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The years' best book by America's best woman writer  
**"BLACK OXEN"**  
by GERTRUDE ATHERTON

**SYNOPSIS**

At a first night performance in New York a beautiful young woman attracts attention by rising and leisurely surveying the audience through her glasses. Clavering, a newspaper columnist, and his cousin, Dinwiddie, are particularly interested. Dinwiddie declares that she is the image of Mary Ogden, a belle of thirty years ago, who had married a Count Zattiany. He is convinced that this is Mary's daughter, but all efforts to establish her identity prove futile. Clavering finally manages to meet her, and she tells him she is the Countess Josef Zattiany, a cousin of Mary Ogden's and had married a relative of Mary's husband. Clavering does not believe her story and tells her so. As time goes on Clavering realizes that he is in love with the mysterious Madame Zattiany, whose first name, he learns, is Mary. He declares his passion and draws from her the admission of a reciprocal warmth of feeling. Mrs. Ogden, having offered her box, Clavering invites Mary to attend the opera with him one evening. Her appearance there in the Ogden box, regally gowned and the spouse of all eyes, is "something in the nature of a challenge to that forbidding Society which had realized the time has come to question her credentials, and clear up the mystery. She promises Clavering she will reveal her secret to him the following Saturday night.

(Continued XXX)

It seemed to Clavering that he had run the gamut of the emotions while listening to that brief biography; so sternly told, but there had also been times when he had felt as if suspended in a void even while visited by flashes of acute consciousness that he was being called upon to know himself before.

There was no precedent in life or in fiction to gild him, and he had realized with a sensation of panic even while she talked that it was doubtful if any one had ever understood himself since the dawn of time. Man had certain standards, fixed beliefs, above all, habits—how often they scattered to the winds under some unheralded or teratogenic stress. He had seen more than once, and not only in var. Every man had at least two personalities that he was aware of, and he dimly guessed at others. Some were frank enough to admit that they had not an idea what they would do in a totally unfamiliar situation. Clavering had sometimes emblemized man and his personalities with the old game of the ivory egg. A twist and the outer egg revealed an inner. Another twist and one beheld a third. And so on to the lined unmanipulatable sphere, which might stand for the always inscrutable soul. Like all intelligent men, he had a fair knowledge of these two outer layers of personality, and he had sometimes had a flashing glimpse of others, too elusive to seize and put under the microscopic eye of the mind.

What did he know of himself? He asked the question again as he sat in his own deep chair in the early morning hours. The heat in the hotel had been turned off and he had lit the gas logs in the grate—symbol of the artificialities of civilization that had played their insidious role in man's outer and more familiar personality. Perhaps they struck deeper. Habit more often than not dominated original impulse. His own room, where he was nearly always alone, with its warm red curtains and rug, the low bookcases built under his direction and

Published by arrangement with Associated First National Pictures, Inc. Watch for the screen version produced by Frank Lloyd with Corinne Griffith as Countess Zattiany.

filled with his favorite books, the refectory table and other pieces of dark old English oak that he had brought from home, and several family portraits on the wall, restored his equilibrium and his brain was abnormally clear. He wondered if he ever would sleep again. Better think it over now. Mary Zattiany she talked had never changed her expression. She might have been some ancient, oracle reciting her credo, and she seemed to have narcotized that magnetic current that had always vibrated between them. Nevertheless, he had been fully aware that she felt like nothing less than an oracle or the noble bust she looked at, and that his soul was racked and possibly fainting, but mastered by her formidable will.

Formidable. Did that word best express her? Was she one of the superwomen who could find no mate on earth and must look for her god on another star? He certainly was no superman himself to breathe on her plane and mate that incarnate will. Had she any human weakness? Even that subterranean sex-life in her past had not been due to weakness. She was far too arrogant for that. Life had been her footstool. She had kicked it about contemptuously. Even her readjustments had been the dictates of her imperious will. And her pride! She was a female Lucifer in pride.

No doubt the men she had dismissed had been secretly relieved, stung for the only time in their lives perhaps, with a sense of inferiority. It must have been like receiving the casual favors of a queen on her throne. Well, she had got it in the neck once; there was some satisfaction in that. He wished he knew the man's name. He'd



"He wondered if he would ever sleep again."

hunt him up and thank him in behalf of his sex. For an hour he excoriated her, hated her, feared her, dissociating her from the vast army of womanhood, but congratulating himself upon having known her. She was a unique if crucifying study.

