



***KATHERINE  
MANSFIELD***

***BLISS,  
AND  
OTHER  
STORIES***

**Katherine Mansfield**

# **Bliss, and Other Stories**

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# PRELUDE

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### 1

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THERE was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kezia in the buggy. When Pat swung them on top of the luggage they wobbled; the grandmother's lap was full and Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a lump of a child on hers for any distance. Isabel, very superior, was perched beside the new handy-man on the driver's seat. Hold-alls, bags and boxes were piled upon the floor. "These are absolute necessities that I will not let out of my sight for one instant," said Linda Burnell, her voice trembling with fatigue and excitement.

Lottie and Kezia stood on the patch of lawn just inside the gate all ready for the fray in their coats with brass anchor buttons and little round caps with battleship ribbons. Hand in hand, they stared with round solemn eyes first at the absolute necessities and then at their mother.

"We shall simply have to leave them. That is all. We shall simply have to cast them off," said Linda Burnell. A strange little laugh flew from her lips; she leaned back against the buttoned leather cushions and shut her eyes, her lips trembling with laughter. Happily at that moment Mrs. Samuel Josephs, who had been watching the scene from behind her drawing-room blind, waddled down the garden path.

"Why nod leave the chudren with be for the afterdoon, Brs. Burnell? They could go on the dray with the storeban when he comes in the eveding. Those thigs on the path have to go, dod't they?"

"Yes, everything outside the house is supposed to go," said Linda Burnell, and she waved a white hand at the tables and chairs standing on their heads on the front lawn. How absurd they looked! Either they ought to be the other way up, or Lottie and Kezia ought to stand on their heads, too. And she longed to say: "Stand on your heads, children, and wait for the store-man." It seemed to her that would be so exquisitely funny that she could not attend to Mrs. Samuel Josephs.

The fat creaking body leaned across the gate, and the big jelly of a face smiled. "Dod't you worry, Brs. Burnell. Loddie and Kezia can have tea with by chudren in the dursery, and I'll see theb on the dray afterwards."

The grandmother considered. "Yes, it really is quite the best plan. We are very obliged to you, Mrs. Samuel Josephs. Children, say 'thank you' to Mrs. Samuel Josephs."

Two subdued chirrups: "Thank you, Mrs. Samuel Josephs."

"And be good little girls, and—come closer—" they advanced, "don't forget to tell Mrs. Samuel Josephs when you want to. ..."

"No, granma."

"Dod't worry, Brs. Burnell."

At the last moment Kezia let go Lottie's hand and darted towards the buggy.

"I want to kiss my granma good-bye again."

But she was too late. The buggy rolled off up the road, Isabel bursting with pride, her nose turned up at all the world, Linda Burnell prostrated, and the grandmother rummaging among the very curious oddments she had had put in her black silk reticule at the last moment, for something to give her daughter. The buggy twinkled away in the sunlight and fine golden dust up the hill and over. Kezia bit her lip, but Lottie, carefully finding her handkerchief first, set up a wail.

"Mother! Granma!"

Mrs. Samuel Josephs, like a huge warm black silk tea cosy, enveloped her.

"It's all right, by dear. Be a brave child. You come and blay in the durserly!"

She put her arm round weeping Lottie and led her away. Kezia followed, making a face at Mrs. Samuel Josephs' placket, which was undone as usual, with two long pink corset laces hanging out of it. ...

Lottie's weeping died down as she mounted the stairs, but the sight of her at the nursery door with swollen eyes and a blob of a nose gave great satisfaction to the S.J.'s, who sat on two benches before a long table covered with American cloth and set out with immense plates of bread and dripping and two brown jugs that faintly steamed.

"Hullo! You've been crying!"

"Ooh! Your eyes have gone right in."

"Doesn't her nose look funny?"

"You're all red-and-patchy."

Lottie was quite a success. She felt it and swelled, smiling timidly.

