



## Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings

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## **Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings** Mary Henley Rubio

Mary Henley Rubio has spent over two decades researching Montgomery's life, and has put together a comprehensive and penetrating picture of this Canadian literary icon, all set in rich social context. Extensive interviews with people who knew Montgomery – her son, maids, friends, relatives, all now deceased – are only part of the material gathered in a journey to understand Montgomery that took Rubio to Poland and the highlands of Scotland.

From Montgomery's apparently idyllic childhood in Prince Edward Island to her passion-filled adolescence and young adulthood, to her legal fights as world-famous author, to her shattering experiences with motherhood and as wife to a deeply troubled man, this fascinating, intimate narrative of her life will engage and delight.

## **Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings Details**

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## From Reader Review Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings for online ebook

### Margaret says

This isn't as good as the biography I read before it (Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf*, which I think is going to be my gold standard for a while), but it's an admirable biography. Rubio co-edited Montgomery's journals for publication, and her in-depth knowledge of Montgomery provides an amazing level of detail and an ability to weigh the contents of Montgomery's journals (rewritten extensively by Montgomery to convey her preferred version of her life) with other sources to paint a fuller picture. Rubio's writing style isn't polished, and I wished she'd talked more about Montgomery's books, but those small weaknesses are more than outweighed by the book's strengths.

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### Stephanie says

Whooboy. This is one of the best biographies I've ever read, but did it send me into a downward spiral. After reading all of Maud's journals, I was determined to fill in the gaps. Rubio's account did not disappoint. Not only did she do some impressive detective work, interviewing old associates of Montgomery, but she adds her own astute observations about the writer throughout this account. Montgomery's incredible talent, wit and intelligence is counterbalanced with snobbery, denial and self-pity.

There's no doubt Lucy Maud Montgomery was dealt some terrible cards in life. It's heartbreaking to read about nasty relatives who treated her like a second-class citizen, a depressive husband who had no appreciation for her talent, and a manipulative son who has all the earmarks of a sociopath. Add to this a crippling addiction to barbiturates, which were prescribed to Montgomery by doctors who didn't understand the effects of these drugs on depression, I found myself crying for her several times. To Maud's great credit, she tried combating these problems through crafting her own novels, encouraging young writers, being a good friend and doing lots of great work for her church.

BUT. Her disdain for a nice girl her younger son dated seems totally out of step with the ideals she promoted on her books. Instead of assessing the girlfriend on the strength of her character, Maud heaps her with her derision for "living on North Street"(HORRORS!) and having the temerity to be the daughter of a bootlegger. Meanwhile, her own older son was busy stealing from maids, exposing himself to young women, and giving his wife VD. It's this kind of cognitive dissonance that kept me shaking my head in utter bewilderment throughout the whole book. Although she repeatedly expresses despair over her older son's antisocial ways, Maud enjoyed a bond with him that had tinges of incest.

I mean, I don't know about you, but if I were shelling out big bucks for my son to go to law school, despite his refusal to study and attend classes, I don't think I would spend my free time lying in bed with him, stroking his hair, and murmuring endearments into his ear. But I'm a little like Rachel Lynde in that way...totally judgmental.

I do disagree with Rubio on one point. I found LMM's 40-page discourse on the death of her cat Lucky TOTALLY understandable and one of the most compelling parts of her journals.

*The Gift of Wings* is a phenomenal work that is informative, entertaining and thought-provoking. I am so impressed with Mary Henley Rubio's research and insight. Her compassion, along with an insistence to presenting an objective picture of all the characters involved, made this an illuminating read. But, oh, my

God. The sorrow, pathos and anxiety described in these pages brought me to my knees. I fervently hope the author has a great therapist, as well as a 24-hour liquor store within walking distance of her home. Because writing the story of Lucy Maud Montgomery's life would have been enough for Anne of Green Gables to puncture her puffed sleeves, poison her kindred spirits and become an utter nihilist.

