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Tintin in the New World

A Romance

Frederic Tuten

Published by Souvenir Press

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Chapters of *Tintin in the New World* first appeared in their entire or altered form in *Fiction* (1975), *Tri-Quarterly* (1975), *Syntaxis* (1984), *Artforum* (1984) and *De Brakke Hond* (1984).

Frontispiece: *Interior with Painting of Tintin*, pencil and coloured pencils on paper, copyright © 1992 by Roy Lichtenstein. Photographs of frontispiece and jacket artwork by Robert McKeever.

With grateful acknowledgement to Fanny Remi and the Hergé Foundation for their permission to use images from *Tintin* on the cover and frontispiece of this edition.

Originally published in the USA by William Morrow and Company in 1993.

This edition published in Great Britain in 2009 by Souvenir Press Ltd
43 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PD

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ISBN 9780285638556

Book design by Rhea Braunstein

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall.

This novel is dedicated to the memory of my friend George Remi (Hergé) and is offered with love to Dooley Worth, Dorothy Herzka, and Roy Lichtenstein

With thanks to the Guggenheim Foundation for its support (1973–1974) in the writing of this book.

1ST LORD: What time o' day is 't, Apemantus?
APEMANTUS: Time to be honest.

Timon of Athens I.i.

Chapter I

"All the winter the north wind roamed on the hills; many trees fell in the park." Marlinspike "seemed barer and more desolate than ever; broken branches littered the roadway, and tall trunks showed their wounds." Beyond the sandstone balustrade, far beyond the tawny, wet dunes and eroded beach, out across the whitecapped sea, a lone fishing boat silhouetted itself against the orangy wintersky, and long sheets of gray clouds heaved on tips of leaden sea-swells. It drizzled. Tintin morosely regarded the blustery scene from his library window.

The tiny ship in the distance made him feel sad, and the rain dispirited him. He had been still for too long, alone in the huge manor with his companions, Captain Haddock and the terrier, Snowy, who was now dreaming in the glow of a fire flaring in the huge stone hearth. Tintin shuffled back to his Morris chair and returned to his book. He read:

> Later, I shaved, got dressed and went over to the trailer. The Greek wasn't there but Rose was, in a negligee and red pumps. She looked swell. I came over close. She

looked awful. Her shoulder was crisscrossed with welts and her left eye was puffy and blue.

"He was sore, Rex, and he walloped me with a clothesline. It was bad."

"I'll kill him," I said, my stomach sick.

"You better, or he'll get us both."

He was a greasy Greek and he sweated a lot like all those greasers do. He was frying eggs over the grill and he didn't hear me come in, even when the screen door hissed shut. I tucked the .38 away, grabbed an iron skillet off the shelf, and cracked his head hard. He went down on the sawdust. The eggs and hot grease went over him and steamed on his face. He was groaning. I smashed him again. He went out.

I dragged him under the counter. The eggs slid down his face and patted the floor. He wasn't bleeding. I hung the "Return Later" sign over the door and pulled down the shade. I left him there and went back to the trailer.

"Rose, I nailed him."

"Oh, baby," she moaned.

"It's over now. We're free."

She slowly slid out of her negligee. "Oh, yes, baby," she purred. I went over to her. Rose. That's all that mattered.

There it was. Adults! Always the same: all for lust and murder. Thank the stars he knew nothing of that.

I shall always be glad to have stayed stunted at twelve, he thought. Quirk of biological fate—my best luck.

Windows rattled and the fireplace gusted smoke in the chimney downdraft. Snowy slept at Tintin's feet, dreaming of marrow bones heaped in secret caves, dreaming of sudden feints at arrogant crows and hairy villains. Captain Haddock's

old ship's barometer sank. For a moment the wind ceased, the air vacuumed; Tintin could scarcely breathe. Then the storm flooded the night.

Tintin put down his novel. Snowy woke, his eyes red-rimmed. "This is no night to be at sea," Captain Haddock mumbled, entering the carpeted room noiselessly.

"No night to be at Marlinspike either," answered Tintin. "We've been home too long with too little to do. I'm tired of reading, tired of long strolls, tired of tranquil evenings before the fire. How can you bear it? Not one adventure, not one exploit in ages. I'm too young to stay still for so long. You've got your whiskey to comfort you, Captain, and you've got your old man's memories to keep you agog through the dead months."