"Go and sit by Zaidee, ducky," said Mrs. Samuel Josephs, "and Kezia, you sid ad the end by Boses."

Moses grinned and gave her a nip as she sat down; but she pretended not to notice. She did hate boys.

"Which will you have?" asked Stanley, leaning across the table very politely, and smiling at her. "Which will you have to begin with—strawberries and cream or bread and dripping?"

"Strawberries and cream, please," said she.

"Ah-h-h-h." How they all laughed and beat the table with their teaspoons. Wasn't that a take in! Wasn't it now! Didn't he fox her! Good old Stan!

"Ma! She thought it was real."

Even Mrs. Samuel Josephs, pouring out the milk and water, could not help smiling. "You bustn't tease theb on their last day," she wheezed.

But Kezia bit a big piece out of her bread and dripping, and then stood the piece up on her plate. With the bite out it made a dear little sort of a gate. Pooh! She didn't care! A tear rolled down her cheek, but she wasn't crying. She couldn't have cried in front of those awful Samuel Josephs. She sat with her head bent, and as the tear dripped slowly down, she caught it with a neat little whisk of her tongue and ate it before any of them had seen.

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**After tea Kezia wandered back to their own house. Slowly she walked up the back steps, and through the scullery into the kitchen. Nothing was left in it but a lump of gritty yellow soap in one corner of the kitchen window sill and a piece of flannel stained with a blue bag in another. The fireplace was choked up with rubbish. She poked among it but found nothing except a hair-tidy with a heart painted on it that had belonged to the servant girl. Even that she left lying, and she trailed through the narrow passage into the drawing-room. The Venetian blind was pulled down but not drawn close.**

**Long pencil rays of sunlight shone through and the wavy shadow of a bush outside danced on the gold lines. Now it was still, now it began to flutter again, and now it came almost as far as her feet. Zoom! Zoom! a blue-bottle knocked against the ceiling; the carpet-tacks had little bits of red fluff sticking to them.**

**The dining-room window had a square of coloured glass at each corner. One was blue and one was yellow. Kezia bent down to have one more look at a blue lawn with blue arum lilies growing at the gate, and then at a yellow lawn with yellow lilies and a yellow fence. As she looked a little Chinese Lottie came out on to the lawn and began to dust the tables and chairs with a corner of her pinafore. Was that really Lottie? Kezia was not quite sure until she**



**had looked through the ordinary window.**

**Upstairs in her father's and mother's room she found a pill box black and shiny outside and red in, holding a blob of cotton wool.**

**"I could keep a bird's egg in that," she decided.**

**In the servant girl's room there was a stay-button stuck in a crack of the floor, and in another crack some beads and a long needle. She knew there was nothing in her grandmother's room; she had watched her pack. She went over to the window and leaned against it, pressing her hands against the pane.**

**Kezia liked to stand so before the window. She liked the feeling of the cold shining glass against her hot palms, and she liked to watch the funny white tops that came on her**

**fingers when she pressed them hard against the pane. As she stood there, the day flickered out and dark came. With the dark crept the wind snuffling and howling. The windows of the empty house shook, a creaking came from the walls and floors, a piece of loose iron on the roof banged forlornly. Kezia was suddenly quite, quite still, with wide open eyes and knees pressed together. She was frightened. She wanted to call Lottie and to go on calling all the while she ran downstairs and out of the house. But IT was just behind her, waiting at the door, at the head of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs, hiding in the passage, ready to dart out at the back door. But Lottie was at the back door, too.**

**“Kezia!” she called cheerfully. “The storeman’s here. Everything is**

**on the dray and three horses, Kezia. Mrs. Samuel Josephs has given us a big shawl to wear round us, and she says to button up your coat. She won't come out because of asthma."**

**Lottie was very important.**

**"Now then, you kids," called the storeman. He hooked his big thumbs under their arms and up they swung. Lottie arranged the shawl "most beautifully" and the storeman tucked up their feet in a piece of old blanket.**

