



# The Persephone Biannually

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Tel: +44 20 7242 9292

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*'The Felixstowe to Ipswich Coach' c. 1940 by Russell Sidney Reeve (1895-1970) © Ipswich Borough Council Museum and Galleries /The Bridgeman Art Library*



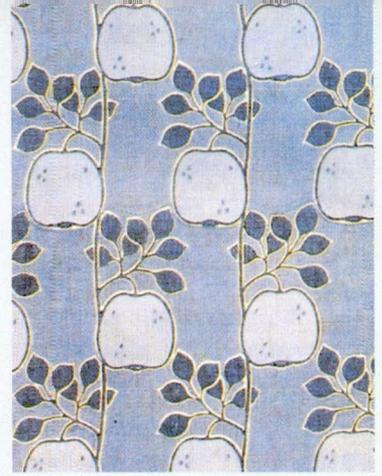
# OUR AUTUMN & WINTER 2007 BOOKS

**T**he *Young Pretenders* (1895) by Edith Henrietta Fowler (1865-1944) is Persephone Book No.73. It is a children's book whose sophistication, humour and ironies are nowadays appreciated by both children (aged about 9-13) and adults. In this respect it resembles *The Children who Lived in a Barn*, Persephone Book No.27, and *The Runaway*, Persephone Book No. 37. It also shares some of the themes of these two books: a child is without her parents and the world of adults in which she has to fend for herself is a harsh one.

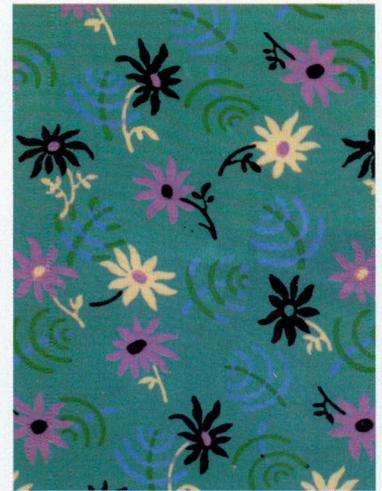
**B**abs in *The Young Pretenders* is too young to run away, as does Olga in *The Runaway*, or to take charge of her siblings, which is what Susan does in *The Children who Lived in a Barn*. At first she lives most contentedly in a large house in the country with her grandmother, her nanny and her brother (their parents are in 'Inja'). Then their grandmother dies and they are sent to live in Kensington with their uncle and his wife. Having run wild in the country, spent hours with the gardener (very like the gardener in *The Secret Garden*) and had a great deal to do and to think about, suddenly they are

abandoned in a world of artifice and convention and are expected to behave artificially and conventionally. 'It all came of so much pretending. But then it was simply impossible for the children not to pretend. It would have been so dull to have lived their child lives only as the little Conways, when they might be pretending that they were such exciting things as soldiers or savages, cab-horses or mice.'

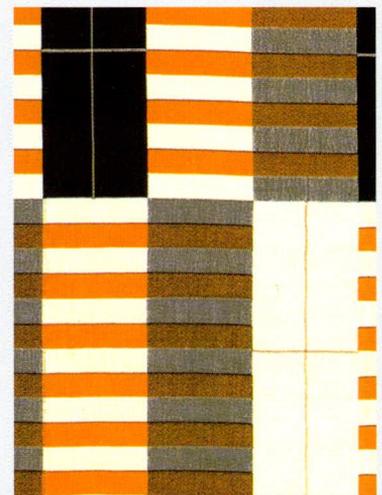
**B**abs cannot, of course, stop playing, and the central theme of the book is that she has not learned how to dissemble (as opposed to playing 'let's pretend') but must learn how to do so. *The Young Pretenders* 'is written from a child's point of view,' writes Charlotte Mitchell in her Persephone Preface, 'and all the villains are grown-ups...its targets are the casual crimes committed by adults against children.' Edith Henrietta Fowler comments about Babs: 'She was not nearly as happy and merry now as she used to be. Constant snubbings were beginning to dim the brightness of her child-nature, and the still stronger element of fear which had crept into her life cast a black shadow across many of the once-cheerful every-days.'



*'Apples' by Lindsay P Butterfield, 1895, for The Young Pretenders*



*A 1930s dress fabric used for The Closed Door and Other Stories*



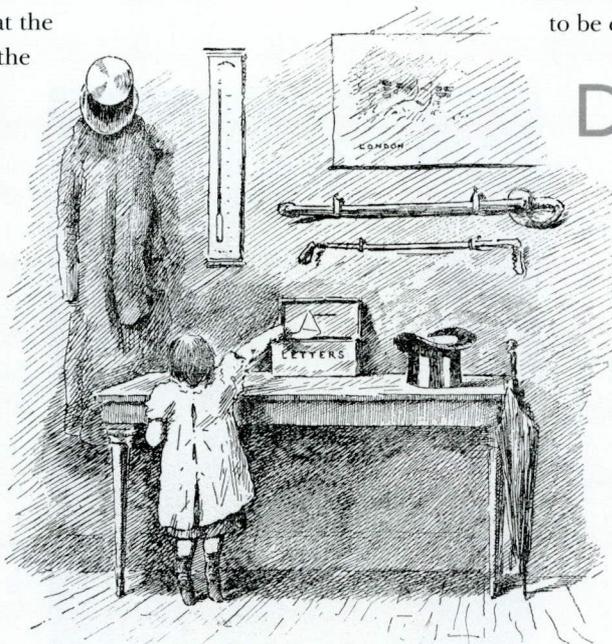
*A 1926 Bauhaus wall hanging by Anni Albers used for On the Other Side*

But, as Charlotte Mitchell adds, this is not a solemn book, on the contrary, 'its great characteristic is a gay malicious irony' as Babs misunderstands the adult world and fails to conform to adult norms. 'As anyone who has tried to bring up children knows, you spend a good deal of time teaching them to be insincere, to simulate gratitude or contrition, and not to repeat other people's comments at the wrong moments. Many of the jokes depend on the fact that Babs has yet to learn these lessons.' Here is an extract:

'Aunt Eleanor put on a tea-gown, and threw herself down on the sofa. "I feel so wretchedly ill!" she exclaimed petulantly, "these hot days give me such a headache!" "Do you fink you'll get better or die?" asked Babs with interest. "She is the most unfeeling child I ever saw!" thought her aunt – but aloud she said snappishly: "Of course I shall get better!" "I'm so glad!" Just then a telegram was brought in asking Mrs Conway to dine with some people in a friendly way and go with them to their box at the opera afterwards. The headache vanished as if by magic. "A hansom!" said their uncle to the butler. "Good-night, little people!" [he said] patting their heads. Uncle Charley always

treated the children as if they were dogs – not prize ones of course – but nice commonplace dogs, who occasionally were brought out of their kennels for a treat.'

The focus, and the star, of *The Young Pretenders* is Babs. She is intelligent, fun, kind, lively and honest and it is hard to think of a heroine in



"I MIGHT POST ONE OF THOSE."

*From The Young Pretenders*

children's fiction (that is, fiction written for children but enjoyed equally as much by adults) who is like her. Her most touching characteristic is her openness and her complete lack of fear. "What was we naughty about?" she asks her brother after their uncle scolds them: 'The children could not know that some very persistent tradesmen had insisted on immediate payment of their

bills.' When the news comes from India that they have a new sister Babs thinks of a name for her – Mrs Brown. Her aunt slaps her down, saying that it's not a name but Babs persists, "It is, I know it is, 'cause nurse has a sister-in-law what's called it." Then she 'began to think so hard that she refused a second helping of pudding' eventually announcing, to renewed scorn, that "I'd like her to be called Strawberry Jam."

Dorothy Whipple would have been very familiar with the themes of *The Young Pretenders* – the selfishness of the adults, their unkind treatment of children, the untamed but well-meaning friendliness of the child – and she made them very much her own in her novels and in her short stories. The ten short stories in *The Closed Door and Other Stories*, Persephone Book No. 74, are a selection we have made from the

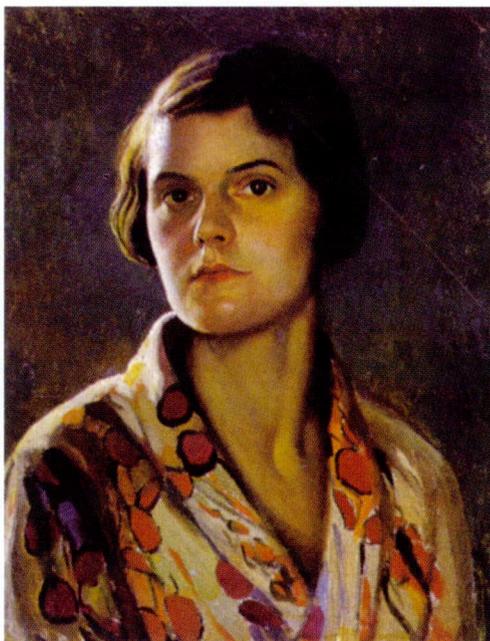
three volumes of stories that she published in her lifetime: *On Approval* in 1935, *After Tea and Other Stories* in 1941 and *Wednesday and Other Stories* in 1961. Five of them are to be read on BBC Radio 4 from 22-26 October: 'The Handbag', 'Family Crisis', 'Wednesday', 'Summer Holiday' and 'Cover'.

There can be few people reading this *Persephone Biannually* who are new to Dorothy Whipple, who is one of the stars of our list, so most will recognise the themes explored in her novels. One of the reasons we know that Avery and Ellen (in *Someone at a Distance*) are good parents is that they speak to their children with courtesy and interest – they would never treat them as ‘dogs’, even puppies. Indeed one of the very worst things about Geoffrey in *They Were Sisters* is that he is cruel to puppies.

