

The Persephone Biannually

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'Portrait of Mrs Charles Metcalf' 1916 oil on canvas by PC Conway (James Brown 1863-1943) © private collection/Messum's



OUR BOOKS FOR AUTUMN & WINTER 2010-11

Mrs Oliphant (1828-97), one of the outstanding writers of the nineteenth century, was in her time as well-known as Dickens, George Eliot and Mrs Gaskell: 'the exemplary woman of letters' is how the literary critic Queenie Leavis described the author of Persephone Book No. 89, *The Mystery of Mrs Blencarrow*. Nevertheless, Mrs Oliphant (also known as Margaret Oliphant, although we have chosen to respect her wish to be known as Mrs) was criticised by Virginia Woolf as a faint-hearted feminist because: 'She sold her brain, her very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual liberty in order that she might earn her living and educate her children.'

It is true that Mrs Oliphant wrote her novels, nearly a hundred of them, in order to support first her husband, then her rather feckless sons. 'I don't think I have ever had two hours uninterrupted (except at night, with everybody in bed) during the whole of my literary life,' she said. At night, therefore, she wrote – her novels, more than fifty short stories, history, biography, travel, articles 'too numerous to list'.

'Mrs Oliphant is at her very best in novellas and short stories' was the novelist Penelope Fitzgerald's claim. She suggested that two of them, *The Mystery of Mrs Blencarrow* (1890) and *Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamond* (1886), might well be reprinted together, which is what we have now done. She then went on to point out that the strongest theme running through all the books is that of the helpless man and the strong woman. Mrs Oliphant may have described herself, self-deprecatingly, as 'a fat little commonplace woman, rather tongue-tied', but at the same time, as Penelope Fitzgerald put it, she 'rejoiced in taking charge and liked her dependants to be weak'; which led to Mrs Oliphant asking in her *Autobiography*, 'Should I have done better if I had been kept, like George Eliot, in a mental greenhouse and taken care of?'

It is interesting to speculate whether or not it was her own subconscious choice never to have two uninterrupted hours, or whether actually she liked it that way; for, it is true, it was her own decision to marry a man who (unlike George Lewes or Leonard Woolf) did not look after her. This point is relevant to the two



A printed velveteen designed by Lewis F Day for Thoms Wardle & Co, sold by Liberty's in 1888 © V & A



A 1950s furnishing fabric in a private collection.

novellas we have reprinted. Both of them are about women left on their own to run their own households. In one, Penelope Fitzgerald continues, 'Mrs Blencarrow, a conventional widow with a large estate, falls in love with her coarse-mannered steward, and in the other the wife, Mrs Lycett-Landon, finds out that her husband has made a bigamous marriage. She has the other woman's address and resolutely sets out for the distant suburb, the street, the house. What follows is "tragifarc", as the author calls it, "the most terrible of all," and she risks a conclusion that dies away into silence and echoes.'

In one respect Mrs Oliphant's subjects were 'the staples of Victorian women's fiction – money, wills, marriages, church and chapel, disgraceful relatives, family power struggles, quarrels, deathbeds, ghosts.' Yet, writes Dr Merryn Williams, who published a critical biography of Mrs Oliphant and has now written the *Persephone* Afterword for us: 'The two novellas in this volume... written in the late 1880s... are surprisingly un-Victorian. Each ends, not with a marriage as is usual, but with the break-up of a marriage. Each is about the terribly destructive effects of middle-aged passion.' As Mrs Oliphant herself said about the husband in *Queen Eleanor and Fair Rosamond*, Mr Lycett-Landon: 'It seems as if they [men] must break out – as if common life and duty become insupportable.' And as JM Barrie

wrote of this novella, 'It is as terrible and grim a picture of a man tired of fifty years of respectability as was ever written', adding, 'Mrs Oliphant wrote so many short stories that she forgot their names and what they were about, but readers, I think, will not soon forget this one', written by a woman who 'was of an intellect so alert that one wondered she ever fell asleep.'

Her intellect was, it is true, supremely alert; yet all her life her main responsibility was to her family, and in this respect she identified very much with the heroines of both these novellas. As Merryn Williams says: 'They belong together because each is

about a middle-aged woman who takes sole responsibility for her children. The children are absorbed in their own young lives and have to be shielded from a parent's behaviour. "Nothing before the children!" says Mrs Blencarrow, and Mrs Lycett-Landon's chief worry when she discovers her husband's other life is how to keep her children from knowing.'

For the last twenty years of her life Mrs Oliphant lived at Windsor, at 9 Clarence Crescent where there is now a plaque. Yet she has become one of the legion of women writers whose disappearance from public view is as mysterious as it is unjustified.



Virago reprinted some of her novels 25 years ago, *Miss Marjoribanks* is in print as a Penguin and *Hester* as an OUP paperback, and a scholarly edition (costing £450!) of much of the work is due in 2012. But we rather agree with Penelope Fitzgerald that Mrs Oliphant is at her best in her novellas and we very much hope Persephone readers will like them as much as we do.

Monica Dickens (1915-92) has, however, not disappeared at all. Persephone Books reprinted *Mariana* (1940) in 1999 and it has been selling continuously since then, both in its grey Original format and as a Persephone Classic with a picture

on the front. We have written about it on the Persephone Forum, there have been appreciative and interesting comments about it, and although Monica Dickens is slightly less well-known than, say, Noel Streatfeild, Richmal Crompton, Dodie Smith or Stella Gibbons (all of whom have been the subject of biographies) most people have heard of her, and not just because of her famous great-grandfather.

The *Winds of Heaven* is a 1955 novel about 'a widow, rising sixty, with no particular gifts or skills, shunted from one to the other of her more or less unwilling daughters on perpetual uneasy visits, with no prospect of

her life getting anything but worse' (Afterword). One daughter is the socially ambitious Miriam living in commuter belt with her barrister husband and children; one is Eva, an aspiring actress in love with a married man; and the third is Anne, married to a rough but kindly Bedfordshire small-holder who is the only one who treats Louise with more than merely dutiful sympathy. As in the short story by Eva Ibbotson in this *Biannually*, the one relation with whom she has any empathy is her grandchild.

However, here we must digress: a reader in America will be angry as she reads this *Biannually*, since she wrote us a long email accusing us of



The late 1890s wedding in Leeds between Frank Jones and Kate Rattenbury, a teacher – hence her pupils.

needlessly giving away the plot; she quoted various instances, even mentioning *Still Missing* where we say ‘but his mother never gives up hope’ and declaring, ‘ok, why would I read the book then?’ Yet we publish books for a whole variety of reasons apart from plot. And if we did not hint that *Still Missing* does not have a tragic ending, who would want to read it? If we said about *Saplings*, ‘it’s about a family in WW2’ who would be that interested? If we say, ‘it’s about a happy family where the father is killed in the Blitz and the mother takes to drink’, people do want to read it. That may be reprehensible, but it’s realistic. And does it matter so much if some of the plot is ‘given away’? We read to turn the pages, certainly; but, just as important, we read to

understand character; to immerse ourselves in a historical period, to confront moral dilemmas. The important thing is to get people reading. In any case, it is clear that publishers have always had to balance enticing readers with telling them what happens because here is the original 1955 blurb for *The Winds of Heaven*: ‘In awkward embarrassment Louise lives with each of her three daughters in turn, her self-respect saved only by the devotion of her understanding and sympathetic grandchild, and

the few friends that remain to her. From a predicament growing always more intolerable and one which is unfortunately true to contemporary life, she is finally able to find contentment and a happiness she thought she had lost.’ Persephone readers can see that the original publisher – Michael Joseph – did not think



Monica Dickens c. 1954 © Getty Images

that he would tempt the book-buying public by saying, ‘this is about an elderly widow with three daughters’ and leaving it at that. End of digression.

We have therefore reprinted *The Winds of Heaven* for several reasons other than what ‘happens’ to Louise. It is very readable: like Dorothy Whipple or Marghanita Laski or Noel Streatfeild, Monica Dickens had the knack of writing about ordinariness while making the reader unable to

put her books down. It is about family relationships: it seems rather cruel that all three of Louise’s daughters are so harsh to her but that, Monica Dickens is saying, is the way of the world. The daughters are no more indifferent than the children in ‘Flesh and Blood’, the story about family life in Irène Némirovsky’s *Dimanche*

(Persephone Book No. 87); and in *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont*, the 1971 novel by Elizabeth Taylor; Mrs Palfrey’s tragedy, and the reason she comes to the Claremont Hotel in the first place, is that her daughter has no time for her. Nor is she lucky enough to have a grandson who loves her.

And, as John Betjeman said in a *Daily Telegraph* review:

‘Monica Dickens is one of the most affectionate and humorous observers of the English scene, particularly of the pretensions of genteel suburban life, that we have. Not only this, but she can always tell a good story, touch the heart with a pleasant sentimental grace... I think *The Winds of Heaven* is her best novel yet.’

While Elizabeth Bowen wrote in *Tatler*: ‘Monica Dickens has chosen a situation perfectly suited to her art – her sense of

comedy, her affection for people and her almost uncanny knowledge of their small ways. Here, in fact, is humour at its most kindly... How well she sees extraordinary in the ordinary, and how familiar she is with all kinds of people... Not a page of *The Winds of Heaven* is not enjoyable: here's a fine blend of comedy with sheer good sense.'

Another of Monica Dickens's fans is AS Byatt, who wrote a piece about her for *Nova* magazine in 1970 which we have reprinted as *The Winds of Heaven* Afterword. In this provocative assessment, which begins 'literary reviewing tends to create an artificial borderline between serious novelists and best-selling women writers,' *plus ça change*, AS Byatt defines why she rates Monica Dickens so highly. 'Her heroes and heroines are characterised by a gallant and attractive innocence, a wish to be useful which is gradually worn down by circumstances entirely beyond their very ordinary capacities. All are saved, or at least enabled to go on living, by love... She thus writes anachronistically in the Victorian tradition of George Eliot and her own great-grandfather Charles Dickens, who were not embarrassed about putting a penetrating analysis of social evil or personal failure into a book with a romantically consoling ending... The mild but genuinely distressing *The Winds of Heaven*... is a novel about ageing that works because its emotions are muted and right, because it is not a tear-jerker... It is not *King Lear* – "Dear daughter, I confess

that I am old – Age is unnecessary..." But it has the ring of that truth.'