**"Lift up. Easy does it."**

**They might have been a couple of young ponies. The storeman felt over the cords holding his load, unhooked the brakechain from the wheel, and whistling, he swung up beside them.**

**"Keep close to me," said Lottie, "because otherwise you pull the shawl away from my side, Kezia."**

**But Kezia edged up to the storeman. He towered beside her big as a giant and he smelled of nuts and new wooden boxes.**

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**It was the first time that Lottie and Kezia had ever been out so late. Everything looked different—the painted wooden houses far smaller than they did by day, the gardens far bigger and wilder. Bright stars speckled the sky and the moon hung over the harbour dabbling the waves with gold. They could see the lighthouse shining on Quarantine Island, and the green lights on the old coal hulks.**

**“There comes the Picton boat,” said the storeman, pointing to a little steamer all hung with bright beads.**

**But when they reached the top of the hill and began to go down the**

**other side the harbour disappeared, and although they were still in the town they were quite lost. Other carts rattled past. Everybody knew the storeman.**

**“Night, Fred.”**

**“Night O,” he shouted.**

**Kezia liked very much to hear him. Whenever a cart appeared in the distance she looked up and waited for his voice. He was an old friend; and she and her grandmother had often been to his place to buy grapes. The storeman lived alone in a cottage that had a glasshouse against one wall built by himself. All the glasshouse was spanned and arched over with one beautiful vine. He took her brown basket from her, lined it with three large leaves, and then he felt in his belt for a little horn knife, reached up and snapped off a big**

**blue cluster and laid it on the leaves so tenderly that Kezia held her breath to watch. He was a very big man. He wore brown velvet trousers, and he had a long brown beard. But he never wore a collar, not even on Sunday. The back of his neck was burnt bright red.**

**“Where are we now?” Every few minutes one of the children asked him the question.**

**“Why, this is Hawk Street, or Charlotte Crescent.”**

**“Of course it is,” Lottie pricked up her ears at the last name; she always felt that Charlotte Crescent belonged specially to her. Very few people had streets with the same name as theirs.**

**“Look, Kezia, there is Charlotte Crescent. Doesn’t it look different?” Now everything familiar was left behind. Now the big dray rattled into**

unknown country, along new roads with high clay banks on either side, up steep, steep hills, down into bushy valleys, through wide shallow rivers. Further and further. Lottie's head wagged; she drooped, she slipped half into Kezia's lap and lay there. But Kezia could not open her eyes wide enough. The wind blew and she shivered; but her cheeks and ears burned.

"Do stars ever blow about?" she asked.

"Not to notice," said the storeman.

"We've got a nuncle and a naunt living near our new house," said Kezia. "They have got two children, Pip, the eldest is called, and the youngest's name is Rags. He's got a ram. He has to feed it with a nenamuel teapot and a glove top over the spout. He's going to show



**us. What is the difference between a ram and a sheep?"**

**"Well, a ram has horns and runs for you."**

**Kezia considered. "I don't want to see it frightfully," she said. "I hate rushing animals like dogs and parrots. I often dream that animals rush at me—even camels—and while they are rushing, their heads swell enormous."**

**The storeman said nothing. Kezia peered up at him, screwing up her eyes. Then she put her finger out and stroked his sleeve; it felt hairy. "Are we near?" she asked.**

**"Not far off, now," answered the storeman. "Getting tired?"**

**"Well, I'm not an atom bit sleepy," said Kezia. "But my eyes keep curling up in such a funny sort of way." She gave a long sigh, and to stop her**

**eyes from curling she shut them. ... When she opened them again they were clanking through a drive that cut through the garden like a whip lash, looping suddenly an island of green, and behind the island, but out of sight until you came upon it, was the house. It was long and low built, with a pillared verandah and balcony all the way round. The soft white bulk of it lay stretched upon the green garden like a sleeping beast. And now one and now another of the windows leaped into light. Someone was walking through the empty rooms carrying a lamp. From a window downstairs the light of a fire flickered. A strange beautiful excitement seemed to stream from the house in quivering ripples.**

