Lovewriting.co.uk

Opening extract from

Ursula's Arm

Written by

Penny Kline

Published by

Matador

All text is copyright of the author and / or the illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Prelims_PK_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:01 Page

URSULA'S ARM

Prelims_PK_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:01 Page 1

Prelims_PK_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:01 Page 1

URSULA'S ARM

Penny Kline

Prelims_PK_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:01 Page

Copyright © 2011 Penny Kline

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

Extracts from Dr. Marie Stopes' "Married Love" by kind permission of Dr. Harry Stopes-Roe and the Galton Institute.

Matador
5 Weir Road
Kibworth Beauchamp
Leicester LE8 0LQ, UK
Tel: (+44) 116 279 2299
Fax: (+44) 116 279 2277
Email: books@troubador.co.uk
Web: www.troubador.co.uk/matador

ISBN 978 1848767 348

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 11pt Palatino by Troubador Publishing Ltd, Leicester, UK

Matador is an imprint of Troubador Publishing Ltd

Prelims_PK_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:01 Page 5

For Paul

Prelims_PK_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:01 Page

Layout_Kline_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:12 Page

CHAPTER ONE

'It is inherent in human nature to have an inclination to consider a thing untrue if one does not like it, and after that it is easy to find arguments against it.'

(Sigmund Freud)

This is the story of me and Leo. Or is it me and Mrs Moberley. Or me and all the women like me. Me, me, me but until you understand yourself you are incapable of understanding anyone else. This is a story about love – and sex of course although when it all began "sex" was not a word that crossed my lips. So much was unmentionable: it was too frightening or too painful.

I remember hearing about a man who fell out of a train. It had reached the station but when he opened the door it was still in motion and he lost his balance and tumbled onto the platform. One of those freak accidents it must have been, because there was no serious injury apart from a finger that suffered nerve damage and ever after hung limply so that he was unable to move it at all.

The point of the story is that a few months later he asked his doctor to cut it off. It seemed he had no interest in the appearance of his hand, just loathed the floppiness of the finger and wanted it removed.

When I told Archie the story he gave me a quizzical look but made no comment about my arm. A not uncommon response, he said, but of interest to those

who concern themselves with the intricacies of the human mind. He smiled and I expected him to add, "and all that palaver", but he never did. I remember that.

Before he retired Archie was a specialist. Dr Archie Ingham. Even Muriel never calls him Archibald. I started working for him straight after my nineteenth birthday, which I had celebrated by having my hair cut in a bob, and I stayed for two and a half years, my first job, my only job.

In the beginning I was the slowest typist you can imagine but Archie was endlessly patient, he always is, ideal for a doctor, strong yet gentle, like the father in one of those comforting children's stories. And his height and his thick white hair add to his reassuring image

The first time he and Muriel invited me to *The Gables* Leo was away at Cambridge, studying Ancient History. "What a pity you've missed him," Muriel kept repeating, so it was no surprise when she invited me again one Sunday in July after he had returned home for the vacation. Looking back I should have been flattered because I think it was deliberate match making. We had tea in the garden and I felt a bit of a fool because Muriel is mad on gardening whereas I can hardly tell a lupin from a delphinium.

All the time she was showing me round the beds she hung onto her hat for fear a gust of wind carried it away. For some reason I can still recall that hat, greenish-blue it was, the shade that looks green against a strong blue but blue against a vivid green, and with a white bow on its brown velvet band. Even for nineteen-twenty-five it was old-fashioned and because the colour

was so strong it accentuated the paleness of her skin and the unusual colour of her eyes. Hazel with tiny flecks of yellow I think they are except I never look at them long enough to be certain.

Do you like flowers she asked, and of course I said I did, adding how the rain earlier in the day had left drops of water on the petals and made everything smell fresh and clean. She laughed, just being pleasant I expect, but the whole occasion was daunting and I felt a small flicker of fear, like being given a Maths test at school and knowing there would be problems I failed to understand.

Bear with me because Muriel is an important part of the story. I dislike jokes about mother-in-laws but she was archetypal – daunting, critical, possessive, although I can see now that everything we feel or do has a reason.

When we first met I thought Leo looked like Archie, but later I could see the likeness to his mother was stronger. His eyes are blue like his father's, but his nose and mouth are more like Muriel's and before her hair started turning grey I expect it was a lovely glossy chestnut brown, like Leo's.