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### Sally says

This is an amazing biography about LM Montgomery. It is well-written and unbelievably well researched. But it is so sad! I felt haunted and disturbed by her story for at least two days after I finished this book. Ironically, even though Maud Montgomery was a dutiful and active minister's wife, she never once seemed to give a thought to the fact that the faith she served for so long might hold some truth, or comfort in the face of the misery she lived with. Mary Henley Rubio did an amazing job of portraying the whole of Montgomery's character, both good and less good. I also really appreciated the Epilogue which told what became of some of the main people who had affected Montgomery's life.

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### Elizabeth says

This was an outstanding and well researched biography of LMM. However, I have two issues with this book:

1. I read this with my friend Jamie and she has not read all of LMM's books yet and the author gave spoilers to ALL LMM's books! It was okay for me because I have read them all but it annoyed me for Jamie's sake and for all the other people out there who may read this bio and may not have read all LMM's books.
  2. I did not like how the author tried to make sensationalize (and I'm stealing this word from my friend Jamie's review) so many aspects of LMM's life. She tried to make it like LMM has a very complex and complicated inner emotional life etc. That she was an abuser of drugs. Wrong-- she was human and she was doing the best she could given the time period and the medications available.
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### Jamie says

This was a well researched and informative book on the life of L.M. Montgomery. It was fascinating to read all of the things she was going through while writing some of her most beloved books. She lived a tough and heartbreaking life. The issues I did have with the book though were some things the author seemed to try to really sensationalize and when talking about the books themselves, spoilers were given. Which was unexpected and a bummer considering I have not read all of the books yet. I also felt at times there was too much unnecessary background information given.

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### Emily says

When I was 20 I stumbled upon the first volume of L.M. Montgomery's published journals in the stacks of my college library. As a long-time fan of *Anne of Green Gables* and other old favorites by Montgomery, I eagerly checked it out. At the time I was living in a romantic garret in an old house, an attic with sloping roofs on which the rain would drum cozily at night, with a row of windows overlooking the back of the

house where a hill sloped steeply down to a creek, giving me a view of an ever-changing sea of tree-tops. Both the place and my state of mind were conducive to a feeling of kinship with Maud. She was, I found, very much like the heroine of one of her own books: vivacious, imaginative, and keenly alive to the beauties of nature and literature. Later I realized that the self L.M. Montgomery portrayed in this first volume of her journal was to an extent as much a created character as Anne or Emily. In middle-age Montgomery began copying out her diaries for posterity and shaped and edited and probably rewrote as she went. Still, the reading of this volume marked for me a turning point, in that I was now more interested in Montgomery as a person than as a writer. She seemed like a friend, and as was the case with real-life friends, one sometimes had to be patient as she worked through her emotional troubles and her doldrums -- not all of the entries were scintillating, and although the early part of her life was full of hope and possibilities, friends and hard work, she seemed prone to gloom and self-pity.

Over the next 15 years or so, I read each new installment of the journals as they were published (there were eventually five altogether). Each volume was progressively more painful and depressing. This reflects many things. Ironically, as Montgomery achieved success, her life became more constricted. Growing up in a small community she was always conscious of the negative power of gossip and the need to keep up appearances. As a best-selling writer she was scrutinized by the public gaze more than ever. Her marriage to a minister didn't help matters -- the cheerful minister's wife, active in all the church affairs, was just another role she had to play while suppressing her own needs and desires (although she did always manage to make time for her writing). So as Maud grew older, her journal became less of a record of events, and more of an outlet for her worst feelings of depression which she couldn't express anywhere else. Accordingly, the events she focused on were largely dreary -- the mental illness of her husband, the petty troubles caused by the small-minded people she had to deal with, a seemingly endless series of law suits with her first publisher, and later, worries over her oldest son. Still I persevered, out of a morbid need to know what awful thing would happen next, and from a sense of loyalty to someone I felt I cared about, despite the fact that I was often maddened by how convention-bound Montgomery was as a person, given that her fiction seemed to reflect someone far more free-spirited. As the journals progressed, I was reminded again that Montgomery was not always a reliable narrator, and I found myself curious about certain gaps -- she had a tendency to write at length about how miserable she was about things (especially concerning her sons), without saying exactly what they were. At some point I became aware that Mary Rubio, one of the editors of the journal, was at work on a biography -- it was a given that I would read it the moment it was possible to do so. Rather shallowly, I wanted to get the whole scoop on some of those gaps, but also, I wanted to get a clear-eyed perspective of Montgomery as a person seen whole.

