



American LGBTQ+ liberation from day 1 to Stonewall.

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Season 2, Episode 1: “Pacing,” or, “A Gay Girl of Good Moral Character”

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For this episode, begin with posts starting May 22, 2020. (Click above.)

The original Mattachine Society jester logo is courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

This transcript includes text from real homophile-era publications, letters, organizational documents, et cetera. These texts contain **identifying terms** that may now be out of date.

MATTACHINE: A QUEER SERIAL
SEASON 2, EPISODE 1:
“PACING,” OR, “A GAY GIRL OF GOOD MORAL CHARACTER”

AUDIO: Phone ringing

HELEN P. BRANSON: Hello?

DR. KINSEY’S VOICE: Is this Mrs. Branson?

HELEN P. BRANSON: Yes.

DR. ALFRED KINSEY: This is Dr. Kinsey of Indiana University. Mr. Owen wrote me about you, saying you would like to meet me and would be glad to answer my questions.

HOST: Helen has just opened her bar for the night. A call from Dr. Kinsey is completely unexpected. She’s across the country in Los Angeles and has never met the sexologist. She knows of him the same way the entire country knows of him – his books, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Female* brought awareness to the spectrum of sexuality. When Harry Hay read the first book in 1948, he was inspired to create the Mattachine Foundation. Now, Dr. Kinsey communicates with the Mattachine, although Harry Hay is long gone from his organization, taken over by conservative assimilationist homosexuals. Whether or not Kinsey agrees with the new leaders of the Mattachine movement, there is still education and work to be done, as the U.S. Senate rallies against so-called sex deviates on nationally televised hearings. Now Dr. Kinsey wants Helen’s experience running a gay bar on record for his institute of sex research. They meet at his hotel. As the door opens, Helen is greeted with a charming smile and asked to take a seat inside. He reaches for his notepad, and they begin.

DR. ALFRED KINSEY: Mrs. Branson, why do you prefer owning a homosexual bar?

HELEN P. BRANSON: Probably two or three reasons all in one. First, my customers are clean, neat, polite, thoughtful and are easy to handle. I have very few problems with them. I worked in regular cocktail bars for years, as an entertainer, and I dislike trying to get along with drunken women. Now, I do not allow unattended women in the bar, although I welcome any woman brought in by my regular customers. Also, the most important reason, I think, is that I can be myself with these boys without misunderstanding. I can be vivacious and yet know that that is not a signal for someone to make a pass at me. Again, referring to my entertainment days, I was so tired of telling someone to keep their hands off me, or assuring some drunk that I did not make a practice of going home with the male customers, that my association with gay fellows is a welcome relief.

HOST: Kinsey smiles as he writes.

DR. ALFRED KINSEY: Mrs. Branson, I have received almost identical answers every time I have asked a woman owner of a gay bar for her reason for operating one. Now tell me how you pay off the police.

HELEN P. BRANSON: I don't. They don't come in.

DR. ALFRED KINSEY: You surely give someone a free drink or a case of beer, don't you?

HELEN P. BRANSON: No, I don't. They don't come in.

AUDIO: Kinsey continues to write.

KINSEY: Do you hire a bouncer?

HELEN P. BRANSON: No, I don't.

DR. ALFRED KINSEY: Don't you need one now and then?

HELEN P. BRANSON: No, I go on the theory that offense is the best defense. I am rude to an unwanted character, and because I look like a lady, he is so surprised he just leaves. Anyway if anyone hit me, I think all the fellows in the bar would take him apart.

DR. ALFRED KINSEY: How do you control the men's room?

HELEN P. BRANSON: I don't have to. The boys police it. If anyone gets out of line I hear about it soon. I take the offender aside and warn him that another complaint will result in an eighty-six. This takes care of it.

HOST: After 90 minutes of questions and stories exchanged, Helen leaves feeling that she's leaving an old friend. A few days later, Dr. Kinsey is hosted by the Mattachine Society at a round table discussion. Helen's Melrose Street bar comes up in conversation, and Kinsey says he's skeptical of some of her answers. The Mattachinos assure him she's honest.

