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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

**Peaches and Daddy: A Story of the Roaring '20s, the Birth of Tabloid Media, and the Courtship that Captured the Hearts and Imaginations of the American Public**

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*Peaches and Daddy: A Story of the Roaring 2*0's, The Birth of Tabloid Media, & The Courtship that Captured the Heart and Imagination of the American Public.*

Real estate multi-millionaire Edward West Browning married Nellie Adele Lowen in 1915. He built a twenty-four-room Manhattan penthouse for them that included an interior aviary, a miniature lake stocked with Japanese goldfish, and a turtle and frog garlanded fountain that spewed the colors of the rainbow. One person said that Browning "combined magnificent opulence with inconceivable bad taste." In 1918 Nellie adopted three-year-old "Little" Marjorie, and in 1920 five-year-old Dorothy "Sunshine." But by 1923, Adele had had her fill of Edward, and she ran off with a dentist, tak-ing Little Marjorie with her. Divorce followed.

With Dorothy's sister and mother gone, Browning tried to make up for the loss by providing po-nies and miniature railways to the left-behind Sunshine on his estate's four hundred fifty acres. For transportation she selected a peacock-colored, stretch Rolls Royce "equipped with a four-foot-high motion picture screen." The child, however, still suffered from loneliness and Edward placed adoption ads in 1925: there were 12,000 applications.

At the end of the selection process, sixteen-year-old Mary Louise Spas flashed a golden-toothed smile that made Browning choose her. The New York Department of Public Welfare became involved, taking umbrage at a male divorcé adopting a female child of sixteen. The adoption was later annulled as it was discov-ered she was twenty-one.

To assuage his failure at marriage and adoption, Edward became active in sponsoring youth-oriented dancing clubs and high school sorority dances. On the night of March 5, 1926, he went to Manhat-tan's Hotel McAlpin's ballroom where the Phi Lambda Tau sorority was having a party. The girls would see Edward and call out "Hi Daddy," the moniker earned from often being seen in the company of young girls. That evening he met Frances Belle Heenan, a tenth grader. She was described as buxom, with a peaches and cream complexion. "Peaches is the

Cinderella of my heart," he said. Thirty-seven days later, on her sixteenth birthday, fifty-one-year-old Daddy married Peaches.

Daddy doted on Peaches, spoiling her with a four and one-half carat diamond ring and Fifth Avenue shopping rampages. There was much activity after their marriage, including social engagements and a stroll along the Long Beach boardwalk with their pet African Honking Gander on a red ribbon leash. But six months after the marriage, Peaches left Daddy, claiming abuse. "[T]he legal battle that would turn their domestic drama into a national scandal" followed.

Attorney Michael M. Greenburg, a former editor of the *Pepperdine Law Review*, unfolds a story told with the panache of a true crime writer. Greenberg divulges snaring court room details in the context of Peaches' assertions of Daddy's excessive eccentricity, including contact with the "Love Cult" High Priestess of Oom, sandpapering shoetrees at night, prowling and barking on all fours, and placing at the end of his lit cigar a white tablet that produced a large snowflake. This is a story worthy of inclusion in *Ripley's Believe it or Not*.