LOVE IN A MUDDLE

Christine Jope Slade

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LOVE IN A MUDDLE

BY

CHRISTINE JOPE SLADE

AUTHOR OF

"BREAD AND BUTTER MARRIAGE"

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE KEYS OF HEAVEN

LOVE IN A MUDDLE

BREAD AND BUTTER MARRIAGE

WEDDING RINGS FOR THREE

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I

I can't sleep.

I should go simply potty lying down and trying to get quiet and peaceful.

I'm going to write down all the absolutely mad, freakish things that have happened to-night, and hope that in doing so I shall perceive some sane and feasible method of escape.

Diaries are useful sometimes; they keep your nerves from going absolutely to pieces with the sheer unexpectedness of life.

Dad and mater were in a particularly horrid mood this evening. The C.O. had complained about the Y.M.C.A. hut in the camp, or something, and dinner was filthy, so the usual mutual recriminations took place. Rows always make me feel so frightfully sick. I've never enjoyed a really proper one, because I've always had to run away in the middle and be ill, and then of course I never feel equal to coming back and finishing it.

I don't think any of the shabby Tommies' wives who come over on the paddle steamer on Sundays to visit their husbands at the camp live such a petty, sordid life as we do in our diggings.

I hate dad when he gets red and shouts—I simply have to beat a retreat. I can quite understand why the men are in such a fearful funk of him. I have been terrified and appalled by him all my life, such is his effect on my temperament that I could do or say anything when he loses control and goes for me, tell any childish lies or make any excuses. My moral sense positively ceases to exist.

I crept from them to-night and went for a walk by the sea.

I am not afraid of the dark. I enjoy it. You can think so awfully well when there is nothing to distract your eyes, and the world feels so spacious after our digs.

All my life I have felt there was never quite enough room for the three of us, dad, and the mater, and myself. I believe if we lived in St. Paul's together I should still feel overcrowded.

I walked for a long time. It was a topping night, the air was as soft and warm as cotton-wool and the moon was on the sea. It was the sort of night that makes you want to do a frightful lot of good in the world, mother a lot of orphans or marry a man from St. Dunstan's. I could have cried because there was such a lot of sorrow and unhappiness in the world. You do feel like that sometimes out of doors.

I went along keeping close to the cliff and not thinking, and then I suddenly realised that I was right under the lee of the big guns, and facing the big guns of the fort just across the water; and the searchlights over there suddenly started playing and picked me out.

I got frightened, absolutely scared.

I could have screamed.

Every minute I expected to see those big guns fire; only the month before a German spy in woman's clothes had been found wandering just where I stood.

I knew the marines behind the searchlights could see me quite clearly, probably even my white mackintosh. I had asked father to let me go to the fort. He wasn't keen. I'm twenty-three, but he pretends to himself that I'm not "out"—it saves dresses, so I never go anywhere.

I was in an absolute panic, and I felt as if all the muscles of my knees had suddenly turned to water, which wibble-wobbled every time I moved them.

I turned back; and those searchlights never left me alone, one steady bar of brilliant, dazzling light kept me focussed the whole time, and I could not see to walk in it. I felt as though every step might be a drop into space.

It was a perfectly beastly experience, and every minute I expected the guns to belch out at me.

I suppose I must have been crying. I seemed to have noticed myself making a funny little bleaty noise; I know I screamed when a very curt voice said: "What the devil are you doing here? You know perfectly well you aren't allowed!"

"The searchlights!" I stammered. "The searchlights!"

"Well, they probably think you're up to no good here."

"I am Major Burbridge's daughter," I stammered; "and they'll fire!"

"Probably," he said casually, "if they think you're spying."

"But they mustn't!"

"It would be a bore," the voice admitted lazily, "especially as I should be included in the result of their energies." It sounded as if he didn't care a hang whether he was or not.

He came and stood in the dazzling white path of light the searchlight made, and I saw he was an officer. I had never seen him before, but there were dozens of officers I did not know. I only met those who came to the house to play auction with father and mother.

"Please, please—make them go away," I pleaded, just like a kid surrounded by sheep or something.

"To signal," he said thoughtfully, "would be to invoke the wrath of the gods at once. We are nearly out of the boundary. They can see I am an officer, they can probably see also who I am." The light remained unwaveringly upon us the whole time he was speaking. "If the gentleman behind them could be persuaded to believe we are but a couple of harmless lovers! I dare not wave or anything, because, although I am attached to the joy-spot, they might not recognise me; the sparkling intelligence behind the guns would immediately take it for the arranged signal to a sporty submarine. Would it annoy you fearfully if I made an effort, by exhibition, to show that we are harmless lovers who shun the light of publicity now being shed upon us? It is the only thing I can think of to persuade them to transfer their attentions." His voice sounded bored and mocking, and I thought he must be an elderly man.

"Please," I said, "please make them go away."

He moved to my other side and put his arm round me, then he turned for a minute so that his embracing arm must have been visible against my white mack to the men behind the searchlights.

"Forgive me," he said perfunctorily. "I think the pantomime will have the desired effect on our friends yonder, and whether they know me or not they

know they'll have a hot time to-morrow for playing the dickens with an amorous officer—the main thing is to get them to switch the light off us, isn't it?"

I thrilled. I had always wondered, as every girl born wonders, what it was like to feel a man's arm round you.

I *liked* it.

I liked the cool, rather insolent, devil-may-care voice.

I am always honest with myself, so I write these things quite honestly and frankly.

I love reading, but I have never thought of love or romance as being even remotely connected with me. I have always been very interested in engaged couples and newly married people, but I think it is rather squashing to be the plain daughter of a pretty mother and a father who can't afford to give you nice clothes. I mean, it doesn't give you much chance. Suddenly, when I felt those arms round me—very limp and casual, it is true—I would have given the world to have been attractive and had an attractive personality and attractive frocks. I have tried very, very hard to be nice and useful and kind in my life, because I know I could never have the more alluring virtues; but it has been very, very dull. I do think clothes matter, and hair-waving, especially when your hair is straight like mine; and I do understand the girl who, when she was asked, "Which would you rather be, beautiful or good?" answered, "I would like to be born beautiful and grow good." I feel she must have been a relation of mine.

The lights swished round.

"That," said the officer, "has done the trick, Miss Burbridge, and here we are at the boundary."

He removed his arms from me, and out of the darkness suddenly came my father's voice.

"I had no idea you were in the habit of taking my daughter for walks, Captain Cromer. Your mother sent me to search for you, Pam. I am awaiting an explanation."

"Oh—Captain Cromer—just—just——"

"Yes," said my father, "I perceived it. I presume you have an explanation to make, sir? I have had the pleasure of watching you for the last ten minutes."

"Yes," said my companion, "Miss Burbridge unfortunately got picked out by the searchlights, and we thought the guns——"

"Pamela," said my father, "have you anything to say? If not——"

"Yes," I said desperately. "Oh yes——" then the old sickening fear of my father, the terror that made me deceive and even lie in a sort of blind panic, rushed over me.

"I presume there is some understanding, an engagement between you and Captain——"

"Hullo! Major. Hullo! Captain Cromer. We've had a most entertaining time. We've been watching you through our glasses. If you will stand in the limelight ——" came an unexpected voice behind father.

It was the C.O. and his wife.

"It brings back my own young days," said the C.O. with his jolly laugh.

"I suppose we are the first to congratulate you young people," the C.O.'s wife said charmingly. "I couldn't help overhearing the word 'engagement.'"

I looked at father.

"Yes," I answered desperately. "You are—thank you very much."

Later.

I threw this on the top of the chest of drawers because mother came in to say "good night!"

She has never done such a thing before.

"What a dreadfully old-fashioned nighty you are wearing, Pam," she said.

"It was one of yours," I answered. "I always have yours when you have done with them."

"You must have some pretty new things now, dear," she said. She stayed and chatted for a few minutes, and then strayed out again, leaving an atmosphere

of elegance and jasmine scent.

I really am numbed mentally. My brain keeps taking records to-night, like a camera. It's a sort of human sensitised plate, but I don't feel anything, not even that it is really happening to me.

When the C.O. and his wife made their appearance, we all turned and walked up the hill together; father and the Colonel and his wife walked on in front, and the man and I walked behind.

The man bent his head quite close to my head and laughed. It was rather a beastly laugh, not villainy, just as if he didn't care whether an earthquake or the millennium started next minute.

"Well," he said, "you seem to have had your innings, Miss Burbridge. Now I want mine."

"I'll tell dad when I get home," I babbled foolishly. "I'll explain fully all about the searchlights and everything."

I felt absolutely the same as I did when I sat down at my "maths." paper when I tried to matric., after having been awake all night with raging toothache. I felt I couldn't be decisive or adequate or even sensible, I couldn't deal efficiently with a fly that settled on my own nose.

"The inopportune arrival of the Colonel and his wife have made it rather difficult to explain," he hazarded. "Don't you remember gracefully acknowledging our tender regard for each other, and equally gracefully accepting congratulations on existence of same?" He sounded all the time frightfully amused in a bored sort of manner. He had the most delightful kind of voice, frightfully deep and soft, and he drawled in a fascinating way.

We walked, unconsciously, slower and slower, far behind the others, in the scent of the heather that clothed the hill.

It was a wonderful night. It sort of caught you by the throat and made you ache for all the things you could never, never have; crave the deep friendships and wonderful love that would never come your way.

"I am afraid I have been very stupid," I said. "I often am. You see, I am

afraid of father."

"He's a bully, a rotten bully," he said; and then: "I beg your pardon, Miss Burbridge—I shouldn't have said that."

"It's just that he shouts, and I can't think when he shouts. I just say something that will make him stop shouting—anything."

"It's funny my not meeting you before," he said. "I've met your mother scores of times. Of course, I've heard of you." He paused thoughtfully, as if he were trying to remember what he had heard.

"I don't go about much," I put in.

It seemed unnecessary to tell him I had no "glad rags."

"Have you ever had a good time?" he demanded abruptly.

"I don't think so," I answered, then sudden loyalty to my parents made me add: "I—I don't care for the sort of good time some girls have."

"Rubbish!" he interrupted rudely. "Every girl likes a good time, and every girl will use a fellow to get one—his money, his influence, his friends, his admiration, his love—anything that adds to her rotten vanity and flatters her. There is no honour among women, they are all the same; there isn't a sport among them—not one; and the prettier a girl is the less of a sport she is."

"I am plain enough to be a sport," I put in.

"Yes," he acquiesced indifferently; then he suddenly swung round on me. "The real explanation of to-night is going to be damned awkward," he said curtly. "Do you realise that?"

"Yes."

"Then why explain? It suits me jolly well if you don't."

"I must."

"Why?"

"Oh—because I must."

"A fool reason."

"We can't pretend to be engaged."

"Why not? I think it would be rather a piquant relationship. It appeals to my

debased sense of humour. It would at least have this Stirling advantage over the average engagement. We needn't be a couple of confounded hypocrites the whole time with each other. We have no mutual regard—we could at least reserve our self-respect by being honest; or perhaps the prospect of explaining to the inflammable Major, his Colonel, and the Colonel's lady, the circumstances that necessitated the loving embrace in which they found us to-night appeals to your sense of humour?"

"Don't be a beast," I flashed out.

"You perceive how charmingly natural we are already. I find it refreshing—and I intend to continue to refresh myself. Own honestly that you simply daren't explain. The Colonel is going back to the mess for bridge. When I arrive the entire mess will be in a position to congratulate me. Those officers who have charming wives in billets will carry back the glad tidings of our betrothal."

"You must stop him!" I said. "Oh—please—please—do something! Where are they?" I searched the hill for the three figures.

"They have considerately left us to our lovers' lingering. Your father is swollen with pride to-night."

"Why?"

"Because I am an excessively eligible young man—the sort of young man no one expected you to noose."

"You are a horrible young man—perfectly beastly!"

Yet I did not hate him, he was so frightfully exciting. I can't quite explain to myself what I felt about him. I could breakfast every morning in his company for a year and not know what I was eating once. I am quite sure of that.

"I am not going to let you go," he said suddenly. "I have made up my mind about that. You are a present from the devil to the worst side of my nature. There, aren't you *thrilled*? Doesn't your foolish female heart flip-flap?"

"No," I said stormily; "and I think you are talking like an idiot."

"Delightful creature! Now, listen here, young spitfire, I'm going to give you a good time——"

"I won't take it!"

"You'll lap it up as a kitten laps up milk—that's all girls are for."

"I am going back to explain to father and mother."

"The thought of 'father' explaining to the C.O. and the mess fills me with pleasurable anticipation. Your own conduct alone will require all his ingenuity to explain; the natural and charming and quite unblushing way in which you accepted the very nice congratulations of Mrs. Walters and the Colonel requires quite a——"

"I didn't know what I was doing."

"That merely denotes you an idiot."

"Where are we going?" I said, suddenly realising the pleasant wiry spring of the heather was gone from beneath my feet.

He gripped my arm and laughed. "I am taking you to pay a little call," he said.

II

"It's Brennon House!" I protested. "You aren't going in here!"

For answer he swung open the gate of the largest house in the neighbourhood, still keeping tight hold of my arm.

"Why not?" he demanded coolly. "I have a book to return."

"But it must be nearly ten."

"Better late than never."

"Besides—I don't know them—and I have my old mack on."

I knew who lived there well enough.

Mother had called.

"It is an honour to know the Gilpins," he assured me.

I knew that. I knew they were frightfully rich and aristocratic, and that half the officers were crazy about Grace Gilpin. All the most attractive ones used to live up at Brennon House playing tennis and boating on the artificial lake in the grounds; and they used to give weekly dances and have a coon orchestra from London, and they had amateur theatricals and no end of fun.

Grace Gilpin had always seemed sort of unreal to me, like the princess in a fairy story. I had never seen her.

"Please! Please!" I protested. "This is madness!"

"It is delicious madness," he said softly.

In the moonlight I could see the heavy, colourless heads of flowers; the scent of them, sweet and strange and all different, seemed to wave over us for a minute as we passed.

"They'll be on the veranda," he said. "We'll go round."

"You're not going in!" I said desperately.

He stopped and looked down at me.

"In six weeks I go to the front with my draft," he said. "And I hope to be killed. To-night has placed us both in the most extraordinary position. It's practically impossible for us, at the moment, to extricate ourselves. It just happens that fate has played into my hands in the rummiest way. I don't want to extricate myself. Six weeks is a very short time. I'm awfully rich. I'll give you a topping time, a time you'll remember all your life—if you won't try to extricate yourself for six weeks."

"Pretend to be engaged to you?"

"Why not? You've no one else in view at the moment. Everyone will envy you, and say sweet things to your face and nasty things behind your back. If you won't—I leave you to explain things to your people and the regiment and the wives of the regiment."

"I can't!"

"Precisely! Then why worry? What does our engagement demand of us? Civility and excessive courtesy in our bearing towards each other before people.

And please"—he caught his breath sharply—"when we are alone we will have no horrible hypocrisy, no feminine flim-flam, no playing up and pretty lies and coquetries and deceits; nothing but the plain unvarnished truth and bare honesty; as we have no interest in each other, we can at least pay each other the compliment of behaving as if we were two men."

"But," I began, dazed. He absolutely carries you off your feet.

"Come on," he said curtly.

We went through a sort of old-fashioned honeysuckle and jasmine pergola and came opposite a broad stoep, all hung with baskets of pink geraniums and ferns and pink Japanese lanterns with electric lights inside, and white wicker armchairs and big pink silk cushions and white tables.

It was just like a theatrical scene.

There was an awfully handsome middle-aged woman sitting at a table playing bridge with three elderly men, and someone inside the inner room was playing "Iolanthe."

Everybody yelled, "Hello, Cromer!" and "Cheerio, Cromer!"