DR. ALFRED KINSEY: Well, if that woman runs that bar the way she says she does and the way you say she does, then it is the only bar in the United States that is run that way.

HOST: He's right. Most bars serving homosexuals in 1954 are subject to police abuse at any moment. The bar can be shut down for what police consider a "disorderly house." In these bars, people of the same sex cannot even touch, or an undercover cop in plainclothes might go for his handcuffs. When police make arrests, the newspapers print the names of the homosexuals in bold type, sometimes on the front page. Name, age, home address, employment and marital status. The result is often divorce, wrecked careers, loss of credit and home, and sometimes suicide.

There is no challenging the newspapers or the police. There is no gay voting bloc to elect officials to change these policies. There is no rioting in the street because no one has been organized as a group to resist the powers of police and government. Helen Branson's bar survives because she allows homosexuals who appear masculine, she only allows men, and she likely only allows white men. If she has the peaceful relationship with the police she claims to have, it's likely because of her strict rules of exclusivity. The rest of the queers can find a different place to gather. And if the lesbians, femme men, gender nonconforming people of all kinds, and all queer people of color can't share a space like the Mattachinos where they can gather for a drink, a place without the pressure of the police raiding, then they will have no choice but to take over the Movement.

Act 1

HOST: **Seattle, 1950.** In the offices of *Pacific Builder and Engineer* magazine, the new associate editor takes her seat at a meeting with the magazine's sister publication, *Daily Construction Reports*. Just out of a small town reporting job where she interviewed Eleanor Roosevelt, Phyllis Lyon is looking for something new. Born in Tulsa, raised in San Francisco, and a journalism graduate of UC Berkeley, Phyllis is quickly moving up. Her co-workers take their seats at the table. The new editor of that sister publication enters, blouse and slacks. Phyllis catches her eye, which drifts down to see a briefcase in her hand. Phyllis has never seen a woman carrying a briefcase. She can't suppress a broad smile. Del notices her big brown eyes trying not to look at her.

Del has just moved to Seattle from San Francisco, too. She grew up there, also studied journalism at UC Berkeley, and worked on her school paper. Meanwhile, Del casually dated men under the assumption that it was something she was supposed to do. It was always awkward, so she arranged double dates. She always found the other girl more interesting, but she never said it out loud, because she's probably the only person in the world who feels like this. So after meeting a nice guy, she convinced herself she was in love and married James Martin when she was 19. Two years later, she gave birth to Kendra, all while writing letters to the woman next door. James eventually found the letters and he could tell Del loved the neighbor more than him. After the divorce, Del won custody of her daughter. The judge somehow wouldn't accept the lesbian letters as evidence of a real affair. Del was on her own with Kendra. So she found a job, and shortly after, she found a book called *The Well of Loneliness*.

It's about two women who met in the First World War and fell in love. Del raced to the library to see what else she could find about women attracted to women. There wasn't much but explanations of sexual deviance as a sickness. Del realized, women all over the world must be experiencing this same story. Finding love, finding *The Well of Loneliness*, and finding little else to support what might actually be a common trait, an identity, a culture. Until finally, they find each other, out there, drinking in bars. Del went out and made new friends, some of them secretly lesbians. She told two of them,

DEL MARTIN: This is what I am!

HOST: And they said, ‘We don’t think you are! But—we know about these bars up at North Beach...’

MUSIC: Edythe Eyde courtesy Making Gay History:

Hello, young lovers, whatever you are,
I hope your problems are few,
All you cute butches lined up at the bar,
I’ve had a love like you.

HOST: She felt like a tourist in these bars, absolutely amazed, not really knowing what she was seeing. Women in suits sang in some North Beach bars. The clientele were clearly sexual deviants with slicked back short hair, leaning in to whisper to another woman. This whole secret world is right under our noses, right down the road. Del thought,

DEL MARTIN: What does this mean for me?

