

Eli: Hello and welcome to Queer as Fact. My name is Eli.

Alice: I'm Alice

Irene: I'm Irene

E: We are a queer history podcast that comes out on the first and fifteenth of every month and in each episode we'll talk to you about a figure or an event or an object or what have you from Queer history. Today we're talking about Henrietta Bingham, a Jazz Age heiress.

[Music Plays]

A: Before we begin, we have several content warnings for this episode: we have discussions of alcohol and drug addiction and abuse, including two overdoses; a possible suicide attempt; an alleged murder; and the death of one of Henrietta's family members in car-crash. There's also unhealthy parent-child relationships; period-typical homophobia including conversion therapy; early-20<sup>th</sup>-century psychoanalysis, including electroshock therapy and mentions of a lobotomy; period-typical racism including mentions of lynchings and the Ku Klux Klan; and one use of the word "bitch" in a quotation. So if any of that sounds like something you don't want to listen to, feel free to check out any of our other episodes. We have content warnings at the start of all of them, so you can tailor the content to what you want to hear.

E: So, Henrietta Bingham is born on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1901, and she grows up in Louisville, Kentucky. Her mother's side has amassed a huge fortune in ironworking, so they make engines and stoves and pipes and things and her father's side isn't all that well off at all. He opens up a legal practice and he sort of tries to get involved in politics but he's never really that successful and they're primarily supported by the mother's wealth which means that there's a lot of tension in the family because her mother in law views her father with a lot of suspicion. Henrietta is the middle of three children. She has an older brother and a younger brother and she is daring and physically active and adventurous as a child and she wins lots of competitions. She's the captain of a lot of sports teams and she does well academically...

I: Wow

A: Is she that one person at high school who you just hate who's just good at everything.

E: Probably

A: I feel like she is

E: She might have had dyslexia. We know that reading and writing are just incredibly laborious to her. And then in 1914 when Henrietta is twelve the family gets into a car accident and their mother dies.

I: Oh

E: Yes. So that's a good start to the episode.

A: A happy life

E: Yes

I: But she was so happy, with her sports teams

E: Yeah... So this affects them all in a very, like, long lasting and negative way. Her older brother Robert becomes an alcoholic and he never really recovers from that.

A: Do you know how long Robert was at the time of the crash

E: I think about sixteen or seventeen. Like, he's a few years older than her.

A: Okay

E: Her younger brother Barry is temporarily mute

?: [Small noise of sympathy]

E: and her father, whose name was also Robert but who gets called Bob, so we shall call him Bob. He was very, very dependent on his wife, emotionally, and he just kind of transfers that to Henrietta

I: Oh no

E: Yeaah. And so they have this really, co-dependent, manipulative relationship and Henrietta's never really able to break free of it.

I: Oh no

E: Yep. So that's going to characterise a lot of this episode. I promise the Jazz Age happens and it's fun for a while.

I: [Laughter] Okay

A: I don't feel like I'm in for a fun story right now

E [in stage whimper]: There are parts that are fun

A: Okay

E [in stage whimper]: I'm sorry

A: [Laughter] Keep going, it's okay

E: We're about to get up to the poisoning of an heiress.

A: Oh, that's fun

E: And then, a few years later, their father marries Mary Lily Keenan, who was the widow of an oil, railroad and real-estate magnate and she is worth a hundred million dollars. Which is a number so big that it just kind of sounds fake.

I: A hundred million dollars at the time?

E: I think so

I: That is a lot of dollars

E: That is several dollars, yes

A: How many zeroes is that after a one?

I: Eight

E: Henrietta is off at a fancy boarding school at the time and none of the children are invited to the wedding.

A: Oh!

E: Yeah. And Mary Lily, when she sees them at Christmas tries to win them over with all these really fancy presents and all of this stuff and Henrietta isn't having a bar of it. She sweeps them all onto the floor and storms out and Mary Lily has just sort of never been treated like this in her life and she hates the children.

A: So back up a second, why weren't they invited to the wedding?

E: I don't know

A: Okay

E: I think that it may have just been that she didn't want them there

A: Okay

E: Like, I don't like her.

I: [Laughter]

A: She sounds like a spoilt heiress at this point in the story

E: Yeah, I don't know how fair that is. There isn't a lot of her in this.

I: How old is she?

E: I dunno, like middle aged?

I: Okay

E: I don't think she's that different in age to the father. She's an adult who's, I think just been wealthy all her life and is used to getting what she wants and, I dunno, doesn't want adult children around? I dunno.

A: Okay

E: Well, not adult children, but you know, like,

I: Adolescent children

E: Adolescent children. So the social situation for their father is very fraught because he's essentially seen by society as being a kept man, which isn't a great thing to be in the 1910's. And also Mary Lily is addicted to alcohol and morphine and the family's trying to keep it quiet. And then in 1917 she gets ill and dies

I: Whoops

A: That didn't last long

E: And contrary to their pre-nuptial agreement, Bob ends up with five million dollars.

A: He was supposed to get more or less?

E: Less. Much less.

I: Ah

A: Good job, Bob.

E: This is very controversial and the family objects to it and they have her exhumed and autopsied.

I: [Laughter]

E: Yep. And it's starting to look like Bob might get charged with murder.

[Amused scoffing]

A: Oh!

I: Do you think he did it?

E: No

I: Okay

A: Poor Bob

E: I mean, he could've, I guess. The biography didn't think so.

A: Okay

I: [Laughter]

E: He vows to take the family to court for his five million dollars, and then they tell him that they have an autopsy report that says that she died of an overdose of the drug that was used to treat syphilis, which would reflect very badly on him socially.

A: Mhm

E: Um, it's probably a fake. They never release it despite constantly threatening to do so but he receives the message, which is, you know, "Keep quiet or we'll try to ruin you." And he doesn't take them to court and he ends up with five million dollars so...

A: Sorry, you said this, like, five seconds ago but, he's getting five million dollars, but he's going to take them to court...

E: So, he is willed five million dollars. The family is like "That is nonsense and we're not giving it to you." He goes, "Well, I'm going to take you to court for my five million dollars." They're like "We're going to implicate you in her murder and also in having syphilis." He goes "Okay, okay." And then they just give him five million dollars so he'll shut up. So they, essentially, kind of, have the ability to ruin each other socially, both parties, which is very important at this time and place and social strata and whatever

A: Yep

E: and then they just kind of back away from the situation

A: Okay, so they just kind of pay him out and then they all just kind of move on.

E: Yeah

A: Okay

E: So, the reason why this is important is because now Bob has five million dollars,

A: Okay

I: Nice

E: And he has no particular plans for his five million dollars, but then two local newspapers, The Courier Journal and the Louisville Times, their management fails and he goes "Okay, why not." And he buys two papers.

I: [Laughter]

A: Coo-ool?

E: And I'm not gonna give you much information about the building of a publishing dynasty or anything like that but basically, like, the papers do very well and they are, like, set up for life and this is the business he runs from here on out, basically

I: Oh,

E: They are rich, that's the point. They're very rich

I: I didn't really expect that, honestly, 'cos he just kind of on a whim bought a couple of newspapers.

E: Yeah, he doesn't seem to run them, like at all. Like he kind of notices, like, "I don't know how to run a newspaper." And then, I guess, hires the right people?

I: Yep

E: Yeah

A: I like Bob

E: [Scornfully] Okay [laughter] sorry

A: He seems okay, he probably hasn't committed a murder

I: Wow, low bar

E: He also buys a mansion and the locals start calling him "Lord Bing"

[Laughter]

E: Which I love

A: See, don't you like Bob a little bit?

E: I like "Lord Bing."

A: Yep

E: And the children are all brought home from their various, like, boarding schools after the death of Mary Lily and Henrietta is spoiled far more than the other two are. She is very firmly the favourite at the moment.

I: Oh dear

E: He buys her horses and furs and cars and jeweller and also she has a very strong interest in music so he buys her lots of concert and theatre tickets, including to see Jazz bands. That is not at all socially acceptable at the time. This is before Jazz enters the mainstream

A: Okay

E: Of what it is acceptable for white people to like

I: Okay, yep

E: But Bob indulges her. The children have wild Jazz parties in the mansion. The next morning after one of them Bob has to ask a servant to pick Fried Chicken out of the Piano.

I: [Laughter] Guys!

E: Which. Sure. So their older brother has lost his place his place as being the father's favourite and he kinda, periodically strives to regain his father's affections and then doesn't manage to do so because Henrietta is firmly the favourite and that is kind of both a result of and the cause of his alcoholism so that's just a vicious cycle that they get stuck in and he never really regains favour with the family and he is always dealing with alcoholism for the rest of his life.

I: You'd think that would be, like, the number one parenting rule

A: Don't have a favourite?

I: Yes, or if you, pretend you don't

E: Bob has a very unhealthy relationship with his children

I: Clearly

E: Yeah

I: How's he about the younger brother?

E: Barry becomes more important to his father later in his life, which we'll get into later in this episode. Like, when they were children because Henrietta was very, like, physically adventurous and very outgoing and everything like that, Bob liked her better than Barry because Barry was not that at all. He was quit, like, you know, just, like quite dreamy and not very into, like, stereotypically masculine pursuits like sports or things like that and was very happy to just trail after his mother and do the gardening, so Bob doesn't seem enormously interested in him at this point.

