



# The Persephone Biannually

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*'The Buffet'* 1917 oil on canvas by William Strang (1859-1921)

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# OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2012

Our first book this Spring, Persephone Book No. 97, is called *Harriet* and is by Elizabeth Jenkins (1905-2010) who wrote twelve biographies and twelve novels during her long life. A few Persephone readers will be familiar with her name because of her 1954 novel *The Tortoise and the Hare*, one of the 'Fifty Books we Wish we had Published' that we sell in the shop. Called 'flawless' by the *TLS* when first reissued by Virago thirty years ago, some (ourselves included) might go further and call it one of the outstanding novels of the post-war period; indeed, the novelist Amanda Craig deemed it 'one of the best novels I've ever read – a near-perfect work of art, like *The Leopard* and *Emma*. And yet,' she said, 'its author is almost entirely unread, and has no presence on the Web.' Now, thanks to Elizabeth Jenkins's family, which reacted so positively to our suggestion that we reprint more of her work, the extraordinary *Harriet* will be better known.

Published in 1934, *Harriet* fictionalises a *cause célèbre* and in this respect is in a long tradition of 'real life' crime novels, of which *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* describing the 1860s Constance Kent case about the

murder of a child is a recent, bestselling example. *Harriet* is based on the 1877 'Penge Murder Mystery', the death by starvation of a wealthy young woman called Harriet Richardson, who had led a protected life because her very limited intelligence meant that her mother kept her at home ('my daughter was a very simple-minded girl' were her words in testimony at the trial) in the belief that she would never be able to lead a normal existence. But one day she has the misfortune to meet an attractive, unscrupulous young man who decides to marry her for her money.

The novel describes the years from 1875-7 during which Harriet changes from the sheltered, beloved only, if grown-up, child of a comfortable middle-class household, with beautiful clothes and an orderly life, to an abandoned, abused wife unable to look after herself and at the mercy of her uncaring husband. Whether the Stauntons plotted her death or whether they were only guilty of wilful neglect is the question at the heart of a book, which, although it could loosely be called a crime novel or horror story, should really be called a psychological



'Small Syringa', a woven silk by EW Godwin for Warner & Ramm 1875 © Victoria & Albert Museum



The endpapers for *A Writer's Diary* are taken from the original 1953 jacket design by Vanessa Bell.



*Elizabeth Jenkins in the only known picture of her when young, taken in the mid 1920s when she was at Cambridge.*

novel, since an unspoken question runs throughout its pages: how on earth could this happen?

The inspiration for *Harriet* was the *Notable British Trials Series* and specifically the 1911 volume, the transcript of *The Trial of the Stauntons* which details the September 1877 trial at the Old Bailey of four people: Louis Staunton, his brother, Patrick Staunton, Mrs. Patrick Staunton, and Alice Rhodes, a sister of Mrs. Patrick Staunton, all of whom were charged with the murder of Mrs. Louis Staunton (née Harriet Richardson) by starvation.

In 1979, 45 years after she published her book, Elizabeth wrote to a friend that when she read the 1911 volume, ‘at first I was only wonder-struck at people who, in the dock, seemed so full of sensibility and family affection, having come to commit so peculiarly horrible a murder. I

couldn’t find out anything about them, so I began to imagine how, if you started at point A, you could possibly arrive at point B. I would not write such a thing now, because I feel that we want fewer horrors, not more; but then one hadn’t heard about the Nazis.’ She added in her memoir, *The View from Downshire Hill* (2004), that Harriet ‘was, I think, one of the very earliest instances – if not the earliest – of a writer’s recounting a story of real life, with the actual Christian names of the protagonists and all the available biographical details, but with the imaginative insight and heightened colour which the novelist exists to supply.’

In 1960 Edgar Lustgarten commented in *The Murder and the Trial* that the real-life Louis Staunton (Lewis Oman in the novel) ‘would have fitted best into the world of Dickens. Balzac or Dostoevsky, with their acute awareness of the infinite gradations that stretch between the absolutes of Evil and of Good, would have... humanised him. Only Dickens’s fierce genius for caricature could have painted Louis as black as he deserved.’ However, Elizabeth Jenkins should be compared not only to Balzac and Dostoevsky but also to Marghanita Laski, because in several respects *Harriet* resembles *The Victorian Chaise-longue*, Persephone Book No. 6. For example, it is equally perceptive about Victorian furnishings, colour and scent; both writers describe women who are confined to their rooms by their husbands;

and both novelists are painfully astute about human nature.

**H**arriet was a commercial success and won the Prix Femina Vie Heureuse (the runners-up were Antonia White’s *Frost in May* and Evelyn Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust*). But Elizabeth Jenkins always had ambivalent feelings about her book: firstly ‘the horror of the story weighed on my mind and became more acutely painful as time went on’; then a few vindictive reviews said that ‘in making use of an actual story, though of a past era, and keeping the names of people and places intact, I had done something considered by some people as highly blameworthy... I confess that it had never occurred to me that anyone would think what I had done discreditable. I had



*Harriet Richardson later Staunton posing for her engagement picture late in 1874, p.23 *Brotherly Love or the Cudham Quartet: the story of the Penge Murder Mystery* by Dorothy Cox (1989)*

been obsessed by the story and the powerful current of energy that enabled me to write it. Since then, numerous writers have followed this method.'

The Afterword to *Harriet* has been written for us by Rachel Cooke of the *Observer*. She says: 'Elizabeth Jenkins's story grips because the horror takes place in familiar surroundings, and to a quotidian beat... To call it the stuff of nightmares really is no exaggeration... *Harriet* is a remarkable and singular achievement: highly controlled, deeply revealing, quite brilliant.' Last year, a blogger on the website Good Reads, regretting that it was not better known, suggested that one reason was 'the darkness, realism and tragedy that form the basis of this novel's insights on humanity's often predatory nature.' We recommend this bleak, wonderfully-written book very highly; but the palpable sense of evil means it is not for everyone.

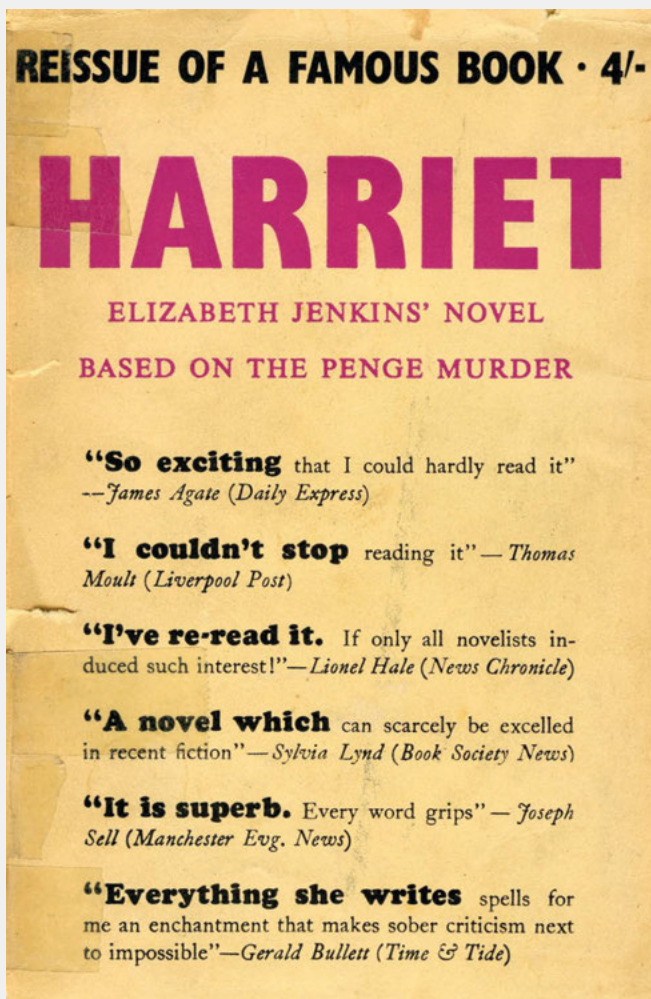
When Elizabeth Jenkins came down from Cambridge she lived in Doughty Street in Bloomsbury (as Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby had done a couple of years before) and was briefly taken up by the Woolfs round the corner in Tavistock Square. Years later, in Virginia Woolf's published diaries, Elizabeth saw her first novel described as a 'sweet white grape of a book: her [Virginia's] critical acumen had led her to put her finger on my inherent weakness: a lack of strength. This has always, I fear, come out in any

novel I have written purely by imagination: a fictional version of a real story of real life, a transcript of experience or a straightforward biography, has been needed to supply my deficiency.' Rachel Cooke comments: 'Elizabeth Jenkins was right about this – and this is why *Harriet* is so masterful. Forged from the unpromising proximity of a Victorian courtroom, a powerful synthesis of truth and imagination renders it indelible.'

