

*The Second Life of Mirielle West, Amanda Skenandore*

Mirielle West lives a lavish lifestyle in 1920's Los Angeles, married to a handsome actor, and the mother of two beautiful young girls. Playing the game of the Hollywood glamorous however is heartbreaking, as Mirielle's young son has died, and she finds relief only in a bottle that helps her forget. While curling her hair for a party, Mirielle burns her finger badly, surprised she doesn't even know she is burning her finger until she smells it. Mirielle's husband Charlie insists on a visit to the doctor, who pretty much ignores the burn and instead questions Mirielle on the raised, pale circle of rough skin on her hand. The doctor finds other spots, and confines her to an isolation room at the end of the hospital hall. The next day he tells Mirielle and Charlie she has leprosy, and arranges a quick and quick transfer to Carville, a Louisiana leprosarium, under a new name.

Mirielle (now called Pauline Marvin) is transported to a leper hospital Carville in the Louisiana countryside, to live under the care of two doctors and an order of nuns. Other than the medical help, only people with leprosy live here, work here and receive treatments here. Most of the medical treatment at this point is experimental, sometimes creating new issues, rarely providing much relief or hope. Leprosy didn't discriminate, it affected people of all ages, including children and from all walks of life. Since the goal of healing rarely is achieved, the stigma attached means few ever leave.

The author writes this story with historical accuracy. It's heartbreaking to think of what the diagnosis of leprosy would have meant, previous to today's medical knowledge.