

## RIP Margaret Mahy

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The world has lost the illustrious Margaret Mahy and it is a huge loss indeed. I met her once (more on that in a moment) in New Zealand, where she lived, but didn't know her. But if what I have been told about her is true...that she had two children without a husband, back in the days before it was trendy to do that!...and that she built her own house with her own hands ...then I deem her surely super-human and am amazed that she was not able to stave off death.

I was surprised, reading an obituary, to find that she was only a year older than I am; I had always assumed she was considerably older, I guess because the magnitude of her work, both in quality and quantity, was so much greater than mine.

Some years ago I did a lengthy book tour of both Australia and New Zealand, and when I was in

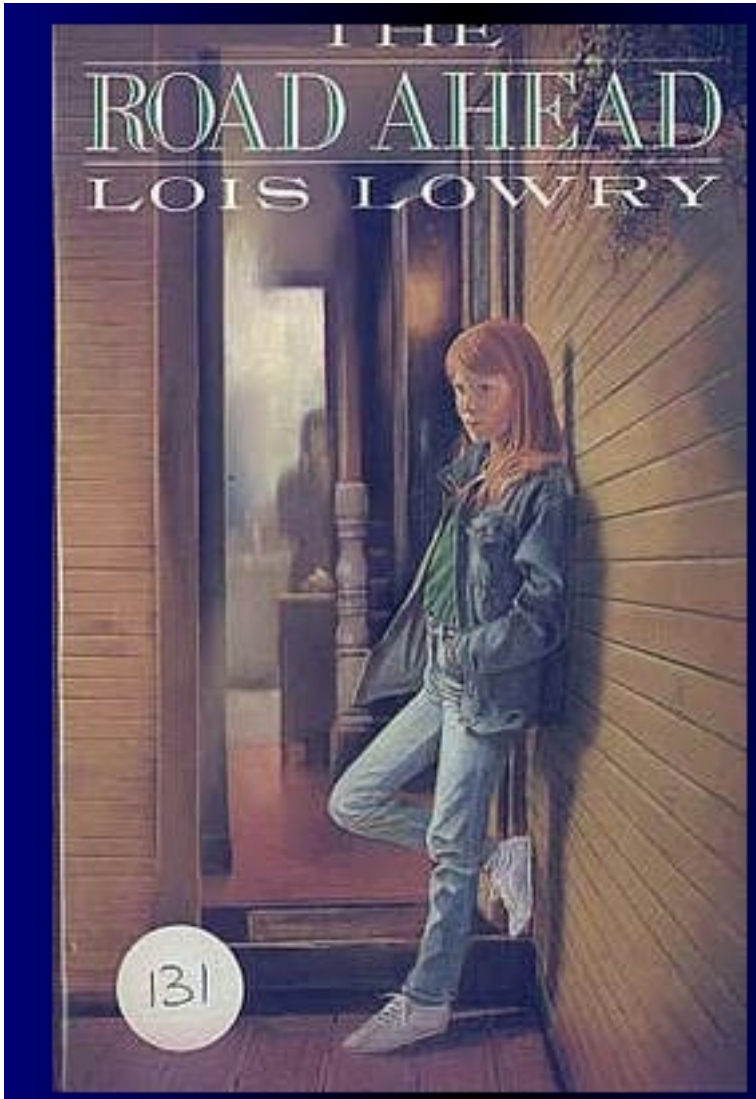
Christchurch, speaking in a public library, I noticed the rather dramatic looking woman in the audience...could she have been wearing a long black cape, or has my memory fantasized that? In any case, she was notable in appearance. I didn't know who she was but during the Q-&-A after my talk, she rose to her feet and expressed outrage at something. She had read a book of mine, a book called RABBLE STARKEY, which was quite new then, I think, and she had quite liked it. Liked it enough that she bought another book of mine, one called THE ROAD AHEAD.

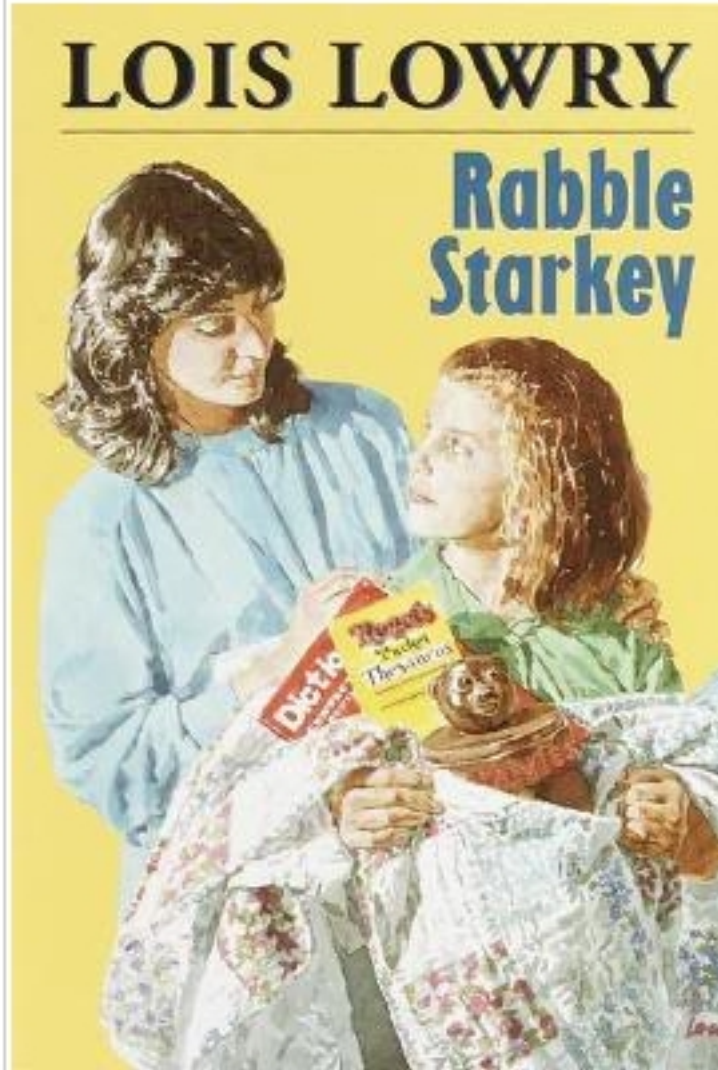
I was startled, because I had never written a book called THE ROAD AHEAD. But she had brought it with her and held it up...waved it about...and I could see that it did, indeed, have my name on it as the author.