It is a book by Virginia Woolf that is our second title for the

Spring: Persephone Book No. 98 is Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*. This posthumous volume, first published in 1953, consists of extracts from the diaries she kept from 1918-41, gathered together by her husband Leonard Woolf to show her in the act of writing, when 'she reveals, more nakedly perhaps than any other writer has done, the exquisite pleasure and pains... of artistic creation.'

Because this is a *writer's* diary – when Leonard Woolf went through the thirty manuscript volumes, which would then be



published in full in five printed volumes between 1977 and 1984, he only selected passages that related to her intellectual life. The reason he did this – and it seems extraordinary looking back over sixty years – is that he wished to restore Virginia Woolf’s reputation as a serious writer, since it was then at a very low ebb. *Really?* one can hear many Persephone readers saying in amazement. And, yes, the slightly older generation has to remind the slightly younger that her reputation for the roughly twenty-five years after her death was – well, she did not *have* a reputation. Partly this was the inevitable and constant dip that happens after a writer’s death; partly, in Virginia Woolf’s case, it was the modernism, the perceived difficulty, of her novels; and partly the manner of her death. The present writer lived next door as a child to a Bloomsbury acquaintance of the Woolfs, the playwright Beatrice Mayor, sister-in-law of FM Mayor who wrote *The Rector’s Daughter*. She used to talk about Virginia Woolf. And it was clear that the way she died was then so scandalous that it affected her literary reputation.

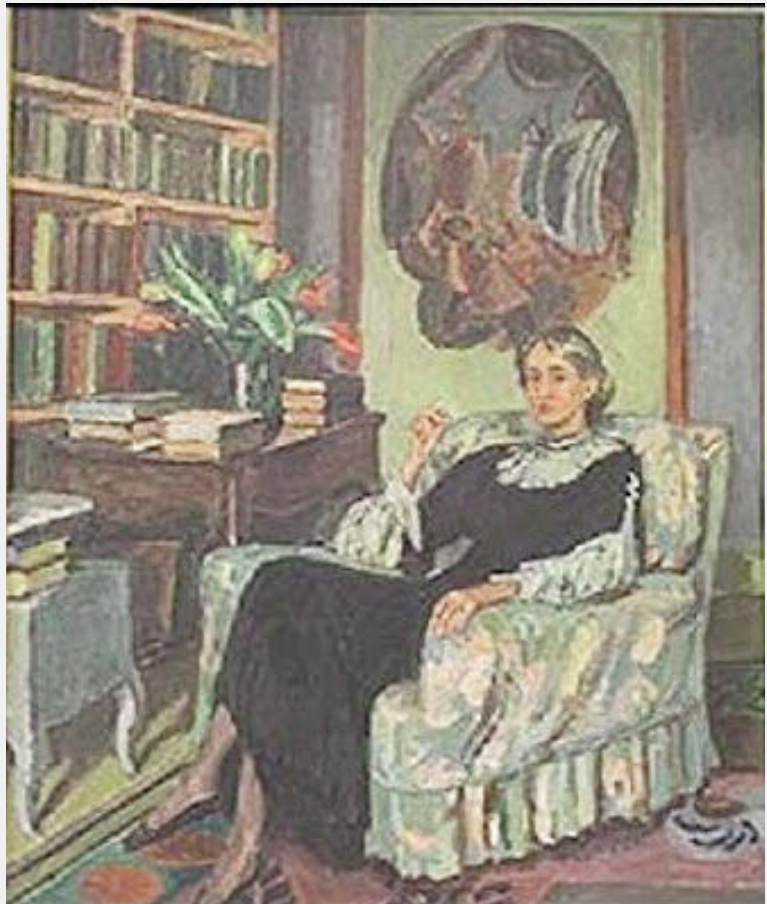
Not, famously, was Virginia Woolf’s work read by the general public or taught in schools or universities in the 1960s. Although there had been some critical books on her, for example Winifred Holtby’s in the 1930s and Joan Bennett’s in the 1940s, she was not rated. Few people read her; few literary critics were interested in her, and

the general perception of her nowadays as the most important female writer of the twentieth century, perhaps *the* most important writer of the twentieth century, would have astonished her and astonished her husband.

But although edited in the early 1950s, and although to some extent superseded by the complete five volumes of diaries, *A Writer’s Diary* remains a crucial book. Yet like Etty Hillesum’s *An Interrupted Life*, Persephone

Book No.5 and like Katherine Mansfield’s *Journal*, Persephone Book No. 69, the diary was obviously not written in order to be read straight through, indeed none of these three volumes were written *as a book*: all are compilations by later editors.

Virginia Woolf suspected that selections from her diaries might be published one day, but she trusted her husband to do the right thing by them, which in *A Writer’s Diary* he did. Whether



*In 1934 Vanessa Bell painted Virginia Woolf in the drawing-room of 52 Tavistock Square, Bloomsbury. Her feet are on a carpet designed by Duncan Grant. The painting is in a private collection and is occasionally on display at Charleston. We apologise for the poor quality of the reproduction – finding it involved some archaeology.*

she knew the diaries would ever be published in their entirety is a quite different question: she almost certainly would never have imagined that would happen. But *A Writer's Diary* is surely something she would have wanted to see in print, although she might have asked for one editorial change: it reveals with horrible nakedness her reaction to reviews. 'Her worst setbacks come from criticism, and self-criticism above all in the apprehensive periods between finishing and publishing a book' writes Lyndall Gordon in her new Persephone Preface for our edition of *A Writer's Diary*. So, for example, 'On 10 July 1933, after she finished *Flush* [now Persephone Book No. 55], her playful biography of the spaniel who was a companion to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she stomps along in Regents Park, "with gloom and pain constricting my heart; and the desire for death... all for two I dare say careless words." She thinks her gloom discreditable, and tries, not always successfully, to talk herself out of it.

'What eases her writing,' Lyndall Gordon continues, 'is the regulated yet "perfectly spontaneous childish" life with a husband who plucks out her "thorns", and from the start has recognised her gift. He recalls her reading aloud from a draft of her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, in March 1912, two months before she agreed to marry him. Two years later he fictionalised the rarity of her voyage-out character

as Camilla Lawrence in his novel, *The Wise Virgins* [now Persephone Book No.43, also with a Preface by Lyndall Gordon]... Here, assembled in the ready compass of *A Writer's Diary*, is all that brings Virginia Woolf to the brink of her works, from the age of 36 in 1918 when she is writing her second novel, *Night and Day*, until the age of 59 in 1941 when she is completing her last novel, *Between the Acts*. What happens "between the acts" can be as fascinating as a polished work or platform speech: it's the unseen drama of

making, with its struggles and breakthroughs.

'Rereading *A Writer's Diary* thirty years on, I'm struck by its concentration on acts of greatness day by day, year by year. In the full diary the creative acts are inevitably dispersed because she's recording much else. So it is that as a distillation of the creator's relation to her creation, as well as to her critics and public, *A Writer's Diary* is a masterpiece in its own right.'



# HOUSE-BOUND ON A GOOD READ ON R4 OCTOBER 2011

Last October Sara Maitland (**SM**) chose *House-Bound* by Winifred Peck, Persephone Book No. 72, for R4's *A Good Read*. She discussed it with the presenter Harriett Gilbert (**HG**) and with Michael Morpurgo (**MM**).

**SM** This is a war novel and it's a bit of an oddity, I think we could say! The story is one it's kind of very hard to get one's head around. It's based in Edinburgh and it is very, very Edinburgh-ish. It's 1942, the war is going on, our heroine can't get any servants – that's the story – nor can any of her friends. The point is that she has literally never washed a vegetable in her life. And she decides, for quite complicated reasons, that she will just do without servants. But I like it very much. I like it because I like her. I liked her as a character, this kind of... determination to do the right thing against your own will and desire, which I found very interesting and very delicately handled. But above all I liked it because it's about emotions that aren't very much looked at any more; people honourably surviving a marriage which isn't very satisfactory – it's not horrible – but it's nice to have a novel about that. It's nice to have a novel in which God is mentioned rather casually and rather nicely, I think rather interestingly, and finally one thing which has somehow not come into any of

this description is that bits of it are seriously funny. So I do think it's an oddity, but it's an oddity that I really, really enjoyed and thought was interesting.

**HG** Well Michael, a novel where the plot hinges on housework, what did you make of it?

**MM** Well, isn't it good to have a book that's an oddity? It isn't like anything else I've ever read. I thought it was elegant...

**HG** Beautifully written.

**MM** Beautifully written. I thought it was supremely funny. I mean, really funny. I had reservations to start with. I thought, this is going to be a book with one joke, it's going to be all about middle-class people without servants and how you manage, and that is how it's going to go on, and I thought this is maybe going to be quite dreary after the first hundred pages. But then I found myself losing myself in her world, really, as she came to grips... There's a wonderful description of the first breakfast that she makes and the chaos that ensues, and she was completely hopeless. So you rock with laughter, and then of course it gets serious because there are interesting relationships in the family. There's the daughter, Flora, who is a problem, and her relationship with Flora is interesting and well portrayed... Then there's this weird Major who turns up. And then there's this kind of guru of a cook who comes along and helps her. It's full of

extraordinary characters, who really shouldn't belong, but actually do belong. And then there is, at the heart of the story, tragedy. There really is, and it's so beautifully done. And I learnt so much. This is the world my mother grew up in as well, and she was in the same predicament – women all were at that time – and they suddenly found they'd got power in their hands, they could do this, but how do you handle this power? How do you manage without servants etc etc? And I thought that was beautifully done, as she grows into her own self-confidence as the book goes on. I thought it was a terrific book and it surprised me because I thought, why am I having to read this... I was completely captivated. I thought it was a terrific read.

