

Coronet

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FDR's RECIPE for SUCCESS



by JANE WEST WALTON

ONE DAY IN 1923, while I was a story editor for Paramount Pictures in New York, Adolph Zukor called me to his office. He was holding a letter when I entered.

"It's from one of the Roosevelts," he said. "He wants to sell us a story about John Paul Jones."

I glanced at the letterhead and read: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Vice-President, Fidelity & Deposit Company of Maryland, 120 Broadway, New York City.

"Are you interested?" I asked.

Zukor shrugged. "Not much. Besides, I can't afford to do a costume picture now."

"What do you want me to do?"

"The Roosevelts are important people," Zukor said. "I think we ought to let him down easy."

That afternoon, I telephoned Roosevelt. "I'd like to talk to you about your story idea on John Paul Jones," I said.

"Wonderful!" he replied enthusiastically. "But not on the phone. Can you come to tea tomorrow?"

Next afternoon, I entered the Roosevelt mansion on East 65th Street and was enchanted by the charm of the family circle. From the things he said, I deduced that Roosevelt looked upon writing as his new career. We were at tea when finally he asked, "What did Mr. Zukor think about my idea?"

The entire group looked at me. There was such trust and confidence in their faces that I could not tell the truth, so I said evasively: "He's considering it seriously."

"Is there anything wrong with it?" Roosevelt asked.

"It's not that," I said, groping for an excuse. "Paramount works so far in advance that we're checking our Hollywood studios to see when we can fit a picture of that type into our schedule."

For three months, we continued the pretense. As I accepted invitations to visit the family in New York and Hyde Park, I became more aware of Roosevelt's deter-

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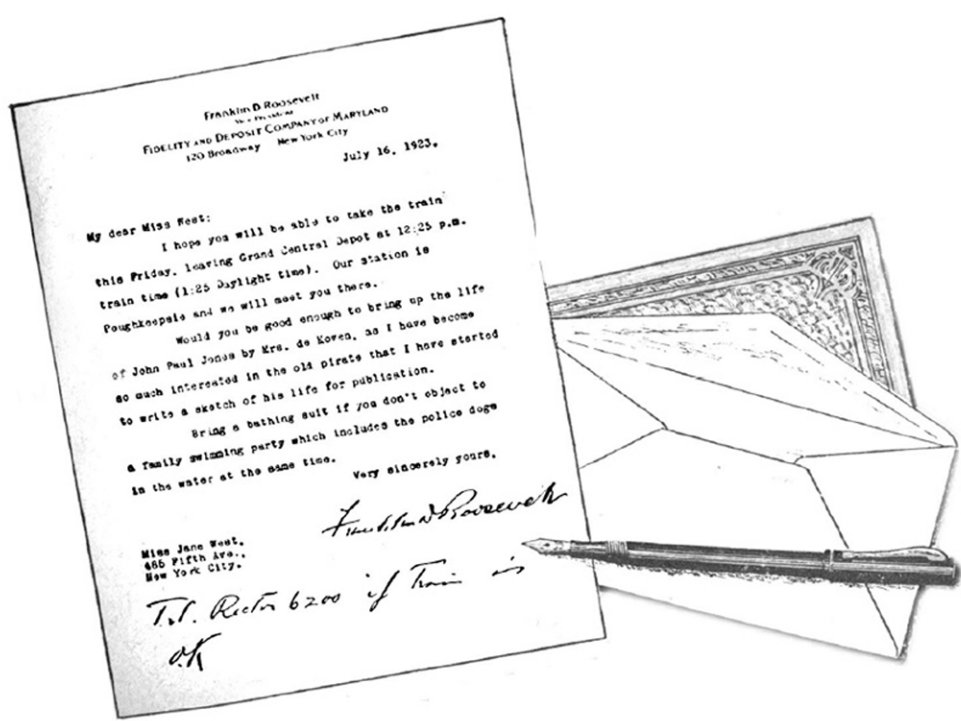
mination to assume a literary career, and the fondness I developed for him made it increasingly painful to tell him that his first attempt was doomed to failure.

At last, when I could endure procrastination no longer, I told him that his story had been rejected. I could see he was crushed. Clumsily I rambled on with excuses of production schedules and studio complications. But he was obviously bitterly disappointed, and the issue was not mentioned again in our last hour together.

Fifteen years passed. During President Roosevelt's second administration, my husband, Capt. Duncan Walton, U.S.N., and I were invited to a White House reception for Army and Navy officers and their wives. When we were presented to the President, he looked at me searchingly. Then he asked, "It's Jane West, isn't it?"

I said, "Yes, Mr. President."

A broad smile brightened his face. "You know," he said, "I think, at the time, I wanted to sell my story about John Paul Jones



and become a professional writer more than I had wanted anything else in my life. My darkest moment was when you told me that Paramount had rejected it."

"I'm sure they regret that more now than you did then," I said.

"Perhaps," he said. "But that rejection taught me something important. A failure, no matter how dismal it may make the future seem, doesn't mean the end of a man's life. I've learned that the best way to overcome a failure is to put it and all its reminders into the past, and then to attack an even-greater challenge with a deeper determination to succeed."

"Your own political success proves that theory," I said.

The President smiled again.

"Do you think so?" he asked. "Well, this much is certain—if Paramount had taken that story, you and I wouldn't be chatting in the White House, would we?"