

Author's Note

Once upon a time, there was a writer. She had just stowed a manuscript away in a drawer. You know the drawer, every writer has one—a dark, secret drawer where failed stories are cast away or buried, so the writer can be free.

Once upon a time, the writer had a good, grieving cry, and then she woke up early the next morning. She had paper, and a pen, and an urge to write something, anything, to distance herself from the dead manuscript still taunting her from the drawer. It was a pink June morning, 7 a.m., and she wrote down a title: *Hour of the Bees*.

Who were the bees? What was the hour? She didn't know. Not yet.

She wrote a first line: “The bees, *chiquita*. The bees are coming,’ Serge calls to me from the porch.”

Who was Serge? Why were the bees coming? She didn't know. Not yet.

For ten days, the writer walked her rambunctious three-year-old daughter to the park and sat in the shade and filled a notebook. For ten days, she listened to Clint Mansell's haunting soundtrack for the film *The Fountain*, and she wrote. In ten days, she had come to the end. But she still didn't know. Not yet.



photo by Hannah Kerby

Hour of the Bees poured out of me with quiet, unrelenting force, and I feel like now, at the end of the editing, I'm finally able to understand why I wrote it.

It comes from my fear of death, the kind of fear that keeps my feet cold at night. *Why can't we just keep on living?* I often thought



as a child. I'm no Peter Pan: death holds no adventure for me. Life, and loved ones, and everything here on earth—this is adventure, and we all have a tiny time frame into which to cram all that adventure.

It comes from my love of tree of life motifs. Every culture has its own version, all of them beautiful and heartbreaking. Also, my love of trees—twisting willow trees, trees for climbing, fruit trees, autumn leaves gathering beneath, bumpy roots, Christmas trees, dead trees.

It comes from my weird, twisted idea of romance—what does Rosa love more in *Hour of the Bees*, Sergio? Or Raul? Or life itself? I wrote her, and I still don't know.

It comes from so many other things, other influences that I couldn't see until it was finished: Salvador Dalí's surrealism; a phobia of snakes; Gabriel García Márquez and the magical realism genre; the way the Utah desert sunset looks against craggy mountains; my sister's time working as an aide in an assisted-living facility for dementia patients; the phrase *carpe diem*; the book *Holes* by Louis Sachar; trees, trees, trees . . .

Sometime during the year between when I finished writing the book and its acquisition by my publisher, I realized what the ultimate source of *Hour of the Bees* was: the death of my maternal grandfather when I was fourteen. It was my first real experience with death, and the loss of someone so close to me changed how I viewed everything. It might seem strange that I wasn't conscious of this as I was writing the novel, but it was such a profound event in my life that it has defined everything else for fifteen years. *Hour of the Bees* is my response to fourteen-year-old Lindsay: death shouldn't define life. Live life to the fullest and you won't be afraid to die. I hope this message resonates with readers of *Hour of the Bees*. I hope readers turn the last page and know that even death doesn't stop the huge, great story, of which we are all a part.

Once upon a time, there was a writer. She always wanted to be an author. She wrote the book that turned her into one. This is that book.

