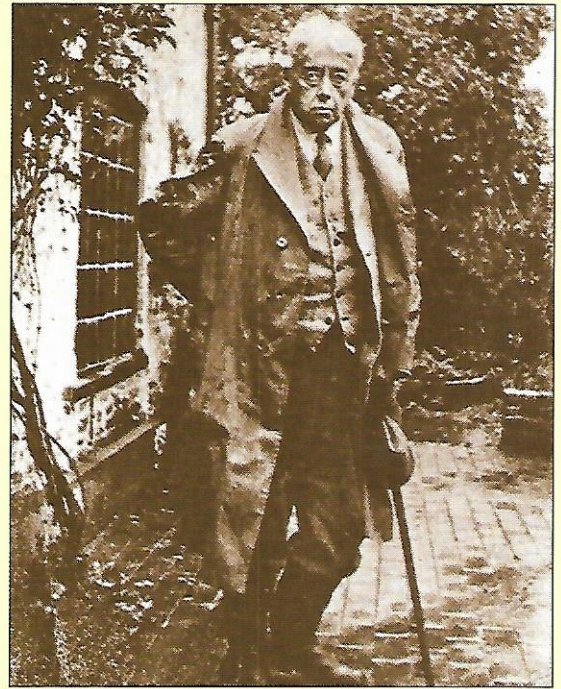


EDWARD GARNETT

Edward Garnett wrote volumes of fiction and non-fiction, but his great contribution to literature lay elsewhere. As reader to the leading publishing house, Jonathan Cape, he discovered and encouraged some of Britain's greatest writers. Bates thought his first meeting with Garnett, in 1925, was a crucial day in his life. The two became close friends, Garnett giving Bates time, constructive (but often savage) criticism, and encouragement. He, his wife, and the son who later took over his post at Cape, lived in spartan rigour at a stone cottage called The Cearne. Here eminent authors often met and talked.

It is impossible to overstate Garnett's importance as a friend and mentor. Bates wrote, 'I have got a monument up to you inside me.' Three years after Garnett's death in 1947, Bates produced a biography of this most distinguished literary figure.



Mike Bussell/Photographers Library

East had a crippling effect, a 'catastrophic impact . . . on his sensitivity' prompted by the 'callous contempt for life' he witnessed there. The only way out was to exorcise everything he had heard and seen by writing about it. The results were two highly successful books: *The Purple Plain* and *The Jacaranda Tree*.

GOING INTO PICTURES

In 1947 Bates' abdominal pains had reached such intensity that his doctors decided he had suffered an internal haemorrhage and operated at last. They had to remove most of his stomach, but he was free of agony for the first time in years.

Three years later came his fine semi-autobiographical novel *Love for Lydia* and a batch of radio plays. Still acutely sensitive to criticism, his writing nearly came to an end after the scathing remarks of a friend on his work, *The Sleepless Moon*. But he was quickly rescued by his love for the short-story form and by the intervention of the film world. Fellow writer A. E. Coppard encouraged him to use 'cinematic' techniques in his writing – fade-outs, cuts and close-ups. The American director Leslie Fenton was so excited by the Flying Officer X stories that he asked Bates to turn them into filmscripts, which he agreed to do, questioning his success in retrospect.

Another great fan of Bates was the director/producer Alexander Korda, who gave him a lavish salary and introduced him to the film director David Lean. Soon afterwards, Lean bought the rights to *Fair Stood the Wind for France* and *The Purple Plain*, giving Gregory Peck the lead role in the latter. He also sent Bates and Madge to Fiji, Samoa and Tahiti in search of inspiration.

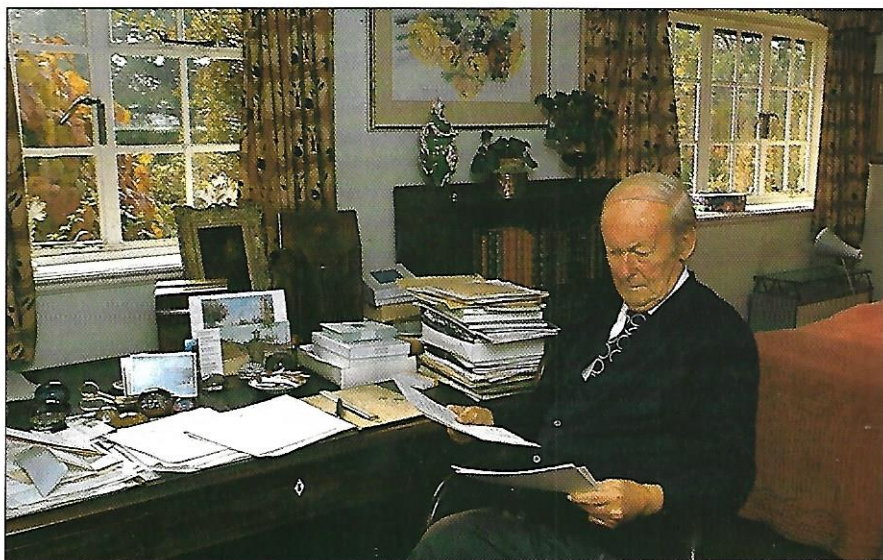
When Bates returned to England, however, he launched into a thoroughly British venture, intro-

