

PENGUIN BOOKS

THE STARS GROW PALE

英国文学



KARL BJARNHOF

COMPLETE 3/6 UNABRIDGED



*Some other Penguins are
described on
the remaining pages*

L. P. HARTLEY

A Perfect Woman

1398

Isabel Eastwood is married to Harold, a serious-minded accountant, and lives conventionally and uneventfully with her husband and children in a south coast town. Into their lives comes Alec Goodrich, a minor novelist to whom Harold's knowledge of income-tax allowances proves useful. To Isabel, Alec stands for romance, and she dreams of being his Egeria.

The story centres round the conflict between Suburbia and Bohemia, though the characters do not always remain on the expected sides. It is a witty, ironic, and compassionate study of individuals in modern society.

The Go-Between

1306

The hero of this novel is a boy of twelve. In the summer of the year 1900 he pays a visit to a school friend at a country house in Norfolk, and there becomes involved in a drama between three grown-up people which brings tragedy to one of them, and to the boy himself temporary loss of memory and a lasting distrust of life.

Besides being an exciting story *The Go-Between* is an acute and sympathetic study of a mind on the threshold of adolescence confronted by manifestations of adult behaviour which it is not equipped to understand.



J. D. SALINGER

The Catcher in the Rye

1248

The Catcher in the Rye, Salinger's famous first novel, is a comic and touching story about a raw American adolescent. Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old, relates in his own words the story of what happens when he runs away from his expensive boarding school and wanders round on his own in New York.

What does a boy in his early teens think and feel about his teachers, parents, friends, and acquaintances? Why does he want to break away from his social and domestic environment? There is no theme more typical of the present age than this, and Salinger presents it with vigour, precision, and refreshing wit.

'A real book, with its roots in living; untidy, witty, painful and pitiable' – *News Chronicle*

'Odd, tragic and at times an appallingly funny book with a taste of its own' – *New Statesman*

NOT FOR SALE IN THE U.S.A. OR CANADA



PENGUIN BOOKS

1430

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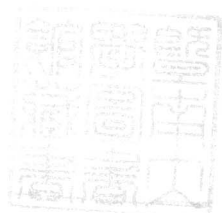
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KARL BJARNHOF

THE STARS GROW PALE

Translated by Naomi Walford



PENGUIN BOOKS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH METHUEN

J

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I

At the corner, the first of the chestnut trees was already waving a green leaf-hand. The chestnuts went with us all the way to school. One took over from the other. In the spring they shone; later they soughed with summer wind until it was autumn and they let their foliage fall. Their leaves came sailing through the air in tilted flight like yellow birds or brown-speckled birds, and settled on the road and on the paving-stones.

First you went through the gate and across the railway-line. Then came the churchyard and after that 'L. Pode's Home for Blind Women'. There was something arresting about all this; not always equally so, but you could never pass by unnoticed. For instance, the Home for the Blind had a stringed instrument over the front door. It sounded whenever the door was opened or shut, and the sound lingered, vibrating in the air. Strange. You could almost believe that that door led into a world quite different from the one you knew.

Behind the wide, tall window-panes facing towards Lange-linje there were usually two or three pale ovals. These were the faces of the blind girls who sat knitting in the window. They were always knitting. I can't remember a time when they were not knitting, and their knitting was always grey. It was grey and long. They were knitting infinity.

There were no flowers on the window-sills. Only a knitting-basket or two with balls of wool in them. And behind the faces a big, dark space, a room that looked quite empty. Yawningly empty and dark.

You could stand outside and look at the girls knitting in there. You could look at them just as if they were photographs. People often did; I wasn't the only one. It was like staring into the face of a portrait. Nothing happened.

Now and again you met the blind girls in the street. They were never alone. They walked in twos. Sometimes there were three of them: one in the middle who could lead the two others. They were going to the woods or coming back from the woods. Just making the time pass. The older ones walked in the churchyard. Nørre Woods weren't far from L. Pode's Home for the Blind, but the churchyard was nearer. In a way it was the blind girls' garden. They often went there, and there was always a sort of faded smile round their mouths; a smile that someone had forgotten to brush off and bury.

