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The years best book by America's best woman writer  
**"BLACK OXEN"**  
 by GERTRUDE ATHERTON  
 Published by arrangement with Associated First National Pictures, Inc. Watch for the screen version produced by Frank Lloyd with Corinne Griffith as Countess Zattiany.

(Continued)  
 "Yes, but Madame Zattiany belongs to a class of women that derive less from immediate ancestors than from a legendary race of sirens—not so merely legendary, perhaps, as we think. Legendry is only a flexible harness for such women and plays no part whatever in their secret lives."  
 "You're in love with Mary."  
 "Don't come back to me. I won't have it. For the moment I don't feel as if I had an atom of personality left. I'm so utterly absorbed in you; and I'd give my immortal soul to help you."  
 "Yes, I know that. I wouldn't be turning myself inside out if I didn't. I've never talked to a living soul as I've talked to you tonight and I never shall again."  
 She stared at him for a moment, and then she burst into a loud laugh. It was awe-inspiring, that laugh. Lucifer in hell, holding his sides at the futilities of mankind, could not have surpassed it. "What a mess! What a mess! Life! Beings nowhere, ends nowhere." She went on muttering to herself, and then, abruptly, she broke into the sarcastic speech which her friend-knew best.

"Lord, Lee, I wish you could have been behind a screen at that lunch con. Thirteen odd tombstones in feathers and net collars—seven or eight of 'em, anyhow—colonial profiles and longnettes, and all looking as if they had been hit in the stomach. I at one end of the table looking like the Witch of Endor, Mary at the other looking like one of our granddaughters and trying to be animated and intimate. I forgot my own tragedy and how-howed three times. She looked almost apologetic when she called us by our first names, especially when she used the diminutive. Polly Vane, who's not a head like a billiard ball and has to wear a wig for decency's sake, drew her self up twice and then relaxed with a sickly grin. . . . All the same I don't think Mary felt any more comfortable or liked it much better than the rest of us. Too much like reading your own epitaph on a tombstone. I thought I saw her squirm."  
 "How did they take it individually?" Clavering hoped she was finally diverted. "Were they jealous and resentful?"  
 "Some. Elinor Goodrich had all ways been too besottedly fond of her to mind. Others, who had been merely admirers and liked her.

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righteous indignation. "What right you got breaking into a gentleman's rooms like a damned policeman? It's an outrage and if I had a gun I'd shoot you. I'd—"  
 And then he collapsed on a chair and was very sick.  
 Oglethorpe turned to Clavering, who had thought it best to remain in the hall and watch other exits. "Just stay there, will you?" He turned to the three gaping youngsters. "You dare make a move and I'll knock your heads together. Just remember that you're drunk and I'm sober."  
 He went into the next room and immediately saw several forms under the bed. He reached down and jerked them out by their legs. They rolled over, covering their faces and sobbing with fright. Emancipated as they were and disdainful of pre-war parents, when it came to late parties in a bachelor's rooms they exercised strategy to slip out, not defiance.  
 "Oh, Mr. Oglethorpe," gasped one convulsively. "Don't tell on us, please."  
 "I've no intention of telling on you. You can go to the devil in your own way for all I care. I'm a fair Janet."  
 "She's not here."  
 "That's what I'm going to find out." He opened the door of a wardrobe and another girl tumbled into his arms, shrieked, and flung herself face downward on the bed. But it was not Janet. He investigated every corner of the apartment and then returned to Clavering, slamming the door behind him.  
 "She's not there, Lee," he said, leaning heavily against the wall. "Where in God's name is she? I don't know where to look next. This is her particular gang. She has no other intimates that I know of. But what do I know about her, anyway?"  
 "You're sure she isn't hiding anywhere at home?"  
 "I searched the house from top to bottom."  
 "I suppose it isn't likely that she's gone to any of her aunts."  
 "Good Lord, no. She'd take a chance on mother, but never with any of the rest of the family, and she's got no money. I saw to that. I'd suppose she's roaming the streets?"  
 "Well, she can't roam long; legs will give out. Perhaps she's home by now or at Mrs. Oglethorpe's. Better telephone."  
 They went out and found a public telephone. Janet had not been seen or heard from.  
 "You don't think it's going to be another Dorothy Arnold case?" gasped Oglethorpe, who seemed completely unerved.  
 "Good heavens no, Jim! And she's able to take care of herself. Nobody better. She'll give you a scare and then turn up—with her thumb at her nose, likely. Better come up to my rooms and have a drink."  
 "Orright. I can't go home and I don't want to be alone anywhere. I'd go out of my senses. Anything might happen to her, and I shan't call in the police until the last minute. Billie scound!"  
 "Police? Certainly not. And as Janet is cold sober, he sure she's come to no harm."  
 A few minutes later they were in the lift ascending to Clavering's rooms. "Hallo!" he said, as he opened the door of his little hall. The foot maid has left the light on, and, as they entered the living room, "what the devil—" Clairette smoke hung in the air.

