

DAILY ITINERARY

h - at 11 a.m., sail  
 Lloyd Pier, Hoboken,  
 Lloyd steamship "Prie  
 h - Call at Gibraltar.  
 i - Probable arrival at  
 h to Friday, May 12th, N  
 h - Evening steamer t  
 h - To Tuesday, May  
 des Palmes.  
 h - To Girgenti. Hôte  
 h - to Thursday May  
 n - To Syracuse.  
 h to Saturday, May 20th  
 h - Per late afternoon  
 dini and, thence by ca  
 to Tuesday May 23rd  
 d - Per morning tra  
 Grande-Bretagne.  
 n - Embark on evening n  
 h - On way to Canea.  
 h - Canea and via Aegina and Cape Sunium,  
 to Athens.  
 h - Arrival at Athens.  
 n - Thursday, June 1st. Athens. Hôtel d'An  
 gletterre. During stay in Athens make  
 excursion to Eleusis.  
 t - Over Bay of Salamis and Bay of Corinth  
 to Itea and, thence, to Delphi.  
 d - To and in Corinth.  
 d - To and in Mycenae, Argos and Nauplia.  
 h to Monday, June 5th. Nauplia.  
 h - Return to Athens and at 9 p.m., drive  
 to Piraeus, where embark for Constantinople.  
 h - Land at Smyrna.  
 n - Over Dardanelles and Sea of Marmora,  
 and arrive at Constantinople. Pera Palace Hôtel.  
 h to Saturday, June 10th. Constantinople.



C. D. FREDRICKS, 770 BROADWAY, N.Y. H. O'NEIL.

y, » 10th - Take afternoon steamer to Noudani  
 thence by rail to Broussa.  
 y, » 10th, to Tuesday, June 13th. Broussa.  
 . » 13th - Per Royal Express steamer up Bosporus  
 and over Black sea to Costanza.  
 ady, » 14th - From Costanza by express train  
 to Brest, Hôtel du Boulevard.  
 y, »  
 »  
 y, »  
 ,  
 ,  
 day



*Pays de malheur!*

# Chasing the Past

A novelist rewrites the history  
of a mysterious antiques collector.

By Joanna Scott

**T**hroughout my childhood, a portrait of my mother's grandfather, Armand de Potter, hung on our living room wall. My mother always referred to him simply as "Granddaddy," though she had never met him. He had died suddenly in the early years of the 20th century, disappearing from the deck of a passenger ship. What caused him to go overboard, no one could say. There were no witnesses. He had left his steamer trunk in his cabin, but his wallet was never found.

According to my mother, there was some suspicion in the family that he'd been murdered. He was a rich man. Maybe a thief robbed him and then pushed him overboard. More likely, though, it was a tragic accident. He may have gone out to the deck for a breath of the cool night air and lost his balance. The rails on ships were lower back then, my mother would point out.

It never occurred to me that there might be more that could be known beyond the speculations reported by my mother. Like her, I thought that the truth had disappeared into the sea with Granddaddy, and I was reminded of the mystery every time I looked at his portrait.

My mother and her sister had been raised by their grandmother—the widow of Armand de Potter—and they'd divided her possessions between them after her death. Mom had inherited enough antiques and paintings to clutter a small house. She had also kept her grandfather's steamer trunk. It followed her from her house to her condominium to her apartment, where it was relegated to the basement storage unit and forgotten for half a century.

Then one day five years ago, my mother asked me to help her find her college diploma. She thought it might be in the steamer trunk, so we went down to the basement. We found the diploma right away,

**MYSTERY MAN:** Armand de Potter (left), the author's great-grandfather, was a collector and trader of Egyptian antiquities who disappeared during a transatlantic voyage in 1905, leaving his wife, Aimée, and son, Victor. On one of her husband's last itineraries from Constantinople, Aimée wrote *Pays de malheur!* "City of doom!"

