

*Tenderly*  
*Lesbian Meditations*  
*on Deborah Kerr*

1



*“Miss Jelkes, we live on two levels.”*

*“Just two?”*

*“The fantastic and the realistic are the two levels upon which we live.*

*But which is the real one, really?”*

*“...I would say – both, Mr Shannon.”<sup>2</sup>*

## *Paradoxy*

She’s often evoked through opposites.

The story of her “being discovered” is of a Gabriel<sup>3</sup> whose annunciation came in these words: “Sweet virgin, are you an actress?”

When she managed to answer that she was, he said “Take down your hair; you look like a tart!”

Ancient dichotomy, the virgin  
and the whore.

The spiritual and the sexual,  
which our culture held so separate;  
yet, from the beginning,  
it seems, she was vividly both.

People note how she combines  
great strength with vulnerability.

And because of her I've never thought  
there need be a conflict between *feminine*  
and *feminist*.

One more: With the very same words,  
the same gesture, which proved to young  
Tom forever that he was not a fairy,  
she showed me past all question  
that I was.



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<sup>1</sup> Title page photo: Deborah Kerr in King Solomon's Mines

<sup>2</sup> from Night of the Iguana, play & screenplay by Tennessee Williams.

<sup>3</sup> film producer Gabriel Pascal (give link to a story)

<sup>4</sup> from an ad by Lux Flakes laundry soap, 1951

<sup>5</sup> Deborah and Thelma Ritter, from The Proud and the Profane,