A girl suddenly appeared from behind a huge flowering Dorothy Perkins in a white tub, and two or three officers and another girl in a bunchy mauve and silver gown fluttered up from a low pink divan.

They stared at me, in my old mack, with well-bred curiosity, and I thought I looked like someone from the pit wandered on to a musical comedy scene.

The music stopped, and a girl suddenly appeared at the french-windows.

She was perfectly wonderful.

She was awfully fair and tall and slender, and she had blue eyes the exact colour of her georgette gown.

You could have cried over her, she was so lovely; and she had the sort of mouth that made you feel you simply couldn't go away until you had seen it smile.

"Hullo! Cap.," she said; her voice was light and high and sweet, almost as if she were laughing at something.

"I've brought your book back, Grace," he said; and then he took my hand. "Oh, Pam dear," he said—then to the handsome lady at the bridge table, "May I introduce my little fiancée—Miss Burbridge."

I knew then; I just knew by the look in those very blue eyes. I quite understood why Captain Cromer was bitter, why he wanted a fiancée.

He wanted to hit back.

A sort of buzz of talk and teasing broke out all round me, and through it all I detected a vein of surprise.

Grace Gilpin came down the veranda to shake hands. She walked wonderfully—just like an actress on the stage.

"Why, you poor souls!" she said, lightly and gaily, "so it's raining"—and she looked at my old mack; then *everybody* looked at it.

I felt suddenly as if I wanted to cry.

"I made her put it on," I heard Captain Cromer say. "She is such a foolish little person. She doesn't take half enough care of herself"—and I knew that I could learn to love that man, that I was doing a crazy thing, and I was going to go on with it.

III

When I am with people I feel as if I am a fairy princess taking part in a fairy play, a wonderful and desirable and adorable person. It is a perfectly marvellous feeling; and when I am alone with Cheneston I feel as if he switched the limelight off with an impatient hand, and I was just a plain, shabby, silly kid.

He has bought me an engagement ring—for the six weeks before he goes to the front.

"Let us be as beastly orthodox as possible," he said as he popped it on.

"Why don't you look after your nails—you've got decent hands."

"What shall I do with it when——"

"When you write and break off the engagement! Oh! keep it if you like."

It is a platinum set with one glorious ruby, an enormous stone. You could almost warm yourself by the red there is in it.

I love warm things, and glows and twinkles and brightness.

I am waking up. I feel as if I were as covered with shutters as an old anchor with barnacles, and every morning when I wake up I find more shutters opened.

I think Cheneston must be perfectly appallingly rich. He has a villa in Italy, and a little hut in Norway where he stays for the ski-ing season, and the white yacht *Mellow Hours* in the harbour is his.

It's more fairy tale-y than ever.

Mother and father are delighted at my engagement; but their surprise is rather humiliating, it does make me realise how awfully plain and dull I am.

I haven't any parlour tricks or conversation, my tennis is rotten, I'm sick on the yacht, I swim like a mechanical toy, I haven't the foggiest idea how to play golf, and I'm never sure of my twinkle in jazzing—and Grace Gilpin does all these things absolutely toppingly. She's been trained to do them from quite a little kid.

We seem to do everything in fours—I and Cheneston, and Grace Gilpin and a man called Markham, Walter Markham, who adores her.

Cheneston is sweet to me when we're all together, but when he and I leave the others and are alone sometimes he hardly speaks.

I imagine he is bored.

I do love him so much, every day I seem to love him more and more and more.

I suppose I ought to be ashamed and humiliated to write that down, because I simply bore him to tears; but I'm not, mine isn't a silly love—he's my very, very dear, the most wonderful man I have ever seen or known.

Sometimes people say things that simply wring my heart.

"I suppose you'll get married directly after the war?" the C.O.'s wife said. "Will you live in England?"

"I—I don't know," I answered.

"We shall winter in the South," said Cheneston; he glanced at Grace Gilpin and I knew she was listening. "We shall probably go to Norway for the sports, and spend the rest of the time in England."

"It sounds like a fairy tale," said the C.O.'s wife.

"I think it is," I broke in unexpectedly.

Grace Gilpin turned in her chair and glanced at me. She was lovely; she wore cornflower blue crêpe and white collar and cuffs.

"I think Cheneston would be quite wonderful in the rôle of a fairy prince," she said.

He laughed, rose, and walked away.

Going home he looked at me gravely.

"I hope you're not getting romantic about our engagement. I don't mean anything rotten, child—but all that silly rubbish about fairy tales and fairy princes. I have only five weeks more—then I go to the front."

"Did you care for Grace most frightfully?" I asked boldly.

He looked down at me with slightly puzzled eyes. I can't describe his eyes exactly, they are hazel, and when he is going to laugh they laugh first; and they are hard and honest and straight.

"I thought," he said. "I gave my very soul into her hands, to play with and laugh at—but I don't know. It doesn't hurt so much—as it did. Pam—I gave her everything that was best in me; and she encouraged me, she let me give, and when I had beggared myself—when I cared like hell—she flung my gifts back in my face and laughed. I wanted to humiliate her as she had humiliated me. I'm not a great man, Pam; she ground my pride and my love and my manhood under her heel—and I wanted to hit back."

"And I afforded you the opportunity," I said very quietly.

He looked out over the downs, his eyes were worried and troubled and his

face was white.

"I wouldn't hurt you for the world, Pam; I have been thinking over this make-believe engagement of ours, wondering if it could possibly hurt you in any single way. The only thing I can see is that it might keep off another man who might want to marry you—and there isn't one about. It simply amounts to this: I give you a good time, and you wear a ring I gave you. I wouldn't hurt you, Pam. Sometimes I could almost fancy you're not like other women—you're not a beastly little actress. I suppose I seem an awful cad sometimes. We can't cry off just now, kid; the Service makes prisoners of us all. I can't leave here, whatever happens, until I go to France with my battery in five weeks' time; and if we pretended things were broken off now our position would be intolerable. We've got to carry on. I'll make the next five weeks as pleasant as ever I can for you."

Mother came out as we reached our gate, and Cheneston said good-bye.

She looked at me curiously as we went inside.

"You funny cold little thing," she said, "never a kiss."

One of the things that makes me feel frightfully sick is the amount mother and father are spending on clothes for me.

It's rather like an Arabian Nights dream to have a wardrobe full of perfectly adorable frocks, but I feel it's so unfair to let them spend all this money to get me settled when being settled is as remote as it ever has been.

I try to accept the light and airy "take what the good gods give" philosophy, but I am too aware that it isn't the good gods, it's mother and father who give, on a Major's pay, fully believing their reward will be made concrete in "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden," and the disposing of a singularly plain and unexciting daughter to a handsome young man with pots of money.

I would so like to be angry with someone for being plain, but I did it absolutely on my own, because mother is quite a beautiful person and father is frightfully aristocratic and romanish—they are both rather splendidly beaky, but mine is a pure and unadulterated snub.

I suppose I have a petty, shallow nature, but I pine to be romantic and

wonderful like Grace Gilpin, and simply draw people to me; no one but deaf old ladies who think I look kind and good ever ask to be introduced to me; and only chivalrous men who think I look tired and anæmic and work for my living ever offer me seats in buses or tubes.

Grace Gilpin takes her surroundings and uses them as a background—she is always to the fore. I sink into the background and become part of them.

Yesterday we took out lunch on the links, caviare sandwiches and stuff, and Grace sat down by a flaming gorse-bush in a grey frock and a grey jersey. She just used that glorious bit of flame as an "effect." I sat on the other side, and they all nearly forgot me and went off without me.

"I didn't see you," Walter Markham said.

It's true; there are heaps of people in this life you don't see because of the more ornamental people.

I would have given almost anything to have been born showy, so that people would look at me. I want Cheneston to look at me as he, and other men, look at Grace, as if she were a splendid vision vouchsafed to them for five minutes.

I do love that man, and love isn't one bit what I thought it was. I always imagined it was a mixture of bubble and scorch, but it isn't—it's so sweet to love. I could be good! It makes me feel good right to my finger-nails, and full of that after-church-on-a-summer-Sunday evening-in-peace-time feeling; that's why I think that my love for the man isn't anything to be ashamed of or humiliated about. He doesn't love me, I know; but I have a conviction you can't grow unless you love, and I feel so much more use in the world since I've started growing.

Loving Cheneston has made life perfectly wonderful for me. He doesn't know it and he never will, but he's shown me all the dear beauty of the world—and it is beautiful.

Walter Markham is awfully nice to me; sometimes he leaves Grace Gilpin to Cheneston and walks with me, and he is teaching me tennis in the mornings before breakfast. He is much older than Cheneston, Grace, or I—he must be

forty—and he is very rich.

I wonder if Grace will marry him—or if she will marry Cheneston. Sometimes I think he will forget he is angry with her, and he will tell her how the mistaken idea of our "engagement" arose, and why he let it prosper—there is a frightful lot of the open-hearted, impetuous schoolboy about Cheneston.

I don't think he is happy.

If he made a clean breast of it to Grace we should have to break off our supposed "engagement," and mother would have to take me away—father couldn't leave.

I can imagine what my life would be!

I think they would pack me off as governess or companion to someone.

I know if I don't marry by a certain age that will be my fate. Mother was perfectly honest about it—before Cheneston came along; now I am her dear little daughter, she looks at me in pleased bewilderment sometimes, as if wondering how so homely a hunter could have achieved such a sensational capture.

They have never tried to equip me in any way. I was never given the opportunity to acquire any accomplishments. Old Giovanni taught me to sing—for love of his art.

Mother laughed when she heard he was teaching me—she laughed because he was a funny, broken-down old Italian singer, and the boys used to pay him five shillings a night out of mess funds to come up and play to them in the evening when the regiment was stationed at Gilesworth and there was nothing on earth to do.

Giovanni was a great teacher, and to him I owe to-night.

I don't think I'll ever forget to-night.

It was lovely!

I wish I could tell Giovanni all about it, he would so understand. Once he was furious; he told mother I had an extraordinary voice, and mother laughed and said she did not doubt it.

Cheneston used the words at the Gilpins' to-night.

"You have an extraordinary voice, Pam!" he said, "amazing."

Grace sings. Cheterton and Pouiluex of the Paris Conservatoire trained her voice.

To-night we all went over to the Gilpins' for coffee—mother, father, Cheneston, and I—and when we arrived Grace was singing "Jeunesse," that funny little song about "taking your picture out of its frame, and out of my heart I have taken your name"—it wasn't very effective. It needs a lot of sorrow in the voice, and Grace's voice is full of light laughter; it was rather like a tom-tit trying to dance a minuet.

I was feeling stirred up and rebellious. It seemed so hard that I had only a funny little face and homely little ways in which to express all the beautiful big, swishy feelings that were eating me up inside, and Grace was so lovely that she could express things she didn't really feel at all.

It seemed so awfully unfair and rotten, just as if we were both trying to touch Cheneston's heart with the same melody, and she had a glorious grand to work on, and I just a little boarding-house upright.

They had blue chinese lanterns with apple-blossom pattern on the stoep, and great copper bowls of larkspurs and pale pink carnations everywhere, and black cushions on all the white wicker chairs; and Grace wore black with an enormous blue sash.

She was singing in the drawing-room, with Walter Markham turning over her music, and when she came out on to the stoep she said:

"Surely, Pam, you play or something?"

"I sing a little," I said.

"Then do try," said she—you know the sort of woman who always asks another woman to "try" to sing.

I went straight to the piano and I sang "Melisande in the Wood," accompanying myself.

I think my voice has a funny register, it seems to surprise people. It's terrifically deep and strong and soft—almost "furry."

It's rather disconcerting, because it doesn't sound as if it belonged to me at all; I am like a doll's house fitted with a church organ.

I don't think I have *ever* sung as I did that night. I was pealing and ringing and chanting inside before ever I started, and all that was there in my heart seemed to rush into my voice.

It was like some great big longing, hoping, sad she-spirit singing.

When the last "sleep" had sort of slid away, I turned round; they were all in the room staring—just staring.

Walter Markham came over to see me.

"You are wonderful!" he said. "Pam—you are wonderful!"

I looked at Cheneston, suddenly I felt as if I had taken control of my background.

Cheneston's face was white.

His face was the face of a discoverer.

He bent over me.

"You have an extraordinary voice, Pam," he said, "amazing—— But of course it lies—women use their singing voices to tell lies—wonderful, beautiful, sweet-sounding lies."

"Sing again," Grace said.

But I would not sing again; I had made my effect—I own it quite, quite honestly—I could have shrieked with triumph.

So Grace sang.

She sang "Rose in the Bud"—and it was like the trickling after the pour had ceased.

I think they all felt it.

They began to talk.

Cheneston did not talk; he leant back against the black cushions and stared into the garden with a white face.

IV

I do love life.

It's a perfectly priceless possession, sometimes I'm quite sorry to go to sleep and forget what has happened and what is going to happen. I suppose I am childish.

Cheneston makes everything so smooth and easy and charming. I never realised the enchanted atmosphere that money and good breeding creates. You feel as if you were continually being fêted. All the women in the set in which I live now are treated the same way. I cannot understand why they ever grow old or have to have their wrinkles massaged and their hair hennaed; none of the sort of things that make a woman grow old are allowed to come near them.

All the things, and the sights, and the feelings that are stale to Grace Gilpin and her chic friends are new to me—I sort of rush at them and mop them up. I can't help being thrilled and happy.

"You'll wear yourself out," Grace Gilpin says.

Yet the men seem to like my enthusiasm. I couldn't be blasé if I tried.

I love, love, love every bit of every single day—that's the honest truth.

I don't think it's rained once since the night Cheneston and I met in the glare of the searchlights. I suppose that seems a frightfully little thing, but it isn't—it's an awfully big thing.

And the battery is nearly due to leave for France.

Cheneston is so sweet and gentle with me, just like an elder brother to his little sister.

I never knew a man could understand in the way he does. I always thought a man had a totally different type of brain.

We went up to Town to the opera last week, and we dined at the Carlton and I wore a rather clever dress mother selected for me—brown and amber tulle the colour of my hair, with just a huge bunch of tea-roses at my breast.

A man Cheneston used to be at Oxford with, and his sister, and Cheneston's aunt and uncle, made up the party; and I seemed to make them laugh an awful lot, and I heard the aunt tell Cheneston I was the most original child she had ever met.

Oh! but the music!

I didn't know I could feel as I did. It seemed to pluck at my heart with little red-hot fingers. One minute it picked me up and swung me into a state of dizzy gladness, and the next I seemed to see nothing but Grace Gilpin and Cheneston, and the battery leaving for France! One minute I felt good—so good that I could have got up and walked straight into a convent for the rest of my life. And the next I wanted to fight Grace Gilpin for Cheneston and start that very minute; me, the funny little thing with the snub nose who made people laugh!

Why did Heaven make me a funny little thing with a snub nose? It wasn't sporting; and I do think it handicaps one. One doesn't somehow expect a snub nose to be a Joan of Arc, or Florence Nightingale, or Mrs. Pankhurst, or anything thrilling and earnest and vital and glowing.

I think it's rotten to be born a quaint little thing that nobody takes seriously.

It was awfully weird the way Cheneston looked at me, and the boy who was at Oxford, and the uncle, and the father—just as though I was something they had never really seen properly before.

Cheneston sat behind me, and I could feel him trying to read things in my brain through the back of my neck—it made me all tingly.

He is a strange man—you could wonder what he was really like for hours.

"Did you like it?" he said when it was all over and he helped me on with my coat.

I nodded. I couldn't speak.

We were staying the night at the Savoy, and Cheneston and I drove there

together, mother and father preceding us in another taxi.

"Pam," he said, "what were you thinking of to-night?"

"Just dreaming," I answered.

"I was thinking that in another week I shall be—out there."

"Yes," I said; and all the happiness that the music had brought me ebbed from my heart, and left it cold and dark, like a little cellar when the lamps had been extinguished.

