

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Cara's Land

Elvi Rhodes

## About the Book

Cara Dunning first came to the wild and remote Beckwith Farm in the Yorkshire Dales as a young landgirl during the Second World War. Beckwith was isolated, sometimes beautiful, sometimes inhospitable, and had been owned by the Hendry family since 1700.

When Cara fell in love with Edward Hendry, it was not what her family had intended for her. Edward was fifteen years older than Cara, a pacifist and a widower with two children, one of whom bitterly resented her new stepmother. But Cara was determined to make the marriage work, in spite of the hard life on the farm, in spite of Edward's reserved personality and the shadow of Nancy, his former wife.

Her greatest friend on the farm was Edward's mother. Edith Hendry, a loyal and wise daleswoman, was to see the young bride through many tragedies, many vicissitudes and the years of trying to run the sheep farm on her own. And as Cara's life began to change, so Cara changed too, finding a complete and utter happiness where she had never expected.

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Elvi Rhodes



**CORGI BOOKS**

*To the memory of Harry, and the happy times, over many  
years, we have spent together in the Yorkshire Dales*

## *Acknowledgements*

*My sincere thanks to Robert and Dorothy Close, of Kettlewell, who farmed in Wharfedale at the time in which this book was set. They gave me freely of their time, their memories, and their scrapbooks, and I am enormously grateful to them.*

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*Any errors there may be on farming matters are mine, not those of Rob, Dorothy or Martin.*

# 1

Cara, beautiful in her wedding dress, her green eyes shining, tendrils of vibrantly red, unruly hair escaping from the veil which was now thrown back from her smiling face, moved hand-in-hand with her new husband amongst the guests in her parents' home. Joy filled her, delight curved her lips. It was true what people said. It *was* the happiest day of her life, of her entire life. But there were even happier days to come. She knew that with certainty, and squeezed Edward's hand to convey her feelings.

'When can we leave?' he asked.

Edward had not wanted all this. He had gone through it before with his first marriage.

'Let's just go off, get married,' he'd said.

'No!' Cara had objected. 'It's my first time. I hope my only time! I mean to make the most of it.'

'All right, Puss!' He'd given in gracefully. 'You shall have it exactly as you want it.'

And so they had, the whole works.

'We can't leave just yet,' she said now. 'You know we have to . . .'

She broke off in mid-sentence to shake hands with Miss Aitchison, her father's secretary. 'Thank you *so* much for the lovely tray, Miss Aitchison! We shall use it often.'

They might or they might not. When their short honeymoon was over Edward would take her to live at Beckwith Farm, in Arendale. It had never even been questioned that they would live in the old farmhouse with his parents. It was a large place, with room enough and to spare for all of them. Edward had been born there, and his

father and grandfather before him. The Hendrys had been in Arendale since the early years of the eighteenth century, longer than any family now farming there. Generations of Hendry wives had added to the contents of the house until, Cara was sure, not so much as an extra teaspoon was needed, let alone a large tray with a picture of York Minster.

'I'm glad you like it, Cara - or I suppose I should call you Mrs Hendry now that you're a married lady!' Miss Aitchison blushed deeply. Weddings did that to her. She hoped the speeches wouldn't be too embarrassing.

'As you've called me Cara since I was a little girl, I don't see why you should change,' Cara said.

Mrs Hendry, she thought. No longer Cara Dunning. Mrs Edward Hendry. I'm a married lady! She touched the slender gold ring on her finger. It had their initials and the date engraved on the inside - 31 August 1946. A sign to the world. But the seal on their marriage was still to come. With this ring I thee wed; with my body I thee worship. And she did, and she would. It was after tonight that she would feel truly married. She had no fears about it, only longings.

She would not be nervous then, as she had been this morning in church. Although the words of the service, the hymns, the presence of their friends and relatives had been wonderful and moving, standing before the altar, when she made her vows, her voice had sounded like a stranger's. But that part was over and as soon as they could they would escape from this reception which her parents had so lovingly laid on for her. Moving away from Miss Aitchison she whispered to Edward.

'I'm as anxious to leave as you are, dearest, but we shall have to stay for the meal, and for the speeches. The minute the speeches are over I'll go upstairs and change.'

'I hope your father doesn't go on and on,' Edward said.

'I hope your cousin Derek doesn't either! In my experience the best man is far more long-winded than the father!'

It was easier for the best man, Cara thought. All he had to do was to thank the right people and crack a few jokes. He wasn't emotionally involved, not losing a daughter and gaining a son-in-law he didn't particularly want.