Lastly, our third book for Autumn/Winter 2010-11 is the first *Persephone Diary*, *The Persephone Ninety*. This is a diary for 2011 which looks exactly like a grey Persephone book on the outside. Inside there are eighty-eight pages, each with a full-page reproduction of an endpaper fabric, while the first fabric, for *William - an Englishman*, and the last, for *The Winds of Heaven*, are reproduced as front and back endpapers. There are some blank pages for notes, calendars for 2010 and 2012, a Publisher's Note and of course a page for each of 2011's fifty-two weeks. At

the bottom of every page we have put in the details of the fabric's provenance and the first line of each book (it is a particularly fascinating way of understanding, in a sense for the first time, that one can tell so much from the first line: it is not a complete exaggeration to say that the whole book is in the opening sentence). *The Persephone Ninety: Diary for 2011* is, like all our books, £10 or three for £27. We hope Persephone readers will want to give it to everyone they know for Christmas and that it will fly out of the shop. It has been printed in China, the colour quality is amazing and, though we say it ourselves, the *Persephone Diary* is a thing of beauty. We hope you think so too.



CONSERVATION

Persephone readers will not be surprised to know that conservation is one of our great preoccupations: we try and conserve out of print women writers; we try and conserve broken bentwood furniture and torn railway posters; and we try and conserve old buildings – indeed are doing so on a daily basis as we stop 59 Lamb's Conduit Street being either modernised or crumbling into the dust.

So it is perfectly appropriate that next year we are reprinting *The Sack of Bath* (1973) by Adam Fergusson. This passionate plea to bring the destruction of Bath to an end had an enormous effect and did indeed halt the demolition; but not before rows and rows of artisan houses had disappeared: the town council wanted to retain the set pieces like Royal Crescent, but got rid of small early C18th terrace houses because they refused to rehabilitate them – yet it is these that are nowadays every young couple's dream.

In his Foreword Lord Goodman wrote: 'It is almost incredible that a city so loved for the character and beauty of its buildings should have suffered the indignities already inflicted on it and should remain exposed to increasing and lethal risks.'

And at the end Adam Fergusson (who has now written a new Preface for our

edition) asked: 'What ought to be done? Bath Council is still bent on implementing a 20-year-old development plan which, amendments and all, ought never to have seen the light of day. Its

purpose was to transform a unique architectural entity into a modern urban complex in which all but the finest pieces of Georgian architecture would be mere encumbrances.'



Poster designed by Fred Taylor in 1945, p.186 *London Transport Posters ed. David Bownes and Oliver Green 2008*

RANDOM COMMENTARY

In 1966 Dorothy Whipple published a selection ‘from notebooks and journals kept from 1925 onwards.’

19²⁸: ‘I try to persevere with *Marnie*. I must “see and interpret” not insist. I must put the question instead of solving it. Katherine Mansfield said, I think in a review of a book of Hugh Walpole’s: “Nothing is deep enough. The risk has not been taken.” I must take my risks.’

19²⁹: ‘Today I finished my second novel [now called] *High Wages*. I don’t think much of it – diffuse, no unity, too lightweight altogether... My book back from Cape. They refuse it. They said it wouldn’t be a commercial success. (This book afterwards sold 1000s of copies and is now in its tenth edition. Still selling after thirty years.)’

19³⁰⁻³²: Dorothy Whipple was writing *Greenbanks*, which Persephone Books will publish in the autumn of 2011.

19³³: ‘I am in despair about *They Knew Mr Knight*. I have only to start writing a novel to become flat and stale. A short story invigorates me, a novel depresses me during all the weary months I am writing it... I went to the Assizes to collect material for Thomas’s trial. A dreadful fog outside had got into the Shire Hall, dimming the already bad lights... I begin the second draft

of my book. The first is very scrappy. I don’t see my way with the book yet... I don’t like having to concoct plots, I like doing people... Having got permission, I went to Deering Street Engineering works to get copy. The place where they were casting was like Dante’s Inferno. The world of men is so different from the world of women. It is a wonder they speak the same language or understand one another. Probably they don’t... I think I shall begin my book again now that I know what is going to happen to everybody – the thought of that fills me with excitement... I feel the novel is spoilt by appearing as a serial. The first instalment appeared in the Christmas number of *Good Housekeeping* today. It reads quite well, but it isn’t what I wanted it to be.’

19³⁵: ‘I have decided to do the country house novel (afterwards *The Priory*). Already I see the house and all the people. I begin to feel excited. I shall set it at Newstead Abbey. I will put every blade of grass in, so that I shall always remember this lovely place when I have left it ...’

19³⁶: ‘I try to get on with my book, but I am tired and flat. I need peace, sleep and thought. In this book, the interest is scattered. There is no central character and, so far, no big moments. It is a kind of chess-board view of life... Will wring the truth out of my people and situations...’

‘Bought from the postman two of the first Edward VIII stamps. His young face with its tip-tilted nose, very attractive – has there



‘Quiet Evening’ 1924 John Nash from Alphabet & Image No. 3

been such a young king since Edward VI?’

19³⁸: ‘Tonight, about six o’clock, I finished *The Priory*. I can’t believe it is done at last. I don’t know whether it is good or bad. I shall just have to wait to see what the verdict of the public is. I am very elated to have finished...’

19³⁹: ‘Suddenly, out of the blue, about six o’clock in the morning, an idea for a novel hit me. I must write it. I think this is a real inspiration...Now, my little girl, materialise with all your troubles, the Aunts, the cousins, the worthless lover and that house!... I can’t write. Fiction seems so trivial. Fact is too terrible.’

19⁴⁰: ‘I am delighted to hear that EM Delafield, so much admired by me, mentioned *The Priory* in her *Provincial Lady in Wartime*. “A delightful novel” she says. “I haven’t enjoyed anything so much for years.”’

19⁴¹: ‘I finish a scrappy third draft of *They Were Sisters* and am now about to begin it again. I will keep beginning again. I ought to go straight on to the end... Henry has read, tonight, my book as far as it goes. When I said, trembling, “Well?” He said, gravely, “It’s very, very good.” He admitted to weeping about the little dog. I wept every time I went back over that piece. I am as miserable about it as if it had really happened...’

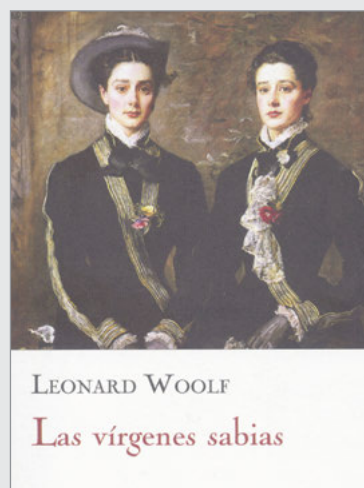
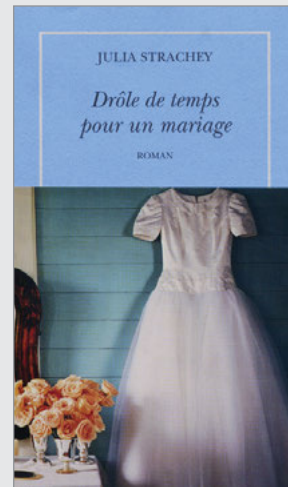
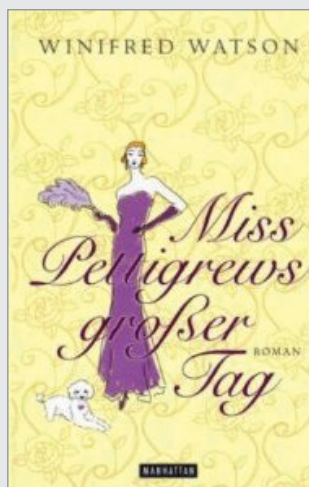
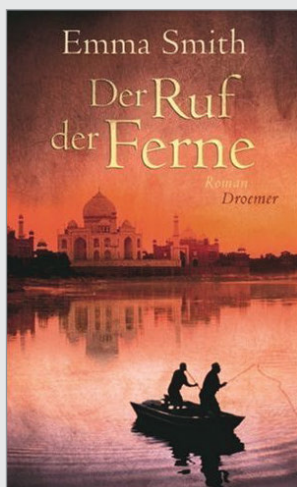
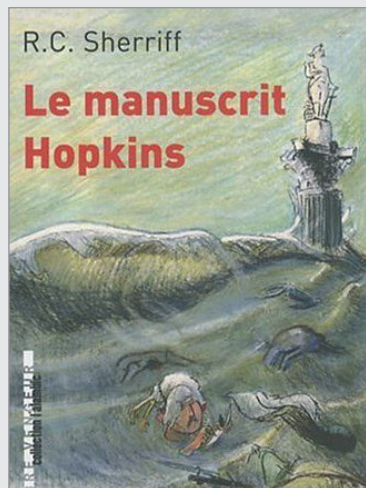


HRH The Prince of Wales in 1925 by John St Helier Lander 1869-1944, p71
[Twenties London](#) by Cathy Ross Museum of London 2003

19⁴²: ‘I am full of work re-writing the early chapters of *They Were Sisters* for serialisation in *Homes & Gardens* and trying to write on to the end of the complete novel at the same time. I am terrified of the badness of this book. I am off my natural bent. Sadness, ugliness throughout is not in my line. I wish I didn’t start on themes without proper thoughts...But I worked well and fast. It seems as if I have to ponder on a situation for several days, seeing no daylight, then suddenly it comes clear and I can write again.’

