



The Valley Of Decision

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Originally published in 1942, *The Valley of Decision* was an instant success, and its story of four generations of the Scott family—owners and operators of a Pittsburgh iron and steel works—has since captured the imagination of generations of readers. Absorbing and complex, it chronicles the family's saga from the economic panic of 1873 through the dramatic rise of American industry and trade unionism, through waves of immigration, class conflict, natural disaster, World War I, and Pearl Harbor. In 1945 it was made into a major motion picture starring Greer Garson and Gregory Peck.

This reissue features a new foreword by noted steel industry historian John Hoerr, author of *And the Wolf Finally Came*, who places the novel in context as a classic depiction of twentieth-century America.

The Valley Of Decision Details

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From Reader Review The Valley Of Decision for online ebook

Karen says

They don't write them like this anymore. Published in 1942, this is the story of an American steel mill family in Pittsburgh, that starts right after the Civil War and ends with the start of Pearl Harbor. The central figure in the book is the sixteen year old Irish maid that goes to work for them for the next 68 years. A very good read.

One very interesting item in my copy of the book (that is totally falling apart) on the 2nd page under the copyright it says "This book is manufactured under wartime conditions in conformity with all government regulations controlling the use of paper and other materials".

Gconnolly says

As I am currently reading The Kennedy Women I have been reminded of this book that I read ages ago but that continues to be one of my all-time favorites. Though Valley of Decision is historical fiction, it seems so real to me that it almost could be biographical. A really great story of a young Irish girl who comes to the household of the Scott family, the owners of the iron and steel works of Pittsburgh in the late 19th century, at 16 as a maid. Her sixty-eight years of service to the Scotts span the growth of the family's mills. A long read, but well worth the effort.

Mark says

I admit I have a soft spot for this book because it's based in my hometown, but on top of that, it's a great ripping yarn about a steel owner's family, the servants that live with them, a feisty union member and on top of all that, has one of the best flood scenes I've ever read in a novel. Set in Pittsburgh in the 1800s, it's written by a woman who went on to be the partner of the son of a founder of Czechoslovakia.

Alethea says

This book is an experience. A few thoughts:

* In my review of the movie (which I adored), I suggested that if the movie had been made today "it would be an ongoing series that would wear itself out with increasingly dramatic cliffhangers and tiring, convoluted plot developments." Well, at times, that's how I felt about the book.

* Why so many mentions of Paul's blonde mustache? I understand that his physical appearance in the book is not that of the tall, dark and handsome Gregory Peck that brings him to life on the screen, and I understand that mustaches were popular around the turn of the century, but do you have to mention it every 10 pages?

* Is that really how floods work? I had trouble picturing it, and videos on YouTube only help so much.

* Did anyone else feel bad for Louise? At least a little?

Coming from the film, I had no idea what to expect for most of the book, particularly after Paul died (That's not a spoiler. The book spans 70 years), so Book III was entirely new to me, but it also seemed to depart a bit from the rest of the story. The characters in Book III aren't given much focus earlier, and there's a ten year jump between Book II and Book III. At first I thought it seemed weird and tacked on. And the content, which deals largely with events leading up to World War II, were interesting but incredibly detailed and increasingly redundant and for pages at a time have just about nothing to do with Pittsburgh or the Scott-family's steel mill. I started to get frustrated with it until I remembered when the book was published: October 1942. I can imagine Ms. Davenport felt a little like Claire as she was writing--trying to yell to a deaf world that America can't stay out of the war forever. After mentally placing it in its proper historical context I was far more interested. In the end, the whole book actually feels like a clever little piece of propaganda. Get readers interested with a juicy cross-class love story set against a historical backdrop, and then--bam!--hit them with an emotional plea for them to get passionately, committedly involved in a war that's happening right now and that America at large was still resistant to get involved in.

In that light the movie seems like a cop-out with its lack of any mention of any war despite battles in the Pacific still raging, but people were getting sick of war tales, of being riled up to support the troops or sacrifice more for the war effort. What they wanted in 1945 was pure escapist melodramatic froth, and that's what they got. And while the Paul and Mary romance is my favorite part of the book, I appreciate Claire's story as well.

