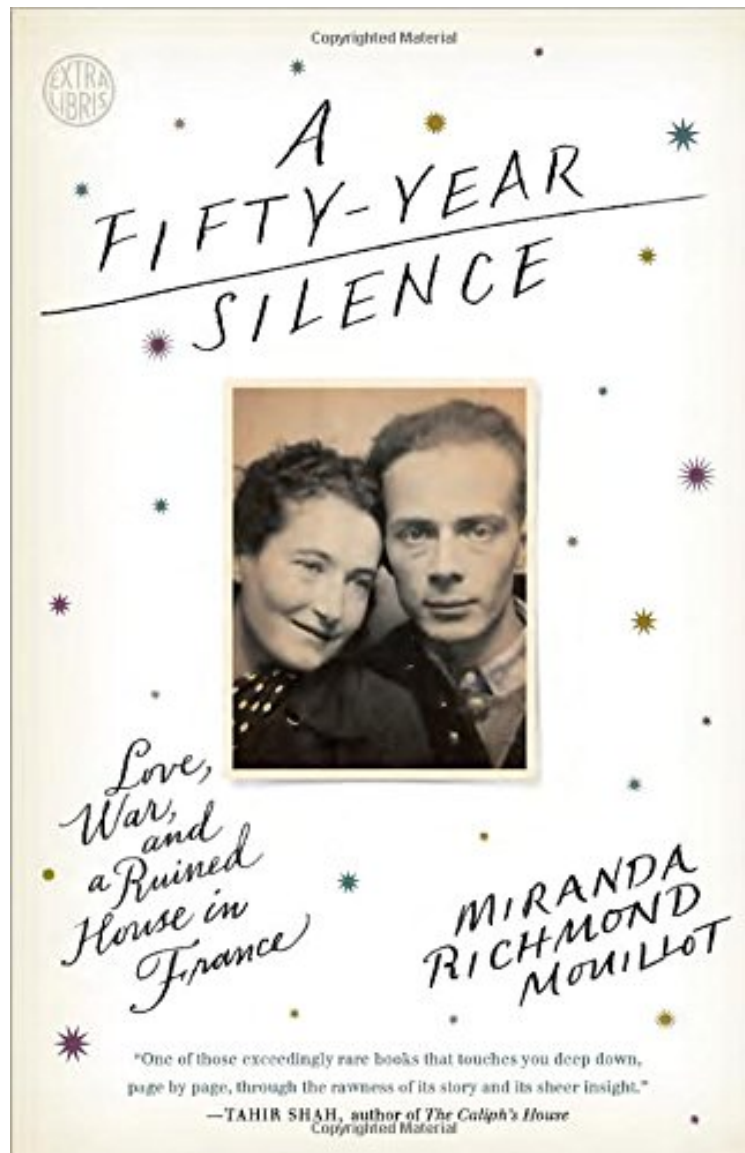


[Free download] A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France

A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France

Miranda Richmond Mouillot

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Miranda Richmond Mouillot : A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Words fail me here By LMFB But I will be sharing this book w family and friends. Powerful and stark, yet somehow lovely and light. I keep thinking of the word hopeful as in full of hope. 0

of 0 people found the following review helpful. The strange twists of a loveless life. By Iron man You have to ask how two people could live apart for 50 years and the children not know why. Now you will find out. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Building on the ruins By caroline R This is a real love story, infused with the reality of incredible pain and yet promise in the future. The author has written a superb account of her grandparents lives and the deep connection she had with each of them. I was deeply touched.

A young woman moves across an ocean to uncover the truth about her grandparents' mysterious estrangement and pieces together the extraordinary story of their wartime experiences. In 1948, after surviving World War II by escaping Nazi-occupied France for refugee camps in Switzerland, Miranda's grandparents, Anna and Armand, bought an old stone house in a remote, picturesque village in the South of France. Five years later, Anna packed her bags and walked out on Armand, taking the typewriter and their children. Aside from one brief encounter, the two never saw or spoke to each other again, never remarried, and never revealed what had divided them forever. *A Fifty-Year Silence* is the deeply involving account of Miranda Richmond Mouillot's journey to find out what happened between her grandmother, a physician, and her grandfather, an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials, who refused to utter his wife's name aloud after she left him. To discover the roots of their embittered and entrenched silence, Miranda abandons her plans for the future and moves to their stone house, now a crumbling ruin; immerses herself in letters, archival materials, and secondary sources; and teases stories out of her reticent, and declining, grandparents. As she reconstructs how Anna and Armand braved overwhelming odds and how the knowledge her grandfather acquired at Nuremberg destroyed their relationship, Miranda wrestles with the legacy of trauma, the burden of history, and the complexities of memory. She also finds herself learning how not only to survive but to thrive--making a home in the village and falling in love. With warmth, humor, and rich, evocative details that bring her grandparents' outsize characters and their daily struggles vividly to life, *A Fifty-Year Silence* is a heartbreaking, uplifting love story spanning two continents and three generations.

