wealth, success--I suppose some people are just born to be miserable. Thank God for a cheerful disposition" (J 5 Aug. 1962). Her concern continued, and she had written,

Everybody has to face the difference between what he is and what he would like to be. You do the best you can, and the result is so
disappointing; you see other people doing what you can't do, and you almost hate yourself for being so inadequate; but that's no reason for killing yourself. You keep on doing the best you can, and life turns out to be a lot of fun anyway. (J 6 Aug. 1962)

Now death had come to the person Bristow loved most. This time Bristow could hardly go out to dinner or go shopping to cover the pain. She remained the woman who destroyed old journals and other papers that might bare her heart too much to the world, and her husband's death created no exception: she quietly grieved in her own way. Too self-disciplined to whine or speak negatively in ways to be handed down to posterity, Bristow yet had a very human side, and she recorded in August that she was gratified at how "fine most people had been," but very hurt by others who had been "utterly horrible," demanding, "Give me this, give me that, trying to grab everything Bruce owned while I was still in a state of shock. I am disgusted by this. Nobody had warned me it would happen"; on the other hand, as letters continued "pouring in," she had cause to exclaim in her journal, "How well loved Bruce was!" (J 9 Aug. 1965).

"Pie" Dufour perhaps best summed up what seems to have been the consensus about the man Bruce Manning:

The world has lost an amiable and witty spirit in the passing of Bruce Manning. . . . Bruce had nothing but friends, no enemies, wherever he went. His genial, gentle nature contained generous quantities of pixie among its main sparkling ingredients. (Caroliniana)

Although Patricia Manning Tanner saw relatively little of her father, she remembers him as an "extremely intelligent and well-read" man, who "loved a good joke," who "was always happy" (Letter, 9 June 1994).
Another personality greatly influenced by this genial and talented man also remembered him. Deanna Durbin David from her home in Paris wrote in February 1994,

> Your letter arrived asking me about one of my favorite people. Bruce Manning was a dear friend, helpful, amusing and certainly responsible for a good part of some of the best Deanna Durbin films. His title at that time was not producer or director but writer. His scripts were excellent, with always a light touch to lift the sadness or sentiment in a scene.

I knew Gwen Bristow and always appreciated her wonderful sense of humor and her charm. She kept a distance from Bruce’s work so I seldom saw her but I remember her with affection. . . .

Sincerely,

Deanna Durbin

In November after her husband died, in cleaning out Manning’s papers, Bristow came across a letter from Crowell to Manning, dated August 3, 1938. She returned it November 9, 1965, writing, "Here is a letter dating back to the days when you and I still called each other 'Mr. Crowell' and 'Miss Bristow.' Bruce thought enough of it to save it all these years, and I don’t blame him. It is a fine tribute" (Caroliniana). Her act was another example of Bristow’s careful attention to details and the value she placed on friendships and meaningful gestures to let others know how she felt.

In spite of Bristow’s apparent emotional aloofness, greater feelings and warmth lay beneath that calculated control. For example, she once reacted to another person’s disparaging remarks about marriage, saying hers was so wonderful it was difficult to understand why people could not get along. Says Jean Fleming, in spite of occasional rumors, there was never a rift in their marriage. Furthermore, whatever anyone may have thought, her close friends and her journals verify that
Bristow dearly loved her husband and he, her. In her May 25, 1994, telephone conversation, Manning's daughter concurred: "If they ever had a problem, I did not see it. . . . They had a modern marriage in those days even for today, but they understood each other and got along very well" (Tanner letter).

Also refuting any implications that a rift had arisen between them is her journal entry in October of 1966 that Bob [Robert] Crowell had written that he and his wife were separating after twenty-seven years of marriage. She was deeply troubled, commenting,

Reading [Crowell's letter], I was so astounded that my hands began to tremble. . . . I thought they were as congenial as Bruce and I. A marriage that crashes after a year or two is bad enough. But twenty-seven years!—after you have knit your lives together, shared everything—thank heaven this is something I never had to go through. I believe it would be harder than death. Death is sharp and clear. It doesn't leave any dirty fringes. (J 21-22 Oct. 1966)

She did not "like funerals"—as she had noted earlier when, in spite of herself, she had watched Churchill's on television. Her attitude hardly seeming adequate justification, she nonetheless did not attend her husband's funeral, and she recorded nothing about it. Catherine Biggs, first wife of Bristow's accountant Bruce Biggs, who had known Bristow since 1957 (J 26 Aug. 1957), explains:

When Mr. Manning died, Gwen called my husband. She told my husband she could take care of anybody alive but when someone died, she couldn't handle that. She wanted my husband to take care of all the arrangements.

There were only two people at the funeral home—Bruce Biggs and one other man, who must have been a friend from work. The friend leaned over and put a couple of cigarettes in Bruce's pocket. Gwen didn't go. There was not a funeral or memorial. She probably wouldn't have gone anyway. (Interview)
Jean Fleming also concurs, "That is correct; Gwen did not go to Bruce's funeral. She was very much afraid she would break down, and that would be very distasteful." Bristow who once had written, "And me with a Confederate pedigree a yard long" (Bristow, letter to Crowell, 16 March 1938), as Fleming explains, did rebel, but she "rebelled in a very ladylike manner." According to Fleming, hardly any single trait could, in Bristow's mind, reflect those "traditional values" to a greater degree than "good taste" (Fleming, 20 Nov. 1993).

Little more can be offered to explain why only two people made an appearance at Manning's funeral. There is Bristow's explanation for her own absence, "I don't like funerals." There is Fleming's explanation for Bristow: "She was afraid she would break down." Neither explanation seems adequate, and a journal entry from 1976 puts an even more puzzling cast to the matter. Pete Dailey, Mannings' old friend and best man, had died after a lengthy illness during which his wife Abbey had personally cared for him, and Bristow continually expressed concern that Abbey was wearing herself out with his care, and Bristow wrote,

Pete Dailey died Wednesday night, and his funeral was conducted today. I am glad it is over for him, and over for Abbey. Pete has been mentally and physically helpless for so long. Much as I dislike funerals, I went to this one. Many people were there, for Pete had a lot of friends. (J April 30, 1976)

So reticent was Bristow about "being public" with her private affairs, the situation raises the question, "Were no more people at Manning's funeral because no one knew of his death on time?" Indeed, during his lifetime Manning had been continually surrounded by friends. Where were they at his death? Patricia Manning Tanner, Manning's daughter, who did not attend her father's funeral because she was not
notified in time, in a telephone interview remembers her father had once said he
wanted no funeral service and no flowers. If that had been his lasting wish, Bristow
would have honored his wishes (25 May 1994).

The older Bristow became in both years and experience, the more she felt that
"All this business connected with a death is gruesome." A year after his death
(December 6, 1966), Bristow recorded, "Bruce’s death took a great deal out of me.
But I believe I am making the adjustment that I have to make. It is long and slow,
but it can be done."
Endnotes for Chapter Seven

1. This conclusion is derived from personal interviews with Angie Fensin (25 July 1993) and telephone interviews with Jean Fleming (17 July, 20 Nov., 28 Nov.), along with information in documents in the Jean Fleming and Michael Hibler materials, recorded during the last days of Bristow's life; also, from a personal visit to graves of the deceased Bristow family members in the Garden of Memories, 25 July 1993.

2. Bristow alternately spells the name of Pete Dailey's wife "Abbey" and "Abby," even "Abbie" (14 May 1976) in her journals.
CHAPTER EIGHT
BRISTOW FACES NEW CHALLENGES

As Bristow had faced the challenge and pain of her husband's long illness by determinedly setting her mind on her work, so she set about learning to live without Manning and to create a life with quality. Putting her mind to work was almost automatic for her because she had always been deeply concerned about national and world events. Throughout her years of writing journals, she had faithfully commented on every event from earthquakes to the death of Sir Winston Churchill. So aware was she of history and its significance that in her journals frequently she simply mentioned a past event, as she did on December 7, 1964: "Twenty-three years today since Pearl Harbor. I shall not give myself over to worrying about the world or I'll never get anything done."

It is policy she adhered to, work being an emollient for whatever troubled her. She spent much of August sorting and discarding Bruce's possessions and responding to the many notes from those who had expressed sympathy upon Bruce's death, along with the unpleasant task of arranging her records in order to attend to corresponding legal matters, such as paying the inheritance taxes. Since her own copyrights were also community property, she had to pay taxes on half of their value. She closed Bruce's apartment and kept her old one with the study and her bedroom. However, she also rented another one, "just half a dozen steps across the hallway" with three
rooms—a dining room, an office for Colette, and a library with a "delightful" view (J 31 Aug. 1965).

By the end of September, she noted in her journal, "I really think I am getting back into my stride," but in October she found that she continued to grieve, noting, "I miss Bruce. People are being grand to help keep me occupied, and of course work is the great restorer. But nothing changes the fact that he is not here anymore. I try not to think about it" (J). She ended the year, feeling,

I am not sorry to say goodbye to this year. It has been one of the hardest years I ever lived through. But I did live through it, and now I can go on into the next year, maybe wiser than I was a year ago. I have much to enjoy—my good health, my friends, my work, and the fact that my books pay off, so that I have no financial worries. (J 31 Dec. 1965)

It would not be until early 1974, however, before she tackled going through her husband's scripts, when she would record, "I have also begun to go through a pile of Bruce’s old scripts and disposing of those that are no longer of any value. For a long time I simply was not able to do this, but now things have eased up and it’s foolish to keep these things lying around" (J 8 Feb. 1974).

Bristow never considered a relationship with another man. She had loved Manning, and she did not seek to replace him in her life. When an acquaintance tried to help her meet someone, Bristow was so astonished that she did not know whether to laugh at the person or tell her to "keep her nose out of my business" (J 8 Jan. 1966).

As time passed, whenever Bristow's pressures became tiresome, she would take a vacation. She chose her destination, got someone to drive her to the airport, and went either with a woman friend or perhaps alone, sometimes meeting friends at
her destination. Bristow always chose to stay in a hotel in spite of friends' invitations because she always felt "more comfortable in a hotel" and she wanted and expected "service and luxury" (J 13 Aug. 1965). Manning, even after his retirement, had never traveled with her, so after his death, she did not hesitate to go wherever she wished to go for relaxation or for research.

Bristow was working on Chapter 18 of Calico Palace when the new year got under way, but along with her writing, certain domestic issues demanded her attention. Although in all her years of driving Bristow would have only one accident—and that one, minor (J 27 Mar. 1972), she had never learned to feel she had mastered driving. Colette Burns had proved to be a pleasant companion and efficient secretary, and Bristow was glad to have Colette drive for her (J 1966). Mrs. Scheurn had continued to assist with the cooking and other duties of housekeeping, and Bristow was, therefore, concerned about Mr. Scheurn’s illness, noting his death in October 1966: "I am glad the poor man’s suffering is over, and especially glad for the end of the even worse suffering of Mrs. Scheurn and her children. They were all loyal and devoted, and the spectacle of his long slow dying has nearly worn them out" (J 25 Oct. 1966).

Increasingly, Bristow enjoyed her friendship with the Flemings. Bristow and Crowell had frequently shared anecdotes about something humorously or ridiculously written, and it was quite natural that Bristow and Jean Fleming shared an interest in devising projects for Fleming’s classes designed to motivate students to want to use the library. Bristow’s leisure time gradually filled around her reserved working hours. Furthermore, always concerned about her own physical condition, Bristow continued to maintain her exercise regimen.
In February her medical examination revealed that she was in "perfect health" except for arthritis in her right arm and shoulder. Soon even this seemed to have almost disappeared (J 26 Feb. 1966). Bristow recognized that the last years had taken more out of her than she was aware of at the time, but, she wrote, "Now that the worst has happened, I can go on from here" (J 26 Feb. 1966). With her writing, her clubs, and her friends—Roberta Whitehead (close friend and owner of the Northridge Bookstore near the university campus), Clyde Bulla (a successful writer of children's books), the Flemings, Madge Kennedy, Karl and Mildred Mastert, Bertram and Harriet Peck, Marge and George Bergar, Catherine and Bruce Biggs, and Colette Burns, among others, that is what she set out to do.

