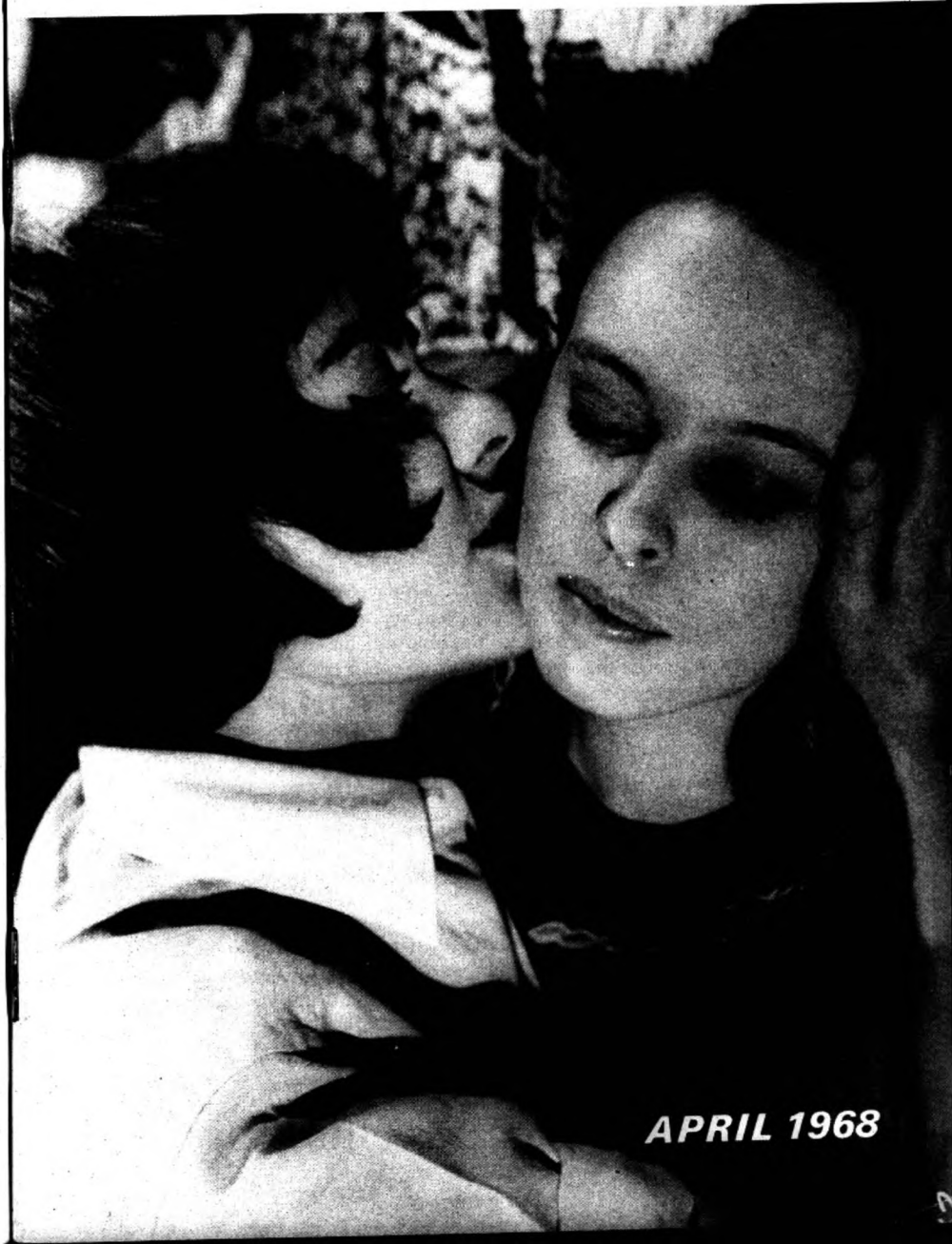


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The Ladder ***a Lesbian Review***



APRIL 1968

purpose of the *Daughters of* **BILITIS**

A WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROMOTING
 THE INTEGRATION OF THE HOMOSEXUAL INTO SOCIETY BY:

- 1 Education of the Lesbian, enabling her to understand herself and to make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic, and economic implications - by establishing and maintaining a library of both fiction and non-fiction literature on the sex deviant theme; by sponsoring public meetings on pertinent subjects to be conducted by leading members of the legal, psychiatric, religious and other professions; by providing the Lesbian a forum for the interchange of ideas within her own group.
- 2 Education of the public, developing an understanding and acceptance of the Lesbian as an individual, leading to an eventual breakdown of erroneous taboos and prejudices - by public discussion meetings and by dissemination of educational literature on the Lesbian theme.
- 3 Encouragement of and participation in responsible research dealing with homosexuality.
- 4 Investigation of the penal code as it pertains to the homosexual, proposing and promoting changes to provide an equitable handling of cases involving this minority group through due process of law in the state legislatures.

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THE LADDER

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Cover Warner Bros. 7 Arts Production "The Fox"

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The Beautiful House

by Catherine Wells

This story was first published in the HARPER'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE March, 1912.

MARY HASTINGS at thirty-five looked older than her age, not by any line in her handsome face, but by a dignity of carriage that went beyond her years, and by the early gray that had touched ever so lightly the waves of her abundant dark hair. Spinsterhood suited her temperament and had not faded her vitality in the slightest degree; indeed, her independence and the passage of time had marked her only with a finer gravity of bearing. Her occupation gave her abiding content; she was an able and even distinguished landscape-painter, and her sufficient income was increased by the sale of her sketches that she liked least. Her best work she either kept or gave away.

Behind her open manner she had reserves of shyness, and although circumstances and her generous nature had made her rich in friends, it was thus comparatively late, and when her youth was gone, that she formed a relationship that shone supreme. That made it all the more precious to her. It happens to most human beings to love at least once with the love that finds no flaw, and that experience came to Mary Hastings through her friendship with Sylvia Brunton, an intimacy that had its birth and ardent life, and faded and died at last, like other human things.

They became acquainted at one of those large miscellaneous art schools at which English girls with a sense of beauty are prone to mark time between the ages of twenty and thirty. Sylvia was one of the time-markers, a girl with that overpowering sense of the responsibility of life that comes to the serious young, a trust of years and opportunity which must be met, it seemed to her, and met instantly, and which she had all too hastily supposed was an obligation to paint pic-

tures. She was fair and as slender and lovely as a stitchwort flower in a hedge, and Mary Hastings saw her, and in a manner fell in love with her, on an occasion when she went back with the sudden fancy to sketch the place where she had worked so many years before.

With a few meetings their mutual liking flamed to intimacy.

Like all congenialities it was largely inexplicable. They liked the same things. They discovered in each other the same passion for the country and the old life of the country, the quiet interiors of eighteenth-century houses, flower-gardens, the smooth surfaces of fine china and polished wood. They liked the same books, the same poets. Between them there was that sense of rapport, that effect of rapid mutual understanding, which finds some of the happiest exemplars among women. And then to intensify their communion, they found the House, which gathered together the threads of their love, and held it as a body should its soul.

Mary Hastings had a four-roomed cottage in Sussex which she called her sketching tent, and there Sylvia came to her for a midsummer visit. It was adjacent to a farm-house, from which the farmer's wife came over to cook and clean for them. Sylvia imported a note of gay picnicking into the cottage that had never appeared there before, and a touch of adventure into their daily meals and walks that was delightfully novel and amusing to Mary. It was on their last day together that they found the House. They had taken their lunch, and raided farther in their walk indefinitely southward than they had ever done before; and in the full beauty of a July afternoon that had been cooled by a brief and exquisite shower they emerged from a little wood of willows upon an open park-like space,

with gentle grass slopes that fell away in gracious sweeps, set here and there with fine beechtrees and oaks. At one side the trees thickened and arched over a rising glade, its grassy floor sun-spattered; before them the slope rose to a trim hedge, and over the shoulder of some trees showed a chimney-stack.

"If we are going to have the luck we deserve," Mary had remarked, "that will be an inn where we can get tea."

They came round the hedge to find a white gate, and then they saw the House.

They might perhaps have found it difficult to convey to any one but each other how supremely beautiful the House seemed to them. At the sight of it Sylvia gave a little cry of rapture and grasped Mary by the arm. It lay long and low to the south like a happy cat stretched to the sun; it was roughly of that E shape dear to the Elizabethans who had built it, with an ample porch and a little square room above marking the letter's middle stroke, and extending forward at either end as if with arms to embrace them. Its old brick walls were covered at one side with a great ivy that sprang from the earth with a gnarled trunk like a tree; the other was hung with a tangle of vine and wistaria and passion-flower wonderfully intermingled. Great bosses of green moss clustered on the old roof of red tiles that were stained, too, with gray and ochreous lichens; on either side of the bricked path that ran between the gate and the brown, nail-studded door was a space of green grass edged neatly with clipped box; and an apple-tree or two slanted their trunks to the ground.

