

Introduction

23 January 1941

I want, I need a husband. Thousands of other lonely frustrated females must be feeling the same way – why should I think that I am to be luckier? Because I intend to try to find one. One must tackle the problem positively, gather together one's assets, accept one's debits and go forth booted and spurred.

Assets: A fair share of good looks, physical attraction, generous nature and more poise than I once had. Subjects about which I know something and can use in work and conversation: architecture, literature, drama, people and certain places.

Debits: an agonising, thwarting knowledge of my deficiencies and general unworthiness; a confused, badly trained, porous mind, a tendency to bolt into silence at the first advance of difficulty.

I must take them, my debits and assets, out into the world, into the battlefield . . . and there must I learn to fight. I may lose, but at least I shall know I have tried while there is still a chance of winning.

In April 1925, at the age of fifteen, Jean Lucey Pratt began writing a journal, and she didn't put down her pen for sixty years. She produced well over a million words, and no one in her family or large circle of friends had an inkling until the end. She wrote – legibly, in fountain pen, usually in Woolworth's exercise books – about anything that

amused, inspired or troubled her, and the journal became her only lasting companion. She wrote with aching honesty, laying bare a single woman's strident life as she battled with men, work and self-doubt. She increasingly hoped for posthumous publication, and her wish is hereby granted; the pleasure, inevitably, is all ours.

I first fell under Jean Pratt's spell in the autumn of 2002, but she had another name then. I was visiting the University of Sussex, immersed in Mass Observation, the organisation founded in London in the late 1930s to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and daily activities of 'ordinary people'. As the project evolved and the war began, hundreds of people agreed to submit their personal diaries, and Jean Pratt was among them. Most of the diaries (and diarists) were, of course, anything but ordinary: they were diverse, proud, intriguing, trivial, insightful, objectionable and candid. Most entries were handwritten, some were illegible. Some were composed on office paper, some on tissue. Mass Observation soon became a unique rendition of history without hindsight.

I had called at the archive with the intention of collating the material into an accessible book. Many of the diarists wrote from 1939 to the end of the war, but I was more interested in what came afterwards. For the book to work, I knew I would need to tell the story of recovery not only from a political and social perspective, but also from a personal one: the quirks and preferences of the diarists would have to be compelling in themselves, each voice overlapping in the timeline.

Over the next few visits I selected five writers who were different from each other in age, geographical location, employment and temperament. There was a socialist housewife from Sheffield, forever at odds with her husband and hairdresser; there was a pensioner from London, endlessly creosoting his garden fence and writing abominable poetry; there was a gay antiques dealer in Edinburgh; there was a curmudgeonly accountant, also from Sheffield, who got cross when fireworks woke him on VE Day.

And then there was Jean Lucey Pratt, whom I renamed Maggie

Joy Blunt. (I changed all the names: this was in keeping with the broad understanding of Mass Observation's founders and contributors – their words would be used as MO saw fit, but their identities would be protected, a liberating agreement, enabling frank contributions and freedom from prying eyes.)

Jean lived in a small cottage in the middle of Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire. During the war she had taken a job in the publicity department of a metals company, where the tedium almost swallowed her. She had been a trainee architect, but what she really wanted to do was write and garden and care for her cats. She took in paying guests; she read copiously; she hunted down food and cigarettes; and entertained her city friends. She researched a biography of an obscure Irish actress at the British Museum. And she kept track of her life in the most lyrical of ways.

My book was called *Our Hidden Lives*. It received generous reviews, and the success of the hardback helped the paperback become an unlikely bestseller. BBC Four made it into a film starring Richard Briers, Ian McDiarmid and Lesley Sharp, with Sarah Parish perfectly cast as Jean. Two further books followed – *We Are At War* and *Private Battles*, both prequels covering the war years – and Jean/Maggie was the only writer to appear in all three. Many readers claimed her as their favourite, and wrote asking whether there was any more. Fortunately there was more. Although Jean Pratt had died in 1986, she had a niece who was still alive. And the niece had treasures in the attic.

