

## THE PEA

By Harriet Bradshaw

I was a pearl. Smooth-shelled and spherical, shaking in my paper packet, poured and counted. Her light and warmth rested on me just long enough to know I worshipped her. I would have slumbered in her presence forever, but it wasn't my choice to make. Plunged I was into darkness. Buried, I watched the last slithers of her brightness disappear above me.

Those first days of loss were long. Disoriented, I sat there, puffing up, lethargic, unwilling, pining for those burning rays, no one telling me I was a fighter. So, I reached deeper into the dimness, anchoring myself to the unknown earth, drinking in the muddy muskiness of my sorrows. But as I stretched, I explored, slowly growing in strength. Just maybe? I thought.

So, this time, I pushed upwards clawing through the mud and grit, hope dragging me out of the dirt until I broke through. And there she was. In her gold I bathed. I craved her and she teased me, disappearing behind puffs of smoke and melting into fire across the horizon.

But the pattern of our lives, her coming and going, began to frustrate. I missed her most by night: the soft silver coin just an imperfect reflection, reminding me of the void between us. I grew to loath the morning crowds that clamoured, like me, to see the first glimpses of her, singing sweetly, fanning their feathers. I couldn't compete. Then my rivals bustled up around me, green and eager. My tendrils uncurled, reaching and grabbing,

pulling me up, just to get closer to her, to not be overshadowed by them. But it was never enough.

Scorched and scorned, withered by jealousy, I wilted. In a limp bow I looked inwardly and to my surprise I saw myself and how I'd grown: my emerald frills, delicate lime curls and loops, and what was this – tightly clasped like pinching fingers – a protected treasure? Alas, I would never know its secrets.

I was wrong. At first, their strength scared me: orbs of water, translucent, striking the soil heavily where I stood. Yet, as they drenched my thirst, I grew stronger knowing who I was. As the clasps of fingers unfolded, white silk bounced forth and unfurled. Then all the attention was on me, the hovering, fussing, delicate wings, murmuring, buzzing and brushing. As they tended to me, I had almost forgotten about her. She warmed me that day like a smile, and I realised how misunderstood she was. Constantly sharing her light, her hope. How could I have consumed all of her, when there was so much of her to give?

As my bounces of silk turn paper crisp, purses of green pearls fatten and weigh me down. Those that survive the slithery pests are picked and pocketed, until finally the air cools and the last few are left with me. My jade frills fade; the final pearls harden and roll into the soil. Don't be afraid, I tell them, there is hope beyond the darkness.