'Didn't particularly want' was a gross understatement. Her father heartily disliked the thought of Edward as a son-in-law. The announcement of her engagement to a man her parents hadn't even met had caused a storm. Her father, never one to mince his words, had been furiously angry, deeply hurt.

'You must be out of your mind!' he'd thundered.

'Dad, if you'd only *meet* Edward . . . !'

'I neither want nor need to meet him,' he'd cried. 'You've told me all I need to know and I don't have to see him to know he's totally unsuitable! He's fifteen years older than you are, he's been married before, *and* he has two children. What's more, he's dragging you off to the depths of the country, which is not where you belong.'

'He's *not* dragging me, Father! I'm going of my own free will, and most happily,' Cara said.

'I knew no good would come of it when you went into the Women's Land Army,' Arnold Dunning went on. 'That wasn't what I wanted for you.'

'Oh I know!' Cara said. 'You wanted me to go into the Forces, rise rapidly to some high rank, and then when peace came you wanted me to be the headmistress of some important girls' school!'

'And why not? You had it in you. It would have been a damned sight better than what you're proposing now!'

'But Dad,' she'd tried hard to be patient, 'all that was what *you* wanted for me: none of it was what I wanted.'

On and on the battle had raged; on and on they'd argued, neither giving an inch. Arnold had found other objections to Edward.

'How can I hand my daughter over to a man who's a *pacifist*?' He spat the word out as if it was poison. 'A man

who refused to take up arms for his King and country!’

‘Doesn’t it count that even though Edward was a conscientious objector he volunteered for an ambulance unit and served three years overseas?’ Cara asked passionately. ‘And have you thought that as a farmer he needn’t have left home at all?’

‘And you are *not* handing me over,’ she’d added. ‘I am not a parcel. I’m marrying Edward of my own free will, and because I love him!’

Beth Dunning stood on the sidelines watching her husband and daughter fight. Nothing she could say would make the slightest difference. It wasn’t the first fight they’d ever had, not by a long chalk, but it was the most serious. In some ways they were so alike; red of hair and hot of temper, both obstinate as mules.

And yet, at bottom, they adored each other, she thought. Cara was always closer to her father than she was to me. But the truth was that in Arnold’s eyes a prince of the realm on a shining white charger, hung about with bags of yellow gold, wouldn’t be too good for Cara.

And so throughout their engagement, during which time Cara had not given an inch, Arnold had found excuses not to meet Edward until, less than two weeks ago, Cara had persuaded her father. Threatened, more like!

‘If you won’t meet him, then we won’t get married in Akersfield. We’ll just go off and do it in Shepton Registry Office. And you can come or not, as you please!’

She was calling his bluff, and she knew it. She’d be heartbroken if her father wasn’t at her wedding.

‘No daughter of mine is going to have a hole-and-corner wedding in a registry office!’ he’d thundered.

‘The choice is yours, Dad,’ Cara said quietly. She knew she’d won. The next weekend Edward had come to Akersfield to meet her parents. The atmosphere around her father had been cool, but reasonably polite. Edward and her mother had taken to each other at once.

All the same, her father had behaved beautifully today, as she had known he would. He would never let her down. Nor would he reveal his feelings in front of all these people. He was too proud for that.

He was standing now over by the door, where her mother, an anxious smile on her face, was attempting to tell him something to which he wasn't paying the least attention. Arnold Dunning was a tall man, well built, and holding himself so straight, shoulders back, chin raised, that he seemed to add extra inches to his six feet. His hair was greying at the sides and receding a bit at the front, giving him an even nobler brow. But it doesn't make him look any older, Cara thought with a rush of affection as she observed him. Simply more distinguished. Beth Dunning, nothing over five feet, had to tilt her head back to speak to him.

Cara moved to where Edward's parents, Edith and Tom Hendry, were sitting. She wondered if they had been dismayed at the thought of their son's marriage. They *could* say she was too young, only twenty, and a town girl at that. But if they had objected they hadn't shown it. Also, they knew her. She'd worked on Beckwith Farm for the best part of two years, while Edward was overseas.

'You must have had to leave Arendale very early this morning,' she said to them.

'We did,' Tom Hendry replied. 'But farmers are used to getting up early, as you well know. I must say, love, you're looking very bonny! Very bonny indeed!'

Cara beamed with pleasure. Her new father-in-law was a taciturn man. His few words were the equivalent of a full-length speech from anyone else.

'You are that,' Mrs Hendry agreed. 'And it was a nice service. Do you know,' she added, 'I've never been as far as Akersfield before! I did once go to Leeds, but that was some time ago.'