Dorothy Whipple's key theme – it is one with which most *Persephone* readers will (we hope) identify profoundly – is ‘Live and Let Live’. And what she describes throughout her short stories are people, and particularly parents, who defy this maxim. For this reason her work is timeless, like all great writing. It is irrelevant that Dorothy Whipple's novels were set in an era when middle-class women expected to have a maid; when fish knives were used for eating fish; when children did what they were told. The moral universe she creates has not changed: there are bullies in every part of society; people try their best but often fail; they would like to be unselfish but sometimes are greedy.

Like George Eliot, like Mrs Gaskell, like EM Forster, Dorothy Whipple describes men

and women in their social milieu, which in her case is the inter-war period, and shows them being all-too human. But her books are not nostalgia reads either, any more than reading George Eliot or Forster is a nostalgia read, nor are they old-fashioned or simplistic. We do not read *A Room with a View* because we want to go to Florence when there were still hansom cabs, or come back to a Surrey where the grocer's boy delivers. We read Forster because



*Self portrait c. 1932 Effie Spring-Smith (1907-74)*

he tells us so much about human nature, and that does not change; and because he is funny, perceptive and writes wonderfully.

Dorothy Whipple's prose is more straightforward. Here are a few lines from ‘The Closed Door’: ‘There was a dead silence. Even Ernest, so ready with words, was bereft of them. He gaped, with Alice, at Stella, as if she had

suddenly gone mad. “Going out with a man!” Alice got it out at last. She leaned forward and thrust her face at her daughter, the better to realise the astounding creature. “You! With a man!” she repeated. Stella smiled radiantly. “Yes, Mother.” “When we thought you were with Beryl Payne, do you mean?” asked Alice. “Yes, but it doesn't matter now, does it?”

The prose is pure, uncluttered, straightforward, pared down to the bone; it never labours the point (the key word in these few lines is ‘radiantly’) but most writers would expend sentences telling us about Stella's demeanour rather than the subtle, throwaway and poignant word (poignant because we know that Stella, like Babs, will be slapped down). Dorothy Whipple's subtlety is the reason why so many people – generally those who have not read her – overlook her excellence. But the *TLS* wrote in 1941, about *After Tea and Other Stories*, ‘Nobody is more

shrewd than Mrs Whipple in hitting off domestic relations or the small foibles of everyday life’ and in 1961, after the publication of *Wednesday and Other Stories*: ‘Economy and absence of fuss – these are Mrs Whipple's outstanding virtues as a writer.’ While Anthony Burgess, notorious for his dislike of ‘women writers’, commented in 1961 that ‘these

stories of the commonplace, with their commonplace-seeming style, are illuminating and startling.'

Today one of Dorothy Whipple's most devoted admirers is Sarah Waters, who has written for the cover of the forthcoming *Persephone Classics* edition of *Someone at a Distance* that it is 'a quiet masterpiece of a novel'. Yet 'editors are mad for action and passion' her publisher told Dorothy Whipple in 1953 when there were no reviews of *Someone at a Distance*. What chance does a quiet writer have if action and passion are what is called for?

Dorothy Whipple's other great strength is that she is a storyteller *par excellence*. We have published four of her novels and each one is a page-turner; but it is a feat indeed to make a short story into a page-turner since normally a story is a photograph, an impression, an atmosphere. The plots are certainly 'quiet' – Ernest and Alice oppress their daughter, a woman is divorced by her

husband and only allowed to see her children on Wednesday afternoons, a man puts flowers on his late wife's grave – but the effect on our empathy for, and understanding of, her characters is profound. Dorothy Whipple is a deeply observant and



*The 'Michel', an unscathed spire that was as important a symbol to the people of Hamburg as St Paul's was to Londoners*

compassionate – and timeless writer; at last she is being acknowledged as the superb writer we know her to be.

**P**ersephone Book No. 75, *On the Other Side: Letters to my Children from Germany 1940-46* by Mathilde Wolff-Mönckeberg, are letters written (but never posted) by a 60 year-old woman, to her children living abroad, about the experience of living in

Hamburg during the war. Discovered in a drawer in the 1970s, they were translated by her daughter, the late Ruth Evans, and first published in England and Germany in 1979. They were serialised on 'Woman's Hour' and in the *Observer* and a television documentary about the book, with Margaret Tyzack acting 'Tilli' and many original newsreel shots of a devastated Hamburg, was shown in the autumn of 1979. The Preface, which fills in the background, is by Ruth Evans and the Afterword, which sets the letters in the context of recent controversies about the Allied bombing of German cities, is

by Christopher Beauman.

**T**illi Wolff-Mönckeberg was the daughter of a lawyer who later became Lord Mayor. (Oddly enough, Edith Henrietta Fowler's father was

Mayor of Wolverhampton and a cabinet minister.) Tilli was intelligent and well-educated but married very young and had five children. Unusually for the time, she and her husband separated during the First World War and Tilli returned to Hamburg, did some translating and took in lodgers. In 1925 she married a Professor of English who later became Rector of Hamburg University.

By the time the letters begin, therefore, in October 1940, her personal life is slightly complicated, with her children living in far-flung places – her youngest daughter Ruth is living in Wales – and her Hamburg relations are slightly disapproving of her unconventional personal life. They would have been even more disapproving if they had known that Tilli was keeping what was in effect a diary: the discovery of the letters would certainly have resulted in her and her husband's arrest. In the first one she writes, about the events leading up to the war, that the German people were led to believe that they had been wantonly attacked but 'in truth this whole campaign had been planned long ago, the Führer's blind lust for conquest, his megalomania being the driving force.' She adds, 'for me

nothing was more devastating than the fact that nobody... stood up against this, but remained passive and weak.'

But *On the Other Side* is not a political book. Instead it is an evocation of daily life in Hamburg during the war years and immediately afterwards (the months after May 1945 make up a third of the book, partly because it was easier to write



'Tilli' Wolff-Mönkeberg in 1916 when she was 37.

without the constant threat of bombing and partly because there was no danger in writing). Tilli is very like Vere Hodgson in her observations and her humanity – and her bravery – and we have published her letters partly to provide a parallel with *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, Persephone

Book No.9. In fact Vere's book also began as letters which she herself turned into diary form in the early 1970s. On neither side of the English Channel were there oranges; but in Germany there was a 'queue for deep-frozen vegetables. We huddled together outside the small cellar shop and almost automatically fell into conversation. All these women shared the same heartfelt longing for a rapid conclusion to this horrendous war. There was no hope of victory, not the tiniest indication of hero worship for the Nazis. *Insane*, they called the whole thing, *criminally insane*.'

'If you want to know what it was like to be a civilian in wartime Germany you must read this marvellous book' wrote Timothy Garton Ash in the *Spectator* in 1979, going on to add: 'The letters document the terrible suffering caused to the German civil population by Allied bombing. It is difficult to read these pages without feeling that this kind of bombing was worse than a mistake' (the issues

covered in the Afterword). However, this is not a harrowing book, it is gentle and domestic, human and humane – and Tilli did survive. We are proud to add it to our list of nine Second World War books, to which it provides an essential counterpoint and parallel.

# OUR READERS WRITE

‘I read *The Blank Wall* in a matter of hours and felt myself holding my breath much of the way through, as I was never certain what was going to happen next. Elisabeth Sanxay Holding imbues the text with much social commentary – including the role of women, class, race and educational background – but this never feels heavy. Indeed, it’s the opposite: effortless and seamless. A wholly gratifying and pleasurable read.’ Kimbofo.typepad.com

‘*Family Roundabout* contains some very acute observations about life, love, and what makes a good mother; and at the same time is a really meaty family saga. All in all it is a most enjoyable, comfortable book, and I recommend it wholeheartedly.’ Reading-recipes.blogspot.com

‘I loved *House-Bound*, *The Shuttle* and *Alas, Poor Lady*. What moving accounts they each give of the ghastly position of women who were financially dependent and so ill-prepared for their lives. It really makes one understand and value the work of the suffragettes and those who campaigned for decent education for women and birth control. The portrayal of Grace in *Alas, Poor Lady* brought tears to my eyes. As always, your books are so absorbing and thought-provoking.’ SW, Dublin 14

‘It is true that *Saplings* is not a happy book in many ways: the slow destruction of a happy family is not a cheerful topic. This, however, is a beautifully written novel, very readable, with fabulous characters, realistic, often flawed. I loved every page of this book.’ Heaven-ali.livejournal.com

‘*Someone at a Distance*’s story of a husband-seduced-by-a-woman-scorned, leaving a very happy family in tatters, seduces us. I found myself staying up all hours of the night to whip through the book in record time. And Ellen, the wife left behind, became a special friend. One I hated to leave at the end. Whipple makes her characters come alive. She also leaves you with hope and redemption. I highly recommend it.’ Beccaandbella.typepad.com

‘Having read E M Delafield’s short story in the Autumn 2006 *PQ* I decided to order a copy of *Consequences*. I am delighted that I did so as I am now well into it and enjoying it immensely: I would rate it among my favourites of the Persephone novels I have read so far. Although poor Alex is to a large extent the author of her own misfortunes, her life could have been so much richer outside the rigid confines of Victorian society. E M Delafield’s anger with this society’s effect on women comes

across clearly in her writing.’ JC, Bray, Co. Wicklow

‘The stories in *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* are gems. Each is no more than a few pages long, and all of them are funny, sharp and entertaining. The stories progress chronologically through the war years, providing trenchant observations about domestic life, relationships and the increasing hardships faced by those on the home front; they are just as legitimate a form of reportage as any non-fiction article and would make wonderful examples for new writers about how to use language and description with economy and elegance.’ Abookaweek.blogspot.com

‘*The Expendable Man* takes on an extra layer of interest, surprise, and shock because of a key fact that Dorothy Hughes reveals only after 70-odd pages. It is to her credit that this revelation doesn’t come off as being at all gimmicky, and in fact is brilliantly done, by way of an almost throwaway comment. I’d recommend this remarkable book even if you’re not really interested in thrillers or suspense novels *per se* – it’s also a fine ‘straight’ novel, which has important things to say about 1950s American society and, indeed, about our own attitudes.’ Livejournal.com/toomanybooks/scarletslippers

# DAVID KYNASTON

Two Persephone writers have been crucial sources for the historian David Kynaston. Here he explains why.

