



The Man on the Third Floor

Anne Bernays

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Walter Samson is a successful book editor in post-World War Two New York. He has more than enough money, an interesting wife, Phyllis, two smart children and reason to believe he's leading the good American life. That is, until by chance he meets Barry Rogers. Barry is blue collar, handsome, single, and poor.

Walter is instantly drawn to Barry and, despite the considerable risks, installs him in the Samson's three-storey house on the Upper East Side, where the two men try to keep their amorous relationship secret.

Against a backdrop of McCarthy-era paranoia with its doleful consequences and society's pervasive homophobia, Walter manages to alter the direction and course of his life, losing much, gaining more.

The Man on the Third Floor Details

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Author : Anne Bernays

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From Reader Review The Man on the Third Floor for online ebook

Jennifer says

Quick read and well done by Blackstone Audio. I found the story a little implausible considering the era, but maybe NYC and the publishing world were more accepting than one would imagine, not having lived in post WWII times. Hard to absorb the details of such deceit but good insight into the conflict that must've tormented people like Walt in the past (and sadly continuing today in some places/circles).

Ellie says

I am a fan of writer Anne Bernays, so I was delighted to win a copy of The Man on the Third Floor from LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

The book was extremely readable, despite the fact that the narrator's voice is cold, usually dispassionate (except with regards to his own passion) and judgmental. As may be obvious, I did not much like Walter Samson, the protagonist in this story, although I enjoyed his world—he is an editor for a small publishing house in 1950s New York, during the height of the cold war. Successful at work and home (more or less happily married with two children he loves), Walter is uninterested in the political pressures of the Cold War, brought home by the doings of the House of Un-American Activities Committee or the personal happiness or tragedies of his wife and co-workers, Walter is an amiable man who gets along with others without ever getting close to any, until he falls in love with another man.

Bernays manages to convince me that Walter would install his lover on the third floor of his house and that this arrangement would continue for several years. Walter has found his connection to the world in his love for another man.

Bernays' prose is beautiful-engaging, charming even when the character is not, and her portrait of New York in the 50s was enthralling. I never, however, cared about the characters which speaks to her power to keep me engaged in a book. My three stars says this is a book worth reading though not life-changing.

Laura Zimmerman says

I read this book thanks to my fiance, who won the book through a Goodreads giveaway. He spoke highly of the book and put it on the top of my 'to read' pile of books--that's high praise from him!

The Man on the Third Floor portrays the life of a book publisher in the early- to mid-1900's. This publisher, while married, is involved in a homosexual relationship with a man who lives in the same house the publisher and his family live in. However, the sexual orientation of the publisher, while an important aspect of the book, isn't treated in a lurid or erotic way. The author manages to convey the publisher's love and attraction for his lover without going into detail; she is able to put the publisher's thoughts on the page in a spare but effective way. I found that with a few well-chosen words, Ms. Bernays was able to capture the man's feelings for his lover in a way that I could relate to quite well.

However, this book isn't solely about the relationship the two men shared. There is much more to it: the publisher's marriage to his wife, his relationship with his children, his professional life, and the political climate of the United States during and after World War II. Living in the early 21st century it can be easy to forget the political and social strains of that time in our history. Communism, racism, homophobia, and classism all played a part in the life of the publisher in this story and Ms. Bernays' treatment of those times serves as a reminder of how far we have come since that time. While those social issues simmered or raged outside the home, other issues were just as pervasive within the home and family life of the publisher. Ms. Bernays created his character into that of a man who was well aware of all the issues facing him as well as how his choices in life could affect him and those around him. Ms. Bernays' creation of a character so conflicted, conscientious, burdened, and full of longing is masterful.

The Man on the Third Floor is a book that quietly affects the reader. There is nothing explosive about the plot, no final ultimatums or tragic endings but rather a well-written book that gently envelops the reader in a rare glimpse of a man struggling to do the best he can in the midst of two worlds that threaten to fall apart at any time. Ms. Bernays has written an outstanding book and I hope to read more of her work in the future.