The hired waitress came into the room bearing a tray of drinks. She was followed close behind by Grace, Mrs

Dunning's twice-weekly help with the rough, now almost unrecognizably kitted out in a black dress and a frilly white apron and cap, and suitably burdened with a similar tray.

'Easy to see your father has a wine merchant amongst the bank's customers,' Edward said, joining Cara.

'Yes. We'd not have this much sherry otherwise,' Cara agreed. 'But it's all quite legitimate. There's no black market deal involved. Dad wouldn't stand for that, as you well know.'

Edward did know. His new father-in-law was as upright as a judge, patriotic to the core, upholding every edict and instruction issued by authority. He had probably enjoyed the entire war, Edward thought, and been only sorry that he was just too old to serve in the army. Which is why he doesn't like me, he reckoned. It sticks in his craw that he, with his row of medals, his Military Cross for bravery, must have me for a son-in-law.

Moreover, though in the nature of things often under fire, Edward had come through it all without so much as a scratch, while Arnold, in the first lot, had been gassed twice and collected a nasty leg wound which still niggled at him whenever the weather turned frosty.

Arnold Dunning now raised a hand and cleared his throat in a purposeful manner. It was quite enough to silence the chatter and bring everyone to attention.

'I trust each one of you has a full glass,' he said, 'because we're about to drink a few toasts!'

He would have liked to have proposed all the toasts himself, made any necessary speeches. It was, after all, his daughter's wedding. She was the important one and no-one knew her worth better than he did. But good manners would prevent him declaring what was in his heart, so he might as well do the right thing and let the best man have his say.

'When we've paid tribute where it's merited and honour where it's due,' he announced, 'my lady wife says you'll find

refreshments in the dining room. Help yourselves. There's plenty for all!

'Thanks to friends, relatives and neighbours!' Beth interrupted bravely.

'Indeed! Quite so! I was coming to that,' Arnold said. 'We shall not forget those who have shared their rations and surrendered their points for this occasion!'

In Dunning's rich baritone, Edward thought, it sounded like the last great sacrifice.

And I shan't forget Mr Thwaite, who let me have a dozen bottles of this quite passable sherry, Arnold thought later, drinking a toast. Not that it could be allowed to influence the matter of his overdraft.

The buffet was a triumph of generosity and ingenuity over shortages and adversity. Edward's mother had supplied and cooked a piece of ham which Beth Dunning, with the sharpest knife, had sliced paper-thin. This, flanked by the contents of two tins of Spam, equally wafer-like, drew cries of greedy amazement.

The mother of a young baby had contributed a whole bottle of orange juice issued by the clinic.

'It's a pleasure, really,' she said. 'The kid hates it. Sicks it up all over himself whenever I give it him!'

It had made a very nice orange jelly, by the side of which stood a cut-glass jug, brimful of real custard; palest yellow, smooth as silk, the eggs for which were once again by courtesy of Beckwith Farm.

'You know that my sister in Australia sent the fruit for the wedding cake?' Grace said with every glass of sherry she handed out. 'Though only the one layer is real, o' course. The rest is cardboard under the icing! What a lark!'

The other cakes on the table were real enough, though regrettably mostly fatless sponges, of which everyone was sick to death.

'Still, I have to admit, it all looks very nice,' Beth's Aunt Mabel remarked grudgingly to her niece. 'You've done a

good job. Naturally I'd prefer a sit-down "do" myself. Feet under the table. They do say the Copper Kettle does quite a nice wedding breakfast for three shillings a head, and it saves you the washing-up into the bargain.'

Beth sighed. Doubtless there was an Aunt Mabel in every family, and they were at their awful best at functions.

'I know, Auntie,' she said. 'I've heard. Lettuce sandwiches, tinned pineapple and fairy cakes! Anyway, Cara wanted the reception at home and that's exactly what we've given her. It's not been easy but people have been generous. It's amazing how folks will always chip in for a wedding.'

Not you though, she thought. Not so much as an ounce of margarine.

'They'll do even more for a funeral tea,' Aunt Mabel said cheerfully. 'A sort of last tribute, I suppose.'

'Look, why don't you and Uncle Joe take your plates and sit at that little table?' Beth suggested. 'I'll bring you both a cup of tea.'

'Nay love,' Uncle Joe said when his niece brought the tea. 'Do you not have owt stronger? And I don't mean sherry. A fancy drink, that. Only fit for ladies.'

'Taste your tea,' Beth told him.

He gave her a suspicious look, then as he sipped and tasted the whisky, his face broke into a smile.

'That's better, love! Now that's what I call a cup of tea! I shall have a second cup of this brew.'