**A**usterity Britain (Bloomsbury, 2007) is the first volume of what I hope will be a multi-volume history of Britain between 1945 and 1979. It covers the first six years after the war and draws on a wide range of contemporary sources and 'voices'. Two of the witnesses – one a journalist, novelist and short story writer, the other a welfare worker who kept a diary – will be familiar to Persephone readers.

**T**he first is Mollie Panter-Downes (1906-97), who wrote, in addition to her short stories (published in two volumes as *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* and *Minnie's Room*), a regular 'Letter from London' for *The New Yorker* from the outbreak of war in 1939 until well into the 1980s. The wartime columns were collected in book form in 1972, but to the best of my knowledge the many post-war letters have hitherto lain in obscurity.

**I** found them beautifully written, fascinating and invaluable, not least for their frequent verbatim quotations of what people were actually saying. 'It 'asn't 'arf put the wind up people,' declared a cockney matron whom Panter-Downes overheard on a bus following the government's announcement, three months

after Hiroshima, that the Civil Defence Services would not be disbanded. 'They can't seem to settle to things, and no wonder. Funny thing, even though I've taken every stitch off me back every night since VE Day, I can't seem to feel easy, either. It's peace, I tell meself, but some'ow it don't feel like peace ought to feel.'

**S**he herself recorded during that difficult, straitened first year of peace the 'row of empty hooks' in most butchers at Christmas, and how in Chelsea, where as in much of middle-class England 'practically nobody has a servant to leave on guard in the kitchen', a householder came home from the cinema to find that burglars had visited for the third time and taken his last overcoat, some tinned sardines, and a pound of tea and two pots of marmalade. 'These are things,' she comments, 'which are painful and grievous to lose nowadays.'

**P**anter-Downes had an eye that was equally acute for social trends (such as the hunger for the New Look), culture (including a damning verdict on the 'deadly facetiousness' of Christopher Fry's *Venus Observed* that has probably stood the test of time), and politics. Her treatment of

Labour's conference at Margate in 1950 is typically brilliant. She not only describes how Aneurin Bevan looked on the platform 'like a sort of walking Union Jack – crimson face, pugnacious blue eyes, and a thick, silvering thatch of hair', whereas the ailing Ernest Bevin seemed 'tired and oddly shrunken', but also gives a delicious picture of how 'in the evenings, when the delegates stopped at the various hotel bars to lower a pint before dinner, the regular customers, attended by their glum, well-tailored Scotties and fox terriers, sat sipping their gins with a self-conscious air of being in dubious company.'

**T**he diarist is Vere Hodgson (1901-79). Her wartime diary, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, is a deserved Persephone favourite, vividly relating her experiences in the Notting Hill area; but historians have been remarkably uncurious about her post-war diary, currently in the safekeeping of her literary executor, Veronica Bowater. There seems to be a gap for the 1950s, but happily there survives much from before and after.

**V**ere Hodgson was as little a lover of Clement Attlee and his colleagues as Mollie Panter-Downes was – 'WHAT A

SHAKING THEY HAVE HAD' she gleefully exclaimed after the 1950 election – but the real value of her diary is its wealth of telling detail. At the Ideal Home Exhibition there were 'queues in all directions' and as a result she 'never got a bite'; on Workers' Playtime she heard and noted down the gist of a decidedly bitter song called 'I'd Like To Be A Refugee From Britain'; and, also on the radio, she vividly recorded listening enthusiastically to Sir Alfred Munnings laying into Picasso and the moderns at the Royal Academy's summer banquet.

'Oh, for a little extra butter!' she wailed in March 1949 after it had been announced that the meat ration was to go down again. 'Then I should not mind the meat. I want half a pound of butter a week for myself alone... For ten years we have been on this miserable butter ration, and I am fed up. I NEVER enjoy my lunch...'

Happily there were no such shortages by the 1960s, when Vere Hodgson was living in Church Stretton in Shropshire. In the dreadful winter of 1963 she struggled through the snow to a performance of *The Messiah* by the Ludlow Choral Society. 'Stretton nobly turned up and the body of the Church was quite full,' she noted. 'But it was nice to plod back home and get a cup of hot Bovril!' Later that year

occurred the Profumo Scandal, profoundly shocking to Vere Hodgson and her friends. 'Poor Mr Macmillan,' she reflected. 'He seems too unworldly to cope with people as they are today. He has the morals and values of the Victorian age.'

And when, two years later, there was a major outcry about 'the low standard of plays on TV', she offered her thoughts

on the dominant medium of the day: 'I don't follow them, because I seldom look, except at "Dr Finlay's Casebook" on Sunday evening. This I love. But I so dislike the interviewers like Robin Day, whose manners are all that you hope never to meet.' The social and moral certainties of the 1940s already seemed a world away.

*David Kynaston's Austerity Britain 1945-51 is published by Bloomsbury*

# Austerity Britain 1945-51

DAVID KYNASTON



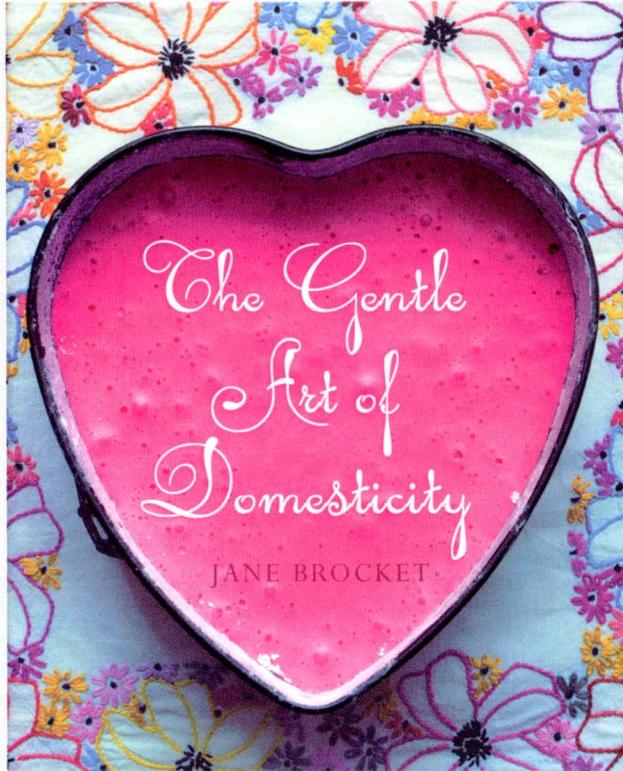
# THE GENTLE ART OF DOMESTICITY

‘There is a world of difference between domesticity and domestication,’ writes Jane Brocket in her book newly published by Hodder. It is, she explains, ‘about the pleasures and joys of the gentle domestic arts of knitting, crochet, baking, stitching, quilting, gardening and homemaking’ not about ‘the repetitive, endless rounds of cleaning, washing, ironing, shopping and house maintenance that comes with domestication.’

She admits that domesticity is an abstract concept, capable of all sorts of interpretations, but concludes that it ‘rises above the bossiness of cleaning products and media exhortations to keep our houses pristine and hygienic, and focuses instead on creativity within the domestic space.’

Painting and literature about domesticity are important to Jane Brocket, and are important features of her wonderful book. She reproduces several Persephone favourites, for

example Eric Ravilous’s ‘Train Landscape’ (1939) which we sell as a card in the shop, and the



‘Ipswich Coach’ painting which we had already decided to use on the front of this *Biannually*. (We chose it because, in atmosphere, it echoes the Dorothy Whipple short stories; and it was painted the very year that Tilli Wolff-Mönckeberg started to write her letters to her children abroad.’

Jane Brocket also writes about the literature of domesticity and, pleasingly, mentions – and photographs – Persephone books

several times. She comments: ‘Domestic literature is both gentle and gently rewarding. It gives a story to so many untold lives, and a meaning and significance to generations of women who were expected to live quietly domestic lives, but who were often far from dull and domesticated.’

‘Domestic novels reveal the textures of women’s lives and the infinite possibilities and permutations of the domestic space. They also give contemporary women the chance to reflect that we are fortunate in not being

compelled to live in that way unless we choose to do so, which makes domesticity a potentially enriching way of life, not a reductive one.’

She chooses eight especial favourites: *Jane Eyre*, *Cranford*, *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, *Mrs Miniver*, *At Mrs Lippincote’s* – and *The Home-Maker*, *They Knew Mr Knight* and *Family Roundabout*, Persephone books No. 7, 19 and 24. *The Home-Maker*, she writes,



is 'the story of what happens when a wife and mother puts all her efforts into the house, and not the home [a very subtle distinction]. Fortunately, irreparable damage is averted when Lester, the father, takes over the role of homemaker. My copy of this incredible book has more folded page corners than any other, so memorable are the observations and details.'

**O**f *They Knew Mr Knight* Jane Brocket writes: 'Anything by Dorothy Whipple is worth reading. Once a publishing phenomenon, then largely forgotten, she writes the most compellingly readable books I have encountered since my childhood, when I often consumed a book in a day. She writes with an astounding fluency and her novels are richly

detailed, wonderfully observed, funny, warm and clever. Her imagery is subtle, her understanding of human nature is amazing, and her ability to move around her characters and see them from all angles is quite brilliant. She doesn't moralise but is deeply ethical. *They Knew Mr Knight* is a cautionary tale, but one with plenty of knitting, crocuses, ginger puddings and permanent waves.'