I: Okay

E: You know, like he doesn't hate him but he does remark, Barry that "It would be nice if Dad would buy me something once in a while" kind of deal

A: Awww

E: Yeah, like it seems like he doesn't like Robert, he loves Henrietta, he just sort of doesn't

I: Doesn't care about Barry

E: Have strong feelings about Barry

I: Yeah

E: I like Barry.

A: Barry sounds nice

E: Barry and Henrietta are very close for their whole lives. Barry will come up. We've said Barry

[Laughter]

E: Our full allotment for this episode so that's going to make it difficult to proofread. It's probably worth mentioning that Barry's first name is George

[Laughter]

E: Barry is his middle name

A: That's kind of standard. Wait, so there was a father called Robert and a son called Robert but they called the son called Robert, Robert, but they called the son called George a different name. Why did they not call Robert by his middle name?

E: His middle name is Worth, so that's probably why. It's not any good.

A: Okay, that's a good answer.

E: Umm. Anyway, we were talking about the very serious matter of Robert being forever displaced within the family and struggling with alcoholism.

[A little laughter]

E: Family legend says that the bad relationship between Robert Jr. and Robert Sr. culminates in his youth with the younger Robert getting up on stage at Barry's holiday part event completely naked, presenting his father with a flower box and when the older Robert opened the flower box he found that there were no flowers inside, there was only horse manure.

I: Wow.

E: Yeah, right. So it's, like, quite bad, their relationship at this point. It's like, quite dramatically bad.

I: Yes.

E: Yep. So... Henrietta is still very promising though. She graduates, she buys a saxophone and she gets into Smith College, which is an elite women's college. So she's living there, she's living in a boarding house and she, at the start of her freshman year is richly inducted, as freshmen were, with what is called a frolic where a sophomore girl plays suitor to a freshman girl and she takes them to a dance and generally goes through all the like, heterosexual courting rituals.

I: Well that's extremely heterosexual.

E: Yes.

A: That sounds very cute.

E: It does. Activities like this were common in women's colleges at the time. Maybe they are now. I don't know, Smith College still exists. Like. Write to us if you're listening to this and you go there.

I: [Laughter]

E: But yeah, women's colleges at the time gained criticism for stuff like this because they were messing with traditional gender roles and all of the expected mainstream criticisms. They were excused (sic.) of encouraging "morbid tendencies" in the girls. Which is code for "It's gay" I assume.

A: [Laughter] Morbid tendencies...

E: Yeah. So. The academic pressure at Smith is enormous. She enrolls in English Composition, English Literature, Latin, French, Astronomy and a class called Hygiene which is mandatory. Her teachers are all older men and women except

A: [chortle]

E: For the twenty-four year old professor Mina Stein-Kirstein who teaches English composition.

I: Oh dear

E: Oh dear, yeah

A: This is going exactly where I think it's going, right?

E: I... I don't know what you mean.,,

[Laughter]

E: So, let's talk about Mina for a moment, which isn't to indicate that she'll be important to this story at all. She had graduated in 1918, it is now 1920,

A: Mhm

E: She is Jewish, which you probably couldn't guess from the name, and she's very politically radical. She boycotts mandatory church services at the college and convinces people to quit social clubs from which Jewish people were banned and she believes, quote, that "Salvation and revolution are synonymous."

I: Aww

A: Good, I like her.

E: So, she graduates from Smith in 1918, as I said, and then she, in a two year span, works for military intelligence for a bit and then gets an MA.

I: Works for military intelligence

A: Just casually

E: Yeah

A: Like, I'm going to take a gap year, not sure what I'm doing with my life, maybe be a spy, okay, time to get my masters now.

E: The quote in a book was something like "She does a stint in military intelligence" and I was like "Whoah, back up."

I: [Laughter]

A: Was that all it told you?

E: Yes. And then she comes back to teach at Smith, and she seems to have made a very big positive impression on the girls that she taught. She's very encouraging and she sort of treats them as her, sort of like, intellectual equals, so that is good. And then Henrietta also makes a big impression on Mina and she, Mina that is, spends a lot of time worrying over Henrietta because she's obviously very intelligent but she's also very homesick and miserable, I think at this point just in a way that is



common for a young woman who has moved away from home for the first time. She's doing very well at Mia's class but she's struggling with some of her others and she thinks that she might fail her exams. So the way it worked was that you were accepted, but then a few months later there were kind of, like, preliminary exams to prove that you could hack it there.

I: Okay

E: Yeah, so she's been there a few months and she doesn't think that she's doing well enough to pass them. Part of the problem here is that again she finds reading and writing particularly difficult so again she's potentially dyslexic or has some other kind of learning disability or something like that. Like, she works really hard, it just never becomes easy for her.

A: Mhm

E: And she's very, very panicked about disappointing her father. She's the one that he has put all of his hopes on at this point for academic success and she's afraid that she's not going to be able to live up to that. So Henrietta at this point becomes one of the three great loves of Mina's life. The first was a man who ran a publishing house and who has already come and gone in her life and who will not appear in this story. The second is Henrietta, the third will appear later. She's very passionate about Henrietta, she's very, very in love with her but she's also very ashamed about that. She destroys pretty much every mention of Henrietta at all in her papers.

A: Is she ashamed because she's in love with another woman or is she ashamed

E: Yes

A: Not because it's her student? Is that an issue?

E: No... There worried that she'll be found out because then she might lose her teaching position but she doesn't seem to be ethically worried about the fact that she's dating a student, no.

A: Okay.

I: I mean the age difference is not huge there.

A: Yeah, like, it's not a huge issue but it could be an issue in her head.

E: It's not, she just doesn't want to be in love with a woman

A: Okay

E: and this colours a lot of their relationship.

I: That is sad. Personally I think being in love with a woman is great.

E: Yeah, it is. If you're listening to this do not be ashamed. You are correct.

[Laughter]

I: But yeah, nevertheless they fall in love and Mina

Becomes, essentially kind of a part of the family circle for a bit. She meets the family and they really like her and she accompanies them on trips and things.

A: Ah

I: Do they know what the relationship is or do they just, like, yeah, is Henrietta's... close friend.

E: Not at this point. Yeah, like, at this point they don't know that they're a couple. Mina manages to arrange for Henrietta to redo some of her classes in the fall and first they go off to London for a nice little trip and Mina and the Bingham's go and see the Ballets Russes put on Sergei Diaghilev's productions and they're so impressed that they go and they see them again and the reason that's exciting to us is because

I: There was another episode.

E: Yes

I: With the Ballets Russes in it. Who are queer.

A: All of them, the entire company

E: Yeah. So if you're interested in hearing more about them go and listen to our episode on Nijinsky and Sergei Diaghilev is in that a whole bunch.

A: Disclaimer: They're not all queer.

[Laughter]

E: Yeah, unfortunately not everyone is queer. Mina is very connected in literary circles and she goes and spends time with George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells.

A: Oh!

E: However it's becoming a problem, more and more, the fact that she and Henrietta can't tell anyone that they're a couple. So for example she's staying with a friend of hers, Frieda Laske and she's trying to encourage her to find another man and she can't tell her that, well "I'm in a relationship. It's just with a woman." Frieda tells her that, you know, "You have to find a new man. The only alternative is to have your sexual organs removed along with your wisdom teeth."

I: [laughs]

A: That's it. That's the options, guys.

E: Which...

I: I didn't...

[laughter]

E: Like, I don't have a lot of context for this but it was just a bit of a striking sentence so I thought I'd mention it.

I: I have wisdom teeth!

[laughter]

E: I... Uh.... So that occurred.

[laughter]

A: Okay.... That was interesting.

E: Yep. And then in 1921 Henrietta goes back to Smith, and essentially is sort of starting over as a freshman. She's very determined to work hard and to actually do well this time, but she's also distracted by the burgeoning jazz scene around her. So she starts doing badly at school again; she's

skipping classes; she gets noticed for leaving campus without permission to go and see movies and to drive in cars.

I: Ooooh....

E: And she also gets appendicitis, which means that she misses weeks of class, and their grandmother dies, which, you know, I imagine would impact your-

I: -studies.

E: -academic performance a little bit.

I: Mmhm.

E: So she's not doing well, and she is declared a "detriment to the community" by the school.

I: Wow!

E: Yeah.

A: Is that a standard phrase the school uses to talk about, like, bad students or is this just a thing that they labelled her? Like, what does that mean?

E: It's an official, like-

A: Okay.

E: -status you can have essentially. Yeah. She's effectively suspended, and she and Mina effectively I think pretend it's like voluntary leave for a while. I don't know when that stops being the ruse because she never goes back to Smith after this.

A: Mmkay.

E: She's done with university. And she and Mina go off to Europe again in 1922. Again, they're increasingly anxious about the fact that they are hiding their romantic relationship.

I: They need some more queer friends.

E: Well!

[laughter]

E: But first we need to do something a bit less fun.

I: Oh no.

E: Henrietta is in particular anxious about hiding it from her father, whom she has an incredibly close relationship with. Mina wants Henrietta to see a psychoanalyst because of her anxiety and because that's preventing her from having a like, healthy life and successful studies, but also it's because Mina doesn't see any kind of real future for them as a couple. And she also doesn't consider herself to be a lesbian. I think that's basically because – I mean, first of all, Mina's more accurately described as bisexual; she's had lovers who are men before and she will again – but also it'll be fairly apparent as this goes on, has very high amount of internalised homophobia that she's dealing with.

A: Uh-huh.

I: I was getting that impression already.

E: Mhm. Yeah. So she writes to Dr. Ernest Jones, who is part of a circle that includes Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

I: Oh no, it is Freud. My nemesis.