What are you guys doing the weekend of January 24? No, you're not. Cross it off, unless it's a beach stay that will allow you uninterrupted time to read Mouillot's *A Fifty-Year Silence*. I have never before read a book like this one. The story is full of worldly drama: the Nuremberg war trials, a short but beautiful existence in the South of France, but it's the minute family-history details that make the book truly delicious. *Glamour.com*, Best New Books Coming Out in January. What makes the book so lively are not only Mouillot's imaginary scenarios, but her dense web of identifications: between herself and her grandmother (both have a talent for finding four-leaved clovers); between her grandparents' experience of the Holocaust and her own generation as bearers of its memory; between herself as author and Marcel Proust, who helps her piece together her grandfathers' past; and between her grandparents' love and the love of Proust's protagonists Swann and Odette. Mouillot delightfully crosses different literary genres: tragic romance, third-generation Holocaust survivor novel, autobiography, fiction, Bildungsroman, and intertextual homage. *Haaretz*. Filled with warmth and evocative details, this is a heartrending memoir about historical memory. *FRANCE*. This haunting, beautiful little mystery deftly shows just how long pain can linger through generations, and what shining a light on the past can do to heal a family. *Winnipeg Free Press*. Gorgeous...define[s] the pinnacle of this new genre...Meticulously researched and artfully constructed: a labor of love, infused with familial tenderness. *Jewish Daily Forward*. Eloquent and engrossing....Miranda Richmond Mouillot has imbibed her tale with the frisson of a detective story while gently introducing us to the charm and hidden pain of her extraordinary grandparents... A totally captivating journey that will keep you rapt from start to finish. *Australian Women's Weekly*. Written with an almost poetic transcendence of time, place and memory, this moving memoir chronicles an amazing circle of life. No fairy tale, it is as epic as the times in which Anna and Armand lived and the love they inspired. - *BookPage*. As Mouillot upends her own life to investigate [her grandparents], she begins to understand the lengths to which people will go to protect their fragile dignity and comes to recognize the power of memories that both comfort and torment wounded souls. A vibrant, earnest, and profound tribute. - *Booklist*. "The corrosive effects of the Holocaust upon those directly involved and generations thereafter are illustrated vividly in this candid saga of familial love and misunderstanding, which will resonate with readers of World War II history as well as those who appreciate accounts of ancestral sleuthing in the vein of Anne Sinclaire's *My Grandfather's Gallery: A Family Memoir of Art and War* and Sarah Wildman's *Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind*." - *Library Journal*. Charming, understated. A wonderful evocation of the way that the Holocaust has haunted many generations. *Publishers Weekly*. "A moving family history researched with dedication and completed with a granddaughter's love." - *Kirkus*. *A Fifty-Year Silence* is one of those exceedingly rare books that touches you deep down page by page through the rawness of its story and its sheer insight. The extraordinary quality of the prose, the elegance of the storytelling, and the genius with which Miranda Richmond Mouillot has laid down the twists and turns make this a book to treasure. It is a memoir that sings to us all. Tahir Shah, author of *The Caliphs House*. *A Fifty-Year Silence* is an existential detective story, a family chronicle, a journey of self-discovery, a meditation on memory, a reckoning with ghosts of a tragic past and, miraculously, this luminous book succeeds on all levels. The complex, unforgettable characters of Anna and Armand belong in a novel.