I was preoccupied by L. Pode's Home for Blind Women. I was obsessed by it – by the faces behind the big, dark panes. By the door with the stringed instrument. I used to stand at the corner, hearing it ring and vibrate in the air.

The little street ended in nothing. It ran to grass, as they said, and continued in a winding path over the meadows to the lime-kiln. In summer it was a dust-grey path through green grass flowered with daisies and cowslips. In winter the grass was withered and the path brown, with water shining on it here and there.

A fiery tongue licked out of the tall, thin chimney of the lime-kiln, flame-yellow at the bottom, then sulphur-yellow, then red. It turned into a pennon of black smoke which drifted away towards the harbour and disappeared between the masts of ships and the roof of a warehouse. There might be a smell of fresh wood from the ships that were being unloaded, or from the timber-yard. But almost always there was a smell of mud, from the ditches in the meadow and from the fjord.

I stood at the corner looking out over the meadow and the fjord and hearing the strings sound in the air. But I never dreamt that I might pass through that door myself. I never imagined for a moment that one day something might take me into those big, dark rooms. And if anyone had told me that I myself would one day become a photograph behind other window-panes, it wouldn't have frightened me in the least. I should have been interested. But nobody did tell me. Nobody even thought of it. And I didn't, either.

IN the beginning my mother was a night-nurse. Every evening at seven o'clock she tied a kerchief round her head, took her chip basket on her arm, and set off to the hospital. She always went 'in Jesus' name'. She tied on the kerchief, put darning-wool, old socks, and knitting in her basket and said,

'Well, in Jesus' name ... I'm off.'

She really meant it. It wasn't just something she said. If she was going into the town – to the shop, for instance, or for cream – she simply went. But if she was going far enough or for long enough to lock the door first and slip the key under the mat, she always went in Jesus' name. Also at nightfall when she lit the lamp; or when we went to bed and she put it out. There were rules about it; not always simple or easy to understand, yet as the years went by one picked them up. In the evenings, at any rate, when she was starting for the hospital, she always went in Jesus' name.

In the mornings when she came home her chip basket had bread in it which the sick people had been unable to eat. It lay well hidden under the socks and knitting and sometimes an old newspaper. Nobody must know that the night-nurses took bread home from the hospital; it was supposed to go into the pig-bucket. But we often lived on it. There were days when we had little else. And if we didn't need it, there were others who did. At any rate the pigs never had it. Bread was holy and one didn't throw it to pigs. It was eaten in Jesus' name. Those who wasted bread were sure to repent; one might need it one day, and badly. It had to be so, and was no more than justice. That was the curse of bread, and it would and should be averted.

Not many words were used at home. As with everything else, we saved them, and avoided wearing them out. One of us asked a question, and the answer was yes or no; seldom more. Silence could be oppressive, but not always. It might be quite

natural. One didn't notice it the whole time, or one noticed it only when it was broken by somebody coming: by a woman, perhaps, who wanted to borrow something – a box of matches, a drop of paraffin, or some coffee. Or by somebody who just wanted to talk; but no one went at it steadily. Not at first. And when she left nobody spoke. Stillness returned. It crept forth from every corner. It seeped out of the walls.

'Is the Hamburg boat unloaded?' my mother might ask.

'Yes,' said my father.

'So you got nothing more this week?'

'No,' he said.

'Other men can find work all right,' said my mother.

Silence.

Wind against the attic window. Cold wind perhaps, and rain slashing down the pane. The wind came from the hills round the town, from the woods and from the fjord. It souged in through the gateway and up the stairs, whistled in the key-hole or between the door and the worn threshold, and swept across the floor. Stillness.

Mother was idle only when she slept. She never knew what it was to sit with her hands in her lap. She had always to be doing something, busy with something, active. When she had rested for a few hours in the morning she got up and began her pasting. We made paper bags for the paper-mill. A man brought great stacks of paper cut by machine – a little pink-faced man without a hair on his head. He had eyebrows but no lashes. And everything he said was frayed in a funny way, because he hadn't any teeth; just bare baby gums.

