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KATHERINE MANSFIELD

(continued from previous page)

called *Her First Ball*—and the title by itself almost tells the story. A young country girl is staying with her town cousins who take her to a drill-hall ball. It is all very much in the feminine tradition. Dresses, gloves, powder, flowers—and the smiles come tumbling out: A girl's dark head pushes above her white fur like a flower through snow . . . little satin shoes chase each other like birds. . . But later on we come to the point of the story. The girl, Leila, bewildered and enchanted by it all, is breathless with excitement. How heavenly, how simply heavenly! she thinks. She dances with young men with glossy hair—and then with an older man who is both bald and fat. He perceives that it is her first dance and tells her that he has been doing this sort of thing for 30 years. Then he goes on and pictures Leila herself in years to come. Her pretty arms will have turned into short fat ones, he says. And she will be sitting up on the stage with the chaperones while her daughter dances down below. And his words destroy the girl's happiness. The music suddenly sounds sad. And she asks herself an agonising question: Why doesn't happiness last forever? "Deep inside her," we read, "a little girl threw her pinafore over her head and sobbed." And of course she hates the bald fat man.

Now I don't know how my listeners will feel about this story, but for me it just doesn't come off. It is, no doubt, true enough of many young girls, but for my part I'm afraid I can't help making some comparisons. For instance, had any of Shakespeare's young heroines (wonderful ones, say, like Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, or Marina in *Pericles*)—had they encountered that elderly bald fat man, and had he told them that shocking truth—well, I don't know, but I fancy they would have just laughed and asked him why he wanted to say anything so obvious. In other words, young female character can be made of somewhat sterner stuff, and there is something in my make-up which refuses to accept the suggestion that that particular trying moment in the girl's life was really so important and significant as it is intended to be.

* * *

THERE is another story which is called, very simply, *Bliss*. And again you have a young woman who experiences a few hours of intense happiness. For no particular reason. She is just happy to be alive, that is all. But it all ends with the discovery that her husband is engaged in a love-affair with a woman they have been entertaining at dinner. But here's the point—if the mere fact of being alive will make you happy, then you must be careful, because being alive must always imply that you will have to be prepared to face disagreeable experiences. And so many of Katherine Mansfield's young women are unprepared. There is, indeed, a rather startling lack of variety in them, and Miss Kathleen Raine, an English critic, has gone so far as to say that she lacked the gift for inventing characters. And if this is true, perhaps the explanation may be partly

found in the fact that Katherine Mansfield, both as a woman and a writer, spent much of her life in a state of suspension between two hemispheres. As a young woman she hated New Zealand and longed to get away from it, yet it was Wellington she wrote about towards the end of her life when she was doing her finest work. But I don't think a state of suspension is a good state to be in when it is a question of inventing characters. You have to depend on yourself too much—and what you find in yourself. Suspension (or to use another word, freedom) always has its dangers, and it is particularly dangerous for a writer to be virtually free from any sense of social tradition. And up to a point it is true to say that is the situation Katherine Mansfield found herself in.

But I don't want to leave you with the impression that her work is nearly all shortcomings. Not at all. Perhaps it is still a little too soon to say for certain just how good a writer she was. But in the meantime one can at least say that there are, as there are with all good writers, certain of her stories that are "musts." And I want very briefly to refer to one of them. It is *The Life of Ma Parker*—a sketch of a London charwoman, and here is a taste of Katherine Mansfield at her best. The old char is with her grandson:

"Gran, gi' us a penny!" he coaxed.
"Be off with you; Gran ain't got no pennies."
"Yes, you ave."
"No, I ain't."
"Yes, you ave. Gi' us one!"
Already she was feeling for the old, squashed, black leather purse.
"Well, what'll you give your Gran?"
He gave a shy little laugh and pressed closer. She felt his eyelid quivering against her cheek. "I ain't got nothing," he murmured. . . .

SHORTWAVE HIGHLIGHTS

The Voice of America Programmes

AS the official news service of the United States, the Voice of America, broadcasting from New York, opens its first English transmission to the Pacific area at 9.0 p.m. and its second at 12.30 a.m., reception of stations carrying these programmes is quite good at present.

Stations, Frequencies, and Wavelengths (9.0-10.30 p.m.): KNBA (9.65 mc/s., 31.09 metres), KNBI (9.75, 30.77), KGEX (11.73, 25.58), KCBR (15.13, 19.83), KRHO (15.25, 19.67), Manila (11.89, 25.23).

Headlines in the Programmes: Sunday—9.0, Late World News; 9.15, Radio Forum; 9.30, NBC Symphony Orchestra; 10.15, Late News. Monday—9.0, Late World News; 9.15, Analysis of the News; 9.30, Fashions in Swing; 9.45, Cavalcade of America; 10.15, Late News and Press Opinion. Tuesday—9.0, Late World News; 9.15, Analysis of the News; 9.30, Fashions in Swing; 10.15, Late News and Press Opinion. Wednesday—9.0, Late World News; 9.15, Analysis of the News; 9.30, Radio Theatre; 10.20, Late World News and Press Opinion. Thursday—9.0, Late World News; 9.15, Analysis of the News; 9.45, An Evening with Romberg; 10.15, Late World News and Press Opinion. Friday—9.0, Late World News; 9.15, Analysis of the News; 9.30, Stars in the Spotlight; 9.45, The Carmen Cavallaro Show; 10.15, Late News and Press Opinion. Saturday—9.0, Late World News; 9.15, Analysis of the News; 9.30, Stamp Club; 9.45, First Piano Quartet; 10.15, Late News and Press Opinion.



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