E and I: [laugh]

E: So, psychoanalysis in the 1920s...

I: Oh no.

E: Yes. So it's a very hot topic of the day. It's talked about a lot, but it is also very controversial, and it's often viewed as obscene, because it talks about, like suppressed sexual urges and things like that. Bookstores in America will often refuse to stock Freud's works.

A: Mhm.

E: So not many Americans are actually being psychoanalysed. At the time its relationship to queer people is, like, kind of ambiguous. It's not as rabidly homophobic as it will become in the next several decades, but the prevalent idea seems to be Freud's idea that homosexuality or bisexuality is essentially like an immature phase of sexual development, and you should develop past it, but sometimes you don't. Freud himself, I believe, didn't think that you could actually change someone's sexuality or at least that you were very unlikely to be able to, and he would advise people in letters to just kind of like, get on with their lives, or to accept their son or whatever, because probably this was just how it things were.

I: Oh!

E: Jones, on the other hand, believed that people could develop past same-sex desire. He essentially viewed this as a kind of psycho-neurosis, something close to narcissism, and effectively he thinks that he can perform a kind of conversion therapy. Like, this is what this is.

A: Mhm.

I: Close to narcissism, as in "You like other women because you really like yourself and you're a woman"?

E: So, look, I was frankly very unwilling to go and do a bunch of reading on

I: Reasonable

E: This, like, not very relevant to the entire story and also, like, not awesome person.

I: [Laughter] Reasonable

E: And frankly I, I didn't think that if I read a bunch about psychoanalysis I would be, like, "Oh no, here, so I'll, like explain this to you." Like, this is nonsense

I: Yeah

E: We know that early psychiatry is nonsense

I: Cool

E: So, you know, the real answer is as nonsense as the half answer would be [indistinct]

I: [Laughter] Yeah, reasonable

E: Yeah, so he is advocating a kind of conversion therapy. It's not with, like, electroshock and things like that, like it's just through kind of, like, sitting down and talking about how, like, maybe you should be less gay, but, you know, that's still terrible and it doesn't work. So Mina in writing to him writes this twelve page history of Henrietta. We don't know if Henrietta knew about this or helped with it

?: [Disapproving intake of breath]

E: Yeah, so this is

A: I

E: questionably ethical.

A: Hmm

E: But basically Mina theorises that Henrietta's feelings for women are directly tied to the death of her mother and her father's dependence on her

I: Well that's Freudian, yeah

A: I suspected that that's where that would go, yeah.

E: It's very similar to a lot of descriptions that Freud had written about lesbian development and lesbian case studies of the time and Jones agrees with Mina's assessment. So, he thinks that Henrietta prefers women because it means that she doesn't have to examine conflict with her father who was her, like, fantasy lover figure because

?: [Disapproving intake of breath]

E: Of Freud

I: Yep

A: Freud why are you like this

E: Mina, in her letter she makes it clear that she views their relationship as an extremely beautiful and honest one but also that the secrecy is essentially destroying her and she doesn't see it as being "Conducive to the fullest and most useful sort of life"

A: Okay

I: So, is what Mina wants here for the relationship to be less secret or for it just to end?

E: As it will become apparent as we go on, Mina doesn't really know what she wants.

E: So, Mina wants both of those. Like, she doesn't want to be in a relationship with Henrietta anymore, but she does.

I: Yep

E: And she struggles with that, like, forever.

A: Mhm

E: So, yeah. Mina tries to persuade Henrietta to go and see Jones and she's reluctant to; she has a more positive view on her sexuality than Mina does but eventually she goes.

A: This really makes me feel like Henrietta was not on board with this twelve page letter that was sent.

E: Nooo probably nooot

A: I liked Mina, but like...

E: Mina, I think, is never, like, actually malicious but she is very screwed up over her sexuality and makes some very bad choices because of it.

A: Yeah

E: Yeah, I feel bad for Mina

A: Mmm

E: Umm

I: On the other hand she thinks salvation is synonymous with revolution.

A: Yeah, good on you Mina

E: That's true, she does. So she starts seeing Jones and he ends up treating both Mina and Henrietta. He's thrilled at this rare opportunity to be analysing both halves of a queer couple and he is apparently just ethically untroubled by this and he even discusses them with each other in their questions.

A: No!

E: Noooh!

I: They weren't very good at this yet

E: No, they really were not yet

A: But surely patient confidentiality is not a difficult concept?

E: Like, they see him for years and years and years and even when they don't see him for sessions any more they stay in contact with him and they tend to have this, like, very close, not quite entirely professional relationship to him anymore. Like, they go 'round his house for dinner and stuff.

A and I in eerily perfect unison: Okay

E: Yeah, so I don't think that it's quite the thing where they are just conceptualising this as, like a purely "You are a medical healthcare professional who I am seeing and we need to maintain a professional relationship." Like, that's just not the conception that any of the people in it have.

A: Okay. Obviously it's still ethically dubious by today's standards but that makes it more okay by the standards of the time.

E: Yeah. Even Henrietta, who doesn't really want to start this to begin with views this man positively for the rest of her life

I: Okay

E: and views him as generally sometimes trying to help her and she seems to want that help so [weird noises]

I and A: Okay

E: So she's in London and she kind of just keeps extending her London visit and the newspaper business is doing very well back home

A: Okay, good

E: Bob periodically demands that she comes home to help him run this newspaper business and then he just, kind of, throughout his life places enormous professional and familial responsibility on her and she's in her early twenties and is really anxious and isn't cut out for this at all. So that doesn't go well.

I: Yes

E: I'm mad at Bob.

A: Yep, I

I: Hear this

A: Okay

A and I: Yes

E: Yeah, like he's quite manipulative about it. He's kind of like "You have a duty to come home and, like, help me with your brothers." And things like that and it's kind of like, she's not your wife man.

I: No, her brothers are adults too.

E: Yeah. I mean, I don't think Barry is yet but nearly. But yeah, so she has no desire to come home and she does not. She and Mina go out to nightclubs and they listen to jazz bands and they drink Gin Fizzes and Lime Rickeys and all of these lovely twenties things.

I: [Laughter]

A: Can we find the recipes for these things and put them on our blog?

E: Yeah, that's a good idea

I: Yep

E: Let's get, like, genuine twenties ones. And they attract the attention of people like the crown prince of Romania, who was serving in the royal navy at the time.

A: That's what always happens when I go to clubs, yes.

E: Who's the crown prince of Romania?

[Laughter]

E: And then one day Mina is doing Christmas shopping and she goes into a little basement bookshop near the British Museum and it's the one that's run by Francis Birrell and David Garnett of the Bloomsbury Group.

So, the Bloomsbury Group is just a collection of friends, many of who remained very famous and relevant in later years and they were all mostly artists of various kinds.

I: Except Keynes, who was not.

E: Except Keynes, who was an economist. No, there were a few others who were not particularly significant as artists but they were, coincidentally, the ones we don't really talk about. So it's people like Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forester and that sort of circle and Francis Birrell and David Garnett. So, now we need to plug another episode that we did:

I: [Laughter]

E: So, this bookstore, this very bookstore, came up in a recent episode of ours which was on John Maynard Keynes who was also part of the Bloomsbury Group. I think both Francis Birrell and David Garnett were lovers of Keynes

A: Yep, they were

E: Umm, the connections of the Bloomsbury group are legion and we can't go through them all here and we won't

A: I wanted to draw a diagram for the Keynes episode but I don't know if I'm, like, capable

E: There is no, like, mapping this.

A: People have tried

E: Yeah, I'm sure

A: I looked on the internet and it was always like, mmmm, not quite.

E: Hm. So, it's not as if the Keynes episode will lay that all out in full for you but it will shed some light so, like, listen to it if this part of the episode is interesting to you? So David Garnett, who was known by his friends as Bunny is working that day and he sees Mina come into his shop and he is completely captivated by her and instead of, like, speaking to her or anything, you know

I: Oh dear

E: He decides to sneak his newly published novella, *Lady into Fox*, which is about a lady turning into a fox, into her packages

[Laughter]

E: And she opens her packages and she reads it and she loves it and is very confused about where it came from.

I: This is quite cute, honestly

E: Yeah, I know. And she goes back to the bookstore and talks to him and they hit it off and they recommend each other books and it's lovely

I: Aww

E: And then David comes around to Mina and Henrietta's flat for tea and he adores Henrietta, as people sort of tend to do. He nicknames her "puppin" and he calls her a pudding

A: Aww

E: And he adores her caressing voice of the south, which, you know, I guess that was the thought of American accents of the day. And David learns about their love affair and he doesn't really understand why they see Jones and he doesn't see anything wrong with them. Homosexuality is



quite, like, the done thing in the Bloomsbury group, although there is a bit of a tendency to see female homosexuality in a, like, less positive light than

I: Male... yep

E: male-male homosexuality. David Garnett is very flirtatious and Mina starts to fall in love with him and then she is taken aback to learn that he is married to Rachael Costello, another member of the Bloomsbury Group, who Keynes almost kind of has a relationship with but doesn't know how to seduce because she's a woman and he's only ever been with men.

I: Aww

E: Yeah

A: You need to listen to the Keynes episode, Irene

I: Yeah, okay, I will. Also listeners, I guess.