HOST: As she explored her new world, James remarried and asked for custody of their daughter. As a single mother working on a pay-gapped salary, Del accepted, on the condition that she sees Kendra regularly, and she moved north to Seattle for a new job. In tailored women’s clothing, Del arrives in 1950 to meet her new co-workers. She thinks Phyllis has a flirtatious style. And she’s quick-witted. Phyllis throws Del a welcome party.

Over two years, Del and Phyllis become good friends. Del thinks Phyl is straight. As people not only under that 1950s McCarthy-era repression, but also their own repression as they come understand themselves as homosexuals, it takes a while for the subject of queer attraction to be mentioned in a safe space. But one day, as they’re out for drinks at a bar with a friend, it does.

MUSIC: Fun, 1940s gay bar, quieter now

DEL MARTIN: Well, I ought to know about that subject because I am one.

HOST: Silently, Phyllis thinks this is one of the most interesting things that has happened in a while in Seattle. She can’t stop thinking about it, even calling her friend on the phone to ask,

PHYLLIS LYON: What does it mean? To go to bed with a woman...?

HOST: Del shows up at her apartment. They’re having a drink. The half-glances, an intrigue on both of their minds, it’s unshakable. Del makes a tentative move. A half-move, Phyllis thinks. She makes the other half.

Phyllis goes on a trip with her sister, spending plenty of Del's money calling her collect every night. When she returns, she tells Del that she has to move back to San Francisco to be with her family, which Del understands.

So Phyllis finds an apartment on Castro Street, and by February 1953, Del moves in with her.

AUDIO: typewriter

LISA BEN: "Here To Stay"

HOST: A 26-year-old typist at RKO movie studios is told to look busy, but not to knit. Edythe Eyde types up what she calls:

LISA BEN: *Vice Versa: America's Gayest Magazine*

HOST: It includes essays, poems, and short stories about lesbians, all written under Edythe's pen name, Lisa Ben, an anagram for "lesbian." She types two originals with 5 carbon copies each and passes them around between friends.

LISA BEN: A magazine dedicated, in all seriousness, to those of us who will never quite be able to adapt ourselves to the iron-bound rules of Convention.

HOST: Lisa Ben writes a prediction in Volume 1, Number 4 of *Vice Versa*:

LISA BEN: Whether the unsympathetic majority approves or not, it looks as though the third sex is here to stay. With the advancement of psychiatry and related subjects, the world is becoming more and more aware that there are those in our midst who feel no attraction for the opposite sex. It is not an uncommon sight to observe mannishly attired women or even those dressed in more feminine garb strolling along the street hand-in-hand or even arm-in-arm, in an attitude which certainly would seem to indicate far more than mere friendliness. Homosexuality is becoming less and less a taboo subject, and although still considered by the general public as contemptible, or treated with derision, I venture to predict that there will be a time in the future when gay folk will be accepted as part of regular society.

Just as certain subjects, once considered unfit for discussion now are used as themes in many of our motion pictures, I believe that the time will come when, say, Stephen Gordon, will step unrestrained from the pages of Radclyffe Hall's admirable novel, *Well of Loneliness*, onto the silver screen and once precedent has been broken by one such motion picture others will be sure to follow.

HOST: Edythe Eyde wrote that prediction in September 1947, more than 5 years before Del and Phyllis moved in together. Over a difficult first year together in San Francisco, Phyllis works for an import-export firm and Del is a bookkeeper for Mayflower Moving and Storage. They buy a car, mortgage a house, and Del's daughter moves in. It's tough, but they don't break up.

PHYLLIS LYON: It would have been too difficult to figure out who would get the cat.

HOST: (She really said that.) Phyl makes Del breakfast every morning for a week, because she thinks that's what the more feminine partner is supposed to do. Del lights Phyllis's cigarettes for her, being the assumed 'butch' role. But they quickly start to realize that they don't have any interest in playing these roles. They don't need to be reliant on each other like that. They can be equals. Despite a shared interest in books and politics, Del and Phyl know they need to socialize with others. They know some heterosexual couples and a gay male couple. But of course, many queer people can only click with heteros on limited basis. (Speaking from experience here.) The pair decides to seek out lesbian friends.

