Woody Allen once controlled the press like his actors--and as critic Andrew Sarris observed, Woody is almost a ventriloquist and all his actors are marionettes. Its his nature. He has to be on top. The Soon-Yi scandal cost him $7 million and his protected reputation, and now weve got Marion Meades unblinking look at his blighted life (superior to John Baxters Woody Allen, not quite as good as Meades Dorothy Parker: What Fresh Hell Is This?). The son of a loveless dad and mom who respectively ignored and beat him daily, Woody grew up mean, scarred, and scared: he slept with a night-light until his early 40s and considered suicide daily until at least age 51. His uncanny gift for comedy gave him no comfort, but movies did. His most autobiographical character is Cecilia in The Purple Rose of Cairo, who took refuge in theaters from the ugly light of real life. Boy, does Meade cast ugly light on Woody and his work. His best role for a woman, Annie Hall, is basically stupid, as Diane Keaton said. In life and art, Woody sought leading ladies he could dominate. He stalled Mia forever before granting her the right to keep her shampoo at his apartment
alongside toiletries belonging to Diane Keaton, preserved there like so many fossilized relics in King Tuts tomb for more than a decade. Mia was horrified that he spilled her familys nasty secrets in Hannah and Her Sisters, and fretted over his obsession with Keaton and her sisters, Mariel Hemingways sister, and Mias own sister Steffi--whose photos she discovered (shades of Soon-Yi!) in his apartment. Woody's lovable persona was as fake as his transplanted, dyed hair. And Mias no sweetheart herself: having caught her scuzzy dad with Ava Gardner one night as a child, she married Avas squeeze Frank Sinatra at 19, and then stole her friend Dory Previns husband, André, saying, You dont fight what feels good. If Meades sour, thorough tome is true, nobody in Hollywood fights what feels good, and they all come out looking pretty bad. --Tim Appelo

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