E: Yeah, it'll, it'll help. I'll try to make this as clear as possible though. I don't think that he, like, hid his marriage or anything. I think that his circle was just quite, like, like the norm was to not be monogamous really and so he just sort of brought up his marriage when it was relevant and Mina was coming to this from a very different angle and was, like, "Wait, what?" So that's a point of contention. And so through David Garnett they begin to meet members of the Bloomsbury group. They look for a country house to spend the summer in and he suggests Lytton Strachey's house and they go and inspect it and...

I: Is Lytton Strachey a man?

E: Yes.

I: Okay, sorry

E: His full name is Giles Lytton Strachey. He's a writer and a member of the Bloomsbury group.

A: And also, slept with Keynes.

E: and also slept with Keynes, like a whole bunch.

I: Did Keynes have a lot of sex-

E: Yes.

I: -or did the Bloomsbury Group sleep with each other a lot?

E: Yes.

[laughter]

I: Okay, just checking. But was Keynes an abnormality?

A: Nah.

E: No? Not really.

I: Alright, cool.

E: He did have a lot of sex. So they go and inspect it. They meet Dora Carrington, who is Lytton Strachey's platonic life partner. I adore their relationship. And they really like the house and they

want to rent it but then Lytton decides that he couldn't bear to have them live in his home because they're Americans.

A and I: [laugh]

E: Unfortunately some of the Bloomsbury Group are quite snobby and English. I apologise, American listeners. [laughs] If it helps they would have been appalled at us staying in their house as well because we're Australian which is probably even worse.

[laughter]

E: Nevertheless, David Garnett decides to use his birthday party to present them to the group in full, and so it's held in Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell's studio – they are two other members of the Bloomsbury Group. They are also artists. This is true of everyone.

A: Duncan also slept with Keynes.

E: Yes, he did. Like, particularly significantly.

A: Yeah!

E: Yeah. Henrietta made a cake and she decorated it with a little fox in a coat chasing two ducks.

A and I: Awww.

E: Which was from one of Ray's woodcuts for *Lady Into Fox*.

I: Aww.

E: Yeah! Which I thought was very cool. We should make this cake.

I: Let's.

A: Mm, we should.

E: So Mina's a bit anxious and out of her element at the party, but Henrietta does very well; she always does very well at social settings, and-

I: What an impressive person.

E: Yeah, I do not understand.

[laughter]

E: So she mixes drinks for everyone, and she plays the mandolin. Lytton Strachey never likes them, but everyone else adores them, and at this party she meets the young artist Stephen Tomlin, who is known as Tommy. He is very good-looking and charismatic and promiscuous, so basically he's a member of the Bloomsbury Group.

[laughter]

E: And he pursues her and she's very attracted to him but she's also hesitant about it, and they have a sort of relationship that drags on for a while. He both delights in this relationship but also resents her. There's a bust of Henrietta that was done in marble by Tommy that we will put a photograph of up on our social media.

A: Oh!

E: So Mina wants Henrietta to find a male lover and move on from their relationship.

I: Yep.

E: Like that is ostensibly the goal. But also she's very in love with her and does not actually want this at all in any way.

I: Oh dear.

E: So as soon as she starts seeing a man, whenever this happens, Mina is like, very jealous and upset, but also kind of encourages it, and it's a mess. Yes.

So they are in London still, and they stay there for a while, now kind of meshed with the Bloomsbury Group, and Henrietta throws a lot of parties, and she invites a lot of jazz musicians to these parties. So jazz, as I've mentioned earlier, is not quite proper for like a young white woman to be into yet. It's quite controversial, and a big part of that is of course just because it's created by African-American musicians, and this is a very racist time. But it's also still very successful, like it's becoming more and more successful.

I: Okay.

E: So for example Florence Mills and Edith Wilson are two very talented jazz singers at the time, and they put a troupe together, and it's successful enough in America that they can fund a trip to London, and when they get to London the shows are sold out and people love them, but also people throw rotten tomatoes at them, so it's that.

Henrietta is a bit ahead of the curve in terms of her enjoyment of jazz. She's very very knowledgeable about it at a time when it's just kind of coming into like, mainstream public consciousness, and so she wants to show her support and her appreciation for these musicians. She never gets like, meaningfully involved in activism or anything like that, but she's very anti-segregation and she throws parties and sort of tries to introduce these musicians to other people who might be useful and have connections and things like that. She also throws parties just to show her support and appreciation-

I: Yep.

E: -because this is what Henrietta does.

So part of why she likes jazz is because she views it as very sexy and she thinks it paints her as kind of being exotic for having this interest.

A: Mmhm.

I: I see.

E: Yeah. And like, the performances themselves are often trading on these very, like, sentimental racist stereotypes about black people and also just the South in general, and Henrietta is from an old Southern family and so she's probably responding to the nostalgia presented in these pieces somewhat. So that's the situation as best as I can lay it out. Yeah, I think she has her heart in the right place and she's not like, overtly awful or anything like that. I don't want to use the phrase "she's a product of her time" because I think that's often used to sort of-

I: -excuse things that aren't...

E: Excuse things and also historicise things a bit. Kind of be like “Oh, well, back in those days people were racist,” and it’s like yeah, okay, those attitudes are still around and saying-

I: Also weren’t universal then.

E: -that that’s just the time like, doesn’t productively deal with that in any way.

So they have one of these parties where she invites her musician friends and at one of them – this is not important to the plot, it was just fun and I’m being gratuitous – Mina’s younger brothers, Lincoln and George – I’m not sure if they’re like, children, or teenagers at the time, but they are young people – are visiting from Boston, and they wake up because of this raucous jazz party that’s going on.

I: [laughs]

E: And so they end up getting dressed in girls’ pyjamas, and then are led by Lydia Lopokova in an impromptu *pas de trois*.

[laughter]

E: Lydia Lopokova being Keynes’ wife!

I and A: [laugh]

E: Who was a ballerina. And then ten years later Lincoln helps form the New York City Ballet, so maybe it was formative.

A and I: [laugh]

E: Yeah.

I: I guess he learnt something.

A: That was good!

E: Lytton Strachey, who apparently hated Henrietta and Mina, seems to have been relatively fond of these two children; he gets them drinks and he apparently answers a bunch of questions that Lincoln has about his beard – he had quite a long beard. Later on in the night Henrietta stands up on top of the piano to play the saxophone.

I: [laughs]

E: And also, just to get Keynes in there one last time, over the summer he takes the boys to a bunch of galleries and things, so...

I: Oh!

A: Good on you Keynes.

E: Yeah. I just really enjoyed that information.

A: That just sounds fun.

E: Yeah. In 1923 – late in 1923 – Mina and Henrietta finally go home. So they’ve been there for like, a couple of years at this point.

A: Aww, I was having fun with them hanging out with Bloomsbury Group. I was enjoying this part a lot.

E: I'm sorry. Blame Bob.

A: Goddammit Bob.

E: Bob has been writing to her constantly for advice on the newspapers, and on her brothers, and finally he insists that she comes home. She does plan to return the following year. And Mina also comes back. She's very insecure about her relationship with David. He's made it clear that his two other lovers – who are Rachel Costelloe and Duncan Grant – are more important to him, but he still likes her, and he's putting a fair amount of effort into trying to sleep with her.

I: I mean at least he's communicated.

E: Yeah, I think they just want different things-

I: Yeah.

E: -out of this.

A: I mean I very much feel like Mina has no idea what she wants.

E: Well, Mina is quite... like she believes in the sanctity of marriage and things like that, and she, I just don't think is cut out of becoming a part of a like, complex polyamory web.

I: Yeah.

E: She never does sleep with him, partly because what he constantly calls her "Puritanism", and partly just because she's very in love with Henrietta, so she leaves London and she's both considering getting a publishing job in London to be near and also never seeing him again.

A: Okay.

E: So she does somewhat not know what she wants.

I: Yeah.

E: Yes. So Henrietta is very bored and restless back in Kentucky. She briefly opens up a bookshop with Barry.

A: Oh!

E: With her father's money, but she gets bored of it very quickly. Tommy is very desperate to have her come back and to be in some kind of steady, definable relationship with him, and he's constantly writing to her and she's just not terribly forthcoming with her replies. She will just take ages to reply and she won't send very long letters and things like that, and this is a pattern with her lovers where someone will fall like...

I: I mean, we've also established that she struggles with reading and writing. It's not super surprising if she's going to write short letters and reluctantly.

A: True.

E: Yeah, but I think it's also just that she just doesn't care as much as them.

I: Yeah.

A: Is this with Mina though – that's not the situation is it?

E: We don't know.

A: Okay.

E: Those letters don't survive.

A: Mmhm.

E: Also they're like, up until this point, haven't really had much occasion to write letters, they've always been together.

A: That's true. That's true.

E: But yeah, like, someone will fall desperately in love with her and then she just never returns it to that extent.

Then she writes to David Garnett and asks if he can ask Tommy if he'll marry her. She's very unsure about what she wants and how she feels but she's tempted by marriage because it's a way out of a life that she isn't happy with in America, and it's potentially a way out of her father's control. That just sort of gets left hanging for a while.

A: Do we know if David Garnett did ask Tommy?

E: So I think he did, and Tommy kind of said that he would, but like, that circumstances would need to be different than they are. Like I think it was kind of like, "I mean if you really want this I would totally marry you, but *what is going on?*"

[laughter]

A: Fair.

I: I mean, fair.

A: That's how I would react in this circumstance I feel.

E: Mina and Henrietta still have feelings for each other, as you might expect, and they're again very stressed about being discovered now they're back in America and away from their nice queer group of friends, and then something bad happens. We don't really know exactly what. Henrietta's relationship with her father reaches its lowest point and Bob severs all ties with Mina.