19⁴³: ‘Letter from Sir John Murray [her publisher] which sent me sky-high with happiness and relief. He says: “You have a wonderful power of taking quite ordinary people in quite unromantic surroundings, in their normal ways of life and making them live and impress themselves on your readers’ minds in a way that really grips. If the general public enjoy the story anything like as much as I have there will be no doubt about its success.”’

PERSEPHONE TRANSLATIONS



OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

‘**D**imanche and Other Stories is a useful addition to Irène Némirovsky’s growing corpus in translation. She cited Chekhov and Tolstoy as her models; in practice, these stories lack the bite and originality of the former and the overtly transcendent ambitions of the latter. Their fascinated probing of implicitly simmering bourgeois discontents has far more in common with Flaubert and early French cinema. Indeed they are all, bar “The Spell” (a nostalgic evocation of rural Ukraine), very pointedly French. Despite a few too many stock characters, Némirovsky achieves her own vision here: a singular combination of thoroughly absorbed Parisian mores offset by an outsider’s sardonic perspective. The slow-burning title story is a beautifully paced depiction of wet Sunday evening ennui and the sort of post-prandial family bickering that uncovers immense sibling animosities. There are also two critical contributions to the ongoing controversy surrounding this Auschwitz victim’s supposedly excessive assimilation and concomitant anti-semitism.’ Chris Ross in the *Guardian*

‘**T**he astonishing posthumous success of *Suite Française* launched a revival of the hitherto forgotten author. And Némirovsky’s latest work to be published in English, *Dimanche and Other Stories*, affirms her newly won

reputation... “Flesh and Blood”, one of her many reflections on family relationships, with a dying old mother at the centre of her four miserable, squabbling children, is *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* transported to Paris – a reminder that although Némirovsky wrote in French, her work most strongly recalls the writers of her homeland, particularly another exile in France, Nina Berberova. Yet if her themes are often dark, and if our knowledge of her fate casts its shadow over our readings, her characters and stories are so vibrant and involving that the dominant impression her writing leaves is one of happiness.’ Benjamin Moser *Harper’s* (USA)

‘**P**ersephone Books has found in *Still Missing* a quite remarkable book. It is a novel so gripping and completely imagined that you dread putting it aside. The story is that of 34-year-old Bostoner Susan Selky. She has recently separated from her husband but, in the private world of her narrow brick house, is happy enough to make a life around her son. Until, that is, 15 May 1980 – the day when six-year-old Alex disappears. What follows is not a detective story, although Gutcheon supplies a first-rate cop. Al Menetti is a family man, and cannot quite fathom the artsy preferences of Susan’s ilk (“where the Selkys lived, it looked to him that what

people thought about was abortions and yoga and eating out in restaurants”). Nevertheless, he throws himself into the Selky case, following it down paths that grow increasingly dark. Yet this is not a thriller, although it will have you hooked. Nor is it (as it could so easily have been) an enervating study in emotional torture and suspended lives. At the end of *Still Missing*, you feel less as though you have shared an ordeal with Susan than accompanied her through something that is almost beyond words: quiet, profound and life-altering.

‘The secret is Gutcheon’s style: she is, it seems, a fundamentally interested author, genuinely keen to know how her characters feel and will react. This is not to say she is unsophisticated – just the reverse – but that her book is somehow brightly alert to itself. Flaubert thought that the author should be everywhere and nowhere in his work; Gutcheon, marvellously, seems present on every page. All the expected elements of a missing-child story are here, the twists, the turns, the ending that is perfect and piercing.’ Stephanie Cross *The Lady*

‘**G**ood Things in England is one of the great English cookbooks and, eighty years on, still remarkably accessible. It’s full of delightful, delicious recipes that actually work.’ Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

THE PERSEPHONE 90

1. William – an Englishman by Cicely Hamilton Prize-winning 1919 novel about the effect of WW1 on a socialist clerk and a suffragette. Preface: Nicola Beaman

2. Mariana by Monica Dickens First published in 1940, this funny, romantic first novel describes a young girl's life in the 1930s. Preface: Harriet Lane

3. Someone at a Distance by Dorothy Whipple 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*) about the destruction of a formerly happy 1950s marriage. Preface: Nina Bawden, R4 'Book at Bedtime' 2008

4. Fidelity by Susan Glaspell 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning writer brilliantly describing the long-term consequences of a girl in Iowa running off with a married man. Preface: Laura Godwin

5. An Interrupted Life by Ety Hillesum From 1941-3 a woman in Amsterdam, 'the Anne Frank for grown-ups', wrote diaries and letters: they are among the great documents of our time. Preface: Eva Hoffman

6. The Victorian Chaise-longue by Marghanita Laski A 'little jewel of horror': 'Melly' lies on a chaise-longue in the 1950s and wakes as 'Milly' eighty years before. Preface: PD James

7. The Home-Maker by Dorothy Canfield Fisher Ahead of its time 'remarkable and brave 1924 novel about being a house-husband' (Carol Shields). Preface: Karen Knox

8. Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes Superbly written short stories, first published in *The New Yorker* from 1938-44. Five of them were read on R4 twice, and on R7. Preface: Gregory LeStage

9. Few Eggs and No Oranges by Vere Hodgson A 600-page diary, written from 1940-45 in Notting Hill Gate, full of acute observation, wit and humanity. Preface: Jenny Hartley

10. Good Things in England by Florence White This comprehensive 1932 collection of recipes inspired many, including Elizabeth David.

11. Julian Grenfell by Nicholas Mosley A biography of the First World War poet, and of his mother Ettie Desborough. Preface: the author

12. It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life by Judith Viorst Funny, weary and wise 1960s poems about marriage, children and reality. Preface: the author

13. Consequences by EM Delafield By the author of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, this 1919 novel is about a girl entering a convent after she fails to marry. Preface: Nicola Beaman

14. Farewell Leicester Square by Betty Miller Novel (by Jonathan Miller's mother) about a Jewish film-director and 'the discreet discrimination of the bourgeoisie' (*Guardian*). Preface: Jane Miller

15. Tell It to a Stranger by Elizabeth Berridge Funny, observant and bleak 1947 short stories, twice in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list. Preface: AN Wilson

16. Saplings by Noel Streatfeild A novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes*, about the destruction of a family during WW2; a R4 ten-part serial. Afterword: Jeremy Holmes

17. Marjory Fleming by Oriol Malet A deeply empathetic novel about the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803-11; published in France; was a play on Radio Scotland.

18. Every Eye by Isobel English An unusual 1956 novel about a girl travelling to Spain, highly praised by Muriel Spark: a R4 'Afternoon Play' in 2004. Preface: Neville Braybrooke

19. They Knew Mr Knight by Dorothy Whipple An absorbing 1934 novel about a man driven to commit-

ting fraud and what happens to him and his family; a 1943 film. Afterwords: Terence Handley MacMath and Christopher Beaman

20. A Woman's Place by Ruth Adam A survey of women's lives from 1900-75, very readably written by a novelist-historian: an overview full of insights. Preface: Yvonne Roberts

21. Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day by Winifred Watson A delightful 1938 novel about a governess and a nightclub singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin Also available as an unabridged Persephone audiobook read by Frances McDormand and available on audible.co.uk and .com

22. Consider the Years by Virginia Graham Sharp, funny, evocative WW2 poems by Joyce Grenfell's closest friend and collaborator. Preface: Anne Harvey

23. Reuben Sachs by Amy Levy A fierce 1880s satire on the London Jewish community by 'the Jewish Jane Austen' who was a friend of Oscar Wilde. Preface: Julia Neuberger

24. Family Roundabout by Richmal Crompton By the *William* books author, 1948 family saga contrasting two matriarchs and their very different children. Preface: Juliet Aykroyd

25. The Montana Stories by Katherine Mansfield Collects together the short stories written during the author's last year; with a detailed publisher's note and the contemporary illustrations. Five were read on R4 in 2002.

26. Brook Evans by Susan Glaspell A very unusual novel, written in the same year as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, about the enduring effect of a love affair on three generations of a family.

