

... is full of gossip and
lives of quiet desperation.

was a Red, and lost his perch, and moved to California where they are more tolerant about such things, and Vegetarianism, too.

"The sister, Marian, married a monster of a man, Mazrowski, and they raise malamutes and huskies in either Ballston Spa, or Malta. I forget which."

Or, on John Stout: "He was walleyed and had a hang tooth, yet the women liked him. They claimed to find him fascinating. They said he had a really big one." Or: "His most characteristic expression was, 'It makes a difference whose bull is gored.'" Characteristic expressions occur frequently, the sign of a man who listens; and Spyker's own voice picks up beautifully his own habits, the habits of the others, and the upstate rhythms as well.

This is a sweet and loving book which uses an old, old fictional device freshly to recreate a place and time. It is not, obviously, continuous narrative, and yet one is carried along more strongly than by plot. I want to quote and quote and quote, but I will restrain myself and ask you to read *Little Lives* so that you can discover Naomi Flegg & Triplicatism, Cack the Sissy, and Serendipity Flatch, of whom Spyker writes, "It is not always honestly given, but you will have a better time, nevertheless, if, when a woman loves you, you take that love seriously." Vanessa Wunderlich, who died because she had once eaten "the hair pie, or so was I told," is here, and the Boleg twins, who "introduced hot red peppers to the county," and Elder Black and Elder Noble, who were the reverses of their names.

There is, in fact, a whole county full of people, and John Howland Stryker has made them live and breathe, and himself also. The lives may be those of quiet desperation, but neither he nor they know—which makes us hear them, and which takes the desperation away. And even the liars can be lived with; I sort of like Budgy Bordelaise who "when she used to go to Troy she said she'd been to New York . . . She told Erny Ames she knew how to make Indian pudding, and then she served My-T-Fine."

John Howland Stryker is a pseudonym, used here to test the muddied waters of publishing and review; he is, in fact Richard Elman, author of some dozen volumes, including six novels. Under any name he has produced a beautiful and original work.

—Joel Oppenheimer