It's taken me longer to get a hold of the biography than I thought it would, because even though it's surely the most definitive and authoritative biography of Montgomery there is, it's not been published in the States. But a kind friend lent it to me, and I gulped the 600+ page book down in three days (with some pauses to attend to my children). It is almost all that I hoped it would be. Like all biographies, it's a little ponderous and full of details that will not interest all readers, but Rubio, who has devoted nearly all her career to the research of Montgomery's life, writes well and the book is readable. The main theme that emerges is a conflict Montgomery herself was aware of, and that she expressed as "a very uncomfortable blend in my make-up -- the passionate Montgomery blood and the Puritan Macneill conscience." It appears to me that, except in her writing, the puritanical side always won out, and that made her life quietly tragic. Depression and mental illness are another theme. Rubio, while abstaining from making any diagnosis provides enough details about Montgomery's mental state and its fluctuations to allow readers to draw their own conclusions. A section towards the end of the book about the inappropriate medications both Maud and her husband were given by doctors for their "nerves" that exacerbated their conditions is both illuminating and horrifying. And yes, some of those teasing little gaps in the journals did get filled, and one can sympathize with Montgomery for not spelling everything out.

If I have one complaint about the biography it's that the first section about Maud's life on PEI Island felt rushed. We have 146 pages about the first 36 years of her life (including the publication of her first books)

and 424 on the remaining 31. This imbalance is a direct reflection of the journals. Simply, Montgomery wrote more later in life when she was unhappy. Perhaps it's natural that Rubio, as one of the co-editors of the journals, found herself following the arc of Montgomery's life that they presented, even as she shows how they often don't present a fully balanced view of Montgomery's life (in her darkest years, people who knew Montgomery recollected a cheerful busy and stimulating person).

Perhaps I read this biography too fast and feverishly. I emerged from it, after three days of gloom, capped by weeping at the description of Montgomery's death and funeral, with a huge sense of nothing less than relief. I now know everything I will ever know about this woman. What I don't know, I will not wonder about. I'll reread her novels, but probably not her journals, and not this biography. I will, however, hold on to my fondness for the memories of the time Maud and I spent getting acquainted, up in my attic room when we were both young.

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### **Serenity Bohon says**

Heartbreaking, absolutely beautiful and well-researched biography about a woman whose writing I have said changed my life. I was thrilled to read that is exactly what many of her fans would say. For me, the big unanswered question remains, how could she save us that way when she couldn't save herself? It's a sobering look at what we can do with our art, what we *must* do, really. We give all we can, we give the best of us - no matter what we get in return. Outside of my personal obsession with L.M. Montgomery, this book is a fascinating look at what it takes to write a life. I read her journals first, which was the intention of the biographer, and then I read the biography. And, of course, I have read Montgomery's fiction over and over most of my life. There is so much to learn here - about being a woman, being an artist, a mother, a wife, a world-changer ("she encouraged change quietly, through the subtle force of her pen"). There is also much to learn about mental illness, self-medicating, the expectations we put on others and the expectations we put on ourselves. A very rich, very enriching read.

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### **Rikke says**

Beautiful. Exceptionally well written.