- 27. The Children who Lived in a Barn** by Eleanor Graham A 1938 classic about five children fending for themselves; starring the unforgettable hay-box. Preface: Jacqueline Wilson
- 28. Little Boy Lost** by Marghanita Laski Novel about a father's search for his son in France in late 1945, chosen by the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard as his 2001 Paperback Choice. A 'Book at Bedtime' on R4 read by Jamie Glover. Afterword: Anne Sebba
- 29. The Making of a Marchioness** by Frances Hodgson Burnett A very entertaining 1901 novel about the ensuing melodrama after a governess marries a Marquis. A R4 Classic Serial in 2007. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina
- 30. Kitchen Essays** by Agnes Jekyll Witty and useful essays about cooking, with recipes, published in *The Times* and reprinted as a book in 1922. 'One of the best reads outside Elizabeth David' wrote gastropoda.com
- 31. A House in the Country** by Jocelyn Playfair An unusual and very interesting 1944 novel about a group of people living in the country during WW2. Preface: Ruth Gorb
- 32. The Carlyles at Home** by Thea Holme A 1965 mixture of biography and social history which very entertainingly describes Thomas and Jane Carlyle's life in Chelsea.
- 33. The Far Cry** by Emma Smith A beautifully written 1949 novel about a young girl's passage to India: a great Persephone favourite. R4 'Book at Bedtime' in 2004. Preface: author
- 34. Minnie's Room: The Peacetime Stories** of Mollie Panter-Downes 1947–1965: Second volume of short stories first published in *The New Yorker*, previously unknown in the UK.
- 35. Greenery Street** by Denis Mackail A delightful, very funny 1925 novel about a young couple's first year of married life in a (real) street in Chelsea. Preface: Rebecca Cohen
- 36. Lettice Delmer** by Susan Miles A unique 1920s novel in verse describing a girl's stormy adolescence and path to redemption; much admired by TS Eliot. A novel in verse sounds unappealing – but we highly recommend this book.
- 37. The Runaway** by Elizabeth Anna Hart A Victorian novel for children and grown-ups, illustrated by Gwen Raverat. 'There never was a happier book' (*Country Life*, 1936). Afterwords: Anne Harvey, Frances Spalding.
- 38. Cheerful Weather for the Wedding** by Julia Strachey A funny and quirky 1932 novella by a niece of Lytton Strachey, praised by Virginia Woolf. Preface: Frances Partridge. Also available on audible.co.uk as an unabridged Persephone audiobook read by Miriam Margolyes
- 39. Manja** by Anna Gmeyner A 1938 German novel, newly translated, about five children conceived on the same night in 1920, and their lives until the Nazi takeover. Preface: Eva Ibbotson (the author's daughter)
- 40. The Priory** by Dorothy Whipple A much-loved 1939 novel about a family, upstairs and downstairs, living in a large country house. 'Warm, witty and realistic' (*Hatchards*). Preface: David Conville
- 41. Hostages to Fortune** by Elizabeth Cambridge 'Deals with domesticity without being in the least bit cosy' (*Harriet Lane, Observer*): a remarkable fictional portrait of a doctor's family in rural Oxfordshire in the 1920s.
- 42. The Blank Wall** by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding 'The top suspense writer of them all' (*Chandler*). A 1947 thriller about a mother shielding her daughter from a blackmailer. Filmed as *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and *The Deep End* (2001); a R4 serial in 2006.
- 43. The Wise Virgins** by Leonard Woolf This wise and witty 1914 novel contrasts the bohemian Virginia and Vanessa with Gwen, the girl next door in 'Richstead' (Putney). Preface: Lyndall Gordon
- 44. Tea with Mr Rochester** by Frances Towers Magical, unsettling 1949 stories, a surprise favourite, that are unusually beautifully written; read on R4 in 2003 and 2006. Preface: Frances Thomas
- 45. Good Food on the Aga** by Ambrose Heath A 1933 cookery book written for Aga owners which can be used by anyone; with numerous illustrations by Edward Bawden.
- 46. Miss Ranskill Comes Home** by Barbara Euphan Todd An unsparing, wry 1946 novel: Miss Ranskill is shipwrecked and returns to a completely changed wartime England. Preface: Wendy Pollard
- 47. The New House** by Lettice Cooper 1936 portrayal of the day a family moves into a new house, and the resulting adjustments and tensions. Preface: Jilly Cooper
- 48. The Casino** by Margaret Bonham Short stories by a 1940s writer with a unique voice and dark sense of humour; they were read on BBC Radio 4 in 2004 and 2005. Preface: Cary Bazalgette
- 49. Bricks and Mortar** by Helen Ashton An excellent 1932 novel by a very popular pre- and post-war writer, chronicling the life of a hard-working, kindly London architect and his wife over thirty-five years.
- 50. The World that was Ours** by Hilda Bernstein An extraordinary memoir that reads like a novel of the events before and after the 1964 Rivonia Trial. Mandela was given a life sentence but the Bernsteins escaped to England. Preface and Afterword: the author
- 51. Operation Heartbreak** by Duff Cooper A soldier misses going to war – until the end of his life. 'The novel I enjoyed more than any other in the immediate post-war years' (Nina Bawden). Afterword: Max Arthur
- 52. The Village** by Marghanita Laski This 1952 comedy of manners describes post-war readjustments in village life when love ignores the class barrier. Afterword: Juliet Gardiner
- 53. Lady Rose and Mrs Memmary** by Ruby Ferguson A 1937 novel about Lady Rose, who inherits a great house, marries well – and then meets the love of her life on a park bench. A great favourite of the Queen Mother. Preface: Candia McWilliam

54. **They Can't Ration These** by **Vicomte de Mauduit** A 1940 cookery book about 'food for free', full of excellent (and now timely) recipes.
55. **Flush** by **Virginia Woolf** A light-hearted but surprisingly feminist 1933 'life' of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel, 'a little masterpiece of comedy' (*TLS*). Preface: Sally Beaman
56. **They Were Sisters** by **Dorothy Whipple** A 1943 novel by this wonderful writer, contrasting three different marriages. Preface: Celia Brayfield
57. **The Hopkins Manuscript** by **RC Sherriff** What might happen if the moon crashed into the earth in 1946: a 1939 novel 'written' by a delightful anti-hero, 'Mr Hopkins'. Preface: Michael Moorcock, Afterword: George Gamow
58. **Hetty Dorval** by **Ethel Wilson** First novel (1947) set in the beautiful landscape of British Columbia; a young girl is befriended by a beautiful and selfish 'Menace' – but is she? Afterword: Northrop Frye
59. **There Were No Windows** by **Norah Hoult** A touching and funny novel, written in 1944, about an elderly woman with memory loss living in Kensington during the blitz. Afterword: Julia Briggs
60. **Doreen** by **Barbara Noble** A 1946 novel about a child who is evacuated to the country during the war. Her mother regrets it; the family that takes her in wants to keep her. Preface: Jessica Mann
61. **A London Child of the 1870s** by **Molly Hughes** A classic memoir, written in 1934, about an 'ordinary, suburban Victorian family' in Islington, a great favourite with all ages. Preface: Adam Gopnik
62. **How to Run Your Home Without Help** by **Kay Smallshaw** A 1949 manual for the newly servantless housewife full of advice that is historically interesting, useful nowadays and, as well, unintentionally funny. Preface: Christina Hardyment
63. **Princes in the Land** by **Joanna Cannan** A novel published in 1938 about a daughter of the aristocracy who marries an Oxford don; her three children fail to turn out as she had anticipated.
64. **The Woman Novelist and Other Stories** by **Diana Gardner** Short stories written in the late 1930s and early 1940s that are witty, sharp and with an unusual undertone. Preface: Claire Gardner
65. **Alas, Poor Lady** by **Rachel Ferguson** A 1937 novel, polemical but intensely readable, about the unthinking cruelty with which Victorian parents gave birth to daughters without anticipating any future for them apart from marriage.
66. **Gardener's Nightcap** by **Muriel Stuart** A 1938 pot pourri: a huge variety of miniature essays on gardening – such as *Dark Ladies* (frittillary), *Better Gooseberries*, *Phlox Failure* – which will be enjoyed by all gardeners, keen or lukewarm.
67. **The Fortnight in September** by **RC Sherriff** Another novel by the author of *Journey's End*, and of *The Hopkins Manuscript*, Persephone Book No. 57, about a family on holiday in Bognor in 1931; a quiet masterpiece.
68. **The Expendable Man** by **Dorothy B Hughes** A 1963 thriller set in Arizona by the well-known American crime writer; it was chosen by the critic HRF Keating as one of his hundred best crime novels. Afterword: Dominic Power
69. **Journal of Katherine Mansfield** The husband of the great short story writer (cf. *The Montana Stories*, Persephone Book No. 25) assembled this journal from unposted letters, scraps of writing etc, to give a unique portrait of a woman writer.
70. **Plats du Jour** by **Patience Gray and Primrose Boyd** A 1957 cookery book which was a bestseller at the time and a pioneering work for British cooks. The black and white illustrations and the coloured endpapers are by David Gentleman.
71. **The Shuttle** by **Frances Hodgson Burnett** A 1907 page-turner about Rosalie Vanderpoel, an American heiress who marries an English aristocrat, whose beautiful and enterprising sister Bettina sets out to rescue her. Preface: Anne Sebba
72. **House-Bound** by **Winifred Peck** This 1942 novel describes an Edinburgh woman deciding, radically, to run her house without help and do her own cooking; the war is in the background and foreground. Afterword: Penelope Fitzgerald
73. **The Young Pretenders** by **Edith Henrietta Fowler** An 1895 novel for adults and children about Babs, who lives with her uncle and aunt and has not yet learnt to dissemble. Preface: Charlotte Mitchell
74. **The Closed Door and Other Stories** by **Dorothy Whipple** Ten short stories drawn from the three collections (now extremely hard to find) that Dorothy Whipple published during her lifetime. Read on BBC R4 in 2007.
75. **On the Other Side** by **Mathilde Wolff-Mönckeberg**: **Letters to my Children from Germany 1940-46**. Written in Hamburg but never sent, these letters provide a crucial counterpoint to *Few Eggs and No Oranges*. Preface: Ruth Evans
76. **The Crowded Street** by **Winifred Holtby** A 1924 novel about Muriel's attempts to escape from small-town Yorkshire, and her rescue by Delia, alias Vera Brittain. Preface: Marion Shaw
77. **Daddy's Gone A-Hunting** by **Penelope Mortimer** This 1958 novel is about the 'captive wives' of the pre-war women's liberation era, bored and lonely in suburbia. Preface: Valerie Grove
78. **A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39** by **Nicola Beaman** A mixture of literary criticism and historical evocation, first published in 1983, about the women writers of the inter-war period.

79. Round About a Pound a Week by **Maud Pember Reeves** A study of working-class life in Lambeth in the early years of the C20th that is witty, readable, poignant and fascinating – and relevant nowadays. Preface: Polly Toynbee

80. The Country Housewife's Book by **Lucy H Yates** A useful 1934 book, suggested to us by the owner of a working farm, on topics such as the storeroom and larder, using garden produce, and game.

81. Miss Buncle's Book by **DE Stevenson** A middle-aged woman writes a novel, as 'John Smith', about the village she lives in. A delightful and funny 1934 book by an author whose work sold in millions. Preface: Aline Templeton

82. Amours de Voyage by **Arthur Hugh Clough** A novel in verse, set in Rome in 1849, funny and beautiful and profound, and extraordinarily modern in tone. Preface: Julian Barnes

83. Making Conversation by **Christine Longford**. An amusing, unusual 1931 novel about a girl growing up which is in the vein of *Cold Comfort Farm* and *Persephone Book No. 38 Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*. Preface: Rachel Billington

84. A New System of Domestic Cookery by **Mrs Rundell** An 1806 cookbook – we have reprinted the 1816 edition in facsimile – which is long, detailed and fascinating. Preface: Janet Morgan

85. High Wages by **Dorothy Whipple** Another novel by Persephone's bestselling writer about a girl setting up a dress shop just before the First World War. Preface: Jane Brocket

86. To Bed with Grand Music by **Marghanita Laski** A couple are separated by the war. She is serially unfaithful, a quite new take on 'women in wartime'. Preface: Juliet Gardiner

87. Dimanche and Other Stories by **Irène Némirovsky** The ten short stories in this volume, especially translated by Bridget Patterson for Persephone Books, were written between 1934 and 1942. Some of

them are dry runs in miniature for *Suite Française*; some are about mothers and daughters; some are about sibling relationships; and one is set in Russia in homage to Chekhov.