With restored youth superimposed upon that exhaustive knowledge of life—every phase of it that counted in her calculations—the rejuvenation of all her great natural endowments, she'd probably go back and rule Europe! What use could she possibly have for any man? He made himself a cup of coffee over his electric stove, turned off the maldororous gas, which affected his head, stood out on his balcony for a moment, then lit his pipe and felt in a more mellow mood. After all she had suffered as only a woman so liberally endowed could suffer, and over a long period of years. She had known despair and humiliation and bewilderment, let her heroic hopelessness, and finally a complete sacrifice of self. His imagination, in spite of his rebellious soul, had furnished the background for that bald recital.

And she must have an indomitable soul, some inner superfluous spiritual essence, with which arrogance and even pride had less to do than she imagined. Otherwise, after the life she had led, she would either have become an imperious, uncomfortable old woman or one of those flattering nonentities crowded into the backwaters of life by a generation which inspires them with nothing but timidity and disapproval. Towering individualities often go down to defeat in old age.

And nothing could alter the fact that she was the most beautiful and the most wholly desirable woman he had ever known, the one woman who had focussed every aspiration of his mind, his soul, and his body. He knew he must ask himself the inevitable question and face it without blinking. Was he appalled by her real age, could he ever get away from the indubious fact that whatever miracle science may have effected, her literal age was verging on sixty? If she were not an old woman she had been one. That beautiful body had withered, undesired of all men, that perfect face had been the battered mirror of an aged ego. He did not ask himself if the metamorphosis would last, if she would still wither again tomorrow. He was abreast of the important scientific discoveries of his day and was not at all astonished that the problem of senescence should be solved. It was no more remarkable than wireless, the Roentgen Ray, the properties of radium, or any one of the beneficent contributions of science to the well-being of mankind that were now too familiar for discussion. He had heard a good deal of this particular

discovery as applied to men. No doubt Dinwiddie, Osborne would soon be appearing as gay young sparks on her doorstep. It might be the greatest discovery of all time, but it certainly would work both ways. While its economic value might be indisputable, and even as she had suggested, its spiritual, it would be hard on the merely young. The mutual hatreds of capital and labor would sink into insignificance before the antagonism between authentic youth and age inverted. On the other hand it might mean the millennium. The threat of over-population—for man's architectural powers were restored if not woman's; to say nothing of his prolonged sojourn—would at last rouse the law-makers to the imperious necessity of eugenics, birth control, sterilization of the unfit, and the expulsion of undesirable races. It might even stimulate youth to a higher level than attained at the present. Human nature might attain perfection.

However, he was in no mood for abstract speculation. His own problem was absorbing enough. He might as well itemize the questions he had to face and examine them one by one, and dispassionately. He would never feel more emotionless than now; and that mental state was very rare that enabled a man to think clearly and see further than a yard ahead of him. Her real age? Could he ever forget it? Should he not always see the old face under the new mask as the X-Rays revealed man's hideous interior under its merciful covering of flesh? But he knew that one of the most beneficent gifts bestowed upon mankind is the talent for forgetting. Particularly when one object has been displaced by another. Retention dulls the memory. He might say to himself every hour in the day that she was sixty not thirty and the phrase would soon become as meaningless as absent-minded replies to remarks about the weather.

And he doubted if any man could look at Mary Zattiany for three consecutive minutes and recall that she had ever been old, or imagine that she ever could be old again. However prone man may be to dream, he is, unless one of the visionaries, still dominated by the present. What he wants he wants now and he wants what he sees, not what may be lurking in the future. That is the secret of the early and often imprudent marriage—the urge of the race. And if a man is not deterred by mere financial considerations, still less is he troubled by visions of what his inamorata will look like thirty years hence or what she might have looked like had disease prematurely withered her. He sees what he sees and if he is satisfied at all he is as completely satisfied as a martyr. He might not doubt that Mary Zattiany would have, if she chose, as many suitors among men of his own age as among her former contemporaries. They would discuss the phenomenon furiously, joke about it, try to imagine her as she had looked when younger, but they would, hesitantly, speculate—and then forget it.

No one would forget it sooner than himself. He had no doubt whatever that when he went to her house tomorrow afternoon he would remember as long as he kept him writing and no longer. So that was that. Did he want children? They charmed him—sometimes—but he had never been conscious of any desire for a brood of his own. He knew that many men felt an even greater need of offspring than women. Man's ego is more strident in the desire to perpetuate itself more insistent, his foresight is more extended. Moreover, however subconsciously, his sense of duty to the race is stronger. . . . But he doubted if any man would weigh the reputation of his ego against his ego's demand to mate with a woman like Mary Zattiany. He certainly would not. That was final.

