

Joan E. Bauer

165 Maybery Road

Salka Viertel gives up a stage career & theatre company in Berlin to arrive in Los Angeles. 1928.

Soon she's almost famous for scripts for Garbo, but more for her Sunday salon on Maybery,

a haven for intellectuals, anti-fascists, Jews, refugees. Christopher Isherwood & his boyfriend sleep above

the garage. James Whale finds composer Franx Waxman, for *The Bride of Frankenstein*. Salka sunbathes

with Eisenstein before he returns to the USSR. All the while, Salka raises money, gathers affidavits

to bring Jews from Europe to safety, finds jobs for the newcomers, drives them to Farmer's Market

on Fairfax, a reminder of the Old World. On Sundays, Thomas Mann toasts his brother Heinrich on his birthday,

Salka keeps rivals Schoenberg & Stravinsky in separate rooms & tolerates 'self-adoring' Alma Mahler.

All the while, Salka feels she hasn't done enough to fight Hitler, hasn't done enough to save refugees & Jews.

For her political sins, she's blacklisted, fired from MGM, hounded by the FBI, even denied a passport.

In '54, she sells 165 Maybery to her friend John Houseman,  
to live near her son, the writer Peter Viertel, married

to Deborah Kerr in Switzerland, where Salka writes  
her panoramic memoir, *The Kindness of Strangers*.

## Letters to Shelagh

*Women never have young minds. They are born  
three thousand years old.*

—Shelagh Delaney, author of *A Taste of Honey*

I was born with a young mind.  
Seeing your play in the Sixties, I felt Jo's desperation.

*I don't want to be a mother. I don't want to be a woman.*

Jo had a young mind too. The old soul in that play  
was Geoff, the gay man who loves & tries to protect her.

\*

You grew up tall & precocious & working class.

At 18, you took a fortnight to see if you could write  
a better play than the posh, tea-cup scripts of Terrance Rattigan.

You sent the play to Joan Littlewood, that subversive genius  
of radical, working class theater.

*Please can you help me?  
I've discovered something that means more than myself.*

\*

You hated being called ANGRY.

The critics you cared about: working people.  
Does the dialog sound real to bricklayers & cleavers?

\*

Once you wrote about a childhood stay  
in a convalescent home surrounded by nuns

who forbid you from reading anything

but the Bible. They took away your fountain pen.

Perhaps they mistook you for someone else.