*The author of 11 books, Joanna Scott is the Roswell Smith Burroughs Professor of English. Her most recent novel, De Potter's Grand Tour, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2014. She is a recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Lannan Award. This essay was adapted from one that originally appeared on the website Work in Progress (fsgworkinprogress.com) of Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Used with permission. All rights reserved.*



- A. 9. Horus, or Ra, bronze; with head of sparrow-hawk surmounted by pschent. H., 6 in.
- " 10. Ammon-Ra, bronze; with shenti, head-dress-crown of Lower Egypt, Sun-disc and two feathers. H., 4 in.
- " 11. Ptah-Sokar, as Mummy (alabaster base), bronze, Saitic epoch; with close-fitting cap, holds tat, ankh, user. H., 6 in.
- " 12. Pasht, bronze; with cat's head, holds lotus-blossom. H., 8½ in.
- " 13. Pasht, sitting (alabaster base), bronze. H., 7 in.
- " 14. Pasht, or Tefunt, standing (alabaster base), bronze, Saggareh. H., 5½ in.
- " 15. Pasht, standing (or Tefunt), bronze, Saggareh. H., 4¾ in.
- " 16. Sebek, Head of Crocodile, pschent on head, holds ankh and sceptre. H., 4½ in. Bronze.
- " 17. Harpocrates, seated (alabaster base), bronze, putting finger to mouth. H., 5¼ in.
- " 18. Khons-Lunus, as Mummy (alabaster base), bronze; holds sceptre and flagellum; wears uraeus, crescent and disk. H., 4¾ in.
- " 19. Horus as child, seated (alabaster base), bronze; lock of youth over right shoulder; wears khaft, and uraeus surmounted by head-dress of uraeus and two rams' horns. H., 5½ in.
- " 19b. Horus as child, standing, no uraeus, bronze. H., 4 in.



Statuettes of Bronze

but also plastic bags full of papers and books. My mother left me in the basement while she went to make dinner, and I began sifting through the bags in the steamer trunk.

Among the papers I found legal documents:

There were dozens of itineraries, including one marked mysteriously by a handwritten exclamation in French.

There were albums full of photographs of travels from around the world.

There were journals with messages written on their inside covers.

There were postcards, letters, wills, and a scrapbook full of newspaper clippings dating back to the 1870s. There was an old belted leather wallet containing a card for a parfumerie in Nice, France. A pamphlet catalogued something called "The De Potter Collection," listing over 300 pieces of ancient Egyptian art, including a decorated sarcophagus and mummy.

The materials gave me a sense of the major events in the lives of my great-grandparents: I read about their wedding in the Hudson Valley in 1879, about Armand's Belgian heritage, his success as a proprietor of a travel business, and his extensive dealings in the antiquities trade.

I felt like I was having a murky dream about the past. Why had everything been kept closed up in the trunk for so long? What were these ancestors trying to tell me? I wouldn't have been able to guess if I hadn't found a set of journals—"A Line a Day" books produced by the Samuel Ward Company, each with a prefatory advertisement that couldn't have been more apt: "Such a book will be of the greatest

value in after years. What a record of events, incidents, joys, sorrows, successes, failures, things accomplished, things attempted." These were the diaries that Armand's wife, Aimée, had kept over a period of 30 years.