What was she demanding in love, that she had sought so ardently and ever missed? Could he give it to her? Was she merely glomored onto him, caught up again in the delusions of youth, with her revived grain and re-awakened senses, and this time only because the man was of a type novel in her cognition of men? Useless to plead the urge of the race in her case. . . . Nevertheless, many women, denied the power of reproduction, fell as mistakenly in love as the most fertile of their sisters. But hardly a woman of Mary Zattiany's exhaustive experience! She certainly should know her own mind. Her instincts by this time must be compounded of technical knowledge, not the groping inherited flashes playing about the shallow soil of youth. . . . If her instincts had centered on him there must be some deeper meaning than passion or even intellectual homology. After

all, their conversations, if vital, had been in number. Perhaps she had found, with her mind's trained antennae, some one of those hidden layers of personality which she alone could reveal to herself. What was it? She wanted far more than love-making and mental correspondence. What was it? He wished he knew. Tenderness? He could give her that in full measure. Sentiment? He was no sentimentalist, but he believed that he possessed the finer quality, fidelity? That was not worth consideration. Appreciation of the deepest and best in her, sympathetic understanding of all her mistakes and of all that she had suffered? He knew the answer as well as he did. The ability to meet her in many moods, never to weary her with monotony? He was a man of many moods himself. What had saved him from early matrimony was a certain monotony in women, the

rest of them. But there must be something beyond some subtle, spiritual demand, developed throughout nearly twice as many years as he had dwelt on earth; born not only of an aspiring soul and terrible disenchantments, but of a wisdom that, only as a deep and living experience, no mere intelligence, however brilliant, could hope to assemble. He was thirty-four. There was no possible question that at fifty-eight, if he lived sanely, and his intellectual faculties had progressed unimpeded, he would look back upon thirty-four as the monage of life—when the future was a misty abyss of wisdom whose brink he had barely trod. She herself was an abyss of wisdom. How in God's name could he ever cross it? Her body might be young again, but never her mind. Never her mind! And then he had

a flash of insight. Perhaps he alone could open her mind. Certainly he could make her forget. Men and women would be aged at thirty, but for this beneficent gift of forgetting. . . . He could make the present vivid enough. He explored every nook of those personalities of his, determined to discover if he felt any sense of inferiority to this woman who knew so much more, had lived and thought and felt so much more, than himself—whom he still visioned on a plane above and apart. No woman was ever more erudite in the most brilliant and informing declensions of life, whatever the disenchantments, and for thirty years she had known in varying degrees of intimacy men in Europe. She had been at no pains to conceal her opinion of their intellectual superiority over American men. He concluded dispassionately that he never could feel inferior to any woman. Women might arrest the attention of the world with their talents, change laws, and bring a better world out of life than man has accorded them in the past, but whatever their gifts and whatever their achievements they always had been and always would be, through their physical disabilities, their lack of ratiocination, of constructive ability on the grand scale, the inferiors of men. The rare exceptions but proved the rule, and no doubt they had been cast in one mould and finished in another.

In sheer masculine arrogance he was more than her match. Moreover, there were other ways of keeping a woman subject. Did he love her? Comprehensively and utterly? Clear thinking fled with the last of his doubts? . . . And when a man detaches himself from the gross material surface of life and wings to the realm of the imagination where he glimpses immortality, what matter the penalty? Any penalty? Few had the thrice blessed opportunity. If he were one of the chosen, the very demi-gods, jeering at mortals, would hate him. And then abruptly he fell asleep. (To Be Continued)

**PLOD ON**  
Show me the man you honor—I know by that symptom better than by the other, what kind of a man you are yourself. For you show one what your ideal of manhood is, what kind of a man you long to be.



The Middle Ground  
By Marion Rubinow.  
A LETTER  
Chapter 52

The mother found Amy as indifferent as Luther.  
"Of course one's unhappy," that young lady remarked, regarding the tip of a very pink and polished nail. "She's in love. Everyone that falls in love is unhappy."  
Having made this sweeping observation, she attacked the next nail with a buffer, until it came forth as pink and perfect as the other.  
"That's why I'm not going to fall in love," she went on, cheerfully mixing up philosophy and manly. "I'm going to have a hard enough time without getting my emotions into it. Love is a luxury, and I can't afford it. Claire and I agree on that."  
"But Amy—" the mother began to protest at once. This was a demoralizing point of view! Surely, she herself had been happy in the early days of her married life. And she was in love then!  
"Look at Luther," Amy went on, putting away the manicure things and regarding her completed nails with a look of pride. "He's in love with Claire, and Claire won't have anything to do with him. He's miserable. She's too good for that matter. That's why she's thinking of asking for a divorce, she says it must be a complete separation—"  
A bombshell dropped into the room would have had less effect upon Mrs. Talbot than this piece of information, so casually thrown off her daughter.

