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Catcher In the Corn

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Catcher In the Corn*

JOAN BOSTWICK

“One Thing I Know—,” by Pati Hill (Houghton, Mifflin. 93 pp. $3), has for heroine an unsaccharine sixteen-year-old who, soured on society, gets scorched by amour. Joan Bostwick is a free-lance writer.

One thing I want to say right now is that this Francesca Hollins, who is the heroine of this book called “One Thing I Know—,” is not exactly what you might call an original. Being sixteen and disillusioned with Adults and Love and the Phony World, she sort of stepped out of this other book I read. If you really want to hear what I think, I think that old Pati Hill, who wrote the book, is beholden to someone for this Francesca character because she is an awful lot like old Jane Gallagher who was aces with “Madman” Caulfield. I also think that being strictly for the girls it might outsell false eyelashes. Even though I’m around a thousand years old, I can understand that girls aren’t too crazy about Amy, Beth, and Jo any more. I’m not exactly Granville Hicks or anything but I think I can draw a Literary Conclusion once in a while.

To get back to Francesca, she lives in Washington, D.C., and she has this lazy old stepfather who takes naked sunbaths and gripes about American women, he being Italian and all. He also sort of propositioned Francesca once, which was a crumby idea even for a pea-brain, so nothing came of that.

Anyway, I wouldn’t want you to get sick or anything, so I’ll skip over the vomity parts like how she fell in love with this Graham von Liddle, for Lord’s sake, the minute she laid eyes on him. He called her Ninotchka or something equally pukey and was always delivering those monotonous sermons about Honor and Loyalty and Fighting the Good Fight. He was clever as hell.

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So old Francesca was doing about as well as you can do if you happen to be in love with a clown, until Gloria attached herself to them. Gloria was this modest plump girl who blushed, for God’s sake, and wore a brave little smile and mittens, and she was always improving them by hauling them to things like lectures on The Life History of the Water Rat. Pretty soon Graham began to think of this royal pain as a safe harbor and all and then he took her someplace without old Francesca, which good old Gloria couldn’t keep to herself. What with all the long boring letters on Pride and Jealousy and The Gentle Art of Understanding which Graham absolutely poured on Francesca, the whole thing sort of fell apart.

Anyway, after this and a lot of other depressing stuff, Francesca wrote in her diary, “One thing I know, I’ll never be in love again.” Now she has only this very sensitive platonic friend who sometimes acts about seven years old, but is very nice to his little brother. But you’ll have to catch that part of the story on your own.

One thing I’ll bet is that around a million P-TAs and Oldguard School Superintendents and Assorted Anxious Parents are going to go absolutely mad with joy over it because it has been sort of soaked in Lestoil. I can just picture them around these bonfires singing “School Days,” and ordering rounds of very dry Kool-Aid to toast old Decency and Purity.

I forgot to mention that there is this one sexy part sort of wedged in between the words, and this “Afterwards . . .” jazz. But you’d hardly notice it at all unless you had an evil mind or something. Evil minds. They kill me.