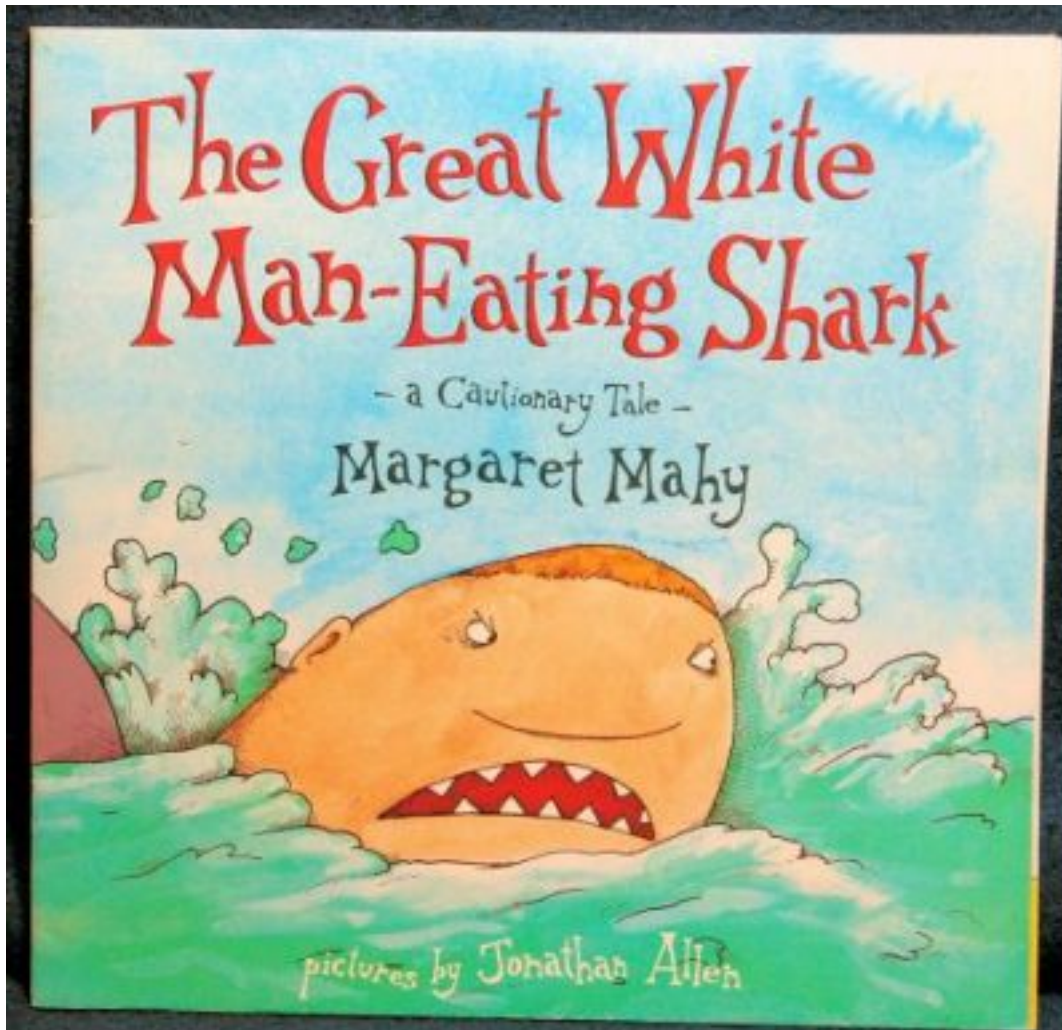
The reason for her outrage was because the text inside was *exactly the same* as the text in RABBLE STARKEY. Apparently the Australian publisher, without telling me, had changed the title. THE ROAD AHEAD is, actually, a good title for the book. And they had put quite a nice jacket on it.

But nonetheless, Margaret Mahy had spent her hard-earned money on a book and bought a book that she already owned, and she was pissed. I stammered a sort of apology and tried to protest my innocence but I think she was still annoyed.

Darn. I would have liked to become friends with her. But I didn't. And now the opportunity is gone.







GREAT WHITE MAN-EATING SHARK that my grandchildren loved, a picture book called THE