Hyacinth says

Received as a giveaway on goodreads.com first reads. Thank you for choosing me and I look forward to reading it. I read this book in a few hours. It had me captivated from the beginning. To me, the narrative was disconnected...well maybe detached would be a better word in a third person kind of way. It was almost as if this were happening to someone else and not him. The story line was true to the time period. I found bits of it comical in an ironic sort of way. I cannot believe he pulled this off with Barry in house as long as he did. Wifey and daughter got in a couple of sharp jabs that got a chuckle out of me. Overall, it was very well written and thought out. It was absolutely believeable but something I pray I will never have to experience. I wonder how authors come up with these things...

Colette says

interesting and thought provoking

Blake Faina says

This slim volume covers quite a bit of territory in its 184 pages. Ostensibly, it's about the gay awakening of its narrator, Walter Samson, set against the backdrop of the 1950's New York publishing world and the red scare of the McCarthy era. Drawing obvious parallels between the communist witch hunt and Samson's justifiable paranoia over being outed as a homosexual, author Bernays sets herself an ambitious agenda. Unfortunately, in certain respects, her reach exceeds her grasp.

Strictly as an evocation of Manhattan's publishing heyday, the book is a total hoot. If you enjoy the world of *Mad Men* where the executives pat the curvy bottoms of their secretaries before heading out for a smoke-filled, scotch fueled lunch on the corporate expense account, then this will be right up your alley. Bernays completely nails the glamourous atmosphere of late fifties/early sixties NYC. And she seems to have an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of publishing's bygone halcyon days - when wads of time and

money was spent wooing potential authors, as well as keeping successful authors already under contract happy.

Almost all of the secondary characters are well fleshed out and believable, chief among them Walter's left-leaning wife, Phyllis. As a matter of fact, the only character who isn't particularly well defined is the titular man on the third floor, Barry Rogers, who is supposedly the love of Walter's life. Walter meets the blue-collar Barry when he comes to install carpet in his office. For Walter, it's lust at first sight. In short order, he hires Barry to work as his driver and installs him in an apartment on the top story of the brownstone he lives in with his family allowing them to carry on a covert affair for many years.

But as a love story this book completely failed for me. Despite assuring the reader, over and over again, how much Barry means to him, there are hardly any scenes between them and almost no dialogue. There's a lot of telling, but very little in the way of showing. Usually, when Walter thinks of Barry, sees him or refers to him, it's in a purely sexual context. For example (and most egregiously) when one of his children suffers a serious medical emergency, Walter emerges from the hospital to see Barry awaiting him in the car and reacts with lust. Somehow, the "love story" did not ring true. I had no sense that Walter esteems Barry in any way, but instead only views him as an object of desire.

Anne Bernays is an excellent writer. Every aspect of this book is complete delight except the central relationship. I think if she had expanded the book, focusing more on Barry and Walter and excluding some of the extraneous publishing storylines, this might have succeeded as both an indictment of persecution and an epic love story. As it is, you get a lot of the former and almost none of the latter.

Jaime says

I had been craving a little gay fiction, felt it was needed, i stumbled upon this title through the local library. I found this book to be very telling of many closeted homosexuals stuck in marriages going about life through their occasional erotic gay encounters. Bernays captured with great certainty the protagonist struggles within himself to reconcile his true self while trying to create for others the image of a perfect home. At times I found Walter to be self serving and narcissistic yet can we place on him or don't we all have skeletons in our closet that keep us up at night, yet you sympathize with his struggles to conform with societies standards all the meanwhile being true to yourself. All in all I found this to be a goodread on a pleasant afternoon.

Mark says

Smoothly written, engaging and satisfying. Sets the period accurately and it's minimum of hysteria gives it an authentic feel. There's a piece missing though. I know very little about the title character and that's the narrator's most important relationship. Also though the resolve is non-clichéd and a relief, it has a lingering effect of anticlimax.

Sheila says

Set in an earlier time of publishing, when editors sought out authors to earn their millions, when words were golden and books were beloved and heroes were seen enjoying martinis lunches in New York hotels... and the closet was closed... Anne Bernays' *The Man on the Third Floor* tells the story of a successful gentleman whose money, home and lifestyle all hang by a thread. A stranger has entered that perfect life and suddenly the world's satisfactions are not what they seemed, at least not for Walter Samson who tries to hold onto the myth of the past while delighting in a future of secrecy.