To-morrow at six the battery entrains.

I heard father giving orders for the band to play them off.

He is to go too, of course, but mother seems quite philosophic about it. I wonder if when people grow older they lose that sort of sick, gnawing fear that attacks you when you think of someone you care for very much going into danger.

If you do I hope I grow old very quickly, because at the present moment I feel dreadful.

To-morrow Cheneston goes—and I mustn't show him I care the least little bit. I've got to keep the flag wagging.

I suppose everyone will turn out to see the battery off. I know a lot of the men's wives came over in the old paddle boat last night to say good-bye. Poor souls!—their eyes were red, and some of them had little kiddies in their arms; but they had the right to grieve. I haven't any.

I think having the right to break your heart makes the breaking an easier affair.

I'm sorry about father, but I'm not as sorry as I ought to be. I have always felt uneasy when he was around, like Pomp and Circumstance, his wire-haired fox-terriers, on the alert to move out of the way quickly and hide if necessary.

I don't think he realises the dreadful effect his red-faced shouting has on people—it's like being scolded by a lion.

The atmosphere of the house is almost as if a raid were just over when he is gone.

The Gilpins had announced their intention of seeing the battery off, and they were calling for us in their motor.

I dread that little station at six o'clock in the morning, and all the men, and the crowd of women beyond the barrier, and the mess band shouting "The Long, Long Trail," and the chilly greyness; it sort of nibbles your heart before ever the good-byes are started.

Cheneston has been up to say good-bye to the Gilpins.

He is whistling outside for me to go down. Oh! I wish I were wonderful like Grace, and I could make him care, ever such a little bit, before he went away!

Later.

The moors, and the stars, and the leaves of the aspens shivering in the moonlight like spangles on a dancer's dress, and the scent of the heather, and of gorse, and the tingling, exhilarating pungency of the unseen sea—could anything hurt more?

And me, longing to belong to the night—to capture just a scrap of its mystic, thrilling beauty—walking beside the one man in the world an unromantic, bunchy little thing with a snub nose.

He was very pale and constrained. I suppose it was his good-byes with Grace. I kept on wondering what they had said to each other, wishing I knew!

"Let's sit down, kid," he said abruptly. "I've a lot to say."

We sat down.

We seemed to have the whole, beautiful, wonderful world to ourselves—only it was an empty old eggshell of a thing, because he didn't care.

"Pam," he said, "I want to thank you for being a fine little pal to me. I—I must have seemed a pretty rotten sort of swine often."

Now, as I write him down and the things he says, he doesn't cut a very

gallant figure, and yet he is. He's a *big* man—his eyes, his laugh, his voice, the funny way he says things. He makes all other men seem little and very young.

"Oh no!" I said. I shut my eyes because I could concentrate on getting carelessness into my voice, and it all hurt so horribly.

He seems little and ordinary—I can pop the atmosphere on paper—but he wasn't; he was *big*, and splendid, and very, very far away from me. I seemed to look at him through glass and hear him through space. He isn't the type that could share himself with two women—I expect I got that feeling because he'd given everything to Grace.

"Pam," he said, "I'm so afraid—it's tortured me! You had a rotten dull life before I came. Will—will it seem very dreadful going back?"

"I always knew I should have to," I said steadily.

"Yes," he said, "I know!" I had never heard his voice like that. "Pam—be honest! I didn't know how absolutely splendid you were! I thought you were just like other women!"

I rose and stuck my hands in my pockets.

"I'm all right," I answered brusquely. "I've had a top-hole time, and I'm frightfully bucked about it. Let's have a tramp."

He rose too, he looked ill and worried.

"Pam," he said, "things may happen—out there. They do. I don't think it's necessary to break off our supposed engagement at once. It—it would be so much easier for you if you didn't. Pam—I wish to God I could undo things."

"Why?" I queried starkly.

"If you should ever pay for these six weeks—in any way—I'd never forgive myself."

I tried to reach him. I wish I were big that I could tuck an arm in his and tell him not to be an idiot, but I dare not touch him. I knew that I should cry and cling to him.

I do not believe there ever was a more wonderful night, so full to the brim of scents and moonlight and velvet shadowed mystery.

"I—I want to go home," I said suddenly. "I'm tired."

We hardly spoke again until we reached our garden gate. I had the feeling that he, too, was surging with the things he wanted to say.

At the gate he put his hands on my shoulders, he was breathing like a man who had run far.

"Pam," he said, "Walter Markham and I were talking about you to-night—and I told him the truth, child—that we weren't engaged, and hadn't any feeling for each other."

"Why?"

"A man knows when another man—cares. I'm glad I'm off to-morrow. Pam, I was just an incident, kid—an incident."

"Did—did Mr. Markham say—he cared?"

"He's too loyal a pal for that. Besides, until I told him, he thought——"

"What did he say when you told him?"

"I—I don't know. I just walked out of his hut and came to you. He's not going with us to-morrow, you know—he's going to take on the new draft. I—I'm glad. Pam, say that I'm just an incident. I shall feel better about things, kid! I feel awful!"

"You're just an incident!" I said quietly.

I couldn't send him away with that look on his face.

He bent and kissed my hand.

His lips seemed hot.

Then he turned, and I heard him running swiftly down the little lane.

I wanted to have a sort of bright and shining appearance the next day, but nothing helped me, neither the sleepless night nor the hot coffee.

I climbed into the Gilpins' car with a white face.

It was the beginning of a gorgeous blue and gold September morning, but everything was misty and silvery and shiny with dew and mist.

"Cheer up, little thing!" Mrs. Gilpin said as I got in.

"Everyone is turning out to give them a send-off," Grace said. "I suppose

the Major has been gone hours?"

"Yes," I answered, "his orderly called for him at four. Mother never goes to see him off. She hates it."

Mrs. Gilpin made sympathetic noises.

"Walter Markham is the most fed-up thing on earth. He hates new recruits. He wishes he was going," said Grace.

"Perhaps the war will soon be over; the papers say the *morale* of the German troops is deteriorating," said Mrs. Gilpin hopefully; conversation languished until we arrived.

All the coldness and greyness of the morning seemed concentrated in that little station. It was heart-breaking; and the mess band blaring out "Soldiers of the King" seemed to accentuate the dreariness.

The battery had answered the roll-call; when we arrived they stood in little groups, some of them sitting on their kit-bags, the tin bullet-proof helmets that had been served out the previous day hanging from their haversacks.

"There's Captain Markham," said Grace. "There's Mr. Wood and Connel; there's Colonel and Mrs. Walters, and there's your father. I don't see Captain Cromer, Pam."

"I—I expect he'll be here," I answered foolishly.

We passed through the gate on to the platform; the little group of women outside the barrier watched us enviously.

I was shivering and my teeth were chattering—the silence was so uncanny. It was as if all those women outside and the men on the platform were waiting for a miracle to happen and deliver them from the necessity to face the immediate future.

Father was much in evidence. He came up and spoke to us, and then bustled off again.

I turned to see Cheneston and his orderly beside me.

"Morning," he said; he, too, was pale, but smiling. He turned aside to speak to Grace.

I saw an A.S.C. man push through the crowd to Colonel Walters; he looked very hot; in his hand he had a telegram.

The men were beginning to get into the train; a cheer, a very feeble cheer that somehow seemed wet, came from beyond the barrier.

Walter Markham joined us, and another man, a cheery boy called Withers.

"I wish I was going too," Walter Markham said. "I applied for a transfer months ago. I want to get into a Scotch regiment."

I thought he avoided looking at me, and I felt uncomfortable.

"I shouldn't have to train," he said, "and my majority is due. Yes, sir?" this to Colonel Walters, who had hurried up looking amazingly agitated.

"The War Office is mad!" he said. "Stark, staring mad! Markham, you have been transferred with a majority to the Cameron 10th Battalion of the Leal Argyllshires. You will report to the C.O. at the headquarters on Wednesday."

"Yes, sir."

"You, Captain Cromer, will remain on home service to train the new battery which occupies the barracks under Colonel Prosser, taking Markham's place. Johnstone is promoted to Captain at my discretion, and I am to go with one subaltern lacking and an inadequate battery. Stark, staring mad!"

"I—I am to stay?" Cheneston said. "I—I can't."

"Headquarters' orders," said the Colonel curtly. "Now, boys, all serene?"

The band blazed out "Tipperary."

V

Fortunately a climax is like a raid or a storm—it has a definite duration.

In the days before the curtain went up on life, I used to think how ripping it would be to live through great situations and climax and tragic happenings, like

the heroines in the novels I used to devour. Now I know you do not know they are happening to you at the time; sometimes it's months before you say to yourself with sudden understanding, "That was a terrible day!" or, "It was a great moment!" or, "It was the happiest day of my life!"

Undoubtedly the biggest moment in my whole life was when Colonel Walters told Cheneston he was not to go to the front with his battery—and yet I didn't know it at the time.

Mrs. Gilpin said, "Oh! isn't that splendid! Aren't you glad, Pam?" and I said, "I'm awfully glad!"

Grace Gilpin was white as death.

I think Cheneston was even whiter.

"I'm to stay behind and take Markham's place, and train a lot of fool boys to form fours and dig trenches! It's infamous!"

"Surely you are glad for Pam's sake, Mr. Cromer," the Colonel's wife interrupted reproachfully.

I think Cheneston had utterly and completely forgotten me until that moment. He turned and looked at me in bewilderment; I suppose he suddenly realised that his enforced stay in the town would necessitate the continuation of our supposed engagement.

He drew a long breath.

"Of course," he said, quite quietly, "of course, Mrs. Walters."

You would imagine that when Fate calmly picked up two people, shook them, and then placed them in a position alien to anything they had ever planned or dreamed of, they would remain in a state of scared chaos; but it isn't so.

When we had seen the train off, Cheneston and I walked back to the camp, quite quietly.

"Poor little kid!" he said. "One never anticipated this, did one?"

"No," I answered. I was thinking that God had made the morning for lovers to walk in—the mist had not lifted, the sun shimmered golden through it. It seemed to encase us in soft amber radiance. I had that only-two-people-in-the-

whole-wide-world-to-day feeling, which must be so absolutely wonderful when you want to be quite, quite alone with a man and he wants to be quite, quite alone with you. I was watching a cobweb sewn with dewdrops; there was a sweet and foolish peace in my heart. I could only remember that Cheneston was going to stay.

"What are you going to do about it, Pam?"

"Oh—carry on," I said. I tried to speak lightly.

"You feel like that about it?"

"Well—we can't break the engagement at once. It would be perfectly awful for both of us—especially me. People would say I was only waiting for you to go to France to—to rot."

"You funny little soul! Pam—I—I blame myself for all this. You seem only a kid to me—until you sing."

"And then?" The golden mist seemed to dance towards me.

"And then I know you are a woman—with all a woman's rotten wiles, the little feline habit of plucking at a chap's heart-strings in order to amuse yourself. There's only one good woman in the world—my mother."

"I—I had no idea you had a mother!"

"Why should you have?" he demanded curtly. "She is a great invalid, she lives at Cromer Court near Totnes, in Devon."

"Does she know about—us?"

"She knows nothing," he said briefly. "There is nothing for her to know. My God! look!"

I looked. We had walked down to the sea, near Brennon House bathing-tents. The Gilpins had built a little diving platform, and on it, her hands above her head, stood Grace Gilpin.

Half mermaid, half angel, she looked. She wore a black bathing-dress, and a beach gown of brilliant violet lay behind her, a little pool of exquisite colour.

No pen can do justice to her, only the brush of a Sargeant or one of those people who have things on the Academy walls that make everybody else's work

look dud. I think if I had been an artist I would have burst into a passion of tears—something rose in my throat because she was so lovely; perched there, gold and black, between the misty blue sea and the misty blue sky, all the colour in the morning seemed to be enmeshed in her hair and her beach gown, and the next minute she had dived into the water.

I looked at Cheneston—and I looked away.

If only I might gleam and shine, if only I might palpitate with youth and beauty and stand twixt sky and earth a thing of loveliness! But I knew that no one would stand and stare if I stood where Grace Gilpin had stood a moment before; they would only say: "There's a girl bathing—but she'll find it pretty fresh."

Cheneston was speaking.

"Life isn't fair. One does a thing in pique or temper, or because one's pride is hurt; one thinks the effects will only last a minute, and they last for months and years—they are far-reaching, they involve other people, till sometimes it seems one cannot light a match or perform the most trivial office without involving other destinies and lives. Kid—I never guessed, that night, that all this would happen."

"In a way we're sort of pawns," I said. "It isn't any good fussing, is it? You'll be sent out with this battery for sure, and then things will settle themselves—won't they? I ought to go home to mother and tell her that father went off quite cheerily. She knows, because Mrs. Gilpin went back to her."

I went home. It seems all singularly lacking in tenseness and emotion, it seems common-place—it seems as if I had skipped the great moment and hurried on with the "afterwards"; but there was no great moment, it was all afterwards-ish.

Things went on the same as usual, Cheneston, Grace Gilpin, and I went about together; she had a new man in place of Mr. Markham, a man called Dickie Wontner. The only change I find is in myself.

Oh! I get so angry when people talk of the "peace of love"—there is no

peace in it. Maybe there is when you are married, I don't know and probably I never shall; but love is revolutionary, it robs you of your power of concentration—it may only be that you dust the same thing twice, or you put things down and can't remember where you put them, or you forget to take an interest in your friends and lose them without knowing it; but the fact remains that you are only living with half of yourself, the other and more vital half is continually padding round after the beloved like a little invisible dog.

I love Cheneston. I write it honestly. It is almost the only thing in my life I am proud of. Sometimes I feel that my love is compounded of blue sky and sunshine, and everything that is big and honest and glittering in nature.

He does not care one little scrap for me.

He loves Grace Gilpin.

I want them to be happy together, but I do not wish to sit in the front pew at their wedding, or watch them fashion life together afterwards—I want to run right away then, to the utter-most corner of the earth.

I don't believe the world is round; I believe that somewhere there are little corners for lovers who are not loved, and there neither moonshine, nor sunshine, nor star shine shall worry them, neither the scent of flowers nor the dear, shrill, heart-plucking songs of birds; there shall be no memory of the quivering, glowing *beauty* and *wonder* of life, which is not for them, but there shall be work—useful, honest work—in which to find forgetfulness and fresh courage.

I am hunting for a corner to run away to when my time comes.

VI

No one has heard from Walter Markham.

He has no relations here, it is true—but it's funny he hasn't written.

He is in Mesopotamia; perhaps the mails have been sunk or he has dysentery or something.

Grace is always asking Cheneston if he has heard, and whenever Cheneston answers he avoids looking at me.

Sometimes I honestly think Cheneston thinks I might have cared for Mr. Markham, perhaps did care for him, and my supposed engagement to himself spoilt and prevented things ever coming to a head.

I know Cheneston is horribly unhappy.

I know Grace is equally wretched.

Neither of them knows how miserable I am, or that I suspect they are.

Sometimes life seems so strange to me, peopled by a lot of actors and actresses all living little lies.

I know Cheneston will never tell Grace that his engagement to me is only a farce. He has a fierce sense of honour, it makes him regard all sorts of things that other men do every day as utterly and absolutely impossible.

Sometimes I have thought of going to Grace and telling her the whole story of the mistake from beginning to end; but it might make things even more impossible for Grace, because it isn't the sort of story a woman should tell a woman.

I wish I could learn to care for one of the boys and they for me, it would simplify matters; but not one of them is a bit keen. Their eyes shine when I sing —but they shine because of the memories I bring of other girls.

I am just "a nice little thing" and "a perfect sport"—and it is as safe as being the mother of sons too old for the Army.