They leaned over the gate, taking it in. "It is, it really is, the house of my utmost dreams," said Mary, softly, as if too loud a tone might blow the vision away.

"If we could only look inside," said Sylvia, desirously.

"I wonder. We might perhaps ask them if there is any place where we could get tea."

They unlatched the gate and went up the bricked path together. At the door Sylvia with a faint murmur of ecstasy

laid her cheek on the sun-drenched stone that framed it. It was one of those spontaneities that freshly enchained Mary's heart. The bell clanged gently and remotely. The door stood already ajar, and softly treading feet came unhurrying along stone flags behind it. It was opened by a silver-haired old man in neat, spare black.

He was most sorry. There was no place for tea. There *was* an inn a mile away. He conveyed that he thought the inn unworthy of them.

"Has this house a name?" asked Sylvia. "I think," she added, extenuatingly, "it's the most beautiful house I've ever seen."

The old man smiled. "Aeridge Manse it is properly called," he said. "But my master, he will have it called 'Love o' Women.'"

"Love o' Women!" wondered Sylvia. "Is it as beautiful inside?"

For answer he fell back with a charming gesture of invitation. "My master is away, ma'am," he replied, to their hesitancy. "I live alone here with my wife. If you would like to come in"

"Could we?" Their eyes consulted.

"The house is to let, as a matter of fact," the old man added.

"Oh! then . . ." and their scruples died.

It was quite as good inside, Sylvia said. It was far better, insisted Mary. They examined the low-beamed, ample rooms, at first tentatively and then exhaustively, as the allurements of the house unfolded them. It couldn't have been touched, Mary rejoiced, for a hundred years at least. The hall of the stone-flagged floor spread itself wide and ample, the hospitable heart of the house; opposite the door they had entered by stood open a garden door, an oblong enchantment of translucent leaves, of hanging creeper, and distant, shining flower-color framed in the deep, cool browns of the hall. Right and left opened low-ceilinged, wide rooms, gravely walled and floored with dark old wood, and one that was larger was delicately gay with white paneling and chintz. From a corner in the hall mounted a broad staircase, barred with

slenderly twisted rails.

The little library, recessed with deep window bays and low window-seats, added a fresh astonishment, for dear, familiar books were gathered there like welcoming friends. "What could we have done more," said Mary, "if we had chosen them ourselves?" "Everything we've ever talked about seems to be here," marveled Sylvia. They passed into the garden. And the garden was the garden of their dreams, grave with still lilies and sentineled with evening primrose. A little lawn led them across its soft, thick turf to a seat of old stone.

They sat down there in silence.

Mary began to speak very softly. "This is very wonderful," she said. "I have never been here before, and yet it is as familiar as if I had known it always. It feels, my dear, as if I had left it years ago, and now come back. Or as if I had already dreamed it all as clearly as I see it now."

Sylvia nodded. "As if one had been a child here," she said. "Oh, look at that old chap!"

That old chap was a laughing head and bust of stone wreathed with carven leaves, that pushed its way out of the ivy beside them and caught the sun full on its face. "Feel how warm and human it is!" said Sylvia, with her slender hands clasping his either cheek.

Mary thought of nothing else but how adorable Sylvia looked there, with the transparent pink of her skin against the old gray stone head.

The old butler met them again at the garden door and smiled. "I've taken the liberty, ma'am," he said, addressing Mary, "of putting tea in the drawing-room." His "ma'am" had a quaint leaning toward "marm" in its intonation.

"But really we mustn't," began Mary Hastings.

"My master would wish it, marm," he said, deferentially.

They abandoned themselves completely to "the spirit of the thing," as they called it. They had tea in the white-painted, chintz-furnished room, and in the

midst of that Sylvia gave a sudden little cry of discovery.

"Mary!" she cried, excitedly. "This house is to let!"

Mary looked at her, aflush with sudden daring. "Shall we take it, then?" She tried to throw a note of facetiousness into her voice.

"We *could*, you know," said Sylvia. Her voice dropped. "Our hearts have taken it," she said.

"We could come here together," she went on. "Just whenever we wanted to. Just you and I, Mary beloved," she almost whispered, "wouldn't you like it?"

Her slender hands lay out along the table, palms turned up. Mary gathered them in her own hands and kissed them.

"I should-like it!" she said, whimsically insistent on the moderate word.

"If only the rent isn't monstrous," said Sylvia. "It ought to be, in fairness."

They put that to the old butler. But he named an astonishingly low sum.

"My master would like it occupied," he said, as if he saw that an explanation was needed. "And then—" he hesitated—"there are conditions. My master wishes me and my wife, marm, to remain and do the service."

"As if," said Sylvia afterward, "we could possibly imagine the place half as nice without the old dear."

His master, he explained, was traveling abroad. For an indefinite period. He himself would undertake, he said, to get his consent to a simple form of agreement. There would be no difficulty, he was quite sure. Meanwhile they might really consider the house quite at their disposal. "I'm so glad, marm, if I might say so," he said, "that it's you and the young lady."

"Why?" smiled Mary.

"The people I've had, marm, over it! If you're fond of a place, it's cruel. Like showing the blind, I say. And then after they've seen every stick and stone they say it's too far from a station, or not big enough, or too big, and I can't say I've been sorry, marm."

Sylvia was reminded suddenly of a forgotten question. "Why does your master call it by such an extraordinary name?" she asked.

The old man looked away above the trees, and the shadow of a smile twisted his lips. "He says it won't last long, miss, he said."

They left reluctantly. "It's literally tearing ourselves away," said Sylvia. "We've so grown up there in this afternoon that it feels as if we'd always been there."

They walked on in silence for a moment, Mary with her hand slipped through Sylvia's arm.

"There was never any fear of the other people taking it," said Sylvia. "It wasn't for them, and if it has a soul—and what should have a soul if that House hasn't?—it knew it was waiting all the time for us, till we came." . . .

Their minds apart and very much of their talk after that was concerned with the House. Whatever else might be about them in their daily life when separated, there together they agreed to share a fastness, have there the things they both cared for most, live the kind of life they loved best, talk out their intimate thoughts. It was Mary, although she did not perceive it, who, so much the elder of the two, could picture their relationship to each other so crystalized and enduring, whose idea of the happy life was such a collection and intensification of the beautiful things she knew. Each, she agreed, should gather together that woman's litter of significant souvenirs, old letters, a photograph or so, little gifts and relics that had memories, and send them to the House. Each went about with eyes awake for little beautifications they might acquire for it, and they bought and sent to it now a china bowl, now an old book, a bit of material, an old quaintness of needlework, and such like. At last they were together and stayed in the House ten days, arranging these things in it and fondling it in its utmost detail.

The House and its surroundings and

Sylvia within it filled Mary's horizon. She could never have told what it was about that young girl and about no other that so entranced her, what it was that she had and no other had for her that so filled her eye with pleasure, what mysterious alchemy touched to delight the most commonplace "something said, something done" of this particular other human creature. And Sylvia devoted herself to a half-whimsical adoration of her friend, squandered before her all the treasures of tenderness and imaginative, rich affectionateness that were stirring and growing and coming to flower in her youth and womanhood like the swelling of buds in spring. In those ten days Mary's mind unconsciously stored a hundred happy pictures; she did not know that each of these moments held its memory within it like a secret sting.

They schemed the good times they would have together at the House. They would come on the first day of every month for at least a week. "Besides every other chance," said Sylvia, "if we don't appoint some definite time that nothing shall be allowed to interfere with, we shall end by getting here hardly at all." Mary agreed instantly. "And I can't possibly do, my dear," said Sylvia, "without seeing you at least as often as that."

Mary's heart sang within her. For her own part she intended to live at the House altogether, and it had come into her mind as at least a possibility that she might prolong Sylvia's visits to her there indefinitely, until there should be a visit at last that did not end.

Their last morning came. "Why are we going away?" said Sylvia, half plaintively, more than once. "When we've got such a good thing as the life we're living here, why don't we stick to it; stick on like limpets, Mary?"

"It won't run away," said Mary, with the happiest certainty. "Nor is anything in the world going to stop us from being here again on the first of October, is it?"

"Nothing," vowed Sylvia, and struck an attitude, hand upraised in the act of

swearing to this promise.

During the rest of September Mary did not see her. Sylvia flitted about England on a series of visits, and wrote fitfully, sometimes more than once a day, and sometimes not at all for several days. She touched off the members of various households in phrases that painted them for Mary to the life, and elaborated a portrait of which Mary had had indications from her before as "my idle, beautiful relative." That was Evan Hardie, and some kind of elaborately removed third-cousinship was their blood tie. Mary wondered what kind of man could possibly be tolerable and fit Sylvia's allusion to "that winsome grimacer." But Sylvia evidently liked him. A snapshot of a house-party showed him tall, and a handsome youth even by that unflattering medium. "Squirrel-brown hair" was another of Sylvia's phrases.