In addition, Bristow, as always careful with her grooming, decided that her daily swim and busy schedule made a wig an excellent alternative to her problem with her hair and weekly salon appointment. Jean Fleming recommended her friend Mrs. Gene Owens as an authority. Bristow wanted one to replicate her own hair color but also one that fit back from her hairline so that she could sweep her own hair back over it. When Bristow had dinner with Madge Kennedy after being fitted, Kennedy thought Bristow had just had Luie do her hair, and her friend Karl Mastert said it was the best he had ever seen. Bristow was delighted (J 3, 10 Mar. 1966).

The Private Bristow and Continuing Success

One day in June the mail brought an old manuscript entitled Meeting Place, which Bristow had finished in 1933 when she and Manning had been visiting in Connecticut. She had destroyed one copy many years earlier ("The idea that I could
have written anything so bad made me shiver"), but Carol Brandt had found another copy when she was cleaning out files (J 13 Jan. 1950). Bristow "was utterly appalled at how bad it was" and very "glad . . . nobody would publish it!" (J 23 June 1966). Upon reconsideration, she found this story of "106,000 words" was based on an idea that was "a good one" ("about the actress and the small-town preacher" [J 13 Jan. 1950]) but one which "only thoroughly experienced professionals ought to attempt," and she promptly shredded it (J 24 June 1966). However she had not heard the last of it, for Brandt and Brandt would find another copy, which she would with comparable horror also shred (J 1 Oct. 1974).

Although she enjoyed many people and many activities, remarkable days were those when she could note, "I accomplished a lot today . . . on my book. Nothing dramatic, but I did have a nice contented feeling about it" (J 7 July 1968).

Bristow continued, working as fast as she could, but as always her writing went slowly. During her breaks she continued the task of sorting through her husband’s possessions. Manning had thrown nothing away, so the task was mammoth, and it would require months to complete. Among his memorabilia were the twenty years’ collection of scrapbooks of his work in the movie industry, which his secretary Deborah Clyde had meticulously kept. Bristow decided to donate the materials to Tulane University because

Bruce is almost a legend in New Orleans, and these scrapbooks— even if he were unknown there—will be valuable for research. Some day somebody will do a Ph.D. thesis on old-time movies, and these books give an excellent look from behind the camera. (J 21 July 1966)

She also discovered her old letters to Manning when he was in North Africa during the war. She wrote,
I had to read them, and it was a hard job, recalling so much that I have now lost. But I tore the letters to shreds. The idea of having strangers go through these is even harder than reading and destroying them myself. (J 23 Sept. 1966)

Her memories were poignant, and she purposely avoided the subject of Manning whenever she could. Her friends, sometimes meaning well and wanting to show that they had not forgotten, would mention him as Karl Mastert did one evening. Bristow had taken her drink out to the courtyard and had just seated herself when he said, "Do you know what day this is? It's Bruce's birthday." Bristow responded, "Yes, and yesterday was Bastille Day," and changed the subject, thinking how much she wished people would not try to talk about Manning (J 16 July 1967). To her journal she confided that his death was "a wound that [would] never heal and [she] simply [had] to live with it (J 31 Dec. 1967).

In late 1967 Crowell Publishers re-issued her plantation stories under separate titles. They would have new jackets and would include Bristow's introductory material to serve as background and transition information that had been used to link the stories for publication under their uniting title Bristow's Plantation Trilogy published five years earlier (Caroliniana). A very proud Bristow recorded in her journal on April 7, 1968, "[A] review from today's Times . . . gave high praise to the whole trilogy . . . [by] Ruth C. Ikerman (J 7 Ap. 1968).

Then, in August 1968 Crowell, cautiously violating his own rule not to press Bristow for completion of her new novel, wrote Bristow a note, saying, "Now we are making plans for the spring list, and I wonder if we may include Calico Palace (Caroliniana). Bristow responded,
I can't do it. I'm sorry—I bet I'm a whole lot sorrier than you are—but there it is. Two hundred pages still to go, and two hundred finished pages means a thousand pages, or more, of writing because I do everything over and over and throw away most of it. Then the final going-over and the final typing, which takes time because it has to be exactly right.

I am not going to make any excuses. In one of my earlier books I said—Nature takes its own time. You cannot hurry a tree, or a baby, or a hard-boiled egg. I might have added "or a book." At least, if I hurried, mine would be awful.

Please forgive me, and give me the benefit of your extraordinary patience a few months longer... (Caroliniana)

Crowell's answer, in spite of that long-ago contract for the completion of the novel October 1, 1965—is one of typical of his personality:

Thanks ever so much for your August 5 letter. Don't be sorry. Don't give it a thought. I was just asking for the purpose of making plans.

To paraphrase one of my favorite people, "You do the writing. We'll do the selling." I just hope we can always sell as well as you write! (Caroliniana)

Another big event for Bristow was that Crowell's news that Deep Summer was going into its twenty-sixth printing, which by August 1969 would have sold 90,114 copies (J 9 Aug. 1969), and Jubilee Trail, its sixth printing; he added that he hoped Calico Palace was going well (Caroliniana). Bristow was still working on it, and the historian in her battled to relate more of the details gleaned during her research than the artist in her recognized would be beneficial to the holding power of her story. She knew at about 240,000 words her story was running too long, but she would wait until she had finished to begin what Elizabeth Riley at Crowell Publishing called "distilling" (J 2 May 1969).

About this time Bristow received a check from the Social Security, something she had earlier been denied because she was still working. However, having read
that royalties on patents and copyrights registered before one’s sixty-fifth birthday were not counted as income, her accountant Bruce Biggs wrote to the Social Security office, calling attention to this information. Her check was retroactive to the previous September, along with a notice that she would receive a monthly check until she again earned money (J 5 Ap. 1969).

Closely following this happy surprise was an anxiety. After reading an article in the Wall Street Journal about the chances of earthquakes in her area, she had the "sudden dreadful thought": "Suppose we had an earthquake and I survived and my manuscript did not?" She immediately set Colette to making a copy, which she planned to send to Angie and Alan Fensin in New Orleans for safekeeping. Then, she thought, she would have peace of mind (J 28 Aug., 7 May 1969). Next, she began making a calendar, carefully fitting the events of her story into the actual events of early summer 1851. Doing this time-consuming task that would require many more hours, she was glad to quit at one o’clock to take her afternoon swim. She knew she was "stalling on this difficult closing sequence," so she gave herself "a good talking to and resolved that [she] would genuinely dig in" and finish (J 9-18 May 1969).

Doing exactly that, on July 1, she recorded,

Well, it's nearly 7 p.m. and I am a shaking wreck, but I have just written the last sequence of Calico Palace. It is wordy and lumpy and terribly rough, but it is actually down on paper. I can't read it over now. I am too tired to do anything. I shall make a drink and stretch out on the long chair and go limp and joyful" (J 1 July 1969).

After "a final polishing" later in the month, Bristow would set it aside a few weeks to let her mind rest before giving it her last revisions before sending to Crowell later
in 1969 (Caroliniana). When she did, she dedicated it to "Louis, Bobby, and the girls" (her brother Louis, his wife Bobby, and their daughters).

On her birthday, Bristow "just for fun" again took a personal inventory, finding her vital statistics to be height, 5 feet, 3 and 1/2 inches; weight, 108 pounds; bust, 35 inches; waist, 26; abdomen 27 and 1/2; hips 33 and 1/2. At age sixty-six, she was "proud of [her] present figure, and [she] didn't mind saying so" (J 16 Sept. 1969). She had lost the weight during the preceding year because her doctor, having diagnosed angina had warned her to lose weight, as well as take various other mild precautions. She would, she recorded, follow his advice, "And heaven help me to keep my mouth shut about my symptoms" (J 25 Oct. 1968).

**Calico Palace**

The years having slipped past, changes were also occurring at Crowell Publishers, and on Saturday, November 1, 1969, a new Crowell employee, Hugh Rawson, called Bristow to say he would be in San Francisco and, if her manuscript was ready, he would fly down to Los Angeles and take it back to New York with him. On Monday, November 3, 1969, Fleming visited Bristow and "while I addressed Christmas cards," noted Bristow, "she finished reading Calico Palace. She was so delighted with it that I have been in a glow ever since." Then, writing to Crowell, she asked that no changes be made without consulting her first. From experience she had become leery of "enterprising young people [who] get too smart" and make "corrections" (J 3 Nov. 1969). Delighted with her "beautiful new fluffed-up hairdo," by Luie (her hair stylist of many years), Bristow met Rawson on
Wednesday as planned. She immediately liked him, "a great big man with a great big red beard and a jovial disposition" (J 5 Nov. 1969).

Later, having had no response from Crowel by November 13, an anxious Bristow called. Crowell was not in, but his secretary, blaming the problem on poor mail services, gave Bristow some startling news. *Calico Palace*, she said, had already gone to the compositor and the proofs were expected by December 3, after which they would be sent immediately to Bristow (J 13 Nov. 1969). Puzzled and somewhat daunted at their speed (her last book *CG* had taken from November 17 to February 5 for the same process), Bristow had not wanted to read proofs until after Christmas. Crowell called that same day, saying he liked her book and had "some terrific plans" for it.

Trying to decide how she could get everything done, she thought that if she got busy and addressed her Christmas cards and finished her shopping, she could be ready to read the proofs when they arrived (J 15 Nov. 1969). Another shock came, however, in the form of a request that she make a map of San Francisco as it was just before the great fire of May 4, 1851, showing every building, real and fanciful, mentioned in *Calico Palace* to use as a frontispiece (J 27 Nov. 1969). Just as she had reconciled herself to the task with, "Oh well, I'd rather have too much to do than too little" (J 2 Dec. 1969), the real shock came in a December 4 letter from Rawson, requesting the map by December 29. Bristow reacted:

> Holy smoke, what do these people think I am? Reading proof on a book the length of *Calico Palace*, and designing the map, and sending Christmas cards and presents, all at the same time. And I have my life to live too. It is a job to design the map. Putting in the actual buildings is work enough, but slipping in the imaginary buildings takes imagination. Luckily I have always had a good sense of what
the psychologists call structural visualization. But I believe this assignment is really too much. (J 4 Dec. 1969)

Fortunately, when the proofs arrived on December 5 (J 5 Dec. 1969), her friend Leo Townsend agreed to help her proofread for typing errors, and they mailed the last batch December 12, the map following December 18 (J 12, 18 Dec. 1969).

Before the year was over, she had lunched with Alfred Kingston of the Swansan Agency, who was already considering a movie of Bristow's newest work. Carol Brandt had already sent him a copy of the galleys. Although he really liked the story, he concluded that rebuilding a San Francisco set six times due to its many fires was prohibitively expensive. Bristow reacted laconically, "Oh well, I write books, not movies" (J 30 Dec. 1969).

In early January 1970 she had the first proofs to begin corrections, and as usual there was a great urgency to get them back to the New York office (J Jan. 1970). She was somewhat concerned about the new person in the Crowell establishment, Rosalie Brady, who wanted publicity pictures and an autobiography. Bristow thought,

I am not sure Rosalie Brady will like anything I write. I have never met her but her letters sound as if they were written by somebody still living in the nineteenth century. Like Louisa Alcott without Louisa's sense of humor. (J 7 Jan. 1970)

When she had completed the autobiographical sketch January 13, Bristow was so well satisfied that she got copies for students writing biographical details (J 24 Jan. 1970). In putting herself into Columbia School of Journalism against her parents' wishes, she had put into practice what seems to have been her basic philosophy of life:
It seems to me that the happiest people are those who make up their minds what they want to do and then do it. This takes courage. It means paying no attention to all those affectionate and well-meaning folk who love to give advice nobody has asked for. (Northridge)

*Calico Palace*, said Bristow, is about the "forty-eighters" rather than the "forty-niners" because its characters are the people who were in California when the Gold Rush started. Bristow, true to her historical bent, weaves an exacting portrayal of the exciting mid-nineteenth century into her tale of romance and adventure, giving her main characters greater depth and complexity than she had managed with her earlier heroines.

One is Marny, a lovely redhead, who flees her intellectual, pedigreed family to salvage her individuality when she recognizes she can never satisfy their expectations. Another heroine is Kendra Logan, born to a mother who, in a moment of youthful dreaming, had eloped. Always a bitter reminder of her mother's juvenile foolishness, Kendra, born to this marriage annulled after two weeks, had been kept out of the way in boarding schools. Having graduated with no place to go, the story opens as she is accompanying her mother to California, where Kendra's stepfather is in the military and where Kendra will find a new life.

