You can go home again

LEAVE A LIGHT ON FOR ME,
by Jean Swallow, $10.00

Morgan is a computer instructor who doesn't understand what exactly has happened to her long-term relationship with Georgia, nor what exactly is happening to the rest of her when she stands near Elizabeth. Georgia, forced into exile from the South she loves and from the alcoholic family she both loves and hates, doesn't understand why, after six years of recovery, she still hasn't found her way home. And Elizabeth, the rich and beautiful doctor, doesn't understand why she can't keep a girlfriend. But Bernice, who watches and waits, understands a lot by just being herself. Together, they move from a difficult past into a passionate and hopeful future.

Elizabeth was caught a little off balance when Morgan turned around from looking at the framed posters she'd bought to decorate the lab. She hadn't quite remembered how those eyes looked, light grey and blue, like the ocean after a hard rain.

When Morgan smiled and extended her hand, Elizabeth was taken aback, Morgan's smile was so friendly and open. Well, she thought when she had recovered and gripped the other woman's hand. Well. She *was* as lovely as she'd remembered over the weekend. Maybe more so.

"Elizabeth," Morgan said, as she took her hand, "It's so nice to see you again. I'm awfully glad to be coming back here this week."

Elizabeth smiled in return and let go of her hand, instantly sorry to have done so. She laced her fingers together and thought how very nice it was to shake hands with a woman who actually shook, not crimped.

Irene Young

Left: Author Jean Swallow lives and writes in San Francisco.

Morgan was still talking. "John was a very quick learner and was interested in the equipment, which is a big plus. And, as you said to me last week, you're eager to learn too, so I'm looking forward to our week together. It's very pleasant for me to be working with another woman and I'm sure we'll do very well this week. Did you have a chance to think about the application questions I asked you about last Thursday?"

She is gorgeous, Elizabeth thought. Right down to her long fingers. And that hair. She doubted Morgan's hair was permed, and she couldn't quite stop herself from thinking about what it would feel like if she wove her fingers through it. She brought her eyes back to Morgan's and saw no hardness there, only an open searching. Then she realized Morgan had asked her a question.

"Certainly," she said, scrambling for the old interns' trick of answering while asleep after being on duty for thirty-six hours. "Why don't we just hang up your coat and get started?" She extended her hand for Morgan's coat and watched as she slipped it off. Breasts the size of her fist, just the right size, and firm. A chemise showing through the opened top of her blouse and a tanned neck.

Elizabeth mentally shook herself. She was relieved when Morgan began talking about the computer and said to herself silently but no less sharply, this will never do. They did have to work together. And after all, she was paying this woman. She wondered briefly just how much she cost for everything, before she took herself firmly in hand and started talking computers.

Monday seemed to fly by. As did Tuesday morning. It seemed like a dream, with Morgan's low voice just behind her shoulder, helping her understand, guiding her in and out, laughing softly with her.

When Morgan went out alone for lunch both days, it wasn't because Elizabeth hadn't tried to persuade her to eat with her. But Morgan had been firm and professional, as she had been all last week. She had things to do. Well. So did Elizabeth. She sat at her desk, sipping from a can of diet soda and looking out the window at the edge of the city and the ocean beyond.

Wednesday would be the last full day they had together. And then, it would be just mornings. These two days had gone by so quickly. But not as easily as she'd hoped; there had been a tremendous amount of material. And Morgan wasn't all that great a teacher. At least, Elizabeth thought, Morgan hadn't explained the main program very well yet. Of course, she didn't really have to know all the details anyway; John would do most of it. All she needed was to get the gist of it and she was sure she'd get that by the end of the week.

But in all honesty, she knew neither the computer program nor the teacher was the problem. Morgan was having much more of an effect on her than she'd bargained for. She felt shaken by the woman and was having trouble concentrating. Fantasy was one thing. This was something else altogether. And she couldn't remember feeling like this in such a long time.

She ran her finger around the top of the soda can. Such a long time. She realized with a shock that she had awakened early that morning, eager to get to work. And then she realized that for the last two days she'd been having fun. Forget the computer. The woman was funny. They laughed together most of the time. And she was bright; Elizabeth didn't have to explain much to her. She was interested in everything.

And, one more thing. Maybe the most dangerous of all, she thought, drawing her finger down the side of the can. Morgan was tender with her, even when she couldn't quite get the answer, even though it wasn't her fault.

Maybe that's what was happening. It was unnerving. There had to be some explanation for it, for what was happening to her. Just before lunch, when she had looked down at the keyboard as Morgan was demonstrating, the keys began disassembling in front of her very eyes. Instead, she saw Morgan's hands, tanned, tapered and strong, gently lying on her grandmother's white laced sheets. The ones she kept for special. It had been such a long time since she'd felt like this. She didn't know, maybe, had she ever felt like this?

She shook herself and picked up her soda. These were just fantasies too. God, you'd think she was a child and Bebe was just in the other room, ironing. She needed to stop it now before it got out of hand. ▼

"This is not only an excellent and highly original first novel, it is also a good lesbian novel, which is a rarity. An engaging story of interesting, complex women who are lesbians dealing with universal issues of love, infidelity, friendship, and family pain." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

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"One of the most satisfying lesbian novels I have ever read. Ambitious and well-written. A marvelous job."
—Susanna Sturgis in the *Women's Review of Books*

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"Swallow proves she is a gifted writer of fiction. Her characters have real depth, her scenes are full of specific detail and specific dialog, and her impeccable sense of time and pace keep the narrative flowing."
—Patricia Roth Schwartz, in *Belles Lettres*

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"I am delighted to see new lesbian fiction which explores the lives of women post-coming-out. Jean Swallow succeeds in presenting complex, interesting characters with real-life issues. This is a novel you will want to reread and pass along to a friend." —*Windy City Times*