The last days of September came. Mary went down to her cottage to make arrangements for dismantling it; now that they had the House, she declared she had no further use for it. Sylvia was to join her there, and go on with her for their week at the House.

Sylvia came, and after their separation was more than ever radiant to Mary's eyes, more than ever enchanting and adorable. She brimmed over with the history of her past three weeks, and in and out of her talk laced the name of Evan Hardie. "I have seen a lot of him," she said at last, with an air of having just realized it, "and talked to him no end. He's been delightful. You don't mind, Mary darling?" she said, on the heels of this avowal, catching her by the shoulders and looking suddenly into her eyes.

"Mind?" Mary's tone banished almost fiercely the faintest suggestion of possible jealousy.

"I'd like you to see him," Sylvia insisted. "He's the prettiest thing, and you adore good looks, Mary. As a matter of fact"—her voice became disingenuous—"he's staying not far from us now, at his uncle's."

"Which uncle? I'm getting so mixed, Sylvia."

"Sir Stephen Hardie. He isn't my uncle, anyhow. Evan might come over."

And later, talking about the House, Sylvia said: "It will be delightful to show it to Evan. I expect he'll come over."

Mary had a sudden spasm of astonishment at the idea of showing it to any one.

"I've told him about it," said Sylvia, happily, taking Mary's concurrence for granted.

Mary had told no one. No one could have understood.

The following morning Evan Hardie did come over, and they walked to the House together.

Mary was alive with scrutiny of this handsomely built, square-faced, clean-shaven youth. She felt at once attracted and antagonistic to him. Actual beauty is so unusual in a man that the startling effect of him almost put out Sylvia's light. She set out to make the acquaintance of this attractive person, but she found herself, as they walked along, constantly dropping out of the three-cornered talk. It kept getting out of focus for her, and alluding to things he and Sylvia had done or seen together in the month just past. There was a running ripple of merriment between him and Sylvia, almost a frivolity of give-and-take chatter that did not fit into Mary's habit of talk; her intercourse with Sylvia had a graver note; and she realized with surprise that this new tone, just like the one that had seemed so peculiarly and specially their own, also seemed to fit Sylvia's mind like a glove.

They reached the House, and Mary found herself reluctant to the last to see him enter it. If she could have thought even then of any device to stop him she would have done so. The whole place had become so intimate to her. She shrank from the roving glance, the careless question. But indeed, she found, she need not have been afraid.

Mary thought she had never seen the House so beautiful before. The late Sep-

tember sun was low in the sky, and streamed deeply into the rooms, lying on the floors in golden pools of light. With the passing of the hall-door Sylvia began to point out this or that special beauty that she loved, but Evan failed to respond. He strode through the rooms with his light, quick step, and became very amusing when he discovered that by tip-toeing to his utmost he could just brush the ceilings with his hair. Through the doors which Mary had never known before were low-pitched he had to bend his head, which he did with a quaintly puckered grimace that sent Sylvia into peals of laughter. "Of course I'd rather live in a house where I didn't have to crawl about on all-fours," he said, with a comical plaintiveness, and made much of stretching himself erect and being able to breathe naturally when he got out into the garden. He seemed to take the garden for granted as the sort of garden that does hang about the country house, but at a corner where two walls ran at right angles, and the great old ivy had stretched round its thick arms, he stopped and became serious.

"If you were to strip down that ivy," he said, with animation, "you could have a fives-court here."

"You're an unutterably brutal and philistine person," said Sylvia, and seemed to like him no whit the less.

Hardie and Sylvia talked less on the way back, but they radiated satisfaction in each other. The sun had reddened the sky and was sinking fast when they reached the farm-house by Mary's cottage, and the tall stone gate-pillars that faced it and gave it the air of an old French chateau, were throwing long shadows on the grass. They crossed the yard to a hayrick, ankle-deep in sweet-scented straw that shimmered in the fading sunlight, and in a corner stood the silent kine waiting motionless for the opening of their byre. Down the quiet air sailed a homing bee. A farm-lad crossed the yard, swinging an armful of hay on the fork over his shoulder, and chanting a scrap of song in his Sus-

sex drawl.

"If you want to choose a wife, Choose in the morning air-r-ly," he droned into the evening stillness.

"Good idea!" said Evan Hardie, as if to himself.

All that evening Evan Hardie remained very much in Mary's mind; she felt that whatever lay beneath that engaging exterior, she hadn't in the least penetrated it, and she was troubled by not being able to take hold where Sylvia seemed to have an easy grasp. And Sylvia was preoccupied and rather silent; her eyes were bright, a little smile curved her lips, and a little tune hummed in her throat. Again and again Mary began to talk, and could not touch her mind to response. It was like trying to throw straws across a gulf. Mary watched her, and wondered uneasily and dared not ask what held her thoughts.

The next morning Mary woke early, woke suddenly as if she had been called. The sun was shining into her room, and outside a bird was singing very sweetly. She got up and looked out of her open casement into the garden beneath. It was very early, and the sunshine was so thin as yet that it scarcely picked out the shadows below, but it shone keen and bright into her face. Everything was very silent. Across the gray grass-plot below, gray with heavy dew, some one's feet had already brushed a green track. And all the garden was a wonder to see, sparkling and glittering with a thousand prismatic colors, that shone from the dewdrops on the grass and from the glistening web of morning-spun gossamer that laced together every leaf.

She started. Treading on the thickly dewed grass almost as silently as ghosts, Sylvia and Evan Hardie stood beneath her window. They were looking up at her, their faces alight with youth and happiness. Something gripped Mary by the heart.

"If you want to choose a wife, Choose in the morning early," sang Hardie, softly, up to her, and put his arm round Sylvia's shoulders.

There was no mistaking the meaning of that, nor the look in Sylvia's eyes, nor the kiss with which she presently greeted Mary good morning.

Evan stayed to breakfast and made a hilarious meal. He was in the wildest spirits. "Hungry?" he said to Mary's inquiry. "I don't believe I can ever have eaten before from the feel of things. Coffee! What a ripping idea! Here, Sylvia, don't stand and look at it; pour out the coffee, or make way for your betters. Eggs! bacon! honey! I say, Miss Hastings, what a time we're having! . . . Another egg! I've never eaten three eggs, but by Jove I will to-day!" And Sylvia laughed and ate, and was lit by a sort of radiance that made her seem to Mary more lovely than ever.

There followed a curious day for Mary. She saw these two young creatures absorbed in each other, and yet she could not get out of the background of her mind the obstinate idea that presently this dazzling irruption into her happy solitude with Sylvia would somehow cease; that somehow Evan Hardie would go away as suddenly as he had come, as if he were some bustling bumblebee that had fallen into and would presently fall through and out of their delicately spun web of intercourse. She could not grasp yet the thing that had happened.

In the evening she and Sylvia were left alone again. They sat by the fire, and Sylvia settled into her old place at Mary's feet and asked her to read. But presently Mary looked up, to see Sylvia's eyes spellbound in dreams.

She stopped. Sylvia started, and looked round at her and laughed. "Oh, Mary!" she said, with a comical air of remorse.

Mary could not speak. She let the book fall on her knee.

Sylvia looked up into her face, regarding her. "I'm very happy, Mary," she said, softly.

"My dear!" and Mary put her lips to the golden head against her knee.

Sylvia turned round again and looked into the fire.

"What do you think of him, Mary?" she said, abruptly.

"Think of him?" repeated Mary, startled by the suddenly searching question.

"I want to know really what you think," persisted Sylvia, gently.

"I hardly know him yet," fenced Mary.

"No," said Sylvia, slowly. "And you won't. I don't know whether I do."

"Sylvia!"

"Tell me what you think of him, anyhow."

Mary probed her own mind. "He's utterly delightful to look at," she said. "He's charming in all sorts of ways . . ."

"Yes?"

"And-I suppose I must say it, Sylvia-it would be something I had hidden from you if I didn't-I ask myself still, why."

"I know," nodded Sylvia, with her eyes on the fire. "I know. Why? I wonder if I know why."

"What do you mean?" said Mary.

"I mean I wonder why it is that I am happier with him than I have ever been before in my life."

"Are you?" said Mary, steeling her heart.

"Yes. What is it makes the difference, Mary? I don't talk to him as I do to you. We've really hardly talked-real talk, I mean-at all. I don't believe I shall ever talk to him in the way you and I have talked. When we talk about impersonal things we don't get on particularly well. I mean talk doesn't flow-it's almost as if we were trying to walk toward each other through something thick and entangling. And it doesn't seem to matter."

"Doesn't it?"

"No. When we are together we don't want to talk; we want . . ." She turned her head, and, resolute to create no shadow on their mutual frankness, she forced out: "Mary, we want to kiss!"

Mary leaned forward over Sylvia and laid her cheek very gently on her soft hair. She felt suddenly old. "That's right," she said, a little huskily.