The unspoken law of California during this time frowns upon asking another about his past since so many have left some secret past. Under such circumstances Kendra falls in love with handsome and charming Ted Parks, who does not tell Kendra is that he has fled from a wife in New York.

Gold is discovered; Kendra and Ted marry and go to the gold mines, along with Marny who loves gambling and cards. Bristow's empathy for women's vulnerability and need for (and right to) independence, as well as her respect for
their sharp minds and ability, all play a role. *Calico Palace* is the story of their lives in San Francisco, beginning at the time when the town comprises a few thrown-to structures made of canvas, rags, or anything else that provides some privacy and cover, to the times the city becomes a big, bustling city with enterprising and civic-minded men who must establish a system of law and order.

So realistically does Bristow interweave the history of the city that Crowell's publicity manager Rosalie Brady wanted "to check the archives of the Palace Hotel and see if it is an outgrowth of the gambling house called Calico Palace" (J 6 Mar. 1970). Bristow, wondering about the conceivability of a "woman who has sense enough to be Crowell's publicity manager not to know that the Calico Palace is a figment of my imagination," hurriedly wrote back that from a tent in the mining camp to the big building on the plaza, Calico Palace was her imaginary creation (J 6 Mar. 1970).

By April 27, *Calico Palace* had already sold 23,000 copies even though publication date was not until May 11. Once on retail shelves, like Bristow's previous books, it was an immediate success, achieving best-seller status by the end of May in spite of its somewhat negative reception by the more scholarly critics. Bristow felt somewhat vindicated, however, when in July Arthur Lerner and his friend, a Dr. Myers, asked for the appointment to talk about some aspects of *Calico Palace*. As a professor and a psychiatrist planning to write a psychiatric study of Poe, Whitman, and Conrad Aiken, Myers was interested in Bristow's characters--the obsessive character of Captain Pollock, of Marny and her reaction to her early background, and of the characters' reactions relative to one another. He had read
the book three times and delighted Bristow with his interest and praise (J 17 July 1970).

Announced June 2 to be on the June 6 New York Times best-seller in sixth place, Calico Palace was climbing as in foreign markets as well (J 2 June 1970). For example, by July 11 a German book club had taken it with a guaranteed circulation of 520,000 copies (J 11 July 1970), and by mid-October, the novel had also been contracted by Sweden, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, along with a magazine publication in Britain (J 15 Oct. 1970). When it reached third on the national best-seller list in Publishers' Weekly at the end of October, an ecstatic Bristow wrote, "Whoops!" her favorite interjection, upon receiving the news (J 27 Oct. 1970).

With the publication of Calico Palace, the promotional responsibilities began. Along with photography sessions and articles to write for publicity came increasingly numerous requests for Bristow to speak to various groups. She tried to oblige those within her vicinity, but she did not want to accept those at a distance, especially those that mentioned nothing about paying her expenses. It angered her that people are asking me to take several days out of my life, pay my own plane fare from California to [the destination] and back, and any other necessary expenses, and make a speech, all for love. Love of what? I don't know them, have not set foot in [the place in question] since I left it nearly fifty years ago, and am not an idle millionaire looking for something to do. What is the matter with people's heads? (J 9 Feb. 1970)

She had not wanted to make public appearances again, but she accepted, saying, "They do sell books" (J 22 Jan. 1971).
Newspapers like the Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* wrote asking for pictures and material for a story that nobody else would have. Of the three states that claimed Bristow, she seemed to have a special love for her second adopted state Louisiana, the place of her newspaper career and the city she had called home for about ten years. Instead, upon receiving the request, she noted, "I always have fun in Baton Rouge" (J 29 July 1950). She maintained a genuine love for Louisiana and New Orleans, as well as for her friends throughout the state, and she cheerfully supplied the materials as quickly as she could (J 1970). She noted, "I got the stuff for the *Morning Advocate* into the mail today. I seem to be working harder now than when I was writing the book. But busy as I am, and tired as I am by evening, I like it (J 26 Ap. 1970).

Another contribution, as Bristow related later to Crowell, was her response to a questionnaire from A. C. Specktorsky, editorial director of *Playboy* magazine querying authors about how they liked being a best-selling author. The editors wanted to publish an article on "The High Cost of Fame," analyzing authors' attitudes about being famous. Most complained about the problems, but Bristow responded that she liked everything about it. She "... never did have any patience with people who say that good fortune is a burden ... . The fact is, if you don't want to write a best-seller, nothing is so easy as not writing one" (Caroliniana).

**Business and Social Life**

A lucrative career was important to the way of life Bristow wanted and expected. To maintain such a life style, her net income from her first novel had
hardly been adequate at $2662.66—even in 1937. In those days, she had been used to living well on Manning’s salary, not on hers. However, by 1970 she was receiving royalties from many foreign markets; Crowell was re-issuing some of her titles, and she was actively lecturing. Surprisingly, the old mystery she had co-authored with her husband, The Invisible Host, was still strong on the market. With the assistance of a broker and accountant, Bristow had invested wisely over the years, so that she was, according to her journals, quite comfortably and securely situated.

Bristow began 1971 ill with her old complaint: her chest hurt and she was coughing, aching, and running fever. She had long ago learned that the only remedy was to live through it, but she hated it, nonetheless. Although Bristow tried earnestly never to complain aloud, she faithfully logged her feelings in her journals, her activities and relationships with friends, as well as each doctor, dentist, and hair dresser appointment—along with the results.

Although she was busy and socially active, Bristow found herself a bit irritated early in the year. Whether from the severe earthquake her area suffered February 9 or the many demands of her, she did not specify. Indeed, her speaking engagements were frequent, and she was growing increasingly tired. In February, she wrote, "Profitable as these personal appearances are, I am really tired of all this. The truth is, I am tired of Calico Palace. I want to get busy on the next one" (J 26 Feb. 1971). She was also again irritated with government policies that again denied her Social Security. She wrote March 3, 1971,

I cannot get Social Security because I am still working and earning my living. I have put in all the requisite payments, and if I sat back
and lived on my income from investments I could get SS, but because I am an industrious soul who does not like to be idle, I can’t get it. The government won’t pay Social Security to anybody who earns $1640 per year. If I did not work (and pay taxes on my earnings) my Social Security payments would amount to $2215.20 per year. Therefore, it is costing me $575.20 per year to be a money-earning taxpayer. If this makes sense I’m a blue-eyed crocodile.

Oh well, I’ve been learning all my life not to worry about things I can’t help.

Following her own advice, she set about other things. As president of her authors’ club PEN, she held an office that over the years had brought her together with many famous and not-so famous people. She was also continuing research on various ideas. Still a swimming enthusiast, at sixty-eight she was as excited over ordering a new turquoise-blue swimsuit as ever for a vacation to Mazatlan, Mexico, as well as visiting and going out with friends (J 12 Mar. 1971).

As always, she enjoyed her celebrity (J 21 June 1970), and she thrived on conversations on literary subjects. She continued to read widely, and in March she read Irving Stone’s new book about Freud, The Passions of the Mind. She and Colette had been invited to attend a cocktail party in his honor given by her friend Roberta Whitehead, and she wanted to be prepared. When the time came, illness kept her from attending the party, but she had thought Stone’s book a "fine" one in spite of his using "too many details, such as where Freud and his family went every summer" (J 28 Mar. 1971).

Bristow’s affinity for research never waned, and in October 1971 she wrote Crowell,

[When] you tell a professional researcher to start searching, you are likely to feel like the man who knew how to turn on the water but didn’t know how to turn it off.
By the way, I bet you think Praisegod Barebones is the most outrageous name in history. Maybe it is, but in the California Historical Quarterly I have found one that runs it a close second. There is a man listed named Deuteronomy Brown. I don’t think he had anything to do with the Gold Rush, but I wish he had. I should love to write, "As we are told by that great authority, Deuteronomy Brown. . . . (Caroliniana)

Bristow’s doctor had diagnosed diabetes in 1971, and she was "sadly depressed" about it at times, but, she said, "... sometimes I don’t think about it at all" (J 9 Jan. 1972). Her latest examination gave her such positive results that she concluded that she "need only stay off sugars to continue well" (J 11 Jan. 1972). This diagnosis prompted her giving up alcohol as nothing else ever had, and she noted in her February 5 entry that she was still drinking nothing stronger than coffee, "and I find I don’t mind it a bit." However, later on the plane to New Orleans she felt "sort of silly to be so abstemious in public" (J 19 Feb. 1972). At any rate, with her doctor’s excellent report, she was greatly relieved.

She continued to thrive on work, a fact which helped with her sad moments like that which prompted her to write January 14, 1972, "This is my wedding anniversary. I suppose I’ll never write down this date without being aware of a lonesome twinge." However, she never allowed herself to brood. Continuing her research in California, Bristow pursued documents on microfilms, thrilled with the advanced technology in the system, "not yet perfect but improving all the time" and such "a relief from the days when I had to copy everything by hand!" (J 13 Jan. 1972).

Although Bristow had enjoyed her trip to New Orleans, visiting with old friends and her family, she enjoyed most the old Crescent City and the amazing
weather sans smog. After what she considered a successful trip, she was glad to be home again, commenting that "being with Jean [Fleming] was grand. We have talked to each other nearly every day since" (J 27 Mar. 1972).

All news, however, was not good. Meeting with Bruce Biggs to sign her income tax forms, which she had left with him prior to going to New Orleans, she was shocked to learn he and Catherine had separated. He did not look well, she thought; he had lost weight, his color was different, and he did not seem happy about the separation.

Daily tasks occupied her time. For example, Simon and Schuster of Pocket Books sent her other authors' books for her endorsement as they had done numerous times previously. Also, true to her habit of responding to her fan mail, she got busy on the stack of mail collected during her New Orleans trip. This time, there was "one of the most touching letters [she] had ever received" from a woman who told how Bristow's books had helped her through the agonies of a mental breakdown. Bristow concluded in recording the incident, "How wonderful it is to know I have been able to help anyone through such an experience. It makes me feel so humble" (J 1 Ap. 1972).

When Bristow had begun thinking of writing the story of the Gold Rush, she had sent Crowell a draft of her opening. Hugh Rawson, who would be her consultant on the Gold Rush book (J 17 Jan. 1972), responded, "Bob is off to London for two weeks, but I can't wait to tell you how terrific your opening is for the Gold Rush. . . . You are making history come alive in a way that I have seldom seen before" (Caroliniana). Upon receiving this letter, Bristow was much
encouraged (J 21 Ap. 1972). He was, however, pressing Bristow to hurry, and as always, such pressure disturbed her (J 4 May 1972). He had not learned yet, as Crowell had, to wait for Bristow.

With her health generally good, Bristow spent 1972 in her usual way—working on her book, visiting with friends, going to movies, reading, crocheting, and going out to eat. Christmas was somewhat unusual in that her friends Michael and Audrey McCarthy had invited her to Carmel. They were, she noted, perfect hosts: "They let me alone." From her hotel, Bristow visited with the McCarthys and others at intervals, visited, walked, shopped, and finally had Christmas dinner at the Pine Inn on Ocean Avenue. Seeing flags at half mast on December 26, she and her friends paused for some moments of silence in respect to the memory of President Truman, who had died early that morning. Upon returning home December 31, Bristow recorded her trip as "one of the most delightful vacations" of her life (J December 1972).

Through the years Bristow's habit had been to record at the end of each journal all important data she considered might be needed on a moment’s notice, and this year was no exception. Numbers of her insurance policies and names of companies, her car license number, driver's license number, credit card numbers—all of these and others are typical of her end-of-year data, just another example of her meticulousness.

Bristow opened her 1973 journal saying,

This has been a fine day. The sort of day of which Robert Louis Stevenson said, "and now at last the sun is going down behind the wood,/ And I am very happy, for I know that I've been good." (He and I were both brought up as Puritans.) (J 1 Jan. 1973)
Looking "Backward"

With Stevenson for inspiration, Bristow finally got into her work on the Gold Rush story. After a day of hard work and a brisk walk, she wrote, "And now I feel fine and glowing with virtue, and I shall reward myself with a highball. Maybe two highballs" (J 1 Jan. 1973).

