

The Leopard and the Lynx
By Michelle Maccarone

The Leopard and the Lynx had its first reading as part of the podcast Vintage Old Biddy's April 2021 episode.

The cast was:

Pat Tanner: Gary Lizardo

Louise Tanner: Margaret Sullivan

Jullian Muller: David Mackler

Its first staged workshop took place in June 2022 at The Heights Players in Brooklyn, New York.

The cast was:

Pat Tanner: Daniel Mitnik

Louise Tanner: Margaret Sullivan

Jullian Muller: Ted Thompson

Betsy Tanner: Martha Allen

Characters:

Pat Tanner: At this point is 55 years old. He has been away from New York for several years, most recently deciding to skirt his "celebrity" to become the butler to the head of the McDonald's corporation. He is estranged from his wife Louise but the two still love each other. Has suffered from depressive episodes most of his life.

Louise Tanner: At this point is 54 Grew up very conventionally in an affluent Upper East Side home. Was a debutant whose main goal, according to her parents, was to marry well. She fell in love with Pat who was very much not what they had in mind and it could not make her happier. After Pat left she was hurt but also is the person who knows and accepts him most in the world.

Julian Muller: A long time friend of the couple. He produced many of Pat's books, most notably Auntie Mame. He is a confidant of Pat and even was noted to have finished many books when Pat's poor mental health would take over.

Betsy Tanner: Pat and Louise's daughter. Freshman at Goodman School for Drama. Amiable and likable. Easy to be around.

Setting: The Tanner's Upper East Side apartment. It is elegant but in an approachable way. Large tapestries adorn the walls.

Time: May 1976

Pat: That would be nice.

Louise: (to Betsy) Would you care to join. I'll phone Michael as well.

Betsy: Maybe. There's some last minute summer stock auditions I wanted to try but I'll try and be there. But in the mean time we had to double park the car and I think there's only so much charm Ed at the door can exert over the New York City Police Department.

Louise: Very well. Goodbye dear.

(Betsy hugs her mother. She mouths to her father "Tell her." She hugs her father. She leaves)

Pat: Well it's just us two big cats all alone in the cave without our cubs for the first time. What shall we do first? (the next two lines are spoken through with Louise trying to get a word in)

Louise: Pat.

Pat: I think our first order of business should be to arrange a party. Cris and Shaun are back in town next week and I think it'd be darling to get them and...

Louise: Pat.

Pat: and of course Roz and I wonder if Peggy is around. I haven't seen her in AGES. Perhaps a theme? I can't remember the last themed party we had here. Let me tell you we are entering a new phase of parties. Our twilight years we must go for broke. It'll be decedent, simply decadent.

Louise: PAT TANNER. You're ignoring what I said. Why are you always the one to decide what is best? We'd been talking every night. Really trying to work though what went wrong before proceeding in physically co existing again. I told you that I had finally accepted that you were gone. I remember the shock when you left. I thought this was about Guy Kent, but then when that dissolved I waited for you to come back, but it never happened. Then I stood by you as a distant partner as you flitted between Mexico and Houston and New York and Chicago. I stood by you and accepted your decision to become a live in servant rather than live with me. Me, the woman you still swore you loved. Then just as I truly healed and was beginning to turn a page and began to write the next chapter of whatever my life

was now you decide to show up here and pretend none of it happened? I cannot abide that.

Pat: We've talked about the reasons why I left. I couldn't stand what my behavior was doing to you. Ever since I was young I knew I wasn't like the other men I grew up with. I just thought it was my interests. I always enjoyed hanging out with groups of girls but I enjoyed dating them. I never had a hard time being attracted to them. But regardless I felt deeply, deeply, unhappy. I ignored it as best I could. Then the war came and I did my part for the efforts. And from that came my first sexual encounter with a man and I thought, "Well this is it this is who I am. I am a homosexual man and maybe once I come to grips with this as who I am this abysmal sadness will stop. But it didn't stop. It just made it worse. Then I found you and I truly found a soul mate and we had our brood and I found career success and I thought, "Well this must be it. The American Dream. I'm complete." But I wasn't complete. I still felt desolate inside. I met our camp cotillion and Cris, Hervey and Katherine and they let me truly be gay in every sense of the word. And I opened myself up. And I had them and I had you and it was the closest I got to feeling complete. But even then in the midst of external acceptance, success, and love, I couldn't find happiness. So, I thought then dash it all. Blow it up. So I started seeing Guy, but loving Guy didn't mean not loving you and I just didn't know what to do. I love you but it wasn't fair to make you live like that, with me not knowing what I needed. What kind of man would that have made me?

Louise: You. It would have made you, you. You never subscribed to these silly arcane vestiges of manhood. You're a man who would take my jewels to be cleaned and wear them all into the store. You attended your son's Parent's Day in a mink, pillbox hat. And I didn't blink an eye. I stood there, because you were my everything. It never occurred to me that I should bray, or whisper about you to my mother. We both made very definite decisions when we were young that we would not let the upbringing that was expected of us poison our future. I would not be simply a society girl planning parties like my parents wanted and you would not drink yourself to death in a boring sales job like your father. And look around, we did it. We succeeded.