May 25, 1955 the *San Francisco Examiner* lands on their doorstep:

REPORTER: "State Fights Bar Hangouts of Deviates."

HOST: A new statewide agency called the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, or ABC, is created to take over liquor authority after a raid on Tommy's Place. Tommy's Place was a lesbian bar, and in the fallout of the police raiding the bar, voters were encouraged to pass a measure splitting up the State Board's *tax* and the State Board's *liquor* regulations, so that the State can better police liquor, which often means the liquor sold illegally for queers in bars. But let's put a pin in the ABC. Essentially, there's a new crackdown on lesbian spaces. Without the bars, there are little, if any, safe places for lesbians to find each other.

Del and Phyllis tell the male homosexual couple they know they'd like to meet some lesbians, but with the bars being raided so much lately, it's scary to go out to them. The bars are no longer an option. So the men introduce Del and Phyl to their lesbian friend Rose Bamberger.

AUDIO: phone ringing

MUSIC: *The Call*

PHYLLIS LYON: Hello?

ROSE BAMBERGER: Hi, Phyllis? This is Rose. Listening, we're starting a group. There's six of us. Would you like to be a part of a group of women like us? A social club for lesbians...

PHYLLIS LYON: YES! (away from the receiver) DEL!

HOST: *Vice Versa* magazine editor Edythe Eyde, A.K.A. Lisa Ben, writes songs for the gay gals of Los Angeles...

EDYTHE EYDE/LISA BEN:

Scattered are we, over land, over sea
How many we number
Will never be known

Each one must learn from the stars
She must wear a mask on her heart
And live in a world set apart
A shy secret world of her own

Here's to the days that we yearn for
To give up our hearts as we may
Love's always [indiscernable]
Despite what the others may say

The world cannot dare to deny us
We've been here since centuries past
And you can be sure our ranks will endure
As long as this old world will last.

So here's to the fairer tomorrow
When we'll face the world with a smile.
The right beside us to cherish and guide us,
This is what makes life worthwhile.
The right beside us to cherish and guide us,
This is what makes life worthwhile.

HOST: Rose imagines a place where the girls of SF can dance. Safe in someone's home, not caught by police or stared at by tourists passing through San Francisco looking for a crazy night at a strange queer bar.

At their first meeting, safe inside a living room, there are four lesbian couples. They discuss a name for their little group, something vague enough that no one will know they're lesbians. But if they want more people to join the group, it has to be something lesbians will recognize.

DAUGHTERS: Musketeers!

Habeas Corpus? No.
Amazon?
Chameleon! No...
Qui Vive!

DAUGHTHER: Huh?

DAUGHTER 2: It means “on the alert.”

DAUGHTER 3: Bilitis!

DAUGHTER 2: Bilitis?

HOST: In 1894, Pierre Louÿs published a collection of erotic poetry called *Songs of Bilitis*. His poems feature Sappho, who herself was a poet from the Greek island of Lesbos, and believed to have been sexually attracted to other women. Louÿs created a fictional woman named Bilitis, who seduces Sappho. The sensual 19th century poems of Louÿs are reprinted in a paperback collection in 1955. Under the mysterious name of Bilitis, the women can draw in other lesbians in the know, and to the outside world they will appear to be a Greek poetry club.

This reclaiming of their queer ancestors, one real, one fictional, this naming their group the Daughters of Bilitis, is their one and only unanimous decision.

Friday, September 21, 1955. Mary and Noni, June and Marcia, and Del and Phyllis all meet for dinner at Rose and Rosemary’s house to decide what the Daughters of Bilitis will actually do. Notes are typed up as they decide that officers will serve 6-month terms and business meetings will be on the first Wednesday of each month at 8PM. They establish some guidelines for inviting new members. Some of them push for an open door policy for anyone to join them. Some of them want to keep requirements strict, including a 21 and up rule. But most importantly, each member must be—

AUDIO: typewriter

DAUGHTER: A gay girl of good moral character.