Changes continued at Crowell Publishing, and on January 20, Bristow received a call from the new president of the Crowell company, Lewis Gillenson. Says Bristow, "[He] is as different from Bob Crowell as I am from the queen of Sheba, but I think he and I are going to be friends and work well together."

Bristow felt that in spite of the differences, Gillenson knew the publishing business, the most important point. Crowell had moved to chairman of the board and editor of the reference books, planning to work only eight months a year. Crowell, said Gillenson, was really cutting back on his work so that he would have time to enjoy being with Muriel, his new wife. After his other unhappy marriage when he had used work as an escape, he now "just sits and looks at her, as if he can't believe his own good fortune." Bristow concluded her entry, saying, "I am glad Bob is so happy at last. He deserves it" (J 20 Jan. 1973).

Spring of 1973 brought concerns about taxes. Having met with Bruce Biggs to finish her income tax report, Bristow was irritated at having to delve into her earnings to pay taxes on her royalties. But the welcome news was that the British company was reprinting Celia Garth. The decision had been made in spite of some angry reviews by writers who, says Bristow,

would not admit that the British army had ever behaved with anything but noble gallantry. . . . But apparently, it was all so long ago that a
lot of British readers are willing to enjoy the story without rancor, and that evidently justifies the reprint. (J 26 Mar. 1973)

By mid-April, Bristow, staying in the Royal Orleans Hotel in the French Quarter (J. 15 Ap. 1973), was in New Orleans to do more research and to visit with her family and her old friend Dr. Ruth Robertson Berry. Berry, who had returned from Nigeria once before because of a heart attack (J 12 Mar. 1973), was back in the states, and Bristow, hoping Berry’s return had not been brought about by renewed ill health, had written, inviting her to New Orleans for a visit ("Medical Missionary"). The visit and succeeding article which Bristow wrote about Berry for The Register were as successful as Bristow had wanted them to be. Berry, who had been a graduate of Tulane Medical School in 1928, had a long, productive career. Berry, however, must have again been in ill health because, according to the Alabama Hall of Fame records, she died during 1973, the same year as her visit with Bristow. She would be inducted into the Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame in 1976 ("Installation"), Bristow’s predecessor by several years.

Bristow returned to California May 2 (J April and May 1973). It had been a trip about which she recorded more of her family than almost any other time during all her years in California. Her journal accounts sound like the usual "togetherness" of a congenial, loving family. She had expended much effort to be affable, having saved samples of each family member’s handwriting over the previous few months to have them analyzed to take to them on this trip for the fun of such an experience. She also went to extensive effort to buy Bobby, her sister-in-law, a "wind-shield," which her brother said she would like, and she made much ado over taking pictures.
At this point, Bristow's journal implies no hint of the negative attitude reported by Jean Fleming and Patricia Manning Tanner and letters from other friends in California. Such a discrepancy makes sense if one remembers Bristow's editing of her journals 1924-1925, her year at Columbia, when she tore up nearly all of it, saving only some old theater programs and such like that I had pasted in. I should not like to have anybody see it, and now nobody ever will. My comments on my fellow-students, and other people, would be overwhelmingly embarrassing if anybody had seen them. . . . And of course, there was a lot of unintended self-revelation. (J 4 Feb. 1974)

Furthermore, she makes clear the fact that she recorded and saved only that which she did not consider "embarrassing if anybody [read it]" or that had "a lot of self-revelation."

Bristow the historian who knew so well the value of the original document; and more than knowing, this Bristow is the same who, in her own research, always actively hunted relentlessly and dug out the original. Little can be concluded other than that she purposely and carefully chose her words for her journal.

The other side of the picture is that Bristow, in her later years, during her visits to New Orleans genuinely tried to try to get to know her family. During the time her nieces were approaching adulthood and marrying, Bristow tried to become acquainted with them. Her comments included such impressions as she found them to be "beautiful girls and I like them" (J 7 Mar. 1972). She remembered their birthdays and sent them special little presents, things she thought they would like, and they exchanged letters (Fensin and J's).

Bristow, having for so long been caught between her regard for her traditions (in this case, her family) and her desire to escape certain social and religious
boundaries inherently the effect of her upbringing, still struggled with her duties
toward them. At the same time, she also valued their positive effects on her life,
and she applied segments of that early training whenever appropriate in her novels
and in her life. For example, when the group calling themselves the Symbionese
Liberation Army kidnapped Patricia Hearst and some of the group were burned to
death as a result of a battle with the police, Bristow, reflected,

It's all so foolish, and so tragic. Of course the FBI will find [Patricia
Hearst and two other Symbionese Liberation Army members], dead or
alive. "They who take the sword shall perish by the sword." I'm
glad I was raised on the Bible. (J. 18 May 1974)

Another incident in September horrified her sense of being "too public"
when, upon receiving from Brandt and Brandt two packages that together weighed
about eighteen pounds, she was shocked to discover they had kept every piece of
correspondence between her and them through the years. It went even back to her
efforts at selling The Meeting Place with comments like "So bad it's funny" and
"Promising but just not quite good enough to print." Reading them, Bristow
observed, "It's like standing behind a door and hearing people talk about me. I had
no idea [Baumgarten] had tried to sell that book to so many publishers before she
finally gave up" (J 1 Oct. 1974). At any rate, Bristow destroyed all the papers after
she had read them, noting that she certainly would not like anyone else to read
them.

But happier moments cheered her. One occurred when Seymour Bricker
called, announcing the sale of two Skirball-Manning pictures, Payment on Demand
Thrilled over this turn of events and wishing it had happened when Manning yet
lived, Bristow was soon back into her work, only to struggle with self-discipline when Watergate erupted on the scene (J July 1973). Fascinated, she wanted to miss none of it. In addition to this distraction, she concluded the year reading a journal from ten years before. Experiencing a "twinge of lonesomeness" reading about "being with Bruce," she wrote,

I'll never get quite used to living without him.

Now at the year's end, the newspapers and broadcasters seem unanimous in saying this year 1973 has been a bad year and they are glad to be rid of it. The Watergate scandal, the sudden shortage of energy and of nearly everything else, the troubles in Ireland, the Arab-Israel crisis in the Mideast—all these have put the country in the dumps. Myself, I feel pretty cheerful. I know the times are grim, but the country has been through grim times before (and so have I), and we have always come through it. (J 31 Dec. 1973)

Her life and days were full, however, with "Writing my book, walking or swimming, [and] doing all the rest," but she preferred "to be over-busy than be like those women who sit around the courtyard all day and do absolutely nothing but watch people go in and out and make comments about them." They reminded her, she said, "of the knitting women in Tale of Two Cities, only they don't even knit" (J 28 Aug. 1973).

January 1974 brought Bristow "absolutely the biggest check I ever got at one time in [her] life." She exclaimed again, "Oh I do love those book-reading Germans" (J 29 Jan. 1974). Hard at work doing research for her book about the Gold Rush, Bristow was pleased as always to share her work with Bob Crowell and his wife Muriel, who were in town briefly to visit Bristow, entertaining her with tales of their winter vacation in New Zealand and the South Sea Islands (J 6 Feb. 1974).
During this time, she also began the final clearing out of her husband's papers. She decided she would look for people who might have collaborated with Manning, if she found any such scripts, and let them have the documents. Otherwise, she believed, they should go to some library (J 8 Feb. 1974).

Carol Brandt, who wrote February 7 to say that Bristow's German publisher Schneekluth wanted to celebrate his twenty-fifth anniversary with an anniversary edition of *Jubilee Trail*, enclosed a contract (J 7 Feb. 1974). A few days later, Brandt wrote again wanting to know whether Bristow would be interested in "licensing the paperback publication in this country for modest terms of *The Invisible Host*, *Two and Two Make Twenty-two*, and *The Gutenberg Murders."

The first had already been published in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy. Bristow noted, "The other two I'd rather forget" (J 11 Feb. 1974) because she and Manning had written them during the Depression, and "they sound like it" (J 13 Feb. 1974).

Bristow remained busy, but her schedule did not include her alma mater: she still refused to return to the schools to which her parents had sent her. Therefore, in March, when she again received an invitation to attend the reunion of the Judson class of 1924, she commented bluntly and simply, "They'll have it without me" (J 30 Mar. 1974). Her attitude was typical of her reaction when, in 1975 Dr. Thomas Johnson of the University of South Carolina wrote requesting the donation of her personal papers. Being from South Carolina did not influence Bristow in her choice of depositories for her papers. In 1963, Bristow had donated the manuscript of *Celia Garth* to the University of South Carolina, along with the galley proofs (J 14
June, 1963, but she did so more in keeping with her pattern of depositing her manuscripts—in this case, on the fact that South Carolina was the setting for *Celia Garth* and not because she was from South Carolina. Therefore, relative to Johnson’s request, she wrote,

> I get so many requests of this sort, and I had to write Mr. Johnson what I have written others—that I have mighty few personal papers to be given away. Printed matter is all right, and old photographs and such like. But I destroy letters after I have answered them. As for my letters to other people, I don’t know whether or not my friends keep them; I rather hope they don’t. (J 23 Mar. 1975)

Something that did please her, however, was the fact that in June a check for Manning’s script of *Appointment in Samarra* arrived. The foreign contract for the translations of *The Invisible Host* had also come through, and again Bristow wished that they could have arrived before Manning died. Part of his "black depressions," Bristow believed, had been due to his inability to work and not contribute to making a livelihood. She noted, "He would have been so happy about" the income from them (J 25 June 1974).

As the year moved on, her journal was interspersed more frequently with her complaints: an ulcer on her tongue, problems with her mouth, a sore throat, a twinge in back due to a "piece of luck" causing her to stumble on her way to exercise to lessen or eliminate back pain, a crick in neck, and eye strain. Bristow had much earlier developed arthritis in her back and arm, among other complaints, although she was still swimming and walking vigorously every day, if possible. All in all, her complaints were numerous and rather detailed, as they had always been. The change would come later.
Bristow's healthy zest for life and obvious sense of humor remained strong, nonetheless, for on February 15, 1975, she recorded that she and the Flemings had gone to the theater to see Somerset Maugham's play *The Constant Wife*, starring Ingrid Bergman as Constance. She found the play "delightful," and she marveled at "how much more perceptive the years [have] made me, how much greater was my appreciation of the more subtle points of Maugham's comedy" since seeing it in 1927 or 1928. "I am not as physically strong as I used to be," she wrote, "but I sure am a whole lot smarter. Which means, I have more fun."

The Long Tentacle of Fate

In addition to her own problems, there were also family problems in New Orleans. On August 13, nine o'clock California time, her brother Louis called to say his wife Roberta (called Bobby) had fallen dead of a cerebral hemorrhage about two hours earlier. At this crisis, Bristow wrote in her journal, "She was a gentle, lovable woman, and [Louis and she] were always congenial. Louis had just retired from his work at the hospital, and they were making plans for a lot of traveling together" (J 13 Aug. 1975). She also recorded,

> All day today, I have been going around feeling as if I had been hit by a ten ton truck. . . . I am glad Louis has those three fine daughters with him. They will be a big help in the readjustment he will have to make. I shall write to him often. (J 13 Aug. 1975)

The next day, she recorded that she felt better, and having planned to go shopping for fall clothes, she "thought this would be better than for [her] to sit around and mope." She did not consider going to New Orleans for the funeral (J 14 Aug. 1975).
There would, however, soon be someone else for Louis Bristow. Mrs. Eunice Langford, who had attended St. Charles Baptist Church, where she had known Louis Bristow's parents, met him early in 1976. She had a daughter, Nancy, about the age of Bristow's niece Angie Fensin (Fensin, interview, 20 Aug. 1993). Eunice Langford, whose ancestor was Eunice Folger, a sister of Abiah Folger—the mother of Benjamin Franklin (Bristow, "New Orleans Research Provides")—married Louis Bristow March 27, 1976, in the chapel of the St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church (J 27 March 1976). He and Eunice would enjoy traveling throughout the world until his death in 1991 (Eunice Bristow).