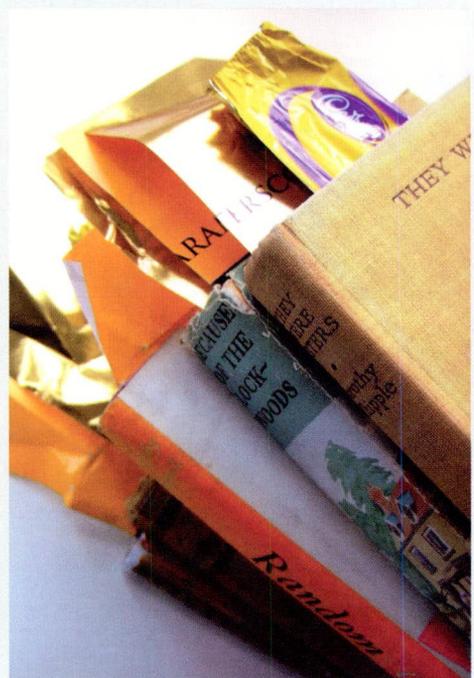
**A**nd, to round off this trio of particularly domestic Persephone

books, she points out that most of Richmal Crompton's novels for adults have sunk without trace but 'thankfully *Family Roundabout* has been rescued and republished, for this gentle, perceptive, often sad, domestic saga about two families still has the power to touch contemporary readers. It's full of womanly, homely detail such as sock knitting, basket mending, name tapes, tapestry, iced cakes, party dresses and grand-children. It's the domestic novel *par excellence*.'

**L**astly, Jane Brocket reproduces a picture of a Persephone hot-water bottle cover

(knitted in grey cashmere, naturally) and adds: 'The hottie cover goes with the book covers perfectly. But there is also a lovely match on a metaphorical level. For I think the Persephone list contains some of the best hot-water bottle literature to be found anywhere.'

**Y**ou know what I mean. The kind of book you take to bed with a nice cup of tea, or read by the fire snuggled under a quilt. The kind of book that is well written and truly readable. The kind of thoughtful, entertaining book into which you can escape, and from which you return with a new perspective.' *The Gentle Art of Domesticity* is that book. But it is also inspiring for would-be quilters, cup-cake makers, knitters and gardeners: and the wonderfully sensuous photographs provide a perfect counterpoint to the text.



# BUTTERFIELD AND ALBERS

Lindsay P Butterfield (1869-1948) was one of the most important and successful designers of the 1890s, who sold patterns to most of the leading British manufacturers. He also taught at both Kingston and the Central School of Art. 'Apples' was one of the first patterns he designed after leaving art school.

Anni Albers (1899-1994) was born in Berlin, her maternal grandfather being a well-known Berlin publisher, and her father a successful furniture-maker; her parents were well-off and artistic and encouraged her to draw and paint. However, in 1922 she left Berlin and enrolled at the Bauhaus, then in Weimar and after 1926 in Dessau. She went there because she admired the Bauhaus painters (such as Klee and Kandinsky) and wanted to be part of the artistic avant-garde rather than the traditional art world.



Lindsay P Butterfield in his garden, from *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement* by Linda Parry p36

The women of the Bauhaus arrived there 'with an astonishing diversity of talents, convinced that this avant-garde institution would accept them as equals,' writes Sigrid Wortmann Weltge in *Bauhaus Textiles*, 1993. 'High-spirited and anti-bourgeois, they participated on many levels in the life of the Bauhaus.' But alas 'they received scant encouragement in their pursuit of non-traditional roles, and often their professional lives suffered. Instead of being fully integrated into the Bauhaus, they were segregated and given their own workshop – the Weaving Workshop – regardless of their talent or inclination.'

Although at heart most of them were painters ('Weaving? Weaving I thought was too sissy. I was looking for a real job: I went into weaving unenthusiastically, as merely the least objectionable choice' wrote Anni Albers) she was hugely successful at weaving and broke the boundaries of the form, for example using texture a great deal and incorporating corn kernels, metal shavings and twisted paper into her work.

In 1928 Anni and Otti Berger, who wove the *Manja* fabric, became teaching assistants at the Weaving Workshop. The

two of them 'shared an intense preoccupation with all aspects of textiles: historical and ethnic, as well as contemporary fabrics' and were close friends: Otti used to visit Anni's parents in Berlin.



One can imagine Anni's despair when Otti, who had gone to London, left to go back to Germany in the late 1930s and died tragically in the Holocaust.

In December '33 Anni and her husband Josef Albers went to Black Mountain College, South Carolina, where they stayed until 1949. They then moved to Chicago. Anni Albers would become the most well-known weaver in America, with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1949. She once pointed out that 'in ancient myths it was a goddess, a female deity [perhaps Persephone?] who brought the invention of weaving to mankind.'

# THE PERSEPHONE 75

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** First published in 1940, this funny, romantic first novel describes a young girl's life in the 1930s. Preface: Harriet Lane
3. **Someone at a Distance** by **Dorothy Whipple** 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*) about the 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 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 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 of them were twice 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 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; 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; published in France last year; to be a film in 2008. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin
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 1945, chosen by the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard as his 2001 Paperback Choice. A R4 'Book at Bedtime' read by Jamie Glover. Afterword: Anne Sebba
- 29. The Making of a Marchioness by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A wonderfully entertaining 1901 novel about the melodrama after a governess marries a Marquis. A R4 Classic Serial in 2007. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina
- 30. Kitchen Essays by Agnes Jekyll** Witty and useful essays about cooking, with recipes, published in *The Times* and reprinted as a book in 1922. 'This is 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.
- 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. Read on two cds or two cassettes by Miriam Margolyes; to be a film with Emily Blunt and David Tennant.
- 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 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 who shields her daughter from a blackmailer, filmed as both *The Reckless Moment* in 1949 and *The Deep End* in 2001. A BBC R4 serial in 2006.
- 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 beautifully written; read on R4 in 2003 and 2006. 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 pre- and post-war 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 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 Memmery by Ruby Ferguson** A 1937 novel about Lady Rose, who inherits a great house, marries well – and then meets the love of her life on a park bench. A great favourite of the Queen Mother. Preface: Candia McWilliam

**54. They Can't Ration These by Vicomte de Mauduit** A 1940 cookery book about 'food for free', full of excellent (and now fashionable) recipes for eg. nettle soup.

**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 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, which is 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 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. First published in 1938.

**67. The Fortnight in September by RC Sherriff** Another novel by the author of *Journey's End*, and *The Hopkins Manuscript*, Persephone Book No. 57, about a family on holiday in Bognor in 1931; a quiet masterpiece.

**68. The Expendable Man by Dorothy B Hughes** A 1963 thriller set in Arizona by the well-known American crime writer; it was chosen by the critic HRF Keating as one of his hundred best crime novels. Afterword: Dominic Power

**69. Journal of Katherine Mansfield**

The husband of the great short story writer (cf. *The Montana Stories*, Persephone Books 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** is a 1957 cookery book which was a bestseller at the time and a pioneering work for British cooks. The superb black and white illustrations and the coloured endpapers are by David Gentleman.

**71. The Shuttle by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A 1907 page-turner by the author of *The Making of a Marchioness* (Persephone Book No. 29) about Rosalie Vanderpoel, an American heiress who marries an English aristocrat and whose beautiful and enterprising sister Bettina sets out to rescue her. Preface: Anne Sebba

**72. House-Bound by Winifred Peck** This 1942 novel describes a middle-class Edinburgh woman who decides, radically, that she must run her house without help and do her own cooking; the war is in the background and foreground. Afterword: the late Penelope Fitzgerald

**73. The Young Pretenders by Edith Henrietta Fowler** An 1895 novel for both children and grown-ups, 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 October 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, Afterword: Christopher Beaman

# PLAYDATE BY KATE WALBERT FROM THE NEW YORKER 2007

Matilda's mother apologises for calling so late, but she wonders whether Caroline might be free for a playdate? Like, tomorrow?

'Matilda's had a cancellation,' she says.

Liz searches the kitchen drawer for Caroline's Week-at-a-Glance. It's ten already and she's had her wine; down the hall the baby nurse, Lorna, is asleep with the twins and Caroline; Ted's out of town. What the hell is Matilda's mother's name, anyway? Faith, Frankie, Fern –

'We could do an hour,' Liz says. 'We have piano at four-thirty.'

She can picture her clearly: a single woman who hovers in the school hallways wearing the look that Liz has come to associate with certain mothers – a mixture of doe-eyed expectancy and absolute terror, as if at any minute they might be asked to recite the Pledge of Allegiance or the current policy on plagiarism; the school being one of those places where mothers are kept on their toes and organised into various committees for advance and retreat, their children's education understood as a mined battlefield that must be properly assaulted. Didn't she just see her last week at the enlightenment session? A talk given by a Dr. Roberta Friedman, Professor of Something, entitled 'Raising a Calm Child in the Age of Anxiety;

or, How to Let Go and Lighten Up!' But now, for the life of her, Liz can't remember whether she and Matilda's mother exchanged two words, just the way Matilda's mother balanced on the edge of her folding chair taking notes, the intentional grey streak (intellectual?) of her cropped hair, the fury of her pen.

'Oh, God, that's great,' Matilda's mother is saying. 'I just need to keep Matilda from losing her gourd.'

'I understand,' Liz says.

'Do you?' says Matilda's mother. 'You do?'

Her name is Fran, apparently. Fran Spalding. Liz has looked her up in the confidential, you-lose-it-you're-screwed Parent & Faculty directory. She and Matilda live across the Park from the school, on West Eighty-Sixth Street. Does anyone not live uptown? Liz wants to know, but she asks the question only of herself, so there's no answer, just the relative quiet of her studio – a big loft in what was once considered Chinatown. Liz spends most mornings here spinning clay into pots and teacups and dessert plates. At this hour there's little interruption, just the occasional rumble of a garbage truck and the low chatter of the radio and her own mind: Fran Spalding, daughter Matilda, West Eighty-sixth. They'll go today after school. They'll cross

the Park in a taxi, mothers and daughters, and aim for the apartment building, three-forty-something, where Fran Spalding and Matilda live, and go up to the fifteenth floor, 15D, she knows – the address listed in the second section of the directory, the front pages clotted with emergency numbers and please-pup-in-a-place-of-prominence evacuation routes.