I forget what I was wearing that day, something unsophisticated I expect, but kind Archie read my mind and said I looked delightful, and me being so ignorant about the plants helped to break the ice with Leo and later he wrote me a letter – nothing very romantic I'm afraid – and I wrote back, and he wrote again, inviting me to stay the weekend in Cambridge in a small hotel quite close to his college. And that was how it all began.

After he started work at Kingslade we found a little house in Highgate, well within walking distance of the preparatory school and only a mile or so from

Layout_Kline_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:12 Page

Hampstead Heath. I used to wonder if he felt he had failed to follow in his father's footsteps. No, not failed, a schoolmaster is a perfectly respectable profession, although I sometimes think his fascination with the Great Doctor, as he liked to call him, may have had something to do with wanting to please Archie because Freud started life as a medical man and it was not until he was almost thirty that his interest turned to psychoanalysis.

I know all this now, in fact I'm quite an expert on the subject – Anna O and poor Frau Emmy – but, amazing as it may seem when Leo gave me that first article to read I completely failed to make the connection.

It was a Saturday, it must have been because Enid had the afternoon off and Leo was worried about leaving me on my own.

'Put your feet up.' He pushed the hideous octagonal footstool towards me, the one that Muriel had provided when I first became ill. 'I won't be long.' Then he scratched at a mark on the Persian rug and it reminded me what a useless wife I was and how I must tell Enid to be more careful with the furniture polish.

'I need more typing paper,' he said, 'and while I'm at the shops I'll buy you some of those blackcurrant cough pastilles.'

'Boiled sweets are better,' I told him, 'something to suck. Oh Leo, I nearly forgot to tell you, yesterday Enid made me the most disgusting concoction, layers of onions and turnips covered with sugar, and the juice expressed into a jug. I hadn't the heart to refuse a spoonful.'

He nodded vaguely and I knew he was thinking about something else. 'I wondered if this might interest

Layout_Kline_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:12 Page

you.' He placed a sheaf of papers on the little inlaid table. 'I'll leave it here where you can reach.'

To be honest I had been looking forward to starting the new Dorothy L. Sayers, immersing myself in the world of Lord Peter Wimsey and his faithful manservant, Bunter. Still at least the article was in English – I was good at French at school but we never studied German – although, as I was soon to discover, it was pretty hard going and the translation probably contributed to its indigestibility, if there is such a word.

The American Journal of Psychology. *Lecture, delivered by Professor Sigmund Freud at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts*. Pulled up close to the fire – it was chilly for April – and not much bothered if the heat penetrated my stockings and made my legs all red and shiny, I struggled through "wish-fulfilments" and "catalytic ferment", "hysterical conversion" and "suppressed libidinous excitations."

Did Leo think a shared interest would bring us closer? Before my stupid arm we had both been too busy to worry about such things – after two years of marriage you expect to run out of conversation – but now that I was more or less housebound the differences between us had become more noticeable.

Sometimes, looking back, I think about all the things we could have discussed. Freud hypnotised his patients as a way of persuading them to disclose their secrets but can you imagine Leo divulging such things? Dropping little hints maybe, although I always think what's left to the imagination tends to be more disconcerting than when someone just spits it out. Women are often accused of talking in riddles when half the time they are simply trying to be sensitive to

Layout_Kline_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:12 Page

other people's feelings. Or else they are afraid of being rebuffed. Is that something Freud wrote about? I doubt it.

Sublimation, repression, the transfer of tender emotion and enmity. Poring over the blotchy print, reading and re-reading, I failed to hear Leo return from the shops and when he joined me in the drawing room was a little shocked to see how agitated he looked.

'What is it?' I was afraid he must have witnessed an accident or learned a friend of ours was ill in hospital, or worse. But he was only thinking about the journal article.

'Did you read it Ursa?' My name is Ursula but Leo prefers a diminutive. Ursa, the feminine of ursus, the bear. Latin of course.

'Most of it,' I told him, though in fact I had read every word. 'I found the style of writing rather trying.'

'Yes, the language does take a little getting used to.' He rubbed the bridge of his nose, a gesture that usually means he has something important to say, something I may not want to hear.

Crossing to the window he began fiddling with the tassels on one of the cords that hold back the curtains. He has long arms, ape's arms his mother likes to say fondly, and his sleeves are always too short. I remember thinking he ought to have his jackets made for him, except sitting at a desk most of the day the elbows tend to wear out. His neck is long too. I like his neck, especially the back of it where his hair comes to a point.