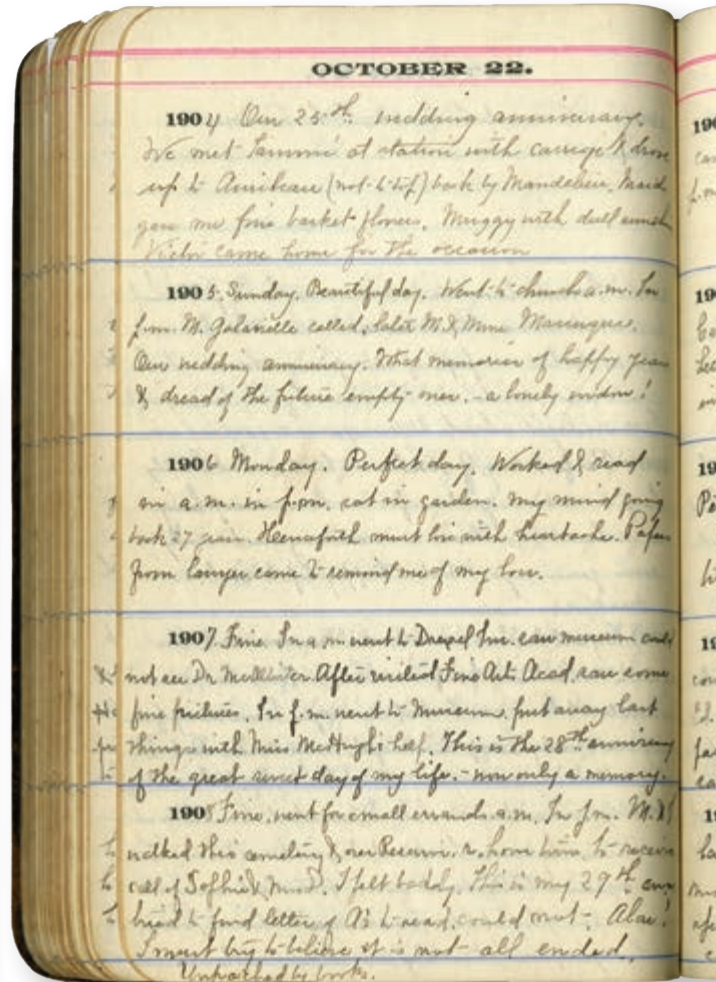
I took all the materials home to my study. My great-grandparents left so many testimonies that I was convinced they had wanted their secrets to survive them. It seemed that I had come upon a history that was begging to be written. I started a family biography, intending to solve the mystery surrounding Armand de Potter.

Yet the more I pored over it all, the more stymied I felt by the missing pieces. Aimée had indicated in her diary that she'd lost the packet of her husband's letters. Where were those letters? What had Armand said in them? As I speculated, I couldn't resist writing the possibilities as imagined scenes. My search kept pushing me away from history, and closer to fiction.

The true story may have been more powerful, full of more beauty, love, whimsy, and heartbreak than anything I could have invented, but it was partial. After spending two years on the book I'd conceived of as nonfiction, I decided to recast it as a novel.

Still, I remained fixated on uncovering evidence. I spent hours in the Egyptian Galleries at the Brooklyn Museum, staring at an illustrated sarcophagus that had once been in the De Potter Collection. I went to the Hudson Valley and knocked on the door of the house where Aimée de Potter had lived out her life after her husband's disappearance.

**SURVIVING SECRETS?** Meticulous record keepers, Armand and Aimée de Potter left their family a trove of catalogs from their antiques business, photos, diaries, and other materials documenting their travels around the world and their lives together. But did they leave clues about Armand's disappearance?



The owner graciously invited me inside and showed me around. As I was leaving, he told me that he thought the house was haunted. I put my ear against the wall and heard a distant knocking—the sound made by mice, perhaps? Or ghosts?

But no matter how hard I peered into the past, I just could not imagine the central piece in the narrative—that point in Armand's last days when he made the decision not to return home to his villa in Cannes. The book I was writing was like the steamer chest: full of pictures and snippets that didn't cohere.

Then I went to Philadelphia, to the museum at the University of Pennsylvania, where Armand's collection of Egyptian antiquities had once been on loan. I had a notion that a curator there at the turn of the century, Sara Yorke Stevenson, was important to the story. I visited the archives and wandered through the galleries, searching for clues.

I knew from Aimée's diaries that Armand had written his last two letters to her in Constantinople. She'd scrawled a lamentation next to the name of the city on an itinerary: *Pays de malheur*, "city of doom." What happened to Armand in Constantinople? I had to figure it out. By the end of the day, though, I hadn't found any relevant information, and my imagination would go only so far before it dissolved in a fog of uncertainty.