It's a playdate, a date for play; Caroline duly apprised of the plan this morning as she and Liz waited for the school bus on Lafayette. Around them, Cooper Union students bunched up like blackflies, bluebottles in window corners, at every 'Don't Walk'.

'Who?' Caroline says.

'Matilda. She's in your class. You know. She wears striped shirts.'

'Does she have a cat?' Caroline asks.

'I have no idea.'

'Does she want to play My Little Ponies?'

Liz looks down at her daughter. 'Who doesn't?' she says.

Caroline shoves her hands in her pockets and swings one leg. She leans against a filthy meter tattooed with stickers advertising things: 800 numbers for important advice; someone staying positive with HIV.

'I'll go,' Caroline says, as if going were a question.

'Great!' Liz says. 'Here comes

the bus!

The school bus is the big yellow kind, exactly the same as the one Liz once rode to elementary school, in that faraway place, that faraway land known as rural Ohio. Here, in lower Manhattan, the bus seems too large, wrong, a dinosaur lurching through the veering bicyclists and throngs of pedestrians, the construction cones and smoking manholes; a relic of a thing, a dirtied yellow shell, an empty chrysalis whose butterfly has flown the coop. Inside, a handful of children are spread front to back, their expressionless faces gazing out of the smeared windows, their ears plugged. Her own school bus, her Ohio school bus, had burst with noise and the boys who

wouldn't move over and then, later, would.

The bus stops; its doors open. Liz releases Caroline's hand and waits as she ascends the high steps and disappears down the aisle. In an instant, she reappears in the window seat closest to Liz, her backpack beside her like a twin. Liz waves and smiles; that she has refused to buy headphones and the machines into which they fit remains a constant source of outrage to her daughter, though on this morning Caroline seems happy enough, smiling back, crossing her eyes and sticking out her tongue as the doors close and the school bus lurches on.

'First, the golden rule: Never

compare your own childhood experiences with those of your children,' Dr. Friedman had said, her glasses pushed to the tip of her nose. 'This is a fruitless exercise, unhealthy and counterproductive. Best to remain alert; to look on the bright side; to, whenever possible, accentuate joy.'

Liz pounds the clay on the wheel and straightens her miner's cap, a figment of her imagination but one that works relatively well in focusing her thoughts away from the business of children and onto the clay. The twins are presumably in the park with Lorna, sleeping in their double stroller or being pushed, side by side, in the swings meant for babies. Lorna is



*'The Chalon Family' 8 Church Lane, Kensington c.1800 by Jacques-Laurent Agasse © Yale Centre for British Art*

a pro. She will have bundled them up and thought to bring nourishment – formula or the breast milk that Liz pumps every evening; her breasts have nearly expired, she thinks, they’ve hit their expiration date. And Caroline is safely in school, repeating the colours of vegetables in Spanish or sitting at a small round table having what’s known as Snack: individual packages of Cheez-Its (they’ve all complained!), or free-of-hydrogenated-oils-and-corn-syrup-though-possibly-manufactured-in-a-factory-traced-with-nuts animal crackers. The point is, Liz has five hours before she needs to take the subway uptown: five whole hours. It is nothing and everything. It could stretch out before her like an eternity if she has the will, or it could evaporate in a single moment.

Concentrate, she thinks.

In the bright light of the cap, Liz sees the spinning clay take form and her own hands, aged, fingernails bitten to the quick. She has written Fran Spalding’s cell-phone number across her knuckles, in case she forgets, or there’s a problem, or the world blows its cork: a possibility, a probability, apparently, but for now she’s going to concentrate. She’s not going to think about that.

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, this is an important message from the New York City Police Department,’ says the subway voice over the loudspeaker five hours later. Liz stands half in, half out of the subway car, a new habit; she

always waits until the last passengers have pushed past before she fully commits to sitting down.

‘Keep your belongings in your sight at all times. Protect yourself. If you see a suspicious package or activity on the platform or train, do not keep it to yourself. Tell a police officer or an MTA employee.

‘Remain alert, and have a safe day,’ the voice adds as the doors shut.

The taxi barrels across Central Park, through its odd scattering of tunnels; blocks of stone rise on either side of the road as if the taxi were plummeting through earth. Above loom the barren trees, leafless and grey, or the blotched white of sycamores; once, aeons ago it seems now, orange flags were unfurled along this same route. Then, thousands of people, all of them vaguely smiling, had wandered the paths like pilgrims in a dream. No one appears to be smiling now. They hurry along, wrapped in their coats, the day leaden, darkening; an Ethan Frome day, Liz used to say in college, to be clever, though she wasn’t particularly, unable to decipher the strange manners and customs of the East. She hasn’t thought of that in years.

Fran pays the driver, while Liz, in the back, unbuckles Caroline and Matilda, leaning over them to push open the door. ‘On the curb,’ she’s saying. ‘Watch your step,’ she’s saying. ‘Grab your gloves.’ Fran gestures for them to follow her into the building

entrance, where two men in uniform hold open the large glass doors, bowing slightly as Fran passes.

‘Partner!’ one of them says, high-fiving Matilda. ‘Who’s your buddy?’

‘Michael,’ Fran says, arrested at the ‘WELCOME’ threshold. ‘This is Matilda’s friend Carolyn.’

‘*Caroline,*’ Liz says; she can’t help it, raw nerve. Anything else she would let slide, she tells herself. Truly.

‘Of course,’ Fran is saying. ‘*Caroline.*’

‘Buddy bear,’ Michael says to Matilda. ‘Look at you.’

They look. How can they not? Everywhere there are mirrors, reflecting them, reflecting Michael and the other guy, reflecting the bounty and the grandeur of it all – potted green plants with white lights, garlands, a cone of poinsettia and even, on a pedestal between the elevator banks, an elaborately carved stone urn containing – what? Liz wonders. Dead tenants?

‘This is lovely,’ Liz says.

‘It’s home,’ Fran says. She rings for the elevator, the girls crowding next to her. In an instant there’s the *ping*, and then the doors slide open. Another man in uniform smiles as they all step in; there is a small chair in the corner for sitting, though he clearly prefers to stand.

‘Hey, Matty,’ he says. ‘How’s the Go-Go?’

Go-Go, Fran explains, is the cat, their cat, who recently contracted a hot spot. A hot spot, she tells Liz, is an itch that can’t be scratched.

'Wow,' Liz says.

They rise in mechanical wonder and then stop, abruptly, on eleven, where the elevator doors slide open to no one.

'False alarm,' the man in the uniform says, releasing the doors and driving them onward, upward. The girls stand stock still; they all stand stock still.

'Are you allergic?' Matilda says to Caroline.

'The cat,' Fran says to Caroline.

'Are you allergic to cats?' Matilda says. She wears pink plastic hair-slides and a striped shirt underneath a pink jumper.

'Caroline,' Liz says. 'Did you hear –'

'No,' Caroline says. She hunches beneath her huge backpack, carried solely for fashion, or just in case. In it now, Liz happens to know, is a palm-size notepad on which Caroline draws the details of her day and a purple-lipsticked Bratz doll that she treasures, received on her last birthday from Ted's mother, who, Ted said, meant well.

'Lots of people are,' Matilda says.

The elevator stops.

'North Pole,' says the man in the uniform.

'Thank you,' says Fran.

'Thank you,' says Liz.

'Thank you,' says Matilda.

'Thank you,' says Caroline, walking behind Liz and tripping her, accidentally on purpose.

'Caroline,' Fran's voice soars in from ahead. 'How do you feel about strudel?' But neither Caroline nor Matilda is listening, or hungry, for that matter; released from the grip of the

elevator, the girls run down the poorly lit hallway playing some sort of imaginary game, knocking into doors and taking corners at high speed.

'Matilda Beth,' Fran yells after them. 'That's one.' She pauses. 'Don't let me get to two.'

Matilda stops and grabs Caroline's hand, pulling her toward what must be D – an unassuming door with a child's drawing taped over its peephole. It's always the same, Liz thinks, in these pictures: the mismatched ears, the round eyes, the name scrawled across one corner. The girls are six years old and have plaits, the days of the week stitched on their underpants. They wear seamless socks and rubber-soled shoes, and both are missing two teeth, though not the same ones; each has been read *Charlotte's Web* and *The Boxcar Children*, the first a story of a pig on a farm and its friendship with a spider, the second a story of children, orphans, living happily alone in the woods, making do with rusted spoons pulled from the dump and the occasional cracked cup of milk.

'Caroline,' Liz says. 'Is this a gold-star day?' She has spied Caroline twisting her finger up her nose and refers to a deal between the two that sometimes results in better behaviour but more often does not.

Once in the apartment, Matilda leads Caroline to her room, where they settle beneath a green canopy of gauze to play *My Little Ponies*. Liz returns to the living room with Fran, whose gray

streak, she learns, is natural and who works at home during school hours, copy editing and proofreading documents for a legal firm. From time to time, the girls interrupt them, flying into the living room in leotards and ballerina skirts and, once, in nothing at all, at which point Fran calls Matilda aside and speaks to her in a voice that Liz has heard only from single mothers or from mothers with numerous children – women who simply do not have the time or the patience for the monkey business that everyone else puts up with, they have told her; once, even, she heard the voice from a mother who said she just placed herself in the hands of Jesus. So maybe it's the voice of Jesus, Liz thinks now, admiring it; her own, she knows, entirely lacks authority, as if she were questioning each verdict she pronounced.

'More tea?' Fran asks.

'Thank you,' Liz says, following her back into the kitchen, where they wait with great anticipation for the water to boil, watching the kettle's curved spout, its shiny, smudged lid, as if they had never seen anything quite so fascinating in their lives.

