



## THE BLACK CAP (1917)

By Katherine Mansfield

*(A lady and her husband are seated at breakfast. He is quite calm, reading the newspaper and eating; but she is strangely excited, dressed for travelling, and only pretending to eat.)*

*She:* Oh, if you should want your flannel shirts, they are on the right-hand bottom shelf of the linen press.

*He (at a board meeting of the Meat Export Company):* No.

*She:* You didn't hear what I said. I said if you should want your flannel shirts, they are on the right-hand bottom shelf of the linen press.

*He (positively):* I quite agree!

*She:* It does seem rather extraordinary that on the very morning that I am going away you cannot leave the newspaper alone for five minutes.

*He (mildly):* My dear woman, I don't want you to go. In fact, I have asked you not to go. I can't for the life of me see ...

*She:* You know perfectly well that I am only going because I absolutely must. I've been putting it off and putting it off, and the dentist said last time ...

*He:* Good! Good! Don't let's go over the ground again. We've thrashed it out pretty thoroughly, haven't we?

*Servant:* Cab's here, m'm.

*She:* Please put my luggage in.

*Servant:* Very good, m'm.

*(She gives a tremendous sigh.)*

*He:* You haven't got too much time if you want to catch that train.

*She:* I know. I'm going. *(In a changed tone.)* Darling, don't let us part like this. It makes me feel so wretched. Why is it that you always seem to take a positive delight in spoiling my enjoyment?



*He:* I don't think going to the dentist is so positively enjoyable.

*She:* Oh, you know that's not what I mean. You're only saying that to hurt me. You know you are begging the question.

*He (laughing):* And you are losing your train. You'll be back on Thursday evening, won't you?

*She (in a low, desperate voice):* Yes, on Thursday evening. Good-bye, then. (*Comes over to him, and takes his head in her hands.*) Is there anything really the matter? Do at least look at me. Don't you—care—at—all?

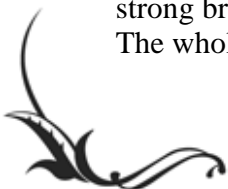
*He:* My darling girl! This is like an exit on the cinema.

*She (letting her hands fall):* Very well. Good-bye. (*Gives a quick tragic glance round the dining-room and goes.*)

(*On the way to the station.*)

*She:* How strange life is! I didn't think I should feel like this at all. All the glamour seems to have gone, somehow. Oh, I'd give anything for the cab to turn round and go back. The most curious thing is that I feel if he really had made me believe he loved me it would have been much easier to have left him. But that's absurd. How strong the hay smells. It's going to be a very hot day. I shall never see these fields again. Never! never! But in another way I am glad that it happened like this; it puts me so finally, absolutely in the right for ever! He doesn't want a woman at all. A woman has no meaning for him. He's not the type of man to care deeply for anybody except himself. I've become the person who remembers to take the links out of his shirts before they go to the wash—that is all! And that's not enough for me. I'm young—I'm too proud. I'm not the type of woman to vegetate in the country and rave over “our” own lettuces ...

What you have been trying to do, ever since you married me is to make me submit, to turn me into your shadow, to rely on me so utterly that you'd only to glance up to find the right time printed on me somehow, as if I were a clock. You have never been curious about me; you never wanted to explore my soul. No; you wanted me to settle down to your peaceful existence. Oh! how your blindness has outraged me—how I hate you for it! I am glad—thankful—thankful to have left you! I'm not a green girl; I am not conceited, but I do know my powers. It's not for nothing that I've always longed for riches and passion and freedom, and felt that they were mine by right. (*She leans against the buttoned back of the cab and murmurs.*) “You are a Queen. Let mine be the joy of giving you your kingdom.” (*She smiles at her little royal hands.*) I wish my heart didn't beat so hard. It really hurts me. It tires me so and excites me so. It's like someone in a dreadful hurry beating against a door ... This cab is only crawling along; we shall never be at the station at this rate. Hurry! Hurry! My love, I am coming as quickly as ever I can. Yes, I am suffering just like you. It's dreadful, isn't it unbearable—this last half-hour without each other ... Oh, God! the horse has begun to walk again. Why doesn't he beat the great strong brute of a thing ... Our wonderful life! We shall travel all over the world together. The whole world shall be ours because of our love. Oh, be patient! I am coming as fast as



I possibly can ... Ah, now it's downhill; now we really are going faster. (*An old man attempts to cross the road.*) Get out of my way, you old fool! He deserves to be run over ... Dearest—dearest; I am nearly there. Only be patient!