I had tea with Babs Everett and her husband at their house near Taunton in the spring of 2005. Babs, in her early seventies, was a familiar name to me: as a young girl she had appeared sporadically in her aunt's diaries, once or twice living with her during the war; her aunt had once complained how untidily she had kept her bedroom; she once referred to her affectionately as the Pratt's Brat. But now she was serving Earl Grey and lemon cake in her living room and wondering whether I'd like to see the rest of Jean's writing. There were

several boxes' worth; she had kept diaries not just for Mass Observation, but during her entire life. Two fat folders contained about 400 loose pages, and then there were the exercise books, forty-five in all.

I sat with the journals at Babs Everett's house for a few hours, and made notes. The sentences I recorded included this terse summation of her life to date, composed in 1926 when she was almost sixteen:

Bare legs and the wonderful silver fountain of the hose. Daddy in a white sweater. School. Very small, very shy. The afternoon in May – taken by mother to Penrhyn. Learning how to write the letters of the alphabet. A beautiful clean exercise book and a new pencil. Miss Wade at the head of the dining room table and me at her right. Choking tears because of youth's cruelty . . .

Very small, very shy. I thought the journals were wonderful – not only their contents, but their physicality; not only the observations but the persistence. I thought immediately about the possibility of a book, but there were snags. Babs was keen on publication, but not quite yet; perhaps the British Library should have the diaries first. Three or four years went by while Babs attempted to find the best home for them. After several further conversations we reached an impasse, and I moved on to other work. I spoke to Babs again a few years later. She still had the journals, but again the timing wasn't right.

In 2013, nine years after our initial meeting, I contacted Babs again. We had another good tea, this time at a friend's house in another part of Somerset. We again talked of how best to bring Jean's writing to a wider readership, but again there was hesitancy. I sensed that the journals were becoming a burden. And then a solution was found. Babs would bequeath the journals to an institution of which Jean would have approved – Cats Protection – and I would be allowed to edit them for publication.

In December 2013 three heavy boxes arrived at my home in

London. The journals smelled faintly of tobacco; they were redolent of pressed flowers and meat paste. I felt privileged, daunted, and responsible. Most of the journals had remained unopened and unread since the day their writer had laid them aside.

How do they hold up, as much as ninety years on? Occasionally they are rambling, anti-climactic, inconsistent, repetitive and opaque, but for the most part they are a revelation and a joy. Not only fascinating to read and startling in their candour, but also funny, unpredictable and so engagingly and gracefully written that I couldn't wait to turn the next page for further adventures. The questing displays of loving and longing (for romance, for life's meaning) are brave and meltingly disarming; her devotion to her cats is heart-breaking; her comic timing owes something to the music hall. At times I felt like an intruder; at others a confidant; I wanted both to scold her and hug her. I found myself rooting for her on every page, willing her to win that tennis game or persuade a man to stay. The life that I had first encountered in her wartime Mass Observation entries now stretched back to her childhood in Wembley and forward to her old age, a snapshot transformed by a greater depth of field. I knew of no other account that so effectively captured a single woman's journey through two-thirds of the twentieth century, nor one written with such self-effacing toughness. When friends asked me for a summary, I could think of nothing better than 'Virginia Woolf meets Caitlin Moran.'

For the modern reader the journals provide many satisfactions. The writer's emotions are universal and enduring: we empathise with her ambitions, disappointments and yearnings. Cumulatively, the journals envelop like a novel: the more one reads, the more one cares what happens next. I frequently thought of Jean's latest challenge or calamity upon waking, and stayed up late to read the latest instalment. I recalled the crowd at the New York docks eager for the latest dispatch from Dickens: would Little Nell survive?

Jean Pratt was not Dickens, of course. She knew how to tell a tale – witness the way she ratchets up the tension over her schoolgirl crushes and her father's new love. And she could draw the sharpest of portraits with a few deprecating lines ('His good qualities seem to indicate a rather "might have been" goodness . . . a plant in decay,' she writes of the man to whom she lost her virginity. 'Not a flattering start.')

But there is no plot to speak of here (beyond the biographical one we all enact, the plot of existence and survival), and strands and characters sometimes disappear from sight as swiftly as they appear, without satisfying explanation. She writes that she would have it no other way: in January 1931 she quotes a writer she admired named John Connell.