Ripe old age

In contrast to many great writers, Bates knew more joy in his old age than his youth. His health was better, and his achievements were crowned by the award of a CBE in 1973. His children and grandchildren he called 'a handsome cornucopia'; the countryside still held its mystical spell, and his talents were undimmed.

ducing readers to his most memorable creations, the Larkin family, inhabitants of a 'perfick' world. The Larkins achieved best-seller popularity in *The Darling Buds of May* and *A Breath of Fresh Air*. All the while, Bates' imagination was toying with people and incidents and stories from long ago. *The Triple Echo* sprang from an idea he had been nursing for nearly 25 years. Again, Bates' highly cinematic style (perhaps a result of his early love for painting) paid off. The story, published in 1978, was turned into a highly acclaimed film.

In Bates' final years, he turned his mind to an autobiography, issued in three volumes: *The Vanished World*, *The Blossoming World* and *The World in Ripeness*. By now, he was such an invaluable part of the English story-telling tradition that in 1973 he was awarded the CBE. He died the following year, aged 68, in Canterbury.



LOVE FOR LYDIA

In this poignant tale, Bates captures the ecstasy and acute sadness of first love, charting the bitter-sweet lives of young people linked by both fate and friendship.

Love for Lydia unfolds slowly and painfully to reveal all the intensity and passion of a first love affair. Set in a small town at the end of the 1920s, the feelings aroused by Lydia in all the people she encounters contrast sharply with the stultifying atmosphere of the town. Lydia is charismatic and beautiful, and the devotion she inspires in her admirers is described with a haunting nostalgic quality, making this one of the most moving and memorable of H. E. Bates' novels.

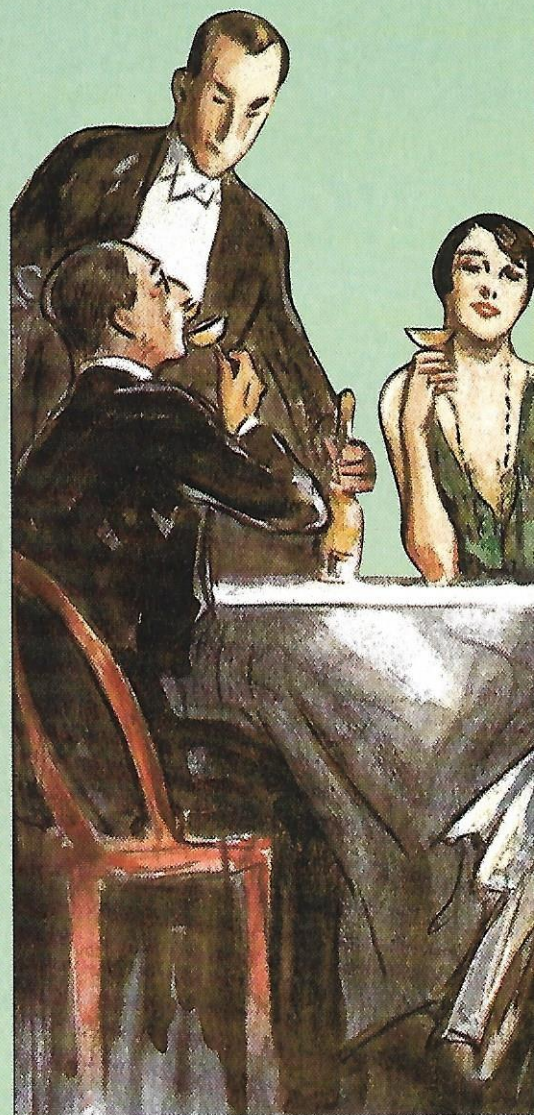
GUIDE TO THE PLOT

Richardson, the 19-year-old narrator of the story, loathes his job as a young newspaper reporter. Sent to the imposing Aspen house for a story, he meets Lydia for the first time. On the death of her father, Lydia's two ageing aunts have brought her to live with them and are anxious that she should have friends and enjoy herself. At their request Richardson takes Lydia skating one Saturday afternoon. She loves it and soon they skate as

often as possible, and at Lydia's insistence, visit every sleazy café and eating house Evensford has to offer.

