



## The Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper

*John D. MacDonald*

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With an introduction by CARL HIAASEN

JOHN D. MacDONALD

.."the great entertainer of our age, and a mesmerizing storyteller."

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.."one of the great sagas in American fiction."

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.."what a joy that these timeless and treasured novels are available again."

--ED McBAIN

## The Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper Details

Date : Published March 9th 1996 by Fawcett Books (first published December 1st 1968)

ISBN : 9780449224618

Author : John D. MacDonald

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Detective

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## From Reader Review The Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper for online ebook

### Emilie Richards says

My husband got this from a Florida bookseller who knew he loved Randy Wayne White. I read it for fun this summer. Also a White fan, I knew I wouldn't be getting the same kind of read even if I was getting another dose of real Florida.

The era was different, but I'd really forgotten HOW different. Travis McGee's a great guy, but this was a lot like reading a pared-down, slightly more thoughtful James Bond. Travis was in and out of bed with three women in the story with several other "encounters" that could have but didn't end up there. More interesting was the way that he uses his considerable sexual expertise to help the women characters overcome problems in their lives. Kind of a PI sex-therapist. Some of the dialogue felt very yesterday, and his view of women and of African-American culture was interesting for the era. He was enlightened by those standards but certainly not by ours.

Having said that, MacDonald's writing and lots of his insights were laudable, even though the story itself wasn't credible. I thoroughly enjoyed delving into this famed series and meeting Travis McGee, but won't be out digging for more selections any time in the near future.

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### Tony says

THE GIRL IN THE PLAIN BROWN WRAPPER. (1968). John D. MacDonald. \*\*\*.

Hold on to your hats and seat. MacDonald usually manages to hold his McGee adventures to about 300 pages – at least in the paperback series that I've been reading. In this tale, you reach about page 280 and realize that he has to wrap the case up. He does, in a whirlwind way using several of the hokiest techniques that have been developed by writers: A dictated summary of the case into a tape recorder; the use of a totally new character who only appears in the book for a few pages, but who has the legal authority to look into the case. What happened here? Pressure from the publisher? This is probably the weakest adventure I've come across so far. I hope it's an exception.

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### Angela says

Travis McGee had a wonderful, spur of the moment, love with Helena after her husband tragically died. He was much younger than her and she wasn't looking for a new husband, just a good time. Which Travis was able to give her on his boat while taking her traveling. When she left after that summer of love, they kept in contact through mail, but never saw one another again. When Travis gets a letter from Helena telling him how she is terminally ill and how her eldest daughter is in a bad mental state since her second miscarriage he is shocked by how much the vital woman he knew so well and intimately is now so frail. He is out on a salvage job on his boat when Helena dies. When Travis gets home, he finds a letter from Helena's lawyer telling him he has been given \$25,000 as a payment for a job he has done for her. The "job" is then described to him by her in a letter that came with the check. Helena wants Travis to help her daughter Maurie so she doesn't destroy herself. She has tried to commit suicide three times since her last miscarriage and Helena

seems to think that Travis would be one that could get through to her and help her recover mentally from it all. What Travis finds after flying in to see the family that he once helped and loved is a scene that is more messed up than even Helena seemed to think it was. Is there more to Maurie's suicides than a depressed woman? As he is trying to make sense of the household she lives in he is almost killed by a couple who thinks he is there because of Maurie's husband Tom and his "business" ventures. This leads Travis to become friendly with the local cops and start an investigation of his own into the life of Tom. When he finds out about a link to a doctor who "committed suicide" with Tom, Travis is in way too deep to just turn and go home. He has to help find out what is going on. His feelings about helping only get stronger when the woman who tried to kill him is now murdered. What is going on in this messed up family and town? Did that doctor, who happened to be treating Maurie, really commit suicide like they say he did? Are the practices and medications being used on Maurie to "treat her mental disorders" really necessary and ethical? What has happened to this family that seemed so put together so many years ago? And can Travis really be of any help to any of them?