'Not if you don't keep quiet, you won't!' Beth warned him. 'I can't serve this to every Tom, Dick and Harry!'

'I hope you've not doctored my tea,' Aunt Mabel sniffed suspiciously at her cup. 'As you well know, I joined the Band of Hope as a slip of a girl, signed the pledge; since when not a drop has passed my lips!'

'I do know,' Beth said. 'Yours is quite safe to drink.'

'It's amazing how you've managed to cram everyone in,' Aunt Mabel remarked, looking around.

‘What do you mean “cram”?’ Beth demanded. ‘It’s a fair-sized house, we’ve got three good rooms on the ground floor, all in use. I don’t see that anyone’s cramped.’

‘Now don’t flare up,’ Aunt Mabel said. ‘It’s not a bit like you, our Beth. I expect you’re nervy, all this on your plate and losing Cara into the bargain.’

‘I am not losing Cara,’ Beth said patiently. ‘Arendale isn’t the other side of the world. It’s no more than thirty miles from Akersfield.’

‘And the train runs to Grassington,’ Cara said, joining them. ‘Only nine miles from Beckwith Farm, so I shan’t exactly be marooned! And Edward has promised not to keep me in chains!’

Aunt Mabel sniffed. ‘We’ll see! Well I must say, you look very bonny. You’ve got a nice figure – a bit thin perhaps – and it’s a nice dress, though I thought you might have worn your mother’s. I expect she still has it and it would have saved coupons. She was a pretty bride, your mother.’

‘I know. I’ve seen the photographs,’ Cara said. ‘But Mother was married in the twenties, with a dress up to her knees. I couldn’t have worn that! Still, I’m glad you like this.’

‘The bride’ she reckoned the *Akersfield Record* would say, under a photograph of herself and Edward, taken as they came out of the church into the fitful sunshine, ‘wore a white satin dress with a circlet of white rosebuds over an embroidered veil. She carried a bouquet of white carnations and roses. The bridesmaids, Miss Susan Hendry and Miss Laura Dunning, wore ice-blue satin and carried pink carnations. The hymns were “Love Divine” and “Lead us Heavenly Father, Lead us”.’

It would not say where the happy couple would spend their honeymoon because Edward had told no-one, not even his bride.

‘It’s a bit easier now that the petrol ration has gone up,’ he’d said. ‘It won’t take us as far as I’d like, but in any case we’ve only got three days.’

'I must have a word with Laura and Susan,' Cara said to her mother. 'And then get changed. Weren't they lovely bridesmaids?'

She found Laura in the breakfast room, looking out of the window, intently studying the garden as if she was seeing it for the first time. She was such a still, quiet little figure, standing there.

'All alone?' Cara queried. 'I thought your fellow bridesmaid might have been with you.'

It was a stupid thing to say. It had been clear from their first meeting that Laura and Susan disliked each other. Apart from the fact that they were more or less the same age, all they would ever have in common, and only for a few short hours, were their identical bridesmaids' outfits.

'I don't know where she is,' Laura said, not moving. 'Did you want her?'

'I wanted you first.'

Cara went to her sister, put her hands on her shoulders and turned her around so that they faced each other. Laura's grey eyes were too bright, Cara drew her close, then felt the dampness on her wedding dress as her sister's tears began to fall.

'Oh honey, please don't cry!' she begged. 'I'm so happy, I can't bear to think of you not being!'

'I'm sorry! I wasn't going to cry. I'd made up my mind not to. But oh, I'm going to miss you so much!' Sobs shook her as Cara held her close, her arms tight around her sister's thin little body.

'I know, love. And don't think I won't miss you. But we'll still see each other a lot. As soon as we get back from the honeymoon you can come and visit us for a weekend, and you can spend all your school holidays at Beckwith if you want to. So please cheer up - for my sake, pet!'

'I'm sorry. I will. And you won't let Susan stop me coming to see you, will you?'

'Not a chance!' Cara assured her.

‘Shall I be allowed to play the piano at Beckwith?’

‘Of course. We’ll have it tuned especially. Hearing you play is one of the things I shall miss most.’

Laura had been playing the piano since she was five – seven years now. Music was in her blood and no-one knew from where her considerable talent came, though Aunt Mabel sometimes quoted a distant cousin on their mother’s side who had played the trombone in a brass band – ‘He were a wizard at double-tongueing,’ she said. Otherwise, Laura was one on her own.