**HG** Well I agree with both of you that *House-Bound* is one of the weirder novels I've ever read. And I was trying to isolate precisely what was so odd about it, and I think it's partly to do with distance, in that Winifred Peck has absolutely no distance from either the events or the writing... It's set actually in '41, published in '42, so it's a very fast, urgent book. And occasionally you just think, slack-jawed, I mean *what* is this world like? There's an amazing moment when her best friend, Linda, is sort of worried about her having to do all the housework, and granted it's a big

house, but she says: 'Is it so very awful, darling?' And Rose, our heroine, says well yes, but also no. She is the heroine, she does know perfectly well that not everybody has servants, and she even understands that a domestic servant's life isn't very good. Nonetheless, she is not remotely thinking, or her creator isn't remotely thinking, outside this society what would people make of this? The wonderful moment when her husband, poor old Stuart, who is desperately trying to say to her, we've got to find servants, we can't carry on like this. And instead of worrying about whether her hands are going to get red or she's going to be exhausted, he's saying, you know darling if we don't have servants you're going to have to answer the door to the tradesmen yourself.

**MM** It was what other people thought that was so important.

**HG** Absolutely! And I don't know that that was intended as a joke – maybe that was because, I agree, it is a very funny book, but it ...

**MM** You're never quite sure if it's intentionally funny at all. It's utterly unselfconscious, this book, and I love that.

**SM** I think, though, that the opening passage, a very early one, when she goes to the employment agency to get some more servants is set up to be funny. I think we're told that

we're allowed to laugh if we want to.

**HG** I think that beginning bit is funny. There are other bits where you're not sure whether you're just going 'what?!' I don't know if I believe it. But also, as Michael's been intimating, there is real tragedy under this. We learn quite early on that her best friend's son has been killed, and this is a generation of women whose – and indeed men of course – whose children are out fighting. And in fact Michael, this is, oddly, a very political novel isn't it?



*The fireplace in Virginia Woolf's bedroom at Monk's House. The tiles were made by Vanessa Bell in 1930 especially for her sister.*

**MM** Well I think it is. It's about a woman who is coping, you know, and I think that's something... quite difficult. I'm the only male in the room, but actually women are really good at coping. I think they are better at coping than men with a broad spectrum of emotions and responsibilities. I just think they are better at that. Maybe it's because they've allowed men to not be like that, they have to be broad-shouldered. But she carries the whole family on her shoulders, this woman, and does it with supreme elegance. She gets down, but she

picks herself up again. You feel really good about human nature and about, I have to say, the female of the species after you've read this. I'd love this to be made into a play. I think it would make a wonderful play, written well, because you would see a strong, middle-aged woman managing... You hero-worship her at the end, she really comes through in this book. I wouldn't say I'm in love with her but I wouldn't mind living with her.

**HG** I don't think Stuart would approve!

**SM** I don't think she'd approve either. Indeed, her very minor and very discreet recognition of the fact that she's quite eroticised by the Major is a very lovely scene...

**MM** I would insist on making breakfast, that's all I'd do definitely...



# OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

‘**N**o *Surrender* is a passionate call to arms issued from the midst of the struggle for female suffrage. From ambushes in country churchyards to assaults in the salons of St James’s, the campaign against the “Antis” is waged with ingenuity, wit and grim determination, the suffragettes’ indomitable spirit undiminished. Yet their exertions cost them dear, and the summary violence with which they are met is profoundly shocking. *No Surrender* is perhaps primarily valuable as a social document: what it lacks in elegance, however, it makes up for in authenticity.’ *The Observer*

‘**A**s fresh now as the day it was written, *No Surrender* shows that the women’s suffrage movement had a lot in common with the women’s movement of the 1970s. We know it primarily as a mass campaign to gain women the vote, but underlying that was a determination to address many wider injustices facing women. Constance Maud’s book gives a remarkable insight into the comradeship of women who were determined to change the world.’ *Glasgow Herald*

‘**G**reenbanks opens in 1909 as an extended middle-class family with all its repressed antagonisms celebrates Christmas. Letty is bullied by her pompous husband, Ambrose, who believes a woman’s place is

in the home, and gives her the same flat, exhausted feeling she gets “when trying to carry a mattress downstairs unaided”. Then war arrives. Old values are blown sky high and Lettie must discover how to fill her empty life once her children have gone. Chosen as the Book Society’s Book of the Month, Whipple’s subtly subversive novel is a good, gripping, old-fashioned read.’ *Daily Mail*

‘**W**hen *No Surrender* was first published 100 years ago women were being attacked, imprisoned and force-fed because of their demand for the vote. Constance Maud’s call to arms is at best a historical curiosity, but readable nonetheless. Jenny Clegg, who works in the mills, is downtrodden, while in the big house Mary is not content with aristocratic pastimes; both astutely realise that nothing will change until women achieve the vote. Maud is no Elizabeth Gaskell and there are plenty of purple tones to her prose, but this is a rare example of a suffragette novel... banner-waving stuff.’ *Guardian*

‘**I**n 1958, Diana Athill writes in her preface to *Midsummer Night in the Workhouse*, she had a “gleeful surge of energy” that resulted in her first short story, then another, and another. Before the year was out, she had written nine, some of which found their way into magazines

and a few years later into a collection, which sank without a trace – short stories by unknown authors being, she writes, “publishing poison”. Nevertheless, these stories are small gems. Diana Athill is “amazed and delighted” that this collection has been published. Her legion of admirers will be similarly pleased.’ *Macleans*, Canada

‘**C**onstance Maud has a message to get across in *No Surrender*: that women, from whatever class, can find solidarity only among themselves. Maud’s didacticism may deter today’s audiences, but her portrayal of life for suffragettes in prison is a real *tour de force*. Her description of Mary’s torture as she is force-fed while on hunger strike is shocking, as is the cruelty of the wardens and the two doctors. It’s not an easy read but it’s a worthwhile one.’ *Independent*

‘**N**o *Surrender*’s historical detail has the accuracy of experience and is still shocking: the protest marches, the enforced sisterhood created by women being crowded into tiny cells, the hunger strikes – which were grotesquely lampooned in magazines as novel ways for women to lose weight – and the force-feeding. It is primarily a political novel, exploring socialist ideas and tracing the history of the early trade union movement, and its place in history is assured.’ *Independent on Sunday*

# THE TWO PAINTER HAROLDS

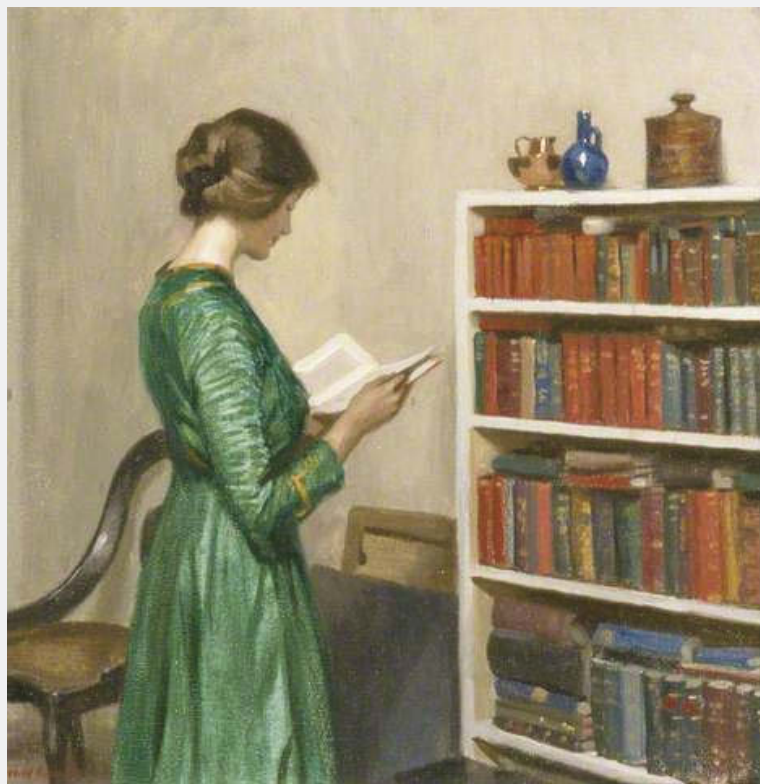
In a few months a film will be released called *Summer in February*. It is based on the (excellent) 1995 novel of the same name by Jonathan Smith, stars Dan Stevens (*Downton Abbey*), Emily Browning and Dominic Cooper, and is about a group of painters living at Lamorna Cove in Cornwall just before the First World War. Why is it of interest to Persephone readers? Well, readers of the *Biannually* will know that one of our heroes is the painter Harold Harvey (1874-1941). And we are very happy to say that we are so influential in this respect that the young couple opposite us in Lamb's Conduit Street have

called their (adorable) baby Harold! This is partly in homage to *the HH*, partly because it is a lovely and, nowadays, curiously *de nos jours* name.

