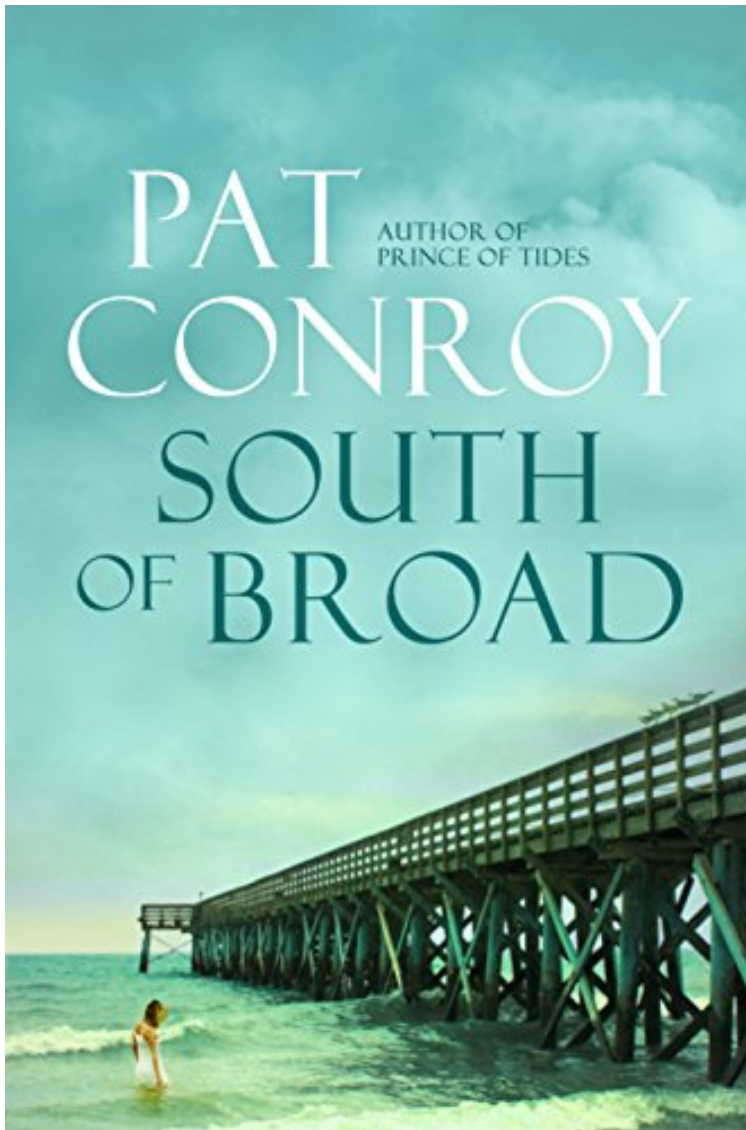


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South of Broad (English Edition)



Par Pat Conroy
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Leopold Bloom King is the son of an amiable, loving father who teaches science at the local high school. His mother, a former nun, is the high school principal and a respected Joyce scholar. He has had an unremarkable, happy family life. But after Leo's ten-year-old brother commits suicide, the family struggles with the shattering effects of his death, and Leo, lonely and isolated, searches for something to sustain him. Eventually, he finds his answer when he becomes part of a tight knit group of older high school students that includes Sheba and Trevor Poe - glamorous twins with an alcoholic mother and a prison-escapee father - hard-scrabble mountain runaways Niles and Starla Whitehead; socialite Molly Huger and her boyfriend, Chadworth Rutledge X. It's an ever-widening circle whose liaisons will ripple across two decades, from 1960s counterculture through to the dawn of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. The ties among

them endure for years, surviving marriages happy and troubled, unrequited loves and unspoken longings, hard-won successes and devastating breakdowns, as well as the American South's dark legacy of racism and class divisions. But the final test of friendship that brings them to San Francisco is something no one is prepared for.