I must say this book had a very slow and odd start to it. I almost put it down actually in those first chapters. I decided to push on though and I am glad that I did. It really turned into quite a good book with lots of mystery and things to think about as the plot thickened. I have read a few of the Travis McGee mysteries that were written after this book and I must say that my favorite part of any of them is the wonderful character of Travis McGee. He is a laid back kind of guy who just wants to help others in any way he can if he thinks he can. This is shown greatly in this book. He travels far from home and gets involved in a murder case and a dysfunctional family's affairs all because he was in love with the old mother of the family and because she asked him to help her family and daughters figure things out. The daughters of the late Helena are open to Travis being there to see them because they remember him helping them when their father died and remember that he was good friends with their Mom. Travis endures a lot in this book both physically and emotionally, but comes out the other end a new and better man. This book is well worth sticking with, no matter how the first chapters seem. After it gets moving it is full of family drama, action, adventure, murder, and mystery. I would recommend picking it up to read. The characters are great and the book/plot are very well developed.

4/5 Stars!

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### **Jean says**

Travis McGee receives a letter from a woman he had a brief romance with years ago; she is dying and asks McGee to help her daughter, Maureen. McGee learns the woman died before he got the letter. McGee travels to Maureen and he ends up in a murder investigation of one of Maureen's physicians. Maureen has gone bonkers. So, does the death have something to do with her condition?

MacDonald is a master story teller and that comes through in this story. He was one of the top pulp writers of the 1950 and 1960s. Typical of the time it was written, the story is racist and sexist. The story takes place in Florida as do most of his books. The language is also typical of the time frame. It is sort of fun to step back in time and see how far society has come, or not.

I read this as a paperback. The book has 256 pages and was published in 1968.

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## Jeff Jackson says

David Bowman published an intriguing list of post-Chandler noir novels on Salon a few years back. This was one of his five picks. Bowman sez: "MacDonald, the last literate and unself-conscious pulp writer, was the first to explore the noir possibilities of Florida. All the titles in his Travis McGee series are precious junk. In this one — part John Updike, part “Jane Eyre” — the lethal Florida beach bum/sexual healer attempts to rescue a housewife held captive in suburbia by her hubby’s mind-control drugs."

It's an enjoyable read, slightly clunky and long-winded in places, surprisingly insightful and well written in others, but not as good as the other random McGee title I picked up a few years back: "The Dreadful Yellow Sky." Neither approach the other books on Bowman's list such as "Tapping the Source" and "Children of Light."

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## Maggie K says

OK, this was a weaker entry in the series. A little bit convoluted plotline to get to the heart of the matter, wherein Travis is checking in on an old flames daughter just as one of her doctors is murdered. Then, when he stays an extra night, a nurse ends up dead. Obviously, there is something fishy here for Travis to figure out.

This is a lot different than how he usually does things, and it shows in the story that it is a plan that MacDonald isn't used to. Many parts of this were implausible, and the police officer suddenly enlisting Travis' help is just totally far fetched.

Still, we spend some time with Travis and Meyer, and the writing itself is good, so it can't be all bad.

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## James Thane says

As the tenth book in John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee series opens, McGee is once again called upon to restore a grieving widow to psychological and sexual health. The grateful woman, Helena Pearson, returns to her normal life, but several years later, she is dying of cancer and calls upon McGee for one last favor. Helena's daughter, Maurie, has become mysteriously suicidal and Helena would like McGee to diagnose the problem and find a solution.

McGee dutifully journeys to Fort Courtney, Florida, where Maurie lives with her husband, Tom, a high-flying local developer. Maurie's younger sister, Bridget, is also in residence, helping Tom look after Maurie. Sadly, by the time McGee arrives, Helena has succumbed to her cancer and so McGee is left to feel his way through a very complicated situation if he's going to be of any help.

As is usually the case in one of these novels, things get complicated in a big hurry. A number of folks seem to be very interested in McGee's arrival; a couple of people will have to die; everyone will be enormously confused and only McGee may be smart enough and devious enough to sort things out.

Like all of the McGee novels, this one is obviously dated, and McGee spends a lot of time philosophizing about the world around him. There's not as much action in this book as in most of the others in the series--things are a bit more cerebral--and there's not a hulking, giant, Neanderthalish brute of an adversary as there often is. The climax beggars belief a bit, but still, it's a fun read and anyone who enjoys the series will

certainly want to find this entry.