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### **Manybooks says**

It has been almost eight years or so since I read (or more to the point with much joy devoured) Mary Henley Rubio's often quite superb biography of Lucy Maud Montgomery, and while I will always consider it very much a personal favourite, I also and definitely will need to in detail reread in order to post a longer and more substantial review (or rather a review I would consider adequate and sufficiently honouring of L. M. Montgomery, her life, her literary legacy). For now, and until I have the energy and even the required time to accomplish this, all I can and will say is that Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings is (in my humble opinion) the absolute best, the most current and the most sensitive and empathetic biography of L. M. Montgomery to date, showing her neither as a paragon of virtue nor as an inherently and massively problematic, troubled individual, showing both Maud's strengths and her weaknesses (including her often serious mental health issues), thus and happily, fortunately making her appear as first and foremost a human being, talented, sensual and with a lust for life (constantly striving forward and upwards even when, even if it pains and feels hopeless and depressing). Highly recommended and in my humble opinion, for fans of L. M.

Montgomery, an absolute and total must read!

That being said, author Mary Henley Rubio does, perhaps, at times provide more than a trifle too much authorial interference and commentary, although considering that I do tend to personally agree with most of her, of these additions and considerations, they do not all that much either bother or hugely distract me. However, as they indeed might still prove majorly frustrating to and for those readers who absolutely desire and expect a straight biography with no (or at least with scant) additional comments and musings from the biographer/author, this small point of potential issue with Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings should, no it must at least be mentioned and pointed out (and upon reconsidering, I have now, albeit with a somewhat guilty conscience, actually decided on changing my erstwhile five star ranking to but three, as I am definitely getting increasingly and annoyingly frustrated with and by biographers adding too much rumour, innuendo and their own "personal takes" on the lives and lifestyle choices of the individuals whose true, whose factual and real stories they are supposed to be recounting, although I do indeed still very much consider Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings totally and utterly a personal reading favourite and will continue to do so).

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### **Kate says**

Good grief, is this a good biography. Meticulously researched, willing to examine Montgomery's journals skeptically and using outside sources to verify or question them, with endnotes just as fascinating as the text, this is a caring, careful, thorough look at Montgomery's life. It is clear that the author's research, beginning in the late 70s and early 80s and continuing through the biography's publication, and her incredible work co-editing Montgomery's journals made this piece of a scholarship possible. All of you go read this.

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### **Alicia says**

So sad....the author basically says that LMM took her own life and it was covered up so her children wouldn't be embarrassed with their own careers.

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### **Rosemary says**

I have just ordered this from Amazon Canada as it is not available yet at Amazon US. This is the long awaited biography, long in the making and longer in anticipation.

Maud Montgomery is my favorite authoress-storyteller.

She was a prolific Canadian writer and world famous with her publication of "Anne of Green Gables" in the early 1900's. Because her works are of a buoyant and uplifting nature, it was a great shock to learn that her life was a burden of tragedies from end to end.

Did Maud end her own life by an overdose of drugs at the age of 68?

It seems that in this book we are to get the facts but will have to draw our own conclusions.

I am just hoping to gain a few more pieces of the puzzle.

## Jan says

Melissa recommends:

Though not for the faint of heart (the size alone is enough to scare plenty of people off), this is one heck of a biography.

I admit it: I've been reading books by and about Montgomery since elementary school. I am a Big Fan. So, when I picked this book up, I was expecting a well-written, thorough biography, but I wasn't really expecting to learn anything new. Oops. I have new respect for LMM's grandmother, more sympathy for Ewan, can never look at my Page editions of her books the same way again, and am seriously scared by her son, Chester. Even more powerfully, though I've "known" her story for years, the bio is a page turner. Rubio sets the scenes beautifully and provides the kind of context that few biographies do. It's more than just a life story, it's social history.

A few minor quibbles--there were times where I felt like Rubio was trying too hard to prove a point (listing every letter that relates to a certain thing), and there were a few weird typos/editing issues.

Highly recommend for Montgomery fans or anyone interested in women writers.

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## Maria Elmvang says

Very interesting biography. However, unfortunately not quite as unbiased as I'd hoped to see from somebody who's done SUCH extensive research on her subject matter (of course I understand no biography can ever be completely unbiased... I guess "neutral" is a better word).