Pat: He never accepted me. He never loved me.

Louise: And I know that hurt you. I'm sorry you never were able to attain your father's unconditional love. But we loved you. Us, your family and your friends and you left.

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Pat: You don't know what growing up was like. I know I've told you but I don't think you can truly understand the immense weight of masculine expectations. So much was expected of me that I had no interest in.

Louise: But you thumbed your nose. You've been able to live the life you wanted.

Pat: But at the end of the day I'm a 6 foot fag in a suit. When I look in the mirror that's all I can see in myself. And I pour myself another drink or lie in bed catatonic and I just don't know what to do about it. I don't know what to believe.

Louise: You can believe in my love.

Pat: I never for a minute questioned your love. It was and will always be precious to me. The Hope Diamond we're going to steal. It was so precious that I couldn't deal with the thought of soiling it with the dirtiness of Guy; with the dirtiness of what I was. Leaving was the only thing I could do to respect our love.

Louise: (quietly) I find that very hard to believe. Can I fix you a drink?

Pat: Martini, I assume you remember how I like it? You haven't replaced Julian's order at the bar cart for my own?

Louise: You're being very silly.

Pat: Did you always know?

Louise: How to make a martini? Well of course darling we both grew up WASPs don't forget.

Pat: That's not what I meant and you know it.

Louise: (Pause) I suppose. I chose not to acknowledge it but I feel like I knew it was true. I remember my mother whispering about it when we were engaged. I've seen some of the looks guests we didn't know would give you at dinner parties. But I just...didn't...care. I thought we were just so ourselves that no superfluous adjective could describe who were were more than what we felt for each other.

Pat: We have had some wonderful times. Made even more wonderful with a dash of fame and then made infinitely worse in the long

run by it. I knew once I succeeded that eventually I would fail, such is the foible of success I suppose.

Louise: Patrick Dennis, Virginia Rowens and the rest of the pen names. Why not simply write as yourself?

Pat: It seemed an awful idea. Too personal. The same as those blasted radio or tv interviews. A writer shouldn't have to defend or represent themselves. When they write fiction, why destroy that with the every day life of the author.

Louise: But you're one of the most well spoken and lively people I've every known in my life. You could dazzle an audience with the same gusto you dazzled a dinner party.

Pat: It's my armor. The distance and allure of a pen name. My pen names were my professional armor and I suppose you and our family were my personal armor.

Louise: Well armor is meant to do battle with. But you waived the white flag. (Pause)

Pat: I'm here now aren't I?

Louise: And why, pray tell, are you here?

(Pause)

Pat: Didn't you think it peculiar that all my most successful characters were women?

Louise: I just thought you were a good writer. And that Mame, no matter how much you did not want to admit it, was based on your crazy old aunt.

Pat: Only to begin with. Only the fact that I had an aunt my father hated and I found simply marvelous. The rest was pure ingenuity. Women are so much easier to write. Women are allowed to bend so much more to different facets of society.

Louise: You have to be kidding me. We have our lives planned out from the second we're born. Once that first ribbon is placed on our head the clock starts to tick towards the moment we can be unloaded in marriage. Yes, the women in some of your stories manage to be glamorous and untied to men but as you yourself just said they are works of fiction. An unattached woman is as imaginary as a unicorn. In the case of your women, they're

wonderfully glamorous and worldly and occasionally able to bag a millionaire that will conveniently die soon after they marry them. Men rule our lives and then blame women for the pressure they feel to conform when they're the ones controlling everyone's destiny.

Pat: Well then from our descriptions one simply can't win being either sex in this world of ours then, can one?

Louise: Not for our generation I suppose. But perhaps for Betsy's. We did what we could with what we were given. And we've made something special. You've created a body of work that will be around long after you've gone.

Pat: Everything I am is because we found each other and created a beautiful life together, professionally and personally. You read every novel. Every article. Every story. Perhaps that's another reason I used pen names. I couldn't bear to take credit for your work.

Louise: You always read my work. A team. I guess the team is officially back together.

Pat: I guess so.

Louise: For good?

Pat: Yes.

Louise: Pat. Why are you here? It's time to tell me. Did you go to the doctor?

(Pat nods. There is a long silence.)

Louise: In the end I am awfully glad that you're back, you know that?

(Pat nods again)

Louise: This is a large, lonely apartment in a large, lonely city without someone to share it with. And I want to share it with you. Since the moment I met you I wanted that. For whatever time there is.

Pat: They wanted to treat me in Chicago. But the second the word Cancer was mentioned I just saw your face and nothing else seemed to matter. I remembered Betsy was driving and called her.

Louise: She knows?

Pat: She does. She's waiting to tell Michael.

Louise: So lunch is going to be a festive affair.

(They laugh)

Pat: I spent so much of my life thinking I didn't belong in it and trying to leave. Now I find the universe calling my bluff. And now all I want to do is make up for the 14 years I could have been with you.

Louise: You were always here. You always will be.

Pat: I love you Lynx.

Louise: I love you Leopard.

THE END