A: Wow.

E: Yes.

A: Okay.

E: So three accounts of what this story was exist. The first is that Mina tried to seduce Bob in order to get his money and be with Henrietta.

I: [laughs]

A: Who gave this account?

E: So they're either from letters at the time or they're like, Bingham family legend.

A: Okay.

E: The second is that Bob tried to seduce Mina, but was rebuffed and banished her. And the third is that Robert, the older brother, saw an intimate moment between Mina and Henrietta and told Bob. The last is probably what happened.

A: Yeah.

I: The last sounds the more plausible, yeah.

E: Yes. But in any case Mina is forever barred from the family, and Henrietta does not react well.

I: Okay.

E: So that is bad. In June Henrietta and her father go back to England to broker purchasing contracts – let's never talk about that.

I: [laughs]

E: Henrietta is reunited with Tommy, and it's very awkward, and they just kind of don't know how to proceed. Essentially they're only communicating through David.

[laughter]

A: Poor David.

I: I mean, I did wonder about that when she asked David to ask him to marry her, like – you're already writing letters to this man.

E: Yeah. I don't know. Bob returns home the news that he might be considered as a presidential candidate by the Democrats.

I: What?!

E: He's involved in politics I guess.

A: Okay.

E: But Henrietta stays in London. He does not become the presidential candidate for the Democrats. And then she spends time with Bloomsburies. Everyone still adores her except for Lytton.

I: [laughs]

E: Someone remarked that "the only safe place for Henrietta was in Lytton's bed if she wanted a quiet night."

I and A: [laugh]

I: I was just imagining that – her coming into Lytton's room like, "Hey, I don't want to do anything, can I just sleep in your bed?"

E: He would be like, "Get. Out."

A: [laughs] I want to know why he hates her. Is it just 'cause he's a snob? I guess we never know.

E: I think so.

A: Okay.

E: Well it could also be because she starts spending a lot of time with Dora Carrington, who goes by Carrington, and they start up a relationship. One day Henrietta poses nude for her. The sketch survives.

I: Aww.

A: Oh, good!

E: It shall be on the blog.

A: Excellent.

E: And after she poses nude for her they have sex which Dora describes as “ecstasy and no feelings of shame afterwards” which is quite a big deal-

A: Good for Dora.

E: -because she had long pattern of revulsion towards her body and would reject potential lovers whenever things started to get serious and things, so I’m glad that she like, had a nice time for once.

I: Yeah.

A: That’s interesting, ‘cause there are like a fair few nude photos of Carrington.

E: Oh, are there?

A: Yeah.

E: Yeah, alright. Well, I don’t know. I imagine that’s complicated.

A: Yeah, I’m sure that is complicated.

E: Like, I started to delve into this, and then I was like, “Listen here.”

[laughter]

E: “This is another episode and you know it.”

[laughter]

E: And then I refused to. But yes, it’s that old pattern where Carrington is very in love with Henrietta and Henrietta is never really that attentive and won’t reply to her messages for days at a time and things.

I: I understand.

E: Yeah.

[laughter]

A: I too ignore my messages for days at a time.

E: Same.

[laughter]

E: She’s also kind of in a relationship with Tommy at this time, but it’s also just very up in the air, as it has been. She also sleeps with David Garnett at some point. Mina is very upset whenever Henrietta has another lover, but she feels especially betrayed by this because she had feelings for both parties.

I: I feel like “both the people I’m crushing on get together” is like a victory. You only have to crush in one place!

[laughter]



A: Your social calendar is so much easier now, Mina.

I and E: [laugh]

A: So despite whatever happened earlier with Henrietta's family and whatever happened with Mina, Mina and Henrietta are still together at this point.

E: Yes.

A: Okay.

E: Yeah. So Mina invites Clive Bell - who is the husband of Vanessa Bell, who was briefly mentioned earlier, and is another Bloomsbury Group member – to a party, and they get drunk, and she has to write him a letter the next day to kind of be like “So.... What happened?”

I: Oh no!

E: And everyone assumes that they slept together, and then suspicions are confirmed a few weeks later when Clive Bell writes to Lytton Strachey and mentions that “Mina's underclothes are the best in America.”

I: [laughs]

E: Mina's underwear comes up again in this episode. [laughs]

A: Good.

I: I want to know more about it. Did she just have really good taste in underwear? Did she spend a lot of money on it? Was it just...

E: I don't know. I will look up... Oh my God, maybe she went and bought nice underwear for this occasion! [laughs]

I: I hope so.

A: [laughs]

E: I don't know. I could find the letter and see if he like, then details it, but I doubt it.

And then Bob reveals that he is going to marry for the third time, which is – I don't know – like a reasonable thing for someone to do in their lives.

A: Yeah.

E: But Henrietta and Bob don't have a healthy relationship at all, and she vomits for five hours after she hears the news.

I: Oh no.

E: She feels she's being punished for not paying enough attention to him.

I: This might be a little Freudian.

E: It's not good.

I: Yeah.

E: It's unhealthy. They're co-dependent and-

I: Yeah.

E: They don't treat each other well and it's bad. I mostly wanted to mention this marriage because of that reaction. His wife is a woman called Aleen Muldoon Hilliard. She is from a gravestone and monument making family. She's never important again.

A and I: Okay.

E: Yeah. So goodbye Aleen.

I: Aleen Gravestone.

E: Yes. Aleen Gravestone. [laughs] And then in late 1924 Henrietta withdraws from the Bloomsbury Group. Their opinions of her have been like, collectively cooling because of how she's been treating Tommy and Carrington. They're very harsh on her though. Carrington talks about "American female bitches".

I and A: [shocked laughter]

E: Yeah. And Tommy writes kind of half in jest of her lovers, that, quote "If they only knew what risks they are running, falling in love with you, they would hang themselves before dinner and die happy. I sometimes wish I had done so."

I: Oh no!

E: So then Mina goes back to America in 1924 and she meets Henry Tomlinson Curtis, who is third great love of her life. He is married when they meet and they have a very unhappy marriage and he's trying to divorce his wife, so this is a risk to Mina's reputation again. She describes him as "a very male Henrietta".

I: I see...

E: Yes.

I: You're making some choices there, Mina.

E: No, they love each other! It's good.

I: Okay.

A: Can I just ask a question about Mina?

E: Yes.

A: So she was working as a teacher.

E: Yes.

A: And then she just kind of went off to London for a while. What's her source of income, or is Henrietta supporting her?

E: I think her family has some means.

A: Okay.

E: But also she is involved in various sort of literary pursuits. She does translations of Proust later on.

A: Mmhm.

E: Yeah, so I'm not sure what she's doing at any given time but she has various sources of income.

A: Okay.

E: She keeps the relationship a secret because she's worried that Henrietta will be upset. It's Jones, the psychoanalyst, who breaks the news to her. We don't have a record of her reaction, but Henrietta does become quite good friends with the two of them and will go to their house and stuff, so it's alright at some point anyway.

I: Okay.

E: When Harry's divorce goes through they get married, and he buys her nice lingerie for the wedding.

I: [laughs]

E: And it's found in a trunk in the Bingham's attic, bearing Harry's monogram. It's either stolen or gifted; we don't know. But it definitely ends up in Henrietta's attic.

A: Okay.

E: Yeah.

A: Huh.

E: That's the last of Mina's underwear.

A: Okay.

E: Yeah.

I: She obviously just liked underwear I guess.

E: Yeah, that's reasonable.

I: Yeah.

E: [laughs]

I: If it's come up in the historical record.

E: In 1925 Henrietta comes back to America and she moves to New York because of the jazz scene there. She gets a job selling ads and building the subscriber base for *Theater Arts Monthly*, and she has a circle of Southern friends, and creates "an atmosphere of glamour and gaiety achieved almost entirely with bourbon and mirrors.

[laughter]

E: Which was-

A: That was a good quote!

E: Yeah, I liked that. And then she meets up with the writer Jack Houseman, who she had originally met in London, and they go out drinking and dancing and they start dating because like everyone else she meets, he falls in love with her. He's very very insecure and struggles a lot with anxiety and self-pity and things like that. She's from this enormous, influential family, and from a lot of wealth, and he's a very like small-time tradesman and struggling writer.

I: Aww.

E: So that impacts, you know, his pre-existing tendency towards being very self-conscious and things like that.

A: Yeah.

E: Bob is very threatened by him; he doesn't want to lose Henrietta to anyone. So again-

A: Bob.

E: -this is unhealthy, and I hate it.

I: Yep.

E: He offers to make her his associate and legal successor publicly if she returns home, and she kind of confesses the situation to Jack Houseman – that she feels like she's drowning in guilt and responsibility. And I think she kind of wants him to help, or to save her from this in some way.

I: Yeah.

E: And he can't, and it's bad. And then they're separated for quite a while because of his work, and she decides to go back to England again. They write, but as always he writes much more, and he's very dissatisfied with her replies. He wants her to come and spend the winter with him in Vancouver, and she decides to spend it in London instead, which he's very upset about.

I: Yep.

E: And so he goes to Mina for advice, and she just tells him all about Henrietta's relationships with women, and how anxious and undependable she is, which seems, you know, a bit like a break in trust.

A: Yeah.

I: Somewhat.

E: Yeah. Jack is pretty overwhelmed by this. It feeds his insecurities again, and all of his insecurities and his self-pity and everything take a big toll on their relationship. He ends up alternating between adoration, verbal abused and then self-flagellating apology.