It seemed I would never finish the book I'd begun. All I wanted was to get out of there. Where was the exit? I turned the wrong way, then the right way. Oh, there it was, and look, beside the door was the entrance to a small exhibition called *Archaeologists and Travelers in*

*Ottoman Lands*. Why not take a quick peak? Maybe I wasn't in such a hurry after all.

How interesting to discover that it was an exhibition about the antiques trade, featuring a professor from the University of Pennsylvania named Hermann V. Hilprecht. And in the display case, a letter sent from Constantinople, postmarked June 8, 1905, caught my eye. That was the same day Armand led his final tour through Constantinople!

I'd intended to spend five minutes in the exhibition. I stayed until closing, reading about false claims the arrogant Professor Hilprecht made regarding excavations in the ancient holy city of Nippur. I learned that he had been hired by the University of Pennsylvania as a lecturer in Egyptology before becoming a professor of Assyriology. He must have been familiar with Armand's collection. And he had been in Constantinople when Armand was there.

While I didn't find the absolute solution to the mystery of Armand's disappearance, I found something else in that exhibition: stories that ignited my sputtering imagination and gave me the means and energy to continue the novel I'd begun.

I'd wondered throughout my life about the bearded man in the portrait in our living room. He was at the height of his career, in love with his wife, and devoted to his son when he set off on his last tour. A century later, I took off after him. *De Potter's Grand Tour* is my pursuit of a man who had clearly wanted to be remembered and yet, as I discovered, was reluctant to be found. ③



# At Sea

## Was the disappearance of Armand de Potter an accident?

By Joanna Scott



**SETTING SAIL?** Armand de Potter traveled to Constantinople (shown here in a family photograph) as part of his life as an antiquities collector before boarding the *Regele Carol* (shown here in a 1916 postcard), the ship from which he disappeared.

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**I**t is close to midnight on the *Regele Carol*. The last of the passengers have finally returned to their rooms, the stewards have stacked the deck chairs, and Armand is alone at the rail, searching the darkness in an effort to make out the coast of the nearest island. By his calculations, Lemnos should be a half mile off their starboard side, close enough to swim to if the steamer foundered. But he isn't worried that the steamer will founder, not tonight, not with the sea perfectly calm, the sky starlit, the breeze barely strong enough to disperse the smoke from his pipe.

He pictures his wife bundled in blankets in her hotel room in Lausanne, the window open a crack to let in the cool night air. In the morning she'll ring for room service and enjoy her tea and brioche in bed. Later she will walk into town to shop with Victor, or maybe they'll take a stroll along the Esplanade de Montbenon and have lunch on the terrace at La Grotte.

If he'd had the foresight to recognize in the midst of his foolishness that his actions would lead him here, to the rail of the *Regele Carol*, he would have attempted to design a different outcome, including joining his wife and son tomorrow for lunch at La Grotte before boarding the train to return to Cannes. Instead he is compelled to stick to the original plan, to keep on leaning against the rail, to lean a little more and a little more, not far enough to fall, but far enough for his pencil to slip from his breast pocket and plummet into the boiling foam below.

He feels a momentary pang but then reminds himself that he won't be needing his pencil anymore. He won't be needing much of anything where he's going. He won't need his pipe. He won't need his buttermilk dress coat trimmed with silk lapels. He won't even need his hat.

He's not sure which his wife will receive first: his last two letters or the official notice that he is missing at sea. He expects that she will weep for the appropriate period, perhaps even longer. But she is a resourceful woman, and sooner or later she will dry her eyes. After taking stock of her new circumstances, she will rebuild her life and watch over her son at Grand Bois.