All in all, it was a fine way to spend a couple weeks worth of commutes.

Sandra says

Wow! This is an older book I found among my Grandfather's books, published in 1944. The book is very long, but so well written; I labored mightily with the tiny print, but was well worth the time it took.

The book follows an impoverished Irish maid, Mary Rafferty, who works in the Scott household, and their son, Paul Scott, and ultimately the rest of the Scott descendants, who manage to cling to their specialty company's sole ownership of the Scott Iron Works of Pittsburgh, PA.

Janna says

I found a very old hardback edition of this book tattered on the shelf at Grandpa's. I read it and loved the story.

Nancy says

May's book club selection, a long, long book. I loved the epic story of the Scott Family of Pittsburgh. The central character was Mary Rafferty, who came to work for the Scotts in her teens and became inextricably entwined in their lives and business for many generations. The story spans from 1873 until 1941. I wasn't able to attend the book club, but heard that almost everyone liked the book, though several commented on the length of the book.

Sabina Tagore says

I have waited long to review this book. I read this book more than ten years ago but lost the copy and couldn't remember the title. However, I always wanted to write a review for this book and its outline was formed ten years ago in me and has stayed for these many years, simmering as it were on the back burner of my mind!

One of the characters in the book, a music composer, is asked by his wife (Claire in the book, 3rd generation member of the Scott family whose life the book chronicles) to write a full symphony to the beat of a mill and he does. My review of the book is based on that imagery.

The Valley of Decision is a song written to the background score of the beat of a mill, a steel mill in fact. A symphony of various notes written to cover almost 70 plus years of history, the book chronicles the life of more than three generations of the Scott family, owners of a Pittsburgh steel mill.

The family's births, marriages, deaths, the changes in relationships these bring, the life of their friends, their struggles and their change of values through 3 generations are movingly portrayed through the eyes of one person Mary Rafferty. Mary, the daughter of Irish immigrants, enters the family as a maid and rises to become a beloved confidant of the family.

Her whole life becomes intertwined with that of the Scotts, in a song of life that marches to the cadence of a steel mill, weaving itself as a principal note in the harmony of their notes, not marring or jarring it but bolstering, strengthening, under girding, muting as well as enhancing the nuances such that song rises from being a mere litany of notes to become a crescendo, a musical artefact.

The style of the book, the pathos of it, its unassuming overtones of family culture, its silent trace of American history from the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s, all make it a literary gem worthy of being reading material for school & college students.

It leaves indelible mark on the reader, a book that will stay in memory, as it has stayed in my mind, with its accurate portrayal of human existence with all its joys and pains. It leaves you surfeited in every sense of the word and impacts you for life!

Gaylen Kemp says

Probably read this 15 or more years ago and have been meaning to reread it. I thought it was one of the best books I'd ever read. Will be interesting to see what I think now!

Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says

Pittsburgh, steel mills/iron works, unions, wealthy families, servants, 1800's....a great story about Pittsburgh.

The book has something for history buffs and also those readers who are interested in the lives of the people during that time period which stretches from the 1800's to December 1941...the day Pearl Harbor was bombed.

The book talks about the steel mills...specifically the Scott Iron Works...and how they grew and how the lives of its owners and workers were totally immersed and devoted. It also discusses unions and how difficult it was to get them started, and how the classes were more apt to snub each other which gave an indication of how life was in the 1800's.

I was not really expecting the book to be what it was, so don't get discouraged from the title and the subject matter. You will enjoy it. It doesn't get too technical...it is more about the Scott family and their lives through the generations. My rating is a 5/5

The Scott family and their history will keep your interest. The love and loyalty between Mary Rafferty and the Scott family was the main theme carried through up to the last pages of the book.

Mary, the main character, was about the same age as William Scott's daughters when she arrived for service at the Scott residence. Mary was a strong girl who held her poor, working class family together even though she only saw them once a week since she had to remain as a live-in servant at the Scott residence. She along with her brother, who worked at the Scott Iron Works, were the breadwinners since their father had been paralyzed by a mill accident a few years before. As Mary's brother James continued to work long hours each day in the mill he also was desperately trying to get a union started in hopes of better working conditions.