'I've been giving it some thought.' He cleared his throat, another warning signal. 'Now the doctors are satisfied there's no neurological problem I feel we ought to try a different tack.'

'What kind of a tack?'

'A year or two back a leader in *The Times* expressed surprise that psychoanalysis seemed to be enjoying so swift and wide a popularity. These days it's an accepted form of treatment.'

'What is it exactly?'

'There's a Mrs Moberley, who as coincidence would have it lives less than a mile from here, close to Hampstead Heath. She's highly recommended.'

'Who by?'

He stared at me and I waited for the correction, *by whom*, but it never came.

'Apparently she's visited Europe and New York. She's well versed in Freudian theory but likes to keep an open mind as to the underlying basis of the patient's symptoms.'

'She's one of your psychoanalysts?' I struggled not to cough. 'I thought they were all men.'

'Oh no, there are several women practising in London.' He was still looking in my direction but over my left shoulder. 'I thought you might feel happier with a woman.'

Solomon had climbed up onto my knees and started kneading my thighs. My left one felt the pin pricks of his claws but my right one, it was always the right hand side, felt numb apart from an uncomfortable tingling sensation. I touched his ear and it flicked in annoyance. Then he started to purr and I thought, it's all right for you puss cat, with not a worry in the world as long as Leo fails to notice where you sharpened your claws on the sideboard.

'So you think it's all up here.' I tapped my temple. 'You think I'm mental.'

'Of course not, how can you say such a thing?' His voice rasped with anger, or was it fear? 'Forget I ever mentioned the woman. We'll get more opinions. I'll have another word with Father.'

'He's a skin specialist.'

'But he knows the best people in other fields.'

'What fields?' I wished Archie were there to stick up for me. 'I've been examined from top to toe, my spine, my ribs, my eyes. Prodded and poked, asked endless questions, many of them quite unrelated to my symptoms. Anyway I'm not seeing that Dr Predicate again.'

'Prendicott,' Leo corrected.

'Or the one with breath like Irish stew that kept leaning over me, and wondered why I twisted my head away from him.'

'Let me talk to Father.' He moved towards me and I thought he was going to kiss me but if he had been going to he thought better of it. A wife, one of whose arms hangs lifelessly by her side, is not an attractive proposition.

'I'll see to the tea things,' he said, leaving the room but returning almost at once. 'Where does the milk jug live? No don't get up, I'll look in the cupboard. And the sugar bowl?'

'Neither of us takes sugar in our tea Leo.'

'Nor we do.'

He looked quite sad and suddenly I wanted to cry, for myself, for both of us. To console him, tell him how guilty I felt, one minute wanting to be looked after, the next protesting that I disliked being treated like an invalid. But the words refused to come. My throat was too dry and scratchy.

Layout_Kline_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:12 Page

'I'm sorry Ursa.' He was standing in the doorway, wondering what I was thinking, what I wanted him to do. 'It's just that I'm so worried about you.'

'I know.' I managed a cheerful smile. 'There's a cake in the tin on the sideboard. Madeira. Enid says it sunk in the middle but I'm sure it will taste delicious.'

A whole week passed and no mention was made of Mrs Moberley but the spectre of her hung in the air between us. Leo was cross with me, I could tell, but when I asked him he denied it. Being angry with a sick person is not the done thing except I was not even certain he believed I was ill. He could easily think I was a sham, coughing unnecessarily and making the silly habit worse, claiming I was incapable of moving my arm when all the time, if I had made a little more effort, I could have exercised it back to its normal strength.

It was Saturday morning and out of a sense of duty he was sitting opposite me, reading *The Times*, and because it was the school holidays he was wearing the cream v-neck sweater I had given him for his birthday. At the time I was not sure he liked it, even though being Leo he had insisted it was exactly what he wanted.

'Has the cricket season started yet?' I asked.

'Not the full season but the South Africans played a one day match at Godalming against an invited eleven.'

'What does that mean, an invited eleven?'

But he had stopped listening.

He reads *The Times* from start to finish and leaves the old copies in the scullery in case they come in useful. I read the *News in brief* part and sometimes run my eyes down the births, marriage and deaths section, although I dislike the way they have it on the front page. Surely

Layout_Kline_Layout 1 16/06/2011 10:12 Page 10

that ought to be for news. A daughter, a son, a son, a daughter. If they gave the babies' names it would be more interesting. Of course, because of my arm I am rather clumsy and the paper often ends up in a muddle, something that irritates Leo considerably.