88. Still Missing by **Beth Gutcheon** A 1981 novel about a woman whose six year-old son sets off on his own for school and does not return. But his mother never gives up hope...

89. The Mystery of Mrs Blencarrow by **Mrs Oliphant** Two 1880s novellas about women shockingly, and secretly, abandoned by their husbands, that were favourites of Penelope Fitzgerald. Afterword: Merry Williams

90. The Winds of Heaven by **Monica Dickens** This 1955 novel by the author of *Mariana* (No. 3) is the story of an impoverished widow with three rather unsympathetic daughters who eventually finds happiness. Afterword: AS Byatt

The Persephone Ninety: Diary for 2011 Reproduces all our 90 fabrics; each page has the opening sentence of one of the books, and the endpaper details. It too is £10 or three for £27.

The First Persephone Life: The Other Elizabeth Taylor by **Nicola Beauman** A biography, written in 2009, of the C20th novelist, £15.



'Winter' 1928 by CRW Nevinson 1889-1946, p 100 [Twenties London](#) Cathy Ross Museum of London 2003

‘A QUESTION OF RICHES’

BY EVA IBBOTSON

Jeremy was seven when he first went to boarding school, his expensive new grey shorts enveloping his skinny knees, a roll of comics for the journey smudging in his tight-clasped, bird-boned little hand. Even Matron, jovial by profession, felt a pang as she unpacked the belongings of this patently unfledged fledgling and wondered whether another year in the nest would have done any harm.

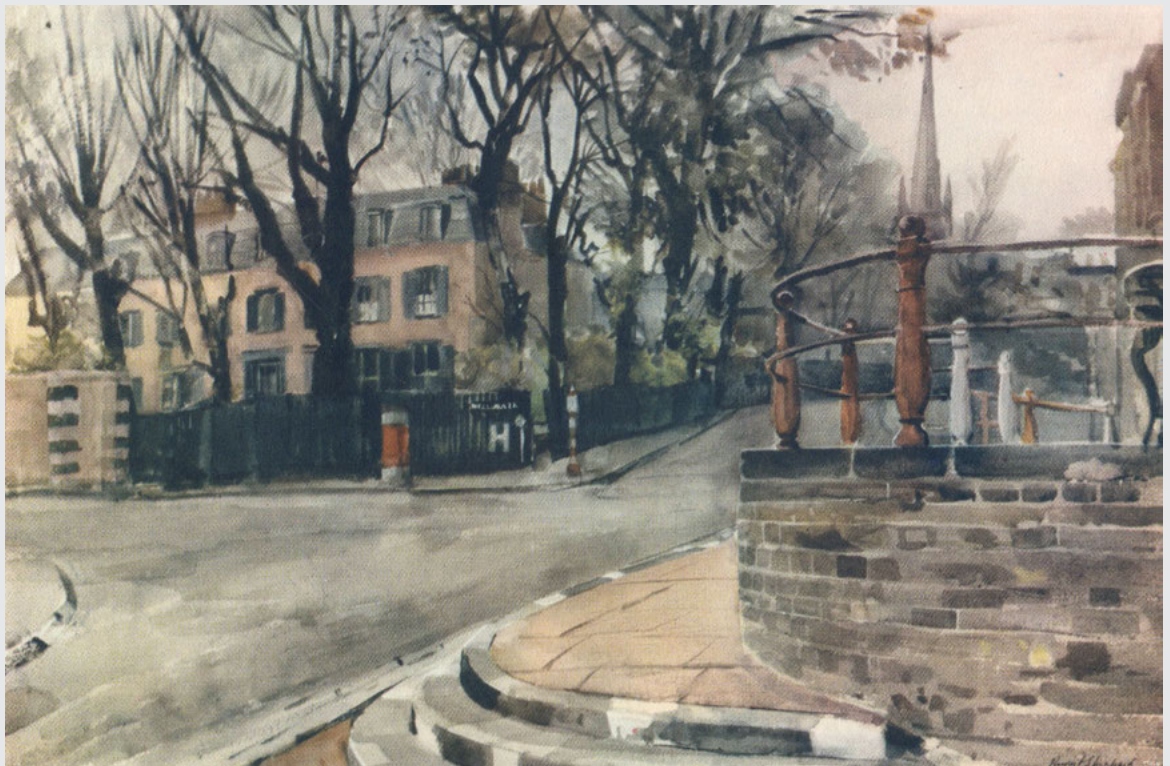
Except that in Jeremy's case there wasn't really any nest. His father, one of the finest climbers of the decade, had died trying to

help an injured companion on a distant, still unnamed Himalayan peak. Jeremy's mother, gay and accomplished, had married again within two years – this time, for solid worth and safety. Jeremy's stepfather was a mining engineer, kind, decent and magnificently unimaginative. When his firm sent him out to the Copper Belt in Central Africa, it seemed obvious to him that what Jeremy needed was to be left behind in a good English prep school.

And Jeremy's school *was* good. When he wrote his weekly letter to his mother out in Africa, his

pen digging holes in the thin blue air-mail paper, it was pointed out to him that to describe one's homesickness was a bit *selfish*, didn't he think? So he wrote instead, in his huge, sloping script, of cricket matches and other suitable topics suggested on the blackboard. After a while, too, he stopped crying under his pillow at night because, as Jenkins minor said, he was simply disgracing their dorm. And gradually, as the weeks crept by, he began to forget. He 'settled'. Really he had no choice.

Fortunately there was no



Well Walk Hampstead in the 1930s, painting by Rupert Shephard taken from [The Londoner's England](#) by Alan Bott 1947

problem about where Jeremy should spend his holidays because he had grandmothers – a full set. There was his mother’s mother, Mrs Tate-Oxenham whose husband, Jeremy’s grandfather, sat on the Board of not fewer than seven major business enterprises. Mrs Tate-Oxenham lived in the centre of the most fashionable part of London in a tall house filled with valuable antiques and had a housekeeper, a chauffeur and a cook. Jeremy called her ‘Grandmother’ in full because abbreviations, she said, were slipshod: one was never *that* short of time.

Then there was his dead father’s mother Mrs Drayton; she was a widow and managed on her pension. She lived in London too: in a single room, in a shabby peeling house on the ‘wrong’ side of the river. Jeremy called her ‘Nana’ but not when Mrs Tate-Oxenham was around because it made her frown.

It was to ‘Grandmother’ that Jeremy went first when his school broke up for the summer. He had never actually stayed with Mrs Tate-Oxenham before, so that at first he took the uniformed chauffeur who had been sent to meet him at the station for some kind of admiral or chief of police.

‘Mind you sit still!’ said this lordly being, settling Jeremy into the huge black car with its silver fittings and the rug made of a whole dead zebra lying on the seat. ‘We don’t want anything kicked, do we?’

Jeremy wouldn’t have dreamt

of kicking anything. Indeed, after a while the mere effort of sitting up straight was all that he could manage, for the great car was almost hermetically sealed against draughts and long before they drew up at the tall house in the hushed street, Jeremy was feeling agonisingly, almost uncontrollably car-sick.

Grandmother had cut short a committee meeting to greet him and was waiting in the hall, beautiful and composed with her upswept silver hair, and it was she herself who showed him round the house.

Jeremy had never seen a house quite like it. It was so quiet you couldn’t hear your feet at all in the deep, deep carpets, nor any noises from the street. All the windows had two pairs of curtains – a thin white pair and a thick velvety pair tied back with cords – and even then there were shutters so that outside it could have been any kind of weather or any time of day.

And everywhere, on the mantelpieces, on the walls, in alcoves all up the stairs were museum-ish sort of things: Chinese dragons, and carved statues and dark pictures of people stuck with arrows.

Jeremy’s own rooms were at the top of the house, a whole suite of them: bedroom, bathroom and sitting-room all to himself.

‘No one will disturb you up here,’ said Grandmother briskly.

‘No one?’ said Jeremy in his thread of a voice, averting his eyes from a grinning bronze head on the bookcase behind which, he was pretty certain,

THINGS were already mustering for the night.

‘No one,’ said Grandmother – and sent for the housekeeper to help him unpack.

At his grandmother’s, Jeremy had a lovely time. He knew he was having a lovely time because everyone constantly told him so.

‘It isn’t every boy gets a car like this to ride around in,’ said Clarke, the chauffeur, who often had instructions – when Grandmother had one of her committees – to take Jeremy for a drive. Very interesting drives they were, too – or would have been: to Buckingham Palace or Hampton Court or Richmond Park, except that long before they got there, Clarke would be obliged to draw up in an empty side street and stand with his back turned while Jeremy was violently and humiliatingly sick.

‘I bet there’s not many little princes eat better than you do in this house,’ Mrs Knapp the housekeeper would say, helping Jeremy to get ready for lunch.

And Jeremy, agreeing, sat very straight, his damask napkin sliding relentlessly across his knees, and chewed gratefully on dark slices of grouse in quivering aspic; swallowed, meticulously, his Russian caviar; didn’t even splutter when what looked like a perfectly ordinary doughnut turned out to be filled with liquid fire.

In the hot, softly-lit department store where Grandmother bought him more grey suits and good white shirts and striped ties,

the assistant was almost overcome by Jeremy's good fortune, as was the waiter in the restaurant with the gold tables and potted palms where she took him when she met her friends afterwards for tea.