Mother is getting a trifle impatient. She twitters about weddings sometimes, and comes and sits on my bed and shows me pictures of bridal gowns from sixpenny illustrated weeklies. Poor mother! it's going to be a bitter blow. Sometimes I feel a little criminal about it. I read a book the other day in which the heroine finds herself in "a ridiculous position, unbelievable and unsurpassed in fiction"—I laughed until I cried. She had only got to use a pennyworth of

honesty and a pinch of common sense to get out of her position; I am wedged tight in mine.

Fantastic problems often demand fantastic solutions.

Meanwhile, winter is coming on, frost is crisping the leaves, this morning the dahlias in our little garden were black and sodden.

Later the same day.

I have found the solution—and it is even more fantastic than I had dreamed of.

I know that Mrs. Gilpin, Grace, young Wontner, Cheneston, and one or two other men who were at Gilpin's to-night, think I am in love with Walter Markham in Mesopotamia and he with me—in spite of the fact that I was engaged to Cheneston when he went out.

I saw the Way Out for Cheneston quite suddenly, and grabbed it before it was too late.

I am sure that to-morrow Cheneston will come to me and ask me outright if I love Markham, and then he will release me—— Oh, I don't know what will happen! There will be a horrible row with mother, and I am sure Grace will marry Cheneston before he goes out.

They were all talking about Markham, and saying how weird it was that no one had heard a single word since he left England.

"He's not the sort of man to drop his friends, either," Mrs. Gilpin said; then she turned to me, laughing. "Come now, Pam, you were in his confidence—haven't you heard?"

"Yes," I lied suddenly, "I've heard."

Everyone exclaimed.

Grace Gilpin was wearing pearl grey crêpe de Chine and old Mechlin lace; she leant forward in her low chair and stared at me; her face was very pale, her wonderful eyes wide.

"You didn't tell us, Pam!" she said, her voice thrilled, that queer silver voice that always seemed to laugh. "Why ever didn't you tell us?"

Cheneston was staring at Grace. He was white too. I had a queer idea that a minute before Grace had seemed very far away from him and I had brought her near.

One or two of the men were looking at Cheneston furtively, to see how he took it.

"Yes, why didn't you tell us, Pam?" Cheneston said.

Suddenly I realised that they were all thinking what I meant them to think —that Walter and I were unconfessed lovers.

I had achieved my effect.

"I—I didn't wish to," I said, and burst into tears.

And now I am wondering what is going to happen, what everyone will say and do, particularly Cheneston and mother.

I wish I could find a corner of the earth now to crouch in, and I want it to be dark and utterly silent, so that I may think and find out where I stand.

VII

Sometimes I wonder what humans are fitted with imaginations for; they are a great nuisance and utterly unreliable. I was fitted with a high-power imagination —it overbalances me sometimes, swings me down to misery and nearer to the face of ecstasy than I was ever meant to go. I spent a sleepless night wondering what would happen after my confession that I had heard from the renegade Captain Markham, and my inexplicable tears; by the time I rose I had all the results planned out, beginning with the interview with Cheneston, in which I implied my love for Walter Markham, and ending in a sort of grand finale scene

with mother, in which elegance and reproaches and jasmine scent mingled, and my clothes, all I had cost, and my obvious lack of chic and charm were hurled at my head.

None of these things happened.

Grace Gilpin and her mother drove by in the high dog-cart as I was taking Pomp and Circumstance for their morning run; they stopped and chatted, but neither of them referred to Walter Markham, or Cheneston, or the little scene I had enacted in their drawing-room the previous night.

I am one of the people who never "click" in their effects.

I had meant to be so frightfully subtle over Walter Markham when the idea first flashed into my mind. I meant to leave my little audience with the vague impression that there might be something in it, that I might have found in Walter Markham's society I had made a mistake in getting engaged so quickly to Cheneston Cromer—I just wanted to make it easy for Cheneston to break off the engagement.

I was so sure he would come to me and ask me if his first suspicions were correct and Walter and I cared for each other; then I would be delicate and subtle again, and hint at devotion, nothing settled, nothing sure.

I had wanted the delicacy of a butterfly, and I had trodden as earnestly and thoroughly as an elephant—a whole herd of them.

I had tried to be subtle and I had achieved blatancy.

I'm more schoolgirl than woman of the world; sometimes I get so mad with myself I wish I could be another person, and meet myself out, and be fearfully subtle and humiliating.

All the morning I was strung up to concert pitch waiting for things to happen, and nothing happened. I had a feeling that the end of my little interlude with Cheneston was nearly over. I tried so hard to be philosophic about it.

We were going for the last picnic of the season with the Gilpins and Morrisons. We were going to motor out to the White Woman's Cave and have lunch there. Cheneston was coming too; the new battery was not in camp yet,

and he was at a loose end. Several of the officers had been invited, and I had looked forward to it.

"You'll wear your lemon linen coat and skirt and your big black sailor, won't you, Pam?" mother said, wandering into my room as I was changing. "Dear, dear! how ragged the garden looks! Winter will soon be here, and then we shall have to see about coats and skirts and things for you. Pam, there isn't any hitch, is there?"

I slipped on my exquisitely cut linen jacket.

"Hitch?" I repeated.

"You've not been doing anything stupid—because, remember, your father and I have had considerable expense in——"

"What have you heard?" I said hardily.

"That you had a certain friendliness for Walter Markham, and that, although no one else has had the honour of being reminded of his existence, you have been hearing from him."

"Well!" I said, my voice sounded like reinforced ice. "Who has been gossiping?"

"I heard it," said mother uncomfortably. "I—I should wear that quaint little collar with the quaint spotted border, Pam."

So already the idea was gaining ground, the little rumour was gleaning strength as it floated along. Pam Burbridge was in love with Walter Markham, they wrote; perhaps they were waiting till he came back to break it off. The Burbridge-Cromer engagement had been too sudden to be lasting. Rather hard on Cromer; still, it was pretty obvious where he would console himself, and a far more suitable match in every way. I could hear them.

I looked at the successor chosen by popular opinion when she and her mother came to call for me. She wore a curious sea-green hand-woven linen; instantly I knew why—it was the colour of the water in the White Woman's Cave. She wanted to make another exquisite picture for Cheneston and the subalterns to gaze at.

"Carver is following with the lunch in the dog-cart," she said. "Melon and salmon mayonnaise and pineapple, and cold pheasant and quail, and all sorts of lusciousness. Climb in, Pam. Captain Cromer and the boys are motoring over. Isn't it a ripping morning? I heard from Walter Markham this morning. He says it's the first letter he's been able to write since he got out there. They seem to have had a ghastly time."

"Yes," I said, "they have."

"Oh—of course," Grace said, "you heard. You said so last night, didn't you? I forgot. Do you like Walter Markham?"

"I like him awfully," I said earnestly. I tried to bring all sorts of things into my voice, but I only sounded, as usual, like a guileless but honest schoolgirl.

"So do I," said Grace Gilpin. Her face was half turned away, exquisite tendrils of gold fluffed about her face and hat—there were cherries on her hat, they seemed no redder than the curve of her wonderful mouth.

"If I were a man I should want to eat you," I said suddenly. "Grace—what does it feel like to be able to make any man you meet feel like that?"

"Are you being catty?" Grace said. She looked at me with surprise in her beautiful eyes.

"I—I don't know," I said miserably. "I think I'm trying to be."

Grace turned.

"Pam, have you really been hearing from Walter Markham?" she said quietly.

I looked beyond her, up at the great bunch of blackberries gleaming like black diamonds in the sun. They seemed like a bunch of eyes watching me.

Suddenly I felt good; I felt as if my silly little soul were enlarging and bubbling to the surface. I knew why Grace asked—she asked for herself and Cheneston, she wanted to think I cared for Walter Markham.

"Yes," I said, "I have."

"Does—Captain Cromer know?" she said.

"You heard me say I had heard from him last night in your drawing-room."

"I know, and then you burst into tears. I was so glad you did."

"Why?" I asked, startled.

"You saved me from doing the same thing, you did it first."

We went into the White Woman's Cave while the maids laid the lunch on the smooth, springy grass. More guests had been invited than I expected, but Cheneston had not yet turned up.

The walls of the White Woman's Cave are smooth and dark, and the sea purrs through it and licks the smoothness with a little kiss, and the light comes through the roof and lights the water so that it gleams like pale green fire.

It was wonderful and a little uncanny, like a theatrical scene, and it was cold in there, and the daylight and the sunshine seemed far away.

"And to think a woman lived here for years," one of the girls said.

"Her lover died and she wanted to get away from the world."

"How romantic!" said another girl. "Look, here's Major Morrison and Captain Cromer."

I think she thought that much more romantic. As she spoke Grace Gilpin moved. I don't know whether she did it purposely; perhaps the instinct to frame her beauty is implanted in her. She stood so that the green light from the water, fairylike and phosphorescent, held her in a shimmering glow of opalescent fire. She had taken off her hat; her coronet of fluffy, tendrilly gold hair shone like a halo, and her dress gleamed like a mermaid's sheath; she seemed neither of heaven nor earth, a betwixt and between creature made for man's undoing.

"I wish I were an artist, Grace!" Cheneston said.

Her pretty silver laughter floated out.

"Oh! Why?"

"He would paint you as a spirit of the cave," Major Morrison said.

As we came out into the sunshine I saw that Cheneston was very white. He gripped my arm.

"Pam," he said, "I must talk to you, child. I'm nearly off my head!"

"Lunch," I said feebly. I was suddenly inexplicably scared. I seemed to have

brought the atmosphere of the cave into the sunshine with me.

"Confound the lunch!" he said violently. He turned to Grace. "I must talk to Pam," he said. "May we have a quarter of an hour's grace?"

"Oh—certainly."

"Begin without us if we don't come."

"Very well," she acquiesced.

"Come," said Cheneston curtly.

So he had been thinking things over, and he was going to ask me about Walter Markham, and tell me that he and Grace had discovered they cared for each other.

I wondered if I could manage to look merry as a marriage-bell with a funeral going on in my own heart. I discovered that to be a quaint little thing with a snubby nose has its advantages: you're not expected to furnish a big display of facial emotion.

"I can't walk any more," I said. My knees were trembling; I felt horribly, unromantically sick. It was my great hour, the hour of my renunciation, and I had no great feelings, only little squeamish, physical ones.

"Sit down, then," he said.

I sat down with a flop, under a crab-apple tree that was like a flame, and there was blue sky above us and golden bracken all around us, and when it swayed we could see the sea, like slits of turquoise through golden fretwork, and it seemed to me the stillest place in all the world.

"Pam," he said, "my mother is very ill—dying," and he turned from me and buried his head in his hands.

I sat very still. It was so absolutely unexpected, and by-and-by I clutched the bracken on either side of me and I prayed inside myself: "Don't let me go on feeling so dreadfully like his mother—or I shall put my arms round him and cuddle him!"

And I knew then that I loved Cheneston with the only sort of love that is real and lasting—I loved him as if he were my little, little boy. I loved him when

he was my strong, decisive young knight. I loved the mystery in him, and the strength of him that I didn't understand; but I loved him best of all, most sweetly and dearly of all, when he was just my hurt boy.

I don't think I see things romantically. I suppose it's in keeping with my appearance. I never see love as something that is remote and cold and miles away. I would go to the ends of the earth with Cheneston, and I would love to nurse him when he's got a cold. I would love to go to his house in Norway, but I would also adore to make toast in front of the kitchen fire with him if the maid was out. I suppose my love is homely like myself, but it seems to me that once you've got love you can't tuck it up with the stars when you order dinner and help make the beds—you don't even want to, it makes you absolutely enjoy ordering dinner and making the beds, that's the splendid part about it.

Love makes ordinary every-days, full of ordinary every-day tasks, into high-days and festivals full of little sacred services and missions.

"Pam," he said. He lifted his head and looked at me. "I'm sorrier than ever, my poor little soul—since last night. You see, I always thought that Walter Markham cared, but I didn't know that you did. Kiddie, you're such a splendid little sport, and I'll help you all I can; but if you can't stick it, dear, I'll understand."

"Stick what?" I said.

He put his hand over mine, and I felt it tremble, and somehow the trembling made me very strong.

"I'm an only son," he said. "I think I've been rather a bad egg, debts and cards, wandering over the face of the earth, a sort of rolling stone, running away from my niche. It's worried the poor old mater. You see, Cromer Court is rather a topping old place, family for generations and all that. She wanted me to settle and marry and all that. Grief of her life that I didn't."

"Yes," I said.

"She's splendid, absolutely fine. Pam, somebody has told her—about us. She wrote me a wonderful letter this morning—it broke me up—about us."

"About us?" I said idiotically.

"Someone wrote to her and told her I was engaged to you. She wants to see my future wife. She's dying. I had a telegram from my cousin down there. Her letter was so wonderful. She said she would die happy knowing. Pam—is it too much?" His eyes were full of tears.

"It's nothing," I said. "I understand."

"Pam!" he said. "Best woman in all the world! Pam, there's something about you—it upsets all my theories; I seem just a pretty helpless sort of rotter."

I tried to find the right words to say.

The bracken swayed, a delicate, golden trellis broken here and there into turquoise like a mosaic; the birches shook their golden spangles; and the little harebells, their stems invisible in the welter of gold, swayed like jewels on invisible chains: all the world was wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, and its wonder was throbbing in me, and all I could say was:

"When is the next train?"

VIII

I am writing this in my bedroom at Cromer Court, at a Queen Anne desk, and by-and-by I am going to climb in a Queen Anne bed to watch the firelight flicker on the white panelled walls, on the quaintest chintz I have ever seen covering the chairs and the great divan, and fluttering like restless wings over open windows—pale green linen, the colour of young leaves, with bunches of white-heart cherries scattered over it.

I feel simple as a milkmaid and good as a nun in this dear old house, and I have never felt so happy. It is a precarious happiness. I should think the wives of the husbands home on leave feel it the last two days. It is a sort of happiness that freezes you while you are hugging it to you because of its warmth, and turns and rends you while you are caressing it—painful and beautiful at the same time.

I saw Cheneston's mother to-night for a few moments.

She is like one of those exquisite miniatures in the Academy that no one but miniaturists ever stay long enough to examine; her skin is like a child's, her eyes are Cheneston's eyes grown infinitely gentle—those queer hazel eyes that look, in a miniature, as if the paint had never dried.

"So this is Pam," she said, looking up at me, and her voice is like Cheneston's, grown faint and gentle; it has the same curious quality that makes you feel thrilled, and causes all the little nerves in your spine to "ping" as they do at an exciting play. "My son," she said, "I am so proud—such a vain old woman!—proud that you should have won such a woman—the only sort of woman that could ever have held you, son."

They have no gas or electric light here, only candles in silver sconces. I looked up suddenly and saw the perspiration glistening in beads on Cheneston's

forehead. She took my hands.

"Pam," she said, "you're a wonderful little person—half gallant boy, half elf, and the other part sheer mother. The gallant boy in you will be his pal, the elf will keep him your eternal lover, and the mother—will keep him on his knees to you." She looked up at me whimsically, tenderly. "The Cromers are a woman's life-work—they run away for years and leave you to break your heart, and they come back and fill the hall with tusks and elephant-leg umbrella-stands, and expect you to go mad with them over the trophies. The elf in you will still the call of the wild in Cheneston, he will not dare to leave you, and the mother that broods in your quiet eyes." She turned to Cheneston. "You mustn't lose her—she's the one woman in the world for you—the only woman."

Then the nurse came back and signed to us to go.

Old Mrs. Cromer gave me a wonderful smile, and in that smile I suddenly realised how beautiful, how magnetic she had been. It was a smile of the most extraordinary and amazing happiness.

"Your father," I said, when we got outside, "your father went away from her?" I wanted to see if I had understood the significance of the smile.

"He took her," he said hoarsely. "She was his star, his goddess."

To-night we dined alone downstairs.

I wore my grey taffeta with the tiny bunches of pink apple-blossom and the little pink georgette fichu.