Lydia rapidly emerges from her shy awkward adolescence, thirsty for new experiences. Her growing sexual curiosity inflames Richardson's passion, and he feels certain, during their mad hot summer together, that he will love her forever. He changes his job, taking an undemanding position as clerk in a small leather firm, from which he escapes each afternoon to meet Lydia clandestinely

"She laughed again lying with her mouth across my face, her voice warm with tenderness and rather hoarse, and I felt all summer spin together... into what was really for me a monstrously simple, monstrously complex web of happiness."



Neil H. Christensen - Skaters in a frozen winter landscape/Private Collections/Bridgeman Art Library

"A wonderful time"

The unfamiliar thrill of company her own age transforms Lydia – almost overnight – into a dazzling coquette.



J.M. Picture Library

in the summer house on the Aspen estate.

During the winter months he and Lydia go dancing with four other friends. But their regular outings in a chauffeur-driven car gradually turn sour, as Lydia becomes increasingly aware of her sexual power. Alex, one of the four, falls desperately in love with her, and her flirtation with Blackie Johnson, their driver, sends Alex into a jealous frenzy. Drunk and depressed he confides to Richardson, "I keep getting a feeling something bloody awful is going to happen."

Lydia is determined to make sure that her 21st birthday party is an event that Evensford will never forget. In a typically extravagant gesture she invites the whole town, determined that no-one should be left out. Fearing Lydia is growing away from him, Richardson proposes to her at the party. She turns him down, impatiently straining to return to her guests who have begun to sing 'For she's a jolly good fellow . . .' Lydia is at her most powerful; propelled by her desire for danger and excitement, she searches to make further conquests, and inflicts deep suffering on both Alex and Richardson.

On the way home from a Midsummer's Eve party Alex falls from a bridge and drowns. How it all happened and who was to blame is never really clear. Richardson comments:

" . . . Alex had been killed not so much by a



fall from a bridge as by an accumulative process of little things, of which some were gay, some stupid, some accidental but all of small importance in themselves. Perhaps he had died on the icy evening when Lydia had first taken notice of Blackie . . ."

Richardson becomes a recluse, unable to bear seeing Lydia or his friends. He meets her again later that summer, and watches painfully as she and Tom (his oldest friend) fall in love. Tragedy strikes again and Richardson flees to London, turning his back on Lydia and Evensford. When he returns two years later every-

Aspen house

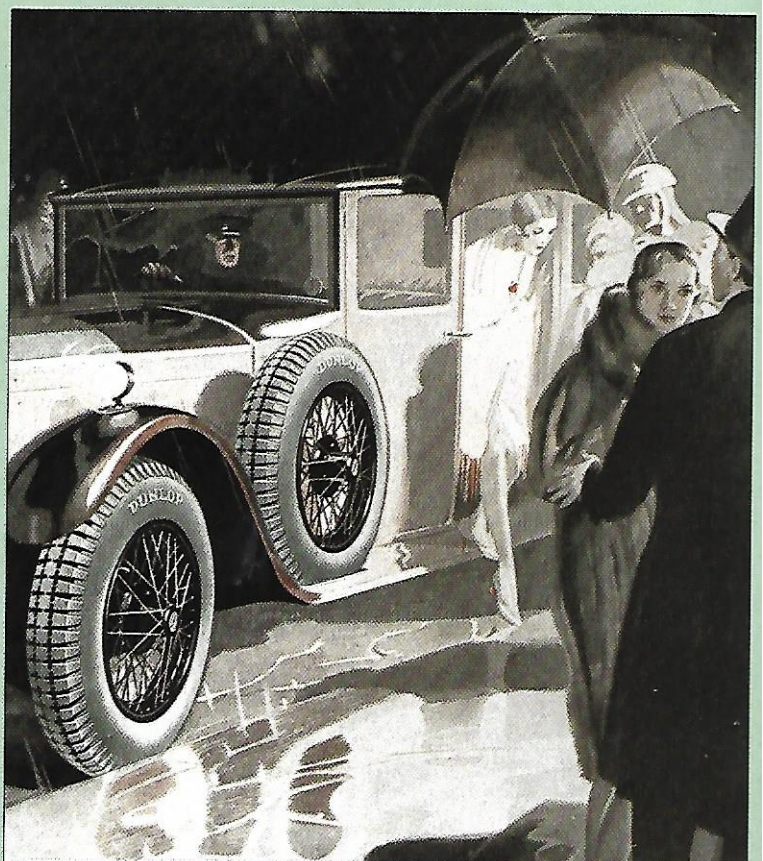
(above) The mystique of Evensford's 'big house' acquires an exciting, sensuous glamour for Richardson. It is the setting for his and Lydia's discovery of their own – and each other's – sexuality.

**Broadening horizons**

(left) Richardson and Lydia are drawn together by her new-found passion for skating, and his growing fascination with her. He neglects his work so that he can meet her every day – "I suddenly did not care about anything but the skating, the frost . . . and the girl in the cloak and the scarlet sweater."