And Jeremy really *was* grateful, everyone agreed on that. Even Grandfather, in the few moments he spent in his own house, found nothing to complain of in the docile, quiet little boy. Except at bedtime...

'Getting that child upstairs to his rooms – you'd think he was going to his execution,' said Mrs Knapp. But otherwise his good manners, his evident gratitude pleased everybody. Clearly he was a child who appreciated gracious living.

It was because of this that Grandmother, after a few weeks, felt compelled to give him a word of warning.

'We are fortunate, Jeremy, in having been able to give you a good time during your stay with us. Now I'm afraid the time has come for you to move on.'

She waited for a sign of regret but Jeremy's eyes – those huge, dark, incurably underprivileged-looking eyes, remained obediently on her face.

'As you know, your mother wanted you to divide your time equally between us and your other grandmother.'

Jeremy nodded.

'I want you...' She broke off, unable to find suitable words. 'You will find...things different there. Mrs Drayton is...' Again, rejecting the unmentionable word 'poor', she floundered. 'You must not be spoilt or difficult to

please, Jeremy. You must try to *adapt* yourself.'

And so, for the last time, Jeremy was packed into the big, closed car and Clarke drove him slowly across London to Nana's house.

Mrs Drayton, waiting at the window, saw the great car inch into the street with a stab of apprehension. It was so huge, so opulent and in the back Jeremy, poker-straight in his grey suit, looked as remote and aloof as some miniature diplomat isolated from the world. How would he get on here? Though she had managed without lunches now for over three weeks, the pile of coins she had saved towards Jeremy's entertainment seemed laughable.

But when she opened the car door she forgot her fears. 'Car sick?' she said. 'You poor chap! Your father was just the same.'

And calmly inviting the lordly Clarke in for a cup of tea, she drew Jeremy gently into the house.

'Nice little place you've got here,' said the chauffeur, and there was no trace of condescension in his voice.

Jeremy, looking round, agreed wholeheartedly. It was just one room and not all that big, with a single window opening out into the bustling, sunny little street, but this one room was so cunningly worked out! Red and white checked curtains slid back and behind them there was a little cooker and a sink. In one corner was a dresser with blue and white cups and a geranium; and the sofa they were sitting on turned itself most intriguingly, as

Nana showed them, into her bed.

'Where will I sleep, Nana?' asked Jeremy when Clarke had gone.

Nana, who had been unpacking his case, straightened herself and looked at him anxiously. 'Well, love, I've made up a bed for you behind the screen there.'

The screen had pictures of parrots and humming-birds on it and Jeremy had already admired it. Now he peered behind and found a camp-bed, a proper khaki one like explorers had, with crisp white sheets turned back.

'You mean I'm going to sleep in the same room as you?' he said slowly. 'You're going to be in the same room as me all night?'

Nana reddened. This was worse than she had feared. 'I've only the one room, you see,' she said quietly. 'But you won't see me –' She broke off. 'Jeremy, what is it?' She pulled him towards her. 'There, don't cry, my pet. Maybe I can go and share with Mrs Post upstairs.'

Jeremy looked at her through his tears. 'Oh, gosh, Nana, you are silly!' he said. 'I want to share a room with you more than anything else in the world.'

There now began for Jeremy one of those periods which makes old gentlemen say that the sun always shone when they were young, the grass was greener and the sky a never-to-be-forgotten blue.

He and Nana lived off the land. Each day they took the cocoa tin from behind the spotted dog on the mantelpiece

and counted out their spending money. Lots of money, it seemed to Jeremy: pennies, three-penny bits – far more money than he had ever seen in his other grandmother's house. Then they did something called budgeting. Jeremy liked budgeting very much because what it really meant was *deciding* things. For example, you'd decide to go to the park and feed the ducks and take a packet of sandwiches – that was clear. But a deck-chair for another ninepence each? Or sitting on the grass and having the money for an ice-cream?

That was an easy one, but others gave Jeremy many deliciously complicated moments of deep thought. A ride on the tube all the way to the Natural History Museum? Or get off two stops away and walk the rest, which meant sevenpence over, and that was a comic under his pillow at bedtime? Nana never *interfered* but sometimes when the agony of choice was almost too much she might nudge him gently towards a solution.

'I think there are those pavements with cracks on them on the way to the Museum,' she would say, and Jeremy would perceive immediately that this meant playing 'the first to step on a crack is a nitwit', and decide in favour of walking and a comic at bedtime.

To Jeremy it seemed as if Nana knew – and owned – the whole of London; perhaps the world. There was St James's Park where they sat for hours, laughing at the Canadian geese and the little ducklings making ripple arrows



'Evacuee Play Centre' by ED Howland *Women's Institutes* by Cicely McCall (1943) p24

on the butter-smooth waters of the lake. Once Nana said there would be a surprise when they came round the corner – and there was a whole band of soldiers in scarlet and gold playing wonderful thumping music. A band they didn't even have to budget for, because it was free!

Then there were the pigeons in Trafalgar Square – they were free too – more pigeons than Jeremy had ever seen. If you stood still and held out the scraps that Mr Oblinsky had saved for Nana, you could *cover* yourself in pigeons. You could even have pigeons sitting on your *head!*

Sometimes they would find a bench in a nice crowded place like Leicester Square and play people-spotting, and the good thing about Nana was that she never cheated to let you win. If she saw more men with curly black beards in the set time, or more women with grey hair and poodles, well then she said so and ate the bull's-eye peppermint they kept for a prize without fuss.

And when they got back at the end of such a busy day there was still lots more to do. Jeremy would unfold the card-table, set it under the window and lay it while Nana cooked. The food at

Nana's was *fantastic!* Whole plates of potato cakes or cinnamon toast or an apple peeled and quartered, with little triangular bits of cooking cheese stuck in each bit so as to make a boat with sails.

And the odd thing was that while staying at his other grandmother's *he'd* been the lucky one, here it was agreed by Mr Oblinsky, and Mrs Post who lived upstairs and by the people in the shops that it was Nana who was the lucky one. Terribly lucky, having Jeremy to stay!

Now, when Jeremy returned to school, he had three weekly letters to write. The one to his mother was shy and stilted because she had become as distant and longed-for as a mirage. The one to Grandmother, Mrs Tate-Oxenham, was the 'proper' letter, the one with

the cricket match and his form position and the achievement of Rutledge minor in the 100-yards. But the weekly letter to Nana sprawled and spread and was one long question. Had she been to see the pigeons lately? Was the geranium growing? How was Mr Oblinsky's cough?

During the autumn term the school gave a long weekend off at the end of October. Once again Jeremy divided his time between his grandmothers and once again it was to 'Grandmother', to Mrs Tate-Oxenham, that he went first.

At Grandmother's, Jeremy began being lucky straight away because she took him to something called a 'Private View', which was a lot of people standing very close together, drinking

and smoking, in a room with pictures on the walls. The next day she had a bridge party and Jeremy was allowed to walk carefully about the room offering trays of canapés to the ladies as they played.

The day after that he went to Nana's.

At Nana's the folding table was set out with newspaper spread over it, and on it sat two big turnips and the kitchen knife.

'It's Hallowe'en,' explained Nana when she had hugged him. 'We're going to make the most horrible turnip lanterns in the whole street!'

And they did. They were so horrible that when they'd propped them on the window-sill with candles in them, Mr Oblinsky, returning from work, almost fainted; and all the



'Woman Choosing Lingerie' Plymouth 1955 © Plymouth City Museum

children passing by said 'Cor!' and stopped to look.

The next day they got up very early, walked to the Common and found the last of the year's conkers buried under a pile of leaves. When he got back to school, Jeremy didn't string up the conkers to fight with but kept them in his pockets and weeks later when he took them out he didn't see them as hard and dry and shrivelled, but as shining and fresh as they had been on that October morning.

For the Christmas holidays, Jeremy was to fly out to Africa.

As the time drew near he became almost demented with excitement. Three weeks, two weeks, one week – and then he would see her. His *mother*...

The suitcases were packed; the grey-suited, ecstatic little boys were hurling themselves into their parents' cars – when the telegram came.

A garbled telegram but one thing was clear. There had been some political trouble in the copper mines. Rioting had broken out in the villages and Jeremy was not to go.

He sat hunched on his suitcase, his legs dangling over the bright airline labels, and listened politely while this was explained to him, and even the arrow-swift boys running through the hall to their Christmas freedom stopped when they saw his face.

'Where shall I go then?' he said at last in his mouse of a voice.

'Where shall I spend Christmas?' Matron peered again at the

telegram, which had undergone some strange sea-changes in its journey from the dry and dusty plains of Central Africa. 'Wait a minute,' she said, 'I'll go and talk to Mr Danworth.'

When she came back from the headmaster's study she was brisk and decisive. 'It's all settled, Jeremy, and there's nothing to worry about. You're to go to your grandmother's. To Mrs Tate-Oxenham's. There's lots to see in London at Christmas; she'll give you a lovely time. We've sent a telegram and Mr Danworth is sending you up in his own car with Ted to drive you,' continued Matron – and all but bundled him out, because there was something in his eyes she preferred at that festive season not to see.

The Head's car was not as bad as Grandmother's and Ted – who acted as boilerman, groundsman and general factotum at the school – was a more approachable character than Clarke. All the same, to Jeremy, sitting wraith-like and silent beside Ted, the inevitable happened.

'Please could you stop the car?' he asked.

Outside it was freezing cold with a gusty, boisterous wind straight off the snow-spattered hills. First it shook Jeremy, his teeth chattering with cold and nausea and despair. Then it blew through the car and scattered the papers on the dashboard...

'Darn it! I've lost the address,' said Ted when they had driven on again. 'Your grandma's address. Must have blown away when we stopped back there. You remember it?'

'I've got two grandmothers,' said Jeremy, his voice almost inaudible.

'Well, the one we're going to, silly.' Searching his mind for what he had overheard in the school office, Ted elaborated. 'The rich one. The one who's going to give you a lovely time.'

A slight tremor ran through Jeremy's skinny frame.