I: Yeah.

E: And that just gets in an unhealthy circle, and in the end she can't deal with that and they break it off. And then in January of 1928 Mina's husband gets pneumonia and dies.

I: Oh no.

E: And Mina is heartbroken.

I: Aww.

E: And she's never the same again.

I: Aww.

E: Yes. And around this time as well *The Well of Loneliness* is published, which is a very influential book by Radcliffe Hall about lesbian women and the protagonist is a very masculine lesbian woman

and it goes a long way to cement what was already this like, public opinion that female masculinity meant homosexuality.

I: Yep.

E: Bob at this point also can't pretend that Henrietta is about to marry a man, or that, you know, her relationships with women are platonic, and so he kind of decides to have a bit of a don't-ask-don't-tell approach to her relationships; he kind of tacitly-

I: Okay.

E: -approves of them, like he'll let her have some of them stay with them and things like that, but he demands that her appearance gives no hint of masculinity, and so she'd dressed kind of alternately in masculine and feminine dress before this.

I: Okay.

E: From now on she always wears skirts, so....

I: Yes.

E: Bob!

I: Bob.

E: *Bob!*

[laughter]

E: So, it's the '30s, which is the best time for money in America, and the stock market free-falls, but they're rich enough that they can kind of cope with it.

I: They're quite rich.

E: They are quite rich.

A: It's nice to be that rich.

E: No it's not.

[laughter]

I: It's unethical.

A: Yeah. Yeah, that too.

E: [laughs] That too.

I: [laughs]

E: It's both pleasant, and unethical.

[laughter]

I: True.

E: Things seem to settle down a bit. She lives with her father for some of the year. Their relationship seems okay. She is drinking more and more and using alcohol to cope more and more, though.

I: Oh no.

E: One night at the Louisville Country Club she makes a pass at a debutante and the debutante runs out of the bathroom and leans over the grand staircase to yell, "Henrietta Bingham just kissed me on the lips."

I and A: [laugh]

I: Oh no.

A: Ohhhhh no.

E: And Henrietta has to go away to Europe for a while to sort of live that down. When she returns from Europe she helps her father in his work of Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaign – for the presidency, if that wasn't clear.

[laughter]

E: When Roosevelt wins the presidency, Bob is up for the ambassadorship to the Court of St. James, which is just the American ambassador to England. The good old murder investigation from back in the day gets dragged up, and there's a lot of drama in the press, and FDR calls him "my favourite murderer" behind his back.

I and A: [laugh]

E: So that might be a new fact that you just learnt about Roosevelt.

A: "Who was Roosevelt's favourite murdered?"

E and I: [laugh]

E: You're welcome on this very specific trivia question if it ever comes up. You owe us a beer. However, he ultimately gets the job, and he tells Henrietta that he'll do it, he'll go, if she goes with him.

I: Of course.

A: Stop, Bob. Just stop.

I: Bob, you need to grow up.

A: Mm.

E: And then he collapses due to stress and he's in ill health and so he basically manipulates her with that and she goes with him to London.

I: Okay.

E: So she's living in their townhouse and she's hosting a lot of social events and she's very successful at that, and then a successful US tennis team comes and stays with them, and it's headed by Helen Hull Jacobs. She is quite cool. She pioneered wearing shorts as a woman in tennis professionally.

A: Good!

I: They still don't do that. They still wear skirts.

A: Yeah, but they *can* wear shorts, and some of them do.

I: No.

E: They wore like, calf-length skirts, and she wore skirts.

A: Ohh, yeah yeah yeah.

I: Yeah.

E: And it was a thing at least then that other women could also wear shorts.

I: Wear shorts, yeah.

E: So she's very successful and competitive and self-disciplined and into clean living and things like that and because she met her she falls in love with Henrietta.

I: [laughs]

E: She becomes very close with the family. She has her own room in their house very quickly. This is one of her relationships that Bob is willing to turn a blind eye to, and the public is very determined to never talk about homosexuality, and also they're both kind of public darlings at the moment, so they're basically able to make a home together, albeit somewhat fragilely. And they're also-

A: -with Bob.

E: With Bob. [laughs]

I: [laughs]

E: But they're also like, you know, unhappy with the fact that they have to be secret, but it's something.

A: Mmhm.

E: In 1935 Henrietta brings Helen back with her to Kentucky, which is quite gutsy of her really because Kentucky...

I: It's Kentucky.

E: Kentuckian society is already suspicious of her sexuality. And she doesn't want to live with her father, so their looking for somewhere else to live, and while they're driving around they just happen across this property called Harmony Landing, and it's beautiful, and they want to establish and horse and dog breeding farm there.

I: Aww!

E: And so they buy it, by which I mean her dad buys it, and they live there, and start up a horse and dog breeding farm, and it's very idyllic.

A: Do they have experience with horse and dog breeding, or was this just like a dream that they wanted to do this thing?

I: I mean, it worked for her father with newspapers.

E: [laughs]

A: That's true.

E: So Henrietta has been an accomplished horsewoman and I believe she also has dogs in her capacity as like a fox-hunter, which she's quite passionate about.

A: Okay.

E: If you remember way back when Bob first go his five million he buys her a horse.

A: Oh, yeah no, he did.

E: She's loved horse-riding since childhood, so Henrietta knows some of what she's doing here.

A: Okay.

E: She teaches Helen to ride a horse and to hunt, which will come up in a moment.

A: Mmhm.

E: So it's a very idyllic property and a very idyllic home, but Henrietta's drinking is quite a sore spot, particularly as Helen isn't really interested in having big parties or anything like that; she's quite, like, a healthy person because she's-

I: -a tennis player.

E: -a very elite sportsman, yeah.

I: Mmhm.

E: At this point Henrietta is seeing very little of either Mina or Jack Houseman. Occasionally they get together and talk about her though. And I just wanted to make a note that Mina introduces Jack Houseman to someone called Archibald MacLeish, who needs a director for a play. The play does not go over well – it's in verse, and no-one likes that.

I: [laughs]

E: But he had cast a 20-year-old actor called Orson Wells-

A: Oh!

E: -in the lead role.

A: Hey Orson!

E: And so Orson Wells and Jack Houseman here start up a partnership that culminates in ends during the making of *Citizen Kane*. So *everything* has come up in this episode! [laughs]

A: There you go.

E: Yep.

I: Both Keynes and *Citizen Kane*.

E: Yes! [laughs] That should go in the little bio thing for the episode.

I and A: [laugh]

E: "From Keynes to *Citizen Kane*: the jazz-age life of Henrietta Bingham."

Mina goes back to England to revive a love-affair with Clive Bell. She writes to him that she was "counting the days since an accomplished hand has stroked my lovely spine."



I: [laughs]

E: Which was dramatic and I liked it.

I: Yes.

E: Yeah.

I: Yes. I like that she thought her own spine was lovely.

E: Yes!

A: Yeah, "my lovely spine." Good for you, Mina.

E: "Picture my spine, Clive. Picture it."

[laughter]

E: Yep, so Henrietta teaches Helen to hunt, and then when Helen wins at Wimbledon, she is asked-

A: Oh!

E: Yeah, no, she's a *really* good tennis player.

A: Okay.

E: She gets put on the cover of *Time* magazine.

A: Oh wow!

E: Which we will also put on our social media.

A: Mm!

E: Yes. It's kind of nice that we're now in the age of like...

I: *Time* magazine.

A: Photographs.

E: Just like, a lot of media being produced, so we have content to put up.

A: I wonder how many queer people have been on the cover of *Time* magazine.

E: We can find out!

A: We can research.

E: Just have a little "*Time* magazine cover" series.

A: Yeah.

I: Yes.

[laughter]

E: But yeah, she wins at Wimbledon and she's asked to what she credits her success, and she says, "I think the hunting I did the past year was grand training." So basically she's trying to credit her lover in public as best she can.

A: Uh-huh.

I: Mm.

E: And that's a way she could do...

A: That's nice!

E: It is nice. Mm.

A: I mean it's sad that she can't actually just be like, "Yeah, my girlfriend's amazing."

E: Mm.

A: Aww.

E: I'm sad about that. Bob does his ambassadorship in London and then he lingers there for a little while because of the war, but he comes home in 1937 – he is getting much weaker and much sicker and he makes his final will, and then he passes away.

A: Oh.

E: Which-

I: Goodbye Bob.

E: Goodbye Bob. Henrietta is distraught. Helen can't appear with her when they speak to the press or at the funeral or anything like that, and she struggles with depression. Also by this time Henrietta no longer quite has that completely established place as Bob's favourite and Bob's darling anymore. He still loves her quite a bit and is very dependent on her, but she's become increasingly unstable in terms of her alcoholism and things like that, and also she started off as a very young woman with a lot of potential and she isn't that anymore. She never succeeded academically; she's not like, you know, having a career or anything like that, and so some of that has been transferred to Barry, who is just quite a stable young man. He gets married and, like, holds down a steady job very successfully and things like that, and so Barry ends up being the only real heir to Bob. He leaves him in control of virtually all of his assets. All he leaves Henrietta is Harmony Landing. He does leave her with a trust but he leaves Barry as the ultimate executor of that trust – so he basically let's Barry decide what living she'll have and like the amount suggested in the trust, or however it works, isn't really enough for her to be running the farm on.

A: Mmhm.

I: Okay.

E: So, I don't know, I feel like that would be a bit of a slap in the face.

A: It would be, yeah.