The authors own quest to uncover the startling truth about their relationship has the candor and intimacy of the best kind of memoir. Anya von Bremzen, author of *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking* A Fifty-Year Silence bravely confronts a truth that most memoirs deny: even the most thorough investigation of family history cannot elucidate the heart of the past. Richmond Mouillots voice shaped by stories yet resisting any single story does the profound work of using imagination, place, love, and art to transform the unknowable past into a rooted, liberating spring of identity. Anouk Markovits, author of *I Am Forbidden* Miranda Richmond Mouillots loving, suspenseful, and determined quest to uncover the mysterious wound that divides her family holds us fascinated in the intimate spaces where generations seek each other. She beautifully explores how time and memory challenge us all. Leslie Maitland, author of *Crossing the Borders of Time* In Miranda Richmond Mouillots luminous and courageous exploration of the two complicated lives of her grandparents, the tragedy of the Holocaust, a crumbling house in France, and her personal search for what might be a kind of truth, *A Fifty-Year Silence* brings to life a singular family across generations. Richmond Mouillot is a writer of extraordinary grace whose love of her subjects illuminates nearly every page. Marianne Szegegy-Maszk, author of *I Kiss Your Hands Many Times* Miranda Richmond Mouillot's remarkable book takes the French concept of the lieux de memoire places of memory those geographic repositories of story and pain, and upends it. Richmond Mouillot draws a powerful portrait of her beloved grandparents, long estranged from one another yet both in love with their only granddaughter, whose own lives are a microcosm of the impact of the Holocaust. In discovering what drove them apart, she unfolds a captivating, intensely moving tale of family, love, war, loss, and finding oneself in the tea leaves of the past. Sarah Wildman, author of *Paper Love* A keenly observed and poignant memoir of one young womans journey from North Carolina to the south of France, and from the present day into the dark spaces in the history of her family and of Europe. Matti Friedman, author of *The Aleppo Codex* and winner of the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature From the Hardcover edition. About the Author MIRANDA RICHMOND MOUILLOT was born in Asheville, North Carolina. She lives in the South of France with her family. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter One When I was born, my grandmother tied a red ribbon around my left wrist to ward off the evil eye. She knew what was ahead of me and what was behind me, and though she was a great believer in luck and the hazards of fortune, she wasnt about to take any chances on me, her only grandchild. My grandmother had fled or lost countless homes in her lifetime, and though she never fully resigned herself to living in America, she was determined to die in her house in Pearl River, New York, to which she had retired from her job as a supervising psychiatrist at Rockland State Mental Hospital. She would tell me this with some frequency, because my grandmother viewed death as an interesting dance step shed eventually get around to learning, or perhaps a pen pal shed come awfully close to meeting several times no doubt this intrigued equanimity was part of the reason she managed to live so long. My grandmother told me many things over the years, in a jumbled and constant flow of speech. I hung on to her every sentence, fascinated and admiring. Each word she said was like a vivid, tangible object to me, a bright buoy, a bloodred lifeline: MY Godtmusckle VEG-eh-tayblesourrwvive That was her favorite word. She rolled it out of her mouth with Carpathian verve, inflected with both Austro-Hungarian German and French. Youre like me, Mirandali, shed say. Youll sourrwvive. This was immensely comforting, because outside the reassuring confines of my grandmothers presence, I was never too sure about that. When Grandma wasnt around, my life was bafflingly full of terror. I say bafflingly because my childhood, albeit eccentric, was outwardly perfectly secure: my parents divorced when I was small, but theyd done so amicably, and each remarried a stepparent I loved as fiercely as if they had all given birth to me. There I was, a nice little girl with two big front yards, climbing apple trees and peeling Elmers glue off my hands at recess with my friends, except for the moments when my comfortably ordinary world incomprehensibly fell to pieces. Take the day my friend Erin and I locked her little brother in the bathroom, and Erin began belting out a loud rendition of *The Farmer in the Dell* so her parents wouldnt hear him hollering for us to let him out: one minute I was singing along with her, and the next I was clutching Erins arm for dear life, as if she might pull me out from under the avalanche of fear now suffocating me. Stop, I begged her. We have to stop. They played music to drown out the screams of the children when they were killing them. Years later Erin recalled that shed been so upset by what Id said that shed run crying to her father. What did he say? I asked her. He told me you came from a family of Holocaust survivors with a lot of bad memories to cope with. All I could think was, I wish someone had told me that. With the clumsy logic of a small child, I tried to protect myself from these episodes by constructing scenes of perfect domesticity in which everything was ordered and beautiful: careful dioramas I fitted into Kleenex boxes or arranged on the shelf beside my bed, elaborate habitats I squirreled away in hideouts behind the bushes of our front walk or tucked under my mothers desk. I would spend hours imagining myself away from the world and into these fictitious universes. If you had asked me, as a child, what I wanted to do when I grew up, I would have told you a careerballerina, scientist, senator but what I really wanted was my own home, a place to keep me safe from the lurking menace of destruction, the horrible crumbling feeling I knew was never far-off. The habitats I created were of no use at night. I kept my shoes near the front door, so I could grab them quickly if we had to escape in a hurry, but then Id lie awake and worry wed have to use the back door instead. Biding my fearful time until I fell asleep, I would calculate how quickly I could jump out of bed and dress and count the places I might hide. I wished I were grown up and more graceful; I believed I was resourceful enough, but not tall enough, to survive. I grieved in advance for the loss of my

