



In My Bottom Drawer

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To Kill a Mockingbird was one of the books that influenced my childhood view of the world, and I always felt there was a kind of romance in Harper Lee's refusal to write another book. For over half a century, her decision seemed to provide evidence of her artistic integrity. As a renowned author, Harper Lee turned her back on the opportunity to cash in on her fame by writing and publishing more books, saying that she had written what she wanted to write, 'and I will not say it again.'

So the controversial publication of Harper Lee's second novel, *Go Set a Watchman*, felt to me like a kind of betrayal. It came out over half a century after *To Kill a Mockingbird*, when the author was arguably incapable of making the decision about its publication for herself. It is telling that her associates published it shortly after the death of her sister, who used to oversee Harper Lee's business affairs. Whether or not the author herself made the decision to publish her second book is impossible to determine, but its publication raised the spectre of the book as a commodity valued for its commercial potential, rather than for its artistry.

As a fiction writer, I must regretfully admit to being unlike Harper Lee in almost every possible way, and this includes the volume of my output. While Harper Lee published one book in over fifty years, I have been fairly prolific, with over twenty books published in the dozen or so years since the start of my writing career. That may sound like a lot of words on the page but, in common with most writers, it doesn't actually represent my total output. I have written at least four full-length novels



that will never see the light of day. A couple have been roundly rejected by publishers, and I have not had the temerity to show the others to anyone for fear they might somehow slip past the gatekeepers. All the same, these embarrassing manuscripts have not been deleted but languish, hidden away in my virtual bottom drawer somewhere in the Cloud.

In addition to my bottom drawer of unpublished work, I have a secret store that must be common to many authors. This is a bottom drawer that exists only in my mind, containing work not yet written. My collection contains many stray and disparate ideas that may one day burgeon into novels, as is no doubt the case with every fiction writer. While the majority of my potential stories remain very sketchy, at least one of them usually emerges every time I embark on writing a book. Without this bottom drawer in my mind, my writing career might fizzle out for want of a new story to write. My secret bottom drawer is where all my books begin.