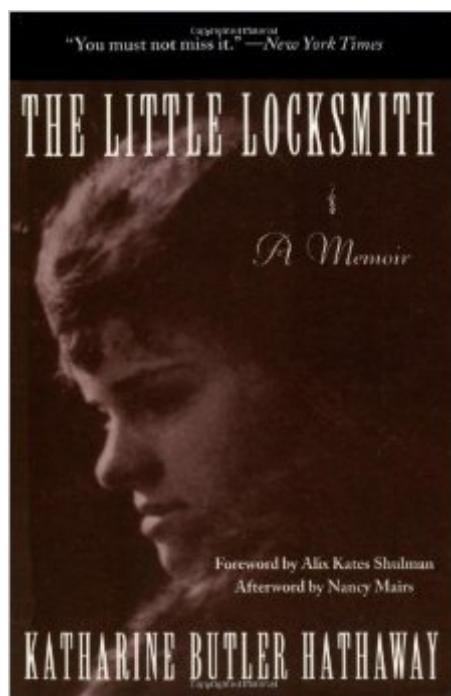


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The Little Locksmith: A Memoir



Synopsis

The Little Locksmith begins in 1895 when a specialist straps five-year-old Katharine, then suffering from spinal tuberculosis, to a board with halters and pulleys in a failed attempt to prevent her being a "hunchback." Her mother says that she should be thankful that her parents are able to have her cared for by a famous surgeon; otherwise, she would grow up to be like the "little locksmith," who does jobs at their home; he has a "strange, awful peak in his back." Forced to endure "a horizontal life of night and day," Katharine remains immobile until age fifteen, only to find that she, too, has a hunched back and is "no larger than a ten-year-old child." The Little Locksmith charts Katharine's struggle to transcend physical limitations and embrace her life, her body, and herself in the midst of debilitating bouts of frustration and shame. Her spirit and courage prevail, and she succeeds in expanding her world far beyond the boundaries prescribed by her family and society: she attends Radcliffe College, forms deep friendships, begins to write, and in 1921, purchases a house of her own in Castine, Maine. There she creates her home, room by room, fashioning it as a space for guests, lovers, and artists. The Little Locksmith stands as a testimony to Katharine's aspirations and desires; for independence, for love, and for the pursuit of her art.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is astounding-- I keep wondering why no one ever told me about it before. Why did I find it on the dusty independent table in the back of bookstore? It is rare and beautiful. Butler-Hathaway's insight, uniquely sensual perspective, enthusiasm, and empathy are lovely. Order it.

This book is amazing, I am 15 and I read it, my mother at 39 read it, my grandma read it and my younger sister at 13 read it. Everyone takes away some different, but something wonderful from this book. It is absolutely indescribable, you have to read it; right now, order it, read it, it will change your outlook on life.

This is a beautiful book on so many levels. The author's voice, the author's spirit, the author's technique of storytelling are awe inspiring. If you have been led to this page, take it as a sign and order this book, reading it is an experience and I can't wait to read it again. If you are looking for a gift to give someone else then this is it, but read it first yourself so that you can truly share it.

My husband gave this book to me and I am truly enjoying it! Katharine sees things from a rare perspective. Her life transformed her into someone that could see deep into even the most mundane subjects. I feel a new appreciation for even the sounds of crickets! She was certainly a person who's cup was always half full! This book is like welcome raindrops, enveloping you and staying with you long after the drops have evaporated!

This book is enchanting, wonderful, and beyond description, except to say it is a testament to the human spirit. If you read this and loved it, also look at "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly," by Jean-Dominique Bauby. If you can't imagine living on your back for ten years, try imagining writing a book using only the ability to blink one eye, to dictate letter by letter. This book is another testament to the human spirit.

There are many wonderful, very modern-sounding insights - not something you would expect from someone of Katharine's time and class. Because of the way it was structured, however, I kept expecting that we were about to learn the story of how she eventually came to have the rich life she longed for but had originally thought out of reach - that is, how she got from here to there. So it felt like a big letdown when I reached the end of the book and that had not happened. Apparently, this was something of an introduction to a book she planned to write later on but never got to. So - it has many good insights yet like the best part was missing.

While certainly well-written, The Little Locksmith is ultimately disappointing, because the author ends the book abruptly. The postscript fleshed out the later years of what was a remarkable life that

is only teased in this book. What we are left with is the inner life of a brilliant young woman forced to endure years of traction and then some disfigurement (spinal TB left her "the height of a ten-year-old" with some curvature). She makes some independent decisions, has a difficult relationship with her mother, and becomes the owner/architect of an unlikely house. She resigns herself to writing and "spinsterhood." But later in life - AFTER this book - she took a number of lovers, married, took up painting, lived in Paris....

Perhaps one of the marks of a masterpiece is the variety of responses it evokes in its readers. The feminists of the 1970s applauded The Little Locksmith as a daring account of the writer's struggle with her deformity and her secret sexual longings. Recent .com reviews are unusually diverse. Most reviewers agree that the book is beautifully written, while others describe it as a book in which almost nothing happens. I found it compelling and couldn't turn its pages fast enough. The physical world of The Little Locksmith is described with breathtaking freshness and immediacy. Its depictions of inner emotional states are even more vibrantly observed. Most of us did not grow up physically strapped to a board for ten years. But Katherine Butler's inner life, so richly portrayed, resonates with every reader who has felt, in youth, unworthy, flawed, unlovable, in despair of participating in the fullness of life. The book also illuminates the power of the wounded self-image to cripple one's emotional life quite as powerfully as a hump on the back. With deep insight and candor, Butler recounts her journey from self-hatred to self-acceptance and finally to the humility that lies at the heart of her creativity. She did not live long enough to document the rest of her intriguing story, but this little book, released just after the writer's too-early death, is as perceptive and alive today as when it was written, seventy-plus years ago.

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