HOST: The following month, on October 5, they create an insignia, with the shape of a triangle, unknowingly using the same shape Nazis used to mark homosexuals. They choose blue and gold as their colors, and a motto: “Qui vive,” French for “on the alert or on guard.” After approving a constitution, bylaws and a rule allowing men on specific occasions, they elect Del president. Noni Frey is vice president. Phyllis is secretary. Next week, each couple will bring a dish to one of their three monthly functions: social, business, and discussion groups. The discussion groups will soon be called a Gab n’ Java.

They don’t know about the Mattachine Society, not yet. But their group forms in a very similar way. So similar that some history books refer to them as the women’s auxiliary of the Mattachine. It’s like if a tabloid of this era said, here’s Arthur Miller and his girlfriend! Oh, you mean Marilyn Monroe? He didn’t create her, she made herself, but oddly enough they will end up working together. Same goes for these organizations.

Anyway, the first official meeting of the Daughters is at June and Marcia's home. Del and Phyl try to invite one of their first lesbian friends, Sandy. But she can't come because her girlfriend has no interest in associating with a lesbian group. Del and Phyl have a bit of luck, though. They sponsor some guests named Bobbie, Toni, and Gwenn. Noni and Mary bring Elizabeth. And they discuss, any and all thoughts they haven't been able to discuss their entire lives. As they come to realize there are other groups out there, they decide to write to the Mattachine Society, and ONE, Incorporated – which prints *ONE Magazine*, that sort-of spin-off gay magazine in the previous season of this podcast – they also write to the National Association for Sexual Research, and to the Cory Book Service in New York, which was recently launched by Donald Webster Cory, who wrote *The Homosexual in America* – another book that tells homosexuals they're not alone. To all of these services, the women announce their club for lesbians and hope that word spreads. The more women gather, the more books they find that have shown them a vast past of lesbian culture. Some bring *The Well of Loneliness*, or *The Homosexual in America*. Others found a book written by Ruth Fuller Field under the pen name Mary Casal in 1930. Her book, titled *The Stone Wall*, is a proudly sexual autobiography detailing her relationship with a woman named Juno.

They share copies of their books, and more women start to show up in the Daughters' homes for meetings. All kinds of women bring unique ideas of what they are. The Bilitis founders begin to realize that sometimes the only thing you have in common with a person is that you're both queer. That is a hard lesson to learn. But often, they learn new points of view because of their differences. Some of them work blue-collar jobs, some of them white-collar. Some have children, others don't. DOB is pretty diverse in race and class, especially for their time. Rose is Filipina, Mary is Chicana, their partners are white. And they're all mostly accepting and open to each other's ideas. But the most divisive issue is that some want a social gathering, while others want social activism. Some want homosexuals to present themselves as respectable citizens, others believe they can be respected and still show up wearing pants instead of a dress.

When three women show up in men's clothing, some members panic a bit. Noni and some other members busy themselves in the kitchen. Del and Phyl attempt to entertain the newcomers, but find it's not easy. Some people can't get over the brazen cross-dressing. 'Peg looks pretty rough and tumble,' Phyllis thinks to herself. Peg sits there in her pants, quiet, uncertain of this group. The only time she speaks up she says,

BUTCH PEG: I certainly wouldn't be willing to carry a DOB membership card. If I did, someone would find out I'm a homosexual.

PHYLLIS LYON: As if it wasn't obvious!

HOST: Phyllis will later say. Whether she's obviously queer or not, in these early days of DOB, gender-nonconforming people will have to look elsewhere for support. For instance, Peg will later open a lesbian bar called Peg's Place. That'd probably be the place.

Many of these butch women never return to DOB. Can you blame them? They're already giving up their safety in the world by embracing the so-called "butch" label, it's hardly worth adding their name to an official group of lesbians if those lesbians don't welcome them into their home, pants and all. The Daughters resist the butches for fear of exposure.

EYDTHE EYDE/LISA BEN:

Gonna sit right down and write my butch a letter
And ask her won't she please turn femme—
--the other evening just for fun,
I tried her clothes on one by one.
I looked so cute with slacks and shirts on,
Now you won't find me with skirts on!