Extrait Prologue The Mansion on the River

It was my father who called the city the Mansion on the River. He was talking about Charleston, South Carolina, and he was a native son, peacock proud of a town so pretty it makes your eyes ache with pleasure just to walk down its spellbinding, narrow streets. Charleston was my father's ministry, his hobbyhorse, his quiet obsession, and the great love of his life. His bloodstream lit up my own with a passion for the city that I've never lost nor ever will. I'm Charleston-born, and bred. The city's two rivers, the Ashley and the Cooper, have ooded and shaped all the days of my life on this storied peninsula. I carry the delicate porcelain beauty of Charleston like the hinged shell of some soft-tissued mollusk. My soul is peninsula-shaped and sun-hardened and river-swollen. The high tides of the city ood my consciousness each day, subject to the whims and harmonies of full moons rising out of the Atlantic. I grow calm when I see the ranks of palmetto trees pulling guard duty on the banks of Colonial Lake or hear the bells of St. Michael's calling cadence in the cicada-lled trees along Meeting Street. Deep in my bones, I knew early that I was one of those incorrigible creatures known as Charlestonians. It comes to me as a surprising form of knowledge that my time in the city is more vocation than gift; it is my destiny, not my choice. I consider it a high privilege to be a native of one of the loveliest American cities, not a high-kicking, glossy, or lipsticked city, not a city with bells on its ngers or brightly painted toenails, but a rufed, low-slung city, understated and tolerant of nothing mismade or ostentatious. Though Charleston feels a seersuckered, tuxedoed view of itself, it approves of restraint far more than vainglory. As a boy, in my own backyard I could catch a basket of blue crabs, a string of ounder, a dozen redsh, or a net full of white shrimp. All this I could do in a city enchanting enough to charm cobras out of baskets, one so corniced and ligreed and elaborate that it leaves strangers awed and natives self-satised. In its shadows you can nd metalwork as delicate as lace and spiral staircases as elaborate as yachts. In the secrecy of its gardens you can discover jasmine and camellias and hundreds of other plants that look embroidered and stolen from the Garden of Eden for the sheer love of richness and the joy of stealing from the gods. In its kitchens, the stoves are lit up in happiness as the lamb is marinating in red wine sauce, vinaigrette is prepared for the salad, crabmeat is anointed with sherry, custards are baked in the oven, and buttermilk biscuits cool on the counter. Because of its devotional, graceful attraction to food and gardens and architecture, Charleston stands for all the principles that make living well both a civic virtue and a standard. It is a rapturous, dening place to grow up. Everything I reveal to you now will be Charleston-shaped and Charleston-governed, and sometimes even Charleston-ruined. But it is my fault and not the city's that it came close to destroying me. Not everyone responds to beauty in the same way. Though Charleston can do much, it can't always improve on the strangeness of human behavior. But Charleston has a high tolerance for eccentricity and bemusement. There is a tastefulness in its gentility that comes from the knowledge that Charleston is a permanent dimple in the understated skyline, while the rest of us are only visitors. My father was an immensely gifted science teacher who could make the beach at Sullivan's Island seem like a laboratory created for his own pleasures and devices. He could pick up a starsh, or describe the last excruciating moments of an oyster's life on a at a hundred yards from where we stood. He made Christmas ornaments out of the braceletlike egg casings of whelks. In my mother's gardens he would show me where the ladybug disguised her eggs beneath the leaves of basil and arugula. In the Congaree Swamp, he discovered a new species of salamander that was named in his honor. There was no butterfly that drifted into our life he could not identify by sight. At night, he would take my brother, Steve, and I out into the boat to the middle of Charleston Harbor and make us memorize the constellations. He treated the stars as though they were love songs written to him by God. With such reverence he would point out Canis Major, the hound of Orion, the Hunter; or Cygnus, the Swan; or Andromeda, the Chained Lady; or Cassiopeia, the Lady in the Chair. My father turned the heavens into a fresh puzzlement of stars: Ah, look at Jupiter tonight. And red Mars. And isn't Venus fresh on her throne? A stargazer of the rst order, he squealed with pleasure on the moonless nights when the stars winked at him in some mysterious, soul- stirring grafti of ballet-footed light. He would clap his hands with irresistible joy on a cloudless night when he made every star in the sky a silver dollar in his pocket. He was more North Star than father. His curiosity about the earth ennobled his every waking moment. His earth was billion-footed, with unseen worlds in every drop of water and every seedling and every blade of grass. The earth was so generous. It was this same earth that he prayed to because it was his synonym for God. My mother is also a Charlestonian, but her personality strikes far darker harmonies than my father's did. She is God-haunted and

