

Hart, H. P.

Thermopolis, Wyoming.  
August 3, 1921.

Mrs. Mary Roberts Rinehart,  
c/o Eaton's Ranch,  
Sheridan, Wyoming.

My dear Mrs. Rinehart:

I should not have the temerity to approach you as I am doing were it not for two things: First, the fact that both you and Dr. Rinehart belong to the medical world - of which I, too, am a part - and second, my conviction that you are as big and liberal-minded as your stories would indicate. So I venture to ask that you will read my letter and consider it.

I was graduated from the Medical School of the University of Oregon (in Portland) in 1917 at the age of 27. Until that time - thru common school, High School, University and professional school - I lived as a woman. Shortly before my graduation I consulted a psychiatrist in Portland, Dr. Gilbert, a physician of established reputation; and with him made a complete study of my case, my individual history and that of my family. This was followed by a complete, careful physical examination. The diagnosis arrived at may be summarized as follows: Complete, congenital and incurable Homosexuality together with a marked modification of the physical organization from the feminine type.

At this stage in my career, life had become so unbearable that I felt myself confronted by only two alternative courses - either to kill myself or refuse to live longer in my misfit role of a woman. I chose the latter, and submitted myself for an exploratory laparotomy for the purpose of establishing definitely and indisputably my proper role, with the result that I left the hospital as a man.

To say the least, the situation in which I now found myself, bristled with difficulties. My family did not know of my operation nor of my transformation; neither did my most intimate friends. I was faced with the problem of making a living and my way in the world alone. It was in war time and my eligibility for military service was an open question. The legality of the whole procedure was uncertain. The legal phase of the matter was taken up and attended to for me by Judge John B. Cleland of Portland, Oregon. Since I dreaded ridicule and publicity, and feared my friends might feel themselves embarrassed by what I had done, I resolved simply to drop out of their ken, and with that in view, secured an internship in the City and County Hospital in San Francisco and went there to take up my duties as soon as I was able to do so.

My work went smoothly and well and things seemed in a fair way to adjust themselves, when by chance I was recognized at a public clinic by a young woman physician who had attended university at the same time I did. She spread the story among her acquaintances in the hospitals of the city, that I had once dressed as a woman and was now posing as a man. This coming to my ears, I went to the Superintendent of our hospital - told him the truth of the case - showed him my documentary proofs and voluntarily resigned. He gave me assurance that he would squelch any further notoriety about the hospital. Imagine my feelings, therefore, only a few days later, to open the Examiner one morning and find a garbled account of the whole thing smeared in broad head-lines across the page. The story was carefully written to convey the impression that I was a rank imposter and



M.R.R. 2.

had fled before the righteous indignation of the authorities; it had been inspired by the young woman who had recognized me and the heads of the hospital I had just left.

I took my letters and statements and went with them to the editor of the Examiner. He realized, at once, that his paper was being used as an instrument of spite and killed the story in the city and stopped further stuff from going out over the Associated Press.

I was more or less stunned by what had happened. I had been prepared for criticism and ridicule - I was accustomed to them. But it had never occurred to me that people might want to hound and persecute me for my change in role. I had lived as a woman because that was my social standing, and had been made fun of and called 'half-man', and now when I had faced the situation and righted the grotesquely false position in which I had lived so long, it seemed that the public would damn me because I had once, perforce, worn skirts. I tried to get other hospital work. I went to the men who had been my chiefs and told them the truth and asked their aid in securing another position; to a man they turned me down. I tried to get other sorts of work and failed for the same reason as soon as I gave my name. Then my family employed counsel and instituted proceedings to have my name legally changed; and the medical school from which I had been graduated served notice on us that if we persisted they would rescind my diploma and have me disbarred from practice.

Finally, I made up my mind to 'face the music' without any attempt at concealment, so I went back home to the little town where I had been raised and gone to school. That was the hardest thing I ever did. This over, I went down into the woods in Southern Oregon and ran a hospital for the lumbermen and spruce boys until the Influenza had passed and the war was over. In the early Spring of 1918, I came to Montana and located at Huntley, a few miles east of Billings where I practised until last February. Crops have been very poor in Montana for several years and that made collections very slow; the work was hard and trying, covering as it did a territory seventy miles long. I was anxious to work into X-Ray and diagnosis instead of general country practise, so I came last Spring to Thermopolis to be Roentgenologist and Pathologist in Dr. Hamilton's hospital here. So far as I know my history is not known to anyone in this part of the country.

To establish the authenticity of my story and give you some side-lights upon it, I am enclosing a number of letters from Dr. Gilbert and others, relative to my predicament. Dr. Gilbert is a man well known in his specialty. He published a detailed medical account of the whole affair in The Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases for October, 1920. I should be glad to furnish you with a reprint of this article, at a future time, should you care to see it.

As you will observe in these letters, Dr. Gilbert has always urged me to write and publish my own story. In the height of my trouble in 1918, I wrote a first-draft of an auto-biography - or rather it boiled out from me without let or hindrance. This Spring I have gone over it and re-written it with a view to publication. The manuscript is now in the hands of the copyist. I want to ask you to read it and give me your opinion of it and advise me as to its publication.

I do not wish to sail under false colors, and so I will admit at once that my motives are <sup>altogether</sup> not altruistic in this. My purpose in writing the book has been serious - and my hope that it might accomplish some good for my fellow-unfortunates, very strong - but there is another side to the matter



M.R.R. 3.

It is a grave undertaking to bare one's whole heart before the world; and it is too much to expect a man to do without reward. I had neither money nor backing when I embarked upon my career as a man four years ago this month; I have had every inch of the way to fight; I have asked no favors from anyone. But it has been mighty hard work and nerve-racking and I am tired. I have never asked for sympathy nor do I want it; I am still capable of standing on my two legs that have held me up for thirty-one years. But if I can make something out of this book, it will relieve the financial pressure and make life much easier and pleasanter for me. So I admit that my motives are mixed; but whose are not?

I have read many of your stories - you are the only writer I know who can get the right atmosphere for things medical. I have also read your accounts of your trips thru the West and your husband's articles in the Post. Will you pardon the slang, if I say that these have given me a hunch that you are 'regular fellows'? And because of this, I have dared to intrude myself upon you. I shall be more than grateful, if you will allow me to send you the manuscript and give me a personal interview before you return East. I want your criticism and advice.

I have made some notations on the letters enclosed to orient them properly in the current of events. These papers I should like to have returned as I value them highly. I have had to throw overboard almost all the associations and friendships and foundations of the first twenty-seven years of my life; the little that is left, I prize.

I shall await a reply from you with eagerness.

Very sincerely yours,

*A. L. Hart*

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c/o Hopewell Hospital,  
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