Gonna march right down and get myself a haircut.
I'll look as handsome as can be.
So I guess I better write my butch a letter,
And ask her to turn femme for me.
(I'm only kidding.) And ask her to turn femme for me.

HOST: In November, the 11 members hold a "special meeting" to "re-define the purpose of the Daughters of Bilitis."

DAUGHTER 2: If slacks are worn they must be women's slacks.

DAUGHTER: No meetings held at non-members' homes.

HOST: They open membership to all women—

DAUGHTER 2: "interested in promoting an education program on the subject of sex variation, and for sex variants."

HOST: They continue to debate whether they're a secret lesbian social club or an activist group in the burgeoning homophile movement. Will they go bowling and horseback riding, or fight for their rights?

Something's in the air, though. It's not a coincidence that these people are all quietly, simultaneously having the same realization. Winds are changing. Word is spreading across the country of another woman fighting for her rights, refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Many of the Daughters hear a similar call. Rosa Parks leads her community through the streets, refusing to take buses through 1956 in protest of racial segregation. These early brave steps are felt across the nation in San Francisco. The members who would rather socialize at a bowling game, who aren't moved to fight with the Daughters, they drop out.

January marks the last recorded meeting for Rosemary. Rose leaves the Daughters, too, and Gwenn soon after. June and Marcia move away for work. Noni leaves to start two lesbian sororities nearby.

Del and Phyllis are frustrated. Like Henry Gerber in Chicago and Harry Hay in Los Angeles, it's difficult to find professionals to join and risk their reputation and their work. Del and Phyl decide they'll throw a party to give the Daughters of Bilitis one more try.

Act 2

HOST: **1947. 8 years ago.** Johnnie Phelps, a Women's Air Command service member met with her Commander General, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

EISENHOWER: It's come to my attention that there are lesbians in the Women's Air Command, we need to ferret them out.

HOST: Phelps looks at the secretary there with them.

PHELPS: If the General pleases, sir, I'll be happy to do that, but the first name on the list will be mine.

HOST: The secretary adds,

SECRETARY: If the General pleases, sir, my name will be first and hers will be second.

PHELPS: Sir, you're right, there are lesbians in the WACs—and if you want to replace all the file clerks, section commanders, drivers, every woman in the WAC detachment, I will be happy to make that list. But you must know, sir, that they are the most decorated group...there have been no illegal pregnancies, no AWOLs, no charges of misconduct.

HOST: Eisenhower takes a moment.

EISENHOWER: Forget the order.

PHELPS: Yes, sir.

HOST: Johnnie's Women's Air Command troupe, like Helen Branson's bar, was an exception to the rule. Some places in the military were safe for lesbian women, often even forming baseball teams. But once additional forces are less necessary in the war, lesbianism, or even suspicion of it, was an easy reason to send women home.

Jaye Bell, a very tall woman nicknamed “Shorty,” returns home to Seattle. After the dishonorable discharge, she met her new girlfriend Billye. And as Billye said, Shorty was accused of being homosexual so she decided to find out what that was. Shorty and Billye Talmadge move to the Bay Area and meet Del and Phyllis. Despite being a public school teacher, Billye is ready join the Daughters along with Shorty.

At that “one more try” party on June 14, Carla, Pat, Brian, Griff, and Helen “Sandy” Sandoz all join, too. Yeah, their old friend Sandy. She broke up with her girlfriend, and the Daughters took Sandy in. Perhaps what opens the door to new sisters is their new focus on their education, and not just socializing. Perhaps it’s their recent decision to ditch the secrecy of the club. It’s at this meeting that they decide to launch what they call an “all-out publicity campaign.” Just as the Mattachine Society’s new magazine is taking off, the Daughters announce their own newsletter.

DEL MARTIN: An article will appear in *Mattachine Review* and also *ONE Magazine* will give us space.

HOST: They write up a press release, and consider adding, “we are against communism,” but they decide that, since they are fighting for civil liberties, it doesn’t really matter whether or not they print an anti-communist statement. They then agree on a Statement of Purpose and their steps to create social progress for “the homosexual.” You might recall in season 1, episodes 5-9, that this is most of the fight and a schism between members of the Mattachine: anti-communism statements and using the word “homosexual.” The Daughters tie it up pretty quickly.