I felt that nothing else in my wardrobe was in keeping with the atmosphere of the Court.

Cheneston changed into ordinary evening dress. It was the first time I had seen him out of khaki. It sounds foolish and snobbish to say he looked a very gallant gentleman, as if I were trying to write an old-fashioned novel; but it is the only phrase that exactly describes him.

I felt an extraordinary atmosphere of noble sweetness, it seemed to throb through me. I was shiningly happy in the very inmost corner of my soul.

Cheneston is a perfect host; so many men leave off being the wives' hosts

after they have married them. I had a feeling that Cheneston never would.

We talked of books—funny, dear old-fashioned authors like Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell and Jane Austen. When we rose he looked at me.

"You, woman, are wonderful," he said tersely: "you have only blown in here, and yet you belong to it, you are of it."

"And to-morrow I shall blow away again," I said.

"And to-morrow you will blow away again, he acquiesced.

"Can you imagine Grace Gilpin here?" I said suddenly. "Can you imagine her beauty in this setting?"

"It is unimaginable," he said curtly.

"She is beautiful," I persisted. I had an idea that my words must come sobbingly, because my heart was sobbing.

"She is the most beautiful thing I ever saw," he agreed. "They are bringing us coffee in the drawing-room."

I think the drawing-room is the biggest room I have ever been in; it is so long and narrow; the walls are white panels, and the carpet pale grey, and the chintz is the same grey with a little fierce blue lobelia bobbing about on it, and there is priceless blue Chinese porcelain everywhere, and a wonderful and enormous grand piano, and there were great bowls of white jasmine everywhere.

I sat down at the piano and ran my hands over the keys, and Cheneston spoke.

"Pam—please don't sing. I—I beg you not to sing."

"I won't if you don't wish it."

"Thank you."

But after they had brought in the coffee old Mrs. Cromer's nurse came and begged me to leave the door open and sing. I looked at Cheneston.

"Yes," he said. "Tell mother Miss Burbridge will sing." Then he looked at me; his face was very white. "Can I fetch you music, Pam?" he said.

"No, I don't need it, thank you."

He opened the french-windows, and the air that blew from the sea and the

red fields of Devon swept into the room in a cloud of jasmine scent, and through the diamond panes I saw the stars twinkling—and suddenly I lost Pam Burbridge and the pretty room. I became something that had kinship with the stars and the hot scent of jasmine, something that was houseless and homeless and free; I walked beside Cheneston through Elysian fields, I talked to him and had no need of words. We were mates, we who had never been lovers.

I stopped. I was quite alone, and someone was rapping on the floor, and I heard the nurse's voice over the stairs. "Miss Burbridge, will you come?"

I went slowly. I was trembling and a little afraid.

I found the old lady sitting up in bed, and Cheneston with his arms round her supporting her at the back.

"Pam," she said, "I was frightened, dear—so frightened. I had to send for you. You and Cheneston had lost each other—I heard it in your wonderful voice, child, I saw it in the boy's face when he came to me. What is it? What is it?" she looked at us piteously. "I feel something is there. I know it! Something that shouldn't be there! I feel it!"

"Nonsense, dearest," Cheneston said.

"There is," she persisted. "I am frightened for you both. Why do I fear you losing each other?—you who were made for her, and she who was made for you."

"You are nervous," he said. "You are worrying yourself unnecessarily."

She caught his hands.

"I am afraid for you, my dears," she said. "Cheneston—let me see you married before I go. Let me be quite sure you have not missed the supreme happiness."

"We cannot do that, mother—there are many things to be thought of."

"White satin and bridesmaids, wedding bells and marriage settlements do not make a marriage, children. Pam, what is the obstacle?"

"Nothing," I said desperately. "Nothing."

She looked at Cheneston; Cheneston laid her down very gently.

"You are worn out, dearest," he said. "You must rest now."

She did not refer to it when I saw her the next morning. She looked frailer than ever by day, a wraith woman with jewelled eyes.

I breakfasted alone; a thin, fine rain drove against the windows like sea-spray. In the garden I could see the michaelmas daisies bowed, great clumps of amethyst, the chrysanthemums gleamed tawny red. Autumn was later here, but in the rain gold leaves kept falling, and the pearly white of the jasmine from the front of the house strewed the path, and here and there the petal of a passion-flower, like an exotic beetle's wing.

I put on my little rainproof coat and sou'-wester and went out.

I walked through the orchards, where wet apples gleamed like jewelled fruit wrought in ruby and emerald, where yellow plums hung like waxen fruit, and the late pears like amber ornaments. I walked through little spinneys where the wet gold made your eyes ache. I saw the red fields waiting for ploughing and fields heavy with the late crops through the rain like a soft coloured map: and I saw the sea, queer and grey as an aged woman, through the trees—and as far as I could see it all belonged to the Cromers, and the words of an old poem came to me, something about "a goodly heritage, bound by the sea and netted by the skies."

I stopped to speak to a little child, and it answered me in the soft up-and-down of the Devonshire dialect; and I knew I could have been happy with Cheneston here—not with the satisfied happiness of those who possess a chippendale drawing-room suite, a parlourmaid, and a car, but happy as those who inherit the earth. I could have been happy with a glorious, keen, swelling happiness.

I turned home. It smelt as fresh as if all the earth had been newly turned that morning, and as I turned a sunbeam struggled through and flickered uncertainly.

I found a letter waiting for me—two letters, one from mother and one from Grace Gil pin.

Mother's was characteristic. She hoped Mrs. Cromer was a nice woman and approved of me. Were the estates extensive? Had Cheneston a big rent roll? The

end was typical. "I cannot see what you gain by postponing your marriage. It cannot enhance your value in Cheneston's eyes. It is always as well to remember that the world is full of girls, and an engaged man is not regarded in the same light as an engaged girl. I shall be very glad to hear that you have come to some sensible decision. Your father writes that he has struck an expensive mess, and that he has not been lucky at bridge lately. He is playing "pirate"—it has superseded auction; try to learn it if you can, social assets are never to be despised."

Pirate at Cromer Court! I smiled.

I sat down on an old oak chest in the tiled hall and opened Grace Gilpin's letter. The sun was shining brilliantly now; the twinkling raindrops that fringed the windows and hung glistening on the strands of jasmine were reflected on the red tiles in wriggling little shadows, like tadpole ghosts. I took off my wet mackintosh and my little sou'wester, and fluffed up my hair with my fingers.

Grace's letter was very much to the point.

"Walter Markham is home wounded. He is at Lynn Lytton Hospital, Long Woodstock, Near Manchester. What are you going to do about it, Pam?"

Well, what was I going to do about it?

What *could* I do about it—except pray that Cheneston didn't get to know until he didn't want me any more.

I sat down stupidly and stared at the letter.

I had a sudden vision of Grace writing, her golden head bent, seeing in the missive and Walter Markham's presence in England the chance of freedom for herself and Cheneston; believing Cheneston loved her and I loved Walter Markham; believing that our engagement was just an emotional mistake, never guessing it wasn't an engagement at all!

A great many engagements are emotional mistakes. Why not ours?

Cheneston came out of the door on the right, I suppose it was his study. He held a letter in his hand. He was in khaki again, and he looked ill and worried.

"Good-morning," I said. I noticed he had his Burberry over his arm, and his service cap and a small dispatch case under his arm.

"You've heard?" he said.

"What?" I said stupidly, and my heart began to beat very rapidly.

"That Markham is in England—wounded. Oh! Pam—you shan't suffer, because you've been so splendid and wonderful. You ought to be with him; but he'll spare you, and understand when he knows."

"Where are you going?" I said desperately.

"Up to Lynn Lytton to tell him I understand that you care for each other, that you've told me all about it, and that we're not engaged to each other. To tell him how absolutely superb you've been, and why you're here. My God! Pam, do you think I'd ever forgive myself if I mucked up your life, dear!"

IX

"You—you mustn't go to Walter," I pleaded desperately. "I—I want to go myself."

I had one thought; it was so vivid that it seemed like something dressed in scarlet floating on a grey sea of little thoughts and fears all inextricably mixed—it was that I must get to Walter Markham first and *explain*.

"Pam," Cheneston said gravely, "are you afraid of my being clumsy and not making things clear to him?"

I nodded. I couldn't speak. The idea of Cheneston being clumsy, Cheneston with his fine, fierce, almost uncanny insight into things, had me by the throat.

"I see," Cheneston said slowly. "Little Pam, I hate to think I have made you

afraid for your happiness even for one minute. You are so worthy of happiness—so absolutely great! He'll understand, dear, how simply priceless you've been to—come here. He's bound to understand." He looked down at me with fierce anxiety in his hazel eyes, he seemed desperately questioning his own belief in Walter Markham's broad-mindedness.

"I'll make him understand," I said. "Don't worry, I'll make him understand."

A sudden flood of fierce protective love swept over me. I wished for the hundredth time that I might be big and Cheneston little—ever so little—that I might take him in my arms roughly and tell him not to look like that. I felt I could go to Walter Markham and explain everything, I could sit by his bedside and skin my very soul—but I couldn't help feeling, even then, it would be easier to do something bigger and less painful, something more actually physical than soul-skinning.

I never found it very easy to show my feelings to people; the bigger they are the more tightly corked they seem. I often wished for, and sometimes I've cried because I haven't, little frothy feelings that bubble over into little easy caresses and kind words and pretty compliments and easy things like that. It rather hurts me to get to the surface, I seem to have to tug from such a long way down.

"I'll drive you to the station," Cheneston said. "I shall tell mater you've got to go up to Town on business."

"I'll tell her," I answered hastily.

I knew she would sense Cheneston's disquiet; women lie to women better than men to women. She took my departure more quietly than I had anticipated. There was a lovely expression on her dear face—it was as if her soul was smiling to itself while she was grave. She patted me with her lovely soft hands.

"And you will be back early to-morrow, dear, funny little girl? It's odd," she said, "I see a cloud between you and Cheneston. When I first saw it I was frightened, but now I know it is not made by your hearts—it is only a cloud your silly brains have made, child, and it will go. You are going to dissipate some of it

to-day."

"Yes," I said, "I am."

It was true. In that at least I didn't lie. I was going to explain the truth to Walter Markham, and I was going to make it easy for Cheneston to marry Grace Gilpin.

She held my hand against her face. The charm of her was like a beautiful, strong current—I can't explain; all the things I long to express and cannot, the things I suffer so for my inability to voice and demonstrate, seemed gloriously easy. I put my arms round her and pressed her face to mine. I loved her with a dear and full love.

"My little Pam!" she said. "My dear, funny little soul!" Then she said sharply and fiercely: "Oh, Pam, it's cruel if we women who are sent into the world with out-size hearts and feelings meet the wrong men! I met the right one!" A note of triumph crept into her voice. "And Cheneston will understand that in your dear tiny body is a soul and a heart too big and strong. People call it the artistic temperament—it isn't really that, it means that something that is shut up and sealed with other people until they get to heaven where nothing can hurt is left open—maybe it's left open accidentally, maybe it's meant—and those people suffer more than the rest of the world, and are more gloriously glad, and out of the glory and the travail of their souls they give to the world wonderful music, or wonderful pictures, or wonderful books. *And they are not like other people*, Pam! They are very great and very little at the same time, and not one in a thousand can understand how life hurts, and how glorious it is when it is glorious. Cheneston will understand; that is why you and he must never, never run away from each other—you dear, funny little soul!"

Then I heard Cheneston calling.

We drove to the station almost in silence. He took the high dog-cart, and we could see over the hedges; they sparkled with thousands of raindrops, and the late dog-roses seemed like phantasies wrought in vivid coral, and blackberries like black diamonds and rubies jewelled the world, and every bird seemed

singing and every cricket chirping for sheer gladness of the newly washed day.

He told me he had had an extension of leave.

I was so happy. I have never had a feeling that I did not want to share—I can't explain. I just want to pass on every bit of loveliness that comes into my life. We passed lots of children picking blackberries, and I could have cried because I wanted to kiss them so, or give them something, or just tell them I thought they'd get the loveliest lot of blackberries I had ever seen—because I was up in the world, sitting above the hedges with Cheneston.

We passed a little girl who had spilt all her blackberries and was crying, and I took off a little gold bracelet I had on and flung it to her.

I shall never forget the ecstatic look in her small, grimy face.

"You see," I said quickly, "I'm sorry if you think I'm mad, but—but she was crying, and now she is happy. She will be awfully happy all day."

I'm never sorry for the impulsive things I do, but I am nearly always sorry because people don't understand. It seems to me like rubbing all the lovely bloom off a butterfly's wing just to demonstrate that it is a butterfly.

"I don't think you're mad," he said, smiling.

If I had had anklets as well as bracelets I could have given them away this morning. He helped me down at the station; he was just a little constrained, so I knew he was feeling tremendously full of feeling, just as I was.

"Modern life doesn't give a fellow much of a chance. I have rather absurd notions about you at this minute—I should like to be Sir Walter Raleigh, and put my cloak down for you to walk on. You don't know how humble you make me feel, Pamela Burbridge."

I felt myself sort of melting towards him.

"What can I do to show you how splendid I think you are?" he said. "You wonderful small person!"

And something inside me wanted to say, "Exchange all this chivalrous gratitude for just a tiny bit of love"; but I sat on the something's head *hard*, like a good girl, and I said:

"Why, you can get me my ticket; the booking-office is open now."

There is nothing more cheerless and depressing than going to a place you don't know and arriving all alone. If only there is a pillar-box in the vicinity where you have once posted a letter, or a tea-shop where you bought chocolates, it establishes a feeling of intimacy. At Long Woodstock I felt an alien of aliens, an Englishwoman in a foreign country.

I swallowed a cup of tea and had a wash on the cheerless northern station; then I took a mouldy old fly that smelt of innumerable weddings and funerals, and set out for Lynn Lytton Hospital, and as I travelled past the rows of grey stone houses I felt myself shedding my high-flown courage of the morning feather by feather, until I became the reserved, nervous little coward I had always been. Furthermore, I began to feel very sick.

I feel with intense earnestness that Charlotte Corday and Nurse Cavell and Christobel Pankhurst, and those wonderful women who fought in the Russian Army, could never have felt sick as I can feel sick, or they would have stopped in the middle of their heroic deeds and gone home to bed.

I can think of nothing more unheroic than to feel sick on all the great and emotional occasions of your life.

We seemed to climb Lynn Lytton, it was high up on a hill, and by the time we reached it the birds were twittering their benedictions and the first stars were netted in the tree-tops.

I told the cabman to wait, and climbed some steps—they seemed like the steps of the Monument.

I am glad the door opened at once, or I would have turned and bolted down them like a rabbit.

I must have been feeling pretty bad, because there was some late clematis clinging to one of the pillars of the portico, and they seemed to me in the twilight like large and particularly meaty spiders.

I want so badly to write of the heroic sentiments and thoughts I had, but I was sick, and the clematis looked like fat spiders, and I wanted to run away. That

is the honest truth.

"I want to see Captain Markham," I told the sister who came to the door.

"It is after visiting hours," said the sister gently. "Are you his wife?"

"No—he hasn't a wife."

"His sister?"

"No—just—just——"

"I see," said the sister very gently. "Please come in," and I saw that she did not see—she thought that Walter Markham and I had sentimental relations.

She took me into a little grey distempered room hung with orange curtains, and sent the matron to me. She reminded me of snow, so deep that it could never, never melt—kind snow, deep enough to be soft.

"Are you Pam?" she said.

I looked up, startled and taken unawares.

"Yes," I said briefly, and stared.

She sat down; she was a large woman, and there was a soothing placidity about all her movements.

"I thought so," she said. "Captain Markham has been calling for you night and day—if we could have ascertained your other name we should have sent for you, but when he was conscious he said there was no Pam." She looked at me thoughtfully. "So you are Pam," she said.

