

THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

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Girl Reading, 1932 (oil on canvas) by Harold Knight

Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston/DACS/Bridgeman Art Library

OUR SPRING 2006 BOOKS

P*rinces in the Land* by Joanna Cannan, our Spring 2006 novel, has the same theme as Persephone Book No. 41, *Hostages to Fortune*, a great Persephone favourite: it too is about a woman bringing up a family who is left at the end, when the children are on the verge of adulthood, asking herself not only what it was all for but what was her own life for? Yet the questions are asked subtly and readably. As *The Times Literary Supplement* wrote in 1938: 'Although Miss Cannan's new book raises many questions, she puts none of them herself; they grow inevitably out of her story and answer themselves. Patricia Crispin, the fatherless grandchild of Lord Waveney, is brought up with her pretty sister and her whining mother who rather deplores her plainness and lack of gentility. But the old Baron adores her, teaches her to ride and take her fences cleanly, and intends to make her wealthy at his death. He dies accidentally just as her engagement to a young, dour Scots professor is announced and Patricia is not wealthy at all.

She has fallen in love with Hugh because he had seemed to answer when she spoke, and she finds life with him in a Glasgow villa on a small income very difficult.

Three children are born, exacting from their mother the sacrifices and services inseparable from motherhood on a small income, but Patricia takes many fences gallantly and even stands smilingly the nagging and whining of Hugh, who has developed an inferiority complex towards her. An appointment to a professorship at Oxford cures his complex and changes him into a genial, vague and kindly scholar; Patricia is very happy in the old farmhouse they have bought on Cumnor Hill, where she can teach the children country ways and indulge her longing for a horse. August, the oldest boy, is destined for Sandhurst, a very unsubtle boy, friendly, devoted to his mother, passionately in love

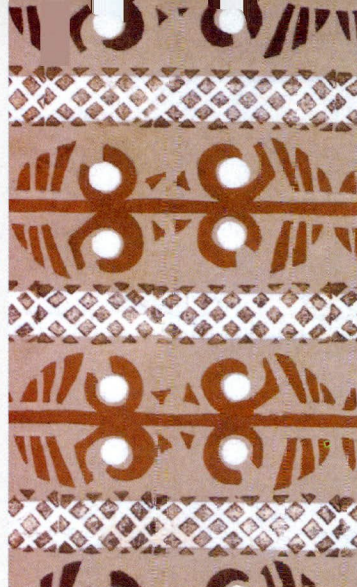
with the country things that are her life. Giles, kindly, rather cleverer than August, and Nicola the schoolgirl make up the family party, which seems ideally happy. Then comes catastrophe...'

Having shown us how everything is made bearable for Patricia if her children can be at the centre of her life and, more important (because she is not a selfish woman) if they grow up to fulfil her ideals, Joanna Cannan proceeds to show us her happiness being slowly destroyed. In *Princes in the Land* the tragedy of the book is that not only do none of the three children live up to their mother's expectations, she has to watch as each of them takes a path that is anathema to her. Yet of course, she can do nothing about it; nor, sensibly, does she try.

Joanna Cannan began writing early, and her first novel was published when she was 26 (by coincidence, at exactly the



'Horse's Head' 1938-9 by Lucienne Day, used for *Princes in the Land*



fabric design by Alma Ramsey-Hosking, used for *The Woman Novelist*

same age as Diana Gardner, our other March writer, was first published). From 1922 onwards she published a book a year for nearly forty years – novels; detective novels, including the very successful *Death at The Dog*, which is in print in America; and the first ‘pony’ book (first in the sense that the focus was on a pony-mad girl rather than a horse or pony), a genre that her daughters Josephine, Diana and Christine Pulein-Thompson were to make very much their own. *Princes in the Land* is about an interesting and rarely-discussed theme; it is also evocative about Oxford (which is why we are having a Persephone Lunch there to celebrate its republication). Joanna Cannan ‘lived enthusiastically’ and wrote novels that were ‘witty, satirical, even cynical. She presented clashes between idealists and materialists, with no easy solutions’ writes the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (making Joanna Cannan the twenty-fifth of our writers to have an entry in that great dictionary); this is the book of hers with a thematic bite that Persephone readers will find hard to forget.

We published ‘The House at Hove’, a short story by Diana Gardner, in the *Persephone Quarterly* no. 22 in the summer



Joanna Cannan just after her marriage in 1919

of 2004. It was widely admired and so we decided to bring out a selection of Diana Gardner’s other stories. She had published a collection in 1946, called *Halfway Down the Cliff*, but we have chosen to make a new selection, to omit some stories and to add one that has not been published before; and we decided to use this as the title story for *A Woman Novelist and*

Other Stories because its theme is so appropriate to Persephone Books. (It is reprinted in this quarterly.)

There are fourteen other stories in our collection, all extremely varied but all sharing a sharp, sardonic quality characteristic of Diana Gardner’s work. This sharpness may be the reason why she found it so difficult to get her stories accepted, something that was happening to the novelist Elizabeth Taylor at exactly the same period for the same reason: all the literary magazines then publishing short stories were edited by men, and they had definite and unrepentant ideas about both the subjects and tone that women should choose. But Diana always eschewed the obviously feminine. Several of the stories in *The Woman*

Novelist are about women behaving badly, and many of them are uncomfortable reading; all are acutely observant, in fact ‘The Splash’, a very short story about a young Nazi in the ‘30s (Diana had been on a walking holiday in Germany just before the war) was described by one reviewer as ‘being as good a portrait of a young Nazi as I have read’.