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### **Benjamin says**

David and Joab were both murderers, but David was penitent and Joab was not. There is a difference in degree but not in kind between the casual, socially-acceptable immoralities of Travis McGee and the criminal immoralities of theft and murder that bring him into play. Perhaps it is MacDonald, perhaps it is just the character, who doesn't appear to recognize the similarities. Nonetheless, MacDonald tells a compelling story.

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### **KATHLEEN says**

I liked this one better than some of the others because it's more of a whodunit. Usually McGee goes into these jobs knowing exactly who the bad guy is. This time he had to figure it out. He also manages to rustle up some sympathy for people of color. Not too bad for 1964.

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### **Wynn says**

Very Sam Spade. This is a classic "hardboiled" detective story published in 1968. One would never know it was 1968 except for the fact no one mentions a cell phone and there is zero talk of DNA. But then again, there is the audio cassette recorder the cops use, the lovely gold carpeting and one "swinging band". Race relations are certainly different. Travis McGee, the unofficial detective, is extremely descriptive throughout the novel as he tells the story. (Especially his description of one dead body, plus he loves the ladies) Overall, this story could be modern day whodunit. It's extremely well written, very entertaining and perfectly narrated. The style of writing reminds me of some of my favorites: Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, Harlan Coben's Myron Bolitar or Stephen J. Cannell's Shane Scully.

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### **Jeff says**

It's been a long, long time since I last read a Travis McGee novel. After a few dated cultural references, I checked the publishing date about a quarter of the way into the book – 1968. References to the Pill (Macdonald's caps, not mine), Walter Cronkite (kids, he was a network news anchor, back when that meant anything), and an antiquated take on sex and race stood out.

He doesn't treat women "badly", it's just that he comes across as Travis, amateur sex therapist, the guy with the answer to every woman's problems because they dig him so much. The fact that the female characters are a mishmash of genre "types" doesn't help. When you've read enough of this type of fiction, like I have, clichés have a tendency to stick out.

That said, McDonald does play with the detective/mystery conventions a little. There isn't a dead body until about two-fifths of the way into the book. McGee, for better or worse, goes into these inner monologues on occasion that aren't your standard mystery/detective fare. Although Meyer, McGee's economist pal, isn't in this book much, he is one of the cooler literary sidekicks for this genre.

McDonald's a fine writer and this is a good read, minor flaws and all.

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## Dave says

Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper is the tenth out of twenty-one Travis McGee novels. Although sometimes categorized as a mystery series, the McGee series may borrow some ideas from mysteries, but it is a series about as far from the standard PI genre as can be. McGee is not a PI. He's a salvage consultant. When someone loses something of value and the normal lawful means of getting it back are not sufficient, he figures out how to outfox the conmen and nets a fifty percent profit of the haul. He lives on a houseboat in the Bahai Mar Marina on the Florida Coast. Often, he confronts conmen, swindlers, and just mean ones, but he is about as unofficial and off-the-books as they come.

This entry into the McGee legend follows some of the usual territory with an old flame looking up McGee and asking for his help, but there is nothing to salvage here, except perhaps a woman's life. He's asked by an old flame who he cruised with for a season after she was widowed and who has now died of cancer to look after one of her daughters, who is apparently suicidal. McGee isn't sure how he can go about this, but looks into it and stumbles on a nest of intrigue and con games and blackmailers.

This novel has quite a bit less action than most the McGee books. Most of it is consumed with McGee sorting things out and logically deducing what is going on and who is who and what they want.

What's really great about it isn't necessarily the mystery so much as how MacDonald describes people so that, even if you haven't met them, you know the type he is talking about. MacDonald has great instincts for understanding types of people and personalities and what makes them tick.

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## Kemper says

If you were a rich widow who was dying from cancer and one of your two daughters, who had been stable and happily married for years, suddenly and mysteriously went bat shit crazy including memory loss and suicide attempts, would you:

A) Pour all your money and remaining time into medical and psychological doctors to try and help while also setting up a safe and protected environment for her?

B) Contact a shady stranger who you had a romantic fling with after your husband died and beg him to help her?

Most people would probably pick option A, but I guess it would have been a pretty short book if the widow hadn't chosen option B.