Now in her seventies, Bristow, for reasons she did not make known, became less faithful about keeping her journal. She did make one final notation in 1976, however, saying that the year had been "pretty good," and adding, "I have worked, and had some good vacations, and good health. I hope I will finish my book by June 1." Then, like an incidental thought, she made one final comment in the back of her journal, "I don't want to prove I can still do what I could do 50 years ago. I want to prove I can do what I could not do 50 years ago. Else why keep on living?" So captured was she by this quotation that she jotted a note beneath it, "Xerox copy of this."

For 1973 and 1974, Bristow's daily record hardly equaled one of her previous years. Each year thereafter she wrote less and less until in 1977 her journal was little more than a blank page. She kept another record, however, numbered by days, with a single line of abbreviations or shorthand. Typically, the entry might be only something like "Leo Townsend—about PEN business" (J 21
Without careful study, it appears to be a mere listing of people to or from whom she sent or received cards or paid bills. For example, her entry of December 24, 1977, reads:

```
Hugh Rawson--I will finish book by end of March
Mrs Sarah Douglas--bthdy card
UCB--ckks 397 for deposit
```

Her laxness in keeping her journal was due, perhaps, to her increasing age or to her failing health. She hardly mentioned her health or her visits to a doctor except with a rare notation, such as "Harriet Hinsdale--thanx for note while I was sick" (J 11 Mar. 1978). Although her fatal illness would not manifest itself for a while, when it did, her notations about it were sparse. Such "neglect" in recording related symptoms, trips to the doctor, treatment, and physical and emotional response as she previously had done may have been a form of denial. She had no thought of accepting this disease. Instead, she intended to fight it. Such an attitude would have been typical of Bristow. At any rate, her journal would remain, albeit in most sketchy terms, only about other happenings in her daily work and social life, almost exclusive of her illness.

Another change for Bristow was that her old staff, except for Colette, had left her service, with Mrs. Scheurn’s receiving her last check May 1, 1977 (J 8 July 1977). Burns, however, remained as secretary and general assistant. Otherwise, Bristow’s life kept its familiar character. She remained very active in PEN and she was still working on her Gold Rush story. She also continued to contribute articles for various publications although on March 20, 1978, as her journal indicates a note to Orene Muse that she could not "write anything for her until I finish [my] book."
Furthermore, her interest in national and civic affairs appear never to have waned. Also alert to her financial affairs, including such matters as maintaining health insurance on her employees (J 28 Jan. 1978), Bristow continued to depend on Bruce Biggs, and she frequently sought his advice and aide. Furthermore, she continued very conscientiously to keep up her correspondence and send thank-you notes as the occasion warranted. At age seventy-five, she even retained a keen interest in the type of swim suit she was ordering (J 2 Mar. 1978).

There were, however, strong indications that all was not well with Bristow. Although her abbreviated journal entries give no indication of the cause or the details, she was hospitalized in February 1978. Colette Burns wrote Jean Fleming February 28 only that she had "picked Gwen up at the Adventist Hospital" [on February 20]. Burns thought that Bristow had begun "gaining strength," and Bristow, who refused to concede to any problems, wrote Jean Fleming March 5 that she was

... never better, only breathless with catching up. ... I think you stated it correctly--my real ailment was Deadline Doldrums, because as soon as I got Colette to write my publisher to this effect my temperature went down and my spirits went up and I got well. Anyway, now I am all right.

With her old affinity for the language and usage, Bristow was again enjoying the challenge of words, as she demonstrated in a letter to Fleming March 5, 1978:

And I loved Philip Dunne's article from Newsweek. Much as I detest "between you and I" I believe my favorite horror is the "whom" enthusiast: "The maid whom was carrying the basket" or "Whom shall I say is calling?"

Some time later that summer, probably in June, still playing word games, Bristow told Jean Fleming in a letter,
... incurable purists like you and Tania and me will notice that there is an error in grammar in the second column [of an article from the Wall Street Journal that Bristow was sending to Fleming]—"A lawyer before becoming a poet, his biting satire"... etc.—but the writer is mighty good all the same. After all, I made a mistake in grammar in Calico Palace, so who am I to cast the first stone?

In another similar instance in a letter also to Fleming, her old regard for "law and history" burned lively:

Your newspaper article about library thefts dismays me as much as it does you and Tania. I don't know what we book lovers can do about it except have policemen on guard, and if Proposition 13 is voted in there will be fewer books and fewer policemen, for the reason you gave. The politicians must have their fringe benefits, come what may. I'm going to vote against it, of course. After all, you and I do get welcome giggles out of the politicians, such as Senator Hatch's line, "new precedent" etc. ... [Also the news article reporting on] "how happy the theater managers are to have more "female actresses."

"No doubt," added Bristow parenthetically, "Shakespeare would have been pleased with the same."

In spite of Bristow's earlier note to Rawson saying her book would be ready by the end of March, she had again misjudged her completion date. She wrote Carol Brandt July 24 that it would be ready by the end of the year (J 1978), but when the time came, the book was still incomplete. Whatever the cause, if, indeed, there was any cause other than the typical Bristow pace, she reported to Fleming in a letter of April 9, 1978, that she was "feeling fine," and could "stand the present tensely-working days by reminding [herself] every night" that her book was closer to its end than it had been the previous day. She added, "And maybe because of this, I am sleeping like a baby." Once again, however, Bristow was forced to write to Hugh Rawson that he would have the book in February 1979 (J 30 Dec. 1978), but
in spite of her good intentions, when February 26, 1979, arrived, her book was still incomplete.

Bristow had begun the new year enjoying her annual bowl games, and in a New Year's Day note, she told Jean Fleming, "By this time you know we had an earthquake in the midst of the Rose Bowl game, but the stadium was so solid nobody there noticed it. And I feel fine and I hope you and Howard and Johnny are likewise." Sometime between this correspondence and her journal entry of February 26 or her next journal entry of May 13, 1979, Bristow broke her wrist. Undated, her journal notes only briefly, "Broken wrist, no record," meaning she had written nothing in her journal during this time. The break, which resulted from a fall, would continue to trouble her through the summer (Bristow, letter to Jean Fleming, 8 Aug. 1979. Hibler).

**Golden Dreams Is Published**

Finally, on May 15, her "... book ha[d] gone to publisher," and, among her other activities, she was planning to attend the national convention of the American Booksellers Association in Los Angeles the last week in May. With the completion of *Golden Dreams* behind her, Bristow wrote Jean Fleming, on May 22, 1979,

I can't drive a car, but Colette will drive me to the convention center, where virtually every publisher in this country and many from outside it will have the forthcoming books on display. We will spend a day there, and will have lunch with the Crowell people. It should be a lot of fun. (Hibler)
Although her journal no longer reflects her comments or summaries of each day, it does indicate, however, her continuing mental keenness and business acumen. For example, on May 24, 1979, she noted, "Carol Brandt-in re new contract if possible, not 32 years but 13," which was a notation about a request for shortening the term of payments for her new book. She also asked Carol Brandt to destroy her "old letters to and from [Brandt and Brandt] before they [the Brandt agency] move." From past experience, Bristow knew she did not want them, nor did she want them in the hands of the public (J 6 June 1979).

Still in love with her work, Bristow wrote Fleming, saying, "Oh brother, is it good to be writing again!" (Letter, 8 July 1979). Several succeeding letters sound cheerful and mention no ill health of any type as Bristow was "so involved with getting [her] book to the end."

Her habit of refusing to be idle and "whine" continued to help her to occupy her time with reading, with letters, and with words. Some of her favorites she passed on to Fleming in her letters, such as

I was struck by . . . *nearly unique*. I wondered how that could be used correctly, if at all, and after some thinking I came up with this possibility: Suppose one of a pair of identical twins should say, "Every human being is supposed to be unique, but I am only *nearly unique.*" Of course even this is not exact. . . .

Laurence Peter is like you and me in his objection to . . . needless, long words. He cited, *utilization*. Why not . . . *make use of*? . . . instead of *utilize*, say *use*. . . . Ah me. So many writers and speakers think that if they don’t use a lot of long words—excuse me, I mean if they don’t utilize a plethora of sesquipedalian polysyllables—somebody might think they don’t know any. (Hibler, 8 July 1979)

Expressing another favorite, she said, "Wow! I almost forgot this one:

"Chutzpah: The world’s biggest dreamer just might be the author who writes a
book on atheism and then prays it will sell.--Robert Fuoss" (Letter, 8 Aug.
1979). Although Bristow possessed an extensive vocabulary, she explained her
impassioned aversion to long words in a letter of August 8, 1979:

> With these polysyllable-addicts on the loose, I don’t wonder the
> students take no interest in learning to read. If I had nothing to
> read but such items as you are sending me, I’d give up reading for
> fancy needlework. At least, if I set out to hemstitch a handkerchief
> border I’d know what I was trying to do; and when I finished it
> other people, whether or not they admired hemstitching, would
> know what I had done.

At the end of August, Bristow’s manuscript was again in her hands for
final editing. She did not feel she could do the work in the desired two weeks,
but she did agree to "work steadily to get it done" (J 31 Aug. 1979). Her next
challenge was a choice of the title for her new book. Only after many letters and
some disagreement, Bristow finally conceded in a letter to Hugh Rawson, saying,

> I still like Gold Mine Found! for the title. Golden Dream sounds
> (to me, anyway) like a title for the diary of a fanciful hoopskirted
> Victorian maiden. Gold Mind Found! tells the reader at once what
> the book is about. However, if you and your colleagues at the
> office prefer another title, I’ll shut up and cooperate.

Having begun Golden Dreams in 1972, Bristow had stuck to her career-
long habit of exacting research that had taken so long that the "old Thomas Y.
Crowell company . . . now Lippincott-Crowell" would not be able to publish it
until 1980.

**Facing Cancer with Courage**

Exactly when Bristow was diagnosed with cancer is unclear because, very
different from her old habit, she did not record this information; however, she
likely did not know in early June 1979 because she renewed her *Weekly Record*
for one year (*J 7 June 1979*). On July 1 she renewed her automobile club
membership to July 1980 (*J 1 July 1979*), and the next day she was getting ready
to write the article she had promised Orene Muse for the Baton Rouge *The
Register* (*J 2 July 1979*). In late October 1979, she attended the Booksellers
Convention. Her sketchy notations of her activities reveal that she paid her health
insurance and continued to revise her manuscript, mailing the new draft on
November 16 and the original draft on November 29, 1979, still not indicating
her illness.

However, by early 1980, Bristow quite ill, persisted hopeful—or
disillusioned—about her prognosis as her journal entries indicate. She continued
very active in PEN and otherwise appears to have lived normally, for a time
making no mention of her personal health. Only one entry of January 31, 1980,
that may be significantly related says, "Louis and Eunice—... I'm doing fine,
thanks for phone calls, ..." but on February 4, she renewed her subscription to
*Publishers' Weekly* for three years, along with the *T. V. Guide*. Then, on
January 5, she wrote the words "my illness" at the end of her daily "list," but not
until February 11 did she include anything definite: "Hematology-Oncology
medical group—ckk for medical services." She undoubtedly had grown quite ill
very rapidly for she also indicated in this same entry that she had given a check
for an oxygen tank to the H.R. Medical Supply Company. By February 3,
1980, she had begun writing her letters by hand because, as she told Jean Fleming
in her letter, "I can't take the typewriter to the cushiony sofa where I have to spend my days." Insisting, however, that she was improving, she continued,

I am still wobbly on my legs, but I am improving steadily. I know it not only by what the doctors tell me but by the way I feel. However, if you know anybody who ought to stop smoking, tell him/her that chemotherapy treatments are no fun. They are effective, but mighty disagreeable. (Northridge)

In her journal, she reiterated, "I am getting better, feeling fine" (J 22 Feb. 1980). Again on February 23, 1980, she wrote to Jean Fleming, still declaring, "My health is improving steadily. Yesterday my doctor told me the latest x-ray showed a substantial diminishment of the cancer. Is there such a word as this [arrow to "diminishment"]? Anyway, you'll get what I mean." And on March 28, 1980, Bristow wrote to Fleming: "My health is steadily improving--I can feel it, so I know the doctors are right. The lung cancer is still there, but it has lessened in size, and in general I am doing well. . . " (Northridge). In this same letter, she also wrote, "Thank heaven, I got my book manuscript off to New York before the cancer made itself known, and also read and corrected the proofs."