The trains were our clock. We knew when they were due, either from the north or from the station. We heard the signal-bell at the level-crossing, and we heard them come. Sometimes they stopped some way up the line and hooted. The signals were against them. One could sit and watch them from the attic window as they went by: goods trains a mile long with rows of horses' heads in them, some with a blaze on their foreheads and some without. But they all looked just as sad.

There might be cows, too. The trains ran by and disappeared round the bend into the station.

Sometimes a trolley appeared, with men on it pumping themselves along. Or a single man on a hand-car. He sat rocking back and forth, back and forth, and was very busy.

'Was that the express coming in?' my mother might ask. 'As late as that, is it?'

When we worked my mother talked to me. She talked to me as if I were a grown-up person. People said it would make me precocious, but she had nobody else, and it only happened when she and I were alone making paper bags. Mostly in the daytime.

In the evenings when my father was at home he sat at the table too. He would sit staring in front of him, twiddling a matchbox between his fingers and smoking his pipe. He stared and saw nothing, and heard nothing but the stillness, which rang in one's ears. He was both absent and present. He sat remembering everything and forgetting everything. Then all at once he would get up, fetch the Bible, and sit down again to read it. He read the Book of Job and the Book of Judges and Ecclesiastes and Revelations. And having read for a time he folded his hands on the book and stared in front of him, hearing nothing. We could talk to him and he wouldn't answer, or only after a long time when we had almost forgotten what we had said. But for the most part he remained quite silent, with a deep, invincible distaste for the least little word, the faintest utterance.

Stillness except for the noise of the paper bags: the paste-brush and the paste-spreader and the paper under smoothing fingers. Perhaps a cart passed along the street, or footsteps sounded on the paving-stones.

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Some evenings my mother didn't have to go to the hospital. She wasn't needed there. She could stay at home. On those days we were ordinary. We were like other people, and as a rule we weren't. My father spoke Swedish. People couldn't

always understand him, and there were some who even made fun of him. It was embarrassing to have a father who spoke Swedish ... And then he was often out of work. And then my mother ... She was on duty all night and had to sleep in the daytime. Nobody else lived like this.

Every now and then she was able to stay at home, but most evenings she had to have her basket on her arm and her kerchief on her head by seven o'clock, and set off in Jesus' name. And if my father hadn't been at the docks and the weather was fine we would go with her. In Wood Street people were sitting out on their steps. Some had brought out chairs. The women knitted and chatted and the men smoked and chatted. There were children too, but none that I knew. We walked with mother as far as the hospital gate. There we halted and watched her go until she disappeared up some wooden steps, across an open veranda, and in through a door that shut behind her. Then we turned and walked home again. We almost always went by Lovers' Lane along the foot of Pilke Hill and the rest of the wood. The trees leaned over the path, and sometimes they would stick out a gnarled and twisted root-finger. One had to take care not to trip and fall.

When we got home my father sat down to read his book. It was a book in a red cloth cover. 'A Novel' it was called, and my mother said it in such a way that one knew it was something bad. That must have been why my father only took it out when he and I were alone. But he read it many times. He read it over and over again and never really finished with it. Perhaps he thought that the people in it would do something different between one time of reading and the next. He couldn't quite get it into his head that the action stopped when he shut the book and hid it at the bottom of a yellow wooden chest where it belonged.

'Yes, but is it true what it says in it?' I asked.

'M'well, true -' said my father; he too was less taciturn when we were alone together. 'True - the man who sold me the book said it was.'

We reached home and my father went back to his red book,

hoping perhaps that things would work out better for the people now – better than the last time he'd had it out. For it was a sad book. Before him stood the lamp, the little kitchen lamp with the green glass container and the brass shade, as shiny as a golden plate. It shed its light down upon the book. He read, and read so intently that one got no answer whatever if one spoke to him. He really didn't exist at all in the place where he was sitting. He was in another world.

Awake all night, asleep for a few hours in the morning, sticking paper bags in the afternoon, and then away again. But it was to end one day. It was to end sooner than anyone expected.