Divorce! Another "modern" evil. She opened her mouth to protest, words of denunciation rushing to her lips. Then she thought better. She had determined to make no comment upon anything new, except in agreement.  
Besides, if she disagreed, Amy would give her no further information. How far the child had come from the point of view she held in her old home! The first disturbing factor was the visit of Luther and Claire. That began in June, this was February. Amy, a child at 17, seemed to have matured into full womanhood with her eighteenth birthday.  
How calmly she sat there now, combing out her wonderful hair and plugging it into the latest style of knot on top of her head. She gave more attention to the fact that each strand should be pinned just so, than to the troubles of her brother and sister; her only worry was the broken comb, which occasionally caught her hair. Amy was in that familiar state of poverty, which must spend money on outward appearances, and has none to spare for things that are not of continual display.  
"What does Luther think about a divorce?" the mother ventured to ask finally.  
"Oh, well, Luther hasn't any old-fashioned ideas about it. He says more." Amy said. "Only he is very fond of Claire, of course, and he hates to give her up; thinks she belongs to him, the eternal cave man, all that sort of thing! Besides, he's still jealous of all the other men that come to see her, and especially of Jim. So he makes her miserable rowing about them. Anyway, there they are,



"He examined the full-length picture of her painted shortly before her marriage."

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STOCK—3 good horses age 1, 4 years, 1, 6 years, 1, 12 years, 10 head of cattle, 5 extra choice milk cows 1 to freshen December 26th, 1 to freshen January 1st, 3 cows in milk.  
CROP—3 tons hay, quantity straw, 100 bus. oats, 100 bus. potatoes, 50 stooks wheat.  
Also all my farm implements and all household furniture including dining room, kitchen and bed room furniture, one Enterprise Monarch range (new) and a lot of other articles not mentioned.  
Sale positive. No reserve.  
Terms of farm at sale. Of stock 12 months on all sums over \$10.00, 6 per cent off for cash.  
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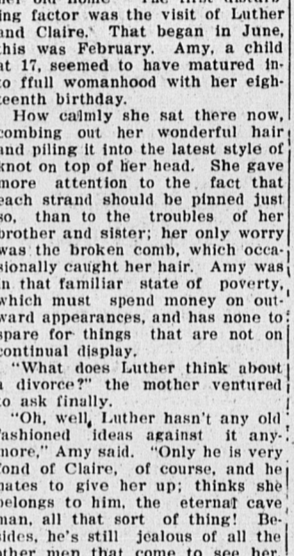
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tied up to each other, and perfectly unhappy."  
"But, if Luther still cares—and if she doesn't hate him—We've all tried to be peace makers. I'd hate Loo myself, he's as jealous as a cat. He's the sort that wants to lock up his wife in a gold cage, and not let any one else come anywhere near her. It's the most depressing form of being in love. It's really medieval, and rather all right, really living in the twentieth century."  
"It's not often that a woman has such devotion from a man. Most of them—well, most women would be glad to have such an undivided love," thus Mrs. Talbot ventured her opinion.  
"Yes. But there are limits to everything," Amy replied. "Luther's a dear, and his devotion, as you call it, is quite touching. At the same time it's wearing. He's just the opposite from Donald. Donald wants complete freedom for himself and the woman too. What ever love exists between them is voluntary, not forced because they are married and tied to each other."

I can see his point of view too. "Luther wants to see Claire all the time. He doesn't even want to look at any other woman and he doesn't want any other man to look at her."  
"Which way then do you think is best?" It was frankly asked to seek information.  
"Neither. Donald's is ideal theoretically, but I can't see myself running in the face of public opinion and trying it. And I'd hate to be tied up the way Luther wants to tie up Claire, or the way father ties up you. He owns you, just as though you were part of the live stock on the farm."  
"I don't see any way out. But I know in my case the solution is not to fall in love. I'm going to marry as a business proposition."  
She broke off her talk to go to the door in answer to a ring. It was the postman, with a small package for her, and a letter postmarked "Hornbrook" for Mrs. Talbot. Amy opened her package with delight. Mrs. Talbot broke open ever love exists between them. What the letter with misgiving. Jordan would not have anything pleasant married and tied to each other."

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