Laura had always been one on her own. She was born, after her mother’s protracted and agonizing labour, with her right foot twisted back to front. Also, early on, she developed a tendency to chest infections. Years of treatment and massage and hospital visits, of her leg in an iron and her feet in special boots, had improved things to the extent that now only the boots, and a limp, remained. Her chest infections were long outgrown. But her infirmities had caused her to be thought of as delicate, to be treated as a bit of an invalid. After twelve years it was difficult for her family to throw off the attitude.

‘You were a splendid bridesmaid, love,’ Cara said. ‘Thank you very much.’

‘Thank you for the boots,’ Laura said. ‘They felt good.’

So that her sister’s special footwear, clumsy-looking and always made in black leather, shouldn’t spoil her outfit, Cara had with some difficulty had a pair of boots fashioned in white leather. They were almost inconspicuous beneath the hem of her satin dress, though nothing could quite disguise her limp.

‘They looked good,’ Cara agreed. ‘And now I must find Susan and say thank you to her before we leave.’

‘I expect you’ll find her near the food,’ Laura said with a touch of acid.

Cara laughed at the malice. It was better than tears.

The dining room was indeed where she did find her stepdaughter. Stepdaughter, she thought suddenly! Great heavens, I'm a stepmother! Susan was gleaning what she could from a now depleted table. Her plate held a curious mixture of Spam, jelly, iced buns and lettuce leaves. Her young brother David was standing close by.

'Still hungry?' Cara enquired.

'There's not a lot to eat,' Susan complained.

'I thought we did very well, considering,' Cara said mildly. She was determined not to be drawn into an argument; not today.

'So did I,' David said. 'I'm full to busting!'

'Oh well, we all know you can eat *anything!*' Susan's voice was filled with the scorn of an elder sister for a six-year-old brother. 'Anyway, at really fashionable weddings they have the reception in a restaurant, or even in an hotel!'

'That's what my great-aunt Mabel said,' Cara observed pleasantly. 'Have you met Aunt Mabel? You'd probably get on well together.'

Susan pouted. She hadn't met any of them and she didn't want to. She couldn't see why there was all this fuss, or even why her father had to get married at all. It had been more or less all right when Cara was a land-girl, working on the farm, but she should have left at once when Daddy came home from the war. She wasn't needed any longer. And if she imagined she was going to take the place of their mother she had another thought coming!

Anger rose in her, and anger always made her hungry. She began to pile her plate higher than ever.

'I'm going to get changed now,' Cara said. 'Do you want to help me? It's the bridesmaid's privilege.'

'No thank you,' Susan said through a mouthful. 'When will Daddy be coming back?'

'We shall both be back on Tuesday. We're needed on the farm.'

‘That’s why Grandpa and Grandma Hendry say we have to leave for home soon,’ David said. ‘You can’t leave the animals for too long with only Johann to look after them.’

Cara smiled at him. He was a lovely little boy, and already every inch a farmer. She would have no difficulty in loving him, and she believed he loved her. She would just have to work harder with Susan. Her stepdaughter was only twelve, still a child, and a child who had had a hard time.

In the event, it was her mother who followed Cara shortly after she had gone upstairs to change. She found her staring out of the window.

‘I’ve looked at this same view ever since I can remember,’ Cara said.

Beth came and stood beside her daughter. ‘I know,’ she agreed. ‘When your head hardly reached above the windowsill I used to lift you on to a chair so you could see better. Do you remember?’

‘Clearly! Yet you wouldn’t think it was a view to interest a child, would you? Not a lot of activity.’

The house stood on hilly ground about two miles from Akersfield town centre, at a point where the town, with its houses, shops, offices and mills, began to give way to the country. From the front the view was of blackened stone buildings with their smoking chimneys, incongruously interspersed, in the fashion of the West Riding, with emerald green fields. But from Cara’s room the whole aspect was different.

At the edge of the garden the land plunged down into the valley, where the beck and the canal ran side by side. It then climbed up again to where, at the distant top of the far hillside, the moors began. Along the floor of the valley the railway ran, steam from the trains etching itself against the landscape until it re-formed into a white cloud where the line curved towards the hill and the train, with a shrill warning whistle, entered the tunnel.

‘It was the trains I used to watch,’ Cara said. ‘I used to make up stories about where all the people were going, and what happened to them when they were plunged into the tunnel. I wasn’t sure they ever came out again.’

She would miss all this, but she would exchange it for the greater grandeur of Arendale. And there she would share her view with Edward. There could be no regrets about that.

‘Now I really must change,’ she said.

‘I’ll help you,’ Beth offered. Cara took one last look at herself in the long wardrobe mirror. Yes, it was a beautiful dress.

‘I’ll see that it’s carefully packed for you to collect at a later date,’ Beth promised. ‘Perhaps you’ll decide to have it dyed, use it for an evening dress? It’s good material. It should dye well.’