Night owls

(right) Under the fatherly care of their chauffeur, Johnson, Lydia, Richardson and their circle embark on a series of outings – drinking and dancing till the early hours.

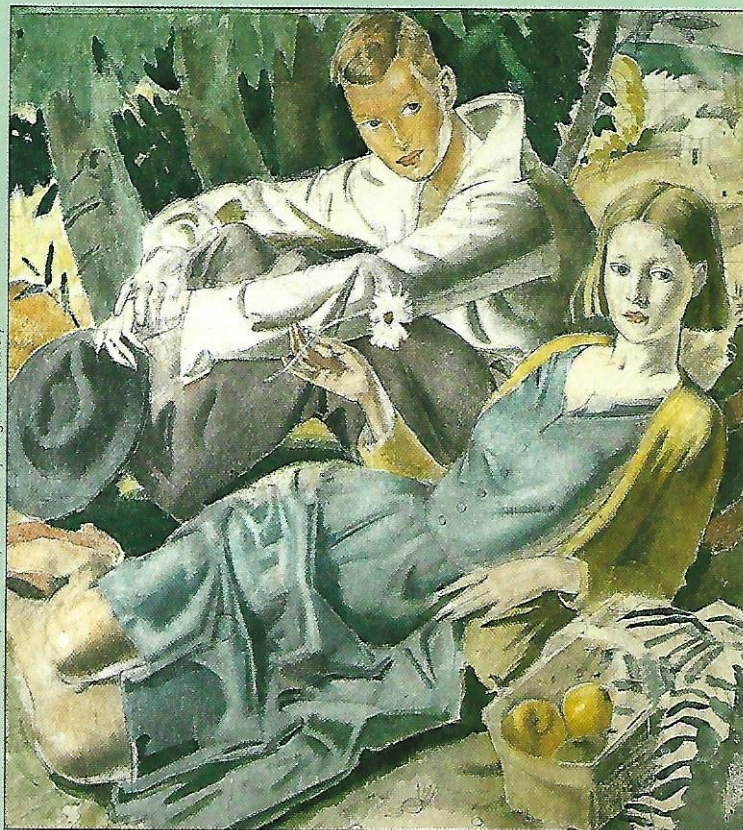


thing has changed. With hindsight and a dawning maturity he begins to understand the events of the past and look forward to a new spring and a happier future.

PASTORAL LOVE STORY

Love for Lydia is essentially a brilliantly crafted love story containing many ingredients of a fine mystery, which makes the book a compelling read. Written in the first person, it is fictional autobiography of the best kind. Richardson, the narrator, tells of his love for Lydia as he remembers it, with all the pain and glory he endures over the brief two years of their acquaintance. His story is punctuated with ominous warnings – “I could not tell, then, what was going to happen . . .” – which add a dramatic sense of foreboding to the tale. Even in the most lyrical slow-moving sections of the novel, there is an awareness of tragedy in store – a device guaranteed to maintain suspense.

Love for Lydia is also in a sense a pastoral eulogy. The vivid descriptions of seasonal changes in the landscape surrounding Evensford are bound up with



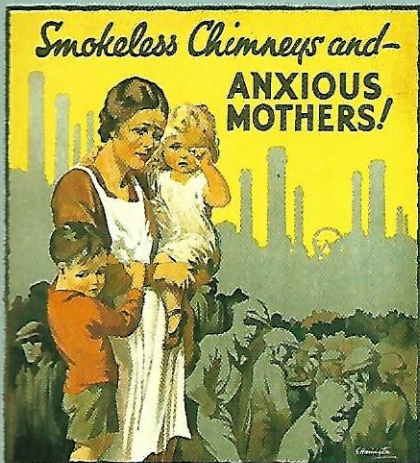
Old friends
(left) Richardson finds that he is outgrowing the simple, wholesome affection of Nancy, the sister of Tom, his oldest friend. He feels, in knowing Lydia, that he has risen “into a world that I thought was golden and lofty and too complicated for her to understand”. But he misjudges Nancy, for she sees some things far more clearly than he does . . .

New passions
(below) As Lydia begins to find other men attractive, Richardson wants her all the more.

In the Background

THE DEPRESSION

The effects of the Wall Street Crash were felt worldwide, reaching Britain within a year. The drop in demand for raw materials forced industry to contract, and by 1932 three million people were unemployed. In *Love for Lydia*, Evensford, which depends on the leather industry, is hit by the slump. Three tanneries close, and four thousand lose their jobs, as if “a million people had suddenly decided to wear shoes no longer.”



“I was hurt because she did not belong to me alone any longer. And because I was hurt I began to grow jealous of her. I could not bear it if she looked at Alex with friendliness, or if she teased Tom in his presence...”