I nodded. "But it couldn't have been me he was calling for. I—I—why?"

"He is very ill," she said, "that is why I am going to let you see him to-night. I do not think he will live till morning."

I saw that she told me purposely without preamble.

I sat numbed. I could only repeat stupidly: "But it couldn't be me he wanted."

I felt as if she were passing to me some imitations of her aloof snowiness. I, too, felt a little unreal.

"I think you have turned up at the right moment," she said. "Please come, and don't be surprised if he doesn't know you." She put her hand on my shoulder.

"Don't give up hope," she said; "nothing is certain—not even in science and surgery."

I think it is in one of Tennyson's things there comes the phrase "into the jaws of Hell"; it crept into my mind when I saw Walter Markham.

I have never seen anything so terrible or so pathetic. He was conscious.

"Why, it's Pam!" he said weakly. "Dear little, funny little Pam." Then earnestly, with a terrible effort to concentrate. "Are you real?" He took my hand and felt it tremblingly. "You're real," he said.

The matron left us alone.

He was in a tiny room by himself, the blind was up and the big window looked on to a great hill, like the hunched shoulder of a giant.

"Why did you come?" he said. "Why did you come?"

I knelt beside the bed. I was trembling and I felt sicker than ever.

Above the titanic shoulder of the hill the tiny bare white shoulder of the moon shrugged itself into view.

"I can't!" I pleaded. "Not now."

"My dear, you must. If I go out to-night I go out—wondering."

I began to tell him. I told him all about meeting Cheneston in the searchlight, and how the mistake about our being engaged had started. I told him that Grace Gilpin and Cheneston loved each other. I told him all about somebody writing to Cheneston's mother and telling her that Cheneston was engaged to me. I told him how fearfully ill she was, and that I had gone to Cromer Court because she so passionately wanted to see her son's future wife.

"But why did you come to me?" he said.

The moonlight was sweeping down the hill to us now, an incoming tide of limpid silver. I looked out of the window desperately.

"I told Cheneston you and I cared—I wanted him to feel free to marry Grace. This morning he—he was coming to you—Cheneston was—he was so afraid you would misunderstand my being at Cromer Court, and think I had ceased to care for you. Also this morning I had a note from Grace Gilpin telling

me you were here, asking me what I was going to do about it."

"And they—Grace and Cromer—believe there is some understanding between us, that we grew to care for each other when the four of us went about together?"

"Yes," I said desperately; the hill suddenly seemed to tip towards me, it seemed to carry with it the smell of iodoform and disinfectant.

And then the amazing and paralysing thing happened: Captain Markham suddenly put his arm round me.

"Well," he said, "isn't it true, Pam! My God! child, isn't it *true*? Don't I love you?—you ridiculous child, you wonderful, wonderful thing with your strange crooked little mouth and your great eyes! Oh! Pam, my little, little girl—didn't you know I cared!"

The hill tipped back into place like a giant sitting back on its haunches, and the silver tide seemed to ripple down it to ultimately engulf us.

X

Love is a cloak and is made in different styles; some people wrap themselves tightly in it, and there is only just enough to go round them: it is their cloak, and if Cupid himself, dimpled and in his birthday suit, came and sat beside them on the top of a motor-bus in the rain, they wouldn't go shares. For other people Love is a large cloak, voluminous and overlapping, and capable of sheltering, warming, and comforting quite a lot of people round the hem.

My heart ached for him as I sat beside him. He held my hand very tightly with his thin fingers, almost like a frightened child, and I had a feeling that he feared to drift out and I was his anchor, and I wished that I could drift out with him.

"Pam," he said once or twice, and I had a feeling as if he were saying "Mother," and I answered, "Yes, dear," and by-and-by he smiled and whispered again, "Pam."

The matron kept coming in and out. Once or twice she fed Walter Markham with a teaspoonful of brandy, once she brought me a cup of bovril; she seemed just the same as when I first met her hours ago, like warm snow immeasurably deep.

"Human vitality is at its lowest in the small hours," she whispered. She looked down at Walter Markham. I looked at her. "I don't know," she said. "I don't know."

I sat on. It was so quiet in there—the world seemed like a very young baby asleep, the moonlight flooding over the hill to diffuse a sort of white holiness, an effortless tranquillity.

They had said that Walter Markham could not live through the night, and yet I was not sorry for him. I only wanted to be immensely good to him while he lived, to send him out happy.

"Pam," he said, "I sort of hear you singing—are you singing?"

"Perhaps my heart is."

"What songs, Pam?"

"Lullabies, dear, lovely, gentle lullabies."

"Not love-songs, Pam?"

"No."

"Love-songs suit you best," he said.

I tried to see the future, sitting there. I thought the peace and the moonlight might help me, it seemed to make things so beautifully abstract and impersonal that the planning hardly hurt at all. In all my plans I never contemplated Walter Markham living and loving me, and believing I had come to him because I loved him. I saw myself leaving the hospital and going back to Cromer Court. I knew that Cheneston's sympathy and gratitude would be my particular Garden of Gethsemane.

I wondered a little why Life and Love should always peck and beat and burn me, and I wondered for the first time without resentment.

The house surgeon came in; he wore a long white linen coat over pink and white pyjamas, and apologised for his costume, and I went and walked in the moonlit corridor with the matron.

"It will be a triumph if we save him," she said—"but it will be your triumph."

I looked at her, startled and perplexed.

"Then you think?" I said.

"Six hours ago the chances were a hundred to one against; they aren't now."

"Doesn't anything ever hurt you?" I said suddenly. "Don't you ever feel all twisted up with the beauty or the honour of things? Don't you find things cruelly lovely or hideously bad? Don't people and their ways make you writhe?"

"I haven't time," she answered tranquilly. "I'm always doing things or else I'm sleeping hard."

The house surgeon came out.

"Everything is extraordinarily satisfactory," he said. "I've tried a very small dose of scopolamin-morphine."

I went back and resumed my vigil. I did not feel at all tired. I felt a little aloof, as if I were sitting apart and critically watching myself.

I heard a bird twitter, and then the stillness settled down tighter than ever, and then the bird twittered again and a tinge of light, pallid and uncertain, crept up behind the hill.

The dawn was coming, the little bird voice had heralded it.

The little tinge became pink; the stars seemed to blink baldly, like eyes without eyelashes.

The bird world stirred, a blackbird trilled a few delicious notes. I saw that a few trees fringed the hill; the dawn peeped behind them, rosy and fresh, like a child peering from behind its fingers.

The hospital was waking up, too; I saw a woman cross the dewy orchard to

a cowhouse in the corner carrying milk-pails and stool.

The scene, which had been changing and intensifying every second, suddenly remained stationary; it was as if Nature suddenly stepped back to view her work—she had fashioned a golden world with the help of the sun, gloriously, dazzlingly gold, golden apples and golden trees, golden thatched roofs; it blazed beyond my window.

Walter Markham opened his eyes.

"Topping day," he said weakly. "Hullo, doc!—I didn't go out, you see."

"Go out! Havers! man, I'll be dancing at your wedding before the week is out!" The gruff Scotch doctor, shaved, and clad in khaki and alert, laughed. "You're doing fine!"

"Wedding," Walter Markham said weakly. "I shall be all right? My arm? There—there isn't any reason why I shouldn't marry?"

"None on earth."

He looked at me. There was a radiancy in his eyes, a sort of throbbing happiness.

"O God!" he said, "I'm so happy!"

The house surgeon took me away; he was babbling foolishly, and he looked like an excited rocking-horse; he had a long narrow face and wide nostrils.

"Splendid!" he kept saying. "Absolutely top-hole! Splendid! Good chap, yours! Splendid!"

"He's going to live?" I said. Suddenly I felt very tired, as if my eyelids had been pressed back.

"Of course! The hospital must have some of your wedding-cake. Oh, splendid!"

The matron came down the long corridor.

"Will you take her down to the visitors' room, doctor?" she said. "I'm just going off duty. I didn't tell you before, Miss Burbridge, but your mother is here—she's been here nearly an hour."

Mother was sitting with her back to the orange curtains. As I entered the

room I became conscious of the faint scent of jasmine with which I always associated her.

"How did you know I was here?" I said involuntarily.

"I wired to Cromer Court that I must see you, and Cheneston wired back that you were away in the North for a few days. I was puzzled. I showed the letter to Grace Gilpin, and she suggested that you had come to see Captain Markham. Why did Cheneston let you come, and why did you come?"

"I wanted to and he wanted me to," I said.

I thought it very clever of Grace Gilpin to guess and send mother here, it made it so much easier for Cheneston and her if I could be caught with the man I was supposed to be in love with.

"I knew that you knew no one in the North; but for Grace I should never have thought. I didn't believe I should find you here."

"But you have," I said wearily. "What do you want?"

"Pam," mother said baldly, "are you in love with Walter Markham?"

I wish I didn't feel so horribly tired and done. I knew I could never be subtle and evasive with mother, somehow she always knocked over my defences and surprised the truth in me. She had a way of taking my deepest and most secret feelings by the scruff of the neck and dragging them ruthlessly into the light—almost as if she wanted to see if their ears were clean.

"No," I said, "I'm not in love with him."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"He wanted me."

"Did he send for you?"

"No."

"Pam," said mother, "you are hiding things. Are you?"

"Yes," I said.

"I am going to find them out, there's something here I don't understand at all. Why did Cheneston let you come to see another man?"

"He thought I wanted to."

"You did not want to," mother said. "You are crazily, madly in love with Cheneston, that is obvious to anyone who knows you."

"Is it?" I said. "I hoped it wasn't. I did it for that purpose, you see, because I am crazily, madly in love with Cheneston, and he is crazily, madly in love with Grace Gilpin."

"He used to be before he met you," mother put in. "I did not know——" she paused and looked at me. "I think you'd better explain right from the beginning," she said decisively.

"Do you?" I countered quickly. "I am afraid it will be rather a shock—you see, I'd never met Cheneston until that night father came home and told you I was engaged to him. He has never for one minute intended to marry me."

"But you are staying with his mother as his future wife."

"We could neither of us help that. It was Fate."

"Look Here, Pam, cease to talk like a penny novelette! Explain things."

"Very well," I acquiesced. I sat down and explained things from the very beginning, fully.

"And so you're engaged to neither of them?" mother said when I had finished.

I felt as if my very soul had been dragged out for public inspection. I was busy packing it back again.

"No," I said. "Now please tell me why you came?"

"I came because I have to get five hundred pounds from somewhere at once."

"I haven't fifteen shillings, mother; why come to me? and what is it for?"

"Your father," answered mother; her lips were compressed. "He must have it immediately. He owes to his C.O.—and there are complications. He—" she paused and frowned—"he was always a vile bridge-player. His declarations were crimes."

"Yes," I said. "But why come to me?"

"You must borrow it from Captain Markham or Cheneston."

I stared at her! This morning she seemed no longer handsome, her elegance was the only thing left to her—and that seemed just a physical and social mark.

"It is impossible," I said, "absolutely! Captain Markham is desperately ill!"

"Then there is Cheneston."

"Absolutely impossible!"

"He would give it to you in gratitude for the way you've played the game. If you don't you force me to take it with my own hands—you see, we should have had the money but for the amount we have spent on you lately."

"What would you do?" I said hoarsely.

"I should just tell Cheneston that you adored and worshipped him, and if he didn't marry you he would utterly spoil your life. I should say you were too proud and noble to come yourself."

"You wouldn't do that," I said. "Mother—at least play the game!"

"Two can't do that," she said. "Your father does that. I pay the price."

XI

I used to wonder, in the days when love and marriage seemed very beautiful and interesting and tremendous food for speculation, but utterly removed from reality and *me*, what the woman felt like when the question of money first cropped up, whether it spoilt the idealism and romance a little, upset the atmosphere like a Ransome lawn-mower introduced into the Garden of Eden.

I used to wonder how I would like asking Cheneston for a new hat, and I always came to the conclusion that I would sooner wear the brim like a halo when the crown fell to pieces from old age than ask him.

I suppose if men love you frightfully they make the question of finance easy; but I think my experience with mother and father has rather terrified me, they made the mutual finance discussion so utterly degrading—and I think listening to them has given me a nervous distaste, a sort of hyper-sensitive shrinking from the discussion of ways and means.

It has always seemed so infinitely easier to go without things.

When I sat in the train and thought of asking Cheneston for five hundred pounds to pay father's card debts I felt sick, and I felt the real me starting to close up tight, like a sea-anemone when you poke it with your toe.

Mother travelled to Town with me.

She questioned me about my farewells to Walter Markham—she has a serene way of questioning. I think she would have made a mark in the Spanish Inquisition.

"Did he show much distress at your leaving him, Pam?"

"I don't know whether he quite realised. He had a sort of relapse, and he was only partially conscious. The doctors thought me callous. The one like a

rocking-horse told me I had no right to leave him. I said it was essential I should return. If he could have kept me there by force he would."

"I understand from the sister that this sudden relapse makes it more unlikely than ever that he will pull through, apparently the next twenty-four hours are the test."

"Yes."

"Your nails are not very carefully manicured," said mother.

I laughed; it was so like mother to obtrude utterly unimportant trivialities, to bring you crashing to earth with some ridiculous trifle.

"You will send the money as soon as possible, Pam."

"I absolutely can't do it, mother!" I said desperately. I had a sudden vision of myself asking Cheneston for money.

"You must," mother returned hardily; she spoke casually, as if she were reminding me to send a postcard to notify her of my safe arrival. "I shall not hesitate to go to Cheneston and tell him you are frantically and desperately in love with him, and what may have been jest to him is grim reality to you, and unless he marries you he'll ruin your happiness. I shall be able to say it sincerely because I know it to be true. You are going to tell Cheneston that Walter Markham quite understands why you are staying at Cromer Court, that you have unlocked your lovers' hearts to each other."

I spoke rudely to mother for the first time in my life, my fear of her was swept away by a sudden passion of rebellion.

"Oh, shut up!" I said furiously. "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!"

She looked at me curiously, her lips a little compressed.

"We should have trained you for the stage," she said. "There is an abandon about you at times that would do better for the theatre than real life—where it is merely crude and bad form."

"It seems to me that everything real and vital and honest, all forms of emotion and feeling, are bad form!"

"Nearly all."

"Except borrowing from your friends and threatening your daughter."

Mother shrugged and looked out of the window.

"Unless your father can produce five hundred pounds within the week he will be forced to resign his commission, in which case he would get no pension, and as he has no influence and no brains the prospect of our future does not intrigue me."

I, too, looked out of the window; a light frost had crisped the leaves, and though there was no sun the landscape was so full of gold that it glowed and vibrated with apparent sunshine. The fields were full of workers, women in coloured linen overalls guiding ploughs, and allotment-workers on their patches, and the little cottage gardens were gay with autumn flowers; and I wondered if there were undercurrents in all these apparently simple lives, if the men and women out there in the brilliant golden world had furtive motives and social masks like mother and I.

It is never safe to wonder for more than three seconds whether everything is what it seems unless you are over fifty—when you are under fifty it hurts, but when you are over fifty you know that you can never alter other people, only yourself, and you know that your disillusionment is half your own fault.

I felt a sort of strangling bitterness. I was very grateful for it, because I knew that out of it you can grow a sort of hothouse don't-care-ness that makes it possible for you to do horrid things and not feel horrid until long after they are done.

I caught a train to Cromer Court almost at once.

Mother saw me off.

She stood at the window and chatted charmingly. I am sure that all the people in the carriage were enchanted with her personality. Mother is so fastidiously, almost contemptuously refined and cultured. Had she lived in the time of the French Revolution she would have been gloatingly guillotined by the revolutionists for the very way she breathes.

"And you won't forget?" she said lightly.

"I won't forget," I answered.