At the moment all I could see was an advertisement for cigarettes. *Players No.3. 20 for one shilling and fourpence. Definitely superior in flavour and cool smoking qualities.* How could a cigarette be cool? I had never smoked and never intended to although I suppose cigarettes might have calmed my nerves and made me appear more sophisticated.

Solomon had jumped down, leaving earthy paw marks on my skirt. I waited for Leo to finish whatever he was reading, and turn to the next page, then told him the identity of the murderer in my Agatha Christie and asked if he agreed that it was a bit of a cheat.

'A kindred spirit.'

'How you mean?' But he had no interest in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

'Listen to this.' He started reading: "Dr Bolton, delivering a lecture on *Mind and Brain*, claimed we were threatened by an exacerbation of world hysteria by the discovery of what he could only call the myth of the unconscious mind, based on Freud's theory of dream interpretation.'

'Why did you say "a kindred spirit"?'

'You and this Bolton chap.'

'Actually I did have an awfully peculiar dream last night. No don't worry I can't remember much of it. Other people's dreams are boring aren't they, except to one of your psychoanalysts I suppose. It was all about cleaning kid slippers. Your mother was standing over

me and she said you had to mix fuller's earth with powdered something or other, I forget.'

The doorbell rang and Leo looked quite startled. 'Are you expecting someone?'

'It's probably the laundry.'

'On Saturday?'

'Oh yes.' I was listening to the sounds in the hall, stumping feet like big boys playing a noisy game.

'Odd kind of dream.' Leo broke off as Enid's head came round the door. 'What is fuller's earth?'

'Mrs Bryant,' Enid announced, wiping her hands on her apron and jumping aside as my sister pushed past her, talking loudly.

'Raining! You still don't appear to have an umbrella stand so I had to lean mine against that carved chair that used to be Mother's. The girls are at home with Sidney and I'm leaving Christopher with Enid. He's asleep so he won't disturb whatever she was in the middle of. How are you both?'

Leo folded *The Times* and stood up. 'Enid will be going home in half an hour.'

'What?' Joyce glared at him as if he had said something entirely irrelevant. 'I've come to see Ursula but I can't stay long. Sidney's rushing round like a scalded cat. Only two weeks until Easter and the chap who was taking the Good Friday service has succumbed to shingles.'

'Poor man.' Leo closed the door behind him, and Joyce settled herself in his chair, patting the cushion appreciatively. 'Still warm. Why isn't he at school? They have lessons on Saturday mornings don't they? Of course, it's the holidays, silly me. How are you, how's the arm? Have you tried Ovaltine, after such a dreary old winter

they say it restores vitality. All codswallop I expect.'

She was wearing her familiar shapeless wool suit and a navy blue hat, the kind you expect to see on an elderly maiden aunt, and I found myself wondering what Muriel would make of the outfit. All right for a vicar's wife perhaps, but hardly suitable for someone like me. In the paper it said there was a sale at Harrods. Half price fur coats, Canadian mink reduced from nine hundred guineas to only four hundred and fifty. *Only* four hundred and fifty!

'Nice to see you smiling.' Joyce looked at me curiously. 'What's the joke?'

'Nothing. I was just thinking about something I read in the paper.'

'So you haven't been out. Fresh air Ursula, does a power of good, and as far as I know there's nothing wrong with your leg muscles. I spoke to Muriel and she agrees a hundred percent.'

'Yes I'm sure you're both right.' Joyce is only five years older than me but when she and my mother-in-law got together, which thankfully was not often, I felt like a child, with the two of them behaving as though they had far more in common than I could possibly have with either of them.

'Christopher's cutting a tooth.' Joyce caught at the hair that had escaped from the tight roll at the back of her neck. 'I was up half the night, propping my eyes open with matchsticks in a manner of speaking, tried to pacify him with a malted rusk but to no avail. You wait till it's your turn. They're easier when they're newborn, just feed and sleep.'

She gabbled away, talking about her other children, both girls, and how Sybil, the eight-year-old was soon

going to be taller than her older sister Helen who was nine and what a rumpus that was going to create, and I listened with half an ear, relieved that so far no mention had been made of the possible cause of my "illness" although I guessed she had come with that in mind.

In the beginning everyone had asked how the paralysis had come about. Not that they ever used the unmentionable word. "The arm", was how most people referred to it. Was it gradual or did you wake up one morning and there it was, hanging limply by your side? Yes, it was quite sudden I would tell them although in truth it was difficult to remember. Looking back I could have felt the occasional twinge during the preceding weeks, but put it down to over zealous gardening, or lifting my robust nephew out of his pram.