Travis McGee, the self-proclaimed salvage expert who specializes in getting back money and goods taken through scams, returns after spending weeks out on his boat and finds a letter from Helena, a woman he had helped years before and had a brief romance with. Helena is dying and asks Travis to check on her daughter Maureen who has gone completely nuts. Travis learns that Helena died before he got the letter, and even though he doubts there is anything he can do, he travels to see Maureen who is being cared for by her husband and sister.

After visiting Maureen and talking with her family, Travis thinks she is being cared for as well as possible

and is about to leave town. Before he can go, he gets sucked into a murder investigation of one of Maureen's doctors. Does the murder have something to do with Maureen's current condition?

As always, you get an interesting character with McGee, and the mystery is intriguing, if a bit wonky. Unfortunately, the inherent sexism of these books written in the '60s is pretty awful. But this one is actually a bit better than the previous ones. Yes, every woman in the story is willing to submit to McGee's wily charms at the drop of a hat, and none of them seem to have a problem that can't be fixed with McGee's patented brand of sexual healing. However, they seem a little less like scatter brained props and more like actual characters this time.

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## Harv Griffin says

© 1968 for the Wrapped Girl – So be forewarned, Ladies, Travis McGee is not politically correct, judged by 2012 standards. The best rendition of the I HATE TRAVIS MCGEE point-of-view may be Amanda's one star GoodReads review:

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

The gals have their Loveswept, Silhouette & Harlequin tubes-through-the-roof romance novels—the guys have our Phillip Marlowe, Travis McGee & Jack Reacher balls-to-the-wall action novels.

BROWN WRAPPER is half way into the Travis McGee series, #10 I think, when John D. was still pushing the limits of the crime novel, before he became bored with Travis. There is a lot of elaborate back-story here, that may put off readers who want a murder on the first page, a fist fight on page two, and a car chase by page five; but John D. is at the absolute top of his game: the story he has to tell sucks me in and holds me. As usual, Travis goes shuffling and blundering into some potentially criminal situation driven by misguided loyalty or a debt he thinks he owes to someone; in this novel a dead woman. It isn't until page 59, when Travis is all set to give up on his foolish notion that anyone needs rescuing from anyone, when he discovers that someone has searched his hotel room: BAD GUY ALERT! My guess is I've re-read this about 4 times over the years.

By page 72 a man and woman try to drug Travis and question him at gunpoint.

By page 103 Travis is questioned by two detectives—because the woman half of the pair who tried to question him at gunpoint was found murdered, and Travis is the main suspect.

I don't like the plot for BROWN WRAPPER, but I can't think of any way to improve anything. And BROWN has some of my all-time favorite scenes of Travis McGee dialogue. And the ending! Oh, baby! I absolutely LOVE the ending.

What I want to know is how John D. MacDonald knew so much about human nature to write scenes that surprise me and awe me with secret knowledge about us critters called humans. Was he tapping random phone conversations? Was he privy to police interrogations? Was John D. listening into shrink/patient conversations?

Oh, s\*\*\*. The NSA has access to all that now; they've read this review before I posted it, before I even saved it to my hard drive: like John D. MacDonald got a read on all of us back in the Sixties. @hg47

## Bethel says

Good old Trav!!! This one is a little sad but he lives to carry on !!

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## Mackenzie Brown says

Number ten in the series, this story finds McGee on an errand of mercy for an old lover who has lost her battle with cancer. He arrives in the apparent sleepy Florida Town of Fort Courtney, but all is not quite what it seems. There is something about the place that is a little off kilter, but by the time our sun bleached hero pieces together a jigsaw of murder and larceny, it is almost too late.....

A skilfull, well plotted crime thriller with everything you want from the genre, from the hands of one of the masters of the art.

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## Darwin8u says

*"That's because we always want to know why. Not so much how and who and when. But why."*  
- John D. MacDonald, the Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper

One of the better MacDonald novels I've read this year. He appears to be unable to escape the bizarrely sexualized, woman-in-peril, sex kitten cliché, BUT for a book that came just 15 years after Playboy and James Bond made their entrance into the Western consciousness, turning women into bunnies and well-oiled sex kittens, some roughness can be forgiven (not overlooked or excused). Generationally, it is understandable, if still hard to really tolerate for more than a couple pages at a time.