It can be no tale of carefully rounded edges, of neatly massed effects, a thing of plot or climax. Somehow life is not like that – it is not symmetrical, measured and finished. The weaver of the pattern doesn't seem to care for neatly tasselled ends and pretty bows – it is all very rough and ragged. Yet through it all there seems to run a purpose and an idea, a kind of guiding line.

Besides, life's like that. And her journals are, after all, only writing; for all her searing honesty, she only records what she can bear to, and what she envisaged would be of value to her as she grew older (and perhaps of value to us after that). Value will date, of course. Not everything she wrote can be of interest to us today, but I was delighted to find that so much of it is.

Jean Pratt was made by the war. Like most who lived through it, the tumult transformed her far beyond the surface terrors and deprivations. Her writing matured, becoming not only more observant, but more worldly-wise. The drama of her war days, which assume a disproportionate weight in my edit, demonstrate the pure thrill of reading something so fresh that it appears still blottable. Completely

lacking the hindsight of more familiar accounts, the pages brim with almost overwhelming poignancy: we know how the war turned out, she did not, and such is the power of her writing that we are flung back to doubt our own certainty. Will Hitler invade? Will Jean's home be bombed? Will she aid the war effort? Is Churchill really the man for the job? Is this the night she finally gets laid?

There is far less writing after 1960. Her daily work becomes too time-consuming, her health worsens, and her introspection wanes. The more she knows about herself, and the more her world and ambitions shrink, the less she imagines a life beyond them. Between 1926 and 1959 her writing fills thirty-eight journals; between 1959 and 1986 there are only seven. But she kept at it. In the final years I do feel she was writing less for herself and more for her family and us, the unknowable reader.

At school she may have preferred botany to English, but words were unquestionably Jean Pratt's craft and trade. Her drift into journalism and published biography seems at every stage a natural one (she made several aborted attempts at novels too). She read widely and wrote criticism, and then in later years she successfully ran a bookshop. Anyone who shares this passion for books cannot fail to recognise both a kindred spirit and a talented practitioner, nor marvel at the opportunity to witness a writer develop in style and intellect (let alone track a mindset from teenage *naïveté* to twenty-something disillusion to something approaching adult contentment). On a daily basis, the overriding value of her writing lies in the piecemeal narration and the telling details, the minutiae too often submerged in the bigger histories or airbrushed by heirs and estates. It's a poetic list: the schoolgirl crushes, the depth of a grave as it appears to a child, the loss of a tennis match, bad car driving, classmates Yeld and Grissell, the dress-sense of Christians, the 'Three Ginx in harmony', the shock of Jacob Epstein, the disappointments of Jack Honour, the prominence of hunchbacks, the thoughts of war in 1931, the tears at a train station, girls playing

cricket, the sodden film crew on a Cornish beach – the unfettered, absurd humanity of it all, and all this before she turned twenty-one.

How to sum up a life's work? Certainly we may regard it as forward-thinking. She was clearly not the first notable woman to engage with the apparently mutually exclusive possibilities of spousal duty and career, but her modernity singled her out from her parents and the herd. She is not always the most humorous of companions, and her mood swings are often extreme (she doesn't write when she is feeling really low). But her self-effacement more than compensates (and she is often funny without signalling the fact; she was aware of the Grossmiths' *The Diary of a Nobody*, and occasionally I wonder if she is not extending the parody). At times her yearning for spiritual guidance leads her up some woody paths, but on other occasions she champions the principles of mindfulness long before it found a name. I admired her willingness to offend, although her wicked intentions never materialise beyond the page. But most of all I admired her candidacy, the raising of her hand. This is an exposing memoir, an open-heart operation. One reads it, I think, with a deep appreciation of her belief in us.

The dual responsibility (to Jean and her new readers) to deliver a volume that was both manageable in length and true to her daily experience – that is, something both piecemeal and cohesive – has resulted in a book incorporating only about one-sixth of her written material. Shaping her writing was a unique pleasure, but losing so much of it was not, not least because even the most inconsequential passages were refined with ardent beauty. In February 1954, for example, she looks from the window of her cottage. 'Our world is frost-bound. Hard, hard, everything tight and solid with frost. I keep fires going in sitting room and kitchen, all doors closed. I fear there will be terrible mortality in the garden.' Unremarkable in content, the words carry a heady poetic potency, the fine-tuned wonder of ephemeral thought. You will find a thousand similarly weighted

reflections in the following pages, the work of a soul singing through time.