But there was another Harold living in Cornwall, a close friend of Harold and Gertrude Harvey's, and this was Harold Knight (1874-1961). He was married to Laura Knight, later to become Dame Laura Knight and a better-known painter than her husband. Two of his paintings are reproduced here: *The Reader* (1910, below, © Royal Pavilion, Libraries & Museums, Brighton & Hove) and *The Manicure* (1933, opposite, ©

PCF/Nottingham City Museums and Galleries), which shows the same young woman as in the picture on the front of our Classic edition of *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*. Both Harold and Laura Knight had been at Nottingham School of Art. They married in 1903 when Harold was nearly 30 and Laura was nearly 26, and in 1905 lived in Amsterdam so that Harold could study the paintings of the artist he admired most, Vermeer (Vermeer, Harold Knight and Dorothy Whipple being linked in a straight line one to the other). In 1907 the Knights moved to Newlyn in Cornwall, where their friends included Alfred Munnings and Ernest and Dod Procter. They also became close friends of Gertrude (née Bodinnar) and Harold Harvey (cf. his painting of *Gertrude in the Kitchen at Maen Cottage* on p.27).

The Harveys had married in 1911 and gone to live at Maen Cottage, Elms Close Terrace, Newlyn. Gertrude was a painter in her own right, and also made some of her own clothes; the stripy textiles and the other fabrics in Harold's paintings are courtesy of her and of her sister Sophie Bodinnar, who would be manageress of the Crysède factory when it was started by Alec Walker in 1920, and of his Newlyn shop from 1923. (The endpaper textile we used for *High Wages* by Dorothy Whipple is a Crysède fabric.)



**S**ummer in February describes Florence Carter-Wood (always called 'Blote'), a society beauty and student at the Forbes School of Painting, played by Emily Browning, joining the group of painters at Lamorna Cove. Alfred Munnings' friend, Gilbert Evans, a land agent, played by Dan Stevens, becomes besotted, with 'Botticelli's Venus'. Munnings, played by Dominic Cooper, is enraptured too, but although he lacks Evans's sensitivity, his feelings become clear when he paints *The Morning Ride*, a picture of Florence sitting side-saddle on a horse. It becomes clear that Florence will choose one of the two men to marry. She makes the wrong decision and in 1912 marries Munnings, Gilbert leaves for India and tragedy ensues: Florence killed herself on July 24th 1914. Rather like LP Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953), and rather like Isabel Colegate's *The Shooting Party* (1980), the novel subtly implies that the tragedy that hits the groups of painters is a faint hint of the tragedy to come in the trenches of northern France.

**B**ut the book suggests that Laura Knight's friendship with Alfred Munnings might have been the cause of the tragedy. And something curious happened a couple of years ago that bears this out. It seems that in 1910 Harold Knight painted Munnings, but the painting was only discovered recently when Christie's specialist Tom Rooth found it under a 1915 work by Laura Knight called *Carnaval*.

During a detailed examination of this painting, he had noticed that at the back there appeared to be the edges of two stretched canvases. When the eighty-three nails that pinned down Laura Knight's work were removed, there was a glimpse of bright green brushstrokes. It was *Alfred James Munnings Reading*, a portrait of the painter seated in a garden chair. It is almost certainly by Harold Knight because it closely relates to *The Sonnet*, another lost work by him, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1911. This shows a larger scene, with the charismatic young Munnings seen (as in the newly-discovered portrait) delivering one of his frequent dramatic readings to a group of young women that include both his future wife Florence and Laura Knight. There seems to be a satirical element in Harold

Knight's portrait of Munnings. Or there could be something deeper and angrier than mere laughter..

**F**or the atmosphere among the artists at Lamorna was in reality fraught with emotional tension, and this was largely because of the complex relationship between Munnings and the Knights. The reserved Harold saw Munnings as a flamboyant extrovert, and his wife's admiration of the other man caused him great concern. Did Harold dispose of the painting and Laura rescue and hide it? Did one or other choose to hide it after Florence's death? No one knows, but in both the book and the film of *Summer in February* Jonathan Smith makes a very plausible guess.



# THE PERSEPHONE 98

**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 Beauman

**2. Mariana by Monica Dickens** This funny, romantic first novel, which came out in 1940, 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 Etty 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 **Also available as a Persephone audiobook (unabridged) read by Lucy Scott**

**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** 'One of the great English cookbooks, full of delightful, delicious recipes that actually work.' Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

**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 Beauman

**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 Oriel 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 committing fraud and what happens to him and his family; a 1943 film. Afterwords: Terence Handley MacMath and Christopher Beauman

**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**

**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. Also available as a *Persephone audiobook* (unabridged) read by Lucy Scott
- 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 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 cookbook 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*). A 'Book at Bedtime' on BBC R4. 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* (fritillary), *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 about a young doctor in Arizona which encapsulates the social, racial and moral tensions of the time. By the author of *In a Lonely Place*. 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 cookbook book which was a bestseller at the time and a pioneering work for British cooks. The line drawings and the

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-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 Beauman** 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 Ten short stories by the author of *Suite Française*, written between 1934 and 1942. 'Luminous, extraordinary, stunning' was the verdict of reviewers.

**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: Merryn Williams

**90. The Winds of Heaven** by Monica Dickens This 1955 novel by the author of *Mariana* is about a widow with three rather unsympathetic daughters who eventually finds happiness. Afterword: AS Byatt

**91. Miss Buncle Married** by DE Stevenson A hugely enjoyable sequel to *Miss Buncle's Book* (No. 81): Miss Buncle's marries and moves to a new village. Afterword: Fiona Bevan

**92. Midsummer Night in the Workhouse** by Diana Athill Twelve short stories, mostly written in the late 1950s, by the celebrated editor and memoir writer. Preface: the author. Six of the stories are available read by the author as a *Persephone audiobook*.

**93. The Sack of Bath** by Adam Fergusson A 1973 polemic, with black and white photographs, raging at the destruction of Bath's C18th artisan terraced housing. Preface: the author

**94. No Surrender** by Constance Maud A 1911 novel centring on the struggle for the vote by a mill girl and the aristocrat who becomes her friend. Preface: Lydia Felgett

**95. Greenbanks** by Dorothy Whipple A 1932 novel by our most popular author about a family and, in particular, a grandmother and her granddaughter. Afterword: Charles Lock.

**96. Dinners for Beginners** by Rachel and Margaret Ryan A 1934 cookery book for the novice cook telling her everything in exacting and rather punishing detail: eye-opening and useful.

**97. Harriet** by Elizabeth Jenkins A brilliant but disquieting 1934 novel about the 1877 murder of Harriet Staunton. Afterword: Rachel Cooke

**98. A Writer's Diary** by Virginia Woolf Extracts from the diaries, covering the years 1918-41, selected by Leonard Woolf in 1953 in order to show his late wife in the act of writing. Preface: Lyndall Gordon



*The Domino Players* Adrian Daintrey 1940 © Sally Hunter Fine Art/private collection.

# 'THE FIRST GRANDCHILD' BY DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER

'If you think I ought to stay in, I will, of course,' Jocelyn told her parents in the voice which meant she had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

Her father and mother understood her. With an air of giving her up altogether, her father silently raised before his face the newspaper he had laid down when the telephone rang.

'Of course, Joy, I can understand it would be a little difficult to explain.' Her mother hastily presented the girl with a talking-point. Jocelyn pushed it away.

'Heavens, no! what would be difficult? I'd just as soon as not tell the crowd my married sister has gone to the hospital to have her first baby, and my early-American parents think it wouldn't be decent for me to go off and dance till we get the great question settled of whether it's a girl or a boy.'

Jocelyn's father folded back the newspaper to the editorial page with rather a loud crackling of paper. She answered this protest crisply, 'Those are the facts, Dad. What is so indelicate about mentioning them out loud?'

'Your father means,' Jocelyn's mother murmuringly interpreted, 'that if you yourself don't *feel* as if it would –'

'Well, I don't,' said the girl. 'Why should I? It's not as if there were anything I could do for Felicia. You and Father live back

in the pre-hospital, pre-trained-nurse days, when all the family felt it a duty to stand by to keep the tea-kettle boiling and scrape lint.'

Her mother broke into an unwilling laugh. She knew it irritated Andrew to have her frivolously see something funny in a situation which annoyed him. But the glimpse of Jocelyn's notion of the past was too much for her.

The girl's complacent young jauntiness was somewhat shaken by the sparkle in her mother's eye. She looked at her with an uneasy inquiry.