(*At the station.*)

Put it in a first-class smoker ... There's plenty of time after all. A full ten minutes before the train goes. No wonder he's not here. I mustn't appear to be looking for him. But I must say I'm disappointed. I never dreamed of being the first to arrive. I thought he would have been here and engaged a carriage and bought papers and flowers ... How curious! I absolutely saw in my mind a paper of pink carnations ... He knows how fond I am of carnations. But pink ones are not my favourites. I prefer dark red or pale yellow. He really will be late if he doesn't come now. The guard has begun to shut the doors. Whatever can have happened? Something dreadful. Perhaps at the last moment he has shot himself ... I could not bear the thought of ruining your life ... But you are not ruining my life. Ah, where are you? I shall have to get into the carriage ... Who is this? That's not him! It can't be—yes, it is. What on earth has he got on his head? A black cap. But how awful! He's utterly changed. What can he be wearing a black cap for? I wouldn't have known him. How absurd he looks coming towards me, smiling, in that appalling cap!

*He:* My darling, I shall never forgive myself. But the most absurd, tragic-comic thing happened. (*They get into the carriage.*) I lost my hat. It simply disappeared. I had half the hotel looking for it. Not a sign! So finally, in despair, I had to borrow this from another man who was staying there. (*The train moves off.*) You're not angry. (*Tries to take her in his arms.*)

*She:* Don't! We're not even out of the station yet.

*He (ardently):* Great God! What do I care if the whole world were to see us? (*Tries to take her in his arms.*) My wonder! My joy!

*She:* Please don't! I hate being kissed in trains.

*He (profoundly hurt):* Oh, very well. You *are* angry. It's serious. You can't get over the fact that I was late. But if you only knew the agony I suffered ...

*She:* How can you think I could be so small-minded? I am not angry at all.

*He:* Then why won't you let me kiss you?

*She (laughing hysterically):* You look so different somehow—almost a stranger.

*He (jumps up and looks at himself in the glass anxiously, and fatuously, she decides):* But it's all right, isn't it?

*She:* Oh, quite all right; perfectly all right. Oh, oh, oh! (*She begins to laugh and cry with rage.*)



(*They arrive*).

*She (while he gets a cab)*: I must get over this. It's an obsession. It's incredible that anything should change a man so. I must tell him. Surely it's quite simple to say: Don't you think now that you are in the city you had better buy yourself a hat? But that will make him realise how frightful the cap has been. And the extraordinary thing is that he doesn't realise it himself. I mean if he has looked at himself in the glass, and doesn't think that cap too ridiculous, how different our points of view must be ... How deeply different! I mean, if I had seen him in the street I would have said I could not possibly love a man who wore a cap like that. I couldn't even have got to know him. He isn't my style at all. (*She looks round*.) Everybody is smiling at it. Well, I don't wonder! The way it makes his ears stick out, and the way it makes him have no back to his head at all.

*He*: The cab is ready, my darling. (*They get in*.)

*He (tries to take her hand)*: The miracle that we two should be driving together, so simply, like this.

(*She arranges her veil*.)

*He (tries to take her hand, very ardent)*: I'll engage one room, my love.

*She*: Oh, no! Of course you must take two.

*He*: But don't you think it would be wiser not to create suspicion?

*She*: I must have my own room. (*To herself*.) You can hang your cap behind your own door! (*She begins to laugh hysterically*.)

*He*: Ah! thank God! My queen is her happy self again!

(*At the hotel*.)

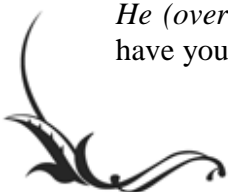
*Manager*: Yes, Sir, I quite understand. I think I've got the very thing for you, Sir. Kindly step this way. (*He takes them into a small sitting-room, with a bedroom leading out of it*.) This would suit you nicely, wouldn't it? And if you liked, we could make you up a bed on the sofa.

*He*: Oh, admirable! Admirable!

(*The Manager goes*).

*She (furious)*: But I told you I wanted a room to myself. What a trick to play upon me! I told you I did not want to share a room. How dare you treat me like this? (*She mimics*.) Admirable! Admirable! I shall never forgive you for that!

*He (overcome)*: Oh, God, what is happening! I don't understand—I'm in the dark. Why have you suddenly, on this day of days, ceased to love me? What have I done? Tell me!



*She (sinks on the sofa):* I'm very tired. If you do love me, please leave me alone. I—I only want to be alone for a little.

*He (tenderly):* Very well. I shall try to understand. I do begin to understand. I'll go out for half-an-hour, and then, my love, you may feel calmer. (*He looks round, distracted.*)

*She:* What is it?

*He:* My heart—you are sitting on my cap. (*She gives a positive scream and moves into the bedroom. He goes. She waits a moment, and then puts down her veil, and takes up her suitcase.*)

(*In the taxi.*)

*She:* Yes, Waterloo. (*She leans back.*) Ah, I've escaped—I've escaped! I shall just be in time to catch the afternoon train home. Oh, it's like a dream—I'll be home before supper. I'll tell him that the city was too hot or the dentist away. What does it matter? I've a right to my own home ... It will be wonderful driving up from the station; the fields will smell so delicious. There is cold fowl for supper left over from yesterday, and orange jelly ... I have been mad, but now I am sane again. Oh, my husband!