One morning when the night-nurses were leaving for home, the new inspector was standing by the hospital gate. He wanted to look into their baskets, just to check that all was as it should be. My mother was nearest, so she was first. Beneath her knitting and an old newspaper he found some bread.

'What's this?' he asked.

'Bread,' my mother answered.

'Did you bring it in with you last night?'

'No,' she said.

('I didn't try to lie myself out of it,' she explained when she got home. 'I don't steal or lie,' she said.)

'Then I must take it away from you,' said the new inspector. 'And I must tell you we shan't be needing you any more.'

He took the bread and tossed it under a hedge. The birds could have it.

'The birds have got to live too,' he said. 'Well, that was just a sample, and we'll let it go at that. But I'm warning the rest of you; you never know when I might do it again.'

My mother had to go with him into the office and get the money that was owing to her. When she came out the other women were waiting for her.

'You haven't dragged us into this, have you?' they said. 'We'll have nothing to do with it.'

'No,' she answered. 'I let him think I was the only one.'

'Oh,' said they, 'you let him think that, did you? Well,

maybe you're not always the only one, but today you were. He could have looked in my basket and welcome,' said one. 'And in mine,' said another. 'That's why we don't want to be mixed up in anything. You'll have to manage this on your own.'

My mother left them. She turned her back on them and went on her way without another word. But at home she cried. She knelt at the green ottoman in the bedroom and prayed to God and cried. She said it was a stain which He must help her to wash away.

'At this rate folk will think we're collecting stains,' she said. I thought it made us more like other people.

3

THEY wouldn't let me play with them. They said I was too stupid.

'If you're so stupid you can't see a ball when it's under your nose,' they said, 'we don't want you.'

I tried to explain that I could see a red ball very well. Of course I could see it, once I'd got my eye on it.

'Buzz off,' said Rudolf the beer-merchant's son. 'We don't want somebody who's too stupid to spot a red ball.'

It was a Saturday evening in the middle of May. I know it was a Saturday because there were so many people in the yard. Almost all the people who lived in the house were there; they stood about in groups, talking and laughing. There was a smell of ammonia from the dungheap in the corner and from the stables. Inside the stables in the twilight you could see the golden-brown flank of a horse and its thigh, a black tail, and two fetlocks. It kicked at the stone floor, and sometimes sparks flew out in the darkness, smelling of sulphur and iron. And there were thick cobwebs over all the window-panes and in the roof.

In the coach-house stood Klyver's wagonette and landau. The landau had the hood down; it was lined with blue cloth. Above was an empty dovecot, and through an open shutter you could look into the loft and see the long bar of the chaff-cutter. The cartshed had been swept and so had the lean-to, where the wagon and the cart were standing because it was Saturday.

The girls were playing hopscotch. They had drawn lines in the earth where there was no paving. Lydia and Gertrud and Else.

Lydia called to me to come over to them. She said they needed one more. She had blue eyes and bare arms. She caught hold of my blouse and pulled me.

'Come on,' she said, 'we're one short.'

There was no girl I liked more. Not in the whole world.

I hit her over the fingers so that she let go. I said,

'Leave me alone, can't you! I don't play with girls.'

Lydia's eyes went dark. Her mouth quivered. She had such a pretty little mouth.

'Leave him alone,' shouted Gertrud. 'He's no good. He's so stupid he steps on the lines and treads on your toes and bumps into you. Let him go and play with Silly Anders.'

Anders had come into the yard too. He was standing with his red knitted reins in his hands, staring at the girls and silly in the head.

'Will you play horses with me?' he asked. Anders was fourteen – or fifteen. He didn't know which. We used to amuse ourselves by asking him how old he was, but he didn't know.

'I haven't learnt it yet,' he said.

'Go away, Anders,' said Marie, who was Else's sister. 'Go away and be silly somewhere else.'

They always said the same thing.

'Go on, buzz off,' they said. 'It makes us sick to look at you.'

'Does it?' said Anders.

'Yes,' they said.

The red reins trailed on the ground. He held them in a full-grown hand, a hand which was big and soft and gristly. And