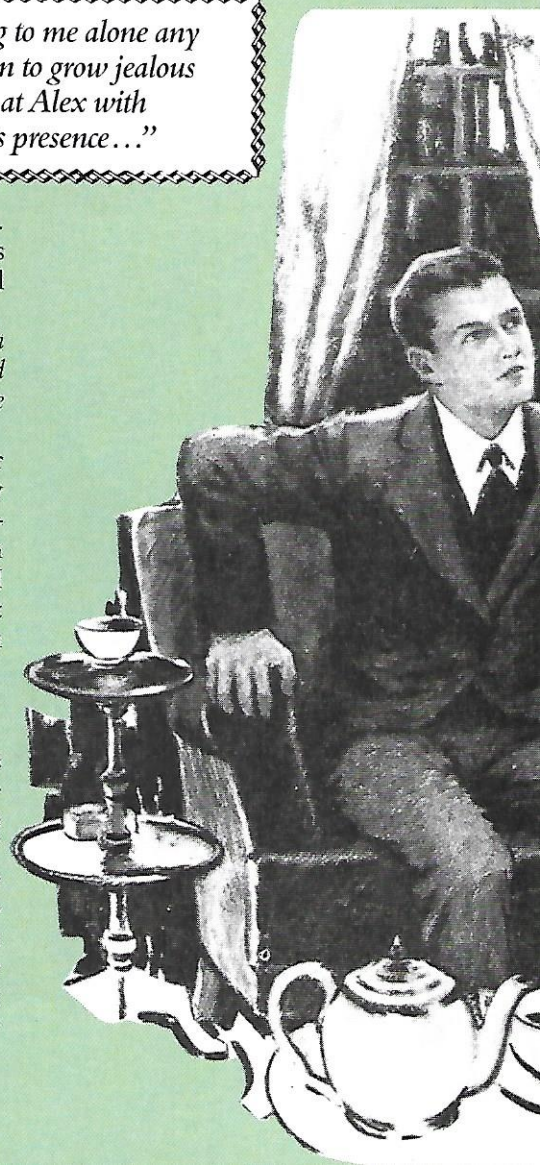
Richardson’s changing feelings for Lydia. Their first summer of sensuous passion is inextricably linked with the natural world:

“By May the spinneys were thick with bluebells. The air all day long was soaked heavy and sweet and almost too rich with the scent of them and the juices of rising grass.”

Lydia is almost too much for Richardson, who is barely able to satisfy her growing appetite for sexual adventure. The cold winter reflects a change in Lydia’s feelings: “As the winter went on I began to be more and more uneasy about her; I did not think she looked at me with the same fondness as before.”

CHANGING ALLEGIANCES

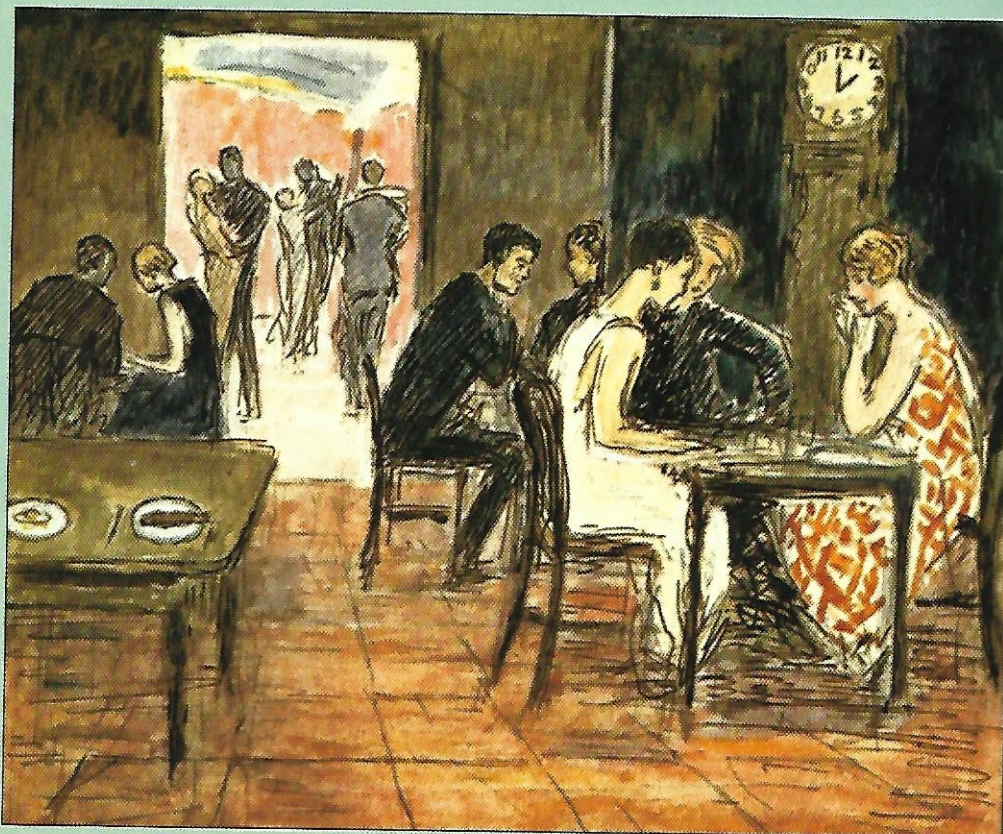
When Richardson first falls in love with Lydia he promises he will never stop loving her, even in the face of her curious question, “Not even if I’m bad to you?” His feelings of loyalty and devotion are simple in the face of Lydia’s restless cravings for new experience. Unable for a long time to believe in her duplicity, he continues to defend Lydia to her strongest critic, Tom’s sister Nancy. “You never