For a few years Diana Gardner remained unpublished – a notebook survives in which she recorded to whom she sent her manuscripts, who returned them and who, eventually, published them. Yet it is an interesting fact of literary history that she succeeded in being published in Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* in 1940, whereas Elizabeth Taylor was consistently rejected by him and would not be published at all for another four years, after endless rejections.

In fact two of Diana's stories were accepted in 1940, 'No Change', and 'The Land Girl', which was the one that appeared in *Horizon*. This was a turning-point for Diana: she now began to be seen as a 'coming' writer and became friends with writers and artists in and around Fitzrovia. 'The Land Girl' remained her best-known story, being reprinted in Anne Boston's 1988 selection of short stories by Second World War women writers, *Wave Me Goodbye*; and it was read on Radio 4 a few days before Diana's death in 1997.

After attending art school in London (where Mervyn Peake did the drawing, or more accurately

caricature, of her reproduced here) Diana went to live with her father in a cottage in Rodmell, where Virginia and Leonard Woolf also lived. She got to know



*Diana Gardner by Mervyn Peake, 1937,
in a private collection*

them and was a friend and comfort to Leonard after Virginia's death in 1941. (Diana's *Recollections of Rodmell* are to be published by Cecil Woolf in the near future.) In Sussex she went on writing short stories, and also did wood engravings (one was reproduced in the *PQ* that had her short story). After the war she worked in publishing, and in 1954 her first and only novel, *The Indian Woman* appeared.

But from the late 1960s onwards Diana concentrated on painting. As her niece Claire Gardner, who has written the Preface to

The Woman Novelist, commented in 1999, she was in fact in her seventies when 'she began photographing the start of the London to Brighton annual Veteran Car Run which sets out from Hyde Park, near where she lived, and from these photographs she created her watercolours of this event' (one of which is reproduced on p6; ten of Diana's watercolours of veteran cars hang in the RAC Club in Pall Mall).

But, in our view, the short story was her *forte* and her most long-lasting achievement. As the critic Walter Allen said in the *Spectator*: 'She

writes very well indeed; her observation is precise, she has a keen eye for colour, and she knows the value of understatement.' And the reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian* thought that she excelled 'in a distinctively modern medium in which the poetry and the prose of life, the fantastic, and the factual give spirit and substance to each other.'

OUR READERS WRITE

'*Doreen* is the first book for a long time that has kept me reading into the small hours. I've read many children's books about evacuees in the Second World War in which the endings are usually happy. It was interesting to read a novel that presents so clearly the viewpoint of the child, the parents and the host family and where the ending is ambivalent.' SR, Powys

'I wanted to drop you a line to say "thank you" to all at Persephone, a million million times, for resurrecting Lettice Cooper's *The New House*. I cannot understand why it was ever out of print and think that it comes as close as can be to such novels as *Mrs Dalloway*, except that I think it has more heart than Virginia Woolf ever showed. I read the scene with the children in the sand-pit over and over again.' CG, Winchester

'I had always intended to read *A London Child* but never got round to it. One thing that Adam Gopnik does not mention in his Preface (perhaps because he is a man) is the feeling of making the best out of the fact that she was a girl, and not allowed to go out on all the trips with the boys.' DM, Dover

'I found *The Hopkins Manuscript* riveting mainly

because of the character of the narrator which was the perfect foil for the melodrama (scientifically totally unbelievable, I adore the idea of the moon glancing off Cornwall for example) but also (and this is the richness of Persephone's selection so often) giving you a glimpse of another social world. Your choice of books is so varied yet unerringly on the pulse.' CS, Rye

'How lovely to be sent Norah Hoult's *There Were No Windows* – I sat down straight away & read it & loved it. It is so funny, even when it is sad, & so witty, even when it is cruel. It caught exactly that all-too-brief stage between a mind being perfectly sharp & then disintegrating – horrible when, like Mrs Temple, the person senses what is happening, later, the sensing goes, & it isn't so terrible, but the torture of being aware is so beautifully conveyed here.' Margaret Forster, Cumbria

'Thank you for sending me *There Were No Windows*, it is fantastic and I stayed up very late last night reading it.' Jonathan Self, Cork

'I loved the shop and have come home with a pile of books to read in Cape Town. I have so far read *They Were Sisters* which I

loved although I hated that man so much. It was, however, a wonderful insight into the lives of the sisters and I could not put it down. I felt as if I was eavesdropping on their lives. Each character was so finely drawn and so soundly portrayed.' EL, Cape Town

'*The Far Cry* is another great read! Emma Smith's evocative descriptions of that complex & beautiful country transported me with a great sense of immediacy. Her insights into her characters are revealing and honest and their different responses to their environment added depth and richness to the story.' JW, Western Australia

'*Someone at a Distance* is the first book I have read in a year, as my life is just too busy! I loved it, I luxuriated in it. Particularly, the side observations were so poignant. Thank you for reprinting it. Now I have to choose what book will follow.' DL, Cambridge

'I enjoyed *How to Run Your Home without Help* very much, although maybe enjoyment isn't quite the right word – exhaustion expresses my feelings much better! When did these women ever find time to read? A fascinating piece of social history.' LB, Australia

LITTLE BOY LOST ON R4'S 'A GOOD READ'

Julia Neuberger...This is a wonderful, wonderful novel, it's beautifully written, very sparsely written, I've always thought that ML writes like a dream but this one I think is the best novel of all of hers. The book opens with a man learning that his son is lost in wartime France in 1943, and the story then continues with him going on a search for this son and eventually finding, through a variety of routes, a little boy. But is this child actually his son?