"Old age? Auguring asteroids! I'm not yet fifty. Tintin, my lad, if you'd learn to drink scotch and love women, you, too, would have cheering memories in old age!"

"I have no feeling for either."

"How do you know till you've experienced them?"

Yes, Snowy thought, *why doesn't he try? Maybe he'll grow up a bit and stay home more.*

"Captain, enough. Let's find something practical to do."

"To do? You've *everything* to do here at Marlinspike. Last month you bought two Arabian steeds and rode them an inch to foamy death, now you hardly give 'em a glance when you pass the stables. They'll soon melt into glue. Then there's the observatory you had erected with a telescope strong enough to see the hairs in God's long nose. 'I've exhausted the heavens,' you said after seven hours of ripping through the skies."

"I'm restless by nature," Tintin said, in a sad whisper.

"Blustering bananas! My dear Tintin, you are perfectly *unsettled*! My heart breaks to see you in such a funk."

"What to do? There's an urge in me to be on the move, to set this wrong world right. Do you realize it's a year since we last adventured?"

"What about your art collecting? Have you given that up, too? All those unopened crates of paintings you've left unexamined: that Matisse you spent ages to acquire—that one with all those naked dancing people—still in its shipping case. Tintin, this house is littered with the goods of your discontent."

One juicy marrow bone keeps me glad for days, thought Snowy, turning on his back to let his pink belly bask in the fire's hot glow. *Humans are peculiar, need so much.*

"Let's take a holiday, Captain, a short trip to the High Atlas or maybe Wyoming."

"My boy, let's steer truer to course. 'Tis no journey you now need. I fear there's something incomplete in you."

"We've been through that, Captain. I'm content in every way, and the other thing, well, I feel nothing for it, so don't miss or want it."

"By Orion's teeth! I've been boy and man at sea, kept a narrow 'n' solitary bunk and wished for none else, yet at times, when the sky washed golden and the sea flattened itself level into a plate of blue, when an island loomed like a ripe persimmon on the horizon, I sometimes wished my briny soul softened by woman's touch. A girl from home country, I mean, none of your port trollops. Yes. A true country girl! Then she would come and say me, 'Oh! Captain, my dear, do come to table.' And there would be waiting my steaming lamb pie and me weatherglass of malt, neat, filled to brim's edge. And this lovely plump, rosy woman, my own wifey, does bend to kiss me on my cheek as I make to tie my napkin 'bout my neck.

"And perhaps, too, there'd be some little Haddocks swim-

ming around me ankles, little ones all glowing and proud of their big papa. . . . 'And what's the wisest fish in the sea, me children?' I'd ask, with a grave, schoolmasterish frown on my face. 'Old Haddock! Old Haddock!' they'd answer in glee.

"I miss this dear wifey I shall never know. My life charts are fixed now—too late to alter course—but I sometimes think I should have planned for warm, fertile shelter at journey's end. Yet there's time ahead left for you to share such homey joys as those I've missed."

"Captain," Tintin said impatiently, "I offer you my final words on this matter. I've read about the subject you raise, 'bout how men hurl themselves off cliffs or blow out their brains or kill other men over the love of a girl. *So,* what is it I have missed? Sorrow? Do you remember that season we went to every opera at La Scala and Bayreuth. Those operas where girl and boy meet, fall in love; then, when one leaves the other, the deserted one moans, cries to heaven and to hell or joins a band of outlaws."

Seldom hear Tintin talk so much. I like him better when he's chasing villains or getting out of a scrape.

"Wait! I forgot," Tintin continued. "Then there's always the case of two who are in love, but one dies, leaving the other in terrible despair, always ready to sob in the street or while strolling alone in a zoo. If death does not divide lovers, it's something else, a war or TB. Sorrow is what love teaches, so what's to gain in this swamp of weepy roses?"

"Where's my bottle?"

"There on the floor, by the Ming vase, where you left it two hours ago."

"And now that you have clarified your sentiments and left me no room to finish my theme," Captain Haddock said sententiously, pouring whiskey into a cup, "I may as well

tell you, one of *those* letters came by messenger this afternoon while you were out scouting about the estate."

