



## Small Treasons

*Mark Powell*

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With writing that is both devastating and tender, Mark Powell (*The Sheltering*) brings his acclaimed eye to an American marriage on the verge of rupture, spinning an all-too-current tale of the world we live in and the world we fear—and how we may not be able to tell the two apart—perfect for fans of Adam Johnson’s *Fortune Smiles* and Denis Johnson’s *The Laughing Monsters*.

Tess Maynard is coming apart. At home with her three young children in her husband’s Georgia hometown, people keep asking if she’s depressed, if she and John are okay.

Secretly, she’s becoming obsessed with the war on terror—an ISIS beheading video in particular. Something about the victim’s captivity on the computer screen resonates with her. Something inside of her demands endless prayers for a world gone mad.

The carefully constructed life of her husband is likewise beginning to unravel. Now a college counselor, John’s former life bears persistently into the present. Once a contractor at a CIA black site that interrogated suspected terrorists—and one innocent civilian—he is given a choice by the Justice Department: either help with a problem in the homeland, or they investigate.

Forced by an old colleague to spy on a new one, John’s experiences abroad come home to roost in Georgia. For his wife, for his family, he goes along with the game. But just as he and Tess work to salvage their life together, the world comes between them in the form of a young man slowly being radicalized by the professor John is reporting on.

In a moment Tess imagined and never wanted to see, the intersection of their three lives is as devastating as the bomber’s explosion of hate and metal, and as inevitable as the battle between powers great and personal.

## Small Treasons Details

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Author : Mark Powell

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## From Reader Review Small Treasons for online ebook

### Lindsay from TrulyBooked says

At first, I wasn't sure if I liked this book or not. It was definitely compelling, but how would that fit into Goodreads' system where stars denote enjoyment of the book you'd read? Small Treasons isn't enjoyable exactly...

The writing is a joy to read, there's a fluidity of it that is breathtaking, but the subject matter and the people involved are what shifts this book away from "enjoyment". Don't get me wrong, Small Treasons isn't bad or anything close to bad. I am 100% recommending this novel to you.

But it *is* uncomfortable and it's meant to be.

This is an unflinching look at the radicalization of people in all the ways that people can be radicalized. From shifting toward racial tensions due to the media's representation of Muslims to the patriotic 'ends justify the means' mentality that gave torture the green light to immersing oneself into fundamentalist religious practice with the aim of seeking martyrdom.

Small Treasons is important *because* it makes us uncomfortable, shining a mirror on our own experiences and those of the people around us.

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### Mary Ruthless says

I read this book kinda slowly because I didn't want it to end. Powell's pacing, characterization, and careful plotting made this novel something to savor and turn over in your mind. Addressing each of us and our basest selves, the darkest parts of our humanity, this novel captures your attention from the beginning. The author skillfully weaves his reader through a mystery and the painful history of his characters as they each try to rebuild themselves after confronting and living their darkest selves.

Mark Powell is a superb author and I look forward to his future works!

I received a galley of the novel from the author in exchange for an honest review.

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### Charles White says

Powell's best book. Real insight in the contemporary American paradox of guilt and faith.

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### Michael says

Powell is a magnificent writer. He can do beauty and brutality with equal power, and he can render an authentic portrayal of a young man's radicalization and a couple whose marriage is splintering apart under the burden of grief and guilt and disconnection with exceptional elegance. *Small Treasons* is a great novel.

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### **Marilyn Shea says**

I see the word, "terrifying," in most of the reviews of this book. I didn't feel terrified. I felt a little bored, like hearing my sister rant about theories of how the government is spying on us, telling us lies and misleading us. But I have to admit that perhaps these conspiracies she speaks of are not entirely theoretical. I am starting to have the queasy feeling that she is probably close to the truth, even though the word "truth" is currently undergoing ruination like the word "gay" already has. I think we all know that everything we do and say falls a little short of the truth. We know that we buy things we don't need. We know that we spend a lot of time and effort trying to avoid thinking. Some of us have been involved in war crimes, justified in our minds by the incompatibility of our Western ideology with the ideologies of others. We don't want to be hated for these things, and, as Americans, we are by many of the world's people. *Small Treasons* examines how our excesses and our excuses, and perhaps I can say, our sins, make all of us targets to those seeking a pure path through what we call religious extremism. The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves come with some huge personal costs.

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### **Maureen says**

I have complicated feelings about this book. Going to have to think about it.

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### **David Joy says**

A brilliant novelist at the top of his game. *Small Treasons* achieves that rare balance between complexity and pacing, a story rich and intricate, propulsive and satisfying. Mark Powell has been the South's best-kept secret for far too long.

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### **James Knight says**

Mark Powell is a brilliant writer who develops a timely and compelling novel based upon America's obsession with Islamic terrorism and radicalization. He also develops flawed but realistic characters that have been shaped (for good and bad) by their life experiences and a believable and realistic depiction of a splintering marriage. None of the major characters are lovable or even likeable. However, the fact that the characters and their actions make the reader feel uncomfortable is a tribute to the author.

The novel is well plotted and diverse story lines are skillfully woven together but some events and depictions somewhat strain credulity. This book deals with an important topic, the prose is a joy to read, and the author has developed story lines and realistic characters. Story-lines and characters that make the reader think make *Small Treasons* a very enjoyable read. I recommend it!

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### **Kathleen Gray says**

This is not an easy book. It raises questions about how the US war on terror has impacted those who we think are beyond its reach. The basic premise is flawed (the files issue) but this is still worth reading. Tess, John, Edward, and Reed are all believable characters; all of them have ethical, philosophical, and personal challenges. You won't agree with everything they do or think but this book will make you think. The ending (no spoilers) is both expected and not. What's most clear is that nothing is clear cut. It's beautifully written and carefully plotted. Thanks to edelweiss for the ARC.