'The *rich* one?' he repeated wonderingly. 'Are you *sure* I'm going to the rich one?'

'Well, it stands to reason, doesn't it? You wouldn't want to bother the other one, not at Christmas time?'

Something had happened to Jeremy, something which made Ted turn his head for a second and give him a puzzled look.

'Oh, yes, I know the address of the *rich* one,' said Jeremy, his voice suddenly loud and strong. 'I know the address of *her* all right.'

And so it was that Nana, sitting quietly by the window and foolishly imagining, as people will at Christmas time, that the person they love best will somehow defy space and time and come to them – looked up, and gasped and saw that it had happened. That Jeremy was running towards her into the house...

from *A Glove Shop in Vienna and Other Stories* (1984) © Eva Ibbotson (daughter of Anna Gmeyner, who wrote *Manja*, Persephone Book No. 39)

OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘**G**ood Evening, Mrs. Craven (No. 6) is a tender, affectionate portrait of people doing their best in difficult times—even if their best isn't the best. Mollie Panter-Downes shows loving empathy for her characters and writes with impressive economy. Reading this collection was a pleasure, albeit often of the bittersweet kind. Tinged with sadness and irony, the stories feature many types of people – single, married, mistresses and adulterers, children, the poor and the wealthy and the middle class.’ BostonBibliophile

‘**M**iss Nona Ranskill is returning to England after four years on a desert island. If that sounds far-fetched, then run with it anyway – it is really just a way of having Miss Ranskill turn up at home in the middle of the Second World War without any idea that it is going on. For this is the main gist of *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*: how surreal and foreign the war seems to one not in the know. Miss Ranskill doesn't understand rationing or black-out curtains; ‘prohibited area’ or air raid sirens’. This was a very brave book to publish in 1946, in its unusual perspective on a very recent war.’ StuckinaBook

‘**B**oth *Miss Buncle's Book* (No.81) and *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* (No.21) feature older women who have to earn their living somehow. It's delightful seeing the good

changes that happen in the village as a result of Barbara Buncle's book. It's adorable, it has fresh country air about it.’ A Few of My Favourite Books

‘**S**till Missing (No.88) reads like a thriller with some very surprising twists and turns. There are some fairly explicit shocks in store too, which all made me wonder how this book will be perceived by those perhaps expecting a more traditional and comfortable Persephone read.’

‘With its themes of class, money and decorum, and marriage and women's lives, *The New House* (No. 47) is a perfect microcosm of a family of its time, all its foibles and temperaments delicately exposed and all revolving around Mrs Powell who, like a child at the centre of her own world, has an expectation that everyone else has been born to minister to her every need.’ Dovegreyreader

‘**C**heerful Weather for the Wedding (No.38) is a tragicomedy about the harm done by mothers who are too self-absorbed to understand – or even recognise – their children's pain. And Strachey shows how that damage can sweep up people beyond the family. Dolly's younger sister appears shocked to find the bride-to-be drinking rum out of a bottle in a bedroom minutes before the wedding. “I'm sorry to say it, Dolly,” she said, “but in some

ways it will be a good thing when you are no longer in the house. It will not be so demoralising for the servants, at any rate.” One Minute Book Reviews

‘**O**ne for fans of self-sufficiency, *They Can't Ration These* (No.54) is filled with recipes for foods from land, hedgerow, river and sea, not to mention information on producing one's own alcohol, beauty products and natural remedies. It's surprising how modern the majority of the prose feels, and how timely. An amusing diversion and an invaluable guide to helping yourself!’ DanLeopard.com

‘**I** really, really enjoyed *Flush* (No. 55). From the very opening paragraphs that take us through the history of the spaniel, which could have easily been a dull read but in some ways became a mini-historical adventure, I was enjoying myself and I hadn't even met the delightful main character yet. *Flush* is one of life's enthusiasts, a bit of a rogue, loyal and in his own way very democratic.’ Savidge Reads

‘**I** was reluctant to read the last story in *Tea With Mr Rochester* (No. 44), never again to be able to come to one anew. Yes, it really is that good. The descriptive writing is lovely and the observation of the characters is exact; empathy is there always, but sentimentality never. The

construction of the stories is elegant, the storytelling is flawless, and although they are set in a very real world they often have the air of fairy-tales.'

'*Marjory Fleming* (No.17) is a joy. Oriol Malet creates a child – a bright child, but a child nonetheless – so beautifully, with such empathy, with such understanding that you really can see what she is seeing, feel what she is feeling. Every detail that makes up a child's life – people, places, events – is written in such lovely descriptive prose.' Fleur Fisher Reads

'*House-bound* (No.72) was actually written in 1942, so there is a sense of not knowing what was going to happen. After a glorious opening scene at a domestic service agency, Rose decides to run her fairly large and oddly-arranged house herself. Mixed in with this interesting theme is a sub-plot regarding Rose's difficult daughter Flora and her troubles. Interesting for its portrayal of lives under the strain of war, and a good balance of pathos, story and humour.' LyzzyBee's Books

'*Little Boy Lost* (No. 28) by Marghanita Laski is about daring to love again after having lost all. As I read, I felt the pain that Hilary was going through. The title, I think, refers not just to the young child but also to the man Hilary, who is looking for his son. He also is lost without love, and he's afraid. For a while I was pretty frustrated (and horrified) by Hilary's selfishness.

It made him truly real, though.' 'When Eva and Lester's roles were suddenly reversed, I fell in love with *The Home-Maker* (No.7). Although some readers may most love seeing the way she blossomed in her new role, I most related to him and his coming to terms with being a "home-maker". For him that term didn't mean "keeping the house spotless" as it had for the compulsive Eva. Rather, it meant reaching out to his children, watching them grow into themselves.' Rebecca Reads

'*Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* (No. 21) is an irresistible book full of memorable and naughty characters, witty dialogue and wonderful adventures. This amazing novel is humorous, charming and intelligent and I devoured every single page, but when I finished reading it, I felt sad and I began to miss all the characters.' Passionate Booklover

'The premise of *To Bed With Grand Music* (No. 86) is a shocking one. What Marghanita Laski has done is expose the underbelly of how the women left at home could – and often did – occupy themselves whilst the men were at the front (the preface by Juliet Gardiner makes fascinating reading). Deborah is brattish and selfish. By the novel's end, she has gone from a doting wife to a tart without a heart who seeks lessons in becoming a good mistress.'

'With *Still Missing* (No. 88) the emotional intensity was present

from the opening page and sustained throughout. It has exceptional emotional depth and vivid characterisation. Much has been made of the seeming modernity of this in relation to other Persephone books but it has an almost timeless quality and universal appeal; the highly emotive *Still Missing* easily joins Laski and Whipple and could be said to be quintessentially Persephone.' Paperback Reader

'*Tea With Mr. Rochester* (No. 44) was an utter delight and I don't know how to do it justice. The writing is romantic and old-fashioned, like a grown-up version of LM Montgomery and Louisa May Alcott. Frances Towers also reminds me of Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen. Altogether *Tea With Mr. Rochester* has got to be my favourite book of the year so far (with *Miss Bunce's Book* not far behind).' AFewofmyFavouriteBooks

'If you haven't read *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* yet, go and get it. It's a brilliant, funny and moving novel – I can strongly recommend you read it on a grey winter's day because it will brighten that day considerably. Both main characters are utterly delightful to read about. And what I enjoyed very much are the glimpses provided of life in London between the wars.' AllAboutRomance

'The prose of *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* (No. 38) is immediately attractive, taking up the material of a story

about a wedding day but transparently hinting at the blackness of the house, the players, the circumstances. The house is chock full of stereotypical English eccentrics, and we as readers are given two lenses through which to view them. We may laugh at their antics or we may view this as social satire in which that which is considered benign or charming in the characters is actually a far darker business. Black humour at its finest. Think Stella Gibbons.’ NonsuchBook

‘*Still Missing* (No. 88) is a startlingly good novel; beautifully and realistically written, powerfully moving, and excellently characterised and plotted. I was so drawn into the story that I could hardly bear to put it down, and it moved me to tears in several places.’

‘*High Wages* (No. 85) is so good, I could hardly bear to leave the world of Jane Carter and her wonderful shop, so marvellously realised as it is on the pages. Jane is an invigorating heroine, whose determination and passion are inspiring. I was enthralled throughout, and not only by her story, but also by the story of the fast changing fashion and retail industries, and the changes in opportunities for women during the early years of the twentieth century.’ BookSnob

‘The stories in *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* (No.8) are not particularly dramatic or sensational in any way [but] are realistic in their focus not so much on the war itself, but on the effects of the war on the women (and a few of the men) who were left behind at home. Despite the subject matter,

there’s also a lot of humour in Mollie Panter-Downes’s writing.’ Shereadsnovels.wordpress

‘During our school years, books written in verse were drudgery to read but *Lettice Delmer* (No.36) is nothing like that. The language needs no interpretation and the story is engaging. Reading a novel in verse is refreshingly challenging: it causes your mind to pay more attention to the writing than it would reading a novel in prose because the sentence structures are not predictable.’ IronandPony

‘*Someone at a Distance* (No.3) is a really lovely, quiet, devastating bit of domestic fiction. Ellen North, the sweet and generous 43-year-old wife, is at the book’s heart, but the omniscient narration keeps her at a distance. And those very English, decorous distances are a theme of the book, beginning with the twin beds, three feet apart, that furnish the bedroom she shares with her husband. Distances can signify comfort or discord and they do both here. The writing is straightforward, not showy but always apt. There are some occasionally really elegant and deft phrases and Whipple goes into the motives and reactions of each of her characters, major and minor, with tremendous sympathy.’ Fernham



[Decades: Careers of Ten Women Artists born 1897-1906, taken from the catalogue for a 1992 Norwich Gallery exhibition.](#)

'SAFETY ZONE' (MAY 1939)

BY DOROTHY VAN DOREN

He left the day after it happened. His papers had been in order for weeks and by some miracle they let him through. Perhaps it was his light-brown hair and grey eyes. He had them from his dead mother. He expected to be stopped when the train got to the border, but he wasn't. When they started again after the last customs inspection, he drew a long shuddering sigh and wiped the cold sweat off his forehead and wrists. Every night on the voyage he woke up thinking he smelled smoke, or hearing the bell-like sound of breaking glass. He could see, even in the safety of his cabin, the long jagged spears – all that remained of the windows. He seemed to know how they would feel raked across his flesh. In his berth he lay with clenched fists and closed eyes, remembering the glass, like icicles hanging over his head, over delicatessen windows from which the neat rows of wurst and pump-ernickel were so greedily snatched, over haberdasher shops.