One of the most disappointing things in life is that you never go back to a place—even if you have only been away twenty-four hours—feeling exactly the same as when you left it. You can recover your old poise, but the going away has altered you, you make a dozen little mental readjustments on your return—you see things with the aid of the new experience you have gained during your absence. Life is one continual process of readjustment with people, places, and things, and ourselves.

We marvel at the chameleon—his feats are nothing to the feats of a perfectly normal human.

I went back to Cromer Court a different person.

I met Cheneston as a different person.

I know that he was different.

Nothing stands still.

"How is he?" he said at once; and I answered:

"They think he will pull through."

"Oh, Pam!" he said; and then "Thank God!"

"Mother came to the hospital," I told him as I climbed into the dog-cart. "Grace Gilpin seemed to think I would be there. It was rather funny her thinking that."

"I told her—I wrote," he said.

I smiled; the don't-care mood was flourishing. I could feel it steadily swallowing up my little qualms and pitiful sense of honour and dignity, they were vanishing in it like débris thrown on thoroughly efficient quicksands.

"How is your mother?"

"Longing for your return. Oh! Pam—the tremendously strong feeling she has for you makes it doubly hard for both of us. You explained to Markham—everything?"

I nodded.

"And they will telegraph news of him here?"

"Yes."

He lifted me out of the dog-cart at the door of Cromer Court; his face looked grey.

"God bless you," he said, "for coming back to us!"

XII

We dined in Mrs. Cromer's room.

She insisted and would take no denial.

I thought she seemed stronger and more lovely than ever; she was full of whims and loveliness. She seemed to sparkle with happiness. She sent us away, she wanted a consultation with the cook.

"It is to be a very special dinner," she told us. "And Pam is to go and lie down. Sweetheart, have you a white frock?"

"No," I said, "only pink, dear, pink and grey."

"You must wear white," she said. "I am bubbling with schemes for my dinner of dinners. I have a frock for you, Pam. Nurse shall bring it—you'll look like a funny little Dutch princess in it, stepped out of an old Dutch fairy-tale book. Now run away, Honey."

Nurse was perturbed when she brought the frock; it was of softest ivory white satin, made in Empire style with a wealth of real point de rose lace.

"She will insist," she said, "and the doctor said she was to have her own way as much as possible—but I don't know. I don't know, I'm sure. She says you are to wear this pearl comb in your hair, and these little white satin shoes studded with pearls. Aren't they ducks? Are you going to pile your hair on the top of your head like those funny old pictures downstairs? I wish the doctor would call again. I think he'd veto this dinner idea, but I'm not sure it wouldn't upset her

more to be thwarted than to give it. She's wonderful."

There are moments in everyone's life when you feel as if you're taking part in an unreal play; there comes a sudden feeling of panic, as if you did not know your part. I got it that night when I was dressing—and yet there was a dreadful thrilling, electric sweetness about it all.

I was excited, my fingers and my toes tingled and my spine felt creepy; and when I brushed my hair it cracked with electricity, and a funny little nerve near my ear that always betrays itself when I am excited began to wriggle.

I suppose there is something of the joy of forbidden fruit in it—but it is *wonderful* and gorgeous to have Cheneston look at me like a lover, even though I know it is only to satisfy his mother.

I think it is awful the way we women can kid ourselves about love, drench ourselves in a sweetness that isn't really there, get intoxicated with a joy that exists only in our own imaginations.

If I had been going to the altar with Cheneston I couldn't have been more thrilled than I was when I entered Mrs. Cromer's room.

Cheneston rose. He was looking very white and bewildered; and suddenly the fact that he was nonplussed made me feel almost cruelly gay and confident.

"Pam!" Mrs. Cromer said. "Oh, boy! boy! isn't she the very sweetest thing that ever happened?"

"Surely," he said.

There was a round table laid for two, with a white linen tablecloth with a border of real lace eight inches wide, and in the centre stood a huge white and gold Venetian glass basket filled with lilies of the valley and maidenhair fern.

"I am going to have a little white love-feast all to myself for my two children," she said.

I caught my breath—somehow I had not quite expected just that.

For a dizzy moment I wondered what she would say and do if she knew the truth—that Cheneston and I had never been engaged and would never marry.

Everything we had was white, from the artichoke soup to the iced pudding.

It was a wonderful meal, exquisitely served; it tasted like straw to me—and it would have fascinated an epicure. There was champagne, the only note of colour on the table; and Cheneston and I talked at high tension.

To me it had a peculiar and appealing joy; I could say to Cheneston some of the things I felt, and he accepted them as part of my rôle in the astonishing little farce; and from her bed the old lady watched us, an indescribably happy expression on her face.

And Cheneston said things to me—things to remember and hoard in myself, and not the knowledge that they were just "part of the game" could rob them of their wonder for me.

The atmosphere was extraordinary—to me it felt rather as if we were all being charming and polite, and listening for an explosion at the same time; and there were moments when the explosion seemed inevitable. It seemed as though it *must* come.

At last she let us go—and yet I was loath to.

As I was crossing the hall a maid came to me.

"The boy brought it nearly ten minutes ago—so I kept him. I didn't like to disturb you, miss."

I took it. It was from the matron of the hospital. "Patient doing well. Out of danger."

"No answer," I said.

So Walter Markham was going to live, and I had promised——

"Good news?" Cheneston said.

I handed him the telegram, and he followed me into the drawing-room.

"Oh, Pam!" he said. "Then you can marry him and be happy! I wish I could do something just to show my enormous gratitude to you."

"Do you really mean that?" I said. I swung round on the music-stool, on which I had seated myself, and smiled up at him.

"Of course I do."

"Then give me five hundred pounds," I said.

Cheneston lit a cigarette.

I do think the girl who has been brought up among a pack of brothers and a crowd of male cousins misses something. When you start knowing men for the first time in your twenties—when your critical faculties are at their very keenest—you do get a fearful amount of astonishment and thrills out of the appalling difference there is between their ways and the ways of your own sex. It's a never-ceasing source of wonder to you.

I had startled Cheneston by a totally unexpected demand for five hundred pounds—and he lit a cigarette.

A woman would have played with something, probably the blind-tassel—Cheneston was standing near the window—repeated my question, and tried to read my face; the man did none of these things. I think cigarettes are to men what dangly things about dresses, and bracelets, and hairpins are to women—something they can play with and readjust when something has robbed them of their poise and sang-froid. I notice that nervy women and shy women often have scarves and bead necklaces and things they can finger in stressful moments.

"Would you like it in notes, or will a cheque do?" Cheneston asked quietly. "If you will take a cheque I will give it to you now; if you want notes I am afraid you must wait until I can drive in to the bank."

"I want it in notes," I said.

I wanted him to ask questions, to show enormous astonishment and interest. I was furious with him for being so calm.

"I think you owe me something for coming here," I said crudely.

I wanted to rouse him at any price. I don't know quite what there is in feminine make-up that makes you suddenly want to hurt the man you love—and somehow the more aloof and patient and wonderful they are, the more you want to scratch. It's only when they get a bit peevish and earthly that you suddenly leave off and feel repentant. If a man, especially a husband, ever patted me on the head, I should *bite* him; and I don't know why, but terribly gentlemanly men always make me feel horribly unladylike.

I don't think I'm a nice character—but I don't think people who feel things terribly, and get themselves all sort of churned up with intensity, are very nice—not what ordinary people call "nice," anyway. I think ordinary people like to feel "sure" of you because it's a great compliment when it is said of you, "She's always just the same." They advance on you with the same trustful confidence that a kitten does on its saucerful of milk. I own it's bad luck to find a saucerful of dead sea, or a minute proportion of fire and brimstone.

"I owe you more than five hundred pounds," Cheneston said quietly; then he looked at me for the first time. "Pam," he said, "you've altered so lately. Are you happy?"

"I'm a twittering bunch of sunshine," I said.

I felt black inside with bitterness and rebellion.

"I'm glad," he answered quietly, "you didn't just strike me that way."

I wanted to cry like a silly kid, and yet I wanted to be a woman of the world and sting and say clever, lashing things full of prettily covered up spite.

I wanted to feel old and hard and bad, and I could only feel young and inadequate and tearful and sniffy, and I hadn't even got a handkerchief.

I opened the piano. I was thinking how horrid it is to have our parents thrust upon us, and have to do humiliating things for them that put you in a false position with the people you love best. My brain was a tangled bunch of rebellious "whys?" all squirming like blind kittens.

"Do you mind if I strum?" I asked.

"Please do," Cheneston answered courteously. "Will my smoking worry you?"

"Oh no," I said carelessly, and what I wanted to say was, "Don't you even care enough to ask me why I want that five hundred pounds from you? It's positively insulting of you just to give it to me without a single query as to its destination. How dare you—dare you—dare you think I am the sort of young woman who calmly asks for five hundred pounds for pin-money! Your silence implies that you *think* I am."

The long narrow drawing-room looked so beautiful, so dainty, so fresh. The candle-light was reflected softly on the white panelled walls; the fierce little blue lobelia on the quaint grey chintz seemed to stand out, and the moonlight coming through the french diamond-paned windows lay in pools on the grey carpet like stagnant water—the room was so big that the mellow candlelight never spread to there.

It was all so big and grave and stately that I felt like an angry mosquito—and yet fate had behaved rottenly to me, assigned to me an ignoble part.

I chose the wonderful love-song from "Samson and Delilah," and I forgot Cheneston, I forgot the room, and the blue dragon-pots of late madonna lilies. I forgot myself—only the scent of the lilies stayed and drenched me with indescribable sweetness, and I seemed to struggle down into the soul of Delilah and understand why she hated and yet loved Samson for his strength, as I hated and loved Cheneston for his.

Cheneston was sitting in the arm-chair, gripping the sides, and when I stopped he lit another cigarette.

I could have smacked him.

"Thanks," he said, "it's a wonderful thing."

I played the opening bars of "Thank God for a Garden."

I felt like a worn-out mosquito.

"I'm afraid you're tired, Pam," he said when I had finished. "You look awfully tired."

"I think I'll go to bed," I said. "My head is rather rotten."

"I'll ask nurse to bring you an aspirin."

"No thanks—it's just sleep I want. I shall be all right to-morrow."

"I'm sorry your head is bad."

"I often get headaches."

He held open the door for me.

I wondered if he were going to refer to the five hundred pounds.

"Good-night," I said slowly.

"Good-night," he answered gravely. "I hope your head will be better in the morning."

Outside the door of old Mrs. Cromer's room I paused. I had a passionate and overwhelming desire to go and tell her the truth. I was in need of counsel. I craved advice. I felt that nothing in the whole world could ever be right again. The future terrified me, and all the people in it—Walter Markham, mother, father.

I felt I would give anything to go and lay my burden on someone else's shoulder.

If I felt like a mosquito at all, it was when it feels and fears the approach of winter.

XIII

I woke at midnight with an extraordinary feeling that I was the last person left alive on earth, a consciousness of desolation and isolation terrifying and indescribable. I used to get it when I was a child, and I would have gone into a lion's cage for company. I believe it is some form of nerve pressure medical men can't explain.

I got up shivering and put on my little silk kimona.

I felt I had to go to Mrs. Cromer—I had to tell her all about Walter Markham, who was getting better and who thought I loved him and wanted to marry me, and Cheneston who did not love me. I felt I had to tell her about Grace Gilpin—the very lovely person Cheneston cared for.

The impossibility of struggling through the immediate future alone and unadvised appalled me; chiefly I was terrified about Walter Markham, the man to whom I had been so horribly unkind in my kindness, the man who believed I

had gone to the hospital to see him because I cared. I had fostered the belief because he was dying—and he had lived, and all the hopes I had raised and the delusions I had tenderly fostered lived with him.

My life had been the life of a little child until my meeting on the shore with Cheneston that day, all things ordered and planned for me, and now I was suddenly called upon to play a rôle almost verging on drama, requiring subtlety of which I was quite incapable, finesse of which I could have no knowledge.

I crept, shivering, along the panelled landing, past Cheneston's door. I knew the nurse was sleeping in the little dressing-room attached to Mrs. Cromer's.

I prayed Heaven she was asleep as I cautiously opened the door.

The night-light on the washhand-stand burned steadily; it was reflected in little spots of primrose light on the mahogany furniture.

I crept to the bed.

The old lady was lying very still. She looked extraordinarily lovely and fragile, and a tiny smile curved the corners of her sweet old mouth, as if she had fallen asleep in a network of happy thoughts.

She seemed so small in the big room full of furniture.

I realised as I knelt beside her how much I loved her, what an ideal she would always be in my life.

I softly kissed her hand, kneeling there, and then I realised it held a letter, and I caught sight of the words.

"I fall asleep happily because I leave you to another mother—little mother Pam of the big eyes and the big heart. The child loves you, Cheneston——"

I touched her face; it was cold as ice. touched her hand.

Cheneston's mother had fallen asleep happily.

"Oh, my dear!" I whispered. "And I came to tell you—and now you'll never know that I wanted to be his mother, and he wanted another sort."

I don't know how long I stayed there. I seemed very close to her. She was so

beautiful, the loveliest old thing with that little tender smile curving her lips; the peace of her, like the loveliness, was indescribable.

I wondered if in heaven there were things to mother and love. I hoped so; her life had been so full of warmth, so radiant with humanity. I thought of her extraordinary quaintness, the delicious way she put things—I heard again her laughter.

I looked at the letter.

"The child loves you, Cheneston."

He mustn't see that; last words have a tremendous significance, and we credit those who are near heaven with super-insight; just those few words might set him questioning and wondering, might get between him and Grace Gilpin.

Had I right to rob him of her last message?

To leave it there would be to give myself a chance; to take it would be to destroy my last.

I took it very gently from her fingers.

I would not destroy it, it was not mine to destroy; I would cherish it very carefully, and after a while I would send it to him anonymously.

I realised that the need for my presence at Cromer Court was over; I was free to go, my part was played and the curtain was down.

Exit Pamela Burbridge from Cheneston Cromer's life.

I staggered to my feet.

It is easy to do dramatic things, to make your exit; but to slip away when you want to stay, when your whole heart is aching to stay, to make exits so silently and unostentatiously that the ones you long to miss you hardly know that you are gone—that is the hardest of all.

I knew before I left Mrs. Cromer's side that I was going to run away—away from Cheneston and Walter Markham and mother and father.

I had to. I couldn't stay and face things out.

To begin somewhere else all over again.

It was the explanation I was afraid of, explanations to mother, to father, to

Cheneston, to Walter Markham.

I was running away from Explanations.

I wrote a little note and pushed it under Cheneston's door, where he would find it in the morning.

"Please send the five hundred pounds to mother.—P.B."

I packed a few of my serviceable clothes in a handbag.

I had five pounds in notes and fifteen shillings in silver.

The dawn was just breaking when I left the Court.

The world was wet and cold.

I looked back at the house from the other side of the wrought-iron gate; its shuttered windows seemed like hostile eyes.

I felt a little like Eve expelled from the Garden of Eden—I wondered if her expulsion had taken place on a wet morning before the sun was up.

XIV

I had read "Alone in London" stories, rather wonderful, poignant things. I remembered two, one by Horace Newte and one by Peggy Webling. They had gripped me at the time. I had been so lonely in my real life that I always found it easy to get inside the skin of the heroines I was reading about, and for days my lonely walks with Pomp and Circumstance across the wet moors and through leafless lanes were no longer lonely or desolate—they had become the streets of the greatest capital in the world.

If you have sufficient imagination and a cheap lending library near you your world is never unpeopled. I often think that the library is the one thing that

prevents prisoners going mad—you couldn't go mad if you were allowed O. Henry once a week and Jane Austen to read yourself to sleep with.

Two things I hadn't expected about London happened: it was radiant with sunshine when I arrived, and no one took the faintest notice of me.