'It was our grandmothers who scraped lint. You're only two generations out,' explained her mother. Andrew rebukingly turned his paper inside out to get at the financial page.

The front door-bell rang. 'There's Hank now,' said Jocelyn. 'What shall I tell him?' As if she had not decided what to tell him! 'Oh, go *along!*' said her father with a sudden angry explosiveness, from behind the paper.

Jocelyn's eye met her mother's and saw, kindling behind the veil of conscientious seriousness, another of those sparks of amusement. For an instant mother and daughter looked at each other as if both were mischievous girls.

Then Jocelyn leaped at her mother for a goodbye kiss, called

to her father, 'Well, since you insist, I will,' and was gone.

'I oughtn't to do that!' thought her mother, remorsefully. 'It's not fair to Andrew. He'd never do such a thing behind my back!' She sighed, the sparks quenched.

She reached for the ball of yarn and her needles, and sitting down began to knit and to remember.

Behind his newspaper her husband was saying to himself suitable regretful words, saying them but not thinking them, 'I oughtn't to snap at the children that way! Joy hadn't done anything to have me take her head off, so – but good God! what a mess girls of her age are!' He ruminated wrathfully on girls! Half they were shallow children, and half, self-willed egotistic young women. Wanting the pleasures of both ages with none of their obligations. Jocelyn's demand on life was to be allowed to do just as she liked and yet have the older generation go through the motions of approving everything she did. Hard-boiled little idiot, priding herself on her vulgar English and lack of natural feeling!

Well, that was too strong perhaps. About Jocelyn anyhow. As his irritation cooled down, he admitted he had gone too far. A misgiving pricked him. His temper was certainly not



improving with age; would he, later on, develop into one of those undignified choleric old gentlemen at whose rages everybody laughed behind his back? He put the idea aside, told himself, 'Anyhow I deserve some credit for not having let Phebe see how that silly laugh of hers rubbed me the wrong way.' He went back to thinking about his younger daughter. She was no worse, he supposed, than any of her gang, her half-naked loud-voiced sorority sisters who, when he came in of a late afternoon, seemed to fill the living-room with miles of silk-stockinged legs as they lay back in low armchairs and crossed their knees, dropping cigarette ashes all over the books on his reading-table, and laughing like hyenas over each other's wisecracks. He couldn't see that modern education had changed girls. What could anybody see in them! Yet some men of his age were crazy about them...

He tried to remember what he had been thinking about. He had been thinking – and this was real reality – that tonight found him on the threshold of old age, and without ever having done what he'd like to have done.

And he knew why! Because he had had children to provide for. Because it had taken all that he could earn in his profession to bring up two girls and a boy. Everything else had been put aside till they should be grown. He and Phebe had grovelled before their three small idols, had beaten loudly on the tomtom of the tribal religion, had

poured out their hearts' blood on the altar before the three celestial treasures. And with the years the celestial treasures had grown into – just three more human beings, strongly resembling several not-very-much-loved aunts and uncles and grandparents.

The clock struck eleven. 'I do wonder how Felicia is getting on,' murmured his wife over her knitting.

He made some appropriate noise to show he had heard her.

His arms, very tired of holding up that unseen newspaper, laid it down and reached for his pipe.

Phebe took advantage of this appearance of not being occupied to ask, 'Do you remember the night little Andrew was born?'

He nodded and said, 'It was awful.'

'Oh, I don't know,' she murmured in a low tone as if her thoughts were sinking back into her mind.



*Thomas Gainsborough The Byam Family c.1765 on long loan to the Holburne Museum of Art. cf. a good article about this painting at [guardian.co.uk/culture/2001/mar/31/art](http://guardian.co.uk/culture/2001/mar/31/art).*

He did not hear her. He was living again through that ordeal. The purity of its suffering had been gone a long time. It was lurid now with anger. At the time he had been in too agonising a fire of terror and pain to do more than suffer like a brute. But when he remembered that night, it was with a Promethean hatred of its suffering, so resentful that it made him hate life. Why should unoffending human beings be sent through such hell as that in which his harmless wife had struggled and screamed. He had been trying to forget what was happening tonight, but here

it came – his daughter was in that hell this instant, his harmless sensitive little girl who always cried so when she cut her finger. An echo of her screaming in his inner ear came out in cold dew on his forehead, took him back to the hideous hospital corridor where he had leaned against the wall, rigid, stiffly silent, assuming the only rag of human dignity left to him, the ‘manly’ pose of Apache insensibility. The Hindus were right! Life is nothing but an endless chain of miseries. To escape is the only –

The telephone rang. Phebe flung her knitting from her and

went hastily to answer with her little trotting step. He said to himself, ‘She’s mistaken. It’s too early for any news from the hospital. I won’t even listen.’ So he listened, every pulse halted, every muscle taut, his eyes fixed on Phebe’s back, as in a silence that seemed eternal she held the receiver at her ear. A boy? A girl? Perhaps – across his heart flickered a flame from the night when his own first child was born – ‘perhaps Felicia is dead.’

Phebe spoke at last. She said, ‘I think three dozen will be enough, don’t you? We can’t expect many people out at this time of year.’



*Stone Dean, Jordans, Bucks 1940 by Stanley Anderson (1884-1966) p43 of Recording Britain (1990). The house was built in 1691.*

Damn! *Damn!* Some of her Ladies' Aid stuff! He drew loudly on his pipe and took a book off the nearest shelf at random, so that when she turned back, she would not know he had been so frightened. He would make her think – he held the book up looking at it intently – that he had forgotten what they were waiting for.

As she crossed the room to go back to her chair and her knitting, she gave one glance at his eyes fixed intently on the page, and thought in shocked anxious sympathy, 'Oh, poor Andrew! How he feels things! But it tires him out nowadays, to get really worried, as he is tonight. He can't stand it as he used to.' She asked herself suddenly, 'Why doesn't he retire? Even with half a pension we'd have enough money – living the way we like to. With Mother's bequest, we'd have enough to travel once in a while. Andrew always wanted to travel. We could go to England, and he could look things up in some old library. He'd love that.'

As if he had read the words on the page before him, he found in his mind the idea of retiring from active teaching. With it, always the other half of that idea, was the old question of whether he could stand life without the steadying grind of daily work. Wouldn't leisure shove him over the edge of the danger-thought he tried to ignore? He began to imagine what it would be not to go into college every morning. Never to go to college again. Never to throw the pearls of

scholarly interpretation at the feet of the swine of – he glanced uneasily at his wife and took back that figure of speech – well, to make it a colourless literally factual statement such as Phebe insisted on, never again to try to force the significance of human history down the throats of young barbarians who cared about nothing but football and girls.

Suppose he should retire – how would it seem to wake up every morning not with a full schedule of work before him, but free to choose whatever seemed really worth while to do – he was slipping, he was lost, that chance phrase had plunged him over the edge into the danger-thought he had set himself not to have. He had it. What he feared was that if he ever had time to look around freely for something worth doing, he would see that there is nothing really worth doing. Nothing.

Clawing hard at the words in the book before him, 'Abundant examples can be found alike in Hellenic and in foreign history –' he clambered back to ordinary ideas, and although he was breathing rather fast, went on reading resolutely.

His wife had thought herself around to the opinion that it would be a mistake for Andrew to retire now. 'He really adores teaching, for all his talk about football morons. What he lives for really are the two or three students a year who see what he's driving at. They are what makes living seem worth while to him. Without them, he'd be lost. No, it would be a great mistake for him

to retire.'

She held up a small half-made garment, wondering if she had made the tiny sleeves small enough. A baby in the family again! What fun! How she talked – as though the little thing were already there! Well, that was the way she felt, as sure as though she had the new scrap of life in her arms, this minute. She supposed she ought to be horribly anxious and tense, like Andrew over there, half-frantic as he was tonight. But she wasn't. She was sorry, of course, for Felicia's suffering. No, she wasn't either. She was glad for her!

'In consequence of the peace, the Athenians sent to recall Iphocrates with his fleet; besides which –'

No, it was no use. Xenophon could not protect him from the fact that he would soon be responsible for the existence of another human being in the world. He saw endless circles of responsibility, widening to infinity around the meeting, years ago, of the life-ignorant boy and girl he and Phebe had been. Because they had fallen in love – whatever that meant – more than a quarter of a century later another human soul – call it 'soul' – was summoned out from safe non-existence to suffering.