My initial impression was that I was glad I'd read the journals before reading this. First of all, there were events Rubio skimmed over very quickly, where I was glad to have a bit more background information than the biography gave. Secondly, I felt it provided me with a more nuanced view of LMM's life than I would have had if I'd only had the biography as a source.

The book is generally well-written, although I did feel like Rubio occasionally included *too* much background information. I understand the desire to share 20+ years worth of research, but I felt the book would have flowed better if she'd limited the detailed information about various people's ancestors and had used the space thus freed up to include the endnotes she was forced to leave out instead. Also, there were many repetitions, where Rubio repeated herself practically word-for-word over a space of just a few pages - close enough, anyway, that I noticed.

I really appreciated this "condensed" version of the journals - it's much, much easier to keep all the details of various events (the different lawsuits in particular) straight when they're presented with all the information in one place, rather than - as necessary in the journals - spread out over the course of several YEARS where you forget the first details before the last have even happened yet.

However, I do think that Rubio unfortunately drew a lot of conclusions that I don't believe she had grounds to make - not based on the information given in GoW anyway. Of course she may have had other interviews etc. to base her theories on, but as these were never mentioned in GoW the reader doesn't know about them, and it therefore comes across as idle speculation. The most obvious case is the alleged importance of a person in LMM's life, based solely on a page in one of her scrapbooks. Based on *this information alone* there

simply isn't enough evidence to state anything for sure one way or the other. I for one didn't agree with her interpretation, and was sad to notice how Rubio twisted a lot of events in the following to suggest that her interpretation was the correct one. It may have been - I don't dispute that - but because of the way it was written, there doesn't seem to be enough evidence, and the entire speculation comes across as gossipy and sensational. Something I was very sad to see in what I'd hoped would be a serious account.

Don't get me wrong, it mostly is. It just wasn't as unbiased as I'd expected, and Rubio seemed at times almost patronizing towards LMM in places - putting a lot of emphasis on small events that made LMM end up looking petty and unkind. She may have been / probably was at times, but these unnecessary connecting of unrelated circumstances stood out like a sore thumb. Once specific example is the end note #38 of the Norval years, where Rubio makes a very unfavourable comparison that I think completely uncalled for and unjust.

That said, I still really enjoyed the book - especially the extra insights and small details that I didn't already know and that were based on Rubio's many and detailed interviews with LMM's various maids, friends and of course Stuart himself. Rubio's obviously passionate about her work, and it clearly shows in her writing, making it engaging and easily read.

So definitely a very, very interesting book - but like with all other biographies it should be taken with a grain of salt and a lot of common "source criticism", as no biography can ever claim to be 100% unbiased.

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## **Kathleen says**

Excerpted from my review "Magic Island and The Gift of Wings," Elizabeth Waterston and Mary Rubio. (Dual Book Review). *Children's Literature* 38 (Spring 2010): 254-259.

"Rubio's *The Gift of Wings* is not the first biography of Montgomery, but it is the most detailed and authoritative one to date. Montgomery penned her own brief memoir, *The Alpine Path*, which originated in 1917 as a series of articles for *Everywoman's World*. Mollie Gillen's *The Wheel of Things* (1975) broke ground as the first modern biography of Montgomery, but it has been superseded by more recent research. In 1995, Waterston and Rubio collaborated on a short biography titled *Writing a Life: L.M. Montgomery*; that study, too, has been supplanted by *The Gift of Wings*. The figure that emerges from Rubio's new biography is complex—ambitious and talented, but deeply troubled. In particular, Rubio does a fine job of detailing Montgomery's hardships, including fights with her publishers, marital troubles, reliance on prescription drugs, and despair over the decline in her prestige as literary tastes shifted away from fiction of "local color" and sentiment, with the rise of modernism.