Mary's brother and Paul Scott, the son of William Scott, worked together on an invention to help steel production even though Paul was the owner and James was a steelworker. Meanwhile Paul begins to fall in love with Mary and she with him. This is not an acceptable match of course, and Mary tries to discourage it; but they both know that is difficult.

One of Mary's MANY duties was her responsibility for Constance, the daughter of William and Clarissa Scott. This was a very trying situation because Constance was a handful. Mary's "side job" was to TRY to keep her in line.

Constance then does something unthinkable, and the family, especially her father, would like to disown her. She moves away, and Clarissa Scott insists that she take Mary with her as her personal servant. Mary and Paul are heartbroken. Mary remains with Constance for four years and then is summoned home....both she and Paul are thrilled.

As the months pass, a strike occurs at the mill, and it wasn't a pleasant affair. Paul and Mary continue to struggle with their relationship. Many good and bad things continue to happen to the Scott family both personal and business.

Life went on for the Scott family, and when the parents were gone, the children were left to live their lives as

a distant family.....they didn't get along too well. Constance returned from London for a visit, Elizabeth and her husband were still uppity, and William Scott, Jr. and his wife also felt they were too good for the rest of the family. Jealousy and greed were a large part of this family's structure.

During all of this, the mill was flourishing, and Paul and Edgar were responsible for its success, but accidents and deaths in the mill were occurring and Edgar had other plans.

Relationships were starting to get edgy...especially Paul and Louise's marriage.

Mary held all the characters together and was the "glue" and stronghold that got the family through everything that happened in the lives of the Scott family....all the happiness, heartache, tragedies, decisions, births, and deaths. Every Scott loved Mary as if she had been a family member...she was the matriarch.

The story was wonderful....I admired Mary for her strength and loved how Marci Davenport allowed this female character to hold such a strong position throughout the book. It makes you want to be a part of that family and have the care and love that Mary brought to all of them. And....pairing up Mary and Claire made a power-house ending.

Elisabeth says

My reactions to this book were twofold. On the one hand, the writing is very good and the historical setting of the Pittsburgh steel mills detailed and interesting. I had to admire the skilled way Davenport handles a huge cast of characters, weaving their storylines together over several generations and making even the smallest supporting players stand out so you remember them when you encounter them again. On the other hand, the pervasive immorality of a number of characters, including some we're supposed to like and root for, gives the story a sordid flavor and spoiled most of it for me. It's the kind of book where I had to keep reading just to find out how things turned out, but not one I'd re-read or recommend.

Kurt Keefner says

This is a wonderful book about a family and a steel mill. But it has a larger theme, too: the importance of having a purpose. And it makes a decisive claim: to have a purpose means being part of something larger than yourself.

All through the story we see how people reach their potential by looking out for their family, working for the mill, fighting for their country. There is an element of self-sacrifice to all this which I do not like, but it's not preachy or treachery.

The novel is masterfully plotted. Davenport plants seeds in the first chapter that only come to fruition 600 pages later. She's especially good at leading you up to an event and then summarizing it from a perspective of five years later in the next chapter. You have to be good at this kind of stuff if you want to write a story that spans 64 years.

She's not a flashy stylist, but her descriptions of the mill and of a flood that rolls through a shantytown are really nice.

The characters are interesting but not superb. Sometimes Davenport seems to believe that temperament is destiny and we veer a bit toward naturalism. But then she shows her characters making key decisions on their own that demonstrate that they have free will. The best character is Claire, who finds her purpose as a journalist, a stock-holder of the mill and a lover in the latter part of the story.

I think if you're interested in the setting, especially the steel industry, and if you want to watch the evolution of a business and a family, this is the book for you.

Mrs. Scott says

This book was a favorite of my mother's. Several years before her death, I bought the re-issue for her so she could read it again. I have her copy, and finally got around to reading it myself. What a remarkable story of ordinary people living heroic lives! The book offers a believable portrait of American life from the late 19th century to the beginning of World War II through the life of an Irish maid and the family to which she was devoted. My mom was right: this is a terrific book!

