



The Pretty Lady

Arnold Bennett

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The Pretty Lady by Arnold Bennett presents the complicated relationship between Christine, a young French prostitute, and Gilbert J. Hoape, a wealthy businessman twice her age, set in the WWI London. The two protagonists meet one evening, when the young pretty woman in search of a client interested in her services is noticed by the man whose age prevented him from enrolling in the army. He accompanies her to a nearby flat that, to his great and pleasant surprise, does not look sordid, as he would expected, but it is cozy, warm and welcoming. As he leaves, Hoape tells Christine that he had seen her once in Paris, and then followed her for five nights, but he had not dare to approach her or speak to her. The courtesan finds this confession and the fact that he remembered her face after all this time very flattering and hopes that this is not the only time the man seeks her company. She is not wrong. The story of the main characters' relationship is also used as pretext for presenting how people from different social classes perceived the war and the devastating impact the war has on their life. The fear London civilians feel every time they see the German zeppelins surveying the sky above the city, the harsh working conditions in the weapon factories, where the personnel is formed mainly of women and teenage children, are elements that do not appear in other literary creations describing that period. As for the Christine's idyll with Hoape, it gets complicated when Conception, a passionate Spanish woman, appears into the rich man's life. Whom will he choose? Will Christine be satisfied with her status of unofficial but very well provided mistress of a wealthy man or will she return to her old ways and risk losing everything she has?

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