‘I doubt evening dresses will feature much in my life,’ Cara said, laughing. ‘Hardly a garment to milk the cows in!’

‘Oh I don’t know! Not the cows, of course, but there’ll surely be a Farmers’ Ball from time to time, now that the war’s over?’

‘Well, at least I won’t be wearing my Land Army clothes,’ Cara said. ‘They *were* terrible, if you like! Thick breeches, those awful socks and that heavy sweater. I tell you, when we went to the occasional “do” in Faverwell or Shepton, and there were ATS or WAAFs there in their smart uniforms, we felt like hiding under the table. We also used to wonder if we smelled of manure! Anyway, I’m going to find Dad now, before we leave.’

‘In spite of everything he says, you’re still the light of his life,’ Beth said.

Clara nodded.

‘I know. And I love him dearly. As I do you, Mother, though I don’t always show it.’

‘I know that too!’

‘It’s been a lovely wedding,’ Cara said. ‘I’m so grateful.’

‘Oh, love, it’s the least we could do!’ Beth said. ‘I’m glad all went well.’

Cara put on the suit she had chosen for her going-away outfit; a skirt of fine, West Riding worsted in small checks of green and mauve and grey, the colours soft, and blending with each other like colours in the landscape. Her blouse was pale lilac and her jacket grey. She had been lucky enough to find a narrow-brimmed hat whose colour picked up the mauve in her skirt.

‘You look lovely,’ Beth said. ‘The colours set off your hair far better than more obvious ones might.’

And her eyes, too, Beth thought. She gets those from me. Her hair and her height from Arnold, but at least her eyes from me; eyes which seemed to change colour from green to brown, according to the owner’s mood. Now her daughter’s eyes were bright and clear and very green.

Cara put her arms around her mother and the two women held each other close, and kissed.

‘And now I’ll find Dad,’ Cara said.

He was at the foot of the stairs, standing for a moment on his own, no-one around. He looked curiously lonely. Cara ran down the stairs and flung herself into his arms.

‘Oh Dad, I do love you! I’m going to miss you so much!’

‘I’ll miss you,’ he said. He found it hard to speak.

‘Dad, you do like Edward, now that you’ve got to know him a bit? You do, don’t you?’

‘I dare say.’ He wasn’t giving himself away. ‘Anyway, I can see you do, and I can see he thinks a bit about you.’

‘And you’ll come and see us at Beckwith?’

‘When I can,’ he said. ‘Don’t forget I work for a living.’

Edward appeared from the sitting room and joined them.

‘The car’s at the door,’ he said. ‘We ought to be going.’

Arnold Dunning looked at him sternly.

‘Now think on you look after my daughter! She’s very precious to me and her mother. So you take good care of her. You’ll have me to answer to if you don’t.’

'I will!' Edward promised.

The car at the door was Edward's old Morris, which had seen better days, though now it had been cleaned and polished within an inch of its life.

They got in, and Edward started the car. Cara turned to give a last wave to the guests who had come out of the house and were standing around. It was her father she looked for, and there he was, ramrod straight, a head above the rest. He met her eyes and she saw the sadness in his and for a swift moment felt guilty at her happiness. Then he smiled and waved.

As he watched them drive away Arnold felt the tears pricking at his eyes. Swiftly, he turned and went into the house.

Edward drove north-east, taking the Harrogate road and then towards York and beyond.

'Where are we going? Do tell me!' Cara said.

'Why can't you wait until we get there?' Edward teased. 'But if you must know, there's an hotel on the North York moors, on the way to Whitby. You'll like it there.'

'Have you been there before?'

'Once.'

Had he been with Nancy, Cara wondered? But surely he wouldn't take her where he had been with his first wife? She had never met Nancy, who had been killed in an air raid when she'd gone to visit her parents in Sheffield, leaving the two small children behind in Arendale. Edward, tending the wounded in the Western Desert, had been given short compassionate leave, and it was only a day or two after his return to the war that Cara had come to Beckwith Farm as a land girl. Not until just before he was demobbed had she met Edward in the flesh, though she had often looked at his photograph on the sideboard, admired the good-looking face with its regular features, high cheekbones, grey eyes.

He had never talked about Nancy, but sometimes others did. She seemed to have been popular in the dale.

'I know you'll like it there,' Edward repeated.

Cara put her hand over his on the steering wheel, leaned her head against his shoulder.

'Of course I shall, my love. I shall like it anywhere, just as long as you're with me!'