Looking for love all her life (from friends, from men, from pets, from teachers, from customers), Jean Pratt may have found her fondest devotees only now, among us, her fortunate readers. A quiet life remembered, a life's work rewarded; Jean would have blushed at the attention. And then she would have crept away to write about it.

Dramatis Personae et Dramatis Feles

(in order of significant appearance)

Family:

Jean Lucey Pratt, a reliable narrator, 1909–1986

George Percy Pratt, Jean's father, an architect

Sarah Jane Pratt (née Lucey), Jean's mother, a concert pianist, died in
1922 when Jean was thirteen

Leslie Vernon Pratt, her brother, born 1901, engineer with Cable &
Wireless

Ethel Mary Watson, later Pratt, her stepmother

Prince, the family Airedale

The Joliffe family: Aunt N. is Jean's father's sister, Joyce is her
cousin

Margaret (Maggie) Royan, one of Ethel's sisters, Jean's step-aunt

Elsie Watson, Jean's other step-aunt

Aunt Jane, on her father's side, an early loss

Ivy, Leslie's wife

Ethel Lucey Pratt (Babs), now Everett, daughter of Leslie and Ivy

Martin Pratt, a cousin, a touring companion, RAF

Friends and acquaintances from youth, university and early travels:

Arthur Ainsworth, ex-Boys' Brigade, kissed Jean's hair

Jean Rotherham, an early crush

Lavender Norris, another early crush, an early tragedy

Miss Wilmott (A.W.), a significant teacher, another early crush
Joyce Coates, a lasting friend from architecture school
Harold Dagley, a disappointing young man
Lugi/Luigi, real name Dorothy Cargill, another friend from architecture class
Valerie Honour, née Buck, friend from Wembley, (much) better than Jean at tennis, wife to Jack
Gus, also known as Peter, real name Geoffrey Harris, significant long-term friend, actor/writer/interior decorator, pen name Heron Carvic, flamboyant
Phyllis Terry, his actress companion, part of the Terry thespian dynasty
Roy Gornold, delicate and opinionated family friend, artistic tendencies
Joan Bulbulion, a confidant since architecture days
Vahan Bulbulion, her architect husband, Armenian, increasingly annoying
Constance Oliver, artist friend, free spirit, casualty of war
Olive Briggs, tragedian
Eva May Glanville (Mary Kate), university friend
David Aberdeen, architecture student, another fleeting fancy, later famous in his field
Chris Naude, horny South African diplomat on trip to Russia
Mr Wildman, the stand-in vicar
Hugh Patrick (Bill), possible Jamaican hook-up, wife in Truro
Neville, cabin dweller, advantage taker
Marjorie 'Nockie/Nicola' Nockolds, latterly just 'N.', enduring friend from journalism course, complicated friendship
Colin Wintle (sometimes Winkle), marriage material in Bath
Dick Sheppard, successful architect, favoured rebel, disabled
Gwen Silvester, ballroom dancing teacher, sister of dancer/bandleader Victor
Charles Scrimshaw, possible beau, good at glancing

Alan Devereaux, appalling marriage material, 'conventionally unconventional', lusts for cream cakes

Monica Haddow, friend, possibly addicted to masturbation, fellow visitor to . . .

Gordon Howe, influential Harley Street psychotherapist

Friends and acquaintances from Wee Cottage, the war and beyond:

Josephine Norris, friend, hypochondriac, ghost-like lover of the actor
Leslie Howard

Lady Spicer, generous next-door neighbour

Kathleen Money Penny, owner of Wee Cottage

D.F., or Francis, good sense of humour, bad nails, goes all the way

Tommy Hughes, a fellow aluminium worker, a lover, a doctor

Jean Macfarlane, an old school chum, legal father

Mac (also M., or Mellas or Alan), Jean's obsession, married and unpredictable, bit of a shit