DEL MARTIN: DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS—PURPOSE

A women’s organization for the purpose of promoting the integration of the homosexual into society...

HOST: They share similar goals with the Mattachine Society: education of homosexuals and the public on their issues. Also, they intend to seek support from religious and medical authorities. But also...

DEL MARTIN: Investigation of the penal code as it pertains to the homosexual, proposal of changes to provide an equitable handling of cases involving this minority group, and promotion of these changes through due process of law in the state legislatures...

HOST: Seeking approval from authorities while also demanding respect from them is a little edgier than the Mattachine. And the perfect woman to balance on that edge, who is happy to demand respect from authorities face-to-face, joins the Daughters in this boom of summer of 1956:

MUSIC: Gittings theme

HOST: Barbara Gittings attends her first meeting in summer 1956. She walks in to see about a dozen women in the room.

BARBARA GITTINGS: And I think—wow! All these lesbians together in one place! I've never seen anything like it!

HOST: When she returns home to New York, she's thrilled to spread the word.

EDYTHE EYDE/LISA BEN:

Here's a song I like to sing, it's not really gay, but...it is...when a girl sings it.

Yellow bird up high in banana tree...

HOST: Back in San Francisco, the Daughters begin holding public meetings — part of the educational component. So many lesbians are so scared of being labeled illegal, immoral, and sick by the state, church, and doctors, so the DOB aims to teach them about their rights. These public meetings are a way for women to show up to a *kind of* discussion group, but they can say, "I'm not queer, I'm just here to learn about the issue." The goal is to teach more women self-esteem and understanding of their homosexuality. The Daughters invite the executive director of the ACLU San Francisco branch to teach them that it's not illegal to be a homosexual and that they have rights when dealing with the police. The ACLU is one of few civil rights organizations willing to work with homosexual activists. Attorneys and psychologists also come to speak to them, educating them on actual facts. 40-50 women typically show up to listen.

When Del and Phyl meet with Mattachine and ONE, Inc. members in Los Angeles, they find inspiration in these small groups, especially ONE, whose magazine blends social activities and social action. By the end of the summer of 1956, 16 Daughters host parties, discussions, picnics, and business meetings, for untold numbers of women hoping to make contact with other women like them. But socializing is just the beginning. Once they reach out with their publication, and make contact with the wider world of lesbians, the letters will flood in, bringing a sea change. New points of view will steer Bilitis away from her safe home on the island.

Their attorney, Mattachine-recommended Kenneth Zwerin, he finishes their application to incorporate as a not-for-profit organization in California. Despite their constitution's open use of words like "homosexual," they keep their nonprofit paperwork more discrete. So discrete Zwerin says,

KENNETH ZWERIN: They could have been a society for raising cats.

HOST: In many ways, like the Mattachine, they wear a mask. But on the other hand, their Articles of Incorporation welcome all women "regardless of race, color, or creed," they balance safety where it's important and they progress in ways the Mattachine will never come to understand. It's this official incorporation that pushes the Daughters forward.

PHYLLIS LYON: For those who doubted our legality or our permanency we can only say, ‘See, we’re incorporated and we’re here to stay.’

EDYTHE EYDE/LISA BEN:

The girl that I marry will prob’ly be
As butch as a hunk of machinery
The girl I idolize
Will wear slacks with flyfronts,
Tailored shirts and bowties

HOST: Del and Phyllis, and the Daughters, get an office in a suite that’s rented by the Mattachine Society at 693 Mission Street, their new national headquarters in San Francisco.

She’ll walk with a swagger
And wear short hair
And keep me entranced with her tomboy air.
‘Stead of cruisin,’ I’ll be usin’
Her shoulder to lean on while snoozin.’

AUDIO: typing

PHYLLIS LYON: For the present you can reach us via the phone number of the Mattachine Society. Our own private phone is still a future project. Phones cost money, you know.