## 2

It was late afternoon when they reached the hotel. It sprawled along the crest of the hill, an old house, many-gabled, curiously shaped, as if succeeding generations had added whatever took their fancy, a wing here, a chimney or two there. Yet the whole was harmonious, welded together beneath the vast expanse of Virginia creeper which covered the walls to the eaves. The red and bronze leaves, caught in the low sun, looked as though they might at any moment burst into flame. The long drive to the house climbed to the main door. Edward drew up.

‘There you are!’ he said. “‘Chimneys”!’

‘Well-named,’ Cara smiled. ‘I like the look of it. Are we expected?’

‘Of course,’ Edward assured her. ‘I booked weeks ago! Around the time you were fussing about your dress!’

At the reception desk she watched while he signed the register, Mr and Mrs Edward Hendry, and felt a glow of pleasure.

An elderly porter, looking far too frail for the job, gathered up their cases with surprising ease and led the way to their room.

‘Oh, this is lovely!’ Cara exclaimed. ‘Isn’t it a lovely room, Edward?’

Flowered curtains hung at the low window. Kneeling on the broad window seat, Edward standing beside her, she looked with pleasure on the view, to where the immaculate green lawns and tidy shrubs of the hotel grounds gave way, not far beyond, to the vigour of the moors, resplendent in the royal purple of the heather in full bloom.

'It's wonderful!' she said. Then she turned away from the view to take in the rest of the room.

The furniture was old, with the patina of age and countless polishings, the wardrobe massive, the dressing table many-mirrored; but dominating everything else was the wide four-postered bed. Cara caught her breath at the sight of it, and felt a *frisson* of fear. Will it be all right? she asked herself. Shall I be what he wants? Her new husband was a man sexually experienced. Though he never talked about it, she believed his first marriage had been a happy one, but she would come to him as a virgin, inexperienced. Until now she had trusted and assumed that the depth of her feelings and the strength of her desires would suffice, but would they?

Her feelings *were* strong. Of late she had sometimes ached with desire, with the longing to lie with Edward and take his body to hers. Suddenly, she wanted him desperately, as she was sure he must her. And now at last there were no barriers between them, neither time nor place nor legalities. They would draw the curtains, shut out the daylight and the world with it, and be in each other's arms. Trembling with longing, she put down her handbag on the dressing table and turned to him.

'Oh Edward! Oh, my love!'

He held out his arms and she ran into them. He kissed her lovingly and then, surprisingly, drew away a little. It was only a little and she might have imagined it, but . . . In a matter-of-fact voice he said:

'I expect we could both do with a cup of tea. Shall we go downstairs and find some?'

Ah, but he was teasing her! He couldn't be serious. But when he quite gently disengaged himself from her embrace she looked at him, and knew he wasn't. He meant it.

Her sharp disappointment was tinged with embarrassment at her own forwardness. What a fool she was, and how nearly she betrayed herself. Edward was conventional, she

already knew that, but was he also more romantic than she had given him credit for? Perhaps he wanted everything to be exactly right; the time, the place, the ambience. And perhaps five o'clock in the afternoon, in broad daylight, both of them in their outdoor clothes, was not exactly the thing. In fact, she realized, she was still wearing her hat!

Her laugh covered her disappointment.

'A cup of tea would be lovely. And a scone or something. In spite of all that spread I had very little to eat.'

Downstairs the buzz of conversation guided them to the lounge. It was crowded with late holidaymakers, but Edward found a small table in a corner, and ordered tea.

'I hadn't expected it to be so busy,' he said, frowning.

'It's because it's the first year after the war,' Cara said. 'Everyone wants to take a holiday, to shed responsibilities, be cosseted.'

'While you are taking on new ones, my dear!'

'I'm happy about them,' Cara assured him.

'Thank you, my love,' Edward said. 'And now if we don't take too long over tea we'll have time for a walk before the sun goes.'

'A walk?'

'Yes. I'll be glad to stretch my legs, breathe some fresh air, won't you?'

'Yes. Oh yes, of course. If that's what you want,' Cara said bleakly.

When they'd drained the last drop from the teapot Edward said, 'Run upstairs and get yourself a coat. It might turn chilly. But don't be long or we'll miss the best of the day.'

In their room she looked at the bed, ran her hand along the cover. Why hadn't Edward come upstairs with her? Why did he want to go for a walk when they could be here together? Or was it she who was wrong to feel like this? Was she not normal, was she too eager? She had only her instincts to guide her and perhaps they were not to be trusted.

She flung herself on the bed, face down, buried in the softness of the quilt. She was perilously near to tears. Then she jumped to her feet and smoothed down the quilt. She was certainly not going to cry on her honeymoon. She snatched her coat from the wardrobe and ran out of the room.