Hugh Laming, soldier, journalist, friend from Malta, lover of Lillian
Gish, lover of Jean, great letter writer

Maritza, his Greek wife

Lydia, a work colleague, a decorator, fellow Mac user

Michael Sadleir, a novelist

Thomas Sadleir, a genealogist, a mentor

Peggy Denny (P.D.), formerly Penny Harding, wife of architect

Valentine Harding, fellow Liberal campaigner, dresses like autumn

Clinton G.F., a despised post-war suitor

D.B., another post-war suitor, met on return journey from Portugal

R.W., a girlfriend at the alloys company, reliable source of gossip

Lady B.P., a large, opinionated local friend, often annoying

Miss Drumm, a property owner, a benefactor

Ralph L., an attractive art teacher

Angela, a lanky young shop assistant

N.G., a picture framer, Angela's pash

Lizzie, adventurous painter friend

Mrs V.N., worried about Liz's mental health

Alison Uttley, obliging children's author

Rolf Harris, unnaturally popular at Jean's book stall

The cars, in order of rusting:

A Fiat, circa 1925, father's, once made it to Cornwall

1947 Ford Prefect, cost £40, known as Freddie, rust bucket, got her to Slough and back (ten miles total)

1954 Ford Anglia, bought in 1965. 'Astounding bargain.'

1964 Morris 1000 Traveller, known as Jolly Morris when it worked, purchased late 1969

1964 Singer Vogue, £150 in 1972, tricky switches

Mini Morris Traveller G. reg., purchased 1976; rusted

Suzie Min, Mini Traveller, purchased 1979, radiator collapses soon after

Standard Mini, purchased 1981, got her to Wexham hospital

The cats, in memoriam:

Cheeta, Dinah, Ginger Tom (visitor), Suzie, Little Titch, The Kittyhawk, Ping, Pong, Twinkle, Joey, Squib, Pepper, Walrus, Pharaoh (formerly Tom-Tit), Starlet, The Damned Spot, Pinkie, Pewter Puss, The Senator, Walter, Nicky, Pye, Bumphrey (Bum), Pinnie, Priss, MaryAnne, Buster, George, Tweezle, Mitzie, Jubie.

Frontispiece

This document is *strictly private*. All that is written herein being the exact thoughts, feelings, deeds and words of Miss J.L. Pratt and *not to be read* thereby *by anyone whatsoever* until after the said Miss J.L.P.'s death, be she married or single at the date of that event. Miss Pratt will, if she be in good state of mind and body, doubtless leave instructions as to the disposal of this document after her decease. Should any unforeseen accident occur before she is thus able to leave instructions, it is her earnest desire that these pages should be first perused by the member of her family whom she holds most dear that will still be living and to whom the pages may be of interest.

Signed: J.L. Pratt 1926¹

1 Added to beginning of diaries some months after commencement.

PART ONE:
Architecture

1.

Into a Cow

Saturday, 18 April 1925 (aged fifteen)

I have decided to write a journal. I mean to go on writing this for years and years, and it'll be awfully amusing to read over later.

We're going to Torquay next week. I feel so thrilled! We start on Tuesday and drive all the way down in our own car. We only got it at Xmas, and Daddy has only just learnt to drive. It'll be rather fun I think. It's a Fiat by make. I've always longed for a car. I'm going to learn to drive it when I'm 16.

Do you remember Arthur Ainsworth, Jean? Funny bloke – he used to be in the Church Lads Brigade when Leslie was Lieutenant.² He used to be my 'beau' then. He used to come and have Morse lessons with Leslie. He used to put his arm round me when he was learning – I could only have been 8 then! And we used to play grandmother's footsteps in the garden and he tried to kiss me – he did kiss my hair. I was quite thrilled – but not overmuch. He used to be sort of Churchwarden at the Children's Service on Sunday afternoon and I used to giggle all the time – even though Mummy was there. I think she knew! She didn't say anything though, the darling – oh how I miss her. I wish she were here now. I'd have been all I could to her.

Anyway, who was my next beau? I can't remember. I think it was

² Leslie her brother is eight years her senior.

Gilbert Dodds. I've got them all down in secret code in my last year's diary. Let's go and fetch it.