Although the glass was horrible to think about, it was not quite so bad as thinking about his father. That he positively must not do. He must remember his uncle in New York, to whose home he was going. That comfortable middle-class home so much like the comfortable middle-class home he had grown up in. But that was gone. He couldn't think about it, either. There were his uncle in

New York, and his kindly aunt and the American cousins.

He had left in such a hurry that there was no time to write what boat he was coming on. But he recalled very well how to get to their house. It was only three years since he and his father had visited them, when he was seventeen. His father had been a university professor then.

He felt at home in New York, although it could never be really home. Except that home was nothing but a place of broken glass and burning temples. Temples which he and his father had not been in for years, but somehow the temples were part of him now. They were more real as smoking ruins than they had been as imposing edifices of brick and stone.

When the boat docked, he would take his big telescope suitcase, that contained everything he owned, and get into the subway. In a few minutes he would be safe inside his uncle's house. Safe from jagged glass and the acrid smell of smoke.

He had no trouble with the customs. But the crowds on the pier worried him. He felt that people were looking at him. He could not raise his eyes to the custom inspector's face, but tears stood in them as he watched the stamps being stuck on his suitcase. He was afraid to give the suitcase to a porter, although he told himself that this was New

York and everything was all right. So he carried it himself all the length of the great pier and down a long flight of stairs, because he was frightened of the elevator.

The subway was crowded, too. He stood, with his suitcase beside him, while people pushed past him into the train, and it was the press of people behind him that carried him inside the doors. He dared not look up at the faces around him. He felt eyes on him everywhere.

He was halfway to the station nearest his uncle's house when something happened. More people got on the train, more people pushed him. He was thrust against a tall man and had to clutch the man's arm to keep from falling. The contact was terrifying. But somehow the man did not seem to notice. Then, as they reached a station, he was pushed again – that dreadful pushing – and he trod heavily on the man's foot. With a desperate gesture, not daring to look at the individual he had so grossly offended, he grabbed up his suitcase and made for the door. In a fog of terror he realised that the tall man was following him off.

He ran into the first doorway he saw as he got to the top of the subway stairs. It was a restaurant. The table nearest the door was empty, and he threw his hat up on the shelf and sat down, breathing hard. When the

waitress came he ordered soft-boiled eggs, the first thing that occurred to him. And then a man sat down opposite him. It was the tall man from the subway!

Not even that last day at home had been so terrible as this. He was such a large man. He sat down calmly, ordered ham and eggs, and took out a thick book from the book bag he carried. When his food came, he went on reading while he ate, never once looking up at his vis-à-vis.

That was the most frightening thing about it. He didn't look. But he knew. He knew that opposite him was a boy who had had the effrontery to step on his foot! He would take his time about it, but eventually something would happen. Of that there could be no possible doubt. The boy pretended to eat his

eggs, and he kept his eyes on his plate and trembled.

After a while the big man pushed his plate away, closed his book, and took up his check. Now – he would get up and lean over the table and take his revenge for an insult. With a gasp, the boy began to talk:

'I – you were in the subway – there were so many people. They pushed me. You will pardon – it was not intentional. That I should hurt your foot –' His voice trailed off. The big man was looking at him now. He shivered from head to foot. Suddenly his English deserted him. He clutched the table with both hands. '*Ich bin Jude,*' he said, his voice no more than a whisper.

The big man's eyes were very blue. There was no surprise in them, no pity; above all, no hate

or anger.

'Yes,' he said. 'So was Jesus Christ.'

Then he got up and reached for his hat. On the rack next to it was an obviously foreign hat. He came around and laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

'I wouldn't worry about it,' he said. 'Not here.' His hand tightened with a friendly pressure. His voice lowered. 'Not yet,' he said sadly. Then he went out.

The boy continued to sit at the table. The tears ran silently down his face and dropped into his plate. But he no longer trembled. He no longer heard glass breaking. Hungry, he began on his boiled eggs.

© Dorothy Van Doren (1896-1993). This story won \$1000 for the best story of 1939 in *Liberty* magazine.



A Womens's Institute Working Party, wash drawing by ED Howland p13 *Women's Institutes* (1943) by Cicely McCall

POMEGRANATE PRESS

Lydia, who ran the office for two years, is leaving (except for the odd day). It's a great wrench for us but, happily for her, she is going to the University of East Anglia to do a PHD on Betty Miller, author of *Farewell Leicester Square*, Persephone Book No. 14. Gently starting her research in the familiar reading room of the British Library, she found this on pp122-6 of *Sunday* (1934). (For those who don't know: the pomegranate was Persephone's downfall, her eating it is what kept her in the underworld.)

'Helen Summers had fair, short hair, and she almost invariably wore blue jumpers, which she herself knitted, and smocks, and light, clear colours, slightly arty. She was a pretty girl, with grey soft eyes, lash-feathered, a small mouth, with teeth very slightly prominent, which increased (so people said) the amiability of her expression; her little neck was slender and well set... She worked in the publicity department of a small but vigorously highbrow press in

Lower Street. She wrote those advertising pamphlets which, carefully concocted, well designed and beautifully printed, were a speciality of the Pomegranate Press. The fundamental 'blurb' note was disguised under a kind of specious literary appeal, deceptive on first reading. The Pomegranate Press never

shown. She sat there at her desk, wearing a pale green linen smock, and the horn-rimmed glasses which she only used for work. She had before her the scribbled pages in which the author of the press's forthcoming book had summed up for her the aim, method, and scope of his book, in case she had not had time to read



Betty Miller

advertised, and these pamphlets, in large cream envelopes, fully stamped, sent out discreetly in the right quarters, brought in the orders with a fair regularity. Miss Summers was therefore an important member of the staff. She had a small room to herself, into which Mark, calling for her after hours, was sometimes

it herself; printers' samples littered the table. The gas-fire burnt at a low grade; there was an empty tea-cup and saucer on the mantelpiece, and, along the ledge of the small window, a row of coloured hyacinths... As she got ready to come with him, replacing scattered papers in the oak drawers of her desk, getting her felt hat and silk scarf out of a cupboard, he would look at those hyacinths...

Peter Wiley, head of Pomegranate Press, had given her a rise in salary, and she had left her aunt's house in Ealing and (inevitably) taken a two-roomed flat in Bloomsbury. Here again, were curtains of curious fabric, light Indian materials, Liberty hangings, a great deal of pottery, and daffodils growing in bowls...'

EVENTS

There are still a few tickets for the *Sixth Persephone Lecture* which will be given by David Kynaston, author of *Austerity Britain* and *Family Britain*, at the Art Workers Guild, 6 Queen Square WC1 on **Wednesday 24th November** at 6.30; the price (£20) includes a glass of wine and cheese straws beforehand (doors open at 6) and afterwards.

On **Tuesday and Wednesday December 14th and 15th** there will be *Open House* from 10-8 at the shop. Mulled wine and Konditor and Cook mince pies will be served and all Persephone books will be gift-wrapped free of charge. *Ancient Industries* will also be at the shop. They sell traditional household goods, finding useful objects in Europe, the US and UK which have been in production for many years but are now curiously difficult to buy. Their goods are both classic and modern, rather like Persephone Books in fact, hence the synergy. And on the **Tuesday** Jane Brocket of *yarnstorm* will also be there – with homemade biscuits, her knitting, and copies of her quilting book.

On **Wednesday January 26th** Dr Merryn Williams, biographer of Mrs Oliphant, will talk at a *Lunch* about her Preface to *The Mystery of Mrs Blencarrow*.

On **Tuesday March 8th** the very rare film of *Little Boy*

Lost will be shown at the BFI, 21 Stephen Street. Marghanita Laski disliked the film very much, yet it has many good points. Over the years there have been moves to remake the film, but nothing has happened yet. Films are at 2.30, cost £25, and there is tea and lemon cake afterwards.



PERSEPHONE BOOKS
020 7242 9292

The books for Spring/Summer 2011 are *Miss Bunclie Married* (1936) by DE Stevenson, *Midsummer Night in the Workhouse and Other Stories* (first published as *An Unavoidable Delay* in the USA in 1962) by Diana Athill, and *The Sack of Bath* (1973) by Adam Fergusson.

On **Thursday April 7th** *Diana Athill* will talk at a *Lunch* about her collection of short stories which we publish that month, and about her writing life in general.

The writer *Adam Fergusson* will talk at a *Lunch* on **Thursday May 12th** about *The Sack of Bath*, which we shall be reissuing with a new Preface written by him. Lunches cost £30 and are from 12.30-2.30 in Lamb's Conduit Street.

There will be a day of walks and talks on **Thursday June 16th** in Bath to celebrate the publication of *The Sack of Bath*, speakers and venue to be announced.

On **Wednesday 19th January** at 3pm Persephone Books will be at Croydon Library; on **Friday March 4th** in the evening we shall be at the Chichester Literary Society; on **Saturday April 16th** we shall be at the First Literary Festival at Moffat (near Edinburgh), DE Stevenson's home town, celebrating the publication of *Miss Bunclie Married*; and on **Saturday May 7th** in the morning we shall be at the Chipping Camden Festival.

Lastly: please do not forget the *Forum*, set up by popular demand; or the daily *Post*; or the *Fortnightly Letter*.

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If we have failed to acknowledge something that appears in the *Persephone Biannually*, please let us know.

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