Even in critical health, Bristow remained ever the traditionalist and Southern lady, vigilantly careful to retain control. She kept up with her business affairs, such as paying the state compensation insurance fund for Colette "if Colette is injured at work" (J 7 Mar. 1980). She also attended to her usual bills, along with certain social activities, such as sending get-well cards and notes of thanks (J). She was concerned as well about Hugh Rawson, writing him a note of regret that he was leaving Lippincott-Crowell and asking him to keep in touch (J 2 Ap. 1980).
Colette Burns, who to a great degree assumed the role of nurse and companion to Bristow during these last months, was not always well and therefore not always able to be with her. Sometimes forced to depend on unfamiliar nurses, Bristow’s letters reflect, one after another, the fact that her attention was turning inward. Not only did Bristow occupy herself with reading, but more and more frequently, her mind teased and entertained her with her fascination with words, something readily accessible and diversionary, as well as exacting little physical strength. Instead of complaining, she enjoyed the humor in the clippings that Fleming sent her. One that struck Bristow with particularly intensity—she called it "especially luscious"—was the word "personhood." Bristow in her response to Fleming April 8, 1980, wrote,

I am going to sent it to Laurence Peter. He likes to collect such horrors. But I want to ask—if the members of the Christian Personhood of United Methodist Women do not mind calling themselves women why should they mind calling their organization a Sisterhood? There are so many people whom I do not understand. Oh well, if everybody was just like me how dull and monotonous the world would be.

(Hibler)

Some of her reading during this time included a new best-selling writer named Judith Kranz. Bristow implied her reaction to Kranz’s work in her "suggestion" to Fleming ". . . that you flee screaming" (Letter, 8 Ap. 1980).

Bristow in her own way waged her fight for life, but there was drama hidden by the surface events, and again it had to do with her family. Exactly when Bristow first wrote her brother that she had cancer is not clear, but when he did learn of her illness, Jean Fleming remembers with anger and bitter sadness, he called Bristow. As Bristow related the incident to Fleming, his first words had been "Do you have a will?" and "Do you have a burial plot?" They were not, Fleming angrily recalls, the
words of comfort Bristow had longed to hear, and she was both hurt and angered by her brother's seeming callousness (Fleming, interview, 20 Nov. 1993).

Crossed Purposes

Bristow had no relatives in California, but her very close friends--among whom were the Flemings, Roberta Whitehead, the Biggses, and her secretary and friend Colette Burns--actively tried to visit, call, and otherwise see to her needs. From New York her friends in the publishing business and especially Carol Brandt of Bristow's agency maintained a vigil, trying to keep in touch. Attorney Michael Hibler, of Leeds and Hibler Law Firm and former star basketball center for UCLA, was Bristow's attorney in California. He rounded out the list of people devotedly determined to see that Bristow's final days were the best they could make them (Fleming, 17 July 1994). He and Bruce Biggs, upon first learning of her terminal illness, discussed her care and declared that she should have every possible assistance they could arrange for her. Knowing Bristow's habits and particular ways, her love of good food and conversation with close friends, and her need for cleanliness and order, they agreed to do their best to see that she had whatever she wanted if it was in their power to arrange it (Fleming, interview, 17 July, 1993).

Bristow finally came to acknowledge the critical nature of her condition in a letter on April 8, 1980, to Jean Fleming:

This is the first time I have ever been seriously sick, and the experience is teaching me a great deal. Not about "the fineness of suffering" or any of that nonsense, but about what it's like to be helpless. I am so weak that I have to lie on a sofa all day and it is an effort for me to walk across the room (I have to hold to the furniture to keep from falling), and I find it humiliating. Colette is being a great
effort for me to walk across the room (I have to hold to the furniture to keep from falling), and I find it humiliating. Colette is being a great helper, quite willing to wait on me, but it is humiliating for me to ask her to do so many trivial tasks—"Please open this heavy envelope, my hands are not strong enough"—it’s disagreeable but it is giving me an education. My doctor says my weakness is due to the fact that my body has mobilized all possible resources to fight my cancer, leaving only the irreducible minimum of strength to keep my vital organs working.

But I am doing much more reading than I usually have time for, and that’s a great compensation. (Hibler)

Her sense of humor remained intact, however, as her letter of April 19, 1980, to Fleming demonstrates:

Forgive the unesthetic paper but it’s the easiest sort to use as long as I have to write lying down. Thank you for sending me that dreadful Metropolitan Police Act from London. Whether using the Queen’s or the President’s English, there is always somebody who believes being obscure means being profound. I should like to introduce these stutters and stutterers to the King James Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the glorious classics—actually one book—Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. (I heartily agree with Amalia that Tom Sawyer outdoes Little Women.) These books are profound, and every time I read one of them I find something I have not found before—but they are so clearly written that a teenaged reader gets as much as he/she can get from any book at that time of life. The first time I read Huckleberry Finn I laughed and laughed. When I took it on a vacation a year or two ago and re-read it, I marveled at how much I had missed earlier. Huck’s description of the gathering of a storm on the river, and his struggle of conscience when he breaks down and says, "All right, I’ll go to hell," and helps the slave-man Jim get away—these are among the best passages I have ever read in any book.

I don’t mean to get started on an essay.

I have already sent "personhood" to Laurence Peter, now I’ll send him "person friend."

I went to the doctor yesterday, and he said my lung cancer was yielding well to treatment. It does not hurt. My health problem is that my body has mobilized all its strength to fight the cancer, leaving me so weak that I can hardly walk across a room without holding on to the furniture. I hate my helplessness, but Colette and other friends are being mighty co-operative. My weight has gone down below 90 pounds. (I weighed 130 last time you saw me) and I have a lean and hungry look, but I am progressing in health if not beauty...
I am reading a good novel, Smiley's People. No dirty words, no perverted sex practices, just a good story about people I would be interested in if they were alive. One compensation for illness is that it gives us plenty of time to read. . . . (Northridge)

For no explained reason, the doctor seemed still to be misleading Bristow, for on April 25, 1980, she again wrote Jean to thank her for sending a book, reporting that "The doctor says my cancer is dwindling, so it won't last forever" (Northridge).

She had discovered, she told Fleming in this, her last known letter,

I have leisure now to do a lot of reading--one more reason why I welcome your book. . . . I find that this illness of mine sometimes makes my head feel as wobbly as my legs.

So, life goes on and it is always interesting because there is always something surprising about it. (Hibler)

As ill as she was, however, even at this time, Bristow continued actively concerned about PEN, noting in her journal April 19, "Colette in . . . hospital, cannot take care of PEN reservations; [illegible] already received enclosed, will send rest as they come in." She also wrote in a letter to Fleming dated on this same day that "Colette and other friends are being mighty co-operative." About her brother, however, her last notation, whose meaning is unclear, was "Louis--letter stop upon this spot etc" (J 2 May 1980). Prior to this time, she had not entered a hospital. She was, however, taken to St Elizabeth's Convalescent Hospital, sometime between May 2 and June 8. On Sunday, June 8, Jean Fleming recorded in a letter that she had called for Bristow there on June 8.

According to Fleming, Bristow was so distressed at her brother's callous attitude when she had first told him of her illness that she did not feel inclined to communicate further with him about her state of health. It was Abbey Dailey who informed Louis Bristow that his sister was critically ill after she had entered St.
Elizabeth’s Convalescent Hospital. It was only then that he and his wife "hot-footed out here" (Fleming, 17 July 1994).

Fleming wrote to Carol Brandt July 7, 1980, apprising Brandt of events,

. . . After Bruce’s death, the three of us [she, her husband Howard, and Bristow] had theater-dinner dates at least once a month. We shared books and articles we liked, humor and games we enjoyed, and writing and ideas we had contempt for. We were together a great deal. We were close friends.

I can’t remember how long ago Gwen asked me to be her literary advisor. . . . Because Howard was an original faculty member (history) and an administrator at California State University, Northridge, it became natural for Gwen to do more and more of her research through the University library. As you well know, Gwen was one hell of a researcher—meticulous and inexhaustible. Our professional interests made our friendship even deeper. Knowing my responsibility for Gwen’s literary product, I spoke to Norman Tanis, the head librarian at SCUN, some years ago, and he said the University would be delighted to accept her collection, partly so because he had become very fond of Gwen personally.

Now to the horrible present. When the Bristows arrived and started to systematically alienate all of Gwen’s friends, neighbors, and business associates, we began to get daily phone calls of dismay and anger from Colette and Roberta Whitehead. The Bristows were dismantling the apartments and eventually sister Eunice, whom I think of Aello, called to say that they were giving up Gwen’s apartment, and I’d better come down and dispose of the papers. ("Gwen will nevah get back to it," said Eunice. "She’s dyin’." By the way, Gwen had been reporting to me that she was feeling better and that the doctor said that the tumor was getting smaller.)

On February 4, 1972, Bristow had modified her will and named Jean Fleming to serve as her literary agent, "with full authority to dispose of all my manuscripts, notes, and other papers" (J 4 Feb. 1972). Thus, it was natural that Fleming was continually on guard for Bristow’s literary product.

In the course of time, in spite of the confusion surrounding Louis’s moving Bristow from California to New Orleans, Fleming, on July 12, was able to deposit the bulk of Bristow’s documents, including her scrapbooks, whatever letters had not
been destroyed, her husband’s movie scripts, journals, and valuable collections of
books and rare magazines safely in the Oviatt Library on campus at California State
University in Northridge (Fleming, letter, 7 July 1980).

As Louis and Eunice Bristow had assessed the situation upon arrival in
California, they had determined that keeping secret their plans to get Bristow out of
the hospital and out of California was essential to avoid the inevitable publicity that
Bristow’s leaving would attract. She was not, they reasoned, well enough for the
confusion and stress of closing her apartment and saying goodbye to friends, hence,
the secreting her into an airport motel, preparatory to a Thursday flight to New
Orleans (E. Bristow).

Bristow’s friends in California and New York perceived the situation
differently. In early June Bruce Biggs, whose long-standing business association had
grown to one of friendship and trust, was deeply grieved at the turn of events.
According to his habit of tending to her affairs, he had gone to St. Elizabeth’s
Convalescent Hospital in early June to get Bristow to sign some checks. She was
ill, of course, but Biggs found her attitude confusing and troubling. This time she
said she could no longer sign anything without her brother’s approval (Fleming,
letter to Carol Brandt, Hibler).

Both hurt and offended after his long years of trusted service and friendship,
Biggs read her attitude as one of distrust; he inferred that she had been led to
believe he was after her money. Biggs was at first quite angry—not with Bristow
because he realized she was ill, believing, instead, that Bristow’s brother and his
wife had caused the change. When he was able to think more objectively, Biggs’
intense hurt. Later, he could do nothing to salvage the long friendship because of Bristow's departure for New Orleans (Biggs).

Amid the confusion and pain of Bristow's illness, Jean Fleming wrote to Carol Brandt, reporting futile efforts to talk with Bristow, who, after June 12 was in New Orleans. Fleming wrote that Louis claimed Bristow was "much too sick to answer the phone and . . . she sleeps all the time." Fleming was leery:

Felicia gave me Mike Hibler's phone number and I called him. He has been splendid. Howard and I felt that we shouldn't do anything without Mike being there. So we set up a meeting with Norman Tanis, Mike Hibler and his secretary, and Howard and me at Gwen's apartment for Tuesday, June 10, at 10:00 A.M. Sunday morning, June 8, I called St. Elizabeth's (Gwen did not have a phone in her room) and left a message saying we would come by to see her Monday evening and then would see her Tuesday afternoon to report about Norm taking out the collection. About 9:30 P.M., Sunday night, a nurse from St. Elizabeth's called (she sounded as though she'd just gotten off a boat from Cuba) and said that Gwen said she was too ill to see us on Monday—nothing about Tuesday. Although we weren't convinced that these were her wishes, we decided not to go to see her on Monday, but we did go to L. A. that day.

Early on Tuesday morning, Mike called us at our motel to say that the meeting time at Gwen's was changed from 10:00 to 1:00 on that same day. We all gathered at 1:00. The Bristows were not there. Their surrogate, a Presbyterian minister with a cadaverous smile, had the keys to the apartment, let us in and watched us all very carefully all the time. Except for the manuscripts, Gwen's journals, and such things (some of the journals were missing), the place was almost empty. . . . Included were the working scripts of a number of Bruce's plays and a complete set of Harper's which the minister informed me that Gwen wanted me to have. I gave them to the library too where they will be used. Norman promised a complete inventory (the minister was very insistent that this go to Mr. (Dr.?) Bristow for income tax purposes.)