I was a little nonplussed; then I found a boarding-house, not in Bloomsbury, where the wallpaper was not flowered and the atmosphere was not cabbagey; the landlady neither stared at me nor asked questions, and the maid was fat and brisk and efficient; and there was a parrot in the basement who said "change for 'Ighgate" all day long; nothing could have been less sinister or more normal and cheery.

I cried myself to sleep the first night—it seemed the right thing to do; but I left off in the middle because I couldn't think of anything more to cry about.

I had a dear old lady in the room next to mine. She knocked at my door just as I was falling to sleep.

"My dear," she piped, "if you should hear a raid warning, if you would just tap the wall. We all go down into the cellar—and one likes to prepare a little."

"Prepare?" I said.

"Hindes," she whispered apologetically, "curlers—you know—one doesn't like——"

I fell asleep smiling on my first night in darkest, dreadfulest, naughtiest London.

The next day I started to hunt for work. I was paying forty shillings a week, and had only four pounds ten left of my money.

I found it at once. I took the money in a cinema booking-office. It was dull, and I got thirty shillings a week; I took it because it gave me the entire morning to hunt for more remunerative work.

I met with no adventures in my hutch. I was sworn at several times for giving the wrong change, and the gorgeous gentleman in Prussian blue and silver uniform, who waved the people to their seats inside, gave me a packet of butterscotch. But the more remunerative work did not present itself. I was

untrained. I could not type or do shorthand, and I had no previous experience. The men who interviewed me were most civil, they suggested Clark's College or Pitman's. I was no good to them.

I had to change my boarding-house. I went to one near Kentish Town, it was very clean, and the landlady had been a professional cook. I boarded with the family, and a Polish Jewess also lived there, a skirt hand in a big West End tailor's. She used to press my skirts.

I wondered if anybody was advertising for me, or if there was any fussation going on. I did not think I was worth a whole detective for one minute. I did not attempt to hide. I had read somewhere that to live an ordinary life was the surest way to escape detection.

I wondered, as the months slipped by, if Cheneston had married Grace Gilpin.

I did not lose Cheneston. I could always step right back in memory into the days I had spent with him, days of infinite and dear delight.

I knew I loved Cheneston, that I wanted passionately to be his wife; that if he were to ask me to marry him I would marry him rapturously and thankfully, even though I knew he didn't care two straws about me and would need a photograph to remember the way I did my hair.

I believe the "if she be not fair for me, what care I how fair she be" sort of people are very, very jelly-fishy.

If you care for a man you care for him, and that's all there is to it; the fact that he cares for someone else or doesn't care for you doesn't alter your feelings, it only makes the pain and hurt of it an artistic success.

I wish I was jelly-fishy in my feelings for people. If I were I could say of Cheneston, "I can't stick here! I'll float on." But I'm a barnacle creature where I love. I shall be Cheneston's girl even if I never see him again. My heart went from me when I first met him, and the doors closed after it and left a little hole. It will always ache, and I shall always know there is a hole where a heart should be—especially when I listen to wonderful music or see sunsets or little children

at play.

I shall never, never have another heart to give away; some women have theirs on bits of elastic so that they can always pull them back and give them away again; a man sort of holds it until somebody else wins it, like a challenge shield or a football cup.

I gave mine entirely and unconditionally; I believe that time will cocaine the hole.

I look to time to do a lot for me in the healing and dulling line—all that the poets and the proverbs say it will. Time never fails you—when all else fails, you can always kid yourself you haven't given it long enough to perform the miracle.

I don't ever want to see anyone I knew in the old life. I feel that the Pamela Burbridge of those days is dead, poor thing! but she has a more exciting time than most defunct people, because every night I shake her up and make her live over again her enchanted halcyon days by the sea and at Cromer Court.

She lives in sunshine and happiness for an hour or two of memory every night, even if she has to die off while I go and do my day's work.

Life is really awfully funny and un-understandable. Why are we given feelings we've got to squash?

Are we big if we squash them and little if we let them grow?

I wouldn't squash my feelings about Cheneston.

I simply love them.

I couldn't squash them even if I knew I would grow such a huge and splendid national character, and such a power for good, that they would give me a gold-leaf Pamela Memorial in Kensington Gardens with a lightning conductor, and ten lines in the *London Guide Book* all to myself.

XV

I have lost my job, and the little Russian tailoress presses my skirt every day and has lent me a pound.

Russia doesn't seem a lucky country for me; the cinema proprietor was a young Russian Jew, and when the August orders about Russians serving came up he got five months' exemption, and now he's joined up and the cinema has been turned into a Y.M.C.A. canteen. I help them two nights a week.

It was funny; the other day there were a lot of men expected in. It's just outside the station, and often we get officers, and an officer in Walter Markham's regiment came in. I knew it was his battalion. The officer was just home on leave. I asked him if he knew Captain Markham.

"Used to be under him," he said. "Went West, poor chap! Died in a hospital somewhere up North."

"Are you sure he died?" I said.

"Positive. He had a sudden relapse. Ballyntine, one of our senior officers, was pipped at the same time and got sent to the same hospital. He was there when Markham died. He's rejoined since; he's out there now. Why? Did you know Markham?"

"He was a great friend of a friend of mine."

"Jolly decent chap," the young officer said.

I thought it such an accurate epitaph. He was a jolly decent chap. I turned away because my eyes were so full of tears.

If he had recovered and I had married him I could never, never have made him happy. I should have been one of those wives who suddenly look at their husbands with vacant eyes, and have thoughts they cannot tell when they are asked—you see, Cheneston Cromer is with me for keeps, the memory of him will never go, and I know that often I should wander away from Walter with Cheneston, and be sorry to come back, and Walter was too great a dear to treat like that, a very gallant and honest English gentleman.

Regina Merolovitch has found me a "job" at twenty-five shillings a week.

She says it is only temporary, and soon I shall find something better; but I don't know. I am only "honest and willing," and the world seems overcrowded with honesty and willingness unadorned.

I "do anything" for Madame Cherry, who has a little cherry-coloured shop with grey fittings and purple hangings in the West End. Sometimes I am in the showroom, sometimes I make tea for the girls, sometimes I pick pins off the showroom floor, sometimes I "match" things at the big London stores, sometimes I take things home to customers.

I marvel at the prices people pay for clothes. The people who fluff in and say, "I must have some little cheap thing, madame," seem to pay most and buy most.

Madame made a wonderful "little cheap thing" the other day—black tulle over blue tulle, and all of it edged with blue beetles' wings, and blue tissue round the waist to match.

It was done in a violent hurry because "he" was coming home on leave; "he" was staying at the Savoy with her for a few days, and then they were going down to their country seat when he had seen about his kit.

She paid for the girl's "hurry."

Madame never breaks her promises.

She had promised it by seven, and I was to deliver it at the Savoy.

"And wear your best coat and skirt; and if it is fine you can wear that blue velour hat that has just come in, but don't put any pins in it," said Madame. "I can't have people carrying my boxes and going to the Savoy looking anyhow."

Madame's boxes are French grey with bunches of cherries on them, tied with gay cherry ribbons, and "Cherry" written across. They are a part of her general scheme.

I had one of them on my arm when I went to the Savoy.

I like the Savoy; it never smells foody, and the orchestra chats to itself instead of shouting at you. I like an orchestra that chats to itself, and then you can talk without feeling you oughtn't to.

I was very, very tired, and I did feel an awful alien in that place. It's not personality or breeding that makes you feel at home in big restaurants and hotels—it's just clothes. It doesn't matter if you've given your twelve country seats to the country for hospitals, and you've got the newest thing in Rolls Royce's nestling on the kerb outside; if you've got the wrong clothes on you feel as out-of-place and insignificant as a flapper at a silver wedding.

I found the right suite and delivered the box; an ecstatic young woman rushed out in a violet kimona with black storks on it. I think my appearance rather nonplussed her, it's horribly embarrassing to wear decently cut clothes sometimes.

"Are you Madame Cherry's daughter?" she said. "Well—it's frightfully decent of you to bring it—er—will you have a cocktail or anything?"

I went down the lift with a huge box of Fuller's chocolates tucked under my arm.

I adore Fuller's chocolates.

As I stepped out of the lift at the bottom someone grasped my arm and said:

"Pam! Pamela Burbridge!"

It was Grace Gilpin.

She looked simply gorgeous.

She wore a cloak of dull velvet the exact colour of her hair, with a great skunk collar. There was a sort of laughing radiancy about her, as if she were bubbling and dancing with happiness.

I wondered if she knew that my people didn't know where I was. I thought I could trust mother for that. I was right.

"I met Mrs. Burbridge not so very long ago," she said. "She was most mysterious and injured about you, Pam. What have you been doing? She seemed quite martyred. I couldn't get anything out of her. Have you got married, or gone on the stage, or what? Won't Cheneston be surprised! You must stay and have dinner with us and tell us all your misdeeds."

"Cheneston?" I said.

People were drinking their coffee and staring at Grace, just as they always did.

"Yes, he's home on leave and staying here. Pam—didn't you know I was married?"

"Yes," I lied swiftly.

I knew that Cheneston was behind me. I knew it without turning. I felt it; once more the old thrilling excitement, the tension of expectancy, stirred in me—for another woman's husband.

"Where is that husband of mine?" Grace said in her familiar, high, sweet, laughing voice. "I do want you to meet."

I wanted to say, "He's behind me. You don't know it, but *I* do. I can feel it all down my neck and spine. He belongs to you, but you can't feel it. I'm glad you can't feel it. Glad! Glad! Glad!"

Instead I said:

"Good heavens! I was forgetting! I'm going on to dinner, and my husband's outside in the car. I went up to see some friends, and said I wouldn't be a second."

"You married, Pam! I never knew that!"

"I must absolutely fly!" I said.

"But, Pam—I'm so interested. Who did you marry, Pam? Hang it all! I'm thrilled to the core—you can't run away like this! Besides, Cheneston's here, and —— Pam, *why did you break off your engagement to Cheneston?*"

"Must fly!" I said.

I caught sight of Cheneston. He had not recognised my back, he was waiting to come forward and join his wife.

That queer, quizzical, bored look was on his face. He's the only man whose thoughts I ever pined to know.

I would have given the world to have been able to stop and say:

"What *are* you thinking about?"

I heard Grace say in that queer, lilting voice of hers:

"Oh, bother! Cheneston, you're just too late! That was Pam Burbridge—only she isn't any more, she's married, and her husband is outside in a car."

And as I hurried out into the courtyard a woman getting out of a car said:

"Look at that woman; isn't she wonderful!"

Of course it was Grace; if it had been me she would have said:

"Look at that funny little moth-eaten rabbit of a girl hurrying away as if there was a stoat after her. You really do see the queerest people everywhere nowadays."

XVI

There is a street that leads round the back of the Savoy Theatre. I ran down that. I don't know what it was like. There were great inky splotches of shadow, they seemed almost glistening wet in their impenetrable blackness. As a rule I mind these pools of darkness. I cross roads to avoid them, and if I must needs pass through them I hurry very quickly and my heart seems to beat in my throat.

This night I did not care; mad kaffirs, Landrus, the denizens of Soho, might nestle in their dozens in the shadows of London—I didn't care.

You can get so absolutely don't-carish that the things that normally terrify and appal you fail even to rouse a flicker.

I reached the Embankment.

I love the Thames Embankment. To me it seems a thousand times more romantic and wonderful than the canals of Venice or the crocodile-y charms of the Nile. The water is so sad and so wicked—the wisest, wickedest thing in England, flowing greyly between the great palaces of commerce; floating little ships and dirty hulks; holding up to the sunset, in places, a tangled mass of sails, a veritable fretwork; the humbler and less ostentatious commerce of the world flows through its veins, dear furtive, dirty, splendid, muddy old river!

I looked over the parapet. Once in my dim, funny little far-away youth, when impressions sort of bedded themselves down on your mind, I had driven in a hansom with mother and father from Blackfriars to Waterloo; and all the electric signs over the warehouses on the bank had streaked the water with colour, and all the Embankment had been fringed with electric lights, and I had cried with the beauty of it, and mother and father had been curious as to the cause of my emotion, and then angry because I wouldn't tell them—but how

could I tell them I was crying because somebody's whisky advertisement looked so lovely on the water.

I remembered as I looked in the water and thought how jolly it is to be able to feel sad and romantically melancholy about abstract things, and let yourself go, when the real sorrows come there is always something to prevent you from letting yourself go.

I wondered why I wasn't feeling more awful about Cheneston's marriage to Grace.

I wasn't feeling at all. I was numbed. The pain hadn't begun to work.

An old gentleman passed me and then came back. Instantly the remembrance of London novels I had read flashed into my mind. Was he going to offer to adopt me, or help me save my soul, or thrust five pounds into my hand.

"You're not thinking of—popping in?" he said.

"It hadn't occurred to me," I answered.

"Good," he said, relieved. "It's cold, and damn silly. It just occurred to me. You seem interested. I can't swim."

"Neither can I," I said.

"Then it *would* be damn silly," he said. "Good-night."

And then I heard Cheneston's voice.

"Where is your husband?"

"Ah," murmured the old gentleman, "now I see."

"Oh," I said stupidly, "he—he didn't wait."

"I followed you," Cheneston said. "I had to know things."

"What things?" I said feebly. I was beginning to feel the pain now, the numbness was passing off; and I knew that I was going to suffer.

"I want to know when you married, and if you are happy—and why you ran away like that, and if you loved Walter Markham. Pam—I'll be content if you'll only answer me one thing, is he good to you? Have you married the right man? Pam, I've got to know."

I knew then how much it hurt; my throat felt like a funny little unoiled, unused machine when I spoke.

"Tell me if you are happily married?"

"I?"

"Yes."

"I'm not married at all."

"Grace," I said, "Grace said——"

"She's married. She married Clay Rendle. She was always in love with him."

"She was in love with you."

"Never! I was in her confidence, that was all. Clay Rendle's wife was a homicidal maniac. She died a week after mother. But, Pam—I'll go away, I'll go straight back to the Savoy now, if you'll just answer 'Yes' or 'No.' Pam, are you happily married?"

"No," I said.

He looked down at me, he was very white there was a queer look on his face, as if his feelings were bunched up inside him and he was sitting hard on the lid.

I wanted the lid up.

"I'm not married," I said.

The lid flew up.

I did not know a kiss *could* feel like that. The Embankment sort of slid away from under it and us. I think it lasted for hours.

We looked at each other blankly.

"Pam," he said shakily, queerly, "you kissed me—did you know you kissed me?"

I nodded. I felt as if half of me stood there and the other half was slowly unwrapping itself from the kiss.

"You kissed me as if—as if——"

"I know," I said.

"I didn't think that any woman in the world could kiss like that," he said. "My God! I didn't think it! Pam, are we both crazy?"

"Yes," I said.

His eyes began to flicker and twinkle, those curious hazel eyes, not brown, not yellow, and not readable.

"I want things explained," he said, "and yet I don't want them explained. You are sure you aren't married?"

"Quite," I said.

"Then, Pam, will you marry me? Oh, Pam!—listen to it—you funny, exquisite little person! Listen to it!—doesn't it sound gorgeous!—Heaven!—*you* married to *me*! Did you ever like anything in the world as much as the sound of that, my sweet?"

"No," I whispered.

He put his face down to mine. I was trembling and crying; his face was wet.

"I love you so!" he whispered. "I love you so's I could eat you, and yet I'm scared to touch you—that's *how* I love you, you exquisite baby thing!" He laughed and kissed my hands. "I'm plum crazy with happiness," he confessed. "You'll have to be sane for the two of us. What shall we do, sweetheart, what shall we do?"

"Walk on—and I'll explain things."

"And every time we come to a shadow I'll kiss you."

"Only big ones, then. Which way shall we go?"

"Towards the Houses of Parliament."

"Why?"

"I see a shadow," he said.

I have always been scared of shadows, but if all the murderers and thieves in the world nestled in the shadows that night, I did not know. I did not care.

I did not see.

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