Sue MacGregor: Paul, did you react to this book with pleasure or did you find it rather difficult to read because it's so sad?

Paul Farley: I didn't find it difficult to read at all, especially formally, it's got the most amazing narrative motor, it's a page turner, and I don't want to sound like an arch blurbist or anything, but it's unputdownable, it just trots along, very economical, very spare as Julia has said, utterly unsentimental as well, and the story, without spoiling it, just snaps shut on the very last page, it's an amazing end. There are all kinds of resonances in there as well, at one point a character called Pierre who has told Hilary about the possible existence of his little boy is almost acting as a kind of

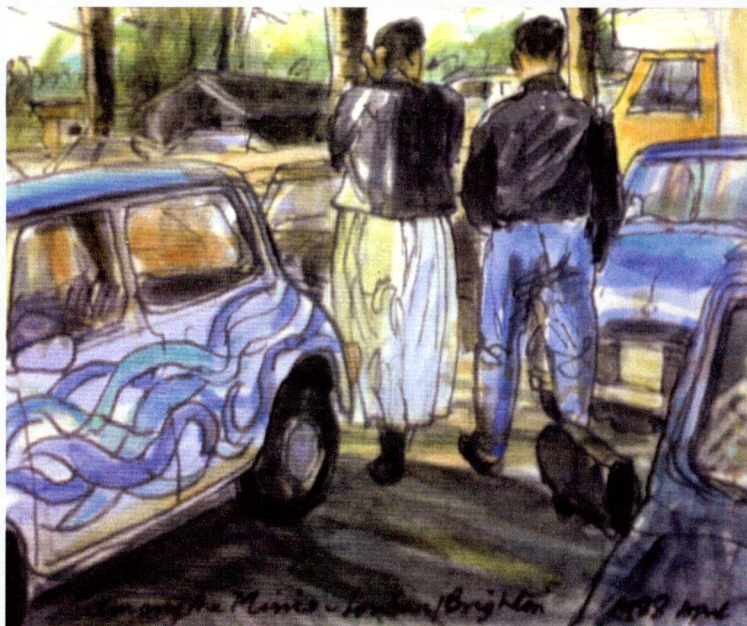
Virgil to Hilary's Dante in Paris and then you get the babies in the washerwoman's basket... And she's fantastic on interiors as well, an entire world refracted through distempered walls, brass bedsteads, and these sad institutional smells and rows of bookcases, marvellous stuff.

SM: I must say that I thought this was a wonderful book as well. The picture of the wounded in every sense but mainly psychological, the people of France post war, is very vivid and believable – a France of black markets and food shortages and, as was most of Europe post-war, of tens of thousands of either orphans or lost children, it's a heart-rending story.

JN: A lot of this is about his own feeling for a lost son and I think she spends quite a lot of time trying to work out what pity is and whether pity is different from compassion and whether he does feel any pity for this particular child whom he is not certain is his son.

SM: We've both agreed with Julia that it is a remarkable book. It is published these days by Persephone Books and regular listeners to this programme will know that Persephone books are in some good bookshops but it's probably best to find out about them from their website.

(The full text of this discussion is on our website.)



Chalk drawing by Diana Gardner, 1988

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

Norah Hoult's *There Were No Windows*, which is about the last years of Ford Madox Ford's lover Violet Hunt, was chosen as one of his *Spectator* books of the year by Alan Judd, Ford's biographer. He called it 'intelligent, unsparing, generous, ironic and funny... Written with nice social observation, it deals with sadness but it's not depressing.' In the *Glasgow Herald* Christopher Lee's books of the year were 'reprints from the wonderful Persephone Books: Marghanita Laski's *The Village*. Love life and station in life. Forget studious histories. Here's upstairs having to make do with downstairs. And *The Hopkins Manuscript*: nothing like his haunting play *Journey's End*. If you think global warming, then read it.' Amanda Craig in the *Independent* wrote that in 2005 she was 'astonished by the power and intelligence of *The Home-Maker* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, which tackles the issue of working mothers and the depression caused by thwarted female energies with brilliant perceptiveness.' Finally, in the *Guardian* Readers' Books of the Year, a reader from Belfast chose *Saplings*: 'Happy childhood holidays at the seaside are contrasted with the dispersal of the children to various relatives; they narrate their mother's nervous breakdown

and descent into alcoholism following their father's death. With endpapers by Marion Dorn evoking Matisse's decoupage, the volume is a triumph of content and form; a delight to read and treasure.'

Just before Christmas *How to Run Your Home without Help* was widely written about and reviewed. In 'Critic's Choice' in the *Daily Mail* Val Hennessy said: 'Dusters ahoy! For a laugh and a half, do read this gripping reprint... of a slice of social history which unwittingly offers a fascinatingly detailed picture of the household duties and everyday skills once expected of women. The tedious lives of our mothers and grandmothers are wonderfully revealed in her pages, and, as we read, we experience uncomfortable little twinges of shame about our own slovenly attitude to house-keeping.' In the *Independent* Christina Patterson called *How to Run Your Home* 'a salutary, and comic, reminder of an age when wifely duties were as strong to your house as your husband', while the *Church Times* described it as 'another delight from Persephone Books'.