'We are living in the Age of Anxiety,' Dr Friedman said, 'and here we sit at the epicenter, the Ground Zero, if you will.' She looked up and over those glasses at all of them, the throng of mothers, the few stay-at-home dads or those fathers whose schedules allowed them to be flexible – men in T-shirts, shorts, and sturdy boots, their hairy legs

oddly comforting, as if, at a moment's notice, they could sweep the whole group onto their shoulders and hoist them out of the window. Many of the women in the circle appeared to Liz to be close to tears, though some were more difficult to read, writing with expensive pens, their briefcases balanced against their slim ankles, their hair blown smooth. Dr Friedman surveyed the room, clearly attempting to make eye contact with the closest suspect, though unfortunately that suspect was Janey Filch, wall-eyed and so shy she looked ready to faint.

'Everywhere we go are reminders of where we are. I don't think they need to be chronicled here. The school has briefed you on contingencies, and your emergency-contact cards have been filed in triplicate. Each child has an individual first-aid kit and a protective mask.

'Still and still, you might say, the question remains: what can you do right now, on this day, at this hour, in this moment?'

Here Dr Friedman looked up again and smiled, the smile so studied as to be disarming, as if Liz weren't really looking at a woman smiling but at a portrait of a woman smiling.

'Take a deep breath,' she said, exhaling loudly. 'Smell the roses,' she said, inhaling loudly. 'Relax.'

The women slouched a bit in their folding chairs, attempting to follow Dr Friedman's advice. Liz imagined that if Dr Friedman were next to suggest that they all stand and do a few jumping

jacks, most would leap to the job.

'Now,' Dr Friedman said, wiggling her shoulders. 'I'm going to give you all some homework. This is an exercise that I've found works very well with my patients. It's simple, really. How many of you keep a journal?'

A few hands shot up, Marsha Neuberger waving as if desperate to be picked.

'That's fine, that's fine,' Dr Friedman said. 'I only wanted to get an idea. Anyway, what I'm going to suggest is that you all try keeping what I call an anxiety journal; just like if any of you have ever tried to diet and kept a food journal –'

Anxiety journal like food journal, Liz would have written in her notes, if she had remembered paper and pen. Bemused laughter, she would have added.

'– where you wrote down your caloric intake. Your anxiety journal will be the place where you write down everything that makes you feel nervous, or anxious, throughout the day: it can be anything you like. Don't worry about how it sounds. No one is going to read it but you.' This Dr Friedman said emphatically, Liz would have noted, whipping off her glasses and looking up, avoiding Janey Filch but generally trying to reassure each and every one of them.

'Promise,' she added.

Liz looks from her steaming tea to Fran. Fran is describing her terrific luck in finding the apartment, falling into it,

desperate, after fleeing San Francisco with Matilda and a few pieces of luggage. Now, as a single mother, she kept a tight rein on things, she said. 'Have you noticed?'

Liz is unsure whether she should have noticed or not, so she blows on her tea and shakes her head.

'There was a burglary,' Fran says. 'In San Francisco. After that we felt like we had to get out. I mean, I did. I left Matilda's father. Richard. And moved back East.'

'Oh.'

'Strudel?' Fran says, sliding a plate across the counter.

'Oh, gosh, no thanks.'

'I've sliced some apples for the girls.'

'Great,' Liz says, knowing that Caroline won't touch them – the edges, minutes after being sliced, too brown.

'And you?' Fran says.

'I'm sorry?'

'What about you?' Fran says.

'Oh,' Liz says. 'We moved from Boston. We were in art school, Ted and I, and then we moved here – Ted works in television, children's television – and then we had Caroline and now the twins, but I'm getting back to it. Art. I'm a potter, actually. I work with clay.'

'In vitro?' asks Fran.

'I'm sorry?'

'The twins,' Fran says. 'In vitro?'

Liz nods.

'Your eggs?'

Liz blows on her tea. 'Nope. We had to shell out twenty thousand dollars; we did it

through the alumni association.'

'Smart eggs,' Fran says.

'I didn't really care. Ted felt strongly about that, you know. He didn't want to adopt.'

'Men rarely do.'

They sit in the living room, on opposite sides of the sofa.

'I think our girls really get along,' Fran says.

'Yes,' Liz says.

'After the burglary, you know, Matilda had trouble making friends. I mean, she played by herself most of the time. Made up stories. I'd take her to a birthday party or something, and there all the other children would be running around and screaming and playing tag, that kind of thing, and Matilda would be sitting by herself involved in some fairy-tale game. It was, well, embarrassing, frankly.'

Liz can't help thinking that taupe is entirely the wrong colour for this room, high as they are above the city. Excellent light, the listing would say. Light and air; airy light; sun-drenched, sun-gorged, sun-soaked, rush to your sun-kissed oasis! There are windows everywhere, and those radiators that line the walls. Fran should clear them off and paint the place – something dramatic, terracotta, she'd suggest, or saffron yellow.

'This was in San Francisco, where everything is, well, healthy, do you know what I mean? There's always someone talking about loving-kindness. I couldn't stand it after a while. I just left. I mean, we did; after the burglary. We just got on a plane and flew away. Anyway, that's it. I'm here for good. I mean, I grew up here,

in the city, but it's different now, of course. It's a lot different.'

There is a bit of a pause; comfortable enough, Liz thinks. The truth is, she's enjoying herself. It's a playdate, she finds herself thinking; I'm on a date for play.

'Would you like a drink?' Fran says.

'A drink?'

'I'd have one if you would. Carpe diem, or whatever. Anyway, screw tea, we're grownups, right?'

'OK,' Liz says. 'Sure. Great. Yes.'

'Excellent!' Fran says.

From behind Matilda's door comes a shriek of giggles.

'Besides, they're having fun!' Fran says.

'So are we!' Liz says.

Fran disappears to the kitchen and Liz stands to stretch a bit, to



*Virginia Woolf's bedroom at Rodmell today (as it would have been in the 1930s).*

look out of the windows. The apartment faces west, she believes, though she gets turned around at these heights. She still isn't used to apartment views or high floors, and the ease with which you can see other lives: how even now, across from here, a boy sits reading at a dining-room table while an old woman – a nurse? a grandmother? a nanny? – moves around him, straightening up, stepping in and then out of Liz's sight. A diorama, they are; what you might see at the American Museum of Natural History: early twenty-first century, NYC, USA. They're dead, actually – stuffed mammals, the old woman on some sort of a moving track.

And what of Fran in the kitchen? Liz in the living room? Urban/suburban women circa 2007 participating in/on playdate, an urban/suburban ritual intended to alleviate boredom/loneliness among children/women while encouraging/controlling social engagement –

'What?' Liz yells.

'Chilled?' Fran yells.

'Wonderful,' Liz yells. She turns away from the windows; there are other things to do. She pokes around the taupe room. On a wide bookshelf are the usual histories and paperbacks and framed photographs: an infant Matilda; an earnest-looking boy in mortarboard and gown, Richard?; a teen-age Fran leaning against a giant redwood, her hair not yet streaked with gray but solely black, her posture sophisticated, worldly – she's in college, possibly, or a Manhattan high school. I live on a narrow island, her posture says. I live at the centre of the world.

On the desk are bills and Post-it notepads and loose receipts and whatnot. Liz has a strong feeling, a hot spot, an itch to be scratched, and, sure enough, there it is among them: Fran's anxiety journal. It's as she expected, a stenographer's notebook generally used for reportage. Liz resists for only a moment.

'Voilà!' Fran says. Liz turns to see her carrying a tray, the

TV-dinner kind; it makes Liz anxious.

'What have you got?' Fran says. She's pouring and doesn't notice.

'Oh, nothing,' says Liz. 'Your anxiety journal.'

Fran stops. 'You were reading it?'

'Oh, God, no. Of course not. I just saw it here and picked it up. I mean, I was thinking, Good for you, and remembering that I've been meaning to buy one, or get one. I'd write, "TV-dinner tray."'

'What?'

'"TV-dinner tray." Like the one you're holding. It makes me nervous and I can't tell you why.'

Fran looks down. 'It belonged to Richard. He liked to eat in front of the news.'

'Exactly.'

'Maybe it's the news you associate it with.'

'Maybe.'

'See? She had a point,' Fran says. 'Cheers!' They toast and sip the wine, which is delicious chilled, Liz says—she never thinks to do that. 'You should,' Fran says. She takes the anxiety journal and tucks it beneath one of the sectional cushions. 'To playdates!' she says, toasting again.

It's near the dinner hour and the girls are getting hungry; they haven't heard a peep from their mothers. Pinkie Pie and Sun Sparkles have been to the castle about a zillion times; they've flown in the blue balloon, late for the costume ball, and then arrived, the 'My Little Pony' theme song playing as Pinkie Pie



*Women's Social and Political Union tea-set c.1910*

and Sun Sparkles twirl on the special pink plastic revolving disk within the castle walls. Caroline lies on her back, pedalling her legs in the air, her finger working her nose. Matilda is reprimanding her imaginary sister, Beadie.

'Get down from there,' Matilda says. Beadie perches dangerously close to the window ledge, threatening to jump, and even though she has wings on her back and little ones at her ankles Matilda pleads with her to stop.

'Goodbye, my friend,' Beadie says. 'Goodbye!'

Beadie takes a tremendous leap and falls, tumbling, toward the street. Matilda screams an imaginary scream, though Beadie, she knows, won't splat; she'll fly with her little wings right back to Matilda's room. Still, Matilda feels scared.

'Help! Help!' Matilda yells. 'Thief! Help! Thief!'

The door swings open.

'Do not even start with that,' Fran says. 'It makes me insane.' Behind Fran, Liz looks in.

'Caroline,' she says. 'Gold-star day, remember?'

Caroline pulls her finger out of her nose.

'Are you girls happy?' Fran says.

'We're hungry,' they say.

'We're staying for dinner, how's that?' Liz says.

The girls hop up and down holding hands; they wear only their underwear.