Sylvia was silent for a moment. "He's

such a beautiful, beautiful thing," she said, slowly. "He's all light and color and movement. To see his hair blowing in the wind-Oh, Mary!" she broke off, "what is the good of trying to tell you!"

"I know," said Mary. "My dear, I understand."

She understood. Something far stronger than she had claimed her beloved for its own. She told herself that she understood, that it was overwhelmingly right that it should be so, and that if it were in her power she would not change a jot of what had happened. And yet she could not sleep that night. She lay still and awake, in the weary state of one who feels the dull discomfort of oncoming pain. And when she fell asleep at last she slept uneasily and dreamed. She dreamed that she stood before the House, the dear House that enshrined her life with Sylvia.

It was night, and a full moon shone that turned the house to liquid silver and the trees and shadows to velvet black. She heard a rustling among the creepers on the wall and on the roof, little noises of snapping and breaking and falling, and, falling, and, looking closely, she saw that there swarmed over the house numbers of little elfish creatures, their faces pallid in the moon-light, who busied themselves with frantic haste. They were tearing the House to pieces; some were throwing down the chimneys brick by brick, others pulling off the tiles. Great dark rents gaped and widened in the roof as she looked. She tried to cry out to stop them with that voiceless agony of the dreamer that can make no sound. She saw one impish form low down on the wall stripping off the ivy with peculiar zest; one after another the long, wavering strands fell back limply with their pale, flattened rootlets stretching out like helpless human things in pain. She ran forward and seized the little wretch by the arm. He turned his face to her, and it was Evan Hardie's face, twisted into an expression of diabolical malice. He clawed viciously at the hand that held him, and stung by the pain of it she saw a long scarlet scratch start out

upon her wrist.

With a cry upon her lips she woke.

There were voices under her window, voices that passed, and hurrying feet.

She got up and looked out. It was still dark, perhaps about three o'clock, but the farmer and two or three other men were out by the gate and in the road beyond, with hastily gathered garments, it seemed, huddled about them, looking up at the sky. She looked, too, and over the dark tree-line to the south there was a red glow upon the clouds, angry and lurid.

"'Tis a fire, sure 'nuff," she heard the drawling voice of the farmer.

"'Tis too far to help 'em, then."

"'Tis likely old Baxter's ricks," said one of the men, after an immense interval.

"Na-ow," said the farmer. "'Tis two mile and more beyond 'em."

The glow reddened and faded, and reddened again. Her dream that had embodied her thoughts with such fierce symbolism was still vivid enough to make her intensely unhappy. That reddening sky, signal of loss and disaster and distress, the careless, gigantic spoliation of some human pygmy's labors, seemed to her all of a piece with the color that her world had taken on. She sat and watched it long after the farm-men had gone, watched it until its brightness faded and the soft, gray wings of the dawn at last brushed it out of the sky.

She did not tell Sylvia of her dream, but as they sat at breakfast she told her of the distant fire. Sylvia had slept through the night serenely and dreamlessly, and she hardly seemed to credit that all the world had not done the same.

There came a gentle knocking upon the door of the cottage. Mary opened it herself.

In the doorway stood the old manservant from the House, and for a moment Mary did not recognize him, he was so infinitely aged and beaten and worn. He looked at her with a white face and reddened eyes and tried to speak, but but the muscles of his mouth were

shaking past his control. In an instant she knew what had happened.

"Oh!" she said, needlessly, putting her hand upon his arm; "tell me-what is it?"

He looked at her, his face working with his effort to speak and stay the dull, gray tears that ran down his cheeks. At her touch he collapsed, leaning his head on his hands upon the door, and trembled and sobbed.

"All, all gone," he said, huskily—"all gone," and then the word "Fire."

For the moment all that this meant to Mary was swamped by the tragic figure before her. Wrenched so rudely out of the house that had held him, that he had cared for and tended so long, he was infinitely pathetic, pitiful as a shelled snail.

"Is your wife safe?" she asked.

He stood up and nodded, trying to speak. "At the inn, marm," he said. "Every one . . . very kind. I had to . . . come and tell . . ." and his voice broke again.

Mary took his wrinkled, quivering hand between her own. "Thank you for that," she said. "Come in and sit down now and rest."

But he would not. The farmer's trap he had come in was waiting out in the road to take him back. "Come to me if you want anything," was all that remained for Mary to say.

He thanked her shakily. "Don't mind me, marm," were the last words she heard from him as he turned away down the path, huddled and bent.

With his disappearance beyond the hedge the full sense of her own loss fell upon her like a swooping bird. She stood still where she was, trying to bring her mind into relation with this immense disaster. Sylvia's voice came from the parlor, humming a little tune.

"Sylvia," she said, going in. "It was our House!"

Sylvia, surprised by her tone, turned round from the flowers she was arranging. "What was?" she asked.

"The fire."

"Mary!" she exclaimed. But it bit in-

to Mary's heart that her voice was astonished rather than dismayed.

It was by Sylvia's suggestion that they presently set out for the House. Mary checked the excuse upon her lips and braced herself to this necessity. It was an exquisite autumn day. The air was very still and full of the woodland scents of fallen leaves, and in the flood of sunshine the trees shone red and gold. At last they stood again upon the familiar slopes of beech and chestnut trees by the House. Mary stopped in a wide space of green grass, leaf-scattered, from which radiated glades of yellow-leaved trees. She looked over the trees where they had seen for the first time the chimneys of the House rise up. They were gone, and the leafy crown of the trees against them had gone too. In its place blackened twigs stood spectral against the sky.

Mary shut her eyes in sudden pain. She wanted intensely to see no more. In one swift, horrible vision she had imagined the charred, smoking ruins that lay beyond those trees.

Sylvia broke the silence.

"Isn't it dreadful to have lost it? Our House. We shall never live there now, Mary."

"No," said Mary.

They were silent, standing side by side, Mary craving with every fiber of her being for something from Sylvia, something said, she knew not what, that should touch her misery with healing.

"After all, you know, dearest, as I'm going to marry so soon, we shouldn't have come here again so very much."

The words, and still more the light melody of Sylvia's voice, fell between her and Mary's heart-aching with the steely separation of a guillotine.

Sylvia exclaimed. Up the glade in front of them, arched over by the golden-leaved trees and floored by the gold that had fallen, sat Evan Hardie motionless upon a chestnut horse. The sunlight struck through the thinned branches and turned him to a figure of beaten gold. As he sat there, conquering, triumphant, a still figure astride the shining, satinskin-

horse, he looked to be a robust, pagan Saint George, whose coat of mail was all of woven sunshine.

Sylvia ran forward to him where he stood and laid her cheek against the horse's neck. Her hair loosened as she ran and fell about her. Her gesture had the happy security of a bird that drops

upon its nest.

A sudden pain seized Mary by the throat. She did not know what it meant at first, for weeping was unfamiliar to her then. But from her strained, longing eyes fell slow tears.

She told herself how glad she was, how very glad.

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LADDER readers, and many others in the homophile movement will be saddened to learn of the death of Jody Shotwell. Jody died on January 28, 1968, at Naval Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, after a long and losing battle with cancer.

Jody was fifty years old, a slight, beautiful, Mediterranean type. She was a major contributor to THE LADDER, ONE, TANGENTS, etc. . . . Her serial novel, THE SHAPE OF LOVE, was run in THE LADDER in 1967, concluding in the November issue.

During the last year of her life she worked feverishly on a biography of Thomas Burke. Though she left this work unfinished, it is possible that it may be concluded.

Jody is survived by her husband, and three grown sons, and a large number of friends. She will be missed . . .

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

by Lennox Strong

Too much has already been written about the sexual revolution which this country is, theoretically, undergoing. I am firmly convinced that what is happening has always happened. If there is a difference, it is in our freedom to talk and our freedom to write. The people, bless or damn them as your taste indicates, do pretty much as they please, and pretty much in the same ways. A number of things have been modernized, but sex is not among them.

This is prompted by an article in the 1967 edition of PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL: "The Three Sexes And Photography", by Jacquelyn Balish.

We are increasingly a society of examiners. We look away less often and this is a good sign. Miss Balish's article concerns the influence of homosexuality in particular, and sex in general, on photographic freedom.

I know nothing about Miss Balish's credentials as a photographer, but I would like to highly recommend her as a philosopher in view of this article. She begins by pointing out the obvious fact that we live in a culture designed to exploit sex on every possible level as a commercially tradeable commodity.

She goes on to complain that the only error in the homosexual influence in the visual arts, dress designing, hair dressing, etc., is the anti-

feminism of the practitioners. This is an old, and possibly valid complaint, but she goes on to point out that "they make many of our most beautiful and sensitive photographs". The "they", of course, being our male homosexual brethren.

Then, after a cursory examination of the different levels of censorship applied to books, articles, movies, night clubs, etc., she points out the freezing or spot-light quality of photography.