Yes, here it is – I've got it down like this:

PR (past romances)

1. A.A.
2. G.D.
3. T.M.
4. K.L.
5. C.B.
6. R.

Gilbert Dodds was the 2nd. He was awfully good looking. He lived at Ealing. The 3rd was Tony Morgan. I hated him, but in my extreme youth I used to go to school with him and I used to go to tea etc. Daddy once suggested he should be my dance partner – was furiously flattered in a way – but I always blushed when he was mentioned. I have an awful habit of blushing, it's most annoying. They've left Wembley now thank goodness. Mr Morgan ran away or something. I couldn't bear Mr Morgan either. He sniffed and always insisted on kissing me. He had a toothbrush moustache and it tickled and oh I hated it. I hid behind the dining room door once till he'd gone.

The next one was a waiter. It was at the Burlington at Worthing and he used to gaze at me so sentimentally. He used to get so nervous when he waited at our table. I never spoke to him – it's much nicer not to speak. The next one was a choir boy at St Peter's. I used to make eyes at him each Sunday and we used to giggle like mad. He was quite good looking with fair hair and pale, rather deceitful blue eyes. At the beginning of the September term I suddenly realised how idiotic it was so I left off looking at him. He was rather hurt at first I think, but he soon recovered and he makes eyes at Barbara Tox and Gwen Smith now.

But in the summer holidays last year I met Ronald. We were all

on the Broads for a fortnight. It was at Oulton, and we were moored alongside a funny little houseboat where an old bachelor spent most of his time. Ronald was his sort of manservant. He was quite a common sort of youth, but rather good-looking. I'm sorry to say I went quite dippy over him and gave Daddy some chocolate to give to him. I wonder if he liked me? He noticed me I know – he used to watch me! Another romance where I never said a word. Perhaps it's just as well – he was only a fisher lad – but my heart just ached and ached when he went away. I wish I had a brother about Ronald's age. Leslie's a dear but he's 24 now, and what is the use of a brother the other end of the world? All that day I felt pretty miserable and when we moored just outside Reedham I went for a long, long walk all by myself along the riverbank, and thought things out and finally conquered. I came back because it began to rain. I'd been out an awful long time and they were getting anxious and had come to find me. They were awfully cross and rather annoyed they hadn't found me drowned in a dyke or something – no Jean, that was horrid of you. I think I cried in bed that night and I know I prayed for Ronald.

I determined not to have any more weak flirtations like that. I'm awfully weak and silly, I've been told that numbers of times. That was the 6th. I wonder who'll be the 7th? No, I won't even write what I think this time – but he goes to Cambridge and Margaret says he's growing a moustache – and oh Jean be quiet, you did fight that down once, don't bring it up again. Oh, I do hope nobody reads this – I should die if they did.

What shall I write about now? I know – my past cracks. It was when I was a queer little day-girl in Upper III when I first noticed Lavender Norris. Oh she was sweet! I went absolutely mad about her. She was awfully pretty with long wavy dark hair with little gold bits in it, and dark eyes. Peggy Saunders was gone on her too. I found a hanky of hers once underneath my desk. I gave it back to her and was coldly thanked – she was talking to Miss Prain at the time. One Xmas I sent Lavender some scent of her own name and she wrote

back such a sweet letter. We were getting on famously when the next term she got 'flu and a whole crowd of us wrote to her and someone said I was pining away for her. I did write to her again in the Spring hols but she never answered.

She left in the Summer term 1923. Peggy used to write to her and once she told her about Mummy's death and Lavender wrote back and said how sorry she was and sent me her love. Angel! I see her sometimes when she comes back as an Old Girl but that is all. If she was to come back again I should still be mad about her I'm sure – but at present Miss Wilmott (A.W.) claims my affections. Everybody knows I'm gone on her and grins knowingly at me and I hate it. I've walked with her too – I and Veronica – but on one awful walk I shall never forget Veronica did all the talking and I couldn't think of a single thing to say. I came home feeling so utterly depressed that I could have howled. I remember some agonising meal times too that term, sitting next to A.W. They are too agonising ever to write here.