A London Child of the 1870s was given a 5-star review in *Metro*. Nina Caplan called it 'not a story of Victorian repression but a

joyous recounting of a delightful childhood... Molly Hughes is lively and unassuming, allowing for neither boredom nor condescension.'

In the *Guardian* Matthew Fort wrote about *Kitchen Essays* 'conjuring up a bygone world of "Country friends to a Christmas shopping luncheon", "Food for artists and speakers" and "Batchelors entertaining", dispensing sound advice, wisdom and eminently practical recipes along the way.'

Benjamin Pogrand in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* called *The World that Was Ours* 'an exceptional book when it first appeared which is even more so now, offering a personal, contemporaneous account of the lives of anti-apartheid activists... It will endure as a finely written record of the moment-by-moment courage that went into opposition to apartheid.'

In a long and charming article about Persephone Books in the *Ottawa Citizen* (and other syndicated Canadian newspapers) Jamie Portman wrote about 'a bookshop unlike any other in London – and it's the public face of a publishing firm unique in the English-speaking world.'

THE PERSEPHONE 64

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

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

3. Someone at a Distance by Dorothy Whipple: 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*) about the tragic destruction of a formerly happy marriage (pub. 1953). Preface: Nina Bawden

4. Fidelity by Susan Glaspell: 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning author brilliantly describing the 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 young woman in Amsterdam, 'the Anne Frank for grown-ups', wrote diaries and letters which 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' 80 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 were read on R4. Preface: Gregory LeStage

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

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

11. Julian Grenfell by Nicholas Mosley: A biography of the First World War poet,

and of his mother Ettie Desborough. Preface: author

12. It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life by Judith Viorst: Funny, wise and weary 1960s poems about marriage, children and reality. Preface: 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: 1947 short stories which were twice in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list; they are funny, observant and bleak. Preface: AN Wilson

16. Saplings by Noel Streatfeild: An adult novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes*, about the destruction of a family during WW1; 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; now 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. Preface: Terence Handley MacMath

20. A Woman's Place by Ruth Adam: A survey of C20th women's lives, 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 night-club singer.

Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; French translation shortly. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin

22. Consider the Years by Virginia Graham: Sharp, funny, evocative WWII 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 patriarchs 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 1945, chosen by the *Guardian*'s Nicholas Lezard as his 2001 Paperback Choice. A 'Book at Bedtime'. Afterword: Anne Sebba

29. The Making of a Marchioness by Frances Hodgson Burnett: A wonderfully entertaining 1901 novel about the melodrama when a governess marries well. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina

30. Kitchen Essays by Agnes Jekyll: Witty and useful essays about cooking, with recipes, published in *The Times* and reprinted as a book in 1922. 'This is one of the best reads outside Eliz-abeth 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 WW11. 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. '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, admired by TS Eliot.
- 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, much admired by Virginia Woolf. Preface: Frances Partridge. *Also read on two cassettes 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 (daughter of the author)
- 40. The Priory** by Dorothy Whipple: A much-loved 1939 novel about three generations of a family, and their servants, living in a large country house. 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 who shields her daughter from a blackmailer, filmed as both *The Reckless Moment* in 1949 and *The Deep End* in 2001.
- 43. The Wise Virgins** by Leonard Woolf: This is a wise and witty 1914 novel contrasting 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 and unsettling 1949 stories, a surprise favourite, that are unusually beautiful written; read on R4 in 2003. Preface: Frances Thomas
- 45. Good Food on the Aga** by Ambrose Heath: A 1932 cookery book for Aga users which can nevertheless 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 wartime England. Preface: Wendy Pollard
- 47. The New House** by Lettice Cooper: 1936 portrayal of the day a family moves to a new house, and the resulting tensions and adjustments. 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 1930s writer chronicling the life of a hard-working and kindly London architect 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 escape 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 Memmery** by Ruby Ferguson: A romantic 1937 novel about Lady Rose Targenet, who inherits a great house, marries well – and then meets the love of her life on a park bench. Preface: Candia McWilliam
- 54. They Can't Ration These** by Vicomte de Mauduit: A 1940 cookery book about 'food for free', full of excellent (and now fashionable) recipes.
- 55. Flush** by Virginia Woolf: A light-hearted but surprisingly feminist 1933 'life' of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel, 'a little masterpiece of comedy' (*TLS*). Preface: Sally Beaman
- 56. They Were Sisters** by Dorothy Whipple: The fourth Persephone book by this wonderful writer, a 1943 novel that contrasts three very different marriages. Preface: Celia Brayfield
- 57. The Hopkins Manuscript** by RC Sherriff: What might happen if the moon crashed into the earth in 1946: 1939 science fiction 'written' by 'Mr Hopkins'. Preface: Michael Moorcock, Afterword: the late 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: the late 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 autobiography, 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 humorous. 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 turn out very differently from how she had hoped.
- 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

'THE WOMAN NOVELIST'

BY DIANA GARDNER

Madeleine finished dressing by the open window, looking down onto the garden. It was not yet seven, but she knew that the day was going to be hot, cloudless and unchanging, because of the vivid, almost unnatural green of the trees on the far edge of the dew-damp lawn. Nothing moved anywhere – except a blackbird, whose tail pitched like a see-saw as it alighted on a stone in the Flemish garden.

She paused, her hairbrush threaded into her dark, soft hair. The Flemish garden! It was bright yellow with charlock. Wykham should have tidied it – there were things that he had undertaken to do at weekends, and during his vacations from the law school – but he had not done so. There were, in fact, other things that he had not done.