Much that is "honest" may be shown in all of these other forms, but photography, still photography, still suffers from its unavoidable permanence. The eye of the moralist distracted by a changing visual form seemingly is better able to concentrate on, and find "smut" in, the photographic product.

Miss Balish points out that rules of censorship must fail primarily because "we simply do not have enough evidence to make rules easily to solve our problems".

Her concluding remarks on the validity of artistic expression and our general moral scene deserve quoting at length:

"Freedom of expression means, if anything, that the artist is free to express something that is going to be objectionable to some part of his society. And if our theoretical artist

is an original, the majority of his fellow citizens are going to object esthetically, morally, politically.

Ironically, our most technologically advanced society is hopelessly handicapped by ignorance for dealing with its sexual problems. We certainly seem more confused than ever when it comes to the question of homosexuality. Slowly, but surely we seem to be moving to a tolerating, if not totally accepting, view of the homosexual.

As for me, I object to a society whose single taste level is dictated and watered down by consensus. Let each one photograph, paint, write, sculpt, whatever he wants. Then let him find his audience. In the infinite variety that makes up our society he may find enough people to

support him. And, if they are a minority audience, so much the better, for one of the deadening aspects of a consensus society is that the majority must approve if any creative art is to have life.

There is no reason why the sensual pleasures of the body should not be stimulated by works of art—be they words or pictures or music. Only if one believes that men and women were put upon this earth solely to procreate—and this without pleasure—can he think otherwise.

A free society is a most difficult one. Above all, it demands that we do not force our personal point of view on our neighbor . . . Love and let love."

Obviously no mere reviewer can add to Miss Balish's sentiments and logic.

LESBIANA

by Gene Damon



Where is the line drawn between innocence and intent? Where does humor end and satiric insight begin? These are the questions the reader asks in John Gooding's THE PEOPLE OF PROVIDENCE STREET, N. Y., Viking, 1967.

Tue, whose full name, Tuese, means killer, was named by her father as a macabre jest celebrating the fact that the birth resulted in her mother's death. Tue marries a Polish adventurer who leaves her when

she is disinherited. A wanderer in life, Tue moves to Providence Street, and takes a clerical job in a musty library. She soon becomes the target of the affections of two women: Miss Budden, who works in the library, and Mrs. Groot, a jolly smothering neighbor.

Miss Budden is a religious spinster, married to a mystical Christ, with the faint corruption of incense, candles and ceremony. Her capacity for love is pure, dry and poisonous.

Mrs. Groot is the mother of miscellaneous children, married to a passive shadow. Her capacity for love is warmer, and much more deadly.

John Gooding's use of symbolism is obvious, sometimes too much so, but it's perfect for his purpose, as when Mrs. Groot brings Tue a melon.

"The melon which Mrs. Groot had brought Tue lay hour after hour on the table, and the knife beside it was untouched. At first still, it began after awhile to revolve till it was spinning dizzily and throwing out sparks. Then a sun-ray turned the melon into a crystal ball of juice, pips, pale flesh and a green rind.

She stretched out and lifted the melon. As its skin touched her lips she became cold and then hot, like someone who had dived into a winter sea . . ."

Days pass and Miss Budden takes Tue to a midnight service a mysterious Christmas. Then Tue attends Mrs. Groot's masquerade party as a soldier radically upsetting Mrs. Groot's image of her own dominance.

In the summer there is a picnic, and swimming, and Tue and Mrs. Groot perform a grotesque ballet in the water . . . and Tue runs away, to Miss Budden who engages her services in a blood rite.

When we first meet Tue she watches the faceless women through her window. She is very safe, and she assures her keepers that she does have a face. But she does not have a mother, and she has learned, too late, that you cannot obtain them free of charge along Pro-

vidence Street.

This is Mr. Gooding's first novel. He is a lecturer in history at Edinburgh University. I hope he continues to write novels, and so will you.

THE LAST YEARS OF A REBEL, by Elizabeth Salter, Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1967, sounds as if it should be about a jungle fighter of some kind. It is, however, subtitled **A MEMOIR OF EDITH SITWELL**. Its author, Miss Salter, acted as Edith Sitwell's secretary-companion from Miss Sitwell's 69th birthday until her death. The much publicized poet, personality, left some witty bon mots celebrating her last years, and some of the anecdotes recorded here are hilarious. All of the expected personalities are mentioned, Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, Pavel Tchelitchev, Stein and Toklas, etc. There is a particularly delightful sketch of Naomi Jacob, whom Miss Sitwell called "The Field Marshall" not without cause. A rather poignant secondary personage is well recorded, Sister Farquhar, who acted as Miss Sitwell's nurse for many years. Nice, minor, secondary reading.

WAITING FOR WINTER, by John O'Hara, has been issued as a paperback by Bantam, 1967. This contains eight pertinent stories, two of them Lesbian in content.

The second volume of **THE DIARY OF ANAIS NIN**, is out. This covers the years 1934 to 1939. It is published by Swallow Press, Denver, and Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1967 (as was the first volume). This book, this section of her diary, is not as pertinent as the first, but it

must be read for the continuity, and for the few gems it produces. Of special interest is the initial letter Nin wrote to Djuna Barnes on the publication of Barnes' novel, **NIGHTWOOD**. Most of Nin's writing came after these years, and she was very strongly influenced by the writing of Djuna Barnes, and by Barnes herself. It is clear from this volume that the editing deemed necessary by the publishers (who must pay for the processing of such an esoteric work) is a serious disservice to the reader. The wealth of material being left out of these books is distressing. It is said that each volume represents less than half of the material available for the years covered. Many living persons have refused to be included, which has caused large sections of the diary to be cut out. To contemplate the probable nature of the deletions is to get a big headache. In any case, whatever is offered is better than nothing. These diaries are magnificent examples of the wholly self-immolated personality at full flower. If Anais Nin had written nothing else, she would still deserve a place of importance in contemporary literary history.

THE GLASS PLAY PEN, by Edwin Fadiman, Jr., has not been available for many years. This was first issued in 1956 by Signet (a paperback original), and has now been reissued by them in 1967. It is a minor, but very good treatment, and worth picking up if you missed it the first time around.

KATIE MULHOLLAND, by Catherine Cookson, N.Y., Bobbs-Merrill, 1967, would not have been a very rare novel 10 or 15 years ago, or almost any time before that, but

today, in a literary scene more devoted to novels without plot or characters, it seems a gem. It is one of those very well-known minor English novels. Apparently Mrs. Cookson is very well-known in this country, possibly to our detriment. Historical novels are usually poorly written and this is several cuts above the usual pap.

Katie was born in October, 1844, in Tyneside England. She was the daughter of a mine worker, and at 12 or 13 she became a kitchen helper in the Rosier household. At 16 or so, she is raped by the family son and "sold" into an undesirable marriage with the sadistic overseer of the estate because of her resulting pregnancy. Her father is hanged for killing her husband, and her mother is driven insane. I could go on with this plot, but if I did you wouldn't believe me, nor believe that it is all quite well-written and very well-handled. Katie's life does not end until 1944, just short of her one hundredth birthday, and along the way we learn all there is to know about her family, and all of the families whose lives touch hers.

Despite the novel's 411 pages of small type, Mrs. Cookson is a master of economy. To express three months of hell in a prison on a false charge of prostitution, she supplies just one scene, half-a-dozen sentences, and that is all that is needed. Marks from a beating many years later, tell the essentials of a marriage of convenience. The novel's conflict is centered around Katie's hatred of the Rosier name, for just cause, and the trouble brought on both Katie and her people, and the Rosiers, by this enmity.

For our interest here, it is the sister of the man who rapes her,

Theresa Rosier, who is Katie's champion and protector. Theresa plays a very major role, and it is made very clear that she is deeply in love with Katie. Theresa is present in the novel from the opening sentence until her death toward the latter third of the book. Realizing early on that Katie cannot return her love, Theresa forms an alliance with another woman and together they operate a girl's school for many years. Theresa continues to be a force in Katie's life, and before her own death, Theresa lives with Katie. Mrs. Cookson's portrait of Theresa is unusually realistic (except for the selfless love bit). It would have been improved had Mrs. Cookson given us some idea about the depth and nature of Theresa's feeling for the other woman, the one she spends most of her life with, and one who is clearly in love with her. Libraries will have this one, and you may end up wanting to own it anyway. You may well agree with the closing statement: "Well, that's the end of the old girl. A legend she was in her day, Katie Mulholland".