E: And also she struggles financially now. So it's the late 1930s, and things start to get worse for queer people around this time. Not to say that pre-this it was ever great, but they enjoyed this period of relative visibility and now the public impression of them starts to be more and more that they're degenerate and cures for homosexuality are talked about more and more; female athletes are held under suspicious; bars frequented by queer people are shut down more frequently; the Haze Code is enacted, which is a kind of like public decency code that's applied to film, which means that a lot of the things that early films could get away with in terms of depicting suggested homosexuality are now just not possible.

I: Oh no.

E: So this of course also makes things harder for Helen and Henrietta, and Henrietta has always struggled with secrecy and now that's even worse. So Henrietta tries to kind of make a clean break from things. She's been splitting her time between her family home and Harmony Landing, and now she moves to Harmony Landing permanently, and she kind of purges her belonging, and leaves some trunks in the attic, and she goes and she starts breeding horses. And it's very difficult for her as a woman – as I said, she doesn't have enough money per year to manage the farm; her stepmother is quite difficult to get along with; Barry's wife is also difficult to get along with at times - she resents Henrietta's very close relationship with Barry; and she feels like an outsider in the like, small town that is near to her home.

I: Aww.

E: Like, there's a lot of gossip about who Helen is, in the community. By this point they've been together five years, but they start spending time away from each other, just to deliberately kind of escape attention, and...

I: Oh yeah.

A: Hmmm.

E: Yeah, and this strains their relationship. And then they see each other in New York and they have some kind of falling out, and they both go home with different women. Helen does return home again, but ultimately they can't sustain living together anymore. They still seem to love each other very much, and they're still in some kind of relationship, but they're just not living together anymore. I have a letter that Helen wrote Henrietta around this time. So, for a little background, Henrietta's nickname for Helen is Hono. So, she writes "I haven't forgotten your promise to go to the doctor for me and give me a report. I don't like to be tiresome about it, but I want to put my own mind at rest." That is in reference to Henrietta going to a doctor about her alcoholism.

A: Alright.

I: Yeah.

E: Yep. "Such wonderful days are ahead for all of us, beloved, if you will only feel well again. Horses from Harmony Landing would be world famous. We will throw historic, brilliant parties, and pool our brains to think up all sorts of fun. And I will be your farm manager when you need one, and put you to sleep when you need that too."

I: Aww.

E: "We can be happy and proud together darling. But even if you don't like this plan, I am beside you, behind you, and on top of you-"

A: [laughs]

E: "-(if you want, naughty Hono)."

[laughter]

E: "You can do and say nothing to stop the constant flow of deep and growing love that goes out to you from my heart every time I like at you."

A: Aww!

E: I'm just really emotional about this letter.

I: Awww.

E: And I also just really like the like "eyyyyy" bit.

[laughter]

I: Yeah.

E: Yes.

A: That was a good letter.

E: It was a good letter.

I: Yeah.

E: And yeah, Henrietta gets rid of all of her letters from female lovers, and this is the only one she keeps.

A and I: Aww.

E: I'm just really emotional!

A: Aww.

E: I love Helen.

A: Why and when does she get rid of her letters?

E: I think she gets rid of them periodically because if they're discovered she'll....

I: It'll be bad for her. So she gets rid of the one from like, the past.

A: Aw.

E: So Helen gets involved with the navy during World War 2. She also writes a bunch of homoerotic pulp novels for the government.

I: [laughs]

A: For the *government*?

E: Yeah, to like-

I: Helen does?

E: Helen does, yeah, to get women to want to join the war, she writes a bunch of pulps about like, sportswomen joining the navy, but they're all massively homoerotic, and then when the war ends she just keeps writing homoerotic pulps.

[laughter]

E: It's great.

I: I love it.

A: I love Helen!

I: I want her to have her own episode.

E: We'll see if we can. I think that'd be a case of we'd just have to do our research and things to an extent.

A: Yeah.

E: I don't know.

A: One day.

E: And I don't want that. But [laughs] one day, yeah. So she stays in the navy for a very long time. She eventually becomes a commander but she leaves in the 1950s. It's ostensibly because of financial cut-backs but it might have been because of the purging of gay people that was happening under McCarthyism. Barry also enlists in the navy during World War 2. He's about to move to Washington DC and he asks Henrietta to join the family for a week's holiday before he moves there, and while that is on she has a breakdown and what exactly happened isn't recorded but it deeply upset Barry's wife, and it's bad enough that Barry has her put in a sanitorium.

I: Oh no!

E: Yeah. So she is in this cycle of drinking and then behaving badly, for lack of a better word, in public, and then feeling remorse and then starting on that cycle again, for the rest of the war years. She struggles throughout her life and especially sort of at this point with feeling like she doesn't actually have a purpose that she's trying to fulfil in life. You know, other people are moving on and building careers or having marriages and she doesn't really have either of those things, and so she struggles to kind of find something to make her days meaningful. She's also at this point becoming increasingly estranged from key figures in her life, like her brother and Helen. She tries to apply to WAVES, which is the navy's Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service.

I: I like that they made a silly catchy acronym for that.

E: Me too. I always approve of those.

I: [laughs]

E: But she's just not well enough physically to do it. She's losing a lot of weight. In 1942 Barry's wife, Mary – I really should have said her name prior to this moment, but whatever – hires a nurse to stay with her at Harmony Landing just to make sure she eats. She does some work drumming up land and agricultural labour volunteers from women in the area.

A: Mmhm.

E: And sometimes she's grateful to have the work and to have a purpose and sometimes she's just frantically questioning what she's doing with her life. And she keeps using alcohol to cope – doctors see her sexuality as the cause of her addictions, and I mean they're kind of right, in that she's dealing with a lot of homophobia that's been put on her by society, and she's using this to cope, but that's not what they mean.

I: Yeah.

E: They mean queer people are degenerate and are inclined to-

I: -alcoholism.

E: -vices.

I: Yes.

E: Yep. She has more than a dozen breakdowns and is hospitalised half a dozen times between 1940 and the late 1960s. So the war period is fairly well-documented because people are scattered and everyone's writing letters to each other, but then it ends in 1945 and we just kind of lose track of her for a bit, so we have a bit of oral history, we have some photographs, there are a few financial reports, and there's letters between Barry and her physicians, but that's it. So we know that Mary – who is the brother's wife – has her liquor cabinets padlocked, and she hacks the padlocks off. She also summons a psychiatrist who says that Henrietta should be watched around the clock, heavily sedated, and fed intravenously. He also suggests electroshock therapy.

I: Psychiatrists are bad at things at this time.

E: They're pretty bad at things now, and they're so much worse then.

I: Yeah.

A: Hmm.

E: Which is a new thing. And Henrietta opposes to it, which Mary basically thinks is just her being annoying and stubborn.

I: Wow, how annoying. Don't want electric shocks.

E: Yeah, so she has electroshock therapy. Basically everything that is happening here would have been massively traumatic for her.

I: Yes.

E: And it's very upsetting. She's prescribed Seconal, which was to help her anxiety and depression and also to help get her off alcohol. It wasn't understood at the time that these could be addictive, and also combined with alcohol, that they can kill you. So she has a severe overdose, and almost dies, and it's possibly a suicide attempt.

So her horses are doing well sometimes, she's having like, occasional success.

A: That's something.

E: But she isn't doing well herself, and she's struggling to manage the farm, and she never manages to – and she never really wants to – integrate into the conservative rural Kentucky community, and she's kind of stuck there.

I: Yep.

E: And this is just how her life is now, until 1950, when she puts Harmony Landing on the market and she moves to Manhattan, and then she meet Dorothy Bigelow Holland, who is almost 60, so she's like about a decade older than Henrietta. She starred in Cole Porter's first musical-

A: Ah!

E: -and also alongside Mae West.

A: Oh!

E: Yeah. Yeah. There you go.

I: There are only like 12 people in America at this time.

E: Yeah, that's true.

A: There are only 12 people in like the world at this time!

[laughter]

E: So she's no longer acting but she's very emmeshed in the like, queer theatre world.

A: Mmhm.

I: Okay, this sounds better for Henrietta.

E: I thought this too, yes. That's not like "I thought this and then like, like-"

I: -horrible things."

E: it is better, yeah.

I: That's good.

E: But her alcoholism and her depression continue, and she ends up in hospital. She escapes the hospital and goes to her apartment, and Dorothy calls the hospital because she's not well.

A: So when she ends up in hospital, who admits her to hospital, if she escapes? Did somebody else put her in hospital?

E: I imagine so.

A: Okay.

E: She gets put in hospital continuously by like her family and, like, she's not well.

A: Yep.

E: Like she does need some kind of care, but the care they're giving her isn't actually productive in any way-

A: Yep.

E: -I would argue. Like the fact that I think Dorothy puts her back, you know, she's not like in any way composed or anything.

A: Mmhm.

E: Like she's doing quite badly. Like it takes four hours to sedate her and take her to the hospital.

A: Okay.

E: Yep. And she's sedated and force-fed through a tube and they take the opportunity of her being out of it and essentially I think not able to protest to do more electroshock therapy. She tells Barry that she's going to jump out of the window if he doesn't get her out, and he takes her home.

So the doctors aren't talking about it in terms of her being mentally ill or anything like that. They're blaming it on her mother's death and her homosexuality and her never having married.

A: Okay.

E: Yeah.

I: What year are we in now?

E: We are in the 1950s.

I: Okay.