cozy home with the books on the shelves and the bright bedspread, brush and comb on the dresser, fire in the woodstove, food in the fridge. I would call out for my mother to come sit with me, hoping she could keep my nameless fear at bay, and pepper her with questions. Could someone steal our house? My mother always took me seriously, and she replied to my questions honestly, which meant her answers were rarely as reassuring as I wanted them to be. No, she would say. Not usually. But sometimes? Well, if something happened. There would be a small pause as she considered what she would and would not explain. For example, if you had to go away for a long time, someone could move in, or steal the papers saying you owned it, or make new ones saying it was theirs. What if you came back? Id press. Well, you would have to prove that the house really was yours. How could you do that? Well, you could go to court, if the government were still intact. There was also the question of fire. What if someone burned our house down? Thats not very likely. Her calm, dry voice was silent another moment in the dark room. Really. Its very unlikely. But no matter how many times she reassured me with rational considerations of likelihood and risk (no one in our household smoked; we didnt have a furnace; we owned three fire extinguishers), my mother could not give me the gift of certainty that every child craves. What I longed to hear was That will never happen. But how could she say that? In our family, everyone had lost a home. The unspoken question that nettled me at night was not whether such a thing could happen but how many homes you could lose in a lifetime. In my dreams, when sleep finally came, Id pack quickly for my flight. Only the essentials. Coat, matches, pocketknife. Id get bogged down as I tried to plan ahead, to think of all the things I would lack: change of underwear, soap, raincoat, antiseptic ointment, adhesive bandages, toilet paper, candles, shoelaces, string, a sweater, powdered milk, wool socks, long johns, tarp, hat, scissors. Pots and pans. A hammer. Stamps. Wallet. Photographs. Some sort of container for holding water. Rubber bands. Gloves, not mittens. A sleeping bag. Salt. Sugar. Towel. Needle and thread. All the dreams were the same, except for the ones where they got me before I had time to pack. Sometimes Id end up in a train, occasionally theyd shoot me right away, and always, afterward, Id wake to a world drained of color, thick with a desolation so familiar I never even thought to mention it to anyone. I preferred the dreams of flight: in those, my grandmother would come back for me, wrest the excess baggage from my hands, and push me out the door. Grandma and I were so close that when I shut my eyes, I can still count the spots on her aging skin, which reminded me of an almond in its smoothness and color. If I concentrate on my fingers, I can feel her silver hair, which even in her extreme old age was soft as silk and streaked with coal black. I can see her standing before her mirror in a pale pink slip, rubbing face cream on her high cheekbones and into her neck, all the way down to her graceful shoulders, doing face yoga to keep away the wrinkles, her gold and turquoise earrings quivering in her ears. They had been in her earlobes since she was eight days old, when her ears were pierced in the Romanian Jewish equivalent of a bris for a girl. I spent so much time looking at those earrings that their existence was more intense, more fully real to me than that of other objects. You could say the same of the way I saw my grandmother. She was so beautiful, even her dentures seemed glamorous, in my favorite shades of seashell pink and pearly white. Your teeth fall out when you dont have enough food, shed say in a matter-of-fact tone when I admired them in their little cup, secretly hoping shed lend them to me one day. So I got mine young. But maybe when youre very old you can have some, too. My earliest memory was of her, of bouncing on her outstretched leg as she chanted a Romanian Yiddish nursery rhyme: Pitzili, coucoulou... Not on her knees but on her outstretched leg my grandmother was the strongest woman I knew. She taught yoga to a group she called my old ladies and had a chin-up bar in the doorway of her bedroom. Lest you think she was some sort of health fanatic, I hasten to add that she also drank a pot of coffee a day and had a secret fondness for Little Debbie cakes. My grandmothers perfume was one of contradictions: she smelled of Roger Gallet lavender soap, Weleda iris face cream, and raw garlic. Beneath that, her skin had a floral and slightly metallic scent, which put me in mind of roses and iron playground bars. When I open her papers, I can still smell it, growing fainter with the passage of time. Her home in New York was like a ship pulled up onto an unknown shore, a bulwark shed fitted out against the oddities of America, intensely personal in a way that indicated she knew she was here for the duration and was determined to make the best of her stay. Taste-wise, it was a mishmash: fine textiles; valuable etchings by her artist friend Isaac Friedlander; paintings by her psychiatric patients; furniture salvaged from the curb; rag rugs; giant plastic flowers in a gaudy ceramic umbrella stand from Portugal; and the bits of Judaica and African art that are standard-issue home decor for left-wing Jews of a certain age. Her wardrobe was a similar jumble. Her dresses and jackets, custom-made for her by a couture seamstress shed befriended in Paris, had been subjected over the years to endless alterations, additions, and improvements. She was devoted to a pair of flesh-colored orthopedic ghillies she called space shoes that a famous podiatrist had made for her in the 1950s to relieve the pain in her frost-damaged toes. Her preferred accessories were a childs sun hat with a bright blue splatter-painted band and matching sunglasses. The year after I was born my grandmother bought the house next door to my mothers house in Asheville as a second home. It was the ugliest house in the neighborhood, but Grandma was extremely proud of it. It looked like a badly constructed pontoon boat had eaten and failed to digest a mobile home, then crashed into the mountainside. It had white aluminum siding and a flat tarpaper roof, with red aluminum awnings that made its doors and windows look like sleepy, half-closed eyes. But my grandmother didnt care. The house was hers, and that was what mattered. Before she moved in, she shipped herself a coal-burning stove and a box of bricks from her house in New York. Grandma sent a lot of things to Asheville over the years, including a