**“Where are we?” said Lottie, sitting up. Her reefer cap was all on**

**one side and on her cheek there was the print of an anchor button she had pressed against while sleeping. Tenderly the storeman lifted her, set her cap straight, and pulled down her crumpled clothes. She stood blinking on the lowest verandah step watching Kezia who seemed to come flying through the air to her feet.**

**“Ooh!” cried Kezia, flinging up her arms. The grandmother came out of the dark hall carrying a little lamp. She was smiling.**

**“You found your way in the dark?” said she.**

**“Perfectly well.”**

**But Lottie staggered on the lowest verandah step like a bird fallen out of the nest. If she stood still for a moment she fell asleep, if she leaned against anything her eyes closed. She could not walk another step.**

**“Kezia,” said the grandmother,  
“can I trust you to carry the lamp?”**

**“Yes, my granma.”**

**The old woman bent down and gave the bright breathing thing into her hands and then she caught up drunken Lottie. “This way.”**

**Through a square hall filled with bales and hundreds of parrots (but the parrots were only on the wall-paper) down a narrow passage where the parrots persisted in flying past Kezia with her lamp.**

**“Be very quiet,” warned the grandmother, putting down Lottie and opening the dining-room door. “Poor little mother has got such a headache.”**

**Linda Burnell, in a long cane chair, with her feet on a hassock, and a plaid over her knees, lay before a crackling fire. Burnell and Beryl sat at**

**the table in the middle of the room eating a dish of fried chops and drinking tea out of a brown china teapot. Over the back of her mother's chair leaned Isabel. She had a comb in her fingers and in a gentle absorbed fashion she was combing the curls from her mother's forehead. Outside the pool of lamp and firelight the room stretched dark and bare to the hollow windows.**

**"Are those the children?" But Linda did not really care; she did not even open her eyes to see.**

**"Put down the lamp, Kezia," said Aunt Beryl, "or we shall have the house on fire before we are out of the packing cases. More tea, Stanley?"**

**"Well, you might just give me five-eighths of a cup," said Burnell, leaning across the table. "Have another chop, Beryl. Tip-top meat,**

**isn't it? Not too lean and not too fat."**  
**He turned to his wife. "You're sure**  
**you won't change your mind, Linda**  
**darling?"**

**"The very thought of it is enough."**  
**She raised one eyebrow in the way**  
**she had. The grandmother brought**  
**the children bread and milk and they**  
**sat up to table, flushed and sleepy**  
**behind the wavy steam.**

**"I had meat for my supper," said**  
**Isabel, still combing gently.**

**"I had a whole chop for my supper,**  
**the bone and all and Worcester**  
**sauce. Didn't I, father?"**

**"Oh, don't boast, Isabel," said**  
**Aunt Beryl.**

**Isabel looked astounded. "I wasn't**  
**boasting, was I, Mummy? I never**  
**thought of boasting. I thought they**  
**would like to know. I only meant to**  
**tell them."**

**“Very well. That’s enough,” said Burnell. He pushed back his plate, took a tooth-pick out of his pocket and began picking his strong white teeth.**

**“You might see that Fred has a bite of something in the kitchen before he goes, will you, mother?”**

**“Yes, Stanley.” The old woman turned to go.**

**“Oh, hold on half a jiffy. I suppose nobody knows where my slippers were put? I suppose I shall not be able to get at them for a month or two—what?”**

**“Yes,” came from Linda. “In the top of the canvas hold-all marked ‘urgent necessities.’”**

**“Well you might get them for me will you, mother?”**

**“Yes, Stanley.”**

**Burnell got up, stretched himself, and going over to the fire he turned his back to it and lifted up his coat tails.**

**“By Jove, this is a pretty pickle. Eh, Beryl?”**

**Beryl, sipping tea, her elbows on the table, smiled over the cup at him. She wore an unfamiliar pink pinafore; the sleeves of her blouse were rolled up to her shoulders showing her lovely freckled arms, and she had let her hair fall down her back in a long pig-tail.**