He lay now, behind her in the room, in the bed nearest the wall. He still slept.

She felt suddenly despondent, although it was so early in the day. She often felt this nowadays, losing, as she did so, the glory of these summer mornings. Such small things, too, sent her skimming down. To keep the seven of them going – herself and Wykham, the three children,

and the two old ladies, Wykham's mother and her mother, whose contributions barely covered the rent – allowed no chance for anyone to slip up on their job. If anyone did that, she could not then carry on with hers, and it was by her work that they lived. Including Wykham. His state grant on leaving the Army barely covered his expenses in London, where he was studying for the Bar.

This last week he had been on vacation, and had spent it reading in his 'study', the old morning-room – was he reading law books or those green and white paperbacks which later she found imbedded in dust in the garbage-bin? – or visiting in the neighbourhood, which was remote enough to contain still a few of the orthodox, but ruined, and beginning to be faintly ridiculous, gentry, who made him feel – as he was handed a glass of brandy by a white-haired squire resembling his late father – that he counted somewhere in the world, that there was a place still for his 'type'. How he enjoyed this, Madeleine thought, softening. At those times, he would become vivid and alive, almost visibly becoming heavier – he was thin – and looking handsome in an old-fashioned

way. She turned from the window and finished doing her hair. That was the sort of life Wykham ought always to live. He ought to have been born a hundred years before.

Her helplessness returned. She leaned one hand on the window-sill, her long, slim body twisted and drooping.

But then she thought of the book she was working on. Last week it had taken a new, interesting turn. It had come strongly to life. Her spirits rose. Those two and a half hours in the afternoon, when the children were at school, and the two old ladies, the mothers-in-law, were withdrawn, resting in their bedrooms, were hers – hers for herself. Some of the joy of those hours now came to her. Her oval, nearly beautiful face – it had a small twist to it, so that the centre of her slightly pointed chin was not in line with the middle of her forehead – which, when first she had gone to the mirror, had been pinched and pale, was now filled out and glowing. She could carry on – the family was secure – if she were certain of those two and a half precious hours.

She went out onto the landing. It seemed very empty, and was bright, whitely bright, as if in

some way it had been gutted by the night. She went into the children's rooms. Only the younger boy was still asleep. Robert and Jenny were already sitting up in bed, looking at books. She told them to get up and dress. She then went downstairs to the large, cool kitchen, let out the tortoiseshell cat, lit the Calor stove, and put on the kettle. The daylight grew stronger, less ethereal and exquisite; the ordinary day proceeded to arrive. A tractor began to climb, as if in pain, up the short hill, which rose beyond the edge of the garden.

Madeleine then thought of Beryl, her twenty-year-old help from two miles away down the valley. At half-past eight she would come, as fresh-cheeked as if she had collected dew on the way, on her bicycle, and with her fair hair crisp and shining, and scarcely out of place. Madeleine thought of her with a gratitude, deep and tender, like love. It was love. For how could she have managed without her? And she was always capable, willing, reliable. She seemed to like working out here at the White House – this old half-mansion among the untidy, farming acres.

As Madeleine made toast and fried the bacon, she heard her mother, Mrs Grinling, coming down the stairs – slowly, because of her rheumatics – to help. The tractor now turned at the bottom of the hill for a second ascent. What had the farmer planned for this morning, out there? Madeleine wondered, idly. It was too early for hay-making. Could

it be ploughing? She scraped fat into the frying-pan and went and joined her mother in the dining-room. Mrs Grinling always laid the breakfast-table, but slowly and painfully, because of her stiff joints. The first child, Jenny, now came downstairs.

During the meal, the youngest, Timothy, spilt his milk; Jenny was gay and too talkative – she was taking anemones to her form-mistress, with whom she was in love. Robert ate his bacon contentedly. Thank goodness, Madeleine thought, they could all now dress themselves. But what, she wondered, would their rooms be like?

Afterwards, she and the old, white-haired lady watched them ride off on their bicycles down the long, white, empty road. There was little traffic in that part of the world, even in the small country town containing the school, so that they could be fairly trusted. The two women then returned to the house – Mrs Grinling to the dining-room for her last, private cup of tea and a brief look at her son-in-law's newspaper, and Madeleine to the kitchen. The warm May wind came soothingly, freshly, through the window – open – above the stone sink. She would have liked to do nothing more in the house all that day, but to have gone out into the garden and to have sat under the beech trees, thinking about, and working out, her novel. But she had still much to do, to get through. Her next job was to prepare breakfast for the other old lady, Mrs Filmer, Wykham's mother.

She took it, with a letter, into the downstairs bedroom, which had once been the drawing-room of the house, and had an ornate, moulded ceiling. Mrs Filmer had furnished it with large, late-Georgian furniture from the country house where she had been born. The old lady, her hair a faint blue-white, in neat, flat waves under an invisible hair-net, was sitting up in her mahogany bed, holding in readiness a silver paper-knife.

'Good morning, my dear', she said, brightly, 'I hope you slept well, and that the children have gone off safely.' She used the same words every morning.

'Yes, thank you, mama,' Madeleine answered, as usual.