'I never knew Andrew to have a worse one of his blue fits than tonight,' thought his wife, sadly; 'of course I might have known he would take it hard, crazy as he's been about the children. It's always scared me, the way he's

loved them. He's tried not to, too – he's always thinking up intellectual things to say about how it's no more than animal instinct. But mercy! let one of them be sick, or in trouble, and poor Andrew is beside himself. If I were any good, I'd know what to say to help him get through this.' She thought wonderingly, 'Why don't *I* feel worried? I am, a little, on top. But underneath – I never felt happier. A baby in the family! Perhaps it will be a little girl. That would be *nice!* I'd love a little girl. You can make such darling clothes for them. Perhaps they'll wear bonnets again. Jocelyn always looked adorable in her bonnet. What fun they are when they're little! And big, too. More fun all the time. Joy's never been lovelier and funnier than now – rushing ahead into being grown up – and so deliciously silly, with those newfangled trimmings of modern manners hung around her! Yes, daughters were great! To have two women in the world so close to you as Felicia and Joy – for Joy was a woman now, too, a warmhearted, loving, dutiful, responsible woman – gracious! what swear-words the child would emit if she heard such adjectives applied to her!' At the imagined expression on Joy's face, a gust of amusement all but swept her mother into another untimely laugh. She repressed it, glancing apprehensively at her husband.

Andrew was looking through the unseen Xenophon at the thought of his descendants. 'Tonight completes the circle.

With the birth of a child to one of my children, the door of escape from the treadmill is closed. Around and around it the great tribe of my descendants will plod towards nothing. Treading on each other's heels, never a step nearer the goal they all set out to reach.' He stood in darkness, watching these doomed great-great-grandchildren of his, plodding around and around to nowhere. And then even this stir of life dwindled, began to die down. He watched it anxiously, as a man in the dark would watch the single spark of light left to him. Like a dying spark it grew dimmer. Went out.

The clock struck midnight.

'I do wonder how Felicia is getting along,' murmured Phebe in a low tone. But she was not thinking of Felicia. Or of the new baby. Of Andrew. Across the room, he sat quiet enough, his face bent over a book, his pipe in one hand. But his jaws were clenched and working. With all the invisible antennae of the spirit she knew him to be in danger, terrible danger, the only danger that ever threatened him, from his dreadful power to torture himself. This was not just anxiety about Felicia. This was the Enemy that had come only two or three other times.

Across the black nothingness in which he stood, his heart dying to ashes, a faint light appeared. It grew brighter – came nearer – priceless beyond thought in that dark void. It was close. Phebe was bringing it to him. Phebe came trotting towards him, with her

unquenchable light, putting the nothingness to naught by not knowing it was there.

His relief was a shock, a sort of physical shock, like the relief of a man in a bad dream, falling endlessly who, with a great start, wakes and finds himself safe, with morning light bright across his bed.

It had been like a bad dream. It had been a bad dream. Were there not waking nightmares?

He filled his lungs with a heave of his chest, and found that he had been half-asphyxiated by forgetting to breathe. Carbon dioxide poisoning. That was what was the matter. That always gave people strange notions. The moment he remembered to draw oxygen into his lungs, he was all right. He had had a moment of dizziness, that was all.

He turned his head and saw that his wife was looking at him. Had he given an actual bodily start, like the man who wakes from a nightmare?

She saw from his face that the Enemy had gone. He laid down his book, looked at his pipe, felt in his pocket for a match. Easily, naturally. Oh, it was *really* all right. 'It's hard to wait, isn't it,' she murmured.

'Yes, it's given me the jim-jams,' he told her, trying to belittle by a trivial word the waking nightmare which had made him forget to breathe. He got up and went to a wastepaper basket to knock out the ashes from his pipe. How enormous the relief was to come to himself out of that smothering helplessness. To

come to himself and find Phebe there. For an instant he must have forgotten that Phebe would be there. Why – the new grandchild would find Phebe there, too! He had not thought of that. Still stooping, and tapping his pipe against the basket he said over his shoulder to his middle-aged wife, ‘I was just thinking that the new baby will get along all right. He’s got nothing to complain of. He’ll have you for his grandmother.’

Phebe heard the words but got no meaning from them. ‘What is Andrew talking about?’ she asked herself, ‘what does he mean?’ Then she knew what he meant. He meant he loved her.

Instantly – it was always the same, as if she were a girl again and he a boy telling her for the first time – she burst into a rosy inner flowering of joy.

But she was shy and clumsy as she always was when she needed specially not to be, and could not think of anything to say except to murmur as she bent her head over her knitting, ‘Oh, he’ll be all right.’

‘I was the one who said he’d be all right,’ Andrew told her. He sat down beside her. ‘Let go of that knitting,’ he said, laid it on the table and took one of her hands in his.

After a while the door opened. Jocelyn came in. ‘A boy,’ she said, ‘a seven and a half pound boy with the requisite number of eyes and noses and fingernails.’ But her eyes were very soft.

They had been too much astonished by her appearance to

stir. ‘Felicia is all right, she’s getting along like –’ She stopped, looked at them, and said, ‘You look kind of nice, Darby and –’ but her lips began to tremble and she could not go on.

She turned away abruptly to hide her face, and cast off her cloak with an exaggeration of her boyish wilful lack of grace.

Her father had turned very white when he saw her come in. As she spoke, the colour had come back into his face, more with every word. He put his hand up now over his eyes as though the light were too strong for them, and leaned back limply.

But her mother had sprung up and run to her, crying, ‘But how in the world –?’

‘Oh, in the middle of the party, I got sort of sick of the crowd and told Hank to play by himself. And I took the trolley bus out to the hospital.’ She reached for a cigarette, ‘I thought it would be a lark.’

She lit the cigarette and sat down in a low armchair. ‘I wouldn’t let them telephone you. I wanted to be the one to throw the bomb.’

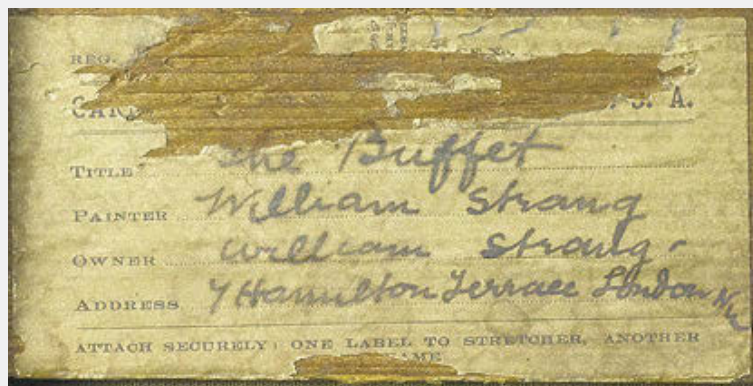
‘Joy, you naughty girl, how you act!’ cried her mother. ‘You make me want to shake you. Tell us about it. Did you see Fred? Did you see Felicia? Did you hear whether –’

‘No, gosh, no! I thought Fred had enough on his mind without a sister-in-law butting in. I didn’t even go up to the floor where Felicia’s room is. I just stuck around downstairs till they came and told me the baby was there all right, and Felicia was OK.’

She crossed her knees and dangled an endless length of still-stocking leg. ‘Emmy Ward’s aunt is a nurse in that hospital. She showed me around some while I was waiting. Took me in to the baby-ward.’

She opened her mouth wide and let out a cloud of smoke. ‘They’re kind of cute,’ she admitted, her eyes following the upward swirl of smoke.

*‘The First Grandchild’ by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, author of The Home-Maker, Persephone Book No. 7, was first published in Fables for Parents in 1937.*



*The label on the back of The Buffet by William Strang, on the cover of this Biannually. Alas, no artist would be able to afford to live in Hamilton Terrace nowadays.*

# OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘Diana Athill’s writing in *Midsummer Night in the Workhouse* is fluid, simple, perceptive and sometimes funny. She is able to capture the internal conflict of her characters with ease, uncovering their insecurities, dreams, joy and despair. I thoroughly enjoyed this delightful collection of stories, slipping into the lives of women who could define a generation. Diana Athill’s prose reveals the hidden desires and adventurous spirits of a woman who came of age in that era.’  
Caribousmom

‘I had no idea of the conditions women prisoners were kept in, and of the horrible nature of force feeding. *No Surrender* is a thought-provoking and intriguing look at the arguments surrounding the women’s suffrage movement, a fascinating and unique chronicle, written at a pivotal point in its history, and a stark reminder of the inequalities women were and still are subject to in the so-called “modern” age.’  
Booksnob

‘Dorothy Whipple is a fine writer. She is economical, shrewd, sharp and unsentimental, while not being afraid of strong emotions. She writes simply, but even so every setting, every room, every garment, every character’s actions and words are there before us, clear and true. That we care so much

about everyone in *Greenbanks* is a tribute to her astonishing ability to take us into so many heads without any confusion whatsoever.’  
Adèle Geras on Normblog

‘*Consequences* is easily the book that made the most emotional impact on me this year. Never before did it hit home so hard how utterly dependent girls were back then. Expected to marry within a year or three after entering ‘the market’, they should be willing to settle for the best offer even if no sympathy existed on second glance. The fact that E.M. Delafield managed to achieve such an emotional read, to convey sympathy without spelling it out, to criticise without literally screaming, but nonetheless screaming in the face of Victorian values in a subdued, figurative sense, makes me want to tell so many of you to read it.’  
Irisonbooks