In the shorter of his last two letters to her, he included instructions on how to handle the estate. He couldn't bring himself to warn her, however, that when she attempts to withdraw money from the Crédit Lyonnais she will find the account has been closed, and then when she continues to the Société Générale, she will discover that their joint account contains far less than she thought and their fortune has shrunk to almost nothing. Divesting all their remaining assets won't satisfy the creditors clamoring for payment. Only the sale of the De Potter Collection at its full value, along with the ample indemnity from his paid-up life insurance policy, will enable his wife and son to remain in their beloved home.

He'd tucked the photograph of them into his pocket, and he takes it out now to examine it. Aimée with her funny topknot the size of an acorn. Victor with his melancholy eyes. Is it possible that he would never see them again? Why, it's very possible! See how possible it is?

He glances over his shoulder to check that the deck behind him is still empty. He looks toward the wall that hides the bridge from view to confirm once more that the quartermaster on watch can't see him. Shadows moving below the light on the front deck catch his attention; he traces them up a pole to a pair of flags fluttering in the light wind. This, he tells himself, is as good a time as any to make his exit, and he would, he will . . . except that right then he hears a quick, muted thud that could have come from the interior of the ship

or might signify that somewhere nearby a door has been opened and swung shut again.

He looks around to see if he has company. A moment later he thinks he hears the same thud again, but it is fainter this time, and he wonders if he'd been mistaken. No one is in sight. Still, he is flustered.


He takes a puff from his pipe to steady his nerves and looks down at the water. As he watches the white froth roll away from the hull into the night, breaking into patches and dissolving into the same wine-dark sea that the ancients sailed, the bitter thought comes to him that they might be passing over a sunken galley full of looted treasures.

He is sorry to have created such a mess for his dear wife to clean up. That it has come to this and he must cause his family such anguish in order to protect their happiness is a reality as absurd as it is unavoidable. He is teetering above the ocean, about to fly away from his life on the presumption that he must take responsibility, he must make sure his creditors are paid, he must remove himself as the target of his enemies and keep his family from being turned out of their home—he can accomplish all this with one simple action, shattering the surface that hides death from human consciousness, subjecting himself to the cruelest agony because he must, he must . . . good God, he must pull himself together!

He reaches for his pocket watch before remembering that he left it in the trunk in his room. He turns to see if the clock on the wooden pedestal inside the unlit dining room is visible through the window behind him. He can't see the clock, but he does notice the steward and stewardess embracing near the funnel on the upper deck, locked in a kiss.

When did they arrive? Everybody is supposed to be in bed by now. It is essential that his last act go unwitnessed. If the couple looks up just as he is throwing himself overboard, they will alert the crew and try to save him. Imagine being reeled back onto the ship, flopping and sputtering while passengers and crew gather round! Even if they don't succeed in saving him, they will be asked for a full report of the incident, and their testimony would be enough proof that Armand de Potter's death at sea wasn't accidental.

He wouldn't have predicted that love would get in the way—love, with its impractical hope. Love is the reason he is standing here. How he loves his wife and son and wants only to protect them. How jealous he is of the young couple kissing on the upper deck.

He could go to the back of the boat, where the couple wouldn't be able to see him. But in truth he is relieved that they have intruded into the scene he has so carefully arranged. He is reassured by the evidence that the two young people are persisting in their devotion, despite all the obstacles the world has thrown in their way, and he doesn't mind if he has to wait for them to get their fill of each other before he proceeds with his plan. On this journey he won't miss a connection just because he is a little late. Keep kissing, he would like to urge the couple, kiss for as long as it pleases you. Though it's unusual for him, the gentleman leaning against the rail of the *Regele Carol* is not in any hurry. 

## Tour the Tour

An exhibition based on Joanna Scott's novel, *De Potter's Grand Tour*, and the historical materials saved by her family that Scott used in her research for the book will be on display at Rush Rhees Library this spring. *To Travel Is to Live: Joanna Scott's De Potter's Grand Tour* will be on view in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections from January 10 through May 10. For hours and more information visit: <http://www.library.rochester.edu/rbscp>.