Of course Joyce had asked endless questions. *How do you dress yourself? I suppose Leo has to help you. And you must have to be careful how you pick up your cup.* Not really, I simply turn it round so the handle is on the left.

Sisterly concern was how Leo described it but in the end it was a rebuke from him that had offended her, reducing her visits from three times a week to once or twice a month.

Drawing up her chair until she was unnervingly close she rooted about in her bag, searching for something that turned out to be a small leather-bound notebook, then looked up, meeting my eyes and giving me what she thought was a warm, sympathetic smile. 'Is Enid pulling her weight?'

I laughed, partly because it was such a peculiar thing to say and partly because, apart from her surprisingly shapely legs, Enid was rather sturdily built. 'Actually I don't know what I'd do without her. She's sweet, so

kind and thoughtful, almost like a younger sister.'

'She's the maid!'

'I know but that doesn't mean she can't be a friend.'

'Yes it does. Honestly Ursula, I despair of you. She's only nineteen and in your present situation I think someone older, more experienced, would be better. How are you sleeping?'

'Dr Sawyer gave me some tablets.'

'And they do the trick? Good. What's your bed like? Not too soft I hope. No, I don't imagine so. As I recall your bedroom's Spartan, all that ultra modern furniture Archie and Muriel gave you and Leo for a wedding present.'

'I've grown to rather like it,' I said, noticing for the first time that Joyce's hands had freckles on the back. 'It's Gordon Russell, his furniture was exhibited at the British Empire Exhibition, that's what Muriel told me, and the chest of drawers she gave us is made from a holly tree. Muriel says it's absurd to believe things have to be old to be beautiful.'

Joyce thought about this for a moment, scanning the room as if she needed to check the rest of our furniture, but it was not a subject that interested her. 'Anyway I saw her yesterday.'

'Who?'

'Muriel. I called round at *The Gables*.' She had adopted the deliberately casual voice of a child confessing a minor misdemeanour, the kind of tone that deceives no one. 'She says Leo wants you to see some woman, a quack by the sound of it.'

'She's a Freudian analyst.'

'And you've dug in your heels, sensible old you. Muriel's appalled.'

'Is she?' Appalled was one of Joyce's favourite words but Muriel tended to favour something less extreme. I once heard her admitting to being "a little perturbed," and one of her favourite expressions was, "what an awful shame."

'Anyway you're not going.' Joyce drew in breath and her chest strained against her collarless beige blouse. 'Has Muriel been round to talk to you about it or am I the first?'

'We're going to lunch there tomorrow.'

'Good. Have you heard of a man called Charcot? I expect Leo's mentioned him. French so you don't pronounce the "t". I thought I'd better check him out, found a tome in the reference library and discovered nearly all his patients were women with symptoms like yours.' She turned to one of the pages in her notebook. 'Do you ever experience a choking sensation or a pain down there? Is your skin particularly sensitive?'

'Where?'

'I don't think it matters where. Pains in the ovaries and mammary glands suggested to Charcot that those regions were hysterical zones. Yes I know it's your arm, but according to Charcot your kind of complaints are all of a piece. It appears he believed himself an expert on the female body.'

I stretched out my good arm towards the notebook but she replaced it in her bag and snapped the catch shut. 'No need to read it, I can tell you the salient points, and you know what my writing's like. He used an ovary compressor, a fearful looking contraption with screws and bolts.'

'What for?'

She stared at me, expecting me to shudder. 'To

reinvigorate the organs and stimulate muscles.'

'Anyway I don't see what it's got to do with the woman Leo wants me to see.'

'I'm coming to that.' Her voice softened a fraction. 'Freud was, or still is for all I know, a disciple of this Charcot chap. They both practise hypnotism, putting you into a trance so that against your will you tell them about your childhood and…' She broke off and I wondered if she was thinking about our own childhood or was it because, as I had begun to suspect, her knowledge of Freud was almost as sketchy as my own.

'Putting you in a trance,' she repeated, 'so you talk about all kind of unmentionable things that doubtless provide an unhealthy thrill for the analyst.'

'I don't know why you're telling me all this.' I suppressed an aching yawn that I knew would be interpreted as yet another of my symptoms. 'I may have a useless arm but my mind is still functioning perfectly well and I've already decided not to see the wretched woman.'