Those of you who have seen the bibliography that Lee Stuart and I had published by Daughter's of Bilitis, in 1967, will recall that I chose to list only a few titles under the general heading of Sappho, rather than list the hundreds possible there. I find that there is one addition to that selected list which won't wait for a supplement, but which should be brought to the attention of the reading public. This is, I am ashamed to admit, a book I have long known about but have not bothered to look up. My bookdealer recently gifted me with a copy of *SAPPHO OF LESBOS*, by Margaret Leland Goldsmith, London,

Rich and Cowan, 1938. Many of you will be familiar with this woman's excellent biography of *QUEEN CHRISTINA OF SWEDEN*. This study of Sappho is subtitled, "A Psychological Reconstruction of Her Life." That is exactly what Miss Goldsmith has done taken all the known historical facts plus the remaining poetry and fragments and put together a wholly convincing portrait of Sappho as virtually an exclusive Lesbian. Very good, and not unusually rare despite its never having been published in the United States.

There is a very scholarly (though certainly readable) biography of John Addington Symonds, by Canadian author, Phyllis Grosskurth, which has some peripheral interest for readers of this column. *JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS*, London, Longman's, 1964 (called *THE WOEFUL VICTORIAN* in the U.S. edition, N.Y., Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965) is, of course, of major interest to the male homosexual library of literature, dealing as it does with one of the fairly major historical studies. Lesbian interest here is another well-documented recounting of the Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) romance with Agnes Mary Robinson (see "The Formidable Blue-Stocking Vernon Lee," by Lennox Strong, in the June, 1967 issue of *THE LADDER*). It is also important to note that in her efforts to fully document Symonds's homosexuality, she quite conclusively roots out the orientation of numerous other eminent Victorians, including Edmund Gosse, Edward Lear, Arthur and Henry Sidgwick, etc.

TARA, by Terence De Vere White, London, Gallancz, 1967, is an Irish social comedy, with enough overtones of misery to make it an important and "serious" novel. Francis Xavier Mangan, and Irish poet whose fame rests on a single poem, *TARA*, has written a verse play without distinction. No one is interested in it, until, through chance, a rich, vulgar social-climbing bitch hears of it, and attempts to use it for a charity performance to aid a worthwhile (?) cause. Mangan's London publisher has mislaid the only copy in existence, and much of the novel centers around the finding of the manuscript. Mangan fervently hopes it won't show up, the bitch hopes it will etc.

Peripheral plots abound. The bitch's husband, Dan O'Connell, is a miserably unhappy natural man, bound up against his will in his wife's pretensions. Their daughter, Maeve, is the unwitting love object of society girl, Maud. Their son, John, is hoping to breathe new life into the IRA.

Mr. De Vere White's object, apparently, is to study frustration, since everyone in this story seems to be frustrated. No one wins, no one even gains ground. Maud is reasonably well presented, but no sympathy is present for her or anyone else. Not for everyone.

In a recent column I mentioned the reissuance of D.H. Lawrence's short novel, *THE FOX*, to tie-in with the Warner Bros. Seven Arts production of the movie. Well this same firm, Warner Bros. Seven Arts, has completed a movie based on Margaret Laurence's novel, *A JEST OF GOD*. Paul Newman directs it, and his

wife, Joanne Woodward stars. No news as to whether the Lesbian friend is retained in the movie version, but the novel has been issued in paperback by Popular Library, 1968, as a promotional tie-in. "Read The Book", at least, not so sure yet about "See The Movie", though nothing with Joanne Woodward could be too bad, and if by some fortunate chance Mr. Newman is also playing the male lead, it should be tremendous.

THE TIME OF THE ANGELS, by Iris Murdoch, N.Y., Viking, 1966, Avon, 1967, is Miss Murdoch's tenth novel. Six of these have been pertinent, including the present title, and four of the six have included Lesbian characters (as well as male homosexuals most of the time).

She is a remarkably prolific novelist, and living proof that quantity does not necessarily lower quality. Some of her novels, certainly, have been superior to this one, but her "poor" efforts are far better than the lifework of many writers.

A resume of the plot of *THE TIME OF THE ANGELS* must sound almost as mad as the "inhabitants" of the story appear to be. Carel Fisher, a reverend who sees no one and does not preach, moves his insular family to a half-ruined pastorate where only the rectory and a tower stand. There is no church building at all. The household servant, Pattie O'Driscoll (she is the daughter of a prostitute and a Jamaican customer), Carel's daughter, Muriel, and Muriel's "first cousin," Elizabeth.

Even in this small and isolated household, there are further separa-

tions. Muriel and Elizabeth, 24 and 19 years old respectively, have the only social contact, and that is rather strained because of Elizabeth's illness (unexplained) and Muriel's love for her.

We are told that Muriel has been in love with Elizabeth for at least five years. These four live together, yet apart, badgered by the outside world, and tormented by their internal terrors. There is little action, and the only explanation lies in the usual Murdoch dark closets of the mind.

The denouement involves, in addition to the explicit Lesbian passion between Muriel and Elizabeth, a revelation of double incest. The ending is, ironically, a dual sword for Muriel, ultimately the novel's dominant figure. A chilly tale . . . (An unusual event in the publishing history of this novel was brought to my attention by a LADDER reader. The most explicit Lesbian chapter in the novel was published as a short story in COSMOPO-LITAN MAGAZINE, January, 1967 proof if any was needed, that the subject has outlived most of its taboos in print.)

The above brings up a point that cannot be made too frequently. Won't you please, all of you, drop me a line EVERY time you read a Lesbian novel or short story or play or poem that you have not seen reviewed in THE LADDER? This is particularly important if you find some relevant portion buried in some long novel, where it was not made unmistakably clear in the blurb (the data on the inside of the front cover) that there was such activity in the novel. I would also be very grateful for any and all magazine information, since I cannot get around to reading ANY magazines except professional periodicals. Never assume I see everything pertinent. Thousands of new books are published in the United States each year, and thousands of new books are published in England each year. It is not possible for one person to read all of them or even every review about them, and many books are poorly reviewed if at all). Help, and enjoy the knowledge that you have helped someone else (perhaps dozens of others) to find something they will enjoy reading. Don't omit the "bad" ones, they have to be recorded too.

The Fox

Reviewed by Vern Niven

For some years it has been apparent that the movie makers of America are striving to "come of age," at least in subject matter. With THE FOX, something far more important has been accomplished; the movies have grown up in subject handling.

D. H. Lawrence's short novel, THE FOX, was first published in 1922. It dealt with two dependent women, probably lovers, who are torn apart by a natural predator, a man who falls in love with one of the women, and kills the other to accomplish his desires.

In the movie, which closely follows the basic plot line of the novel, the women run a chicken farm in Canada. They are plagued by a clever fox who

steals and kills their chickens. A drifting male, on leave from military service, comes into their lives.

He, played by Keir Dullea, falls in love with the more masculine, more resilient of the women, played by Anne Heywood. She is, we are lead to believe, bisexual and she responds to him physically, though she rejects, even hates him otherwise. (Miss Heywood bears an astonishing resemblance to Greta Garbo, incidentally.)

The more feminine woman, Sandy Dennis, is unable to cope with the man's presence. Anne Heywood attempts to soothe her fears, and precipitates a graphic and beautifully handled love scene. In this, to some extent, the movie departs from the novel, since every effort is made to convince the audience that these women have always been lovers.

The man kills the fox, and nails its hide to a door. He then becomes, symbolically, and in fact, the fox himself.

When it becomes apparent that he must win the unequal battle, Sandy Dennis allows herself to be the sacrificial victim, in a cruel and glorious death.

The two (Keir Dullea and Anne Heywood) are left with the taste of ashes in the coming spring, and as the farm is abandoned only the fox hide on the door is left, wearing a suitably malevolent expression on his very dead face.

The acting is superb, as is the photography. The handling of all of the various "controversial" scenes tends to be poignant rather than sensational. The voyeurs will be disappointed, but the lovers will rejoice.



THE FOX, a Warner Bros.-7 Arts motion picture, starring Anne Heywood, Sandy Dennis and Keir Dullea.

Temple of Athene

CONCLUSION

by Hilary Farr

As Betsy dropped the hoops Psych burst into her favorite 'You've got that thing, that certain things, that makes the birdies begin to sin-' and impudently capturing her reluctant partner she began to swing Cotterill in what was really a night club routine. The younger of the cast perched on the dressing shelf chanting the tune and beating the rhythm with heels and palms. The older ones, recognizing admonition as futile, began to slip quickly out. Theodora could feel them thinking 'At least no students are around to see it.' Chem Smith thank heaven had left before it began. Agnes Haynes stood near the door looking black.

Suddenly Theodora caught a violent movement at her left and saw Gaby crouched with jaw thrust out till the cords of her neck were like wires. A low sound, almost a growl, came across to her below the noise inside. Beyond a doubt the girl was going to crash straight in, under or *through* the blind, and then there'd be mayhem.

At a stretch Theodora got from her own railing to Gaby's, put a foot down in the constricted space there so that she sat astride the coping, and let a firm hand fall on the rigid shoulder. "Steady," she whispered. Her feet struck something that made a sound and she groped and brought up a half-empty pint of cognac, by the scent of Gaby. The girl gave no sign of knowing she was there, and that horrible sound still buzzed in her throat. Thinking fast, Theodora opened the flask awkwardly without releasing her hold on the shoulder and pretended to down a good gulp. Then she held it to the girl's lips. If one could get her quite drunk, the after the room cleared one could somehow drag her in over the sill. And something must be done for this rigor or she'd go into convulsion next.