"The same cream-white envelope?"

"As ever. Here," said Captain Haddock, removing the letter from the side pocket of his gold-buttoned blue blazer.

Tintin recognized the stationery and the address at the right-hand corner: "Avenue du Vert Chasseur, Bruxelles." In whatever remote part of the world Tintin found himself, the writer had known where to reach him to signal him to an adventure. Tintin perceived immediately that this missive was different from all the others, which, in their tone and brevity, seemed almost brusque commands. It began:

> *Mon cher* Tintin, for some time our destinies have linked, yours and mine. I have directed your pursuits, leaving you, however, in the time not taken by some mission at hand, to plot your own stars. I do not know how kind those stars have been to you or how well or wisely you have followed them; all that is beyond my power and past my design. But in those matters in which I have influence, I have seen to it that you've been the instrument of good service to this planet. Always you have been sincere and intrepid. Were you the child of my own blood and not the personage of my dreams, I could wish for no better. But once we are born and once set on path, there's more splendid uncertainty for each of us, not least among us you. Thus, I'm told, even God and his knowing stars create and direct and foreknow the end, yet the route itself and the journey's reach no one but the destined traveler may choose, though the whole map be drawn and charted to our lastmost step.
>
> I myself know little of the prospect before you, except that it shall be of consequence to you. Follow now your

destined but alterable track, which begins at Machu Picchu, Peru. Go there now.

"I see by your expression we're at it again," Captain Haddock said glumly.

"Not a moment too soon," Tintin exultantly replied.

Snowy yawned. An ancient oak crashed in the park.

Chapter II

[Prow side, Tintin alone. Eight bells. Wind, N by NW, (Apollo's wind). Snowy parades the deck, his snout aloft, sniffing the aroma of brine and dolphins.]

"Come, come, Snowy, here by me. Look up, my boy, see Orion and his dog, Sirius, and there—no, no, there!—the Dipper so large and so low as to seem ready to ladle the ocean. What a mighty sky tonight."

The world's dream plays in the sky, but he can't quite see it, though with his child's eyes and child's heart he comes closer to perceiving it than any other human I know. I love him and will keep beside him.

"Yes, Snowy, it makes one think about things, doesn't it?—about how this watery world came to be made and what is the sense of it, to be going on always this way, from one episode of right doing to another, to what final end, I ask . . . though I've never asked this before. Yes, to what end? I ask. Snowy, look there. A phosphorescent question mark gleams dully in our ship's roiling wake. Is it a glowing sign of reply or is this milky mark a picture echo of my thoughts projected on high?"

The night's sea and sky offer him a terrific theme, and soon, I fear, like those of his human kin, even he will burst rhapsodic and strain to lofty spheres. Oh, Tintin, brother animal whom I love, stay the animal that you are, and leave aside these extravagant sensations and thoughts. Don't trouble yourself with dreamy troubles, let humans be humans and dogs dogs. There's no matter beyond that, I say.

Chapter III

[Some weeks later. The port of Callao, Peru.]

Pilings, moorings, fastening of stout lines to lead cleats, the chainy letting-down of anchors, the rush of ship's crew and harbor porters, the uneasy tremble of body as Tintin first steps again on land.

The valise-piled quay, the silver-gray Rolls and capped chauffeur, the settling of luggage in trunk, the silent ride through the luxurious quarters of town. Snowy, his eyes wide, his ears pricked, his snout sniffing the open window space; Haddock listless, his beard flounced; Tintin alert, his hearing the phrase, "It's breaking, it's the cliff for me, too, then"—the voice his own. They arrive.

The Grand Hotel of Lima. Politeness at the front desk. Señor Tintin has been expected. Manager, in morning coat, tails, and pinstripe, pants' cuffs drooping to his heels, assistants in blue suits, uniformed porters (lots drawn weeks earlier for the privilege of carrying the young detective's suitcases), the entire staff seen and unseen, in halls and

kitchens, out in the gardens and by the pool, waiting for him.

But no word for him at the desk, no letter or note of instructions. Nothing as well the following morning, when Tintin leaves for Cuzco, the middle of his journey.