Life is filled with myths of course. Mythical love that's never quite up to the test, mythical children who know much more than they should, mythical characters written a favored author who harbors no hint of sympathy, and the myth of a government determined to protect at the cost of sanctioning McCarthy's witch-hunts. The man with too much sympathy never knows where his sympathies lie. And the man behind the window upstairs, the driver, the object of questions like "What does he do?" waves his individual thread of truth between and behind them all. But is he honest? A hero? Is he true?

Secrets hurt and secrets half-revealed carry heavy penalties. But when the curtain of myth falls away will anything remain, or was it just the danger that made it real? Truths tested lead to truths revealed in Anne Bernays' starkly real and believable tale. Falling from the third floor or falling from grace, Samson faces the future and learns that nothing and no-one is complete, none fully known. But at least he can be true to himself, and in that gentle touch of hope the novel ends by looking forward to a future through eyes of honest human interactions. Maybe people are kinder than governments after all, and that's as it should be.

Disclosure: I received a free bound galley of this novel from the publishers in exchange for my honest review.

Connie Lee says

Such an easy read for an excellent book. Post WWII Walter struggles with his slowly dawning acceptance of his gay identity. At the same time while he tries not to get involved with J Edgar Hoovers war on "commies," he is finally forced into choosing sides. As in life, the right moral choices are often not easy.

Nancy says

Well written for a first person narrative.

Sherree Gaskell says

This was my first reading of a book by this author. I was taken by surprise. The writing style had a quality and kindness to it that I loved from the beginning. The author takes us on a journey without becoming

tiresome. There are no long drawn out descriptions, but rather the gentle tale comes across as if a narrative between friends having coffee. Walter is likeable as is his wife Phyllis. The homosexual theme of the book is interesting and I found this to be an altogether pleasant reading experience. I intend to try other books by Anne Bernays.

Heather(Gibby) says

This book packs a lot into 184 pages, it portrays a moment in the main characters life without going through a lot of detail on how he got there. It takes place in New York during the 1950's where paranoia regarding communism and the investigations into anti-American activities are being pursued. The main character works in a publishing house, and lives with his wife and two children in an upscale neighborhood. He also has a secret, his part time chauffeur is also his lover. The book comes to a conclusion when the main character is confronted with all these realities at the same time and is forced to choose one life over the other.

Julie says

Walter Samson is a married man with two young children. He is a senior editor at a Manhattan publisher. By chance, he meets Barry Rogers, who is laying carpet in his office. Barry is very blue collar, poor, and quite handsome. When Walter finds himself drawn to Barry, they meet repeatedly, with Walter finally offering Barry an apartment in the third floor of his home. Barry accepts, and acts as a chauffeur and handyman for the family. Walter and Barry covertly carry out a love affair, supposedly hiding this from his family and the household help. We watch Walter struggle between keeping his true love, and also trying to keep his family and his social standing. This is the era of McCarthyism, and Walter has seen many acquaintances lose everything for being Communist sympathizers. Interesting read, in that the feel is very dated, though written in 2012. The characters were very matter of fact and could have used more character development.

Curtis says

In the post-World War II era of McCarthyism, Walter Samson, a very successful editor with a picture-perfect family (loving wife, adoring son and daughter) has little worry in the world. Until one day Barry Rogers shows up in his office and awakens a whole part of Walter he never knew existed. Spurred by his passion, he not only takes up a clandestine relationship with Barry, he goes so far as to move him into the servants' quarters of his home so they can be closer together. While constantly at risk of being found out, Walter tries to juggle his double life at home with his career.

I really enjoyed this book. The writing flows rather well - it's written in a first-person narrative style and it's easy to feel like Walter is right there telling you his story. There are some interesting twists and turns in the path the story takes and I think it's easy for the reader to find themselves conflicted between frowning on Walter's duplicity and truly feeling for the circumstances of the era in which he lived. Bernays has created a very believable world that makes the characters - to use her own words about one of the authors Walter discovered - "not so much realistic as real."

I would have personally liked to see more of the private moments in Barry and Walter's relationship, but what it lacks in that area doesn't detract from the story or what I see as the primary purpose of the narrative,

so I can't fault the book at all on that front. Recommended for those interested in historical fiction, m/m romance, and stories focusing on LGBT issues.