Moppet says

This 1942 novel was a Florence King recommendation, and she has yet to let me down. *The Valley of Decision*, the story of a Pittsburgh steel mill-owning family from the 1870s to the 1940s, is an epic, sweeping saga - a bestseller in its day, filmed in 1945.

The book opens on the day the well-to-do Clarissa Scott employs Irish teenager Mary Rafferty as a maid. Mary lives to see Clarissa's great-great-grandchildren, and over the intervening years it is Mary who, elevated to housekeeper/companion, becomes the family's rock, settling disputes, keeping up traditions, providing nurture and support. Despite her long-term romance with Paul, the son and heir, this is less a Cinderella fantasy than a novel about the importance of duty and sacrifice – not a very popular concept today. (The irresponsible 1920s, the period with which the book is least in sympathy, are covered in a token chapter). Mary's service at home is paralleled by the military service of the men in the book and by the mill's contribution to various war efforts. Some of the book's patriotism appears simplistic (I couldn't agree, for example, with the idea that all wars are part of the same war – wars are fought for different reasons in different circumstances) and one of Paul and Mary's conversations struck a note somewhere between jingoism and mawkishness:

“You see?” Paul said. He put his hand on her shoulder and his blue eyes stared deep into hers. “Anybody else might think me a sentimental fool,” he said softly. “But you know me. You really know me. I tell you,” he said, “any time this country gets in a scrap, it’s my scrap and this mill’s scrap. Highspeed saws and fancy springs are all right in their place – but this mill makes death for anyone that bothers the U.S.A.”

“Oh, Paul. I-I love to hear you talk that way.” Her eyes were wet and shining.

But the final section, which shifts the focus to journalist Claire's experiences in 1930s central Europe,

contains a powerful anti-isolationist argument in the form of a graphic account of the horrors of the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia which followed the Munich Agreement.

Even without two world wars, the book would be meaty: there are elopements, liaisons, feuds, betrayals, nervous breakdowns, strikes and boardroom battles galore. While there's plenty about the history of Pittsburgh and of the steel industry, the story ranges much further afield. Clarissa's daughter Constance lives in great luxury in Europe, bankrolled (it's implied but never stated) by the Prince of Wales, and the descriptions of her lifestyle almost drip off the page:

Constance, in a black velvet dinner gown and great pearls, sat at the head of the table critically attentive and judicious as perfect soles followed perfect turtle soup, a garnished filet of buttery red beef followed the soles, artichokes from the South of France followed that, a huge pâté en croute appeared with the salad, and a frozen bombe masked in golden spun sugar brought – Mary hoped – the formidable meal to a close. But no, there was the savoury to cope with, peppery devilled mushrooms on thrones of toast. There was sherry with the soup, Meursault with the fish, Richebourg with the beef, and Mary actually shuddered when Constance, helping herself to the sweet, said, "Champagne, Radford. The Cordon Rouge."

This is a long, ambitious work. Like the 1947 film *The Courneys of Curzon Street* (which may have been inspired by this), it is set against the background of enormous social and technological change and offers the opportunity to reinterpret the Victorian past in the light of Freudian analysis. The Valley of Decision has the faults of its genre. It sags somewhat in the middle, some plot twists appear contrived and melodramatic, and more than once moments of crisis are skipped over in favour of the everyday. But Marcia Davenport has enough talent to make the everyday fascinating, to evoke a vanished world and, most of the time, to keep the pages turning very fast indeed.

Leenie Bastidas says

I first became a fan of *The Valley of Decision* through my mother. It was a favorite movie of my mother's as a child.

In my teens Mom and I were talking about movies and what she liked as a child, this was one of them.

When my mother was stricken with Alzheimers, I purchased this on DVD for her, we sat and watched it together. It took Mom back to her childhood when she first saw this movie with her Mum.

Mom loved Greer Garson, and in this movie I fell in love with her as well.

It was not until many years later, after mom had passed away, that I found out it had been a book.

Well of course I had to have my own copy.

My copy is old and has cigar clippings throughout the book, it smells of cigar, which I guess is only fitting. Yep have to read the book or watch the movie to find out why. A must for all who love a great story.

