



Jennie Lee: A Life

Patricia Hollis

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Jennie Lee was the brave, passionate, and beautiful miner's daughter from Scotland who became a socialist MP at the age of 24, before she was old enough to vote. In spite of her youth, she was one of the finest political orators of her day, as much at home in Scottish working-men's clubs as in the chamber at Westminster. She married Aneurin Bevan on the rebound from a tragic love affair, and became his loyal comrade through the lonely war years, the trials of founding the NHS, and the bitter internal feuds of the 1950s. Her mission was to make Nye the leader of the Labour party; she was the 'dark angel', 'Nye's Lady Macbeth', both loved and loathed by fellow MPs. She broke down after Nye's early death in 1960 but was rescued by Harold Wilson who made her the first Minister for the Arts. With his support she founded the Open University. Jennie Lee is the biography of a stormy political dissenter; the study of a pioneering woman MP whose socialism undermined her feminism; the moving and intimate story of an outstanding political marriage; the chronicle of the first, and most successful, Minister for the Arts. What emerges is a compelling portrait of a remarkable woman: widely admired, loved more often than she was liked, and impossible to ignore.

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