Taken by surprise the girl swallowed, spluttered, and struck the flask from Theodora's hand over the rail to the grass below.

"What's that?" Someone inside whirled toward the window.

"It's only Hart, you dimwits," she said loudly. "Do be your age and go home or you'll have a fine student audience. If I can get up here they can. I spotted a few hopeful prowlers and came up on guard." As soon as she began to speak Gaby tried to lunge free and cry out, but Theodora's left arm caught her around the neck and her hand covered the mouth. The bite she expected closed on the flesh of her outer palm, but with the head held at that punishing angle the jaw had little power and she managed not to let the pain break her speech.

"And don't pull the blind up, you can be seen clear to Shackleton," she added crossly. Then she turned to the problem of letting Gaby have a little breath before one of them should be dislodged from their perch. But as the

dressing room rapidly emptied, the girl stopped fighting and half collapsed across her arm with a quite different sound. Presently she was very sick, leaning over the coping like any seasoned channel passenger at the rail. By that time no one was left inside to hear.

There seemed little point in taking her across to Maplewood, for she had a single room and once dumped into bed should be incapable of further motion for some time, but the difficulty was getting her there unobserved. And anyhow Gaby might not be a 'normal' drunk according to her limited experience. she might be a somnambulist. And Lenox had said- . . . Nice rationalization, she thought as she put through the dreary business of propping and steering the half conscious figure through the darkness. Maplewood had no first floor lights, but Mrs. Curtiss came quickly in answer to the bell, and with a pitying headshake led the way back to a sort of staff sitting room with a couch on which they deposited and half undressed their burden.

"She'll be all right now, she sleeps it off," the courteous voice said incongruously, "and Miss VanTuyl will be so grateful. I'll tell her the minute she's out of her bath. Do you need to stay and tell her about anything or can you get to rest yourself and leave it till morning?" It was plain what answer she hoped for.

"That'll be best," Theodora said dully. "Tell her no one but me knows about it." She heard the door closed and locked behind her like the gates of paradise and went home to try iodine on her now painful hand. It was midnight and she had a class at eight, but she sat down and scrawled off some kind of rough draft of an application before she could sleep.

VII

On Saturday evening she walked across to the auditorium in an odd calm. The letter was mailed yesterday, and if there was a favorable answer then she had taught her last class at Radnor. Too bad. Last July the prospect was so alluring. If Lenox had been anything but president . . . But even that pigeon wouldn't fly any longer. Lenox VanTuyl would never had yielded, not had she been the merest nobody. One knew that now.

Would even the promised Paris story be forthcoming? Not likely. In the hectic week left of the year a driven president would hardly sit down to a luxurious session of self-revelation. She hadn't apparently found time in the past two days for so much as a phone call or a scribbled word of thanks for Gaby's rescue. Why should one think oneself in any way singled out? Probably Mary Dawson had lived this same chapter with different detail . . . and having been faithful and patient, had she been rewarded with confidences? What private treasures might not be hidden beneath that charged reticence of Mary's that she had so resolutely not plumbed?

Well, she didn't want to be another Mary Dawson.

Take a fresh start, profit by this lesson in how adequate one was to handle oneself and everyone else. Live on thin New England sunshine-if one was lucky enough to get the chance-or on some other emotional bread-and-butter. No more midnight calls . . . and futile violets . . . and biennial dramatic cham-

pagne—so far pretty flat!

She paused to brace herself before entering the dressing room. Another effort wasted, Lenox wasn't there. But everybody else was, the place was one still joyous bedlam. She reached a narrow vacancy along the dressing shelf, wedged herself in, and began to spread Number Three foundation. In the continuous strip of wall mirror she watched the door.

At five minutes before curtain Lenox arrived already made up so that for an instant Theodora did not recognize the Byronic head above a dark cloak in the doorway. Then someone squealed and everyone turned and cried out and the evening cape came off revealing a sleek teal-green figure, the perfection of romantic elegance. The makeup was uncanny, either the eye-shadow or reflection from the suit turned the hazel eyes a deep sea-green beneath their heavily straightened brows. When she turned back to the mirror Theodora saw her own face white under the pain.

... Dressing and making up at home. What will she do about the quick change before Set Three. Has she some private cubby arranged down the corridor? ...

Then they went on. And within two speeches Lenox VanTuyl was gone, there was only Lord Farrand. It was almost frightening. And she herself became only Raoul Wilde, foil for that high gentility. When the first act was over she had a dim impression of Ally Lind's face as she waited in the wings, all but tearful with joy. And then green eyes plumbing hers and a voice somewhere between Lenox's and Lord Farrand's saying, "You're an actor." Just that. And you!" she echoed. It was as if they had kissed.

She played the second act somewhere above the level of the boards. She had no body, only a voice and the low passions of Raoul Wilde, the needed darkness to set off Lord Farrand's growing flamboyant nobility. At the end she heard the audience go wilder than ever. A prominent alumna pushed in against Ally Lind's best effort and began demanding of Lenox that they repeat the thing next Friday, Alumnae Day. Still in that tone between her own and her part's Lenox VanTuyl said irrevocably, "No, I'm afraid that is out of the question. I couldn't consider doing it again."

A hope that had rocketed dropped faster, but Theodora felt no surprise. Without knowing why she knew this could indeed not be repeated. The alumna went off snubbed and Lenox VanTuyl strode to the dressing room shedding upper garments as she came. Theodora stopped just outside the door where she could stare unnoticed, not opposite a mirror with a dozen pairs of eyes able to rake her face. Unconscious and indifferent as Psych Smith, Lenox stripped to the minimum and reached for the wedding suit. It was silver gray untouched with color.

Theodora leaned against the casing and felt her face go as rigid as Gaby's had been with eyes on Betsy. She could not have turned her gaze aside from that unbearable beauty if she knew Peeping Tom's fate was upon her. It was Ally Lind who roused her, shaking her lapel, crying "Hart! Hart! Fix you make-up you're on in three minutes." She could never recall the last act save as a dazzled haze in which she moved and spoke through no agency of her own.

When her black villainy had been joyously booed off for the last time to make way for the wedding she still stood barely within the wings, wide eyes unable to leave the gray figure.

With the last echo of applause after curtain calls two alumnae together came and swept Lenox off still in costume to some impromptu celebration. There went the hope Mary Dawson and her crowd had nursed of luring the hero to their sherry party . . . Theodora slumped cheek on fist at the dressing shelf half asleep as she sat, current off and mechanism stopped. Again it was Ally Lind's sharp reminder that waked her. "Costumes! Every one of them and every scrap of accessories. We're checking them in tonight and packing, and what you bring in late you can ship back yourselves and pay the fine."

So Lenox would have to bring hers in. Theodora crossed the room and volunteered to stay and help with the checking, but Ally Lind informed her privately that she hadn't the least notion of packing tonight really, just wanted to make it drastic so things wouldn't get carried off . . . Mary Dawson's party were clamoring for her to come along—what excuse could she hatch? With the one hope now over here, the return of that suit, she couldn't *couldn't* go and sit still in a room . . . She slipped off the watch and rings she had just put on and dropped them secretly in a drawer. Now she could come back.

All the way across campus amid the excited laughter and nonsense her will was pushing, hurrying them. Sooner there, sooner back. She controlled herself as far as the landing below her room and Mary's. Then she clasped her wrist and uttered the planned outcry. "My watch—and my rings! I must get them before they lock up over there. Don't wait, I'll fly."

She flew. The corridor door was still open and a light on. She switched on the dressing room lights, got her jewelry, and darkened the room again at once. But she had seen what she needed—the gray suit was not yet on the rack. She settled down to wait in the dark, a hand at her breast to ease the pain of her heartbeats.

But—the green suit was there, and Lenox had worn that coming over and had brought no dressing case. Naturally she must wear the light one home. A president had privileges. So she would not be coming here again tonight . . . Theodora laid her arms along the dressing shelf and her head upon them. All hope gone then. One could not go a second time and stand on the lawn of Maplewood . . . Scent of powder and paint from the shelf pricked at memory. Lenox's powder . . . She got up and corssed the room and found infallibly by scent and then by touch the green suit dependent from its hanger. Her arms closed about it, her face lay against the ruffled shirt that had covered Lenox's fragrant flesh. She stood so, more asleep than awake, for a long time.

When the chimes sounded a half-hour she turned without thought like a mechanical toy set in motion . . . She will be home now. Or soon . . . Darkness in the corridor surprised her, she had no idea when that light had been turned off or by whom. But her eyes tonight had a cat's vision, she let herself out of the building with a cat's quiet . . . I've come because my need tonight is as grave as Gaby's ever was. This night I must stay—for goodbye. Because this

isn't enough. Coming alive tonight has shown me how far from enough. Ab-stention is very well for you, you had fulfillment before you chose it. But not for me who have never known fulfillment wholly. Not yet for me . . .