Why do I read him if I can't stand MacDonald's attitude toward women? Because there is something there. Because I like his perspectives on a great deal more. Because he isn't just writing crime fiction, but doing a mini-exegesis on the American, male psyche of the 1960s and 1970s. And, each book seems just about to escape the confines of his highly marketable form of misogyny. The bright spot in this book, published in 1968, was his brutal (for the time) honesty about race as it intersected with commerce, law enforcement, sex, and justice.

The dialogues between Travis and Lorette, a black maid at the hotel he is staying at, is almost worth the entire price of admission. I kept reminding myself that this book was MacDonald's 10th McGee novel and published in 1968. That was the year that Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act). It was written from the perspective of a white libertarian (Travis McGee) living in Florida. His perspective on race was refreshing and honest, given the time and place. It shows that we have made some strides as far as sex, and some strides with race too. Just not as many or as quickly as many would prefer.

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## Debra says

A letter from an old friend takes salvage expert Travis McGee by surprise. He hasn't seen Helena Pearson in five years, and since she recently died from cancer, the letter brings back a lot of poignant memories. In the letter, Helena asks Travis to see if he can determine what's causing her eldest daughter, Maureen, to repeatedly attempt suicide. To honor her memory, McGee pays Maureen a visit, although he doesn't really know how he can help. Unfortunately, McGee gets more than he bargained for when he's attacked his first night in town and finds himself digging up all sorts of secrets and odd behavior concerning people who could be connected to Maureen.

The Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper is an intelligent, riveting look at human behavior, and written by one of the best crime novelists there ever was. John D. MacDonald's style is engaging and distinctive, his pacing and plotting marvelous. As someone who reads a lot of crime novels I can usually predict where a story is going, however, the twists and turns in this book kept me guessing. The ending, while not gloriously happy, was truly satisfying.

My only quibble is the confusing opening chapter. The author supplies the directions and names of so many locations within the Florida Keys that they become confusing and therefore meaningless to anyone unfamiliar with the area. Still, I did learn that there is a lot more to the Keys than I thought. This was my first MacDonald novel, but it definitely won't be my last.

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## Cathy DuPont says

Unfortunately, this was a weak book in the series.

This isn't a four star, (most TM series are) it's clearly a three. Weak storyline is why it get three stars from me.

My last read (#2) I gave it a four. I think age is making me a tougher critic! OMG, Katy bar the door!

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## Nicholas says

Zero Spoilers alert: I barely touch on the plot in this review.

Even if MacDonald's philosophizing and ruminating on race and gender weren't so horrifically antiquated and racist and sexist, he's so much better at terse noir gems like, 'Her stare was wise, timeless, sardonic.' and 'She laughed, a rich raw little sound, full of derision.' - that it begs the question of why bother with the former?

I get the idea of attempting to give your crime writing texture and depth by speaking about broader social concerns, but when it distracts from the lurid plot at hand—which is why I signed on to begin with, for the stylish crime and sly sleuthing—it simply makes for tedious reading: In short I'm as likely to pick up a paperback detective novel hoping to hear the author's thoughts on Big Issues as I am to pick up a tome of Kierkegaard's expecting a steamy vampire bodice-ripper.

But MacDonald's depiction of sun-drenched anomie in his Floridian setting is so compelling that I was still engaged throughout. This was only the second Travis McGee novel I've read, and while I do enjoy said private-eye's archetypal toughness and swagger, having him land all of the most beautiful women in this book—two elegant widows and one comely nurse—as well as having the gorgeous daughter of one of the widow's offer herself up to him, was a bit much. In fact the onslaught of meticulously detailed—or overwrought, depending on your view—sex scenes early in the book makes it abundantly clear that McGee is nothing short of an Olympian shagger. Okay Okay the guy's supposedly uber-smooth and implacably attractive. But he's not cosmopolitan James Bond: he lives on a houseboat and plies his trade in sleepy backwaters. And so having him actually pass on the occasional female delight might be nice, might imply some of that nuanced texture and complexity of character the author was going for by giving us McGee's trite disquisitions on African-Americans and women.

However, MacDonald wins back some originality in the denouement, which I found well-executed in giving us something other than the great McGee knocking the shit out of the bad people.

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