When we had finished, Mike, Howard and I drove to St. Elizabeth's to report to Gwen. We were told at the desk that her brother had removed her from the place that morning. Later we found out that he'd checked her in to an airport motel until they could take a Thursday plane to New Orleans.

I . . . did want you to know that her literary product is well housed. . . . Also you should know that, according to Mike, there is nothing legally that can be done. Louis is her closest relative, her
heir, and he and his wife have carefully estranged Gwen from her friends, so . . . she went with them willingly. (Fleming, letter to Carol Brandt, 7 July 1980)

In a postscript, Fleming, very angry that her "cards and letters of explanations" about arrangements for Bristow's materials had not reached Bristow, thought she had never "in all my personal or professional life . . . met with calculated cruelty and deception--and to all the people who love Gwen."

Bristow's sister-in-law Eunice Bristow recalls the events differently:

The first thing we did when we got to California, we took her to her apartment . . . two apartments in Encino . . . but one apartment didn't have anything in it but books, some furniture with mostly books. You can imagine a two-bedroom apartment lined with books. I don't know whoever . . . a friend came and said he would help us. He had no idea what we had to put up with. . . . And we had to get her out without publicity. She never got out of bed. There was nobody to take care of her after her husband died the last few years she was in California. (E. Bristow)

At the turn of events, all of Bristow's friends were horrified. Roberta Whitehead, along with Colette Burns, and Ken Givens, Colette's son, made daily frantic calls to Jean Fleming (Fleming, interview, 17 July 1993). Bristow's acquaintances in California were dismayed and angry, but Eunice Bristow, defending herself, wrote to Jean Fleming on Tuesday, July 14, 1980, explaining:

Dear Mrs. Fleming,

Gwen appreciated your card and asked me to answer. I cannot understand "why your family is keeping them (notes) from you and us apart," as we have received only one letter from you which we gave to Gwen the same day it arrived when we made our daily visit.

You know she is unable to write replies to any of the many people who are remembering her with cards, etc.

Her correct address is Chateau de Notre Dame, Room 214, 2832 Burdette St., New Orleans, La. 70118. Someone at the Carrollton Ave. address kindly forwarded your card.

Yours truly,

Eunice Bristow
This new address was part of the horror for Bristow's California friends, who knew her dislike of nursing homes. Says Jean Fleming, the final act of putting Bristow into a convalescent home was perhaps the cruelest of all, for it was a predicament Bristow particularly abhorred. Bristow felt so strongly about this that at no time did she consider subjecting her beloved Bruce to the care of an outside agency (Fleming and Journals).

One of many instances in which Bristow expressed her attitude about such matters concerned Madge Kennedy when Kennedy had a "near-stroke" in 1973. Bristow, especially worried that Kennedy was showing symptoms of diabetes, talked with her own doctor about Kennedy. Of the incident Bristow wrote, "I feel much better now that I have discussed this with him. Madge is all alone in the world and she is such a dear that she deserves to have her friends rally round when she needs them" (J 22 Aug. 1973).

In August, Fleming wrote Carol Brandt that they were unable to communicate with Bristow at all, and the various stories from the Bristows in Louisiana were too conflicting to be reconciled (Northridge). Bristow's friends and acquaintances in California continued to point the finger of blame mainly toward Eunice Bristow. Echoing Attorney Michael Hibler and Bruce Biggs' second wife, Fleming reiterates Bristow's expressed dislike for her brother's new wife. (She had also worried about her nieces, Angie and Roberta. Their unhappiness about the marriage concerned Bristow because, she said, "If anything happens to my brother the burden of caring for him will rest on their shoulders.") Colette Burns' account is the same:
. . . [Eunice] sat at the foot of the bed, her elbow propped on the desk to her right, looking stony-faced. She never said one word—just glowered.

The second time was when the Givens and I were calling on Gwen, one Saturday morning, at the Convalescent Hospital. . . . We were there but five minutes when the Bristows arrived. Louis greeted us but Eunice marched into the bathroom without looking at us. One might imagine she was on a hurry call, but when she came out of the room, she was just as rigid and dark-faced as before—never acknowledging our presence. (Burns, letter to Hibler, 25 July 1980)

Whatever happened to cause Louis Bristow to abscond from California with his terminally ill sister, her friends in California agree, it had to be due to Eunice's influence. Patricia Manning Tanner, Bruce Manning's only daughter, on the other hand, thinks both Louis and Eunice Bristow were at fault. Tanner recalls that when her father died in 1965, Bristow delayed notifying Tanner until "it was too late for me even to send flowers." Later an attorney from California, whose identify Tanner does not recall, got in touch with her. She might, he suggested, wish to contest her father's will, which was in the six-figure range and which totally ignored her, his only child. Tanner, however, talked the matter over with her husband, and they agreed not to pursue the matter. They reasoned that Manning had been too ill to work for several years and Bristow had taken care of him during that time; she did not want to demand what she felt Bristow might need, and probably had, in fact, earned. Tanner would wait; perhaps there was a clause leaving her something when Bristow died. For the time being, in addition to other reasons for not pursuing the matter, her husband had been a successful doctor and they were not in need. Of course, none of this reasoning assuaged Tanner's pain at the loss of her father nor her sense of rejection (Tanner).
Although she had not seen her father for several years, she had thus became involved with the proceedings. Upon Bristow's death, she recalls that she learned that Bristow's brother and his wife had "romanced" Bristow into signing over to them power of attorney by telling her that they were her only family and that what she needed was to be with her family, that they would take her home with them and take care of her. Once they had control of her money, they sneaked her out of California.

Colette Burns concurred, reporting the strange proceedings in a July 25, 1980, letter to Michael Hibler. "Madge Kennedy, the long-time N. Y. state and movie star, and friend of Bristow's for many years, has termed it 'something out of a Gothic novel,'" Colette reported. However, as Michael Hibler wrote Burns later,

You and I have a similar understanding of the situation surrounding Gwen. . . . I really think that [Bristow's brother] has his sister's best interests at heart; however, he also has to deal with Eunice, and unfortunately, his dealings with Eunice operate not always to Gwen's best interests.

My first contact with Louis Bristow was really very cordial. His initial contact was seeking my assistance concerning his sister so that her affairs could be handled properly. At the time of my second contact, I could see that Eunice was interested in using Gwen to her own best interest. When I saw what was happening, Bruce Biggs and I made a power play to isolate Eunice and Louis, and Bruce and I were simply outflanked. They in effect kidnapped Gwen from us.

Colette, I think that we have nailed the situation down, and the best thing that we can do at this time is not complain about what might have been but make sure that we do everything within our power to help Gwen at this time, which would be by way of phone calls and correspondence. (Hibler, letter to Colette Burns, 30 July 1980)
Bruce Biggs also came to believe Louis was being influenced by his wife Eunice, probably for Gwen’s money. According to Felicia Imlay, Bruce’s secretary, there should have been a great deal of money. Her books had been in publication with superb sales since 1937. They were still being published on a very strong market overseas, so their royalties should have been quite lucrative (Imlay).

However, toward the end Eunice dutifully responded with "thank you" cards apprising Roberta Whitehead of Gwen’s deteriorating condition, writing as she did on August 11, 1980,

"Thank You" for calling. We went to the Chateau at once, and found Gwen comfortably installed in bed. When she reached for the phone to answer your ring she dropped the receiver and the phone fell on the floor. She is enjoying the books, and after her usual orange juice asked for one of your cookies. We try to keep her interested in the news. Now she’s watching the hurricane. We all have our fingers crossed. 185 hr. winds are the second worst storm in recorded history. She has your latest card beside her pink begonia plant.

Sincerely,
Eunice

But Bristow’s literary associates and California friends continued to worry about her well being. In August Carol Brandt wrote to Jean Fleming that she would be grateful if Jean would let Bristow know she was "following her progress with concern and love," again offering her assistance. She concluded, saying,

If Gwen is suffering physically and she certainly is suffering physiologically I cannot help but believe she is starving her way out. I would feel better if I knew that the place she is staying is as attractive and luxurious as possible for her morale. For someone of such character and such pride this shocking end of her life seems to me too cruel. (Brandt, letter to Fleming)
Bristow died August 17, 1980, but her California friends could grieve only from a distance. The New Orleans legal firm of Nicaud, Justrabo & Rousset wrote to Colette Burns October 14, 1980, saying,

Dear Mrs. Kolsbun:
Thank you for the legacy receipt with your informative letter of October 10 to which I shall pass on to Dr. Bristow, Mrs. Manning’s brother.
I have no doubt Mrs. Manning’s coming to New Orleans was quite a disappointment to some. But I gather that while she was living, she had taken good care of those who had been of service to her.
Mrs. Manning’s health was such that her brother had to go to California to attend to her. She needed attention of relatives, not of strangers, however well meaning. Dr. Bristow’s stay was perforce limited, and her condition required no delay. After she came here, she could not stay at her brother’s fine, comfortable home for she was terminally ill and needed constant medical attention, which she got at the excellent, new nursing facility she entered close to her brother.
I visited Mrs. Manning and except at the end she was in pretty good spirits. It is understandable that she would miss some of her old friends. Her brother did everything to make her comfortable as only a relative could.

Colette Burns sent Jean Fleming a copy of this letter; in anger and frustration, Fleming inserted her diacritical markings implying her own distress and mailed it the Louisiana law firm of Nicaud, Justrabo, and Rousset. In part, she wrote,

I have just read your letter to Mrs. Kolsbun and must straighten you out on several matters. It is obvious from your letter that you did not know Gwen at all. Dr. Fleming and I had been close friends of Gwen and Bruce since 1958 when we bought the Lassen St. estate from them. First you speak of strangers vs. relatives. Gwen had lived in California for over 45 years—the major part of her life. This was her home here. These were the people she knew and loved and who knew and loved her back. It was her relatives who were strangers. She visited New Orleans only out of a sense of duty and to do research. However well meaning, her relatives were cruel and heartless, both in
the fact that they took Gwen away and the manner in which they did it. Dr. Fleming and I are personal witnesses to that fact. The devious way in which they kept us from Gwen on our June trip to see her was base and mean. . . .

Finally, and most important the brother and sister-in-law . . . will have to answer why they did not return Gwen to the burial plot she had had in Forest Lawn at the very least 15 years to lie beside her beloved husband Bruce Manning, who died in 1965. Don't tell me that Gwen's choice to go to [New Orleans] because if she said "Yes," she was too sick to be asked. Gwen always planned to be buried next to Bruce. (Hibler)

Bristow's death certificate lists her death caused by "Carcinouratosis" due to "Carcinoma of lung" with the "Approximate interval between onset and death as December 1979 and death on August 17, 1980" (Bristow family papers). In a letter dated Friday, August 22, 1980, Eunice Bristow wrote a letter to Roberta Whitehead:

We are deeply grateful for the expression of sympathy because of our recent sorrow. It is a friend like you that lets us know some people really care.

How wonderful of your group to plan to honor Gwen, [Roberta had written that the Booksellers' Association was honoring Gwen at its Fall Awards Dinner. Bristow was to be its first "Earlier Honoree" (Northridge)] and we are grateful that she knew of the intended honor. Would she could have been with all of you in October!

The Associated Press, The Times-Picayune, Baton Rouge The Register learned the news almost immediately Sunday, and I was told it was broadcast on radio and TV. We did not give any interviews or pictures, but many confused facts were printed, and the dreadful picture I am enclosing. I have piles of mail to answer. We are planning a memorial to Gwen at our church. Don't know just what it will be yet.

The Chateau [de Notre Dame] is supposed to let me know if any mail is received there.

Thank you for the attention you gave Gwen during her illness. It was a great comfort to her, and to us. We shall never forget it.

Sincerely,
Eunice

On September 2, 1980, Eunice Bristow wrote again to Roberta Whitehead, saying,
Dear Roberta,

Received 2 communications from you today. Now to try to answer everything.