Chicken nuggets are served. Somewhere in Matilda's room, Fran is saying as she prepares the tray, lives a round table and two

chairs, Little Bear size, ordered from one of those catalogues which arrive daily in the mail; this one featured three child models, she's saying, two girls and one boy, sipping tea at the table, sunlight streaming through windows that looked out on what appeared to be Russian countryside. The girls were dressed beautifully; the boy served in a monogrammed apron. Or maybe it came from the other one, Fran says, knocking on the door, the one where the child models introduced themselves and listed their goals. 'I'm Zelda,' Fran says in a wavery falsetto. 'I'm going to be a rock star.' Fran opens the door; inside, the girls huddle within the gauzy tent, apparently hiding.

'I can't remember which,' Fran continues, 'but the point is, it's really cute, and it cost a fortune, and it must be here somewhere. I mean, you can't just lose a table and chairs.'

Fran wades through stuffed animals and clothes and artwork and books, to a stack of pillows and blankets in the centre of Matilda's room, excavating until she finds the ensemble buried beneath. They were making a fort.

'Jesus,' she says, flushed. 'Can you believe all this crap?'

'Yes,' Liz says.

Fran sets down the tray and calls the girls over. 'OK, ladies,' she says. 'Which princess?'

'Jasmine,' Matilda says.

'Oh, for God's sake,' Fran says, rotating the plates.

'Ketchup?' Liz says; she holds the bottle at the ready. The girls

nod, and she lurches toward them, ready to squirt.

'I can't say that anything really happened with Richard,' Fran says. 'It was just, you know, the feeling.' She lies on the floor in the now dim light of the apartment, balancing her wineglass on her chest, her feet propped on the sofa. 'The elephant-in-the-room feeling.'

'The wha?' Liz says. She can't remember the last time she drank so much wine in the afternoon; usually, she waits until Caroline's asleep, the twins with Lorna in the nursery, Ted back at the office (the demanding life of a children's television executive!) before pouring her first glass. Then she might have another, and another, enough to erase the day, or the parts of it she doesn't want to remember: Caroline standing with her backpack on Lafayette, the neon-scrawled windows of the gay bar next to the bus stop, the public-service poster of an unattended bag, like an old-fashioned doctor's bag, shoved beneath some unsuspecting person's seat.

'The elephant-in-the-room feeling,' Fran says. 'You know, the thing that's just, God, there.'

Fran rolls over on one elbow. 'Did you ever ruin your life for a feeling?' she says.

'I don't know,' Liz says. 'I hope not.' She has closed her eyes to watch the tiny red pricks of light behind her eyelids. It's a trick she likes to do, a habit; she likes to count them, pretend they're sparks. She's combustible, perhaps – she's burning up.

'I miss Richard,' Fran is saying. 'I miss him every day. There's nobody to tell anything to anymore. Nobody.'

Liz opens her eyes and the sparks die out; she is back where she was, things reassembling around her – bookshelf, desk, radiator, carpet, floor lamps.

'I mean, there never was anybody to talk to, really,' Fran is saying. 'But there sort of was. I thought there was. For a while I used to. Do you know what I mean?'

'Yes,' Liz says, closing one eye and then the other; it changes her perspective. 'I think so,' she says. She is a highly trained artist, she could tell you. She got a fellowship, even, and there were many, many applicants. She graduated in art history, in case you're interested.

'Do the others look like you?' Fran asks.

'What?' Liz says.

'The twins. Do they look like you? Or, you know, like the smarter, younger egg woman?'

Liz laughs. She doesn't mean to, but she laughs and tips over the wineglass that she forgot she'd balanced beside her. There's just a little left, just a drizzle to darken an already wet spot; she's a well-trained klutz is what she is, a social miscreant fluent in art history, trained in art history. 'Sorry, sorry,' she says. 'I did it again.'

'Forget it,' Fran says.

Liz blots the wet spot with her shirtsleeve. 'Not at all is the thing,' she says. 'The twins don't look like either of us. They're blond and blue-eyed, for one. I mean, adorable. Absolutely adorably wonderful, but people think they're adopted.'

'That's so funny,' Fran says.

'Caroline?' Liz yells.

'Yes?'

'Are you still there?'

'I'm here,' Caroline says.

'I thought she might have disappeared,' Liz says.

'They're fine,' Fran says.

'More?'

'Just a skosh,' Liz says.

'A skosh?' Fran says.

'Japanese for 'a little,'

Liz says. 'Sukoshi.'

'Oh,' Fran says. 'Do you speak it?'

'My dad was in the service. Stationed there. I used to think it was Yiddish. He'd say 'Just a skosh' whenever you offered him wine. I miss him, too,' Liz says. 'Like Richard.'

'Your dad?'

'Yes.'

'Here,' Fran pours; they've finished one bottle and opened another. What they are celebrating they have no idea.

'Lemme at it,' Liz says.

She crawls along the sofa on all fours. She hasn't been able to locate the

floor-lamp switch, but it doesn't matter; she's a cat who can see in the dark. 'It was here, I saw it. You took it away from me.'

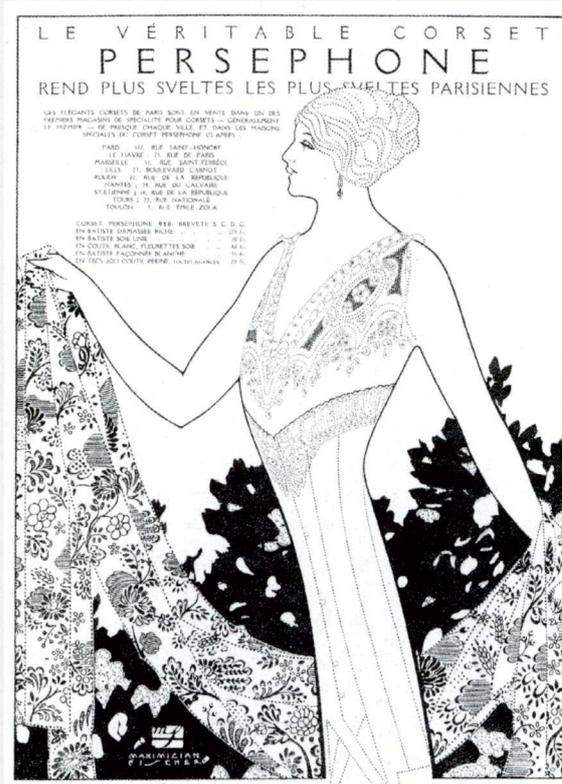
'Oh, God!' Fran shrieks. 'The whole thing is so stupid. Please.'

'Lemme, lemme, lemme,' Liz says.

'You're going to hate me,' Fran says.

'Are you kidding?' Liz says.

'You're my new best friend.'



'I forgot to laugh,' Liz says.

'But you're lucky,' Fran says.

'God, I know,' Liz says. 'I am in the ninety-ninth percentile of luck.'

'You tested out,' Fran says.

'I am among the gifted and talented.'

From Matilda's room there's the sound of a thud.

'You guys happy?' Fran yells.

'We're OK!' Matilda yells back.

'You have to promise,' Fran says.  
'I promise, I promise,' Liz says.  
'Not to laugh. Really. No. I mean it. Don't laugh. You're going to laugh. I know it. I can just –'

'Bluebird's honour,' Liz says.  
'Bluebird, Brownie, Girl Scout, Kappa Kappa Gamma. God, can you believe me?'

'Wow,' Fran says. 'Are you serious?'

'I'm always serious,' Liz says.  
'I'm never not serious. I'm a never-not-serious Ohioan, Ohioette gal, aren't I? I remain alert.'

'Do you think if we lived there or, like, Montana or something, things would be, I don't know, different?' Fran says.

'Ta-da!' Liz says.

'Shit,' Fran says.

'I found it!' Liz says.

'Shit,' Fran says.

'You said I could.'

'Go ahead, just please. You promised.'

'I'll be dead serious,' Liz says. She swings her bare feet around. 'I am dead serious,' she says. 'I am a deadly serious, dead-serious, never-not-serious person. I repeat, I remain alert.'

What is she saying? She has no idea, really, though it feels good to speak, the words tumbling out of her mouth and knocking around in the darkening room, high above the city where she has spent the afternoon with a new friend, a sophisticated friend, a woman who grew up here, a woman with a streak of natural gray, a divorced single mother with a legal, razor-sharp mind who can look down on the lights

and know where she is, know all the cross streets and the avenues, know the best places to buy things, the best things to buy, a woman who used to bicycle to Greenwich Village, who met Bob Dylan, even, in one of those places where people met Bob Dylan, back when the Village was the Village, and Bob Dylan lived there, or, at least, sang there, but then that would have been Fran's mother, maybe, or an older brother who didn't mind Fran tagging along, who took her even, rode with her balanced on his handlebars. And now look! This! The promise of the journal in her hands! Fran made notes! She caught all the things that Liz missed – the meeting room overheated and crowded, the acoustics so bad it was impossible to concentrate. And afterward – this is now Liz talking, Liz continuing to talk, Liz babbling – Dr Friedman had been so mobbed, so impossible to get to, that she had actually waited in the school lobby and followed her out, down Madison and then some, then over, to Lexington, the subway entrance there, Dr Friedman walking with such robotic –

'What?' Fran says. 'What?'

'Robotic,' Liz says.

'Oh,' Fran says. 'Right, robotic. Go on.'

– purpose, that she quite literally couldn't catch up. She just couldn't catch up, she says again, before Dr Friedman flew down the stairs to the subway.

'A flying robot,' Fran says.

Liz turns to the journal. 'It must

be done,' she says. 'The consensus has been reached.'

'OK,' says Fran, who has moved to sit cross-legged on the floor in front of her.

'It won't hurt,' Liz says.

'Please.'

'Well, just a little.'

'Thank you.'

'I'll make it quick,' Liz says.

'All right,' Fran says.

'These are difficult times, terrible times. Someone's got to police the world.'