A faint-hearted fairy, the girl that I marry won’t be.

HOST: Del looks out the window of their new office, a decent view of the city’s Tenderloin neighborhood. Down below, on the sidewalk, a woman stands across the street, looking up at the building, examining the address she has written down. She’s pacing. Every so often, Del sees her. Every so often, the Daughters see a different woman pacing outside, down below, taking weeks or months to knock on their door. One day she will. In the office, Daughter Brian O’Brien sketches two women, one in a skirt, one in tailored slacks. She draws them down below, looking up a ladder, which reaches up into the clouds. Looking at the drawing the Daughters find their magazine’s title: *The Ladder*. It’s likely unintentional that the Daughters utilize a similar “uplift ideology” once used by women of color in the first wave of feminism. Their goal is the same: to elevate women out of self-hatred and claim their self-esteem and human rights. It’s time to climb the ladder, rise up, and take every woman with you.

AUDIO: typing

EDYTHE EYDE/LISA BEN: Perhaps even “Vice Versa” might be the forerunner of better magazines dedicated to the third sex, which in some future time might take their rightful place on the newsstands beside other publications to be available openly and without restriction to those who wish to read them. In these days of frozen foods, motion picture palaces, compact apartments, modern innovations and female independence, there is no reason why a woman would have to look to a man for food and shelter in return for raising his children and keeping his house in order unless she really wants to. Never before have circumstances and conditions been so suitable for those of lesbian tendencies.

HOST: A long memorandum is printed at Bureau headquarters, information about the Mattachine Society. They are the subject organization of this FBI memo. On the bottom of this stack of papers is an additional section with the misspelled headline: “DAUGHTERS OF BELITAS.” An FBI agent writes,

FBI AGENT: According to information received in March 1956, the above organization is in the formative stage, with headquarters in San Francisco, California. It is composed of women whose aim is to solve the many problems of the lesbian and the ‘lesbian mother.’ The Daughters of Belitas are the ladies’ auxiliary of Mattachine.

AUDIO: Fading in, Allen Ginsberg reading *Howl*

HOST: Allen Ginsberg’s poem *Howl* gains popularity. Christine Jorgensen opens her act in Chicago.

AUDIO: Christine Jorgensen singing

HOST: Many queer people in the mid-50s see hope ahead. But when Mattachine publications director Hal Call visits Chicago that summer, he finds their chapter—

HAL: practically dormant.

HOST: It seems some cities are progressive because they are exceptions to the rules. Chicago police have scared activists from rising up. With every step forward, an FBI memo sends agents hunting. With every bar opening, local police find a reason to raid. And now in San Francisco, a law and order mayor has been elected.

A new fury is sweeping through the city's safe queer bars. Taverns shutter all over the Bay... The city is full of gay bars to be shut down. There are so many because of how the mayor has been running the police department... the police department has an established tradition of controlling gay spaces, like the Black Cat, which was open way back at the turn of the century for queers because — actually, put a pin in that. Tie a thread to it, and follow me back to San Francisco, 1821. Next week on episode 2, “Disorderly Establishment.”

EYDYTHE EYDE/LISA BEN:

If your disposition's gay,
Be mighty glad you're made that way
Don't frown cause you're world's upside-down
Why should you be thought a fool
For not conforming to the rule
It has its advantages abound

Now the ladies are the fairer sex, as everybody knows
Their charms are emphasized in ads
And even move in picture shows

I can't convince the fellows
I'm not daffy in the head
Cause I'm saving all my kisses
For the little gals instead

Mama Nature played it smart
When she tied a string around my heart
And said, “No no no,” to me.
My kind opens lots of fun,
But I'm glad when all is said and done
There's no, no responsibility

Now science claims that likes repel
and opposites attract
But since I've been in Hollywood,
I sure don't know that that's a fact

Whene'er I see a likely lassie
Swaying down the street
I must curb my natural urge to whistle
At each one I meet

Never act as though you mind

If people sometimes seem unkind,
Keep smiling though you may be blue
And no matter what you are,
If you hitch your wagon to a star you'll find
You shall have happiness, too.