She drew back the brocade curtains. On the path under the window a tricycle lay on its side over a crushed white, lidless shoe-box and some old tennis balls. She ought to have put them away last night, and not left it to the children. On this side of the house, the garden was even more neglected. Her despondency returned. If only Wykham would fulfil his promises! She leaned on the window-sill, and looked through the foliage of the trees, at the cornfield beyond. Why, she mused, had this large white house been built right out here, in the first place? Whose vision had started it all off? They had heard of it – to let cheap – through an ex-Army friend of Wykham's. And how enormous it was! The rooms had been designed for large house-parties, even balls: and yet it belonged to

no especial period. She wondered how long they would be able to afford to live here. Her heaviness increased.

But once more she remembered her work, and the solace it brought her – as well as the money it earned. Again, she grew cheerful. Today she would work out in the conservatory, instead of, as was customary, in the dining-room. No one ever went there. She would be undisturbed. And the trees, having grown up round it, cooled it off. She would use the white painted bamboo table, and leave the door open so that, from time to time, she could look out onto the garden.

She turned back to her mother-in-law, whom she had almost forgotten.

The old lady smiled brilliantly, and said charmingly, but without sincerity – she was already returning to her letter – as she left the room: ‘Now dear, you’re to let me know if I can do anything to help you.’

Out in the sunny kitchen, Madeleine found Beryl putting on her snow-white overall. She was, as Madeleine had expected to see her, fresh, cheerful, neat – even elegant. She lived with her grandmother in a brick cottage beside the canal, in the nearby town.

‘Good morning, Mrs Filmer.’ Beryl’s eyes were admiring and kind.

Together they cleared the breakfast-table – except for Wykham’s things, which were left for him to enjoy peacefully. While on vacation, he never

came down before ten. Beryl then started the washing-up, while Madeleine went upstairs to tidy the children’s rooms. Passing Wykham’s and her bedroom, she went in. He lay on his back, wide awake, staring at the ceiling. He was unusually good-looking, with a square jaw, deep-set blue eyes, and black, curly hair. He smiled at her, showing his flawless teeth.

She felt brighter. When he greeted her like this, she always felt warmed, soothed.

But then, through the window, as she turned her head, she saw once more the charlock choking the Flemish garden. She thought desperately: What a pity he has not cleared it, as he promised.

‘I suppose I had better get up,’ he muttered, feeling that she had accused him of lying in bed.

‘And I must get on with my housework,’ she said, flatly, going to the door.

He sat up and scratched his back with his thumbs, under his striped pyjama jacket. As she passed him she drew her hand lightly over his hair. He caught at her wrist, smiling.

She went to the children’s rooms. As she had expected, they were in vivid, elemental disorder. The sun poured over them through the enormous square windows. Each child seemed to have left something of its own personality in all three rooms. Particularly Jenny. Madeleine could almost hear her high, eager and faintly irritating voice, as she went in. How unconcerned they all were by their parents’ struggle to feed

and educate them! She collected up their soiled underclothing. Tomorrow she and Beryl would have a big wash-day. She then ran the Ewbank over the threadbare, almost paper-thin Oriental rugs, which Wykham’s mother had once given them.

When, finally, she went downstairs, Beryl was already preparing the lunch. Peeled potatoes lay, transparent-looking, in a bowl of water; cabbage leaves glistened under the tap. Beryl had also thoroughly ‘done out’ the dining-room, the hall, and the drawing-room – where Mrs Grinling now sat at the desk, writing a letter. Old Mrs Filmer had not yet appeared. She did not usually arrive until lunchtime. Wykham must have gone already to his study.

Madeleine took a basket, and went out into the garden, to pick rhubarb, and a lettuce for salad. While out there she would transplant some of the young lettuces from the frame. She wished that Wykham could have been out there with her, that they could have had a little time alone together, as in the old days. But it would not have been right: she must not ask for it. She must do nothing to prevent him from one day getting to the Bar.

Wykham came and stood at the french window of the study, with his hands in his pockets. He found it almost impossible to concentrate these bright mornings. He wanted to go over again to see Colonel Clavering, at Place House. Would

Madeleine mind; would the Colonel be in? He watched the white butterflies fluttering above the charlock in the Flemish garden. It was his mother who had called it the 'Flemish' garden. Very like her. Such big ideas still, when for so long she had possessed nothing more impressive than a downstairs bed-sitting-room.

He supposed, he thought idly, that he ought to have cleared out that charlock weeks ago. Now that he remembered, hadn't he promised Madeleine that he would do so?

At twelve, Madeleine returned to the house. Beryl was rolling the pastry for the rhubarb pie. Together, they built up the lunch; fish for Mrs Filmer, salad for Mrs Grinling; 'solid' food for Wykham. The children took theirs at school. They worked silently and steadily. The kitchen felt peaceful, industrious. Once, Mrs Grinling came out to the kitchen for water for some flowers. Madeleine and she then laid the table for lunch.

When she heard the one o'clock time signal coming from the library Madeleine untied her apron, and went in there. Both the old ladies were there, trying to make conversation. At all other times of the day, they avoided each other. Wykham, in his new dark-grey flannel suit, was standing up reading aloud the label on a sherry bottle.

'I couldn't find the brown glasses, darling,' he said, to Madeleine, 'so I've used those.'

He pointed to a brandy glass

on the spinet. With dismay, she saw that a ring of sherry had formed on the polished wood, showing white. Could it be removed? she wondered, anxiously.

But suddenly she decided that she would no longer mind so much about things like that. The most important thing was to get lunch over so that she could get to her novel. Was this progress: or was she growing old? She did not know. She sat down.

Wykham raised his glass. 'To all the Filmers,' he said, smiling. Mrs Grinling tried, with a self-effacing smile, to feel included.