‘At 374 pages (plus Afterword) there is plenty of space for character development, but *Greenbanks* never drags. We really get to know the women of the Ashton family particularly well, as we do Kate, whom Louisa keeps trying to rescue. Reading this gripping, well-crafted and satisfying novel has made me into an instant Dorothy Whipple fan, and I will look forward to reading as many of

her books as I can.’  
Gaskella

‘What a wonderful and charming book this is. Written in 1932, it is centred around the house, Greenbanks, in the Lancashire village of Elton, and revolves mainly around Louisa Ashton, mother and grandmother. *Greenbanks* may be a lovely, beautifully written book about a family in a grand old house but there is plenty of room for sibling rivalry, illegitimate births, divorce, tyrannical fathers and heartache. In fact all these are done so well that I was in awe of how well Whipple understood human emotion such as depression, jealousy, shame and love. I highly recommend this gorgeous book.’  
Thebookwhisperer

‘The energy of worry and excitement drives the majority of the stories in *Midsummer Night in the Workhouse*, allowing each narrative to catch you up individually. Although the majority are about young-ish women, and all of them involve romantic relationships in one way or another, each one is crisp in the way it stands alone from the stories preceding and following it.’  
Booksunderskin

‘I am Canadian and although I treasure Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro and Martha Ostenso, I was not familiar with

Ethel Wilson. Imagine my delight upon reading *Hetty Dorval*. She writes beautifully and with great clarity. She has captured the nature of a young girl exploring a world beyond her own home boundaries perfectly, in fact so perfectly that it mirrored a very similar incident in my own life as a young girl. Frankie's growing recognition of who Hetty really was and how she could affect others around her was remarkable and very true to life. I also loved the Canadian setting.' MelissaC

'*Greenbanks* is largely a poignant examination of the changing role of women but also a quiet family saga taking place during a critical period in history. This is such a wonderful and beautiful story and rather heartbreaking too for what once was. Dorothy Whipple writes

eloquently and quietly; the passing of time is so seamless; characters grow and age without you realising it and, by the book's end, sixteen years have lapsed. I have read only one other Dorothy Whipple, *Someone at a Distance*, but I think *Greenbanks* tops that. A wonderful and, at times, a desperately sad read.' Madbiibliophile

'The pieces in *Kitchen Essays* are both timebound and timeless. They are timebound in their concern over the management of a dwindling pool of domestic servants and in their predilection for aspic in all things; Agnes Jekyll also assumes that her reader has a working knowledge of French and considers lobster a convenience food. Her writing is timeless in its humour, compassion, wit and, almost incidentally, good recipes.

She reminds us of the need to "forget for a while, if possible, the sordid limitations of a reduced income" and offers frugal recipes to enhance the effort, including an appealing creamed cabbage that will be "welcomed by many who have hitherto looked with hostility on its homely virtue." Britishfoodinamerica

'*No Surrender* affords the retrospective reader the accuracy of information it is impossible to guarantee with contemporaneously written historical novels, no matter how much research the author does. The novel is a sensitively written and accurate account of the suffrage campaign.' MadameJ-Mo

'When I started *No Surrender*, it was in the hope that it would be interesting as an historical document. Expectations were far exceeded by the irresistible page turning quality of what I'm guessing must have been a labour of love. This is a significant book both as a reminder of how far we've come and how far we have to go – and why fairness is worth fighting for. It is written with a passion and conviction behind it that makes it far more than the sum of its parts. It may be riddled with faults but it's utterly compelling, not to mention enjoyable, to read. I cannot recommend it highly enough.' Desperatereader



*Intermission by the Scottish painter James Cowie 1935 © Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool*

# STILL MISSING ON RADIO 4

Last November Rachel Johnson (RJ) chose *Still Missing* by Beth Gutcheon, Persephone Book No. 88, for R4's *A Good Read*. She discussed it with the presenter Harriet Gilbert (HG) and with Martin Kelner (MK).

RJ *Still Missing* came into my life completely by accident. It arrived on my desk and I took it down to Somerset and I read it, and it was one of those books where you say 'no, I don't want to go on a walk; no, I don't want to play scrabble.' I sat engrossed in it, and then every single member of the household read it, and went into a similar intense trance. Even my, then I think, 11-year-old son, who has never read a book, read it, and if he disappeared I'd find him up in his room, sitting with his back to the door, and if anyone came in he'd say 'go away'. So it is incredibly emotional. It's the story of a child who disappears, who disappears without trace, whose mother – Susan Selky – is a Harvard Eng. Lit. professor. The child is about to turn seven and she's separated from her husband and she decides it's OK for him to walk two blocks to school. One day, he walks to school and he disappears. He never arrives at school, and she doesn't discover this until going home time. And I'm literally... I'm slightly coming into goosebumps just even explaining the plot. But then you go into an extraordinarily tense and engrossing... I

hate the word 'journey', but I'm afraid to say it is a slight journey as you simply don't know. You enter Susan's world of pain, and you cannot wait to find out whether she is reunited with little Alex Selky again.

HG Well, Martin Kelner what did you make of it?

MK I wouldn't disagree with any of that. It's a kind of book that used to be described as a 'rattling good yarn'. It is a real page-turner, you cannot put it down – it moves at a fantastic pace. And really I suppose if you're talking about this book, about a child that goes missing in mysterious circumstances, missing, you know, without trace, it's difficult to avoid mentioning Madeleine McCann. And when you look at the phases of the story: huge sympathy at the start, quickly followed by an element of blame, and that's followed by resentment really for the mother's inability to move on from this. And it's exactly – it was published I should say in 1981 first of all...

HG So decades before Madeleine McCann disappeared.

MK Decades before her. I liked also, I liked the sense of place. We all know the sort of neighbourhood in Boston where Susan lives, and where she brings up a child. It's a sort of sandal-wearing, lentil-eating community. They pride themselves on their multiculturalism, the fact they're accepting of other people's sexual preferences and all that.

And then it all disintegrates through the course of the story. Susan "gradually came to see the world as the police saw it. Like a deranged hobbyist who's dropped her glue and toothpick model of the Parthenon, she felt surrounded by the scattered pieces of a world view, a view that she came to recognise as pitiful, fabulous, undefended and indefensible." Basically all the certainties that she had, and that people do have, in I'd suppose you'd say a slightly smug community – it could be Islington, it could be Whiteladies Road in Bristol, Headingley in Leeds, one of those communities where media types, academics live – all those certainties disappear.

HG Yes, it's the policeman, the detective who hangs around in the house for weeks trying to find out what's happened to the child, trying to wait to see if the kidnapper rings in. It's him who says you don't know your neighbours at all, I mean this family where you know, you sent little Alex to be babysat, do you realise that the father is a drug pusher and he was in prison, in fact for a while? I mean, you don't ask do you, because you're just so liberal and so laid back.

I agree with both of you that this is the most page-turning novel. But what I find interesting is that we can all describe this as a page-turner when it is about something unimaginably painful. And I think the reason we can do that is, I think, that Beth



Gutcheon, right from the beginning, says we're going to keep a tiny distance, actually, from Susan's pain. She opens the book very cleverly because she says that we've all lost something in our life, and she sort of immediately swoops to bathos by saying by the age of 34 we've probably all lost our Swiss army knife, and we've lost a good friend we had in school. Then she goes up through the... we've probably lost a love affair, and indeed Susan's lost the battle to keep her family intact, her marriage intact. All this before the child disappears. And then she kind of pauses and we go into the novel. And for me this was as though she was giving us permission so that we didn't actually have to really imagine Susan's pain. We could be told about it, indeed we are told how this all affects her.

**RJ** She doesn't assume that everyone's a mother with children, but she completely conveys what it would be like to be in the position of a parent whose child has disappeared off the face of the earth. It was very interesting how she said her good friends were somehow slightly absent and detached as if giving her, in quotes, 'space'. And then there was a whole kind of B-list of friends who she wondered whether they were simply disaster tourists. Then she said there was this sort of lasciviousness about a really ghastly event happening to anybody, that kind of ghoulish rubbernecking that goes on. Then, you know, the media being sympathetic, and then the media

turning, and the false hopes, the false sightings, the trails, the dead ends... All of that extraordinarily uncanny, and then we have an ending that I don't think we should talk about.

**HG** I think we shouldn't talk about the ending. But I have occasionally thought about the way that the media covered the Madeleine McCann disappearance, and continues intermittently to cover it, that maybe it would be better if there wasn't so much coverage actually, if police work could be allowed to go on quietly... I found this book made me think absolutely about that again, because of the whole business of people getting bored, forgetting. And Susan feels absolutely driven, and you can understand why when you read this novel, to be on television, to keep giving interviews, to find a new photograph of her missing son because the public has got... they can't see any longer the original photograph, it's just 'oh it's that child'...

**MK** Absolutely

**HG** ...And so she has to find a different image.

**MK** I mean for a start it's very accurately done. I mean you're a magazine editor, Rachel, you must remember the scene in the book where a magazine is going to do a big feature, and she's quite thrilled that the magazine are doing a big feature...