**“How long do you think it will take to get straight—couple of weeks—eh?” he chaffed.**

**“Good heavens, no,” said Beryl airily. “The worst is over already. The servant girl and I have simply slaved all day, and ever since mother came she has worked like a horse, too. We**



**have never sat down for a moment. We have had a day.”**

**Stanley scented a rebuke.**

**“Well, I suppose you did not expect me to rush away from the office and nail carpets—did you?”**

**“Certainly not,” laughed Beryl. She put down her cup and ran out of the dining-room.**

**“What the hell does she expect us to do?” asked Stanley. “Sit down and fan herself with a palm leaf fan while I have a gang of professionals to do the job? By Jove, if she can’t do a hand’s turn occasionally without shouting about it in return for ...”**

**And he gloomed as the chops began to fight the tea in his sensitive stomach. But Linda put up a hand and dragged him down to the side of her long chair.**

**“This is a wretched time for you, old boy,” she said. Her cheeks were very white but she smiled and curled her fingers into the big red hand she held. Burnell became quiet. Suddenly he began to whistle “Pure as a lily, joyous and free”—a good sign.**

**“Think you’re going to like it?” he asked.**

**“I don’t want to tell you, but I think I ought to, mother,” said Isabel. “Kezia is drinking tea out of Aunt Beryl’s cup.”**

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**They were taken off to bed by the grandmother. She went first with a candle; the stairs rang to their climbing feet. Isabel and Lottie lay in a room to themselves, Kezia curled in her grandmother's soft bed.**

**"Aren't there going to be any sheets, my granma?"**

**"No, not to-night."**

**"It's tickly," said Kezia, "but it's like Indians." She dragged her grandmother down to her and kissed her under the chin. "Come to bed soon and be my Indian brave."**

**"What a silly you are," said the old woman, tucking her in as she loved to be tucked.**

**“Aren’t you going to leave me a candle?”**

**“No. Sh—h. Go to sleep.”**

**“Well, can I have the door left open?”**

**She rolled herself up into a round but she did not go to sleep. From all over the house came the sound of steps. The house itself creaked and popped. Loud whispering voices came from downstairs. Once she heard Aunt Beryl’s rush of high laughter, and once she heard a loud trumpeting from Burnell blowing his nose. Outside the window hundreds of black cats with yellow eyes sat in the sky watching her—but she was not frightened. Lottie was saying to Isabel:**

**“I’m going to say my prayers in bed to-night.”**

**“No you can’t, Lottie.” Isabel was very firm. “God only excuses you saying your prayers in bed if you’ve got a temperature.” So Lottie yielded:**

**Gentle Jesus meek anmle,  
Look pon a little chile.  
Pity me, simple Lizzie  
Suffer me to come to thee.**

**And then they lay down back to back, their little behinds just touching, and fell asleep.**

**Standing in a pool of moonlight Beryl Fairfield undressed herself. She was tired, but she pretended to be more tired than she really was—letting her clothes fall, pushing back with a languid gesture her warm, heavy hair.**

**“Oh, how tired I am—very tired.”**

**She shut her eyes a moment, but her lips smiled. Her breath rose and**

**fell in her breast like two fanning wings. The window was wide open; it was warm, and somewhere out there in the garden a young man, dark and slender, with mocking eyes, tip-toed among the bushes, and gathered the flowers into a big bouquet, and shipped under her window and held it up to her. She saw herself bending forward. He thrust his head among the bright waxy flowers, sly and laughing. “No, no,” said Beryl. She turned from the window and dropped her nightgown over her head.**

**“How frightfully unreasonable Stanley is sometimes,” she thought, buttoning. And then, as she lay down, there came the old thought, the cruel thought—ah, if only she had money of her own.**

**A young man, immensely rich, has just arrived from England. He meets**