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Anyone who writes knows how difficult it is to come up with a good title. Lynne Truss published a moderately enjoyable ramble about punctuation but somehow had the genius to call it *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*. John Berendt's new book is *The City of Falling Angels* -- certainly a haunting phrase, though still a notch below the viscerally thrilling words *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. In like fashion, I'm sure the sassy titles of the two Richard Feynman volumes here gathered together helped more than a little to make bestsellers out of the tape-recorded memoirs of a physicist: *Surely, You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!* (1985) and *What Do You Care What Other People Think?* (1988). It didn't hurt, of course, that both books were also enormously, irresistibly entertaining.

Twenty years on, there are three main reasons to welcome this complete edition of, as the subtitle has it, "all the adventures of a curious character." First off, it's packaged with a CD on which we can hear Feynman relating some of his serio-comic escapades at Los Alamos during the development of the atomic bomb. Nearly everyone who knew this playful and eccentric Nobel laureate seems to comment on his colloquial, self-amused, New York-y way of talking. So, as Ralph Leighton suggests in his preface: "If you listen to the CD first, you can become familiar with Feynman's voice and speaking style, and then hear him in your head as you read the book." Second, *Classic Feynman* rearranges the anecdotes in roughly chronological order and adds a superb foreword by the physicist Freeman Dyson and an affectionate afterword by Alan Alda (who played the Caltech scientist in the play "QED"). Dyson, in particular, underscores Feynman's place in modern physics. Despite his unexpected avocations (playing the bongos, drawing nudes, studying Mayan hieroglyphs, hanging out with showgirls in Las Vegas), "the central theme in his life was long, slow, hard work, slogging away at a difficult scientific problem with all his strength until it was solved." Feynman, emphasizes Dyson, always "took endless trouble to get the details right. He said that the job of a scientist is to listen carefully to nature, not to tell nature how to behave."

And what, you may ask, is the third reason to acquire *Classic Feynman*? Simple. Those old

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copies of his books have almost certainly been read to pieces or passed on to teenage children thinking about careers in science. You probably need a handsome, well-bound new edition. There aren't that many bestsellers of the 1980s about which one can say that.

As a boy, Richard Feynman (1918-1988) was clearly something of a young Tom Edison, and in his anecdotes one can occasionally detect the peculiar self-deprecating smugness of the naturally smart kid. In truth, though, Feynman's great trait isn't his intelligence; it's his passion to understand, his sheer doggedness, and this is what makes reading him so inspiring. Maybe we're each stuck with our own particular less-than-genius I.Q., but any of us can learn to be more determined, can learn to focus his or her energies on a difficult problem and eventually solve it. Feynman watches a dinner plate tossed vertically into the air like a Frisbee and begins to wonder about its wobble. This leads to years of research, and ultimately a Nobel Prize in physics. His sister sends him a letter written in Chinese characters -- she's studying the language -- and he goes off and learns enough Chinese calligraphy to write back, "Elder brother also speaks." (He adds, "I'm a real bastard -- I would never let my little sister score one on me.") Whether it's breaking into safes at Los Alamos (to show the need to beef up security), learning how to play in a Brazilian samba band, taking a year off to work in a biology lab on viruses or laboriously reviewing high school math textbooks, Feynman sets his life upon each task and never lets go. When one day he realizes he's yearning for a drink in the middle of the afternoon, he simply stops drinking forever.

His inquiring character was first formed by his father, who taught him that knowing the names of things wasn't the same as knowing them. The resulting independence of mind is then firmly ratified by his first wife, Arlene, the most wonderful person in this wonderful book. She and Feynman fall in love while in high school and agree to marry. But while they are engaged, Arlene is diagnosed with a fatal disease that they both know will kill her within five or six years. Feynman marries her anyway, against the wishes of both families, and loves her passionately till the end. She clearly deserves his devotion. It was Arlene, in the hospital in Albuquerque, who sends her husband pencils engraved, "RICHARD DARLING, I LOVE YOU! PUTSY." Feynman confesses to being embarrassed to use them at Los Alamos. You see, there are all these famous scientists and. . . . Incredulous, Arlene says, "Aren't you proud of the fact that I love you?" And then, without a pause, adds the words that Richard Feynman came to live by, long after Arlene was dead: "WHAT DO YOU CARE WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK?"