Louis' daughter in N. O. was ill and needed him. We were exhausted from the physical work of nursing, and from having to listen to unkind phone calls and visits. Both of Gwen's doctors--the one she had at the hospital and one at nursing home both urged us to take her home. . . . It was the right decision. Gwen was too tired after 2 moves from hospital to apt.--from apt. to St. Elizabeth's and did not feel equal to entertaining guests.

She was glad to see you and appreciated your visits. You actually did her good as did Abby Dailey and the pastor of the Presbyterian church. (Incidentally, we are Baptists. Gwen's father was a Baptist minister before he built the Baptist Hospital in New Orleans and several others.)

We took care of her car insurance, and had the title, etc. transferred to St. Elizabeth's when we gave them the car. I talked to her broker Gorden Casey on the phone in L.A. in June before leaving which he does not choose to remember.

I am writing all this--I do not know how many of these people we were involved with you know--but if anyone says anything to you at least you know the truth of the matter. We are having a surprising amount of unsolicited paper work which keeps us busy.

Thank you for your expression of sympathy, and the note which I received this week. It is surprising how few we have received from her so called California friends.

We are planning a memorial to Gwen at our church. I'll let you know more about it later.

Sincerely,

Eunice

Bristow's funeral was conducted quietly. Dr. Lee, who gave the eulogy, did not know Bristow, but he was very close to Bristow's brother (Fensin, interview, 25 July, 1993). Eunice Bristow explained the choice of Garden of Memories in Metairie, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans: "... because she didn't die [in California], she wasn't eligible [for burial in Forest Lawn]" (E. Bristow, 15 July, 1993). However, according to Lupé Bond of Forest Lawn Cemeteries, such was not the case: place of death does not prohibit burial in Forest Lawn (Bond).
Eunice Bristow recalls her husband's reasoning for moving Bristow to Louisiana. Upon their arriving in California, he, being a doctor, immediately examined her and recognized at once her dying condition. Thinking the fastest, quietest way best, he quickly set about making the necessary arrangements to take her to Louisiana (Fensin, 26 Dec. 1992). After all has transpired over the years, today Eunice Bristow feels her husband took the only steps open to him relative to Bristow's care at the time. (E. Bristow, 15 July 1992).

However, Bristow's associates have remained unconvinced. In August, Carol Brandt of Brandt and Brandt Literary Agents, wrote Jean Fleming:

For Gwen's sake, I am glad she is free. It is tragic that she was moved from friendship, loyalty and kindness of you and all her friends. We will all miss her. She was a very great lady and a very talented one. (Northridge)

Final Honors

Bristow was beloved and honored in several states, with various groups that "claimed" her for reasons of their own. For example, in 1981 the Houston-Love Memorial Library in Dothan, Alabama, honored her through her long-time friend Mrs. Annie Lorrie Stutts, with whom Bristow became friends while they were in college together at Judson. Annie Lorrie had saved her almost sixty years of correspondence with Bristow and lent her collection for the Dothan Library display. On July 15, 1981, in a special ceremony, the library opened its display of Bristow memorabilia, which included books, letters, and pictures from the personal collection of Mrs. Stutts. However, she did not donate these items to that library (Judson). They remain in the Stutts collection.
In 1989, in a formal ceremony in Marion, Alabama, Bristow was inducted into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame at Judson College. Hanging among those of eighteen of her predecessors lining the walls of Bowling Library is a bronze plaque on which is Bristow's portrait and the following inscription: "1903-1980 Gwen Bristow Successful journalist and prolific novelist. Some of her best-selling works were translated into a dozen different languages."

Thomas Johnson of the University of South Carolina, out of regard for his state's being Bristow's birthplace and her novel *Celia Garth*, as well as his admiration for Bristow as an author, actively sought to acquire her personal library and papers to house in the Caroliniana Library in honor of the fact that South Carolina was her birth state.

When Gwen died August 17, 1980, the Judson College paper stated, "Paul Harvey reported ['Judson's best selling author's'] passing in his broadcast of Aug. 18 (Caroliniana). She was 76."

The Baton Rouge *The Register* noted, "...we have lost a valuable and longtime friend--Gwen Bristow" ("Farewell to Gwen Bristow") According to an unidentifiable source from Louisiana, "Her life ended in the city where the excitement--the newspaper stories, the murder mysteries, the novels, the movie scripts--all began to take shape. It was appropriate" (Judson).
1. From the beginning of the year, Bristow made frequent, various complaints in her journal.

2. This is the opinion of the people in California who knew Bristow well. Earlier, according to Fleming, Bristow had thought she liked her brother’s second wife because "she did not get in Bristow’s way."
REFERENCES


"Author Gwen Bristow Is Flying to Atlanta: Mr. and Mrs. Frank Neely to Entertain Novelist and Miss Annette Duchein," Atlanta Journal 5 June 1938.

Baptist State Convention, Manual of Information: 92nd Annual Session. 3-5 Dec. 912.


Baton Rouge Mid-City Branch Library. Baton Rouge.


"A Bow to Gwen Bristow: Louisiana Author Whose Jubilee Trail Is Being Made into a Movie." Register 17 Nov. 1953: 2+.


---. Personal interview. 7 Jan. 1993.


---. Letter to Gwen Bristow. 27 May 1936. (Bristow family papers).

---. Letter to Gwen Bristow. 15 Jan. 1937. (Bristow family papers).


388

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


---. *Gwen Bristow.* N.p.: n.p, ([c. 1940]).


---. Letter to Bruce Manning. 12 Sept. 1935. (Bristow family papers).


---. Letter to Jean Fleming. 29 Nov. 1979. (Northridge).
---. "Medical Missionary to Nigeria—Tulane Graduate of 1928." Register 2 June
---. "New Orleans Research Provides Local Historical Footnotes." Register May
---. "A Review of The Handsome Road." A review prepared for oral delivery,
Spring 1938, as recorded by Annette Duchein. (Caroliniana).
---. This Side of Glory. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1940.
---. This Side of Glory. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1940. (Special
Collections, James A. Rogers Library, Francis Marion College, Florence, South
Carolina).
---. "Writing About Louisiana." Register 4 July 1953: 3.

Bristow, M. E., "Notes on the Bristow Family," Tyler's

Bristow, Dr. Otis Allen. Family records. West Point, VA. Bulletin of Judson
College: Catalogue for 1923-1924 Vol. XI, No. 5 (Marion, Alabama: May
1924) 20.


---. Letter to the author. 3 June 1993.


---. Personal interview. 20 Nov. 1993.


"Farewell to Gwen Bristow." Register Football 1980: 12.


---. Telephone interview. 20 Aug. 1993.

First Baptist Church library. Abbeville, SC.
First Baptist Church. Marion, SC.

First Baptist Church. Williamston, SC.

Fleming, Jean. Letter to Carol Brandt. 7 July 1980.
---. Telephone interview. 17 July 1993.
---. Telephone interview. 20 Nov. 1993.
---. "To Louisiana Attorneys." n.d. Copy to author.


Gwen Bristow Collection California State U at Northridge. Northridge: Oviatt Library.


Harper Norman, "History of the Abbeville First Baptist Church," ts., sent by Doris Hughes, Abbeville County Library, Abbeville, SC.


Hibler, Michael. Collection of correspondence relative to Bristow at the time of her illness and death.


Hoyt, Georgann Tanner. Telephone interview. 25 May 1994.


Imlay, Felicia. Telephone interview. 30 July 1993.

Indirect Index to Deeds, 1905-1925. Abbeville: Abbeville Court House.

"Installation." Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame, Judson College, Marion, Alabama, 1989.


Judson College Library Archives. Gwen Bristow Collection Marion, AL.


Lowry, Julia B. "Carolina’s Gwen Bristow Finds She’s Obliged to Write!" The State Magazine 5 Nov. 1950: 7.


Mack-Manning, Bruce and Gwen Bristow, Marriage license, 14 Jan. 1929.


Manning, Bruce, Letter to Gwen Bristow, Dec. 1937.

Marion County Library Collection. Marion, SC.


The Ninth Guest Brimful of Thrills: New Mystery Drama Well-Received by Large Audience at Garrick Theatre," Courier 2 June 1931.


Tulane University Manuscripts, Rare Books, and U Archives, Gwen Bristow Collection, Howard-Tilton Library, New Orleans.


Voter Registration Files. New Orleans Public Library, Main Branch at Tulane and Loyola Avenues.


APPENDICES

A Churches


First Baptist Church. Marion, SC. 8 Jan. 1993.

First Baptist Church. Williamston, SC. 6 Nov. 1993.
B Interviews

Bowie, Margaret Flynn. Personal interview. 4, 5 January 1993.


Hughes, Doris K. Personal interview. 4 Jan. 1993.


Howie, Vickie. Personal interview. 5 January 1993.


Johnson, Thomas L. Personal interview. 8 Jan. 1993.

Klugh, Margaret. Personal interview. 5 Jan. 1993.


Libraries


Hill Memorial Library. LSU. Baton Rouge.

Marion County Library. Marion, SC. 8 Jan. 1993.

Mid-City Branch Library. Baton Rouge.

New Orleans Public Library (main branch).


Southeastern Louisiana U. Hammond, LA.

**Foreign Countries Publishing Which Published Bristow’s Works**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Berlin</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
POSTSCRIPT

Handled in the Civil District Court in New Orleans, the succession of Bristow's estate (almost half a million in assets) was completed June 2, 1981. It gave one half of her estate to her brother Louis, one fourth to his wife Eunice, one twelfth each to nieces Angie and Roberta and granddaughter Melanie. Bristow also remembered several of her friends in California with small legacies. However, recalled New Orleans Attorney Gordon Hartman on August 2, 1993 via the telephone, "Through her reluctance to provide information, Eunice Bristow made winding up Bristow's affairs worse by complicating the already difficult task of tracing book royalties."

Earlier in 1989, Bristow's long-time friend Annie Lorrie Stutts suffered a debilitating stroke, leaving her unable to speak and requiring that she be placed in a nursing home. She was unable to attend the ceremony honoring Bristow's induction to the Alabama Hall of Fame.

Eunice Bristow was never one to neglect the dictates of etiquette. Returning from the ceremony inducting Gwen into the Alabama Hall of Fame, she wrote a gracious note to Mildred G. Yelverton thanking her for the hospitality and praising the work done in Bristow's honor (Judson).

Bristow’s brother Louis continued in excellent health for several years. In 1991, however, New Orleans had what is sometimes referred to as one of those really severe "hundred-year floods." Slipping in some water that had puddled on the garage floor, he broke his hip and never recovered. After about two months in the hospital,
steadily deteriorating, Dr. Louis Judson Bristow, Jr., died August 2, 1992, on his
daughter Angie Gwen’s birthday, having several times told his Angie and Roberta,
"I’m ready to go. I’ve done everything I wanted to do."

His daughter Ann Gwen Fensin felt he had. He had been a good father, a
successful radiologist, a world traveler. He had also been, in general, a happy man.
Yet for some reason, he clung to life, unmistakably struggling with some inward
dilemma. Angie, noting his apparent but silent anxiety, tried to reassure him.

"Dad, you know, you don’t have to worry about leaving Roe and me behind.
You brought us up to be perfectly independent. We can get along just fine, and it’s
all right for you to go." Quickly she knew she had hit upon the right explanation for
his restlessness. He visibly relaxed. Next morning, he died quietly, the last of Louis
Judson and Caroline Winkler Bristow’s children, Caroline Bristow Riley having died
VITA

Billie J. Cashio Theriot was born at Batchelor, Louisiana. She graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1962 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a minor in social studies. In 1974, she earned a Master of Education in Administration and Supervision at Southeastern Louisiana University and continued her studies to earn a "plus 30." In 1984, she earned a Master of Arts in English at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. Her main field of interest is Southern literature, but she generally enjoys all areas of the discipline. She is currently an assistant professor at Southeastern Louisiana University, where she has taught since August 1982. Prior to that, she taught high school sophomore and college preparatory (senior) English for nineteen years. She lives in Loranger, Louisiana, a predominately dairy community, ten miles north of Hammond with her husband of thirty-three years, Harvey A. Theriot, Jr. She is the mother of two daughters--Terri Anne and Paula--and the grandmother of a boy, Justin--aged two, and a girl, Lacey aged three months.
Candidate: Billie J. Theriot

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: Gwen Bristow: A Biography with Criticism of Her Plantation Trilogy

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination: October 27, 1994