Liz opens the journal to read, but the truth is, it's difficult to see what's written in the near-dark, and her eyes have started to go. She brings the page to her face, and squints:

- (1) Thieves
- (2) Crowds
- (3) School
- (4) Shadows
- (5) Playdates
- (6) Lunchrooms
- (7) Helicopters
- (8) Anniversaries
- (9) Night

'What?' Fran's saying. 'What? Oh, God. What did I write?' She moves closer to Liz, scoots in, so that Liz imagines Fran might next crawl into her lap as Caroline does, settle there between her legs to practice reading in the way she's been instructed at school: Read It Once to See; Read It Twice to Comprehend; Read It Again to Fully Absorb Its Meaning.

Go-Go appears from nowhere. He scratches and scratches, biting at the hot spot on his leg,

gnawing. 'Stop!' Fran says, clapping her hands. 'Stop!'

Liz closes the journal and stands up a bit unsteadily. 'Jesus, it's dark,' she says. 'I can't believe it got so late.' She hands the journal to Fran. 'I promised Lorna I'd be back earlier.'

'Right,' Fran says, taking the journal. 'God, I'm sorry.'

'Oh, no. This was fun. I mean, this was really fun, and the girls –'

'They seem to hit it off,' Fran says.

'Caroline!' Liz yells in the direction of Matilda's room, the shut door. 'Shit. We had piano, I totally forgot.'

'Oh, my God. I'm really sorry,' Fran says. 'I started –'

'Don't apologise. Caroline hates piano. Anyway, it wasn't your – are these my shoes?'

'Here,' Fran says. 'They're here, with Caroline's backpack.'

'Caroline!' Liz yells.

'It's impossible to get them –'

'Caroline, now!'

The door opens slowly and the girls, or what looks like shadows of the girls, drift out, fall out, into the hallway.

'Are Thursdays better?' Fran is saying.

'I'm sorry?'

'Thursdays. We could do Thur –'

Liz feels a kind of draining away, as if the ebb of the twilight has returned to the night all that is loose, unmoored. She has always fought the feeling of this time of day, when her father would remain in the garden and her mother did what mothers did then in the house. Liz would ride her bike up and down the drive-

way, waiting for her father to call her, to tell her to come quick, to come see the misshapen gourd, or the earthworm, or the potato bug before it got too dark, and she would, before it went black as pitch. She would hurry, she would pedal like the wind to get to what her father held: this thing unknown, random, discovered in the dirt and now there for her in her father's hand. A miracle. It's what placed her squarely in the world, what kept her from being sucked out.

'Yes,' Liz says. 'Sure, whatever.' She ties up Caroline's sneakers, yanks the laces tight. 'I'm sorry about Richard,' she says, straightening.

'Oh, it's fine,' says Fran. 'Really. Matilda and I are a team, aren't we, Matty?'

'Rah rah,' Liz says.

'Thursdays,' Fran says. She has found Caroline's jacket beneath the coat rack and now holds it out for her. 'We're going to do Thursdays!' she says to Matilda.

'Let me check at home,' Liz says. 'I never know which end is up.'

'Oh,' Fran says.

'Thank Matilda,' Liz says to Caroline.

'Thank you,' Caroline says.

'Thank Fran,' Liz says.

'Thank you,' Caroline says.

Liz clutches Caroline's hand on the subway platform. There is work being done somewhere, and the trains are running intermittently, though a taxi or a bus is out of the question – the traffic insane. The twins have had

their baths and are sleeping, Liz has heard from Lorna. Everything is fine, she has been told.

'Ladies and Gentlemen,' booms the intercom. 'This is an important message from the New York City Police Department. Keep your belongings in your sight at all times. Protect yourself. If you see a suspicious –'

'Did you have a good time?' Liz says, talking over the recorded voice, squatting so that she can be at eye level with the girl.

'Uh-huh,' Caroline says.

'Is Matilda nice?' Liz says.

'Uh-huh,' Caroline says.

'Does she like to play My Little Ponies?' Liz says.

Caroline pulls on the loose straps of her backpack, a filched Pinkie Pie, its tail braided, its eyes pocked by a pen point, now zipped into one of the many compartments.

'I don't know,' Caroline says. She turns away from her mother and stares out over the empty tracks. 'No,' she adds, quietly, though who could hear anything for the screech of the approaching train. In the rush Liz teeters, grabbing Caroline into a hug, her hands gripping Caroline's thin shoulders for balance. 'But it was a gold-star day, baby,' she says as the crowd swells over them. 'Wasn't it?'

© Kate Walbert 2007. First published in *The New Yorker* March 26th 2007

# THIS AND THAT

The first three *Persephone Classics*, the covers of which can be seen in the *Persephone Catalogue 2007-8*, are chosen from some of our bestselling titles. They will be launched in the UK in the late spring of next year and in the late summer in the USA. As a result they will be – potentially – available in any bookshop and in any case displayed, we hope, in every ‘good’ bookshop. However, the shop and the mail-order will continue exactly as usual for the 75, and the future *Persephone Originals*, side by side with the

more conventional distribution of the *Classics* through the trade.

The film of *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, starring Frances McDormand, is due some time next year. Ahead of this excitement life at Persephone Books goes on as normal. We are always delighted when you come in to the shop to see us, or come to the *Events* (cf. over the page).

We are also very pleased about the broadcasting of five Dorothy Whipple short stories on Radio 4; and about the

fourth and, alas, final part of the incredibly interesting exhibition at the Geffrye Museum – Paintings and Drawings of English Middle-Class Domestic Space, cf. the wonderful painting on p.17 which appeared in Part I. Part IV, which covers 1960 to the present, runs until February 4th 2008.

Persephone will have a stand at the *Country Living* Christmas Fair. This runs from 14-18 November from 10-6 and is in the Business Design Centre, Upper Street, Islington.

## PHILIP BURNE-JONES

The illustrations to *The Young Pretenders* are by Philip Burne-Jones (1861-1920). He knew the author because she attended the Wolverhampton Methodist church at which the services were taken by the Rev George Macdonald, the father of the sisters written about by Judith Flanders in *A Circle of Sisters*; one of them, Georgie, was Philip’s mother. But it was the fame of his father, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, that dominated his life: even his godfathers were Ruskin, Rossetti and Henry James. As a child he was ‘one of the nerviest children in Kensington’ (in the words of Edward’s biographer Penelope Fitzgerald) and though Philip was happy at Oxford, he went down without a degree.

His niece Angela Thirkell would write movingly about him in her book *Three Houses*. But she concluded: ‘Two things told fatally against him. He never needed to work, and he was



*Denis Mackail painted by his grandfather, Sir Edward Burne-Jones*

cursed with a sense of diffidence and a feeling that whatever he did would be contrasted unfavourably with his father’s work.’ Philip’s great talent was for comic illustration (as can indeed be seen from p.3 of this *Biannually*) but he was fatally interested in social climbing: he persuaded his father to hyphenate his name and, later, to accept a baronetcy (scorned, naturally enough, by Burne-Jones’s socialist friends such as William Morris).

Philip’s sister Margaret married Jack Mackail and had two children, Angela and Denis. The latter was the shy, charming, hard-working and happily-married author of *Persephone* Book No. 35, *Greenery Street*.

# EVENTS

**T**he first *Lunch* this winter is on **Thursday November 15th** from 12.30-2.30 and will celebrate *On the Other Side* by Mathilde ('Tilli') Wolff-Mönckeberg: Jessica Atkinson will talk about her great-grandmother's life and Chris Beaman, who wrote the Afterword, will set the book in its wartime context.

**O**n **Tuesday November 20th** Penelope Lively will give the *Third Persephone Lecture*. The lecture, the title of which is 'House and Home in Fiction' will again take place at the Art Workers Guild 6 Queen Square WC1, round the corner from Lamb's Conduit Street. The doors open at 6, a glass of wine and cheese straws will be served, the lecture will be at 6.30, and wine will be served afterwards.

**O**n **Thursday December 6th** Jane Brocket, author of *The Gentle Art of Domesticity* will talk at a *Lunch* about the domestic arts (knitting, crocheting, baking, quilting, a great deal of reading) as practised by her. Jane's Persephone cup-cakes will be served; her book (£18 instead of £25) is one of the 'Fifty Books we Wish we had Published'.

**L**ate-night shopping: on **Thursday December 6th**, **Friday December 7th** and **Thursday December 13th** the shop will be open until 8pm; there will be mulled wine and Konditor and

Cook mince pies. **Friday 7th** is the Lamb's Conduit Street Winter Festival mulled wine will be on offer all afternoon!

**T**here will be a *Persephone Tea* from 4-5.30 on **Saturday December 8th** at Hatley Village Hall, Cambs (north-west of Royston). Our 75 books will be available and orders can be taken.



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**O**n **Wednesday December 12th** from 6-8 there will be a *Persephone Party* at the shop (mulled wine and mince pies will be served) during which the books will be gift-wrapped free of charge.

**O**n **Thursday January 24th** 2008 there will be another showing of the 1924 silent film of *The Home-Maker* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher at the British Film Institute 21 Stephen Street W1. Lunch will be served at 1pm, the film will be at 2 and lasts about 75 minutes and then there will be tea. This is a unique and extraordinary film which was made available to us through the kindness of Kevin Brownlow.

**O**n **Thursday February 28th** our lunchtime speaker will focus on some of our WWII books. Juliet Gardiner, who has written extensively about the period and was historical advisor on the film of *Atonement*, will talk about the film (in which a Persephone book can be seen right at the end) and about titles such as *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, *Saplings* and *A House in the Country*.

**O**n **Wednesday March 26th** Christina Hardyment will talk at a *Lunch* about her newly-reissued book *Dream Babies: Childcare Advice from John Locke to Gina Ford*: she will draw on old favourites such as *The Home-Maker* and *Hostages to Fortune*.

**T**o book for any of these events, including the *Party* (for which there is no charge), *please telephone the shop*. The *Tea* costs £5, the *Lecture* £20, the *Lunches* and the *Film* £28.

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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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TEL: 020 7242 9292 / FAX: 020 7242 9272

sales@persephonebooks.co.uk / www.persephonebooks.co.uk