After lunch, Madeleine and Beryl washed up swiftly, for at half-past two, Beryl had to go. They then prepared the children's tea, spreading it out on the great kitchen table. With every five minutes that passed, Madeleine's heart lifted: soon she would be working at her book.

At twenty-past two there were still a few small jobs to be done in the kitchen.

'I'll do them,' said Beryl. 'You go and get started, Mrs Filmer.'

Madeleine hesitated, but the determined understanding in the girl's clear eyes destroyed argument. She went to the dining-room, and collected her folder from the window-seat. An idea for the book's next sequence was already bubbling, like a fountain under pressure: clear images were waiting to be fixed on paper. But she must hurry. She was almost perspiring.

On her way through the hall,

she met Wykham, standing, undecided, at the front door.

'Thought I might do a bit in the garden,' he said, vaguely. He hoped that she would make up his mind for him. He was still wondering whether or not to go over to Colonel Clavering. If he gardened, he would have to change his clothes.

'It's very hot,' she said, 'If you do, perhaps you ought to wear a hat.'

He half-barred her way, about to put his arm round her, but she would not stop. At this moment, she could give no more time to anyone.

She walked round the great, pale house – to the conservatory, which looked out onto a deserted part of the garden. The door was jammed. She pushed it hard, and it ground open, scraping over the tiled floor. Inside, it was hot and airless. For thirty years nothing had been cultivated there and the heating grills were rusted through. Entering, she felt as if she had stepped into another, earlier time.

She pulled the bamboo table up to the open door, so that, while working, she could feel the summer air on her bare arms. She sat down swiftly, and opened out her folder.

Wykham decided, in the end, to clear the Flemish garden. He turned up his trousers at the ankles. They'd be all right like that, surely! He then went out to the garage, to fetch a fork. If only he'd tackled the job a fortnight ago, when the ground

was softer. Today, he'd probably break the fork.

The garage was crammed. Under a dust-sheet was a car, wheel-less, blocked-up. He had bought it with the idea of one day making it go. On all sides were garden tools and children's toys. He had to climb over a pile of tomato boxes, to get at the fork.

He then saw Beryl's bicycle against the wall. Like herself, it was gleaming, bright, new, and he felt a sudden surge of admiration, envy, for her, which came to him now frequently, when he saw her. Whatever she did, she did so well. Success for her seemed certain. He sought for the fork in a group of rusted garden tools.

Just after half-past two, Beryl came out. She had folded up her white overall to put in the bicycle basket. She did not see Wykham deep in the garage, watching her. He kept very still. How fresh and clean she is, he thought. More like a smart dentist's assistant, than a house-help.

He half-lent against the covered car, to watch her better. Without meaning to, he moved a bucket.

She started.

'I didn't know you were there, sir.'

Without speaking, still watching her, he came forward, climbing slowly over the tomato boxes. Again he was thinking: How fresh she is.

She stood, seeing his approach, as if transfixed.

He was now very near her. Suddenly, thoughtlessly, he

leaned forward and gently took hold of her wrist. She was surprised, looking at him in the eyes. Slowly and deliberately, he bent and kissed her on the mouth.

She stepped back, her blue eyes steady and reproving.

'No, Mr Filmer,' she said. 'Not that. I'm not here for that. I'm here to help Mrs Filmer.'

He looked down, foolishly.

'You ought not to do that, you know,' she went on, as if speaking to a child.

He now spoke quickly: 'I'm extremely sorry. I can't think what came over me.'

'That's all right then,' she answered, stern, still reproving.

Under his thick, rather pale skin he looked hot, awkward. He helped her wheel her bicycle out of the garage. He watched her get up on it.

'Goodbye, sir'.

'Goodbye, Beryl,' he said.

She rode out into the lane.

He turned back nervously, to get the fork.

He was suddenly deeply worried. Supposing that Beryl, after this, gave notice? What, then, would happen to them? Madeleine depended on Beryl – or else she could not write – and the rest of them, including himself, depended on Madeleine, and Madeleine's writing. He must do nothing, must never do anything that might make Beryl not want to come to the house. He ought to have thought of this before.

And when, he wondered, would he be able to earn enough to support this family of his and

Madeleine's? Fear cut through him. He felt small, young, doomed. During the war he had felt like this sometimes.

He searched among the tools. He had better hurry up and clear the charlock from the Flemish garden.

On the far side of the house, everything was deeply still; the conservatory was enfolded by silence. In that detached, blazing hour after lunch even the birds were withdrawn, not moving, or visible, and the tractor which, all morning, had droned on the hill was now quiet.

Madeleine looked at her manuscript. This next section was going to be the most difficult and involved, and the most significant. How would her two central characters – the man and the woman – come together again? If she could get this next part to go right, the rest would follow. Surely she could do it; surely she had the power? The answer was very near the surface of her mind. She must let her mind go free, so that she could pick it up.