One of the most valuable aspects of Rubio's biography is its inclusion of interviews with people who knew Montgomery—her children, her maids, and her admirers. The inspiration for this project originated from an interview with Montgomery's son, Dr. E. Stuart Macdonald, who informed Rubio that his mother was not the "ideal mother" present in her fiction—the maternal figure with a wonderful sense of humor and a tolerant appreciation of humanity—that Rubio had assumed her to be, but instead a rigid and touchy character who "prevented any easy camaraderie in the family" (5). It was Stuart Macdonald who requested that Rubio write this biography and who authorized its honest, if not always flattering, portrait of his mother's life. He did so hoping that the biography would serve an educative function: if readers knew the truth about Montgomery, they might learn from her mistakes.

One such "mistake" was a rumored extramarital affair. Rubio makes the provocative claim that Montgomery may have had an adulterous liaison with Captain Edwin Smith. She includes an interview with Montgomery's cantankerous maid, Lily, who attests to the romance, whispering conspiratorially, "He was her boyfriend" (268). Of course, this information raises questions about the reliability of its source, but the

existence of such gossip says much about Montgomery's complex relations with the people in her community. Her social interactions were often fraught, and Rubio does a fine job of illuminating two such problematic relationships—a fight with a local man, Marshall Pickering, that led to a bitter lawsuit, and an ill-fated friendship with an obsessed fan, Isabel Anderson.

Rubio is particularly impressive not only when discussing Montgomery's journals, but when reconstructing periods of Montgomery's life for which journal entries are scant. Her biography builds on the work of Irene Gammel who, in *The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery* (2005), established the importance of life-writing for Montgomery "as a self-consciously literary and artistic genre"; as Gammel has said, "theories of autobiography and life writing are crucial in examining the extent to which she managed to achieve a sense of agency for herself in composing her self-portraits in journals, letters, autobiography, and photography" (4-5). Like Gammel, Rubio contends that the journal entries are not so much records of fact as they are performative, deliberate artistic creations. She speculates that Montgomery created two personae in her journal entries: one, a persecuted, alienated, sensitive writer-figure; the other, a relatively happy, socialable individual (276). Rubio claims that these carefully cultivated personae emerged as Montgomery began to recopy and edit her journals: "Real life is untidy, unshaped, with loose ends. Her journals have no loose ends, no pointless stories, no catalogues of the boring effluvia of life, no people of importance to her narrative who have not been introduced. Each descriptive or narrative unit always becomes part of a unified whole" (274). Montgomery, the consummate storyteller, may have scripted her life writings, just as she outlined the plots of her novels.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this new biography is the inclusion of what may be Montgomery's suicide note, released by the author's heirs for the first time in 2008. Rubio provides a persuasive reading of the document, disputing that it is a suicide note and asserting instead that it is merely a page of "grumbles" from her journals. Montgomery's name for her journal was her "grumble book," and she viewed it as a safe space to air her frequent disappointments and grievances. Rubio looks to the number on the suicide note, 176, as evidence of its being merely a page from her journals, which she always numbered. The other 175 pages of this journal are missing, which makes the appearance of the "suicide note" all the more mysterious. Rubio also speculates as to how and why these pages may have disappeared, concluding that Montgomery's disreputable son, Chester, may have stolen them in an effort to hide his mother's strong disapproval of his behavior and to secure inclusion in her will. The new research in this biography also reveals Montgomery's possible addiction to prescription barbiturates. Given Montgomery's depressed state of mind, her dependency on drugs, and her weakened central nervous system, an unintentional overdose was, as Rubio proposes, just as likely the cause of death as a suicide. However, no one knows the truth, and such information about Montgomery's life is guaranteed to engender new controversy.

If Lucy Maud Montgomery falls short in any way, it is in occasionally reviving clichés of women's biography that involve romance. Rubio suggests that Montgomery's "'gift of wings' had finally enabled her to take flight, thanks to the astonishing effect of the dimpled and rosy-cheeked Ewan" (119). She claims that Montgomery wrote her best books, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Emily of New Moon*, only when she was in love—either with her husband, the Reverend Ewan Macdonald, or possibly with Captain Edwin Smith. The old argument about a necessary relationship between romance and creativity for women writers has long been debunked by feminist criticism, and it seems especially reductive in the case of an author as prolific and talented as Montgomery"

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