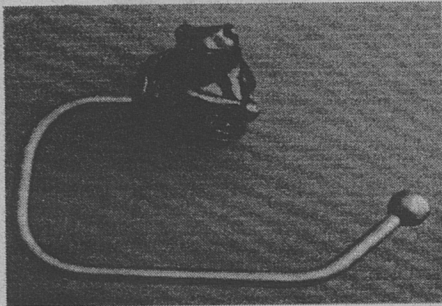


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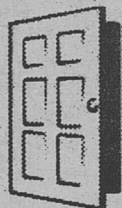
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Women Like That: Made For Each Other

In the winter of 1905, in London, ten-year-old Violet Keppel invited a new friend, 12-year-old Vita Sackville-West, to have tea with her. When Vita was in the hall ready to leave, Violet gave her a kiss. It was the beginning of an intense friendship and the prelude to a tempestuous affair that took seventeen years to play out.

Violet's parents were Alice Keppel and Colonel George Keppel. A dazzling, seductive figure, Alice was a favorite mistress of King Edward VII and lived a fashionable lifestyle in the highest echelons of society. Her children, Violet and Sonia, were fascinated and ruled by her. When King Edward died in 1910—of dissolute living mostly—the Keppels' lives changed dramatically. To avoid any unseemliness in her social circles, Alice took the girls on a long trip to Asia.

Violet, then sixteen, was miserable at having to part from Vita. They went out together just before the Keppels left. Vita kissed Violet in Hyde Park and threatened to kill her if she did not remain faithful during her trip, although the friendship had yet to become sexual. However, while Violet was gone, Vita enjoyed an affair with another girl and became engaged to Harold Nicolson.

Alice, for whom socially acceptable appearances were paramount, wanted Violet to marry soon and well, as society expected. It didn't matter if the marriage was a cover for being mistress to a king or lover of another woman. So on their return, eighteen-year-old Violet was thrust into the glittering whirl of a London season. The idea of marriage repelled Violet completely; to her it was an intolerable sham. But the pressure was lifted somewhat when the World War broke out in 1913 and lasted until 1918.

One day, in April of 1918, while Violet was visiting her, Vita put on a pair of trousers for the first time. She had bought a pair of army-issue to garden in, but dresses and skirts were de rigeur and pants-wearing was a new sensation. "I went into wild spirits," Vita wrote. They ate dinner alone together that evening, and later lay on the sofa as Violet counted the ways she loved her on Vita's fingers. They made love, probably for the first time together. They were overwhelmed by their passion.

That passion soon became fodder for gossip in London. Alice liked Vita, but not the gossip, and

**francesca
susanna**

she insisted Violet marry. She urged Violet to encourage Denys Trefusis, a major in the army. "I am so fed up with lies," Violet wrote to Vita. "How right you were when you said we were made for one another ... You are the *grande passion* of my life. How gladly would I sacrifice everything to you — family friends, fortune, EVERYTHING." Vita was as possessive as ever of Violet, though she thought Violet should go ahead and marry Trefusis, but without conjugal consummation.

In October of 1918, to Violet's horror, Denys proposed. No doubt she understood that her mother would not let her easily slip out of this engagement. She turned him down and begged Vita to run away to France with her. It was "the *only* thing that can save me from an otherwise CERTAIN FATE," Violet wrote, threatening that if Vita refused, she *would* marry Denys. They ran away to France.

"I had never felt so free in my life," Vita wrote of their months in France. She wore a suit and went around as a young man with Violet as her wife. Violet wrote, "I was madly insatiably in love with you." They went to Monte Carlo where, "the weather was perfect, Monte Carlo was perfect, Violet was perfect." In London, their families frantically tried to reach them.

Eventually, missives from home reached them. Vita's family begged her to come home and look after them. Violet's mother told her in no uncertain terms that she would marry Denys, having already announced publicly that the nuptials would take place in June. To Violet it was a "hideous farce," but she was not capable of opposing her mother's will. "I loathe and abominate deceit and hypocrisy," Violet wrote to Vita. "I belong to you body and soul. I ache for you all day and all night. You are my whole existence—O [Vita] it is so *horrible*, so *monstrous*, so *criminal* to be with someone one doesn't care for when

your whole being cries out for the person you *do* love and *do* belong to."

She was desperate to get out of the marriage and managed to persuade Vita to agree to 'elope' with her before the wedding. Vita was wildly jealous at the thought of Denys and Violet being intimate, but as Violet planned their escape, Vita wrote to Harold in Paris, "I can't be in England or *it will never take place* ... I shall do something quite irretrievable and mad if I stay in England." Three days before the wedding Vita told Violet that she would not rescue her, and went to Paris.

As for Denys, Alice had promised him an income, a cushy office job, a home — in short a very nice life after the horrors of the war. On June 16, 1919, Violet and Denys were married and went straight to

**Vita kissed
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trip.**

Paris for their honeymoon, where Vita was. There the lovers, sparing Denys nothing, made clear to him what their relationship was. Nor could the marriage be an understanding such as Harold and Vita had (Harold had his own homosexual flings), for Violet considered Denys the reason she and Vita were apart and was constantly cruel to him. After a month of marriage, they were ready to separate, which Alice would not allow. Everyone was miserable.

In February, Violet and Vita attempted another elopement to France. This time Denys and Harold, at Vita's instigation, >>