E: Yes. They suggest performing encephalograms on her to see if there's something wrong with her brain, and she refuses because she's scared that that's going to lead to a lobotomy.

I: Yeah.

E: Which Barry did consider looking into.

I: Yeah.

E: But that never happens, to be clear. It never happens.

A: Okay.

E: And then at the age of 53 she becomes engaged to Benjamin Franklin McKenzie.

I: Where did she get him from? Who is this guy?

E: We don't really know. He might have been a bartender or a waiter. He's referred to as both in like, letters from the time.

A: Okay.

E: They get married in June. By September he's run off, and four years later the divorce goes through on grounds of desertion.

I: Okay.

A: So, is this possibly maybe linked to the idea that they were telling her homosexuality was the problem here, and that she needed to get married?

E: I mean maybe, but I don't know.

A: We know nothing?

E: No-one knows. There's like a photo of them sitting at a table together. I don't know.

A: Okay.

I: It was literally-

A: That was as much information as you had.

E: Yeah. That is literally ever fact I have for you on Benjamin Franklin McKenzie.

A: Okay.

I: He just came out of nowhere and went to nowhere like three months later.

E: Yeah. The reason why this is kind of relevant is because it worsens her financial situation, 'cause they like, buy a house together.

A: Oh, yeah.



E: And then he runs off, and she's like "Okay." Yeah.

A: Yeah.

E: She goes back to England in 1955 for the first time since 1937, and then she gets in touch with David Garnett. He says that he felt upon hearing her voice that he'd "opened a door onto a scene in 1923".

I: Aww.

E: He wants her to meet his family, especially his daughter, who is named Henrietta.

A and I: Aww!

A: Aww.

E: But he also writes to his contemporaries that he noticed a kind of a vagueness and a forgetfulness about her that probably comes from long-term alcohol abuse.

A: Yep.

I: Yep.

E: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

E: She's not doing well. The first half of this book as so much fun, guys, and then I committed, I'm sorry.

I: Aww.

A: The first half was fun and like...

E: Yeah. So a lot of little details we have about her come from the memoirs and the writings and the letters of artistic crowds that she's not really in, but is associated with the members of, and this is kind of really her last hurrah for being involved with any of them, and she passes out of mention at this time. Over the '50s and the '60s her life is increasingly occupied with doctors and her family starts not wanting her to come to events because of what she might do. Barry has to sit her down and kind of have a very frank conversation with her about her finances in the wake of her disastrous tiny marriage to whoever Benjamin Franklin McKenzie is.

I: [laughs]

E: Which she's very ashamed about. So Dorothy remains committed to her in the '50s and '60s but Dorothy is like, not a young woman, and she can't look after her.

I: Mmhm.

E: And Barry pays a woman to live in her apartment and to make sure she eats and takes her medication, and the nurse says she's doing a bit better but that her problems clearly aren't solved, and then in June 1968 she dies in the night.

I: Oh.

E: Yeah. And so Barry doesn't talk about her a lot. He had a tendency – I think just as people did at the time – to kind of only portray the best face to the public.

I: Yeah.

A: Yep. Mmhm.

E: And to not talk about problems in the family.

A: Mmhm.

E: And she just sort of wasn't talked about all that much in the Bingham family for a long time, and then Emily Bingham was curious about her, she'd heard about her, and then she found the trunks that she'd left in the attic, which were full of clothes, including Mina's-

I: -underwear.

E: -lingerie.

[laughter]

E: And papers of her, and she decided to piece together a biography, and that is really the only source on the life of Henrietta Bingham. She doesn't have a Wikipedia page.

A: Mm.

I: Wow, okay.

E: Yeah. So yeah, to be clear, I essentially read the biography and then googled her, and was like "Oh." [laughs]

I: [laughs]

A: That's it.

E: And then I presented this episode.

A: Is Emily a descendent of Barry?

E: Yes. Yes.

A: Okay.

E: Emily is a descendent of Barry, so Barry is her grandfather, I believe.

A: Okay.

E: Her father is also called George Barry.

A: Okay.

E: Emily Bingham is not called George Barry.

[laughter]

I: Weirdly.

A: Good for you Emily.

E: Yes. Yeah, good for you Emily. [laughs] I'm sorry if you listen to this Emily.

[laughter]

E: Yeah, so Emily Bingham by the way named her daughter Henrietta Bingham as well.

A: Oh!

E: Which I thought was quite nice.

A: That's good.

E: So Emily ends her biography of her great-aunt thus: "The whole Henrietta remains out of reach. She would not want to be delivered or pinned down anyway. The former is insulting, and the latter always scared her. Yet she is now without question extant. The trunk is open. This volume is in sense another lover, pursuing her and being pushed away. Henrietta leaves us with a series of sounds: unceasing calls to come home; ice clinking in empty highball glasses; the saxophone note trailing away at the party's end..." – this is just really dramatic and I enjoyed it.

[laughter]

A: I'm picturing her standing on the piano.

I: I was going to say.

E: Mmhm. It's so dramatic. "...a tennis racquet smashing a ball; a powerful car engine sighing as it's shut off; pills rattling in a bottle. She took freedom as far as she could. She gave pleasure. By not living the brilliant life expected of her she disappointed her father, her brother, her lovers. Henrietta's charm and best efforts could not dissolve the pain she spent years trying to escape, but in her return to us again she may even briefly find acceptance."

[book closes]

A: Aww. I enjoyed that paragraph. It was a good....

E: So that was Henrietta Bingham. So the biography of her written by her great-niece is called *Irrepressible: The Jazz-Age Life of Henrietta Bingham*. If you google "Henrietta Bingham" it will come up, and like, nothing else will so it's easy to find. Yeah, and I also wanted to make a note that if you were interested in this, and you want to go read her biography, like, do it, it's interesting, it's great, there's a lot that we have to cut out of someone's life to fit into an hour, but also yeah, just be aware that those racial dynamics come up, and that like, her father has a much worse view on African-Americans than she does. She's a positive influence on him, and he like, moves away from those views, but those views are listed, and he talks about lynchings and things, and just like-

I: Oh wow, okay.

E: Be careful if you go and read this book, if that kind of thing is something that you don't want to read.

I: Yes.

E: Like, there are a few stories he tells about an ancestor of his who was in the Ku Klux Klan, and things like that, like it's right in there.

I: Oh dear, yeah.

E: Yeah. How do people feel about us having done this episode? Henrietta doesn't do much, also lives a very unhappy life. Obviously neither are things that we just do not talk about, but it's not like, you know, something that we've massively talked about yet.

A: Yeah, and I mean, she lives a very unhappy life in a large part because she's queer.

E: And it's just very frustrating to read something where it's like, if not clear fixes, then like, clear problems that didn't need to be these problems. And-

A: Yeah.

E: -her life was like ruined because of it. Like it's not as if, you know, we get someone with depression and alcoholism and we can just solve it like that today, you know. Like, she had so much pressure put on her academically, and it's like, if she was today maybe you know, someone would have picked up on the fact she had a learning disability, and like, maybe she wouldn't have experienced such crippling homophobia, and things like that. You know, like she starts out with all of this potential, and then I feel like, yeah, society makes it like impossible for her to ever really follow through on having like, a happy life.

I: Society makes it impossible for her to follow through on her potential, and then is disappointed in her for not doing it.

E: Mm.

A: Yeah.

I: She also doesn't do any less that say, Anne Lister did. She travels a bunch; she meets people.

E: But I think the thing is more that Anne Lister feels that she has purpose and she has goals, and that Henrietta Bingham struggles with the fact that she does not her entire life. And I'm not saying that she is worth less because of that, but like, she felt that her life held less meaning because of that.

I: I'm definitely on board for queer historical figures that don't do anything. Like, I'm happy for that to be a thing, I don't feel like we should limit ourself to people who are famous or people who you can define with an occupation or something like that.

E: Mm. I mean, that's going to be most of them, just by default.

I: Yeah, most of them we've heard of 'cause they're famous other than their queerness.

A: I think she's worth talking about because, like, it's very nice to talk about queer people who do what they want and are successful, and that's very important for us to talk about, but it would be a misrepresentation if we didn't also talk about queer people who didn't succeed at what they wanted and also who suffered because they were queer.

E: Obviously we still have to talk about that history, but I do feel like I need to be able to contextualise that in some way that's like, useful for people. Her life just trails off into a spiral of like, trauma and misery, but I don't think I can say anything about it.

I: Yeah, and I don't necessarily feel like you need to say anything about it. I think we just are going to have to acknowledge that this is a sad one.

E: Yeah.

I: And sometimes there are sad ones.

A: Yeah, and that is a part of queer history, that sometimes people have lives with no nice narrative and then it ends badly.

I: And homophobia happens, and...

A: And homophobia happens, and that's a part that we have to talk about.

E: Mm. I love her. Like, at the very least, she was a charismatic and happy person who made people happy, and then later she wasn't a happy person, but she still made a fox cake once, and danced on a piano playing the saxophone.

I: She did.

A: With that, thank you very much for listening. If you enjoyed our episode and want to follow us online, we're on Tumblr as Queer as Fact, on Facebook as Queer as Fact, and on Twitter as Queer as Fact. You can also write to us directly at [queerasfact@gmail.com](mailto:queerasfact@gmail.com), and you can find all our other episodes on Podbean and on iTunes. If you listen to us on iTunes please rate us and review us because it really helps us. And we'll be back on the fifteenth of October, where I'll be talking to you about Rosa Bonheur, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century French artist. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you then.

[Music plays]