She smiled at me once, quite of her own accord. It was the 2nd of June and we had to go for walks. We were waiting by the gate when I looked up quickly and she was looking at me rather funnily and then she just smiled! I nearly died. She's never done it since – except once, again that term, when I held the door open for her. I went into ecstasies in the dorm. That term was glorious all through.

Sunday, 19 April

Yesterday afternoon Daddy and I went and fetched the car from Harris's. It had been there to get mended. Daddy and I were going to Marlow and Daddy backed into the tree and bent the front axle and crumpled the mudguard to nothing. Harris came down to fetch it on Tuesday and promised it us on Saturday, but when we got there the mudguard hadn't come back from the makers, so we took it without. It does look funny but the car goes all right. I do love going out in it so – being able to go and see one's relations and friends.

Thursday, 23 April

We're down at Torquay at last! Glorious place! We started on Tuesday morning about 9 a.m. and after fetching Miss Watson we carried on till Andover, where we stayed for lunch. Andover is in Hampshire. Daddy drives awfully well!

After we left Andover we went on to Yeovil in Somerset. We meant to stay the night there but everywhere was full up so we went on to Crewkerne. The hills were something awful for the car, but oh the view from the tops was so lovely. Just after we left Newton Abbot something went wrong with the car.

Monday, 27 April

Home again. Such a lot has happened. I shall never forget this trip as long as I live – never.

Daddy has always addressed Miss Watson with more than usual politeness and kindness. I have wondered often if he meant anything. And when we started on this trip my heart grew very heavy. He seemed so, so, I don't know how to call it – so very nice to E.W., and I began to think thoughts, thoughts I could not get out of my mind, unbearable thoughts. Oh Mother dearest! My heart grew heavy for you, darling one – it seemed too grotesquely untrue that Daddy could be forgetting you so soon. Jesus alone knows my heartache when Daddy lingered over saying goodnight to her at Crewkerne in the semi-dusk, and tears would come when I got into bed. I was jealous too – I thought, oh Daddy might not love me so much now. And then it rankled a bit to think of her coming into our home and taking your place.

The next day we arrived at Torquay and we went to see *M. Beaucaire* (the film) in the evening, and it was glorious and Daddy was so nice and dear to me after and I was so much happier.³

And then the next day little things cropped up all day – things

³ *Monsieur Beaucaire*, starring Rudolph Valentino.

he said to her, looks they exchanged. I grew sad again until Ethel – yes, I shall call her that – changed quite early for dinner. Just before 6.30 Daddy came in and sat down. In my heart of hearts I knew what was coming. (I had pictured a sort of scene to myself, something like this: Dad comes to me and says, ‘Jean darling, we shall have someone to look after us at last. Ethel has promised to marry me,’ or words to that effect. I knew tears would come and he might say, ‘Why Jean, aren’t you pleased?’ Perhaps then I’d say, bravely gulping down the tears and smiling, ‘Oh yes Daddy, I’m very pleased, but Daddy, have you forgotten mother so soon?’)

But he just sat in the chair and watched me undress for a while and then he said, ‘And what do you think of Miss Watson?’ So I naturally said, ‘I think she’s very nice,’ but I had to bite my lip hard. ‘Jean,’ he said, ‘I want to ask you a question.’ I knew what was coming but I feigned an interested surprise. ‘How would you like someone to come to live with us?’ I just slipped into his arms and cried, and I tried to get out about Mother but it just wouldn’t come. But oh he was so nice. I never knew I loved him so much until that moment. He explained that he’d thought of it now for some weeks, and that Mother had told him before she died that he was free to marry again (dearheart, that is your sweet unselfishness all over again!). He thought Ethel the nicest girl he knew and it would be a companion for me. His friends had often said to him, ‘Pratt, why don’t you get married again? You’re killing yourself with hard work.’ And then he said, ‘But Jean darling, if you think there is anything in this plan that might come between us I will throw up the cards at once, for after all you are all that I have got now and nothing must come between you and me.’