To Be Continued

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**The Middle Ground**  
 By Myrlon Rubincam.

"He says he'll take you along anyway," Mrs. Talbot spoke as though she thought Donald capable of throwing a cloak over Jane's head and carrying her off bodily. And, in truth, she knew he was capable of throwing a cloak over her reasoning powers and, metaphorically, carrying her off her feet.  
 And so the subject rested. But Mrs. Talbot soon had other things to worry about, so that Jane could get only part of her attention.  
 First came Amy and Adam Arnold. Amy brought him in for tea one afternoon. All day she went about the house, bringing the prettiest pillows from her room to adorn the living room couch, putting dress, frowning discontentedly at the furniture in the little flat.  
 "Everything in the place pretends to be something it isn't," she complained, staring moodily into the living room. "The desk is a kitchen table disguised by gaudy enamel; the book case an old box knocked apart for shelves; my dressing table is an old washstand painted."  
 "It's all very attractive," Mrs. Talbot protested. "It shows how clever you are to have made a home from odds and ends."  
 "I hate being poor and living on odds and ends," Amy burst out. "We make sofa cushion out of my old dresses, and 'new-art' table doilies from gingham, and pretend we like them because we can't afford real linen. I wear Claire's castoff clothes, and tell the girls in my Italian class I like riding on tops of buses because I can't afford taxis. I hate being poor!"  
 The mother looked her astonishment at this.  
 "But we aren't! Luther pays all the expenses here. We live very well indeed. Claire gives you lovely clothes, nicer than I ever had in my life. And all the money you make, you can spend on music and dancing and language lessons—you don't know what being poor is."

Chapter 58  
 Adam Arnold was 40 and quite plainly wished himself 30, or even 25. The older he became, the more he affected everything youthful. At 20 he had fallen in love, with women of 30-odd; at 30 he preferred them in their 20's at 40 he found his greatest interest in fluffily-haired, fluffily-brained girls in their teens. He began to hate serious things and serious people. He was attracted by the little giggling laugh that Amy possessed, and by her easy excitement and her great enthusiasm—her pleasure in everything new.  
 He had worked hard when he was young. At 40 he was trying to recapture his lost youth. He liked to sit and laugh awkwardly at the silly jokes of college boys. He could not always see the humour in them, but he longed for the irresponsible point of view that these lads had.  
 It was a struggle in which, inevitably, he must be defeated, for no mature man, bordering on middle age, can recapture his lost youth. He explained that his youth "was not lost, only mislaid," and laughed at his joke. But the effect was the same, it was a ghost that fled before him and melted when he reached out his hand to capture it.

He had a great deal of money. Much was inherited, most he had made himself, after his tyrannical father had died. His father had kept him so hard at work he had little time for fun. He had more money now than he wanted and he thought he could use it to buy back youth.  
 Ent all he could do was to buy presents for youthful friends. The emerald bracelet he gave Amy was a mere top to him, but in her great joy at owning it, Arnold felt, vicariously, a real thrill of young pleasure.  
 He felt that if he gave lavishly enough, he could buy love—and fine youth again with a youthful wife. The young girls bred in the city had an oldness and a sophistication that annoyed him. Buy Amy, in spite of her city mannerisms, was at heart still a little girl from the country, wide-eyed with wonder and redcheeked with excitement over the pleasures of the city.  
 Mrs. Talbot watched him curiously, not knowing anything of him except that he gave Amy presents that amazed her by their value, and that she had met his type before.  
 To keep his head from going bald, he used great quantities of ointments, so his hair was always slick and shiny. His greatest sorrow was the pitch of gray behind his ears. He seriously considered dyeing this black, and when very confidential, asked the advice of his friends upon this important subject.  
 "To make his figure appear thin and young, he wore college cut clothes, and bright ties which he thought youthful—his father had made him wear black ones. To keep himself from getting stout, he never ate potatoes and took his tea without sugar and with two slices of lemon.  
 But maturity crept upon him in spite of these precautions and the fact that he danced every night he could find a partner.  
 "My house will be done next week," he said, as he drank his tea and looked longingly at the seventh sandwich he felt he should not take. "I've been building a house, Mrs. Talbot, just off Fifth Avenue—a very nice block. I've the biggest firm of interior decorators, do it inside for me. It ought to be beautiful, they're charging enough for it."

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