She looked up, letting her gaze wander out on the garden. Her thoughts then left the book and she unexpectedly thought of Wykham and Beryl. She believed that Wykham liked Beryl. He often grew quiet when he joined them in the kitchen, and stood, staring at her, his blue eyes dense and dark. She knew his tendency to admire twenty-year-olds, she thought wryly. Was this likely to grow less, or to develop? she wondered. But out here, she was

without anxiety about the idea. She could review it calmly. Yet what would happen if Wykham were to make a pass at Beryl? What would Beryl do? She felt then, almost instantly, as she looked down at the white sheet of paper in front of her, that she had such trust in Beryl, and the girl's common-sense – that Beryl, apart from her loyalty to her, Madeleine, had some plan in life which would not be deflected by the passing advances of the husband of her employer – that she could not feel anxious about this. It was more likely that Beryl would leave, if Wykham got fresh. She was only out here because she liked it, and liked working for Madeleine. But if Beryl were no longer here to help her, the fat would be on the fire. Then her

troubles would really start. For it was almost impossible to get help so far out. What would she do? For a moment, she felt helpless, lost, almost trembling. She wondered how she would be able to go on with her book.

And for all she knew, Wykham might at this very moment be making those passes at Beryl. They were alone on that side of the house. She had left him, half-amorous, at the door. What a risk she had taken!

But she looked again at her work, at the open folder and the white page, and her old strength came back. She always had this – to earn money, to keep the family going. Somehow they would survive by it, whatever happened. Even if Wykham did not get to the Bar for years. Even if Beryl

went away. She could cope – if she had this.

She heard then a bee humming against the glass in the depths of the conservatory, and got up to lift it in her handkerchief, and let it go free through the door. It flew off, vivid with relief. She returned to her bamboo chair, and sat down – its creaking was the only sound in the silence. She knew now how to go on; how to link up her characters. Yes, this was right. Such and such would follow; and so on. She took up her pen and began to write swiftly, without pausing.

A beam of sunlight, striking through a break in the clouded glass above her head, struck across the white page.

MAY WEDDERBURN CANNAN 'LAMPLIGHT' (1917)

We planned to shake the world together, you and I,
Being young, and very wise;
Now in the light of the green shaded lamp
Almost I see your eyes
Light with the old gay laughter; you and I
Dreamed greatly of an Empire in those days,
Setting our feet upon laborious ways,
And all you asked of fame
Was crossed swords in the Army List,
My Dear, against your name.

We planned a great Empire together, you and I,
Bound only by the sea;
Now in the quiet of a chill Winter's night
Your voice comes hushed to me
Full of forgotten memories: you and I
Dreamed great dreams of our future in those days,
Setting our feet on undiscovered ways,

And all I asked of fame
A scarlet cross on my breast, my Dear,
For the swords by your name.

We shall never shake the world together, you and I,
For you gave your life away;
And I think my heart was broken by war,
Since on a summer day
You took the road we never spoke of: you and I
Dreamed greatly of an Empire in those days;
You set your feet upon the Western ways
And have no need of fame –
There's a scarlet cross on my breast, my Dear,
And a torn cross with your name.

*May Wedderburn Cannan, a noted First World War poet,
was Joanna Cannan's sister*

FINALLY

It has taken us a few weeks to recover from the excitement of *How to Run Your Home without Help* becoming a little bestseller. It was written about widely, featured on both 'Des and Mel' and on BBC Breakfast and extracts were run in the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*. The latter also commissioned two journalists to write about it, one of them, Carol Midgeley, being persuaded to live for a week according to the book's precepts. She discovered that 'to have any chance of adhering to the manual's exacting standards you must haul yourself out of bed no later than 6 am each day and, if you're taking it seriously, you won't stop until 10 pm.'

There are links to articles like this on our website as well as on our Letter from Lamb's Conduit Street on the 1st and the 15th of each month; and occasionally we send out an email letter. The last was about the Persephone Clothes, which have now arrived. They are in the fabric used on the endpaper for *The Far Cry* by Emma Smith and we have an apron (£20), a pinny (£30) and a dressing-gown in a matching bag (£40). There is also a grey jacket, lined with the fabric, which is £65 and comes in S, M and L. It needs to be tried on and therefore can only be bought from the shop; everything else can be sent for £3 extra. Also in the shop we have the

Persephone mugs, the Persephone book bag, and the Fifty Books We Wish We Had Published. And don't forget the cassette of *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* read by Miriam Margolyes (this will soon be available on a cd as well).



Primavera: house decoration in Pompeii, Museo Nazionale, Naples

There are two forthcoming **Persephone Events:** on Wednesday 29th March there will a celebration of Joanna Cannan's *Princes in the Land* in Oxford, where it is set. A three course lunch with wine will be served at the Cotswold Lodge Hotel, 66A Banbury Road, and during coffee the writers Lyndall Gordon and Charlie Lee-Potter, both Oxford residents and both great supporters of Persephone Books, will be in discussion about the book and about the Oxford

novel in general. (It is hoped that Joanna Cannan's daughter Josephine Pullein-Thompson will be able to join us.) A free copy of the book will be sent to all those coming to the lunch, the cost of which is £38. Then on Thursday 27th April at 1.45 there will be a showing at the BFI 21 Stephen Street W1 (two minutes north of Tottenham Court Road tube station) of *The Reckless Moment*, the 1949 film of *The Blank Wall* by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding. This is to celebrate the book's forthcoming serialisation on Radio 4. A sandwich lunch will be served at 1 o'clock, and tea at 3.30; the cost is £28.

Our June 2006 books are *Alas, Poor Lady*, a 1937 novel by the former suffragette Rachel Ferguson about the miseries endured by the daughters in a family whose parents do not think it 'worth' educating the girls to earn their own living. And *Gardener's Nightcap* by the well-known poet Muriel Stuart, a fascinating 1938 book about gardening with delightful Rex Whistler-type illustrations: an excellent present for the summer weekend guest to give to their gardening host.

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

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