pious in a city with enough church spires to have earned the name of the Holy City. She is a scholar of prodigious gifts, who once wrote a critique of Richard Ellman's biography of James Joyce for the New York of Books. For most of my life she was a high school principal, and her house felt something like the hallway of a well-run school. Among her students, she could run a ne line between fear and respect. There was not much horseplay or lollygagging about in one of Dr. Lindsay King's schools. I knew kids who were afraid of me just because she was my mother. She almost never wears makeup other than lipstick. Besides her wedding band, the only jewelry she owns is the string of pearls my father bought her for their honeymoon. Singularly, without artice or guile, my mother's world seemed disconsolate and tragic before she really knew how tragic life could be. Once she learned that no life could avoid the consequences of tragedy, she softened into an ascetic's acknowledgment of the illusory nature of life. She became a true believer in the rude awakening. My older brother, Steve, was her favorite by far, but that seemed only natural to everyone, including me. Steve was blond and athletic and charismatic, and had a natural way about him that appealed to the higher instincts of adults. He could make my mother howl with laughter by telling her a story of one of his teachers or about something he had read in a book; I could not have made my mother smile if I had exchanged arm farts with the Pope in the Sistine Chapel. Because I hero-worshipped Steve, it never occurred to me to be jealous of him. He was both solicitous and protective of me; my natural shyness brought out an instinctive championing of me. The world of children terried me, and I found it perilous as soon as I was exposed to it. Steve cleared a path for me until he died. Now, looking back, I think the family suffered a collective nervous breakdown after we buried Steve. His sudden, inexplicable death sent me reeling into a downward spiral that would take me many years to ght my way out of and then back into the light. My bashfulness turned to morbidity. My alarm systems all froze up inside me. I went directly from a fearful childhood to a hopeless one without skipping a beat. It was not just the wordless awfulness of losing a brother that unmoored me but the realization that I had never bothered to make any other friends, rather had sated myself by being absorbed into that wisecracking circle of girls and boys who found my brother so delicious that his tagalong brother was at least acceptable. After Steve's death, that circle abandoned me before the owers at his graveside had withered. Like Steve, they were bright and ashy children, and I always felt something like a toadstool placed outside the watch res of their mysteries and attractions. So I began the Great Drift when Steve left my family forever. I found myself thoroughly unable to fulll my enhanced duties as an only child. I could not take a step without incurring my mother's helpless wrath over my raw un-Stephenness, her contempt for my not being blond and acrobatic and a Charleston boy to watch. It never occurred to me that my mother could hold against me my untness to transfer myself into the child she had relished and lost. For years, I sank into the unclear depths of myself, and learned with some surprise that their haunted explorations would both thrill and alarm me for the rest of my life. A measurable touch of madness was enough to send my fragile boyhood down the river, and it took some hard labor to get things right again. I could always feel a inty, unconquerable spirit staring out of the mangroves and the impenetrable rain forests inside me, a spirit who waited with a mineral patience for that day I was to claim myself back because of my own erce need of survival. In the worst of times, there was something that lived in isolation and commitment that would come at my bidding and stand beside me, shoulder-to-shoulder, when I decided to face the world on my own terms. I turned out to be a late bloomer, which I long regretted. My parents suffered needlessly because it took me so long to nd my way to a place at their table. But I sighted the early signs of my recovery long before they did. My mother had given up on me at such an early age that a comeback was something she no longer even prayed for in her wildest dreams. Yet in my anonymous and underachieving high school career, I laid the foundation for a strong nish without my mother noticing that I was, at last, up to some good. I had built an impregnable castle of solitude for myself and then set out to bring that castle down, no matter how serious the collateral damage or who might get hurt. I was eighteen years old and did not have a friend my own age. There wasn't a boy in Charleston who would think about inviting me to a party or to come out to spend the weekend at his family's beach house. I planned for all that to change. I had decided to become the most interesting boy to ever grow up in Charleston, and I revealed this secret to my parents. Outside my house in the languid summer air of my eighteenth year, I climbed the magnolia tree nearest to the Ashley River with the agility that constant practice had granted me. From its highest branches, I surveyed my city as it lay simmering in the hot-blooded saps of June while the sun began to set, reddening the vest of cirrus clouds that had gathered along the western horizon. In the other direction, I saw the city of rooftops and columns and gables that was my native land. What I had just promised my parents, I wanted very much for them and for myself. Yet I also wanted it for Charleston. I

desired to turn myself into a worthy townsman of such a many-storied city. Charleston has its own heartbeat and ngerprint, its own mug shots and photo ops and police lineups. It is a city of contrivance, of blueprints; devotion to pattern that is like a bent knee to the nature of beauty itself. I could feel my destiny forming in the leaves high above the city. Like Charleston, I had my alleyways that were dead ends and led to nowhere, but mansions were forming like jewels in my bloodstream. Looking down, I studied the layout of my city, the one that had taught me all the lures of attractiveness, yet made me suspicious of the showy or the makeshift. I turned to the stars and was about to make a bad throw of the dice and try to predict the future, but stopped myself in time. A boy stopped in time, in a city of amber-colored life that possessed the glamour forbidden to a lesser angel. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Praise for *South of Broad* "Conroy is an immensely gifted stylist. No one can describe a tide or a sunset with his lyricism and exactitude." Chris Bohjalian, *The Washington Post* "Conroy writes with a momentum that's impossible to resist." *People*, 3 of 4 stars. "Beautifully written throughout. Conroy is a natural at weaving great skeins of narrative, and this one will prove a great pleasure to his many fans." *Kirkus s* (starred review) "Conroy is a master of American fiction and he has proved it once again in this magnificent love letter to his beloved Charleston, and to friendships that will stand the test of time." *Bookpage* Praise for *Beach Music* "Astonishing . . . stunning . . . the range of passions and subjects that brings life to every page is almost endless." *Washington Post Book World* "Blockbuster writing at its best." *Los Angeles Times Book* "Pat Conroy's writing contains a virtue now rare in most contemporary fiction: passion." *Denver Post* "Reading Pat Conroy is like watching Michelangelo paint the Sistine Chapel." *Houston Chronicle* "Incandescent." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* "Grand." *Boston Globe* "Lyrical . . . evocative . . . *Beach Music* is one from the heart, and it beats with a vibrancy that cannot be denied." *Hartford Courant* "Breathtaking . . . perhaps the most eagerly awaited book of the year . . . a knockout." *Charlotte Observer* "Beach Music attains an almost ethereal beauty." *Miami Herald* "Few novelists write as well, and none as beautifully . . . Conroy's narrative is so fluid and poetic that it's apt to seduce you into reading just one more page, just one more chapter." *Lexington Herald-Leader* "Compelling storytelling . . . a page-turner . . . Conroy takes aim at our darkest emotions, lets the arrow fly, and hits a bull's-eye almost every time." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* From the Hardcover edition.