**RJ**: It never runs.

**MK** It never runs. Because as far as they're concerned it's an old story. I'll tell you the other thing I found about the book that I thought was very accurate,

the fact that because she is in this condition of having a missing child, immediately other groups of people with missing children get hold of her so you become part of a group, almost like a pressure group, and that's what happens with diseases, with all sorts of things. People think you automatically want to be in a community of other people.

**HG** I have to say at that point, when all these support groups entered the novel, I did begin to think hmm, I don't know that Beth Gutcheon is wearing her research lightly here. It did feel a bit as though she'd kind of... I mean clearly she'd researched this very well. And I just thought this bit yeah I could... let's move on, let's move on, I can do without all this stuff about the support groups.

**RJ** Oh, I thought the support groups were sort of darkly comic, you know the idea that you want to be in a group called Parents Remember exclamation mark. I thought the description though of their kind of dead-eyed pain, as they sat around, and each one completely unreachable in their own... isolated by their own loss, was very good. And, I mean, unbearable to read.

**HG** And I think we should just say that this novel does operate really well as a whodunit. I mean, the finger of blame gets very delicately moved from character to character. And I read the last few pages walking along the street saying 'this is absurd, wait till you're sitting down somewhere, there isn't far to go.' But I was just *totally* gripped...

# RACHEL & MARGARET RYAN

When we published *Dinners for Beginners*, *Persephone Book No. 96*, we did not know who the authors were. But the family got in touch and told us: When Rachel and Margaret married the Ryan brothers there began fifty years of a close and constant friendship between the sisters-in-law, reflected in their joint writings. By a happy chance, during the 1960s and '70s both families lived in Betchworth in Surrey.

Their personalities and talents were diverse but together, in the 1930s, they recognised the enormous social changes taking place. Their first collaboration, teaching basic shopping and cooking, *Dinners for Beginners*, appeared in 1934. This was followed in 1950 by *Quick Dinners for Beginners*, a smaller volume intended to be a supplement to the former, again making everything absolutely clear to the inexperienced cook. Their third and last joint publication, *Shopping for Food* (1958) was in dictionary form; all fresh and basic

foods available in the 1950s were featured, with a view to bridging the gap in understanding between shopkeeper and customer. Both women were lifelong, active members of the WI and in the 1960s first one and then the other wrote the cookery articles for its monthly magazine *Home & Country*.

Rachel Ryan neé Montague (1901-78) was brought up in a leafy, if sooty, suburb of Manchester and went to Somerville College, Oxford to read PPE in 1920. She met her journalist husband Patrick Ryan when he was working for her grandfather, C P Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*. In 1937 she wrote *A Biography of Manchester*, the second in what was to have been a series of biographies of cities; it was preceded the year before by *A Biography of Dublin* by Christine Longford, author of *Persephone Book No. 83 Making Conversation* (1931). But the series was cut short by the threat of war. Rachel was a qualified cookery

demonstrator for Surrey WIs during and after WWII, and in 1960 edited the WI's *Poultry and Game*. Following her time with *Home & Country*, she wrote weekly cookery articles (anonymous in those days) for *The Times*. Having to give up London life in the 1940s, she gardened passionately, read hugely (an interest shared with Margaret) and was heavily involved in local voluntary work.

Margaret Ryan neé Thompson (1904-91) attended Kensington Secretarial College and at the age of 21 was head-hunted by Canada's Western University to set up, run and lecture in a new faculty of Secretarial Science. Romantically, she met her future husband Peter Ryan aboard the transatlantic liner. In 1933 she published *Office Training For Girls*, a reference book covering private secretarial work as well as commerce and industry. During and after the War she contributed to the BBC's *Woman's Hour* and *The Kitchen Front* as well as writing articles for *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *Evening Standard*. At a later date, being an enthusiastic walker, Margaret devoted much time and energy to ensuring that by walking them her local authorities kept public footpaths open and maintained. *Betchworth Within Living Memory* was the title of her meticulously researched village history of its people, buildings and community life.

Rachel and Margaret Ryan were close friends most of their adult lives. This photograph of them on holiday was taken in Cornwall in 1934 when they were on holiday with their husbands.



# RC SHERRIFF'S FORTNIGHT

In September 1931 RC Sherriff and his mother took a holiday at Bognor Regis, partly as consolation for the comparative failure of the two plays he wrote after *Journey's End*. He still had a strong urge to write (although not for the theatre) and it was while sitting on the Esplanade at Bognor watching people go by that the title for a book came to him: he would take a typical London suburban family and write a story about what they did on their annual holiday at Bognor. That same evening, in his hotel bedroom, he began the first chapter of *The Fortnight in September*, now Persephone Book No. 67. He had no idea what would have happened to the family by the end of their two-week holiday and was, as he recalled years later in his autobiography, 'writing for my eyes alone', with no intention of submitting the result to a publisher. But the story progressed so well (he had the advantage of being surrounded by his raw material every time he stepped out of his hotel) that, when he had finished it, he sent it to Gollancz. Enthusiastic reviews greeted the book when it was published and the first edition was sold out in a week. This 'miniaturist of genius, a poet of the ordinary and the banal', as Juliet Gardiner called him in *Slightly Foxed*, was indeed 'a George Grossmith for his time'. And in Australia the novelist Kate Morton chose to talk on television

about *The Fortnight in September*, 'a book that I read for research but fell in love with and am now bound to read over and over again...This book about nothing, this little slice of the ordinary, turns out to be an extraordinary book about everything.'

From Bognor's point of view, the great thing about *The Fortnight in September* being a bestseller was that Sherriff made no attempt to disguise its setting

under a fictional name. It is easy to identify 'St Matthews Road' (where the Stevens family lodged in a house 'halfway down on the right-hand side') with Gloucester Road. Later on, Sherriff built a house: 'Sandmartins', white-walled with a green-tiled roof, is in King's Parade facing Marine Park Gardens and still looks the same today; now it is a care home for fourteen residents. (Information taken from *A History of Bognor Regis* by Gerard Young.)



*Gertrude in the Kitchen at Maen Cottage 1927 Harold Harvey, sold at Phillips 1996, whereabouts unknown. From Harold Harvey (2001) by McConkey, Risdon & Shepherd.*

# EVENTS

**T**he first event of the Spring is *Tapas from 6-8 on Thursday 17th May* when Rachel Cooke of the *Observer* will talk about *Harriet* by Elizabeth Jenkins, for which she wrote the Afterword.

**O**n *Wednesday 30th May* the biographer Lyndall Gordon will talk at a *Lunch* from 12.30-2.30 about *A Writer's Diary* by Virginia Woolf, for which she wrote the Preface.

**O**n *Wednesday 13th June* Professor Jenny Hartley will talk at a *Lunch* from 12.30-2.30 about *Dickens in Doughty Street* to celebrate his bicentenary and her newly published *Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*.

**O**n *Tuesday 26th June* the historian Christina Hardyment will speak at a *Lunch* from 12.30-2.30 on *Writing Britain: Wastelands to Wonderland*, an exhibition at the British Library which runs from 11th May-5th September, for which she has written the accompanying book.

**O**n *Thursday 5th July* we shall show the film of *They Knew Mr Knight*, Persephone Book No. 16, at the BFI 21 Stephen Street W1 at 2 o'clock, lunch will be served at 1 o'clock. (Please note: we can lend anyone who asks the dvd of *They Were Sisters* or *The Blank Wall – The Reckless Moment*.)

**O**n *Thursday 20th September* there will be a Persephone outing to *Bognor Regis* where RC Sherriff's *The Fortnight in September* is set. The walk will be led by the historian Juliet Gardiner, who wrote about RC Sherriff in *Slightly Foxed* and will write the Preface to RC Sherriff's



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*Greengates* in 2014. We shall meet for lunch at a café in Bognor, have our walk (about an hour and a half) and then have tea.

**O**n *Tuesday 25th September* Dr Zarrina Kurtz, an expert on child mental health, will talk at a *Lunch*. Her subject will be

*Doreen, Saplings* and *Miss Ranskill*: How did Wartime Experience affect Children?

**A** date for the diary: in celebration of our one hundredth book, the *Eighth Persephone Lecture* 'From William to Patience: What is a Persephone Book?' will be given by Nicola Beauman, Publisher Persephone Books, on *Thursday 22nd November* at 6.30 at Swedenborg Hall 20 Bloomsbury Way WC1.

**T**he two books for the Autumn, to be published on October 18th, will be *Patience* (1953) by John Coates, Persephone Book No. 99 and *The Persephone Book of Short Stories*, Persephone Book No. 100. We plan a readers party to celebrate our one hundredth book: details in the *October Biannually* and on the (new, redesigned) website. There will also be a *Persephone Diary* for 2013 containing all 100 endpapers. And in November, a 1957 Morris Traveller, filled with Persephone books, will tour the Midlands and West Country for a week! If you would like us to come to your local bookshop or reading group, for coffee or tea or to give a talk, do get in touch.

**T**he price of all Persephone events (except the two bookgroups in the shop, which are £10) is £20. Please ring the office in order to book a place.

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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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