



by Grete Hartwig-Manschinger, Vojin Saša Vukadinovi? (editor)
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Fiction

Rendezvous in Manhattan

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review

Rendezvous in Manhattan was first published in Vienna in 1948. It is the only novel by the exiled Austrian writer and cabaret artist, Grete Hartwig-Manschinger, who settled in New York after fleeing the Nazis. Republished in 2022, it is ripe for discovery by a new generation of readers.

Set in New York during the Second World War, *Rendezvous in Manhattan* captures the everyday atmosphere of the bustling city from the point of view of beautiful factory worker, Edna Scarlatti, as she rises from rags to riches. Hartwig-Manschinger simultaneously unravels the American Dream, by depicting the divisions between different social classes in minute detail. She adds a political dimension by allowing her characters to gain and voice insights as the story progresses.

Edna Scarlatti is a 22-year-old factory worker. She lives with her immigrant parents and much younger sister in a run-down flat in one of the poorest areas of Manhattan. Her father is an alcoholic and her mother is ill, so Edna, who earns a pittance as a pieceworker filling bottles with nail polish, has to use her income to support the family.

When Edna manages to save enough money for a short holiday, she travels to Greenwood Lake and meets twenty-nine-year-old Ray Garguin, a charming engineer who is holidaying with his parents at the family's villa. The couple fall in love but Edna is ashamed of her

background and does not admit that she is a poor factory worker. She and Ray continue dating in New York after her holiday ends, until Edna realises that she can't keep up appearances and stops seeing him.

When America enters the war, Edna meets Ray and tells him everything. He forgives her. The couple marry hastily and, for a brief moment, Edna enjoys married life. Their marital bliss is shattered, however, when Ray goes to war and Edna receives the official news of his death. With no one to support her, Edna moves back in with her family and returns to work. Still young and beautiful, but deeply dejected, she agrees to marry the much older Dr. Connawer. He buys her jewellery and beautiful dresses, but is cruel and abusive.

When the war ends, Edna discovers that Ray is still alive. He returns from German captivity depressed and disillusioned by the war. He feels betrayed by Edna for marrying someone else and is not prepared to forgive her. In despair, she tries to kill herself. The story concludes as Ray comes to his senses and decides to give their marriage a chance.

Rendezvous in Manhattan is full of vibrant descriptions of life in and around 1940s Manhattan in different social classes, focusing on the differences in people's clothes, food, entertainment and tastes in films and music. Hartwig-Manschinger creates a vivid picture of social injustice and its effects on the working poor, while highlighting the price of living in a capitalist world. The novel is fascinating from a historical perspective while remaining highly relevant today and will appeal to fans of Elena Ferrante.

[See more on the book at the publisher's website.](#)

press quotes

*In places, *Rendezvous in Manhattan* actually feels like an early version of *Mad Men* written by Elena Ferrante. Without a doubt, if the book had gained recognition, it would have been turned into a film.*

Margarete Affenzeller, DER STANDARD

about the authors



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Grete Hartwig-Manschinger (1899–1971) was born in Vienna, the daughter of free-thinker Theodor Hartwig and the sister of writer Mela Hartwig. She was an author, vocalist and singing teacher. Together with her husband, composer Kurt Manschinger (1902–1968), she wrote many poems, songs, sketches and opera libretti. When Austria was annexed in 1938, the couple were at direct threat from National Socialism and fled to Great Britain. They worked at the Laterndl Theatre in London, which acted as the cabaret for the Austrian Centre and became the heart of the expatriate scene. In 1940 they emigrated to the United States. In exile in New York, Hartwig-Manschinger wrote her novel *Rendezvous in Manhattan*, which was published in Vienna in 1948. Like her sister, she did not return to her home country after the end of the Second World War. She died in Florida in 1971. Her multi-faceted work has been all but forgotten in the German-speaking world.

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