even begin to see why women do things do you?" says Nancy scathingly, as Lydia dances outrageously one night in a glamorous scarlet gown.

The centre stage of the novel is Lydia's. Nancy's unrequited love for Richardson, and Pheley the farm girl's attachment to Tom are tragedies in themselves, with their share of misunderstanding, heartache and pain. But every character in the story is in some way subordinate to Lydia, affected by the sheer force of her personality.

Richardson is slow to react to Lydia's faithlessness, preferring instead to cling to the memory of their first months together. He describes his state as "a monstrosously simple, monstrosously complex web of happiness." Later again, at Lydia's birthday party, he says, "I was caught up . . . tangled and lost, in the most trembling, bemusing web . . ." This aspect of Richardson as a trapped victim of Lydia's devouring nature is hinted at repeatedly throughout the book. Her desire "to be loved – near and far and always and everywhere" is all-consuming, destroying hopes and dreams and ultimately human



lives in its heedless, unrepentant progress.

Inevitably Richardson falls prey to overwhelming feelings of fear and jealousy: "Then I remembered how Alex had kissed her; I remembered the keen stab of jealousy, then sudden slitting through of my puffed vanity; and I was sick because I did not want another person to touch her, and because I did not want to share her with another soul." His behaviour towards her becomes childlike and possessive. His repeated attempts to assert his supremacy in her life irritate Lydia, and she abandons him to his deep sense of pain and loss.

SELF-DISCOVERY

As Lydia changes and develops throughout the story, so too does Richardson. Permeating his version of events is a strong desire not just to record what happened but to understand how and why. During his first encounter with Lydia he felt "poised on the edge of a knife, in a queer excruciating quiver of heat and cold . . ." What makes her exciting is also what makes her dangerous. It takes Richardson a long time to realize Lydia attaches no moral sense to her actions: ". . . she was one of those people who, as they rush into maturity, really think less and less and less. Thought is driven out by a growing automatism of instinct and feeling and blood." She says much later in defence of herself, "People do all sorts of

Changing partners

(above) In the course of one year, Lydia and her friends cross each other's paths in love as well as on the dance floor.

odd things and they never know why."

Richardson believes for a long time that Lydia was deliberately cruel to him. In growing up he finds himself able to forgive her "expressive friendliness with us all", and to admit he had "forgotten how much a prisoner she had been: how exciting and unbalancing and lovely it must have been for that winter to live a life broadening to full freedom with young people like us." Harder to accept is that when Lydia makes her choice of lover she does not choose him.

In his pain and despair at not having Lydia all to himself Richardson chooses solitude for a time, cutting himself off from his friends and family. When he returns to Evensford after two years, he is still restless and unable to settle. It is only after he sees Lydia again and comes to know her in a different way that some meaning reappears in his life – perhaps most significantly in the form of self-knowledge:

