Three Unsent Letters for Maud

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writers’ biographies

they all die from abdominal cancer
stroke or suicide
I wish their biographies
would start with their last note
and end with birth
I wish it wouldn't be
such a dangerous profession
loneliness
being misunderstood
having to fight for recognition

take the life of a gardener
or a merchant at last
they marry happily
or not, or don't marry at all
they may fail or have success
not all have good mental health
in the end they are just like writers
but without leaving any literature behind
in the end
we all die from the same causes

Would you like to have an island?

Would you like to have an island?
Yes, please.
My own childhood memories—
My grandmother in a big house,
Living with tides and storms,
Hearing the birds all day long.

I imagine a village,
Everyone has the same name.
My name.
Everyone talks.
They know my sleeping hours,
They disapprove of my love interest.

Decades later—
There is a museum of me,
At my old schoolhouse workplace,
With my head chopped off.
Just my clothes and desk,
An island of ghosts and tourists.



Me, I still want the island though.
A big-city child,
Both grandmas in other countries.
I want the old home.
With good neighbours, please,
No fame for me this time.
My own red clay dead end road with no airport around.

How to write a novel

First, you write.
There is no way around it.
You don't have the time,
No talent, encouragement,
No voice and no ideas of course.
But still you've got a story to tell.
Then it’s “all in the laps of the gods.”

Or you work.
Read other people’s books,
Meet at The Literary weekly,
Practise your craft and skill,
And when you're really sure, start writing.

Or you wait.
Until you have enough to say.
Until you have enough money
To be free from the public's taste,
To be finally true to yourself.
Until you develop a really interesting voice,
Unique characters,
Finally something fresh and new.

At last, you publish a full body of work.
Millions of people read your words,

Streets are named after you,
Prizes established in your name—
And still you are famous
From that very first story.
You are the author of *Anne of Green Gables*,
That thing you wrote when
You had no idea how to write.
Now it is recognized.

And this is how you write
A novel.

Bio: Grigory Stanskiy was born in 1988 in Moscow, Russia. He studied Linguistics in Stuttgart, Germany, and Creative Writing in Leipzig, Germany, and Binghamton, New York. His prose and poetry has been published in German anthologies such as *Jahrbuch für Lyrik* (2023) and *Tippgemeinschaft* (2022, 2023).

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Banner image: "Dear Maud." Submitted by the author.

Image caption: Photo of the display in the schoolhouse in Lower Bedeque, PEI, where L.M. Montgomery taught in the late 1890s. Russell, Nancy. “Lucy Maud Montgomery taught at the schoolhouse in the late 1890s.” *CBC*, 24 June 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-bedeque-schoolh….