From across the street she could see that Maplewood had light only in the lower hall and that its door stood open still. . . . Then she has not come back. I will go in and wait. If the screen is locked Mrs. Curtiss must come. 'I must see Miss VanTuyl, it's imperative.' She walked evenly up the three steps and across the wide verendah and put out her hand to the screen door.

A pale figure came from the unlit study. Without formal coat and stock, thin silk followed the long lines of shoulder and arm, silver broadcloth molded narrow waist and thing. "Theodora! They found you quickly."

"Found me?" She was startled almost back to reality.

"I knew you would come. So I phoned, and not getting you I told Mary Dawson you were needed here, implying our problem child. But she is completely out back there for twelve hours at least—under heavy hypo, thanks to an understanding medical alumna who saw her tonight. She's to be hospitalized in the city for a few days. We'll get her through."

Her voice still had that deep intensity, Theodora noted from her dream . . . She knew you must come . . . she has covered your traces . . . her strength has dealt with Gaby . . . dark hero in luminous pearl . . .

She was drawn into the small room whose only light was dim reflection and settled on the Victorian love-seat with a glass in her hand. They drank in silence while her tranced eyes lingered on every line and motion of the silvery figure beside her, long sensitive fingers curved loosely about the glass, warm rise and fall of breathing beneath the silk. As in real dream, her own slightest move lagged in dragging adagio against a weight of dark water.

"You're leaving," the cello voice said at last, neither question nor instruction, mere fatalistic statement.

"It seems the only way." Phrases that came so easily in solitary darkness were unutterable here, she groped for others. "Long famine and sudden champagne . . . aren't a diet I can live on."

"Nor I. These three weeks!" As the hard sigh faded Theodora's eyes were her only question, but she felt them read in the dimness. Lenox's voice was lower. "You've seen how I dared not be myself for one moment."

. . . No, no I haven't! *Was that it?* . . . Sharp bliss checked her breath before the first incredulous syllable and she leaned and set down quickly the glass her fingers could no longer hold."

"Undertaking to play the man discreetly was rash enough, and tonight's exhibition will cost me a deal of living down. No more male parts, ever. But to imagine I could play opposite you and betray nothing!" The laugh was a rueful gasp. "That madness has taught me my judgment is not even yet proof against—wish."

Theodora melted and was rocked on a hot rhythmic tide and her arms reached out uncontrollably, but not looking at her Lenox said rapidly, "I once promised you the story of that portrait but there is not time tonight. One day

perhaps—though there must never be many meetings. Now I can only just try to make you understand." Her head was bent and her eyes stared at one hand gripping the other on her crossed knees.

"I believe Jan Ivorsen's and mine was truly a great love. All she did was done greatly. It began here in innocence and went on in Paris . . . in completeness . . . for nearly three years. We were reticent and discreet but we were so uplifted, so unashamed, and Paris seemed to us little provincials so safe. We had learned too little of the world's ways to know that only the completely obscure—or completely indifferent—can live as they choose even there.

"There was a man, a Parisian, of—shall we say some consequence but no real stature, who believed that he loved me. But when he could not win me from a plain penniless *garçonne*—that was how he saw her, for all her growing fame and that lambent inner beauty—it did such violence to his pride that he made a scandal."

. . . *Legere*, a gnat-voice buzzed within Theodora's aching trance, but her heavy lips would not move.

"Providentially Gabrielle's—Liane d'Estree's—brother was a barrister, and he and Maurice Doro who loved us both in his fashion fought for us and salvaged enough good name to give us another chance. Both of us, I believed in the blindness of panic. So I fled home to an academic haven . . . Only for a little while, I thought, till the blackest cloud blew over and I had earned enough . . . But she . . . The scandal reduced the sales she lived by and she would tell no one, not even me. She . . . died. A great artist lost. In part at least because of our reckless blindness. That lesson can never be unlearned." Her straining voice was a plea.

Theodora stood quickly, supported by a hand on the light seat that quivered with her tremor. "Thank you for telling me. I must go." It was just audible. "Not another risk for you, Lenox. So I must go, Now."

Lenox VanTuyl came to her feet, tall, steady, and since she was smiling her face was not the face of the portrait, but she looked at Theodora with its eyes. "Yes. And bless you," she said with deep gentleness. Her voice alone was not firm.

Once again Theodora felt the strong hands grip her shoulders and hold her at arm's length while she stood helpless. But then the arms slackened and suddenly enclosed her and Lenox's fragrant powder was warm against that steadfast strength. Then she straightened and kissed wet lids and said, "Goodbye, my beloved . . . Many meetings or not—you haven't lost me."

As she drifted across the dewy lawns she heard from dormitory windows June's reckless midnight shreds of nostalgic sound and laughter, and breathed June's poignant linden and wild grape and honeysuckle. Not to be weeping surprised her, and then for one clear moment she knew through her daze of weariness and ecstatic pain that she had had of Radnor what she had come for: Love. And if she had not managed it and herself quite according to her confident prevision, she had been equal to it in a fashion . . . And gained a new touchstone for whatever might come after.

TIMELY TOPICS

By Ben Cat



This is a time of great decisions. We are going to vote for a new president or continue with an old one. It seems to me that we must have a man (or woman) who can solve our war, can solve our domestic problems and bring a feeling of brother and sister-hood to all mankind. Since I have not seen any such candidate on the landscape, I am declaring myself available for the presidency. I have searched the constitution and can find no barrier other than age and my age is computed by sevens so I have no problem there.

I am your best bet. I have the right amount of selfishness, the right amount of guile, the right amount of personal beauty. I have not sold my soul to Lanvin or any other private enterprise (least of all, Dr. Ross) and I have at my paw-tip the news of every day.

A vote for Ben Cat is a vote for sanity. If you feel that you have no choice when you face your ballot next November, write me in. Try hard to choose well on every other office. Don't waste your vote by staying home or going to the movies. And don't vote for impossible candidates.

* * *

I understand that there is going to be a meeting of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the DOB in August. I think it is 9-10-11 and it is to be held in Denver, Colorado. There won't be any great big program, but it will be a very important meeting for all members of DOB and friends who may wish to come and help plan our course for the next two years. Sandy says we are going to have to get a new editor for THE LADDER. This does cut me up a bit. However, she knows what she is doing and if that has to be, I will cooperate with the new editor as best I can.

* * *

My column is very short this week because I have many new neighbors to get acquainted with. Some of the cats are very pushy and the dogs are simply dreadful. The people are nice enough and the mailman is a girl who strokes my ears and has excellent taste in her remarks. She doesn't say silly things, but refers to me as a "good cat."

* * *

Next month I will review a book for you and I hope that Gene Damon doesn't get all uptight about it. Cheers!

* * *

HO! One more thing. In the near future I am going to edit an edition of CONCERN which is the publication of the Southern California Council on Religion and the Homophile. If you want a copy of this, please send 25c to me (Ben Cat) c/o DOB at P.O. Box 727, Manhattan Beach, California 90266. Just say you want Ben's Concern.

Memento Mori

By then you will not care;
When I breathe my last quivering sigh
You will remain silent,
Your long hair soft against your cheeks,
Wondering, behind those solemn eyes,
If Death might bring you flowers
As a pledge he will not come for you.
You would enjoy his nosegays, I fancy,
Standing by my grave,
Your small warm hands crumbling the dry petals into dust.
When I am gone, yes, Death will bring bouquets to you,
Massing the dead blooms at your feet
With an apologetic smile.
"Your loveliness," he'll say,
Pressing a wilted rosebud in your hand,
"Shall never die; you need not fear me
As these others have," with a gesture to my corpse,
"And only to reassure you do I come now,
Bearing these few faded treasures,
The best that my poor realm can offer you."
And you will thank him for the gifts,
Not knowing that he lies, a clever rogue
Beguiling women with his promises.
I heard him once; can you believe it, seeing me
As I am now? But yes, he came to me,
And I, reluctant mourner at a lover's grave,
Clutched eagerly at youth and pushed away decay.
"Will I, like she," I asked Death,
"Wrinkle and grow old? Must I die too?"
He gave me violets, their purple fading into gray,
The parchment petals circled by some yellowed lace.
"No, no," he whispered but time proved him wrong;
I have grown old, and Death walks close beside me,
A more ardent suitor with each passing year.
I watch you now, anxious at your mirror,
With pots of paint to capture back your youth.
You fear me; my years serve as heralds
To the future you must face one day,
And our love dwindles, ebbs,
Hesitant and powerless against your fears.
At least, my dear, when Death has taken me,
Please let a tear slip through the crumbling petals;
Miss me, just a little.

by Maura McCullough

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