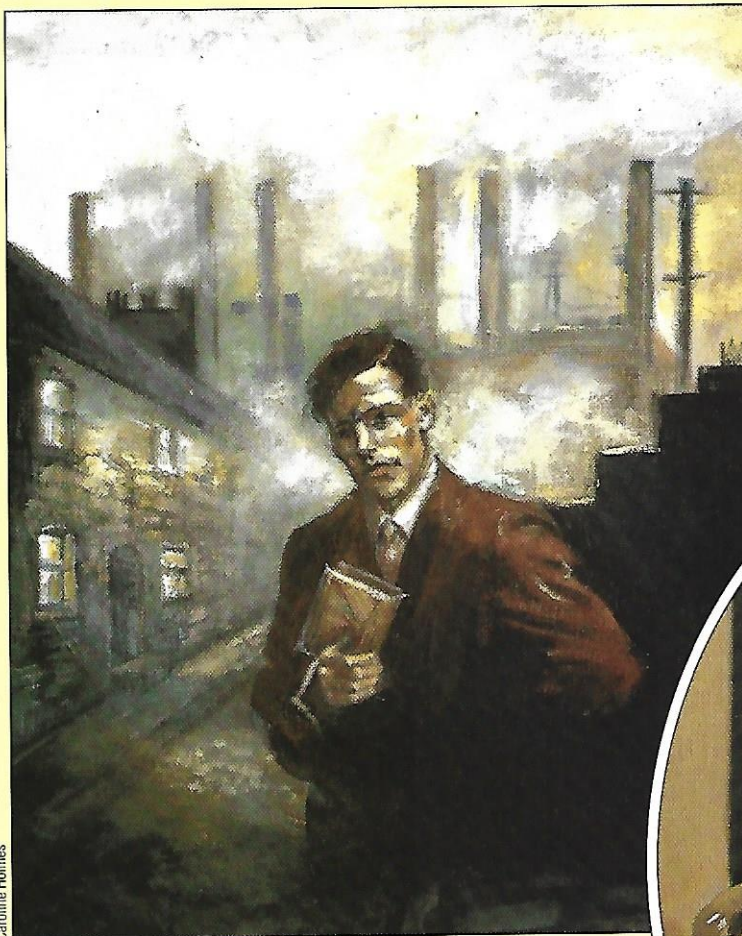
"I had so often thought of her growing up from something awkward and lonely that it had not occurred to me that I too had been growing up, just as painfully, in that same way. It had not occurred to me that the pain of love might be part of its flowering."

CHARACTERS IN FOCUS

The characters in *Love for Lydia* are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. Aristocratic Lydia is fascinated by the brooding physical presence of working-class Blackie. Alex and Richardson share similar intellectual and cultural values, while Tom and Nancy are firmly rooted in a simple farming tradition. Lydia draws all the characters together, but also drives them apart.

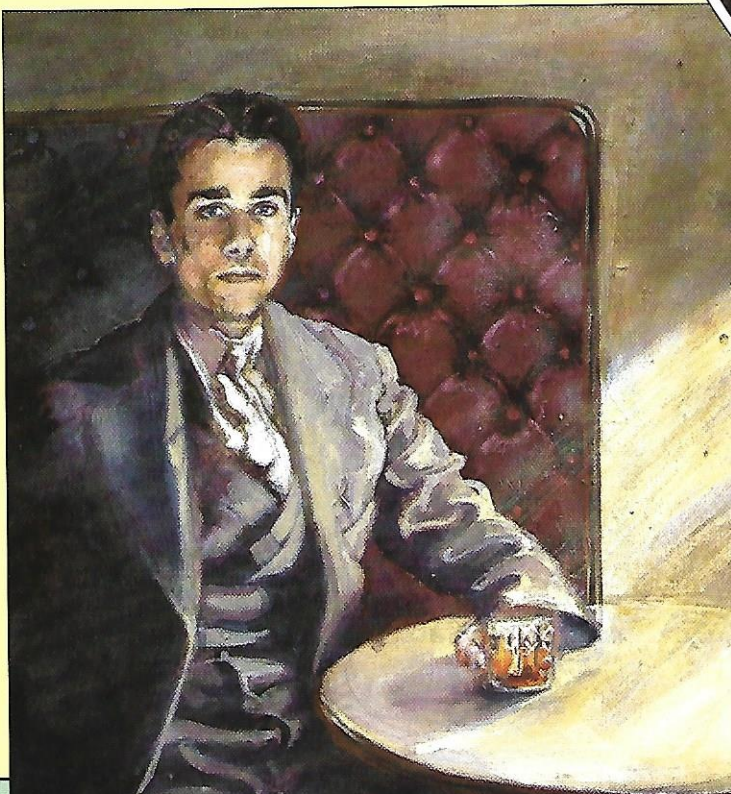
WHO'S WHO

- Richardson** The narrator of the story, sensitive, dreamy and romantic, whose love for Lydia becomes obsessive.
- Lydia Aspen** A captivating, wealthy young beauty, a "prisoner" of her upbringing who is liberated through her friendship with Richardson.
- Alex Sanderson** One of Richardson's closest friends – handsome, charming and urbane, even when drunk.
- Tom Holland** A local farmer's son, Richardson's "oldest friend, as decent and solid and lovable as earth". He is the shyest of Lydia's suitors.
- Nancy Holland** Tom's devoted sister, "fresh and clean and smooth . . . neither flat nor exciting", she is hopelessly in love with Richardson.
- Blackie Johnson** The sullen, enigmatic chauffeur who takes Richardson and friends to parties.
- The Misses Aspen** Lydia's aunts, Miss Bertie and Miss Juliana, who bring her to the Aspen house when her father dies. Kindly and eccentric, they want her to lead a 'normal' life with friends her age.
- Captain Rollo Aspen** Lydia's sinister uncle, "a thinish hooked man of six feet with a pronounced weakness of chest and loose in-bred lips".
- Mrs Sanderson** Alex's mother shows "an almost impulsive refiring of youth that is more beautiful than youthfulness".