pair of fuchsia suede high-heeled sandals too large for anyone but my father, a fur wallet made by one of her psychiatric patients, and a kerosene lamp and cookstove, with live fuel included, just in case. A lot of things were just in case. Candles and cough drops, the woolen bandage she always carried in her purse. My grandmother practiced a peculiar and intensive form of self-sufficiency. She wasn't a wilderness type; she just knew that in the end, the only person she could truly rely upon was herself. My grandmother lived alone in a way that seemed natural, inevitable, and inviolable, and for all our closeness, it never occurred to me to wonder with whom she had managed to produce her two children, my mother and uncle. She seemed perfectly capable of doing such a thing unassisted, and where in her life would a companion have fit in? Still, I remember a day when I was about five years old, and my mother handed my grandmother a photograph of me posed with my grandfather in a Sears, Roebuck studio, taken that summer on one of his infrequent visits to Asheville. My grandmother examined the picture. What a nice photo. Whos that with Miranda? My mother replied, Thats Daddy. My grandmothers smooth forehead wrinkled into a map of sadness. She looked carefully at the picture, as if searching for a sign. Then she set the photo on the table in front of her. I would never even have recognized him. She sounded the words out slowly, shaking her head. I wouldnt know him if I met him on the street. She picked it up and looked again. May I keep this? she asked. Sure, my mother said, sounding surprised. Later that day I found the photograph tucked into a picture frame beside my grandmothers bed, where it remained until her death. At the time I wondered why she wanted to keep a picture of me with someone she didnt know. I was too young to put one and one together and realize my grandparents might once have been two, to discern they might ever have been anything but strangers to each other. Chapter Two How could I, at that age, have thought to match my grandmother to my grandfather? He wasnt apples to her oranges; he was pine cones or prickly pears: a remote and vaguely terrifying figure who noted corrections in the margins of his dictionaries, sent my letters back marked up with red pencil, and occasionally appeared in our house with tasteful gifts and an inclination to take umbrage in toxic doses. He was retired from the UN civil service and had been an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials. I didnt know what the Trials were (we called them the Trials, as if they were some kind of kissing cousin or family vacation spot), except that they added to his aura of prestige and authority. Yes, he and my grandmother were more than opposites, or perhaps less; they were like the north poles of two magnets, impossible to push close enough together in my mind to make any kind of comparison, let alone a connection. The idea that they might be linked first came to me on the day we began addressing invitations to my bat mitzvah, and I pointed out to my mother that my grandfather hadnt been included on the guest list. I guess you could send him an invitation, she replied. But hes not going to come. Why? Think about it.