I couldn’t have him sacrifice so much – such love must entail a sacrifice from me. My heart sank and sank, but I said bravely that I was quite quite sure it would be all right and he need not worry. And he kissed my hand and said, ‘Thank you.’ And he also said that he had not asked her yet, but he must risk that. But when he had gone

– Oh Mother, to think of seeing anyone else in your place. I never knew I loved you or your memory so much. So I came down at 7 cool, calm and collected, faintly perfumed with lavender. That evening we went to see Norma Talmadge in *Smilin' Through*.⁴

We came back along the coast – much worse hills but such pretty country. And I felt tired and sad and a little exhausted, but the level, smooth stretch of sea peeping between the graceful lines of the cliffs seemed to comfort the innermost recesses of my soul. And when we lost sight of it behind high hedgerows I ached for one more sight of it.

I became drowsy and rather cross, and across Salisbury Plain it began to rain and I tried to sleep, until Daddy bumped into a cow. The cow's mild expression of pained surprise tickled me, so that I sat up once more and recovered my spirits.

Wednesday, 29 April

I have thought the matter over a good deal recently and I have come to the conclusion that it is a very good sensible thing. The only fear I have now is what our relations and friends might say. She is very nice and kind, she can listen to Daddy's business affairs much better than I can and understand. She will be such a companion for Daddy while I'm at school. But Mother your memory will always linger: there are your clothes that I cannot wear, your jewellery, the little things you gave me, the letters you wrote, the books you read, the piano and your music. And most of all that large photo of you in the dining room with your sweet, sad eyes, always smiling at me wherever I am in the room.

I went to see *M. Beaucaire* at the Crown Cinema. That was the 2nd time I'd seen it but I loved it more and more. I have ordered the book at Smith's and I'm longing for it to come. After seeing good films like that I have a strange feeling that I want to film act and to

4 A silent melodrama with themes of unrequited love and forbidden marriage.

act well. I'd love to just make people wonder, envy, admire, to be famous, to be too good for any petty criticism and have certain people I know say, 'Fancy – Jean Pratt! And when I knew her one would never have thought her capable of it!' I just want to act, to live, to feel like someone else, to live in a real world of Romance. I know it would mean hard, hard work and many disappointments and heart-breaks, but I should love to feel that I sway men's hearts to a danger mark, and women's too for that matter.

Last night Daddy, Ethel and I went out to a big Conservative meeting dinner, and I'm sure I looked so nice. It is the sweetest frock – very pale blue georgette, cut quite full over a pale blue silk lining. Right down the middle is a piece of silver lace about two inches wide. I wore very pale grey silk stockings and silver shoes. I also wore a blue and mauve hairband and displayed a mauve crepe-de-chine hankie in my wristwatch strap. I saturated myself in lavender water. For the reception I wore white silk gloves – I shook hands with the Duke of Northumberland. I do not like him very much – he has ginger hair and a moustache, a prominent nose and weak chin and white eyelashes – ugh! The dinner was great and some of the speeches were quite nice.

Coming home from Oxford Circus I had to be most tactful. I pretended to be frightfully sleepy and closed my eyes half the time and didn't listen much to their conversation. When we arrived at Wembley Daddy said, 'I hope you don't mind Jean, but we'll see you indoors and then I'm going to take Miss Watson home.' I yawned and said, 'Oh I don't mind a bit, all I can picture in front of me is bed.' Oh Jean, Jean, Jean – may your sins be forgiven you. When they had left I flaunted about upstairs in my nice clothes and did up my hair and admired myself in the glass and did a little film acting on my own. Then I thought I'd better hurry into bed – I heard it strike one and Daddy hadn't come back. Then I fell asleep. He's been in an awfully good mood all day today so I suppose his midnight vigil was satisfactory. Somewhere deep down in my heart it hurts.

Thursday, 7 May

It's over a week now since I last wrote my journal, but there are several good reasons. First, I got *M. Beaucaire* the novel, and, not liking it as much as the film version, decided to write my own account. Second, Miss Floyd the housekeeper has been away for a holiday, so yours truly has had to light the fires and peel the potatoes. Thirdly, IT'S HAPPENED!!!! Yes, last Wednesday evening about 11.45 I was still reading and Daddy came in saying he'd gone to Ethel's and 'It's all settled!' And he looked so happy.

Ethel is so sweet and nice to me. Daddy was busy buying new shirts and suits etc. It's going to be awfully nice, and everybody's very pleased and excited.