A callow youth, Richardson (left) appears the more vulnerable for believing himself to be worldly wise. In his romantic yearning for Lydia, he desires her "as he had always longed . . . in the appalling drabness of an Evensford winter, for the intensified tenderness . . . of a summer day".

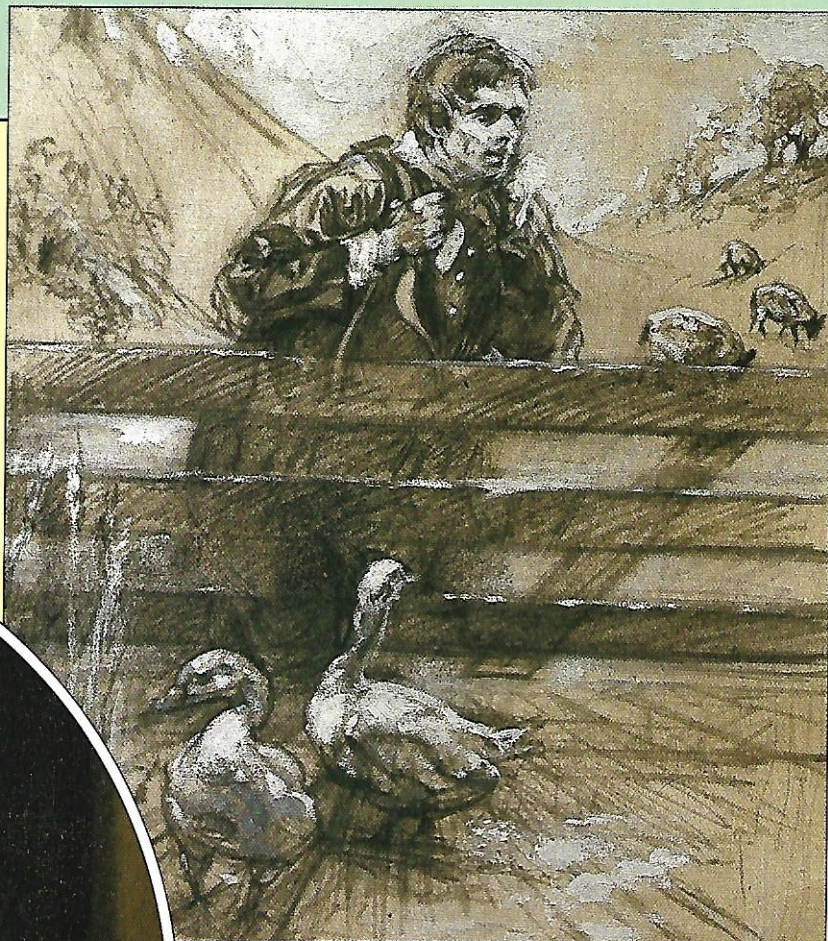
Behind an ironical, casually elegant façade, Alex (below) is "inconsistent, excitable, charmingly unreliable, and volatile". A heart-breaker himself, he falls under Lydia's spell, and quite uncharacteristically intends proposing to her. But tragedy intervenes . . .



Arrogant, defensive and inarticulate, the hired chauffeur Blackie (right) is a striking contrast to the other young men in Lydia's life. Powerful in appearance and "remarkably dark, . . . with a heavy crop of oil-black hair", he has a magnetic male presence that fascinates Lydia, and infuriates Richardson and Alex. The young men's hostility towards Blackie contributes to one of the decisive tragedies that occurs among their group.



Predatory, powerful, with a smile "like sunlight on the surface of a knife", Lydia (below) finds it "exciting and unbalancing and lovely" to be with new, lively friends after a prolonged, over-protected childhood. She matures fast physically, but not intellectually, and is unconscious of the suffering she causes.



Tom (left) – "big and easy" . . . "a beautiful swimmer and a good tennis player, heavy but never rough, immensely healthy and shy and warm-hearted" – restores Richardson's faith in human nature. Richardson also derives much comfort from working on the land with Tom. Then he becomes an unwilling witness to Tom's growing feelings for Lydia – "now he was in love, for the first, the most miraculous time."

Lydia's benevolent ageing aunts, Miss Juliana and Miss Bertie (below), are instrumental in arranging Lydia's departure from her repressed, obscure childhood and adolescence. Juliana, "bony and large and monolithic", appears at first to be the assertive sister; but in fact it is Bertie, who "had a sort of dampness about her round soft face . . . that made her seem self-effacing, without power", who makes the important decisions. Despite their fondness for Richardson, they cannot influence Lydia's feelings towards him.

Archibald Barnes - Secret Thoughts
Anthony Mitchell - Fine Paintings/Fine Art Photographic