Leaving the hotel, Edward tucked her arm through his and held her close as they walked briskly along the cliff path. The wind there was sharp from the east, the North Sea steel-grey and choppy. Cara shivered.

‘Darling, you’re cold!’ Edward said. ‘Never mind. The walk will soon warm you up!’

They walked until the sun went low in the sky, until the cliffs and the curve of the headland were darkly silhouetted against the sky, all colour gone. Far below them the waves crashed and thudded against the rocks with rhythmic, menacing sounds. By the time they were back at the hotel, dinner had started.

‘I hadn’t realized how late it was,’ Edward admitted. ‘Well, we needn’t change.’

‘But I must tidy myself!’ Cara protested. ‘I’m all windblown!’

‘You look fine to me,’ Edward said with appreciation. The wind had brought colour into her cheeks and tousled her curly hair into a frame around her face. ‘Go and tidy yourself if you must, and be down in the bar in ten minutes. We’ll have a quick drink before we eat.’

When she joined Edward in the bar he was caught up in conversation with a man and his wife.

‘Mr and Mrs Plummer!’ Edward said.

‘So this is the little lady we’ve been hearing about?’ Mr Plummer was a little fat man, all geniality.

Surely Edward can’t have told complete strangers we’re on our honeymoon? Cara thought. Her look asked the question.

'I was just saying you were fond of walking,' Edward explained.

'I see!' Am I? she thought.

'Not for me,' Mrs Plummer said. 'My corns won't stand it. Hadn't we better go into dinner, Oswald? There'll be no choice left.'

They ate at their separate tables, but afterwards it seemed natural that the four of them should drift together in the lounge. At least it seemed natural to the others. Cara was deeply disappointed. The Plummers - he ran a small clothing factory in Leeds - would have been a boring couple at any time. Surely even Edward must feel that? The conversation, more of a monologue from Mr Plummer with occasional interruptions from his wife, at last began to slow down, hopefully to a stop. Then Mr Plummer, a sudden gleam in his eye, said, 'How about a game of billiards, old chap?'

'Fine!' Edward agreed, though without enthusiasm.

'I didn't know you liked billiards,' Cara said quickly.

'Well if you must, Oswald. But don't stay up too late,' Mrs Plummer warned. 'I know what you're like when you start playing billiards.'

When the men had gone she turned to Cara.

'I shall give them an hour and then I shall go up. I advise you to do the same. You know what men are!'

I don't, Cara thought. That's the trouble, I don't. But surely on our wedding night . . . ? Did Mrs Plummer guess they were on honeymoon? Had she given it away by not knowing that Edward played billiards? She didn't want the woman to be sorry for her.

At the end of an hour Mrs Plummer rolled up her knitting, stowed it in her tapestry bag, and rose.

'Well that's it, my dear! I've got to have my beauty sleep or I'll be fit for nothing in the morning. So good night.'

What do I do now, Cara asked herself. Shall I find Edward and drag him away? She decided she would. She couldn't go

on sitting here, and almost certainly he'd be glad to be rescued. She found the billiard room, thick with smoke, thronged with men, not a woman in sight, and braved her way in. Edward was at a table, his face furrowed with concentration. She stood aside quietly until he had played his shot and then went up to him.

'Edward, I wondered . . .'

'Not now, love. I shan't be long.'

He called her love, but his tone wasn't loving. She had done the wrong thing, venturing into this holy of holies.

'You go on up,' he added.

'Aren't you . . . ?'

'I shan't be long!' he said, his eyes on the arrangement of the balls on the green baize.

Cara marched instantly out of the billiard room with short, sharp steps, her heels stabbing the parquet floor. She had been dismissed, and in no uncertain manner. How dare he order her about like that? I will *not* go up to the room, she thought furiously. I will *not* do as I'm told. I am *not* a child and I won't be treated like one! On the contrary, she would go straight back to the lounge and she would order a brandy. A double brandy.

'I'm afraid I can only serve you a small one,' the waiter said, his voice icy with disapproval. 'There's a shortage.'

She took too large a sip. It burned her throat and she choked on it, coughing until the tears came to her eyes, aware that people were looking at her. Why could nothing go right? She left the rest of the brandy and hurried upstairs.

She ran a bath, defying the rule by more than half filling the tub instead of sticking to the permitted five inches. There she lay and soaked until, gradually, the hot water soothed her, body and mind. Afterwards, when she had dried herself, she looked at her naked body in the long wardrobe mirror, studying it critically. What would Edward think of her? Would he think her breasts were too small? But