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### **Jeremy Langett says**

The book attempts to convey a story of bored and morally suspect suburban inhabitants intersecting with the radicalization of a privileged young man. Although it puts forth a valiant effort of entering into the minds of both parties, the stereotypes and predictable storylines diminished any real hope of original thought. The one minority professor on a college campus in North Georgia: ISIS recruiter. A dissatisfied suburban housewife: Affinity for shopping, wine and track pants. The radicalized recruit: Anti-capitalist with a father as a reputable economist. A good beach read, I suppose.

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### **Julianne says**

A realistic glimpse into terrorism and the technological world. Very well written and plotted; relatable characters and adequate pacing keeps things interesting.

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### **Denton says**

Mark Powell's latest novel, *Small Treasons*, examines a number of the tragedies and obstacles that particularly face us in these uncertain times. But also, as with the best of literature, Powell is exploring some of the most universal questions of humanity. Perhaps the central question of this book is about forgiveness. Forgiveness of others, and more importantly, forgiveness of ourselves.

At the heart of this question is John Maynard, man whose past blocks him from having genuine relationships with his parents, his children and even his wife. His wife, Tess, has a secret also. She has become obsessed with videos ISIS beheadings. And then there is Reed Sharma, one of Powell's most complex characters: a young, would-be jihadist searching for something truthful, something more meaningful than those things that satisfy most young Americans, but unable to discern love from hate.

One of the strongest factors that keeps forgiveness at bay is the distance that builds between us and others. Powell wrote an essay for Authors 'Round The South about Don DeLillo's book *Players* and how that book and the idea of distance inspired *Small Treasons*: <http://authorsroundthesouth.com/90-th....>

I've read all of Mark Powell's novels, falling in love along the way with all of them. There are lines and

images from each one that stick with me, and even more so, there are life-shattering questions and explorations from each book that haunt me. Possibly to Powell's own detriment, he is able to see the ever-moving mechanics of our modern world, all of the forces working with and against each other. To our great fortune, Powell is able to use that knowledge to write a book like *Small Treasons*, both beautiful and tragic.

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### **Marjorie says**

Tess is the mother of three children and while she loves being home with them, she's developed a very odd obsession. She can't stop watching online terrorist ransom videos. She gets up in the middle of the night to watch them, particularly one she refers to as "The Man in the Basement", an American journalist held by ISIS.

Her husband John, now a professor at a small college, has a bit of an obsession, too, his being with the past. He can't shake an incident that happened at his previous job and he still mourns his dead first wife and his grown daughter who he hasn't seen or talked to in many years. James Stone, a man John worked with at his old job, is pressuring him to turn over files of another professor, Professor Edward Hadawi. The FBI is investigating Professor Hadawi in connection with an extremist religious group. If John doesn't turn the files over, James Stone is threatening to bring to light what happened at John's previous job.

Stone is not only looking for Professor Hadawi but also for a young man named Reed Sharma. Reed is being groomed to be a terrorist bomber. The growing connections between Tess, John, James Stone and Reed Sharma make up the backbone of this compelling novel.

This is a very suspenseful political thriller and very well-written. The characters are very well developed and I cared about them all. The most disturbing section was watching how Reed Sharma is convinced that becoming a terrorist bomber has great meaning. It's a chilling section and very disturbing. The author smoothly moves between the interconnected stories – from Reed's transformation to the personal issues in Tess and John's marriage to the political undertakings. It's a wonderfully written timely novel about obsession, faith and violence amidst our current political climate. There were sections that moved a bit slowly but three quarters of the way in, there was no stopping this story. The suspense in the last quarter of the book was quite nerve wracking. I'll definitely be looking for more of this author's work.

Recommended.

This book was given to me by the publisher in return for an honest review.

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### **Natelle Woodworth says**

3.5/5 this may change.... I still need to process... but I balled my eyes out at the end!!!!

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### **S.W. Gordon says**

Wow! What a fascinating and compelling story, told brilliantly in the exquisite prose that we've come to

expect from Mark Powell. There's a perfect mix of intellectual intensity, philosophical musings and plot lines of divergent stories that Powell brings together for a epiphanic and surprising climax. I wonder if Powell's overriding theme is the unfortunate state of religious faith in our secular world of social media, global wars, and rising immorality that threatens the welfare and safety of our families. Whales use echolocation to find their way through the vast oceans and to keep the pod together using reflected sound waves. Similarly, humans used to rely on faith and religion to find their way to spiritual enlightenment and to help keep the family together. Hence, in these dark days, humanity has lost its way. Our faith and religiosity have atrophied like our ability to echolocate (interpret reflected sound). We have been distracted by "reflected light" instead of focusing on the true inner light. We have forgotten the message of the prophets and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. "God is a staircase that ascends to a place that isn't there, or isn't there yet." This quote from Israel's National Poet Yehuda Amichai resonates deeply late in the novel. In a world where situational ethics have infected our moral character and sullied our eternal soul, all we can do is beg for forgiveness and hope that Jacob's ladder as promised in Genesis still exists, that the covenant between God and man is still intact. Thus, the ending is an echo of the Lord's Prayer: forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Click, click, click...salvation and redemption are still possible...click, click, click..."the stairs are my faith, the stairs are my despair"...click, click, click.

I also noticed some intertextuality with Daphne Du Marier's *Rebecca*: the ghost of the dead first wife, the burning of the cabin/Mandalay, the husband's shadowy past. I didn't see any significant connection with the Greek mythology of Echo unless you equate her unrequited love of the selfish Narcissus to Tess's love of John---seems like a reach, though. I love novels that you can sink your teeth into like this. Thank you, Professor Powell for another damn good read!

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